



Winter 2024

City of Bellingham Planning and Devel Tech Aide

Julian Medina-Schroeder
Western Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/cenv_internship



Part of the [Urban Studies and Planning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Medina-Schroeder, Julian, "City of Bellingham Planning and Devel Tech Aide" (2024). *College of the Environment Internship Reports*. 202.

https://cedar.wwu.edu/cenv_internship/202

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of the Environment at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of the Environment Internship Reports by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT



Internship Title: Technical Aid Position

Organization Worked For: City of Bellingham—Planning and Community Development Dpt.

Student Name: Julian Medina-Schroeder

Internship Dates: 10/4/23 3/22/24

Faculty Advisor Name Kamel N.

Supervisor: Elizabeth Erickson

Department: UEPP

I grant to Western Washington University the non-exclusive royalty-free right to archive, reproduce, distribute, and display this Report document in any and all forms, including electronic format, via any digital library mechanisms maintained by WWU.

I represent and warrant this is original work and does not infringe or violate any rights of others. I warrant that I have obtained written permissions from the owner of any third party copyrighted material included in this document.

I acknowledge that I retain ownership rights to the copyright of this work, including but not limited to the right to use all or part of this work in future works, such as articles or books. Library users are granted permission for individual, research and non-commercial reproduction of this work for educational purposes only. Any further digital posting of this document requires specific permission from the author.

Any copying or publication of this document for commercial purposes, or for financial gain, is not allowed without my written permission.

STUDENT SIGNATURE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julian Medina-Schroeder".

DATE: 03/21/24

Table of Contents

Contents

Introduction	3
Duties and Responsibilities	3
Reflection	9
Next Steps	12
References.....	14

Introduction

The following is a final report on my internship with the City of Bellingham's Planning and Community Development department. This report is intended to be complimentary to the interim report that I produced at the end of Fall Quarter 2023. Consequently, this report will be cumulative of my experience over the past two quarters, and it will address my learning objectives that I established in my internship agreement. It is worth noting that my position was part-time at roughly 10-12 hours per week for Fall and Winter Quarter.

Once again, my official position title is *Technical Aid* and I work in the Planning department's Long-Range Division, as part of the Comprehensive Plan periodic update team. The team is made up of two Planner II's, one Senior GIS Analyst, one Senior Planner, our Long-Range Planning Manager, and me. My immediate supervisor is Elizabeth Erickson who is the Senior Planner and functions as our "team lead," and Chris Behee is the manager of the division.

Since this report complements the previous interim report, it is not necessary to include additional background information as it has not changed. However, it will outline my duties and responsibilities and provide examples of my deliverables; contribute a reflective section that covers 1) how the internship helped me achieve my learning objectives and 2) to what capacity my education in the Urban & Environmental Planning & Policy (UEPP) program prepared me for the internship; finally, it will provide a small conclusion where I outline next steps and provide acknowledgements.

Duties and Responsibilities

My duties in a broad sense have not changed: assisting with *The Bellingham Plan* outreach events and processing the input that we receive from the public. However, my duties

can be further segmented into three main responsibilities, which I will describe in detail in this section. They are the following: data input and processing, producing a public-facing summary report, and assisting with logistics at public community events.

Data Input and Processing: My first responsibility of data input and processing spans largely across the entire duration of the internship up until now. One of my primary responsible tasks was to manually scan close to 2,000 mail-back survey responses from the community and use computer software to collect the answers from them. Additionally, I was also the main party responsible for reviewing and correcting answers that the software was unsure of or got mistaken. My workflow was to scan several hundred surveys in batches of 50-60 physical copies and run them through the software. Next, I reviewed the software's mistakes and manually cross-referenced the specific paper copy to correct any issues. Primarily, the software had issues reading open-ended responses that were submitted in handwriting. I corrected close to 1,000 mistakes with the help of my colleagues. Finally, I would clip the batches and mark them for filing purposes so that they could be referenced in the future if necessary. It took approximately 3 months at part-time to fully process the data from the mail-back paper copies of the survey.

