

Bellingham Water System Plan

Community Engagement Summary

July 2024



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Introduction

The City of Bellingham owns and manages its water system which includes residential, commercial, industrial and public water uses. Managed by the City's Public Works Department, the system collects water from Lake Whatcom, treats the water at the Water Treatment Plant, and brings the water through pipes to homes, businesses, and facilities across Bellingham and parts of Whatcom County.

The City of Bellingham (the City) is updating its Water System Plan (the Plan) to ensure Bellingham's water system continues to provide safe and reliable water service for customers now and in the future. Bellingham's Water System Plan will help the City make smart choices about how to use, manage, and share the area's water resources.

The Washington Department of Health (DOH) requires cities to update their Plans every 10 years. This helps cities plan for growth, make sure their water systems are functioning properly, and keeps communities healthy.

The City hired PRR, an independent communications firm, to support engagement efforts for the Plan update. This summary describes the City's community engagement approaches, activities, and feedback gathered through community engagement efforts in May and June 2024.

ENGAGEMENT GOALS

The purpose of this engagement was to seek input from community members on shared community values and priorities to inform where the City will invest in water system maintenance and expansion in the coming decades. Engagement goals were to:

- Increase awareness of the Plan update and invite community input on certain elements of the Plan.
- Provide accessible opportunities to learn about the Plan by presenting clear, easy-to-understand information.
- Communicate how community input will inform the Plan and clarify which decisions the public can influence.
- Build trust through transparent communication that helps people understand the City’s planning and decision-making process.

Timeline



How the City plans to incorporate community input

For this effort, the City collected input from the community through a survey fielded in May and June 2024. The survey invited people to share input related to drinking water quality, elements of the Plan, actions the Plan may recommend, and community values related to the Plan.

The City received over 200 survey responses and over 100 open-ended comments. This input will help inform the Plan in the following ways:

- Input shows 80% of respondents select community health as their top objective for the Plan. This aligns with the Plan’s focus on water quality and investments to maintain quality now and in the future.
- Community members want to see the City invest in construction to replace old water pipes. The City will account for this value when considering timing and elements of potential Capital Improvement Projects.
- Community members shared input on rates and incentivizing water conservation. The City may use this input for financial evaluation on future rates and charges.
- Many commenters expressed concern about additives in drinking water. The City will consider this input when evaluating future regulations and water quality goals.
- The City has reviewed all comments and responses gathered during this engagement and will continue to identify additional ways to reflect community input in the Plan.



Key findings

COMMUNITY VALUES

The survey asked respondents to select the three Plan objectives that were most important to them. These are the top five responses:



Community health (80%)

Ensuring clean and safe drinking water quality for customers.



Protecting the environment (51%)

Using our water resources in a way that protects the environment and our water source.



Sustainable water use (35%)

Sharing water across different uses and activities without using it all up.



Keeping water affordable (31%)

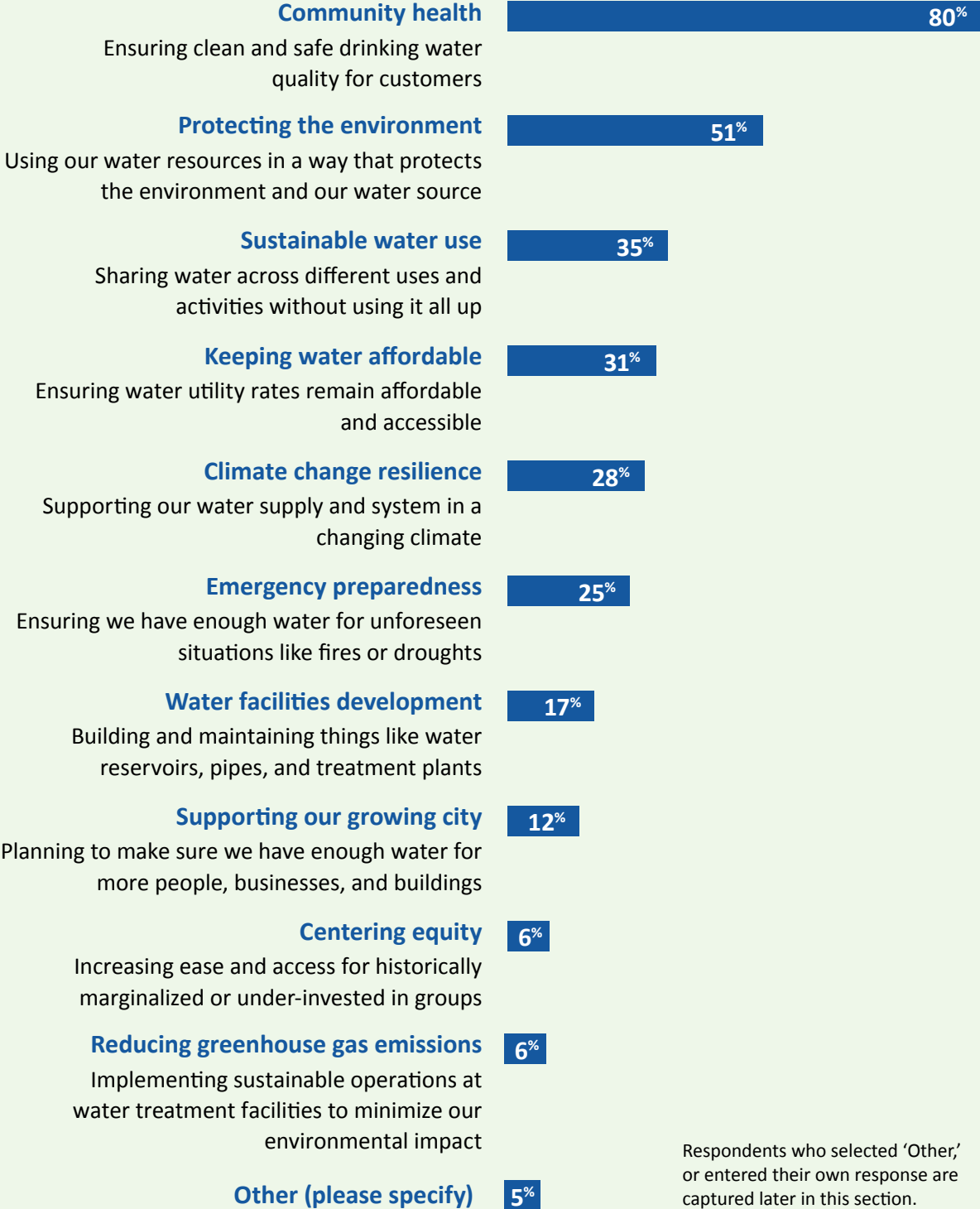
Ensuring water utility rates remain affordable and accessible.



