



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

June 26, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting

COMMUNITY WELLBEING AND CIVIC PRACTICES CHAPTER OVERVIEW

TO: *City of Bellingham Planning and Development Commission*
FROM: *Sydney Prusak, Planner II*
Planning and Community Development
SUBJECT: *Community Wellbeing Chapter Discussion*
DATE: *June 26, 2025*

Background

The Bellingham Planning Commission is in the process of discussing updates to the City's Comprehensive Plan, the Bellingham Plan. An overview of the process and anticipated updates was provided at the February 6th meeting. A review of the material for that meeting, including the [Summary of Proposed Changes](#), will provide important context before continuing.

On June 5, staff released a package of material for Planning Commission and public review. The material covers the proposed final chapter of the plan: Community Wellbeing and Civic Practices. An overview of this chapter, including draft goals at the time, was also provided at the May 1st meeting. "Community Wellbeing" and "Civic Practices" had previously been proposed as two separate new chapters, but they have since been combined into a single one.

The posted material includes this short overview memo for the chapter, a summary presentation (posted on [Engage Bellingham](#)), and a spreadsheet with the draft goals and policies (see attachment). Members of the public are invited to comment online on this material, and staff will provide a summary of comments received at the meeting.

Planning Commission Discussion Process

Staff has been presenting each of the proposed chapters of the Bellingham Plan to the Planning Commission between February and June. The Commission has discussed the main elements of each chapter, with an emphasis on the most impactful updates. Some of these changes impact multiple chapters simultaneously and have been highlighted in each. Following these discussions, the full draft plan will be brought through the adoption process as a whole.

The final chapter for discussion is the new Community Wellbeing and Civic Practices Chapter. This chapter strengthens the City's commitment to equity and belonging through community

partnerships and civic practices. It covers topics related to health and wellbeing, belonging and safety, arts and culture, equity and inclusion, community engagement, and tribal relations. The chapter aims to improve access to social services, nutritious and affordable food, community gathering spaces, personal enrichment opportunities, and City decisions. Community wellbeing is achieved when all residents can meet their basic needs, feel safe, connect with others, and engage with City government.

Community Wellbeing Chapter: Significant Proposed Ideas

The most significant proposed changes and ideas for this chapter relate to the following topics.

1. *Consolidation of information from other chapters* | Many of the policies in the proposed chapter exist throughout the 2016 comprehensive plan. These policies relate to food systems and access, opportunities to gather, arts and culture, supporting community partners, increasing activity, and community engagement. Additionally, many of the Library, Museum, and Theatre's priorities have been consolidated under this chapter.
2. *New concepts for this chapter* | Most of the policies are new concepts for Bellingham's comprehensive plan. However, these concepts exist in City work, projects, and partnerships. They have been elevated to the comprehensive plan level to reiterate our commitment to making Bellingham a more welcoming, safe, and inclusive community. The new topics include:
 - *Community Health* | This chapter identifies the socioeconomic determinants of health and includes policies on how to leverage partnerships and reduce barriers to improve health outcomes.
 - *Equitable Civic Practices* | This chapter includes policies to increase representation and engagement from historically under-invested and marginalized communities in Bellingham's civic practices
 - *Tribal Relations* | This new goal amplifies the important relationship the City has with local tribes and the indigenous community. This goal opens the discussion for future collaboration between the tribes and the City, encouraging respect, understanding, and recognition.

