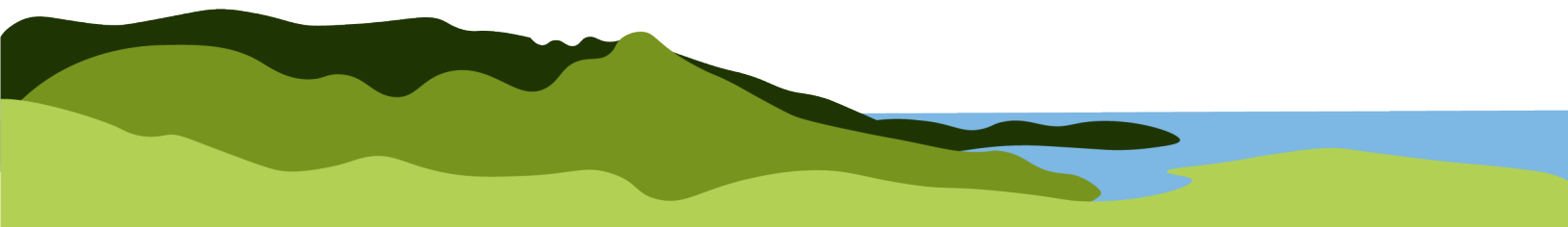


Varsity Village Site Evaluation: Report and Recommendations

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Land Acknowledgement

The UW Team acknowledges that the site and area of focus sits on the land of Coast Salish peoples, including the Lummi Nation and Nooksack tribe. The Coast Salish tribes nurtured and preserved this land and waterways since time immemorial. In recognizing that current occupation is a result of broken treaties and the forced removal of indigenous tribes, the Team asks for reflection, respect, and consideration of the injustices that historically define the region's origins.

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Executive Summary

This report provides an evaluation of the Bellingham Housing Authority's Varsity Village affordable housing complex in Bellingham, Washington to assess future needs and opportunities for the site. The assessment includes the need for community facilities to serve both the residents and neighborhood, the potential for infill development, and other possible improvements. The analysis and subsequent recommendations in this report were compiled by a team of Master of Urban Planning candidates at the University of Washington in Seattle (UW), under the supervision of affiliate faculty member Rick Sepler, AICP.

Bellingham, like many other cities in Washington, has a shortage of both market-rate and affordable housing, and the 101 units of subsidized housing on the Varsity Village site reflect a much lower density than what the site can accommodate. The site is currently zoned for single family residences, however the site is non-conforming as to its use. A Conditional Use Permit issued in 1966 allowed 183 units on the site. For these reasons, the Bellingham Housing Authority has the opportunity to provide much needed affordable housing while still maintaining a high quality of life for its residents.

In 2012, the Bellingham Housing Authority was awarded Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to renovate the 101 units on the Varsity Village site. The compliance period for these credits will expire in 2027, at which point the Housing Authority may choose to pursue redevelopment options. Compiling the necessary plans and funding for site redevelopment can take several years, so now is an opportune time to begin evaluating the potential redevelopment of the site.

The report documents the iterative design process, beginning with initial meetings in April with the Bellingham Housing Authority, the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association, and the residents of Varsity Village, and carried out through the development of four site plan alternatives of varying densities:

- Alternative A: 121 units achieved through partial redevelopment of the site
- Alternative B: 141 units achieved through partial redevelopment of the site
- Alternative C: 161 units achieved through partial redevelopment of the site
- Alternative D: 183 units achieved through full

redevelopment of the site

The UW Team presented these alternatives to key stakeholders and residents of Varsity Village and the greater Happy Valley neighborhood at an open house on May 23, 2022 and gathered feedback on the density, housing typology, distribution and programming of open space, and community amenities for each alternative.

After reviewing comments received, the UW Team determined that none of the four alternatives alone would adequately meet the needs of current and future Varsity Village residents, the Bellingham Housing Authority, and the surrounding community. However, the UW Team does recommend the Bellingham Housing Authority pursue infill and/or redevelopment on this site after further investigating:

- The entitlements granted by the 1966 Conditional Use Permit;
- Phased development methods to limit tenant displacement;
- The addition of unit density while maintaining a comfortable living environment;
- How townhome units can be designed to meet the accessibility needs of residents;
- Incorporating intentional and programmed open space with native plants and trees;
- Sustainable onsite stormwater management;
- Improvement of the surrounding streets and sidewalks;
- Potential forms and functions of onsite community spaces.

Project Introduction

Problem Statement

Varsity Village is a 10 acre, 101-unit housing development in the Happy Valley neighborhood of Bellingham. It was acquired by the Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) in 2010 and renovated in 2012 using Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). The 15-year compliance period for these credits will expire in 2027, and the BHA will own the property outright. The BHA believes it is appropriate at this time to review long-term options that may be available to ensure that the site best meets the needs and interests of the Housing Authority, current residents, and the broader community. Contextual design, the provision of amenities, and planned public/private open space are important contributors to a high quality of life.

Problem and Site Context

The timing for this proposal is critical for a myriad of reasons. Bellingham is currently facing a housing shortage that is characteristic of many cities across Washington State. The degree to which residents are considered 'rent-burdened' is an important indicator of housing affordability in a city. In 2019, 57% of Bellingham renters paid more than 30% of their income toward rent alone (United States Census Bureau). This shows how more than half of renters in Bellingham are considered 'rent burdened' according to the affordability standards laid out in Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan (Bellingham Comprehensive Plan). Unaffordable rents can lead to other social problems: Bellingham's Consolidated Plan explains that "a lack of affordable housing contributes to the rise in homelessness because it makes it even more difficult for low-income residents to save enough money to avoid eviction or foreclosure in the event of unforeseen expenses" (City of Bellingham). Although the openness to diverse housing types has grown in Bellingham, significant resistance to housing diversity persists because the zoning code prevents alternative housing types from being developed in all Single Family Residential neighborhoods (City of Bellingham, "Infill Housing"). However, the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan seeks to expand housing choice in an effort to move away from the dominance of single family housing.

Fortunately, there are remedies for this crisis. LIHTC has been one of the most important tools for the development and preservation of affordable

housing in the United States. Since it was introduced in 1986, LIHTC has been used to build more than 100,000 units of low-income housing in the State of Washington, including 2,238 low-income units in the City of Bellingham (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Database). Thus, the Varsity Village site presents a suitable opportunity to allow more people to live affordably by utilizing funding tools such as LIHTC and housing typologies that can accommodate more units and people. Ultimately, the goal of this project is not to pack as many units on the site as possible. Instead, the goal is to maximize the potential of the site to accommodate additional housing while ensuring the recommended density is commensurate with the surrounding neighborhood and is complemented by plenty of open space. The UW Team wants to underscore that the need for units should never compromise the quality of life for residents who live here.

Underdeveloped Publicly-Owned Land

The history of housing in Happy Valley is characterized by piecemeal development of low-density "garden tracts" on what was originally farmland (Happy Valley Neighborhood Plan). The legacy of a semi-rural neighborhood remains present today through the area's low densities, multiple tracts of undeveloped land, significant open space, and a lower level of infrastructure service than in a denser urban core. Happy Valley is Bellingham's largest neighborhood when measured by housing units, containing 3,681 (9%) of Bellingham's 41,062 units. Happy Valley is skewed heavily in favor of multi-family units, as 70% of units are multi-family and only 20% are single family ("Bellingham Housing Statistics"). This unique context should be considered when evaluating alternatives for the Varsity Village site.

Varsity Village has very few housing units per acre of land and a much lower density than most publicly owned housing developments in Bellingham. At 10 dwelling units per acre, it is a density typically seen in suburban single family development. Varsity Village's low density contributes to the area's semi-rural character that residents wish to preserve. However, this site is within Bellingham's Urban Growth Area, which means it is meant to accommodate more development in ensuing years in order to preserve open spaces in more rural, outlying areas outside of the growth area. Varsity Village is also the only site that the Bellingham Housing Authority owns in the southern part of Bellingham. Thus, the presence of urban services

to the site (full utilities, proximity to parks, trails, schools, and regular transit service) would comfortably allow more intense development in order to address the housing crisis faced by the City of Bellingham.

Land Encumbered Until 2027

While the site is ripe for development, the earliest that any changes could be made at the Varsity Village site is 2027, when the 15-year compliance period with LIHTC ends. As a result, it is appropriate for the Bellingham Housing Authority to consider alternatives that have been developed by the UW Team's initial outreach process. In addition, the voices of stakeholders such as the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association should also be included in the outreach process. Five years is an adequate period of time to perform a thorough analysis so that when the LIHTC compliance period ends, the Bellingham Housing Authority has a concrete plan in action for Varsity Village's future development including funding sources and entitlements.

Project Goals

The UW Team's project intends to fulfill a few different purposes based on the following key values. Furthermore, the UW Team's motivations for developing these alternatives are varied. Firstly, the UW Team wants to incorporate current residents' needs and concerns about any future development proposal into the alternatives. The entire studio project process has been undergirded by a desire to include the local residents in this project as much as possible and incorporate their feedback.

Secondly, the UW Team intends to develop alternatives that can mitigate and prevent the displacement of current residents. This project is not meant to recommend an increase in density as an end in itself. Rather, the UW Team hopes to minimize any disturbance to the daily lives of Varsity Village residents.

Thirdly, the UW Team intends to make appropriate recommendations that suit the wants and needs of Happy Valley. The goal of the project is to preserve the qualities of the Varsity Village community that residents prize, and mitigate any harmful externalities that stem from future development in the Happy Valley neighborhood in general.

Finally, the UW Team recognizes that Varsity Village represents an opportunity to add housing to a low-density site for an urban area. The UW Team wants to address the housing shortage affecting the City of Bellingham in a manner that is reflective of community needs while also ensuring that people have adequate access to affordable housing in a city that will continue to grow in the coming decades.

Participants

Bellingham and Whatcom County Housing Authorities

The client for this project is the Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA). The BHA owns the Varsity Village site. The UW Team has worked with BHA staff over the past six months. BHA staff have helped provide insight into what they hope to accomplish at Varsity Village, as well as guide the engagement process and the development of alternative recommendations for Varsity Village's future.

Happy Valley Neighborhood Association

Varsity Village is located in the Happy Valley Neighborhood and remains an integral part of the community. The Happy Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA) was founded in the 1970s by Wendy Scherrer to represent the interests of community members in preserving the character of their neighborhood and maintaining a high quality of life for residents. The HVNA is composed of a president and a board that manage the neighborhood's affairs and conduct meetings to discuss contemporary issues. The HVNA members have been well represented at the UW Team's community meetings over the past few months and have provided useful feedback to the UW Team concerning the community engagement process and the development of alternatives for Varsity Village.

Varsity Village Residents

The 205 residents who live at the Varsity Village site are essential stakeholders in this process. More so than any other group, they will be the most affected by any future development that occurs at the Varsity Village site. The residents the UW Team heard from in the outreach process are proud of where they live and greatly appreciate the amount of open space the site provides. Any proposal that is put forth to the BHA or City Council must be informed by the residents at Varsity Village. They

are central to the community engagement process and the UW Team has sought feedback from Varsity Village residents through a variety of modes of engagement, from a mailed and online survey to multiple open house meetings over the past six months.

UW Team

The UW Team is composed of Master of Urban Planning students at the University of Washington in Seattle. The students come from a diverse set of backgrounds, professional experiences, and interests, yet they are bound together by a shared commitment to further this project and engage with the community and relevant stakeholders. All students are in their first year of the Master of Urban Planning program.

