

2022 – 2026 GREENWAYS STRATEGIC PLAN











City Council approved December 12, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan ("Plan") guides and directs the expenditure of Greenways levy funds. In 2016, voters approved Bellingham's fourth Greenways property tax levy following similar ballot measures passed in 1990, 1997 and 2006. All four levy ballot measures emphasized acquiring land in contiguous corridors when possible; protection of unique and sensitive property; the enhancement and connection between trail corridors, parks, and open space; and park and trail development and maintenance.

The 2016 Greenways IV Levy ("Levy") authorizes a 7-year property tax levy that collects between \$5 million and \$6 million per year for the Parks & Recreation Department. This levy expires at the end of 2023.

This document works in concert with the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan¹ (PRO Plan) adding specificity to projects funded by the Greenways levy. This Strategic Plan will be updated every six years in conjunction with the PRO Plan. This ensures consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, improves public process, and uses staff resources effectively. This update is a culmination of months of work by the Greenways Advisory Committee, its sub-committee and significant staff time beginning in the Fall of 2021.

While these planning documents look well into the future, this document also helps guide the shorter-term Biennial Action Plan. This is done through the biennial budget process to identify projects and acquisitions that will be pursued with Greenways levy funds in the near future. To be consistent with BMC 2.20.040(5)², the Department's biennial budget³ should be reviewed with Greenways' priorities found in this document. The Greenways Advisory Committee will review and make recommendations on the biennial budget in the spring of each biennial budget year. Other City of Bellingham documents and plans also helped shape this Strategic Plan; a list of these resources is included in this Plan.

Levy funds collected but not expended at the end of 2023 may be spent consistent with this Plan until exhausted. The Plan has been written with the assumption that the Greenways_Levy will be renewed by voters on a future ballot. As such, the scope of the Plan contemplates priorities and strategies that extend in time beyond the term of the current levy.



³ https://cob.org/gov/budget

funds.

HOW CAN GREENWAYS FUNDS BE USED?

Greenways IV (Resolution No. 2016-16⁴) stated that Greenways funds should be applied to "acquire, improve, develop and maintain greenways, open space sites, parks, park facilities and trails." To frame this differently, one might view the Greenways funds in two questions:

On what can Greenways funds be spent?

- Greenway corridors
- Open space sites
- Parks
- Park facilities
- Trails

How are Greenways funds used?

- Acquisition
- Improvements and Development
- Maintenance

Goal: "to acquire, improve, develop and maintain greenways, open space sites, parks, park facilities and trails."

As detailed in the 2020 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan⁵ (PRO Plan), funding sources for parks and park facilities also include Real Estate Excise Tax (REET), grants, Park Impact Fees, and the General Fund. These funding sources are often restricted in their application, either by project or by location, while Greenways funds may be applied broadly to achieve the goals of the levy. Greenways funds remain the most flexible of the funding sources available and have been critical in leveraging other funding sources.

An important part of this Strategic Plan is to guide the expenditure of funds between property acquisition, development, and maintenance. Acquisitions are not consistent year-to-year expenses and are often opportunistic as properties become available. The same can be said for development and maintenance expenses. Greenways IV provides guidelines for the spending of levy funds over the life of the program, but does not constrain biennial budgeting to the following allocations:

- 42% for the development of properties purchased by the City;
- 33% for land acquisition, specifically including trail connections; and
- 25% for the ongoing maintenance, operation and capital replacement needs of park properties and facilities.

Decisions about allocation of Greenways funds, including property acquisitions, are guided by this Plan, the PRO Plan and approved by the City Council through adoption of the City Budget⁶. Specific procedures for the acquisition of properties can be found in the governance documents listed in the Greenways Advisory Committee Chapter of this Plan. Greenways levy revenues, expenditures, and balances are reported annually to the City Council. The Greenways Fund Annual Report breaks down actual expenditures by acquisitions, development, and maintenance. This annual report along with the adopted budget is the most complete and current source of information on the Greenways fund. The

⁴ https://bellingham.municipal.codes/enactments?type=Res

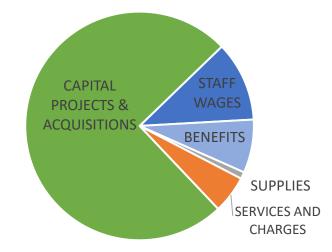
⁵ https://cob.org/project/parks-recreation-open-space-plan-update

⁶ https://cob.org/gov/budget

latest annual report is included here as <u>Appendix A</u>. Annual reports are posted to the <u>Greenways web</u> page⁷.