Attachment 1: Draft Goals and Policies

Attachment 1

Policy ID (existing)	Amended Policy (resolved)	Potential Change
<u>Goal CW-1</u>	Confront systemic and regional community health and wellbeing issues through ample social services, a resilient food system, and interactive programming.	New
Policy H-52	Foster and support partnerships and approaches that have proven to be successful in * Reducing food insecurity, homelessness, and other issues that are detrimental to community health; and * Promoting positive health and wellbeing outcomes.	Minor Amendment
<u>Policy CW-A</u>	Reduce barriers to establishing healthcare, childcare, grocery stores, and educational uses through permissive land use and navigable permitting and review processes.	New
Policy H-26	Leverage public safety resources and partnerships to continue to support the goals in the Whatcom County Justice Project Implementation Plan (JPIP), including strategies to address substance-use challenges, behavioral health issues, childcare, therapeutic courts, and a wide range of other urgent community needs.	Minor Amendment
<u>New Policy CW-B</u>	Collaborate with Whatcom County to further their actions and plans in providing and promoting health and community services, regional parks and recreation, and a sustainable regional food system.	New
Policy ED-51	Consider the importance of local and regional food systems assets and infrastructure in policy decisions, encouraging locally-based food production, processing, distribution, and consumption, such as through community gardens, urban farming, and farmers and seafood markets.	Minor Amendment
Policy LU-81	Encourage access to a diversity of nutritious, affordable, and culturally-appropriate food by exploring opportunities to support, incentivize, or encourage the location of food purveyors and urban food production near residential areas and transit, especially in low-income and underserved areas.	Major Amendment
<u>New Policy CW-C</u>	Promote and encourage food waste reduction and food recovery initiatives as part of a healthy and resilient local food system.	New
Policy LU-40	Encourage activity for all ages and abilities through parks and recreation, educational and cultural programming, active transportation, and other city amenities.	Major Amendment
Policy LU-89	Consider the experience and changing needs of residents as they age through universal design approaches, accessible facilities, and social opportunities and programming.	Major Amendment
<u>Goal CW-2</u>	Foster community vitality, reduce loneliness, and promote a positive sense of belonging through safety and connection.	New
<u>New Policy CW-D</u>	Further a culture of support and belonging within Bellingham that aspires to be more understanding, respectful, and accountable to those who experience marginalization and exclusion.	New
Policy LU-87	Support and encourage a variety of flexible and adaptive gathering spaces for the community to come together and strengthen connections, including spaces for all ages, abilities, cultures, identities, and traditions.	Major Amendment
<u>New Policy CW-E</u>	Provide and support programming and safety of large community gatherings within the City Center.	New
<u>New Policy CW-F</u>	Continue implementing proactive safety strategies, such as community-oriented policing, bike patrols and community paramedics, to support safe neighborhoods.	New
<u>New Policy CW-G</u>	Maintain support for incarceration diversion strategies, such as alternative response programs or other outreach teams, throughout our community.	New
<u>New Policy CW-H</u>	Work to decrease public health risks, social tensions and environmental impacts related to unauthorized encampments by leveraging resources to promote safety and wellbeing, balancing the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness with those of nearby residents and businesses.	New
<u>New Policy CW-I</u>	Continue to prioritize bold actions and innovative thinking to ensure a thriving future for Downtown Bellingham, providing opportunities for all community members to live, work, or play.	New
<u>Goal CF-5-Policy CW-J</u>	Foster lifelong learning and social interaction opportunities for all ages through City programs and partnerships that support a curious, informed, and resilient community.	Major Amendment

