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BioDesign Studio Youth Engagement Internship

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COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: BioDesign Studio Youth Engagement Internship

Student Name: Carson Cortez

Internship Dates: 2/24/2022 – 6/13/2022

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STUDENT SIGNATURE

Carson Cortez

DATE: 6/9/2022

Introduction

I completed my internship with Kristi Park with BioDesign Studio. My internship started out as being about doing community engagement work for the Millworks Affordable Housing project that will be one of the first major steps in developing the Bellingham Waterfront into the spectacle of Bellingham that the district is meant to become. I would be working with community members to understand and report their vision of what Bellingham and a new Affordable Housing development on the waterfront would mean to them and how they think it should be improved. We would hold community meetings and do workshops and charrettes and surveys to gather all this invaluable information from the community. Maybe, we would even get the chance to put on school events to teach people what goes into constructing an apartment building. These were all things that I had been learning about how to do in my Community Engagement class in the fall so I was excited to be able to get hands-on experience with those methods that we were only able to discuss throughout that class. That was what my internship was supposed to be about. However, as always, life had other plans.

Described below are the three phases of events that occurred and tasks that I and my intern-mates were given over the course of the internship. These phases were not planned out. Instead, as circumstances surrounding what we would be able to accomplish changed, so did our plans. Each phase marks a different stage of what we thought this internship would be about with Phase Three finally leading to the deliverables that we were able to achieve.

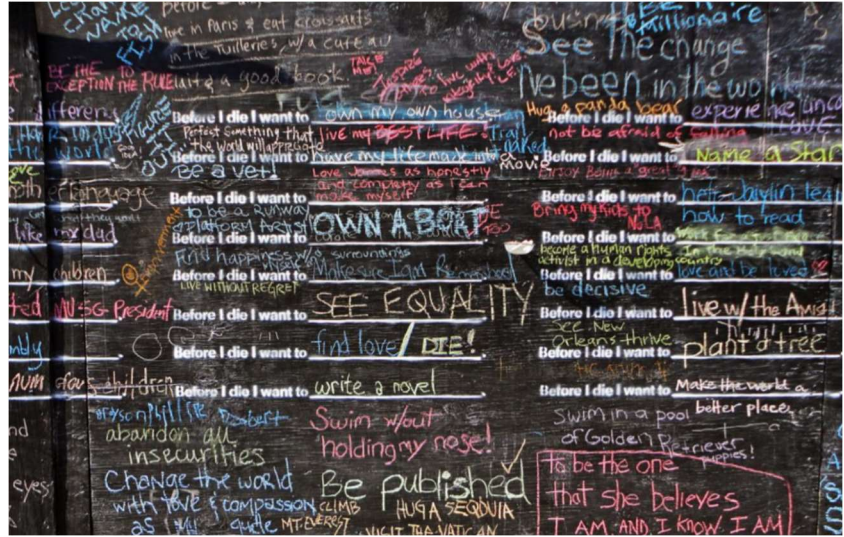
Internship Phase One

The first thing to know about affordable housing development is that it is state funded. This means that it is also riddled with state design standards that make it quite difficult to implement any variability in design that the community could have input in. So, when it came time to meet with Mercy Housing (the developers) and RMC Architects, we realized that what we thought we were going to be doing was not actually what we would get to do. As it happens, Mercy Housing, RMC Architects, the Whatcom Community Foundation, and the local chapter of the YMCA had already been working on this project for months and had come up with a design that met the state standards and worked for all of them but had no way for community members to get involved. This posed a problem for our internship supervisor, Kristi Park, and the person representing Mercy Housing, Ellen Lohe, who is leading this project and still wanted to find some way to get the community involved. They were still hoping to produce an idea that includes some sort of community-driven art piece for one corner of the building that would allow for a participatory process to define and create.

My first task was to find case studies of community art projects like was being proposed for the Millworks Housing development for Kristi and the rest of the team. This presented a difficulty because Kristi specifically asked to find examples of art pieces that people could be involved in making that would not be a simple mural; Bellingham has enough of those already. After spending multiple hours searching, I found many examples of different art pieces that could bear fruit, but only one of them ended up resonating with Kristi. The idea was to have some sort of chalk wall or other material on one of the walls that would allow community members to write on it. We would provide a prompt or question that the community member would answer, and their response would be clearly visible for all to see on this wall. The original idea came from an artist named Candy Chang who had put a chalk wall in New Orleans with a prompt reading "Before I die I want to..." and encouraged people to walk up and write an item from their bucket *Figure 1: Candy Chang's "Before I Die" Chalk Wall in New Orleans, Louisiana*

list on the wall. For our version, we decided to go with a prompt or question that was more inspiring. This became the art piece idea that we were running with for the time being.

