

HOW SHOULD WE GROW?

Each of the next three boards shows a different way we could grow. Each approach focuses on a growth strategy, including different elements to make it happen.

We do not need to pick one approach only.

It is likely that we will **select multiple elements from each approach**. These elements will form the Bellingham Plan growth strategy. No matter which other elements we select, our growth strategy will:



Continue to focus on and invest in urban villages.



Meet state housing legislation, including allowing middle housing across the city.



Meet state climate legislation, including focusing on resilience and equity.



Use an equity lens, balancing growth with public investment to mitigate displacement.

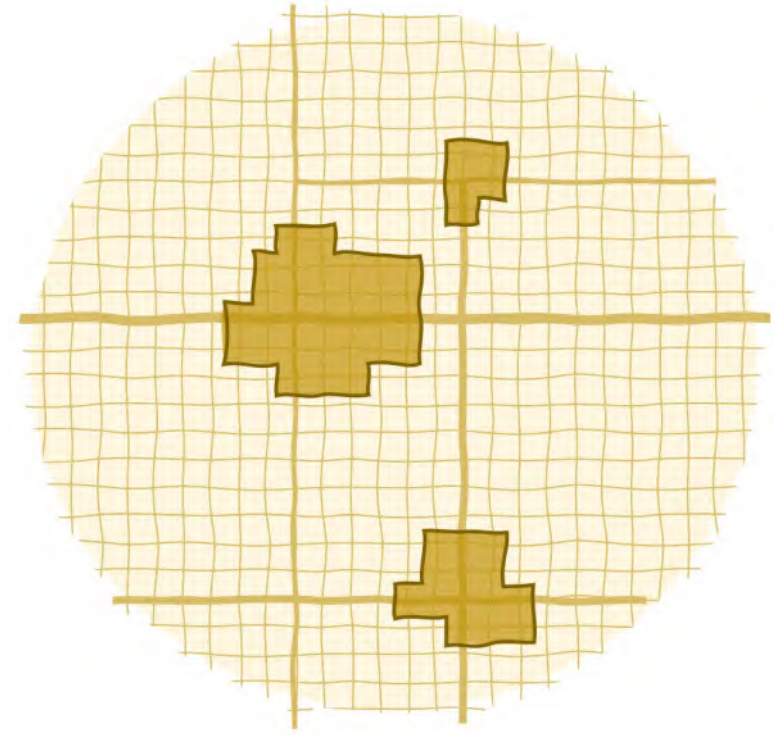
As you look at all three boards, consider which elements of that approach you support. Consider how those elements work with one another.

How would you describe your preferred overall approach?

Does it align with just one or several of the following boards ?

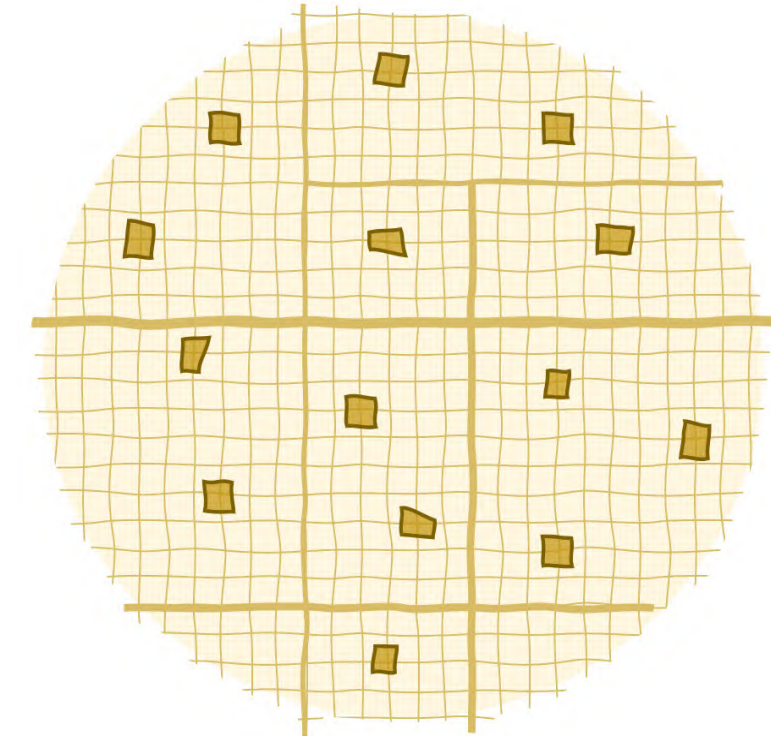
Ways the City Could Grow

Add a green sticky for “pros” & pink for “cons”



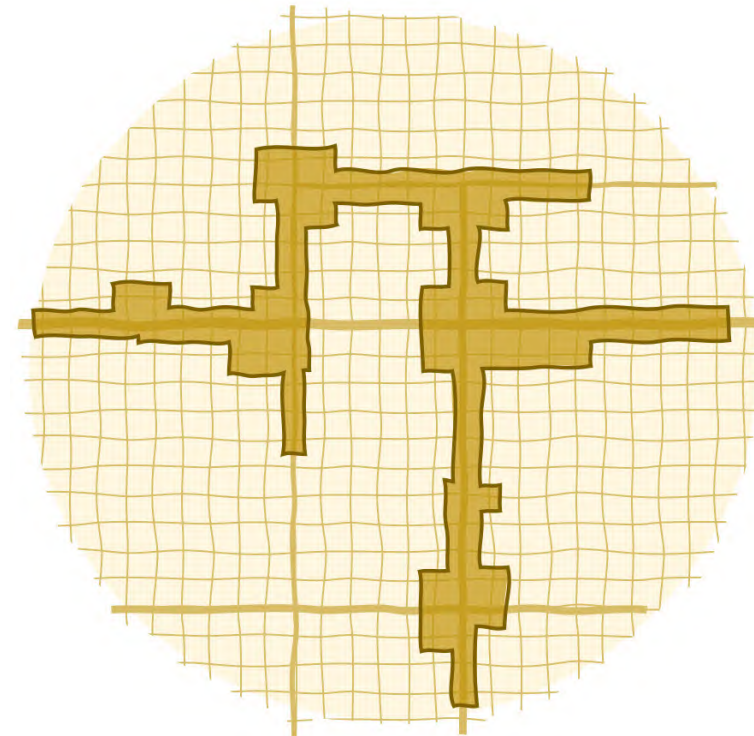
Focus on Urban Villages

Continue development of Downtown, Fairhaven, Samish Way and other urban villages with a mix of uses and opportunities for people to live close to jobs, transit, services, entertainment, and recreation.



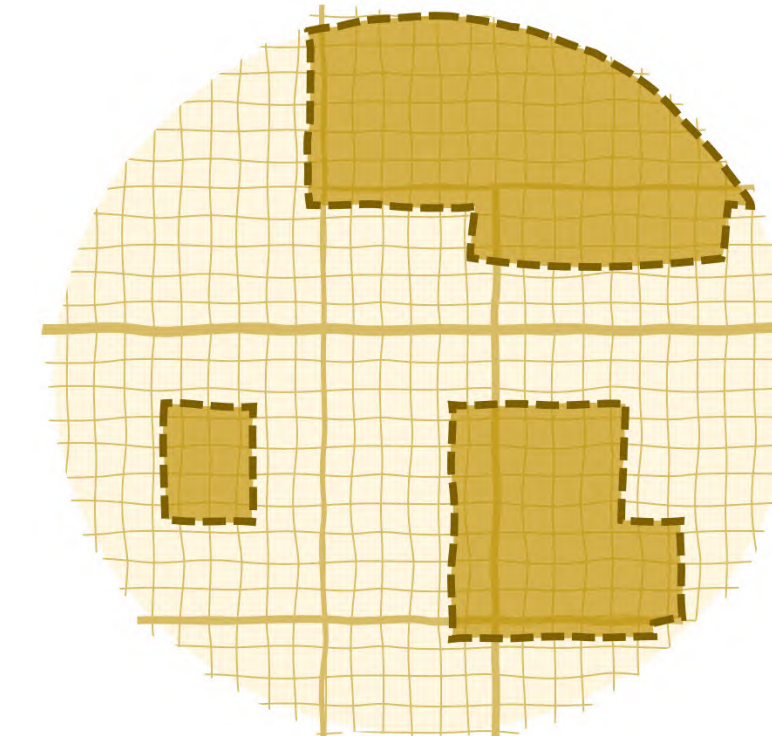
Focus on Distributed Nodes (“15-minute city”)

Allow small-scale commercial services to locate inside neighborhoods within walking distance of where people live.



