

Health and Wellness Element

Introduction

Unlike other elements of the Lynden Comprehensive Plan, the Health and Wellness Element is not required by the Growth Management Act (GMA). The City, however, recognizes the importance of planning for overall community health, and adopted the Health and Wellness Element as part of the 2025 Periodic Update of the Lynden Comprehensive Plan.

How a community is planned has a direct effect on health and wellness. The goals and policies of this element are organized by topics where planning can impact long-term community health and wellness, including public safety, social health and human services, community design and active transportation, parks and open space, and recreation.

This element does not stand alone but rather unifies other elements of the Comprehensive Plan through the lens of health and wellness. For instance, the theme of multi-modal transportation is addressed by overlapping policies of the Transportation Element (Appendix A) and the Community Design and Active Transportation section below. Relationships between elements are identified under the section headings below. Together, these goals and policies will guide City decisions that have a direct effect on community health.

GMA Requirements

The Health and Wellness Element is not required by the GMA. Under the GMA, however, cities are allowed to include additional optional elements that deal with subjects relating to the physical development in their comprehensive plan (RCW 36.70A.080).

Commented [HG1]: The Health and Wellness Element is a good location to showcase the strengths of the community and the priorities of its residents. For Lynden it can include recognition of the social safety net that exists outside of local government - many non-profits and religious organizations fill the role of emergency housing, social support, and nutritional aid.

Purpose

The Health and Wellness Element was prepared as a unified planning effort to implement the community's vision as well as identify and build on the strengths of the Lynden community; ~~but The Element pulls information from a variety of sources including~~ ~~also as a reaction to~~ a County-wide community health assessment. In 2018, the Whatcom County Health Department prepared a Community Health Assessment that celebrated community health but also identified challenges. These findings illuminate the need to plan for the health and wellness of youth, families, and seniors, as well as an increasingly diverse population. Relevant findings for Whatcom County include but are not limited to those summarized in the figure below.



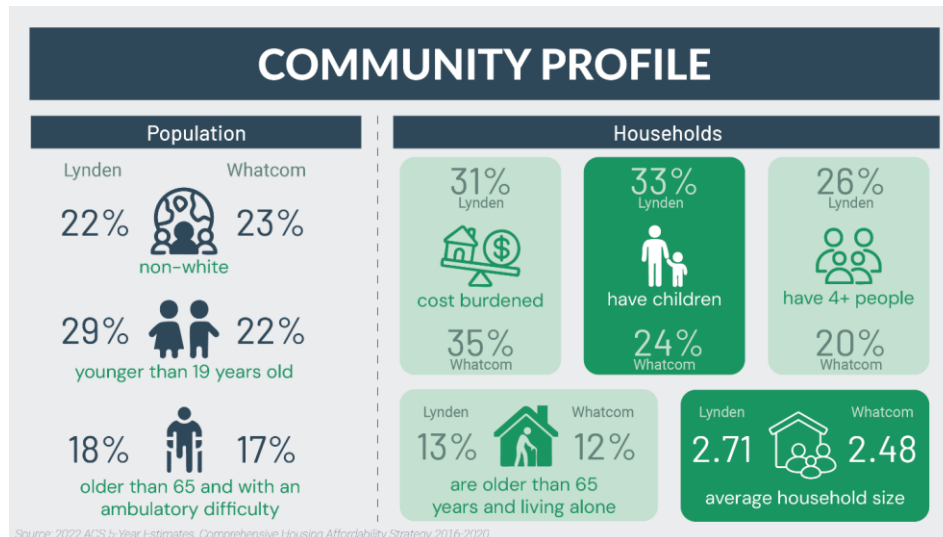
The Community Profile contained in the Housing Needs Assessment ([Appendix X](#)) characterizes Lynden as a growing community of young families and shifting demographics. By comparing Lynden population data to Whatcom County, the Community Health Assessment findings can be applied to help inform the City's goals and policies as it relates to Health and Wellness.

Lynden is family-centric and growing. Over the past decade, Lynden's population has grown by about 25 percent, compared to about 13 percent at the County level. The population is also skewing younger with 29 percent of the population under 19. In a City where one-third of households have children and more than one-quarter have more than four residents, this signals a need for youth and family-oriented goals and policies. The Health and Wellness Element enables the City to continue to support a youth community known for athletics, but also responds to the need for a broad range of services that support families, physical health, social connection, and mental well-being.

Commented [HG2]: Lynden has a lot of families!

Similar to County levels, 16-percent of the Lynden population is older than 65 and 13-percent of households are residents older than 65 living alone. Coupled with the goals and policies of the Housing Element, the Health and Wellness Element supports aging in place by encouraging development of walkable communities and access to services, as well as a strong social support system – a “social safety net” so to speak.

