

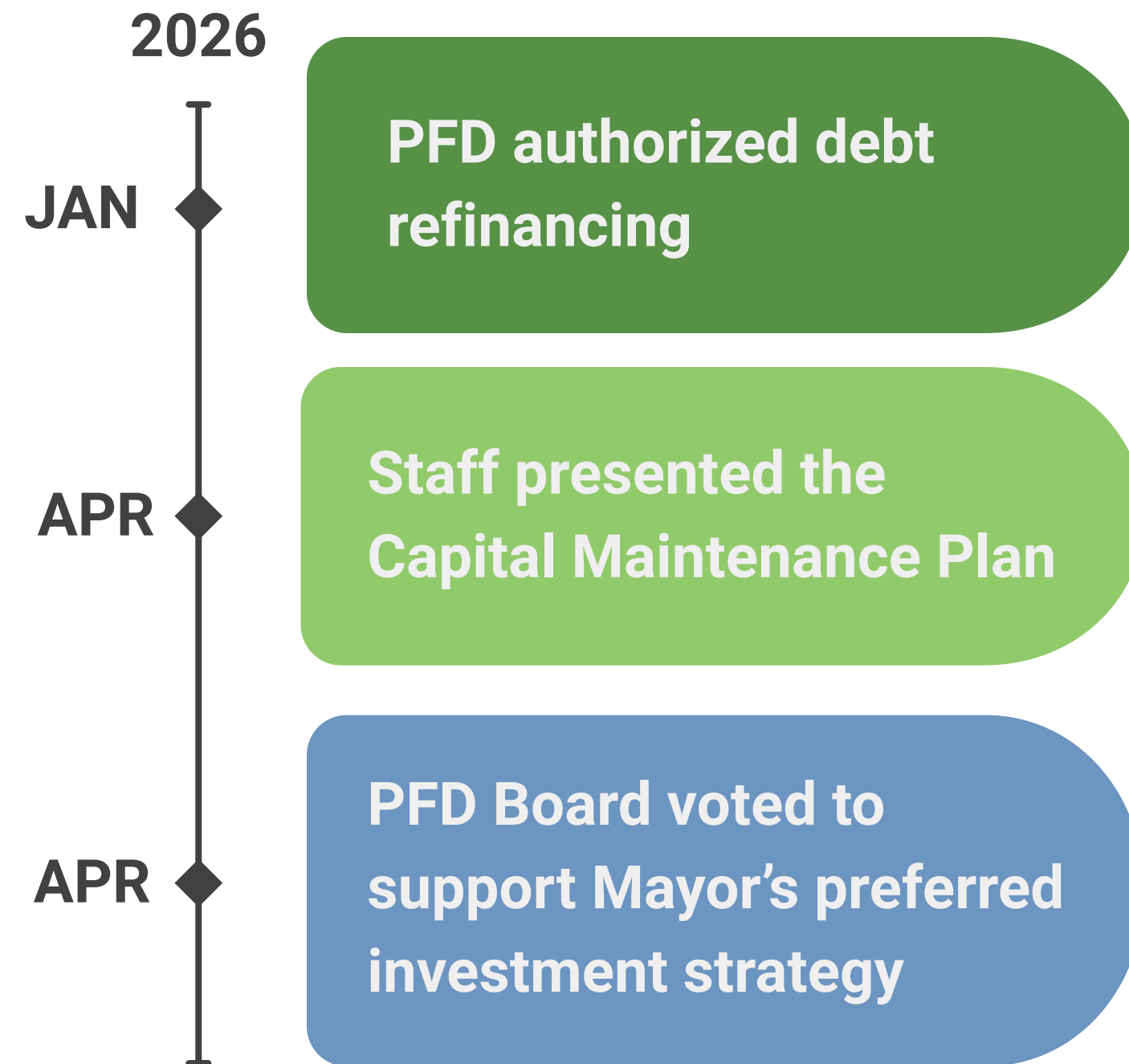
PUBLIC FACILITIES DISTRICT MEETING

**INFORMATION SESSION #2:
TOURISM - ARTS AND CULTURE**

**Presented by City of Bellingham, Visit Bellingham
and Downtown Bellingham Partnership
August 20, 2026**



BACKGROUND



INVESTMENT STRATEGY:

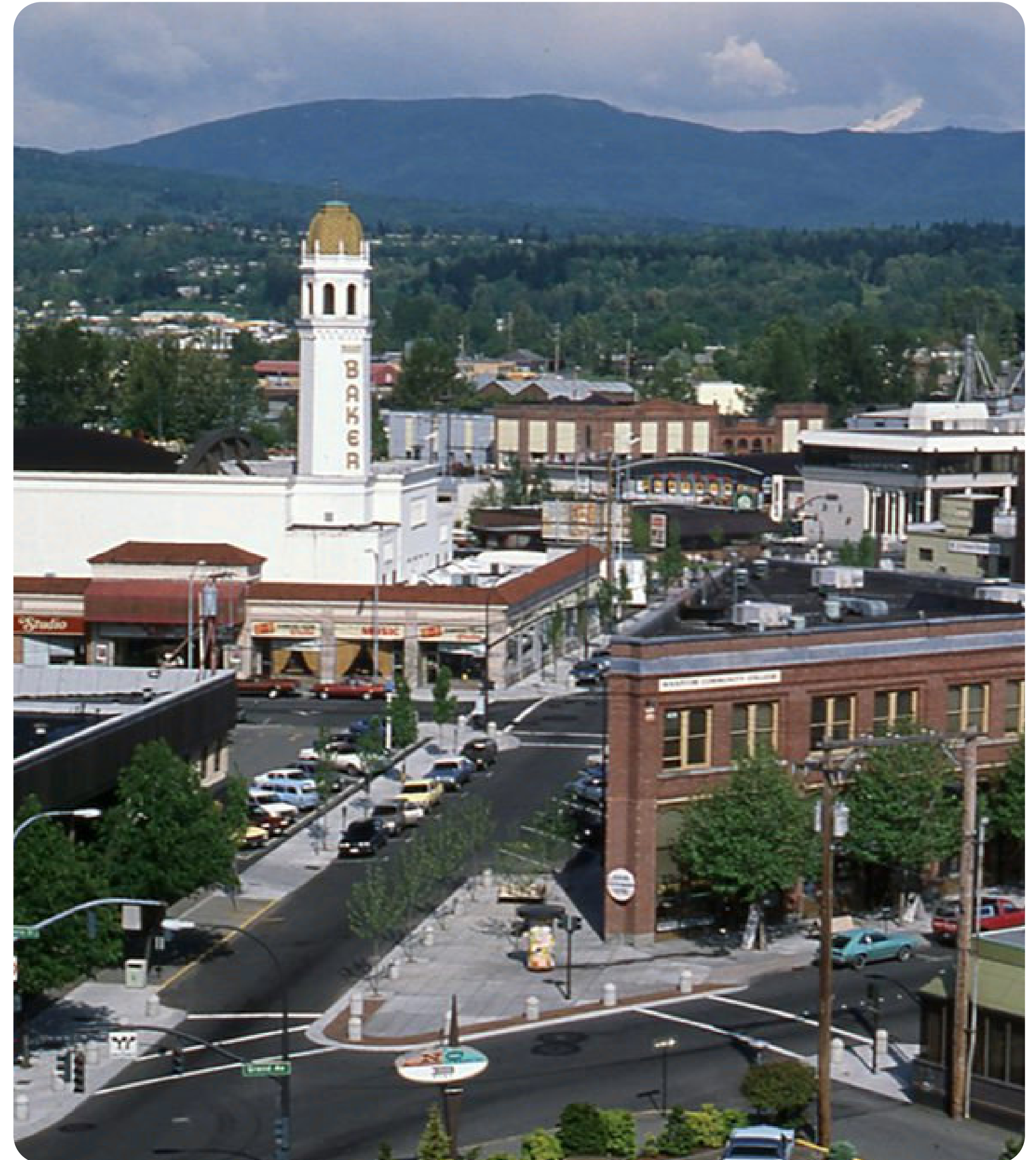
- Reserve 65% revenue for capital maintenance needs for
 - Mount Baker Theatre
 - Lightcatcher
 - + Old Fire Station #1
 - + Old City Hall
- Invest available funds in “enhancements” to the existing Regional Center