Additionally, another ongoing data-processing task that I continue to maintain is to process the information from the physical interactive boards where participants leave their feedback during public open houses. My task involves summarizing the information from the boards in a separate Word document and taking pictures of the boards with participant feedback for record-keeping. These boards are intended to encourage residents to interact with planning topics and give feedback on how the City of Bellingham should address these topics in the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update. For example, at the open house event at Western Washington University (WWU) one board prompt read, "Which of the following amenities are

most important to have near campus?” In fact, it is worth noting that for the “What kind of housing?” interactive board at the WWU open house I contributed to the content on the board. The board (*Figure 1*) asked students to give feedback on what type of student housing they want to see more of. I conceptualized the different housing types so that they made sense in the context of college students, and defined them.

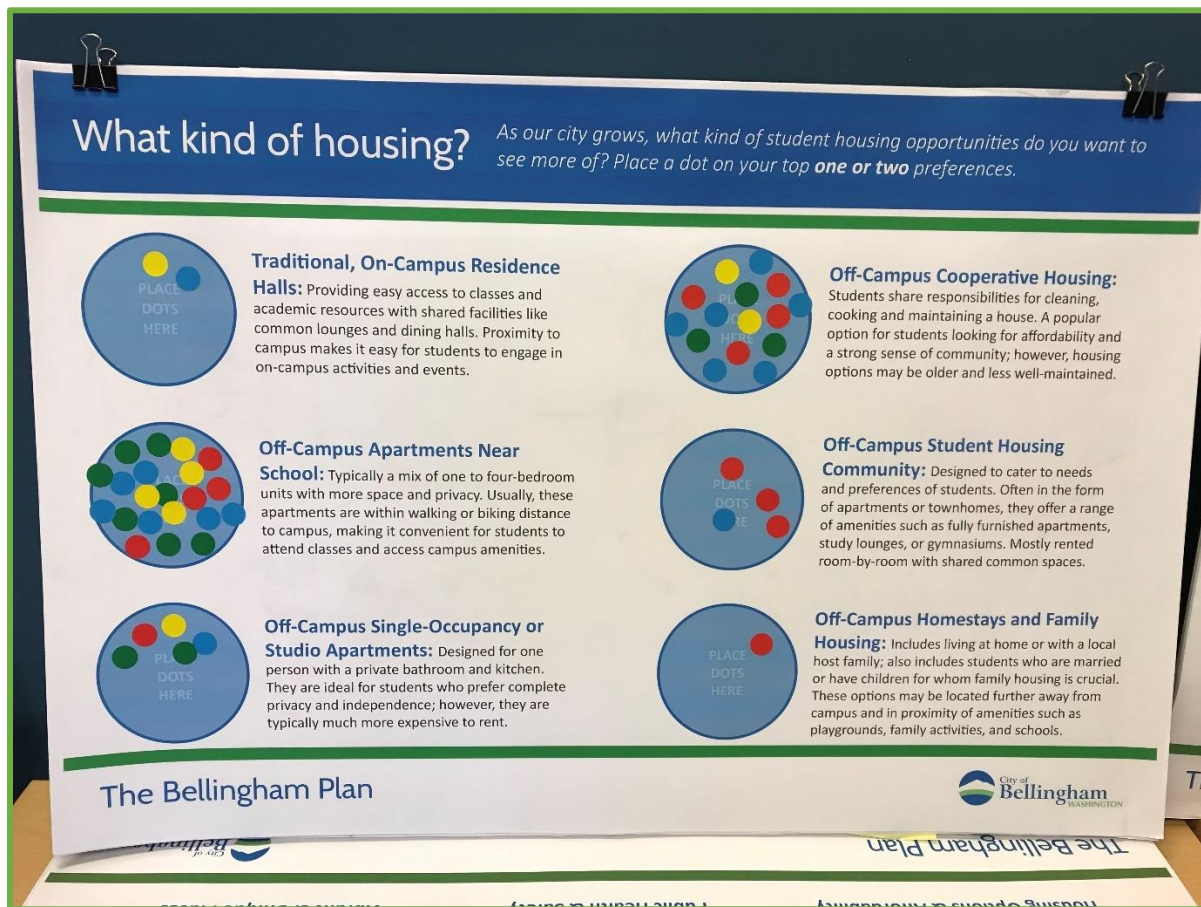


Figure 1: interactive board from *The Bellingham Plan* November 9, 2023 open house at WWU with round sticky notes signifying student feedback on housing types.