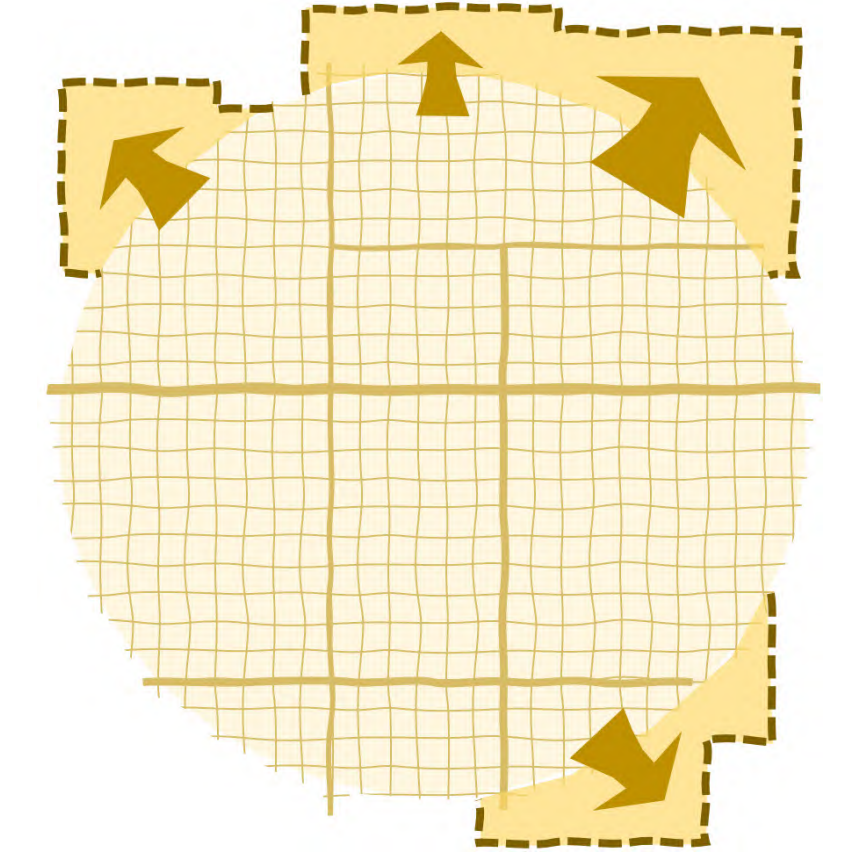
Focus on Corridors (Transit-Oriented Development)

Allow higher-density development with more housing, offices, and commercial services to develop along transit corridors to support higher frequency bus service and reduce personal vehicle trips.



Focus on areas with fewer opportunities today

Direct investment for infrastructure like parks, trails, sidewalks, street lights, and libraries to recently annexed, low-income, or under-invested-in areas.

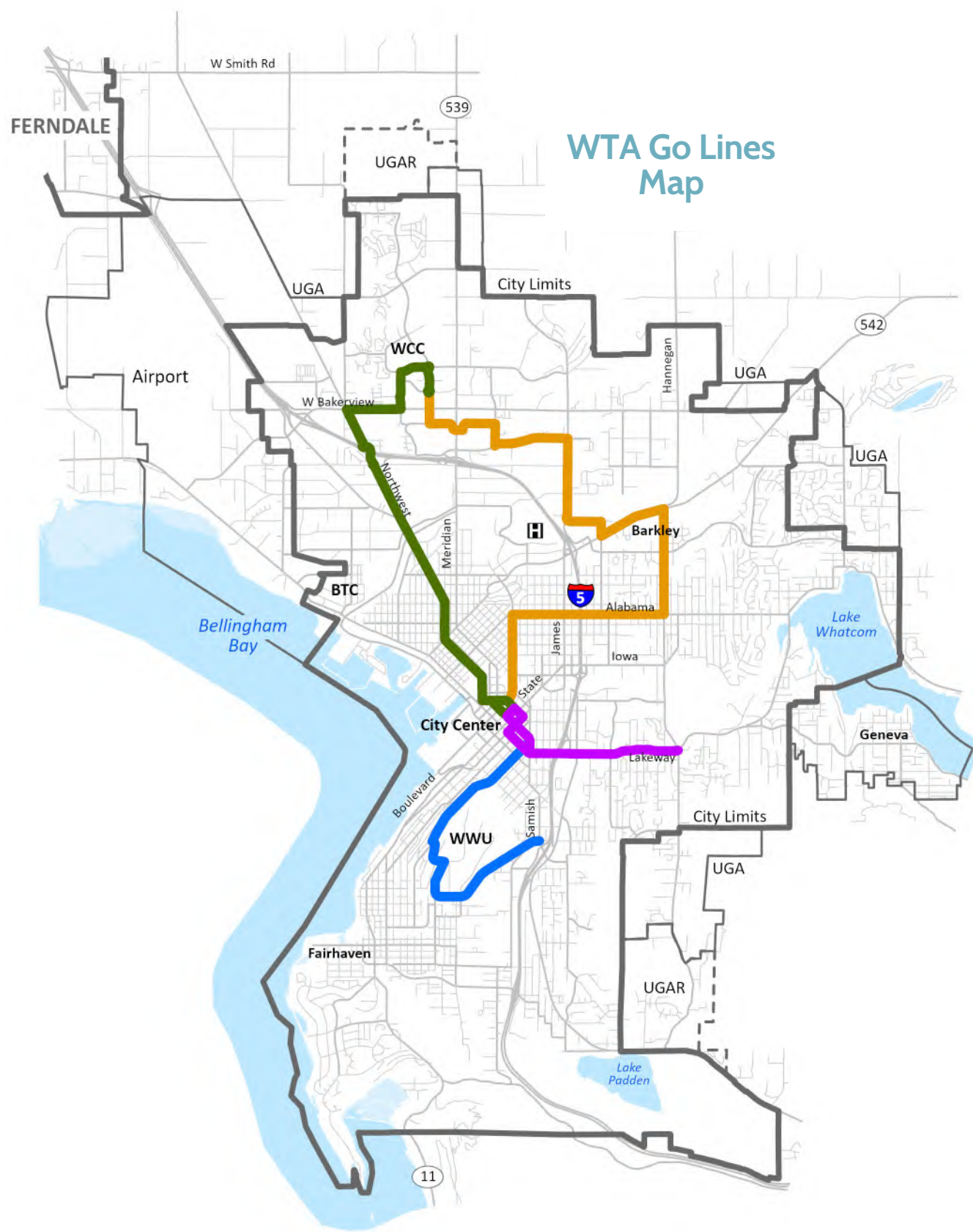


Focus on Urban Growth Area Expansion

Allow expansion of city boundaries to areas where new neighborhoods can be created and provide funding for extension of urban services.

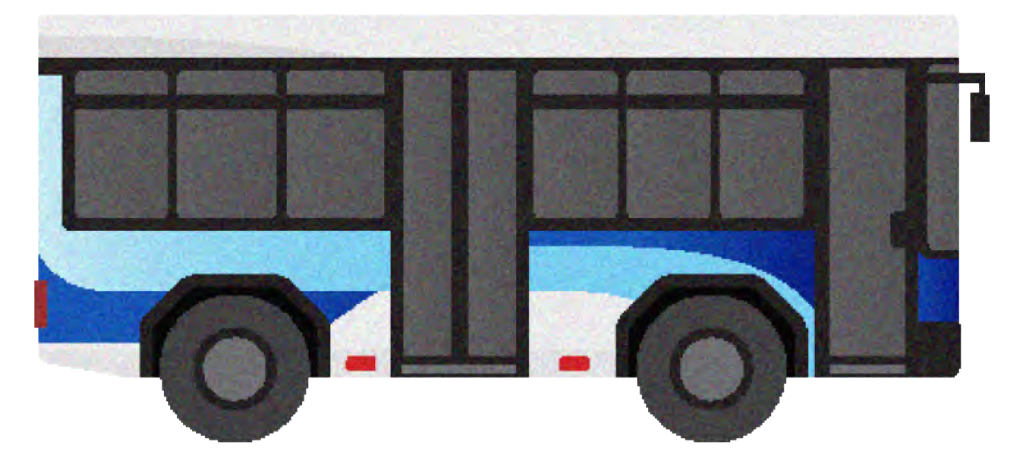
WHAT IS TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT?

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) creates dense, walkable, and mixed-use spaces near transit that supports vibrant, sustainable, and equitable communities. A mix of uses, activities, and services allow TOD residents to commute to work, run errands, recreate, and meet basic needs without a car. TOD is typically thought of in terms of light and heavy rail transit, but some communities like Bellingham apply this concept to bus transit (Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) - Transit-Oriented Development).



Currently, Whatcom Transit Authority operates four “GO Lines”, which offer service every 15 minutes on weekdays along major corridors in Bellingham (Blue, Green, Gold, and Plum Lines). In the future, stops along these lines may be considered “major transit stops”; that means areas close to these stops would be able to accommodate additional development under new State legislation compared to other parts of Bellingham.

With the Bellingham Plan, we could expand the development potential along transit even further. The City could incentivize and encourage TOD, leading to higher density neighborhoods along existing GO Lines.



Did you know that House Bill 1110, allows at least 6 units on all residential lots if located within a quarter mile of a major transit stop?

WTA recently completed a Rapid Transit Study. This study reviewed how WTA can improve speed and reliability on key corridors, as well as the potential for Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). BRT is a premium service that includes increased frequency and features to improve speed and efficiency. The study looked at two different options for future BRT – one on the existing Gold Line and the other on the existing Blue and Green Lines combined.

Visit engage.ridewta.com/rapid-transit-study to learn more!



Transit-Oriented Development could support Bus Rapid Transit and Bus Rapid Transit could support Transit-Oriented Development!

Transit corridors being studied:

- Gold Go Line (Route 331)**
Approximately 7 miles connecting the downtown Bellingham Transit Station to Cordata Station at Whatcom Community College
- Green plus Blue Go Lines (Route 232 and WWU Routes)**
Approximately 6 miles connecting Cordata at Whatcom Community College to Western Washington University and Lakeway through Downtown.

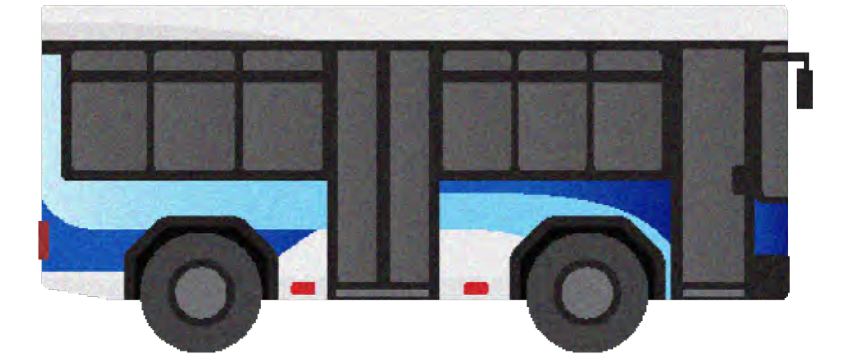
These routes represent

- 60% of our total system ridership (2.57m boardings)
- Western Washington University having the highest demand of any destination in Bellingham

While both corridors are candidates for BRT improvements, funding and resources are a challenge for WTA. The outcome of this study will help WTA and the City pursue the necessary funds and resources.

