

Bellingham Comprehensive Plan

Chapter 1 – Framework Goals and Policies

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BELLINGHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Chapter 1 – Framework Goals and Policies

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan reflects the long-term values and preferences held by the community. This chapter expresses those values and preferences through:

- Goals that summarize the intent of the comprehensive plan;
- Visions that describe what our community will look like in 20 years if the goals are achieved; and
- Framework policies that the City will use to achieve the goals and visions.

Many of the framework goals were developed in the landmark **Visions for Bellingham** and the **Growth Forum** community planning processes.

The **Waterfront Futures Group** developed "visions" for six planning areas along the Bellingham Bay waterfront. The vision statements are included as Framework Goals.

This chapter includes "Framework" goals and policies. More specific goals and policies can be found in the individual chapters of this plan.

PART 2

FRAMEWORK GOALS

These goals provide the basis for much of the recommendations in the various chapters of the plan.

2.1 Visions for Bellingham

The original Visions for Bellingham goal statements were developed by the over 200 "delegates" who participated in the community visioning process. The goals are divided into nine categories:

- Development Patterns and Community Character
- Transportation

- Housing
- Schools, Education, Cultural Resources
- Community Health, Welfare and Safety
- Downtown and Waterfront
- Environment and Natural Resources
- Parks and Recreation
- Economic Vitality and Employment

All the original Visions for Bellingham goal statements are included as framework goals.

Visions for Bellingham: Development Patterns and Community Character

VB 1 – Bellingham relies on distinctive neighborhoods, a vital downtown area and the community's respect for its natural setting to retain its unique identity in the 21st century.

VB 2 – Bellingham's way of accommodating growth while retaining a compact form is to emphasize infill. Private and public development decisions continue to reinforce a clear distinction and separation between urban and rural areas. Bellingham retains and strengthens its well-defined compact form and allows sufficient sites to accommodate projected growth, including some growth to the north.

VB 3 – Bellingham continues to retain its natural, green setting by protecting unique natural features and public open spaces, creating greenbelts and preserving wooded hillsides in and around the City. New development is encouraged to incorporate existing mature vegetation and additional trees and native vegetation. Open space corridors along creeks include connections from the Bay to Whatcom and Padden lakes as well as along the Squalicum and Chuckanut Creek corridors heading to the mountains. In order to preserve or create these green corridors and open spaces, the community employs a

variety of techniques, including incentives and regulations for the design and siting of new development, as well as public acquisition.

VB 4 – Because infill is a major growth strategy, Bellingham devotes considerable energy to determining how to accommodate growth in existing neighborhoods in a manner that complements neighborhood character and builds on the pattern of planned park and open space systems. *(NOTE: Other goals and policies related to development patterns and community and neighborhood character are listed in both the Land Use and Community Design chapters.)*

VB 5 – A large number of historic structures remain, providing a sense of place and history for existing and future citizens. Incentives assist in retaining and restoring historic structures and encouraging new development, which is complementary in terms of architectural style and scale. These incentives may include property tax breaks, zoning and building code flexibility for adaptive uses, and density or other bonuses that encourage good design.

VB 6 – The character of individual neighborhoods is enhanced through flexible design standards and incentives that ensure compatibility as existing neighborhoods receive infill development and new neighborhoods are formed.

VB 7 – Where entire new neighborhoods are formed, development incorporates a system of connected park and open space corridors and human-scale arrangements of mixed housing types.

VB 8 – The community recognizes Bellingham Bay as a finite and valued resource. All new waterfront uses emphasize water-related activities, provide access to and along the waterfront, and respect views from other parts of the community to the water. The waterfront remains a working waterfront, reflecting its industrial heritage, including fishing, forest products and its role as an operating port. *(NOTE: The ideas in VB 8 were revised and updated by the Waterfront Futures Group's planning process in 2004-05. See pages F-10 to F-13 of this chapter and the WFG Guiding Principles beginning on F-21.)*

VB 9 – Downtown Bellingham retains its role as the community's center through preservation and increased use of its fine historic buildings. Professional offices; government services; cultural, art and entertainment facilities; support services; retail uses; and higher density housing combine to create the complex mix that is downtown. Access to these features is supported by an integrated parking and alternative transportation system that is responsive to its users. New development adds to the existing building stock, complementing it in scale and quality. Public buildings set a standard of design quality that positively contributes to the community. *(NOTE: The statements in VB 9 were modified and updated in the City Center Master Plan.)*

VB 10 – Bellingham retains a regional retail center in the vicinity of the intersection of the Guide Meridian and I-5 corridors, complemented by increasingly diverse specialty retail in downtown and Fairhaven, and community and neighborhood commercial services in dispersed locations. *(NOTE: The statements in VB 10 were modified and updated by the new Community Growth Forum policy recommendations in this chapter and by the City Center Master Plan.)*

VB 11 – Bellingham maximizes the contributions of Western Washington University to the community. City coordination with University representatives ensures that the impacts of the University's ongoing programs and development are consistent with the goals of the community as a whole.

