



Planning Commission Agenda

June 22, 2023, at 7:00 PM

City Council Chambers

Participation Options: Planning Commission meetings have returned to in-person but can also be attended virtually online or by phone by using the meeting information below.

Virtual Meeting Link: <https://cob.org/pconlinemeeting>

By Phone: • (253) 215-8782 • (669) 900-6833 • (301) 715-8592 • (929) 205-6099

ID/ Password: Meeting ID: 972 2474 9200 / Password: 21

Planning Commission Members

Jed Ballew, Mike Estes, Scott Jones, Rose Lathrop, Mike McAuley, Barbara Plaskett and Russell Whidbee

Call to Order

1. Roll Call

Approval of Minutes

Public Comment Period

During this time, citizens may take up to three (3) minutes to address the members about any topic not on the agenda. Citizens wishing to speak during this time will be recognized by the Chair for comment.

Agenda Items

Presentation

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. The Bellingham Plan briefing
Information/Discussion | p. 2 |
| 2. Buildable Lands Report Presentation
Information/Discussion | p. 19 |

Other Business

1. Director's Report

Adjournment

Accessibility: The City of Bellingham complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Elevator access to the second floor is available at City Hall's west entrance. Hearing assistance is available, and a receiver may be checked out through the clerk prior to the evening session. For additional accommodations, contact Heather Aven at 360-778-8300 (voice), 711 (WA State Relay), or haven@cob.org at least 3 days prior to the meeting.



Planning Commission

Agenda Item

6/22/2023 7:00 PM
Meeting

Subject:

The Bellingham Plan briefing

Summary:

A briefing on launching The Bellingham Plan: A 2025 Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan.

Previous Action:

N/A

Recommendation:

Information/Discussion

This is an information-only briefing with no action required. Staff will present the anticipated scope, schedule, and engagement plan for update. Commissioners are invited to provide feedback as staff prepare for project initiation by the City Council.

Attachments:

1. STAFF MEMO: THE BELLINGHAM PLAN
2. PROJECT SCOPE: THE BELLINGHAM PLAN
3. THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN: THE BELLINGHAM PLAN

Activity:

Briefing

Clearances

Date

Chris Behee

Long Range Planning Manager

06/20/2023

Category:

NA

James Erb

City Attorney Office

06/20/2023

Presenter:

Blake Lyon

Department Head

06/20/2023

Time Estimate:

Staff Contact:

Elizabeth Erickson



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street

MEMORANDUM

TO: *City of Bellingham Planning and Development Commission*
FROM: *Elizabeth Erickson, Senior Planner – Planning and Community Development*
SUBJECT: *Launching The Bellingham Plan: A 2025 Periodic Update to the Comprehensive Plan*
DATE: *June 22, 2023*

Background

The Comprehensive Plan is the City’s guiding community plan, providing policy on a range of topics to guide growth over the next twenty years. Once a decade, the City updates and/or refines this plan. This next major update is due in mid-2025 and provides a key opportunity to intentionally plan for the City’s future. This update will cover many topics. Rather than a technical exercise, it will allow the City to take a step back to evaluate what future to work towards as we grow over time.

Comprehensive planning is required by the State, including several specific requirements that will be addressed in this update. The previous presentation for the Planning Commission given on May 8th describes these requirements and the overarching process for updating the plan. While these requirements define the basic framework of the update, the plan itself includes much more than is required. It sets forward complex topics and often conflicting issues. It brings the priorities to the forefront and creates a framework for moving them forward. As the City’s important community plan guiding difficult decisions across a myriad of topics, it will be known as “The Bellingham Plan” as it goes through its periodic update. This more accessible title works hand-in-hand with staff’s planned open and accessible engagement strategy.

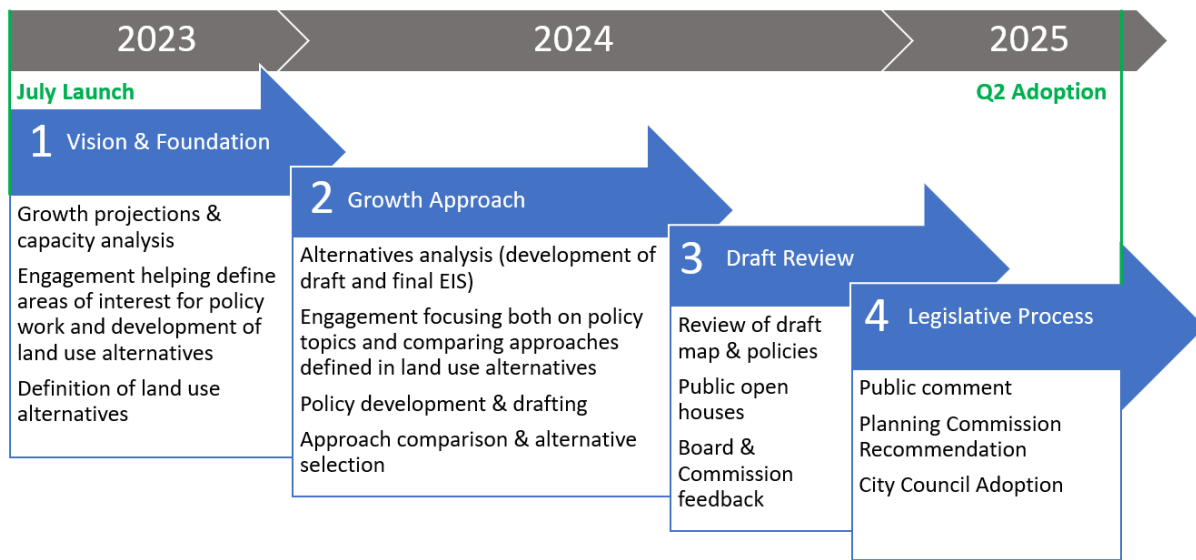
Project Schedule and Scope

The Bellingham Plan will cover a wide range of issues. The policies within the plan will be revised to reflect the updated vision for the City and to address any changed conditions or requirements. A key portion of the update will focus on revisions to the City’s land use map, which guides zoning classifications across the City. This process will be informed by the 2022 *Buildable Lands Report*, which evaluates growth accommodated from 2016 to 2021 to assess the effectiveness of policies in the current plan. It will also include an existing capacity

