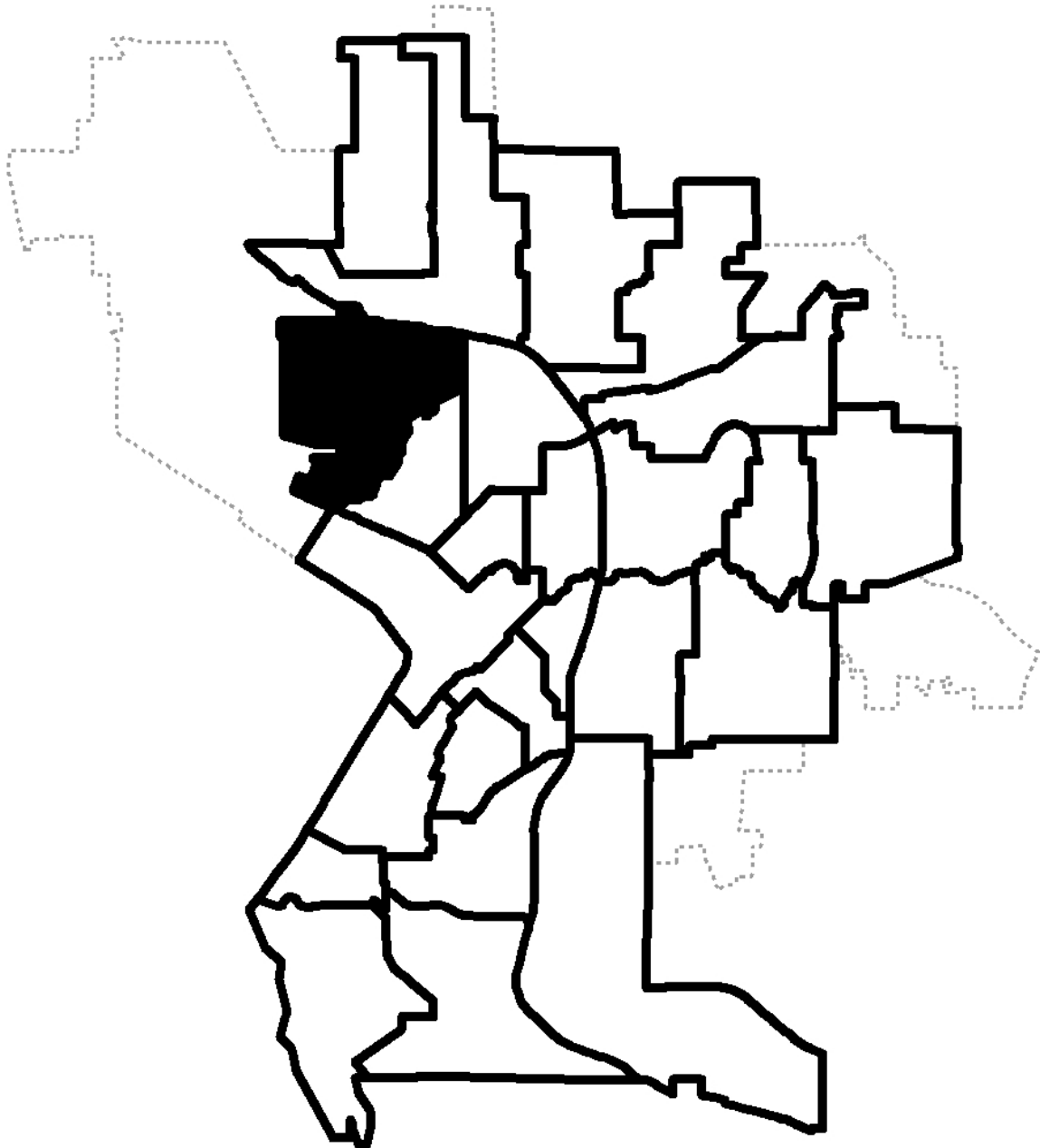




City of Bellingham Neighborhood Plan **BIRCHWOOD**



BIRCHWOOD NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

I. NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

The Birchwood Neighborhood is an interesting study in contrasts. The neighborhood has historically been an area consisting of single family homes built on extremely large lots. It is characterized by older, well-kept homes on lots often in excess of 400 feet deep. Mature landscaping, open fields and narrow streets lend a rural atmosphere to the neighborhood. The neighborhood has seen the growth of apartment and condominium complexes located primarily along Northwest Avenue, and on W. Maplewood Avenue. In addition, there is a large commercial area located in the vicinity of the intersection of Northwest Avenue, W. Maplewood Avenue and Birchwood Avenue. Other significant features of the neighborhood include the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, the Squalicum Creek greenway, an elementary school, middle school, and technical college located in the neighborhood. Identification with neighborhood character is perhaps strongest to the large single family residential area in the western portion of the neighborhood.

II. OPEN SPACE

The large lots in the Birchwood area give the neighborhood a spacious, rural feeling. There is a need for an additional neighborhood park facility in the northwest portion of the neighborhood; the park site at W. Maplewood Avenue and McLeod Road should be developed. There are other areas that should be preserved as open space. In order to minimize the potential problems inherent in the boundaries between land uses of different intensities, vegetated buffers are proposed at those boundaries.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT A TREED BUFFER BE ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE INTERSTATE AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD. IN ADDITION, IF, THE BELLINGHAM GOLF AND COUNTRY CLUB WERE TO RELOCATE, THE EXISTING GROUNDS SHOULD ALSO BE PRESERVED; IF NOT, THEN AN EAST/WEST CORRIDOR ALONG AN EXTENSION OF THE ALDERWOOD RIGHT-OF-WAY AND A NORTH/SOUTH CORRIDOR ALONG THE BAKER CREEK CHANNEL SHOULD BE MAINTAINED.

MAJOR RECREATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS THAT PERTAIN TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD INCLUDE:

