



## Suggestions/Comments/Ideas/Questions

Community Input

### Neighborhood Meeting No. 4: August 24, 2004

Happy Valley, Samish, South, Yew Street Neighborhoods

Fairhaven Library, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

*(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:

- “Is this the official legal public process as part of the Comprehensive Plan revisions?” ④
- “Are UGAs a provision of the Comprehensive Plan? Will they change at the end of the year?” ③
- “Why is there a need for a transition between institutional and commercial land-uses, as seen in the Ohio Street Study Area?” ①
- “One of the problems with infill is that it rips neighborhoods apart. If we are going to emphasize traffic corridors, we should do so in a way that mitigates for congestion problems already noticeable during peak traffic times. We need to concern ourselves with the human scale of buildings if we are going to ‘mass’ structures. The effect on traffic is already being felt in Fairhaven, and it’s not even infilled yet. That is definitely an issue.” ①②③
- “Fairhaven is a good example of a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly area. If you live in the Ohio Street Study Area, you need to get in your car and drive to the grocery store and to other services. If you rezone certain areas of the City, you may create districts that have similar characteristics to Fairhaven’s. In this process, are we looking for underdeveloped areas that may be redeveloped as neighborhood centers?” ①
- “I don’t think it is responsible to ‘mass’ structures without effectively mitigating trip generation issues directly relating to automotive traffic.” ①③
- “I have been very active in planning in Bellingham for over 20 years. We have seen many presentations throughout the years that show examples and not specific proposals. Later on, we hear that no one objected, and plans have been incorporated into the law. I find this process less than forthright as to how these recommendations are going to be brought forward and put into law.” ④

- “Happy Valley has seen, by far, the greatest amount of infill amongst the neighborhoods of Bellingham. We have seen many apartment buildings and duplexes go up as single-family homes are torn down. Little has been spent, however, on infrastructure such as separations between roads and sidewalks. Infill should be targeted more rationally than it has been in the past.” ❶
- “Edgemoor has many large homes on spacious lots. It also has many ratty 1950’s homes on relatively small lots. As we talk about infill, we should talk about replacing some older ranch style homes with charming, attractive duplexes. I believe homes could be constructed in Edgemoor that mesh with neighborhood character while fitting a few more people into the same amount of space.” ❶❷
- “Half of the entire Samish Neighborhood does not even have a sewage system. Planners have great ideas for creating neighborhood centers, and a lot of those ideas can happen in the UGA. Mixed-use, multi-family, and duplexes can all be incorporated. I think you will heavily tax the City if we do infill within existing neighborhoods as you are prescribing.” ❶❸
- “We, in Happy Valley, have proposed many things to City Planning that have not been implemented. First, we pushed for detached, mother-in-law units to accommodate more students and allow a greater income to property owners for mortgage payments. The City would not hear of it. Second, we advocated for turning unused ROW into large lots that could be built upon with more residences. Third, I talked with a developer who wanted to do a ‘living-homes’ development on 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. Planning would not allow it. Fourth, we wanted single-family lots to be reduced from 7,500 square feet to 5,000 square feet. Again, City Planning would not even consider it. The Planning Department has been the problem with regards to sensible, rational infill. Happy Valley has been more than willing and we have proposed many infill strategies for our neighborhood.” ❶❷
- “Cordata and Cordata North could become neighborhood centers in the future. It is a multi-use area that incorporates educational, retail, light-industrial and industrial uses. Utilities and other infrastructure are already in place to service North Cordata. It is the perfect opportunity for a master-planned community, as it is largely under single ownership. I think that is what we as a community would like to see. The issue of where is it fair to put density is an important one. We have a balkanized city that’s based on an equity situation. With the City’s Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping technology, is it possible to identify the proportionate densities of the neighborhoods in Bellingham? We could then take those ratios and infill proportionately to existing neighborhood density percentages. The neighborhoods would increase proportionately in residences through the infilling process. This type of strategy is imperative if we want to infill in a way that is equitable.” ❶
- “Several neighborhoods do not have the levels of parks and green-space as we have in Happy Valley. Infill needs to be complimentary to our parks and open-spaces. You should not fill-in the undeveloped ROW in Happy Valley because we need that area for wildlife and ecological function. I do not want to see urban sprawl, I want infilled areas, but parking concerns, traffic concerns, and retention of open space need to be important considerations as a part of this process.” ❶❸

