



PARKS

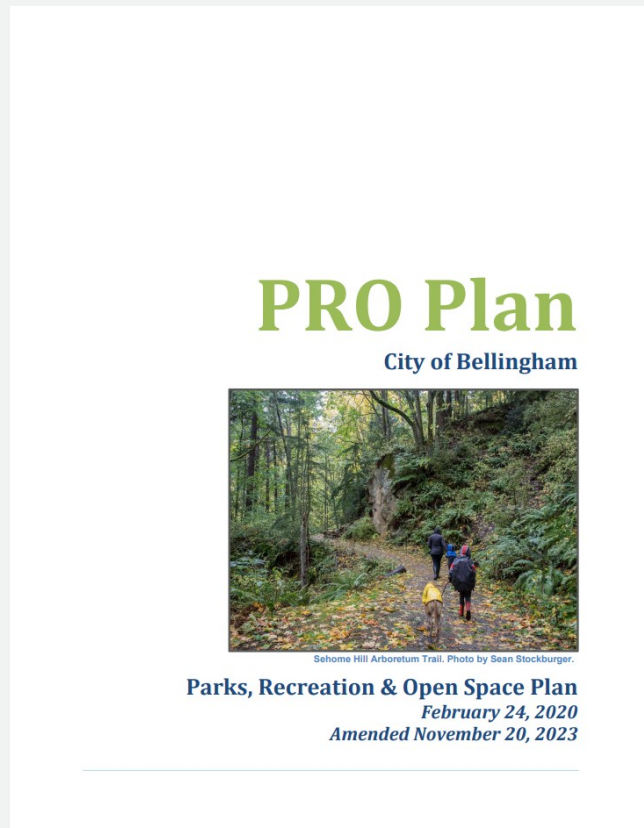
Parks, Recreation Chapter
Updates and Existing Goals and Objectives
January 2025





Existing 2020 PRO Plan

The City's Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan (PROS Plan) is part of the City's comprehensive plan.



This document guides the development of the park, recreation and open space system as the community grows.

The PROS Plan is updated every six years. The last complete update of was in 2020.

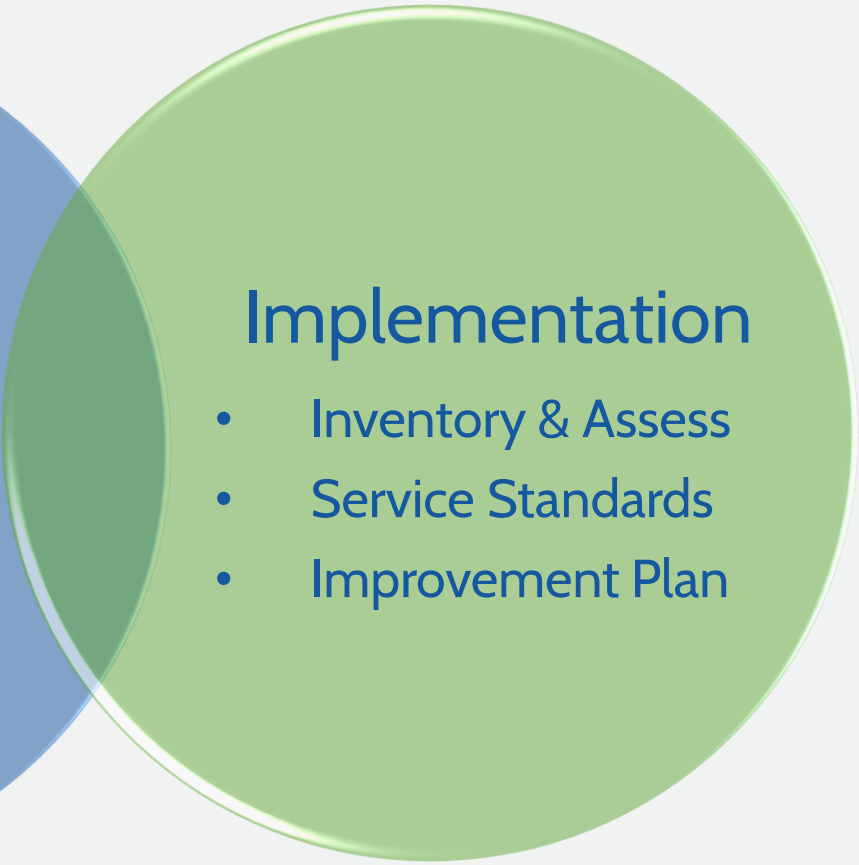
The parks chapter of the Bellingham Plan is being updated with goals and policies. The more technical, functional plan will be adopted by reference.



