Summer 2023

Whatcom Housing Alliance Intern

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Western Washington University

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Internship Title: Whatcom Housing Alliance Intern - Events Organizer

Organization Worked For: Sustainable Connections (Housing and Smart Growth)

Student Name: Julian Medina-Schroeder

Internship Dates: 6/21/23  8/25/23

Faculty Advisor Name: Ed Weber

Department: Other

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STUDENT SIGNATURE

DATE: 8/26/23
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Introduction

The following is a student report on my internship with Whatcom Housing Alliance (WHA), a “broad alliance of organizations including; public health proponents, economic development agencies, for-profit and non-profit housing developers, smart growth enthusiasts, private business owners, investors and others all united to build an affordable, healthy, equitable, thriving, and inclusive community.”¹ WHA is managed by staff at Sustainable Connections (SC) as part of their Housing and Smart Growth program; and led by a steering committee made up of local housing stakeholders in the County. The objective of WHA is to provide “community education, technical assistance, and advocacy to advance affordable and diverse housing choices in all neighborhoods and works.”² This document has been reviewed and approved by my supervisor Scott Pelton, Manager of WHA.

Sustainable Connections is a local non-profit focused on five leading programs: Think Local First, Food & Framing, Housing and Smart Growth, Energy & Green Building, and Towards Zero Waste. The goal of SC is to “advance a regenerative local economy that builds community, strengthens food systems, catalyzes climate solutions, and expands access to housing in NW Washington.”³ SC receives contracts from local jurisdictions which delegate actionable goals in accordance with regional objectives and legislation.

The purpose of my internship is to utilize and grow my knowledge in Urban Planning by submerging myself in a leading community organization focused on creating more affordable housing options in Whatcom County. The scope of the internship is to assist in two of WHA’s

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¹ Whatcom Housing Alliance, “About” website page, https://whatcomhousingalliance.org/about/
² Ditto
³ Sustainable Connections, https://sustainableconnections.org/
ongoing projects: the ADU Design Competition and Whatcom Housing Week 2023; as well as gain professional and networking experience.

The objective of this report is to reflect on and showcase the practical experiences, skills gained, and personal growth during the internship, while addressing specific learning objectives, contributing to academic and professional development.

**Background**

I am a senior undergraduate student in the Urban Planning and Sustainable Development program at Western Washington University, currently pursuing a Minor in Sustainable Design while I complete my Major. As an Urban Planning student with a deep-rooted passion for Asset-Based Community Development as well as Housing, the internship at a community-led organization promoting affordable housing options has been profoundly relevant to my academic pursuits. This internship aligns seamlessly with my academic focus by allowing me to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation. Through this experience, I have gained a pragmatic understanding of the challenges and nuances surrounding affordable housing initiatives, from navigating policy frameworks to fostering community engagement. This hands-on opportunity has provided me with invaluable insights, reaffirming my commitment to fostering equitable urban development and reinforcing the significance of accessible housing as a cornerstone of vibrant communities. In the following chapters of this report I will go into detail describing exactly what practical experiences I gained throughout the duration of my internship, and how they directly address my learning objectives. Firstly, I will describe my internship position overview as a background extension for greater context.
Internship Position Overview

The Housing and Smart Growth project helps “create vibrant and healthy built environments for both people and the planet” by which the program “supports local businesses in this sector, advances the most cutting edge sustainability practices, and contributes to an improved quality of life for our region.” Furthermore, Smart Growth is defined as “an approach to development that encourages a mix of building types and uses, diverse housing and transportation options, development within existing neighborhoods, and community engagement.”

During my internship, I had the pleasure of joining the Housing and Smart Growth department, where I was entrusted with administrative assistance and development roles within the two noteworthy initiatives: Whatcom Housing Week 2023 and the ADU Design Competition. The team I worked with comprised of mainly two people: Scott Pelton my immediate supervisor and WHA manager, as well as Rose Lathrop director of the Housing and Smart Growth program. Although, I also got to work with folks from other departments as well as my peer intern and graduate student from WWU.

