



PORT OF BELLINGHAM

RECREATION, CONSERVATION, AND PUBLIC ACCESS PLAN

2024



PORT OF BELLINGHAM
Washington State

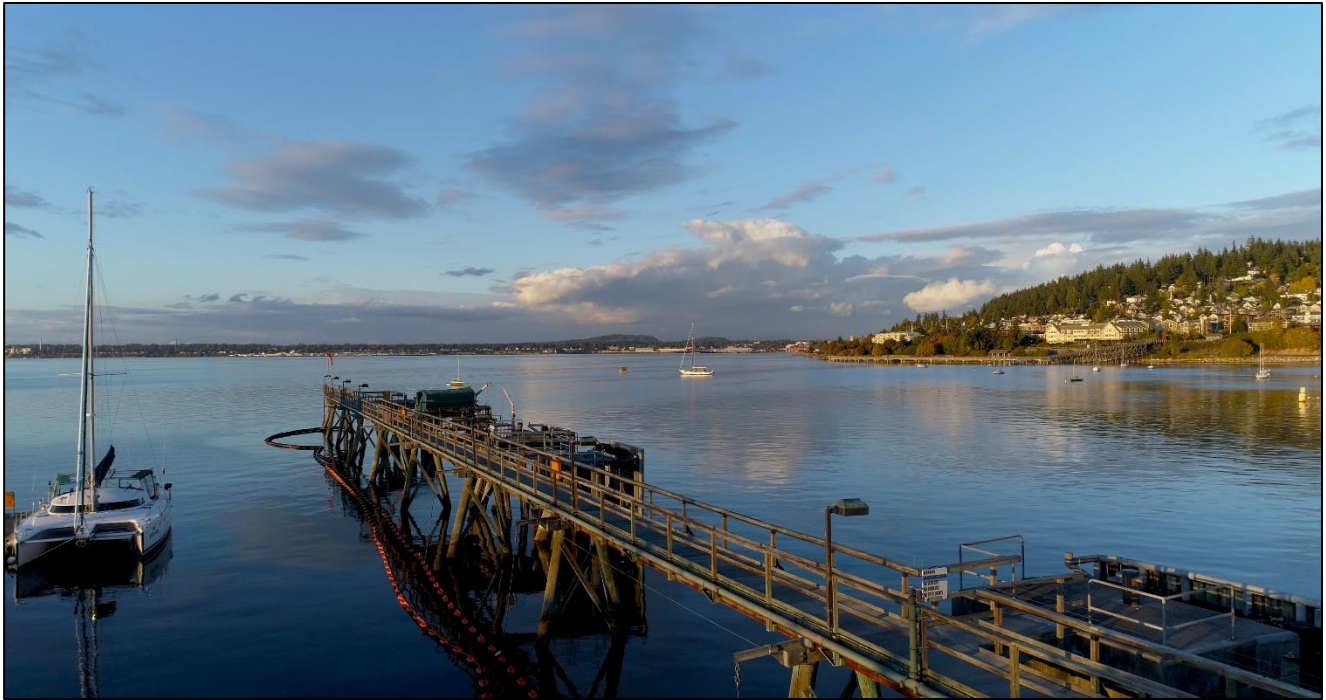
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Looking North from the Bellingham Cruise Terminal

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3 Introduction

The Port of Bellingham's Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan is a comprehensive document created to guide the development of Port open space, park, and recreation facilities. This plan is prepared to retain eligibility for certain Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) funding programs, as well as a means of coordinating plans with County and local municipal park agencies having jurisdiction over Port properties.

3.1 Jurisdiction

The Port of Bellingham was established in 1920, becoming the northernmost port district in the continental United States and the closest deep-water U.S. port to eastern Pacific Rim countries and Alaska. As a county wide jurisdiction, the Port's mission is *to promote sustainable economic development, optimize transportation gateways, and manage publicly owned land and facilities to benefit Whatcom County.*

Subject to Title 53 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), ports may develop and operate harbor improvements, belt line railways, water and land transfer and terminal facilities, airports, industrial and commercial developments, toll bridges, tunnels, foreign trade zones and economic development and tourism programs. The Port may levy property taxes, issue bonds, charge for services, and create local improvement districts (LID) or benefit assessment taxes to pay for improvements.

RCW 53.08.260 enables ports to construct, improve, maintain, and operate public park and recreation facilities when such facilities are necessary to more fully utilize boat landings, harbors, wharves and piers, air, land and water passenger and transfer terminals, waterways and other Port facilities authorized by law pursuant to the port's comprehensive scheme of harbor improvement plan.

Pursuant to RCW 53.08.270, before ports undertake any such plan for the acquisition and operation of any park or recreational facility the proposed plan shall be first submitted in writing to the director of the parks and recreation commission and to the governing body of any county or municipal park agency having jurisdiction in the area. The state director and/or such county or municipal park agency shall examine the port's proposed plan and may disapprove such proposed plan if it is found to be in conflict with state or local park and recreation plans for the same area.

3.2 Park, Recreation and Public Access Goals

Supporting public access is a priority for the Port of Bellingham. The Port works to create a compelling system of public access opportunities for current residents, visitors, and future generations to maintain a healthy active lifestyle and connection to the working waterfront by exploring the Port's open spaces, and shorelines. The Port engages in several activities for the benefit of the community. These activities are categorized as Public Priorities, are largely supported by property tax dollars and are one of the Port's Strategic Budget Public Priorities - *Community Connections*.

This includes the Port's open spaces and parks, meeting spaces, community outreach activities, management of Port records and the availability of those records to the public, the Marine Life Center, and the Commissioners' governance activities.

The following recreation, conservation, and public access goals support the Port's Community Connections priority.

The Port of Bellingham:

- Continues to develop a high quality, diversified and accessible recreation system that provides for all ages and interest groups.
- Incorporates historical and cultural lands, sites, artifacts, and facilities into public access improvements when feasible.
- Preserves or enhances marine habitat and shorelines where opportunities exist.
- Balances the maximization of public access with the need to minimize impacts related to safety and the environment.
- Seeks opportunities to eliminate or soften barriers to access when feasible.



Figure 1: Squalicum Harbor Promenade

3.3 Plan Objectives

The following list contains specific near-term priority objectives of this Recreation, Conservation and Public Access plan. These projects are identified in the Port's Strategic Budget and may be eligible for RCO grant funding.

- Replace the Port's Marine Life Center Observation Tank.
- Replace 550 lineal feet of visitor dock in Squalicum Inner Harbor.
- Replace approximately 144 16'X16" concrete boat launch panels at Blaine Harbor.
- Replace approximately 575 lineal feet of Blaine Harbor Promenade.
- Replace 24 shore power electric meters at Blaine Harbor Visitor Dock.
- Repair approximately 7500 square feet of worn asphalt and repair drainage at Blaine Harbor boat wash down.
- Develop upland at the Port's Little Squalicum Beach including paved parking, accessible picnic tables, benches, a small lawn area, an art installation, hand launch watercraft rack, a rest room, and bike parking.

4 Community Setting

The Whatcom County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) (2022-2026) describes Whatcom County in the following ways: Whatcom County is on the land of the Lhaq'temish (Lummi), Nuxwsa'7aq (Nooksack), Coast Salish, Ntəʔkepmx Tmíxʷ (Nlaka'pamux), Nuwhaha, Sauk Suiattle, Semiahmoo, and Stillaguamish tribes and people past and present. Whatcom County borders Lower Mainland British Columbia (BC) to the north, Skagit County to the south, Okanogan County to the east, and the San Juan Islands to the west. The Lummi Indian Reservation is primarily to the west of Bellingham and approximately 20 miles south of the Canadian border and the Nooksack Indian Reservation is located near Deming and approximately 12 miles south of the Canadian border. Three islands in the Strait of Georgia – Lummi, Portage, and Eliza – are part of Whatcom County or the Lummi Nation Reservation. Lummi Island is part of Whatcom County with a small population and many businesses.



Figure 2: Map of Whatcom County

There is regular ferry service between Lummi Island and the mainland. Eliza Island lies to Lummi Island's southern tip. Portage Island is fully within the jurisdiction and boundaries of the Lummi Reservation. Point Roberts, which is on the southern tip of the Tsawwassen peninsula, is a highly unusual geographic feature of Whatcom County known as a pene-exclave: land area of one country that is accessible only by traveling through that of another. Point Roberts can be reached from the rest of the county, and vice versa, by boat or via two border crossings and a 23-mile drive through Canada (Port of Bellingham, 2022).

4.1 Topography

Whatcom County is comprised of 2,107 square miles of diverse landscape ranging from agricultural flat lands and foothills overlooking the Salish Sea to Mount Baker rising to 10,778 feet in elevation. The county is approximately 25 miles from north to south and 115 miles in length east to west with over 130 miles of saltwater shorelines and hundreds of lakes and streams. Much of the county is mountainous and includes portions of the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park. There are two inhabited islands, Lummi and Eliza in Whatcom County.

4.2 Climate

Whatcom County is located within the Puget Sound Lowlands, East Olympic-Cascade Foothills, and the Cascade Mountains West climatic regions. Major climatic influences include the rain shadow created by the Olympic Mountain Range, the Salish Sea, and the Fraser River Valley in British Columbia (County, 2014).

4.3 Wildlife Habitat

Whatcom County contains significant habitat for wildlife due to varied climatic and physiographic characteristics, and because vast areas of the county are not devoted to intense urban land use.

The lower, wooded areas of the County provide habitat for significant birds including the bald eagle, ruffed grouse, California quail, and barn owl. The

higher elevations and forests provide critical habitat for the goshawk and spotted owl. The lower, wooded, undeveloped areas of the county provide habitat for mammals including the black bear, cougar, and Columbia black tail deer. The higher elevations and forests provide critical habitat for the fisher/marten, wolverine, red fox, Roosevelt Elk, and mountain goat. The most remote regions of the Cascade mountains have also seen the recent presence of grizzly bear and gray wolf.

Much of western Whatcom County is located within the Western Hemlock zone. This zone is the most extensive vegetation zone in all western Washington, extending from the Pacific coast to an elevation of about 2,500 feet, and characterized by a mild and generally wet climate.

Marine Environment

Urban development and forest practices along the shoreline can seriously impact the marine environment by increasing suspended solids, pollutants, or freshwater entering marine areas.

Bulkheads, revetments, docks, piers, wharfs, and other waterfront structures reduce the natural shoreline and can affect the rate of natural beach deposition, resulting in loss of vegetation and loss of the shoreline and intertidal habitat. Many estuarine areas have been filled or drained, especially around the developed waterfront. The remaining unaltered estuarine areas are protected by the Shoreline Management Act, which regulates further alterations.



Figure 4: Intertidal Habitat

Healthy intertidal and shallow sub-tidal environments provide important habitat for aquatic species. These include forage fish such as herring, surf smelt, and sand lance, and migratory fish such as Salmon and Bull Trout. Deep sub-tidal environments provide habitat for marine mammals including the harbor seal, orca whale, grey whale, and harbor porpoise.

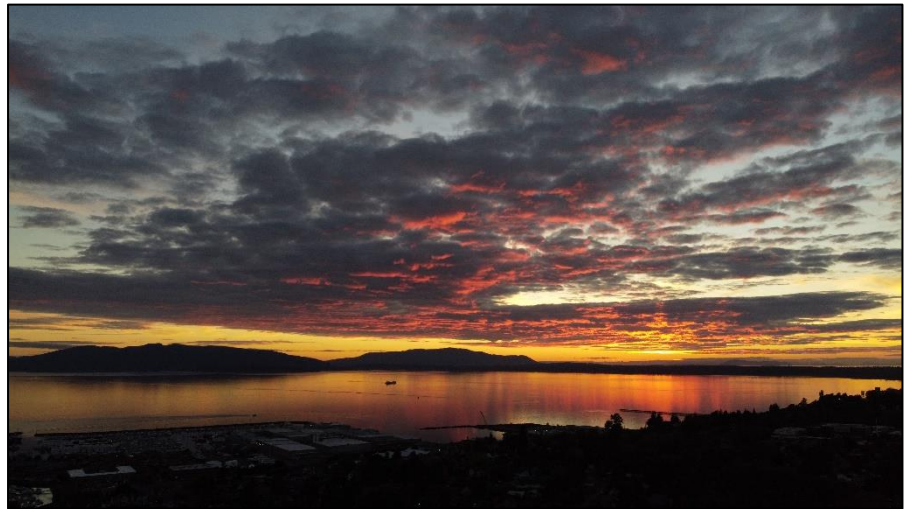


Figure 3: Sunset Over Bellingham Bay



Figure 5: Orca Whale Pod

Additionally, County shorelines lie within the Pacific Migratory Flyway and provide habitat for wintering seabirds, migrating shorebirds, and many other bird species.

4.4 Land Use

Most of the nonfederal land in unincorporated Whatcom County is dedicated to forestry and agricultural uses. The next largest category of land use is residential. Much smaller areas of the county are dedicated to industrial, commercial, and other uses.

Cities and Counties are required to comply with Washington State's Growth Management Act and, among other requirements, must identify critical areas and adopt development regulations to protect them. Critical areas include wetlands, habitat conservation areas, and critical recharge areas for drinking water aquifers. Development on Port property is subject to local land use development regulations from Bellingham, Blaine, Sumas, and Whatcom County, as well as State and Federal permitting requirements.

5 Climate Change and Parks

In 2023, the Port Commission adopted a [Climate Action Strategy](#) containing goals and actions to reduce carbon emissions and build resilience to climate change hazards. The Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan supports specific goals and targets of the Climate Action Strategy and Master List of Potential Climate Resilience and Mitigation Actions. The following summary was adapted from the *National Recreation and Park Association* website article, “Parks as a Solution to Climate Change” by Taj Schottland:

5.1 Cooling Urban Heat Islands

Parks and trees are one of the most effective ways to combat extreme heat. A recent study in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., showed that on one of the hottest days in the summer, parks were a cooling oasis — as much as 17 degrees cooler than parts of the city lacking trees and green space. In addition, the cooling benefit of parks can extend as far as a half-mile from park boundaries, helping cool surrounding areas and reduce heat stress for residents.

5.2 Minimizing Flooding and Improving Water Quality

Parks that incorporate water-smart landscaping features (called “green infrastructure”) can reduce flooding and protect water quality. Green infrastructure can filter as much as 95 percent of major pollutants out of stormwater runoff. Research has also shown that green infrastructure features, such as rain gardens, can reduce stormwater runoff by as much as 90 percent, reducing the likelihood of costly flooding. However, ports are often located on fill which can present design challenges and limitations for applying green infrastructure techniques.

5.3 Cleaning the Air

Urban tree canopy in parks and along city streets are estimated to remove 711,000 metric tons of air pollution annually (a \$3.8 billion value) and sequester more than 90 million metric tons of carbon (CO₂ equivalent). Urban trees also filter particulate matter from automobiles and other vehicles, further cleaning the air.

5.4 Designing to Protect Communities

While parks inherently provide climate and health benefits, there are opportunities to design them in a way that maximizes these benefits. The first step is identifying where parks can provide multiple benefits. The Trust for Public Land’s Climate-Smart Cities program has laid out four objectives for parks as multi-benefit climate solutions:

- **Cool:** Shady green spaces reduce the “heat island” effect to protect people from heat waves and reduce summer energy use.
- **Absorb:** Water-smart parks, playgrounds and streetscapes absorb rainfall, reduce flooding and recharge drinking water supplies, while saving energy for water management.
- **Protect:** Strategically placed and managed parks and natural lands buffer cities from rising seas, coastal storms, inland flooding, and wildfires.
- **Connect:** Trails, greenways, and park systems provide carbon-free transportation options and link residents to popular destinations and to one another (Schottland, 2019).



Figure 6: Park Users at Zuanich Point Park

6 Port Property & Facilities

Port property consists of 6 principal land holdings or service areas. These include Sumas International Cargo Terminal (SICT), Bellingham International Airport (BLI), Blaine Harbor, Squalicum Harbor and Little Squalicum Beach, the Waterfront District, and Fairhaven Terminal and Marine Park.

The Port's Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement Plan describes proposed improvements to Port facilities located in Blaine, Sumas, Bellingham International Airport, Squalicum Harbor, the Waterfront District and Fairhaven which are contemplated to be developed over time.

The Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement Plan (CSHIP) is intended to be updated periodically. Site specific plans or master plans may be prepared for various sub-areas or regions of the Port district. Regional, sub area plans, or existing master plans provide valuable history and may have more detailed information about Port properties and facilities than the Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements; and are retained as reference documents to the extent that they adopted by the Board of Commissioners. Previously adopted Master Plans include:

- 2019 Bellingham International Airport Master Plan - October 2019
- Blaine Wharf District Master Plan - January 2022
- Bellingham's Waterfront District Sub-Area Plan - December 2019
- Fairhaven Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements - November 2008
- Squalicum Harbor Land Use Plan (dredging & Inner harbor/ peninsula creation)-June 1983 as amended.
- Sumas Cargo Terminal Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements - January 1986

6.1 Sumas International Cargo Terminal

The Sumas International Cargo Terminal, located near the border with Canada, was designed for truck-and-rail cargo transfers. A master plan was developed for this property in 1986. Bob Mitchell Way, the principal haul route, was constructed by the Port with a grant from the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and has since been dedicated to the City of Sumas. The Port has also dedicated two parcels adjacent to Sumas Creek for shoreline restoration purposes.

In April 2003, the Port declared the SICT property surplus to its needs with the idea that proceeds from the sale of this property would be reinvested elsewhere in the County.

SICT Opportunities

There are no known opportunities for SICT property to advance park and recreation goals identified in local municipal park agency plans having jurisdiction in the area.

6.2 Bellingham International Airport (BLI)

Bellingham International Airport (BLI) is a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Class 1, Part 139 airport located adjacent to Interstate 5, just northwest of Bellingham city limits but inside the City's urban growth area boundaries. BLI supports an all-weather approach runway, with a full instrument landing system and FAA operated Air Traffic Control Tower. BLI hosts both Commercial and General Aviation operations.

A detailed master plan for BLI was last updated in 2019. Port lands to the southwest consists of property purchased with FAA noise mitigation grant funding and contain the Marine Drive Park and viewpoint overlooking the bay. Improvements to the Park in 2023 include new trail connections to the Whatcom County bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Marine Drive, trail resurfacing and new gates.

