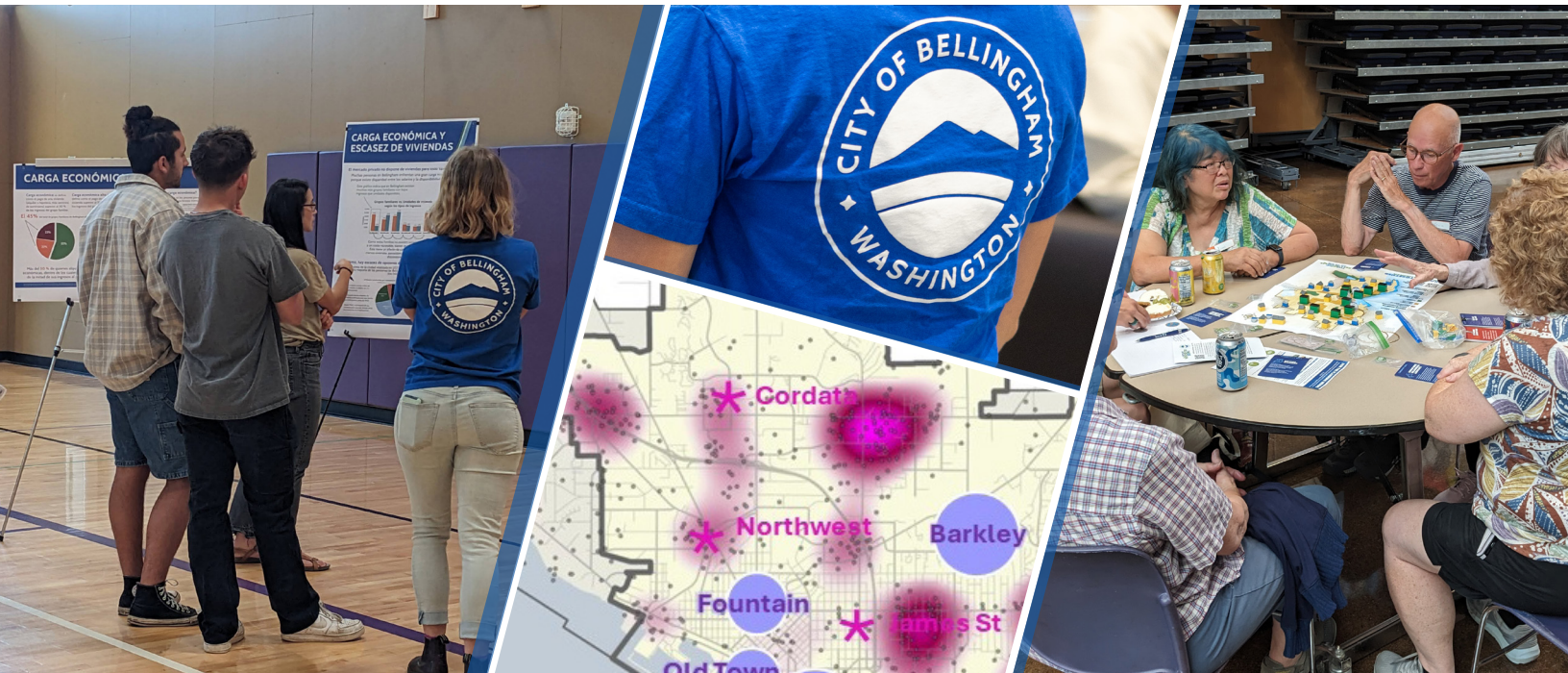


THE BELLINGHAM PLAN



THE BELLINGHAM PLAN GROWTH SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT



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Executive Summary

The Bellingham Plan will serve as an updated version of the City’s existing Comprehensive Plan established in 2016. Mandated by the State, Comprehensive Plans define guidance for implementation, such as zoning and development regulations, capital financial investments, and other specific actions or programs. To ensure the plan aligns with community needs, the City of Bellingham relies on public input to inform and guide updates to the Comprehensive Plan.

One such piece of community input is the Growth Survey, which garnered feedback on a variety of growth-related topics under consideration in the Bellingham Plan. The goal of this survey was to provide feedback from the community to help inform the city’s overall growth strategy over the coming decades. The survey was available online between July 8 and August 14, 2024 and was most widely distributed by postcard in mid-July. This postcard was sent to all households within the city and included a link and a QR code for the survey to be taken in either English or Spanish. Additional outreach was completed over email (to the Bellingham Plan email list developed over the prior year), social media (posted by both the City and City partners), and in person at events held during the survey window. These efforts resulted in 3,230 valid responses, 5 of which were taken in Spanish.

Notable trends and significant insights from the survey point at the community’s growth strategy preferences:

Respondents see many values in a growth strategy centered around **continued investment in urban villages** and **additional development along transit routes**.

They are excited to bring people **closer to goods and services** and to provide **choices to walk, bike, and take transit** in these areas.

They can recognize the multiple benefits of urban villages (**sustainability, efficiency, pedestrian oriented**), and want to see them throughout the city.

Most respondents want a **variety of 2+ bedroom units** available across the city. Simultaneously, they think having units close to urban villages is more important than having them be larger in size.

They want **middle-scale housing to be focused along transit routes and near urban villages**, rather than scattered across the city.

They also expressed some concerns associated with the existing growth strategy and urban village focus.

Many appreciate the identified benefits but worry that they have **not yet come to fruition in existing urban villages**.

They are concerned that **existing urban villages are too auto-centric** and do not have enough safe pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure.

Simultaneously, many expressed **concerns about parking access and traffic impacts** as we grow and urban villages become more developed.

Growth preferences are rooted in Bellingham's interest in **preserving and celebrating nature**.

There is **significant concern that by expanding the city's boundary, we would encroach** on natural lands and wildlife.

As Bellingham grows, **access to green and open space** is important to retain for all residents.

There is a link between respondents' interest in **clustering development** in intentional areas and their interest in providing **clustered stands of trees**, rather than evenly distributing both across the city.

There is interest in allowing new areas to **develop with a mix of uses**.

Respondents shared their interest in **developing new urban villages**, both in existing commercial areas and in new areas that fill a gap in services. This interest is particularly strong in areas located in the northern part of the city, both north and east of I-5.

There is strong support for **introducing small-scale commercial uses** across Bellingham's residential areas, but there is interest in addressing potential parking, traffic, and noise/odor impacts that might result from their presence.

Stay Informed

With a better understanding of the community's growth strategy preferences from the survey findings, the next phase in the update process will be shaped by a commitment to addressing the needs identified by the community. As we move forward in the update process, continued community input remains pivotal. Stay informed at **engagebellingham.org** and continue reading for more detailed survey results.

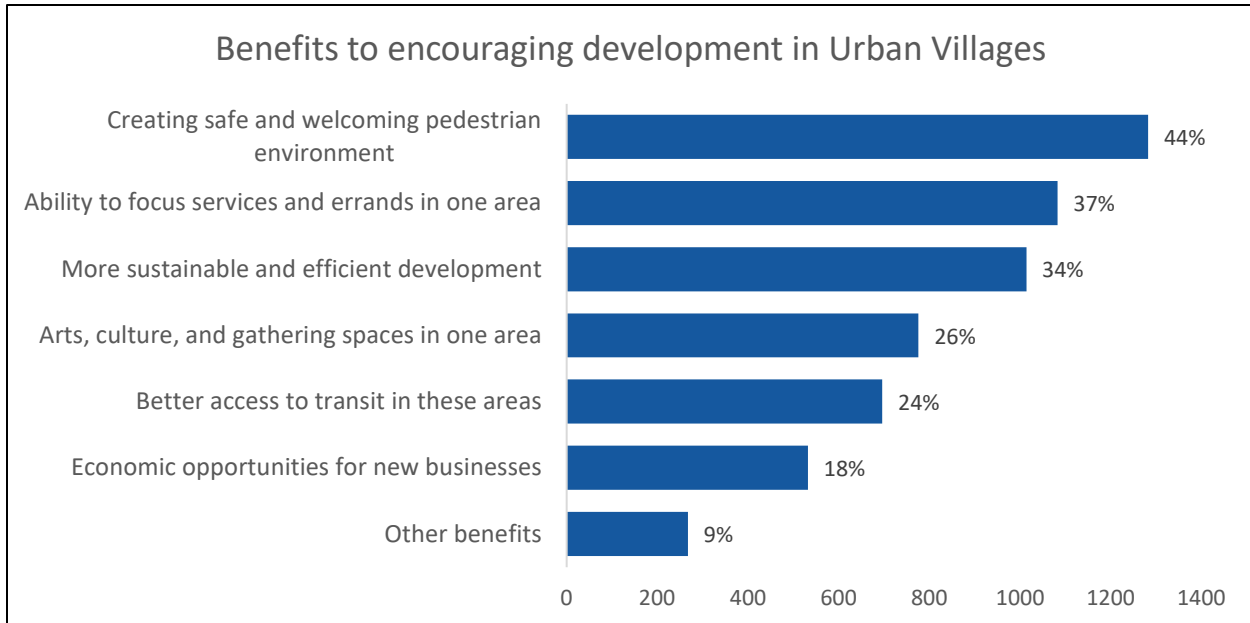
Survey Results

The response results for each question are listed here alongside narrative summarizing their relevance to the Bellingham Plan. Because this survey was primarily distributed through a mailed postcard with a survey link, the demographics of the results were skewed more toward owner households than renters. To account for this mismatch between the survey respondents and the demographics of Bellingham as a whole, the results shown here have been weighted to more accurately represent the overall Bellingham community. The weighting addresses for the variation between owners and renters, and it also helps bring some of the other demographics closer to representing the city as a whole. See the demographic section for more details.

A copy of the full question wording is available in the appendix.

Urban Village Benefits:

In Bellingham’s urban villages, residents see value in a **safe and welcoming pedestrian environment** and in focusing **services and errands in one area**.



