

Spring 2019

# Bellingham Annexation Research Initiative Report

University of Washington  
Master of Urban Planning  
URBDP Studio 507

Submitted to the City of Bellingham  
June 10, 2019

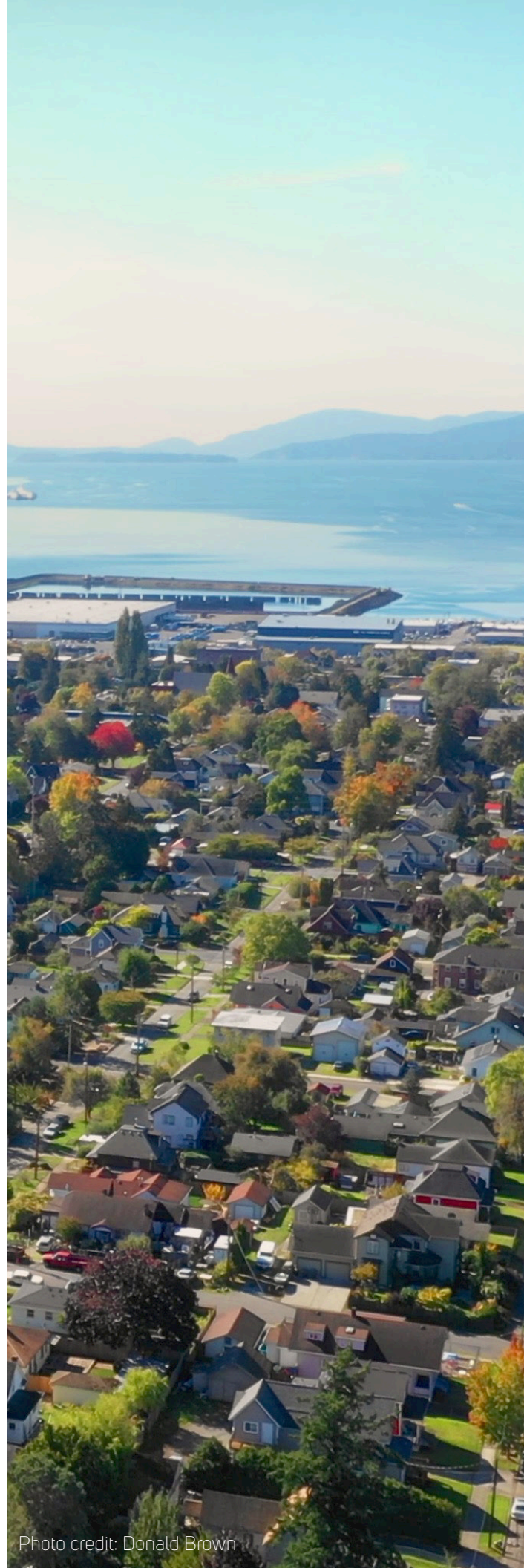


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UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON  
Bellingham Annexation Research Initiative



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## UW TEAM (URBDP 507- SPRING 2019)

Michelle Abunaja; Casandra Brown; Dan Cloutier; Isis Moon Gamble; Bebhinn Gilbert; Stefanie Hindmarch; Yang Liu; Dorothy Mulkern; Daniel Munkel; Daniel Osterhage; Alex Phillips-White; Jason Robert Walsh. Faculty: Rick Sepler, AICP; Greg Aucutt, AICP

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From January through June 2019 University of Washington (UW) Master of Urban Planning students partnered with the City of Bellingham (COB) Planning and Community Development Department to assess interest in annexation among property owners in the easterly unincorporated portions of the Bellingham Urban Growth Area (UGA).

The UW Annexation Research Initiative consisted of three foundational elements: background research, community engagement, and a statistically valid community assessment. Initiative outcomes are detailed in this report and appendices; and resulted in the following conclusions and recommended next steps, submitted for Bellingham City Council consideration:

## CONCLUSIONS

**Opinions on annexation:** Britton Road sub-areas of the UGA indicate highest level of support for annexation, Geneva generally opposes, and Yew Street findings are inconclusive.

**Information confidence:** Increased support for annexation is generally associated with increased understanding of the process and potential outcomes.

**Opinion elasticity:** Increased likelihood of support for annexation is generally associated with the prospect of decreased taxes and fees, and improved public services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (NEXT STEPS)

**Consider annexation in areas of support:** Dedicate resources to potential future annexation of Britton Road sub-areas of the UGA.

**Continue the information campaign:** Conduct additional outreach prioritizing areas of support and those with low information confidence and high opinion elasticity.

**Address inconclusive results:** Assess Yew Street vacant property owner support through mailed assessment; partner with Whatcom County to consider adjustment of Yew Street area boundary; and re-evaluate assessment outcomes accounting for pre-annexation agreements.

In accordance with the City's 2018 Annexation Strategy, the City of Bellingham (COB) is interested in evaluating the current opinion of residents in the easterly unincorporated portions of the Bellingham Urban Growth Area (UGA) in annexation. The UGA sub-areas (listed by identifying number) in question include UGA 11 (Northern Heights), UGA 12 (Tweed Twenty), UGA 13 (Hillsdale), UGA 14 (Geneva), and UGA 15 (North Yew Street).

## ANALYSIS AREA

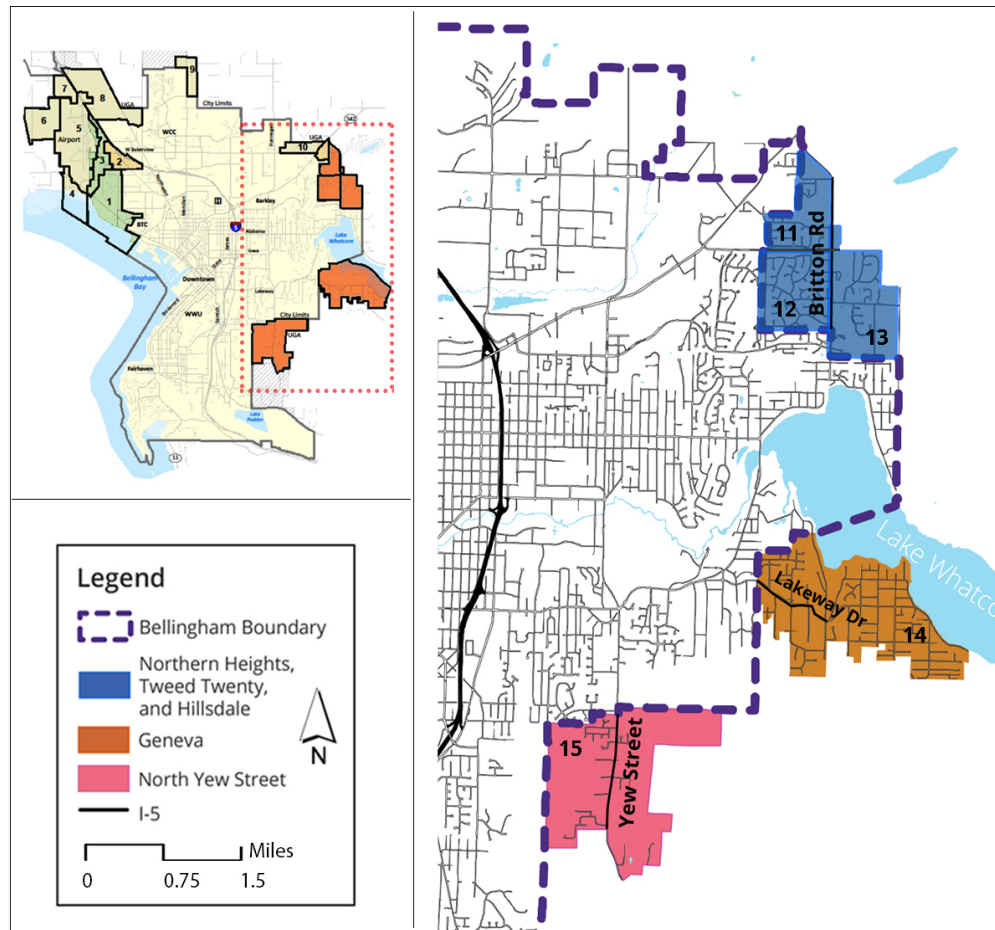


Figure 1: Annexation Research Initiative Analysis Area

## SCOPE

A team of twelve UW Master of Urban Planning students, in partnership with the COB Planning and Community Development Department, launched the Annexation Research Initiative in April 2019 to preliminarily identify costs and benefits associated with annexation, conduct public outreach with UGA community members through web communications and public meetings, and assess UGA community interest in annexing into the City through a statistically valid survey of property owners.

