

Legislative Proposal Request Form

- **Title** (*Should be short and articulate the subject of the proposal*): Student Housing
- **Sponsor(s)** (*Groups that are supporting this proposal*): If passed, LAC and the AS will be the sponsors
- **Describe the issue** (*What is the problem, why should Western work on it, and what is the solution?*): There is currently a huge shortage of rental units in Bellingham. The renter to homeowner ratio used to be 40:60, but in recent years this ratio has flipped. The ratio of people looking to rent to available rental units has left the power in landlords' hands. The upcoming Rental Registration and Inspection system that the City is approving will help to alleviate this power dynamic by providing a codified means for controlling health and safety hazards that tenants have previously had to overlook in favor of having a place to live. With the program, an unknown number of rental units are likely to be either made temporarily unavailable for rent while repairs are made or closed down entirely if conditions have deteriorated beyond reparability. While the number of these units is unknown, any decrease in housing availability will only increase the demand on an already under-supplied system. Regardless of how many units the program affects, more rental units need to be available for students and community members alike.
- **What are you advocating for** (*Specify the legislative action you are looking for*): We are advocating for increased student housing, specifically along Samish Way. This would increase the amount of housing available and decrease the crime that occurs. We would like to see the lot that currently houses the Aloha Motel to be developed for student housing. Since the owners of the Aloha rejected the City's offer to buy the lot, however, we will have less ability to advocate for specific development since the lot will likely be purchased by private developers. The Aloha has not officially been condemned yet (the City's Legal Department is in the process of doing so through the courts), so this is a long-term goal. This is also why we are advocating for there to be development along all of Samish Way and not just this particular lot. As it stands, this lot is the most likely candidate for development since it will be vacant in the foreseeable future. If this proposal is included as part of the Local Agenda, a large portion of this will be meeting with members of the Planning Department to determine on what aspects of property development we can have input.
- **Who do you have as support so far?** (*Identify at least one legislator who would be willing to sponsor a bill for this issue, and list any organizations or individuals that would support the proposed action*): The Mayor is in support of putting student housing at the location where the Aloha currently is and offered to support us directly if we put it on our Local Agenda. She also indicated that council members would also likely be in favor of this. This proposal also aligns with the City's goal for infilling and would therefore likely receive support from the City's government at large.

- **Who needs to be moved/potential opposition?** *(Identify specific legislators, committees, and organizations):* Potential opposition include residents of this area, potential developers, and the Hearing Examiner who ultimately rules on development issues. Because this area lacks a significant number of residents, however, the opposition may come from a small – but likely vocal – minority.
- **Provide any legislative background and context for the issue.** *(Has this issue been worked on recently, how far did it get, other legislative history, where is the public at with issue, etc.):* Previous attempts have been made to rectify the situation, the University Ridge being the most prominent of these. It received incredible opposition, however, due to its poorly chosen proposed location. The proposed development was in the middle of many single-family neighborhoods and was on a street that already had limited visibility and traffic issues. Ultimately the development was denied due to the overwhelming opposition. Another proposed project deemed as “student housing” in the Sehome neighborhood received opposition from the neighborhood due to its proximity to single-family homes and the perceived lack of proper parking options for the development. The section that we would be advocating to be developed for rental units would be Samish Way approximately from where the Aloha Hotel currently is to the end of the strip, approximately where the Wendy’s is at the intersection of Samish and Bill McDonald. This strip has businesses and hotels along it and currently only has about 253 residents. Many organizations and committees have looked at how to redevelop this area so as to decrease the amount of crime and general “sketchiness” (for lack of a better word). By making this area more populated and by developing areas that would otherwise be used for illegal or undesirable activities, this proposal will benefit the students by providing them with places to live and decreasing the amount of crime in areas close to the university, and will benefit the community at large by decreasing crime in this area and helping to achieve the City’s infill goals.