VB 12 – Development patterns in Bellingham's urban fringe reflect the cooperation of the City, County and public to assure an orderly and compatible transitions from rural to urban uses in the fringe areas surrounding Bellingham. The impacts of increased urbanization on existing residential areas are mitigated through the use of vegetative buffers, adequate open space, design and performance standards. *(NOTE: The goals in VB 12 are modified and updated by the UGA policies in the Land Use Chapter of this plan, Section L.)*

VB 13 – Bellingham's increasingly diverse citizenry continues to take an active part in, and is aware of, land use and other decision making processes through a variety of means, including effective notification procedures, neighborhood

meetings with developers prior to project review, and actively involved neighborhood and community groups. *(NOTE: Additional public participation policies and strategies are in the Growth Forum recommendations #1 to #11 of this chapter (pages F-15 to F-16) and in the Land Use Chapter)*

**Visions for Bellingham:
Transportation**

Other transportation goals and policies are listed in Chapter 3, Transportation

VB 14 – Whatcom Transit Authority’s route enhancements reflect Bellingham’s commitment to adjust to changing transportation needs, and to utilize public transportation to improve air quality, to decrease parking demand, and to reduce reliance on the use of the automobile. Route enhancements may include enhanced service hours, shuttles from outlying areas to downtown and Bellis Fair, a downtown area bus providing both internal circulation and access to parking, and the use of innovative or historic vehicles in downtown and Fairhaven.

VB 15 – Both pedestrian and bicycle facilities connect living, working and recreational areas throughout the town. New development is designed to be pedestrian friendly. Walking is made easier by requirements for street trees and separated sidewalks on all new or reconstructed arterials except where existing mature vegetation or terrain suggest otherwise. Bicycling as a form of recreation and bicycling as a form of transportation flourishes, using facilities that are well lit and are built and maintained to allow year-round, all-weather use, and allow safe on and off-street travel.

VB 16 – Bellingham continues to recognize the need for an efficient arterial system, which minimizes through traffic on local residential streets. Transportation grant applications and local transportation funding priorities address capacities on arterials, the I-5 overpasses, and the Interstate between Bill McDonald Parkway and West Bakerview. *(NOTE: The direction in VB 16 has been modified and updated by the new goals and policies in the Transportation Chapter.)*

VB 17 – Development patterns that encourage walking, biking and transit use are fostered through incentives and zoning regulations, including provisions for developments that allow people to live within walking distance of shopping and employment. These provisions may encourage small scale neighborhood centers as well as cottage industry or home occupations.

VB 18 – Bellingham’s transportation network is consistent with its position as a cultural and economic center, with particular emphasis on fixed or light rail access connecting Seattle, Bellingham and Vancouver; ferry service to the San Juan Islands, British Columbia and Alaska; and continued use of our waterfront for water transportation.

**Visions for Bellingham:
Economic Vitality and Employment**

VB 19 – Bellingham’s employment base combines public and private resources to increase economic diversity emphasizing renewable resources, clean and quiet industry, higher paying family wage jobs, small business, and home-based cottage industries.

VB 20 – Bellingham’s economy builds on the educational research, teaching facilities and technical resources provided by Western Washington University, as well as building on the community and technical college resources.

VB 21 – Bellingham’s port and its marine and water-related industries reflect the City’s commitment to a working waterfront that retains space for public access and recreation. *(NOTE: See the Waterfront Futures Group’s Vision Statements (page F-10) and Guiding Principles (F-21) for additional goals and policies related to Bellingham’s marine waterfront.)*

VB 22 – Bellingham’s arts community thrives as incubator facilities for the arts are developed, contributing to the City’s attraction as a cultural center.

VB 23 – The community recognizes that economic vitality and employment for all its citizens requires an increased commitment to education and training, and a service support system that stresses affordable, quality childcare.

VB 24 – Bellingham’s private and public sectors work together to build on its locational advantage, resulting in increased and improved trade with Canada and the Pacific Rim. While retail sales to southern B.C. continue at a healthy rate, they are outstripped by growth in other economic sectors more conducive to family wage jobs.

***Visions for Bellingham:
Housing***

Additional housing goals and policies are found in Housing, Chapter 4.

VB 25 – Bellingham’s regulations encourage and provide incentives for innovative housing and mixtures of housing types that preserve natural resources and consolidate open space.

VB 26 – Increased housing density and infill exists in the downtown area and in other parts of the community that are appropriate for small lots or higher density housing, reflecting a variety of housing costs.

VB 27 – Density bonuses for well-designed housing that complements existing neighborhood integrity supplement new opportunities for mother-in-law apartments and duplex or triplex options, subject to design review standards and neighborhood input.

VB 28 – Rehabilitation and housing financing programs support the maintenance of older/historic housing, including programs to assist low-income households to stay in their homes.

VB 29 – Increases in the supply of housing for low income households result from assistance and support to private non-profit groups and other organizations such as the Housing Authority and Opportunity Council, and from inclusionary provisions that require a range of housing prices in new developments.

VB 30 – On-going efforts to address housing affordability for all citizens include continued streamlining of the regulatory review and building permit process, and reviewing costs of infrastructure improvements and their impact on housing costs.

***Visions for Bellingham:
Schools, Education and Cultural
Resources***

VB 31 – Bellingham emphasizes ongoing interaction and exchange between citizens, educational institutions and students, including community use of school facilities, and information sharing and communication among educational institutions, government and business.

VB 32 – To promote economic diversification and achieve full employment, Bellingham’s educational institutions increase opportunities for adult education and job training, and the community assists in this process through internships and other on-the-job training opportunities

VB 33 – The community supports the highest possible educational quality for its children, including a curriculum that fosters innovative ways of learning, and preparation for life in the 21st century.

VB 34 – The City and school district obtain a significant contribution from the private sector for new residential development to augment the school district’s financial resources and meet new enrollment demands.

VB 35 – Neighborhood schools in developed areas are retained and new schools are located consistent with the City’s commitment to infill and compact growth.

VB 36 – Bellingham honors and supports ethnic and cultural diversity through community education and expanded cultural events, and opportunities to participate for all segments of the population.

