

FW: Case # HE-23-PL-012 | Project # SUB2022-00033 / VAR2023-0002 Hearing Mar 13, 2024 05:00 PM | Filed Jul 12, 2023 Applicant Bellingham Golf & Country Club

Nelson, Ryan J. <rnelson@cob.org>

Wed 3/13/2024 4:12 PM

To: Bowker, Kristina J. <kbowker@cob.org>; ali (ali@avtplanning.com) <ali@avtplanning.com>

Additional comment

Ryan Nelson
Planner II
Planning and Community Development Department
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie St.
Bellingham WA, 98225
(360) 778-8368
rnelson@cob.org

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From: Jim Smith <jim.kgwllc@gmail.com>

Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 4:00 PM

To: Nelson, Ryan J. <rnelson@cob.org>

Subject: Case # HE-23-PL-012 | Project # SUB2022-00033 / VAR2023-0002 Hearing Mar 13, 2024 05:00 PM | Filed Jul 12, 2023 Applicant Bellingham Golf & Country Club

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**Case # HE-23-PL-012 | Project # SUB2022-00033 / VAR2023-0002
Hearing Mar 13, 2024 05:00 PM | Filed Jul 12, 2023
Applicant Bellingham Golf & Country Club**

STATEMENT OF James D. Smith in Opposition to the Project as Proposed.

Your Honor, my name is Jim Smith.

I am a Whatcom County resident.

I currently serve as the Planting Coordinator for Whatcom Million Trees Project. I have been a licensed landscape contractor for several decades. I have studied forestry and participated in reforestation projects. I have supervised planting and care for thousands of trees.

I oppose this project unless it is substantially modified to minimize the loss of mature trees. Michael Feerer's presentation has identified a way to preserve both trees and housing units. I support that alternative fully.

It is wrong to think that replanting tree seedlings compensates for loss of mature forest in any time frame that is relevant to our present climate crisis.

Many mature trees on this site can continue to live for hundreds of years. Studies show an increase in carbon capture as mature trees age. By contrast, seedlings can require up to 40 years to become net metabolizers of carbon. They will need decades more to catch up with the carbon metabolism rate of the big trees they are intended to replace. The best solution here is to redesign the project to minimize tree removal.

Applicant proposes to plant only 474 replacement tree seedlings as claimed compensation for its massive tree removal. This is grossly inadequate. That would be less than 1.5 seedlings planted for each mature tree removed. Image D in the packet submitted by Michael Feerer proposes a better approach. I support that.

Even vastly increased replanting is an illusory benefit unless the trees have perpetual legal protection, such as a conservation easement.

In addition, all new seedlings must be protected with mulch over the ground in their root zone after planting. Without this protection, many seedlings will likely die. There is no mention of mulch in the Planning Department's recommendations. It is unclear if a surety bond would include the cost of mulch and its application.

Michael Feerer's presentation has also identified 12 trees applicant claims will be retained on-site. Mr. Feerer explains that these 12 trees

are too close to new buildings to survive the construction phase. I agree.

It is standard practice to protect a tree's critical root zone from substantial construction impact. Critical root zones are calculated as one foot of protection for every inch of trunk width.

Under applicant's proposal, construction activity will occur well within the critical root zones of these 12 trees. These trees will not likely survive the proposed construction for long.

Thank you.

Planning & Community Development,
210 Lottie Street, Bellingham, WA 98225
planning@cob.org

Public Hearing Testimony on the following proposal:
SUB2022-0033 / VAR2023-0002: An Infill Toolkit and Variance request for the Stream
Bellingham Townhomes Plat.

March 13, 2024

Hello, I am Wendy Larson, a Bellingham resident. My formal education is that of a biologist and a businessperson, with Masters degrees in biological sciences and in business, both.

Others have spoken today about how certain Infill Toolkit ordinances have not been met. The applicant's Green Factor calculations are incorrect, and the design of the project's inner vehicle lane does not meet the Toolkit's required design standards.

The Infill Toolkit ordinance details and specifications must be enforced by the Planning Department, to protect the community as it is intended to do. It would be harmful to the community, including future residents of this development, to make developer-favoring discretionary interpretations of our ordinance.

While this is a privately-owned property, it is also a special site in our city. The mature woodland on this site is currently wildlife habitat, and exists in a larger context of adjacent wildlife habitat, as shown in the city's 2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis. This wildlife habitat has been fragmented and damaged by previous city development decisions, yet a community wildlife network continues to function at this location. A question before you today is: will you allow it to be further and needlessly damaged?

This is a special site, with special habitat. Few remaining stands of mature native forest remain in our city, especially in the Birchwood neighborhood that this project is located in. These stands support our community's climate resilience and public health. Mature trees are the heavy lifters for all climate resiliency benefits. To achieve this resilience, though, mature trees must be *woven* into the community.

That means *woven* within new infill developments such as this one. Substantial stands of mature trees cannot be mainly in parks and greenways blocks or miles away to have any positive effect for residents of this neighborhood from increasingly dangerous climate problems.

Another major problem with this proposal is that planting 474 small tree seedlings would

not even begin to replace the benefits provided by the more than 320 mature trees that would be removed. In addition to that ratio being inadequate, planting the little seedlings in and around the Golf & Country Club, on unprotected land that could be bulldozed or changed later, is also a weak and inadequate mitigation of the loss of these mature trees.

The habitat network which this site is part of has been severely damaged by the compounding effects of short-sighted, developer-lenient planning decisions, followed by subsequent property owner actions. The community has suffered such losses and harms long enough. Please do not make it worse now. Require the developer to follow our Infill Toolkit specifications.

Thank you.

Wendy Larson

606 Clark Rd.
Bellingham, WA 98226

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Anne Poulson <annepoulson@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 6:18 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Meridian development

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I was distressed to hear that the Meridian development will involve the removal of over 300 old trees. One of the reasons my husband and I chose to raise our family in Bellingham was that the city seemed to place a value on nature and preserving it's natural habitats. Things seemed to have changed steadily in a direction that seems to prioritize development and profit over quality of life. I understand that housing is a priority, but I am disappointed that a solution hasn't been considered that could include leaving the trees. Many urban areas are trying to PLANT trees to combat global warming and improve the local environment by adding trees. Please consider leaving the trees.

Thank you,
Anne Poulson

--

Please note that I am transitioning to a new email server and my new address is:

annepoulson@gmail.com

My Comcast account will remain viable for the foreseeable future, but there may come a time when I will need to close it. In order to prevent losing track of me, please update your records with my new address. Sorry for the inconvenience, and thank you for your understanding.

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Sarah Gardam <sgardam@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 9:06 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Re: Public Comment on Proposed Meridian Development

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Please let Mr. Teji that I work in Ferndale, I drive a Prius, I've thought a lot about my carbon footprint, and mature trees are a lot more than just carbon.

Sarah

On Wed, Mar 13, 2024, 6:36 PM Sarah Gardam <sgardam@gmail.com> wrote:

Please consider the attached public comment on the Meridian housing development discussed at city hall on the evening of 3/13/24.

Sarah Gardam

sgardam@gmail.com

Public comment on Meridian project hearing

3/13/24

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a public comment. My name is Sarah Gardam, and I do not represent any organizations or groups. I live in Blaine, though I spend most of my leisure time here in Bellingham. I would LOVE to live in Bellingham, but I work in the nonprofit sector and cannot afford to rent an apartment in this town, let alone buy a home. So you see, this housing crisis affects me very directly, but the answer is NOT to cut down mature trees to make room for me. I would much rather continue tolerating the inconvenience of living in the county than see precious, majestic trees be sacrificed.

For those who must live in town, we can certainly find better solutions than the proposed project, which includes eight unnecessary luxury home lots that require the sacrifice of the mature trees. We simply do not have the right to destroy these trees to increase developers profit margins, but that is exactly what is going on with the proposed project.

Unlike us, Bellingham's large trees cannot be moved anywhere else. Once they are gone, they're gone, and an abundance of research indicates that seedlings are not an adequate replacement for mature trees. I'm not referring to a few misleading studies from UW's corrupt timber industry-funded CINTRAFOR research institute. Rather, I'm talking about real research that I and others have been reading and gathering for the last few years in an effort to fight the cutting of mature trees in Washington. I have plenty of research I can send that explains why planting seedlings is not appropriate mitigation for removing significant trees.

Lastly please consider the 70 to 100 years that the trees in question have been quietly laboring to filter and cool the air we breathe and the water we drink. For decades, these trees have asked for nothing in return. Now the time has come for us to return the favor – to protect those who protect us from heat islands, torrential flooding, pollution, noise, stress, and other fates that befall communities that fail to stand up for their trees.

Thank you for reading.

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Katharine Gring <k.gring@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 8:28 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Meridian Development

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Dear Mr. Nelson,

this development does not seem very good to me. The buildings should be higher to maximize the density while preserving more open space and trees. Even one more level would be a huge help. Seeing that there are several variances being allowed this shouldn't be too much to ask.

There should be a buffered sidewalk along Meridian there, partly to encourage alternate transportation (walking, bikes) and Meridian may need more space in the future.

The single story luxury townhomes could be closer to the golf course to save more trees which seem to be on the Meridian side of the development.

I have seen a lot of bad, short sighted development. This seems like a done deal, please consider public comments seriously.

Thank you for your time.

Katharine Gring.
2809 Yew Street
Bellingham WA



Virus-free www.avg.com

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: sageshouse@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 9:20 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Please save the mature urban trees!

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Hello there,

I am opposed to a development that requires the mature trees being removed from the 4+ acre parcel of trees next to the Bellingham Gold and Country Club. We need some urban trees to absorb carbon, absorb run off, provide shade and cooler temperatures, and provide a home for birds and other wildlife. Please only allow a development that conserves a majority of the trees.

Thank you

Caroline Ferguson

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Lynn Billington <lynnbillington@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 10:25 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: COB Planning Department: RE: Bellingham Golf & Country Club Development proposal

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Dear Ryan Nelson:

I reviewed the development proposal for the Bellingham Golf & Country Club area. I believe it is not the appropriate development for our city. We need to save as many of our larger trees in the city of Bellingham. I do believe we need more affordable housing but this development, as proposed, is not the answer. I have lived here for over 30 years and have seen many of our large trees removed for development and view. Climate Change is happening and we need to be proactive and save as many of these large trees which are great carbon sinks.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lynn Billington, MS, PE

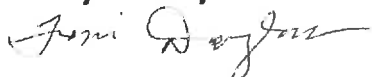
To City of Bellingham Hearing Examiner

My name is Tim Douglas, 2114 Williams Street.

As a former Mayor of Bellingham, I was deeply involved in the initial Comprehensive Plan and its successors and am committed to implementing the provisions of the City's Climate Action Plan. I make the following recommendations for changes to the proposed 68-unit townhome proposal along Meridian Street next to the Golf and Country Club:

- 1. Remove two of the larger units adjacent to each other having the largest number of large caliper trees and designate the units' footprint as a forested preserve for use by residents of the entire townhome complex. This will allow onsite recreation for residents rather than their having to cross busy streets to access parks. It also ensures preservation of large tree canopy to combat climate warming.**
- 2. Replace two others of the larger townhome units with higher density units like the rest of the development. This will help the city meet its increased need for affordable workforce housing as well as create more income for the developer.**
- 3. Instead of planting replacement trees in undesignated places near the development, have the City identify at least two of its neighborhoods with the lowest existing tree canopy. Direct the developer to plant replacement trees in those neighborhoods. This will ensure heat-cooling shade where it is urgently needed consistent with the City's Climate Action Plan.**

Thank you for your careful consideration of these three recommendations.



Tim Douglas

2114 Williams Street

(360) 676-8530

Barbara Zielstra
316 Willow Ct. N.
Bellingham, WA 98225
March 13, 2024
RE: Variance request for 3509 Meridian

Dear Hearing Examiner,

I believe infill housing is important to Bellingham's future as a livable city and this project meets many of our community's goals in creating new housing within our city limits. Yet, with a minor modification, this planned development would save 120 trees, mostly large conifers, thereby meeting a very important community goal.

City staff recognized that there were options available to the developer to save more of the trees on the property and, according to the documents, they encouraged the developer to consider doing so. The city staff do not have the authority to require this change of plans, but you, as Hearing Examiner, do.

The subdivision variance the developer seeks under BMC 23.08.020 and 030 address issues relating to this variance request. 23.08.020 states, "integrate open spaces and natural elements into the design of development," and 23.08.030.c. "Natural features that may or may not be regulated by other code provisions including but not limited to TREES... should be incorporated into the overall land division design through preservation to the extent feasible." These two code sections speak to our desire, as a city, to preserve trees and other natural elements whenever and wherever possible and the code gives the authority for interpreting these regulations to you, the Hearing Examiner.

The modification suggested here tonight, would remove 8 units, resulting in a project of 60 townhouses and saving 120 mature trees, which would add immensely to the livability of this new neighborhood. The words, "to the extent feasible" raise an important question – who decides what is feasible? You alone, as Hearing Examiner, can decide that 60 townhomes on this property with 120 old trees is feasible.

We all know the power of trees to aesthetically soften our built environment. I found it ironic that the developer's renderings of the planned development include trees that loom high above the rooflines of the housing. We all know that large trees make a neighborhood more desirable but this vision of the development will not be the reality as those trees will be gone. We know that trees are our most effective tool for surviving climate change in the short term as well as continuing to sequester carbon and helping our planet survive.

We, the people, intuitively know that trees help us stay healthy -brain and body, relieving stress, calming anxiety. Now research is demonstrating the health and healing benefits of trees (See "The Journalists' Resource" publication of Harvard Kennedy School – issue Sept 6, 2023, especially, *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2020**, 17(12), 4371; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124371>

The impact these trees will have on future residents' health and wellbeing cannot be overstated. Of course, the trees with their climate moderating and stormwater absorption effects will enhance our larger community but their greatest value will be for the people, the children, who will live in the shade of these trees, who will call this place home.

I understand that the developer agrees to plant seedlings to replace the old trees removed. While such required actions will be of benefit, we won't see that benefit for 40-50 years. It is the old trees that rise above us 70 plus feet, that provide the health and aesthetic benefits we so desire. We plant seedlings in the hopes that their future towering branches and deep roots will delight those who come long after us. But they will not replace the existing magnificent conifers once they are gone.

