



**Our Mission:** The Downtown Bellingham Partnership (DBP) champions the health and vitality of downtown Bellingham through the promotion of commerce, culture, and celebration.

**Our Vision:** The Downtown Bellingham Partnership envisions Bellingham as everyone's neighborhood – a growing and evolving center for businesses, residents and visitors that is vibrant, welcoming, clean, and safe. It is easy to get access by all modes of transportation and it is Whatcom County's center for innovation, culture, and entertainment. Downtown is a collection of unique shops, restaurants and other businesses that reflect the authentic character and sense of community of downtown. Together they create an active and diverse downtown neighborhood, offering something for everyone.

**Background:** For the past 23 years, the Downtown Bellingham Partnership (DBP) has worked to create and maintain a vibrant city center in Bellingham to make it a prime location for businesses, residents, and visitors. It has focused on creating a clean, beautiful, safe, and friendly district for all. As the designated neighborhood association, the Partnership acts as a strong voice for downtown and an effective liaison between downtown stakeholders and local decision-makers. As a central source for information and discussion on downtown issues, the Partnership is uniquely situated to respond appropriately and immediately to downtown's economic development needs.

The Partnership is governed by an 8-member Board of Directors comprised of downtown property owners, business owners and employees, and residents, as well as community partners with a stake in downtown's success. In addition, it is comprised of approximately 7 full-time professional staff as well as 2-3 part-time staff, some of whom work seasonally. In addition, volunteers and interns from local institutions help with event planning, marketing, administration, and other tasks as needed.

**2024 – A Year of Transition:** The 2024 Work Plan reflects a major year of transition for the DBP with the departure at the end of 2023 of Alice Clark, who was the Executive Director of the organization since January 2016. DBP Program Director, Lindsey Payne Johnstone, has agreed to take on the Interim Executive Director role starting in January 2024, while the Partnership Board conducts a search for a permanent Director, which will take place within the first six months of the year.

Another big milestone in 2024 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Downtown Sounds. The DBP is committed to elevating and expanding the event in anticipation of celebrating this beloved community event.

Considering these changes, the Partnership has made a conscious decision to focus on the essentials in 2024 and limit the launching of any new projects, programs, or events. The DBP will lean into three big goals for the year – **increasing visitorship, influencing the perception of Downtown, and continuing to champion the health and vitality of the Downtown business community.** The strategies below reflect this focus and direction for the year ahead.

## **GOAL 1.) INCREASE VISITORSHIP TO DOWNTOWN**

**Strategy 1 – Expand marketing and communications for Downtown Bellingham district to boost visibility, as measured by impressions to DBP-owned promotions, and attract more visitors, as measured by 3rd party data software licensed by Bellingham Whatcom County Tourism (BWCT) and City of Bellingham (COB).**

**COLLABORATIVE TACTICS:**

1. Share DBP events and promotional materials with BWCT quarterly. **Deliverables: Number and name(s) of events shared, media materials delivered, and overview of what, if any, collaborative promotions BWCT brokers to expand visibility (ex: Travel blogger itinerary includes a Downtown event).**
  
2. Cultivate relationships with regional partners to expand Downtown’s promotional reach including but not limited to BWCT, Whatcom Museum, Western Washington University (WWU), Port of Bellingham. **Deliverables: Meetings and/or agreements for cross promotion each quarter; impact of established cross-promotional campaigns (ex: Western Wednesdays).**
  
3. Partner with BWCT and COB to measure impact of paid media campaign, *Rediscover Downtown*, to promote and measure visitation to the district. Quarterly visitation reports produced by working with COB to report from Placer.ai and BWTC to report from Datafy/Bandwango. **Deliverables: Monthly campaign media placements, impressions, and campaign call-to-action results as reported by DBP’s marketing agency, Quarterly traffic reports provided by COB and BWTC.**
  
4. Influence creation of Tourism Grant recipient cohort of Downtown event producers to formalize cross-promotional activities. **Deliverables: Meetings and/or agreements for cross promotion each quarter; impact of cross-promotional campaigns (ex: traffic to NW TuneUp event listing on DBP site).**

**DBP-OWNED TACTICS**

1. Maintain Monthly Happenings calendar on DBP website to solicit, receive, and publish other events happening Downtown, including waterfront district. **Deliverables: Number of events listed each month, website traffic to Monthly Happenings landing page.**
  
2. Increase DBP’s website traffic by 50% year-over-year. **Deliverables: Traffic report by month year-over-year, summary of traffic building tactics implemented (ex: search engine optimization efforts taken in the month).**
  
