

Bellingham Comprehensive Plan

Introduction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part 1: What is a Comprehensive Plan?.....	Intro-1
Part 2: Background.....	Intro-2
The 1980 Bellingham Plan.....	Intro-2
1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan.....	Intro-2
The 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update.....	Intro-3
Part 3: Comprehensive Plan Format and Content.....	Intro-4
Chapter 1, Framework Goals and Policies.....	Intro-4
Chapter 2, Land Use.....	Intro-4
Chapter 3, Transportation.....	Intro-4
Chapter 4, Housing.....	Intro-5
Chapter 5, Capital Facilities.....	Intro-5
Chapter 6, Private Utilities and Services.....	Intro-5
Chapter 7, Parks, Recreation and Open Space.....	Intro-5
Chapter 8, Community Design.....	Intro-5
The Neighborhood Plans.....	Intro-6
The Urban Fringe Plan.....	Intro-6
The Appendices.....	Intro-6
Part 4: Citizen Involvement.....	Intro-7
2002-2003 Development of Population Growth Forecasts.....	Intro-7
2003-2005 Urban Growth Area Planning.....	Intro-7
2004 Environmental Impact Statement.....	Intro-7
2003-2004 Waterfront Futures Group.....	Intro-7
2004 Community Forum on Growth Management.....	Intro-8
Planning Commission Hearings and Public Worksessions, 2005.....	Intro-9
Neighborhood Meetings, 2004-2005.....	Intro-9
City Council Hearings and Worksessions, 2005.....	Intro-9
Part 5: Relationship to the State Growth Management Act.....	Intro-9
Part 6: Comprehensive Plan Implementation.....	Intro-10
Land Use Regulations.....	Intro-11
Capital Budgets and Spending.....	Intro-11
Part 7: Monitoring and Evaluation.....	Intro-11
Part 8: Amendments.....	Intro-11

Part 9: Updates.....	Intro-11
Part 10: Public Participation in Future Comprehensive Planning, Neighborhood Planning, and Urban Village Planning Activities.....	Intro-12
The Comprehensive Plan Process.....	Intro-12
The Neighborhood Planning Process.....	Intro-13
The Urban Center (Village) Planning Process.....	Intro-14

BELLINGHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Introduction

Comments and explanations are shown on this side of the page.

Note to readers: *The Introduction chapter is new. It is intended to **replace** the Executive Summary section of the 1995 comprehensive plan.*

This section explains the role of the comprehensive plan in city government.

An explanation of some of the most important characteristics of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan.

PART 1: WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

The residents of Bellingham expect a safe and secure place to live, an economy that provides jobs, healthy and diverse neighborhoods, choices with respect to ways to get around town, excellent schools, a clean and healthy environment, and extensive and diverse recreational opportunities. The city government is responsible for developing policies, providing public facilities and services, and adopting rules to manage growth and development in a way that reflects community values. Since 1980, the guide for Bellingham's growth and development has been the Comprehensive Plan.

The comprehensive plan is a broad statement of community goals and policies that direct the physical development of the city. The plan anticipates change and provides specific guidance for legislative and administrative decisions and actions.

The comprehensive plan has three general characteristics. It is:

- **Comprehensive.** The plan includes all geographical and functional elements that have an effect on the city's development.
- **Long-range.** The plan seeks to guide immediate change, while also looking beyond the present to anticipate issues and identify strategies that will create a healthy, safe, and vibrant community in the future.
- **Flexible.** Planning is an active, continuous process. The comprehensive plan will continue to evolve after it is adopted to reflect actual experiences, changing circumstances and citizen concerns. The annual amendment process and the GMA's seven-year update requirement will ensure that the document remains a reflection of community priorities and values.

Used as a guide for the physical, economic and social development of the city for the next 20 years, the Comprehensive Plan establishes goals and policies to use in future decision-making. The plan's goals and policies, especially those developed during the VISIONS FOR BELLINGHAM process in the early 1990s, communicate the

Comments

long term values and aspirations of the community. By viewing the community as a whole, the plan shows how all the different parts – land use, housing, transportation, capital facilities, parks, and so forth – must work together to achieve the vision.