Varsity Village Site

The Varsity Village site was constructed in 1968 on 10 acres. It is bounded to the north by McKenzie Avenue, private property to the east, Donovan Avenue to the south, and 24th Street to the west. It

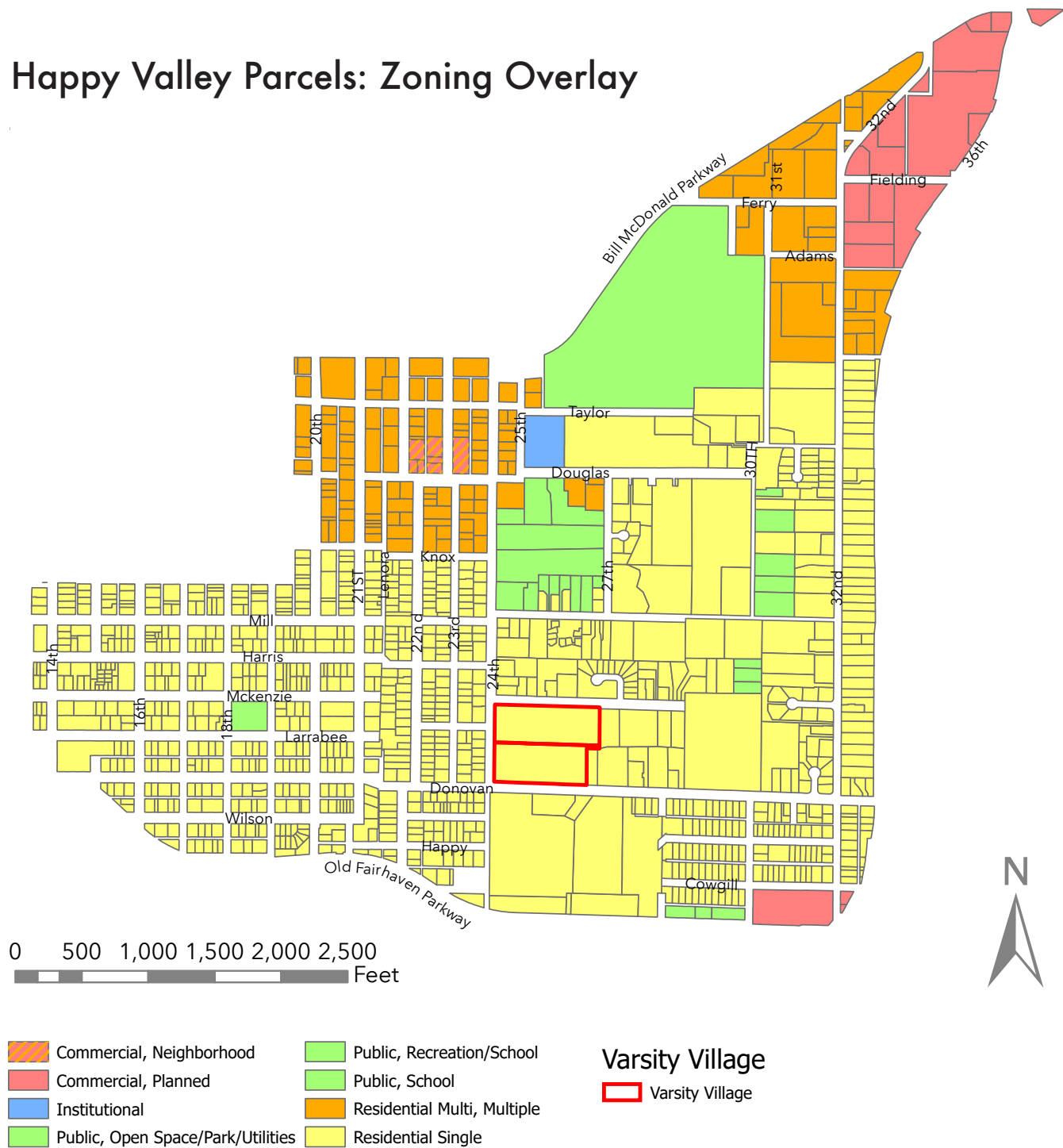
is composed of 29 buildings that contain 101 units of affordable housing and one laundry facility, interspersed with expansive lawns (Figure 1). The buildings on site are low-rise detached housing that are mainly fourplexes (four units to one building). The site houses 205 residents total, with about an equal distribution of children and adults. For the demographic information of those who completed the survey, please reference survey results in Appendix 4. The site is not dense when compared to the rest of the Happy Valley neighborhood; it is about 10 units per acre.

Varsity Village is currently zoned for Area 9 Residential, single family, with a cluster-attached qualifier containing special conditions according to the Bellingham Municipal Code. Please reference Figure 2 to view a current zoning map of Happy Valley. While it is zoned for Single Family Housing, it currently hosts multi-family housing on site. As a result, the site is currently non-conforming. The site contains a shoreline floodplain and requires stream setbacks, a clearing, and a buffer along Padden Creek and Connelly Creek. Relatedly, the site itself has topographical variation and because



Figure 1. Varsity Village site plan showing the existing 101 units on 10 acres. Source: Jude Brown. Varsity Village [map]. Data from: Google Earth, 2022. Using Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator.

Happy Valley Parcels: Zoning Overlay



This map displays current Bellingham zoning by parcel.

Figure 2. The current zoning map of the Happy Valley Neighborhood. Source: City of Bellingham, ESRI, 2022.

it is low elevation relative to the surrounding area, it has experienced flooding previously and flooding remains a concern today.

The site’s amenities include a communal laundry facility, shared playground, basketball court, network of sidewalks, and three main areas for parking along the interior east-west road and the two lots abutting Donovan Avenue. There is also a bus stop on 24th Street located near the southwestern corner of Varsity Village, which is serviced by the Whatcom Transit Authority 14 Line and runs from Fairhaven to Downtown Bellingham.

As previously stated, a key goal is to ensure that Varsity Village is fully integrated into its neighborhood. This goes both ways — Happy Valley residents’ interests should also be given weight. Any future development on the site must amplify the site’s assets and be responsive to both the aspirations and concerns of the residents who live there.

Planning Process

In assessing the opportunities for the Varsity Village site, it was crucial to gather input from involved parties early in the planning process. Figure 3 shows the planning process from initial research to the development of the final recommendations. This preliminary timeline was designed to show the first steps in the process, which the BHA will continue if they find merit in the project. The dashed arrow represents ongoing community involvement in future stages if the project progresses.

Recognizing the importance of local perspectives, initial community engagement came early in this

process to ensure that any alternatives that the UW Team proposed were informed by community input. Subsequent community response to the alternatives significantly informed the final recommendations presented in this report.

To better understand the values, concerns, and priorities of the community, the UW Team facilitated a series of outreach meetings and a community survey.

In April 2022, the UW Team hosted focus group meetings with both the Bellingham Housing Authority and Happy Valley Neighborhood Association, an open house for Varsity Village residents, and distributed paper and online surveys to Varsity Village residents. These events informed the UW Team of priorities for the Varsity Village site, which helped shape the site design alternatives which were then presented in a final workshop. Attendees of the first series of meetings, along with all Varsity Village residents and others who had been involved in the project, were invited to this final workshop to provide feedback that would influence the UW Team’s final recommendations for the Varsity Village site. The results of these meetings are summarized below. Additional information such as memos and survey results can be found in Appendices 1 through 4.

Focus Group with the Bellingham Housing Authority

On April 18, 2022, members of the UW Team hosted a focus group meeting with staff from the BHA at the Squalicum Boathouse. The goal of the meeting was to learn more about the BHA’s priorities for the Varsity Village site, including the technical and

Our Process:

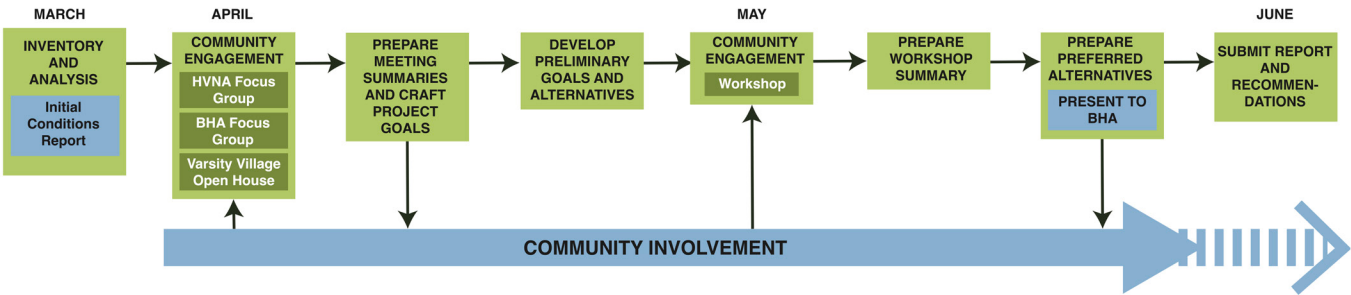


Figure 3. The UW Team’s planning development process from March to June 2022. Source: Wren Wilson.

financial feasibility of potential redevelopment. The meeting took a hybrid format, with one staff member attending in person and two joining via Zoom.

The UW Team asked BHA staff about their interest in site redevelopment and recommendations for what to include if it were to happen. The BHA expressed a desire to add a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom units to the site and suggested townhomes as a typology to increase density while maintaining a residential feel. Staff recommended phased construction to minimize tenant displacement, and noted that this approach has been successful in previous projects. BHA staff supported adding more community facilities on site, like a childcare center, common room, in-unit or in-building laundry, and designated outdoor play space. If the final proposal significantly increased density, the BHA would prefer not to rezone the property. The BHA prioritizes diverse and integrated communities and looks forward to providing housing that meets the needs of their residents.

Focus Group with the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association

On April 18, 2022, members of the UW Team hosted a focus group meeting with members of the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church. The purpose of this meeting was to gain insight into the character, values, and needs of the neighborhood, recognizing that Varsity Village is part of the Happy Valley community. Six community members attended the meeting, one of whom was also a Varsity Village resident.

Five themes emerged from the discussion: natural environment, sense of community, Varsity Village facilities, affordability, and transportation. Participants highlighted the importance of the natural beauty and wildlife in the neighborhood, and recommended incorporating more native plantings and trees to maintain the balance of green space and housing. Happy Valley is a very tight-knit community and participants spoke about how they appreciate their neighbors' kindness and open-mindedness. They recommended better connecting Varsity Village, Happy Valley, and the BHA through increased communication and more shared community spaces. Participants mentioned the need for updated facilities within Varsity Village including in-unit washers and dryers, a new playground, and ways to better delineate

private and public spaces to allow for more individualization per unit (for example, landscaping around the doorsteps). Many attendees praised Varsity Village as a model for livable public housing and stressed the importance of maintaining open space and affordability. Finally, participants described active transportation in Happy Valley: their walking commutes to work, the grocery store, and school for their kids. Attendees wanted more pedestrian and bike infrastructure to ensure routes are safe.

Open House for Varsity Village Residents

On April 20, 2022, the UW Team held an open house with the residents of Varsity Village at the Happy Valley Elementary School. The purpose of the event was to gain insight into the goals, needs, and preferences of current and future Varsity Village residents through a set of activities held at stations that attendees could visit throughout the event. These stations aimed to spark conversation and allow for the residents to express opinions about Varsity Village and provide valuable feedback on community resources, community values, and potential areas of improvement. Four community members attended, three of whom lived in Varsity Village.

The main themes gathered from this meeting were the value of the current trees with the additional landscaping, highlighting the unity between the Varsity Village and the Happy Valley Neighborhood as a whole, amenity upgrades such as the necessity of in-unit washers and dryers, and more connectivity of pathways that limit the necessity to walk to lawn space.