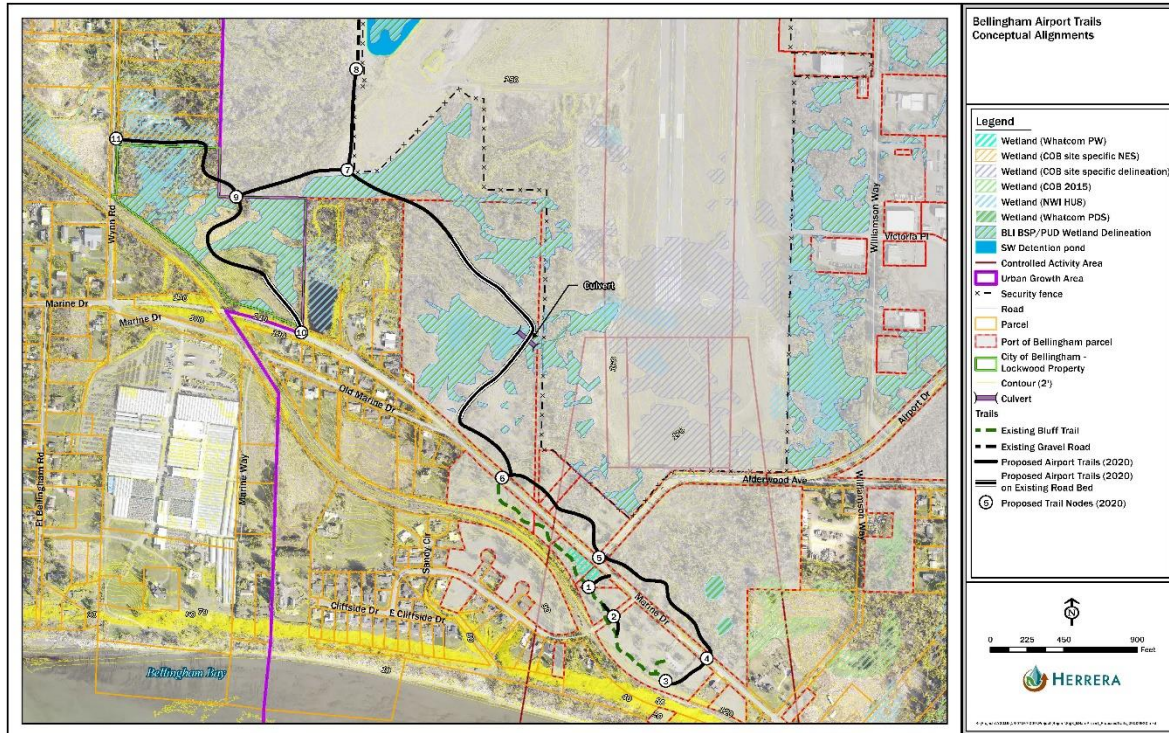


Figure 7: Bellingham Airport Trails Conceptual Map

BLI Opportunities

FAA regulations, habitat areas, topographic barriers and BLI operational concerns limit recreation opportunities on airport property. BLI properties south and west of the airport have been suggested by the Whatcom County Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee, the Whatcom Park and Recreation Foundation, and the City of Bellingham's Greenways Strategic Plan, among others, as locations to develop bicycle and pedestrian connections north toward Ferndale as part of the Nooksack Loop Trail and Coast Millennium Trail. The Port has and will continue to coordinate with the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County to explore and enhance bicycle and pedestrian trail connections in this area.

For example, the City of Bellingham Park's "Lockwood Property" which is adjacent to Port property could be linked with Port and County property around the airport to facilitate bicycle and pedestrian transit around the Marine Drive BNSF RR bridge crossing. The crossing is a known area of limited sight distance causing significant safety issues for cyclists and pedestrians.

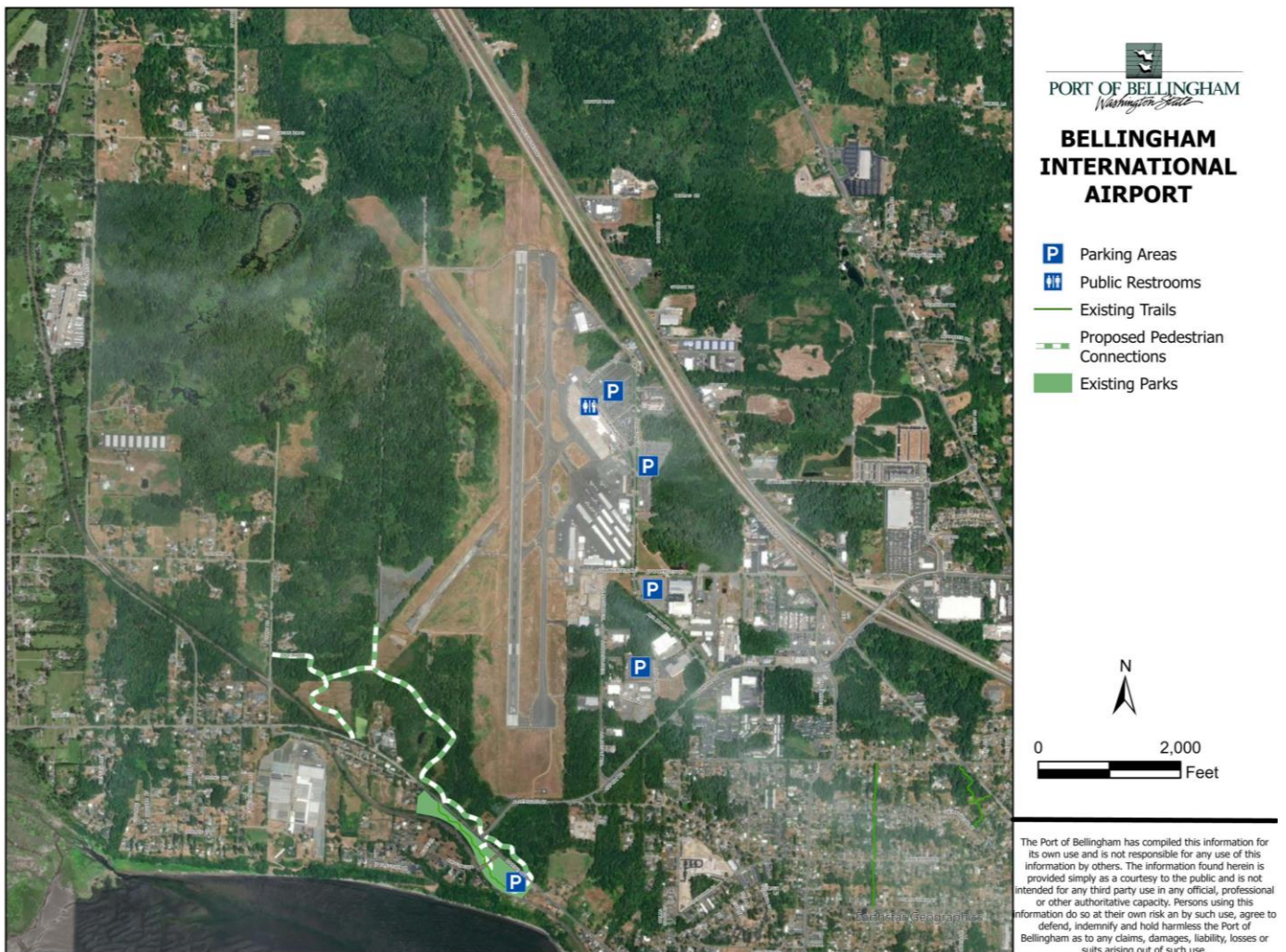


Figure 8: Bellingham International Airport

6.3 Blaine Harbor

Blaine Harbor is a certified Clean Marina located in the northwest corner of the county, contiguous with the border of Canada and just a half-hour's drive south of Vancouver, B.C. Blaine is a primary point of entry between Canada and the United States.

The Blaine Wharf District contains about 2 miles of shoreline adjacent to the City of Blaine's downtown core. The Burlington Northern Railroad right-of-way separates the downtown area from the Wharf District. Marine Drive is the main arterial within the Wharf District and separates Port property to the south, and City property to the north.

The Port owns about 24 acres of uplands, 46 acres of tidelands, and manages 12.5 acres of State tidelands. Port facilities include a boat harbor with 630 slips, a sawtooth dock, a two-lane boat launch with public restrooms, three web houses for commercial fishing gear storage, a marine industrial area, commercial development, and public access facilities, such as Jorgensen Pier and picnic shelter.

As part of the WA State Clean Vessel Act Grant Program through State Parks Blaine Harbor has installed and maintains 6 mobile pump outs with dump stations for boater use. In 2022, approximately 97,981 gallons of sewage were pumped to the sanitary sewer as reported to State Parks. The Port receives 75% reimbursement for installation, operation, and maintenance Costs through the State Parks program.



Figure 9: Jorgensen's Pier in Blaine

In 2007, a comprehensive improvement plan for the Wharf District was jointly developed by the City of Blaine and the Port of Bellingham. The Plan was last amended in 2020. The Blaine Wharf District Master Plan promotes public access and the enjoyment of the shoreline. The key to success in improving access and circulation, however, lies not only in public access to the waterfront, but also in providing a strong connection to the waterfront from the City's downtown core.

The six major goals that direct this plan are:

- Integrate the Wharf District with the upland downtown Commercial Business- Market District.
- Create a pedestrian access system with a continuous waterfront trail along the shoreline.
- Provide opportunities for mixed use development, public/private investment, recreational opportunities, and public access to the shoreline for the citizens and visitors of Blaine.
- Establish design and development guidelines for land use and development of this publicly owned property.
- Manage the shoreline to further optimize circulation, public access, development, and environmental restoration.
- Retain and enhance all characteristics of the waterfront that support marine related activities.

Blaine Harbor Opportunities

Blaine Harbor is an instrumental part of the county and local municipal park inventory. Pedestrian access and connectivity are a crucial component of the Wharf District Master Plan. Opportunities include:

- Completing remaining segments of the 2 mile "Wharf Loop Trail", a non-motorized circulation element, which includes:
 - Adding amenities (paving, lights, exercise equipment, etc.) to the promenade extension that leads to the boat launch;
 - Improving access to Jorgensen Pier as part of the Marine Drive Improvement Project; and
 - Working with the City of Blaine to increase trail connectivity to the Amended Wharf Loop Trail.
- Port dedication of land and City development of proposed Plover Park adjacent to the boat launch;
- A proposed pedestrian bridge over the BNSF mainline railroad tracks connecting downtown to the waterfront (City of Blaine Project with Port support); and

- A harbor overlook has been planned for the Port property at the terminus of the Blaine City Marine Park Trail near the existing “stub pier” south of Marine Drive.

Additional upcoming recreational boating and public access projects include:

- Boat launch panel replacement
- Boat launch rinse down station
- Boat launch parking lot asphalt repair
- Boardwalk promenade replacement



Figure 10: Blaine Harbor

6.4 Squalicum Harbor

The Squalicum Harbor planning area is situated on the northern shores of Bellingham Bay, mostly within the City of Bellingham’s Commercial Business District. Squalicum Harbor is a full-service certified Clean Marina surrounded by marine services and supplies, water related industry, restaurants, commercial uses, two yacht clubs and public access amenities including a public boat launch, a shoreline promenade, the Marine Life Center, Zuanich Point Park and Fisherman’s Memorial.

As part of the WA State Clean Vessel Act Grant Program through State Parks Blaine Harbor has installed and maintains 2 stationery and 8 mobile pump outs with dump stations and for boater use. In 2022,

approximately 260,940 gallons of sewage were pumped to the sanitary sewer as reported to State Parks. The Port receives 75% reimbursement for installation, operation, and maintenance costs through the State Parks program.

The Squalicum Harbor planning area, including Bellwether peninsula and Little Squalicum Beach, is generally bound on the northwest by tidelands; on the northeast by the BNSF mainline right-of-way; on the southeast by the I&J State Waterway, and on the southwest by Bellingham Bay.

The Bellwether peninsula was created with dredge materials from the development of Squalicum Harbor's inner basin in the mid 1980's. The peninsula was developed for a mix of uses including a hotel, meeting facilities, restaurants, retail shops, office buildings, apartments, a Coast Guard Station, and a Park.

Public open spaces and recreational facilities includes an extension of the Squalicum Harbor promenade around the surrounding shoreline, Tom Glen Commons with a 1.60-acre park, performance stage area and plaza furnishings, Squalicum Harbor's Gate 12, the Squalicum Harbor boat launch and the boat launch and associated parking lot.

The boat launch ramp and vehicle /trailer parking area are heavily used during peak periods and parking of vehicle trailer combinations sometimes overflows onto adjacent but vacant development areas or along Bellwether Way, Hilton and Roeder Avenues.

Squalicum Harbor is generally located east of Squalicum Waterway which includes deep water loading facilities for Bellingham Cold storage. Squalicum Harbor provides long term moorage for both commercial fishermen and pleasure craft, as well as visitor moorage, fueling and other marina services.

The land adjoining the easterly, inner harbor entrance is Zuanich Point Park (named after a long time, former Port Commissioner), was partially funded with a Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) grant. The park provides a grassy viewing knoll with a telescope, picnic tables, benches, playground, and a Fisherman's memorial. The park is also home to the Squalicum Boathouse, a community day use rental facility, complete with two meeting rooms, kitchen, and public restrooms. A day use visitor's dock and hand carry boat landing are located inside the jetty adjacent to the park. The recent construction of the Fisherman's Pavilion at Zuanich Point adds space for commercial fisherman to maintain nets and for other events.

The Little Squalicum Beach area is just outside Bellingham City limits in the City's urban growth area consisting of 63 acres of aquatic tidelands and 25 acres of uplands including the peninsula occupied by Mt. Baker Products and the Gaston Bay Harbor Building and beach area north of the former Bellingham Cement Plant pier. The former Cement Plant pier and abutting access property is currently owned by the City of Bellingham and will be opened as a public pier in the near future. This stretch of beach is popular with beach goers, paddlers, and wind sports.

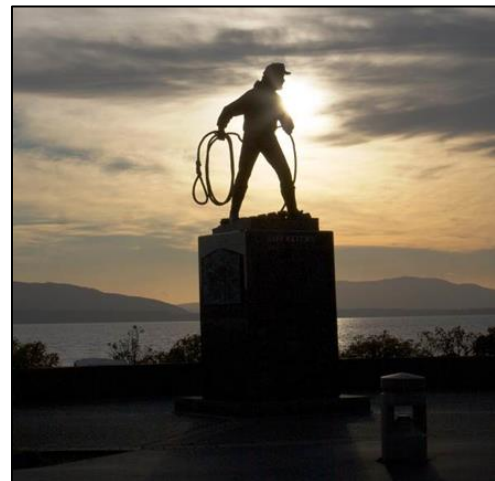


Figure 11: Fishermen's Memorial at Zuanich Point Park

Little Squalicum Beach is one of the few protected, accessible sandy shorelines within the developed portions of Bellingham Bay. The beach is as close to what constitutes a natural beach as exists in urban Bellingham. Residents presently access the beach using a trail system developed by the Bellingham Parks Department at Little Squalicum Park near Bellingham Technical College or from a small parking area adjacent to Mount Baker Products at the end of Schultz Drive. From this point north, the shoreline is remote and isolated by steep bluffs and the railroad right-of-way all the way to the Nooksack River delta.

The peninsula behind Mt. Baker Products currently does not have formal access for recreation due to potential conflicts with existing industrial uses. However, in the past several years there has been a great deal of interest in developing access to this area to utilize the existing concrete ramp for a non-motorized launch. To that end, the Port's 2024 proposed budget has funding for site preparation to accommodate wind sport and hand launch vessel access. Public Access to a non-motorized vessel launch site should continue to be explored in this area.

Squalicum Harbor Opportunities

The primary recreational opportunity is to maintain and enhance the existing assets of Squalicum Harbor and the Port's Little Squalicum Beach area. Several upcoming projects reflect this commitment:

- As part of the upcoming Squalicum Inner Harbor renovation, 550 lineal feet of visitor moorage will be replaced with a modern facility.
- To complement the 2022 Little Squalicum Habitat Beach project, a Port upland park facility is proposed including paved parking, accessible picnic tables, benches, a small lawn area, an art installation, hand launch watercraft rack, a rest room, and bike parking. Any upland improvements may necessitate a process to establish a name for the park to prevent any confusion with existing location names in the area.
- To facilitate access to the Mt. Baker Peninsula for access to the existing concrete ramp the Port has proposed funding in the 2024 budget for site prep and access.



Figure 12: Little Squalicum Beach Port Upland Improvements Concept Plan

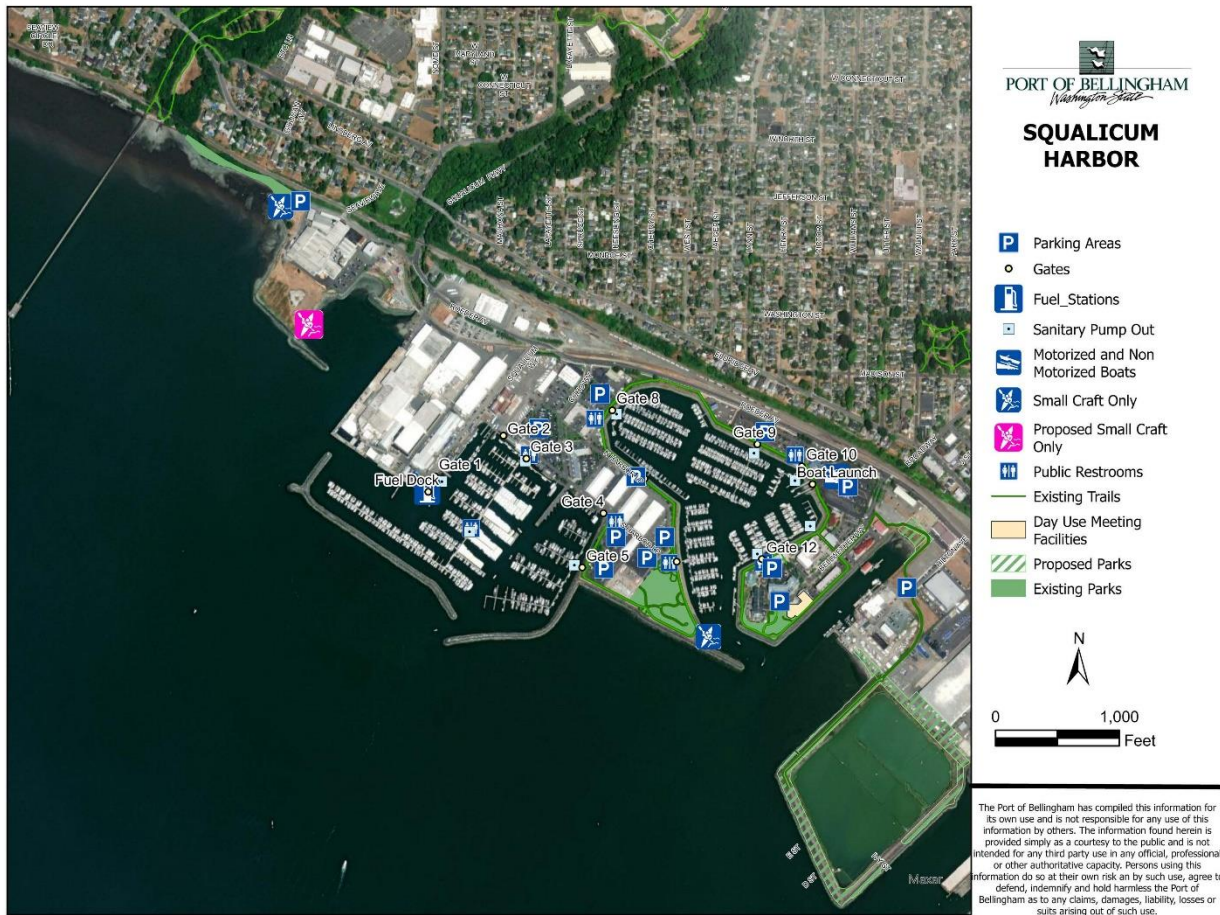


Figure 13: Squalicum Harbor

6.5 The Waterfront District

The Waterfront District is a 237-acre mixed-use redevelopment site located in the City of Bellingham on the former Georgia Pacific Mill site. This site has been the subject of a joint multi-year master planning process by the Port and the City of Bellingham with the participation of other agencies including Western Washington University, Washington State Department of Ecology and Washington Department of Natural Resources.

This process included the joint adoption of the 2013 Waterfront District Sub-Area Plan, a Waterfront District Development agreement, an Interlocal Agreement for Facilities in the Waterfront District, a Planned Action Ordinance and associated Environmental Impact Statement developed under the State Environmental Policy Act. The sub area plan was updated in 2019.

