



GREENWAYS STRATEGIC PLAN 2022 – 2026



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Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan (“Plan”) guides and directs the expenditure of Greenways levy funds. In 2016, voters approved Bellingham’s fourth Greenways property tax levy following similar ballot measures passed in 1990, 1997 and 2006. All four levy ballot measures emphasized acquiring land in contiguous corridors when possible; protection of unique and sensitive property, the enhancement and connection between trail corridors, parks, and open space; and park and trail development and maintenance.

The 2016 Greenways IV Levy (“Levy”) authorizes a 7-year property tax levy that collects between \$5 million and \$6 million per year for the Parks & Recreation Department. This levy expires at the end of 2023.

This document works in concert with the [Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan¹](#) (PRO Plan) adding specificity to projects funded by the Greenways levy. This Strategic Plan will be updated every six years in conjunction with the PRO Plan. This ensures consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, improves public process, and is an effective use of staff resources. This update is a culmination of months of work by the Greenway Committee, a sub-committee and significant staff time beginning in the fall of 2021.

While these planning documents look well into the future, this document also helps guide the shorter-term Biennial Action [Plan](#). This is done to as part of the biennial budget process to identify projects and acquisitions that will be pursued with Greenway Levy funds in the near future. To be consistent with BMC 2.20.040(5)², the Department’s [biennial budget³](#) should be reviewed with Greenways’ priorities found in this document. The Greenways Advisory Committee will review and make recommendations on the biennial budget in the spring of each biennial budget year. Other City of Bellingham documents and plans also helped shape this Strategic Plan; a list of these resources is included in this Plan.

Levy funds collected but not expended at the end of 2023 may be spent consistent with this Plan until exhausted. The Plan has been written with the assumption that the Greenways Levy will be renewed by voters on a future ballot. As such, the scope of the Plan contemplates priorities and strategies that extend in time beyond the term of the current levy.



¹ <https://cob.org/project/parks-recreation-open-space-plan-update>

² Chapter 2.20 Greenways Advisory Committee 2.20.040 (5.) To consult with and make recommendations to the parks and recreation department on annual budgets and the six-year capital facilities plan involving greenway levy funds.

³ <https://cob.org/gov/budget>

WHAT CAN GREENWAYS FUNDS BE USED FOR?

Greenways IV ([Resolution No. 2016-16⁴](#)) stated that Greenways funds should be applied to “acquire, improve, develop and maintain greenways, open space sites, parks, park facilities and trails.” To frame this differently, you might view the Greenway funds in two questions:

What can the Greenway funds be spent on?

- Greenway Corridors
- Open space sites
- Parks
- Park facilities
- Trails

How are the Greenway funds used?

- Acquisition
- Improvements and Development
- Maintenance

Goal: “to acquire, improve, develop and maintain greenways, open space sites, parks, park facilities and trails.”

As detailed in the [2020 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan⁵](#) (PRO Plan), funding sources for parks and park facilities also include the Real Estate Excise Tax (REET), grants, Park Impact Fees, and the General Fund. These funding sources are often restricted in their application, either by project or by location, while Greenways funds may be applied broadly to achieving the goals of the levy. Greenways funds remain the most flexible of the funding sources available and has been critical in leveraging other funding sources.

An important part of this Strategic Plan is to guide the expenditure of funds between property acquisition, development, and maintenance. Acquisitions are not consistent year-to-year expenses and are often opportunistic as properties go on sale. The same can be said for development and maintenance expenses. Greenways IV provides guidelines for the spending of levy funds over the life of the program, but does not constrain biennial budgeting to the following allocations:

- 42% for the development of properties purchased by the City;
- 33% for land acquisition, specifically including trail connections; and
- 25% for the ongoing maintenance, operation and capital replacement needs of park properties and facilities.

Decisions about allocation of Greenway funds are guided by this Plan, the PRO Plan and approved by the City Council through adoption of the [City Budget⁶](#). Specific procedures for the acquisition of properties can be found in the [governance documents](#) listed in the Greenways Advisory Committee Chapter of this plan. Greenway levy revenues, expenditures, and balances are reported annually to City Council in the fall. This Greenways Fund Annual Report breaks actual expenditures by acquisitions, development, and maintenance. This annual report along with the adopted budget is the most complete and current

⁴ <https://bellingham.municipal.codes/enactments?type=Res>

⁵ <https://cob.org/project/parks-recreation-open-space-plan-update>

⁶ <https://cob.org/gov/budget>

source of information on the Greenways fund. The latest annual report is included here as [Appendix A](#). Annual reports are posted to the [Greenways web page](#)⁷.

A summary of Greenways IV expenditures and revenues is included in the following charts. The vast majority of Levy IV funds (71%) go toward capital costs, while another 15% went toward salaries and benefits needed in order to spend the capital on acquisitions, operations and maintenance, and park development shown in Figure 1. Roughly thirty-five million dollars of the Greenways fund were spent or budgeted over the six year between 2017 and 2022. Figure 2 shows the revenues and the expenditures from the Greenways funds during Levy IV. The chart shows that expenditures vary from year to year based on available properties, staff work load, and need. Overtime the expenditures closely match the revenues.

