

## MEMORANDUM

<b>Date:</b>	September 2, 2022	<b>TG:</b>	21264.00
<b>To:</b>	Brett Schock, PE, AICP, RSP2i, Transpo Group		
<b>From:</b>	Chirs Comeau, AICP, City of Bellingham		
<b>cc:</b>	Michael Hintze, AICP, Toole Design		
<b>Subject:</b>	Unimproved Right-of-Way Assessment		

This memo documents the screening process that was used to assess the City of Bellingham's unimproved rights of way for use as assets for future pedestrian and bicycle connections. The process outlined herein does not include the final assessment of the feasibility of the unimproved rights of way as connections for active modes. Recommendation to use connections identified as feasible for further study will be assessed as part of the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Planning processes, under a separate cover.

### Existing Data Collection and Assessment

Unimproved rights of way are defined as public rights of way that are not currently in use for a transportation purpose, typically paved roadways. Some of the unimproved rights of way in the City of Bellingham are already in use, either as informal trails, drainage facilities, or because of the lack of defined use by the City, are being used by neighboring property owners for gardens, vehicle access and storage or outbuildings.

The process identified to narrow the full range of data is a two-stage screening using electronic mapping data, followed by a field assessment and consultation with the City of Bellingham to understand short- and medium-term development proposals and history of use of unimproved rights of way.

The City of Bellingham provided Geographic Information System (GIS) data for the identification of unimproved rights of way and constraints within the City limits, as well as in the urban growth area (UGA) outside of the current City limits. The assessment of unimproved right of way assumes that the information provided by the City is accurate and up to date. A total of 1,257 unimproved right of way segments were included in the dataset provided by the City of Bellingham. Some of the 1,257 segments are continuous, creating a single corridor made up of multiple segments. A large-scale map of all the segments, color coded by screening phases and final assessment priority is included in Appendix A.

### Phase I Screening

The Phase I screening process used three criteria to eliminate unimproved rights of way that would be unfeasible based on physical location criteria. The criteria are:

- **Do not cross wetlands** – wetlands and the buffers to wetlands, which can extend over 100 feet from the delineated wetland boundary, are critical environmental resources. Avoiding impacts to wetlands and wetland buffers, even with trails without hard surfaces, is important to the continued functioning of wetlands. Permitting and constructing in wetlands or wetland buffers is a long-term and resource-intensive process.
- **Within 300 feet of a park, open space or public building** – selecting segments within 300 feet of parks, open spaces (including parks) or public buildings, which includes recreation centers, City municipal infrastructure and schools, seeks to prioritize segments that are likely to serve significant active mode generators and destinations.

- **Within 30 feet of an existing or previously planned active mode facility** – a 30 foot buffer on existing or planned facilities helps to identify unimproved right of way segments that connect to other facilities and wouldn't require additional connections in order to provide independent utility to the public.

The Phase I screening process was completed using GIS analysis. GIS allows for the distance buffering described above and will only select segments that pass all three of the above criteria. The Phase I screening removed 1,015 of the total number of unimproved right of way segments from further consideration.

## ***Phase II Screening***

A Phase II level of screening took the electronically-screened Phase I results, 242 segments which met the Phase I criteria, and manually removed features using the following four additional criteria:

- **Must be within the City limits** – The City of Bellingham does not currently have jurisdiction over the UGA and therefore does not wish to focus on unimproved right of ways outside the City limits. Some segments that would have otherwise met the criteria for final analysis, but are in the UGA, have been identified for future study once the UGA has been incorporated.
- **Connect on both ends to existing or planned active mode facilities** – while the Phase I assessment eliminated facilities that did not connect to any existing or planned active mode facilities, some of the segments that passed the Phase I screening only connected on one end to a facility. Unimproved right of way segments that do not provide connections on both end would have limited utility to the overall active mode network. The single-connection segments could be re-assessed in future master planning efforts as the City's active mode network expands.
- **Do not cross creeks or streams** – similar to the screening based on wetlands, avoiding impacts to waterways and the buffers on waterways is an important criteria for the health of the City's environmental systems. Crossing of a waterway is likely to require a bridge structure which further increases the cost, complexity and permitting, making the connection unlikely to be completed in a short to medium timeframe, compared to other priority segments.
- **Does not parallel other facilities** – while some unimproved right of ways may meet all other screening criteria, if there is a nearby (less than 1/8 mile or 660-feet) facility that provides the same connection and is already developed, improving the right of way would provide limited additional connectivity benefits.

