

Downtown Bellingham Plan

Summary of changes to the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, Neighborhood Plans, Development Regulations, Design Standards and other regulatory changes

The following is a summary of the main changes proposed in the course of adopting the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* and associated development regulations, design standards, and other regulatory changes. Hyperlinks are provided as noted. Due to the extent of changes necessary to accomplish the proposal, detailed changes are not provided here. Work on the detailed changes is still ongoing and final drafts will be issued with the Planning Commission staff report, scheduled to be available on **March 13, 2014**.

Use this [hyperlink](#) to access downtown planning information, including maps that highlight existing conditions such as zoning, parking, height and parks. They provide a useful tool in evaluating differences between the existing conditions and the proposals below.

1. Downtown Bellingham Plan

The *Downtown Bellingham Plan* provides a policy framework for future development within the Downtown Bellingham subarea. Portions of the following neighborhood plans are included within the Downtown Bellingham Plan boundaries:

- [Central Business District \(CBD\) Neighborhood Plan](#),
- [Lettered Streets Neighborhood Plan](#),
- [Sehome Neighborhood Plan](#),
- [Sunnyland Neighborhood Plan](#), and
- [York Neighborhood Plan](#)

Those sections in the neighborhood plans that are within the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundaries will be amended as necessary to be consistent with the [proposed changes in zoning](#). Work on the neighborhood plans is still ongoing and final drafts will be issued with the Planning Commission staff report.

2. Change the name of the CBD Neighborhood Plan to City Center Neighborhood Plan

The name change reflects that the downtown has evolved into more than just the community's primary financial, commercial and government center. Cultural attractions, entertainment and residential uses, and physical improvements to the public realm have enabled an expanded range of businesses to stay open later, and together have increased the vibrancy of the downtown.

Work on the City Center Neighborhood Plan will include a substantial rewrite to reconcile recent changes to the Old Town and Waterfront District Subareas with the current work on the *Downtown Bellingham Plan*. This work is still ongoing and a final draft will be issued with the Planning Commission staff report.

3. Downtown District Development Regulations

The Downtown District Development Regulations implement the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* and include, but are not limited to, specific zoning, permitted uses, height limits, setbacks, landscaping, parking and signage.

Many changes to the Bellingham Municipal Code are necessary to accommodate the new zoning and development regulations and eliminate references to previous zoning and regulations. This work is still ongoing and a final draft will be issued with the Planning Commission staff report.

The following is a summary of the main changes proposed to the zoning and development regulations:

- 1) In all proposed Residential Transition (RT) zones, increase the range of small scale mixed uses (currently limited to offices in most areas that are currently zoned residential) to include:
 - Corner stores
 - Bed & Breakfast
 - Personal Services
 - Eating Establishments
 - Live/Work
 - Art Galleries/Schools/Studios
- 2) In proposed RT-1 (North and South):
 - Limited mixed uses in #1 above allowed outright.
 - No residential density limit (currently ranges from unlimited, 1,000 sq. ft. of land per dwelling unit, and 1,500 sq. ft. of land per dwelling unit).
 - No setbacks due to minimal view blockage and to allow for more efficient use of land (currently use standard multifamily setbacks in BMC [20.32](#)).
 - Maintain existing 45' height limit.
- 3) In proposed RT-2 (York Neighborhood):
 - Limited mixed uses in #1 above would largely be permitted only as adaptive reuse of existing buildings as an incentive to invest in, and rehabilitate, historic housing stock (historic preservation). Exceptions: Offices, corner markets, and corner eating establishments could take place as new, purpose-built development.
 - Residential density is limited to 1 unit per 1,500 sq. ft. of land to allow reasonable redevelopment in the event that an existing building is destroyed by any cause.
 - Height is limited to 35' to respect the predominant scale of existing historic single-family residential development.
- 4) Proposed Commercial Core (CC):
 - Maintain existing unlimited height limit.
 - Prohibit drive-up facilities such as bank tellers, food and beverage services, laundry pick-up, and car washes.
- 5) Proposed Commercial Transition (CT):

CT zoning is generally applied to the edges of the Commercial Core to provide a transition between the more intense Commercial Core and less intense residential zones. Within the CT:

- Height is limited to 65', and further limited to 32' and 2 stories when within 15' of a residential zone.
- Prohibit drive-up facilities such as bank tellers, food and beverage services, laundry pick-up, and car washes.

6) Existing Industrial zones:

- A half block of land SW of Laurel Street that is currently zoned 'Industrial/Waterfront Mixed Use' will be consolidated into the proposed Commercial Core.
- Land north and east of Whatcom Creek that is currently zoned Industrial, Light will become a new Industrial Transition (IT) zone with minimal changes to zoning and development regulations from what currently exists.