Varsity Village Resident Survey

Understanding that many residents were unable to attend the open house and/or may want to express opinions anonymously, the UW Team created a survey that was mailed and emailed to each unit. The 15 survey results (representing a return rate of 15%) reinforced the main takeaways from the open house event, highlighting the desire for in-unit laundry facilities, as well as the value placed on existing trees. Respondents also mentioned that Varsity Village is very quiet, which they like, and they expressed interest in more community events, like gardening and grounds beautification.

Varsity Village Visioning Workshop

The final community workshop was held on May 23, 2022 at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church. In this workshop, all participants from the previous events were invited back to view the proposed site alternatives that were created based on feedback gathered from previous meetings. Four alternative site designs were presented at rotating stations in which all participants were invited to comment, ask questions, provide feedback, and vote on which alternative aligned the most with their vision of Varsity Village. Nineteen community members attended the workshop.

After reviewing the proposed alternatives, workshop participants provided extensive feedback, which is summarized in the "Preparing Recommendations" section of this report. The comments received were given significant weight in crafting final recommendations.

Alternatives

The Purpose of Developing Alternatives

The UW Team created four alternative site plans to visualize how additional units can be incorporated into the site. The primary goals included developing alternatives that would not result in population displacement, making recommendations that are suitable for Happy Valley, and recognizing the opportunity to add desperately needed housing to a low-density site. The alternatives assume that any changes to the site will be implemented in phases, meaning that different portions of the site will be developed at different times. Phasing the development would prevent the widespread displacement of residents and is feasible given the approximately 20% annual turnover rate at the Varsity Village site.

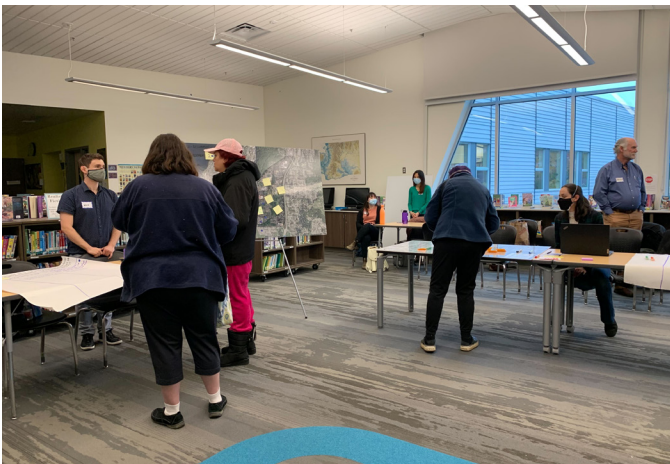


Figure 4. Varsity Village residents at stations at the April open house. Source: Melissa Hom.



Figure 5. HVNA members at the April 2022 focus group meeting. Source: Elena Arakaki.



Figure 6. Opening remarks at the May 2022 visioning workshop. Source: Maddie Weicht.



Figure 7. Workshop participants moved from station to station to discuss the site plans. Source: Maddie Weicht.

All of the alternatives include a number of amenities identified through community meetings and a survey of residents, such as native plantings and green stormwater infrastructure to manage flooding on-site, as well as updated pathways, walkways, and sidewalks to improve walkability and accessibility throughout the site. In addition, each alternative includes a community center that can be tailored to specific community needs, such as child care, a computer lab, or a venue for birthday parties and other events.

Developing the Alternatives

Regulatory and Environmental Constraints

Currently, Varsity Village is zoned as residential single family. During the research phase, the UW Team discovered a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) from 1966 that, if still in effect, would allow for up to 82 additional units onsite. Entitlements granted by CUPs typically run with the land unless otherwise specified, and there is no indication on the document that the entitlements will be extinguished at any time. However, if it is determined that the CUP is no longer in effect, the site would need to be rezoned to residential medium for Alternative A or residential high for Alternatives B, C, and D. The necessary Comprehensive Plan amendments would need to be approved to allow for increased density. These regulations were considered in deciding the number of units presented in each alternative.

Along with zoning regulations, the Team used the Whatcom County Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan goals along with site-specific considerations to form each alternative. Varsity Village lies on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's floodplain boundary, which imposes a flood risk for the community. If the project progresses, green stormwater infrastructure and permeable pavement could help mitigate flooding concerns while aligning with the Whatcom County Natural Hazards Plan goals.

BHA Programmatic Needs

The BHA is considering this project to achieve their goal of increasing the inventory of affordable housing in Bellingham while also preserving the overall character of the Happy Valley neighborhood. The BHA suggested townhomes as a viable option for increasing density while preserving livability, expressing interest in a mix of one-, two-, and three-

bedroom units with the potential to add in-unit washers and dryers. However, the BHA must also weigh the financial and time costs of any proposed changes.

Community, Context, and Policy-based Parameters

Neighborhood Character and Connection

According to the Happy Valley Neighborhood Plan, the neighborhood is a residential community with a human scale that “maintains its stability and diversity by preserving and enhancing wildlife habitat; controlling density, light, and noise; emphasizing open space and gardens; prioritizing efficient transportation options, and cultivating community opportunities” (Happy Valley Neighborhood Plan). Outreach activities reiterated this desire to preserve the area's semi-rural character for wildlife habitat and native plants, as well as the mental health benefits of proximity to nature. Thus, each alternative was carefully thought out to ensure the neighborhood character was preserved through the prioritization of lowrise townhomes, access to nature, and the inclusion of a community center.

In response to resident comments, the UW Team also aimed to better connect Varsity Village with the rest of the Happy Valley community by making the site a pleasant place for community members to gather and spend time together.

Building Typology and Scale

Each alternative includes a mix of one-, two-, and three-bedroom townhomes constructed with materials that complement the surrounding neighborhood. Townhomes are typically 1,300-1,600 square feet and 2-3 stories tall. They can include ground-floor garages, street parking, or a combination of both. In the alternatives, the townhomes are all 22 feet by 35 feet, for an area of 770 square feet per floor, totaling 1,540 square feet for a two-story townhome. This typology has the potential to meet the BHA's goals of increasing density on the site without disrupting the residential character of the Happy Valley neighborhood. Townhomes each have their own front doors, which would mimic the single-family homes surrounding Varsity Village.

The UW Team aimed to create alternatives that would enhance the quality of life for the residents of Varsity Village. For example, outreach activities revealed that residents and neighbors strongly value the open space, semi-rural character, and natural feel of the site and neighborhood overall. Because of this, the UW Team prioritized preserving as much open space as possible in each alternative, carefully placing additional units rather than packing in as many townhomes as possible. The UW Team also attempted to respond to requests to increase the number of trees and native plants on-site, as well as the desire for a mix of communal and private outdoor spaces. Pedestrian circulation was also prioritized both as a way to create a functional site plan and in response to resident concerns. The UW Team drew inspiration from market-rate townhome case studies, ultimately striving to generate site plans that would create a community and environment equivalent to that of market-rate development.

The Preliminary Alternatives

The following alternatives show a range of options the BHA have for increasing site density to provide much-needed affordable housing to Happy Valley. The UW Team chose to create a range of site plans that add between 20 and 82 additional units. While the site could be rezoned to accommodate any number of units, 183 units was chosen as the maximum density because it maximizes the use of the site under the CUP, should it remain in effect. The lowest density option, adding 20 units, was chosen because the BHA will incur costs with any redevelopment, so any changes must provide significant benefits in terms of increased density. Finally, the UW Team created two intermediate alternatives—141 units and 161 units—to provide more nuanced choices between the two extremes. These alternatives are preliminary, and the UW Team has taken care to present them in a balanced fashion to avoid skewing favor towards a particular option.

Alternative A

Alternative A would require a rezone to Residential Multi, Medium Density if it is determined that the CUP is no longer in effect. In the northwestern quadrant of Varsity Village, 24 units are replaced by 44 townhomes. At 12 units per acre, this alternative adds a net gain of 20 units to the site. A

community center is included at the corner of 24th and McKenzie, with the potential to incorporate a number of community uses. See Figure 8 for the site plan.

While this alternative highlights a lower density increase, improvements of existing site amenities and open spaces are emphasized throughout. Naturally, the lower density increase allows for many existing open spaces to remain and offers the opportunity to focus on improvements and programming of these current spaces. Pedestrian circulation is added throughout the site to provide residents with designated permeable paths to allow stormwater to pass through and increase site accessibility. Existing open space could be programmed with amenities such as a pollinator path, which could flow east to west and include native plants to provide food and shelter for birds and other pollinators. Additionally, the site could include gardens, space for dog parks, and designated children's play areas.

Increased tree density along a multi-use path on the east side of the property could offer privacy screening and additional carbon sequestration. The basketball court could be renovated with permeable asphalt and the laundry room could be replaced with bike lockers. To mitigate flooding, stormwater infrastructure could be included at the southwest corner by the bus stop. In addition, this alternative involves renovating existing units to include in-unit washers and dryers.

Alternative A includes a 9% increase in impervious surfaces (proposed 171,609 square feet total) and a 5% reduction in total open space (proposed 263,780 square feet total). This alternative would require the least amount of relocation for current residents.

Alternative B

Alternative B replaces 36 existing buildings in Varsity Village with 76 townhome units, for a total of 141 affordable units, increasing the residential density to 14 units per acre. All buildings north of Varsity Village's interior road, as well as the three buildings just south of the interior road near the center of Varsity Village, would be replaced; these buildings were selected for the ease with which they can be redeveloped under a multi-stage, phased approach that would limit the displacement of residents. See Figure 9 for the site plan. If the CUP is determined to no longer be in effect, this

Alternative A



Figure 8. The site plan for Alternative A, which has 121 total units. Source: UW Team.

Alternative B



Figure 9. The site plan for Alternative B, which has 141 total units. Source: UW Team.

Alternative C



Figure 10. The site plan for Alternative C, which has 161 total units. Source: UW Team.

Alternative D



Figure 11. The site plan for Alternative D, which has 183 total units. Source: UW Team.

increase in units would require a rezone of Varsity Village to Residential Multi, High Density under the Bellingham Municipal Code.

The newly introduced townhomes face the adjacent streets, creating an enhanced streetscape and allowing for possible garage parking in street-facing units. Adjacent to every new unit and the portions of Varsity Village abutting Donovan and Mackenzie Avenues are shared courtyards and green spaces featuring pedestrian walkways. Alternative B includes a community center south of the Varsity Village entrance along 24th Street. Varsity Village's existing playground and basketball court are relocated to the area south of the proposed community center in order to accommodate townhomes where these amenities currently exist.

Alternative B would introduce an additional 18% of impervious surface (proposed 186,000 square feet total) and reduce the total open space by 10% (proposed 249,389 square feet total). This alternative may require the temporary relocation of residents to different units on site during phased construction along the north and south of the interior road.

Alternative C

Alternative C replaces 48 units with 108 townhomes, adding 60 units by replacing six buildings north of the internal road, three south of the road, and four in the southwest corner of the site. This brings the overall density to 16 units per acre. See Figure 10 for the site plan. Alternative C would also require a rezone to Residential Multi, High Density if the CUP is determined to no longer be in effect.

Townhomes are arranged in groups of three to five units. A shared area for a community center, childcare facility, or sports courts, and a new playground is located just south of the interior road next to 24th Street. This alternative is organized around shared green spaces and plazas, which allow for neighborhood interaction and socialization. The townhomes on 24th Street and McKenzie Avenue face the road to align with houses across the street, while the back entrance of most units face a communal green space to foster community among neighbors.

Alternative C increases the impervious surface on the site by 26% (proposed 198,135 square feet total) and decreases total open space by 15% (proposed

237,254 square feet total). This alternative would create significant disturbance to the site and may require the temporary relocation of residents to different units on site during phased construction along the north and south of the interior road.

