

## **Bellingham Metal Shredder Community Education Teach-In**

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Introduction ..... 3  
Vision/Purpose Statement..... 3  
Background ..... 3  
Preparation ..... 6  
Event Reflection..... 7  
Appendix A..... 11  
Appendix B..... 12  
Appendix C..... 14  
Appendix D ..... 15  
Appendix E..... 16  
Appendix F ..... 17  
Bibliography..... 19

## Introduction

Our group designed and hosted a teach-in at Western Washington University focused on the controversy and environmental risks of a proposed metal shredder in Bellingham, WA. Our group aimed to understand the potential environmental impacts on the community and the goals of the stakeholders so we could present information regarding the plans for the metal shredder. We aimed to bridge a knowledge and communication gap between the broader community and the student population at Western. As part of the teach-in, we facilitated a panel including people involved in the campaign against the shredder and community members impacted by ABC Recycling operations in Whatcom County. Our group spoke with stakeholders and community members to consider and represent views, perspectives, concerns, and hopes regarding the metal shredder and potential alternatives for the site.

## Vision/Purpose Statement

Through hosting a Teach-In, we hope to educate and mobilize students and members of the greater Bellingham community to understand the threat that the metal shredder poses to the health and livelihood of some of the most vulnerable communities in Whatcom County.

## Background

[Powerpoint- Brief Context](#) (Shown at event)

Our goal for this project was to educate and encourage students and community members to act on a local environmental injustice involving ABC Recycling and the Birchwood and Marietta-Alderwood neighborhoods. ABC Recycling currently has a 15–20-year lease on the Bellingham waterfront where they currently store large metal piles (Craven, 2023). They plan to install a metal shredder on Marine Drive near the Alderwood, Chartwell, Marietta, and Birchwood neighborhoods (Save the Waterfront, 2024).

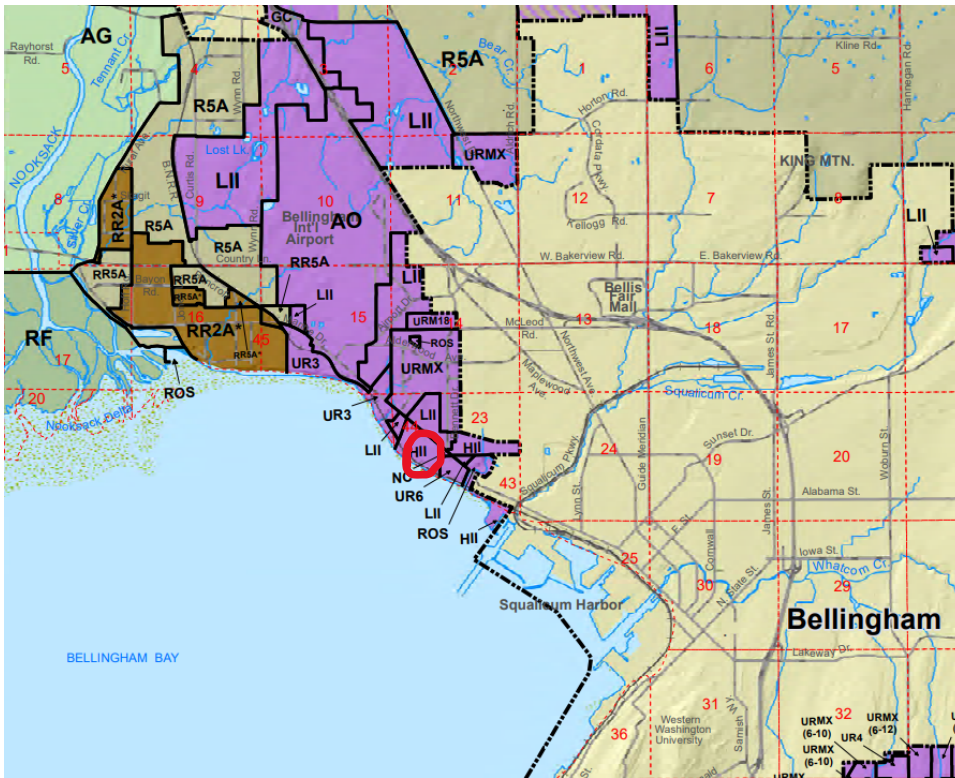


(Proposed Metal Shredder Site via [Salish Current](#))