Community Vision Survey Summary Report Production: Following the data input and processing of paper surveys, I undertook the responsibility during Winter Quarter 2024 to produce a summary report (City of Bellingham, 2024) of the results alongside my supervisor Elizabeth Erickson. My contributions to the final report were the Executive Summary as well as

the following sections of the report body: Strengths & Weaknesses, Prioritization, Encouraging or Discouraging Industries, Most Important Amenities, and Appendix A. Importantly, I also compiled and processed the data used for the report and the team’s Senior GIS Analyst did the data analysis including the crosstabs on the demographic data. Specifically, I prepared 4,287 survey responses across several formats (mail-back paper copies and online submissions) for analysis. Afterwards, my task was to compile the results in the format of tables and present a high-level analysis of the results in a public-facing document. The biggest challenge was making the report palatable to a wide range of viewers whose interest and time availability vary. Below is an example of one of the tables showing the survey results (*Table 1*).

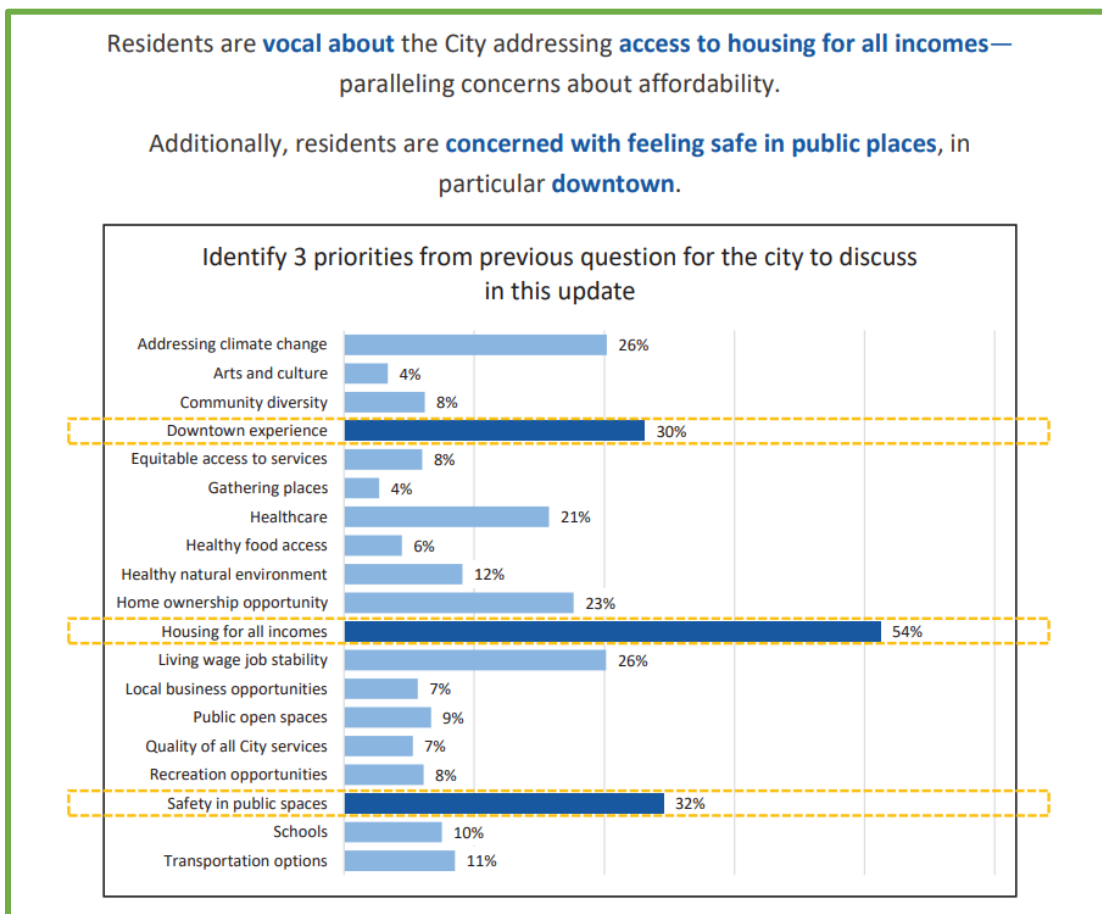