Climate change resilience (28%)

Supporting our water supply and system in a changing climate.

**Which of the following objectives are most important to you?
Select your top three (3).**



Respondents who selected 'Other,' or entered their own response are captured later in this section.

OPENED-ENDED COMMENTS

The survey gathered over 100 open-ended responses and comments. Respondents were most interested in and shared comments on the following topics:

- Concerns about toxins and chemicals present in the drinking water.
- Strong opposition of the distinct presence of chlorine in drinking water.
- Desire to see climate change resiliency considered in water system planning.
- Questions about water system infrastructure, including testing and treatment processes.
- Support for more educational programs on how Bellingham’s water system works and how to conserve water.
- Support for equitable distribution of information, specifically for people who rent.
- Concern over recreational uses and influences on Lake Whatcom.
- Requests to incentivize water conservation efforts in utility rates.

These key themes and priorities from open-ended comments are captured in this section.

Concerns about water quality, additives, and taste

Of the 52 comments related to water quality, 29 were considered neutral and 19 were considered negative. Commenters mentioned concerns about:

- Toxins or chemicals in the water, specifically chlorine and fluoride.
- The taste and smell of the water.
- How the watershed is protected from pollutants or other contaminants.
- Requests for the City to maintain a thorough water testing process, including testing for “forever chemicals” and microplastics, fecal presence, gasoline, and agricultural products like pesticides and fertilizers.

A significant number of comments mentioned drinking water tasting and smelling like chlorine, describing a distinct, unpleasant, and noticeable presence in the drinking water. Comments related to fluoride in drinking water were divided, with about as many people requesting that it be added to the drinking water as those requesting it never be added or removed altogether.

“The water stinks badly of chlorine. Too much chlorine. So much that it requires filtering at home.”

“How is Bellingham addressing new and upcoming PFAS standards? What is the status of our water in relation to those standards? Is Bellingham testing for and trying to address contaminants in our water supply that aren’t officially regulated, such as medications and other endocrine disruptors?”

“We should fluoridate our drinking water, which is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions to address dental health.”

Maintaining water system infrastructure and planning for climate change

Several comments mentioned water system infrastructure, including protecting the water system from stormwater and residential runoff, aging pipes, low water pressure, monitoring and inspection, and land use planning surrounding Lake Whatcom.

Commenters also shared thoughts about system infrastructure and planning for climate change. Respondents would like to see a holistic approach to maintaining the water system in the plan that includes:

- Forest preservation.
- Seismically sound treatment and system facilities.
- Stronger regulation on non-native plants.
- Erosion control near water sources.
- Other innovative conservation efforts.

Some respondents requested the City explore other and more diverse methods of water use to bolster resiliency to climate change, including innovative recycling and catchment methods, while still increasing oversight and protection of existing sources.

Commenters also want the City to consider population growth, emergency preparedness, water storage and reservoirs, and aging and potentially toxic pipes and storage facilities.

“I’m also concerned about algae contamination as it seems climate change has increased the water temperature to warm making adverse toxic water and conditions.”

“How is Bellingham addressing lead service line replacement and/or additives to the water to prevent lead leaching?”

Protecting Lake Whatcom from pollution

Some commenters strongly opposed motorized boats on Lake Whatcom and requested motorized recreational activity be banned to protect the lake.

"I have some concerns how our water source is managed namely Whatcom Lake itself - my concern is allowing watercraft that use petroleum to power their vessel - seems like it could well contaminate water quality thus degrading water quality."

