

Downtown Bellingham Plan Public Comment Tracker

| Date Submitted: | Submitted By: | Comments/Recommendations: | Staff Recommendation: NC = No change to proposal C = Change to proposal |
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| 2/7/14 | Michael Lilliquist, Bellingham City Council member | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Would like to see noise impacts on Downtown residents from entertainment uses addressed in the City Center Design Standards for new and redeveloped buildings. Standards would include better sound shielding between first floor areas and upper levels, as well as vestibules/double doors for establishments with music. 2. Would like to see Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) practices, such as lighting and design of entryways and environs, addressed in Design Standards. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NC: The draft Downtown Bellingham Plan includes policy language acknowledging the need to maintain a healthy mixed-use environment that respects the needs of both residents and late night venues, as outlined in the Downtown Entertainment District Ordinance. The Downtown Entertainment District Ordinance, adopted in 2010, regulates public disturbance noise in the Entertainment District. The 2012 International Building Code (IBC) includes performance criteria for both airborne and structure-borne sound. For example, the IBC requires that common interior walls, floor/ceiling assemblies, and partitions between adjacent dwellings or between dwellings and public areas be built to limit sound transmission. Additional physical sound-proofing requirements could pose a barrier to development/redevelopment due to the additional cost (3-5% for new construction) associated with such requirements. 2. C: One of the Downtown Bellingham Plan’s 10 core visions is as follows: “Downtown’s streetscape is active and comfortable day and night, with pedestrian-scale lighting...”.The Plan also includes recommendations from the Community Solutions Workgroup’s Report of Findings, one of which is to increase marketing of the Bellingham Police Department’s CPTED resources. As part of this program, police officers trained in CPTED provide free analysis to building and property owners seeking to build or remodel. Planning and Community Development staff work with these officers in applying CPTED principles to projects Downtown and in other parts of the City. The existing City Center Design Standards include sections on lighting, entries, and windows. Several other sections of the standards speak specifically to safety, but do not reference CPTED by name. As such, staff proposes adding language referencing CPTED principles to the Design Standards. |
| 2/27/14 | April Barker, Birchwood Neighborhood Association | Would like to know if discussions have taken place regarding the designation of a specific area/district of Downtown that will not | NC: The establishment of a Downtown Alcohol Impact Area was included as a recommendation in the draft Report of Findings developed by the Community Solutions |

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| | <p>president and Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission member</p> | <p>sell alcohol beyond what is consumed in an establishment.</p> | <p>Workgroup. This is listed as a short-term action (D.17) in the City Center Implementation Strategy. Details regarding the specific area or limitations have not yet been discussed or determined. It is intended that these restrictions would target the highest alcohol-content beverages being sold in a retail environment, not beverages served in a bar or restaurant setting.</p> |
| <p>3/7/14</p> | <p>Gregory Griffith, Deputy State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General comment commending the City for undertaking the Downtown Plan update. 2. R.e. Goal 3.1, consider historic preservation incentives and the Main Street Program as means to achieve this goal. 3. R.e. Policy 3.9, keep in mind that rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of historic properties are effective tools for sustainability and wise use of resources. 4. R.e. Policy 3.11, caution is urged in applying energy retrofits and incentive programs to historic properties that may compromise historic character (i.e. historic windows, doors, etc.), as well as the inherent energy efficiency, of historic building design and materials. 5. In the Historic Buildings and Resources section on page 14, it would be worthwhile to include another bullet point about the value of historic preservation that might read something like the following: "Support goals for sustainability by conserving resources". 6. R.e. Policy 3.17, a recommendation is made to add the possibility of salvaging/recycling historic features that cannot be reused. 