

January 5, 2012

Nicole Oliver, Project Manager
Planning and Community Development
Bellingham City Hall
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear Ms. Oliver:

Thank You for the Public Process: Thank you very much for the completion of the first draft of the Fairhaven Neighborhood and Urban Village Plan. It reflects many hours and years of work by city staff, consultants, and citizens. We appreciate your efforts to include our vision, concerns and suggestions and appreciate the many public meetings held in 2011 where our views were heard.

Height Limits: We discussed the plan extensively at our December 7, 2011 and January 4, 2012 meetings. Our consensus, again, is that the proposed 56 foot height limit in the Historic District and the sixty six foot height limit in the Historic Influence areas, even with setbacks on the upper floors, are ten feet too high for Fairhaven. We question the wisdom of allowing, for instance, a 66 foot tall building at the northwest-east corner of Harris and 12th, where the Mason Building across the street is tall enough at 51 feet, or the wisdom of a 66 foot height limit at the northwest corner of Mill and 11th, where directly uphill, a project completed as recently as 2004 at 32 feet would be negatively impacted. We believe those lots should be included in the Historic District Commercial Core and be limited to 35 feet. We believe tall buildings should not be allowed to overshadow the Historic District and so we suggest a return to the 35 foot height limit in the Historic Commercial Core, and that this area be expanded to include the blocks north of Mill Ave and east of 12th Street and north of Harris Ave. And we request that the Historic Influence area be limited to a 45 foot height.

The City's Comprehensive Plan mandates that the character of the neighborhood be maintained. These lower height limits will help accomplish that goal. Moreover, we find it is our responsibility to represent the wishes of our neighbors, and we cite the survey results to the 2007 Questionnaire where Question 14 was worded and answered "Do you agree or disagree that there should be a 35-foot height limit in all of the Fairhaven commercial core area (*most of the Fairhaven core already has a 35-foot limit*)?" Neutral answers were 7%, Disagree and Strongly Disagree combined were 14%, and Agree and Strongly Agree combined came to 79%, with 54 % in the Strongly Agree column. This is a huge percentage when you consider that the response rates from the single family residential area was 38% and from the commercial core area response rates were 33% and 42% from Harris Square residents. A 79% of survey respondents want to see lower building heights, not taller.

Infill and Density: We understand the projections for redevelopment potential as described on page 12 of the draft plan for the next twenty years, or until 2032. Recent multi-family construction, exemplified by the 34 foot high properties on Old Fairhaven Parkway between 12th and 14th, or the Fairhaven Gardens project at heights of 32 feet to 41 feet, or the 34 foot tall condos on the south east corner of Mill and 13th, all prove that infill can be accomplished while keeping the character of the Urban Village that we all value. We can't say the same about some other newer projects, such as those 55, 60 and 65 foot structures along the west side of 10th Street. Those are not models we wish to repeat. We hope to see a final plan that represents a generous allowance for future density in a manner that is consistent and predictable, and values our human scale goals and the historic neighborhood preservation.

Old Area 4 & 5: We are happy to see that the Historic Influence area includes Harris Avenue as far as 8th Street and suggest that structures there could be as tall as 45 feet, since that property is downhill from the Historic District core area. We believe all new construction along Harris Avenue should have aesthetic protections to be visually appealing, remembering that visitors coming from the water or the Multi-Modal Center should have a welcoming introduction to Fairhaven.

Design Review and Standards: We support maintaining the downhill visual flow along Harris Avenue, and retaining the historic character as described in the draft Design Review District areas.

Waterfront: Our waterfront is our most valuable asset, whether we just view it from a distance or have jobs created there, or enjoy our recreation or travel opportunities at the beach or boat docks. We are happy our plan stresses the importance of industry and jobs and waterfront access. We also notice that the Port of Bellingham's Fairhaven Scheme of Harbor Improvements is in step with this draft. We look forward to the restoration of the eastern shore of Padden Estuary as promised in 1989 Agreements.

View Corridors: Vacated rights of way should be kept open for views. Fairhaven's blocks of 200 feet each provide for that nicely. The City's legal ownership of the right-of-way on McKenzie Avenue between 8th and 9th should be re-established. We believe that transfer of ownership happened without the proper process and would like to see it reversed. We appreciate the attempts in the plan to protect view corridors and we see the value of stepped back upper floors on taller structures. The views looking north along 4th, 6th, 10th and 12th Streets should be protected as much as those looking west or south from the upland side or looking east from the downhill side.

Parking and Traffic: The Transpo and other studies conducted last summer are very revealing, showing that we barely have the capacity for much increased density. This becomes another argument for limited heights of new buildings. We would like to acknowledge that the Fairhaven Parking District created parking solutions in the past, but that going forward, there will need to be adjustments made and new solutions found. We oppose paid street parking and expect that over time, some of those new solutions will preclude paying to park on the streets.

Trail Connections, Green Space, Natural Environments: We applaud the policies that will protect and strengthen our natural spaces. We envision future connections with the South Bay Trail and Taylor Dock. We envision a connecting link for pedestrians between The Village Green and the Bellingham Bay Shoreline. We envision bike lanes where feasible. We suggest that angle parking on the 10th Street block between Mill and Harris be changed to parallel parking in order to provide bicycle safety and trail connectivity from the South Bay Trail at Mill and over to the bike lanes heading towards Padden Creek.

Single Family Infill Toolkit: We accept the suggestion of allowing detached ADU's and Carriage House type infill models in the single family area of Fairhaven. Our view is not unanimous, rather, still in discussion.

Haggen : Haggen's Fairhaven Market is an important resource valued in the community as a full service grocery. We support the inclusion of all Haggen property into the Fairhaven Urban Village boundary, whether the lots are in the Fairhaven or the Happy Valley neighborhoods. We suggest moving the RTZ 4 designation north to McKenzie Avenue and including retail uses as a conditional use in that zone.

Capital Facilities: We are pleased to see some of our suggestions such as upgrading and moving under ground our electric power infrastructure included in the new plan. We especially want to emphasize the urgency of correcting the storm water management system, or lack thereof, at the Harris Avenue outfall, so that Puget Sound and Bellingham Bay are kept as clear as possible.

Thanks Again: We really appreciate the efforts being made by you, Nicole, and city staff in all of the departments who are working on our Fairhaven Neighborhood and Urban Village Plan and thank you for taking our comments. We were glad to attend all of the working meetings last year and look forward to further refinements before approval of the final Fairhaven Neighborhood and Urban Village Plan, a legacy for future residents and visitors to Fairhaven that we can all be proud of.

Respectfully,

Vince Biciunas, President

cc: Mayor Kelli Linville
Planning Commission
City Council
Old Fairhaven Association-Robin Robertson
Fairhaven Village Association-Brad Imus