

City Center Master Plan Implementation Strategy

August 29, 2002

Appendix A

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this appendix is to provide a general strategy for the implementation of the Bellingham City Center Master Plan. This appendix is the result of a collaborative process between Nore' Winter and Co., Dave Leland Consulting, the Downtown Development Workshop Steering Committee and City staff.

Implementation of the Master Plan will require a planned and coordinated effort involving the community as a whole, downtown interests, city staff and officials. Implementation success will depend a great deal on the private sector's willingness and ability to bring to the table the resources necessary to undertake the identified major redevelopment projects. As this ability is very much market driven the public sector's ability to respond to the "opportunities" presented by the market and to make public resources available as needed will be critical.

A public/private partnership, based on mutual perceived benefit, must be developed as the keystone for the successful implementation of the Master Plan.

This appendix will be divided into the following sections:

- ❑ Strategy for implementation
- ❑ Prioritization criteria
- ❑ Funding options
- ❑ Action Plans

STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

City use of a bilateral approach to implementation of the Master Plan recommendations is a key concept of this strategy. Implementation should be both *proactive* and *responsive*. The City should follow the priorities contained in the recommended Action Plans presented later in this appendix. These plans provide priorities for implementing specific Master Plan recommendations. However, at the same time, the City should modify strategies, as necessary, to respond to projects that may be proposed by the private sector.

Also, the City should coordinate its planned actions with the work of other City departments and governmental agencies and be ready to refine its schedule to be responsive to the activities of others.

In essence, implementation should proceed in the order recommended in the strategy and yet the schedule should remain flexible to accommodate changing conditions, especially where opportunities to share construction costs and administration arise.

Public Process -

Public involvement and participation in CCMP implementation are high priorities. City staff and elected decision-makers always take into consideration community "feedback". Public participation in the implementation process generally takes place in the following venues:

- ✓ One on one discussions – as ideas evolve discussions are conducted with affected individuals, knowledgeable parties and community opinion setters.
- ✓ Community stake holder meetings – Ideas and plans are brought to small gatherings of affected parties
- ✓ Community – wide meetings – refined plans are presented for comment by staff at gatherings designed for community feedback
- ✓ Council working sessions – informal Committee of the Whole meetings where ideas are freely exchanged with the Council
- ✓ Public Hearings – formal sessions where testimony is gathered on project details
- ✓ Written Comments – Council accepts written testimony after most public meetings and public hearings.
- ✓ General Council meetings – every task that requires funding for implementation requires final Council approval of funds

In order to help the City execute refinements in the implementation schedule, in an orderly manner, a series of prioritization criteria is presented later.

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

The schedule of improvements presented in this appendix should be considered to be dynamic and should be changed in response to plans and projects by other agencies to combine efforts and maximize benefits. In general, the City should set a high priority on an improvement when it can help support private development that is consistent with the vision of the Master Plan. However, there will be times when the City faces multiple choices as where to best use its limited resources. When this occurs, the City should use the following criteria. The Action Plan that follows in this appendix has established an order for prioritization based on this criteria as well.

Private Investment Criteria –

Does the project leverage or cause the investment of private funds?
EX. – Providing a public park or open space could encourage the investment of private capital in near – by housing

Timing Criteria –

Does the project under consideration have to be completed prior to other projects being initiated?
EX. – Design work must proceed construction or an umbrella organization must be created in order to mobilize public support for later efforts.

Visibility Criteria –

Is the project visible to the public?
EX. – Early actions must be easily seen, such as street trees, banners, signage, façade improvements, in order to show progress and generate support.

Location Criteria –

Does the project occur in one of the five priority focus areas? Project development should be given priority and supported in one of the following focus areas: (listed in order of priority)

1. Holly Street Gateway Corridor
2. Railroad Avenue Corridor
3. Commercial core
4. Old Town/Waterfront area
5. Civic Center/Cultural area

Linkage Criteria –

While somewhat related to the Timing Criteria there is a subtle difference. Would project or staff costs be reduced if the project were to go ahead in *conjunction* with another project?
EX. – The replacement of a sidewalk might be an appropriate time to make other streetscape improvements as well.
EX. – The development of parking that serves more than one development

Financing Criteria –

Does the project share development and or operational costs with other entities? (i.e. Private investor or governmental agency)

EX. – a parking structure with ground floor retail or upper floor market rate housing.

