



# BELLINGHAM'S LATIN AMERICAN CULTURAL DISTRICT

A Proposition

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## Background

Bellingham is home to a large and vibrant Latinx community that is unrepresented in both policies and the built environment. Mérida, a community member with a vision of change, proposed the idea of a cultural district. Her concept incorporated Spanish Colonial architecture, spaces for Latinx business owners to occupy store fronts, and community spaces/events celebrating Bellingham's Latin American presence. Establishing such a Cultural District would centralize the underserved, overlooked Latinx community, providing the missing environment with which to celebrate culture and create community.

Mérida originally brought this vision to Professor Tammi Laninga in 2023 after presenting her idea to the City of Bellingham (See Appendix A). Since then, multiple students have taken on this project and assisted Mérida in the gathering of resources and information (See Appendix B and C for all relevant previous WWU student projects). Utilizing the research that was already completed, this group was able to help Mérida take the next steps necessary to make this vision a reality.

## Project Goals & Objectives

The foundational goal of this project was furthering Mérida's vision of establishing a Latin American Cultural District in North Bellingham. Mérida's project is a long-term one, its completion will require resources and time beyond what our group could offer. Therefore, our primary objectives were ones we deemed actionable within the 10-week time frame, and included the following:

- i. Gaining traction and excitement with community members through outreach and a formal proposal presentation.
- ii. Researching successful instances of cultural district establishment, both local and otherwise.
- iii. Identifying and reaching out to North Bellingham community stakeholders with the goals of:
  - a. Establishing working relationships with Mérida.
  - b. Utilizing community members' professional experiences, skills, and resources.
  - c. Gauging stakeholder interest in establishing a Cultural District.
  - d. Understanding the community's vision and goals for their space.
- iv. Creating a resource that outlines potential steps and milestones to guide future action.

Each of these objectives were guided by the foundational principle that change should be determined by those within a community. Our mission was not to impose an agenda cooked up

in a classroom but develop a comprehensive understanding of what the Birchwood community envisions for itself.

## Methods

To achieve our goals and objectives, we categorized our methods into the following: Community Outreach and Research & Development. Below is a discussion on what we have done in each type of method collection.

### *Spreading the Word*

Our Community Outreach team primarily worked on spreading the word. Our main goal was to engage with different community members who could act as possible stakeholders and/or committee members. Our first objective was to create a flyer to get more information out there via kiosks and emails (See Appendix D and E). Our second objective was to send emails to possible stakeholders to invite them to a presentation where we formally presented ‘La Villa de Las Americas’ (See Appendix F).

We drafted the flyer over the span of multiple weeks as information was provided to us. Originally, the plan was to post them around the Birchwood and Alderwood neighborhoods to promote awareness to a possible cultural district. However, once we confirmed that our end goal was a stakeholder presentation the aim of the flyer shifted to improve our message. As seen in Appendix D, the flyer is promoting our stakeholder meeting and asking individuals to join a committee for the Latin American Cultural District.

Soon after we completed the flyer, a group worked on sending an email to possible stakeholders inviting them to our meeting. During this process, we sent emails to a wide range of individuals and organizations (See Appendix G for list of stakeholders). After sending the stakeholder emails, we received a response asking if it was possible to create a flyer written in Spanish, so that information could reach more individuals within the community (See Appendix E). This original oversight was unfortunate, but the team formed a new flyer in Spanish that was posted on a Birchwood Neighborhood Association Facebook page as soon as possible.

We finished the *Spreading the Word* aspect of our methods with our final stakeholder presentation (See Appendix H). In this presentation, we spread Mérida’s vision as well as our ideal plan for how the Latin American Cultural District should be made. We had a relatively good turnout with a total of eight individuals showing up to learn more about our project and express their own opinions on the creation of a cultural district (See Appendix I). The results of our stakeholder presentation will be further discussed in the findings section of this paper.

## *Collecting Information*

To better understand how cultural districts are built, our team researched multiple case studies of success stories of completed cultural districts (See Appendix J for links and summaries of relevant information). We researched an arts and cultural district in Rhode Island, another in Bellevue. Considering those districts had a different nature than the Birchwood Latin American Cultural District, we mostly investigated the structure of their proposals, as well as the process they underwent to finalize their project. Calle 24 and Barrio Logan Cultural District, both in California, had a lot more similarities to the Latin American Cultural District that Mérida is proposing. With these two projects we were able to get inspiration and direction regarding the content and activities, as well as how a completed Latin American Cultural District may look like.

Through our research, it became apparent that some sort of guiding document would be beneficial to inform Mérida how to proceed forward. Initially our team thought a skeleton document that would lay out how to write a proposal would be the best path forward. Upon further reflection and consultation with our instructor, we settled upon writing a roadmap that lays out step by step instructions for the path forward. Our roadmap was broken apart into three temporal phases, short-term, medium-term, long-term, guided by

With our research and roadmap completed, we needed some way to collect contact information of those interested in forming a committee with Mérida and working on the Latin American Cultural District. At the beginning of our community presentation, we requested whoever may be interested in being communicated with, to write down their contact information on a sign-in sheet. Following the presentation, we sent out an initial newsletter email indicating that we intended to keep everyone informed as the work continues.

## *Findings*

Our formal proposal to the stakeholders and several meetings with Mérida provided necessary information regarding Latin Americans in Birchwood, prominent and rising Latinx businesses, and the community's vision for its own future. Community members that attended the presentation on December 5<sup>th</sup> expressed their excitement of the future of this project. Many members stated feelings of currently being scared and lonely within their neighborhoods. The idea of a community center as a starting point gained much traction and gave many members a sense of hope for the future. They conveyed how having a space to come together and hold events would greatly impact their lives and connection to their community.

While most feedback was positive, some participants communicated concerns surrounding the feasibility of an undertaking like a Cultural District.

For the research side of this project, we as a group decided that identifying a more local project would be very beneficial in showing members of the stakeholder presentation, that the idea that

we are proposing could actually work and come to life. A very prominent and local example of this was the Samish Urban Village. The Samish Urban Village is a great example of a successful community-led project created by students. The ultimate purpose of this urban village is to design an area within the community that will foster economic growth, create uplifting energy, and provide vibrance to an area that is considered dull and bleak by the community. With the help of the city of Bellingham, students were able to put this plan to fruition and get it off the ground floor.

