

**WHATCOM COUNTY  
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

**JON HUTCHINGS**  
Director



**NATURAL RESOURCES**

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**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** The Honorable Satpal Singh Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive, and  
Honorable Members of the Whatcom County Council

**THROUGH:** Jon Hutchings, Director

**FROM:** Gary S. Stoyka, Natural Resources Program Manager

**DATE:** February 9, 2021

**RE:** February 16, 2021 Council Water Work Session

Please refer to the proposed agenda below for the next Water Work Session. Additional supporting documents may be distributed at or before the meeting.

**AGENDA**

<b>Date:</b>	Tuesday, February 16, 2021		
<b>Time:</b>	10:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.		
<b>Place:</b>	Virtual Meeting. For instructions on how to watch or participate in this meeting, please visit us at <a href="http://www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil">www.whatcomcounty.us/joinvirtualcouncil</a> or contact the Council Office at 360.778.5010. View meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, videos, and archives at <a href="http://www.whatcom.legistar.com">www.whatcom.legistar.com</a> .		
Time	Topic	Council Action Requested	Background Information Attached
10:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Water Resources Update	Informational	None
11:00 AM – 11:30 AM	Marine Resources Committee 2020 Annual Report	Discussion	None
11:30 AM – 12:00 PM	Homeowners Incentive Program (HIP) update	Discussion	2020 HIP Annual Report HIP Program Overview for Whatcom County

If you have questions, please feel free to call me at (360) 778-6218.

cc:	Mike McFarlane	Jim Karcher	Paula Harris	John Wolpers	Doug Ranney
	Beth Bushaw	Josh Fleischmann	John Thompson	Kraig Olason	Erika Douglas
	Tyler Schroeder	Roland Middleton	Karen Frakes	Jennifer Schneider	
	George Boggs	Cathy Craver	Dana Brown-Davis	Atina Casas	
	Mark Personius	Jill Nixon	Lonni Cummings	Kristi Felbinger	

# HIP 2020 Annual Report



## HIP Overview

The Lake Whatcom Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP) is a joint City of Bellingham (City) and Whatcom County (County) program delivered in partnership with the Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) aimed at reducing runoff and pollution entering the lake. The program provides technical assistance and financial incentives for homeowners who voluntarily make water quality landscape improvements on their property. HIP was piloted under a Washington State Department of Ecology grant from 2011 – 2015. At the end of that pilot period, the City conducted an extensive program evaluation. Findings from this evaluation were used to develop a new and improved HIP 2.0 starting in 2017. HIP 2.0 provides the greatest level of assistance for properties that have the greatest potential to impact water quality in the lake through the “Target” program. All other properties in the program area qualify for the “Do-It-Yourself Native Landscaping” program.

## Purpose of Report

The HIP Annual Report provides a summary of program goals, objectives, activities, accomplishments, and expenditures. The report is a tool for HIP partners (i.e., staff from partnering jurisdictions and districts) to use in program evaluation and adaptive management and to serve as a reference to provide information about HIP to decision makers, stakeholders, and the general public.

## Program Goals

The overall goal of HIP is to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering Lake Whatcom from developed neighborhoods and properties without stormwater management facilities that meet current standards.

### Annual Goals and Objectives

- Increase area treated each year
- Increase homeowner engagement
- Provide good customer service and support to participating homeowners
- Promote awareness and participation in HIP through outreach and advertising
- Provide workshops and site visits for the DIY program
- Provide site visits and feasibility studies for the target program
- Improve program administration

