SAMISH WAY URBAN VILLAGE SUBAREA PLAN

City of Bellingham, Washington

Planning & Community Development Department
Adopted by Ordinance No. 2009-XX-XXX
Month, 2009

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INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBAREA PLAN

This document provides a policy framework for the creation of an urban village in a 78-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 Subarea Plan is to guide re-development 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 2006 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The 2006 Comprehensive Plan states that anticipated population growth should be accommodated primarily through the creation of a series of urban centers. An urban center (or "urban village") is generally considered an area that:

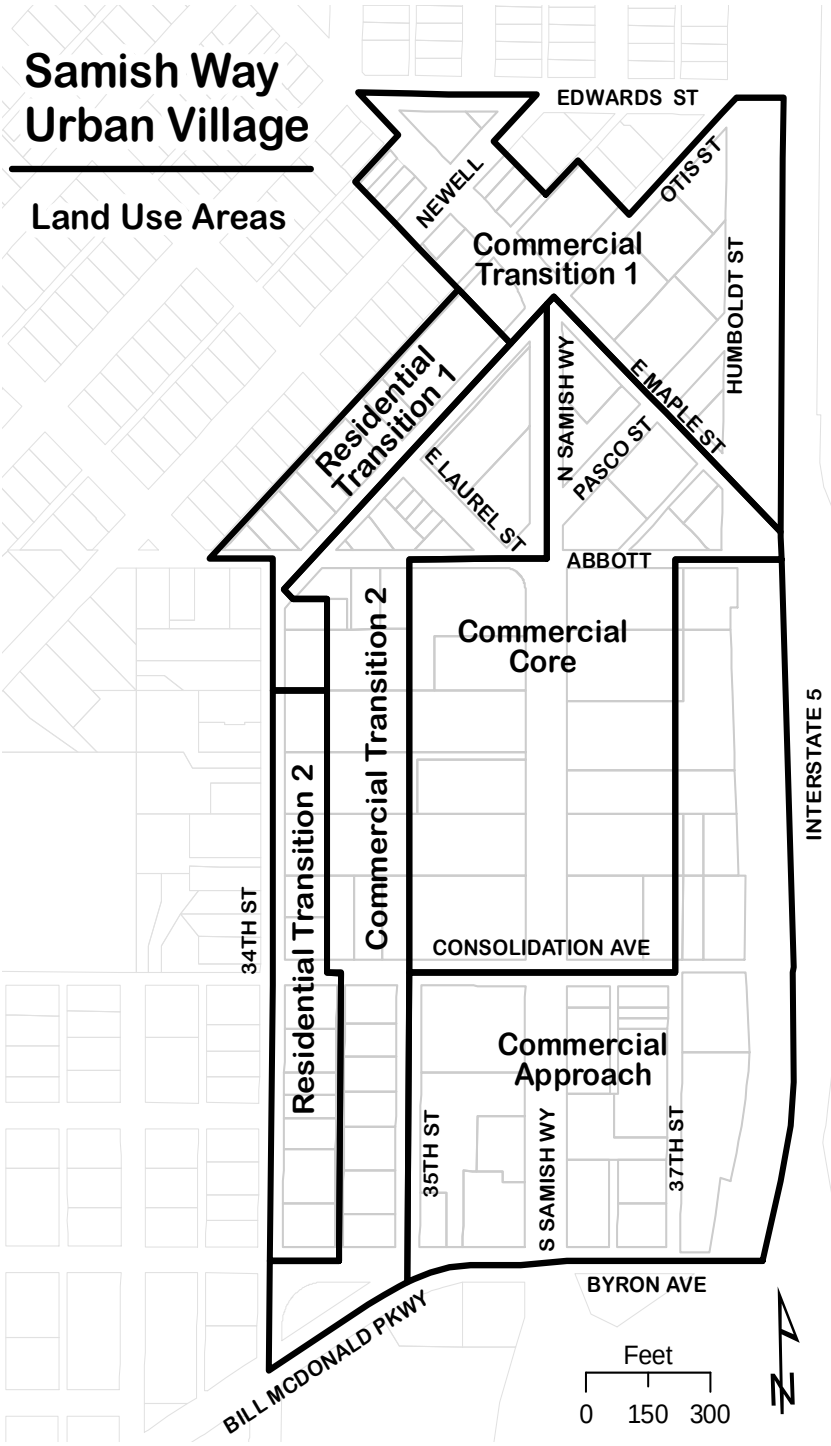
- Contains a mix of commercial, residential, and service uses;
- Provides amenities and necessities within walking distance;
- Is designed for pedestrians, bikes, and transit, as well as the automobile;

- 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 a potential urban village. Comprehensive Plan policy FLU-18 directs that Subarea Plans be developed for each of the proposed urban villages. Each plan must specify the following elements:

- Land uses and densities;
- Street and utility layouts;
- Lot arrangements, housing types;
- Plaza locations, streetscape amenities;
- Relationship of 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.

These elements are each addressed in this Subarea Plan and/or the associated development regulations.



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 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 owners, 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.

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.

1960 Aerial Photo of I-5, Bill McDonald Parkway and Samish Way (Jack Carver)

History of Samish Way

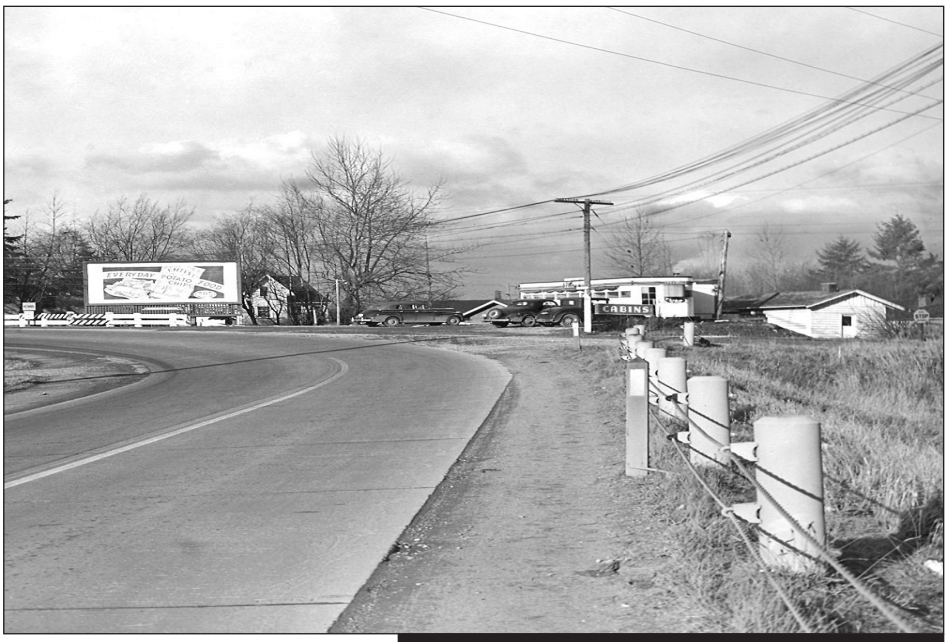
In the early 1930s, Samish Way was known as Maple Valley Road, a gravel road bounded by fields, trees and a few houses. In 1936, the road became part of Highway 99, also known as Pacific Highway 1, which ran along the West Coast from Mexico to Canada. By the mid 1950s, this main route into Bellingham had blossomed with motels, gas stations and other auto-oriented businesses. Reminders of that area include the Aloha Motel.

Rocket Express, serving coffee and doughnuts, is housed in the old two-pump gas station that opened in 1933 as Johnson Motor Service. (Bellingham Herald, October 2008)

Johnson Motor Service circa 1933 (Marlene Hadley)

