



Walk & Roll Bellingham

Bellingham City Council Candidate Questionnaire - 2021

Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions for us. Please cite specific examples for each question, as those help us understand the types of proposals you might bring rather than general policy goals.

1) Since land use, zoning, and transportation are integrally linked how would you change these policies to improve access to active transportation?

Tonia Boze

The goal here should be to provide a certain level of mobility. We need to find out what residents use and how transit can adjust to their community. This will look different for the single mom vs. the college student. All voices need to be heard and the most vulnerable made a priority.

Kristina Michele Martens

While I don't have a lot of personal experience with zoning and land use policies, I want to closely look at this to see how we can help create a more vibrant and useful transportation system. For instance, areas like the Birchwood neighborhood are in a food desert and the residents don't have the best access to public transportation and we need to look closely at what we can do to not only bring a grocery store back to the neighborhood, we need to make sure the residents have access to viable transportation and sidewalks to create a more vibrant and functioning neighborhood that enables all residents to move freely.

Russell Whidbee

Thankfully, the Bellingham Transportation Fund passed overwhelmingly for a second time. The first levy funds helped to accomplish great improvements towards creating safe opportunities for multimodal transportation, and I am confident the continuance of this levy will help fund many additional improvements. As someone who has built a career in assisting individuals to understand finances and teaching students accounting at the Community College, my experience and knowledge will be an asset to ensure fiscal oversight for accountability to the voters who supported this levy and ensure equitability of transportation improvements for our community.

How would I change these policies? I will list several goals below, yet more will be identified through collaboration with community stakeholders so I fully understand our needs. I would seek out and listen to those who are invested and know what needs to be improved. I would also rely on some of my own experiences and insights. As someone who has recently injured their knee and needs assistance to walk right now until surgery, I am seeing firsthand the need to remove barriers. I walk on the uneven sidewalks, navigate the lack of ADA curb cuts and even have to walk in the street where we have blocks without sidewalks in our pre-1970's neighborhoods. Fixing transportation infrastructure in our older neighborhoods will take decades and will be expensive. To avoid creating new transportation issues we must limit sprawl and ensure green field developments are built with full multimodal transportation amenities. We should not approve variances for these essential installations.

Along Samish way, there is a building boom due to tax incentives that encourages development in this location. To avoid sprawl and encourage high density development the city should expand these incentives to include main transportation corridors and other urban villages that have not yet seen the same investments. This will help to incentivize housing where we have access to our improved multimodal transportation infrastructure. It is important that we continue to focus on the use of infill, urban villages, and increase our density along our main urban corridors - not only for transportation but addressing our climate action plan. We need to not only ensure new greenfield development addresses our multimodal transportation needs, but to legislate a requirement for electric charging stations and locked bike storage lockers in our multifamily buildings. I will advocate to increase requirements supporting multimodal transportation infrastructure in our building codes.



Walk & Roll Bellingham

Currently the large development projects happening in north Bellingham seem out of step with our priorities. Some of the new developments are situated where they are not on main bus routes (King Mountain and North Cordata) where residents must drive to stores and services. We need to make sure these large developments work with WTA to create a main bus line into their design and that resident can walk to amenities. I want to work with our Planning Department to update the areas of Cordata and King Mountain to have urban villages as part of their neighborhood plans so that the residents do not have to take a car to get to the store or to services. Both have small retail zoning, but we must make it more robust to serve these growing communities. Increasing our housing options is important, but equally important is to create vibrant communities where one does not have to get into a car to participate. This would be an improvement I would like to pursue with the Planning Department and our Comprehensive Plan Update. The city has a responsibility to provide some of these amenities too. I will push for a library extension for North Bellingham.

Additionally, I appreciate how Public Works and the Parks Departments are now using a tiered priority rating system to ensure projects will be focused on neighborhoods that have seen a past imbalance of funding and improvements. Recently, this priority rating system helped focus Transportation Improvement Projects (TIP) updates to fund much needed projects in the Birchwood Neighborhood. I look forward to safer routes for our children to walk and bike to school and an improved park for them to play in. As a council member, I will make sure our neighborhoods benefit from these funds where they are needed the most.