ABC Recycling is based in Surrey, BC. Their first operation in the States was the metal pile on the waterfront downtown. The pile was already controversial because of the noise pollution it produces. For just under 2 weeks of the year, the transport boat docks, and longshoremen load the ships with the scrap metal for 22 hours of the day, from 6 a.m. to 3 a.m. The metal stored on the waterfront is then shipped to countries with less strict labor rights, like India and Vietnam. They have also been criticized for [operating without correct permits](#) (Lerner, 2023), the city's failure to trigger a SEPA (State Environmental Policy Act) review of the operation, and for the hazards created by the metal pile itself.

ABC bought the land for the shredder for more than \$3 million. On Oct. 24, 2023, they submitted a [major project permit land use application](#) to Whatcom County (Whatcom County, 2023). Community members tried to pass a moratorium on new heavy industry that they hoped would have blocked the permitting process from moving forward, but it [failed](#) (Showalter et al., 2023). The metal shredder project will now likely have to go through a SEPA review, which will be conducted by an independent contractor.

The main environmental concerns with the metal shredder are air pollution, truck traffic, and noise levels. The metal shredder releases volatile organic compounds that are hazardous to people's health when inhaled (Craven, 2023). There is an estimate of 3-5 trucks per hour from trucks transporting metal to the metal pile then to the shredder and back to the port (Craven, 2023). Noise is a concern because the shredder will produce noise that equates to the decibel level of a normal conversation (Save the Waterfront, 2024).



(Purple indicates “Urban Growth Area; HI stands for Heavy Impact Industrial; red circle indicates location of the proposed shredder. Map via [Whatcom County](#))

This has inspired a local environmental justice movement around the potential impact of the proposed facility on neighborhood residents. Birchwood and Alderwood are [low-income neighborhoods](#) and some of the most racially diverse in the county. Those living the closest to the shredder would be the most vulnerable to its potential negative environmental impacts. There are two elementary schools nearby, both roughly a mile from the site. A \$2.25 million grant was awarded by the state Department of Commerce’s Housing Trust Fund for a new affordable housing development project less than a mile away, as well.

The site of the proposed metal shredder is designated by the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan as an Urban Growth area but is still zoned for Heavy Impact Industrial use. Members of the County Council failed to update the zoning to Light Industrial when it was brought up 20 years ago.

Organizations like Save the Waterfront and the South Hill, Birchwood, and the Alderwood neighborhood associations have been invested in blocking ABC Recycling from installing the metal shredder. A recent (December 2023) meeting brought strong emotions, with residents vocalizing their concerns to ABC Recycling representative, Riley Sweeney (Denkmann et al., 2023).

## Preparation

This project required a lot of planning by reaching out to partners, gathering community input, and conducting background research (see Appendix A). We began conducting background research on the metal shredder controversy to get an idea of the scope of the issue and why the shredder has been controversial in Bellingham. We read news articles from *The Front*, *Cascadia Daily News*, *Bellingham Herald*, KUOW, and *Whatcom Watch*. We also found statements from Lummi Nation, RESources for Sustainable Communities, Save the Waterfront, and ABC Recycling. Using this background information, we identified individuals from various backgrounds and interviewed them to help us reach a deeper understanding of the community's concern about the potential impacts of the shredder proposal. We interviewed elderly residents, professors, activists, neighborhood association members, undergraduate students, and subject matter researchers.