A summary of Greenways Levy IV expenditures and revenues is included in the following charts. The vast majority of Greenways Levy IV funds (75%) go toward capital costs and acquisitions, while another 19% go toward salaries and benefits needed for operations and maintenance, acquisitions, and park development shown in Figure 1. Figure 2 shows the revenues and the expenditures from the Greenways funds during Greenways Levy IV. The chart shows that expenditures vary from year to year based on available properties, staff work load, and need. Over time the expenditures closely match the revenues.

Greenways Fund Expenditure Type, 2017-2022*



*2022 Estimated expenditures Oct. - Dec.

Figure 1. Levy IV Expenditures

Greenways Annual Expenses and Revenues



Figure 2. Annual Revenues and Expenses

⁷ https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway

Roughly thirty-one million dollars of the Greenways fund were spent over the six-year period between 2017 and 2022. Below is a graphic showing a number of significant acquisitions, development, and maintenance projects that have occurred from 2017 through 2022.



Figure 3 Significant acquisitions, development, and maintenance that have occurred using Greenways Levy IV funds

Due to new construction during this time frame, Park Impact Fee (PIF) revenue was higher than normal, resulting in the use of PIF rather than Greenways funds for most new development projects. Saving Greenways funds for future projects provides more flexibility, as Greenways funds may be used for both maintenance and development, as well as acquisition. As with prior Greenways levies, the levy will expire with a reserve balance. This is typical as projects take considerable time to complete. All revenue generated remains in the fund at the end of each levy. A healthy reserve provides Greenwaysfunded maintenance and development staff a cushion should the planned 5th Greenways levy fail to pass. As our community and park system grows, requiring additional restoration, facility upgrades and maintenance, it is likely that a 5th levy will increase funding in those areas.

GREENWAYS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The citizen led Greenways Advisory Committee is charged with strategic guidance in use of Greenways funds. The purpose of the committee is to identify, develop, review, and recommend selection criteria, general project priorities and specific actions relating to the expenditure and allocation of Greenways Levy Funds. The Greenways Advisory Committee provides citizen advice to the City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department staff on implementing the intent and objectives of the Greenways levies. Specific authorities and duties are laid out in the Council Ordinance 2006-09-096, codified in BMC 2.208

The nine-member volunteer committee study maps, take field trips, and create strategic plans to prioritize acquisitions for each levy. The committee members role includes assisting the Parks Department in mapping Greenways corridors, looking at key linkages, connections, and intact habitat, leveraging other funding and donations, and recommending purchases. Their active participation contributes to the success of the Greenways Program.

"To provide citizen advice to the city council and the parks and recreation department on implementing the intent and objectives of the greenway levies in a manner that best addresses current opportunities, conditions and needs." (BMC 2.20.040)

Committee Guiding Documents:

- Business rules: (https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/greenway-committee-bylaws.pdf)
- Authority and Duties: (https://bellingham.municipal.codes/BMC/2.20.040)
- Acquisition Policy (https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/greenway-levy-acquisition-approval-procedure.pdf)
- Committee Meeting Schedule and Archive (https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/greenway-bc)

DEFINITIONS

Greenways IV uses the terms "development," "land acquisition," and "ongoing maintenance, operation, and capital replacement needs of park properties and facilities." Although the terms are not defined within the text of Greenways IV, this Plan uses the terms as follows:

"Development" means the construction of physical structures, trail/surface improvements, and signage on land, or lands covered by water, that improves the quality of life of people residing, working within or visiting Bellingham. Development also means to enhance and restore natural systems, such as through

⁸ https://bellingham.municipal.codes/BMC/2.20

removal of invasive species, planting of trees and native vegetation, habitat restoration or mitigation of impacts to address climate change or improve climate resiliency.

"Land acquisition" means the purchase of real property in fee-simple, easement or other such instrument.

