

# Snohomish First Street Master Plan | Initial Conditions Report

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this report is to compile and communicate our understanding of existing conditions of Snohomish’s First Street, considering block- and parcel- level details as well as the larger context of the City of Snohomish and its history, planning efforts, infrastructure, land use, and ecology. Through this report, we aim to develop a comprehensive understanding of the assets and challenges facing First Street, goals and visions for the future of First Street, and contextual factors impacting future master planning efforts. This report will aid in upcoming community visioning, program exploration, and design development phases.

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## Executive Summary

### *Community Context*

This section summarizes the historic and community context in which the First Street Redevelopment will take place. Additionally, it will provide an overview of prior city plans up to current ones and visions of the community held by the city’s leadership, local organizations, and residents. Divided into three areas of focus, the subsection begins with an overview of the “Snohomish Context,” a broad review of the city’s history, population, economy, and community as a whole. Next, “Snohomish Goals and Visions” outlines key values of the city government and community as developed and stated in previously published plans. Lastly, “First Street Context” is devoted to a more focused understanding of the social, economic, and characteristic factors that make up First Street specifically. In this subsection, the reader will be able to trace First Street back to the City of Snohomish’s establishment in 1861, as center for a growing timber industry, through the 1911 “Great Fire of Snohomish” that reshaped downtown, up to its current revitalization efforts that emphasize First Street’s historic character and richly preserved cultural and architectural heritage.

The critical aim of this section of the report is to link the histories of the city’s founding and first inhabitants—and the origins of First Street as a cornerstone of Snohomish’s community, economy, and culture—to uses of First Street over time up to present day. First Street is a convergence point for the city’s businesses, relationships, communities, visitors, and identity. A contextual understanding of its successes, challenges, and demographics helps to better inform redevelopment of such a foundational street in an cooperative and integrated manner. Thanks to the efforts of key organizations within the community, the city has maintained a unique character

and preserved physical ties to its history while also looking to its future with vested interest in making Snohomish's First Street even more vibrant and welcoming for years to come.

### *Capital Facilities*

The Capital Facilities section informs the physical analysis of existing circulations, transportation networks, utilities, infrastructure, and the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) in Snohomish, mainly representing First Street. The current physical conditions of First Street in Snohomish encompass commercial corridors with two-lane streets, shared space for bike and traffic, and street parking. The diverse character of commercials has excellent potential to attract locals and tourists for shopping and dining. However, the existing circulation and wayfinding analysis reveal challenges, including aging sidewalks with tripping hazards, a lack of traffic control measures and curb management, faded crosswalks, and sharrow markings. A critical issue evident in parking remains limited, with demand for positioning adjustment. Accompanied by limited transit access and periodic loading service, this issue exacerbates congestion during peak hours. Furthermore, the Snohomish Public Utility supplies clean and renewable electricity serving the city's needs, necessitating revitalization and system separation. Upon considering these challenges, the City Capital Improvement Plan addresses priority spending to enhance the infrastructure of First Street, aligning with current transportation policies' projection to improve the physical infrastructure in First Street, Snohomish.

First Street currently provides ample parking—about 589 spaces along and within one block of First St—thanks to diagonal stalls along both sides of the street, with additional parallel and diagonal parking available on intersecting streets, as well as designated public parking west of the main historic area's entry intersection. Parking availability, however, as discovered in a parking inventory study conducted for this report, remains limited immediately on First St, especially during busy periods (summer, weekends, events, etc.) as the street is a popular shopping and dining area for locals and tourists alike. (Driving is necessitated for many due to limited broader transit access.) Updates to streetscape infrastructure, improved curb management and clarity, and a formalization of the western public parking lot are recommended to address this parking strain.

### *Land Use & Environment*

The Land Use & Environment section provides a comprehensive overview of the current built landscape and environmental conditions of First Street. This section aims to lay the foundation for the future First Street Master Plan by way of an in-depth analysis of First Street's current zoning, streetscape, ecological, and environmental characteristics. The Land Use & Environment sub-team acknowledges the purpose of this research in its relationship to overall challenges and opportunities, and with this in perspective, attempts to make future recommendations for the site; while upholding the long-term visioning and preservation goals of the historic downtown district.

Section 1, “Land Use”, opens with an assessment of the “Specifics of the Site”, showcasing the current storefronts housed on First Street, and articulating a wide range of business types covering various amenities/categories. This section also reviews the current zoning designations within the city, focusing on the historic district, current housing market conditions, and population trends. We provide insight into the principles of The Regional Growth Strategy and Countywide Planning Policies, which contribute to guiding and managing future growth. We also explore the current commercial vacancies along First Street and suggest new business ventures that the area currently lacks to fill them. We close this section by observing the current streetscape design/ecology characteristics, which are maintained under the Historic District Design Standards.

Section 2, “Ecological Conditions”, assesses the current ecological landscape of the site, addressing green space and habitats. It explores the current open space land designations in Snohomish, noting a significant portion located within the Historic District; these being Kla Ha Ya Park and Cady Park, located adjacent to First Street. It also addresses future open space expansion. This section closes by exploring the habitats of Snohomish, and the influences from the area's indigenous roots. It explores the variety of species and vegetation and also highlights forestry (a primary industry during the town's inception).

Section 3, “Environmental Conditions and Hazard Mitigation”, explores the flooding implications for the site. This section provides insight into the policy guides for the impact of natural disasters, while also providing clarity on the risk assessment of these events. The conditions also present air quality goals and concerns, citing the experiences of community members during wildfires, as well as evidence from previous research and public engagement processes.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and challenges, such as current zoning trends conflicting with housing/business needs and recurrent disruptive flooding. Moving forward, priorities include enforcing parking rules to enhance air quality and pedestrian experience. As well as, adapting buildings to mitigate impacts from wildfire smoke and climate change while addressing the immediate housing shortage. There's also an opportunity to attract new categories of businesses to First Street, so long as they respect the deeply ingrained history and tradition of the city. Infrastructure changes should consider the increasing frequency of natural hazards globally.

## Key Findings

1. The First Street redevelopment offers an opportunity to adapt urban form for climate resilience through expansion of multimodal transportation options and integration of more green space to mitigate impacts of air pollution, urban heat island effect, and flooding.
2. The City of Snohomish has strong networks of community organizations and residents, passionate about the city's character and quirks. Key organizations include the Historic Downtown Snohomish Association, Arts of Snohomish, Snohomish Walks, and the Snohomish Historical Society, among others.
3. Diversification of employment opportunities and housing stock is necessary in order to reverse current commuter patterns, relieve cost burdens, and prepare for projected population growth.
4. Inspiration for First Street redevelopment can be taken from other successful Main Streets of America, including fellow west coast small towns Langley, Washington and Hood River, Oregon.
5. Streetscape infrastructure – existing sidewalks, curbs, and paint – are deteriorating.
6. Parking on and adjacent to First Street is confusing, unevenly utilized, and unregulated, leading to parking misuse, crowding, and heightened greenhouse gas emissions. There are similar issues with large trucks; loading trucks making deliveries working hours potentially cause congestion during peak hours and cover storefronts.
7. There are ecological impacts due to flooding, landslides, and soil erosion that need to be addressed when there are any infrastructure changes made.
8. To maintain historic character, the process of alterations or additions is partnered with the Snohomish County Historic Preservation Commission.

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# I. Community Context

## Snohomish Context

### *Historic Context*

The City of Snohomish is located just north of where the Pilchuck River empties into the Snohomish River. Snohomish County was established by white settlers in 1861 after arriving at the confluence of the two rivers just a few years prior. The area was home to fisherpeople, hunters, and gatherers of the Snohomish Tribe before they were forcibly relocated to Tulalip Reservation after the 1855 signing of the Point Elliott Treaty (City of Snohomish Washington, “History of Snohomish”).

Snohomish was initially attractive to white settlers due to its location along the rivers and ability to support nearby agricultural communities, but soon settlers realized the potential profit of the nearby Douglas Fir forests, and timber production became a dominant activity alongside family farming (“History of Snohomish”).

The City of Snohomish was incorporated in 1890. When the construction of the Great Northern Railway was completed in 1893, the route from St. Paul to Seattle included a stop in Snohomish, increasing the City’s visibility and starting a trend of population growth that has continued (with a few dips and dramatic spikes) through today (Snohomish County Tomorrow 2015 Growth Monitoring Report). The railroad ran along what is now the River Front trail (Snohomish Walks).



Figure 1. “Snohomish in 1866. The Eagle Saloon (Ferguson) on the left, Sinclair and Clendenning store on the right. Taken from the south bank of Snohomish River.” (Source: Snohomish Historical Society archives via Snohomish Walks)

## Location

Located about 30 miles north of Seattle, the City of Snohomish is designated a small city within Snohomish County. Tucked in between the fields of the Snohomish and Pilchuck River valleys, away from the I-5 corridor, Snohomish City is set apart from the heavy urbanized metropolitan areas of Western Washington. Its unique and picturesque location is attractive to regional visitors hoping to get away from the big city. Snohomish is now a tourist destination where visitors come to enjoy shopping and entertainment experiences as well as the Historic Downtown.

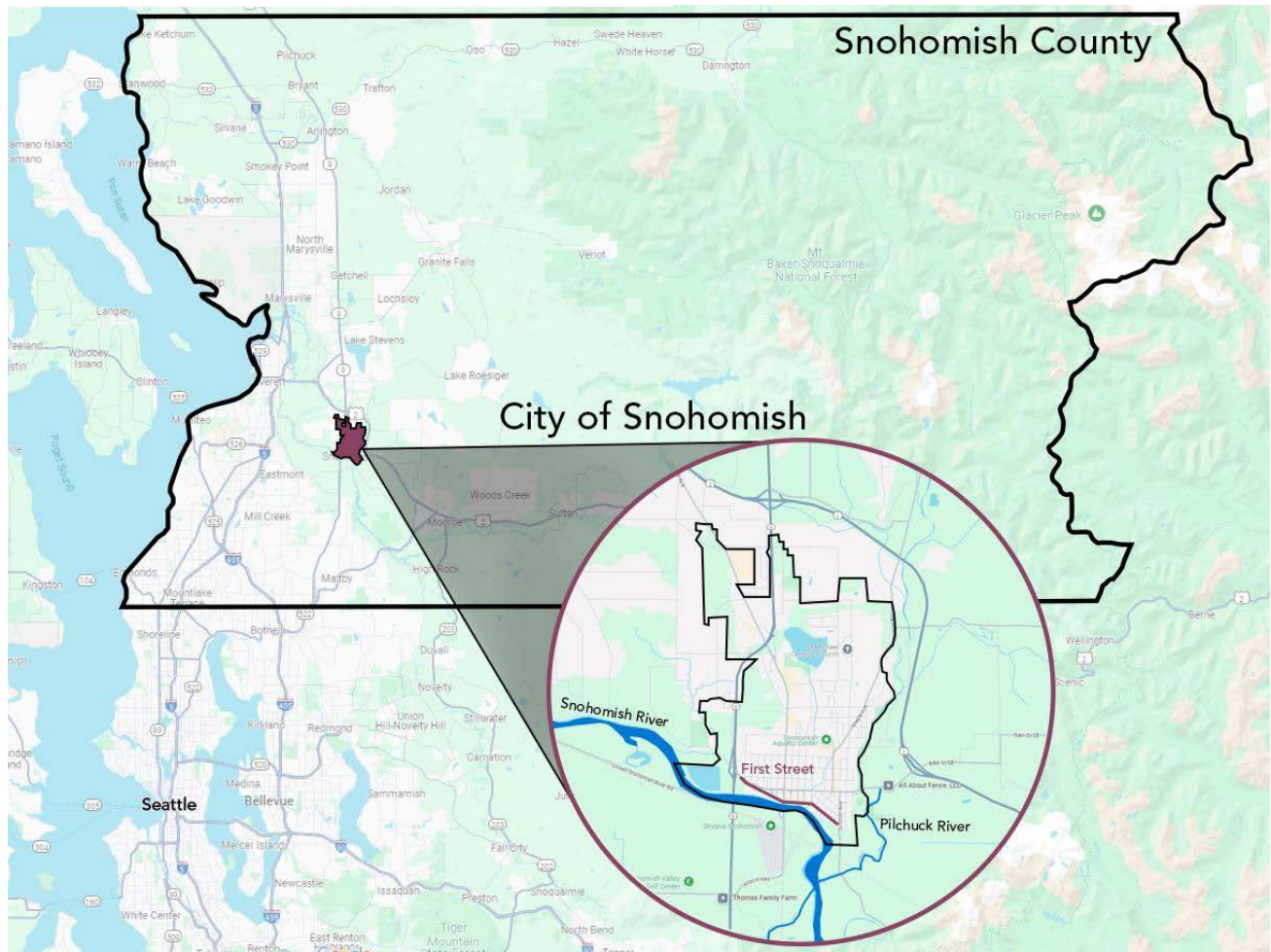


Figure 2. City of Snohomish and First Street in Context (Map by Katherine Magee)

Snohomish is also considered a “free-standing city” in the Puget Sound Regional Council’s Vision 2040 due to its isolated location “separated from the contiguous urban growth area.” According to the same document, free-standing cities should serve as hubs for “relatively higher-density housing choices and as job and service centers for surrounding rural areas” (Puget Sound Regional Council, 2020, 34)



While small cities and towns in Snohomish County are expected to accommodate a higher share of countywide growth compared to larger cities and rural areas, the City of Snohomish is not expected to grow as much as other small cities in the region (Puget Sound Regional Council, 2020, 34).

