



City of Bellingham Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission

June 17, 2020

The Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission meeting was called to order by Mayor Seth Fleetwood at 6:30 p.m. The meeting was held remotely using Zoom meeting platform.

MINUTES

Unless noted, all officially appointed MNAC representatives were in attendance.

Absent: Alabama, Barkley, Birchwood, and Roosevelt

Staff attending: Janice Keller, Communications Director; Brooksana Raney, Mayor's Executive Assistant; Matt Bezanson, Information Technology Services Department, providing technical support; Eric Johnston, Public Works Director; Rick Sepler, Planning & Development Director.

Current MNAC roster can be found on the City website:

<http://www.cob.org/documents/mayor/boards-commissions/neighborhood/mnac-roster.pdf>

No minute approval at this meeting. February 19, 2020 and May 20, 2020 will be reviewed and put forth for approval at July meeting.

Welcome

Mayor Fleetwood welcomed all and introduced the Zoom platform technology and format. The main purpose of this meeting is to provide a quick update about City COVID-19 response and have a roundtable discussion about what is happening in our neighborhoods during this challenging time. All other items tabled for now.

It's been noticed by many who attend remote meetings, they take longer than in person meetings we are finding despite our careful preparation. When reporting or commenting, please be concise.

Roll Call and Introductions

Since the presence of representatives may be seen on the screen, via the Zoom platform, this action was skipped.

Overview of COVID-19 Response by Mayor Seth Fleetwood

Whatcom County is still in Phase 2, as it related to COVID-19. There is still concern and we're not out of the woods yet. The City of Bellingham continues to be actively engaged with the issue and has some big questions to be addressed in the coming days on how to address health protocols. If representatives have something around this topic you'd like to discuss or share, you are invited to do so.

The City has opened up some of recreational facilities and providing some virtual activities. More information may be found at <https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/City-re-opens-some-recreation-amenities-under-States-Phase-2-declaration.aspx>

Other City Updates

There's been lots of activity since the death of George Floyd. Neighborhood representatives are welcome to bring up any related topics you may be seeing in your neighborhoods.

Some Right-of-Way changes are occurring, as a benefit to neighborhoods as well as businesses in the Downtown and Fairhaven districts; look for green cones. See City News story

<https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/Green-means-go-as-businesses-open-for-Phase-2.aspx> .

There is a new program for neighborhoods to close streets for pedestrian use. Eric Johnston will speak more about this.

There have been efforts to create better trail connections. See City News story

<https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/City-offers-better-trail-connections-and-use-of-residential-streets-for-recreation.aspx>

Bellingham Public Library now providing curbside pickup at the Central Library. See City News story

<https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/Library-invites-book-returns-prepares-for-curbside-service-to-begin-June-15.aspx>

The temporary Drop-In-Shelter, located at Bellingham High School needs to move by 7/16. Last evening City Council approved the former Public Market (on Cornwall Ave) for the new location. See City News story

<https://www.cob.org/news/Pages/features/City-County-mission-seeking-new-location-for-drop-in-shelter.aspx> Rick Sepler will speak more about this.

Neighborhood Roundtable

Christopher Grannis (South) Thank you to Eric for coming to a meeting to speak about Chuckanut Dr. and Samish Way. Our neighborhood has concerns about the traffic pattern. Chris presented a map to identify the area he is speaking about. Speed is an issue in this area of the road. A fish culvert is scheduled to be put in by the State and the streets will be changed. The project is paid for by State Fish & Wildlife, not transportation funds. Neighbors have concerns because the new traffic flow plan is not going to reduce traffic speed. Our neighborhood feels a roundabout is a good idea, or a left turn lane onto Old Samish, funding is not available though. The South Neighborhood Association has voted and asked the COB to put a roundabout in the traffic plan (TIP) so it is recorded in the event of a traffic fatality, it would be noted and may move the project along as well as a second motion that passed at that meeting to ask the COB to do a left turn lane for that intersection.

Eric Johnston shared the general range of costs for a roundabout to be installed. He also shared about the creation of the TIP. The Six-Year TIP is a useful document for the City and community members who are interested in what the City is doing with transportation projects. The primary purpose is allocating federal funds given to the City with its key purpose as defining what the priorities are for the City and how we're choosing to spend funds.