"Ongoing maintenance, operation and capital replacement of park properties and facilities" is defined as follows. Routine maintenance and repair of park properties and their structures, assets, and grounds. Operation means the routine operation of the park system. Capital maintenance or replacement includes repair, rehabilitation, or full replacement of a capital asset.



Parks & Recreation Mission: Support a healthy community by promoting high quality parks and recreation services.

Greenways Goals, Objectives, & Priorities

These are the overarching, long-term goals and priorities of the <u>Greenways Program</u>. Specific projects and actions to implement these goals are reviewed and updated every two years in conjunction with the biennial Capital Budget. Note that the scope of this Plan contemplates priorities and strategies that extend in time beyond the term of the current levy. The following goals work within the Comprehensive Plan, specifically the Parks & Recreation, Open Space Plan goals:

PRO Plan Goal 1: Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.

PRO Plan Goal 2: Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of use of the existing park and recreation system.

PRO Plan Goal 3: Create environments that encourage regular active and passive recreation activities to support health, sense of safety, wellness and social connections.

PRO Plan Goal 4: Preserve and integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout the park system.

PRO Plan Goal 7: Manage Bellingham's park land and programs effectively, efficiently and sustainably utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures.

GOAL 1: ACQUIRE PROPERTY WHICH CONNECTS PARKS, NEIGHBORHOODS, OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT ACROSS BELLINGHAM AND ITS URBAN GROWTH AREA

Objectives:

- a. <u>Equitable community access</u>. Ensure equitable community access when setting acquisition priorities. Priority consideration should be given to neighborhoods with a disproportionate number of low-income households in ensuring access to greenways, open space, parks, park facilities and trails.
- b. <u>Connecting neighborhoods</u>. Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to connect neighborhoods and provide viable alternatives to motor vehicles. Development or redevelopment of shared use trails should be pursued only when dedicated "green" trails are not feasible or likely. The use of shared sidewalks should be minimized. "Green" trails are preferred over "grey" trails.
- c. <u>Connecting parks</u>. Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to provide public access to parks and open space.
- d. <u>Habitat corridors</u>. Create wildlife corridors consistent with City of Bellingham <u>Wildlife</u>

 <u>Corridor Analysis</u> for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, <u>Priority Habitat and</u>

⁹ https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/210719 Wildlife-Corridor-Analysis-SHORT-REPORT.pdf

- <u>Species</u>¹⁰. Areas along the City's fresh- and saltwater shorelines, as well as forested habitats, should be connected.
- e. <u>Environmental Quality</u>. Consideration should be given to the acquisition of property which protects or restores the environment. Water quality, forest lands, and priority habitats are examples of environmental features that should be protected through acquisition. In addition, acquisition strategies should help implement the City's <u>Climate Protection Action Plan</u>.
- f. Open Space. Acquire property that creates open space corridors to mitigate the impacts of growth. Areas at the edge of the city limits or urban growth area, as well as areas that transition from more intense development (e.g., industrial) to residential, should be sought.
- g. Blueways. Acquire properties that improve access to Bellingham's many water features.

Acquisition Priorities:

- Riparian/Habitat corridors:
 - o Chuckanut Creek
 - o Whatcom Creek
 - o Squalicum Creek
 - o Silver Creek
 - o Padden Creek
- Equitable community access:
 - See PRO Plan for identified gaps in level of service for parks and proposed trail corridors.
 - Community gardens
- Open Space/Habitat:
 - o Between Bellingham and Ferndale Urban Growth Areas
 - North and northeast of Bellingham Urban Growth Area
 - Bear Creek Open Space
 - o Missing links between Samish Crest and Padden Open Space
 - Marine shorelines

Specific trail corridors can be found in the Mapped Priorities section of this plan.