2017-2022* Average Fund Expenditure Type

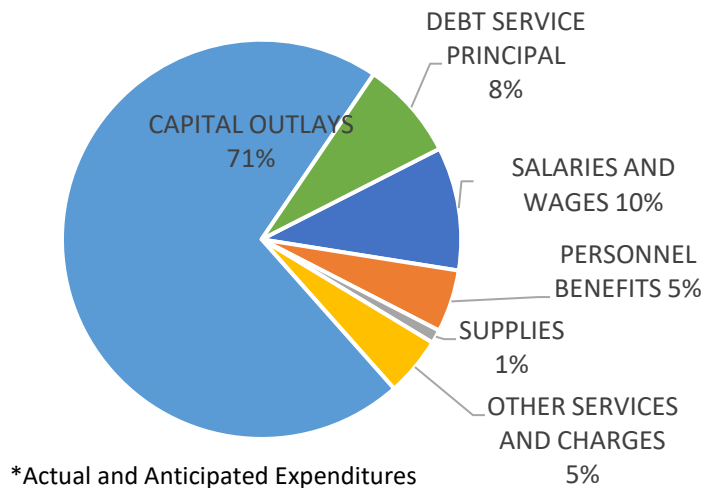


Figure 1. Levy IV Expenditures

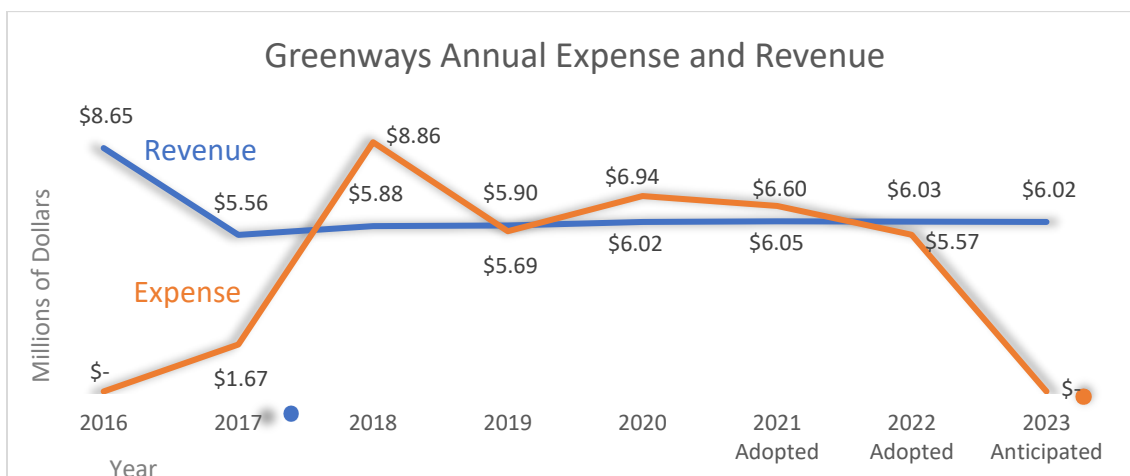


Figure 2. Annual Revenues and Expenses [to be revised with updated numbers]

⁷ <https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway>

GREENWAYS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The citizen led Greenways Advisory Committee (GAC) is charged with strategic guidance in use of Greenways funds. The purpose of the committee is to identify, develop, review, and recommend selection criteria, general project priorities, and specific actions relating to the expenditure and allocation of Greenways Levy Funds. The Committee provides citizen advice to the City Council and the Parks and Recreation Department staff on implementing the intent and objectives of the greenway levies. Specific authorities and duties are laid out in the Council Ordinance 2006-09-096, now codified in [BMC 2.20](#)⁸

The nine-member volunteer committee study maps, take field trips, and create strategic plans to prioritize acquisitions for each levy. The committee members role includes assisting the Department in mapping Greenways corridors, looking at key linkages, connections, and intact habitat, leveraging other funding and donations, and recommending purchases. Their active participation contributes to the success of Greenways.

Committee Guiding Documents:

- Business rules: (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/greenway-committee-bylaws.pdf>)
- Authority and Duties: (<https://bellingham.municipal.codes/BMC/2.20.040>)
- Acquisition Policy (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/greenway-levy-acquisition-approval-procedure.pdf>)
- Committee Meeting Schedule and Archive (<https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/greenway-bc>)

“To provide citizen advice to the city council and the parks and recreation department on implementing the intent and objectives of the greenway levies in a manner that best addresses current opportunities, conditions and needs.”
(BMC 2.20.040)

DEFINITIONS

Greenways IV uses the terms “development,” “land acquisition,” and “ongoing maintenance, operation, and capital replacement needs of park properties and facilities.” Although the terms are not defined within the text of Greenways IV, this Plan uses the terms as follows:

“Development” means the construction of physical structures, trail/surface improvements, and signage to land, or lands covered by water, to improve the quality of life of people residing, working within or visiting Bellingham. Development also means to enhance and restore natural systems, such as through removal of invasive species, planting of trees and native vegetation, habitat restoration or mitigation of impacts to address climate change or improve climate resiliency.

⁸ <https://bellingham.municipal.codes/BMC/2.20>

“Land acquisition” means the purchase of real property in fee-simple, easement or other such instrument.