### *Population*

According to the latest census data, the population of Snohomish is just over 10,000. Snohomish has a 2035 population growth target of 14,494 for the city and urban growth area (City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan 2022), which represents a 43% increase in population from 2023. This projected growth rate is consistent with the city's historic trend, but is a relatively small growth projection compared to other large and small cities; for example, Sultan, an adjacent small city, is expected to see a 68% growth in population by 2035.

In 2022, 54.5% of the city's total population was female and the median age was 38 years, up from 34.4 in 2000. The city's average age has shifted in recent decades to an older population; between 2012 and 2022, residents in the 15-44 years age groups have decreased in population while residents aged 60+ have increased. Snohomish's median age is slightly younger than that of Snohomish County overall (38.3). About 81% of the city's population is white, with the second largest racial group identifying as two or more races (9.5% of the population). The minority population in the city has increased by about 15% since 2000.

The majority of Snohomish residents of 25 years and older have a high school diploma (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024). The city's median household income was \$70,234 in 2022, low compared to the county's median household income of \$104,083 in the same year (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024; U.S. Census Bureau).

### *Commuters & Housing*

Census data shows that most people who work in the City of Snohomish do not *live* there – 92% of workers commute in from Everett, Lake Stevens, Marysville, or unincorporated Snohomish County – and 95% of Snohomish residents commute out of the city for work, primarily to Everett and Seattle (City of Snohomish Washington “Economic Development”). Fewer than 500 of the 6,204 jobs within the city are held by residents of Snohomish, according to a 2022 Housing Assessment and Gap Analysis. The average commute time for working residents of Snohomish is 31.3 minutes via car, according to the same analysis (City of Snohomish, Housing Assessment & Gap Analysis).

This discrepancy is likely due to retail wages not covering the cost of housing in Snohomish; the median wage for Snohomish residents who commute *out* for work is about \$10k higher per year than the median wage of those who commute *into* Snohomish (City of Snohomish Washington, “Economic Development”). Further, housing in Snohomish is generally unaffordable: 60% of the

city's housing stock is made up of single-family homes while only 19% consists of studio and one-bedroom units. As a result, 30% of Snohomish homeowners and 40% of renters are cost-burdened, spending 30% or more of their income on housing costs.

Nearly 47% of all households in the City of Snohomish are renters, and the average household size is 2.33, with recent increases in one-and two-person households and reduction of households of three or more people. It should be noted that this data doesn't align well with the housing stock in Snohomish; it is likely that many residents live in homes or units that were built for larger households due to general housing scarcity.

### *Economy*

Environmental regulations passed by the federal and Washington State governments in the 1970s and 1980s slowed Snohomish's dominant timber industry and forced a pivot in the city's economic focus towards tourism. With its many curated antique stores and collection of other local-owned small businesses, bakeries, and restaurants, Snohomish grew as a tourist destination. The City leaned into its "small-town vibe" and identity as the "Antique Capital of the Northwest" as its new economic model, based in tourism as well as in historic preservation (Porter, 2021). Historic Downtown Snohomish remains famous as a lively shopping destination for locals and tourists alike, with antiquing as a "cornerstone" of the historic downtown (City of Snohomish Washington, "Economic Development").

There are currently 1,159 business licenses registered in the City of Snohomish (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024). Sales tax revenues are one of the largest revenue sources for the City; 2021 sales tax revenues were around \$5.25 million and are expected to continue growing (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024).

With its dependence on sales tax and relatively small population, the City's economy relies on tourism – bringing people in from outside the city to spend money (Palmer, 2017). On its [LinkedIn page](#), the City of Snohomish promotes itself as one of the "Top 10 Coolest Towns in America" and records that First Street "lures over 70,000 tourists each year," although this data (or any other data regarding tourism in specifically the City of Snohomish) is unable to corroborated elsewhere.

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## Snohomish Goals & Visions

The City of Snohomish's policies and stated goals in its 2022 Comprehensive Plan commit to preserving and restoring ecosystems, improving water quality, and "providing the facilities and compact, walkable, and transit-compatible urban form necessary to reduce greenhouse gasses and other emissions as well as providing for residents' health and wellbeing" (City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan, 2022, 4-i).

In 2013, City of Snohomish adopted *Imagine Snohomish: Promoting Vitality and Preserving Character*, a document sharing “hopes and desires for the future of the community” compiled from public meetings and strategic planning among City Council and Snohomish residents (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024). Key values of the Snohomish community included retaining small-town character (strong connection to neighbors, historic preservation, a vibrant local business scene), environmental stewardship, and heritage (with a focus on high quality public spaces, schools, nature connections, and local business support). This visioning also emphasized Snohomish as a tourist destination. These community-developed goals (see Figure 3 below) are still used in city planning processes and are reflected in current plans and budgets.

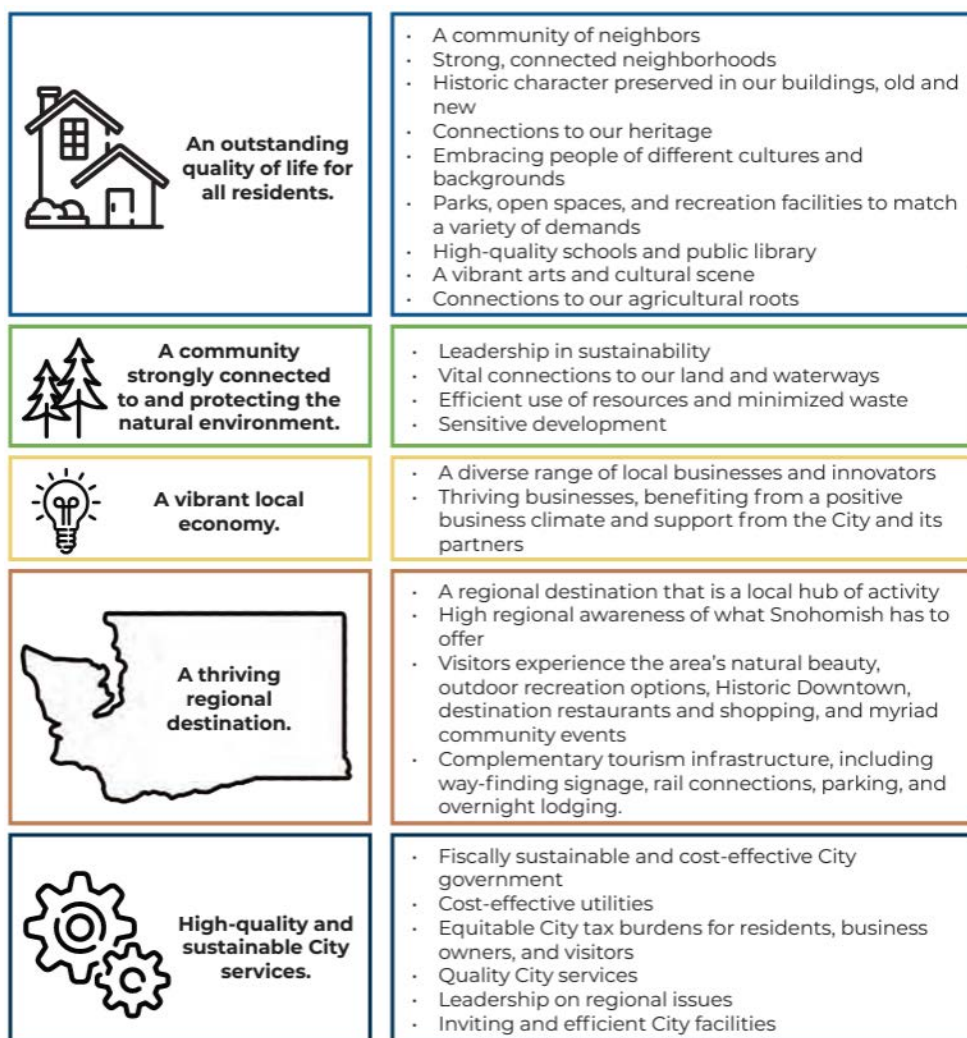


Figure 3. City of Snohomish Community Values (Source: Imagine Snohomish via City of Snohomish 2023-2024 Proposed Budget)

*Infrastructure, Transportation, and Community Development*

In a 2022 inventory of the city's facilities, staff, and financial resources, the City of Snohomish recognized gaps in staffing capabilities to respond to community needs as well as outdated infrastructure and capital facilities. The City had fallen into a pattern of delaying slated infrastructure and transportation projects, waiting to deal with emergency-level repairs rather than consistently updating city facilities and systems, leading to higher costs, lower levels of service, and slower responses to community needs (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024). In the Winter 2023 Quarterly Report presented by the City of Snohomish, Mayor Linda Redmon announced long-term plans to modernize city systems (including communications channels between community residents and the City), fill staffing gaps and strengthening partnerships in order to provide better support for community needs (especially related to schools, libraries, senior centers, food banks, and public safety), and work with community members on issues of housing affordability, inclusivity, and environmental protection (Redmon, 2023). The Mayor also announced a new “ambitious” Capital Improvement Plan. All of these points of emphasis are reflected in the 2023-2024 Biennial Budget (see Figure 4 below).

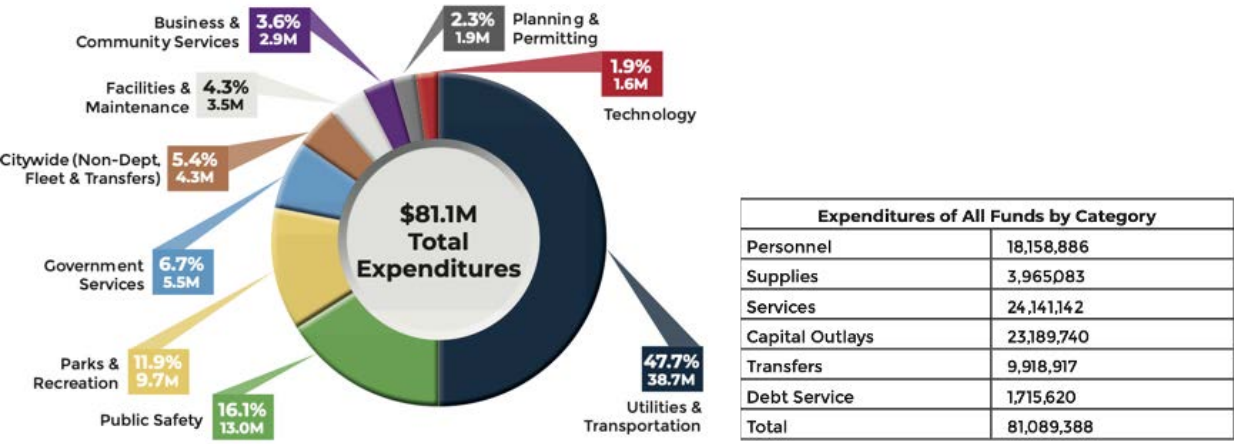


Figure 4. 2023-2024 City of Snohomish Expenditure (Source: City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024)

Around \$24 million of the total \$81 million budget (more than 28%) is allocated to service expenditures: public safety, legal services, professional services, and utilities. Notably, funding for Community Engagement and Strategic Initiatives has increased dramatically since the previous 2021-2022 budget allocation; there was a 113.8% increase in funding in this category between the previous budget and the current budget, bringing the total to \$1,187,630 for FY 2023-2024. This fund, while allocated to continue the success of 2022 community engagement strategies – providing community event support and small business training in response to COVID-19, collaboration with community members, mapping the city’s business practices,

providing behavioral and mental health services – it is also intended to support several new priorities for 2023-2024, such as developing a comprehensive community engagement plan and “Map Your Neighborhood” disaster-preparedness program, working with marginalized communities, developing an economic development strategy, and maintaining the Carnegie Building as a community space (City of Snohomish Proposed Budget 2023-2024).

### *Economy*

Key economic goals stated in the City’s Comprehensive Plan include: attracting more and better local employment options, increasing municipal revenues to enhance public services and facilities, improving the city’s physical environment, and diversifying the range of businesses within the community. Diversifying would not create a more stable economic base moving into an uncertain future, but it also creates a greater variety in employment opportunities (attracting more people to work in Snohomish) and a greater variety of shopping, entertainment, and other tourist activities (City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan, 2022).

