

SOUTH HILL NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

I. NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

The distinctive character of Bellingham's South Hill Neighborhood is derived from its unique setting, historic buildings, and views of important natural features such as Bellingham Bay, the San Juan Islands, Mt. Baker, and surrounding foothills and communities. The South Hill Neighborhood values view protection, including maintenance, preservation and enhancement of its views outward to the water, islands, mountains and foothills.

The South Hill Neighborhood strongly supports building and site designs that complement and enhance their surroundings, especially in regard to building height and bulk. Zones within the South Hill Neighborhood should restrict building height and bulk to preserve neighborhood character, and to protect private and public views, vistas, and view corridors.

South Hill is a unique, pleasant neighborhood with several interrelated design characteristics that are appealing to the residents. The neighborhood has a number of areas with distinguishing characteristics. The Ridgeway area, south of the university on the highest elevations of the hill, has been developed since World War II. There are streets with larger lots, fewer sidewalks, more open drainage rather than curbs, and predominantly single story houses. Residential construction continues to be active in this area.

In the area below 17th Street, many of the homes were built in the early 1900's. Homes vary widely in size, architectural detail, and finish materials, and nearly all are very well kept. The presence of many trees enhances the neighborhood's pleasant character. Many yards are small, but most are well landscaped and very well kept. A large portion of the neighborhood was platted in 25-foot lots. As development often took place on multiple lots, there is no consistent streetscape rhythm. Because of the steep slopes and the age of development, much of the neighborhood is organized along the alleys, rather than principal streets. Deliveries, child play areas, and neighboring often take place in the alley.

Excellent views of Bellingham Bay, the San Juan Islands, and the Canadian coastal range mountains are widely distributed and highly valued. Views of Mt. Baker and the Olympic Mountains, while less widely distributed are equally highly valued. A number of people make regular and extensive use of sidewalks because of the varying views, well kept gardens, and nearness to the university and Fairhaven commercial area. Since the first zoning ordinance was drafted 50 years ago, South Hill has been viewed as a "first class" residential neighborhood.

The theoretical carrying capacity (population if all land is built upon) of South Hill Neighborhood under the 1967 plan is 3,440. The 1970 census listed the population of South Hill as 2,951. Based on building and demolition permits and adjusted persons per household figures, the 1977 population was projected to be 2,735. A 1980 projection is

2,750. The 1990 projected population is 2,800. The decreasing population per household is being balanced by new construction of residential units.

The 1977 housing inventory, performed by the Buildings and Code Department, tabulated 876 single family residences, 35 duplexes and triplexes, 21 multi-family structures with 4 to 8 units, 11 multi-family structures with 9 to 20 units, and 5 multi-family structures with more than 21 units.

Of the 948 structures, one is classified as being dilapidated and 26 are shown as having major deficiencies.

II. OPEN SPACE

The improvement of the Boulevard Park site represents the principal opportunity for improvement of open space and park opportunities in South Hill Neighborhood. While the facility will be designed to accommodate city wide needs, it will provide an opportunity for strolling and viewing harbor activity for the South Hill Neighborhood residents who have indicated high values for these activities.

Because walking is valued, care should be taken to improve key pedestrian routes, which connect activity nodes. Repair and completion of sidewalks, installation of curbs, street tree planting, and improvements of crosswalks are city sponsored actions which can enhance the pleasure of walking in the neighborhood. Routes identified for improvement are:

1. Taylor from the bay to the Taylor Street stairs on the east.
2. Douglas Street from 14th to 18th.
3. 10th Street right-of-way from the old Fairhaven business through to Boulevard Park and on to the Central Business District.
4. Finnegan Way, 11th Street and South State to the Boulevard Park access at 14th Street.
5. 14th Street.
6. Garden Street from 14th north to the university.
7. 18th Street and Highland Drive from Taylor to the university.

The Lowell School site is an attractive location for neighborhood activity. Additional play space, either within the present block or on the block east across 15th, would enhance the site's use for both school and neighborhood recreational use.

