



Suggestions/Comments/Ideas/Questions

Community Input

Neighborhood Meeting No. 2: August 10, 2004

Central Business District, York, Sunnyland, and Sehome Neighborhoods
Bellingham Public Library, 7:00 – 9:00pm

(Note: The following are paraphrased comments from meeting attendees, transcribed from notes and audio 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:

- "I do not want to see infill in the Ohio Street Study Area that would displace the industrial uses that are presently there. If the expense of infill is the elimination of industrial lands and jobs, I cannot support it." ①
- "I have seen the penny weighting display. It does not allow choices for people who do not want to pay for future growth. As a citizen, I do not want to pay for the infrastructure necessary for growth. Not paying for increased fire services, more parks, more schools, and other costs of growth are not options in your survey. They should be." ④
- "It is a mistake to say that we should try and stop growth entirely. Even if we do not pay for it in dollars (increased taxation) we will pay for it in other ways." ①③
- "A way to slow growth down is to make it pay for itself." ②
- "Right now, impact fees within the City of Bellingham are slowly starting to go up. Currently, new homeowners do not pay the full cost of new school buildings. Existing residents are required to pay 40 percent of the costs. That is the kind of thing that should change." ②
- "It is astounding to me that we are going to increase in population by 50% over the next twenty years. That is one of the highest growth rates in the entire country. The City Council has never looked at how we can reduce our growth rate. Currently, the Visitor's Bureau sends out relocation packets to anyone who asks for them over their website. If the city truly "shared our pain", they would not be supporting a visitor's bureau that practiced in such a way. You are talking about packing us in here like sardines and I don't want it. There are many things we can do to reduce our rate of growth. Growth is always seen by City Government to be inevitable yet we are doing things to encourage people to move here. I wish our government would look at ways to reduce growth. Now we are left with more condos and asphalt, and what once was a charming little town, is now being ruined." ①③

- “I am intrigued with the idea that the intersection of James Street and Iowa Street could become a neighborhood center. This area needs to become more transit, pedestrian, and cyclist friendly. That intersection could be enhanced to make it much more inviting to people outside of their cars.” ①②
- “If you are expanding existing building footprints in areas such as the Ohio Street Study Area, you need to recognize the value of the parking lots and loading docks that business in that area need to function. Infill should not be at the expense of accessibility for current light industrial and commercial uses.” ①②
- “To make infill development a reality in the Ohio Street Study Area, zoning changes will have to be made to allow residential right along side commercial and light industrial uses. If you allow housing in that area, that use is going to take over. Commercial and industrial areas will be lost due to denser housing. In a functional city, we need places where people can walk to work, and the Ohio Street Study Area is a walkable area. That value should be held high.” ①②
- “It should be noted that parking areas only have a building footprint when there is more than one level of parking. Parking would not necessarily be lost due to infill, it would likely be consolidated onto parking garages instead of surface lots.” ①②
- “Around the world, consumption of hydro-carbons has been steadily increasing. There is some question as to whether production has peaked and will quickly begin declining. Issues may come up in the next twenty years, such as the lack of fossil fuels, which severely affect people's driving habits. The potential for change needs to be part of a planning process that is both adaptive and progressive.” ①②③
- “I have heard that mixed-use development actually eases the parking situation. People that reside in such areas may drive their cars to work thus freeing up parking spots that could be used by others who may be using the area for other purposes than living. You end up getting much more effective use of space allocated for parking.” ①②
- “I saw an article in the Seattle Times that outlined how Whatcom County is not growing at the rate that is anticipated for this area.” ④
- “A building boom in this area is speculative and is not necessarily related to how many people are coming here. What is the science behind these population projections?” ④
- “We need to take the existing problems within the neighborhoods into account.” ①
- “Why didn't the City Council adopt the lower figure for a population growth estimate? If they had the power to do so, they should have anticipated growth at the smallest level possible. A majority of the citizens at the public hearings on the population projections advocated for the lowest possible figure.” ④
- “The success of new building construction lies in whether or not people are set to move into it upon its completion. Looking at how long new homes are vacant before being sold is a good indicator for housing demand.” ①