The Lynden population has also diversified, with 22 percent identifying as non-white in 2022, compared to 18 percent in 2012. As demonstrated by Key Findings of the Community Health Assessment, people from minority racial and ethnic backgrounds experience greater health disparities across all age groups. Additionally, community members report that access to healthy foods and safe places to walk, bike and recreate varies based on income and race or ethnicity.



The Community Health Assessment also found that there is a desire for creative solutions to improve coordination and access to services. Overall, the Health and Wellness Element aims to present goals and policies that bring awareness, support public safety, promote a social support system, encourage active lifestyles, and plan for the needs and interests of an increasingly diverse population, across generations.



Image: SafeWise

Crime in Lynden is notably low, in fact the city consistently falls within the top 20 safest cities in the State. However, Lynden's ranking among Washington's Safest Cities, as ranked by SafeWise.com fell from 5th in 2018 to 19th in 2024. According to SafeWise rates of violent crime, such as assault, have remained the same, while rates of property crimes, such as package theft, rose from a rate of 15.4 incidents per 1,000 people in 2022 to 22.6 in 2024. By comparison, the same 2024 report indicates that Washington State has the highest property crime rate in the nation with 35.6 incidents per 1,000 people while the national average rests considerably lower at 20.7.

(Insert WASPC data could also be discussed here.)

Commented [HG3]: Is there support to discuss public safety and crime?

Health and Wellness Goals and Policies

Public Safety

Goal HW-1: Develop and maintain safe public spaces through interdepartmental collaboration, community involvement, programming and design so that all residents and visitors feel safe in the community.

Policy HW-1.1 COORDINATION. Collaborate across City departments, including Police, Fire, Parks, and Public Works, to actively support public safety and crime prevention programs.

Policy HW-1.2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. Explore ways to support public safety by involving the community in neighborhood beautification and active use of public space.

Policy HW-1.3 DESIGN. Increase the sense of security by designing and programming public spaces and facilities to be highly visible, well-lit, and inviting, and encourage active use by a variety of users at various times of the day and throughout the year. Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into the design of public spaces and facilities.

Policy HW-1.4 PATROL. Strive to provide excellent police service and a presence in the community. Prioritize the maintenance of bicycle and pedestrian police patrols in public spaces, including parks and trails.

Policy HW-1.5 ENFORCEMENT. Maintain a high standard of public behavior by establishing and clearly posting rules for hours of operation and safe use of public spaces and facilities. Facilitate enforcement through the funding of security cameras and lighting while providing City staff and the Police Department with tools to enforce rules. Prosecute offenders.

Policy HW-1.6 DATA COLLECTION. Track the annual rate of crime committed in public spaces within the City in order to assess the safety of streets, parks, and trails.

The goals and policies of this section relate to those found in the **Capital Facilities Element** pertaining to the provision of services, such as police

Commented [HG4]: Many property crimes are crimes of opportunity - vehicles are left unlocked, for example. Designing for visibility and an increase in public education can go a long way to reducing crime.



Social Health and Human Services

Goal HW-2: Foster a connected and caring community that nurtures and supports the needs of children, families, and the elderly.

Policy HW-2.1 EDUCATION. Support opportunities to educate the community about health and wellness.

Policy HW-2.2 COMMUNITY IDENTITY. Promote opportunities for intergenerational activities to achieve a sense of belonging, foster connections within the community, and reduce instances of social isolation amongst older populations.

Policy HW-2.3 OUTREACH. Plan for the unique needs of children, teens, families and seniors when developing or improving public spaces, community facilities, or programs. Seek direct input from these groups on how spaces, facilities and programs can better meet their needs.

Policy HW-2.4 COORDINATION. Increase awareness of and support access to youth programs that help children and teens gain skills and self-esteem, feel safe, and provide opportunities for community engagement, social connectedness, physical activity, and mental well-being.

The goals and policies in this section relate to those found in the Land Use and Climate elements of this Comprehensive Plan. The **Land Use Element** includes goals and policies pertaining to Quality of Life, which emphasize the preservation of small-town atmosphere and community spirit. Goals and policies pertaining to the health impacts associated with climate hazards are found in the **Climate Resiliency Element**.



Policy HW-2.5 SENIORS. Encourage consideration of issues like transportation for the elderly and the need for dependent care for families in planning for community health and human services programs.

Policy HW-2.6 FAMILIES. Respond to the County-wide childcare shortage by evaluating and eliminating barriers to the development of childcare facilities within the City, and accommodating childcare programs within public facilities.

Goal HW-3: Foster a social safety net by anticipating the needs of the community, strengthening community approaches to human services, and maximizing awareness of public and community-based spaces, facilities and programs.