2) How could the City of Bellingham improve its active transportation facilities and achieve Target Zero?

Tonia Boze

Educating drivers, those who ride, walk and run on how to safely share the road as well as what best practices are in regards to getting rid of distractions. Reducing speed limits in areas where road share is the heaviest, lowering limits on impaired driving and enforcing laws when it comes to distracted driving. I think a regular evaluation of the safety in our current design of our bike lanes, crosswalks, and sidewalks is beneficial. The standard of safety and mobility should be equal in the north end of town as it is in the south end. It's important to research other areas, learn and make a change if it could greatly move us closer to the goal of Target Zero.

Kristina Michele Martens

We need to look at the underlying issues that cause traffic fatalities and injuries. I believe part of that is making sure we have to create more bike lanes and creating more intersections where bicyclists can safely access a traffic light. We also need to help educate the public about the dangers of impaired driving and make sure people take the proper precautions when going out, whether that be having a designated driver or utilizing an alternative transportation method to get home safely. I believe things like the Western shuttle are helpful in keeping us all safe and I want to work with WTA to find ways to run buses later at night so that people would have access to public transportation to get home safely.

Russ Whidbee

I wish this was about climate action and reducing (eliminating) fossil fuel engines to achieve zero emissions- along with creating trip reductions and use of multimodal options to get us there, but I assume Target Zero is the state's goal of zero traffic fatalities. What we can do to help eliminate traffic fatalities is to improve our infrastructure. I am reminded about a response by community members about their opinion regarding commuting by bikes. Many would if they felt safer. A major improvement would be more installations of protected and separated bike lanes. We must prioritize this. I was extremely disappointed when, due to cost, only painted lanes were implemented along Roeder Avenue. Standing with the striking Teamsters along that road recently, it was impressive to see residents use those bike lanes. I do think we would see more individuals use this transportation route had there been protected lanes. Another improvement I would like to see implemented across Bellingham is the new road paint that marks cars to stop before the crosswalks at major intersections (Ellis) with a designated space for bikes to be in front of the cars at a red light. Making bicyclist and pedestrians visible is essential. The lighted HAWK pedestrian crossing signals along Lakeway that have an auditory signal is another improvement I would like to see implemented across



Walk & Roll Bellingham

the city at all major arterial crossings. I believe we can reduce car trips by having more of these safety features. Our continued partnership with WTA is also a win-win for the climate and trip reduction. Getting people out of cars seems to be an intuitive way of reducing road accidents.

3) Currently, Bellingham's bicycle mode share (percentage trips by bike) is 4-5%. In the most recent TRAM (Transportation Report on Annual Mobility) report, the bicycle mode share goal for 2036 is 12%. What would you do to help us reach this bike mode share goal?

Tonia Boze

I would advocate for a culture of safety. The safer people feel the more likely they will be to increase their use of public transit, trails and road share. This includes planned maintenance as well as safety from personal injury, petty theft and overall crime. I personally ride/run to work often but there are certain trails or hours of the day I don't feel safe doing so. This needs to be addressed to encourage more participation. Establishing partnerships with private businesses and existing organizations with getting bikes, and other alternative means of mobility to those that cannot otherwise afford it would also be a huge improvement in moving toward the 12% goal. It's also a great way to get people outside, increase movement and improve their overall health!

Kristina Michele Martens

I believe the residents of Bellingham have done a great job with approving the green levy, which has helped to create more safe bike lanes. We need to create more safe spaces for bicycles to move freely throughout our community. I also think incentives like Smart Trips from WTA entice our residents to use bikes and other forms of transportation. We've learned with the states vaccine lottery that providing incentives works to get people to do things to help the community.