The goals and policies in this plan provide the basis for adoption of regulations, programs and services designed to implement the plan.

In addition to citizens and the Planning Department, the primary responsibility for formulating and updating the Comprehensive Plan rests with the Planning Commission. The Commission is made up of citizens appointed by the Mayor specifically to make recommendations to the City Council for land use or policy changes to the plan. The ultimate land use and policy decisions are made by the City Council. The Council, through adoption of the City's capital budget, regulations and department work programs, implements the comprehensive plan.

PART 2: BACKGROUND

The background section gives the history of comprehensive planning in Bellingham.

The 1980 “Bellingham Plan”

From 1980 to 1995, growth in Bellingham was guided by the policies and zoning established in the 1980 “*Bellingham Plan*”. This plan included community-wide goals, policies, and a number of “technical appendices” that dealt with issues such as housing, land use, parks and circulation. The plan was visionary for the times. It had many unique features, including specific land use plans and zoning in 22 neighborhood plans.

1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan

In 1990, the State adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA). For the first time, local jurisdictions were required to plan to accommodate the projected population growth. The GMA included a number of provisions that made the 1980 comprehensive plan obsolete. As a result, the city began an extensive planning process to create a new, GMA-compliant comprehensive plan.

The process to develop a new plan began with a “visioning” exercise. In 1992, over 200 citizen delegates participated in the “Visions for Bellingham” project. The result was 62 goal statements that articulated the community's values and its ideal future. The goal statements provided the basis for the 1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan and for subsequent adoption of new development/environmental regulations.

Bellingham's 1995 Comprehensive Plan contained updated

Comments

population growth forecasts and newly available land supply and consumption information. The various sections of the plan dealt with land use, housing, capital facilities, transportation, community design, utilities, and parks, recreation and open space. The 22 neighborhood plans were also readopted as part of the plan.

Subsequent to the adoption of the 1995 plan, the city and county collaborated on a new subarea plan for areas adjacent the city limits. The Urban Fringe Subarea Plan was adopted by the city and county in 1997. It formally established the city's Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and adopted county zoning for the areas. Also in 1997, the city and county jointly developed and adopted an interlocal agreement addressing issues such as annexation, revenue sharing, and joint review of development projects in Bellingham's UGA.

The 2004-05 Comprehensive Plan Update

Background Note: This section identifies some of the changes that have occurred in the city and in the urban growth area since the 1995 comprehensive plan was adopted.

The Bellingham urban area has changed significantly in the 10 years since the 1995 plan was adopted. The city's population increased by more than 20%, from 57,830 in 1995 to 72,320 in 2005. The city's urban growth area population increased from 8,713 to 13,350 during this same period. The number of housing units in Bellingham increased by 25%. The city also grew geographically, with about 1,500 acres added as a result of 10 annexations initiated by property owners in the annexed areas. A 23rd neighborhood (the Meridian Neighborhood) was created as a result of these changes to city boundaries. New schools were built. The city center and Fairhaven areas saw significant new construction for the first time in many years. Campus enrollments increased at Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College. Georgia Pacific discontinued the majority of its operations on the Bellingham waterfront and sold its holding to the Port of Bellingham.

Rapid growth can create a host of pressures on a city, from rising housing prices to an increased demand for public services and facilities. At the same time, unforeseen changes in state law have reduced funding and further limited cities ability to raise money to pay for the full range of services people have come to expect in an urban environment. All of these circumstances have influenced this update to the Comprehensive Plan.

The 2004-05 plan update was guided by the following policy and information documents:

- The 1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan
- The state Growth Management Act

Comments

The major policy documents and information sources that were used to update the comprehensive plan are listed here.

