

## Year-End Report – 2022

### 2022 Reflections

2022 was a big year for the Downtown Bellingham Partnership – in part due to a host of new programs, but also because we were finally able to do our events in earnest. In addition, we experienced some changes in staffing, which really propelled the organization forward.

The first quarter of the year was spent in planning activities and starting in the second quarter, things began to accelerate. We held our first Downtown Neighborhood Association meeting to a packed house at Boundary Bay Brewery's beer garden in April, where we were able to roll out a host of new programs. Since the Partnership and City leaderships heard from the community that safety and security were rising as top priorities in the district, this meeting allowed us to convey that we had heard them and that we were launching some programs in response.

In attendance were representatives of RSU private security, Streetplus (who we contracted with to do the Safety Ambassador program), Kenny Austin from our team to discuss his work and the new Graffiti Abatement Program, DBP staff to give an overview of the new City Block Program, and Mayor Fleetwood.

Spring also saw several volunteer opportunities to help Kenny and his team with landscaping and cleaning activities, a successful campaign to install almost 40 hanging baskets, and an in-person Spring Wine Walk.

Summer brought a return of a couple of important business support grants – the Storefront Improvement Grant and the Summer Activation Grant, which gave vital support to many Downtown businesses. We worked on several other fronts during the summer, as well, including in placemaking and Gallery Alley activation, working with RAM Construction to help create a new mural on the Rocket building, and producing Downtown Sounds in full. In late summer, DBP worked with Bellingham Region Chamber of Commerce and Guy Occhiogrosso to produce a community Town Hall related to the recent changes to state laws related to law enforcement, which included state representatives and local law enforcement representatives.

In addition, the summer saw the implementation of the new Graffiti Abatement, City Block, and Safety Ambassador programs, which had positive results including removal of hundreds of tags on downtown businesses, advocacy efforts and the creation of new events coming out of the City Block Program, and a great response from businesses for the Safety Ambassadors.

The fall months included another Downtown Neighborhood Association meeting on the topic of Downtown service providers, which gave each participating organization the opportunity to explain what they do and what they have planned in future. In addition, the Partnership created an easy one-

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page reference guide with contact numbers and other important information. Year-end activities included the usual Trick-or-Treat, Tree Lighting, and other holiday events including the Holiday Wine Walk, which was also held in person.

The Partnership was also able to bring on two new, valuable employees in 2022, who have added increased professionalism and credibility to the organization – Jenny Hagemann as the Marketing and Communications Manager and Nathalie Wagler in the role of Events and Promotions Coordinator. Both have brought energy and enthusiasm to their work, which has elevated what we do for the Downtown community. There was one major loss to the organization in 2022, which was the exit of the Retail Advocate, Jennifer Walters, who accepted a position with a downtown property owner.

## **Downtown Events**

### **First Fridays (formerly Art Walk)**

The Art Walk program was rebranded as First Fridays in 2021 to provide more opportunities for businesses to be involved and to promote a broader district-wide monthly celebration. The 2022 season ran from January to December and included 88 participating businesses and organizations. Venue participation averaged 25 a month. The Partnership received sponsorship funds from credit union BECU to include another busking season element that took place from August – December. The Partnership contracted with local trumpeter and Bellingham musician, Pace Rubadeau, to coordinate the busking program. Pace curated local and regional artists each month and stationed them at different areas throughout downtown during First Friday evenings. The live outdoor entertainment strongly contributed to a vibrant atmosphere during First Friday evenings. Estimated average monthly attendance ranged from 2,500-3,000 with May (addition of the Children's Art Walk), June, and December being reported as the months with the most foot traffic.

### **December First Friday – Friday, December 3**

December's First Friday map featured 37 venues and highlighted the 41 businesses that participated in the Shine Bright holiday window competition. December is historically one of the busiest First Fridays in downtown, averaging over 3,500 attendees throughout the evening. December's directory is enclosed.