GOAL 2: DEVELOP AND RESTORE PUBLIC PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Objectives:

- a. <u>Protect, enhance and restore public parks, trails, open spaces and wildlife corridors</u>. Monitor natural and human impact of properties and facilities to ensure minimal loss of sustainable use, enjoyment, and functionality for wildlife.
- b. <u>Improve access to current parks, open spaces and trails</u>. Utilize effective signage, accessibility, and level of service that promote inclusivity, equity, and education. Develop

¹⁰ https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs/maps

- trails to improve multimodal connectivity along and between neighborhoods, parks and open spaces.
- c. <u>Develop environments that promote active and passive recreation</u>. Maximize use of public spaces for varied activities and enjoyment. Support access and opportunity for community gardens.
- d. <u>Utilize data effectively</u>. Collect data on use of public spaces to measure equity and access. Evaluate data available from other resources, such as the city's Habitat Corridor mapping and the Urban Forestry Management Plan, to inform potential protection, restoration, and mitigation actions to offset impacts to parks and natural areas.
- e. <u>Increase public enjoyment, education and ownership for parks, trails, and open spaces</u>. Implement effective tools, supported by research, to increase positive public interactions and connections to parks, trails and open spaces. Provide signage and other information systems to guide people through open spaces and trails that will enhance understanding, experiences, respect and appreciation.

Development priorities for Greenways funding:

- Community garden improvements
- Boulevard Park shoreline beach and trail improvement
- Complete Whatcom Creek trail and restoration efforts
- Coordinate <u>PRO Plan recommended trails</u> with new developments' internal trail systems
- Improve access to Bear Creek Open Space
- Design and develop public access and amenities at the pier at Little Squalicum Park
- Plan, design, and develop Community and Neighborhood Parks:
 - Cornwall Beach Park, Maplewood/McLeod, N. Samish Park, Bakerview, Hundred Acre Wood, and Julianna Park
- Improve north side access to Galbraith Mountain trails with trailhead, parking and wayfinding
- Add restroom at Little Squalicum Park
- Happy Valley Park access and amenities improvements
- Rehabilitate boardwalks and decommission trail at Maritime Heritage Park
- Plan and develop Van Wyck Park to improve access to a community garden and provide interim uses
- Add wayfinding at Samish Crest trails
- Acquire and/or develop trailheads (parking, signage, restrooms, picnic areas, etc.) at Woodstock Farm, King & Queen Mountain, and Bear Creek Open Space
- Coordinate with PRO Plan for removal of invasive species, protection/restoration of habitat and increased planting of trees and undergrowth
- Complete Sunset Pond trail loop and add park amenities
- Bloedel Donovan community building redesign
- Improve and restore Arroyo Park bridges
- Broadway Park access improvements
- Woodstock cook's house renovation, Gates house stairs, and ADA improvements

GOAL 3: MAINTAIN GREENWAYS, OPEN SPACE SITES, PARKS, PARK FACILITIES AND TRAILS

Objectives:

- a. <u>Support acquisition and development objectives and priorities</u>. Consider maintenance implications when pursuing property acquisitions and development projects especially in regards to the City <u>PRO Plan goals</u>, <u>Urban Forestry Management Plan¹¹</u>, Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment, Wildlife Corridor Analysis and other COB/greenways planning/prospective projects where relevant.
- b. <u>Prioritize maintenance operations that enhance the natural state and reduce environmental impacts</u>. Ensure all Parks staff and programs are using equipment and Integrated Pest Management controls that have the lowest environmental impact where possible and maintenance projects align with Greenways priorities of environmental stewardship.
- c. <u>Monitor and provide input on Greenways and parks property conditions</u>. Utilize department reporting and community engagement to identify potential maintenance needs and make the appropriate recommendations for actionable items.
- d. <u>Prioritize capital maintenance projects based on safety, public use, socio-economic factors</u> and preservation of critical park system assets.

Maintenance Priorities:

- Ensure maintenance needs are met equitably and in a timely manner
- New park and trail development should be met with additional staff for maintenance
- Hire Stewardship supervisor to provide oversight to mitigation sites, facilitate work parties, and assist community garden groups
- Provide self-maintenance opportunities in parks wherever applicable (Plant beds with native and drought tolerant species, use long lasting building materials, etc.)
- Promote/partner/fund invasive species removal and habitat restoration on open space properties
- Utilize the Park Enhancement Prioritization Tool (PEP tool) to prioritize repairs and maintenance according to socio-economic conditions and equity issues. (See PRO Plan)
- Promote trail surface/general development alternatives that balance the natural character of Bellingham's trail system with accessibility requirements, long-term maintenance, sustainable development practices and availability of local materials
- Continue to provide input and analyses for separation of maintenance and development projects through thoughtful conversation; consider augmenting the Greenways funds used for maintenance
- Improve the management of trees throughout the City consistent with recommendations from the Urban Forestry Management Plan
- Fund staff and material for position directly relating to maintenance of trails, stewardship, urban forestry, and grounds.

