



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

February 20, 2025 Planning Commission Meeting (Attachment 1)

LAND USE CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Background

Staff is presenting each of the proposed eleven chapters of the Bellingham Plan to the Planning Commission between February and May. The Commission will have the opportunity to discuss the main elements of each chapter, with an emphasis on the most impactful updates. Some of these changes impact multiple chapters simultaneously and will be highlighted in each. Following these discussions, the full draft plan will be brought through the adoption process as a whole.

The first chapter of the plan focuses on the ways the City manages the use of land. This chapter provides significant guidance when the city interprets or updates [the zoning code](#).

Land Use Chapter: Significant Proposed Changes

The most significant updates proposed for this chapter relate to the following topics.

1. *Continued Shift towards Citywide Planning* | This and other chapters of the plan will continue the shift away from neighborhood-specific planning and towards consistent citywide planning. This allows for an equitable approach to addressing change over time. The proposed residential classification system is an example of this shift.
2. *Realignment of the Residential Classifications* | Local housing needs and several bills recently passed by the State legislature will lead to significant changes to residential classifications. The 2025 updates propose separating out the residential areas within the Lake Whatcom Watershed for more environmental protection while adopting Low, Medium, and High designations for the remaining residential land. Each of these designations would include a minimum development density or maximum lot size to encourage urban levels of development. Within the Residential Low designation, middle housing types similar to the existing infill toolkit would be permitted citywide.
3. *Allowing More Small-scale Commercial Uses* | Community members expressed significant interest in allowing more small shops and businesses in residential areas. While this concept is generally encouraged in the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, the 2025 proposed updates directly allow small commercial uses in all residential zones and provides a framework for code updates to follow.
4. *Stronger Emphasis on Transit Corridor Planning* | The 2016 Comprehensive Plan highlighted the importance of considering transit in land use planning. The 2025 proposed updates strengthen this and call for a coordinated planning process that identifies and intentionally plans key corridors connecting areas of the city and county.