The Phase II screening was completed manually, using GIS-created maps developed in Phase I. The Phase II screening removed an additional 158 of the total unimproved right of way segments from further consideration. Following the Phase II screening, 84 segments were considered eligible for field assessment as potential connections in the City's active mode network.

## ***Field Assessment***

A field assessment of the remaining 84 segments that passed both the Phase I and Phase II screening was completed on June 1, 2022. A drive-by assessment was conducted of each segment. The primary features that were being assessed in the field included:

- **Topography** – unimproved right of way that would require stairs, walls or be entirely unfeasible due to steep topography were noted and eliminated from further consideration.
- **Vegetation** – high value vegetation, such as evergreen trees of a significant height or dense stands of deciduous trees that would need to be removed in order to create an active mode connection through an unimproved right of way were considered a barrier to development. Highly vegetated segments were eliminated from further consideration.

- **Existing use** – existing use of an unimproved right of way as an active mode connection removed that segment from further consideration. In addition, some segments were found to be in use as significant drainage facilities that could not be removed for an active mode connection. Use of unimproved right of way by adjacent property owners was noted, but as the right of way is a public asset, use for buildings, gardens and other private property uses was not considered a reason to eliminate a segment from further consideration.

The field notes on each of the 84 segments that passed the Phase I and Phase II screening are included in Appendix B. A total of 61 segments were identified as not meeting the above criteria for an assessment of high priority segments for further analysis during the master planning process.

### ***City Interdepartmental Coordination***

The City of Bellingham’s planning group provided information on the near term, defined as less than five years, expected development that could convert unimproved right of way into either roadway connections or active mode connections. The City’s information resulted in changing the status of 13 segments that had otherwise been passed or removed from consideration at the Phase I, Phase II or field assessment stages. Three segments in the UGA have been categorized as Future Analysis Recommended, as shown on the map in Appendix A.

Additional coordination occurred with the City Parks Department. The Park’s Department’s PRO (Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces) Plan was analyzed for any overlap or connections that would otherwise modify the screening. No additional status changes occurred, although several unimproved ROW segments were identified as planned Parks facilities. The planned Parks facilities are still in the very early development stages, and several lack defined alignments. The segments near Parks alignments were identified for future analysis as the Parks projects become more defined.

### ***Transportation Commission Review***

The Phase I, Phase II and Field screening process and results were presented to the City of Bellingham’s Transportation Commission on July 12, 2022. The Commission asked several questions about the process, but no modifications of the process or the resulting segments for further analysis were requested by the Commission.

## **Unimproved Rights of Way for Analysis**

After the Phase I, Phase II, field assessment and consultation with the City of Bellingham regarding near-term development, the 1,257 unimproved right of way segments in the initial dataset have been reduced to 20 high priority segments that will be considered as part of the Pedestrian and/or Bicycle Master Plan network. The unimproved right of way segments will be considered alongside other potential roadway segments to provide the needed linkages identified through the planning process.

While unimproved right of way segments, by definition, do not have existing roadways to modify to provide active mode facilities, developing land that does not have dedicated facilities, with the goal of providing active mode connections that are ADA-compliant and therefore accessible to the widest range of potential users, can be resource-intensive compared to existing roadway segments. The screening criteria used to identify the priority segments used to make active mode connections are outside of the scope of unimproved right of way screening and are described under separate cover.