7. R.e. Goal 3.6, a general comment is made that applies here and also to the development regulations to address the potential to uncover and disturb archaeological resources from new construction or other ground-disturbing activities. This can be addressed by including requirements to explore the potential for intact archaeological resources at project sites through survey work and contact with DAHP. 8. We support Policy 3.20, 4.8 and other goals and policies in the Plan that encourage the reuse and rehabilitation of historic properties in Bellingham. In doing so, DAHP recommends referencing the Secretary of the Interior's | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NC: Noted. 2. NC: The existing policies under GOAL 3.1 note redevelopment incentives as a means to support continued business expansion and relocation to Downtown. Staff considers historic preservation incentives to be included as part of this package of incentives. 3. NC: Noted. 4. C: Revise POLICY 3.11 to state "Encourage building owners to participate in energy efficiency retrofits and access incentive programs, such as the Community Energy Challenge, to help subsidize these upgrades where appropriate and when the <u>character of historic buildings won't be compromised</u>". 5. C: Add the following bullet point to the list of values associated with the preservation of historic resources on page 14: "Supporting goals for sustainability by conserving resources". 6. C: Revise POLICY 3.17 to read: "The City should, whenever possible, uncover, preserve, <u>salvage</u> and restore historic landscape features such as rail tracks, brick streets, granite curbs, glass sidewalk prisms, and other small-scale features that tell the story of Downtown's layered history. If preservation is not possible, the City should photo document artifacts prior to removal". 7. C: Add a policy under GOAL 3.6 that states: "Encourage the public and private sectors to identify possible intact archeological resources at project sites through survey work and contact with the State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation". 8. C: Add a reference to the Secretary of Interior's <i>Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings</i> in Exhibit U, City Center Design Standards, Chapter 2. 9. NC: Noted. 10. NC: Noted. See response to comment #7. |

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| | | <p>Standards for Rehabilitation for work at the Federal Building and other National Register listed or eligible properties. This is particularly important for projects that could also take advantage of historic preservation tax incentives or grants.</p> <p>9. We note with interest the reference to the Tourism Analysis and Recommendations study on page 30 under Downtown Tourism. This is useful information and beneficial to communities seeking to revitalize historic downtown districts through heritage tourism.</p> <p>10. R.e. the policies under Goal 7.4, it is recommended that care be exercised when designing and constructing streetscape projects to make sure to assess the presence of archaeological resources in the project area, as well as compatibility with the historic character of the downtown.</p> | |
| <p>3/10/14</p> | <p>Sylvia Goodwin, Planning and Development Director, Port of Bellingham</p> | <p>1. Goal 3.7 seems too broad. If taken literally, it would mean that the City sewage treatment facility, all neighborhood parks and schools, and the Fairhaven library would all be located Downtown. Government facilities also include Port, county, state, federal, and possibly university, properties, so this could mean that all facilities owned by these entities should be located Downtown. Might re-word to be more narrowly-focused with language such as: "All new municipal offices and civic/cultural facilities serving the general public..."</p> <p>2. R.e Maritime Heritage Park on page 32, the last two sentences could be expanded to mention the Waterfront District and proposed network of public parks and trails a few blocks away from this park.</p> <p>3. R.e. page 38, see above. The recently approved Waterfront District Plan includes trail connections that would extend this trail along the Whatcom Waterway and Cornwall Beach to Fairhaven via the overwater walkway.</p> | <p>1. C: Revise Goal 3.7 to state: ""Civic functions, cultural institutions and government services continue to be New government facilities are located in Downtown whenever possible".</p> <p>2. C: Add language to the bottom of page 32 that states: "In the future, Maritime Heritage Park will also serve as a key connector, via Central Avenue, to the large network of public parks, shoreline access, and trails associated with the Waterfront District".</p> <p>3. C: Revise "Whatcom Creek Trail (West)" map on page 38 to show future connections to the Waterfront District. Add language after the first paragraph on page 38 to state: "The corridor is also an important ecological and recreational link to all three City Center Districts."</p> |