EX. – The City/Port and County share the cost of a waterfront trail.

FINANCING THE IMPROVEMENTS

The capital improvements recommended in this Master Plan are ambitious, and a concerted effort on the part of the City of Bellingham, its residents and business and property owners is needed to realize their completion. A variety of funding mechanisms are available and should be evaluated for their utility.

The Mayor asked the City Council to convene a citizen committee early in 1999 to evaluate the City's capital financing needs. This group first met on March 19th, 1999 and a subsequent sixteen times. The committee, - issued its report to the Mayor and Council in November of 1999 -

- The Capital Facilities Committee made six recommendations that could assist the City in determining how to fund future capital projects. Those recommendations were:

- **Recommendation #1** – Capital improvement projects should be funded from revenue sources in the following hierarchy of analysis a) user fees (e.g. golf course users), b) assessments on beneficiaries (e.g. LID'S), c) the general population (e.g. a bond issue)
- **Recommendation #2** - Generally, capital maintenance requirements should be funded from current revenue.
- **Recommendation #3** – Capital projects that present a general benefit to all residents should be considered for funding by voted debt instruments.
- **Recommendation #4** – Capital projects with indirect benefits to residents should be financed through non-voted debt instruments.
- **Recommendation #5** – The City Council should use debt instruments that require only their approval, as they deem appropriate and necessary.
- **Recommendation #6** – In funding capital projects all possible funding sources should be considered and used as appropriate, including the development of currently unknown alternative sources.

These six important recommendations provide valuable guidance as to seeking and using funding from the public sector for components of the projects identified in the Action Plans.

Financing tools that could be used to provide needed funding in the manner recommended by the Capital Facilities Committee include:

Revenue Bonds (a levy on users) – Bonds may be issued by the City of Bellingham, whose debt service can be maintained by the revenue generated from the use being assisted.

EX. – The Parking System may use revenue bonds to build parking facilities and repay the debt from fees charged.

Special Assessment Districts (a levy on beneficiaries) Local Improvement Districts (LID) and Business Improvement Districts (BIA) are examples of this financing technique. The City Council may designate an assessment district, either as a result of City initiated action or as a result of citizen petition, and then at least 60% of the property owners must agree to assess themselves. (Then it applies to all property owners in the case of an LID or business owners in the case of a BID) The special property tax assessment (LID) or other assessment techniques in the case of a BID

(?) is then used to retire debt used to make improvements.

Bonds – (a levy on the general population) Several bonding approaches can be used to finance capital improvements. They are:

Non-voted Limited Tax General Obligation, (Councilmanic) – the City Council may vote to sell bonds for some specific capital purpose. With this technique the City Council is bound to only existing General Fund revenue for debt repayment.

Voted General Obligation – the City Council may put on the ballot, for voter consideration, a question relating to the funding of public purpose capital needs. This approach requires a 60% approval level at an election where at least 40% of the numbers of the voter turn out from the last general election vote. This approach creates new revenue for debt reduction and raises the legal levy limit.

Voted General Obligation -levy – the City Council may place on the ballot, for voter consideration, a question relating to the funding of public purpose capital needs. This approach needs only a simple majority of those voting and does not raise the legal levy limit.

Grants – from time to time financial assistance may be available from government agencies or private organizations to further the physical or programmatic goals of the plan. These grants are generally made for some specific rather narrowly defined purposes, e.g. bike paths or traffic signalization. These programs should be pursued aggressively and customized to the plan's needs, if possible.

The above mentioned funding sources represent the standard financing tools available to the City of Bellingham at the current time. The City should support the development and utilization of new and

innovative funding sources, such as tax increment financing and Public Facility District funding, whenever possible.

The Capital facilities Committee recommended that the City Council appoint a new committee in the coming year to further refine this un-funded list and to provide the Council with a prioritized list for community consideration.

In late summer of 2000 the Mayor and City Council moved forward with a plan to develop this prioritized list.