"I think it's ridiculous that motorboats are allowed to operate on a lake (Lake Whatcom) from which drinking water is sourced. Fuel spills are common while boating and this is especially dangerous given that the EPA recently approved a component of a new Chevron boat fuel made from discarded plastic that the EPA's own risk formula determined was so hazardous, everyone exposed to the substance continually over a lifetime would be expected to develop cancer."

"The gas and oil from boats concern me. Too many homes are being built near and around the lake. Irresponsible homeowners not properly disposing chemicals and the runoff into the lake."

Keeping utility rates affordable

Commenters were worried about utility rates already being too high and raising rates may make them unaffordable for many. A few comments mentioned incentivizing conservation of water.

Some commenters talked about the inequity of rates and usage, and that it does not seem like cost reflects individual usage of the system.

"The pricing structure should incentive conservation. As it stands, 80% of my bill is made up of fees that have nothing to do with my use. When I consider how I want to water my garden, water quantity is only factored in by my goodwill. If I use a tremendous amount of water with overhead irrigation or if I conserve water with drip irrigation, my bill is a few dollars changed. I understand that depending upon fees provides stability in cash flow, but incentivizing conservation will be a growing need."

“This can also be considered an equity issue; conserving resources should be reflected in the billing. By having the majority of the bill be standardized fees you are enabling irresponsible use and passing the fees on to responsible users which eliminates any opportunities for substantial cost savings for folks with a tight budget.”

“Consider reducing base / connection fees but increase usage fees. Incentivize efficiency, and ideally reduce demand & the need for capacity related investments.”

“I am a renter and do not currently pay my own water bill. For this reason, utility bill inserts are not an effective communication channel for my household and other rental and multifamily households that do not pay their own water bills / do not have individually water metered units.”

Educating Bellingham residents about the water system

Commenters asked for more transparent and accessible information on water quality data and how to help keep contaminants out of the water. Some commenters requested more educational programs for youth and adults to increase understanding of how the water system works and how to protect Bellingham’s water system.

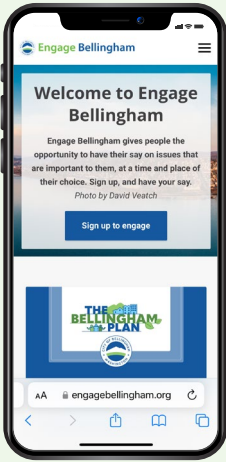
“Through the city’s education efforts on the subject, I’d like to learn more about how the natural water sources for the city are protected from contamination, both natural and man-made. Also, I’m curious about details of water treatment plants processes.”

“I’d also like to see continued outreach and education for folks living on the lake and in the watershed about keeping contaminants out of the water.”

“I think the public should be able to attend tours of both water treatment plant and wastewater. Keep the 5th grade program going. As a retired 5th grade teacher, I have toured with the program every year for over 30 years. It is so effective in learning how your community works.”

Engagement approach and strategies

To increase awareness of the Plan update and gather community input on the Plan, the City engaged with the public through various channels and formats designed to meet people where they are and reach a broad range of Bellingham residents. See Appendix D for all notification materials.



ENGAGE BELLINGHAM

[Engage Bellingham interactive website](#) hosts information about the Plan, how to get involved, and promoted the survey. The site is available in English and Spanish. The site received 966 unique visitors starting May 22 through August 5, 2024.

THE WATER SYSTEM PLAN SURVEY

The Water System Plan Survey invited people to share input related to drinking water quality, elements of the Plan, actions the Plan may recommend, and community values related to the Plan. The survey was available in Spanish. The survey received 200 responses between May 22 and June 12, 2024.



WATER SYSTEM PLAN VIDEO

The City created a [short video](#) to explain the Water System Plan update and posted the video to social media. The video shared easy to understand information about the purpose of the Plan and where to find additional information.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

Educational materials, including:

- A fact sheet about Bellingham’s water system.
- A fact sheet about the Plan update.
- Frequently Asked Questions.

The City brought printed materials to in-person events.

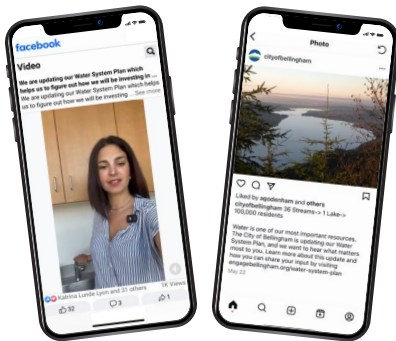
IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT

In-person engagement at community events, including the Bellingham Farmers Market and Meet-a-Truck events, to share information about the Plan and encourage people to take the survey.

- The City team hosted an informational table at the Bellingham Farmers Market on June 1 and June 8. The team talked with approximately 200 people.
- The City team attended the Meet-a-Truck event on May 23. The team talked with approximately 300 people.
- The City offered translated materials in Spanish at in-person events.



The City team attended in-person events and used fun and interactive ways to explain how Bellingham’s water system works.



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media posts promoted the video, encouraged people to visit Engage Bellingham, and directed people to the survey.

- Social media post #1 on May 22 reached over 4,000 people.
- Social media post #2 on June 7 reached over 5,000 people.

