

# BELLINGHAM COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

## Introduction

### **PART 1**

### **WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?**

*This section provides: 1) an explanation of the role of the comprehensive plan in city government and how the plan is used by staff; and 2) a summary of the most important characteristics of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan.*

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

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

The comprehensive plan has three general characteristics. It is:

- **Comprehensive.** The plan includes all geographical and functional elements that have an effect on the city's development.
- **Long-range.** The plan seeks to guide immediate change, while also looking into the future to anticipate issues and identify strategies that will create a healthy, safe, and vibrant community.

- **Flexible.** Planning is an active, continuous process. The comprehensive plan will continue to evolve after it is adopted to reflect actual experiences, changing circumstances and citizen concerns. The annual amendment process and the GMA's seven-year periodic update requirement will ensure that the document remains a reflection of community priorities and values.

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

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

In addition to citizens and the Planning Department, the primary responsibility for formulating and updating the Comprehensive Plan rests with the Planning Commission. The Commission is made up of citizens that are appointed by the Mayor specifically to make recommendations to the City Council whenever changes to the plan are proposed. Ultimately, changes to the plan are made by the City Council and implemented through adoption of the City's capital budget, regulations and department work programs.

## **PART 2**

## **BACKGROUND**

*This section provides the history of comprehensive planning in Bellingham.*

### **The 1980 "Bellingham Plan"**

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

### **1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan**

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

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

Bellingham's 1995 Comprehensive Plan contained updated population growth forecasts and newly available land supply and consumption information. The various sections of the plan dealt with land use, housing, capital facilities, transportation, community design, utilities, and parks, recreation and open space. The 22 neighborhood plans were also readopted as part of the plan.

### **The 1997 Urban Fringe Plan**

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

### **The 2006 Comprehensive Plan**

The Bellingham urban area changed significantly in the ten years between the 1995 and 2006 comprehensive plans. The city's population increased by more than 20%, from 57,830 in 1995 to 72,320 in 2005. The city's urban growth area population increased from 8,713 to 13,350 during this same period. The number of housing units in Bellingham increased by 25%. The city also grew geographically, with about 1,500 acres added as a result of 10 annexations initiated by property owners in the annexed areas. A 23<sup>rd</sup> neighborhood (the Meridian Neighborhood) was created as a result of these changes to city boundaries. New schools were built. The city center and Fairhaven areas saw significant new construction for the first time in many years. Campus enrollments increased at Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College and Bellingham Technical College. Georgia Pacific discontinued the majority of its operations on the Bellingham waterfront and sold its holdings to the Port of Bellingham.

These many changes influenced the decision in 2002 to develop an entirely new comprehensive plan. The process to complete the new plan took four years, from 2002-2006. Much of the work that was done during this time is still relevant and is retained in the 2011 update.

The neighborhood plans were once again adopted as a component of the 2006 Comprehensive Plan.

## The 2011 Comprehensive Plan Update

The City is required by state law to periodically update the comprehensive plan. The purpose of the update requirement is to ensure that local plans address any changes in state law that have occurred since the last plan update.

The 2011 version of the comprehensive plan represents a relatively minor and strategic update of the previous plan. The decision to update rather than create a new plan was based on a number of factors:

- Bellingham's 2006 comprehensive plan was an entirely new document based on four years of planning work.
- The changes to the GMA since 2006 that require only minor modifications to the City's comprehensive plan. The newly adopted population growth forecast is less than the forecast used in the 2006 plan (total growth 25,000 vs. 31,600 in the 2006 plan).
- The planning area is significantly smaller than the area covered by the 2006 plan due to changes made by the County in 2009 to the UGA boundary and elimination of the "5-year Review" areas.
- Current limitations on staff resources due to economic conditions.
- The commitment to focus staff efforts on comprehensive plan implementation activities such as urban village planning and code updates (such as multi-family design review and the Infill Toolkit).

Staff identified a number of basic requirements that needed to be addressed as part of the 2011 update process. These include:

- A new planning period, 2011 to 2031.
- New population and employment growth forecasts.
- Changes to the city's urban growth area boundary.
- Creation of a new Economic Development Chapter.
- Creation of a new Environment Chapter.
- Inclusion of Shoreline Master Program goals.

- Consideration of planning approaches that increase physical activity.
- Policies addressing the Bellingham International Airport.