The Capital Improvements Advisory Committee (CIAC) was created by City Council resolution on September 18, 2000. The CIAC was given a very clear mission to pursue and measurable outcomes to achieve. The mission statement read: *"The Capital Improvements Advisory Committee shall update, review, and prioritize the list of un-funded capital needs of the City of Bellingham as presented in the Capital Facilities Committee report of October 28, 1999 and other new needs as may be identified by the community. The Committee shall also prepare a financing strategy that identifies techniques and recommendations for funding the most needed capital projects. The report shall be presented to City Council at the second City Council meeting of January 2001."*

The 2000/2001 capital improvement needs process pointed out to the CIAC that the findings identified in 1999 were still valid. The City still has significant capital needs, there are still more needs than resources and debt still seems to be the only way the community can effectively address these needs.

The evaluation process identified the following nine (9) capital improvements, as the most needed:

1. Streetscape/public space along Railroad Ave.
2. Improvements for the Farmers Market

3. A new parking structure at Railroad Avenue and Holly Street
4. Streetscape/public space/plaza in Cultural District
5. New Library and expanded Museum
6. Completed Mt. Baker Theater Master Plan
7. New parking structure in Cultural District
8. Waterfront Acquisition and Development

The CIAC, in addition, wishes to encourage the City Council to consider these needs for G.O. Bond funding as soon as is practical.

The very projects the CIAC deemed critical have also been identified as high priorities in the CCMP.

ACTION PLANS

The implementation strategy contains many recommended tasks to meet the community's vision of the City Center. They are based upon comments received from the Mayor's Office, the Planning Department, Office of Neighborhoods and Community Development, other city departments, community organizations and the public during the DDW, focus groups and one – on – one meetings held during the development of the Master Plan. As much as possible, the recommended actions build upon existing policies, plans, public investment, and other public programs already in place. They also reflect the current organization and mission of the other city departments.

The objectives for the Action Plans have been designed to support the total implementation of the Master Plan. Those objectives are:

- Continue to produce and implement a great plan for the city center of Bellingham.
- Involve many, many projects for the purpose of generating a lot of activity at one time, bringing in multiple investors who can share new project risk together, blending public and private commitments in support of one another and creating exciting places. Recruit experienced and capable developers who will build quality projects.
- Involve many players at once—the city, developers, investors, downtown merchants, citizen leaders, other government entities and downtown residents.
- Involve strong advocates from the public and private sectors that are dedicated to overall implementation. All participants are necessary, but committed individuals determined to see the plan through are critical.
- Organize people in a manner that supports the many projects moving forward simultaneously—people helping people to get their projects implemented—not letting projects get isolated or suffering from lack of support.
- Regulate the process—establish development standards and assertively promote the kind of design and development wanted in Downtown Bellingham while vigorously prohibiting that which is not wanted.
- Commit public capital and resources in a timely and strategic manner, sending a strong signal to the investment and development community of the City's serious commitment to downtown revitalization.
- Communicate success—with multiple projects moving forward simultaneously, there is a steady stream of good news

to report. Communication provides a means to advertise success and involve a wider audience and more stakeholders.

- Allow for change—because conditions change, the plan and its implementation strategy will benefit from the establishment of a formal and ongoing review process. The plan must be allowed to evolve. A feedback loop will allow for adjustments over time.

The implementation strategy is organized around interrelated “task groups” that fall into three categories: organizational infrastructure, physical projects, and programmatic tasks. The task groups are highly interrelated and will overlap.

The projects have been grouped into ‘Action Plans’ based on the recommended year of implementation within a “task group”.

“**Initial Action Plan**” projects should start in the year 2002 -2003.

“**Short Range Plan**” projects should start in the time frame 2003 to 2007.

“**Long Range Plan**” projects would start sometime after the year 2007.

Projects within each “Action Plan” are prioritized as to their implementation strategy importance. For example –

2.A.1 Plan/Develop the RR Ave. special project area –

2 - denotes it as a physical task

A - indicates it is an Initial Action Plan Project and

1 - says that it is the top priority project

The City must be responsive and to be able to respond to “opportunities” as they occur. While a project ranked as “11” would normally occur after a project assigned a “10” the “11” project may be able to go ahead more quickly as a result of an unforeseen opportunity that occurs.

Implementation action is the key – priority order is of secondary importance.