## 2020 Accomplishments

### COVID-19 Response

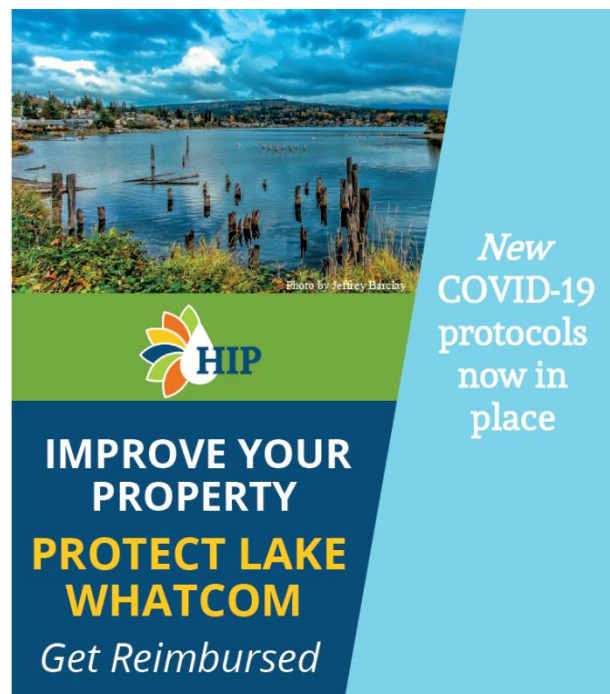
At the beginning of 2020, HIP was coming off of its most productive year since the launch of HIP 2.0 in 2017. Program staff were working with a number of homeowners to get their projects moving forward to construction in the spring and summer. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor issued a Stay Home, Stay Healthy order on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

The Stay Home, Stay Healthy order eliminated staff's ability to provide in person assistance to homeowners. Site visits and workshops were cancelled. HIP staff transitioned to working at home and assisting homeowners virtually, while safety protocols were developed. In addition, some staff were assigned to assist in the COVID-19 response efforts, which slowed aspects of the permitting and reimbursement processes.

Based on guidance set forth by the state, and with approval of city and county managers, HIP was deemed essential. WCD staff worked with county and city staff to develop safe site visit protocols. Once the protocols were in place, site visits continued safely and HIP staff continued to support homeowners still interested in having a site visit or pursuing projects. Homeowners were receptive. However, the pandemic affected HIP project completion in 2020. For example, five of seven target program homeowners interested in completing a project in 2020 opted out in the face of the pandemic.

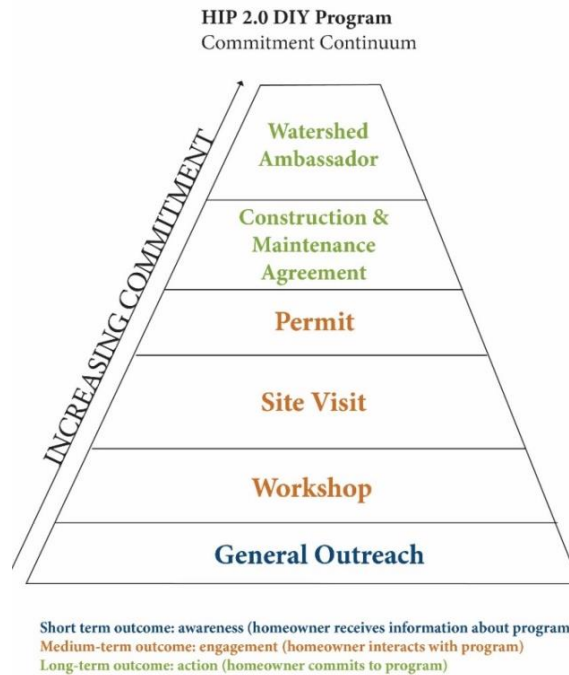
Staff's capacity to be flexible, creative, and adaptable during the transition and development of the safety protocols led to a seamless transition from business as usual to a targeted response to unusual times. Homeowners did not notice a substantial pause during the shift.

*Social media ad from June 2020.*



## Awareness, Engagement, & Action Continuum

HIP accomplishments are tracked on a continuum of awareness, engagement, and action. The process of implementing HIP begins with awareness and evolves into action with quantifiable results (see commitment continuum diagrams below). Awareness and engagement will always serve as the foundation to meet desired outcomes.