“Ongoing maintenance, operation and capital replacement of park properties and facilities” is defined as follows. Routine maintenance and repair of park properties and their structures, assets, and grounds. Operation means the routine operation of the park system. Capital maintenance or replacement includes repair, rehabilitation or full replacement of a capital asset.



Parks & Recreation Mission: Support a healthy community by promoting high quality parks and recreation services.

Greenway Goals, Objectives, and Priorities

These are the overarching, long-term goals and priorities of the [Greenways Program](#). Specific projects and actions to implement these goals are reviewed and updated every two years in conjunction with the Biennial Capital Budget. Note that the scope of this Plan contemplates priorities and strategies that extend in time beyond the term of the current levy.

GOAL 1: ACQUIRE PROPERTY WHICH CONNECTS PARKS, NEIGHBORHOODS, OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT ACROSS BELLINGHAM AND ITS URBAN GROWTH AREA

Consistency Review with the Parks & Recreation, Open Space Plan:

PRO Plan Goal 1: Provide high-quality facilities and services that are accessible, inclusive and distributed equitably across Bellingham.

PRO Plan Goal 2: Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of use of the existing park and recreation system.

Objectives:

- a. Equitable community access. Ensure equitable community access when setting acquisition priorities. Priority consideration should be given to neighborhoods with a disproportionate number of low-income households in ensuring access to greenways, open space, parks, park facilities and trails.
- b. Connecting neighborhoods. Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to connect neighborhoods and provide viable alternatives to motor vehicles. The development of shared use trails should be minimized, preferring “green” trails over “grey” trails.
- c. Connecting parks. Create a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails to provide public access to parks and open space.
- d. Habitat corridors. Create corridors for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, [Priority Habitat and Species](#)⁹. Areas along the city’s fresh- and saltwater shorelines, as well as forested habitats, should be connected.
- e. Environmental Quality. Consideration should be given to the acquisition of property which protects or restores the environment. Water quality, forest lands, and priority habitats are examples of environmental features that should be protected through acquisition. In addition, acquisition strategies should help implement the city’s [Climate Protection Action Plan](#).
- f. Open Space. Acquire property which creates open space corridors to mitigate the impacts of growth. Areas at the edge of the city limits or urban growth area, as well as areas that transition from more intense development (e.g. industrial) to residential, should be sought.

⁹ <https://wdfw.wa.gov/species-habitats/at-risk/phs/maps>

- g. Blueways. Acquire properties that improve access to Bellingham’s many water features.

Acquisition Priorities:

- Riparian/Habitat corridors:
 - [Chuckanut Creek](#)
 - [Whatcom Creek](#)
 - [Squalicum Creek](#)
 - [Silver Creek](#)
 - [Padden Creek](#)
- Equitable community access:
 - See PRO Plan for identified gaps in level of service for neighborhood parks.
 - Community gardens
- Open Space/Habitat:
 - Between Bellingham and Ferndale Urban Growth Areas
 - North and northeast of Bellingham Urban Growth Area
 - Bear Creek Open Space
 - Missing links between Samish Crest and Padden Open Space
 - Marine shorelines

Specific Trail corridors can be found in the Mapped Priorities Section of this Plan.

GOAL 2: DEVELOP AND RESTORE PUBLIC PARKS, OPEN SPACE, TRAILS, AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Consistency Review with the Parks & Recreation, Open Space Plan:

PRO Plan Goal 2: Enhance the capacity, quality and variety of use of the existing park and recreation system.

PRO Plan Goal 3: Create environments that encourage regular active and passive recreation activities to support health, sense of safety, wellness and social connections.

PRO Plan Goal 4: Preserve and integrate nature, natural systems and ecological principles throughout the park system.

Objectives:

- a. Protect, enhance and restore public parks, trails, open spaces and wildlife corridors. Monitor natural and human impact of properties and facilities to ensure minimal loss of sustainable use, enjoyment, and functionality for wildlife.
- b. Improve access to current parks, open spaces and trails. Utilize effective signage, accessibility, and level of service that promote inclusivity, equity, and education. Develop trails to improve multimodal connectivity along and between neighborhoods, parks and open spaces.

- c. Develop environments that promote active and passive recreation. Maximize use of public spaces for varied activities and enjoyment. Support access and opportunity for community gardens.
- d. Utilize data effectively. Collect data on use of public spaces to measure equity and access. Evaluate data available from other resources, such as the city's Habitat Corridor mapping and the Urban Forestry Management Plan, to inform potential protection, restoration, and mitigation actions to offset impacts to parks and natural areas.
- e. Increase public enjoyment, education and ownership for parks, trails, and open spaces. Implement effective tools, supported by research, to increase positive public interactions and connections to parks, trails and open spaces. Provide signage and other information systems to guide people through open spaces and trails that will enhance understanding, experiences, respect and appreciation.

