

2026 Commitments to Downtown

November 26, 2025 – You’ve probably seen the headlines about the City’s budget challenges – and yes, we’re navigating some tough decisions. However, our commitment to downtown and the incredible businesses that bring it to life has not changed.

Since launching Downtown Forward in 2024, we’ve made significant strides toward reinforcing downtown as the hub where people are eager to work, live, and visit. Our work will continue in 2026, including:

- **Commercial and vacancy strategy** – The City is developing strategies to encourage the reuse and redevelopment of vacant buildings downtown.
- **Parking garage mural** – We’re working with the Downtown Bellingham Partnership to kick off the Commercial Street Parking Garage art plan, which will eventually feature an expansive mural brightening up Commercial Street
- **World soccer tournament fan zone** – The world’s game is coming to Northwest Washington in 2026, and we’re ready to celebrate! We recently [launched a grant program](#) to support community watch parties, designated game venues, and soccer-related activations.
- **Downtown transportation plan** – We’re taking a holistic look at how everyone moves through downtown to make informed decisions about changes to our public streets and sidewalks.
- **Central library renovation** – We’re making a significant investment in one of downtown’s most-used public spaces next year, bringing new life to the beloved, but 75-year-old Central Library. A refreshed Children’s department and relocated Teen space will anchor the year-long renovations, creating a welcoming, modern hub where families can learn and connect.

We will also continue investing in many programs that have made a measurable impact over the past two years, including:

- **Cleaning and litter control** – Our crews are regularly out keeping downtown clean and welcoming, including keeping sidewalks and alleys clean and maintain the Portland Loo downtown public restrooms. Plus, we’re continuing to invest more than \$200,000 in the Downtown Bellingham Partnership to provide litter pick-up, landscaping, and graffiti removal service.
- **Bike patrol unit** – We are maintaining our \$750,000 investment to keep this police presence downtown.
- **Downtown activation grants** – From murals to activated vacant storefronts, these grants have brought more interest and excitement to downtown, encouraging people to visit and explore. We are keeping our downtown activation and beautification grants rolling into 2026 with a \$250,000 investment of tourism funds.

In short: We are still all in on moving downtown forward, in partnership with the businesses and organizations that continue to invest in downtown’s bright future. We know how important downtown is to our community’s identity, economy, and future, and we’re doing our part to keep building on the progress we’ve made together.