

THE BELLINGHAM PLAN



Community Wellbeing and Civic Practices

Chapter Update Summary | June 2025



Proposed *New Chapter* for the 2025 Plan



Why are we proposing this new chapter?

Community feedback: We heard how important the wellbeing of the community is throughout the engagement process. Part of this feedback included support for equitable and inclusive civic practices.

Significance: This topic is important and should be consolidated so relevant and new information is easier to find.

State Requirements: We must meet legislative requirements to plan for and accommodate housing that is affordable to all income levels. HB 1220 (2021) requires Bellingham to examine and address racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing policies and regulations.



What the Community Said

These descriptions summarize the most common opinions we heard relevant to this chapter.

I want to gather with my friends in a place that feels authentic my identity.

We like to know what the City is working on and how our ideas might be incorporated.

Everyone should have a voice, and we should put extra effort into reaching those who aren't represented yet.

We like learning new things in welcoming spaces.

We want to foster safe, vibrant, and unique places, especially in our City Center.

A connected community is a stronger, more resilient one. We want more ways to connect with each other.

The best decisions come from listening to many viewpoints and choosing directions that benefit everyone.

Community engagement is important. It is a part of what makes us Bellingham.

Multi-generational relationships are important, especially when considering ways to combat loneliness.

We want to reduce food deserts and provide more access to basic essentials and services.

Equity is important. We want our choices today to benefit everyone in the future.



Related Comprehensive Plan Themes

We are proposing a variety of updates to our 2016 Comprehensive Plan. While the plan is divided into distinct chapters, there are updates that touch multiple chapters.

Here are the most significant updates related to community wellbeing and civic practices. These themes span multiple chapters beyond this one.

- >> Fostering a connected and resilient community
- >> Inclusive and equitable planning
- >> Integrating City work in an efficient and responsive “One City” approach
- >> Better public accessibility of the plan itself

Get a quick overview of the most significant updates we're proposing.

If you haven't yet, take a look at the [Summary of Proposed Updates](#).

It describes the most significant updates we're proposing. We recommend viewing that the summary first, and then diving in here for more details on this chapter.



Community Wellbeing Chapter Draft Topics

Each blue box represents a topic that will later become a goal in the Community Wellbeing Chapter. These will be the overarching goals for the City, with more specific policies to support them.

Proposed Goals

Community Health and Wellbeing

Confront systemic and regional community health and wellbeing issues through ample social services, a resilient food system, and interactive programming.

Equity and Inclusion

Expand and strengthen equity and inclusion throughout the City's civic processes and practices.

Vitality and Belonging

Foster community vitality, reduce loneliness, and promote a positive sense of belonging through safety and connection.

Community Engagement

Foster a welcoming environment for outreach and engagement by inviting and enabling community members to be involved in City government.

Arts and Culture

Promote and celebrate Bellingham's arts and culture.

Tribal Relations

Strengthen relationships and engagement processes with tribal nations and indigenous community members through informed practices that respect tribal sovereignty and honor treaty rights.



Walking through the Topics

Now, we'll walk through an overview of the proposed updates for each goal. Each bubble represents a concept within that goal. Each concept may become a single policy or several in the final document.

Existing Concept

This concept exists in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan already.

Some Updates

Either this concept will be emphasized more than in the current plan, or something minor is being changed about it.

New Concept/ Major Updates

This concept does not exist in the 2016 plan at all or will include significant changes.



This icon indicates this concept is related to state requirements or legislation.



Community Feedback

**As you learn about the concepts proposed in this chapter,
think about...**

**Is anything big
missing?**

**Are you excited or
concerned about any
of the ideas proposed
here?**



Community Health and Wellbeing

Vitality and Belonging

Arts and Culture

Equity and Inclusion

Community Engagement

Tribal Relations



Reducing food insecurity and homelessness; Promoting positive health outcomes

Through partnerships and approaches that have been proven to be successful

Reduce barriers for healthcare, childcare, grocery stores, and educational uses

Through permissive land use and navigable permitting and review

Addressing substance use challenges, behavioral health issues, and other community needs

Encouraging activity through parks and recreation, programming, transportation, and amenities

Whatcom County collaboration for health and community services, parks and recreation, and local food system

Considering changing needs of residents as they age

Encouraging local food production, processing, distribution, and consumption

Community gardens, urban farming, and farmers and seafood markets

Increasing access to food, especially in low-income and underserved areas

Nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate

Food waste reduction and recovery

Existing

Update

New



Community Health and Wellbeing

Vitality and Belonging

Arts and Culture

Equity and Inclusion

Community Engagement

Tribal Relations



Culture of support and belonging that is understanding, respectful, and accountable

Variety of flexible and adaptive gathering spaces

Large community gatherings in the City Center

Proactive safety strategies

Incarceration diversion strategies

Unauthorized encampment impacts

Thriving Downtown

Lifelong learning and social interaction

Amplify Library and Museum

For all ages, abilities, cultures, identities, and traditions

Alternative response programs and outreach teams

Balancing the needs of individuals experiencing homeless with those of nearby residents and businesses

Supporting personal and community enrichment by being welcoming and easy to access for all

Existing

Update

New



Community Health and Wellbeing

Vitality and Belonging

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Tribal Relations



Downtown Arts District

Involve artists and creative workers

Art in public places and events

Indigenous culture and history

Recognizing and respecting its importance in the region

Creative and interactive opportunities at Museum and Library

And in the broader arts community

Cultural awareness and education

Ongoing fulfillment of Parks & Recreation, Museum, Library, and Theatre

Existing

Update

New



Community Health and Wellbeing

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In building a more equitable and welcoming Bellingham

Strategic Plan

Understanding of Racism's Impact

Accessible hiring and appointment process, and supportive workplace culture

Representation in City Workforce & Advisory Bodies

Provide guidance and resources to residents

Welcoming and inclusive messaging

Accessible and available services and facilities

Considering factors such as access to infrastructure, city services and programs, and housing and economic opportunity.

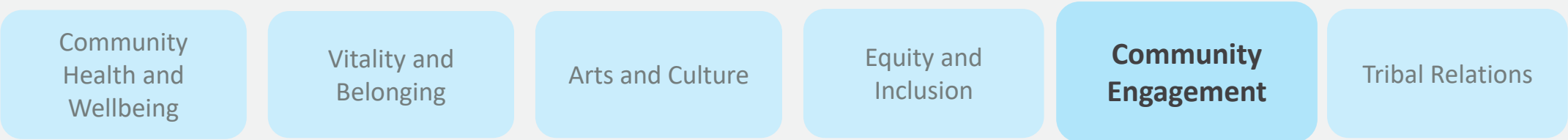
Identifying and addressing disparities (results of City processes)



Existing

Update

New





Community Health and Wellbeing

Vitality and Belonging

Arts and Culture

Equity and Inclusion

Community Engagement

Tribal Relations



Provide and prioritize opportunities

To better understand needs and priorities

Elevating the relationship between tribal leadership and the City's elected executive

Recognizing and understanding through culturally appropriate actions that are responsive to tribal input

Staff training

Listening to Tribes

Government relationships and ongoing communication

Internal consistency and processes

Building relationships

Community awareness

Existing

Update

New