| <p>3/13/14</p> | <p>Harvey Schwartz</p> | <p>Suggests adding fountains and small plazas (gathering places) throughout Downtown. To address challenges with weather, could have coin-operated propane heaters and/or bike-generated energy for heaters. Suggests a glass-covering to</p> | <p>NC: A discussion of plazas and opportunities within underutilized rights-of-way is on page 33 of the DBP and a map of Opportunity Sites is included on page 34. Although heaters and fountains aren't specifically called out, Goal 6.3 states that "plazas and parks draw people to use these spaces in a variety of positive ways". Policies 6.3-6.6 and Policy 6.10</p> |

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| | | protect from weather. Will need to figure out a way to address unwanted activity in these spaces. | further emphasize the need for these spaces, as well as the appropriate amenities within them to increase their use. Additionally, Goal 7.4 and Policies 7.9-7.12 further outline the need for balancing the use of the public rights-of-way by incorporating artistic features and attractive pedestrian amenities to enhance the public realm wherever possible. See page 1, comment 2 of this Comment Tracker regarding CPTED as a tactic to address unwanted activity. |
| 3/23/14 | Michael Schacht, Schacht Law Office, Inc. | Supports the approval of the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and BMC for the purpose of adopting the new Downtown Bellingham Plan. | NC: Noted. |
| 3/24/14 | Heather Wolf, Brownlie Evans Wolf & Lee, LLP, representing the Community Food Co-op, 1220 N. Forest Street | The Co-op intends to expand its operations into a recently-purchased property, located across Holly Street from the existing Co-op store. Supports the inclusion of their existing and new properties in the Downtown District and the rezoning of these properties to Commercial Transition. Supports these goals of the Plan: Improving safety, promoting sustainability, and promoting alternative transportation. | NC: Noted. |
| 3/24/14 | Patricia Herlevi | Provides a "Proposal for Pedestrian-Centered City for Bellingham (move away from cars)". Questions the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists on Bellingham's streets, specifically Meridian near Cordata, Northwest, Cornwall, Alabama (near Woburn) and James. Single-occupancy vehicles increase air pollution from tailpipes, congest neighborhoods, make streets unsafe, and contribute to obesity. Speaks to the "carless city trend", providing further evidence of the vehicle's negative impact on society. Portland has moved away from cars through a skinny streets program, a bicycle program, and urban road boundaries. | NC: The DBP includes several goals and policies aimed at encouraging more bicycle and pedestrian activity Downtown and making those modes of transportation safer (e.g. GOAL 7.3 and POLICIES 7.4-7.5). It integrates recommendations from the Bellingham Pedestrian Master Plan and Bellingham Bicycle Master Plan (under development). Additionally, short-term actions in the City Center Implementation Strategy include pedestrian improvements at the intersection of State and Laurel Streets (D.34), installing bike racks and bike lockers as needed (D.39), and expanding the bicycle and pedestrian wayfinding system (D.40). Proposed changes to the development regulations include reducing the amount of vehicular parking required, adding opportunities for shared and unbundled parking, and increasing bicycle parking requirements. |
| 3/25/14 | Sylvia Goodwin | Reviewed the City Center Implementation Strategy. Likes the format of this document and believes it will be very handy to have all of the actions, descriptions and timing of all projects in the Downtown, Old Town and Waterfront Districts in one document. The projects listed are well-described and logical, and the timing seems appropriate. | NC: Noted. |
| 3/27/14 | Patrick Hurley, Executive Director, Downtown Bellingham Partnership | On behalf of the Downtown Bellingham Partnership and its Board of Directors, supports the Downtown Bellingham Plan, Implementation Strategy and related documents. Recognizes the great time and effort that has been put into making the planning | NC: Noted. |

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| | | documents clear, well-written, and ambitious yet achievable. Stakeholder feedback regarding the substance of the plan has been positive. People have felt a sense of inclusion in the process from the beginning and feel comfortable with the ample opportunities to provide input. They also feel that their input has been heard and is consistent with the draft plan. Questions regarding timing and prioritization have been primarily addressed through the Implementation Strategy. The Partnership’s organizational goals are in line with the plan and they want to see it implemented. They welcome the opportunity to be involved in implementation. | |
| Comments from 3/27/14 Public Hearing | | | |
