



2026

Parks, Recreation & Open Space Plan

Access to Recreation, Nature, and Play



PAVILION
3,550 S.F.

PAVILION WALKWAY,
4,376 S.F.

MITIGATION FENCE,
373 lf

TRAIL TO CONCRETE
WALKWAY, 2,395 S.F.

PARKING AREA,
33,761 S.F.

MITIGATION FENCE,
253 lf

PICNIC SHELTER AND
ADJACENT LAWN, 5,502 S.F.

TRAIL TO CONCRETE
WALKWAY 2,349 S.F.

TRAIL TO CONCRETE
WALKWAY, 945 S.F.

80 s.f.

600 s.f.

SPORT (PICKLEBALL/BASKETBALL)
COURTS, 12,919 S.F.

DONATA BUSINESS PARK ASSOCIATES

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Adopted: Resolution #2026-11 (City Council meeting May 11, 2026)

Front cover: concept plans Cordata Park



Nicole Oliver at Sunset Pond loop trail opening, 2025. Photo: Kathy Furtado

Letter from the Director

The City of Bellingham's 2026 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan provides a 20-year vision for delivering equitable access to recreation, nature, and play.

Bellingham's identity is rooted in the community's strong connection to its parks system. The Plan outlines a strategic shift from expansion to targeted enhancements and maintaining existing assets. While the system will continue to grow—with nearly 100 acres of new parkland and more than 120 acres of open space—the primary focus is improving the quality, accessibility, and distribution of parks and facilities. Today, 70% of City of Bellingham residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park or trail, up from 54% in 2016, with continued emphasis on closing remaining gaps.

This Plan is shaped by what we heard from you.

Community feedback shaped key priorities, including completing trail connections, improving wayfinding, and adding essential amenities such as restrooms, lighting, and accessible features. Residents also expressed strong demand for expanded recreation opportunities and care for our extraordinary natural landscape.

In response, the plan prioritizes strategic investments in existing parks, new amenities such as sports courts, skateparks, and disc golf, and the development of an indoor community recreation center, supported by the Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan. Environmental stewardship, habitat preservation, and open space acquisition remain central to the system's identity.

Implementation will be guided by clear prioritization criteria, available funding, and partnerships, alongside operational strategies such as aligning staffing with park use, maintaining facilities on a lifecycle basis, and sustaining volunteer support. Programming will be balanced to recover costs for specialized offerings while keeping core services accessible.

This plan positions Bellingham to deliver a high-quality, inclusive, and sustainable parks system that reflects community priorities and enhances quality of life for all residents.

Nicole Oliver, Parks & Recreation Director



Chapter 1

Purpose & Background

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Plan Purpose

The City's Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PROS Plan), is the overarching document that guides the development and maintenance of the park, recreation, and open space system as the community grows.

The PROS Plan serves as a guide for the Parks & Recreation Department to achieve strategic, sustainable growth and development over the next twenty years. As with all plans, the analysis is based on the current state of the parks system and should not become static. The plan is intended to be reevaluated as conditions on the ground change and as funding sources require. This is a functional plan that provides the following:

- o An inventory of parks, trails, and recreation offerings (Ch. 3, 4, 5)
- o Assessment of park facility conditions (Ch. 6)
- o Identification of gaps in service levels within the Bellingham Urban Growth Area (Ch 2)
- o Goals and policies to prioritize projects and actions into short, mid, and long-term actions (Ch. 3, 4, 5, 6)
- o Funding options and cost estimates for capital improvement projects (Ch. 7)

The PROS Plan reflects input from local stakeholders and community groups, staff, citizen advisory committees, the Mayor's office, and City Council. Relevant data and community surveys provided a foundation for this Plan. Data, public feedback, and other pertinent background information were integrated in a collaborative effort.

The PROS Plan is a mechanism to guide the Parks & Recreation Department into the future by directing growth and change in accordance with the established goals and policies of the [Bellingham Plan](#).

Bellingham has long taken a pardonable pride in its parks. No city of its size in the Northwest has a finer system of public playgrounds – Bellingham Herald, February 6, 1935

Access to Recreation, Nature, and Play

Parks and recreation are at the heart of Bellingham's exceptional quality of life. This plan provides direction for developing new recreational amenities, expanding enrichment programs, acquiring key properties, and enhancing park design to meet future needs. The community values outdoor access, conservation, aquatics, and quality programming. Bellingham stands out as one of the Pacific Northwest's premier outdoor recreation hubs, offering an unparalleled blend of mountains, forests, and coastline within minutes of each other. From world-class hiking and mountain biking on the trails of Galbraith Mountain and the Chuckanut Range to sea kayaking, sailing, and beachcombing along the Salish Sea. With Mount Baker just a short drive away, locals enjoy exceptional skiing and snowboarding in winter and wildflower-filled alpine hikes in summer.



Figure 1 - 1. Bellingham's outdoor recreation setting.

1 Purpose & Background

Park Legacy

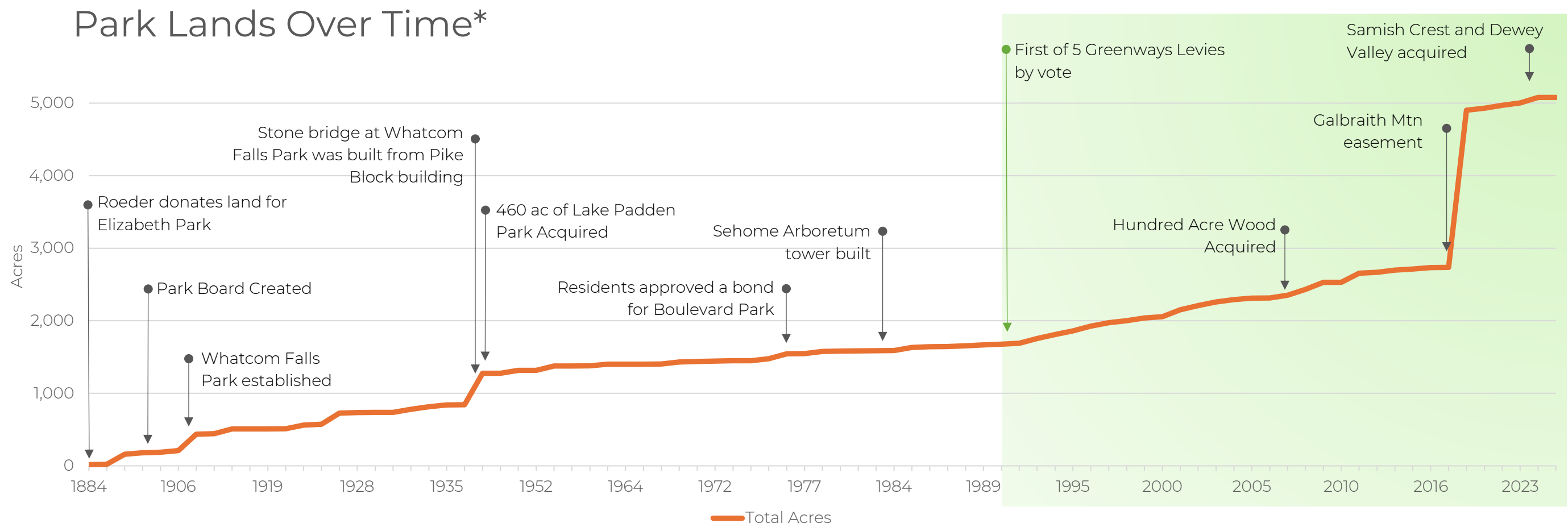
Bellingham has long held a special place for parks in the civic consciousness. The birth of the modern park movement was not lost on Bellingham residents. Roughly the same time that Central Park in New York opened, land was donated for Elizabeth Park in the Columbia neighborhood. Most of the early parks emerged through grassroots funding efforts and wealthy benefactors. This continued through the Great Depression.

Park design evolved from an early focus on scenic beauty and passive entertainment to recreation in the 1920-30's with playgrounds and athletic fields. Cornwall Park (1909) became a

automobile tourist park in 1923 that could be admired from the seat of a car and camped at if one desired.

The environmental renaissance of the 1970's brought a new focus on acquiring lands for conservation, greenways, and trails. The Greenways Levy of 1990 represented this movement in Bellingham, where it has funded the acquisition of roughly 1,100 acres, and a 2,100-acre easement on Galbraith Mountain. In addition to securing open space and habitat, it has funded the City's volunteer program, parks and recreational facilities, trails, community gardens, and the staff to maintain it all.

Bellingham today is increasingly blending beautification, recreation, and environmental stewardship with better access for all to health and wellness, climate resilience, and environmental justice.



*Events source: Aaron Joy, A History of Bellingham's Parks, 1999

Figure 1 - 2. Growth of parkland from 1884 through today.

1 Purpose & Background

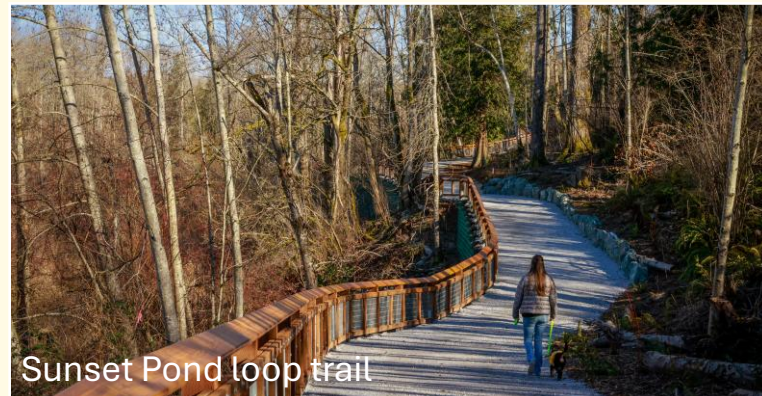
Opportunities & Challenges

The Parks & Recreation Department is currently navigating several key topics in the development of this plan. The department is working to address the community's shortage of year-round recreational space and to improve coordination between trail planning and transportation projects. There are also significant opportunities to enhance underperforming parks by updating recreational facilities, improving safety and comfort amenities, and expanding accessibility and adaptive features. These improvements must be balanced with the protection of natural and cultural resources and the department's capacity to maintain the system over time.

Although Bellingham maintains a high quantity and overall quality of parkland and trails, the City lags behind peer communities in the availability of recreational amenities. Additional challenges include behavior issues in some parks and trails that reduce comfort and usability, as well as an uneven distribution of parks, trails, and events across neighborhoods, contributing to inequitable access. The new Greenways 5 Levy provides important funding that is helping to address several of these issues.

To respond to these needs, the park system is expected to slow its recent pace of expansion and instead focus on updating and enhancing existing parks and facilities. The plan continues to emphasize equitable access, including the goal that all residents live within a 10-minute walk of parks and trails. It also introduces new park visitation metrics and condition assessments to make sure we are allocating resources effectively. This Plan reinforces Bellingham's long-standing commitment to providing access to recreation, nature, and play.

Accomplishments from the 2020 Plan



Department Profile

The Parks & Recreation team is made up of over a hundred full-time employees across four work groups. Operations and Maintenance is the largest team and they are responsible for caring for buildings, trails, parks, and grounds. This group also includes arborists, manages wetlands, oversees the volunteer program, and cares for community gardens.

The Recreation division is responsible for events like the Padden triathlon, classes, adventures, and team athletics found in the Playbook. They also manage and maintain athletic facilities, Arne Hanna Aquatics Center, and the Civic Athletic Complex.

The Design and Development division plans, designs, and constructs new parks and trails and capital maintenance projects, creates park and trail master plans, reviews private development plans, and purchases property.

Administration manages budgets and handles human resource decisions, manages advisory boards, and establishes the culture of the department in coordination with other City Departments.

The Parks & Recreation Department works with a number of boards and committees.

- o City Council – Legislative and budgetary oversight
- o Parks and Recreation Advisory Board – Park projects, recreation program, master plans, policies, PROS Plan
- o Greenways Advisory Board – levy spending allocations, property acquisitions, trail planning
- o Sehome Arboretum Board of Governors – Arboretum maintenance and improvements
- o Lake Padden Golf Committee – Golf course operations and finances

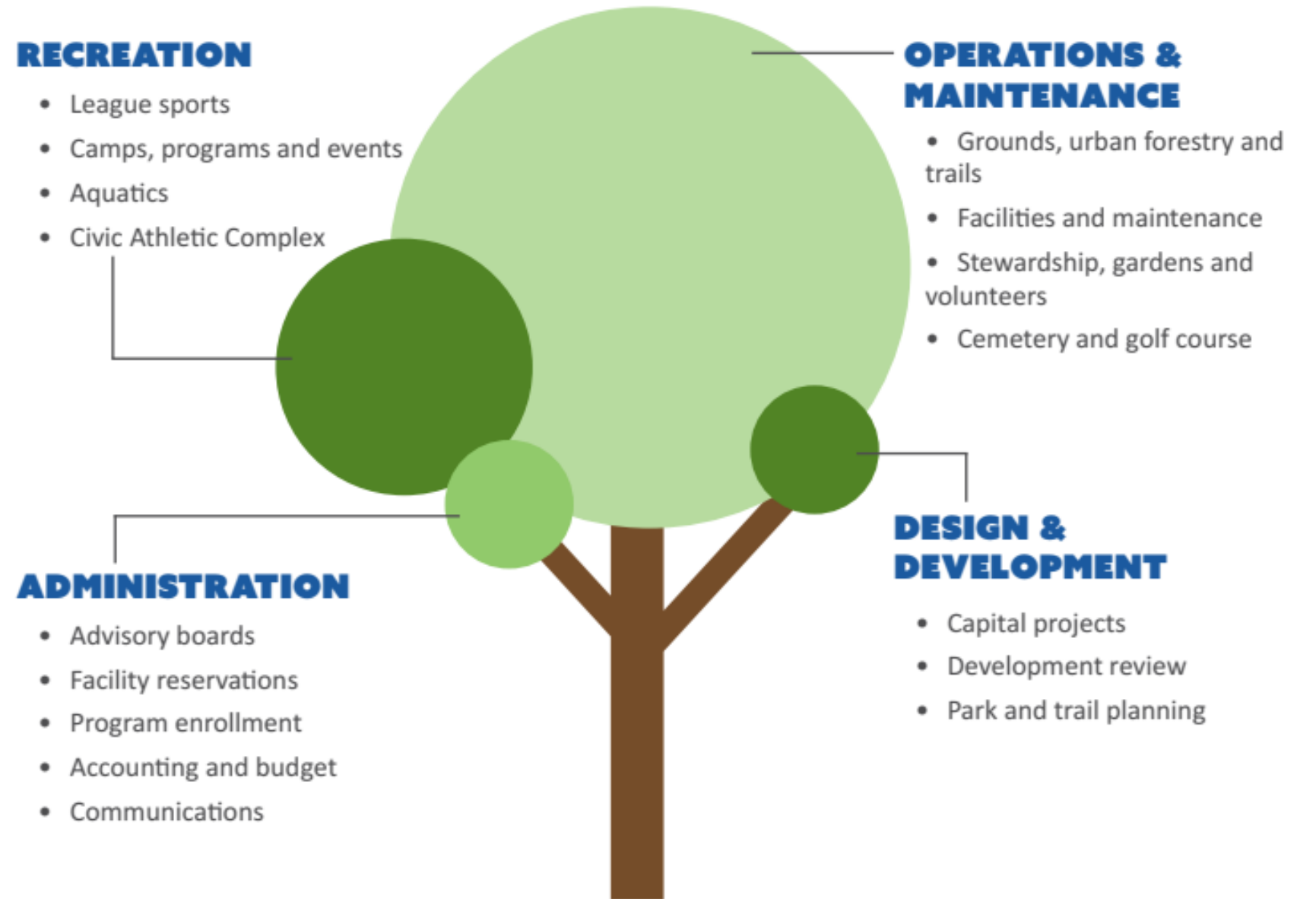


Figure 1 - 3. Parks & Recreation Department work groups and roles

1 Purpose & Background

Staffing

Comparable park and recreation agencies have 8.2-10.0 full time employees for every 10,000 residents (NRPA, 2025). Bellingham has 10.9 benefited employees for every 10,000 residents, some of which are part-time or seasonal positions.

Figure 1 - 5 shows the average division of parks and recreation department labor in at a national level. In Bellingham, of the 109 benefited positions, 66% are operations, 21% recreation, and 12% make up development and administration. Bellingham has more staff in operations and maintenance than typical departments.

Benefited positions at the City of Bellingham have increased since the 2020 PROS Plan. Figure 1 - 4 shows that the most significant staffing change in the last five years occurred in the park operations work group. This was partially due to a restructuring that added a capital maintenance improvements team and a stewardship team.

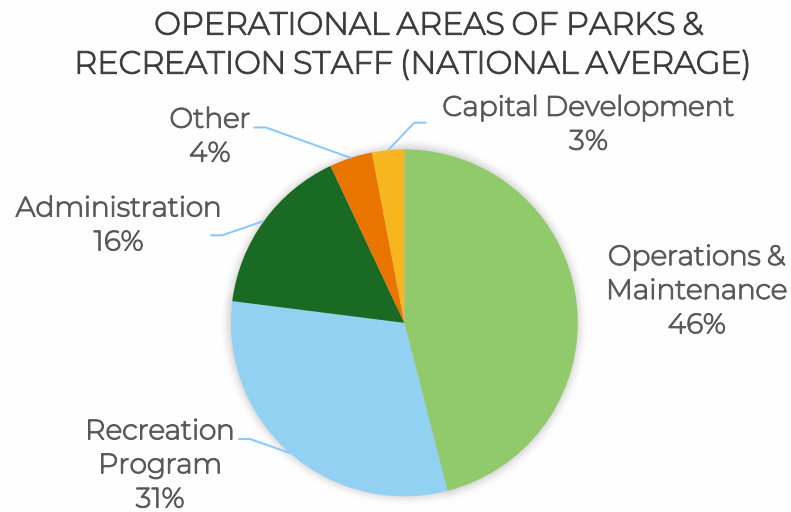


Figure 1 - 5. Responsibilities of Park and Recreation Staff (NRPA, 2025)

This PROS Plan outlines a framework for adding staff in response to the development of new park facilities and the introduction of additional services.

STAFFING CHANGES OVER TIME

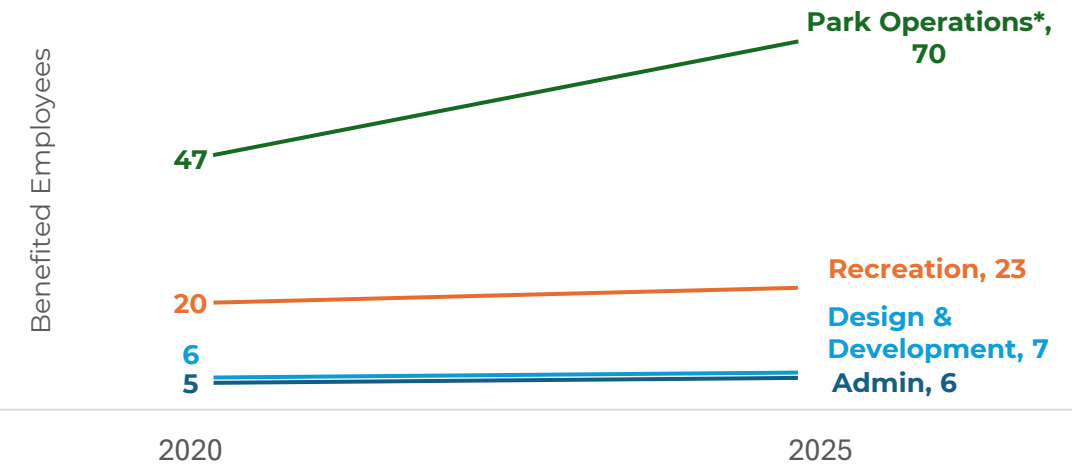


Figure 1 - 4. Changes in the number of benefited staff positions since 2020. *Operations count represents FTE's. Many seasonal positions converted to benefited employees in 2023. Not all positions are filled at any given time.

Recreational staffing requires a higher number of seasonal and part-time positions. Summer programs, camps, aquatics, and sports leagues are seasonal and rely on seasonal labor. Many of the positions are also service-based and are only needed on a part-time basis.

Recreation Staffing by Program

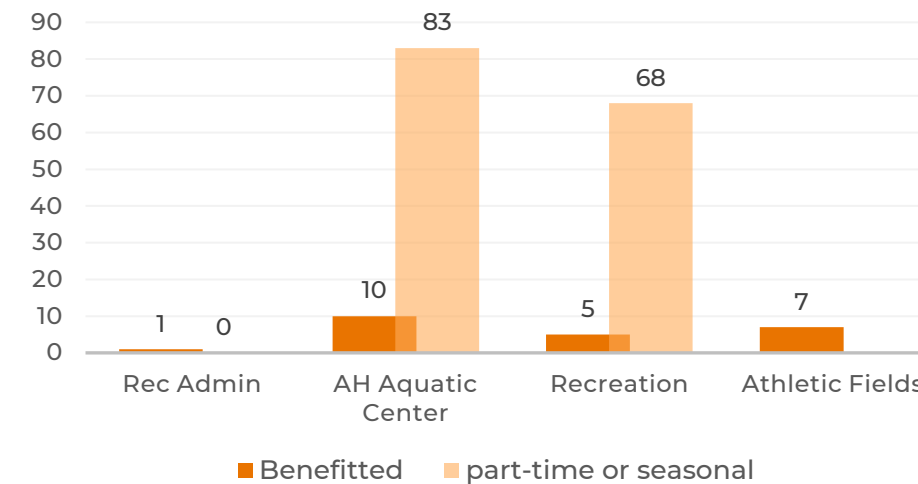


Figure 1 - 6. Current recreation division staffing

1 Purpose & Background

Population Profile

We don't get to decide how many people move to Bellingham, but we do have the opportunity to prepare so that we can continue to offer enough parks, trails, and programs for everyone.

Today Whatcom County is home to about 236,000 people. The Urban Growth Area (UGA) for Bellingham contains an estimated 106,000 people.

The City is anticipated to grow to about 135,000 people and 66,000 housing units by 2045.

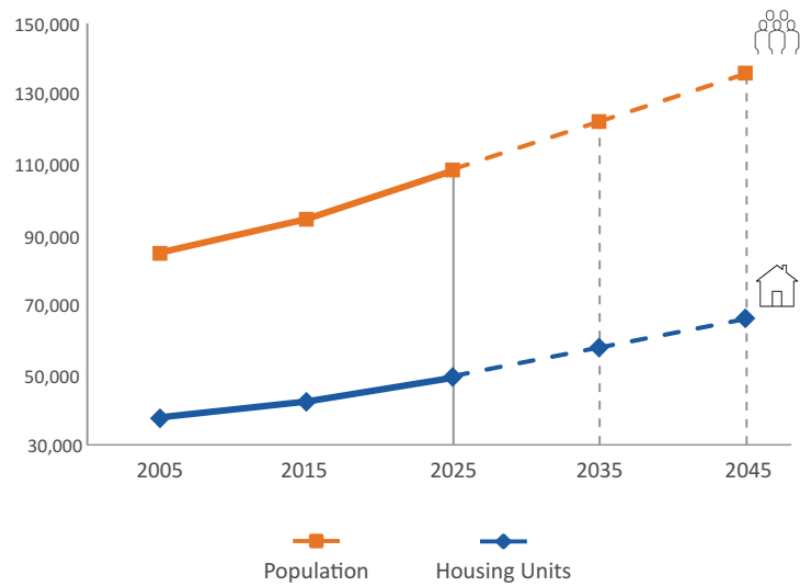


Figure 1 - 7. Adopted growth estimate from 2025 Bellingham Plan.

Over the past 30 years, we added about **3,000** new residents per year in Whatcom County.

Over the next 20 years, we expect to add about **2,600** new residents per year. About half of those new residents will live in Bellingham.

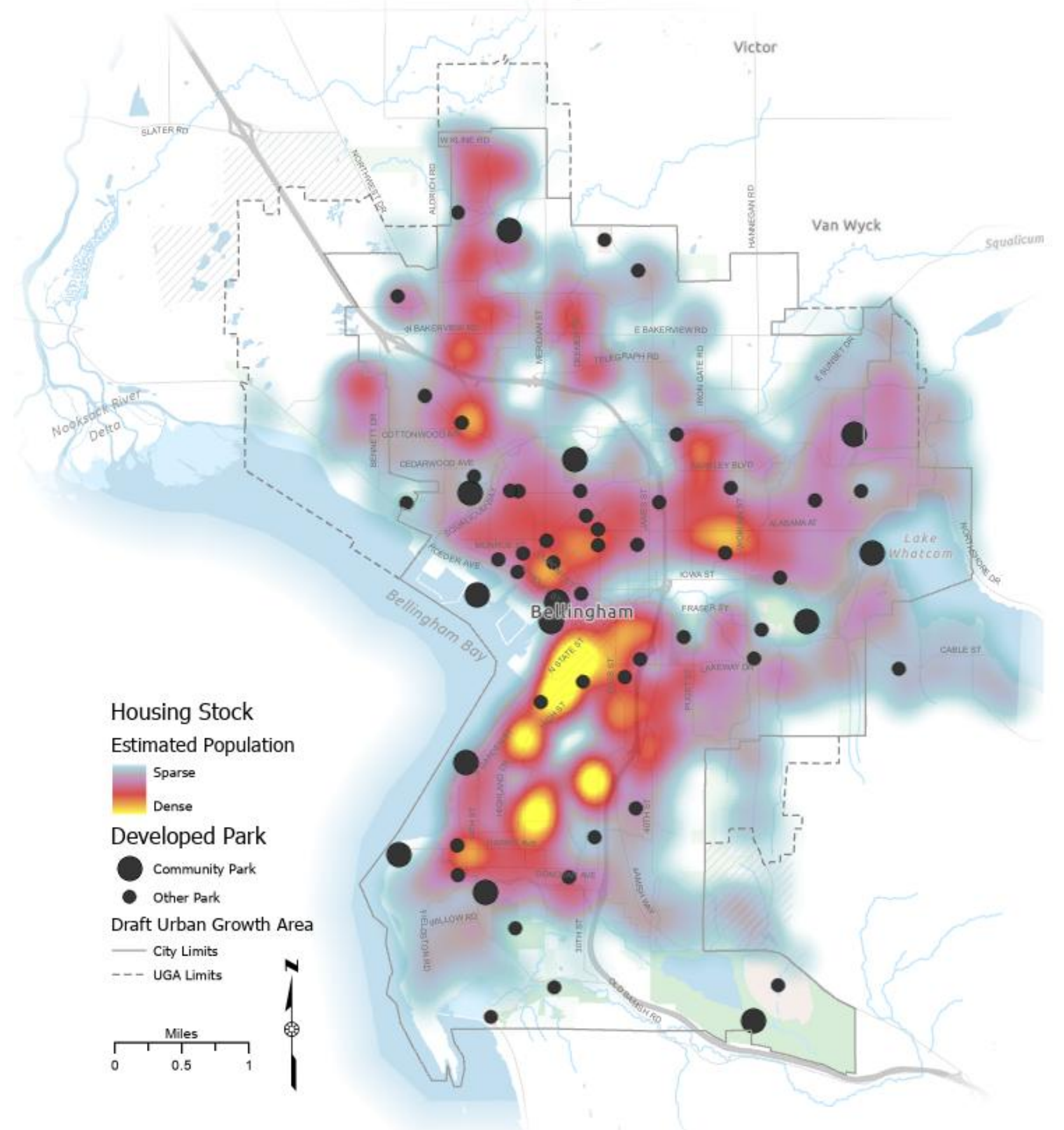


Figure 1 - 8. Population density heat map in the Bellingham Urban Growth Area. Source Notes: 2005-2025 population and housing estimates are from the OFM Small Area Estimate Program (SAEP) and include the City of Bellingham and Bellingham UGA areas.

1 Purpose & Background

Demographics

A changing demographic and an increase in cultural diversity in the Bellingham area have brought new types of interests in recreational activities and programs. It has also brought a greater need for more community recreational activities and financial assistance to lower-income residents for program fees.

The Spanish language is the language most often spoken besides English. Russian, Mandarin, Japanese, Punjabi, Somali, and Indigenous languages of the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe are also heard in Bellingham.

The census data shows that, much like the rest of the nation, Bellingham's population is aging with the percent of the population over 65 years of age increasing from 13.2% in 2014 to 18.9% in 2025.

Ensuring that park facilities provide active recreational opportunities for our changing demographics, people with disabilities, and those without access to a vehicle is critical to community health.

Esri's At Risk Population report indicates that there are nearly 10,000 people with a disability in Bellingham, and 18%

of the population is below the poverty level (Figure 1 - 9). Accessible facilities for those with limited finances will be key in ensuring access for all groups in our community.

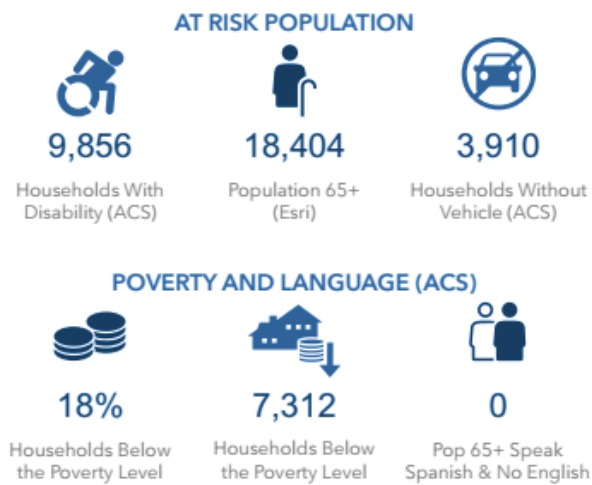


Figure 1 - 9. Bellingham At Risk Population Statistics

The demographic overview (ESRI 2025) shown in Figure 1-10 shows one standout area for population in Bellingham is the 20 – 29 age group. They are the largest age group, comprising 23% of the population, which is significantly higher (10% above) than the national average.

Nationally, there has been recognition of the importance of recreation and park systems to overall quality of life, health, and well-being, especially as related to the growing obesity rate across the nation. Research shows that well-designed and accessible parks and open spaces are correlated with better physical health through increased rates of physical activity and lower rates of depression and stress.

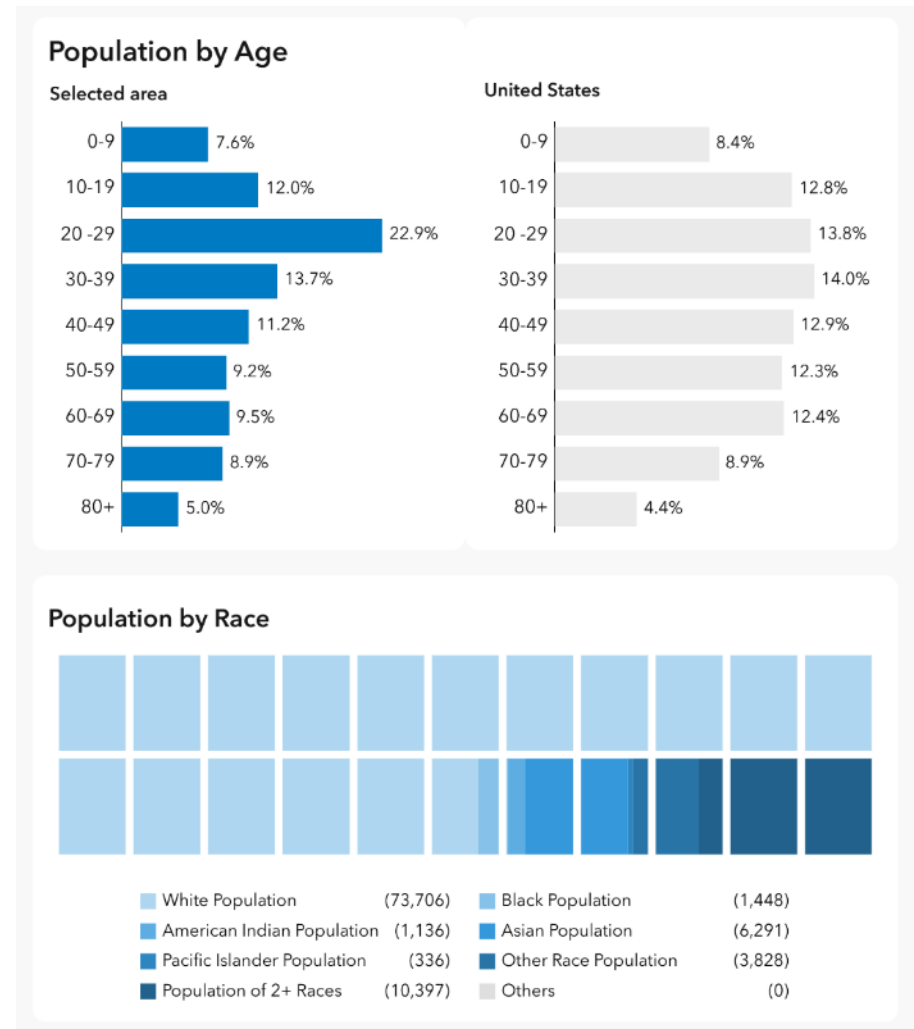


Figure 1 - 10. Demographic Overview shows median age in Bellingham is far lower than the national average (Business Analyst, ESRI 2025)

1 Purpose & Background

Public Involvement

Public input is important to a community-based parks and recreation plan. Over a year's worth of public engagement feedback and data informed this plan and was the most resource-intensive part of the plan update. This section of the plan provides a high-level overview of the outreach and the feedback we received. Each chapter contains more detailed feedback related to the theme of that chapter.

The members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) served as the Steering Committee to help oversee the process, provide input, and evaluate the recommendations. Greenways Advisory Committee members guided updates to the recommended trails. A web-based survey, focus groups, and five public meetings were conducted to augment and inform the Committee's discussions. The public engagement timeline included in Figure 1-12, documents the significant events that occurred over 18 months, beginning in December 2024.

Community Touch Points

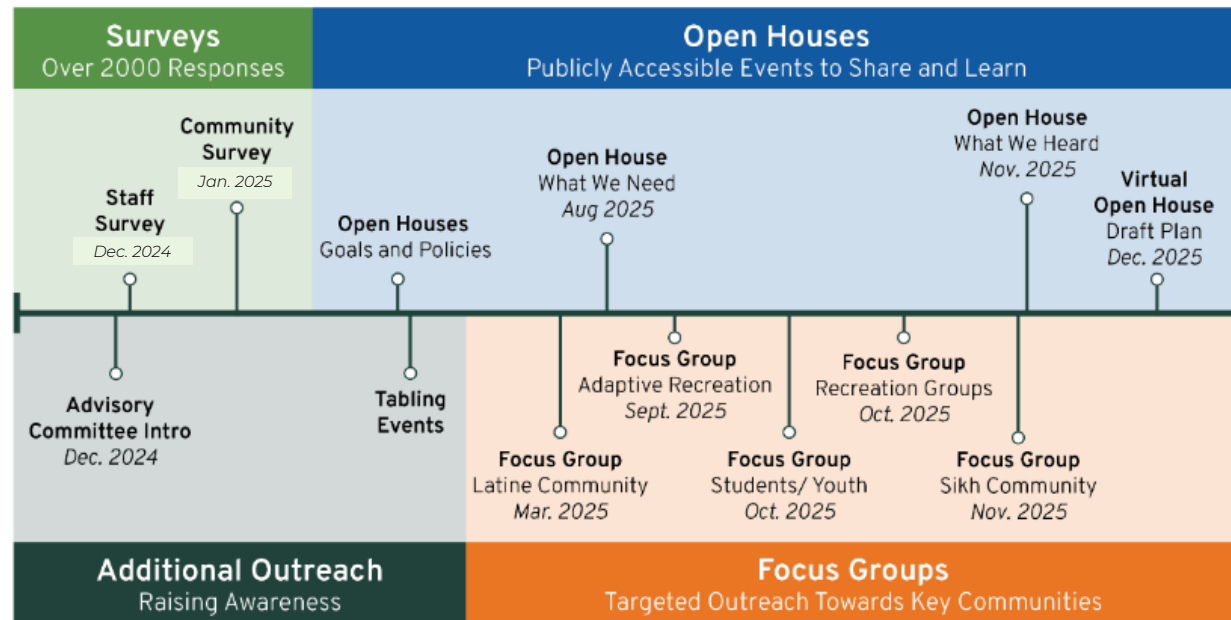


Figure 1 - 12. Summary of Community outreach events 2024 -2025

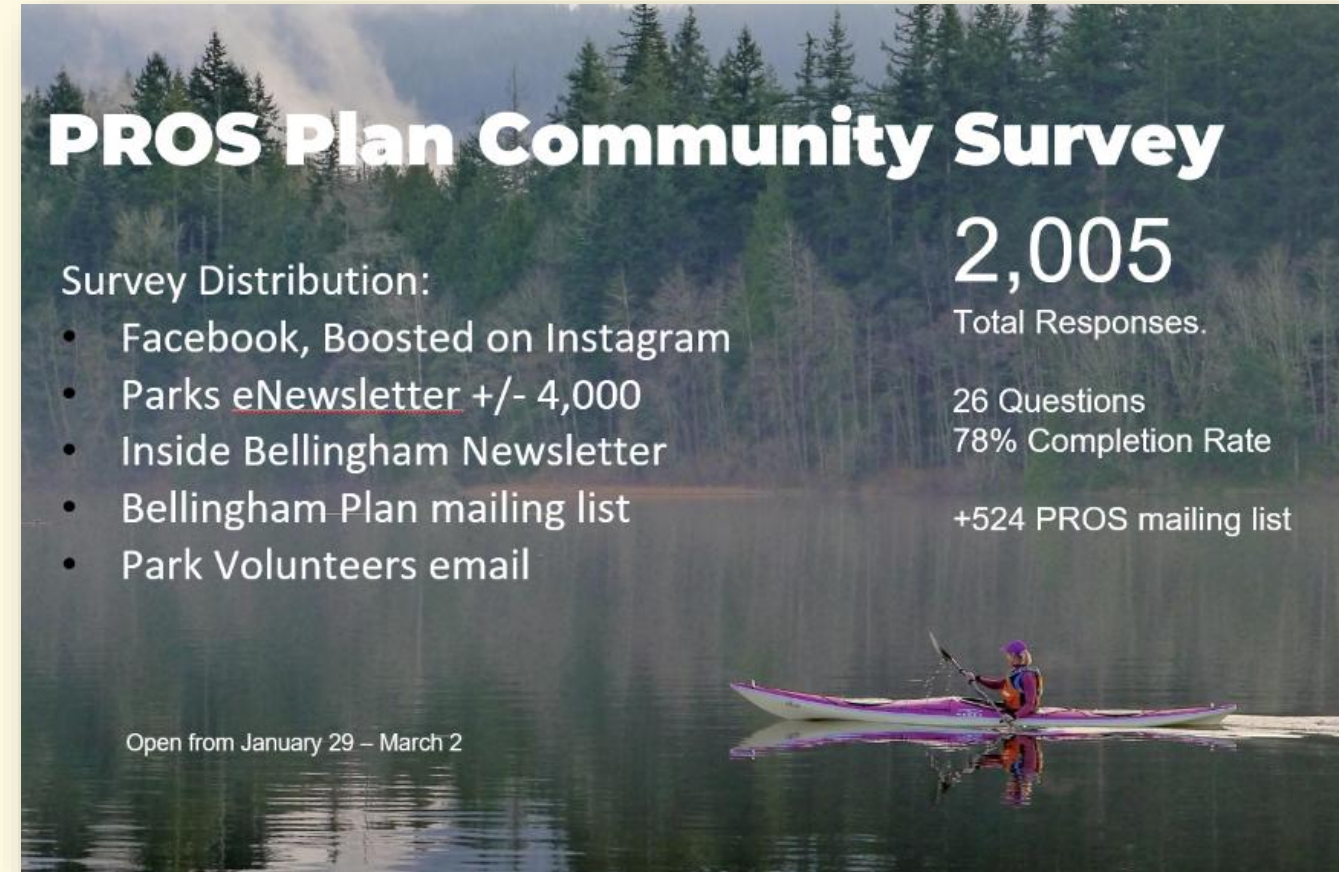


Figure 1 - 11. Summary of community survey results.