## Awareness

Awareness refers to public knowledge about HIP including knowing what HIP is and where to go for information about HIP. In order to raise awareness of both the DIY and Target HIP programs, a variety of outreach tactics were implemented in 2020. Awareness efforts were reduced in 2020 due to program uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- From February through June, an advertising campaign was conducted to inform Lake Whatcom watershed residents about HIP.
  - Over 5,500 postcards were mailed to all eligible HIP property owners. Postcards were mailed in February and June. The June postcards promoted an online information session to help eligible residents learn more about HIP.
  - Six Facebook boosted posts yielded over 33,000 impressions and about 470 engagement activities such as likes, comments, and shares. Boosted posts were geographically targeted to both residents and visitors in the watershed in order to achieve the necessary sample size to meet Facebook requirements.
  - Three Nextdoor announcements were posted yielding an average of 939 impressions per post. Posts were geographically targeted to HIP-eligible residents.
  - Eight street signs were posted throughout the HIP-eligible portion of the Lake Whatcom watershed.
- Yard signs (with messages “This property is HIP and “I’m a HIP Homeowner”) were distributed to and installed by 2020 HIP participants.
- A virtual information session for eligible watershed residents was held in June. The session included an overview video about native landscaping, program information shared by HIP staff, and a Q&A session with staff and watershed ambassadors.
- The HIP website was maintained to provide property-specific information to interested homeowners at [www.lakewhatcomHIP.org](http://www.lakewhatcomHIP.org).



## Become a HIP homeowner

The Lake Whatcom Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP) helps watershed residents improve their property and protect Lake Whatcom for generations to come. Shoreline, creekside, and large lawn properties like yours qualify for enhanced support to install water quality improvement projects.

## Start planning now

**Schedule a free site visit to learn about:**

- ♦ How HIP works
- ♦ Project options & planning process
- ♦ Landscape design & construction
- ♦ Reimbursement

Plan now to be ready to build your project during the busy summer construction season. Sign up for a site visit with Ryan O'Connor, Whatcom Conservation District HIP Coordinator, online or call (360) 306-4701.

## Learn more

Enter your address at [www.lakewhatcomHIP.org](http://www.lakewhatcomHIP.org) to learn more about HIP and schedule a site visit for your property.



**Join more than 150 HIP homeowners!**



Photos by Gabriella Mednick and Jenny Coe, WCD

*Example of postcard mailer sent to eligible target program households in February 2020.*

## HIP is up and running

These are unsettling times that have disrupted numerous lives. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP) remains focused on protecting our drinking water and the health of our residents.

HIP provides financial and technical support to watershed residents to install water quality improvement projects that beautify yards *and* protect the lake. New safety protocols are now in place to ensure our work is protective of homeowner and HIP staff health. See

[www.lakewhatcomHIP.org/covid19safety](http://www.lakewhatcomHIP.org/covid19safety) for more details.

## Extra time at home?

**Take a free online Do-It-Yourself Native Landscaping workshop.** After completing the online workshop, project consultations can be scheduled with HIP staff.

## Learn more

Enter your address at [www.lakewhatcomHIP.org](http://www.lakewhatcomHIP.org) to learn more about HIP and sign up for a free online workshop.

Contact Cynthia May at City of Bellingham Public Works for registration assistance: (360) 778-7711 or [cmay@cob.org](mailto:cmay@cob.org).

**Join more than 150 HIP homeowners!**



Photos by Gabriella Mednick, WCD

## Questions?

**Get answers at an online info session!**

Join us for a free webinar on **Tuesday, June 23 at 5:00 pm** to learn more about HIP, see examples of recent projects, and join a Q&A session to help get you started on your own project.