VB 37 – The community is enriched by support of downtown arts activities, a fully restored and maintained Mt. Baker Theater, an expanded Whatcom Museum of History and Art, a library serving contemporary needs, and a full range of cultural events

**Visions for Bellingham:
Community Health, Welfare and Safety**

VB 38 – Bellingham’s commitment to trained professionals in both police and fire departments contributes to an ongoing sense of security and safety in the community.

VB 39 – Transit riders enjoy an increased sense of security and safety on the enhanced transit system.

VB 40 – Bellingham students and the community continue to benefit from programs aimed at drug and gang intervention.

VB 41 – City officials, Burlington Northern Railroad, and Georgia Pacific worked together to eliminate the threat of chlorine and other toxic chemical spills in the community.

VB 42 – Residents benefit from access to quality health and child care through programs supported by public and private resources and keyed to households’ economic resources.

VB 43 – Citizens who require social services that address homelessness, abuse and a range of disabilities can find the services they need in Bellingham.

VB 44 – Bellingham is characterized by clean air and water and low levels of noise pollution. Particular attention is paid to noise pollution from the I-5 corridor, the airport noise impact area, and the waterfront industrial area.

VB 45 – Bellingham reduces noise pollution and increases air quality by reducing its reliance on the automobile and promoting walking, bicycling and other modes of transportation.

VB 46 – Bellingham’s water quality is improved through the pursuit of goals expressed in the Joint Lake Whatcom Watershed Agreement with the County and Water District #10, and through continued efforts to control stormwater quantity and quality. *(NOTE: Goal VB 46 is modified and updated by new Lake Whatcom goals in this chapter and policies in the Land Use Chapter, Section N.)*

**Visions for Bellingham:
Downtown and Waterfront**

Some of the goals listed here have been modified by the City Center Master Plan and the Waterfront Futures Group’s Vision and Framework Plan.

VB 47 – Downtown, including the Central Business District, Civic Center and Cultural District is the heart of the community as evidenced by new development in the form of major new office uses, higher density housing that is well-designed and reflects a variety of housing costs, and related goods and services to support those uses.

VB 48 – Downtown’s role as a cultural center has expanded due to the influence of arts activities and the resulting expansion of the arts community in the downtown area.

VB 49 – Height restrictions for downtown address the relationship of new development to historic structures and to retaining view corridors.

VB 50 – Pedestrians enjoy improvements downtown that reduce or eliminate cars on some streets or alleys, and provide space for public gatherings, such as a public square.

VB 51 – Parking improvements downtown emphasize support for downtown redevelopment, are pedestrian friendly, flexible, and adaptive to changing regional transportation technologies and patterns. Improvements may include satellite parking.

VB 52 – Public access to downtown and to and along the waterfront and creek corridors is a strong component in Bellingham. Access points connect to the Bay at strategic points stretching from Fairhaven to Squalicum Beach. Public docks and former railroad trestles are key elements in this public access system, as is preservation of all remaining natural shorelines and beaches.

VB 53 – Linkages between downtown and the waterfront connect the Central Business District with the Bay and provide a safe walkway along Whatcom Creek between the Bay and Lake Whatcom.

VB 54 – Mixed-use development on the waterfront has allowed for a mix of water dependent uses and residential, recreational, professional, commercial and industrial uses. This marks a change from the previous pattern of primarily heavy industrial uses, though Bellingham Bay remains a working waterfront, both in Fairhaven and in the downtown area.

VB 55 – City and Port of Bellingham officials have found ways to improve access to the waterfront from the downtown area and to provide for public access along the waterfront without jeopardizing the safe operation of the nearby waterfront and light industrial uses.

VB 56 – A significant increase in the number of bicycle commutes into the central downtown area reduces the need for new parking spaces while decreasing the congestion, noise and pollution caused by motorized traffic. Lower levels of motor-driven traffic (and a lessened need for parking) frees up street areas for open green spaces, creative commercial activities and cultural events that are increasingly attracting people to the downtown and waterfront area. *(NOTE: Goal VB 56 is modified by the visions and guiding principles developed in the Waterfront Futures Group's planning process (see page F-10 and F-21).*

**Visions for Bellingham:
Environment and Natural Resources**

Note: See also the Environment Chapter for more goals and policies related to the environment.

VB 57 – Citizens and property owners join forces to protect the quality of Lake Whatcom, its watershed, the City's other lakes and creeks and Bellingham Bay. Through community education, regulation, performance based development standards, and public and private cooperation, the community as a whole supports protection of these natural resources as a priority.

VB 58 – Tree preservation and replanting efforts have been combined with interests in preserving views. Greenery is retained on the hillsides and throughout the City while creating "windows" and view corridors for area residents.

VB 59 – Undisturbed natural areas allow habitat for fish and wildlife, provide connections within greenway corridors and protect steep slopes and sensitive areas. Greenways in Bellingham connect with similar corridors in the urban fringe. Mechanisms to retain these open areas range from public acquisition to clustering development on adjacent portions of sites, and from regulatory requirements to regulatory incentives.

**Visions for Bellingham:
Parks and Recreation**

Note: See also the Parks, Recreation and Open Space chapter for additional goals and policies.

VB 60 – Developed parks and trails are integrated into the City's open space system. Acquisition and development of park sites that adequately serve both existing and newly developing neighborhoods are accomplished in part through developer contributions.

VB 61 – Design and location of parks and recreation facilities recognize the demand for indoor as well as outdoor activities and the need for facilities that serve teenagers as well as younger children, including a possible indoor swimming pool. Parks are safe and well maintained, and where appropriate include lighting for evening recreation. Playgrounds and parks are available in all neighborhoods.

