



City of Bellingham Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission

May 20, 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: Barkley, Fairhaven, Meridian, Roosevelt, Silver Beach, and Whatcom Falls

Staff attending: Janice Keller, Communications Director; Brooksana Raney, Mayor's Executive Assistant; Matt Bezanson, Information Technology Services Department, providing technical support; Greg Hope, Fire Department/Emergency Management Education and Activities Coordinator.

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 will be reviewed and put forth for approval at June meeting.

Welcome

Mayor Fleetwood welcomed all to the first ever virtual MNAC meeting and introduced the Zoom platform technology and format. The 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.

Introductions & Roll Call

Overview of COVID-19 Response by Mayor Seth Fleetwood

The City response to COVID-19 has involved all COB employees in one respect or another. Many staff have been telecommuting, with a small number on standby, and approximately 50-60 deployed to Whatcom Unified Command (WUC).

Staff have created teams to respond to challenges brought by COVID-19. We have been involved in the temporary move of the Drop-In Center to Bellingham High School, which is on loan for a brief period of time, with the understanding we'd have to vacate before the school year begins. There's effort happening now to find another temporary location where the Drop-In shelter can go that has sufficient size to create adequate distancing. The Byron Street quarantine facility is now up and running.

In-person customer service in City offices are closed, but online services and phones are available. The Mayor's office is staffed and Mayor is working at City Hall and remotely.

We are working hard to identify public service needs. There are teams working on recovery preparation and are actively partnering with Whatcom County Government and Health Department. The experience has been remarkable for teambuilding.

COVID-19 Impact and Response (Neighborhood Roundtable)

Topic: Mayor asked about park use during COVID-19

Tom Dohman (Samish)

We enjoy still being able to access the parks to some extent. Tom finds people are nice and considerate and understand certain areas are blocked off, but happy to have open areas to use without congestion.

Mayor asked Tom what is his favorite park? Tom responded Lake Padden; it has trees, sunshine and is great for dogs.

Mayor asked if people are respecting distance? Tom stated more people are and many wearing masks.

Steven James (Puget)

He finds Bayview Cemetery is a great place. It's peaceful and quiet and easy to exercise distance.

Jill MacIntyre Witt (Columbia)

With weather getting nice, more people are getting out into the parks. The Parks Department has cut off parking. She feels more parking will reduce the congestion in the parks. She feels people will think the parks aren't equitable if only those who live close can use them.

Mayor thanked for the comment and stated the intention is to avoid lots of people at the park at once and it allows people to avoid being in close proximity. However, he will speak with Public Works and Parks.

John LaSpina (Cordata)

Cordata Park just opened today and has lots of walking space. Work on Julianna Park continues. Mayor mentioned he went out to the new park today with Councilmember Lisa Anderson & Interim Parks Director Nicole Oliver. This will be an exciting asset and already is very nice and ready for visitors. He also noted the enormous progress on our Greenways and more projects in the North end.

Question: Christine Farhas asked why tennis courts are cordoned off. WWU has theirs open but not in City parks. Mayor said he will check on this for summer and find out if there's a way to open them.

Gordon Durham (Cornwall)

Gordon offered an answer to the question about tennis courts being closed. He stated only those courts which are staffed may be open; at Whatcom Community College they opened, but had to close them again. They are looking at other ways to open and suggested Mayor reach out to the Governor to see if can be opened. There are lots of groups and seniors who use the courts and have made comments.

Mayor Fleetwood asked what comments have been offered. Gordon stated equity is a priority on our campus and the seniors in the area feel tennis is one of the sports that they can do during this time.

Nancy Fayram (Cornwall)

Nancy noted with dog parks and off leach areas being closed she has seen many off-leash dogs in Broadway Park. There's been dog fights and children feel a little intimidated and sometimes even go into the park. I had to pull my grandchildren out of the park in February.

Question: Pickleball at Cornwall is very active and they are wondering when they can return, even for singles. Mayor offered to look into this.

