



# DRAFT ASWWU Local Agenda

## Housing Affordability and Livability

### Introduction:

ASWWU recognizes the troubling barriers students and community members face in obtaining affordable, safe, and quality housing in Bellingham. We face a shared challenge that threatens this basic human right. Rising home and rent costs are outpacing wages. The lack of affordable and quality housing options disproportionately affects marginalized communities: people of color, low-income families, first generation students, and more. These groups bear the worst effects of our housing policy; segregation and lack of access to resources like quality education and transportation. We need to change our housing policy if we are to sustainably provide homes for a growing and diversifying population.

### ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

- Require information on tenant rights, responsibilities, support organizations, and other how-to resources be posted in rental units alongside the certificate of registration as part of the Rental Safety and Inspection Program.
- Prevent income discrimination by landlords and property management companies. We support funding for an enforcement program in to prevent discrimination.
  - Model Legislation: [City of Seattle, WA, Ordinance No. 125114](#)
- Cap move-in fees and application costs that landlords can charge incoming renters. Offer renters the right to pay their move-in costs in installments with no interest. High upfront costs are blocking people from entering housing, with a disproportionate impact on low-income renters and families, communities of color, students, the LGBT community, seniors, people with disabilities, and those paying with alternative sources of income such as social security.
  - Model Legislation: [City of Seattle, WA Ordinance No. 125222, City of Berkeley, CA, Ordinance No. 7171](#)
- Decriminalize roommates by amending the definition of family in zoning code to remove antiquated 'blood law' that discriminates against poor people and non-traditional families. Establish occupancy limits by square footage of living space to prevent overcrowding as they do in North Bend, OR.
  - Model Legislation: [City of North Bend, OR, Ordinance No. 1834](#)
- Establish a Renter's Commission in Bellingham. Tenants make up roughly 54% of Bellingham's population, but none are represented on the City Council and Planning Commission.<sup>1</sup> A Renter's Commission can amplify the voices of groups historically left out of the housing discussion and provide a balance to the majority homeowner Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Selected Housing Characteristics, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. U.S. Census Bureau. 2015. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS\\_15\\_5YR\\_DP04&prodType=table](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_DP04&prodType=table)



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- Decommodify housing and reduce land speculation by prioritizing the rapid expansion of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) and other mission-driven housing. Increase mission-driven housing funding, reduce their permitting costs and taxes and consider discounting vacant or underutilized city property to CLTs and mission-driven housing organizations.
- Modernize our zoning laws to allow for 'Missing Middle' architecture throughout Bellingham; housing options that represent an in-between subdivision and apartment high-rises. Building enough housing in a variety of options will allow for renting students and community members to avoid being price gouged by landlords. We recommend updating outdated zoning laws to allow a richer variety of affordable and quality 'Missing Middle' housing options and applying the infill-toolkit in *all* neighborhoods, especially higher-income neighborhoods.
  - Model Legislation: [City of Buffalo, NY, Green Code Unified Development Ordinance](#)
- Require backyard cottages have the property owner live on-site for at least one year after a unit is created to prevent speculative real-estate and removing the on-site parking requirement.

## Equity and Inclusiveness

ASWWU recognizes the injustices many people of marginalized identities face in Bellingham. Bellingham has a long history of white supremacy, from the colonial violence against Coast Salish peoples, to the white mobs and leaders that drove out Chinese families in 1885, Sikhs in 1907, and Japanese in 1942. The present-day racism directed against people of color and city's denial of racial profiling shows that this is not an issue of the past. We also have a serious issue with too many people in our community experiencing poverty. We support the city's strategic commitments to 'Equity and Social Justice' and encourage the city to innovate robust policy and programs to back them up.

### ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

- Support the WWU Blue Group's Keep Bellingham Families Working Ordinance. We believe their collaboration with local social justice organizations has produced a policy that will best protect vulnerable community members from racial and immigration status discrimination. We are especially in support of a civilian oversight board of Bellingham police.
  - Model Legislation: [Contact WWU Blue Group](#)
- Ban conversion therapy within city limits. Research has shown the practice is harmful to LGBTQ people and leading organizations such as the American Medical Association have voiced opposition to conversion therapy.



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- Model Legislation: [City of Seattle, WA, Ordinance No. 125100](#)
- Explore forming a Bellingham Office of Civil Rights to advance civil rights and improve equity in Bellingham. A dedicated office to assist dismantling deeply embedded systems of oppression within our society would be a great asset.
  - Model Program: [City of Seattle, WA, Office of Civil Rights](#)
- Impose a surtax on companies whose chief executives earn more than 100 times the median pay of their rank-and-file workers. Income inequality is causing social malaise in our city and country. Support small business and ethical practices with this innovative tax which could be small to begin with. We encourage the revenue from the tax to go towards equity programs or affordable housing.
  - Model Legislation: [City of Portland, OR, Ordinance No. 188129](#)
- Explore developing a program to support and provide business development services to worker cooperatives - businesses owned and operated by workers. Worker cooperatives can bring democracy to the workplace and build an inclusive economy in Bellingham that provides well-being for everyone.
  - Model Program: [New York City, NY, Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative](#)

## Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform

ASWWU recognizes two interconnected issues: our criminal justice system is broken and we have a homelessness crisis. Mass incarceration disproportionately affects people of color and low-income people in Whatcom County. We encourage the city to take actions to reform our broken criminal justice system and protect the most vulnerable in our community. Furthermore, we encourage the city to innovate policy and fund programs that disrupt the root problems: white supremacy, patriarchy, lack of living wage jobs, lack of affordable housing, and social isolation.

### ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

- Develop a robust program to provide alternatives to incarceration, similar to the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program built by a partnership between King County and City of Seattle. LEAD in Seattle reduced recidivism by 25%. We encourage Bellingham to work the county, tribes, neighboring cities, and the public, especially people of color and low-income people, to design and implement a similar program here.
  - Model Program: [City of Seattle, WA & King County, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion](#)
- Reform our unfair bail system that wastes taxpayer money on pre-trial detention and harms the lives of detainees by implementing a Supervised Bail Release Program. The majority of people in our jail can't afford bail, they are simply there because they are poor.
  - Model Program: [New York City, NY, Supervised Bail Release Program](#)



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- Vote against any policies that increase mass incarceration in Bellingham or Whatcom County, such as the proposed mega jail expansion. Bellingham's recent 20% reduction in incarceration is promising; we should not waste precious taxpayer dollars funding increased incarceration. Instead, fix and improve existing jail facilities.
- Stop the inhumane practice of sweeping out homeless encampments and parks when vulnerable people have no housing to go to. Instead of wasting taxpayer dollars on sweeps, provide sanitary services to homeless encampments and fund housing-first models.
- Improve collaboration with Whatcom County on safe-injection sites. Heroin and other opioids are public health crises that require attention and best practices to reduce harm.
  - Model Program: [City of Vancouver, BC. Supervised Injection Sites](#)
- Improve the quality of lighting in several locations identified as unsafe by students: Lincoln Creek, Bill McDonald, Humboldt St between Lakeway and Samish. Walking is a primary mode of transportation for many students who live near campus, the poorly lit areas near WWU raise a significant challenge. Lack of adequate lighting creates an environment of fear and insecurity.

## Voting Accessibility

ASWWU believes that voting is a right and recognizes that many communities do not have the access they need in order for this to be true. We believe the following recommendations will increase the amount of underrepresented communities and young people participating in elections and local governance.

### ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

- Amend the City Charter to change the qualifications for registering as a voter in municipal elections such that being a citizen of the United States is no longer a requirement to be a vote. Require residency for thirty (30) days is sufficient provided the individual does not claim the right and vote elsewhere in the United States. Further, allow in-person registration in municipal elections on election day.
  - Model Legislation: [City of Hvattsville, MD. Charter Amendment 2016-2](#)
- Pass an ordinance to require property owners and managers in Bellingham provide all new tenants with information about how to register to vote at the time they move in.
  - Model Program: [City of Minneapolis, MN. Tenant Notification of Voter Registration](#)
- Explore innovative public financing of elections to democratize campaign finance and reduce oligarchic control of democracy.
  - Model Program: [City of Seattle, WA. Democracy Voucher Program](#)

## Environmental Stewardship & Green Jobs



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ASWWU recognizes the people of Whatcom County and our environment are interconnected; each depends on each other for long-term success. As Whatcom County becomes more populated and our economy grows, we must innovate solutions for an economy that is compatible with our planet's climate and health. We must transition off of fossil fuels to clean energy, creating new green living wage jobs. In addition, our prosperity depends on protecting safe and clean drinking water, farmland, salmon and the people who depend on them, and honoring the highest law of the land, treaties with tribal nations.

## **ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:**

- Continue the moratorium against future fossil fuel export projects indefinitely. With a new federal administration that has made removing environmental protections a priority, we need strong local protections for the people of Whatcom County. The safety of our rails, water, air, and climate can't be compromised. We thank the Council for their work on this issue so far and urge you to keep our community safe using local tools like the comprehensive plan and its subsequent land use regulations.
- Shorten the timeline for meeting the Lake Whatcom Water Quality Project (TMDL) water quality improvement plan to reduce phosphorus and fecal coliform in the Lake. The investments in protecting our drinking water will reduce the cost of water purification and save taxpayer dollars in the long run. Clean drinking water is a must for the residents of Whatcom County.
- Provide economic incentives to grow our local solar companies and other emergent clean technologies in Whatcom County that provide family-wage green jobs.
- Reduce the number of housing units planned in rural areas to prevent overdrawing aquifers connected to the river or needed for other uses like agriculture. Preserving farmland, protecting salmon and treaty rights, and improving water quality are all higher priorities than making money off of sprawling development.
- Support the Nooksack Wild and Scenic designation to promote stewardship of our local rivers.