PROS Plan Community Survey (2025)

The intent of the 2025 Parks Recreation and Open Space Plan Community Survey was to gather feedback from users of Bellingham's parks, trails, recreational programs, and open space. The feedback focused on:

- How respondents use the park system
- How respondents feel about the park system
- Barriers to using parks and programs
- Respondents' priorities for improvements and development

1 Purpose & Background

The survey was distributed by social media, newsletters, Bellingham Plan mailing list, and Park Volunteers email. The survey received 2,005 responses. A summary of the 2025 Parks & Recreation Community Survey is attached as Appendix A-1. Surveys with staff and the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board were also used to inform this plan.

Open Houses

There were four in-person public meetings held in 2025 – two in February, one in July, and another in November. There were 40 – 60 participants at each meeting. The first two meetings focused on the role of the PROS Plan and goals and policies of the parks and recreation system. The July meeting, held at Bellingham High School, was focused on park amenities and desired improvements. The final open house recapped public input and focused on projects and actions that were important to those in attendance.

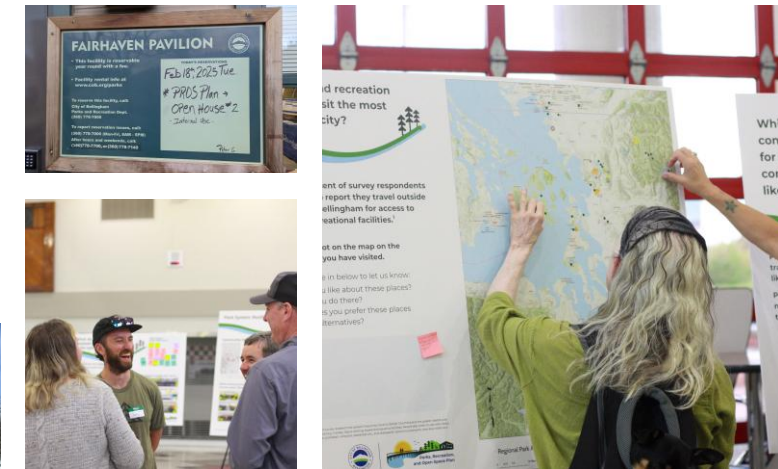


Figure 1 - 13. PROS Plan Open houses and Workshops in 2025

1 Purpose & Background

Pop ups

Pop up events were held throughout the planning process and were used to solicit feedback on what people liked best about the existing park system, how can we improve what we have, and what playgrounds children prefer.

- Vamos Annual Community bike day - April
- Golf Committee - May
- Cordata Neighborhood Association annual party - July
- King Mountain Neighborhood PROS sub committee - September
- Elizabeth Park Concerts, Boulevard Park Concerts - Summer
- Waterfront skatepark public meeting - November

Focus Groups

The focus group meetings were intended to gather information from those we did not hear from in our surveys and those that have a unique need or relationship to the park system. Subject specific feedback from the focus groups is included in each chapter. A complete summary is available in Appendix A-2.

- Latine (Vamos Workshop) – Mar 2025
- Adaptive/inclusive – Sept 2025
- Youth 18 – 24 age (WWU Recreation Program) - Sept 2025
- Recreation providers – Oct 2025
- Sikh/Punjabi – Nov 2025



Figure 1 - 14. Example digital feedback board from focus groups.

Advisory Committees

The Parks & Recreation Advisory Board met 12 times to review and discuss this Plan and voted at their April 2026 meeting to recommend adoption. They were surveyed on their top priorities for the plan and provided written comments on draft work products. The Greenways Advisory Committee provided input on public trail planning.

Plan Adoption

A public draft of this plan was published to the City's web site on April 1, 2026 and provided three weeks to leave comments through the online form. Public comment period was promoted through social media, mailing lists, and boards and committees.

Planning Commission (April 23, 2026) and City Council meetings were publicly noticed and public comments presented prior to final adoption. The 2026 PROS Plan was adopted by resolution at the May 11, 2026 City Council meeting (Resolution #2026-11).

Organizations that participated in Focus Groups in 2025:

- AIROW Project
- Bellingham Bells Youth Sports
- Chardi Kala Project
- Max Higbee Center
- National Federation of the Blind
- NW Skate Collective
- Recreation Northwest
- Special Olympics Bellingham
- Vamos Outdoor Project
- Whatcom Aquatics Foundation
- Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition
- Whatcom Sports and Recreation Sportsplex
- Western Washington University (WWU) Recreation Evaluation
- YMCA

1 Purpose & Background

Key Feedback

Through 15 events and multiple surveys we have heard from more people than ever about what makes parks and recreation so critical to life in Bellingham and how we should grow moving forward.

Bellingham residents are satisfied with the parks and recreation system. Figure 1 - 15 is based on an annual utility services survey conducted by the City. 84% of residents surveyed rate parks and trails as good or excellent.

JOB RATING FOR SERVICES PROVIDED BY CITY OF BELLINGHAM

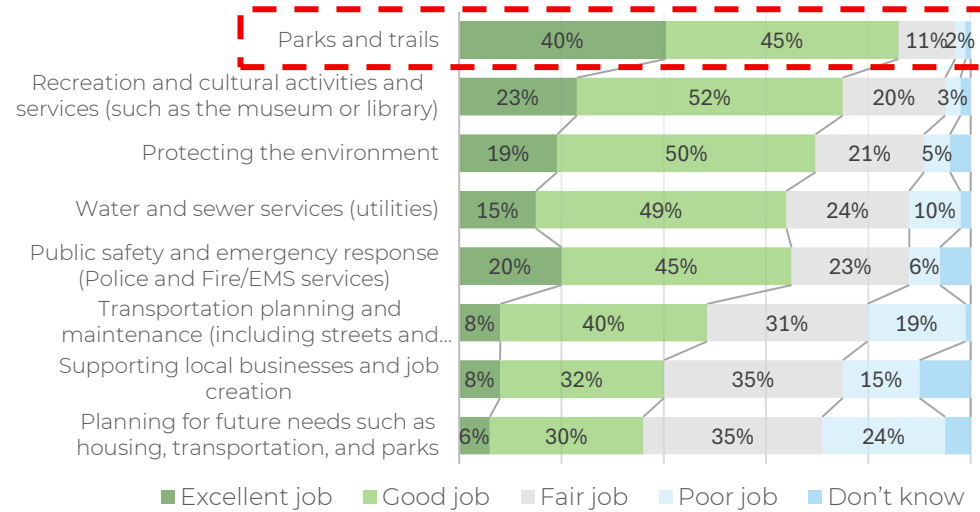


Figure 1 - 15. 2025 Utility ratings survey on services provided by the City.

Beyond overall satisfaction, the general results of the PROS Plan survey are shown at right. Each section of this plan has a summary of more specific public feedback related each chapter.

What Do We Like?

Trails

Access to Nature

"I like the access and beauty of the parks. I love that there is green space throughout the city so people can get to a green space relatively easily. A big part of what makes Bellingham special is the nature surrounding and within it."

There is strong interest in safe and connected trails, access to water, street trees, and connecting with nature. Favorite parks have a blend of nature and recreation.

How Can We Improve?

Completing Features

Accessibility

"It would be nice if restrooms were open (unlocked) throughout the night so I can use them when I run through the parks in the early morning."

Features such as restrooms, lighting, parking, accessible signage, ramps, and wayfinding are completing features that can take facilities to the next level for all users.

How Do We Use It?

Special Events

Outdoor & Sports Programs

"Would love to try mountain biking with my family, but would be nice if there was a way to do a beginner lesson with all equipment provided, this would be a great option for people who may not have the budget for the initial outlay for all the equipment."

The community noted that they enjoy family events in parks, access to water, and passive and active recreation.

What Are we Missing?

Aquatics

Community Rec Center

"We desperately need indoor recreation and ESPECIALLY aquatics. Kids in our area absolutely must be not just water safe but accomplished swimmers and that's impossible to do when pool access is so limited."

Due to weather conditions in Bellingham, the community expressed desire for indoor spaces for sports, swimming, and community building.

Figure 1 - 16. Summary of public feedback from PROS Plan outreach.

1 Purpose & Background

Greenways Levy



The first Greenway Levy passed in 1990 largely in response to citizen interest in protecting valuable natural spaces and corridors. There have been four levies since that have responded to the current needs of the park system. The Greenways 5 levy is now an essential part of everything the department does. All four levy ballot measures emphasized the acquisition of land in contiguous corridors when possible, the protection of unique and sensitive properties, and the enhancement and connection between trail corridors, parks, and open spaces. Levy 3 added funding for park and trail development and maintenance. Levy 5 added funding for projects that improve climate resilience within the park system.

The program has provided the ability to purchase unique properties, including King Mountain open space, Fairhaven Village Green, Dewey Valley open space, Samish Crest open space, and critical creek corridors. The 2024 Greenways 5 Levy authorizes a 10-year property tax levy that will collect approximately \$9 million per year.

The Greenway Advisory Committee provides public input on the expenditure of levy funds. They review and recommend the acquisition of properties consistent with this PROS Plan. Specific recommendations related to the expenditure of levy funds are described in the Greenways Strategic Plan.



Figure 1 - 18. Guidelines for Greenways levy funding

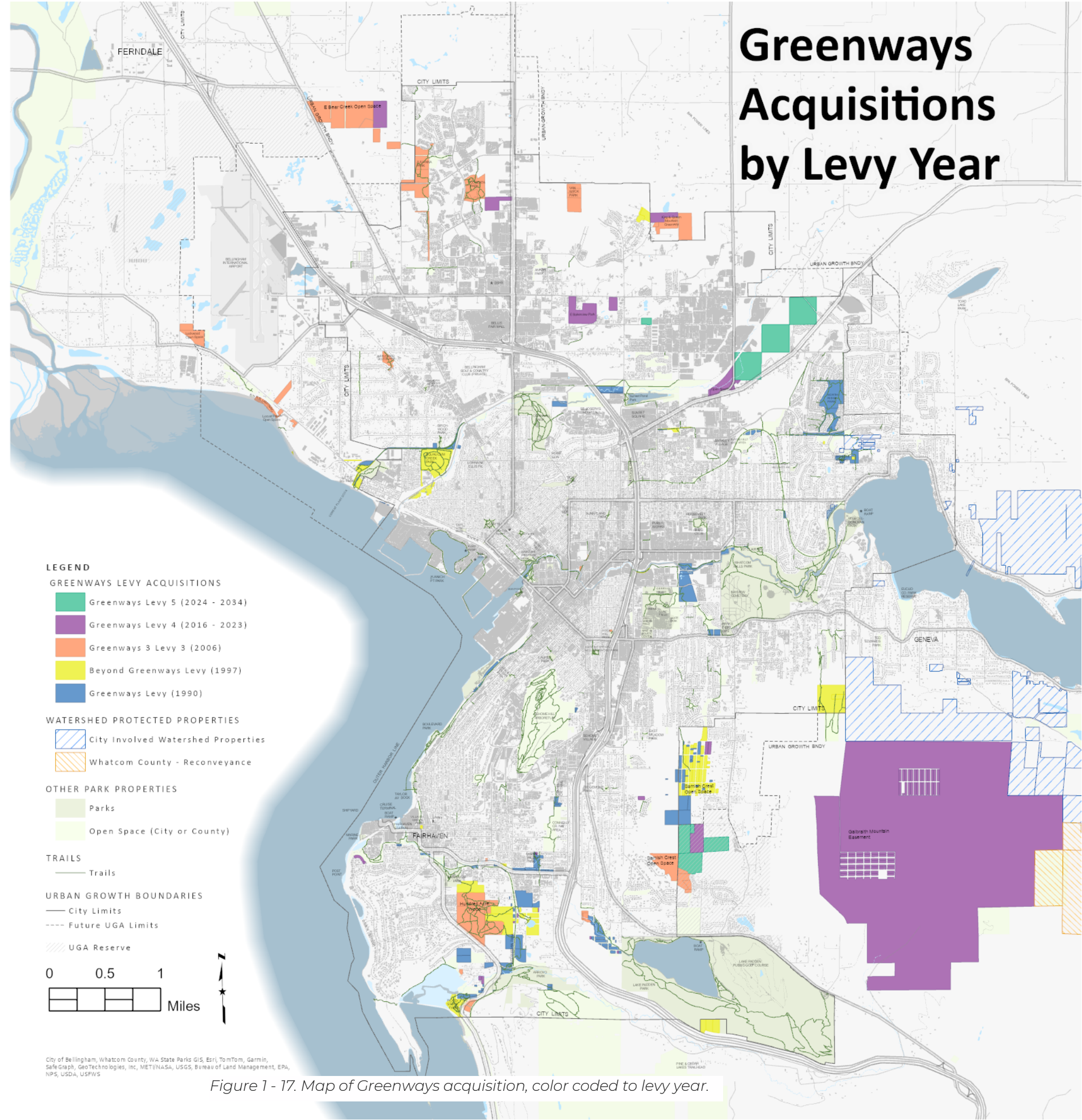


Figure 1 - 17. Map of Greenways acquisition, color coded to levy year.

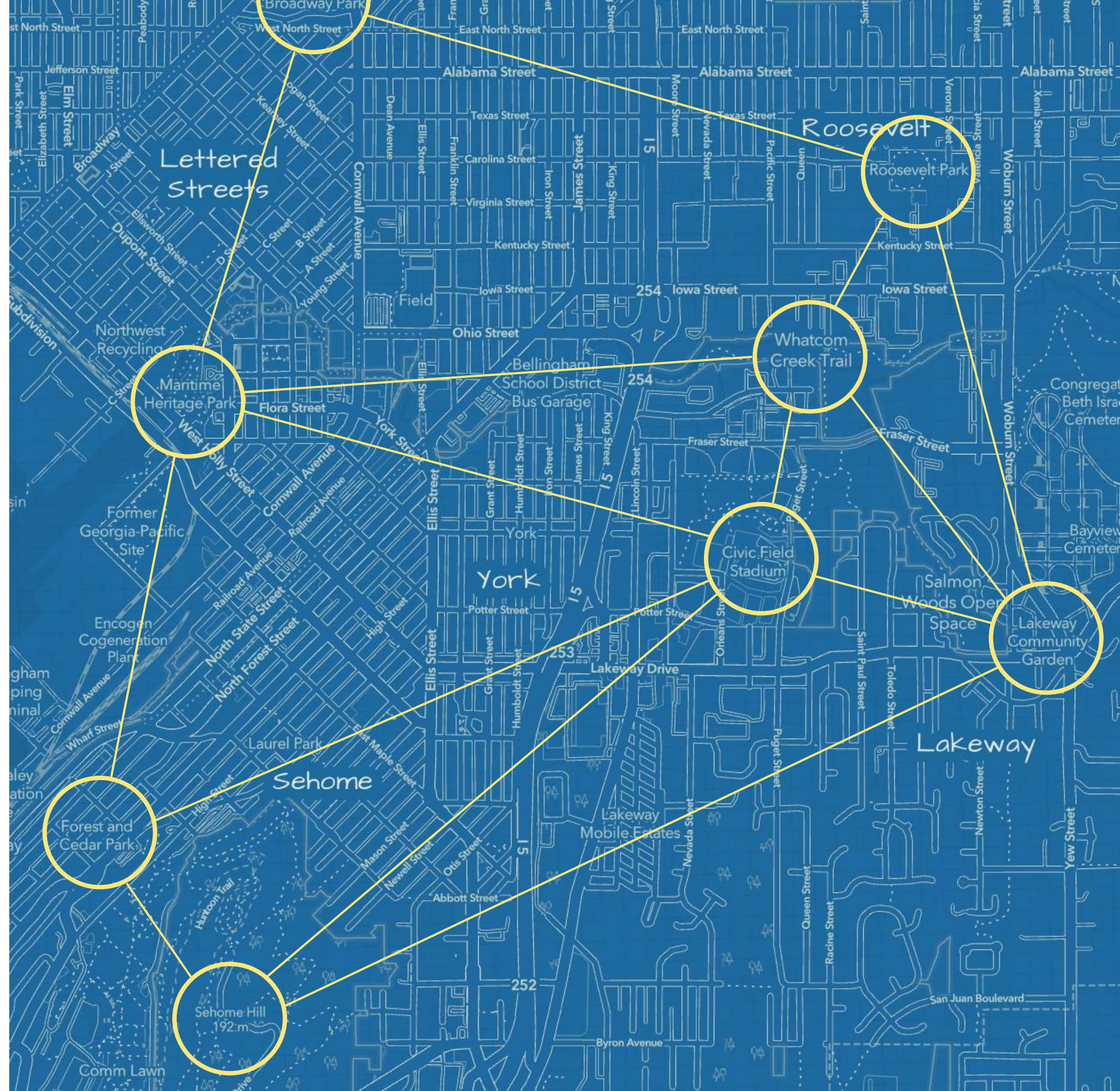


Chapter 2

Planning Framework & Standards

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State Recreation and Conservation Office and Growth Management

The PROS Plan must be updated every six years for the City to remain eligible for grants administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, (RCO) such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Boating Facilities Program, and Land and Water Conservation Fund. **Washington State has provided over \$10 million since 2000 toward City of Bellingham park projects.** This includes funding toward the development of Sunset Pond loop trail, Boulevard Park beach enhancement, and the purchase of East Bakerview Park.

The Growth Management Act (GMA) establishes goals for cities and counties to ensure that their quality of life is sustained as their communities grow. One of these goals is to “retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreational facilities” (RCW 36.70A.020(9)). The Bellingham Plan is the City’s comprehensive plan under GMA. The [Bellingham Plan](#) contains the goals and policies as well as growth projections that are implemented with this PROS Plan. The Bellingham Plan contains a Parks & Recreation Chapter that incorporates this PROS Plan by reference.

Additionally, this Plan compiles and coordinates information from the Greenways Strategic Plan and the Recreational Needs Assessment Financial Strategy Report.

The planning area for this process includes the Bellingham Urban Growth Area (UGA). Whatcom County is responsible for planning the area outside of the UGA, however, the planning efforts of each agency must be coordinated. For the purposes of the PROS Plan, it is assumed that residents who currently live within the UGA are served by existing parks, and that by the end of the 20-year planning period, or 2045, all UGA areas will be incorporated into the City. The proposed facilities, population, level-of-service and any other recommendations projected to 2045 include the existing City and the entire UGA. If all these areas are not annexed, some of the recommendations would not be implemented. The Shoreline Master Program (SMP) was updated in 2013, adding more protection for shorelines and providing habitat restoration guidance while supporting public access.

This Plan contains the following required components:

- o **Establish goals and policies** – Identify the goals to be met and policies or actions that can be measured as the PROS Plan is implemented. (See Chapter 2)
- o **Inventory existing park system** – List the lands and facilities owned and operated by the City or other public agencies within the City limits and the Urban Growth Area. The inventory contains an assessment of facilities and an estimate of maintenance and operational costs. (Chapters 3 – 6)
- o **Public engagement** – The community was integral in the plan development and adoption. Provide early and ongoing engagement and opportunities for public to give input. (See Chapter 1, 3, 4, 5, 6)
- o **Analyze Needs & Opportunities** – Based on public engagement, and available resources, determine the service standards for future park, recreation, and open space facilities or programs. (Chapter 2)
- o **Create Implementation Plan** – Estimate the overall cost of achieving the proposed level of service, based on the community’s recommendations, prioritize those recommendations, and develop a plan to pay for them. (Chapters 7)

Principles, Goals & Policies

These seven principles demonstrate the collective community values regarding Bellingham’s parks and recreation system. The goals and policies are developed around them.

Goals and Policies

The following pages contain policies that relate to the seven goals as found in the [Bellingham Plan](#). The goals and policies are in the Bellingham Plan and further broken down into “actions” within the chapters of this plan.

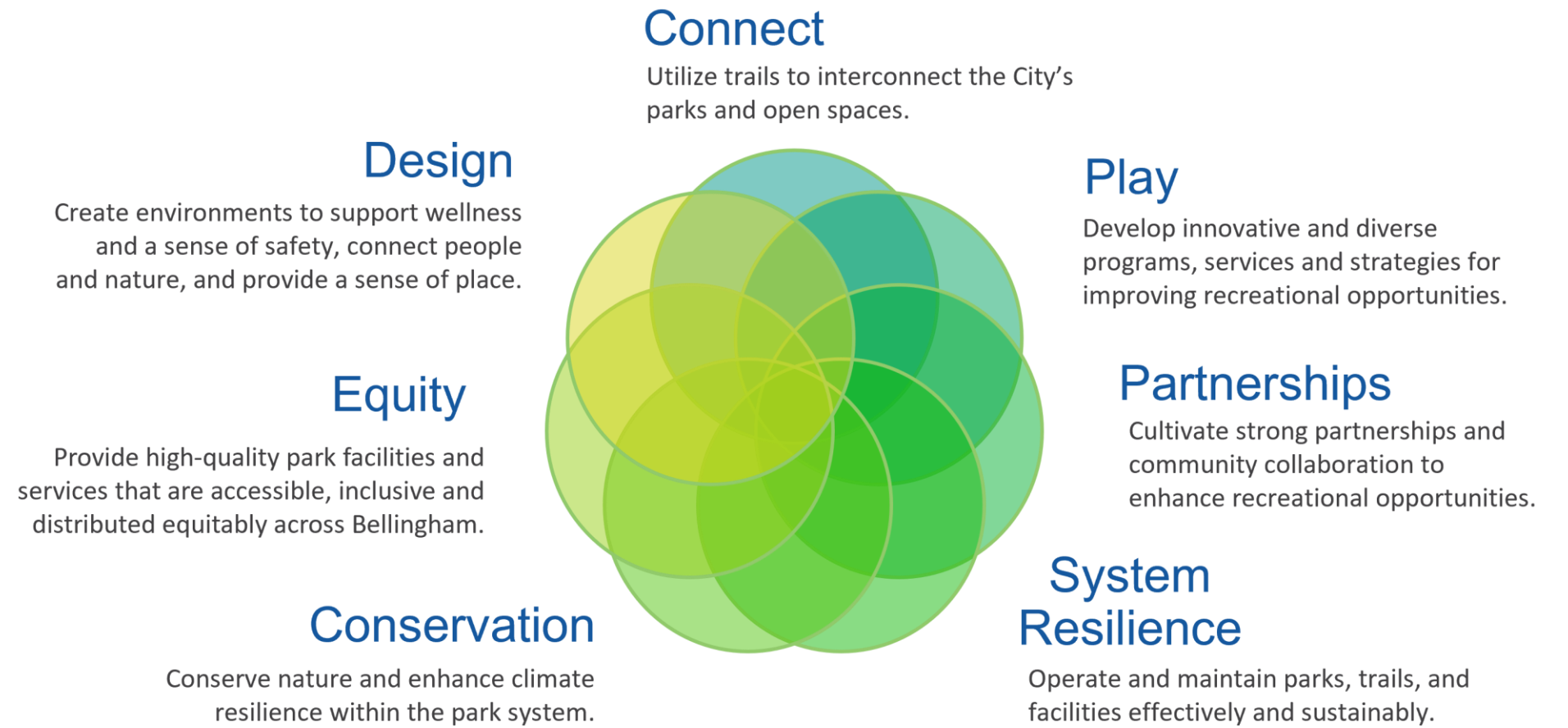


Figure 2 - 19. Principles and Goals of Parks & Recreation

2 Planning Framework & Standards

PR - 1 Provide a system of parks, trails and open space so that all residents live within one-half mile safe route of a developed park and trail.

PR - 2 Target property acquisitions that provide key trail linkages and enable infill parks in underserved areas.

PR - 3 Target facility and program improvements that decrease barriers and expand park and recreation use by underserved communities

PR - 4 Provide recreational programs and cultural events that celebrate the diversity of the community.

PR - 5 Prioritize new community gardens in underserved areas to improve food access, foster community and provide environmental benefits.

Equity - Goal PR-A | Provide high-quality park facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.



Figure 2 - 20. Outreach at Singh Sabha Gurudwara in 2025

2 Planning Framework & Standards

PR - 6	Develop new park forms and provide recreational opportunities based on setting and level of use.
PR - 7	Develop parks and trails to take advantage of views of water, islands, ridgelines and mountains.
PR - 8	Design parks, open space and shorelines that respect and integrate natural systems and connect people to nature.
PR - 9	Provide opportunities for education and interpretation of historic, environmental and cultural resources in the park system.
PR - 10	Improve safety and extend hours of use with ground lighting in parks, trails and parking areas.
PR - 11	Activate open spaces with trails, trailheads, loop trails and events.
PR - 12	Incorporate art and whimsy into park facilities.
PR - 13	Acquire and develop additional water access for the public.
PR - 14	Design and develop facilities to be efficient, with low maintenance and operations costs.
PR - 15	Design and prioritize system upgrades that respond to condition assessments, capital improvement plans, community vision and preferences.

Design - Goal PR-B | Create environments to support wellness and a sense of safety, connect people and nature and provide a sense of place.



*Photo credit:
Elijah Forslof,
Maritime
Heritage Park*

2 Planning Framework & Standards

- PR - 16** Acquire environmental features that reflect Bellingham’s unique natural character, including ridgelines, critical areas, forests and wildlife corridors.
- PR - 17** Manage urban forests and street trees for human wellness and safety, to provide shade, improve wildlife habitat, sequester greenhouse gases and mitigate fire hazards.
- PR - 18** Take action to improve facilities, parks and beaches to serve as areas of respite during extreme weather events.
- PR - 19** Continue to incorporate the City’s climate response objectives into park design and development projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- PR - 20** Acquire property within designated open space corridors between and within urban growth areas that provide recreation opportunities, protect habitat, species migration, critical areas, forest cover and buffer working lands.
- PR - 21** Balance the demand for public access and interpretive education with protection of environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites

- PR - 22** Develop programming and facilities that promote public health and wellness, encourage leisure, fun and games and strengthen community connections.
- PR - 23** Enhance safety with a presence in parks and trails through programming, recreation, education and enforcement.
- PR - 24** Evaluate opportunities to renovate existing facilities and develop multiuse facilities, including indoor recreation and community centers.
- PR - 25** Enhance aquatics and recreation opportunities at the Civic Athletic Complex.
- PR - 26** Expand reservable spaces such as enclosed meeting rooms and outdoor shelters suitable for a variety of event types to meet community needs.

Conservation - Goal PR-C | Conserve nature and enhance climate resilience within the park system.



Figure 2 - 21. Wetland enhancement at Cordata Park

Play - Goal PR-D | Develop innovative and diverse programs, services and strategies for improving recreational opportunities.



Figure 2 - 22. Bloedel Donovan swimming dock

2 Planning Framework & Standards

PR - 27 Integrate and expand signage, wayfinding and outreach materials that guide users through and between trails and clearly establish rules for use.

PR - 28 Explore trail surface alternatives that balance the natural character of Bellingham's trail system with accessibility requirements, long-term maintenance, sustainable development practices and availability of local materials.

PR - 29 Improve public education about safe trail use to ensure they function for a range of recreation and transportation users.

PR - 30 Target improvements that connect trails with transit stops, key destinations, bike routes and sidewalks to improve non-motorized transportation options.

PR - 31 Establish clear maintenance standards for park assets and evaluate and report progress towards meeting standards and improving conditions.

PR - 32 Prioritize capital maintenance improvements based on safety, condition, equity factors and number of people served

PR - 33 Explore options to improve enforcement of park rules while ensuring all park users feel welcome.

PR - 34 Proactively upgrade and restore existing facilities to address community needs, improve resilience and protect the longevity of existing park assets.

PR - 35 Steward and protect the park system from invasive species, illegal activity and repair and restore damage where needed.

PR - 36 Develop and implement metrics to evaluate ongoing costs in property acquisitions, park and trail development and recreation programming.

Connection - Goal PR-E | Utilize trails to interconnect the City's parks and open spaces.



Figure 2 - 23. Stone bridge at Whatcom Falls Park, Photo: Hanna Montroy

System Resilience - Goal PR-F | Operate and maintain parks, trails and facilities effectively and sustainably.



Figure 2 - 24. Maintenance and Operations staff

2 Planning Framework & Standards

PR - 37 Work with community organizations and across City departments to keep parks safe, welcoming, maintained and clean.

PR - 38 Identify ways to support outside agencies to improve access and conditions at non-City recreational facilities.

PR - 39 Explore partnerships that expand services or leverage support for specific projects.

PR - 40 Involve the community in habitat restoration and maintenance activities through the Parks Volunteer Program.

PR - 41 Partner and collaborate with local service providers to fill in gaps in equitable programming, events and services.

PR - 42 Link open space and trail corridors with those of adjacent jurisdictions and agencies.

Partnerships

- Goal PR-G | Cultivate strong partnerships and community collaboration to enhance recreational opportunities



Figure 2 - 25. Volunteer work party 2025

Project Selection & Prioritization

Recommended projects and actions in this plan are selected based on input from the public, staff, elected officials, and advisory boards. These recommendations are then prioritized based on whether they are consistent with and further the goals and policies. Not all projects can be completed with the resources (staff, volunteers, and funding) available, and each project is assigned a short-, mid-, or long-term priority within the 20-year horizon of this plan.

Each recommendation table provides:

- Qualitative assessment
 - Park Principles
- Quantitative assessment (location based)
 - Equity – Social Vulnerability Index
 - Service level gaps (10-minute walk)
 - Population/visitation

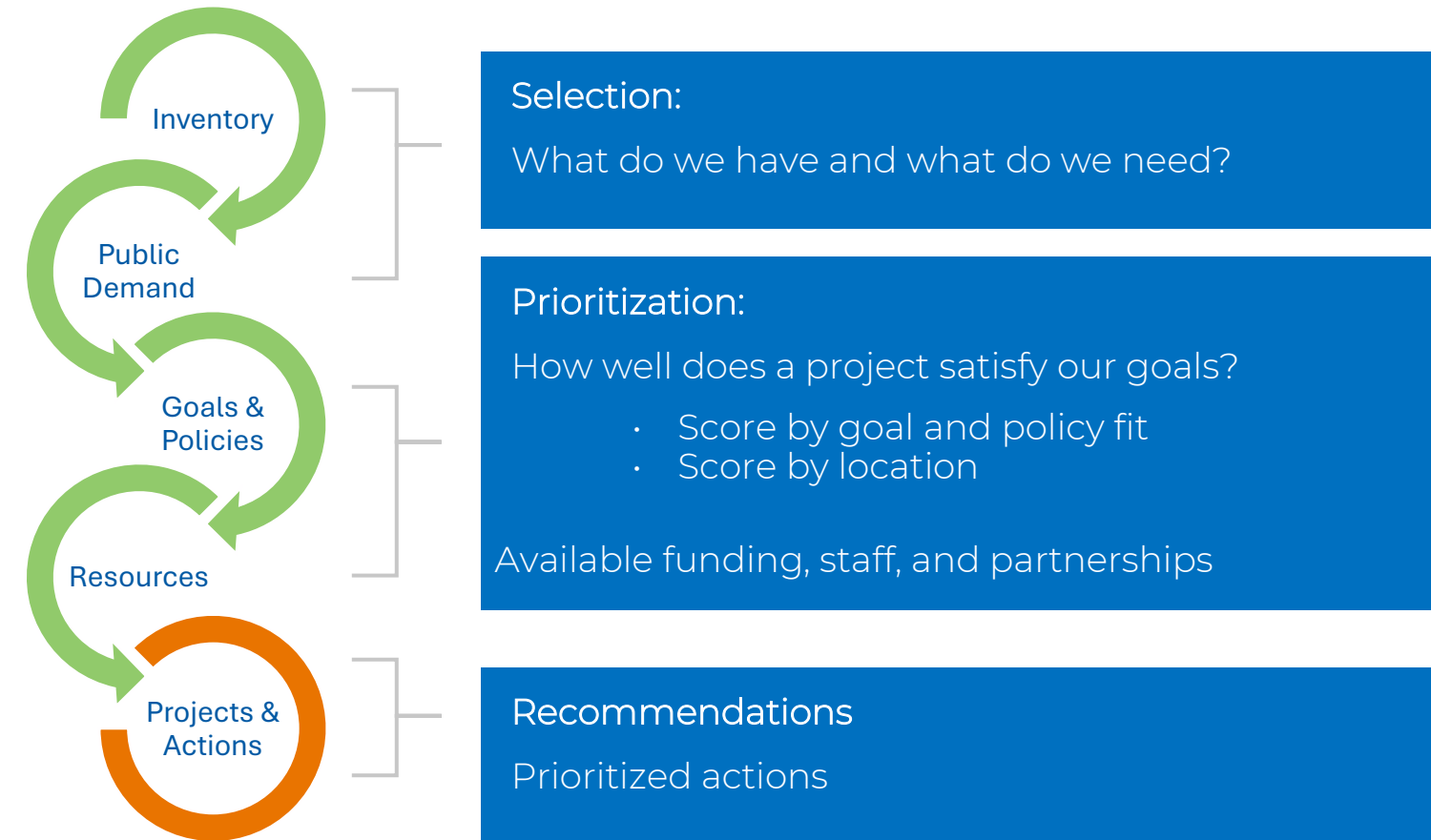


Figure 2 - 26. Project selection and prioritization process for projects and actions

Service Levels

This section outlines how level of service has been assessed in this PROS Plan. The following analysis is intended to help identify gaps in our service.

A common industry approach to level of service utilizes a per capita method, which looks at the number of park features (ex., neighborhood parks) relative to population. This per capita approach is useful for tracking over time but provides little insight into how to improve or grow. The following questions help assess existing community services:

- What is the quantity relative to the population?
- How does this compare to our peers?
- What is the distribution?
- What condition are they in?
- Do they serve the public need?

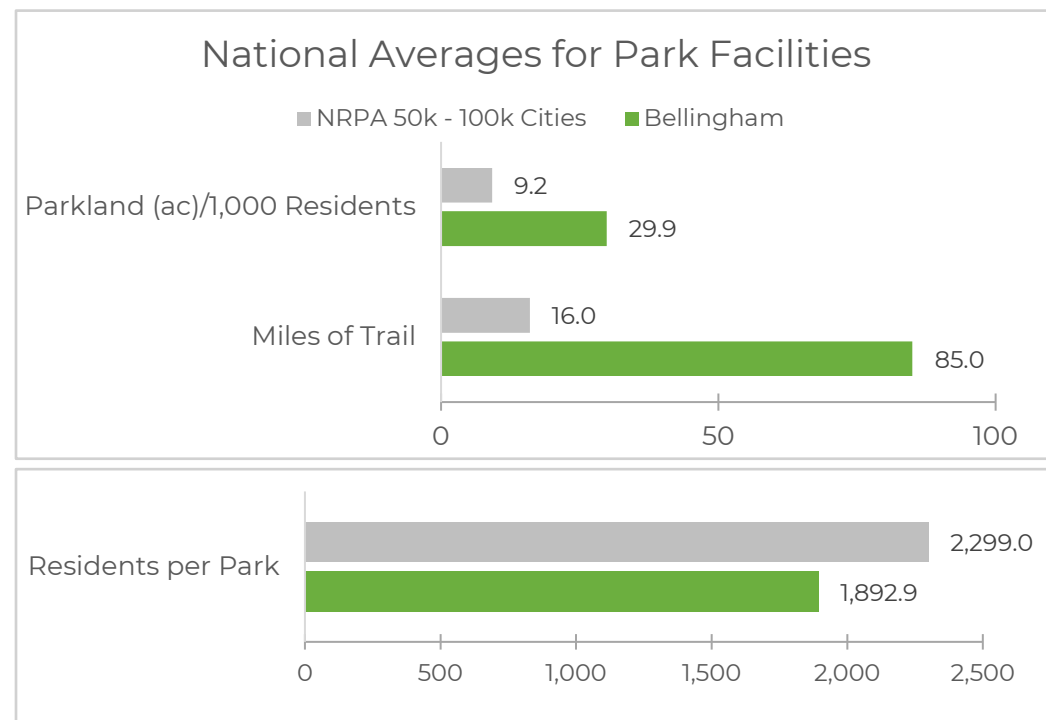


Figure 2 - 27. Parkland and trails in Bellingham relative to national averages for similar sized municipalities (NRPA, 2025).

Quantity

Level of service for the number of parks: **High**

Purpose: Measure the quantity of existing park and recreation facilities in a community.

The City exceeds the national average and that of comparable cities in the number of outdoor park spaces and facilities. Figure 2 – 27 shows that Bellingham has nearly five times the trails, three times the parkland acres, and 18% fewer residents per park as similar-sized jurisdictions across the country (NRPA 2025).

Comparing the numbers from the 2020 PROS Plan, the total park and open space acreage has increased by 242 acres. The largest change is with respect to open space, with significant purchases of 66 acres on Samish Crest and 116 acres in Dewey Valley along Squalicum Creek in 2024 and 2025.

Table 2 - 1. Park facilities comparison 2020 - 2025

Park Facilities 2020 - 2025							
	Population	Total Land (Ac)	Trail (Miles)	Neighborhood Parks (Ac)	Community Parks (Ac)	Special Use Sites (Ac)	Open Space (Ac)
2020* UGA	100,567	2,938	80	111	1,249	294	1,283
2025 UGA	106,000	3,180	85	327	1,040	384	1,428
Difference	5,433	242	5				

*2020 PROS Plan facility numbers adjusted to remove aquatic lands

The shifted acreage of developed parks (highlighted in yellow) is due to a reclassification of park types to more accurately reflect current use, as well as the additions of Storybrook Park, Scramble Nature Play Park, Northern Lights Park, and King Mountain Neighborhood Park.

Comparable Cities

National statistics are useful, and it is also useful to understand what similar cities located regionally are doing to get a better feel of local park services. Table 2-2 shows that Bellingham is higher than most cities with respect to park acreage and trail miles.

Peer cities were selected based on location in Washington or Oregon; a population size close to 100,000; and a high park acreage relative to population. The one outlier with respect to population was Issaquah, WA. Issaquah was selected due to its proximity to the protected wildlands, outdoor activities, and a high park and trail ratio to population.

Bellingham is in a unique position compared to these other cities when comparing acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. Bellingham has around 30 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, which is higher than most cities of similar size. Much of this is due to open space land that has been purchased through the Greenways Program. Developed parkland acres are closer to the mean for peer cities.

Operational costs are \$5,717 per acre, which is second only to Bend, Oregon (\$10,211), showing more resource-intensive maintenance costs than Olympia (\$3,633), Lacey (\$1,836), and Issaquah (\$1,747).

Bellingham has a balanced mix of developed versus undeveloped parkland (55 vs. 45), strong trail network, and high operational investment. The current system is land- and trail-rich, well maintained, and still growing into its active-amenity goals.