Our research on the case studies regarding the Barrio-Logan cultural district and the Samish Urban village, show that students have the ability to make a profound difference in their community with the help of local business, organizations, neighborhood associations, and other key stakeholders in the community. Overall, from both the Barrio Logan cultural district and the Samish Urban Village we see that economic growth/incentives need to be an integral part of the plan so stakeholders, cities, and other organizations can back the proposed plans/idea.

## Recommendations

Our team has three primary recommendations focused on outreach/networking, creating a non-profit entity, and hosting a community event. We believe these recommendations are important next steps to continue the development of this district. Each recommendation can help satisfy the different, important aspects that are required to continue this project.

During our stakeholder's presentation we provided a sign-in form for everyone who came to provide their contact information. All of these contacts were compiled and added to an email list to ensure future communication and awareness about information regarding the cultural district. Everyone who came to that presentation expressed interest in Mélida's project, bringing their experience and ideas into the discussion following the presentation. This event was not just important for proposing this project but also provided an opportunity to network and connect with community residents and stakeholders. Continuing these kinds of community events is vital for bringing more residents and stakeholders to the table, after all, this project should be done by the community, for the community.

After the presentation, Mélida informed us that the City of Bellingham is interested in the development of a Latin American Cultural District. However, some challenges arise from the fact that they require an entity to partner with, rather than an individual. This is why the formation of a non-profit would be a crucial next step for developing this space. For this reason, Mélida has been working on creating a non-profit to support this project. In fact, the creation of this non-profit has already found some success, having found a fiscal sponsor. Currently, Mélida is in the process of filing the application to make this non-profit official! Having this non-profit will offer the city a community NGO to partner alongside so they can take the next steps together!

Lastly, we recommend working on developing a community event to promote the creation of this new cultural district! Creating an event like this would not only help connect new possible stakeholders but would also spread awareness among the Bellingham community at large! Our vision for this event would be to celebrate Latin culture through the promotion of La Villa de las Americas, ideally giving the larger public a taste of this space would be provided in the future. Some of our ideas include collaborating with different Latin food businesses, music and dance groups, and possibly the Bellingham low-rider club. This event would likely take place in the Park Manor Plaza, the current area “identified” for our project development. An event like this would help rally the Birchwood and Bellingham Latin American communities and hopefully rally the larger Bellingham community as well. A Latin-American community celebration would build excitement and give people something to engage with that is more immediate as opposed to a long-term goal. Ultimately, an event like this would increase community awareness, ideally bolstering the level of community support and interest surrounding this project.

While our group was successful at helping plant the seed of La Villa de las Americas, this project will require further nurturing in order for it to blossom into the space we envision. The recommendations listed above are three short-term, achievable steps that we believe will progress this project fruitfully. Obviously, this cannot be achieved overnight, but by focusing on completing these short-term steps we can further lay the foundation for the long road ahead!

## Lessons Learned

This project has a lot of potential to make change and encourage community development within Bellingham, but it did have a few hiccups throughout the quarter. One aspect that we would have done differently is contacting permanent stakeholders (Mélida) sooner. Although we tried periodically throughout the quarter to set up a meeting with Mélida, we were not able to connect until Week 7 of the quarter. This setback caused a few challenges.

**Contacting permanent stakeholders** sooner would have broadened the scope of what our group had the capacity to do. Our group did not feel comfortable moving forward until we knew what Mélida’s vision was for our deliverables. This limited what we were able to accomplish, as there were only four weeks left in the quarter when we met. Without early contact with our key stakeholder, our team lacked a clear vision of what the purpose of our project was. This made forward progress difficult to accomplish.

**Engaging a broader group of community** for input on the development of the Latin American Cultural District plan is going to be crucial for the success of this project. Important bureaucratic figures such as a commissioner on the City of Bellingham Planning Board, Suneeta Eisenberg, was at our community meeting. She was interested in the project but was disappointed by the turnout of our event. While the intention of the meeting was to be a small group, future meetings should aim to reach a broader range of the community.

**Frame a meeting of key stakeholders as a “Focus Group”** instead of an “Informational Meeting” may help clear confusion on what the purpose of the meeting is. Our goal was to have an intentional conversation with a small group of community stakeholders who hold sway in this community. Our marketing may not have properly communicated this to attendees.

**A more interactive presentation** would engage the community and make them feel that their voice is welcome in this space. The set up of our meeting was very similar to a class lecture. While it was informative, the feeling in the room was less of a conversation of community members and more of a Q&A with our group presenters. Using round tables or another similar seating arrangement may be more welcoming for conversation. Collective imagination exercises would be a good thing to incorporate into future meetings. Activating community imagination is a great method of gathering excitement and passion in a productive way to steer future efforts.

**More resources in Spanish** should be created. Having a pamphlet explaining context, goals, and benefits of this project in Spanish would have been very useful at our event. Also, it feels like a bit of an oversight that we did not create more informational material in the language of those we seek to engage.

**Splitting the project up into smaller groups** for future class projects would allow for more specialization. It has been difficult to clearly communicate and have everyone be on the same page with a large group. Perhaps it would be more productive to have smaller, more specialized groups to accomplish the array of tasks that need to be done moving forward.



# Appendix

## Appendix A — Mérida's Presentation (Made by Mérida Lopez-Baca, circa 2023)



**COMMUNITY INTEGRATION  
NORTH BELLINGHAM**

**HISTORIC TOURIST ATTRACTION  
PETITION**

Guatemalan  
Mayan Indigenous & Mestizo

Honduran  
Garifona & Meztizo

Salvadoran  
Indigenous & Mestizo

**COMMUNITY INTERGRATION: REQUEST HISTORICAL  
TOURIST ATTRACTION: NORTH BELLINGHAM**



Selling artisanal goods, we can get some leverage over competitors such as Vancouver, Bellevue and Seattle. Consumers are willing to spend more for nostalgic experiences.

Latin American migrant families miss their homes and will not be able to go back ever in some cases.




A historic commercial tourist destination in North Bellingham that reflects the Honduran, Guatemalan and Salvadoran communities will greatly increase Bellingham's revenue. Having a small piece of what home is for new settlers in North Bellingham sets for a unique lucrative opportunity unlike any other.



By attracting consumers who come from the north and south, these sites historic commercial tourist destinations (North Bellingham and Fairhaven) will elevate the consumer experience with variety. Captivating Latin American tourists and local Latin American communities, it provides North Bellingham with the foot traffic to locate a tourist destination.