### **Spring Wine Walk**

The Spring Wine Walk event made its return after two years on Friday, May 13 from 5:30-9pm. The event sold out the week before at 500 tickets and was hosted by 15 downtown businesses: Babygreens, Backcountry Essentials, Beck's Shoes, Fringe Boutique, Gold Comb Salon, Greenhouse (Title Sponsor), Ideal, Mo's Parlor, MW Soapworks, Neko Cat Café, Quinn and Foster, Third Planet, Wandering Oaks Gallery, Welcome Road Winery, WinkWink. Two ticket options were available, General Admission and VIP. The VIP reception was held at Locus, a wine bar on Holly Street, and those tickets sold out weeks in advance. The event was a success overall, bringing hundreds of people into the city center to support small businesses, dine out at restaurants, and increase awareness for downtown as a shopping destination.

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### **Holiday Wine Walk**

The Holiday Wine Walk took place on Friday, November 11 from 5-8:30pm. This was the first time bringing this seasonal edition back since the pandemic. Holiday Wine Walk featured 15 venues and sold out at a maximum 550 tickets. Similar to the Spring Wine Walk, two ticket options were available, General Admission and VIP. The VIP reception was held at Locus, a wine bar on Holly Street, and those tickets sold out weeks in advance. The event was a success overall, meeting the same goals as the spring event to increase foot traffic in the city center, support small businesses during the holiday shopping season, dine out at restaurants, and increase awareness for downtown as a shopping destination.

### **Downtown Sounds**

Downtown Sounds celebrated its 18th anniversary in 2022 with the 5-week concert series taking place on July 6, 13, 20, 27, and August 3. Downtown Sounds takes place on Bay, Prospect, and Holly Streets and featured high-quality musical performances, a 21+ beer/wine/cider/seltzer garden, food trucks, a game zone, bike valet, nonprofit tabling groups, face painting, glitter tattoos, and more. The series experienced beautiful weather and strong attendance with the event's beverage garden breaking record sales the first three weeks of the event. The Premier Sponsor was WECU, In-Kind sponsors included Boundary Bay Brewery, Hotel Leo, SPARK Museum, Groove Merchant Northwest, Cascade Radio Group, Bellingham Cider Co., Bayou on Bay, Sandwich Odyssey, Aslan Brewing, Wander Brewing, Kulshan Brewery, Menace, Stemma, Bellingham Company, Faithlife, RAM Construction with event partners including City of Bellingham, Groove Merchant Northwest, Boundary Bay Brewery, SPARK Museum, Bayou on Bay, Bellingham Cider Co., and Hotel Leo. The Partnership will assess growing the event footprint in 2023 to accommodate the ongoing annual increase in attendance. Total estimated attendance: 25,000+

### **Downtown-Trick-or-Treat**

The Downtown Trick-or-Treat took place on Monday, October 31 from 3-5pm and featured over 115 participating businesses. DBP staff dressed up and passed out candy in the Commercial Street Plaza. The event was well attended but felt lighter compared to past years. Estimated attendance: 1,800. Event map attached.

### **Shop Small Saturday + Downtown Holiday Events (Shine Bright Bham)**

Downtown's holiday events and promotions kicked off in November under the campaign name "Shine Bright Bham" featuring a mix of in-person events and digital promotions including Shop Small Saturday on November 26, a storefront window competition that launched over the Shop Small Saturday weekend, a "Find Twinkle, the Holiday Hamster" promotion, the annual Tree Lighting on Friday in partnership with the City of Bellingham on December 2, a Santa Saturday in collaboration with Boundary Bay on December 3, and the Lighted Bike Parade in conjunction with the Fairhaven Association on Saturday, December 10. Shine Bright graphics enclosed.

*Shop Small Saturday* – The Partnership assisted with securing funding from WECU to help Greenhouse host Santa in conjunction with Shop Small Saturday from noon to 4pm that day. Downtown retailers and bars and restaurants participated in the promotion using resources provided by the Partnership that included a shared digital graphic, poster, and marketing kit. Graphics enclosed.

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*Twinkle the Holiday Bellinghamster* - Twinkle the Holiday Bellinghamster was featured at Mallard Ice Cream from Shop Small Saturday until Friday, December 23rd. Every week Twinkle moved to a new hiding spot, and those who found Twinkle were entered to win a free two-scoop sundae courtesy of Mallard. Everyone who found Twinkle received a 10% off coupon. Overall, 81 people found Twinkle, and everyone who came in to find Twinkle made a purchase at Mallard. It was a great experience, and we will repeat the same program in 2023.

