

Acquisition Guidelines

Greenway Advisory Committee

Overview

Acquisition Guidelines are a screening tool to ensure that properties that are suggested by the community or possible sellers satisfy the best and most effective use of limited Greenway levy funding. These guidelines will work in coordination with the Greenway III Levy Summary Revenue and Expense Guideline approved by voters, the Acquisition Decision Process (adopted Nov 16, 2006 by the Committee), and the Greenway III Acquisition List Framework (discussed Oct 19, 2006 by the Committee).

Acquisition Guidelines

All properties to be considered must be evaluated against the following issues and questions. These sections are not prioritized in any particular order or importance. It is essential to understand that the community has numerous and varied needs throughout Bellingham. No one ranking or other schedule of prioritization is possible without biasing one area of town over another in an unfair manner.

Outstanding, diverse or unusual environmental attributes:

- Are there wildlife corridors or other habitat/species protection issues?
- Are there diverse geographical/geological/hydrological features?
- Are there cultural features?
- Does this property contribute to the Cityscape backdrop (the aesthetic attribute of tree line or other features in the City's surrounding skyline)?

Financial implications:

- Is property available at or below projected appraised value?
- If property is significantly above value, do overriding circumstances substantiate a presentation to Council for an exception?
- Is property within the levy line item budget and does not jeopardize other targeted future acquisitions within that line item?
- Are there creative trade or development opportunities?
- Are there grant, donation or match opportunities?
- Is this property a good choice for some other funding source, such as Park Impact Fees or Real Estate Excise Tax (REET)?

Opportunity:

- Is this a current willing seller and if not, when?
- If the seller is not yet willing, what barriers need to be overcome?
- Is eminent domain necessary for critical acquisitions and under what public justification?
- Is this a critical property threatened by development or other factors that would make it a lost opportunity?
- What are potential regulatory set-asides?
- Are there potential low-cost access easements?
- What is the vision of the property's natural and infrastructure improvements and the benefit to the community in the long-term (50-100 years)?

Recreational value:

Within the definitions of the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PRO) Plan;

- Does property contribute to trail corridors?
- Does property contribute to resource conservancy?
- Does property contribute to park and recreational opportunity?

System connection as a Greenway element:

- Is this new anchor property identified in the PRO Plan*?
- Is this part of a new or established corridor in the PRO Plan*?
- Does this property augment planned anchors or corridors to create identified active use areas or buffers for recreational or open space needs?
- Does property size and configuration support program goals and objectives?
- For properties located outside of the UGA, does the property augment the City's Greenway program goals and objectives?

Strategy:

- Does the property reflect levy campaign specific and general objectives?
- What other acquisition or ongoing costs will the purchase require or encourage in the future?
- What other public properties does the acquisition support?
- What other purchases might be given up or precluded by a purchase?
- Does the property have a long-term strategic role?

Balancing Level of Service:

- Does the property help meet Level of Service (LOS) deficiencies in geographic areas or in the type of use as determined in the PRO Plan*?
- How do we attempt to better equalize geographic and use imbalances and when does this happen?

Negative attributes and hazards.

- Does the property have qualities such as critical areas that inhibit or prohibit our desired use of the property, toxics, development barriers, community opinion, site improvement work prior to use (eg. moving or demo a house), etc.

Prioritization of the acquisition of anchor and corridor properties

Properties that have been successfully screened through the Acquisition Guidelines for possible acquisition will be categorized in one of the following five options. Listings can be changed or updated from time-to-time given new circumstances:

- Acquisition of properties or areas to complete within the 1 year budget cycle
- Acquisition of properties or areas to complete within 3 years as a goal
- Acquisition of areas to complete within the life of the levy as a goal
- Acquisition of areas to list on PRO Plan in conjunction with alternative funding
- Acquisition of areas to archive for future planning

* = until the 2008 PRO Plan update is adopted, other tools such as the North Bellingham Trail and Greenway Master Plan or Committee research will be used.

(adopted by the Greenways Advisory Committee, April 19, 2007)

Issues the Greenway Committee Typically Deals with
In Response to Changing Information or New Opportunities

1. Balancing original levy commitments (parcels and projects identified on the levy ballot) with changing conditions, needs, and opportunities.
2. Responding to new opportunities for land purchase, for example, a parcel in a good location at a good price.
3. Keeping up-to-date with changing needs and conditions in neighborhoods and regions across the city.
4. Balancing the need for (and, therefore, spending on) narrow, linear properties for corridors vs. larger blocks for parks or natural reserves.
5. Balancing opportunities for economical purchases for longer-term needs on the urban fringe, with more urgent needs but costlier purchase in already developed areas.
6. Evaluating functions of a parcel:
 - The mix of potential uses (neighborhood park, trail corridor, ecological corridor, scenic preservation) compared to real needs in that vicinity;
 - How does it compare to other available parcels for those uses;
7. Determining parcel value:
 - Fair value?
 - Good value given other considerations (corridor connections, scarcity of appropriate parcels in the vicinity, etc.)?
 - What property rights need to be purchased?
8. Are there alternative, comparable uses of the purchase money that would be better value?
9. Considering reallocation of funds:
 - What other properties or projects to pursue or not to fund, given a particular spending decision;
 - Property acquisition to development, or vice versa.

Checklist of Criteria for Purchase of Greenway Parcel or Easement

Part of an adopted plan?

Complimentary to adopted plan; likely to be approved as plan element?

Part of a connected or continuous greenway system?

Critical “keystone” or hub element of a corridor or corridors?

Definite part of a protected corridor?

Possibly part of a corridor, planned or logical?

Isolated parcel which cannot be part of connected greenway?

Does size, biological uniqueness or other factors make it vital or valuable to public or other species?

Unique quality or suitability compared to other parcels in area or city?

Biologically unique or uncommon?

Uniquely suited to an over-riding human need or use?

Is it funded?

Is it likely to be funded?

Is the property readily available and readily known?

Is there a willing seller?

Is there a reasonable offer by seller?

Is there a “partial take” of a part of the property, one that involves uncertainties for buyer and seller?

Are there unknowns to be addressed, like soils, wetlands, hazardous waste?

What are the number and importance of uses suited to the parcel?

Active park or recreation?

Passive wildlife habitat or natural reserve?

Buffer between land uses?

Backdrop for local or regional view?

Suitable for trails and public access? What type of trail, major or secondary?

Socially responsible?

Only opportunity to address need in an underserved region or neighborhood?

Supply of similar use parcels or projects in city or region?

Special demographic profiles?

Is the purchase value fair or acceptable?

Does matching cash, a donation or a bargain sale arrangement enhance a purchase?

Is the purchase likely to stimulate complimentary dedications by other owners?

Are there “strings”: restrictive covenants or easement terms, or structures to be removed or maintained?

Decision-Making for Purchase of Greenway Parcels