**SURVEY**



**Survey Conducted in 2022:**

Would having a tourist attraction inspired by a place in Guatemala be something you're interested in?

Survey concluded 100% favorable results.

**Demand**

The demand for quality authentic Mayan/Meztizo goods and services is high!

Canadians drive to North Bellingham to purchase Latin American goods.

For the experience of nostalgia and they drive further down south.


**Speaking with International Tourists**

Tourist from Canada spoke on the over saturation of corporate stores in North Bellingham.

Need a space for more local businesses in North Bellingham.

Demand for authentic South and Central American goods.

**Adequately Reflect the People's Culture: Create a Space for Community Development.**



The adequate tourist destination will be providing the opportunity to settle families permanently, in conjunction with residential, commercial and recreational development of North Bellingham.

Familial communication through social media and advanced forms of communication, will ease the importation of culturally appropriate goods and services (which is currently happening at a dispersed level).

Guatemalan/Salvadoran/Honduran families, who have been established for generations in North Bellingham, will have opportunities to elevate and appropriately reflect their culture.

North Bellingham notability being the host of numerous diverse cultures, various foods, music and events, which provides the foundation to modify the consumer territory and marketing approach for a tourist destination.

## HOW WE IDENTIFY

Migration, various communities to North America: Whatcom County  
 Guatemalan Mayan Indigenous and Meztizo Communities  
 Mexican Aztec Indigenous and Meztizo Communities  
 Honduran Meztizo/ Garifona / Indigenous Communities  
 Mexican American Californian Meztizo Communities  
 Salvadoran Indigenous and Indigenous Communities



## A SPACE FOR US BRINGING IN TOURISM AND REVENUE



## 4015 ELIZA AVENUE CURRENT CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Images as of February 17, 2022



## NORTH BELLINGHAM LOCAL NONPROFIT FACILITIES

Images as of February 27, 2022





BELLINGHAM'S CULTURAL REPRESENTATION  
PREVIOUS CULTURAL HISTORY



Images as of December 2021

WHERE WE COME FROM  
ADEQUATE CULTURAL REPRESENTATION



Tropica, warm weather



Local Shopping



Nery Jonathan Pérez

WHERE WE COME FROM  
ADEQUATE CULTURAL REPRESENTATION



There is no tourist attraction such as this anywhere in the PNW.

Flea markets and low quality commercial spaces.

Events are hosted often celebrations and so forth; however, these spaces are more often than not, temporary. During the holiday season vendors are not able to be found.

Current property owners and city officials are perplexed on how to help, this is the solution.



## CURRENT NEEDS

### ADEQUATELY REPRESENT MY CULTURE

Help developing North Bellingham  
 Planting greenery in North Bellingham  
 Recruiting: The right representation  
 A community space: Church/School/Park  
 Connections to Developers  
 Speak with current NB property owners  
 Hosting community events in areas



## HOW TO HELP?

Funding/Grants/Land/ Building  
 Access to starting committees  
 Assisting local nonprofits helping communities  
 Conversation with city developers  
 City official Recruiter



The survey also concluded the demand for a tourist destination reflective of the Mayan/Meztizo communities, is increasing and in high demand.

Investing in a Historical commercial tourist destination in North Bellingham reflective of the Honduran, Guatemalan, Salvadoran communities, will increase Bellingham's revenue immensely.

By attracting consumers coming in from the North and as well as the South, these Historic commercial tourist destinations (North Bellingham and Fairhaven) will elevate the experience of consumers with variety.

Captivating Latin American tourist and local Latin American communities provides North Bellingham with the foot traffic to place a tourist destination.

Modifying the marketing approach for North Bellingham as culturally appropriate Historic Tourist destination for Mayan/Meztizo.

Settling artisanal goods, we can get some leverage over competitors such as Vancouver, Bellevue and Seattle.

Consumers are willing to spend more for nostalgic experiences.

Latin American migrant families miss their homes and will not be able to go back ever in some cases.

Having a small piece of what home is in North Bellingham sets for a unique lucrative opportunity.

There is no tourist attraction such as this anywhere in the PNW.

Everything is always flea markets and low quality commercial spaces.





# Appendix B — Relevant Previous WWU Student Project 1 (Nunez, 2023).

Suleyma Nunez  
LACD - Senior Project  
Dec. 14, 2023

## Establishing A Latin American Cultural District

The purpose of this senior project was to begin working on an idea brought up by a member of the community, Melida, that interested me for various reasons. In a small brochure Melida presented the idea of developing a Latin American Cultural district (LACD) in Bellingham where Latinos would be able to see development reflective of them and their cultures. I saw this project as a great opportunity to get some hands-on planning experience in the real world, and the fact that it was centered around the Latin experience was also a plus. Additionally, I felt like this would be a great way to practice actual community development tactics because it is one of the sides of planning that most interests me.

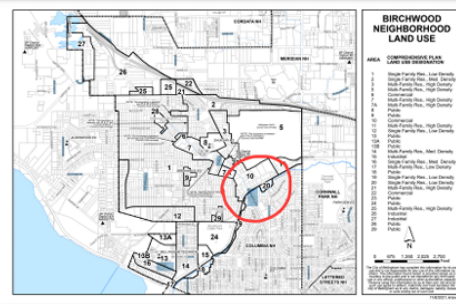
When I took my first planning class, Intro to Planning, I found that studying and working in this field could be a good way for me to help people in my community. I've lived in low-income housing and other places with minorities that are often pushed towards the fringe. Experiencing those environments firsthand, in a Hispanic community, has given me a different perspective than many of the people in the major. That desire to help those who don't know how city planning works, and don't always speak or understand the language, was one of the biggest reasons why I decided to switch my major to Urban Planning and Sustainable Development.

While working on this project I've been able to learn more about the Latin community in Bellingham and the history of the area in general, why there is a food desert in the Birchwood neighborhood and how land use is allocated. More recently I was able to meet with Latino students from Squalicum High School to present the project to them and hear their ideas. This presentation made the project feel more real and motivated me to get more people behind it. My project sponsors and I are coming up with plans to get community members together so that they themselves can decide how they wish to approach the project. While my role in this project was mainly to research and help Melida, I was hoping to have accomplished more than what I did. I found it difficult to allocate the appropriate time to this project with all my other homework and classes but I did find myself thinking about the project constantly. There were times when ideas presented in class also made sense for this project and I began thinking of how to apply them. Even though we were only able to coordinate one community event for feedback, I plan to continue helping with this project after I graduate this quarter, because it's something that truly interests me and would bring me great satisfaction to accomplish.