More specifically, my tasks were divided between the two afore-mentioned initiatives. On one hand I was assigned the task of assisting with event planning in preparation for October’s Housing Week, which included coordinating throughout the internship duration with interested community partners who want to participate. On the other hand, I was assigned with the development of the ADU Design Competition guidelines which include the competition timeline, submission instructions, design requirements, site conditions, and scoring criteria. This second

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4 Sustainable Connections, “Housing and Smart Growth website page, https://sustainableconnections.org/housing-smart-growth/
5 Ditto
task lasted primarily during the development stages of the competition prior to releasing it to the public, although I was also assigned assistance roles during the FAQ period after the launch.

**Learning Objectives**

Commencing the internship, my learning objectives were to utilize and grow my knowledge in Urban Planning by submerging myself in a leading community organization focused on creating more affordable housing options in Bellingham. I aimed to attain the following concrete learning objectives: 1) Grow my skills and compatibility in event planning and coordination, 2) Expand my knowledge and understanding of local ordinances and state legislation that directly affect the feasibility of affordable housing in Bellingham, 3) Develop an acute comprehension of the role ADU's play in improving local affordable and environmental sustainability attainment, 4) Broaden my familiarity with City of Bellingham's building process including a project's conception, design preparation, application, land use review and permitting, 5) Extend my participation as a member of the community who wishes to empower residents to pursue a more equitable society, and finally 6) Grow my overall skills in a professional environment within the field of my interest.

I can confidently say that my internship experience effectively addressed all my learning objectives except for one, due to unforeseen changes. At the time when I conceptualized my learning objectives, I was potentially going to have a third tract assigned to me: updating WHA’s ADU Handbook. Working on this third project would have directly addressed my 4th learning objective, however, this project was assigned to another intern focused more on research. Nevertheless, I largely gained invaluable experience only attainable through pragmatic action, and the next chapter will outline specifically how I attained the remaining learning objectives.
Learning and Experiences

Firstly, I will provide a comprehensive account of how exactly I attained my learning objectives throughout the duration of my internship. Later in this report I will give a more open-ended account of valuable experiences that go beyond my definite learning objectives. Starting with learning objective #1, which is very straightforward. My role in planning Housing Week 2023 gave me direct experience with event organization and was a huge part of how I attained my first learning objective. Throughout my participation in coordinating this event, I learned basic skills such as utilizing Excel to stay organized, keep track of changes, and remember details. Additionally, this experience taught me what it takes to organize and run such an event with so many moving parts—day & time, venue/virtual, speakers, food, themes, sponsors, etc. All in all, good communication is crucial, and I learned the value of timely responses as well as the balance between giving space and sending out reminders. My daily activities in this case included checking my email and responding to questions, compiling event details, updating and sending out “Host Packets” to confirmed events; all while managing the schedule in preparation for making it publicly available information prior to October. As of the day this report is being written, I participated in coordinating details for 15 separate events that are all happening within a single week. I would say the hardest obstacle was dealing with unforeseen changes and having to reschedule already confirmed events.

In terms of attaining my learning objective #2, I have a very specific example that pertains to my other assigned tract developing the ADU Design Competition. The development of WHA’s very first ADU Design Competition was partially inspired by WA State HB 1337, which greatly reduces the restrictions previously set on ADUs. This was very exciting, and I was most invigorated to contribute to this particular task because it meant creating something new (I
am still very excited and proud to show my contribution). Nevertheless, around halfway through the competition development stage, the Bellingham City Council voted on the legislation and as I learned—passing state legislature is not the same as local adoption. City Council voted to adopt the new legislation except for the language that removes owner occupancy, in fact they made an amendment that explicitly retains it. Essentially, owners of a lot with an ADU on it must remain in that ADU or other structure within the same lot. Effectively, this impacts some of the potential that ADUs have for being a widespread affordable housing option. Although the City legally must adopt the state legislation within 6 months after their next comprehensive plan, we were disappointed that the Council did not adopt all of it effective immediately, and therefore encourage more ADU development. All of this I learned by being directly involved with a project that was significantly impacted by legislation and local ordinance, however it also made me reflect on the importance of making this type of legislative analysis available for everyone. Moreover, it taught me real-life application of the theoretical legislative action that I have been imparted in my education. In the end, City Council’s vote mostly impacted the competition’s design requirements such as increased minimum square footage and allowing two detached ADUs on one lot.