A number of open space opportunities for "play lot" and "neighborhood woods" play activities exist on private property in South Hill. The increased demand for residential view property is resulting in construction on a number of these lots. Construction is currently underway on two houses at Palm and Garden and two houses at Sycamore and Garden, as well as several houses along Highland Drive.

Opportunities for neighborhood sandlot recreation should be preserved. Because the pressure for development in this area is likely to continue, locations will have to be secured soon if they are to be preserved.

Lowell Park site (south of Easton at Ridgeway) is a 3.7 acre undeveloped site in the southeastern portion of South Hill Neighborhood. The under-story vegetation and small trees were cleaned from a portion of the site to discourage its use as a disposal area. Continuation of clearing and light improvement is recommended.

Cedar Park in the Sehome Neighborhood should be improved to more adequately serve as a play area for both Sehome and South Hill Neighborhoods.

COMPLETE BOULEVARD PARK, IMPROVE KEY PEDESTRIAN ROUTES, ENLARGE LOWELL SCHOOL SITE, ACQUIRE "PLAY LOTS", INCREASE MAINTENANCE OF LOWELL PARK SITE, AND PRESERVE UNIMPROVED EAST-WEST STREET RIGHTS-OF-WAY FOR VIEW OPPORTUNITY AND PEDESTRIAN ACCESS.

III. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

Storm Drainage

Long, wet winters and poorly draining soils on steep slopes aggravate drainage problems in developed portions of Bellingham's neighborhoods. Because storm sewers have been installed throughout most of the neighborhood, the problem is not as serious in South Hill as in other neighborhoods. Many narrow streets running east/west up and down the South Hill do not have curbs and, therefore, experience some drainage problems. Because most houses are on the north/south streets, there are few improvements needed on the east/west streets.

Lack of sidewalks results in pedestrians walking in the street. However, Highland Drive has open ditches, which complicates solutions to sidewalk construction. See circulation below for recommendation on improvement of Highland Drive.

Overhead Service Lines

Responses to the Resources Inventory, and discussion at the neighborhood planning meeting, indicate wide-spread interest in undergrounding the existing overhead power, telephone and TV cable lines. Because the lines that service a specific residence may not be the ones that mar a cherished view, programs to underground utilities will need to be on a wide-spread, area basis if they are to be successful.

The utility's (Puget Sound Power and Light) participation in the undergrounding of existing service lines is regulated by state tariff requirements. A significant contribution, possibly in the form of a Local Improvement District (L.I.D.) commitment, will be required of the property owners.

THE CITY SHOULD PUBLICIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES AND ORGANIZE PROPERTY OWNERS INTERESTED IN LOCAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS FOR UNDERGROUNDING OVERHEAD SERVICE UTILITIES.

Water

The upper portion of the South Hill Neighborhood, in the vicinity of Highland Drive, does not have the fire flow recommended by the Bellingham Fire Department.

A LARGER LINE ALONG HIGHLAND DRIVE OR ONE OF THE PARALLEL STREETS IS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE THE DESIRED FIRE FLOW.

Sanitary Sewer

The South Hill neighborhood is regularly subjected to sanitary sewer backups due to excessive storm water in the sewer system. The primary cause of this backup problem is street inlets connected to the sanitary sewer system. Correction of this problem will require some additions to the storm drain system in the area and connection of many of the existing inlets from sanitary sewer to storm sewer.

MAP, SOUTH HILL ARTERIAL ROUTES

IV. CIRCULATION

Arterials

Boulevard/State/11th Street serves as a major north/south primary arterial connecting the Central Business District with the southern residential neighborhoods. Average daily traffic volumes in 1977 were 13,400 vehicles near the north edge of the neighborhood and 8,300 near the south edge of the neighborhood. The 1973 Fairhaven Plan recommends realignment of the southern end of the arterial from 12th to 10th in order to route traffic around the developing historical/commercial district. The State Street arterial is fed by a neighborhood collector on 14th Street. Highland Drive, Knox Avenue and Garden Street are also neighborhood collectors.