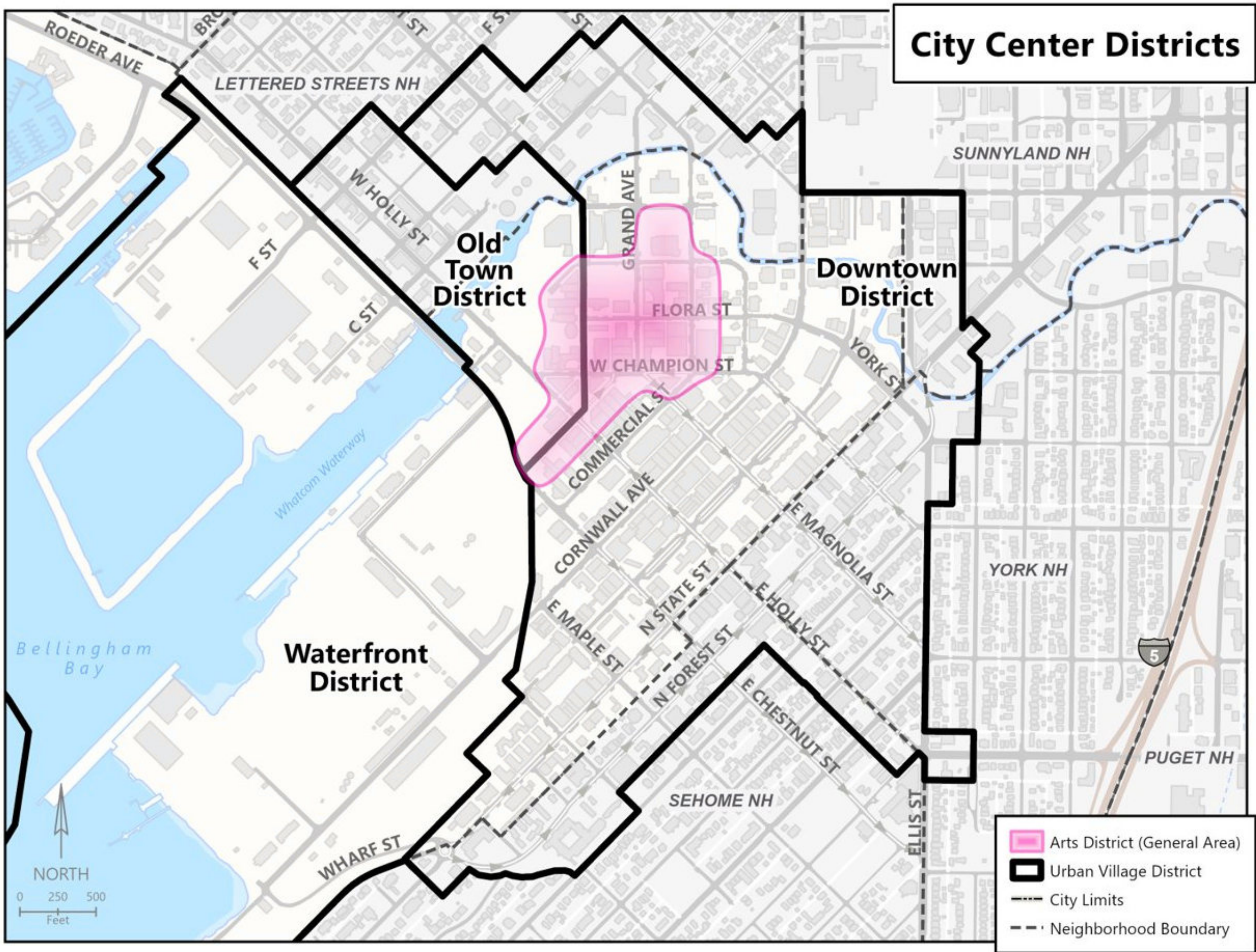
City consults with PFD Board to develop a set of recommendations for future “enhancements” to the existing regional center.

BACKGROUND

BELLINGHAM'S REGIONAL CENTER IS DEFINED AS:

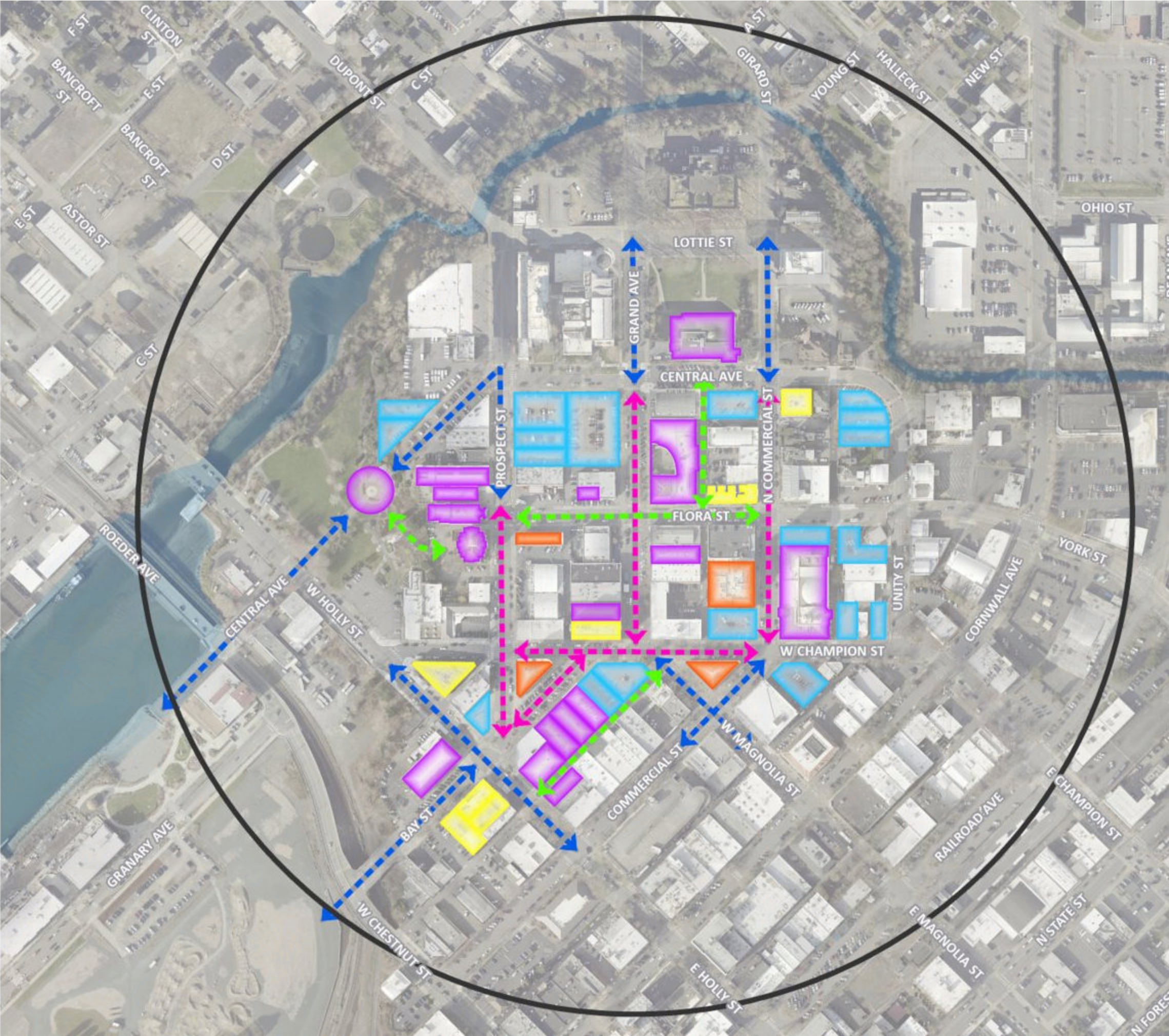
- Mount Baker Theatre
- Streetscapes
- Whatcom Museum
- One or more performing arts facilities
- Related parking facilities