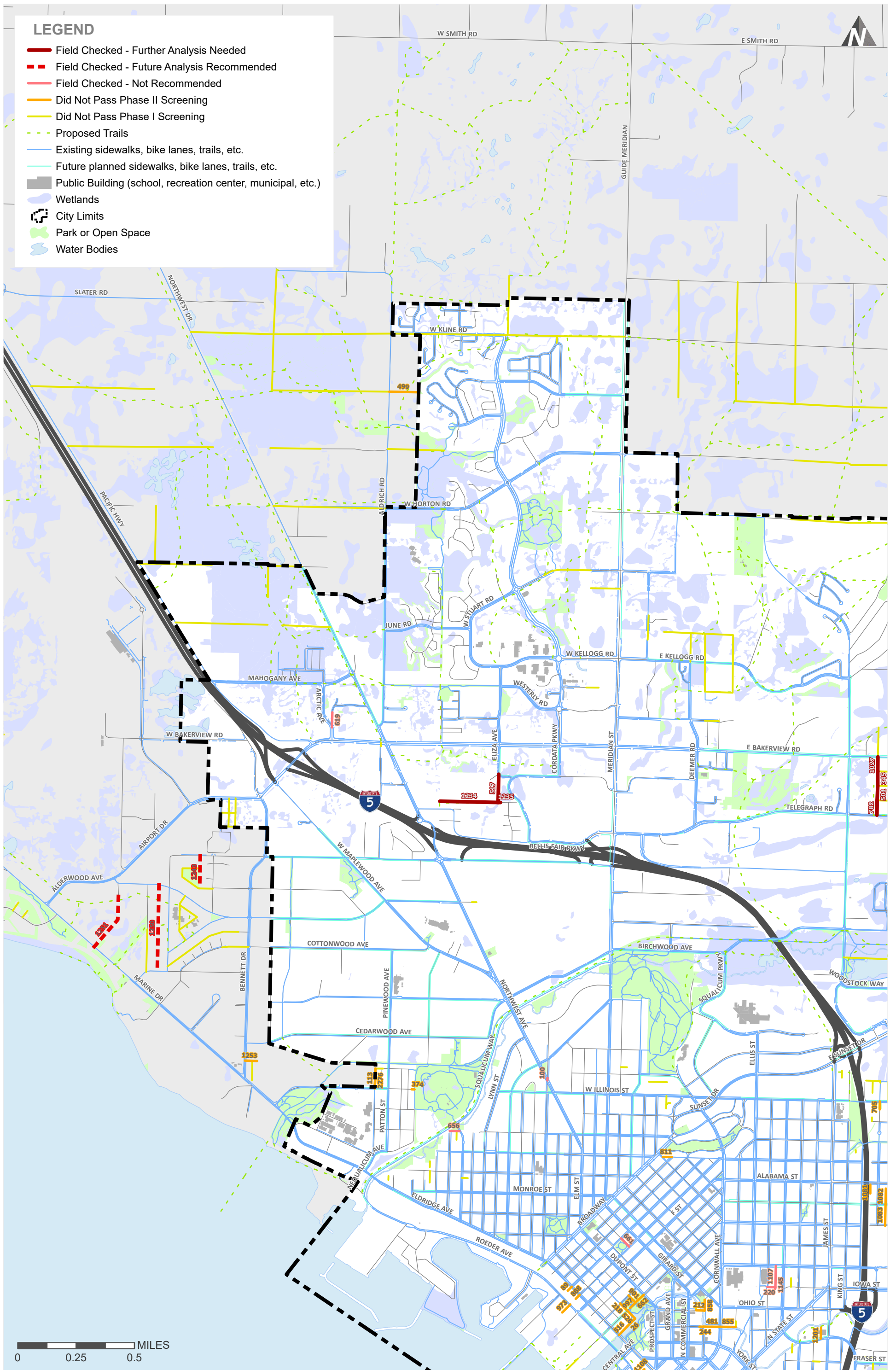
ADJACENT ROADWAY	SEGMENT ID	FIELD CHECK COMMENTS
<b>FURTHER ANALYSIS RECOMMENDED</b>		
BENNETT AVE	46	Flatter topography, low vegetation. In use by adjacent properties. Some ad-hoc use already, especially from the south. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
BENNETT AVE	363	Flatter topography, low vegetation. In use by adjacent properties. Some ad-hoc use already, especially from the south. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
27TH ST	476	Flat topography, some vegetation but there are openings. Already in use as an ad-hoc trail. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
20TH ST	680	Flatter topography, low vegetation. In use by adjacent properties. Some ad-hoc use already, especially from the south. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
VERONA ST	751	Flat topography, unvegetated. Possible drainage use that would need to be rerouted and/or enclosed on the south end. Potential for connection further south to trail. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
BENNETT AVE	756	Flat topography, some trees, but mostly low vegetation. In use by adjacent properties. Some ad-hoc use already especially from the south. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
GAMBIER AVE	802	Steeper topography, but easy connection, although would be "between driveways". Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
KNOX AVE	1122	South end is flat and open, but it has a steep climb with vegetation to connect at north end. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
DONOVAN AVE	1133	Flat topography and clear of vegetation, but in use by residences. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
DONOVAN AVE	1134	Flat topography and clear of vegetation, but in use by residences. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
MARS ST	200	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
WASHINGTON AVE	345	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
MARS ST	457	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
WASHINGTON AVE	501	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
ELIZA AVE	517	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
WASHINGTON AVE	782	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
RICHARDS ST	969	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
WASHINGTON AVE	1027	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
BARNES RD	1234	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
BARNES RD	1235	Near-term development identified by COB staff will connect to network. Recommend further analysis as a potential network link.
<b>FUTURE ANALYSIS RECOMMENDED</b>		
MCLEOD RD	1243	Within UGA. Recommend future analysis if UGA is annexed.
ALDERWOOD AVE	1250	Within UGA. Recommend future analysis if UGA is annexed.
ALDERWOOD AVE	1251	Within UGA. Recommend future analysis if UGA is annexed.