Of relevance to the report herein, the primary focus of the UW Team's effort was to provide community members with accurate and unbiased general information from which property owners can discern whether annexation to the City would be in their best interest.

## RESEARCH

The UW Team began background research related to the 2018 COB Annexation Strategy, urban service provision, and UGA community profiles in January 2019. Outcomes of this preliminary effort are documented in the Bellingham Urban Growth Areas: Initial Conditions Report which was submitted and briefed to COB and Whatcom County planning staff in March 2019. The UW team used this research as a basis for the current Annexation Research Initiative.

Research of primary sources include Whatcom County Assessor data and Whatcom County and COB plans, policies, and initiatives related to taxes, utilities, emergency services, parks and recreation, housing, economic development, and transportation. The findings resulted in the generation of informational materials the UW Team used to facilitate public engagement through:

Establishment of a website on the COB domain providing a consolidated public resource and opportunity for comment related to annexation and preliminary research outcomes.

A series of three public open houses designed to share information and receive feedback from UGA community members related to annexation.

Preliminary research outcomes and feedback on community engagement informed a series of questions used as a basis for a subsequent statistically valid community assessment. The UW Research Team conducted in-person

household surveys to gauge property owner support for annexation in each of the UGA sub-areas studied; the results of which were detailed in the June 3 presentation to City Council.

## PROCESS

The Team created a systematic approach to its research, community engagement, analysis of assessment results and recommendations. As illustrated in Figure 2, background research served as a basis for community engagement; feedback from community meetings and e-mail comments informed the community assessment; and results and recommendations were derived from assessment outcomes.

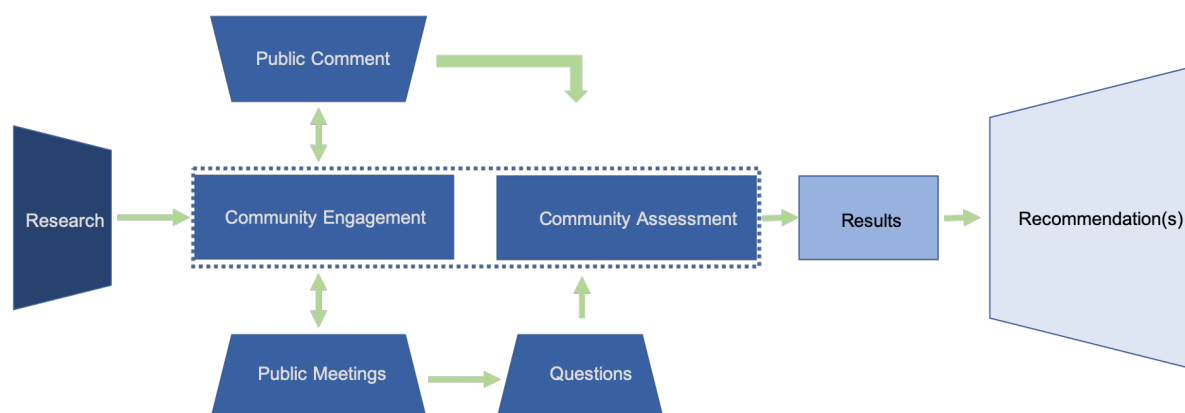


Figure 2. Initiative process chart displaying key areas of planning, administration, analysis and presentation.

## TIMELINE

The Annexation Research Initiative's milestones are separated into three primary activities: Research, Community Engagement, and Community Assessment; the results of which were presented to the Bellingham City Council June 3, 2019. A timeline of key project milestones is presented in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Annexation Research Initiative Milestones



The University of Washington (UW) Team created a community engagement plan to disseminate information on the project and to gather input from community members regarding annexation. This plan focused upon two principal strategies: media engagement and public meetings. Both strategies required material production and distribution, facilities reservations, and coordination with city, county, and school district officials.

## **MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**

The media component of the community engagement plan required the creation of the following outreach tools, also included as Attachments 1-6:

- Initiative website ([www.cob.org/uwresearch](http://www.cob.org/uwresearch))
- Email Invitations
- Project fliers and postcards
- Radio station Public Service Announcements
- Press release
- Social media announcements

Each item was produced with the goal of communicating essential information on the purpose and process of the Initiative.

## **WEBSITE**

The Initiative website consists of four primary content pages: the landing page, the Calendar of Events page, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page, and the Annexation Area Maps page.

The landing page orients the viewer to the general background and origin of the University of Washington's research, explaining the relationship between the matter, the City of Bellingham (COB), and the UW Team.

The Calendar of Events page lists the dates and provides brief explanations for the Initiative's three community outreach meetings. This page also includes copies of the meeting materials.

The FAQ page lists 28 common questions regarding the process and potential outcomes of annexation. Each question has a concise response, often with links to additional information and sources, plus contact information for public input and further questions. Questions are purposely general in nature and intended to provide preliminary (non-property specific) information. It was anticipated



that should the City choose to continue the annexation conversation, more specific information pertinent to each subject area would be prepared by the COB.

The Annexation Area Maps page contains custom created maps of the five unincorporated Urban Growth Area sub-areas that are the subject of the Initiative. These maps display the boundaries of the UGA sub-areas, the boundary of the City, and locations of some relevant community institutions and geographic landmarks. This page also includes an interactive map that allows the viewer to enter their address and learn whether their property is within one of the five UGA sub-areas.

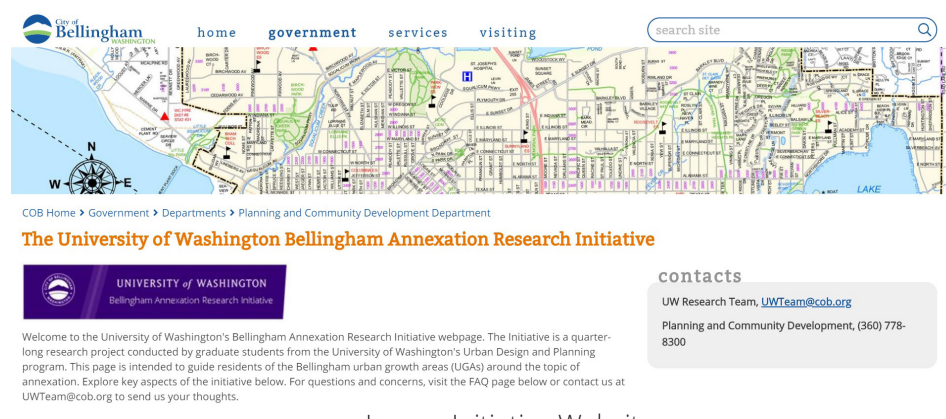


Image: Initiative Website

## Email Invitation and Responses

The UW Team prepared an email that explained the purpose and nature of the initiative and invited community members to the Team's public meetings. The email was sent to community members who were identified as potential members of homeowner associations in the UGA sub-areas.

The Initiative website includes a contact email where site visitors can ask questions or make comments. The Team logged these comments and questions into a comment matrix (Attachment 7) for review to identify the appropriate party and response. The COB Planning and Community Development Department addressed all questions and comments relevant to them. The UW Team addressed comments and questions related to the Initiative, which were then approved by the COB prior to distribution through the project's email address, [UWTeam@cob.org](mailto:UWTeam@cob.org).

### **Fliers and Postcards**

Fliers and postcards were distributed throughout the COB and the UGA sub-areas. The fliers detailed the purpose of the public meetings, the dates, times and locations of the meetings, and directions on how to learn more information on the Initiative and how to contact the University of Washington Team. The postcards contained information on the dates, times, and locations for the three community meetings; a context map of the UGA sub-areas; and a link to the project's website, both through a URL and a scannable QR code. The fliers and postcards were distributed at various Bellingham and UGA-area businesses, community centers, schools, religious institutions, and Whatcom Falls Park and Bloedel Donovan Park public advertisement boards.

### **Public Service Announcements**

A Public Service Announcement (PSA) was written and submitted to five local radio stations:

- KUGS
- KMRE
- KZAK
- KGMI
- Cascade Radio Group

The PSA explained the nature and purpose of the project, dates for the community outreach meetings, and directions on how to learn more information at the project website.

