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APA WASHINGTON NEWSLETTER
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Bellingham's Urban Village TIF Reduction Program Wins 2012 Transportation Planning Award

By Chris Comeau, AICP

Bellingham transportation planners received the 2012 Award for Transportation Planning for the Urban Village TIF Reduction Program. The award was announced at the Washington Chapter APA conference held last month in Olympia. While this award is unlikely to quiet misinformed local activists who have their own theories about TIF, or those who simply don't think they should have to pay TIF, it is clear validation from the planning profession that Bellingham has integrated goals for mixed use infill development, multimodal transportation, and economic development to create the most progressive TIFs in Washington.

Under authority of the state's Growth Management Act (GMA), Bellingham has assessed TIFs for new development and redevelopment to recover a proportional share of the City's investment in transportation infrastructure to accommodate growth. On a citywide basis, Bellingham recovers only about 20 percent of the transportation funds invested each year. In some parts of the City, the recovery rate is even lower. Despite on-going complaints about TIF from developers, business owners, and some policy makers, Bellingham's TIF rate is relatively low compared to those charged in other Washington cities. In fact, a 2010 study revealed that Bellingham's TIF rates were in the lowest 30 percent, and far below the average TIF in the state:

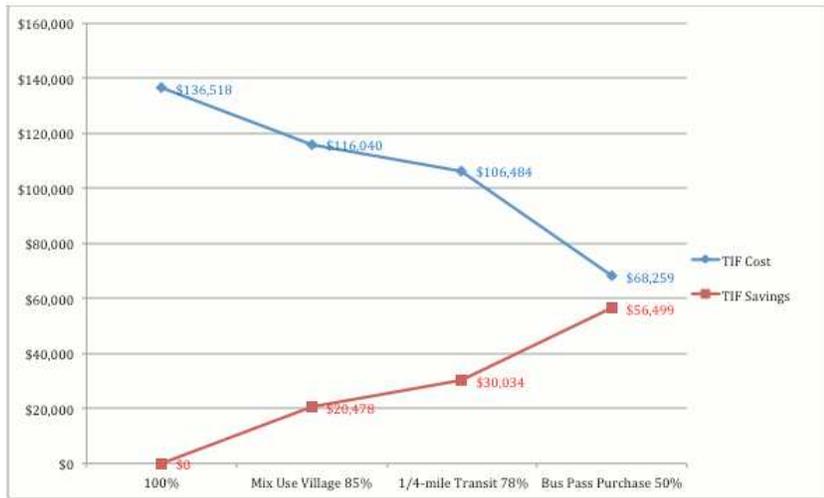
<http://www.cob.org/documents/pw/transportation/compare-2010-tif-western-wa.pdf>

Since 1995, Bellingham has invested millions of transportation dollars to make the Downtown and Arts District more pedestrian, bicycle, and transit-friendly. Wider sidewalks, curb extensions, marked and flashing crosswalks, and road diets or parking removal to install bike lanes are among the techniques applied for that purpose. Millions of dollars more have been invested to improve access to the Downtown and Arts District for all transportation modes.

To further promote comprehensive plan goals for mixed use urban infill, and to create more financial incentives for new development in designated Urban Villages, the city's transportation planners created the Urban Village TIF Reduction Program in 2010. The program is based on legally-defensible practices using ITE trip generation methodology, and widely-accepted practices within the field of transportation planning and engineering. Learn more about the basis for this program at: <http://www.cob.org/documents/pw/transportation/uv-tif-faq-2012.pdf>

In addition to the citywide 100 percent credit for previous uses, Urban Village development is rewarded with an automatic 15 percent trip reduction for a mixed use location and an automatic 7 to 10 percent trip reduction for proximity to high-frequency public transit. Vehicle trips, and thus TIF, can be further reduced, by as much as 50 percent, through purchase of bus passes, car share memberships, or other transportation demand management strategies.

As the following example demonstrates, Bellingham's Urban Village TIF Reduction Program has saved developers and business owners tens of thousands of dollars since it began in 2011. At the same time, the fee reduction program helps to fulfill the community's policy emphasis on mixed use infill development and multimodal transportation.



Please visit the following link to see the Urban Village locations that are eligible for TIF reduction, and more examples of the substantial cost savings derived for qualifying projects:
<http://www.cob.org/documents/pw/transportation/impact-fee-comparison-pie-charts.pdf>

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