PART 3 **FRAMEWORK GOALS –
WATERFRONT FUTURES
GROUP "VISION
STATEMENTS"**

The WFG's "visions" for the six character areas along Bellingham's waterfront are included here.

The Waterfront Futures Group (WFG) planning process resulted in the development of "visions" for the six character areas located on the Bellingham Bay waterfront. The visions are included here. The policies or "Guiding Principles" intended to achieve the visions are adopted as part of this plan.

WFG AREA 1**Little Squalicum**

The vision for Little Squalicum restores the natural beach and habitat, and preserves the largely deciduous tree-covered bluff and its connection to the landscape of the Nooksack River delta. Public access along the beach will be limited in favor of habitat restoration. Access to the beach will be improved with trails that traverse the slope, connecting the beach with the bluff trail and connecting pedestrians to transit stops and parking along Marine Drive. The existing cement plant will be accommodated as long as it continues to operate, but new heavy industrial uses will be precluded. When the cement plant ceases operation, the 50-acre site should be master planned for a mixture of uses, including light industrial, research and institutional uses. Existing landmark industrial buildings should be adaptively reused where possible, and the existing landmark smoke stack should be preserved. The emphasis should be on habitat restoration and enhancement rather than human use along the beach and bluff in Little Squalicum. Future development should be limited to the top of the bluff and be compatible in scale and density with surrounding residential development in the area.

WFG AREA 2**Squalicum**

Squalicum is a place that supports industry, working boats and pleasure craft, along with places to walk, sit and enjoy water views. The vision for Squalicum builds upon and reinforces this character. Water-related industrial uses will continue around the Squalicum Waterway, and marina-related activities will continue to be predominate around the inner and outer harbor. Over time, maritime uses will be diversified and the existing parking and marina support-area will gradually transition to a mixture of light industrial, commercial and residential uses. The Bellwether Peninsula will be further developed with retail and visitor support services along with some housing. Marine habitat will be recreated at the mouth of Squalicum Creek, and along existing marina breakwaters. Public access to the water and

around Squalicum will be enhanced with improved trails, new viewpoints and improved transit. Squalicum will be a diverse center of maritime activity, and a place that welcomes residents, workers and visitors alike.

WFG AREA 3**City Center**

The vision for the city center waterfront calls for the creation of a mixed-use neighborhood that combines commercial, institutional, educational, retail services and residential uses, and that over time will provide many new job opportunities and a substantial amount of urban housing. It will be a neighborhood that complements the existing central business district. The neighborhood will provide a place where people can live, work, study and spend their leisure time without relying on vehicular transportation, while offering a healthy and sustainable relationship between the city and the Bay.

The existing aeration stabilization basin will be cleaned and opened up to accommodate either a new marina or new marine habitat combined with stormwater treatment, or some combination of those uses. When the adjacent tissue warehouse closes, the building will be adapted to accommodate a combination of public uses with links to Old Town.

Deep-water moorage will be maintained in the Whatcom Waterway and marine-related commerce will continue on both the I & J and Whatcom Waterways. The waterways will retain sufficient depth to support existing and planned shoreside uses. Public access will be provided throughout the area, with a network of walkways connecting new public spaces and regional trails. Transient moorage will be provided on both sides of the Whatcom Creek Waterway while avoiding critical habitat areas. Habitat enhancement will be a condition of this new transient moorage provision. New transit routes will serve the area and public docks will accommodate multiple modes of water transportation.

New facilities for Western Washington University and other educational institutions will be located in the Center City area with new transportation linkages to the main WWU campus. The Cornwall

Avenue landfill site will be improved including open space and pedestrian spaces along the waters edge connected by an over-water trail to Boulevard Park. Mixed-use development on the adjacent uplands could include a terrarium and a Native American facility.

To realize this vision, the Georgia Pacific property should be acquired and held in public ownership as it is planned and developed over time. Infrastructure and public amenities to support development should be constructed, and development should be phased and coordinated by a public renewal authority or by other tools that ensure public accountability while avoiding excess bureaucracy.

WFG AREA 4	South Hill and Boulevard
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The South Hill and Boulevard waterfront will continue to be an area of open space, transportation connections and enhanced habitat and recreation. The vision for the area seeks to build upon and enhance these qualities. Connections between Fairhaven and the City Center will be reinforced with trail and transit improvements, including an over-water walkway between Boulevard Park and the Taylor Avenue Dock. Upland connections over the railroad and to the water will also be improved, and woodland vegetation on the hillside will be preserved. Beaches will be improved and hardened shorelines will be softened, while marine habitat will be enhanced wherever possible.

WFG AREA 5	Fairhaven
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The vision for Fairhaven extends the pedestrian scale and character of the Fairhaven business district to the water. The existing mixture of maritime activities and transportation facilities across the tracks in the vicinity of the cruise terminal will remain, but the area between there and the business district will develop with a mixture of uses that will be more pedestrian-oriented, and will include improved pathways and connections to regional trails. The existing light industrial area east of Padden Creek Lagoon will be developed in a similar fashion, with a mixture of light industrial, commercial and residential

uses.

Small boat launching, kayak landing, and docking for multiple modes of water transportation will continue to be accommodated in Fairhaven, and good vehicular access to the transportation terminals will be maintained. Water flow in the lagoon will be improved, habitat will be enhanced and public access around the lagoon and up Padden Creek will be provided. The shoreline along Marine Park will be enhanced as marine habitat and eventually a safe water-level trail will be constructed through Fairhaven to connect to the Chuckanut and Edgemoor shoreline.

