



2026 PROS Plan – Communications and Community Engagement Plan

DRAFT - January 2025

Background

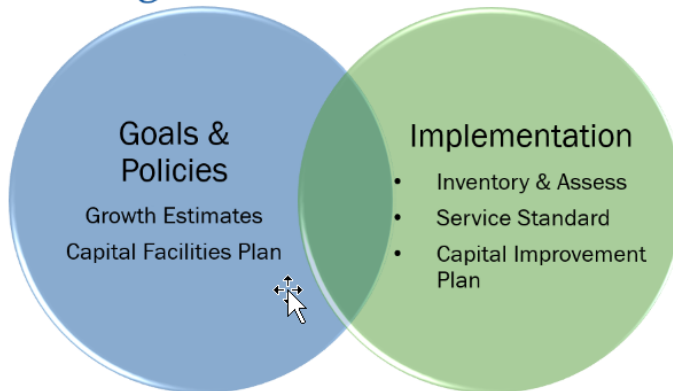
We are updating our six-year Park, Recreation, and Open Space Plan (PROS Plan). The new 2026 plan will be based on an extensive public outreach process that will outline future service levels, development projects, maintenance policies, and funding options for the parks system.

The update is required to stay eligible for Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office grants and for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan for Bellingham. Parks and Recreation is an element of the Growth Management Act. The demand for park facilities as documented in the PROS Plan forms the basis of Park Impact Fees. Work will be done in two phases and result in one integrated plan.

Two Integrated Parts

Bellingham Plan

PROS Plan



Audiences

- All Bellingham **community members**, including those who live or work in, go to school in, or visit Bellingham. Made up of existing park users and infrequent or non-users.
- **Boards and Committees:** City Council, Planning Commission and neighborhood associations
- **Underrepresented groups** whose participation in City activities has historically been lower by percentage than that group's representation in the broader community
 - Youth and seniors



- Renters
- Households making less than \$50K
- Employees who may live outside the city
- Immigrants and others whose primary language is not English
- Mobility-impaired residents
- Students and youth (aged 14-25)
- **City Staff**
- **Partners:** community-based organizations, recreational organizations, Bellingham School District, Port of Bellingham, Whatcom County, tribes, neighboring towns

Parks Element (Chapter) of the Bellingham Plan

Communications and Engagement Goals and Audiences

Phase I

During Phase I, we are seeking stakeholder input and decisionmaker approval on the goals and policies that outline the priorities and results we expect from the 2026 PROS Plan. This phase is primarily about getting high level input to inform a strategic framework to include in the 2025 update to The Bellingham Plan.

Phase I Communication and Engagement Goals:

- Provide opportunities for people to reflect on and provide input on goals, policies and high-level priorities for parks, trails, open spaces and recreation. Specifically, consult audiences to learn:
 - What are the strengths of the Bellingham park system? Provide inventory, characterization, and assessment of the existing system.
 - How well the current programs, services and amenities meet the community’s needs and expectations
 - Identify barriers to equitable enjoyment of the park system and recreation services.
- Describe how community feedback is considered when developing the Parks & Recreation chapter of the Bellingham Plan.
- Where possible, show how previous and future feedback informs the goals and policies and avoid duplication of feedback requests. (ex: Recreation Needs Assessment results, Bellingham Plan open houses, Civic Master Plan engagement results, upcoming engagement for new indoor recreation center.)

Phase I Goals by Audience

Audience/ Stakeholder Group	Comms and Engagement Goals or Objectives by Audience <i>(What do we want them to think, feel, know or do?)</i>
Decisionmakers	
City Council	We want: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Councilmembers to approve the parks chapter of the Bellingham Plan.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the PROS Plan update is being phased • How the GMA requirements are satisfied through this two phase approach. • How the parks chapter is consistent with the Bellingham Plan • Councilmembers to see how community feedback informed the parks chapter. • Councilmembers to see how goals and objectives of the parks chapter reflect community values and priorities.
Planning Commission	Same as above.
Advisors	
Parks and Rec Advisory Board (PRAB)	<p>We want:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members to give direct input on goals, objectives and priorities reflected in the PROS Plan. • Board members to recommend approval of the goals and objectives in the PROS Plan. • Board members to understand and incorporate community feedback in their recommendations. • Board members to see how goals and objectives of the PROS Plan reflect community values and priorities.
Greenways Advisory Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members to give direct input on goals, objectives and priorities reflected in the PROS Plan. • See that goals and priorities reflect Greenways levy spending categories
Reviewers, Commenters, Input-Givers	
Recreation groups and partners	<p>We want:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This audience to give us high-level feedback to inform updates to our goals, and priorities for future, and opportunities to coordinate.
Existing parks & rec users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback should reflect satisfaction with park facilities and programs • Provide guidance on where park system is lacking • Inform park system priorities for the future
Infrequent or non-users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on barriers to using the park system that could be addressed by the City
Underrepresented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on barriers to using the park system that could be addressed by the City • Culturally specific recreation issues and concerns
COB staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most beneficial improvements to the system based on experience and understanding of limitations.