Arts District

-  Cultural Destinations
-  Other Iconic Buildings
-  Residential
-  Surface Parking
-  Primary Pedestrian Connectors
-  Pedestrian Connectors to Other Districts
-  Secondary Pedestrian Connectors
-  1/4 Mile (~15 min walk distance)



TODAY'S SESSION:

Tourism

AGENDA

- Bellingham Tourism Strategic Plan
- City of Bellingham's investment in the arts (beyond MBT & Museum)
- Visit Bellingham's Strategic Plan and arts related marketing efforts
- Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategy upcoming update
- Downtown Bellingham Partnership's role in elevating Arts & Culture economy



2025-2030 BELLINGHAM TOURISM STRATEGY

Position Bellingham as a premier destination for *recreation, arts & culture*, while ensuring tourism strengthens the community, supports downtown and the Waterfront District, and protects our natural assets.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR INVESTMENTS

Maximize Economic
Impact

Strengthen Bellingham's
Identity

Grow Off-peak
Visitation

INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

Recreation



Arts & Culture



Visitor Experience



ARTS & CULTURE:

Turning Bellingham's Identity into a Tourism Asset

Arts & culture are central to Bellingham's identity—and a powerful reason for visitors to explore, stay, dine, shop and return.



TOURISM BY THE NUMBERS



**AVERAGE
VISITOR SPENDING:**

\$107

DAY TRIP VISITOR

\$353

OVERNIGHT VISITOR

Datafy, 2025.

CULTURAL FACILITIES:

Showcasing Bellingham's Cultural Assets



MOUNT BAKER THEATRE

\$526,147



WHATCOM MUSEUM

\$210,000

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES: Elevating Bellingham's Visibility



2026 TOURISM
PROMOTION
GRANTS

\$700,000+

TOTAL INVESTED

32

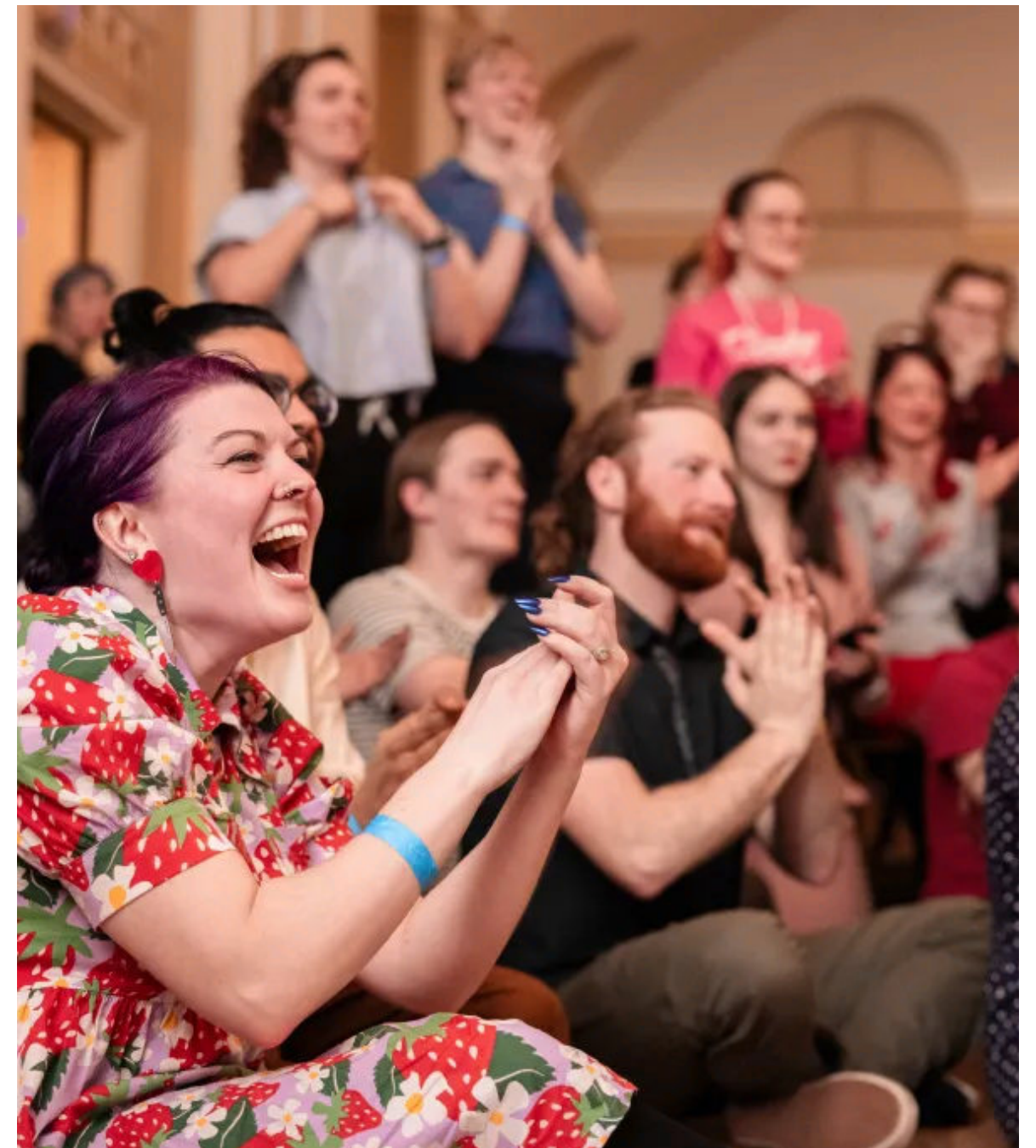
PROGRAMS
SUPPORTED

EVENTS & ACTIVITIES:

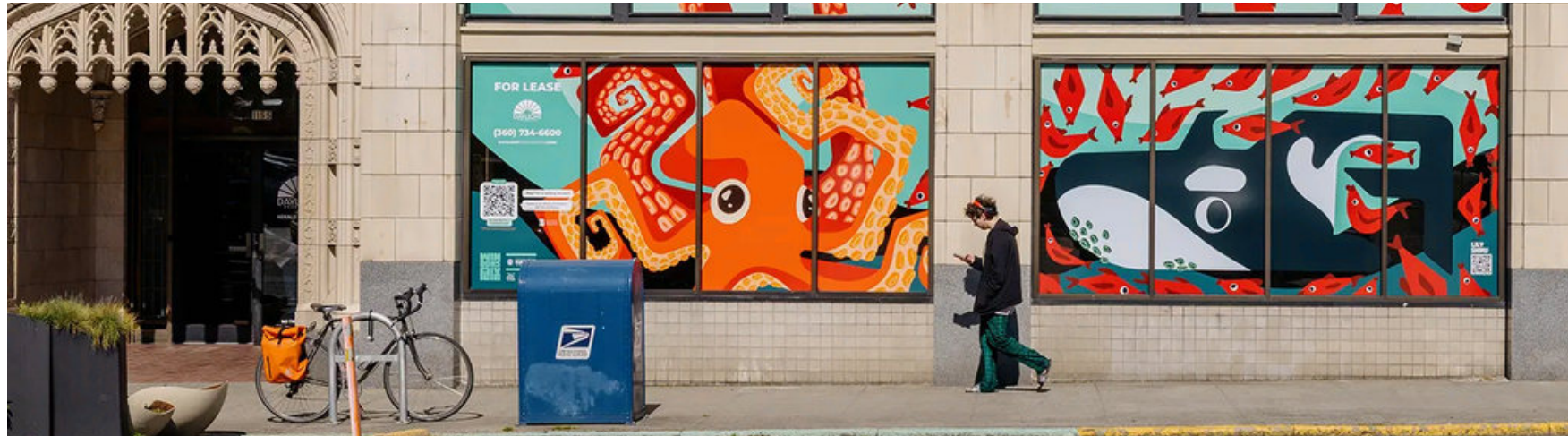
Bringing Visitors to the Arts District

APPROXIMATELY **\$400,000** FOR EVENTS & ACTIVITIES
LOCATED IN/NEAR THE ARTS DISTRICT:

- Noisy Waters Mural Festival
- Fire & Story Festival
- Downtown Sounds
- CASCADIA Women's International Film Festival
- Pickford's Doctober
- SPARK Museum
- B'ham Swing Jam
- Wild Buffalo House of Music
- The Upfront Theatre
- Bellingham Symphony Orchestra
- NW Tune Up
- Bellingham Festival of Music
- SeaFeast



PLACEMAKING: Surprise & Delight Downtown



**DOWNTOWN
ACTIVATION &
BEAUTIFICATION
GRANTS**

\$800,000+

TOTAL INVESTED

21

**PROJECTS
SUPPORTED**

DESTINATION EXPERIENCE: A Year-round Events Calendar

Bellingham is bursting with activities - lodging tax investments ensure the events calendar is full year-round, in addition to other events commonly hosted by other entities.



Visit Bellingham: Arts & Cultural Tourism

Presented by
Visit Bellingham

August 20, 2026



How Visit Bellingham Promotes Arts & Culture

R-R-U

R-T-A-N

VISIT BELLINGHAM STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

Our marketing strategy builds awareness, inspires travel, and connects visitors with more reasons to explore, stay longer, and spend their time and money throughout Whatcom County



WE INSPIRE VISITORS
BEFORE THEY ARRIVE.

Paid Advertising
Social Platforms
Earned Media
Travel Writers



WE GUIDE VISITORS
WHILE THEY'RE HERE.

Event Calendar
Itineraries
Quest Passes
In-market Ad Campaigns



WE MEASURE
WHAT WORKS.

Website
Ad Engagement
Attribution
Datafy



PAID ADVERTISING STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

Visit Bellingham leads with place-based imagery and features arts in all marketing and advertising channels year-round.



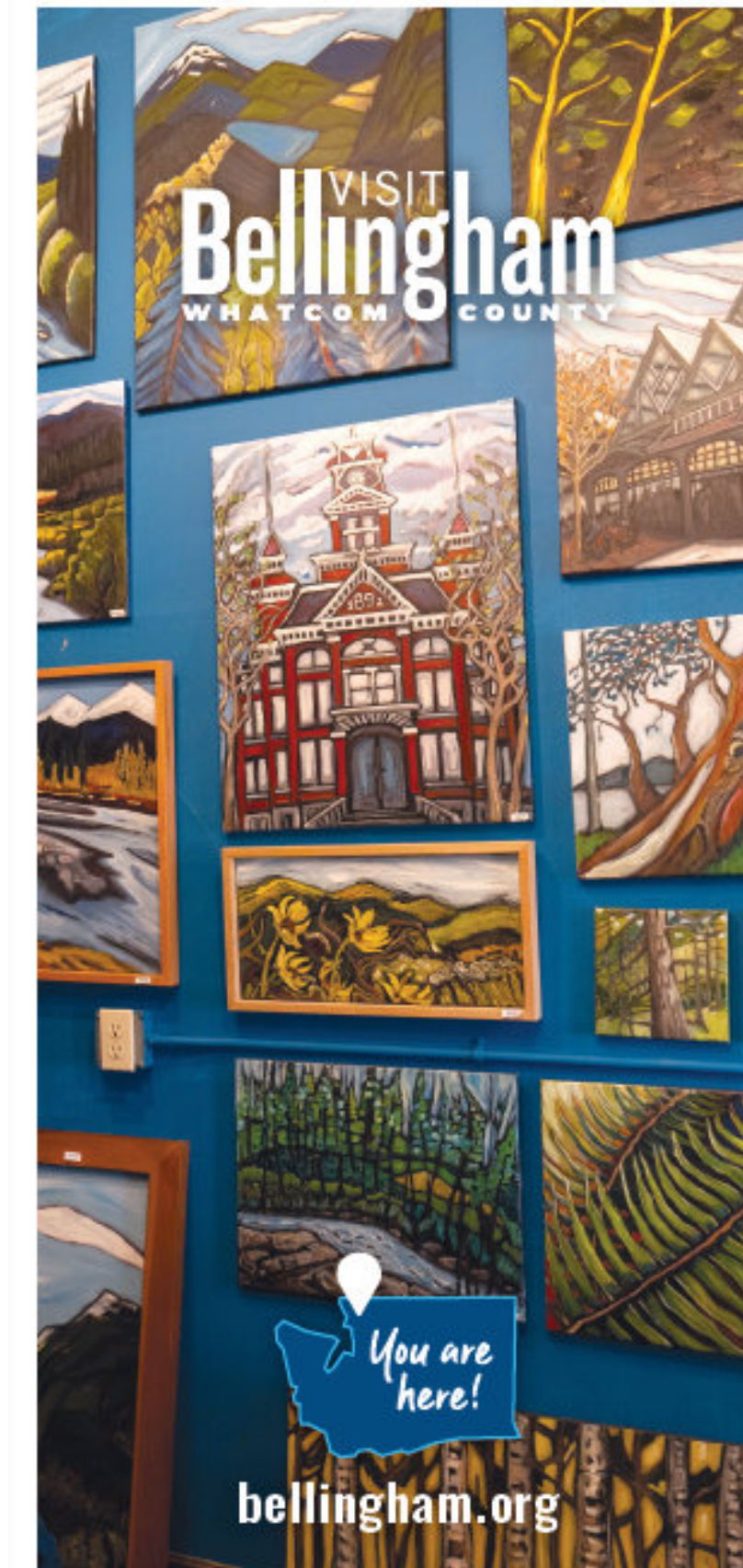
WE INSPIRE VISITORS
BEFORE THEY ARRIVE.