### **Press Release**

A press release, or community release, was emailed to local, regional and national media, the COB City Council, boards and commissions members, neighborhood representatives, key city staff, and more than 900 subscribers. It was also posted on Facebook, Twitter, and the COB website. The release contained information on the nature and purpose of the Initiative with details such as:

- The UGAs that served as the focus of the project's research
- Dates, times, and locations of the three public meetings
- An announcement of the project's intent to canvas the UGA neighborhoods to administer an assessment of property owner's knowledge and thoughts on annexation
- Notice of the Team's intent to present its findings before the City Council on June 3
- Directions on how to find more information on the project and how to contact the University of Washington Team

## **Social Media**

The UW Team, through the COB and with its assistance, monitored and replied to the COB Facebook page regarding the Research Initiative and provided responses to comments and questions whenever possible. This determination was based upon the nature of the question or comment and to whom the question or comment was directed. If the comment or question was not specific or germane to the UW Team's research, the Team directed it to City staff. City staff reviewed all of the UW Team's responses prior to posting.

## **Direct Mailings**

Due to the informal nature of the Team's process, with no direct relation to annexation petitions and insufficient time to reach community members by mail, no direct mailings were made. Mailing of legal notice to property owners would be completed for any subsequent COB processes involving annexation.

## **COMMUNITY INFORMATION MEETINGS**

Three meetings were held on the following dates and times at the listed locations:

May 2, 2019, 6:00-7:30 PM at Geneva Elementary School  
May 2, 2019, 6:00-7:30 PM at Wade King Elementary School  
May 7, 2019, 6:00-7:30 PM at Northern Heights Elementary School

Teams of six students administered each meeting with the purpose of providing area residents with information on the process of annexation and its possible outcomes. The meetings functioned in an open house format consisting of three informational stations and three activity stations. For meeting materials, see Appendix A.

The informational stations provided general information on the process of annexation, the potential effects of annexation on city or county services, and the potential effects of annexation on taxes and fees. UW Team members attended these stations and fielded attendee questions. COB and Whatcom County staff provided technical assistance at these meetings. Staff included members from the planning, parks, public utilities, and emergency services departments. In addition to the informational stations, the meetings had three interactive activities. These activities provided attendees with opportunities to independently engage with information on annexation and provide their comments in writing or by other means. All attendees were invited to complete an exit questionnaire, which allowed them to identify where they live and their

opinions on annexation. For a copy of the exit questionnaire, see Appendix A. Following all public meetings, the Team sent a follow-up email to all those attendees who provided email addresses. The message thanked the attendees and provided information on the Team's next steps. See Attachment 8.

## **Outcomes**

Questionnaire feedback provided some insight into the thoughts and opinions of 114 of the 128 community members who attended the meetings. Based on questionnaire responses, North Yew Street meeting attendees demonstrated the least interest in annexation into the City of Bellingham, Tweed Twenty attendees reported the most "no opinions" on interest in annexation, Hillsdale attendees leaned toward supporting annexation, and Northern Heights and Geneva attendees provided nearly split responses. Attendees from every UGA reported that overall, they felt engaged in the meetings and events improved their understanding of annexation. Questionnaire responses are not statistically valid, and results are subjective. However, the results from the questionnaires informed the questions included in the community assessment. Meeting outcomes associated with each of the events are summarized below and detailed in Appendix A:

### *Geneva*

The meeting hosted at Geneva Elementary School on May 2 had 46 attendees. The optional questionnaire provided at the meeting was returned by 39 people. The respondents reported that they felt "Very Engaged" at the meeting and that the meeting improved their understanding of annexation. However, the majority of respondents indicated that they did not support annexation.

### *North Yew Street*

The meeting hosted at Wade King Elementary School on May 2 had 31 attendees. The optional questionnaire provided at the meeting was returned by 24 people. A number of the respondents reported they felt "Very Engaged" and nearly all respondents felt the meeting improved their understanding of annexation. However, responses indicate meeting attendees were generally unsupportive of annexation at the time of the questionnaire.



Image: May 7, 2019 Northern Heights Elementary Community Meeting Information Stations

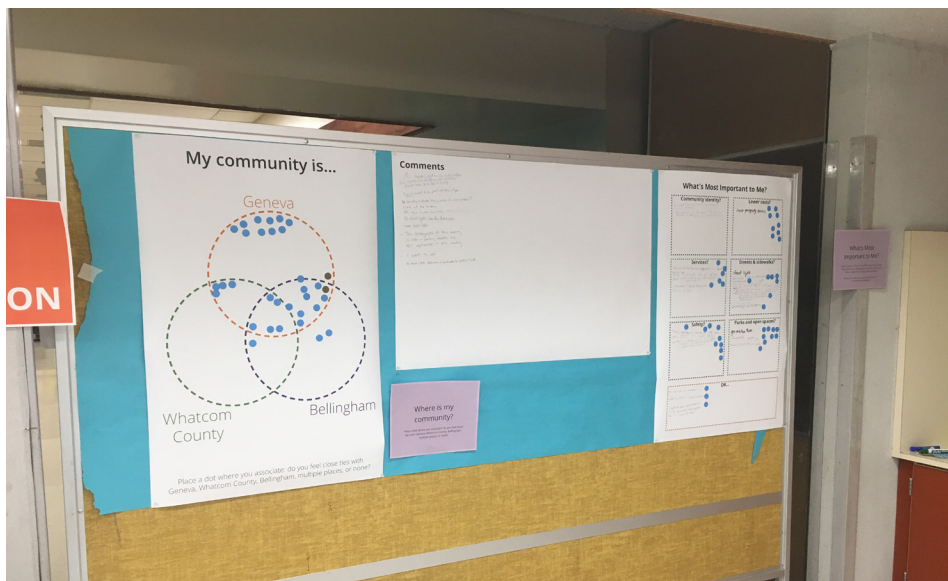


Image: May 2, 2019 Geneva Elementary Public Meeting Activity Station

#### *Northern Heights, Hillsdale, Tweed Twenty*

The meeting hosted at Northern Heights Elementary School on May 7 had 51 attendees. The optional questionnaire provided at the meeting was returned by 51 people. Of the 51 total respondents, 32 reported they were from the Northern Heights area. Of these, most people reported they felt “Very Engaged” and nearly all respondents felt the meeting improved their understanding of annexation. Attendee responses in this area were largely supportive of annexation.

Nine attendees reported they were from the Hillsdale area. Of these, most people reported they felt “Very Engaged” and nearly all respondents felt the meeting improved their understanding of annexation. Respondent support for annexation in this area was generally split at the time of the questionnaire.

Nine attendees reported they were from the Tweed Twenty area. Of these attendees, the majority reported that they felt “Very Engaged,” and all respondents reported that the meeting improved their understanding of annexation. Respondent support for annexation in this area was approximately split at the time of the questionnaire.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

The UW Team created multiple avenues of communication for UGA residents to voice their opinions. Public comments were received via exit questionnaires at community meetings and through email. While public comments were not used as statistically valid measures of community opinion toward annexation, all input was taken into consideration when developing recommendations and next steps. After analyzing over 130 public comments by UGA residents (detailed in Attachment 7) the UW Team identified the following key themes:

#### *Requests for more information*

Comments included many questions about the annexation process in general, the relationship between the UW Team and the City of Bellingham, and what stage this research was in within the context of the overall annexation process. Residents who commented were also curious to know how annexation would affect them immediately and long-term, how UGA boundaries were established, whether boundaries could be re-drawn to include or exclude specific areas, and if smaller portions of the UGA could be annexed. Most comments indicated a desire for more information about financial and infrastructure changes.

#### *Comments regarding outreach*

A number of comments expressed disappointment with how outreach was conducted for this research, especially regarding the community meetings. Comments generally indicated that outreach efforts should have been more direct and should have included direct mailers to homeowners. Many residents who commented felt that they did not have adequate information to make a decision on annexation. They also felt like while they were informed, their neighbors were lacking information. Some comments expressed concerns that community members were spreading misinformation regarding annexation contradicting the team's efforts. Others indicated the information that was provided did not adequately display both the costs and benefits of potential annexation.

#### *Comments supporting annexation*

A number of comments alluded to the positive benefits of annexation but did not elaborate in depth. Comments from residents in the Hillsdale, Tweed Twenty, and Northern Heights UGA sub-areas expressed the highest level of positive opinions towards annexation. Some residents also stated that they felt more connected to the COB than the County, and that they would like to have better infrastructure and infrastructure management in their neighborhood.

#### *Comments opposing annexation*

Many comments expressed concerns with increased development density, as well as increased traffic and crime with a rise in population. Comments from the Yew Street area identified potential environmental impacts of annexation as a key concern. Most residents who had concerns regarding annexation stated that they moved to their neighborhoods to disconnect from city life and appreciate their quieter lifestyles.



The University of Washington (UW) Team continued the work of the community engagement plan through the implementation of a community assessment. This plan focused upon a structured analysis of current community opinion regarding possible annexation. The assessment was conducted with the explicit purpose of remaining scientifically and statistically sound. The decision to conduct such an effort was informed by several factors, namely: a stated interest by the City of Bellingham (COB) for area-specific data that could speak directly to current residents' understanding and opinions regarding possible annexation.

