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HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION
RE: Proposed Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan

I am a resident of Fairhaven Gardens Condominiums located in Fairhaven. After reviewing the proposed Fairhaven Neighbor Plan, I have several concerns.

Fairhaven is one of the jewels of Bellingham. An historic village atmosphere and friendly mixture of commercial and residential make Fairhaven a model urban village for smaller cities. Fairhaven has seen many changes since the 1980s, which I have watched as a long time resident of the area. Thanks to the efforts of this commission and the City's Planning Department the changes have been mostly positive and have served to enhance Fairhaven.

We are now at a critical point that will affect the future of Fairhaven. The question is; can Bellingham preserve one of its jewels, the village environment and people friendly place to live, work and shop? Your decisions on this plan will help determine the direction for Fairhaven.

Historic District

Height Limits

When considering building height limits for Fairhaven, several criteria should be applied.

- Enhancing Fairhaven's distinctive and historic character.
- Maintaining a human scale that promotes a friendly village environment
- Providing an appealing view of Fairhaven when approaching from the bay
- Preserving views of the bay from Fairhaven and surrounding neighborhoods

Historical Character

Historically the Fairhaven Central area buildings have been two to four stories. Even the famed Fairhaven Hotel lost its looming tower in the 1930s making it a four story tall building. All of the buildings constructed in the last few years have been two to three stories with a few reaching four stories on the downhill side. Good design has resulted in the newer buildings nicely blending with the older buildings and they do not overwhelm the many shorter historical buildings. The building I live in is an excellent example of blending old with new and preserving the character of the neighborhood. A picture of Fairhaven Gardens is on page 22 of the Plan. In most places the building is three stories from the sidewalk with a maximum of 4 stories from the sidewalk The Plan's call for 5 story height limits contradicts other sections of the Plan.

"Policy 3.9 New construction should reference traditional proportions and building components into new storefront design using similar floor heights, entries, and window sizes and shapes."

Human Scale and Friendly Environment

Using the natural slope and stepping down the building levels has been an effective way to maintain a "human scale" for buildings such as Village Books and Fairhaven Gardens. Design also needs to consider the windy environment of the Southside of Bellingham. Taller buildings help create wind tunnels, which would make Fairhaven a considerably *less pleasant place* to walk.

View from Bay

Bellingham is an inviting place for boaters and ships, such as the Alaskan Ferry. A pleasant and inviting approach to Bellingham and Fairhaven is important. It promotes tourism, the economy, and our quality of life.

View of the Bay from Fairhaven, Edgemore and the Southside

People live in this area for many reasons. One is the location near the water, walking trails, vitality and the view of Bellingham Bay. Once you block off the view with tall buildings, you will never get it back. People want to live and work in Bellingham because of the quality of life available to us all. For many on the Southside, that includes enjoying a view of the sailboats on the Bay. Building heights need to be restricted to current levels in the Historic District to continue the historical practice of view preservation for the surrounding neighborhoods and visitors to Fairhaven.

Design Standards

This commission and the City Planning Department have done an excellent job at blending in the newer buildings, such as Village Books and Fairhaven Gardens, with the historical buildings.

- The concept of not allowing balconies that over hang the public sidewalk seems to limit the design's creativity. Would it not be best to have the ability to approve these on a case by case basis?

Historic Influence Area

I applaud the Planning Department for expanding the Commission's review area to include the surrounding Historic Influence Area.

Height Limits

- The areas closest to and up hill from the core Historic Area should have the same height limit of 35 feet as the core Historic District.
- There are some areas outside of the Historic Core where a five story height limit might be acceptable. Harris St., from the Tennis Club to the Ferry Terminal is a significantly lower elevation than the central core of Fairhaven. This area is just West of Harris Square and currently has no height limits. It is an area that could lend itself to a variety of heights including five story buildings.

Design Standards

- Fairhaven will greatly benefit from the commission's ability to apply design standards to the Influence area.

I ask this commission to

- Recommend retaining the current height limits in the Historical District.
- Apply the existing height limits to the Historic Influence area by considering the affect of such changes on the core Historic District.

Respectfully Submitted,
Sandy Pratt