3. Grow DBP’s organic marketing audiences and engagement year-over-year. Specifically:
  - a. Increase social media followers by 20% year-over-year as aggregate of Instagram and Facebook channels. **Deliverable:**

Channel	Previous Year Followers	2024 YTD Followers To Date	+/- Change Month-over Month 2024	% To Goal	Notes
Facebook					
Instagram					

b. Increase general interest email list subscribers by 15% year-over-year **Deliverable:**

Previous Year Subscribers	Previous Month Subscribers	Current Month Subscribers	+/- Change	% To Goal	Notes

**Strategy 2 – Produce a top-quality slate of events that attract a wide range of audiences.**

**TACTICS**

1. Consciously expand promotional reach to non-typical demographics. **Deliverable –Number of neighborhoods where deliverables were distributed; number of publications where press release and media announcements were sent.**
2. Successfully execute roster of legacy events, optimizing for max efficiency/impact. **Deliverable: Progress on upcoming, current, and past events as charted below:**

Event Name	Event Date(s)	Program Goal	Status	Estimated Attendance
First Fridays	First Friday each month	Drive visitors to destinations monthly	Achieving goal	
Cider & Spirits Stroll	February 8	Increase visitors downtown during slow Q1 timeframe		
Spring on State	April, TBD	Increase family foot traffic		
Spring Wine Walk	May 10	Seasonal sip & shop event to support retailers		
Downtown Sounds	July 10, 17, 24, 31 & August 7	Drive visitorship on a large scale, bolster community engagement and stimulate the local economy		
Western Wednesday: First Night Out	September TBD	Increase WWU student foot traffic downtown and awareness for downtown		
Trick-or-Treat	October 31	Increase family foot traffic		
Holiday Wine Walk	November 8	Seasonal sip & shop event to support retailers		

Scepter Awards	December TBD	Recognize stakeholders		
Shine Bright (Q4 holiday events & promotions)	Thanksgiving weekend – December	Increase visitorship and awareness for local business		

**Additional Monthly Event Narrative:**

**(2.) INFLUENCE THE PERCEPTION OF SAFETY DOWNTOWN**

**Strategy 1 – Implement strategies to create and maintain a safe and welcoming Downtown.**

**TACTICS**

1. Continue to enhance and improve Downtown’s physical appearance through continuation of landscaping and cleaning and graffiti contracts. **Deliverable – see contracts.**
2. Coordinate placemaking efforts/CPTED projects/activations year-round. **Deliverable – seasonal Gallery Alley installation/number of Commercial St Plaza activations/alley improvement efforts/Commercial parking garage activations.**
3. Coordinate with City on new street banners and other infrastructure improvements, including streateries. **Deliverable – number of collaborative efforts.**

**Strategy 2 – Collaborate with COB to effectively communicate the Downtown District's Safety Plan, fostering community awareness and support for the initiative.**

**TACTICS**

1. Establish COB and DBP staff members to meet monthly, virtually or in person, to discuss and agree on content updates and communications channels to share updates on programs including, but not limited to Ambassadors/Private Security, Downtown Safety Plan, agreed on progress metrics (ex: police hours/staffing dedicated to Downtown, overdoses in district, vacancies). **Deliverables: Monthly meeting minutes.**
2. Assist execution of short-term goals in the DT Safety Strategy plan where DBP’s role is appropriate and there’s organizational capacity to do so (ex: alleyway improvement projects, plaza activations,vacant building activations, etc.). **Deliverables: Project updates as applicable.**
3. Provide DBP audiences monthly updates on Safety Plan progress via email newsletters to both general interest and business lists. **Deliverables: Links to DBP email newsletters and summary of safety updates.**
4. Share community sentiment surveys with downtown stakeholders bi-annually to identify areas of improvement and the most valuable assets of our work in 2024. **Deliverables: Results from Q1 Business-focused survey and Q3 Community-focused survey.**

**Strategy 3 – Enhance overall Downtown experience for visitors and locals alike.**

**TACTICS**

1. Implement Phase 1 of making Commercial Street a designated Festival Street. **Deliverables:** *Draft project proposal, obtain buy-in from surrounding businesses, obtain special event permit, present to the Permit Center for approval, outline programming for Phase 2.*

**(3.) ACT AS CHAMPIONS FOR THE DOWNTOWN BUSINESS COMMUNITY**

**Strategy 1 – Inform and educate businesses about resources, funding opportunities, training, best practices, and local civic issues impacting business viability.**