| 3/27/14 | Jim Bjerke, Downtown Neighborhood president (as well as downtown business/property owner, Transportation Commission member) | DBP planning process has been a thorough, attentive process. Two items for consideration: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The design criteria for awnings is too restrictive. Would like to see awnings allowed to extend over the sidewalk. 2. In favor of the proposal to restrict drive-throughs in the Downtown core, but would like to see them allowed in the outlying portions of the Downtown District. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NC: See Exhibit U - City Center Design Standards, Chapter 4,(B)(1) for specific street frontages within the Commercial Core where awnings are required, as well as ‘minimum’ dimensional standards. Awnings are optional, but encouraged, elsewhere. 2. NC: The proposal to limit drive-thru windows in the CC, CT, and RT zones within the Downtown District is intended to facilitate a more pedestrian-friendly environment Downtown. Drive-thru windows will be permitted in the IT zone. Existing drive-thru windows in the Downtown District would become legally non-conforming and require hearing examiner approval to reconstruct if destroyed. |
| 3/27/14 | Patrick Hurley, Executive Director, Downtown Bellingham Partnership | The Downtown Bellingham Partnership supports the draft plan. Stakeholders felt a sense of inclusion throughout the planning process and that their input was heard. Questions regarding the timing and prioritization of implementation were answered with the City Center Implementation Strategy. The Board is now eager to implement the plan and get involved in its implementation. | NC: Noted. |
| 3/27/14 | Casey Diggs, Boundary Bay, Downtown Bellingham Partnership Board Member | Has questions regarding the proposed Alcohol Impact Area (D.17 in the City Center Implementation Strategy). Who is being targeted? How will this impact the breweries Downtown (both existing and proposed)? | NC: See response to April Barker’s comment on page 1 of this Comment Tracker. |
| 3/27/14 | Kyle Fuller, Downtown Bellingham Partnership, Director of Marketing | Concerned about the lack of engagement of the local college students during the planning process. Need to ask students what they like/don’t like about Downtown. | NC: 112 full-time students participated in the myDowntown survey. Staff welcomes suggestions on how to better engage college students in future planning activities. |
| 3/27/14 | Tom Follis, Downtown | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Questions whether properties within National Historic | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NC: Noted. Data is available that demonstrates properties located in historic districts |

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| | property owner | <p>Districts have seen an increase in property values. Would like incentives considered (similar to those offered in Fairhaven).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Has concerns about the maintenance of proposed raingardens. Owns property Downtown that includes extensive landscaping and has found it difficult to keep these areas clean of debris. Are the sidewalk bollards coming out? Taxpayers paid for those and will have to pay again if they come out. | <p>may see an increase in property values. Incentives available for buildings and districts on the National Register of Historic Places (an honorary, not regulatory designation) include eligibility for grants, federal tax credits, and code flexibility.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> NC: Noted. Maintenance of the proposed Downtown raingardens is proposed to be handled by adjacent businesses, as well as the Public Works Department and through existing maintenance contracts. NC: The future of the bollards is to be determined. Action D.32 of the City Center Implementation Strategy references the need to formalize Downtown streetscape design standards. The process to develop these standards will include an analysis of the bollards (i.e. whether they meet ADA standards and the City’s streetscape goals). |
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| 4/7/14 | Kay McMurren, Western Washington University employee (transportation office) | <p>The following article does an excellent job of explaining the positive effects of “setting the right price for parking” in the downtown area. It should be of great value in helping to clarify the function of the price of parking and its effect on downtown areas.</p> <p>http://www.theatlanticcities.com/commute/2014/04/3-enormous-benefits-charging-right-price-parking/8772/</p> | NC: Noted. |