Who we heard from

The City developed a Water System Plan Survey to invite community members to share their values related to Bellingham’s water system and better understand community priorities for maintaining the water system.

The survey was live from May 22 to June 12, 2024, and received 200 responses. The survey invited respondents to share demographic information to capture who participated.

Almost all respondents live in Bellingham proper (about 92%).

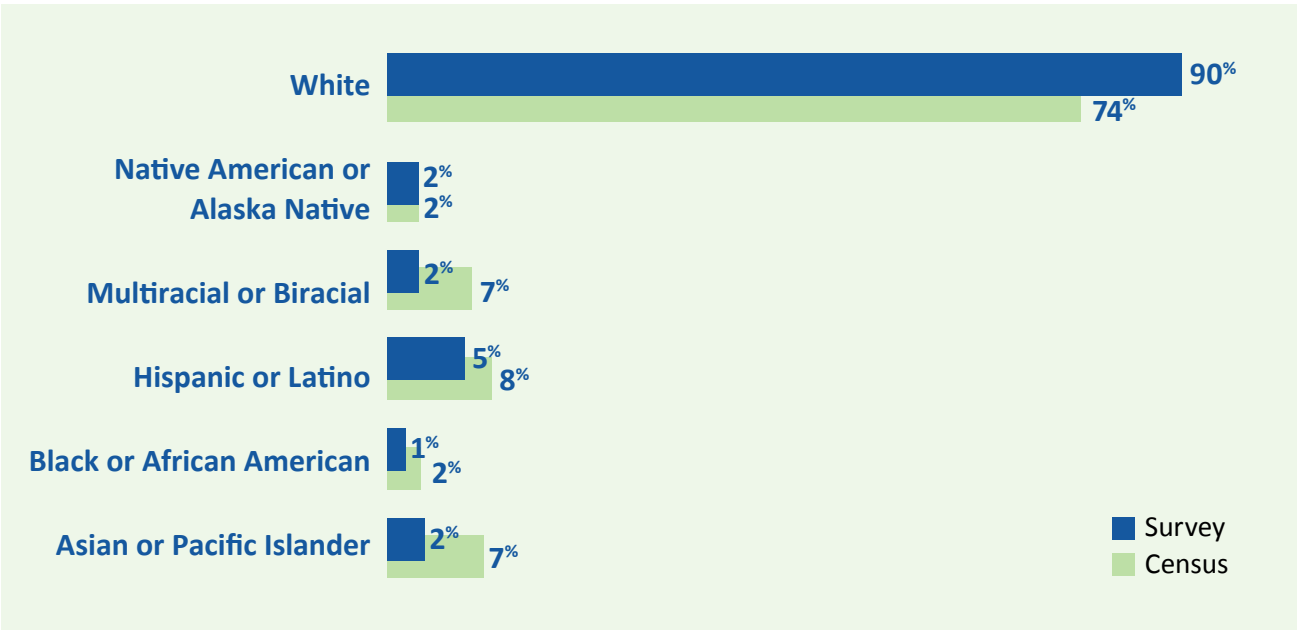
- Most live in Roosevelt Park, Lake Whatcom and Barkley Village; or by Civic Stadium, Lake Padden Park and Kulshan Middle School.
- 6% of respondents live somewhere else in Whatcom County.

Women represented 60% of respondents.

- Men represented 37% of respondents; and people who identified as non-binary, gender non-conforming, or transgender represented 4% of respondents.

Compared to census estimates, people who are white were overrepresented in survey responses.

- Survey respondents who are Hispanic or Latino; Asian or Pacific Islander; and Multiracial or Biracial were underrepresented compared to census estimates. (See graph below.)



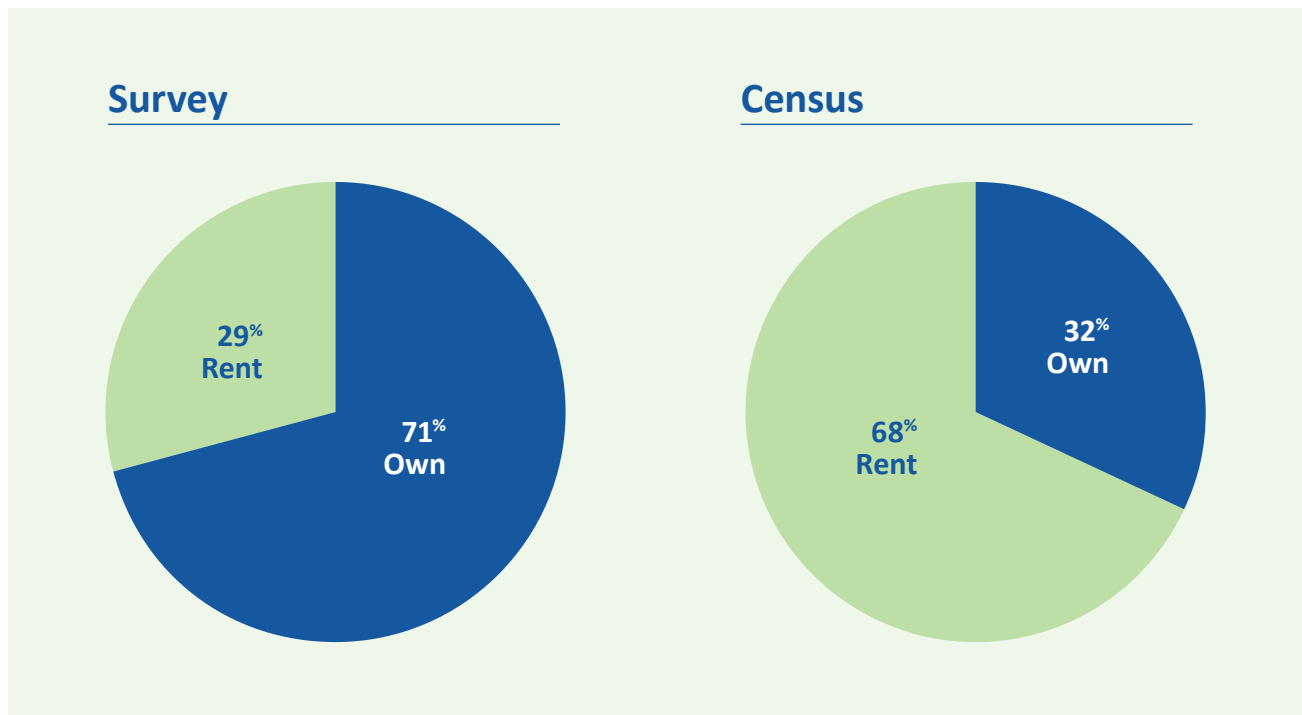
Most respondents (72%) are aged 25-64 years old.