Table 1: screen capture of a table showing results from *The Bellingham Plan* Community Vision Survey Summary Report. The caption above it demonstrates the high-level analysis that I made. (City of Bellingham, 2024)

Each of the report’s sections mentioned above include a table similar to the one above, and also have a couple short paragraphs of accompanying narrative which I wrote. The entire document has been cited and is publicly available by following the given link in the reference section at the end of this internship report. Moreover, I designed and made the following figure (*Figure 2*) from the crosstab demographic data that our team’s GIS Analyst provided. This design was inspired by an example from the City of Bellevue, which was provided to me by my supervisor Elizabeth. The design I made was incorporated into the rest of the report’s crosstab analysis as an important visual tool meant to illustrate complex demographic variations. For instance, this figure visually shows how “housing for all incomes” is a priority for all income brackets according to the survey, however “downtown experience” increases in priority as household income increases.

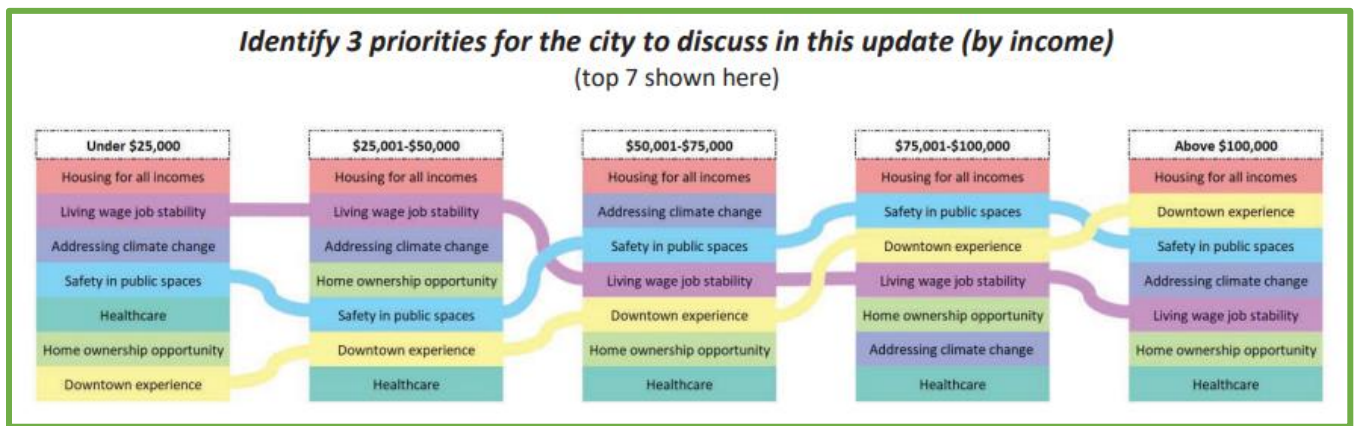


Figure 2: demonstrates how priorities shift by income ranges. This figure was extracted from *The Bellingham Plan Community Vision Survey Summary Report* (City of Bellingham, 2024)