Table 2 - 2. Bellingham's park inventory compared to similar sized cities in the Pacific Northwest

Metric	Bellingham	Olympia, WA	Lacey, WA	Issaquah, WA	Bend, OR	Mean
Population (2024)	106,000	70,506	96,432	41,500	99,178	82,723
Total Parkland Acres	3,179	1,373	1,269	1,798	3,553	2,234
Developed Parkland Acres	1,751	1,000	518	261	2,066	1,119
Undeveloped Parkland Acres	1,428	373	751	1,537	1,487	1,115
Developed Park Sites	56	53	26	28	54	43
Playgrounds	35	12	23	11	45	25
Miles of Trail	85	24	7	44	98	52
2024 Total Annual Expenditures (\$)	28,710,607	15,187,825	7,650,452	13,333,461	73,302,930	27,637,055
2024 Operational Expenditures (\$)	18,173,716	4,988,733	2,330,364	3,140,727	36,281,280	12,982,964
Per Capita Comparison						
Acres of Parkland / 1,000 Residents	30.0	19.5	13.2	43.3	35.8	28
Developed Parkland Acres/1,000 Residents	16.5	14.2	5.4	6.3	20.8	13
Undeveloped Parkland Acres/1,000 Residents	13.5	5.3	7.8	37.0	15.0	16
Residents per Park	1,893	1,330	3,709	1,482	1,837	2,050
2024 Operational Expenditures / Acre (\$)	5,717	3,633	1,836	1,747	10,211	4,629
2024 Operational Expenditures / Capita (\$)	171	71	24	76	366	142
2024 Operational Expenditures / Total Expenditures	63%	33%	30%	24%	49%	40%

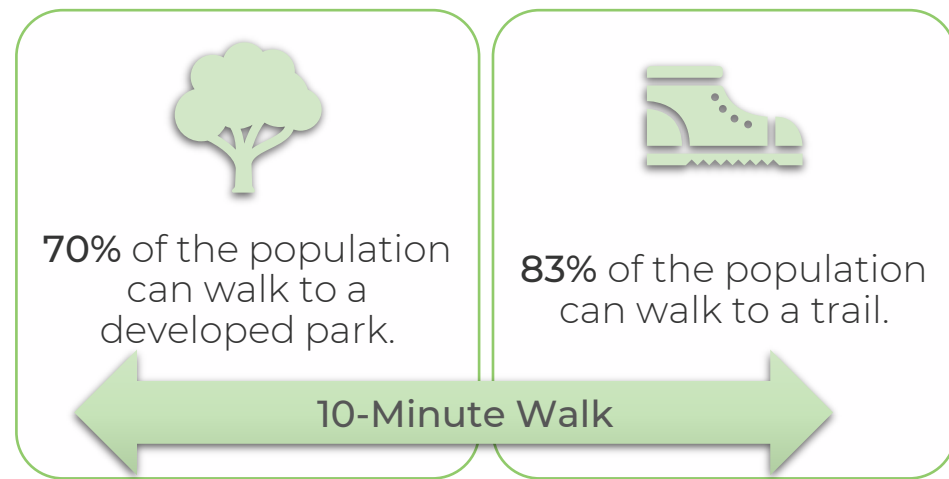
2 Planning Framework & Standards

Distribution

Distribution Level of Service: **Moderate**

Purpose: Measure the ability of people within the developed city boundaries to access park and recreation facilities without a personal motorized vehicle.

Bellingham has a wide variety of parks, trails, and recreational facilities, but they are not all evenly distributed. Some newer parts of the city and areas of lower population density lack park and trail access. All residents should have a 10-minute walk to a park or trail. Figures 2 – 28 and 2 – 29 show the actual distribution of parks and trails and the existing 10-minute walk service area.



Gap Areas by Park Zone

This assesses the distribution of parks across five park zones shown in figure 2 – 30. These zones represent similar geographies separated by physical barriers to movement (highways or arterial roads). This figure includes feedback from the community survey that reflects the desired improvements and perceived barriers to access in those zones.

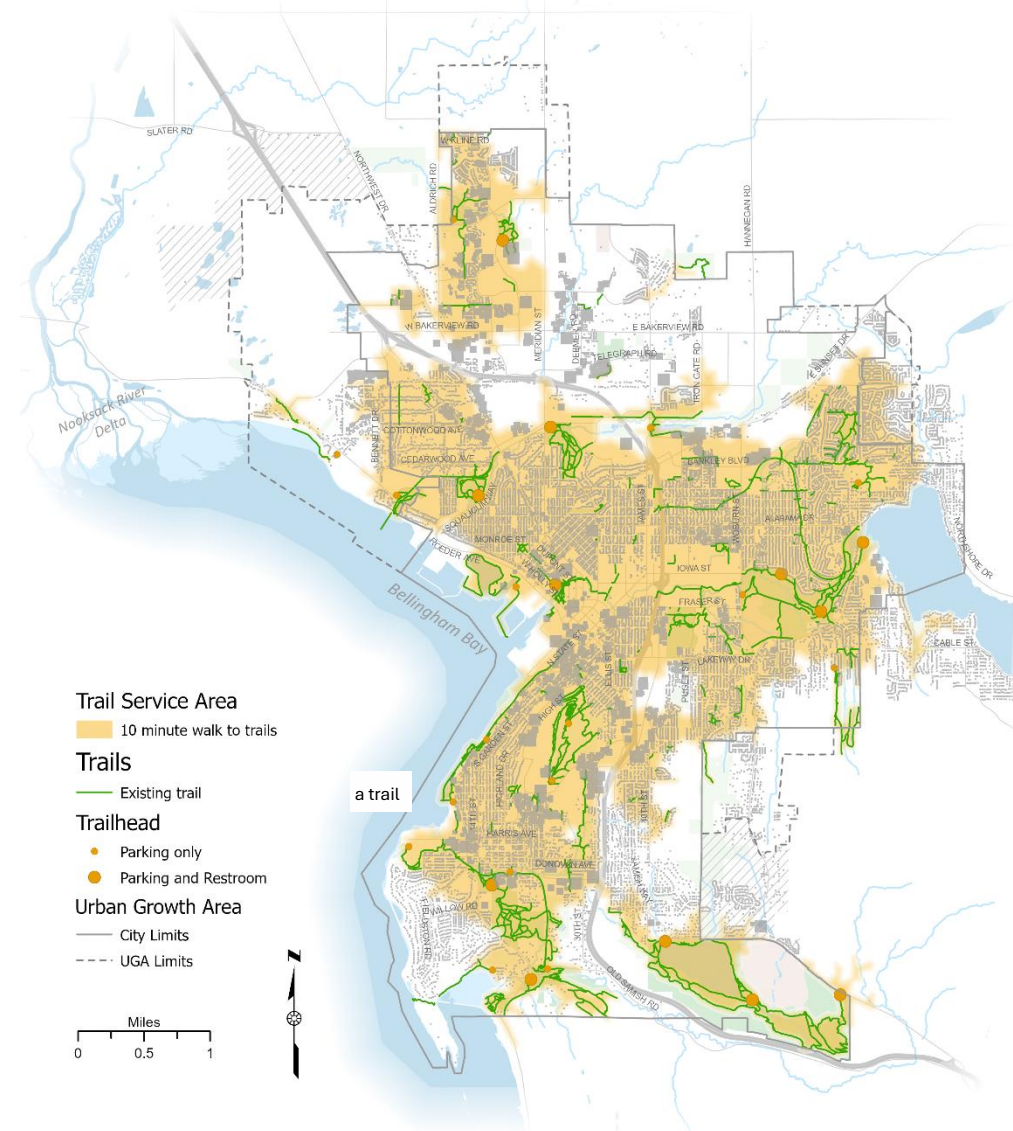


Figure 2 - 28. 10-minute walksheds to a park trail.

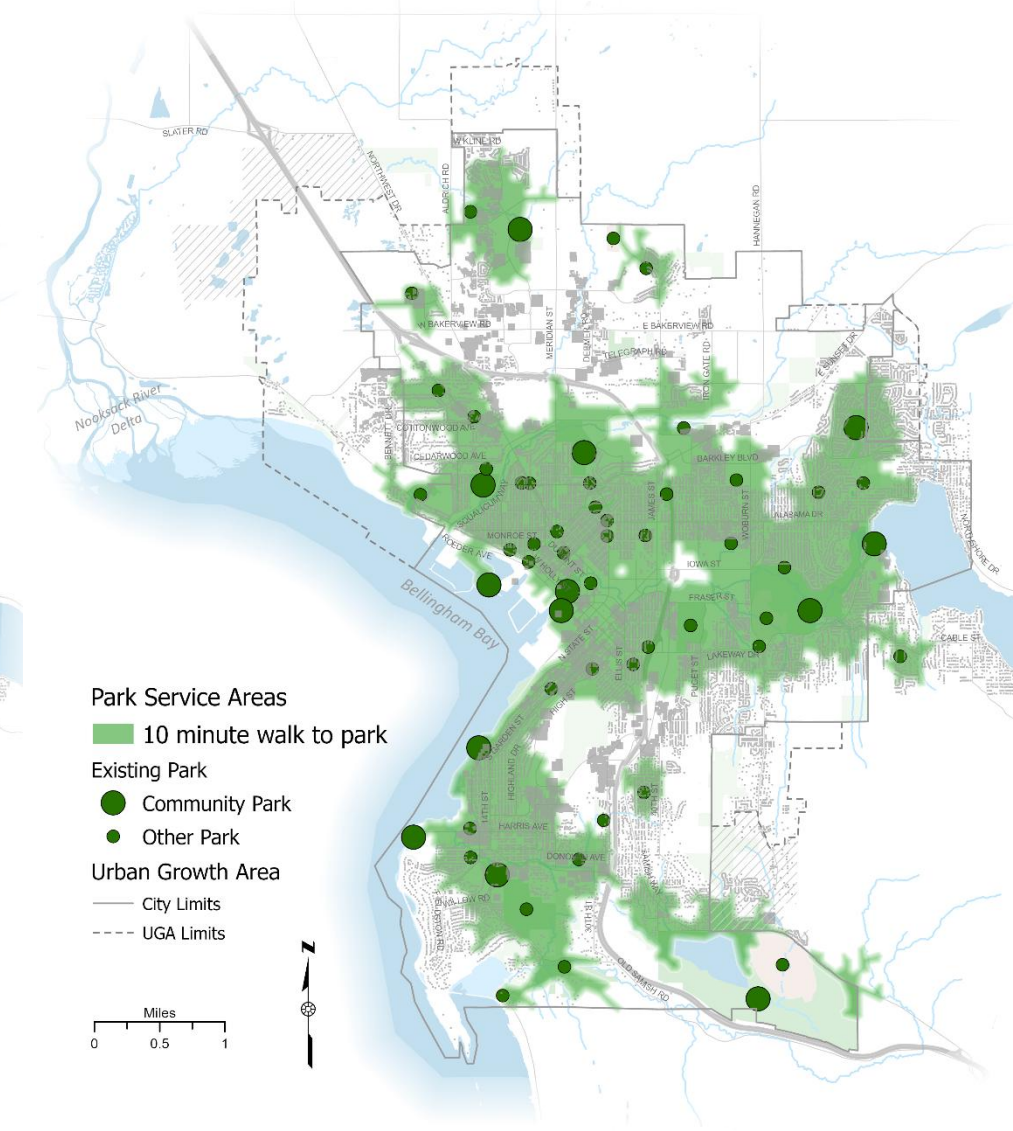


Figure 2 - 29. 10-minute walksheds to a park or special use site

2 Planning Framework & Standards

North

The northern zone is the City's newest developing area and contains the largest amount of undeveloped land in the city. It is primarily developed with multifamily housing, which frequently lacks access to recreation facilities and greenspace. There is ample opportunity for new trails, and neighborhood parks.

Central

This zone includes the oldest part of town and contains many small parks and gathering spaces, as well as access to saltwater beaches.

Whatcom (east)

There are a significant number of trails that provide access between Whatcom Falls Park, the swimming beach at Bloedel Donovan Park, and the Barkley urban village. This area has ample parks but is often crowded in the summer by beach users.

Samish

This large area represents the residential area south of Lakeway Drive and East of I-5. It has ample open space with the 200-acre Samish Crest, Lake Padden Park, and easy access to Galbraith Mountain. While the area contains large tracks of open space, much of the area lacks walking access to neighborhood parks.

South Bay

This zone is south of the downtown waterfront and west of I-5. It contains a mix of housing, commercial, Western Washington University, and large parks and open space. The zone contains a number of prized parks including Hundred Acre Wood, Woodstock Farm, Fairhaven Park, and Sehome Arboretum. The heavily populated Samish Way urban village lacks access to a park.

Survey Feedback on Improvements and Obstacles in each Zone

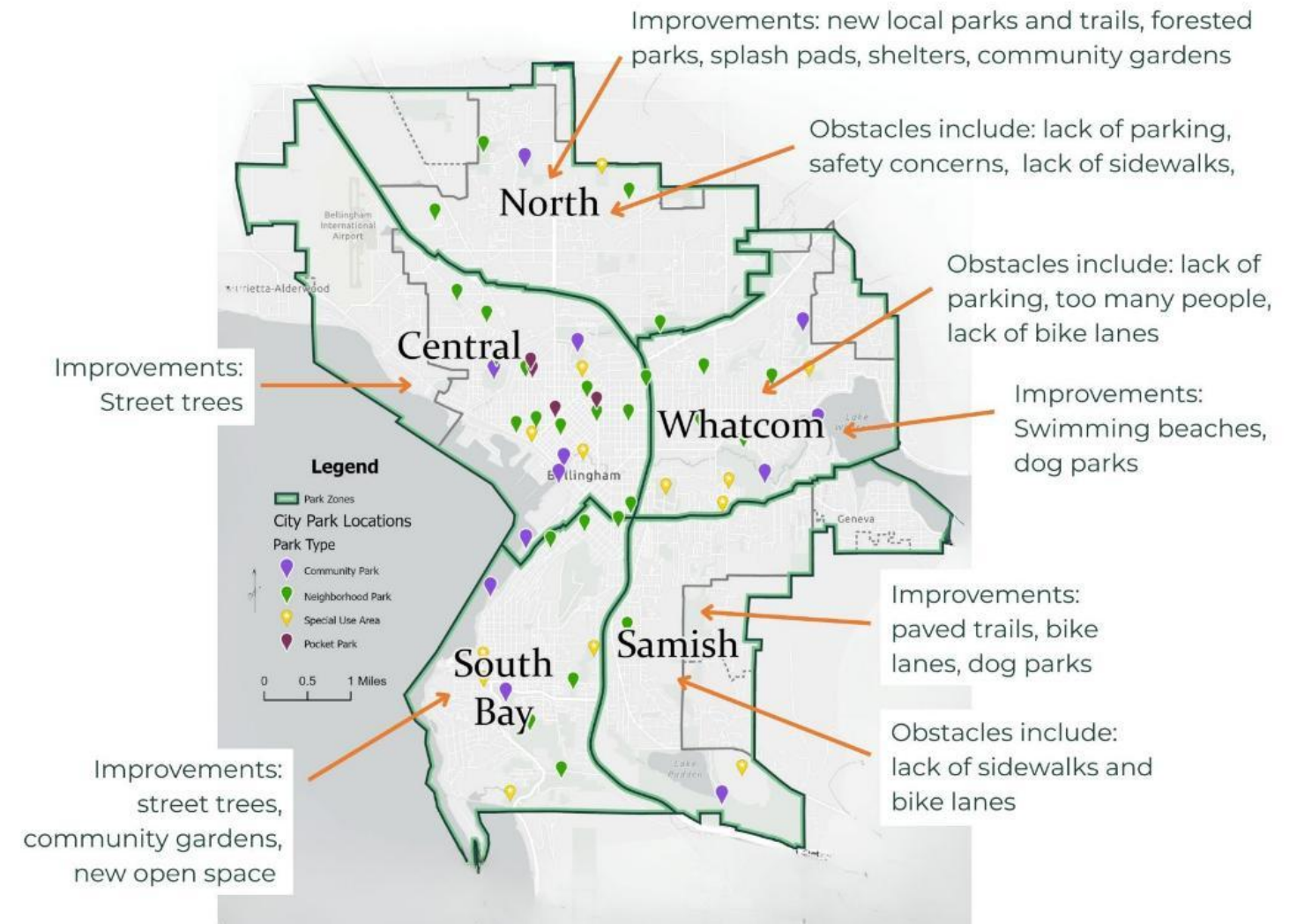


Figure 2 - 30. Improvements and barriers specific to each zone from 2025 Community Survey.

Park Condition

Overall Condition level of service: **Good**

Purpose: Evaluate park and facility usability and identify maintenance needs.

A park condition assessment was conducted to determine the current maintenance status of our parks and inform future maintenance budgeting.

The condition assessment is a high-level assessment broken into four general categories: recreational amenities, site amenities, park structures, and vegetation. This assessment was completed in the summer of 2025 and is intended to be updated on a regular basis. This assessment can also guide future efforts toward establishing system-wide maintenance standards.

Table 2-3 shows the condition assessment for neighborhood parks. The conditions assessment for community parks is included in the operations chapter.

The results show that the parks are well maintained, with some showing wear and tear associated with aging facilities and infrastructure. This assessment, paired with the staff hours spent on different facilities, can help prioritize capital improvements and staff resources. This is further described in the Park Operations Chapter. The full condition assessment is found in Appendix D.

Table 2 -3. Park Condition Assessment for Neighborhood Parks. See Appendix B for full assessment.

Site Name (Developed)	Classification	Annual Visits - 2020-2024 ave*	Recreational Amenities						Site Amenities					Park Structures					Vegetation							
			Playgrounds	Sports Courts - Bball, volleyball	Sport Fields/ Multiuse Fields	Pathways / Trails	Wayfinding /maps	Swimming Beach/Spraypark	Site Furnishings	Lighting	Signage	Rec Fencing	Parking Areas	Restrooms	Shelters/Pavilion/Gazebo	Recreation Buildings	Kiosks	Bridges	Boat Ramp	Overwater Structures	Operations shop/Storage	Natural Turfgrass	Park Trees	Irrigation	Drainage/ Stormwater	Landscaped Beds
Little Squalicum Park	NP	59,613	-	-	-	2	2	-	1	1	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2	1	-	2	-	1
Arroyo Park	NP	83,318	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	1
Birchwood Park	NP	31,195	3	1	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	1	2	-	
Broadway Park	NP	25,770	1	1	1	2	2	-	2	1	2	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	2	2	-	2	3	-	
Carl Lobe Park	NP	No Data	1	2	2	-	-	-	2	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2	-	
Cornwall Tot Lot	NP	No Data	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	
Elizabeth Park	NP	39,600	2	3	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	1	2	2	1	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	2	1	-	
Forest & Cedar Park	NP	8,535	1	1	1	2	2	-	1	-	2	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	-	3	2	2	
Fouts Park	NP	No Data	2	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	1	-	2	2	-	
Happy Valley Park	NP	6,634	2	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	1	2	2	-	2	2	2	
Harriet Spanel Park	NP	13,398	1	1	1	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	2	1	2	
Highland Heights Park	NP	No Data	1	1	-	2	2	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	1	2	2	1	-	
Julianna Park	NP	29,619	-	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	1	2	-	-	2	1	-	2	1	1	
King Mountain	NP	No Data	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	
Laurel Park	NP	28,718	2	2	1	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	2	-	-	
Lorraine Ellis Park	NP	No Data	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	
Storybrook Park	NP	No Data	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Memorial Park	NP	13,720	-	-	3	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	1	2	-	2	2	-	-	
Northern Lights	NP	No Data	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	
Ridgemont Park	NP	5,938	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	
Rock Hill Park	NP	No Data	3	1	-	2	2	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	2	2	-	2	2	2	2	
Roosevelt Park	NP	27,796	2	1	2	3	2	-	2	3	1	-	2	2	-	-	2	-	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	
Shuksan Meadows	NP	13,912	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
St. Clair Park	NP	28,824	1	-	-	2	2	-	2	2	1	-	2	2	-	-	-	-	2	2	1	-	2	2	1	
Sunnyland Park	NP	No Data	1	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	2	2	-	-	
Sunset Pond Park	NP	29,661	-	-	-	2	2	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-	2	2	1	1	

Recreational Amenities

Recreation amenity level of service: **Low**

Purpose: Compare active recreation opportunities such as swimming beaches, pickleball, and field sports to similar jurisdictions. This table also compares passive recreation facilities such as picnic shelters, gardens, and dog parks.


Table 2-4 demonstrates a mismatch between:

- The amenities in which Bellingham has historically invested (trails, open space, restrooms, playgrounds), and
- The amenities residents increasingly demand, particularly athletics, and aquatics-based recreation.

This tracks with the public demand for the following:

- Rectangular and synthetic multiuse fields
- Swimming pools
- Volleyball courts
- Outdoor and indoor fitness equipment
- Ice rinks

Table 2 - 4 Key

 Bellingham has at least 1.5 times more population using the amenity (**less amenities**) than the peer cities, or the peer cities and the NRPA average


 Bellingham has 1.5 times less population using the amenity (**more amenities**) than both the peer cities and the NRPA average.

Table 2 -4. Bellingham recreational amenities relative to peer cities and NRPA average

Recreational Amenity	Bellingham Count	Bellingham (Population per amenity)	Peer Cities Mean LOS (Population per amenity)	NRPA 2025 50k-99k (Population per amenity)	Public Priority
Playgrounds	35	3,029	3,433	3,643	High
Rectangular Fields	7	15,143	4,277	4,659	High
Swimming Pools	1	106,000	17,171	48,064	High
Skate Parks	2	53,000	37,247	61,384	High
Pickleball Courts	13	8,154	21,064	8,592	High
Volleyball Courts	2	53,000	17,751	29,214	High
Fitness Zones	0	106,000	42,354	32,500	High
Splash Pads	3	35,333	34,543	51,000	High
Disc Golf Courses	1.5	70,667	24,231	56,150	High
Ice Rinks	1	106,000	34,543	28,500	High
Bike Park	4	26,500	16,420	-	High
Miles of Trail	85	1,247	3,294	-	High
Swimming Beaches	2	53,000	25,545	-	High
Restroom Buildings	40	2,650	5,875	-	High
Diamond Fields	8	13,250	8,449	4,560	Med
Tennis Courts	7	15,143	18,814	5,818	Med
Fenced Dog Parks	2	53,000	18,301	55,250	Med
Community Garden Plots	257	412	728	-	Med
Multiuse Courts	0	106,000	10,375	25,512	Med
Multiuse Racquet Courts	2	53,000	18,614	13,339	Med
Walking/Running Tracks	1	106,000	10,375	19,700	Med
Picnic Shelters	15	7,067	4,263	-	Med
18-Hole Golf Courses	1	106,000	-	62,756	Med
Basketball Courts	24	4,417	6,859	8,447	Med-low
Synthetic Fields	1	106,000	20,393	33,799	Med-low

NOTES: Basketball Courts, Tennis Courts, Pickleball Courts, Volleyball Courts: Dedicated to a single sport (not multiuse); Fitness Zones: Fitness zones/exercise stations; Multiuse Courts: basketball, volleyball, etc.; Splash Pads: Splashpads/spray grounds/spray showers; Multiuse Racquet Courts: tennis, pickleball, etc. (Excluding racquetball/handball/squash courts.); Walking/Running Tracks: Walking/running tracks/loops; Synthetic Fields: synthetic rectangular fields.

Level of Service (LOS) Summary

The number of park amenities in relation to the number of residents is one way suggested by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) to track the city’s level of service. This includes neighborhood parks, community parks, special use parks, open space, and recreational amenities. The service level was lowered in 2020 to 28.5 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents and will need to continue to be lowered if a sustainable park system is to be achieved.

Bellingham’s population is projected to reach nearly 135,000 people by 2045, an increase of approximately 29,000 residents from today. To sustain a high level of maintenance in our parks and trails and develop new recreational amenities, the service level goal for total parkland has been decreased to 25.2 acres per 1,000 residents. Based on public feedback we have expanded the trail level of service to 0.9 miles per 1,000 residents. Our capital improvements in Chapter 7 are calibrated to the 2045 LOS amounts shown in Table 5.

Table 2 - 5. Per capita Level of Service in 2025 vs. 2045

Current and Planned Park Acreages					
Year	Total Land (Ac)	Trail (Miles)	Developed Parks (Ac)	Open Space (Ac)	Population Estimates
2025 Count	3,179	85	1,751	1,428	
2025 Count/ 1,000 residents	30.0	0.8	16.5	13.5	106,000
2045 Count	3,400	115	1,850	1,550	
2045 LOS/ 1,000 Residents	25.2	0.9	13.7	11.5	135,000

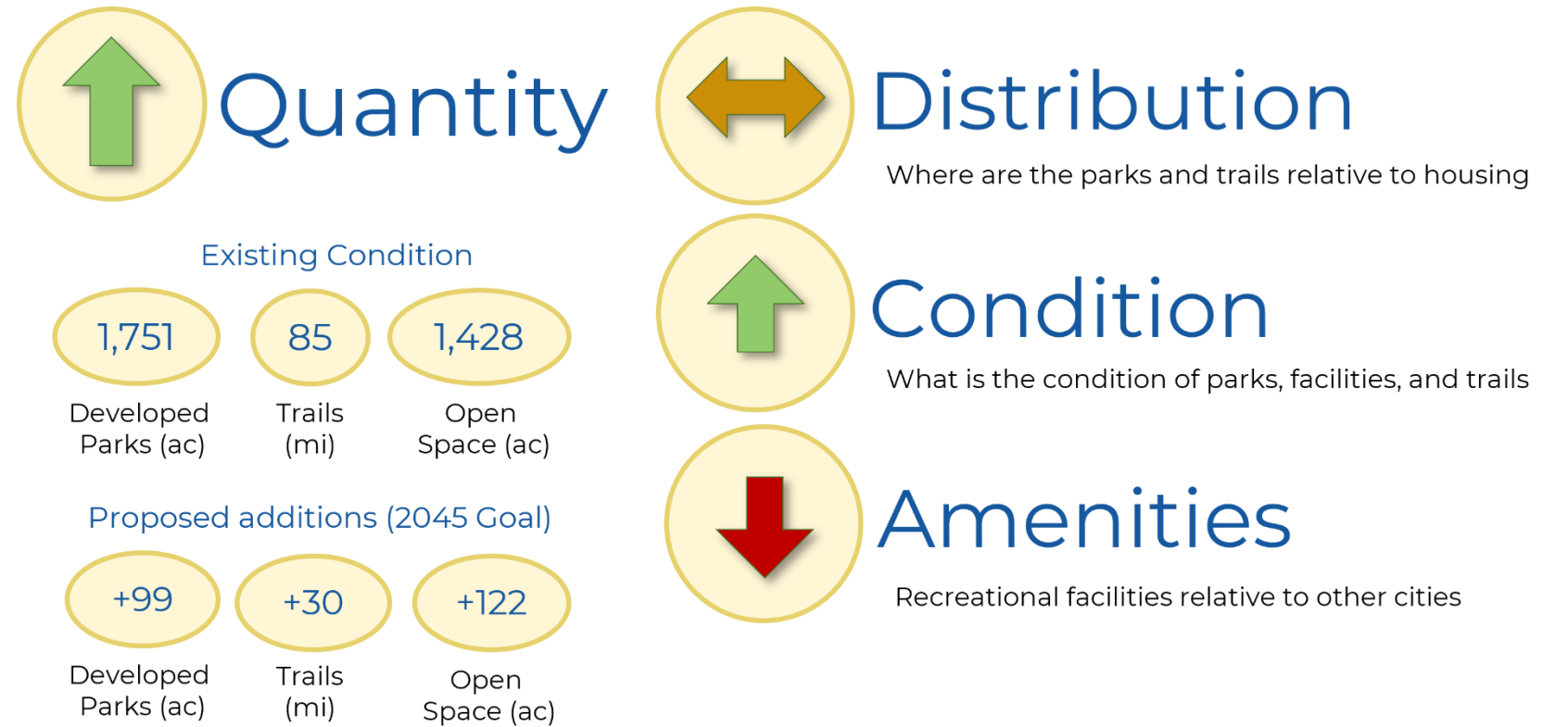


Figure 2 - 31. Summary of results relative to the four measures of service described in this chapter

Quantity (per-capita supply): Bellingham’s park system is robust relative to national benchmarks: ~85 miles of trail, ~3,179 acres of parkland, and ~30 acres per 1,000 residents. That translates to 18% fewer residents per park than similarly sized NRPA cities—i.e., more parks available per person.

Distribution (10-minute walk access): About 70% of residents can walk to a developed park and 83% can walk to a trail within 10 minutes. Access is uneven across park zones, e.g., the North and Samish zones lack walkable parks; South Bay’s Samish Way urban village lacks a nearby park; Whatcom has ample parks but summer beach use strains capacity; and Central is relatively well served.

Condition (maintenance/asset health): A 2025 condition assessment (amenities, site features, structures, vegetation) found parks are generally well maintained but are showing age-related wear.

Amenities (active recreation mix): Compared with peers and NRPA averages, Bellingham under-supplies several active amenities—e.g., 7 rectangular fields (~15,143 residents per field vs. ~4,277 peer avg), 1 swimming pool (~106,000 residents per pool), 2 volleyball courts, and 0 outdoor fitness zones—even as the system excels in trails (85 miles) and restroom buildings (40).

Chapter 3

Parks and Open Space

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Julianna Park master plan



LEGEND

- 1 SCULPTURAL ROCKS
- 2 BRIDGE WITH OVERLOOK
- 3 CREEK #1
- 4 SECONDARY PATH (CRUSHED STONE)
- 5 GREAT LAWN/BENCHES AT PERIMETER
- 6 PRIMARY PATH (PAVED)
- 7 PICNIC
- 8 INFORMAL SEATING
- 9 EXISTING WETLAND
- 10 SWINGS
- 11 NEIGHBORHOOD GATHERING PLAZA
- 12 RESTROOM & SHELTER WITH GREEN ROOF
- 13 PLAY (AGES 2-5)
- 14 PLAY (AGES 5-12)
- 15 PARK KIOSK
- 16 NATIVE PLANT BUFFER
- 17 SKATE SPOT
- 18 WOODCHIP PATHWAY
- 19 OVERLOOK/BIRD BLIND
- 20 WETLAND MITIGATION & STREAM ENHANCEMENT
- 21 SPORT COURTS
- 22 LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT PARKING LOT

3 Parks & Open Space

Parks & Open Space

Parks and Open Space make up the heart of Bellingham’s park system. They support active and passive recreation and are distributed throughout the city. Parks range in size from less than an acre (Cornwall Tot Lot) to over 700 acres (Lake Padden Park) and are classified into four types: community parks, neighborhood parks, pocket parks (new with this PROS Plan), and special use sites.

Open Space is also shown on this map. Open Space includes creeks, forests, wetlands, floodplains, shorelines, and other wildlife habitats. These sites allow residents to observe wildlife, experience nature, and recreate. This chapter includes a summary of public feedback on parks and open space, an inventory, an assessment of use, and a list of recommendations for future growth. Not all the facilities shown on the map are managed by the City of Bellingham.



Engagement Summary and Trends

Public engagement is critical in the creation of a community-based parks and recreation plan and over a year’s worth of public feedback helped to inform this plan. This section provides a high-level overview of the outreach and the feedback we received through open houses, surveys, committee meetings, and pop-up events.

The PROS Plan Community Survey was open from January through March 2025 and was completed by 2,005 participants. The survey focused on how the community uses parks, their satisfaction, barriers to use and participation, and desired improvements.

Top ten resident uses of the park system:

- Trails
- Beach and swimming
- Access to nature
- Playgrounds
- Mountain biking
- Picnic shelters
- Dog off-leash area
- Athletic fields
- Boat launch/dock
- Pickleball courts

Survey respondents generally feel most satisfied with parks, shelters and pavilions, and natural open space and habitat areas. Satisfaction with the aquatic center and indoor recreation facilities was lower.

Several questions in the survey and open house boards asked about barriers to use. The most frequently reported barriers to park use include:

- Access - including busy roads or highways, lack of parking, and a lack of ADA facilities
- Safety with others' behavior and a lack of rule enforcement



Figure 3 - 1. Poster from outreach events that shows preferences for different outdoor recreation

- Lack of year-round restrooms
- Overcrowding at the aquatic center, freshwater beaches, and ice rink

3 Parks & Open Space

Figure 3 - 2 shows a strong preference for trails, water sports, bike parks, and skate parks. This aligns with the high number of residents in the 20 – 29 age segment. This is the largest age segment in the city, with 22% of the City’s population. This group often engages in outdoor recreation like hiking, skiing, trail running, rock climbing, and camping, along with fitness activities like yoga and gym workouts.

Bellingham residents continue to demand more walking and bicycling trails. As trails increase in popularity and the community grows, there are increased user conflicts, including dogs off leash, and increasing cut-through trails causing erosion and vegetation damage.

Residents voiced the need for:

- More indoor programmable space
- Expanded aquatics and swimming access
- Equal distribution of parks, trails, and events
- Acquisition of open space and wildlife habitat
- Open undeveloped parkland by providing access and signage
- Open undeveloped parkland by providing access and signage
- Updates to basic amenities (restrooms, trash cans, bike racks, playgrounds)
- Cyclocross bike race venue

State Assessment of Outdoor Recreation Demand

In 2022 the Recreation and Conservation Office conducted a statewide survey of outdoor recreational demand¹. Participation rates in nearly all activities had increased since 2017:

- Wildlife or nature viewing + 28%
- Paddle sports + 28%
- Visiting outdoor cultural or historical facility + 27%
- Hanging out (in a park) + 19%
- Mountain biking + 18%

We see many of these trends in Bellingham. The same study also asked what factors were most important in motivating them to participate in outdoor recreation. Top five factors are listed in Figure 3 - 3. These are important considerations for how parks and open spaces are designed.

We asked the community: What are the most important needs for new park and recreation development in the next five to ten years? (recreational amenities only)

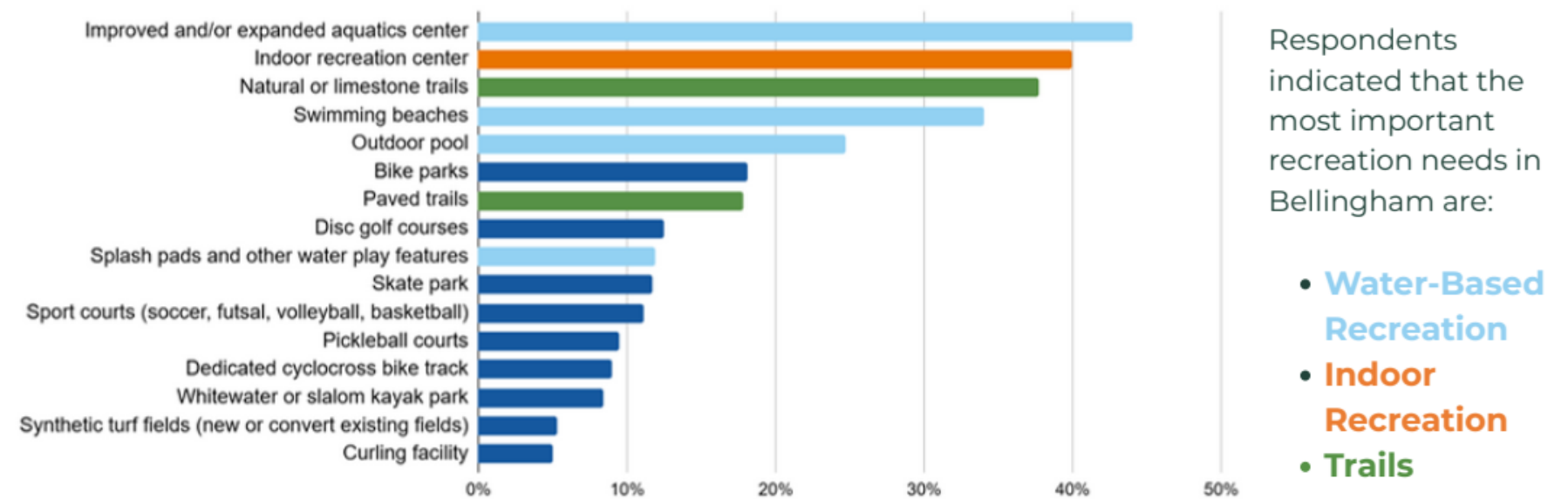


Figure 3 - 2. Chart of recreation needs from 2025 PROS Community Survey

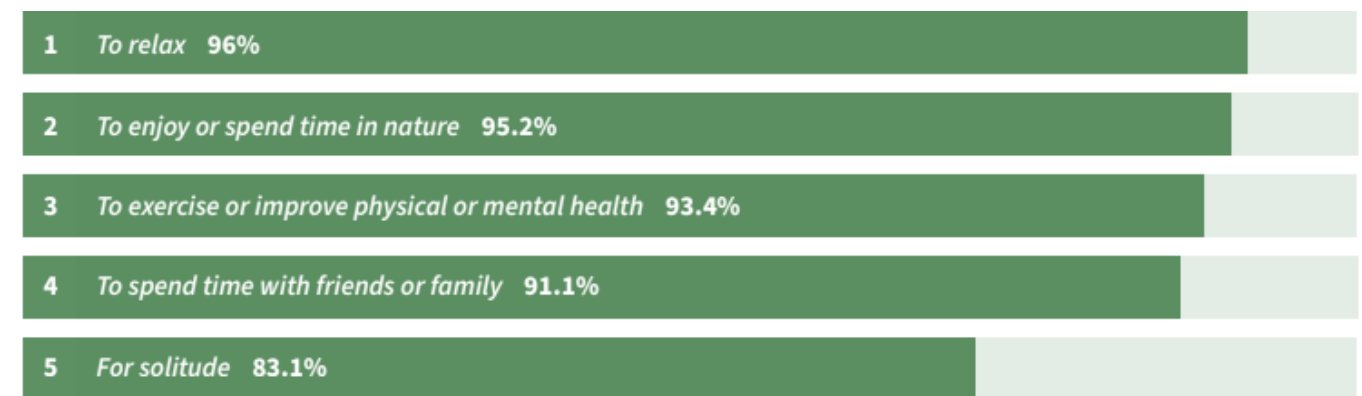
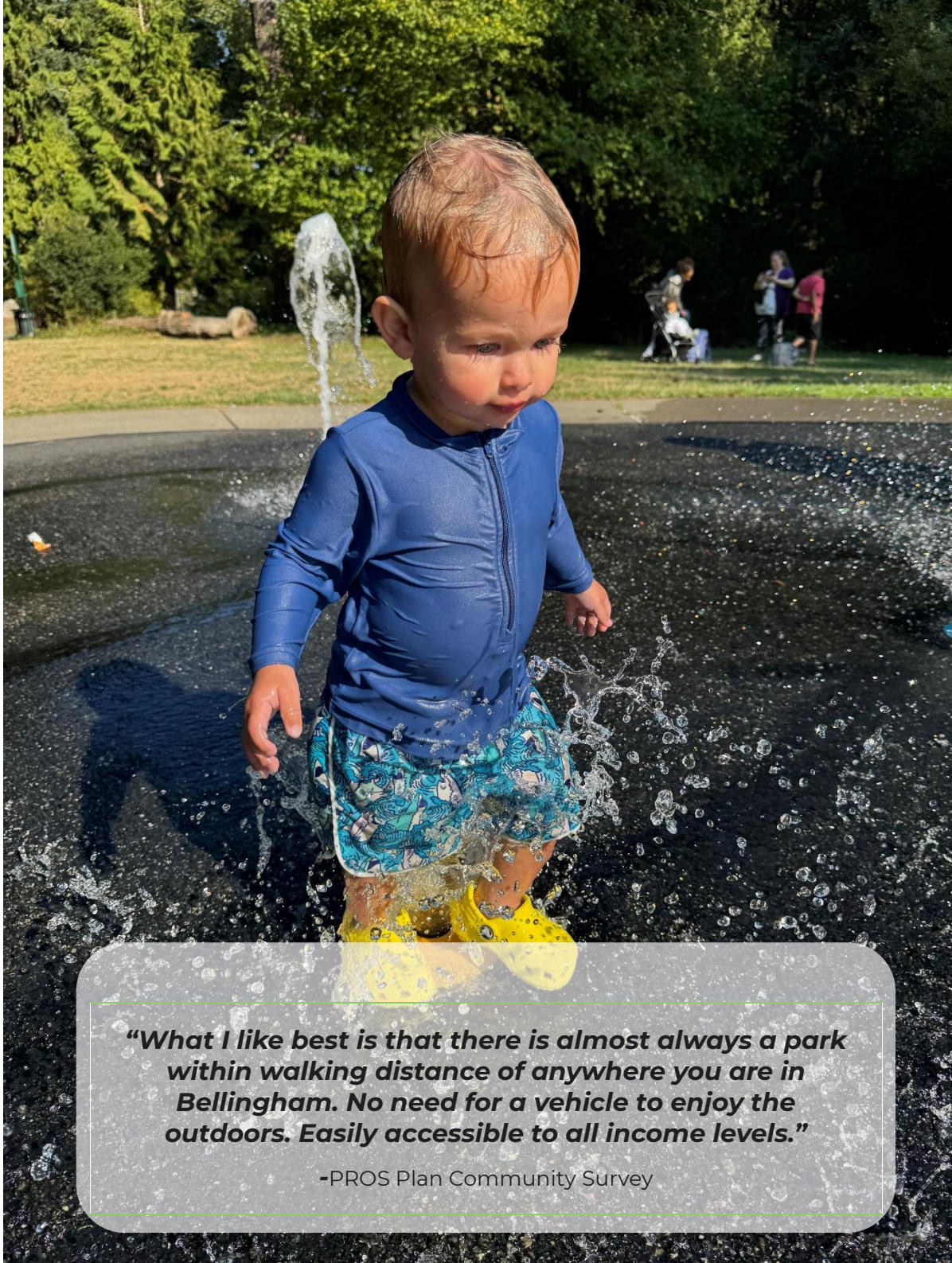


Figure 3 - 3. Recreation demand: the top motivating factors for outdoor recreation, with percentages for “very” and “moderately important”.