For planning purposes, the Waterfront District has been divided into five planning areas: the Downtown Waterfront area, the Log Pond, Bellingham Shipping Terminal, Salish Landing, and Marine Trades. After a land swap between the Port and City in 2012, the Salish Landing area became solely owned by the City of Bellingham. In late 2013, the City of Bellingham adopted a Park Master Plan for Salish Landing.

The Downtown Waterfront Area calls for a mix of housing, office, retail, and institutional uses, centered

on a network of public parks, trails, and open space. This area will have an urban character with pedestrian oriented uses encouraged along arterial streets and a shoreline promenade. The Bellingham Shipping Terminal (BST) is an existing deep-water terminal facility on the Whatcom Waterway which will be maintained for shipping, port, or other industrial related opportunities. Between the new downtown waterfront area and the BST a light industrial area is planned as a transitional zone.

The Aeration Stabilization Basin (ASB), once the wastewater treatment lagoon for the Georgia Pacific mill, is in the Marine Trades Area. The Whatcom Water Phase 2 sediment cleanup project will convert the ASB into open water with adjacent upland marine trades opportunities, as well as include future development of habitat restoration and enhancement actions and future public access and park improvements. The vessel size and type associated with potential marine trade uses in the open water and uplands likely preclude the construction of a bridge spanning a future opening in the ASB berm. Additionally, a trail around the entire ASB would be incompatible with future marine trade upland uses.

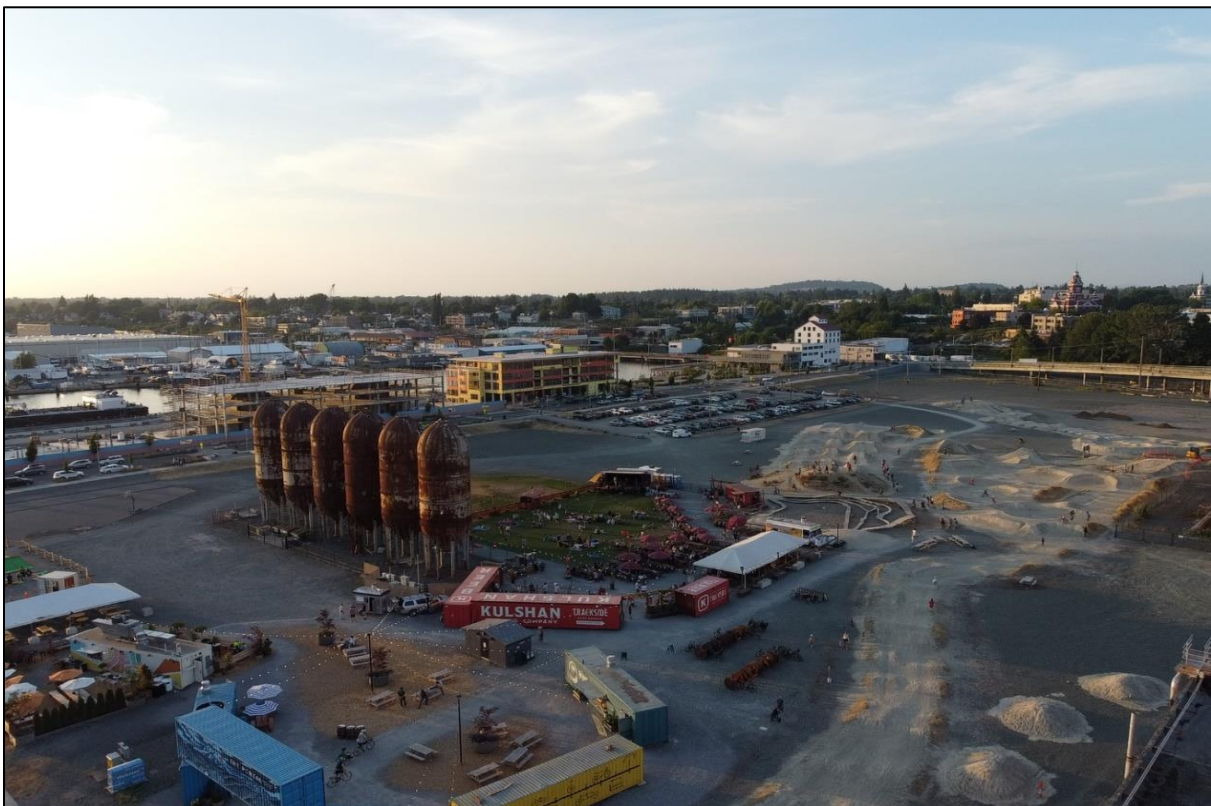


Figure 14: Aerial View of the Waterfront District Bike Park

Current interim uses in the Downtown Waterfront include a bicycle pump track, dirt jump line, bike skills area, and art installations. Some interim uses may be incorporated into future park spaces. Historic industrial artifacts have been preserved and are being maintained for incorporation into public open space.

Waterfront District Opportunities

The Waterfront District is an integral part of the City of Bellingham's Central Business District and Park and Recreation inventory. The City of Bellingham recently constructed the first phase of Whatcom Waterway Park in the Downtown Area. Waypoint Park includes a Port and City developed public access

beach and non-motorized watercraft launch site. The Port is also in the process of exploring options to provide public access at the site of the former GP wharf. These may include a public pier or wharf structure, visitor moorage, and float plane docks.

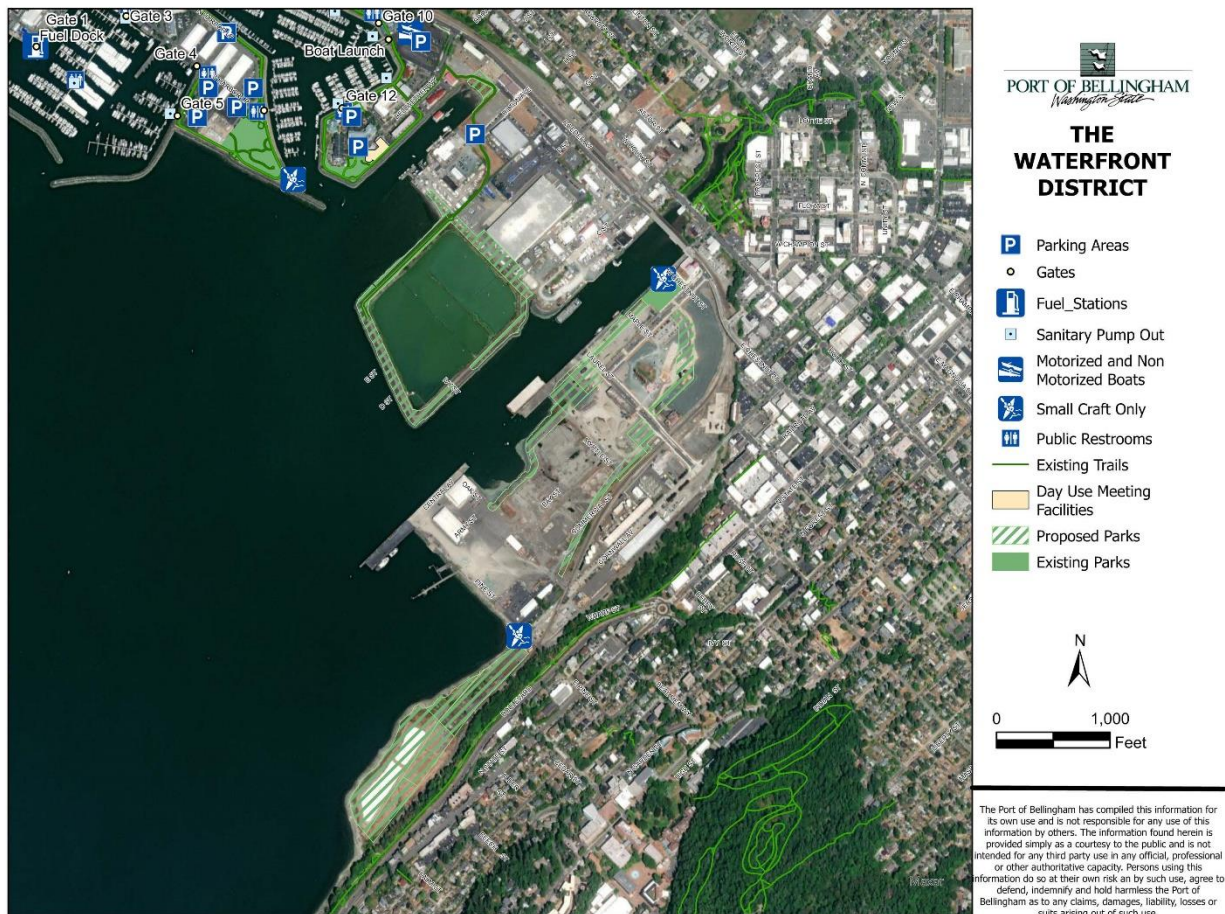


Figure 15: The Waterfront District

6.6 Fairhaven

The Port owns 33 acres of uplands and manages 65 acres of state tidelands in Fairhaven. The Port's Fairhaven property is located at the south end of Bellingham Bay adjacent to the historic Fairhaven business district.

The Port's Fairhaven property includes the Bellingham Cruise Terminal, which is the southern terminus for the Alaska Marine Highway System. Amtrak and Greyhound are located in the multi modal facility Fairhaven Station. Fairhaven properties are also home to numerous boat manufacturers and repair facilities.

In the early 1990's, Padden Creek Estuary was donated by the Port to the Bellingham Parks Department for operation, maintenance, and continued enhancements. The City of Bellingham subsequently received an Aquatic Lands Enhancement Act (ALEA) grant to provide trails, nature signs, and native plantings along the western shoreline. The City of Bellingham has also completed a habitat restoration project on Padden Creek which included better channelization of mudflats and eastern shoreline buffer

enhancements.

The Port operates a small boat launch on the northwesterly side of the Padden Estuary area adjacent to the Community Boating Center. The Community Boating Center fosters small-watercraft education, access, safe recreation, and marine stewardship on Bellingham Bay. In 2021, the Port received an RCO Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account Grant for \$500,000 to develop a hand launch dock adjacent to the existing boat ramps. The project is designed and awaiting final permits for construction.

A public boat launch parking area and restroom building are located in an upland area adjacent to the lagoon. The boat launch facility was originally developed with the assistance of Washington State Interagency for Outdoor Recreation grant funding and RCO funding recently replaced the boat launch floats.



Figure 16: Marine Park on Ski to Sea Race Day

Marine Park is located at the west end of Harris Avenue overlooking the entrance to Bellingham Bay. The 1.9 acres waterfront park has developed parking and a picnic shelter available for outdoor gatherings. An enhanced, sandy beach is ideal for non-motorized launches. Facilities include restrooms, benches, picnic tables, paved pedestrian paths, a kayak washdown area, an interpretive display, scenic overlooks and parking. Marine Park is the finish point for the kayaking portion of the County's annual Ski to Sea Race.

A master plan of this area was completed in 2008. No significant acquisitions or developments are proposed. Generally, the Port's near to mid-term plan for Fairhaven is to maintain and enhance its existing assets.

Fairhaven Opportunities

Aside from the development of a hand launch dock adjacent to the existing boat ramps no significant new public access facilities are proposed for Fairhaven. The Port will maintain the existing boat launch

for motorized boats as long as water depth supports continued use and make enhancements to restrooms, circulation, and staging areas to increase safety between pedestrians and vehicles as needed. The Port will continue to look for opportunities to improve the restrooms at Marine Park to meet the current needs of park users. After an unsuccessful RCO Local Parks Maintenance Grant application budget for repairs has been proposed in the Port’s 2025 Strategic Budget.



Figure 17: Fairhaven

7 Inventory

The Port of Bellingham operates two harbors with excellent visitor facilities including parks, walking trails, bathrooms, showers, and laundry. Both harbors offer easy access to nearby restaurants, shops, grocery stores and marine supplies.



Figure 18: Squalicum Harbor

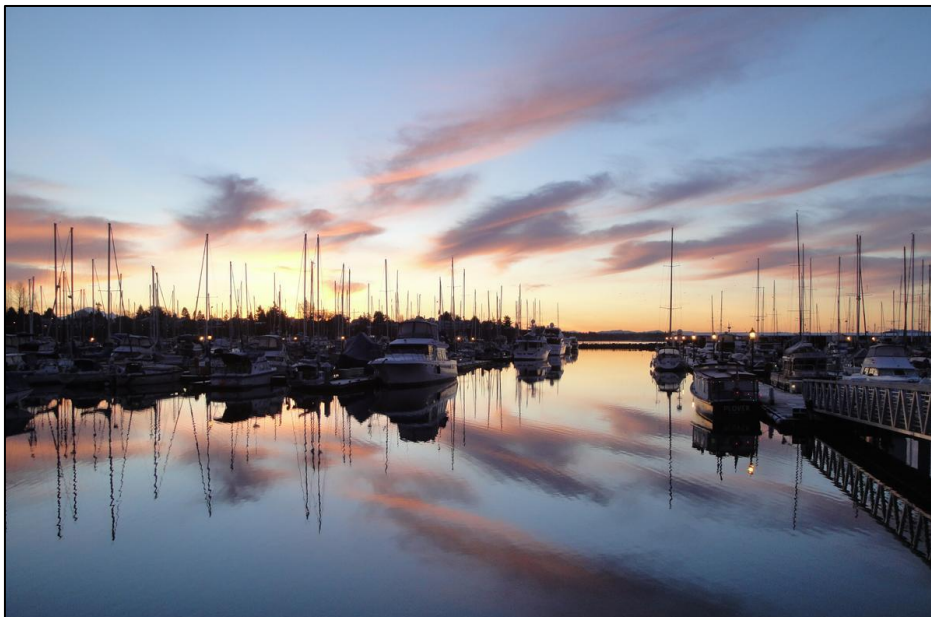


Figure 19: Sunrise at Blaine Harbor

Table 1 lists the current inventory of public recreation facilities and open space lands under Port management or control:

Table 1: Existing Port of Bellingham Inventory of Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Boating Facilities

Port Planning Area Facility Name	Park or Recreation Area (ac.)	Habitat/ Open Space (ac.)	Trails (miles)	Picnic Shelter	Playgrounds/Exercise Equipment	Public Restrooms	Soft Beach	Viewing/Sitting Area	Fishing/Crabbing Pier or float	Boat Launch (lanes)	Boat Trailer Parking (spaces)	Boat Moorage Slips	Boat Rinse Facilities	Visitor Moorage (LF)	Sewer Pump-out (F=Fixed; M=Mobile)	Public Meeting Facilities	Artwork/Sculptures	Interpretive Signs
Bellingham Airport																		
BLI		79.0				X											X	
Marine Drive Trail	10.4	8.3	.50															
Blaine																		
Blaine Harbor			.30	X		X		X				630		800	6M	X	X	X
Jorgensen Pier	.34			X				X	X									
Public Boat Launch	1.64					X	X			2	45		X					
Fairhaven																		
BCT						X		X	X							X	X	X
Marine Park	2.9		.06	X		X	X	X										X
Public Boat Launch	1.24		.03			X				2	24		X	600				
Squalicum																		
Squalicum Harbor			4.20		X	X		X				1386		1,000	2 F 8 M	X		X
Zuanich Point Park	3.96				X	X		X						X		X	X	
Tom Glenn Common	1.13							X										
Double Thunderbird @ Bellwether																	X	
Public Boat Launch	4.48									3	161		X					
Little Squalicum Beach	3.12	1.2	.25				X											
Waterfront District																		
Park Lands to COB	15.0																	
Log Pond		5.0																
Historic Industrial Icons/equipment																	X	
Public Access Wharf	2.69																	
Total Port Facilities	46.90	93.5	5.17							7	230	2016		2400				

8 Forecast of Demand

The purpose of the analysis is to provide useful information to Port of Bellingham leadership and staff to assist in developing priorities for investment. Port districts in Washington State are not required to provide public recreational facilities. Port of Bellingham leadership has prioritized offering recreation opportunities, enabling the public to interact with the Port's public lands and natural environments. Outdoor recreation is a vital component of Whatcom County's economy, as well as a critical aspect of its quality of life and part of what makes Whatcom County an exciting place to live, work, and play.

The demand and need analysis was developed using national, state, and local trends, population characteristics, as well as Port of Bellingham's Park and Open Spaces Survey 2023. The rest of this chapter reviews trends and demand in the outdoor recreation industry at the national, regional, state, and local level. In addition, it will highlight the most popular activities, on average, at every level and will discuss how factors such as age, gender, race, and income impact and change participation over time. Given climate change, we suspect that outdoor recreation trends will shift over time, but exactly how, or in what ways, remains to be seen.

8.1 United States Trends

Since the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, there have been a plethora of studies and reports on the notable increase in Americans participating in outdoor activities and recreation. The next section talks about demographic trends, generally, in the United States. National recreation trends will then be reviewed. These trends and data are drawn from two different sets of surveys and reports administered and developed by two national recreation non-profits, [The Outdoor Foundation](#) and the [National Parks and Recreation Association](#).

National Demographic Trends

The size of the American population is important to discuss in brief because population trends impact the economy, as well as federal spending, revenues, deficits, and debt. Changes in US demographics are therefore important to review and compare to Whatcom County's local situation to gain an understanding of what the future demand for parks and open spaces might look like.

In the United States, population growth is expected to continue to slow over the next 30 years. This is occurring for two reasons: death rates remain above birth rates and the absence of immigration. The American population is also aging and growing more racially and ethnically diverse (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2018). The non-Hispanic white population is projected to shrink from approximately 199 million in 2020 to 179 million people by 2060 (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2018). By 2030, one in five Americans will be 65 or older and according to predictions by 2034 (just ten years from now), older adults are expected to outnumber children for the first time in recorded American history (Vespa, Medina, & Armstrong, 2018).

The Outdoor Participation Trends Report 2021 + 2022

The Outdoor Participation Trends Report is a national report produced by The Outdoor Foundation. The Outdoor Foundation is the philanthropic arm of [Outdoor Industry Association](#) (OIA), which is a 501c3 nonprofit membership-based organization comprised of "business leaders, climate experts, policy makers and outdoor enthusiasts committed to sustainable economic growth and climate positivity while

protecting – and growing access to – the benefits of the outdoors for everyone.” [The OIA Board](#) has members from many major outdoor recreation brands including but not limited to Gerber Gear, Patagonia, L.L. Bean, REI, and Merrell.

The Outdoor Participation Trends Report data are drawn from a nationwide study conducted by the Sports Marketing Surveys USA (SMS) under the guidance of the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) and the seven other sports industry associations that make up the [Physical Activity Council](#) (PAC). In 2020 and 2021, 18,000 online interviews were conducted with people in the United States who were six and older. The sample is considered balanced as there were strict quotas in place for gender, age, income, region, and race/ethnicity.

According to the Outdoor Participation Trends Report (OPTR) (2021, p.3), in 2020 160.7 million Americans participated in at least one outdoor activity.¹ This is over 50% of the population and was an increase of nearly 7.1 million people (about twice the population of Oklahoma) over 2019. Many ascribe this increase to the COVID-19 pandemic and related school and work closures that started in March 2020.

While many individuals participated in outdoor recreation activities more than once over the course of 2020, the average number of annual outings per participant decreased. This is part of a continued, steady, long-term decline, which the Foundation has recorded falling from 87 outings per year in 2012 to 71 outings per year in 2020 (OPTR 2021, p. 4). Of all participants, children ages 6 to 17, were outdoors far less. In 2012, children in this age group averaged 91 outings per participant versus just 77 in 2020. Young adults ages 18 to 24 exhibited similar declines over the same period (OPTR 2021, p.7).