TELL US ABOUT TRANSIT

Use a sticky note to answer the following questions related to transit in Bellingham.



Do you take the bus? Tell us about your experience.	When do/don't you take transit, and what could change this?	Would you use transit more frequently if your home and/or place of employment was located on a high frequency route?

How We Grow - Approach 2

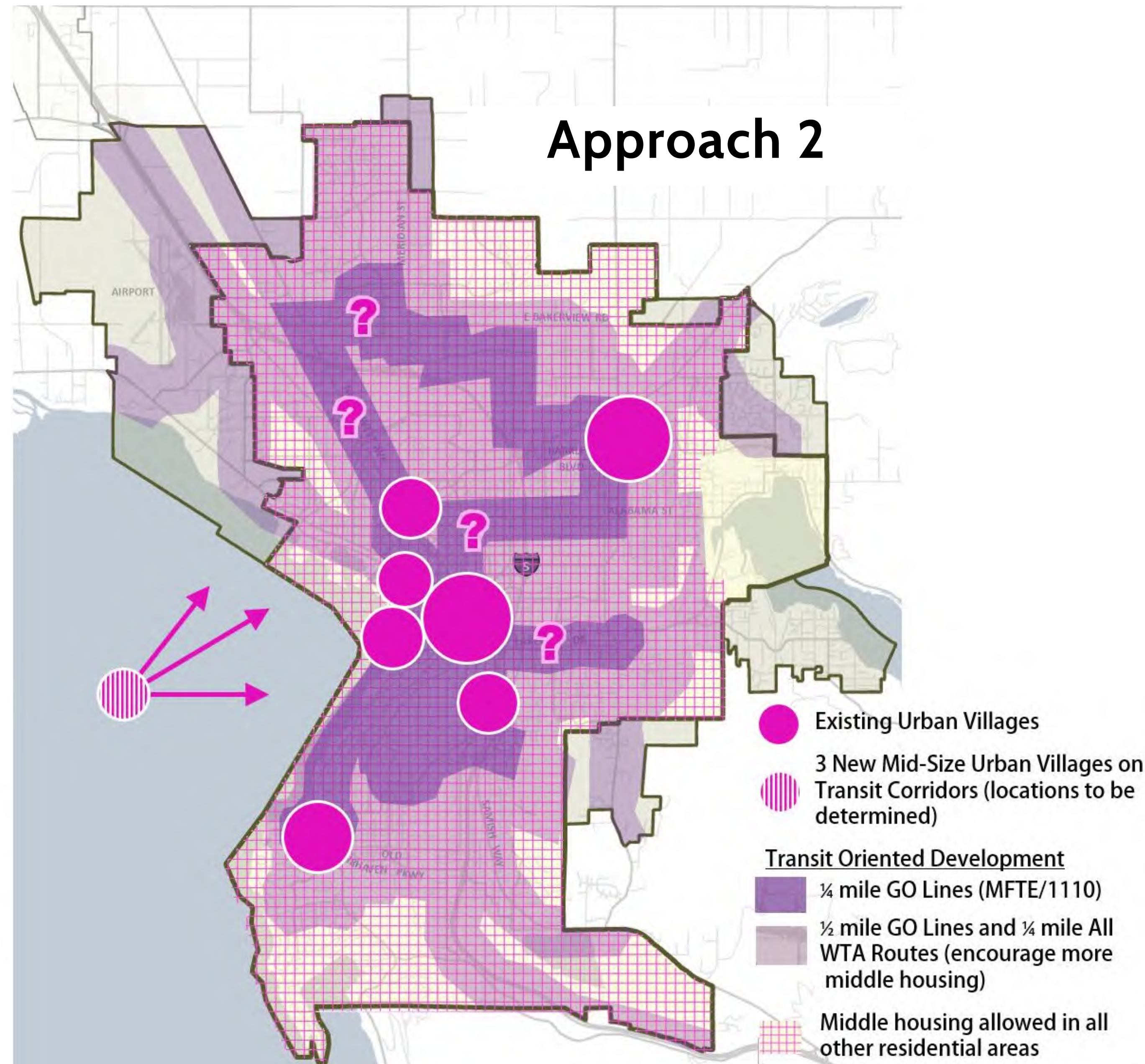
TRANSIT-ORIENTED FOCUS

Key Concepts:

Focus of new growth along high frequency transit routes.

Incentives/requirements for middle-scale housing near these routes, providing more housing close to transit and creating a buffer to lower-scale neighborhoods.

Addition of three new Urban Villages located along transit routes (specific locations to be determined at a future time).



✚ What elements of Approach 2 do you want to incorporate into Bellingham's growth strategy?

■ What elements of Approach 2 do you want to avoid as Bellingham grows?

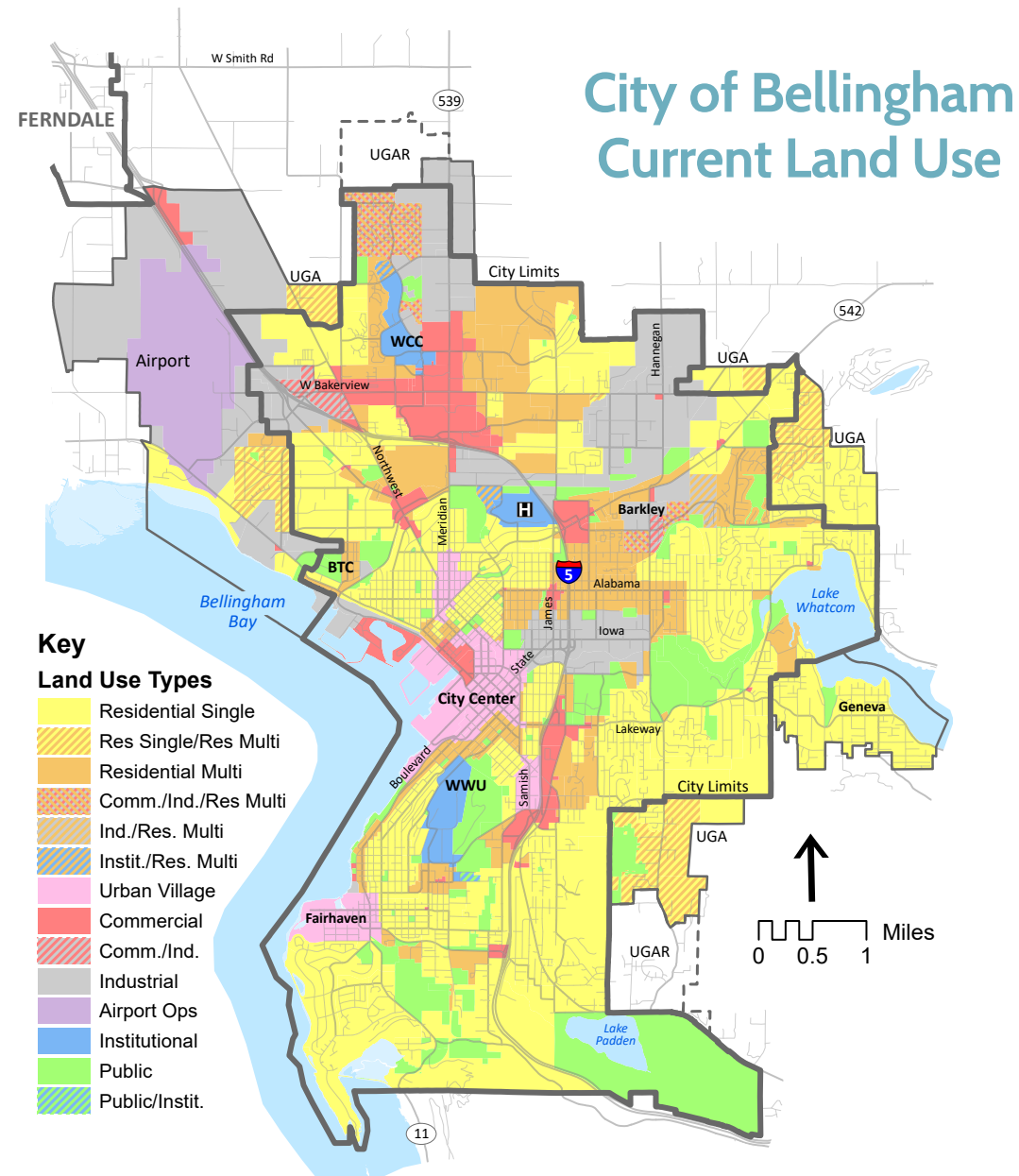
LOCATION AND TRANSPORTATION

Location, location, location!