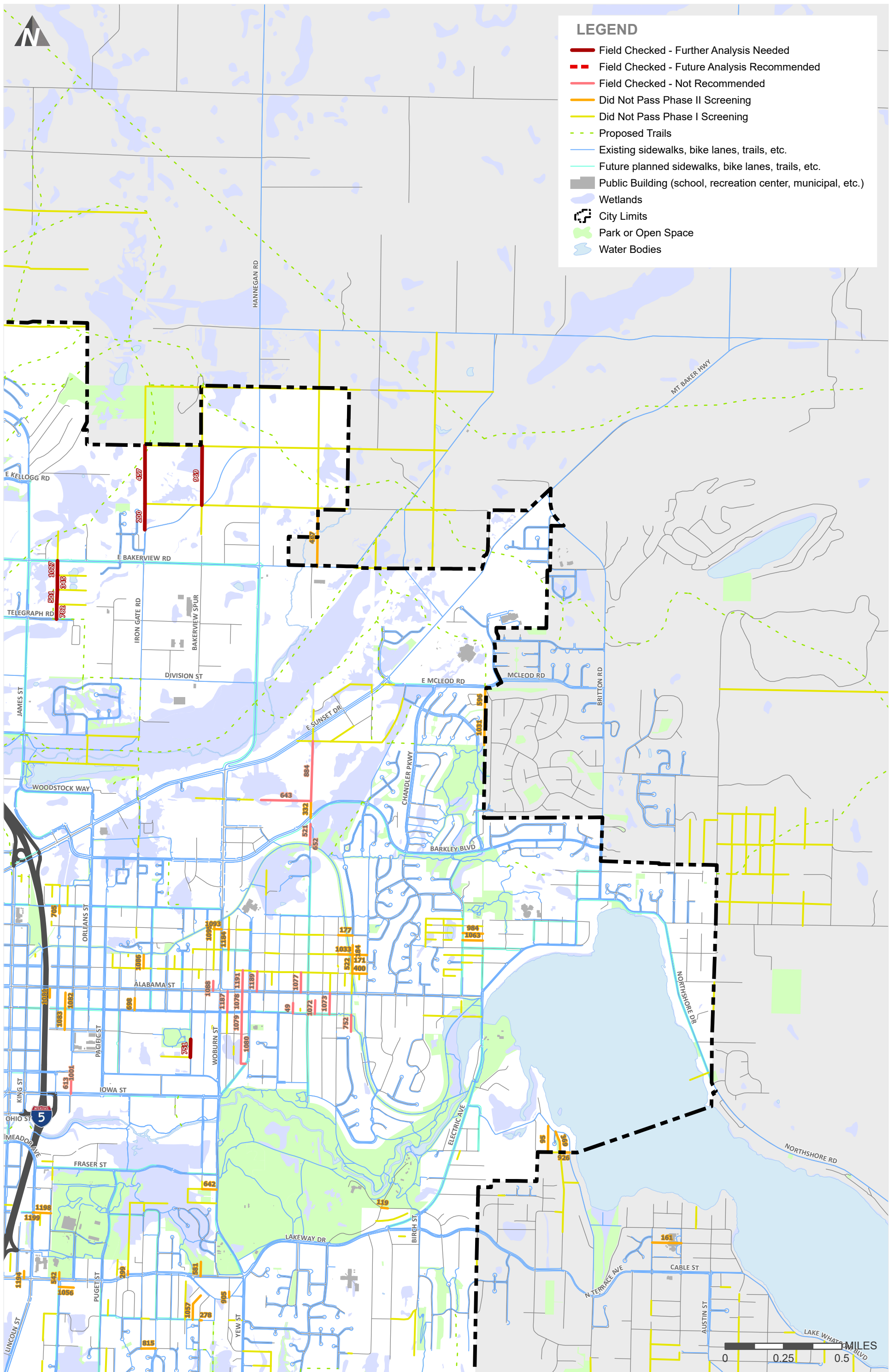
ADJACENT ROADWAY	SEGMENT ID	FIELD CHECK COMMENTS
<b>NOT RECOMMENDED</b>		
41ST ST	38	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
ONTARIO ST	49	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended.
32ND ST	51	North half favorable terrain, although steep at road connection. South half very heavily vegetated. Not recommended
WALNUT ST	100	Short conenction across Northwest Avenue. Not recommended. Other crossing improvements in design.
41ST ST	103	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
42ND ST	112	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
KNOX AVE	178	Already in use as steep, but paved connection. No need for further analysis.
IOWA ST	220	Flat, unvegetated, connected to other paved surfaces. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended
32ND ST	249	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
KELLOGG ST	263	Very steep topography, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. No recommended.
OLIVE ST	286	Very steep topography, lightly vegetated. Some use by adjacent properties. Would need to be a staircase, no recommended.
COWGILL AVE	335	Steep topography at Old Fairhaven Parkway, densely vegetated, in use by adjacent property. Not recommended.
ADAMS AVE	361	Very steep, heavily wooded, potential drainage conflicts. Not recommended.
32ND ST	379	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
HARRISON ST	402	Very steep vertical terrain, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. No recommended.
WILLIS ST	413	Very steep vertical terrain, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. No recommended.
34TH ST	417	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
26TH ST	421	Very steep vertical terrain, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. Not recommended.
33RD ST	434	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