This process required frequent follow-ups, meetings with our interviewees, and the capacity to hold space for them to feel heard and seen. We hope our efforts prime further connection between Western's student community and Whatcom County's broader community. Part of our team's goal was to ensure that the experiences and information we gathered were presented fairly. So, in our teach-in planning process, we decided that a guest panel was the best format to platform our speakers and highlight their lived experience. We put a lot of thought into the questions we asked in order to draw out key information that we believed would help students understand the issues at play (see Appendix B). We were successful in recruiting Professor Troy Abel (WU), his undergraduate students Louisa Keating & Maree Madeiros, and Scott Jones from Save the Waterfront to speak on our panel:

- Professor Troy Abel works at Western Washington University and has conducted research on the Seattle Iron & Metals shredder that is in South Seattle in the Duwamish River basin. His research uses moss samples to document pollutants and pollution hot spots in the area.
- Louisa Keating & Maree Madeiros are undergraduate students working under Professor Troy Abel on incorporating an environmental justice framework for the comprehensive plan of environmental impact in Whatcom County. Their work has been to provide evidence through risk assessment of potential harm to marginalized communities. They are also working on alternative uses for the land that ABC Recycling owns and doing community outreach in the Birchwood and Alderwood-Marietta neighborhood for their Urban Planning studio class.
- Scott Jones from Save the Waterfront is a concerned community member who was initially made aware of the issue when the noise at the metal pile at the waterfront caused trouble for him and his family in the South Hill neighborhood. Since then, he has helped lead Save the Waterfront's campaign against the proposed metal shredder and works as a liaison between various stakeholders and community members/groups.

In addition to these panelists, we also talked with the following stakeholders in advance of the event: Suneeta Eisenberg, a representative of the Alderwood-Marietta community, Riley

Sweeney from ABC Recycling, Sarah Gardner, the Birchwood neighborhood president, and Alicia Wills, a Birchwood representative and Save the Waterfront member.

Our team used various methods to promote our Teach-In event. We created a flyer (see Appendix D) that was posted around the Western Washington University campus. We also dropped off some flyers at the Western Publication Office, who then posted the flyers in residence halls and in glass display cases around campus. We presented to a few lecture classes, including ENVS303 about our event. Each of us promoted the event via social media sharing to at least three other people or clubs to repost our flyer. In hopes of diversifying our audience we also posted flyers downtown at the Community Co-op and a few other local businesses. The event was also promoted at a community yoga class to forty people. Our group contacted *Western Today*, a campus news outlet, about promoting our event, though we didn't hear back after multiple inquiries. Our main goal was to promote the event to diverse groups of people in the community, we accomplished this through posting flyers at many different locations and promoting our event through social media. We found that when presenting directly to classes or clubs, people had the opportunity to engage and ask questions about the event which may have increased the likeliness they would attend.

## Event Reflection

Our event had a great turnout, with about 50 people in attendance (Figure 2.). We did not know what to expect in terms of attendance because of a few challenges we faced in the weeks leading up to our event. We ended up having to reschedule our event because there was a time conflict with a keynote speaker at Washington Oregon Higher Education Sustainability Conference (WOHESC), which was hosted on our campus this year. The new date we scheduled was during prep week (the week before finals). Another challenge we faced was access to printing flyers in color. We planned to have our flyers printed at the Honors Center, which offers free printing, but it ended up only having black and white printing. Our team agreed that the flyers were better in color due to the design. Luckily, our professor Kate Darby printed them in color for us through the ENVS department. We were delayed in posting flyers due to the challenge of finding accessible color printing, but we promoted the event via social media and posted the flyers a few days before the event. Our team was relieved to see the lecture hall filling up near the start of our event, meaning even with the date change and delayed promotion, we still effectively spread the word about our event.

