

I. Introduction, Goals & Objectives

The City's Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan (PRO Plan), an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan, is the overarching document that guides the preservation and expansion of the park, recreation and open space system as the community grows. The PRO Plan must be updated every six years in order for the City to remain eligible for grants administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, such as the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, Boating Facilities Program, and Land and Water Conservation Fund. The PRO Plan outlines the steps to continue to achieve a quality park and recreation system for the future.

Mission Statement: Support a healthy community by promoting high quality parks and recreation services.

1.1 Growth Management Act and Plan Components

The Growth Management Act (GMA) establishes goals for cities and counties to ensure that their quality of life is sustained as their communities grow. One of these goals is to “retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreational facilities” (RCW 36.70A.020(9)).

This plan contains the following components:

- Establish Goals and Objectives – Identify the goals to be met and objectives to carry out those goals as the PRO Plan is implemented.
- Inventory Existing Park System – List the lands and facilities owned and operated by the City or other public agencies within the City limits and the Urban Growth Area.
- Analyze Needs & Opportunities – Determine the needs for future park, recreation, and open space facilities or programs.
- Adopt Level-of-Service – Based on the existing park system and the identified needs, establish level of service standards to help guide development of the park system over the next 10 to 20 years.
- Create Implementation Plan – Estimate the overall cost of achieving the proposed level of service, based on the community’s recommendations, prioritize those recommendations, and develop a plan to pay for them.



Overlooking South Bay Trail at Taylor Dock. Photo by Kenni Merritt.

1.2 Principles, Goals and Objectives

Principles

These six principles demonstrate the collective community values regarding Bellingham's park system:

- **Preservation:** Conserves habitat and open space, enhances native species and creates opportunities to learn about and interact with nature.
- **Connection:** Supports community connection through enhanced trail corridors protecting wildlife habitat and improving physical, mental and emotional health.
- **Play:** Inspires imagination and joy.
- **Equity:** Quality and quantity of amenities equally distributed, easy to safely use year-round and accessible by all modes of travel.
- **Resiliency:** Stewards a long-term park system that helps reduce the impact of climate change and supports flexible spaces that accommodate traditional, emerging and future recreational use.
- **Inclusivity:** Responsive to the entire Bellingham community: all ages, abilities, languages, genders, cultures and income levels.



Couple dancing at Boulevard Park. Photo by Dex Horton.

Goals & objectives

These eight goals, and their corresponding objectives, reflect the community's desired outcomes and provide a strategic framework for recommendations in the PRO Plan.

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

Objectives:

- a. Provide a system of parks, trails and open space so that all residents live within one-half mile safe route of a developed park or trail.
- b. Proactively upgrade and restore existing facilities to address community needs, improve resiliency and protect long-term health of existing park assets.
- c. Provide adequate staff year-round to maintain and enhance park facilities and services.
- d. Target new park acquisitions and development in areas that are under-served.

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

Objectives:

- a. Evaluate park facilities and infrastructure to ensure adequate capacity can support existing and future use.

- b. Incorporate art and whimsy into park facilities.
- c. Evaluate opportunities to renovate existing facilities to expand use and accommodate popular recreational activities such as pickleball, volleyball, disc golf, competitive swimming and alternative sports such as skate boarding, BMX and other biking, and water/paddle sports.
- d. Design and prioritize system upgrades that respond to condition assessments, community vision and preferences.
- e. Acquire and develop additional shoreline access.



Bellingham Farmers Market. Photo by Cynthia St. Clair.

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

Objectives:

- a. Partner and collaborate with local service providers that activate underserved locations and populations.
- b. Work with other City departments and organizations to keep parks safe and clean.
- c. Provide more small gathering spaces, especially in the urban area as infill occurs.
- d. Provide larger event spaces such as enclosed meeting rooms and outdoor shelters suitable for family gatherings, weddings, festivals, and events.
- e. Identify outdoor facilities that may be identified or designated as natural therapy locations.

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

Objectives:

- a. Protect environmental features that reflect Bellingham's natural character, including ridgelines, critical areas, forests and wildlife corridors.
- b. Participate in development and implementation of an Urban Forestry Master Plan to proactively assess and protect urban tree canopy and undergrowth.
- c. Recognize the importance of taking action to reduce the impacts of climate change and the natural carbon sequestration function of our existing parks.
- d. Contribute to the City's sequestration capacity through continuing to incorporate principles of preservation in park design and development.
- e. Expand dog-waste program and provide additional trash receptacles to improve self-maintenance and litter control.
- f. Implement low impact development measures and integrated pest management to reduce environmental impacts.

- g. Steward and protect open spaces from invasive species, illegal activity, and inappropriate use, and revegetate where appropriate.
- h. Perform invasive species removal and habitat restoration on open space properties.
- i. Provide environmental education opportunities such as interpretive signage or other educational programs to promote the value of the natural environment throughout the park system.