7) Existing Public zones:

Each of the existing 'public' zones within the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundary will be rezoned to the zoning district that predominately surrounds them, such that there will no longer be any public zones within the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundaries.

8) Parking requirements for new development and redevelopment:

- Expand the exempt auto parking district to one block around the Whatcom Transportation Authority Transit Center, and include all of the Civic Center.
- Reduce auto parking requirements in all other areas within the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundary.
- Provides flexibility to reduce required auto parking to zero by means of providing offsetting mitigation such as implementation of a shared car service (i.e., Zipcar™).
- Do not require additional parking for a change in use.
- Increase bike parking in all areas within the Downtown Plan Boundary, consistent with what was recently adopted for Fairhaven and the Waterfront.

9) Sign Standards

- Residential and Industrial zones - No major changes from what currently exists.
- Commercial zones:
 - Prohibit pole signs.
 - Limit monument signs to 6' in height and 60 sq.ft. per sign face.

4. **Design Standards**

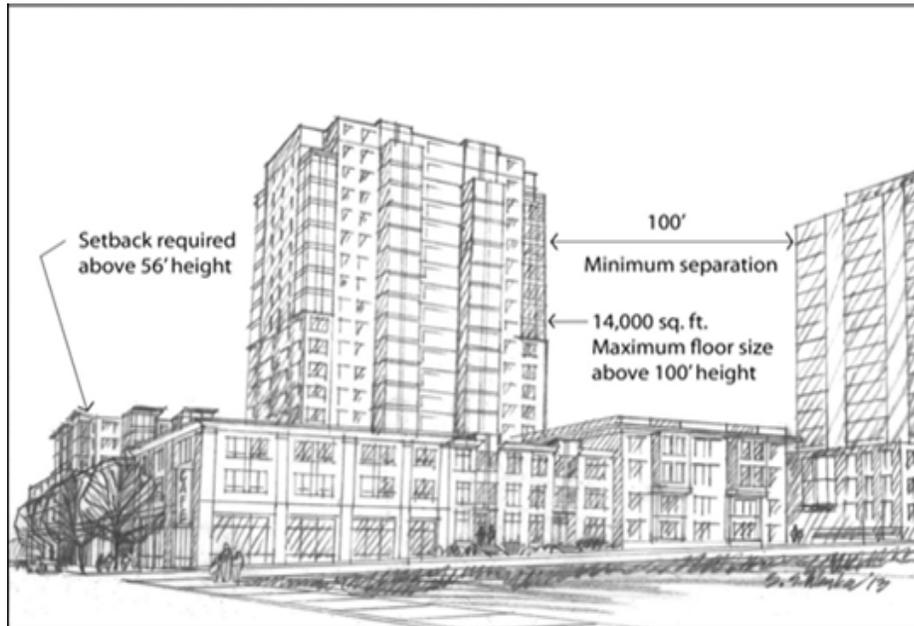
Design standards applicable within the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundaries are currently located in two places in the Bellingham Municipal Code as follows:

1) Bellingham Municipal Code [20.25.050](#), and

2) Appendix 20-B ([City Center Design Handbook](#)) at the end of BMC Chapter 20.25.

- Standards located in BMC 20.25.050 are proposed to be consolidated into the Handbook and amended as necessary to fit the format and context of the Handbook.

- Two additional design standards and a corresponding figure shown below are proposed to be added to the Handbook to regulate tower development where allowed. These standards are consistent with what was recently adopted in the Waterfront Design Standards.
 - **Standard:** The floor plate for any portion of a building exceeding 100' in height is limited to 14,000 square feet.
 - **Standard:** Any portion of a building exceeding 100' must be located at least 100' from any portion of an existing or approved building face which exceeds 100'.



- The City Center Design Standards Map will be amended to align with the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundary. Work on the Handbook is still ongoing and a final draft will be issued with the Planning Commission staff report.

5. **BMC 17.82 Multifamily Housing (Multifamily Tax Exemption Program)**

The City Center Targeted Area map will be amended to align with the *Downtown Bellingham Plan* boundary.

6. **Waterfront District Clean-Up**

Minor amendments are proposed to correct conflicts and oversights associated with the adoption of the Waterfront District Subarea Plan. These include:

- Amending chapter and subarea narratives in the CBD (City Center) Neighborhood Plan,
- Adopting a Waterfront Design Review District map,
- Moving Waterfront Design Review Procedures currently located in BMC 20.25.080(B) to appropriate sections in BMC [20.25.020](#) and .040, and
- Adopting thresholds in BMC 20.25.020 consistent with City Center Design Review which dictate when development in the Waterfront Design Review District 1) is exempt from design review, 2) requires staff review, and 3) requires Design Review Board review.