DEVELOPMENT OF PERMANENT PUBLIC RESTROOMS AT THE SHUKSAN MIDDLE SCHOOL, BIRCHWOOD PARK, AND LITTLE SQUALICUM PARK

MASTER PLANNING AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF LITTLE SQUALICUM PARK.

COMPLETE THE DEVELOPMENT OF SQUALICUM CREEK PARK PER THE ADOPTED MASTER PLAN.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PARK SITE LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF MCLEOD ROAD AND MAPLEWOOD AVENUE UNDER A MASTER PLAN.

A TENNIS COURT SHOULD BE LOCATED AT ONE OF THE SCHOOL SITES, PREFERABLY SHUKSAN MIDDLE SCHOOL BECAUSE OF ACCESS AND PARKING.

The Birchwood Neighborhood contains several significant environmental resources that should be preserved and restored. Squalicum Creek, Little Squalicum Creek and Baker Creek systems are important resources on both a neighborhood and a citywide basis. The Squalicum Creek system, including Baker Creek, contains the best potential salmonid habitat within City jurisdiction. The marine shoreline of Bellingham Bay, including the mouth of Squalicum and Little Squalicum Creek is designated Critical Habitat for several species of salmon and trout under the Endangered Species Act. Coho, chum, steelhead, Chinook, cutthroat, and pink have been documented utilizing Squalicum Creek.

The existing Shoreline Management Master Program classifies the Squalicum Creek as Conservancy I to Meridian Street. This generally means that no fill, hard surfacing, permanent structures or storage can be located within 100 feet of the ordinary high water mark. Squalicum Creek for the entirety of its path through Bellingham is a FEMA regulated floodplain. Since 1982 it has been fully mapped floodplain with a floodway delineated. The City has more recently completed the 2007 Stormwater Comprehensive Plan which includes new modeling of stormwater flows coupled with installation of a flow gauge on Squalicum Creek to calibrate modeling. Significant floods occur on Squalicum Creek that periodically shut down the Squalicum Truck Route when flows exceed the capacity of existing culverts. These culverts were upgraded in 2006 to improve fish passage. In the future, when these culverts are considered for replacement, upsizing for fish passage and flood passage should be accomplished.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

SQUALICUM CREEK: PRESERVE AND RESTORE GEOMORPHIC, FLOODPLAIN, AND RIPARIAN ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES ARISE.

