



## Suggestions/Comments/Ideas/Questions

Community Input

### Drop-In Center: June-October 2004

120 E. Holly Street, Bellingham

Open, Noon – 6:00 pm

*(Note: The following are comments offered by citizens visiting the Growth Forum "Drop-In Center," written on available forms or paraphrased following conversations with Center staff. Key numbers following each comment indicate policy category(s) assigned for report analysis, see key legend below. Further questions or comments may be addressed to Mr. Greg Aucutt, Senior Planner, City of Bellingham, 360-676-6982, e-mail address: [gaucutt@cob.org](mailto:gaucutt@cob.org))*

- "Post land-use changes on site, explanation of zoning changes, what new development will be allowed, and why it should be allowed." ①②
- "Keep public notices on-site throughout the permit application process and construction phase." ①
- "Post a description of new development on site, possibly with a graphic representation." ①
- "Presently, public notices of land use permit applications do not describe proposed action." ①②
- "Do a better job marking trails around the City. For example, Palm Street staircase separated Old Sehome and Fairhaven before they were consolidated into Bellingham, but this is not properly marked." ①③
- "Develop high-density communities throughout Whatcom County. Incorporate new towns or villages, with maximum populations of a few thousand, with unmovable boundaries that separate city from agricultural and resource lands. Future county population increases could be accommodated through urban infill and through this method of small community creation. Road networks and/or a light rail could connect these villages with each other and with the major population centers already existing in Whatcom County." ①②③
- "Use the neighborhoods as a way of discussing and designing the future. The neighborhood format is a historical place to start and an easy way to discuss distinct areas." ①②
- "If the zoning and the regulations come solely out of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, how will the City be legally responsible to the neighborhoods?" ①

- “Can we set up a format for rewriting the Bellingham comprehensive plan and the neighborhood plans so that it is useful to City planning, citizens, and neighborhoods? How can City Planning, neighborhoods, and citizens come together to design something that is useful to all? Key design elements based upon the existing architecture in established neighborhoods should be used in the design of new structures within those neighborhoods. This should be implemented with a ‘cookbook’ guide that can be used by City planning staff, rather than the creation of neighborhood design review boards.” ①②
- “Increasing density should not mean the demolition of houses that have defined neighborhood character to build apartment buildings or other multi-family housing that does not mesh with the residences that have been present for generations. Allowing a higher density within the existing city limits is fine, but infill opportunities should be identified in such a way that preserves and enhances neighborhood character.” ①②
- “Older homes have been torn down to build apartment buildings and other multi-family housing in the York neighborhood. The increase in housing units has logically led to a higher density of people within the neighborhood - mainly students. Parking and noise have become more of a problem as a result of the conversion of land from single-family houses to multi-family residences.” ①
- “It has been the case in the Sunnyland neighborhood that old houses are getting torn down and commercial or light-industrial buildings are being erected in their places. It weakens the fabric of the community to have discontinuity between residences and commercial/ industrial businesses. I have seen recent development that conforms to the current zoning, but not to the nature and character of the neighborhood. The worst example of this type of change is where a house is torn down and it is replaced by a new business and, surrounding it, are single-family residential houses. It lessens a sense of place and a neighborhood feel in an area where new types of land uses are designated that are out of context with the surrounding uses. In addition, new buildings that look like warehouses with flat sides and few windows do little in retaining the look and feel of the neighborhoods. Plain utilitarian development does not enhance, but instead destroys neighborhood character.” ①②
- “There should be a combination of incentives and fees used to direct growth away from R5 and R10 areas outside the UGA and into the UGA or City limits.” ②③
- “Incentives should be given for the reduction of impermeable surfaces for parking, walkways, etc.” ②
- “In general, building heights should not exceed five stories.” ②
- “In locations where tall buildings are permitted, there should be variations in height. The taller portions of the buildings should be setback towards the center of the block; maintaining wide view corridors.” ②
- “In areas such as the Parberry/ReStore location, the view blockage created by the GP tissue warehouse should define the acceptable height of buildings inland from the bay.