Logistical Assistance at Public Events: Finally, I undertook responsibilities of helping with logistical support at select public open house events and tabling events hosted by the City of Bellingham and its partners in the community. During the Fall Quarter I attended two open house events as a staff member to assist with the meeting logistics. Firstly, I attended an open house

hosted at WWU on September 3, 2023, which was targeted towards students because they are currently underrepresented in the City's outreach efforts. At this event I sat with my colleague at the entrance of the Viking Union multipurpose room and welcomed students to come participate and eat pizza. I saw several familiar faces and I think it helped to have me there as a fellow student to encourage participation. I also attended a second open house event during the Fall that was hosted by the Bellingham Rotary Club at the Whatcom Community College on December 4, 2023, where I helped facilitate table-group discussions on how the City should grow. During Fall Quarter I also participated in two tabling events with the purpose of distributing Community Vision Surveys to interested attendees. The first tabling event was on October 14, 2023 at the Bellingham Seafest, and the second one was on December 7, 2023 at Birchwood Elementary School. I especially feel proud about my participation at the Birchwood Elementary tabling effort because I was able to use my Spanish to speak to family members that were there for a gingerbread house activity with their kids; and encourage them to take an important Housing Preference Survey that will inform the Comprehensive Plan Update.

During the Winter Quarter, however, my responsibilities shifted to focusing on finalizing my data input tasks and producing the Community Vision Survey Summary Report previously mentioned. As such, I only attended one of two open house events hosted by the City during the Winter. The event I attended was an open house on March 6, 2024, with the theme of Vibrant, Equitable, and Welcoming Community, which was hosted at Bellingham High School. My contributions to this event were assisting with accessibility accommodations by setting up secondary tables and chairs for wheelchair users to participate in table discussions. Additionally, I functioned as staff answering basic questions about the project and thanking people for their participation. Unfortunately, I was obligated to leave this event after an hour because I had to

clock in at my regular evening job. My responsibilities at my evening job were a barrier for me participating more regularly during these public events, however, I was able to contribute through other efforts. For example, I reserved a City vehicle in the first week of March and spent over 3 hours distributing flyers around Bellingham to promote the upcoming five open houses (two of which have already passed as of this report's date). During these efforts, I posted promotional flyers in public posting areas at local coffee shops, grocery stores, neighborhood posters and stores. All in all, I posted flyers around Downtown Bellingham and Fairhaven; then I purposefully went to Birchwood Neighborhood to extend my efforts to an underrepresented community. In Birchwood I posted flyers in Spanish with permission at Neto's Market, Mi Rancho Meat Market, and EL Mana Salvadoran restaurant as well as the Hispanic-owned secondhand store next-door. I am proud to be able to use my native Spanish language to help make the City's outreach to the Latine community perhaps more inviting and effective.

Reflection

My reflection in this report has two approaches, the second of which builds on the basis of the first. Firstly, I will evaluate whether I achieved my initial learning objectives from my internship agreement at the very beginning of the internship; and secondly, I will use that to assess how well the UEPP program at WWU prepared me for the internship.

Learning Objectives: In my internship agreement signed by the involved parties, I outlined five broad, but purposeful learning objectives based on the job description and my own professional goals. The first of which was to *enhance my knowledge of City Planning and Public Policy*, which sounds almost too broad. However, I consider that theoretical knowledge on Planning and Public Policy is not complete until it is complemented by practical experience. Indeed, I believe

that my experience at this internship has enhanced my knowledge on these punctual topics by exposing me to them in a real-world environment. For example, my responsibilities in assisting with public outreach efforts have confirmed with me that public participation in Planning is one of the easiest things to do wrong and hardest to do right within the professional field. Moreover, the process of taking public feedback and using it to justify Public Policy in front of City Council has been eye-opening for me in terms of the importance of direct community feedback.

My second learning objective was to *grow my skills in community outreach and public engagement strategies* which I have begun to achieve, however I believe I still have a lot to learn and accomplish in this area. My participation at public open houses and efforts to spread the word have absolutely grown my skills in public engagement, nevertheless my goal is to play a key role in upcoming community outreach, specifically to the Latine population in Bellingham. I believe I have certainly begun achieving this learning objective and look forward to learning even more in the next quarter as the internship continues.