As Hearing Examiner, you have the power and the obligation to look carefully at the subdivision plan and assess whether it meets the entire intent of BMC 23.08 or you can find that a minor modification would better meet the requirements of the code and better serve our community. I ask that you amend the request and save the trees while adding important housing to our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Zielstra". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbara Zielstra

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Mike and Kristina Heintz <mikeheintz@msn.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 8:35 AM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Meridian Development Project

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Good Morning, Mr. Nelson

I am writing in regards to the proposed removal of over 320+ Majestic Century Plus Years Old Irreplaceable Conifers for the Meridian Street InFill development Project in the Birchwood neighborhood. My understanding is that the Hearing Examiner is holding a hearing to decide the fate of this revived Project.

From my understanding the same plans are being considered as the previous Stream project.

I am respectfully requesting that the Planning Department not approve or permit this development until there has been mitigation and a plan made that follows the City's InFill Toolkit's primary intent to provide affordable housing and to support the City's Climate Resiliency by removing the plans for the 8 luxury residences to save priceless hundreds of trees. No Action on the part of the City or Developer can ever replace the environmental and aesthetic and community value these trees hold. Not removing them is the best plan of action.

From our own City website, we are supposed to love and support our trees, not only for the stated below reasons, but especially for their climate resilience and mitigation capacities.

<https://cob.org/services/recreation/parks-trails/parks-guide/trees>

"...Trees do wonderful things for the City of Bellingham and contribute to our quality of life. Trees contribute in many ways. They add beauty, boost property values and reduce energy costs by cooling our environment. They contribute to our infrastructure by preventing erosion, reducing storm runoff and supplying food and shelter for wildlife...."

Thank you for your time & consideration and your service to our community.

Kristina Heintz

Birchwood

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Deb Valentine <dj.val88@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 11:11 AM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: 3509 Meridian Housing Project

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Mr. Nelson:

I would like to add my name to the critics of the project proposed at 3509 Meridian in Bellingham.

Bellingham needs more housing in the affordable range, but not at the expense of 327 trees. Please require a modification of the proposal to reduce the number of old growth trees removed. It would take many years to replace the benefits to the environment and ecology of the area that these trees are providing.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Deborah Valentine
2323 Park St, Bellingham, WA 98225
206-390-9515

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Reisa Latorra <rlatorra@hotmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 9:09 AM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: meridian development

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Hi Ryan,

I've sent you this letter before, but am sending it again just in case!

I am not at all against infill planning. I think it is what we need. But I think we can balance that with keeping some old trees and not OVER-building, when there is a likelihood of too much traffic and too little green space. I think Whatcom Million Trees Project has some very good ideas for mitigating the problems in the existing plan of this housing project. They aren't against it, they are FOR making it benefit both people and nature. **WMTP is 100% in favor of affordable infill housing in Bellingham.** But it should be accomplished with **nature-integrated site plans**. Ample trees and green spaces *interwoven* throughout our city — not just in parks and Greenways — will reduce deadly heat effects and urban flooding from climate change as well as support our community's health and livability.

Pitting housing versus trees is a false narrative. More than ever, our community needs well-designed developments that **balance** all needs. It's possible and has been proven elsewhere. All it takes is more careful site planning plus a willingness to step back *just a wee bit* from maxed-out profiteering.

Thank you,

Reisa Latorra

Bellingham, WA

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: patricia villhauer <pvillhauer@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 4:32 PM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Meridian Infill

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Hello

I would like to oppose the infill construction on Meridian.

I oppose having the old growth trees cut down, and I oppose more infill in beautiful Bellingham.

Thank You!!

Pati Villhauer

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: Ken Kaliher <kenkaliher@hotmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 10:35 AM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: PLEASE plan for the WHOLE future of our community

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Dear Mr. Nelson,

Regarding the BGCC's desire to replace 327 mature trees with housing units, let us PLEASE give some thought to our community's overall future health and ecological balance. We can achieve a sane compromise between the needs for affordable infill housing and for the many benefits MATURE trees bring to the well-being of all our fellow residents (as well as other living beings).

Please seek to preserve the maximum number of these irreplaceable mature trees. Our lives, and especially those of our grandchildren and their grandchildren, may well depend on them.

Thank you!

Ken Kaliher

430 S. Garden St., Bellingham, WA 98225-6117
Home Landline Phone: (360) 734-2096

Trees ARE the view
-- Bumper sticker seen years ago in Bellingham, Washington

Nelson, Ryan J.

From: shrlynp <shrlynp@aol.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 13, 2024 8:51 AM
To: Nelson, Ryan J.
Subject: Please save the old growth trees!

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If there is a way to save ALL or MOST of the old growth trees along the meridian stretch, please, please do!!! They are irreplaceable! Generations will lose if they're cut down. One reason I moved to Bellingham from California was the park like feel of the town and neighborhoods, and all the parks! There are other areas for building, and other designs that would save these trees. Please follow that route for our grandchildren 's sake. Sincerely, Sheryl Peterson
360 296 0407

Sent from my Verizon, Samsung Galaxy smartphone

March 13, 2024 Public Comment for Meridian Project Hearing

Your Honor, I'm Michael Feerer, Executive Director of Whatcom Million Trees Project. I live at 4107 Harrison St. in Bellingham.

The applicant claims to have met infill ordinance BMC 20.28.110(d4), which requires the project to have a Green Factor landscaping score of .4 or more. They claim .4038, just squeaking by.

It appears the Planning Department did not double-check that, so their Staff Report agrees.

However, **the Green Factor is not met.** Not even close.

Please see Image A1 in my packet.

The trunks of **12** "retained" trees are less than **15'** from new three-story walls. This is unrealistic for 70-100 year old trees with drip lines and rootballs that are 25'-40' in diameter. Our orange circles have 30' diameter for comparison.

Now please see Image A2.

A2 shows **18** "retained" trees (the red circles) that are rated **poor likelihood of survival by the applicant's own arborist report.** Poor means most will die within 5 years, primarily from root ball intrusions or soil pressures from surrounding heavy grading & construction.

Please see Image A3.

Their claimed landscape area is 50,023 SF. We carefully measured **~42,600 SF.** Note the 10,600 SF roundabout ROW will be partially converted to hardscape eventually. This will reduce their area further.

Now see Image A4.

This is the project's Green Factor score recalculated with our corrections. The applicant's score is actually **.33**, well below the .40 required.

For this reason, we ask you to not approve this project until modifications ensure the legally required Green Factor score is *truly* met -- and verified by the Planning Department and others.

By the way, solving this is not hard.

Please see Image B, the applicant's site plan. Eight double-sized luxury units along the golf course are in yellow. Sixty smaller homes are in white.

Image C is the site plan with the 8 units removed and the other units more carefully placed. This simple adjustment would save **88 more trees** -- the yellow circles shown. It would solve their Green Factor score **and** result in a higher-quality, more livable project that better meets the Infill Toolkit's intent and reduces other negative impacts.

Again, please do not approve this project until the required Green Factor score is *verifiably* met.

Thank you.



Image A1: Green Factor Problem 1

12 “retained” large trees are too close (**15’ or less**) to new 3-story buildings to realistically survive (as shown in orange below). Also, the applicant shows 15’ dia. circles for existing trees, but more realistic is **25’-40’ diameter** for the canopy drip line and root ball of 70-100 years old trees. (Our orange circles below are 30’.)

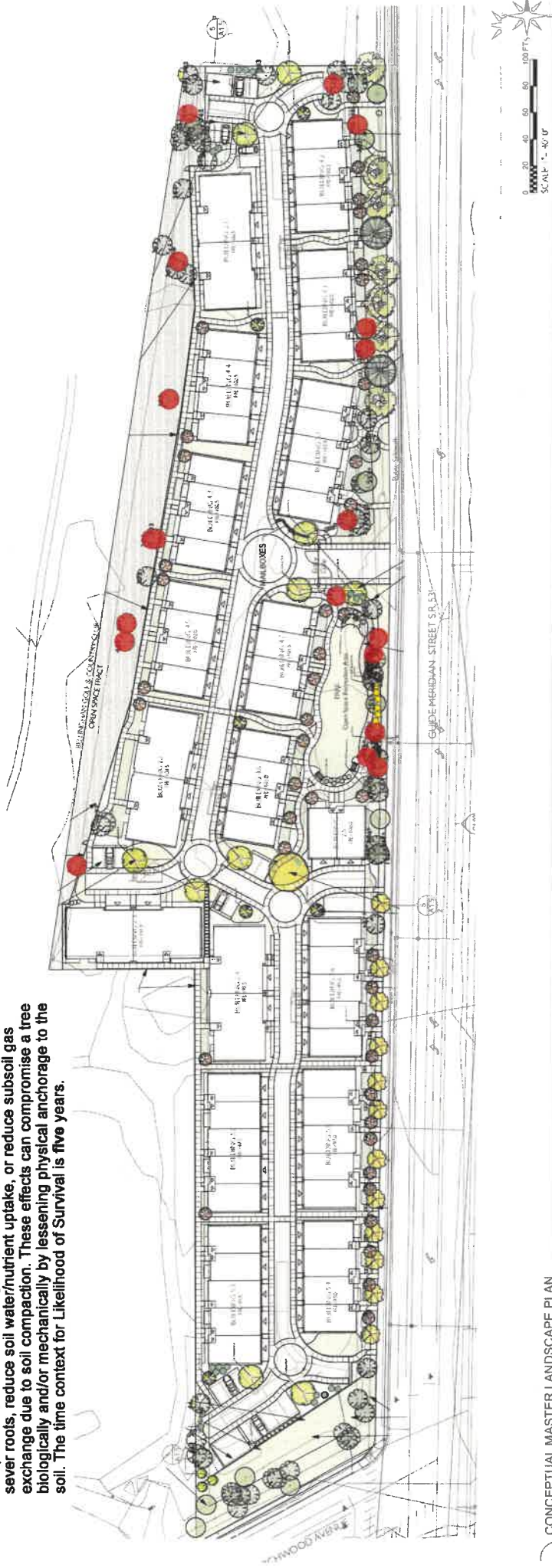




Image A2: Green Factor Problem 2

18 “retained” trees (red circles) have a **poor Likelihood of Survival*** beyond 5 years as determined by the applicant’s own arborist report. This is due to immediately adjacent construction activity occurring. (See their arborist’s note below.)

*Likelihood of Survival rating by the applicant’s certified arborist is based upon the current condition of each tree and extent/% of proposed construction activity within the CRZ of each tree. Construction activity can include excavation, grading, pavement/concrete placement, soil compaction, utilities, trenching etc. These activities have the potential to sever roots, reduce soil water/nutrient uptake, or reduce subsoil gas exchange due to soil compaction. These effects can compromise a tree biologically and/or mechanically by lessening physical anchorage to the soil. The time context for Likelihood of Survival is five years.



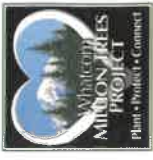


Image A3: Green Factor Problem 3

Applicant's claimed landscape area (in green below) is **50,023 SF**. We measured **~42,600 SF** which includes the 10,600 SF ROW (lime green at left below) that will partially become hardscape for the City's future large roundabout, thus reducing the project's landscape area even further.



1 GREEN FACTOR CALCULATION PLAN
Scale: 1" = 40' 0"



Image B: 68-unit maxed-out applicant's site plan

8 large footprint luxury homes (shown in yellow) have twice the footprint of the other 60 smaller units, thus crowding the site and creating several negative impacts, such as a deficient Green Factor score and poorly designed inner access lane.

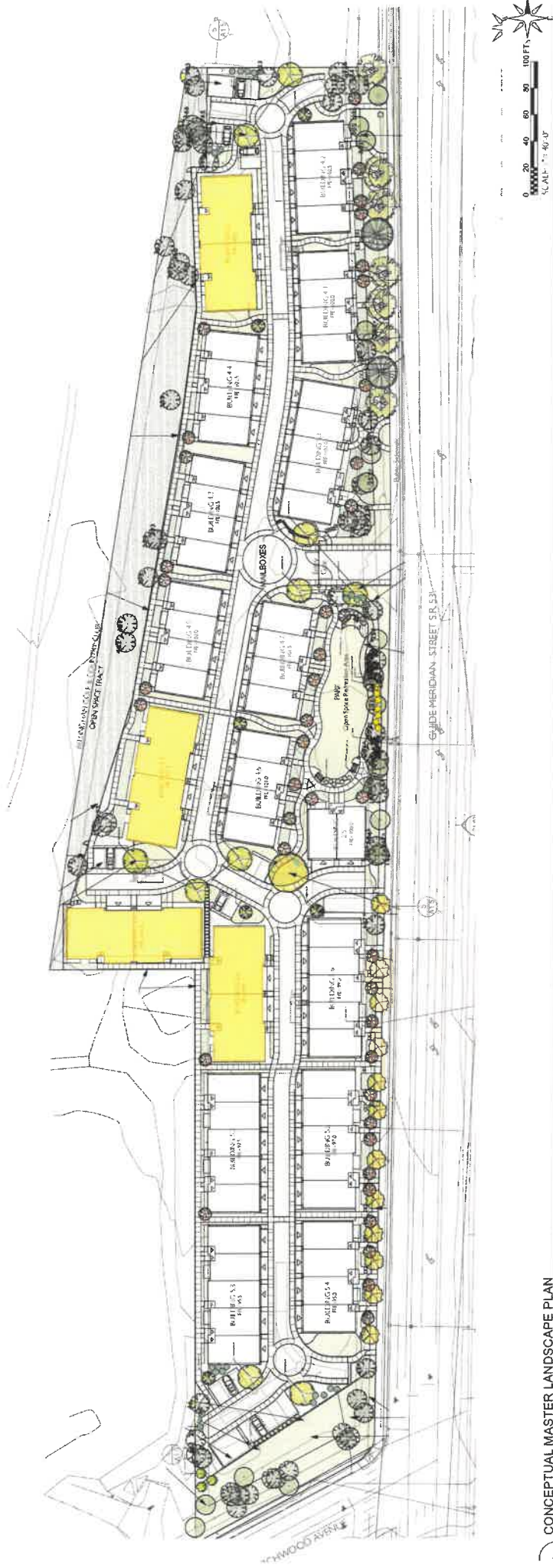




Image C: 60-units saves up to 88 more trees

Removing the 8 large footprint homes and slightly adjusting other unit locations **saves 88 more trees** (yellow circles below) AND solve the deficient **Green Factor score**. It's a higher-quality, still-profitable development that **balances** needed infill housing with COB's tree retention, livability & climate resilience goals.



1 ALL EXISTING TREES ON SITE
Scale: 1" = 40'-0"

Image D: Replacement Trees to Be Planted



What Planning recommends...

- **3** native tree seedlings planted per 30" dbh or larger tree removed.
- **1** native tree seedling planted per 6"–30" dbh tree removed.
- **NO** mulch.
- Plant **anywhere** in BGCC or the Birchwood neighborhood.
- **1.5x** surety bond (undefined).

