

2006 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN GOALS AND POLICIES

VB-14: Whatcom Transit Authority's route enhancements reflect Bellingham's commitment to adjust to changing transportation needs, and to utilize public transportation to improve air quality, to decrease parking demand, and to reduce reliance on the use of the automobile.

VB-15: Both pedestrian and bicycle facilities connect living, working and recreational areas throughout the town. New development is designed to be pedestrian friendly. Walking is made easier by requirements for street trees and separated sidewalks on all new or reconstructed arterials except where existing mature vegetation or terrain suggests otherwise. Bicycling as a form of recreation and bicycling as a form of transportation flourishes, using facilities that are well lit and are built and maintained to allow year-round, all-weather use, and allow safe on and off-street travel.

VB-16: Bellingham continues to recognize the need for an efficient arterial system, which minimizes through traffic on local residential streets. Transportation grant applications and local transportation funding priorities address capacities on arterials, the I-5 overpasses, and the Interstate between Bill McDonald Parkway and West Bakerview.

VB-17: Development patterns that encourage walking, biking and transit use are fostered through incentives and zoning regulations, including provisions for developments that allow people to live within walking distance of shopping and employment. These provisions may encourage small scale neighborhood centers as well as cottage industry or home occupations.

VB-25: Bellingham's regulations encourage and provide incentives for innovative housing and mixtures of housing types that preserve natural resources and consolidate open space.

VB-26: Increased housing density and infill exists in the downtown area and in other parts of the community that are appropriate for small lots or higher density housing, reflecting a variety of housing costs.

VB-45: Bellingham reduces noise pollution and increases air quality by reducing its reliance on the automobile and promoting walking, bicycling and other modes of transportation.

VB-58: Tree preservation and replanting efforts have been combined with interests in preserving views. Greenery is retained on the hillsides and throughout the City while creating "windows" and view corridors for area residents.

VB-60: Developed parks and trails are integrated into the City's open space system. Acquisition and development of park sites that adequately serve both existing and newly developing neighborhoods and accomplished in part through developer contributions.

GF-1: Allocate and design urban villages, rewriting neighborhood plans as necessary – Representatives from neighborhood associations have been asking for updated neighborhood plans. This implementation step, a critical one, will cast neighborhood planning in a new light, concentrating on the functions of urban neighborhoods rather than on planning solely within district boundaries.

GF-8: Establish neighborhood incentive programs to encourage support for infill – These types of programs may include raising the priority of capital improvement projects, such as street reconstruction, parks enhancement or water system upgrades, in those neighborhoods accepting increased intensity.

GF-11: Support public and private efforts to build homes people can afford – Strong communities and healthy neighborhoods have a balanced mix of homes people can afford, in sync with the wages and incomes in the community. Reaching this ambitious but achievable goal can involve collaborative efforts of neighborhoods, nonprofit organizations, for-profit builders and local governments, each contributing to create and implement a strategy that keeps neighborhoods desirable, walkable, with a mix of homes affordable at the wages of nearby jobs. The entire community benefits when everyone has a home they

can afford, at an urban location that allows them not to drive so much, putting the time and money they save into family, friends and community betterment.

GF-13: Establish design guidelines for areas that are particularly sensitive and for development types that are particularly controversial – Design guidelines, if written well, can go a long way to establish and enforce design expectations. The City is now preparing revisions to residential development standards. Additional guidelines, impacting certain types of commercial development (like “big box” retailers) or addressing urban villages (like Fairhaven) may also be helpful.

GF-15: Include commercial or institutional uses in or near new large multi-family projects – A consistent community complaint throughout this process has been the development of large-scale multi-family housing projects and their impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Infill strategies rely on higher-density housing, but it is clear that the high-density housing types used in the past will not work as part of future infilling efforts. Mixing uses is crucial to successful infill development, and the addition of residential units above first-floor retail in commercial areas is well understood and accepted as one approach. This recommendation encourages including small-scale commercial or institutional uses within multi-family projects, giving residents convenient access to services and increasing the dimension of activity in housing areas. This policy recommendation received mixed support from participants at the policy workshop, indicating some skepticism of its ability to succeed. As an alternative, the City may wish to establish guidelines for land uses in urban villages, ensuring that residential developments front directly on public streets and are located within a five-minute walk from commercial or institutional projects.

GF-27: Define and invest in high-intensity transit corridors – Land use and transportation are interdependent systems. This recommendation recognizes that land use patterns and investment in transportation infrastructure influence each other and suggests that the City, County and WTA work together to reinforce high-intensity transit corridors by coordinating public investment and land use policy. This particular policy recommendation received a large amount of support in the Forum’s policy workshop, indicating the community’s desire to see public transportation fill a much more important role in shaping Bellingham’s urban pattern.

GF-28: Target public investment to improve roads in a manner consistent with infill objectives – Increasing roadway capacity does not solve traffic congestion problems. It merely prolongs them. While the City and the County will continue to need to make roadway improvements, they may wish to design them and prioritize them in a way that furthers infill objectives. This may include providing additional bicycle lanes, reducing the number of travel lanes on underused roadways, increasing the number of crossings over I-5, and improving sidewalks and trails and other similar types of improvements that act to put less emphasis on car drivers and more on pedestrians, bicyclists and riders of public transportation. It might be perfectly acceptable in an infill strategy to tolerate level of service “F” conditions for roadways leading into and out of the city. Roadway improvement money should be spent on making infill work better and not on helping people live and commute beyond the UGA.