The third learning objective is to *increase my abilities to develop outreach materials*, which I believe I achieved through my efforts in producing a public-facing report this Winter. The purpose of the Community Vision Survey Summary Report is to encourage continued participation from community members by providing visible results from their engagement so far. I learned that it is very important for community members to begin seeing results that confirm they are being heard, otherwise people get discouraged quickly.

My fourth learning objective was to *advance my proficiency in digital information management and data management*, which I consider is the only learning objective that I did not achieve satisfactorily. Although some of my responsibilities were directly connected to data management tasks, my skillset specifically involving statistical calculations and the use of

computer software such as Excel did not allow me to grow my proficiency beyond what I already had. Punctually, I did not have the skills to contribute to the cross tabular analysis of the Community Vision Survey which I would have liked to. To be clear, I do not believe that the internship per se failed in helping me achieve this objective.

The fifth and final learning objective is to *continue to grow my skills in a professional environment within the field of my interest*, which I believe I definitely have achieved and am very grateful for. Although this is possibly a very subjective achievement, I consider that this report should be proof in itself that I have achieved my fifth learning objective and will continue to do so.

UEPP Program Preparedness: My coursework in the UEPP department at WWU has largely prepared me effectively to perform my duties and thrive in this internship. Specifically, I think that I was very well prepared with a deep understanding of comprehensive plans and the role they play, as well as State policy requirements that influence it such as the WA State Growth Management Act and its population growth allocations. However, I do recognize that too much singular importance was placed on comprehensive plans in my classes at WWU, and not enough emphasis was placed on how other plans influence each other such as Climate Adaption Plans, Capital Facilities Plans, Sub-Area Plans, Neighborhood Plans, and Transportation Plans among others. I left the UEPP program perhaps thinking that comprehensive plans are the all be all but the reality is that it is only one piece of a very complex puzzle.

Another area where I believe the UEPP program strongly prepared me for is in equitable practices during community outreach. My coursework at WWU spent a considerable amount of time studying the history of inequality in this country's planning practices over the past couple centuries, and I believe this was essential in forming a strong ethical baseline for us as aspiring

planning professionals. Specifically, I know that my experience with our cohort's Studio Project last academic year in collaboration with the Lummi Commercial Company was a forming experience in terms of maintaining equitable considerations at all times.

Nevertheless, I believe that formal education in statistics is a concrete area where I **did not** feel adequately prepared by the UEPP program in my experience. Specifically, I did not feel prepared to achieve some data analysis tasks in my internship, specifically when tasked to perform cross tabular analysis on survey results in relation to given demographic data. I am also aware that the UEPP program has gone through many changes since I was accepted into it nearly 3 years ago, and that courses which cover basic statistics are becoming more of a Major requirement. I would just like to use this opportunity to further advocate for UEPP students at WWU to receive more robust technical skills in statistics, because I experienced being underprepared in that area.

Next Steps

In conclusion, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity that this internship represents for me in my professional path and I would like to acknowledge the role that my professors, mentors, and current supervisors play in it being a reality. I thank all of my UEPP professors at WWU; in particular Nabil Kamel for his spectacular Urban Planning Theory class and continued mentorship, Tammi Laninga for her unfaltering dedication to- and compassion for her students, and Sheri Russell for demonstrating the power of Dispute Resolution in the professional field and in life.

I also thank Scott Pelton, manager of Whatcom Housing Alliance (WHA), for his mentorship and recommendation leading up to this opportunity with the City of Bellingham.

WHA and Sustainable Connections do great non-profit work and continue to be important players in the local scene. Finally, I thank my current supervisor Elizabeth Erickson and colleagues at the City for their continued mentorship and support.

Although this internship's direct relationship with UEPP and WWU is officially concluding, it is just beginning from my point of view. I am very excited to begin working full-time in my same position at the City of Bellingham's Planning and Community Development Department for the next four months.

References

City of Bellingham. (2024). *The Bellingham Plan Community Vision Survey Summary Report*.

Engage Bellingham. <https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/Vision-Survey-Report.pdf>