

City of Bellingham One City Project: City Image and Logo

Summary of Brainstorming Sessions

Mayor Mark Asmundson is commissioning a new logo for the City of Bellingham. The graphic design firm of YaM Studio has been hired to create the logo, as well as an application package that will allow the logo to be used for all city departments and functions. To begin the logo design process, a series of three brainstorming sessions were conducted in April-May 2006. Those sessions are summarized here.

Several logo alternatives will be created for a second round of review in summer 2006. Additional sessions to obtain feedback on the logo alternatives will be scheduled at that time. It is anticipated that the logo will be designed in final form in August 2006.

Session One: Mayor's Department Head Team

The first brainstorming session occurred on April 24 at a regularly-scheduled meeting of the city Department Head team. Twenty Department Heads and Executive Staff attended this session and offered these ideas:

Major Themes: What is the essence of Bellingham?

History and Future

- The logo must have staying power – we need something that does not get dated. We are not 1980 OR 2006 – we are 2020 AND 1890. We respect our history, but we are moving into the future. We are forward looking, but our past makes us unique.
- This city keeps being reborn – we are always rediscovering ourselves.
- We have preserved, and have been reshaped, by the past.
- We are transforming ourselves – Bellingham's history was all about the exploitation of resources/environmental degradation. We are leaving our robber baron past behind.
- We are forward looking and confident in our future.

Nature of the Community

- The logo should serve as a unifying force – we are “the city” – your city government. There has to be a “totality” of the presentation...your city government at work for you.
- The logo should convey stewardship and service.
- Bellingham has an independent streak. We are a diverse community.
- We still have hippies!
- Bellingham is reasonable in size. We are comfortable. We have easy living.
- We are not a suburb of anywhere. And, we don't have suburbs.

- We are a people who control our own destiny.
- We are sophisticated – we have to convey economic vibrancy.
- The logo has to be about the business of the city. We are responsive, progressive, professional, and community oriented.
- We are more than just mountains and streams.
- Our community is active in civic engagement. We have a passion for this.
- We are bold and unique. The logo should take us from old to new.
- The logo shouldn't be slick. We are not a big city that is slick and expensive.
- There is a sense of warmth and friendliness here. This place is down to earth. There is a real personal connection.
- We have a strong working class/union presence.

Look and Feel

- We have a great natural beauty. The city is approached from the water.
- We should think of the waterfront as a huge amphitheatre. Our future is on the waterfront.
- This city has great architecture.
- We're a city – we are not out in the country.

Icons: What are some physical symbols of Bellingham?

- Mt. Baker
- Mt. Baker Theater
- Museum
- View to the West – the Bay

Session Two: City Identity Project Team

A second brainstorming session took place on the afternoon of April 24. This session included city employees who have been involved in the project since its inception and helped select the Yam Studios team for this work. Some 20 people participated in this meeting.

Major Themes: What is the essence of Bellingham?

History and Future

- Our history is unique.
- We should not lose a sense of our history; we have a respect for it.
- We should recognize the presence of Native Americans.
- Fishing is an important part of our history.

Nature of the Community

- We are a small town, not Seattle LA or Vancouver. We want to stay the little guy.

- The logo should convey energy, activity, movement. We have active, engaged citizens.
- We are sophisticated.
- We should convey sustainability, health, safety – a high quality of life.
- The text logos are effective. We should think in broader strokes. We can say it with the right font.
- We want to convey that we are “one city” We have to let citizens know “where we are in their lives”. The logo should be simple and memorable.
- Our logo has to be distinctive. It has to set us apart from the County.
- The colors should not be flashy or trendy. They should be more conservative; not tacky.
- If we were a car we would be a Prius; a hybrid – a progressive city.
- The logo needs to express our civility. We are nice people.
- We have clean air and clean living.
- We are a well-educated city.
- The street grid system is unique – the four cities coming together.

Look and Feel

- We’re all about the Bay – we are reconnecting to the waterfront. A waterfront without smokestacks.
- We are all about water – the Bay, lakes, streams.
- We are focused on the outdoors.
- The logo should be timeless – mountains and water are not unique to us. We shouldn’t use them as many cities do, in a standard “formulized” way. This is overused. We should have a logo that is more symbolic.

Icons: What are some physical symbols of the city?

