

# SAMISH WAY URBAN VILLAGE PLAN

City of Bellingham, Washington



Planning & Community Development Department  
Adopted by Ordinance No. 2019-12-038  
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### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

This document provides a policy framework for the development of an urban village in a 69-acre area surrounding Samish Way, generally located west of I-5 at the base of Sehome Hill Arboretum, north of Bill McDonald Parkway and south of Edwards Street. This area contains portions of the Sehome and York Neighborhoods. The goal of the Urban Village Plan is to guide redevelopment towards the community vision. Specific implementing regulations must also be adopted to incorporate this vision into code.

Connections and compatibility to surrounding areas are of paramount importance. However, the goals here are only applicable to areas within the Samish Way Urban Village boundary.

#### 1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO THE 2016 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The 2016 Comprehensive Plan states that anticipated population growth should be accommodated primarily within urban villages. An “urban village” is generally considered an area that:



- Contains a mix of commercial, residential, and service uses;
- Provides amenities and necessities within walking distance;
- Is designed for pedestrians, bikes, and transit, as well as the automobile;



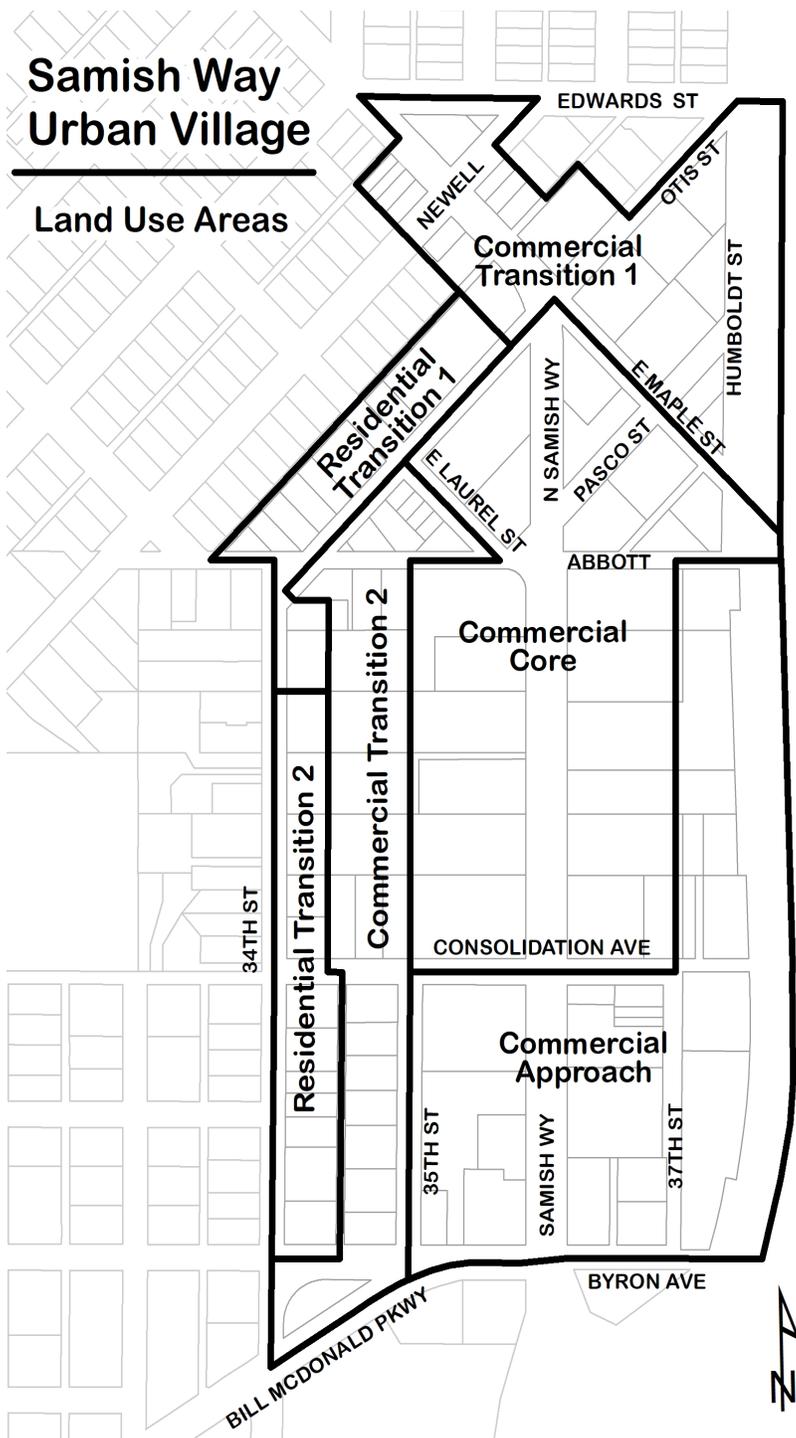
- Facilitates strong community connections and interaction by serving as a neighborhood focal point and providing active public spaces; and
- Promotes sustainability and quality design.

The Comprehensive Plan designates the Samish Way area as an urban village. Comprehensive Plan policy LU-18 directs that the City develop new plans and update existing plans as needed to reflect the unique nature of each urban village.

The Samish Way Subarea Plan was originally adopted in 2009, and was amended in 2019 to reflect new information and consistency with other adopted policy documents. Its name was updated in 2025 for consistency with other urban village plans.

# Samish Way Urban Village

## Land Use Areas



### 1.3 THE PLANNING PROCESS

In 2004, a group of students at Western Washington University presented their ideas to the community illustrating the potential for the area surrounding Samish Way as a dynamic, people-centered place. This led to the formation of a Sehome Neighborhood Association committee to investigate neighborhood sentiments about this kind of redevelopment along Samish Way.

Starting from neighborhood survey data, the neighborhood association conducted outreach over the course of almost three years to discover interest, objections, and preferences regarding a walkable, mixed-use community along the Samish Way corridor. Outreach efforts included door-to-door contact with area businesses, multiple presentations and input opportunities for the Sehome and surrounding neighborhood associations, and collaboration with a local nonprofit, Sustainable Connections, for a professionally-moderated design charette as well as a business breakfast meeting attended by about one-third of area businesses.

These efforts culminated in the inclusion of the urban village concept in the proposed update to the Sehome Neighborhood Plan, as well as support in the proposed York Neighborhood Plan update, which led to the initiation of the City-sponsored master planning and rezoning process.

In June 2008, the City launched the master planning process by inviting the general public and all anticipated

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

stakeholders to attend a series of four workshops to discuss the future vision of the area. The purpose of these workshops was to gather input on how the area should redevelop over time to achieve the goals of an urban village. Each workshop focused on a different subject:

Meeting #1: Introduction and Character - Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the project area in terms of how these elements help or hinder the development of an urban village.



July 2008 Workshop Participants

Meeting #2: Public Realm: Streets, Trails and Plazas - Focus on street design, trail connections and plazas.

Meeting #3: Development Character: Permitted Uses, Design and Scale – Discussion of future development regulations, including permitted uses, design standards, floor area limits, height, and identification of “core” and “transition” zones.

Meeting #4: Summary of Input and Discussion of Alternatives – Presentation and discussion of concepts gathered at the previous meetings. Approximately 50 people attended each meeting, including neighbors, business own-

ers, property owners, developers, real estate agents, land use consultants, and other interested stakeholders. At the conclusion of the workshops, staff hired a private engineer, architectural firm, economist, and transportation planning firm to analyze the feasibility of the concepts that were generated.

Staff presented the resulting draft master plan concepts and regulations for public review at a pre-application meeting on February 26, 2009, then to numerous City Boards and Commissions, City Departments and small stakeholder groups, which led to the finalization of the plan.

The Samish Way Urban Village Subarea Plan was updated in 2019 to reflect changing conditions, such as the adoption of a Pedestrian Master Plan (2012), a Bicycle Master Plan (2014), a Comprehensive Plan update (2016), and completion of an in-depth transportation study (2016-2017) for the feasibility of a new multimodal cross-section for the Samish Way corridor. The update also included recommendations from the City’s [Urban Village Status Report](#), published in late 2018.



## 1.4 NATURAL AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

Sehome Hill Arboretum provides a striking backdrop to this valley, which was established by early fishermen and builders as one of Bellingham's first developed neighborhoods. It wasn't until Highway 99 was constructed that the area began seeing the auto-oriented commercial development that exists along Samish Way today.

In general, the site slopes gently to the south from Edwards Street at its north end and to the east from 34th Street at an overall low grade, with some areas of rolling surface. Along Samish Way itself, the road consistently loses elevation from north to south.

### *History of Samish Way*

In the early 1930s, Samish Way was known as Maple Valley Road, a gravel road bounded by fields, trees and a few houses. In 1936, the road

became part of Highway 99, also known as Pacific Highway 1, which ran along the West Coast from Mexico to Canada. By the mid 1950s, this main route into Bellingham had blossomed with motels, gas stations and other auto-oriented businesses.

In 1950, when Bellingham's population was around 34,000 people, there were approximately 38,000 cars using Highway 99 every day, most with destinations outside of Bellingham (and most without stopping). In 1960, the first stretch of Interstate 5 opened between Samish Way and Northwest Avenue. The businesses along Samish Way west of I-5 have remained oriented to travel and auto oriented uses today largely due to the location of I-5's interchanges.