Russ Whidbee

As mentioned previously, Bellingham needs to increase their investment in our infrastructure to support safe commutes. To improve the percentage of trips by bike, the city must continue to fund and install protected or separated bike lanes to motivate the 60% surveyed who may use a bike if they felt safe. As we improve our current roadways, we must invest in this infrastructure as part of that improvement project. Another great step recently taken by our Parks Department and council was to propose and support the use of E-bikes on our interurban trails. As our population ages or for those who are working on endurance, e-bikes are a wonderful option for transportation. Some individuals may not feel safe on the roads with traffic, but they may feel safe on an interurban trail. Education will be important to make sure all users are compatible and those who walk also feel and remain safe.

Economics also play a part in access to bikes. I fully supported the City of Bellingham's recent decision to lease city property downtown to The Pedal Project/HUB at a below market rate. This great organization helps to recycle bikes and bike parts to keep them out of landfill and put them back in to the community at a reasonable cost. It will also help the infrastructure by providing a central location for maintenance workshops and tire repair. As a City of Bellingham Council member, I will support these types of initiatives and look for additional opportunities to provide alternative transportation options for our community.

4) How can the City of Bellingham create more livable spaces and address equity issues in housing and transportation?

Tonia Boze

Lower income areas are usually more reliant on cars. Many times, there are multiple jobs they are working or they have to travel farther to get to work. Competitive access to the greatest number of jobs within a 30 minute period would be a great help to these individuals. Streamlining the permit process, for new construction and renovation would greatly help our housing issues. Allowing tiny homes, cottages, etc. creates more opportunities for people to find affordable rentals.



Walk & Roll Bellingham

Kristina Michele Martens

Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home. We're not going to solve the housing and homelessness crisis without more housing. The Puget Sound region is growing in population and we need city leaders who embrace responsible growth.

Zoning laws were created decades ago in a very different economy. We need to update them to allow for more housing types in all of our neighborhoods, not just a few. The "urban villages" idea pioneered by the city government over the last decade is helping, but it's not enough on its own. The city's Infill Toolkit is also a solid step in the right direction and I look forward to expanding its use.

Our city's Planning Department has some creative staff who are working hard to innovate. And a huge majority of voters in Bellingham stepped up in a big way by passing the bold Bellingham Home Fund. I commit to being a city councilmember who embraces big, bold ideas rooted in data and evidence. Let's build on our successes.

Russ Whidbee

Housing is a huge issue in our community as it is in many cities along the west coast. There are opportunities to influence costs by incentivizing density which can lower the cost of building- less land and shared walls can be cost effective. We also need to adhere to the voter's wishes to use our housing levy to create subsidized housing along with finding new partnerships to create more affordable workforce housing. A friend and colleague on Bellingham City Council is currently working with union representatives who invest their national pension funds into building workforce housing at a modest return rate. They are interested in a Bellingham partnership having maximized their housing development investments in Seattle and Portland. I will be excited to team up with her to use my finance background to help create new funding partnerships that can lead to affordable housing and affordable ownership (cooperative housing opportunities). One of their requirements for investing is for new housing to be built within a 15-minute walk of a major transportation line. Our investment in transportation is often an incentive to housing investment. There are programs that can help reduce housing interest rates for buyers near alternative transportation routes. Reduction of transportation costs will also help families with lessor means who can't afford cars. We have a responsibility as city leaders to ensure equitability for our community who rely on alternative transportation to work, school, and services.

I previously mentioned the project funding tiered rating system from the Parks and Public Works Departments as a good step to help create equity in less served low-income neighborhoods. I would not only encourage the continuance of this type of rating system, I would also examine how they determine each project's rating and look for possible improvements to ensure the desired outcomes. Livable spaces are those where we can access essential needs, work, and recreate. Our urban villages, with reduced parking and increased transportation infrastructure, can help create more housing on a smaller footprint that is walkable to services.

Another avenue to create a more equitable livable community would be to examine, and support a no-fare bus ridership. During COVID, riding the bus was free. I would like to make that a permanent change to help increase ridership and assist households who may be burdened.

I am excited to continue to learn more about pathways to provide leadership for our community that will support multimodal transportation options and infrastructure. I appreciated your questions and having the opportunity to reflect on this important work.