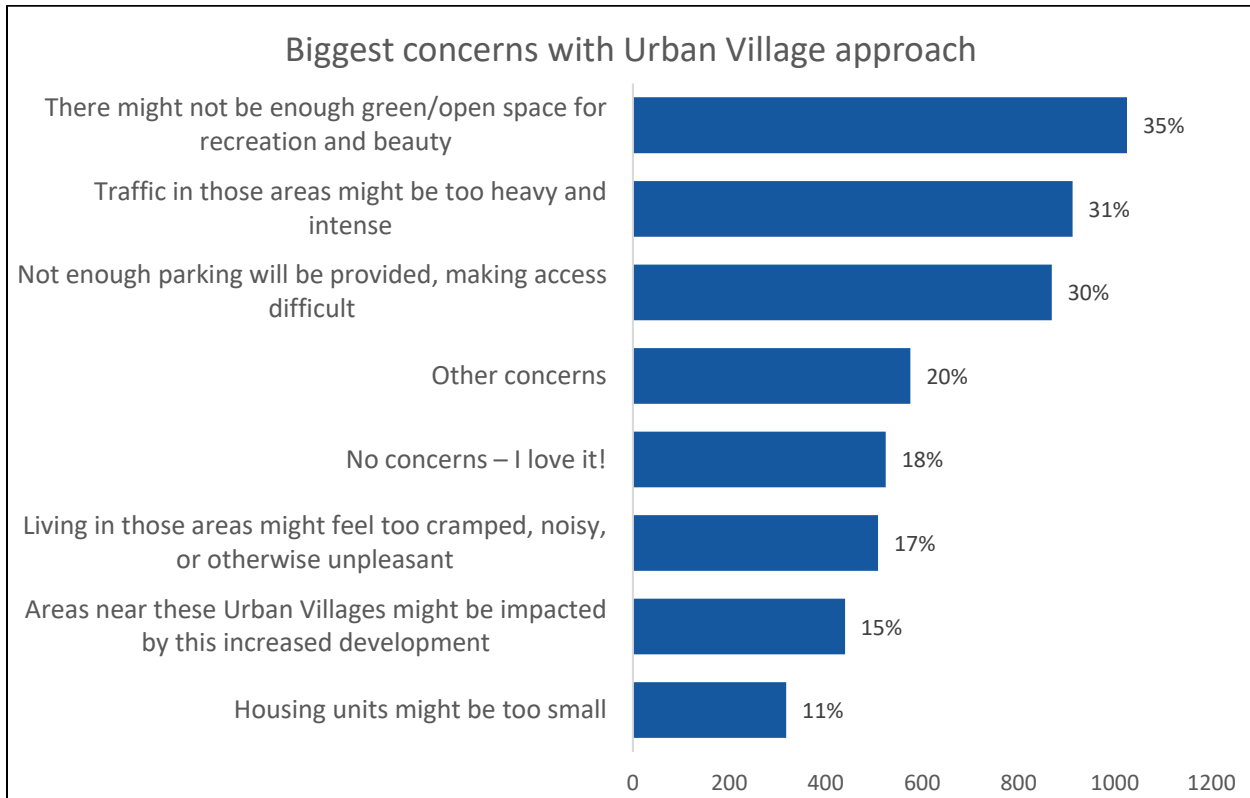
*Note: This trend is consistent for owners and renters, but renters generally prioritized the pedestrian environment more than owners, bringing the weighted top result more in the lead.

Respondents see value in the benefits that higher density and mixed-use development provides in urban villages. The results show that residents like a safe and welcoming pedestrian environment, which is a key feature of our urban villages. They also appreciate the ability to focus services and errands in one area, which results in greater efficiency and helps meet our climate goals by concentrating development within urban areas and limiting urban sprawl. When asked for more open-ended feedback, respondents also shared appreciation that these compact areas have their own neighborhood character and create a greater sense of community.

Nine percent of respondents selected “other” and provided written detail as one of their responses. While many of these added detail to the options provided, another theme emerged of seeing urban villages as fostering a stronger sense of community. Additionally, many of the “other” responses highlighted concerns with the urban village approach, describing that the listed benefits have not panned out yet in existing urban villages. This was emphasized for pedestrian and bicycle safety and housing affordability in particular.

Urban Village Concerns:

Respondents had concerns regarding **sufficient green and open space** within urban villages. There was also concern regarding **heavy and intense traffic** as well as **not having enough parking** in these areas.



Some of the concerns about focusing on urban villages as part of our growth strategy center around limited or reduced access to green or open spaces for their aesthetic and recreational values. Additionally, the other greatest concerns relate to increased traffic and insufficient parking. Results showed that renters were more apprehensive about traffic while homeowners were more concerned about impacts to parking availability. When asked for open-ended feedback, other concerns touched on the need for robust infrastructure and adequate transit options, affordable housing, attention to safety, a dedicated vision with political will and effective planning, sensitivity to the potential for gentrification and cultural displacement, and more.

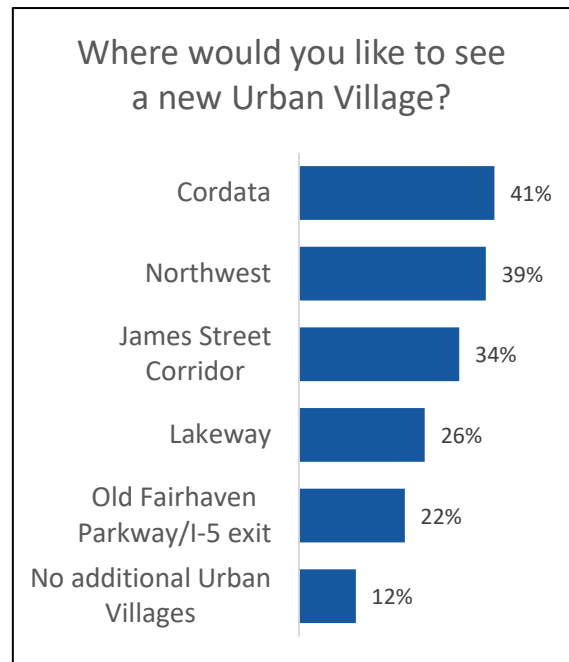
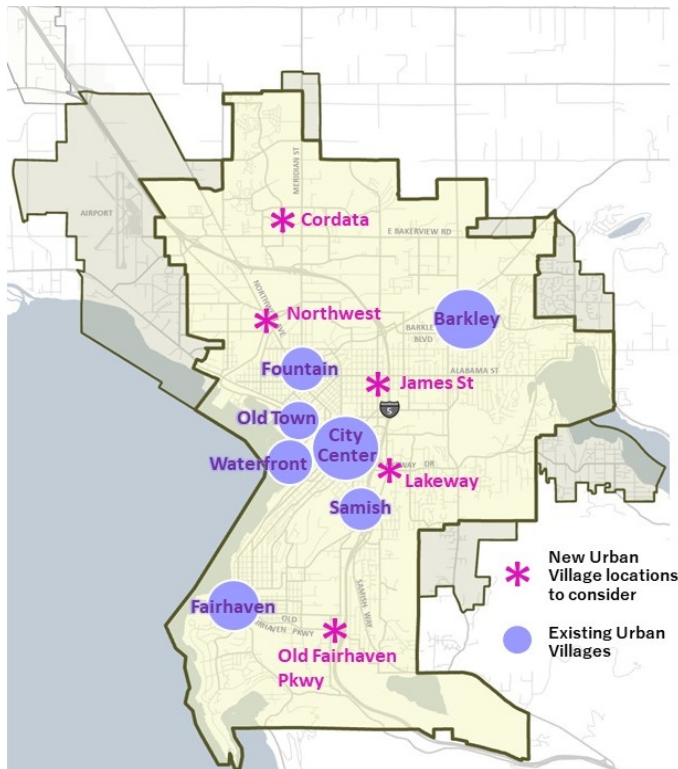
Twenty percent of respondents selected “other” and provided a written response. Some of the additional concerns include:

1. The auto-oriented/car-focused design of urban village infrastructure.
2. Lack of affordability of new developments.
3. Potential displacement and gentrification of cultural nodes within the city.

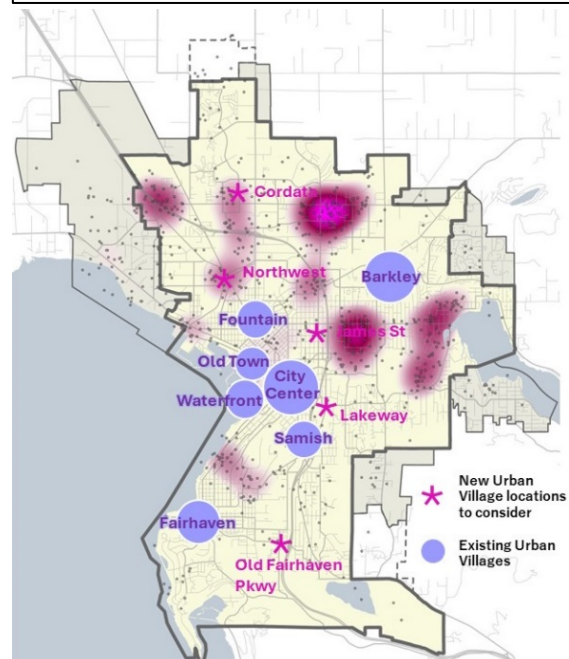
New Urban Villages:

The majority of respondents would prioritize new urban villages in the **Cordata area**, near the intersection of **Northwest Ave. and Birchwood Ave.**, and along the **James St. Corridor** more so than other areas.

The next question allowed respondents to select an additional area on the map for a location where they'd like to see a new urban village. The heat map below summarizes these responses. This map is not weighted by demographics but instead represents the raw results.

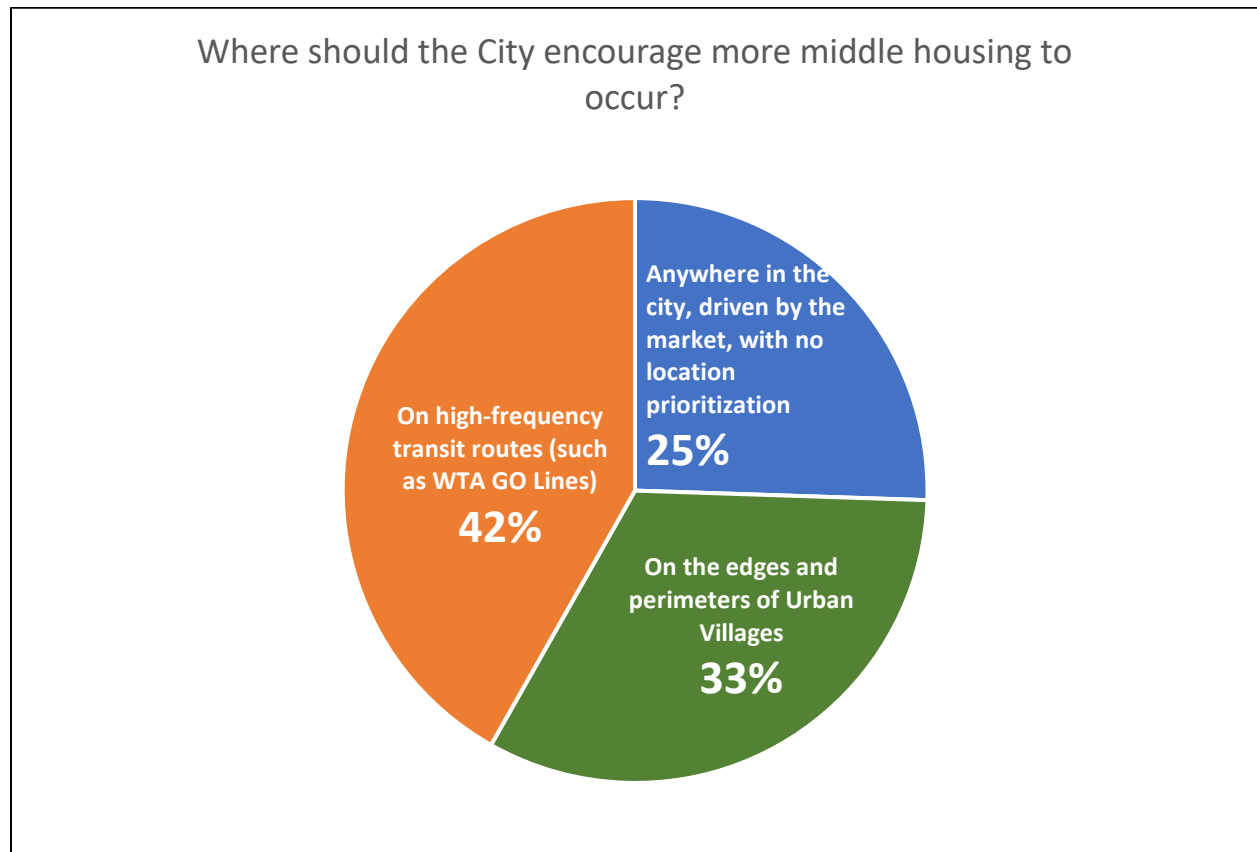


The city's seven existing urban villages are represented by purple circles on the map. Respondents felt that many other areas across the city could be considered for potential new urban village locations. The most commonly identified locations appear to include the following areas or intersections: I-5 and W. Bakerview Road, James St. and E. Bakerview Road, the area between Alabama, Iowa, James, and Woburn streets, and along Electric Ave.