### *The Area Today*

Samish Way is a gateway to Western Washington University (WWU), downtown, the waterfront and Lake Padden. The area is easy to access



Aloha Motel 1960 (Jack Carver)



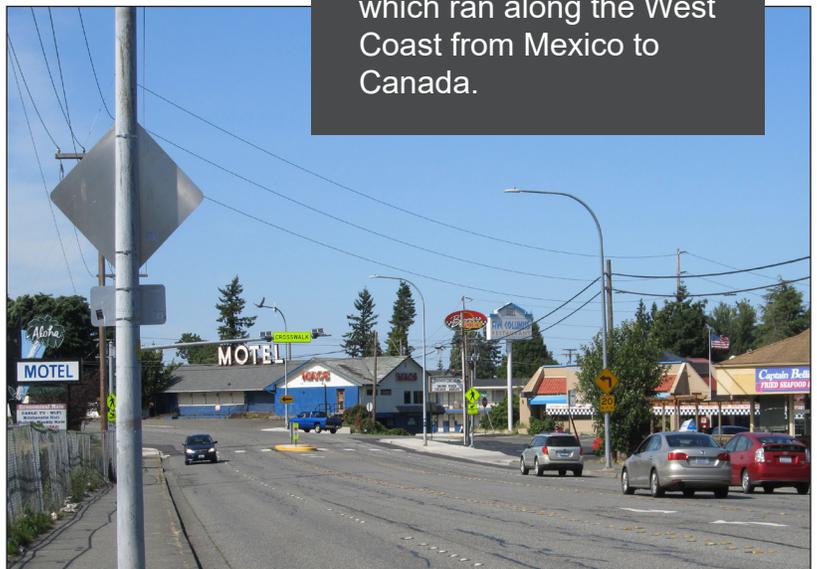
1946 Historical Photo - Heading North on Samish Way turning into Maple St. (Jack Carver)

from Interstate-5, which may perpetuate the automobile service-orientation of many businesses along this stretch. Currently, the area contains commercial and limited residential development, and the vast majority of the area is covered by parking lots. Approximately 61% of the project area is currently covered with impervious surfaces.

Businesses along Samish Way include gas stations, hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments. The nearby Sehome Village shopping center provides grocery and other retail services to the south of the project boundary.

The areas to the west and north/northwest of the area are primarily residential, with single-family homes and small apartment buildings.

In the early 1930s, Samish Way was known as Maple Valley Road, a gravel road bounded by fields, trees and a few houses. In 1936, the road became part of Highway 99, also known as Pacific Highway 1, which ran along the West Coast from Mexico to Canada.





# CHAPTER TWO VISION

## 2. VISION

Envision Samish Way in the future. After passing the freeway service businesses near Bill McDonald Parkway, visitors enter a welcoming gateway to Bellingham, greeted by a tree-lined streetscape with wide sidewalks supporting cafes and window shoppers. The area feels comfortable, bright, and is spotted with small green spaces and public amenities.

In the morning, residents of the nearby historic neighborhoods stroll down the hill for a cup of coffee through the tree-lined bike and pedestrian trails that connect their homes to the urban center. They join the diverse mix of residents from the condos and apartments above as they start their day at a breakfast eatery.

Casual lunchtime spots are filled with students and workers enjoying free internet access along the tree-lined sidewalks safely separated from Samish Way car traffic. Business is brisk all day, with a diverse mix of retail and professional services complementing each other. Cars move slowly past the tree-lined median, stopping at the signalized intersections to allow

students heading up and over Sehome Hill to cross the street.

In the evening, neon signs advertising the nightlife infuse the area with an atmosphere of fun that draws families as well as the young professionals and WWU faculty that live in the area. The couple sitting in the drive-up burger joint remembers this was once Old Highway 99.

Many people who visit from other parts of town enjoy riding the bus on the high-frequency transit line that offers frequent transit service through the area, or else they park their car in the garage located below the business they're visiting. The solid row of businesses along the street draw people to continue window shopping until they are surprised to find they've perused the whole stretch of "The Way".

From the urban center, the taller buildings abutting Samish Way taper down to single-family and courtyard housing, facing the landscaped park-like expanses of the single-family homes which back up to the Historic Districts and Sehome Hill Arboretum above.



Artist rendering of 35th street

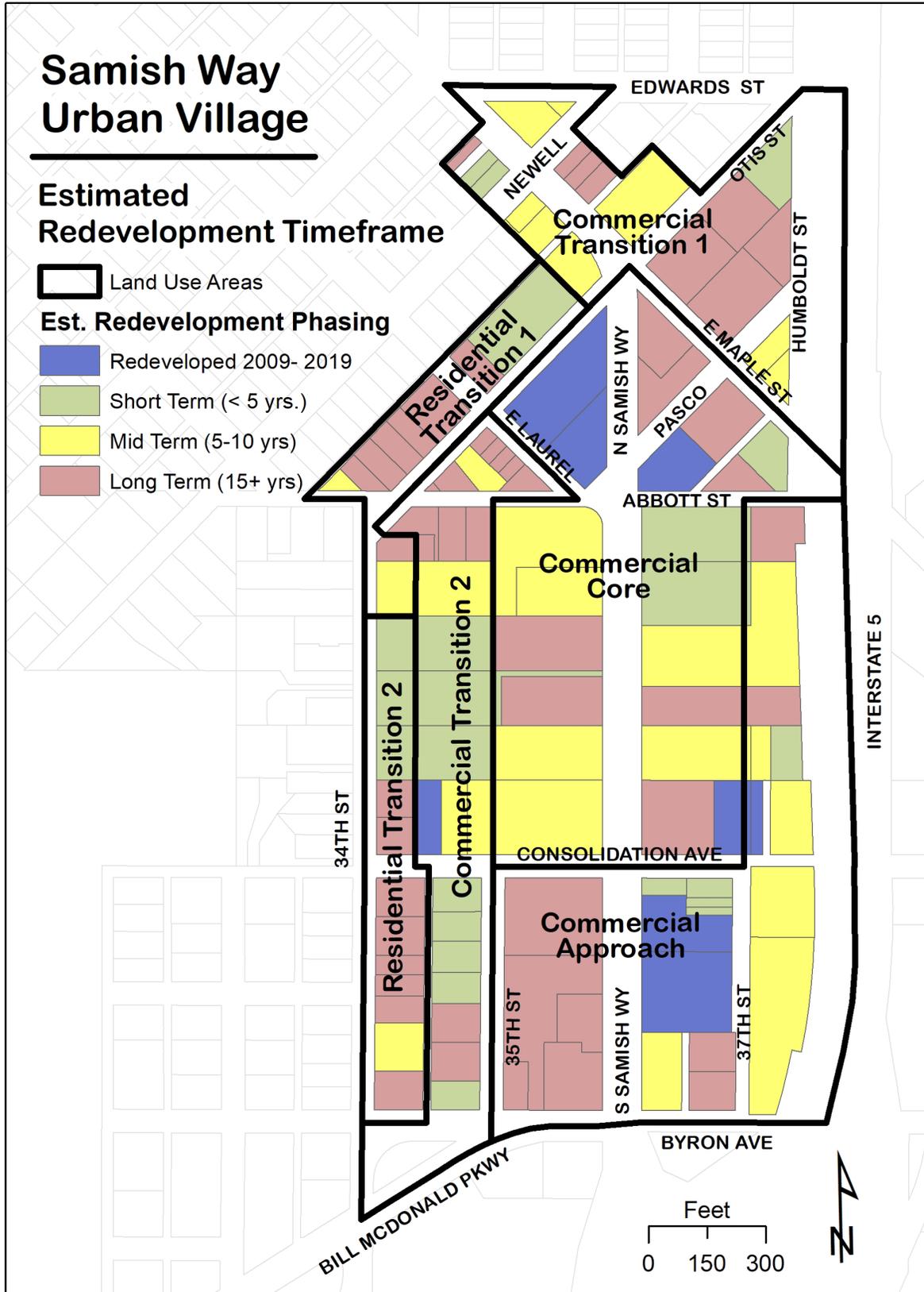
# Samish Way Urban Village

## Estimated Redevelopment Timeframe

 Land Use Areas

### Est. Redevelopment Phasing

-  Redeveloped 2009- 2019
-  Short Term (< 5 yrs.)
-  Mid Term (5-10 yrs)
-  Long Term (15+ yrs)



### 2.1 REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

In 2008, each parcel within the Samish Way Urban Village was evaluated for its redevelopment potential based on recent financial investment in the property, the condition of existing structures, the redevelopment interest of the property owners, and physical parcel characteristics to estimate a general timeline for redevelopment. 2013 growth projections estimated 646 housing units and 306,125 square feet of commercial space may be added to the area by 2036. Development was limited during the first 10 years of the Plan's adoption, with only three new residential units and 17,530 square feet of commercial space added during that period. Changes in market and regulatory conditions are expected to speed up pace of redevelopment over the next decade.





### 3. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

#### *Housing*

There are currently 169 residential dwelling units in Samish Way urban village. The units are split almost evenly between condos (23%), single-family (22%) and apartments (22%). Mobile homes parks make up another 15% of the housing. There are 38 units that are subsidized for low-income residents, which makes up 22% of all housing units in Samish Way urban village.

#### *Employment*

There are currently 71 employers in the Samish Way urban village, providing a total of 595 jobs. Of these, 57% are in hospitality or food and beverage, 20% are retail, and another 17% are commercial businesses.

#### *Environment*

The LEED-ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development) rating system was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council to analyze whether a development will achieve a more sustainable development pattern. LEED-ND categories include several aspects of development, including “Smart Location and Linkage”, “Neighborhood Pattern and Design”, and “Green Construction and Technology”.

Many of these elements must be achieved on a site-specific project level at the discretion of the individual developer. However, using just the known aspects of the Samish Way Urban Village Plan, it appears this urban village could achieve at least a LEED Silver rating if constructed as envisioned. This is due primarily to the following plan elements:



Smart Location: The project is located on a previously-developed site within the City limits and is served by existing utility and street infrastructure

Environmental Sensitivity: Except for a few steep slopes, there are no environmentally sensitive areas (such as wetlands, streams, floodplains, agricultural land, etc.) within the site boundaries.