- Some buildings could be taller, but most should not block any more of the view than the warehouse already does." ②
- "In general, parking should be in the back or side of buildings with access via alleys or shared driveways." ②
  - "Large retail buildings should have their parking hidden, either behind the building or enclosed within the structure. There should be incentives for multi-story parking." ②
  - "Road width and parking space should not dictate development forms. Innovative solutions to parking space requirements, such as one vehicle in front of another, should be allowed." ②
  - "Regulations should be changed to allow development forms that were shown in 'Honey I Shrunk the Lots,' such as cottage housing, etc." ②
  - "Within existing or newly formed zoning area that allow four-plex buildings, extra units should be allowed if cottage housing is constructed instead of traditional housing." ②
  - "Accessory Dwelling Units should be encouraged, and should also be monitored to ensure that there is owner occupancy, as well as rental space. Owner-occupied ADU's are a good way of controlling behavior among 'problem' populations." ①②
  - "There should be some mechanism for the county to share in property taxes collected inside municipal boundaries for pursuing policies that encourage growth within those boundaries." ②③
  - "Large retail (big box stores, etc.) should be required to include smaller rentable spaces as part of the front of the building so a mix of small and large businesses can occur." ②
  - "A connection between James Street Road and the North side of St. Joseph's Hospital over I-5 could provide relief for fire trucks and other emergency vehicles accessing the Hospital. This new route could be accessed via Bakerview Road or East Sunset Drive. The Hospital would pay for all 'on-grounds' road improvements that would be necessary to make the connection west to Birchwood Avenue. One Bellingham resident estimates the cost at around \$5 million and potential funding sources as such: 80% transportation corridor through State DOT, 10% County 911 phone fee (add 50 cents per month until paid), 5% City budget, 5% County budget." ④
  - "The 700 block of Van Wyck Road should be connected with King Mountain Road." ④
  - "East/west roadway connections are vital to City function and they are lacking in Bellingham. A connection between West Bellingham and Woburn Street would provide a better cross town access and connections to Lynden via Hannegan Road and Mount Baker Highway from Woburn Street. To make this connection the Illinois Street right-of-way would need to be fully developed. Presently Illinois Street is broken up numerous times across its East to West expanse. It should be extended along the undeveloped ROW that it presently does not connect through. This construction should connect the bluff to the west of the proposed 'Squalicum Fields' park space eastward to James Street. Illinois should then be extended across I-5 (next to the existing pedestrian overpass bordering Memorial Park) east to Woburn Street. Illinois would need to be widened to

accommodate the increased traffic load this connection is sure to attract. Utility lines are presently spaced widely enough along Illinois Street so that road widening would not require a disturbance to these lines. Funding for an bridge across Squalicum Creek (required to complete Illinois connection from “Squalicum Fields” to James Street) could be applied for through the Urban Arterial Fund.” ①

