

DOWNTOWN FORWARD

It starts in the heart 



2026 Progress

For the third year in a row, we're sharing the latest steps we've taken to keep moving Downtown Forward. We've organized updates around our Downtown Forward goals — so you can see exactly where progress is happening and where work continues. Visit cob.org/DowntownForward to learn more.

Goal: Downtown Bellingham is safe and welcoming.

This year brought new efforts to keep downtown safe while expanding support for vulnerable community members.

- **Temporary alley closure** – In April 2026, we closed a three-block section of alley downtown that had become a well-known spot for drug dealing and other dangerous activity. This temporary closure will give neighboring businesses a respite and allow us to clean and improve the space before re-opening it.
- **Severe weather day shelter opened** – We partnered with Whatcom County to open a temporary Severe Weather Day Shelter in December 2025. The shelter provided a safe, warm space for individuals experiencing homelessness during periods of cold weather, and laid the groundwork for a more permanent day center later this year.



2026 Progress



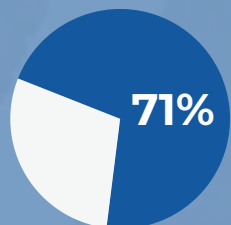
We also continued some of our most impactful programs, including:

- **Bike patrol** – Our bike patrol unit has patrolled downtown since January 2025.
- **Added security** – We've continued to contract a private security firm to provide security at public parking garages and parks downtown. These professionals keep these spaces safe and well-maintained, and direct people in need to services.
- **Portland loos** – We've maintained these 24-hour public restrooms as a clean, safe resource for all members of the community.

And, we kept downtown clean and spiffy along the way:

- As the City's contracted service provider, Downtown Bellingham Partnership (DBP) removed more than **2,000 graffiti tags** and **7,000 piles of dog waste** in 2025.
- Public Works responded to **more than 2,000 SeeClickFix requests** for services downtown in 2025.

Measuring our work



Most 2026 Downtown Pulse survey respondents say they feel either the **same** or **safer** downtown.

Bike Patrol by the numbers

January-May 2026

- Infractions/citations: **147**
- Calls for service: **691**
- Narcotics impounded: **329g**
- Miles ridden (since January '25): **6,271**



2026 Progress

Goal: Downtown has active public spaces and thriving arts and culture.

This was a big year for events! The **Downtown Activation and Beautification program** supported programming throughout the year:

In August 2025, we joined KZAX 94.9 at the Make.Shift Art Space for the **Radio Forever Festival**. The free event featured art installations, vendors, and musical performances.

In October, we celebrated the opening of the **Sunset Alley outdoor gallery**. Paper Whale transformed the two-block alley, and Children of the Setting sun created a large-scale **Coast Salish mural**, which will soon receive projection lighting.

Throughout the year, we enjoyed Bike Polo in the Commercial Street Parking Garage, including a particularly memorable **Halloween tournament**. The City purchased an on-site storage unit to make it easier to convert the space into a bike polo arena each week.

Finally, May 2026 saw some unexpected visitors downtown — ranging from a 10-foot-tall crane to child-sized ladybugs. The annual **Procession of the Species Parade and Festival** once again traversed the streets of downtown before a celebratory conclusion in Maritime Heritage Park.

2026 Progress

... and that's not all!

- **Waterfront Skatepark** – Community members shared big dreams for a future skatepark under the Roeder Avenue Bridge. In November 2025, 400+ people filled out our design survey and nearly 100 joined us in person at an open house. The final design is in progress.
- **Lightcatcher Building refresh** – The Whatcom Museum's Lightcatcher Building received fresh paint and banners, and stunning 3D lighted "Nocturnal Lanterns" by Sparks Design and the Femme Metal Collective.
- **Find Billy** – Hundreds of people joined our scavenger hunt last summer for each of the four adorable "Billy" sculptures by artist Uckiod installed around downtown (find one on the cover of this report!).
- **Bellingham Blooms** – Starting in April 2026, downtown is coming alive with monthly installations of locally grown flowers from North Sound Flower Collective. Events and installations through the end of the year will range from storefront window displays to floral selfie arches and workshops.

➔ *Discover more of the 2026 grant winners for this year's Downtown Activation and Beautification program [on our website](#).*



2026 Progress

Goal: Downtown is a top destination to work, shop, invest, and enjoy.

- **Vacancy study** – We heard from our community that downtown vacancies are a concern. A less active street life shapes how we all feel about downtown and our desire to spend time and money there. In response, the City completed an in-depth study — completed March 2026 — to get a clear, data-driven snapshot of vacant commercial buildings downtown and what we can do about it.
→ [Read the full report on our website.](#)
- **Soccer fan zone** – The FIFA World Cup is coming to Washington this summer, and Bellingham is an official SeattleFWC26 fan zone. Ahead of the excitement, we gave grants to downtown businesses and organizations to improve their spaces and host watch parties and other activities.
- **Hello Lampost** – 5K in tourism funds helped DBP expand its visitor-assistance app, which has so far fielded more than 3,000 messages and questions about downtown activities and amenities.

