

WHATCOM FALLS NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN

I. NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

The majority of the Whatcom Falls Neighborhood is a residential area consisting of newer homes on large lots, giving the area a suburban character. Most of the recent development has been in the form of well designed subdivisions that have minimized their adverse impacts on the neighborhood character. It is anticipated that this development trend will continue in the future, perpetuating the character of the area.

Low density single family homes on larger parcels characterize most of the area along Roland and Raymond Streets. This is also true of Yew Street. A notable exception is a cluster development on the southern portion of Yew Street. Most of the southern portion of the neighborhood is largely undeveloped and is designated for detached cluster development. This undeveloped hillside area also gives the neighborhood some of its character by serving as a wooded backdrop. There are also good views of the surrounding mountains. A large portion of the neighborhood, with the exception of several non-conforming uses and a small neighborhood business area, is in public ownership. The cemetery, Whatcom Falls Park, and the middle school site make up the publicly owned portion of the neighborhood. Bloedel-Donovan Park is easily accessed by the neighborhood.

A housing survey shows that there are currently 413 single-family residences, 2 duplex units, and 1 large facility containing 16 individual units, for a neighborhood total of 433 living units. Of this total, only two units are classified as either having major deficiencies or being dilapidated.

Some other statistical data that will give the reader an additional feeling of the character of the Whatcom Falls area follows. All information given is from the Whatcom County Opportunity Council 1976 Survey of Housing in Whatcom County.

The average value per dwelling is well above the city's average. The area ranks third from the bottom with only the Samish and South Neighborhood having a lower density per square mile figure. Along with the Samish Neighborhood, it has the highest rate of owner occupied residences in the city, with the actual figure approaching 95%. The average income per family is well above the city's norm.

Neighborhood Plan Proposals

II. OPEN SPACE

The existing residential areas of the Whatcom Falls Neighborhood have, within a short distance, two of the City's more popular parks, those being Whatcom Falls and Bloedel-Donovan Parks. Although these parks are adequate to serve the present population of the neighborhood, heavy use of the facilities by non-residents as well as

the continuing growth of both the neighborhood and the City indicate a need for additional park facilities to meet the future needs of the neighborhood.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT, AS DEVELOPMENT OCCURS IN THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD, TWO NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS BE ESTABLISHED, ONE IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PORTION OF THE AREA AND THE OTHER IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PORTION.

The parks should be similar in nature to St. Clair Park in the Alabama Hill Neighborhood and should provide areas for informal or spontaneous individual activities. It is envisioned that these parks would be from one to two acres in size and would include enough level land for a play field. The actual location of these facilities is not spelled out, in order to allow flexibility in dwelling location in return for the provision of the parkland. It is important, however, that the parks are corridors proposed in this plan.

PLAY LOTS SHOULD ALSO BE REQUIRED IN ALL NEW DEVELOPMENTS AT A SIZE THAT IS DETERMINED BY THE DIRECTOR OF PARKS AND RECREATION.

ADDITIONAL RECREATION FACILITIES SHOULD ALSO BE PROVIDED AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SITE WHEN IT IS DEVELOPED.

This would help to meet the demand for active recreational facilities in a centrally located site.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF FACILITIES IN WHATCOM FALLS PARK SHOULD CONTINUE TO OCCUR IN THE FORM OF NEW STRUCTURES AND THE IMPROVEMENT OF EXISTING FACILITIES AS IS NECESSARY.

In most urban and residential areas like Whatcom Falls, people commonly associate open space with recreational use, especially parks. However, a high value should be placed on the amenities of open space including scenic views, a wooded backdrop for the area, plant and animal life, the relief from crowding and the recreational opportunities afforded by the land. The open space in this area also provides the basic setting for the rural character of the neighborhood.

Other values associated with maintaining open space would be utilitarian in nature and include items such as the preservation of natural drainage systems, decreasing water runoff rates and volumes as compared to urbanizing the area, and the preservation of steep slopes, marshes, wet areas and other hazardous areas.

The opportunity still exists to maintain the open space character of the neighborhood while still allowing for residential development. The designated densities in the land use section of the neighborhood plan will help maintain the openness of the presently undeveloped areas in the southern portion of the neighborhood.

A system of open space and trail corridors has been developed on a citywide basis. In general, these corridors or greenbelts have been located in areas that are basically unsuitable for development because of either the topography or other natural constraints of the land. This system has been designed not only in response to the open space amenities mentioned earlier, but also to serve as a functional pedestrian system allowing people to move from one location to another in a natural setting.

