

An In-Depth Analysis of Urban and Suburban Growth in Neighborhoods Within Bellingham, Washington

Kara Roberts – Undergraduate Geography/Geography Information Systems/English Literature

Jennifer Egan – Undergraduate Geography-Social Studies Education/Geography Information Systems

Western Washington University – 516 High St., Bellingham Washington 98225

Email: robertk5@cc.wwu.edu

eganj2@cc.wwu.edu

Conclusion:

Introduction:

The city of Bellingham and its neighborhoods have provided populations of people throughout the years with positive characteristics of maintaining a good quality of life opportunity where families and visitors can thrive. Through our findings of researching population, housing, and socio-economic trends within the neighborhoods on an individual basis, it helped to not only decide where the great locations were located, but also helped to develop a framework of what characteristics are important to these populations. With this framework, the goal is to educate these populations to make intelligent choices on where to live and visit based on their needs, wants, desires, and their ideas of what is attractive to them. This research concluded in a general scope that each neighborhood has something different to offer, which enhances the character of the city of Bellingham as a whole. By doing this research, it gives citizens and visitors the chance of learning what each neighborhood has to offer on an individual level, and then choose which variables are most important in choosing the right neighborhood for them.

Significance and Value of Data:

In order to achieve the goal of analyzing the neighborhoods of Bellingham as well as the attractiveness in Bellingham as a whole, this information provides evidence of significant features that are of importance when people choose to visit an area or call a specific place their home. For population data, it provides people with the knowledge of knowing where heavily populated areas are, where areas of ethnicity are, and where possible income brackets are. For a city or neighborhood to function in a well-organized way, people of the same income status and a well balance of population demographics allows for the overall productivity and functionality of the sector. With discrepancies or gaps within certain sectors of these variables, people are often struggling to meet the quality of life that is optimal for the neighborhood or city.

For socio-economic data such as ethnicities, home/land median values, and age dispersion within a neighborhood, it is easy to draw conclusions on why these groups are located in the areas that they are.

Age Demographics

Young Age Group (0-17)

In terms of the younger age breakdown of the neighborhoods, many young families with children are located in areas outside of the Central Business District and the Guide Meridian neighborhoods respectively. This age group avoids areas of commercial and industrial zoning and prefers neighborhoods that are more strictly residential. Neighborhoods such as Roosevelt, Silver Beach, Whatcom Falls (eastern Bellingham) have traditionally been known for their parks, schools, and other features that adhere to the desires locating in this area for families with children of this age bracket. This leads us to conclude that many children within the age brackets of 5-17 year olds and younger adults starting families, within the age bracket of 30-39 see these features as a priority when choosing where to live and visit.

Middle Age Group (18-49)

The age group 18-29 congregates around the Western Washington University neighborhood. They are attracted to this area because it is close to the college, the rent is cheap, and needed amenities are close. Happy Valley and Sehome are the two neighborhoods where their renting occupancy is higher than ownership occupancy. Many students have a lower income and require cheaper living, along with easy access to jobs. This age group is more likely to use public transportation for school and work purposes. This neighborhood is attractive for them since it supplies the location of one of its two major transportation hubs. This age group does not have to provide for a family so location of family oriented features are not important to this group at this time.

This age group from 30-49 congregate along the coastline neighborhoods that hold residential (South Hill, Edgemoor, Fairhaven, Birchwood) and within the northern part of the city (Roosevelt, Sunnyland, Cornwall, Columbia). These neighborhoods are attractive for families due to parks, schools, and other family oriented features. The quality of life around these areas is higher here for a few reasons. One reason is that the atmosphere of these neighborhoods are more kept since there is a greater emphasis on maintaining the attractive landscape versus less kept up areas around the colleges. These areas are more expensive because of the more attractive environment. Another reason quality of life is higher is because of the urban center effect. Urban centers are areas where all urban amenities are placed within a walking distance of a quarter of a mile distance. There are numerous urban centers located in these neighborhoods. This and the proximity to interstate five add to the family's convenience.

Older Age Group (50 and Up)

This group is the most dynamic since Bellingham has been known as a retirement community for years. They too are attracted to the natural environment Bellingham contains while also wanting to have urban centers nearby. Due to their retirement status, they no longer have to provide for a family and therefore seek out more expensive housing along coastal and lake zones. They have less interest in residing near parks and schools where children are in mass densities. Their financial stability allows them to afford waterfront views, or areas with more property. If they are not interested in more space or are interested in being near more amenities Bellingham provides ample opportunities for high end retirement condominiums and apartments.

Ethnicity Demographics

Bellingham has been a predominantly white city. We see the trend changing as we approach the year 2000 where ethnicity numbers have nearly doubled from 1990. Being that Bellingham is characterized as a coastal city on Bellingham Bay and its proximity to Vancouver, British Columbia and Seattle, Washington, it acts as a site for many of ethnic backgrounds to either travel to or live in. In addition, with Bellingham being a college town to Western Washington University, this allows for the increase in Bellingham's diversity demographics as well. Some of the most major ethnicities that we found within the Bellingham neighborhoods are: Asian, Hispanic, American Eskimo, and people of multiple ethnicities. Most of these populations are found within the Roosevelt, Happy Valley, Western Washington University, and Guide Meridian neighborhoods. These centers of ethnic populations are driven by the opportunity of higher education (Western Washington University and Whatcom Community College), economic opportunities (business and industry), and lower income housing.

Housing Demographics

In general Bellingham is a middle class city in comparison to other cities in Washington State. Bellingham offers every opportunity when it comes to buying and renting homes, apartments, and condominiums. Due to the vast distribution of income levels in Bellingham, ranging from low income college students to financial stable retirees, Bellingham is a great place for people of various status and ethnicities to live there. The better well maintained neighborhoods that offer accommodations to families and retirees overall hold the reputation of being neighborhoods that have the higher number of purchased homes. As a result the opportunity to rent units in these neighborhoods is less. These areas are located in the north and east regions of the city. In places where cheaper residential units are desired, they are often times more populated areas and offer a more diversified population as well. These are located within the inner city or college areas of the city, in and around Downtown Bellingham.

Attractive Neighborhoods (Recommendations)

Depending on the needs of the individual thinking about coming to reside in Bellingham, there could be a number of choices and variables taken into consideration. When deciding what neighborhood best fits their lifestyle and needs, the variables analyzed in this project will assist in their final decision. From our analysis we recommend that the most optimal neighborhood take into account characteristics including: well maintained landscapes, affordable housing for the majority of residents, proximity to urban centers, and a balanced spread of diverse population. Our findings suggest that the neighborhoods of Whatcom Falls, Silver Beach, Alabama Hill, Roosevelt, Mount Baker, and Puget meet the requirements that are of the greatest priority to the average citizen. With its proximity to natural features, urban centers, and Interstate 5, this enables citizens to reach any destination needed. In addition, housing is affordable for nearly every income bracket and appears to be a more equal opportunity region in comparison to other neighborhoods in Bellingham.

Use in Other Studies and Lessons Learned:

In researching these phenomena that occur within different sectors of a city, this information is useful in detecting both positive and negative effects that socio-economic factors have on neighborhoods within a city. This information provides city, county, and state officials with indicators of the progression of cities and neighborhoods and allows for the examination of whether they are reaching the optimal quality of life for their