## Research

### Neighborhood/ Community Background

- Important to note that the proposed district would be in two two neighborhoods, Birchwood and Columbia so connections would need to be made with both neighborhood associations.
- What other historic groups live here and how could issues arise?
  - Is there a need to talk to Lummi? Work in collaboration?
  - Coal Mining History

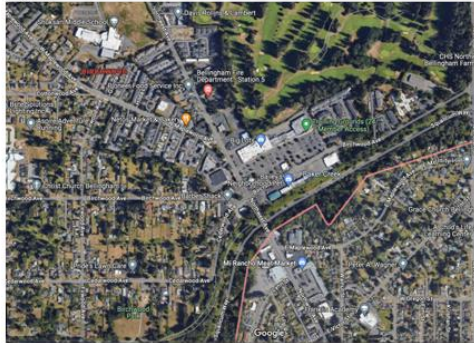


<https://cob.org/wp-content/uploads/birchwood.pdf>

The Birchwood Neighborhood plan (2021) notes the importance of open space/ green spaces and the protection of waterways: Squalicum creek, Little Squalicum Creek

- One question asked is how to get LACD into the next neighborhood plan?

### Site Area



### What's there?

- Food - **Mi Rancho** (Mexican)
- Netos Market** (Mexican) (Pictured)
- El Maná** (Honduran/Salvadorian)
- Little Caesars** (Pizza)
- That's What I Like** (Phillipian)
- What a Pho** (Vietnamese)
- Grants Burgers** (Burgers)
- Wanida Thai** (Thai)
- Tecalitlan** (Mexican)
- Birria Tijuana** (Mexican)
- Super Marios** (Salvadorian) (Pictured)
- Subway** (Sandwiches)
- The Bean Stop 2** (Coffee)
- Cruising Coffee** (Coffee)
- Salvation Army Food Bank**



- Financial - **WECU** (Credit Union)
- Northside Tax Service**
- Summit Bookkeeping**
- Industrial Credit Union**
- Liberty Tax Service**
- North Coast Credit Union**
- Edward Jones - Financial Advisor:**  
Frank Ellars



- Health - **Advanced Vision Family Eye Care**
- Rite Aid** (Drug Store)
- Training Grounds** (Cym)



- Other - **7 Eleven** (convenience store) (Pictured)
- Shell** (gas station/convenience)
- Big Lots** (Discount Store)
- Baileys Neighborhood Pet** (Pet Groomers)
- Lovely Nails and Spa** (Nail Salon)
- Whatcom Humane Society Thrift Shop**
- Barber Shack** (Barber Shop)
- Northwest Pawn** (Pawn Shop)
- Northwest Mini Storage**
- Doorstep Pet Supply** (Pet Store)
- Honey Nails** (Nail Salon)
- Fido Physio** (Dog Trainer)
- Birchwood Auto Repair** ( Repair Shop)
- Professional Nails and Spa** (Nail Salon)
- Bellingham Bay Spa** ( Massage Spa)
- The Beauty Mark Boutique** ( Nail Salon)
- 5 Kings** (Clothing Store )



**Example Locations/ Inspiration**

*Calle 24 Latino Cultural District*

"Calle 24 (formerly The Lower 24th Street Merchants and Neighbors Association) was created in 1999 by a group of long time residents, merchants, service providers and art organizations concerned with quality of life issues in the community."

I believe this is a close sentiment to what our project in Bellingham would encompass. It also shares the similarity that this could be something started by the Latino merchants in the area since homeownership might not be a strong factor in this case.



Calle 24 has multiple committees, including a Land Use, Design and Housing committee that oversees development in the district to ensure that that housing can be affordable and not only meets the design guidelines of the city, but also the ones created to promote Latin heritage. Other committees include the Economic Vitality committee, the Arts and Culture committee and the Quality of Life committee. This last committee looks to foster neighborhood safety in a culturally sensitive manner that includes respect for all people, including the homeless. They also organize community forums from time-to-time for more extensive public comment, such as community meetings, debates, town halls, and the like.



**City and County of San Francisco . (2023, March 9). *How the Cultural Districts Shape their Communities*. SF.GOV. <https://sf.gov/information/how-cultural-districts-shape-their-communities>**

**Calle 24 : About Us <https://www.calle24sf.org/about>**

San Francisco and the state of California as a whole has a long history of hispanic culture and settlement. Adoption of a plan like this one may seem difficult because Washington and Bellingham don't have that history. The PNW has mostly been settled by white settlers and has a rich Native American Culture. I would argue that in recent times, hispanic settlers have also made their impact on the state and deserve to have spaces where they feel acknowledged and welcomed. Latinos in Whatcom County/Bellingham hold many roles and provide more than labor, they are integral members of our community.

Washington too has a hispanic/ latino history that simply needs to be written down and acknowledged. But none of this will happen if people are not willing to voice their opinions. Speaking up and especially protesting is something not all latinos are comfortable with doing, and it's understandable, but there are others who can do the work without experiencing the risk. But who?

**WHATCOM COUNTY'S POPULATION GROWTH**

Whatcom County's population in the 2020 U.S. Census grew by 12.8% from 2010, as the racial/ethnic makeup changed.

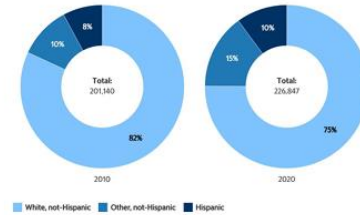


Chart: David Ralbach - Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**Additional Research Sites:**

**Birchwood Neighborhood association:** <https://www.birchwoodneighborhood.org/>  
Good resource to see when and where public meetings are happening.

**NW Hispanic Chamber of Commerce:** <https://nwchcc.org/>  
Resource to help current or future business owners.

**Bellingham Districts info:** <https://coh.org/services/planning/historic/national-districts>  
Bellingham has many established historic districts and even an arts district downtown where they promote diversity via various events throughout the year, but there are no cultural districts like the one we're proposing.