- “How are you designing this process so that input from the public will be recreated accurately? I have heard projections about how many trees will be dying as a result of growth. Bellingham is as charming as it now is because it grew-up around natural beauty. The trees, lakes, and streams of this area should be built around, not built upon. If you sincerely want our participation, you should be following our objectives.” ①③
- “I really oppose sprawl, the loss of open-space, the loss of farmland and salmon habitat. There is an inherent conflict to reducing sprawl: we must accommodate people in our existing urban areas. We’d also like to have walkable, livable, attractive neighborhoods while protecting and enhancing them. There is also a lot of fear associated with infill. I wonder how many homes will go into my neighborhood, but I think it is fair to distribute infill around the City.

Is there a way this process could produce some incentives for the neighborhoods as they accommodate higher densities? Neighborhoods could do their part to combat sprawl, but should get something in return to enhance parks and trails, to calm traffic or mitigate other traffic problems.

If we make our neighborhoods more walkable and truly enhance them, we also need to create housing that is affordable and concurrent with wages. Otherwise, many people will drive in from the County where housing is much cheaper.” ①③

- “What about sidewalks? Many roads are lined with ditches. It’s difficult to connect neighborhoods without having walking connections in the form of sidewalks.” ①②
- “Citizens will not have any input as to the final product of how our neighborhood will look like. How is traffic going to be controlled? What about runoff and lot sizes? Many homes look lovely when they are built but become rundown because they are not kept up.” ①②③
- “I think all of us here think sprawl is something we want to avoid. It affects our taxes. Subtle incremental change in population growth does not equate with the number of cars on the road. In many instances a greater percentage of people begin to drive - congesting roads at a substantial rate. I believe that we should throw an overlay zone over the entire city allowing detached mother-in-law residences. Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) can provide on-site supervision for renters if the landlord is living in the ADU or in the main unit on the lot. This strategy could, in effect, double the density of Happy Valley. The problem is that we cannot get it through the Bellingham Planning Commission. We also need some forward-looking investment strategies for the infrastructure that will be necessary in accommodating infill.” ①③
- “Seattle has developed street-edges that have a stormwater control feature. Roads are wiggled to calm traffic flow and these systems are cheaper to maintain. In this sort of system, water is filtered between roadside and sidewalk by vegetation. The only downside is that is it a bit more expensive to build.” ①②

- “Improved street-edges that have stormwater control/filtration features are a great example of an incentive if neighborhoods are to take more density. This kind of street improvement is a phenomenal asset.” ①②
- “Infill is a natural process that is always happening. There are presently six to eight houses going up in Happy Valley. Unfortunately, a lot of those houses are five and six bedroom residences that instantly fill up with students. We need to work on an ordinance to control that. I do not think there are many families anymore that would require such a house, so these large structures turn into student housing.” ①②
- “I am absolutely convinced that we will both infill and grow out, unless we seriously look into alternatives. I have not seen a discussion topic on the table as to what our alternatives are.” ③
- “When I immigrated into this country, I was allowed in because either I had a job here, I had family here, or I was potentially an economic asset to the U.S.A. Why can’t we adopt the same policy for cities? Before we let someone into a neighborhood we need to determine if there is a job for him or her there, if they have family living there, or if they are going to be an economic or artistic asset to the community. This sort of strategy may not be sensible, but it is daft to talk about infill as only more houses. You have to start looking at what makes a city tick. Once employment is created in an area, perhaps we can create rental housing in that area to reduce trips and sprawl.” ②
- “We are dealing with 100 years of a car culture superimposed on a national grid plan. This has been stimulated by unlimited consumption, spurred on by a multi-million dollar advertising industry, and aided by corporate greed and manipulation. This is where we are coming from. These, and other factors, have created a situation that would require two to three more planets than we now have. This is the American environmental footprint. If everyone lived like we Americans do, we would require more than we have. We pollute our land, oceans, and sky.