- ❑ The VISIONS FOR BELLINGHAM goals
- ❑ The County-wide Planning Policies
- ❑ The Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan
- ❑ The 2000 Census
- ❑ 2002 Population and Economic Forecasts by Econorthwest
- ❑ The 2004 Community Forum on Growth Management
- ❑ The Waterfront Futures Group plans
- ❑ 2004 Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement

PART 3: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FORMAT AND CONTENT

This comprehensive plan is divided into chapters dealing with specific issue areas:

The plan's format and content has changed from the 1995 version. The Executive Summary section of the 1995 plan has been replaced by this Introduction and Chapter 1, Framework Goals and Policies.

- ❑ Introduction
- ❑ Framework Goals and Policies
- ❑ Land Use
- ❑ Transportation
- ❑ Housing
- ❑ Capital Facilities
- ❑ Utilities
- ❑ Community Design
- ❑ Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- ❑ Bellingham Neighborhood Plans
- ❑ Urban Growth Area Plan

Chapter 1 - The Framework Goals and Policies contains all the goals that the community has formulated. Many of the goals are originally from the landmark 1992 Visions for Bellingham community planning process. The policies in Chapter 1 are more general in nature than the specific policies found in the individual chapters of the plan.

The framework goals and policy recommendations provided guidance and direction in the development of this plan.

Much of the comprehensive plan is based on the adopted population and employment growth forecasts. See Chapter 2 for the details.

Chapter 2, Land Use contains the population growth forecasts, residential, commercial and industrial land supply and demand figures that are the foundation of the plan. Also policies and criteria that are used to set the urban growth area (UGA) boundary are included. The UGA boundary sets the limit of urban development and represents the anticipated city limits boundary during the 20-year planning period. Annexation is also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 3, Transportation contains the policy base supporting the City's commitment to providing an interconnected, multi-modal transportation network that meets the needs of the community. The chapter includes an analysis

Comments

of the existing transportation system and projections of future needs. Alternative modes such as walking, bicycling and transit are supported by policies requiring coordination between land use patterns and transit routes and by completing an interconnected pedestrian and bikeway system.

Chapter 4, Housing contains an analysis of the existing housing situation in Bellingham. It includes recent trends in population, income, and housing availability and affordability. The goals and policies in this chapter reflect the City's commitment to maintain a range of housing choices that meet the needs of Bellingham residents at all economic levels.

Chapter 5, Capital Facilities contains a description of existing public facilities and services such as police, fire, libraries, schools, water, sewer and drainage. (Park facilities are addressed in Chapter 7 - Parks, Recreation and Open Space.)

The Capital Facilities chapter includes projections of future needs for facilities and services, integrates the location and capacity of the facilities with the Land Use Element, and provides a financing plan to prioritize and accomplish the projects.

The policies in this chapter reflect a commitment to provide adequate, affordable public facilities and services to meet the primary needs of the city during the 20-year planning horizon.

Chapter 6, Private Utilities & Services includes a summary of the major "private" utilities serving the Bellingham urban area, including electricity, natural gas, oil and fuel transmission, telephone (including cellular), cable television and solid waste/recycling.

Chapter 7, Parks, Recreation and Open Space includes an inventory and level of service standards for existing facilities, identification of deficiencies in the system, and projections for future needs.

Chapter 8, Community Design contains policies that reflect the community's desire to retain Bellingham's distinctive character as derived from its unique physical location, views of important natural features, distinctive neighborhoods, and small town atmosphere. The policy base in this chapter also recognizes resident's desires as expressed through the public participation process to have design and development standards that improve the visual character of the built environment as the community grows.

The policies in this chapter reflect the fact that citizens of Bellingham take great pride in, and place a great importance

Note: The private utilities section was grouped with Capital Facilities chapter in earlier drafts.

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space chapter was reviewed by the Planning Commission and given preliminary approval by the City Council in 2004. This was done to keep the city eligible for certain grants.

Comments

Even though the zoning designations and the development regulations were moved out of the neighborhood plans in 2004, they remain an important part of the comprehensive plan.

Work on the update to the Urban Fringe Plan began in 2004 and will be completed in 2006.