Middle Housing Locations:

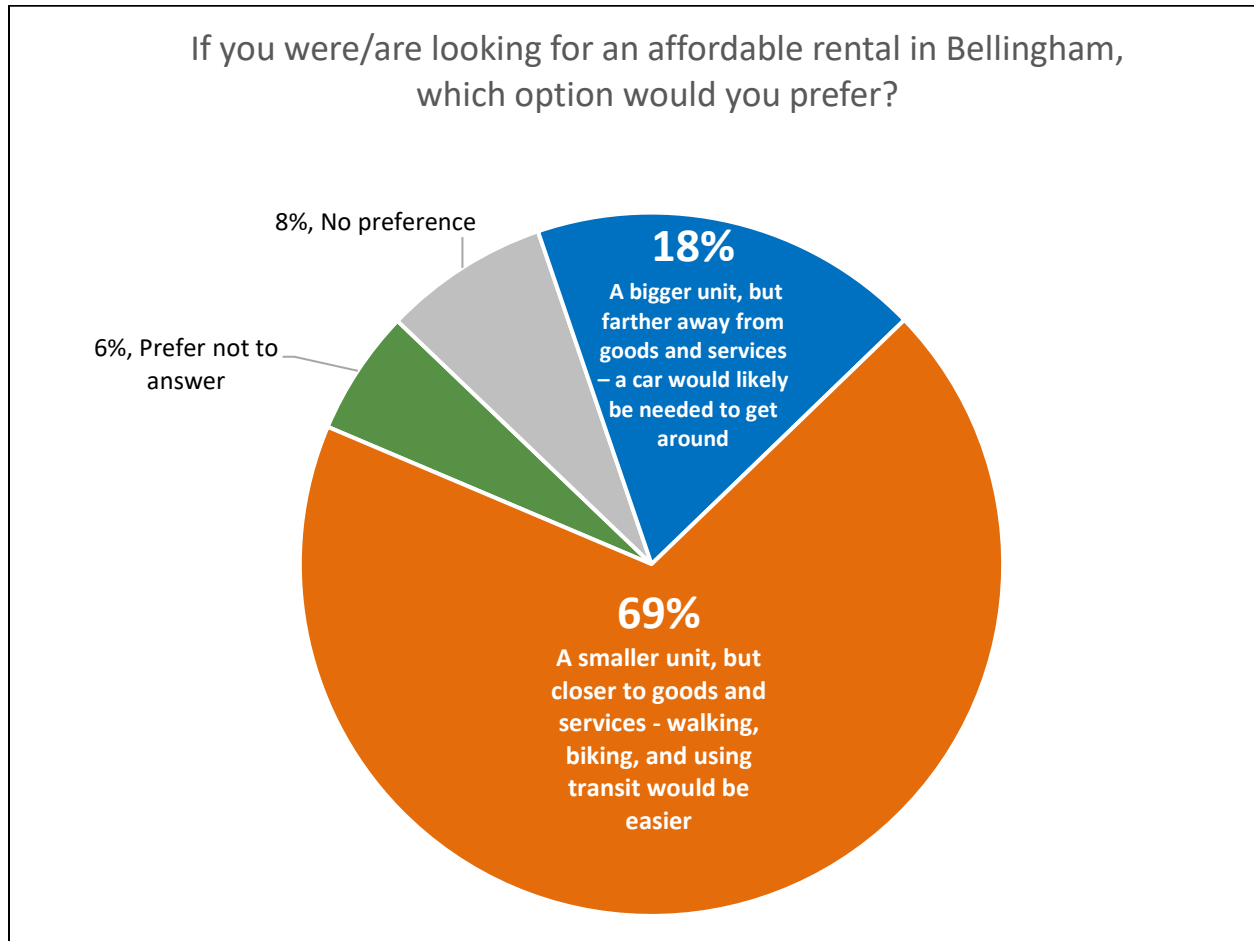
The majority of respondents feel that middle housing (middle-scale like cottages and townhomes) should be encouraged on **high-frequency transit routes (such as WTA GO Lines)**, followed by **on the edges and perimeters of urban villages**.



Almost half (42%) of all respondents agree that middle housing should be encouraged on high-frequency transit routes (such as WTA Go Lines) and about a third (33%) of respondents would like to encourage middle housing on the edges and perimeters of urban villages. Only a quarter of respondents think middle housing should be encouraged anywhere in the city, driven by the market, with no location prioritization. This suggests that most respondents see value in encouraging density in targeted areas rather than without any prioritization.

Affordable Housing Locations:

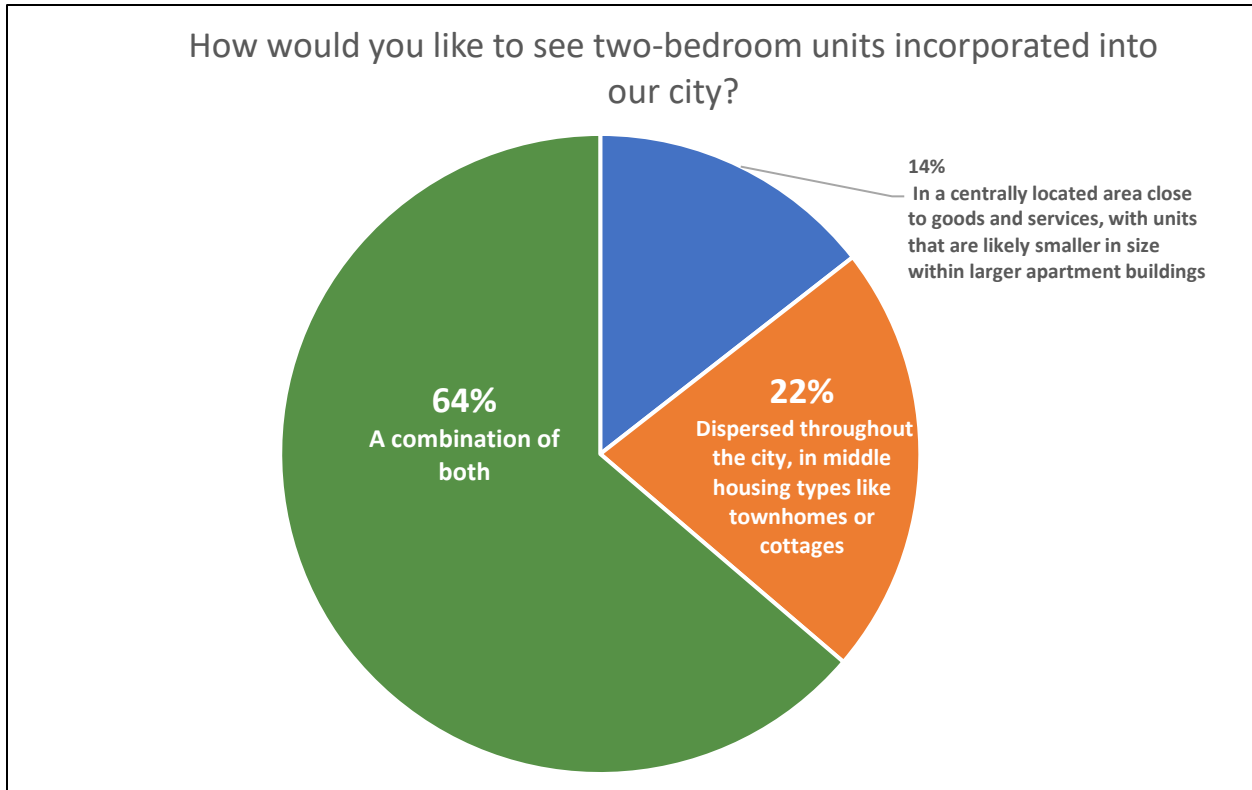
When considering common trade-offs in affordable rental housing, most respondents **prefer a smaller unit closer to goods and services** than a larger unit further away.



This question asks respondents to consider common trade-offs found in affordable rental housing. Sometimes smaller units have the benefit of being close to goods and services, making it easier to walk, bike or use transit for running errands. Conversely, larger units are often further away from goods and services, making it more likely to depend on a car to get around. When forced to choose between these two scenarios, most respondents (69%) opt for a smaller unit and appear to value the convenience and efficiency that urban living can provide. Eighteen percent prefer a bigger unit, farther away from goods and services, 8% had no preference, and 6% preferred not to answer.

Housing Size:

Most respondents envision having two-bedroom units in **both central locations and dispersed** throughout the city



Two-bedroom units are less common than studio or one-bedroom units. However, they are often highly sought after, especially by larger families. Twenty-two percent of respondents prefer two-bedroom units to be dispersed throughout the city, in middle housing types like townhomes or cottages; 14% of respondents prefer two-bedroom units to be incorporated into centrally located areas close to goods and services, with units that are likely smaller in size within larger apartment buildings. However, the majority of respondents (64%) prefer a combination of both scenarios and would like to ensure that two-bedroom units are prevalent throughout the city.

Errand Location Drivers:

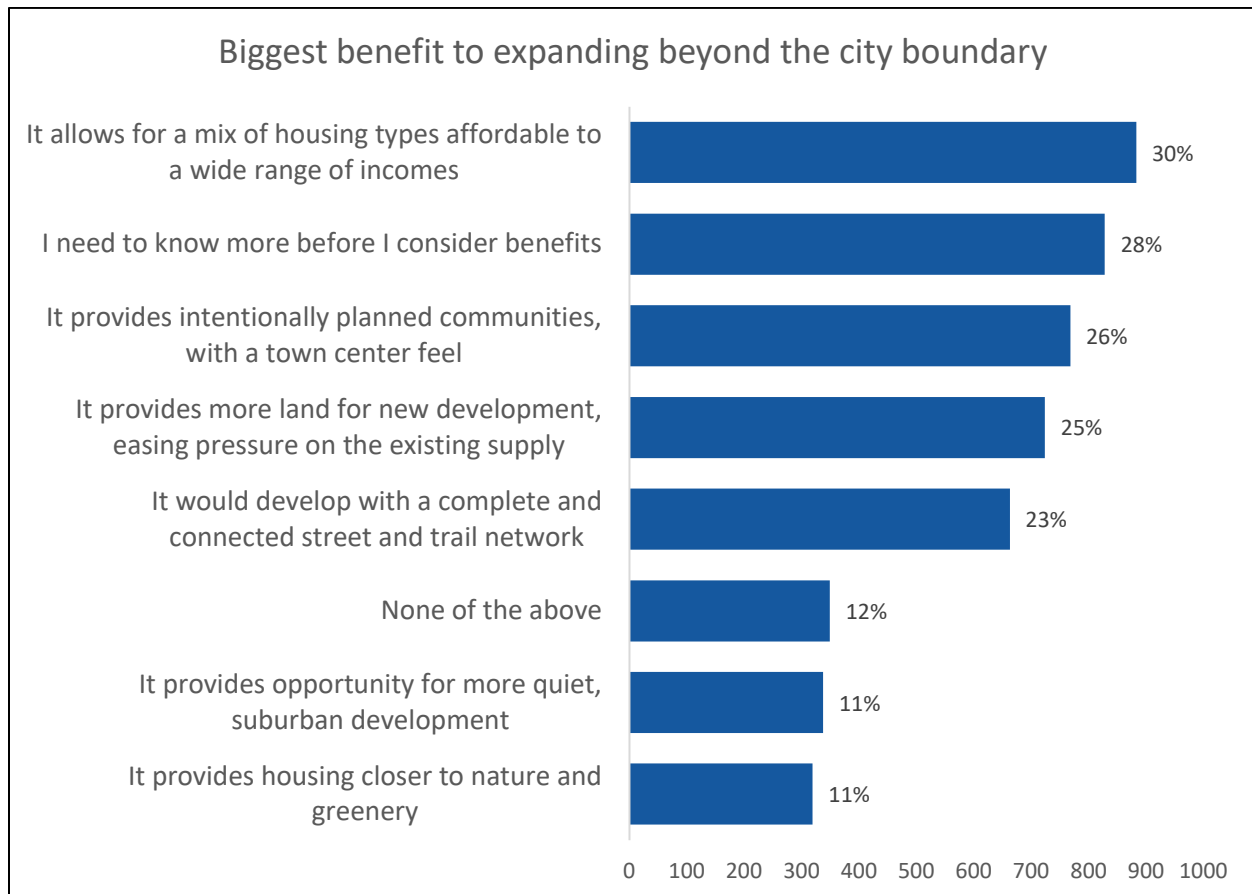
Respondents typically consider **a mix of factors** when it comes to **running errands**.