This goal to diversify the city’s economy is consistent. In the 2013 *Imagine Snohomish* Strategic Plan, “a vibrant local economy” is outlined as one of the City’s five key visions, which will be achieved through building “a diverse range of local businesses and innovators” as well as a “positive business climate” with support from the City and its partners to help businesses thrive (City of Snohomish & Berk Consulting, 2013). The City’s web portal for Economic Development emphasizes the City’s unique advantage in its proximity to “major industry hubs of bio-tech, aerospace/Boeing, hi-tech, construction, and medical markets,” again suggesting movement toward diversification (City of Snohomish Washington “Economic Development”).

The same web portal states the importance of “natural areas, sports, farms, and local history” to its attractiveness and potential for economic development. The City sees its reputation for picturesque parks and unique “high quality” character as key to economic growth. In the Comprehensive Plan’s “Park Element,” the City of Snohomish states its intention to increase parks and open space, not only for the aesthetic, ecological and public health benefits, but also to bump up property values of adjacent parcels and stimulate economic development by attracting businesses, tourists, and residents.

### *Tourism*

As previously mentioned, Snohomish is known for its many antique stores and its historic downtown; the City has additionally encouraged business and civic activities to promote the city as a tourist destination– including outdoor recreation opportunities, arts and culture, annual events, and local wineries and breweries. In its updated Comprehensive Plan, the city recognizes its potential for ecotourism and bicycle tourism as many regional bicyclists regularly make a stop in Snohomish (City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan, 2022).

In 2018, the Snohomish County Tourist Promotion Area was established, granting funds to grow the county’s tourism economy by encouraging overnight stays, emphasizing the importance of tourism to Snohomish County’s as well as Snohomish City’s economies; tourism generates over 10,000 jobs and over \$1 billion in visitor spending in Snohomish County per year (Snohomish County Washington, “Snohomish County Tourism”). The City additionally receives about \$8500 per year from a Washington State fund for tourism, which is distributed to local businesses via grant to promote tourism (Palmer, 2017).

### *Climate and Environment*

In response to Washington State’s net-zero goal by the year 2050, the City of Snohomish aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 103,497 megatons (35%) in the next seven years (UW Climate Planning Studio, 2023). To move towards this goal, the City of Snohomish partnered with the Snohomish Climate Planning Studio – a group of Master of Urban Planning students from the University of Washington – to develop policy recommendations to incorporate into the Climate and Environment Element in the 2024 update of the City’s Comprehensive Plan. Recommendations produced by this partnership included: reducing greenhouse gas emissions through reducing natural gas dependency; promoting localized adaptation to climate hazards like flooding, extreme heat, and exposure to wildfire smoke; integrating equity and environmental justice; and considering co-benefits of individual policies to enhance the overall impact on the City’s health, well-being, and climate preparedness.

Of particular relevance to First Street are impending threats of extreme precipitation and flooding; as First Street runs parallel to the Snohomish River, extreme weather events have the potential to impact historic character, structural integrity of buildings and soil, safety, and tourism on First Street (City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan Draft, 2024).

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## First Street Context

First Street has been central to economic growth in the City of Snohomish for centuries. From the housing the first residential and public buildings in the city (Ferguson’s Cottage built in 1859 and Carnegie Library built in 1910), to the growth of milling and introduction of rail lines, to the devastating 1911 fire, growth of tourism, and contemporary revitalization efforts, First Street reflects the town’s resilience and adaptive strategies. In 1960, a push to preserve the character and commercial viability of the First Street led to the establishment of the Snohomish Historic District and placement on the National and State Historic Registers. First Street remains a lively and growing commercial and community center year-round.



Figure 5. First Street Context Map

*History*

The history of First Street cannot be separated from Snohomish's history; Ferguson’s Cottage, built in Steilacoom and shipped upriver in 1859 and occupied by Emory Canada Ferguson, was the first building in Snohomish. Placed on a cleared hillside overlooking the Snohomish River, this structure was a home, as well as Snohomish County’s first courthouse, post office and city hall (Snohomish Stories, “Ferguson Family Archives,” 2019). In the same year, Woodbury/Celndenning claimed land on the north bank of the Snohomish River and built a small shack as a store catering to the local loggers. These structures can be seen in Figure 1.

In 1884, the Blackman brothers opened a sawmill on the Snohomish River, which became the first sawmill in the region to produce more lumber than could be sold locally. When rail service reached Snohomish in 1889, kiln-dried red cedar was shipped from the Blackman Mill all across the country (Snohomish Historical Society, “The Blackman Family Story”). In 1884, Hyrcanus Blackman opened a general store at the intersection of First Street and Avenue C, then in 1888, built the four-star, three-story Penobscot Hotel in anticipation of guests arriving in town by rail. Through early milling operations and expansion into other business opportunities, the Blackman brothers took a huge part in directing the economic engine of early Snohomish and especially of First Street.

*Fire & Reconstruction*

In the early morning of May 30, 1911, a fire broke out on First Street near Avenue B, quickly spreading to both sides of the street and west along First Street toward Avenue C due to

close-neighboring buildings as well as their wooden construction (most stood on wood stilts). Population growth led to the rapid construction of wooden buildings, crammed close together (Dominguez, 2011).

While the fire ravaged the heart of downtown – First Street between Avenues B and C – one building stopped the fire from spreading even further. Located at 1118 First Street, the Schott Building – also known as the Burns Building, although not due to the fire but rather due to its original owner John Burns – was made completely out of bricks, manufactured in Snohomish, which protected it from the fire and stopped the fire’s spread to its western neighbors (Blake, 2014). Even still, the fire cost \$175,000 in damage according to an Everett Herald article (Dominguez, 2011). The community learned its lesson; after the fire, the buildings in what is now Historic Downtown were constructed in brick.



Figure 6. Schott Building circa 1973 (Source: Snohomish Historical Society) and Schott Building circa 2014 (Source: Snohomish Stories.)

### *Early Revitalization Efforts*

The City of Snohomish hit an economic lag after logging activity was drastically cut back in the 1970s-1980s due to new environmental protections and US Route 2 was completed in 1985, losing the town daily passersby.

In response, First Street was redeveloped in the 1990s to take advantage of its historic buildings as a tourist attraction. Sidewalks were rebuilt and public restrooms added. The city hall and police station were moved away from First Street, historic buildings were renovated, and a new fire station was built. This renewed focus on First Street’s historic character and its ability to create new economic opportunities allowed for groups such as the Historic Downtown Snohomish Association (HDSA) and the Snohomish Historical Society to form (Porter, 2021).



### *Historic Character*

The Snohomish Historical Society formed in 1969 with the goal to preserve the character of the City of Snohomish, seeing the town’s heritage as essential to its commercial viability. In 1974, the Historic District – a roughly 36-block area bound by the Snohomish River to the south, Fourth and Fifth Streets to the north, Avenue E to the west, and Union and State Aves to the east and southeast – was placed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Washington State Historic Register. The Historic Business District, which includes First Street, is the portion of the Historic District that is just north of the Snohomish River and is zoned for commercial use (City of Snohomish Washington, “Historic District”).



Figure 7. Map of the Snohomish Historic District. (Source: City of Snohomish Washington)

The Historic District Ordinance protects buildings and structures within the district from demolition and alteration and puts forth design standards for new construction in order to preserve the area’s unique character. Within the Historic District, certain structures are ‘designated’ as historic buildings and more are reviewed by the Design Review Board and City Council periodically. The Design Review Board additionally reviews every new development application in the Historic District to ensure that all new developments fit within the Historic District’s Design Standards, which the City of Snohomish states are intend to “preserve and continue the City’s rich heritage and character, to foster quality design and development, and to promote land use compatibility within the City’s historic neighborhoods” (City of Snohomish Washington, “Historic District”).

The Design Standards state that the intent is “to provide pedestrian-friendly, visually integrated and historically appropriate commercial development within Snohomish” (Snohomish City Council Action, “Snohomish Historic District Design Standards”). The character of the Commercial Historic District is described by the City of Snohomish as follows:

- Buildings range in height from one to three stories (although there is just one building that is three stories: the Schott Building pictured in Figure 7 above)
- Building materials include brick, wood siding, stucco
- Buildings typically have large storefront window, glass doors, and tall ceilings on the ground floor (typically retail) and shorter ceilings and windows on upper floors (typically combined retail, restaurant, lodging, office, and residential)
- The street grid includes mature street trees, alleys, and sidewalks
- Pedestrian activity is “an important feature of the Historic District”

Specific details about First Street include:

- Landscaping is “commonly limited to flower pots and corner street trees”
- South side: buildings are typically one- and two-story, with night-oriented uses (bars, theaters) due to more shade
- Lower building height allows for more winter solar access, “improving the microclimate” and supporting “year-round economic viability”
- North side: buildings are typically two- and three-story, with day-oriented uses on ground floors and residential upper floors

Further elaboration on current streetscape ecology with regard to Historic District Design Standards can be found in Section 3, Land Use and Environment.

### *Historic Structures*

Historic structures line First Street on both sides. Snohomish Walks – an online resource founded in 2020 offering historical content and genealogical research on Snohomish – maintains an [interactive map](#) inventorying historic sites around the city. Notable historic structures that remain along First Street include the following:

- Ferguson’s Cottage (Off First Street between Cedar Ave and Avenue A): the first house in Snohomish, brought by founder E.C. Ferguson. The home is still standing and still residential (Snohomish Stories, 2019).
- Carnegie Library Building (Off First Street on Cedar Ave): the oldest public building in Snohomish, built in 1910.
- 802 First Street: site to the town’s first gas station, which opened in 1924.

- 901 First Street: home to a confectionary in the 1930s and an early local Snohomish brand “K&K Ice Cream.” Later became the depot for the first local motorized bus service connecting to Everett, called the Stage Depot.
- Blackman House Museum (Off First Street on Avenue B): built in 1878, now home to the Snohomish Historical Society.
- First National Bank (1001 First Street): built in 1907 and represents the first Greek-inspired architecture, first building made of reinforced concrete, and first banking institution in Snohomish.
- Old City Hall (1009 First Street): built in 1927, one of City Hall’s many homes over the years.
- Schott Building, or Burns Building (1118 First Street): due to its brick construction, the building effectively saved its west-adjoining wood buildings from the Great Fire in 1911. Also the only three-story building on First Street (not counting basements).
- Wilbur Block, or American Legion Post 96 (1201 First Street): the oldest brick building still standing in Snohomish County, built in 1888. Constructed by J.S. White, a renowned Snohomish architect and builder, to house Lot Wilbur’s growing pharmacy business.



Figure 8. Carnegie Library Building, 802 First Street, and First National Bank, left to right (Photos by Katherine Magee, taken February 7, 2024)

### *Community*

Downtown Snohomish, and particularly along First Street, is a popular community gathering spot for formal organizations, informal socializing, and community events. Currently, two of the 34 non-profit organizations registered as members of the Snohomish Chamber of Commerce are located on First Street: American Legion and Arts of Snohomish. Arts of Snohomish is a non-profit cooperative gallery featuring work of local artists and committed to its contribution to revitalization of Historic Downtown Snohomish and to the local art scene in Snohomish (Arts of Snohomish).

Regular events in downtown Snohomish include the Kla Ha Ya Days, the Snohomish Farmers Market, the Snohomish Block Party, and the Art Walk. All of these events are held directly on

First Street and/or make use of the lawns fronting the Carnegie Library Building adjacent to First Street, such as for the live music stage during the annual block party. Kila Ha Ya Days is one of longest standing events for the city – an annual summer festival over 100 years old, originally hosted by local hotels to celebrate the Fourth of July with speeches, parades, and dances (Kila Ha Ya Days). These events are the centerpieces of the city’s history and vibrancy, creating “ample opportunity to celebrate what makes Snohomish special” (City of Snohomish Washington, “Economic Development”).



Figure 9. Photo of Ka Ha Ya Days Summer Festival, the Snohomish Farmers Market, and Promotional Information for Snohomish Art Walk and Snohomish Block Party. (Source: City of Snohomish Washington)

*Revitalization Efforts*

The Historic Downtown Snohomish Association (HDSA) is a volunteer-driven nonprofit organization “dedicated to the (re)vitalization of Downtown Snohomish.”. According to their website, their mission is “to promote, preserve, and improve the Downtown Historic District as the heart and soul of the City of Snohomish” through promoting community, inclusion, innovation, promotion, and preservation (Historic Downtown Snohomish Association website).

In 2020, the City of Snohomish became one of 25 small towns – and the only west coast town – to make it to the quarterfinals of America’s Main Streets Contest. Then, spearheaded by the Historic Downtown Snohomish Association, First Street became a fully accredited designated Washington State Main Street Community in 2023, joining a “state and national network of more than 1,200 neighborhoods and communities who share both a commitment to creating

high-quality places and to building stronger communities through preservation-based economic development” (Historic Downtown Snohomish Association, 2023).