Two Integrated Parts

Bellingham Plan

PROS Plan



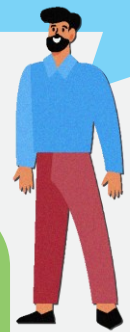


What the Community Said So Far

Most of us feel that recreational opportunities, a healthy natural environment, and public open spaces are the top three strengths of Bellingham.



There are all kinds of ways that we like to use public recreation spaces and facilities.



These descriptions summarize common opinions we heard relevant to this topic.

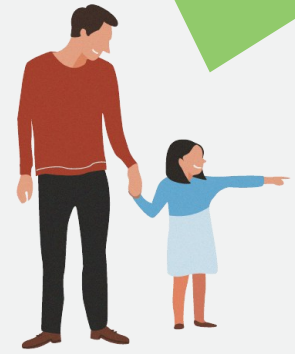
Public parks, recreation opportunities, and open spaces are some of the most important community assets.



We have lots of ideas for how to make our parks, trails, and recreation facilities more accessible and inclusive.

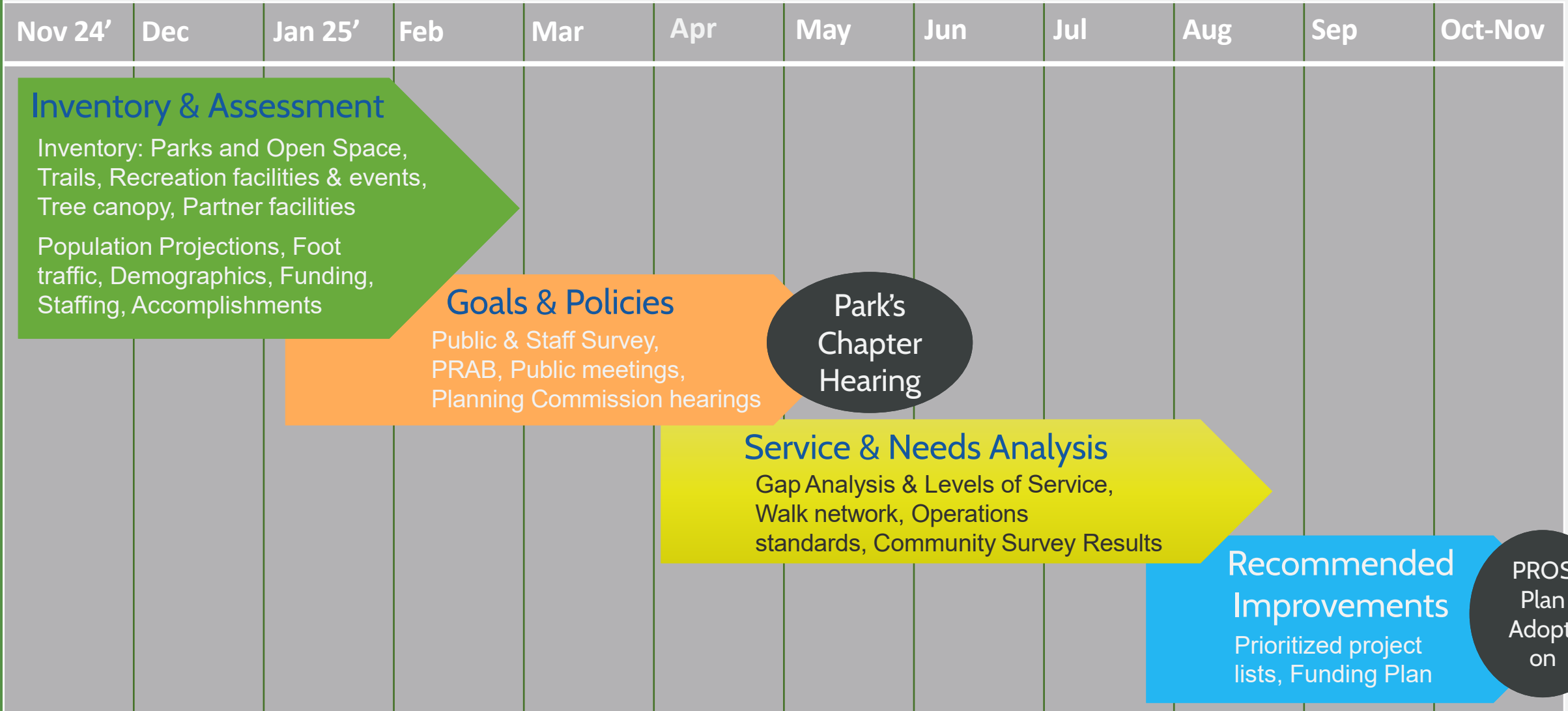


We should continue providing indoor and outdoor recreational amenities with growth and increased density.





Update Process Timeline





2020 PRO Plan: Existing Goals

The current PRO Plan is organized around eight existing goals with related “objectives”. These concepts will be revised during the 2026 PRO Plan update.

Equity and Inclusion	Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.	Innovate	Develop innovative programs, services and strategies for expanding recreational opportunities and improving accessibility.
Enhance and Expand	Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of use of the existing park and recreation system.	Connect	Connect and unify the community with trail and greenway corridors.
Health Wellness and Community	Create environments that encourage regular active and passive recreation activities to support health, sense of safety, wellness and social connections.	Effective Operations	Manage park land and programs effectively, efficiently and sustainably utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures.
Integrate Nature	Preserve and integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout the park system.	Recreational Assessment	In 2020, conduct a Community Recreation Needs Assessment



Get Involved

Project updates are available here:

[Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan Update - City of Bellingham](#)