At the beginning of the Teach-In, one of our guest speakers requested a few slides be added to our PowerPoint presentation (see the original in Appendix C). Our group quickly added the slides and gracefully accommodated the impromptu change of plans. During the event, the audience asked great questions that complimented our panelists' discussion questions well. During the audience Q&A we noticed an overlap to topics we planned to discuss in our final statements meaning the information discussed and presented by the panelists was right on target with our closing remarks. After concluding the event, many guests stayed and talked with our group members as well as with the panelists. Our group is proud that we were able to host an event and have a platform as Western students to shed light on a local environmental justice

issue that is unfolding in our Bellingham Community. Figure 1. is a group photo with our discussion panelists following the successful execution of our event.

After our closing remarks we displayed a QR code that led to a Google Form that attendees could fill out to provide feedback for how they believed our event went. We received 23 responses, meaning that over half of our participants filled out the form. See Appendix E for a summary of responses.

Later in the week, we took the panelists out to dinner at Brandywine Kitchen. We chose this location because it is one of the few Black-owned restaurants in Bellingham, and because it was able to accommodate our large group upstairs in the mezzanine. We wanted to make sure that we were being intentional about building relationships with members of the community that were not transactional. We agreed that sharing food was a great way to show our appreciation, and the meal sparked a lot of insightful conversation and thought about our next steps.

Prior to the event, our group wrote a budget proposal for hosting a dinner at Brandywine Kitchen, and providing food at our teach-in. The budget proposal was submitted to the ENVS discretionary fund and the Dean's sustainability fund, and \$500 was approved by the ENVS department. We used the funds to purchase refreshments and pizza for our Teach-In and covered the dinner costs for our panelists as a thank you in lieu of honoraria (see Appendix F).

One of our goals with this event was to spur students into prolonged engagement with the issue and the community members fighting against the Shredder. Students for Climate Action, a club on campus, is currently working with Urban Planning Club and the Office of Civic Engagement to host another related event during Earth Week. We were regretful that we could not get Suneeta Eisenberg on our panel but are hopeful that she will be able to make it to the next one. We hope to take the lessons we have learned and connections we have made with us when planning future events. Students with the Urban Planning Department will be holding an event on April 9<sup>th</sup> at Alderwood Elementary school to try and hear from more of the community. The hope is that, after that event, it will be easier to reach out to the community as a whole and amplify their concerns and vision for the site of the proposed metal shredder. SCA will also mobilize students to attend protests and meetings held by Save the Waterfront.





Figure 1. Group Photo with Discussion Panelists after the Teach-In Event



Figure 2. Audience watching presenters field questions to discussion panelists



## Appendix A

### **Project Objectives (Vision):**

1. Understand the “Metal Shredder Problem”
2. Field information to the campus & broader community
3. Facilitate conversations about environmental justice (EJ)
4. Inspire participation in local activism

### **Timeline:**

1. Turn in Work Plan 1/26
2. Promotion 2/28-3/11
3. Research & community outreach 2/7-2/28
4. Plan event (it's going to take considerable time and thought to create a structure that supports conversation and engagement without things turning confrontational)
5. Finalize material by 3/8
6. Host event March 11<sup>th</sup>, 6:00-7:30 pm
7. Write reflection + turn in deliverables on/before 3/15

### **Promotion**

- Book room on Mazevo
- Contact Western Today about promoting Teach-In
- Contact AS Students about money for flyers?
- Create Flyers for promotion (Bellingham College Campus', local businesses)
- Other colleges: BTC, Whatcom Community College, NWIC
- Present to clubs/classes about the Teach-In
  1. SCA
  2. SRE
  3. ENVS303, ENVS305
- Distribute flyers in Bellingham
- Contact ATUS about recording
- Teach-In Monday March 11<sup>th</sup> at 5:00 pm

### **Community Outreach**

- Contact Urban Planning Club about previous engagement
- Contact ABC Recycling
- Contact Troy Abel about the situation in more detail
- Contact Suneeta Eisenberg on Birchwood community impacts
- Save the Waterfront