analysis, updates to the land use map itself, and a demonstration of the new land use map's capacity to accommodate the growth planned for the next twenty years (by 2045).

The update to the City's land use strategy and associated land use map will be achieved through Countywide analysis of several land use alternatives. The report resulting from this analysis will be known as the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The City will develop Bellingham's portion of these alternatives but will be linked to the Countywide process and timeline.

The schedule below shows the overall project phases and lists the high level analysis, policy work, and engagement anticipated for each phase.



Working with the community will be an essential part of defining the precise scope of updates to be made to the existing plan, though some critical topics have already been identified. Exhibit 1 highlights these areas of the scope, including six cross-topic themes that have been selected. This initial scope is based on the following:

1. New legislation at the state level since the last periodic update completed in 2016;
2. Topics that have come up in other conversations with the community and in work across many departments; and
3. Other issues identified by staff that reflect changed needs or desires when looking forward toward the City's next twenty years.

One of the issues that crosses many of these topics and themes relates to the affordability and attainability of housing that meets the community's needs. While the housing supply shortages will be a large portion of the scope of this update, housing affordability and choice

issues are also tied inextricably to economic vitality and transportation issues. Affordability is not only about housing cost but is also linked to both income and access. The plan must address housing today's residents with options that better suit their needs. It also must plan for, accommodate, and potentially influence the migration of households and jobs, many of which may no longer align geographically, given the recent increases in teleworking opportunities.

State Legislation

Legislation passed in recent years at the state level has defined particular elements of the scope. A summary of those bills passed in the most recent legislative session was presented to the City Council by the Planning and Community Development Department Director on June 5th. The most noteworthy of these and past bills with regard to the Comprehensive Plan include the following.

HB 1220 (2021): This bill made significant changes to the portion of the Growth Management Act related to the requirements of the Housing Element. Its most impactful changes for Bellingham's update include:

- A process for defining 20-year projections for housing needs for all economic segments of the population and distributing them to each county and city;
- Requirements to plan for and accommodate Bellingham's allocated housing needs, including emergency housing types such as shelters (these have not yet been allocated by city, but 62% of Whatcom County's allocated units fall below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and therefore qualify as affordable housing need); and
- Requirements to identify and address racially disparate impacts of existing housing policies and regulations including displacement and exclusion.

HB 1110 (2023): Often referred to as the "middle housing bill," HB 1110 has the most significant impact on permitted residential zoning across the state. Amongst other changes, it requires Bellingham, defined as a Tier 2 City (i.e., a city with a population greater than 75,000 people) by the bill, to allow on any lot zoned primarily for residential use:

- At least four units per lot outright;
- At least six units per lot on those lots within one-quarter mile walking distance of a major transit stop (today, this only includes the Fairhaven Amtrak station, but staff will coordinate with WTA on any planned GO line improvements that may fall within this definition); and
- At least six units per lot if two of the units are made affordable to households earning under 80% AMI for ownership or 60% AMI for rental units.

- Requires only administrative design review (no public hearings, except for variances); and
- Development regulations must be based on objective standards.

HB 1181 (2023): This bill focuses on climate change and resilience. Its main impacts on Bellingham’s comprehensive planning include:

- A new requirement for a climate change and resiliency element, a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction subelement, and a resiliency subelement;
- Requirements to address the impacts of climate change and reduce both GHG emissions and vehicle miles traveled (Bellingham has already adopted a [Climate Protection Action Plan](#) that addresses many of these requirements); and
- Requirements to equitably enhance climate resiliency (Whatcom County has adopted a [Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan](#) that addresses many of these requirements).

HB 1337 (2023): Focused on limiting barriers to accessory dwelling unit (ADU) development, HB 1337 includes many requirements that are already addressed by the City of Bellingham’s code and policy. An ongoing process to revise the City’s ADU code was last discussed by the City Council on April 24th. While these changes may be covered by upcoming code revisions, the changes will be evaluated alongside other middle housing topics as part of The Bellingham Plan discussions. This bill’s most substantial impacts on Bellingham’s ADU code provisions include:

- Requiring allowances for at least two attached or detached ADUs per lot where single-family homes are permitted;
- Prohibiting a requirement for the property owner to reside on the same lot as an ADU, often referred to as owner-occupancy;
- Prohibiting a maximum size requirement less than 1,000 square feet or height limit less than 24 feet; and
- Prohibiting a more stringent design review process for ADUs than for single family residential structures.