LITTLE SQUALICUM CREEK AND SHORELINE: PRESERVE AND RESTORE THE SHORELINE AND CREEK AS OPPORTUNITIES ARISE.

BAKER CREEK: CREATE AND PRESERVE A RIPARIAN BUFFER ALONG THE LENGTH OF BAKER CREEK. PRESERVE AND RESTORE GEOMORPHIC, FLOODPLAIN, AND RIPARIAN ECOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS AS OPPORTUNITIES ARISE.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT THE ENTIRE SQUALICUM CREEK CHANNEL, FROM VALLEY WALL TO VALLEY WALL, BE PRESERVED AS AN OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL CORRIDOR FOR BOTH FUNCTIONAL AND AESTHETIC PURPOSES.

THE ABANDONED BNSF/BIRR RAIL LINE SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AS A SEGMENT OF THE BAY TO BAKER BIKE TRAIL BETWEEN ROEDER AVENUE AND MERIDIAN STREET.

THE CITY SHOULD MASTER PLAN AND FURTHER DEVELOP THE LITTLE SQUALICUM PARK.

III. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

Schools

The major improvements recommended for the school site is that a public restroom be constructed at Shuksan Middle School similar in nature to the one at Battersby Field. A crosswalk with a variable speed sign above and below the walkway should be provided across W. Maplewood Avenue to Shuksan Middle School in Area 7. If traffic loads warrant it in the future, then either warning lights or a pedestrian controlled traffic light should be installed.

Drainage/Storm and Surface Water

The Birchwood Neighborhood contains a combination of natural and man-made stormwater systems. Squalicum Creek and Little Squalicum Creek both flow to Bellingham Bay. The West Maplewood stormwater trunk system also conveys a tributary to Squalicum Creek that originates in the county and collects water from north of Interstate Five. A part of the Maplewood system contains a separate branch originating from Northwest Avenue north of the Interstate. The Maplewood system still contains some portions of open channel that should be protected from enclosure.

Little Squalicum Creek is largely enclosed within the present City Limits with only about a thousand feet of open channel to the bay remaining. This stream has been the subject of considerable study due to its proximity to the Oeser superfund cleanup site.

Stormwater management in the Birchwood area should pay great attention to the possibility of infiltration as a best management practice (BMP). Some of the underlying soils in this area contain sands and gravels. Water quality consideration must be given to infiltration as the soils are so permeable that pollutants may be inadvertently transferred to the large subsurface aquifer attendant with the gravels.

Stormwater retrofitting should also consider the removal of water from surface drainage systems and directing this water to the subsurface. This should help to improve low flows in Squalicum Creek and alleviate pipe capacity problems if done judiciously.

See also the City of Bellingham 2007 Comprehensive Stormwater Plan by Clear Creek Solutions and Parametrix. For historic reference see the 1979 City of Bellingham Comprehensive Drainage Plan by Kramer, Chin and Mayo.

Water and Sewer

Water and Sewer facilities are continually evaluated to ensure existing services are maintained, upgraded, and future needs can be met to accommodate Bellingham's projected population growth. As part of the City Comprehensive Plan, the City has developed a comprehensive water and sewer plan, which manages the City's water and sewer system and provides a detailed list of projected public improvements necessary to provide and maintain existing and future service needs throughout the City.

Libraries

Birchwood residents have ready access to the Central Library in downtown Bellingham. The full ranges of library services are available through this facility, other Bellingham Public Library facilities such as Barkley Branch or Fairhaven Branch, through a reciprocal borrowing agreement with the county library, and through online access. Convenient for Birchwood residents, library community book drops are located at the Haggen grocery store on Meridian Street, and further north in the Guide Meridian / Cordata Neighborhood, however the Library Board monitors population growth throughout the community for future library locations and services.

IV. CIRCULATION

The official citywide arterial street network and projected public transportation improvements for the Birchwood Neighborhood are identified in the Transportation Element of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Transportation Element identifies a citywide multi-modal (pedestrian, bike, transit, and automobile) transportation network that considers the location and conditions of the existing transportation network, identifies transportation problems, and projects future needs while attempting to maintain established standards. The Transportation Element complies with Growth Management Act requirements and it represents the community's transportation policy plan for the next 20 years.

