

Summary of Consolidated Plan survey

Survey details

- Open November 5, 2017 – February 5, 2018
- Survey was available online and distributed in hardcopy to agencies that serve low-income residents (e.g., UnityCare NW) and low-income housing properties (e.g., Walton Place, Washington Square).
- 865 total responses:
 - ~700 general public (non-agency, not low-income) or did not answer demographics questions
 - 117 agency staff serving low-income residents with housing or other services
 - 46 low-income residents receiving housing assistance or other services
 - 97% live or work in Bellingham
 - 9 Spanish language responses
- Participants could choose to answer questions on some or all of the following topics:
 - Homelessness
 - Affordable housing
 - Community development & Human services

Homelessness

Participants were asked to choose two homeless housing programs which the City should prioritize over the next few years (among 6 types of programs). Priorities selected between the general public and agency staff differed greatly.

- Agency staff prioritized permanent supportive housing (53%), transitional housing (29%), and single room occupancy housing (26%). Rapid rehousing was ranked lowest (20%).
- The general public prioritized transitional housing (46%), emergency shelter (32%), and single room occupancy and permanent supportive housing (both 28%). Rent payment assistance was ranked lowest (12%).
- About 4% of respondents thought the City should not provide any housing programs for the homeless.

The top priorities for homeless services did not differ by group. Mental health/behavioral health was selected as the clear priority (69%). Access to treatment for addiction/substance abuse was second (45%), followed by job training and employment programs (26%).

One way in which Spanish language responses differed was that they prioritized job training and employment programs (63%), followed by peer-to-peer support/mentorship (50%).

Affordable housing

Participants were asked to choose the top two problems (among 9 options) related to affordable housing. They identified:

- Most of the jobs here don't pay enough to afford the cost of housing (38%)
- Rents have increased too much (38%)
- Low-income and working families can no longer afford to live here (37%)

These problems were ranked in the same order by low-income residents as the general public.

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The solutions prioritized to address affordable housing issues were a bit more spread out, but the top priorities of the general public were to:

- Build or purchase more housing for low (or mixed) income residents (51%)
- Recruit companies that will bring higher wage jobs to town (39%)
- Change zoning to allow backyard cottages, ADUs, and infill development in all neighborhoods (31%).

Among agency staff, the clear priority was also to build or purchase more housing (74%). The next highest priority was to change zoning to allow multi-family units in more neighborhoods (36%), and also to change zoning to allow more backyard cottages, ADUs, and infill development (36%).

Community development & Human services

Participants were asked which public facilities and improvements the City should prioritize for low-income residents. Both the general public and low-income residents prioritized the following in the same order. Percentages for low-income residents are shown below.

- Non-profit service facilities (clinics or other places where people can get help) (74%)
- Mobility and transit (32%)
- Community centers or public gathering places (32%)

Low-income residents prioritized street safety (crosswalks, lighting, speed bumps, etc.) more highly compared to the general public (26% compared to 15%).

Participants were asked which two types of services the City should prioritize for funding.

- The general public prioritized mental and behavioral health services above all (70%), but also selected housing support services like case management (49%) and affordable childcare (40%).
- Agency staff had the same order of priorities as the general public, though affordable childcare was rated even more highly (47%).
- Low income residents prioritized housing support services first (56%), then mental and behavioral health services (50%) and affordable childcare (38%). Low-income residents also prioritized legal and/or mediation assistance more highly than the general public.

Participants were asked to select three special needs populations which the City should prioritize for more help. Corresponding to the service needs above, the top three populations selected among all groups were:

- People with mental illness (49%)
- Families with children or single parents (48%)
- People experiencing homelessness (43%)

There were some variation between the groups, however. Agency staff were more likely to prioritize youth and young adults (31%) and people with a criminal record (15%), while those who don't work for an agency were more likely to prioritize victims of domestic violence (27%). Low income respondents were more likely to prioritize seniors (41%).

Another way in which Spanish language respondents differed from other groups is that they prioritized seniors (75%) and people with physical impairment (63%) as the populations most in need of extra help.