



## SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

### CITY OF FERNDALE MISSION STATEMENT

**“To encourage and promote active cooperation with all citizens and stakeholders of Ferndale, we will work to provide for growth while planning and supporting progressive economic and community development for the well-being of our community.”**





## HISTORY OF THE CITY

### **Pre-Contact Era: Time Immemorial – 1850's**

The site of what is now Ferndale was originally known to the Lummi people as “Te’Ti’Sen,” While Te’Ti’Sen was well-known to the Coast Salish, and was the site of seasonal camps, fishing, and hunting grounds; permanent villages generally occupied coastal areas to the west of Te’Ti’Sen. There is evidence to suggest that a Lummi settlement was established on the prairieland east of the Nooksack River, situated in a manner that provided access to seasonal hunting and fishing grounds as well as a distance from the coast, so as to be better-protected from raids by the Haida arriving from the north.

In addition to the Nooksack River itself, Tennant Lake was the site of traditional hunting and fishing grounds for several local tribes. During this time, the western hills (and most of the low-lying areas) were characterized by dense evergreen and deciduous forests, often extending to the banks of the Nooksack River. These forests were interspersed with wetlands, marshes, and prairies. It is likely that a number of trails also existed through the area, facilitating overland movement between Bellingham and Semiahmoo Bays, and travel along the Nooksack itself. River travel above Ferndale was often challenging, due to a series of logjams in the area.

### **Pioneer Era: 1850's-1907**

Whereas the Coast Salish peoples often viewed Te’Ti’Sen from the south, early European settlers saw the area from the north, calling the area near the Nooksack River the “*lower crossing*” to distinguish it from the principal river crossing at Everson.

Early European pioneers forged relationships with the Coast Salish people, trading resources and providing for mutual defense from slave traders from northern Canada. Many of these relationships were informed by the Point Elliot Treaty, signed in 1855, which provided a legal framework for European settlers to homestead while also protecting the sovereign rights of the tribes native to the Puget Sound region.

Billy Clark, a Texan who came to the Northwest during the Fraser River Gold Rush of the 1850's, was the first European full-time resident of what eventually became the City of Ferndale. He lived here with his wife and family for over a decade beginning in the early 1870's on 174 acres situated on the west side of the Nooksack River, occupying much of what is now Downtown Ferndale. His residence was an Alder cabin approximately 200 feet south of the existing Main Street bridge.

Clark also operated a canoe ferry between the east and west banks of the Nooksack at this location. Clark's ferry operation became possible following the removal of most of the log jams in the area in 1877, spearheaded and completed by local community members.



Ironically, the removal of the log jams also meant the end of the Ferndale area's first official name – Jam –the name given to the voting precinct in the area. At approximately the same time, Ferndale's first school teacher, Alice Eldridge, described the area as Ferndale (owing to the large number of ferns around the schoolhouse) in a letter to her family – and the name stuck. The town was officially named Ferndale in 1876.

Most of the “settlers of the 1870's” confined their operations to locations near the river. There were no roads and transportation was primarily viameandering muddy trails winding through the woods. After the removal of the logjams, river traffic in the form of steamboats and private vessels commenced. The Nooksack became a waterborne highway, and the population of the community started to grow, particularly along the east side of the river.

Over time, property owners on the east and west sides of the river competed for dominance of local commerce, with eastern interests prevailing until the further platting of land on the west side, combined with the closure of the post office on the eastern banks of the river (a second post office was located on the west side), and the destruction of a hotel on the east side resulted in a migration to the west.

The strength of resources for fishing and lumbering brought early settlers, many from Scandinavia. A multitude of small mills were built along the Nooksack River and gradually the forests receded to reveal the fertile soil beneath. Agriculture soon became an important industry and has remained key to the area.

In 1884 the Northwest Diagonal Road was opened up to Ferndale, and connected up with a road that ran through Custer to Blaine. In 1886 the Guide Meridian Road was opened, but Whatcom County remained rustic and isolated until 1893 when the Great Northern Railroad built its railway line across the western part of the County, through Ferndale, to Blaine, and on to Vancouver, British Columbia.

Augustus Griffin, having earned and then lost a fortune in Chicago following the Great Chicago Fire before regaining it during the California gold rush, acquired property in Ferndale north of Downtown in expectation of the extension of the Great Northern Railroad extension. He lost his holdings in the financial panic of 1892, the year before the rail line through what is now Griffintown was established.