Transportation Network: The project includes the creation of a more compact street grid to facilitate connections within and through the area. Additional and more frequent bus service may be provided by WTA is proposed as density in the area increases. Bike and pedestrian pathways through the area will be added and clearly delineated through a wayfinding system.

#### Compact, Mixed-Use Development:

The goal of the Urban Village Plan is to create a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood with a variety of businesses and services. Buildings would be designed to enhance the pedestrian experience, and the impacts from automobiles mitigated through traffic management and design standards.

Property owners and developers in the area are encouraged to consider how LEED-ND or other green

building criteria may be incorporated into their own site-specific redevelopment projects to save money on energy costs and meet the stated sustainability goals of the community.

### 3.1. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER POLICES

#### *Land Use Policies*

- Encourage a healthy mix of residential and commercial uses to make the area a desirable place to live, work and play.
- Continue to offer the Multi-family Tax Exemption Program to encourage market rate and affordable residential development.
- Allow light manufacturing and some auto-oriented uses within the Approach area.
- Require ground floor retail uses between the Otis Street and Abbott Street intersections as the primary commercial node. Provide flexibility in areas where topography, power lines, onstreet parking and/or market conditions do not support commercial uses in the short-



term. In these cases, ground floor residential development should be designed for future retrofit to commercial use.

- Encourage development of a community center, day care, and other family-oriented uses, preferably in close proximity to the public plaza.
- Add street trees and landscaping to the right-of-ways within the project area.

The lodging industry in Bellingham experienced phenomenal growth between 2008-2018, with the addition of over 400 new hotel rooms, primarily in the north end of the city, according to Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism. Meanwhile, two motels in the Samish Way urban village closed due to enforcement issues (including one, the Aloha Motel, which was purchased by the City through condemnation proceedings, demolished, then sold to the Bellingham/Whatcom Housing Authority for redevelopment). The remaining motels along the Samish Way corridor continue to serve budget travelers and those visiting nearby Western Washington University. The market is not likely to result in hotel/motel redevelopment in this area in the near future.

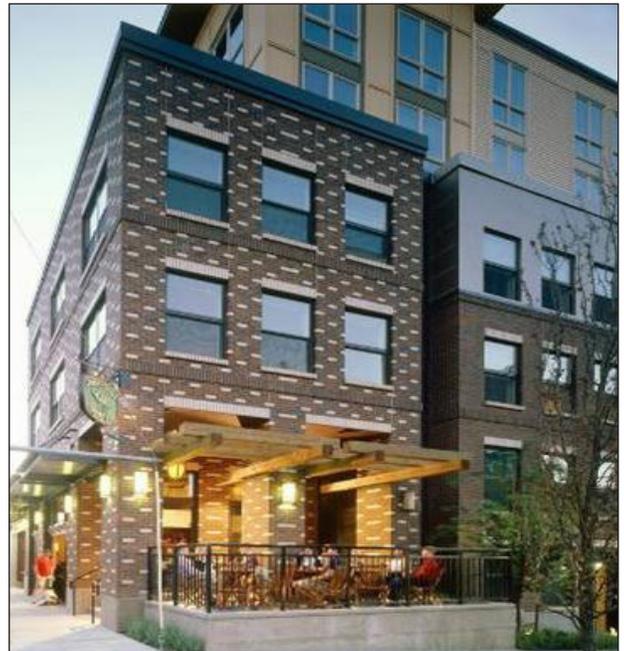


# CHAPTER THREE

## DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

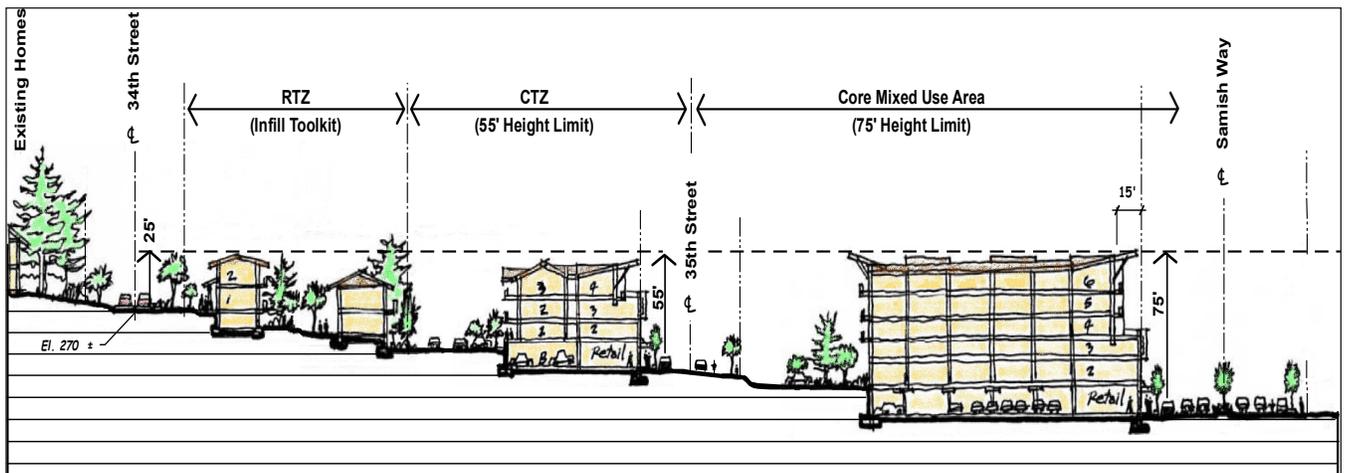
### Site Design Policies

- Develop street frontage to create an interesting and comfortable environment for pedestrians.
- Construct buildings adjacent to the sidewalk except when setback to accommodate plazas, outdoor dining, wider sidewalks or enhanced landscaping.
- Locate eateries, outdoor cafes and plazas on the south and west sides of the development whenever possible to maximize light, warmth and comfort.
- Encourage structured parking where possible to focus ground floor space on pedestrian retail activity and other active uses. Where structured parking is impractical, locate it behind the building and provide landscaping to lessen the impact on the public streetscape.
- Incorporate bio-swales and other low-impact stormwater management techniques where possible to provide an aesthetic amenity and reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff.



### Building Design Policies

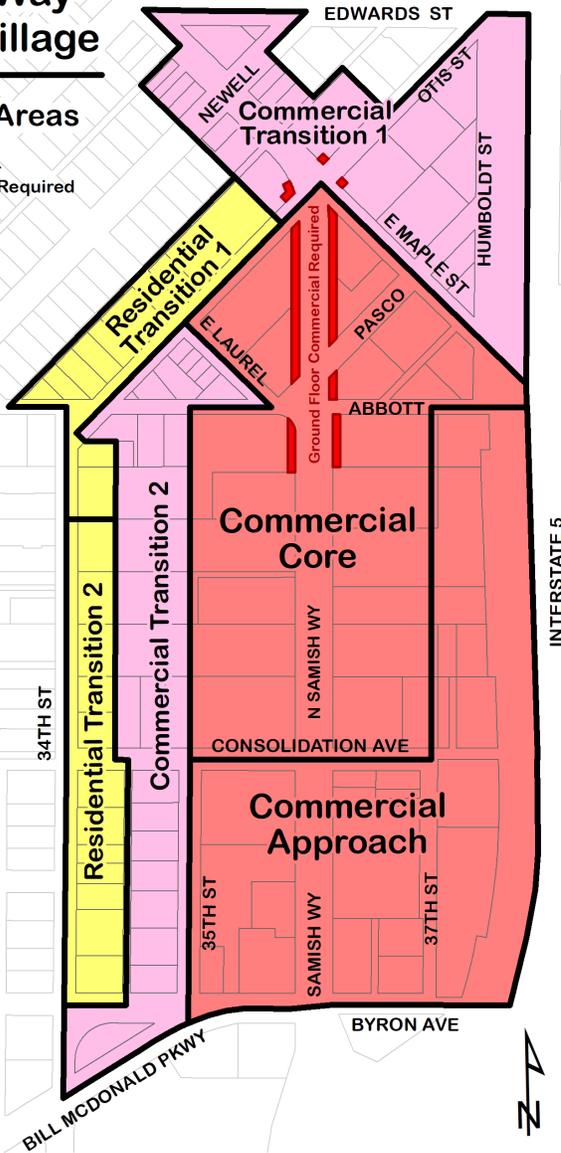
- Employ a design review process that ensures projects comply with the intent of the established design standards.



# Samish Way Urban Village

## Land Use Areas

 Ground Floor Commercial Required



### **Commercial Core (CC) -**

The Commercial Core area is intended to be the densest area within the urban village with the highest concentration of employment and housing. This area is likely to have direct access to transit and a wide range of supportive land uses such as retail, office, recreation, public facilities, parks and open space. The pedestrian environment is emphasized.

### **Commercial Approach (CA) -**

The Commercial Approach area is intended to allow commercial uses similar to the Core, with a less intensive mix of ground floor pedestrian oriented uses such as offices and interspersed drive through services such as gas stations, banks and fast food restaurants. Some light industrial and auto oriented uses are allowed to continue due to proximity to I-5 and the auto focused history of the area.

### **Commercial Transition (CT) -**

The Commercial Transition areas allow commercial uses similar to the Core and Approach Areas, but with limits on height, FAR, and uses that may generate more noise and/or vehicular impacts on abutting residential areas. Residential only buildings are more likely to occur in the CT areas than mixed-use buildings, given the focus on N. Samish Way street front commercial development. However, all buildings should be designed with an active and direct interface with the street to support the pedestrian experience.

### **Residential Transition (RT) -**

The Residential Transition areas are immediately adjacent to existing single family neighborhoods. A mix of residential housing types is encouraged to support the abutting commercial area and provide housing choices for people of various incomes and ages.