¹¹ https://cob.org/services/planning/environmental/ufmp

Mapped Priorities

The intention of the following pages is to present maps that show some of the priorities and actions within this Strategic Plan. The map to the right shows Greenway corridors that are included in the following detailed maps. Not all priorities are shown on the maps. The following areas are included within this section:

- Lake Padden Connections
- Chuckanut Creek/Woodstock Farm/Interurban Trail
- Whatcom Creek
- Squalicum Creek
- Cordata to King & Queen Mountain and Urban Growth Area Open Space

2023 – 2024 (Proposed) Biennial Budget (See the adopted budgets here: https://cob.org/gov/budget)

- Acquisition: \$5 Million
- Development and Restoration: \$6.1 Million
- Maintenance: Maintenance projects and 17.5 Full Time Employees, in Stewardship, Trails, Urban Forestry, and Grounds.

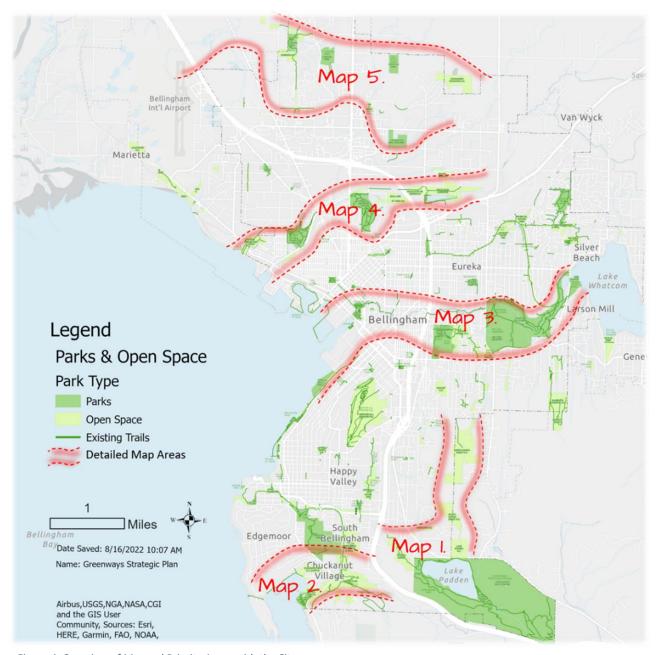


Figure 4. Overview of Mapped Priority Areas with the City

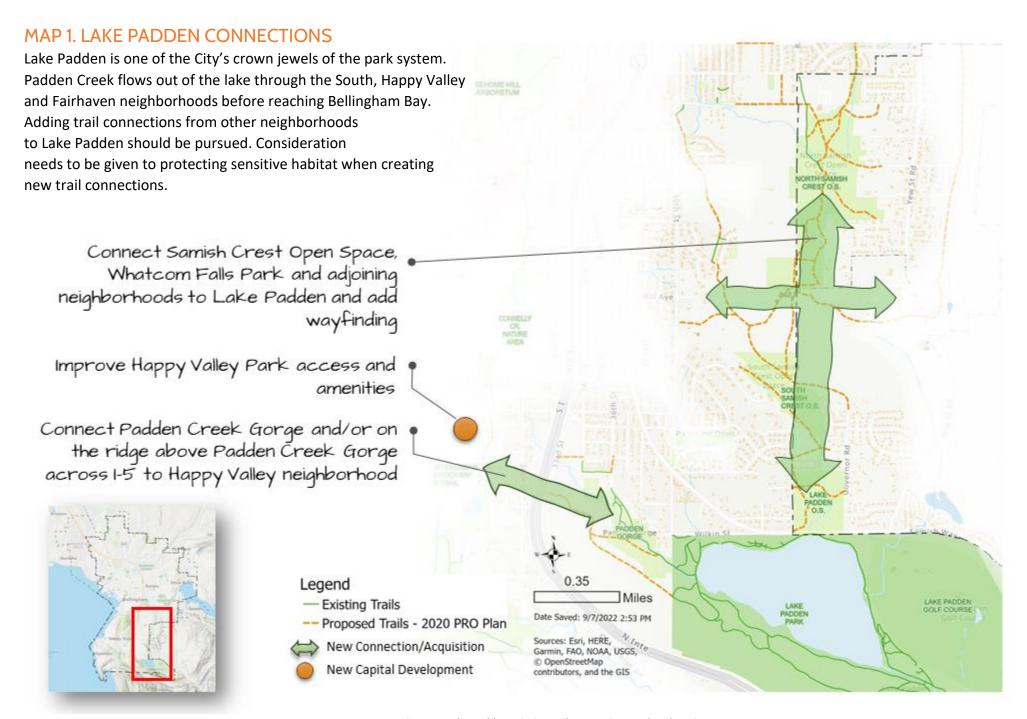


Figure 5. Lake Padden priority trail connections and park projects

MAP 2. CHUCKANUT CREEK, WOODSTOCK FARM & INTERURBAN TRAIL

