

# **BELLINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**JANUARY 24, 2019**

Following a public hearing and deliberation on the proposed amendments to the Samish Way Urban Village subarea plan and development regulations, the Bellingham Planning Commission has determined by a vote (7-0) that the proposal complies with and implement the goals and policies of the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan and should be adopted.

## **I. FINDINGS OF FACT**

### **1. Summary of Proposal**

The Samish Way Urban Village (SWUV) is located generally west of I-5, east of 34<sup>th</sup> Street, north of Bill McDonald Parkway and south of Edwards Street. Updates to the 2009 Subarea Plan and associated development regulations for the area were proposed due to changes in the transportation network identified in the city-wide pedestrian master plan (2012), bicycle master plan (2014), and N. Samish Way arterial study (2017). Other changes to the development regulations were recommended in the 2018 urban village status report. Outdated information was updated for consistency with city-wide codes and current conditions in the area.

### **2. Background Information**

- The SWUV plan was initiated by the community and adopted in 2009 after significant public outreach and involvement in developing the overall vision and goals. The proposed amendments are consistent with this community vision.
- In 2015, the City acquired the site of the former Aloha Motel at 315 N. Samish Way. The property was sold to the BHA in 2017 and will be redeveloped with a mix of over 150 housing units serving a range of incomes, new office headquarters for the agency, and commercial uses. Redevelopment of the site will be a major step in moving closer towards the future vision for Samish Way urban village. The BHA has been pursuing financing and preliminary design feasibility since the purchase of the property, and recently received notification of a \$3M award from the State Department of Commerce Housing Trust Fund for project, which is scheduled to break ground later this year.
- In 2017, the city conducted a study to identify alternative configurations for N. Samish Way to reduce the number of drive lanes with the goal of improving pedestrian and bicycle safety. This resulted in a revised recommendation for the cross-section of this street, in conflict with the existing subarea plan.
- On October 24, 2018 city staff held a neighborhood meeting at Garden View Methodist Church on Forest Street to introduce the preliminary recommendations for the amendments. Approximately six members of the public were in attendance.
- On December 10, 2018, staff presented a report on the status of Bellingham's urban villages to City Council. Council supported the recommended changes for Samish Way, which are included in the proposal.

- On December 21, 2018, the site was posted and a Notice of Public Hearing mailed to property owners within 500 feet of the SWUV boundary.
- On January 24, 2019, the Planning Commission held a public hearing and work session on the proposed amendments.

### **3. Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies**

The City's Comprehensive Plan identifies the goals and policies that are used as a guide for legislative and administrative decisions regarding changes to the comprehensive plan and development codes. Relevant comprehensive plan goals and policies are provided in Attachment A.

### **4. Public Comment**

The public comments received are provided in Attachment B.

### **5. State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Determination if applicable**

A non-project Determination of Non-Significance was issued on December 20, 2018.

### **6. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and/or Review Criteria (BMC 20.20.040)**

#### **A. There exists an error, omission or inconsistency in the pertinent comprehensive plan or neighborhood plan provision;**

Changing neighborhood conditions and updates in city-wide regulations have resulted in inaccuracies in the SWUV plan and regulations. The amendments will address these issues:

- Update required street improvement cross sections and right-of-way dedication maps to reflect current conditions;
- Update preferred bike routes, bike facilities and pedestrian facilities for consistency with the city-wide bicycle and pedestrian master plans;
- Update growth projections from the most recent Comprehensive Plan analysis;
- Update hotel/motel data to reflect the current status of those operating in the district and the overall lodging industry;
- Update capital facility cost estimates with current projects and prices.

#### **B. All of the following criteria have been met:**

##### **1. The proposed amendment is consistent with the Growth Management Act (GMA) and other applicable laws; or**

The Bellingham Comprehensive Plan, developed in accordance with the GMA, contains several goals and policies that are consistent with and addressed by these amendments, as provided in Attachment A.

##### **2. The proposed amendment addresses changing circumstances, changing community values, and is consistent with and will help achieve the comprehensive plan goals and policies.**

The proposed amendments address the changing circumstances and values and support the applicable comprehensive plan goals and policies:

- Revise the proposed configuration of the Samish Way arterial to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and create a more appropriate street character to support development of a compact mixed-use district;
- Eliminate the requirement for a setback or step-back when abutting a right-of-way to reinforce building to the street edge;
- Provide flexibility in building height for the BHA redevelopment to support the creation of a range of housing types, including much needed affordable, senior, and transitional housing;
- Expand the allowable types of infill housing and increase the density of infill housing in the Residential Transition zones to promote residential development and range of housing opportunities.