To register\* and receive notification of future webinars:  
[www.lakewhatcomHIP.org/webinar](http://www.lakewhatcomHIP.org/webinar)

\*Register by Monday, June 22 to receive webinar details

*Example of postcard mailer sent to eligible DIY households to promote HIP info session in 2020.*



*Example of a Facebook boosted post shared with residents in the Lake Whatcom watershed.*

## Engagement

Once people are aware of the program, they can begin engaging, which may include visiting the website, contacting HIP staff, signing up for a workshop, scheduling a site visit, signing a Homeowner Acknowledgement Form (which indicates that a homeowner intends to move forward with a project), or getting a permit. Engagement accomplishments in 2020 included:

- 2,305 unique visitors to the HIP website participated in 3,086 online sessions.
- Hosting one in-person DIY Native Landscaping Workshops with four households participating. 34 additional households registered for an online DIY Native Landscaping Workshop. A total of nine households (24%) completing follow up site visits.
- Conducting site visits with 11 households interested in the Target Program.

<b>2020 Homeowner Engagement</b>				
<b>Program</b>	<b># attending a workshop</b>	<b># requesting site visit(s)</b>	<b># signing acknowledgement forms</b>	<b># permits issued</b>
<b>Target</b>	N/A	11	4	3
<b>DIY</b>	38	9	8	6

### Action

After homeowners become engaged in HIP, they can begin to take action leading to on-the-ground results. On-the-ground actions in 2020 for both the Target and DIY HIP programs are summarized in the tables below. These numbers reflect 2020 actions only and are not cumulative.

<b>2020 Homeowner Action</b>			
<b>Program</b>	<b>Number of Projects</b>	<b>Area Improved (square feet)</b>	<b>New Watershed Ambassadors</b>
<b>DIY</b>	7	19,642	6
<b>Target</b>	2	41,694	0
<b>Total</b>	9	61,336	6

In addition to projects going in the ground, six homeowners committed to being Watershed Ambassadors in 2020. A Watershed Ambassador is a homeowner that is happy with their HIP experience and is willing to help recruit other watershed residents to participate in the program.

Watershed ambassadors helped promote HIP in 2020 by participating in an online information session for prospective HIP participants in June. They also shared their projects and experience in HIP Homeowner Spotlight videos that will be used to promote the program in 2021.





*Filming of HIP Homeowner Spotlight Video in October 2020.*

<b>2020 HIP BMPs Installed (Target and DIY)</b>			
<b>BMP</b>	<b>Number Installed</b>	<b>Total Area Improved (ft<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Number of Native Plants Planted</b>
Native Landscaping	9	52,002	3,477
MFD	1	3,274	n/a
Dispersion	1	6,060	n/a
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>61,336</b>	

## 2020 Target Project Examples



*Maggie Kinsella and Jim Hopper's large lawn before HIP improvements*



*Here is the same large lawn converted to Native Landscaping with a dry creek bed and three dispersion trenches treating a total of 17,410 square feet.*





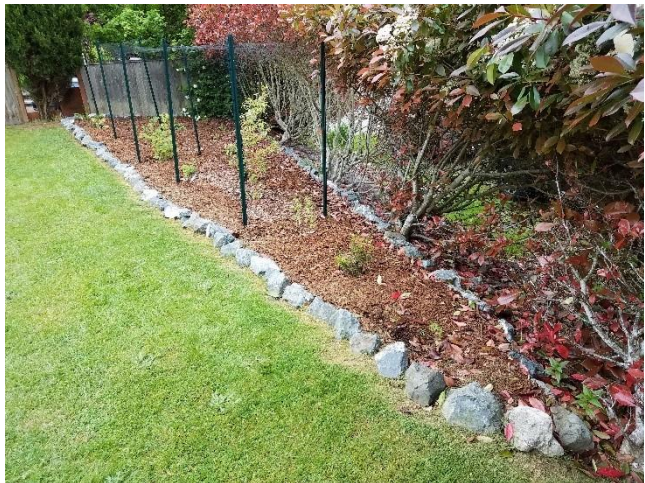
*Jon and Jolie McGrath's large front lawn before HIP Improvements*