See Exhibit D, Comprehensive Plan Appendices 1 through 4.

on, their parks and open space system. The policies also contain a commitment to maintain the existing system while providing new facilities, especially in areas of the city where population growth is anticipated. A special emphasis is placed on acquiring and developing lands for neighborhood parks and indoor recreation facilities.

The following subarea plans are also adopted as part of the comprehensive plan:

The 23 Neighborhood Plans. Bellingham's neighborhood plans were adopted as part of the comprehensive plan in 1980 and again in 1995. That tradition continues as the plans are once again included as part of this comprehensive plan.

Bellingham's neighborhood plans remain critically important to achieving the vision and goals of the comprehensive plan. The plans are powerful tools that help to maintain neighborhood character and define the "vision" of the neighborhood in the future. This section also includes the City Center Master Plan.

The Urban Fringe Plan for Bellingham's urban growth area was first adopted by the city and county in 1997. Both jurisdictions are currently working to update the plan. The update includes: 1) an extensive evaluation of land supply and zoning designations/densities in light of adopted population growth forecasts; 2) a review of the suitability of land within the existing UGA for urban development; 3) a review of the portions of the UGA in the Lake Whatcom Watershed; 4) an analysis of the "5-year Review Areas" for possible inclusion in the UGA; and 5) potential designation of an "ultimate" city boundary. When this work is completed, it is anticipated that the plan will be adopted by the City as part of this plan.

Appendices - Several documents are included in this plan as appendices:

1. 2002-2022 Whatcom County Population and Economic Forecasts, ECONorthwest.
2. Council Resolution 2006-15, including recommendations for UGA zoning and boundary changes.
3. City of Bellingham Land Supply Methodology Report.
4. Bellingham Comprehensive Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Comments

The opportunity to participate in several aspects of the comprehensive plan update process is explained in this section.

Hundreds of citizens participated in the Waterfront Futures Group's 2-year process to develop visions, framework principles and recommendations for the redevelopment of the entire length of the Bellingham Bay waterfront. The "vision" and guiding principles for each of the six waterfront character areas are included in the comprehensive plan (see the Framework Goals and Policies Chapter 1 and Appendix 2).

PART 4: CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN PREPARATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

This 2005 comprehensive plan update is based on an extensive public involvement process that included community growth forums, open houses in the urban growth areas, meetings with neighborhood groups, hearings on the environmental impact statement, and Planning Commission and City Council hearings and study sessions. Throughout the process, a data base of interested citizens was used to keep residents apprised of the process.

Public involvement activities included:

- **2002 – 2003 Development of Population Growth Forecasts.** The process to develop and adopt population growth forecasts included meetings with neighborhood groups, the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, public hearings before the Bellingham and County Planning Commissions and the City and County Councils.
- **2003 – 2005 Urban Growth Area (UGA) Planning.** A series of neighborhood meetings were held in various sections of the UGA to discuss growth and annexation issues. City and county planning commissions and councils each held many public hearings and work sessions on the UGA chapter of this plan.
- **2004 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).** An EIS evaluating four different Bellingham area growth alternatives was prepared for the comprehensive plan and urban fringe plan updates. A draft EIS was issued in March, 2004 followed by a 30-day comment period. A hearing on the draft EIS was held in April. In addition to public testimony, 130 pages of comments were received during the comment period from 35 citizens. The city responded to the comments in the final EIS, issued in July 2004.
- **2003 – 2004 Waterfront Futures Group.** The Waterfront Futures Group (WFG) was established by the Port of Bellingham and the City of Bellingham in 2002. The city and the Port selected members of the community to serve as the Waterfront Futures Group (see the inside cover of the plan for a list of the WFG members). This group was asked to take a fresh and independent look at the Bellingham Bay waterfront. Work began on the project in 2003 and continued in 2004. Dozens of meetings were held during the process. In June, the draft *Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan* and the *Waterfront Action Plan* were presented to the Port Commission, City Council and the public. Final documents became available in

Comments

The Community Growth Forum was a successful component of the plan update process. Over 1,000 residents participated in some way in the forum.