## ASSESSMENT CONSTRUCTION

To maintain neutrality and gain accurate data, the UW Team designed a brief assessment which was meant to gain insight into residents' current opinions on and knowledge of annexation, as well as the elasticity of those opinions.

The assessment consisted of twenty-two questions which were designed using best practices aimed at maintaining neutrality and validity. Questions were written and sequenced in such a way to avoid biasing responses. The research team was supported by COB staff in this effort. Due to the legal process associated with annexation, assessment collection was limited to property owners, rather than renters and dependents.

Key themes addressed in the assessment include:

- Community member familiarity with the annexation process
- Community member preparedness to decide on annexation
- Current likelihood of approval or rejection of annexation as well as likelihood given hypothetical changes in taxes, fees, or levels of service

For a full list of assessment questions see Attachment 9.

## SAMPLING METHODOLOGY

The UW Team, with the assistance of the COB staff, developed sample areas in which to implement the community assessment. These sample areas were constructed by dividing each unincorporated urban growth sub-area into sections, for a total of ten assessment areas. Randomized selections of 30% of properties were made for each of the ten assessment areas. These 30% selections became the sample of the community assessment. Sample areas 1 through 9 became the field maps for assessment implementation. Area

10 was a selection of currently vacant land and was not assessed by the UW Team. The sample areas are highlighted in Figures 4-7 and described below. Detailed sample area maps are included in Attachment 10.

## UGA COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT SAMPLE AREAS

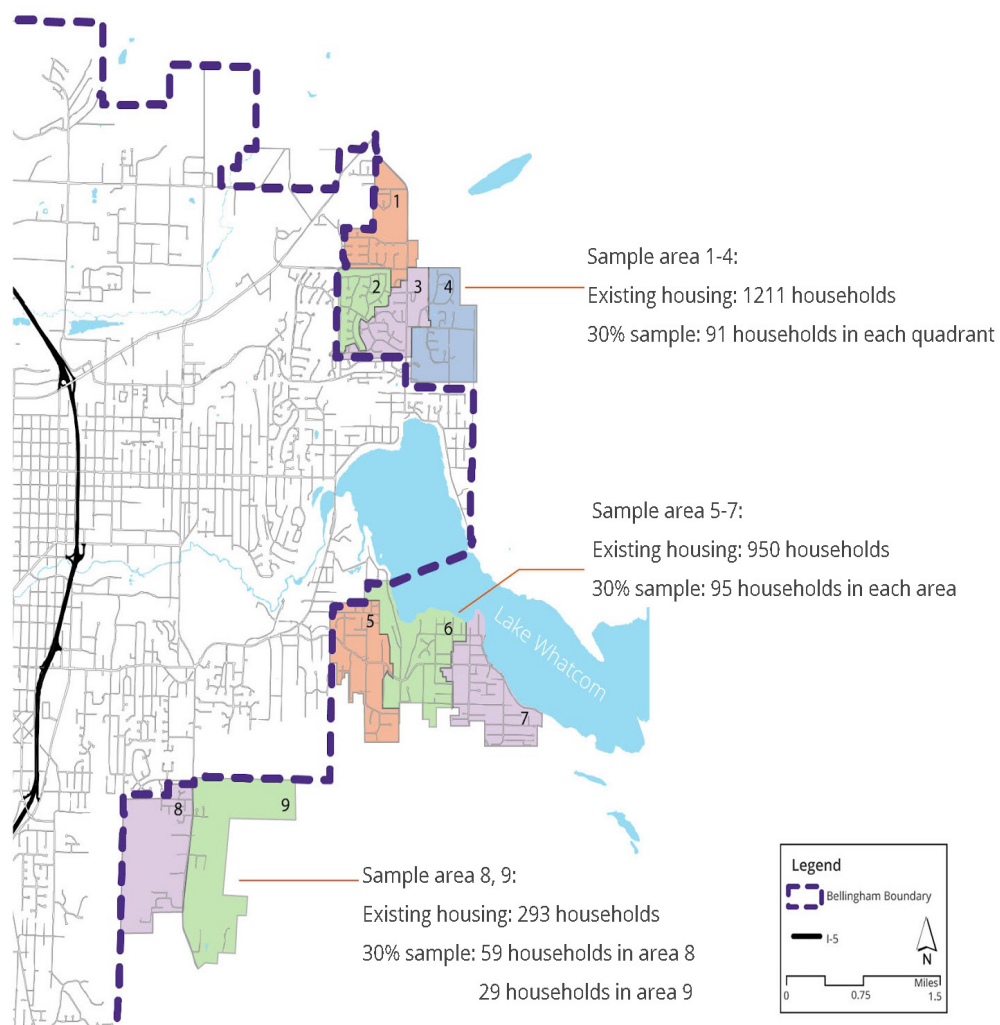


Figure 4. Sample areas map showing locations and sample sizes

### Sample Areas 1-4 (Northern Heights, Tweed Twenty, Hillsdale)

Each of the sample areas identified in Figure 5 had a 30% sample size of 91 properties. Sample area 1 is located adjacent to City limit and shares a common boundary with City of Bellingham to the west. McLeod Road and Britton Road form its southern and eastern boundaries. This area includes all Northern Heights and a small portion of Hillsdale and Tweed Twenty at its southeast corner. Sample areas 2 and 3 represent most areas of Tweed Twenty as well as the northwest part of Hillsdale. The City limit forms their western and southern boundaries. McLeod Road and Brownsville Drive form the northern and eastern boundaries. Sample area 4 includes most of the Hillsdale area except a portion in the northwest. The area is situated south of Gala Loop, west of Toad Lake Road and east of Britton Road, and it shares a common boundary with the City limit to the south.

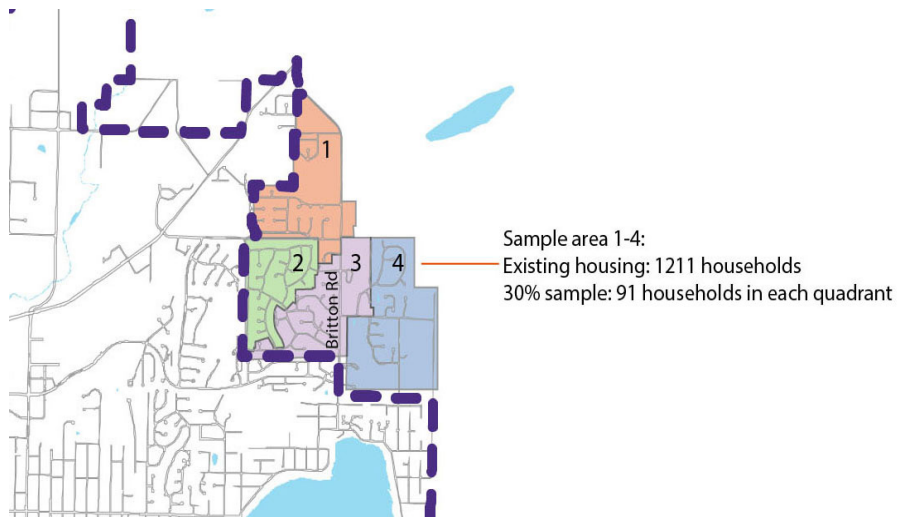


Figure 5. Sample areas 1-4 map

### Sample Areas 5-7 (Geneva)

The three areas identified in Figure 6 each had sample sizes of 95 properties. Sample area 5 is a residential community situated west of Euclid Avenue, south of Susan Court, and it shares a common boundary with the city to the west and the north. Sample area 6 is in central Geneva. Sample area 7 is situated in the eastern portion of Geneva.

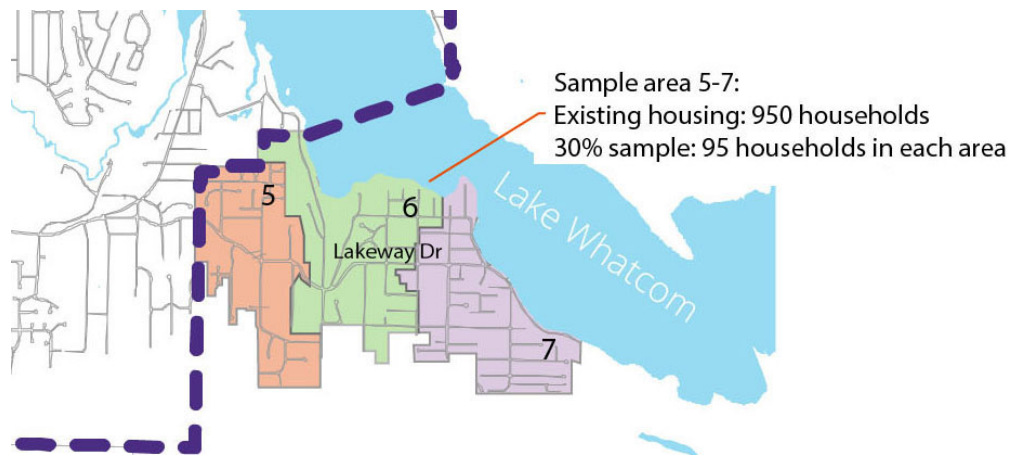


Figure 6. Sample areas 5-7 map

### Sample Areas 8-9 (North Yew Street)

Identified in Figure 7, sample area 8 is the western side of North Yew Street and had a sample size of 59 properties. Sample area 9 is the eastern portion of North Yew Street and had a sample size of 29 units.