- “A truck route should connect the existing routes between Roeder Avenue and Bennett Drive. The current route from Roeder Avenue connects to Squalicum Parkway along a turn that is dangerous as well as quite narrow. Instead of connecting with Squalicum Parkway, this route would continue northwest along Sea View Avenue. A new road would need to be constructed along the coastline up to the cement plant dock at which time the new roadway would need to turn north under a railroad trellis and continue along what is an old railroad line. Currently, this line is a trail that connects up to a parking lot at Bellingham Technical College. Finally, this route would connect through the existing parking lot onto West Illinois Street, which is scheduled for a road improvement that would link Morse Steel to the existing truck route on Bennett Drive. This new truck route would connect I-5 with the waterfront and provide a safer route with less limitations than the current route.” ④
- “The City should install parabolic reflectors on street lights to direct light downward. The amount of ambient light lost is a waste of energy and fixtures that extend below bulb level could allow for replacement with lower-wattage bulbs. These types of fixtures would also lessen the amount of light pollution to residences.” ②
- “The City should focus on improving traffic congestion. Traffic levels have increased substantially in the last ten years.” ①
- “Make a list of what makes Bellingham special and make sure all of those things are protected.” ①
- “Keep Bellingham ‘creative!’” ①
- “The City needs to provide housing opportunities for artists who live on a below median income. As the economy grows and people move to Bellingham, the cost of housing (especially downtown) increases substantially. A mechanism should be adopted that allows for low-income housing that is not dependent upon market demand.” ①
- “If we introduce more opportunities for mixed-use, along with a mixture of land-uses, we should accommodate a diversity of income ranges. Presently, Fairhaven is being gentrified, upscale businesses are moving in and expensive condos are being built. Opportunities for a wide range of economic classes are becoming limited. If infill opportunities are identified, they should be planned as inclusive not exclusive.” ①
- “Growth is fine, but it should pay for itself. All costs of population growth should be levied in impact fees for new development. Costs should not be put upon current residents when it is the influx of people moving here that is driving up taxation for the current residents. Proportional pricing for impact fees to development may make growth

less attractive for many, but fairness should not be disregarded in growth management.”  
②

- “What are we going to do with the ‘Big-Box’ stores if they are vacated due to lack of business? Is there a way we can reuse these huge structures that is economically viable? Architects should be brought in that could conceptually design these buildings for future uses, as they may become vacant hulking buildings.” ①②
- “I believe this process should be projected many years into the future. Instead of planning for the next twenty years, why aren’t we planning for 50 or 100 years? The twenty-year scope of this process does not allow us to view managing growth in its totality. What is the maximum build-out of Bellingham? I can see neighborhood centers becoming the central point of higher intensity development and that intensity spreading from these centers until we have a density that makes Bellingham more like a major urban city such as Seattle.” ④
- “I believe that if we do not plan with the automobile in mind as the primary form of transportation, planning efforts will fail. People love driving cars and we are not going to get away from that. Public transportation is great for students, who will ride the bus, but for everyone else, we need to acknowledge the importance and convenience of the automobile. Development needs to consider the fact that more people are going to drive than not, so any planning efforts that do not include the automobile in large part, will fail.” ②④
- “Recently, Fairhaven has been building new condominiums at a substantial rate. How are we going to mitigate the coming increase in traffic in that area? Even if multi-modal transportation options are promoted, the fact is that people are going to drive. We cannot deny that fact. I have a few ideas for Fairhaven. First, make Harris a pedestrian mall. Move the truck route of Harris and still allow through traffic along 12th Street. Second, provide a parking garage at the periphery to still accommodate cars, but in a way that retains the attractive pedestrian liveliness that we now see in the area. If we do not do these things, Fairhaven will no longer be a choice destination within the city because the lack of accessibility will have a decidedly negative impact on area users.” ①②
- “Infill development should be an amenity instead of strictly fitting more people into the same finite area. There needs to be an architectural guideline component to this process as well to insure development that is attractive and compatible to the City.” ①②
- “We have seen infill development in the recent past that works in increasing density, but fails in providing parks for the children. Case-in-point: new duplexes constructed between East Illinois Street and Barkley Boulevard just West of Woburn Street. Density was increased dramatically in this area, yet we saw no new park creation. The problem is that City planning has established a much better relationship with developers than they have with citizens. Staff goes out of their way to make code interpretation as favorable as possible to development. What I want to know is this: how do we take what comes out of this process and apply it? Can we create concurrency between the public will and plan updates in the future? How can citizens influence day-to-day operations of the planning department - having a say with which way permits are approved or denied?” ①②