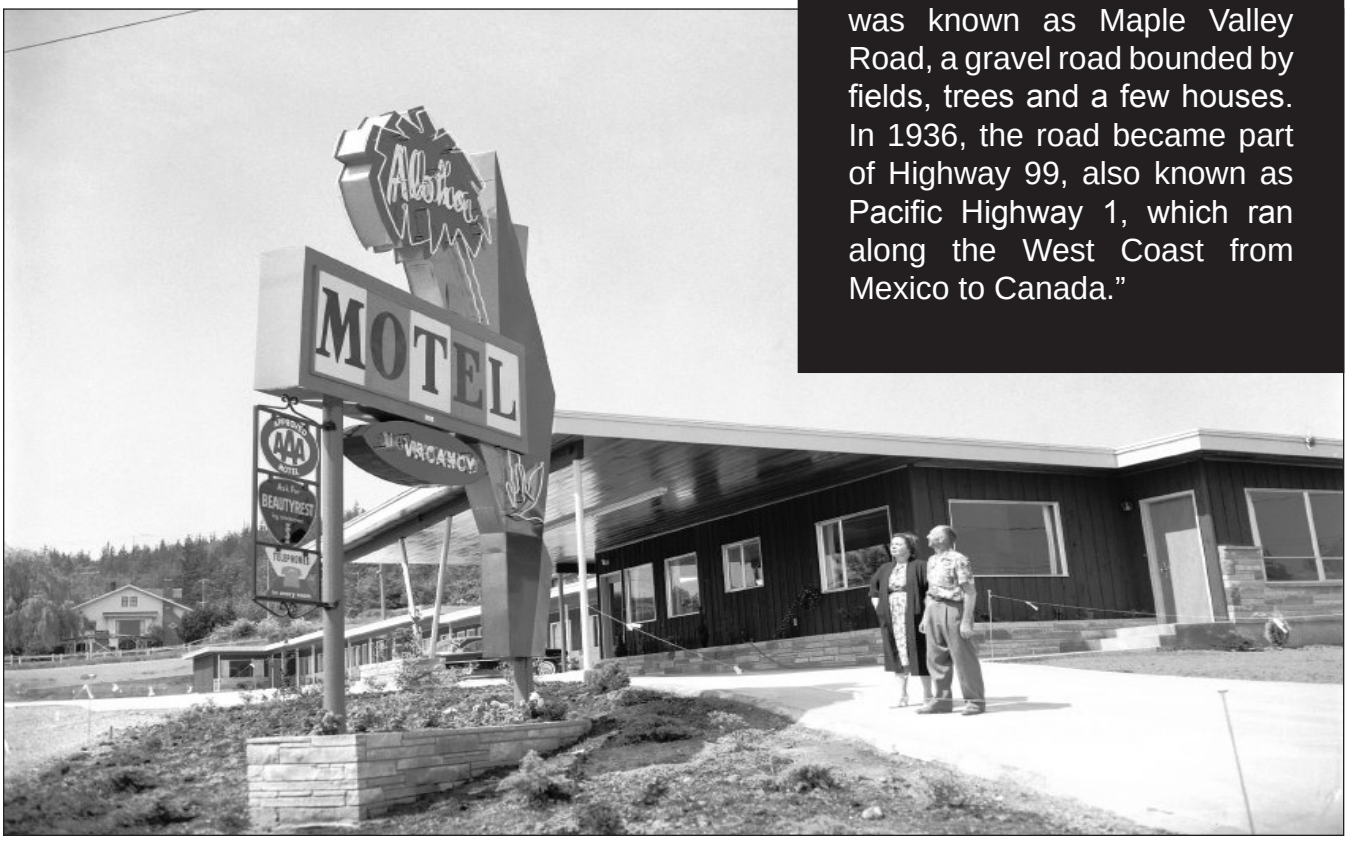
2009 use: Rocket Donuts

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.

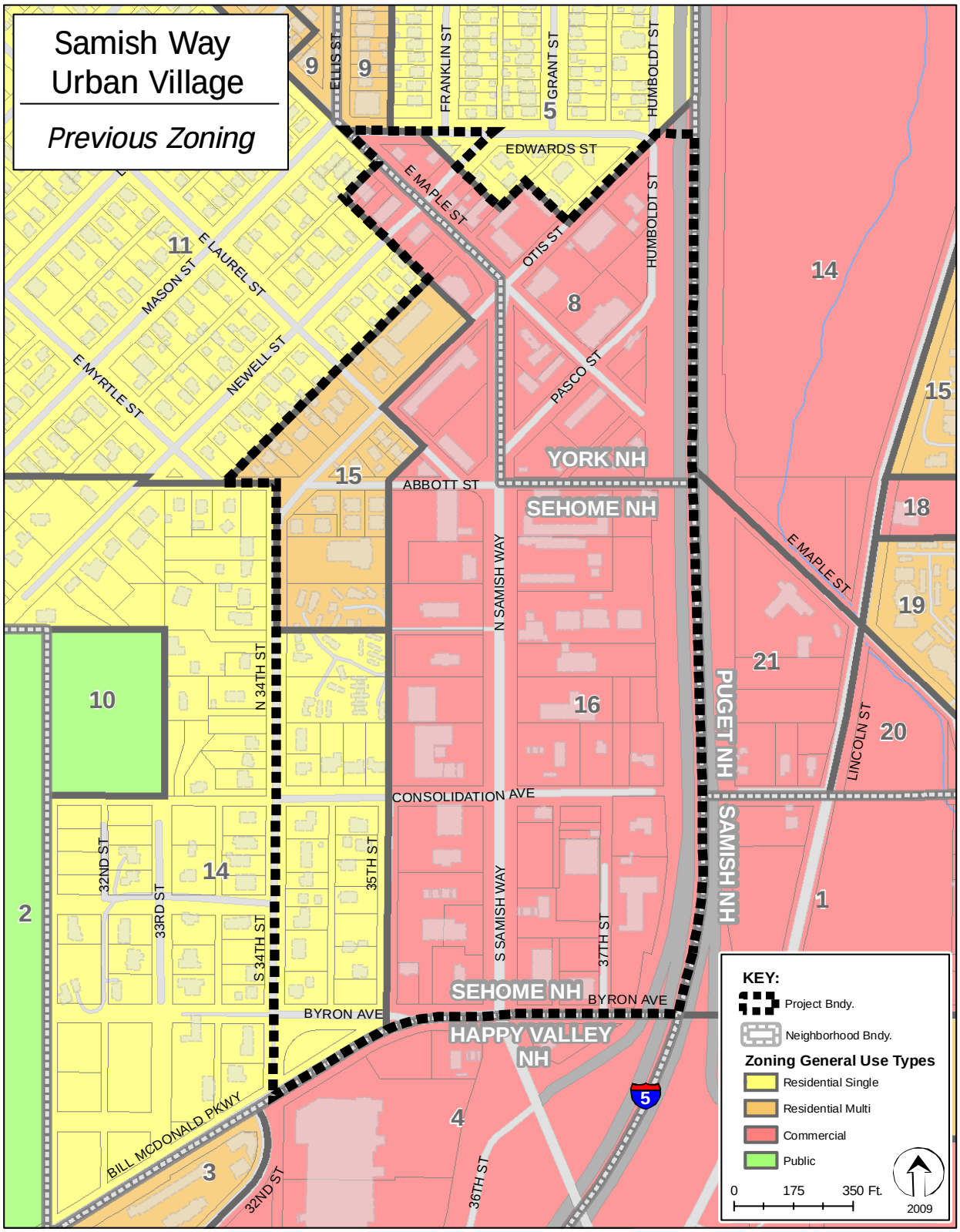


1946 Historical Photo - Heading North on Samish Way turning into Maple St. (Jack Carver)

"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."



Aloha Motel 1960 (Jack Carver)


Samish Way
Urban Village
Previous Zoning
ELLIS ST
FRANKLIN ST
GRANT ST
HUMBOLDT ST
EDWARDS ST
E MAPLE ST
OTIS ST
HUMBOLDT ST
E LAUREL ST
MASON ST
NEWELL ST
E MYRTLE ST
PASCO ST
YORK NH
ABBOTT ST
SEHOME NH
N SAMISH WAY
E MAPLE ST
N 34TH ST
PUGET NH
LINCOLN ST
CONSOLIDATION AVE
SAMISH NH
32ND ST
33RD ST
35TH ST
S 34TH ST
S SAMISH WAY
37TH ST
SEHOME NH
BYRON AVE
BYRON AVE
HAPPY VALLEY NH
BILL MCDONALD PKWY
32ND ST
36TH ST
5
KEY:
Project Bndy.
Neighborhood Bndy.
Zoning General Use Types
Residential Single
Residential Multi
Commercial
Public
0
175
350 Ft.
2009

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 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 67% of the project area is currently covered in impervious surfaces.

Businesses along Samish Way include gas stations, hotels, restaurants, and retail establishments. The 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.