Chuckanut Creek is one of the few streams that currently meets water quality standards in Bellingham. There are large tracts of public ownership in the area, including Arroyo Park and Woodstock Farm. The actions in this area include protecting water quality, fish habitat, and wildlife corridors in Chuckanut Creek and making trail connections to Woodstock Farm and the Interurban Trail.

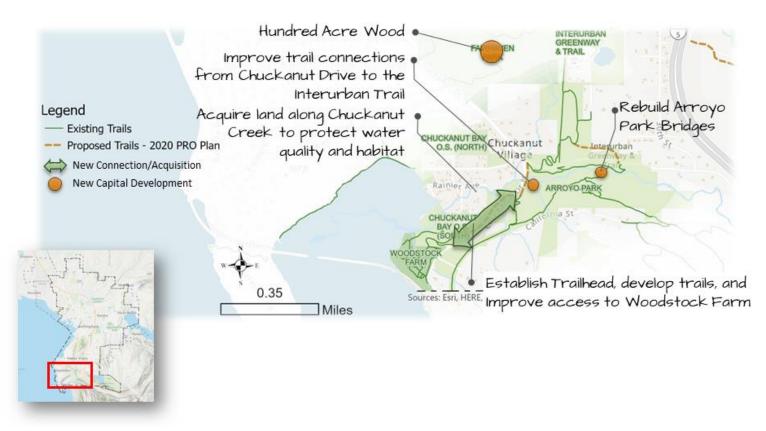


Figure 6. Chuckanut Creek priority trail connections and park projects

MAP 3. WHATCOM CREEK

Whatcom Creek is a major creek in Bellingham which originates in Lake Whatcom. The creek goes through Whatcom Falls Park. Restoration work along the creek west of Woburn Street to I-5 followed a tragic gas line explosion in 1999. Whatcom Creek flows through downtown Bellingham and into Bellingham Bay in the Port of Bellingham's Whatcom Waterway.

The following actions to acquire land or access to create a continuous greenway trail and habitat corridor along Whatcom Creek focuses on the lower reach of Whatcom Creek below I-5.

- Enhance trail and greenway opportunities from Meador Avenue to Commercial Street near City Hall
- If Senior Center is redeveloped, create green spaces along Whatcom Creek with enhancement of the trail and other amenities, coordinate with adjacent properties upstream to Cornwall Avenue