*Shine Bright Window Displays* - 41 businesses participated in the #ShineBrightBham window display contest, with 154 individuals voting for their favorite window in three categories from Shop Small Saturday to December 20. Each business received a poster with a QR code to access the voting form and were updated periodically with reminders to promote their window and encourage voting. Weekly social media posts highlighted 11 participating businesses.

*Downtown Tree Lighting Ceremony* - In partnership with the City of Bellingham, the Partnership coordinated the annual Tree Lighting Ceremony on Friday, December 2 from 5:30-6pm. Special guests included Mayor Fleetwood, Bellebrity Betty Desire, and the Mount Baker Toppers. Woods Coffee provided cookies and Boundary Bay provided hot cocoa for attendees. Estimated attendance: 1,000. The Partnership will bring back more programming (Santa, performances, make & take craft tables) in 2023.

*Downtown's Santa Saturday* - The Partnership collaborated with Boundary Bay to host Santa from 1-3pm on their restaurant deck. Boundary provided hot cocoa and cookies for families who lined up to get a photo with Santa and drop a letter in his mailbox. Estimated attendance: 80+

*Lighted Bike Parade* - The Parade took place on Saturday, December 10 and it was changed a bit from 2021's event due to some rules from Parks and Rec that we weren't aware of last year. Due to these rules (biking contingents could not pass each other on the trail), it was determined that each district (Fairhaven and Downtown Bellingham) would depart from their respective starting points and meet at Boulevard Park. At the park we organized live music, a fire juggler, along with some food and drink options for participants. The turnout was estimated to be around 300 people and thankfully the weather cooperated. The park was a great place to meet halfway and we're looking forward to building on this concept in 2023.

## Community Outreach and Support

### Downtown Neighborhood Association Meetings

The Downtown Bellingham Partnership produced three DNA meetings and one year-end celebration in 2022.

**April** - DBP held its first DNA meeting on April 21 at Boundary Bay's beer garden. 150 - 175 people attended to learn more about RSU Private Security, the Downtown Safety Ambassador Program, the City Block Program, and the Graffiti Program. In addition, Bellingham's mayor was on hand to say a few words and others were available to field questions related to parking changes and social

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services. The format was intended to present an overview of each program relatively quickly and allow the attendees to speak to each presenter individually afterwards.

**September** – The DBP and the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce collaborated on producing a Town Hall event in September that focused on the state laws that were changed last year that related to law enforcement and safety concerns downtown. The event was held at the Old City Hall’s Rotunda Room and attendance was at capacity (200+ people). The Town Hall featured Representatives Alicia Rule and Alex Ramel, Whatcom Sheriff Elfo, BPD Officer Almer, and Malora Christensen from the GRACE/LEAD programs. The event was live-streamed and recorded. Link: <https://www.downtownbellingham.com/public-safety-security>

**October** - DBP staff produced a virtual webinar that outlined what service providers were working downtown, what they do and don’t do, who to call about what, and more and shared it with the downtown business community. The recording was then shared with the downtown business community and can be found here - <https://www.downtownbellingham.com/public-safety-security>

**December** - The Partnership held the Scepter Awards, Downtown Bellingham’s annual celebration of the most notable places and people of the year, on November 14 at the Wild Buffalo. More than 200 people attended the event, which featured the bestowing of 12 awards, a raffle, a friendly lip-sync competition, and a huge amount of community good-will. Everyone who attended seemed to enjoy the evening and appreciated the event’s return after a brief hiatus due to COVID.

### **Promotions and BBRN Meetings Overview**

DBP Program Director, Lindsey Payne Johnstone, facilitated the Promotions Committee meetings with support from DBP Marketing and Communications Manager, Jenny Hagemann, and Events and Promotions Coordinator, Nathalie Wagler. The Promotions Committee met in January, February, March, April, October, and November and discussed several topics including First Fridays, holiday planning, a spring egg hunt slated for April 2023, and social media promotion ideas. In 2023 Partnership staff will seek to recruit new members and return to meeting in person.

The Bellingham Bar & Restaurant Network is a group of bar and restaurant professionals working together with Downtown Bellingham Partnership, WA State Liquor & Cannabis Board, Washington Hospitality Alliance, local law enforcement, City of Bellingham, Whatcom County Health Department, WWU, Small Business Development Center, and other community organizations. The BBRN was meeting every other Tuesday at the beginning of the year then moved to monthly in September. Attendance from bar and restaurant representatives has been low but that could be a reflection of things looking up compared to pandemic meeting days. Lindsey is the Partnership staff representative for the BBRN with support from Jenny.