42ND ST	462	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
ST CLAIR ST	521	Already a gravel trail connection. No need for further analysis.
NEVADA ST	613	In use as a drainage facility, not feasible.
DOVER ST	619	In use as a drainage facility, not feasible.
KNOX AVE	627	Already in use as steep, but paved connection. No need for further analysis.
BURNS ST	643	Private developer has already committed to active mode improvements in this area. Not recommended for further analysis.
ST CLAIR ST	652	Private developer has already committed to active mode improvements in this area. Not recommended for further analysis.
W CONNECTICUT ST	656	Very steep vertical terrain. Heavily vegetated. Not recommended.
FARRAGUT ST	661	Flat, some vegetation, but borders park/may impact park and adjacent property owners' frontage on the park. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended.
KELLOGG ST	695	Very steep, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. Not recommended
DICKENS AVE	725	Very steep topography, lightly vegetated. Some use by adjacent properties. Would need to be a staircase, not recommended.
NIAGARA ST	752	Steeper terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended.
25TH ST	777	Very steep, heavily vegetated. May be in use by adjacent residences. Little connectivity. Not recommended
ALLEN AVE	790	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
ADAMS AVE	806	Very steep, heavily wooded, potential drainage conflicts. Not recommended.
32ND ST	829	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded.
E LAUREL ST	830	Existing path, no further analysis needed
ST CLAIR ST	884	Private developer has already committed to active mode improvements in this area. Not recommended for further analysis.
ADAMS AVE	934	Very steep, heavily wooded, potential drainage conflicts. Not recommended.