December and were submitted to the City for final review in January. The Introduction section of the Framework Plan contains a brief summary of the public process used to develop the plans. These plans contain the results of one of the most ambitious and extensive public planning processes ever undertaken in Bellingham. The process to develop the plans was inclusive, well publicized and well attended.

In approving the waterfront framework and action plans, the City Council directed staff to use the plans to inform the updates to the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, the applicable neighborhood plans and zoning regulations, the Shoreline Master Program, and in the development of master development plans for the waterfront and adjacent areas, such as the central waterfront (former Georgia Pacific site) and Old Town areas.

- **2004 Community Forum on Growth Management.** This process was intended to involve the community in shaping policy to manage growth over the next 20 years and beyond.

The project had multiple objectives:

1. Engage as many community members as possible in discussions about growth, economics, urban design and the Growth Management Act.
2. Describe tradeoffs and impacts of different growth options and explore specific design solutions.
3. Strengthen communication with the community, making information accessible, understandable and easy to find.
4. Facilitate greater understanding of neighborhood concerns.

A steering committee of city/county elected officials, planning commissioners, city/county/WTA staff, and neighborhood representatives was formed to guide the process. The forum consisted of four community meetings: 1) growth seminar; 2) planning fair; 3) design charette; and 4) policy workshop.

Five neighborhood meetings were also held throughout the summer. A “drop-in” center was located in a downtown office building to serve as the headquarters for the process. The center served as a place where people could learn about the Growth Forum process and to talk with staff about growth issues. Participants in the forum were also invited to participate in a visual survey.

Comments

The Growth forum process was well publicized and well attended. All the community meetings were videotaped and broadcast several times on local television. The local print media extensively covered the process. In all, over 1,000 citizens participated in some way during the forum process.

- **Planning Commission Hearings and Public Work Sessions, 2005.** The Planning Commission is comprised of seven Bellingham residents who volunteer their time to advise the City Council on comprehensive planning, land use codes, and other planning issues. During a series of meetings from February to October 2005, the Commission reviewed each plan chapter, considering public comment and testimony as they developed findings, conclusions and recommendations that were sent to the City Council. The updated comprehensive plan chapters were reviewed by the Bellingham Planning Commission in a total of 24 public meetings.
- **Neighborhood Meetings, 2004 – 2005.** Throughout the process, city staff met with a number of individual neighborhood groups, the Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods and the Mayor’s Neighborhood Advisory Board to discuss the plan update and growth issues.
- **City Council Hearings and Work Sessions, 2005.** Beginning in March 2004, the City Council held a total of 16 public hearings and committee work sessions to review the updates to the plan. The Council accepted written comment throughout the process. The plan was formally adopted in June 2006.

PART 5: RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

This section explains how the goals of the state Growth Management Act are addressed in this comprehensive plan.

State law requires the city’s comprehensive plan to be consistent with the Growth Management Act (GMA) and the Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies.

Adoption of the GMA in 1990 by the state Legislature was a critical step in the development of rational policies to manage growth in Washington. For the first time in the state’s history, all urban counties and their cities were required to plan comprehensively and for the future.

The GMA contains 14 goals that were adopted by the Legislature to “guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plan and development regulations of counties

Comments

and cities required to plan under the act.” (RCW 36.70A.020). In addition to the goals and policies in this chapter, the GMA goals are addressed by the policies in the other chapters of the comprehensive plan per the following list.

The GMA goals address issues such as:

- ❑ Managing growth and reducing sprawl (see Chapter 2, Land Use)
- ❑ Housing (see Housing and Land Use chapters)
- ❑ Transportation (see Chapter 3, Transportation)
- ❑ Economic development (see Chapter 2, Land Use)
- ❑ Open space and recreation (see Parks, Recreation and Open Space, Chapter 8)
- ❑ The environment (see Land Use and Parks chapters)
- ❑ Public facilities and services (see Chapter 5)
- ❑ Historic preservation (see Land Use and Community Design chapters)
- ❑ Shoreline management (see the Land Use Chapter and the city’s updated Shoreline Master Program)
- ❑ Property rights, permits, natural resource industries, citizen participation and governmental coordination (see the Land Use Chapter and the County-wide Planning Policies in Appendix 3).