### *First Street Gazebo Renovation*

Located at First Street and Avenue A, a weathered gazebo dating back to the 1980s was only recently renovated due to the private investment of a local company, Construction company Nordic Home Solutions funded materials, and a gathering of volunteers completed the rebuild in 2022. “We want to make Snohomish smile again,” Nordic co-owner Palmer Bodin told the city’s design review board, saying it is a “genuine desire to give back to the community that took me in” some 20 years ago as a newcomer (Whitney, 2022).



Figure 10. Snohomish’s First Street Gazebo Pre/Post-Renovation Photos. (Source: City of Snohomish Washington)

### *Challenges*

In 2020, Snohomish's community members gathered on First Street in protest for Black Lives Matter and George Floyd, but violence ensued. Armed individuals converged on downtown Snohomish to "protect" small businesses in rumors of emerging protester looting. Video clips of these altercations, recorded in late May 2020, are part of “What Happened on First Street,” a documentary created by two former Snohomish School District students who were recent college graduates. For a time after, public relations associated with the city’s downtown business bureau admitted their struggle with new conceptions of Snohomish as “synonymous overt racism, public drinking, and brandishing long guns on street corners” (Porter, 2021). Public racial tensions cooled due to increasing concerns over effects of the pandemic on the Historic Business District, but the then-mayor John Kartak refused to condemn the right-wing militia members who raided the protests, all the way through to when he left office in 2021. (Breda, 2021).

Residents, especially First Street business owners, have concerns each year over the natural hazard of major flooding caused due to the nearby Snohomish River’s potential to overflow. The entirety of the Southern Urban Growth Area of Snohomish is at risk to flooding due to its location near the river. Though only rarely at risk of disruptive flooding events, the

misconceptions of the frequency lead to a mental challenge for the community. However, due to the risk, flood-resilient infrastructure investments and emergency preparedness education are required of the community and the city. By implementing floodplain management strategies, engaging the community, and investing in infrastructure resilience, the city can turn this challenge into an opportunity for preparedness and enhance the well-being of its residents.

It has been observed that several restaurants in the downtown area close early, which can restrict the unique dining experiences for visitors. Although some restaurants with bars remain open late, many boutiques and antique stores close early, making it challenging for people who want to indulge in leisurely shopping. This early closure trend in downtown areas can limit the opportunities for travelers to explore the local food, shopping, and vibrant nightlife. Consequently, the operating hours of numerous restaurants and retail outlets have received negative ratings from out-of-town travelers. General nightlife and other evening attractions have also been rated poorly on various travel surveys.

### *Moving Forward*

First Street is a convergence point for the city's history, economy, communities, visitors, and identity. A contextual understanding of its successes, challenges, and demographics helps to better inform a successful redevelopment. Passionate individuals and local organizations – including the Historic Downtown Snohomish Association, Arts of Snohomish, Snohomish Walks, and the Snohomish Historical Society – have been indispensable to the city's growth as a tourist destination and to the revitalization of First Street as a vibrant historic Main Street, with value to Snohomish residents as well as visitors.

The future of First Street requires community involvement, climate resilience, and leaning even further into its identity as a newly-designated Main Street. The First Street redevelopment offers an opportunity to adapt urban form for climate resilience through expansion of multimodal transportation options and integration of more green space to mitigate impacts of air pollution, urban heat island effect, and flooding. The redevelopment plan should also consider potentials for diversifying economic and employment opportunities and for growing and diversifying housing stock in order to ease burdens, better fulfill needs of the city's residents, and provide opportunity for those who work in Snohomish to also live there.

### *Street Redevelopment Precedents*

Inspiration for future First Street development can be taken from other vibrant Main Streets across the country and, in particular, the west coast.

Langley, Washington is a charming waterfront town on Whidbey Island. A notable urban design project was the Langley Second Street Project. The objective was to reimagine the function and design of this major street in the town. The project involved intensive community collaboration

which led to a series of focal points in a design strategy. This community engagement is a model for how Snohomish can identify its key desires from a design solution. Langley's Second Street had a design for seamless integration of art, landscaping, civic buildings, stores, and a network of narrow pedestrian routes. A parking study supported the removal of several parking spaces, creating room for a plaza as part of the street redesign. The plaza now hosts community events, dinners, and street dances, earning the project recognition through the APA Great Places Award in 2019 (Framework Design and KPG Engineering).



Figure 11. Langley, Washington's Completed Second Street Project (Source: Framework Urban Design).

Hood River, Oregon is a community that has been hard at work in urban redevelopment throughout its city. The city itself is already a successful example of a livable town that is also visited by tourists due to it being a gateway to Mount Hood outdoor recreation areas. Finalizing a nearly five-year planning process, the city completed the Heights Streetscape Plan in early January, 2024. The Heights is a Hood River destination, filled with unique homes and diverse local businesses. Growth has spurred the need to create a safe streetscape for pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists traveling to and through the area every day. The Height's central transportation spine links downtown Hood River with the Hood River Valley. The corridor serves many public amenities. The plan focuses on the commercial core of the city which has a mix of office, restaurant, and other retail uses, with single and multi-family housing located next to the commercial core. The recently completed plans provide insights into alterations to streetscape especially related to vehicular traffic that could prove successful in Snohomish as well.



Figure 12. Cover Sheet for The Heights Streetscape Plan in Hood River, Oregon. (Source: City of Hood River, Oregon)



## II. Capital Facilities

### Existing Physical Conditions

#### *Circulation*

First Street has one lane in each direction for automobile circulation. Shared lane markings, or sharrows, indicate that bikes and automobiles share the lanes on First Street in both directions from Avenue D to Union Avenue. The majority of these markings are faded. A short unprotected bike lane runs along First Street west of the study area ending between Avenue E and D.

Just south of First Street, Snohomish Riverfront Trail, a paved walking and biking path, runs parallel to First Street along the Snohomish River from Avenue D to Maple Avenue. Just east of the study area, Centennial Trail, another walking and biking path beginning on First Street, runs parallel to Maple Avenue.

First Street has sidewalks along the full stretch of the study area on both sides of the street. These sidewalks are aging and have various tripping hazards and accessibility issues like holes and uneven areas. Some stretches appear newer and have less of these issues.

All intersections have all-way crosswalks, with the exception of First Street and Maple Avenue, which lack crosswalks across First Street. At most crosswalks, paint has faded to varying degrees, and in some spots has been paved over and not repainted. There are no stop signs along the segment of First Street within our study area, and only one traffic signal, located at the intersection of First Street and Avenue D. Pedestrian visibility at crosswalks is reduced by angled parking along both sides of First Street between Avenue D and Union Avenue. All crossings have some version of curb ramps, providing some level of accessibility for crossing at each intersection. Most corners have two curb ramps each pointing in both possible directions of travel for crossing. The intersection of First Street and Avenue A is an exception with the southwest corner of the intersection having one curb ramp pointing diagonally towards the center of the intersection, posing a safety and accessibility issue.



Figure 13. Southwest corner of the intersection of First Street and Avenue A has one curb ramp pointing diagonally towards the center of the intersection. (Source: Google Maps)

No bus stops are located on First Street in our study area. One block away, Community Transit buses 271, 270, and 424 run along Second Street with bus stops about two blocks apart between Avenue D and Maple Avenue. Route 424 runs twice in the early morning, approximately an hour and a half apart, from Snohomish to Seattle passing through Monroe, and twice in the opposite direction in the evening, about an hour and a half apart. Route 270 runs twice in the morning, two hours apart, and once in the evening in both directions, between Everett and Monroe. Route 271 runs hourly in both directions from 7AM to 9:30PM, traveling between Everett and Gold Bar, passing through Snohomish, Monroe, and Sultan (Community Transit, n.d.).

Utility Infrastructure

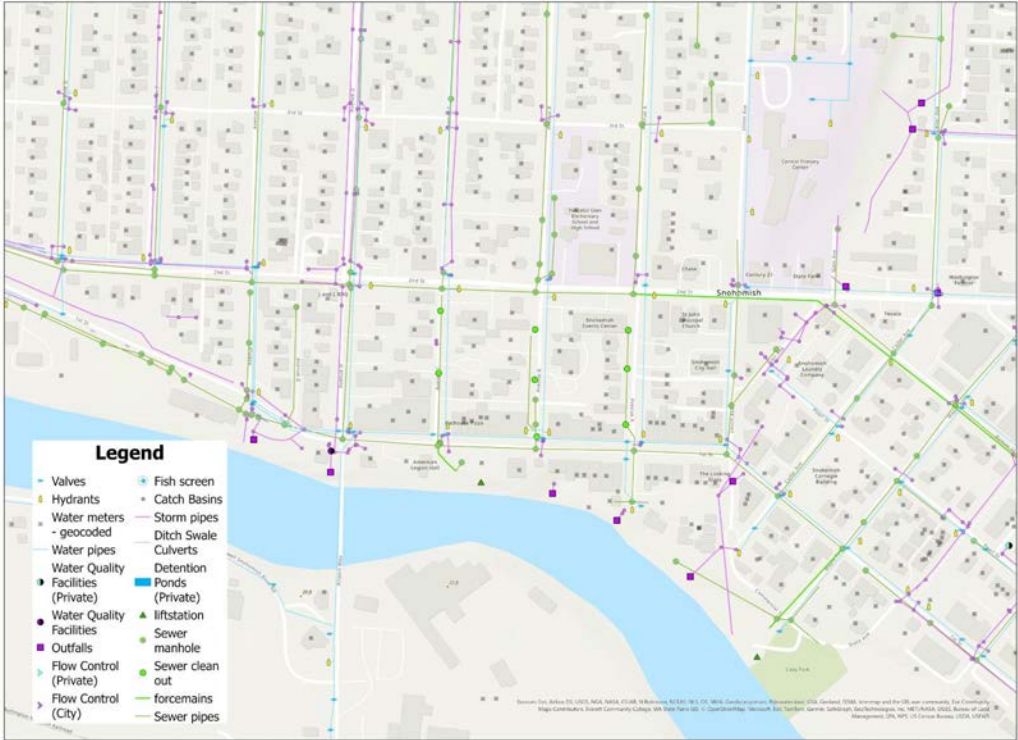


Figure 14. Study Area Utility Locations Map

Context on utilities with emphasis on utility locations in the study area are provided in this section.

Water

Approximately 90% of the City of Snohomish’s water comes from the City of Everett, with Snohomish PUD, a public utility district, supplying the rest. The City of Snohomish operates and maintains 35 miles of pipe in the water system (City of Snohomish Washington, n.d.).

A water main runs along First Street along the entire stretch within the study area. Cross streets Avenue D, Avenue A, Cedar Avenue, and Maple Avenue have water mains running across First street, and the rest of the cross streets have water mains running north of First Street. Each intersection has at least one hydrant within close proximity. Each intersection also has at least one water valve with several more within a one block radius.

Sewer & Storm

The City of Snohomish owns and operates its own wastewater collection and treatment plant which serves almost all areas within the urban growth area and city limits. The city also operates and owns its stormwater infrastructure. A combined sewer system collects wastewater and stormwater together in the historic downtown area where First Street is located. The combined wastewater and stormwater are then sent to the wastewater treatment plant northwest of the study area on 2nd Street. During large storms, combined wastewater and stormwater is discharged

directly into the Snohomish River through two combined sewer outflow locations. The remaining approximately 75% of the service area utilizes a separated sewer and stormwater system where wastewater is sent for treatment at the wastewater treatment plant and stormwater is discharged into various surface waters (City of Snohomish, 2013). The city is working on separating stormwater and wastewater in the combined sewer system by installing a stormwater main in the combined sewer system area. In the summer of 2014, they installed a stormwater trunkline from Avenue H to Avenue E (City of Snohomish, 2019) just west of this report’s study area. They have also worked to increase system capacity to reduce the number of combined sewer outflow events into the Snohomish River (City of Snohomish, 2013).