Alternative D

Alternative D replaces all existing buildings in Varsity Village with 183 townhome units to bring the overall density to 18 units per acre. This alternative reorients internal vehicle movement and introduces two alleyways. Alternative D would require a rezone to Residential Multi, High Density if the CUP is determined to no longer be in effect. See Figure 11 for the site plan.

This alternative includes a community center in Varsity Village's northwest corner as an amenity for the broader Happy Valley community and Varsity Village residents. In order to accommodate additional units and plentiful open space, the playground is relocated to the center of the site and the basketball court is removed.

This layout orients new townhomes to face adjacent streets, internal alleyways, or shared courtyards and green spaces. This orientation maintains view corridors through Varsity Village and promotes inclusive social activity with the addition of new outdoor space, which could be accessible to all. These shared spaces are connected by a network of pedestrian walkways, which extend to new pedestrian facilities along Donovan and Mackenzie Avenues.

The total impervious surface area in Alternative D would increase by 14% (proposed 178,715 square feet total), while open space would decrease by 8% (proposed 256,674 square feet total). By increasing the site's density, more disturbances would occur to the site, likely resulting in less tree retention and a higher chance of resident displacement.

Pro Formas

In order to gauge the potential funding outcomes of all the alternatives, pro formas were created to estimate the sources, uses, and costs associated with each alternative. Each estimate is based on the total square footage constructed as well as an estimated cost per square foot (\$350). They also include estimations for impact fees and soft costs. Potential sources of funding are also included. The pro formas were based on information shared

by Bellingham affordable housing providers and real estate developers. Appendix 6 shows further estimates for all alternatives.

Park, Multi-modal Transportation, and School Impact Fees will be assessed by the City of Bellingham for new units (although credit will be given for pre-existing units that are demolished and replaced). Per BMC 19.08.080, there is an 80% waiver for Parks and Transportation, and School District Impact Fees may also be reduced by 80%. See Appendix 6 for referenced code requirements.

Preparing Recommendations

Response to Alternatives

During the final community meeting, participants' comments gave rise to a few overarching themes. They are as follows:

Concerns and questions about:

- Accessibility/ADA compliance of townhomes
- Parking availability, type (tuck under, surface, garage, covered, etc), and placement on- versus off-site
- Funding and cost of construction
- Feasibility of adding second stories to existing buildings

Favorable opinions toward:

- Programmed open space and green space
- Intentional courtyard space between groups of townhomes to promote neighborly interaction and sense of ownership
- In-unit washers and dryers (negative feedback about existing shared laundry facilities)

At the end of the meeting, participants were invited to vote for their preferred alternative using anonymous ballots. Of the nineteen participants present, twelve submitted ballots. Of these participants, one participant favored Alternative A; one favored Alternative B; two favored Alternative C; and four favored Alternative D. In addition, some participants did not choose one, but rather preferred a mix of a few alternatives. One participant saw beneficial elements in Alternatives A, C, and D; another participant favored C with the addition of some multi-story buildings; another favored Alternative A as the first phase of eventual development to Alternative D; and another favored both C and D. On the whole, the vast majority of participants preferred denser alternatives—which also featured more legible, rectilinear plans made

possible by the full redevelopment of the site—compared to the alternatives with lower unit counts, where layouts were constrained by existing buildings and roadways.

Developing Recommendations

Key Findings

During the focus group meetings with the BHA and HVNA, and open house and survey with Varsity Village residents, the UW Team sought to understand what would make the site an enjoyable place to live, how it might fit in with the surrounding neighborhood, and how quality of life for present and future residents could be balanced with the housing needs of Bellingham as a whole. While these questions were answered during this initial information gathering phase, ideas were further fleshed out and confirmed during the final community workshop on May 23.

During this workshop, participants' comments gave rise to a few overarching themes. According to residents and neighbors, green open space gives this site value and quality. This amenity is one that should be preserved, although perhaps in a different form than the existing unprogrammed grass lawns. Residents and neighbors also expressed interest in amenities such as in-unit washers and dryers, a mix of public and private outdoor spaces, and a community center. There was strong support for a phased approach to any redevelopment.

Townhomes were chosen as the preferred typology as a result of BHA guidance and in order to reflect the neighborhood's character, which was another concern from the neighborhood. However, unit typology merits further consideration, as many participants expressed concerns about stairs for unit accessibility in the final meeting. Additionally, participants had questions regarding the type and placement of on-site as well as street parking. Several participants wanted to know more about project funding and the cost of construction.

Topics for Further Discussion

Throughout this process, the UW Team generated a wide range of ideas, and not all of them could be fully explored. Ideas that require further attention include small accessory one-bedroom apartments, pathways to tenant ownership, selling market-rate units as a funding strategy, land trust partnerships,

and deploying a mix of typologies on site.

Additional information on site zoning and code is also required before this project may move forward. No decision has been made on if the 1966 Conditional Use Permit remains in effect, which will determine if a zoning change is required. Whether the infill toolkit or multifamily code will be applied to the site has also yet to be determined. Findings about the zoning and code that will be applied to the site will dictate other key decisions and possibilities going forward, including the number of units allowed, the number of parking spaces necessary, and the stormwater infrastructure required. This will significantly impact the viability of different site plans and programs by constraining the size and location of other features.

Recommended Approach for Further Research and Engagement

The University of Washington Team recommends that the Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) continue to pursue the partial or full redevelopment of Varsity Village in order to increase the number of units on the site while still maintaining a high quality of life for residents. Based on community feedback and a comparative analysis, no single alternative developed by the UW Team during this process proved adequate to definitively and comprehensively serve the needs of current and future Varsity Village residents, the BHA, the Happy Valley neighborhood, and the City of Bellingham. The UW Team suggests the following general recommendations for future development alternatives.

All plans for Varsity Village must first and foremost consider Varsity Village as an integral and inseparable part of the Happy Valley community, rather than as a separate entity. This involves planning for continued community engagement throughout the process. A participation plan should be developed to incorporate the values and concerns of Varsity Village and Happy Valley residents.

Entitlements and Zoning Changes

In order to accommodate more housing, it is recommended that the BHA further investigate entitlements granted by the 1966 Conditional Use Permit (CUP) (see Appendix 5) which would allow for up to 183 units to be constructed on the property. Entitlements granted by CUPs typically

run with the land and no extinguishment has been identified.

Should the City of Bellingham determine that the CUP does not provide the necessary entitlements to increase the number of housing units, it is recommended that the BHA begin the process of rezoning the site to Residential Multi, High Density, per the Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC 20.32.040; BMC 20.19.020). A zoning change will require an update of both Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan as well as Happy Valley's Neighborhood Plan.

Whether through the CUP entitlement or a change to the site's zoning, any action to increase the density would require an environmental review under Washington's State Environmental Policy Act to assess the environmental impact of the new development.

Phased Development

Regardless of the level of density proposed, future alternatives should adopt a phased construction approach by building housing in stages to mitigate displacement of current Varsity Village residents.

Density

Future designs for Varsity Village should focus on higher density development, closer to densities seen in Alternatives C and D (16 units per acre and 18 units per acre, respectively). These should include structures of up to 8 townhome units each, with staggered facades and walkways to avoid impenetrable lines of houses and create a welcoming and pleasant experience.

Open Space, Trees, and Natural Features

An emphasis on open space is recommended to preserve the nature-rich character of both the site and the Happy Valley neighborhood. Open spaces should be deliberately designed and accessible to all in the Happy Valley community. The property should have a combination of smaller areas, such as the courtyards in Alternative C, and larger central open spaces, such as those proposed in Alternative D. Flexibility in open space design can accommodate a variety of features including but not limited to: a playground, basketball courts, community gardens, a pollinator pathway, and private gardens. All open spaces should incorporate native plants to foster a healthy local ecosystem. The specific uses and placement of amenities

in open spaces should be determined by future community engagement.

Trees are a high priority for residents and neighbors. Although tree retention will be difficult when adding new housing units, the BHA should consider alternatives which preserve mature trees. Plans for the site should include an increased number of native trees on and surrounding the site, providing noise and visual buffers while preserving sightlines across the site.

Stormwater Management

Stormwater management for the site should be integrated into the design of proposed open spaces, thereby providing both ecological function and potentially a visual amenity. Green stormwater infrastructure is recommended to offset the increase in impermeable surfaces, particularly along the southern border of the site where pooling has been reported.

Street Improvements

All street frontages should be improved to adopted City standards with both sidewalks and (where appropriate) on-street parking. Street improvements along Donovan and McKenzie Avenues, triggered by development of the site, should focus on creating sidewalks lined with ample greenery. It is important that these exterior sidewalks are connected with the site's interior walkways. Interior walkways should be developed to connect Varsity Village residents to their neighbors on site and provide inviting spaces for Happy Valley. Walkways should focus on preserving sightlines through Varsity Village to increase site permeability and safety.

Housing Typologies

The UW Team agrees with the BHA's assessment that townhomes are the most appropriate housing typology for Varsity Village, as they enable the increase in density while remaining compatible with the character of the neighborhood. However, the BHA should strongly consider additional options that prioritize accessibility, such as two-unit townhomes with an accessible floor-level unit and a second stair-accessed unit above. The BHA should further explore accessible townhouse designs as well as the possibility of a mix of typologies to improve accessibility. New units should have an in-unit washer and dryer included and existing units

that are retained should be retrofitted for washer and dryer hookup. If constraints do not allow for in-unit washers and dryers, smaller laundry facilities throughout the site are preferable to a single, central facility.

Building frontages should be street-oriented to reflect Happy Valley's residential character and connect the homes in Varsity Village to adjacent street frontages. Street-facing garages should be avoided in favor of off-street parking or tuck-under garages behind units.

Community Spaces

A community space is recommended, but its specific use and design are flexible. Potential uses include a childcare facility, a computer lab, a multi-purpose room, or a combination of uses. Uses are dependent on future partnerships and funding to construct and maintain the space. Future engagement efforts should continue to inform the type of community space that best fits the needs of Varsity Village residents.

Conclusion

This list of recommendations is not exhaustive. Rather, it contains a series of qualities, values, and crucial next steps that emerged from focus group meetings with stakeholders and a comparative analysis of alternatives for the site. Further engagement with Varsity Village residents and the Happy Valley community will illuminate other essential priorities that should be included in any future alternative development scenarios.

Next Steps

1. Secure Land Use Entitlements.

The most critical step is ensuring that the property's land use codes and characteristics allow for more housing units. The permitted uses of the Varsity Village site, or its entitlements are contingent on the following:

- *Check the validity of the existing Conditional Use Permit (CUP).* The existing CUP from 1966 originally outlined 183 units on the site, while only 101 units were constructed (Appendix 5). An inquiry to the Office of the City Attorney should be placed to determine whether or not the CUP would be honored. If the CUP is honored, a rezone would not be required for the development of up to 183 units on site.

- *Should the CUP be determined to be insufficient, begin the process of rezoning to Residential Multi, High Density which will also require an amendment to Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan as well as Happy Valley's Neighborhood Plan.* Given the number of plans rezoning must amend, it is important to start early on in the process should it be deemed necessary.

2. Enter plans for funding alternatives with Whatcom County Housing Advisory Committee (WCHAC).

Preliminarily meet with both the City of Bellingham's Community Development Division and the WCHAC to introduce the proposed project, the new housing program for the site, the anticipated entitlement and review process and the preliminary development timeline. Once entitlements are secured, investigating funding options should take priority. In this case, coordinating with WCHAC to place on the yearly docket for state and federal project funding increases the chance of securing funding early in the process.