Phase II

During Phase II, we are seeking stakeholder input in order to meet community needs now and into the future

This phase is about getting feedback to:

- Set level of service standards for parks and trails based on system inventory and phase one feedback.
- Illustrate and describe gaps in service based on level of service standard,
- Identify new programs, facilities, amenities or services to develop.
- Demonstrate how Goals and Policies guide the selection of park projects.
- Prioritize the Parks and Recreation Department’s work in the next ten years and get feedback on recommended improvements.
- Get plan adopted by City Council and approved by WA State Recreation and Conservation Office.

Phase II Communication and Engagement Goals:

- Get feedback from a diverse group of people and organizations, not just the usual voices. Put added effort into making it easy to for people from underrepresented groups to provide their input.
- Show people how community feedback was considered in the process.
- Where possible, show how previous and future feedback informs the goals and policies and avoid duplication of feedback requests. (ex: Recreation Needs Assessment results, Civic Master Plan engagement results, upcoming engagement for new indoor recreation center.)

Audience/ Stakeholder Group	Comms and Engagement Goals or Objectives <i>(What do we want them to think, feel, know or do?)</i>
Decisionmakers	
City Council	We want: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councilmembers to approve the PROS Plan. • How the GMA requirements are satisfied through this two phase approach. • How projects and program improvements were prioritized based on the goals and objectives. • Councilmembers to see how community feedback informed the PROS Plan. • Councilmembers to see how goals and objectives of the PROS Plan reflect community values and priorities.
Planning Commission	
Advisors	