### **Storefront Improvement Grant**

The 2022 application period opened in April and projects were completed in September. Recipients were selected for a matching grant opportunity of up to \$2,000 each for quick and impactful improvements such as painting, window decals, signage, and planters. With BECU funding, the

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Partnership was able to award three businesses the grant funds: HOSA Hot Sauce, Ragfinery, and Stockton's Paint. Grant report to BECU enclosed.

### **Summer Activation Grant**

The DBP was able to do another round of the popular Downtown Bellingham Summer Activation Grant Program due to support by BECU again as a sponsor in 2022. The grants were able to support businesses downtown as well as artists, performers, and other local creatives. The grant program offered 25 of businesses \$500 micro-grants to produce their own activations. The businesses benefitted from having additional resources to hire creative talent, artists and other creatives who were able to be paid for their work, community members benefitted from a renewed sense of pride and interest in the downtown neighborhood, and tourists visiting Downtown Bellingham had positive experiences of our city center.

Our first grant round began at the end of June and each month we received applications, and we were able to grant funding to most of the applicants. Activations included: Sock Tie-Dyeing Workshop outside Modsock, an Outdoor Concert Series hosted by Make.Shift Art Space, and the Incredible Honk Summer Kick-Off organized by Bellingham Music. Grant applications were vetted by DBP staff and board, and recipients were required to supply a summary report after each activation noting how it went, how the money was spent, and other details.

### **First Friday Busking Program**

This grant provided an avenue to reinvigorate Downtown Bellingham's legacy monthly First Friday program by adding a live music component during spring and summer months. Funding from BECU support made it possible for talented, local buskers to participate throughout the city center during First Friday evenings, enhancing the atmosphere and increasing monthly attendance to further expand economic goals of the program. Additional funding from the City of Bellingham also made it possible for buskers to perform during First Fridays in the targeted area along State Street to help with mitigating some of the negative behaviors that had been witnessed in that section of the district.

### **Resource Sharing**

Throughout the year the Downtown Bellingham Partnership maintained its role as an important aggregator and distributor of information to both downtown businesses and residents. In 2022, DBP regained staffing with a full-time Marketing Communications Manager to lead internal and external information sharing. In Q1 2022, Omicron variants and infections required DBP to continue bridging the gap of COVID-awareness by publishing maps and guides of businesses maintaining or adopting new policies for masking and/or proof of vaccination status to dine or shop.

By Q2, focus shifted to launching the Safety Ambassador to supplement Private Security Patrol services in cooperation with the City of Bellingham. DBP facilitated a media blitz via a co-authored press release with City of Bellingham Communications teams to educate the public and businesses about these new resources. In addition, DBP arrange a Town Hall meeting at Boundary Bay

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Brewing's open air beer garden for the public to meet and understand the scope of a) the mayor's office and response to post pandemic issues Downtown, b) Private Security Patrols via RSU, c) Safety Ambassadors services and Street Plus, d) Graffiti abatement program sign up and expectations, e) Preview of mental health crisis and police response changes coming. An estimated 250 people attended and press members from the *Bellingham Herald* and *Cascadia Daily News* published supporting stories.

In late Q2/early Q3, DBP formally launched the City Block Program to coordinate knowledge sharing between business owners/managers in geographical proximity to each other. With the nomination of Block Leaders from seven downtown districts, DBP coordinated an initial meeting with Mayor Fleetwood in July to address high priority issues facing the business community: namely criminal activity surrounding the 22 North facility on State Street, public restroom shortages and resulting excrement cleanup burdens on businesses, parking garage underutilization, and slow or lacking police response to incidents. To address concerns and educate the general public about similar issues, DBP partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to host a September Town Hall meeting addressing changes in legislature that impacted law enforcement's authority and recruiting functions since 2021. This meeting included state Representatives, the Whatcom Sheriff's Office, business leaders, and Bellingham Police Department leaders. An estimated 200 people attended and BTV live broadcast the event and later hosted the recording on YouTube.