Focus Group Summaries

<p>Latine</p>	<p>The greatest need is a community center that provides resources, cultural/art activities, and fosters inclusivity.</p> <p>Parks in Latin America serve as cultural hubs with merchants, music, and food—parks in Bellingham could integrate more community activities to increase use.</p>
<p>Sikh/Punjabi</p>	<p>Parks could host Punjabi markets with cultural clothes, food, programs or sports</p>
<p>Young Adult</p>	<p>Interested in low-cost indoor climbing options with top roping.</p> <p>There is a need for more beaches, the crowds at Bloedel are anxiety-producing</p>
<p>Adaptive/ Special needs</p>	<p>Very little guidance materials on what park facilities are accessible for people with disabilities</p> <p>Difficulty with ADA parking stalls without on ramps or steep or very long trail routes to amenities</p> <p>Off-leash parks often do not work with guide dog users</p> <p>Fencing around play areas is needed to address elopement</p>
<p>Recreation Providers</p>	<p>Need for a combined center for aquatics and fitness, and courts and year-round turf fields</p> <p>Our dream is a covered concrete skatepark, that's got lighting and is welcoming and accessible to all</p> <p>Need fenced in playgrounds for kids who elope</p> <p>More turf baseball fields or turf existing fields</p> <p>More small, covered structures where people can gather for outdoor programming and teaching</p>



“What I like best is that there is almost always a park within walking distance of anywhere you are in Bellingham. No need for a vehicle to enjoy the outdoors. Easily accessible to all income levels.”

-PROS Plan Community Survey

Photo credit: Patrick Ulinski, Cornwall Memorial Park

Parks & Open Space Inventory

An extensive network of parks, recreation, trails and open space are available to Bellingham residents. The parks and open space inventory identifies passive and active recreation assets in Bellingham and outside of Bellingham (when managed by the City of Bellingham).

The inventory of existing facilities is organized into those that are owned or managed by the City, along with other agency facilities available to the public within the City/UGA planning area. These include Whatcom County and the Port of Bellingham. State assets are not included in this inventory. The Bellingham School District has playgrounds, gymnasiums, and event space available to the public. These are not part of this inventory, but are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, Recreation and included in Appendix C.

The inventory of existing facilities is divided into the following park classifications:

- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Pocket Park
- Special Use Site
- Open Space

Parkland is classified to assist in planning for the distribution and cost of recreation in Bellingham. Classifications inform development standards that are reflected in site planning, operations and maintenance expectations, capital costs and future staffing.

A detailed inventory of existing park facilities, organized by ownership and classification, is also included in Appendix B – 1 of this plan.

Table 3 - 1. City of Bellingham Park and Open Space Summary (full inventory can be found in Appendix B)

City of Bellingham Park Inventory - 2025							
	Population	Total Land (Ac)	Trail (Miles)	Neighborhood Parks* (Ac)	Community Parks (Ac)	Special Use Sites (Ac)	Open Space (Ac)
2025 UGA	106,000	3,180	85	327	1,040	384	1,428
Count*				32	11	14	59

*This table does not include parks owned and operated in the City by Port of Bellingham or Whatcom County. Change in the count of parks since 2020 is due to a reclassification of park types (Little Squalicum Park, Hundred Acre Wood, Arroyo Park, Civic Athletic Complex, Fountain Plaza) to more accurately reflect current use, as well as the additions of Storybrook Park, Scramble Nature Play Park, Northern Lights Park, and King Mountain Neighborhood Park. Acreage totals do not include Galbraith Mountain, or aquatic lands owned or leased by the City.

+ Includes four pocket parks

Table 3 - 2. Other park facilities within the Bellingham UGA

Non-City Owned or Managed Park Facilities			
Name	Land (acres)	Designation	Ownership
Bellingham Senior Center	1	SU	Whatcom County
Roeder Home	0.5	SU	Whatcom County
Ted Edwards (Truax) Park	3.7	NP	Whatcom County
Fairhaven - Marine Park	1.9	CP	Port of Bellingham
Squalicum - Harbor Boat Launch	3.5	SU	Port of Bellingham
Squalicum - Tom Glenn Commons	1.6	CP	Port of Bellingham
Squalicum - Zuanich Point Park	4.4	CP	Port of Bellingham
Little Squalicum Beach	3.2	NP	Port of Bellingham
Port of Bellingham Trails	5 Miles	TR	Port of Bellingham
Whatcom County Trails	1.3 Miles	TR	Whatcom County

3 Parks & Open Space

Community Park (CP)

Community parks are typically larger parks designed to cater to a broader range of activities and users. Their focus is on meeting the recreation needs of the larger community with more specialized activities, as well as preserving unique landscapes, open spaces or environmental features. They allow for group activities and offer diverse recreational opportunities, such as lighted, programmed sports facilities not typically found at the neighborhood level. Due to their larger size, they are often designed to serve both as a neighborhood park as well as having expanded and unique activities.

42,000 - 830,000 visits annually
11 sites | 1,040 acres | No change since 2020



Figure 3 - 4. Community park concept

Neighborhood Park (NP)

Neighborhood parks are the basic recreational focus and center of neighborhoods. They are developed with both active and passive recreation activities and serve those living within a ten-minute walk along a designated pedestrian route, sidewalk or trail. Neighborhood parks accommodate a wide variety of ages and user groups: youth, adults, seniors and special needs populations. Creating a sense of place by bringing together the unique character of the site with that of the neighborhood is vital to a successful neighborhood park. See list of Neighborhood Parks in Table 3 - 3.

2,000 - 80,000 Visits annually
28 sites | 326 acres | 4 new since 2020



Figure 3 - 5. Neighborhood park concept

Pocket Park (PP)



Figure 3 - 6. Pocket park concept

Pocket Parks are centrally located within neighborhoods, along streets or trail corridors, or in urban centers. Pocket parks serve a local and limited population and can hold an existing piece of art or local heritage. They are small, often one acre or less, and contain few amenities. There are no visitation numbers due to the low volume of use at most of these parks. This is a new park classification with this plan update. Fountain Plaza and Gossage Plaza are examples of pocket parks in Bellingham.

4 sites | 1 Acre | No change since 2020

3 Parks & Open Space

Special Use (SU)

The special use classification covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward a single purpose. They often fall into four general categories:

- **Cultural Facilities** – unique resources offering historical, educational, visual/performance art or other similar experiences. These include Big Rock Garden, Woodstock Farm, and Fairhaven Village Green.
- **Indoor Facilities** – focused on indoor uses, such as athletics, aquatic centers, and generally limited to the Civic Athletic Complex.
- **Unique Sites** – generally, but not necessarily, a single use of significance that draws from a larger region. These include Bayview Cemetery and Padden Golf Course.
- **Community Gardens** – These are locations with publicly leased garden plots. Typically used for growing food or flowers and managed by the local community with support from the Parks & Recreation Department. There are four publicly available gardens managed by the City. (4 Gardens, New: King Mountain Garden)

14 sites | 384 acres |



Figure 3 - 7. Special Use Site. Fairhaven Village Green Photo: Kenni Merritt

Open Space

Open space sites are generally lands with significant natural resources, unique or sensitive landscapes, or that provide buffer functions between incongruent land uses. The purpose of open space is to protect sensitive ecological landscapes, provide public access and connectivity, and preserve or restore wildlife habitat in urban areas.

Open space lands include forests, upland meadows, wetlands, and water to encourage species diversity and a range of habitats. Examples include Dewey Valley Open Space with steep slopes, old or second-growth forests, upland meadows, wetlands, and streams. A marine example includes Chuckanut Bay Open Space with tidelands, marine shorelines, estuary wetlands, meadows, and agricultural lands. Open space includes trails and interpretive facilities that increase public awareness and appreciation of significant and visually interesting ecological features. Depending on site-specific conditions, they often include amenities such as wildlife viewing areas, trailheads, parking lots, trails, and restrooms.

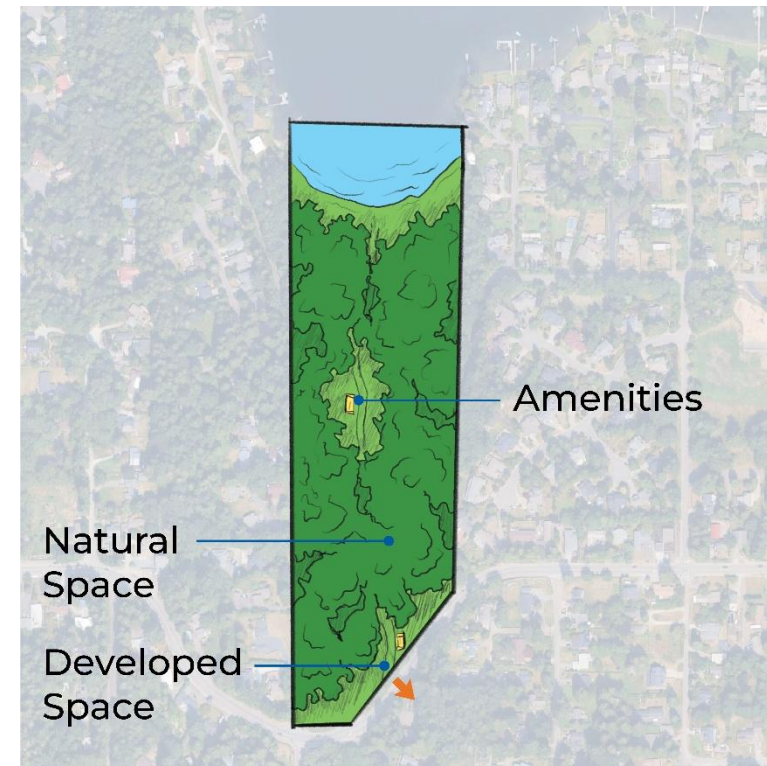


Figure 3 - 9. Open Space concept



Figure 3 - 8. Trailhead concept

3 Parks & Open Space

Open space may include portions of other City property acquired for public purposes such as future parks, stormwater management, wetland mitigation, watershed protection, and wastewater treatment sites. Open space may also be preserved on privately owned land, subject to public-use agreements or easements. Homeowner association open space lots and green spaces are not managed or maintained by the City of Bellingham or inventoried herein.

“The nation behaves well if it treats its natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.”
 – Theodore Roosevelt

New open space areas should link to existing parks and open spaces to create a network of wildlife migration corridors and natural areas, and trail corridors. These linked areas can visually define and separate developed areas in accordance with the objectives of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). The linked areas should lead to parks and larger open space sites that help visually break up development patterns and preserve large tracts of ecologically important areas. Inventory counts do not include Galbraith Mountain. Fifteen open space properties have been acquired since 2020.

47 sites > 1 acre | 1,428 acres | <100 – 50,000 visits per year

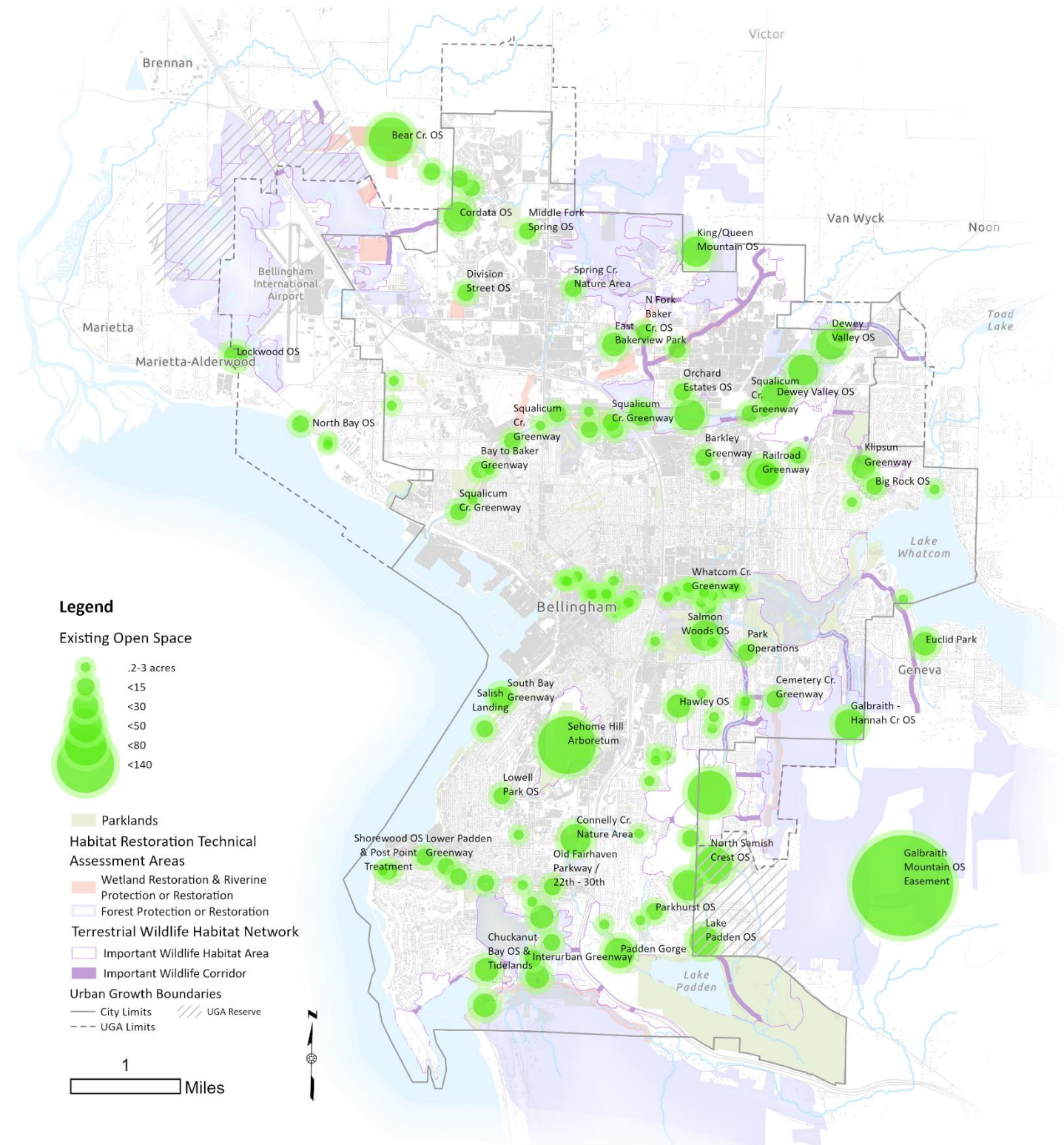


Figure 3 - 10. Existing and potential Open Space lands

Galbraith Mountain

The largest existing open space is an easement on Galbraith Mountain. In July of 2018, the City of Bellingham, Whatcom Land Trust, and Galbraith Tree Farm LLC entered into an agreement that secured the public's access to trails on Galbraith Mountain and protected over 2,100 acres from development in perpetuity. Greenway Funds contributed \$2.75 million toward the purchase of a conservation and recreation easement. For over 30 years, the Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition (WMBC) has worked to keep Galbraith Mountain open for recreational use, coordinating with hundreds of volunteers to help maintain and build trails.

Galbraith Mountain stands as a model for how conservation, recreation, and working resource lands can coexist. The City of Bellingham has a contract with WMBC to manage the 70 miles of trail on the mountain. Mainly used by mountain bikers (including class 1, electric-assisted bicycles), the trails are also open to horse riders, hikers, and trail runners. The mountain welcomes over 300,000 trail users per year.

Galbraith Tree Farm (GTF) retains the right to manage timber on the mountain. The mountain continues to be managed as a working forest in accordance with sustainable forestry principles. Both easements "protect, preserve and promote GTF's Commercial Forest Practices within the property." Management of the mountain includes the WA Department of Natural Resources and Whatcom County.

There are two main access locations to the mountain: the 184-stall parking lot on the east side of Lake Padden Park and at Whatcom Falls Park. A new trailhead on the north side of the mountain is a priority for future acquisitions.



Photo: Galbraith Mountain, Mark Roberts

3 Parks & Open Space

Park and Amenity Distribution

The geographic distribution of parks and amenities throughout the city is just as important as the quantity. The walkability between parks is an important factor in who has access to parks. City policy is to provide a ten-minute walk to a park for all residents. Figure 3 - 11 shows the distribution of developed parks and special use sites and the area within a ten-minute walk. The existing ten-minute walk service area covers 74,000 people in the City of Bellingham.

Figure 3 - 12 shows the number of developed parks by park zone. The Central zone has the largest number of parks, especially neighborhood parks. Few developed parks exist north of I-5 and in the Samish zone east of I-5. It is worth noting that Samish zone has the largest park in Lake Padden and a significant number of open space areas not included in the figure.

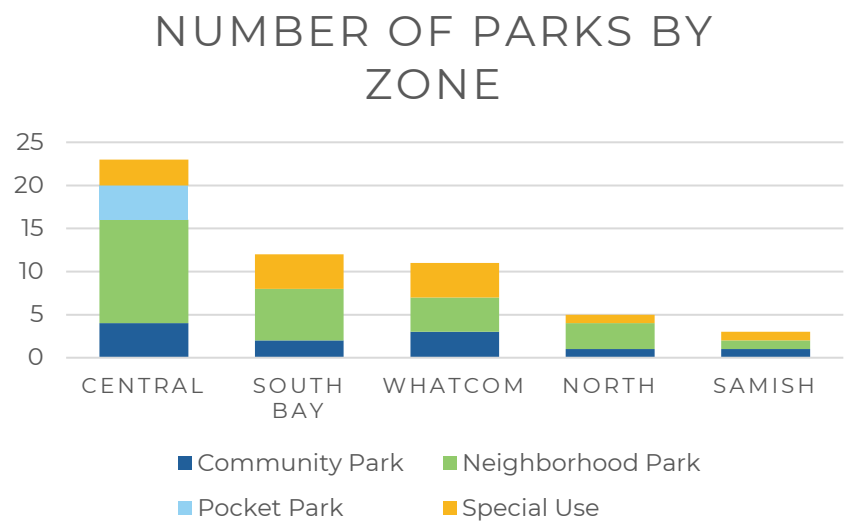


Figure 3 - 12. Park distribution by type

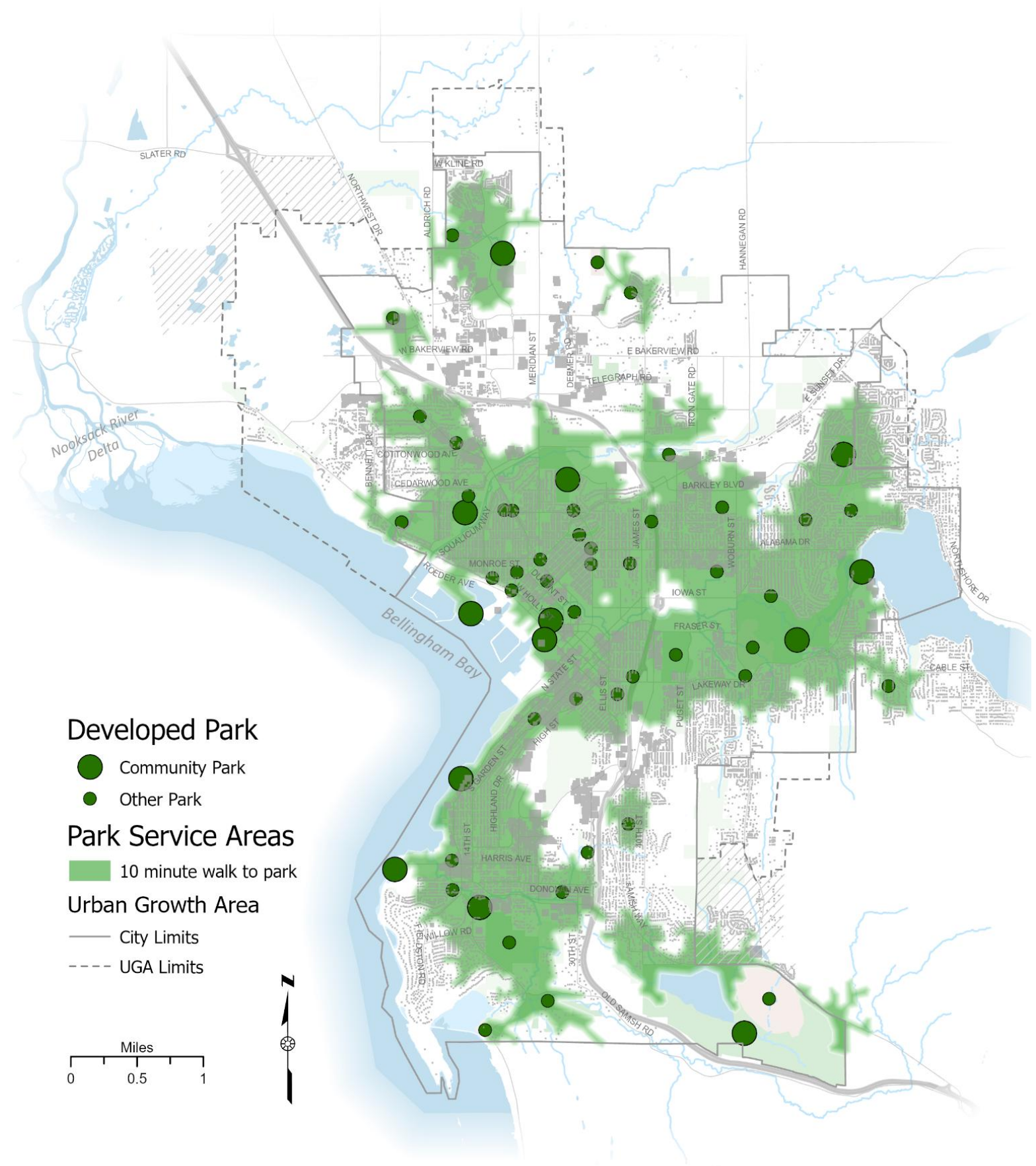


Figure 3 - 11. Ten-minute walk service area for parks

3 Parks & Open Space

In addition to the location of parks and trails, we have evaluated the distribution of popular park amenities based on our public outreach. These include playgrounds, picnic shelters, dog parks, community gardens, permanent restrooms, spray parks, pools, and swimming beaches. People travel to parks that have the amenities they desire. The most desirable amenities should be distributed to promote equity and prevent overuse.

The results show gaps in some of the most requested amenities. This information, alongside the population-based service standards, helps direct future improvements and additional amenities in this plan's recommendations.

These maps show a lack of basic facilities like picnic areas and restrooms on the north side of the city and in the Samish and Puget neighborhoods. City run community gardens are missing in the north and central neighborhoods. There is only one disc golf course and one full size skate park. The four bike parks are well distributed around town. The public has requested more water access in the summer. The main swimming beach is Bloedel Donovan Park, and it is also the only boat launch for Lake Whatcom. The three spray parks help distribute the families with children on hot days. The city has 35 playgrounds without counting the 20 available at Bellingham School District locations. Our service level for recreational amenities is low. See Level of service measures in Chapter 2 for details.

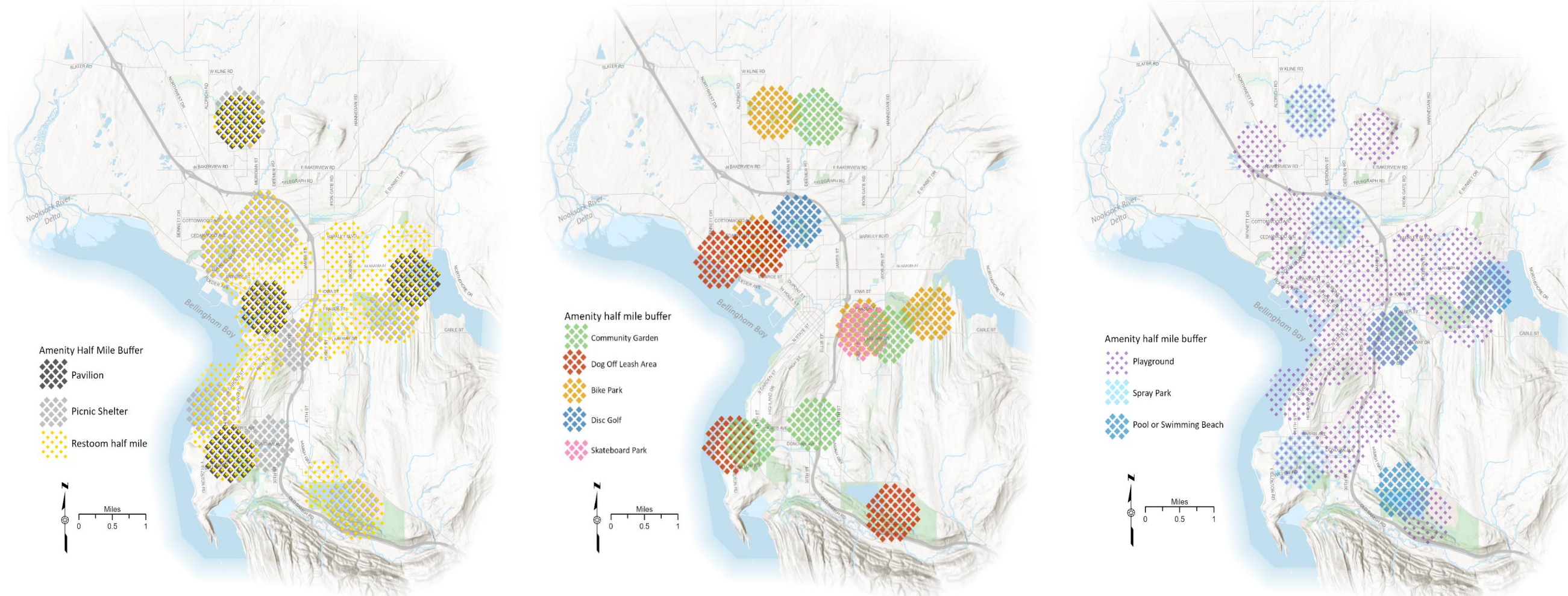


Figure 3 - 13. Maps showing general location and distribution of park amenities

Park Visitation

This section includes visitation data collected from Placer.ai, an online platform that aggregates human movement data from smartphones.

Understanding the use levels by collecting and analyzing park visitation allows the City to provide improved service levels and develop desirable parks in the future. In 2025, the City of Bellingham's park system welcomed over 100,000 people per week. This jumps to 170,000 visits during peak summer weeks and draws down to 50,000 visits during winter weeks. Figure 3 -14 shows the estimated number of park visits weekly. Community parks account for 60% of all park visits and vary most dramatically by season. This Civic Athletic Complex gets approximately a million visits per year. This is more than all of the neighborhood parks combined in one facility.

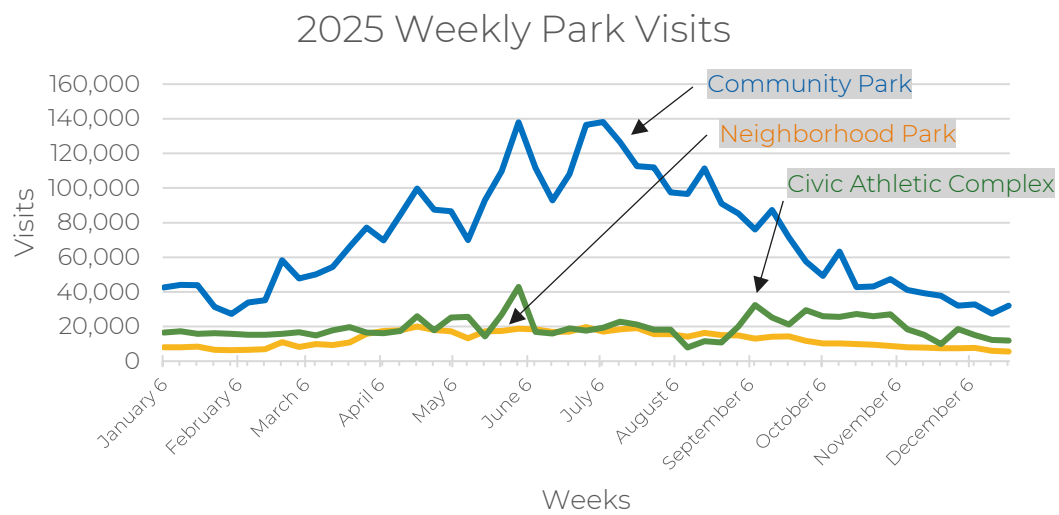


Figure 3 - 14. 2025 park visitation summary

Table 3 - 3 shows average annual visitation estimates for neighborhood parks from 2021 to 2025, along with the population within a short walking distance. Parks with larger nearby populations tend to have more visits, but this alone does not determine the level of use. Visitation appears to have more to do with the amenities, trail network, parking, and events. The sharp increase in visitation at Little Squalicum

Park reflects the opening of a new pier in 2025. The Birchwood Park increase could be due to the new bike pump track also built in 2025.

Table 3 - 3. Neighborhood Parks visits and adjacent population (*new parks since 2020)

Neighborhood Park	2025 Visits	Ave Annual Visits	% Change 2024-2025	Population within 10-min walk	Ave Work Hours 2020-2024	Park Type
Little Squalicum Park	163,650	80,420	▲ 138%	3,029		NP
Arroyo Park	72,310	79,891	▬ -17%	216		NP
Elizabeth Park	47,730	41,226	▲ 19%	4,908	438	NP
Birchwood Park	37,320	32,420	▲ 69%	1,095	279	NP
Julianna Park	41,430	31,981	▲ 10%	1,435	199	NP
Sunset Pond Park	38,980	31,525	▲ 19%	2,501	284	NP
Laurel Park	35,800	30,134	▬ -11%	7,414	240	NP
Roosevelt Park	37,420	29,721	▬ 5%	3,838	444	NP
St. Clair Park	24,280	27,915	▬ -8%	1,476	154	NP
Broadway Park	19,560	24,528	▬ -26%	6,275	476	NP
Scramble Nature Play Park*	18,710	21,087	▬ -11%	3,366		NP
Hundred Acre Wood*	19,110	17,502	▲ 10%	2,463		NP
Harriet Spanel Park	19,270	14,572	▲ 6%		199	NP
Shuksan Meadows Park	10,810	13,292	▬ -25%	2,423		NP
Memorial Park	11,530	13,282	▲ 22%	3,982	299	NP
Euclid Park	9,020	9,833	▲ 9%			NP
Forest & Cedar Park	12,870	9,402	▬ 5%	5,539	205	NP
Lorraine Ellis Park	8,000	7,267	▲ 13%	3,008	115	NP
Happy Valley Park	7,100	6,727	▬ 3%	2,463	227	NP
Fouts Park	5,050	6,113	▬ 3%	5,189	185	NP
Ridgemont Park	3,350	5,421	▼ -31%	783	137	NP
Sunnyland Park	4,300	3,900	▬ -2%	3,029	123	NP
Rock Hill Park	2,800	3,000	▬ 0%	-	151	NP
Carl Lobe Park	4,040	2,960	▲ 15%	2,538	112	NP
Cornwall Tot Lot	3,610	2,770	▲ 50%	2,169	90	NP
Highland Hights Parks	2,100	2,033	▬ -9%	1,550	151	NP
King Mountain Park* (open 2025)	No Data		No Data	703		NP
Northern Lights Park* (open 2025)	No Data		No Data	666		NP
Storybrook Park* (open 2026)	No Data		No Data	2,462		NP

Projects and Action Recommendations

Projects with a specific location were analyzed geographically to provide a score based on level of service, number of people served, and social vulnerability (equity).

Figure 3 - 15 maps these three criteria. Projects received higher scores if they addressed service gaps, ranked high on the Social Vulnerability Index, and served a large number of people.

In Table 3 - 5, these three criteria are scored and summed in the “LOS, Equity, and Demand” field, with a maximum possible score of 2.5. This score was combined with the principles score and project size/resource needs to estimate whether completion is a short-, medium-, or long-term goal.

The recommendations included in this chapter are intended to provide measurable steps to achieve policies linked below:

- [Play](#)
- [Partnerships](#)
- [System Resilience](#)
- [Conservation](#)
- [Equity](#)
- [Design](#)

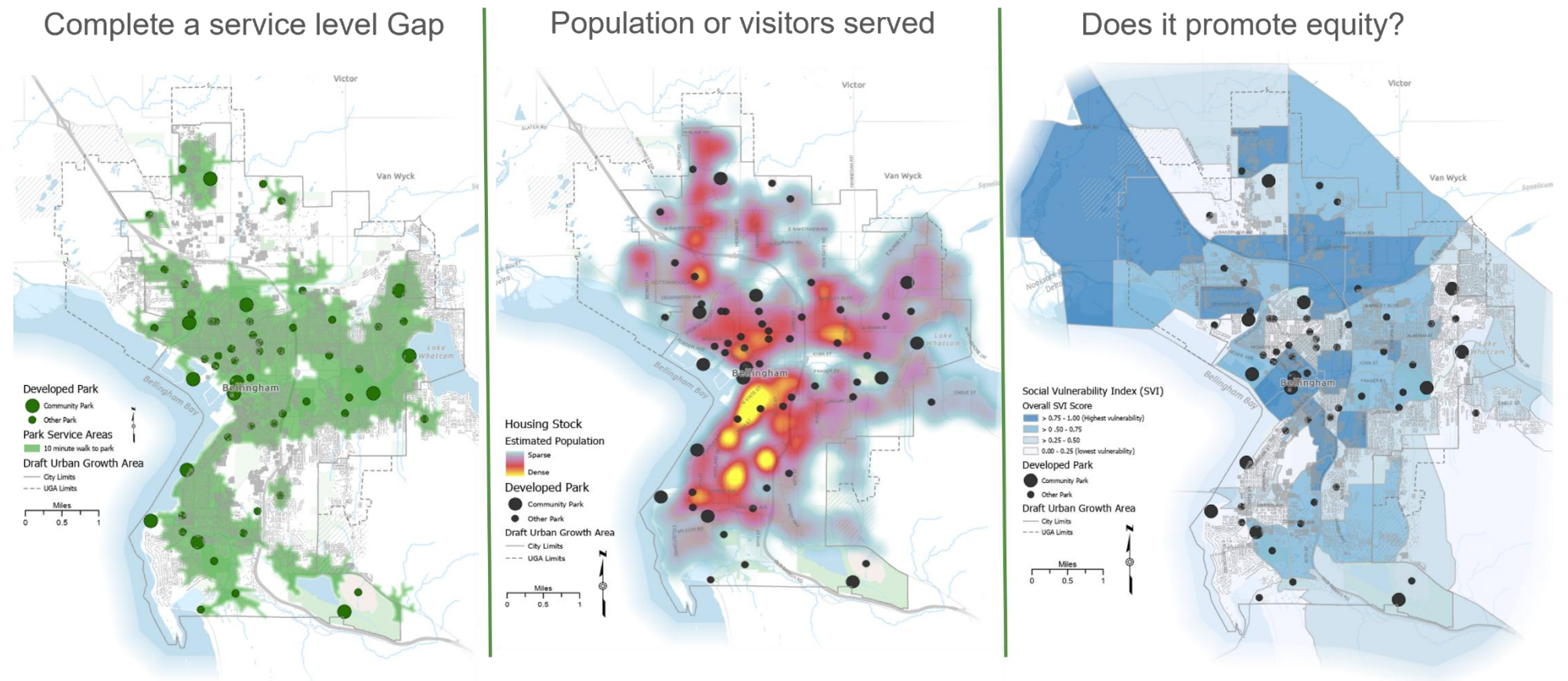


Figure 3 - 15. Spatial criteria used to assist in the prioritization of projects

3 Parks & Open Space

The tables in this section identify projects and actions to be completed within the 20-year horizon of this plan. Each project should be measurable and produce outcomes aligned with the plan's guiding principles found in Chapter 2.

As Bellingham's urban growth area develops, parks should be constructed in order to maintain a 10-minute level of service. The general location of these recommended parks are shown in Figure 3 – 16.