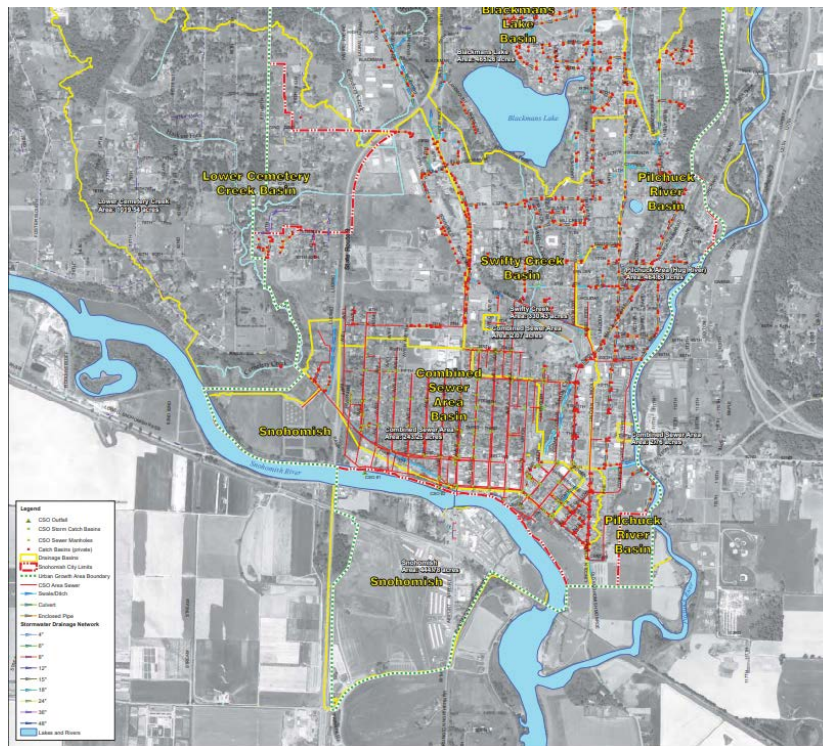


Figure 15. Map showing the location of Snohomish’s combined sewer area. (Source: City of Snohomish Comprehensive Plan Update 2013.)

## Sewer

A sewer main runs along First Street from Avenue D to Maple Avenue. Cross streets have sewer mains running north of First Street, with the exception of Avenue A, which has a main line that continues south of First Street. Most intersections along First Street have manholes providing beneath ground access to the combined sewer system, with several other manholes located in proximity to First Street. A sewer cleanout is located at the intersection of First Street and Avenue C with several others in proximity to the study area. At this intersection is a force main for transport of wastewater from low-lying areas to higher elevations. An additional force main is located along Maple Avenue between First Street and Cady Park. There is a lift station located just south of First Street between Avenue B and C.

## Storm

Each intersection along First Street from Avenue D and Maple has multiple catch basins for stormwater collection, with the exception of First Street and Maple. There are 5 outfall locations along the trail running parallel to First Street. There is an additional outfall location just south of the intersection of First and Union. Storm pipes run north-south along Avenue D through the intersection of Avenue D and First. Several storm drains running north-south roughly connect public catch basins and outfalls between Cedar Avenue and Avenue A, running across First Street. Between Avenue D and Maple Avenue, intersections on First Street all have short storm drains connecting public catch basins, excluding Maple Avenue. There is one public water quality facility just southwest of the intersection of Avenue D and First. West of the area are a few ditches, swales, or culverts just north or south of First Street.

## Electricity

Supplying the city's electricity is Snohomish PUD, boasting a power portfolio with a range of renewable, energy efficient sources. Approximately 75% of PUD's electricity is generated by hydroelectric dams, 9% from nuclear, 8% from wind, 3% solar, 3.5% unspecified, and 1% biomass. Electricity conduction wires run along all cross streets from Avenue D to Maple Avenue, intersecting with First Street at all intersections except Union Avenue and Avenue D. There is an electrical vault located at the intersection of Cedar Avenue and First Street (City of Snohomish Washington, n.d.).

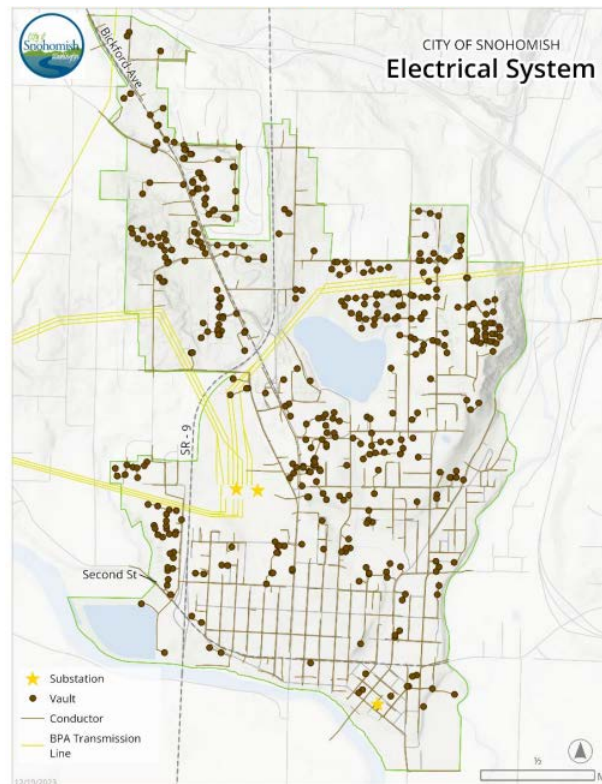


Figure 16. Map showing Snohomish's Electrical System. (Source: City of Snohomish Washington)

*Infrastructure Issues Inventory*

As part of our initial conditions analysis, we created a geospatial inventory of identifiable infrastructure issues present along First Street between Avenue D and Maple Ave. We looked for the following issues: bike sharrow faded, crosswalk paint faded, curb eroded, curb ramp missing, drain clogged/broken, inaccessible entryways, sidewalk holes, sidewalk unevenness, sidewalk obtrusions, street lamps damaged, street signs broken, and street potholes. Interestingly, sidewalk issues far outnumbered any roadway issues, with 19 crosswalks that had faded/missing paint stripping, 41 uneven sidewalk points (either tripping hazards or unpassable for wheelchairs and strollers), 12 holes in the sidewalk, and 12 inaccessible retail entrances (with either steep ramps or stairs). The map of the 102 issues is shown below.

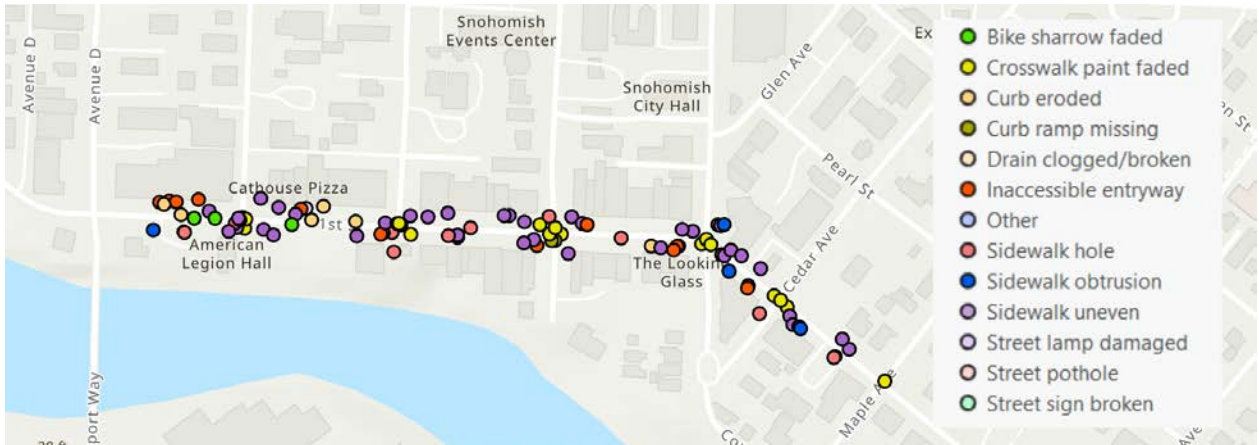


Figure 17. Infrastructure Issue Inventory February 2024

## Parking Analysis

While parking dominates the streetscape of First Street – with ample parking available both onsite and on blocks adjacent to the historic street – parking availability remains notably limited immediately adjacent to storefronts. This is augmented in busy summer months, weekends, and during events that attract tourists. Coupled with limited transit connectivity for the broader city and region, automobile access and parking remain necessary to support vendors within the Historic District.



Figure 18. Parked cars dominate a view of Historic Downtown Snohomish

### *Parking Availability*

First Street is lined with public, diagonal parking stalls along both sides of the street, extending from Avenue D to the west, until Union Avenue to the east. As part of Historic Downtown Snohomish, the public parking along First Street is free, with no restrictions on usage, or time limits. Extending from First Street, Avenues D, C, B, and A also feature a mix of free diagonal and parallel parking extending north as well. Additional public parking can also be found west of Avenue D, including several EV chargers.



Figure 19. Angled and back-in curbside parking allows vehicles with large overhangs to block pedestrian mobility, greatly reducing sidewalk capacity and equal access.

### *Parking Policy*

Along First Street, all public parking is free of charge, with limited restrictions on usage, aside from a few designated temporary parking spaces (locations?). While this approach provides convenience and simplicity to some users, it also hints at a variety of problems. Due to the surplus of free, on street parking on First Street itself, patrons appear most inclined to search for

the parking closet available to their intended location, rather than trying to park further away along other nearby streets, or using off-site designated parking areas.

There also appears to be limited parking policies/standards in place, in order to prevent business owners or employees from using the parking spaces adjacent to their buildings, or to save designated street parking for potential customers. This equates to highly utilized street parking, even on slow business days as noted on off-hours weekdays. Considering the existing available quantity of parking on nearby streets, implementing Historic District parking guidelines for businesses to utilize other nearby parking may be able to address some visitor parking concerns.

### *Curb Management*

Despite the many businesses and restaurants of First Street, few curb management practices appear to be in usage to best manage curb space and access to sidewalks. Notably, there appears to be no formal loading zones designated on First Street (both in-street commercial loading, or off-street loading), as well as space for food vendors or parklets. There is also limited bicycle storage along the curb, further highlighting the car-oriented nature of First Street and opportunity presented by potential curb management measures.



Figure 20. Commercial delivery trucks park in the angled parking along First Street and illegally in the crosswalk at First and Union Ave, blocking pedestrian mobility.

Parking on and around First Street is also very confusing for many visitors. A disconnect between signage vs. painted curbs creates uncertainty about whether a parking space is legal or not; the streets largely use yellow paint to demarcate legal/illegal parking, though curb paint is less universal in the US and less understandable than explicit parking signs. To make matters worse, much of the yellow paint is faded and curbs are crumbling. In other places, signage/paint is missing or incomplete, leading to cars parked haphazardly, blocking pedestrian and vehicle traffic. Issues of aging infrastructure and unclear rules are exacerbated by the fullness of parking stalls along First and people's desire to park as close as possible to their place of business, resulting in people parking wherever they can fit their car (even if it doesn't totally fit).





Figure 21. Missing signage and incomplete pedestrian infrastructure encouraged these vehicles to park in clearly improper spaces.

### *Parking Inventory*

As part of our analysis of existing parking utilization of First Street, a parking study was conducted. An inventory of existing parking stalls along First Street extending from the publicly accessible parking stalls that begin at Art Culinaire from the West, and one block of each adjacent intersecting avenue, until Maple Avenue to the West. An image highlighting the study area is shown below.



Figure 22. Parking study area with streets studied highlighted in blue.

Within the defined study area, 589 parking spaces were available, including public parking along First Street, each intersecting block, and approximately 100 available public spaces of parking east of Avenue D just outside the main commercial area of First Street. Utilization was calculated by using two study days on a Wednesday and Saturday in February to determine weekday and

weekend utilization. Users were counted at regular intervals of 3.5 hours, 9am, 12:30pm, and 4pm on both days to determine utilization trends and average stay details throughout the day.

Total Utilization:

Overall, utilization was higher within our study area on the weekend study date (67.97%) compared to the weekday (52.8%). Additionally, along First Street alone, excluding side-street parking and the public lots west of Avenue D, utilization was much higher on both the weekend and weekday again, at 88.39% and 69.33% respectively. This contributes to a perception of limited parking specifically along First Street itself, while there is capacity on surrounding streets and the additional lot parking beyond the main commercial area as needed.

**Total Utilization Rates**

	9am	12:30pm	4pm	<b>Total</b>	East of Ave D Total	First St Blocks 3-8	Side Streets east of Ave D
Saturday	57.05%	76.91%	69.95%	<b>67.97%</b>	88.39%	73.18%	67.44%
Wednesday	41.94%	68.93%	47.88%	<b>52.80%</b>	69.33%	69.63%	68.87%

Figure 23. Parking study total utilization rates

Length of Stay:

Most visitors on both the weekend and weekday study dates generally parked for less than 3.5hrs, at 80% and 69% of cars respectively. However, on the weekday the proportion of cars parking for longer time frames was higher, with 31% of cars parking for greater than 3.5 hours compared to a weekend rate of 20%. This could be due to a different visitor profile, or a higher proportion of local visitors during the weekdays. This also presents a potential opportunity for hourly parking limits to be enacted, limiting use to 4 hours or less knowing that this would accommodate most existing parking users.