By Q4, DBP was able to share progress on all topics addressed at July's Mayoral meeting. The two most empowering updates were a) *Cascadia Daily News* article confirming community consensus of drastic improvement surrounding 22 North, and b) City Council passing permit fee reduction and expansion of parking garage access to increase use by downtown employees and visitors.

## Beautification

The Landscaping and Cleaning program through the DBP once again saw some exciting changes in 2022. The team continues to be led by Kenny Austin, Landscaping Supervisor, who poured his energy and passion for Downtown by supporting existing programs, adding new programs and continuing to his work to keep Downtown clean, safe, and thriving.

Kenny and Alec were the two permanent staff, with rotating temporary staff as well. They added 2 cigarette butlers, one by Leaf and Ladle and the other by Grand Ave, and continue to collect and dispose of the butts properly. They hung 34 hanging flower baskets and maintained them well into fall. Gallery Alley was once again partially organized by Kenny, and we were able to increase the number of doors to 8.

2022 was the first full year of incorporating cleaning into the crews' duties, which included litter clean up and public furniture cleaning. Kenny also agreed to take on a brand-new Graffiti Abatement Program, which officially began in June. The crew removed 3,659 slap tags, 4,554 tags and did multiple large scale cover ups and reported the vandalisms to the Bellingham Police Department. Kenny worked closely with Office Almer to develop best practices for this new program.

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Kenny also collaborated with many partners this year, in various formats. He partnered with Public Works to do twice monthly alleyway clean ups in the fall, which he hopes to continue. He also hosted two public volunteer planting and clean up events, one in April and one in October. He met with some of the staff at 22North to train them on graffiti removal and general clean up tips, so their residents could get involved with clean-up efforts on their part of State Street.

## Placemaking

*Pedestrian Plaza* – At the start of the year, the Partnership’s Design Committee focused on a pilot program for a pedestrian plaza on the 1300 block of Bay Street. There was a lack of support and interest from the businesses on the block, so the Partnership redirected efforts to the Commercial Street Plaza, an existing pedestrian space on the 1300 block of Commercial Street.

*Railroad Avenue Corridor Project* - The Partnership and Darby Galligan with City Planning supported a WWU Urban Planning studio class that focused on re-imagining the Railroad Avenue Corridor for its project. Informed by public surveys and downtown planning documents, students re-imagined what the Railroad Avenue corridor could look like with more bicycle and pedestrian paths, affordable housing, parks, pop-up businesses, and more. Their final presentations took place in April and was attended by City and Port leadership staff including Mayor Fleetwood and Blake Lyon, the City’s new Planning Director.

*Commercial Street Plaza Activation* – The Partnership has a facility-use agreement with the City of Bellingham to coordinate activities in the Commercial Street Plaza. The Rebel Artists of Whatcom Collective activated the space with their vendor markets from March – December. Bellingham Jazzercise utilized the space for seasonal outdoor classes and the plaza was a popular location for events that resulted from the Partnership’s Summer Activation Grants. In 2023 the Partnership will seek to coordinate a seasonal food truck lunch series in the Plaza on Mondays and Tuesdays when many restaurants are closed on those days and potentially work with community partners to utilize the mezzanine for bike polo activities.

*Gallery Alley* - 15 artists were featured in this year’s Gallery Alley installation - eight in June/July and eight in August/September, with one artist participating in both series. The doors were flipped monthly, and social media post accompanied both new doors and monthly door flips which were done in accordance with First Fridays. Gallery Alley was listed as a First Friday location on the digital map and printable directory from June-September. Doors from 2021 and 2022 have been featured in the windows of Bank of America since November, with new doors being installed for January First Friday. The Bank of America installation was listed in First Friday promotional materials and social media posts in November and December. 2 doors from 2022 were auctioned at the Scepter Awards, raising a total of \$300 for DBP.

## Economic Development

### City Block Program

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The Partnership launched the City Block Program in 2022, with the goals of seeking to engage Downtown Bellingham property and business owners in the health, safety, cleanliness, and beautification and of their downtown. Working to enhance communication between the property and business owners and the DBP and each other as well as increase their representation in advocacy efforts that concern the Downtown Bellingham neighborhood was another priority.

The early phase of the program involved planning and creating a list of those within the district that we felt would be good leaders to assist us with the work. Planning also entailed drawing lines to create 7 separate distinct districts within the downtown core, assigning staff leads to each district, creating goals for meetings, and other admin related tasks.