We all know that Bellingham is a desirable place to live. While we are proud of all the amenities Bellingham has to offer, it does come at a cost. Housing is more expensive in Bellingham than other cities, and depending on the location within Bellingham, the cost of housing can vary. Many location impacts will continue to affect housing costs, however the Bellingham Plan can address the following location barriers to help reduce prices:

Land Use

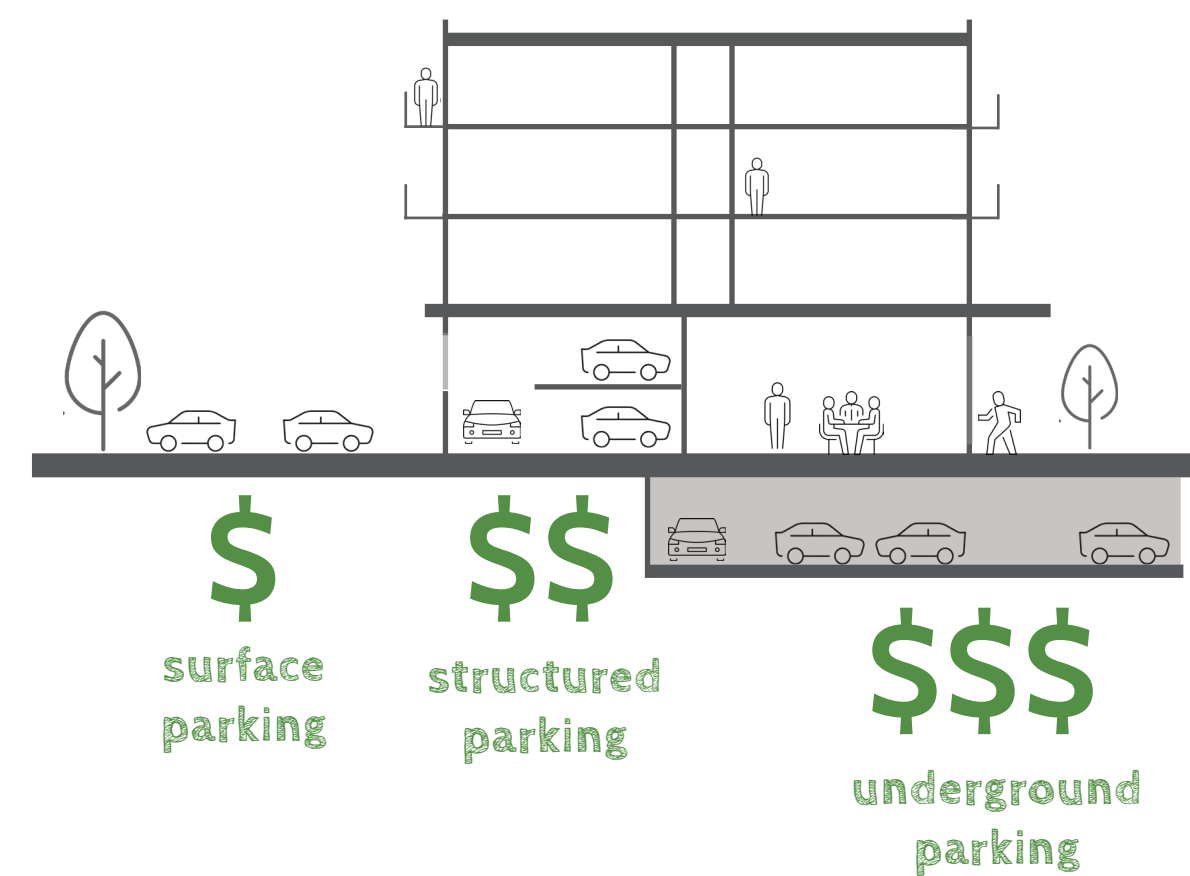
Bellingham's land use code regulates where different uses and housing types are allowed. **Excluding certain uses and housing types from specific areas can inflate the cost of housing** as land supply is essentially limited.



Over 40% of land in Bellingham is zoned Residential Single

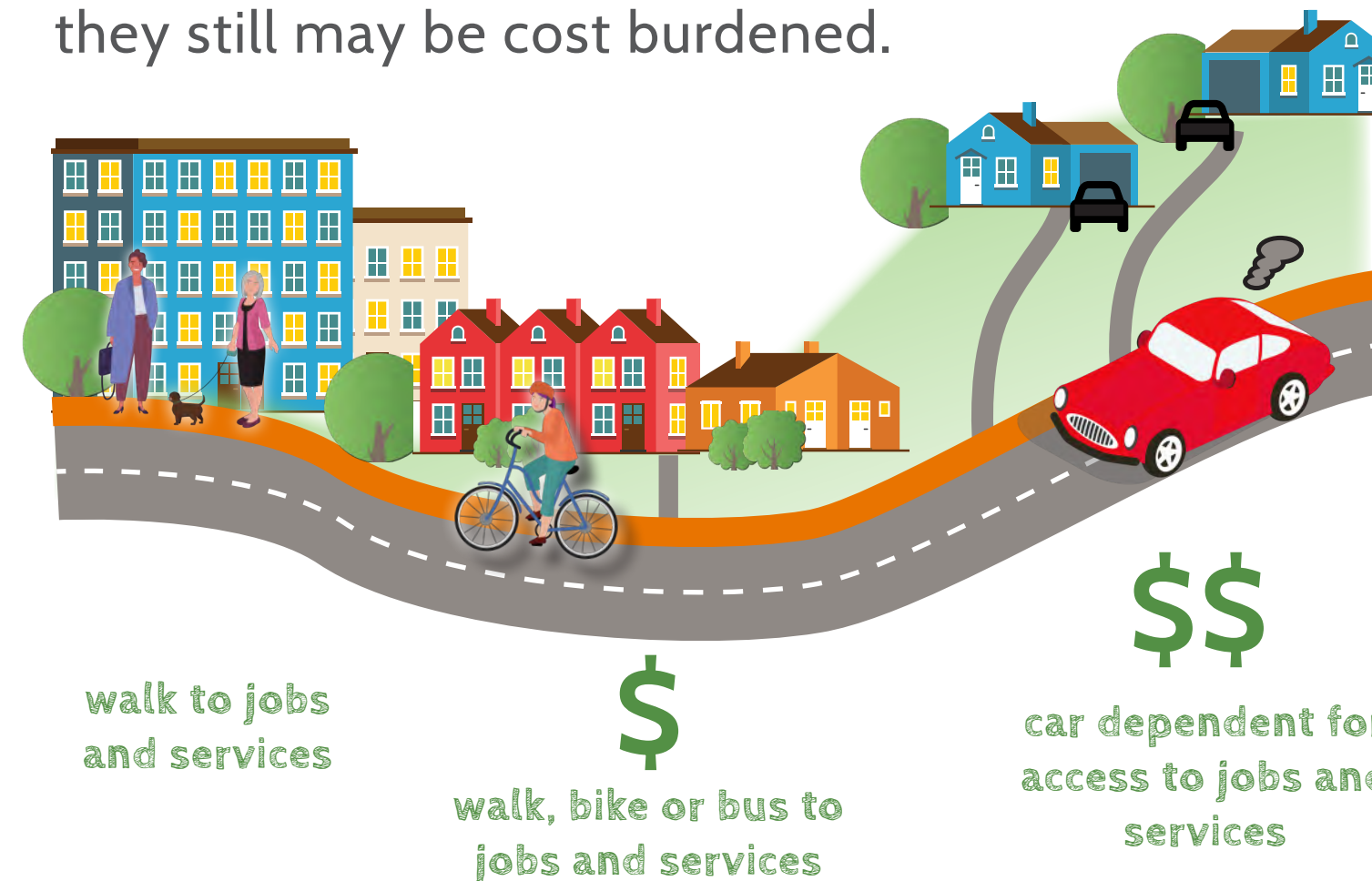
Parking

Providing off street parking is expensive! On average, a surface lot space in Whatcom County can cost \$20,000, a space in an above-ground structure can cost \$40,000, and a space in an underground structure can cost over \$80,000.* **This cost ultimately falls on the tenant as developers need to charge more per unit to account for the parking costs.** When parking is “bundled” with rent, households do not have a choice but to subsidize that parking with their rent – even if they don’t own a vehicle.



Transportation

While housing costs tend to be less when they are farther away from services, amenities, and jobs, the transportation costs associated with the additional distance can ultimately increase the cost of living. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), **households in car-dependent neighborhoods spend up to 25% of their income on transportation**, compared to 9% for households in more walkable neighborhoods with more transit options.** Even if a person is paying less than 30% of their monthly income on rent, if their transportation expenses are so high due to owning a car, and the associated commute, they still may be cost burdened.



Use sticky notes to write down potential solutions for removing these barriers.

* Jo, N. (2022). Parking policy & housing affordability. Whatcom Housing Alliance. <https://whatcomhousingalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Parking-Report-Final-Draft-6.6.22.pdf>

** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development | Office of Policy Development and Research. (2014). Creating connected communities - HUD USER. https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/Creating_Cnnted_Comm.pdf

PARKING AND LAND USE

The City Council recently discussed reducing or eliminating the rules that require a minimum number of parking spaces to be provided alongside new development. On May 20th, they directed the Planning Commission to consider a number of potential approaches to reducing these requirements.

Today's Parking Requirements

While there are many nuances to the parking regulations, the following outlines the general role of our code in regulating the minimum number of spaces that a development must provide.

Single Family



2 parking spaces per house
(+ 1 space for each bedroom over 3)

Multi-Family



Total number of parking spaces is based on unit types:

Studio: 1 space per unit
1-2-bedroom: 1.5 spaces per unit
3+ bedroom: 2 spaces per unit

Urban Villages



- The residential requirements vary but are generally less than the Single/Multi-family requirements.
- Non-residential requirements vary but include things like 1 parking space for every 350SF of office space.
- Downtown, Old Town, and Fairhaven all have some areas that are exempt from parking requirements.

