

Legislative Proposal Request Form

- **Title** (*Should be short and articulate the subject of the proposal*): Student Housing
- **Sponsor(s)** (*Groups that are supporting this proposal*): If passed, LAC and the AS will be the sponsors
- **Describe the issue** (*What is the problem, why should Western work on it, and what is the solution?*): There is currently a huge shortage of rental units in Bellingham. The renter to homeowner ratio used to be 40:60, but in recent years this ratio has flipped. The lack of affordable, safe housing affects students and community members alike. Rental properties are an integral part of Bellingham and approximately 83% of students at Western live off-campus, so it should be a top priority of Western to ensure students have access to housing that will not be a disadvantage to their lives as students. This means affordable housing that is not detrimental to their health. With tuition costs higher than ever before and the cost of rent increasing by the year, students who do not have extra income are paying the price. Providing opportunities for students to find housing that is convenient (i.e., close to campus and places to get food) is necessary for student success at Western. It is imperative that this be done without compromising on safety code standards and honest landlord-student relationships. As rent costs rise, housing becomes less available to lower-income students and other marginalized students, pushing them farther away from campus.
- **What are you advocating for** (*Specify the legislative action you are looking for*): We are advocating for increased student housing, specifically along Samish Way. This would increase the amount of housing available and decrease the crime that occurs along the street. The former Aloha Motel lot is likely going to be used for subsidized housing for lower-income and previously homeless residents, and is a good first step in transitioning Samish Way from a street of worn-down motels and fast-food joints to a hybrid residential/commercial street.
- **Who do you have as support so far?** (*Identify at least one legislator who would be willing to sponsor a bill for this issue, and list any organizations or individuals that would support the proposed action*): The Mayor is in support of putting student housing at the location where the Aloha currently is and offered to support us directly if we put it on our Local Agenda. She also indicated that council members would also likely be in favor of this. This proposal also aligns with the City's goal for infilling and would therefore likely receive support from the City's government at large.

- **Who needs to be moved/potential opposition?** (*Identify specific legislators, committees, and organizations*): Potential opposition include residents of this area, potential developers, and the Hearing Examiner who ultimately rules on development issues. Because this area lacks a significant number of residents, however, the opposition may come from a small - but likely vocal - minority. Commercial business may also pose a threat if they are looking to expand along Samish, but student and local government support could thwart this.
- **Provide any legislative background and context for the issue.** (*Has this issue been worked on recently, how far did it get, other legislative history, where is the public at with issue, etc.*): Previous attempts have been made to rectify the situation, the University Ridge being the most prominent of these. It received incredible opposition, however, due to its poorly chosen proposed location. The proposed development was in the middle of many single-family neighborhoods and was on a street that already had limited visibility and traffic issues. Ultimately the development was denied due to the overwhelming opposition. Another proposed project deemed as "student housing" in the Sehome neighborhood received opposition from the neighborhood due to its proximity to single-family homes and the perceived lack of proper parking options for the development. The section that we would be advocating to be developed for rental units would be Samish Way approximately from where the Aloha Hotel currently is to the end of the strip, approximately where the Wendy's is at the intersection of Samish and Bill McDonald. This strip has businesses and hotels along it and currently only has about 253 residents. Many organizations and committees have looked at how to redevelop this area so as to decrease the amount of crime and general "sketchiness" (for lack of a better word). By making this area more populated and by developing areas that would otherwise be used for illegal or undesirable activities, this proposal will benefit the students by providing them with places to live and decreasing the amount of crime in areas close to the university, and will benefit the community at large by decreasing crime in this area and helping to achieve the City's infill goals.