My other intern-mates, Logan and Aaron, were given their own tasks to accomplish during this time. Aaron was tasked with creating a potential itinerary for a workshop-like event with local schools so that



kids of all ages can feel involved in the planning and development process of an apartment complex in a way that they were never able to before. Logan was tasked with brainstorming events that we could do to get community members involved in the project. When we presented our deliverables to Kristi, Aaron was able to show a quite well put together itinerary, and Logan was able to provide several ideas for community events; two of which we would end up pursuing.

Internship Phase Two

The second phase of the internship was the smallest but was effective at limiting what our deliverables could be to what they would end up becoming. With an art piece idea picked out, Kristi decided to start focusing more on the community events that we had picked out from Logan's suggestions and to start seeing if those could be possible. These two events would be: an information booth at the local Farmers Market and an event at Kulshan Brewery's Trackage location on the waterfront near where the development will be going. To pursue these further, Kristi asked Logan and I to split up and find out from either the Farmers Market or Kulshan if such an event could be possible. I took the Farmers Market and Logan took Kulshan Brewery. For me, all it took was a simple cruise through the Farmers Market website to discover that information booths would only be allowed at the Wednesday market which would not start until after the school year would be over and the internship would end. This was not possible. Logan found out similar news about the Kulshan idea so we discovered that these ideas would not be possible either.

While Logan and I were working on this, Aaron was tasked with continuing work on the itinerary for a school event, now called a "Design Jam," while Kristi worked on finding a school that would allow us to come in and hold such an event.

During the transition from the First to the Second Phase, Kristi had also briefly mentioned that she had a Grad Student from UW who did a youth engagement project using the extremely popular video game, Minecraft, in a way that could help children get involved and creative in planning projects using a medium that they all knew quite well. I took an interest in this idea, knowing how popular it was even as far back as when I was in Middle School and how even my little cousins, one in Middle School and one in Elementary School continue to play the game. However, it was only just mentioned and was not

touched on further until this second phase in which it was mentioned again, when Kristi told us that she thought that something like that could be quite fun.

Internship Phase Three

At the beginning of this phase, we saw the introduction of a new member to our team, Adele, who would be joining not as a fellow intern but as somebody who would use work attributed with this project for senior project credits. It also saw us as a team really hone in on this “Design Jam” idea as the last real method of community engagement that we had left at our disposal besides the community art piece.

The community art idea had been going through several changes because of design changes that had to be made due to a problem that the Bellingham Public Works department had with the design as well as the architects’ hesitance to have a part of the building not be planned out by the architecture team itself. In fact, they had come back to everybody on several occasions with ideas that ranged from a building-height mural to some sort of sculpture that was fashioned onto the side of the building. Neither of which included ways to get the public involved in the art piece’s creation. Nevertheless, Kristi and Ellen are still hopeful that they can find some way to include something that the community could be involved in. Adele, as an industrial design major, took an interest in continuing with this aspect of our work and began doing her own work in this regard.

At this point, with the Design Jam being the last idea that we had to work off of, Aaron, Logan, and I decided to dig deep into putting something together that we could present to children and create some sort of workshop that they could be a part of. With Aaron taking lead on the project and working with Kristi to finalize an itinerary, Logan got started with his own project of planning out a video that would include interviews with multiple people involved in the project about what they do, their contribution to the project, why they like their job, etc. He was also hopeful that he could gather drone footage and other footage to use as B-roll for the video.

During this Phase, Kristi and Logan put on their own design event with another already built Affordable Housing development, Sterling Meadows, and used a version of the Design Jam itinerary with residents from that development. Logan then reported back to us how it went, and we decided to model the last version of the Design Jam itinerary off what went right and wrong at the Sterling Meadows event. The video project that Logan was working on would never come to fruition as there was just not enough support from the other people involved in the project and we just ran out of time to get it done.



Figure 2: Kristi running workshop at Sterling Meadows

Below are the two different sets of deliverables that we were finally able to achieve out of this internship. They are nowhere near what I thought my deliverables would be when I finished the project, but I am still proud of what we were able to achieve, nonetheless.

Final Internship Deliverables: Fairhaven Middle School Design Jam

Finally, we were ready to put on a Design Jam at a local school and see how all of Aaron and Kristi's prep work would pay off. On the day of, we all met at the front of the school and signed in at the front desk. We then went up to the classroom and waited for the period in between classes when the classroom would be cleared of students and we could begin setting up.