**Length of Stay breakdown**

	Less than 3.5 hrs	3.5-7 hrs	7+ hrs
Saturday	80%	13%	7%
Wednesday	69%	21%	10%

Figure 24. Parking study length of stay breakdown

Turnover Rates:

On average, each spot had limited turnover for both the weekend and weekday study date. A slightly higher turnover rate of 1.47 cars/stall was found on the Saturday count date compared to a total average rate of 1.12 cars/stall for the Wednesday analysis. These rates are fairly low considering the generally high utilization rate. Increasing turnover through parking policy changes would be able to provide a greater shared use of available parking to visitors.

**Turnover rates:** represents # of cars in a space per day (max is 3.0)

Saturday	1.47
Wednesday	1.12

Figure 25. Parking study turnover rates

Opportunities:

Including the available parking on intersecting streets, as well as the public lots available east of Avenue D, First Street has some level of capacity to accommodate high parking demand/visitation, but parking is highly utilized along First Street itself. Utilization rates for the stalls along First Street remain at higher rates than surrounding blocks, representative of this trend. Additionally, the available public parking lots beyond the main commercial area lack proper pedestrian access and signage to encourage use, but may provide a viable option in particularly busy times, especially in the summer months. Investment in improving these areas may provide a solution for excess parking capacity without the creation of additional off-site parking facilities.

A lack of existing parking policy also leads to limited options for those looking to take quicker trips, or incentives for First Street business employees to park further from their workplace, and leave adjacent spaces for customer use. A strong opportunity exists to further awareness and pedestrian access to the excess parking beyond Avenue D as well, as throughout each day the over 100+ stalls of available parking were underutilized, and no vehicles were found using the existing EV charging stations either. This could provide a relief to existing parking restraints, specifically along First Street itself, but will require a combination of further education of the parking available, but also investments in pedestrian access and safety features to make for a comfortable parking experience.

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## Existing Plans Review

### *CIP Overview*

The City of Snohomish Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) provides a guiding map to the financial priorities and investment schedule the city will use from 2024-2029. This information helps inform priorities for the potential First Street Master Plan while also providing insight on relevant infrastructure investments in the next 5 years.

The City of Snohomish has identified the following six priority categories for spending in the 2023-2024 biennium: Public Safety, Housing Equity & Inclusion, City Infrastructure, Environment, Community Involvement, Economic Vitality, City Services, and Comprehensive Planning. Considering the aging infrastructure of First Street, alongside the economic and community opportunities proposed by the Historic District, exploration of a First Street Master Plan aligns with current spending priorities, though not yet included in the City's 5 year CIP. Currently, transportation and utility expenditures comprise 47.3% of the City's \$80 million total expenditures, with Sewer and Wastewater being the largest spending category. Due to the deteriorating quality of physical infrastructure on First Street, the City has likely already considered this need. This likely also includes investments related to flooding and drainage concerns from the Snohomish River, adjacent to the site.

The CIP also emphasizes investments in the area's trail system. Notably, this includes investments to the Interurban trail, as well as the Snohomish River Regional Trail connecting Snohomish to Everett, which potentially could also influence a desire to improve the City of Snohomish River trail just south of the site. With these considerations in mind, and the understanding that the City of Snohomish underspent in recent prior years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City appears well-positioned to make necessary infrastructure improvements, while also promoting the business opportunities, and livability of the area.

### *Transportation Plan*

The Snohomish Transportation Plan presents the 2014 study of Snohomish's existing transportation network, the projected 2035 of future growth and transportation needs, and the current transportation network condition in 2024.

### Roadway Network

Based on the functional classification system in the Snohomish Transportation Plan, the primary roadway networks in Snohomish are North-South Roadways and East-West Roadways. The North-South Roadways are SR-9 highways, serving two lanes with a speed limit of 55. The

roadway network in First Street is categorized as Collector Street, adjacent to most local streets in the neighborhoods, with Right of Way width of 23-25 ft. and flex zone for parkings 8-10.5 ft. pm. The area's typical traffic volumes peak during the weekday between 4:00 and 6:00 pm, Monday through Friday.



Figure 26. Roadway Functional Classification and Intersection. (Source: City of Snohomish Transportation Element Update)

### Transit Facilities and Plan

The existing transit facilities are presented in Figure 1-2, with currently operating four bus routes facilitating 53 weekday trips through Snohomish and maintaining 22 bus stops and one park & ride facility. The City of Snohomish is projected to accelerate the implementation of Long Range Transit Plan 4 in 2030, which will focus on two corridors: US 2 (Everett to Monroe) and SR 9 (Arlington to King County).

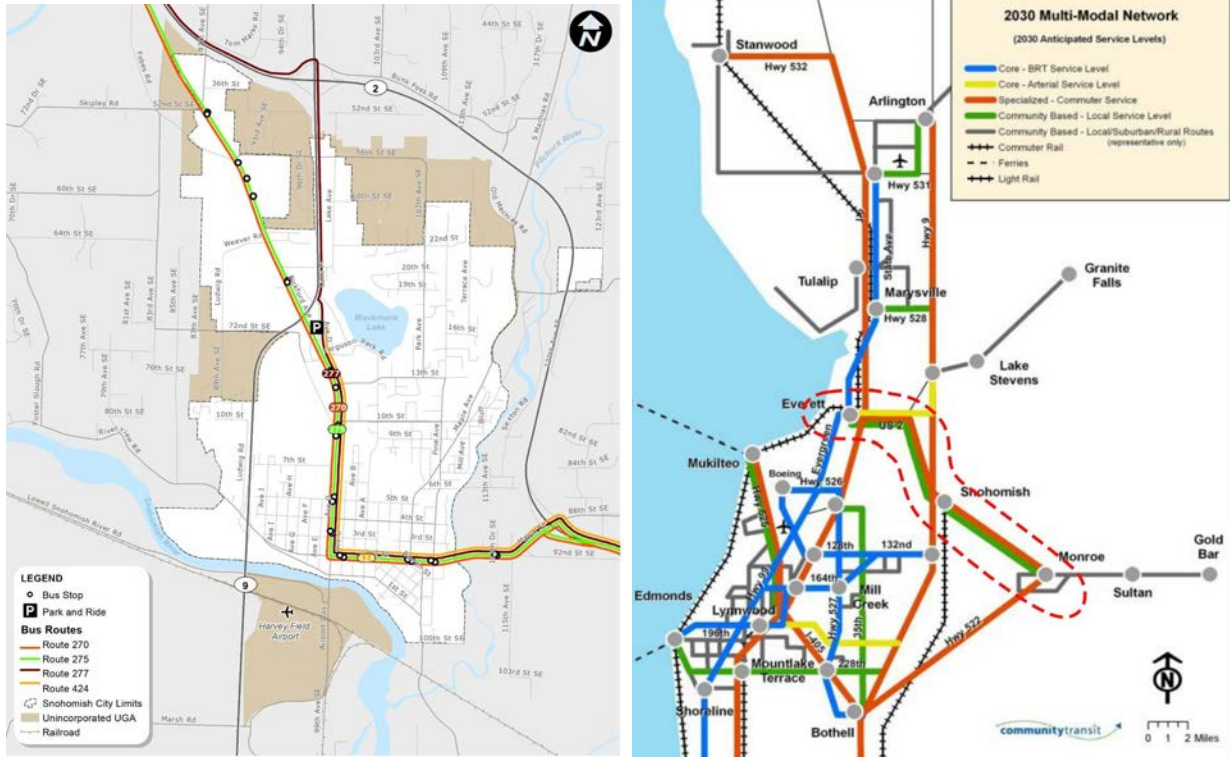


Figure 27. Existing Transit Facilities in Snohomish (left) and Multimodal Transportation Network 2030 Anticipated Service Levels, with Snohomish marked in red (right) (Source: City of Snohomish Transportation Element Update)

### On-Street Facilities

On-street facilities include the bicycle lanes, striped shoulders, and shared roadways that comprise the non-motorized facilities on State Highways and City roads. The Transportation Master Plan existing Bicycle Facilities in the City of Snohomish are located along 30th Street, East of Bickford Avenue, First Street, and across Avenue A. The Bicycle lanes are dedicated in both directions on the edge of the traveled way, marked with a wide stripe and range from 4 to 6 feet in width. The Bicycle network will undergo future improvement in the Transportation Master Plan 2035.

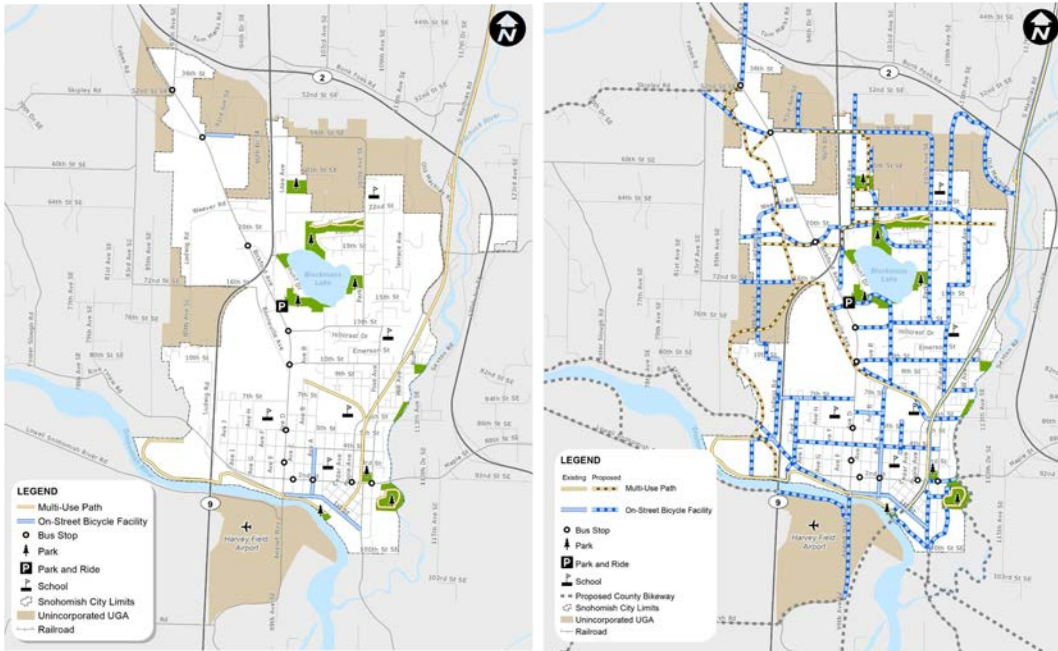


Figure 28. Existing Bicycle Facilities (left) and Citywide Bicycle Network Improvement in 2035 (right) (Source: City of Snohomish Transportation Element Update)

### Off-Street Facilities

Off-street facilities comprise multi-use pathways and unpaved trails used by all types of non-motorized users. The Transportation Master Plan displays Off-Street Facilities in Figure 1-5, which features the existing and proposed pedestrian networks improvement in 2035.



Figure 29. Existing and Proposed Pedestrian Facilities. (Source: City of Snohomish Transportation Element Update)

## *ADA Transition Plan*

In order to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Snohomish is currently creating an “ADA Transition Plan” to address accessibility issues for non-vehicular modes of mobility within the city. They have identified which curb ramps, sidewalks and street crossings are and are not in compliance with ADA standards. Additionally, they conducted an interest/demand survey of the community to identify subjective areas of priority. Finally, from their analysis the city has identified the following recommendations to update their infrastructure, as well as a 2 to 50 year time schedule for doing so:

- Update City design standards to match ADA Standards
- Identify an official responsible for Transition Plan implementation within the Public Works Department
- Develop a Citywide Accessible Pedestrian Signal (APS) policy
- Educate City staff, consultants, and contractors on ADA standards and provide dedicated training to City inspectors
- Develop a standard grievance process for barriers to accessibility
- Develop a consistent and centralized MEF documentation database
- Develop performance measures and processes to track removal of barriers
- Continue data collection for pedestrian features in the public right-of-way
- Review and clarify policies relating to accessibility and implementation of accessible features in construction projects
- Look for opportunities to increase existing barrier removal funding
- Evaluate all City Programs and Activities as they relate to the ADA

The redesign and rebuilding of the First St streetscape is a prime opportunity to address many of the ADA compliance issues in the busiest pedestrian-trafficked area of the city. We hope our data collection efforts (including the infrastructure inventory discussed above) and our upcoming design proposal will help the city find innovative and practical ways of incorporating the ADA Transition Plan into the First St Master Plan.



### III. Land Use & Environment

#### Land Use

*Specifics of the Site*

There are currently 49 businesses on the Northside of first street, and 27 to the South of the street from the intersection of Ave D to Union Ave. Totaling 71 active businesses directly along first street. Within the street there are shopping centers, food centers and various services provided. The businesses on first street articulate the culture along the avenue. As a hub of activity for Snohomish, conducting study on which businesses are most successful can assist in filling any vacancies and bringing more foot traffic to the community.