No additional open space or recreation land is being recommended for purchase by the City out of its general fund or by bond issues for the neighborhood. It is anticipated that enough land could be acquired through dedication as developments occur to meet anticipated needs.

III. PUBLIC FACILITIES AND UTILITIES

Utilities

Urban development has a profound effect on the amount, duration, and timing of runoff.

It has been estimated that urbanization, with its inherent impervious surfaces, may cause a three to ten-fold increase in surface runoff. There are two basic ways to deal with drainage problems, the most common one being the extension of the storm sewer network on the basis of urgency and the availability of funding. Unfortunately, this solution tends to treat the symptoms rather than the cause of the problem.

Furthermore, in many cases the costs of treatment are paid by the people who will suffer damage to their property rather than the individuals who in fact caused the problem.

IT IS FELT THAT, IN THE WHATCOM FALLS NEIGHBORHOOD, A BETTER SOLUTION FOR AREAS THAT HAVE YET TO DEVELOP IS TO HANDLE THE RUNOFF PROBLEM AT ITS SOURCE RATHER THAN DOWNSTREAM. METHODS THAT ARE SUGGESTED INCLUDE THE RETENTION OF NATURAL DRAINAGE WAYS AND THE PRESERVATION OF AS MUCH OF THE NATURAL VEGETATION AS POSSIBLE, AND THE REDUCTION OF IMPERVIOUS SURFACES BY MEANS OF CLUSTERING AND URBAN DESIGN CRITERIA.

This approach makes it difficult to specify individual recommendations as they are, of necessity, site specific. The recommendations take the form of limiting the amount of runoff allowed from new developments, with the means of meeting the criteria dependent on specific project design.

The public facilities and utilities element of the plan spells out those watercourses that should be maintained in a natural state for storm water drainage purposes.

A July 1973 study entitled A Comprehensive Drainage Plan for the City of Bellingham, Washington, recommends installation of a 12 inch trunk along Yew Street from the County line to approximately the Edward Street right-of-way; then from there north the line goes to 15 inches until it reaches the 18 inch main following Lakeway Drive. Additional recommendations are made for Raymond Street, Portal Drive, and Electric Avenue. All of these lines assume that runoff control at the development sites will limit runoff to its present rate. Detailed information concerning routing, sizing, and costs are presented in the study.

There do not appear to be any water supply or sanitary sewer problems in the neighborhood. However, topographic considerations dictate that careful planning is required to assure that adequate pressure is available for fire protection.

A SUPPLY FACILITY IS RECOMMENDED FOR CONSTRUCTION IN THE VICINITY OF THE EXISTING WATER TREATMENT FACILITY.

This storage is required to provide additional water to the gravity-supplied zone. Details of this proposal are contained in the Public Facilities and Utilities element of the Comprehensive Plan.

MAP, WHATCOM FALLS ARTERIAL ROUTES

IV. CIRCULATION

General

The neighborhood currently has one primary arterial, Lakeway Drive, that both bisects the area and forms the northern boundary of the existing residential development. Lakeway and Electric, from the neighborhood boundary to the point where they converge, are both classified as secondary arterials.

Residential streets in the neighborhood are generally narrower than are called for in the city's current subdivision codes. The current condition of these streets range from good to poor. However, with the exception of some of the newer developments, none of them have had curbs or gutters developed in association with the streets. As a result, drainage is a problem throughout the neighborhood.

Proposals

Arterials

The neighborhood has been characterized by a rapid rate of growth during recent years, with growth coming in the form of single family homes. The projected annual growth rate for the area is 4% for the period 1976-1990 as compared to a citywide rate of 2.2%. This growth rate, combined with potential growth in the county and the large amount of vacant land in the neighborhood, make it imperative that additional transportation routes, which impact the developed portion of the neighborhood as minimally as possible, be developed.

TO SERVE LONG-RANGE DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL SOUTH OF THE CITY LIMITS, THE CONSOLIDATION PARKWAY IS PROPOSED FOR EXTENSION EAST FROM YEW STREET.

It would likely contour southeastward over the ridge to South Lake Whatcom as its eventual routing. If this routing proves to be unfeasible for either engineering or economic reasons, then it is likely that the route would take on a secondary arterial status at Yew Street and extend as far east as slopes would allow. This long-range project, which will require the cooperation and coordination of the county, would insure permanent traffic protection for the neighborhood from the long-range development in the county to the south and southeast.

