



Request for Proposals: Downtown Activation and Beautification

Issued: October 22, 2025
Proposals Due: December 10, 2025 at 12:00 (noon) PST
Available Funding: Up to \$250,000, for multiple projects

I. BACKGROUND

Downtowns define cities. They are the heart of community connection, tourism, culture, and economic activity. The right mix of businesses, housing, social services, and civic uses make a downtown great. And while the City has a primary responsibility to foster a vibrant downtown, we look to partnerships with creative people and groups to promote beautiful, artistic, joyful and fun experiences for locals and visitors. With this third Request for Proposals (RFP) for Downtown Beautification and Activation, we are once again investing resources to bring more great things to Downtown Bellingham.



The Radio Forever event, hosted by Make.Shift. Photography by Jo.

Bellingham has also been designated as a Washington state fan zone for the 2026 worldwide soccer tournament taking place throughout North America, including games in Seattle and Vancouver B.C, between June 11-July 19, 2026. This presents an opportunity to celebrate the excitement of the tournament, connection of sports, and influx of tourism in an inclusive, hyper-local and empowering way. See [Bellingham Fan Zone RFP](#) for additional funding opportunities related to the soccer tournament.

II. AVAILABLE FUNDING

Up to \$250,000 in lodging tax funding will be distributed through this RFP. Applicants may request any funding amount; however, the intent is to fund multiple projects, so full funding will not be contracted to a single project. Funding may be used for project development and design, materials/supplies, fabrication/production, marketing/promotion, installation, service or artist fees and/or insurance and other fees. Successful proponents will enter into a services agreement or similar contract with the City of Bellingham and will be paid on a reimbursement basis.

Funding is limited to:

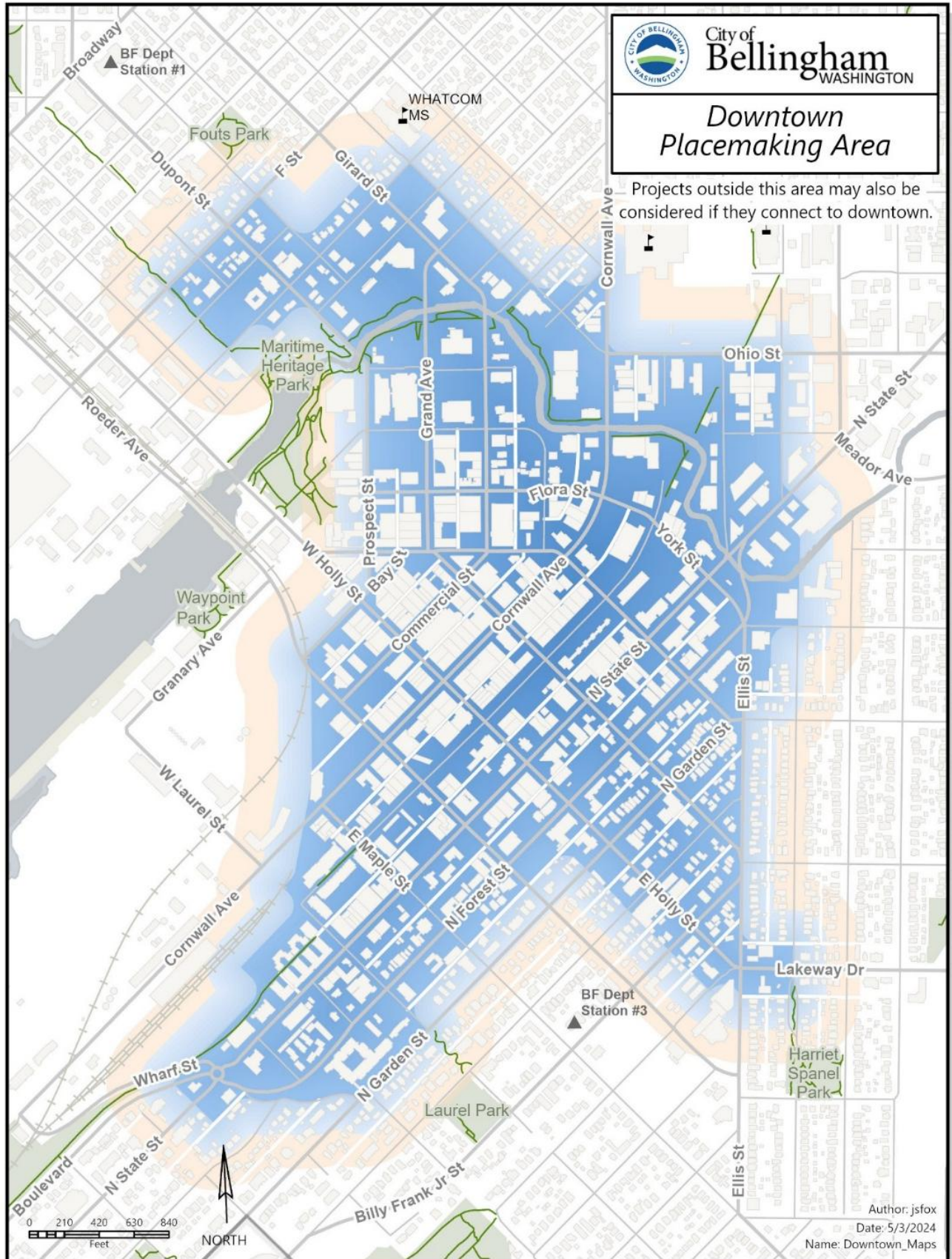
- 1) Projects on public streets, sidewalks, plazas, parks or other public properties.
- 2) Projects on the exterior of private buildings, provided they create a public benefit. Permanent improvements to private property are not permitted.
- 3) Activities or events in private buildings or on private property that are open to the public.

III. PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Attract visitors and create new and memorable experiences to enhance the city's brand as a tourism destination to boost revenue and economic growth.
- Create a more enjoyable experience for pedestrians ("surprise and delight") to encourage exploration, longer stays and increased foot traffic.
- Enliven public streets, sidewalks, plazas, and parks to promote use of underutilized spaces, create opportunities for community connections, and foster a sense of belonging.
- Enhance aesthetic appeal, district identity, and "Instagram-worthy" opportunities.
- Encourage connections between downtown and the waterfront, Old Town, and other adjacent neighborhoods.
- Foster people's positive engagement with downtown to improve the experience of joy, sense of safety, pride, and interest in the downtown neighborhood.

IV. PREFERRED LOCATIONS

Projects are targeted within the downtown area shown on the map below. Projects outside of this boundary may be considered if they have a strong connection to or influence downtown activation.



V. DESIRED PROPOSALS

Activation examples include, but are not limited to:

- Performances or live music
- Cultural celebrations, storytelling, or dance
- Outdoor games or activities
- Public workshops, skilled demonstrations, or classes
- Block parties, festivals, markets, or other events

Events that are family-friendly, free or low-cost to attend; showcase local identity, diverse voices, and creative expression; and foster inclusive experiences for visitors and residents are preferred.

Beautification examples include, but are not limited to:

- Pop-up art installations or displays
- Creative lighting
- Artwork
- Signage
- Interactive exhibits or displays

Collaborations with local businesses, cultural institutions and/or organizations are encouraged.

VI. REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

To be considered for funding, applicants must meet the following criteria:

- Experience designing and implementing projects and/or programs.
- Ability to provide or secure expertise, supplies, materials, equipment, staffing and all other aspects necessary to carry out the project or program, including fronting the costs for reimbursement.
- Ability to provide proof of insurance and endorsement listing the City as additional insured, showing the insurance as primary and non-contributory and waiving subrogation for the duration of the project. Coverage shall include but is not limited to:

○ Workers Compensation	Statutory Amount
○ Automobile Liability	\$1,000,000
○ Broad Form Comprehensive Liability	\$1,000,000/occurrence
	\$2,000,000 aggregate

A pre-contract discussion with Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism and/or City of Bellingham Communications staff will be required if your proposal is approved for funding. Recipients may

also be required to provide a post-installation or event report on the tourism benefits of the project.