*HIP improvements to the McGrath property include large areas of Native Landscaping and a Media Filter Drain treating lawn sheet flow. Total area treated is 18,224 square feet.*



## 2020 DIY Native Landscaping Project Examples



*Watershed ambassadors Anthony and Sherar Quattrocchi transformed a problem area in their lawn into a beautiful HIP native landscape covering 1,071 square feet. Once a blot on the landscape, this area is now a beautiful focal point in their yard. The Quattrocchi's really took into consideration how water moved across their property and located beds in areas to best capture it before running off into the streets and ultimately Lake Whatcom.*





*Morgan and Brittany Myers upgraded 1,787 square feet of existing landscaping to HIP standards. Here is a portion of their backyard lawn converted to HIP native landscaping. Temporary wildlife protection was used as well to protect the small plants from predation.*





*Front yard before*



*Front yard after*



*Back yard before*



*Back yard after*

*Wendy Walker landscaped her entire front yard and portions of the back, covering 2,828 square feet with HIP native landscaping. Initially she was concerned that it was going to be a lot of work, but she enjoyed it so much, that she quickly decided to add more area to the back yard. Her cedar chip mulch paths are impressive and functional.*

## Program Administration

There are many administrative tasks required to successfully implement HIP and support homeowner engagement and action. Administrative tasks completed in 2020 included:

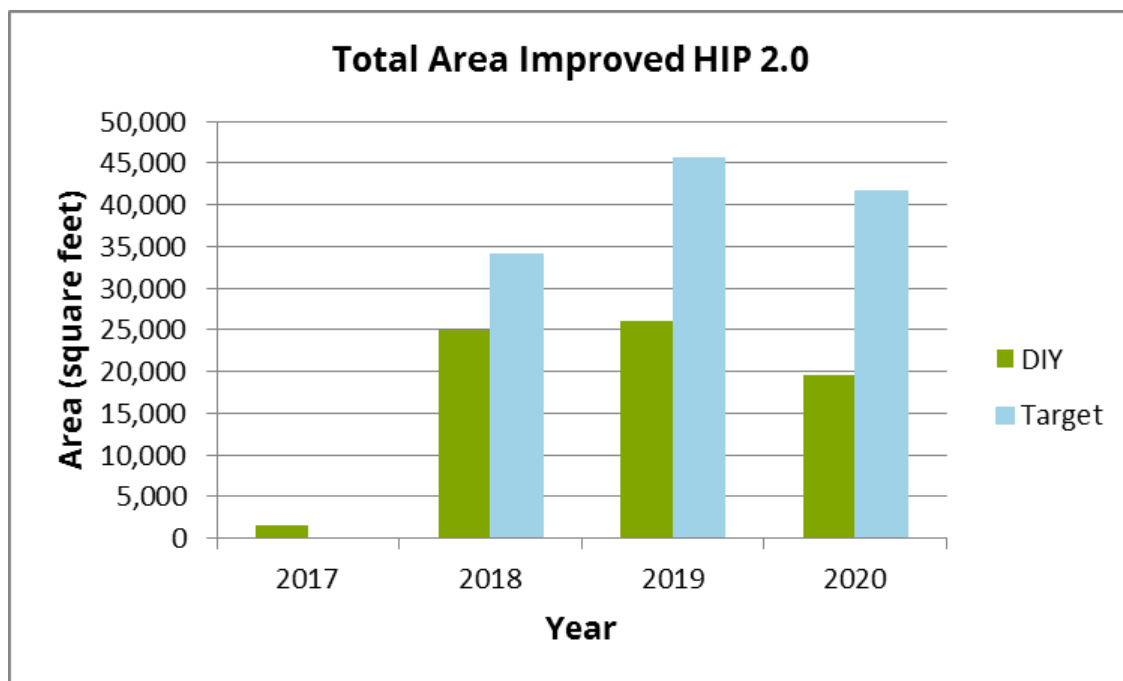
- Maintaining the HIP website.
- Maintaining accurate customer and project records in the HIP database.
- Sending thank you letters and requests to provide feedback to homeowners completing HIP projects.
- Evaluating HIP and developing proposals to revise the program starting in 2021 to better meet the unique needs of the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County.
- Developing and approving a new interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the Whatcom Conservation District for 2021.
- Amending the current interlocal agreement between the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County for continued implementation of HIP through 2021.