In 2021, participation rates saw an even larger increase. 54% of Americans, or 164.2 million people, ages 6 and over, participated in outdoor recreation at least once. This is the highest number of participants on record. In 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic continued; however, vaccines became available, and many restrictions were lifted. We therefore saw outdoor participant base grow 6.9% more since March 2020 (OPTR 2022, p. 1).

The number of total outdoor outings was up 8.4% to 12.4 billion outings in 2021. The average number of outdoor outings per participant increased 6.1% in 2021 to 75.6 outings per participant. This was the first recorded increase in outings in over 10 years. Another interesting shift in the 2021 data was that for the first time ever adults with no children had higher participation rates than all families. This trend caused concern within the industry as many worry that if children are not introduced to outdoor recreational activities at a young age, they may never participate in them as adults. The number of kids participating increased in 2021, however, they are participating less frequently and have a lower number of outings per year (OPTR 2022, p. 1).

TOP FIVE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES (MILLIONS OF PARTICIPANTS)

2015 TO 2021

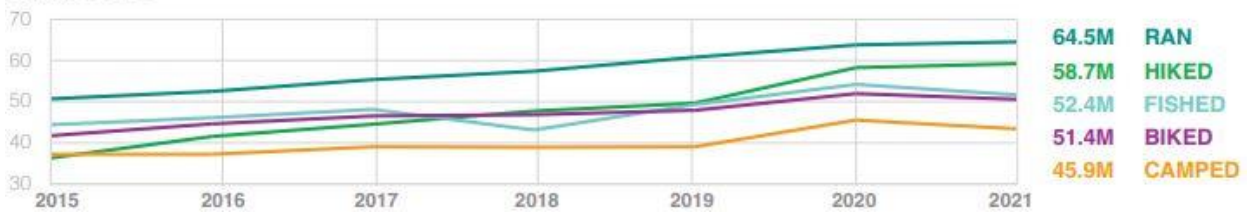


Figure 20: This line graph illustrates trends over time for the top five most popular activities 2015-2021 (OPTR 2022, p. 5).

As shown in Figure 20 above, the top five outdoor activities among Americans polled for this survey between 2015-2021 are running, hiking, fishing, biking, and camping, in that order. Running includes running, jogging, and trail running. Fishing includes freshwater, saltwater, and fly-fishing. Camping includes car camping, backpacking, and RV camping. Biking includes road biking, mountain biking, and BMX biking. The popularity of activities is simply the activities with the highest participation rates.

Socioeconomic Trends in Outdoor Recreation Participation

Race, age, gender, income, and many other individual level variables influence the choice to participate or not in any given outdoor recreation activity.

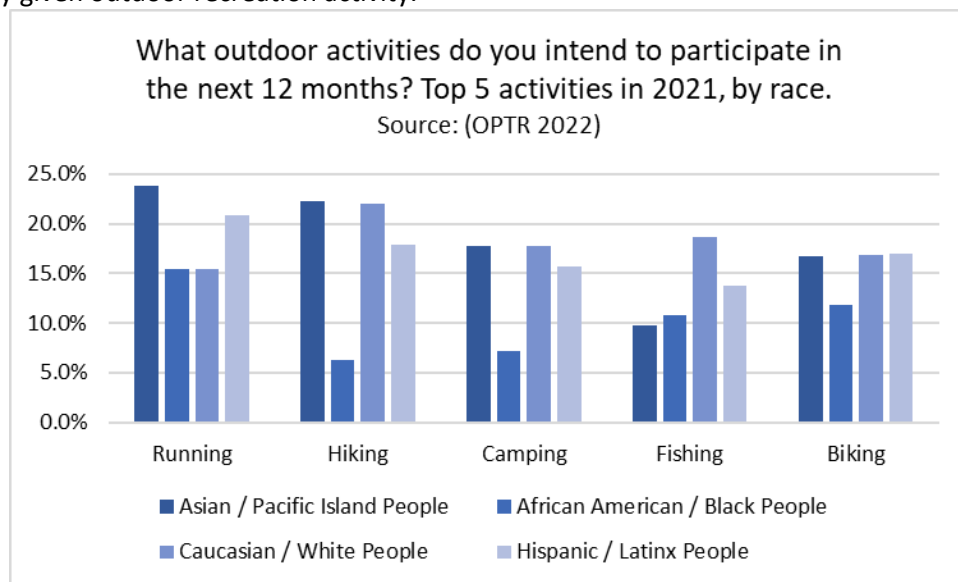


Figure 21: OPTR (2022)'s data on activity by race of participant illustrates that preferred outdoor activities vary by race.

As shown in Figure 21 above, the most popular activity among Asian people, Black people, and Latinx people is running. While Asian and Latinx people's second most preferred outdoor activity was hiking, it was the lowest ranked of the five activities for Black people. White people's most popular activity was hiking, followed by fishing, camping, biking, and running last.

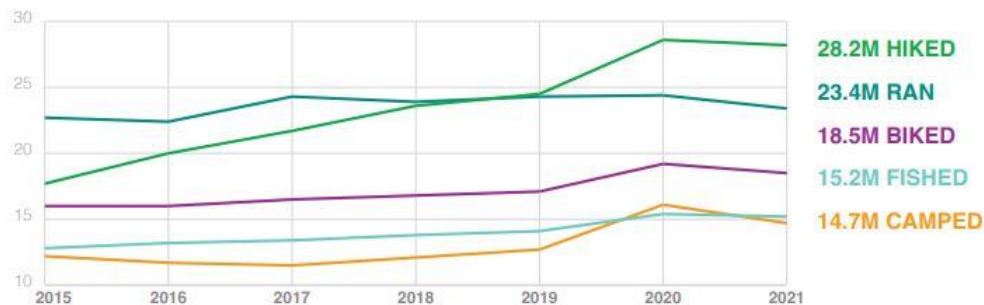
These differences could and do exist for many reasons. OPTR (2022, p.8) notes that currently 72% of outdoor recreation participants are white. Described as the "adventure gap" or "nature gap," outdoor

recreation historically excluded people of color, many explicitly¹. Unfortunately, rural spaces continue to not be safe for all people. They note that if the lack of diversity in outdoor participation continues, the industry will lose significant revenue and there is likely to be less support for the conservation of public lands, as people will not have experience using them.

In terms of gender, men have historically higher participation rates in outdoor recreation than women. In 2015, 54.3% of outdoor recreation participants were men and 45.7% were women. In 2021, this number has shifted slightly, with men making up 53.5% of participants and women were up to 46.5% OPTR (2022, p.10).

TOP FIVE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

FEMALE PARTICIPANTS: 2015 TO 2021 (MILLIONS)



MALE PARTICIPANTS: 2015 TO 2021 (MILLIONS)



Figure 22: This line graph illustrates trends over time for the top five most popular activities, by gender 2015-2021 (OPTR 2022, p. 10).

When comparing the activities of men and women, the favorite of both groups is hiking. However, after hiking women next most popular activities are running and biking and men's next most popular activities are fishing and running. This is important to note as that means that men and women may have different needs when it comes to open spaces and parks. Men may be more likely to be looking for a fishing or crabbing pier, whereas women may be looking for biking and running trails (OPTR 2022, p. 10).

¹ For example, when the National Park Service was founded in 1916, Jim Crow laws were being actively implementing in the South and women still did not have the right to vote. While the NPS officially desegregated relatively early in 1945, many local ordinances still barred Black people entry ([Asmelash 2021](#); see this article for more background history).

Age

According to the OPTR (2022, p. 1) the number of people 55 and over participating in outdoor activities has increased by more than 14% since 2019. Seniors over 65 is now the fastest growing age category for participation, growing by 16.9% since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The average age of an outdoor recreation participant in 2021 was therefore quite high at 37.4 years of age (p.13).

Income

Finally, the average income of an outdoor recreation participant in 2021 was \$70,635, which is significantly higher than the average national per capita income of \$52,787 as well as Whatcom County's per capita income of \$59,510 (OPTR 2022, p.15) ([ESD 2023](#)).

In 2021, the largest income bracket for participation was those earning \$100,000+ (32.2%), followed by those who earn only \$25,000 to \$49,000 (20.4%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (18.4%), under \$25,000 (14.9%). In fifth place was \$75,000 to \$99,999 with 14.1% of participants.

This is interesting because while income plays a role in outdoor recreation, particularly with respect to the activity chosen, many may assume that those who participate the least are the poorest². According to this national survey, that is actually not true. The people who participate the least are actually right around the average income of a participant. This could be for several reasons. For example. People earning under \$25,000 a year includes many families with children and may have a parent who stays at home and can take them on outings. People who earn under \$25,000 a year also include university and college students and those who work part-time jobs, who may have more free time for outdoor activities.

National Parks and Recreation Association: Park Pulse Surveys

Every month the NPRA polls US residents on their views related to parks and recreations. Every poll targets a cross section of 1,000 adults age 18 and up. While the surveys are too numerous to summarize all of them, a few notable key findings will be highlighted in areas that are most relevant to Whatcom County. Those are quality of life, inclusivity, and aging.

First, many Americans believe that proximity to parks are an important factor in quality of life and therefore are key to choosing where to live. In October 2023, the Park Pulse Survey found that 84% of American adults indicated that proximity to high quality parks, open spaces, and playgrounds, as well as other recreational facilities was an important factor when choosing a neighborhood or area to live in ([NRPA Park Pulse October 2023](#)).

Unsurprisingly, because parks are vital to communities nationally, Americans report that they want their parks to be welcoming and inclusive. Nine in 10 US adults indicated they want their local parks and recreation agencies to take steps to make sure that all community members feel safe and welcome. NRPA notes a few ways that agencies can do this: offering all-ability activities, offering low and no cost programs, engaging with community leaders to identify recreation needs and desires, and training staff on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion ([NRPA Park Pulse September 2023](#)).

² For example, running simply requires a pair of sneakers for a participant. Soccer requires a soccer ball. Other activities that require special facilities, membership, protective gear, jerseys, etc., are cost prohibitive activities for those in lower income brackets unless subsidized.

Given that the national population is aging, it is not surprising that national trends are pointing towards creating more activities and opportunities for older adults to stay involved (or become involved – it is never too late!) in outdoor recreation. According to [NRPA Park Pulse issued in August 2023](#), 9 out of 10 Americans want their local agencies to provide activities for older adults. Currently, 77% provide programs specifically for adults over 65.

8.2 Washington State Trends

The recreation economy of Washington State is vast. Residents and visitors alike have a plethora of options: walking, hiking, biking, birding, boating, fishing, hunting, swimming, skiing, sailing, horse riding, snowboarding, paddle boarding, kitesurfing, whale watching, and much more. Washington's rich outdoor recreation choices also provide jobs to many families and businesses. This section first discusses some basic facts about Washington State's demographic trends, then moves on to outline the economic contributions of outdoor recreation to the state economy. The section concludes with a review of the most popular activities by spending identified by Earth Economics.

Washington State Demographic Trends

Between 2010 and 2020, Washington State was among the top ten fastest growing states in the US. However, population growth in Washington, like many other states, slowed dramatically during the pandemic. From July 2019 to July 2020, Washington grew by around 100,000 people (1.2%), whereas from July 2020 to July 2021, Washington's population only grew by 19,900 people (.3%) (Balk 2022).

As with national trends, this slowing is a continued trend stemming from two factors: decreased birth rates or put another way fertility rates do not match or exceed the replacement rates, increased death rates, and fewer instances of international or domestic migration. Despite this, Washington State's population has grown by 14.5% between 2011 and 2021 from 6.78 million to 7.76 million people ([ESD 2023](#)). Additional demographic information and comparisons between Washington State and Whatcom County can be found in the local trends section below.

Economic Contributions to Washington State's Economy

In 2020, Earth Economics updated their Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. They found that the outdoor recreation industry in Washington State supports \$26.5 billion in annual expenditures, which is largely the results of spending by residents and tourists on trip to local and state parks, national forests and parks, fishing, boating, and on recreational great. They estimate that trip-related spending is approximately \$18.8 billion and consumer-related spending to be an additional \$7.7 billion (p.4).

In comparison, in 2015 recreation spending totaled \$21.6 billion (\$12.6 billion trip related expenditures, and \$9 billion in consumer-related spending). When considering associated secondary effects, or multiplier effects, Earth Economics estimates an additional \$40.3 billion generated in 2020. In addition, the industry supported 264,000 jobs throughout Washington.

There are also non-market benefits of outdoor recreation, in what Earth Economics terms "ecosystem services." These are essentially the benefits that humans derive from nature, such as breathable air, potable water, fertile soil, disaster resilience, and more. They estimate that Washington has an average of \$240 billion in ecosystem services, which \$192 million of those services being in aesthetics, \$19 million in climate stability, and the rest divided between air quality, cultural value, disaster risk reduction, food, habitat, science and education, soil retention, water capture, conveyance and supply,

as well as water quality (p. 26).

State Outdoor Recreation Participation Trends

The Earth Economics (2020) update also provides information about where and what residents and tourists are spending their money and time on. In terms of the number of participation days, the top five land managers receiving visitation are city parks (205 million participant days), events (51 million), county parks (46 million), state parks (38 million), and swimming in natural waters (32 million). Table 2 below shows only the activities that were estimated to have total expenditures over \$1 billion annually.

Table 2: This table shows every outdoor activity for which Earth Economics (2020, p. 34-37) estimates over a billion dollars in annual expenditures.

Activity	Total Expenditures	Number of Participants
Visiting rivers and streams	\$5.85 billion	3.9 million
Day hiking	\$2.11 billion	3.1 million
Walking – sidewalks	\$1.9 billion	3.8 million
Visiting wetlands	\$1.88 billion	1.4 million
Tech-based games (e.g. Pokémon Go)	\$1.73 billion	1 million
Day hiking with a pet	\$1.63 billion	1.5 million
Walking with a pet	\$1.57 billion	2.7 million
Walking – roads / streets	\$1.53 billion	3.6 million
Scenic or wilderness sightseeing	\$1.49 billion	3 million
Motor boating <26 feet vessel	\$1.47 billion	1.3 million
Walking – parks or trails	\$1.34 billion	4.9 million
Golf – ball golf	\$1.28 billion	1 million
Bicycling on roads and streets	\$1.27 billion	1.4 million
Walking – paved or gravel trail	\$1.01 billion	4.3 million

This table demonstrates some very interesting trends. First, with the exception of tech-based games, motor boating, and bicycling, all of the most profitable outdoor activities require almost no gear except shoes. Second, many of the activities that are most profitable, such as visiting rivers and streams and wetlands require nothing at all except for the places to exist to visit. This means that ports, cities, counties, and the state do not necessarily need to be spending a lot of money on new facilities and programs, but rather focus efforts on maintaining and enhancing the natural environment and improving infrastructure and sustainability practices to accommodate visitors and participants. As the focus of the Earth Economics (2020) update is the economic impact of the industry on the state's economy, unfortunately it does not provide a breakdown of recreation trends broken down by age, income, race, or gender.

8.3 Local Whatcom County Trends

Demographic Trends

Whatcom County's population grew to 226,300 between 2011 and 2021 for an 11.9% growth rate (ESD 2023). This is slower than the state growth rate of 14.5%. As with national and state trends, Whatcom County is aging and slowly becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.

Table 3: This table shows the most recent Census (2020) estimates for 2022 comparing Washington State and Whatcom County.

	Whatcom County	Washington State
Population by age, 2022		
Under 5	4.5%	5.5%
Under 18	18.3%	21.1%
65 and over	18.9%	16.8%
Female persons	50.4%	49.5%
Race/ethnicity, 2022		
White	85.5%	76.8%
Black, African American	1.3%	4.6%
American Indian, Alaskan Native	3.3%	2%
Asian	5.1%	10.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	.3%	.8%
Hispanic or Latino	10.5%	14%
Two or more races	4.4%	5.3%

As shown in Table 3, Whatcom County has a slightly older, slightly more homogenous population when compared to the state. Whatcom County has 2% more people 65 or over. It also continues to be predominantly white, with 85.5% of the population self-identifying as white in comparison to 76.8% of Washington State.

In order to address these demographic shifts locally, the Chuckanut Health Foundation has developed the [Aging Well Whatcom Blueprint](#), which is “a community initiative that aims to make Whatcom County a place with the culture, physical infrastructure, social supports, and services for all of us to age well.” The Blueprint includes [a vision and goals for health and wellness](#) for older adults. The plan notes that the activities older adults can participate in shift as they age and that “parks, trails and greenspaces aren’t always well-designed for people with limited mobility, and some parts of Whatcom County have few outdoor spaces for safe physical activity” (Chuckanut Health Foundation 2022, p. 24).

Economic Contributions to Whatcom County

In 2015, Earth Economics released the [Economic Contribution of Outdoor Recreation to Whatcom County \(2015\) report](#), which estimated that annual consumer outdoor recreation spending in Whatcom County was \$705 million. Total direct economic contributions to the Whatcom County economy amount to \$585 million every year, which supported an estimated 6,502 jobs in a variety of industries including the hospitality and restaurant industries. Additionally, the nonmarket benefits of outdoor recreation in Whatcom County was estimated to be between six and ten billion dollars a year.

In the 2020 update for the state, Earth Economics did include updates of expenditures, jobs, and non-material benefits by county. Whatcom County’s total estimated spending was \$582 million, with a total economic contribution of \$1.21 billion dollars, supporting 8,122 jobs. The increase in employment related to the recreation industry is of particular note, as it totals a whopping 24.9% increase in the number of jobs in just a five-year period. Very few industries, if any, in Whatcom County add jobs at this rate even over much longer periods.

Recreation and Whatcom County Economic Development

Recreation is a key industry in Whatcom County's base economy. Therefore, recreation is an important part of [Whatcom County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) 2022-2026](#). Goal 1.5 of the Whatcom County CEDS is to "support innovative recreation industries and projects that have the potential to increase sustainable tourism, value-added manufacturing, and/or create new or improved infrastructure and transportation benefits to the community."

To fulfill this goal, partners in Whatcom County agreed to support recreation activities in Whatcom County, especially biking, kayaking, and hiking. Action points 1-8 focus on support the mountain and road biking industry (manufacturing, local culture and infrastructure, the Pump Track, Northwest Tune up) and kayaking industry (Whatcom Water Trails map, increasing water and beach access for recreational users). The Action plan also notes the need to increase trail connectivity between the Small Cities and Bellingham and supports improving recreational infrastructure at trailheads and boat launch and water entry points, by increasing the availability of restrooms, potable water, and trash receptacles (Whatcom County CEDS 2022, p. 28).

Vessel Registrations in Whatcom County

In terms of vessel registrations, Whatcom County currently has a total of 7,601 vessels moored and registered in Whatcom County. An additional 710 vessels are registered to someone within Whatcom County but are moored in other counties. The bulk of those out of county moorings are located in Skagit (236) and King (187) Counties (Washington Sea Grant, [Washington Coast Economist Dashboard 2023](#)).