**3. The proposed amendment will result in long-term benefit to the community and is in the community's overall best interests.**

The proposed amendments will continue to support the long-term vision and goals for the SWUV of creating a dense urban mixed-use neighborhood, additional housing opportunities and safer bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and amenities. In addition, the amendments support the BHA redevelopment of the Aloha Motel property by providing flexibility in the height, while protecting the interests of surrounding property owners. This project will be a major investment in the area and will result in the conversion of a highly underutilized vacant property.

**4. The amendment will not adversely affect the public health, safety or general welfare.**

**Staff Response:** The proposed amendments will improve public health, safety and welfare by supporting revisions to the Samish Way arterials to improve travel conditions for bicycles and pedestrians, increasing opportunities for housing and creation of a neighborhood commercial district, and providing additional commercial, entertainment, services and amenities for the area.

## **II. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the staff report and the information presented at the public hearing, the Planning Commission concludes that the proposed amendments to the comprehensive plan and development regulations meet all of the Comprehensive Plan amendment criteria in BMC 20.20.040.

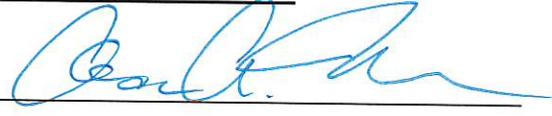
## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the Bellingham Planning Commission recommends that the City Council approve the proposed amendments to the comprehensive plan and development regulations as shown in the draft ordinance as provided in Attachment C.

ADOPTED this 24<sup>th</sup> day of January, 2019.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Planning Commission Chairperson

ATTEST:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Recording Secretary

APPROVED AS TO FORM:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
City Attorney

# EXHIBIT A

## Samish Way Urban Village Plan Update Relevant Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

### **GOAL LU-1 Support sense of place in neighborhoods.**

**Policy LU-4** Protect the unique character and qualities of existing neighborhoods, while identifying opportunities for improved livability, safety, and housing affordability and diversity.

**Policy LU-5** Foster neighborhoods with a balanced mix of housing prices that are compatible with the wages and incomes in the community.

**Policy LU-7** Periodically review and update the City's residential zoning regulations and design standards to promote quality development that considers and complements existing neighborhoods.

### **GOAL LU-2 Foster vibrant urban villages.**

**Policy LU-12** The Urban Village designation encourages the creation of intensely-developed mixed use areas where infrastructure, transit, and other public facilities and services are available or can easily be provided. Urban villages should provide significant job opportunities and a substantial amount of new housing, allowing people to work, shop and recreate near where they live. The ultimate mix of land uses, densities, infrastructure requirements and other typical zoning, design, and development standards should be established in a master plan.

**Policy LU-13** Promote and facilitate continued development of the City's seven existing urban villages - Downtown, Waterfront, Fairhaven, Fountain, Samish Way, Old Town and Barkley. These areas are expected to accommodate significant residential and mixed use development over the 20-year planning period (see urban village master plans, design standards, and regulations).

**Policy LU-15** Continue effective incentives and develop new incentives where needed for the planned urban villages. These incentives should be targeted to areas where they have proven to be successful and/or where the greatest need has been identified. Incentives should be flexible to respond to opportunities and changing markets.

**Policy LU-18** Develop new plans and update existing plans as needed to reflect the unique nature of each urban village. The plans should consider the elements identified in Policy LU-11, as well as the following:

- Land uses and adaptive performance-based development standards to encourage compatible new development and greater flexibility in design, particularly when the development context is well defined;
- An appropriate mix of commercial, office and residential uses;
- Parking requirements, including the potential for parking maximums and/or reduced parking requirements, and design standards that support multi-modal transportation options; and
- Sustainable development practices and the use of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) rating system, or similar system, to measure the potential sustainability outcomes of the proposed plans.

### **GOAL LU-3 Support a thriving local economy across all employment sectors.**

**Policy LU-22** Avoid auto-oriented strip commercial development. Where such areas already exist, prohibit linear expansion and encourage redevelopment into more compact, mixed-use nodes of activity, especially along WTA transit routes.

**Policy LU-23** Regularly review and update the City's commercial zoning regulations (e.g. text and associated maps), design standards, and design review process as needed to allow design flexibility and creativity, address emerging issues, and foster compatibility of development with the character of surrounding areas.

**Policy LU-24** Encourage the inclusion of context-sensitive elements in the design, maintenance, and update of new and existing mixed-use, industrial and commercial sites (e.g. lighting, signs and landscaping) and buildings (e.g. scale and height).

**Policy LU-71** Review parking standards to reduce the impacts of parking lots on urban form, pedestrian mobility, and the natural environment. Continue to pursue parking management best practices.

**GOAL CD-1 Promote streetscapes that enhance the economic vitality and overall visual quality of the City, support the circulation network, and support pedestrian-scale streets and patterns of activity.**

**Policy CD-1** Enhance the streetscapes along the City's major commercial corridors and other major streets through coordinated public and private improvements to convey a positive image of the district they are located within, contribute to its economic vitality and perception of the City, and improve visual and physical transitions into adjacent neighborhoods.

