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Millworks Community Housing Project Internship

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: Millworks Community Housing Project

Student Name: Aaron Stolberg

Internship Dates: 2/7/2022 - 6/11/2022

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STUDENT SIGNATURE 

DATE: 6/10/2022

Aaron Stolberg

Tammi Laninga

Kristi Park

6/10/2022

Millworks Community Housing Project Internship Report

The internship I was involved with took place between February of 2022 and concluded in June of the same year. I worked to support Kristi Park and the Millworks Housing team to help with community outreach related to the new low-income housing development on the downtown Bellingham waterfront. This involved observing and working closely with RMC Architects as well who were the architecture firm who designed the architecture for the new apartment complex. Three other WWU students and I would meet once a week on average to discuss what work we had been doing the week before for the internship and what work we planned on completing or starting by next weeks meeting.

In the earliest stages of the internship, our involvement was primarily observational. Kristi Park would update us on the ever-evolving plans of Mercy Housing and the RMC Architect team as they formulated their goals for the housing project as a whole. Although we did not do a significant amount of work outside of research and reading their plans, it was a very beneficial

and education part of the internship because we were able to focus more on internalizing the information and learning from it.

In this beginning stage we also learned more about what our specific role in this project would be, which at this stage was focused on community outreach. Kristi Park had shared broad guidelines and goals the professional team had for community involvement and let us work on our own specific areas of potential community outreach. This process was very similar to what I had learned in my previous classes, especially Community Development because the whole process was built from the community up. We tailored all our efforts towards what would be best and most accessible to the community. We scheduled our community meetings at 7pm because it allowed the adults to be off work and we chose locations which would allow parents to bring their kids. We also worked to create an open environment which would generate the most honest and as a result useful responses and feedback about what the community members wanted from the new development.

My area of community outreach was focused on reaching out to school aged children. I started by conducting online research and through a book from Kristi Park about the best ways to involve children of different ages in urban planning or general community involvement efforts. Both the book and an online document from the University of California Berkley pointed towards using kids' passion for art-based expression to convey their ideas and also encourage group work when it came to formulating ideas. One strategy we adopted to promote children to express their ideas was the concept of mind maps. Mind maps are maps which are created with the purpose of expressing an area while putting more significance on the personal memories and thoughts of the area as opposed to spatial accuracy. Mind maps have

exaggerated features such as landmarks being proportionally larger in scale and landmarks which are particularly noticeable to the mind map creator being expressed while less notable landmarks being left out. Mind maps also encourage group work and conversation for kids because it makes them talk about and discuss their favorite aspects of a city with their peers.

This strategy was ultimately implemented in May when our internship team had the opportunity to visit Fairhaven Middle School for a design jam. We were able to meet with two enthusiastic classes during school hours. We began the event by doing a quick few sentence overview of Mercy Housing and the new housing development by the waterfront. The class was then split into four groups. Each group was given a large poster with a map of Bellingham and the waterfront as well as questions for the students to answer along with a large sheet of tracing paper as well as colored pens and pencils. The tracing paper allowed the students to write and draw on the maps and questions on the poster without writing directly on the poster itself so we could reuse it. The questions asked them what their favorite part of Bellingham was and to draw it on the map, what they would like to see most to be developed on the waterfront, any ideas they had for an art project for the new housing development, and if they live in an apartment what they like most about living there or what they would most like to see added. For the first question, the most common answers were areas in nature such as the coast or forest near by or their favorite place to eat which tended to be ice cream. The second question was the one they tended to be most enthusiastic about answering. The students came up with a wide range of ideas varying from serious ideas such as electric bike or scooter charging stations and a small forest where large art pieces can be draped between the trees and more eccentric ideas such as golden statues and turtle soccer. As much as the more

eccentric ideas were not feasible, it got them invested in the project and having fun, and from there it was a lot easier to get the students to come up with the more reasonable ideas. For the third question, we had sets of cards with different examples of art which they could choose from to help spark ideas if they had trouble coming up with art on their own. The students in most groups tended to prefer more modern art pieces than art with historic/cultural significance behind it. For the final question, the most common response was for green elements and plants to be incorporated in the new apartments.

Overall, this internship was incredibly helpful and formative for me as a graduating student. Being able to observe and listen in with the different professional groups and hear the issues that came up in their design processes and how they worked them out showed me things that I would have likely not considered without seeing firsthand. Even the parts of the internship that were difficult or did not go to plan like the rapidly changing schedule and shifts in plan were beneficial on an experiential level because it showed the bumps in the road I will likely encounter repeatedly as a professional planner. Being able to work closely with members of the community was also a great experience for me. It showed me how willing people are to get involved with community planning if the setting, atmosphere, and team members are fit for the occasion. I am incredibly grateful for this experience, and I will carry many of the lessons learned for a long time.