Highland Drive requires improvement to increase safety for pedestrians. Sight lines are poor at many locations and the 18 to 22 foot widths with ditches and no sidewalks do not provide adequate safety for pedestrians.

IMPROVE HIGHLAND DRIVE SIGHT LINES AND PROVIDE UNDERGROUND DRAINAGE AS REQUIRED TO ALLOW CONSTRUCTION OF A SIDEWALK ON ONE SIDE.

Garden Street functions adequately as a neighborhood collector, except for a restriction to one lane north of 15th Street.

IMPROVE GARDEN STREET BETWEEN 14TH AND 16TH TO 25 FEET (THE WIDTH NORTH OF 16TH) FOR TWO LANES OF TRAFFIC WITH PARKING ON ONE SIDE. PROVIDE NEW RESIDENTIAL SCALE STREET LIGHTING; UNDERGROUND PARALLEL AND CROSSING UTILITIES; PLANT STREET TREES; AND REPAIR SIDEWALKS TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF STREET IMPROVEMENTS.

Residential Streets

Residential streets running along the hill generally have curbs and drainage and are of adequate, if minimal, width. Forest Street is considered too narrow, but residents expressed real concern for the loss of street trees, shortening the distance from sidewalks to houses, and the other disrupting impacts of street improvements.

Residential streets at right angles (Adams, Easton, Bennett, Taylor, etc.), are less completely developed, although they are presently being maintained by the city. Some have seriously deteriorated surfacing.

Because the major traffic flows are along the hill, rather than over the hill, and few residences face these east/west streets, improvement for auto traffic is not warranted. Drainage and pedestrian circulation problems do exist along specific rights-of-way and are addressed elsewhere in the plan.

THE RECOMMENDED RESIDENTIAL STREET STANDARDS FOR THE SOUTH HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ARE AS FOLLOWS: 24-FOOT WIDE STREETS WITH CURBS, GUTTERS, AND SIDEWALKS FOR ALL STREETS WEST OF HIGHLAND DRIVE; HIGHLAND AND STREETS TO THE EAST, THEREOF, SHOULD BE 28 FEET WIDE WITH CURBS, GUTTERS AND SIDEWALKS.

Bicycle Facilities

Bicycle recommendations are taken from the Bellingham Bicycle Facilities Plan (1978). The goals of bicycle improvements under this plan are to improve riding conditions on existing streets as commuter routes and to provide a variety of off-street, recreational and potential connector routes.

RECOMMENDATIONS AS THEY RELATE TO THE SOUTH HILL NEIGHBORHOOD ARE:

Five-Year Focus

1. STATE STREET: WIDEN NORTHBOUND CORNER AT SOUTH STATE/10TH; PAVE CORNER APPROACH ON OUTSIDE OF BUTTONS TO DECONGEST CORNER; PAVE GRAVEL PARKING STRIPS ON BOTH SIDES OF 11TH FROM CORNER TO DOUGLAS STREET TO PREVENT GRAVEL BUILD-UP ON SHOULDERS.
2. SIGN STATE/BOULEVARD BIKE LANE.
3. RE-STRIPE SHOULDERS ON "BOULEVARD" BETWEEN 14TH TO NORTH STATE TO INCLUDE BIKE LANE BETWEEN THROUGH AND RIGHT TURN LANE.

25-Year Focus

1. SOUTH BAY BIKE LINK - OLD NORTHERN PACIFIC RAILROAD SPUR (NOW BURLINGTON NORTHERN) FROM RAILROAD AVENUE/MAPLE INTERSECTION TO BOULEVARD PARK; BIKE PATH ALIGNMENT ALONG WEST EDGE OF BURLINGTON NORTHERN RAILROAD DIRECT ACCESS TO BAYVIEW RAIL CROSSING; BAYVIEW AVENUE TO 10TH STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY FROM DOUGLAS TO MILL (FAIRHAVEN NEIGHBORHOOD).
 2. NEW SOUTH HILL GRADE SUITABLE BIKE LINE TO WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY; NEW BIKE TRAIL CONSTRUCTION ALONG A FORMER LOGGING TRAIL BENEATH RIDGEWAY DORMITORIES AT WWU TO WEST COLLEGE WAY. OVERPASS OR SIGHT DISTANCE CLEANING AND CROSSING DEMARCATION AT WEST COLLEGE WAY; UTILIZE 20TH STREET TO LOWELL PARK AND NEW TRAIL CONSTRUCTION ALONG 19TH STREET RIGHT-OF-WAY TO DOUGLAS.
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MAP, SOUTH HILL LAND USE