WFG AREA 6	Chuckanut and Edgemoor
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The vision for Chuckanut and Edgemoor is one that emphasizes conservation and public access. The rugged shoreline and tidelands will remain accessible only by water or on foot. Eventually a safe water-grade trail is envisioned that will connect to both Fairhaven and the Coast Millennium Trail near Woodstock Farm. Woodstock Farm will become a new city park, and the railroad causeway across Chuckanut Bay will be perforated to improve water flow and allow for marine habitat enhancement. Kayak and other hand-carry landings will give boaters access to various points along the shoreline.

PART 4	Other Framework Goals
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The following goal statements were included in the 1995 and 2006 versions of this plan. They are included here as "Framework Planning Goals" because of their importance.

FPG-1 Industrial and commercial growth providing family-wage jobs occurs in locations where site characteristics are amenable, and where needed services are available or can be feasibly provided by private and/or public means.

FPG-2 Bellingham's increasingly diversified economy results in a tax base for the City and associated taxing districts (such as the Bellingham School District) capable of supporting needed public facilities and services.

FPG-3 Economic vitality is essential in achieving other comprehensive plan goals. Promoting employment diversity and improving wage levels relative to state and national averages are among the highest priority City goals.

PART 5 **Framework Goals – Lake Whatcom Reservoir**

See additional Lake Whatcom goals and policies in the Environment Chapter

FGLW – 1 Protect the quality of the water in the Lake Whatcom Reservoir to ensure long-term sustainability of the Lake as a drinking water reservoir.

FGLW – 2 Reduce the development potential in the Lake Whatcom Reservoir Watershed.

PART 6 **FRAMEWORK POLICIES**

This section explains the source, purpose and intent of the framework policies.

To be effective, the goals and vision in the plan must be translated into policies and actions. The Framework Policies in this section are the overarching statements that express the core concepts on which this comprehensive plan is based. Together with the policies in the individual chapters, the framework policies set the direction for how the plan should be implemented. The difference is that the policies in the various chapters of the plan are more detailed, specifically describing potential methods of accomplishing the vision.

The framework policies come primarily from three sources:

- County-wide Planning Policies
- Community Growth Forum Report
- Waterfront Futures Group's Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan

The **Whatcom County-wide Planning Policies** were used in the process to update the comprehensive plan. Urban counties

and cities are required under the GMA to have CWPPs. The policies address many of the GMA goals by providing for regional cooperation on a variety of planning and development issues. The policies also provided the basis for the 1997 City/County interlocal agreement that governs annexation and development in Bellingham's urban growth area.

The CWPPs were originally adopted in 1993 and then updated in 1997 and 2005. The 2005 amendments reinforce existing comprehensive plan goals to encourage urban levels of development in cities and their UGAs and discourage urban development in rural areas. Policy language encouraging regional coordination on land use and infrastructure issues was also strengthened in the 2005 amendments. The City and County should continue to work together to update the CWPPs as necessary.

Policy recommendations from the 2004 **Community Growth Forum** are listed in Section 6.1, identifiable by the letters "GF".

Policies or "Guiding Principles" developed in the 2003-04 **Waterfront Futures Group** planning process are listed in Section 6.2.

PART 6.1 **2004 COMMUNITY GROWTH FORUM**

Policy recommendations from the 2004 Community Growth Forum final report are included here. The actual policy language is listed as an action step in bold text. The text that follows each action step is not policy, but rather an explanation of the recommended step.

In 2004, the policy recommendations or implementation steps from the Community Growth Forum final report were designated as the official "infill strategy" of the City. These policies have become the foundation for much of the recommendations in this plan. Therefore it is appropriate to include them as part of the "Framework" section of the plan. These policies are carried over from the 2006 comprehensive plan.

A number of points should be kept in mind with respect to the Growth Forum policy recommendations listed here:

1. The location of the proposed urban villages in the GF report are preliminary. While some of the village locations are known (Barkley Village for example), many of the recommended sites represent the “best guess” of the consultant and the participants at this point in time. Factors such as land availability, property ownership and interest, transportation patterns, market demand, neighborhood acceptance and others will help determine appropriate locations for many of the proposed urban villages. Master planning for the villages (with neighborhood participation) will help determine final locations. See the Land Use Chapter, Figure 1, map of the proposed urban village locations.
2. Development Intensity (number of dwelling units, size of commercial and office uses) listed in the GF report are estimates. Actual buildout figures will vary greatly from village to village. There is no way to predict with any certainty at this point in time how many dwelling units will be developed in the “Ohio Street” urban village for example. Again, master planning the villages will help determine eventual buildout.
3. The GF policy recommendations listed here are a long-term strategy for accommodating growth through appropriate infill development in the city. While some of the proposed villages may begin to develop in the next few years (the central waterfront and Old Town areas for example), most are years away. This is due to fragmented property ownerships, market demand forces, zoning issues, and master planning requirements that will take years to resolve. Our experience with other community development projects shows that areas like Ohio Street or the smaller “pocket” villages proposed in existing neighborhoods have property ownership, zoning and master planning issues that will take significant time and staff resources to address.

Community Growth Forum Policy Recommendations - Building Community: Encouraging Civic Wellness

The Community Growth Forum policy recommendations identify important actions that the city should take to address GMA and local goals regarding growth management, promoting infill, and discouraging sprawl. See the Land Use Chapter 2 for more information on the Growth Forum and master planning for urban villages.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 1: Allocate and design urban villages, rewriting neighborhood plans as necessary – Representatives from neighborhood associations have been asking for updated neighborhood plans. This implementation step, a critical one, will cast neighborhood planning in a new light, concentrating on the functions of urban neighborhoods rather than on planning solely within district boundaries.