A number of different factors might drive decision making when it comes to completing errands. The majority of respondents (66%) base their errands on a variety of factors such as time or access to transportation. A smaller portion (20%) of respondents think most about proximity and are willing to spend more money for the convenience of the nearest shop. Only 13% of respondents are primarily driven by the price of goods and will drive or find a way to get to the store with the best deals. One percent of respondents stated that these factors don't apply, because they order most things online. There is no clear predominant factor

Expanding City Boundary Benefits:

Respondents said many benefits could be realized by expanding the city’s boundary, such as **housing affordability, planned communities, more available land, and completing streets and trails** .

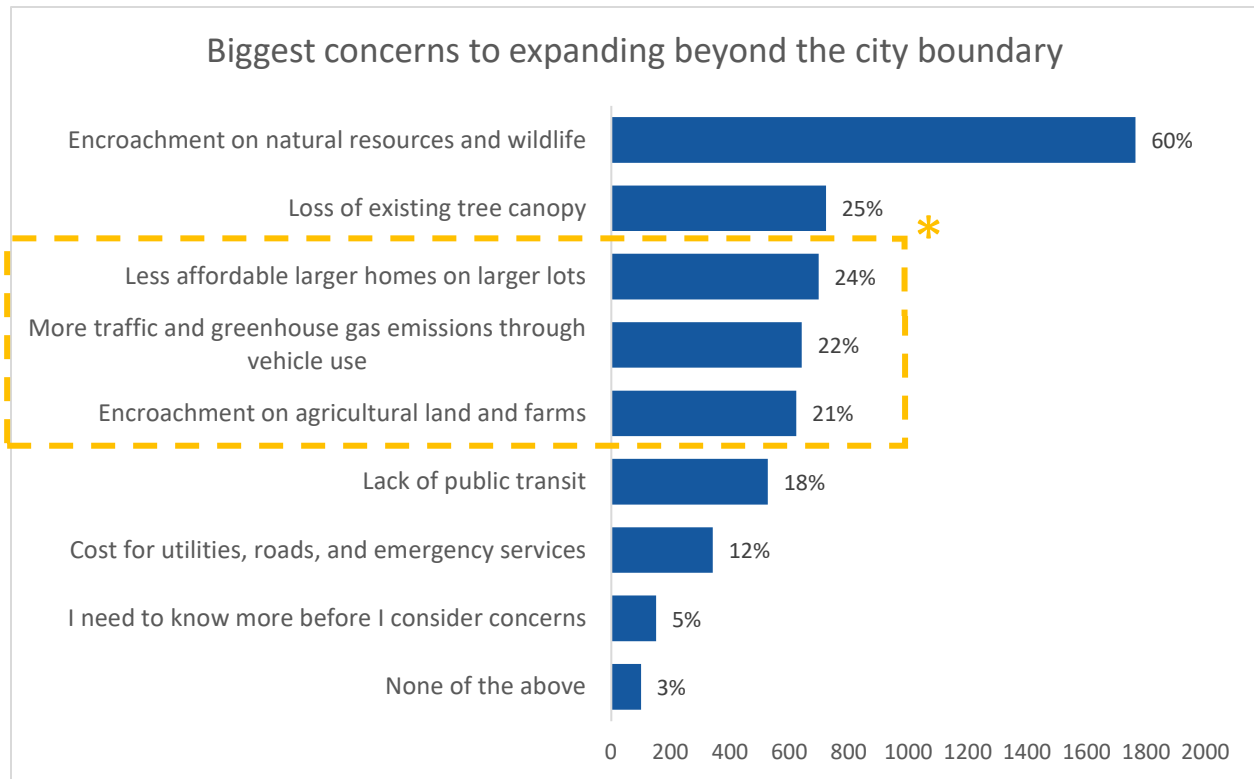


*Note: This trend is somewhat consistent for owners and renters, but renters generally prioritized providing a mix of housing types much more than owners did. This means that the weight results give stronger preference (first priority) to this option than the unweighted results did (second priority).

A large percentage (28%) of respondents did not feel able to answer this question without additional information, indicating this is a topic about which the community feels less knowledgeable. Other perceived benefits for expanding the city’s boundary were split relatively evenly between housing affordability, planned communities, providing more land for development, and completing streets and trails. There was less interest in the benefits of suburban development and providing housing near nature.

Expanding City Boundary Concerns:

The biggest concern respondents identified for expanding the city’s boundary lies with its **encroachment on natural resources and wildlife**.

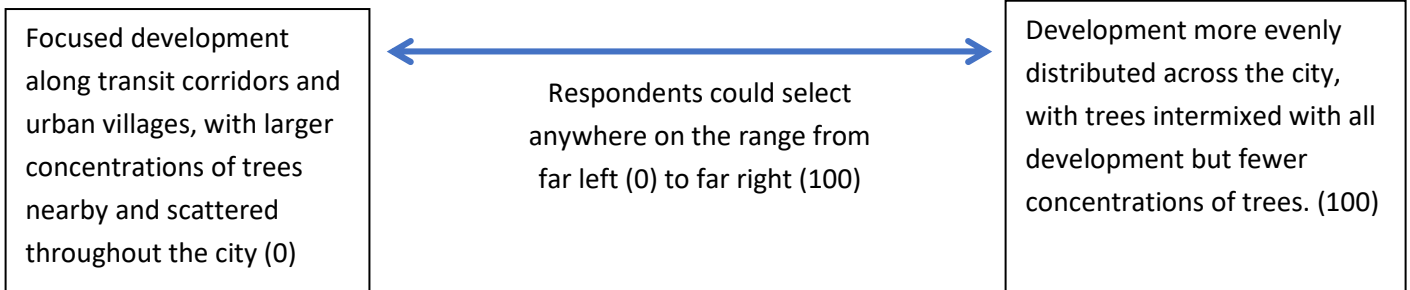
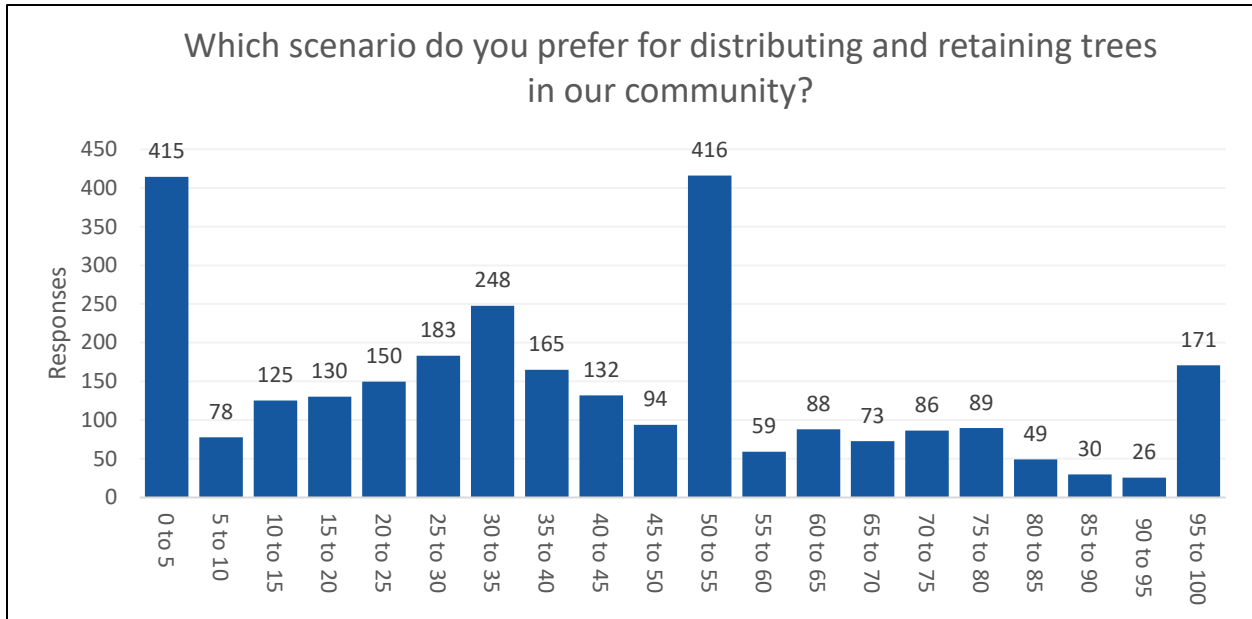


*Note: This trend is somewhat consistent for owners and renters, but renters generally prioritized concerns around providing less affordable homes more and encroachment on farmland less. This shifted the order of the highlighted areas in the weighted results.

Far fewer respondents said they did not know enough to describe the concerns with expanding the city’s boundary. More than half (60%) of respondents were concerned about encroaching on natural resources and wildlife if the city expands its boundary. Most of the remaining concerns (loss of trees, less affordable housing, more traffic and emissions, encroachment on farms, and lack of transit) were also clear concerns but did not rise to the same level as encroachment on nature. Very few respondents (3%) shared none of these concerns.

Tree Distribution:

Respondents generally prefer Bellingham to **cluster development near transit and urban villages**, which also clusters trees rather than evenly distributing them.