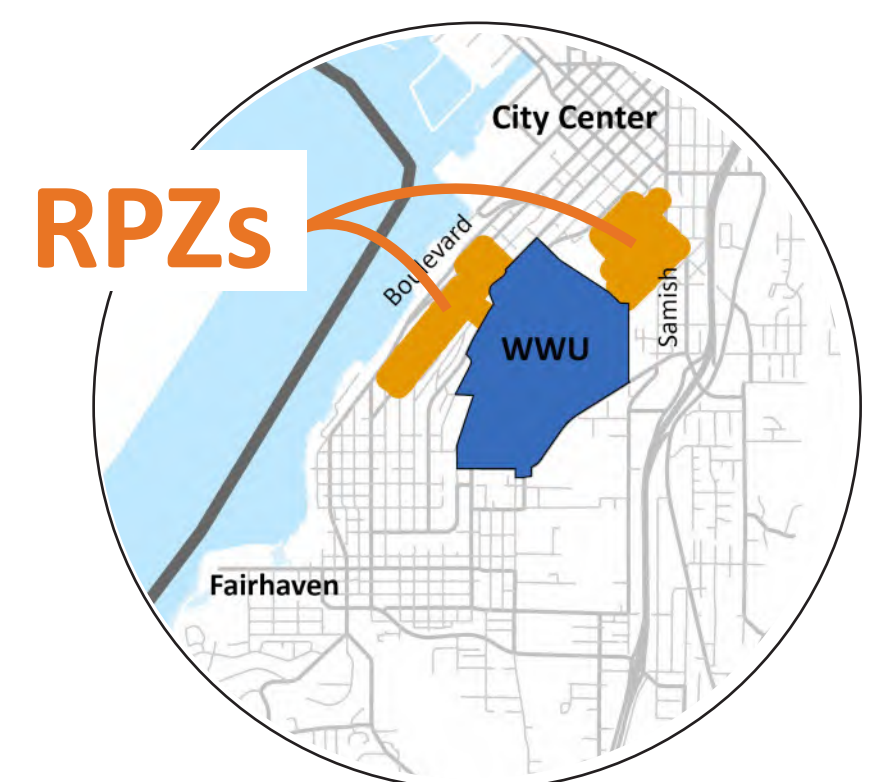
Accessible Parking

Accessible parking stalls are required based on a ratio of how many total stalls are provided (for instance, 1 disabled stall is required if 20 total stalls are provided, but 6 disabled stalls are required if 200 total stalls are provided).



Residential Parking Zones

Residential Parking Zones (RPZs) exist near Western Washington University and help secure an ample supply of parking for residents and visitors through the use of parking permits to residents within the parking zone.



NOTE: The number of required parking spaces can be altered through a variance or through a parking waiver or shared parking agreement, each of which has its own process for potential approval.



Learn more about parking reforms at the City.

View City Council discussion on reducing or eliminating parking requirements.



PARKING AND LAND USE

Benefits of Reducing Parking Minimums

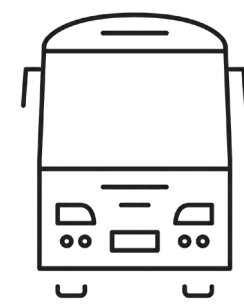
Over the past several decades, the City has shifted its policy framework and has made efforts to move away from the suburbanization of the city. The objective was to provide more shared parking resources and reduce single occupancy vehicle use, primarily through increased biking, walking, and transit usage.

Reducing/eliminating minimum parking requirements would put the decision of whether to create parking spaces, and how many, in the hands of individuals so they can make land-use decisions that work for them and their property. Additionally, staff will evaluate regulations to determine what types of mandates should be loosened and which should remain, taking considerations such as ADA requirements, safety, and electric vehicle charging stations into account.

Some benefits of reducing parking requirements include:



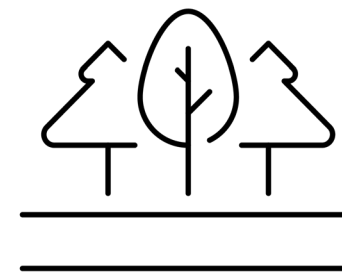
Reducing the cost of providing housing (each parking space generally costs over \$20,000 in Bellingham).



Reducing reliance on cars and encouraging alternative (lower environmental impact) methods.



Increasing the amount of housing that can be built (parking requirements often limit the number of units that can be built due to limited space for parking on site).



Reducing hardscaped areas that both increase the temperature of urban areas and create stormwater runoff.

Considerations if Parking Minimums are Reduced/Removed

Planning Commission and ultimately the City Council will consider reducing or removing minimum parking requirements across the city (or within certain areas of the city).

If these parking requirements are reduced or removed, what are the most important considerations to include alongside these changes? Place up to two dots on the ideas below.

Provide more paid public parking at popular destinations	Require alternative parking to be provided (such as shared parking agreements between multiple building owners)
Require more accessible parking spaces (link disabled stalls to the size and type of building rather than to the total number of stalls provided)	Dedicate more street parking spaces to short-term pick-up/drop-off (carpooling or ridesharing)
Increase funding for transit and pedestrian infrastructure (requires new funding source)	Increase funding for bicycle infrastructure (requires new funding source)
Encourage the development/locating of a bicycle or scooter share in Bellingham	Provide a “fee-in-lieu” option for those who reduce the parking they provide (they pay a fee for each parking space they choose not to provide, which can be utilized to improve pedestrian, bicycle, or transit infrastructure)
Establish more RPZs in residential areas near popular destinations (requires funding for enforcement resources)	Other (place a stickie)

PARKING AND LAND USE

Benefits of Reducing Parking Minimums

Over the past several decades, the City has shifted its policy framework and has made efforts to move away from the suburbanization of the city. The objective was to provide more shared parking resources and reduce single occupancy vehicle use, primarily through increased biking, walking, and transit usage.

Reducing/eliminating minimum parking requirements would put the decision of whether to create parking spaces, and how many, in the hands of individuals so they can make land-use decisions that work for them and their property. Additionally, staff will evaluate regulations to determine what types of mandates should be loosened and which should remain, taking considerations such as ADA requirements, safety, and electric vehicle charging stations into account.

The City Council recently discussed reducing or eliminating the rules that require a minimum number of parking spaces to be provided alongside new development. On May 20, they directed the Planning Commission to consider a number of potential approaches to reducing these requirements, including citywide changes or those based on geographic differences.

At the Housing Types and Neighborhoods (June 6) event, staff asked the community what considerations are important if parking minimums are reduced or removed. They overwhelmingly showed support for increased funding towards pedestrian, transit, and bicycle infrastructure.

Now, we want to hear about the parking changes themselves. Use dots to answer each question below:

In what areas would you like to decrease or eliminate the required parking minimums?
Select as many of the below as you like.

Near existing transit service	
In existing urban villages/areas with a mix of denser residential and commercial uses	
Small (infill) residential projects within existing neighborhoods	
In areas with street parking today	
Other (provide input on sticky note)	

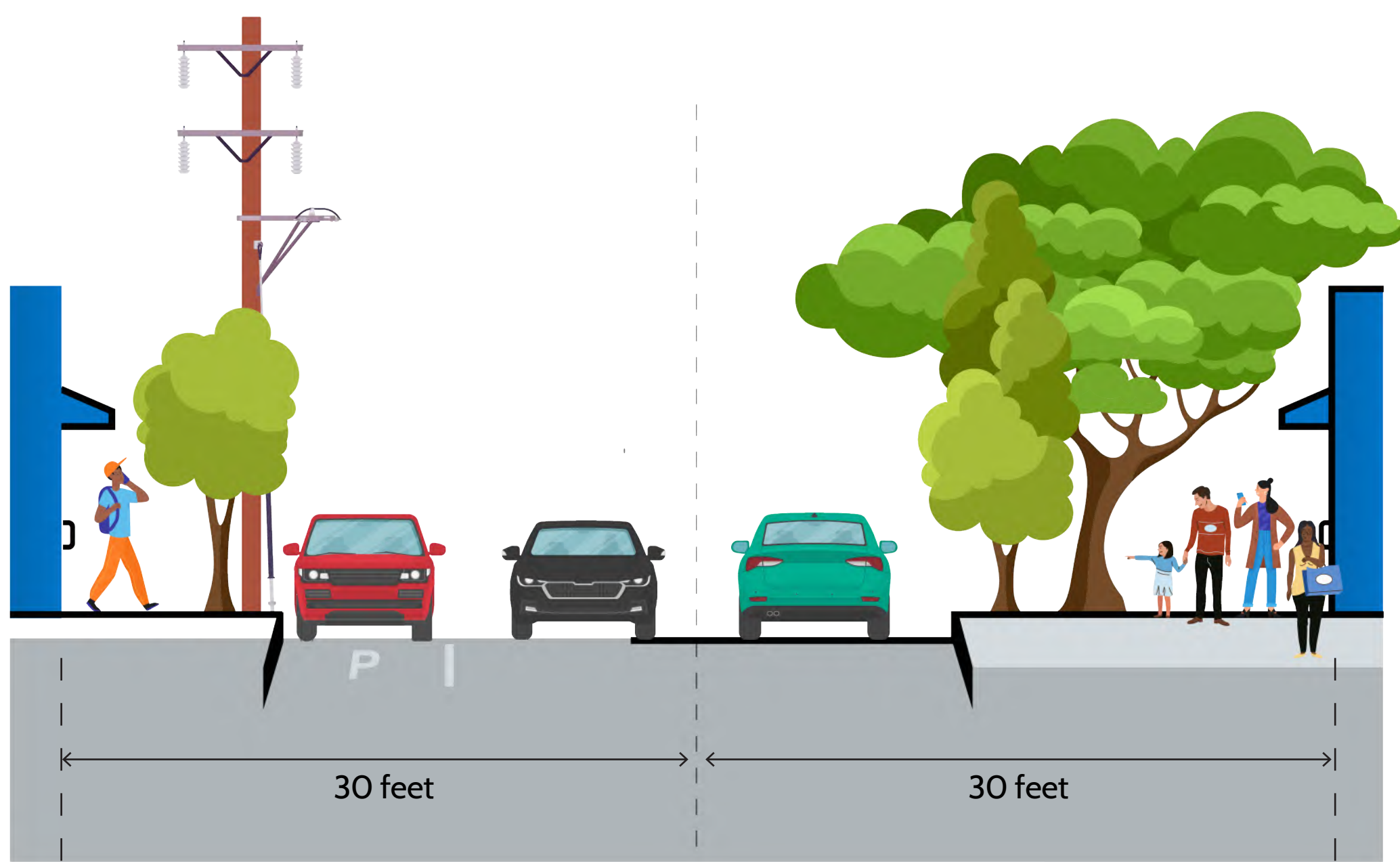
If on-site parking requirements were to be eliminated for residential neighborhoods, how far away from your home would you feel comfortable parking your car?
Select only one of the below.