- “If growth means more of what we have been seeing out on the Guide Meridian and in the Cordata area, I don’t want to see any more. It is horrible what has happened with the degradation of the natural environment in that area. If we need to grow, as a city, it should be in a way that is as favorable as possible to the natural beauty that surrounds us.” ①②③
- “Some of the biggest perpetuators of growth are outside interests that want to build in Bellingham even though they will never live here. Development approval should be limited to local companies who have a vested interest in promoting responsible development. We have seen the effect of multi-national corporations in the Cordata area. Huge single and multi-family housing developments are being constructed that do not guide what the future of this city should look like. Local developers would have more of a conscience about creating not only suitable but desirable, functional, culturally rich communities.” ②
- “Thank you for your presentation to the Columbia Neighborhood Association (Neighborhood Meeting #1). I believe that growth is inevitable and it is up to us to determine what form it will take. I feel that we should infill as much as possible to save our farmlands. But, I also feel that it is imperative that we keep the character of our neighborhoods and maintain the livability that is attracting people to Bellingham. Thank you for your help with this.

I wonder what this place would look like if the Lummis had done this (growth process) 150 years ago? Certainly those who at the meeting claimed to have some special status because they had been born in Whatcom County would not be here today had the Lummis been more pro-active!

There were two items that came up a lot in Meeting #1. These are:

1. What has been done to limit or stop growth in Whatcom County? I realize that this isn’t your job, but I know there are things we can do towards this aim and I think it is a good idea to look at these actions seriously even as we plan for growth. Can you make sure that this is included in the plan somewhere?
2. While I really appreciate the work you are doing, I am from Seattle and was peripherally active in planning for growth there, but most of our ideas were never realized. What methods are in place to implement our ideas and recommendations that you collect through your series of meetings?

The following are things I consider essential in planning for smart growth:

- Urban centers (Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, Everson) connected by adequate bus lines
- Strictly enforced farmland protections
- Downtown condos with their own parking garages
- Somehow make it so that people earning Bellingham wages can afford housing – this is not currently the situation and I can never hope to buy a house here on my

salary. This is not good for the citizenry and needs too be addressed. A Bellingham only for the rich will destroy Bellingham faster than sprawl

- Speaking of sprawl – outlaw it
  - Pass an ordinance that limits the number of franchises and every so many years reduce that number
  - There are a lot of not very well used lots just around to downtown area that can be used for housing – you mentioned one area in your presentation. Kulshan Community Land Trust has some good ideas for people-friendly housing developments that include green space
  - Traffic calming techniques such as “roundabouts” or ‘traffic circles’ – I love these things! Why is the City so against them?
  - A really useful bus system – go to Zion National Park to see what one looks like in the domestic context. Theirs is excellent!
  - Pedestrian plazas with trees and flowers instead of parking places!
  - Each neighborhood should have a little center – not a strip mall – with shops and such. Like we had in Seattle.” ①②③
- “I support the ‘focused growth strategy’. Barkley Village is a prime spot for creating a neighborhood center – no more banks and medical centers. Walking should be promoted with sidewalks and sufficient lighting. Bike lanes should be painted onto roadways that are already wide enough to support them. Just painting a line increases driver awareness and biker safety dramatically. Development must be in accordance with neighborhood wishes and input. Developers that do not live in a neighborhood should not have total say! Infill needs to be done in such a manner that it accords with the character of neighborhoods.” ①②
- “Please keep the Drop-In Center open. It is just beginning to be noticed by the public. There should be a banner outside so that passers-by, including automotive traffic, would notice the DIC. It would be great if public service announcements on local radio and in the Herald were commissioned to inform the public about how and where they could give their input about Growth Management issues.” ④
- “Having just participated in the September 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Growth Forum meetings, my feeling is that the City is on the right track. Citizens know best how to “grow” their neighborhoods and retain the identity they find so attractive and livable. If each neighborhood association was given the assistance of a planner and the opportunity to work through the charrette process to improve and densify their neighborhoods, the planning department would find their role appreciated and assisted if the citizens felt that they partnered with Planning – that Planning existed to be in service to the neighborhoods, to plan, not just ‘permit.’