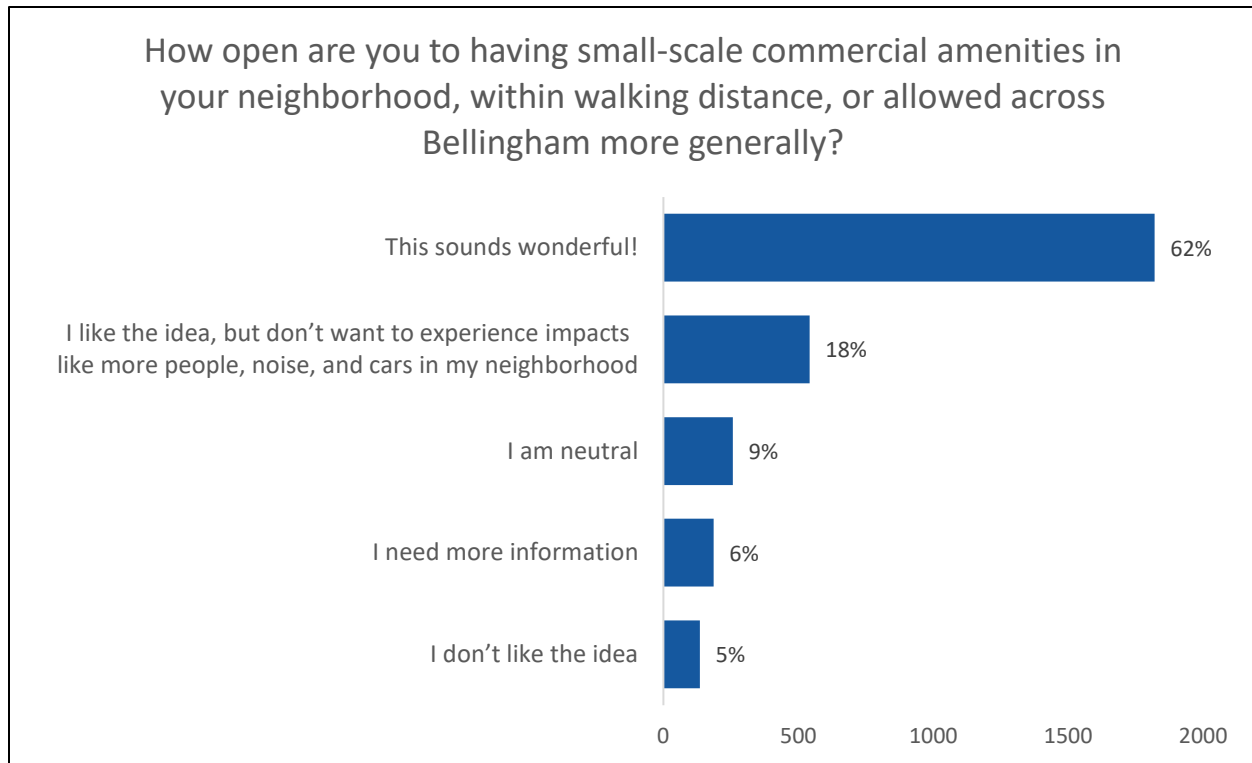


This question allowed respondents to select anywhere on a range between the two scenarios described above. These scenarios linked development patterns (clustered vs evenly distributed) with tree patterns (clustered vs evenly distributed). These responses represent the tendency for development patterns to impact tree canopy patterns.

Respondents generally prefer Bellingham’s development and trees to be clustered rather than evenly distributed around the city, with the most common responses either being entirely on that end of the spectrum, or left at the center (where the default response begins). Significantly more responses fell within the clustered half of the range than the distributed half. While responses were distributed across the entire spectrum, this shows a clear overall preference for clustered development patterns when their impact on trees is considered.

Small-scale Commercial in Neighborhoods:

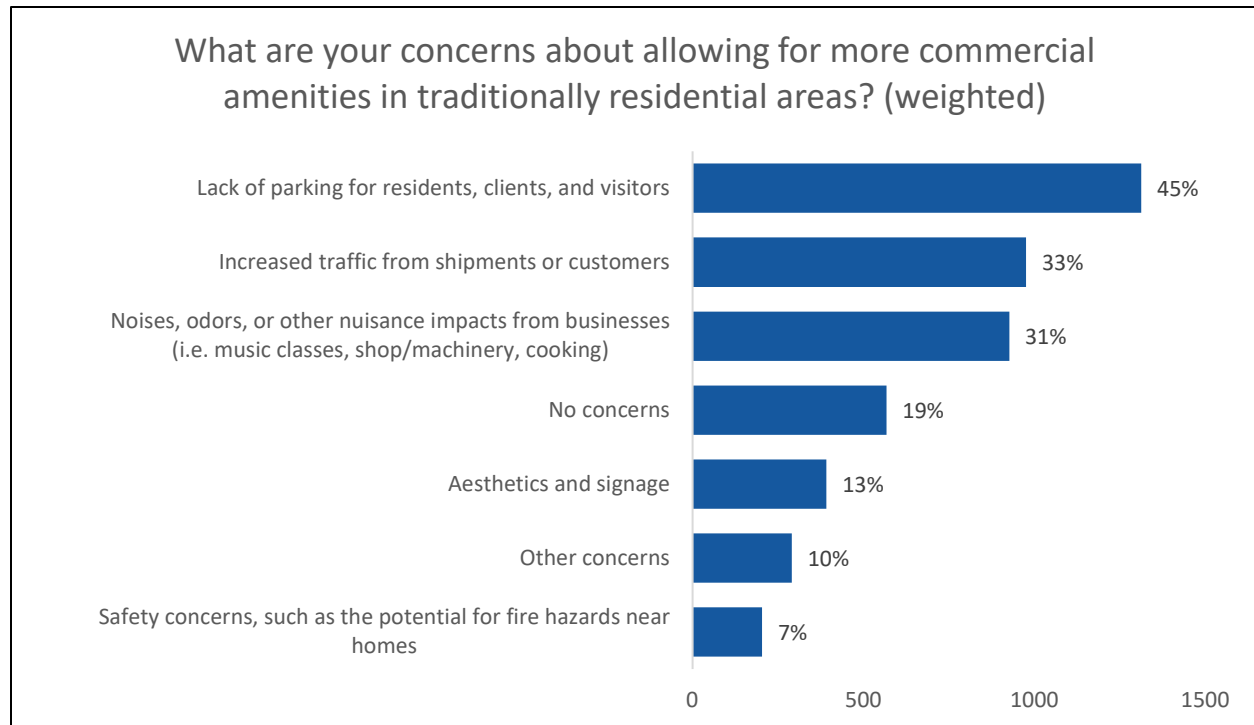
Respondents are **very supportive of introducing small-scale commercial amenities** into their neighborhoods, especially if impacts are addressed.



Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the idea of introducing small-scale commercial amenities into traditionally residential areas. Sixty-two percent of respondents favored the approach without question, while 18% favored it but are concerned about impacts. Very few respondents were either neutral, disliked the idea, or needed more information. See the responses to the next question to dig more into the types of impacts that respondents were concerned about.

Small-scale Commercial in Neighborhoods Concerns:

Respondents are most concerned about **parking**, but **traffic** and **noise/odor** impacts are also important to consider.



While respondents were very supportive of this idea in the previous question, they do have some concerns about its implementation. Their main concerns relate to transportation (parking and traffic impacts), but they also are concerned about impacts like noise and odors. A fifth of respondents had no concerns at all, and a small number had aesthetic or safety concerns.

Ten percent of respondents also selected “other” and provided written feedback. These responses emphasized a few key concepts not covered in the above options:

1. The importance of providing alternatives to driving to these commercial locations, with more transit, bike lanes, and sidewalks present in their vicinity.
2. Concerns that multiple spaces may redevelop and shift the nature of the neighborhood, especially if they attract crime to the area.
3. A worry that the new spaces may become chain stores or less useful businesses rather than local businesses providing a benefit to residents.

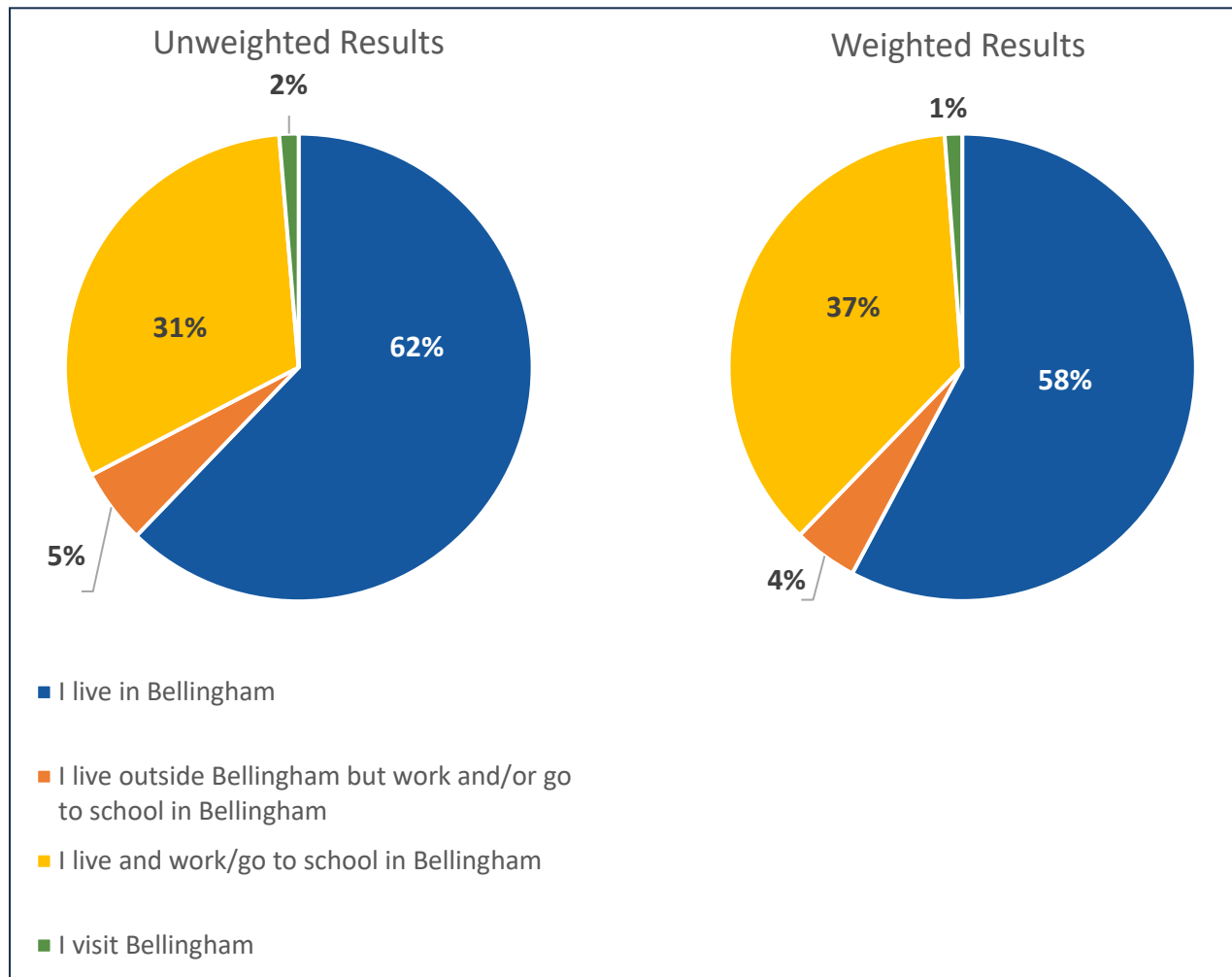
Appendix A: Demographic Data

The results reported above are weighted to represent the true renter/owner breakdown within Bellingham. That means that the other demographic information was also skewed, often bringing the weighted results closer to Bellingham’s true breakdown.