| 4/7/14 | Greg Winter, Whatcom Homeless Service Center, Opportunity Council, Director | <p>The following comments are from the 4/3/14 Homeless Coalition meeting concerning the City Center Implementation Strategy (Draft 3.13.14). The group offered questions, ideas, and possible concerns to some of the actions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> O.17 Install a safe 24 hour sanitary public restroom: The Coalition discussed the Portland Loo concept, and expressed overall approval for people to be able to access a safe 24 hour restroom facility. D.17 Alcohol Impact Area: Coalition member concerns included the possibility that these negative behaviors might move to neighboring areas outside of the AIA and not provide a positive solution to the issue; although there was generally approval of the concept, but a strong feeling of a need to learn more about the real effects from other locales where this program has been in place long enough to learn about such impacts. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> NC: Noted. NC: Noted. As part of the process to evaluate whether an Alcohol Impact Area will be established in the Downtown District, examples of Alcohol Impact Areas from other communities will be compiled and provided to stakeholders. The Homeless Coalition will be advised on this issue during the development and implementation of this project. NC: Noted. Action D.22 is specifically aimed at stricter penalties for the criminal activities of those breaking open container laws and sitting and lying on the sidewalk. These codes are already in place; the action item is geared at assisting officers with enforcement. This action item is part of a package of efforts, including enhancement of social service outreach, that when implemented together will address multiple facets of this issue. NC: Noted. Code changes aren’t proposed as part of Action O.13, rather the idea is to use CPTED techniques to make physical changes to Maritime Heritage Park to reduce the desirability to loiter, while at the same time providing programming and infrastructure to increase the legitimate use of the park. NC: Noted. The City Center Implementation Strategy states that all BPD staff that |

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| | | <p>3. D.22 Change regulations to better enforce common infractions: This very vague proposal along with O.13 (see below) elicited the most concern among Coalition members. At the same time many community leaders are expressing the need for stepped up jail diversion policies and programs, this proposed strategy to “better enforce” common infractions may be at odds with diversion goals. But without knowing more about the specifics, it’s hard to know what this really entails. The Coalition members agree that there are plenty of objectionable behaviors happening downtown by people who are homeless and those who are not homeless. And these behaviors are not compatible with a thriving downtown. However, for some people who are most challenged by one or more disabling conditions, simply citing, arresting and displacing will not solve the problem.</p> <p>4. O.13 Reduce desirability for loitering (Maritime Heritage Park): The group was concerned and interested to learn more specifics about the proposed changes to “Sit-Stand laws”. Most voices did not have a positive idea of what stricter / increased infractions would mean for those penalized. Theresa and Bonnie from Hope House wondered what penalties homeless people might face if found sitting on the sidewalk (would they be treated differently than others committing the same infraction).</p> <p>5. D.23 Police training for mental health and chemical dependency: This is a very positive strategy, however, we’re disappointed it will take so long to fully implement to the entire police force. The group sees a serious need for more mental health (MH) and chemical dependency (CD) street outreach. Existing supports include Linda Read / PATH program, the Mobil Outreach Team, but all clients must be voluntary and some group members identified some people in need of this support may be facing major MH and CD barriers that inhibit them from accessing or accepting services. The Mayor's Community Solutions</p> | <p>interact with the public will receive core training in 2014, with all staff receiving training by the end of 2018. This is what was determined to be feasible by the BPD based on realistic expectations of resources and scheduling.</p> <p>The City Center Implementation Strategy only includes actions undertaken by the City with an exclusive focus on the City Center. The mobile outreach and mental health court initiatives are actions the City supports and is working on in partnership with numerous agencies. However, these actions are not appropriate to include in this document as they are being undertaken as part of a coalition to support activity City- or county-wide.</p> |
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| | | <p>Workgroup has prioritized increased street outreach in that work product and it should be integrated as a strategy into the City Center plan. The presence and need for a Mental Health Court was brought up, which would entail added support for people in MH crisis who become involved in law enforcement and criminal justice systems. It was discussed that this idea is “in the works” and the County has plans to fund the project. Perhaps this strategy could be incorporated into the City Center plan to help offset the potential negative impacts of stricter enforcement of common infractions. The Behavioral Health Sub-committee has plans to draft and administer a survey to service providers to gain more information and insight about the state of MH and CD services and where gaps might be identified in the system, survey coming soon.</p> | |
