

INSIDE Bellingham

NEWS ABOUT OUR CITY

COB.ORG | SPRING 2024



Welcome newly elected leaders

The new year brought two newly elected leaders to your City government. Bellingham Mayor Kim Lund and Councilmember Jace Cotton, serving the At-Large position, each took office on January 1, 2024, after winning their respective positions in the November 2023 General Election. Welcome, Mayor Lund and Councilmember Cotton!



Photo by Radley Muller

ABOVE: Bellingham City Council and Mayor, left to right: Councilmember Holly Huthman (2nd Ward), Councilmember Hannah Stone (1st Ward), Councilmember Edwin "Skip" Williams (4th Ward), Mayor Kim Lund, 2024 Council President Dan Hammill (3rd Ward), Councilmember Jace Cotton (At-Large), Councilmember Lisa Anderson (5th Ward), Councilmember Michael Lilliquist (6th Ward). Photo by Radley Muller.

Testing Holly Street bike lane downtown for improved safety

Hundreds of cyclists navigate Holly Street daily

Exciting changes are coming to Holly Street this May! The City is launching a pilot project to improve safety and accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians on this busy downtown street.

The most recent data show that hundreds of cyclists navigate busy Holly Street daily. To address their needs, the plan includes

installing a buffered bike lane from Ellis Street to State Street, transitioning to a protected lane separated from traffic by parked cars from State Street to Bay Street. This pilot allows the City to study the impact on traffic flow, speeds, and how comfortable people feel biking, walking, and driving.

Throughout the summer, we will collect data and gather community feedback. Whether you bike, drive, walk or roll downtown, everyone is invited to visit EngageBellingham.com to share your experience.

This project represents a key step towards a more connected and vibrant downtown for cyclists and pedestrians alike.

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Bellingham Plan Survey Results Are In

Community identifies safety, housing and affordability among top priorities.

As part of our efforts to update Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan, we spent the better part of 2023 gathering community feedback. The plan (called The Bellingham Plan) is our city's guide to managing growth. It addresses important topics, such as housing, transportation and climate resilience, and will guide development, capital investments, city programs and other actions for the next 20 years.

We invested significantly in community outreach to create a plan that reflects our community's priorities for Bellingham's future. We reached thousands of community members in various ways. Here's just a sampling of what we heard:

- **Choice of housing types, rental protections and housing affordability** for all are clear priorities, although people noted that they see significant barriers to achieving this.
- When we asked people to describe in three words what they want to see for Bellingham in 20 years, "safe" was the most frequent response, followed by "affordable."

- **Recreational opportunities, a healthy natural environment and public open spaces** were rated as the top three strengths of Bellingham.
- Participants expressed a clear interest in **creating walkable community spaces and more greenways and parks**, plus prioritizing investments and equitable access to these places.
- Respondents said a locally **scaled economy** that allows people to comfortably live and work in Bellingham is important.
- **Representation** was a focal point, calling for more collaboration with tribal governments and more efforts to empower historically marginalized and underrepresented community groups.

WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES FOR BELLINGHAM?

We want to hear from you! All events, reports and feedback opportunities are available at engagebellingham.org. You can also email us any time at TheBellinghamPlan@cob.org.



Charging up for a cleaner future with new EV stations

Plug in and enjoy the benefits of going electric! This year we're adding 20 new electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across Bellingham, including some powered by the sun, bringing the total to 90 plugs spread across 26 convenient locations.

Electric vehicles mean zero tailpipe emissions and less air pollution. Plus, they're quieter and offer a smooth, comfortable ride. This March, we added four innovative solar-powered charging stations around the city, including the station **shown above** at Civic Field, making charging your EV easier and more sustainable than ever. Now you can cruise around town and contribute to Bellingham's ambitious climate action goals while harnessing the power of the sun.

This project, funded by a Washington State Department of Commerce grant and Bellingham's Transportation Fund, shows the City's commitment to a sustainable future. With more charging options on the way, Bellingham is making it easier than ever to go electric. Learn more, including the locations of the new stations, at cob.org/ev-project.



ABOVE: 2023 Santa 5K at Cordata Park

More Fun to Come at Cordata Park

We're nearly done with the Phase 2 construction at Cordata Park! In addition to its other features, this northside community park will soon feature a park pavilion with public restrooms, a covered outdoor stage, a small picnic shelter, pickleball courts, a basketball court, even more parking for cars and bikes, trail links to the north and south and so much more.

The new park pavilion has a full kitchen and a large outdoor patio, along with tables and chairs for 72 guests so you can host your event with ease!

SEE ALL THE CORDATA PARK FEATURES AT cob.org/project/cordata-community-park.

Rental Safety Program Updates

The City's Rental Registration and Safety Inspection Program was revamped over the past several months to improve renter protections. The program was originally adopted by the City Council nine years ago. In our recent updates, we adopted stricter safety inspection rules and increased fees to support compliance with safety requirements and program enforcement.