What approval should require...

- Plant **10** native tree seedlings per 30" dbh or larger tree removed **AND** per **retained tree that dies within 5 years.**
- Plant **3** native tree seedlings per 6" to 30" dbh tree removed **AND** per retained tree that dies within 5 years.
- **Sufficient mulch for every seedling.**
- Plant in **perpetually protected public lands/ROWS** in Birchwood to better address tree canopy inequity that this project will worsen.
- Provide a **meaningful** surety bond (**3x** of ALL planting + replanting costs) to encourage **positive** results.

Kathy Furtado kathyfurtado@hotmail.com

Thank you for hearing our concerns

In the past few days, I've looked over some of the planning documents from this Seattle developer. I believe that Bellingham should be very concerned about the **decimation** of the mature evergreens, to be only partially replaced by a few small, non-native species. A young tree is by no means as resilient to the harsh weather that we experience here. Young trees also provide much less value to the city and environment in terms of flood control, shade, wildlife habitat, and aesthetics. This development will be a net loss for our city.

As a grandparent and a former pediatric nurse, I also have grave concerns ^{for the children living here and} about the proximity of the 68 units to the Guide-Meridian, which is essentially a 5-lane ^{busy} highway between the always-busy Birchwood Avenue and I-5. This unfortunate location offers no safe walkable or bikeable access to any amenities. This is a stretch where drivers are distracted by lane changing, route finding, commercial traffic, and trying to squeeze thorough the lights before they turn red. ~~Probably unfamiliar with this,~~ the Seattle developer plans one small, grassy oval as the only outdoor space, and just steps from this busy street, with only a ladder-like, 42" fence between the play area and the Guide-Meridian! And because the units are tall and narrow, with many steps, they are not suitable for seniors, so I imagine lower-income young people (with children ^{TKFS}) will end up in those units. That play area so close to Meridian is a real concern, particularly for single parents and their rambunctious children, not to mention pets. Where else can kids go when Mom or Dad wants them outside?

Based on their graphics, this *appears* to be a nice development, but because the majority of the units are just steps away from the ^{busy} Guide-Meridian, overlooking that highway and with a view of only parking lots and industrial-looking buildings from the windows, and no ^{or play} place to walk safely, it's not a place that anyone should have to live. But the existing trees are perfect residents. They offer the city of Bellingham a visual respite from all the cement and blacktop already in that area. Please preserve them. *Safe, outdoor space for children should be required for a project such as this, perhaps through fewer units and more open space.*

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Kathy Furtado

Bellingham, WA

Laura Weiss Testimony

March 13, 2024

Good evening. My name is Laura Weiss and I live in the Sunnyland neighborhood. I am here tonight because I care about the quality of life in our community and I believe that the large evergreen trees we are blessed to have here are a key component of that quality life.

I understand that the Hearing Examiner's role here isn't to protect trees because its the right thing to do – but to make sure that the law is being followed.

As Michael Feerer described earlier, it doesn't appear that the law IS being followed in this case. While the applicant's calculations say they will meet the minimum required Green Factor of 0.4 for this type of project, there are a number of highly questionable assumptions being made to reach this conclusion.

First, to meet the required Green Factor minimum, **everything they promise in their application must occur.**

Yet, the applicant does not actually **commit** to preserving the mature trees they claim **will be retained on site. They use words like "may" and "if possible" throughout their application.**

In addition, several of those 60-plus trees they plan to retain are simply too close to the new construction. This might be okay with smaller new trees, but it **will not work for older trees** with a canopy width and root ball diameter of 25 to 30 feet.

Last but not least, many other trees they are claiming will be preserved are rated in "poor health" by the applicant's arborist and are therefore **not likely to survive surrounding construction activities.**

For all these reasons, I hope – your honor – that you will not approve this project until modifications are made to ensure the legally required Green Factor score of .4 is truly met – in a way that is well-verified by the Planning Department and that the public can have confidence in.

The suggestion to modify this plan to remove 8 of the larger units is an excellent idea and one that will lead to a higher-quality, nature-integrated, still-profitable development that balances our need for infill housing with community livability & climate resilience.

I hope, your Honor, that you will **strictly hold this proposed project to the required standards and stated intents** of the Infill Toolkit ordinance.

Thank you.

Karen (Kari) Galbraith
1915 Governor Road
Bellingham, WA 98229
karigalbraith@comcast.net

March 13, 2024
City Hearing on proposed Meridian Street Development

Karen (Kari) Galbraith, resident of Lake Padden area for 40 years.
Bellingham Park Steward to Padden Open space

We are living in a time of significant changes, both locally and globally. Many of our ways of thinking and acting that we've done for decades are no longer serving our best interest. We are called to think and act in ways that help us now, while giving considerable thought for the future. This is challenging us at every turn.

I agree with the stance of Whatcom Million Trees that our community needs both infill housing and to maintain our 40 % canopy cover. These were identified in the Urban Forestry Mgmt Plan survey as the top 3 community priorities: affordable housing, climate resilience and urban forest. Though the UFMP is not yet in place, the need for these guidelines are current and real. I urge you to listen to, and strive to balance the community needs and values with those of development.

Removing a large stand of mature trees and building a development that will be surrounded by cement/asphalt creates a multiple ripple effect. First, we will lose the known benefits of tree cover: their cooling effect, increased oxygen and decreased CO2, filtering air and soil/water pollutants, noise reduction, increased human and animal wellbeing. Secondly, the loss of canopy cover increases energy usage, especially during extreme temperatures that are straining our already marginal resources.

I ask that this development be amended to maintain 2-3 stands of healthy mature trees within the development. This will increase the survival of the trees; benefitting both inhabitants and our energy infrastructure.

What may seem like a single decision on a development is another step in changing our world. What we do now has a lasting effect on the future of our community and our world. I ask you what legacy do you, do we want to create?

Resources:
SEPA guidelines
Bellingham's Climate Action Plan
Bellingham Urban Forestry Management Plan
Cascadia Daily News March 9, 2024 "A maxed-out power grid:..."

WMT TESTIMONY ON MERIDIAN PROJECT MARCH 13TH 2024

My name is Brenda Chevalier. I have lived in Bellingham Wa for 32 years and in western Washington for 55 years. I have traveled many parts of the world and find Bellingham one of the most beautiful places on the planet. What makes Bellingham so special are our prominent mountains, abundant water, unique islands, fresh air, cleanliness from the rain, and of course all of our magnificent trees. Many old native long standing trees have surrounded the Bellingham Golf and Country Club for many decades, and maybe longer. Their astounding beauty has not only made our views more esthetically pleasing, but they have captured carbon and removed greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Old native trees have an unparalleled ability to store carbon and provide more oxygen than younger trees. They improve our air quality, water quality, protect vital ecosystems, provide cooling in extreme heat, and connect us to our sacred planet earth.

Urban growth is inevitable as more people find our Bellingham paradise. However, we have choices on how it is done. Taking out old mature trees is unwise, especially for greedy companies that don't care about our environment or community, only their financial interests and profits.

Compromise is necessary when there are opposing views. I am respectfully asking that you accept WMT's creative suggestions to save as many trees as possible for this project. Please help us keep our cherished trees around the Country Club to help our community, environment, climate change, and all the amazing qualities these majestic trees bring.

Thank you,

Brenda Chevalier~ *MA.*

[360-739-8857](tel:360-739-8857)

Hello, my name is Robin Thomas, a Bellingham resident of the Sehome Neighborhood and I am a Whatcom Million Trees Project Board member.

I have an ordinance-related concern as well as overall concerns about how the project conflicts with our City's Climate Goals.

My ordinance concern is about the site plan's inner access lane. Please see Image B of the packet provided earlier to you. The Infill Toolkit ordinance **BMP 20.28** provides specific guidance about such lanes in the **General Standards section regarding Pedestrian Oriented design**. Fronting units along existing streets is preferred, but when not possible there are several design standards that apply to new streets and lanes.

Item 4a states: *The width of the garages and driveways accessing a street or lane shall be proportionally less than the width of the dwelling unit.*

and 4c states: *Architectural and landscaping details shall be embellished to minimize the visual presence of the garages and any open driveway parking.*

I see no evidence that either of these requirements have been met along the inner lane in the proposed design. It is basically a dead end street dominated by garage doors the full width of the building and expansive asphalt driveways without landscaping areas. This proposed roadway design does not meet the Infill Toolkit guidelines or result in the type of infill density mandated through city standards.

For this reason alone, the application should not be approved until the applicant remedies this inner lane design deficiency that violates the Infill Toolkit's specifications.

My bigger picture concern is about the immense tree loss and the consequences for the livability and resilience of our city.

There are very few remaining mature native trees left within our neighborhoods. We know that mature tree groves better withstand climate impacts and cannot be replaced within our lifetimes. Carbon storage is calculated by weight, and it should be obvious that a mature Douglas fir is far more valuable in multiple ways that cannot be compensated for by planting less than 2 seedlings for each established tree. Shade and stormwater benefits cannot be accrued from down the road. Large evergreen trees significantly cool pavement and roofs with deep shade and pump hundreds of gallons of water into the atmosphere daily, lessening localized flooding. Strategically retaining trees provides habitat for birds for the enjoyment of those living in the buildings, and supports long term mental and physical health. Ultimately mature trees are the key to climate resilience.

Both housing and tree retention can be provided with good planning, and we support building this housing with modifications. We have good examples of tree retention on sites here in Bellingham as well as by looking at examples of construction in the rapidly growing cities north of our boarder. Let's do better.

Planning & Community Development,
210 Lottie Street, Bellingham, WA 98225
planning@cob.org

Public Hearing Testimony on the following proposal:
SUB2022-0033 / VAR2023-0002: An Infill Toolkit and Variance request for the Stream
Bellingham Townhomes Plat.

March 13, 2024

Hello, I am Wendy Larson, a Bellingham resident. My formal education is that of a biologist and a businessperson, with Masters degrees in biological sciences and in business, both.

Others have spoken today about how certain Infill Toolkit ordinances have not been met. The applicant's Green Factor calculations are incorrect, and the design of the project's inner vehicle lane does not meet the Toolkit's required design standards.

The Infill Toolkit ordinance details and specifications must be enforced by the Planning Department, to protect the community as it is intended to do. It would be harmful to the community, including future residents of this development, to make developer-favoring discretionary interpretations of our ordinance.

While this is a privately-owned property, it is also a special site in our city. The mature woodland on this site is currently wildlife habitat, and exists in a larger context of adjacent wildlife habitat, as shown in the city's 2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis. This wildlife habitat has been fragmented and damaged by previous city development decisions, yet a community wildlife network continues to function at this location. A question before you today is: will you allow it to be further and needlessly damaged?

This is a special site, with special habitat. Few remaining stands of mature native forest remain in our city, especially in the Birchwood neighborhood that this project is located in. These stands support our community's climate resilience and public health. Mature trees are the heavy lifters for all climate resiliency benefits. To achieve this resilience, though, mature trees must be *woven* into the community.

That means *woven* within new infill developments such as this one. Substantial stands of mature trees cannot be mainly in parks and greenways blocks or miles away to have any positive effect for residents of this neighborhood from increasingly dangerous climate problems.

Another major problem with this proposal is that planting 474 small tree seedlings would

not even begin to replace the benefits provided by the more than 320 mature trees that would be removed. In addition to that ratio being inadequate, planting the little seedlings in and around the Golf & Country Club, on unprotected land that could be bulldozed or changed later, is also a weak and inadequate mitigation of the loss of these mature trees.

The habitat network which this site is part of has been severely damaged by the compounding effects of short-sighted, developer-lenient planning decisions, followed by subsequent property owner actions. The community has suffered such losses and harms long enough. Please do not make it worse now. Require the developer to follow our Infill Toolkit specifications.

Thank you.

Wendy Larson

606 Clark Rd.
Bellingham, WA 98226

TESTIMONY ON PROPOSED 68 UNIT DEVELOPMENT ON MERIDIAN STREET

1. Expertise: I have an educational and work background as a habitat and wildlife biologist. I have an MS from Huxley College with research directly related to forest stands. I have worked for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Lummi Tribe and have authored several documents relating to forest function.

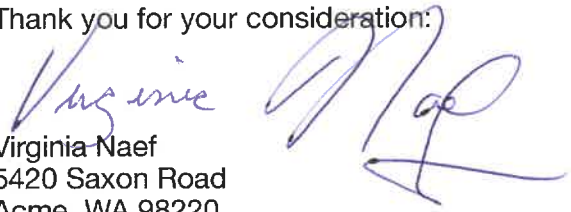
2. Project setting: This project is situated in a heavily developed neighborhood with a paucity of retained forest, parks, and greenways. Removal of this rare patch of trees will have significant environmental and cultural effects.

3. Effects: This forest island provides "stepping stone" habitat for migratory birds as well as permanent habitat for local birds and small mammals. Last year I observed a pair of red-tail hawks in nuptial flight over the stand. It is quite possible that this forest provides nesting habitat for these birds as well as a source of cover and food.

4. Consequences: The proposed leave behind trees are merely a fringe of trees with no interior habitat. Consequently, the edge effects will result in heating, freezing, and dessication of the remaining trees and will greatly reduce their ability to modify noise, air pollution, wind, and harsh weather. Also, this fringe of trees won't be wind-hardened and will be at significant risk of falling in wind storms, or of failure to thrive and dying because they are no longer protected by fellow trees.

5. Alternative: The Whatcom Million Tree's proposed modification to this project— eliminating eight of the most impactful units—will retain much of the ecological benefit of this forested jewel within Bellingham's city limits, while still allowing for in-filling goals and income for the parties involved.

Thank you for your consideration:


Virginia Naef
5420 Saxon Road
Acme, WA 98220

360 595-1093

vnaef@yahoo.com

jim.kgwille@gmail.com

**Case # HE-23-PL-012 | Project # SUB2022-00033 / VAR2023-0002
Hearing Mar 13, 2024 05:00 PM | Filed Jul 12, 2023
Applicant Bellingham Golf & Country Club**

STATEMENT OF James D. Smith in Opposition to the Project as Proposed.

Your Honor, my name is Jim Smith.

I am a Whatcom County resident.

I currently serve as the Planting Coordinator for Whatcom Million Trees Project. I have been a licensed landscape contractor for several decades. I have studied forestry and participated in reforestation projects. I have supervised planting and care for thousands of trees.

I oppose this project unless it is substantially modified to minimize the loss of mature trees. Michael Feerer's presentation has identified a way to preserve both trees and housing units. I support that alternative fully.