Looking north on Samish Way

Looking south on Samish Way towards Bill McDonald Parkway

Parking Lot adjacent to Samish Way

Abbott Street

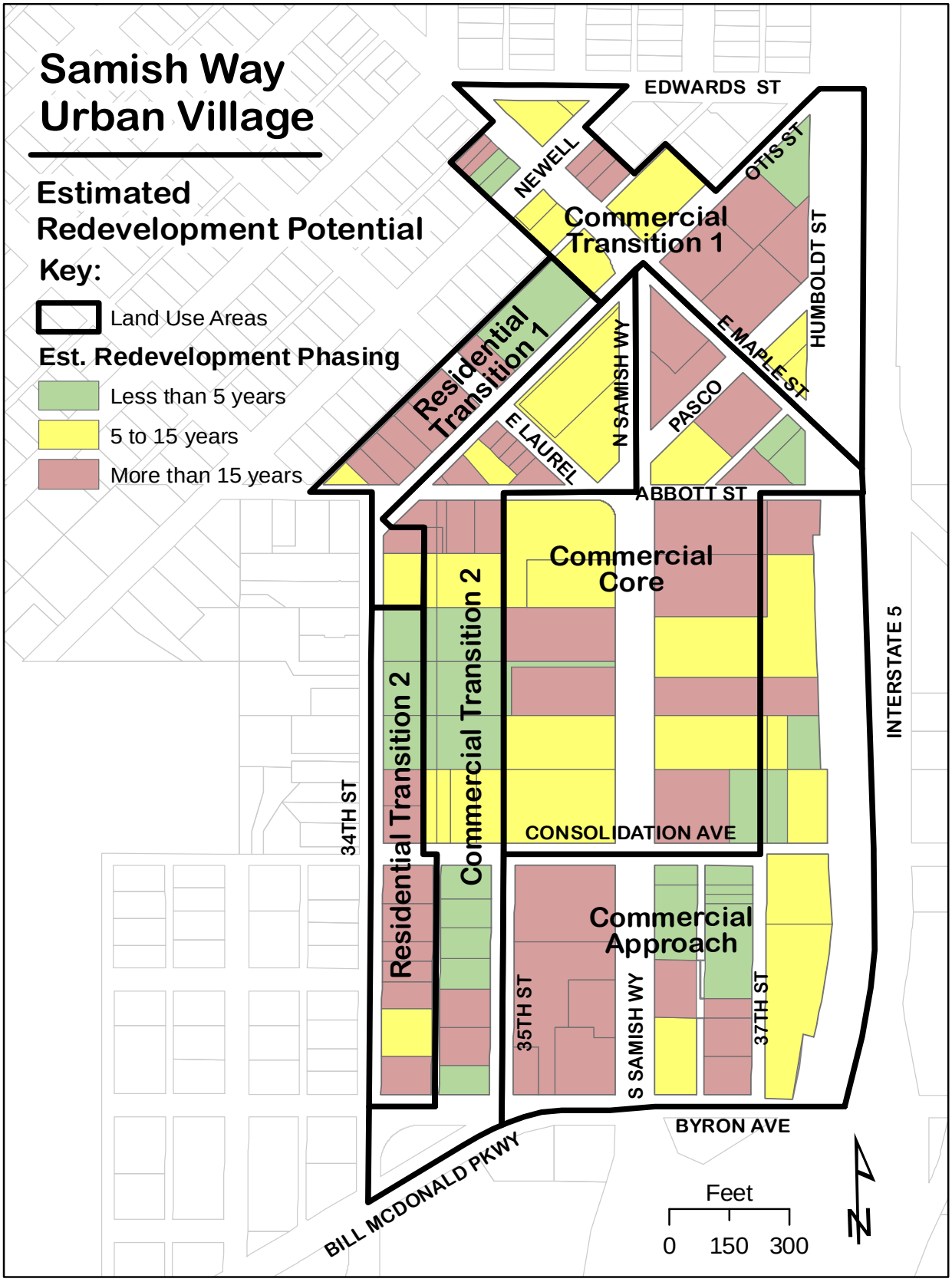
2. VISION

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


Samish Way
Urban Village
Estimated
Redevelopment Potential
Key:
Land Use Areas
Est. Redevelopment Phasing
Less than 5 years
5 to 15 years
More than 15 years
EDWARDS ST
NEWELL
OTIS ST
HUMBOLDT ST
Commercial
Transition 1
Residential
Transition 1
N SAMISH WY
E MAPLE ST
PASCO
E LAUREL
ABBOTT ST
Commercial
Core
Commercial Transition 2
Residential Transition 2
INTERSTATE 5
34TH ST
CONSOLIDATION AVE
Commercial
Approach
35TH ST
S SAMISH WY
37TH ST
BYRON AVE
BILL MCDONALD PKWY
Feet
0
150
300
N

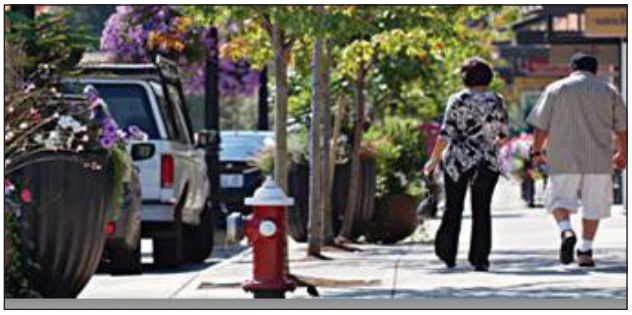
WWU faculty that live in the area. The couple sitting in the drive-up burger joint remembers this was once Old Highway 99.

Many people who visit from other parts of town enjoy riding the bus on the GO 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.

2.1 REDEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

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. Utilizing this analysis, it's estimated that up to 1,291 housing units and 612,250 square feet of commercial space may be added to the area by 2022. This level of residential development would result in a net density of approximately 29 units per acre. Limited development is anticipated within the first 5 years of the adoption of this plan. Some parcels may not develop until 2022 or later, depending on the economic environment.



3. DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER

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 Subarea 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. Additionally, more frequent bus service 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 Subarea 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 the LEED-ND 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.

- Explore the establishment of a Multi-family Tax Exemption zone within the Subarea to encourage market rate and affordable residential development.

- Allow light manufacturing and some auto-oriented uses within the Approach area.

- Require ground floor commercial uses along Samish Way and emphasize Samish Way as the primary commercial corridor.

- 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.

Site Design Policies

- Develop sites 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.

The hotel market in Bellingham and Whatcom County is relatively strong (Property Counselors, 2009). Nine motels flank Samish Way between E. Maple St. and Bill McDonald Parkway. Hotels and motels are encouraged to continue to provide accommodations in the area, which is in close proximity to I-5, Western Washington University, and other area attractions. New hotels and motels should consider incorporating ground floor uses, such as restaurants, that support the pedestrian character and provide services for area residents.

- Incorporate bio-swales and other low-impact stormwater management techniques into landscape medians, street plantings and private stormwater systems where possible to provide an aesthetic amenity and reduce the impacts of stormwater runoff.

Building Design Policies

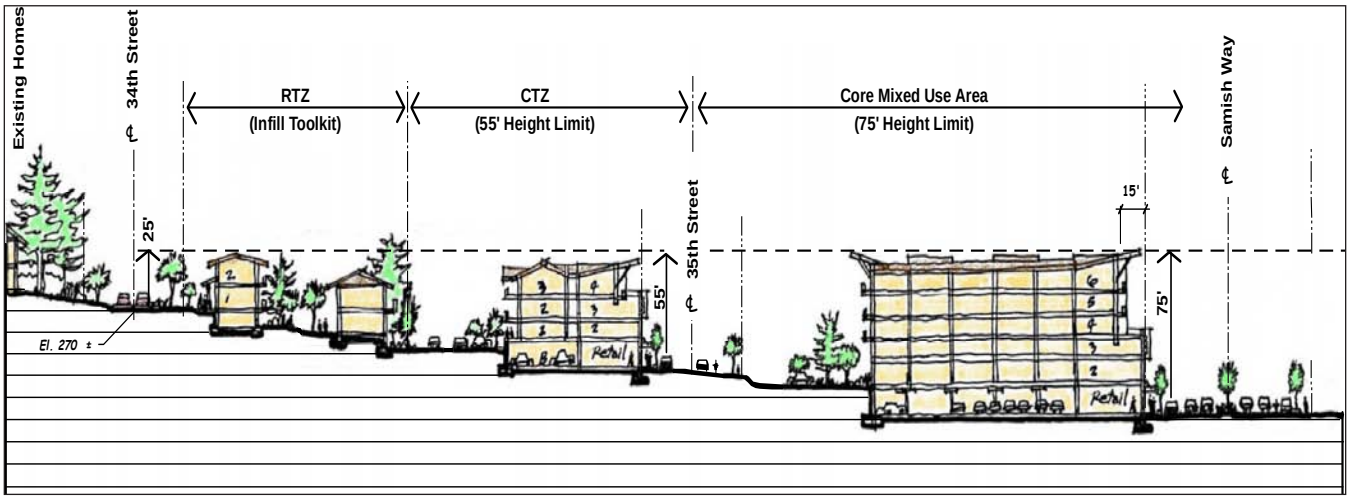
- Employ a design review process that ensures projects comply with the intent of the established design standards.

