



Suggestions/Comments/Ideas/Questions

Community Input

Neighborhood Meeting No. 5: August 25, 2004

Edgemoor, Fairhaven, South Hill, and WWU 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:

- “The results from the penny-weighting survey will be invalid because it only allows ten categories for pennies to be placed into. There are many more categories that should be included that reflect other real concerns within this area. In addition to the survey being incomplete in scope, it does not reflect the actual budgetary expenditures for the City. I believe that people should be asked ‘what are the most important ten categories to you’ and those answers should be written down thus forming a more complete survey.” ④
- “You are not talking about how to minimize growth in Bellingham. Is the point of this meeting to find out how to make infill work? Is it a forgone conclusion that infill is the growth strategy that is going to be employed?” ④
- “Is it required that we come up with the number of people moving here first? Spokane has a resident visioning process that determined the expected amount of growth. Whose vision are we working off of?” ④
- “The reason we are here is to figure out how to accommodate growth. The Happy Valley model is not working. We want to find out the best way to influence sustainable growth in the County.” ①③
- “*Visions for Bellingham* was a participatory process 12 years ago. Our current choices should not be based on this dated document.” ④
- “It seems to me that this process is working from a slightly flawed premise. What does growth do for us? It brings jobs, houses, and more infrastructure. The current residents, in the form of higher taxes, incur many of the costs of growth. We need to be discouraging growth. We need to keep the ‘Big-Box’ stores out of our area as well. We should be talking about how we can slow growth and looking into how to discourage it.” ④

- “I have lived in many areas including Chicago, Paris and Los Angeles. I spent my college years in L.A. and I can tell you, that is not the way to grow. Many of us left Southern California because we hated those kinds of growth patterns. You get more ‘bang for your buck’ in expanding local businesses. Economy of scale in infill is important. Infill also makes public transportation more of a practical alternative to driving.” ①③
- “We need to be having a discussion about who is coming. The manufacturing base has been greatly reduced in this area, as has the timber base and local fishing economy. Western has become the largest employer in the area. People decide to move here because we make it a great place to live. We invest in greenways, schools, WTA, and will be redeveloping the waterfront. So who is coming? Mainly students and retirees. People are certainly not coming here for the jobs. It is imperative that we determine who is likely to be moving here and then decide what tools would build the best possible city for these people to move into.” ①②③
- “It is my observation that many of the best places to live in this country have gone through boom and bust cycles. Fairhaven is a prime example. What once was a thriving town was falling apart twenty years ago. Now, it is a popular destination for people living in Bellingham, as well as people visiting. My family chose to live near Fairhaven because it is walkable and schools are close-by. We wanted to move somewhere that you didn’t need your car. Fairhaven is that kind of place.

I see growth as inevitable. We can direct it so that new development matches the older character of the established neighborhoods in Bellingham. We can control this character of growth so that it reflects our values.” ①

- “There is certainly a desire to keep Bellingham as it is today. If we envision small Fairhavens around the City, you could see how our city can improve upon what we presently see. If we manage growth correctly, we can improve upon this place that we call home.” ①
- “If you do not want infill in your area, do not support it at all. Most of us at this meeting do not want infill. We have not seen positive forms of infill to date, and I do not expect any in the future. Do we, by making this place attractive for 31,000 people, encourage our own demise? People are not coming here for the jobs.

If we had faith in the planners, we could work together.

The County has broken up lots in R5A encouraging growth outside of the urban areas. I believe planners are like doctors. They finish their education and come out of school wanting to see disease. They want to apply their knowledge into fixing problems even when there are none. Planners are not listening to community input. Cordata and the Guide Meridian are good examples of what growth has looked like in Bellingham. What we need is an ombudsman who looks out for the interests of the citizens. We need someone who will fight to protect our views, allow our children to be able to walk to school, promote affordable housing and a safe environment. We speak up but developers march on.” ①③

- “Where could neighborhood centers go? One area that is ripe for a neighborhood center is the Cordata area. We have seen a recent continuation of sprawl in that area. It could be a better place to live, and a way to accommodate some of the 31,000 people that may be moving here, if we allow that area to be more intensely developed with a mixture of land uses.” ①
- “Traffic and congestion need to be considered in Fairhaven. Mixed-use is wonderful, but the stresses on parking and our existing streetscape should be considered. All of the new condos now being built in that area are going to mean many more people driving and trying to find a place to park their cars. Fairhaven will change almost overnight. Growth will lead to the deterioration of Fairhaven, and it all begins with the lack of circulation and parking problems being addressed before we move into crisis management.” ①
- “I am supportive of a blue print for growth, but I believe the City Council needs some direction. The answer is not to squeeze more houses onto current single-family lots. My question is: how will infill actually work? Lets say I own a one-story paint shop in the Ohio Street Study Area. If I wanted to redevelop the land, would I be required to put housing above my shop? Would we be establishing minimum densities requirements for redevelopment? If areas are rezoned throughout the City, how do you get property owners to build residences on the newly designated lands?” ①②
- “Much has gone under the bridge before this process began. I am skeptical about this process. What assurance can you give that our comments will appear? Our comments do not show up before the City Council. How will this be recorded? What happens all too often is that the Council does not have enough time to review this material.” ④
- “Growth either happens or it doesn’t. I think it is dangerous to sell this place as a commodity. We should cool the money that goes into growth. The problems in Happy Valley have come about because the vision in the Comprehensive Plan has not been followed. We need to feel like there is someone who represents us (*the citizens*) in the planning department. We need people on staff who determine if development is compatible with the surrounding character of the Community.” ①②
- “I have an issue with destroying the green lungs of the City through infill. We once had green gateways to the City that have been built over and I wonder how an infill strategy retains the green areas we have remaining. This concept of infill is an implied contradiction. If you have more and more people, where are the parks going to go? If we don’t protect green spaces now, what are we going to have left for the future?” ①
- “I do not believe infill will work unless the City makes formal recommendations to the neighborhoods. Neighborhoods need to feel like they own their own future. Our comments do not get to the City Council for consideration. Formal democratic neighborhood associations should develop and be financially backed by the City.” ①
- “There needs to be a more specific definition of mixed-use. Different types of mixed-use need to be identified. Exactly what uses will be mixed and where will they go? Areas around Alabama Street could take more density. There are currently 7200 square foot lots with only one house on them. We could reduce lot sizes in that area to provide for more houses.” ①②

