

Engage Bellingham Results Summary (March-July 2015)



City of Bellingham

Comprehensive Plan Update

Engage Bellingham Overview

Earlier this year, the city launched [Engage Bellingham](#), a new community engagement website where citizens can connect, communicate and collaborate with decision makers and other residents on the future of our community. The goal is to involve broad representation of citizens in the planning process. Along the way, [Engage Bellingham](#) will be used as an online tool to generate new ideas and feedback from citizens using this interactive and accessible platform.

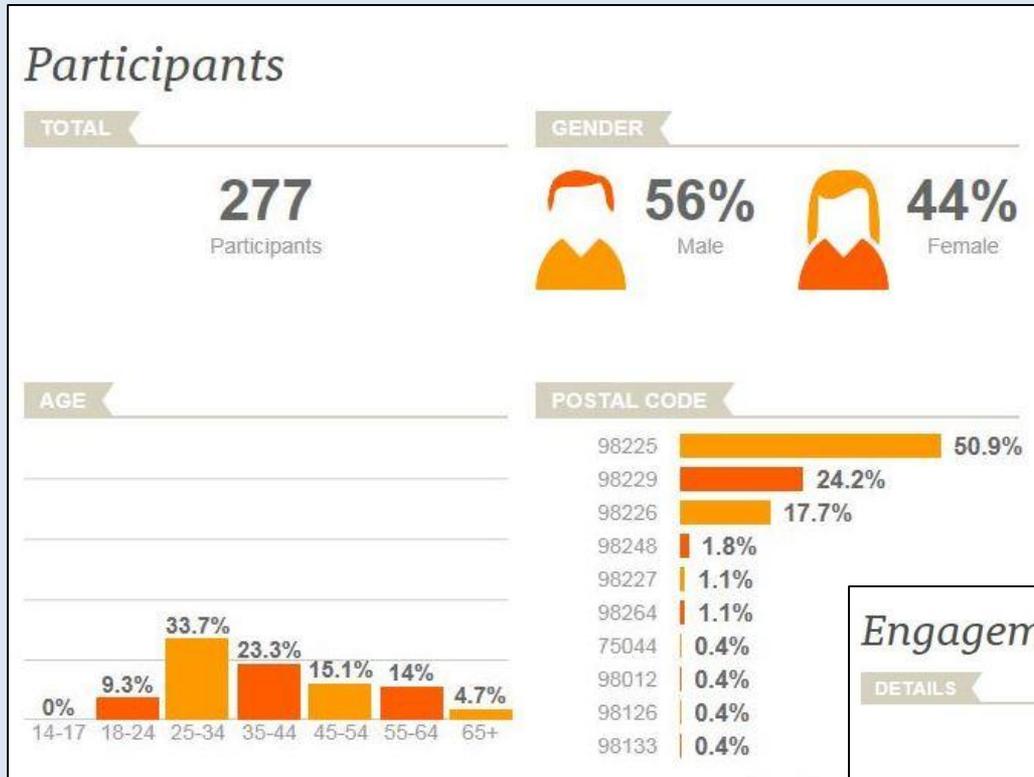
The discussion started with the following questions, and branched off from there based on input:

- What are you most concerned about as the city grows?
- What can we do to create a more sustainable community as we grow?

A few weeks ago, the site hosting the conversations, MindMixer, received a new look and is now called mySidewalk. The results summarized in this report include input received via the prior site from March through July. Summary statistics and sample ideas with the most interactions are listed for each open-ended question. Full results are also available via a separate "Idea Report".

The City encourages residents to share their ideas, be heard and build a better community through participation in Engage Bellingham. Go to mysidewalk.com today and register to provide your feedback.

Summary Statistics



Question 1: Our Growing City

What are you most concerned about as the city grows? Pick two options.

197 interactions

374 votes

- Increased crime 76 votes
- Impacts on rural and agricultural lands 74 votes
- Increased traffic 69 votes
- Environmental impacts, incl. air and water quality 67 votes
- Impacts on neighborhood character 60 votes
- Impacts on the “small town” feel of Bellingham 28 votes

Question 2: Sustainable Communities

What can we do to create a more sustainable community as we grow?

201 interactions

62 ideas

94 participants

“Denser development has less environmental footprint, brings economies of scale for public transportation, more cost-effective for City infrastructure, and takes the pressure off of existing single-family neighborhoods to accommodate growth.”

“Let’s buy run-down hotels on Samish and building urban villages of 600-1200sq single family homes for lower-middle-class working families. More efficient, community oriented, green community to work etc.”

“Compelling research shows public health goes up, negative environmental impact goes down and economies thrive when people are given housing options (supported by transit options) that are close to where they work, play, shop and study. We have an opportunity and an obligation to provide leadership in growth management, just as we have in clean energy, energy efficiency, local economic development, green building, local food and farm support, not to mention great schools, parks, and much more. Thanks!”