## Results and Evaluation

### Overall HIP Project Status

The following table provides a summary of known HIP project status for all projects initiated from 2017 to 2020. The chart below shows total area improved per year by all HIP BMPs installed from 2017 to 2020.

HIP Project Status by Program									
Program	Not moving forward	On hold	Pre-Design	Design	Permitted	Construction	In the Ground	Closed Out	Total
DIY	10	25	0	1	5	1	2	20	64
Target	39	8	1	12	1	0	1	8	69
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>133</b>



## Phosphorus Reduction

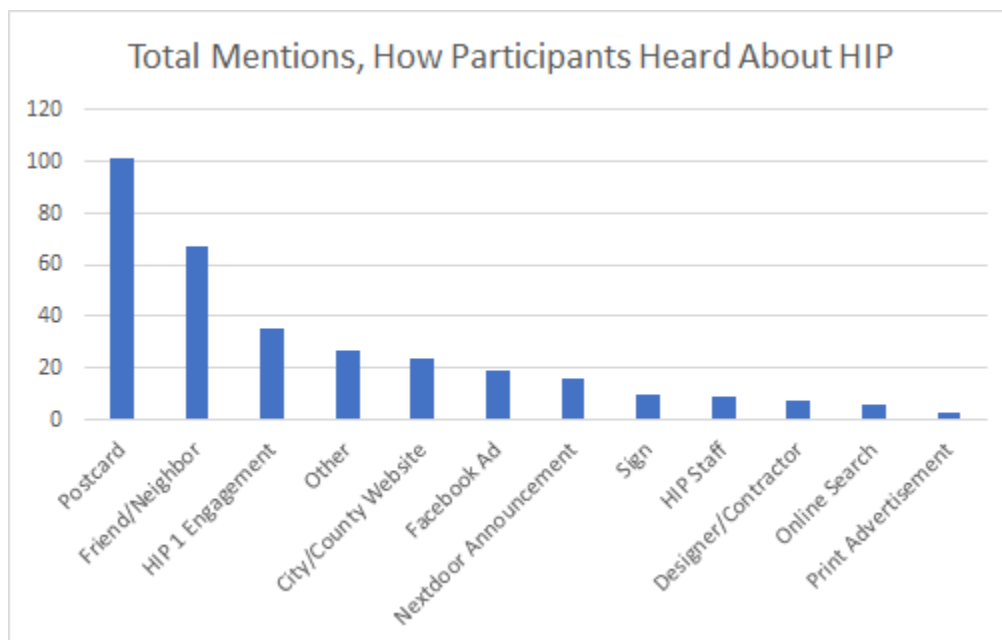
The following is a summary of the potential phosphorus (P) reduction per year achieved by HIP BMPs installed from 2017 to 2020. Projects that are either closed out or in the ground at the end of 2020 are included in the total area improved.

