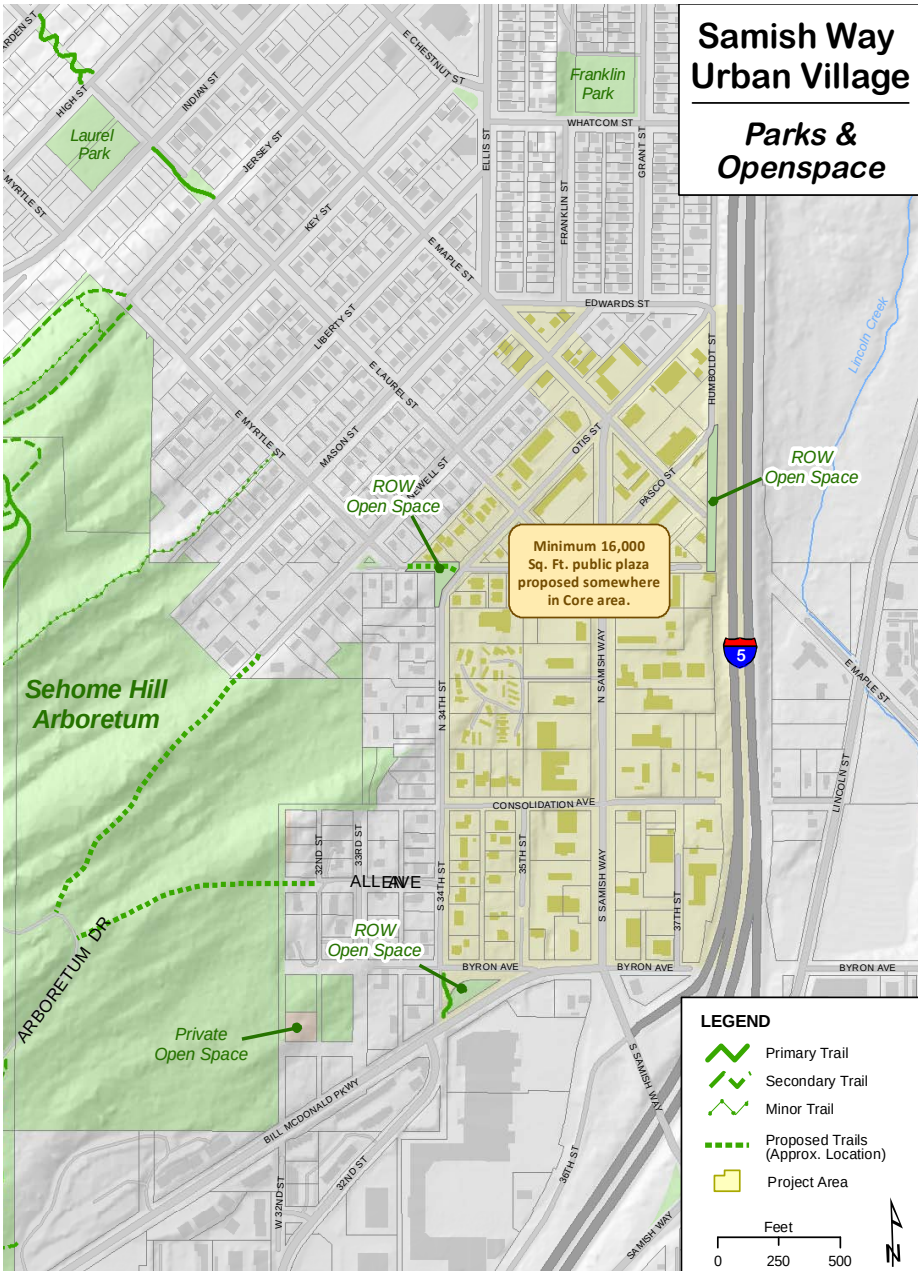


5 . PARKS, PLAZAS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTIONS

Today, there is limited public open space within the Samish Way urban village boundary. However, there are several existing parks within close proximity. This plan contains goals to enhance the connections to these surrounding open spaces and create new gathering places within the urban village.