Most respondents were somewhat familiar (38%) or not very familiar (28%) with Bellingham’s water system.

- Some people (35%) said it was easy to find information about Bellingham’s water system and water quality, but about half of respondents (48%) said it was neither easy nor difficult. Only 8% said it is very easy to find information.
- People who said they were less familiar with Bellingham’s water system were also less likely to think finding information was easy.

Most respondents (71%) own their home in Bellingham.

- This differs from census estimates, which show most Bellingham residents rent their home.



THE FOLLOWING RESPONDENTS WERE MORE LIKELY TO BE FAMILIAR WITH BELLINGHAM’S WATER SYSTEM:

- Identified as men
- Older respondents
- Homeowners
- Long-term residents (i.e., lived more years in Bellingham)

Next steps

The project team will use input gathered through this engagement effort to refine the Plan and ensure it reflects community values. The draft Plan will be ready for review, public comment, and initial City action later in 2024. The City will submit the Plan for review by the Washington DOH and Department of Ecology. Then the final Plan will be considered for approval by the City Council in summer 2025.

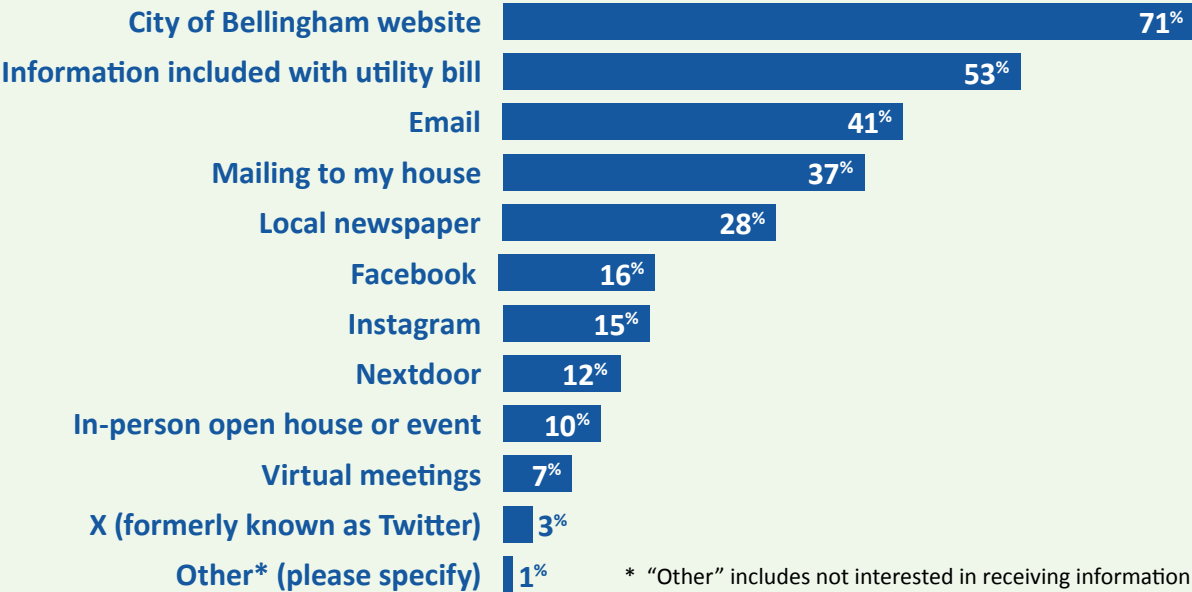
KEEPING PEOPLE INFORMED

Survey responses showed that people want to receive information about the Plan through the City of Bellingham Website (71%), followed by utility bills (53%). Using a range of engagement channels will help reach people who may not be as familiar with Bellingham Public Works or who think finding information is difficult.