Gordon asked if Parks has any staff available that may monitor the tennis and pickleball courts so they may be used? Perhaps use Greenways Funds to help pay?

No additional comments were offered on the topics of Park use. Mayor suggested the roundtable discussion move to comments and concerns. Tom Dohman suggested including any neighborhoods that have had any successes during this time they want to share.

Topic: Comments and Concerns

Birchwood.

From what is being seen and read online, people are doing their best to stay home as well as be of help at a distance. We are seeing people volunteering to grocery shop and making and distribution of masks. Mostly hearing positive things. The only concern came from being at the grocery store a couple of weeks ago and mask wearing was sporadic. It's challenging to distance without limiting numbers in the store. Mayor stated he wasn't sure if people may not yet have seen the directive from Dr. Stern from Monday, but feels there's been an increase in compliance with masks just in the last few days.

Central Business District

There are lots of issues with businesses and their closures and so we're seeing some negative behaviors (vandalism and graffiti, loudness at night, and more fear). Going forward we're navigating how to social distance downtown and use sidewalks. We're very thankful for making some easements of sidewalks and parking spaces for businesses to use. 75% of businesses have had to lay off staff. Income is down 75% from this time last year; they are having to scramble to learn how to stay alive. If there was one concern, it would be the lack of police patrols but understands why they're thin, due to shortage on force and calls all around Bellingham, but think this needs to be addressed.

Mayor asked if the closures are temporary or permanent. Alice Clark responded DIS is closing as well as Downtown Emporium.

40% of businesses said they have gotten some sort of rent relief but are not sure how long that will go. We did a survey and identified businesses in the most trouble; but we also know not all businesses will make it. We need to look at anchor businesses and who has the best chance to make it.

Mayor understands that Alice is part of the Business Assistance Team. Alice said it's nice to have a variety of businesspeople coming together and sharing what they are doing. Some are doing better than others with the changes. For example, Boundary Bay has a large footprint and can do more spreading out of customers, but smaller ones will have challenge. This is why the right of way use is so helpful; we are all learning as we go.

Columbia

New Zoom technology helped us to have 15-18 people at a neighborhood meeting last night. We had Whatcom Helpers (whatcomhelpers.org) talk about what they're doing; we are having a food drive this Saturday. Mark Peterson from Sustainable Connections presented on zero waste and food waste; he's open to do so for others if you're interested. The Share Shack is currently closed to food, but for May Day we had an art display by children in neighborhood. We are looking at summer activities to keep neighbors engaged. We have a Facebook page for our neighborhood and it's currently very active. Due to a topic blow up about facemasks we've drafted Facebook guidelines. If others have any of these guidelines already and would like to share, please email Jill MacIntyre Witt.

Cordata

We've not had a live meeting since March and plan on a Zoom in June. There are lots of things on hold but we're looking at growth and change in the area. We are meeting with developers and City staff, but it's been challenging to do so. We're still doing some work on the Community Garden and received a grant to fix up some of the things that needed some work there. It's pretty quiet in the area with WCC and Bellis Fair closed. There's lots of activity in the parks and we see the work continues.

We want to hear more about economic recovery, especially for small businesses and what we can do to help those folks out. Mayor shared that we are all concerned about businesses closing and it is very

challenging. The City finance team is monitoring information daily and trying to assess the status of revenue decline in the City, but has been challenging because B&O and sales tax will be down, but we don't yet have the data for March & April. Once we see that, will have a better picture of the status. The City is looking at 9% reduction of General Fund money this year. Mayor mentioned the 60 Minutes interview with Gerome Powell who spoke about the infusion of money into the US economy in the last few months. Further, Powell stated they're noting what is structurally wrong with our economy and feels, with stimulus, the country will be positioned in next 1- 1/1/2 years to come back and it won't be the great depression we fear. Mayor also shared he had spoken with Sen. Murray who stated we should see significant funds coming into our area over the next month and one of the uses could be business assistance.