There are numerous examples of poorly directed development in this City. Let this be a new era where each development project enhances existing neighborhoods.

I whole-heartedly support densifying the downtown as well. Multi-family housing must be done well to create little pocket communities within each multi-family development. City Planning must designate a low ration of rental to condo/owner occupied residents so that people can “own” their tiny neighborhood pods. The housing must be affordable. There must also be transition zones between the surrounding (historical) neighborhoods to protect the existing vistas, character and relationships to downtown in order for citizens to support the infill process.

So, City Planning, City Council and Mayor Asmundson: keep planning on the right track, avail the process of the abundant citizen interest and willingness to participate in Bellingham growth. Please continue these processes and support neighborhood organizations as they define themselves through the Neighborhood Plan updates and densification processes.

If people are complaining, there is a reason. Listen deeper. Respond thoughtfully and back up words with sincere action.” ❶❷

- “I believe that Bellingham should infill, but only to an extent. There are presently great opportunities for focusing neighborhood centers along major arterials that would benefit surrounding community members. Reducing automobile dependence relies on providing alternatives to driving. This can be accomplished through infrastructure improvements, including sidewalks, and the proximity of services close to residences. The idea of a five-minute walk to all of your frequently used goods and services is an exciting one. Infill needs to be implemented in concert with a definite edge between Bellingham and Whatcom County. This kind of infill, with local businesses and residences in high-intensity development areas can indeed enhance our Community.

Big corporate businesses are not the kind we should be trying to attract to Bellingham. We should be harnessing our commerce locally within a context that is beneficial to Bellingham’s residents. We do, however, need to acknowledge that creating jobs does not mean a reduction in unemployment. Unemployment rates, as a percentage, are not positively influenced with job creation. I discount the notion that job creation helps this trend, as it actually does not affect the percentage of employed.

The final plan that comes out of this process needs to include a few things. First, we need to articulate and record a vision of sustainability. Second, we need to determine what the maximum population for this area should be. Infill is only positive to a point, and then it becomes detrimental as we continue to grow. Third, we need a statement in this plan about where we have come from. How much have we grown in the past 50 years? How have development patterns changed? Fourth, we need to articulate a long-range vision of this area. What is a logical extension of our growth rates? Our present direction, even without sprawl, puts us on our way towards a population similar to Los Angeles, when viewed in the long term. We need to foster a dialogue with the community about where our current growth trends will lead us in the distant future.” ❶❷❸

- “We live on Larson Road, off the Guide Meridian. We have lived here for 37 years and plan on living our lives out here IF we are allowed to.

We have been very involved in County and City growth issues for 15 years. We are very aware of the ‘push and shove’ tactics that Caitac is using to get their property (formerly Wilder Farm/Cordata North, now Larrabee Springs) into the UGA. We know if it is included in the Comprehensive plan this time around, it will be built out within ten years, which will take the pressure off of infilling. If it had been approved (like they wanted and said was needed) at the last UGA update, it would be built out now!

We and our neighbors are being included into the mix and we DO NOT WANT that.

Over the last 15 years our neighbors and us have gone to many, many meetings and written letter after letter regarding this and it doesn’t change. Caitac wants to build their large, sprawling development and they have the money to pay lawyers and front men to lobby for them.

We do not. During the last Comp Plan update, we gathered and handed in over 2,500 signatures of City and County residents that were against Caitac’s plan. Many feel very strongly that citizens who are actually living on the ground that is being discussed should have a heck of a lot more say than someone that has the money to purchase a large chunk of easily developed land but DOES NOT LIVE on it.

When the last part of Cordata was annexed, the Boundary Review Board did not want to approve it, but because it had been agreed upon at an earlier date by Bellingham and Whatcom County, they had no choice. BUT they did say that they would not approve any more annexations that made the City boundaries uneven (such as the Caitac property would make a finger). We will fight any attempt to annex us into the City

IF this huge chunk of property is added to the UGA, it should not be allowed to start any development of said property until every square inch of the Bellingham City limits is built out. Leapfrog development will occur if this is not part of the Comprehensive Plan. And it should be phased in, not in one large parcel as they are asking.

