



Suggestions/Comments/Ideas/Questions

Community Input

Growth Forum Meeting No. 1: June 5, 2004

Sehome High School Auditorium, 10:00 am – 6:00 pm

(Note: The following are paraphrased comments from meeting attendees and facilitator replies, transcribed from notes and video taped minutes. 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)

Comments:

- “There was much opposition to the Mall within this community, but it still went in, so there is much trepidation as to how much citizen input can do in stopping unwanted development.” ①
- “If there is a type of commercial activity you don’t like – don’t use it! A way to reduce the proliferation of national companies locating here is behavioral choices as to what businesses citizens choose to frequent.” ④
- “You mentioned earlier the influence of bank lending on development. I heard recently that because most of our bank financing is resold on a secondary market. There is a market for single land-use because (REEP?) managers are managing a portfolio, and real estate investment trusts are managing portfolios of financed loans. This does not bode well for mixed-use development. How have communities successfully gotten mixed-use development? Have they had to overcome any hurdles in terms of getting bank financing because banks cannot resell that loan on a secondary market?” ①②
- “If Bellingham intensifies to the north, stress will be put upon the Meridian School District. Development needs to consider turn-arounds for school buses, and places for kids to get on the bus. Every time you have 72 new students, you have a new bus going to that neighborhood, how are you going to handle that?” ①
- “Every new bus load of kids means three new classrooms, do we have site placing to put new schools? Elementary schools require 12 acres, middle schools require 20 acres and high schools require 30 acres of land. Where are these new schools going to be located if we increase density within the City? Are we going to make provisions for the growth we will be seeing over the next 20 years? Are developers willing to set aside land for new schools? We should deal in a cooperative manner with developers to satisfy the new students that will surely be a portion of 31,000 people moving to Bellingham. The developmental needs of children need to be considered in our growth management planning. Accessible parks and playgrounds need to be a part of this process, as do

- activities for children after school. Crime rates go up substantially around the nation when many teenagers are unsupervised between the hours of 2:30 and 5:00 pm. 40% of students in the Guide Meridian School District are on assisted lunch programs. They need things to do after school, and they also need access to public transportation to increase their mobility. Children should not be left behind in this growth planning process.” ❶
- “Kids that live in the York Neighborhood that reside as close as a block away from Carl Cozier Elementary are being bussed all the way to Lowell Elementary. How attractive is it for families looking to move to the York Neighborhood once they find out their child would be bussed all the way to Lowell Elementary?” ❶
 - “The issue of density leading to losing our neighborhood schools is an issue that is flying under the radar in this process.” ❶
 - “Future neighborhoods of Bellingham should be more friendly to children. We need to plan in advance for where schools will go in the urban fringe. Regarding the 12 acres per elementary brought up a few minutes ago for new schools, that figure may be based upon the suburban model. What would an urban alternative be? Could a school occupy half or a third of that land size?” ❶
 - “We should be thinking about light rail even if the need is in the distant future. Eventually, a light rail may connect the cities of Whatcom County.” ❸
 - “For schools, smaller is better. Effective, safer schools are the smaller ones. Kids need to be able to walk or ride their bicycle to a neighborhood school. The smaller they are, the closer schools can be placed to the kids they serve.” ❶
 - “Medical services should not be clustered out on the Guide Meridian, but should be located within neighborhoods throughout the City that are easily accessible to urban populations.” ❶
 - “Are we going to go through each neighborhood and determine the land supply, vacant lands, and buildable lands? What kind of housing units are we going to build, and where? We are going to need to include lands for services, including schools as we increase in population. We need to do a land supply analysis neighborhood by neighborhood to see where infill can happen, and look into UGA lands as well.” ❶❷❸
 - “We need to identify neighborhood centers that makes transportation options more viable throughout the City.” ❶❸
 - “We need a concept to look at the ecological footprint of increasing density. The higher density areas would need more schools, parks, services, etc. How much space do we need per person? We should locate these necessities within the vicinity of where people live and where higher density would go in the future.” ❶❷
 - “Do we have any estimates of how many people may be displaced out into the County when we create high density areas within the City? What are County impacts of infill if many people would not be willing to live in higher density neighborhoods within the City and instead move to unincorporated areas?” ❶❸

- “As we age and older people move to condominiums, how many single-family homes will open up within the City? I see it happening already within my neighborhood.” ❶
- “We have talked a lot about redeveloping areas within the City. Could we go through a process of identifying those areas? Georgia Pacific is an example of this type of area. There are many areas within the City that are ripe for redevelopment. Redevelopment should not include the apartment buildings that blight many parts of Bellingham. We can give developers incentives to redevelop these blighted areas in the City.” ❶❷
- “We should look into combining places that we traditionally see as segregated such as community centers, social services, and senior centers. Facilities can provide for more than one use, and it would be beneficial for the City to try and locate many facilities in one. We need to make sure that our regulatory framework really makes possible the kind of service centers that provide for different types of people, be it children, the elderly, or anyone in-between. Our current codes do not allow for this type of progressive community center.” ❶
- “Infill is not necessarily the ‘panacea.’ You may have systems that are currently at capacity like traffic and sewer. Infill is not a cost free opportunity to manage growth. There is also a psychological impact of fitting more people into the same space – that changes community.” ❶❷
- “We need development guidelines that are followed, similar to Fairhaven. People can look at what is possible for development rather than the forms of development they see in many other parts of the City.” ❷
- “We have seen such a negative model for development in the past. Developers see impact fees as a taking, while neighborhoods fight proposed development. We need a more positive model for development, such as the URMX zones around the James Street Road/Bakerview Road area. These zones allow for a flexible maximum density from 10 units/acre up to 24 units/acre. Developers can increase density over 10 units/acre when they purchase transferable development rights up to the maximum density. We should use the same type of incentive system for increasing density throughout the City.” ❶❷❸
- “We need a development model that is not only flexible, but leads to an atmosphere that is not as adversarial as our current system.” ❷
- “We need to look at the effect of infill on areas surrounding the sites of increased density. For example, if there is not enough parking in Fairhaven with the building of new condos in that neighborhood, people are going to park in surrounding areas. This type of analysis is important and should be included in assessing the impacts of infill.” ❶❷
- “Where are students going to be living in the future? We need to use our resources, including mapping student addresses around the City, to locate where students live and to what areas they are moving. We should then figure out a way to lessen the impacts on the neighborhoods.” ❶
- “Are we planning on a regional level? No matter what the City does, in terms of growth management, there may still be substantial development out in the County.” ❸