**Policy CD-2** Ensure that land use, fire, and street standards are coordinated to provide greater pedestrian comfort and safety and more attractive alternative modes of transportation. Implementation strategies include:

- Discourage cul-de-sacs where topography allows and encourage well-connected streets in new and existing neighborhoods.
- Connect missing links within the Citywide multimodal transportation network for all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicycles, transit, freight trucks, and automobiles.
- Implement street calming measures in street designs to improve speed limit observance.
- Where possible, install physical buffers between the sidewalk and traffic such as site appropriate street trees and landscaping, street furniture, rain gardens or other low impact development techniques, and on-street parking.
- Orient new development to streets, and effectively frame in the streetscape.
- Encourage commercial activities such as sidewalk retail and outdoor dining.
- Restrict parking to the side or rear of development, or within a structure.
- Consider allowing on-street parking to count toward off-street requirements in selected mixed-use areas to encourage compact, pedestrian-oriented development and to lessen the size and impacts of large parking lots.
- Encourage the use of alleys for vehicle access and utility installation.
- Coordinate placement of physical features between streets and buildings to accommodate staging areas for emergency response vehicles, including aerial apparatus.
- Prioritize implementation of the above in designated urban villages as outlined in the Land Use Chapter

**Policy CD-8** Discourage future extension of linear auto-oriented commercial development along rights-of-way in areas already developed. Existing auto-oriented strip commercial areas should be converted to support and contribute to walkable, mixed-use areas wherever possible.

**Policy CD-9** Support public and private investment in improved infrastructure and amenities in existing neighborhoods, particularly in areas with high concentrations of low-income housing.

**Policy CD-12** Periodically review and update the City's zoning regulations, design standards and design review process to ensure they promote quality development and result in projects that consider and complement existing neighborhoods. Specific recommendations include:

- [several bullets not applicable]

- Review auto parking standards to reduce the impacts of parking on urban form, adjacent uses, housing affordability, pedestrian mobility, and the natural environment. Continue to pursue parking management best practices.
- Adopt long- and short-term bike parking requirements.

**GOAL CD-5 Ensure that the design and development of urban villages and transit corridors convey a positive image of the district they are located within, contribute to the economic vitality and perception of the City, and improve visual and physical transitions into adjacent neighborhoods.**

**Policy CD-29** Design urban villages and transit corridors to promote reduced dependency on automobiles and provide opportunities for increased pedestrian, bicycle, and public transit access.

**GOAL H-1 Ensure that Bellingham has a sufficient quantity and variety of housing types and densities to accommodate projected growth and promote other community goals (see Land Use Chapter).**

**Policy H-1** Support high-density and mixed commercial/residential development in the City's urban villages, high capacity transit corridors connecting the villages and other appropriate areas that allow people to work, shop and recreate near where they live.

**Policy H-3** Encourage well-designed infill development on vacant or underutilized properties.

**Policy H-4** Continue to support implementation of the Infill Housing Toolkit, which permits innovative housing forms such as small and smaller lot single-family homes, cottages, duplexes, triplexes, common courtyards and townhomes.

**Policy H-6** Review commercial zoning regulations that require commercial development along with residential development. Consider adding criteria that would allow, in certain circumstances, residential uses to develop independently or within commercial flex space.

**Policy H-13** Consider the impacts on Citywide housing capacity, affordability and diversity when making land use policy decisions and code amendments.

**Policy H-14** Actively coordinate with public and private partners in efforts to meet regional housing needs.

**GOAL H-4 Support housing options for special needs populations.**

**Policy H-46** Work with agencies, private developers and nonprofit organizations to locate housing to serve Bellingham's special needs populations, particularly those with challenges related to age, health or disability.

**Policy H-52** Foster and support partnerships that have proven to be successful in reducing homelessness, preventing homelessness and assisting the chronically homeless with needed care.

**GOAL T-2 Provide safe, well-connected, and sustainable mobility options for all users.**

**Policy T-5** Connect missing links within the Citywide multimodal transportation network for all modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle, transit bus, freight trucks, and private automobiles.

**Policy T-6** Design multimodal transportation improvements on existing and new streets with the safety and mobility needs of all user groups considered and with priority emphasis placed on the most vulnerable user groups, as illustrated below:

- Pedestrians
- Bicycles
- Public Transit
- Commercial Vehicles/Trucks
- High Occupancy Vehicles
- Single Occupancy Vehicles

**GOAL T-3 Increase infrastructure for bicycles, pedestrian, and non-single-occupancy vehicle modes of transportation**

**Policy T-9** Incorporate sidewalks, crosswalks, and bikeways identified in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plans into all transportation capital improvements on public streets, wherever feasible.