It is wrong to think that replanting tree seedlings compensates for loss of mature forest in any time frame that is relevant to our present climate crisis.

Many mature trees on this site can continue to live for hundreds of years. Studies show an increase in carbon capture as mature trees age. By contrast, seedlings can require up to 40 years to become net metabolizers of carbon. They will need decades more to catch up with the carbon metabolism rate of the big trees they are intended to replace. The best solution here is to redesign the project to minimize tree removal.

Applicant proposes to plant only 474 replacement tree seedlings as claimed compensation for its massive tree removal. This is grossly inadequate. That would be less than 1.5 seedlings planted for each mature tree removed. Image D in the packet submitted by Michael Feerer proposes a better approach. I support that.

Even vastly increased replanting is an illusory benefit unless the trees have perpetual legal protection, such as a conservation easement.

In addition, all new seedlings must be protected with mulch over the ground in their root zone after planting. Without this protection, many seedlings will likely die. There is no mention of mulch in the Planning Department's recommendations. It is unclear if a surety bond would include the cost of mulch and its application.

Michael Feerer's presentation has also identified 12 trees applicant claims will be retained on-site. Mr. Feerer explains that these 12 trees are too close to new buildings to survive the construction phase. I agree.

It is standard practice to protect a tree's critical root zone from substantial construction impact. Critical root zones are calculated as one foot of protection for every inch of trunk width.

Under applicant's proposal, construction activity will occur well within the critical root zones of these 12 trees. These trees will not likely survive the proposed construction for long.

Thank you.



City of Bellingham

Meridian Street Roundabouts Feasibility Study Bellingham, WA

December 2019

Mary Lou White
905 Birchwood
Ave

PREPARED BY

Reid Middleton

City of Bellingham
Meridian Street Roundabouts Feasibility Report
December 2019

The engineering material and data contained in this report were prepared under the supervision and direction of the undersigned, whose seal as registered professional engineer is affixed below.



Charles Smith, P.E.
Project Manager

Reid Middleton

728 134th Street SW, Suite 200
Everett, WA 98204
File No. 252018.003

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- B – Conceptual Layouts & Alternatives Analysis
- C – Open House & Public Comments
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The two closely spaced intersections at Meridian/Birchwood and Meridian/Squalicum are critical nodes in several major transportation routes for the movement of people, emergency responders, industrial freight, and commercial goods between the following locations:

- Bellingham's commercial, industrial, and residential Waterfront District
- Birchwood Neighborhood commercial center and residential area
- Fountain District Urban Village commercial center and residential area
- Saint Joseph's Hospital and medical offices
- King Mountain Neighborhood (Via Orchard Drive)
- Irongate industrial area (Via Orchard Drive)
- Meridian-Bakerview commercial area north of Interstate 5
- U.S.-Canadian border crossings on Interstate 5 and State Route 539 (Guide-Meridian).

Increased vehicular capacity at these intersections is needed to accommodate the level of growth and development that the City is planning for in the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. Over 5,000,000 square feet of commercial, industrial, and residential growth is planned for the Waterfront District. Approximately 500,000 square feet of new medical offices and patient care is planned for Saint Joseph's Hospital. Several hundred thousand square feet of mixed-use commercial and residential development is planned for the Fountain District Urban Village. Many vacant parcels await commercial and residential development in the Meridian-Bakerview commercial area north and east of Interstate 5.

Since 2006, the City of Bellingham has been working to study the feasibility, develop plans, secure funding, and obtains permits to construct the Orchard Drive Extension in 2020 between Birchwood Avenue and James Street in the heart of Bellingham's 25th and newest residential neighborhood. This area was annexed to the City in 2009 and is expected to develop with over 3,000 homes over time. This has been a critical component of Bellingham's strategy to both plan for and accommodate growth while also providing a new, grade-separated crossing beneath Interstate 5. This new connection would relieve existing traffic congestion at the I-5/Meridian and I-5/Sunset interchanges, which are the only other route options from King Mountain into downtown Bellingham.

While the Orchard Drive extension would provide a much-needed connection, it would also introduce new traffic impacts to the Meridian/Birchwood and Meridian/Squalicum intersections. Replacing the existing traffic signals at these intersection with a multimodal roundabout has the potential to increase long-term intersection capacity for passenger and freight vehicles and to improve safety and comfort for all people using the multimodal transportation system. However, there are many significant challenges and risks to reconstructing these intersections and the purpose of this feasibility study was to examine all of these variables, test some possible alternative solutions, weigh the pros and cons of each alternative, and to make a recommendation as to how best to proceed forward. Importantly, there is no funding currently identified for right-of-way acquisition, engineering, design, or construction, but the recommendations from this study lay out a basic strategy and next steps for Bellingham to follow in order to seek funding for scalable transportation improvement of these intersections over time.

BACKGROUND

The following background provides a glimpse of the attention that these intersections have received from the City over the past 15 years.

In **2006**, Bellingham adopted the Orchard Drive Extension as an important new transportation project needed to accommodate the 20-year growth planned for in the Comprehensive Plan. This new grade-separated crossing of Interstate 5 would provide a multimodal transportation connection from James Street in the north-central Urban Growth Area (UGA), passing beneath Interstate 5, to Birchwood Avenue, Meridian Street, and the Bellingham urban core.

In **2006**, Bellingham also adopted a new Institutional Master Plan for Saint Joseph's Hospital, which called for hundreds of thousands of additional square feet of medical offices, surgery facilities, patient care, and a cancer center. The Orchard Drive Extension beneath Interstate 5 would provide a much faster and more direct route for emergency responders carrying patients from the northcentral UGA to a new backdoor to the hospital without having to deal with delays due to traffic congestion at the I-5 interchanges at Meridian and Sunset, which offered the only other routes to the hospital.

In **2007**, understanding that a new Orchard Drive Extension would provide major mobility benefits, but would also increase traffic congestion and delay at the Meridian/Birchwood and Meridian/Squalicum intersections, Bellingham Public Works issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ), hired consultants, and began studying alternatives to improve the intersections. In 2008, the "Great Recession" negatively affected the national, state, and local economies and the intersection alternatives analysis was shelved.

In **2009**, approximately 1,000 acres of the northcentral UGA was annexed into the City of Bellingham and, through a lengthy public planning process in 2010, became the King Mountain Neighborhood, Bellingham's 25th planned neighborhood. The zoning approved for the King Mountain Neighborhood will allow over 3,000 new homes to be constructed over time, which will bring increased vehicle traffic, as well as the need to provide sidewalks, bikeways, and transit routes for the people who live in this area. During the same time period, the City adopted the Fountain District Urban Village Master Plan, which calls for higher urban densities in mixed-use, multi-story buildings in a relatively compact area focused along the Meridian Street corridor with transitions from higher densities to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

In **2013**, the City adopted the Waterfront District Master Plan, which calls for significant redevelopment of the former 200-acre Georgia-Pacific pulp mill property, purchased by the Port of Bellingham in 2001, with up to 6 million square feet of commercial, industrial, marine shipping, institutional (WWU), and residential development over time.

In **2013**, Bellingham Public Works had secured a federal grant for \$1.25 million for the preliminary engineering, design, and right-of-way (ROW) acquisition of the Orchard Drive Extension. This worked has progressed steadily since the funding became available to the City and a significant amount of private land has been purchased to be used as public ROW for the new multimodal transportation route, but the final ROW acquisition has been delayed and is

awaiting the resolution of negotiations with individual property owners on each end of the project.

In **2014-2015**, the City rehabilitated and resurfaced the Bay-Chestnut Bridge, which allowed the removal of weight restrictions and re-established the major freight trucking route between the marine shipping terminal on south Cornwall Avenue to Chestnut, Roeder, Squalicum, Meridian, and Interstate 5.

In **2015**, the Washington legislature approved a \$15 billion “Connecting Washington” gas tax revenue funding package for major transportation projects throughout the state. Bellingham was fortunate to have the Orchard Drive Extension identified for \$10 million in the State 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 biennial budgets.

Due to the economic recession of 2008, the change from rural, suburban, and industrial areas to higher urban densities began very slowly, but with each passing year the pace of development, and change, has increased in throughout Bellingham. As development continues, the need to identify a feasible alternative to improving the multimodal transportation connections through and traffic operations at the Meridian/Birchwood and Meridian/Squalicum intersections has also grown in importance.

In **2018**, Bellingham Public Works issued an RFQ and hired Reid Middleton consultants to take a fresh look at the alternatives analysis for the Meridian/Birchwood and Meridian/Squalicum intersections.

In early **November 2019**, Washington voters approved Initiative 976, which proposed to cap vehicle registration fees at \$30 per vehicle. The day after the election, Washington Governor Jay Inslee issued a statement acknowledging the passage of I-976 and announcing that hundreds of millions of dollars will be removed from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) budget in the coming years as a result.

On **November 27, 2019**, WSDOT published a list of major transportation projects whose funding has been delayed by at least 6 months until the repercussions of I-976 are better understood with the very real possibility that all project funding will have to be permanently eliminated. Bellingham’s Orchard Drive Extension is on this WSDOT list and at the time that this feasibility study report is being published (December 2019), it is uncertain whether Bellingham will have funding to construct the Orchard Drive Extension in 2020, as originally planned, or in the post I-976 future.

In **December 2019**, Reid Middleton concluded this multi-agency roundabout feasibility study with a recommended alternative for Alternative 3 strategically broken into phases 1 and 2 for both funding and construction purposes. Importantly, this Alternative 3 provides significant transportation benefit whether the Orchard Drive Extension is ultimately constructed or not. **Assuming the City can obtain ownership of right-of-way claimed to be owned by BNSF, Alternative 3 also provides the best at-grade crossing option for the regional multiuse trail to cross the roundabout into Cornwall Park.**

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the analysis performed for the Meridian Street intersections with Squalicum Way and Birchwood Avenue. The study includes evaluation of existing conditions, future no-build conditions, and analysis of conceptual design alternatives for the intersections. The alternatives analysis includes advantages and disadvantages of each alternative, preliminary analysis of probable costs, and assessment of multimodal and safety impacts related to each alternative. A conceptual layout of the preferred alternative is included, along with the challenges and risks associated with the proposed alternative.