ADJACENT ROADWAY	SEGMENT ID	FIELD CHECK COMMENTS
37TH ST	959	Very steep, limited connectivity. Not recommended.
NEVADA ST	1001	In use as a drainage facility, not feasible.
BYRON AVE	1049	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
BYRON AVE	1050	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
BYRON AVE	1051	Rough, uneven topography and roadside vegetation. Does not have many network connections to the surrounding area. Dumas Street is dead end. Nearby wetlands to the south and creek crossing of Lincoln Creek. In use by adjacent residences. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1072	Steeper terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1073	Steeper terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1077	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1078	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
TEXAS ST	1079	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
CAROLINA ST	1080	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1088	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
GRANT ST	1107	Flat, unvegetated, connected to other paved surfaces. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended
TAYLOR AVE	1124	Relatively flat, no vegetation, already in use as an ad-hoc trail. WWU planned improvements. No further analysis needed.
GRANT ST	1145	Flat, unvegetated, connected to other paved surfaces. Redundant with other connections. Not recommended
TAYLOR AVE	1164	Relatively flat, no vegetation, already in use as an ad-hoc trail. WWU planned improvements. No further analysis needed.
CHESTNUT ST	1180	Developed, flat, unvegetated, but highly redundant. Not recommended.
CHESTNUT ST	1181	Developed, flat, unvegetated, but highly redundant. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1187	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1189	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
ALABAMA ST	1191	Flatter terrain, lightly vegetated. Already paved/in use or are being used by adjacent property owners. Redundent with other connections. Not recommended.
BILL MCDONALD PKWY	1204	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.
BILL MCDONALD PKWY	1206	Very steep topography connection to Bill McDonald Pwky. Heavily wooded. Not recommended.