GF-29: Study the use of tax exemptions and deferrals to encourage infill-type projects – Bellingham adopted a multi-family tax credit to encourage development of residential units in the CBD. It is working. This recommendation suggests that similar efforts be employed in other areas where infill is sought.

FLU-2: Bellingham’s land use pattern should accommodate carefully planned levels of development that promotes efficient use of land, reduces sprawl, encourages alternative modes of transportation, safeguards the environment, promotes healthy neighborhoods, protects existing neighborhood character, and maintains Bellingham’s sense of community.

FLU-4: Affordable, attractive, stable and diverse residential neighborhoods should be encouraged while providing for a variety of housing opportunities.

FLU-5: The character of single family neighborhoods should be protected as higher intensity land uses are located in designated urban villages and corridors.

FLU-15: Growth in Bellingham will be accommodated primarily in compact “urban centers” as described in the Community Growth Forum report, while preserving the character of existing single family neighborhoods.

Infill Strategy 1: Make more efficient use of the remaining City land supply: facilitate development of existing lots of record; develop flexible code provisions that allow a range of housing types; adopt minimum density requirements; other steps necessary to make better use of the remaining land supply.

Infill Strategy 3: Promote and facilitate the development of the other six urban villages identified. These areas can accommodate significant additional dwelling units if resources are available to properly master plan and provide needed infrastructure and amenities.

Infill Strategy 4: Evaluate potential density increases in existing residentially zoned areas of the City. Also examine commercial or industrial zoned areas for potential rezone to residential to increase the amount of land available for housing. This step also relates to the urban village concept of the Community Growth Forum. Through the neighborhood planning process, other areas of the City appropriate for urban village mixed-use and higher density development would be identified and master planned as described in the Growth Forum report.

FLU-18 A master plan must be developed for each of the proposed urban centers. (The City Center and Fairhaven areas are exempt from this requirement.) The planning process to site urban centers should include neighborhood groups, residents, property owners, business owners and others. Although the process to develop the master plans and the contents may vary depending on the location and size of the center proposed, some common elements can be identified:

- Master plans should specify land uses and densities; street and utilities layout; lot arrangement; housing types; village square or plaza location(s); streetscape amenities; relationship of the buildings to the street; parking structures or lots; protection of critical areas; pedestrian and bicycle facilities; and other items deemed necessary to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas.
- Neighborhood plans and zoning designations shall be updated as district and neighborhood urban center master plans are developed.
- Establish urban center zoning district(s) to enable development of urban centers.
- Establish requirements for district and neighborhood urban centers that provide a pleasant living, shopping, and working environment; pedestrian accessibility; adequate, well-located open spaces; an attractive, well-connected street system; and a balance of retail, office, residential, and public uses.
- Urban centers should be required to have an appropriate mix of commercial, service and residential uses as determined during the master planning process.
- Establish urban center design and development standards to ensure that new urban centers are of a type, scale, orientation and design that maintains the character and livability of the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Where appropriate, require the use of streetscape treatments, building styles, architectural details, materials, roof forms, setbacks, windows and doors similar to those of other structures in adjacent areas.
- Where possible, locate urban centers on or near arterial streets and transit routes to give them visibility, a central location, and allow them to serve as the neighborhood focal point. Transit routes and stops should be designed to provide increased service in and around the urban centers. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be designed so as to attract and encourage non-motorized trips.

- Urban center designs should include, where possible, a central park, plaza, village green or other public space that is usable for a range of age groups.
- When possible, parking lots in urban centers shall be located behind or beside the buildings.
- Minimize the amount of land area in urban centers devoted to parking.
- Encourage the development of parking structures in the city center and the district urban centers.
- Establish parking requirements for land uses in urban centers that reflect their pedestrian and transit orientation (e.g. consider reducing parking requirements 10% to 15% in such areas).
- Consider counting on-street parking toward meeting commercial use parking requirements where appropriate.
- Provide incentives such as density bonuses for establishing shared parking lots.
- Design and size parking lots to avoid interrupting the pedestrian orientation of urban centers. Locate parking lots to the side or rear of commercial and multifamily buildings.
- Screen parking areas from the street and residential areas through landscaping, berms, walls or other methods. The landscaping design should also consider the safety of parking lot users, i.e. employ CPTED principles.
- Require signage to be of a size and location so as to not detract from the character of the area.
- Where possible, establish walkways, bikeways and appropriate buffers between urban centers and adjacent neighborhoods.
- A maximum floor area size may be placed on commercial buildings constructed in district, neighborhood or pocket urban centers.
- Special overlay zoning should be examined to allow a mix of uses in the urban centers. Incentives to encourage neighborhood scale commercial buildings with upper floor offices or residences should be provided in the neighborhood and pocket centers. Other uses such as day care centers should also be encouraged.
- To encourage development of the urban centers, activities such as assembling land, approving tax exemptions, reducing in parking requirements, approving density bonuses, providing assistance with predevelopment tasks such as site planning and environmental review and others should be examined.