**Bellingham & Whatcom County Cultural Heritage Tourism Plan 2018-2022:**  
<https://coh.org/wp-content/uploads/cht-plan.pdf>

EXAMPLES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM as defined by the STRATEGIC PLAN					
ARTS			CULTURE		HERITAGE
performing arts	visual arts	educational, exploration & maker arts	culinary arts	includes traditional cultural sites, centers, events as well as contemporary culture	historic & prehistoric sites & activities
dance, music, theatre, comedy clubs, etc.	folk & fine arts - painting, sculpture, galleries, museums, film, photography, etc.	museums, art centers, libraries, literature; classes / experiences for all ages, etc.	locally-sourced food; craft beer, wine, spirits, etc.	Native American and other public traditional events; festivals, programs, farmers markets, museums, libraries, art/cultural experiences, etc.	walking tours, museums, house museums, historic districts, architecture, farmsteads, heritage trails, maritime assets, events & programs, etc.

It would be good to create a board of representatives that could be in touch with the city so that the Latin community can be a stakeholder to this plan. Many other stakeholders are included in the city's plans including Lummi and Nooksack but there seems to be no Hispanic/Latin representation.

**What we need to know:**

- Who/what is the community of people we are trying to represent/ empower to mobilize?
- How do we connect with people and ensure that various ages and backgrounds are heard, not just those who are politically motivated?
  - Maybe Dudley Street could be used as an example.
- What makes our site area the optimal location for this district?
  - Are there any numbers on the number of latino populations living in the area or is it mostly because of jobs?
    - Look at schools demographics
    - Talk to high school club
- What are the needs before what are the wants?
  - What needs to be addressed first (maybe healthy food or health care access)?
    - Non compete clause
- How to gain allies for this project, non Latino community?

**Next Steps**

- Hosting Community Gathering
- Universalized questions
- Squalicum High School

**Winter Quarter 2024**

Finding information about the Hispanic/Latino population in Bellingham was very difficult. To better understand where these populations lived or how many there really are, I looked at school demographics. This way I could not only see the population of young people, but also guess on what the parent population could be.

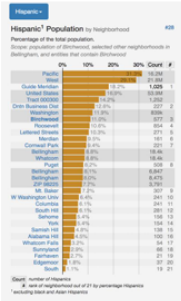
**School Demographics**

Shuksan Middle School  
35.1% Hispanic/Latino  
52.6% Minority Students

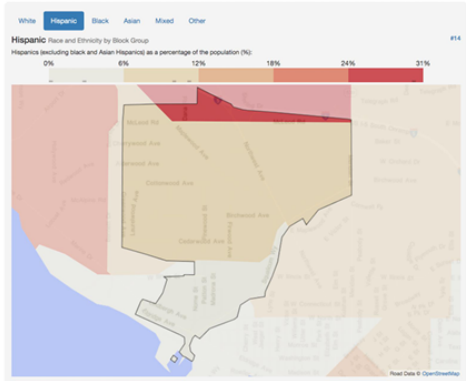
Birchwood Elementary  
41.2% Hispanic Latino  
56.0% Minority Students

Squalicum High School  
22.3% Hispanic  
42.8% Minority Students

**Neighborhood Demographics**



**Map of Race and Ethnicity by Block Group in Birchwood**



The information presented in the graphics above, makes me wonder if we should also be connecting with people living in the Guide Meridian neighborhood since the biggest Hispanic population lives there. Even when looking at Birchwood, it looks like there is a greater concentration of Hispanic residents towards the northern part of the neighborhood which borders with Meridian neighborhood.

**Squalicum High School Presentation Jan 25th 2024**

**Grassroots Effort**

- How does our built environment reflect us as a community?
- Ask the city to designate a cultural district in the Birchwood neighborhood (Northwest Ave)
- Establish committees from members of the community



**Drawing Inspiration**

Latin America

The States: Calle 24 San Francisco

**Why is it important?**

- A way to create and strengthen community
- Feel reflected in our built environment
- Support Latin businesses
- Beautiful area and hopefully make it feel safer for everybody



**Future connections**

**Vamos Outdoors Project:**

<https://www.vamosoutdoorsproject.com/>

**Community to Community**

<https://www.foodjustice.org/>

**Samish Mobile Home Park Residents**

**About their story:**

<https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/mobile-home-park-tenants-fight-save-land/281-1326380e-aa7d-4966-b3f6-e011d7c3f907>

# Appendix C — Relevant Previous WWU Student Project 2 (Laudisio, 2024)

Western Washington University

## Establishing a Latin American Cultural District in Birchwood, Bellingham, WA

Nicole Laudisio  
 Tammi Laninga  
 Senior Project  
 June 12, 2024

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Project Overview:  
 The project builds upon the foundational work started by previous student Suleyma Nunez. The goal of our project is to aid the Birchwood neighborhood with creating a vibrant cultural district that celebrates Latin American heritage. When engaging with this initiative as an outsider I wanted to come from an asset-based community development perspective, focusing on leveraging the community's strengths and resources to enhance cultural pride, economic development, and social cohesion. By engaging local residents, businesses, and organizations, the project aims to engage with the community and understand their needs and create a dedicated website to support ongoing efforts and provide a centralized platform for information and participation.

Long-Term and Short-Term Objectives:

1. Community Engagement: Attend local events and markets to connect with residents and gather insights into their needs and aspirations for the cultural district. Along with establishing relationships in the neighborhood.
2. Resource Center Development: A long-term goal is to establish a community resource center to serve as a hub for cultural activities, information, and support.
3. Website Creation: Develop a website to provide updates, resources, and a platform for community interaction.
4. Cultural Promotion: Promote Latin American culture through events, markets, and educational programs that can be integrated with existing events.
5. Sustainable Growth: Ensure the project supports long-term community development and economic opportunities that consider the community's needs.

**II. OUTCOMES**

Project Activities:

1. Community Outreach: Attended various Birchwood neighborhood events and markets to engage with residents, at these events I would conduct a structured survey and informal recorded interviews to understand the community's opinion on a district. See appendix for survey documents.

Over the course of 10 weeks I compiled the result of these surveys with a total of 137 respondents that were from .


	"I support the development of a Latin American cultural district in the Birchwood neighborhood."	"A Latin American cultural district would enrich the cultural diversity of the Birchwood neighborhood."	"The establishment of a Latin American cultural district would positively impact the local economy in Birchwood."	"I would participate in events and activities hosted in a Latin American cultural district in Birchwood."	"There is a need for a resource center to provide information about a cultural district in Birchwood."
Strongly Agree	54	41	57	49	25
Agree	43	44	42	46	63
Neutral	21	35	19	27	40
Disagree	13	13	12	10	4
Strongly Disagree	6	4	6	5	5
Total Survey Submissions	137	137	137	137	137

The survey results indicate community support for the development of a Latin American cultural district in Birchwood, both in terms of its potential to enhance and showcase cultural diversity while also positively impacting the Birchwood local economy. There is also a high level of interest in participating in events and activities associated with the district. There was support for the establishment of a resource center to provide information and updates about the cultural district but less support compared to the other questions. These results suggest that the community is largely in favor of the project and would actively engage with it. This provides a solid foundation for moving forward with the development plans and addressing any concerns raised by the minority of respondents who are neutral or opposed.