Note: Since the GF policies were adopted in the 2006 comprehensive plan, the City has completed master planning processes for three urban villages – Old Town, Samish Way and the Fountain District. Master planning for two other urban villages is underway – the Waterfront District and King Mt.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 2: Adopt policies reinforcing citizen participation and “informed consent” in planning – Bellingham residents appreciated their involvement in the growth forum process and called for more processes like this one when the City considers significant land use policy issues.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 3: Reinforce transparency and accountability in civic decision making – Part of rebuilding resident confidence will be configuring the public process to allow complete transparency in how decisions are considered and made.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 4: Reformat planning documents to inform budgeting decisions – Increasingly, public agency budgets are becoming policy tools, directing investment to promote certain objectives. Formatting land use documents such as neighborhood plans to help inform policy-based budgeting will also help determine work programs for agency staff.

GF Strategy, Action Step 5: Conduct periodic community exercises in controversial areas – Increased public participation can make the planning process much more effective, allowing diverse points of view to influence the process and helping ensure local commitment to implementation.

GF Strategy, Action Step 6: Continue and expand neighborhood communication efforts – Bellingham's neighborhood associations are effective and vocal, representing neighborhood viewpoints in the arena of City policy. They should continue to be involved in planning processes, though the boundaries of each neighborhood should be reevaluated to ensure they make sense as planning area boundaries.

GF Strategy, Action Step 7: Evaluate the progress of infill planning and development – Though the direction may be established in the comprehensive plan, the City should make a concerted effort to monitor its progress in achieving infill objectives.

GF Strategy, Action Step 8: Establish neighborhood incentive programs to encourage support for infill – These types of programs may include raising the priority of capital improvement projects, such as street reconstruction, parks enhancement or water system upgrades, in those neighborhoods accepting increased intensity.

GF Strategy, Action Step 9: Reinforce institutional networks in neighborhoods – Schools, churches, community centers and the like are very, very important to neighborhood wellness. Policies should facilitate development of institutional capacity for neighborhoods, particularly where neighborhood populations are increasing.

GF Strategy, Action Step 10: Contract for neighborhood amenities to make greater intensity succeed – In conjunction with elevating priorities for capital improvements, the City and County may also wish to consider entering into contracts with neighborhoods to articulate commitments and expectations, and to identify other service providers who will need to

be involved in the area's future development.

GF Strategy, Action Step 11: Support public and private efforts to build homes people can afford. – Strong communities and healthy neighborhoods have a balanced mix of homes people can afford, in sync with the wages and incomes in the community. Reaching this ambitious but achievable goal can involve collaborative efforts of neighborhoods, nonprofit organizations, for-profit builders and local governments, each contributing to create and implement a strategy that keeps neighborhoods desirable, walkable, with a mix of homes affordable at the wages of nearby jobs. The entire community benefits when everyone has a home they can afford, at an urban location that allows them not to drive so much, putting the time and money they save into family, friends and community betterment.

**Community Growth Forum Policy
Recommendations - Design and
Development Control: Empowering the
Process**

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 12: Support staff development to enrich design and technical development skills – The agencies may wish to invest in bolstering staff's knowledge of land development, and staff's understanding of the costs and capabilities of different design or development approaches. This will enable staff to discuss development and design options with applicants at a technical level, perhaps resulting in improved project concepts and designs.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 13: Establish design guidelines for areas that are particularly sensitive and for development types that are particularly controversial – Design guidelines, if written well, can go a long way to establish and enforce design expectations. The City is now preparing revisions to residential development standards. Additional guidelines, impacting certain types of commercial development (like "big box" retailers) or addressing urban villages (like Fairhaven) may also be helpful.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 14: Reinforce staff's ability to insist on high-quality design from project applicants

– The community repeatedly mentioned its frustration with the appearance of new development projects, and staff responded that they were powerless to influence project design. Part of the skepticism expressed by community members was this control gap, where their expectations over what projects should look like were unable to be realized because staff had no ability to intervene in project design. Empowering staff to get involved in design discussions will involve staff training, design guidelines, and the political support of staff recommendations. The community did not necessarily support this policy recommendation, speaking to its doubt that staff could be particularly effective in this role. The City and County may, nonetheless, wish to implement this policy, equipping staff with the knowledge, mission and accountability to discuss design and have design recommendations backed up.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 15: Include commercial or institutional uses in or near new large multi-family projects

– A consistent community complaint throughout this process has been the development of large-scale multi-family housing projects and their impact on surrounding neighborhoods. Infill strategies rely on higher-density housing, but it is clear that the high-density housing types used in the past will not work as part of future infilling efforts. Mixing uses is crucial to successful infill development, and the addition of residential units above first-floor retail in commercial areas is well understood and accepted as one approach. This recommendation encourages including small-scale commercial or institutional uses within multi-family projects, giving residents convenient access to services and increasing the dimension of activity in housing areas. This policy recommendation received mixed support from participants at the policy workshop, indicating some skepticism of its ability to succeed. As an alternative, the City may wish to establish guidelines for land uses in urban villages, ensuring that residential developments front directly on public streets and are located within a

five-minute walk from commercial or institutional projects.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 16: Review zoning provisions to empower design review and permit increased residential density

– Intensification relies on compact development, and compactness relies on proximity. This closeness requires great care in design to ensure that potential negative impacts are identified and mitigated early in the process. This recommendation suggests that projects that make it through a design review process be awarded higher development intensity than those that do not.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 17: Conduct design-related Planning Commission/City Council/County Council workshops

– It may take design savvy to manage a development review process that is as design-intensive as this one could be. Planning commissioners and elected officials may wish to brush up on their design skills, particularly in the context of urban design, landscape architecture and architecture.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 18: Refine regulatory priorities and elevate design and form considerations to the level of land use considerations

– Land Use authorities generally do not regulate the aesthetics of development. When they are regulated, they usually focus on building design and not on urban design. While building design is a component of urban design, regulating building design alone will in no way promise an attractive and functional urban environment. This recommendation suggests that the City and County look at development in terms of its impact on the urban form and not on just its building design or proposed use.