Cornwall

It's enjoyable to see how current events have unified us – even at a distance. For budget and small business help, community stakeholders and groups have been a great information opportunity to not only learn in best practices, but also to provide a consistent message and expectations. I think there'd be a great value at the City level, public and private to have the City develop little groups for small business. We could share what are the best practices. The neighborhood wants to get involved with this type of group activities.

We've created a "Thank You" sign that acknowledges grocery, postal, hospital and had 50 printed.

Question: City still doing mailing notices on projects? There's an application in for a building on Meridian and a new proposed land use application that's gone in for a four-story building, but the neighborhood hasn't gotten mailers yet. They may already be on their way though.

Specifically, are we still doing mailing notices the typical 500 foot boundary?

Mayor replied he would check with the Planning Director tomorrow about the mailings and will get back to you, but he also is assuming they are going out.

Nancy Fryram shared that Amy Brown (Parks & Recreation) has done a great job even though we had to cancel our park cleaning. Neighbors on S. Park and N. Park Drives have been out cheering for the lawn maintenance group; they've done great job too.

She also noted when Fountain Square was pulled apart, it was a big community highlight with many people in the community coming out to watch.

Edgemore

It's very quiet in our area, more than usual. There's lots of wildlife and delivery trucks. No questions or information from the board to share at this time.

Happy Valley

Not much activity in the Neighborhood Association except the occasional emails traded. We've seen lots of sidewalk chalk art and at 7PM each evening there is a community 'howl' that's been pretty popular; it's social distancing but still social.

There used to be a process when a lot was going to be dozed, the public could go in and save plants. It appears this has not been happening lately and we would like to get it back.

Mayor noted 21st & Larrabee right of way that goes through the retention pond area was full of blackberries and he believes Alex McLean was one of the people with the Happy Valley Neighborhood who suggested clearing of the blackberries. It has been done and suggested we could do something with it for the benefit of the public. It will be interesting to see how the right of way will be used by the community.

Jake stated he understands the idea of Safe Streets is being discussed since there's a lot less traffic, not on his street, but in general there's less traffic and more pedestrians.

Mayor offered some insight into this topic. There is a group that's promoting this and working with community Member, Laura Weiss. The idea is to close off some streets to non-local access allowing more space to walk around and keep good distance. He believes the community group is requesting an Executive Order to move forward because of the declared emergency, but instead a process is being

created where neighborhoods can determine if this is something they want to do. A neighborhood representative would apply, contact their neighbors on the street, and if they are in agreement, Public Works would provide street closures signs stating the road is closed to thru traffic. This way neighborhoods can empower themselves as well as to allow all to express their support or disagreement. Jake noted another minor activity he found inspiring was a neighbor had a birthday party and put a sign-up saying honk for a 7yr old birthday. We saw lots of people coming by and honking.

Question: What do we do if we see neighbors having parties and they may or may not be doing social distancing?

Mayor replied contact the police who will take the opportunity to educate people. We expect this question will come up as it gets more into summer. We need to determine if we need to be more strict, and what that may look like. We will need to increase our Park Ambassadors in City parks. We're monitoring and discussing what to do if the need arises.

Lettered Streets

We had initially started a mutual aid effort, beginning of March and it was a little tricky to coordinate, but we know other neighborhoods were doing something similar; it seems we may have gotten the idea from Sunnyland. It's evolved into a larger community response so we're hoping to coordinate our response. There are some concerns about neighbors who are not social distancing and there seems to be a desire to 'report' on others. They will share the information Mayor shared when he was speaking to the Happy Valley question about social distancing. One big thing is the Drop-In Center moving from one side of the neighborhood to the other.

Question: Can you speak more about the timeline of the move and what that might look like as a transition away from that site?

Mayor replied the center needs to be moved from Bellingham High School by mid-August so the school district can prep for school; we are contractually there through July. Steered by Whatcom Unified Command, the City, County, Port and Health Department are looking for alternative sites. The former site is not good for social distancing needs. We will announce what we've decided in that regard. It's an ongoing negotiation around land use and the details of that negotiation effort aren't publicized, or at least are not supposed to be publicized. You'll be hearing more. But we'll find a place, and we'll get out of Bellingham High School sometime in the next 2 ½ months.