CORRELATIONS

- Respondents who are familiar with Bellingham’s water system were more likely to want to receive information from the City of Bellingham website.
- Respondents who thinking finding information on Bellingham’s water system and water quality is easier were more likely to want to receive information by email.
- Respondents with a lower income were more likely to want to receive information on Facebook.

Where would you like to receive information about Bellingham’s Water System Plan?



Appendices

APPENDIX A: SURVEY COMMENTS

The gas and oil from boats concern me. Too many homes are being built near and around the lake. Irresponsible homeowners not properly disposing chemicals and the runoff into the lake

Through the city's education efforts on the subject, I'd like to learn more about how the natural water sources for the city are protected from contamination, both natural and man-made. Also, I'm curious about details of water treatment plants processes. I have recently learned that water in most cities of the country has trace amounts medications, among other things, which is really hard to clean out. Is it so?

Another thing would be good to know is the city's recommendations on additional filtering. I understand that the main effort is to make faucet water as safe as possible, but I also feel it is better to be transparent and openly talk about that with all the safety efforts, water cannot be 100% "clean".. I guess on this note, explains more what "clean" and "highest safety standards compliant" means in layman terms.

Because I previously experienced a chemical spill into the water supply (in Charleston WV) I am concerned about keeping water safe from industrial residues released into water. I believe water is precious and its safety needs to be respected.

It is unbelievable that gasoline engines are allowed on our water reservoir!!!! The pollutants from gasoline cannot be removed from the water!!!! All because some rich boat owners want their toys the rest of us have to drink their poison. Also, there should be a moratorium on building in the watershed and yard chemicals prohibited!!!! Bellingham is allowing too much growth!!! We should stop city growth to preserve our limited water resources. Agriculture should be made to use water saving practices.

I am concerned about allowing motorboats and pesticides and fertilizers around Lake Watcom which is our main water source.

We should be adding fluoride to the water!

No fossil fuels watercraft in our drinking supply.

Besides checking fecal counts, it would be of most interest in testing forever chemicals, and other byproducts. I am thankful for the effort of what the city does, but it makes no sense to allow motorized boats and continual growth in Lake Whatcom's watershed!

Bellingham tap water tastes excellent!

We should fluoridate our drinking water, which is one of the most cost-effective public health interventions to address dental health.

I am a renter and do not currently pay my own water bill. For this reason, utility bill inserts are not an effective communication channel for my household and other rental and multifamily households that do not pay their own water bills / do not have individually water metered units.

Bellingham should test for substances beyond what EPA requires. Specifically, more advanced testing for disinfectant byproducts and PFOAs. Consider safer water treatment technologies like activated carbon and reverse osmosis over chemical additives.

The water systems of Bellingham are vital but outdated. We have responsibilities to our children and to our indigenous peoples to do better. Whatcom Lake needs to be declared a Critical Zoning Area and we need to pursue more intense protection of our water as we move forward.

Knowing that PFAFs are not measured and some contamination from pipes may make household water less than safe is worrisome.

Lake water possible polluted by chemical run off and fuel from watercraft

I would vote NO on any potential plan or consideration to add fluoride to Bellingham water.

Lake Whatcom is a questionable source of municipal water due to runoff from fertilizers, boat motors on the lake, and other possible factors.

If the water quality in Bellingham Bay has high levels of bacteria, especially off of boulevard park- why? How is Bellingham addressing that and what are we doing to fix it?

I say it's safe, but I guess I don't really know. I'm not wild about the idea of lawn care around our drinking supply or gas-powered boats on it. I have no idea what the condition of pipes and conduits are in my neighborhood.

The COB tap water smells of chlorine, bleach, chemicals. It's hard to even brush teeth with it from the tap. Even our houseplants thrived after we filtered the water.

How is Bellingham addressing lead service line replacement and/or additives to the water to prevent lead leaching? How is Bham addressing new and upcoming PFAS standards? What is the status of our water in relation to those standards? Is Bham testing for and trying to address contaminants in our water supply that aren't officially regulated, such as medications and other endocrine disruptors?

The water in my new home tastes kind of funny. I had to get a Brita filter. I worry about PFAs.

Please don't add toxic fluoride to our water!

We deal with enough environmental toxins and chemicals as it is! We are most interested in it being clean, safe, and pure water – with as much toxins and chemicals being removed, please!

My concern is that our source isn't protected from pollution and our policies regarding motorized boats in Lake Whatcom and herbicide use for surrounding properties are perpetuating the problem.

I regularly smell chlorine when I run my water at home. I am very concerned that we are not doing enough to protect Lake Whatcom from pollution. We are all dependent on it for our water and we should be doing more.

I appreciate that there is no fluoride and that the water tastes good

My water often smells of chemicals (like bleach), I have to let it sit for a while to "off-gas"

Add fluoride

The CCR reports don't show nearly as many analytes as they should. Both influent and effluent water samples should be run for a full suite of petroleum products, PFAS, PCBs, VOCs, and RCRA metals. This data should be publicly available and easy to access to consumers. Reporting limits should be reported as well and data should be compared against MCLs in the report. The 2023 report states that "we detected none of the PFAS chemicals." What were your reporting limits? What PFAS chemicals did you screen for? What didn't you screen for?