3. Construct a Community Participation Plan.

A participation plan should include scheduled meetings with members of the community early in the process and continuing iteratively throughout the process. The BHA should attend HVNA meetings as well so that the process can be reciprocal. Key to the participation plan should be an increased effort to reach out to Varsity Village residents.

4. Refine alternatives and develop a preferred site plan.

As stated in the recommendations, the alternatives produced in this report do not necessarily serve all purposes intended, and should be further refined to better suit the needs of current and future residents.

- *Conduct Cost Analysis.* Given the limited scope of this project, cost analysis was limited by many broad assumptions. A more in-depth analysis should be done to determine whether or not proposed alternatives are feasible.

5. Conduct on-site studies.

A limitation of this study was ground-truthed analysis of the site, which is necessary to determine feasibility, cost, and timelines for any sort of development. The following studies should be conducted promptly to inform the planning

process.

- *Stormwater Management: Conceptual Stormwater Plan.* The current on-site stormwater management system was most likely installed when the site was built in the 1960s. As stormwater code has evolved rapidly since then, it is safe to assume that the property would require a re-work of stormwater facilities. This should be done early in the planning by site analysis and the completion of a conceptual stormwater plan.
- *Parking Study.* Increasing density on the site will also increase the site's parking needs, and thus its impact on local parking conditions. Parking studies serve to demonstrate the site's current parking characteristics and whether or not a project will be able to waive some parking requirements. Lowering parking requirements could decrease costs and impact of impermeable surfaces for the site.
- *Traffic Study.* Current traffic studies of the area are dated by two years, and would most likely need to be updated regardless of development. As this recommendation suggests adding significantly to the number of people and thus trips generated daily, a traffic impact assessment will most likely be required.
- *Utilities.* As the site was developed for a smaller number of units, there is a possibility that adding units would require an upgrade of existing utilities. If the impact of the site on water and sewer lines is significant, larger system upgrades may be required.
- *Tree Retention.* An inventory of existing and significant trees should be developed to inform the placement of buildings and open spaces.

6. Prepare a Preliminary Planting Plan.

Given the environmental emphasis of Happy Valley and Bellingham as a whole, a responsive plan should include a planting plan which provides a variety of native plantings throughout the site. This will also be beneficial for stormwater management and offsetting impacts of the site.

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Appendix 1: Bellingham Housing Authority Focus Group Memo

Bellingham Housing Authority Focus Group Meeting Summary **Monday, April 18, 2022** **Squalicum Boathouse**

Meeting Goal

The objective of this discussion is to broaden our understanding of the wants and needs of the Happy Valley community to better inform next steps regarding the Varsity Village site.

The Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) is working with a team of University of Washington graduate students (“UW Team”) to assess future needs and opportunities for Varsity Village. The students will evaluate the need for community facilities to serve both the residents and neighborhood, the potential for infill development and other possible improvements. The results of the study will inform long-term planning by the BHA.

Summary

The meeting began at 4:00 PM as a hybrid meeting (two BHA staff joined via Zoom). The UW Team ran through the agenda – the UW Team kicked off the meeting by outlining our project background, objectives, and introductions. Then, the UW Team facilitated the discussion portion of the meeting for about 45 minutes. The UW Team wrapped up the meeting just after 5:00 PM by summarizing key takeaways and sharing the next steps in our project.

To inform our exploration of alternatives for the Varsity Village site, the UW Team asked BHA staff about the potential for redevelopment. When asked what they would recommend including on the site if it were to be redeveloped, we heard the following responses:

- Low rise building typology (townhomes were specifically mentioned by BHA staff as an option)
 - Retention of the existing green space, although not necessarily in the existing layout
- A mix of 1- and 2-bedroom units, with some 3-bedroom units (or larger)
- A focus on providing sufficient off-street parking
- Phased on-site construction process
 - BHA has experience with “hoteling” during phased construction, and have done this process during the previous renovation of Varsity Village
 - No BHA staff members at the meeting expressed major concerns with phased construction due to their prior experience
- Addition of amenities such as a childcare facility, common room, in-unit or in-building laundry, and designated outdoor play space. A BHA staff member noted that to their knowledge the existing concrete basketball court is never used
- Ideally, redevelopment would see 60-80 additional units added to the site.

Other important points from the discussion include:

- Bellingham and Whatcom County community members have been very supportive of affordable housing and the BHA projects have not faced extensive pushback from their neighbors. Any concerns that arise are generally related to traffic and parking
- Funding conditions require that there be no fewer than 101 units on the site at any time, therefore any redevelopment process must add units before removing any units
- Generally, BHA projects are developed as of right (without a rezoning process) and this would be BHA's preference
- BHA prioritizes diverse and integrated communities. A portion of units are usually set aside for large households, persons with disabilities, and persons exiting homelessness
- Properties need to be designed to be future-proof. Properties are competing on the open market and need to be attractive to residents in comparison to what they might find elsewhere
- BHA doesn't focus on measuring the "success" of a property by a single metric; instead, they want to provide housing that fits the needs of their residences, whatever those needs might be
- A large population with unmet needs in the housing market is workforce single persons. More studio and 1-bedroom units can help fill this gap

Appendix 2: Happy Valley Neighborhood Association Focus Group Memo

Happy Valley Neighborhood Association Meeting Summary

Monday, April 18, 2022

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church

Meeting Goal

The objective of this discussion is to broaden our understanding of the wants and needs of the Happy Valley community to better inform next steps regarding the Varsity Village site.

The Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) is working with a team of University of Washington graduate students ("UW Team") to assess future needs and opportunities for Varsity Village. The students will evaluate the need for community facilities to serve both the residents and neighborhood, the potential for infill development and other possible improvements. The results of the study will inform long-term planning by the BHA.

Summary

On the evening of April 18, six members of the Happy Valley Neighborhood Association joined a group of University of Washington Master of Urban Planning students for a focus group. The goal of the discussion was to gain an understanding of Happy Valley residents' perspectives and neighborhood values to help inform draft alternatives that the UW Team will develop for the Varsity Village site. Resident participants talked about their experiences living in Happy Valley and pointed out areas of interest on a neighborhood map. The following notes are grouped into five themes that were mentioned a lot by residents: natural environment, sense of community, Varsity Village facilities, affordability, and transportation.

Natural Environment

All focus group participants spoke about the natural beauty and wildlife in the neighborhood, and a couple highlighted the psychological benefits they experience from living so close to nature. The natural beauty makes many residents feel at home and they appreciate how the neighborhood is "welcoming to wildlife," like deer and ducks. Being surrounded by nature encourages sustainable behaviors and makes people realize the value of protecting the environment. Several participants would like to increase the number of trees in the area and maintain a balance between housing and nature.

- Views of the water, mountains, and sky are important to all participants
 - Lighting under bushes could make walkways visible while keeping the sky dark
- One resident expressed a desire for more landscaping to give units more individuality and privacy
- Many participants commented that the amount of existing open space is amazing and helps with the psychological impacts of living so close together and other challenges of having lower incomes
- Several members emphasized the need to keep and plant more trees (especially fruit trees)

- What species are the best for urban environments (won't drop big branches), native, and have long-term sustainability?
- One neighbor shared that stormwater ponds could be made to look nicer and integrated into the environment

Sense of Community

During the meeting, one Varsity Village resident emphasized that Happy Valley and Varsity Village are intimately connected, and that development of alternatives should seek to maintain and improve these connections. Neighbors look out for each other and are open-minded and trusting, which creates a strong sense of community in this “eclectic” neighborhood. One HVNA member suggested that relationships could be improved by increasing communication between the residents of Happy Valley (HVNA in particular) and Bellingham Housing Authority, which are previously non-existent. Additionally, there was a general consensus that spaces and uses which encourage Varsity Village residents to participate in Happy Valley's community (and vice versa) should be explored for alternatives. Exploring the connections between Varsity Village, Happy Valley, and Bellingham Housing Authority has the potential to yield positive outcomes for all.

- One participant stated that Varsity Village is already intimately connected with Happy Valley, and should not be viewed as separate
- Several members contributed thoughts that Happy Valley's character of being open minded, nurturing, sustainable, and resourceful is beneficial for residents of affordable housing
- One HVNA member noted that Improving connections between BHA and HVNA could prove beneficial for all parties involved moving forward.
- Several participants indicated that shared spaces, such as bulletin boards could open up communications between Happy Valley and Varsity Village residents, breaking down potential barriers

Varsity Village Facilities

Varsity Village was seen by some at the meeting as a great model for low income housing, especially given the ample amount of open space on site. Thoughts about how to better utilize this open space were raised, and a number of recommendations to improve facilities and life at Varsity Village were also brought up. Most recommendations were in reference to improving laundry facilities, preventing dumping of old furniture on site and throughout Happy Valley, improving recycling and compost efforts throughout the neighborhood, and improving play areas on site. At the end of our meeting, we discussed the importance of locating facilities near low income housing instead of concentrating all low income housing near existing facilities, and beginning to think about what kind of facilities would best meet the needs of Varsity Village and Happy Valley.

- Open space: a few members mentioned wanting to improve run down play areas on site, especially since it's not always clear if they are for just Varsity Village residents to use, or

the neighborhood as a whole. One member raised an idea for potential covered parking with solar panels

- A couple members mentioned implementing a buffer with landscaping so residents don't feel like people are looking at them as they drive by, would also help with delineating space between neighbors a little more
- A resident mentioned wanting a washer/dryer in each unit, along with education about efficient water use so water bills don't surprise residents
- Furniture dumping throughout the neighborhood was a large concern from multiple members, and a lot of ideas were raised to create somewhere to store furniture in order to repair them, allow new families moving in to use furniture if they need it, etc. There were also concerns over dumping on the Varsity Village site specifically, from people outside of Varsity Village as well, not just from Varsity Village residents moving out.
- Discussion from all participants regarding locating facilities near Varsity Village/on site: thoughts about childcare, medical clinics, all with the intention and additional benefit of creating jobs in Happy Valley as well

Affordability

Throughout the meeting, many people discussed wanting to provide housing for different income levels, so that if people with lower incomes started making more money, they wouldn't be displaced from their unit. People also mentioned that Varsity Village is "how affordable housing should be" or look like, and that it should be a model for new spaces to build affordable housing on. They also discussed that part of what drew them to Happy Valley in the first place was cheaper, larger lots that were full of open space. We also heard that, generally speaking, Happy Valley tends to be supportive of ADUs (accessory dwelling units).

- One member said, "This is one of the best public housing projects I've ever seen"
- One participant mentioned that the amount of open space allows for residents to not feel overcrowded
- There were concerns from multiple participants over being displaced from the neighborhood when they get above the income bracket - suggestion to provide 120% AMI housing so people who make more money eventually will not be kicked out
- There were also questions raised by a participant as to why Happy Valley has relatively few families of color, especially African American families

Transportation and Mobility

All meeting participants were disappointed with the minimal sidewalk coverage throughout Happy Valley, which is particularly concerning considering that community members regularly walk to meet each other and children often walk to the schools in and near the neighborhood. Some neighborhood association members identified Varsity Village's portion of McKenzie Ave and Donovan Ave as needing investment into pedestrian facilities. Furthermore, stewardship of the local ecosystem is a major priority of the Neighborhood Association, and this should be taken into account when investing in transportation related facilities on the Varsity Village site.