- Mt. Baker Theater
- Sailboats on the water
- Whatcom Creek/Falls
- Museum
- The Bay
- Waves
- Trees

Session Three: Key Stakeholders

A third session took place on May 11, and included a wide variety of key stakeholders and interested people, for example, members of the Bellingham City Council and members of various city boards and commissions including the Bellingham Planning Commission and Mayor’s Neighborhood Advisory Committee. Other participants included people associated with the Whatcom Museum and the

Bellingham Public Library. Sixty people were invited to this session; 35 people participated in this session, and offered the following:

Major Themes: What is the essence of Bellingham?

History and Future

- Acknowledge our history, but that isn't all we are. We are progressive and we are looking to the future.
- Our future is on the waterfront. What happens there will shape what we will become.
- Our Native American heritage is important. It links us to both the past and the future.

Nature of the Community

- The logo should convey stewardship – both from government and from our citizenry.
- We are an education city. We have great schools here.
- We have a strong history. We are over 100 years old.
- We are an authentic city – we are not Redmond. We are not a Boom Berg. We have grown up independent of any other city. This gives us a very strong sense of place.
- We are a city of subdued excitement.
- We are casual and outgoing.
- We are an international city – close to the Canadian border.
- This city is about action and activity.
- The logo should convey that we are a community of people – it shouldn't be so focused just on the place.
- We are not superficial or stylized. We are made of solid stuff.
- We are fresh and authentic.
- We have a progressive city government.
- The symbol of the city should be its own icon. We should have a more graphically-generated logo. This would give the logo more tension, and that's what we are about. We want to imply invigoration, change, a sense of opportunity.
- The stewardship and service we provide is so much more important than a building.
- Ninety percent of the businesses in this city have ten people or less.
- We are a spirited city.
- This is a city of neighborhoods, each with its own distinct personality.
- Even as this city grows, there will always be small places to call home.
- Family is important here. This is a safe community, and a place for people of all ages.

- We offer a refreshing change.
- People choose this as a place to live and then they find work here.
- People are truly drawn to this city. They come here for a visit and then they want to move in.

Look and Feel

- We are a transportation hub between Seattle and Vancouver.
- We are trail town USA.
- This is a city that is walkable and that is bicycle friendly.
- The logo could be a Subaru with a kayak on the top and a bike rack on the back.
- We have clean, fresh air here. We just got an award for our air quality.
- We are an outdoor recreation mecca.
- The waterfront is important, and the waterfront redevelopment will shape our future. It provides us with an opportunity that most cities do not have.
- The historic architecture is important.
- Bellingham has an eclectic, funky feel to it.

Icons: What are some physical symbols of the city?

- Museum
- Mt. Baker
- Mt. Baker Theater
- Western Washington University
 - Impact on community
 - Old Main
 - Outdoor sculpture garden
 - Overlooks city
- Buildings on Sehome Hill
- Fairhaven
 - Victorian influence
 - Trail
 - Walkability
 - Funky
 - Taylor Street Dock
 - Essence of “local”
- Harbor area
- Alaska Ferry Terminal
- Brick buildings
- Bicycles
- Sailboat masts in the harbor
- Green – our hillsides and trees

- Greens and blues – healthy colors
- The Bay
- Red brick
- Parkade
- Herald Building and Sign
- Whatcom Creek/Falls
- Two brick towers on the GP site
- The tower at the arboretum
- Bellingham Lions sign on the Boulevard
- Bellingham Towers Building
- Farmers Market
- Boundary Bay
- Meridian corner
- Cornwall Park
- Country Club

Informal Sessions with people who live, work and play in Bellingham

In addition to the formal discussions hosted by the City of Bellingham, the Yam Studios team immersed themselves in Bellingham by taking a week-long “working vacation” in this vibrant, scenic community in May during Ski to Sea. (*Yam Studios’ costs during this time are not included in the city’s contract and were not paid by the City of Bellingham*)

During this time, the Yam Team visited parks, businesses and restaurants. They biked Bellingham trails and ate pizza and ice cream downtown. They participated in Ski to Sea festivities, relaxed on the shores of Lake Whatcom, and visited with a group of Happy Valley neighbors. They shopped at Fountain District shops and Bellis Fair Mall and dined on the waterfront.

All along the way, they talked to people individually and in small groups and for a short time they were “Bellinghamsters.” This immersion in the people, culture and beauty of this community helped Yam Studios appreciate further how the citizens view city government and city services, and why they care so much about Bellingham. The experience they gained will be greatly reflected in logo designs presented to the community for their review.