The second, and more immediate, arterial recommended within the neighborhood is located along the existing Woburn and Yew Streets rights-of-way.

BOTH WOBURN AND YEW STREETS ARE PROPOSED FOR MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS INTO A PARKWAY TO SERVE DEVELOPING AREAS IN THE SOUTHWEST PORTION OF THE AREA.

To provide traffic protection for the developed areas of Whatcom Falls from the future residential developments in the south and southeast sectors of Whatcom Falls, a "belt" of secondary arterials and neighborhood collectors are proposed as shown on the Arterial Routes Map.

Alvarado, Birch, Cascade, and Kenoyer Drives can be anticipated for extensions as sub-collector streets to serve the developing areas in the south central portion of the neighborhood. Traffic increases on these streets can be carefully controlled because of the prerequisite consideration(s) placed on the residential areas to the south of these streets. The limits of their designated service area are described in the land use section. The additional traffic would come from the infilling of the areas immediately adjacent to the area already served by these streets.

It is anticipated that many of the yet to be developed residential streets will be cul-de-sacs because of the topography of the area. Locations of individual streets will be dependent upon development proposals and, as such, are impossible to locate in this plan.

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS FOR RESIDENTIAL STREETS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD ARE AS FOLLOWS: NEIGHBORHOOD COLLECTORS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED TO FULL RESIDENTIAL STANDARDS, 36 FEET WITH CURBS, GUTTERS, AND SIDEWALKS ON BOTH SIDES. THE REMAINING RESIDENTIAL STREETS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF CUL-DE-SACS, SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AT 28 FEET IN WIDTH WITH CURBS, GUTTERS, AND SIDEWALKS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STREET. CUL-DE-SACS SHOULD HAVE A MINIMUM WIDTH OF 28 FEET AND HAVE CURBS, GUTTERS, AND A SIDEWALK ON ONE SIDE OF THE STREET. ALL SIDEWALKS SHOULD BE SET BACK A MINIMUM OF 4 FEET FROM THE CURB FOR BOTH AESTHETIC AND PEDESTRIAN SAFETY PURPOSES. STREETS TRAVERSING STEEP SLOPES THAT REQUIRE A CUT ON ONE SIDE SHOULD NOT BE REQUIRED TO HAVE SIDEWALKS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE STREETS. PARKING WOULD BE ALLOWED ON BOTH SIDES OF RESIDENTIAL STREETS AND A STREET TREE PLANTING PROGRAM SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED.

Bikeways

A 1978 report entitled Bicycle Facilities Planning, done for the Bellingham Office of Planning and Community Development, details on both a 5 and 25 year focus those actions which are required to provide a safe and adequate city wide bicycle transportation system.

The general focus of the 5-year program is to provide for safe cycling on existing streets. The 25-year focus is a combination of bikeways, open space, and greenbelts, which will serve as both a recreational facility as well as a transportation system.

The recommendations presented here are excerpted from that report and are included to present the type of development that will be required in the neighborhood to meet its aforementioned 5 and 25 year goals.

THE FIVE YEAR PLAN IDENTIFIES IMPROVEMENTS FOR ARTERIALS ONLY. THOSE THAT RELATE TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. SHARED USE LANE SIGNING ALONG LAKEWAY DRIVE TO ITS INTERSECTION WITH ELECTRIC AVENUE;
 2. SHOULDER STRIPING AND PAVING ON ELECTRIC AVENUE;
 3. WARNING STRIPING ALONG THE ENTIRE LENGTH OF LAKEWAY DRIVE.
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The 25-year program recommends that a bikeway be located along Lakeway Drive from the county line to Portal Drive and from there across to Arbor Street. From this point, the cyclist could go east paralleling Lakeway Drive in the park, to the north and then east on a proposed route that would follow Whatcom Falls Creek, or to the northeast on another route that roughly follows the eastern boundary of the park.

MAP, WHATCOM FALLS LAND USE

V. SUBAREA DESCRIPTIONS AND LAND USE DESIGNATIONS

Area 1

This area is designated as a planned residential area due to the large ownerships in the area, the proximity to Whatcom Falls Park and Creek, and the physical conditions of the area. A planned designation would help protect the creek and the steep slopes from encroachment while allowing reasonable development of the property. Woburn Street is proposed for improvement adjacent to this area. Its development to the recommended standard is a prerequisite consideration for the area.

AREA 1 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL

Area 2

This area is the site of the Bayview Cemetery and is currently in public ownership.