MAP, BIRCHWOOD LAND USE

SECTION V. SUBAREA DESCRIPTIONS AND LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Area 1

This low-density residential area makes up the bulk of the Birchwood Neighborhood and gives it much of this character. The lots in this area generally exceed 35,000 square feet with many of them approaching one acre in size. The lots are long and narrow and the combined open spaces in the rear of the lots contribute heavily to the rural character of the neighborhood. The lots generally are too narrow to be divided in width, so any subdivision would require multiple lot ownership and would result in the intrusion of residences into the interior open spaces. To maintain the existing development patterns in this area it is designated Residential, Single with a density of 20,000 square feet of ground area per dwelling unit.

This area includes the corridor along W. Maplewood Avenue from Alderwood Avenue north to the city limits. It is characterized by sound single family homes. Traffic volumes on W. Maplewood Avenue have shown significant increases. Commercial development in the adjacent county area near the I-5 interchange at Bakerview Road and along Bakerview Road will result in significant increases in traffic volumes on W. Maplewood Avenue. Future commercial development near the interchange will, without doubt, increase the use of the interchange. Street, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements along W. Maplewood Avenue should be constructed concurrent with new development. The park site located at the corner of McLeod Road and Maplewood Avenue should be rezoned to public and developed under a master plan.

AREA 1 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 2

This area is currently a single-family area characterized by long, deep lots, south of McLeod Road and smaller lots north of McLeod Road. The 7,200 square foot density maintains the current pattern of development. Wherever possible, a vegetated buffer should be maintained or enhanced along Interstate 5.

AREA 2 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 3

The presence of several apartment and condominium complexes characterizes much of Area 3. The existing densities vary according to parcel size. The land use designation will allow one unit for every 1,500 square feet, which is equivalent to 29 units per acre.

The density appears to fit the character of the area and would allow the existing pattern of development to continue.

Traffic increases close to Shuksan Middle School are an additional concern in this area. Sidewalk improvements are needed to McLeod Road, between Northwest Avenue and W. Maplewood Avenue and also on W. Maplewood Avenue in order to provide safe school routes. A sidewalk is scheduled to be constructed on the north side of McLeod Road in 2010 in conjunction with the Northwest/McLeod roundabout.

Multiple family uses that are proposed in this area should be carefully reviewed to provide for adequate usable open space, landscaping, and other design standards to ensure their compatible integration with the site and the surrounding lots.

The Alderwood Avenue right-of-way, connecting Northwest Avenue to the existing Country Club should be preserved as development occurs.

AREA 3 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 4

This area has been deleted.

Area 5

This is the site of the Bellingham Golf and Country Club, which has been granted open space tax status. Because of the size of the parcel, the well-landscaped grounds and the desirability of preserving the existing clubhouse, it is felt that a Planned Residential classification is an appropriate designation. This would allow, if and when the property is developed, the flexibility in dwelling location that is necessary to take full advantage of the area. Access from this area should be carefully designed to minimize traffic problems. The Baker Creek flood plain should be protected from encroachment.

AREA 5 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 6

This area is a commercial site. It is felt that Area 6 is large enough to meet the demand for neighborhood commercial uses in this portion of the Birchwood Neighborhood.

AREA 6 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL

Area 7

This area is characterized by a mix of single family homes, apartments, and scattered repair and service facilities. Commercial areas exist on either end of this area, which

should provide sufficient land for those uses in this neighborhood. It is not desirable to encourage a Commercial land use classification along large portions of arterials when other options are available. The designation for this area would allow multiple family housing at a density dependent on the combination of existing lots of record. This designation would generate less traffic than a Commercial designation, which would help minimize the impact on school children walking to Shuksan Middle School. In 2009, the City made several pedestrian crossing and traffic safety revisions to help provide safe school routes for children in this area. The prerequisite consideration in the Land Use and Development Code relates to this improvement. Access onto W. Maplewood Avenue should be consolidated where possible to minimize the number of driveways. Single family uses should be buffered from new multi family construction where possible.