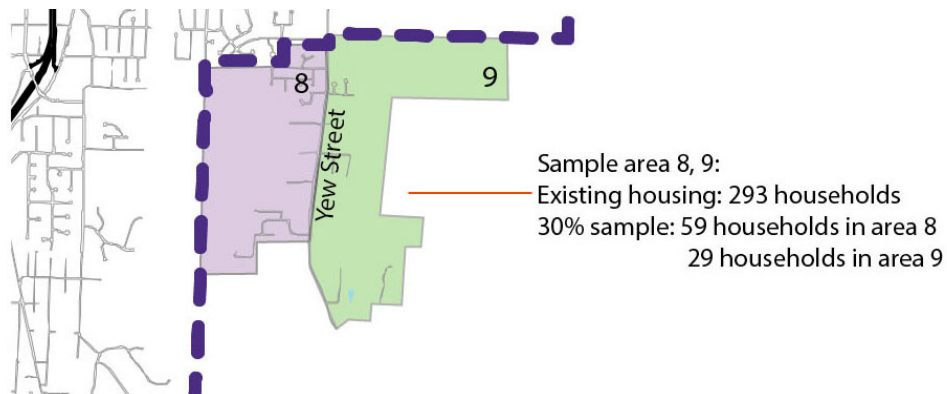


Figure 7. Sample areas 8,9 map

## **ASSESSMENT FIELDWORK**

In order to implement the community assessment, the UW Team planned and conducted field outreach on May 11, 2019 and May 18, 2019. The nine sample areas, identified in the sample construction during the survey design, were repurposed into field maps.

Team members were paired into groups of two or worked alone to canvas the identified sample area. Each research team member was given a script, found in Attachment 11, to assist in conducting the assessment. The script included a brief description of the research project and the role of the UW team, and it asked residents whether they were available to participate in the assessment. It also screened out any renters. If a resident wanted to know more information regarding the role of the research team and the relationship between the COB and the assessment, team members had a letter written by the COB Planning and Community Development Department which provided further clarity. The letter can be found in Attachment 12. The assessment questions were provided in written form and were read to the resident by the team members upon request. Responses were recorded once per residence; respondents could decline to answer any question. Nonresponses and refusals were recorded by the research team.

The community assessment was implemented on Saturday, May 11, 2019 beginning at 10:00 AM and lasting through the evening. Although statistically valid, a few geographic areas remained unsampled after May 11. Rather than exclude those areas and leave portions of the UGA unsampled, the assessment was completed on Saturday, May 18, 2019.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data gathered from the community assessment was compiled into a single dataset, which was analyzed by the UW Team using statistical computing programs R and Microsoft Excel as well as data visualization programs ArcGIS, Microsoft Power BI, and Tableau.

The data gathered from the community assessment was analyzed with the goal of addressing three major questions:

- What are residents' current opinions on annexation?
- How elastic are those opinions?
- How informed do residents consider themselves about the annexation process?

Framed by these guiding questions, the research team concluded preliminary results, detailed in the following section.

Community assessment outcomes led to four overarching conclusions, which are listed below and detailed throughout this section:

## **Opinions on Annexation**

Britton Road area UGA sub-areas indicate highest level of support for annexation, Geneva generally opposes, and Yew Street findings are inconclusive.

## **Information Confidence**

The majority of property owners in UGA sub-areas 11-15 do not feel they have enough information to make a decision regarding annexation.

## **Knowledge and Favorability**

Increased support for annexation is generally associated with increased understanding of the process and potential outcomes.

## **Opinion Elasticity**

Increased likelihood of support for annexation is generally associated with the prospect of decreased taxes and fees, and improved public services.

## **OPINIONS ON ANNEXATION**

Annexation support was assessed primarily through two specific questions. Question 20, which asked “At this point in time, do you favor or oppose annexation of your area into Bellingham?” with binary responses of “favor” or “oppose”; and Question 7, which asked “How likely are you to approve of annexation into Bellingham?” with responses ranging from “very unlikely” to “very likely.”

Based on analysis of community assessment results, property owners in the Britton Road UGA sub-areas indicate highest level of support for annexation, Geneva generally opposes, and Yew Street findings are inconclusive. A map identifying areas of relative support for annexation is presented as Figure 9. Detailed analysis results are included in Appendix B.

Figure 8 provides a breakdown of responses to Question 20 of the Community Assessment. The figure is broken into the five UGA sub-areas looked at for the assessment: Northern Heights (UGA 11), Tweed Twenty (UGA 12), Hillsdale (UGA 13), Geneva (UGA 14), and Yew Street (UGA 15). The important thresholds to consider for each area are greater than 60% “favor”

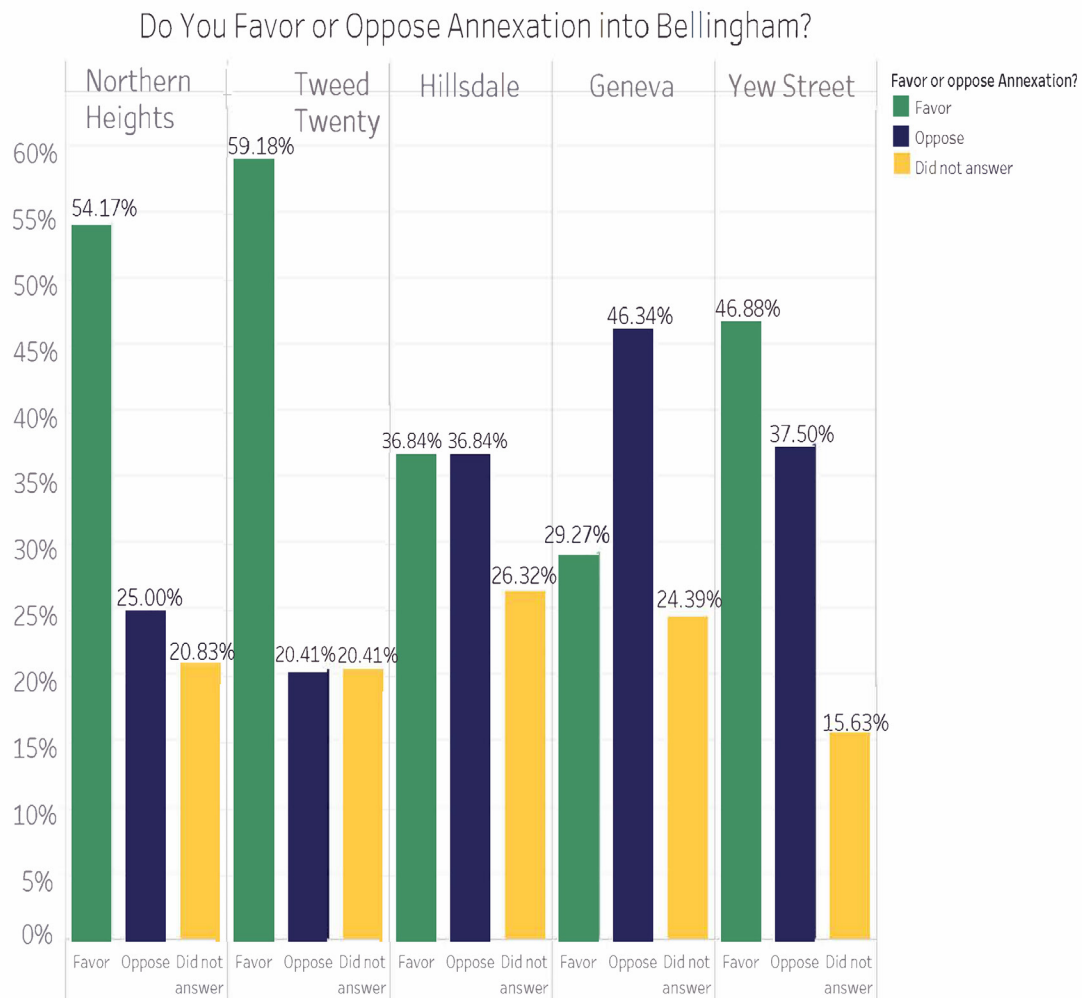


Figure 8. Resident responses to Question 20 by UGA sub area

Conversely, assessment outcomes indicate property owners in the Geneva area (UGA 14) generally oppose annexation, demonstrating conclusive opposition at the 85% confidence interval. Though individual assessment area results vary, combined analysis indicates broad opposition.