AREA 2 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 3

This area is the site of Whatcom Falls Park, a highly valued, Citywide recreational attraction.

AREA 3 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 4

Area four is designated as Residential Single with a density of 7,200 square feet per unit. A 30-foot setback from Whatcom Falls Park should apply to this area. Clearing and development of the hillside areas should be done in a sensitive manner.

AREA 4 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 5

This area is designated Residential - Single with a 7,200 square foot per unit density, and attached or detached clustering would be allowed. Structures should be set back from the park and access onto Electric Avenue should be coordinated with other traffic conditions and concerns in this general vicinity.

AREA 5 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

Area 6

This area is designated for neighborhood commercial uses to serve the surrounding neighborhood. The density figure for this area is that the total retail sales are to be no larger than 7,000 square feet. Curb cuts on Electric Avenue should be kept to a minimum and abutting residential uses should be buffered.

AREA 6 LAND USE DESIGNATION: COMMERCIAL

The next three areas are all classified at a density of 10,000 square feet per lot. They are however, listed as three separate units because of difficult use qualifiers, special conditions, and prerequisite conditions that have been applied to them. These vary because of the different topographic characteristics that exist within the individual areas. In all the areas, the interrelated concerns of sensitive land clearing, hillside development, and related drainage impacts should be addressed as development occurs.

Area 7

AREA 7 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 8

AREA 8 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 8 East

AREA 8 EAST LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 8 West

AREA 8 WEST LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 9

AREA 9 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 10

This land is in public ownership and is the site of Kulshan Middle School.

AREA 10 LAND USE DESIGNATION: PUBLIC

Area 11

This area is designated as Residential Single with a density of 20,000 square feet per unit. The steep topography and resultant drainage problems, combined with difficult access routes place limitations on the density of this area. Efforts should be made to mitigate these impacts as this sensitive hillside develops.

AREA 11 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 12

This area is designated Residential-Multi, Multiple, Mixed (Funeral Home) with a 20,000 square feet per unit density. The mixed-use qualifier allows construction of a funeral home adjacent to the public cemetery. Low-density residential use also may be developed. The area of approximately 2 acres is bounded in the north and east by Bayview Cemetery, on the south by Lakeway Drive and on the west by Woburn Street.

An east/west bicycle and pedestrian trail runs along the northerly boundary of the site. Landscape buffering shall be provided as required by the Director of Parks and Recreation. Future street expansion at the intersection will require dedication of 20 feet along Lakeway Drive and 10 feet along Woburn Street.

AREA 12 LAND USE DESIGNATION: MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, LOW DENSITY

Area 13

Area 13 comprises approximately 12 acres. Yew Street abuts the area on the east; San Juan Boulevard extends from Yew Street in an east/west alignment through the northern portion of the area linking Yew Street with the Pacificview subdivision. To the south is the 83-lot Woodbine subdivision. The area was annexed to Bellingham in 2008.

The area lies within the Cemetery Creek watershed and drains northward via the west fork of Cemetery Creek. The topography generally slopes to the east and north. Deciduous and evergreen trees are found throughout the undeveloped areas. An open space tract lies to the west of the Area 13 and includes the west fork of Cemetery Creek. Stream protection should be required as development occurs. Several wetland areas have been identified in the National Wetlands Inventory maps using data from aerial photographs and soil maps. This wetland information is considered incomplete due to its inability to detect wetlands on the ground beneath any forest canopy. As a consequence, delineation studies should be required when development is proposed.

Storm water runoff should be collected through a series of catch basins and storm drains and detained in ponds and released at its natural points of discharge along the boundaries of the area. A County maintained stormwater facility exists within the northern portion of the area which drains into Consolidation Creek. The existing storm water pond was constructed as mitigation for the County's Yew Street road improvements.

San Juan Boulevard extends through the area providing linkage between Yew Street to the east and Pacificview subdivision to the west. Vehicle access from San Juan and Yew Street should be limited. Parks, trails, and open space are needed to serve future residential development. Trail corridors, setbacks from creeks and wetlands should be considered as development is proposed. Proposed trails should tie into existing City trails and open space areas.

AREA 13 LAND USE DESIGNATION: SINGLEFAMILY RESIDENTIAL, MEDIUM DENSITY

As adopted by Ordinance No. 8868 and amended by Ordinances 8946, 9046, 9090, 10147, 2004-12-087, 2007-11-085, and 2008-12-107.