



Parks and Recreation Department City of Bellingham

MEMORANDUM

To: Bellingham City Council
From: Peter Gill, Planning and Development Coordinator
CC: Nicole Oliver, Parks & Recreation Director and Laine Potter, Parks Development Manager
Subject: Docketing Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan Minor Amendment
Date: April 24, 2023

The Parks & Recreation Department is requesting an addition to the 2022-2023 annual docket of Bellingham Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Summary

The Parks & Recreation Department is requesting an amendment to the 2020 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (PRO Plan). The PRO Plan is an adopted chapter of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan and a required element of the State Growth Management Act. Changes to the PRO Plan must be processed consistent with the Comprehensive Plan annual docket.

This minor amendment addresses Section V. Recommendations, 5.5 Trails, and Appendix D, the six-year Capital Facilities Plan. More specifically, the proposal would amend the mapped “proposed trail corridors” to address changes since 2020, improve trail alignments to better reflect geographic constraints and align with proposed updates to the City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans.

In addition, three infrastructure improvement projects will be added to the Capital Facilities Plan, including: a Railroad trail overpass at Woburn Street, Old Village trail revitalization, and a covered pickleball court. By incorporating these improvement projects into the Capital Facilities Plan, a private developer would be eligible to propose the construction and dedication of such improvements for park impact fee credit and the items could be included in future budgeting request cycles.

Annual Docketing Criteria

The proposal addresses the annual docketing criteria found in BMC 20.20.030.

A. The city has the resources, including staff and budget, necessary to adequately and comprehensively review the proposal within the time frame of the annual review process;

Staff from the Parks & Recreation Department, Design and Development Division, will be responsible for administration of the amendment and managing the associated public process.

B. (3.) The public interest would be best served by considering the proposal in the next amendment cycle, rather than delaying consideration to a future plan update process;

These public facility improvements are timely due to the ongoing residential growth in Bellingham. Waiting until the next PRO Plan update in 2026 is not in the public interest. Several key trail corridors have been dedicated and constructed as part of private development or City-led capital projects, and it is critical that the adjoining trail segments be included in the PRO Plan now to ensure development of multimodal trails for recreation and transportation keep up with the pace of growth. Waiting until the next PRO Plan update cycle may mean missing out on opportunities for trail dedication and/or construction required by current land development regulations. Several of these trail corridors serve neighborhoods with new infill housing and multifamily development, and it is essential that these community members have access to high-quality trail systems for both recreation and alternative transportation routes. Adding new projects to the Capital Facilities Plan allows for project planning and budgeting to start earlier, thus securing private development partners or grant funding sooner.

B. (4.) The amendment addresses changing circumstances, changing community values, or corrects or updates information in the comprehensive plan or a neighborhood plan;

The amendments adjust proposed trail alignments in recognition of newly developed trails and proposed bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The amendments take advantage of new GIS data compensating for steep slopes and wetlands. They recognize changing circumstances on the ground with new developments and City property acquisitions. This amendment is intended to be responsive and adaptive to the fast pace at which residential development is occurring City-wide, specifically in the north side of the City.