We held an all-leader meeting initially to explain the program and get buy in from potential leaders and after that each district began to meet and explore areas of concern and opportunity. Throughout the year the districts held meetings and each district had their own areas they wanted to tackle – from advocacy for immediate responses to challenging situations like 22 North to creating engaging events such as the Commercial Street Block Party and the State Street Parking Lot Party.

In addition, the program was able to convene one meeting with Mayor Fleetwood in the summer of 2022, where the group was able to bring forth their concerns, ask questions, and express appreciation for some of the good work that was being done by the City. Topics included addressing the problems at 22 North, a proposal for utilizing the Commercial Street Parking Garage, and an ask for increased public restrooms downtown.

In the fall, DBP staff did a quick assessment of the program and came up with several ideas for ongoing improvements and adaptations including redrawing some of the lines of districts and doing some realignment of staff representation.

Positive outcomes of the program so far are increased engagement, working together on advocacy efforts and having a unified voice, creation and implementation of great community events that drive traffic downtown, and an increased sense of solidarity – always appreciated by all involved.

### **Safety Ambassador Program**

The Safety Ambassador (SA) Program came to fruition in April after contracts were signed with the Partnership and Streetplus, the national company selected by City staff and the DBP to implement the program. The first months involved getting all of the positions filled, trainings, and various logistics to support this new team. The ambassadors were able to be located in the former parking offices in the Commercial Street Parking garage and their patrols of the downtown city center were set from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm daily.

Representatives from Streetplus and the ambassadors were part of the April DNA meeting, where they were introduced for the first time, which also coincided with an effort of the SA team to conduct some of their first orders of business – outreach to the business community. May offered the team

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an opportunity to supplement their trainings with a day-long learning opportunity from Ryan Dowd at the Mount Baker Theatre, which was incredibly valuable to them as they embarked on this work.

The SA were also integrated into regular communications with the other service providers working downtown via meetings, texts, and emails, which was critical to the program – and the work of these other organizations. Ambassadors were also regular guests at the new City Block Program meetings, giving business owners more opportunities to learn about their work – what they do and don't do – and who to call about what.

The business community overall was very supportive of the program, however some businesses (especially near Basecamp) relayed that they didn't feel their tactics were enough to help “move people along.” The SA main tool for being effective was to form relationships with the people that they may need to ask to move from a doorway, for instance, as having that in place first makes the any request easier to deliver.

Positive feedback about the ambassadors was related to their ability to respond quickly, diffuse situations, and making themselves available to assist in any situations business owners needed more support with.

The end of the year saw the former supervisor leave for another job and the promotion of Rowan Powell, a highly capable and engage ambassador take over that position. We'll be doing some informal assessing of the program in early 2023, which will help the SAs continue to work to be effective.

## **2022 Surveys**

The Partnership conducted two economic related surveys in 2022 – the annual COVID impacts survey that we started in 2020 and a second survey later in the year to both the general public and business owners.

**Economic Impacts of COVID Survey** results showed that in 2020, businesses saw drastic reductions in income, which slowly improved through 2022. Thankfully, many businesses were able to secure funding to offset their losses. Although businesses did report getting support, many remain in a tenuous position and will require increased income in order to remain in business. Approximately half of those surveyed received some form of rent relief early on, however by 2022 we saw rents begin to increase. Half of businesses saw the need to reduce staffing hours at the beginning of the pandemic and by 2022 that number had increased to 60% of businesses.

Business owners ranked creating a clean and welcoming downtown as a first choice when asked about further support from the DBP and in 2022 the highest-ranking priority became promoting the district with a clean and welcoming downtown still ranked as important. When asked about stressors to their businesses, many ranked financial stability and hiring staff highest, followed by increased costs of operations and supply chain issues. In addition, when asked about staffing specifically, business cited a lack of available, qualified people and not being able to afford them as their highest

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concerns followed by the high degree of instability in retaining good employees. Most businesses also had to close their doors temporarily in 2021 and 2022 in order to weather these challenges. Survey results are included.