Projects get on the TIP by suggestions from community, Council, Planning, and the Transportation Commission. Staff then prepares the proposed TIP, done every six years, present that proposal to the Transportation Commission, which is a public meeting that includes public representatives, where they create a recommendation to the City Council; a public comment session happens and then the plan moves forward. During this process, projects may be added or taken away, based on assessment and comment. If you have an idea, share them with Eric. Christopher asked the roundabout be added to the list for TIP consideration.

Gordon Durham (Cornwall) Gordon stated he had some questions about the development happening at 2605 Meridian around parking for developing properties. Also, there's been some concerns about the design review process on the new development. Neighbors are going to be requesting a variance or a waiver for parking. To reduce parking for the site there was some mention about unbundling parking. For those who aren't familiar with this, it's a charge to residents of the building to park in the parking lot. Some of the things that have happened in Seattle, where this is in action, discourages people to own a car

because it's an added cost to the renter. The concern from neighbors is if this allowed, especially as a part of a reduction, that it's going to compound the issue of pushing people into the neighborhood parking. If it's free on the street, or pay to park in the lot, that's going to kind of compound that issue. The neighborhood wishes to learn more about the parking variances and the impact due to the buildings under construction.

Rick Sepler provided some general information by starting with the comment that each project is a little different. Parking will be a discussion item for us in the coming years, in all neighborhoods. If we are looking to achieve our climate action goals we have to change modes and will increasingly look for ways to disincentive buying and car usage to achieve the goal of reducing car pollution. Likely coming forward through climate action in the next year, we will need to talk about parking and when you unbundle parking. There's no proposal pending right now.

One of the things it does is reduce housing costs, by reducing rent for those who don't need the parking. You raise the common, valid, concern that folks just park in the public right-of-ways, which they're allowed to do in the surrounding neighborhoods. We are facing a significant change as people are used to being able to find a spot right in front of their house and now it's somewhere on their block. That is a very delicate discussion because it tries to balance our competing goals. Our goals for climate action and our goals to have mobility.

As far as the specifics of design review for a proposal, parking is not the only variable in terms of building heights. I'm open to speaking about this more. It is a complex issue that varies project to project.

Sheryl Russell (Central Business District) For several years, I have been the representative and I'm now the alternate. The new representative had a personal emergency and was unable to come to this meeting. Things are starting to open up downtown; you can see the green cones outside of a building if they are open and offering services.

The Downtown Neighborhood Association meeting will be June 24th. The guests will be Mayor, Chief Doll, and Rep, Shewmake. Welcome to submit questions from any neighborhood. Go to downtownbelingham.com to submit.

As you may have heard, there were recently armed men downtown who were kind of patrolling. It was a little scary. We have a diverse group of people who live downtown, of all ages. It was a little intimidating to be downtown and have that presence there. I think that's been taken care of. It appears Downtown Sounds this year will be a virtual format.

I'm seeing more people walking, biking, skateboarding downtown. It's good to see people and we can tell the parks downtown will be well used.

Jill MacIntyre Witt (Columbia) We don't have anything new to report, aside from the Elizabeth Park Concerts will be live streamed on KMRE, starting tomorrow night, at 6PM, thanks to the Eldridge Society and Marla Bronstein. For 4th of July there will be a chalk art celebration.

I wanted to add, I don't know if this is the venue, but I would love to see some sort of community committee for working on transforming the Police budget and support Black Lives Matter; I imagine you're working on that. Let us know if there's a way that neighborhoods can help.

Mayor Fleetwood replied the first step will be a community listening session. We hope that we're able to translate protest into action. Logistically, with COVID, it's a little challenging.

John LaSpina (Cordata) We started doing Zoom meetings for the board, although we don't have any community meeting scheduled right now. We have a new community garden that's starting in October, and we received a grant to do some construction and repair work to it.

Cordata Park trail section is open and a playground later in the year. The playground section is opening later in the summer and we're going to try to get together with the Parks Department to see about an opening event.

We've had some problems on Cordata Parkway with speeding and racing. We're getting in touch with a Police resource officer to help. If any neighborhoods have issues with this in your neighborhood, we'd like to know what you did.

Questions: Gordon Durham: Is there any updated information on the Fountain District park development. I know there was some issues with the competitive bid that was a little over and went back out; I think Tiger got the award. I understand there were several alternatives but there hasn't been a clear understanding, at least for us or anyone I've spoken with about what was ultimately approved with the limited budget. We would like to know what elements are for sure and what are possible, as the construction phase progresses.