What I would like to do is calculate our growth rate based upon the average ecological footprint on a global scale. The first thing we need to do is figure out what provisions we are making for the children. What provisions are we making for pedestrians? What about smaller cars, scooters, public transportation biodiesel vehicles and cyclists? They all need to be planned for. Bellingham has endorsed something called the Earth Charter. This charter, adopted by the City Council, backs all the things I have previously mentioned. The City and County Councils also support Leadership in Environmental and Economic Design (LEED). At the rate we are going, implosion is going to happen. Environmental collapse is happening in many places in the world right now.” ①③

- “The Waterfront Futures Group unanimously supported redevelopment of the Waterfront. We are making progress. Hopefully, in the future, we will see the first LEED neighborhood in the United States. I have heard many concerns at this meeting about the effect of infill that accommodates for students will have on neighborhoods such as Happy Valley. We are going to have recommendations to the City and County Councils as to what the development standards should be. There was an effort that really got watered down. In Europe, along street edges you see plantings a half a foot high. They

work to filter stormwater, add to the ambience of the area, and slow traffic as people admire them. How can you, as a consultant, affect the changes we need in a timely manner to actually implement what we know will work, but what is tough to get through the process?" **123**

- "I grew up in Bellingham. I moved away for about 12 years. What I appreciate - now that I am back - is the character of the different areas. You have a lot of variety throughout the City. In cities like Washington, D.C., Boston, and Atlanta, people have more control over what their neighborhoods might look like. In many parts of Bellingham, such as Happy Valley you have turn-of-the-century homes and homes from the 1920's right next to huge four-story apartment buildings that have cheap vinyl siding and the cheapest windows the builders could find. In cities such as Boston, there are neighborhood review boards that review potential development to see if it matches with the existing character. That's what is lacking in Bellingham. The zoning determines the sizes of buildings and whether they are multi or single-family, but it does not really enforce a neighborhood context to new development. From a development standpoint, it costs more to buy building materials, but citizens need to live with development for at least 30-40 years. How can we incorporate a mesh with existing neighborhood character into the review process for development? To do something like this would certainly cost more money. Tax increases are always an issue. Planning Staff is already overworked, so if we are to implement something like this, we are going to need to find a way to pay for it." **123**
- "There is something that has always bothered me when you talk about infilling. It seems like there is a distinction that doesn't get made during any sort of process. There is a difference in infilling buildings on a space with the number of people who could occupy that space. This gets into social engineering, but if you want to control some of the aesthetic aspects of structures, you need to look into what people think they should be entitled to live in. How much space per human being are we entitled to? Most of the people in this room probably grew up with only one bathroom in our houses or no bathroom at all. Most of us shared bedrooms with siblings. When we went away to college, we expected to live with between one and five other people in a room. We also shared one bathroom per floor. Now students go to college and expect to live in a house as large as the one they grew up in at home. They expect two bathrooms in each unit, a huge gourmet kitchen, and large living rooms. They can't cook; they use disposable plates, and huge amounts of garbage collect around their residences.

We have talked a lot about infill but we need to determine one thing. How big should housing units be? What can we do to encourage people to start sharing their living space? Not everyone can afford to live at the standard that we would like to be living at. If we keep building large houses we will create a situation favorable to the economic elite. Why are single-family residences in neighborhoods held so sacred? How can we establish an equitable condition that does not rely on established norms of preserving the single-family lifestyle and the reinforcement of economic ghettos?" **12**

- "I like the idea of fitting more houses on a piece of land than we normally think of having on a piece of land. Reducing lot sizes and house sizes is extremely important. I have two

kids and I live in a house that is less than 1000 square feet. It is possible for families to live in smaller residences, and we probably know each other better because of our close proximity. Good looking, accessible houses, with parking areas and small gardening areas are important to the Community. Having choices in housing types and sizes allows options for a variety of people and families.” ①②

- “The current Bellingham Comprehensive Plan includes neighborhood elements. I have heard of ‘balkanization’ within the neighborhoods, but I have not seen it. In fact, I have gone into many homes, and talked with numerous people. They do not mind large, 40-unit apartments next to farmhouses, like you see in Happy Valley. People in Happy Valley have been very tolerant in allowing that sort of development. We do see some intolerance to these in what have been called economic ghettos. In cities such as Seattle, more power was given to the neighborhoods to define their character.

