

York Neighborhood Association General Membership Meeting

Christ the King Church (the former Norway Hall), 1419 North Forest Street

February 26 2026 Minutes

Approved: Motion 2026-03-26.1 ✓

Present: Chris Donaldson (Vice President), Colin Beazley (President), Élan Engel, Erin Vonnahme, Kevin Cussen, Mark Ellis Walker (Secretary), Opie Knechtel (Treasurer), Paul D'Agnolo, City of Bellingham representative Hailey Sanders, and around 12 York residents

The meeting began at 6:30pm.

1. Community Streets Program

Colin introduced Hailey Sanders, the City of Bellingham's Public Works Education & Outreach Specialist, to speak about their Community Streets Program, in which basically the City is asking its residents where we feel less safe on our streets. This is specifically regarding **nonarterial** streets, which most of York's streets are, but obviously there are safety concerns with overlaps between those and arterials such as Lakeway Drive and Ellis Avenue. Also, this has to do with streets and not alleys.

This program began last year with a focus on the north and northeast parts of town, and in the first three months of 2026 it's the turn of the middle belt south of it—York, Downtown, Lettered Streets, Sunnyland, etc., as well as the northwest edge; its goal is to have residential neighborhoods used and enjoyed more by people. The results of the first part of the study indicated that by far the biggest street-safety concern expressed by residents was about **speeding**, and around 20 projects for improving street safety were initiated by the Public Works project team via the concerns reported. Those projects were summarized on a table Hailey showed that indicated a lot of very interesting information including the ranking of projects' priority and how more easily achievable and lower-costing projects could increase their ranking.

The project team groups the public feedback into four response pathways: 1. **Checklist Actions** (quick fixes for straightforward, immediate issues), 2. **Capital Projects** (which are bigger and need funding as well as involving higher rankings), 3. **Location Studies** (which will require the gathering of data such as traffic counts, leading to treatment plans), and **Neighborhood Projects** (for which Public Works can provide tools to help neighborhoods address their concerns at a more grassroots level such as planting street trees, creating street murals as traffic-calming elements, and hosting block parties).

The vehicle for providing feedback about street safety is a page on the City's website (cob.org/services/community-streets), where there's a link to an arcgis.com survey that can be used until the end of March if concerns are to be included in the study. Concerns about arterials can be submitted but won't be considered within the purview of this program because its funding limits its focus to nonarterials. Hailey advised that multiple reporting of specific locations as concerns do not necessarily increase its ranking or assure that they'll get more attention; once they're reported as a concern, they're on the Public Works' radar for full consideration.

For those more-immediate concerns about specific street-related problems such as abandoned vehicles and physically unsafe roads and sidewalks as well as alleys, residents should continue to use the City's online [SeeClickFix](#) service; this also includes parking enforcement, which is largely not handled by the Police Department as some assume and even within Public Works is handled by just four staff members responsible for this entire city of nearly 100,000 residents.

Visit cob.org/services/community-streets/how-community-streets-works for more information about this program, which will involve project design up to the end of 2026 with construction of projects envisioned for summer of 2027. Again, smaller projects are more likely to get implemented.

Hailey kindly fielded a variety of questions from the attendees. One for which she had no information readily available to answer with had to do with how the City's bike/transportation study of recent years fits into this one, although she suspects the answer could be found on the City's website.

2. Bellingham Comprehensive Plan

YNA Board Student Representative Lilli Kihlstrom was unable to attend tonight's meeting, so Colin presented on her behalf regarding her summarization and overview of the nature and circumstances of the City's Comprehensive Plan update. This is a mandated update process to revisit the status of its planning efforts and priorities at least every 10 years, but it is one now intrinsically affected by recent State-legislated city-planning/development prioritizations and goals which are in some cases in conflict with those identified by the city's neighborhoods themselves in resident-driven neighborhood plans created and maintained over decades.

The focus of the new requirements is on housing availability and affordability. As it pertains to York, among other things it means that ADUs are made more readily approvable and constructable, and there is very little protection left in place for historic buildings even when nationally designated as such. Colin presented a five-point slide summarizing what the YNA should do to strike the right balance and said that he sees York as being a good partner with the City on what it decides but that we can still express locals' concerns about development and how it impacts us—infill housing likely being the issue that will likely be biggest here. His five recommended approach points are:

- 1. Pursue formal historic district designation.**
Bellingham's Historic Preservation Commission can designate historic districts through a Type VI legislative process (the same process used for comprehensive plan amendments), and properties within designated districts are subject to review by the commission when alterations are proposed.
- 2. Engage deeply and technically in the 2026 code update process, armed with the plan's own language.**
The Bellingham Plan is a policy document, not a regulatory code. The city has signaled that 2026 will be the year of zoning code implementation—when the goals and policies are translated into the specific regulations that will govern what gets built and how.
- 3. Refine the YNA role from regulatory gatekeeper to community design advocate.**
The new model requires associations to operate more like design review advisory bodies, historic preservation advocates, and community development organizations.
- 4. Build new coalitions and strategically embrace the complete neighborhoods vision**
This means welcoming middle housing but demanding excellent design through form-based standards. It means supporting ADUs while advocating for tree-canopy protections under Policies CD-39 and EV-13.
- 5. Create a neighborhood character document that outlives the formal plan and fills the policy vacuum.**
Document the architectural heritage, landscape features, cultural history, streetscape patterns, and community values of the neighborhood—can serve multiple purposes.

He also mentioned that City Council members have advised him that impacts from these requirements are already coming fast in other neighborhoods. Élan reiterated his observation, expressed at previous meetings, that the Council is listening to the neighborhood associations about this.

Carolyn Mulder suggested that it would be good for neighborhoods' historically documented concerns to be brought forth and used to inform the City's decision-making when development conflicts with our stated values. Colin noted that the fifth recommendation on his slide, "Create a neighborhood character document that outlives the formal plan and fills the policy vacuum," addresses this and that the YNA should try to have such documentation available by summer.

Some observations by Paul D'Agnolo about what Kulshan Land Trust (of which he is also a board member) sees as housing opportunities in York, and then by Élan as to ways the neighborhood can influence the nature of urban growth through demonstrations of civic efforts such as pushing for green strips along streets, brought this topic to a close.

3. 2026 York Neighborhood Plan

After a quick update from Kevin on the outlook for Rock Hill Park's new playground being installed this year, Colin gave a recap of what the YNA priorities for 2026 are as expressed and discussed at recent Board and General Membership meetings. This are our annual events plus a Rock Hill Park inaugurating concert on the 19th of September (doubling as this year's picnic), a focus on safety including how to improve the impression of a safe neighborhood by getting out and using it more visibly, encouraging historical preservation but with recognition of the need for available and affordable housing as the City's planning will strive to make happen, and recruiting more Board members (renters as well) for more diverse representation of the neighborhood's constituency. Also, remember to support our local businesses!

4. Other Business

A last question as to whether it was known what company or companies ended up acquiring Lakeway Realty's properties when it closed wasn't definitely answered, but the general impression seems to be that they were just bought by other real-estate companies already active in the neighborhood and not a new entity.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54pm.

Respectfully submitted, Mark Ellis Walker, Secretary.