VII. SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS

To receive full consideration, submissions must include each of the following elements and be submitted by email via combined PDF. **Total pages of the combined PDF should not exceed five (5) pages. The cover sheet, budget, and references/letters of support are not included in this page limit.**

- ☐ Cover Sheet, attached.
- ☐ Description. Describe the proposed project location, including a map or photos if helpful. Describe the proposal in detail. Consider including inspirational or example images, if available.
- ☐ Evaluation. Explain how the goals and objectives of this RFP will be achieved by the proposal. How will it bring visitors downtown, encourage them to linger, or otherwise contribute to local tourism? How might it activate or beautify downtown or contribute to a festive atmosphere?
- ☐ Team Experience. List the names of the people responsible for implementing the project or program, with a summary of their qualifications and experience and their primary duties/role with the proposed project.
- ☐ Approach and Timeline. List the steps necessary to implement the project or program, with timelines and the person responsible for completing each step.
- ☐ Budget. Provide a list of all expenses required to implement the project. Include anticipated vendor(s) or service provider(s). Indicate which items would be paid for with grant funds and which would be paid for with other funding sources or in-kind contributions (not required). Show the total program cost and the amount of grant funding being requested. See Sample Budget Form, attached.
- ☐ References and/or letters of support (optional).

VIII. PRE-SUBMITTAL RESOURCES

Questions regarding this RFP should be directed to:

Darby Galligan, Senior Planner | Special Projects
Planning and Community Development Department
dgalligan@cob.org | (360) 778-8389

Projects in the public right-of-way may require a [Special Event permit](#) or [Temporary Right of Way Use permit](#).

IX. HOW TO APPLY

Proposals must be received at or before **12:00 PM (noon) PST on December 10, 2025**.

Submissions or materials received past this deadline will not be considered.

Proposals must be submitted as a single combined PDF attachment not exceeding five (5) pages, not including the cover sheet, budget, or references/ letters of support. PDF submittals should be sent via email to:

Darby Galligan, Senior Planner (she/her)

dgalligan@cob.org

X. SCORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

Proposals are first screened for feasibility, then scored by a review committee of local tourism, arts, downtown, and City representatives. The committee develops funding recommendations for the Mayor, who forwards them to the Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC) of the City's Tourism Commission. LTAC makes the final recommendation to City Council for approval.

Proposals will be ranked based on the following criteria:

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION	MAX POINTS
Overall activation and beautification value	Activates and/or beautifies the targeted areas, creates interest and a draw for visitors. Reflects local identity and culture. Achieves the goals and objectives of the RFP.	20
Quality and appropriateness	Represents high quality and appropriateness of the project to the proposed location and program goals. Reflects support from surrounding and affected parties.	20
Feasibility and readiness	Project team demonstrates experience and expertise implementing projects. Presents a realistic plan, manageable scale, reasonable and clear budget, feasible timeline and rational logistics for implementation.	20

Inclusivity, accessibility and sustainability	Welcomes a broad audience, considers how to provide equal access and environmental sustainability wherever possible.	20
Positive community and economic impact	Supports local businesses and organizations, generates overnight hotel stays and/or creates other positive community impact.	20

The City of Bellingham promotes equal opportunity and shall not discriminate against any person or proposal based upon race, color, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, nationality or disability.



Cover Sheet: Downtown Activation and Beautification RFP

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Project/Program Title: _____

Contact Name/Title: _____

Organization Name (if applicable): _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Organization Status (if applicable):
☐ Non-Profit ☐ Public Agency ☐ For-Profit

Grant Amount Requested: \$ _____

Total Project/Program Budget: \$ _____

Installation/Event Dates (if applicable) _____

Is the event open to the public and free of charge (if applicable):
☐ Yes ☐ No

Name

Date

By signing you acknowledge all required documents and information has been provided and required qualifications to be considered for funding have been met.

SAMPLE BUDGET

BUDGET SHEET

Project Name: _____

BUDGET ITEMS	TOTAL EST. COST	GRANT PORTION
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
TOTAL	\$	\$

Eligible operational expenses are limited to venue rentals (i.e., conference rooms), equipment rentals (i.e., cones, traffic signs, etc.), contracted services, and/or the purchase of goods/supplies with prior approval by the City. For example, payroll, travel, alcohol, any expense that may trigger prevailing wage and permanent equipment expenses are NOT allowed. Final decisions by the City on allowed operational expenses will be identified in the contract and pre-approved. All expenses must be incurred up front and paid via reimbursement during the contractual period with appropriate back-up documentation available, including proof of payment.