**LEGEND**

- Field Checked - Further Analysis Needed
- - - Field Checked - Future Analysis Recommended
- Field Checked - Not Recommended
- Did Not Pass Phase II Screening
- Did Not Pass Phase I Screening
- - - Proposed Trails
- Existing sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, etc.
- Future planned sidewalks, bike lanes, trails, etc.
- Public Building (school, recreation center, municipal, etc.)
- Wetlands
- City Limits
- Park or Open Space
- Water Bodies

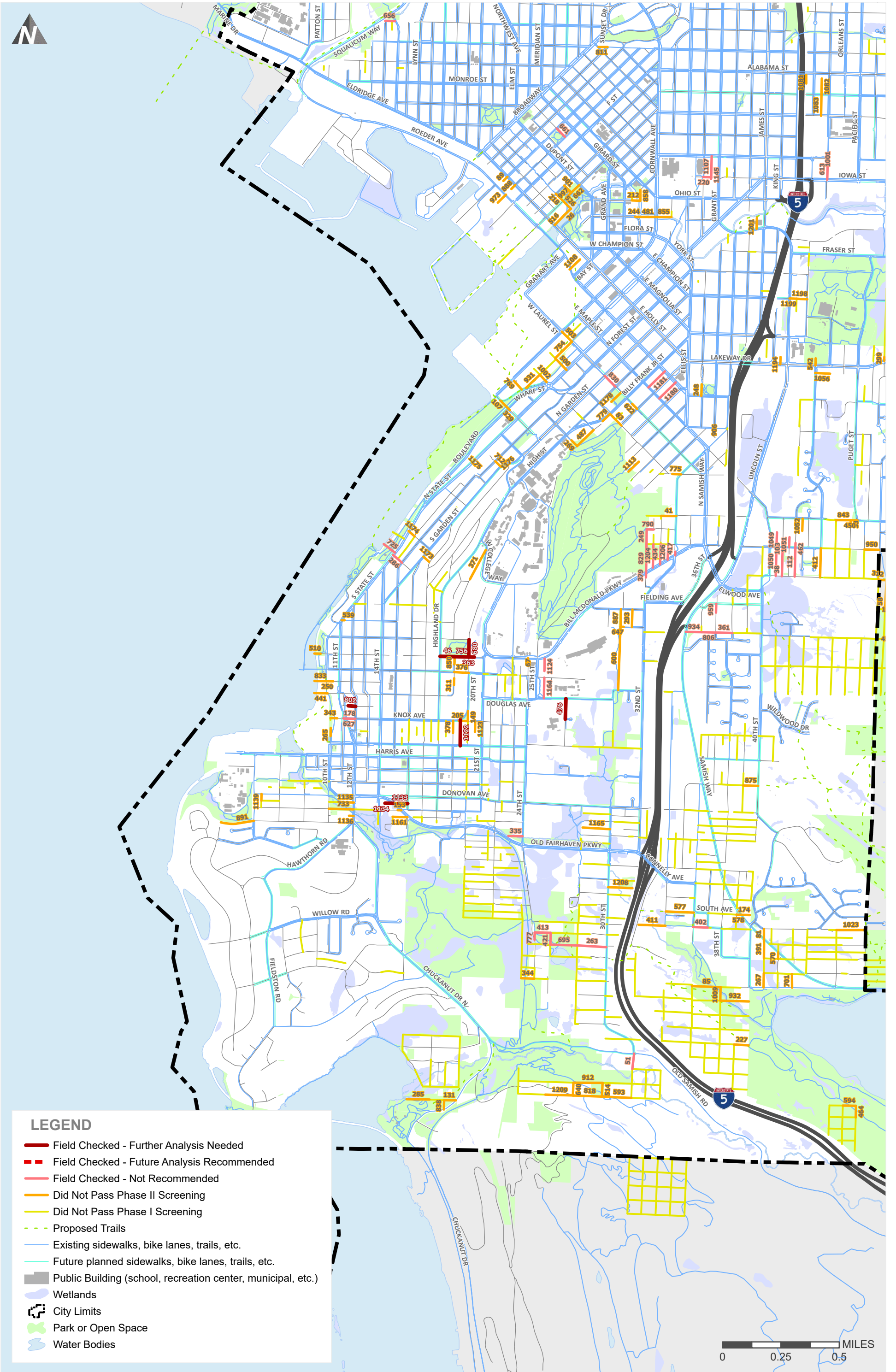




**Selected Unimproved ROWs - NE Portion**  
 Bellingham Ped-Bike Master Plan Updates

8/2/2022 FIGURE





**LEGEND**

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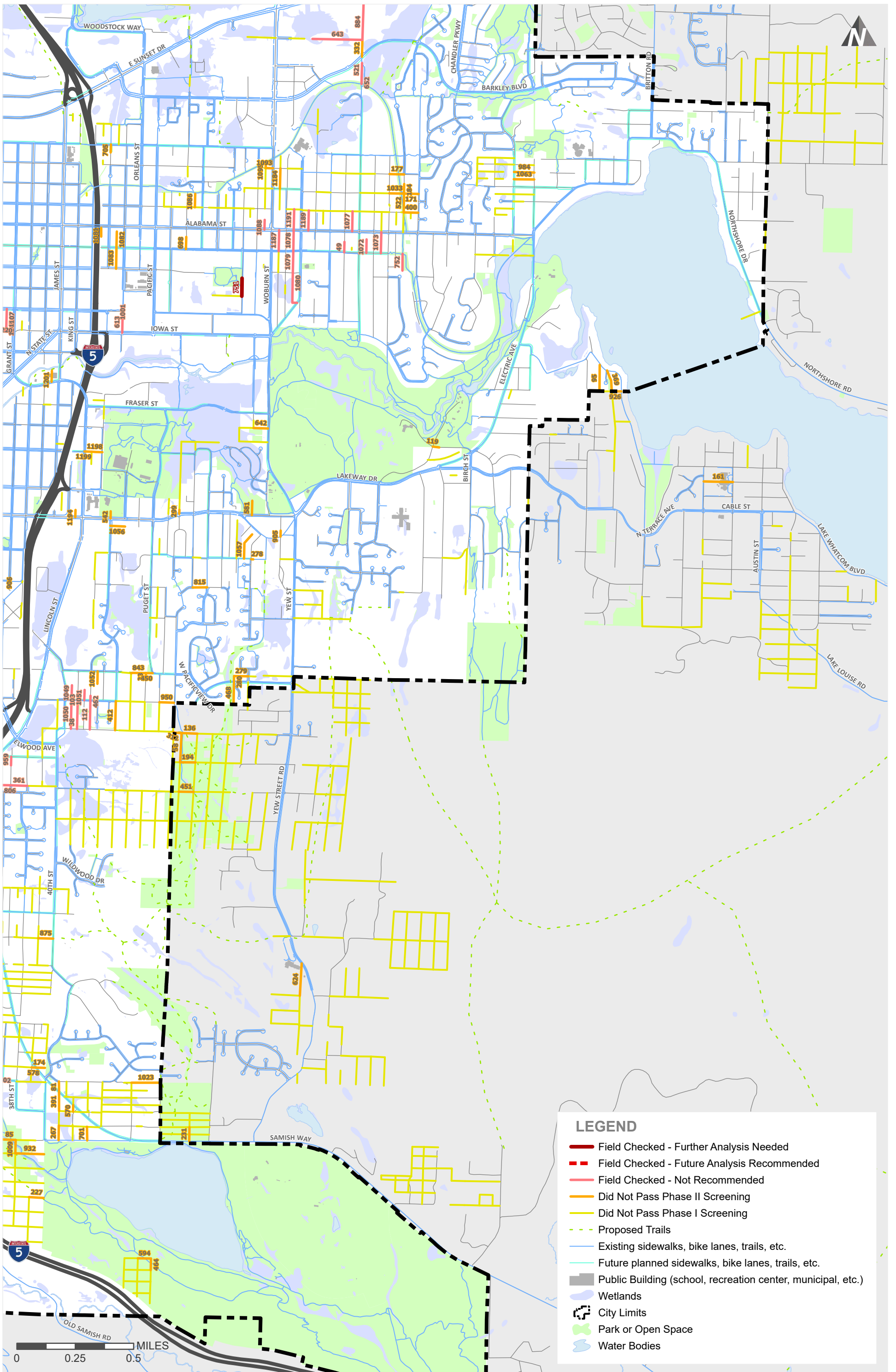


**Selected Unimproved ROWs - SW Portion**

Bellingham Ped-Bike Master Plan Updates

8/2/2022 FIGURE

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**Selected Unimproved ROWs - SE Portion**  
 Bellingham Ped-Bike Master Plan Updates

8/2/2022 FIGURE