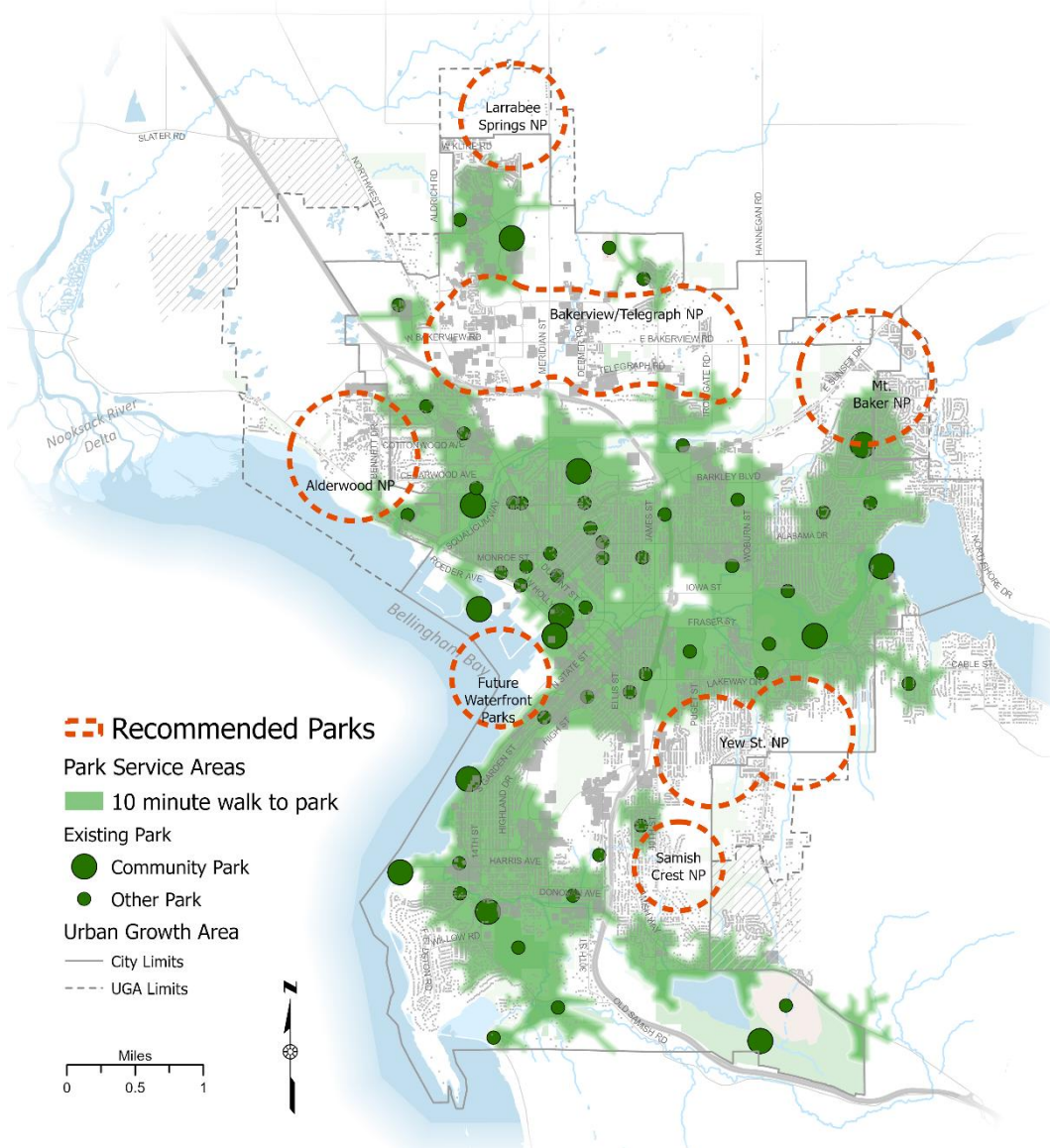


Figure 3 - 16. Recommended Parks for a 10-minute service standard.

Table 3 - 4. Recommended Parks and Open Space Actions

Park and Open Space Actions	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
Pursue stable, long-term funding options for park facilities and staffing. Project operational costs over time to strategically plan for future financial stability	Ongoing			✓	✓	✓		✓
Coordinate with the Port of Bellingham to develop parks based on development thresholds in the Waterfront District Subarea Plan	Ongoing	✓		✓		✓	✓	
Integrate historic and cultural resources, and elements of the natural landscape when developing or improving park facilities	Ongoing				✓	✓	✓	✓
Meet annually with non-profits and governmental agencies on the management of recreation on Galbraith Mountain Tree Farm	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Work with developers to ensure that adequate park facilities are provided to serve new growth and development as shown in the recommended park facilities figure	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Evaluate service gaps to identify opportunities to add recreation facilities and amenities to underutilized parks	Short term	✓			✓		✓	✓
Add year-round restrooms at parks based on staff availability and public demand	Short term	✓					✓	✓
Improve public information on park amenities, including accessible features	Short term	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Implement low impact development measures, native landscaping, and integrated pest management to minimize environmental impacts in new parks.	Short term				✓	✓		✓
Develop a Lake Padden Golf Course Master Plan	Mid term	✓		✓	✓			✓
Acquire additional open space in areas identified in the Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment and the City of Bellingham 2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis	Mid term			✓	✓	✓		✓
Work with advisory committees to prioritize the acquisition of open space lands that provide trail and wildlife connectivity between parks and open spaces	Mid term	✓	✓			✓		✓
Periodically review land ownership to surplus underutilized lands that could better serve the City's goals around housing and industrial lands, specifically on Meridian St. and Samish Crest	Mid term				✓		✓	
Develop a city-wide management plan for public open space that is consistent with best practices for invasive species control, wildfire risk, habitat value, and provides climate respite for the community	Long term			✓	✓	✓		✓

3 Parks & Open Space

Table 3 - 5. Project Prioritization for Parks, Special Use, and Open Space

Location	Project Description	Park Type	LOS, Equity, and Demand Score	Principles score	Prioritization	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Design
Bear Creek OS	Develop access, including trailhead, parking, and trails	OS	☆ 0.412	★ 4	0 - Ongoing	x	x			x	x
Salish Landing	Construct Salish Landing Park Phase I	CP	★ 0.921	★ 4	0 - Ongoing	x	x			x	x
Waterfront Skate Park	Partner with stakeholders to design, fund, and develop a waterfront skate park	SU	★ 0.998	★ 3	1 - Short term	x		x			x
Lee Memorial Park	Master Plan and develop Lee Memorial Park	NP	★ 0.984	★ 3	1 - Short term	x		x			x
Fouts Park	Playground replacement	NP	★ 0.936	★ 3	1 - Short term	x			x		x
Happy Valley	Park improvements & playground replacement	NP	☆ 0.603	★ 3	1 - Short term	x			x		x
Galbraith Mountain	Acquire and improve parking and access from the north	OS	☆ 0.400	★ 3	1 - Short term		x	x			x
Bakerview Park	Plan and construct East Bakerview Neighborhood Park	NP	★ 1.402	★ 4	1 - Short term	x	x			x	x
Samish Crest	Master plan and construct trail and restoration improvements	OS	★ 0.920	★ 4	2 - Mid term	x	x			x	x
King and Queen OS	Develop trailhead and complete trails at King and Queen Mountain Greenway	OS	★ 0.733	★ 4	2 - Mid term	x	x			x	x
Bloedel Donovan Park	Replace rowing dock with fully accessible non motorized boat launch	CP	★ 0.664	★ 4	2 - Mid term	x		x	x		x
Civic Athletic Complex	Geri Fields upgrades, scoreboard, lighting assessment, stadium turf replacement, and ADA wayfinding at the stadium	SU	★ 1.666	★ 3	2 - Mid term	x			x		x
Birchwood Park	Birchwood Park playground improvements	NP	★ 0.896	★ 3	2 - Mid term	x			x		x
Big Rock OS	Construct master plan improvements at Big Rock Garden	SU	☆ 0.013	★ 3	2 - Mid term	x			x		x
Telegraph Rd Pocket Park	Add park amenities utilizing existing infrastructure	NP	★ 1.264	★ 2	2 - Mid term	x					x
Sunset Pond Park	Add playground, restroom, and hand boat launch	NP	★ 1.022	★ 2	2 - Mid term	x					x
N Samish Hill area	Acquire and develop a new neighborhood park	NP	★ 0.864	★ 2	2 - Mid term	x					x
Hundred Acre Wood	Complete the implementation of Hundred Acre Wood Master Plan	NP	★ 0.825	★ 2	2 - Mid term		x				x
Lake Padden Park	Implement projects in the Lake Padden Recreational Assessment (2023): Multipurpose field redevelopment, beach rehabilitation, trail and shoreline erosion	CP	★ 1.179	★ 4	2 - Mid term	x	x			x	x
Elizabeth Park	Elizabeth Park playground replacement	NP	☆ 0.142	★ 3	2 - Mid term	x			x		x
Squalicum Creek Park	Improve athletic fields and complete master plan elements	CP	☆ 0.397	★ 2	2 - Mid term	x					x
Little Squalicum Park	Little Squalicum Park restroom, parking, and accessibility improvements	NP	☆ 0.192	★ 3	2 - Mid term		x		x		x
Civic Athletic Complex	Design and develop a recreation center and redevelopment of the aquatic center	SU	★ 1.666	★ 3	3- Long term	x		x			x
Dewey Valley OS	Master plan, develop trails and trailhead at Dewey Valley OS	OS	★ 0.760	★ 3	3- Long term	x				x	x
Samish UV Pocket Park	Develop pocket park/plaza in Samish Way Urban Village	PP	★ 1.920	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x
Happy Valley	Develop pocket park in Happy Valley	PP	★ 1.646	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x
Julianna Park	Develop Julianna Park Phase 2	NP	★ 0.910	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x
Boulevard Park	Clean up of South State Street Manufactured Gas Plant	CP	★ 0.831	★ 2	3- Long term					x	x
Van Wyck Park	Master Plan and develop Van Wyck Park	NP	★ 0.784	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x
Cordata Park	Develop Phase 3 (shade tree planting, boulder and log placement, roof for	CP	★ 0.616	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x
Little Squalicum Park	Renovate pier structure for long term public access	NP	★ 0.192	★ 2	3- Long term				x		x
Arroyo Park	Add parking, ADA access and trail connectivity to Woodstock Farm and develop a	SU	★ 0.150	★ 2	3- Long term	x					x

Chapter 4

Trails

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Photo credit: Jonathan A. Schilk, Storybrook Park



4 Trails

Trail Facilities

Recreational trails are a vital part of Bellingham's identity and connect people to the spaces that define our city. With an extensive network of trails, Bellingham offers opportunities for everyone - whether you're a hiker, runner, nature enthusiast, or commuter. These trails weave through neighborhoods and streetscapes, creating a seamless link between urban life and some of the most treasured natural areas. From natural surface single-track trails to wide, paved urban corridors, the system provides spaces for exploration, relaxation, and connection with nature. Trails are more than pathways—they are essential to the health, mobility, and quality of life for our community.

Management Responsibilities:

Design & Development

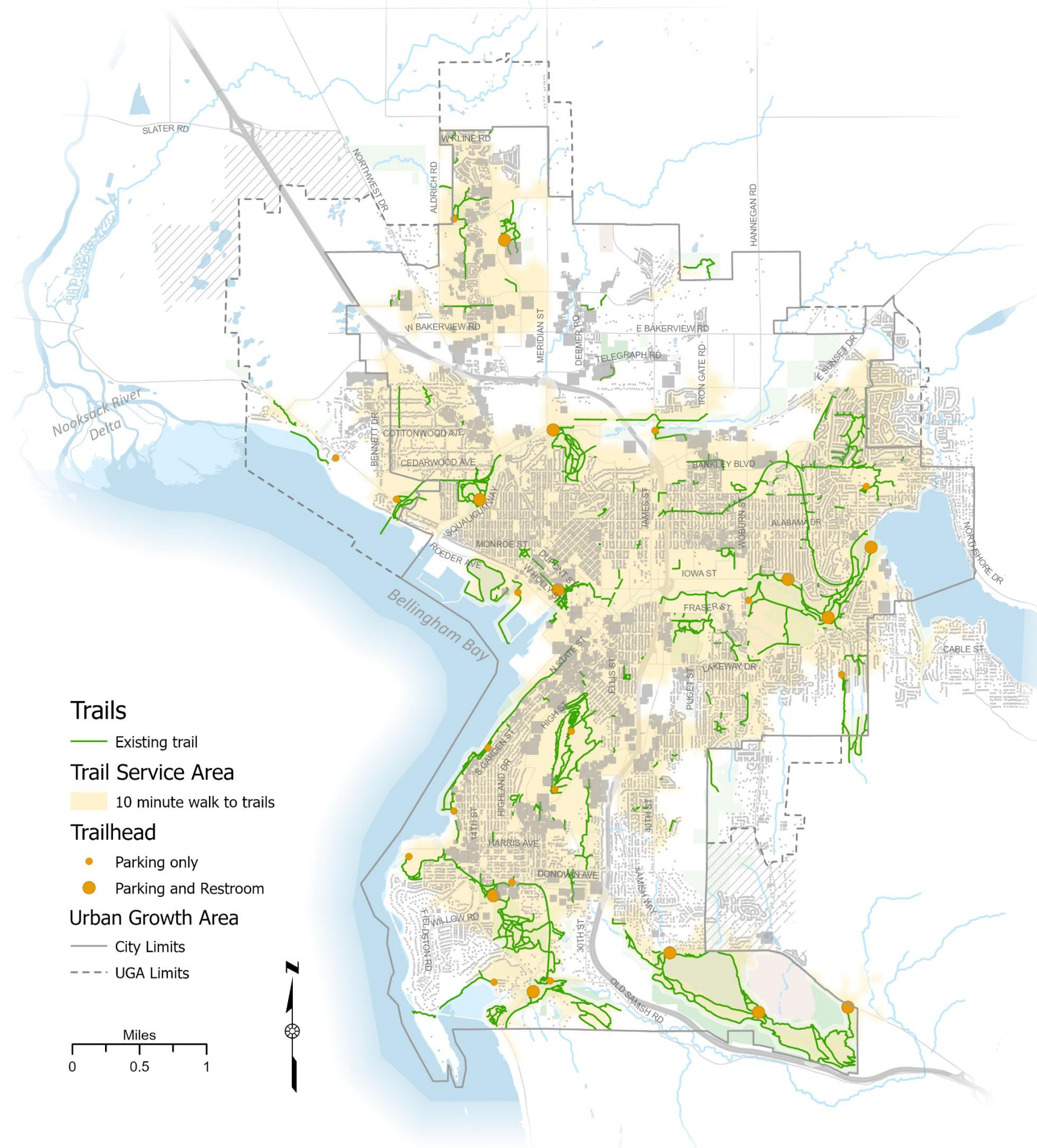
Land acquisition, trails, trailheads, and amenities, mitigation plans, signage

Operations

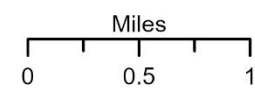
Surfacing, mowing, invasive species removal, forest management, mitigation management, signage and maintenance, volunteer coordination

Recreation

Programming



- Trails**
- Existing trail
- Trail Service Area**
- 10 minute walk to trails
- Trailhead**
- Parking only
- Parking and Restroom
- Urban Growth Area**
- City Limits
- - - UGA Limits



Engagement Summary and Trends

Public engagement is critical in the creation of a community-based parks and recreation plan and over a year’s worth of feedback helped to inform this plan. This section provides a high-level overview of the outreach and the feedback we received through open houses, surveys, committee meetings, and pop-up events. Top priorities for improvement from public feedback:

- Improve wayfinding between trails
- More low impact, natural surface trails and paved trails
- ADA signage and trail accessibility for adaptive users
- Complete trail corridors and loop trails
- Connect to regional trails
- Upkeep on trail surfacing and vegetation

The PROS Plan Community Survey was open from January through March 2025. This survey was taken by 2,005 participants. The survey focused on how the community uses parks, their satisfaction, barriers to use and participation, and desired improvements.

Most survey respondents have used trails within the past year, which is the highest among all park amenities. Respondents indicated their top budgetary priority was maintaining current facilities, followed by developing new trails and connecting parks.

Three of the top ten things that participants like most about the park system have to do with trails:

- **Connectivity of the parks through the trail system**
- **Trail network**
- Quantity of parks
- Park variety/diversity
- Park maintenance, cleanliness, and upkeep
- Connections to nature and green feeling
- Affordability
- **Bike friendly trails**
- Wooded areas
- Accessibility

Which of the following features have you or someone in your household used in a City-managed park, trail, or open space in the last year? (Check all that apply)

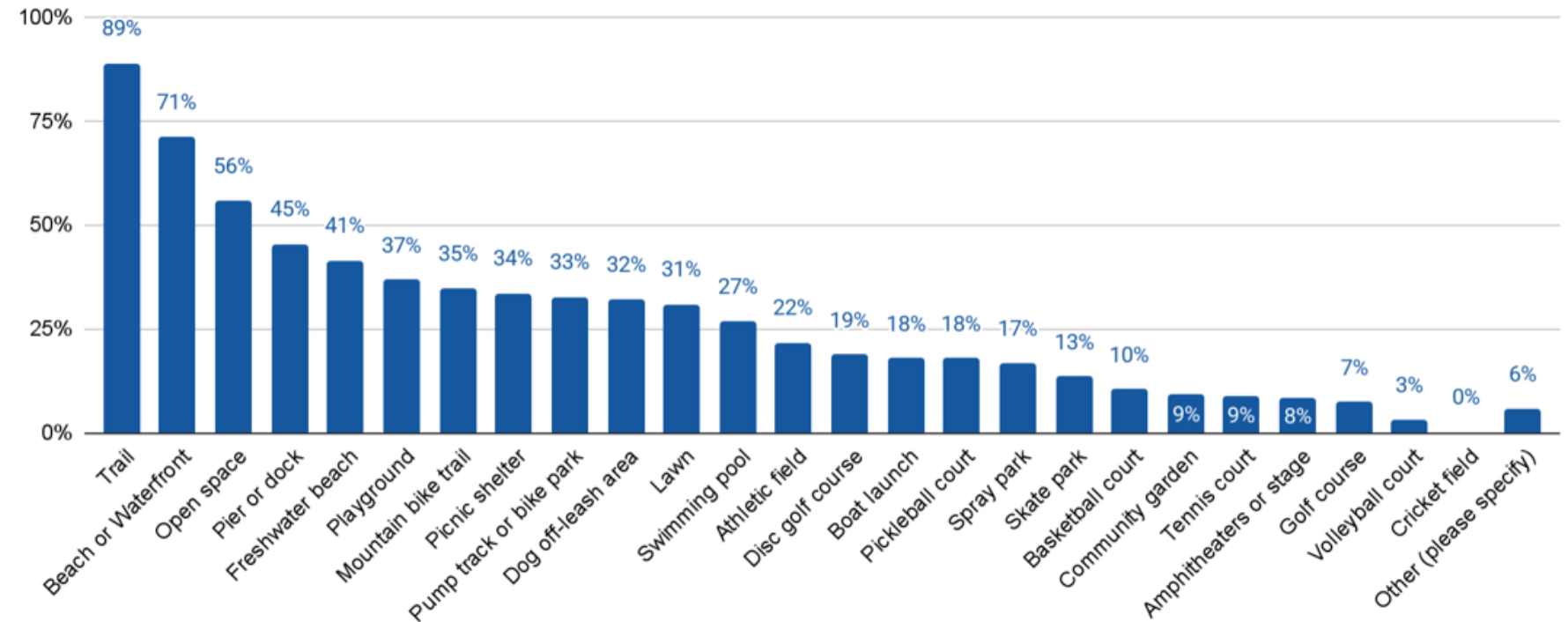


Figure 4 - 1. Survey results showing trails as highest used recreation Facilities

4 Trails

Similar to national trends, Bellingham residents continue to desire more multimodal trails. Figure 4-3 shows the locations of future trails that were most requested at open houses. Attendees were asked to place a dot on locations where they would like to see trail improvements. Popular requests were Bay-to-Baker trail, Boulevard Park to Salish Landing overwater walkway, Samish Crest, Woodstock Farm to Chuckanut Bay, and Toad Creek trail.

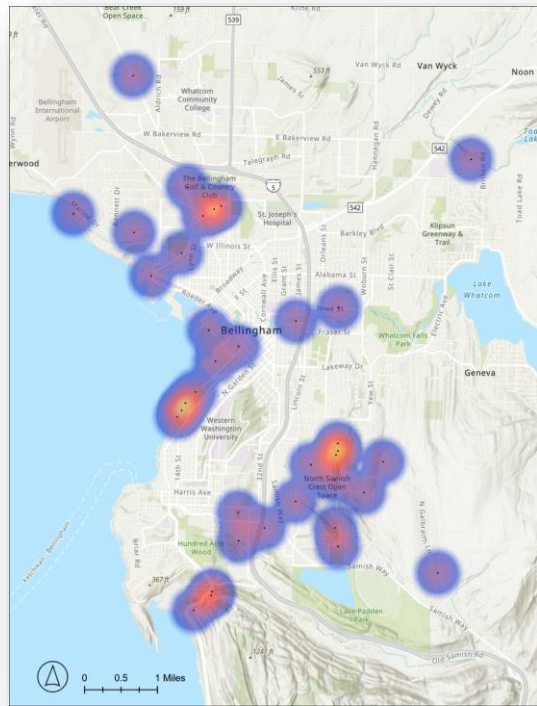


Figure 4 - 3. Results of open house feedback on trail needs.

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how the City maintains parks, trails, and recreational

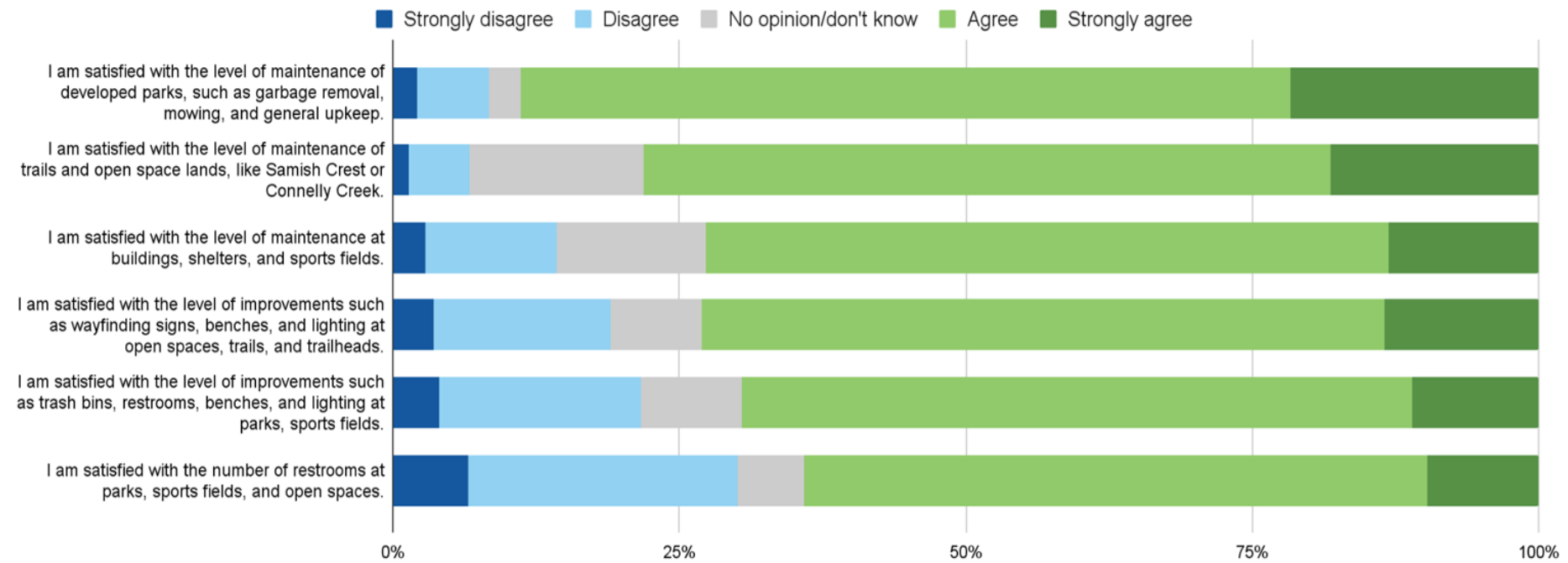


Figure 4 - 2. Survey Results showing need for additional amenities on trails.

“The largest gap I see is pedestrian/bicycle access between certain areas. This is as much, if not more, about practical access than recreation, though solving the issue for one would solve it for both. For example, I can bike almost exclusively on trails from Fairhaven to Bloedel Donovan, which is great. But getting to Cordata requires bike lane usage on Northwest (dangerous, especially at roundabouts) then Aldrich (even more dangerous).”

Focus Group Summaries

Focus group meetings were intended to gather information from those we did not hear from in our surveys and those that have a unique need or relationship to the park system. A complete summary is available in Appendix A-2.

Sikh/Punjabi	<p>Need for walking trails with benches for elders.</p> <p>Trails provide access for many older Sikhs that do not have a vehicle.</p>
Young Adult	<p>Older teen programming like group runs, races, cyclocross, robotics club, and education about different cultures is needed.</p>
Adaptive/ Special needs	<p>Very little guidance materials on what park facilities are accessible for people with disabilities; difficulty with ADA parking stalls without on ramps or steep or very long trail routes to amenities;</p> <p>Trails need signage for difficulty level and ADA barriers like steps and steep; more adaptive trails for bikes on Galbraith along with functional bus access to the southern trailhead (trails); accessible sidewalks to get to parks are often missing (trails)</p>

“As a disabled, homebound, single mother, I spent five years, saving and planning to make this move to Bellingham. It’s the best place I knew to bring up a child connected to the natural world and to community by Bellingham’s superior set of trails and walkability standards”

2025 PROS Plan Community Survey



Trails Inventory

For the purpose of the PROS Plan, trails are generally limited to non-motorized off-road linear pathways. Trails are intended to form a network linking neighborhoods, parks, open spaces, employment centers, and schools.

There are approximately 85 miles of maintained trails in the City of Bellingham, which is an increase of 5 miles since 2020. This does not include over 5 miles of trails shown on the map are managed by the Port of Bellingham.

generally usable by people of all ages and skills. While multi-use trails are preferred, not all trails are appropriate for all uses. Narrower trails or trails in environmentally sensitive areas may be suitable for pedestrians only. Trails in Bellingham are often constructed with crushed limestone, which provides a smooth and durable surface, is flexible enough to handle shifting roots, and easier to maintain than paved options. It is also a low carbon option given that it is locally sourced and does not require cement. Select trail corridors, including those within the Waterfront District, should be concrete or asphalt to allow for greater flexibility of use and improved accessibility. In open space areas with a low volume of use, a lower impact native trail surfacing and width is appropriate. Examples of these trails exist in Arroyo Park and Sehome Arboretum.

Trail Length by Park Zone

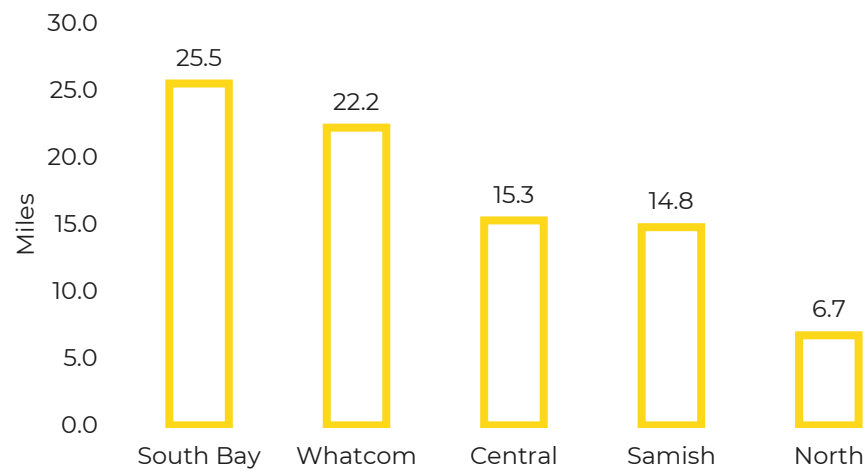


Figure 4 - 4. Trail mileage by park zone

Existing Trail Surfacing in miles

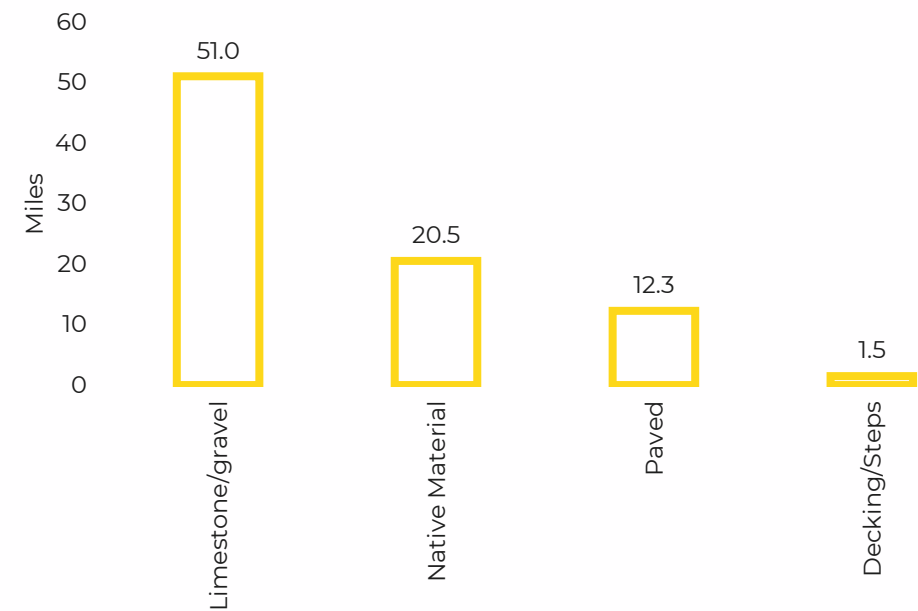


Figure 4 - 5. Trail surface materials in miles

Trail Design and Amenities

Trails should be developed for a variety of recreational and transportation uses, including walking, rolling, running, and horseback riding. Trail widths and surfacing vary depending on use type, volume, and location.

Our multi-use trails are designed to meet Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and American Association of State Highway & Transportation Officials (AASHTO) trail standards. Trails may be concrete, asphalt or a fine crushed limestone base, and are

The primary purpose of park trails is to provide a recreational experience. Whenever feasible, recreational trails should be located off-street; however, on-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities could be used to complete connections where necessary. Specific trail design should consider the following:

- Develop a high-quality system of signage and wayfinding to connect the recreational trail system and non-motorized transportation systems including sidewalks and bike lanes.
- Require the installation of safe, convenient, and dedicated trails with new development, consistent with the Public Trail Facilities map (Figure 4-8)

4 Trails

- Work with public and private landholders to secure trail corridors and access to complete the recreational trail system through land dedication, purchase, use of vacated rights-of-way, land donations, public easements, and/or use agreements.
- Develop paper and digital trail guides and branding for major trail corridors.
- Build trails with loops with neighborhood connectors to encourage recreational use and trail activation.
- Improve safety with signage on how to share the trail, with walkers, rollers, and animals.
- Install lighting at trailheads and high-volume trails for winter use
- Install vehicle turn-arounds for service vehicles on trails where no through route is available.



Jinx at Boulevard Park, Photo: Peter Gill

Off-leash dogs are permitted in at least nine different sites. Bikers, runners, walkers, and rollers are on the same trails and off-leash dogs must respond to voice command to accommodate all users. Dog waste must be scooped and removed at all sites.

Off-leash trails are marked with signage. Animal regulations and a current list of off-leash dog trails can be found on the [Parks & Recreation website](#).



Primary Trail

Multimodal trail, 10ft-12ft wide. Comfortable for recreational users and commuters, they serve to connect the many active areas and minimize circulation conflict. Durable surfacing materials like asphalt, concrete, or limestone support high use while minimizing maintenance needs.



Primary Trail – Natural Areas

Multimodal trail, 8ft wide path with 1ft shoulders. These paths safely connect major points between and through parks and open space while minimizing impacts from trail development. Crushed limestone surfacing blends in and supports high use while minimizing maintenance needs.



Secondary Trail

4 ft - 6-ft wide path with 1-foot shoulders on each side. Surface material comprised of crushed limestone. Typically, softer trails through natural areas with less traffic than the primary trails.



Tertiary Trail

Single-track trails with soft material surfacing like mulch and duff. Smaller trails within the natural areas for closer connections to nature and ample opportunities to explore the forest edge

Figure 4 - 6. Trail types typically found in Bellingham parks and open spaces (Board & Vellum 2025)

4 Trails

Trail Corridors and Regional Connections

Trail corridors are the main thoroughfares of the trail network and provide major connections to parks, natural areas, and public facilities. Some trails extend beyond city limits and serve as extended recreational corridors or commute routes. These trails are typically multi-modal routes that are separated from public roads. In existing developed areas, these may utilize on-road facilities where necessary.

On-road systems (sidewalks and bicycle lanes) are included in the transportation element of the Bellingham Plan, which includes functional Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans. The community has expressed the desire for all non-motorized elements to be clearly identified with an integrated system of signage and maps. New projects and actions reflect the need for improved integration of trail corridors and transportation systems.

Trail corridors should provide the highest level of trail amenities, including trailheads, parking, and signage, either independently or shared with other park facilities. Trailheads should be improved with:

- Restrooms/water stations
- Shade
- Interpretive signage
- Benches
- Parking
- Trail maps and wayfinding markers
- Safe bicycle parking

Figure 4 – 7, illustrates Bellingham’s trail system as an interconnected network of waterfront paths, creek corridors, ridge trails, and regional routes. The network forms several major east–west and north–south spines, creating loops and cross-town connections. Key corridors make the following links:

- Waterfront and **South Bay Trail** along Bellingham Bay
- Downtown area via the **Whatcom Creek Trail**
- **Railroad Trail**, running north–south through central Bellingham
- **Interurban Trail**, extending south toward the county line
- The **Bay to Baker Trail**, forming a major regional connection toward Mount Baker

Trail Corridors and Regional Connections

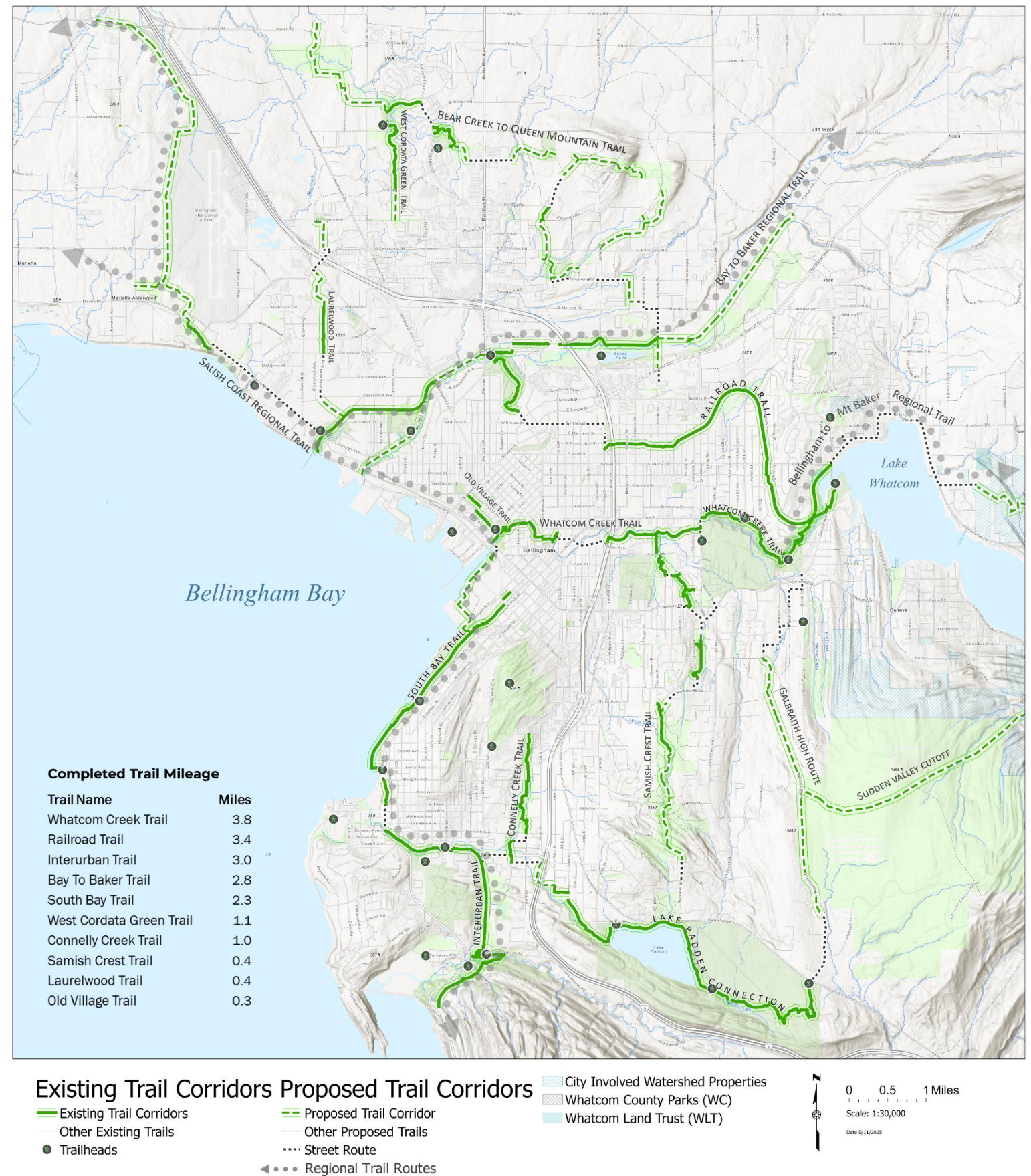


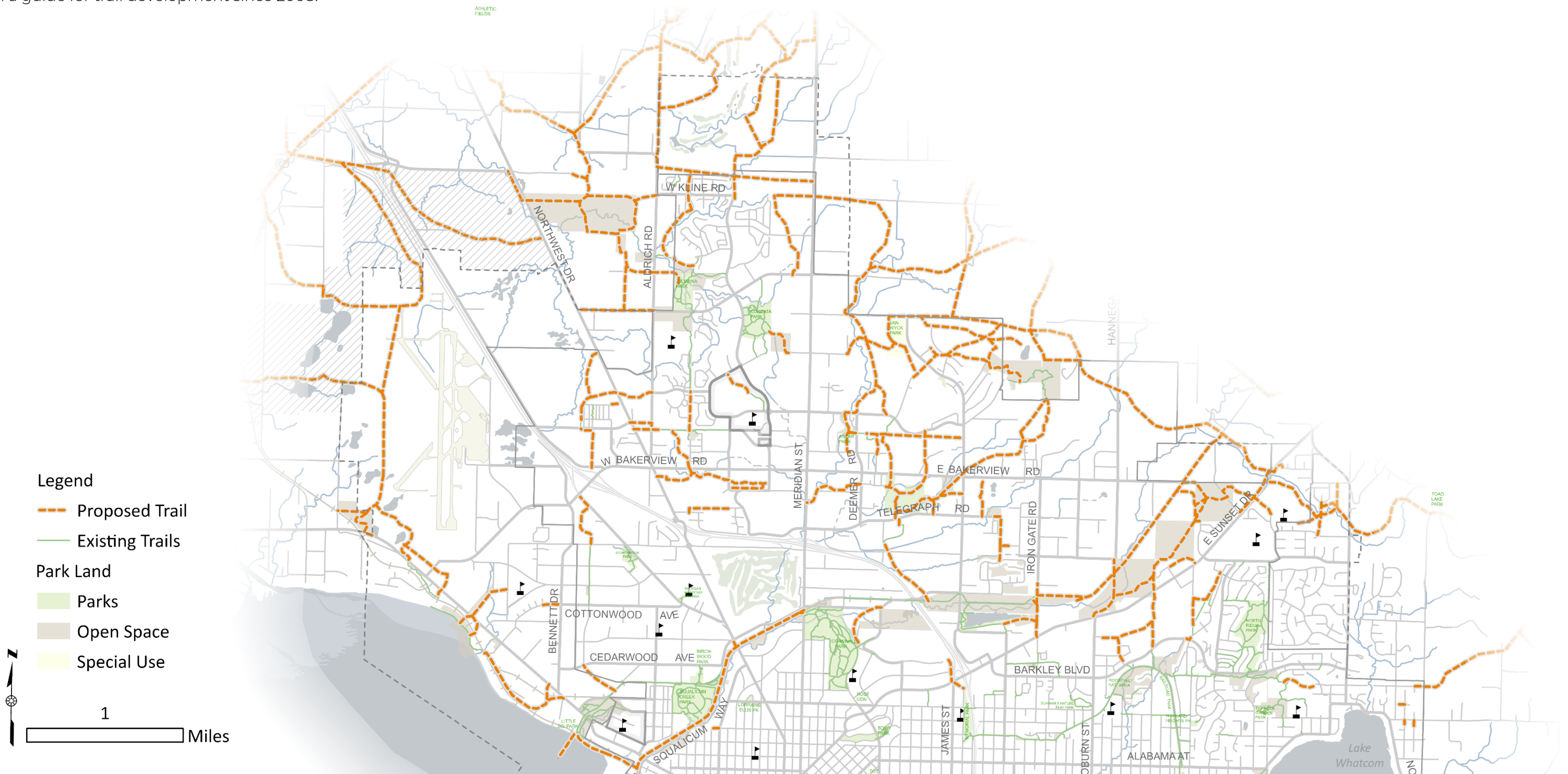
Figure 4 - 7. Existing and proposed trail corridors and regional connections

4 Trails

Recommended Public Trail Facilities

Trails provide recreational amenities and safe access to and between parks and open spaces, and residential neighborhoods. Originally based on the North Bellingham Trail Plan, Bellingham's proposed trail map has been a guide for trail development since 2008.