### **Panelists:**

Troy Abel, Louisa Keating & Maree Madeiros, and Scott Jones

## Appendix B

### I. Introduction

- Welcome the audience into the space (**Makayla**)
- Introduce ourselves and our guest speakers
  - i. (Ask them in advance about what could be added in a rough draft)
- Land acknowledgment (**Mer**)
  - i. Lummi & Nooksack
- Share agenda of meeting (**Makayla**)
- Set expectations about speaking (**Mer**)
- Brief context about the issue we will be discussing (**Karis**)
  - i. PowerPoint slides and share with the panel prior so we can get feedback

### II. Central conversation

- Fielding questions from us to the panel (**Mikayla & Seddie**)
  - i. Tentative time ~ 1 hour
- Open to the audience for remaining time (**Maggie**)

### III. Actions & Concluding remarks (**Seddie & Maggie**)

- Promotion of SCA/Earth Week (April 24<sup>th</sup>)
- CURB Act (failed this legislative session, but still good to talk about)
  - i. [CURB Pollution Act - Front and Centered](#)
- Action protests by StW in Downtown (March-April roughly)
- Get more involved with community members active right now (bridge the Western vs. broader community disconnect)
- Shout to Darby for this!
  - i. “Students are not a permanent resident but are a permanent demographic”

#### Expectations:

- We are in a community space; we ask the attendees to respect the opinions of panelists and others in attendance. We welcome questions, but please save them for the appropriate time. No interruptions or aggression will be tolerated. If you have a *question*, you may raise your hand and ask.
- We are not subject matter experts, and as such we ask that you respect the time and effort, we put into this teach-in.
- Please be mindful of allowing time for others to also ask questions or engage with our guest speakers.

#### Questions:

- **\*\***(To all participants) Can you give us a summary of what you believe to be the main issues at play here? What is the metal shredder and why is it controversial?

- Based on your expertise, what is the greatest environmental threat associated with a metal shredder in Bellingham?
- What impacts on community and health do you anticipate seeing with a development like the metal shredder?
- ABC Recycling says that other metal shredders have failed because they haven't had the right controls. Is there a more sustainable process to shred? (Transportation, disposal, shipping etc.)
- Where is ABC Recycling at in the permitting process? Is there still time to stop it? How?
- What makes ABC Recycling ill-equipped to run this project?
- ABC Recycling owns the land at the proposed metal shredder site. What do you hope will happen to it if the shredder isn't approved for the necessary permits?
- How can members of the community, including students, effectively participate in discussions and decision-making processes related to projects like the metal shredder?

# Appendix C

## Powerpoint- Brief Context (Shown at event)

### Metal Shredder Context



Hosted by Karis Felton, Maggie Langsted, Seddie Leblanc, Makayla Marquez, & Mer Pascual



### What is the metal shredder?

What we know about the shredder:

- ABC Recycling is a Canadian recycling company who bought 20 acres from Heidelberg Industries, who was responsible for cement production
- They have signed a 15-year lease with the Port of Bellingham
- The main process consists of trucking the metal material to the site to be "stockpiled"
  - Shredded material is then stored at ABC's pile on the waterfront (visible from campus)
- Construction of the metal shredder facility is set to be complete by 2024



### Location

- Marine Drive, affecting the Birchwood and Alderwood-Marietta neighborhoods
- Crucial land near the water, near Lummi Reservation & near residential areas
- Affecting vulnerable populations: Elderly, low-income residents, BIPOC, young families
- In residents' "backyard"



### Prominent Concerns

#### Pollution

Noise impacts, fine particulate matter, stormwater runoff, Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)

#### ABC Recycling

Management of Metal Pile, State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review/regulations, Canadian ownership/profit

#### General location

The location is not ideal for the Birchwood and Alderwood-Marietta communities and is also situated within the Urban Growth Area (UGA) and is densely populated.

- Could the Shredder set a precedent for heavy industrial projects in the UGA?