Development priorities for Greenways funding:

- Community garden improvements
- Boulevard Park shoreline beach and trail improvement
- Complete Whatcom Creek trail and restoration efforts
- Coordinate [PRO Trail Plan](#) with new developments' internal trail systems
- Improve access to Bear Creek Open Space
- Design and develop public access and amenities at the pier at Little Squalicum Park
- Plan, design, and develop Community and Neighborhood Parks:
 - Cornwall Beach Park, Maplewood/McLeod, N. Samish Park, Bakerview, Hundred Acre Wood, and Julianna Park
- Improve north side access to Galbraith Mountain trails and improve wayfinding
- Add restroom at Little Squalicum Park
- Happy Valley Park access and amenities improvements
- Rehabilitate boardwalks and decommission trails at Maritime Heritage Park
- Plan and develop Van Wyck Park to improve access to a community garden and provide interim uses
- Add wayfinding at Samish Crest trails
- Acquire and/or develop trailheads (parking, signage, restrooms, picnic areas, etc.) at Woodstock Farm, King & Queen Mountain, and Bear Creek Open Space
- Coordinate with PRO Plan for removal of invasive species, protection/restoration of habitat and increased planting of trees and undergrowth
- Complete Sunset Pond trail loop and add park amenities
- Bloedel Donovan community building redesign
- Improve and restore Arroyo Park bridges
- Broadway Park access improvements
- North Galbraith trailhead and parking
- Woodstock cook's house renovation and ADA improvements

GOAL 3: MAINTAIN GREENWAYS, OPEN SPACE SITES, PARKS, PARK FACILITIES AND TRAILS

Consistency Review with the Parks & Recreation, Open Space Plan:

PRO Plan Goal 7: Manage Bellingham's park land and programs effectively, efficiently and sustainably utilizing quantitative and qualitative measures.

Objectives:

- a. Support acquisition and development objectives and priorities. Consider maintenance implications when pursuing property acquisitions and development projects – especially in regards to the city [PRO Plan goals](#), [Urban Forestry Management Plan](#), Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment, Wildlife Corridor Analysis and other COB/greenways planning/prospective projects where relevant.
- b. Prioritize maintenance operations that enhance the natural state and reduce environmental impacts. Ensure all Parks staff and programs are using equipment and Integrated Pest Management controls that have the lowest environmental impact where possible and maintenance projects align with Greenways priorities of environmental stewardship.
- c. Monitor and provide input on Greenways and parks property conditions. Utilize department reporting and community engagement to identify potential maintenance needs and make the appropriate recommendations for actionable items.
- d. Prioritize capital maintenance projects based on safety, public use, socio-economic factors and preservation of critical park system assets.

Maintenance Priorities:

- Ensure maintenance needs are met equitably and in a timely manner
- Hire Stewardship manager to staff mitigation sites, facilitate work parties, and assist community garden groups
- Provide self-maintenance opportunities in parks wherever applicable (Plant beds with native and drought tolerant species, use long lasting building materials, etc.)
- Promote/partner/fund invasive species removal and habitat restoration on open space properties
- Utilize the Park Enhancement Prioritization Tool (PEP tool) to prioritize repairs and maintenance according to socio-economic conditions and equity issues. (See PRO Plan)
- Promote trail surface/general development alternatives that balance the natural character of Bellingham's trail system with accessibility requirements, long-term maintenance, sustainable development practices and availability of local materials
- Continue to provide input and analyses for separation of maintenance and development projects through thoughtful conversation; consider augmenting the Greenways funds used for maintenance
- Improve the management of trees throughout the City consistent with recommendations from the Urban Forestry Management Plan

Mapped Priorities

The intention of the following pages is to present maps that show some of the priorities and actions within this Strategic Plan. The map to the right shows Greenway corridors that are included in the following detailed maps, it doesn't mean there are not any priorities in that area; it simply hasn't been mapped at the time this Strategic Plan was drafted.

The following areas are included within this section:

- Lake Padden Connections
- Chuckanut Creek/Woodstock Farm/Interurban Trail
- Whatcom Creek
- Squaticum Creek
- Cordata to King & Queen Mountain and Urban Growth Area Open Space

2023 – 2024 (Proposed) Biennial Budget (See the adopted budgets here: <https://cob.org/gov/budget>)

- Acquisition: \$5 Million
- Development and Restoration: \$6.1 Million
- Maintenance: 17.5 Full Time Employees, in Stewardship, Trails, Urban Forestry, and Grounds.



MAP 1. LAKE PADDEN CONNECTIONS

Lake Padden is one of the city’s crown jewels of the park system. Padden Creek flows out of the lake through the South, Happy Valley and Fairhaven neighborhoods before reaching Bellingham Bay. Adding trail connections from other neighborhoods or open space to Lake Padden should be created. Consideration needs to be given to protecting sensitive habitat when creating new trail connections.