Community Growth Forum Policy Recommendations - Interorganizational Coordination: Cementing Aspirations

People are concerned that Bellingham's unilateral acceptance of infill could be a bad idea if Whatcom County continues to allow development in the rural areas. The success of increased density within City limits relies heavily on the

County's willingness to stem rural population growth. If large-lot, unincorporated development continues, traffic congestion, parking demand and the dispersion of economic activity away from the center will denude the City's attractiveness and quality of life.

NOTE: Action Steps 19 – 26 will be addressed in the Urban Fringe Plan Update process and the corresponding update to the city/county interlocal agreement governing annexation and development in Bellingham's UGA.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 19: Adopt interlocal agreements between the City and County managing rural development – This is an important step, outlining each agency's role, expectations and commitments in supporting an infill strategy.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 20: Establish strong, clear policies guiding UGA revisions – Bellingham's population will probably continue to grow, and there will be future requests to expand the urban growth area to help accommodate it. The City and the County should develop clear policies to ensure that the land included within the urban growth area is land that is developable to urban levels of density and that the size of the UGA is entirely consistent with the infill strategies the comprehensive plan adopts. The size of the urban growth area may also vary from its current configuration, but only in a way that allows the City and County to further their objective to provide a more compact urban form.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 21: Enhance communications (COB, WC, WTA) – both formal and informal – between agency legislators, planning commissions and staffs – Interagency communication is an important part of attaining mutual goals. The City, County and WTA may wish to sponsor retreats, interagency lunches, an infill newsletter or other vehicle to keep staff and leadership aligned and aware of the cooperative mission.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 22: Review the transfer of development rights (TDR) program in terms of incentives, penalties, sending areas and receiving areas – The County has implemented a TDR program designed to

alleviate development pressure in the Lake Whatcom watershed. It may be time to expand that program, alleviating pressure to develop in the rural countryside and encouraging the transfer of development intensity to areas designated as urban villages in the UGA or within the city limits. The City and County may wish to explore making TDR credits a mandatory component to permit increased density within urban villages, similar to the County's current program for provisional density increased in designated TDR receiving areas.

NOTE: The City has taken a number of steps to promote the use of TDRs:

1. Density bonuses for transferring development rights were established in the Old Town, Samish Way and Fountain District urban village master plans.

2. A purchase of development rights program was adopted in 2009. This allows property owners in designated receiving zones to purchase additional residential density by paying a fee to the City. Funds collected in this program are used to purchase additional land and/or development rights in the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

The City has annexed several areas of the UGA that were designated TDR receiving zones by Whatcom County.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 23: Annually review agency comprehensive and strategic plans for consistency – This is something that is already being performed by the City and County, but this recommendation suggests that the review be interagency in nature, ensuring each agency is operating cooperatively with the others.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 24: Consider new fiscal policies to ensure equity in sales and property tax disbursements relating to annexation and improvement districts – Community members expressed concern about the costs of providing services for infill development. This recommendation begins to address that, suggesting the County and City consider apportioning the costs of new development fairly, and that they consider apportioning the property tax and sales tax revenues resulting from annexation in a way that encourages a logical and equitable transfer of jurisdiction.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 25: Consider the application of impact fees as areas develop and/or annex – Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham already charge impact fees, but they may not accurately reflect the true cost of development, particularly when that development occurs beyond the current UGA. The County should continue to reassess its impact fee policies to make sure new development outside the UGA pays the true cost of its impact to regional road systems, including the impact to the transportation system within the City of Bellingham.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 26: Solicit agency comments on all development applications within mutual areas of interest –

This recommendation suggests that any development application within the UGA be circulated to the City and WTA for comment, and that any development within the City above an intensity threshold (yet to be defined) be circulated to the County and WTA for comment. This is probably now being done as part of the SEPA process, but, under this recommendation, agency comments could be made concerning issues other than environmental impact.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 27: Define and invest in high-intensity transit corridors –

Land use and transportation are interdependent systems. This recommendation recognizes that land use patterns and investment in transportation infrastructure influence each other and suggests that the City, County and WTA work together to reinforce high-intensity transit corridors by coordinating public investment and land use policy. This particular policy recommendation received a large amount of support in the Forum's policy workshop, indicating the community's desire to see public transportation fill a much more important role in shaping Bellingham's urban pattern.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 28: Target public investment to improve roads in a manner consistent with infill objectives –

Increasing roadway capacity does not solve traffic congestion problems. It merely prolongs them. While the City and the County will continue to need to make roadway

improvements, they may wish to design them and prioritize them in a way that furthers infill objectives. This may include providing additional bicycle lanes, reducing the number of travel lanes on underused roadways, increasing the number of crossings over I-5, and improving sidewalks and trails and other similar types of improvements that act to put less emphasis on car drivers and more on pedestrians, bicyclists and riders of public transportation. It might be perfectly acceptable in an infill strategy to tolerate level of service "F" conditions for roadways leading into and out of the city. Roadway improvement money should be spent on making infill work better and not on helping people live and commute beyond the UGA.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 29: Study the use of tax exemptions and deferrals to encourage infill-type projects –

Bellingham adopted a multi-family tax credit to encourage development of residential units in the CBD. It is working. This recommendation suggests that similar efforts be employed in other areas where infill is sought.