Concerning my learning objective #3, my internship experience enlightened me on some of the current limitations the ADU industry faces in reaching its full potential. ADUs undeniably offer an avenue to augment the spectrum of affordable housing solutions while advancing the values of smart growth, predominantly by fostering infill over sprawl. Nevertheless, receiving insightful feedback from industrial practitioners on my ADU Competition Guidelines draft has revealed a salient truth to me: the endeavor to curtail the cost per square foot in ADU construction remains a formidable challenge. This challenge is underscored by constraints such
as insulation R-value standards that inflate wall thickness requirements and therefore the cost for materials, as well as upgrading outdated utility hardware on older properties wishing to add an ADU. It became evident to me that the ADU sector, in its relative infancy, needs a surge of innovation to truly fulfill its potential as a mainstream and viable affordable housing alternative. I learned some examples of innovation include emerging trends in prefabricated and modular design methodologies, which hold promise within this evolving landscape. It is exactly for this reason that I think it is extremely important to stimulate the industry with exciting events such as Housing Week and the ADU Design Competition, in pursuit of sparking innovation.

Precisely because I know that I am contributing to important work being done in affordable housing, I feel that my internship overall absolutely helped me attain my learning objective #5. My contributions to planning Housing Week and developing the ADU Competition have been undoubtedly fulfilling in my personal journey to becoming an active member in the community who advocates for housing as a right. Moreover, this experience has certainly contributed to my ability to turn this passion into a career that will allow me to support myself and the people I love moving forward. In that sense, my internship has also helped me achieve my learning objective #6 because I was given the fortuity to collaborate in a space with countless stakeholders in the field, which has been absolutely fruitful for my growing professional path. For example, I sat in on a WHA steering committee meeting where I saw familiar faces from Housing Week, and acquired hands-on experience in agenda-setting, committee voting, and budgeting. On a different occasion I also helped my supervisor film a commercial for the City of Bellingham on affordable housing, where I got to interact with City of Bellingham staff and learn about the role that organizations like Sustainable Connections play in local jurisdictions.
Achievements and Contributions

Planning Housing Week is an ongoing achievement that I hope to continue past the official duration of this internship report, which would extend to October when the event occurs. However, for the purposes of this report I will highlight some of my contributions to date. Being as WHA only has a total of two full time Sustainable Connections employees, I think I provided much-needed dedication and attention to detail for scheduling events, while my supervisor Scott attended to other overarching elements. Some of my contributions include the following:

- updating a series of documents (Host Packet) then sending them to confirmed hosts & answer questions;
- directly assisting hosts with setting up Zoom registration & developing standardized demographic questions for grant-reporting;
- aggregating event details & pictures through a Microsoft form fillable by hosts, which will then be posted to the WHA website;
- and overall functioning as a point of contact for a dozen or so event hosts from varying organizations and with varying needs. My contributions required that I respond to emails almost on a daily basis and occasionally answer my phone during business hours.

Nonetheless, I am most proud of my contributions to the ADU Design Competition which has been launched and will run through to Housing Week. My most outstanding contribution to the competition was by far the development of the Guidelines, which first required research followed by a drafting stage and a feedback stage. My research involved looking at what has been done before and drawing inspiration from aspects that aligned with our values and purpose. Then I spent around two weeks developing a draft document with input from my supervisor. Finally, my draft was sent to several industry professionals, and I spent around a week implementing their feedback and receiving observations from WHA’s director. During this final stage I learned the most and my Guidelines document reached its final version, which was then
launched on the WHA website along with a newsletter. The final version of my document is attached to this document (view Appendix) with permission from my supervisor, and publicly available on the WHA website. Please review the Guidelines document for context! Additionally, I also assisted with administrative duties in preparation for the competition being live, which included making a submission form on Form Assembly, composing a press release to market the competition, and producing a FAQ document after receiving submission questions. The FAQ document is also publicly available on the WHA website at 

https://whatcomhousingalliance.org/adu-design-competition-2023/

**Conclusion and Reflection**

Throughout my education at Western, I have been taught the existential importance of applying tenets from Smart Growth to urban planning practices. This internship has conclusively strengthened my education by involving me in projects that emphasize the need for thoughtful, community-driven solutions in urban planning and development. Through my involvement in Whatcom Housing Alliance’s projects, I had the opportunity to actively contribute to the realization of these principles, thereby gaining hands-on experience in advancing smart and sustainable urban development.