- “The report produced for the City and County Councils should be distributed to citizens at an early date. People need time to go over and react to the recommendations before they are finalized.” ①
- “The people that are involved in this process want to be involved. If you don’t have the report available for them to review in advance that would be unfortunate. We are very busy people and need a reasonable amount of time to prepare and digest the report before it is presented at the workshop on September 29, 2004.” ①
- “Is the City intending to shred the neighborhood plans?” ④
- “Is the Growth Management Act sacrosanct? It is always given as the reason behind why we must accept growth. Can it be challenged? Have other communities, frustrated with exorbitant growth rates, successfully challenged the GMA?” ④
- “A major purpose of the GMA is to protect the rural character of Washington’s counties. The local government does not have control over the GMA. Growth is not driven by the government, but directed as to the manner in which growth happens in our area. It is a mistake to blame City and County officials who are trying to facilitate responsible growth.” ③
- “Our City Council actively promotes growth in our community. Even if all other cities in Washington State do that, it does not make it right.” ④
- “One primary goal here is to protect the rural character of our county. A trade-off is that areas, such as Bellingham, that have available services and infrastructure will increase in density. People that are saying we need to protect our rural culture are looking at our pragmatic alternatives and saying, “let’s try and deal with this issue”. The GMA is a response to the unregulated growth of the 1980’s. Since the 1990’s, it has worked in making growth more responsible and sustainable than our previous growth patterns. We need a framework to understand what we are trying to achieve here. It begins with how we can protect rural culture, character, and lifestyle.” ①③
- “We are trying to decide, what is the most efficient way to accommodate growth based on the economic forces that are bringing in new residents. If we decided that we do not want them in Bellingham, they would move into the County. Then we will lose the rural character of this region. I don’t think we can blame the GMA for the unfavorable impacts of increased populations.” ①③
- “What is the tradeoff for inner-city neighborhoods? That is the challenge. If we are trying to protect the rural character of the county what load are we willing to put upon the neighborhoods within the City? We need to address the displacement of children from their neighborhood schools by large, multi-family development loading more children into existing school service areas. We also need to look at the issue of housing affordability and homelessness as we increase in population within the City.” ①③
- “I believe the developer is the client for City and County Planning. The residents speak, but are largely ignored. While our interests should come first, we are often seen as a minor obstacle to paving the growth road.” ④

- “Vacant land, within the City, has great ecological value. It acts to filter and hold stormwater and as a wildlife refuge within an urban area. If vacant land is a giant parking lot; I say redevelop it and use it more intensely.” ①
- “Can we empower the City to have ‘teeth’ with developers? There should be a ‘three strikes and you’re out’ law that punishes developers for non-compliance with City code. I have talked with City planners who have to allow permit approvals for developers that they know have disregarded requirements in the past. There should be a system whereas these repeat offenders are punished. Perhaps there can be a moratorium on their building projects for 3-5 years.” ②
- “If we are looking to reduce sprawl, how can we do so while still retaining neighborhood character? We already have many neighborhoods that are dense already. How can we increase density in those areas while maintaining the quality-of-life for the current residents?” ①②
- “People living in denser cities are actually healthier than people living in less dense cities. Density and walkability are intertwined.” ①②
- “In a lot of ways I see the no-growth position as a generational issue. Many of the people who already have jobs, and already have a collection of resources do not want further job creation or an atmosphere that is favorably to the younger generation. The reality is that our society works by growth. It has been like that for hundreds of years and in the future, our economic vitality will largely depend on growth. I don’t want to have a situation like Boulder, CO where the only people that can afford to live in the city are the very wealthy and everyone else has to commute in from 50 or 60 miles away. We need to provide for a variety of income ranges and people – including younger folks.” ①②③
- “There are many successful housing types that are not currently possible because of our current code. Cottage Housing, reduced lot sizes, and Co-housing developments would work to create a higher density within existing neighborhoods. We need to make our code more flexible to allow for progressive forms of housing.” ②
- “How are we communicating with the business community?” ①
- “Crime rate is actually less per capita in higher-density areas than in lower-density areas.” ①
- “Bellingham is in between two major population centers – Vancouver and Seattle. As they grow, they certainly will impact Bellingham.” ①③
- “Our policies should be modeled for livability and affordability.” ①②
- “We need to be having a discussion about what ways we can discourage growth.” ④
- “Will we build ourselves into something ugly? Authentic needs to be defined.” ②
- “We need to talk about who is coming and why are they coming. Many industries throughout the County have severely reduced their work forces. What kind of jobs are the people moving here going to have? We always invest in good schools by passing greenways levies. Our funding for public transportation is substantial. We create a great

place to live and it is inevitable that other people are going to realize the attractiveness of the community we consistently improve.” ①③

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 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*