



Local Lobby Day Agenda

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1. Shelter

Shelter is a human right, and many in Bellingham have no way to access this need. Western students want this to be a priority. In our 2022 Legislative Priorities Survey, 76% of participants marked Housing Affordability and Accessibility as one of their highest priorities, and it has been reported that [over half of Bellingham residents consider homelessness to be our most important local issue](#). Although we recognize the council has little control over state/federal housing policy and market forces, they do play an essential role in ensuring every member of the community is housed. Protecting members of our community who are experiencing homelessness and making steps towards decriminalizing homelessness is important and urgent in order to strengthen the Bellingham community. We need to take active steps towards undoing the systemic discrimination against marginalized identities in Bellingham/Whatcom county, and ensure that everyone can safely live a fulfilling life.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

1.1 Institute a permanent ban on sweeps of encampments and redirect funds to mental health resources and no-barrier housing for people experiencing homelessness in Bellingham, and eliminate the complaint-driven model.

- On January 28th, 2021, the city of Bellingham [spent nearly \\$75,000](#) to remove an encampment at City Hall and [\\$27,000 to clear the ensuing encampment](#) at Geri Fields on March 16th.
- Currently, the city of Bellingham completes street “clean ups” on a complaint-driven basis. Based on the model of [Services Not Sweeps](#), WWU urges you to eliminate this model and instead clean public spaces on a regular schedule to address health concerns. Complaint-driven cleanups allow people experiencing homelessness to be profiled and placed in potentially dangerous situations and is alienating due to being policed by community members. Under this new model, folks experiencing homelessness would simply move their belongings during a clean-up, and return when it was complete.

1.2 Repeal 10.24.070 and additionally ‘Sitting and Lying’ Ordinances

- [Ch 10.24.070](#) prohibits individuals from sitting and lying on public sidewalks, a violation which can incur a \$250 fine. Existing in public spaces should not be a crime, and this ordinance criminalizes people who are experiencing homelessness.
- As [stated by the ACLU](#), laws that prohibit peacefully existing in public spaces are primarily used to target folks who are experiencing homelessness, and this

deserves to be challenged. ASWWU believes every member of our community deserves to utilize public space and that sitting and lying in public spaces is not harmful to others.

1.3 Establish a Municipal Land Trust to address the growing issue of houselessness and housing insecurity in Bellingham.

- [A Municipal Land Trust would allow the City of Bellingham to buy land and lease out the homes on that land at affordable prices.](#) While there is a privately owned nonprofit which already does this in Bellingham, Kulshan Community Land Trust, the problem of housing insecurity is far from solved. A Municipal Land Trust would allow for extra protection and oversight of the community. Further, basic needs, like shelter, being solely controlled by private entities will naturally result in a shortage.
- There is evidence to suggest that Municipal Land Trusts result in [reduced foreclosures, communities benefiting from land values, and importantly protection against displacement.](#)

2. Food Accessibility

Access to food is essential to keeping the residents of Bellingham healthy, nourished, and able to thrive. In the Legislative Priorities Survey administered to Western Students, 89.2% of students marked Food Affordability as one of the most important issues to address, and 74.5% marked Food Desserts specifically as a top issue. ASWWU urges you to support these items in order to ensure the basic right of access to food for everyone in Bellingham.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

2.1 Provide residents of the Birchwood neighborhood with free bus passes to address the Birchwood Food Desert

- [The Birchwood neighborhood has been experiencing a food desert](#) (an Urban area where residents have limited access to transportation and the nearest grocery stores are further than a mile away) since 2016 with the closing of Albertson's.
- All Bellingham residents deserve access to fresh produce and healthy food, and it is unlikely that Birchwood will be able to attain a new grocery store in the near future due to the [non-compete clause put on the property by Albertsons.](#) Providing free transportation begins to fill this gap.

- [Food deserts can cause a lack of nutrition](#), and overtime the possible development of various chronic health conditions. ASWWU asks you to provide all residents of the Birchwood neighborhood with free bus passes to make accessing fresh food easier and less expensive.