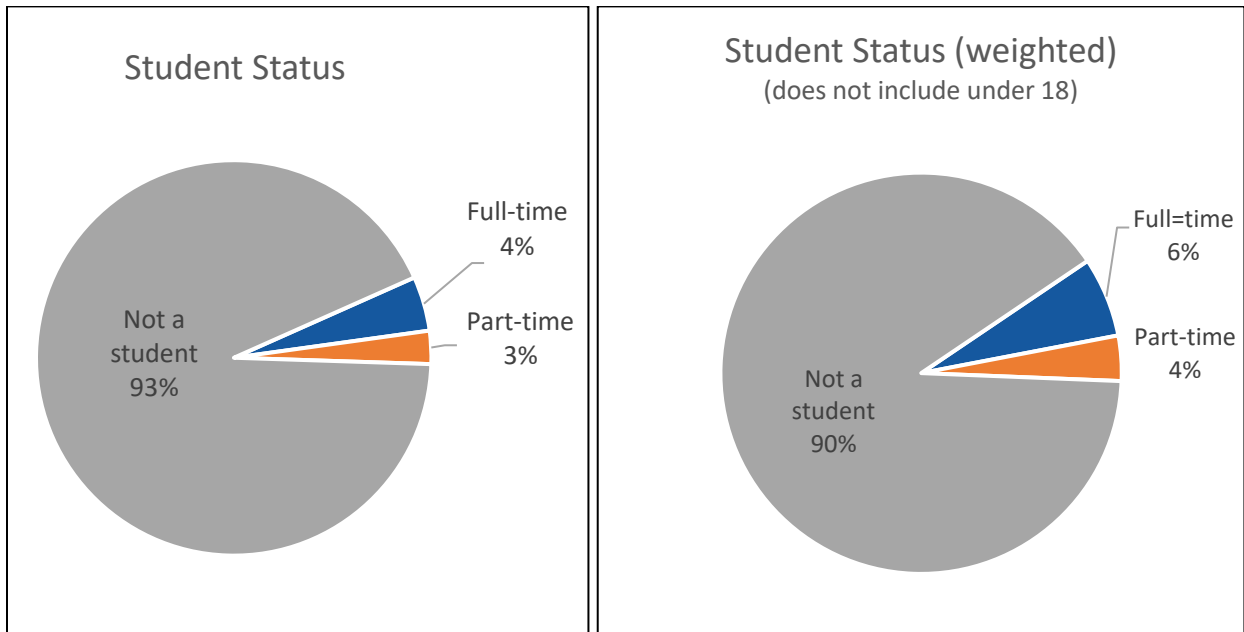
The following two charts include information about those who responded to the survey.

Residency

Everyone who cares about Bellingham can take part. Do you live, work, go to school, and/or visit Bellingham?)

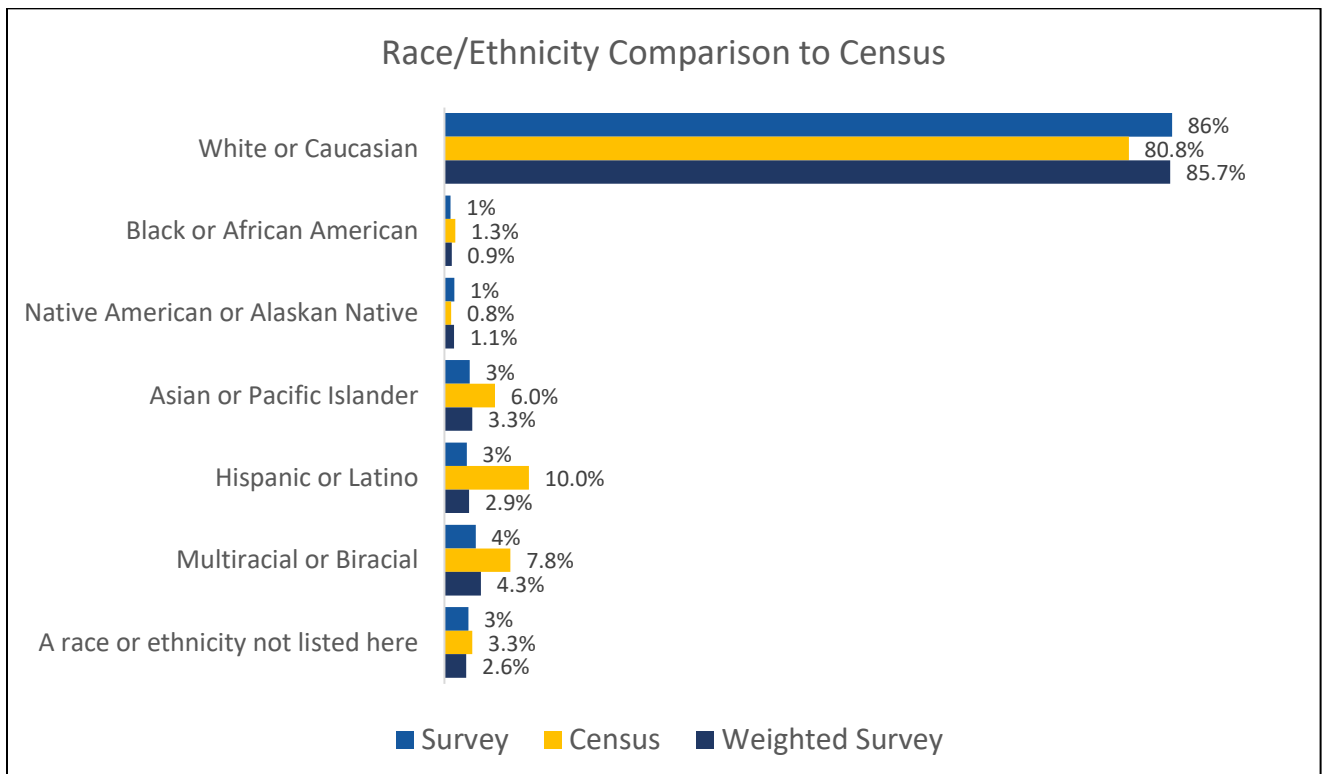


Student Status

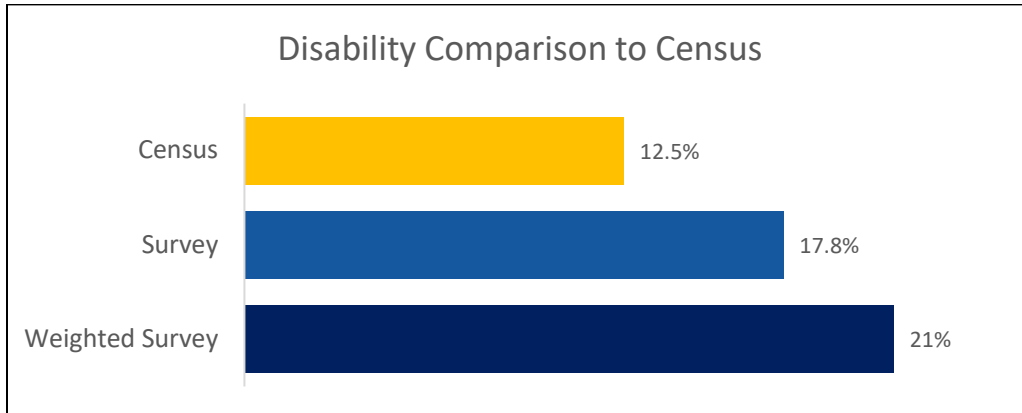


The below charts represent the demographics of those who responded to the survey as they compare to census figures for the city of Bellingham as a whole. Both weighted and unweighted survey results are included.