- “The mess around Bellis Fair mall needs to be redone. Development groups can go in and infill around and through existing mall areas. This could complement the existing businesses around the Mall. I believe the Samish Study Area is ripe for redevelopment and that the Fountain District could use a defined neighborhood center. I have heard many comments about folks not wanting higher densities. The problem is that many people experience density as automotive-oriented density. Density does not and should not look and function in a strictly automotive context. Areas like Edgemoor are made for cars. We need to deal with the problem of the automobile in the city. The City needs to prioritize. The first priority should be to clean up messes past City Councils have made. Road projects, such as the widening of Sunset Avenue, are not the answer.

Neighborhoods like Happy Valley already have a high population density but few sidewalks. Priorities need to be reordered with walkability at or near the top. In areas like Fairhaven, you don’t need incentives for development - market forces are already working. In areas such as North Samish Way, incentives for redevelopment need to be offered. If infill is done near single-family areas, money needs to be spent to mitigate the negative impacts of infill which are sure to be felt. Traffic calming measures are an example of effectively addressing these negative impacts.” ①②③

- “Walkable neighborhoods are a desirable goal. Before moving here, I lived a life independent of the automobile. I desired the same sort of life here and have it.

Infill often comes too late as land is already paved over. It seems we have to make a compact urban area before everything is paved. I think no growth is a great ‘Plan A,’ but we need a ‘Plan B.’ We need to expand our options throughout the City and allow flexibility in our single-family areas. From a social equity standpoint, it is fair to let changes affect the city as a whole instead of singling out specific areas that must accommodate increases in density. For example, if we allowed duplexes in all single-family zones that abided to current character, we could fairly spread density without polarizing the neighborhoods against each other. We need more forms of housing throughout the city and flexibility to allow for such advances.” ③

- “My question is: Where are the protections for the neighborhoods? There needs to be something in it for the neighborhoods in the form of incentives. There also needs to be protections in place to ensure that we retain our neighborhood character.”
- “Growth is a cyclic activity. New jobs are created, people move here, more homes are built, etc. We will be going through this same process in 7 years, faced with the same astounding figures. Eventually, this city will become quite dense from north to south. We should not forget that many people move here because Bellingham is a small town. That is part of what makes this place so attractive. We are not planning for the several million people who could move here ultra-long term. Long range strategic planning is needed.”
- “The present potential for new housing units is 4,500 under our current zoning (*within Bellingham*). That means we need about 9,000 more units within the City to have the over 13,000 units that will be necessary for the 31,000 people moving here over the next twenty years. We should spread those units evenly through the neighborhoods based on current ratios. That way growth would be proportionate. For example, if Happy Valley

- now has 8% of the housing units within the City, that neighborhood would be required to take 8% of the expected housing units. GIS mapping technology could allow us to have a graphic representation of these proportionate ratios. Determining where infill will go needs to be equitable.” ❶
- “We can’t see growth as a city versus county issue. The fact is that Bellingham was supposed to take 44% of the County’s growth as directed in the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, but has only taken 42%. Lot prices have risen and the service people have relocated out into the County where land and housing prices are much cheaper. We need to look at this process in an overarching way that encompasses both City and County.” ❸
 - “We need organic growth, we do not need to promote it or market it so people choose to move here.” ❷
 - “How do we protect what we have? We’ve heard this many times before. The City has not enforced controls to the extent that they can. What can we gain? There are areas we could put growth on the ‘where’ map you have handed out. Growth can improve those areas. We can strengthen existing character by not putting multi-family residences in single-family zones. Look at Old Town – it is underdeveloped and an opportunity for infill. While emphasizing infill, this process needs to include the value of old homes and neighborhoods to this community.” ❶❷
 - “I have a few ideas that could guide development in the coming years. First, developers should be required to live in their developments for five years. Second, WWU should start later in November. That way snowbirds and students could use the same residences when the students leave/the snowbirds come and vice versa. Third, there should be a moratorium on building, in any open-space within the City. Fourth, views should be preserved at all costs. Elimination of views should not be an option.” ❷
 - “City policy should provide incentives for development that is pedestrian oriented and affordable. Developers should be allowed to build with fewer parking spot. Rental rates should differ from parking. Parking passes could be sold for apartments so people will not have two cars or will leave their car at home when they come to Bellingham for school.” ❷
 - “Affordability of housing is a major issue and it needs to be solved.” ❶❷
 - “One thing that is missing from this process is a long-term vision. We should try and articulate what that vision should be.” ❸
 - “There are aesthetic elements in preserving neighborhood character. People shy away from legislative design guidelines. Protecting neighborhoods goes beyond square footage requirements for building. That defense needs to include specifics of how development will be required to look and function.” ❶❷

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*