Question 3: Neighborhood Character

How can we retain and enhance the character of our existing neighborhoods while also accommodating new residents?

113 interactions

27 ideas

39 participants

“Encourage infill, allow small lot sizes, incentives for ADUs, allow smaller/tiny houses, co-housing, publicly subsidized rentals and home ownership. Design review to ensure compatibility with other surrounding land uses. Allow flexibility for mixing types of residential, commercial and industrial uses. Allow experimental housing types. Encourage WWU and WCC to build more housing.”

“The way this question is worded assumes that ALL new residents purchase a NEW housing rather than an EXISTING one. Since more existing homes are sold each year than new ones, this assumption is simply not valid. Most neighborhoods in Bellingham accommodate new residents without any impact on neighborhood character, simply because these new residents move into existing homes. A better question would be, “How can we retain and enhance the character of our existing neighborhoods while also accommodating new DEVELOPMENT?” See the difference: new RESIDENTS vs. new DEVELOPMENT...”

Question 4: Affordable Homes

How can we make single-family homes affordable to future generations?

90 interactions

21 ideas

27 participants

“I don’t believe the problem of affordability is well defined. Are we talking about helping PEOPLE who already live here afford a home? Or are we talking about building inexpensive HOMES to attract people to move here. If we’re talking about the latter, before someone moves here, wouldn’t it be wise to first determine if they could afford to live here? That is really more a function of income than housing affordability. In this case, wouldn’t it be better to focus on increasing the number of higher paying jobs?...”

“The only way this will happen is a substantial decline in inequality. That would require policy changes such as substantial (not marginal) increases in the minimum wage and the earned income credit, or a guaranteed annual income. It would also require a far less regressive tax system, including a progressive income tax, lower property and sales taxes, taxes on Wall Street transactions, higher estate taxes, etc. Not much of this is likely to happen. Absent these changes, the wealthy (including foreigners and retirees from elsewhere in the country) will price the poor and middle class out of this market...”

Question 5: Rising Housing Costs

As housing costs increase region-wide, what alternatives to traditional single-family homes should be investigated?

115 interactions

25 ideas

34 participants

“Organize groupings of single family homes in the 600-1000 sq ft range into urban villages. These homes could be ultra efficient using techniques learned in the tiny-house movement, but apply them to more realistic sized homes for families from 2-5. Bellingham is the perfect place to pioneer such endeavors with its forward thinking and eco-friendly population.”

“Single-family homes are what the vast majority of us want, but they don’t have to have Bellingham’s traditional big yards, setbacks from the street, etc. We need flexibility for variety. Allow use of the infill toolkit in all residential zones. Encourage accessory dwelling units in all residential zones – and have a file of pre-approved plans that can be built without further ado, and allow other plans to go through the normal planning process. We have rules on how much of a lot can be covered and how high homes can be – stick with those...”

Question 6: Reducing Housing Costs

When is it appropriate for government to underwrite or reduce the cost of housing in Bellingham?

72 interactions

19 ideas

30 participants

“If the city and school board collected the full proportionate share of these growth costs, there would be \$7 million to \$8 million every year available to provide housing assistance for long-term Bellingham residents who really need it. A portion of that could be used to reduce property taxes. Why do we currently subsidize the cost of a new house that will be purchased by someone moving to Bellingham from another state?...”

“It has always seemed odd to me that when we upzone an area and land values increase significantly overnight we give that increased value away for free and then when the public seeks a downzone that is considered a “take” and needs to be purchased at the new increased market value. We could pay for a lot of affordable housing if we taxed the “GIVES” when upzones are put in place. This would be done by creating areas where density is available for purchase with cash or by providing a certain number of units of affordable housing...”

Question 7: Quality of Life

What specific strategies can be developed to keep Bellingham a great place to live?

153 interactions

33 ideas

49 participants

“I suggest the citizens, led by our city government, have a serious discussion of the kind of future we want for the city. A key element of that desired future is the amount (if any) of population growth we want to occur in the city (and, perhaps, in the county). My sense is most of the inputs to and work on comprehensive plans is from people with a vested interest in growth. Average citizens either don't have time or don't know how to make their voices heard.”

“We need to preserve and protect our neighborhoods, making sure each has quality of life amenities. When people feel good about their neighborhoods, they fix the roof, paint their house and are more involved in the community, rather than thinking about where they should move to.”

Question 8: Focusing Limited Resources

On what issues should the city focus its limited resources to make Bellingham a better place to live, work and play?

59 interactions

16 ideas

29 participants

“Stable zoning in our single family neighborhoods make residents feel that the city values our neighborhoods. If people have predictability regarding what can be built next to them, they have more energy to fix up their neighborhood or be more involved in the community. Some areas have covenants to protect them and provide the predictability. In neighborhoods without covenants, people count on the city to not change the development rules.”

“It’s a walk in the park, we all know that people need to talk to a support system to get over their problems. The money we save putting people behind bars and serving them three meals a day can be better spent on treatment.”