AREA 7 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 7A

This area was formerly commercially designated property but because of a lack of demand has been reclassified for apartment use. It is similar to the classification and description of Area 7 (and those comments apply here) but is different in that additional flexibility is given in the required interior side yard setbacks, so that the building design is not "barrack" like in appearance. For both building and parking areas residential multi setbacks should be applied. Wooden fences 6 feet high along the rear property line should also be required during site plan review. The adequacy of subsurface geology (from previous coal mine use) must be determined prior to any building permit issuance.

AREA 7A LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 8

This is the Shuksan Middle School site and is designated as public.

AREA 8 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 9

The area is currently in public ownership and is the site of the Birchwood Elementary School.

AREA 9 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 10

This area, together with the adjacent commercial area in the Columbia Neighborhood, currently provides much of the retail and service needs of the northeastern portion of the City. Recent development in the Guide Meridian Neighborhood also meets this demand. It is felt that the size of a commercial area in this portion of the neighborhood should not extend the full length of any designated arterial route in accordance with a citywide goal of discouraging strip commercial development.

Much of this area has been mined in the past by the Bellingham Coal Company. There is a State law that presents standards for the reclamation of the shafts running from the surface to the ore bed. There is, at this time, a question concerning the adequacy of the reclamation of the shafts because of the potential for subsidence and the damage that could result, a prerequisite consideration is recommended for Areas 10 and 11 addressing the ability of the land to support development in its present condition.

AREA 10 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL

Area 11

Because of the undeveloped nature of the property, the adverse effects that traffic generating commercial uses would have on the existing nursing home and the residentially classified area to the north, and the condition of Birchwood Avenue, the land use designation for this area is appropriate. Under a Planned Residential designation, most of the adverse impacts could be mitigated, the physical character and amenities of the property could be preserved, and the development potential of the property could be realized.

AREA 11 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, NO DENSITY SPECIFIED

Area 12

The designation for this area is Single-Family - Detached at 10,000 square feet per unit. This designation and the density reflect the existing pattern of development and the platting characteristics for the area. Little Squalicum Channel passes through this area and should be protected as development occurs. Drainage in general should be of concern as this area develops.

AREA 12 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 13

The area is publicly owned and is used as the campus for the Bellingham Technical College. Parking for the school should not adversely affect the surrounding neighborhood. Access to and from the school on Eldridge Avenue is of particular concern for this area.

AREA 13 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 13A

Area 13A was annexed to Bellingham in January 2002. It is approximately 7.5 acres in size and is bounded on the north by West Illinois Street and on the east by Nome Street. Bellingham Technical College (BTC) campus is adjacent to the area on the south. The area is publicly owned and is part of the BTC campus. Currently some parking is available in the area for college students and staff. The College anticipates considerable growth in student enrollment and expanded programs and has designated Area 13A for future expansion of the campus. Development of the area will include new classrooms, parking facilities, and relocation of the primary access from Nome Street to West Illinois Street. Completion of improvement of West Illinois Street scheduled for 2010 will be required before development of the area is allowed. Drainage systems should be developed and improved with roadway improvements and building or parking lot construction. The college will be required to provide a public, non-motorized pedestrian and bicycle access across this area as a connection to Little Squalicum Creek Park.

AREA 13A LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 13B

This area was annexed to Bellingham in January 2002. It is approximately .41 acre and is located between the Bellingham Technical College main campus and Little Squalicum Creek Park. A portion of Lindberg Avenue extending from the College property to Marine Drive is part of this area. Area 13B is publicly owned and is part of the Bellingham Technical College campus. Currently, student and staff parking is located on this site. Drainage systems should be developed and improved with roadway improvements and future building or parking lot construction.

AREA 13B LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 14

This area is platted into 4,480 square foot lots north of W. Connecticut Street and 5,600 foot lots south of Nequalicum. The zoning designation for the area would allow single-family structures at 4,000 and duplexes at 4,000 square feet per unit or 8,000 square feet per structure. The density reflects the existing pattern of development.

There are currently access problems to this area. The only way in and out of Area 14 is either through the neighborhood or out Nequalicum to Eldridge Avenue. In the first case, access is through a residential area; and, in the latter case, there are problems at an intersection with sight lines and with turning left off Nequalicum Avenue. Completion of West Illinois Street between Nome Street and Marine Drive will change the traffic patterns in this area and should decrease the amount of traffic using the intersection at Nequalicum and Eldridge Avenues.