The railroad, including the Ferndale Station located north of what is now Washington Street fundamentally changed Ferndale from a remote hamlet to a small town that was now connected to not only Bellingham and Lynden, but the larger world around it. Goods produced in and around Ferndale could be shipped out, and goods, services, and new neighbors could be shipped in.



### **Small Town: 1907 - 1954**

Incorporated in 1907, Ferndale began its existence as a “town” under Washington law. The 1910 census revealed a population of 691, and these numbers did not rise above 760 until the late 1950’s. While still close to the larger city of Bellingham, Ferndale remained somewhat isolated, relying on a large hinterland of agricultural, forestry, and, to a lesser extent, fishing to produce goods for sale. In turn, Ferndale’s downtown was the center for commerce in the area and provided the majority of shopping options that were needed for a community of its size.

Without a significant amount of migration in and out of town, Ferndale’s identity tended to reflect the individuals, families, and industries that had built it. The Old Settler’s picnic had begun prior to the turn of the century, but in the 1920’s the Old Settler’s Association began relocating original Pioneer cabins from the surrounding community. Ferndale High School was established at its current location, and Old Main was constructed in the 1930’s. Then, as now, the high school was a center of community activity and pride.

During the Great Depression, Ferndale’s residents weathered the difficult times on the strength of their agricultural prowess, managing some of the most productive poultry farms, sugar beet crops and dairy farms in northern Washington.

During this time a major granary was built on the west side of the railroad tracks south of Washington Street, and the Carnation Building was constructed on the east side of the Nooksack River, north of Main Street. These businesses further refined the raw products made in Ferndale and shipped them to larger markets.

### **Industrial Growth: 1954-1980**

Following World War Two and the opening of Alaskan oilfields, the General Petroleum Corporation opened the Ferndale Refinery west of Ferndale. This refinery sparked a building boom in Ferndale, pushing the City’s population to nearly 1,500 people by 1960 and over 2,000 people by 1970.

The Ferndale area was seen as ideal for large industry, due to its strategic location relatively close to raw resources, its proximity to major (and growing)

population centers in Vancouver BC and Seattle, its relative remoteness from immediately-adjacent centers, its deep water port, and the growing aviation industry that ultimately relied on the fuels refined at Cherry Point.

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, two additional major industries were established in the Cherry Point region just north of what was now the Mobile Refinery (and would eventually become the Phillips 66 Refinery). The Cherry Point (now BP) refinery is the largest refinery in Washington State, and the Alcoa Intalco Aluminum smelter, which opened in 1966, was for a time the largest aluminum smelter in the United States. These industries, together with the construction of Interstate Five through Ferndale, increased the City’s population to almost 4,000 by 1980.



Even as Ferndale's population grew, however, the downtown core of the community began to decline. While major industries were located immediately adjacent to Ferndale and many industrial workers lived in Ferndale, the ease of access to Bellingham increased the ability to commute to and from that larger city. The auto-dependent nature of suburban life also gave rise to larger grocery, fast food, and convenience stores located outside of Ferndale's core, while Bellingham's department stores, recreation, and cultural activities were now only ten minutes away.

### **Bedroom Community: 1980-2010**

As a result of these changes, while Ferndale's population grew and the economy became more diversified and transitioned from an agrarian community to a more-industrial community, it also became more of a bedroom community. With this loss of shared employment combined with the influx of new residents, the community sought new ways to connect with each other.

From 1980 to 1990, the City's population grew by rapidly once again, approaching 5,500 by 1990. Whereas growth in each of the previous three decades could be attributed to a major new industrial employer, growth in the 1980's was fueled primarily through residential construction attracted by the region's quality of life, the relative affordability of Whatcom County (and the small cities/unincorporated County), as compared to California, Seattle, Vancouver, and even Bellingham, and more.

The rapid growth of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia in particular changed commerce in Northwest Washington. Expo '86 in Vancouver, increased investment and in-migration from Asia to Vancouver, at-times favorable exchange rates, made the introduction of regional shopping in Bellingham possible.

The construction of Bellis Fair Mall in 1989, followed by Walmart, Costco, and a range of national retailers, decimated Ferndale's downtown. Traditional downtown retailers could not compete with one-stop shopping, and the relatively sudden shift in shopping patterns following high interest rates in the early 1980's, combined with restrictive land use regulations discouraging mixed residential and commercial uses at the time, prevented downtown property owners from changing the physical characteristics of downtown buildings to remain competitive.