Figure 3: Aaron, Logan, and I working with our groups at Fairhaven Middle School

The students would be separated into four groups. Each group would be given a poster that has a map of the waterfront on it, as well as some questions that the students would answer. Each team would also be given tracer paper that would be placed over the posters so that the posters could be reused. Each group was also given two sets of cards. One set had famous or local artists on them that the children could choose their favorites from. The other had various societal goals (peace, health, wealth, etc.) that the students could choose from to be the most important to them. Also provided were pens, markers, crayons, etc. that the students could use to write on the tracer paper.

When the students walked into the room, they were all told to sit at one of the four tables. Once the students were seated each of us gave brief introductions about who we were, our major, and our career aspirations. Once that was over, each of the four interns picked a table and began the Design Jam.

We had two different classes come in and participate in the Design Jam, so each intern got to work with two groups. How serious these students would be with this kind of workshop varied from student to student. My second group produced a waterfront district that functioned like an entertainment complex. There would be a waterpark, a roller coaster, a zoo, a large community pool, lots of trees, etc. This idea was the more put together of the two teams and could be a viable alternative to the current plan for the waterfront. The first group included one particular student who was adamant that the Waterfront should be entirely taken up by one large skyscraper made entirely of gold and that all his teammates' suggestions should be inside his skyscraper. His teammates' suggestions include two different circuses, a library, and other small buildings.

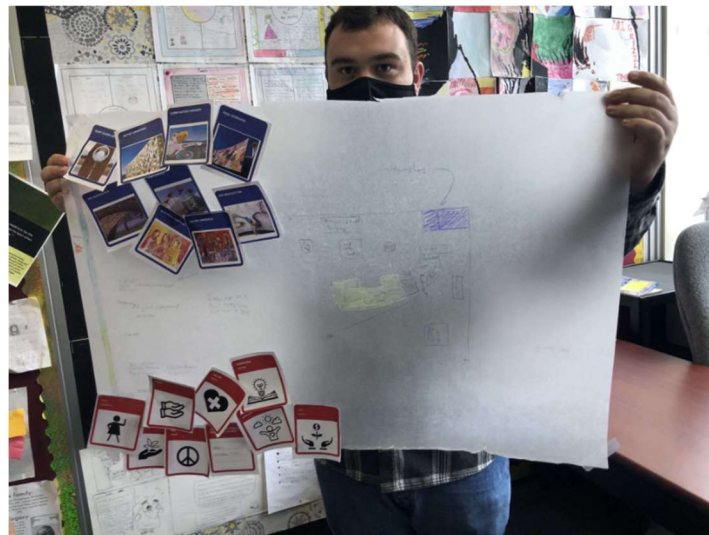


Figure 4: Me holding up my first group's final results

Once each group had finished drawing on their maps and picked out their favorite artists and world goals, they presented their findings to the rest of the class. We then made a quick announcement about the upcoming Minecraft Contest to each class before they left.

At the time, we thought that everything had gone as smoothly as it could have with the Design Jam. We did not, however, perceive that Kristi's daughter, who was in the second class, had gotten COVID and had spread it to her mom. We also did not perceive that Aaron would end up getting a fever shortly after the Design Jam. Because Kristi's daughter had gotten COVID and was probably a carrier of it when she was at the Design Jam, Adele, the intern that worked with her group, had to be careful to make sure that she did not get COVID herself from the event. With Kristi having gotten COVID, Adele being exposed to COVID, and Aaron having contracted the flu, we decided that it was not the best idea to try another Design Jam. We especially had no way of knowing if the COVID outbreak that had started at Fairhaven Middle School would travel to other schools as well (which was likely). Because of this and the little amount of time that we had left before the end of the school year, we did not pursue another Design Jam.

Final Internship Deliverables: The Minecraft Contest

I decided that I liked the idea of using Minecraft to engage with children too much to not capitalize on the opportunity. Without telling anybody I was doing this; I began to produce a Minecraft contest in which kids would download a model of the Bellingham Waterfront built in Minecraft. They would then build whatever other buildings they would want on the model and then send screenshots of their constructions back to us. We would provide categories and we would decide winners of those categories based on the kids' submissions. Once this initial idea for the contest was created, I began work on actually building the Waterfront in Minecraft. I also made initial instructions on how they could download a Minecraft world and place it into their accounts so that they could access the world.



Figure 5: Higher-up shot of the Waterfront in Minecraft

With the initial foundations of the Minecraft world, the contest, and the instructions completed, I brought my idea to the team. They really liked my idea and were excited to see how it would go. Kristi was particularly interested, despite not really knowing anything about Minecraft, and offered to put us in contact with Sarah, her Grad Student from UW who might be able to give us some insights into the best way to engage students using Minecraft.