Policy HW-3.1 COORDINATION. Collaborate with public and community-based organizations, such as local religious organizations, Whatcom County Health Department and the Healthy Futures Group, to advocate for healthy communities and promote cooperative planning for human services throughout the region. Support coordinated efforts to plan for a new Lynden Community Center as an inclusive "third place" outside home and work with facilities and activities for all.

Policy HW-3.2 OUTREACH. Encourage existing human service organizations to evaluate needs, identify gaps, and offer services which are not currently available in the community.

Policy HW-3.3 STRATEGIZE. Involve the providers of human services in the development of human service policies, funding strategies, and programs.

Policy HW-3.4 ACCESS AND INFORMATION. Improve access to and availability of services and programs. This may include co-locating within public and community-based facilities or participating in a clearinghouse of comprehensive information on the availability of services in the community. Make use of technology to improve access to services and information.

Commented [HG5]: Other organizations that could be added here include "Be the One" and "The Boys and Girls Club". Are there others?

Community Design and Active Transportation

Goal HW-4: Implement planning and design strategies that promote active transportation and overall community health by prioritizing safe, attractive, and well-connected pedestrian and bicycle networks, while fostering small town atmosphere.

Policy HW-4.1 DESIGN. Require land use and development patterns that promote walkability for people of all ages and abilities. Incorporate an interconnected network of sidewalks, trails, off-street walking and bicycling paths, and on-street bicycle lanes, that support connectivity, recreation, and non-motorized travel between neighborhoods and commercial centers across the community.

Policy HW-4.2 MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE. Enhance and maintain public rights-of-way, parks, and open spaces by providing sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, and other amenities.

Policy HW-4.3 PRIORITIZE. Prioritize sidewalk improvements in areas that maximize connectivity, and safe and convenient pedestrian access to parks, community facilities and programs, and schools.

Policy HW-4.4 DOCUMENT. Implement the adopted Complete Streets Ordinance in roadway design.

Policy HW-4.5 AESTHETICS AND COMFORT. Work with concerned citizens to develop a plan to create aesthetically pleasing streetscapes and urban forestation. Prioritize protected paths, and off-street trails that enable pedestrians to safely and comfortably walk (one-half mile) from home and between destinations.

Policy HW-4.6 SAFETY. Promote the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists by providing lighting, signage, and protection from vehicle traffic.

The goals and policies in this section strongly relate to those found in the **Land Use Element, Climate Element, Transportation Element (Appendix A),** and Park and Trail Master Plan **(Appendix B)**, particularly the theme of non-motorized and multimodal transportation. The map of the City's Conceptual Trail Network is contained in the Park and Trail Master Plan. This section expands and consolidates those overlapping goals and policies to focus on community design and active transportation.

Commented [HG6]: More to come on this in the Transportation Element.

Parks and Open Space

Goal HW-5: Provide a variety of outdoor open spaces that allow for the active and passive enjoyment of people of all ages.

Policy HW-5.1 DOCUMENT. Promote health and wellness through the implementation of the goals and policies of the adopted Park and Trail Master Plan.

Policy HW-5.2 ACCESS. Ensure that all community members have equitable access to parks and open space within a half-mile walking distance. Strive to create open spaces and playgrounds that consider and accommodate children and adults with physical impairments.

Policy HW-5.3 COORDINATION. Work with the Lynden Regional Park and Recreation District to pursue park development within the City and the surrounding district. Work with Whatcom County and surrounding communities to coordinate linked greenbelt corridors along the Nooksack River and as identified within Whatcom County's Park and Recreation Plan.

Policy HW-5.4 PRESERVATION. Retain open space and increase access to natural areas for passive recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and aesthetic value.

The goals and policies in this section strongly relate to and supplement those found in the City's adopted **Park and Trail Master Plan (Appendix B)**. The **Land Use Element** also includes related policies pertaining to the preservation of public land as open space in order to maintain a high quality of life as the population grows.



Recreation

The goals and policies in this section strongly relate to and supplement those found in the City's adopted Park and Trail Master Plan (Appendix B).

Goal HW-6: Provide a diverse range of opportunities for people of all ages, interests and ability levels to participate in fitness and recreational activities.

Policy HW-6.1 PROGRAM VARIETY. Work with community partners to support a range of recreational programs for children, including organized youth sports and alternative activities that encourage active play, fitness and well-being.

Policy HW-6.2 ACCESS FOR SENIORS. Provide access to a variety of fitness and recreational programs for seniors with varying abilities and interests within public and community-based facilities.

Policy HW-6.3 **COORDINATION**. Foster working relationships with other agencies, jurisdictions, citizen groups and volunteers to assist in the planning and implementation of recreational programs, and expand opportunities for City residents inside and outside of City limits.

Commented [HG7]: The city keeps park use fees as low as possible so that schools and youth organizations can access the fields while keeping their rates low. The Parks budget must be supplemented by the City's general fund in order to do this.