Program updates stem from community input, our experience with the program, and an understanding that we need better follow through for safety inspections. Fee increases will allow the City to pursue compliance within a more responsive timeframe by supporting program administration,



coordination, communication, inspections and enforcement. Some recent updates include:

- Increasing the rental registration fee to \$20 per unit per year for properties with up to 20 units.
- The fee for an initial safety inspection will remain \$100, but if rental units fail safety inspections, owners will be charged more for reinspections.
- Inspections must now be done before a property can be registered, where previously landlords were able to self-certify.

MORE DETAILS AVAILABLE AT
cob.org/rentals

Investing in our facilities to meet a growing community

Investing in our City facilities is essential to continue providing you with well-run, efficient and well-maintained services. Often, we face the decision of renovating existing facilities or rebuilding entirely. This choice hinges on several factors, including projected population growth, evolving workforce needs and cost-effectiveness. Ultimately, we prioritize making the best investment for your tax dollars.

Examples of these decisions are already taking shape in projects underway now:

■ The Pacific Street Operations Center

Center: This multi-phase project is transforming how our Parks and Public Works departments operate. While several major upgrades were finalized in 2023, construction on additional parts of the facility will begin in 2024. Once complete, the center will foster even greater collaboration, resource sharing, and efficient equipment use.

This modern operations campus also incorporated important measures to help us meet our climate goals, such as fully electric buildings and charging stations for the City's growing fleet of electric vehicles.

- **Old Woburn Street Renovations:** This former Parks Operations site will be transformed into much-needed storage for Parks and Public Works, along with improvements for people walking in the area.

As our community grows, so will our facility needs. We invite you to follow our progress at cob.org/projects and see how we're investing in a thriving Bellingham.

Municipal Court home monitoring

Electronic home monitoring saves millions, offers immeasurable benefits for defendants

Starting in March 2016, the City began contracting with the non-profit organization, Friendship Diversion Services (FDS), for electronic home monitoring, a jail diversion program providing defendants and our community with immense benefits. Home monitoring allows defendants serving sentences for misdemeanor crimes to serve their days of incarceration outside the jail system.

Defendants wear GPS ankle bracelets that monitor their location. An order signed by a Judicial Officer allows the defendant to leave their residence for school, work, treatment, counseling, probation appointments, scheduled attorney appointments and court hearings.

The cost of a bracelet is \$15.50 per day, compared to jail costs of \$172 daily, plus administrative fees. The City provides the service on a sliding scale so that the cost to the defendant does not prohibit them from participation. Over the last eight years, the City has saved more than an estimated \$7 million dollars by using electronic home monitoring.

While the cost savings are substantial, more important are the immeasurable benefits to the defendant and the community. Defendants can retain their employment, maintain their housing, keep their children at home, attend treatment and court obligations, continue their education, and maintain their enrollment with social services while still being accountable for criminal actions, all increasing their chances of success in our community once their sentences are served.

LEFT: The planned design for the new administrative offices coming to the Pacific Street Operations Center.



Community tree planting initiatives take root in 2024

The City is launching exciting new programs this year to help grow our urban forest, on private property and throughout neighborhoods. Why trees? They provide a wealth of benefits, from cleaner air to cooler streets, making Bellingham a healthier, happier place.

These programs offer something for everyone including tree coupons to reduce the costs of planting trees on private property, grants for neighborhood tree planting projects, partnerships with local organizations, free tree giveaways at local events, youth education and volunteer opportunities.

By increasing our tree canopy cover, we're not just planting trees, we're investing in a greener, more vibrant Bellingham. These programs will also help us reach our climate action goals as well as the goals of our first-ever Urban Forest Plan, currently in the works.

Learn more at cob.org/trees.



LEFT: A community paramedic talks with the owner of MW Soapworks outside the public safety office on Commercial Street.

Downtown Updates

On February 20, 2024, Mayor Kim Lund signed an Executive Order that directs her administration to take immediate actions to address the fentanyl crisis and its negative impacts on the safety and well-being of Bellingham's downtown. Many of the actions called for in the order focus on expanding the presence of first responders downtown to enhance safety, disrupt drug-related criminal activity and support quick responses to overdoses.

Bellingham Police Department is now regularly conducting emphasis patrols downtown. During emphasis patrols, all police officers who are not responding to priority calls focus their efforts downtown -- on foot and in vehicles-- meeting with local business owners, talking with community members and building relationships. On recent emphasis patrols, BPD personnel have been joined by behavioral health specialists from Whatcom County's Alternative Response Team.

The Mayor's Executive Order also directed additional attention downtown by Bellingham Fire/EMS community

paramedics, who serve frequent users of emergency medical services who have complex medical needs, including substance use disorders and behavioral health needs. Community paramedics provide help beyond emergency needs, assessing the chronic or non-medical needs and coordinate their care with appropriate resources.

The Mayor's Executive Order also called for opening a new public safety response office on Commercial Street, a hub for first responders and partner agency personnel as they work downtown.

These and other actions in the Executive Order are the beginning of a continuum of actions to realize a downtown Bellingham that is vibrant, thriving, welcoming and safe for everyone. In the coming months, Mayor Lund will unveil future phases of her plan for downtown, with more strategies for business support, economic development, arts and culture and other actions to re-enliven Bellingham's downtown.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT cob.org/downtown-safety