The history and status of the county-wide planning policies is explained in this section.

The 2005 version of the County-wide Planning Policies were used in the process to update the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan.

The GMA also requires urban counties and their cities to jointly develop policies that are to be used to “establish a county-wide framework from which county and city comprehensive plans are developed...” (RCW 36.70A.210) In 1993, Whatcom County and all the cities developed the Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies (CWPPs). These policies were included in the 1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. The policies were amended in 1997 and again in 2005.

The County and all the cities will continue to work together to amend and update the policies as needed.

PART 6: COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A comprehensive plan means little if it is not implemented. To be successful, the plan must be implemented by the combined efforts of individuals, neighborhoods, civic groups, and local government. Many of the plan’s goals and policies reflect this shared responsibility.

Part 6 summarizes how the comprehensive plan is implemented through regulatory and capital budgeting programs.

City government has the primary responsibility to implement the comprehensive plan. The city’s two main implementation activities are regulating and managing development, and funding capital improvements such as roads and parks. The GMA requires local government to make sure that their regulations and capital budgets implement the comprehensive plan.

Comments

Land Use Regulations

The city has created and will continue to develop regulations to ensure that growth and development occurs consistent with the community's values and goals as expressed in the comprehensive plan. These regulations include zoning, subdivision, building and environmental codes, historic preservation and design review guidelines and standards.

Capital Budgets and Spending

As communities grow, new schools, parks, libraries, streets, additional police and fire services are needed to serve the increasing population. The Capital Facilities chapter of this plan lists the facilities that will be needed over the next 20 years to serve the growing population. The City Council updates this list every year as part of the budget process. In addition to ongoing needs for repair and maintenance, the list of capital facility improvements includes the projects that will be needed to support growth in conformance with the comprehensive plan.

PART 7: MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Throughout the life of the comprehensive plan, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted periodically to assess the effectiveness of the goals and policies, and to identify new ideas that may need to be added in order to produce a result consistent with the GMA, the communities visions and values, and changing needs and priorities. Population growth, land supply, development patterns and densities are particularly important to monitor on an ongoing basis in order to test growth projections and other assumptions made in the plan.

PART 8: AMENDMENTS

Comprehensive plans can be amended no more than once a year under the GMA. There is a process in place for residents to request amendments to the text in the comprehensive plan, or to the neighborhood plans that are a component of this plan. See BMC Sec. 20.20.000.

PART 9: UPDATES

Although comprehensive plans can be amended yearly, the GMA requires cities to fully review and update their plans at least every seven years.

The framers of the Comprehensive Plan recognize that the world changes, sometimes rapidly, and that plans, procedures, and policies must also change. It should be recognized that this plan is a guide for the future. New conditions may require

These sections explain how the plan is monitored, evaluated, revised and updated.

Comments

Section 10 explains the City's intent with respect to public involvement in future planning processes such as:

- *the comprehensive plan update*
- *the neighborhood plans update*
- *the urban village master plans*

Public involvement in future comprehensive plan updates is explained here.

examination of adopted goals and policies. Adjustments to the plan should be considered on a regular basis.

**PART 10. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING, NEIGHBORHOOD
PLANNING, AND URBAN VILLAGE PLANNING
ACTIVITIES**

Public participation in comprehensive planning processes is required both as a matter of law and policy. The public participation section details the city's commitment to public involvement in the planning process. It reaffirms our intention to develop planning processes that provide ample opportunity for residents to participate in the decision-making process. We will ensure that city-wide and neighborhood planning and the development of regulations is done with the cooperation and contribution of all interested parties, including neighborhood associations, residents, property owners, business owners and others. The city will make every effort to involve citizens in the processes to develop and update the comprehensive plan, the neighborhood plans, urban village plans, and the environmental, zoning and other development regulations. See Chapter 1, Framework Goals and Policies for public participation policy statements.