At a more personal level, my internship experience has strongly prepared me for entering the professional field of my choosing. It has been a very rewarding experience to work at such a forward-looking non-profit with so many ongoing projects of varied scale and reach. Additionally, I learned a handful of new hard skills such as using Canva to produce appealing documents and utilizing organizational tools like Asana to prioritize tasks and meet deadlines. Finally, it was a pleasure working in an office with such welcoming and uplifting coworkers at all levels—thank you! I highly recommend any student take the opportunity to intern at SC.
Appendix
ADU DESIGN COMPETITION GUIDELINES 2023
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INTRODUCTION

Whatcom Housing Alliance is holding its first-ever ADU Design Competition!

WHA creates opportunities for more diverse housing choices in all neighborhoods that will contribute toward equitable, prosperous, healthy, and vibrant communities for everyone. We believe ADU’s have an important role to play in expanding housing choice and increasing housing affordability in Bellingham.

We are excited to announce an ADU Design Competition that seeks to inspire creativity and contribute to more equitable neighborhoods. It is a platform for architects and designers to showcase their talent and contribute to addressing housing challenges.

The goals for the competition are to:

• **Promote Innovation:** Encourage architects, designers, and creative individuals to come up with innovative and unique solutions that spark new ideas and push the boundaries of what’s possible in ADU construction.

• **Public Awareness & Education:** Raise public awareness about ADUs and their potential benefits including for multi-generational living and aging-in-place.

• **Foster Sustainable and Affordable Design:** This ADU design competition places a strong emphasis on sustainability and affordability.

• **Make Connections:** This ADU Design competition will help community members looking for ADU solutions make connections with our design and construction professionals and other ADU resources.

All ADU Designs will be featured on the Whatcom Housing Alliance website, through social media and in person at Whatcom Housing Week events. We look forward to celebrating all applicants and new ADU legislation at the ADU Design Awards Ceremony on October 20!

Thanks to AARP and our sponsors for the generous support that made this event possible and will help make this community a great place for all ages.
ADU OVERVIEW

What’s an ADU?
An ADU is a small, self-contained residential unit typically located on the same lot as an existing single-family home. As the term “accessory” implies, ADUs are designed to be smaller in size and prominence than the main residence on the lot. These are sometimes called “mother-in-law apartments” or “granny flats.” An ADU has all of the basic facilities needed for day-to-day living independent of the main home, such as a kitchen, sleeping area, and a bathroom.

ADUs can be attached or build within the primary residence, such as basement or garage conversions; or they may be detached such as a newly built cottage or above-garage conversion. ADUs can yield rental income to homeowners while providing a cost-effective solution for renters, or they can help older residents age in place. Because of their many benefits, there is a growing market for ADUs.

Known Benefits:

Rental Income –
Renting a second unit can provide a steady flow of supplemental income while providing others with a place to live.

Aging in Place –
An ADU can be a lifelong, accessible home for aging adults, or it can house an in-home caregiver, allowing residents to remain on their property as they age.

Community Benefits –
ADUs help reduce housing challenges by adding more affordable housing options, allowing more people to live in the community in which they work, while preserving diversity and community character.

Downsizing –
Some people may wish to move into their ADU and rent out the main house.

Housing Friends and Relatives –
Close friends and family can stay together while also maintaining separate lives and privacy.

Environmental Benefits –
Small-scale living is an effective way to reduce the environmental footprint of a home and building within existing neighborhoods and can reduce commute times and make efficient use of public infrastructure and services.
Design Competition Period Begins - The Project Team will conduct outreach and invite the community to submit proposals.

Public voting for the People’s Choice Award will open at 9:00 am at whatcomhousingalliance.org.

Submissions Due!!! Submissions for ADU proposals will close at 11:59 pm.

Public Voting Opens
Public voting for the People’s Choice Award will open 9:00 am at whatcomhousingalliance.org.

People’s Choice Award voting will close at 11:59 pm.

ADU Design Competition Awards Celebration
Winners will be announced on the Friday of Housing Week during a celebratory event.

Competition questions will be accepted through Aug. 20th with responses available August 28th.
Award

The winners of the competition will be announced at the end of Housing Week 2023 on Oct. 20th at a celebratory event in Bellingham. First Place will be decided by a Jury of local housing stakeholders, and the People’s Choice Award will go to the most voted by the Public. Juried deliberation will occur the week prior to public voting opening.

