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## Parks and Recreation Department City of Bellingham

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### MEMORANDUM

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**To:** Parks and Recreation Advisory Board  
**From:** Peter Gill, Planning and Development Coordinator  
**Subject:** Property Acquisitions and Greenways Property of Interest Maps  
**Date:** April 5, 2023

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The Greenways Advisory Committee (GAC) has worked diligently with staff over the last several months to update and extend the Property of Interest (POI) Maps and clarify the property acquisition process. They recommended the POI map for approval on April 6, 2023. We are now seeking a review and recommendation from the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB).

#### **Purpose**

Improve property acquisition approval timelines by pre-approving priority properties for “due diligence.” Due diligence is commonly used to refer to property research needed to value a property, including: appraisals, environmental assessments, title reports. By mapping properties of interest, the City is able to better understand the funding needed for high priority acquisitions. This helps plan for budgets, future levy needs, equitable distribution of levy funds, and trade-offs between property acquisitions. Ranking properties also focuses limited staff time on the highest priority acquisitions. This work does not limit Parks and Recreation to property acquisitions contemplated in these maps.

#### **Mapping approach**

An online map was developed and private access to GAC members was granted. GAC members provided comments and ranked parcels directly on the map by placing map pins. Property interest is largely based on the Greenways Strategic Plan and PRO Plan recommendations. Staff then reviewed parcels for in-progress private development projects, landowner information, known prohibitions and critical areas that may prevent the intended use of the property.

Staff generally evaluated a property’s ranking based on the following considerations:

- The property is included in the PRO Plan or the Greenways Strategic Plan
- The property is already developed with existing buildings
- There are private development plans in-progress to develop the site and a trail/park and will be developed with private development funds within City boundaries
- The property completes an existing gap in the greenway network

Properties of interest are ranked according to the following:

1. **Action Approved**, these are parcels that Council has approved for staff time investments and due diligence.
2. **High Interest**, these properties are a high priority, and provide key linkage between existing trails, park land, or an existing recreational facility. These parcels are the primary option for park facilities and trail connections. These are connections or parks identified in a Park's plan. These may also be parcels outside of City limits that, if developed, would not be required to build trails proposed in the PRO Plan. It is intended that these be approved for staff time investments and due diligence.
3. **Potential Interest**, parcels that are functionally important to the greenway system and which may be desirable for acquisition at a later date, secondary to high interest properties, or in response to various contingencies. Related studies by the Greenway Program are limited to staff investigations and are intended for reporting to the GAC, PRAB, and Council prior to due diligence.
4. **Archived**, parcels that may have been a priority in the past, but are no longer being considered following due diligence reports, already purchased by the City, currently under development, etc. These parcels are not presently being pursued for Greenway Program acquisition.

### **Map Review and Maintenance**

A map is presented to GAC members showing original POI map versus the updated map based on the collective comments and staff review. Staff has review properties with GAC members to verify the property rankings and review their mapping comments. Comments are archived once new POI map is recommended. The Properties of Interest map was recommended by the GAC on April 6, 2023. The map is now being presented to PRAB for review followed by Council for approval. Staff will amend the map as properties are purchased. New maps should be reviewed and updated by GAC periodically and no less than every GW Strategic plan update.

### **Property Acquisitions**

Purchases will continue to go through the GAC, PRAB, and City Council prior to final purchasing, but the initial round of approvals sought for "due diligence" work will not occur for properties that are identified on the map as Action Approved or High Interest. This is consistent with Bellingham's adopted procedures for property acquisitions.

Applicable sections of the Greenway Levy Acquisition Approval Procedure ([PAR 04.01.01](#)):

*3. The staff will prepare a preliminary recommendation priority list of properties that will be submitted to the Greenway Advisory Committee for consideration, including the estimated acquisition cost.*

*4. After the property has been presented to the Greenway Committee, their recommendation will be forwarded to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board for their review and recommendation.*

*5. The Parks and Recreation Board's recommendation, along with the Greenway Committee recommendation, is then forwarded to City Council for their information and direction to staff*

The Bellingham Municipal code authorizes GAC to make recommendations on program procedures and priorities for acquisitions under Greenways Authority and Duties.