Marinas Activity and Revenues

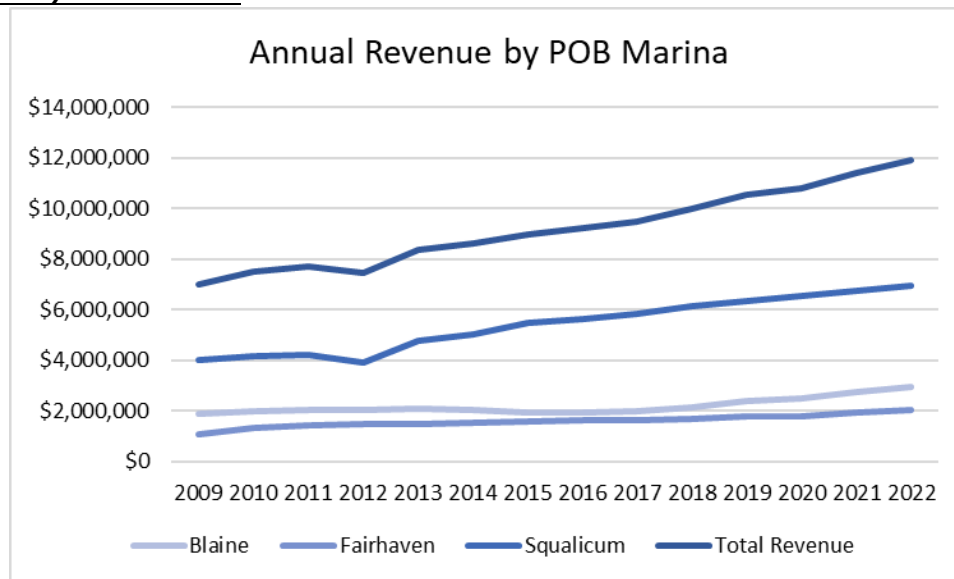


Figure 23: This figure shows marina revenue from 2009-2022 for Blaine, Fairhaven, and Squalicum Harbors (POB Marinas 2023).

As shown in Figure 23, above, annual revenue has steadily increased overall from \$6.9 million in 2009 to \$11.9 million in 2022. This is a 72.46% increase over time. However, the majority of revenue growth has been in Squalicum Harbor. Fairhaven and Blaine (the bottom two lines in light blue) have not decreased but their growth has been slower, with Blaine increasing from \$1.9 million in 2009 to \$2.9 million in

2022 and Fairhaven increasing from just over \$1 million in 2009 to just over \$2 million in 2022.

Whatcom County Saltwater Moorage Supply and Demand

In Whatcom County, there are a total of 3,557 wet moorage berths in Whatcom County. The number of berths has not changed since the Parks Plan update in 2018. Table 4 below shows the occupancy rate as well as the size of each waiting list by marina. This is used to assess overall saltwater moorage demand in Whatcom County.

Table 4: Berth supply organized by recreational and commercial occupancy, waitlist, and demand by marina in Whatcom County, Washington.

Moorage Facility	Berth Supply			Recreational			Commercial			Surplus or (Shortage)
	Commercial	Recreational	Total	Occupancy	Wait List	Demand	Occupancy	Wait List	Demand	
Squalicum Harbor	102	1284	1386	97%	205	1450	85%	0	87	151
Blaine Harbor	91	539	630	85%	255	713	75%	0	68	151
Pt Roberts Marina	0	924	924	20%	0	185	N/A	N/A	N/A	739
Semiahmoo Marina	0	280	280	99%	8	285	N/A	N/A	N/A	(5)
Birch Bay Marina	0	265	265	100%	0	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	-
Sandy Point Marina	0	72	72	100%	0	-	N/A	N/A	N/A	-
Total	193	3364	3557	5	468	2634	2	0	155	1037

As such, Squalicum and Blaine Harbor currently have waitlists for 205 and 255 berths, respectfully. The only other saltwater marina with a waitlist in Whatcom County is Semiahmoo, with a waitlist of just 8. Currently, Squalicum Harbor is 97% occupied for recreational moorage and 85% occupied for commercial moorage. Blaine Harbor is at 85% occupancy for recreational and 75% occupancy for commercial.

Point Roberts Marina has seen significant declines since the 2017 update. In 2017, Point Roberts was 72% occupied, with a wait list of three for recreational moorage. According to Port financial statements in 2023, Point Roberts is approximately 20% occupied with no wait list and a surplus of 739 berths. Port staff called the Port Roberts Marina to verify these numbers and confirmed that there is no wait list; however, they estimated closer to 50% occupancy.

Boat Launch Activity and Revenues

The use of Port of Bellingham boat launches is on an honor system, so rates of compliance vary. The last fee increase became effective January 1, 2020. The launch fees were raised from \$7.00 to \$9.00 daily and from \$85 to \$100 for an annual pass. As shown in Figure 23, since 2017, boat launch revenues have generally increased each year. Squalicum Harbor's boat launch revenues have generally increased year over year from 2017-2022, while Blaine and Fairhaven boat launches revenues remained relatively flat or slightly decreased.

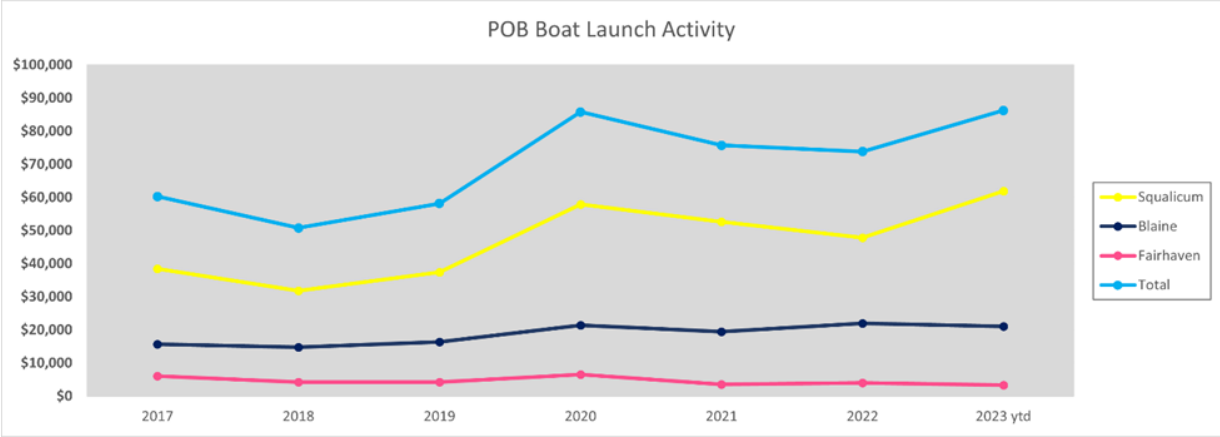


Figure 25: Port of Bellingham boat launch activity from 2017-2023 year to date. Each line represents a boat launch at a different location and the lines show annual revenues.

In Whatcom County, there are 24 boat launch locations. Eight of those boat launches offer motorized and non-motorized launch amenities, while 16 of the locations only accommodate small, hand-powered non-motorized launches. As shown in the map labeled Figure 25 below, many of the launches are around Bellingham Bay, Blaine and Birch Bay, Chuckanut Bay, and Lakes Samish and Whatcom.

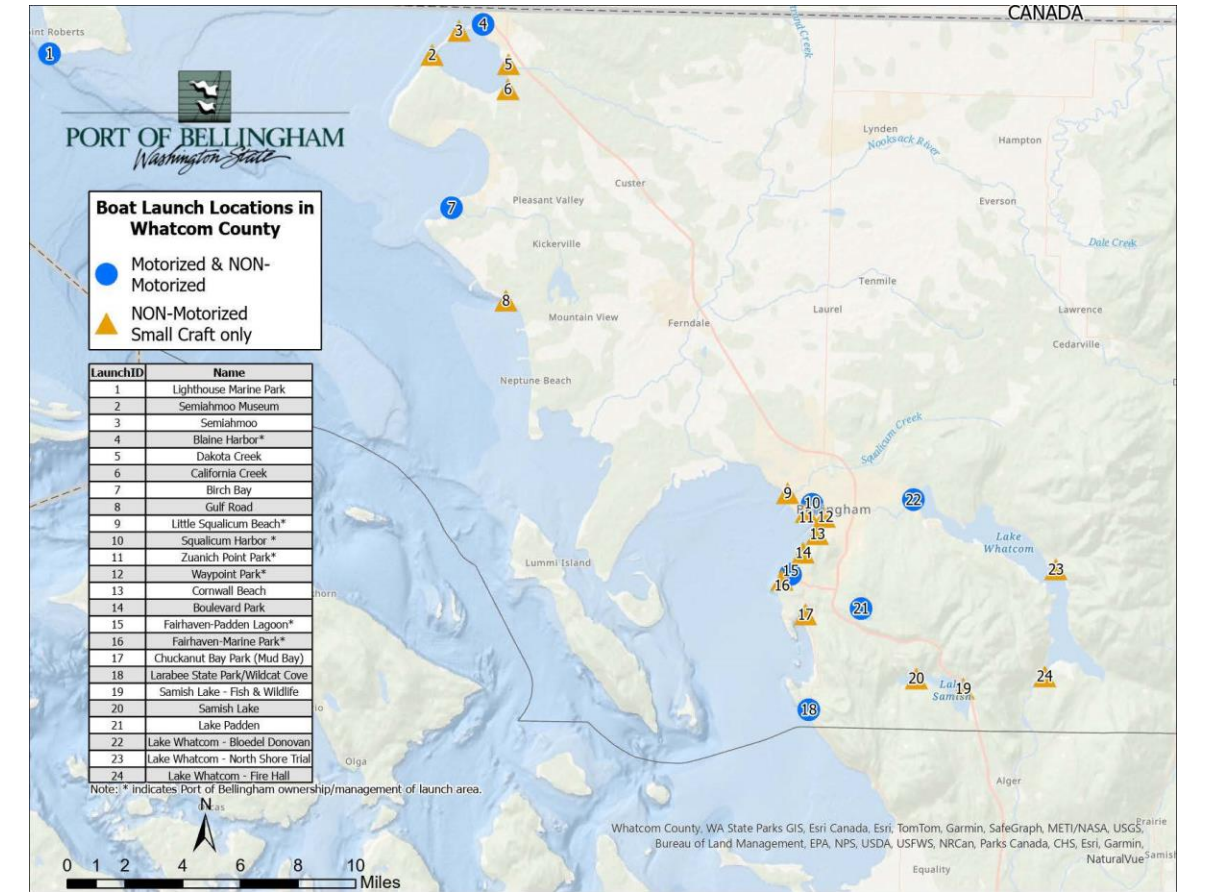


Figure 24: Motorized and non-motorized boat launches located in Whatcom County, Washington (POB Planning 2023).

9 Public Involvement

Public involvement is important to a community-based parks and recreation plan. An online survey was conducted to inform the Port Commission and Marina Advisory Committee and a 30-day public comment period was held prior to the Port Commission’s final adoption. The public survey questions are included as Appendix A and a *Summary of Public Input on Port of Bellingham’s Recreation Plan* is included as Appendix B.

9.1 Public Online Survey

Public engagement is an important part of the Port’s Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan update. The Port conducted a brief online survey about how Whatcom County residents use Port public open spaces and their perceptions about needed improvements or amenities. To make the survey accessible to the widest possible audience within Whatcom County, the survey was available in English, Spanish, Eastern Punjabi, and Russian.

These four languages were chosen for translation because of best practices learned from the Nooksack River Flood in 2021. Expanded accessibility is also in alignment with the Whatcom County CEDS for 2022-2026, which has several goals related to supporting equal and fair access to quality public, private, and nonprofit resources and services for all residents and businesses in Whatcom County.

The survey was open from Monday, July 17, 2023 until Monday, August 21, 2023. Input and feedback on the survey questions were developed in coordination between multiple divisions of the Port of Bellingham including Economic Development, Environmental and Planning, and Marinas. The first section of the survey covers questions regarding usage of and satisfaction with Port open spaces, parks, and facilities. The second section of the survey covers usage of and needs regarding Port boat launches and marina facilities and amenities. The survey was anonymous and did not require respondents to provide a name, log in, or create a special account to participate.

The Port publicized the opportunity for the public to participate in the survey through its social media feeds on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The data on engagement and reach of the posts is shown in **Table 5** below.

Table 5: Engagement Data from the Port’s Social Media Feeds Promoting the Survey

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter /X
Average Engagement Rate	5.5%	6.48%	7.65%
Total Reach	20,942	2,879	895
Total Likes	183	177	7
Total Link Clicks	365	76	13
Total Comments	9	4	
Total Shares/Saves/Retweets	53	6	2

The Port also distributed the survey to its Blaine and Squalicum Marina Customer email address database, as well as to the email lists for the Small Cities Caucus, the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee, which includes over 100 Whatcom County businesses, and Team Whatcom, a consortium of economic and business development service providers in Whatcom County. Many of

them included the survey opportunity on their social media channels and newsletters. The survey was posted on the Port's website from July 17-August 21, 2023. The Port issued a press release to local news announcing the survey was open to public responses. The preliminary results were highlighted by the [Cascadia Daily](#) on September 18, 2023 and shared with the Port Commission in an update presentation on November 21, 2023.

Port of Bellingham Survey Results

The Port survey was divided into two distinct sections. The first covered parks and open spaces generally and the second covered moorage and marina services for motorized and hand-powered boat users. The first section was comprised of nine questions and the second ten additional questions, the majority of which were multiple choice with write ins optional. The survey was anonymous and did not ask for any identifying information except if they were a resident of Whatcom County and what zip code they reside within. The full set of survey questions can be found in **Appendix A**.

The Port surveys received a total of 818 responses. All 818 responses were to the English survey³. Of those 818 responses, 802 were from Whatcom County residents, the majority of which reported they lived in a Bellingham zip code (98225, 98226, and 98229). Figure 26 below shows the full breakdown by zip code.

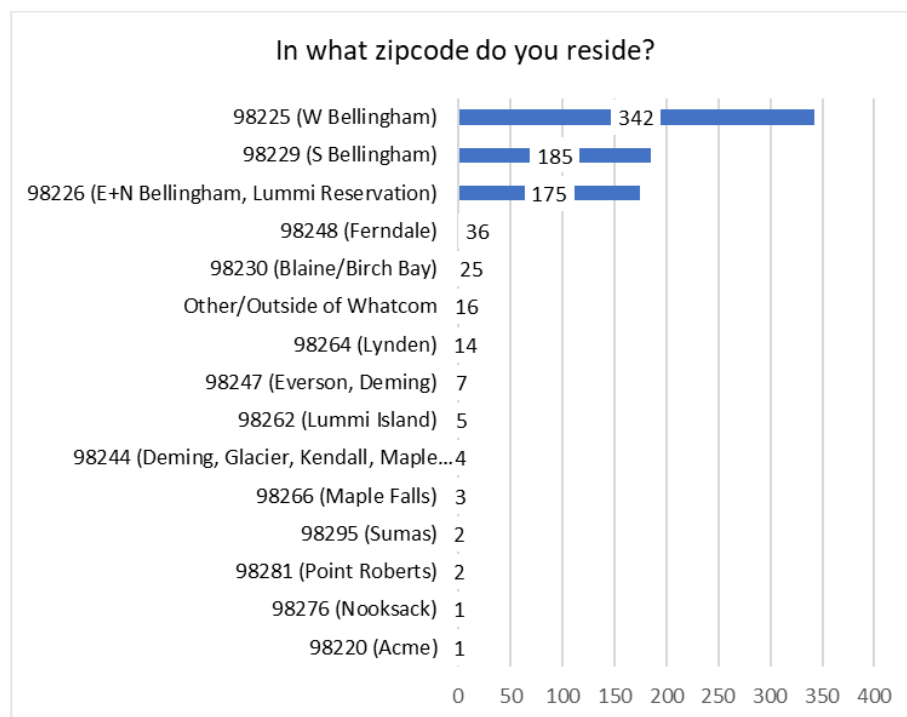


Figure 26: Question #2 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked residents in what zip code they reside. N=818.

³ Despite the Russian, Punjabi, and Spanish surveys being available and publicly posted and shared on social media, the surveys did not elicit any responses. This points to the fact that while tools can be made more accessible and inclusive, tool accessibility is insufficient for participation. In the future, consultants have recommended conducting additional outreach via community leadership and pillar organizations.

It is important to note that only 25 responses out of 818 were from Blaine, Washington. The Port has several open spaces and facilities in Blaine, including the Blaine Harbor Marina, the boat launch, as well as the Waterfront Trail and Jorgensen Pier. The survey results show Blaine appearing much less utilized than the spaces and facilities in Bellingham. However, this is not necessarily true and is likely due to the very small number of observations from Blaine residents. Other evidence, including Port Commissioner and staff knowledge, points to these spaces being busy and well utilized. For example, Canadians frequent the Blaine Harbor but the survey targeted citizens of Whatcom County. To better understand usage of the Port of Bellingham's spaces in Blaine additional outreach would need to be conducted.

The next question asked respondents which Port of Bellingham parks and facilities they had visited. Figure 27 shows that the top three most visited parks or facilities selected were Zuanich Park, Marine Park in Fairhaven, and Squalicum Harbor Marina (with the Squalicum Harbor Waterfront Trail right behind it).

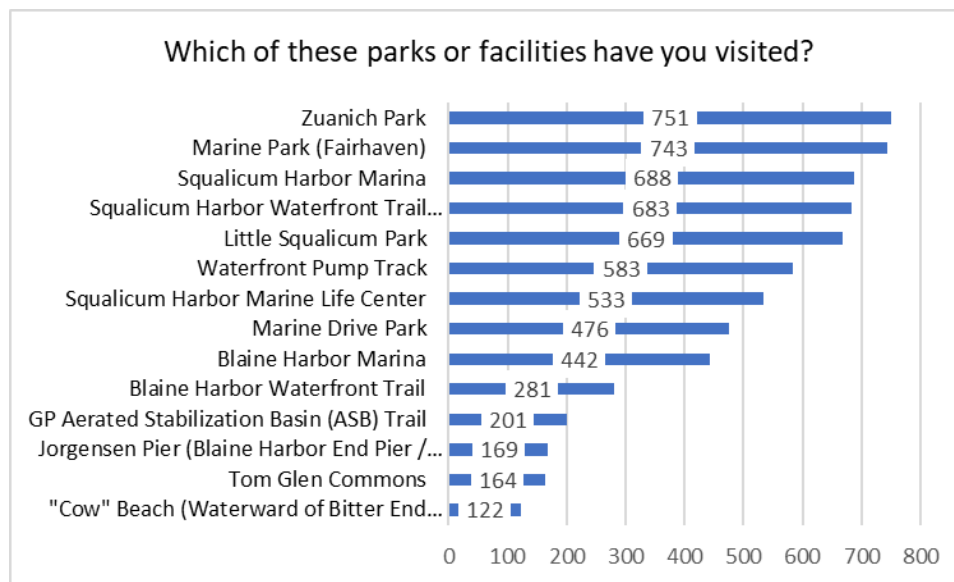


Figure 27: Question #3 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents which of the parks and facilities of the Port's they had visited. N=818.

Of those parks, Figure 28 demonstrates that Zuanich Park, Marine Park in Fairhaven, and the Waterfront Pump Track are the three parks that people visit most often.