**2022 Community Survey** results also showed that the safety and cleanliness of downtown was a major concern. We did speculate that cleanliness for some most likely also including clearing signs of homelessness from the streets. Other findings of the survey included that COVID was still a factor for community members in attending events and that over all the Partnership and its work were perceived positively. Comments within the survey pointed to a disconnect in what the public understood about what the role of the Partnership is as well as what the City is actually doing about finding and investing in solutions. In response to that, the Partnership and City have done steps to create a plan for greater and enhanced communications going forward. Survey results are included.

### **Economic Vitality Committee**

The committee set out with goals for the year that included creating a safe and welcoming downtown, continue to support downtown businesses as they recover from the pandemic, identifying properties that have been hung up for assorted reasons and see if we could get movement, and exploring creating a BID (business improvement district).

In the beginning of the year the committee acted in more of an advisory capacity as the Partnership began to bring several programs onboard, including the Safety Ambassador and City Block programs. Their input was given as these programs took shape and reports on their progress was part of the committee's activities after the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the year. The committee also participated in the formation of the two surveys that the organization did this year as well.

Towards the end of the year there were new additions from the board and the DBP staff lead changed from DBP Executive Director, Alice Clark, to Marketing and Communications Manager, Jenny Hagemann. In 2023 we plan to identify new goals for the year and add new members to the committee from the business community.

### **Marketing & Communications**

As we approached 2022, the Downtown Bellingham Partnership's Marketing and Communications remained throttled by COVID's looming presence with the Omicron wave impacting business hours and operations through mid-February. DBP began a parallel track strategy of adopting stop-gap communication strategies by managing a digital map and website landing page to educate the public on business closures or alterations while preparing unbridled marketing plans for the return of our signature events. 2022's communications can be summarized as straddling the reality of COVID's ever present impacts and the celebratory energy of bringing back all of DBP's events and programs.

**Key programs, initiatives, and highlights throughout the year channeling this duality:**

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***COVID-related community programs and response:***

In cooperation with the City of Bellingham, DBP launched the Safety Ambassador/Private Security and Graffiti Abatement programs in 2022. Both programs were designed to support the small business community's need for non-emergency response to increasing property vandalism and nuisance behavior. They also served the purpose of building public trust in Downtown's cleanliness and vitality. DBP joined City of Bellingham Communications staff to author joint press releases announcing Private Security and Safety Ambassador programs in the first half of 2022. DBP also published and continuously updated two supporting resources; 1) over 2K printed resource cards for direct business distribution, and 2) a new website landing page dedicated to safety and security programs. Monthly email newsletters to both the general interest (public) and business community audiences contained relevant updates and opportunities for feedback regarding Ambassador and Graffiti programs throughout 2022.

To supplement the digital communications strategies, DBP also facilitated two in-person public meetings about these programs and in tangent, the lingering side effects to public health and crime COVID and recent changes to law enforcement scope imposed. More can be read about these meetings in the 'Resource Sharing' section of this report.

***Business & City Block District contact database:***

DBP took on the important, but time consuming, task of updating our database of street-level business names, immediate contacts, City Block district assignment, and addresses in 2022. This work resulted in 315 primary email contacts (351 total) stored and maintained in our donor management system (DMS), which then routinely syncs with our email marketing tools to insure we are providing regular updates specific to the needs of small business owners **and** reaching the right contacts. This contact management work was especially important with the absence of a Retail Advocate staff member dedicated to welcoming new businesses and serving as point contact for common issues business owners face.

***Event Marketing brand & identity refreshes:***

2022 marked the return of Wine Walk(s) and Downtown Sounds without COVID adaptations, meaning brand elements and sponsor commitments had not been updated since 2019. For both signature events, DBP invested time and resources to modernize branding elements (logo, design guides), digital and print advertisements, and venue/sponsor marketing kits.

To maintain the momentum started in 2021, DBP also made some marketing improvements to First Friday promotions. From June to November, First Friday events and promotions included special street-side activations and/or busking through fiscal support from private sponsorships and City of Bellingham funding. DBP worked to select and secure artists and venues to host these pop-up performances and activities and promote across our channels.

***Consistent placement in Bellingham Whatcom Tourism promotions:***

To expand DBP's audience reach, we focused on partnering with *Bellingham Experience* platforms managed by Bellingham Whatcom Tourism. By sharing upcoming event promotions with Tourism's social media marketing manager, DBP gained placement on their social media accounts, email newsletters, and website features each quarter in 2022.

