



G E Y E R
& Associates, Inc.

1008 16th Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

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City of Bellingham
Planning

360 • 224 • 6317
bill@billgeyer.com
www.billgeyer.com

Mr. Jeff Thomas, Planning Director
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

February 16, 2012

Dear Mr. Thomas:

**Re: JACARANDA DEVELOPMENT & THE IMUS FAMILY COMMENTS
ON THE STAFF DRAFT FAIRHAVEN URBAN VILLAGE PLAN**

In response to the City's invitation for comment on the staff draft Fairhaven Urban Village Plan published December 21, 2011, I am speaking tonight on behalf of the Imus family, owners of Jacaranda Development and several properties in Fairhaven.

"The Imus family has been directly involved in the Fairhaven area for over 40 years. We have been fortunate to participate in the rebirth of Fairhaven from its low point in the 1970's, the few bright spots in the 1980's, the merchant resurgence in the 1990's, and the more recent mixed use development in the last decade. All along the way, every historic renovation, building redevelopment or new development in Fairhaven had to grapple with an overly of complex and often conflicting set of City regulations. In spite of these hurdles, and often at great costs, projects were built to serve the local and regional market. Customers responded with enthusiasm that has helped create the vibrant urban village we see today.

"Now our economy remains exposed to the recession, and Fairhaven merchants and property owners have experienced its impact. Tonight we are considering the staff proposal for a new Fairhaven Urban Village Plan. This draft, unfortunately, takes some of the conflicting regulations and restrictions of the past 30 years and makes them worse. A more positive approach is needed to protect the Fairhaven and to encourage a vibrant urban village for the next 30 years.

"We support adopting a new Fairhaven Urban Village Plan that:

- defines Fairhaven as a Tier 1 Urban Village;
- is developed according to professional planning and engineering standards;
- complies with the City Comprehensive Plan;
- complies with the goals of the State Growth Management Act;
- and is internally consistent; and
- encourages investment and stewardship for a vibrant Fairhaven.

"The current staff draft needs to be improved in many areas which we will address in future public hearings. However, we have specific concerns to list tonight:

*Comment Letter from Jacaranda / Brad Imus
To the City of Bellingham regarding the
Staff December 2011 Draft Fairhaven UVP*

Our undeveloped property at 10th and Mill should have flexibility to pursue a broad mixed range of commercial and residential uses, and the same should apply throughout the Fairhaven commercial core.

The proposed Design Guidelines are too complex as they establish a review process that can deny a project based on a minor design element. A better approach would be to define a palette of pre-approved design elements a property owner could use at their choice in their design without the threat of denying the project. We have a strong track record of constructing new commercial buildings reflecting Fairhaven's historic character. The standard is now prevalent in the market place. Future projects cannot afford to go through an entire building design, then remain at risk of denial due to some technicality at the final design review process. The permit process should be changed to facilitate quick approval of good design instead of punishing projects with lengthy and contentious reviews.

The current parking proposal in the staff draft plan is incomplete. We were instrumental in establishing the existing Fairhaven Parking District with other property owners. The City Council agreed to provide parking exemptions for specific properties that paid into the parking district. Along with other property owners, we paid significant amounts to build parking spaces in the McKenzie Avenue right-of-way. The parking district continues to be a success. The staff draft plan does not adequately address parking solutions and requires a substantial amount of work. Parking is critical to the current and future Fairhaven economy and must be addressed in the final urban village plan.

"Thank you for the opportunity to comment. The Imus family and Jacaranda Development should remain designated as a Party of Record as the City continues its work on the Fairhaven Urban Village Plan. We look forward to reviewing subsequent proposals."

On behalf of the Imus family and Jacaranda Development,



Bill Geyer, AICP

Geyer & Associates, Inc.

360.738.2836 office / 360.224.6317 cell

Cc: Bellingham Planning Commission
Mayor Kelli Linville
Brad Imus, Jacaranda Development