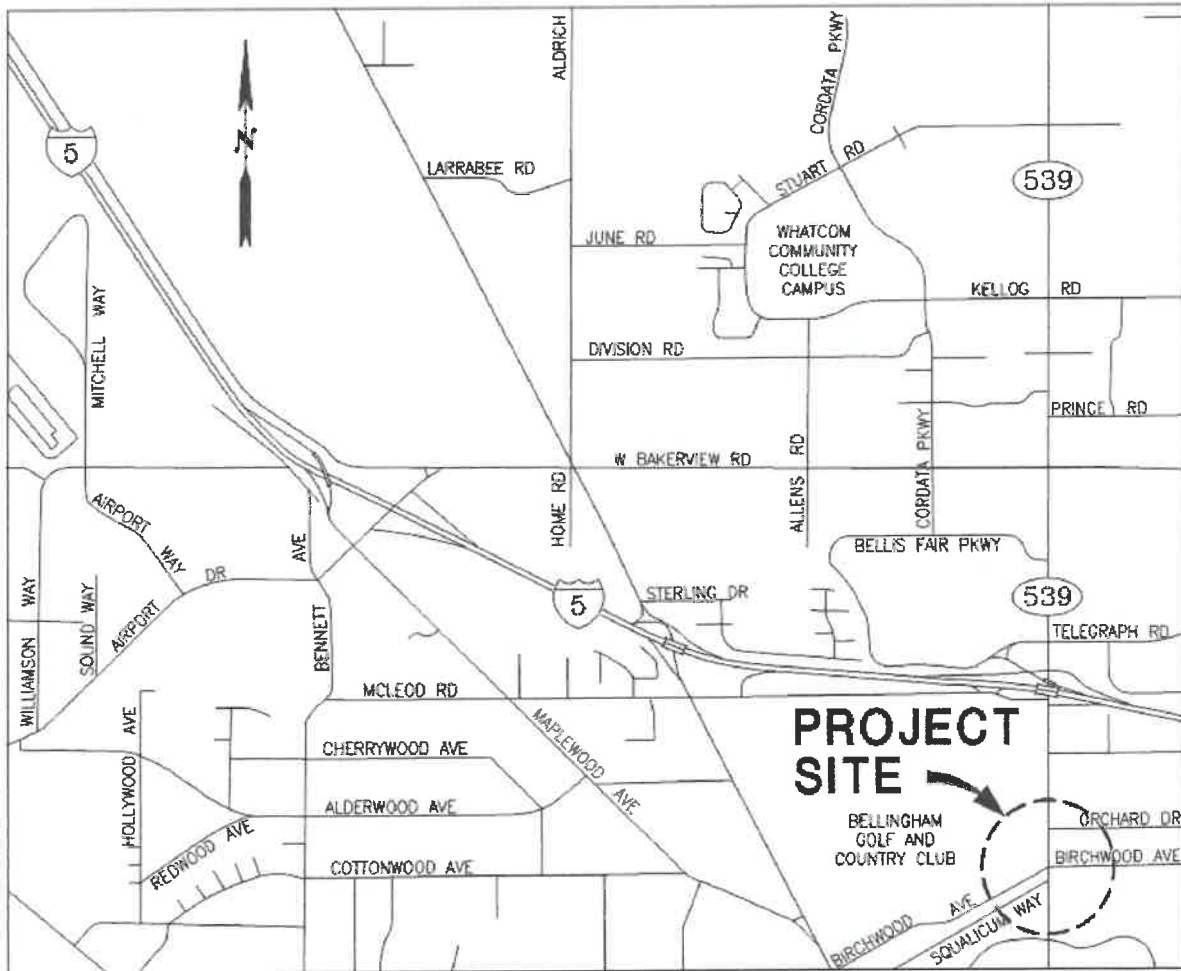


Figure 1. Vicinity Map

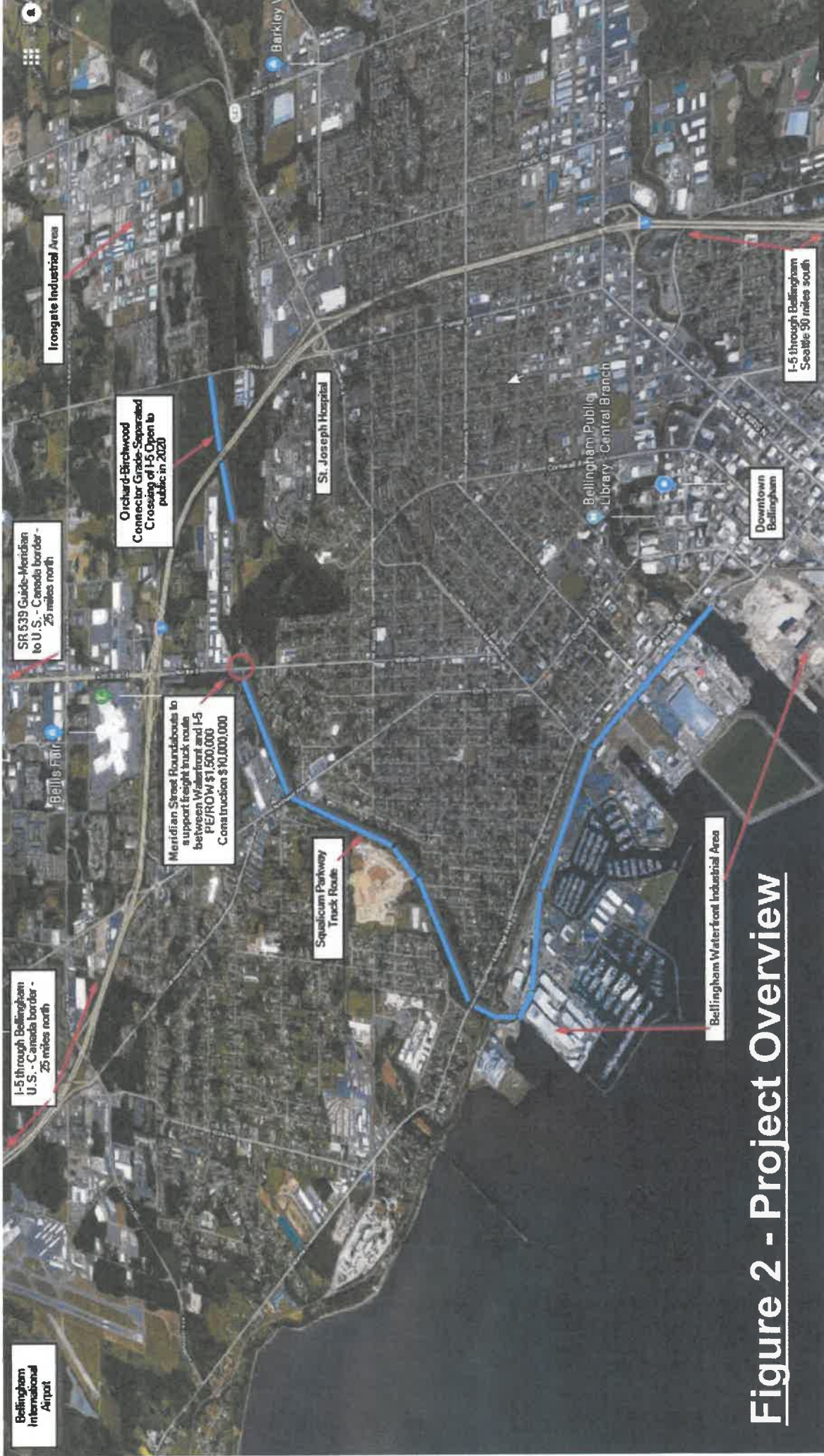


Figure 2 - Project Overview

Project #17: Meridian Street Roundabouts (Meridian/Squalicum & Meridian/Birchwood)



PROJECT NARRATIVE: These two closely spaced intersections are a critical freight route and multimodal transportation link between the industrial Bellingham Waterfront and U.S.-Canadian border crossings connected by Interstate 5 and Guide-Meridian (SR 539). When the Orchard-Birchwood extension is completed in 2020, vehicle traffic volume, as well as pedestrian and bicycle demand, will increase and these intersections will become increasingly congested. Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans call for sidewalks and Parks plans call for a multiuse trail on the former railroad bed. WTA has indicated that Meridian is a candidate for future high-frequency GO Line service.

MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS: Tier 2 sidewalks, Tier 3 bicycle lanes, turn lanes, increased access, safety, sight distance, and efficiency. WTA Routes 4 and 15 currently provide transit service, with future consideration for high-frequency transit on Meridian Street (SR 539).

PROJECT STATUS: Feasibility Study 2019. Unfunded. State and federal grants, as well as public-private funding partnerships will be sought.

No.	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	FUNDING SOURCE	Cost Estimates (000's) 2019 Dollars						PROJECT TOTAL \$	
			Previous Budget	FUNDED			UNFUNDED			
			2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025		
17	Meridian Street Roundabouts (Squalicum & Birchwood) (2019 Feasibility Study)	Street	160				Feasibility Study 2019			
		Unknown					10,000			
		Subtotal	160				10,000			10,160

TRANSPORTATION IMPACT FEES COLLECTED

Yes, for local funds

RIGHT-OF-WAY ACQUISITION NECESSARY

Yes: Intersection corners and railroad ROW



Figure 3. Project Summary

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Traffic Signal Operations

The existing signal operation of these two closely-spaced intersections is inefficient due to the split side street signal phases. This causes significant delay to traffic, creating a bottleneck effect for the flow of traffic on Meridian Street. This condition is exacerbated by the heavy flow of truck traffic that uses Squalicum Way as the designated truck route to and from the City's waterfront industrial area.

Traffic counts were collected between 7-9 AM and between 4-6 PM. The AM peak hour occurred between 7:45 and 8:45 AM and the PM peak hour occurred between 4:45 and 5:45 PM. The combined demand at both intersections was approximately 1,800 vehicles during the morning and 2,400 vehicles during the evening. The percentage of freight vehicles (defined as FHWA vehicles classes 4, 6 and above) was 3.6% during the morning and 1.4% during the evening. There was limited bicyclist and pedestrian activity during either peak hour with a total volume of approximately 10 users via each mode during each peak hour. This is consistent with pedestrian and bicycle count data collected at the Meridian/Birchwood intersection annually during the last week of September as part of Bellingham's volunteer-based pedestrian and bicycle counts in partnership with WSDOT and Cascade Bicycle Club (2010-2019).

Table 1. Bike & Pedestrian Volumes.

Bellingham Volunteer-Based Annual Count of People Walking and People Riding Bicycles (Last Week in September)											
Intersection	Time	People Riding Bicycles Through the Intersection									
Count Location	2 hours	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Meridian/Birchwood	7-9 am	28	54	26	36	23	28	33	No Data	10	17
Meridian/Birchwood	4-6 pm	35	47	53	42	54	60	52	31	23	28
Intersection	Time	People Walking Through the Intersection									
Count Location	2 hours	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Meridian/Birchwood	7-9 am	14	27	24	18	17	10	23	No Data	17	20
Meridian/Birchwood	4-6 pm	23	35	24	20	34	25	21	24	25	29

The following existing traffic conditions were observations were during the PM peak hour:

- Tractor-trailers make a wide right turn from southbound Meridian Street onto westbound Squalicum Way, often blocking both southbound lanes on Meridian Street. They also make a wide left turn eastbound from Squalicum Way onto northbound Meridian Street, blocking both northbound lanes.
- Transit buses in the area were typically shorter, approximately 40' in length.
- Pedestrian and bicycle activity in the area was generally low.
- The largest queues observed on Birchwood Avenue and Squalicum Way were around 15-20 vehicles in length. Southbound queues on Meridian Street extended as far north as Orchard Drive (approximately 25 vehicles). Northbound queues on Meridian street extended as far south as Maplewood Avenue (approximately 20 vehicles).
- All queued vehicles typically cleared the intersection during each signal phase.
- Queuing did not extend to the I-5 ramp intersections, and queues were contained within the available left turn storage lengths.



Figure 4. Existing Peak Hour Traffic Volumes.

Existing conditions were modeled using VISSIM (see Appendix A). The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. The results indicate that significant delay occurs for vehicles traveling south along Meridian Street. The overall level of service for the intersection is LOS D with average delays per vehicle of 41 seconds.

Table 2. Existing Peak Hour Traffic Volumes.

Approach	Demand (veh)	Percent Served	Delay (s/veh)	LOS	Maximum Queue (veh)
Meridian St – Northbound	608	100%	49	D	16
Meridian St – Southbound	814	100%	36	D	18
Birchwood Ave – Eastbound	264	99%	47	D	10
Birchwood Ave – Westbound	434	100%	30	C	15
Squalicum Way – Eastbound	260	100%	45	D	13
Cornwall Park - Westbound	10	100%	36	C	2
<i>Intersection Total</i>	<i>2,390</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>-</i>

Source: Fehr & Peers.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

An open house for the Meridian Street Roundabouts Feasibility Study was conducted on the evening of June 24, 2019 at the A Life Church located at 3220 Meridian Street, immediately south of the Meridian/Squalicum intersection. Comments received included conversations with attendees, comment cards from open house participants and email correspondence for some community members that were unable to attend. The following list gives a summary of the comments received.

- Bike lanes and pedestrian facilities are needed in this area. Lack of facilities and a safe environment for cyclists may limit users.
- Multiple commenters indicated that bike lanes should be included in the chosen alternative.
- One local resident indicated the existing traffic light provides gaps in traffic along Meridian to allow vehicles to turn from E. Maplewood Ave.
- One commenter asked if bicycle volumes had been considered in the analysis.

Copies of the public notice, mailing area, comment forms, and the written comments received are included in Appendix C.



ALTERNATIVES ANALYSIS

Traffic Analysis

PM peak hour traffic analysis was conducted to evaluate operational improvements at the Squalicum Way and Birchwood Avenue intersections along Meridian Street. The operation analysis covered Existing, Future No-Build, and Future Build conditions for the study area.

Traffic forecasts for future year 2040 conditions were prepared using the latest version of the Whatcom County regional travel demand model maintained by Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). The model includes a 2016 base year and a 2036 future year. Before developing the forecasts, the base year model volumes at the study intersections were compared with the collected intersection counts to determine if a post-processing adjustment to the model volumes would be required to account for any differences between 2016 base year and 2019 count year. The model volumes were within 10% of the count volumes during both the AM and PM peak hours so no adjustments were necessary.

The future year intersection forecasts were prepared by adding the 20-year growth from the traffic model to the 2019 demand volumes. Overall, the model forecasts approximately 35% growth in vehicle trips and 50% growth in freight trips at the study intersections. These growth estimates are consistent with the forecasted population and employment growth within the City of Bellingham. The forecasts also account for additional traffic volume on Birchwood Ave from the Orchard Dr extension project.

The future year demand volumes were coded into the microsimulation model and minor signal timing adjustments were included to optimize the intersection operations. The analysis results for the 2040 PM peak hour are summarized in Table 3. Overall, all approaches except the park driveway operate with LOS F conditions and the maximum queue lengths are between 25 and 60 vehicles during the peak hour. It should be noted that traffic queues spilling south from Meridian/Birchwood can block access to the northern Cornwall Park driveway at Meridian/Squalicum. Detailed results are included as an attachment.

Table 3. Future Peak Hour Traffic Volumes (No Build Condition)

Approach	Demand (veh)	Percent Served	Delay (s/veh)	LOS	Maximum Queue (veh)
Meridian St – Northbound	742	102%	76	E	23
Meridian St – Southbound	1,127	99%	107	F	46
Birchwood Ave – Eastbound	444	98%	128	F	34
Birchwood Ave – Westbound	565	100%	>150	F	56
Squalicum Way – Eastbound	361	94%	>150	F	38
Cornwall Park - Westbound	20	98%	53	D	3
<i>Intersection Total</i>	3,259	99%	125	F	-

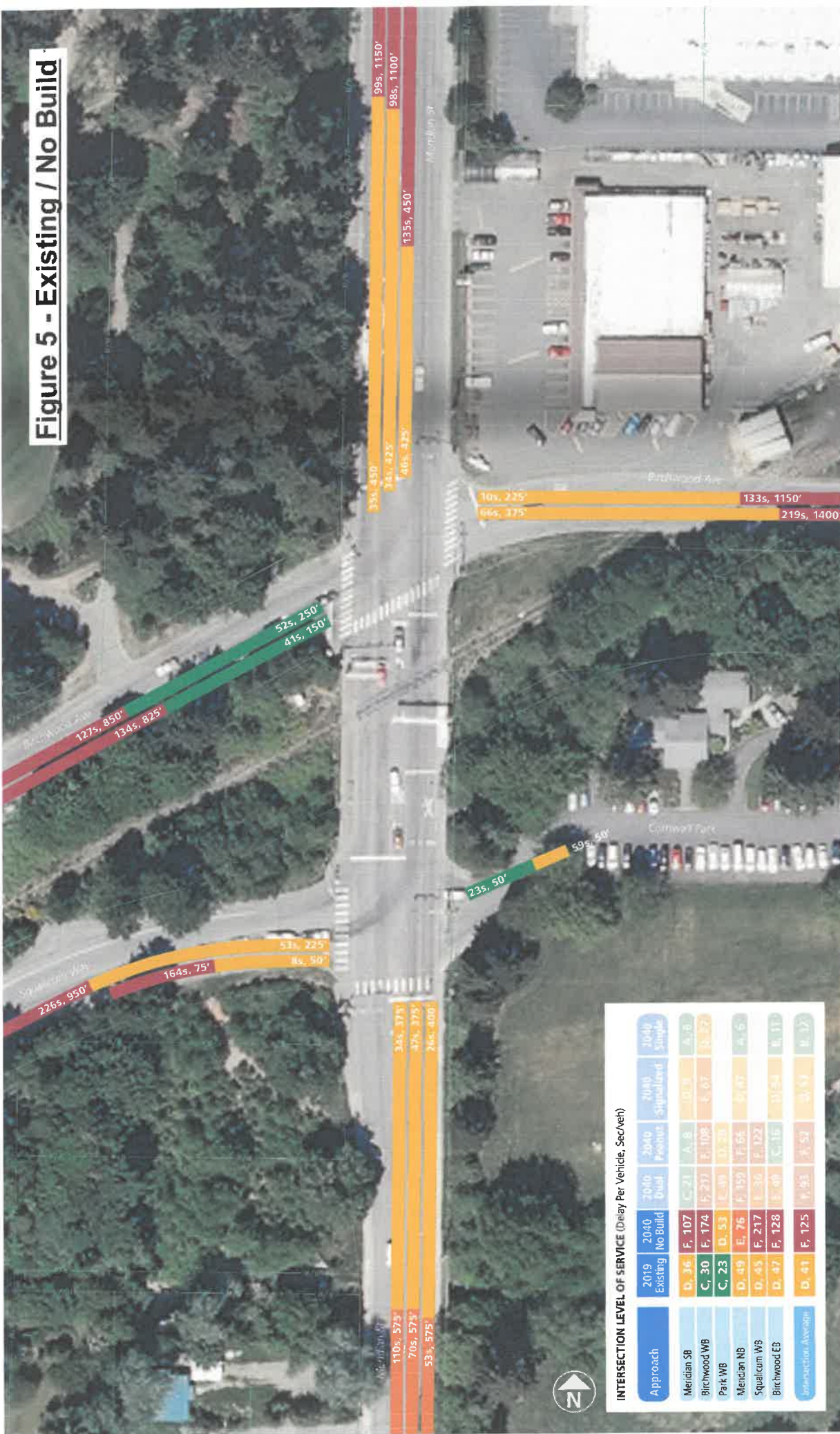
Source: Fehr & Peers.