V. SUBAREA DESCRIPTIONS AND LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Area 1

Area 1 of the South Hill Neighborhood was moved to the CBD Neighborhood Plan in 2005 – CBD area 21.

AREA 1 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SEE CBD NEIGHBORHOOD AREA 21

Area 2

This area lies between State and Boulevard and south of Cedar extended, with present uses being multi-family, single family vacant, and one restaurant. Slopes in excess of 15% exist in much of this area.

Multi-family residential development is appropriate in this area, which has fine views of Bellingham Bay, arterial street access, and close proximity to employment opportunities in the CBD and at the university.

AREA 2 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 3

The area southeast of State to Forest Lane and the property lines extending southwest from Forest Lane, between Cedar and 14th, includes single family residences, newly constructed duplexes, large older homes converted to duplexes, and a few apartments. The recommendation extends this existing use, which serves as a buffer between the higher residential densities low on the slope and the lower residential densities high on the slope.

AREA 3 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 4

Area 4 is the major land use category in the South Hill neighborhood and lies southeast of Forest Lane and east of the alley between 11th and 12th.

Views are highly valued in this neighborhood and existing views need to be protected. In three subareas - labeled 4B, 4C, and 4D - the slopes are predominantly in excess of 15% and require additional review of project proposals to insure that adverse impacts on drainage and risks to life and safety associated with hillside development will not occur.

**AREA 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, AND 4E LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL,
MEDIUM DENSITY**

Area 5

Area 5 represents tidelands between the industrial fill to the north and the existing fill being developed as Boulevard Park to the South. The tidelands belong to the State of Washington and are administered by the State Department of Natural Resources. Present policy of the D.N.R. on tideland leases is to grant them to noncommercial or non-industrial uses only if it is clear that all foreseeable needs for commercial and industrial uses can be met on other available properties. The Shoreline Management Program designation is Conservancy III.

The Coastal Zone Management Study (June 1977), done for the City of Bellingham by Kramer, Chin and Mayo, investigated the loss of marine habitat and the feasibility of using fill from scheduled maintenance dredging to create land in this area behind an impermeable bulkhead. The study did not address economic feasibility or the structural capability of the bottom soils to support a fill.

Adverse effects to marine life could be mitigated by the re-establishment of habitats similar to those, which were covered with fill. An alternative approach would be to establish a new type of habitat (e.g., artificial reef) which would increase species abundance and diversity in the general area. Potential exists for enhancement of sport fishing as water quality increases in the bay.

Access to this area, which currently does not exist, could be accomplished by extending Cornwall south of Pine on new fill outside of the existing industrial area.

AREA 5 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 6

This area is approximately 22 acres. The properties are owned by the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, and the Port of Bellingham, and consist of Boulevard Park and trails. The shoreline designation is Conservancy II.

AREA 6 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 7

This is the area southwest of 14th and generally west of the alley between 11th and 12th to 10th. Uses are predominantly multi-family apartment buildings with some single family residences on the uphill side of State. Good auto and bus access to the CBD

and the Fairhaven commercial area via the State Street arterial, nearness to Lowell School, Boulevard Park, and the potential to utilize views of Bellingham Bay, make this area suitable for apartment use.

AREA 7 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, HIGH DENSITY

Area 8

The area west of 10th to the shoreline, between Bennett and Douglas, presently contains industrial uses, which are no longer water related and represent minimal capital improvement in relation to present land values. The Shoreline Management designation is Urban I. Expansion of Chris Craft north into this area is limited by topography. Shallow tidelands and exposure to destructive winds do not make this property a likely site for water related industrial development.