Trails shown in Figure 4 -8 are intended to show point-to-point connectivity rather than a specific trail route. While the trail map has been refined with each PROS Plan update, the purpose is consistent. This high-level trail map ensures public trail facilities are provided concurrently with private development and new growth, guides City-led trail development, aids coordination with the City's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans, and guides Greenways acquisitions. The City will work with Private development to construct public facilities in the PROS Plan concurrently with their development projects.



4 Trails

This updated map was developed in concert with the Greenways Advisory Committee in 2025. Staff and committee members reviewed development patterns, undeveloped rights-of-way, critical areas, and neighborhood trail mapping efforts from the Samish, King Mountain, and Happy Valley neighborhood associations. Bellingham's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans and property acquisitions were also consulted when considering routes. A summary of the trail planning work is included in Appendix C.

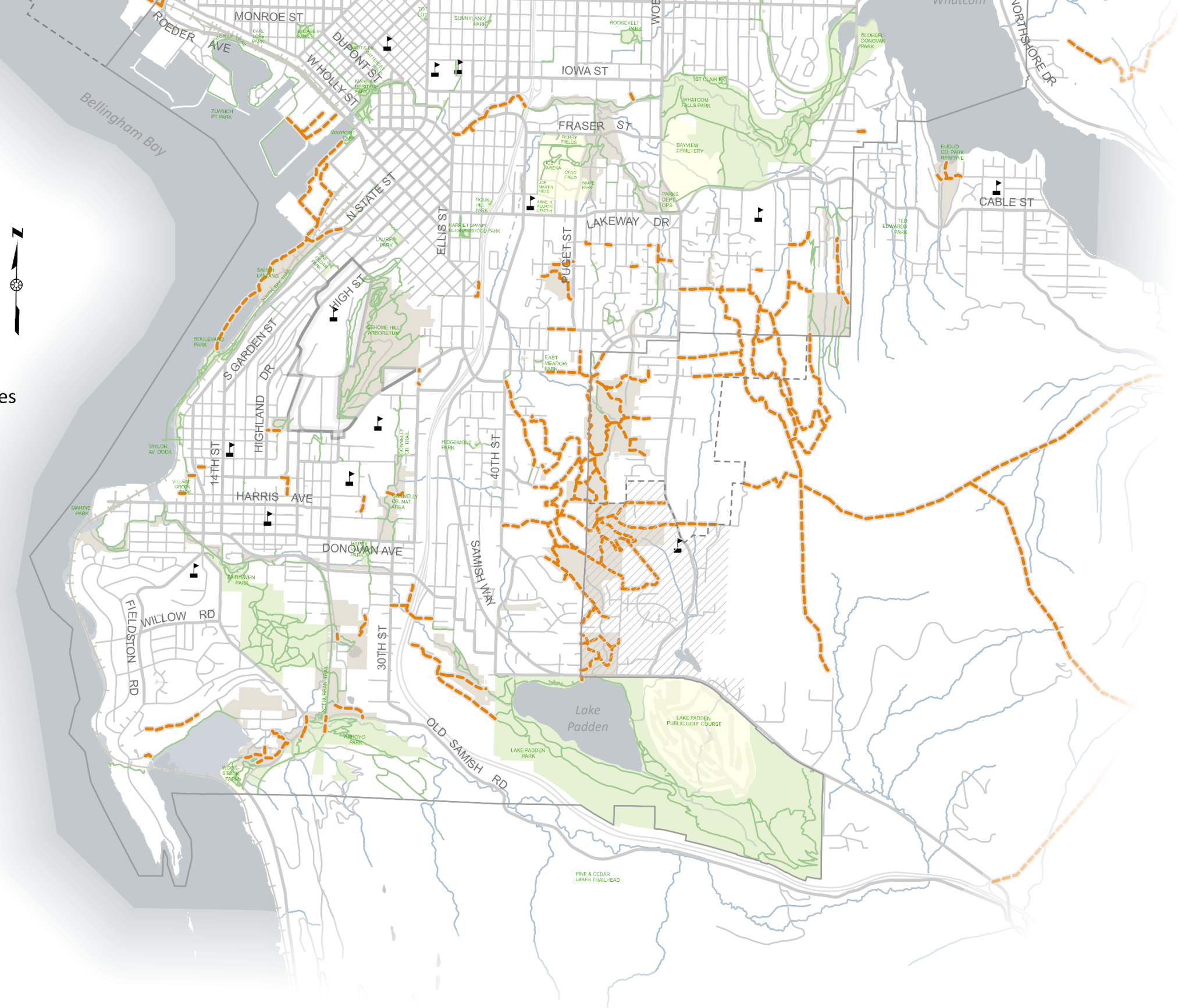
Legend

- Proposed Trail
- Existing Trails

Park Land

- Parks
- Open Space
- Special Use

1 Miles



R **RESPECT.**
Respect the places where you recreate. That includes the neighborhood, parking area, and mountain.

E **ETIQUETTE.**
Whether you're on foot, hooves or wheels, go slow and say hello.

S **SHARE THE TRAILS.**
You are not the only trail user to be aware of your surroundings. Wheels yield to hooves (and hooves).

P **PETS.**
Clean up after and be in control of your pet at all times. Leash your dog when you are not in an off-leash area and on all paved roads and neighborhoods.

E **ENVIRONMENT.**
Protect it! Stick to the trail: carving shortcuts and skidding tires will damage the ecosystem.

C **CLOSED TRAILS.**
This is not a suggestion! Please respect trail closures and the builder's hard work.

T **TRASH.**
Leave no trace. Pack out your litter, including your dog poop, or find one of the many garbage cans provided on our trail systems.

WMBC **WMBCMTB.ORG**

Figure 4 - 8. Public Trail Facilities Map

Figure 4 - 9. Share the Trails signage found on Galbraith Mountain (WMBC)

4 Trails

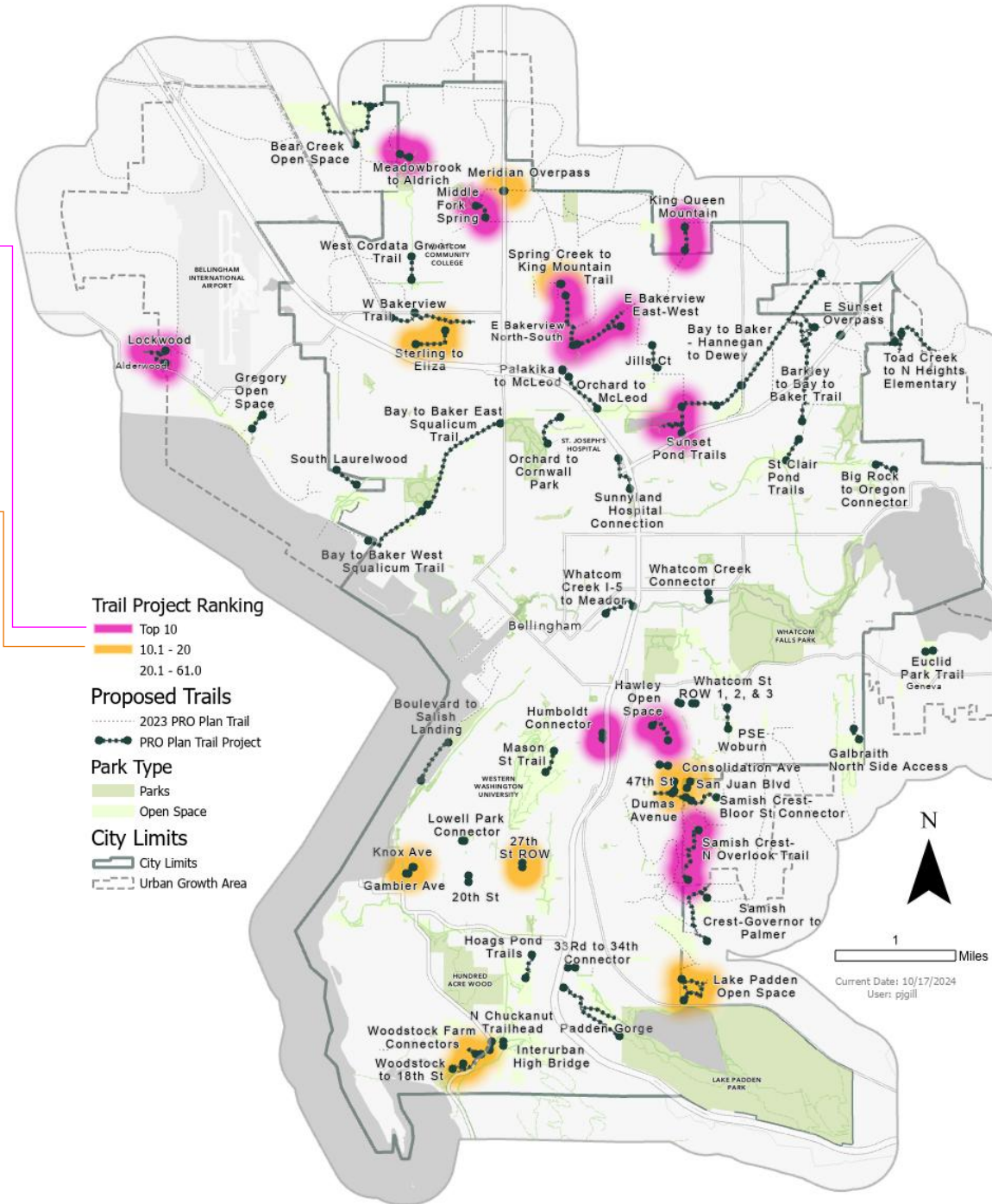
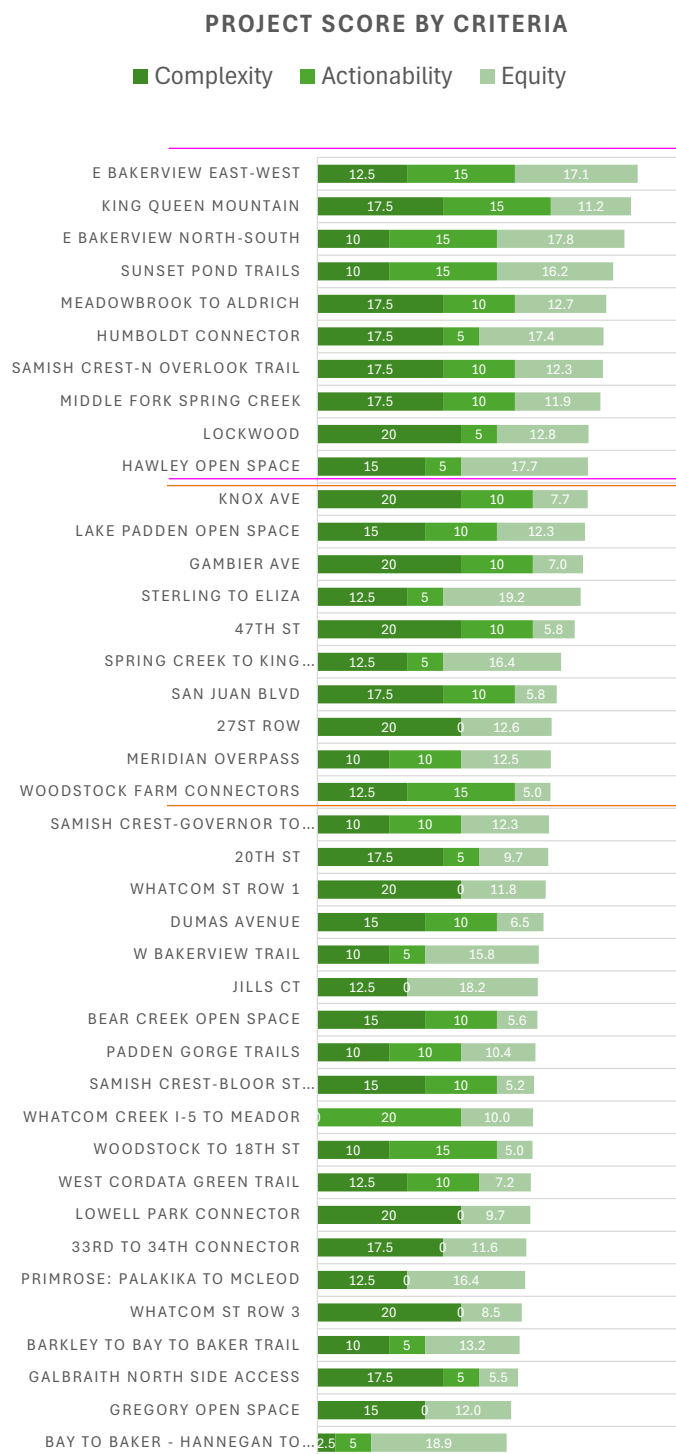


Figure 4 - 10. GIS scoring of public trail from 2024

Projects and Action Recommendations

Trails were one of the most frequently requested park amenities during the PROS Plan public outreach process, and it is also the most used amenity. Because of the extent of the proposed trails shown in Figures 4–8, an unbiased approach to trail development is essential. A map-based analysis provides one method for evaluating potential projects and should be repeated regularly before project budgeting. In 2024, such an analysis was conducted, forming the foundation for many of the project recommendations in this chapter. This score represents only one factor in the overall prioritization process; project planning must also consider comprehensive plan goals, opportunities, and available resources. A brief description of the analysis is provided below. The next update will occur prior to the 2027 budget process.

A total of 61 trail projects were evaluated using this method. Each project received scores for complexity, actionability, and equity. These prioritization criteria and metrics were selected to create a framework that is logical, reproducible, and based on existing data.

Complexity

Complexity evaluates trail project area ownership and site environmental constraints and is considered proxy for potential increased project costs and extended design and permitting timelines.

Actionability

Actionability measures include projects identified in existing plans, and trail project proximity to potential transportation and private development projects and is considered proxy for community support and increased project gain.

Equity

Equity evaluates level of service gaps and social vulnerability to support equitable distribution of facilities. See Chapter 2 for details on the social vulnerability Index, level of service, and population served.

4 Trails

This section describes projects and actions to be completed within the 20-year horizon of this plan.

The figure (right) illustrates how projects and actions are prioritized based on public demand, how well they accomplish our goals, staffing, and available funding.

The recommendations included in this chapter are intended to provide measurable actions to achieve the policies contained within the links below:

[Play](#)

[Connection](#)

[Partnership](#)

[System Resilience](#)

[Equity](#)

[Design](#)

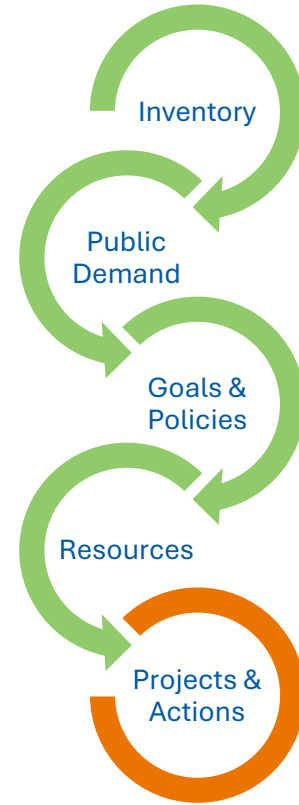


Table 4 - 1. Trail related actions prioritized by Plan goals.

Trail Actions	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
Acquire and develop new trail connections as shown on the Public Trail Facilities map according to level of service gaps, population served, equity, and affordability.	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Secure a new source of limestone surfacing for trail maintenance and development	Ongoing				✓			✓
Coordinate in the development of urban villages, subarea plans, development agreements, and subdivisions to secure trail easements consistent with the Public Trail Facilities map.	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Adopt and utilize a variety trail standards including paved trails in high-volume areas and single-track natural surface trails in low-volume and sensitive environmental areas.	Ongoing		✓				✓	✓
Target acquisitions that will complete trail corridors and fill in missing trail gaps.	Short	✓	✓				✓	✓
Coordinate with Public Works to identify opportunities for better trail, sidewalk, and bike route connectivity and the management of off-trail impacts.	Short		✓	✓				
Consider restricting user types (e.g., hikers, bikers, dogs, horses) on trails where recurring conflicts or trail maintenance issues occur.	Short	✓	✓		✓			✓
Build trails in unopened rights-of-ways to improve connectivity where on-street facilities are not feasible or cost effective	Short	✓	✓					
Expand signage, wayfinding and outreach materials that guide users through and between trails by coordinating with Public Works to install signage and on-street improvements	Short	✓	✓	✓				✓
Improve education and outreach regarding trail etiquette. Post rules for safe use of shared trails	Short	✓		✓			✓	✓
Publish trail system maps with difficulty ratings, surfacing, distances, and accessibility barriers	Mid	✓	✓	✓			✓	
Develop branding and style guide for arterial trail corridors to encourage recreation, multimodal transportation, and to improve wayfinding	Mid	✓	✓					✓

4 Trails

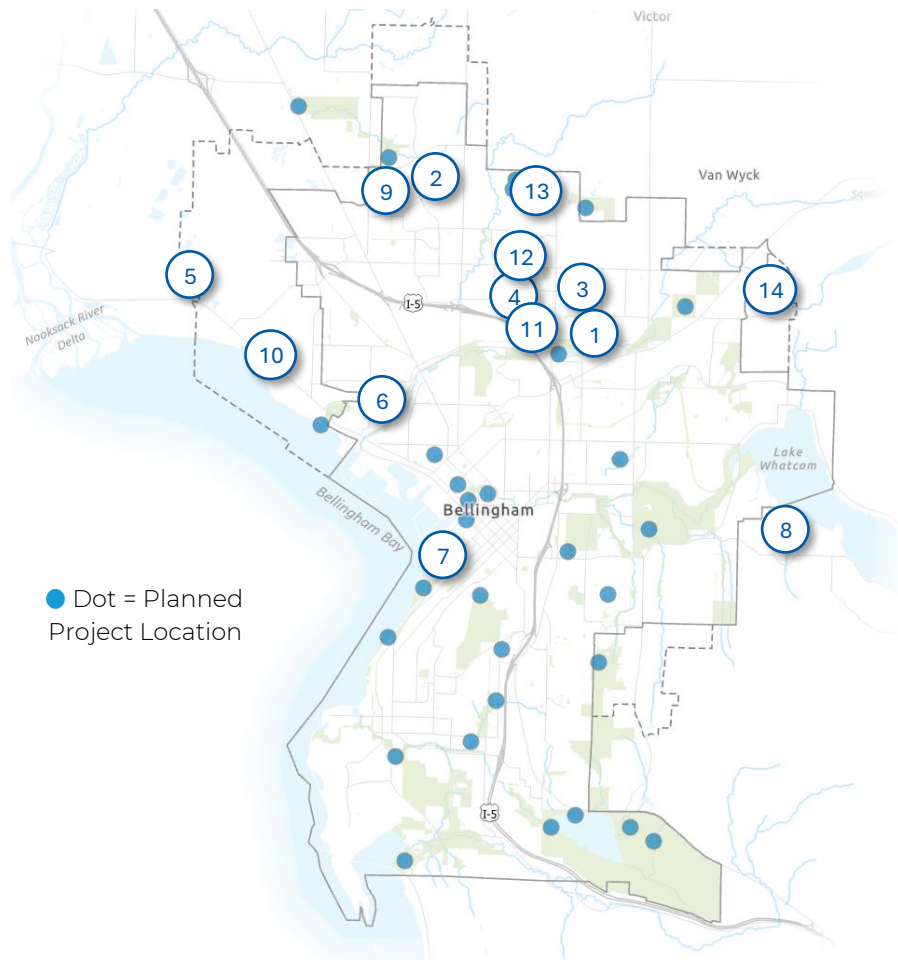


Table 4 - 2. Trail projects prioritized by Plan goals.

Map #	Project Description	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
1	Sunset Pond loop trails and Racine to Irongate connection	Ongoing	✓	✓				✓	✓
2	Middle Fork Spring Open Space, Cordata Connector Trail from Cordata Park to Meridian	Ongoing	✓	✓				✓	✓
3	Sunset Pond to Telegraph Rd via Jill's Court trail	Ongoing	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
4	Complete Primrose Trail from Telegraph Rd to E McCloud Rd	Short	✓	✓				✓	✓
5	Lockwood trail and vegetation management, Marine Dr bridge detour and Salish Coast trail expansion	Short	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
6	Bay-to-Baker trail / Squalicum Creek corridor, Meridian to Roeder Ave.	Mid	✓	✓					✓
7	Complete gaps in the Salish Coast Trail through the City of Bellingham	Mid	✓	✓	✓				✓
8	Euclid Park trail and water access	Mid	✓	✓					✓
9	West Cordata Green Trail, Cordata loop, acquisition and development	Mid	✓	✓				✓	✓
10	Locust Beach trailhead improvements	Long	✓	✓		✓			✓
11	Primrose Trail from E McCloud Rd to Bay to Baker/Squalicum Creek Trail	Long	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
12	Bakerview East-West, Baker Creek Trail	Long	✓	✓				✓	✓
13	Cordata Park to King and Queen Mountain	Long	✓	✓				✓	✓
14	Toad Creek to N Heights Elementary	Long	✓	✓	✓				✓

Chapter 5

Recreation Facilities, Programs, and Events

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Recreation Facilities

Recreation facilities in Bellingham provide space for indoor and outdoor specialized recreation needs. These include a pool, gymnasiums, sport courts, ice rinks, indoor soccer and more.

These facilities include reservable picnic shelters, indoor pavilions, event centers, a senior center, and indoor/outdoor sport complexes. Not all the facilities shown on the map are managed by the City of Bellingham.

Bellingham School District operates gymnasiums shown on the map and athletic fields that are available for reservation when not in use by the District. A full list of recreation facilities available through the school district is found in Appendix B – 2.

Responsibilities:

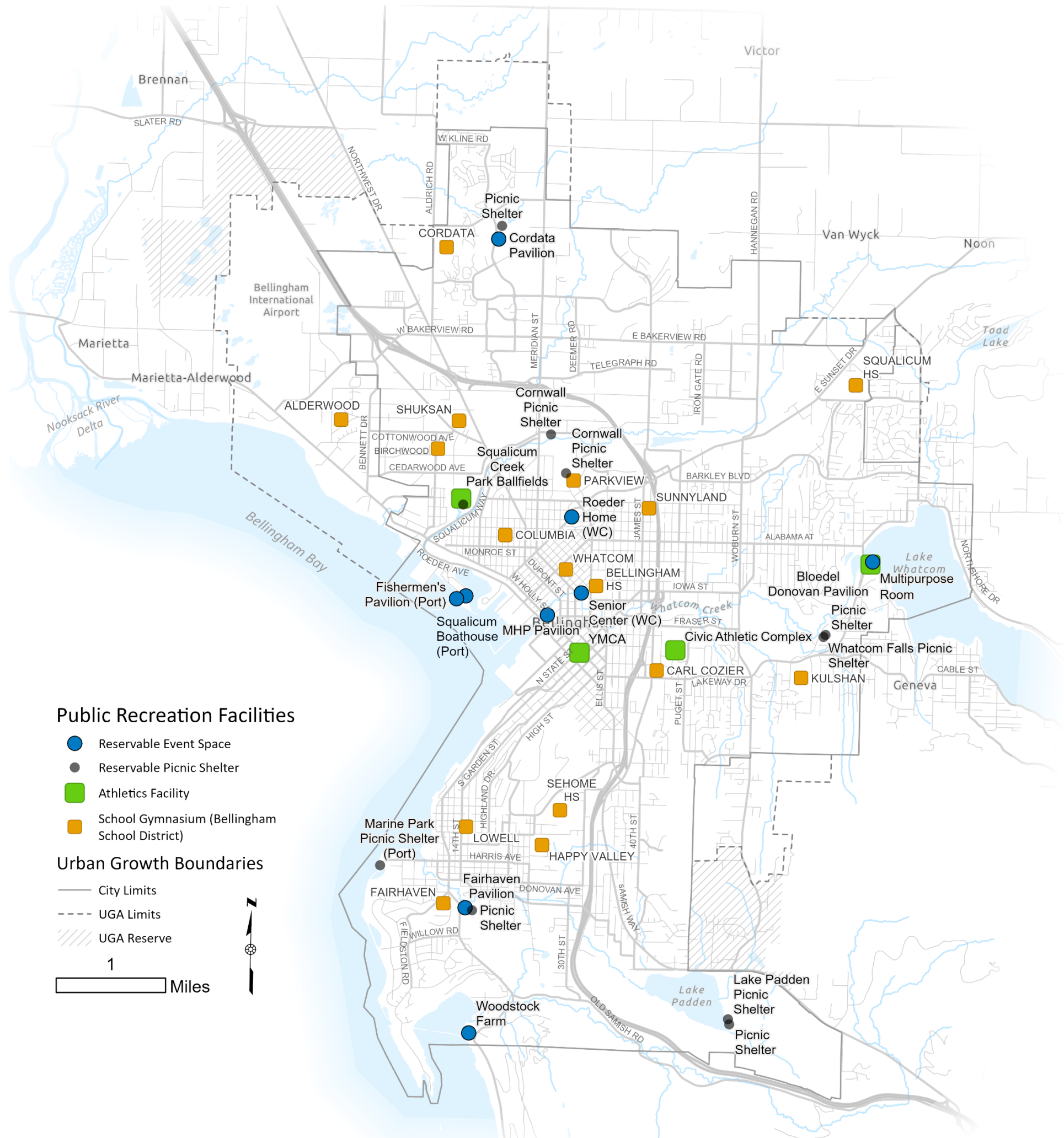
Recreation Division

Event management, daily operations, programming, maintenance of athletic buildings and facilities specifically at Civic Athletic Complex and Squalicum Creek Park.

Facility scheduling for athletic facilities, including Arne Hanna Aquatic Center, Civic and Joe Martin Stadiums and ballfields.

Administration

Billing, special event permitting and contract execution. Public reservations for park facility use.



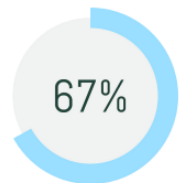
Engagement Summary

Public input is important to for this community-based parks and recreation plan. Web-based surveys, committee workshops, and four open houses were conducted to augment the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board review.

Two surveys, the Recreation Needs Assessment Community Survey (2022) and the PROS Plan Community Survey (2025), were available to inform the Recreation Chapter.

Survey respondents want a year-round indoor recreation center, expanded aquatics facilities, nature-based play and education spaces, and active/adventure amenities for youth and families. They also emphasized safety, maintenance, and reducing overcrowding as essential to improving recreation.

Overview of community priorities: Indoor recreation and community center, expanded aquatics, special events, adaptive programs and equipment, cultural events, and reservable spaces.



Percent of survey respondents who report they travel outside of Bellingham for access to recreational facilities.¹

Bellingham’s 2022 Recreation Assessment survey revealed that people

frequently travel to British Columbia and the greater Seattle area for access to modern, indoor recreation, ice based (e.g., hockey, figure skating) and aquatics facilities. People also travel to use roller derby and roller-skating facilities, sports courts for pickleball, volleyball, basketball, and skateparks. Sports tournaments were also noted as a reason for out-of-area travel.

PROS Plan Community Survey (2025)

Bike and skate parks, disc golf, sport courts, all ranked high in our survey. Of the athletic amenities requested, sport courts/fields for soccer, volleyball and cricket are missing from our system.

Households with children at home, BIPOC, and Latine respondents tended to be more interested in the subject of the events, but impeded by timing, cost, and registration processes.

Respondents feel that improving year-round restrooms would increase their use of park facilities. In addition to City owned facilities, many athletic facilities and reservable event spaces are provided through the Bellingham School District, non-profits, and the Port of Bellingham. When asked about these about these facilities, 32% of respondents indicated that the largest obstacle to using non-city owned facilities is reservations, scheduling, and availability.

The majority of respondents have participated in our recreation activities or programs. Special events are the most popular programs offered at 48%. These are often free of charge and do not require registration. Concerts in the park, parades, polar dip, Mother’s Day party, and kid’s fishing derby are examples of special events.

Have you or any member of your household participated in any of the City of Bellingham’s recreation activities or programs in the last two years?

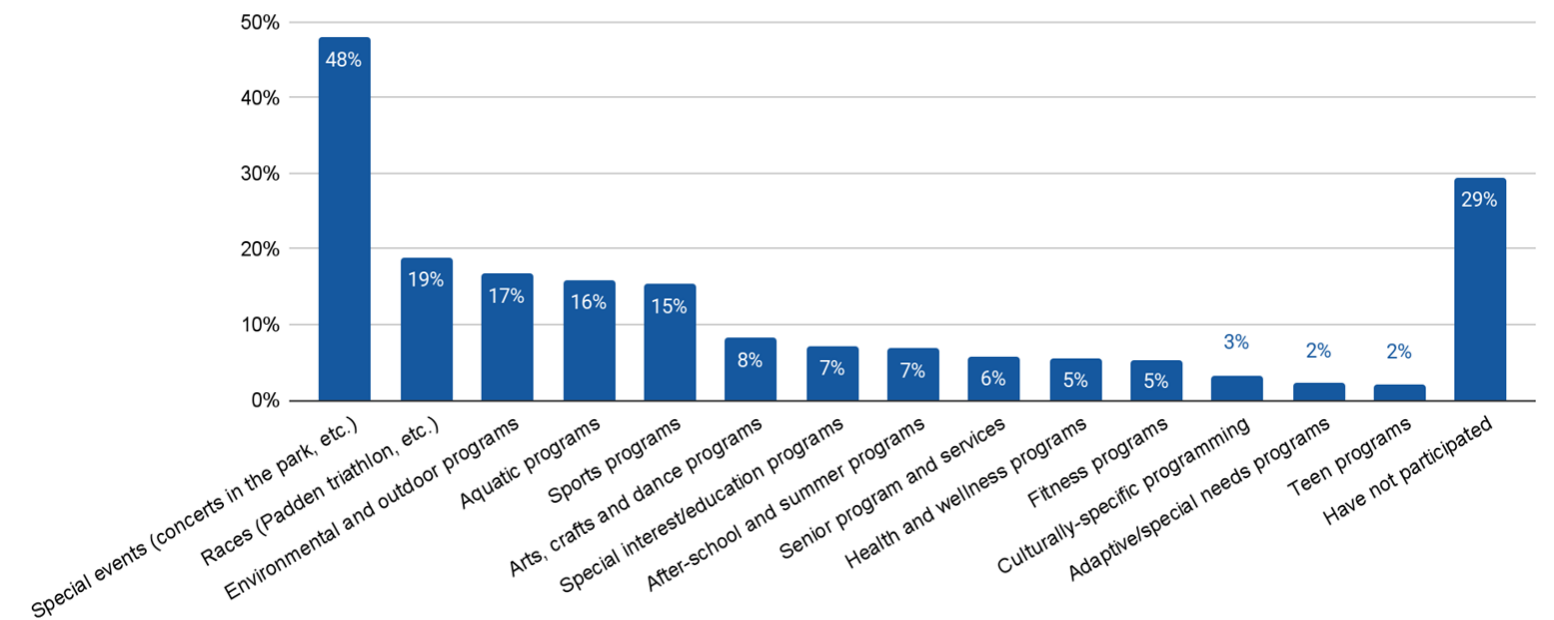


Figure 5 - 1. Survey responses showing participation in recreation programs

Focus Group Summaries

<p>Latine</p>	<p>Parks in Latin America serve as cultural hubs with merchants, music, and food—parks in Bellingham could integrate more community activities to increase use.</p> <p>There is a strong desire for more structured activities in parks to make them more inviting gathering spaces.</p> <p>The greatest need is a community center that provides resources, cultural/art activities, and fosters inclusivity.</p>
<p>Sihk/Punjabi</p>	<p>Programs and classes offered in Punjabi: prenatal/Zumba/fitness classes for women and elders</p> <p>Cost, safety, and awareness of programs can be challenging</p> <p>Would use a community center with fitness, climbing, aquatics, and attend cultural events in Punjabi</p> <p>Top recreation needs: swimming lessons, Cricket fields, soccer, safe walking areas, ice skating</p>
<p>Young Adult</p>	<p>Difficult accessing the Playbook on campus, so lack of awareness was the biggest barrier to participation.</p> <p>Older teen programming, like group runs, races, cyclocross, robotics club, and education about different cultures, is needed.</p> <p>Interested in low-cost indoor climbing options with top roping. Need community gathering are that isn't focused on food and drink.</p>
<p>Adaptive/ Special needs</p>	<p>Barriers to getting highly competitive ice time and water time at Arne Hanna Aquatic Center</p> <p>Difficulty finding ADA access to the Civic Stadium field</p> <p>Adaptive equipment for adults and taller people</p> <p>Improved water access</p>
<p>Recreation Providers</p>	<p>Collaborate on which youth sports leagues are offered when, so we can provide the best possible opportunities for the community</p> <p>Lack of a modern lit skate park, Civic is not well-maintained, spray paint, etc., makes it feel forgotten</p> <p>Expand aquatics for regional swim meets, High school state meet, masters swim meet, and special olympics</p> <p>More small covered structures where people can gather for outdoor programming and teaching</p> <p>Senior programs - expand offerings, YMCA provides over 50 drop-in runs 3 days a week and sells out</p> <p>Organizations depend on park facilities for camps, wellness, meetings, etc., and also depend on the school district for all indoor court-based programs</p> <p>Need for more bilingual people to do things like teach swim lessons, fitness classes, etc. to make these services open to all</p>

"I have small children and winter time is so hard, having an indoor recreation center would be amazing. Childcare options would also be life changing. Expanding the aquatic center and providing more programming and better services would be great for our kids. We really have a lack of updated family centered places in Bellingham compared to so many other communities."

PROS Plan Community Survey

Recreation Program Inventory

The Parks & Recreation Department provides a number of program offerings each season through its Playbook. Some of these programs are managed internally and others are provided through outside contractors or partnerships.

Figure 5 -2 shows the number of programs typically offered per year, by program area. Examples of the types of programs, events, or classes in each program area are included in the figure.

Programming areas:

Events and Seasonal Programs: Broad community interest and high impact events, such as the Lake Padden Tri, Runnin' O' the Green, KidsFest and the Polar Dip/Resolution Walk.

Family & Community: Holiday themed events and programs, trips and wellness classes are often full with waitlists.

Adaptive recreation: Adaptive swimming, Gangball, and CAMP T.E.A.M. are offered by community rec and aquatic staff in partnership with WWU. Adaptive also depends on volunteers. SPIN dances are in partnership with Max Higbee Center.

Adult Sports: Indoor adult sports leagues (basketball, volleyball, badminton) always quickly fill with waitlists. Adult softball leagues are also very popular, often filling quickly.

Fitness and Wellness – Instructor led classes vary yearly.

Aquatics – Programs designed to build swimming skills, confidence, and a lifelong love of the water.

Camps – Youth and teen camps for creativity, personal growth, and athletics. In partnership with Bellingham Public Schools, the city offers a wide range of sports camps.

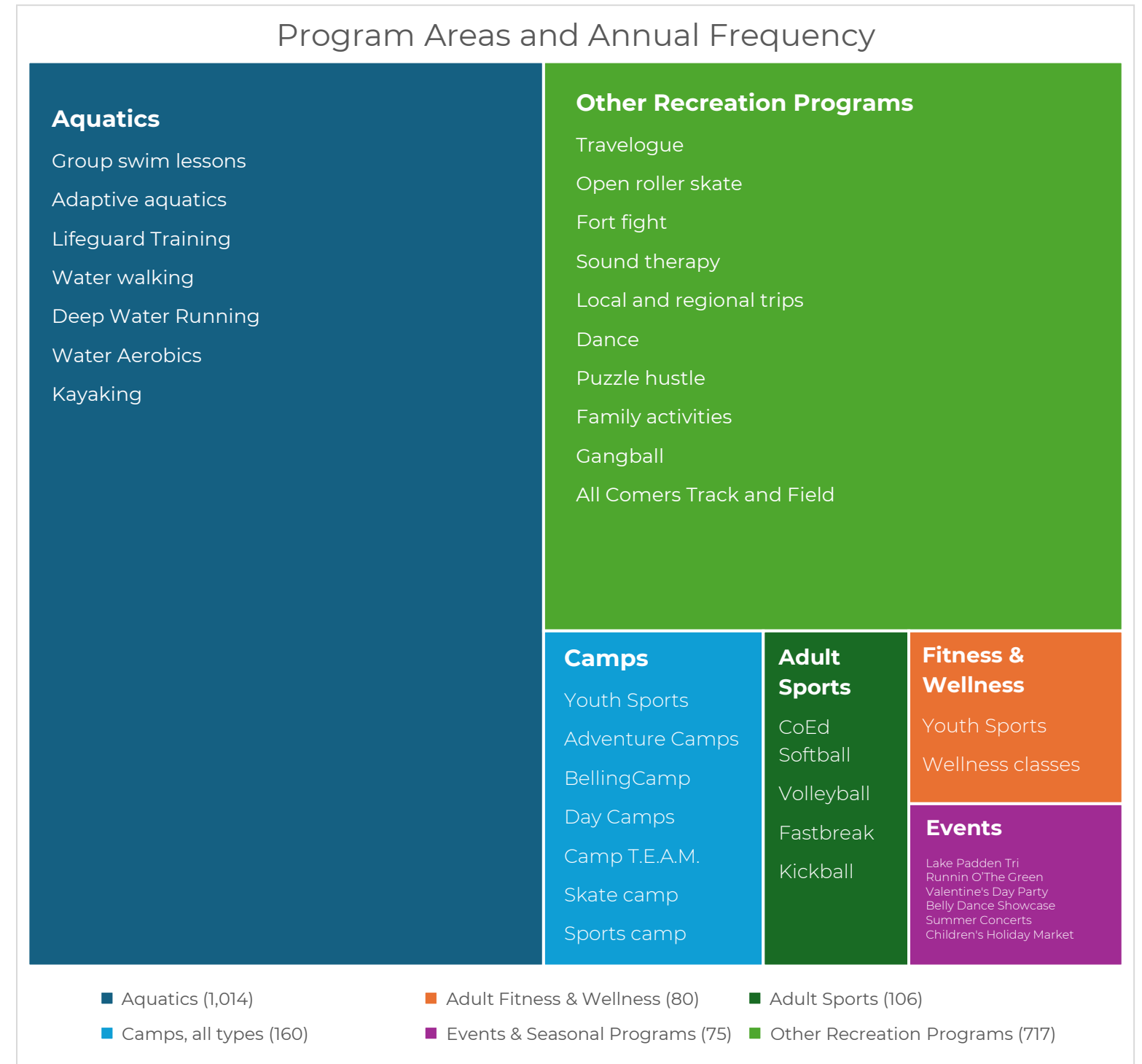


Figure 5 - 2. Annual program counts and types (average 2023 – 2024)

5 Recreation Programs and Events

These programs are set up to serve kids, teens, adults and those with special needs. ActiveNet data from 2025 was used to understand what age groups are being served by our programming.