# CHAPTER THREE

## DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

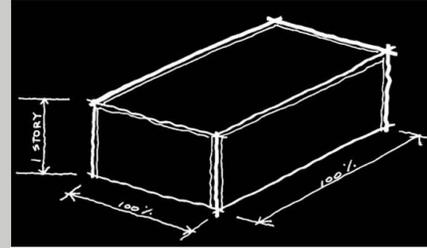
- Encourage developers to implement Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) noise mitigating measures in buildings adjacent to I-5 to buffer traffic noise.
- Establish building heights that create appropriately-scaled development for the desired intensity while providing economically feasible redevelopment opportunities.
- Require signs to be appropriately scaled in proportion to the building and site.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the adopted Design Review criteria as development occurs in the area.

### 3.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

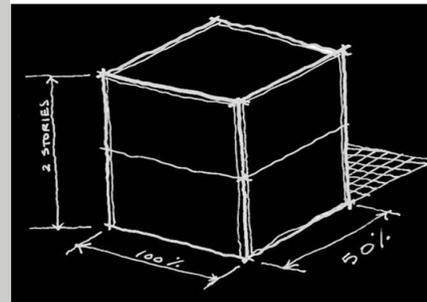
- Adopt development regulations to ensure all redevelopment complies with the community vision established in this document.
- Develop an economically feasible Floor Area Ratio (FAR) system, allowing for increase in development capacity in exchange for provision of public amenities such as affordable housing, green building, public plaza dedication and/or contribution to the Lake Whatcom Watershed Acquisition Fund.
- Establish four development areas based on the desired intensity of development and physical characteristics: Commercial Core, Commercial Approach, Commercial Transition, and Residential Transition areas. These areas are intended to ensure development is appropriately scaled and to allow uses that are compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Reduce the minimum parking rate and provide bicycle parking with all new development in the Commercial areas to support the multi-modal nature of the urban village.
- Establish landscaping requirements to increase the amount of vegetation provided with new development.

#### What is Floor Area Ratio (FAR)?

FAR is the gross square footage of a building divided by the square footage of the site.



**Two different forms of a 1.0 FAR building**



For example: In both examples above, the building is 10,000 square feet, and is built on a 10,000 square foot lot. This is an FAR of 1.0.

If you know the FAR and you want to calculate how much gross floor area you could build, multiple by the FAR by the site area.

- Encourage incorporation of smaller evergreens and other vegetation found in the Sehome Hill Arboretum to strengthen the connection to help integrate this open space amenity with the urban village.
- Work with neighborhood associations and private property owners to adopt a tree preservation plan identifying trees and other native vegetation that should be preserved to support habitat and add aesthetic value to the area.



# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

### 4. CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC PARKING

#### EXISTING CONDITIONS (2019)

Street right-of-way accounts for approximately 34 of the 69.25 total acres of the project area (~49%). N. Samish Way defines the character for most people traveling through in their cars. Wide traffic lanes, narrow unprotected sidewalks, businesses separated from the street by parking lots, and a lack of vegetation creates an unpleasant environment for people and discourages pedestrian activity. Flashing crosswalks and pedestrian refuges were added at several locations along the corridor, which have improved pedestrian safety.

Most bicyclists choose to ride on the sidewalk, which exists only on Samish Way and parts of Byron Avenue. These sidewalks are interrupted by numerous driveway curb-cuts, creating the potential for collision with vehicles attempting to enter the roadway.

A comprehensive corridor study was completed in 2016 to examine alternatives for the Samish Way streetscape. This study identified several methods for improving bicycle and pedestrian comfort and safety, and to change the street to a more urban character. These improvements are intended to be constructed in 2020, as resources allow.

Side streets in the district often dead-end or have 1 way access. Lack of right-of-way in other areas results in large “superblocks” with no through pedestrian or vehicular access for over 900 feet in some cases.

In contrast, 34<sup>th</sup> Street has a pleasant rural environment despite proximity to Samish Way and Bill McDonald Parkway. Shared lane markings were added in 2018 to direct bicyclists from Bill McDonald Parkway along 34<sup>th</sup> Street to signalized crosswalks at Otis/Maple/Samish and beyond to Lakeway Drive through the York Neighborhood. This link to the surrounding bicycle network was recommended in the 2014 city-wide Bicycle Master Plan, and provides an alternative bike route with less traffic than Samish Way. Pedestrians appear comfortable walking down the street, surrounded by well-established vegetation. However, there are limited connections to the Sehome Hill Arboretum or into the commercial area, and no sidewalks exist.



Bicyclists riding on Samish Way sidewalk

As Samish Way redevelops, adequate parking must be provided in a way that does not detract from the intended pedestrian-oriented streetscape. Shared parking facilities should be encouraged and on-street parking added wherever possible as conditions warrant to support the commercial activity in the area and to protect adjacent residential neighborhoods.



# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETScape AND PARKING

### 4.1 CIRCULATION, STREETScape AND PARKING POLICIES

#### *Circulation Policies*

- Enhance the street grid and reduce the impact of “superblocks” by extending connections from 35<sup>th</sup> Street and 37<sup>th</sup> Street between Consolidation Avenue and Abbott Street. Right-of-way should be dedicated upon property redevelopment for this purpose.
  - A new east-west mid-block pedestrian connection from 34<sup>th</sup> Street to the Commercial areas should be provided as shown on the right-of-way & pedestrian connection map on page 22.
  - Create an access management ordinance that requires redevelopment to consolidate individual driveways to shared driveways along Samish Way to increase automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian safety. An access management ordinance would allow for the identification of future opportunities for landscaped medians that could be constructed in the center turn lane if driveways are consolidated and/or eliminated.
  - Consistent with the City’s 2016-2017 Samish-Maple-Ellis Corridor Study, reduce Samish Way to one vehicle lanes in each direction, add buffered bicycle lanes in each direction, and a landscape median on Maple Street between Otis and Edwards where feasible.
  - Once the Samish Way transportation improvements are completed, reduce the posted speed limit along Samish Way to a maximum of 25 miles an hour to make the street more comfortable for bikes/pedestrians and increase the visibility of businesses to passersby.
- 
- The image shows an aerial view of a street intersection. A landscaped median with a brick pattern runs along the street, separating the lanes. Pedestrians are crossing the street at a crosswalk. A traffic signal is visible at the intersection. The street is paved with asphalt, and there are white lane markings.
- As warranted over time as redevelopment occurs and as vehicle traffic increases, construct traffic signals or roundabouts on Samish Way at the intersections with Abbott and Consolidation to manage traffic flow from side streets while maintaining safe pedestrian crossings.
  - Highlight pedestrian crossings with use of the landscape median as a mid-street pedestrian refuge.
  - Add a new pedestrian-activated crossing signal to the intersection of 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Bill McDonald Parkway.
  - Study future multimodal transportation improvements to the Samish Way/Bill McDonald Pkwy intersection, which is expected to experience significant morning and evening vehicle traffic congestion.

- Add new multi-use public trail connections to the Sehome Hill Arboretum at Allen Avenue and Newell Street, as identified in the Sehome Arboretum Master Plan.
- Expand the City’s vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle wayfinding system to guide people to and from the Sehome Hill Arboretum, WWU, Lake Padden and downtown.
- Explore the feasibility for a bike and pedestrian overpass across Interstate 5 near Consolidation Avenue to connect the Samish Way Urban Village to the Western Washington University/Whatcom Transportation Authority Park and Ride and developed neighborhoods east of I-5.
- As traffic increases, implement traffic management techniques as needed (based on established Public Works’ criteria) to regulate traffic flow through established neighborhoods.
- Prohibit vehicular access from 34th Street to the commercially-zoned areas of the urban village, except for emergency vehicles as needed.

**Transit Policies**

- Provide covered bus shelters and other amenities at bus stops and orient development towards transit stops to create a comfortable and interesting environment for pedestrians and transit riders and promote transit use.
- Encourage WTA to expand high-frequency transit service as redevelopment occurs and as new residential density creates a ridership base to connect the Samish Way corridor to WWU and downtown.
- Work with WTA to design a bus pullout in



Courtesy of Whatcom Transit Authority

the public right-of-way on the north side of Bill McDonald parkway between 34th and 35th Streets that is capable of accommodating future 70-foot long articulated buses traveling to WWU

- Encourage developers to work with WTA to provide annual bus passes to residents and/or employees in exchange for development incentives such as reduced parking requirements or transportation impact fees.

**Streetscape Policies**

- Maximize sidewalk width for pedestrian safety and comfort.
- Add street furniture, public art, and pedestrian-scale lighting to streets within the Core to create a sense of place and define the center of the village.
- Narrow the drive lanes on residential and commercial shopping streets to slow traffic and allow wider sidewalks.
- Design streets bordering the existing single-family neighborhoods to reflect the adjacent residential character and provide a buffer from the urban village.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING



Artist rendering of Samish Way

### **Public Parking Policies**

- Consider expanding the Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) if needed to limit parking encroachment into adjacent single-family neighborhoods as density occurs.
- If parking demand and commercial activity warrants over time, add on-street metered parking to one side of Samish Way, provided safety for people walking or on bicycle should be a priority and should be maintained or enhanced, should this retrofit occur. Install parking meters in this area, utilizing revenue from the meters to form a Parking Benefit District for maintenance and improvements.
- Encourage on-street parking on all non-arterial streets where possible.