- Digital Advertising in all Fly, Drive, and Leisure Markets
- In-Airport Advertising
- National & Regional Print Ads
- Magazine advertorials
- Video campaigns



Advertisement placed in Seattle Gay News in 2026

VISIT
Bellingham
WHATCOM COUNTY



Ad displayed at airports in 2026

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



Arts content performs because it feels distinctly Bellingham, with strong creativity and visual appeal



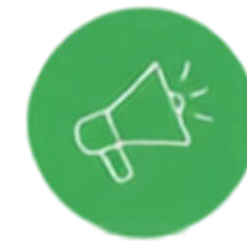
WE INSPIRE VISITORS
BEFORE THEY ARRIVE.

Video Shoots In 2025/2026

- Bellingham Symphony Orchestra, Pickford on Grand
- Upfront Theatre, Bellingham Circus Guild
- Firehouse Arts & Events Center
- First Friday in Downtown Bellingham
- Outdoor art (murals, story poles, WWU sculptures)



TRAVEL WRITERS STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



WE INSPIRE VISITORS
BEFORE THEY ARRIVE.



Arts and culture are built into our travel writers itineraries, regardless of the primary focus of their visit



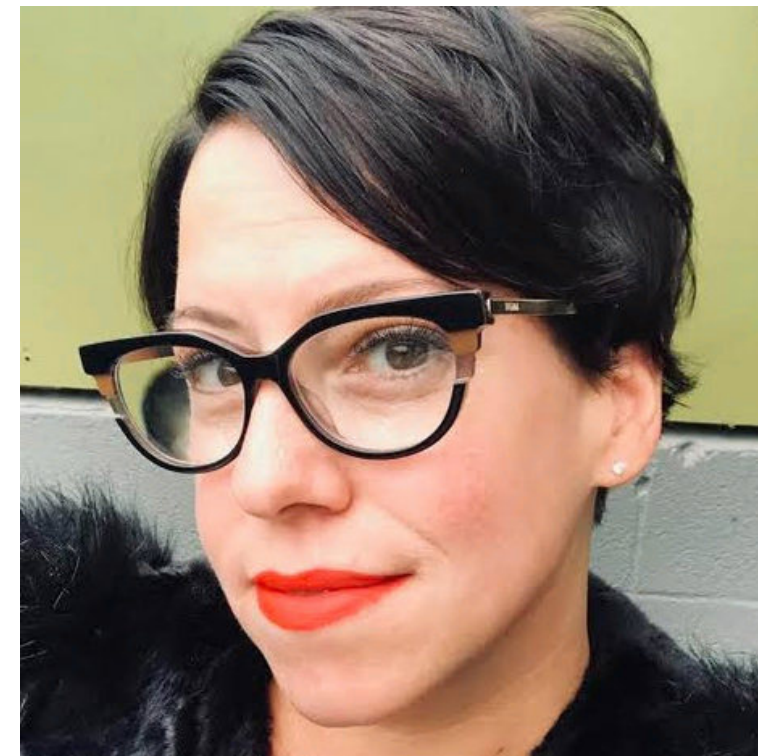
Gina Tarnacki

SPARK Museum



Marie Sherlock

Dirty Dan Mystery Weekend
Whatcom Museum
Fairhaven Art Galleries
Pickford Film Center
Bookstores



Ryn Pfeuffer

SPARK Museum
Whatcom Museum
Pickford Film Center
Bellingham Circus Guild
Bookstores
Art Galleries



Alex Pulaski

SPARK Museum
Whatcom Museum



Elaine Bevington

SPARK Museum
Whatcom Museum
Lummi Stommish
Water Festival

EARNED MEDIA STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



WE INSPIRE VISITORS
BEFORE THEY ARRIVE.

VISIT
Bellingham
WHATCOM COUNTY

1889
Washington's Magazine

Explore Washington, Trip Planner / June 11, 2026

Bellingham Washington Trip Planner

The Pickford Film Center is where locals go for independent and international films, with art-house releases, documentaries, festivals, and filmmaker Q&As shaping the calendar. Nearby, Mount Baker Theatre adds another kind of drama. The 1927 Moorish Revival venue draws a mix of indie and legacy talent—artists like Modest Mouse, Tori Amos and Joan Baez—along with comedians, touring musicians and orchestras.



The Moorish Revival architectural style of Mount Baker Theatre is, itself, drama. (photo: Visit Bellingham)

Halfway through the year we've already earned coverage of arts offerings including:

Mount Baker Theatre

Whatcom Museum

SPARK Museum

Pickford Film Center

Whatcom Art Market

Jansen Art Center

Bellingham Circus Guild

Upfront Theatre

and more.

NORTHWEST
TRAVEL & LIFE

Lynden, Washington, A Storybook Town in the Pacific Northwest

by Emily Molina Jul 13, 2026

A few doors down on Front Street, the Jansen Art Center is housed in what was once Lynden's City Hall and Fire Station. Today, this creative hub invites visitors to take classes, explore rotating exhibits, and attend special programs. Once home to a library, jail cells, and even a morgue, it has been fully repurposed for ceramics, dance, painting, jewelry-making, music, and textiles—all under one roof.

THE
ROAM
REPORT

The Birthplace of Grunge Is Now a Six-City Music Tour

Karee Blunt Jul 16, 2026

Bellingham: Indie Rock Roots Between the Mountains and the Sea

About 90 miles north of Seattle, Bellingham gave the world Death Cab for Cutie, a band whose influence on indie rock in the 2000s proved lasting. The city's downtown arts scene centers on venues like the historic Mount Baker Theatre, while trails at Whatcom Falls and kayaking on the Salish Sea offer outdoor options just outside the city.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

Extending the visitor experience beyond the original reason for the trip.



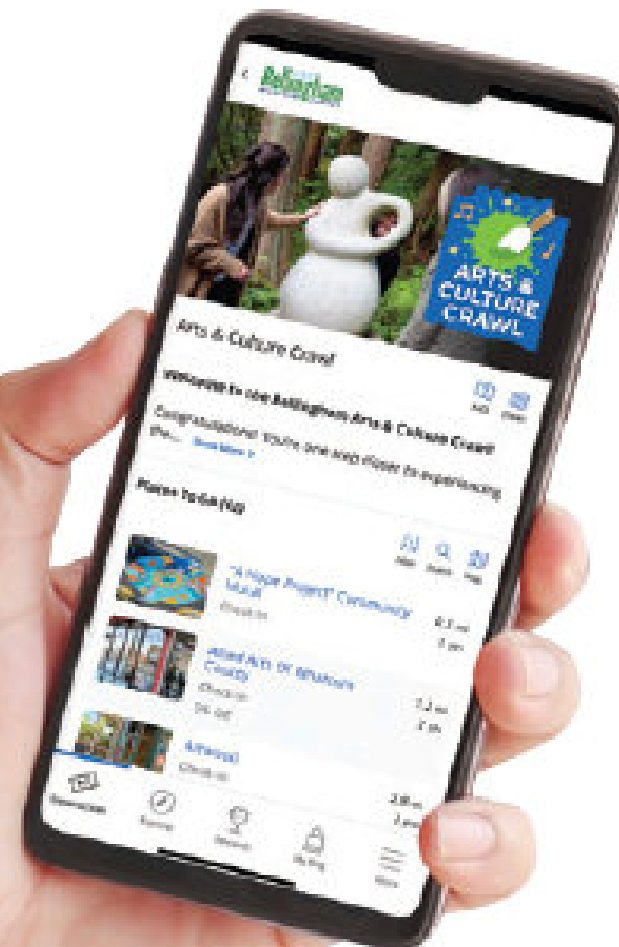
WE GUIDE VISITORS
WHILE THEY'RE HERE.