Community Engagement

Engaging with the community will be a critical portion of work on The Bellingham Plan. The project team has developed a detailed Engagement Plan as shown in Exhibit 2. This outlines the goals, strategies, and schedule of engagement. Outreach will focus on working with and hearing from those community members who have traditionally not taken part in City processes. A goal of more representative engagement will guide much of The Bellingham Plan, including strategies such as:

- A Community Workgroup of representative members meeting throughout the process;
- Outreach through community-based organizations;
- A statistically valid survey on housing preferences;
- Budgeting for and encouraging opportunities for communication in community member's own language and within their community or neighborhood; and
- Offering on-demand (online, in-person, or paper-based options that can be completed as convenient) alternatives to live events or activities.

Engagement with community members will often revolve around active listening and education using both data and personal experience stories. They will also be encouraged to take part in meaningful dialogue both with staff and one another on critical issues. Additionally, approaches such as surveys or interactive activities will be essential ways to understand community sentiment. After each project phase or major milestone, the project team will report back to the community on what has been achieved to date and what comes next. This system will be critical in allowing community members to understand how staff heard their and others' input and ultimately incorporated it into the update process.

Next Steps

Tonight, the Planning Commission will provide feedback to staff regarding the planned scope, schedule, and engagement plan for the project. Staff will incorporate any changes needed prior to bringing material to City Council for a planned discussion on July 10th. At this meeting, the City Council will have the opportunity to provide feedback and instruct staff to initiate work on The Bellingham Plan by implementing the approach as discussed.

Phase 1 of the project will commence through approximately the end of the year. During this phase, staff will build a foundation with the community, especially making connections and building relationships to include a broad range of community members for Phase 2 engagement. Additionally, staff will engage with the community to understand vision, values, and priorities to work with throughout the rest of the update. Staff plan to return to the Commission in the fall to provide an update on this work. The City Council also requested an education session on the current Comprehensive Plan, so the Commission may also be invited to a joint or similar session in preparation for the more in-depth Phase 2 discussions.

Exhibits

1. Project Scope
2. Engagement Plan

The Bellingham Plan

Scope of work for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update

June 2023

Updates to the plan will focus on changes that...

Build upon what is valued today

- » Outdoor recreation and opportunities to explore nature
- » Convenient access to friends and family, a variety of activities, services, and more
- » Small and local businesses
- » Vibrant and unique places
- » Mitigation of climate change contributions/GHG emissions
- » Connections to Bellingham's full range of historic periods

Respond to changed conditions

- » Expanded capacity for housing and jobs to meet expected 20-year growth
- » Planning for increased telework to jobs based both in Bellingham and elsewhere
- » Health resilience and accommodation
- » Housing affordable to all income bands (HB 1220), especially those aligned with local employment
- » Integrated and comprehensive approach to address gaps in housing and human services
- » Approaches to assist vulnerable populations struggling with mental health and addiction issues
- » Climate resilience and adaptation (HB 1181)
- » A range of housing types to support current and future residents' housing needs, including a diversification of middle scale housing with larger units (HB 1110, HB 1337)
- » Land use investment in planned transit network improvements
- » Potential annexation and/or changes to the UGA boundary

Aspire to a brighter future

- » A safe and welcoming environment
- » A healthy community, physically and mentally
- » Economic vitality, business diversification, and living-wage jobs
- » An active community that is informed and engaged on a range of city issues
- » Gathering places of varied types and sizes across the city
- » An accessible, diverse, equitable, and inclusive community (ADEI)

Increase the legibility of the plan for a broad range of audiences

- » Document simplification and usability improvements
- » Links between related topics
- » Online interaction in addition to traditional printable format



Accessibility,
Diversity, Equity, &
Inclusion (ADEI)



Climate Mitigation
& Resilience



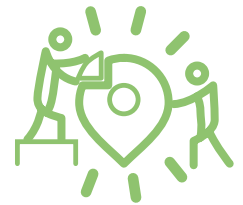
Economic Vitality



Housing Options &
Affordability



Public Health &
Safety



Vibrant & Unique
Places

The Bellingham Plan

Engagement Plan

Setting the Stage

Comprehensive plans are used by communities to establish a vision for the future and provide a framework for building toward that vision. Bellingham's document looks forward twenty years and provides guidance for development, capital investments, city programs, and other actions over that timeline. This document provides a framework for staff to follow as they work with the community on a once-a-decade update to the plan.

While an annual process provides a framework for targeted updates to the plan each year, a major update each decade known as the Periodic Update allows the City to respond to changing conditions and needs over time. The City will be working towards the 2025 Periodic Update to its Comprehensive Plan, to be known as "The Bellingham Plan," over the next two years.

Community engagement is a critical part of the Periodic Update process. Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) defines the process, timeline, and requirements for updates and emphasizes the need to engage meaningfully with the community. The City strives to not only meet requirements but to truly engage with the community, collaborating on a plan that will successfully guide the City moving forward.

While part of the update requires technical analysis to be performed by staff and/or consultants, a large portion of the project will rely on bigger-picture planning. Staff will work with the community to understand current values and concerns as well as what they hope for the future. This community feedback will help guide the formation of draft policies and potential map amendments that will be considered by the advisory boards/commissions and ultimately City Council.

Goals of Engagement

The following goals will inform and frame the engagement process throughout the project.

1. Build trust between community members and city staff.
2. Gather broad and representative feedback from a range of community members, including those who live or work in, go to school in, or visit Bellingham.
3. Ensure that groups that have historically been underrepresented in city outreach participate in the planning process.
4. Make the process accessible, understandable and engaging for a broad range of community members.
5. Value community members' time and respect their input.
6. Support community-driven planning.
7. Understand where general consensus exists. Define what values or experiences are driving this consensus.
8. Define where heightened tensions and disagreement exist. Dive into the details of *why* each party holds their unique opinion.
9. Strive for understanding and respect, not agreement.
10. Utilize a transparent process that clearly tracks the inputs and outputs of each decision.

Ensuring Equitable Engagement

The goals of engagement for this project include outcomes of equitable outreach and engagement. While staff hope to hear from a broad range of community members and encourage all to participate, certain groups will require additional effort or unique approaches. The intention is to have the range of engaged community members broadly represent the interests and needs of the entire community. This means focusing particularly on those groups that generally do not participate as much as others.

Traditionally, many groups have been under-represented in past planning projects, meaning that a lower percentage has participated than exist in the community as a whole. Exhibit A highlights those groups that will receive focused outreach on this project, particularly those who are traditionally under-represented. Although this plan focuses on engagement with the general public, the project will also engage with public agencies on both technical work and broader engagement efforts. The following approaches will be utilized to focus on these community members with the goal of including a more representative percentage of them in the engagement process:

- Requesting (optional) demographic information from event and survey participants, including basic information regarding age, gender identity, race, income, and neighborhood of residence (or if working in Bellingham but living elsewhere);
- Comparing the demographic information of participants to the percentages present in the community. This does not apply to employees or small business owners, who may not be residents and therefore cannot be compared by percentage to resident demographics;
- Utilizing a variety of opportunities for engagement both in person (at a variety of locations) and remotely accessible;
- Offering both live and on-demand (available on the participant's schedule) opportunities for providing feedback and engaging with other community members;
- Offering stipends to community-based organizations (CBOs) for organizing outreach and discussion opportunities for under-represented groups;
- Offering stipends to individuals participating in consistent engagement commitments such as the community workgroup;
- Recognize community member's participation with hospitality at public outreach events;
- Utilizing targeted awareness campaigns such as posting flyers or tabling in areas frequented by these groups;
- Offering presentations or discussions to organizations focusing on serving or working with these groups;
- Focusing social media posts and ads towards groups that traditionally have not participated in planning processes; and
- Providing information in multiple languages, as identified under engagement strategies.

Strategies for Engagement

Throughout the process, a variety of strategies will be used to engage with the community. These generally fall into the following tiered categories of participation. Some approaches may fall into multiple categories, such as if staff mail a flyer (inform) to residents with a survey attached (consult).

Inform – Staff inform the community about the project or future engagement opportunities. This is often used at the beginning of a project to build out an engagement list.

Consult – Staff request feedback about the project. This one-way communication approach is useful for broad, representative engagement from the largest group possible.

Involve – The community engages in two-way communication, discussing the project, providing ideas, and giving feedback.

Collaborate – Community members participate in the project process, providing direct feedback and working with staff and one another to develop recommendations together.

Empower – The community is empowered to make decisions, provide formal recommendations, or otherwise directly impact the project outcome.

The intent for each form of engagement should be clear to participants, defining expectations for that strategy at the start. This ensures that participants' expectations align with the intended level of engagement for each approach.

The following strategies will be utilized during various phases of the project.

Web Presence – The City will maintain a standard city website with information on formal city processes as well as a link to the Engage Bellingham site, which will be the hub for two-way engagement throughout the project. Social media posts and digital advertisements will be utilized to direct community members to project and event information, sign up for news alerts, or to engage with the project.

Flyers, Newsletters, + Outreach – Staff will work with local businesses, community events, property management companies, and others to get information out to the community about the project and upcoming engagement opportunities. Live events or high foot traffic areas will provide great tabling opportunities, and community members will be able to check Engage Bellingham for future opportunities to connect with staff out in the community. Existing CBOs, non-profits, professional organizations, and others will be important partners in both getting the word out and coordinating events.



Listening Sessions, Presentations, + Discussions – Throughout the project, staff will go out into the community for both city-led events and as invited by community organizations or groups. These events may be in-person, online, or hybrid to allow flexibility in attendance. Throughout the phases of the project, these sessions will shift from an initial focus on listening, to more focused discussion on targeted issues, and ultimately to direct feedback. Presentations may be used as needed to inform the community about the process, but the majority of time will be utilized for staff to hear from the community. Community members will also be encouraged to discuss issues with one another.

On-demand Activities – While live engagement can be beneficial, not all community members will be able to attend specific events. City-led events will include mirrored materials and activities posted on Engage Bellingham. Surveys that are handed out in person may also be mailed to residents and made available online. Additionally, community members will be empowered to

run their own events or discussions, providing information back to staff. Examples of key on-demand activities include:

- A statistically valid housing preference survey to set the stage (Phase 1);
- A visioning and values survey mailed to every household, handed out in person, and available online (Phase 1);
- Targeted surveys and engagement activities on topics identified during Phase 1 engagement (Phase 2);
- “Meeting-in-a-box” style packets for community members to use to host their own engagement events or discussions (Phase 2); and
- Online opportunities to provide feedback on draft updates, reflecting the open houses planned for Phase 3.

Translation + Interpretation – Not all members of the community speak English fluently, so the project team intends to reach and engage with those who may not. In Bellingham, Spanish is by far the most common primary language after English, while many other languages are also spoken first by members of the community. Basic project information, all major surveys, and other significant milestones will be translated into Spanish and will include guidance in a variety of languages regarding how to contact the city for more information, translation, or interpretation. Materials for specific events, such as an event at an international festival or tabling at an ethnic grocer, may be translated into appropriate languages for those groups. Interpreters may also be included for these types of events.

Community Workgroup + Focus Groups – While many of the above approaches will be used to gather basic feedback and hear from the broadest cross section of the community possible, it will also be important to dive deep into certain topics. A Community Workgroup will be set up with a commitment to meet regularly throughout the process. This group will include members of the community that broadly represent the city as a whole and will help staff discuss critical issues, identify successful methods of communication for the public, and generally provide more informed and representative feedback and discussion throughout the project.

Separate from the Community Workgroup, individual stakeholder focus groups will be formed on targeted issues in Phases 2 or 3 of the project. Each will gather only once or twice to tackle a specific issue on which those members have relevant expertise or lived experience.

Report-Backs – A critical part of empowering the community and building relationships with community members is reporting back on how their engagement influenced the process. After each phase of engagement or major engagement activity, staff will summarize what we did, who we reached, what we heard, how it was used, and what comes next.

These strategies will be utilized throughout the process to help define the trajectory of the project, inform key decision points, and refine the plan as it moves forward. While it is unlikely there will be any topic with complete community agreement, this combination of strategies will ensure broad participation and balanced discussion. Not only will all opinions be heard and carefully weighed, but active discussion between opposing viewpoints will be essential at key decision points. This “collaborate” approach will often be used at key decision points, allowing deeper dialogue by bringing disagreeing parties together for meaningful conversation.

Engagement Topics

The Comprehensive Plan is a broad, long-range planning document that must balance the City's needs and desires around a myriad of topics. Often, several interests may compete. The Comprehensive Plan needs to define those interests and their potential conflicts clearly. In addition, emphasis on those issues that are most important to the community is critical to prioritizing actions in the future. In a broad sense, the Periodic Update must identify changes to the plan to focus on:

Building upon what is valued by the community;

Responding to changed requirements (such as state mandates) and conditions (such as local issues that have cropped up since the last periodic update); and

Aspiring to a brighter future, setting the framework for actively planning towards a vision for the future.

This means that a combination of reflecting on the past and looking ahead to the future will be needed. The project scope will define the specific items to consider in each of these categories, but it is important that the engagement plan recognizes the need to both reflect and envision.

The early phases of engagement will help further define the topics of most interest to the community, but many themes have already come to the forefront through other City work and engagement with the community. These topics will require both expertise and lived experience as staff engage with the community.



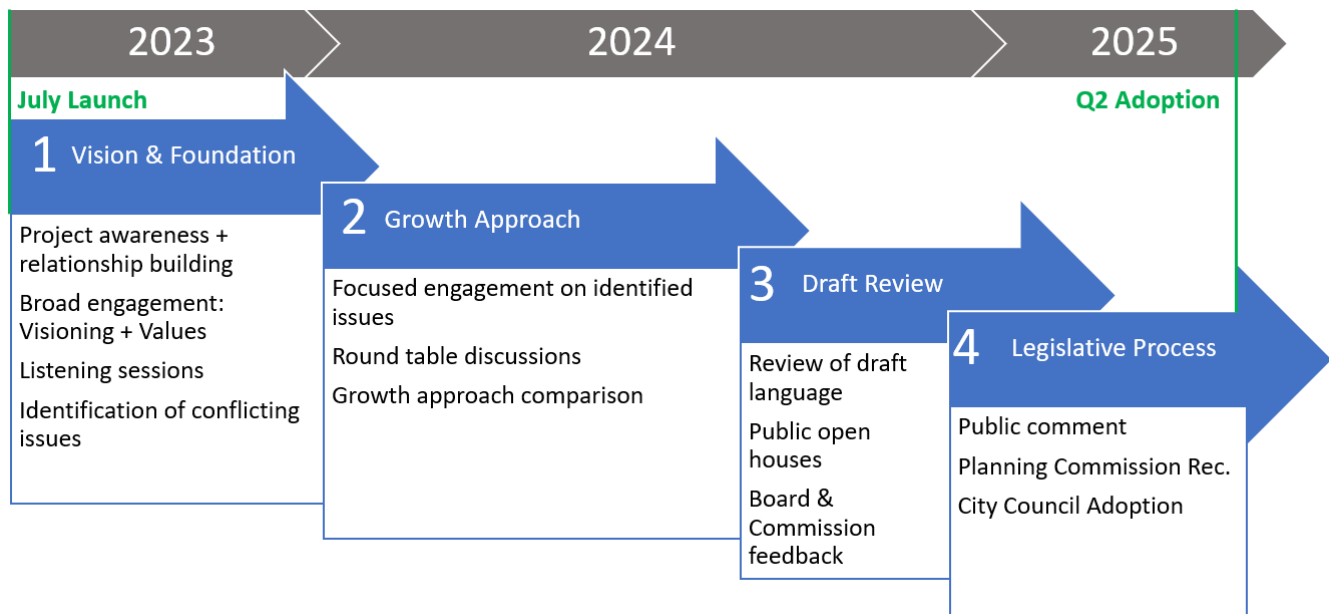
Engagement Phases

The planned engagement process is broken out into four phases. These phases are based on several drivers:

1. Start with broad feedback that will help shape the engagement that follows;
2. Build around the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process that defines a schedule for developing and analyzing several alternatives for the community's growth;
3. Allow time for the community to become familiar with draft changes proposed by the project team and provide feedback; and
4. Plan for significant engagement with the City's boards, commissions, and City Council during the adoption process.

These drivers broadly define the four phases of engagement. Each phase is described in detail below but may be adjusted based on feedback received in early phase(s) of engagement. In particular, engagement activities and strategies will respond to discussions with the community around how best to connect with hard-to-reach or under-represented groups. The topics covered in specific events may be adjusted to meet concerns or interests expressed by the community in previous discussions.

The following diagram highlights the anticipated phases of engagement. The timeline for each phase may shift slightly based on engagement opportunities, County timelines, and other unanticipated events. The topics to be covered in each phase may be adjusted or defined based on early community discussions, but they will broadly focus on the following.



Phase 1: Vision & Foundation This phase focuses on setting the stage for the phases to come. Engagement will aim toward two goals:

1. *Gather a robust and diverse set of stakeholders with whom to engage in future phases.* This list-building stage should produce an engaged list of residents, employees, students, and visitors who fully represent the broader Bellingham community. Later phases will continue building upon this list, but those brought in during Phase 1 will likely form the basis for the majority of public participation throughout the project.
2. *Listen to the community's priorities and garner broad feedback to help support the definition of several possible growth approaches for the next twenty years.* This feedback will focus on filling out the three areas described above under Engagement Topics. It will also develop an understanding of what is working well and what could be improved upon within the topics covered by the existing Comprehensive Plan.

Concurrent with engagement efforts, City and County staff will be working together on growth projections and capacity analysis to inform the development of growth alternatives as inputs for the EIS. As a technical exercise, this will not be a focus for engagement but will need to be summarized in a manner that is understandable to the general public.

Phase 2: Growth Approach This phase focuses on the majority of technical work. Engagement will aim toward three goals:

1. *Educate the community about the issues at play.* Determining the most appropriate approaches to growth requires a deep understanding of the issues at hand. This includes summarizing Phase 1 engagement and how it has been incorporated in potential changes brought forward by staff.

Technical work completed in Phase 1 will also need to be summarized and explained. Finally, general planning concepts and how they relate to one another will need to be described. Often, community values conflict with one another in determining an appropriate approach to growth. Education in Phase 2 will focus on digging into these conflicts so that the community can participate in the selection process in an informed manner.

2. *Gather feedback to help support targeted updates to the plan.* This will include targeted outreach on specific issues that will inform updates to goals or policies within the plan. These issues may relate to the growth alternatives also being discussed in Phase 2, but they will also address topics that span all potential approaches to growth. For instance, Phase 2 will require feedback on ways to address resilience to climate change impacts. These policy updates will apply to all growth alternatives. While topics will be added to and further fleshed out for this Phase's scope following Phase 1 engagement, the following themes will guide discussion.
3. *Consider the potential impacts of various approaches to growing as a community.* These approaches will reflect the elements of the growth alternatives developed at the end of Phase 1. During Phase 2, these alternatives will be undergoing analysis through the EIS. The EIS findings will be wrapped into the final stages of Phase 2 discussions. A preferred growth alternative will be selected based on this engagement and the related discussions with boards, commissions, and the City Council.

While working with the community on the above goals, staff will be developing draft targeted updates to the plan throughout Phase 2. These updates will reflect both technical work, such as incorporating new growth projections and housing needs analysis, and updates reflecting community needs, such as those identified in working with the community in Phase 1. By the end of Phase 2, an initial draft update will be developed that reflects both the preferred growth alternative and any other areas determined for changes in the plan.

Phase 3: Draft Review This phase allows the community to reflect on an initial draft of targeted changes being proposed to the plan. Engagement will aim toward two goals:

1. *Familiarize the community with the proposed changes, relevant issues, the work done to date, and how that engagement was wrapped into the draft changes.* Reports from Phase 2 will continue to be utilized in Phase 3 to explain complicated concepts and track community feedback through the proposed changes.
2. *Gather feedback regarding the proposed changes.* This phase is an important way to respond to what was heard in previous phases and ensure that it reflects the communities needs and desires. While not all community members will agree, this phase will allow them to reflect on what others said throughout the process and how it was wrapped into the changes. Staff will then be able to refine the draft changes into a final draft to be brought through the legislative process in Phase 4.

Phase 3 will bleed into Phase 4, as the legislative process also focuses on reviewing the draft plan and includes a recommendation from Planning Commission.

Phase 4: Legislative Process This phase includes less targeted community engagement than prior phases but focuses instead on representing community sentiment to decision-makers throughout the legislative process. Reports from each of the prior phases of engagement will be utilized to explain why changes

are suggested throughout the plan. Additionally, the community will be welcomed to participate in public comment opportunities as defined by the [Type VI process](#). Engagement will focus on informing stakeholders of these opportunities and educating them on how engagement has been incorporated in the plan updates to date.

Staffing Strategy

The project team includes a diverse array of staff focused on implementing various parts of the project. They generally fall into the following categories.

1. **The Core Team:** Four staff members within the long-range planning group in the Planning and Community Development Department have been identified as the central project team members. This group may be augmented by additional staff as the project progresses. This team will organize outreach events and activities, develop public-facing materials, staff engagement events, and coordinate all proposed updates to the plan. They will also manage any consultants that may be utilized for the project to focus on equity, public-facing graphics and documents, survey design and delivery, meeting facilitation, or other engagement foci.
2. **Primary Subject Matter Experts (SMEs):** Key staff members across all departments have been identified as point people for various topics of the plan. These staff members will act as connections to the rest of their workgroup or department. Additionally, they will help connect the project to community members or organizations for engagement efforts, staff events relevant to their areas of expertise, and provide feedback on the project as specific plan amendments are drafted by the Core Team.
3. **Additional SMEs:** Additional staff members across the City will be pulled in on an as-needed basis to provide expertise, lessons-learned, or assistance on targeted efforts. These staff will generally not work with the public on engagement events or activities unless there are clear synergies with their typical duties.

Contact Information

A large, cross-departmental team with representatives across the organization is collaborating on this project. A project email and phone number have been set up for efficient directing of inquiries.

TheBellinghamPlan@cob.org

(360) 778-8310

Exhibit A: Stakeholder groups for focused project outreach

<p>Traditionally under-represented community members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adults utilizing services • BIPOC community members • Employees who may live outside the city • Immigrants and others whose primary language is not English • Low-income households (Owners and renters) • Low-income seniors on fixed incomes • Mobility-impaired residents • Renters • Students and youth (aged 14-25) • Those who have experienced/are experiencing homelessness • Traditionally marginalized community members such as those who are disabled and those who identify on the LGBTQ+ spectrum • Tribal members • Youth utilizing services 	<p>Other community members with unique experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bikers • Residents in areas with increased change such as those within or adjacent to UVs • Residents in areas with limited access to basic needs • Residents looking for housing • Residents of existing middle housing developments • Residents representing array of neighborhood types, such as through neighborhood associations and community spaces • Seniors • Single-member households • Transit users • Veterans
<p>Community and activism organizations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art organizations • Climate Advocacy organizations • Community-oriented Organizations, such as those focused on particular geographic, ethnic, or topical groups • Environmental Advocacy organizations • History organizations such as museums • Organizations that provide services to the community • Those who work with the unhoused • Transportation-related Advocacy organizations 	<p>Professional organizations and businesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architects, Developers, Builders (including their professional organizations) • Businesses located in existing mixed-use nodes or other areas with increased recent changes • Designers/builders of middle-scale housing • Health providers • Industrial business owners and organizations • Large employers • Manufacturers • Realtors • Small business owners • Sustainability leadership within both public and private organizations • Tourism-based organizations • Workforce or employment groups focused on the local economy



Subject:

Buildable Lands Report Presentation

Summary:

Staff will provide an overview of the 2022 Buildable Lands Report.

Previous Action:

N/A

Recommendation:

Information/Discussion

N/A

Attachments:

1. STAFF MEMO: 2022 BUILDABLE LANDS REPORT

Activity:

Presentation

Clearances

Date

Chris Behee

Long Range Planning Meeting

06/20/2023

Category:

NA

James Erb

City Attorney Office

06/20/2023

Presenter:

Blake Lyon

Department Head

06/20/2023

Time Estimate:

Staff Contact:

Chris Behee



City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

MEMORANDUM

TO: *City of Bellingham Planning and Development Commission*

FROM: *Chris Behee, Long Range Manager – Planning and Community Development*

SUBJECT: *Overview of 2022 Buildable Lands Report*

DATE: *June 22, 2023*

Background

In 2017 the Washington State Legislature revised RCW 36.70A.215 adding Whatcom County and the cities therein to the list of jurisdictions included in the Review and Evaluation Program. This growth management requirement commonly referred to as the “buildable lands program” directs jurisdictions to evaluate development in urban growth areas (UGAs) in the five years since adoption of the Comprehensive Plan (2016-2021) and compare it to development that was anticipated when the plan was approved. The program also requires a look forward, to evaluate remaining buildable land to determine if there is sufficient capacity to accommodate growth anticipated through the end of the planning period (2036). Finally, if development patterns and characteristics deviate from planning goals and objectives reasonable measures should be considered in the next plan update to better align planned and achieved growth. This analysis and related recommendations for each jurisdiction are included in the *2022 Buildable Lands Report*.

Developing the Buildable Lands Report

Work on the *2022 Buildable Lands Report* (BLR) began in 2018 with a cooperative effort managed by Whatcom County and involving planners from the County, Bellingham, the other six cities, and a consultant (Community Attributes Incorporated). As this was Whatcom County’s first Buildable Lands Report, time was taken to develop and agree-upon a common approach for each jurisdiction. In 2018 comments and feedback were provided to the Washington State Department of Commerce as they revised the Buildable Lands Program Guidelines. In 2019 stakeholders were interviewed to provide input on the evaluation methodology. In 2020 a property owner survey was sent to more than 4,800 owners of buildable land throughout the county. More than 1,700 (36%) completed survey responses were received. More than 900 of these responses were for properties in the Bellingham Urban Growth Area. The survey included a variety of questions assessing owners’ intent, likelihood, and timing of developing their land. Through 2020 and 2021 the County and cities with assistance from the consultant performed data collection and analysis related to building permits and plats completed during the five-year evaluation period. The preliminary data and analysis were shared with stakeholders and then compiled into the draft report released in July of 2022.

Review, Revision and Adoption

The analysis in the draft BLR focused on how development completed in each jurisdiction met planned densities expressed as units per acre for residential or floor-area-ratios for non-residential uses. The analysis also showed how achieved densities relate to the estimated growth capacity on remaining buildable land. The draft report did not address related planning objectives like housing affordability. When reviewing the draft report, concerns specific to housing affordability were expressed in public testimony and by the Whatcom County Planning Commission, who adopted findings and by the Whatcom County Council who also adopted findings and requested revisions to the report. The requested revisions included:

- Documenting steps Bellingham has already taken to address housing supply and affordability.
- The continued lack of affordable housing.
- Identifying additional reasonable measures addressing housing supply and affordability that Bellingham should consider as it completes the 2025 periodic update to the Comprehensive Plan.

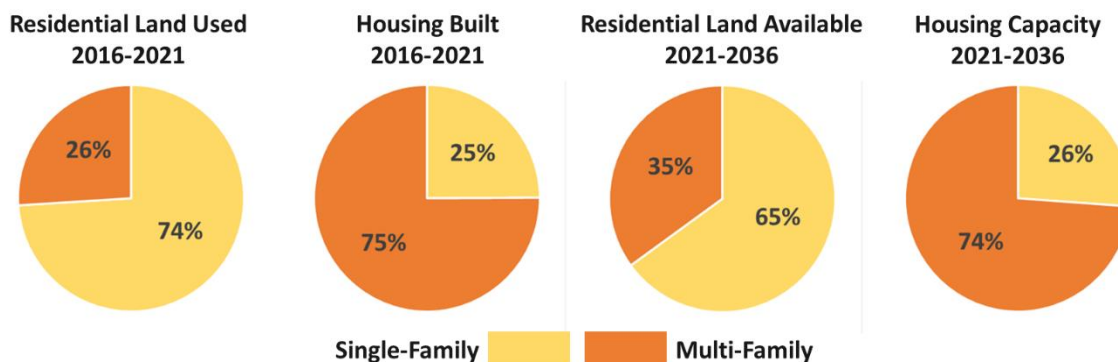
These revisions were incorporated into the BLR, and a final version was adopted by the County Council on March 21, 2023 (W.C. Ord. 2023-010). The councils for each of the cities including the Bellingham City Council will consider adopting the final report later in 2023.

Summary of Results

The BLR includes a jurisdiction profile for each UGA. Total housing built across all county jurisdictions during the review period was about 90% of what was anticipated (6,659 new homes completed compared with 7,390 homes planned). All UGAs except Birch Bay exceeded planned residential densities. Commercial and industrial development providing space for jobs totaled almost 4 million square feet of completed floor area which is about 66% of what was anticipated during the review period. The remaining buildable land has an estimated capacity to accommodate housing and jobs anticipated through the 2036 planning horizon.

While Bellingham's housing production was about 91% of totals anticipated during the review period, residential development significantly exceeded anticipated densities with most new housing built in urban village and multi-family zones. A total of 3,187 new housing units were completed at an average density of 11.5 units per acre compared to the 7.2 units per acre anticipated in the 2016 plan.

The charts below show the land utilization and housing production for single-family and multi-family development for the review period and the estimated capacity for the remainder of the planning period.



About 1.4 million square feet of non-residential floor area was completed in Bellingham of which 68% was commercial (including institutional uses) and 32% was industrial which aligns well with the 65% commercial 35% industrial mix anticipated in the 2016 plan.

Housing affordability and availability are important issues highlighted in the City's 2016 plan. To address these issues Bellingham has already taken many steps that are consistent with reasonable measures identified by the Department of Commerce Buildable Lands Guidelines:

- Housing Incentives - reduced parking, impact and connection fee waivers, multi-family tax exemption districts, and federal opportunity zones.
- Protecting, preserving and monitoring existing affordable housing - the Home Rehabilitation Program, the Rental Registration and Safety Inspection Program, the Short-Term Rental Registration Program, the Manufactured Home Repair Program, and the Manufactured Home Park overlay zone.
- Code amendments to encourage more housing - revised subdivision ordinance with a 50% density bonus for infill housing types, the Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance, revisions to the Infill Toolkit middle housing regulations, simplified multi-family housing regulations with minimum densities, and streamlined urban village design review standards.
- Production of affordable rental housing - the City uses federal grants, a local housing levy, and sales tax funds to spend 10 million dollars per year on production of affordable rental housing and providing related supportive services.

Conclusions

Bellingham's growth strategy focusing on compact mixed-use development in urban villages, and multi-family housing in proximity to transit and other urban services is making efficient use of the buildable land in our community. The higher achieved densities are also in alignment with the City's climate action goals helping to reduce vehicle miles traveled and overall emissions of greenhouse gases. And the incentives, programs, code amendments, and funding dedicated to housing availability and affordability have helped and continue to help many of our community's most-vulnerable households find and remain in housing.

Despite these efforts, more than 40% of Bellingham households and more than 50% of renter households are still cost-burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their income to housing. Home ownership opportunities are limited as the majority of single-family housing is out-of-reach for most households, and production of condominium units has been minimal.

The Buildable Lands Report suggests that Bellingham should consider reasonable measures including:

- Evaluate single family zoning to find ways to simplify the code, establish minimum density requirements, increase allowed densities where appropriate, and consider allowing Infill Toolkit middle housing forms everywhere.
- Continue to invest in capital facilities prioritizing those that support housing production.
- Evaluate the feasibility of and consider implementing inclusionary zoning.
- Encourage limited equity cooperatives and other models that provide opportunities for affordable home ownership.
- Remove regulatory barriers from neighborhood plans where appropriate.

- When conducting the 2025 periodic update to the Comprehensive Plan, follow state guidance to conduct a housing needs assessment and implement the requirements of House Bill 1220 to accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments of the community.

Note on State Housing Legislation Passed in 2023

The housing bills passed by the Washington State Legislature in 2023 are not incorporated into the 2022 BLR analysis. Among them, House bills 1110 and 1337 will likely increase housing capacity. The middle housing forms these bills encourage align well with the reasonable measures Bellingham will evaluate in the periodic update to the Comprehensive Plan.