Conceptual Alternatives

Three future scenarios were considered for the alternatives analysis. Conceptual plans for the future alternatives are shown in Figures 5 through 9. Each alternative includes the traffic analysis information for future operations projected in the year 2040. A summary of those alternatives is as follows:

- Future No Build: Maintain existing configuration (no change to intersections).
- Build Alternative 1: Dual Roundabouts to match existing intersection locations.
- Build Alternative 2: Peanut Roundabout.
- Build Alternative 3, Phase 1: Merge Birchwood and Squalicum arterial streets west of intersections; eliminate Meridian/Squalicum intersection; continue to operate Meridian/Birchwood with a traffic signal until a roundabout can be constructed.
- Build Alternative 3, Phase 2: Convert Meridian/Birchwood traffic signal to a multimodal roundabout.

Figure 5 - Existing / No Build

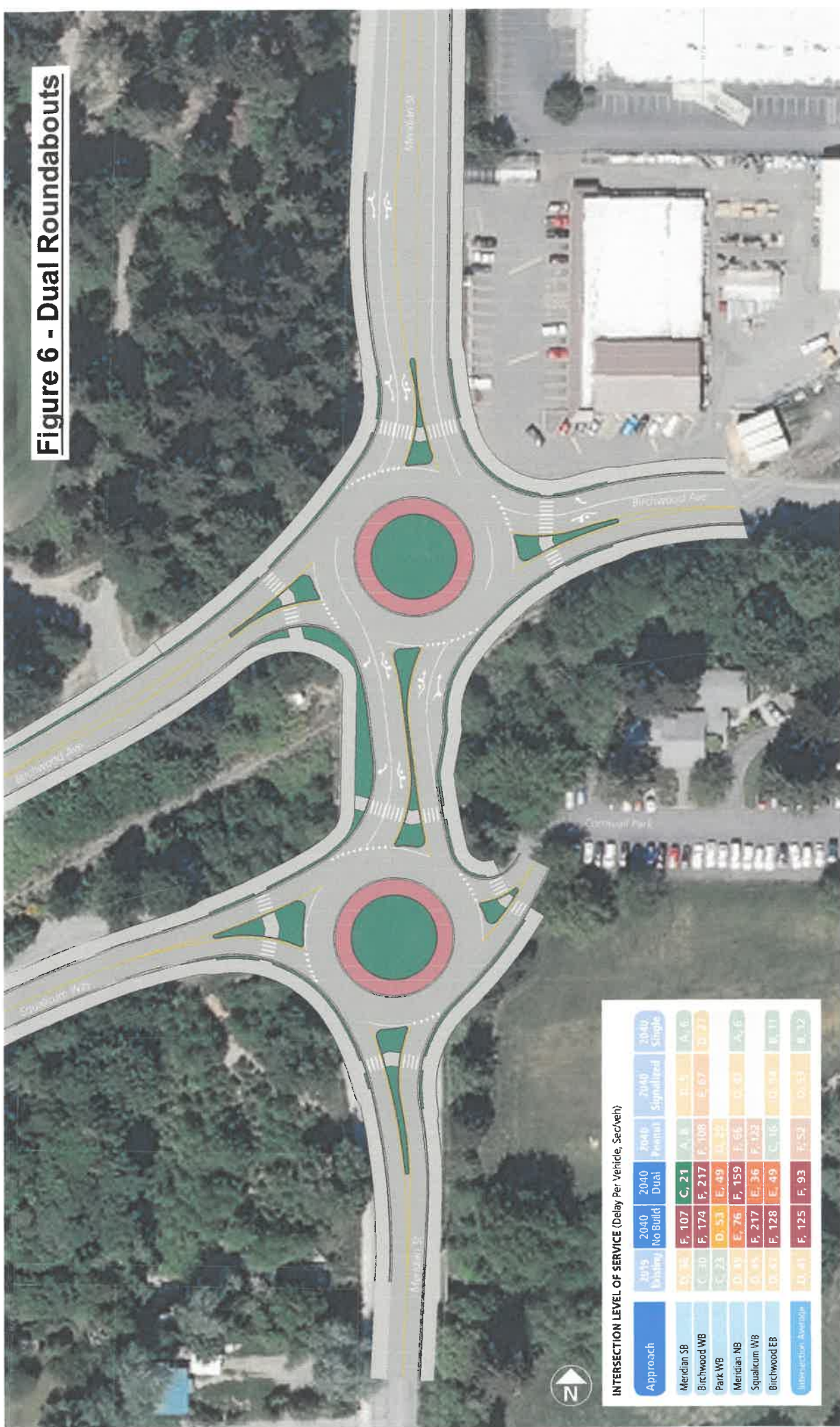


INTERSECTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (Delay Per Vehicle, Sec/Veh)

Approach	2019 Existing	2040 No Build	2040 Dual	2040 Partial	2040 Signalized	2040 Single
Meridian SB	D, 36	F, 107	C, 71	A, 8	D, 11	A, 4
Birchwood WB	C, 30	F, 174	F, 271	F, 108	K, 67	D, 17
Park WB	C, 23	D, 53	E, 89	D, 28	F, 67	A, 6
Meridian NB	D, 49	E, 76	F, 159	F, 66	F, 47	A, 6
Squalicum WB	D, 45	F, 217	E, 36	F, 122		
Birchwood EB	D, 47	F, 128	E, 40	C, 16	D, 54	D, 11
Intersection Average	D, 41	F, 125	K, 93	K, 57	D, 53	H, 17

Meridian Street Roundabout Feasibility Study – Existing
 City of Bellingham

Figure 6 - Dual Roundabouts

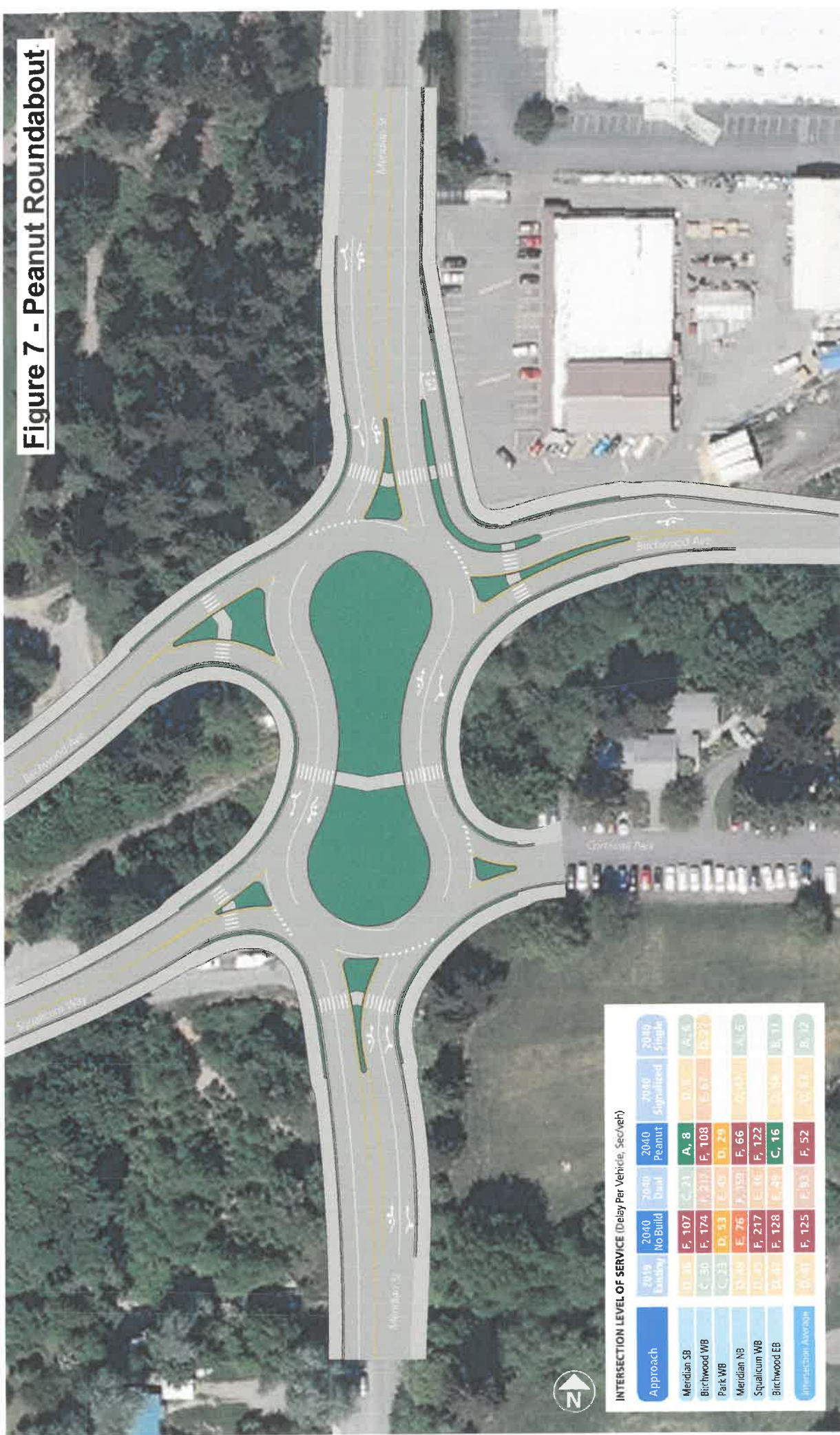


INTERSECTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (Delay Per Vehicle, Sec/veh)

Approach	2019 Existing	2040 No Build	2040 Dual	2040 Present	2040 Signalized	2040 Single
Meridian SB	C, 36	F, 107	C, 21	A, 1	D, 5	A, 6
Birchwood WB	C, 30	F, 174	F, 217	F, 108	E, 67	D, 27
Park WB	C, 23	D, 53	E, 49	D, 25		
Meridian NB	D, 8	E, 76	F, 159	E, 65	D, 6	A, 6
Squalicum WB	D, 8	F, 217	E, 36	F, 223		
Birchwood EB	D, 6	F, 128	E, 49	C, 16	D, 18	B, 11
Intersecting Avenue	D, 4	F, 125	F, 93	E, 52	D, 53	B, 32



Figure 7 - Peanut Roundabout

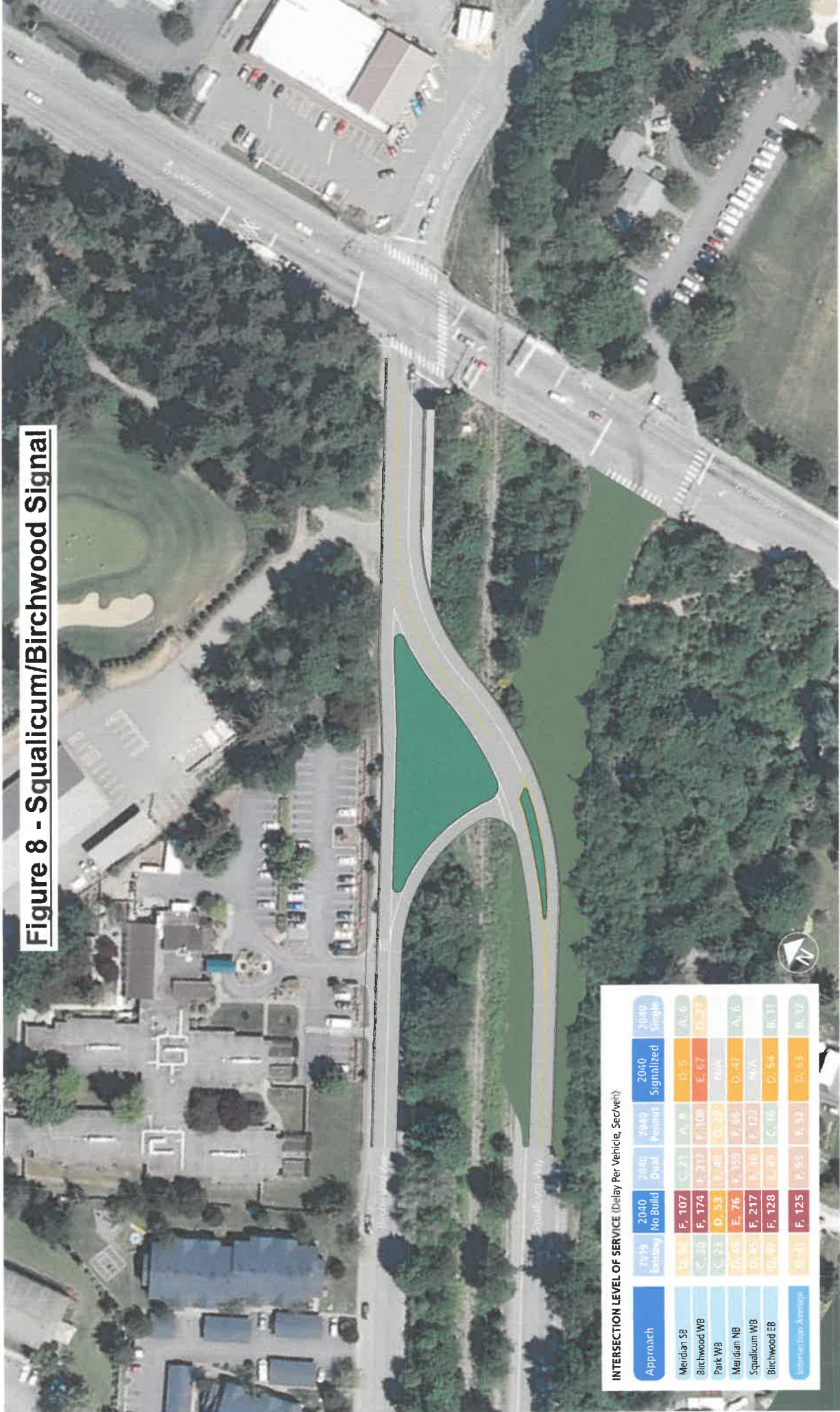


INTERSECTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (Delay Per Vehicle, Sec/Veh)