AREA 14 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 15

This area is designated as a Planned Industrial area. Squalicum Creek flows near this area and its shoreline and flood plain should be protected as development occurs. A vegetated buffer should be encouraged where the property abuts residential uses.

AREA 15 LAND USE DESIGNATION: INDUSTRIAL

Area 16

This area along Eldridge Avenue consists of established single family homes, some with good views of the bay. These views should be protected where possible. Access is a concern at the intersection of Nequalicum and Eldridge Avenue, where a sight distance problem exists. This intersection is important because it serves as an access to the Bellingham Technical College and the residential area to the east of the school.

AREA 16 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 17

This is a residential area of large, older, well kept homes built on large lots, most of which have been short platted. In some cases, two dwelling units are built on one lot of record. A designation allowing duplexes is assigned to this area in order to allow the continuation of this pattern. A special condition for this area limits access to Eldridge Avenue to one access per existing lot of record. Views of the bay should be protected as well as the integrity of adjacent shoreline and flood plain areas.

AREA 17 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 18

Area 18 is owned by the City of Bellingham. It is approximately seven acres and comprises a linear strip of property that includes a portion of the Squalicum Creek Channel. Presently this area is dominated by a second-growth deciduous riparian corridor. The dominate species in this area include Alder, Cottonwood, Big-leaf Maple, Willows, and Reed Canary-grass. The optimum use of this property is open space. The Squalicum Creek Park Master Plan states this area is to remain in its natural state.

AREA 18 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 19

Area 19 in the Birchwood Neighborhood are linear strips of properties that include the Squalicum Creek Channel. The optimum use for this area is open space; however, because a majority of the property is in private ownership it is recommended that no development be allowed to occur until the flood plain boundaries have been delineated by an ongoing study by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. For land use classification purposes this area has been designated with the same land use classification as the adjacent properties in the Columbia Neighborhood. This was done because those uses are basically more compatible with the environmentally sensitive creek bottom area than are the more intensive uses in the Birchwood Neighborhood. Access to Squalicum Parkway should be designed with maximum traffic safety in mind.

AREA 19 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 20

Area 20 is made up of two properties that are owned by the City of Bellingham for open space purposes, which includes the Squalicum Creek Channel. This area should be rezoned to a Public, Open Space zoning designation.

AREA 20 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 21

This area was annexed to the City of Bellingham in 1987 and is located adjacent to I-5. The area is made up of 2 developed parcels, consisting of 48 unit multi-family development on one parcel and a single residential unit on the other parcel.

AREA 21 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 22

This area was annexed to the City of Bellingham in 1987 and is located at the norther edge of the Birchwood Neighborhood, adjacent to I-5 to the northeast. Currently, there is a commercial auto dealership located on the entire area.

AREA 22 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL

Area 23

This is the site of the fire station serving Birchwood and surrounding neighborhoods.

AREA 23 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 24

This area comprises approximately 35 acres and is the site of Squalicum Creek Park. In 2002, the City of Bellingham purchased the property from Pacific Concrete, Inc. with Greenway Levy funds. The City was reimbursed with State grant funds in 2003 and is encumbered with a deed of right requiring perpetual use for recreation on the site. In January 2005, the Bellingham City Council approved the Squalicum Creek Park Master Plan.

Development of the site offers an excellent opportunity to meet the City's growing demand for athletic fields, trails, and open space areas. In addition to athletic fields, other recreation uses include a community pavilion, picnic shelters, children's playgrounds, off-leash dog area, basketball court, park trails, and connections to regional trails including the Coast Millennium and Bay to Baker trails.

Additional educational opportunities may be provided as part of the passive park areas

such as interpretive viewpoints, a park entry overlook near Birchwood Park, an outdoor classroom area, forest restoration areas, a backyard wildlife display area, and an integrated environmental play and education area.

AREA 24 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

As adopted by Ordinance No. 8868 and amended by Ordinance Nos. 8946, 9023, 9271 and 9491, 9686, 9772, 9991, 10490, 2000-12-094, 2001-12-088, 2004-12-087, 2005-12-105 and 2009-12-081.