I think it's ridiculous that motorboats are allowed to operate on a lake (Lake Whatcom) from which drinking water is sourced. Fuel spills are common while boating and this is especially dangerous given that the EPA recently approved a component of a new Chevron boat fuel made from discarded plastic that the EPA's own risk formula determined was so hazardous, everyone exposed to the substance continually over a lifetime would be expected to develop cancer.

Worried about all the chemicals we put in. Put in too much

The water that comes out of my tap has been tested as slightly acidic.

I live off N Forrest and sometimes the chlorine is extremely overwhelming

Our water sometimes leaves an odd smell on dishes we have hand washed.

Please add fluoride, it's ridiculous this hasn't happened yet.

Bellingham used to have water that tasted like the finest bottled water. But now there's so much chlorine in it, you can smell it when you run water from your faucets.

I have been hearing about elevated nitrate levels.

The most important thing to me about the Bellingham water system is that fluoride is NEVER added to the water. Thank you!

We live on the 1600 block of Lakeway. We were told we're on one of the last lines from Whatcom creek. We have extremely low water pressure at the city connection (we had it tested) but the city said they can't do anything about it. We'd have to install a pump where our system connects with the city. On top of this the water tastes very chlorinated. We've installed a filter system under the sink and we also bought a RO system to better combat microplastics and forever chemicals. Now we're looking for a new property out in the county because we're fed up with the water system and more.

How much micro plastic is in our water and how do we filter it out?

I am very concerned about PFAS and glad testing hasn't shown any appreciable levels. I would like our water supply to be tested for microplastics and glyphosate. I strongly support banning motorboats from Lake Whatcom.

Water quality is very important to my health. A concern that I've had for years about Bellingham's water quality is the amount of chlorine that must flow through the pipes. I used to smell it a few times a year, but in recent years I've smelled it pretty much every day. I drink gravity filtered water because I don't trust the water straight from the tap.

I cook with it and wash with it but won't drink it. It smells of chemical additives. Additionally, the psychological effect of knowing that our drinking water source is also an expanding recreational source (Lake Whatcom) with public beaches, private residences, and urinating swimmers, oil fouling motorboats is just disgusting. Reservoirs in other parts of the country are completely fenced off from Public Access.

At times our water is SO chlorinated it is undrinkable. We don't want to drink it or cook with it. Really not right.

The water stinks badly of chlorine. Too much chlorine. So much that it requires filtering at home.

Please do not use chlorine.

I feel our Bellingham water is safe and taste okay. I do believe the water system is well managed and in good condition plus well poised for the future. However, I have some concerns how our water source is managed namely Whatcom Lake itself - my concern is allowing watercraft that use petroleum to power their vessel - seems like it could well contaminate water quality thus degrading water quality. I'm also concerned about algae contamination as it seems climate change has increased the water temperature to warm making adverse toxic water and conditions.

Human activities in the drinking water reservoir is ridiculous but, since that horse is already out the barn, I am curious how the City should address actually providing pure water with all contaminants removed, not just the biologicals.

I would like our municipality to be ahead of the curve on fighting contamination by PFAS and other forever chemicals. Please ensure all manufacturing or other companies with likely contamination sources are not allowed to operate in or upstream of our water system.

I especially appreciate that we do not have fluoride in our water

We get days where the water has a distinct chlorine smell. Over the last several years water pressure has decreased in our house.

Bham city water is so chlorinated it is like drinking out of a pool. All water has to be filtered to keep scunge from forming in toilets, showers, etc. Something is off. When water is filtered scunge does not build up...

I also had my water turn brown for half a day with no notice from the city of any back flushing, etc. it was toxic water until it stopped.

I would like the issue of fluoride being add back into the water supply to be talked about again. And also there should be ban on all motorized vehicles on Lake Whatcom.

The chlorine is so strong it smells like a swimming pool.

Why is it still legal to use Round Up in the watershed?

Too much chlorine.

Wish we had fluoride added to our water.

APPENDIX B: NOTIFICATION MATERIALS

Water System Plan Fact Sheet

Spring 2024
City of Bellingham Water System Plan Update

As our city grows, we need to plan for how we will use, manage, and share our area's water resources. The City of Bellingham is updating its Water System Plan to ensure Bellingham residents continue to have access to safe and clean drinking water now and in the future.

Ensuring the reliability and efficiency of our water system
Bellingham's Water System Plan will help us make smart choices when planning for population growth, protecting our environment, and using water sources sustainably. But we need your help. Your input will help us reflect community values in development and implementation of the new plan.

Did you know?
The City currently provides water service to **over 100,000** City and Whatcom County residents.

Why are we updating our Water System Plan?
We last updated our Water System Plan in 2012. Since then, more people and businesses are relying on our water system for clean, safe drinking water. We need to make sure our water system is aligned with updated best practices and can meet the needs of a growing city. These best practices are set by the Washington State Department of Health.