- Connect Samish Crest Open Space and adjoining neighborhoods to Lake Padden and add wayfinding
- Improve Happy Valley Park access and amenities
- Connect Padden Creek Gorge and/or on the ridge above Padden Creek Gorge across I-5 to Happy Valley neighborhood



Legend

- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails - 2020 PRO Plan
- ↔ New Connection/Acquisition
- New Capital Development

0.35 Miles

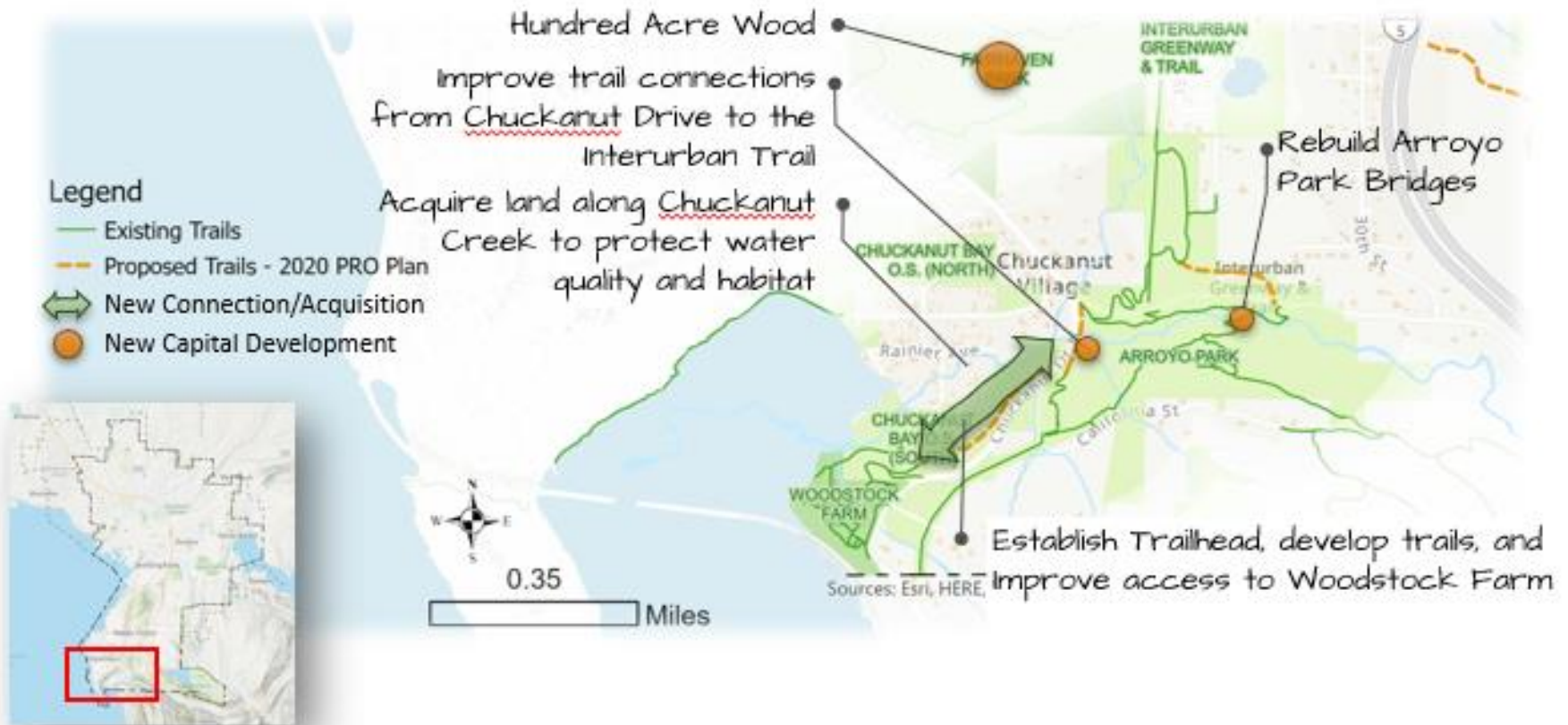
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Sources: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS



MAP 2. CHUCKANUT CREEK, WOODSTOCK FARM & INTERURBAN TRAIL

Chuckanut Creek is one of the few streams that currently meets water quality standards in Bellingham. There are large tracts of public ownership in the area, including Arroyo Park and Woodstock Farm. The actions in this area include protecting water quality, fish habitat, and wildlife corridors in Chuckanut Creek and making trail connections to Woodstock Farm and the Interurban Trail.