One thing about Minecraft that needs to be understood is that there are two different versions of the game. There is Minecraft: Java Edition and Minecraft: Bedrock Edition. Minecraft: Java Edition is the original build of the game and is thus considered to be the main version. Minecraft: Bedrock Edition is the build that Microsoft made when they bought the rights to the game. The two versions have only slight differences in gameplay but are totally incompatible with one another. One cannot simply transfer over a world from one edition and have it work in another edition. There is a way to convert between the two, but it is quite the process and would not end up working out for what we needed anyway.

The problem arose when we met with Sarah and she introduced us to Minecraft: Education Edition, which is a version of the game that schools (such as Bellingham School District) can buy licenses to and anybody with a school email can download and play for free instead of buying the \$30 Java Edition. Kristi really liked this idea and wondered if we could have the world be in Education Edition instead. The problem was that Education Edition is built from Bedrock Edition. I was building the Waterfront in Java Edition. The two were incompatible and, after several hours of both Kristi and I trying to find a way to get the Waterfront to transfer to the other version, we decided that it just was not possible. The best course of action would be to try and rebuild the Waterfront in Education Edition so that we have the world in both versions.



Figure 6: Shot of Waypoint Park, the Granary, and the Acid Ball in Minecraft



Figure 7: Shot of the Pump Track, Silos, and the Millworks Project in Minecraft

This was obviously not my favorite course of action because it would require me to start all over. However, during the Fairhaven Middle School Design Jam, I got to tell the students that I was working on this Minecraft Contest thing and the way their faces lit up and the amount of enthusiasm that they showed to the idea really invigorated me to make sure that we had both versions. One of the kids even came up and asked me if I could send it to him. When I told him that it was going to be going to all students, he doubled down that I need to send it to *him*. This enthusiasm really drove me to make sure that the second version of the Waterfront was ready as soon as it could be. I spent most of the next weekend building this second version until both were at the same place in construction so that I could finish them at the same time. After a few more revisions that Kristi asked for, both versions of the Minecraft world were completed and ready to send out. At the time of drafting this report, the contest has been up for two weeks, and zero responses have been submitted to me yet.

Reflection

I wanted to recount all the events that transpired over the course of this internship because I believe that understanding the many twists and turns that we had to deal with as a team really illustrates what I learned most about this internship. Society is not necessarily built in a way that fosters community participation when it comes to the planning and development of our buildings and it can be frustrating to find any way to allow community input in this process, especially when there's state regulations

involved. This is what makes our work even more important; to include more community participation in development so that we can incentivize this aspect of society to change. I think that the twists and turns that we saw only serve to exemplify just how society can inhibit community participation and show how much this needs to change.

Originally, the class experience that I was going to be able to compare with my work experience were the community participation methods that I learned in my Community Development class. When fate decided to throw a wrench into our plans, I thought that we were not going to be able to engage the public in those ways at all. However, what we were able to do was the Design Jam, which is a workshop, as well as a small survey for the YMCA that we sent out to people. With the Design Jam and the Minecraft Contest, I feel that even though I did not get to do everything that I wanted to with this internship, I still got to apply a version of what I learned from that class.

Besides the fact that we happened to do the Design Jam whilst the school was going through a COVID outbreak without anybody knowing, I still think that what we were able to accomplish at the event was notable. We still got to get kids involved in the planning and development process, even if none of their ideas will be able to come to fruition. There is also always the possibility that the Design Jam could help to grow a seed of inspiration into one of those students that they could be a Planner or Developer one day. I also got to see first hand just how enthusiastic the kids were about the possibility of a Minecraft contest which only drove me harder to get it out despite the setbacks.

It is a little disappointing that we have not received a single response for the Minecraft Contest, but I think I understand why. We decided to roll out the contest as a blog post on the BioDesign Studio website with a link to a google drive where they can download all the relevant files. This creates a problem in that parents may see their kids downloading something off an unknown website and shut it down right then and there. I also do not know if the contest was ever given to the schools to be distributed. If it is not distributed through the school, then I cannot blame parents for not wanting their kids to download something off a random website.

Despite our zero replies, I think that there is still a lot of knowledge that I can gain because of this Minecraft contest and the internship in general. The biggest thing that this will teach me is that life is always going to try and throw a wrench in your plans and that you just have to roll with the hand that you are dealt and move forward. I think that this is a lesson that I am going to run into repeatedly in my professional life as well as life in general, so it is good that I got so much experience with it over the course of this internship.