Directly in front of my residence	
On the same block as my residence	
Within a 2-3 block radius of my residence	
Any distance, as long as it supports more needed housing	
I prefer to have dedicated parking on the property. I will not live anywhere that doesn't have dedicated parking.	

STREET AND SIDEWALK TRADE-OFFS

How to utilize limited space to meet diverse public uses.

Many Bellingham streets include a travel lane for cars and a dedicated lane for street parking. The diagram below shows the typical street components on the left side, with a sidewalk, small street trees, overhead utility lines, street parking and a travel lane in each direction.



However, in the context of walkable neighborhoods with abundant tree canopies, this pattern could change. Wider sidewalks can enhance the pedestrian experience and accommodate larger trees. Larger trees mean more money is needed to place utility lines underground and it reduces the space available for the street—as a result there might only be room for a single travel lane for cars and no parking. This is just one example of the trade-offs we must consider when designing streets.

There are many possible street and sidewalk design combinations that can accommodate various public uses and meet different needs, but they each prioritize different elements.

As we encourage more street connectivity across the city, we may have opportunities to improve some streets that include a mix of both residential and small commercial uses (not including existing Urban Villages).

**What elements are most important to include along these mid-sized streets?
Add a stickie note to the top 3 elements that you'd like to prioritize along these streets.
Write any considerations you want to add about that element.**

Travel lanes for cars	Travel lane for transit	Separated bike lane	Larger street trees	Wide sidewalks	Street Parking	Bus shelters, bike parking, benches or other features

CLIMATE ACTION

The City of Bellingham is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the resiliency of our community to prepare for the coming impacts of climate change that we are already experiencing. Our climate work is guided by the city's Climate Action Plan.

Timeline of Recent Climate-Related Engagement

2017 - 2018

Outreach to community interest groups and a public hearing regarding Climate Action Plan update

2018 - 2019

Climate Task Force meetings open to the public, with subject specific meetings and a City Council public hearing

2019 - 2023

Climate workplan presentations to Council

2023

Engaged community members on discussions of three main topic areas: transportation electrification, building electrification, and renewable energy

Current Workplan Programs Include Approaches To:

- » Increase the use of electric vehicles
- » Reduce emissions in homes and other buildings
- » Plan and respond to extreme heat and wildfires
- » Assess risk for sea level and storm surge
- » Create and buy renewable energy
- » Consider community resilience facilities
- » Coordinate with other stakeholders across all sectors

How does this relate to “the Bellingham Plan?”

Consistent with House Bill 1181, signed into law in 2023, the City will be updating the Bellingham Plan to include a climate element (the most recently added mandatory element). This climate element will include goals and policies that:

- Focus on resiliency – improving climate preparedness, response, and recovery efforts
- Maximize economic, environmental, and social co-benefits and prioritize environmental justice
- Reduce overall emissions and vehicle miles traveled

Learn more about the City's Climate Action Plan at cob.org/climate.

For questions, email Seth Vidaña at savidana@cob.org

PLANNING & CLIMATE EMISSIONS

How we plan will impact Bellingham greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

In our daily lives, many actions we take – from heating homes to driving cars – cause the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs). GHGs contribute to climate change by trapping heat, harming our health and the environment around us. As our city continues to grow, more GHGs could be emitted overall. We can work together to decrease these emissions and their impact on the climate.

Transportation of people and goods contribute the most carbon in Bellingham.

Building energy, especially **heating and cooling**, is most efficient in multifamily buildings with multiple units insulating one another.

Some **building materials**, like concrete, contribute more carbon emissions than others, like wood.

When buildings are farther apart, more material and construction emissions are required to provide **roads and utilities** to those buildings.



URBAN AREA

There will be fewer emissions in this scenario.

SMALL SCALE RESIDENTIAL AREA

There will be more emissions in this scenario.

SUBURBAN AREA

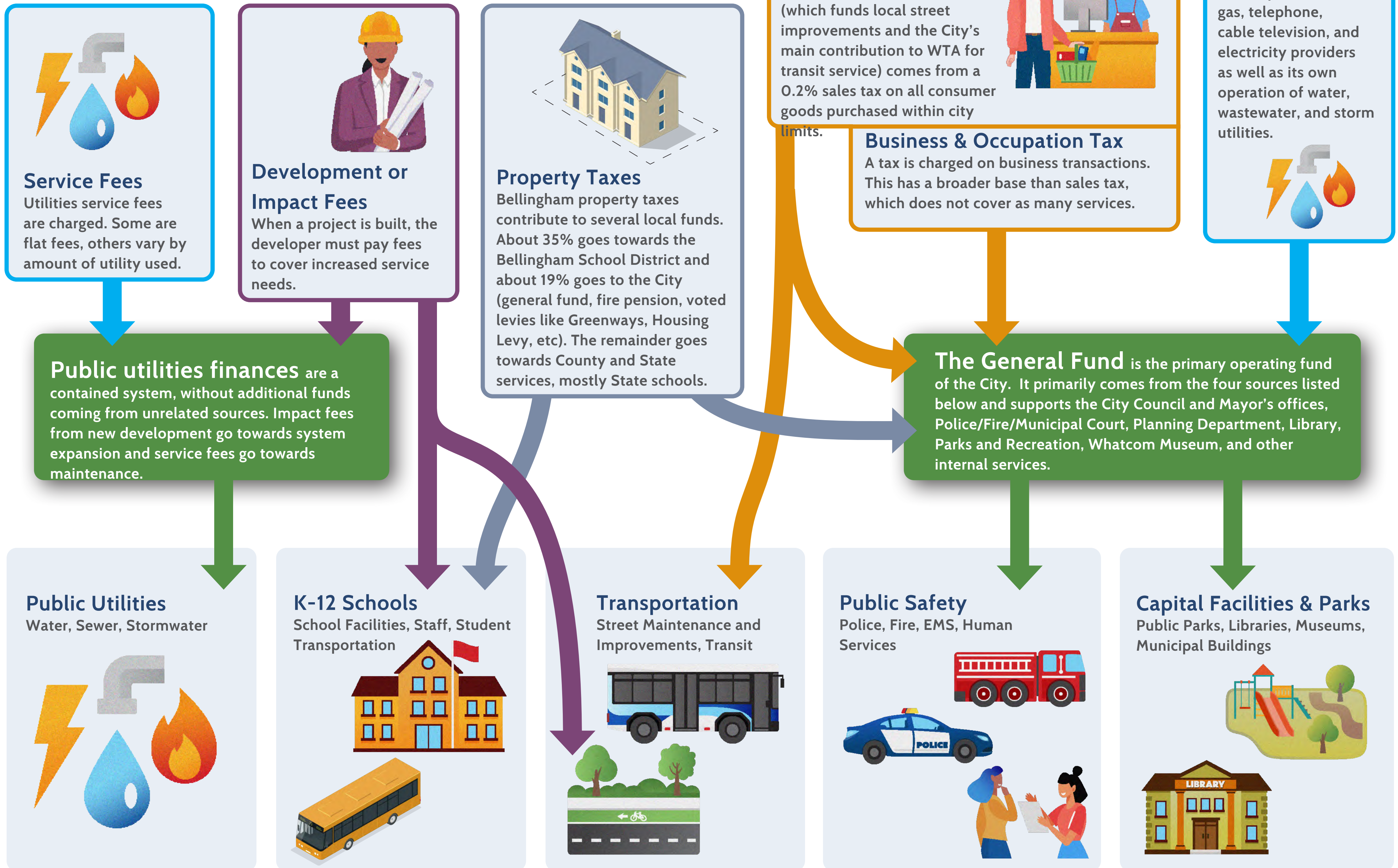
There will be the most emissions in this scenario.

Scan the QR code for more information on the City's climate emissions and goals.



INFRASTRUCTURE PLANNING

Primary Funding Sources



Local Government Services

Many other sources, especially state and federal grants or taxes, also fund these services.

Providing these urban services to each home costs the City more when those homes are further apart.