Rick Sepler replied he was unable to answer but would check with the Public Works project manager.

Gordon also asked if he has a question from a neighborhood member, how do I connect them to the appropriate City staff?

Rick replied start with the basic staff person or department and then we can go from there. Eric Johnston chimed in and said feel free to contact Public Works staff who can be reached by emailing askpw@cob.org. (Members may also email mayorsoffice@cob.org to be routed to appropriate staff.)

David LeBow (Edgemoor) The neighborhood has been quiet; people have been staying at home. I'm surprised at how many people in Fairhaven appear to think COVID is over and are not wearing masks.

Mayor Fleetwood replied he will work with the Health Department and Unified Command to see what kind of messaging we can do to help convey the need for continued vigilance.

Jake Charlton (Happy Valley) We had a neighborhood meeting yesterday and are working on updating our bylaws to make them more inclusive. If other neighborhoods have done this, we'd welcome your suggestions.

We've have had to cancel some community activities because of COVID.

We're pulling together some ideas for the Right-of-Way on 21st and Larrabee. Ideas include a garden, a solar water pump, bench and artwork.

Questions: Is there a way to find out how many COVID cases per neighborhood? We wonder about our own neighborhood. We also wonder about the numbers from the recent protests.

Mayor Fleetwood responded he isn't aware of neighborhood specific statistics. There may be privacy issues but will get back to you. As far as numbers of cases due to protests, that's an unknown now.

Kathryn Rismondo (Lettered Streets) We have been meeting as a board online. I think we decided at our last meeting to cancel all of our plans for public gatherings, at least into the fall, due to uncertainty and unease right now. We're focusing more on our backburner items that are easier to do. One of the things we're working on is a neighborhood survey or neighborhood census, both to try to get a better picture of the needs of our neighbors, how they're feeling or how they've been affected by both COVID and the recent events surrounding police brutality. It will help us understand what we can do as a neighborhood association to provide assistance. Launch date not yet set. We are excited to see what information we're able to gather and how we can compare that to information available from the City, like in City IQ, to make some interesting inferences about what's going on as well as what's changing about our neighborhood makeup.

We're trying to keep up with our mutual aid efforts. Being close to downtown, we have a lot of neighbors who are concerned about the 3% armed group. I've been in communication with our neighborhood police officer about that and we want to express our disappointment that it took so long for somebody to go speak to them and convey that it was really not appropriate for them to be there. We heard there was nothing the

Police or the City of Bellingham could do. We were just asking for somebody to go engage with them and explain that, regardless of whether or not you could prove they were breaking the law, what they were doing was actively intimidating and threatening people in our community and making people in our community feel unsafe. We were disappointed that it took so long and so many people being vocal about it in order to get action from the Police. People are feeling unsafe due to this and of the recruitment flyers for white pride originations put up in our neighborhood. We're trying to figure out what we can do at a neighborhood level and to push for more inclusivity. If anybody else is also dealing with this and would like to share some ideas, we would love to hear from you.

Mayor Fleetwood responded by stating we have received messages from many people about the 3% group. This is a complex issue as it related to the response from Police and had to do with the fact that open carry, unfortunately, in my opinion, is legal in this state. I'm in conversations with our Police Chief and our City Attorney about the additional law that you're probably familiar with. It says if you carry a gun in a manner that manifests an intent to intimidate, then it is a crime. If I walk down the street and pass a person carrying a gun, I would feel intimidated. A policy conversation is to come about the question of when we deem it appropriate to conclude that they're violating that part of the law. We are talking to our counterparts at the state level and imagine there's going to be some traction in the coming sessions.

Steven James (Puget) We're still curious about Tiny Homes facilities in Puget. We think it's a great idea; tiny homes seem to be working out.

We're also wondering about the results of the Lakeway bike and pedestrian study. The new crossings on Lakeway were great improvement. The bicycle lanes are getting used regularly.

We got the pack it out signs but haven't had a lot of requests from neighbors to place them. We don't know how many students are moving; it seems less than in years past.

We're waiting to see the final results on CityView and wondering about housing for students. Are we overbuilding? I'm concerned about so many students returning to WWU in crowded spaces if the infrastructure isn't in place to deal with a potential second wave of COVID.