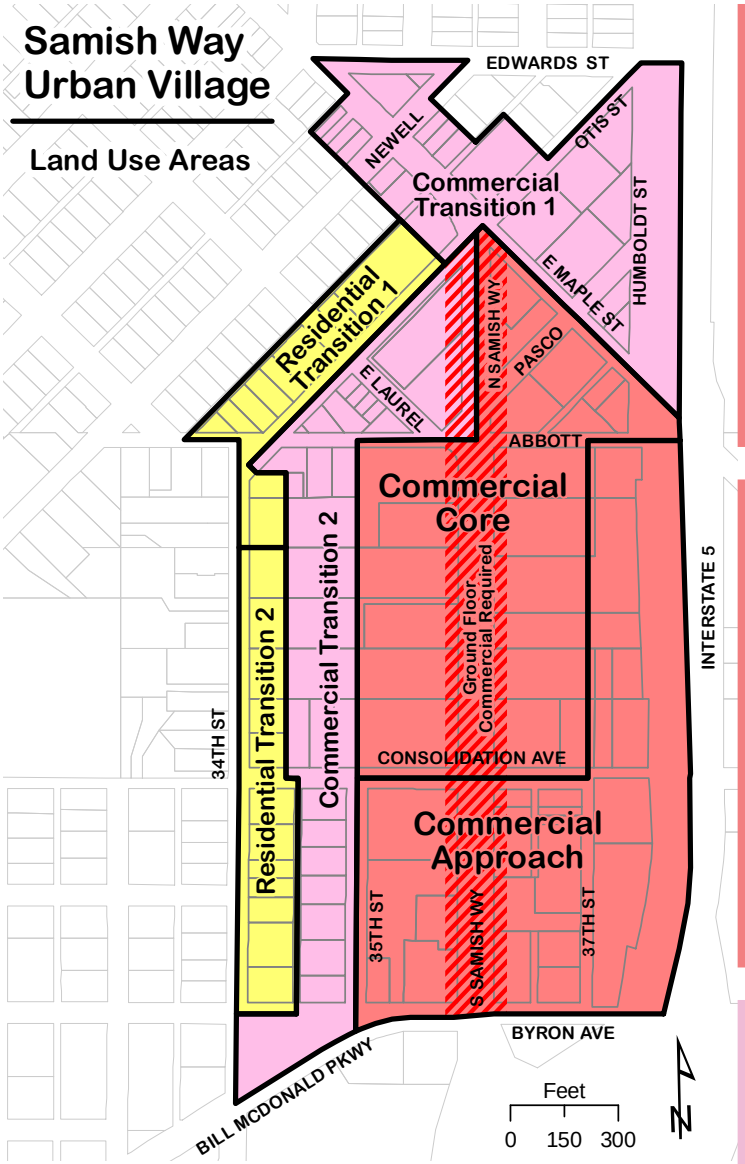
- Encourage developers to implement Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) noise mitigating measures in buildings adjacent to I-5 to buffer traffic noise.

- 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.





Commercial Core (C) *-*
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 (C) *-*
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 are intended to allow commercial uses similar to the Core and Approach Areas, but those with less noise and vehicular impacts on abutting residential areas. Height limits are lower to lessen the impact on the adjacent residential areas. Residential only buildings are allowed in the Transition area, however they 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.

3.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Adopt development regulations to insure 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.

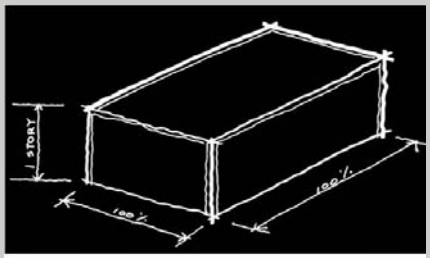
- Establish four development areas based on the desired intensity of development and physical characteristics: Commercial Core, Commercial Approach, Commercial Transition, and Residential Transition areas. These areas are intended to ensure development is appropriately scaled and to allow uses that are 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.

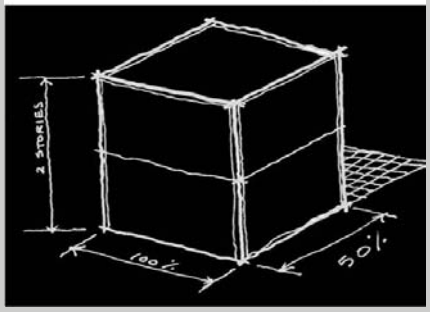
- Establish landscaping requirements to increase the amount of vegetation provided with new development.

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.

4. CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PUBLIC PARKING

Street right-of-way accounts for approximately 34 of the 78 total acres of the project area (~43%). 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 a threatening environment for people, and discourages pedestrian activity.

Bicylists riding on Samish Way sidewalk

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.

Some streets dead-end or have 1 way access, and lack of streets in other areas results in large "superblocks" with no through pedestrian or vehicular access for over 900 feet in some cases.

In contrast, 34th Street has a pleasant rural environment despite it's proximity to Samish Way and Bill McDonald Parkway. 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.

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 to support the commercial activity in the area and to protect adjacent residential neighborhoods.

4.1 CIRCULATION, STREETSCAPE AND PARKING POLICIES

Circulation Policies

- Enhance the street grid and eliminate "superblocks" by extending 35th Street and 37th Street between Consolidation Avenue and Abbott Street. Right-of-way should be dedicated upon property redevelopment for this purpose.

- Add a new east-west mid-block pedestrian connection between Abbott Street and Consolidation Avenue to connect 34th Street to the Commercial areas as shown on the right-of-way and pedestrian connection map on page 23.

- Support street vacations when exchanged for newly dedicated right-of-way.

- Consolidate driveways along Samish Way to increase automobile, bicycle, and pedestrian safety.

- Reduce the posted speed limit along Samish Way to a maximum of 25 miles per hour as redevelopment occurs and automobile traffic increases to make the street more comfortable for bikes/pedestrians and increase the visibility of businesses to passerby.

- Add traffic signals or roundabouts to Samish Way intersections to manage traffic flow and create safe pedestrian crossings.

- Highlight pedestrian crossings with bulb-out sidewalks, use of different surface materials and markings, and use of the landscape median as a mid-street pedestrian refuge.

- Add a new traffic signal to the intersection of 35th Street and Bill McDonald Parkway prior to 35th Street being opened to traffic.

- Provide a double left turn lane at Bill McDonald Parkway to allow for adequate storage space for vehicles preparing to turn northbound onto Samish Way.

- 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.

- Establish a wayfinding system to guide people to and from the Sehome Hill Arboretum, WWU, Lake Padden and downtown.

- Supply curb cuts through the traffic diverters at Grant and Humboldt Streets to allow bikes and wheelchair access between the Samish Way Urban Village, Franklin Park, and the York Neighborhood.

- Explore the feasibility for a bike and pedestrian overpass across Interstate 5 near E. Maple and Abbott Streets 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' adopted criteria) to regulate traffic flow through established neighborhoods.

- Prohibit vehicular access from 34th Street to the commercially-zoned areas of the urban village.

Looking North on new 35th Street towards Abbott

Artist rendering of 35th street

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.
- Expand high-frequency ("GO Line") transit service as redevelopment occurs and as new residential density creates a ridership base to connect the Samish Way corridor to WWU and downtown.
- Relocate the westbound transit stop at Bill McDonald Parkway to the City right-of-way at Byron and 35th Street (across the street from the eastbound transit stop) to facilitate a safer pedestrian crossing to the Sehome Village retail service area and provide a pleasant environment for transit riders.
- Accommodate either 2 buses or a double bus at new bus pull-outs to support an eventual increase in transit service.

Courtesy of Whatcom Transit Authoriy

- 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.

- Provide stormwater treatment in public landscape beds wherever possible.

- Construct a continuous 14-foot wide "sharrow" lane to accommodate bicycles along each outside travel lane of Samish Way. Each sharrow should be marked with a bicycle symbol to clearly identify that it is a shared lane for both bicyclists and motorists.

- Consolidate transit stops and fire hydrants into one location to maximize on-street parking.

- 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.

Example of a sharrow

Streetscape Policies

- Add a landscape median with left-turn pockets at major intersections and consolidated driveways, and include street trees and landscaping along Samish Way.

- Maximize sidewalk width for pedestrian safety and comfort.

- 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.

Public Parking Policies

- Consider expanding the Residential Parking Zone (RPZ) if needed to limit parking encroachment into adjacent single-family neighborhoods as density occurs.

- Add on-street parking to the Commercial Core of Samish Way and all side streets where possible.

4.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Create a Maintenance District for the public spaces, landscaping and other public amenities within the Subarea.

- Explore adding metered parking stalls to the Core and creating a Parking Benefit District to direct meter revenues into local beautification and maintenance.

- Work with property and business owners to adopt an access management ordinance consolidating driveway curb-cuts at a minimum spacing of 200 feet.

