



FALL 2023

INSIDE Bellingham

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Focusing on a safe, healthy, thriving downtown

Bellingham's downtown is the heart of our community and – in our city of active neighborhoods – it is everyone's neighborhood. We are doing more than ever before to create a safe, healthy, thriving downtown.

We have overseen a multi-year, multi-million-dollar focus on downtown public health and safety, including police foot patrols, security personnel, cleaning services, graffiti removal and more. These efforts are summarized on page 2.

These actions and others are continuing as fall begins, specifically focusing on drug use, crime, sanitation and behavioral health needs.

The growing fentanyl and meth use crisis, an affordable housing and homelessness crisis, and critical lack of adequate incarceration and behavioral health support systems, all are felt deeply in our community and are especially converging on our downtown.

We are actively engaged in extensive efforts to address the local effects of these regional and national issues through leading edge programs, creative uses of funding and innovative partnerships.

Our actions to improve conditions downtown are continuing and new initiatives are emerging. We are implementing creative solutions that are caring, responsive and effective. We are monitoring conditions closely, seeing tangible results, receiving positive feedback, and have many reasons to be optimistic.

But we also recognize that public health and safety concerns continue. Using feedback from downtown stakeholders, the Mayor's Downtown Solutions Workgroup, and many other people, we have established the Downtown Safety Strategy: a comprehensive and collaborative response to the complex challenges faced by downtown districts nationwide.

Our Downtown Safety Strategy outlines the concerted efforts and direction of City leaders and partners, informed by the voices of our community. It shows the City's commitment to addressing these challenges with urgency and creativity. Together, we are advancing solutions to breathe new life into downtown.



To learn more, see the Downtown Safety Strategy cob.org/downtown-safety

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Our Work Downtown

Downtown was flourishing in the years right before the pandemic. During the pandemic and beyond, however, we have seen increases in our community of people who are living unsheltered and suffering with substance use and behavioral health crises. These challenges are particularly visible downtown.

Multi-year, multi-million-dollar strategies to foster a safe, welcoming environment in Bellingham's downtown have been underway and are continuing as top City priorities. These initiatives were identified with participation and feedback from the downtown business community and other stakeholders.

KEY INITIATIVES 2022 - 2023:

- ✓ Resumed regular police foot patrols downtown.
 - ✓ Implemented creative, effective recruiting and retention strategies to reduce personnel shortages and staff back up as fast as possible in the Police Department.
 - ✓ Funded and contracted for more than a million dollars per year towards downtown security personnel, downtown ambassadors and other downtown services.
 - ✓ Passed an ordinance that prohibits open public use of drugs, which became a model for other cities and led to similar actions at the state level.
 - ✓ Increased downtown sanitation services, including monthly deep cleaning of alleys, sidewalks and streets.
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- Downtown deep cleaning**
- ✓ Developed litter, graffiti and junk vehicle removal programs.
 - ✓ Funded alley improvements, such as increased lighting, painting, murals and more.
 - ✓ Created a Mayor's Downtown Solutions Work Group, bringing together people who live and work downtown with City leaders to discuss needed improvements.
 - ✓ Continued funding and other support for the Downtown Bellingham Partnership, which organizes special events, downtown advocacy, business promotions, landscaping, cleaning and more.
 - ✓ Increased funding to the Homeless Outreach Team, operated by the Opportunity Council.
 - ✓ Supported new businesses and housing downtown, including the activation of significant investment and development in Old Town.
 - ✓ Continued to cultivate relationships through our economic development, non-profit and business partnerships to support our downtown business community.

- ✓ Funded and helped develop the Alternative Response Team (ART), a program that sends behavioral health specialists to respond to certain 911 calls rather than police.
- ✓ Increased resources for Ground-Level Response and Coordinated Engagement (GRACE), a program that provides support to frequent users of EMS, law enforcement and other emergency services.
- ✓ Actively participated in Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD), a program providing alternatives to arrest and incarceration for people whose unlawful behavior stems from unmanaged substance use, mental health challenges, or extreme poverty.
- ✓ Initiated a municipal therapeutic drug court that will provide people suffering substance use or behavioral health needs an opportunity to be diverted from criminal court proceedings to treatment.
- ✓ Worked with our legislative partners to identify needed funding for increased behavioral health services.
- ✓ Actively involved in the regulatory steps to support the relocation and expansion of Lighthouse Mission Ministry's Base Camp back to its original Holly Street location, with significant conditions on operation of the new facility.
- ✓ Partnering with Whatcom County leaders and others to develop and expand incarceration and criminal justice facilities and services, permanent supportive housing, behavioral health and crisis support services and more.