Following is a description of the “task groups” and the projects recommended for implementation within each.

1.0 ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE –

A strategy is more than a plan. Physical elements are included within the strategy, as are policies, programs, and a variety of human activities that together help create a dynamic place. This strategy depends upon many projects—potential and existing. It involves many stakeholders—ultimately mobilizing them through a motivating vision that captures the imagination of the entire community. Public involvement is necessary on many levels and will support the organizing of people into an umbrella organization.

Successful implementation of a great plan requires strategic use of resources to bring together the interests of several players. This task group concentrates on projects developing the relationships and organizations, communication mechanisms, and supportive government action plan necessary for real long-term change. This necessitates an approach that integrates public involvement and organizational development. The following projects are necessary for developing both public understanding and support, as well as the organization and human leadership for continued implementation of this strategy over time.

Initial Action Plan –2002 - 2003

- **1.A.1 - Assign Project Manager to implement plan**¹- A full-time Downtown Project Manager is recommended to

¹ Tasks that are in dashed borders and are shaded have begun or are completed.

assure that the implementation strategy moves forward in a timely manner. It is anticipated that many projects will be moving forward being managed by many lead parties and many participating parties. Someone must devoted fulltime to ensuring that projects make progress and are coordinated.

- **1.A.2** – Create a City interdepartment team – A team representing the major affected departments should meet regularly, under the direction of the Mayor, to coordinate, plan and implement the elements of the Master Plan for which the city has responsibility.
- **1.A.3** – Create an umbrella organization - The city/downtown steering committee team will assist in developing an organization with the first purpose of promoting existing projects and setting up communication for future projects. The umbrella organization will not replace any current organization but will rather serve as a point of coordination and cooperation on issues of downtown wide importance.
- **1.A.4** – Develop and implement a public information process – The city will develop a public information process that will involve the public in identifying key issues, key public leaders, appropriate involvement tools, and that will engage the public, and provide feedback to the projects.

2.0 PHYSICAL TASKS

Physical projects include publicly-initiated street improvements, parking facilities, landscaping, amenity development (plazas), public buildings and other public investments designed to serve the community and strengthen targeted parts of

Downtown Bellingham. These public activities include developing public/private and public/public partnerships for development. They will also include the definition and mobilization of private sector and non-profit activities such as downtown housing, office or hotel development; increased retail space and dining establishments; an expanded farmer's market; or other private projects.

Initial Action Plan – 2002 - 2003

- **2.A.1** - Plan/develop the Railroad Ave. special project area – Prepare development programs for the Railroad Avenue District as well as programs for specific projects within the district such as Morse Hardware, the "Hole in the Ground," the SeaFirst Garage, more retail and restaurants, joint use of City parking facilities and other projects. As a follow up to the programs, prepare conceptual (physical) plans for the targeted districts and the specific projects. Based on the programs and concept plans, prepare cost estimates for the various projects. Prepare district financial analyses and pro forma analyses for each project, exploring, when needed, public/private partnership opportunities. Finally, define specific implementation steps and procedures necessary to actually implement each of the projects—such as RFQ's (request for qualifications) from developers, providing incentives to property owners to initiate projects, and other initiatives.

- –Converting Holly Street to a two-way traffic flow is seen as a technique that could positively address all of these requirements.. Once a workable alternative is identified the project will move to preliminary design stage.

□ **2.A.2 – Begin Holly Street Corridor Improvements** –Improvement of the Holly Street corridor will involve various initiatives and funding sources. The first improvement will involve the resurfacing of Holly from Bay Street to F Street.

□ **2.A.3 – Design and implement Phase I automobile wayfinding/gateways system** - Many of the recommendations of the City Center Master Plan address issues associated with automobile circulation and access to the core downtown. Automobile access should focus on being efficient and convenient to downtown, but not just necessarily through downtown. A number of traffic routes into the downtown area (especially from the freeway) need to be made into major entries into the City Center through the use of Gateway structures, directional signs, landscaping and boulevarding.

□ **2.A.4 Finalize streetscape/landscape design** -The pedestrian experience can be enhanced by a comprehensive streetscape design system that unifies the image of the City Center and its various Character Areas. The Commercial Core may have many streetscape elements already in place while other character areas have none. Consensus on design should be reached early to allow funding options to proceed.