A number of policy and information documents were used in the update process:

- The State Growth Management Act
- 2006 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan
- County-wide Planning Policies
- The Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan
- 2004 Environmental Impact Statement
- 2009 County Urban Growth Area update process and EIS
- 2010 Shoreline Master Program update
- 2009 Annexation Phasing Plan
- The City's 2009 Comprehensive Water and Sewer Plans
- The 2010 Census

### **PART 3**

### **PLAN FORMAT AND CONTENT**

*The comprehensive plan format and content is very similar to the 2006 plan.*

The plan is divided into chapters dealing with specific issue areas:

- Introduction
- Chapter 1, Framework Goals and Policies
- Chapter 2, Land Use
- Chapter 3, Transportation
- Chapter 4, Housing
- Chapter 5, Capital Facilities
- Chapter 6, Private Utility Services
- Chapter 7, Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Chapter 8, Community Design
- Chapter 9, Environment
- Chapter 10, Economic Development

Bellingham's neighborhood plans and the UGA plan are also adopted as a component of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Chapter 1 - The Framework Goals and Policies**

chapter contains all the goals that the community has formulated critical goals and policies formulated by the public, the Planning Commission and the City Council over the years. The goals and policies in this chapter in Chapter 4 provide the policy direction used to develop the are more general in nature than the more specific goals and policies found in in the other individual chapters of the plan. Some of the framework Many of the goals were are originally from developed in the landmark 1992 Visions for Bellingham and the 2004 Growth Forum community planning processes.

**Chapter 2 - The Land Use** chapter contains the population and employment growth forecasts that are the foundation of the plan. These forecasts are used to establish a preferred land use pattern and to determine how much land will be needed to accommodate the expected growth.

Chapter 2 also includes the policies and criteria that are used to set the urban growth area (UGA) boundary. The UGA boundary establishes the limit of urban development and urban service provision and represents the anticipated city boundary during the 20-year planning period.

**Chapter 3 - The Transportation** chapter contains the policy base supporting the City's commitment to providing an interconnected, multi-modal transportation network that meets the needs of the community. The chapter includes an analysis of the existing transportation system and projections of future needs. Alternative modes such as walking, bicycling and transit are supported by policies requiring coordination between land use patterns and transit routes and by completing an interconnected pedestrian and bikeway system.

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

**Chapter 5 - The Capital Facilities** chapter contains a description of existing public facilities and services such as police, fire, libraries, schools, water, sewer and drainage. It also includes projections of future needs for facilities and services, integrates the location and capacity of the facilities with the Land Use chapter, and provides a financing plan to prioritize and accomplish the projects.

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

The Six-Year Capital Facilities Plan component of this chapter is updated annually by the City during the budget process.

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

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

*The Parks, Recreation and Open Space chapter was updated in 2008. This was done to keep the city eligible for certain state and federal grants.*

The policies in this chapter reflect the fact that citizens of Bellingham take great pride in, and place a great importance on, their parks and open space system. The policies also contain a commitment to maintain the existing system while providing new facilities, especially in areas of the city where population growth is anticipated. A special emphasis is placed on acquiring and developing lands for neighborhood parks and indoor recreation facilities.

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

**Chapter 9 – The Environment** chapter is new. Previous plans had environmental information, goals and policies spread throughout the various chapters. This update consolidates all of the goals and policies addressing the environment in one chapter. Issues covered in this chapter include the Lake Whatcom Reservoir and Watershed, other environmentally sensitive areas, shorelines, resource conservation and other topics.

**Chapter 10 – The Economic Development** chapter is also new. It includes a compilation of information, goals and policies from the previous plan; as well as, new goals and polices addressing economic growth and vitality. Issues covered include employment growth forecasts and land supply, a summary of the local economy – strengths and weaknesses, and potential strategies to encourage economic development and provision of family wage jobs.

**Bellingham's 25 neighborhood plans** are also adopted as part of the comprehensive plan. They have been a part of the comprehensive plan since 1980, and that tradition continues in the 2011 update.

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

The **Urban Fringe Plan** for Bellingham's urban growth area was first adopted by the City and County in 1997. This plan includes the appropriate comprehensive plan and zoning designations for areas that are expected to become part of the city at some point during the next 20 years. This plan should be updated as soon as possible. Both jurisdictions are currently working to update the plan. The update includes:

- an extensive evaluation of land supply and zoning designations/densities in light of adopted population growth forecasts;
- a review of the suitability of land within the existing UGA for urban development;
- a review of the portions of the UGA in the Lake Whatcom Watershed;
- an analysis of the "5-year Review Areas" for possible inclusion in the UGA;
- potential designation of an "ultimate" city boundary.

When this work is completed, it is anticipated that the plan will be adopted by the City as part of this plan.

**Appendices** – Several documents are included in this plan as appendices – **See Exhibit D, Comprehensive Plan Appendices 1 through 4:**

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

**PART 4**

**CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT IN PREPARATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

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

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

- **2002—2003 Development of Population Growth Forecasts.** The process to develop and adopt population growth forecasts included meetings with neighborhood groups, the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, public hearings before the Bellingham and County Planning Commissions and the City and County Councils.