### **4.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES**

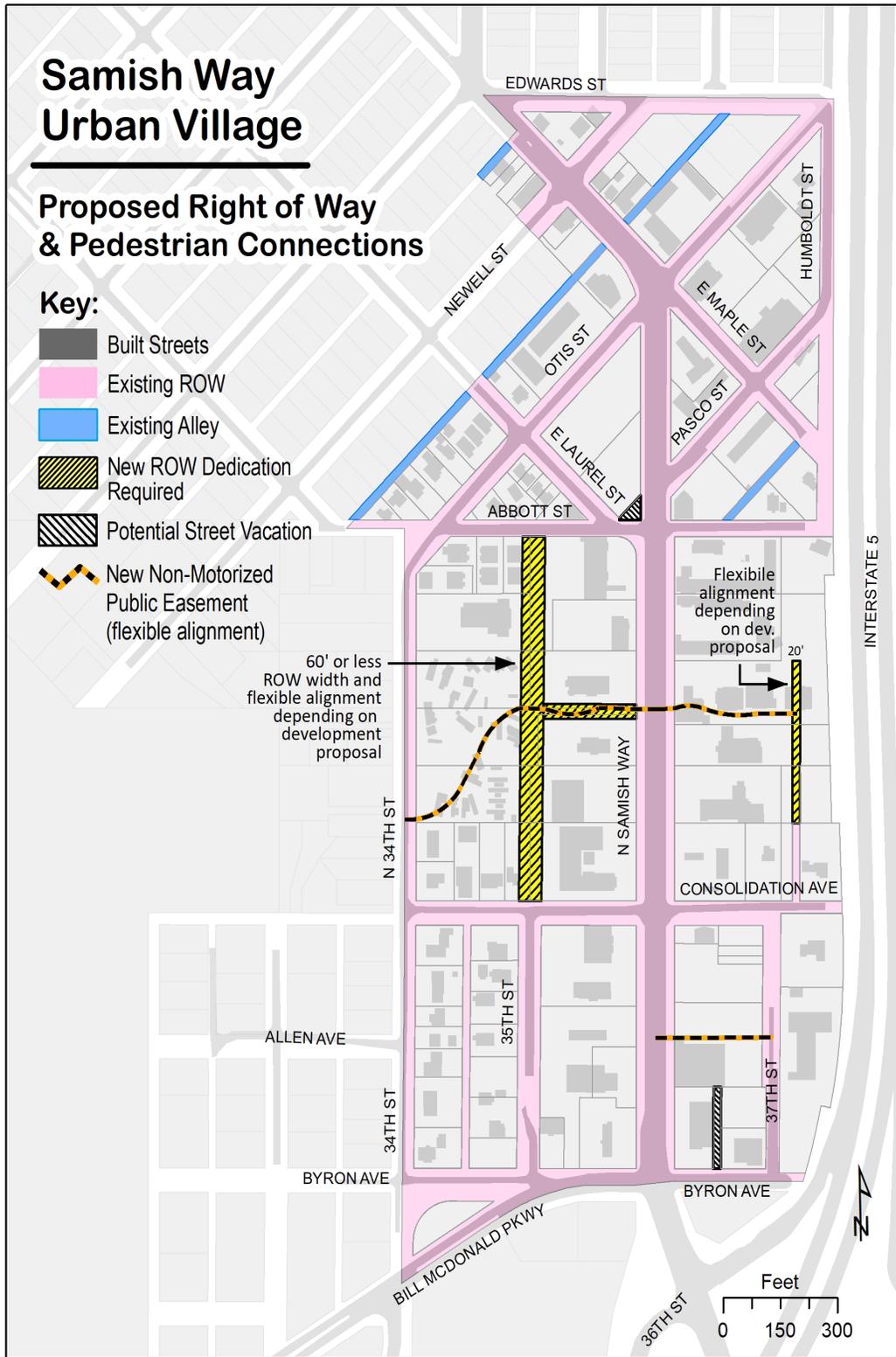
- Require new development to construct adjacent streets to the standards recommended in this Urban Village Plan, with limitations for N. Samish Way and Abbott Street, which are identified as longer-term transitional areas which will require a coordinated effort by the City to transform when conditions are ripe and resources are available.
- Explore grants and other funding sources to help implement the proposed street designs for N. Samish Way and Abbott Street, as conditions warrant.
- Require dedication of right-of-way with redevelopment where identified and needed to provide access and create a more compact street grid.

# Samish Way Urban Village

## Proposed Right of Way & Pedestrian Connections

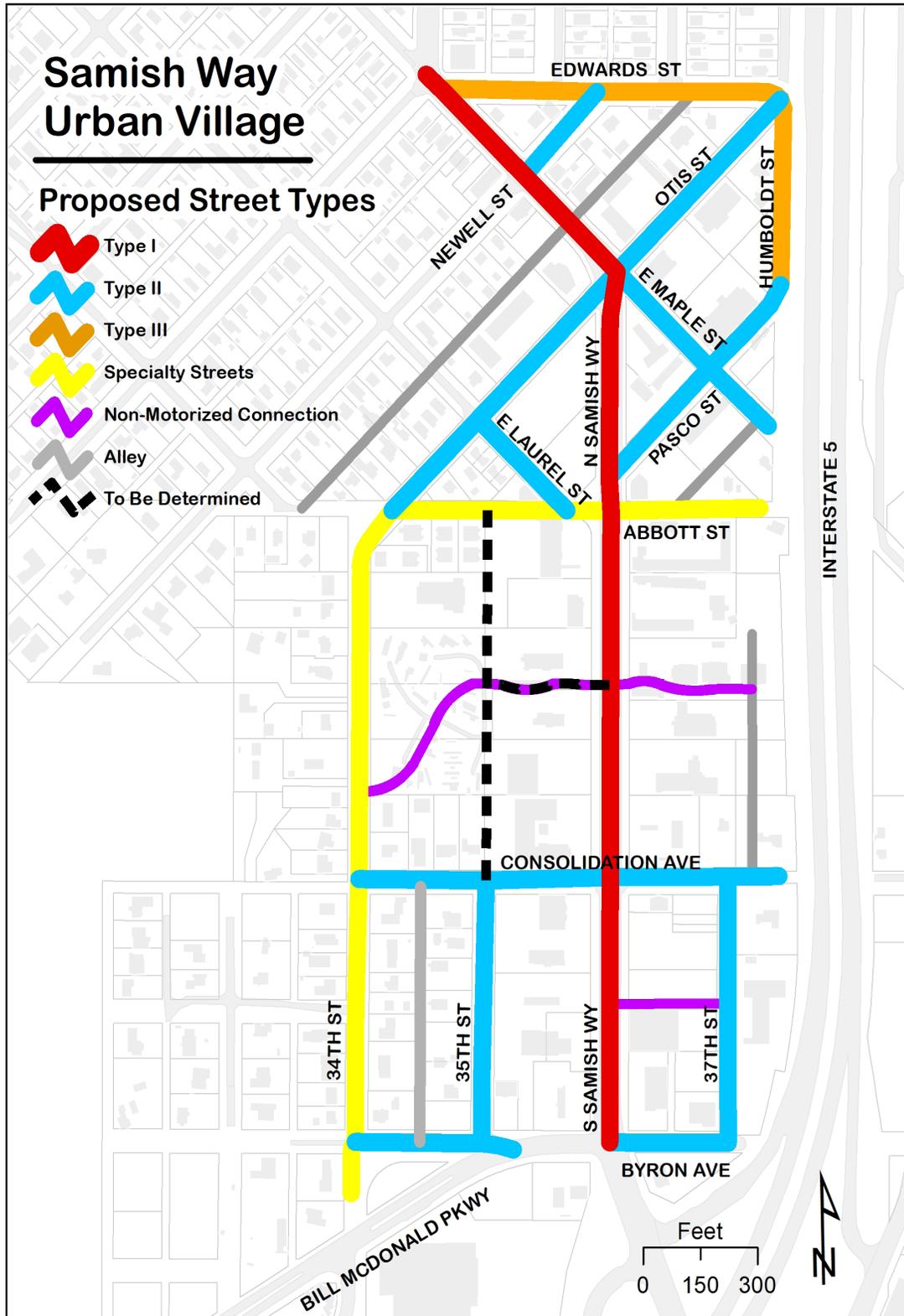
### Key:

-  Built Streets
-  Existing ROW
-  Existing Alley
-  New ROW Dedication Required
-  Potential Street Vacation
-  New Non-Motorized Public Easement (flexible alignment)



# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING



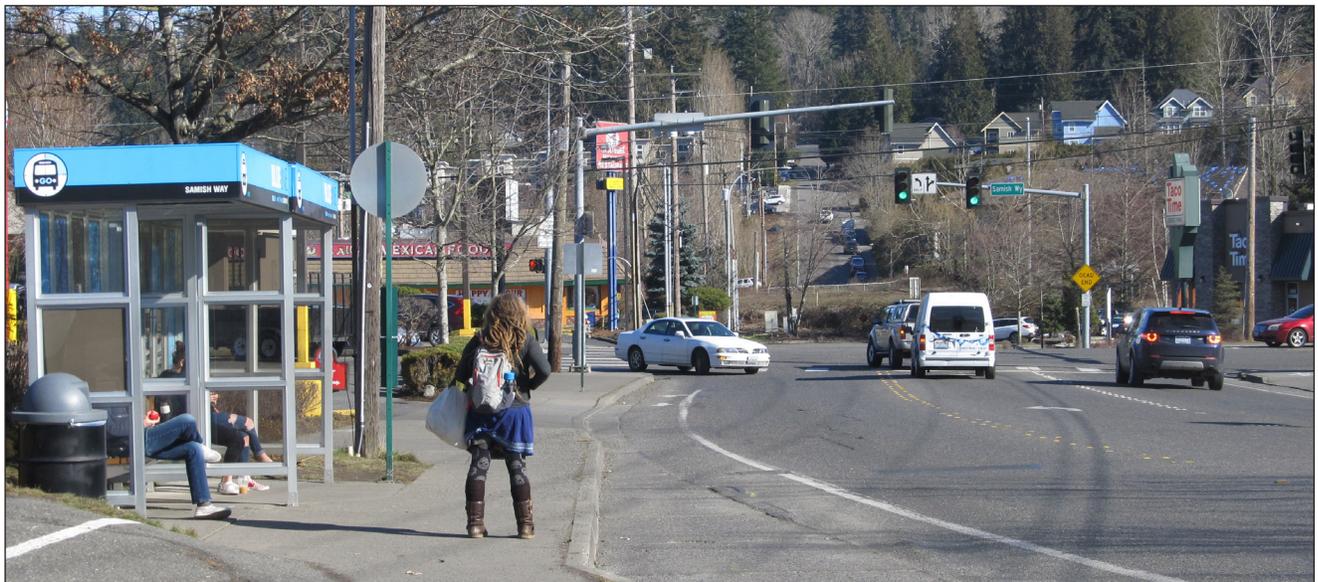
## Samish Way Urban Village Street Design

**Type I: Samish/Maple/Ellis Arterial.** N. Samish Way is the former highway 99 corridor and a critical connection to Western Washington University (WWU), downtown Bellingham, the waterfront, I-5 and Lake Padden.

