

Western Washington University

Legislative Affairs Council

February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020

VU 567

**Board Members:** *Present:* Grace Drechsel (VP for Governmental Affairs), Phoebe DeMeerler (Local Issues Coordinator), Nicole Ballard (Organizing and Outreach Coordinator), Bennett Massey-Helber (Director of Legislative Affairs), Kayl Gillihan (Outreach and Representation), Grace LaMonte (Student At-Large), Collin Thrower (Student At-Large), Kaitlyn Davidson (Student At-Large), and Jennifer Leveque (Student At-Large).

**Secretary:** Sierra Templeton

**Guest(s):** None

**Motions:**

**LAC-19-W-14** To approve the meeting minutes from the date of February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020. *Passed.*

**I. Call to Order**

*Grace Drechsel, VP of Governmental Affairs, called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m.*

**II. Additions and Changes to the Agenda**

None

**III. Approval of Minutes**

A. February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

*MOTION LAC-20-W-14 by Thrower*

To approve the meeting minutes from the date of February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

*Second: Leveque Action: Passed*

**IV. Discussion Items**

A. Local Lobby Day

1. Drechsel stated that the Local Lobby Day agenda is under the purview of DeMeerler, but still needs to be approved through the LAC. The goals today should be to figure out a timeline and initial ideas of what should be advocated for at a city and county level.
2. DeMeerler stated that one big issue that should be brought to the table would be housing. The lack of housing for the homeless, as well as the rule that prohibits more than 3 people who aren't blood related living in the same home. She has also

noticed a lot of reports concerning domestic violence lately, which may be something to look into.

3. LaMonte mentioned that the LAC advocated against the housing rule the previous year, which seemed like it may be an easy fix, but nothing happened to it, so it's good that we're following up.
4. Massey-Helber mentioned that there's a bill in the legislature currently that bans rules like this.
5. Drechsel stated that this kind of rule is something landlords seem to pull if there's other preexisting issues. This should be something to think about locally still, because we don't know what will happen at a state level.
6. Ballard said that the rule was put in place to force Western to figure out the housing issue on campus, as well as the steep prices, but that didn't fix the issue so instead there's just a lack of housing options for students.
  - a. DeMeerler added that even if Western were to create more options, it may not be affordable, and there would be a lack of space to do this in the first place.
7. Harren brought up advocating for environmental issues, and basic student safety, such as more streetlights on Garden and Billy Frank Jr streets.
  - a. DeMeerler stated that it might be useful to talk to the police about this public safety issue with lighting. Also questioning the use of ICE within the county, especially concerning the Canadian border.
8. DeMeerler commented that in the snow, even though sidewalks are city property, the city doesn't clear them which leads to a lack of accessibility in Bellingham.
  - a. Thrower mentioned that the city of Bellingham sold their snow plows for funding for other projects.
  - b. Ballard noted to make sure the ways of getting rid of snow are sustainable.
9. Drechsel brought up the Birchwood food desert, which is the area where there is a lack of access to a grocery store in a reasonable vicinity.
  - a. DeMeerler stated that a first step would be to get into contact with the Birchwood Food Desert Fighters. She clarified that the situation that created this was that there was an Albertsons, who signed a contract with the city so that no other grocery stores could be put in a near vicinity. The Albertson's closed down, but the contract still exists. This area is low income as well.
10. DeMeerler stated that there may be proposed bands to prohibit condos, which would limit the amount of housing available. There are some good housing resources in Bellingham; Homes Now, the Lighthouse Mission, the YWCA, and the Opportunity Council. There has been an issue with reports the city doesn't want to acknowledge. She brought up looking into Cherry Point and how they possibly have been making expansions that infringe upon the rights of the Lummi Nation.
  - a. Ballard suggested talking to the Office for Off-Campus Living.
  - b. LaMonte suggested to reach out the Whatcom Peace and Justice to look into what the LAC can do locally to support native rights and indigenous sovereignty.
11. Drechsel stated to contact her if LAC members have any ideas for the Local Lobby Day Agenda.

## V. Reports

**Phoebe, Local Issues Coordinator** stated that she has been planning for local lobby day, and mentioned an upcoming housing fair on March 5<sup>th</sup> that will have lots of different property management groups/people, and information and resources regarding tenant rights. It may be held in the VU multipurpose room.

**Bennett, Director of Legislative Affairs**, stated that the legislative session is wrapping up with students testifying for the undocumented student loan program. He is confident in this passing, and the environmental asks have a good chance of this as well. As far as funding for higher education, this is a tough year. However, better sex education guidelines are passing as well as Title IX reform. There was a little bit of funding for Western on the Peninsula, and Massey-Helber was unsure about the status of funding for the longhouse on Western's campus. There was \$50,000 allocated for 6 colleges to have a veteran specific mental health counselor put in place. Overall, Western specific items weren't as successful, but it was overall a good year, and the work we've done this year on those items will only help in the following years.

**Nicole, Organizing and Outreach Coordinator**, stated that she has been very busy, and is currently focusing on the primary elections. There will be ballot box tabling sign-ups and everyone should put their name down for a little bit of time for the sake of civic engagement!

**Grace, AS VP for Governmental Affairs**, directed the statement to Gillihan concerning Western Intersectional Lobby Day. Gillihan stated that WILD went really well, with very few hiccups, and that there will be a post WILD meeting the following week.

## VI. Other Business

A. None

*Grace Drechsel, AS VP of Governmental Affairs, adjourned this meeting at 1:44 p.m.*