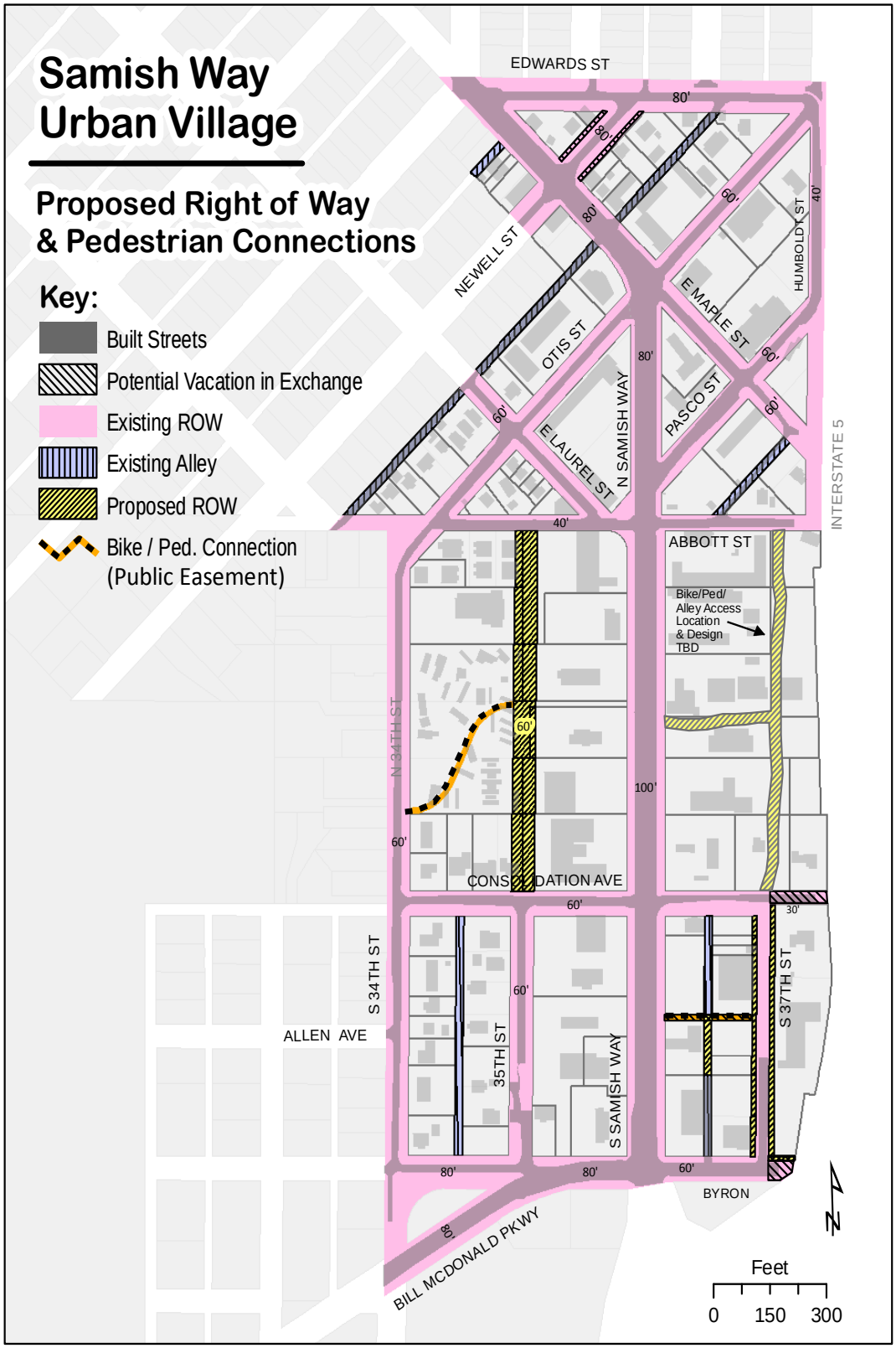
- Establish a Local Improvement District (LID) to organize the proportional fair share cost of improvements and amenities in the area.

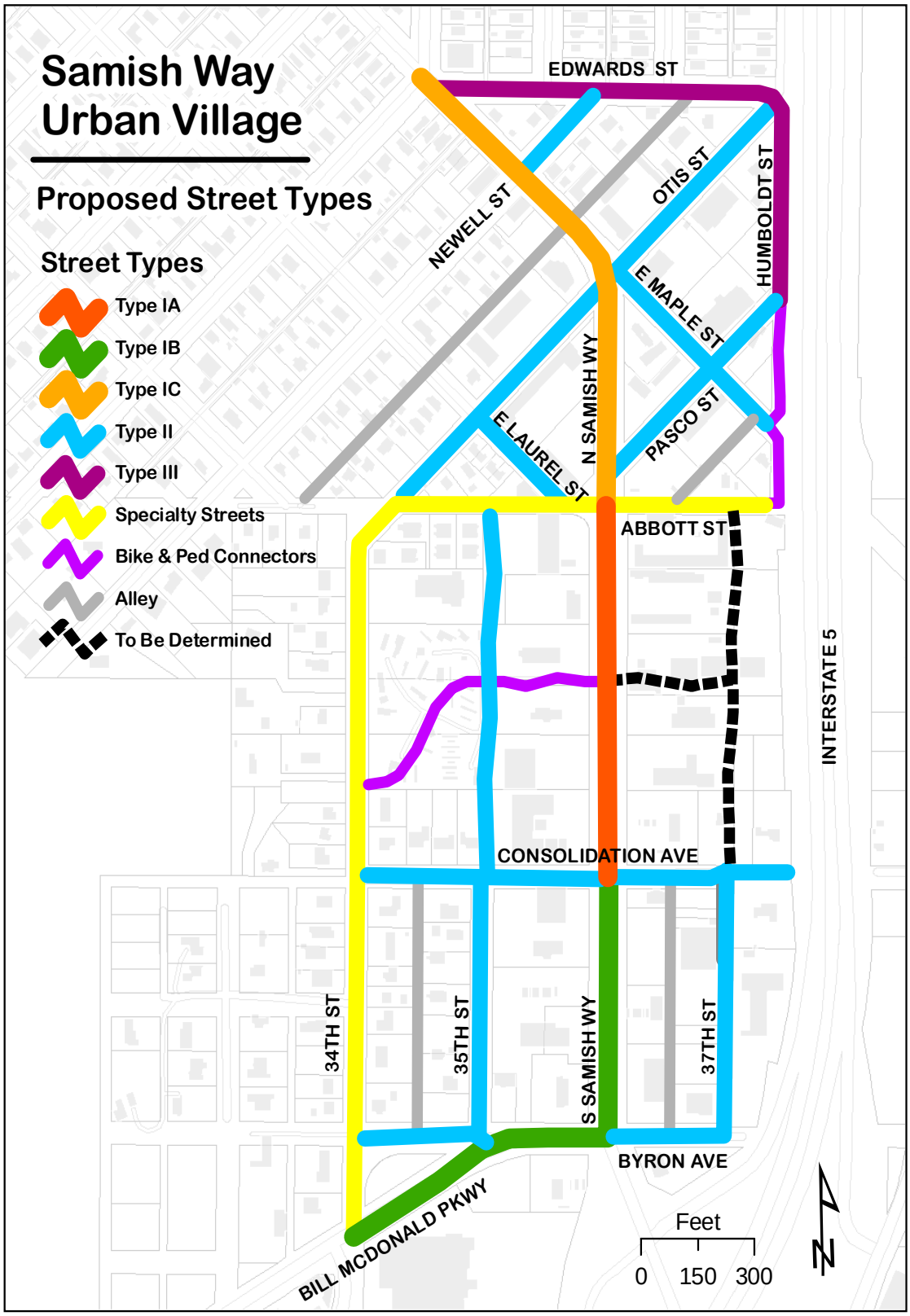
- Require new development to construct adjacent streets to the standards recommended in this Subarea Plan, except for Samish Way and identified “special streets”.

- Prohibit private vehicular access from 34th Street to the commercially-zoned areas of the urban village.

- Explore grants and other financing tools to help implement the proposed street designs for Samish Way, 34th Street and Abbott Street.