The 2009 urban village plan recognized this history and recommended slight changes to the five-lane roadway to better accommodate increased bicycle and pedestrian travel and commercial activity. However, these options were limited by conditions at this time, and were recognized in the subsequent city-wide pedestrian and bicycle master plans as inadequate.

In 2016, in response to recommendations in the city-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans and increasing interest in redevelopment, a comprehensive corridor study was initiated to examine alternatives for the Samish Way streetscape. The goal of this study was to identify methods for improving bicycle and pedestrian comfort and safety and change the street to a more urban character within the 56-feet of space between the existing curbs. The results of the study, published in 2017, support a “road diet”, which includes restriping the roadway between the existing curbs to one travel lane in each direction and adding buffered bike lanes on each side of the street. On-street parking on one side was also identified as a future possibility that could be accommodated when/if conditions warrant and funds are available for the substantial retrofit that would be required

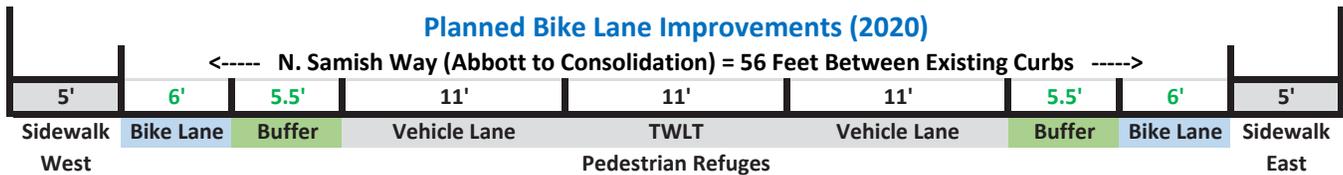
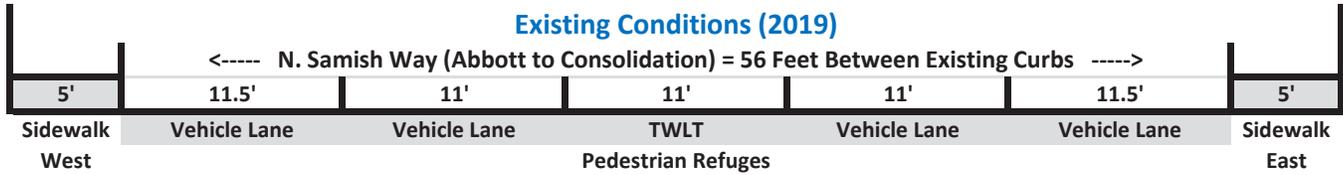
The intersection at Bill McDonald Parkway, another arterial which serves as the southern boundary of the project area, should be analyzed in further detail.



# CHAPTER FOUR

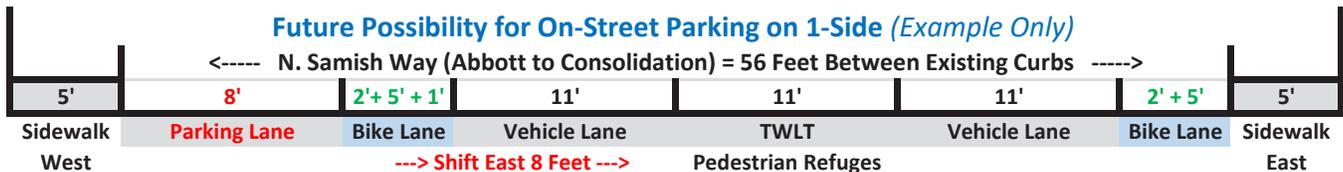
## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

<----- N. Samish Way (Abbott to Consolidation) = 56 Feet Between Existing Curbs ----->

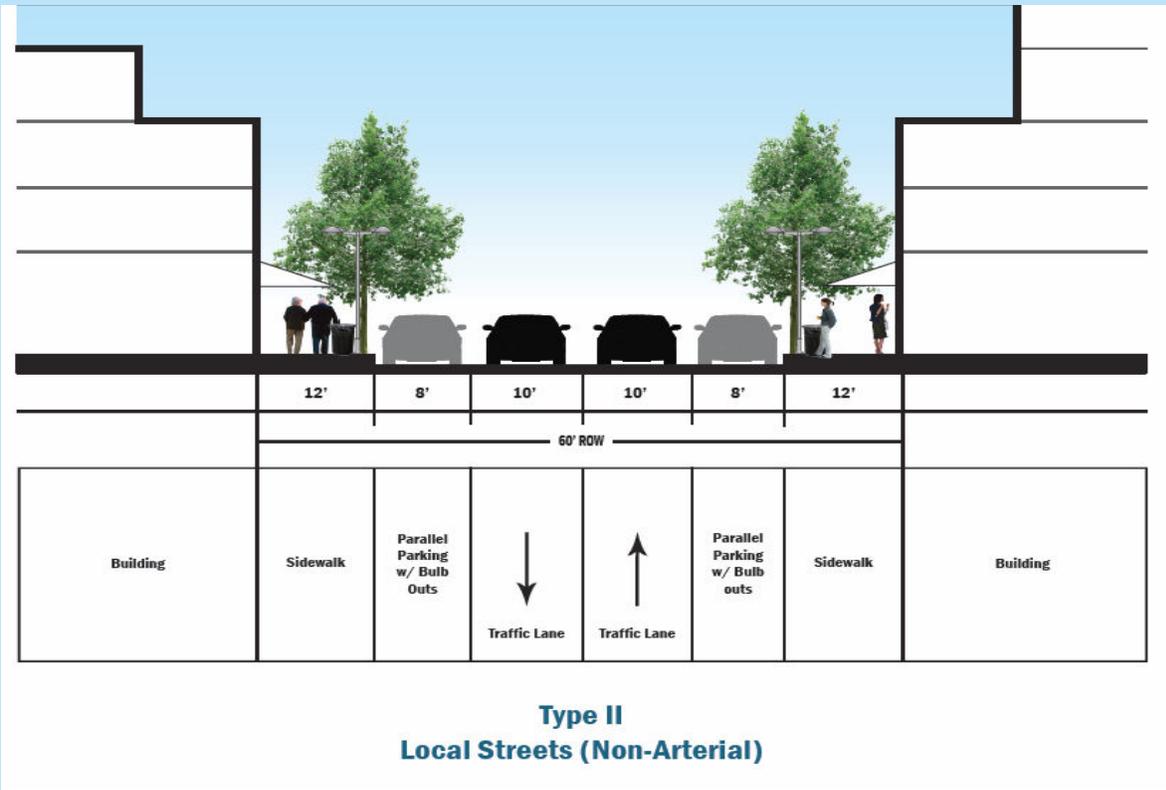


The 2016-2017 Samish-Maple-Ellis Corridor Study conducted by Public Works determined that if on-street parking is desired on one side of N. Samish Way, without widening the street, then all of the following changes must be made before parking can be accommodated on the street

- 1.) Eliminate, consolidate, and reduce the number of commercial driveways along N. Samish Way
- 2.) Demolish & reconstruct ped refuges, medians shifted 8 feet to opposite side of desired parking lane
- 3.) Downgrade bike lanes to 5 foot + 2 foot buffer with an extra foot buffer for bike lane against parked cars
- 4.) Rechannelize features on the street surface.



**Type II: Local (non-arterial) Streets.** These streets should maximize sidewalk width and on street parking. Drive lanes should be reduced to 10-feet to slow traffic. This cross section should be used as a guide to setting street standards in the area, with flexibility to approve alternatives based on localized conditions.



**Type III: Residential boundary streets (not shown).** These streets abut existing single-family zones and should be improved to the City's ¾ standard, with parking and sidewalks added to the project side.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING

**Special Streets:** 34<sup>th</sup> Street and Abbott are designated as “special streets” with a unique design character to complement their location and function. These are primary travel routes for bikes and pedestrians and/or intended to serve as a neighborhood amenity.