**TACTICS**

1. Organize and facilitate at least two Downtown Neighborhood meetings. **Deliverable:** *Dates, topics, number of attendees, minutes from meetings.*
2. Share relevant webinars, seminars, workshops. **Deliverable:** *Brief description of workshop shared, date, and communication method used to share.*
3. Educate and solicit participation in sharing DBP promotions and marketing kits. **Deliverable:** *Brief description of promotions shared and what, if any, adoption.*
4. Aggregate resources from COB, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Team Whatcom, Chamber of Commerce, and others for new and existing businesses on DBP website. **Deliverable:** *link to landing page, any notable content changes over the month, traffic to landing page.*
5. Deliver monthly email newsletters to two audiences: both including pertinent business news:
  - General interest subscribers receive news about new businesses openings, events hosted by businesses, awards, and/or seasonal promotions to visit businesses. **Deliverable:** *Link to newsletter, send date, open rate, views/impressions.*
  - Business subscribers receive news about educational opportunities, City of Bellingham public meeting opportunities and news, DBP grants and services available. **Deliverable:** *Link to newsletter, send date, open rate, views/impressions.*

**Strategy 2 – Reduce financial barriers for businesses through DBP-owned grant and assistance programs.**

**TACTICS**

1. Award three to five micro-business grants through the Storefront Improvement Grant program, enabling each business to access up to \$2,000 for the implementation of small-scale yet highly impactful facade projects. **Deliverable – Number of businesses awarded funds.**

2. Allocate 10 – 15 micro-grants via the Seasonal Activation Grant program to downtown businesses and organizations aiming to enliven the sidewalks or streets surrounding their establishments. **Deliverable – Number of activations.**

**Strategy 3 – Advocate for the business community's collective needs through various feedback mechanisms and collaborate with the City of Bellingham to implement solutions.**

#### **TACTICS**

1. Keep the pulse on issues impacting businesses through City Block meetings and advocate for proposed solutions. **Deliverable – number of meetings, tracking of issues brought up at meetings.**
2. Continue to organize City Block Leader meetings with City leadership (minimum 2 times per year). **Deliverable – number of meetings with mayor and other City staff.**
3. Communicate progress/outcomes of identified issues and what, if any, solutions are being implemented. **Deliverable – number of communications.**
4. Track openings, moves, and closures within the designated Downtown Retail Focus Area quarterly to indicate time in place net growth or contraction and share with COB. **Deliverable – number of business changes as outlined.**
5. Advocate for changes/adoption of legislation and policies at the city, county, and state levels that impact Downtown's business community. **Deliverable – number of advocacy efforts.**

**Strategy 4 – Engage and empower businesses to overcome obstacles and collaborate on opportunities.**

#### **TACTICS**

1. Integrate business owners into standing committees. **Deliverable – Number of committees, number of meetings, minutes.**
2. Continue City Block Program with limited capacity (meeting frequency, empowering leaders, etc.) **Deliverable – Number of meetings.**
3. Welcome new businesses, giving them resources and ways to be involved. **Deliverable: Names and quantity of new business welcome kits delivered.**

**Strategy 5 – Collaborate with other economic development partners on common goals.**

#### **TACTICS**

1. Attend relevant meetings and community functions. **Deliverable – Number of meetings and functions.**
2. Keep abreast of the work of other economic development organizations and create partnerships around common goals as appropriate. **Deliverable: Interact with a minimum of 10 local, state, and national organizations/year.**

3. Work with City of Bellingham to evaluate the Downtown Retail Strategy and determine whether to refill the Retail Advocate position to actively recruit new businesses and fill vacant downtown storefronts. **Deliverable: Number of meetings with City on the topic.**

**Strategy 7 – Promote consumer-oriented businesses using DBP's marketing platforms to enhance their visibility and showcase Downtown's dining, shopping, culture, and arts venues to locals and tourists.**

**TACTICS**

1. Maintain and update directories for restaurants, bars/breweries, retailers, and events/culture businesses on DBP's website. **Deliverable: Links to each directory, any notable updates per month.**
2. Solicit businesses to share media for use in *Rediscover Downtown* campaigns and include them in quarterly content themes. **Deliverable: List of current businesses featured in media campaign.**
3. Post, tag, and share business on DBP's Instagram and Facebook accounts to support the goal of increasing engagement on social media. **Deliverables:**

Channel	Monthly Reach	Monthly Engagement	Top Three Performing Posts	Businesses Tagged/Notes
Instagram				
Facebook DT Bham				
Facebook Partnership				