To review the complete PRO Plan in the existing 2016 Comprehensive Plan, visit:

[2020 Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan \(cob.org\)](#)



Equity and Inclusion

Enhance and Expand

Health
Wellness &
Community

Nature

Innovate

Connect

Effective
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Recreational
Assessment

- a. Provide a system of parks, trails and open space so that all residents live within one-half mile safe route of a developed park or trail.
- b. Proactively upgrade and restore existing facilities to address community needs, improve resiliency and protect long-term health of existing park assets.
- c. Provide adequate staff year-round to maintain and enhance park facilities and services.
- d. Target new park acquisitions and development in areas that are under-served.



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- a. Evaluate park facilities and infrastructure to ensure adequate capacity can support existing and future use.
- b. Incorporate art and whimsy into park facilities.
- c. Evaluate opportunities to renovate existing facilities to expand use and accommodate popular recreational activities such as pickleball, volleyball, disc golf, competitive swimming and alternative sports such as skateboarding, BMX and other biking, and water/paddle sports.
- d. Design and prioritize system upgrades that respond to condition assessments, community vision and preferences.
- e. Acquire and develop additional shoreline access.



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- a. Partner and collaborate with local service providers that activate underserved locations and populations.
- b. Work with other City departments and organizations to keep parks safe and clean.
- c. Provide more small gathering spaces, especially in the urban area as infill occurs.
- d. Provide larger event spaces such as enclosed meeting rooms and outdoor shelters suitable for family gatherings, weddings, festivals, and events.
- e. Identify outdoor facilities that may be identified or designated as natural therapy locations.