Approach	2019 Existing	2040 No Build	2040 Dual	2040 Peanut	2040 Signalized	2049 Single
Meridian SB	D, 36	F, 107	C, 23	A, 8	D, 8	A, 5
Birchwood WB	C, 30	F, 174	F, 217	F, 108	E, 67	D, 27
Park WB	C, 23	D, 53	E, 45	D, 29	D, 29	A, 6
Meridian NB	D, 49	E, 76	F, 159	F, 66	F, 45	A, 6
Squallicum WB	D, 45	F, 217	E, 161	F, 122	F, 122	B, 11
Birchwood EB	D, 41	F, 128	E, 48	C, 16	D, 34	B, 11
Intersecting Avenue	D, 41	F, 125	F, 93	F, 52	D, 53	B, 12

Meridian Street Roundabout Feasibility Study – Alternative 2 – Peanut
 City of Bellingham

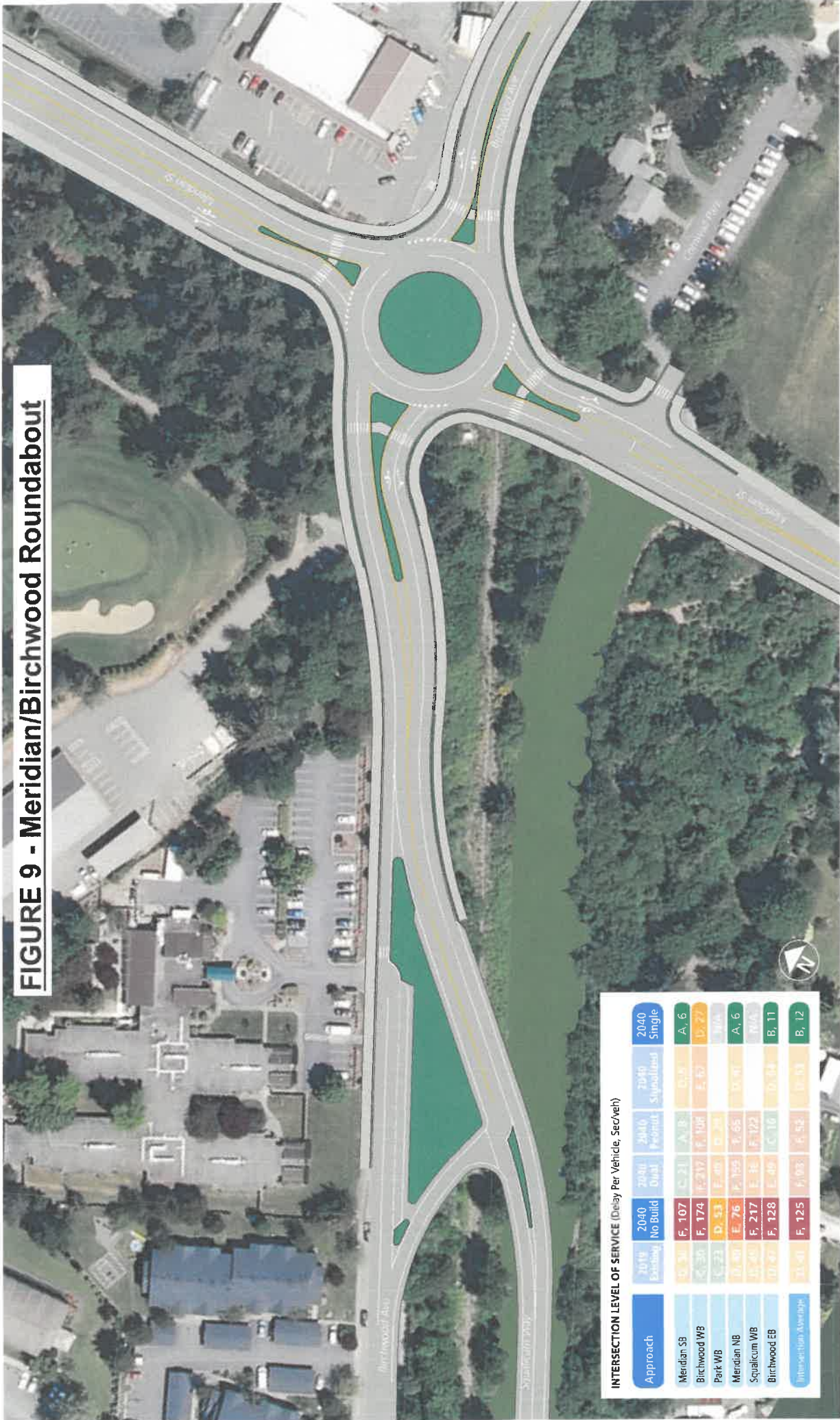
Figure 8 - Squalicum/Birchwood Signal



INTERSECTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (Delay Per Vehicle, Sec/Veh)

Approach	2019 Existing	2040 No Build	2040 Dual Permit	2040 Signalized	2040 Single
Meridian SB	D, 3.1	F, 107	C, 21	A, 8	D, 5
Birchwood WB	C, 30	F, 174	F, 217	F, 108	E, 67
Park WB	C, 23	D, 53	F, 48	D, 29	A, 4
Meridian NB	D, 46	E, 76	F, 159	F, 66	D, 47
Squalicum WB	D, 45	F, 217	F, 10	F, 122	A, 4
Birchwood EB	D, 47	F, 128	E, 48	C, 16	D, 54
Approach Average	D, 41	F, 125	F, 93	F, 52	D, 53

FIGURE 9 - Meridian/Birchwood Roundabout



INTERSECTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (Delay Per Vehicle, Sec/Veh)

Approach	2019 Existing	2040 No Build	2040 Dual Feedlot	2040 Signalized	2040 Single
Meridian SB	C, 30	F, 107	C, 21	A, 6	A, 6
Birchwood WB	E, 30	F, 174	F, 217	F, 198	F, 27
Park WB	C, 21	D, 53	F, 46	C, 26	B, 4
Meridian NB	C, 30	E, 76	F, 159	F, 65	A, 6
Squalicum WB	D, 43	F, 217	E, 16	F, 122	NA
Birchwood EB	D, 43	F, 128	E, 49	C, 16	B, 11
Intersecting Avenues	D, 43	F, 125	F, 93	F, 52	B, 12

Additional Considerations

Several other factors have been considered in addition to the traffic operations at the intersection. Table 5 provides a summary of various criteria for each alternative. These criteria were used to select the preferred alternative for the project.

TRAFFIC SAFETY

Each alternative has been evaluated for safety of vehicles and other multimodal users.

RIGHT-OF-WAY

All of the future build alternatives require additional area outside of the existing City Right-of-Way. These areas have been evaluated for square footage required, current use, potential loss of parking, points of property ingress/egress, and overall impacts to adjacent properties.

STORMWATER IMPACTS

A preliminary determination of new impervious surfacing was calculated for each alternative. The evaluation also includes potential impacts to Tributary W and the existing culvert crossing Meridian Street.

MULTIMODAL IMPACTS

A discussion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities has been included and WTA played an integral role in the multi-agency project team for the alternatives analysis.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

A summary of impacts to critical areas is provided for each alternative. Project elements include potential impacts to the culverts for Tributary W, floodplain mitigation, stream buffer impacts, and possible habitat restoration.

ANTICIPATED COSTS

A preliminary cost estimate has been developed for each alternative.

TABLE 5 - Alternatives Analysis

	Alternative 1 - Dual RAB	Alternative 2 - Peanut	Alternative 3A - Squalicum/Birchwood Signal	Alternative 3B - Meridian/Birchwood RAB
Traffic Operations				
LOS F Significant queues during PM Peak. Nearly all legs of the intersections at LOS F. The exception is NB Meridian which degrades to a LOS E. Total Avg Delay of 125 sec/veh.	LOS F Improved overall operations as compared to the No-Build scenario, but degraded operations for WB Birchwood and NB Meridian. Improved LOS for SB and EB movements, but at the expense of the WB and NB. Total Avg Delay of 93 sec/veh.	LOS F Improved overall operations as compared to the No-Build scenario as well as the Dual RAB option. Compared to the Dual RAB option there is improvement for SB Meridian and EB Birchwood, but at the expense of Squalicum operations. Total Avg Delay of 52 sec/veh.	LOS D The elimination of Squalicum and its incoming traffic significantly improves the overall operations of the signalized intersection. The operations degrade by the year 2040 but provide improved functionality in the interim and significant improvement compared to the No-Build scenario. Total Avg Delay of 53 sec/veh.	LOS B The elimination of Squalicum and its incoming traffic significantly improves the overall operations of the intersection. There are still delays for WB Birchwood, resulting in LOS D for that leg of the intersection (PM Peak Hour), but the operations are still better than any other option and only slightly worse than the existing conditions. Total Avg Delay of 12 sec/veh.
Traffic Safety Signalized operations with higher volumes likely to result in increased rear-end crashes.	Reduced speeds throughout the intersections may reduce the severity of crashes. Minimal storage between roundabouts may cause traffic to back up into adjacent RAB and further impact operations and related safety. Long rolling queues for NB Meridian may block access at E Maplewood intersection.	Reduced number of conflict points and vehicle speeds through intersection may reduce both the number of crashes and crash severity.	Removal of intersection of Meridian and Squalicum reduces conflict points along Meridian. Reduced congestion. New connection between Squalicum and Birchwood requires slopes from 5% - 10% along the roadway.	Reduced number of conflict points and vehicle speeds through intersection may reduce both the number of crashes and crash severity.
Right-of-Way				
None	28,000 SF Minimal impact to adjacent properties. Partial acquisitions do not significantly impact the remaining use of each property. Assumed that loss of parking can be mitigated by replacing lost parking on site. \$175,000	45,000 SF Increased footprint for peanut hour glass configuration. Partial acquisitions do not significantly impact the remaining use of each property. Assumed that loss of parking can be mitigated by replacing lost parking on site. \$270,000	None* *Assumed BNSF RW acquired as part of regional trail project. \$0*	37,000 SF The west connection to combine Squalicum and Birchwood requires BNSF agreement for abandoned rail corridor. This option cannot be constructed without acquiring significant RW from railroad and assumes the City is successful acquiring RW from BNSF for trail alignment. \$230,000

Future No Build (2040)		Alternative 1 – Dual RAB	Alternative 2 - Peanut	Alternative 3A – Combined Squaquicum/Birchwood	Alternative 3B – Meridian/Birchwood RAB
Stormwater Impacts					
None	18,500 SF New Impervious Increase in impervious surfacing will require stormwater mitigation. Likely stormwater treatment and flow control required. May require extension/replacement of culvert for Tributary W.	29,000 SF New Impervious Increase in impervious surfacing will require stormwater mitigation. Likely stormwater treatment and flow control required. Will require replacement of culvert for Tributary W. May require replacement of culvert crossing Squaquicum Way as well.	11,000 SF New Impervious Increase in impervious surfacing will require stormwater mitigation. Likely stormwater treatment and flow control required. No impact Tributary W.	21,900 SF New Impervious** Increase in impervious surfacing will require stormwater mitigation. Likely stormwater treatment and flow control required. **Impervious Area calculations do not include west connection for combining Squaquicum/Birchwood. Minimal impact to culverts for Tributary W.	
Multimodal Impacts					
None	RRFB or speed tables recommended to alert drivers of pedestrians. Trail crossing and pedestrian crossing between RABs but within close proximity of Squaquicum RAB could be problematic. Slowdowns for NB transit operations due to congestion and delays for the NB Meridian movement.	RRFB or speed tables recommended to alert drivers of pedestrians. Trail crossing and pedestrian crossing between intersections provides large pedestrian refuge. Requires portion of Cornwall Park to be used for travel lanes.	Simplified pedestrian crossings prior to intersection. Regional trail crossing could be added near existing Squaquicum alignment—in line with park access and further away from intersection. Abandoned Squaquicum Way alignment could be used for large amenity zone.	RRFB or speed tables recommended to alert drivers of pedestrians. Simplified pedestrian crossings prior to intersection. Regional trail crossing could be added near existing Squaquicum alignment—in line with park access and further away from intersection. Regional trail crossing connection to Cornwall Park.	
Environmental Impacts					
None	Potential minor impacts to critical areas require mitigation- ~0.2 acres buffer enhancement. Mitigation required for fill within floodplain. Extension or replacement of Tributary W culvert required. This alternative appears to have the least amount of impact to the stream buffer and floodplain.	Potential minor impacts to critical areas require mitigation- ~0.4 acres buffer enhancement. Mitigation required for fill within floodplain. Replacement of Tributary W culvert required. This alternative appears to have the most amount of impact to the stream buffer and floodplain.	Potential minor impacts to critical areas require mitigation. Mitigation required for fill within floodplain. Additional fill for west connection located outside of flood plain for Tributary W. Abandoned Squaquicum Way alignment could be used for habitat restoration- mitigation this project (buffer enhancement and floodplain cut) and potentially other projects.	Potential minor impacts to critical areas require mitigation- ~0.4 acres buffer enhancement. Mitigation required for fill within floodplain. Replacement of Tributary W culvert may not be required. Abandoned Squaquicum Way alignment could be used for habitat restoration- mitigation this project (buffer enhancement and floodplain cut) and potentially other projects.	
Construction Costs					
None	\$5,500,000 - \$7,500,000	\$6,500,000 - \$8,500,000	\$2,800,000 - \$3,700,000	\$6,300,000 - \$8,200,000	

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE

The full implementation of Build Alternative 3 to construct a dual-lane roundabout at the intersection of Birchwood Avenue and Meridian Street is the preferred option. This option functions significantly better than the other alternatives. The elimination of the Meridian/Squalicum intersection requires Squalicum Way to be connected to Birchwood Avenue west of Meridian Street. Due to the extreme challenges and costs associated with right-of-way acquisition, environmental impacts, mitigation, and construction costs of this alternative, the ultimate buildout of this configuration will be broken into phases to be realistic for funding and construction purposes. This alternative is shown in Figure 10 and further described below. Schematic plans and additional design information is included in Appendix E.



Figure 10. Preferred Alternative – Ultimate Buildout

Anticipated Benefits

The primary benefit of the combined Squalicum/Birchwood alternative is the reduced delays for vehicles trying to travel through the corridor. Constructing one roundabout instead of two provides significant improvement for all legs of the Meridian/Birchwood intersection. The average intersection delay of 12.0 seconds/vehicle in the PM peak hour of the design year is

markedly better than the 125.0 seconds/vehicle delay of the projected No-Build alternative, and improves upon the existing average intersection delay of 41.0 seconds/vehicle.