- “We should look at redeveloping areas within the city. We only need to add 3,500 units that are not available to be developed under the current zoning. In *Visions for Bellingham*, we envisioned moving or growing north into undeveloped parts of the City and I think we still need to do that.” ❶
- “In order to do the transportation planning that is part of this process, don’t we need to look longer term? What is going to be the maximum population of this area 100 years from now? Once we build-up all the buildable lands, and hopefully we will have saved some agricultural lands, what is the maximum density we can achieve? What transportation infrastructure is going to be necessary to accommodate our maximum build-out down the road?” ❸
- “Are we considering the effect of Vancouver and Seattle on Bellingham? I have heard of a train out of Seattle that may take 25 minutes to get to Bellingham eventually being built. Are we considering the implications of these large cities on Bellingham and especially the attractiveness of Bellingham for people potentially moving here if access is greatly improved?” ❸
- “Make more bus pullouts in the City so buses can pull-over and stop without blocking traffic. Northwest Ave. is a case-in-point of buses blocking traffic as they stop to pick-up and drop-off.” ❶❷
- “What are the essential elements of Bellingham we are trying to preserve? We need to identify those things. As we grow, when are we going to lose the characteristics that make Bellingham ‘Bellingham?’ We need to identify those characteristics, and hold onto them. People move here because Bellingham is a great place to live. Are we going to have so many traffic corridors that we become a freeway city like Los Angeles? Once we identify the things we love so much about our city, we need to fight like hell to preserve them.” ❶❷
- “We need to identify what we love about this place and use that to guide redevelopment. What places do not define what we cherish about this city? Those should be the places that are ripe for redevelopment. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. *Visions for Bellingham* already laid the foundation for growth in Bellingham. We need to apply *Visions* to areas of the City that are non-conforming to our groundwork laid 12 years ago.” ❶❷
- “If we force businesses into places where people may not use them, we are not solving anything. People have many options for services presently, if we take down current residential areas and replace them with businesses, they may not be used, unless they are located within the right areas.” ❶❷
- “As we grow, and if we infill, are their ways it can be advantageous to us? How can we work to improve quality-of-life for the current residents? I do not want increased density to mean wider roads, so it is more cumbersome to cross the street. I am hearing that people want to walk and want to ride their bicycles. So as we grow, we need to make opportunities for many modes of transportation more practical.” ❶❷❸

- “The easier places to build houses have already been built within the City. I would hope development in the future not be in a grid pattern, so that it is easier to preserve wetlands. Often the regulations are from a grid model; so you cannot do little things like changing the orientation of a building, or locating driveway access in different areas. A key component, form based to meet our needs, will have to break from a standard grid model and become more flexible for development.” ②
- “How effective is using congestion as a means of directing growth? If an area is difficult to access, is it less likely to intensify in development?” ③
- “How much road building will be necessary to accommodate the 31,000 people who will be moving here over the next 20 years? If we provide for the same congestion levels and levels-of-service, what will our streetscape become?” ③
- “A website should be available to access the information presented at the Growth Forum meeting on June 5, 2004. The PowerPoint presentations provided at that meeting should have been printed in advance to allow the audience to follow along and examine them at home.” ④
- “I-5 has become a surface street for inter-city travel. Can the City provide better arterial service so that I-5 is not used as a major connector within the City? Some cities have only one on/off ramp from freeways in the area and the effect of that is that inter-city travel is located on city streets instead of freeway connections within these cities.” ②
- “Do we have any data that shows what housing demand will look like in the future for Bellingham? Can we base future housing unit construction on historical trends? Are we just determining how many housing units we will need and not identifying market demand for what those types of residences will be? What quality-of-life will the people moving here be looking for? We need to pay attention to who we will be building for in the next 20 years.” ②
- “Won’t our design choices about the City we want to make influence who decides to move here?” ②
- “I have a concern about minimum lot sizes...” *(Transcriber could not hear remainder clearly)* ④
- “Bellingham currently has over 50 percent of housing units as rentals. How healthy is it for a community to rent rather than own, and how can that shape a community? Kent is a prime example of an extreme rental rate at 98%.” ②
- “We need to look at development along the Guide Meridian and out at Sunset Drive. Huge corporate buildings have been gobbling up our community for too long. We need to move towards what we are seeing at Barkley Village and in Fairhaven and away from ‘Big-Box’ retail. The same national corporations that are building north and east of I-5 are worsening our traffic problems because of their location away from residential centers and their automotive orientation.” ①②③

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.

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*