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- a. Protect environmental features that reflect Bellingham's natural character, including ridgelines, critical areas, forests and wildlife corridors.
- b. Participate in development and implementation of an Urban Forestry Master Plan to proactively assess and protect urban tree canopy and undergrowth.
- c. Recognize the importance of taking action to reduce the impacts of climate change and the natural carbon sequestration function of our existing parks.
- d. Contribute to the City's sequestration capacity through continuing to incorporate principles of preservation in park design and development.
- e. Expand dog-waste program and provide additional trash receptacles to improve self-maintenance and litter control.
- f. Implement low impact development measures and integrated pest management to reduce environmental impacts.
- g. Steward and protect open spaces from invasive species, illegal activity, and inappropriate use, and revegetate where appropriate.
- h. Perform invasive species removal and habitat restoration on open space properties.
- i. Provide environmental education opportunities such as interpretive signage or other educational programs to promote the value of the natural environment throughout the park system.



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- a. Involve the community in habitat restoration and maintenance activities through the Parks Volunteer Program.
- b. Explore partnerships that expand services or leverage support for specific projects.
- c. Target service improvements that decrease barriers and expand park and recreation system use.
- d. Evaluate existing scholarship program for low-income families with the goal of expanding participation.
- e. Ensure new development invests in and dedicates new parks, trails, street trees and open space.
- f. Target improvements that connects trails with transit stops, key destinations, bike routes and sidewalks to improve non-motorized transportation options.
- g. Coordinate with Public Works to identify opportunities for better trails, habitat corridors, sidewalks and bike route connectivity.
- h. Provide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training opportunities for staff.
- i. Provide programs and events that meet the diverse needs of the community-increasing access to public services in underserved areas.
- j. Provide program and service information in multiple languages.
- k. Modernize recreation programs to meet interests and needs of the community.
- l. Redefine “duplication” of services. There may still be a lack of services even if other agencies provide certain opportunities (after-schools, camps, pre-school, teen, senior programming etc.).
- m. Develop a partnership agreement with Recreation Northwest to integrate their Parkscriptions model into City recreational programs and curricula.



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- a. Provide an interconnected trail system so all residents are within a one-half mile of a safe route.
- b. Balance the demand for public access and interpretive education with protection of environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites.
- c. Implement the Greenways Strategic Plan and pursue recommended future parks, open space and trails.
- d. Provide safe street crossings (i.e. beacons, raised crossings, signalization, medians, etc.) that connect to parks and trails.
- e. Improve wayfinding.
- f. Continue to explore new trail surface 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.
- g. Promote the use of pedestrian and bike travel and encourage the reduction of single occupancy vehicle use by providing safe and connected alternative transportation routes.



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- a. Design and develop facilities that reduce overall maintenance, operation requirements and costs, while improving resiliency and efficiency.
- b. Establish baseline conditions and maintenance standards for park assets and evaluate and report progress towards meeting standards and improving conditions.
- c. Prioritize capital improvements based on safety, condition, socio-economic factors and population served.
- d. Analyze options for long-term financial sustainability.
- e. Explore options to improve enforcement of park rules while ensuring all park users feel welcome.
- f. Provide staff with adequate training, resources and equipment to increase productivity and efficacy.
- g. Assess energy efficiency of park facilities and prioritize energy and system upgrades.



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- a. Explore barriers and/or constraints to recreation participation, such as timing, location, lack of information, transportation, or money.
- b. Evaluate public willingness to pay for services.
- c. Identify who we are serving and what demographics have unmet needs.
- d. Explore specific recreation programs and services - what will people use vs. perceived desires.
- e. Identify facility needs and/or desires for enhancements or improvements.
- f. Explore marketing needs to understand how the public learns about program opportunities.
- g. Determine what community needs are being met by other service providers.