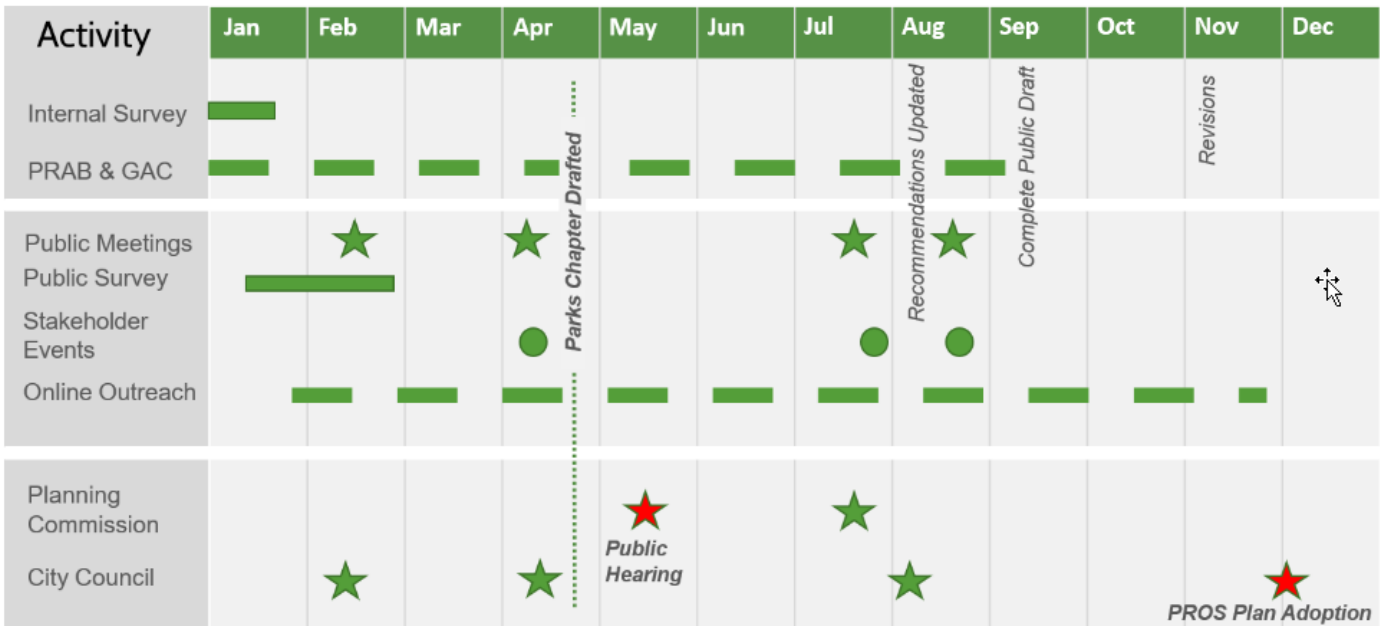


Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB)	<p>We want:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members to give direct input on service standards, project list, and project priorities criteria in the PROS Plan. • Board members to understand and incorporate community feedback in their recommendations. • Board members to see how the final project priorities in the PROS Plan reflect community values and priorities. • Board members to recommend approval of the PROS Plan.
Greenways Advisory Committee	<p>We want:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board members to give direct input on service standards, trail project list, and trail project priorities criteria in the PROS Plan. • Board members to understand and incorporate community feedback in their trail recommendations. • Board members to recommend approval of the proposed trails in the PROS Plan.
Reviewers, Commenters, Input-Givers	
Recreation groups and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential partnership opportunities. • Input on service standards, project list, and project priorities criteria in the PROS Plan.
Existing parks & rec users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • input on service standards, project list, and project priorities criteria in the PROS Plan.
Infrequent or non-users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of facilities, programs, or services that would increase participation.
Underrepresented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on barriers to using the park system that could be addressed by the City • Culturally specific recreation issues and concerns



Communication and Engagement Tactics and Timeline

Public Outreach and Legislative Review (Phase I & II)



Phase I & II

Engagement Tactic & Specs	Key Message and Purpose	Audiences	Timeline	Leads, Reviewers and Approvers
2026 PROS Plan Communication and Community Engagement Plan	Purpose: Provide transparency on how and when the public will be involved in the update.	Community members, City Council, Planning Commission, Advisory Boards	January 20, 2025	Lead staff: Melissa M., Peter G. Approvers: Laine P., Parks Director
Internal Survey	Purpose: Involve staff in their park plan, Understand internal priorities for future development.	Priority audiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks & Rec Staff Parks and Recreation Advisory Board 	Development and review: December Go live: Dec/Jan Close: Jan 9, 2025	Lead staff: Peter G. Approvers: Dept Director
Phase 1 Survey	Purpose: Survey will ask questions that	Priority audiences:	Development and review: January	Lead staff: Peter G., Laine P.



<p>Format: Digital</p> <p>Hosted on Engage Bellingham page</p> <p>Available in English and Spanish</p>	<p>help inform the update.</p> <p>Key message: We are updating our Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Plan, which sets goals that guide our work for the next ten years. As we start the process, we want to hear how you think we should update our goals from the last plan. Take this survey to give us your input.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members Underrepresented groups Partner organizations City Staff <p>Secondary audiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boards & Committees 	<p>Go live: Jan 29, 2025</p> <p>Close: Feb 28, 2025</p> <p>Results available to public: March</p>	<p>Reviewers: Melissa M., Parks & Recreation Staff</p> <p>Approvers: Department Director</p>
<p>Project webpage</p>	<p>Purpose: Base information for PROS Plan and historic reference point for public review documents, access point to drive to EB page and tie the two phases together.</p>	<p>All digital audiences COB.org users</p>	<p>Development and review: December/ Go Live: January 20</p>	<p>Lead staff: Peter G.</p> <p>Approvers: Laine P.</p>
<p>Engage Bellingham page – Bellingham Plan</p> <p>Located within the Bellingham Plan EB Hub (during Phase 1 only)</p>	<p>Purpose: Provide information about the parks chapter of the Bellingham Plan, any community engagement opportunities and results of community input Provides for Document drafts and public comment.</p> <p>Key message: We are updating our Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Plan, which sets goals that guide our</p>	<p>All digital audiences</p>	<p>Development and review: January</p> <p>Go live: Jan 20, 2025</p> <p>Close: June, 2025</p>	<p>Lead staff: Laine P./ Peter G.</p> <p>Reviewers: Melissa M.</p> <p>Approvers: Department Director, Planning Dept.</p>