**2003—2005 Urban Growth Area (UGA) Planning.** A series of neighborhood meetings were held in various sections of the UGA to discuss growth and annexation issues. City and county planning commissions and councils each held many public hearings and work sessions on the UGA chapter of this plan.

**2004 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).** An EIS evaluating four different Bellingham area growth alternatives was prepared for the comprehensive plan and urban fringe plan updates. A draft EIS was issued in March, 2004 followed by a 30-day comment period. A hearing on the draft EIS was held in April. In addition to public testimony, 130 pages of comments were received during the comment period from 35 citizens. The city responded to the comments in the final EIS, issued in July 2004.

- **2003—2004 Waterfront Futures Group.** The Waterfront Futures Group (WFG) was established by the Port of Bellingham and the City of Bellingham in 2002. The city and the Port selected members of the community to serve as the Waterfront Futures Group (see the inside cover of the plan for a list of the WFG members). This group was asked to take a

fresh and independent look at the Bellingham Bay waterfront. Work began on the project in 2003 and continued in 2004. Dozens of meetings were held during the process. In June, the draft *Waterfront Vision and Framework Plan* and the *Waterfront Action Plan* were presented to the Port Commission, City Council and the public. Final documents became available in December and were submitted to the City for final review in January. The Introduction section of the Framework Plan contains a brief summary of the public process used to develop the plans. These plans contain the results of one of the most ambitious and extensive public planning processes ever undertaken in Bellingham. The process to develop the plans was inclusive, well-publicized and well-attended.

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

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

- **2004 Community Forum on Growth Management.** This process was intended to involve the community in shaping policy to manage growth over the next 20 years and beyond. The project had multiple objectives:
  1. Engage as many community members as possible in discussions about growth, economics, urban design and the Growth Management Act.

2. Describe tradeoffs and impacts of different growth options and explore specific design solutions.
3. Strengthen communication with the community, making information accessible, understandable and easy to find.
4. Facilitate greater understanding of neighborhood concerns.

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

Five neighborhood meetings were also held throughout the summer. A "drop in" center was located in a downtown office building to serve as the headquarters for the process. The center served as a place where people could learn about the Growth Forum process and to talk with staff about growth issues. Participants in the forum were also invited to participate in a visual survey. The Growth forum process was well publicized and well attended. All the community meetings were videotaped and broadcast several times on local television. The local print media extensively covered the process. In all, over 1,000 citizens participated in some way during the forum process.

- **Planning Commission Hearings and Public Work Sessions, 2005.** The Planning Commission is comprised of seven Bellingham residents who volunteer their time to advise the City Council on comprehensive planning, land use codes, and other planning issues. During a series of meetings from February to October 2005, the Commission reviewed each plan chapter, considering public comment and testimony as they developed findings, conclusions and recommendations that were sent to the City Council. The updated comprehensive plan chapters were reviewed by the Bellingham

Planning Commission in a total of 24 public meetings.

- **Neighborhood Meetings, 2004—2005.** Throughout the process, city staff met with a number of individual neighborhood groups, the Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods and the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Board to discuss the plan update and growth issues.
- **City Council Hearings and Work Sessions, 2005.** Beginning in March 2004, the City Council held a total of 16 public hearings and committee work sessions to review the updates to the plan. The Council accepted written comment throughout the process. The plan was formally adopted in June 2006.

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| <b>PART 4</b> | <b><u>PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE 2011 UPDATE OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN</u></b> |
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Because the 2011 version of the comprehensive plan is a limited and "strategic" update, as explained on page INTRO-3, public participation occurred primarily in the legislative review process. However, prior to the legislative process, components of the plan were reviewed by the Transportation Commission, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission, the Community Development Advisory Board and others. The # Planning Commission and # City Council public hearings, meetings and work sessions that occurred in 2011 and 2012 provided a significant opportunities for the public to review and comment on the update.

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| <b>PART 5</b> | <b><u>RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT</u></b> |
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*This section explains how the goals of the state Growth Management Act are addressed in this comprehensive plan.*

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

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

The GMA contains 14 goals that were adopted by the Legislature to "guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plan and development regulations of counties and cities required to plan under the act." (RCW 36.70A.020). These GMA goals are addressed through the goals, policies and implementation strategies outlined in Chapter 1, as well as other chapters of the comprehensive plan per the following list.