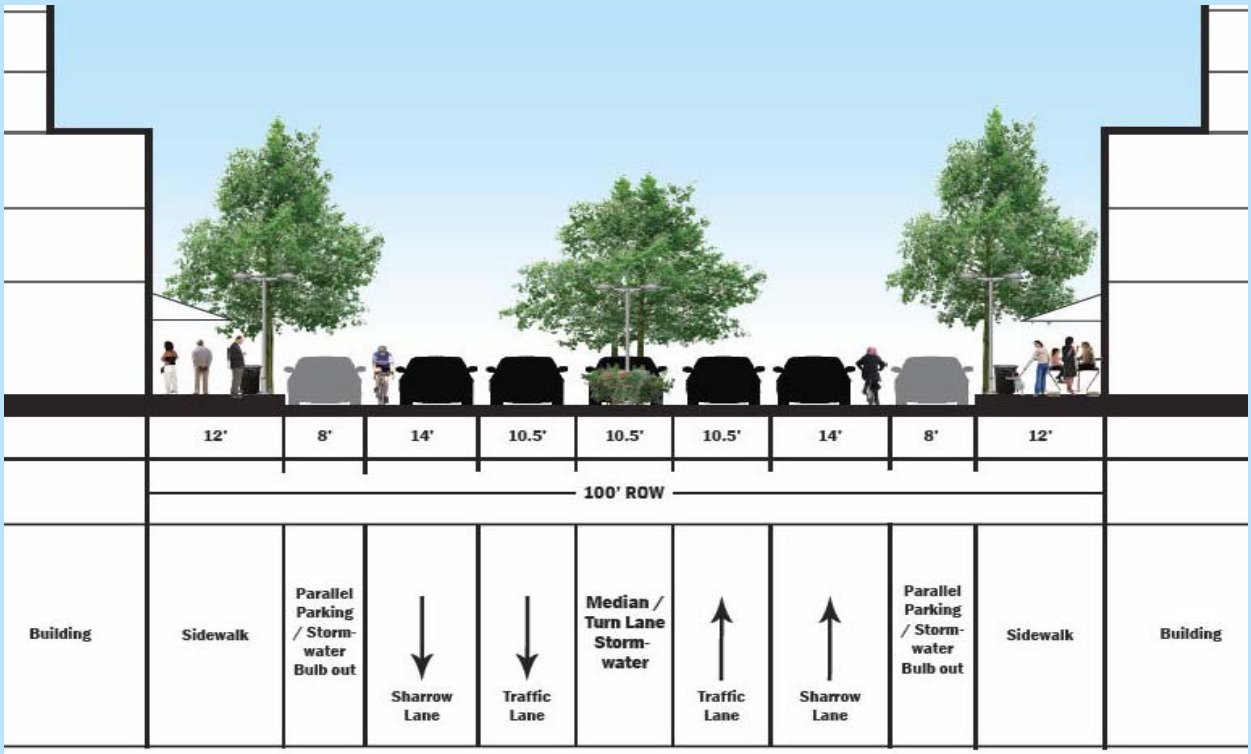
- Acquire right-of-way where needed to create a more compact street grid.


Samish Way
Urban Village
Proposed Right of Way
& Pedestrian Connections
Key:
Built Streets
Potential Vacation in Exchange
Existing ROW
Existing Alley
Proposed ROW
Bike / Ped. Connection
(Public Easement)
EDWARDS ST
NEWELL ST
OTIS ST
E LAUREL ST
N SAMISH WAY
E MAPLE ST
PASCO ST
HUMBOLDT ST
INTERSTATE 5
ABBOTT ST
Bike/Ped/
Alley Access
Location
& Design
TBD
N 34TH ST
CONSOLIDATION AVE
S 34TH ST
ALLEN AVE
35TH ST
S SAMISH WAY
S 37TH ST
BYRON
BILL MCDONALD PKWY
80'
60'
40'
100'
30'
Feet
0
150
300

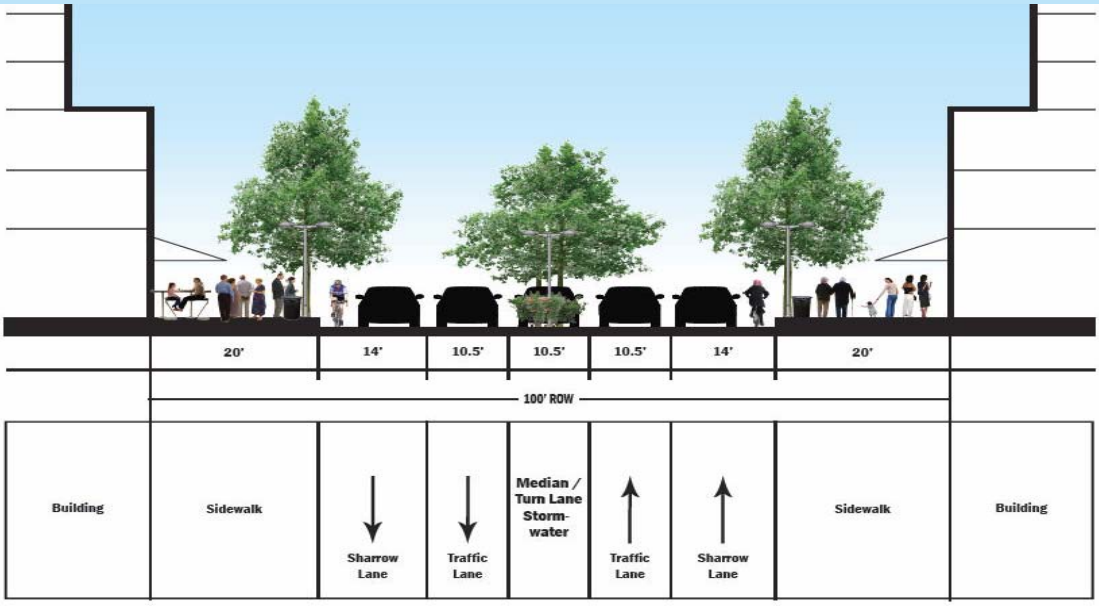

Samish Way Urban Village
Proposed Street Types
Street Types
Type IA
Type IB
Type IC
Type II
Type III
Specialty Streets
Bike & Ped Connectors
Alley
To Be Determined
EDWARDS ST
NEWELL ST
OTIS ST
HUMBOLDT ST
E MAPLE ST
N SAMISH WY
E LAUREL ST
PASCO ST
ABBOTT ST
INTERSTATE 5
CONSOLIDATION AVE
34TH ST
35TH ST
S SAMISH WY
37TH ST
BYRON AVE
BILL MCDONALD PKWY
Feet
0 150 300
N

Samish Way Urban Village Street Design

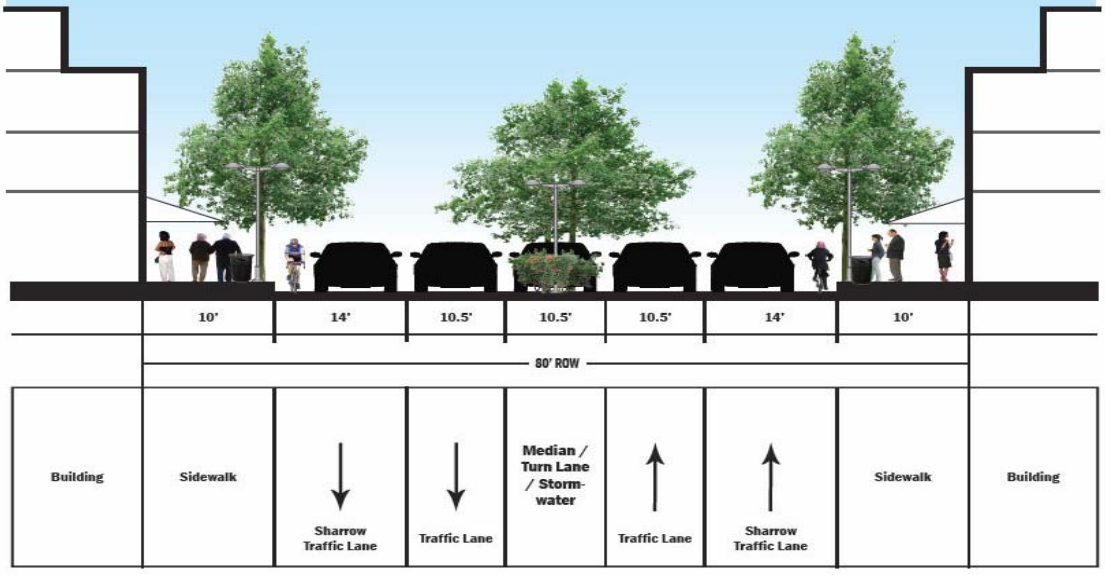
Type I: Arterial. The cross sections below represent a guide for setting street standards for Samish Way, the main arterial serving the area. The Type I designs are divided into A, B, and C, based on the variation in anticipated land use and the change in right-of-way width from 100 feet to 80 feet north of the Abbott Street intersection. Recommended improvements to the intersection at Bill McDonald Parkway, another arterial which serves as the southern boundary of the project area, should be analyzed in detail.



