

To: Planning Director

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City of Bellingham
Planning

As owners and residents of Judson Plaza and Fairhaven Gardens, we are quite familiar with Fairhaven and are quite concerned with the draft Fairhaven Urban Village, which will increase building heights, regulate interior ceiling heights, and alter Fairhaven's existing historic and contemporary village.

Increase Building Heights: The draft Urban Village plan changes our community from primarily 3 story, 35' buildings to 56-66' tall buildings throughout the core area. When we invested in our properties, the existing height restrictions of 35' allowed 3-story buildings (like Judson Plaza or Fairhaven Gardens), preserving our views of the bay and islands. Because Fairhaven rests on a large, steep hill sloping to the sea, consistent height limits ensure that uphill views will be preserved and that the built village will follow the natural topography.

We invested in our properties because we wanted to be in Fairhaven, a charming, historic village with a vibrant mix of retail, offices and residences. The existing height limit protects our roof garden views and, for many, views from the units themselves.

Regulate Interior Ceiling Heights: The plan, for the first time, seeks to regulate interior ceiling heights. With the proposed mandatory ceiling heights – 14' for 1st floor, 12' for 2nd floor, 10' for 3rd floor – one cannot build a 3 story building in 35'. Given these new restrictions, the plan alters the building heights to 56', to allow 3-4 story buildings, in order to maintain an appropriate density for the community. This density issue is easy to solve. Simply remove ceiling heights requirements and a 3-story building will fit again in 35'. Fairhaven has ample examples of recent 3-story buildings at 35', which fit nicely into the historic setting.

Alter Fairhaven's existing historic and contemporary village: Not only will 56-66' buildings alter forever our views and our property values, they will negatively affect Fairhaven's pedestrian friendly, village ambiance. The emphasis will be on "urban" and less on village. Fairhaven's origins and history connect to the sea. A large part of the interest and draw of this village is its proximity to and views of the water from nearly every place in the neighborhood. This irreplaceable asset will disappear for many people and properties with 66' tall buildings.

Fairhaven represents the best of what a contemporary village can be. In addition to our 17 historic buildings (76% of which are 35' or less), 38 new buildings have been built in the past 20 years in these relatively few blocks. All but 7 of these new structures have been 35' or less. Our village has been created by the buildings of 100 years ago as well as those of the past decades. Changing the rules now is unfair to those of us who have invested with the knowledge that Fairhaven's plan protects the village we love and our views we cherish.

We ask the Planning Director to remove the regulations for interior ceilings and reinstate the existing height limits of 35' for the commercial core, protecting Fairhaven's character, preserving the dominance of our historic buildings and ensuring we, as well as future generations, will enjoy this lovely shelter by the sea.

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