- Targeted digital & print campaigns
- Discover events, attractions & experiences
- Self-guided experiences
- Arts & Culture Crawl
- Historic Walking Tours
- Love Your Waterfront



THINK
LOCAL

HISTORIC
WALKING
TOURS



HISTORIC

WALKING TOUR • DOWNTOWN



Downtown Bellingham Historic Walking Tour

- Mobile exclusive
- Instantly delivered via text and email
- No apps to download

FREE

[Sign Up](#) [Learn More](#)



HISTORIC

WALKING TOURS

BELLINGHAM, WA

EXPLORE these historic areas on foot!

DOWNTOWN



OLD SEHOME



FAIRHAVEN



Download your free pass, complete the tours, and win local prizes!

 GET YOUR FREE PASS

WHAT'S NEXT?

STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN



Curiosities

If you're looking for quirky things to see and do in Bellingham and Whatcom County, you're in the right place! There are plenty of odd attractions in the area, from the SPARK Museum of Electrical Invention—home to the world's largest Tesla coil and one of only two original Thomas Edison light bulbs in the world—to the John M. Edson Hall of Birds at the Whatcom Museum, where you'll find an astounding collection of preserved animals. Round it all out with a playful festival like the Fairhaven Chicken Fest or the Process of Species.

Curious Attractions

SPARK Museum of Electrical Invention



SPARK Museum of Electrical invention is an ideal place to explore on a rainy day in Bellingham. Visitors of all ages will feel a zip of excitement while exploring the museum's world-class collection of artifacts and objects that highlight the history and development of electricity, radio, and early technology.

On weekends, catch the hour-long [MegaZapper Electrical Show](#), featuring one of the largest Tesla coils in the US.

Curious Events



Procession of the Species



Fairhaven Chicken Fest



Shoestring Circus

Experience This!



Cultural Heritage Tourism



ARTS & CULTURE ARE AN ECONOMIC ENGINE

 The arts are a major economic driver in Washington State:

-  190,684 creative sector jobs
-  79 billion annual contribution to Washington's economy
-  33.4 billion in annual compensation to creative workers
-  9.78% of Washington GDP



Sources: Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account (ACPSA), U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis and National Endowment for the Arts, ArtsWA 2025



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BELLINGHAM ARTS EVENTS



Total Economic Impact
\$485,592



Total Economic Impact
\$668,864



Total Economic Impact
\$702,678



Total Economic Impact
\$329,680

Visit Bellingham's Event Impact Calculator is powered by Tourism Economics and Destinations International. Results are estimates and based on data inputs provided by to Visit Bellingham. The total economic impact includes direct impacts, as well as indirect impacts (supply chain effects) and induced impacts (income effect).

VISITOR INSIGHTS BELLINGHAM ARTS

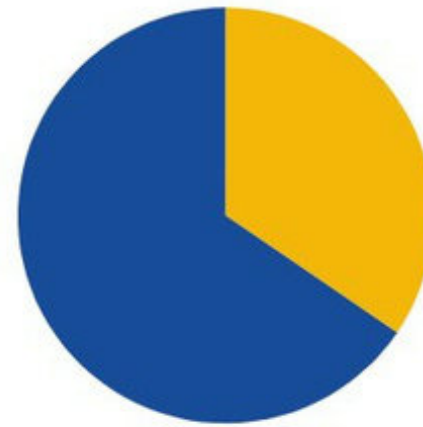
This report looks at visitation to arts & entertainment attractions in Bellingham from January 1, 2023 through July 31, 2026.

A **visitor** is defined as someone who originated from 50+ miles outside of Bellingham.

📍 Repeat vs One Time Visitation

What share of visitors are repeat vs one time?

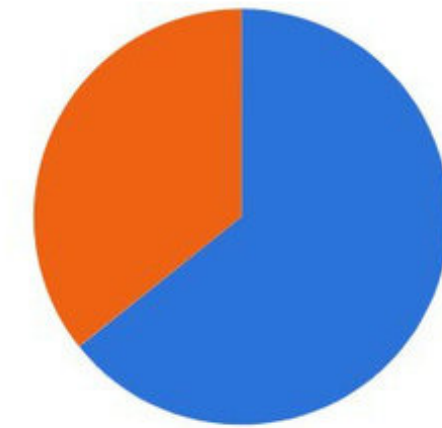
📍 Geolocation



● One Time	34.52%
● Repeat	65.48%

📍 In/Out of State Visitation

What is the visitor days split for in-state vs out-of-state?



● In-State	64.29%
● Out-of-State	35.71%

CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM STRATEGIC PLAN



2017

Community planning + stakeholder engagement



→ **2018–2022**

Strategic Plan + implementation



→ **Today**

Many actions completed or evolved



→ **2026–27**

Update the strategy



VISITOR SPENDING 2025



Every visitor contributes to the quality of life enjoyed by Whatcom County residents. The taxes generated through visitor spending help fund essential public services and infrastructure, reducing the average local household's tax burden by \$702 in 2025.

**Total Travel Spending in
Whatcom County in 2025:
\$772.8 Million**

**Average Tax Savings per Household in
Whatcom County in 2025:
\$702.30**



*Source: State of Washington Tourism and Tourism Economics
Photo: Downtown Sounds, Downtown Bellingham Partnership*



Visitor Spend on Arts & Recreation
in Whatcom County in 2025

\$96.9 Million

+ 5.8% from 2024

Visitor Spend on Food & Bev
in Whatcom County in 2025

\$197.6 Million

+ 2.3% from 2024

Visitor Spend on Retail
in Whatcom County in 2025

\$141.7 Million

Same as 2024

Source: State of Washington Tourism and Tourism Economics



“About 90 miles north of Seattle, Bellingham gave the world Death Cab for Cutie, a band whose influence on indie rock in the 2000s proved lasting. The city's downtown arts scene centers on venues like the historic Mount Baker Theatre, while trails at Whatcom Falls and kayaking on the Salish Sea offer outdoor options just outside the city.”

Karee Blunt, The Roam Report

Published July 16, 2026

3-Year Strategic Plan

Places for People

2026–2028



Lindsey Payne Johnstone | Executive Director
lindsey@downtownbellingham.com

Nathalie Wagler | Community Engagement Manager
nathalie@downtownbellingham.com

PLACES FOR PEOPLE

Strengthen our placemaking efforts to support economic vitality, attract diverse audiences to Downtown, and create spaces that are inclusive and welcoming.

- First Fridays
- Event Support
- Surprise & Delight
- Downtown Sounds



FIRST FRIDAYS

First Fridays is a monthly celebration of art, culture, shopping, dining, and community that brings Downtown Bellingham to life with special events, exhibitions, promotions, and activities.