Combining Squalicum Way and Birchwood Avenue also allows for improved operation of the existing signalized intersection at Birchwood. The simplified signal phasing offers congestion relief by eliminating delays related to the split phase side street operations. The Squalicum/Birchwood connection could be constructed without the need to immediately construct the roundabout at Meridian Street. This offers potential phased construction based on available funding.

The inherent safety of roundabouts related to reduced speeds and conflict points, coupled with improved operations of the intersection provides the following ancillary benefits:

- Safer means of ingress / egress to abutting properties
- Potential increase in land values and tax revenue
- Promote redevelopment of properties throughout the corridor and neighborhood
- Sustain and improve regional economic development
- Provide increased vehicular, pedestrian and bicycle user safety
- Opportunity to vacate a portion of Squalicum Way and repurpose the area

This feasibility study recommends that the two signalized intersections at Meridian/Squalicum and Meridian/Birchwood be reconstructed in phases to provide a multimodal roundabout at Meridian/Birchwood.

- Phase 1 would join the Birchwood and Squalicum arterials together west of the Meridian/Birchwood intersection and then decommission the Meridian/Squalicum traffic signal. The unused segment of Squalicum Way between Meridian Street and the new intersection of Birchwood-Squalicum would be removed.
- Phase 2 would reconstruct the Meridian/Birchwood signalized intersection into a multimodal roundabout. The regional trail crossing at the south leg of the roundabout would be constructed to provide a connection to Cornwall Park.

Challenges and Risks

There is no defined timeline for either Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the Meridian Street Roundabout project. Significant physical space challenges, environmental constraints, and considerable construction costs means there will be multiple steps that must be completed before funding can be sought for the recommended transportation improvements. Several of the challenges associated with the project are summarized below.

RIGHT OF WAY

In order to provide the operational benefits of a single multi-lane roundabout, the connection for Squalicum Way and Birchwood Avenue must be constructed. This new connection of Squalicum Way and Birchwood Avenue requires the acquisition of the BNSF railroad Right-of-Way. Whereas other alternatives would require portions of the Right-of-Way that could be acquired from BNSF, Alternative 3 is not viable unless the City is successful in their efforts to acquire the abandoned rail R/W for the Bay to Baker Trail.

BNSF Railroad Right-of-Way

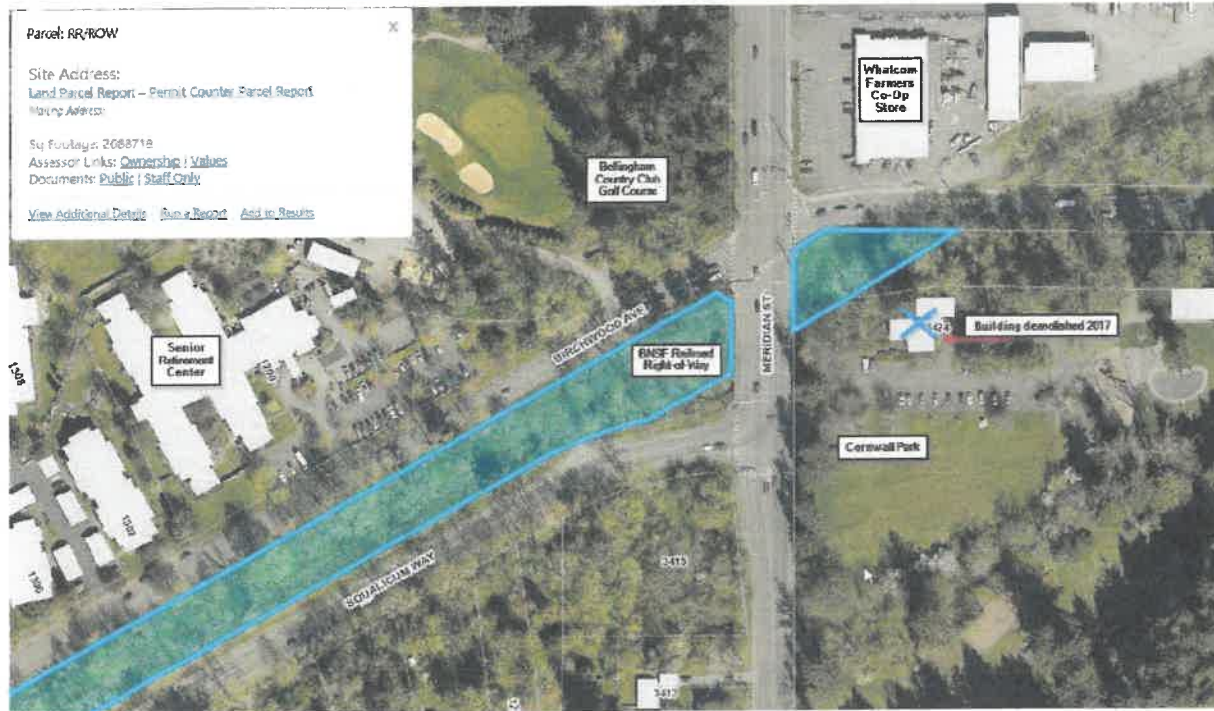


Figure 11. BNSF Right-of-Way

Neither Phase 1 or Phase 2 is possible without City ownership of the strip of land (pictured above) between Birchwood Avenue and Squalicum Parkway that is claimed to be owned by Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad. The Bellingham Parks Department has long viewed this strip of land as a critical link in a regional trail system known locally by various names such as: Bay to Baker Trail, Squalicum Creek Trail, Coast Millenium Trail, and the Nooksack Loop Trail. In the summer of 2018, the City and BNSF had nearly reached an agreement for transfer of ownership of this Right-of-Way, but BNSF abruptly and inexplicably withdrew and ended negotiations with the City. As of December 2019, the City of Bellingham Attorney's Office is actively pursuing legal strategies to acquire the Right-of-Way.

CORNWALL PARK LAND OWNERSHIP

In addition to the need to acquire Right-of-Way from BNSF, there may be legal implications associated with using the northwesternmost corner of Cornwall Park to accommodate the footprint of a multimodal roundabout. Cornwall Park was gifted to the City of Bellingham in 1909 by the Cornwall family for the exclusive purpose of providing recreational enjoyment for the citizens of Bellingham in perpetuity. If this condition is not maintained, then ownership of the land could theoretically revert to the heirs of the family that donated the land to the City. Bellingham Parks and the City Attorney's Office must obtain approval of the heirs for the land to be used for anything other than park use.

From a transportation planning, multiuse trail, and park access perspective, a case can be made that using a small slice of Cornwall Park property for the construction of a multimodal roundabout at Meridian/Birchwood will provide additional benefit to the park, as follows:

- A regional trail planned from Bellingham Bay to the eastern city limits (see below) will cross the south leg of the roundabout in a marked ADA-compliant crosswalk directly into Cornwall Park;
- The decommissioning of the Meridian/Squalicum traffic signal and reconstruction of the northern Cornwall Park driveway; and
- Enhanced mobility, safety, and access to Cornwall Park for more people in the future.

The Bellingham Public Works and Parks Departments will continue to seek a resolution to this issue, but at this time, it remains to be seen if using a small sliver of Cornwall Park land for a roundabout will be allowed.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATION NEEDS

As with all of the alternatives that were considered it is expected that mitigation will be required for the Squalicum/Birchwood connection and Meridian/Birchwood roundabout. The project will trigger requirements for stormwater treatment and flow control as well as mitigation for impacts to environmental features. The surrounding area includes streams, wetlands, buffers, steep slopes, and other critical areas in the immediate vicinity of the intersection (see graphics below). Fish passage improvements as well as maintenance of flood storage and flow to the existing culvert crossing for Tributary W beneath Meridian Street is also anticipated. All of these impacts and mitigation requirements have been included in the cost estimates for the project.

Environmental Issues, Challenges, & Opportunities Surrounding Intersections

Critical Areas & Natural Features

- Wetlands & Buffers
- Streams & Buffers
- Steep Slopes
- Forest & Habitat

Probable impacts to all of the above

- Mitigation sequencing documentation
- How to minimize impacts
- Alternatives analyzed
- Cost to mitigate unavoidable impacts

Preferred Alternative(s) Balances:

- Accommodating Planned Growth
- Multimodal Transportation Needs
- Environmental Protection
- Improvement Costs & Funding Capability



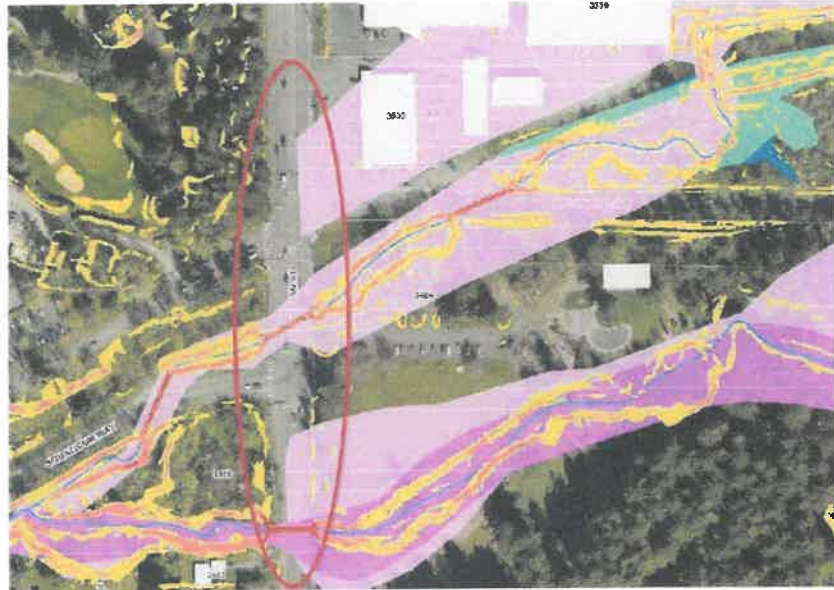
TRIBUTARY W

This side channel of Squalicum Creek is not a fish-bearing stream, but is considered to provide needed overflow capacity for flood stages of Squalicum Creek. Tributary W flows parallel to Birchwood Avenue and then flows southwest through culverts underneath both Birchwood Avenue and Meridian Street. During roundabout construction the Meridian Street culvert will need to be replaced, but it remains to be seen what level of mitigation may ultimately be required

due to environmental, storm water, and flood regulations in place when the roundabout seeks permits for construction.

Recreational & Environmental Issues

- Cornwall Park abuts both Intersections
- Vehicle entrance to Cornwall Park is 4th leg of Meridian/Squalicum intersection
- Possibility of removal/replacement with Birchwood vehicle entrance
- BNSF Railroad Right-of-Way thru middle of two intersections; Needed for Bay to Baker Trail connection to Squalicum Creek Trail
- Squalicum Creek and Tributary W both cross Meridian thru/near intersections
- Flood zone, wetlands
- Critical Areas Impact and mitigation
- Salmon and riparian habitat restoration
- Feasibility Study to Determine Preferred Alternative(s) to Pursue



The preferred alternative includes the potential to mitigate for project impacts within the abandoned portion of Squalicum Way. This area could be used to mitigate critical area impacts (both buffer impact and floodplain fill) associated with the roadway project and future parks trail as well. During future project planning there is potential to increase efficiency and reduce costs associated with mitigation by considering all potential impacts for the upcoming work in the project vicinity.

The preferred alternative could include improvements to the stream corridor by removing the section of roadway which is currently fragmenting habitat between the two streams (Squalicum Creek and Tributary W). Daylighting a portion of Tributary W and allowing for enhancement to riparian buffers in the project vicinity are possibilities with the reconfiguration of Squalicum Way. These potential improvements may also balance the floodplain cut/fill and compensate for impacts to the regulated floodplain, thus avoiding additional floodplain mitigation.

Project Funding

Once the Right-of-Way issues described above have been addressed and the necessary land is owned by the City, then funding can be pursued. The total combined cost of preliminary engineering, design, permitting, and construction for Phases 1 and 2 is estimated to be between \$10 million and \$12 million (2020 dollars). This does not include the cost to construct the regional trail connection. No single grant funding source can cover the total cost of this complex project. As a result, the project must be constructed in separate, sequential stages and leverage multiple funding sources to complete the overall project.

- Phase 1 is estimated to cost in the range of \$3-4 million (2020 dollars) and must be completed prior to Phase 2.
- Phase 2 is estimated to cost in the range of \$7-8 million (2020 dollars).

FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS

For each phase, the City will need to create a local public-private funding partnership while also seeking state and federal grant funding. Local funding partners might include:

- City of Bellingham (Multimodal Transportation, Parks, Trails, Natural Resources)
- Port of Bellingham (Shipping, Freight, Economic Development)
- Whatcom Transportation Authority (Public Transit)
- PeaceHealth (St. Joseph's Hospital)
- WSDOT (Interstate 5 and SR 539 – Guide-Meridian)
- Surrounding businesses and other interests

FUNDING SOURCES

If current grant funding programs remain available in the future, then possible grant funding sources could include:

- Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) federal funds – administered by WCOG
- Highway Safety Improvement Program (HSIP) federal funds – administered by WSDOT
- Freight Mobility Safety Improvement Board (FMSIB) – federal funds administered by WSDOT
- Urban Arterial Program (UAP) - state funds from WA Transportation Improvement Board (TIB)
- Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) – state funds administered by WA Commerce

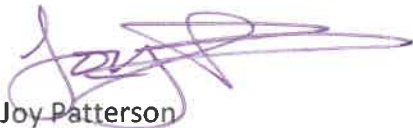
March 13, 2024

Dear Hearing Examiner and Ryan Nelson

As Birchwood Neighborhood Association's vice-president, I speak on behalf of our board members and represent our 6,500 residents. The Birchwood neighborhood, which includes a higher rate of marginalized residents, has unfortunately been losing our mature trees at higher rates than other neighborhoods. We all deserve climate justice with trees, forests, and biodiversity that enhance our community's health and help us all become more resilient in this current climate crisis. We urge you to **deny** the Bellingham Golf and Country Club application to remove the vast majority of mature trees at the 4.2-acre site.

We do *not* need to be short-sighted by removing more than 320 mature carbon-sequestering trees. What we *do* need are community-based solutions that will provide walkable * neighborhoods with affordable housing for Bellingham residents, while saving trees. Housing can coexist with trees only with a thoughtful and thorough approach. We ask that you listen to the desires of ALL stakeholders. Please **reject** this proposal to remove this much-needed mature canopy on this site. It's time to listen to the community and go back to the drawing board.

When public resources like trees become private property, we all lose.



Joy Patterson
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