GF Infill Strategy, Action Step 30: Provide parks, monuments, schools and other public facilities to make higher density living attractive –

Institutional facilities enrich urban lifestyles, and they are critical in maintaining the quality of life Bellingham and Whatcom County residents value. As development density increases, however, the availability of land for these types of facilities will decrease, making coordination between the various providers and the City/County very important. The City and County should strengthen their relationships with the Bellingham, Meridian and Mt. Baker school districts and develop relationships with other institutional organizations to help the community facilities fabric keep pace with the development of urban villages.

PART 6.2

WATERFRONT FUTURES GROUP

The WFG's general guiding principles are listed here. The more specific Guiding Principles for each of the six character areas should be added as policy statements to the applicable neighborhood plans as they are updated. This was done in 2005 with the CBD Neighborhood Plan as part of the Waterfront District subarea planning project.

The four general guiding principles from the Waterfront Futures Group's 2004 Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan are listed in this section as Waterfront Futures Group Policies (WFGP). These policies are being used to inform planning processes such as the Waterfront District subarea master plan.

WFGP 1 - REINFORCE THE INHERENT QUALITIES OF EACH PLACE ON THE WATERFRONT:

- Make the waterfront a regular part of the lives of more people.
- Respect history, cultures and the arts.
- Make the waterfront inviting to people on foot.
- Reinforce a unique "sense of place" at different waterfront locations.
- Complement adjacent uses.

WFGP 2 - RESTORE THE HEALTH OF LAND & WATER:

- Enhance or reintroduce natural systems.
- Create and restore habitat wherever possible.
- Remediate upland and in-water contamination.
- Protect existing natural shorelines.
- Seek opportunities to soften existing hardened shorelines.
- Tailor environmental cleanup strategies and remediation to planned use.
- Manage stormwater to enhance estuarine habitats.
- Require sustainable practices in all development.

- Restore, enhance and expand beaches wherever possible.
- Connect proposed open space and natural areas to regional open space network and wildlife corridors.
- Explore mitigation banking and incentives (such as environmental credits) for environmental resource protection and enhancement prior to redevelopment.

WFGP 3 - IMPROVE WATERFRONT ACCESS:

- Develop strong connections between uplands and water.
- Provide links to regional trail systems.
- Provide multiple modes of access to each area of the waterfront.
- Provide convenient connections between different modes of transportation.
- Create and connect large and small parks and open spaces with a "braided" system of pedestrian trails.
- Enhance opportunities for visual access to waterfront areas.
- Provide the opportunity to walk the waterfront while respecting natural habitat.
- Help people find their way.
- Provide way finding for the Coast Millennium Trail as a route that follows existing and proposed trails.
- Explore the concept of public access "banking" and other financing incentives for improving public access.
- Protect and enhance environmental resources when designing for shoreline access and upland development.

WFGP 4 - PROMOTE A HEALTHY & DYNAMIC WATERFRONT ECONOMY:

- Create new mixed-use areas on the waterfront for commercial, industrial, educational, recreational and residential uses.
- Support water-dependent activities and uses.
- Create conditions attractive to jobs of the future.

- Strengthen the tie between local jobs and resources.
- Provide public amenities and infrastructure to support redevelopment.
- Improve permitting processes to achieve the goals and principles of the Waterfront Vision.
- Explore economic spin-off related to Bellingham Bay Pilot cleanup strategies.
- Provide incentives and credits for "green" buildings.

PART 6.3

**OTHER FRAMEWORK
POLICIES**

FPP 1 - Establish a collaborative neighborhood planning process that reflects the City's commitment to neighborhood planning. Updating neighborhood plans should be guided by the goals and policies in this plan to ensure that:

- Neighborhood character is maintained as new development occurs.
- Both neighborhood specific and City-wide goals and policies are considered.
- Representatives of both the City and the neighborhood are working together in partnership.

The City will use a number of techniques to encourage participation in the neighborhood planning process, including but not limited to:

- Public hearings and work sessions
- Open houses and community forums
- Polls and other mass mailings
- Advisory and working committees
- Newspaper articles and inserts
- Radio and television

As the neighborhood plans are updated, important characteristics, priorities, and issues should be identified. In general, neighborhood plans should address issues such as:

- Housing densities sufficient to accommodate the forecasted population growth.

- Narrow, tree lined streets with sidewalks arranged in a modified grid pattern to make walking, bicycling and transit use easy and interesting.
- A coordinated system of open space, parks and trails, with a neighborhood park within walking distance or a short transit ride away.
- A prioritized list of infrastructure needs (such as sidewalks, parks, streets, schools, etc.).
- A readily accessible elementary school.
- Design and development policies for urban centers that are within walking distance or a short transit ride away.
- Diverse housing types that accommodate varying income levels, household sizes, and lifestyles.
- Sufficient housing densities to enable frequent transit service and sustain neighborhood businesses.
- Identified view corridors from public spaces such as parks and trails.
- Important historical or cultural resources.

FPP 2 – Significant staffing and other resources will be needed to accomplish the goals and policies in this plan. Comprehensive planning, neighborhood planning, urban center planning, waterfront planning, etc., and encouraging public participation in these processes are staff intensive. The City will provide sufficient resources to accomplish the goals and policies listed in this plan.

FPP 3 – All chapters of the Comprehensive Plan shall be consistent in their policy recommendations.

PART 6.4

**CHAPTER-SPECIFIC
POLICIES**

Other, more detailed policies are included in the individual chapters of the comprehensive plan.