LU-33: Encourage energy-efficient site and building designs to increase efficiency and preserve natural resources.

LU –34: Multi-family housing should be sited in urban centers and on designated primary transit corridors where appropriate levels of public facilities and services are available.

LU-37: Residential density bonuses may be considered in instances such as planned unit development, that combine excellence in design with housing affordability, purchase or transfer of development rights, or other important community objectives.

LU-50: Development regulations should be revised to encourage mixed-use infill development in urban villages. Design and site improvement standards should be established through the master plan process for urban village development.

TV-2 Development patterns that encourage walking, biking and transit use are fostered through incentives and zoning regulations, including provisions for developments which allow people to live within walking distance of shopping and employment. These provisions may encourage small scale neighborhood centers as well as cottage industry or home occupations.

TV-3 Both pedestrian and bicycle facilities connect living, working, education, and recreational areas throughout the town. New development is designed to be pedestrian friendly. Walking is made easier by requirements for street trees and separated sidewalks on all new or reconstructed arterials except where existing mature vegetation or terrain suggest otherwise. Bicycling as a form of recreation and bicycling as a form of transportation flourishes, using facilities that are well lit and are built and maintained to allow year-round, all-weather use, and allow safe on and off-street travel.

TV-5 Bellingham reduces noise pollution and increases air quality by reducing its reliance on the automobile and promoting walking, bicycling, and other modes of transportation.

TG-6 Provide a transportation system which minimizes environmental and social impacts and reduces reliance on fossil fuels.

TG-10 Emphasize, accommodate, and provide facilities for multiple transportation modes on Bellingham streets wherever possible.

TG-12 Provide safe and functional residential streets while retaining those elements of the right-of-way which are valued aspects of the character of the area.

TG-18 Identify and analyze low-cost opportunities to increase street connectivity to create better traffic circulation within neighborhoods and throughout the city.

TG-19 Increase mode share of bicycle and pedestrian trips by providing a safe, well-connected, and convenient bicycle and pedestrian circulation network throughout the city.

TG-20 Prioritize pedestrian and bicycle facility improvements over auto-oriented improvements within Urban Villages and areas targeted for infill development.

TG-22 Support WTA high-frequency transit service by allowing higher density development in designated Urban Villages in Bellingham and the Bellingham UGA.

TG-32 Emphasize and commit to the implementation of infill and Urban Village land use strategies to create residential densities that will support safe, viable, and convenient opportunities to use transportation modes other than the private automobile.

TG-35 Encourage the “unbundling” (separate pricing) of parking spaces associated with residential development in Urban Villages to promote reduction in ownership of multiple automobiles.

TG-36 Encourage the provision of car-sharing with new residential development within Urban Villages to reduce the residential parking demand.

TG-37 Establish parking reduction allowances for residential units in Urban Villages and within ¼ mile of the WTA Primary Transit Network that require each unit to receive WTA bus passes in perpetuity.

TP-1 Consider revision of land use plans to allow densities and mixes of uses that reduce the number and length of vehicle trips and increase the opportunity to use public transportation and non-motorized modes of travel.

TP-2 Reinforce the link between land use and public transportation by encouraging transit-oriented

development along and within ¼ mile of WTA Primary Transit Network corridors and near urban villages, town centers, and neighborhood centers.

TP-4 Provide development incentives (such as increased density, increased square footage, and parking requirement reductions) for new development located within Urban Villages and along and within ¼ mile of WTA Primary Transit Network corridors when amenities for transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians are included, while minimizing impacts to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

TP-5 Encourage land development proposals to utilize the full capacity of the existing multi-modal transportation system, especially transit and non-motorized modes.

TP-6 Encourage public and private development proposals to enhance the street side environment to maximize comfort of the transit user and pedestrian.

TP-35 Minimize and control levels of harmful pollutants generated by transportation related construction, operations, and maintenance activities from entering surface and groundwater resources.

TP-39 Encourage use of non-automotive travel modes by developing parking management plans. Mechanisms to be considered include:

- An emphasis on short-term parking in retail areas;
- Market-based pricing of on-street parking meters to encourage short-term day time parking;
- Incentive-based pricing in garages to encourage long-term day time parking;
- Reduction of free or subsidized employee long-term parking availability;
- Re-evaluation of appropriate minimum and maximum parking ratios for development proposals; and
- Elimination of “free” public parking in Urban Villages.

TP-40 Consider revisions to current zoning code requirements for the area adjacent to the CBD, Urban Villages, and major retail districts, as part of a parking management plan designed to reduce the minimum number of on-site parking spaces required for development and to increase preferential space and lower costs for car pool and van pool parking in private developments.

TP-43 Encourage the use of common parking facilities among compatible, adjacent land uses where feasible.

TP-65 Provide safe, convenient and protected bicycle parking at activity centers such as commercial areas, institutions, parking garages, park-and-ride facilities and transit terminals.