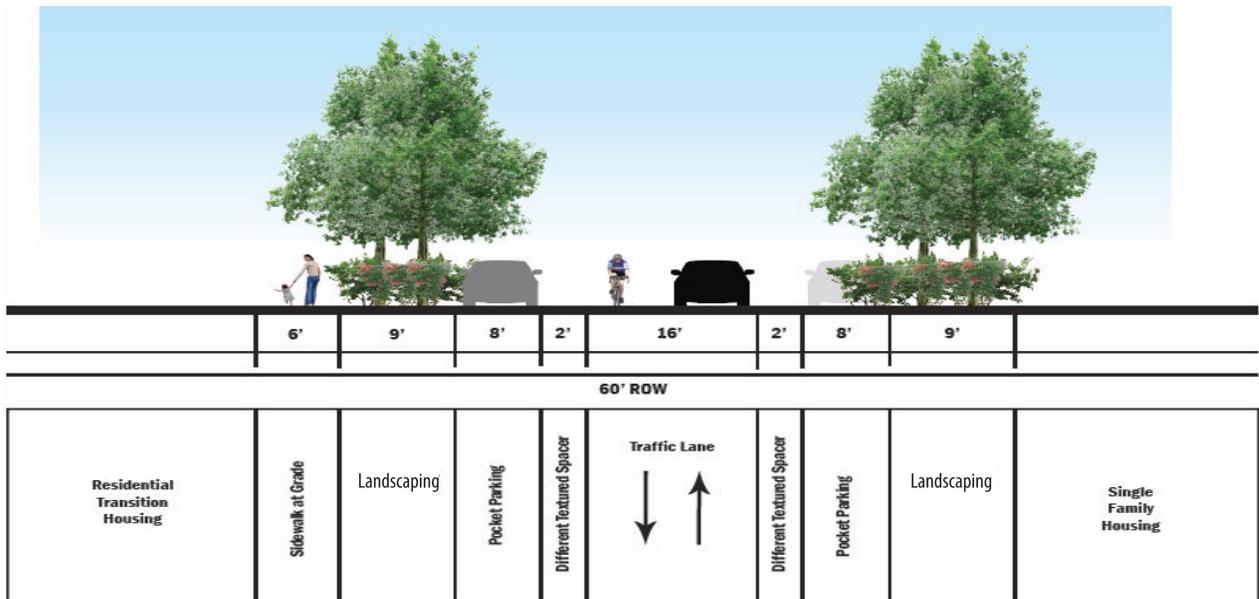
### 34<sup>th</sup> Street Bike Boulevard Concept

34<sup>th</sup> Street should be maintained by promoting a design with ample landscaping, at grade sidewalks and narrow drive lanes. Addition of a sidewalk should be limited to the east side of 34<sup>th</sup> where new development and higher density is expected, and should be set back from the street edge and allowed to meander to further accentuate the more leisurely character of 34<sup>th</sup> Street.

Pocket parking and landscaping dimensions may vary depending on the localized conditions such as topography, desire to preserve existing vegetation and whether on-street parking is required.



34th Street



### Specialty Street 34<sup>th</sup> Street (Street Edge Alternative Concept)

### **Abbott Street: Shared Street Concept**

Abbott Street is an existing 40-foot wide right-of-way located in the core of the urban village. While not necessary for circulation, this street connects people from the commercial areas into the residential neighborhood and Sehome Hill Arboretum. To create a sense of place and community, a portion of this street should be redeveloped into a residential shared street.



Artist rendering of Abbott Street

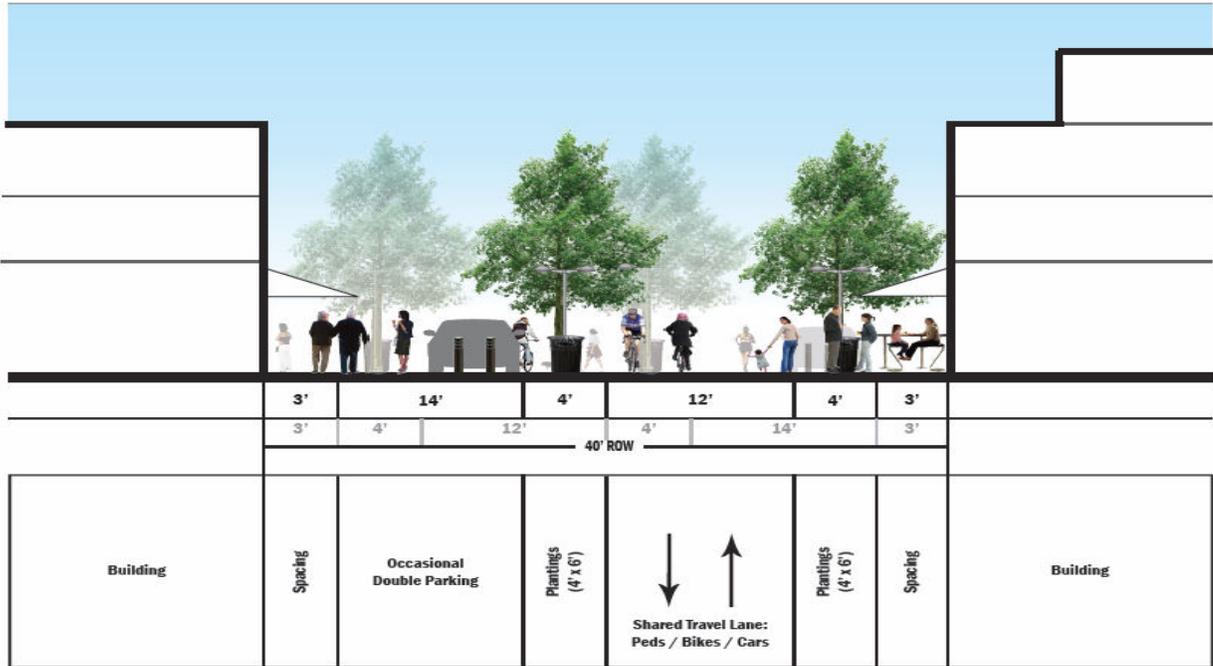
The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) contains recommendations for shared streets which include:

- 1) Textured pavements flush with the curb that reinforce the priority of the pedestrian.
- 2) Street furniture to define the shared space and subtly delineate the traveled way for all modes.
- 3) Signage and tactile warning strips to reinforce the use of the space.
- 4) Staggered blocks of landscaping, parking, or other elements to define use of spaces, decrease traffic or create traffic calming.

The specific elements appropriate for Abbott will need to be defined in further detail as the area develops and conditions and resources warrant the redesign of the street.

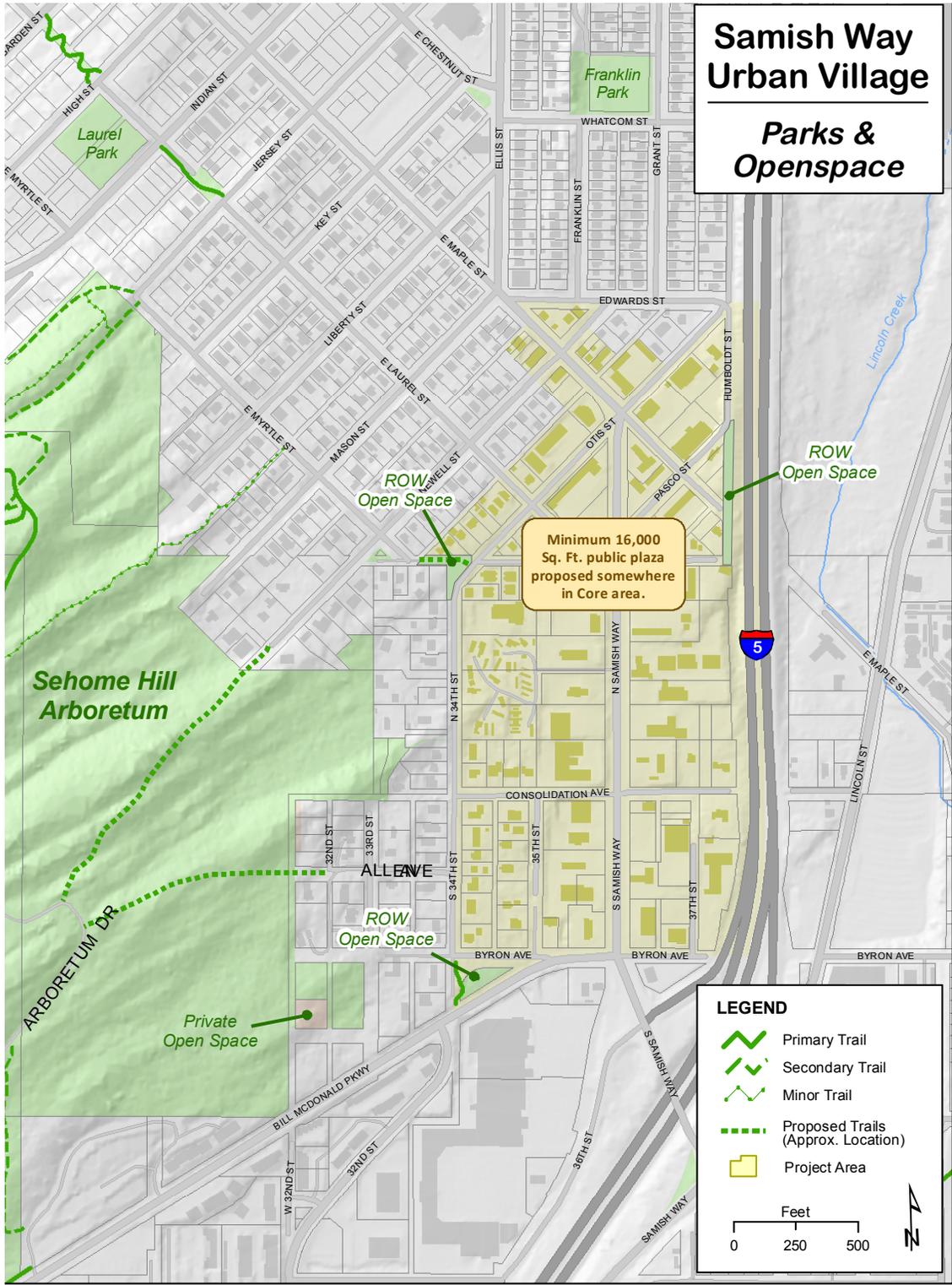
# CHAPTER FOUR

## CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING



**Specialty Street**  
**Abbott Street**  
**(Shared Street Concept)**





# CHAPTER FIVE

## PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

### 5 . PARKS, PLAZAS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Today, there is limited public open space within the Samish Way urban village boundary. However, there are several existing parks within close proximity. This plan contains goals to enhance the connections to these surrounding open spaces and create new gathering places within the urban village.