The zoning designation in the Land Use and Development Code is Waterfront Commercial and the development standards of that district shall apply. However, in order to coordinate development and help assure compatibility, the zoning designation requires the planned process prior to any further development in the area. The contract shall contain appropriate mitigating measures related to the proximity of the project to waterfront, park and residential areas. Of special concern is the protection of views of the water from upland areas. New construction in Area 8 should minimize view disruption by providing view corridors and varying walls and rooflines.

Pedestrian access to and along the waterfront where appropriate, should be a design component of any site plan. The City and developer should work cooperatively in completing a pedestrian link through this area with Boulevard Park to the north and Fairhaven to the south. Vacation of rights of way may be granted in exchange for tideland amenities and/or state harbor leases, supporting upland facilities and pedestrian access where appropriate.

To avoid traffic problems, the improvement of 10th Street should be a prerequisite condition to development.

AREA 8 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL

Area 9

South of Douglas and west of the 10th Street right-of-way is the northern extension of the marine-related industrial area occupied by Uniflite in the Fairhaven Neighborhood. This area is well established as an industrial area and should remain in this use. The Shoreline Management Program designation is Urban I. Offices should be allowed as a use in areas serving as transitions to residential areas.

AREA 9 LAND USE DESIGNATION: INDUSTRIAL

Area 10

This area consists of the existing Lowell Elementary School and grounds. The Capital facilities (CF) Element of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan includes these Goals and Policies:

CFG-11: "Provide and maintain adequate public facilities and service to meet the primary service needs of the city in a manner, which protects investments in existing facilities, maximizes the use of existing facilities, and promotes orderly compact urban growth."

CFG-5: "Neighborhood schools in developed areas should be retained and new schools are located consistent with the City's commitment to infill and compact growth."

CFP-31: "The City of Bellingham and Bellingham School District should continue to work to provide consistency between the District's Capital Improvement Plan and the City's Comprehensive Plan."

Therefore, the City of Bellingham strongly encourages the Bellingham School District and School Board to:

- 1) Evaluate the qualitative factors (such as learning environment and community identity), not just quantitative, in any analysis of the future of Lowell School, and
- 2) Examine the existing demographics to ensure its accuracy and currency, and
- 3) Analyze this data, taking into account CFG-5's "neighborhood schools in developed areas should be retained... consistent with the City's commitment to infill and compact growth."

As growth occurs in Bellingham, additional schools may be needed. However, protecting the investment in neighborhood landmarks such as Lowell, and maximizing its use as a functioning Elementary School, serves to promote the City's goals of orderly compact urban growth, preserving historic buildings, and promoting dynamic neighborhoods.

AREA 10 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 11

Known as Lowell Park, this area is a relatively undeveloped city park property.

AREA 11 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 12

This area is the location of the city-owned water reservoir on the corner of Highland Drive and West College Way.

AREA 12 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 13

The 5.8 acre area bounded by Highland Drive, Knox Avenue, 20th Street and Douglas Avenue contains the headquarters facility for the International Society of Photo-Optical Engineering (S.P.I.E.), 8 single family homes and vacant lots. The area was previously designated as single-family and multi-family mixed residential.

S.P.I.E. is an educational institute with activities that include all administrative and operational functions necessary for the development of conferences and symposia as well as the publication and distribution of professional journals. No conferences are held on site.

These activities require a "think tank" atmosphere, which is compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood. In order to allow for the flexibility needed to provide for the phase expansion of the facility, assure reasonable review in developing S.P.I.E. and allow continued use of single family housing in the area, a Planned zoning designation which excludes several uses which may not be compatible with the surrounding area is proposed. Development in this area should be sympathetic in terms of scale, roofing material, height and design to the surrounding residential neighborhood. No vehicle access from Knox Avenue or Highland Drive should be allowed.

AREA 13 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

As adopted by Ordinance No. 8868 and amended by Ordinance 8946, 9733, 9752, 10202, 2000-12-094, 2003-12-085, 2004-12-087, 2005-12-106, and 2007-12-105.