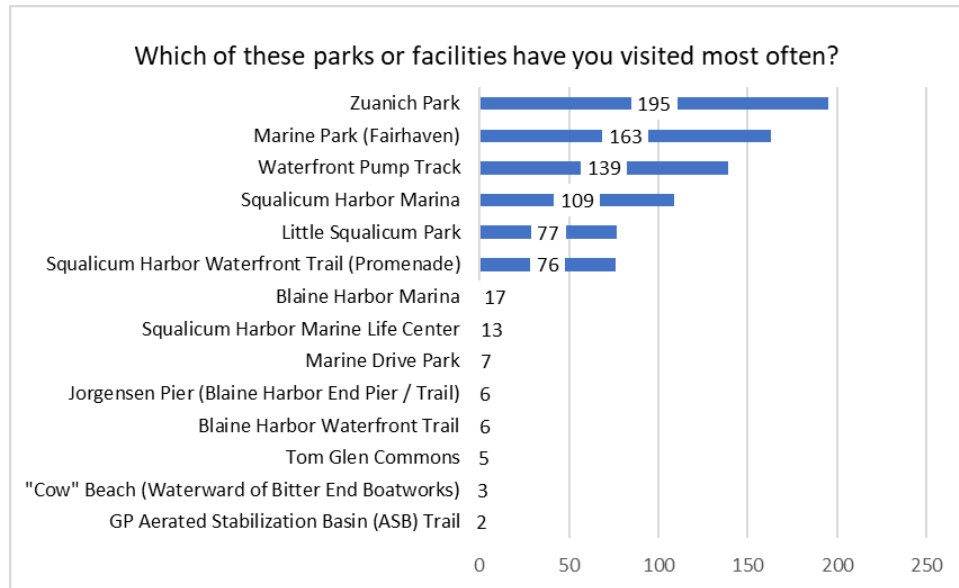


Figure 28: Question #4 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents which park or facility they most often visited. N=818.

When asked how satisfied they were with the parks that they had visited, the vast majority of respondents said that they were satisfied or extremely satisfied (91.44%).

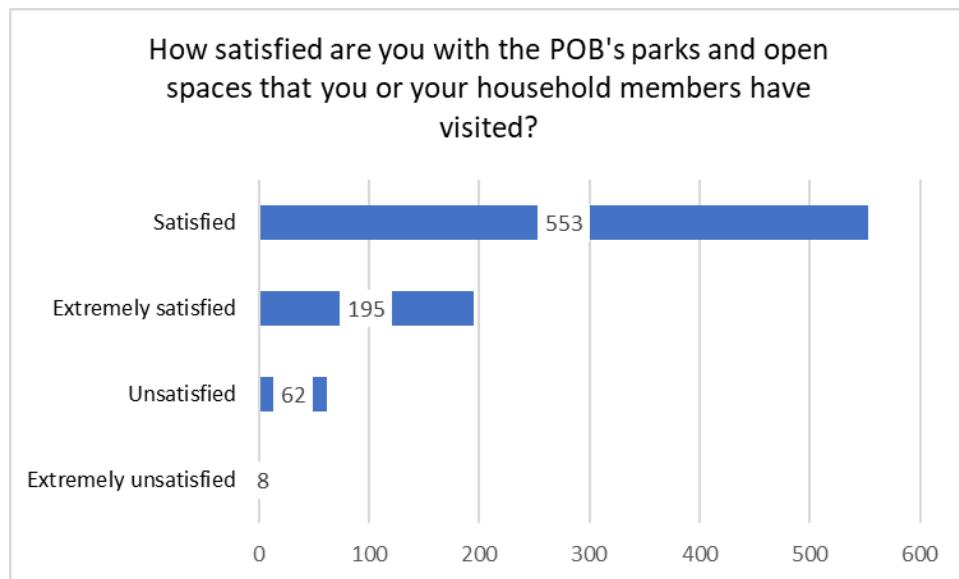


Figure 29: Question #6 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents how satisfied they were with the Port of Bellingham parks and spaces they had visited. N=818.

The final two questions of the section asked respondents what was most important to them when visiting a Port park or open space and what they thought the community needed more of. For the first question, the top three answers were: restrooms, multi-use biking and walking paths, and beach access. For the second question, the top three answers were: beach access, waterfront access, and walking

trails.

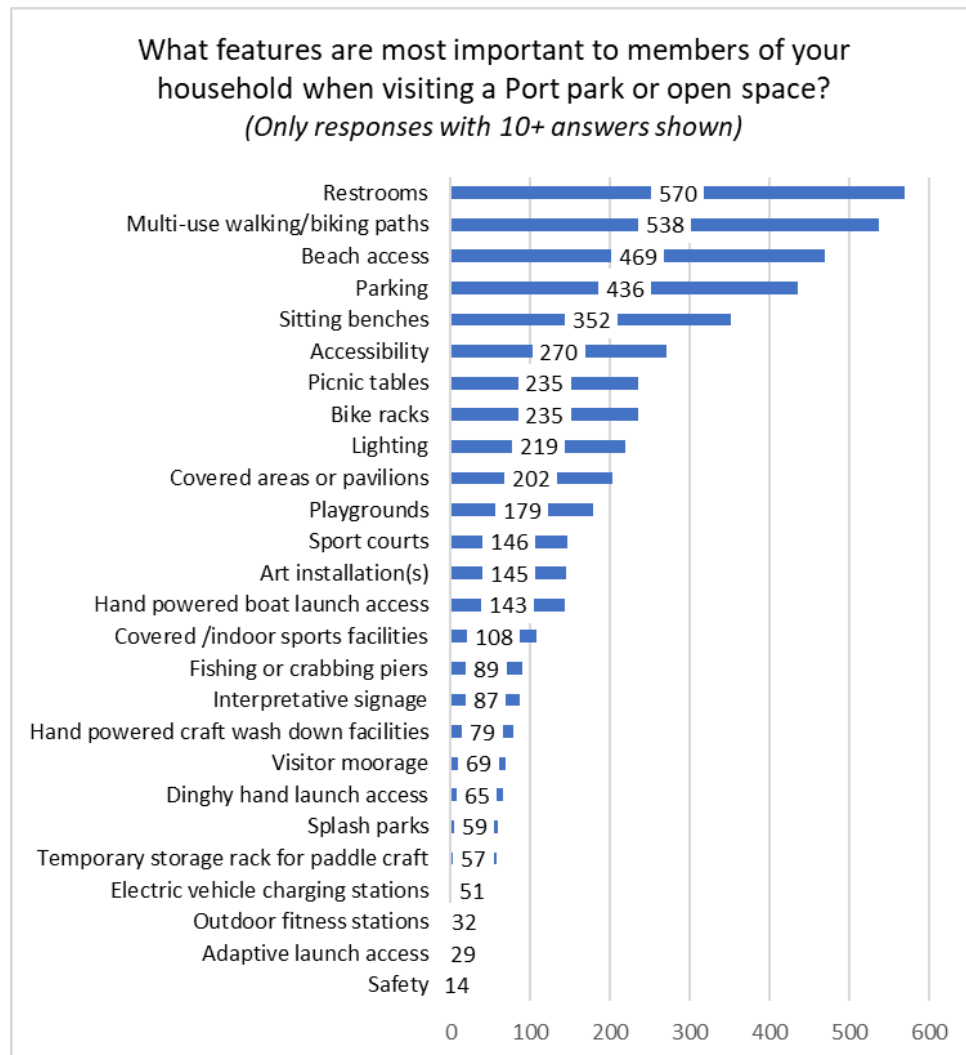


Figure 30: Question #7 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents how satisfied they were with the Port of Bellingham parks and spaces they had visited. N=818.

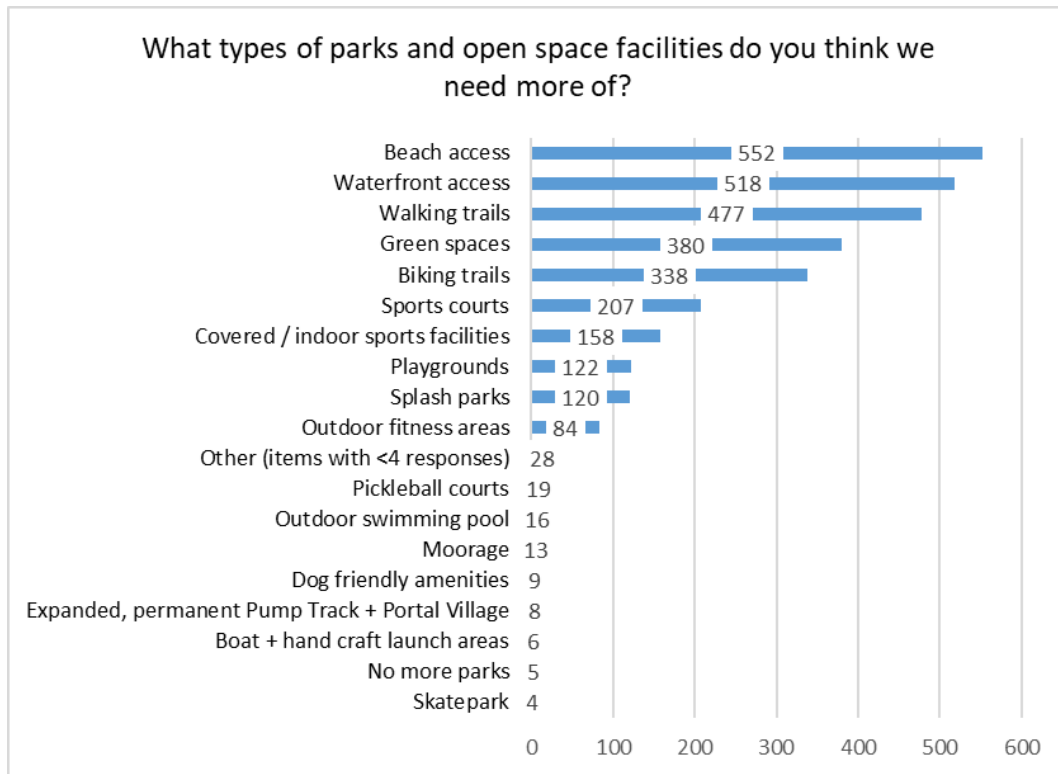


Figure 31: Question #8 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents what they think we need more of. N=818.

Finally, the last question of this section asked respondents what changes could be made that would make them more likely to visit the Port's parks and open spaces more often. The top five answers were additional multi-use walking/biking paths, additional beach access, additional restrooms, pickleball courts, and additional parking. It should also be noted that several items on the list were also accessibility related: additional sitting benches, covered areas and pavilions, improved accessibility, as well as adaptive launch access. There was also great interest in increased swimming options and dog friendly amenities in the write in responses.

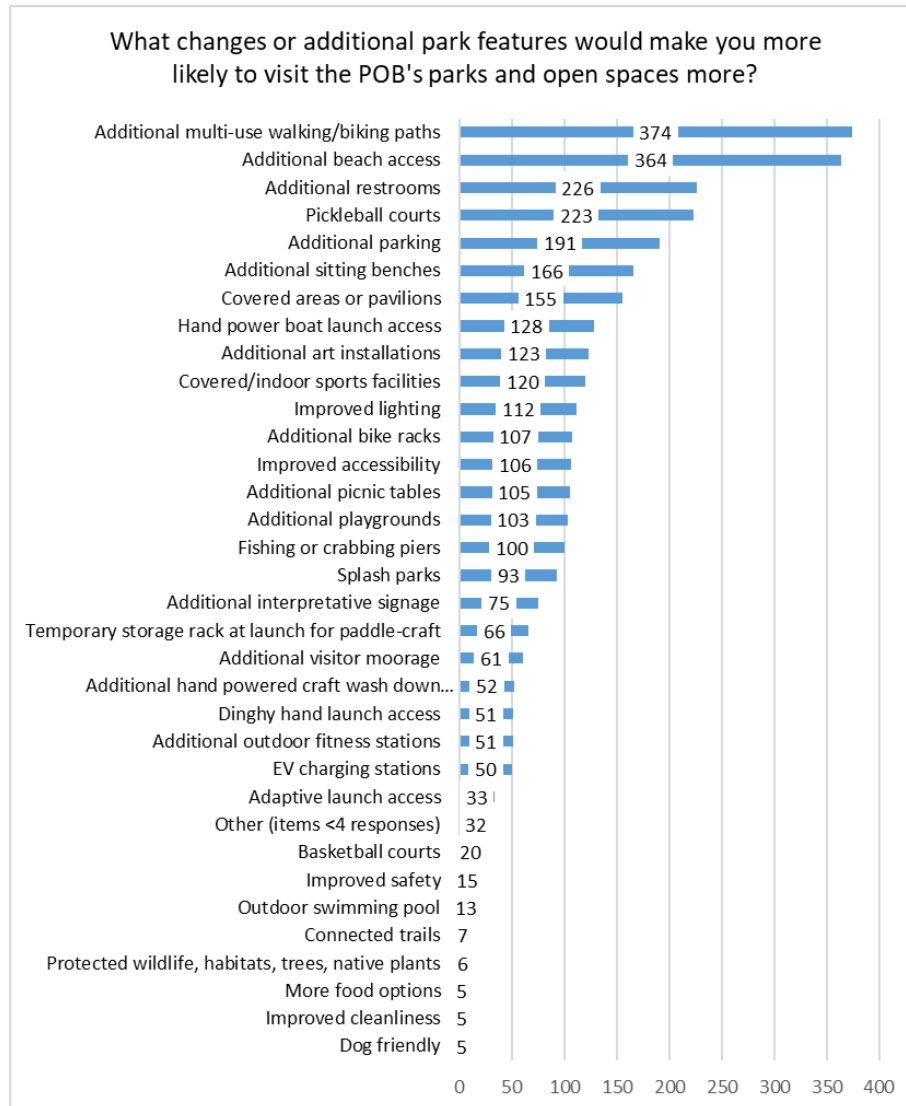


Figure 32: Question #9 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents what amenities would make them more likely to visit Port parks and spaces more often. N=818.

In the second section, the first question asked respondents if they owned a boat or watercraft and used the Port's boating and marina facilities. There were 818 responses and 45% said yes, 55% said no. Respondents were asked to only continue if they answered yes to this question, however, many completed the rest of the survey questions. This data was included, rather than omitted for the following reasons. First, harbor amenities are not available for boat owners and moorage customers only and it is arguable that some of the amenities are used more by the public than moorage customers such as bathrooms, green spaces, walking trails, and so on. It was also evident from later answers and write in responses that many kayak, paddleboard, and other human powered craft owners answered no to the question of owning a boat.

As for the types of boats that respondents owned, there were 414 responses and the majority were

hand-powered (191), followed by power (146) then sail boats (63). Most of these power boat and sailboat auxiliaries were gas or diesel powered, with only two power boats and five sailboats identified as being electric (N=222). The next question in the section asked respondents if they would be more likely to purchase an electric boat if there were amenities to and facilities to support one at Blaine and Squalicum Harbors. Out of 527 responses, the majority of respondents indicated that they would remain very unlikely or unlikely (329 responses) to purchase an electric boat and 198 respondents indicated it would make them somewhat likely or very likely to purchase an electric boat.

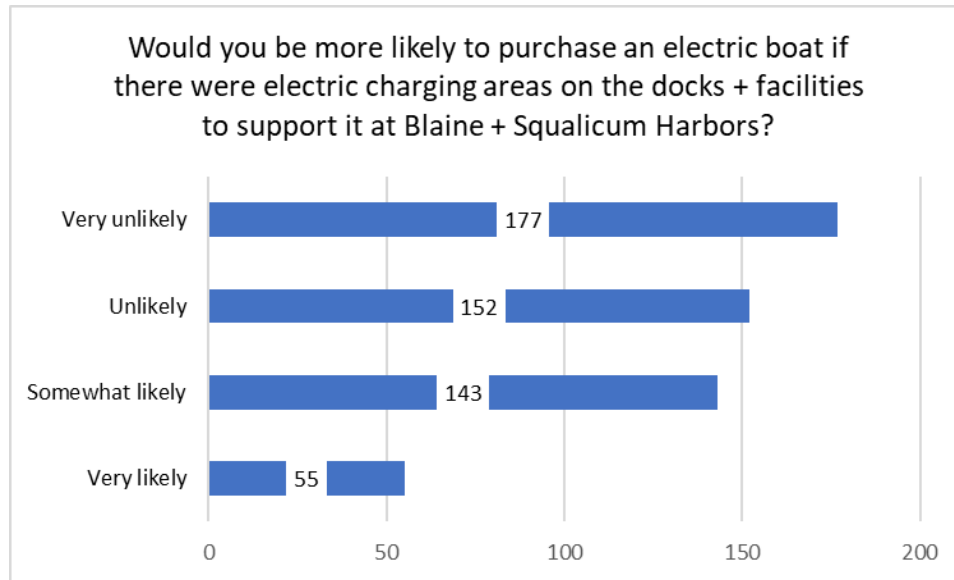


Figure 33: Question #13 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents if they would be more likely to purchase an electric boat if amenities and facilities to service it were available locally. N=527.

The following set of questions focused on how gathering information related to how often the boat launches the Port manages are used, how much parking is required, and if they ever use overnight moorage. Two caveats are important to keep in mind. First, some of these numbers are lower than expected as non-motorized boat owners, and potentially some non-boat owners, answered these questions. Second, because most respondents to the survey are Bellingham residents, the numbers for Blaine should be assumed to be lower than reality as well.

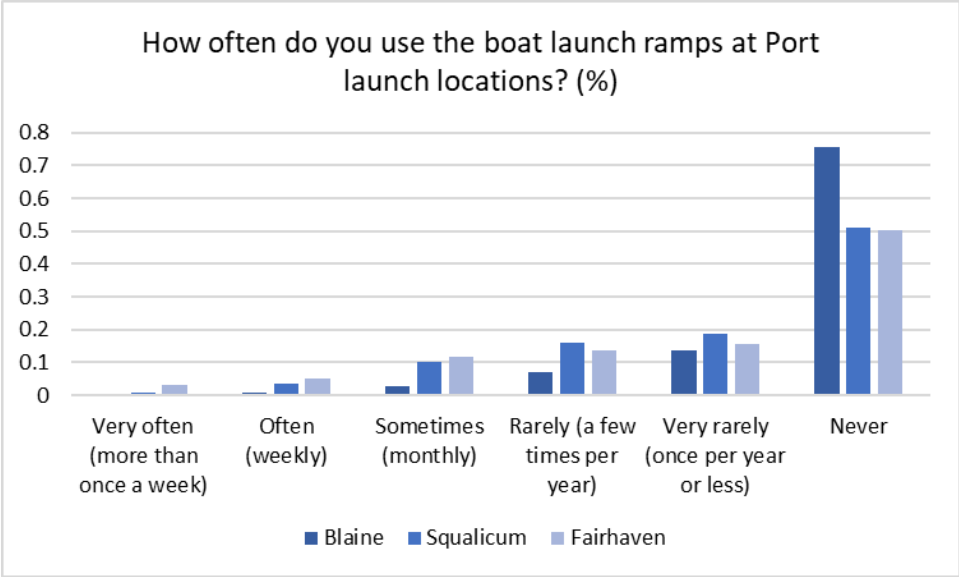


Figure 34: Question #14-16 on the Port of Bellingham’s Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents how often they use the boat launch ramps at the three Port locations. Blaine N=578. Squalicum N=580, Fairhaven N=589.

Many respondents answered that they never used any of the three boat launch ramps. Those that did use it reported using it very rarely (once per year or less) or rarely (a few times per year). Those that answered very often ranged from 0% (Blaine) to just 3.2% (Fairhaven) of responses. It is important to note that many respondents were answering this survey as recreational users, not as commercial boaters or fishers.

Of those that use the ramps, most respondents said they need approximately four hours of parking when they use the launch ramps.

