



... at 12th and Harris in Fairhaven

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COB Planning Commission (planningcommission@cob.org)
Subject: Parking as a vital component of the Fairhaven Master Plan

Dear Sirs:

For the record, I would like to make comments on two points regarding the comprehensive plans for Fairhaven:

- 1) The concept of transportation (including **parking**),
- 2) and the concept of **profit**.

Indeed, Fairhaven is known for its walk-ability ... *once one gets there*. With the exception of the people who actually live within walking distance, other methods of transportation are necessary for those coming from other areas of Bellingham, as well as from communities miles away. Fairhaven is a destination urban center - meaning that most customers and clients live elsewhere. Besides those who come in to the district to shop, dine, or frequent one of the many businesses on the upper floors, there is also the issue of those working in those places. How do all these people get to Fairhaven, conveniently? A question we must answer.

We are a culture that is wedded to our cars. I find it frustrating when I hear plans to manage parking by basically making it scarce ... using the stick rather than the carrot. If we want to encourage other methods of transportation, then those other methods must be made to be attractive, not *the only*. We are not dealing with a closed system. People have choices and will not come to Fairhaven if they *perceive* getting there to be inconvenient.

Phyllis McKee

Fairhaven Comprehensive Plan

We do not have the luxury of looking at a closed or static system when laying out the comprehensive plan for Fairhaven. We have no real idea what all the dynamics might be over the course of the next several years thereby making it imperative that the planning process now build in feed-back loops and refocus techniques that will allow us to avoid being out of touch with reality with no sensible way of correcting our course.

One example of this dynamic process was in the mid-90s when a few of the commercial property owners pooled their resources and created a Parking District in order to be able to build on land that remained vacant or had been used as parking lots. At that time isolated buildings sat flanked by individual parking lots or vacant lots. Those property owners created the parking we now have on McKenzie, Harris, and 11th. That alone started the infill development that made Fairhaven what we see today. However, where Fairhaven is today is just another point in time in the ever-evolving process. It is a video, not a snapshot. The current parking model must be retooled.

In the process we must not lose sight of the fact that for Fairhaven to thrive and survive those people in business there, be it the shop-owners, the restaurant-owners, office/business owners – or land owners, all must be able to make a profit. **Profit** is *not* really a bad word. It is what makes the wheels turn. Lack of profit on any level grinds the wheels to a halt. Rents that businesses pay must be low enough to allow the businesses to profit, but high enough to offer a profit to those having invested in the property. From the City's point of view, profit increases all manner of taxes the City imposes; therefore, support systems, like parking, should not be viewed solely from the point of view as to whether or not the parking per se pays for itself. It should not be isolated from the over-all profitability of the area, rather seen as a vital component.

Things must balance. It is only when viewing the bigger picture that one sees how any infrastructure element (e.g., water, sewer, telecommunications – and parking) supports the over-all system. Often missed in planning is the sensitivity as to how inter-dynamic these systems can be.

Regards,
Phyllis McKee

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Some thoughts to consider:

Plan infrastructure that will support grand visions, not limited views. In 1806 when then President Thomas Jefferson welcomed home Meriwether Lewis and William Clark he boldly announced that he envisioned the entire continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, being populated within 200 years.

Avoid the urge to load up the property owners with costs that would tip the profit balance.

Avoid choking creative thinking in design and execution. Same-old, just gets old ... regardless of how well it may have fit at some point. Would you like to have had your hair-style set for the next 30 years in 1985?

Work with the existing Fairhaven Parking Districts. They have a history, insight and connections – not to mention a vested interest.

Bring the Port on-board to discuss parking on their property – NW of the Village Inn – over the bluff ... and out of sight – before they decide to do something else with that it. This could be done in phases, even beginning with just surface parking and then building out to a multilevel structure at some point in the future. Who knows what could sit atop the structure at the Village Green level? ... most likely not parking. On the water-facing side of the structure, again, who knows? Again, it need not be parking. The actual parking portion of the facility could be totally cloaked from above and from the water side – and it does not need to all happen at once.

Work with WTA to run shuttles from outlying parking within and without Fairhaven. (The Port property, Haskell property ... the lot on Lincoln Street....) Even if these are just temporary, so what?

Back-off making a big deal of using *The Pit*. It serves a present need. Eventually it will go away....

At some point, bring in a *very* sophisticated LUKE that will make Fairhaven the model for paid parking. Different streets pay different amounts and rather than limiting time, just create an increasing cost per hour. Allow people to use their cell phone to add time to their parking – thus easing the concern about rushing to get back to the car because the meter is about to run out. Make it friendly.