- Happy Valley is safe and many parent attendees feel comfortable with their kids walking to a neighbor's house, school, and sports practice by themselves
- Vehicle parking in South Happy Valley was mentioned as being of little concern to the meeting participants; producing greater vehicle parking than the Bellingham Municipal Code requires is unnecessary
- Active transportation is common in Happy Valley but bicycle-supportive facilities, including bicycle parking, are lacking
- A couple members expressed concerns about flooding and the impacts of the neighborhood's roadways on the local wildlife; investments into sidewalks, driveways, parking, etc. would receive greater neighborhood support if measures were taken to substantially reduce or offset any negative environmental impacts

Appendix 3: Varsity Village Open House Memo

Varsity Village Resident Open House Notes Wednesday, April 20, 2022 Happy Valley Elementary School Library

Meeting Goal

The objective of this discussion is to broaden our understanding of the wants and needs of the Happy Valley community to better inform next steps regarding the Varsity Village site.

The Bellingham Housing Authority (BHA) is working with a team of University of Washington graduate students ("UW Team") to assess future needs and opportunities for Varsity Village. The students will evaluate the need for community facilities to serve both the residents and neighborhood, the potential for infill development and other possible improvements. The results of the study will inform long-term planning by the BHA.

Summary

The Varsity Village Open House was held on April 20th, 2022 at the Happy Valley Elementary School from 5:30-7pm. There were three stations that held activities that would spark conversation and allow for the residents to express opinions about Varsity Village. 4 community members (3 from Varsity Village) attended and provided valuable feedback on community resources, community values, and potential areas of improvement.

Varsity Village Community Values and Key Resources

Neighborliness

- One resident strongly emphasized the sense of community within Varsity Village through encounters on the property and with Happy Valley through community activities, while others seemed less interested in a sense of community
- Two participating residents stated that the basketball courts are used by residents and by other members of the community
- Three respondents from Varsity Village utilize facilities/resources around the Happy Valley community
- One resident liked the ability to go to her neighbors and exchange fruit/vegetables

Sense of Belonging

- All participants described feeling at home in Varsity Village, including several longtime residents
- One resident emphasized that Varsity Village is unified with Happy Valley as a whole, rather than a separate entity
- One resident described Varsity Village as quiet and comfortable, with residents who care about the community
- Some residents added that safety and pet waste concerns detract from homey feel of community

- One resident felt that making a distinction between Varsity Village and Happy Valley was potentially harmful

Valued Resources and Qualities in Varsity Village and Happy Valley

- Two participants valued the bus stop
- One participants mentioned valuing the parking lot
- Several people mentioned the importance of religious Institutions as meeting/gathering spaces
- One person mentioned utilizing the South Side Food Bank at Hillcrest Church
- One residents enjoyed visiting the FireHouse Cafe
- One resident liked the quiet nature of property location within Happy Valley
- Two residents mentioned visiting Happy Valley Community Gardens, such as Joe's Garden
- Two participants affirmed the quality of elementary and high schools in the area
- Two participants visited the Community Co Op and local Grocery Stores in Happy Valley
- One participant confirmed that they enjoyed the open Space in the area (Connelly Creek) and local Parklet with native plant garden
- One participant visits a local manufactured home park and the Bellingham Co-Housing Complex
- Two participants mentioned utilizing major pathways around Varsity Village to get around the community (Fairhaven, Sehome, Happy Valley) to important destinations

Concerns and Opportunities for Improvement

Landscaping and Beautification

- All participants desired planting of additional trees
- Three participants showed interest in flowers and flowering trees, one in fruit trees, and three in better tree trimming
- One participant suggested native or edible landscaping, individual yard areas for each unit, and shrubs around property
- We heard mixed opinions from participants concerning the addition of a community garden
- Three participants voiced major concerns about impacts of pets on lawns
- One participant requested landscape lights to help with safety but maintain evening ambiance
- One participant emphasized avoiding fencing in the property

Amenities

- *In unit*
 - Multiple residents wished they had In-unit washers, dryers, dishwashers
 - A couple of residents wanted upgraded kitchen appliances
 - Participants voiced desire for greater unit accessibility
- *Property-wide*
 - One participant suggested an upgrading of playground equipment

- One resident requested an upgrade of a secure mailroom and/or a secure dropbox for rent
- Better mailbox system– less confusion and mistakes in mail delivery
- One participant suggested a bulletin board/communication board
- Two residents stated concern of unauthorized users of Varsity Village amenities (ie laundry/garbage facilities)
- Sustainable & cost effective energy sources (i.e. solar panels)
- Recycling dumpster
- Storage for sharing/reuse of items

Pathways

- Four participants desire sidewalks around all sides of property
- Four participants desired increased connectivity and number of pathways through property

Other

- Three participants stated issues with unauthorized pets, pet waste
- Two participants would like light at bus stop and increased street lighting
- Two residents voiced their concern about the BHA leaving doors unlocked after finishing cleaning Varsity Village apartments
- One resident mentioned the issue of domestic violence at Varsity Village

Appendix 4: Varsity Village Resident Survey Summary

Varsity Village Resident Survey Summary May 28, 2022 Digital & Print/Mail Survey

Survey Goal

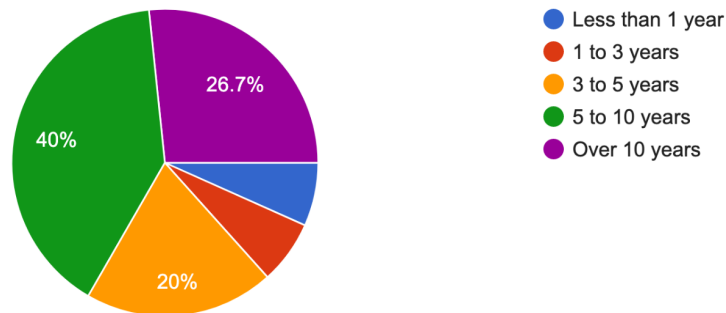
The goal of the survey was to offer a platform in which Varsity Village residents could share their perceptions, concerns, and opinions of Varsity Village and the surrounding neighborhood. The survey was anonymous and could be accessed remotely, serving as a means to share feedback without attending the community meetings.

Summary

Over the course of the outreach period (approximately 1 month), 15 responses to the survey were received. The questions and responses were as follows:

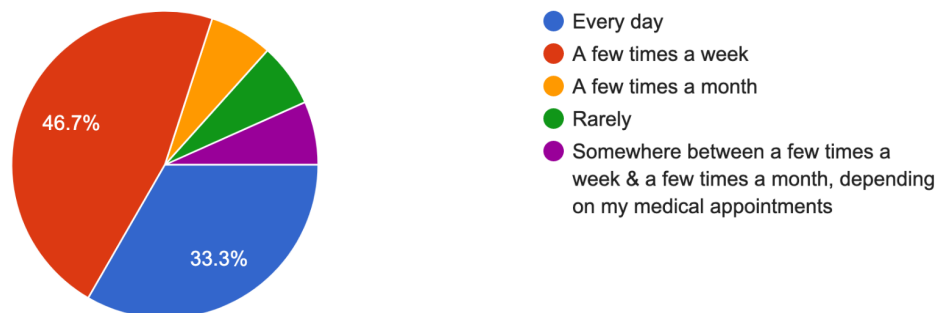
How long have you lived in Varsity Village?

15 responses



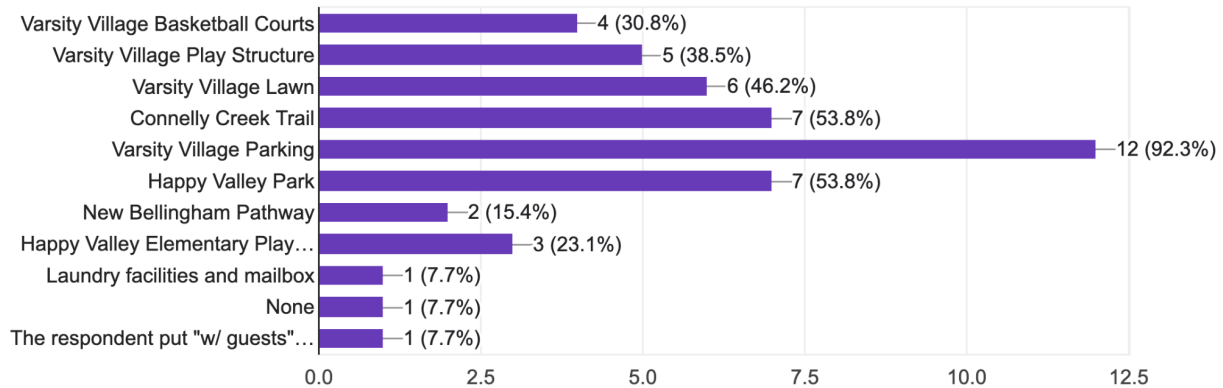
How often do you spend time outside of your unit on the Varsity Village grounds?

15 responses



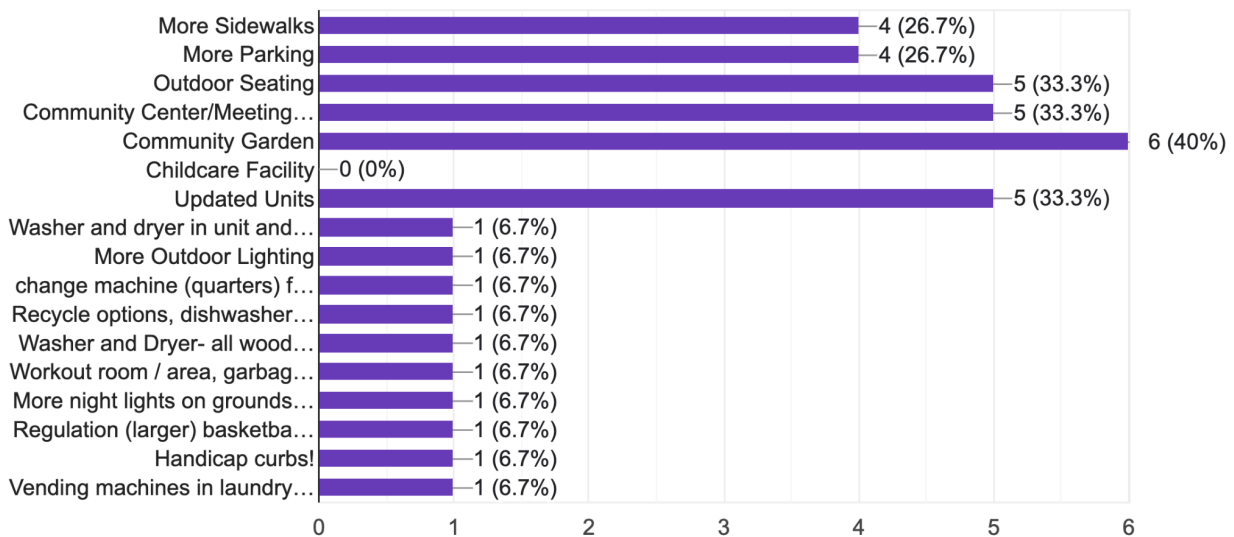
On a weekly basis, which amenities do you use at Varsity Village or the surrounding area? Check all that apply...

13 responses



Which amenities would you like to see added to Varsity Village? Check all that apply...

15 responses



What do you like best about Varsity Village?