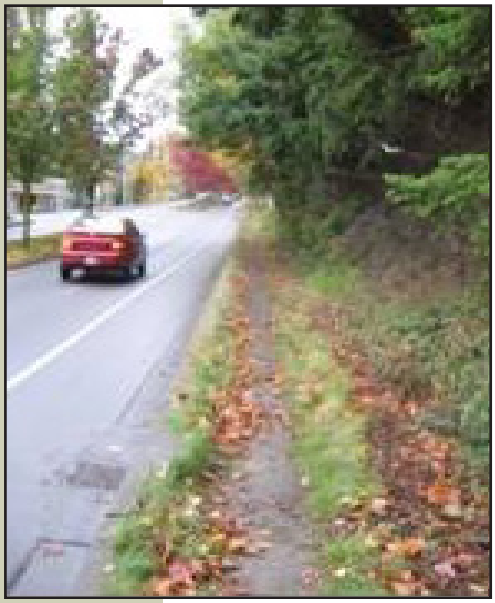
The Sehome Hill Arboretum is a 180-acre natural forest habitat managed jointly by The City of Bellingham and Western Washington University. Passive recreational amenities are provided via the numerous trails that crisscross the site. The eastern boundary of Sehome Hill creates a lovely forested backdrop to the Samish Way Subarea. However, steep topography limits the number of access points.

Other parks within walking distance include Franklin Park (located within the York Neighborhood) and Laurel Park (located to the northwest in the Sehome Neighborhood). These are small neighborhood parks that provide space for families and students to intermingle and play.

Several small areas of undeveloped right of way dot the project area. These have been sporadically attended to by adjacent neighbors and other interested parties, but could be further enhanced to provide additional amenities to the public.

Using Existing Public Right-of-Way

Byron / Bill McDonald Parkway – A volunteer group intentionally planted this area as a chestnut grove. This grove should be maintained and enhanced as a pocket park, including removal of invasive species and addition of plantings. Several large evergreen trees border Bill McDonald Parkway, providing pleasant coverage but limited visual access into the site. Larger evergreens along Bill McDonald should be selectively thinned to increase sunlight and make the area safer for general public use.



Byron/Bill McDonald Pkwy

Bicycle access from 34th Street to Bill McDonald Parkway should be enhanced. The existing Whatcom Transportation Authority bus stop should be moved west to this area, across the street from the eastbound bus stop. An enhanced pedestrian crossing should be provided via a new signalized intersection at the intersection of 35th and Bill McDonald Parkway. Passive recreational opportunities such as trails and benches would also make the area a more usable amenity for pedestrians and transit riders.

34th Street & Abbott Street – This small triangular piece of right-of-way is at a crossroad between the existing neighborhood and the urban village. Native vegetation at this site should be retained, and the trail widened to allow increased access. Wayfinding signs should be added to this location to direct people to the Commercial Core, Abbott Street, and down 34th Street to the Sehome Village shopping center.

34th & Abbott Street

The other small triangle of vegetation located to the west on Newell Street should be preserved as native habitat, with a wayfinding sign to the Newell Street trail connection.

Humboldt Street Right-of-Way – The south end of the Humboldt Street right-of-way terminates and becomes property of the Washington State Department of Transportation. Fir and other tall trees would interfere with existing power lines, so unless these are moved underground and relocated, a tree buffer of short pines and tall shrubs should be established. A bike and pedestrian connection should be extended to 37th Street and wayfinding signs added to indicate connections to other areas of interest within the City.

5.1 PARKS, PLAZAS, AND NEIGHBORHOOD CONNECTION POLICIES

- Construct a new public plaza within the Core area of the village. This plaza should be a minimum of 16,000 square feet, and abut on at least 1 public street.

- Public plaza(s) should be constructed to include amenities such as:

  - Water feature(s);
  - Landscaping (including a mixture of trees, shrubs and groundcover);
  - Public art;
  - Outdoor furniture and resting places;
  - Pedestrian-scale lighting;
  - Community garden;
  - Play equipment;
  - Unique paving pattern; and/or
  - Other elements that promote public use.

- Encourage the development of smaller, privately-owned and maintained plazas and open spaces.

- Enhance connections to the Sehome Hill Arboretum and surrounding parks by providing wayfinding signs from the urban village to the new trail entrances proposed at Allen Avenue and Newell Street.

- Consolidate private and public open spaces where possible to achieve larger and more functional public spaces.

- Utilize existing undeveloped right-of-ways to enhance connections to and from the urban village and provide passive recreational opportunities.

5.2 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Offer a density bonus for the dedication of land to construct a public plaza.

- Incorporate pedestrian/bicycle connections and plazas into the Parks Capital Facilities Plan so that Park Impact Fee funds may be applied to acquisition and/or construction of capital projects within the project area.

- Require a public access easement to connect 34th Street to the Commercial Core, as shown on the Proposed Right-of-Way and Pedestrian Connection map on page 24.