Fitness	Shopping centers	Services	Food centers	Spas and salons	Antique stores
2	23	16	19	4	7

Figure 30. Businesses on First Street.(Source: Historic Downtown Snohomish Association)

The shopping centers aligned on First street consist of the Anna Marie Collective which is a curated handmade boutique. This space is being utilized on the corner of Avenue B. As a historical building, it blends historic charm with a modern change of new window art and bright colors. Similar to this approach is the Olive and Bloom home decor company sitting next to Avenue A and first. This shop is a pop up shop with Olive and Bloom home decor and furniture and clothing. The appearance brings life to the neighborhood, especially during the holidays as the street lights up the avenue with wreaths and decor. Neighboring this storefront is the Pegasus Theatre shop, a large selection of movie memorabilia. The street also features multiple antique stores including; Remember When Antique Mall, Antique Warehouse, Antique Station in Victoria Village. A frequent appearance of Antique stores along first street tells of the historic atmosphere. From the number of stores, it is worth considering the importance of antique memorabilia. The street has 7 antique stores, notable mentions of Victoria Village which has been operating for 26 years (Becker, 2022). The stores feature clothing, books, furniture and Native Pacific Northwest baskets. The services include Caliber Home Loans, Thomas J Steven, Attorney at Law.

## *Zoning*

The zoning in Snohomish is broken into Single-family Residential to High Density Residential, Commercial, Industry and Public. The area is made up of primarily single-family zoning with the exception of first street and the surrounding area being held for commercial space. The first street is specifically zoned as the Historic District. As a part of the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) the goal has been to “Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical, cultural, and archaeological significance” ([RCW 36.70A.020](#)(13)). First street in Snohomish is specifically marked as a Historic District under the protection of the GMA, as seen on Figure 35. Local historic designations meet robust protections under this authority, with strict limitations on the alterations of properties and any structure marked for demolition. As an attempt to maintain the historic character, the process of alterations or additions is partnered with the Snohomish County Historic Preservation Commission.

## *Housing and Population*

Similarly to Seattle, there is a demand for housing in Snohomish County as it is a growing and quickly urbanizing county. The total population at 827, 957 with an expected growth rate given the current trajectory of 16.4% growth since the 2010 census reaching 830,500 residents. A total gain of 117,65 with the older population at majority. Growth is mostly associated with the construction of the interstate-5 through the county and the location of Boeing in the mid 1960s. The period between 1965 and 2020 experienced a growth of 212, 700 residents. At a total of 314,000 housing units, 65% are single-family homes (*Snohomish County, WA Official website*). There is current demand for senior facilities and additional housing units. There is a projected housing need of 167,443 housing units that will need to be built to accommodate the population target. Specifically for first street, there are few housing facilities in the surrounding area of first street. The housing need would need to be addressed if there is improvement to the Historic District, as it will most likely affect businesses.

## *Growth Strategy*

The Regional Growth Strategy (RGS) is a strategic framework to identify the population growth for the year 2035. This outline is accompanied by the urban growth area cited in the GMA. This guides the population growth into specific cities and manages expected growth trends. Snohomish County is shifting growth into the regional growth centers which are identified as Everett, Lynnwood and Bothell. The countywide Planning Policies are the source of the residential growth projections. The CPP housing framework can help identify annual housing trends and adjust for the population growth expectations. The graphs below are the population and housing targets as part of the VISION 2040 RGS (*Snohomish County, WA Official website*). They directly compare the trends in population and housing accommodations for the time period 2000-2020 accounting for the 2034 population and the current housing growth trends.

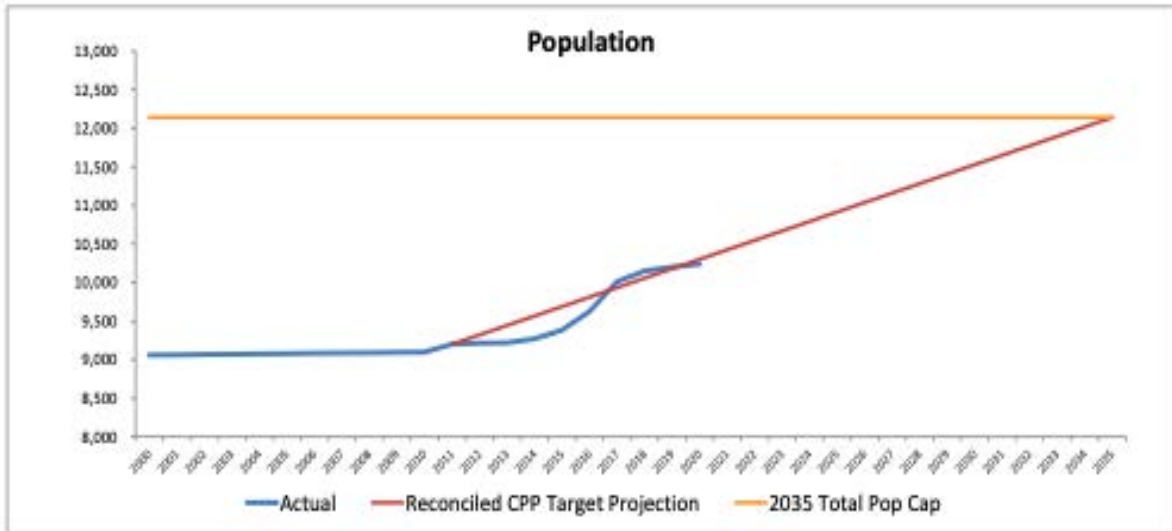


Figure 31. Snohomish Population Trends (Source: *Snohomish County, WA - Official website*, <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/>)



Figure 32. Snohomish Housing Permits. (Source: *Snohomish County, WA - Official website*, <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/>)

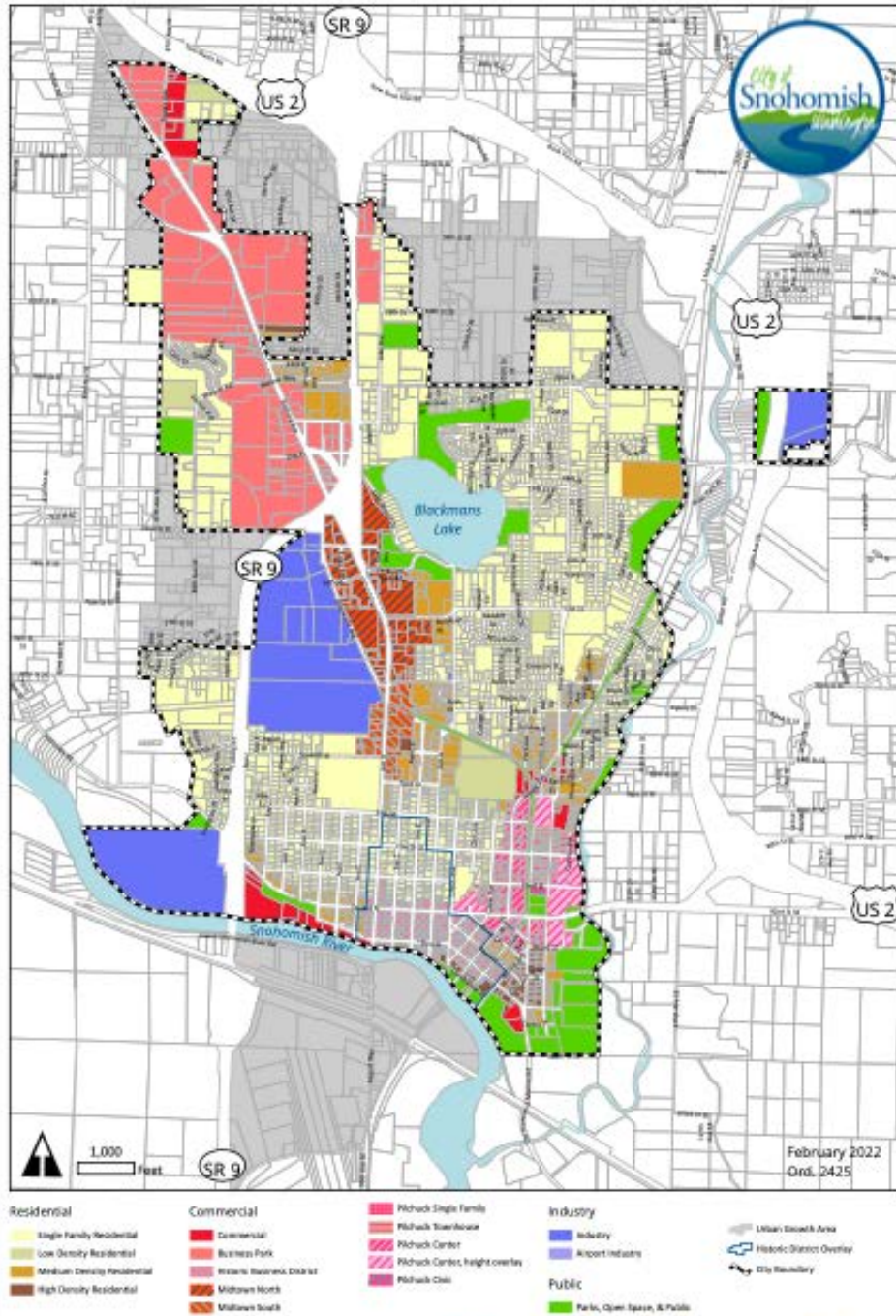


Figure 33. City of Snohomish Zoning Map. (Source: Snohomish County, WA - Official website, <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/>)

*Vacancies*

Along First Street, there are currently three commercial property vacancies. Two of these properties have official listings by Workman Real Estate Services, below are the active listings (as of 03/13/2024):

- The Marks Building: 1024 First Street – 19,502 sqft building (Property listed at \$5,800,000)



Figure 34. The Marks Building. (Source: Workman Real Estate Services)

- 922 First Street – 1,450 sqft ground-level retail (Sublease available at \$21.96 sqft/annually)



Figure 35. 922 First Street (Source: Workman Real Estate Services)

Additionally, there is a ground-floor retail vacancy at the Pioneer Market Building (1118 First Street), however, there is no advertised listing at this time.

First Street houses a significant number of antique shop outlets. Remember When Antique Mall, one of the oldest, is preparing to close its doors and vacate the property after thirty years of occupancy. Currently, it occupies a strip of three separate spaces (spanning from 908-910 First Street), see below.



Figure 36. Remember When Antiques. (Images by Chandan Brar)

119 Union Ave, located adjacent to First Street, is currently listed for sale at \$650,000. This property contains two fully-detached spaces, with Luxe Salon occupying the lower level and no tenant currently occupying the upper level.



Figure 37. 119 Union Ave. (Source: John L. Scott Snohomish listing)

### *Business Opportunities*

First Street serves as the commercial center of Snohomish, accompanied by a large variety of businesses. There are some amenities, however, that First Street lacks that these vacancies have the opportunity to fill, these include:

- Health & Wellness oriented businesses (yoga/pilates studios, fitness studios, meditation centers, physical therapy, recreation centers)
- Community-focused spaces (banquet halls, community centers, art studios)

- Non-profit organizations (food banks, community pantries, donation centers)
- Secondhand goods retailers (vinyl record shops, thrift stores, consignment stores) – excludes antique shops since First Street already houses a notable amount of them.

### *Streetscape Design/Ecology*

The overall ecology aims to reflect Snohomish’s historic preservation measures and pedestrian oriented design. Current streetscape conditions of First St include:

- A modified north-south oriented grid system with eighty-foot wide right-of-ways and forty-foot wide paved streets
- Storefronts located along the front property line
- Storefront landscaping limited to planter pots and corner street trees
- Mature street trees, alleys, sidewalks, and street parking
- Original building materials that accentuate Snohomish’s historic commercial beginnings

Current streetscape designs for First St must fall within the Historic District Design Standards, this document lists the following requirements:

- Site Lighting:
  - Light fixtures must have cut-off shields that direct light downward to prevent glare
  - Lighting should be adequate for pedestrian visibility. Parking lot lights may not be more than 15 feet tall. Lighted bollards encouraged for walkways
  - Light fixture designs cannot be contemporary, they must incorporate historic references/influences
- Building/Traffic Signage:
  - Cannot interrupt/overlap architectural features (such as cornices, columns, and trim)
  - New signage cannot be situated above second floor window sills in two-story buildings. Signage on one-story buildings cannot project above the cornice line or eave
  - Cannot extend beyond the edges of the wall on which they are mounted.
- Landscaping & Street Trees
  - Long life span (30+ years)
  - Disease- and pest-resistant
  - Non-invasive roots
  - No sight obstruction created at the base
  - No excessive fruit or debris dropping on sidewalks

# Ecological Conditions

## *Green Spaces*

According to the City of Snohomish, 9.6% of the land is maintained as dedicated open space. 23,594 sq.ft. of this space is located within the Historic District with the Kla Ha Ya Park and Cady Park. However, the City also plans to add about 8.2 acres of open space with this area dedicated to “City Publics Work Shop” (official park name is still to be decided) on 1801 First Street which will be situated just outside the Historic District.