### Now, please join us in a discussion with our panelists!





### Take Action!

Protests with Save the Waterfront in Downtown- March-April roughly

Promotion of SCA/Earth Week- April 24th

CURB Act Front & Centered- failed this legislative session but important!

Get more involved with community members!

Save the Waterfront Lawn Signs- by donation



### Thanks for coming to our event!

If you have the time, we would appreciate you taking a minute to fill out this feedback survey!



\*Additional slides on presentation are from Troy Abel, Louisa Keating, and Maree Madeiros

Appendix D  
Teach-in flyer

PRESENTED BY COLLEGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT STUDENTS

MONDAY MARCH 11TH, 2024 AT 6:00  
LOCATION: WWU CF 115

# TAKE ACTION AGAINST PROPOSED METAL SHREDDER

WHAT TO EXPECT

LEARN ABOUT THE PLANS FOR THE PROPOSED METAL SHREDDER ON THE BELLINGHAM WATERFRONT. HEAR FROM DISCUSSION PANELISTS ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS, NOISE POLLUTION, AND HEALTH RISKS THE METAL SHREDDER WOULD IMPOSE

EVENT DETAILS

## FREE PIZZA AND REFRESHMENTS

LEARN ABOUT WAYS TO TAKE ACTION TO STOP THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE METAL SHREDDER

WESTERN IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY INSTITUTION  
CONTACT [AS.DOC@WWU.EDU](mailto:AS.DOC@WWU.EDU) FOR DISABILITY ACCOMODATONS

## Appendix E

### [Metal Shredder Teach-In Feedback \(Responses\) - Google Sheets](#)

- 8 responses rate our presentation a 10
- 5 responses rate our presentation a 9
- 6 responses rate our presentation an 8
- 1 rated our presentation a 7
- 1 rated a 6

Common areas for improvement were staying on-topic and being more organized/coordinated with each other. The audience was very interested in the panelists' responses to the audiences' questions. The specific content areas they were intrigued by vary greatly.



## Appendix F

### Teach-In Food Budget Proposal and Panelist Dinner: Total Budget \$500.00

We are hosting a Teach-In to educate community members about the proposed plans for the metal shredder and provide opportunities for involvement. Our group would like to provide pizza and refreshments at our Teach-In for guests as a gesture of gratitude for their attendance and participation in our event. Our hopes are that this event will serve as a place to connect community members with subject matter experts regarding the proposed metal shredder plans and highlight local environmental justice efforts.

Item	Cost per Unit	Quantity	Total Cost	Justification
Pizza	\$12.50/ pizza	10 pizzas	\$125.00	Teach-In food
Gratuuity	15%		\$19.00	Gratuuity
Canned Soda	\$10/ case	5 cases	\$ 50.00	Teach-In Beverage for guests and Speakers
Veggie Platter (Fred Meyer Deli)	\$30/ platter	1 platter	\$30.00	Teach-In food
Total Budget			\$230.00	

#### [Pizza Time Menu and Party Deal](#)

#### Panelist Dinner at Colophon Cafe

Our group would like to take our panelists to dinner instead of providing an honorarium, to serve as a gesture of our gratitude for their participation and valuable contribution to our Teach-In. We would like to recognize their expertise and willingness to attend our event and participate as panelists. By treating our panelists to a meal, we demonstrate our gratitude for their time and reinforce the positive relationship we have built with them throughout this process. Our group would like to host the dinner at Brandywine Kitchen, this cafe offers vegan and gluten free options. Brandywine Kitchen strides towards sustainability and their values align with our environmental values as students at the College of the Environment. Hosting a dinner for our panelists is a meaningful way to express our gratitude and strengthen connection to our community.

#### [Brandywine Kitchen Menu](#)

Item	Cost per Unit	Quantity	Total Cost	Justification
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Meal at Brandywine Kitchen	\$20/ meal	11 people	\$220.00	In lieu of honoraria
Gratuity 20%	20%		\$44	Gratuity for meal
Total Budget			\$270.00	

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