Measuring our work



\$600K

supported downtown activation and beautification projects in 2025 (mostly in lodging tax dollars)

\$113K in grants to 11 City Center businesses and organizations to host activities and watch parties for the SeattleFWC26 fan zone



676

new units built downtown since 2018

200+

more units currently in application or under construction downtown

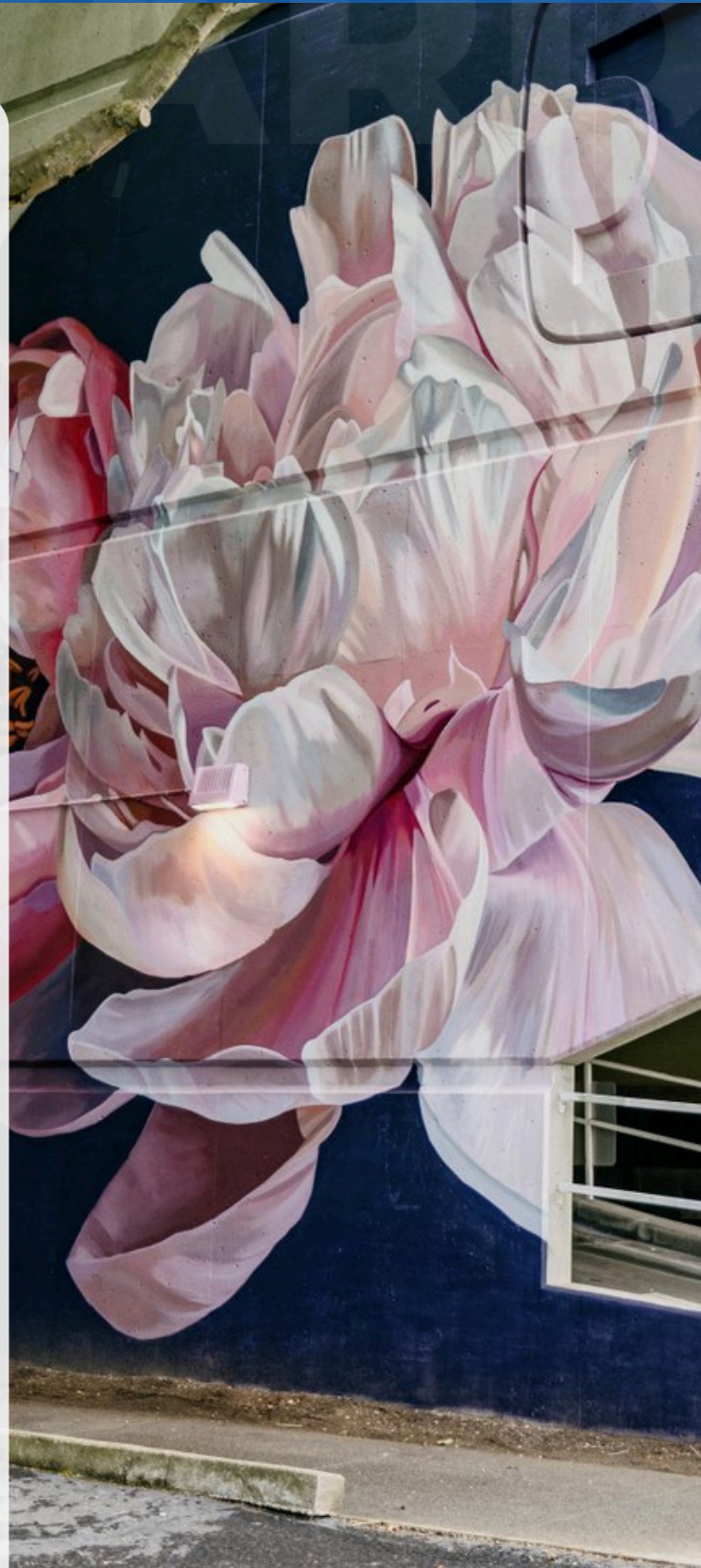
2026 Progress

Goal: Downtown is walkable, bikeable, and resilient

- **Holly St. Bike Lane** – Last summer, the City of Bellingham implemented our latest round of changes to enhance cyclist visibility, reduce right-turn conflicts, and encourage safer speeds through downtown intersections. These changes respond to community feedback and concerns we heard during the initial phase of this project.

Goal: Downtown is a desirable, lively, and affordable neighborhood to live in

- **Affordable Housing Development at Unity and Flora** – We're partnering with the Whatcom County Housing Authority to transform a former office property into 64 units of low-income housing, including units specifically for people with disabilities. The groundbreaking is scheduled for this fall.
- **Old Town residential development** – More than 200 new housing units are in application or under construction in the Old Town District, which will bring more people to our City Center within walking distance of downtown. The first mixed-use 6-story apartment, with 86 new housing units, is nearing completion, and associated street improvements are underway.



What's next

This past year brought real challenges for many of our local businesses — from rising operating costs to reduced border traffic. Through it all, the downtown community has shown remarkable resilience.

Looking ahead, we remain deeply committed to supporting the businesses, neighbors, and visitors who make downtown Bellingham thrive. The year ahead is full of promise, and we have a lot to look forward to. Here are a few highlights of what's in store.

More arts and culture

- **Bay Street Outdoor Cinema** is returning for three Fridays this summer, courtesy of the Pickford Film Center.
- **Free music** is coming to the City Center through the Tides and Tunes series at Central Pier and the kid-oriented Lunchtime at Maritime series.

Facility and infrastructure improvements

- We're launching the **Downtown Connections Plan**, an effort to identify practical projects (think sidewalks, parking, curb use, and more) to support a more accessible, welcoming, and vibrant downtown.
- The long-awaited **Central Library renovation** is kicking off this fall to create a refreshed children and teen space, central AC, and more.
- The City is opening a **year-round day shelter** to provide a safe space for individuals experiencing homelessness. The space will be easy accessible to downtown.
- We'll also kick off key strategies outlined in our **Vacancy & Vibrancy report**, including expediting downtown permits.

Stay informed

cob.org/downtown-forward
engagebellingham.org/DowntownForward

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