Everyone wants the same thing: we want our kids to be able to go out and play safely along the street. We want to preserve the little places that children go to play and come home dirty. There are a few really basic aesthetic features that people want to preserve, and it’s really not that tough to do. We have recently seen gas prices go up 40% and the peak in oil production is probably not far away. We may soon see fuel-cell cars and smaller cars. It is time to consider development that is not strictly a car priority. If we are all to raise our hands in this room we would see how many of us own more than one car, so it is hard to blame somebody else. When we think of the 30% of our income that we spend on transportation and how that could enrich our local economy, and how it could make housing actually affordable for some of us, it makes sense to work that into the Comprehensive Plan. Moving towards a plan that is not automobile dependent is something we can do immediately as part of this process.” ①③

- “It’s no good to have great sidewalks if you have no place to walk to. Within two blocks from everyone’s residence there should be pocket parks with playgrounds, and small businesses including neighborhood stores. We need to create little pockets within our neighborhoods that have services and parks that we can walk to. Right now we have large chunks of single or multi-family housing without any services within close proximity. We would like to get rid of our cars and walk more. The problem is that we have no place to go.” ①②
- “What recourse do the citizens have if the powers-that-be do not adopt the recommendations that come out of this process? Do we have any power?” ④
- “We need to explicitly discuss the capacity of the local schools as criteria for where infill should go within the City. You would assume that there would be additional open space in neighborhoods that accommodate an increased number of people as a requirement for infill as well.” ①
- “The City should adopt low-impact development standards as part of their design standards for all future construction. In the Happy Valley Neighborhood Plan, the roadside ditches are referred to as waterways. These waterways work in filtering stormwater and slowing down traffic. Sidewalks can be located on the opposite side of a road as the ditch to still allow for pedestrian circulation. I think there should be a subsidy

for affordable housing; the developers have been having their way with this county for too long. With regards to the commercial centers that were mentioned earlier, we already have four of those in Happy Valley and would like to limit any more. Parking and traffic issues are the main reasons why we would not like to see more commercial development in the area. I also believe that regions of the City - not necessarily neighborhoods, but clusters of neighborhoods - should have community centers. We made a proposal to make the old fire hall on 14<sup>th</sup> Street into a community center. It would have been packed with programs and helpful events. I think the neighborhoods should be the foundation of the city and the city should be built up from there." ①②

- "Looking at the 'Where' map for infill opportunities, I think all of those areas are great opportunities for infill to happen. I think a good job was done in conceiving where these places may be within our city." ①
- "We should look into clues for what the job situation might look like here in Bellingham in the future. An aging population will undoubtedly mean more jobs in the medical industry. These types of things should be used as indicators for how job creation will be shaped. I certainly don't favor corner stores every two blocks. I think that assumes a certain level of consumerism that we may not see in the future. The City should revisit regulations about in-home business activity and what that might look like. I do not like (City) Planning assuming that I will shop in my neighborhood. If I want to support local businesses, I may have to travel well outside of my neighborhood to do so. For example, I go to the Co-Op to do my shopping which is an hour's walk away. The prices are the best in town, much better than I can get from my neighborhood grocer. A lot of what people do is not in their neighborhood." ①②
- "I think it is sad that this process is going on in August. Far fewer people would have attended this event if it had not rained today. It's good for the community to have this dialogue, but I think this process is deceptive. The consultants are a private organization that has been hired by our professional planners who should be able to do this themselves. This process is now being rushed through and I will look to see which of these recommendations are brought forth and see if it will be determined that the citizens approved of them. This is not formal input, you had less than 35 people here from four neighborhoods." ④
- "There was an attempt in June to do this process and it was reconfigured for good reasons. There is never a perfect time to do something like this. This is an immensely important process and there should be an opportunity for people to come forth and express themselves. What are going to come out of this process are recommendations to the City and County Councils and they are only recommendations. That is an important observation to make." ④

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*