Yew Street Area findings are inconclusive due to inability to account for a random sample of vacant lot property owners and excessive margin of error among responses obtained. Vacant lots account for approximately 10% of the Yew Street Area land value, which was not considered in this assessment. Among assessment responses obtained, unacceptable margin of error exists at the 85% confidence interval, which is the lowest considered statistically valid for the purposes of this study. Based on the combination of incomplete sampling and excessive margin of error, Yew Street Area results are considered informative in terms of understanding respondent sentiment, but not conclusively representative of area property owners.



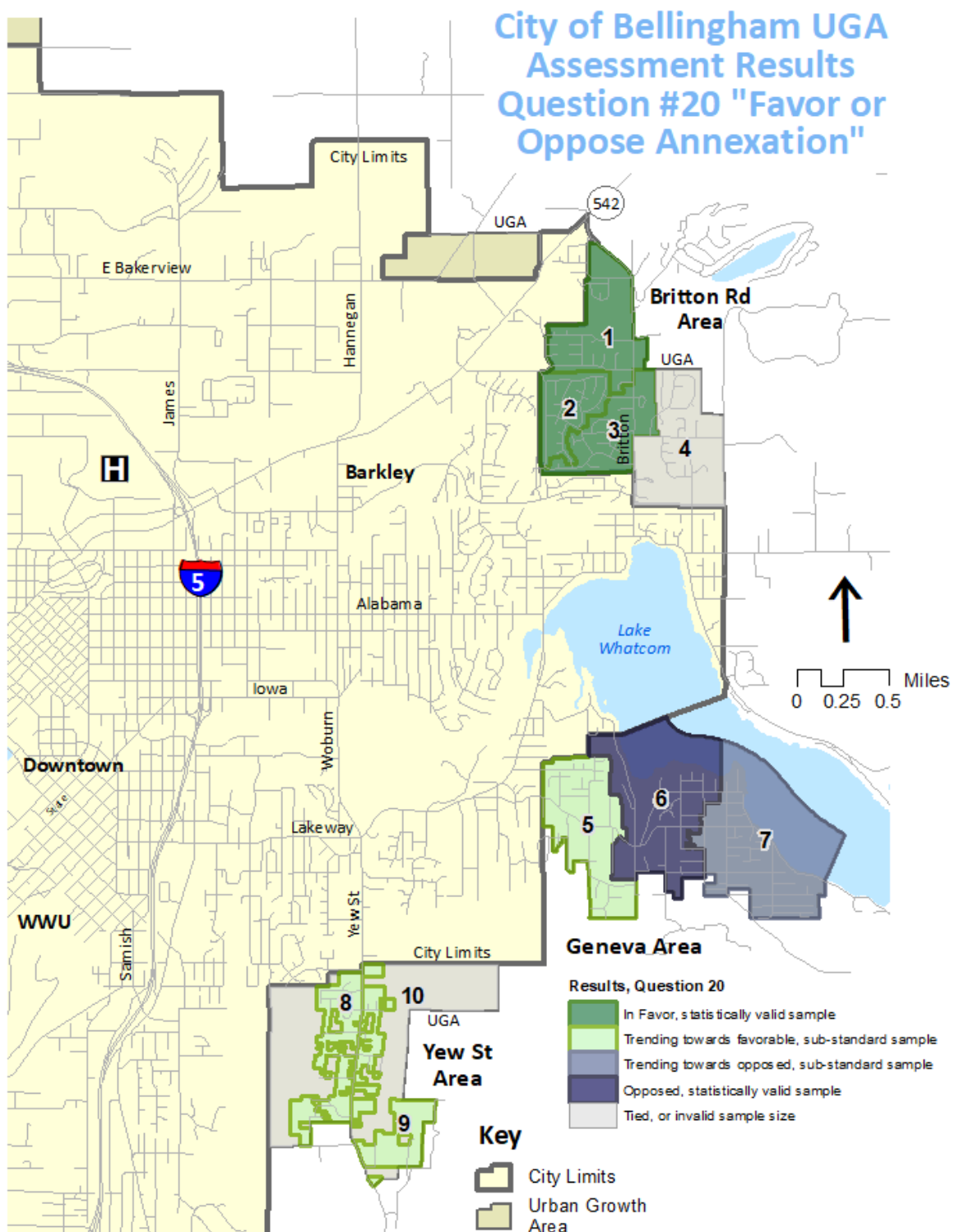


Figure 9. Assessment Question 20: Current support for annexation (favor/oppose)

## INFORMATION CONFIDENCE

Assessment results indicate the majority of property owners in UGA sub-areas 11-15 do not feel they have enough information to make a decision regarding annexation.

As indicated in Figure 10, more than 50% of respondents across UGA sub-areas 11-15 indicated they did not have enough information to make a decision regarding annexation at the time of the assessment. Lowest levels of information confidence were encountered in Tweed Twenty (UGA 12), Geneva (UGA 14), and North Yew Street (UGA 15).

In aggregate, among respondents who felt they had enough information to make a decision on annexation, approximately 58% identified as “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to approve annexation. Among respondents who felt they did not have enough information to decide on annexation, approximately 26% identified as “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to approve annexation.

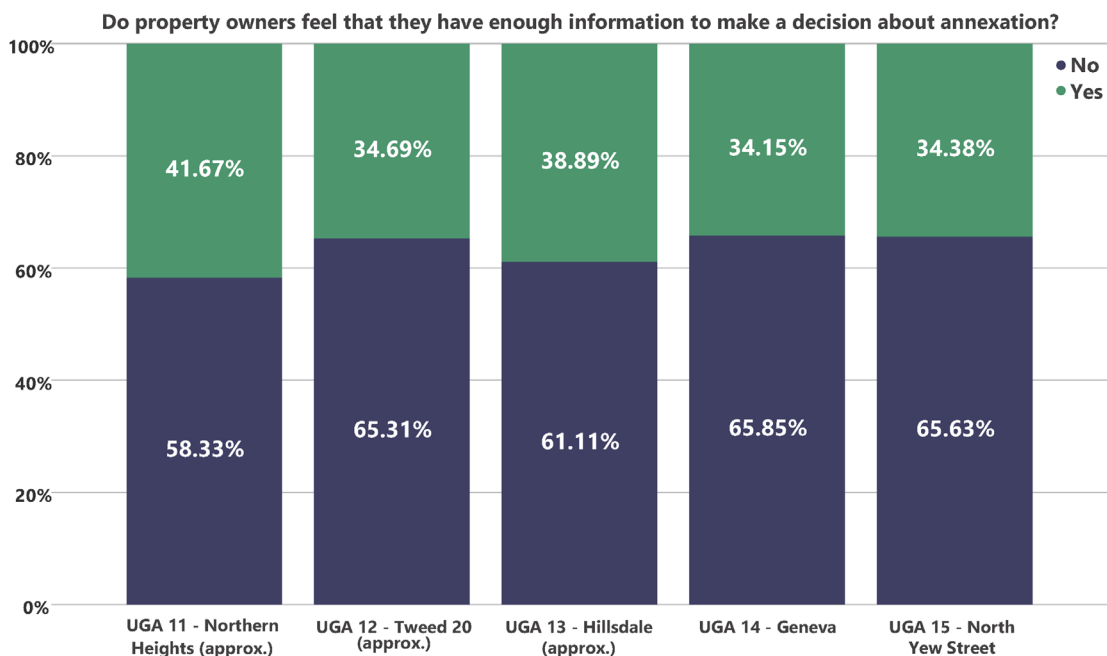


Figure 10. Question 6: Do property owners feel they have enough information to make a decision?

## KNOWLEDGE AND FAVORABILITY

Assessment results indicate likelihood of support for annexation is generally positively associated with increased understanding of the process and potential outcomes.

Figure 11 displays the likelihood of respondents approving annexation. The “annexation threshold” line marks the 60% approval margin needed by an annexation petition. This assumes that property values are roughly equivalent among property owners in each urban growth area. This graph shows that, with the exception of North Yew Street, around 30% of respondents in each urban growth sub-area were indifferent to annexation at the time of response. Cross tabulation of results revealed that many of the respondents that were indifferent to annexation also were not confident that they had enough information to make a decision about annexation at the time.