	work for the next ten years. Engage Bellingham is the place to weigh in.			
Engage Bellingham page – PROS Plan	Purpose: Virtual open house for PROS Plan update. Information dissemination and opportunity for ongoing community input. Document drafts and public comment	All digital audiences	Development and review: May Go live: June, 2025 Close: Dec, 2025	Lead staff: Laine P. Reviewers: Peter G., Melissa M. Approvers: Department Director
Public open houses	Purpose: Meet with the community in-person to provide information, answer questions and raise awareness. Meet with the community in-person to get input on proposals and solicit feedback.	Non digital audiences, neighborhood associations, under represented groups	Development and review: February Advertise: February Open houses, Kickoff: February, 2025 Open house, draft parks chapter: April, 2025 Open houses, PROS Plan: July-Sept	Lead staff: Peter G./ Laine P./ Consultant
Stakeholder listening sessions	Purpose: Meet with the special interest groups virtually to provide information, answer questions, and solicit feedback	Recreation clubs and businesses, neighborhood associations, and governmental partners	Phase II June - August	Lead staff: Consultant/Peter G./ Laine P.
Planning Commission	Purpose: Present Parks chapter and solicit formal public comment into the record.	All audiences	Public notice: Apr 15, 2025 Public comment: April 20-May 10 Public hearing: May 15	Lead staff: Peter G. Reviewers: Laine P. Approvers: Department Director, Planning Dept



			Recorded motion: June 2025 (depends on Bellingham Plan)	
City Council	<p>Purpose: Present Parks chapter and solicit formal public comment into the record.</p> <p>Present approach used to update the PROS Plan, get feedback on parks development</p>	All audiences	<p>Parks & Rec Committee: Feb, April</p> <p>Public hearing: Summer 2025 consistent w/Bellingham Plan</p> <p>Parks & Rec Committee: Aug, Oct</p> <p>Approval: Nov 2025</p>	<p>Lead staff: Peter G.</p> <p>Reviewers: Laine P.</p> <p>Approvers: Department Director, Planning Dept</p>
<p>Summary of results from Bellingham Plan open houses, surveys etc.</p> <p>This could be a one page summary and/or content for the Engage Bellingham page.</p>	<p>Purpose: Understand and share back to the community what we gleaned during Phase 1 feedback of the Bellingham Plan engagement process.</p>	<p>Post report on EB and as appendix to PROS Plan.</p> <p>Infographic for open houses and website</p> <p>Send to respondents that leave an email or on sign up list.</p>	March 2025	<p>Lead staff: Consultant, Peter G.</p> <p>Reviewers: Laine P.</p> <p>Approvers: Department Director</p>
<p>Social media</p> <p>Post on both City and Parks channels</p> <p>Consider using short video when appropriate</p>	<p>Purpose: Push out information about milestones and engagement opportunities, such as public survey, highlights from survey results, etc.</p> <p>Key message: Varies by post.</p>	Digital audiences	Phase I and Phase II	<p>Lead staff: Consultant, Parks staff</p> <p>Approvers: Laine P., Department Director</p>
Outreach to specific groups	<p>Purpose: Gather information about recreational</p>	Partners and recreational orgs	Phase I and Phase II	<p>Lead staff: Consultant, Parks staff</p>



	opportunities, outreach to members, and potential partnerships	Might also include underrepresented groups		Approvers: Laine P.
Presentations to advisory boards	Purpose: Get feedback on draft work products, add public voice to early information, hear contrasting views on priorities	Boards and Committees	Monthly	Lead staff: Peter G./ Laine P. Approvers: Director, Laine P.
Weekly news summary (Inside Bellingham), Press releases, Inside Bellingham Spring print edition	Purpose: Push out information about milestones and engagement opportunities. Key message: Varies by post.	All audiences	Phase I and Phase II	Lead staff: Melissa M, David B. Reviewers: Peter G., Laine P. Approvers: Melissa M
Parks Playbook, Parks Newsletter	Purpose: Push out information about milestones and engagement opportunities, such as public survey, highlights from survey results, etc. Key message: Varies by post.	All audiences	Phase I and Phase II	Lead staff: Consultant, Parks staff Approvers: Laine P. Melissa B., Parks Director