Urban (Over 35 homes/acre)

~\$5,000/home/year



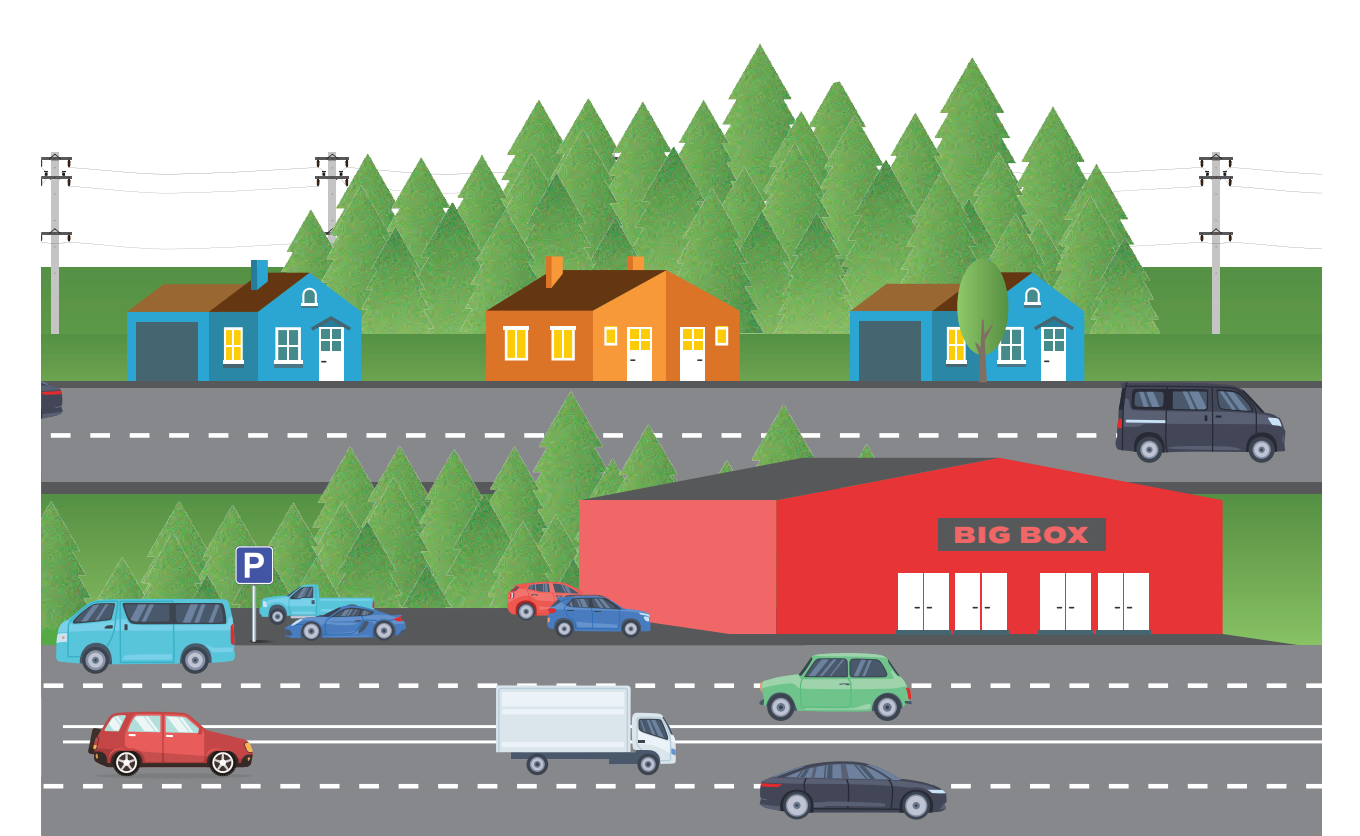
Middle-scale (10-35 homes/acre)

~\$8,000/home/year



Suburban (3-9 homes/acre)

~\$11,000/home/year



HOUSING AND CLIMATE IMPACTS

How our housing types and neighborhoods grow over time - and where development occurs - has an impact on the climate.

Design for Resilience

Housing can be designed to withstand climate impacts such as extreme weather, flooding, or heatwaves. Additionally, building in areas less prone to climate hazards (e.g., avoiding floodplains, wildfire-prone areas) can reduce the risk of climate-related damage.

Design or Retrofit for Energy

Incorporating energy-efficient technologies and designs (e.g. better insulation, energy-efficient windows, solar panels) can reduce the carbon footprint of houses. Implementing more stringent building codes and standards can help drive the development of climate-friendly housing.

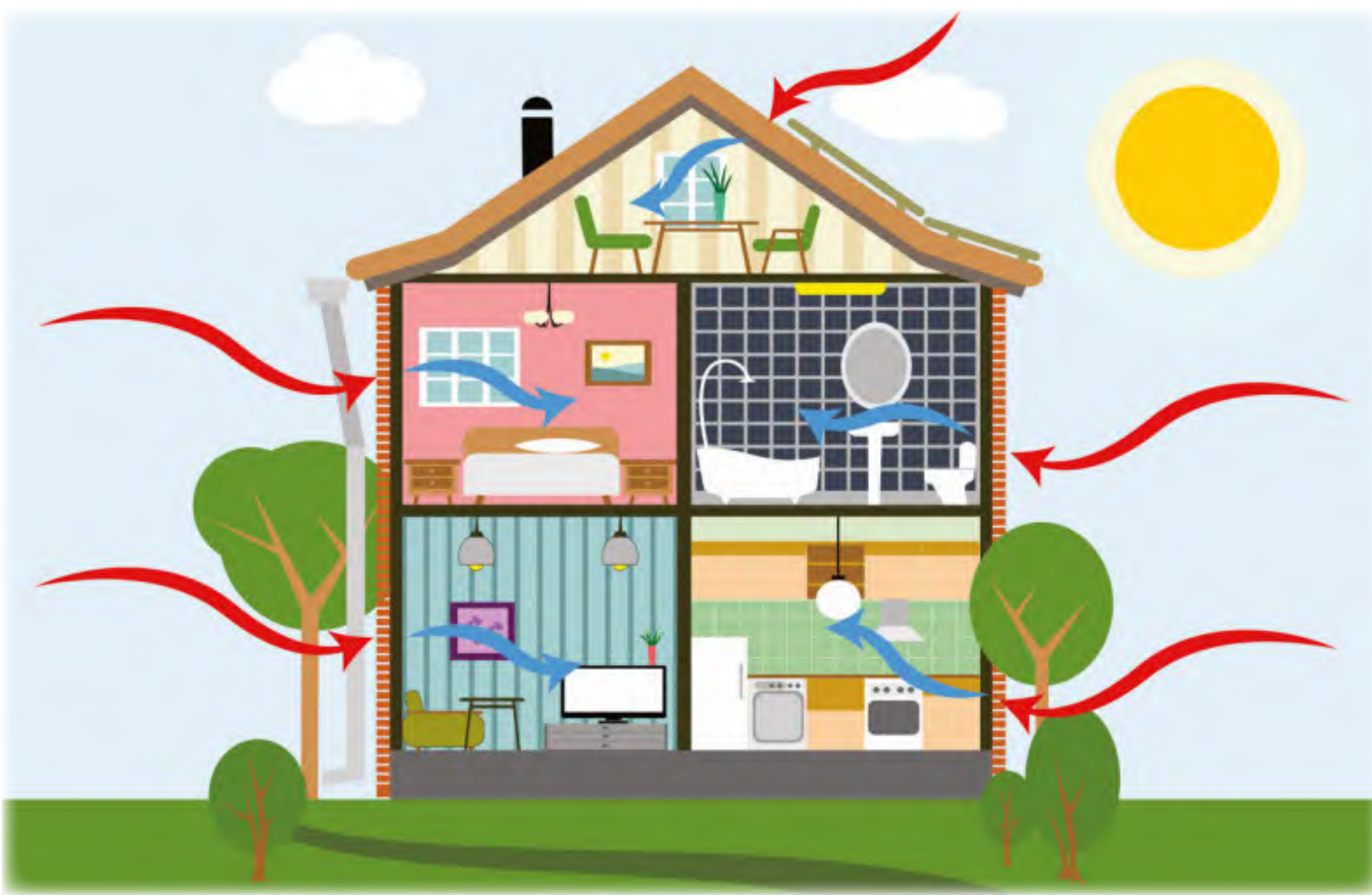


Image Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/energy-efficient-housing-made-more-affordable-mortgage-shachi-naidu/>

Compact Development

Promoting higher-density development can reduce urban sprawl, lower emissions, and improve energy efficiency. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, found that for the 700 cities they studied, “infill housing — that is, homes built in existing urban areas, near transit, jobs and services — can reduce greenhouse gas pollution more effectively than any other option.” (Seattle Times)

Smart Growth and Transit-Oriented Development

Promoting higher-density development can reduce urban sprawl, lower emissions, and improve energy efficiency. Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, found that for the 700 cities they studied, “infill housing — that is, homes built in existing urban areas, near transit, jobs and services — can reduce greenhouse gas pollution more effectively than any other option.” (Seattle Times)



HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

How can we be friends?

We can....

Promote Energy Efficiency And Reduce Emissions

- Encouraging and funding the rehabilitation of existing homes can reduce operations and maintenance costs for renters and owners. Retrofitting homes can also build resiliency to climate change by improving insulation to reduce heating costs, adding cooling measures for heat events, and upgrading air filtration systems to improve indoor air quality due to wildfire smoke.
- Providing homeowners with information on energy efficiency project costs, projected cost savings, and the availability of rebates, incentives and other supportive funding programs will help homeowners make informed decisions.
- Replacing gas heating with electric heat pumps will reduce emissions and provide cooling as well as heating functions year round.

Reduce Urban Sprawl

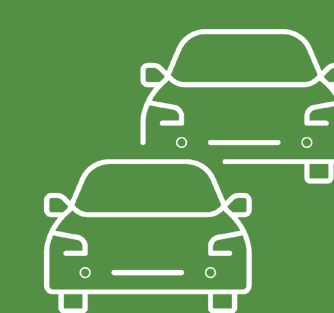
- Urban sprawl drives many challenges facing cities, including greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, road congestion, and lack of affordable housing (OECD Report). It also increases the per-user costs of providing public services such as water, energy, sanitation, and public transport.
- Researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, found that for the 700 cities they studied, “infill housing — that is, homes built in existing urban areas, near transit, jobs and services — can reduce greenhouse gas pollution more effectively than any other option.” (Seattle Times)
- Cities can regulate development to allow for affordable and climate-friendly housing: denser housing, revised parking requirements, taller buildings, and transit-oriented development close to jobs and services.