2.2 Buy a building and rent it out to the Birchwood Food Desert Fighters as a center for distributing fresh food to the Birchwood Neighborhood

- To address the lack of access to fresh food, a group of community members came together and created the Birchwood Food Desert Fighters. As of March 2021, they were distributing [2500 pounds of food a week](#).
- They have shown continued commitment to addressing this problem in their community, [working since 2016 and continuing into today](#). Birchwood Food Desert fighters have requested this assistance and it would allow them to continue providing food for their community.
- This would provide a physical location within the Birchwood Neighborhood to access food without violation of the [Alberton's non-compete property clause](#).

3. Diversity, Equity, Justice

Western students value equity and preventing injustices from occurring in our community. ASWWU asks you to create, support, and pass legislation that protects and benefits people of color, the queer community, people with disabilities, and our undocumented community members. It is important for the Associated Students that the council prioritizes policies that promote equity, diversity and justice in order to create a rich community that thrives off of individual expression and autonomy. This city was built in exclusion of many members of the community, so it is essential that policies are created to repair the harm that exclusion and injustice has caused these groups.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

3.1 Establish Bellingham as a sanctuary city to protect our undocumented community

- Every member of our community deserves to feel safe. Over half of the students who filled out the Legislative Priorities Survey marked legislation protecting our undocumented community as one of their highest priorities
- Although Whatcom County has stated that it would [not enforce federal immigration laws](#) via local police and have committed to not asking community members about immigration status, this legislation should be expanded to a sanctuary status.

- Specifically, we would like to see policy extended to include the [restriction of sharing immigration status with the federal government, the restriction of ICE entering local jails without a judicial warrant](#), as well as a commitment to continue to refuse to partner with federal agencies to enforce immigration law.
- Sanctuary cities have been shown to have [lower rates of crime, 1.1% lower unemployment on average, and a 2.3% lower poverty rate on average](#). While we are already part of the way there, ASWWU urges you to support expanding our policies to fully align with sanctuary city policies.

4. Environment

ASWWU believes that protecting and maintaining the environment is essential to living sustainable, healthy lives. Outdoor spaces should be cared for, and accessible to everyone. WWU students indicated that environmental issues were among the top three choices of the most pressing issues facing our community. Waste reduction, reducing CO2 emissions, and supporting indigenous environmental initiatives were among the most supported suggestions for addressing environmental issues. Protecting the environment is essential to ensuring the future of Bellingham/Whatcom is viable, and to take action behind honoring the stewardship the Lummi, Nooksack and Coast Salish peoples have had in preserving this land since time immemorial.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

4.1 Establish a Pay-As-You-Throw program, wherein residents would only pay for as much garbage as they dispose of.

- This encourages people to recycle more, promotes waste reduction and supports the purchasing of recyclable items. [There are a variety of options for pay-as-you-throw programs](#). however because Bellingham predominantly uses wheeled bins the easiest transition would likely be to provide a variety of bin sizes. Residents who produce less trash will pay less for waste disposal, and waste reduction will be incentivized.
- [The EPA cites these types of programs as a source of environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and equity](#).
- Pay-as-you-throw has been proven to [reduce landfill waste by 17%, and increase recycling by 50%](#).

4.2 Repair access to Canyon Lake Community Forest by fixing the washed out portion of Canyon Lake Road and repairing the bridge.

- Canyon Lake Community Forest is co-owned by WWU and Whatcom county. [In 2007, a flood washed out the bridge on Canyon Lake Road](#), restricting access to the community forest. The canyon lake community consists of roughly 2,300 acres including over 700 acres of old growth forest. Canyon Lake provides the opportunity to enjoy hiking trails around a 45 acre lake and old-growth forests.
- The community forest has potential to support research and educational opportunities at Western in topics such as forest management, geology, ecology, and watershed studies. There is potential to study old growth forests in comparison with forest regeneration post-logging.
- Nature should be accessible to everyone, and this beautiful area should be open to benefit Whatcom County residents and students.