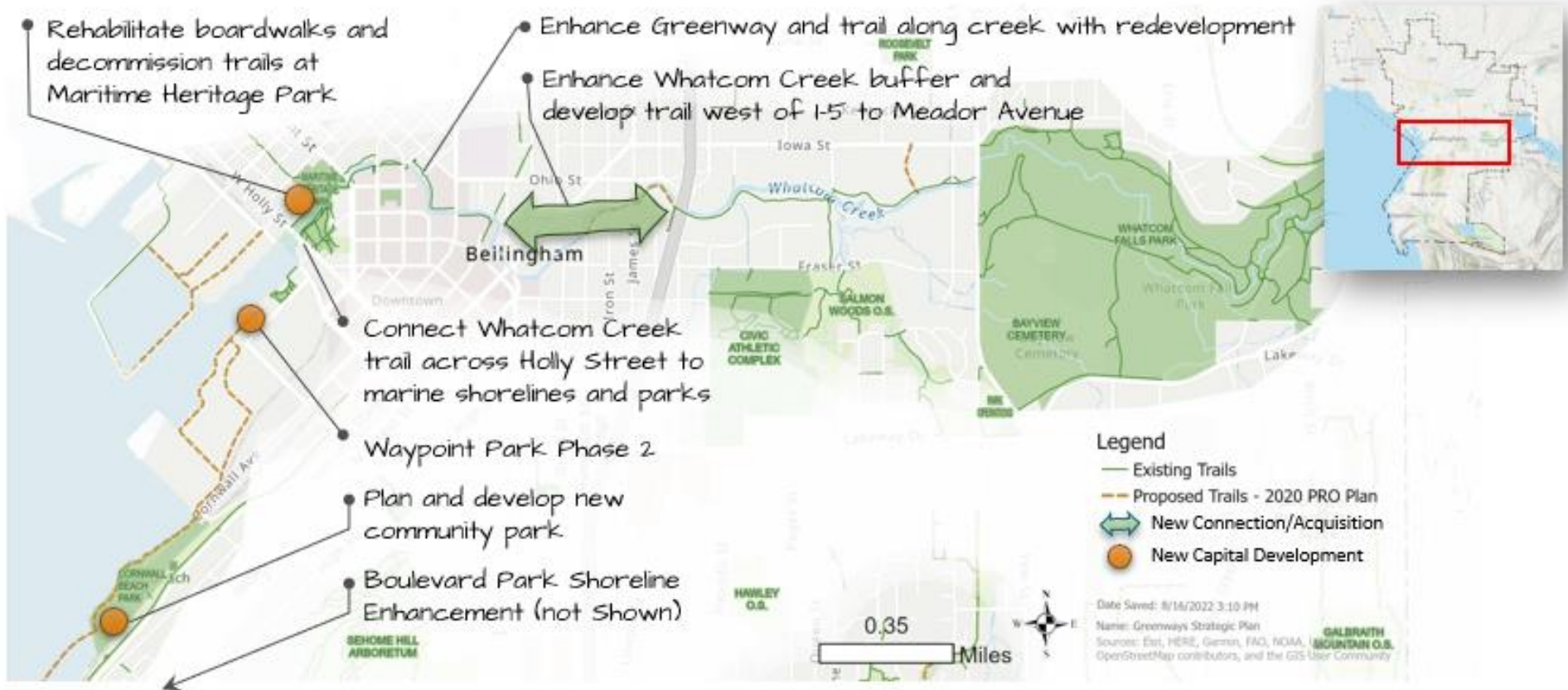


MAP 3. WHATCOM CREEK

Whatcom Creek is a major creek in Bellingham which originates in Lake Whatcom. The creek goes through Whatcom Falls Park. Restoration work along the creek west of Woburn Street to I-5 followed a tragic gas line explosion in 1999. Whatcom Creek flows through downtown Bellingham and into Bellingham Bay in the Port of Bellingham's Whatcom Waterway.

The following actions to acquire land or access to create a continuous greenway trail and habitat corridor along Whatcom Creek focuses on the lower reach of Whatcom Creek below I-5.

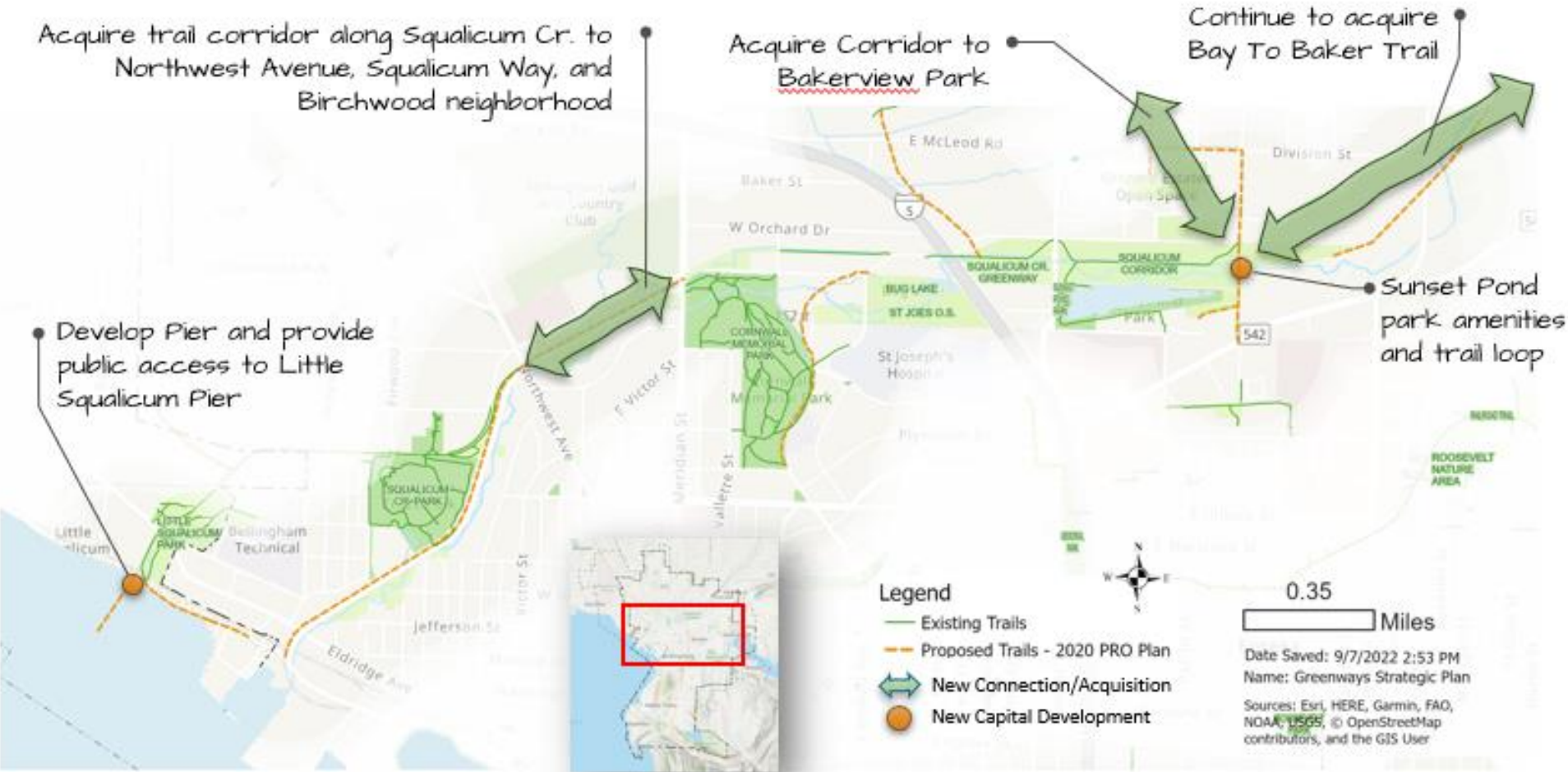
- Enhance trail and greenway opportunities from Meador Avenue to Commercial Street near City Hall
- If Senior Center is redeveloped, create green spaces along Whatcom Creek with enhancement of the trail and other amenities; coordinate with adjacent properties upstream to Cornwall Avenue