2. Website Development: Designed and launched a website for the Birchwood Latin American Cultural District. Included features such as a calendar of events, news updates, community resources, and contact information. Ensured the website was user-friendly and accessible to all residents, specifically focusing on creating a website that is accessible in both English and Spanish.

**Final Products:**

**Website:** A fully functional website providing comprehensive information and resources about the cultural district that is bilingual while including events, resource drop box, and mission statement.



**Home Screen of Website**



**File Share Screen of Website**

**III. ASSESSMENT AND NEXT STEPS**

Project Success:  
 The project laid the groundwork for the Birchwood Latin American Cultural District by engaging the community and identifying key needs and resources; outreach efforts were

generally well-received, and there was support for the establishment of more resources such as a website or a designated resource center in the neighborhood. The project highlighted the community's enthusiasm to integrate cultural aspects into their neighborhood that can hopefully continue growing in coming years with more progress done for the district.

**Skills and Experience Gained:**

**Community Engagement:** Developed skills in conducting community outreach and building relationships with diverse community members. Engaging with communities as an outsider with little connection in an appropriate and helpful manner.

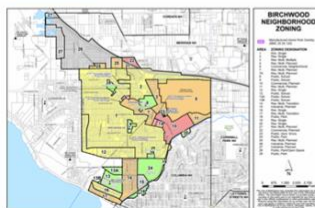
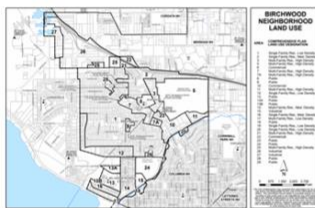
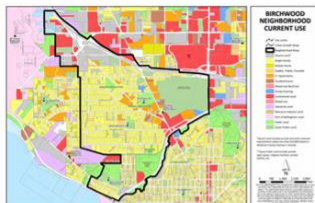
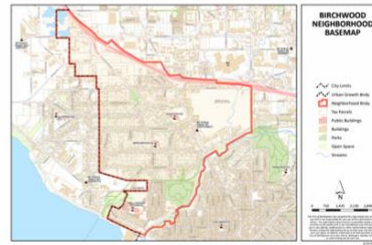
**Project Planning:** Gained experience in planning and organizing community-based projects.

**Recommended Next Steps:**

1. **Expand Community Engagement:** Organize additional community meetings and workshops to gather more input and encourage participation. Engaging with the community as just one college student was sometimes hard to garner support and having a more solidified group may be more successful. It may be useful to promote the project through local media and social networks to reach a broader audience, consider talking to the Bellingham Public Library or neighborhood groups.
2. **Develop Cultural Programs:** Plan and implement cultural events, markets, and educational programs that promote Latin American culture; integrating booths into local markets and events so more residents can be engaged. Partnering with local schools and organizations to offer cultural education and activities, while also engaging younger residents in the planning process.
3. **Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Establish a form of metrics to assess the impact of the cultural district on the community, provide research of similar initiatives and their impacts. Regularly review progress and make adjustments based on community feedback and changing needs.

IV. APPENDIX

**Birchwood Maps:**



**Resources:**

- [Birchwood Neighborhood Plan](#)
- [Bellingham and Whatcom County, Washington Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan](#)
- [COB Birchwood Neighborhood Page, includes more resources and updates project list](#)
- [Spring 2024 Goals for LACD senior project](#)
- [English Version of Survey](#)
- [Spanish Version of Survey](#)
- [Project Website](#)

**Contacts and Events:**

- Birchwood Neighborhood Association upcoming community meetings: Tuesday September 24, Tuesday October 29, Tuesday January 28, 2025. Meetings generally held the fourth Tuesday of September, October, January, March, and May from 6:30-8:00 pm at Birchwood Elementary School (3200 Pinewood Ave). Contact: Jeannie Gilbert, birchwoodboardmember@gmail.com
- Whatcom County Resources  
Cultural Heritage Tourism presenter and writer of "Bellingham and Whatcom County, Washington Cultural Heritage Strategic Plan": 2018-2022: Cheryl Hargrove and Katie Franks was the project manager, kfranks@cob.org, 360-778-8388

The establishment of a Latin American Cultural District in Birchwood enhances cultural diversity and economic development. Building on previous work, I approached this project from an asset-based community development perspective, focusing on community strengths. As an outsider I aimed to prioritize listening and learning from residents. Survey results showed strong support for the cultural district and a resource center, reflecting a shared vision for celebrating cultural heritage. Creating a bilingual website was one step towards accessibility and inclusivity, serving as a hub for information and community interaction. This project laid the groundwork for both a physical and online presence. Through this project I gained valuable skills in community engagement and project planning. The next steps should include expanding community engagement, developing cultural programs, enhancing website features, and monitoring progress. This project emphasizes collaborative efforts in community development and the importance of cultural heritage when building inclusive communities.

Bellingham's  
**LA VILLA DE LAS AMÉRICAS**  
Latin-American Cultural District



**Join Our  
Committee**


Help us create a designated area in Northern Bellingham  
that has cultural facilities, activities and artistic resources

**Thursday | 5 Dec | 6:00 PM**  
1538 Birchwood Avenue Suite A, Bellingham, WA



Food will be provided and children are welcome!  
Contact [leporea@wwu.edu](mailto:leporea@wwu.edu) if you have any questions


Bellingham's  
**LA VILLA DE LAS AMÉRICAS**  
Distrito Cultural Latinoamericano



**Únete a nuestro  
comité**

Ayúdanos a crear un área designado en el norte de  
Bellingham que tenga instalaciones, empresas y recursos  
culturales

**Jueves | 5 Dec | 6:00 PM**  
1538 Birchwood Avenue Suite A, Bellingham, WA



¡Tendremos comida! ¡Niños bienvenidos!  
Manda un correo a [leporea@wwu.edu](mailto:leporea@wwu.edu) si tienen preguntas



Appendix F — Email Draft (Written by Meaera Nystrom and Sidra Miller, 2024)

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, I am a student in Western Washington University's Urban Planning Program. We have been working alongside community member and Cambio Unanime founder, Mélida Lopez-Baca, to help her bring her vision of a Latin-American Cultural District to Bellingham.