EVENT SUPPORT

DBP supports organizers with making their events a reality. Our team supports through the permitting process, street closures, site ideation, business connections, as a liaison with the City of Bellingham, and anything else they may need.

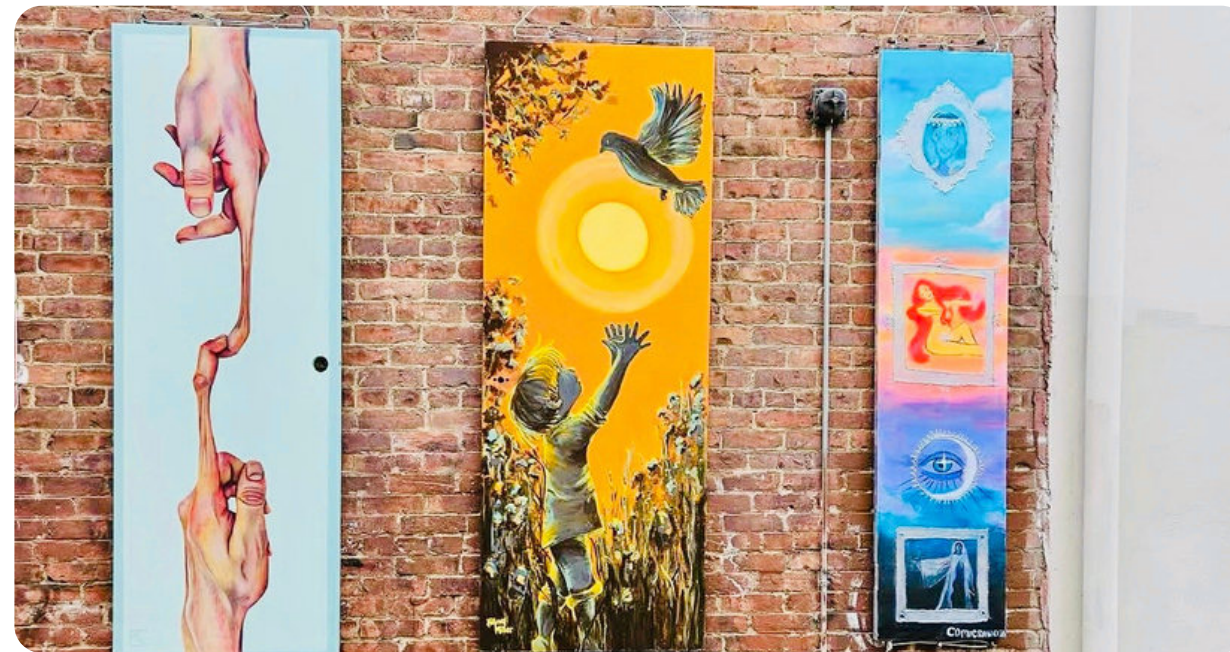
- Wonderz Market
- St. Patrick's Day Parade
- Bellingham Bike Polo
- 2BB Productions Block Parties
- Commercial Break Watch Party
- Allied Arts Block Party
- Bellingham Bike Month



SURPRISE & DELIGHT

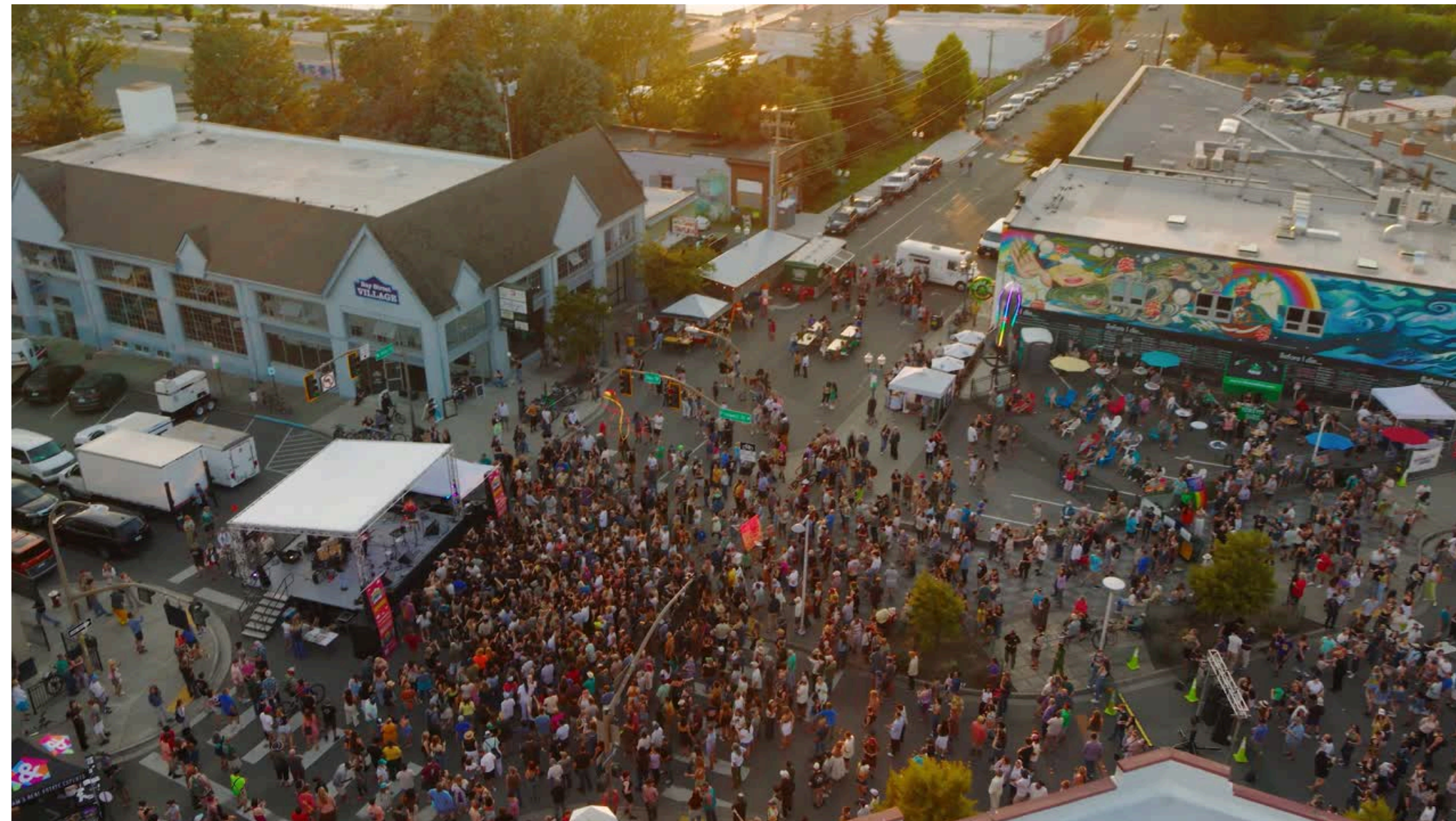
In addition to large, annual events, DBP hosts a myriad of small-scale pop-ups with a variety of goals, including neighborhood connectivity, underutilized space activation, and creative, low-cost high-impact shoulder season events.