The growth of residential development and the expectations of a residents for full City services, compelled the City to undertake significant capital improvements while also addressing a reduction in revenues due to a loss of sales tax. The City closed its Parks Department in the early 2000's and practiced a variety of austerity measures through the Great Recession beginning in 2008.



## Small City: 2011-Present

Despite the 2008-2010 recession, Ferndale's residential growth continued unabated. During the recession, the City sought to modify its long-range growth expectations and re-emphasized recreation opportunities, assumptions for future infrastructure needs, increased allowances for infill development opportunities, and a rebirth of the Downtown core.

Ferndale's population was estimated at nearly 11,500 in 2010, and during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the City became home to several relatively large companies and industries with a regional and in some cases, a global presence. The increasing diversity of the employment sector also began to change Ferndale's status from a bedroom community to a small city: whereas Ferndale had generally experienced an exodus of workers during the day in the 1980's and 1990's, traffic patterns in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century reflected an approximately-equal number of workers entering for work each day as those leaving it.

The community's efforts to rediscover or reinterpret the sense of place of Ferndale have been at the forefront of community conversation. Community build projects such as Star Park, gatherings in response to tragedy and success, the re-examination of history and social norms, the closure of the Intalco Aluminum Smelter, a re-assessment of the costs of growth and expectations for service, and the transition from a small town to a small city have all resulted in a turbulent second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In 1980 the City became a Non-Charter Code City with the Council-Manager form of government. In 1998 the citizens of Ferndale voted to return to the Mayor-Council form of government, with a special election held on March of 1999 to choose a new Mayor and seven Councilmembers. The third largest community in Whatcom County, Ferndale's 2020 population was 15,468.





## **ELECTED OFFICIALS**

### **FERNDALE MAYOR**

**Greg Hansen**

*Term ends 12/31/2023*

### **FERNDALE CITY COUNCILMEMBERS**

**Position #1 – Herb Porter**

*Term ends 12/31/2023*

**Position #2 – Ali Hawkinson**

*Term ends 12/31/2023*

**Position #3 – Erin Gunter**

*Term ends 12/31/2023*

**Position #4 – Paul Shuey**

*Term ends 12/31/2023*

**Position #5 – Ryan O’Larey**

*Term ends 12/31/2021*

**Position #6 – Kate Bishop**

**Mayor Pro term 2019-2021**

*Term ends 12/31/2021*

**Position #7 – Maralise Fegan**

*Term ends 12/31/2021*



## **APPOINTED OFFICIALS**

**City Administrator**  
**Jori Burnett**

**Finance Director**  
**Sirke Salminen**

**Public Works Director**  
**Kevin Renz**

**Chief of Police**  
**Kevin Turner**

**Community Development Director**  
**Haylie Miller**

**City Clerk**  
**Susan Duncan**

**Deputy City Clerk**  
**Sherry DeJong**

**Communications Officer**  
**Riley Sweeney**

**Other Officials**  
**Dannon Traxler – City Attorney**

**Mark Kaiman – Municipal Court Judge**

**Thomas P. Lyden – Public Defender**

**David Nelson – City Prosecutor**





## MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL ORGANIZATION

The City operates under the Mayor-Council form of government and utilizes a City Administrator who runs the day-to-day business of the City. The seven-member City Council is the legislative and policy-making branch of City government. The Council must approve City laws (through ordinances) and policies (through resolutions); they approve expenditures through the annual budget process and set the general tone for the government itself.

The Mayor represents the executive branch of government and is responsible, together with City Staff, for carrying out and interpreting the policies set by the City Council. The Mayor and City Council meet at least twice monthly to conduct business appointed by the Mayor.

The Mayor and councilmembers are elected to four-year terms. Councilmembers are elected at-large with overlapping terms (three members are up for election in one cycle, with the remaining members up for election two years later). Any resident of the City who has lived in Ferndale for longer than one year, if a qualified voter, is eligible to run for election to the Council. Elections are held in odd-numbered years.

## COUNCIL COMMITTEES

In addition to serving as members of the City Council, Councilmembers also participate in various committees that have been created to assist them in examining issues that may come before the Council in greater depth and detail. Every two years the Council reassigns membership to the various Committees.