Table 5 - 1: Programing available by age group in 2025

Age Group	Winter	Spring/Summer	Fall	Total
Early Childhood	11	12	11	34
Preschool	49	94	76	219
Youth	66	180	82	328
Teen/Adult	31	57	40	128
Adult	10	40	40	90
All Ages	35	48	41	124
Family	4	4	4	12

Bellingham attracts retirees from across the county. Additional senior programs that tailor to all abilities and diverse interests are needed. Offering more ongoing series for many of the fitness and art offerings could save overhead, marketing, and registration.

Program Participation & Trends

This section summarizes participation trends, program counts, and capacity indicators for all recreation programs offered between January 2023 and November 2025. Data is derived from ActiveNet registration reports, which collectively represent the recreation program portfolio.

Figure 5 – 3 shows aquatics programs are the largest contributor to total participation, with 5,832 enrollments and 1,710 waitlisted. Preschool and youth swim lessons drive the highest demand, emphasizing the need for expanded aquatic facilities.

Adult Sports include approximately 212 unique offerings across softball, volleyball, basketball, kickball, and badminton. Indoor

Program Participation and Waitlists (2023-2025)

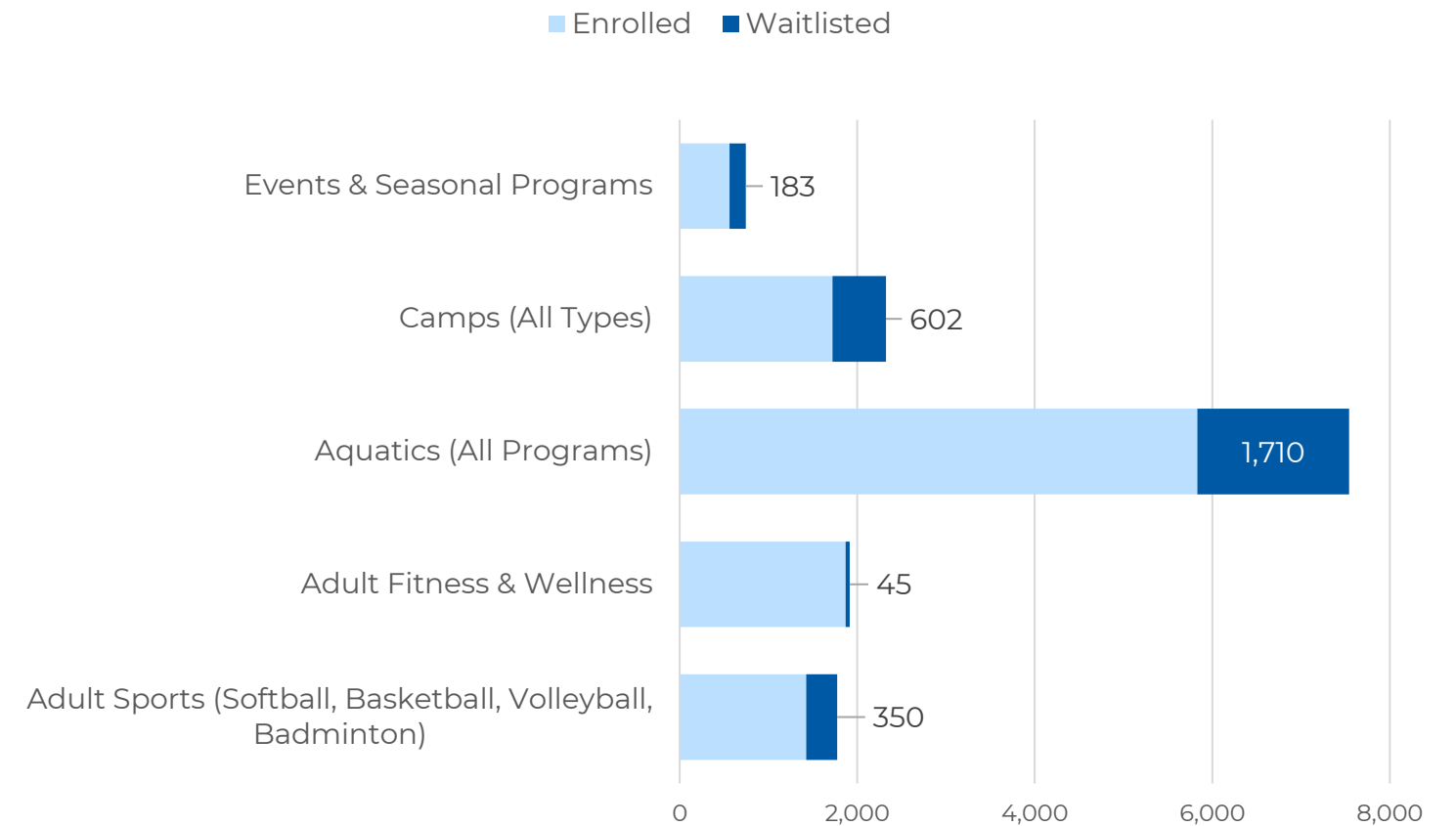


Figure 5 - 3. Waitlists and Participants by Program Area

sports like basketball and volleyball show the highest unmet demand, demonstrating a need for additional indoor gym space.

Adult Fitness & Wellness maintains high engagement and low waitlists, suggesting capacity aligns well with community needs.

Camps report 1,721 enrollments and 602 waitlisted, reflecting continued youth and family interest during seasonal periods. Expansion opportunities include additional sites or flexible scheduling.

Events and seasonal programs engage over 500 participants with consistent waitlists, indicating strong community connection to themed recreation.

5 Recreation Programs and Events

Facility Rentals

The City also offers facilities available for events, private parties, meetings, and athletic events. [Park facilities can be reserved through our website.](#)

Pavilions and Shelters

Available for rent year-round, pavilions are indoor spaces that accommodate groups up to 75. There are also picnic shelters and special event space available for reservations:

- Bloedel Donovan Multi-purpose Room
- Bloedel Donovan Park Multi-purpose Room and Pavilion
- Cordata Park pavilion and picnic shelter
- Cornwall Park picnic shelter
- Fairhaven Library multi-purpose room
- Fairhaven Park pavilion and picnic shelter
- Lake Padden Park picnic shelters (large and small)
- Maritime Heritage Park pavilion
- Squalicum Creek Park picnic shelter
- Whatcom Falls Park picnic shelter
- Woodstock Farm

Figure 5 - 4 shows the use of pavilions and shelters by the public since 2017. Park shelter is trending up over time, and both have rebound to pre-COVID era use after 2020. Woodstock Farm was not available for rental in 2024.

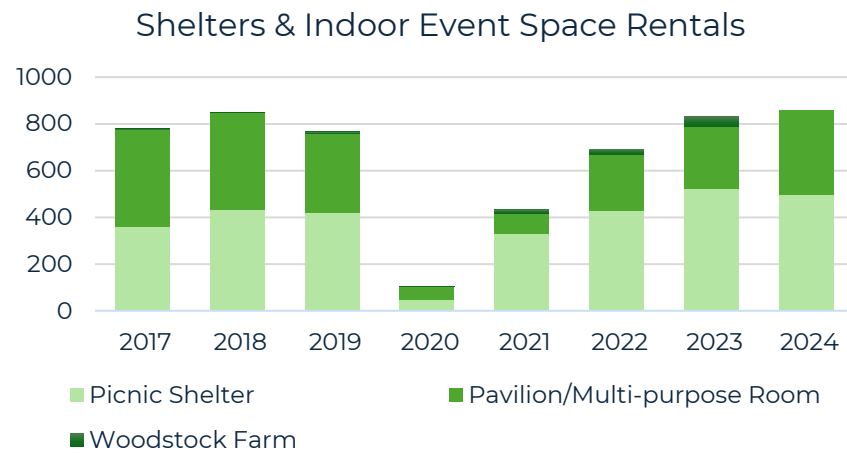


Figure 5 - 4. Event space rental use 2017 - 2024.

Athletics & Sport Fields

The City offers synthetic turf and natural turf fields for rent. Fields can accommodate baseball, softball, ultimate frisbee, rugby, football, soccer, lacrosse, and cricket. Synthetic turf fields are available for year-round use, while natural turf fields are available March through October.

- Joe Martin Stadium – Lighted, turf baseball field with seating for up to 1,600 fans.
- Civic Stadium - Multipurpose turf field with a surrounding track. with covered seating for up to 4,000 spectators. Available for football, soccer, and large events.
- Frank Geri Fields 1, 2, and 4 – Three natural surface softball fields have lighting and are available late spring through fall.
- Downer fields – Two
- Squalicum Fields 1 and 2 – Two natural surface baseball fields
- Lake Padden multiuse field – Rectangular field available for cricket, soccer, and softball during the dry summer months.

Civic field rental has trended up over time, while the baseball and softball field rentals have trended slightly down due to the completion of new synthetic turf availability at local schools.

Athletic Field Rentals

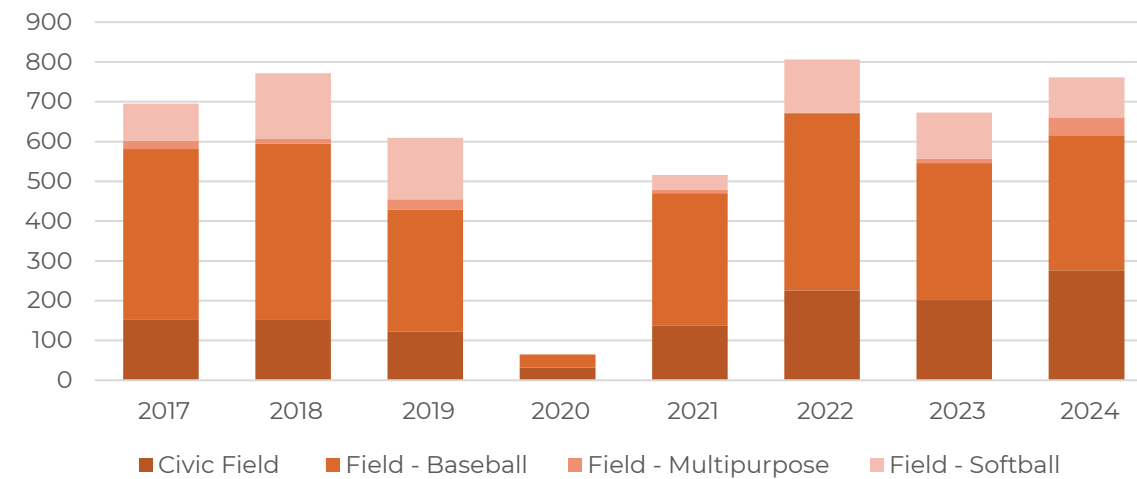


Figure 5 - 5. Athletic field use 2017 - 2020

5 Recreation Programs and Events

Arne Hanna Aquatic Center

The Arne Hanna Aquatic Center is the city's largest and only public, indoor pool facility. It offers four pools, including an 8-lane, 25-yard lap pool, a dive tank with a competitive 1-meter springboard, a 100 ° hydrotherapy pool, and an instructional pool featuring a 0-depth entry, a spray feature, and a 135-foot waterslide. The Aquatic Center offers a wide range of programs such as swim lessons, water aerobics, open swim, lap swim, and American Red Cross trainings. It is heavily used by all ages for recreation, fitness, and relaxation. It is the home training and competition pool for three local high schools and the Bellingham Bay Swim Team.

Arne Hanna Pool Rentals

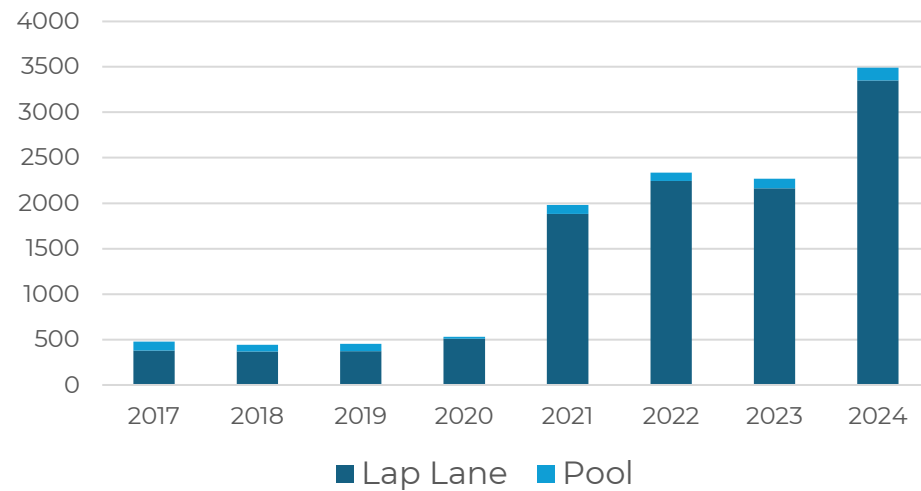


Figure 5 - 6. Aquatic center rentals 2017-2024

Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan

Developed in 2025, the plan proposes updated facilities that will expand opportunities for aquatics, community programming, and athletics in the City of Bellingham.

Legend

- ① All Ages and Abilities Shared Use Path
- ② Wetland Overlook
- ③ Multi-purpose Fields
- ④ Possible School Site
- ⑤ Disc Golf Course in Existing Forest
- ⑥ Future Sportsplex Expansion or Fieldhouse Location
- ⑦ Reconfigured Parking Lot/Plaza
- ⑧ Shared/Festival Street Plaza
- ⑨ Reconfigured Plaza Entry to Joe Martin Stadium
- ⑩ Civic Promenade
- ⑪ Stormwater Green Streets
- ⑫ Playground
- ⑬ New Community Recreation Center with Expanded Aquatics
- ⑭ Downer Baseball/Softball Field Improvements
- ⑮ Gateway Roundabout
- ⑯ Site for future recreational or other development, pending formal agreement with Bellingham Public Schools for land purchase and sale



5 Recreation Programs and Events

Recreation Program Partners & Providers

In addition to the programs offered by the City, private businesses and non-profit organizations offer a number of programs that are promoted directly in the [Parks & Recreation Playbook](#). The larger providers in our area are described below. The programming offered by these organizations is not included in this plan.

Bellingham School District: Youth Sports Camps and enrichment programs. School gyms, playgrounds, and fields serve many recreational and sports organizations after hours and when not in use by the district. See Appendix B – 2 for full list of facilities.

Port of Bellingham: Rentable pavilions at Zuanich Park, appropriate for small gatherings and events

Whatcom County: Owns a facility serving as a senior center. The facility has rooms for programs, gatherings, and activities such as cards and billiards.

Whatcom County YMCA: Adult, senior and youth fitness, sports, childcare, afterschool programs, youth development, teen center. The downtown facility features a gym, two small swimming pools, fitness studios, a climbing wall, and a teen-focused “third space.” The building is very old and has many accessibility issues and limited parking. Non-Profit. Membership based.

Bellingham Bells: Adult and youth baseball programs, utilizing Frank Geri fields, Downer fields, and Joe Martin Stadium

Gabriel's Art Kids: Arts, enrichment, afterschool programs, camps, multiple locations in Bellingham and Ferndale.

Max Higbee Center: Programming and support for developmentally disabled community members, a physical building downtown for programs and gatherings.



Figure 5 - 7. Recreation program guide sent to Bellingham residents three times per year.

The Parks & Recreation Playbook was re-introduced in 2020. This guide to recreation is distributed to over 30,000 residences and businesses seasonally. In addition to Bellingham programs and events, it provides private organizations with an opportunity to advertise their programs and classes. The Playbook is also available online.

The community can register for classes, programs, events, and reserve facilities using our Active Net website, making registration easy and consistent.

In addition to the Playbook, we publish a monthly e-newsletter with current events, public input opportunities, and new programs. Sign up for the newsletter here:



Whatcom County Boys and Girls Club: Youth Sports, youth development, afterschool programs, and camps. Four physical clubhouse locations in the county (Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, and Blaine). The Bellingham location features indoor gymnasiums, program rooms, and access to outdoor spaces, including Roosevelt Park. Non-Profit. Membership based.

Wild Whatcom: Nature-based education, mentorship, and service-based projects for families and individuals of all ages. It takes place in public parks throughout Whatcom County

Whatcom Sports & Recreation: This organization runs programs in the Sportsplex, which features two indoor turf fields for soccer and one NHL sized skating rink

Recreation Program Cost Recovery

In 2025, the City finalized a recreation program cost recovery study, resulting in the creation of a Financial Sustainability Strategy. The strategy requires the use of a data input tool to inform decisions and cultivate fiscal management in its program offerings. The cost recovery data input tool uses participation numbers, labor and supply costs, and indirect administrative and facility expenses to make fee recommendations which align with the subsidy levels defined in the cost recovery continuum shown in Figure 5 - 8.

Policy Recommendation: Cost Recovery and Subsidy Strategy for Community Recreation Programs

The Community Recreation and Aquatics Divisions should continue advancing a cost recovery and subsidy strategy that ensures long-term financial resilience and equitable access to recreation services. This strategy is grounded in community benefit, data-driven decision-making, and operational efficiency.

Key Policy Components

1. Common Good–Driven Subsidy Allocation

- Prioritize public subsidy for *broad-based services* that deliver wide-reaching community value and are considered essential (“must-haves”).
- Apply lower subsidy levels to *individual-focused services* that provide more exclusive and discretionary benefits (“nice-to-haves”).

2. Categorized Service Framework

- Maintain the established structure for categorizing program and event offerings based on service type, beneficiary group, and degree of community benefit.

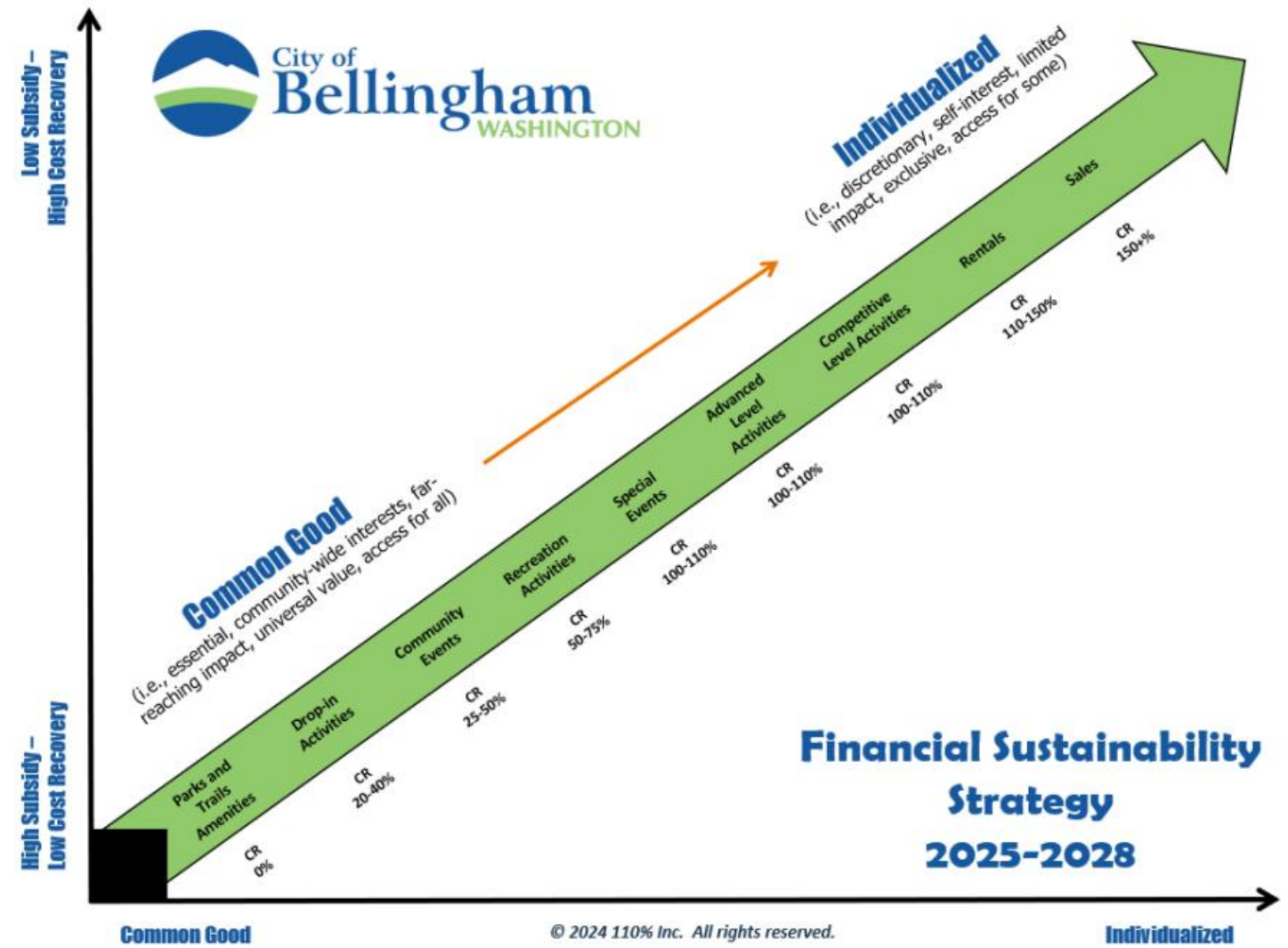


Figure 5 - 8: Cost Recovery Prioritization Graph

- Review and update service categories regularly to reflect evolving community needs and priorities.
3. **Use of the Beneficiary of Service Cost Recovery Continuum** (Figure 5 - 6 above)
 - Continue applying the adopted continuum to ensure pricing decisions are aligned with who benefits from each service.
 - Keep the continuum central to discussions on equity, program prioritization, and resource allocation.
 4. **Data-Supported Fee Setting and Cost Analysis**
 - Use the cost recovery tool to calculate fees based on the true cost to provide service—including direct labor, indirect overhead, and facility operations.
 - Conduct ongoing review of cost data, participation trends, and community sentiment to inform adjustments.

Projects and Action Recommendations

The tables in this section identify actionable projects and activities that can be completed within the 20-year horizon of this plan. Each project and action is rated against the seven park principles found in Chapter 2.

The figure (right) illustrates how projects and actions are prioritized based on public demand, how well they accomplish our goals, staffing, and available funding.

The recommendations included in this chapter are intended to provide measurable actions to achieve policies linked below:

[Play](#)

[Partnerships](#)

[System Resilience](#)

[Equity](#)

[Design](#)

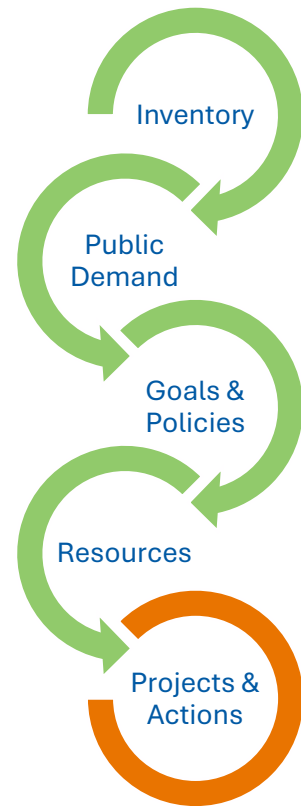


Table 5 - 2. Recreation programming actions prioritized by Plan goals

Recreation Actions	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
Evaluate expanding existing fee reduction programs for underserved populations	Ongoing	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Evaluate costs of program offerings to implement cost recovery in accordance with the Financial Sustainability Strategy Report	Ongoing			✓	✓		✓	
Look for ways to partner with public and private entities to implement the Civic Athletic Master Plan	Ongoing	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Improve the distribution of the Playbook and program offerings to WWU, Bellingham Technical College, and Whatcom Community College	Short	✓		✓			✓	
Work with local youth sport and youth providers to create a comprehensive guide or “landing” place for coordinated local program information	Short	✓		✓			✓	
Annually evaluate programming success according to cost recovery goals, operational efficiency, community outcomes, and user demand. Reallocate services accordingly.	Short			✓	✓			
Reach out to cultural groups to expand programming that is culturally appropriate and provides a sense of belonging	Short	✓					✓	
Work with Sportsplex operators to make ice time available for the adaptive community	Short	✓		✓			✓	
Purchase ADA access tracks - portable material that can make accessible paths on difficult terrain	Mid	✓					✓	✓
Continue to expand and develop programming in downtown parks, including Maritime Heritage and Lee Memorial Park	Mid	✓		✓	✓			
Meet with local service providers periodically to provide community access to available facilities, programs, and events	Mid	✓		✓				
Expand programming that provides access to local goods, food & beverage, and family-friendly entertainment	Mid	✓		✓			✓	
Identify a location for requested recreational amenities: a climbing/bouldering wall and sand volleyball in two areas of town and a disc golf course	Long	✓						✓
Identify playfields that could be redeveloped to better serve athletics, specifically soccer, lacrosse, and cricket	Long	✓					✓	✓

Chapter 6

Park Operations

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"I feel incredibly fortunate to live in a city with such an amazing Parks and Recreation Dept. Facilities, activities, and spaces are abundant, safe, and well-cared for."

-PROS Plan Community Survey



Engagement Summary

PROS Plan Community Survey (2025)

Overall, the response from the public regarding the maintenance of our park system was overwhelmingly positive. Over **90% felt satisfied with the level of maintenance in developed parks and open spaces, and trails.** Additionally, the public ranked maintenance of our park system as the highest budget priority of all.

Community priorities: park maintenance, rule enforcement, street trees, safe spaces, volunteer program, park stewards, community gardens, year-round bathrooms, nature conservation and habitat enhancement

Do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about how the City maintains parks, trails, and recreational amenities?

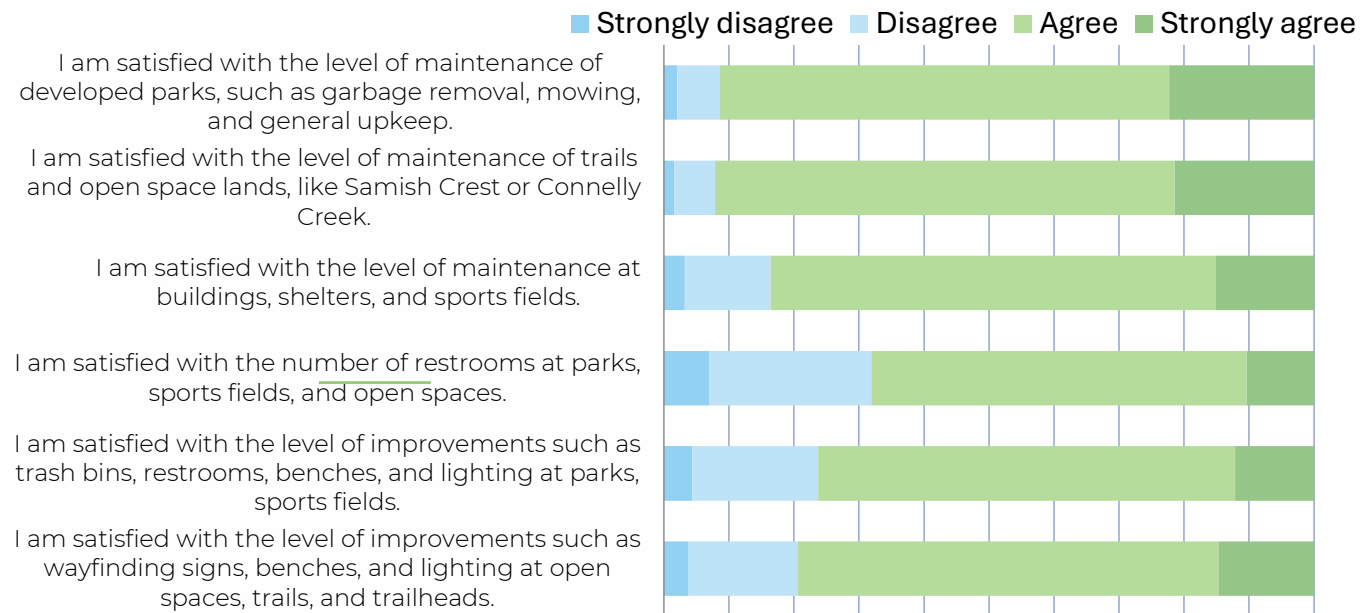


Figure 6 - 1. 2025 Survey results showing an overall high satisfaction with level of maintenance in the park system.

The public is less satisfied with the level of improvements, specifically availability of restrooms, lighting, parking, and trail wayfinding in the parks. The majority of respondents feel safe in the parks during open hours, however, fewer respondents feel safe on the trails. Many respondents feel that people are aware of park rules, but they don't feel that they are adequately enforced.

What are the most important improvements that would increase your use of parks and recreation facilities?



Figure 6 - 2. 2025 Survey results showing needed improvements in the park system.

Inventory

Park operations and maintenance staff are responsible for maintaining all the parks, trails, structures, facilities, street and park trees, and all vegetation in the system. Their work also includes the Bayview Cemetery (234 acres), Woodstock Farm (16 acres), and infrastructure associated with the Lake Padden Golf Course (120 acres) and the Civic Athletic Complex.

Park Facilities: This work group maintains all park facilities including restrooms, playgrounds, sports courts, signage, and other park infrastructure. Typical tasks include janitorial cleaning, garbage collection, minor facility repairs, coordinating facility reservations, advising/informing on park rules, mitigating graffiti/vandalism, and painting structures.

Park Grounds: This work group maintains all park grounds including turf, shrubs, and other plantings. Typical tasks include mowing, trimming/pruning, weeding/mulching, leaf removal, and irrigation system repairs. This crew also responds to storm damage and mitigates vandalism to landscaping.

Park Trails: This work group maintains the park trail system including all trail surfaces, foot bridges, signage, vegetation, and other trail features. Typical tasks include trail resurfacing, vegetation trimming, clearing drainage systems, and maintaining wetland mitigation sites.

Park Structures & Utilities: This work group maintains and repairs all buildings and structures, plumbing systems, electrical systems, mechanical/HVAC systems, bridges, park furnishings, and other park infrastructure. Typical tasks include carpentry repairs, minor construction projects, inspections, responding to utility failures, and preventative maintenance tasks.

Work Activities - Average Annual Labor Hours, 2019 - 2024

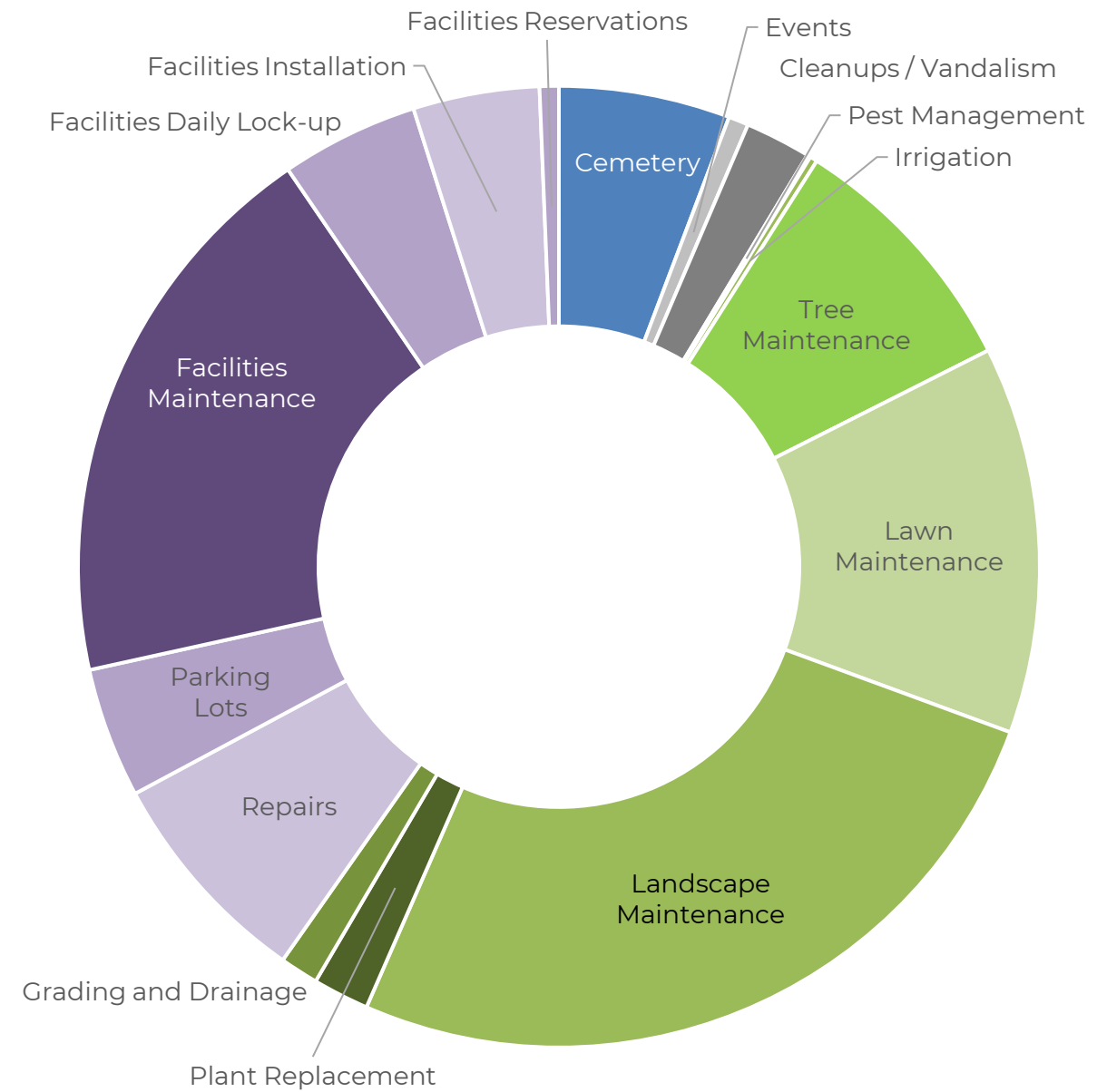


Figure 6 - 3. Operations labor hours by activity type 2019 - 2024.

6 Park Operations

Urban Forestry: This work group maintains all park trees, street trees, and trees located in open space areas. Typical tasks include pruning, planting, assessments, insect/disease treatment, and hazard tree removals. This group also evaluates and approves street tree permits and manages the City's urban forest.

Park Stewardship: This work group coordinates restoration and wetland mitigation, community gardens, a native plant nursery, and the Park Volunteer Program which includes park stewards, community work parties, school stewardship, and partnerships with local organizations. Typical tasks include implementing, maintaining, and monitoring restoration projects, organizing volunteer events, managing individual volunteers and groups, and conducting outreach in the community.

Park Improvements: This work group completes projects related to facility improvements or infrastructure repairs.

Bayview Cemetery: This work group maintains the Cemetery grounds and provides support for burial and interment services. Typical tasks include monument installation, mowing/trimming, and customer service.

Lake Padden Municipal Golf Course: The City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department operates the Lake Padden Golf Course under an enterprise system, meaning that all golf operations must be supported by the revenues generated at the golf course. The popular par 72, 18-hole championship course was built in 1971 and is currently operating under a contract with a golf management company, which provides operation and maintenance of the golf course, including the pro shop, restaurant, driving range, disc golf course, golf instruction services, and all grounds maintenance.



Community Garden Program

The Community Garden Program offers 233 plots available year-round in four unique community gardens. Staff support gardeners with water, mulch, fencing, and renting garden plots. Most recently, the King Mountain Community Garden opened in 2024 with 30 plots, on 12 raised beds. Two plots at the Lakeway garden offer increased accessibility.

In addition to the City managed gardens, WSU Extension provides a [list of community gardens](#) that are generally available to the public in and around the City of Bellingham.



Photo credit: Scott Melnick, King County Mountains

The Urban Forest

The Urban Forestry crew is very active in managing trees located on City property whether it be a park, along a trail, right-of-way, street, or open space which is set aside for preservation or park development. Our crew also responds to hundreds of requests from property owners who share a common boundary with the City, which we call "edge properties". The city is currently working to complete an Urban Forest Plan which will identify all future goals, priorities, and actions for the City's urban forest.

6 Park Operations

Parks Volunteer Program

Approximately 4,000 volunteers contribute roughly 12,000 hours annually through the Parks Volunteer Program to improve parks by removing invasive species, restoring areas, and planting native plants. **That's the equivalent of having five additional full-time employees.**

Since 1992, The City of Bellingham's Parks Volunteer Program has been supporting the Parks & Recreation's Department's mission by engaging community members of all ages enhancing public parks, trails, and open space, and educating citizens about responsible choices.

The unique and very successful program empowers our community to have the tools, knowledge, and skills to care for, restore, and protect the park system. Activities include planting native trees and shrubs, removing invasive species, spreading mulch, educating about the issue of dog waste, picking up litter, and more. Beyond volunteer work parties and school outreach, Parks & Recreation supports over **90 volunteer park stewards** that help steward specific parks, open space, and trails.

Number of Volunteers by Year

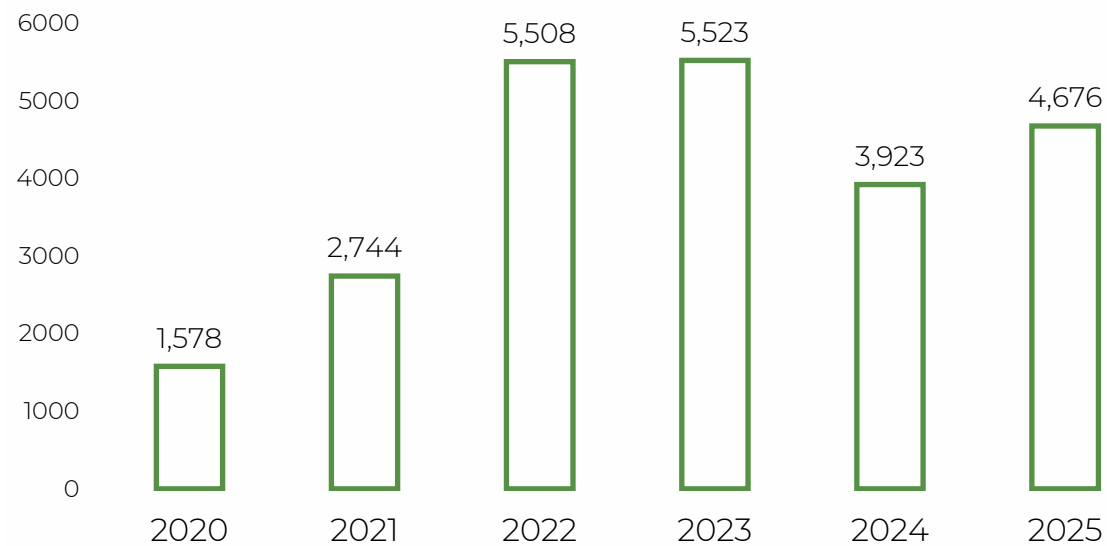
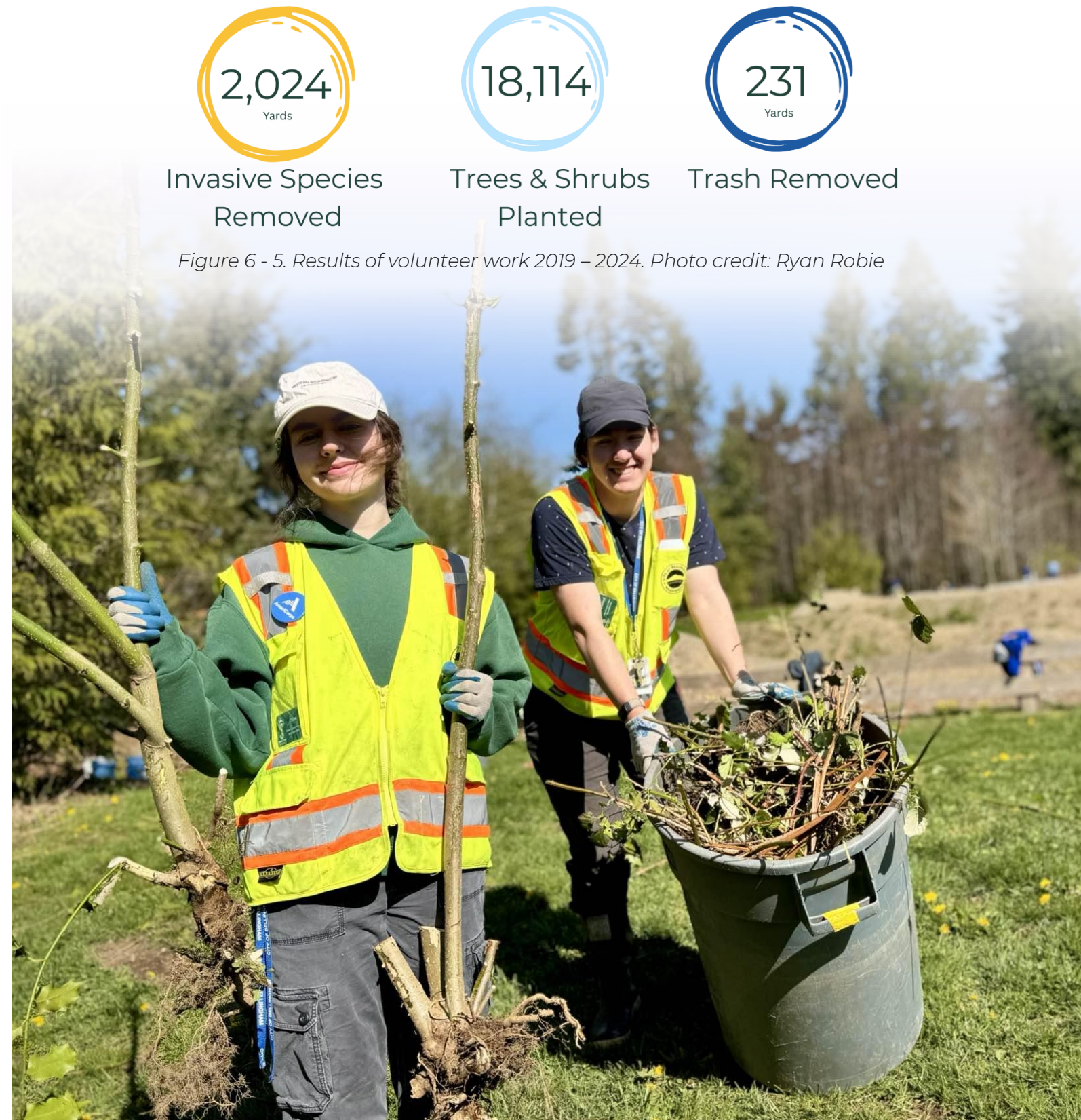


Figure 6 - 4. Volunteers that participated in stewardship activities by year.