- Tides & Tunes at the Granary
- May Mondays at Maritime
- Spring Scavenger Hunt
- Commercial Street Plaza
- Gallery Alley



DOWNTOWN SOUNDS

For 5 consecutive Wednesdays for the last 22 summers, Downtown Bellingham comes alive with free live music, local drinks, food, and all-ages summer fun, welcoming 6,000+ attendees weekly.



Economic Impact of Downtown Sounds 2025

Direct Business Sales: \$496,920

Total Jobs Supported: 408

Estimated Room Demand: 324

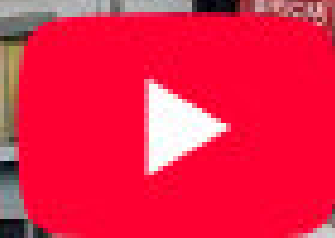
Total Economic Impact \$702,678

**The total impact includes direct impacts, as well as indirect impacts (supply chain effects) and induced impacts (income effect).*



Downtown Sounds: Bellingham's Beat for 21 Years

City of Bellingham, Washington



DOWNTOWN SOUNDS
BELLINGHAM'S BEAT FOR 21 YEARS



Watch on  YouTube

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE: A Stronger, More Distinctive Tourism Destination

ATTRACT



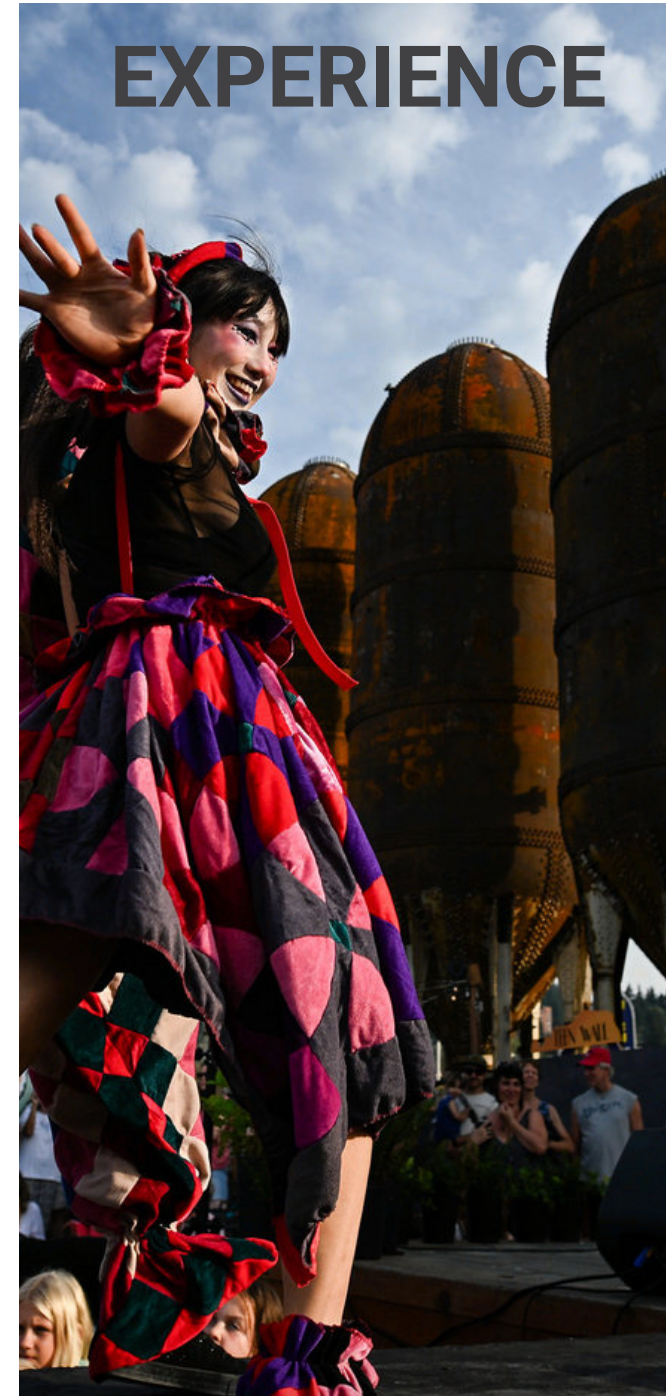
EXTEND



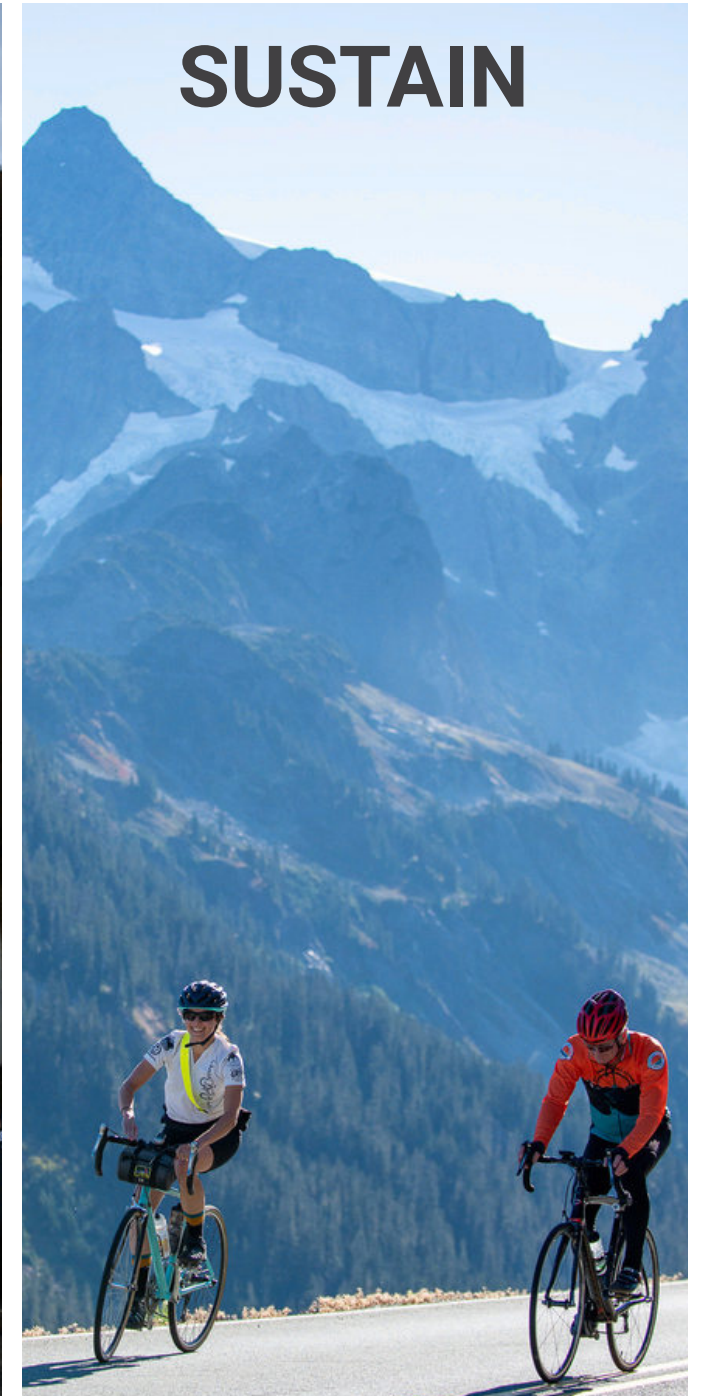
SPEND



EXPERIENCE



SUSTAIN



QUESTIONS?