The Committees normally meet twice a month the week prior to regularly scheduled full Council meetings, or as needed in order to review issues that come to them via referral from the full Council, a member thereof, citizens, or staff. Often times, issues are resolved in Committee without further action on the part of the Council. Frequently the Committees make recommendations which are then later considered by the full City Council. The following standing Committees currently exist:

### **Public Works & Utilities Committee**

#### **Councilmembers Fegan, Porter, Shuey**

This Committee directs its attention primarily to matters of City infrastructure. The Committee may hear issues concerning City development standards, the plans for improvements to the water, sewer, storm drainage, or street systems, or the consideration of rates, fees, and policies for the utility operations of the City.



### **Planning & Land Use Committee**

#### **Councilmembers Bishop, O'Larey, Porter**

This Committee is focused on the growth policies of the City, typically associated with the built or natural environment, and often focused on private land use regulations. Frequently, new legislation originates in the Planning & Land Use Committee.

### **Finance & Administration Committee**

#### **Councilmembers Bishop, Gunter, Hawkinson**

This Committee concerns itself with City finance and budget matters, as well as the administrative duties of the City. Additionally, the Finance & Administration Committee has historically been involved in labor relations, and in giving direction to the staff on personnel issues.

### **Lodging Tax Advisory Committee**

#### **Councilmember O'Larey**

The Lodging Tax Advisory Committee consists of five members appointed by the City Council. One member is a current Councilmember, two members are representatives of businesses required to pay the tax, two members are persons in activities authorized to be funded by revenue received from the tax, and one member is from City staff. The City staff member coordinates the meetings. The Council reviews the membership on an annual basis to make changes as appropriate.

## **COUNCIL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ASSIGNMENTS**

Members of the City Council and City staff serve on a number of Boards or Committees which are intergovernmental, support, or advisory in nature and designed to coordinate activities of the City with the other political subdivisions and groups within the County or within the State. Council liaisons are expected to communicate City business to the groups whose meetings they attend, and to communicate the group's business that is relevant to the City to the full Council. The following is a listing of current council assignments:

### **Bellingham International Airport Advisory Committee**

#### **Councilmember Fegan**

The Airport Advisory Committee consists of representatives of the various groups served and affected by the Airport. The Committee makes recommendations to the Airport Manager and the Port of Bellingham, which operates the Airport.

### **Ferndale School Board Liaison**

#### **Councilmember Gunter**

The Council liaison to the Ferndale School Board attends Board meetings and meets with School District Administration to provide a communications link between the Council and the School District.



**Whatcom Transportation Authority Governing Board**

**Councilmember Hawkinson**

The Whatcom Transportation Authority provides specialized and public transportation services throughout most of Whatcom County. The Governing Board oversees the activities and operations of the agency.

**Whatcom County Fire District #7 Council Liaison**

**Councilmember Porter**

The Council liaison to Fire District #7 attends Fire Commissioners' meetings to provide a communications link between the City and the Fire District.

**Chamber of Commerce Council Liaison**

**Councilmember Hawkinson**

The Council liaison to the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce attends Chamber meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and the business community.

**PRTAB Liaison**

**Councilmember Gunter**

The Council liaison to the Parks, Recreation, and Trails Advisory Board (PRTAB) attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.

**Heritage Society Council Liaison**

**Councilmember Porter**

The Council liaison to Ferndale Heritage Society attends Society meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this civic group.

**Old Settlers Council Liaison**

**Councilmember Gunter**

The Council liaison to Old Settlers attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this civic group.

**Art Commission Council Liaison**

**Councilmember Hawkinson**

The Council liaison to the Art Commission attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.

**Pioneer Pavilion Community Center Advisory**

**Councilmember Bishop**

The Council liaison to the Pioneer Pavilion Community Center Building attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.



**Ferndale Downtown Association**

**Councilmember O’Larey**

The Council liaison to the Ferndale Downtown Association attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group

**Community Service Cooperative**

**Mayor Greg Hansen, Councilmember Fegan, and Communications Officer Sweeney**

The Council liaison to the Community Service Cooperative attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.

**Ferndale Public Market**

**Councilmembers Hawkinson, Shuey**

The Council liaison to the Ferndale Public Market attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.

**Planning Commission**

**Councilmember Bishop**

The Council liaison to the Ferndale Planning Commission attends meetings to provide an effective communications link between the Council and this group.