Spring 2024
City of Bellingham Water System Plan Update

Plan timeline

Gather community input on values and priorities (MAY - JUNE 2024)
Share draft Water System Plan (AUG - OCT 2024)
Present draft Water System Plan to City Council (NOV 2024)
Adopt and share updated Water System Plan (JAN 2025)

Benefits of a healthy, resilient water system

- Protects the environment**
The Plan helps us decide how we use our water resources in a way that protects the environment.
- Keeps our community healthy**
The Plan ensures that the water we use is clean and safe, so we don't get sick from drinking it or using it for daily activities.

Get involved
You are an important part of our Water System Plan. Here are some ways you can help make sure the plan reflects the Bellingham community's values.

- Visit Engage Bellingham to learn more about our water system and the plan update: engagebellingham.org/water-system-plan
- Complete the short questionnaire by **Wednesday, June 12**, to tell us about your values related to the plan
- Request a briefing for your community group or organization by contacting **Natalie Monroe** at nhnida@cob.org

Questions?
Contact us with your questions and comments at askPW@cob.org.


What else we're up to
Our Water System Plan update is one of several City efforts to enhance water quality and create a healthier Bellingham. Visit our website to learn more about other current or upcoming plans and projects.

- Water Conservation Rebate Program
- Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan
- Post Point Resource Recovery project

About our Water System Fact Sheet

Spring 2024

About our Water System

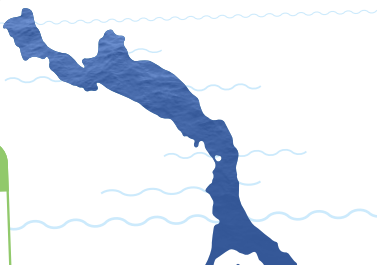


What is a water system?

You're using your city's water system whenever you turn on your faucet to fill a water glass, take a bath, or water your lawn. The City of Bellingham owns and manages its water system, which includes a water source (Lake Whatcom), treatment and pumping facilities, and pipes that bring water to homes and businesses. Our water system not only ensures you have clean water at home, it also brings water to businesses and facilities like fire hydrants.

Mmm... that's fresh!
Bellingham's water comes from Lake Whatcom

Lake Whatcom is fed by 36 streams that flow into the lake, including Silver Beach Creek and Smith Creek.



Did you know?

- At its deepest point, Lake Whatcom's depth reaches **334 feet deep**.
- Lake Whatcom is made of three distinct basins that hold about **250 billion gallons of water**.
- The lake is **10 miles long** and just **over a mile wide** at its widest point.
- Lake Whatcom has **30 miles of shoreline**.

How we make sure your water is clean and safe to drink

Much like the drain in the center of your kitchen sink, the lake has a 1,200-foot in its middle basin. This is where the City pulls its water supply. The pipe takes water to the Water Treatment Plant where it is treated before making its way to your home.

Our water treatment process


Step 1: Your water is treated with aluminum sulfate, which helps remove fine particles and algae. Then we use bubbles to collect other impurities by floating them to the surface where we can remove them from the water.

Step 2: We use chlorine and strong filters to remove any remaining impurities.

Step 3: We hold the treated water in a reservoir to eliminate any pathogens or bacteria in the water.


Step 4: We test the water's pH level and treat it with chlorine to protect it as it travels through the distribution system.

Step 5: Pipes and faucets bring high quality drinking water straight to your home and businesses.



Spring 2024


About our Water System



You can help keep our water system healthy

These daily tips will help keep Bellingham's water system strong and resilient for years to come.

- Be mindful about your water use** – turn off the water while brushing your teeth or shaving, shorten your showers, and run your dishwasher and washing machine only when it's full.
- Pick up after pets** – clean up and properly dispose of pet waste to avoid bacteria entering our streams and lakes.
- Safely manage harmful chemicals** – never dump chemicals like motor oil, pesticides, leftover paints, and medicines down drains or on the ground.
- Look out for leaks** – check on your vehicle or septic system regularly to help prevent or catch leaks that can wash into our waterways.



Get involved

The City of Bellingham is updating its Water System Plan and wants your help. Here are some ways you can help make sure the plan reflects Bellingham's community values.

- Visit Engage Bellingham to learn more about our water system and the plan update: engagebellingham.org/water-system-plan
- Complete the short questionnaire by **Wednesday, June 12**, to tell us about your values related to the plan
- Tell your neighbors and friends about the update so they have a chance to share thoughts and questions
- Request a briefing for your community group or organization by contacting **Natalie Monroe** at nhnida@cob.org




Questions?

Contact us with your questions and comments at askPW@cob.org.

What else we're up to

Our Water System Plan update is one of several City efforts to enhance water quality and create a healthier Bellingham. Visit our website to learn more about other current or upcoming plans and projects.

- Water Conservation Rebate Program
- Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan
- Post Point Resource Recovery project

Outreach flyer

City of Bellingham Water System Plan Update



The City of Bellingham is updating its Water System Plan to ensure Bellingham residents continue to have access to clean, safe drinking water now and in the future.

You are an important part of this plan.



Visit EngageBellingham.org/water-system-plan to learn more and share your input.

Your opinion matters – take our brief survey by **Wednesday, June 12.**

Questions?

Contact us with your questions and comments at askPW@cob.org.