I don't hear any negativity on the smaller building projects in our area. We support them when done right; properly permitted, and environmentally thoughtful.

Mayor Fleetwood shared he is meeting with the President of WWU next week and will share your observations and whether he thinks the COVID situation will have lasting effects on student populations in Bellingham.

Rick Sepler shared the City has an ordinance and the ability to accommodate Tiny Houses. The group has asked the City to find and provide a permanent site for them without any fees. They can apply for the housing levy dollars. As with any group, they will need to apply. Applications are reviewed by a committee comprised of a number of folks in the community, who then make recommendations to Council.

Regarding the CityView application, it is under review. Planning received an update on that yesterday, our project planner is going through the over 200 comment letters that were received and are being reviewed. In terms of this matter before the Planning Commission, he met with the Planning Commission chair and both agree that the public interest is well served to allow for a time for community members to come forward and raise their concerns. We have not reached a conclusion, whether the project conforms to the code or does not at this time. Also, this is not a student housing project, but is being reviewed as a multi-family one. Many have suggested the floor plans and configuration are really designed for students. We look forward to hearing from public comment.

Question: Kathryn Rismondo stated Rick mentioned the tiny home ordinance addressing competing projects. Does that ordinance and process still only allow for one tiny home village or encampment at a time and if so know? There can be multiple?

Rick replied, we've allowed for multiple and this group would like it to not just be temporary. City Council passed an ordinance that allows us to have an interim housing, which means somewhere between being unsheltered and being fully sheltered, but the location or facility would endure, as opposed to a temporary project.

Tom Dohman (Samish) We're trying to keep our board active and got a Zoom meeting going; we had 100% board attendance. The Community Outreach Officer for the area also attended and filled us in on policing during COVID. At our last General Meeting, we learned there may be some traffic improvements on 48th Street area. I've been able to get good information that I've been able to pass on to our board. I find it's sometimes hard to understand and translate some of the construction drawing and ideas into language I can share with our neighborhood. I agree some training and guidance from the City would be helpful. Also, I hear frustration from others that they feel information gets to them too late in the planning process; Zoom is helping with this.

Eric Johnston stated he agreed with the challenge many have in reading engineer and other construction-based documents. We will look at doing a better job of this. If there are folks who would like to speak more about the project around 48th, please contact Eric.

The City is expanding bike lanes all over with more bids being opened tomorrow for Samish Way. Eric briefly mentioned a few projects in progress for bike lanes and improvements that include lane slimming and biking additions.

Joseph Hayes (Sehome) It has been a quiet spring and looking forward to the possibility of having a face to face neighborhood meeting. I have a question and concerns related to some things going on in the neighborhood that we've also been talking about tonight. In our neighborhood and in general, how the City deals with parking and the exceptions is an overall plan I agree with, but it appears to have some holes as to what developers are required to do.

Question: Eric referred to the lane slimming and biking additions in the Lakeway and Bill McDonald area. Are these still scheduled to begin?

Eric Johnston replied yes, the projects on Lakeway and Bill McDonald are still on schedule. Eric shared back history of the intent of the project and mentioned there's a really good description on the City's website <https://www.cob.org/search/pages/results.aspx?k=Samish%20Way%20Urban%20Village>

Question: With regards to the Black Lives Matter movement, I'm wondering if the City would support the creation of signs that neighborhoods can place in their area to show solidarity and inclusion?

Mayor Fleetwood responded he would bring that idea up.

David Frankel (South) It's been a mostly quiet month on South Hill. It's getting to be summertime again and people are going to be opening their windows and the loud train sounds will be coming in. I understand Mayor has a meeting scheduled with some folks from our neighborhood. We feel this is a public health issue, not just noise.

Mayor Fleetwood responded saying train noise is something on my list and I'm hopeful for a quiet zone through town. I've asked for input on quiet zones from Planning and Public Works.

Eric Johnston commented much of this is in the hands of BNSF, on their timeline. The City has programmed those safety improvements that result in the ability to create the quiet zone. They are funded as listed projects in the Six Year TIP. We anticipate moving forward with crossings at Holly and Roeder next year. There are also some which are the responsibility of the Port. Until all of the quiet zones are in place, the train will continue to be a noise.