These actions and others represent significant investments and remain a top priority for City leaders. We recognize, however, that public health and safety concerns continue and so do our efforts to address them.

Mayor's 2023 City Center Awards showcase downtown investments

Four exceptional projects were recently honored by Mayor Seth Fleetwood with 2023 City Center Awards, an annual program that recognizes and showcases outstanding achievements and significant investments in Bellingham's downtown.

- **Chuckanut Bay Distillery and Penny Farthing, 1309/1311 Cornwall Avenue**
- **Renaissance/Elks Building, 1414 Cornwall Avenue**
- **Hudson Yard, 954 N. State Street**
- **Storia Cucina, 109 Grand Avenue**

The projects chosen for this year's awards represent significant investments that honor legacy buildings, help revitalize our downtown, and create wonderful improvements that will live on for decades to come. Thank you to past and present award recipients and all who contribute to the health and vibrancy of our downtown.

FOR MORE DETAILS

Visit cob.org/city-center-awards for videos of each project

Summer fun extends into fall

Visiting, shopping, dining and enjoying all it has to offer is the best thing we all can do to support a thriving downtown. Summer was filled with big events and sunny, enjoyable moments. New activities and cherished legacy events drew

thousands downtown. Stay on top of happenings downtown and beyond via the City website at cob.org and through our partners at Downtown Bellingham Partnership (downtownbellingsham.com) and Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism (bellingsham.org)

WHAT'S YOUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF BELLINGHAM?

The Bellingham Plan offers city residents – and those who visit, work or go to school in the city – opportunities to share their vision for the future of Bellingham and provide feedback about climate resilience, housing, recreation, economic vitality, transportation, equitable growth and more.

The Bellingham Plan is a two-year project to update the City's Comprehensive Plan, the policy document that guides development, capital investments and other actions and programs. See engagebellingsham.org/bellinghamplan for opportunities to engage and learn more.

Creating a walkable, bikeable, accessible city

The design of our city's streets, sidewalks, and bike lanes impacts our whole community daily. Whether you are walking with your dog, biking downtown or commuting to work, the safety and accessibility of our community's transportation system matters.

Our commitment to roadway safety improvements is long-standing. A decade ago, the first Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans were adopted by City Council with significant community input to shape our transportation investments. We have seen significant progress on these plans and are

still seeing projects constructed around town today. New bike lanes, new sidewalks, new crosswalks; these are all improvements that are aimed at making it safer and more comfortable for people of all ages and abilities to get around town.

This year, we are renewing our commitment to these projects by working with the community to update and redevelop the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans, providing a roadmap to a more walkable, bikeable and more accessible Bellingham that we can all continue to enjoy. To get involved or receive email updates, visit cob.org/project/pbmp2022.



FALL IS IN THE AIR... AND ON THE GROUND

Fall is finally here and with it comes a lot of rain. While our deep-rooted forests and native plants absorb and filter about 80% of rainfall, only 40% of rain gets captured by grassy lawns. The rest of the water runs off yards, roads and sidewalks, picking up pollutants like oil and pet waste on its way to the lakes or bay. Learn how to keep pollutants out of our waterways by visiting cob.org/stormwater.

It is also time for our trees to turn beautiful colors, then drop their leaves in the streets and gutters. Fallen leaves can block storm drains and cause localized flooding if not picked up. Please clean up leaves on your lawns and sidewalks, and report clogged storm drains and flooding in the streets via the SeeClickFix app or at cob.org/fix.

Forested land protects our drinking water supply

Our commitment to preserving forested land in the Lake Whatcom watershed has led to some big wins in 2023, thanks in part to the community's contributions through the Lake Whatcom surcharge included in utility bills each month.

So far in 2023, Bellingham City Council approved the purchase of ten properties spanning 46 acres, removing up to 35 potential development units. With the addition of these new properties, the Lake Whatcom Land Acquisition and Preservation program has protected 2,653 acres (that's over 2,000 football fields!) and removed 877 potential development units.

These acquisitions underscore our dedication to environmental conservation and responsible land management to protect our drinking water source. Forested land protects the lake because it soaks up and naturally filters rainwater, reducing impacts on the lake from high flows and pollution. Learn more about the properties currently protected through the program or how you can sell your property to leave a legacy of protection in the watershed at cob.org/lw-property.

Preserving forests in the Lake Whatcom watershed is one of many coordinated actions we take to protect and enhance our vital drinking water source. Learn more about Lake Whatcom and what you can do to protect it at cob.org/lake-whatcom.