Goal 5: Develop innovative programs, services and strategies for expanding recreational opportunities and improving accessibility.

Objectives:

- a. Involve the community in habitat restoration and maintenance activities through the Parks Volunteer Program.
- b. Explore partnerships that expand services or leverage support for specific projects.
- c. Target service improvements that decrease barriers and expand park and recreation system use.
- d. Evaluate existing scholarship program for low income families with the goal of expanding participation.
- e. Ensure new development invests in and dedicates new parks, trails, street trees and open space.
- f. Target improvements that connects trails with transit stops, key destinations, bike routes and sidewalks to improve non-motorized transportation options.
- g. Coordinate with Public Works to identify opportunities for better trails, habitat corridors, sidewalks and bike route connectivity.
- h. Provide Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training opportunities for staff.
- i. Provide programs and events that meet the diverse needs of the community-increasing access to public services in underserved areas.
- j. Provide program and service information in multiple languages.



Fairhaven Village Green. Photo by Kenni Merritt.

- k. Modernize recreation programs to meet interests and needs of the community.
- l. Redefine “duplication” of services. There may still be a lack of services even if other agencies provide certain opportunities (after-schools, camps, pre-school, teen, senior programming etc.).
- m. Develop a partnership agreement with Recreation Northwest to integrate their Parkscriptions model into City recreational programs and curricula.

Goal 6: Connect and unify the community with trail and greenway corridors.

Objectives:

- a. Provide an interconnected trail system so all residents are within a one-half mile of a safe route.
- b. Balance the demand for public access and interpretive education with protection of environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites.
- c. Implement the Greenways Strategic Plan and pursue recommended future parks, open space and trails.
- d. Provide safe street crossings (i.e. beacons, raised crossings, signalization, medians, etc.) that connect to parks and trails.
- e. Improve wayfinding.
- f. Continue to explore new trail surface 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.
- g. Promote the use of pedestrian and bike travel and encourage the reduction of single occupancy vehicle use by providing safe and connected alternative transportation routes.

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

Objectives:

- a. Design and develop facilities that reduce overall maintenance, operation requirements and costs, while improving resiliency and efficiency.
- b. Establish baseline conditions and maintenance standards for park assets and evaluate and report progress towards meeting standards and improving conditions.
- c. Prioritize capital improvements based on safety, condition, socio-economic factors and population served.
- d. Analyze options for long-term financial sustainability.
- e. Explore options to improve enforcement of park rules while ensuring all park users feel welcome.
- f. Provide staff with adequate training, resources and equipment to increase productivity and efficacy.
- g. Assess energy efficiency of park facilities and prioritize energy and system upgrades.

Goal 8: In 2020, conduct a Community Recreation Needs Assessment guided by the following objectives.

Objectives:

- a. Explore barriers and/or constraints to recreation participation, such as timing, location, lack of information, transportation, or money.
- b. Evaluate public willingness to pay for services.
- c. Identify who we are serving and what demographics have unmet needs.
- d. Explore specific recreation programs and services - what will people use vs. perceived desires.
- e. Identify facility needs and/or desires for enhancements or improvements.
- f. Explore marketing needs to understand how the public learns about program opportunities.

- g. Determine what community needs are being met by other service providers.
- h. Design the Community Recreation Needs Assessment to achieve the following implementation tools:
 - Provide a policy framework for the use of parks and facilities that establishes methods for effectively tracking service utilization and creates realistic cost recovery models.
 - Informs recommendations for the provision of equitable services.
 - Form the basis for a Recreation Services Strategic Plan that includes staff guidance, program development, cost recovery models and staffing needs.



Boulevard Park. Photo by Brian Pitzen.

1.3 Public Involvement

Public input is important to a community-based parks and recreation plan. The members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) served as the Steering Committee to help oversee the process, provide input and evaluate the recommendations. Greenways Advisory Committee members tackled the updates to recommended trails and open space. A web-based survey, public workshops and a public open house were also conducted to augment and inform the Committee’s discussions.

A summary of the 2,463 responses to the Parks & Recreation Community Survey is attached as Appendix F. Public hearings were held with the Planning Commission and City Council prior to final adoption. The public involvement process included the following:

Meeting	Topic	Date
2019		
Steering Committee/PRAB	Project Launch	April
Online Public Survey	Community Survey	June-July
Public Workshop #1	Goals and Objectives	June 4, 2019
All Staff Workshop	Priorities and Goals	June 6, 2019
City Council	Project Update and PEP Tool	June 17, 2019
Workshop #2	Maps	July 11, 2019
Steering Committee/PRAB	Recommendations	September 11, 2019
Public Open House	Overview of key elements	September 19, 2019
Steering Committee/PRAB	Final Recommendation	October 9, 2019
Planning Commission	Public Hearing	November 21, 2019
City Council	Public Hearing	February 10, 2020