David shared he investigated the City guidelines for street closures.

Question: We are wondering if adjacent streets are also being contacted because they may see increased traffic. Also, is there any thought on making these closures permanent?

Mayor Fleetwood stated our hope is traffic will use arterial streets, so that we wouldn't see more on others. The closures are temporary.

Question: We want to start having meetings again, starting in August, and may do Zoom through the summer. Can we have a socially distanced meeting in a City park?

Interim Parks & Recreation Director could best answer this question. An order that came from the Mayor's office over a month ago now, indicating that any City sponsored events are not approved through end of August. If people just show up and are socially distanced, under that scenario would not require a permit, but you are not able to use any park facilities.

Last, on a personal note, I'm concerned about the armed militia groups in our area. They seem to want to intimidate.

Alexarc Mastema (Sunnyland) All is fine in Sunnyland. We've had a few businesses close and others open and doing good social distancing. Want to express our support of the Drop-In Center to the former Public Market space.

Jenny Baker-Couch (Whatcom Falls) We haven't met in 2020 yet but hope to meet in September. All is quiet in the neighborhood. In the parks it depends on the time of day how the social distancing and mask directives are being followed.

Question: Who do we contact to get an arborist to get to the wetland area to look at trees that are dead and may be a liability to the properties below?

Mayor Fleetwood suggested to speak with the Parks Department.

Rick Sepler asked if they are on public or private land. Jenny stated they are on private lands. Rick stated those which are private owned are the responsibility of the owners, but the City is available for help with questions on ownership or additional questions.

Chris Roselli (WWU) Virtual commencement happened last weekend and please join me in wishing a happy graduation to our student representative, Phoebe DeMeerleer. This means next year we'll need a new representative.

Thank you to our adjacent neighborhoods, specifically Tom Scott, we've been partnering with on move out education. I'm meeting with Whatcom Community College leadership tomorrow to see how they can also get messages out to their students too.

Staff and faculty will continue working remotely through phase 2. Fall registration has opened and students have many different learning experiences including online, face to face and remote/site specific. About 20% of regular classes will still be face to face. Safety continues to be our #1 priority. I'm not sure what to expect on student return.

Phoebe DeMeerleer (WWU Student Representative) I've heard various things about students returning to Bellingham for fall. An issue of concern for students is the armed people downtown and other presence of racism in the community. These are real and happen to real people. I really appreciate that our neighborhoods are working to address these issues. I would recommend, as a neighborhood association

you can watch documentaries together about racial justice, hold teach-ins and help educate your neighbors to understand. Listen to black voices and experiences in our community. WWU students are also your neighbors and community and thank you for making student voices an active part of this discussion.

Dean Haskins (Alabama Hill) Not a lot going on in our area. But the pedestrian overpass has been a place people have been with signs and people honk; and I've been by a few times. We had a troublemaker who came out and tried to antagonize one of the protesters and understand one person has had their life threatened. We need to stand in solidarity with people and not allow them to be stifled. We need to do our part to help.

Amy Cloud (Unified Command) The Health Department won't be sharing case numbers in specific neighborhoods due to privacy issues. Instead they are being done by school districts; totals may be found on the Health Department website. If you have questions, you're encouraged to contact the Health Department. I appreciated hearing the alternate ideas neighborhoods have to activities planned in a social distanced way. I'd love to hear more.

Open Question/Comment Period

Question: Christopher Grannis: I have heard the Tiny Homes village isn't moving to the former Clean Green site. Is this correct?

Answer: Rick Sepler shared the group was given an extension to stay in the Fairhaven area due to the crisis.

Comment: Dick Conoboy thanked Mayor for the way he handled the crowd at City Hall and downtown as well as the shelter move. His only concern is the numbers of homeless population is going to grow and there needs to be some planning for the future.

Comment: Jean Hamilton: We are so pleased to see the progress on the Aloha site and to see what happens on Samish Way with speed limits, bike lanes and pedestrian crossings.

Comment: Jill MacIntyre Witt: White silence equals violence and it's important we stand up to racism when we see it.

Question: Kathryn Rismondo: The \$500 we get for neighborhoods, can it be used for Zoom account membership? Janice Keller said she'd investigate and get back to the group.

Meeting adjourned at 9:01 PM

Our next meeting is scheduled for July 15th at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom
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