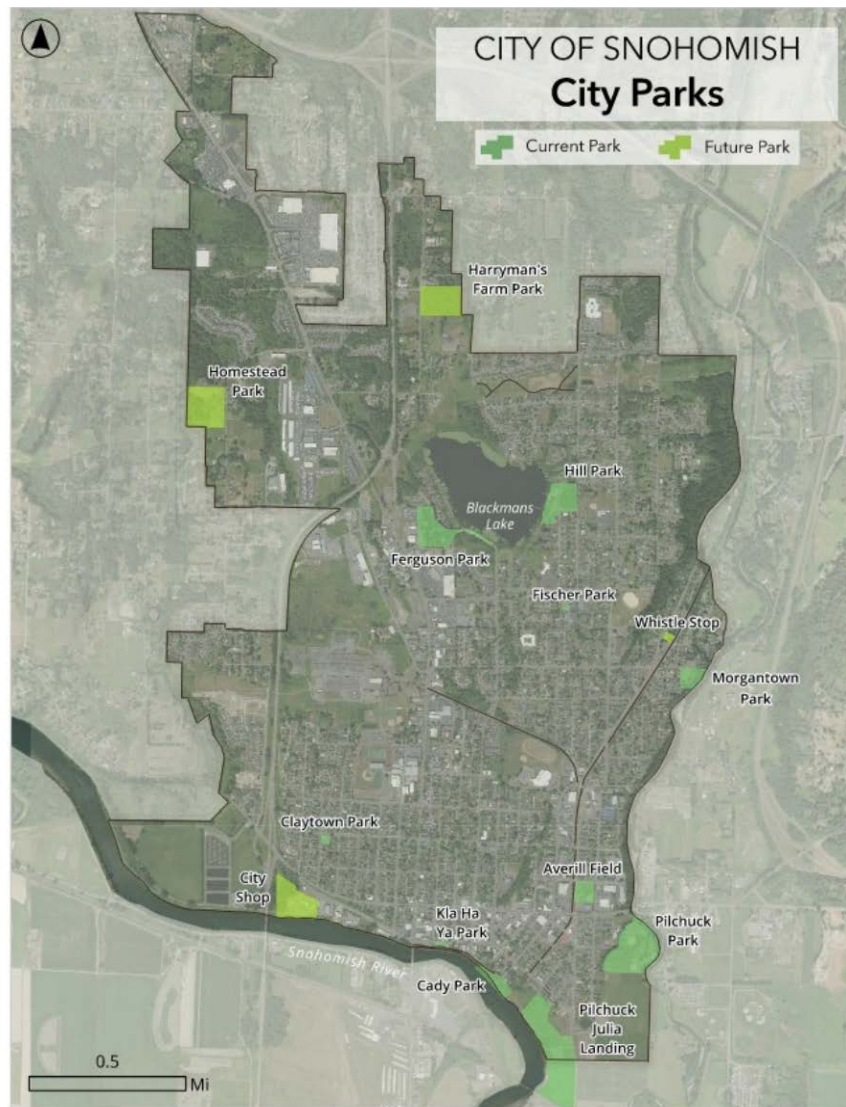


Figure 38. City Park Inventory (Source: Document Center, Snohomish, WA, “CivicEngage,” n.d.)



### *Habitat*

The banks of the Snohomish River have historically been adorned with a variety of trees, including big-leaf maple, red osier dogwood, and cottonwood. Surrounding the community, the valley and hills are characterized by dense forests containing hemlock, fir, and majestic cedar trees. Forestry emerged as the primary industry, playing a pivotal role in shaping the historic district. This richly forested land served as the ancestral home to five Indigenous tribes, including the Snohomish, who extensively used cedar in the construction of their dwellings.

The recognition of the critical link between the health of the Pilchuck and Snohomish Rivers and the well-being of Chinook salmon and their habitat imposes a collective responsibility to safeguard these natural resources. The success of ongoing efforts to enhance habitat and protect the environment is contingent upon the active engagement of both residents and businesses within the city. Employing a strategy aligned with the Endangered Species Response Act, the approach underscores individual accountability and community-based stewardship for optimal effectiveness. The ultimate triumph of these initiatives is contingent upon ensuring the sustained return of salmon to the city's streams.

Anticipating a flourishing of mature vegetation, the expectation is for an increase in both the abundance and diversity of avian and other wildlife species, thereby emphasizing the intrinsic connection between environmental health and sustainable practices.

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## Environmental Conditions and Hazard Mitigation

### *Snohomish River and Flooding*

The Environmental Protection Element (EPE) serves the primary objective of providing a policy guide to minimize the impacts of natural hazards, protect critical areas, and advocate for a sustainable approach to community development. The EPE for the City of Snohomish describes the various ecological and environmental elements of the region, including the Snohomish River, farmland, wetlands and floodplains, and other natural spaces. The historical significance of the Snohomish River as a transportation route and fertile farmland adds to its regional importance. This figure below is the Historic Flood Record of Snohomish River from 1942-2022. This shows that while there is a risk of flooding, disruptive flooding events do not occur on a regular basis. More information on flooding can be found in the comprehensive “Planning for Climate Change: Integrating Climate Mitigation & Adaptation into the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Snohomish” Report published in 2023 by students of UW and has been adopted into the City’s documents.

Various natural features, including wetlands and floodplains, contribute significantly to the environmental landscape. The urban growth area designation offers opportunities for greenbelts, passive open spaces, and habitat preservation, albeit posing challenges in balancing growth and development, preserving property rights, and ensuring sustainability without compromising citizens' quality of life.

The region encompasses crucial environmental resources such as basins, wetlands, the Snohomish River, Pilchuck River, Cemetery Creek, and Blackmans Lake/Swifty Creek. Glacial deposits characterize the uplands, while the floodplains of Snohomish and Pilchuck Rivers contain post-glacial sediment layers. Due to soil variability and associated risks like slides, erosion, and seismic events, the city relies on site-specific geotechnical studies to evaluate and mitigate potential hazards. It is noteworthy that groundwater within the city and its Urban Growth Area is not utilized for public water supply.

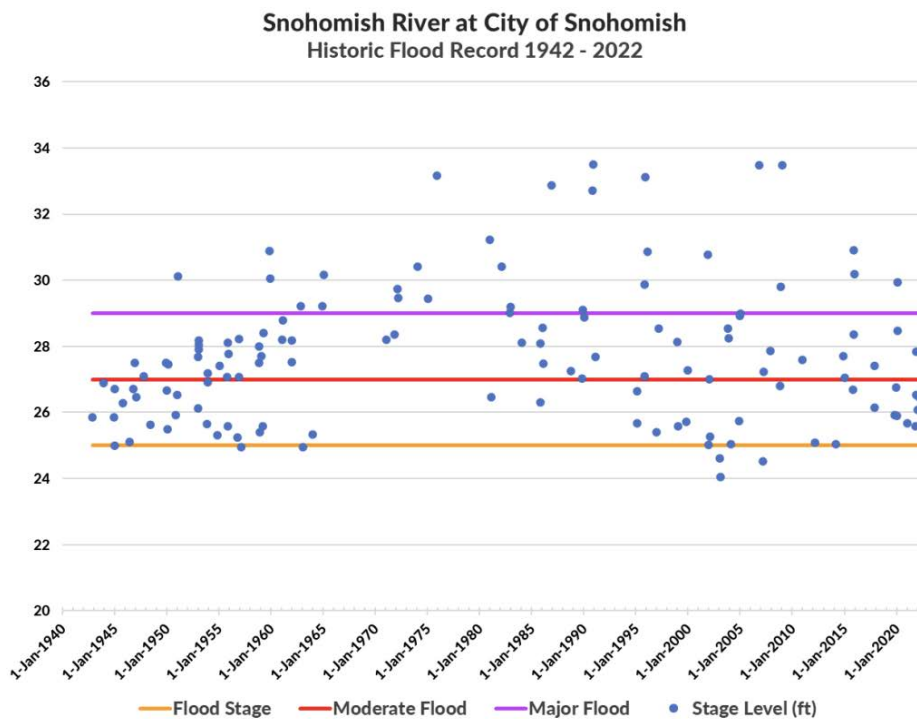


Figure 39. Snohomish River Historical Flood Record from 1942 to 2022 (Source: NOAA, 2020)

### Air Quality

The EPE also delineates air quality goals, with Goal EP 4 specifically dedicated to maintaining high air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This goal encompasses policies related to non-motorized travel, tree preservation, non-city regulations, emission control, and greenhouse gas reduction strategies. Current air quality indicators, including an AQ Index of 6 (considered good), PM 2.5 as the main pollutant, and compliance with WHO guidelines, contrast

with the broader Snohomish County's lower air quality grade, attributed to factors like wildfire smoke and wood stoves.

In “Planning for Climate Change,” the research team collected public input from community members about their experience during heavy wildfire smoke days. Participants identified needing safe and protected indoor spaces to reduce exposure, which are currently lacking in the area. Additionally, an important point of feedback from participants included the need to improve employee safety. This feedback is important in understanding the current experience of residents with the air quality conditions in the City.

Under Capital Facilities, our team identified a need to augment parking facilities to serve the needs of businesses and customers. However, the current traffic and parking conditions lack enforcement which could be contributing to increased air pollution. Design and land use changes to First Street may help reduce traffic congestion and emissions. These changes could improve air quality and enhance the pedestrian experience of First Street which is one of the primary goals of transforming the area for the City.

### *Climate Change*

The City of Snohomish has drafted their 2024 comprehensive plan which has a section dedicated to “Climate Change Preparedness” (“Comprehensive Plan | Snohomish, WA - Official Website,” n.d.). The plan recognises climate change and observes how the total annual precipitation and average annual temperature have been increasing for over a century. Based on the data, the city has made projections - as shown below - as they believe that the climate projections provide a range of possible scenarios based on different levels of future greenhouse gas emissions.

<b>Hazard Indicator</b>	<b>By Year</b>	<b>Low-Emissions</b>	<b>High-Emissions</b>
<b>Extreme Heat</b> Increase in days of Humidex above 90°F	2049	6.7 days	8.5 days
	2079	14.1 days	32.7 days
<b>Drought</b> Percent decrease in June-Sep. streamflow of Snohomish River	2049	-32%	-38%
	2079	-51%	-61%
<b>Extreme Precipitation</b> Percent increase in rain magnitude of a 25-year storm	2049	No data	8%
	2079	8%	17%
<b>Flooding</b> Return interval of 25-year peak streamflow of Snohomish River	2049	9.7 years	10.5 years
	2079	4.7 years	5.1 years

*Table C-1: University of Washington Climate Impacts Group*

Figure 40. Prioritized hazard, select climate indicators, and median projections (Source: Snohomish, WA 2024 Comprehensive Plan)

The City also acknowledges the significance of considering the interplay between various indicators and hazards, albeit their less predictable nature. The convergence of extreme heat and drought, for instance, could heighten the risk of wildfires and devastate ecosystems. Moreover, compounding events, characterized by simultaneous failures across sectors that amplify risk or trigger cascading impacts, may manifest. The interconnections among climate indicators and hazards underscore the necessity for a comprehensive approach to adaptation planning. Concurrent occurrences of multiple hazards or infrastructure failures resulting in additional hazards are plausible. Hence, meticulous infrastructure planning aimed at maintaining operational systems during disasters will be pivotal in mitigating the ramifications of compounding events (Comprehensive Plan | Snohomish, WA - Official Website, n.d.).

## Conclusion

### *Challenges*

We've identified the current challenges within confined zoning. The current zoning trends in Snohomish confine the objectives for the space. There is particular concern on the amount of single-family zoning and commercial space for the amount of housing needed. While there are no frequent weather or natural hazards to be particularly wary about, there is evidence of a trend in disruptive flooding of the Snohomish River every 7 years, with the last occurrence in 2009.

### *Moving Forward*

Snohomish is a quaint, charming town deeply rooted in its history, and at the heart is a dedicated, thriving community. However, it has several opportunities for it to grow and build upon its land use and environmental policies. In the future, Snohomish needs to enforce traffic and parking regulations that help improve air quality and pedestrian experience along First Street. Wildfire smoke and climate change will continue to impact the region. Businesses/buildings along first street need adaptation measures to protect employees and visitors indoors. There is also an immediate need for housing of 167,443 to accommodate the population target. With the identified vacancies, there is an opportunity to bring in new categories of business that could provide amenities which First Street currently lacks. Economically speaking, as the commercial center of the area, it's crucial that First Street offer a wide range of businesses catering to a diverse range of interests—as this will attract more people and breathe new life into the area. However, it's equally important that these businesses acknowledge and support the culture, history, and traditions of Snohomish, which the city aims to preserve. Any changes in infrastructure should keep in mind the frequent trends in natural hazards, as they are on the rise worldwide and must be accounted for.

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