Preserve Existing Housing

- The greenest building is the one already built: “Building reuse almost always yields fewer environmental impacts than new construction when comparing buildings of similar size and functionality.” - The Greenest Building – NTHP
- Marginalized groups are disproportionately cost burdened and more vulnerable to the effects of climate change (such as air pollution and climate disruption).
- Extreme weather events due to climate change can reduce the supply of affordable housing.



Image Source: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/energy-efficient-housing-made-more-affordable-mortgage-shachi-naidu/>

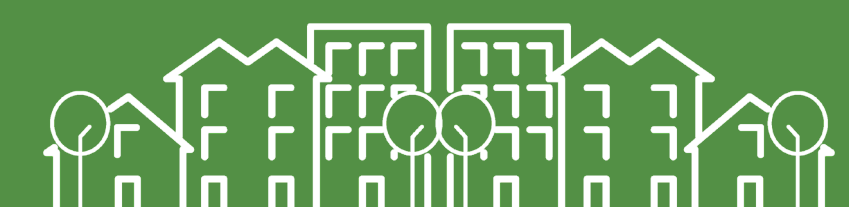


How can reduced parking standards support climate and housing goals?

Climate: A more compact city built for people, not cars, makes it easier to choose alternative transportation (walk, bike, or bus) and prevents sprawl.



Housing: Reduced parking supports compact growth, which reduces the cost of development and supports more affordable housing.



BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN MASTER PLANS

In May 2024, the Bellingham City Council approved Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans to create safer, more connected ways to get around. The Bicycle Master Plan focuses on enhancing designated areas for bicycles and programs to encourage bicycling among all community members. The Pedestrian Master Plan aims to improve access and safety for people walking by developing sidewalks, multi-use trails, and neighborhood streets. Both plans seek to increase use of alternative transportation and foster recreational opportunities, healthy lifestyles, and stronger community connections.

SAFETY

Improve the safety and comfort of bicyclists, micromobility users, and pedestrians through well designed bikeways and walking facilities, along with promoting safe driving, walking, and bicycling behaviors.

EQUITY

Build a bicycle network and provide accessible pedestrian facilities for people of all ages and abilities by prioritizing investments in under-served communities and through equitable community engagement and infrastructure investments.

CONNECTIVITY AND ACCESS

Complete a citywide network of bikeways and accessible pedestrian infrastructure that connect people of all ages and abilities to homes, jobs, transit, shopping, schools, services, and recreation areas.

INCREASE RIDERSHIP & WALKING TRIPS

Increase the percentage of trips made by bicycle, micromobility, walking, and rolling to support Bellingham's Climate Action Plan and promote a healthy, accessible, and safe experience.

Community Input

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans are made by Bellingham, for Bellingham. While technical analysis is important to structuring an updated bikeway and pedestrian network, the backbone of the Plans is the lived, on-the-ground experience of Bellingham residents and the vision of the Bellingham community.



The recommendations included in these Plans were identified, shaped, and prioritized with help and direction from the Bellingham community. The planning process included an extensive engagement effort that used a variety of in-person and online strategies to hear from as many community members as possible, including those with the most barriers to alternative means of transportation.

Read the plans and learn about the future of biking and walking in Bellingham:



2024 Bicycle Master Plan



2024 Pedestrian Master Plan

YOUR SAFETY STORY

Safety is a common theme of our feedback, what does it mean to you?

In what context don't you feel safe in Bellingham? What causes you to feel that way?

Place a sticky note on the category (or two) that reflect why you might not feel safe. Include a note detailing why. If you prefer, submit your comment in the comment box below.

Road traffic (walking, biking, driving, etc.)	Visibility (lack of nearby activity, poor lighting, etc.)	Familiarity with surroundings (don't know the way, don't know people, etc.)	Property (concern for property safety due to theft or damage)	Job stability (security in finding or keeping a good job)	Other
People you don't know (people you see seem dangerous or a general concern for personal safety from strangers)	People you know (bullying, harassment, etc.)	Social network (don't have family/friends to rely on)	Health (personal health challenges, access to healthy food, etc.)	Housing stability (security in making rent or mortgage payments)	

To participate digitally in this exercise, scan the qr code at the right
You may submit your story anonymously



CASCADIA MEGAREGION

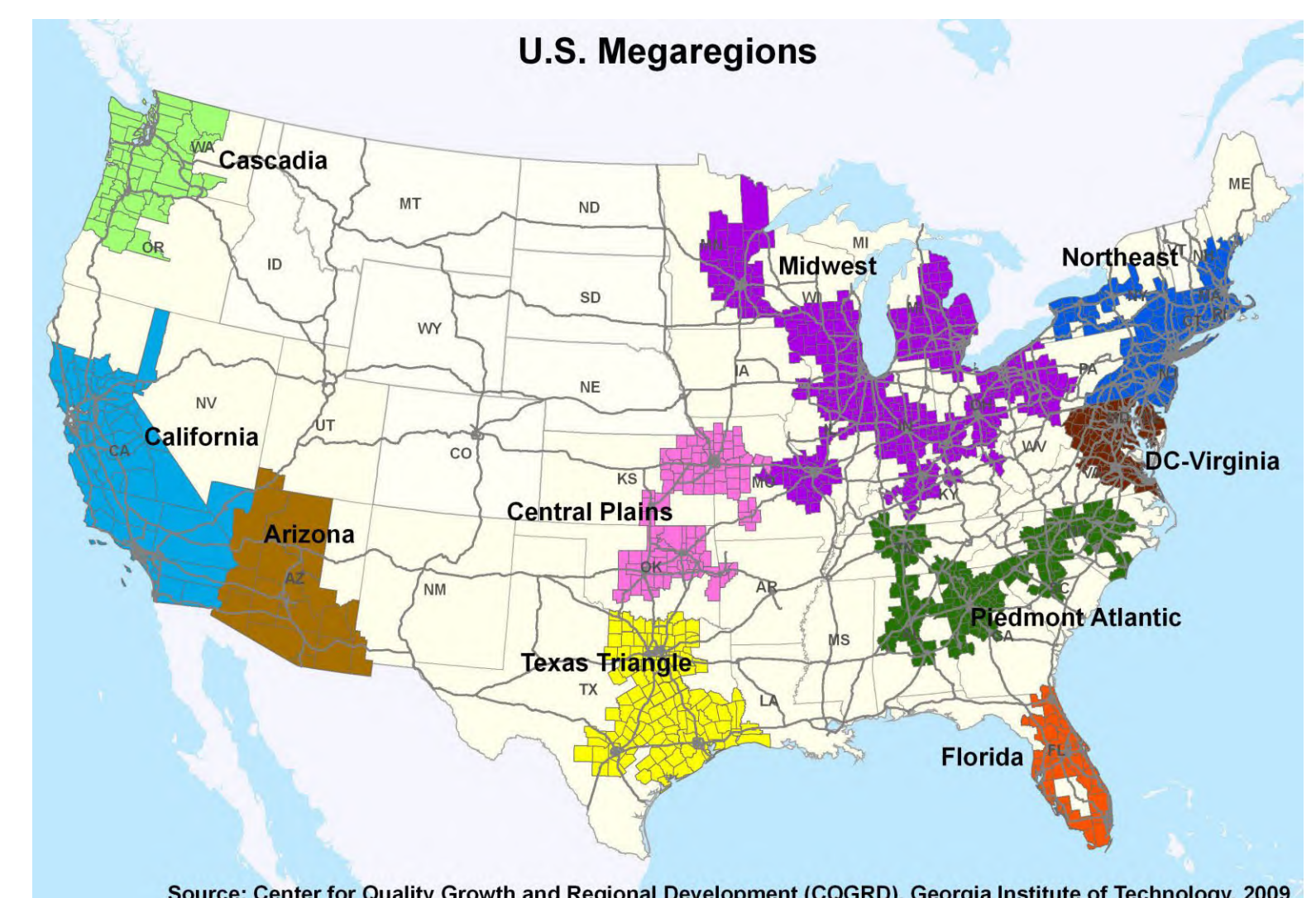
The Cascadia megaregion connects Portland – Seattle – Vancouver, BC (and beyond!)



Future High-Speed Rail Connections
Image Source: Washington State Department Of Transportation

Situated on the I-5 corridor, Bellingham sits 90 miles north of Seattle and 50 miles south of Vancouver. Megaregions are inherently connected due to proximity, environment, and culture. Cascadia is known for innovation, access to nature, and location on the Pacific Rim – Bellingham fits right in!

Here is a map showing the other megaregions in the US for perspective.



Source: Center for Quality Growth and Regional Development (CQGRD), Georgia Institute of Technology, 2009

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) recently began collaborating with the state of Oregon, the province of British Columbia, the private sector, and other regional partners to explore how a high-speed, high-capacity corridor could better connect Cascadia. This project is called The Cascadia Ultra-High-Speed Ground Transportation Project, but the concept is more commonly known as “high-speed rail”. This project could help shape and strengthen regional transportation systems, connect communities, support jobs and the economy, improve access to housing, and help decrease carbon emissions.

(Source: WSDOT Cascadia Ultra-High Speed Ground Transportation Project Report - June 2023 (wa.gov))

Where does Bellingham fit? The most recent (2019) study included Bellingham as a stop in most potential line scenarios. If we become a stop on this route, what do you see as opportunities or challenges for Bellingham?

Opportunities	Challenges