Type I-A
Samish Way (Core)

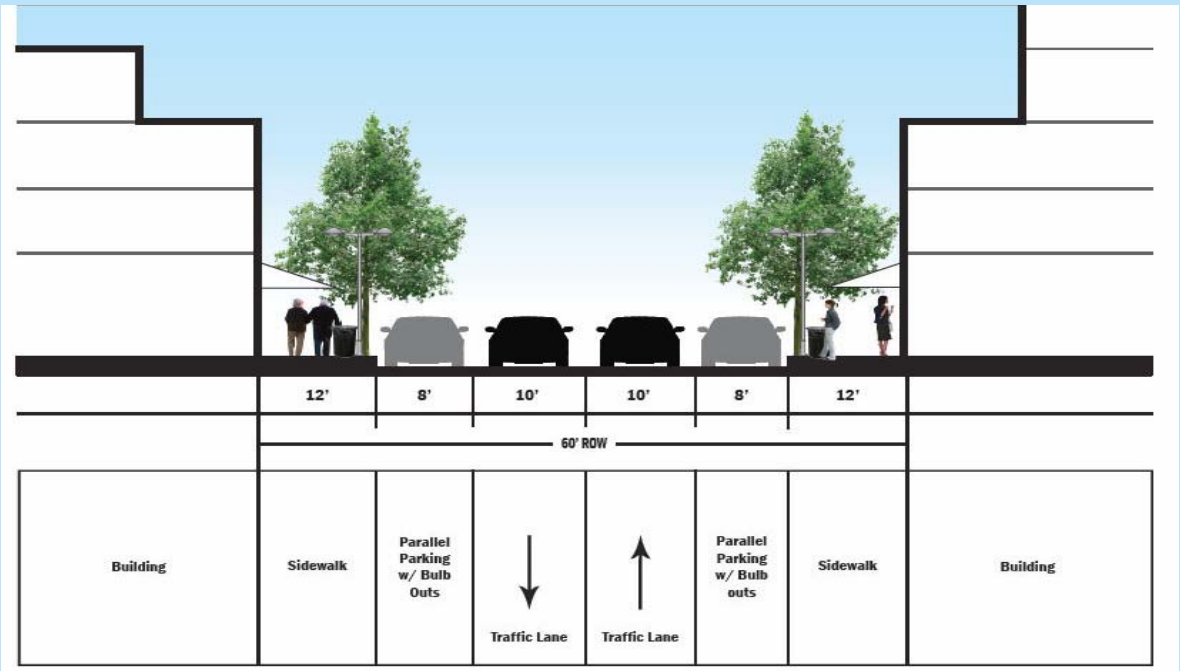


Type I-B
Samish Way (Approach)



Type I-C
Samish Way (Commercial Transition)

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.



Type II
Local Streets (Non-Arterial)

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.

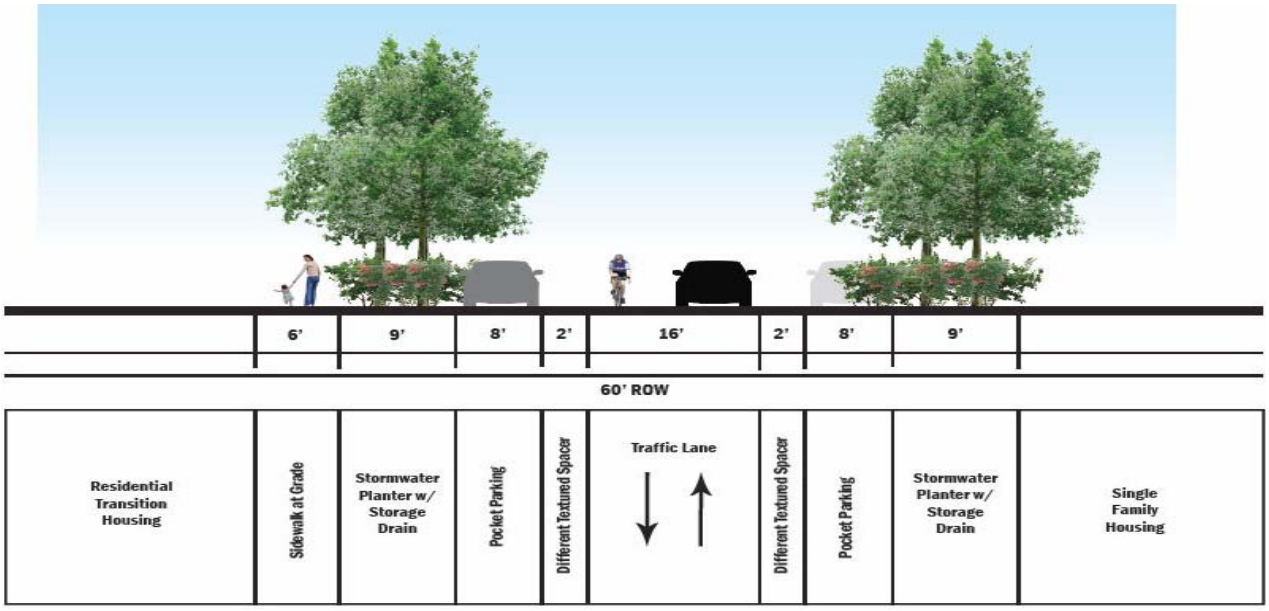
Special Streets: 34th Street and Abbott are designated as "special streets" with a unique design character to compliment their location and function. These are primary travel routes for bikes and pedestrians and intended to be a draw to the neighborhood.

Special Street: 34th Street

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

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

Example of the design character proposed for 34th St



Specialty Street
34th Street
(Street Edge Alternative Concept)

Special Street: Abbott Street

Abbott Street is an existing 40-foot wide right-of-way located in the core of the Subarea. This street connects people from the commercial areas up 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 woonerf. There are five components found in most woonerfs:

Example of a woonerf

1) Create distinct gatways that announce, celebrate, and enhance the neighborhood's identity; this signifies to drivers that they are guests in the neighborhood.

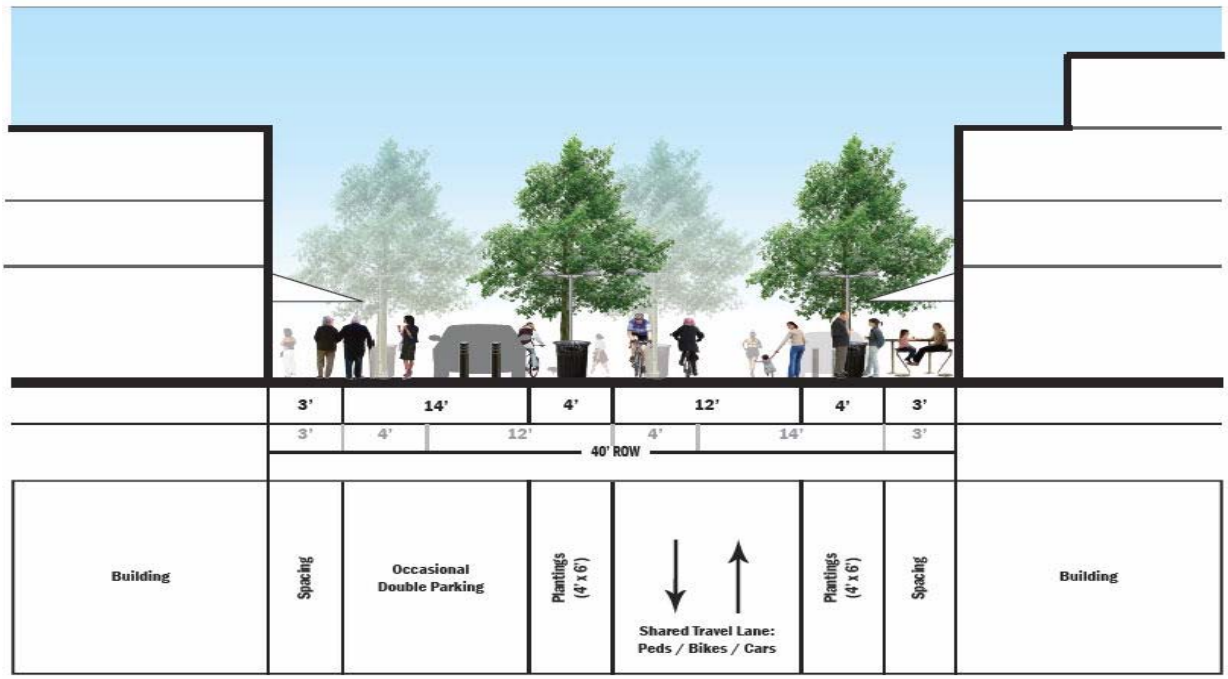
2) Add curves to the travel lane to deliberately break up the driver's sight line.

3) Use features that serve a dual purpose of slowing traffic while providing amenities for residents to create a more pedestrian friendly environment. Examples of such features would be benches, bollards, play equipment, and plantings.