MAP 4. SQUALICUM CREEK

Squalicum Creek is one of the three major creeks through Bellingham that drains into Bellingham Bay. Parks along the corridor include Squalicum Beach, Squalicum Creek Park, Cornwall Park and Sunset Pond. The city has undertaken significant work in recent years to improve water quality and habitat along this corridor.

The priorities along the creek include acquisition and development of trails and park improvements.



MAP 5. CORDATA TO KING & QUEEN MOUNTAIN AND BELLINGHAM-FERNDAL OPEN SPACE CORRIDOR

The north end of Bellingham has seen significant new housing, commercial and industrial development recently. This development has created a need for parks, open space and trails to serve the area.

The priorities in this area include acquisition and development of trails and park improvements.

- Create access, parking, trailhead signage and wayfinding for the King/Queen Mountain Open Space
- Acquire property and develop trail corridors to connect with King/Queen Mountain Open Space
- Create east-west trail connections that link King/Queen Mountain Open Space to Van Wyck Park, Cordata Park, Julianna Park and the Bear Creek Open Space
- Create north-south trail connections to Cordata Park, Julianna Park, and Bakerview Park
- Acquire property or conservation easements for open space at the edge of the city's urban growth area ([Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, LU-58](#) and [Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan](#))

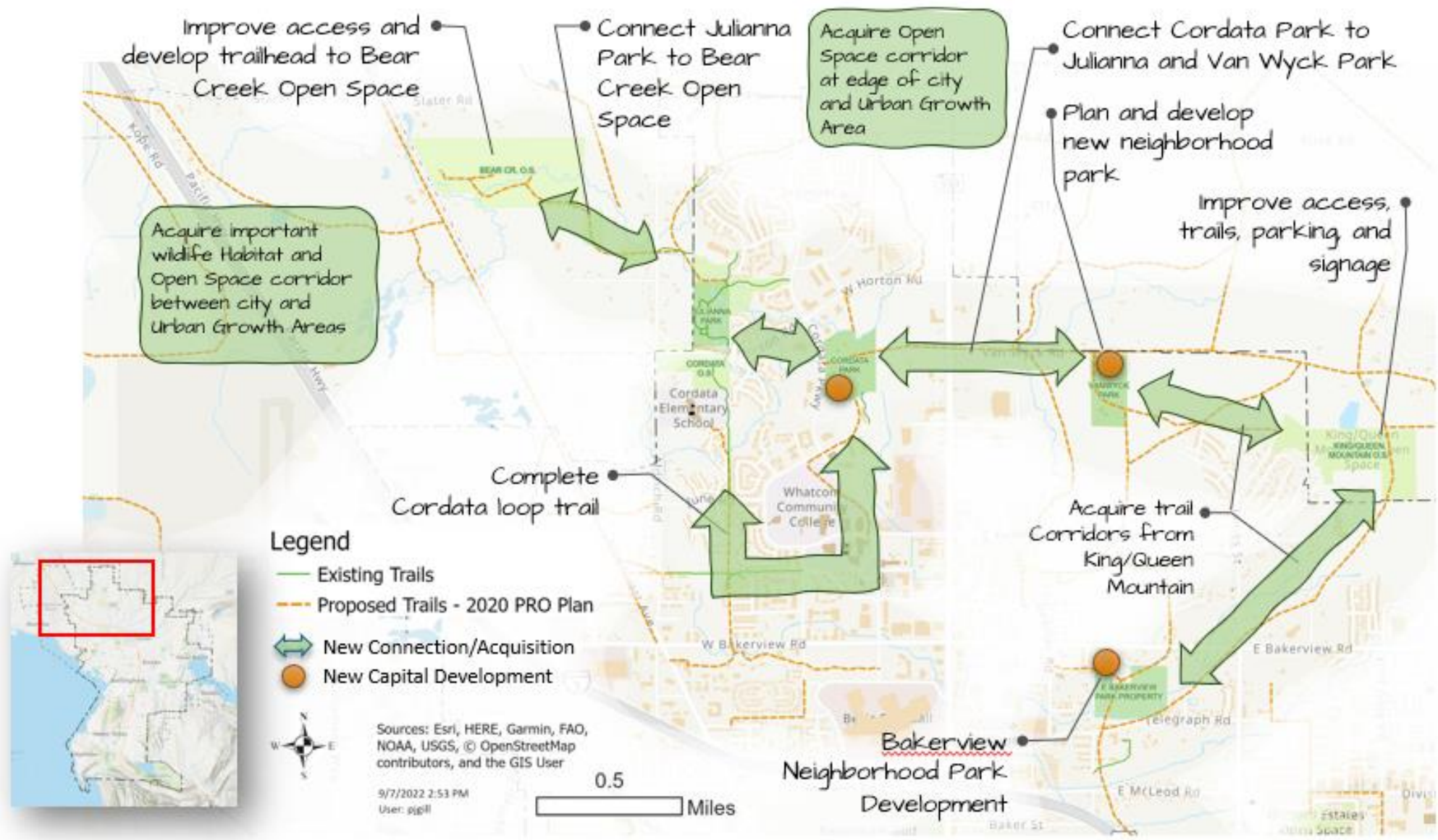
BELLINGHAM-FERNDAL OPEN SPACE CORRIDOR

The Growth Management Act ([RCW 36.70A.160](#)) and the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan ([LU-59](#)) requires open space corridors within and between urban growth areas (UGAs); the corridors should be useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails and connection of critical areas. Since the first Growth Management plans were adopted by Whatcom County in 1997, an open space corridor between Ferndale and Bellingham Urban Growth Areas has not been identified.

The [2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis](#) mapped important habitat hubs and corridors for terrestrial species. Figure 8 of that report shows a hub stretching across I-5 to the boundary of the city's UGA. A significant portion of this area is owned by public entities including the Lummi Nation, Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham and the State of Washington (DNR). Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan and Land Supply Analysis identifies job growth in this area and should be updated to reflect environmental constraints and habitat protection opportunities.

The priorities in this area include acquisition of important wildlife habitat and corridors, and development of trails.