As illustrated in Figure 12, among respondents who felt they had enough information to decide on annexation, 37% identified as “somewhat unlikely” or “very unlikely” to approve annexation. Among respondents who felt they did not have enough information to decide on annexation, 29% identified as “somewhat unlikely” or “very unlikely” to approve annexation.

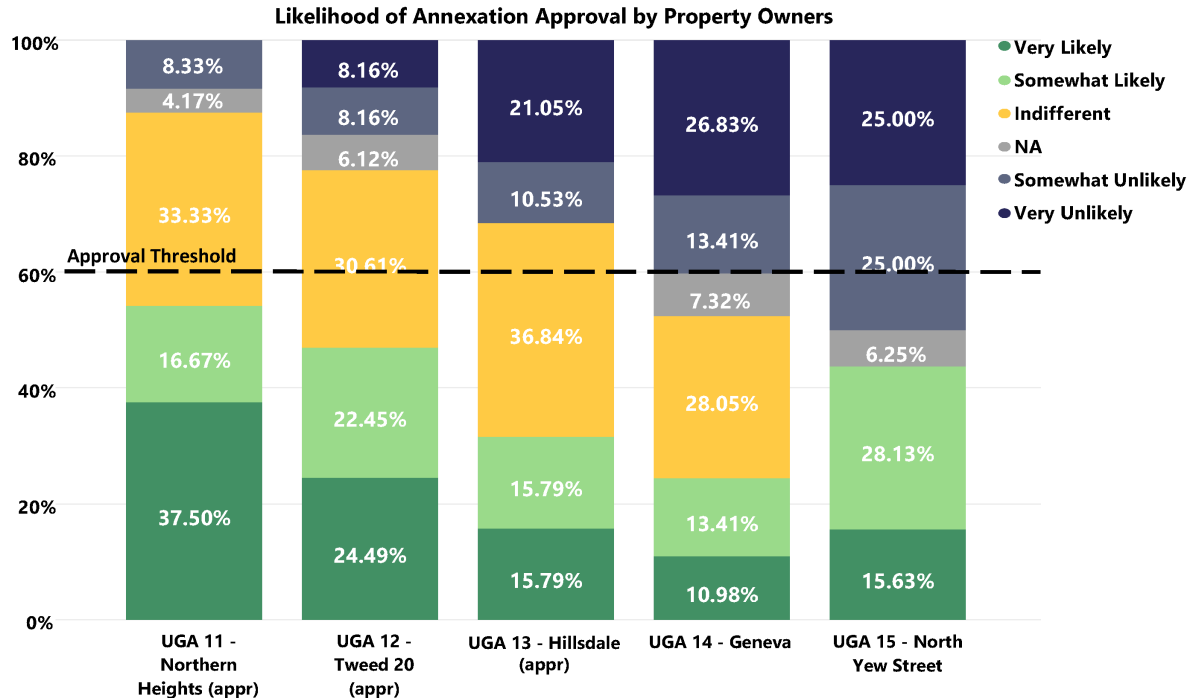
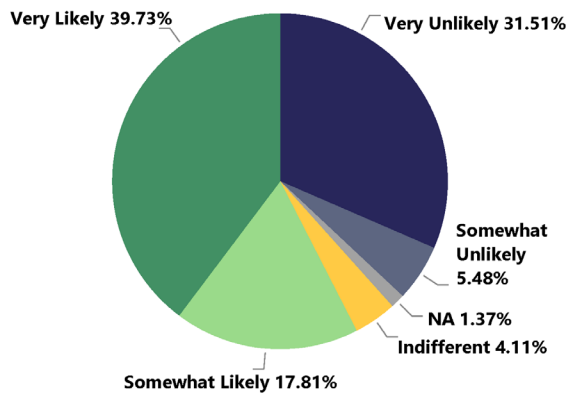


Figure 11. Question 7: How Likely are Respondents to Approve of Annexation into Bellingham?

**Likelihood of Annexation Approval by Property Owners Who Feel Confident That They Have Enough Information to Make a Decision About Annexation**



**Likelihood of Annexation Approval by Property Owners Who Do Not Feel Confident That They Have Enough Information to Make a Decision About Annexation**

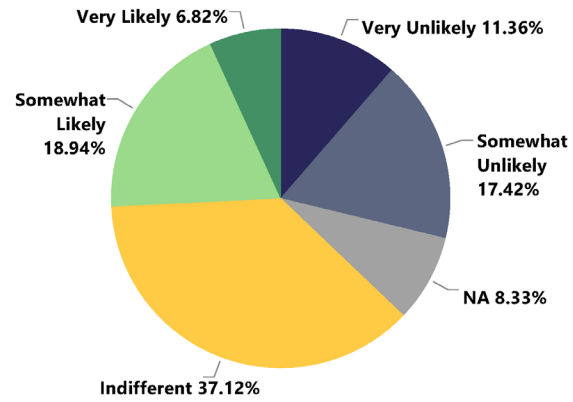


Figure 12. Comparative likelihood of annexation approval among respondents indicating high and low information confidence

## OPINION ELASTICITY

Assessment results indicate increased likelihood of support for annexation is generally associated with the prospect of decreased taxes and fees, and improved public services.

The map presented as Figure 13 identifies average likelihood of annexation support given a slight (less than 20%) decrease in taxes and fees and a slight improvement to the level of public service provision including police, fire, and parks. These conditions are anticipated to be the most likely outcome in the case of annexation and are reflected in Questions 13 and 18 of the assessment. Colors on the map represent average responses to these questions by assessment area, with values below 3 indicating respondents are unlikely to approve annexation, and values above 3 (green) indicating respondents are likely to approve annexation. The map should be viewed as an indicator of sentiment, however, due to the small sample size for each response, it is not considered a statistically conclusive assessment of overall UGA property owner opinion.

The Figure 13 map shows that within the northern assessment areas (UGAs 11-13), on average, respondents are either “very likely” or “somewhat likely” to approve annexation given decreased taxes & fees and improved public services. Conversely, average respondents in Geneva assessment areas (UGA 14) range from “somewhat likely” to “indifferent.” North Yew Street Area results are inconclusive due to the limited sample size, and interpretation is limited to understanding of respondent feedback.

Further analysis of average UGA responses related to taxes, fees and level of service changes, potentially resulting from annexation, revealed the trends identified in Figure 14. The figure indicates respondents’ elasticity of likelihood to support annexation under conditions ranging from a significant decrease in taxes and fees coupled with significantly improved public service provision, to significant increase in taxes and fees coupled with significantly diminished public service provision.

Figure 14 indicates respondents in all UGA sub-areas demonstrate elasticity of opinion, with Tweed Twenty and Northern Heights respondents having a more favorable view of annexation as compared to areas like North Yew Street and Geneva. It should be noted that this graph does not exclude inelastic respondents, defined as respondents with identical answers to the first and last condition. This results in the elasticity lines of Geneva and North Yew Street to be lower than that of the North Britton UGAs due to their higher percentage of inelastic voters against annexation. Detailed analyses of elasticity outcomes for each UGA are provided in Appendix B.