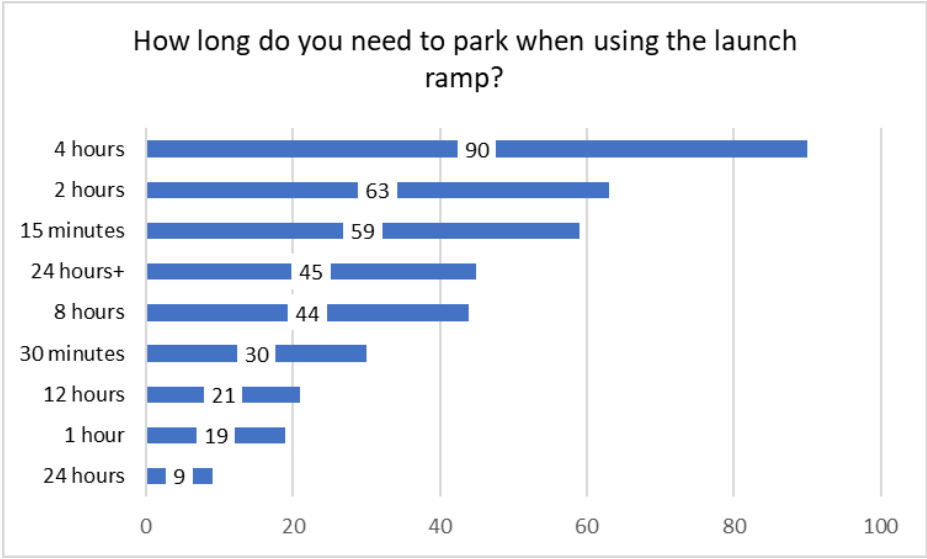


Figure 35: Question #17 on the Port of Bellingham’s Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents how long

they need to park when using the launch ramps. N=380.

Finally, the survey concluded by asking respondents what type of harbor and marina amenities were most important to them and their household. The top six answers were: restrooms, waterfront accessibility via walking trails, green spaces, restaurants, ample long-term parking, and dog friendly. The full results are shown in Figure 36 below.

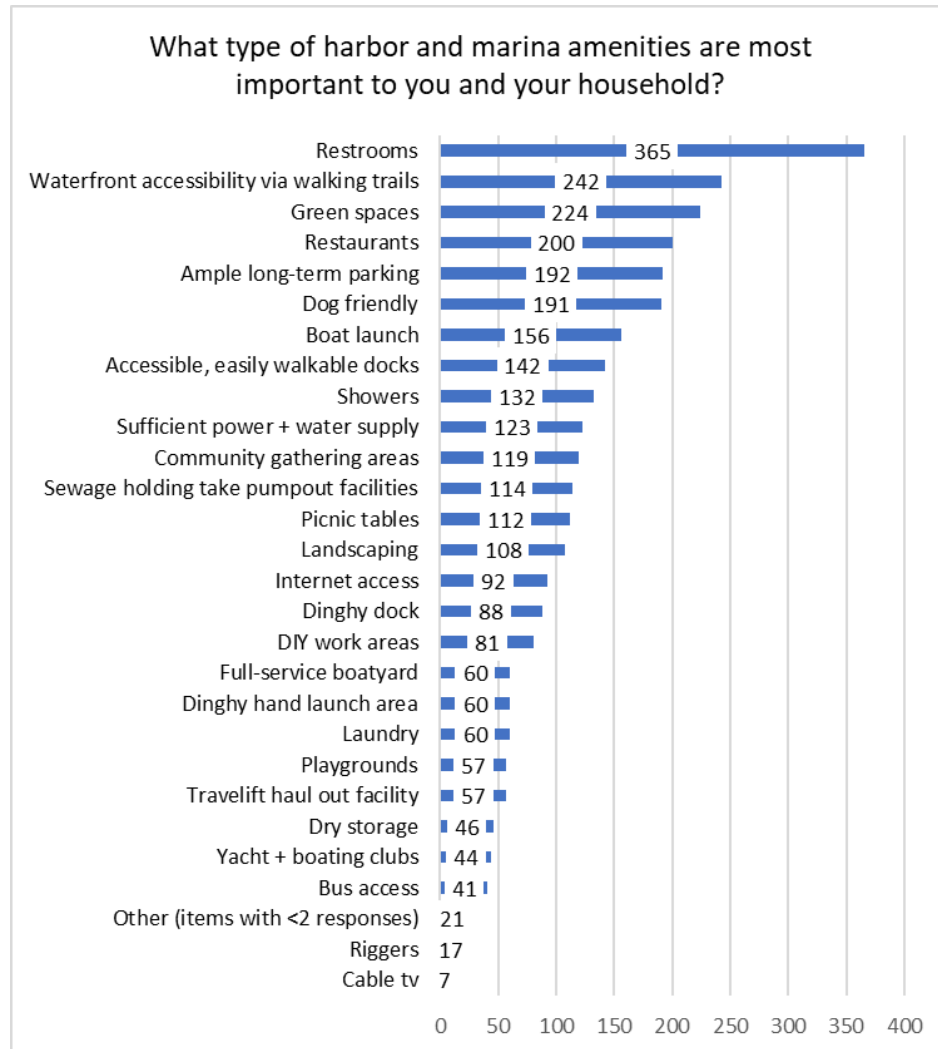


Figure 36: Question #19 on the Port of Bellingham's Parks and Open Spaces survey asked respondents what type of harbor and marina amenities were most important to them and their household. N=510.

9.2 Comments on Draft Plan

Public Comments and responses on the Draft Plan and the Commission Resolution adopting the final Plan are available as companion documents to the final Port Recreation Conservation and Open Space Plan. A *Summary of Public Input on Port of Bellingham's Recreation Plan* is included as Appendix B.

Dates of Public Engagement for Draft Plan:

- Commission presentation on the Plan Update Process: November 21, 2023
- Key Stakeholder Review (Internal and Jurisdictional): December 1 – December 7
- Public Comment Period: December 19 – January 22. A total of 158 comments were received.
- Commission Meeting Adopting the *2024 Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plan* - March 5, 2024

10 Capital Improvement Program

The following sections are a brief overview of strategies and projects that address the Port of Bellingham's role in providing public access opportunities. This includes a summary of select projects some of which may be eligible for submittal to the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board for the next 6-year planning cycle.

10.1 Strategy

This plan recommends that the Port of Bellingham pursue a strategy where the Port assumes responsibility for projects that no other agency or organization provides and helps coordinate with other viable sponsors.

Development, Operation, and Maintenance

The Port will develop, operate, or maintain public access facilities when:

The facility is consistent with the Port goals and objectives; and

- The facility will have broad benefits for a large proportion of the service area population; or
- Facility costs will be mostly recaptured from direct charges on the population using the facility, or
- Facility costs will be compensated in some manner through grants or agreements with public agencies, or organizations.

10.2 Role and Responsibilities

This plan recommends the Port of Bellingham assume the following roles and responsibilities:

- The Port will assume a primary role in the development of waterfront beaches, boat launch sites, marinas, and multipurpose trails including picnic shelters, interpretative exhibits, and other natural or park-based activities which complement the Port's planned land uses and are authorized by the Port's Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvements.
- The Port will work with other public agencies, such as, Whatcom County, the Cities of Bellingham, Blaine and Sumas and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources to create and maintain a system of interconnected trails, natural corridors, and related facilities accessing Port properties and connecting community parks and public facilities as appropriate.
- The Port supports the expansion of non-motorized activities on marine waters when:
 - The proposed non-motorized launch site does not conflict with an existing motorized boat launch site; and
 - The proposed non-motorized launch site would be on or adjacent to Port properties.
- Where appropriate, the Port will make available for public use, indoor spaces and facilities providing a multiple purpose community function, such as, meeting, event and exhibit spaces in

- Squalicum Boathouse, the Fisherman’s Pavilion, Bellingham Cruise Terminal, and the Blaine Boating Center.
- The Port will assume a major responsibility for the planning, coordination, and preservation of unique environmental areas and open spaces located within or adjacent to Port properties consistent with Port plans.
- The Port will work with other public agencies, such as Whatcom County, Cities of Bellingham, Blaine and Sumas and the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Ecology, creating an effective approach to site specific conservation issues and proposals.
- Where appropriate, the Port may assume some shared responsibility for preserving facilities or environments with special or unique interests, impacts or relevance - such as the Marine Life Center or Fisherman’s Memorial.

10.3 Development Plan

The following select public access and boating facilities projects are based on the Port approved comprehensive scheme of harbor improvement, current draft plans, field analysis, adjacent jurisdictional planning proposals and consultations. In addition to capital funds for new projects, the Port of Bellingham budgets annually to maintain and repair existing public access facilities. These funds are identified in the Port’s operating budget known as “Community Connections - Open Space Program.”

Public Access Projects

BH- “Plover Park”

A new public park is proposed to be developed by the City of Blaine on Port dedicated land adjacent to the existing boat launch and restroom facilities. The park would provide a destination for pedestrians using a proposed pedestrian overpass from the Blaine downtown area, a picnic spot for the boat launch and marina visitors, and a recreation area south of Marine Drive. The park will include pedestrian walkways tied to the network of pedestrian trails within the Wharf District. The Port of Bellingham will either dedicate the land or grant the City of Blaine an easement for park development purposes to support City of Blaine efforts.

Planning and Development of the remaining sections of the “Wharf Trail Loop” circulation element in Blaine’s Wharf District include:

BH -Improved access to Jorgensen Pier

The City and Port recognize that driving out onto the Public Fishing Pier has been an activity enjoyed by residents of Blaine for many decades. This plan reduces vehicle access to one lane of vehicle traffic while adding dedicated pedestrian walkways and a bike lane to access Jorgensen Pier. The difference in the two alternatives is the method of how the filled right of way will be retained or supported. A condition survey will be done in 2024.

BH- Pintail Marsh

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The Port of Bellingham will support the City of Blaine with coordinating assistance for the proposed wetland enhancement and trail development on BNSF property. This effort would likely be coordinated with efforts surrounding the Pedestrian Bridge. While coordination, planning and permitting may occur during this planning period, this project is not anticipated to begin construction during this planning period.

BH- Repair Boardwalk & promenade

Remove approximately 575 feet of existing wood boardwalk and replace it with improved promenade. A condition survey will be done in 2024.

AP- Support Development of trails around the airport

Develop trail connections to north on west side of BLI.

WF - Wharf Construction

Public access adjacent to a proposed shoreline restoration, bank stabilization and future waterfront parks in the Waterfront District. Construction of a public pier or wharf structure, visitor moorage and float plane docks. The current GP wharf will be removed prior to any future construction.

FH – Marine Park Restroom Remodel

Replace fixtures and coverings.

FH – Marine Park Osprey Nesting Platform

Design, permitting and installation of Osprey nesting platform.

SH - Little Squalicum Beach Park

Develop upland park facilities including paved parking, accessible picnic tables, benches, a small lawn area, an art installation, hand launch watercraft rack, a rest room, and bike parking.

Boating Facilities Projects

Ongoing maintenance of existing boating facilities and equipment replacement is a priority for the Port of Bellingham. The following capital maintenance projects are envisioned during this planning period pending budget approval:

BH-Boat Launch Ramp Panel Replacement

Replace approximately 144 16"X16' concrete panels on boat ramp.

BH-Boat Launch Rinse Down Station and Asphalt Repair

Fix drainage issues by repairing storm drain, construct a berm for better rinse water capture and replace approximately 7500 square feet of worn asphalt.

BH-Visitor Dock Meter Replacement

Replace 24 shore power electrical meters on visitor dock.

SH-Squalicum Inner Harbor Visitor Moorage Renovation

Replace approximately 550 lineal feet of visitor dock.

New boating facilities contemplated during this planning period include the following:

WF- Visitor Moorage along the Whatcom Waterway

Visitor moorage along the Whatcom Waterway is subject to the phased development of the Wharf. This visitor moorage project anticipates ramps and floats on either the east end near Waypoint Park or the west end near the Log Pond. In either case, the ramps and floats should not extend beyond established pier headlines for Whatcom Waterway.

Conservation Projects

Squalicum Creek Estuary Restoration Project

Squalicum Creek has the highest potential for salmon habitat restoration within the City of Bellingham jurisdiction and likely supports the largest number of salmon species. As a result of historic shoreline development, the mouth of Squalicum Creek has been relocated and confined between concrete box culvert bridges in a heavily armored channel with a concrete bottom that creates fish passage barriers at most tidal elevations. Fish habitat in the estuary has also been heavily compromised due to historic industrial development. The mouth of Squalicum Creek has a triple fish passage barrier: the Port owned BCS Truck Bridge, the BNSF MBP Spur culvert, and the COB Roeder Ave bridge/ culvert. Due to the sizing of the culverts and spans these structures also significantly contribute to the periodic flooding experienced in the area. It has been a long-term vision of the Port, the city, and the Department of Ecology led Bellingham Bay Action Team to improve this complicated system.

The Port has been working with multiple agencies to restore habitat functions in the Squalicum Creek estuary including the City of Bellingham, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington Department of Ecology, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources. In 2007, DNR removed 1700 tons of creosote-treated materials from the outer estuary. In 2013, with grant funding from Ecology, the Port removed derelict bulkheads, creosote pilings, and other debris from the outer estuary and created new shallow areas for fish to reproduce, feed, rest, and hide from predators.

The next Phase of this project will be to develop a feasibility study and alternatives analysis for a flood mitigation and habitat enhancement project in the estuary. This work will be done in coordination with the Port, the City of Bellingham, BNSF Railway, and other key stakeholders. The partners have recently made significant advancements to facilitate the improvement, including the City's construction of a sewer lift station to allow lowering of a sewer main and the State's prioritization of BNSF culverts listing Squalicum Estuary as one of the top priorities in the Puget Sound. The State Toxics Cleanup Program awarded the project \$300,000. The City has also been granted \$1.84 million via the USDOT Culvert Aquatic Organism Protection Program to advance the project through 60% design.

10.4 Capital Improvement Plan

Each year The Port's Board of Commissioners approves an annual budget including a five year out year estimate to consider the longer-term needs of the organization and a list of unfunded projects.

The following table contains recreation, conservation and public access capital projects that appear in the 2024 budget, in out years or as unfunded. The projects are ranked 1-3 respectively as funded in 2024, listed in the budget in out years or unfunded

Table 6: Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Capital Projects in the 2024 Budget

Project Name	Project Description (include quantities, lineal feet, etc.)	Estimated Year(s) of Construction (2024-2030)	Funded or Unfunded	RCO Grant Type and other anticipated funding sources	Estimated Total Project Cost	Rank
Little Squalicum Beach Stormwater Improvements	Design and install stormwater treatment	2024	Funded	Ecology Grant/ Approved Annual Budget	\$130,000	1
Lower Squalicum Creek Flood and Habitat Improvements	Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis	2024	Funded	Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) Recreation Projects- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)/ Approved Annual Budget	\$100,000	1
Digester Tanks Abatement/Structural Improvements	Design, Engineering and Construction	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$700,000	1
Waterfront Art Installations	Design and installation	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$75,000	1
Blaine Boardwalk / Promenade Replacement	Condition Survey	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$50,000	1
Blaine Jorgensen End Pier	Condition Survey	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$75,000	1
Osprey Nesting Platforms	Design, permitting and installation of Osprey nesting platform	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$30,000	1
Mt. Baker Products Peninsula	Site preparation for recreation access	2024	Funded	Approved Annual Budget	\$90,000	1
Marine Life Center Observation Tank Replacement	Remove existing, leaking tank, and replace with a new waterfall, ellipse touch tank.	2025	Funded in budget out year	No Child Left Inside, Outdoor Learning/ Approved Annual Budget	\$214,550	2
Waterfront District Visitor Moorage	Design and Engineering	2025	Funded in budget out year	Approved Annual Budget	\$250,000	2

Tile Tank Repair	Design & Engineering Construction	2025	Funded in budget out year	City of Bellingham Cost Share / Approved Annual Budget	\$680,000	2
Marine Park Restroom Remodel	Replace fixtures and coverings	2025	Funded in budget out year	RCO Park Maintenance Grant / Approved Annual Budget	\$100,000	2
Little Squalicum Beach Park	Develop upland park facility including paved parking, accessible picnic tables, benches, a small lawn area, an art installation, hand launch watercraft rack, a rest room, and bike parking.	2025	Unfunded	Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) Recreation Projects- Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP)/ Approved Annual Budget	\$1,100,000	2
Vessel Pumpout O & M Reimbursement	75% Reimbursement for Pumpout Operating & Maintenance Costs	Ongoing- 10-year contracts	Unfunded	WA Parks & Rec Clean Vessel Act Grant Program / Approved Annual Budget	variable	3
Vessel Pumpout Replacements	Purchase new pumpout carts to replace old carts	Ongoing - every 2 years	Unfunded	WA Parks & Rec Clean Vessel Act Grant Program / Approved Annual Budget	variable	3
Airport Trail Phase 2	Develop trail connections to north on west side of BLI	2027	Unfunded	Approved Annual Budget	\$250,000	3
Squalicum Inner Harbor Visitor Moorage Renovation	Inner Harbor Renovation Project; replacing 550 lineal feet of visitor dock	2025-2028	Unfunded	RCO Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG)/ Approved Annual Budget	\$500,000	3
GP Wharf Improvements / Waterfront District Visitor Moorage	Construction of a public pier or wharf structure, visitor moorage and float plane docks	2029	Unfunded	Approved Annual Budget	\$9,530,000	3
Blaine Boat Launch Ramp Panel Replacement	Replace approximately 144 16"X16' concrete panels on boat ramp	2026-2030	Unfunded	RCO Boating Facilities Grant (BFP) / Approved Annual Budget	\$500,000	3

Blaine Visitor Dock Meter Replacement	Replace 24 shore power electrical meters on visitor dock	2027-2030	Unfunded	RCO Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) / Approved Annual Budget	\$50,000	3
Blaine Boat Launch Rinse Down Station and Parking Lot Asphalt Repair	Fix drainage issues by repairing storm drain, constructing berm for better rinse water capture, replace approximately 7500 square feet of worn asphalt.	2025-2030	Unfunded	RCO Boating Facilities Grant (BFP)/ Approved Annual Budget	\$75,000	3
Blaine Boardwalk/Promenade Replacement	Remove existing wood boardwalk and replace with new, approximately 575 lineal feet of improved promenade	2026-2030	Unfunded	RCO Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) / Approved Annual Budget	\$300,000	3
Plover Park	Land dedication only	Unknown		Approved Annual Budget	\$0	3
				Rank 1 = In 2024 Budget		
				Rank 2 = In Budget Out Year		
				Rank 3 = Unfunded		

11 Appendices

11.1 Appendix A: Public Survey

Note: This survey was translated into Spanish, Punjabi, and Russian via [The Language Exchange](#). All four surveys were input into Google Forms and were available for anonymous responses from the public during the same time period: Monday, July 17, 2023 and until Monday, August 21, 2023.

Parks Plan Survey Questions

The Port of Bellingham is currently updating its *Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan* or Parks Plan. A current Plan is a requirement for the Port to be eligible for certain State grants. An important component of any Parks Plan is community engagement and gathering information on your needs and experiences at Port parks, open spaces and facilities. Thank you, in advance, for your time in helping us better understand how you and your household use Port properties and what we could do to enhance your experience.

Section 1: This part of the survey asks you to provide feedback on the Port of Bellingham's parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities. All questions are required.