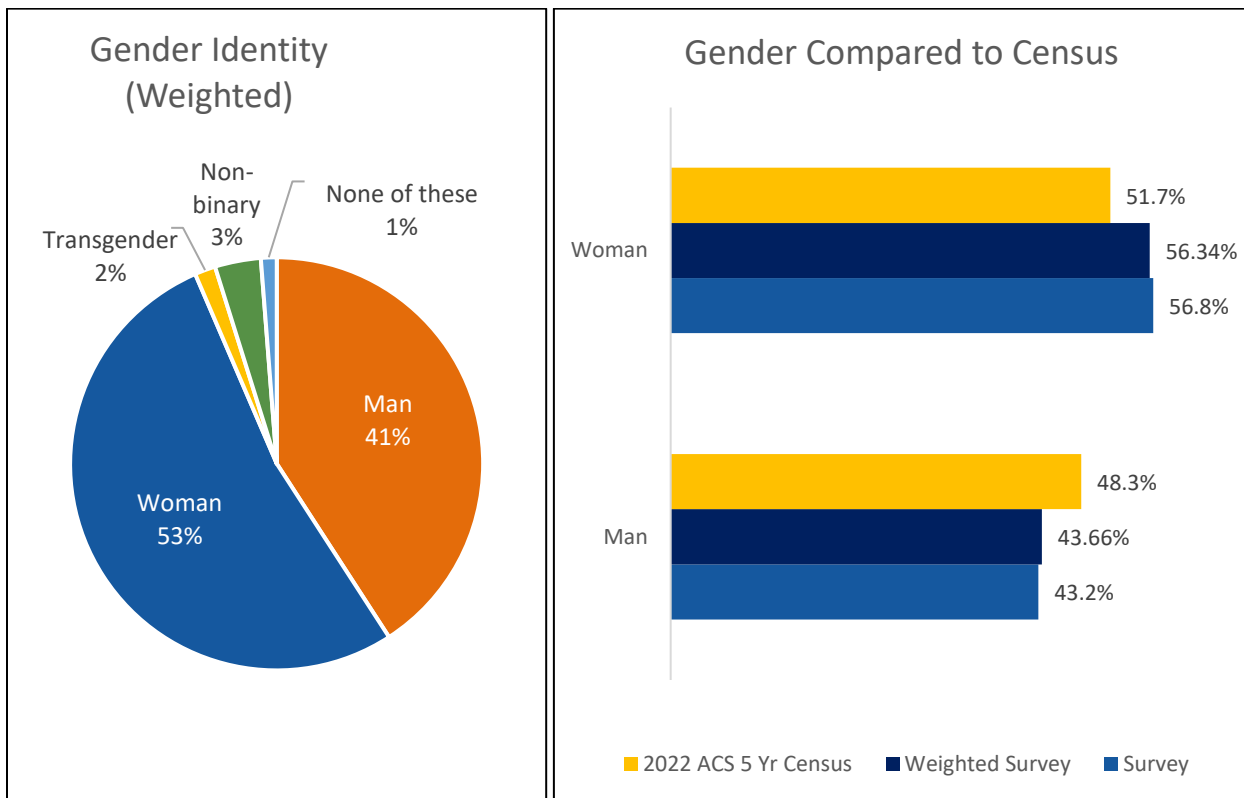
Ethnicity



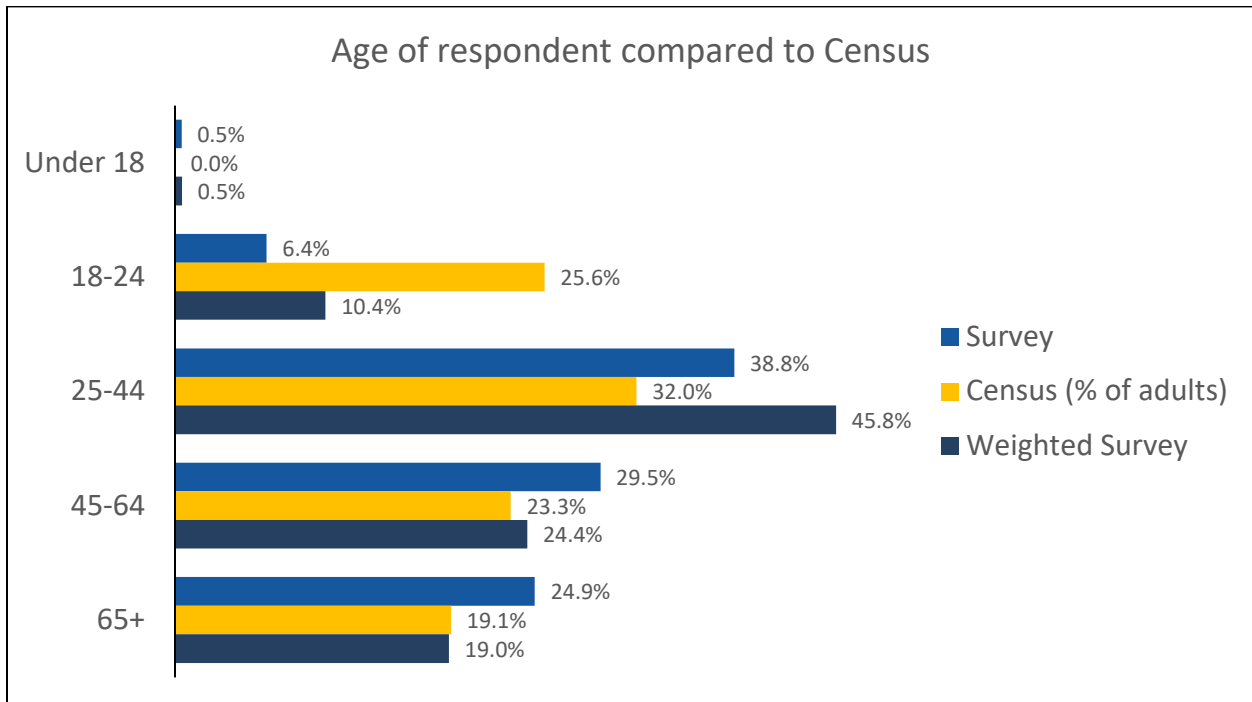
Disability Identity



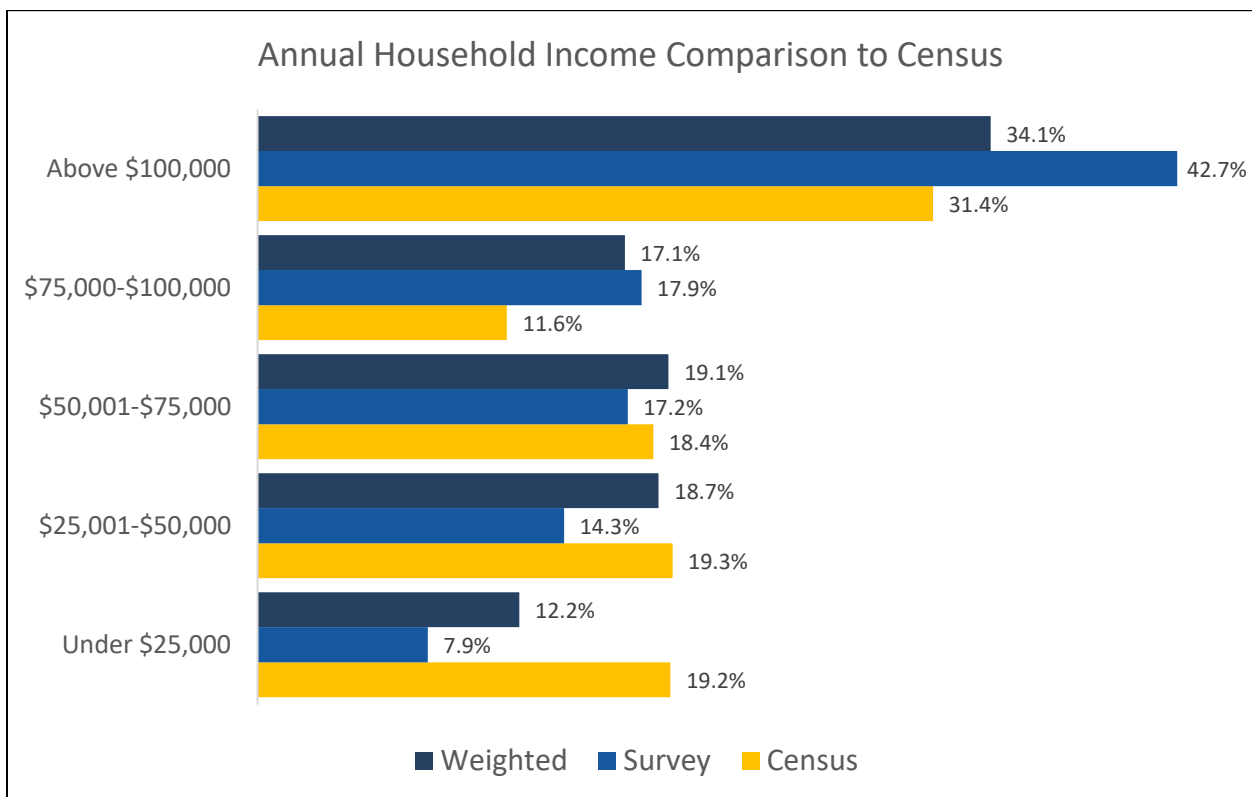
Gender Identity



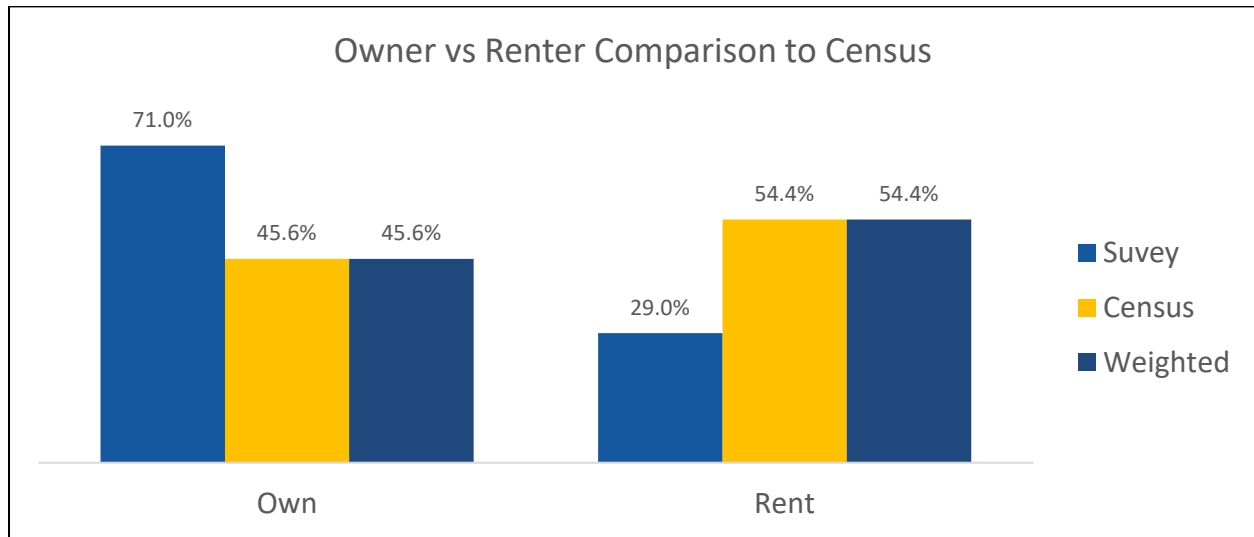
Age



Household Income



Home Ownership



Appendix B: Full Survey Content

While the survey was delivered online, the questions have been inserted here for reference as a pdf.



How should we grow, Bellingham?

This survey should take around 10 minutes to complete. Please complete it by August 11th for a chance to win one of several gift cards to local businesses. Your personal information will not be used in association with your survey answers.

We are currently updating Bellingham’s comprehensive plan, which will be known as the Bellingham Plan. It will address important topics such as housing, transportation, and climate resilience, and will guide development, capital investments, City programs, and other actions for the next 20 years.

As part of this Plan update, we need decide how and where Bellingham should grow. We have identified some possible growth patterns. Now, we are seeking community feedback to help us choose an option for Bellingham that best meets the preferences and priorities of community members. The final growth pattern may ultimately incorporate aspects from one or more of the current options and could also include ideas not represented in any of them.

Your answers to the questions in this survey will help us refine the final option.

* 1. Over recent decades, Bellingham has encouraged development primarily in designated “Urban Villages,” which are large mixed-use areas: Downtown, the Waterfront, Samish Way, Old Town, Fairhaven, Fountain District, and Barkley.

What do you see as the biggest benefits with this approach? Choose your top two (2).

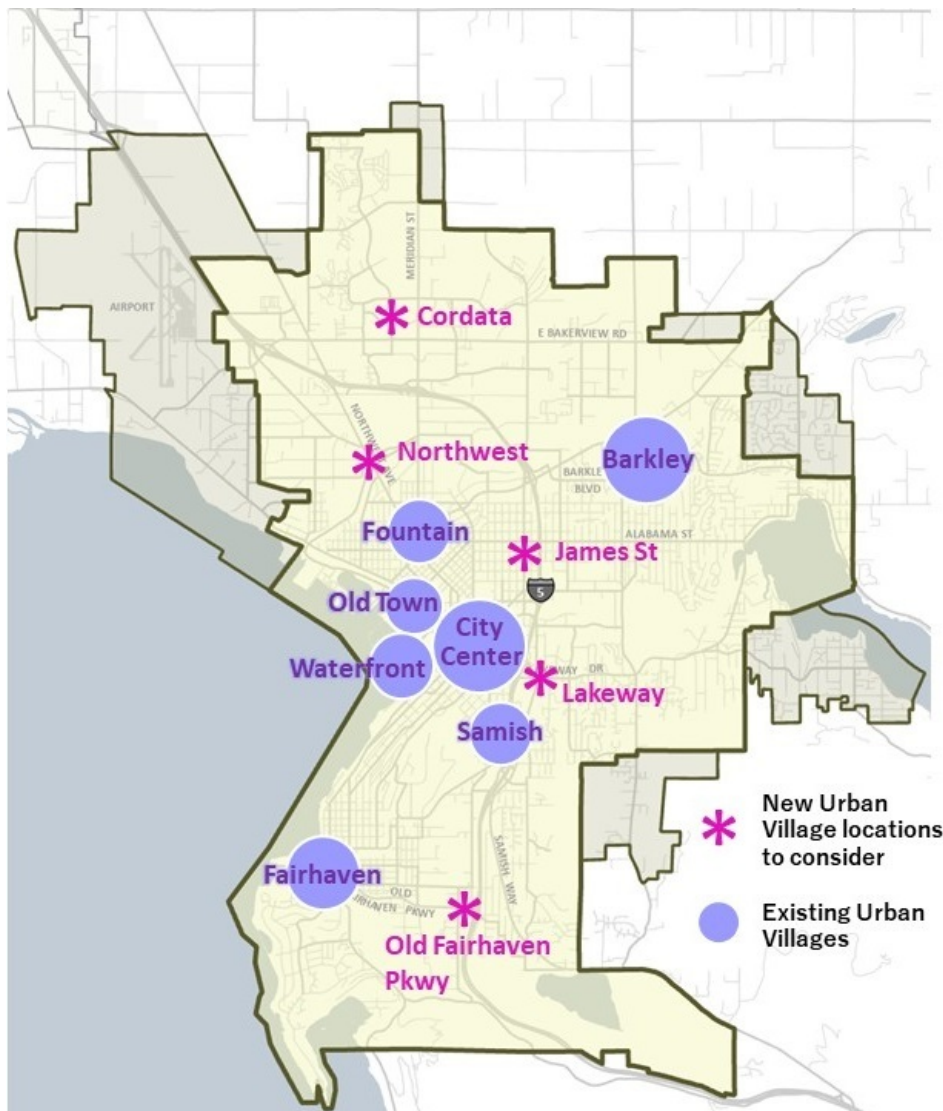
- Better access to transit in these areas
- More sustainable and efficient development
- Ability to focus services and errands in one area
- Arts, culture, and gathering spaces in one area
- Creating safe and welcoming pedestrian environment
- Economic opportunities for new businesses
- Are there other benefits? Please describe:

* 2. What, if any, are your biggest concerns with this approach? Choose your top two (2).