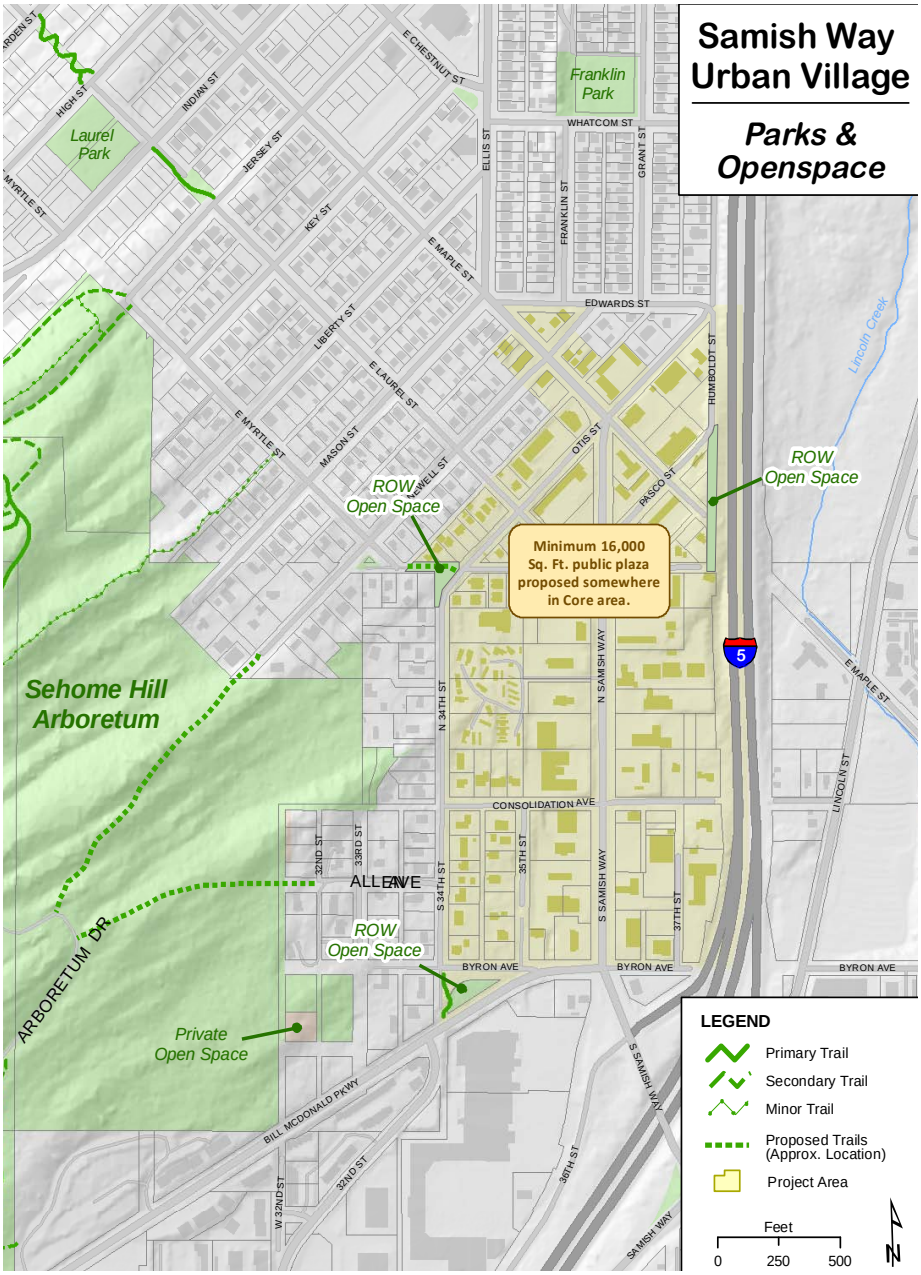
4) To discourage drivers from speeding, a shared street should eliminate continuous curbs. This creates a situation where drivers and pedestrians are placed on the same level, and drivers are directed by bollards, street furniture, trees, and varied pavement treatment.

5) Finally, it is crucial to provide parking but with intermittent spacing so that the street does not begin to feel like a parking lot. The cumulative effect of these measures is a greater sense of comfort in hope that pedestrians will use the street space. (Colin Hand, 2007)

Artist rendering of Abbott Street



Specialty Street
Abbott Street
(Shared Street Concept)



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.

Using Existing 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 through the removal of invasive species and addition of plantings. Several large evergreen trees border Bill McDonald Parkway, providing pleasant coverage but limited visual access into the site. Larger evergreens along Bill McDonald should be selectively thinned to increase sunlight and make the area safer for general public use.

Byron/Bill McDonald Pkwy

Bicycle access from 34th Street to Bill McDonald Parkway should be enhanced. The existing Whatcom Transportation Authority bus stop should be moved west to this area, across the street from the eastbound bus stop. An enhanced pedestrian crossing should be provided via a new signalized intersection at the intersection of 35th 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 at a crossroad between the existing neighborhood and the urban village. Native vegetation at this site should be retained, and the trail widened to allow increased access. Wayfinding signs should be added to this location to direct people to the Commercial Core, Abbott Street, and down 34th Street to the Sehome Village shopping center.

34th & Abbott Street

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 and becomes property of 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. A bike and pedestrian connection should be extended to 37th Street and wayfinding signs added to indicate connections to other areas of interest within the City.

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 1 public street.

- 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 right-of-ways 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 and Pedestrian Connection map on page 24.

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.

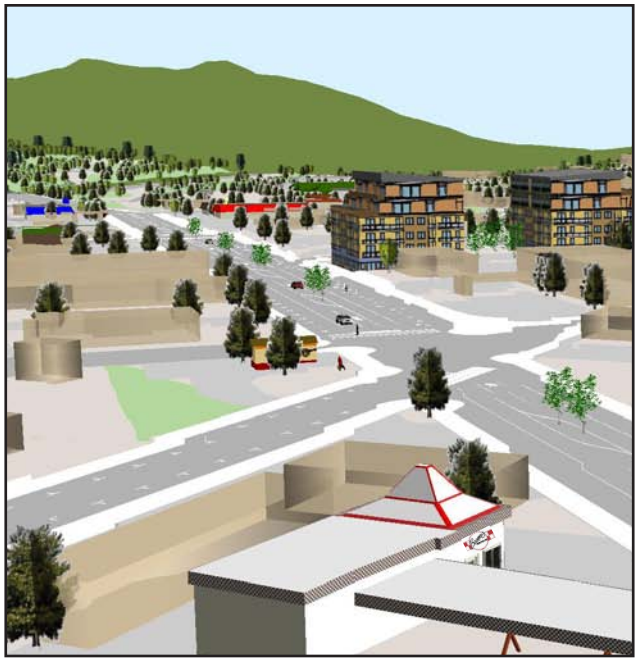
6.1 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Where possible, the City should invest in improvements that will generate renewed interest in the area and promote redevelopment, primarily in the high-visibility location of Samish Way itself. These types of improvements are necessary for City-wide benefit, as they play into the larger transportation network.

Private property owners are responsible for undertaking local street improvements on a site-specific project basis, but may wish to explore establishment of an LID, urban taxation district, latecomer fee system or other funding method to more equitably time street improvement costs. 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.

Full implementation of the proposed street designs for Samish Way, Abbott Street and 34th Street should be completed by the City and paid for with a combination of infrastructure improvement grants or loans, Local Improvement District and any available City funds.

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.



Capital Improvement Costs and Revenues

The costs and sources of revenues below are estimates only, and reflect the approximate costs and fees in 2009 dollars.

Local Streets*	
Estimated Cost	$12,024,000
Source of Revenue	Adjacent local street improvements would be required as a condition of private development.
Arterial Upgrade (Samish Way and E. Maple)	
Estimated Cost	$3,818,100
Sources of Revenue	
City Funds (LIFT, REET, Street, etc)	$564,764
State and Federal Grants (Transit -oriented development, Low-Impact Development, Urban Renewal, etc	$2,000,000
Traffic Impact Fees**	$1,253,336
Abbott Street (Shared Street / Woonerf Concept)	
Estimated Cost	$1,065,000
Sources of Revenue	
City Funds (LIFT, REET, Street, etc)	$565,000
State and Federal Grants (Bike / Ped Improvements, etc)	$500,000
34th Street (Natural Drainage System model):	
Estimated Cost:	$1,775,000
Sources of Revenue:	
State and Federal Grants (Stormwater/LID, Bike/Ped)	$500,000
LID Commitment from abutting property owners	$500,000
City Funds (LIFT, REET, Street, etc)	$775,000
Plaza Construction and Trail Improvements	
Total Cost	$860,000
Plaza Construction	$800,000
Trail Improvements	$60,000
Source of Revenue	
City Funds (PIF, REET, Grants, Etc)	$860,000 (Estimated $1 million generated from Park Impact Fees.)

*Does not include Samish Way, Abbott Street or 34th Street

**Traffic Impact Fees (TIF) and Park Impact Fees (PIF) estimates were based on potential build-out of the Samish Way urban village through 2022 using 2009 impact fees charges.

7. CONCLUSION

This Subarea 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

- The abutting neighborhood associations should prioritize which projects should be included in the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), identified for grant opportunities, and promoted for volunteer activities.

- 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 to represent the goals of the business community by creating an organized forum for discussion and pooling of resources.

- A Local Improvement District should be established as a method for achieving the desired infrastructure improvements in the Subarea Plan.

- Design and development of public amenities such as wayfinding signs, public plazas, artwork selection and street design details 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.

- A Parking Benefit District should be explored to funnel meter revenue into local improvements for the Subarea.

- Issuance of a Planned Action Ordinance should be explored as resources become available to streamline the SEPA environmental review process for site-specific developments.

- 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.