1. Are you a resident of Whatcom County? Yes / No.
2. In what zip code do you reside? Choose one. If you are from outside of Whatcom County, including Canada, please use the Other field to input your zip/postal code. ***Required**
 - a. 98220 (Acme)
 - b. 98225 (Bellingham West)
 - c. 98226 (Bellingham East + Lummi Reservation)
 - d. 98229 (Bellingham South / Sudden Valley + Chuckanut Drive)
 - e. 98262 (Lummi Island)
 - f. 98230 (Blaine / Birch Bay)
 - g. 98240 (Custer)
 - h. 98264 (Lynden)
 - i. 98248 (Ferndale)
 - j. 98276 (Nooksack)
 - k. 98247 (Deming, Everson)
 - l. 98295 (Sumas)
 - m. 98266 (Ferndale)
 - n. 98244 (Deming, Glacier, Kendall, Maple Falls)
 - o. 98281 (Point Roberts)
 - p. 98266 (Mount Baker)
 - q. Other _____
3. Which of these parks or facilities have you visited? Check all that apply. ***Required**
 - a. Blaine Harbor Marina
 - b. Blaine Harbor Waterfront Trail
 - c. Jorgensen Pier (Blaine Harbor End Pier and/or trail)

- d. Little Squalicum Beach Park
- e. Zuanich Park
- f. Tom Glen Commons
- g. Squalicum Harbor Marina
- h. Squalicum Harbor Waterfront Trail (Promenade)
- i. Squalicum Marine Life Center/ Touch Tank
- j. Marine Park (Fairhaven)
- k. Marine Drive Park
- l. Waterfront Pump Track
- m. "Cow" Beach (Waterward of Bitter End Boatworks)
- n. GP Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB) Trail

4. Which of these parks or facilities have you visited ***the most often***? Check one. ***Required**

- a. Blaine Harbor Marina
- b. Blaine Harbor Waterfront Trail
- c. Jorgensen Pier (Blaine Harbor End Pier and/or trail)
- d. Little Squalicum Beach Park
- e. Zuanich Park
- f. Tom Glen Commons
- g. Squalicum Harbor Marina
- h. Squalicum Harbor Waterfront Trail (Promenade)
- i. Squalicum Marine Life Center/ Touch Tank
- j. Marine Park (Fairhaven)
- k. Marine Drive Park
- l. Waterfront Pump Track
- m. "Cow" Beach (Waterward of Bitter End Boatworks)
- n. GP Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB) Trail

5. How often do you visit that facility (the facility you chose in #4)? Choose your best estimation.

***Required**

- a. Very often (More than once week)
- b. Often (Weekly)
- c. Sometimes (Monthly)
- d. Rarely (A few times a year)
- e. Very rarely (Only for special events)
- f. Never

6. How satisfied are you with the Port of Bellingham's parks and open spaces that you or your household members have visited? ***Required**

- a. Extremely Satisfied
- b. Satisfied
- c. Unsatisfied
- d. Extremely Unsatisfied

7. What features are **most important** to members of your household when visiting a Port park or open space? Check all that apply. ***Required**

- a. Accessibility
- b. Restrooms
- c. Picnic tables
- d. Sport courts
- e. Splash parks
- f. Playgrounds
- g. Outdoor fitness stations
- h. Covered /indoor sports facilities
- i. Sitting benches
- j. Covered areas or pavilions
- k. Electric vehicle charging stations
- l. Hand powered boat launch access
- m. Dinghy hand launch access
- n. Adaptive launch access
- o. Bike racks
- p. Beach access
- q. Multi-use walking/ biking paths
- r. Temporary storage rack at launch for paddle-craft (kayak, canoe, paddleboard)
- s. Fishing or crabbing piers
- t. Hand powered craft wash down facilities
- u. Lighting
- v. Parking
- w. Art installation(s)
- x. Interpretative signage
- y. Visitor moorage
- z. Other _____

8. What types of parks and open space facilities do you think we need more of? Check all that apply.

***Required**

- a. Sport courts
- b. Splash parks
- c. Playgrounds
- d. Waterfront access
- e. Beach access
- f. Outdoor fitness areas
- g. Covered /indoor sports facilities
- h. Green spaces
- i. Walking trails
- j. Biking trails
- k. Other _____

9. What changes or additional park features would make you more likely to visit the Port of Bellingham's parks and open spaces more? Check all that apply. ***Required**

- a. Improved accessibility
- b. Additional restrooms
- c. Additional picnic tables
- d. Pickleball courts
- e. Basketball courts
- f. Splash parks
- g. Additional playgrounds
- h. Additional outdoor fitness stations
- i. Covered /indoor sports facilities
- j. Additional sitting benches
- k. Covered areas or pavilions
- l. Electric vehicle charging stations
- m. Hand powered boat launch access
- n. Dinghy hand launch access
- o. Adaptive launch access
- p. Additional bike racks
- q. Additional beach access
- r. Additional multi-use walking/ biking paths
- s. Temporary storage rack at launch for paddle-craft (kayak, canoe, paddleboard)
- t. Fishing or crabbing piers
- u. Additional hand powered craft wash down facilities
- v. Improved lighting
- w. Additional parking
- x. Additional art installation(s)
- y. Additional interpretative signage
- z. Additional visitor moorage
- aa. Other _____

Section 2: This section covers the Port's boating and marina facilities. If you do not own a boat/ watercraft or use the marinas, please answer the first question and then your survey is completed!

10. Do you own a boat/ watercraft **and** use the Port's boating and marina facilities, including any of the boat launches? ***Required**

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. If you do own a boat, what type is it generally? **Optional**

- a. Power
- b. Sail

c. Hand powered

12. If you do own a boat with propulsion, how is it powered? **Optional**

- a. Power Boat (gas or diesel)
- b. Power Boat (electric)
- c. Sailboat (gas or diesel axillary)
- d. Sailboat (electric axillary)

13. Would you be more likely to purchase an electric boat if there were electric charging areas on the docks and facilities to support it at Blaine or Squalicum Harbors? **Optional**

- a. Very likely
- b. Somewhat likely
- c. Unlikely
- d. Very unlikely

14. How often do you use the boat launch ramp at Blaine Harbor? **Optional**

- a. Very often (More than once week)
- b. Often (Weekly)
- c. Sometimes (Monthly)
- d. Rarely (A few times a year)
- e. Very rarely (Once per year or less)
- f. Never

15. How often do you use the boat launch ramp at Squalicum Harbor? **Optional**

- a. Very often (More than once week)
- b. Often (Weekly)
- c. Sometimes (Monthly)
- d. Rarely (A few times a year)
- e. Very rarely (Once per year or less)
- f. Never

16. How often do you use the boat launch ramp in Fairhaven? **Optional**

- a. Very often (More than once week)
- b. Often (Weekly)
- c. Sometimes (Monthly)
- d. Rarely (A few times a year)
- e. Very rarely (Once per year or less)
- f. Never

17. How long do you need to park when using the launch ramp? Choose the option that reflects your average time. **Optional**

- a. 15 minutes
- b. 30 minutes
- c. 1 hour
- d. 2 hours
- e. 4 hours
- f. 8 hours
- g. 12 hours
- h. 24 hours
- i. More than 24 hours

18. Do you use a harbor visitor dock for overnight moorage when using the boat launch? **Optional**

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Sometimes

19. What type of harbor and marina amenities are most important to you and your household? Check all that apply. **Optional**

- a. Ample long-term parking
- b. Restrooms
- c. Showers
- d. Laundry
- e. Restaurants
- f. Yacht and boating clubs
- g. Green spaces
- h. Landscaping
- i. Dry storage
- j. Travelift haul out facility
- k. Sewage holding tank pumpout facilities.
- l. Do it yourself (DIY) work areas
- m. Riggers
- n. Dog friendly
- o. Dinghy dock
- p. Dinghy hand launch area
- q. Picnic tables
- r. Community gathering areas
- s. Playgrounds
- t. Accessible and easily walkable docks
- u. Boat launch
- v. Waterfront accessibility/ walking trails
- w. Internet access
- x. Cable tv
- y. Full-service boatyard

- z. Sufficient power and water supply
- aa. Bus access
- bb. Other_____



Summary of Public Input on Port of Bellingham's Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan

Prepared by Triangle Associates

Overview

The Port of Bellingham released a draft *Recreation, Conservation and Public Access Plan* (Draft Recreation Plan Update or Draft Plan) for a five-week public comment period between December 19, 2023, and January 22, 2024. Triangle Associates, an independent third-party consultant, facilitated the public comment process. Members of the public could provide comments on the online platform Konveio, via email, or by phone.

This document summarizes the comments received as a result of this process. A full list of verbatim comments and the Port's responses to each comment, including descriptions of the edits to the Draft Plan that resulted from public engagement, will also be available in spring 2024 in a separate document.

Tally of Comments

The following table tallies the comments received via each platform during the public comment period. Individual commenters on Konveio were able to make multiple comments throughout the document, consequently the number of unique individuals who provided input is lower than the total number of comments received. **There were a total of 159 comments from 50 unique commenters across all platforms.**

	Konveio	Email	Voicemail	Total
Views	1,447			1,447
Comments	142	16	1	159
Unique Commenters	34	15	1	50

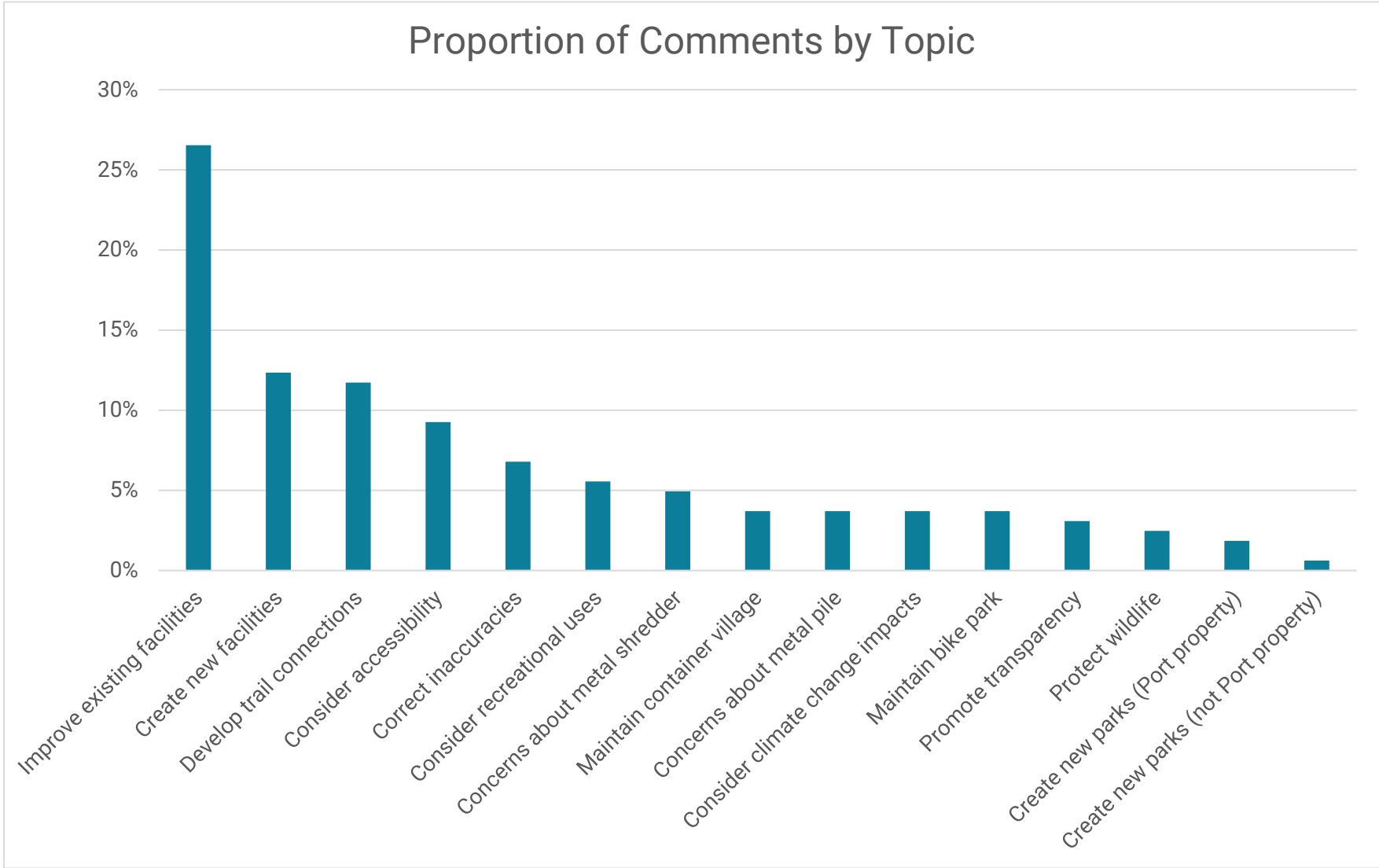
Comment Review Process

After compiling the public comments, the Port of Bellingham and Triangle Associates reviewed and summarized each comment using the following steps:

1. Triangle reviewed the comments and identified consistent topics/themes.
2. Triangle tagged each comment based on the topic(s) that the comment addressed.
3. Port staff reviewed each comment and determined whether it warranted edits to the Draft Plan.
4. Port staff coordinated internally and with external partners as needed to make edits to the Draft Plan.
5. Port staff drafted responses to each comment, including answers to questions and explanations of any changes made to the Draft Plan.

Summary of Comments and Responses

The following chart shows the frequency of topics that comments addressed. Some comments addressed multiple topics, so they are counted multiple times in this chart.



The following table contains a non-exhaustive high-level summary of comments received regarding the Recreation Plan, organized by topic. More details and context can be found in the separate full list of comments and responses document. **Bolded** comments appeared most frequently.

Topic	Summary of Comments
Improve existing facilities	• Upgrade the restrooms at Marine Park (Fairhaven) and the Community Boating Center (e.g., insulation, heating, enlargement, outdoor rinsing area, ventilation). • Enforce launch fee payment. • Prioritize Lockwood/Bellingham International Airport development. • Enhance the ability to land watercraft safely around the Mt. Baker Plywood peninsula area. • Install a security fence and remove the tall mound of dirt at the Mt. Baker Plywood property to facilitate use by non-motorized watercraft. • Improve parking at Marine Park (Fairhaven). • At Fairhaven Boat Launch, keep the launch area free of congestion. • Improve and expand the Marine Life Center Observation Tank. • Bring sand to the beaches at Marine Park (Blaine). • Provide space to the side of the Squalicum boat launch for sail boats to set up the mast and rigging. • Prioritize improving beach access and parking at Little Squalicum Beach. • Install a webcam at Squalicum Beach. • Create a small beach or cove for kilters and windsurfers at the peninsula at Little Squalicum Beach. • In the process of converting the ASB to a marina, add a bridge over the marina entrance, exclude sailboats from this marina, and make the current marina sailboat-only. • Develop the additional property between Boulevard Park and the waterfront industrial area (Salish Landing). • Install a swim dock at Marine or Boulevard Park. • Dredge at the Fairhaven Boat Launch site. • Pave the Fairhaven Boat Launch parking lot. • Ensure the break bulk area at is compatible with residential and commercial uses (Shipping Terminal). • Improve swim platform and access at Taylor Dock. • Add lighting to the South Bay Trail and Boulevard Park. • Add dog waste bag stands and trash cans. • Develop facilities at Little Squalicum Beach Park. • Find a less expensive way to repair the Blaine Boat Launch Ramp Panel. • Add more boat slips and moorage capacity at Blaine Harbor and Squalicum Harbor.

Topic	Summary of Comments
Create new facilities	• Install a dock, pier, and boat launch at Lighthouse Park in Point Roberts. • Build a non-motorized small craft launch on the north side of Marine Drive. • Build a ferry terminal with access to nearby islands. • Develop a community center. • Develop a new indoor recreation facility with a hockey rink. • Create a new hand-launch location on the south end of Chuckanut Bay. • Build a pier at Marine Park (Blaine). • Create a spray park in Marine Park (Fairhaven). • Construct water treatment facilities at boat wash-down areas. • Develop a world class skatepark (Waterfront under a bridge). • Develop a site in which a float plane service could operate (Waterfront). • Develop a new aquatic center (Waterfront). • Create ‘turnkey’ business park facilities for light manufacturing or distribution. • Create safe places to swim in marine water.
Develop trail connections	• The proposal to create trails to connect Lockwood to Kope would be helpful, especially for cyclists and pedestrians to transit between Bellingham and Ferndale. • Make the ASB a full loop or connect it to surrounding areas. • Provide a safe rail crossing to connect the Interurban Trail and Marine Park (Fairhaven). • A loop trail around the ASB would not be possible because a section of the wall will be removed. • Create a gravel trail towards the Little Squalicum Estuary. • Develop a dedicated bike/pedestrian path for the BNSF railroad bridge (Marine Drive). • Develop more cycling routes. • Connect Plover Park to Blaine. • Improve the sidewalk at the Roeder and Squalicum Way road intersection. • Provide signage when trails end in a dead end. • Develop a mixed-mode pathway connecting Boulevard Park to Salish Landing. • Prioritize the Airport Trail Phase 2 project.
Consider accessibility	• Provide vehicle access to Jorgensen pier. • Consider access for different populations, including families with children, people without cars, older adults, and people with disabilities. • Do not allow vehicle access to Jorgensen pier. • Clarify how future plans would impact parking capacity. • Provide funding for public access. • Improve bus access to recreation sites.

Topic	Summary of Comments
	• Ensure that older adults are included in the Port’s advisory groups. • Focus on amenities that support activities that are more accessible to older adults, such as walking.
Correct inaccuracies	• Clarify that Plan objectives are not tied to RCO funding. • Note that development on Port property is also subject to state and federal regulations. • Further describe the relationship between the Recreation Plan and the Growth Management Act. • Clarify that Port property is unlikely to have good infiltration rates because it is often located on fill. • Update the marina occupancy percentage to reflect 2023 data. • Remove references to the Envirostars 5-star rating because it is no longer being used. • Note that launch usage is higher than what is implied by launch usage fee data.
Consider recreational uses	• Wind sports, including kite launching and windsurfing, are growing in popularity in Bellingham. • Cold plunging is growing in popularity. • Boaters would benefit from floats being returned to the water earlier in the spring (Fairhaven Boat Launch). • Focus on activities that are specifically relevant to Bellingham and the Port. • Better support the outdoor recreation sector by working with small maritime business. • Pickleball is growing in popularity. • The waterfront should prioritize recreational uses over industrial ones.
Concerns about metal shredder	• A metal shredder would negatively impact safety and the environment at Little Squalicum Beach and the Birchwood neighborhood. • A metal shredder would negatively impact recreation, tourism, and local business appeal. • More transparency regarding the metal shredder is needed.
Maintain container village	• Make the container village permanent.
Concerns about metal pile (Shipping Terminal)	• The metal pile negatively impacts the health of the neighboring environment. • Provide more details about future plans for the light industrial area that is currently used as scrap metal storage. • The scrap metal site prevents the adjacent area from being attractive to commercial development. • The metal pile poses problems to future recreational uses, housing, tourism, and business uses. • More transparency about the metal pile is needed.

Topic	Summary of Comments
Consider climate change impacts	• Require proposed projects to account for future climate change impacts (precipitation, sea level rise, weather conditions, etc.). • Consider the future need to relocate Port facilities due to sea level rise. • Add a climate projection statement. • Link the Recreation Plan to the Climate Action Strategy more specifically.
Maintain bike park	• Make the pump track permanent. • Create park space around the pump track. • Maintain a viewshed toward the water from the pump track area.
Promote transparency	• Adjust maps in the draft plan for clarity. • Clarify the approval process of the Recreation Plan. • Explain the process of making decisions about the metal pile and metal shredder. • When using demographic data for planning decisions, stratify by age.
Protect wildlife	• Create signage for no-idle zones near sensitive wildlife habitat (Marine Park). • Create signage indicating no access to the lagoon (Marine Park). • Plant trees. • Remove blackberries in the northwest part of the peninsula at Squalicum Harbor. • Enhance vegetation around estuaries. • Enhance the intertidal area on City-owned property near McKenzie.
Create new parks (Port property)	• Create floating parks.
Create new parks (not Port property)	• Create a public park in the Lockwood area.