Our next step is gathering stakeholders together to get more thoughts, opinions, and ideally support! We are hosting a meeting on **December 5<sup>th</sup>** from **6-7 pm** at **Iglesia “Cristo Con Nostros” Ministerios Ebenezer**. Here, we'll be presenting our research, exploring the creation of a cultural district, and discussing potential next steps. There will also be time to get an understanding of your vision, as a stakeholder, for your community.

We hope you will join us in creating a space that celebrates the heritage of many of Bellingham's residents! We have attached a flyer below and encourage you to share it with friends, family, and any others you think should have their voice heard.

Snacks and beverages will be provided, and children are welcome!

Please feel free to follow up with questions! We're excited to see you there.

Best,

Appendix G — List of Possible Stakeholders (Created by Caitlyn Wilson, 2024)

Birchwood Neighborhood Association
City of Bellingham and Whatcom County <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liz Darrow</li> </ul>
Vamos Outdoors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marissa Avalos (Leadership Team)-</li> <li>• Julian (Vamos and COB Employee)-</li> </ul>
Birchwood Food Desert Fighters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tina McKim</li> </ul>
Local Schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Squalicum High</li> <li>• Kulshan Middle School</li> <li>• Birchwood Elementary</li> </ul>
Cultural Food Stores <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• La Gloria Market</li> <li>• Mi Rancho Meat Market</li> <li>• Alebrijes Mexican Store</li> <li>• Netos Market &amp; Bakery</li> </ul>
Latino Community Fund Washington State
Tara Sundin
Birchwood International Market
Katie Franks

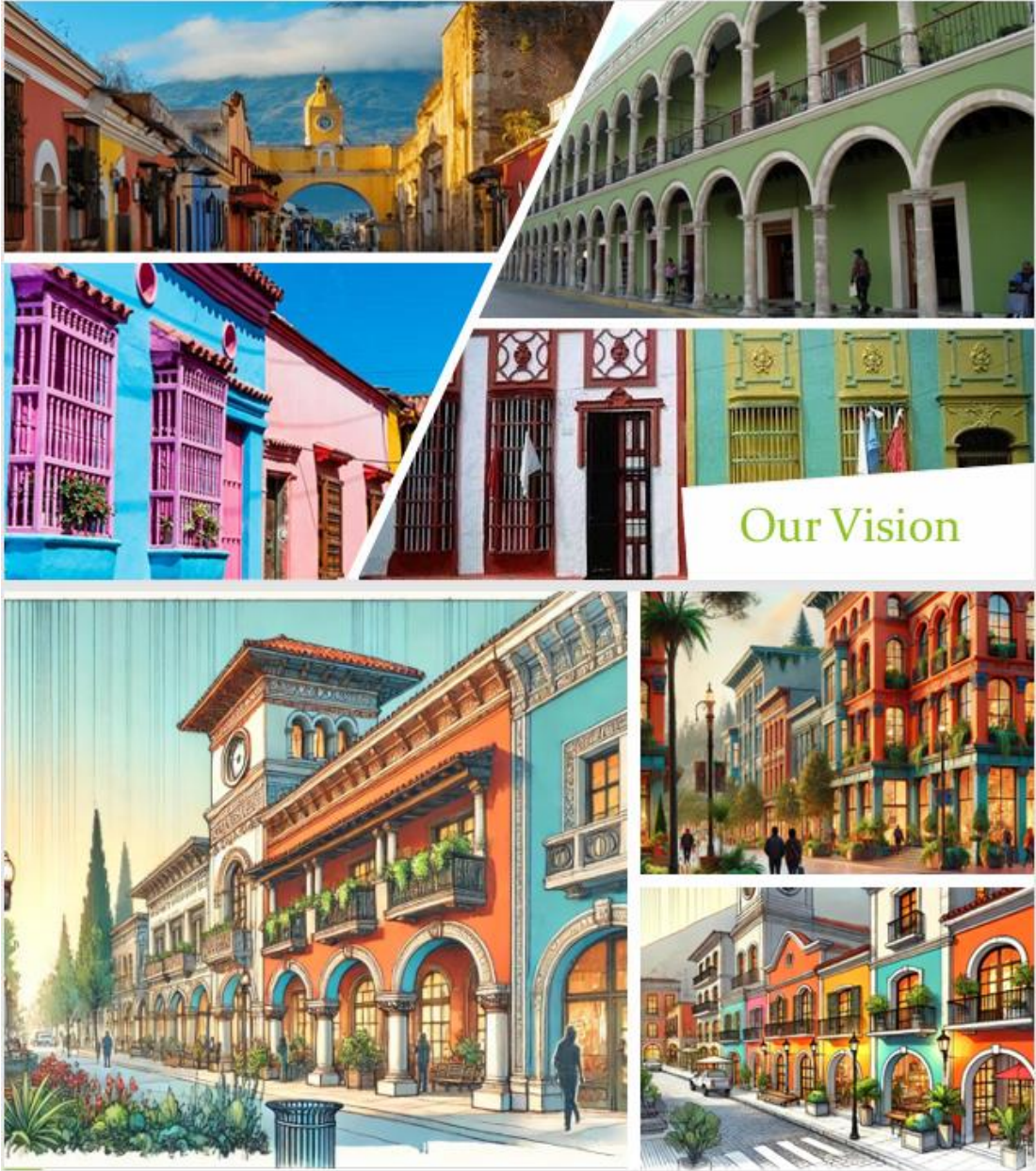
Appendix H — Stakeholder Presentation (Clark, et al., 2024)



# La Villa de Las Américas

A Proposition for a Latin American Cultural District  
In North Bellingham





## What is a Cultural District?

A designated space that celebrates cultures and their people. It provides a place for cultural institutions, businesses, and practices to thrive.