1. Positive: Overall quiet living / Challenges: Messy neighbors, filthy laundry facilities, garbage diggers, don't always feel safe
2. Like
 - plenty of parking
 - secure mailbox

Don't like

-not having my own washer and dryer in unit

-wall heaters

-no outdoor outlet or light in patio area

-bathroom too small

3. Positive: It is most the time very quiet, that is a huge plus / Challenge: Cars get broke into a lot, druggies use own parking lot to come park and get high ALL (emphasis) the time.
4. I like that it's affordable, it's a roof over our heads with a big open area in front of our unit. Challenges are definitely the one laundry room for all of the tenants. Not having the option to have a washer/dryer in the unit, repairs not being done or shrugged off, and all the drug activity/ child rapist that stay here with "friends".
5. I like the green spaces & not having to use apt# when I write my address, unfortunately, that's also my challenge. I cannot go to the mail/laundry room by myself; it might be possible if I could walk down the stairs & then from the sidewalk, straight to the patio, but I have to walk down the sidewalk, past the entire building, where there is no entrance, then past the end, then halfway across the front; it nearly doubles the distance.
6. I like that people are quiet and leave you alone, or will socialize with you if you want (like while you're doing the laundry). When the kids play, they can be quite loud, going back and forth outside my window with skateboards, etc. screaming at each other, etc. But when they do, I try and adjust by listening to music on headphones, or playing my own music.
7. Parking is the problem. It is a nice place to live, I like my neighbors. We help each other
8. It's quiet, safe, and I have great neighbors. Maintenance and office staff are great.
9. It's challenging to do flower bed weeding for me
10. Positives: Nice neighbors, green spaces, laundry room / Challenges: mental illness, noisy neighbors, idle kids getting into trouble, trees on playground, laundry room
11. Love nature and the wildlife. Love that it is subsidized living that is not a high rise.
12. Challenges: Laundry room is too gross to use. Privacy is hard to have. No walkable shops.
13. I like the maintenance upkeep, the trees, and the calmness of the community
14. Positives: Quiet / Challenges: Mailboxes are too far away and difficult to move for those who are disabled.
15. Like having a "house" feeling with an outdoor entry and a bit of a yard
16. very disappointed with the patio design. would like sliding door access and a privacy fence.
17. I love the location, as well as the fact its on a bus line. I love where my unit is as I have a bit of privacy. The challenges are the neighbors never watching their kids. The price of laundry has doubled and we can't host garage sales.
18. I like the area, it super quiet. Its very hard to get to know neighbors

What 3 words would you use to describe Varsity Village?

1. My stepping stone
2. Welcoming, peaceful, entertaining
3. Old, poor, open

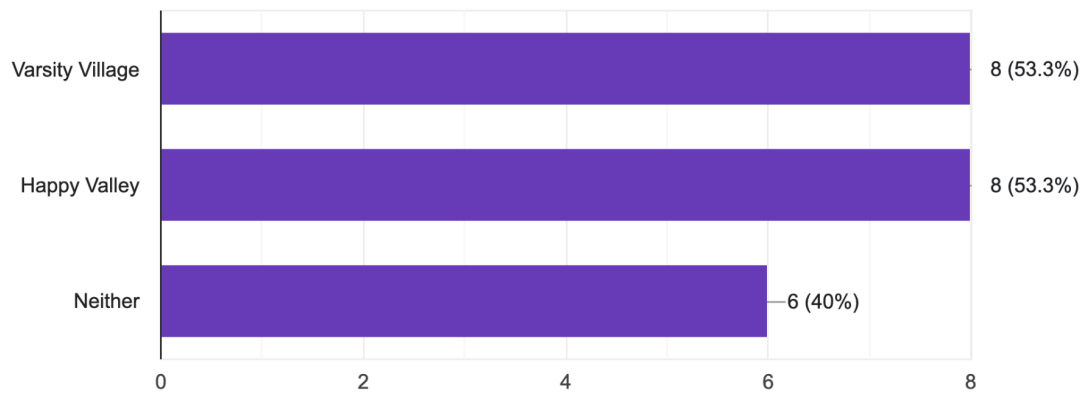
4. Affordable, decent, housing
5. Green Spread-out decent
6. scenic, livable, mellow
7. I like the busline. The clean lawns. The neighbor kids.
8. Quiet, safe, semi-rural
9. Community, Home ,Opportunities
10. Haven from homelessness
11. Lovely, comforting, safe
12. quiet, peaceful, nice
13. Well maintained, Attractive, Good design
14. My saving grace
15. Clean, quiet, and great location

What 3 words would you use to describe Happy Valley?

1. Friendly, inviting, watchful
2. Eclectic, amusing, green
3. Trails, friendly, relaxed
4. Old Busy cramped
5. nice, friendly, quiet
6. Clean, quiet, friendly people.
7. Quiet, residential, beautiful
8. Friendly, Neighborhood, Community
9. Walkable.
10. Comfortable, quiet, friendly
11. I don't have a car
12. Quiet, Clean, Convenient
13. A quiet community
14. Excellent, friendly, and beautiful

Which of the following communities do you feel included?

15 responses

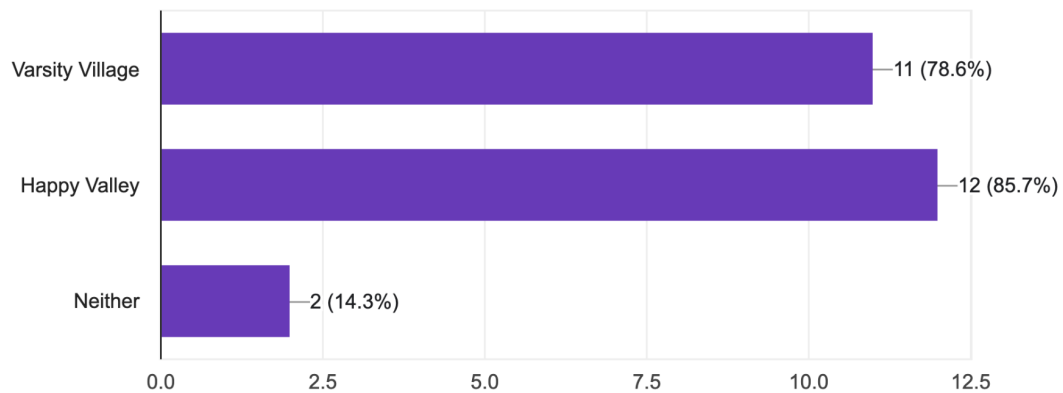


Why or why not?

1. Lack of community over all & no community events
2. Varsity Village as well as Happy Valley neighborhood are a bunch of friendly people. They make you feel at home
3. I like to stay to myself.
4. I'm not really one to conversation with many around here due to all the activity.
5. My disability is unpredictable, which keeps me from attending community events.
6. I could, or should, try to meet more people (I'm pretty reclusive). But I still feel a part of the community. I just signed on to nextdoor.com, for one thing.
7. They are good neighbors
8. Long time resident
9. Most people are friendly and welcoming, sharing extra fruit and walking dogs. Lots of families and open green spaces. Bike friendly too with transit nearby.
10. Friendly people we see as we walk the neighborhood.
11. People speak to one another. Sharing and being invited to Dinner. School create and promote inclusivity
12. "No way anywhere"
13. I have minimal interaction with either
14. Why - I'm friends with my closest neighbors and have been happy with the community that surrounds us. Not much crime in area
15. My kids are grown so I am not as social as I use to be

Do you feel safe in the following communities?

14 responses

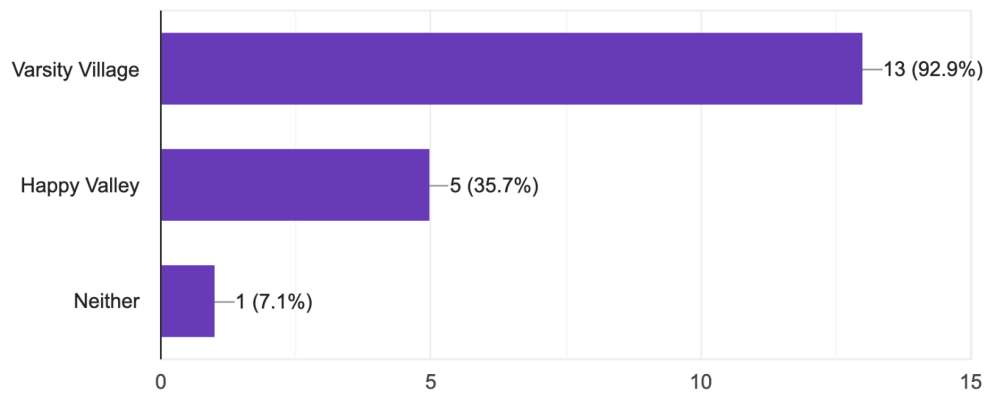


Why or why not?

1. Respondent put "sometimes" to the above question. They felt sometimes safe because there are strange people digging in the trash
2. never have I had any issue or safety concerns
3. A lot of crime at varsity, and in the neighborhoods near by
4. Happy valley seems like a decent area. Varsity village has really gone down hill as far as safety goes though
5. I don't feel specifically safe, or unsafe in either area; I stay home most of the time, but I do know that this area, unfortunately, like much of Bellingham, has had a lot of crime, especially thefts, as well as break-ins on cars.
6. I know they aren't perfect, but they feel safe enough to me, and I usually stay in my apartment, anyway.
7. We check on our neighbors
8. Low crime and semi rural. BHA addresses issues.
9. Feels safe for the most part. There are some drugs and homeless problems, mental illness, etc. But most people are polite and friendly. Police are just a call away and often nearer - here to respond to complaint or call for help.
10. No one harass you. You can talk long walks but need sidewalk. It's well kept and clean
11. Quiet, friendly neighbors
12. Why - low crime. I've only had a few things stolen from my yard and that was at least 5 years ago
13. Most of the time.

Do you interact with your neighbors from either of the following communities?

14 responses

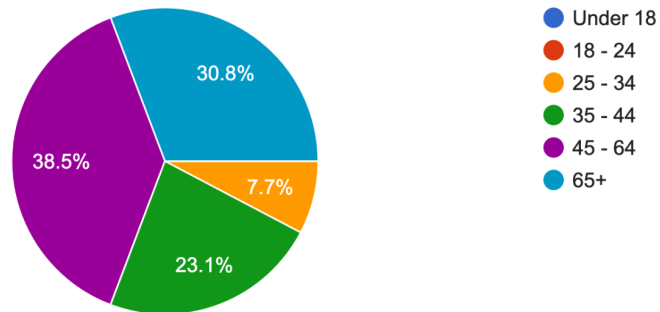


Why or why not?

1. I try
2. I believe in getting to know my neighbors. Varsity Village has a lot of kids at it. My kids play with them all
3. Some of my neighbors are elderly and I look after them to make sure they are OK
4. I interact with one neighbor as we've lived next to each other for years
5. Most I have no reason to interact with, there are only 2 that I do, & not frequently.
6. Varsity Village - occasionally my neighbor. Happy Valley - via nextdoor.com
7. They are great.
8. We get along, and work together
9. Sure! Mostly interacting in passing, sometimes offering or asking for assistance, like moving heavy furniture or offering people potted plants or leafy greens from my garden plot at the Chuckanut Community Garden.
10. I do because that's what I do. Talk to my neighbors and participate in neighborhood and school events.
11. Neighbors beside and across are very friendly & helpful & alert
12. friends with closest neighbors and friends with those in Happy Valley

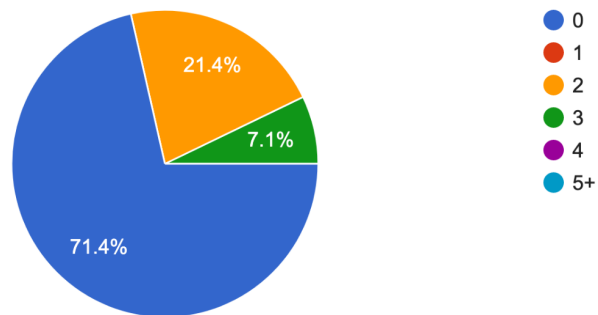
How old are you?