Policy ID (existing)	Amended Policy (resolved)	Potential Change
New Policy CW-K	Amplify the adopted Library and Museum standards and policies as Bellingham grows, to ensure the City continues to support personal and community enrichment and be welcoming and easy to access for all.	New
Policy LU-88 Goal CW-3	Promote and celebrate Bellingham's arts and culture.	Minor Amendment
New Policy CW-L	Support our community's commitment to arts and culture and our Downtown Arts District.	New
Goal CF-6	Involve artists and creative workers in integrating art into public places and events that celebrate Bellingham's diverse identities.	Minor Amendment
New Policy CW-M	Integrate indigenous culture and history into the community dialogue, art installations, and event programming, recognizing and respecting its importance in the region.	New
New Policy CW-N	Foster curiosity and joy about our world by continuing to support and expand access to creative and interactive opportunities at the Museum, Library, and in the broader arts community.	New
Policy CF-64	Promote cultural awareness and education for all ages through City programs, partnerships, communication, and ongoing fulfillment of the Parks & Recreation, Museum, Library, and Theatre missions.	Major Amendment
Goal CW-4	Expand and strengthen equity and inclusion throughout the City's civic processes and practices.	New
New Policy CW-O	Develop and implement a strategic plan to guide the City's work in building a more equitable and welcoming Bellingham for all.	New
New Policy CW-P	Promote community understanding about racism's impact on health and wellbeing, working with local organizations to further Bellingham as an anti-racist community.	New
Objective PRO-5h	Foster inclusion and diverse representation in the City workforce, particularly for first responders and others that interact with the public, including through training opportunities, accessible hiring and appointment processes, and a supportive workplace culture.	Major Amendment
New Policy CW-Q	Foster community representation in City decision-making, by evaluating opportunities to tailor the appointment process and reduce barriers to achieve a diverse perspective and representative set of advisory groups.	New
New Policy CW-R	Provide inclusive guidance and resources to welcome residents of all backgrounds as they interact with the City, supporting them in navigating complex processes with greater ease.	New
New Policy CW-S	Proactively reduce barriers to make City services and facilities more accessible, available, and easily navigable, ensuring access to all.	New
New Policy CW-T	Explore and quantify disparities in both beneficial and detrimental impacts of past, current, and proposed City practices. Consider factors such as access to infrastructure, city services and programs, and housing and economic opportunity.	New
New Policy CW-U	Identify under-invested and marginalized communities and direct resources to reduce disparities between areas and populations.	New
Goal CW-5	Foster a welcoming environment for outreach and engagement by inviting and enabling community members to be involved in City government.	New
Policy CF-21	Continue implementing systems and strategies to inform the community of City processes and provide meaningful opportunities for public engagement.	Major Amendment
New Policy CW-V	Build community trust and foster transparency in City decision-making processes.	New
Policy T-34	Proactively reduce barriers to engagement for community members across a continuum of needs and abilities, prioritizing access, accessibility, ease of use, and cultural sensitivity.	Major Amendment
New Policy CW-W	Coordinate and balance community engagement efforts, ensuring outreach is sensitive to social context and overall community capacity.	New
New Policy CW-X	Strive to tailor community outreach strategies, considering an achievable range of engagement levels before identifying the appropriate approach methods to meet specific project needs and address community expectations.	New
New Policy CW-Y	Continually evaluate effectiveness of engagement strategies to reach populations that may be most impacted by the City decision(s) under consideration.	New

Policy ID (existing)	Amended Policy (resolved)	Potential Change
Policy LU-64	Focus resources to increasing involvement by under-represented and historically-marginalized community members.	Minor Amendment
Policy LU-65	Foster a culture of service among City staff, supporting and enhancing their roles as City ambassadors.	Major Amendment
Goal CW-6	Strengthen relationships and engagement processes with tribal nations and indigenous community members through informed practices that respect tribal sovereignty and honor treaty rights.	New
New Policy CW-Z	Provide and prioritize opportunities for City staff to learn about appropriate engagement practices, and tribal governance, culture, and history.	New
New Policy CW-AA	Actively listen to tribal nations to better understand their needs and priorities; utilize this input to inform and refine City processes in closer alignment with their interests.	New
New Policy CW-BB	Uphold City government relationships and protocols with tribal governments, prioritizing early and ongoing consultation or communication about City plans, projects, and processes.	New
New Policy CW-CC	Elevate the important relationship between tribal leadership and the City's elected executive.	New
New Policy CW-DD	Standardize internal protocols, improving consistency and centralization of tribal engagement processes Citywide.	New
New Policy CW-EE	Welcome and seek opportunities to build relationships and greater connection with the indigenous community, both for the public and between tribal and City leaders.	New
New Policy CW-FF	Support enhanced community awareness, recognition, and understanding of tribal nations and indigenous cultures through culturally appropriate actions that are responsive to tribal input.	New