- ▶ Community Hub
- ▶ Social Opportunities
- ▶ Economic Opportunities
- ▶ Preserve and Promote Cultural Heritage
- ▶ Stronger Community
- ▶ Cultural Education



## Benefits of a Cultural District in Bellingham

-  Celebrate Latin American cultural heritage 
-  Foster economic growth and Latin business ownership
-  Increase commerce to local business
-  Expand and diversify Bellingham's tourism sector
-  Expand knowledge about Latin culture and heritage
-  Connect community to space



## What Would it Look Like?

Future developments would represent Latin American heritage:

- Architecture/design that reflects cultural heritage
- Latin American Businesses
- Cultural Events
- A Community Center

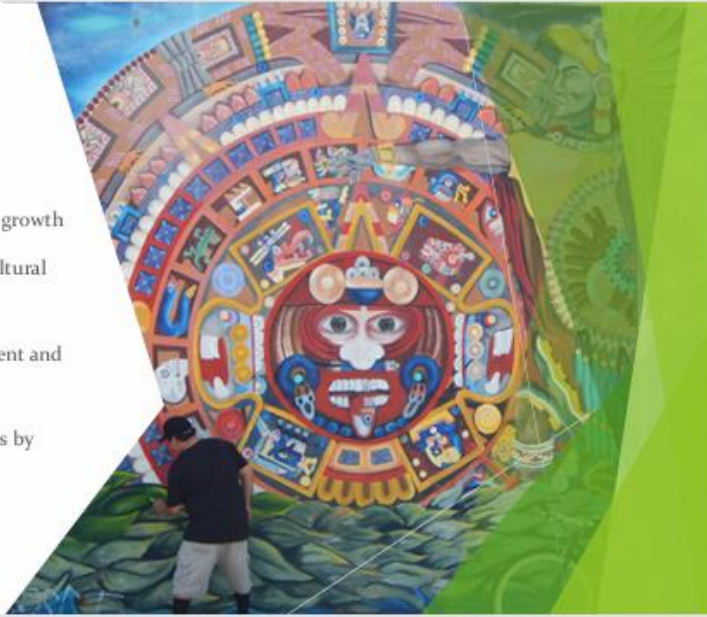


## Barrio-Logan, San Diego

- ▶ In 1970, Chicano students stood up for justice and created Chicano Park
- ▶ The park is in San Diego's Barrio Logan neighborhood, the oldest Mexican-American neighborhood in the city
- ▶ Showcased 80 art murals, car shows (low-rider event), Aztec dancing, galleries, and drumming groups.
- ▶ Collaborated with local restaurants, cafes, breweries, and shops
- ▶ Embraced Chicano culture

## Cont.

- ▶ Brought generational economic growth
- ▶ Expand social awareness and cultural opportunities
- ▶ Increased community engagement and participation
- ▶ Grew the visibility of local artists by showcasing their work



## Samish Way Urban Village



- ▶ New urban village in Bellingham on Samish Way
- ▶ Began as WWU student project



## Proposed Timeline



### Short-Term Plan:

Form a Coalition of Stakeholders  
Identify Funding Sources & Investors  
Host Community Event to Promote the idea of our future Latin Cultural District



### Medium-Term Plan:

Apply for Grant Funding  
Design and Plan the Community Center



### Long-Term Plan:

Design and plan Latin American Cultural District  
Open the Community Center

## Our asks of you!

Join	Form a council of stakeholders
Continue	Carry the work forward with Melida
Spread the Word	Get excited about our future!

## Discussion

- ▶ Questions?
- ▶ Comments?

Thank You!

## Appendix I — List of Stakeholders who attended (Collected on December 5, 2024)

<b>Name</b>	<b>Phone Number</b>	<b>Email</b>
Ricardo Sanchez	360-220-9150	Dracir3722@gmail.com
Hannah Stone	360-582-7543	Leftcoaststone@gmail.com
Susan Willhoft	360-778-7014	Swillhoft@yahoo.com
Marian Marquez	360-603-6162	Marmarquez@gmail.com
Mercedes Enriquez	360-441-7652	Mcal8195@hotmail.com
Bertha Rodriguez	360-441-9963	Rodrijen055@gmail.com
Julian Medina-Schroeder	206-953-5049	Julianms1137@gmail.com
Suneeta Eisenberg	360-739-8703	Not disclosed
Máté Pásztor	4252992132	Mate.z.pasztor@gmail.com

## Appendix J — List and Descriptions of Relevant Case Studies

### i) Barrio Logan Cultural District in San Diego, California



In 1970, Chicano students stood up for justice and fought to create a space that made them feel at home. This was known as the Chicano Park which is located in the Barrio Logan neighborhood in San Diego. This is San Diego's oldest Mexican-American neighborhood. It showcased 80 art murals, car shows (low-rider event), Aztec dancing, galleries, and drumming groups. The students and the neighborhood partnered and collaborated with local restaurants, cafes, breweries, and shops to provide an economic benefit as well. It allowed local Latin/Chicano business owners an opportunity to grow their business while promoting their culture. The focus of this cultural district is to embrace the Chicano culture, but also bring economic growth, social awareness, cultural opportunities, and increase community engagement participation. It also grows the visibility of local artists by showcasing their work all around the area.

ii) [Roger Williams - Student Developed Arts and Cultural District Proposition in Providence, Rhode Island](#)

Designed by students, this proposal can be used as an outline and has a comprehensive background of the area, including information from surveys. It describes a problem statement which investigates the current conditions while highlighting the positive impacts of the proposed Cultural District, and the possible negatives of not implementing it. They include the promise of increased tourism, new economic developments while considering the problems of community detachment and lack of investments in the area. Also has an attached presentation developed by students outlining the plan. This proposal shows how students have collected data of what the community wants to see and taken steps to formalize and implement these ideas.

iii) [LCD Proposition - Calle 24 in San Francisco, California](#)

Presents the History of a grassroots organization developed in 1999, and the designation of Calle 24 as a SUD (Special Use District) which preserves character and represents the values of the community. This organization is focused specifically on protecting a space for members of the Latin community. It shows the process of grassroots organizing and a reasonable timeline for the development of a Cultural District with extensive community engagement (1999-2014). This grassroots movement allowed for community empowerment and became a SUD to protect the neighborhood from displacement and gentrification.

iv) [2022 BelRed Arts District Implementation Plan](#)

Inspired to generate an Arts District due to the high prevalence of art markets in the area, the community ended up making a cultural district plan. The practices to generate the district were less important at this point of the research due to how different this project was rather than Mérida's desired project. The most important elements were understanding what would be needed in a proposal and how to formulate one. Aiming to provide more tools to help Mérida build her project. We were able to take notes on its structure and are trying to reach out to the team that developed the proposal so that we may better understand the frameworks they used and embolden Mérida's vision.