*BMC 2.20.040 (4.) To consult with and make recommendations to the parks and recreation department on greenway levy projects and greenway program procedures developed and proposed by the parks and recreation department, including individual project plans, system or area plans, selection criteria and priorities for acquisition and development projects, and procedures for expenditure and reporting of greenway levy funds.*

The Bellingham Municipal code authorizes PRAB to make recommendations on program procedures and priorities for acquisitions under Greenways Authority and Duties.

*A. To formulate an orderly program for the acquisition of land, waterways, buildings, facilities and equipment, and for the development, operation and maintenance of an adequate system of public parks, playgrounds, and recreational facilities of the city, both within and without its boundaries, in cooperation with other departments, or bodies, public or private;*

*B. [...]*

*C. To consult with and make recommendations to the director of parks and recreation regarding policies for the planning, development, maintenance and use of all of the city's park and recreation areas and facilities, as well as the implementation of policies concerning the city's recreation program;*

### **Cost Estimating**

Estimating cost is useful to for Greenways budget planning. Understanding how much Greenways could expect to pay to secure parkland and trail connections will help the community understand the need. This will also help staff understand trade-offs between properties that are available now versus those that are a part of a long-term plan. The approach to estimate cost is simplistic and comes with a value range for a variety of reasons. The primary reason is that the real estate market fluctuates quickly, second is that every property has unique circumstances that are negotiated during sale, last is that multiple properties are prioritized when only one may be needed to achieve plan goals.



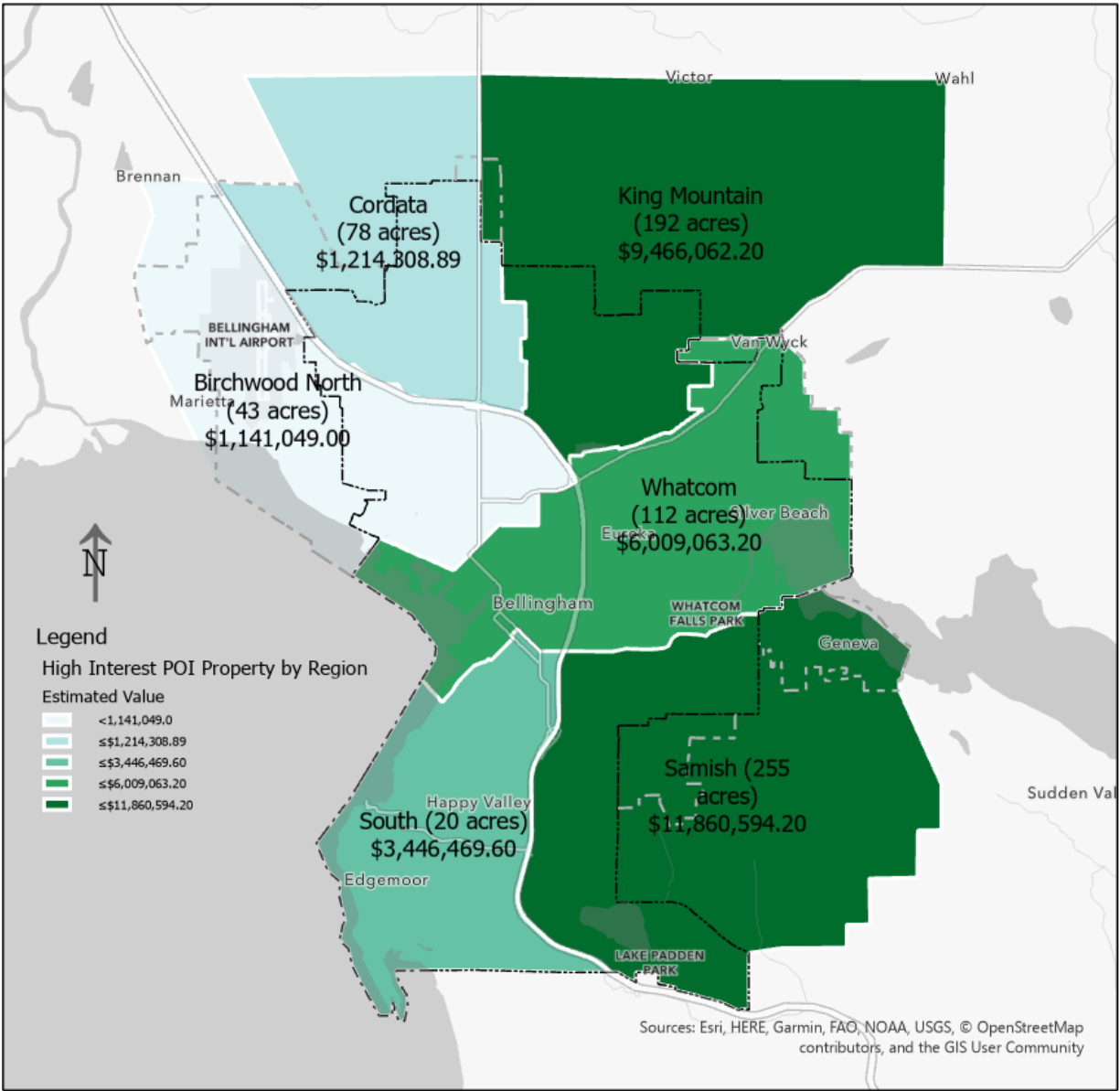
Figure 1. Regions used to summary POI results

