

Friday, Feb 24, 2012

Below are the comments I spoke at the open meeting on Feb 16. Please include them as part of the public record. I may send additional comments.

John Servais, 1609 Mill Ave, Bellingham

Before us we have the Planning staff's plan for Fairhaven. This has never been discussed in open session with the residents and business owners of Fairhaven. After 5 years of process, are pleased to finally have a chance to give ideas in a staff conducted meeting that records our ideas. I request that my comments be included on the record. My concern is that even now, all comments and written statements may not be included for staff review and public access. I also state myself a party of record for all future correspondence.

I may well speak longer than 3 minutes. I hope staff will allow all of us to speak our thoughts and concerns. We can be here all evening and we can come back to another meeting. This is the plan for the next 30 years and we should do it right.

My vision for Fairhaven.

I think any planning should **preserve the unique character** of this small 10 city block residential neighborhood. And **development** around it - by the Port, by the commercial property owners, by the City - should mitigate intrusions of noise, light and traffic - and even visual intrusions if they be glaring. The residents are almost cutoff from anyone even being able to drive though their neighborhood on the way to anywhere else. There is **not a single sidewalk**, not a single curb, not a single marked crosswalk, not a single white stripe on any road. There are maybe only half the normal number of street lights. Street drainage is mostly surface. It is a rural enclave with character homes and a relaxed feel to it. While this is a very small area compared to all other neighborhoods in Bellingham, the residents are vocal and very active in their desire to keep their small area this way.

But I also think planning should **enable the commercial district to grow** into what the founders envisioned and what it is so natural for it to do. And it can be done without impacting and hurting the small residential shire. You see - there is a **deep wooded gorge** between the residential and the commercial. Even now, you cannot see the tops of any commercial buildings from the residential area - except a bit when all the leaves are down. The trees hide the buildings. **Buildings 60 to 75 feet** or so can be built facing Harris Avenue and not even be seen from the residential area. Building heights should be lower near the the green gorge of Padden creek and the natural separator of residential from commercial.

I think the plan should look to **enhance this natural green separator**. Evergreen climax trees such as firs, hemlocks and cedars should be planted in the green creek divider. 6th street should be vacated to eliminate what could become a 'back door' for employees going to work in the future. The block of Larrabee Avenue from 6th to 4th should be turned into permanent greenway. Perhaps build a pedestrian **bridge** about at 8th street connecting residential to commercial. The commercial district should commit to working with the residential area to enhance this natural greenway over the next 30 years . I am sure they will.

Additionally, we should plan to **daylight** Padden Creek at 10th and Donovan. We should get the trash out of the stream. The plan should vacate Larrabee Ave between 4th and 6th and permanently commit it to the Green buffer between residential and commercial.

There should be **restrictions** on noise levels from the commercial district. Levels on light from street lights and commercial buildings into the residential area. These are easy and, while can add some costs to development, will not be impediments to quality developments in the commercial area.

The **commercial district should be allowed to develop** into the regional business and visitor district that it naturally tends towards. We have the pieces or resources to be as unique and fun a place as Taos, Durango, Monterey, Moab, Annapolis or any number of other unique American places. The dozen **historic** buildings are the core resource. Being on a gentle **hill** expands the views; the **transportation** center, the **cruise** boats to the San Juan Islands, charter boats, the many restaurants, the access to outdoor sports such as hiking and bicycling Chuckanut Mountain - all contribute to Fairhaven being a draw for visitors from several states. Even now Canadian shoppers who discover Fairhaven love it and compare it to Gas Town. The Fairhaven plan should allow the district to become the outstanding Urban Village that others pretend it is now. All while protecting the life style and ambience of the residential neighborhood across the green gorge.

There is **no reason for conflict** between a quiet residential neighborhood and a thriving commercial district. They can exist together.

The Plan should not try to imagine or control exactly what uses and buildings might be built in the next 30 years. This plan is for those of us who live, work and own property in Fairhaven. It is our future and I request that staff understand it is for us. We need staff to assist us in our plan based on our input. I request staff not see this as a place for their ideas. The Fairhaven district belongs to us.

I will submit these remarks in written form before February 23 for inclusion in the record. And I will be posting articles on my Northwest Citizen website.