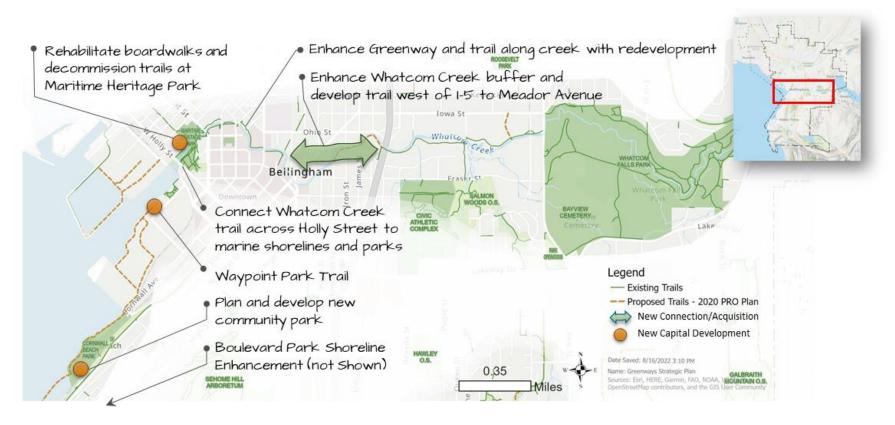


Figure 7. Whatcom Creek priority trail connections and park projects

MAP 4. SQUALICUM CREEK

Squalicum Creek is one of the three major creeks through Bellingham that drains into Bellingham Bay. Parks along the corridor include Little Squalicum Park, Squalicum Creek Park, Cornwall Memorial Park and Sunset Pond. The City has undertaken significant work in recent years to improve water quality and habitat along this corridor.

The priorities along the creek include acquisition and development of trails and park improvements.

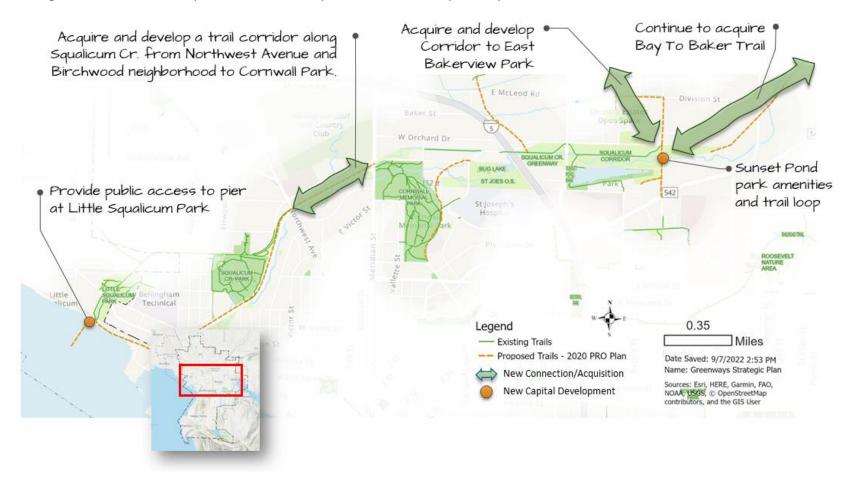


Figure 8. Squalicum Creek Priority trail connections and Park Projects

MAP 5. CORDATA TO KING & QUEEN MOUNTAIN AND BELLINGHAM-FERNDALE OPEN SPACE CORRIDOR

The north end of Bellingham has seen significant new housing, commercial and industrial development recently. This development has created a need for parks, open space, and trails to serve the area.

The priorities in this area include acquisition and development of trails and park improvements.

- Create access, parking, trailhead signage and wayfinding for the King/Queen Mountain Open Space
- Acquire property and develop trail corridors to connect with King/Queen Mountain Open Space
- Create east-west trail connections that link King/Queen Mountain Open Space to Van Wyck Park, Cordata Park, Julianna Park and the Bear Creek Open Space
- Create north-south trail connections to Cordata Park, Julianna Park, and East Bakerview Park
- Acquire property or conservation easements for open space at the edge of the city's urban growth area (<u>Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, LU-58</u> and <u>Parks</u>, <u>Recreation and Open Space Plan</u>)

BELLINGHAM-FERNDALE OPEN SPACE CORRIDOR

The Growth Management Act (<u>RCW 36.70A.160</u>) and the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan (<u>LU-59</u>) requires open space corridors within and between urban growth areas (UGAs); the corridors should be useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails and connection of critical areas. Since the first Growth Management plans were adopted by Whatcom County in 1997, an open space corridor between Ferndale and Bellingham Urban Growth Areas has not been identified.

The <u>2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis</u> mapped important habitat hubs and corridors for terrestrial species. Figure 8 shows a hub stretching across I-5 to the boundary of the city's UGA. A significant portion of this area is owned by public entities including the Lummi Nation, Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham and the State of Washington (DNR). Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan and Land Supply Analysis identifies job growth in this area and should be updated to reflect environmental constraints and habitat protection opportunities.

The priorities in this area include acquisition of important wildlife habitat and corridors, and development of trails.