□ **2.A.5 – Install a demonstration “kit of parts” streetscape project** – Utilizing the design theme developed above implement the streetscape improvements to Cornwall Avenue from Chestnut Street to Champion Street and along Commercial Street from Holly Street to Central Avenue.

□ **2.A.6– Design/fund/construct “Seafirst site parking option** – Acquire and renovate the current parking structure. Obtain options or rights of first refusal on the remaining bank property to the south of the current parking structure for future parking requirements.

□ **2.A.7 -Plan bicycle/pedestrian/transit circulation system.** - Many of the recommendations of the Plan address issues associated with the development of bicycle, pedestrian and transit circulation systems throughout the City Center. The bicycle paths, lanes, and routes should be coordinated throughout the City Center so that bicycle traffic has a continuous way to get through the downtown area. Even though the way bicycle traffic is handled may vary (i.e., sometimes in a separated bicycle path, sometimes in a dedicated bicycle lane, and sometimes just mixed in with traffic) within the system, it should be coordinated and continuous. Increased transit usage, car pooling and telecommuting should also be encouraged. Involvement of the various groups that have an interest in alternative transportation is critical to the development of a viable system

□ **2.A.8 - Plan streetscape maintenance program** – Before a streetscape plan can be implemented a system of maintaining the streetscape needs to be established. Many groups should have a role in addition to the City of Bellingham

□ **2.A.9 – Continue Maritime Heritage Park Improvements** – The momentum generated by the Old Town merchants, creek advocates and city departments should be reinforced. Trail construction, sculpture creation, public access and

parking improvements should continue as possible.

- **2.A.10** – Plan the Old Town Special Project area – The Whatcom Waterfront Action Program should continue to serve as the main plan for the ultimate development of the Old Town character area. However, the additional detailed planning needs to be continued for that area around the former Sash n’ Door north along both sides of Holly Street to F Street. This area is the key to strengthened connections to the Bellweather area of the Port.

- **2.B.4** – Continue Implementation of the Maritime Heritage Park improvements - Emphasis will be placed on completing the upper Central Ave. walkway connection and the public/private parking solution on the south side of the park.
- **2.B.5** – Develop new library site – As the Library Board moves forward with plans for a replacement to the main library the overall goals of the City Center Master Plan should be kept in mind. The site should help create public space in the Civic Center/Cultural District.

Short Range Action Plan – 2003-2007

- **2.B.1** – Create a land acquisition strategy - In order to better target reinvestment in the area, establishing a Land Acquisition Strategy is encouraged. This strategy would establish guidelines under which properties should be considered for acquisition. At a minimum, properties should be considered when they help to promote the recommendations of this Plan.

- **2.B.2** – Implement the Mt. Baker Capital Plan – The complete development of the MT. Baker Theater is critical to the success of the Civic Center/Cultural District character area and city center as a whole. The Theater should play a role bringing in bringing people to the city center for not only performances but also for meetings and gatherings.
- **2.B.3** – Continue implementation of RR Ave. special project area – Special importance will be placed on moving forward the redevelopment of the Flame Tavern site and redevelopment of the former Mason Building site.

- **2.B.6** – Implement 2-way street system changes – Make the required changes in the city center circulation system as suggested in the Circulation and Transportation Plan. Ensuring that city - wide circulation needs are met is also important.

- **2.B.7** – Implement Phase I & II of the automobile/pedestrian wayfinding and gateways system – Funding should be secured for the Holly Street gateway and corridor improvements as an important first step. Insuring the proper operation of any change in the two-way street system should be the next highest priority.
- **2.B.8** – Design parking/Market solution on South Lot – The permanent home for the Farmers Market must be provided on the South Lot in conjunction with a parking solution that is in support of the south Railroad Ave. district development.
- **2.B.9** – Provide a trails link along RR Avenue - The linkage between the South Bay Trail and the Whatcom Creek Trail should be made in an expanded median along Railroad Avenue. This improvement could be made as a part of

other street improvements in support of the Railroad Avenue district development.

- ❑ **2.B.10 - Fund streetscape maintenance program** – Upkeep and management of the pedestrian environment needs to be assured of on going and consistent funding support. Funding of this activity should be a joint public/private effort.