- Managing growth and reducing sprawl: Chapter 2, Land Use
- Housing: Chapter 4, Housing and Chapter 2, Land Use
- Transportation: Chapter 3, Transportation
- Economic Development: Chapter 10 Economic Development
- Open Space and Recreation: Chapter 7, Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- The Environment: Chapter 9, Environment and Chapter 7, Parks, Recreation and Open Space
- Public facilities and services: Chapter 5, Capital Facilities
- Historic preservation: Chapter 2, Land Use and Chapter 8, Community Design
- Shoreline management: Chapter 9, Environment and the City's updated Shoreline Master Program  
Property rights, permits, natural resource industries, citizen participation and governmental coordination Chapter 2, Land Use

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

1995 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. The policies were amended in 1997 and again in 2005.

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

## **PART 6**

## **COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION**

*This section summarizes how the comprehensive plan is implemented through regulatory, capital budgeting and other programs.*

A comprehensive plan means little if it is not implemented. To be successful, the plan must be implemented by the combined efforts of individuals, neighborhoods, civic groups, and local government. Many of the plan's goals and policies reflect this shared responsibility. City government has the primary responsibility to implement the comprehensive plan. The city's two main implementation activities are regulating and managing development, and funding capital improvements such as roads and parks. The GMA requires local government to make sure that their regulations and capital budgets implement the comprehensive plan.

### **6.1 Regulations**

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

### **6.2 Capital Budgets and Spending**

As communities grow, facilities such as new schools, parks, libraries, streets, and additional police and fire services are needed to serve the increasing population. The Capital Facilities chapter identifies the facilities that will be needed over the next 20 years to serve the growing population. The City Council updates this list every year as part of the budget process.

**PART 7**

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

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

**PART 8**

**AMENDMENTS**

Comprehensive plans can be amended no more than once a year under the GMA. There is a process in place for residents to request amendments to the text in the comprehensive plan, or to the neighborhood plans that are a component of this plan. See BMC Sec. 20.20.000 and 21.10.150.

**PART 9**

**UPDATES**

Although comprehensive plans can be amended yearly, the GMA requires cities to periodically review and update their plans.

The framers of the Comprehensive Plan recognize that the world changes, sometimes rapidly, and that plans, procedures, and policies must also change. It should be recognized that this plan is a guide for the future. New conditions may require examination of adopted goals and policies. Adjustments to the plan should be considered on a regular basis, as needed and as allowed under state law.

**PART 10**

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN FUTURE PLANNING ACTIVITIES.**

*This section explains the City's intent with respect to public involvement in future planning processes.*

Public participation in comprehensive planning processes is required both as a matter of law and policy. This section details the city's commitment to public involvement in the planning process and reaffirms our intention to utilize planning processes that provide ample opportunity for residents to participate in the decision-making process.

We will ensure that city-wide and neighborhood planning, and the development of regulations is done with the cooperation and contribution of all interested parties, including neighborhood associations, residents, property owners, business owners and others. The city will make every effort to involve citizens in the processes to develop and update the comprehensive plan, the neighborhood and urban village plans, and zoning, environmental, and other development regulations.

*(NOTE: See Chapter 1, Framework Goals and Policies for public participation policy statements.)*

**10.1 The Comprehensive Plan Process**

The Bellingham Comprehensive Plan is prepared by city staff, reviewed and recommended by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council.

State law allows the comprehensive plan to be amended only once a year. The process the city uses to amend the plan is described in the Land Use and Development Code, BMC Section 20.20.000 and 21.10.150. These sections explain how proposed comprehensive plan amendments are docketed, processed and evaluated. They include criteria for the Planning Commission and City Council to use to determine whether or not a proposed amendment should be approved. The amendment process includes public participation requirements appropriate to the scope of the proposed amendment.

The Planning Commission has the responsibility to conduct the planning process, review the results, and to formulate recommendations for the City Council's consideration and adoption.

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

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

### 10.2 The Neighborhood Planning Process

Bellingham's 25 neighborhood plans are adopted as a component of the comprehensive plan. As such, the plans are covered by the annual amendment and public participation requirements of the GMA.

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

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

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

### 10.3 The Urban Village Planning Process

*The terms "urban center" has been replaced with and "urban village" throughout this plan. are used interchangeably throughout this plan.*

The 2004 Community Growth Forum identified the development of urban villages centers as a key strategy to accommodate Bellingham's forecasted population growth, both in the short and long term. (NOTE: Chapter 2, Land Use also contains a number of policies related to the proposed urban villages centers.)

Some of the proposed urban villages centers can and are developing now – the City Center, Fairhaven and Barkley areas for example. Three other proposed villages have been master planned since the Growth Forum – Old Town, Samish Way and the Fountain District. In addition, it is expected that a master plan for the Waterfront District urban village will be submitted for formal review in 2011.

The other villages will require development of a master plan, changes to all-adjacent neighborhood plans, and zoning and adoption of design and development regulations other rules before they can occur.

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

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

See the urban village Center section of the Land Use chapter for more urban village information and specific policy statements.