We have been told not to fight this, as it is a done deal. We do not believe it is a done deal at this time, although we are aware of at least one County Council member that has been very involved with Caitac in regards to this.” ③

- “There should be a way that we can put what community visioning process into practical application. We have seen the contrast of infill with sprawl and it seems that most citizens would like to see Bellingham develop inside our current boundaries. The development that goes on at the edge of Town are the undertaken by large developers. They have a substantial staff and need to do development in large housing developments to make their work profitable. With infill, you do not have the same potential for development on such a scale. It would be more individual buildings and cottage housing

that is not of the same scale as the edge development. If infill is to work, we need to be cultivating the smaller local developers and house builders that will take part.

There was recently a 'Live It Up' workshop held in Bellingham. Planners, developers, and bankers were invited to examine and discuss mixed-use development in the Downtown. I believe we need to do something similar again, but invite smaller developers and home builders as well to look at infilling throughout Bellingham."

①②③

- "I live in the Puget neighborhood and am concerned with how growth is intended near my residence. Currently, there is a 58-unit development planned for Nevada Street that would not accord with the character of the area. The Plan proposes that all the traffic from this development be funneled onto Nevada Street, which is ill equipped to handle such an increase. I believe high-density development, such as this, should be limited to along major arterials that can take heavy increases in traffic; that would (*otherwise*) have a very negative impact on smaller streets like the one that goes by my house. Infill is a better alternative than sprawl, but needs to be done in a way that regards and protects neighborhood character." ①
- "I fully support the idea of infill within Bellingham. To make infill function and work for this city, we need to examine what has worked in the older neighborhoods in Bellingham. An interconnected street grid, alleys, different forms of architecture and housing type, and various amenities such as parks and trails can be found in these traditional neighborhoods. The same components that lend themselves to productive city function need to be included with the process of infilling. A stock of small houses and the diversity of income ranges of Bellingham residents provide this beautiful varied community we now enjoy. Services need to be placed in close proximity to residences so that citizens will be encouraged to walk through their neighborhoods. Locating services at great distances from housing does not help us to make Bellingham a more livable city that can be sustained into the future." ①②
- "There has been a fundamental flaw in the way we plan our street system here in Bellingham. Traffic congestion worsens and we respond by widening roads, which then fill-up with cars, and the cycle repeats itself. If we continue to create conditions favorable toward vehicular travel, we should not be surprised with what we get. Other transportation options need to be promoted so that they are held as a higher priority than continuous road widening. Infill is a great concept for Bellingham, and can work successfully, but not if we continue our focus on making vehicle trips as convenient as possible.

Creative forms of housing options are another area that needs to be adequately addressed in this city. I have seen forms of multi-family development and planned unit development that allows for dedication of common open space requirements instead of lot-by-lot open space requirements. This way, housing units do not tend to have individual yards but instead, a shared space, that is beneficial in many ways including the fostering of a neighborhood ethic that binds neighbors instead of segregating them. If infill is to work, creative solutions to housing and flexible zoning codes need to be

adopted so that progressive solutions are possible and, in fact, reinforced within our community.” ①②

### Key legend:

The following categories were formulated following review of public input to aid analysis and guide policy recommendations for client agencies. See associated comments from all neighborhood meetings, Drop-in Center, and Planning Fair, tabulated results document in Forum report appendix:

- ① = **“Building Community”** - *Comments related to improved or new civic infrastructure, supporting community values*
- ② = **“Development and Design Control”** - *Comments related to regulating new development in accord with community values*
- ③ = **“Inter-organizational Coordination”** - *Comments related to civic and regulatory agency coordination, affecting growth and development*
- ④ = **Other** - *Comments unrelated to primary categories*