Program	Number of Projects	Total Area Improved (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Total Pounds of P Reduced (Per year)	Pounds of Algae Prevented* (Per Year)	Claimed Reimbursement	Reimbursement Cost per Pound of P Reduced Annually
DIY	22	72,396	1.775	888	\$77,581	\$43,707
Target	10	121,378	2.983	1,492	\$121,685	\$40,793**
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>193,774</b>	<b>4.758</b>	<b>2,380</b>	<b>\$199,266</b>	<b>n/a</b>

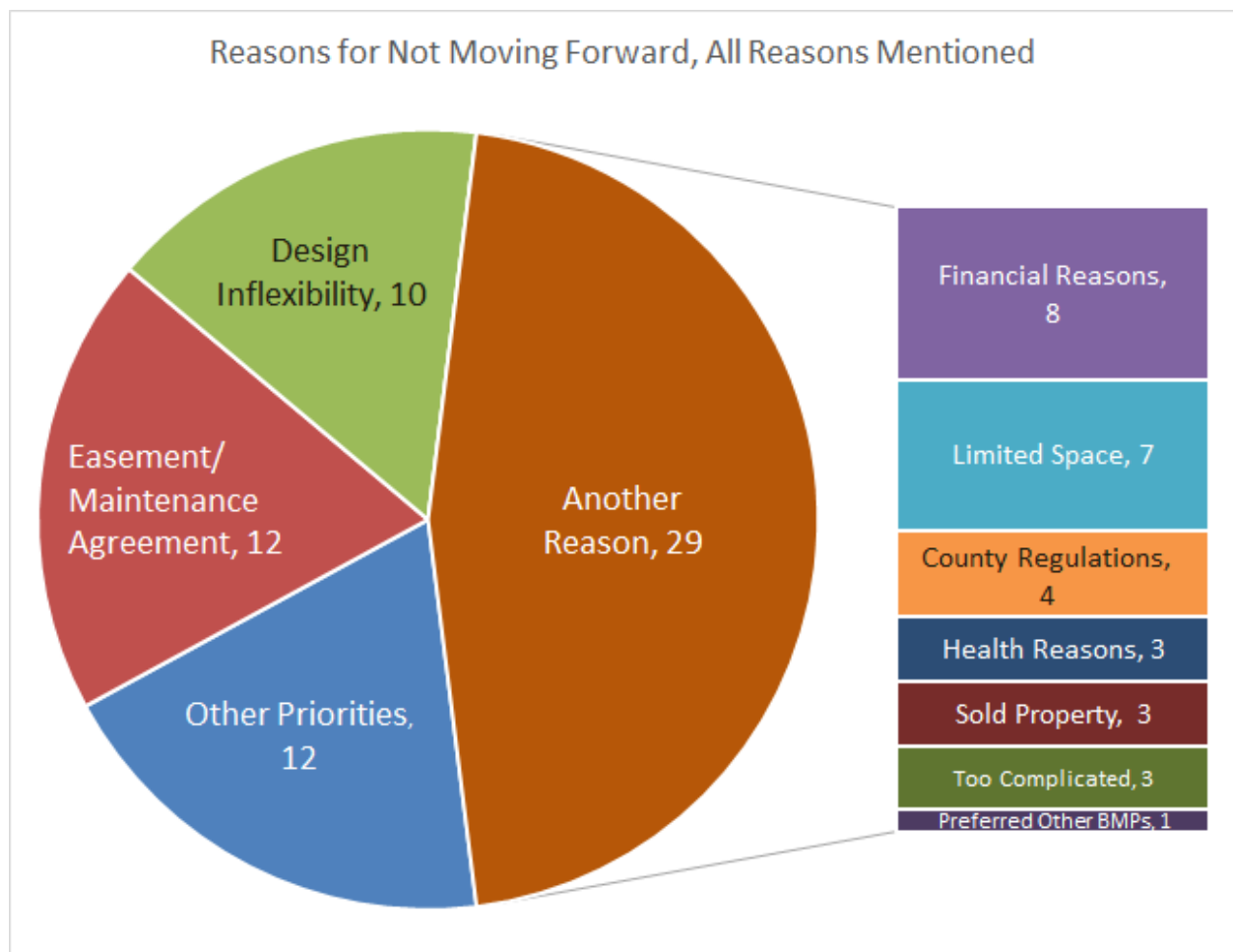
\* 1 pound of phosphorus can support 500 pounds or more of algae growth

\*\* includes 23,470 square feet improved "in the ground" in December 2020 that will be reimbursed in 2021.