Notification: You will be notified by email by Oct. 18th if your design is considered for a prize, and if your attendance at a ceremony will be necessary.

ONE WINNER WILL BE CHOSEN PER AWARD:

🌟 $3,500 Juried Award
🌟 $1,500 People’s Choice Award

Eligibility

Eligible participants include all design and construction professionals, from interns to licensed architects and builders practicing in Washington, with preference going to those working in the Bellingham area.

Importantly, the design proposal must be constructible and follow the requirements outlined in this document.

Finally, we will be accepting old and new designs alike. Applicants may submit already-designed ADU concepts!

Submission Instructions

All submissions must be submitted via the online form by 11:59 pm on Oct. 3rd. Find the online form at: whatcomhousingalliance.org

Entry Fee: $25
Limitation: maximum of 1 submission per designer; 3 submissions per firm

Please email your questions to the contact at the end of this document by Aug. 20th. We will share responses publicly on our website no latter than Aug. 28th!
**PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

**Design Requirements**

The ADU design must be detached and meet site conditions, as well as have the following elements to be considered in the competition:

- **KITCHEN** - includes food storage, food prep space, sink with running water, and cooktop.
- **BATHROOM** - includes toilet, sink, and shower/tub with running water.
- **SLEEPING AREA** - minimum of one sleeping area (includes studio designs).
- **SEPARATE ENTRANCE** - entry and exit points distinct from the main structure.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Design Criteria</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADU Size</td>
<td>maximum of 1,000 square feet, minimum of 250 square feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>max 24 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SetBacks</td>
<td>5 ft rear and side minimum</td>
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**Submission Requirements**

All Submissions must include the following to be eligible:

1. **Digital Design Board**
   - a. 11" X 17" Landscape (1-3 pages)
   - b. 200 dpi (min)
   - c. PDF and .jpeg format (10MB max)
   - d. ADU rendering
   - e. Floor Plan
   - f. Site Plan
   - g. Must not indicate any information related to an individual or team’s identity.

2. **Accompanying Narrative**
   - a. 750 words max, PDF format
   - b. Project title
   - c. Describe in detail how the project addresses the scoring criteria (see Page 7 for more information)

3. **Project Preview**
   - a. Upload one project preview image that best describes the project (may be from requirement #1 above)
   - b. At least 2000x1680 pixels large, oriented horizontally, 10MB max, PDF format
   - c. This will be used for promotional materials to showcase project for People’s Choice Award
The site conditions act as a framework, offering high-level constraints and parameters that participants must adhere to when creating their designs for Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). By providing a specific design scenario, including typical lot dimensions of 50 feet by 100 feet found in denser neighborhoods, the site conditions enable participants to envision and craft ADUs that are compatible with the existing surroundings. These conditions reflect pre-existing dense urban environments, which highlights the importance of walkability and access to services for residents in such neighborhoods. Overall, the site conditions provide contestants with a realistic context within which they can unleash their creativity and propose innovative ADU solutions!
**Scoring Criteria**

The following scoring criteria will be used to evaluate design submissions in a way that reflects our community goals and values.

**Universal Design & Aging In Place (30%)**: Submissions must encompass ADU designs that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity, incorporating universal design principles to ensure usability and adaptability for all individuals, including those with disabilities or special needs. We strongly encourage designs that support flexible living arrangements, meet the changing needs of people as they age, and allow people to continue living in their homes as long as they wish.

**Affordability & Cost Effectiveness (30%)**: Submissions should be economically viable and efficient, considering factors such as construction costs, ongoing maintenance, and operational expenses. We are seeking inventive and cost-effective approaches that minimize costs and promote affordability.

**Sustainability & Resilience (25%)**: Submissions should feature designs that place a strong emphasis on sustainability and energy efficiency. These designs should incorporate key elements of energy performance, water efficiency measures, and resilience against potential hazards. Designs should also consider the use of sustainable materials, waste reduction strategies, and overall ecological footprint reduction.

**Innovation & Creativity/Aesthetics (15%)**: Submissions should showcase ADU designs that are visually captivating, consider scale, exemplify innovation, creativity, and distinctive design solutions. We are interested in designs that thoughtfully and creatively support modern living needs for everyone, now and long into the future; and incorporate imaginative utilization of space, creative storage solutions, and original concepts that push the limits of creativity.
CONTACT INFO

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whatcomhousingalliance.org