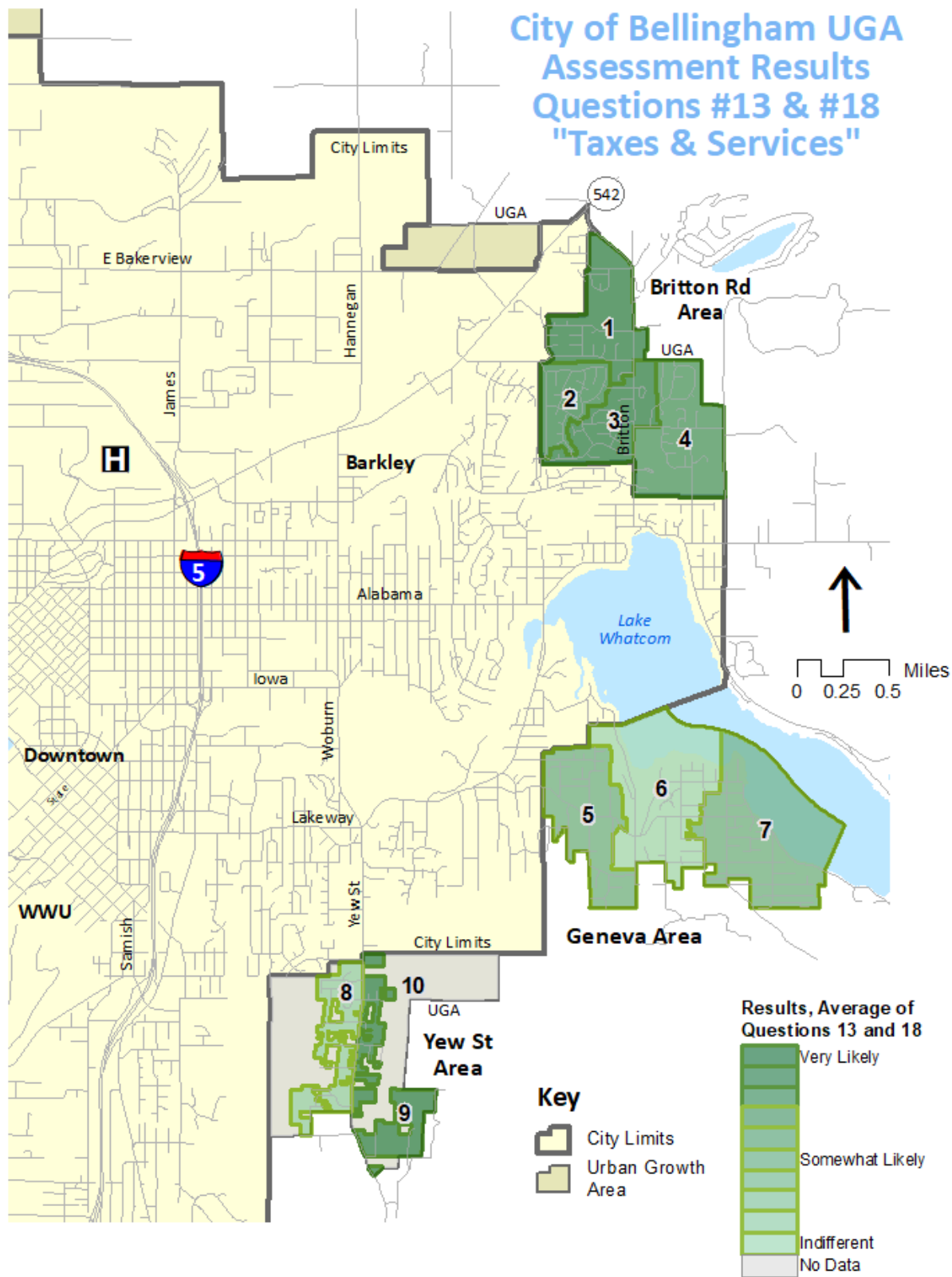


Figure 13. Average likelihood of annexation support given decreased taxes & fees and improved public services

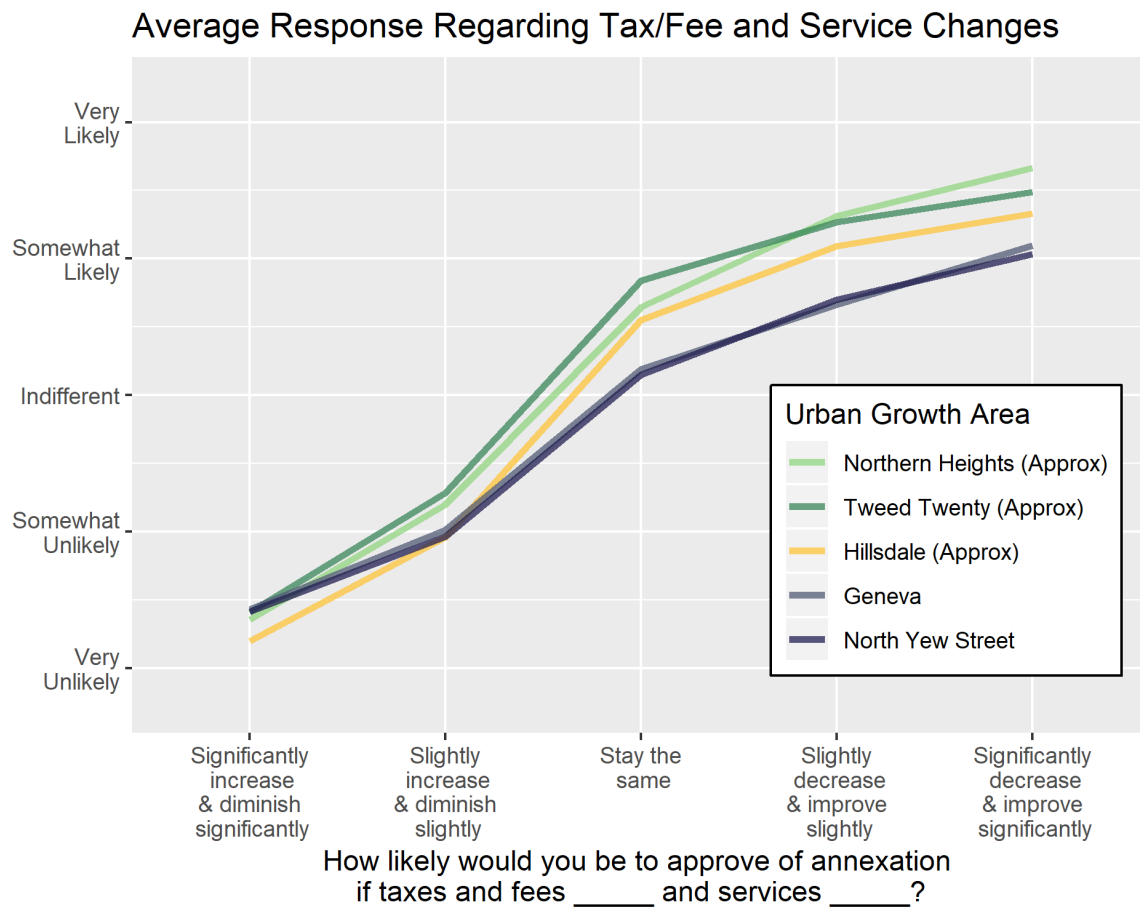


Figure 14. Average Elasticity of respondents regarding Tax and Fee and Service Changes



## RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

As a result of research and community assessment outcomes detailed in this report, the UW Team recommends the City of Bellingham consider the following actions as next steps in advancing its Annexation Strategy.

### **Consider Annexation in Areas of Support**

Based on assessed interest from residents in Northern Heights and Tweed Twenty, the UW Team recommends that the City of Bellingham dedicate resources to a potential future annexation of these areas. Assessment results indicate Britton Road area UGA property owners generally have a favorable view on potential annexation, but further engagement is necessary to initiate the process. To create a strong basis for potential annexation of these UGAs, the City will need to invest resources into further community engagement and information dissemination.

### **Continue the Information Campaign**

Residents from all the UGA sub-areas expressed interest in having more information regarding the annexation process and potential changes and impacts to their communities. The UW Team recommends that the City dedicates resources to conducting additional outreach, focusing primarily on UGA sub-areas that expressed support and UGA sub-areas that reported low information confidence but showed high elasticity in opinions on annexation. The information campaign would be most beneficial in the Northern Heights, Tweed Twenty, Hillsdale, and North Yew Street UGA sub-areas. Due to Geneva's lack of assessed interest, it is recommended the City of Bellingham focus resources on the other UGA sub-areas and exclude Geneva from consideration for annexation at this time.

### **Address Inconclusive Results**

While the community assessment results displayed a high level of interest in Northern Heights and Tweed Twenty UGA sub-areas and a lack of interest in Geneva, North Yew Street and Hillsdale need further study. Due to inconclusive results, the UW Team recommends that the City conduct more thorough research in North Yew Street and Hillsdale. Specifically in North Yew Street, it is recommended the City assess vacant property owner support through a mailed assessment, and partner with Whatcom County to consider adjusting the boundary for the UGA to exclude areas opposed to annexation and extend south to include all, or portions of, the South Yew Street Reserve Area.

## LIST OF ATTACHMENTS AND APPENDICES

### **Attachments**

- Attachment 1 - Initiative Website
- Attachment 2 - Email Invitation
- Attachment 3 - Project Fliers and Postcards
- Attachment 4 - Radio Station Public Service Announcement
- Attachment 5 - Press Release
- Attachment 6 - Social Media Announcements
- Attachment 7 - Comment Matrix
- Attachment 8 - Follow-up Email
- Attachment 9 - Community Assessment Questions
- Attachment 10 - Community Assessment Sample Area Maps
- Attachment 11 - Canvassing Script
- Attachment 12 - City of Bellingham Letter Drafted for Canvassing

### **Appendices**

- Appendix A - Community Information Meeting Materials and Outcomes
- Appendix B - Community Assessment Analysis