The approach presented here aggregates properties into logical groupings across the City and County. In order to be consistent with regions used by Greenways in the past, we have broken the City into six regions, roughly aligned to greenway corridors in the Strategic Plan. Figure 1 showing those regions is included here.

Estimated value was then evaluated against the Whatcom County Assessor appraised value. The benefit of this approach is that Assessor values are updated regularly and this analysis can be rerun whenever needed. The drawbacks of using the Assessor data is that it is can be inaccurate due to a fast moving real estate market, as well as tax

exemptions based on owner demographics and protected land uses. In order to accommodate this unknowable inaccuracy we have provided a value range based on a sample of recent properties purchased through Parks and Recreation. The sample showed that sale price varied from 86% of assessed value to nearly 200% of assessed value. The average sale price was 140% of assessed value.

For the purposes of this exercise property value is estimated at be 140% of assessed value and will be given a range of 100% to 180% for reporting purposes. The figure below estimates the value of only the “Action Approved” and “High Interest” parcels within each of the six regions described above. The properties of interest that are ranked “Potential Interest” are not included in the cost estimates.



PARK REGION	SUM ACRES	LOW RANGE \$ (ASSESSED)	ESTIMATED VALUE	HIGH RANGE \$ (180% ASSESSED)
BIRCHWOOD NORTH	43	\$ 815,035	\$1,141,049	\$1,467,063
CORDATA	78	\$ 867,363	\$1,214,308	\$1,561,254
SOUTH	20	\$ 2,461,764	\$3,446,469	\$4,431,175
KING MOUNTAIN	192	\$ 6,761,473	\$9,466,062	\$12,170,651
SAMISH	255	\$ 8,471,853	\$11,860,594	\$15,249,335
WHATCOM	112	\$ 4,292,188	\$6,009,063	\$7,725,938
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>\$ 23,669,676</b>	<b>\$33,137,547</b>	<b>\$42,605,417</b>

*Table 1. Cost Estimates based on Highest Priority Properties. [Map and table be updated once POI Mapping is complete]*

These values can be used for general planning purposes only. The numbers inform the distribution of the most sought after properties across the planning area and how Greenways levy funds could be used over the long term with respect to property acquisition.