- Identify a riparian corridor to connect important wildlife habitat to the Nooksack River
- Use [2015 Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment](#) to identify restoration actions recommended in this area
- Identify and ensure an open space corridor between Bellingham and Ferndale UGAs
- Collaborate with Whatcom County and Port of Bellingham on completing regional trail connections between Bellingham and Ferndale.



Other Resources and Information

Greenways Documents

- Greenways Program Web Page (<https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway>)
- Land Acquisition Summary (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2019%20GAC%20land%20acquisitions.pdf>) – Note, this summary is out of date (2019)
- Greenways Advisory Committee (<https://cob.org/gov/public/bc/greenway-bc>)
- 2016 Greenways IV Levy, Resolution No. 2016-16 (<https://bellingham.municipal.codes/enactments/Res2016-16>)
- Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (<https://cob.org/project/parks-recreation-open-space-plan-update>)

City Budget, Plans, Reports and Studies

- Bellingham City Budget (<https://cob.org/gov/budget>)
- Climate Protection Action Plan (<https://cob.org/services/environment/climate/program>)
- Urban Forestry Management Plan (<https://cob.org/services/planning/environmental/urban-forestry-management-plan>)
- 2021 Wildlife Corridor Analysis (<https://cob.org/services/environment/restoration/wildlife-corridor-analysis>)
- 2016 Comprehensive Plan (<https://cob.org/services/planning/comprehensive-plan>)
- 2015 Habitat Restoration Technical Assessment (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/final-bhrta-12-15-15.pdf>)
- 2015 North Bellingham and Urban Growth Boundary Wetland, Stream, Habitat Conservation Area and Buffer Assessment (<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-buffer-assessment.pdf>)
- Bellingham Shoreline Master Program Update (<https://cob.org/project/smp-update>)
- Bellingham Mitigation Program (<https://cob.org/services/environment/mitigation-program>)
- Bellingham Habitat Restoration Projects (<https://cob.org/services/environment/restoration/projects-restore>)
- 2014 Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan (<https://cob.org/services/planning/transportation-planning/bike-master-planning>)
- 2012 Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan (<https://cob.org/services/planning/transportation-planning/pedestrian-master-planning>)

City Maps

- City website (<https://cob.org/services/maps>)
- CityIQ (<https://cob.org/services/maps/online-mapping>)

Appendix A: Example Greenways Fund Annual Report, 2020-2021

(Updated reports are available at <https://cob.org/gov/dept/parks/greenway>)