- Identify a riparian corridor to connect wildlife habitat to the Nooksack River
- Use <u>2015 Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment</u> to prioritize restoration actions recommended in this area
- Identify and ensure an open space corridor between Bellingham and Ferndale UGAs
- Collaborate with Whatcom County and Port of Bellingham on completing regional trail connections between Bellingham and Ferndale.



Figure 9. Important habitat, 2021 Wildlife habitat Corridor Analysis.

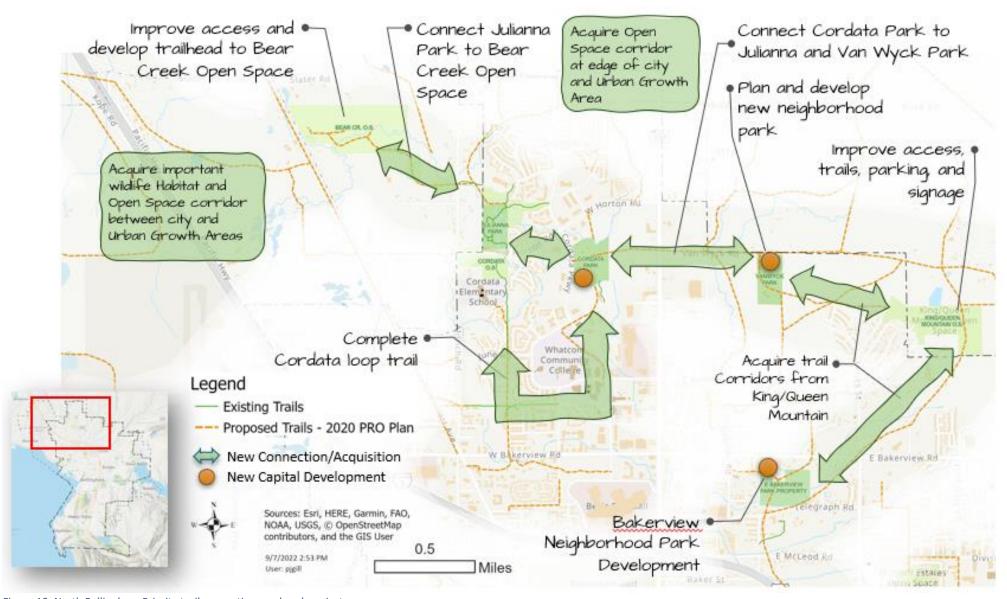


Figure 10. North Bellingham Priority trail connections and park projects

Other Resources and Information

Greenways Documents

- Greenways Program Web Page (https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway)
- Land Acquisition Summary (https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2019%20GAC%20land%20acquisitions.pdf)
- Greenways Advisory Committee (https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/greenway-bc)
- 2016 Greenways IV Levy, Resolution No. 2016-16 (https://bellingham.municipal.codes/enactments/Res2016-16)
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (https://cob.org/project/parks-recreation-open-space-plan-update)

City Budget, Plans, Reports and Studies

- Bellingham City Budget (https://cob.org/gov/budget)
- Climate Protection Action Plan (https://cob.org/services/environment/climate/program)
- Urban Forestry Management Plan (https://cob.org/services/planning/environmental/urban-forestry-management-plan)
- 2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis (https://cob.org/services/environment/restoration/wildlife-corridor-analysis)
- 2016 Comprehensive Plan (https://cob.org/services/planning/comprehensive-plan)
- 2015 Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment (https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/final-bhrta-12-15-15.pdf)
- 2015 North Bellingham and Urban Growth Boundary Wetland, Stream, Habitat Conservation Area and Buffer Assessment (https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-buffer-assessment.pdf)
- Bellingham Shoreline Master Program Update (https://cob.org/project/smp-update)
- Bellingham Mitigation Program (https://cob.org/services/environment/mitigation-program)
- Bellingham Habitat Restoration Projects (https://cob.org/services/environment/restoration/projects-restore)
- 2014 Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan (https://cob.org/services/planning/transportation-planning/bike-master-planning)
- 2012 Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan (https://cob.org/services/planning/transportation-planning/pedestrian-master-planning)

City Maps

- City website (https://cob.org/services/maps)
- CityIQ (<u>https://cob.org/services/maps/online-mapping</u>)

Appendix A: Example Greenways Fund Annual Report, 2020-2021

(Updated reports are available at https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway)