

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a growing urban area, Bellingham's park system needs to respond to the changing environment of its community.

1.1 Mission Statement

The mission of the Bellingham Department of Parks & Recreation is to "Support a healthy community by promoting high quality parks and recreation services." The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Comprehensive Plan builds on this mission and outlines the steps to continue to achieve a quality parks system for the future.

1.2 Overall Vision

Throughout this process, some core values and characteristics emerged that set the tone for the overall planning process. These values centered on:

- ***the natural environment*** – a strong recognition of the value of and access to the natural environment as a core component of the Bellingham park system, including trails, open space and the waterfront;
- ***flexibility*** – a need for a flexible system to respond to changing community interests;
- ***extreme or newly emerging sports*** – recognition that Bellingham residents pride themselves on living outside the "recreation box" with strong interests in more extreme or newly emerging sports, such as BMX racing, rugby, rock climbing, bocce ball, disc golf and similar sports;
- ***variety*** – the desire for the system to continue to offer the variety of choices, both within the city and in the region, for recreational activities of all types, for all ages and abilities.

Some specific ideas suggested during the planning process to increase the variety of activities in the system include more spray parks, a wave pool, underwater park, rock climbing or bouldering, and a whitewater kayak course.



Cornwall Park Spray Park 2007

1.3 Previous plans

This plan, prepared in 2008, builds on previous comprehensive planning efforts by updating the 2002 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan and the 2006 Comprehensive Plan for Bellingham. The

plan considers parks, recreation and open space land, facilities and programs, collectively referred to in the plan as the “park system”.

Bellingham continues to grow and is a changing community. Greater infill development is occurring within the central part of the city, while new development is expected in the annexing Urban Growth Areas (UGA). New types of recreation are emerging and activities once considered “extreme” are now “mainstream.” The park system is also attracting a greater number of users than ever before and requiring more flexibility of park resources to respond to these trends.

This plan outlines general goals and objectives, specific recommendations and includes an implementation plan to expand and enhance Bellingham’s park system as a vital part of the quality of life for Bellingham’s citizens.

1.4 Objectives & Approach

The specific objectives of this planning effort are to:

- **Community Setting** – Establish the framework within which park, recreation, and open space facilities should be provided, including natural features, wildlife habitat, historical context, land use implications, current recreation trends and demographics.
- **Existing Park System** – Update the existing park system inventory within the Bellingham area. This includes those that are owned and operated by the city or other public agencies, both within the planning area and beyond. The planning area is defined in section 1.6 of this chapter.
- **Needs & Opportunities** – Analyze the needs for future park, recreation, and open space facilities or programs and develop recommendations for meeting those needs.
- **Goals and Objectives** – *Identify the goals to be met and objectives to carry out those goals as the plan is implemented*
- **Level of Service** – Based on the existing park system and the recommendations of the community, establish proposed level of service standards to help guide development of the park system over the next 6 to 14 years.
- **Implementation Plan** – establish the overall estimated cost of achieving the proposed level of service, based on the community’s recommendations, prioritize those recommendations, and develop a plan to implement those recommendations through a 6 year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and general strategies to be considered through the year 2022.



Bloedel Donovan Park - Photo by Ellyn Ginsburg

1.5 Public Involvement

Development of this plan included an extensive public process. A Steering Committee was developed to help oversee the process, provide input and evaluate the recommendations. The Committee included representatives from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the Greenways Advisory Committee, the Planning Commission, Whatcom County Parks Commission, the Bellingham School District, city staff and citizens at large. A random sample household phone survey, a web-based survey, public workshop and public open house were also conducted to augment and inform the Committee's discussions. Specifically, the public involvement process included the following:

<i>Meeting/Action</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Date (2008)</i>
Steering Committee	Overall Vision	January
Public Workshop	Needs & Opportunities	February
Steering Committee	Telephone Survey	February
Telephone and Web Survey	Conducted	February-March
Steering Committee	Level of Service	March
City Council Update	Progress Update	March
Steering Committee	Draft Plan	April
Public Open House	Draft Plan	April
City Council	Work Session	April
Steering Committee	Plan Priorities	April
Steering Committee	Plan approval	May
Park Board	Plan Approval	May
City Council	Preliminary Approval	May
Steering Committee	Plan Approval	June
Planning Commission	Work Session	August
Planning Commission	Public Hearings	July, Aug., Oct.
City Council	Public Hearing	October

1.6 Planning Area Boundary

The planning area for this process includes the Bellingham City Limits and the 2008 Whatcom County adopted Urban Growth Area (UGA). The 2006 City Comprehensive Plan proposed Urban Growth Area Boundary is shown on the maps for reference. The City recognizes the UGA boundary may change and if so, this Chapter of the City's Comprehensive plan will be modified to include those areas.

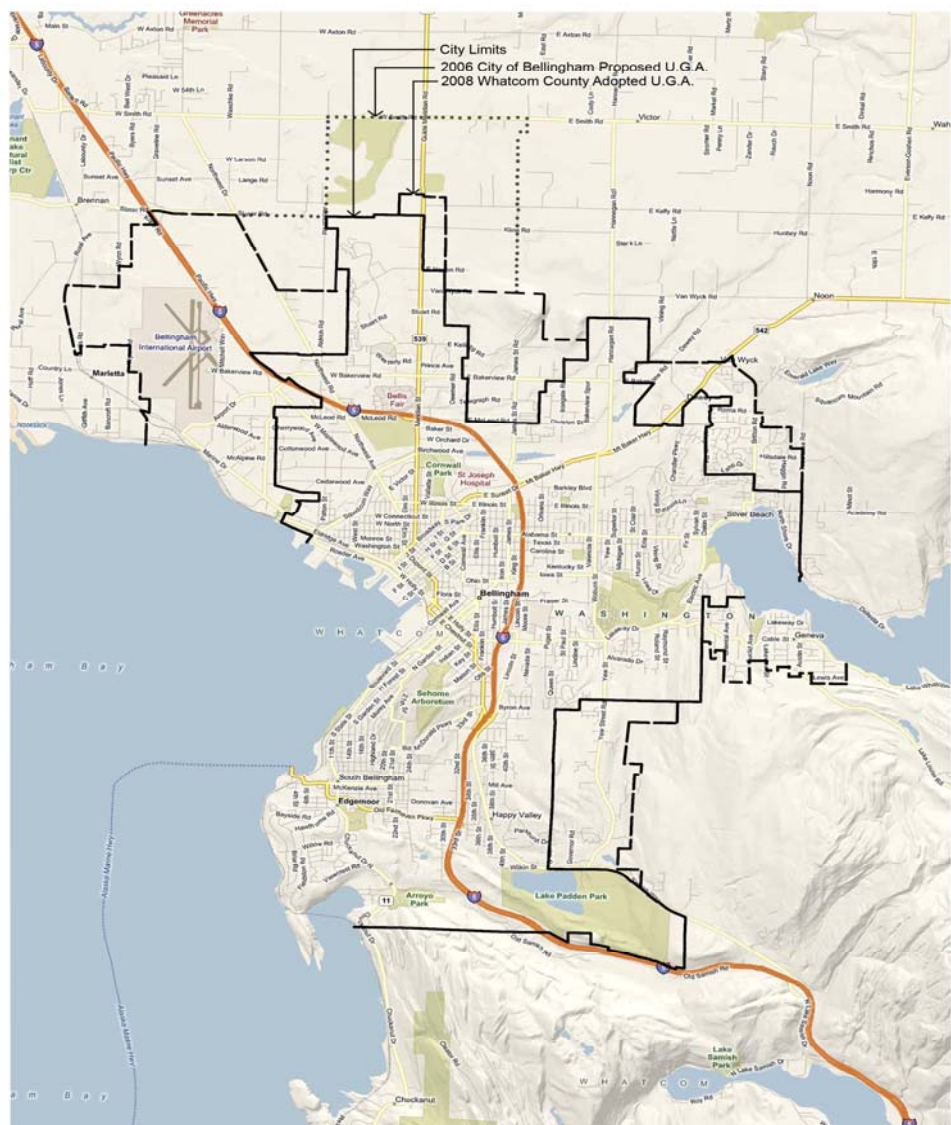
The surrounding regional park, recreation and open space facilities were inventoried and considered, but are not included in any specific calculations within this plan (level-of-service, cost estimates, implementation). Whatcom

County is responsible for planning the area outside of the UGA; however, the planning efforts of each agency must be coordinated. Any areas added to the UGA in the future or areas that may be annexed currently within the UGA will need to address park, recreation and open space needs concurrent with that action. Also, for the purposes of this plan, it is assumed that by the year 2022 all UGA areas will be incorporated into the city so the proposed facilities, population, level-of-service and any other recommendations projected to the year 2022 include both the existing city and the entire UGA. If all of these areas are not annexed, some of the recommendations may not be implemented.

1.7 Plan Documentation

This plan is organized into seven chapters including the community setting, inventory of existing facilities, the demand for new land and facilities, the goals and objectives in fulfilling those demands, recommendations to meet the demand, and finally how to implement the recommendations.

Appendices include park type classifications, public opinion survey results, public meeting summaries, and a detailed table of existing and proposed park system facilities. This plan is organized such that existing facilities and conditions are discussed first, both in terms of the overall community setting (Chapter 2) and existing facilities (Chapter 3). Documentation of the needs and demands from the analysis of existing conditions and the community process are presented next (Chapter 4). Goals and objectives based on the analysis and the need expressed through this process then follow (Chapter 5). The recommendations resulting from the overall planning process are then presented (Chapter 6), with the implementation of those recommendations described at the end of the plan (Chapter 7). Additional information is outlined in the associated Appendices and Supporting Documentation.



Planning Area Boundary