13 responses



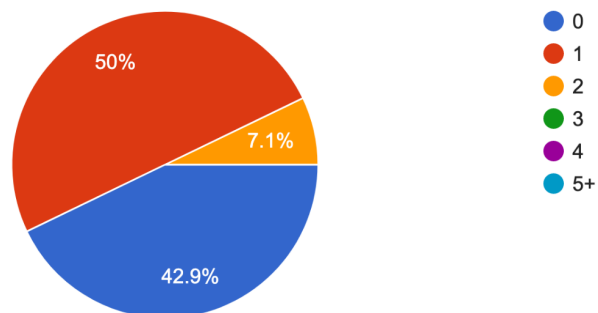
How many children are in your household?

14 responses



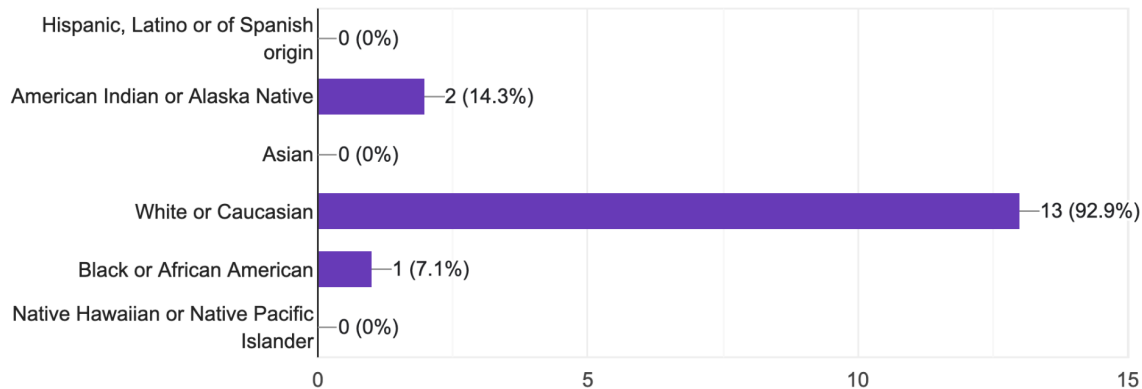
How many adults are in your household? (Do not include yourself)

14 responses



What is your race/ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

14 responses



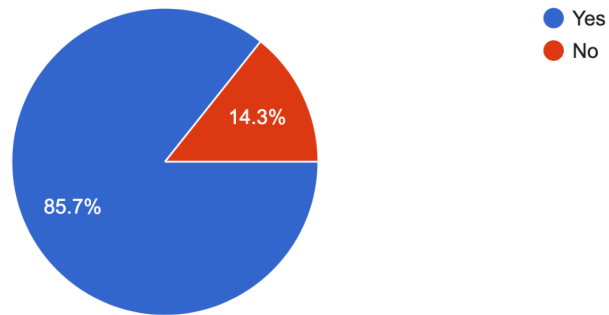
Is there anything else that you'd like us to know?

1. It would be nice to have Varsity Beautification events for residents to do gardening and to be able to recycle.
2. Yes! Receiving Rent Statements before Rent is due! Numerous months over the 3 years I have been here monthly Rent statements were not mailed before Rent is due!
3. It would be nice if there weren't so many ? on our flower beds and stuff outsides. Its hard enough making them look nice and it be nice if we could make our outside look nice too.
4. No
5. The landscaping crew's machinery is painfully loud; it's ridiculous. If they are supposed to wear 2 layers of hearing protection for their machinery to run the machines, they shouldn't be within 10 ft from my bedroom window, & I know they come much closer. There is hardly any sound proofing from outside to in; especially near the giant window.
6. Not really.
7. Could we have a washer/dryer please. The laundry room is dirty and people can not read the signs on the wall. They don't keep it clean.
8. Not at this time
9. A priority for me is having a gated and/or fenced garden space available here. Several of my neighbors have attempted to grow food in pots on the door step, only to have the plants eaten by deer or have the pots taken. Gardening is so therapeutic and growing food is healthy in many ways. We could have classes and mentors and volunteer coordinators to help get things started and keep it clean and safe.
10. Please don't turn this into a high rise development. We would lose our sense of community and our connection with the outdoors.
11. We need our own washer and dryer. More trees
12. Laundry room difficult to access as there are curbs & stairs hard to negotiate if mobility is limited & carrying clothing. Also need handicap curbing!

13. people would like permission to have things like portable dishwasher, laundry, deep freezers to be allowed in the unit. Also curtains would be a better investment for tenants than blinds which we always have to replace. We are low income and maintenance is EXPENSIVE

Would you like to be included in any further correspondence?

14 responses



Appendix 5: Conditional Use Permit

March 27, 1969

Mr. Al Angelo
A. A. Construction Company
105 West 5th
Vancouver, Washington 98660

Dear Mr. Angelo:

A couple of months ago Mr. Victor Grimson, our former Planning Director, was asked for a ruling on the status of the Conditional Use Permit granted to Dr. Clinton Sevensen in connection with property located in the Varsity Village Replat at 24th and Donovan. He stated at that time that in his opinion the permit granted June 22, 1966, for 184 units was still in effect. In the confusion of his departure from Bellingham he apparently forgot to put this decision in writing.

This letter is to confirm his ruling and to assure you that the Conditional Use Permit will be honored. Any change in plot plans must be submitted to this office for approval.

Yours truly,

Eunice Wolf
Director of Planning

EW:c
cc: Building Official

2400 McKenzie

Permit No. 120

-CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT-
CITY OF BELLINGHAM
CITY PLANNING COMMISSION
City Hall, Bellingham, Washington

June 22, 1966

(Date)

Mr. Clinton J. Sevener

1315 38th Street

Bellingham, Washington

Reference is made to your June 9, 1966 application to
(Date)

construct a planned multiple-family development of approximately 184 units on all

of "Cascade View Add. to the City of Bellingham", and the East 273 feet of the W 818'

of Lot 2, "Padden Court Partition Plat" (Northeast corner of 24th and Donovan.)

Please be advised that, in accordance with provisions of the zoning ordinance of the City of Bellingham, following careful consideration of all pertinent information and the holding of a public hearing on June 22, 1966 that the City Planning Commission, by verbal motion on June 22, 1966 acted to GRANT subject application on condition that the following requirements are met:

Construction to meet all building and zoning code requirements
pertaining to density, setbacks, off-street parking, etc.

The Commission, as the basis for this action, finds that the use may
be allowed under Section 5, subsection (3) of Zoning Ord. 6457

Permit covered by this authorization is subject to satisfaction of the City Building and Zoning Ordinance requirements.

If construction on the project is not commenced within one year of the date of approval, the conditional use permit will be revoked.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

By: Victor Grimson, Director of Planning

cc: Building Inspector

(Section 6)

ZONE:

USE: 101 units

ACTION	DATE	RESULT OR COMMENT
Conditional Use	6/22/66	Multiple-family development OK'd (52 units)
Conditional Use	12/13/67	49-unit apartment developmen OK'd (49 units) /

Appendix 6: Pro Formas

Sources and Uses: Alternative A	
Uses	
Units Added	44
Sq ft per Unit	1540
Sq ft Added	67,760
Cost per Sq ft	\$350
Land Cost	\$0
Estimated Construction Cost	\$23,716,000
Transportation Impact Fee	\$63,980
Park Impact Fee	\$58,837
School Impact Fees	\$35,860
Estimated Impact Fees*	
*All impact fees reduced by 80% per BMC 19.08.080.A.2	\$31,735
Professional Services	\$3,518,182.97
Sales Tax*	
Exempt per RCW 35.82.210	\$0
Financing, Fees, & Reserves	\$2,052,273.40
Estimated Soft Costs	\$5,570,456.37
Total Cost	\$29,318,192
Sources	
Local, State, and Federal resources	
Grant and low interest loan programs	
Washington State Housing Trust Fund	
City of Bellingham waiver of fees	
Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program	
Equity based on sale of tax credits (administered by WA State Housing Finance Commission) to investor	
Public funding and LIHTC programs both highly competitive	
Philanthropy	
Tax Credit Equity	
Bank Debt	
Bond issuance	
P3's (Public Private Partnerships)	
Tax Increment Financing	
Private investment	
Total	\$29,318,192

Sources and Uses: Alternative B	
Uses	
Units Added	76
Sq ft per Unit	1540
Sq ft Added	117040
Cost per Sq ft	\$350
Land Cost	\$0
Estimated Construction Cost	\$40,964,000
Transportation Impact Fee	\$127,960
Park Impact Fee	\$117,674
School Impact Fee	\$71,720
Estimated Impact Fees*	
*All impact fees reduced by 80% per BMC 19.08.080.A.2	\$63,471
Professional Services	\$6,078,143.85
Sales Tax*	
Exempt per RCW 35.82.210	\$0
Financing, Fees, & Reserves	\$3,545,583.92
Estimated Soft Costs	\$9,623,727.77
Total Cost	\$50,651,199
Sources	
Local, State, and Federal resources Grant and low interest loan programs City of Bellingham waiver of fees Washington State Housing Trust Fund Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program Equity based on sale of tax credits (administered by WA State Housing Finance Commission) to investor Public funding and LIHTC programs both highly competitive Philanthropy Tax Credit Equity Bank Debt Bond issuance P3's (Public Private Partnerships) Tax Increment Financing Private investment	
Total	\$50,651,199

Sources and Uses: Alternative C	
Uses	
Units Added	108
Sq ft per Unit	1540
Sq ft Added	166320
Cost per Sq ft	\$350
Land Cost	\$0
Estimated Construction Costs	\$58,212,000
Transportation Impact Fee	\$191,940
Park Impact Fee	\$176,511
School Impact Fee	\$107,580
Estimated Impact Fees*	
*All impact fees reduced by 80% per BMC 19.08.080.A.2	\$95,206
Professional Services	\$8,638,104.59
Sales Tax*	
Exempt per RCW 35.82.210	\$0
Financing, Fees, & Reserves	\$5,038,894.34
Estimated Soft Costs	\$13,676,998.93
Total Cost	\$71,984,205
Sources	
Local, State, and Federal resources	
Grant and low interest loan programs	
City of Bellingham waiver of fees	
Washington State Housing Trust Fund	
Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program	
Equity based on sale of tax credits (administered by WA State Housing Finance Commission) to investor	
Public funding and LIHTC programs both highly competitive	
Philanthropy	
Tax Credit Equity	
Bank Debt	
Bond issuance	
P3's (Public Private Partnerships)	
Tax Increment Financing	
Private investment	
Total	\$71,984,205

Sources and Uses: Alternative D	
Uses	
Units Added	183
Sq ft per Unit	1540
Sq ft Added	281820
Cost per Sq ft	\$350
Land Cost	\$0
Estimated Construction Cost	\$98,637,000
Transportation Impact Fee	\$265,517
Park Impact Fee	\$244,174
School Impact Fee	\$148,819
Estimated Impact Fees*	
*All impact fees reduced by 80% per BMC 19.08.080.A.2	\$131,702
Professional Services	\$14,632,400.30
Sales Tax*	
Exempt per RCW 35.82.210	\$0
Financing, Fees, & Reserves	\$8,535,566.83
Estimated Soft Costs	\$23,167,967.13
Total Cost	\$121,936,669
Sources	
Local, State, and Federal resources	
Grant and low interest loan programs	
City of Bellingham waiver of fees	
Washington State Housing Trust Fund	
Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program	
Equity based on sale of tax credits (administered by WA State Housing Finance Commission) to investor	
Public funding and LIHTC programs both highly competitive	
Philanthropy	
Tax Credit Equity	
Bank Debt	
Bond issuance	
P3's (Public Private Partnerships)	
Tax Increment Financing	
Private investment	
Total	\$121,936,669