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- **Q1:** Businesses were featured in three promotional partnerships with Visit Bellingham/Tourism in March. First, Twinkle the Holiday Hamster returned as a mascot for a St. Patrick's Day event round-up featuring four businesses. Second, a family-minded blogger documented a weekend stay and the Downtown Bellingham Partnership leveraged this content for a social post featuring five businesses. Lastly, the Seattle Times food critic featured four downtown eateries and the DBP shared the article on social media.
- **Q2:** Downtown Bellingham and around a dozen downtown businesses were featured in a Rick Steve's video series sponsored by Bellingham Whatcom Tourism and shared on their social media channels and in newsletters in May 2022.

In June, Tourism included Downtown Sounds in their marketing newsletter. Additionally, Tourism partnered with DBP to share and repost a *New York Times* article praising Bellingham's accessibility, outdoor adventure culture, and food scene.

- **Q3:** Tourism supported DBP's marketing efforts by syndicating Downtown Sounds, Pride banners and events, and NW Tune Up Festival across their channels. Additionally, Tourism's Social Media Manager connected DBP with photographers to capture media during Downtown Sounds.

In September, DBP and Tourism partnered on content promoting SeaFeast. Since the actual event occurs outside of downtown, we agreed to tie marketing back to year-round destinations to eat seafood dishes at restaurants downtown. As a result, DBP's Marketing Manager landed an article with Washington Trust for Historical Preservation featuring dishes from five downtown restaurants.

- **Q4:** Tourism featured DBP holiday events and promotions in two of their newsletters in November. Specifically, the Lighted Bike Parade and Holiday Tree Lighting were featured blocks of email content. On social media, Bellingham Experience promoted Twinkle the Holiday Hamster's scavenger hunt at Mallard Ice Cream in an Instagram reel.

### ***Increased social media presence***

In 2022 the Downtown Bellingham Partnership social media accounts experienced growth across all historically managed platforms and we re-introduced Twitter to our platform portfolio.

- **Instagram @downtownbham**  
13,700 followers to 15,400. +12.4% growth.
- **District Facebook account @DowntownBellinghamWA**  
10,700 followers to 12,500. +16.8% growth.
- **Organizational Facebook account @DowntownBellinghamPartnership**  
1,000 followers to 1,650. +65% growth.
- **Twitter @downtownbham (reinstated September 2022)**

7,300 followers to 7,200\*. -1.3% (\*Note: Twitter experienced user loss across the platform following Elon Musk's ownership takeover in October 2022)

## **DOWNTOWN BELLINGHAM PARTNERSHIP**



## A Look at 2023

Looking ahead to 2023, the Partnership plans to continue to work side by side with the City to address the challenges facing Downtown Bellingham and to work to promote the positive and generate excitement and interest in the district. We are grateful for the City's support both financially as well as with City staff help to accomplish our shared goals for the city. The additional funding for safety and security, cleaning, and graffiti will go a long way in stemming some of the more negative influences we've seen post-pandemic in the downtown core.

Organizationally some new things we plan to integrate into our working 2023 is a focus on integrating other partners deeper into what we do and in a targeted way, for instance identifying demographics we want to bring closer to our organization and then finding those partners that would exemplify those groups.

We also plan to add a couple of new events in Q1+Q2 this year, which include a cider and spirit stroll in February and a spring family event planned for April. These events will help drive more people downtown during the shoulder months and both will be relatively easy to produce as the February event is similar to Wine Walk and we expect a business support of the spring event similar to the kind of support we see during Halloween and other holiday promotions.

Another one of our goals is to continue to produce our other events again this year in full and we're looking forward to an event season where we can continue to refine our systems and garner bigger audiences. We are still defining our placemaking goals for the year, but one big project we have in mind is a community-driven placemaking initiative that would offer a match of funding to the projects that get support through crowdfunding.

As of this writing in early January, many of our other goals for the year are still being worked on in our committees (Economic Vitality, Design, Outreach), however we do plan to continue to focus on how we can make the biggest positive impact that we can on the perception of Downtown Bellingham – making it a great place to live, work, and visit. As we have seen over the past couple of years, this will entail leaning into safety, security and cleaning to make the city center feel and look better and creating events and promotions that drive people into the streets and shops downtown.

**DOWNTOWN BELLINGHAM PARTNERSHIP**