- Not enough parking will be provided, making access difficult
- Traffic in those areas might be too heavy and intense
- Housing units might be too small
- There might not be enough green/open space for recreation and beauty
- Living in those areas might feel too cramped, noisy, or otherwise unpleasant
- Areas near these Urban Villages might be impacted by this increased development
- No concerns – I love it!
- Are there other concerns? Please describe:



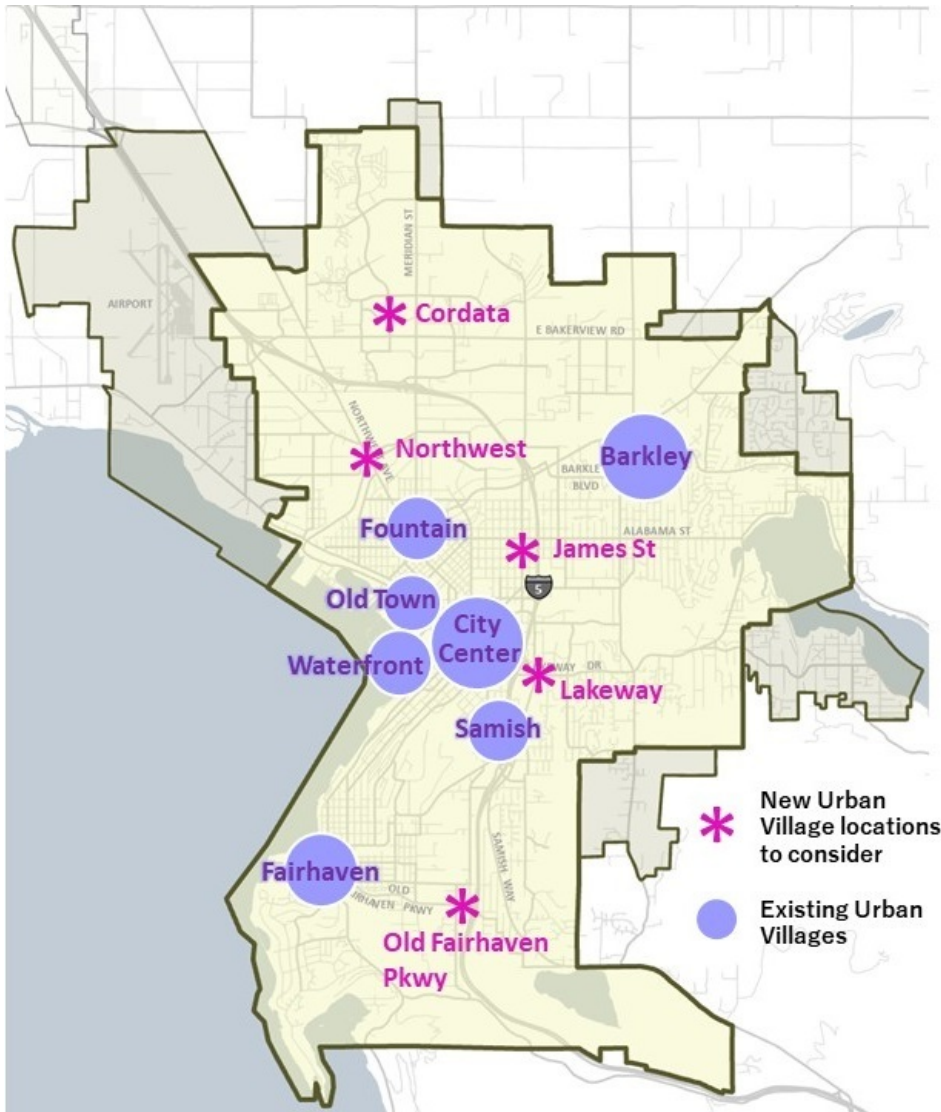
How should we grow, Bellingham? New Urban Village(s)



* 3. In what area(s) of the city would you like to see a new Urban Village with more significant mixed-use (housing, retail, office, etc.) development? Use the map for location references. Choose your top two (2).

- James Street Corridor (between Iowa Street and Illinois Street)
- Old Fairhaven Parkway/I-5 exit
- Cordata
- Lakeway
- Northwest
- No additional Urban Villages

4. Are we missing any places? Is there another area (outside those already indicated) where you would like to see more vibrant mixed-use development that include housing and are welcoming of pedestrians? Click on the map to show where it is. If you do not want to add one, either skip this question or click in Bellingham Bay.





How should we grow, Bellingham?

Housing

5. Following adoption of the Bellingham Plan, “Middle Housing” (which includes triplexes, townhomes, ADUs and more), will be allowed in essentially all of Bellingham’s neighborhoods. New State legislation requires cities of Bellingham’s size to allow a variety of housing types, up to four units per lot, and in some cases, up to six units. While this type of housing will be allowed throughout all of Bellingham, there are ways the City can encourage more of it in specific locations. The additional density will occur incrementally over time and changes will be gradual over many years.

Thinking ahead, where do you think the City should encourage more middle housing to occur? (pick one)

- On the edges and perimeters of Urban Villages
- On high-frequency transit routes (such as WTA GO Lines)
- Anywhere in the city, driven by the market, with no location prioritization

6. As Bellingham grows, we need to be intentional about requiring subsidized affordable housing units in new developments. Accommodating these units will require trade-offs. If you were/are looking for an affordable rental in Bellingham, which option would you prefer?

- A bigger unit, but farther away from goods and services – a car would likely be needed to get around
- A smaller unit, but closer to goods and services - walking, biking, and using transit would be easier
- No preference
- Prefer not to answer

7. Based on feedback we have received so far, community members would like to see more two-bedroom units in Bellingham. How would you like to see these units incorporated into our city?

- In a centrally located area close to goods and services, with units that are likely smaller in size within larger apartment buildings
- Dispersed throughout the city, in middle housing types like townhomes or cottages
- A combination of both



How should we grow, Bellingham?

Visiting Businesses

8. When considering growth options, we need to be mindful of where industrial, commercial, and general employment areas are located. When thinking of your typical errands (grocery, hardware, pharmacy, etc.), what matters most to you?

- Cheapest price of goods – I will drive or find a way to get to the store with the best deals
- Closest to me – I am willing to spend more money for the convenience of the nearest shop
- A mixture – it depends on how much time, or access to transportation I have
- Neither, because I order most things online



How should we grow, Bellingham? Expanding the City Boundary

* 9. One of the ways to accommodate future growth could be to allow for development in new areas, expanding beyond the city boundary where it is already allowed. What do you see as the biggest benefits to this approach? Select up to two (2).

- It provides more land for new development, easing pressure on the existing supply
- It allows for a mix of housing types affordable to a wide range of incomes
- It would develop with a complete and connected street and trail network
- It provides housing closer to nature and greenery
- It provides opportunity for more quiet, suburban development
- It provides intentionally planned communities, with a town center feel
- None of the above
- I need to know more before I consider benefits

* 10. When thinking about potential expansion, what are you most concerned about?
Choose up to two (2).

- Encroachment on agricultural land and farms
- Encroachment on natural resources and wildlife
- Loss of existing tree canopy
- Cost for utilities, roads, and emergency services
- More traffic and greenhouse gas emissions through vehicle use
- Lack of public transit
- Less affordable larger homes on larger lots
- None of the above
- I need to know more before I consider concerns



How should we grow, Bellingham?

Trees

11. Trees are a value to our community. There are different ways to distribute and retain the same number of trees throughout the city. When considering trees and new housing, which scenario do you prefer?

Focused development along transit corridors and urban villages, with larger concentrations of trees nearby and scattered throughout the city

Development more evenly distributed across the city, with trees intermixed with all development but fewer concentrations of trees.



How should we grow, Bellingham?

Small Businesses

12. Community members have expressed a desire to have more small-scale commercial amenities throughout Bellingham, like cafés, plant stores, or hair salons. How open are you to having these types of amenities in your neighborhood, within walking distance, or allowed across Bellingham more generally?

- This sounds wonderful!
- I like the idea, but don't want to experience impacts like more people, noise, and cars in my neighborhood
- I am neutral
- I don't like the idea
- I need more information

* 13. What are your concerns, if any, about allowing for more commercial amenities in traditionally residential areas? Choose up to two (2).

- Lack of parking for residents, clients, and visitors
- Noises, odors, or other nuisance impacts from businesses (i.e. music classes, shop/machinery, cooking)
- Increased traffic from shipments or customers
- Aesthetics and signage
- Safety concerns, such as the potential for fire hazards near homes
- No concerns
- Other (please describe):



How should we grow, Bellingham?

Demographics

You're almost done! The following brief questions include optional demographics to help us better understand who we are reaching.

14. Everyone who cares about Bellingham can take part. Do you live, work, go to school, and/or visit Bellingham?

- I live in Bellingham
- I live outside Bellingham but work and/or go to school in Bellingham
- I live and work/go to school in Bellingham
- I visit Bellingham



How should we grow, Bellingham? Neighborhood

15. What neighborhood do you live in? See [the neighborhood map](#) if needed.

- Birchwood
- Cornwall Park
- Barkley
- Columbia
- Lettered Streets
- Sunnyland
- Roosevelt
- Alabama Hill
- Silver Beach
- City Center
- York
- Puget
- Whatcom Falls
- Sehome
- WWU
- South Hill
- Happy Valley

- Samish
- Fairhaven
- Edgemoor
- South
- Meridian
- Cordata
- King Mountain
- Irongate



How should we grow, Bellingham? Final Demographics

16. Age

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65+

17. Disability Identity

- Visible Disability
- Invisible Disability
- No Disability
- Prefer not to answer

18. Race/Ethnicity

- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- White or Caucasian
- Multiracial or Biracial
- A race or ethnicity not listed here

19. Student Status

- Full-time
- Part-time
- Not a student

20. Gender Identity

- Woman
- Man
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- None of these

21. Household Income

- Under \$25,000
- \$25,001-\$50,000
- \$50,001-\$75,000
- \$75,000-\$100,000
- Above \$100,000

22. Homeownership Status

- I own my home
- I rent my home
- Other

23. If you would like to sign up for project updates and be entered into a prize drawing for one of several gift cards to local businesses, please provide your name and email. Your information will not be used in association with your survey answers.

Email address