Participating HIP homeowners are asked how they heard about HIP. As shown in the chart below, the most effective outreach method is direct mailers (postcard) followed by word of mouth from a friend or neighbor. These data were collected from participants from 2017-2020.



A total of 239 households have engaged in HIP from 2017-2020. Of these participants, 105 households (mostly DIY) have not yet responded to inquiries about their interest in continuing a HIP project. A total of 49 households have confirmed they are not moving forward with a HIP project (39 target and 10 DIY). These homeowners provided feedback on why they decided to withdraw from the program. Homeowners may cite multiple reasons. From the 49 households offering feedback, a total of 63 reasons were provided summarized in the chart below.





## 2020 Expenditures

The table below includes all HIP expenditures paid by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County in 2020. Contracted staff support is included under professional services. City and County staff support costs are funded separately and are not included in this table.

<b>2020 HIP Expenditures</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Advertising & Outreach	\$3,860
Professional Trainings	\$0
Professional Services ( <i>Whatcom Conservation District Assistance</i> )	\$147,500
Homeowner Reimbursements	\$48,228
Title Recording Fees	\$0
Permitting	\$0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$199,588</b>



## Program Overview for Whatcom County

### What is HIP?

The Lake Whatcom Homeowner Incentive Program (HIP) is a coordinated City of Bellingham and Whatcom County non-regulatory program that reduces phosphorus pollution in Lake Whatcom. HIP provides free technical assistance and financial reimbursement for voluntary water quality improvement projects on properties within the Lake Whatcom watershed.

### Who is eligible to participate in HIP?

All homeowners with property in the Lake Whatcom watershed that does not meet current stormwater management standards may participate in HIP (current county code standards were approved in August 2013). Staff will confirm eligibility with each interested homeowner. Other property types (e.g., schools, condos, mobile home parks) may also participate in HIP. Program requirements are the same for all property types.

### What's new in 2021?

Whatcom County is offering a revised HIP for county homeowners starting in 2021. Changes to the program in the county include:

- Expanded program area to include the entire Lake Whatcom watershed.
- A single version of HIP for all eligible properties with additional project options available for shoreline properties that drain directly to the lake.
- Flexibility to use the HIP reimbursement budget for labor—Homeowners can choose how to manage their reimbursement budget and contribute to their project. You can do the work yourself or pay for help.
- Native landscaping focus with options for other types of water quality improvement projects is feasible for the site. Design assistance provided as needed.
- Maintenance agreement only for most projects. An easement is still required for large shoreline projects.

## How does HIP work?

Here are the basics of how HIP works and the program requirements.

- Homeowners receive free technical assistance from Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) staff. Staff is available to help throughout the entire process.
- HIP projects are limited to the following types of water quality improvements: native landscaping, dispersion systems into native landscaping, underground filters (i.e., media filter drains), infiltration trenches, and rain gardens.
  - Native landscaping is an option for all properties.
  - WCD staff will determine if other project options are recommended for a given site. Not all project types are suitable for all locations.
- The minimum project size is 1,000 square feet or 25% of the property's improvable area, whichever is smallest. Improvable area is area not already in native landscaping, forest, or directed to a stormwater management facility.
- The reimbursement budget is \$1.30/square foot of area improved up to a maximum of \$8,000. Homeowners pay costs upfront and apply for reimbursement after their project is installed.
- Homeowners must agree to maintain their project and complete annual self-inspection and maintenance reports to receive reimbursement.

## How do I get started?

Visit [www.lakewhatcomhip.org](http://www.lakewhatcomhip.org) and check your address to see if your property qualifies. Complete a short online form and WCD staff will follow up with you to answer your questions and help you start planning a project.