- ❑ **2.B.11 – Develop Old Town Special Project Area** – The acquisition of the former Sash ‘n Door site for a multi – use public/private use should be pursued as a priority first step. Additional activity in this area should be tied to the recommended strategy identified in the EPA Brownfields report.

- ❑ **2.B.12 – Design parks/art parks** – A comprehensive and consistent design package for all of the recommended public spaces in the city center should be developed prior to implementation.

- ❑ **2.B.13 – Plan/design Civic Center parking solution** – An opportunity exists to create a public/public partnership between the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County in the provision of parking in the Civic Center/Cultural District. Plans should be discussed and adopted as soon as possible detail how this important need is to be met.

- ❑ **2.B.14– Intersection treatments** – Begin installing the high priority intersections improvements first then proceed with several per year until complete.
- ❑ **2.B.15 – Fund upgrades in bicycle/pedestrian circulation system** – Priority should be given to connecting existing trail systems followed by general enhancements.

- ❑ **2.B.16 – Develop festival street designs** Several key streets in the downtown should be improved in a way that promotes “street festival or fair” usage.

- ❑ **2.B.17 – Fund South Lot/Farmers Market options** – The development of this site for area parking and Market needs needs to proceed, as funds become available.

- ❑ **2.B.18 – Fund Civic Center parking options** – These improvements should proceed, as funds become available.

- ❑ **2.B.19 – Continue intersection treatments**– Fund these intersection improvements in priority order based on visual impact over a five year period.

- ❑ **2.B.20 – Develop first Art Parks/develop rotating displays** – The priority Art Park should be the one where the greatest chance of acquiring private participation can be found.

3.0 PROGRAMMATIC TASKS –

Existing codes regulations and policies determine to a great extent how the city organization will respond in any given situation. As it relates to city center development and promotion the city must act in a predictable and supportive manner. To facilitate this role existing policy and regulation need to be reviewed, evaluated and changed in order to facilitate change.

3.B. Short Range Action Plan – 2003-2007

- ❑ **3.B.1** – prepare citizen summary of the City Center Master Plan – A brief easily duplicated summary of the Plan should be developed and widely distributed.
- ❑ **3.B.2** – Prepare citizen summary of the design guidelines – A document similar to, and perhaps a companion piece to, the City Center Master Plan summary should be produced explaining very simply the design guidelines.
- ❑ **3.B.3** – Complete necessary zoning ordinances – Most tasks in the implementation strategy can be implemented within current zoning and landuse regulation. However, clarification and simplification of zoning and landuse requirements should be a high priority wherever needed.
- ❑ **3.B.4** – Adopt and train inspectors in the latest and most appropriate building code applications – In addition the Building Services Section should facilitate as much as possible redevelopment projects downtown by implementing the CREATE program and Facilitated City Center Building Permit Process.
- ❑ **3.B.5** – Develop the parks/trail system as a whole – The city center parks system should be developed and planned as a single functioning unit.
- ❑ **3.B.6** – Survey and nominate historic resources – The historic qualities of the city center should be preserved. Creating a public information program would help inform the public about the value of these resources.
- ❑ **3.B.7** – Create a loan/grant program to rehab historic resources – Rehabilitation funds could be used as a incentive for property owner to list their historic properties on state and national register.
- ❑ **3.B.8** – Develop a heritage tourism marketing plan – The Tourism Commission should look into preparing a marketing program to bring visitors to the city center to enjoy the area’s many historic resources.
- ❑ **3.B.9** – Confirm city center parking demand – As an initial step a First Phase Parking Strategy of needed parking system improvements in the Railroad Avenue corridor and the Civic Center/Cultural District should be developed.. This strategy would project parking demand in these two areas over the next eighteen (18) to twenty-four (24) months. It would look at ways to enhance system efficiency and maximize the use of resources. In the longer run a new parking demand study should be commissioned to look at the entire city center area as a part of the Circulation and Transportation Plan. Every effort should be given to the promotion of alternative transportation options.
- ❑ **3.B.10** – Incorporate character area concept into plans – The character areas names and concepts identified in the Plan should be utilized in all city and community publications, plans and promotional material.