| <p>4/8/14</p> | <p>John Templeton, owner at 770 E Holly Street</p> | <p>Doesn't agree with the proposed rezone of his property at 770 E Holly Street. The height limit of 35 or 65 feet is of no useful purpose in an area where the city wishes to infill. The size of his site is large enough to accommodate several stories, which could easily be rented to retail and office spaces on the first levels and several stories of residential through the use of underground parking. The old St. Luke's Hospital facility is on the side adjacent to his property and includes several stories for medically-affiliated space. A multi-story building exceeding the proposed 65-foot limit could easily be determined to be in keeping with the current and desired density of the neighborhood. The city granted a variance to the lot line setbacks for the lot adjoining his property to the south (over his objections). To limit that portion of his property to 32 feet would not be a welcomed change.</p> <p>The configuration of his building and lot lends them to a future use requiring a drive-through such as a commercial bank or Starbucks. To say that his neighbors on the blocks near him can have such a use, while he would be prohibited, is an unfair</p> | <p>NC: The height in this area, while currently unlimited, is under the discretion of the Planning Director. Establishing a concrete standard creates predictability for the development community. Coupled with reductions in parking requirements, staff believes a 65-foot limit is adequate to achieve multiple-story mixed-use development to fulfill the infill objectives in the Downtown area.</p> <p>The only portion of this 165-foot long property subject to the 32-foot/two-story height limit is the area within 15-feet of the southwest property line. According to City records, the apartment buildings constructed adjacent to this property line are two-stories/22.26 feet tall (under height definition #1) and the medical building across Jersey Street is less than 45-feet tall. Staff believes the 65-foot height limitation in the Commercial Transition area creates an appropriate scale and better transition between the high-intensity commercial uses in the core and the abutting residential neighborhoods.</p> <p>See the response to comment #2 on page 5 regarding drive-through windows in the Downtown zone.</p> <p>Existing signs that do not comply with the new proposed sign regulations would become legally nonconforming and subject to restrictions on replacement as outlined in Bellingham Municipal Code 20.14.040</p> |

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| | | <p>restraint of trade with potential legal implications.</p> <p>The signage he currently has would violate the regulation proposed under the new zoning. The large (unsightly) traffic control boxes and overgrown city trees make signage difficult as it currently stands. He doesn't want signage further limited through more regulations.</p> | |
| <p>4/22/14</p> | <p>Dr. Mark McEathron, owner/operator of Binyon Vision Center, 411 E Magnolia St</p> | <p>Request that his property be included in the Commercial Transition zone. The development of the property is nonconforming to Residential Multifamily standards (BMC 20.32). Has existing parking to facilitate additional commercial and residential units, but is restricted by land use, max. height, setbacks, etc. required under the RT2 zone.</p> | <p>Discussion Needed:</p> <p>The 13,750 square foot parcel consists of two lots currently developed with a commercial office building and an abundance of surface parking located at the street intersection. The lot size provides a compelling infill opportunity within 3 short blocks of the WTA Transit Center,</p> <p><u>OPTION 1: INCLUDE THE PROPERTY IN THE CT ZONE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>65-foot height limit</u> • <u>2-story height limit for the 15-feet of the property adjacent to the residential zone</u> • <u>Incentivize higher-intensity redevelopment</u> • <u>Streamline process</u> • <u>Church tower ~ 62-feet tall on opposite corner</u> <p>-</p> <p><u>OPTION 2: KEEP THE PROPERTY WITHIN THE RT-2 ZONE CHANGE THE SETBACK REQUIREMENTS IN THE RT-2 ZONE</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Reduce the arterial setbacks for commercial uses on a corner lot</u> • <u>Facilitate redevelopment plans (no variance or conditional use permit required)</u> • <u>Would apply to other properties within the area</u> <p>-</p> <p><u>OPTION 3: NO CHANGES</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Property remains in RT-2 zone with standard RM setbacks and height limits (35-foot)</u> • <u>Staff would likely support a variance application</u> • <u>Extra time, expense, and risk for the applicant</u> |