System Management

Cityworks maintenance management system (Cityworks) Data was used to evaluate how much time was spent at various parks over the last five years. The time spent at each park is highly variable based on the number of amenities, age of the park, and volume of use. Larger and more complex community parks like Lake Padden and Bloedel Donovan have the highest maintenance hours due to building use, swimming beaches, vegetation management, trails, recreational amenities, and parking lots. Bellingham currently has the equivalent of 70 FTE in the Park Operations work group.

The Chart below shows number of labor hours compared to the number of annual visits to a park. These data are helpful in estimating ongoing maintenance funding and issues when building new parks and trails. It is also helpful to understand whether staff hours spent on different amenities are commensurate with the value they bring to the community in terms of park visitation.

Demand drives labor: A strong labor-to-visits correlation (Figure 6 - 6) indicates staffing and maintenance hours scale with park use. Some parks require more effort to maintain relative to the number of visits. Parks with the highest maintenance relative to the visitation include:

- Happy Valley Park, 6,727 annual visits
- Forest & Cedar Park, 9,402 annual visits
- Memorial Park, 13,282 annual visits
- Broadway Park, 24,528 annual visits
- Harriet Spanel Park, 14,572 annual visits
- Roosevelt Park, 29,721 annual visits
- Fairhaven Park, 123,795 annual visits
- Maritime Heritage Park, 67,510 annual visits

Parks with high labor hours and low visitation are candidates for design optimization (e.g., simplify planting beds, drought-tolerant plantings, replace problematic structures, standardize furnishings) to flatten maintenance curves. These parks could also be candidates for improved recreational amenities to draw more public use.

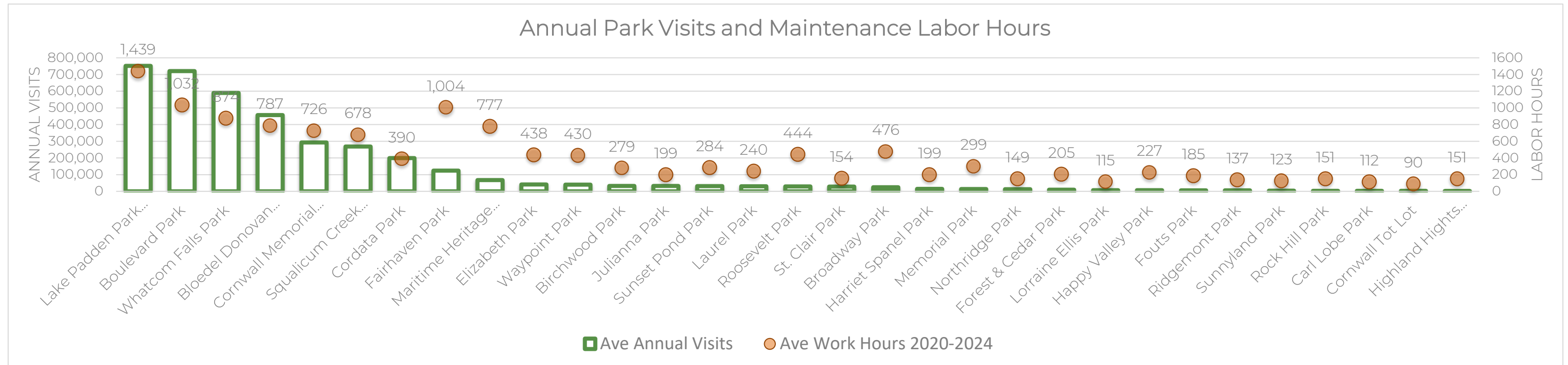


Figure 6 - 6. Annual labor hours (2019-2024) by park compared to annual visits (Placer.ai, 2024)

Maintenance Staffing Needs for New Facilities

This data can be leveraged into future planning for a resilient park system. Community parks on average are at least five times more maintenance-intensive than pocket parks and neighborhood parks. Trails are more difficult to analyze. Trail surfacing, vegetation management, and trail work within parks make tracking time spent on trails challenging. Presently, we record spending 50 hours per mile to maintain trails. Open space is a little more straight forward since it is quite similar between sites and has few unique amenities to maintain.

- Multi-use trail maintenance – 50 hours/mile
- Community Park maintenance – 600 hours/site
- Neighborhood Park maintenance – 120 hours/site
- Open space maintenance – 1 hour/acre of land

Future capital improvements should factor in long-term staffing and fixed costs such as utilities when proposing new parks, open space, and trails, according to the estimated labor needed in Table 6 - 1. Bellingham currently has roughly 70 FTE employees in maintenance and operations, and 56 developed parks and special use sites to maintain. This is 1.25 employees per site.

All new facilities should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

While this table provides a helpful guideline for staffing future parks, maintenance employee needs should take into consideration:

- Demand or level of use
- Type of amenities
- Programing and events
- Life-stage of facilities

Table 6 - 1. FTE employees needed by park facility type.

Facility Type	Estimated Employees Needed
Community Park	2.2
Neighborhood Park/Pocket Park	0.4
Special Use Site	(varies significantly based on level of use)
Multi-use Trail (per mile) <i>Other trail types require more or less time</i>	0.17
Open Space (per 100 acres)	0.3

Condition Assessment

In 2025, Park Operations staff conducted an assessment of current conditions of the Bellingham park system. This assessment helps identify existing site maintenance issues and opportunities for future capital improvements. The assessment includes a review of general park infrastructure and amenities.

The assessment is broken down by park type and four main maintenance areas: recreational amenities, site amenities, park structures, and vegetation, including trees.

The general conditions rating system is shown to the right. A sample of the assessment for Community parks are shown in Table 6 - 2. The full assessment for all facilities and more specific ratings criteria for individual features are included in Appendix D.

Generally, the assessment shows that the majority of parks are in good or fair condition, but are generally showing the age of amenities that were installed decades ago and have not been replaced. Some findings from the assessment are described by features below:

General findings

Neighborhood Parks (NP) show elevated vegetation issues as compared to other park classes. Community parks (CP) have the highest number of features with a “fair” or “poor” score. When considering annual visits the following community parks show the most need:

- Lake Padden Park
- Cornwall Memorial Park
- Maritime Heritage Park
- Whatcom Falls Park

Other facilities to note:

- Big Rock Garden Park
- Bayview Cemetery
- Civic Athletic Complex, specifically the condition of the structures and Geri Field 3

Table 6 - 2. Conditions assessment for community parks.

Site Name (Developed)	Classification	Annual Visits - 2020-2024 ave*	Recreational Amenities							Site Amenities				Park Structures						Vegetation							
			Playgrounds	Sports Courts - Bball, volleyball,	Sport Fields/ Multiuse Fields	Pathways / Trails	Wayfinding /maps	Swimming Beach/ Spraypark	Site Furnishings	Lighting	Signage	Rec Fencing	Parking Areas	Restrooms	Shelters/Pavilion/ Gazebo	Recreation Buildings	Kiosks	Bridges	Boat Ramp	Overwater Structures	Operations shop/Storage	Natural Turfgrass	Park Trees	Irrigation	Drainage/ Stormwater	Landscaped Beds	Natural Areas
Bloedel Donovan Park	CP	442,197	1	3	-	2	2	1	2	1	2	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	3	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	
Boulevard Park	CP	711,236	1	-	-	2	2	2	1	1	2	-	2	1	1	3	-	-	-	1	2	2	1	3	-	1	
Cordata Park	CP	187,315	1	1	-	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	
Cornwall Memorial Park	CP	299,644	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	3	-	3	2	2	-	2	2	2	
Fairhaven Park	CP	123,872	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	3	-	1	-	3	1	1	-	1	2	2	
Lake Padden Park	CP	747,248	2	1	3	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	1	1	-	2	1	2	2	2	-	2	2	1	
Maritime Heritage Park	CP	64,535	1	-	-	3	2	-	1	1	1	-	2	2	-	1	-	3	-	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	
Northridge Park	CP	No Data	-	-	-	2	2	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	-	2	
Squalicum Creek Park	CP	275,630	1	1	2	2	2	-	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	
Waypoint Park	CP	38,148	1	-	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	1	2	-	
Whatcom Falls Park	CP	589,691	1	2	-	2	2	-	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	-	2	2	-	1	3	1	2	-	2	2	1

General condition ratings are based on the following scale:

1 - Good Condition: Generally, amenities in 'good' condition offer full functionality and do not need repairs. Good facilities have playable sports surfaces and equipment, working fixtures, and fully intact safety features (railings, fences, etc.).

2 - Fair: In general, amenities in 'fair' condition are mainly functional, but need minor or moderate repairs. Fair facilities have play surfaces, equipment, fixtures, and safety features that are operational and allow play, but have deficiencies or at or near the end of their expected lifecycle.

3 - Poor: In general, amenities in 'poor' condition. They need significant repairs to be fully functional. Some examples include athletic fields that are too uneven for ball games, broken features, standing water, buildings that need structural retrofitting, etc.

(-): These features don't exist in this park or were not able to be evaluated.

6 Park Operations

The following specific amenities were called out for repair through the condition assessment.

Overwater structures

- Repair or replace docks at Lake Padden and non-motorized boaters dock at Bloedel Donovan

Trails

- Resurfacing of Old Village Trail and Huntoon Trail in the Sehome Hill Arboretum

Bathrooms

- Repair the Lake Padden bath-house sewer system
- Winterize Roosevelt Park restroom for year-round use
- Winterize Elizabeth Park restroom for year-round use
- Repair, replace, or decommission restrooms at the Fairhaven Village Green
- Improve capacity at Whatcom Falls Park upper restroom and demo or restore retired restroom.
- Demo decommissioned restroom at north end of Boulevard Park

Irrigation

- Repair or replace irrigation system in Big Rock Garden
- Repair or replace irrigation system at Maritime Heritage Park
- Replace irrigation system at Boulevard Park
- Replace irrigation system at the Lake Padden Golf Course

Drainage

- Improve drainage on the trails between wetlands at Cordata Park, multiuse playfields at Memorial Park, and Lake Padden Park

Signage

- Install new sign at the Sven Hoyt Community Garden
- Replace Cornwall Memorial Park and Boulevard Park entrance signs

Lighting

- Add lighting to parking area and large shelter at Whatcom Falls
- Repair or replace lighting at Roosevelt Park
- Add lighting to Lake Padden parking areas and bath-house



Photo credit: Jeffery Barclay, Big Rock Garden

Projects and Action Recommendations

This section describes projects and actions that can be completed within the 20-year horizon of this plan. Each project and action is rated against the seven park principles found in Chapter 2.

The figure (right) illustrates how projects and actions are prioritized based on public demand, how well they accomplish our goals, staffing, and available funding.

The recommendations included in this chapter are intended to provide measurable actions to achieve the policies contained within the links below:

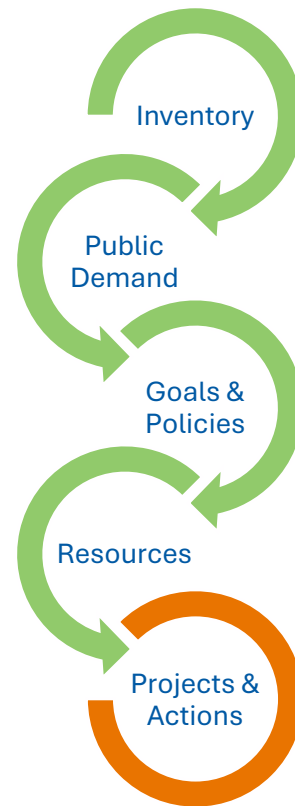
[Partnerships](#)

[System Resilience](#)

[Conservation](#)

[Equity](#)

[Design](#)



The maintenance projects in Table 6 - 4, have three criteria are scored and summed in the “LOS, Equity, and Demand” field, with a maximum possible score of 2.5. This score was combined with the principles score and project size/resource needs to estimate whether completion is a short-, medium-, or long-term goal.

Table 6 - 3. Maintenance and Operations actions prioritized by Plan goals

Maintenance & Operations Actions	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
Augment invasive species control and provide environmental enhancement where feasible through volunteer program, partnerships, and Washington Conservation Corps (WCC)	Ongoing				✓	✓		
Utilize "crowd-sourcing" apps and maintenance management software to track maintenance needs and track work orders	Ongoing			✓	✓		✓	
Increase staffing for maintenance relative to the addition of capital improvement projects or new park development listed in this plan	Ongoing				✓			✓
Update the park conditions assessment regularly to monitor park assets and prioritize asset improvements using a deferred asset criticality matrix	Short				✓		✓	✓
Install vehicle gates at parks that are difficult to patrol, are subject to vandalism, or illegal activities	Short				✓			✓
Coordinate with the Public Works Department on the update of the street tree maintenance responsibility list with an annual meeting to reinforce roles and cooperation	Short			✓	✓	✓		
Conduct a building condition assessment of shelters/pavilions in Fairhaven and Cornwall Memorial Parks	Short	✓			✓			✓
Seek opportunities for new community gardens in underserved areas and raise awareness of non-city gardens available to the public	Short			✓	✓		✓	
Expand the Bayview Cemetery for green burials	Short				✓	✓		
Assess park maintenance equipment needs by location and budget for new equipment and storage facilities that will improve efficiency	Short				✓			✓
Replace, upgrade, or repair restrooms at Roosevelt, Whatcom Falls, and Elizabeth Parks	Short	✓					✓	

Maintenance & Operations Actions (cont.)	Priority	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Equity	Design
Evaluate and replace bridges – Whatcom, Civic, Cornwall, Silver Beach Creek.	Mid		✓		✓			
Assess building mechanical/electrical systems and roofing that is nearing their expected life spans	Mid				✓			
Review Cityworks staff hour data to align hours spent with goals and level of visitation	Mid				✓		✓	
Develop a water conservation plan to reduce irrigation water use and annual water utility costs, while updating and repairing inefficient/damaged irrigation systems	Mid				✓	✓		
Inventory and assess maintenance needs park asphalt and stormwater systems	Mid				✓	✓		
Update the 2002 Street tree maintenance responsibility list	Mid			✓	✓	✓		
Identify areas where street trees are failing and plan for their replacement or rehabilitation as part of an annual work plan.	Mid				✓	✓		
Complete Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment of community parks. Install and repair lighting to increase safety and extend hours of use in Winter at Maritime Heritage, Galbraith Mountain Trailhead, Sunnyland, Whatcom Falls, Lake Padden, and Cornwall Memorial Parks	Mid	✓					✓	✓
Look out for community partnerships to increase capacity for easy or specialized (i.e. historic buildings) maintenance activities to free up staff time	Long			✓	✓			
Work with the asset management group to organize and build efficiencies in the management of park assets	Long			✓	✓			
Hire a limited commission Park Ranger to help educate park users, conduct interpretive programs, and enforce park rules	Long	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Develop a Sehome Hill Arboretum urban forestry management plan	Long				✓	✓		
Participate in the development of a City-wide pesticide use plan that incorporates an integrated pest management plan.	Long				✓	✓		

6 Park Operations

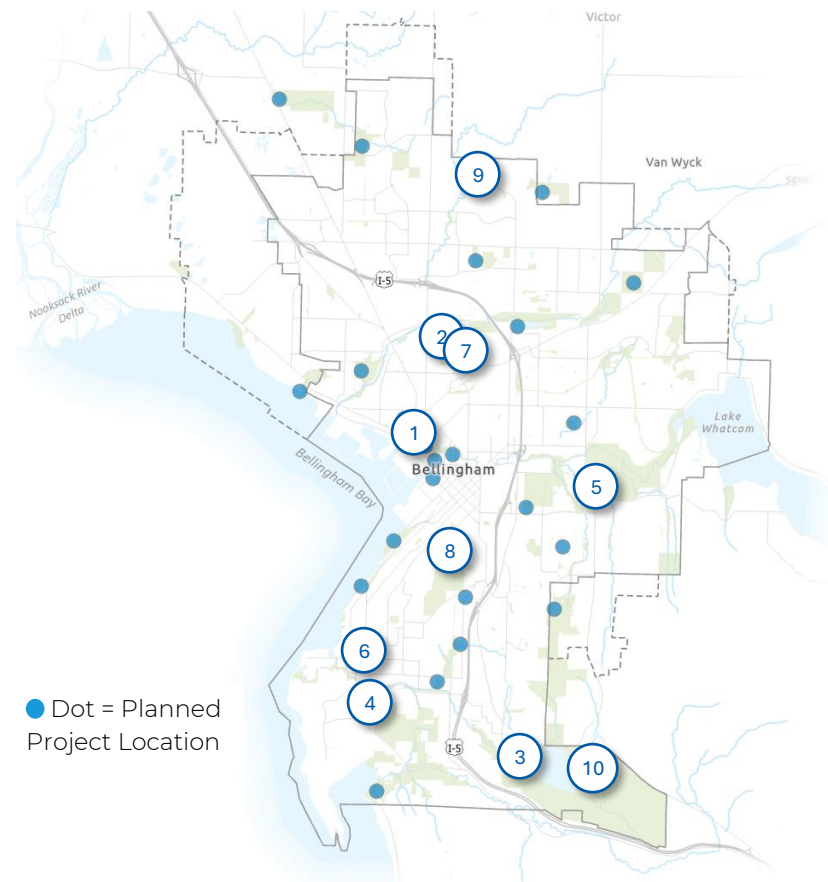


Table 6 - 4. Maintenance projects prioritized by location and Plan goals.

Map #	Location	Project Description	LOS, Equity, and Demand Score	Principles score	Prioritization	Play	Connection	Partnerships	System Resilience	Conservation	Design
1	Maritime Heritage Park	Whatcom Creek south trail decommissioning and shoreline restoration	1.023	3	Ongoing				✓	✓	✓
2	Cornwall Memorial Park	Cornwall Memorial Park forest understory restoration	0.572	2	Ongoing					✓	✓
3	Lake Padden Park	Restore and improve changing rooms and bathrooms with sewer installation at bathhouse	1.179	3	Short term	✓			✓		✓
4	Fairhaven Park	Repair or replace Fairhaven pavilion and shelter	0.825	3	Short term	✓			✓		✓
5	Bayview Cemetery	Bayview Cemetery ongoing road improvements	0.730	1	Short term				✓		
6	Fairhaven Village Green	Repair or replace bathrooms at Fairhaven Village Green	0.451	4	Short term	✓		✓	✓		✓
7	Cornwall Memorial Park	Upstream bridge replacement and fish habitat improvement project	0.572	3	Mid term		✓			✓	✓
8	Sehome Arboretum	Resurface Huntoon Trail through the Sehome Arboretum	0.228	3	Mid term		✓	✓	✓		
9	Van Wyck Park	Install city water/sewer hookups for the Van Wyck Lodge to make it available for facility rental once James Street utilities are installed	0.784	1	Long term	✓					
10	Lake Padden Park	Replace golf course irrigation system and do nutrient balance study minimize potential for water quality impacts to Lake Padden from the golf course	0.567	2	Long term				✓	✓	

Chapter 7

Implementation and Funding

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Photo source: Matt Rose, Taylor Dock

Funding Strategies

The financial strategy for Bellingham Parks & Recreation for the next six to 20-year period should generate sufficient revenue to maintain and renovate existing facilities, provide recreational programs and services, and implement the capital improvements listed in Chapters three through six.

Recommendations outlined in this PROS Plan total approximately \$230 million in today's dollars. This estimate includes maintenance costs and improvement projects but does not include staffing or overhead. Capital projects include repair and improvements to existing facilities, as well as additional land and facilities to serve new growth.

The project lists in this report are not exhaustive or static; priorities shift over time in response to new interests, opportunities, and community decision-making processes. The City's six-year Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) is updated annually as part of the budget in order to reflect these changes.

City Budget Process

The City operates on an annual budget that is prepared in the fall and adopted for the first of the year. Based on priorities developed by the mayor's office, each department prepares and submits a budget for review.

The mayor's office then refines these budgets and submits an overall city report to the City Council and the public. Following their review and recommendations, the budget is then discussed at a public hearing and eventually adopted by City Council.

Funding Sources

Understanding potential funding sources for the parks and recreation system is critical to identifying limitations and opportunities for future projects and services. Projected funding amounts for growth related park projects is roughly \$80 million,

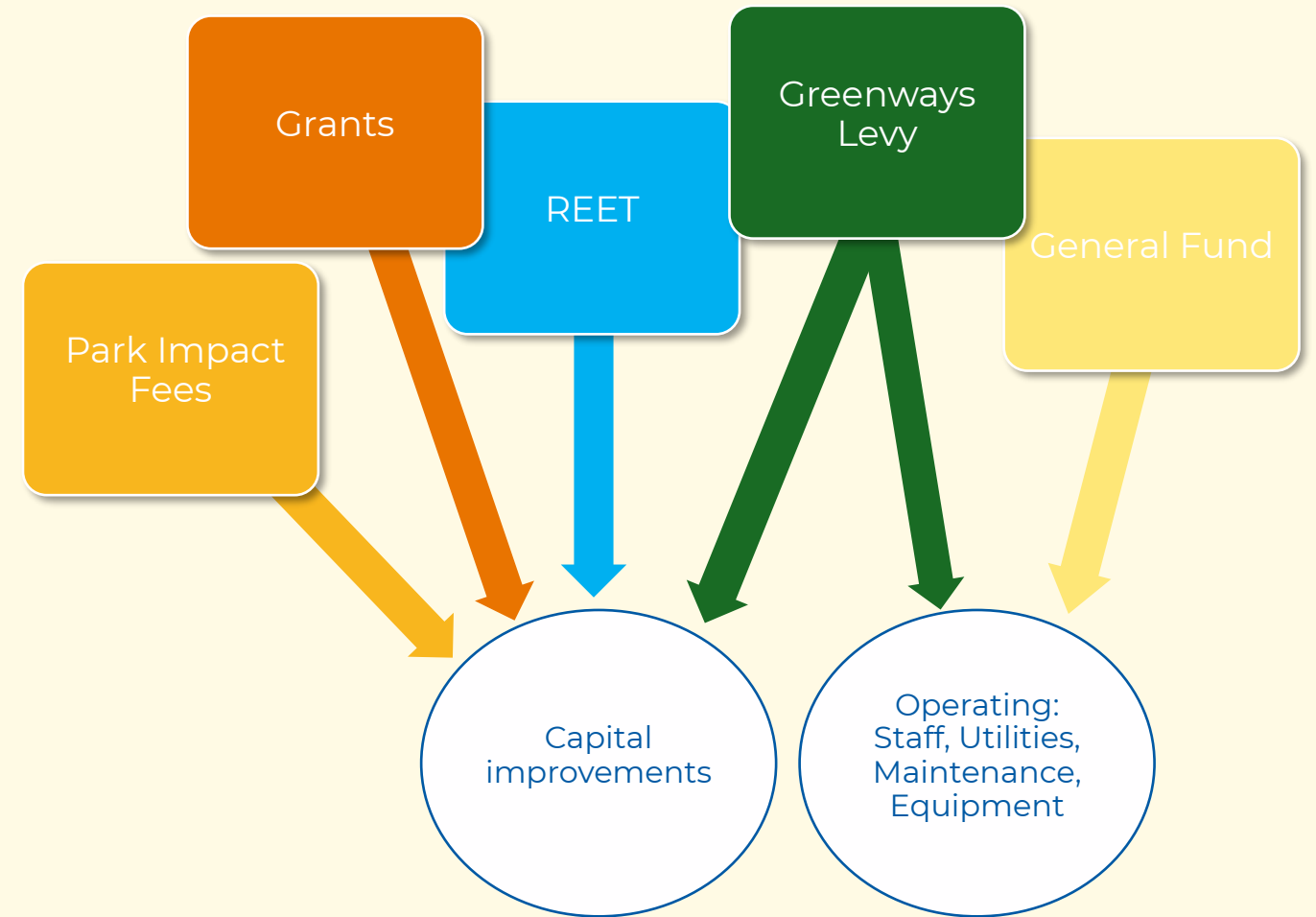


Figure 7 - 1. Common funding sources for capital projects and operations.

and is comprised of REET, Greenways Levy, and Grants (Table 7 – 2). The balance of funding for new capital growth will be made up by park impact fees. Park impact fees are described in the capital improvements section of this chapter.

General fund

The General Fund is derived from property taxes, licenses and permits, intergovernmental revenues including state and federal grants, service charges and fees, fines and forfeitures, and other miscellaneous revenues. General funds are used to finance most government operations, including staff, equipment, capital facilities, and other requirements. Park, recreation, and open space programs and facilities staff are funded primarily from general fund accounts.

The majority of recreational programs generate direct revenue through service charges and partnerships. Service charges and fees provide revenue to the general fund through:

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- User fees for athletic fields, picnic shelter, pavilion and other park facility rentals
- Arne Hanna Aquatic Center
- Facility leases
- Recreation hosted races, events, classes, and programs

This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 under cost recovery. In 2023, revenue through these services generated roughly \$1.3 million (110%, Inc, 2025). These fee recovery revenue sources are not expected to substantially cover operating, maintenance, and capital costs, but help defray those costs and capture value provided to the community.

Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)

REET revenue has been used to pay off the Civic Field Bond, help fund large capital maintenance projects, and set aside to fund future waterfront development projects, including parks and roads. REET revenue has historically been available for capital projects and a recent change in State law allows more flexibility for using REET funds for maintenance.

Park Impact Fees

Bellingham has adopted a growth impact fee provision in accordance with the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). A park impact fee is applied to all proposed residential developments within the city as a means to maintaining park, recreation and open space levels-of-service. The ordinance makes provisions for setting aside the resources, including lands or monies, necessary to offset the impact new residential development project has on park, recreation and open space facilities. There is more information on impact fees in the next section.

Greenways Levy

Since 1990, Bellingham citizens have approved five property tax levies to fund Bellingham's park system. Greenways Levy funds are the most flexible funding source available to Parks & Recreation and can be used for property acquisition, development, climate resiliency, and maintenance and operations. Development and acquisition funds through 2033 are

included in the projected revenues in Table 7 - 2. Additional levy revenue is anticipated but not assumed for funding past 2033. Chapter 1 contains more information on the Greenways levy.

Cemetery Fund

This enterprise fund is for Bayview Cemetery operations.

Golf Course Fund

Accounts for the revenue and expenditures associated with the oversight, repairs, and maintenance of the facilities and grounds of the golf course. In 2018, the operational model changed from operation by a contracted private vendor to a management contract to operate on behalf of the City.

Grants

The City has received an average of \$1 million annually over the last five years from various sources, including Washington Recreation and Conservation Office grant programs, federal Transportation Enhancement grants and Department of Ecology grants. This plan estimates a total of \$20 million in grant funding over a 20-year period.

Metropolitan Parks District

City of Bellingham does not currently have a Metropolitan Parks District. While Washington State law authorizes four types of parks and/or recreation districts, urban areas tend to create Metropolitan Parks Districts (MPD). MPDs "may be created for the management, control, improvement, maintenance, and acquisition of parks, pathways, boulevards, and recreational facilities" or also formed for a limited purpose that identifies specific public parks and/or recreational facilities.

Community Volunteers

Volunteers and community groups already contribute to the improvement of park and recreation services in Bellingham. Volunteer projects include habitat enhancement and restoration, invasive plant removal, and tree planting, and trash collection.

While organized groups and community-minded individuals add value to the park and recreation system, volunteer coordination and support require a substantial amount of staff time. Additional resources may be necessary to enable a volunteer coordinator to fully utilize the community's willingness to support park and recreation efforts

Donations and Dedications

Donations include park system land and improvements received by the city from private individuals as well as other agencies or organizations.

Property dedication for park use by a developer could occur in exchange for Park Impact Fees or as part of a planned development where public open space is a key design for the layout and marketing of a new residential project. The Parks and Recreation Department should vet any potential dedications to ensure

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that such land is in an area of need, can be developed with site amenities appropriate for the projected use of the property, and any impact fee credit proposal is consistent with state law and municipal code.

Unlimited General Obligation Bonds

Bellingham may come to depend on voter referendums as a means of financing a larger portion of the capital improvement program, since unlimited obligation bonds are not paid from the property tax subject to the 1.0% limitation.

Voter approved capital improvements may be more representative of actual resident priorities than some other methods of validating capital expenditures, and will at the least, ensure referendum submittals provide widespread benefits. However, bond revenue cannot be spent for maintenance and operational issues - and bond referendums must be approved by a margin over 60% of the registered voters who participated in the last election.



Photo: Megan Travis. Locus Beach

Capital Improvements

Table 7 - 1. Estimated costs of 20-year capital improvements in 2025 values

The capital facilities table (Table 7 – 1) reflects the projects listed in Chapters three through six of this Plan and corresponds with the adopted level-of-service discussed in Chapter 2. This table reflects the full 20-year planning horizon to 2045.

The more detailed six-year capital facilities plan (CFP) is found in the City Budget. The six-year CFP is a project-specific plan that is updated annually, generally guided by the full 20-year plan, and not constrained to projects listed in this plan.

Table 7 – 1, has a column for “New growth-related project costs” that would be driven by new population growth (impact fee related) and “Total project costs” for all projects, including capital repair projects or those that will likely require bonding or similar outside funding.

Project Type	Description	Per Acre	Per Unit	Per Site	Planning Level Cost	Count	New Growth Project Costs	Total Project Costs	New Staff	Comments
New Neighborhood Park	Development of 3-acre park based on planning guidelines (does not include site acquisition costs)		X		\$3,000,000	4	\$12,000,000	\$12,000,000	1.6	Puget, Bakerview, PP in HV, PP in Samish Urban Village, Lee Memorial
New Community Park	Development of 10-acre park based on planning guidelines (does not include site acquisition costs)		X		\$8,000,000	2	\$16,000,000	\$16,000,000	4.6	Salish Landing, Lake Padden, and Van Wyck upgrades
New Trail	Construction and materials cost of a 10' wide asphalt path with 1' wide gravel shoulder, one mile (does not include planning, design, or land costs)		X		\$635,000	30	\$19,050,000	\$19,050,000	5.3	Based on LOS, includes trails at samish crest (land dedication is assumed for private trail development, other land costs are included in OS land and developed park land costs)
Open Space Land	Acquisition costs and minimal development, signage and wayfinding only (Ave price/acre for OS last 5 years + development)		X		\$48,467	123	\$5,961,441	\$5,961,441	0.4	Based on LOS
Park or Facility Repair/Replacement	Overall allowance for park updates	X			\$ 1,000,000	20		\$20,000,000		Golf irrigation, Padden sewer, repair projects from condition assessment, Fairhaven Green restrooms, bridges repair and replace
New / Improved signage	Interpretive and wayfinding signage			X	\$ 10,000	100		\$1,000,000		Improving trail maps and wayfinding
Accessibility Improvements (ADA)	Accessibility improvements within programmable spaces (e.g. play areas, picnicking facilities, etc)	X			\$ 500,000	5	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000		General upgrades
Sports Court Improvements	General allowance for court resurfacing & striping		X		\$ 100,000	10		\$1,000,000		
Turf Field Improvements	General allowance for natural turf field resurfacing		X		\$ 200,000	3		\$600,000		Squalicum Crk Park regrading, surfacing and drainage improvements
New Synthetic Field	Allowance for new synthetic sports field		X		\$ 4,500,000	2	\$ 6,750,000.00	\$9,000,000		Growth includes one new field, Lake Padden upgrade, Total Cost includes Civic field repair
Trees and Landscaping	General allowance for tree planting and landscaping	X			\$ 200,000	20	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000		
Play Enhancement	New or improved small (3,500 SF) playgrounds		X		\$ 350,000	8	\$2,800,000	\$2,800,000		Sunset Pond, Julianna, and 6 upgrades
Shelter and Amenities	General allowance for new picnic shelters, picnicking amenities, and utility connections			X	\$ 800,000	4		\$3,200,000		Fairhaven Park, Storybrook, Happy Valley (Cost based on 2025 Fairhaven improvement costs estimates of \$1.7M for two pavillions)
Nature Integration	Replacing selected grass turf areas with native grasses and landscaping	X			\$ 200,000	5		\$1,000,000		
Shade Structure	General allowance for shade sail and structure			X	\$ 75,000	4	\$300,000	\$300,000		
Restroom	Small permanent Restroom		X		\$ 250,000	4	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000		Sunset Pond, LSP Pier, Julianna,
Connectivity Improvements	Replaced or new perimeter sidewalks or accessible paved pathway within park (per 100 lineal feet)		X		\$ 7,500	104		\$780,000		
Indoor Recreation Improvements	Expansion of Bloedel Donovan community building, Community Center (Separate bonding)			X	\$ 80,000,000	1	\$6,800,000	\$80,000,000	5.0	New staff estimate assumes conversion of existing acquatic center staff to assist in community/acquatic center
Outdoor Recreation expansion and upgrades	Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan			X	\$ 30,000,000	1	\$30,000,000	\$30,000,000	2.3	Site plan and facility improvements
Park Land	Acquisition cost for developable land (existing ave cost/acre)		X		\$ 125,000	99	\$12,375,000	\$12,375,000		Based on LOS of 25.2 per 1,000 people. Existing property maybe developed rather than purchased
Park and trail wetland and buffer mitigation	Mitigation bank anticipated costs		x		\$ 500,000	6	\$3,000,000	\$3,000,000		
							\$ 122,536,441	\$ 225,566,441	19.3	

Staffing Considerations

The additional parkland and improvements will also require additional maintenance and operation costs. The existing 3,179 acres of City managed parks, open space, recreation facilities, and trails are maintained by full-time and part-time or seasonal staff with a full-time equivalent (FTE) of 70.

In 2025, the ratio of developed park or special use site to maintenance staff is estimated at 1.25 FTE per developed site or 24 acres per FTE. This is a decrease from the last plan update of 38 acres per FTE. The estimated additional full-time employees to meet the ambitions of this plan are 14.3 (FTE) for the maintenance and operations work group, and five (FTE) for the recreation work group. The Parks & Recreation Department staff would grow by 19.3 FTE by 2045 if all recommendations are implemented. More details on maintenance and operations staffing ratios can be found in Chapter 6.

An increase or decrease in the intensity of maintenance needed based on the type of park or facility would affect the actual costs.

Park Impact Fees

Park impact fees, or PIFs, are fees assessed on the construction of new residential housing to help pay for park acquisition and development. Impact fees may be collected for parks, roads, schools and fire protection facilities that are part of adopted capital facilities plans. In 2006, the City began assessing Park Impact Fees on new residential units. Bellingham last updated its PIF rates in 2020.

PIFs are based on a state statute (RCW 82.02) that authorizes Washington counties and cities to collect impact fees to “ensure adequate facilities are available to serve new growth and development.” Impact fees must be spent on projects that are related to the impacts of new development. They cannot be used to correct pre-existing deficiencies or for maintenance costs. They also cannot exceed a proportionate share of the total cost for system improvements.

This proportionate share of the costs is included as an “adjustment factor” representing special taxes, fees, State and Federal grants, and other revenue sources available for park growth. The remaining portion of the costs can be collected through impact fees.

PIFs are determined by calculating the cost of acquiring and developing parkland to serve growth. These projects are based on public demand and level of service standards described in Chapter 2. The cost of these projects is then distributed based on new residential development activity. The City expects an additional 29,000 new residents by the year 2045, which is the difference between the current and projected urban growth area population as adopted in the Bellingham comprehensive plan. This calculation assumes that all urban growth areas will be incorporated into the City during that time frame.

Table 7 - 2 outlines estimated revenue for capital improvement projects through 2045. The revenue forecasts are based on average trends in capital facility fund expenditures by the City during recent years. The “New growth project cost” is pulled from the capital improvements table, Table 7 - 1. The difference in “New growth project costs” and “Total Estimated Revenue” are costs that can be defrayed by park impact fees.

New impact fee rules adopted by the State in 2023 require Bellingham to adopt impact fees that produce proportionately lower impact fees for smaller housing units. By applying a per capita cost to the number of bedrooms or square foot size of new residences, Bellingham will be able to meet the new requirements to establish proportional impact fees.

Table 7 - 2. Project revenue sources and capital costs of new growth projects.

Capital Project Revenue Sources		Notes
REET	\$10,000,000	Estimated 20 year REET funding for park projects
Greenway Levy 5	\$41,800,000	Acquisition and development funding through 2034 (8 yrs)
Grants & donations	\$10,000,000	20 yrs, estimate based on last 5-years
Park Impact Fee Balance	\$2,200,000	Existing balance allocated for recommended projects
Total Estimated Revenue	\$64,000,000	
New Growth Project Cost	\$122,536,441	
Remainder to be funded through new growth	(\$58,536,441)	

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Appendices

- Appendix A – 1: 2025 PROS Plan Community Survey summary
- Appendix A – 2: Focus Group and Open House summaries
- Appendix B – 1: Park Facilities, Open Space Inventory
- Appendix B – 2: Bellingham School District Athletic Amenities
- Appendix C – Greenways Public Trail Facilities Planning
- Appendix D – Park Conditions Assessment