The Comprehensive Plan Process

The Bellingham Comprehensive Plan is prepared by city staff and involved citizens (including the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission), reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council. The Planning Commission has the responsibility to conduct the planning process, review the results, and to formulate recommendations for the City Council's consideration.

Adoption by the City Council is necessary to make the Comprehensive Plan an official city policy document. The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires that the Council's action to adopt the plan must be based on the "early and continuous citizen participation" provision of the GMA. This provision ensures that the plan represents the community's "informed consent" with respect to community goals and values.

State law allows the comprehensive plan to be amended only once a year. The process the city uses to amend the plan is described in the Land Use and Development Code, BMC Section 20.20 and in Development Regulation Procedures, BMC Section 21.10. These sections explain how proposed comprehensive plan amendments are initiated, processed and

Comments

evaluated. It includes criteria for the Planning Commission and City Council to use to determine whether or not a proposed amendment is appropriate. The amendment process includes public participation requirements appropriate to the scope of the proposed amendment.

Throughout the 20-year life of the comprehensive plan, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted periodically to review population growth forecasts and other assumptions that form the basis of the plan. This monitoring and evaluation process should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the goals and policies in producing results consistent with the community's original vision and values. The GMA also requires the comprehensive plan to be updated at least every seven years. The process to update the plan will include public participation opportunities. A public participation program will be developed and broadly disseminated to neighborhood groups, property owners, business owners, and other people who express interest in participating in the process.

The Neighborhood Planning Process

Bellingham's 23 neighborhood plans are adopted as a component of the comprehensive plan. As such, the plans are covered by the annual amendment and public participation requirements of the GMA

The City Council expressed a desire to continue in future years to discuss policy and process issues with the neighborhood plans update process.

The city is committed to neighborhood based planning. Like the comprehensive plan, the neighborhood plans should be periodically updated to ensure that the plans are consistent with, and implement the comprehensive plan. Ideally, neighborhood plans should be fully updated at least every 10 years. Updating neighborhood plans is challenging work that requires significant staff resources and neighborhood participation.

The neighborhood plan update process shall be conducted with the cooperation and contributions of all interested parties, including residents, property owners, business owners, neighborhood groups, institutions and others. The Planning Commission will review neighborhood plan changes and make findings and recommendations that are sent to the City Council for final decision.

The process used to update neighborhood plans should be flexible, given that each neighborhood is somewhat unique. However, there are some common elements that should be considered in all neighborhood plan update processes, such as neighborhood character, infrastructure requirements, and city-wide and neighborhood specific goals and policies.

Comments

Note that the terms “urban center” and “urban village” are used interchangeably throughout this plan.

Cross Reference Note: See the Land Use Chapter, Section C for urban center policies.

The Urban Center (Village) Planning Process

The 2004 Community Growth Forum identified the development of urban centers as a key to strategy to accommodate Bellingham’s forecasted population growth, both in the short and long term. (The Land Use chapter of this plan also contains a number of policies related to the proposed urban centers.) Some of the proposed urban centers can and are developing now – the City Center, Fairhaven and Barkley areas for example. The other villages will require changes to all adjacent neighborhood plans, zoning and other rules before they can develop.

Master planning for the urban centers will ensure that the areas develop in a coordinated manner, with a compatible mix of land uses. Development phasing requirements should ensure that each project component and amenity is developed at the appropriate time. While the urban centers will have many characteristics in common, the design and composition of each center will vary in response to site conditions, location, market demand, available street and utility capacity, and the character of the surrounding area.

In the larger centers, the mix of land uses and the design of the street and trail system will create a livable environment that encourages walking, biking and use of transit. These centers will foster efficient land use through compact, higher density development and by placing residences close to bus stops, basic retail and supporting services.

See the Urban Center section of the Land Use Chapter for more urban center information and policy statements.