The Sehome Hill Arboretum is a 180-acre natural forest habitat managed jointly by The City of Bellingham and Western Washington University. Passive recreational amenities are provided via the numerous trails that crisscross the site. The eastern boundary of Sehome Hill creates a lovely forested backdrop to the Samish Way Subarea. However, steep topography limits the number of access points.

Other parks within walking distance include Franklin Park (located within the York Neighborhood) and Laurel Park (located to the northwest in the Sehome Neighborhood). These are small neighborhood parks that provide space for families and students to intermingle and play.

Several small areas of undeveloped right of way dot the project area. These have been sporadically attended to by adjacent neighbors and other interested parties, but could be further enhanced to provide additional amenities to the public.

#### 5.1 PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION POLICIES

- Construct a new public plaza within the Core area of the village. This plaza should be a minimum of 16,000 square feet, and abut on at least one public street.



## Providing Amenities Within the Public Right-of-Way

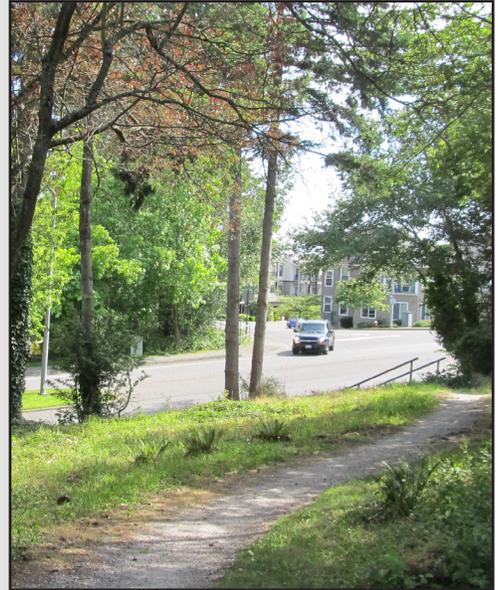
**Byron / Bill McDonald Parkway** – A volunteer group intentionally planted this area as a chestnut grove. This grove should be maintained and enhanced as a pocket park, including removal of invasive species and addition of plantings.

Bicycle and pedestrian access from 34th Street via the trail to Bill McDonald Parkway should be upgraded to ADA standards and enhanced as conditions warrant and resources allow. The existing bus stop should be moved west, adjacent to this area, across the street from the eastbound bus stop. An enhanced pedestrian crossing should be provided via a new signalized pedestrian flashing crosswalk at the intersection of 34th and Bill McDonald Parkway. Passive recreational opportunities such as trails and benches would also make the area a more usable amenity for pedestrians and transit riders.

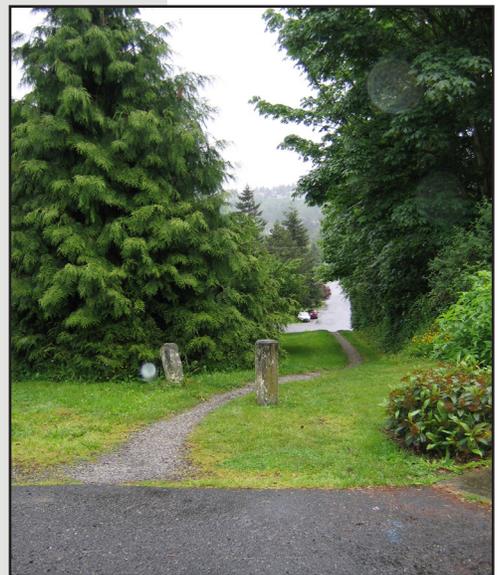
**34th Street & Abbott Street** – This small triangular piece of right-of-way is a crossroad between the existing neighborhood and the urban village. Native vegetation at this site should be retained, and the trail widened to improve access. Wayfinding signs should be added to this location to direct people to the Commercial Core, Abbott Street, and down 34<sup>th</sup> Street to the Sehome Village shopping center.

The other small triangle of vegetation located to the west on Newell Street should be preserved as native habitat, with a wayfinding sign to the Newell Street trail connection.

**Humboldt Street Right-of-Way** – The south end of the Humboldt Street right-of-way terminates at property owned by the Washington State Department of Transportation. Fir and other tall trees would interfere with existing power lines, so unless these are moved underground and relocated, a tree buffer of short pines and tall shrubs should be established.



Byron/Bill McDonald Pkwy



34th & Abbott Street

# CHAPTER FIVE

## PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

- Public plaza(s) should be constructed to include amenities such as:
  - Water feature(s);
  - Landscaping (including a mixture of trees, shrubs and groundcover);
  - Public art;
  - Outdoor furniture and resting places;
  - Pedestrian-scale lighting;
  - Community garden;
  - Play equipment;
  - Unique paving pattern; and/or
  - Other elements that promote public use.
- Encourage the development of smaller, privately-owned and maintained plazas and open spaces.
- Enhance connections to the Sehome Hill Arboretum and surrounding parks by providing wayfinding signs from the urban village to the new trail entrances proposed at Allen Avenue and Newell Street.



- Consolidate private and public open spaces where possible to achieve larger and more functional public spaces.
- Utilize existing undeveloped rights-of-way to enhance connections to and from the urban village and provide passive recreational opportunities.

### 5.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Offer a density bonus for the dedication of land to construct a public plaza.
- Incorporate pedestrian/bicycle connections and plazas into the Parks Capital Facilities Plan so that Park Impact Fee funds may be applied to acquisition and/or construction of capital projects within the project area.
- Require a public access easement to connect 34th Street to the Commercial Core, as shown on the Proposed Right-of-Way & Pedestrian Connection map on page 22.





### 6. CAPITAL FACILITIES

The Samish Way Subarea contains basic capital facilities, such as utility infrastructure, streets, and minimal trails. Enhancements are needed primarily in the form of public space, trail connections and street improvements to achieve a pedestrian-oriented environment. Much of the area lacks adequate sidewalks or street trees, crosswalks, or other pedestrian amenities such as street furniture and garbage cans. Although some trails exist, many of these are informal dirt pathways that have been carved out by frequent use.

Utilities are well established in the area and appear to have the capacity to handle increased development and density. Prior to increasing infrastructure capacity, developers should explore new technologies that could reduce additional impact on the existing system without requiring an expansion of these systems.

### 6.1 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Since 2010, the City has invested over \$1,070,000 in transportation infrastructure projects, with another \$1,400,00 in investments planned for the coming years. This has been for improvements to sidewalks, four flashing crosswalks, center pedestrian refuges and curb extensions to improve pedestrian safety, as well as bicycle boulevards to improve access and safety for cyclists.

Since 2009, the private sector has invested \$1,088,404 in the form of 19 different improvements to commercial buildings. This does not include the additional cost of improving local streets, which is on a site-specific project basis, according to the intended streetscapes established in this plan. The estimated costs of adjacent street improvements were incorporated into the economic analysis of the proposed Floor Area Ratio, and



although they appear to be feasible, still bear a substantial portion of the cost of development. Flexibility in the street improvements required is necessary to reflect the slow evolution of this neighborhood over time and to respond to specific conditions effecting each redevelopment parcel.

The proposed addition of bicycle lanes on N. Samish Way requires coordinated analysis and construction. This project will be undertaken by the City utilizing a combination of infrastructure improvement grants, and other funding sources. Addition of on-street parking may be undertaken individually by a developer in the short-term as feasible, or may be undertaken by the City in the future if conditions warrant and resources allow.

Improvements to convert Abbott Street to a future shared street concept will also require significant coordination and expense, and should also be undertaken as a City-led project in the future, as conditions warrant and resources allow.

Park and Transportation Impact Fees generated from redevelopment in this area may be a potential source of revenue for capital facility projects. However, these projects must be incorporated into the Capital Facility Plans of the Parks and Recreation and Public Works Departments in order to utilize this funding source.



### ***Future Capital Improvements***

*The Samish Way urban village is a long-term project which will develop over several decades. The following projects have been identified as future improvements to support the vision outlined in this document. Projects will be scheduled and budgeted over time a redevelopment occurs and as conditions warrant the prioritization of these investments*

#### Local Streets

Improvements to adjacent local streets are required as a condition of private development.

#### Reconfiguration of Samish/Maple/Ellis

Estimated Cost

\$2-2.5 M Cost estimate or rechannelization to add a separated bike facility.

Future on-street parking may be added by individual developer in the short-term as feasible, or in the future as a coordinated City project as conditions warrant and resources allow.

#### Public Space Improvements

Abbott Street (Shared Street Concept)

\$1.2 - \$2 M

Trail Improvements

\$ 72,000





### 7. CONCLUSION

This Urban Village Plan contains the long-term vision for the area. There are several actions within this plan that may help expedite the redevelopment of the area and implement the goals of the plan. Community involvement and interest in the project lead to the initiation of the City's master planning effort. This energy should continue through the promotion of the projects in this planning document.

#### 7.1 IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES

- Public/Private partnerships should be explored with WTA, WWU, WSDOT, Bellingham Housing Authority, and the Bellingham School District, along with private developers, to further the goals of the Subarea Plan.
- A Samish Business Association should be established over time to represent the goals of the business community and create an organized forum for discussion and pooling of resources.
- Design and development of public amenities such as wayfinding signs, public plazas, artwork selection and sidewalk amenities should include a public process.
- Public plazas and other park amenities should be adopted into the Parks Capital Facilities Plan to make these improvements eligible for Park Impact Fee funds.
- Street improvements and other capital facility goals within this document should be prioritized and adopted into the Public Works Capital Facilities Plan to make these improvements eligible for Transportation Impact Fee funds, as conditions warrant.
- A Parking Benefit District should be explored to invest meter revenue into local improvements.
- Study the feasibility of moving utilities underground on new and existing streets to enhance the aesthetic of the area and protect future cutting of large, native trees.