5. Safety

ASWWU asks you to create policies that protect BIPOC, people with disabilities, and those with mental health issues. Across the country we have seen trends of discrimination, violence, and misconduct towards these marginalized groups at the hand of law enforcement. Bellingham is not immune to these trends, and the system must be altered to ensure accountability and safety. We need to reevaluate how we keep our communities safe, and search for alternative practices that do not condemn individuals for systemic problems.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

5.1 Create a community police oversight board to allow for civilian oversight of law enforcement.

- [A presentation was delivered to Bellingham City Council in June 2021](#) laying out the options for a community review board, wherein the two options are an investigation-based model and a review-based model. The ASWWU urges you to support an investigation-based model to encourage the highest possible level of accountability for Bellingham Police.
- [An investigation-based model](#) would allow civilians to review cases and complaints from citizens on an on-going basis, and allows for more involvement, as opposed to a review model which would require the board to view cases after the fact.
- Community police oversight boards creates connection between the community and law enforcement, and prevents and intervenes in the case of discrimination or general misconduct.

5.2 Supplement Anti-Racist and Anti-Bias training for police officers once every two years, and require the curriculum to have been crafted by and include literature by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

- Bellingham Police Officers are currently set to receive refreshers regarding anti-bias and anti-racist training [every 5 years](#).
- According to multiple sources, including [this Harvard article](#), anti-bias training is not effective if only administered once, or with large periods of time in between. Structural racism is complicated and long-standing and requires more frequent attention to unpack bias.
- ASWWU requests that this training is funded from the existing BPD budget.
- According to the [Whatcom Civil Rights Project](#), in Whatcom County in 2013, 18% of arrests were of Indigenous people, compared to taking up only 3.2% of the population. Black people accounted for 5% of arrests, compared to being only 1.2% of the population. 67% of Whatcom County Jail inmates were white, compared to being 87.6% of the population. Steps must continue to be taken to address this imbalance.

6. Transportation

ASWWU believes that improvement of our transportation is a necessary step to ensuring that Bellingham is safe, equitable, sustainable, and healthy. In order to have a thriving community accessible transportation is needed so everyone is able to easily access their needs and all the amenities that make Bellingham a great place to live. Ensuring our community has transportation needs met outside of the car infrastructure is critical to supporting the addition of housing, and creating a community that is safe for the environment. Many students come to college without a vehicle, so accommodating their needs so they can access all of Bellingham is essential.

ASWWU Urges Policymakers to:

6.2 Include protected bike lanes in areas that link dense student housing to Western in Bellingham's 2022 pedestrian and master plan. These bike lanes include but are not limited to 32nd, and 21st.

- Bike lanes are essential to both encourage bike usage and also to keep bike riders safe. According to multiple sources including this [peer reviewed article](#), bike lanes reduce crash rates by 50%.
- Developing bike lanes will support the goal of getting to [Washington State's Target Zero](#), aiming to reduce injuries and fatalities of pedestrians and bicyclists. These roads are heavily biked and dangerous. The city of Bellingham recorded [6](#)

[crashes on 32nd street](#) from 2006 to 2010. Between 2008 and 2013, [21st street was the third most trafficked street](#) by bikers in Bellingham

- Many students are unable to drive to school and need to bike or use other forms of alternative transportation, and should be able to move back and forth from school safely. This is an urgent issue, and 21st and 32nd are currently classified as “long term” projects under Bellingham’s bicycle master plan.
- [There are multiple studies stating that increasing bike lanes will increase the use of bikes.](#) Increased bike use results in lower carbon emissions and healthier communities.
- 32nd street is roughly 40’ wide, it currently has two parking lanes [\(7’ each\)](#) and two travel lanes [\(10’ each\)](#). This leaves enough room for a 6’ foot bike lane. No parking would need to be removed for this bike lane.
- [\\$68,592](#) is the city's estimated cost for a bike lane on 32nd street.