Sarah stated she's heard reports of damage that may have been done and there will be a lot of work needed to be done by the School District. Mayor stated those rumors are false. This rumor has appeared on social media site, NextDoor. Reports we hear from the people who actively monitor as well as staff has been overwhelmingly positive. He suggested to take a look at the videos about the Lighthouse Mission at the high school, including the [setup of the shelter](#) and linked the [high school principal's video tour](#).

Commented [KJL1]: Any idea if that really was the word he used? I suspect it should be "supposed"

King Mountain

We have been working on "Map your Neighborhood" and had intended to do canvassing just as COVID hit, so this is on hold. We'd really like to get back to this project. A shout out to other MNAC neighborhoods for the great ideas you've been doing. As far as the art projects and things happening in other areas, we don't have a park in our neighborhood so we can't really have an art display or anything like that. Regarding parks, the biggest issue is getting the tennis and pickleball courts back open with an okay from the Governor, but perhaps this is a local issue.

Question: What type of resources can the City provide for email or phone contact for people in the King Mountain neighborhood? We'd like to get information out virtually, while we have the time. Mayor stated we'll look into the idea of emails.

Commented [KJL2]: Does this refer to contacts for the King Mountain area?

Commented [RBB3R2]:

Puget

The Association is staying in touch via email and looking at an electronic meeting options. One side effect

is neighbors are getting to know each other. The majority of interest in our neighborhood is City View. The permit is in and comments closed on May 8, but we understand they may be open longer until the hearing and presentation go before the Planning Commission. We have gotten five inquiries about permits of some sort in the neighborhood – people are hypersensitive to infill since CityCenter has again been brought forward. We believe 150 comments have been submitted with most, if not all, against. We understand another development is on Ellwood and Lincoln is also being planned. City View has brought up the idea about student housing. One of the questions is are we devoting lots of resources to student housing, but we're wondering if we will we continue to see the number of students coming to attend school.

The trail system is being used a lot. We'd like to advocate for trails to be improved and used.

Samish

A tip other neighborhoods may use when you want to get board members approved is, we used Survey Monkey with our email list and got them approved this way.

The City View development is right on the border of our neighborhood. We also know Lincoln/Samish and Elwood is being discussed as well as other apartment complexes on Samish Way. Undercurrents and questions have surfaced about how so many new residents and cars will have an impact on our area. The City seems to keep doing their thing; we've heard about road widening, bike lanes and a streetlight at Elwood and 40th going in. We've spoken with City engineers and learned the light is still planned but slightly delayed. City is doing a nice job keeping things going.

Dick Conoboy noted the skateboard park at Civic Field barrier has been smashed down and congregating is happening. He is concerned about possible virus spread.

We are also concerned about the return of WWU students. We dodged a bullet because most students were already gone. If we have the same number of students return from all the areas they do, it will be an absolute disaster. Mayor suggested Chris Roselli from WWU may be able to respond.

Question: We're aware of the eviction moratorium but rent still piles up. I think it was Seattle that said piled up rents could be paid over time. Can we do this here? I think that might be something for Council to look at and discuss.

Sehome

It was quiet for a while and now seeing more activity. It seems more people in our neighborhood are seeing more prowlers and burglary, but maybe it's just more people have time on their hands. We've had no neighborhood meetings recently. We did one just before closure and the board was voted in.

We're happy to see the Aloha projects move forward

Question: We'd like to know the number of police responses. We are also curious about developments of bike lanes.

Mayor stated a presentation on law enforcement and the court will be done by Police Chief Doll and Darlene Peterson, Municipal Court Administrator, and they will present statistics. He will also provide you with information on bike paths.

South

We had to cancel our April meeting and didn't get the board voted in. We may use the Survey Monkey idea. We are waiting for info on the redirect of the culvert. We want to get in touch with law enforcement to put up some barriers to help slow traffic. We're hopeful to have police come and talk about this. The Chuckanut Center has been giving out seeds.

Question: The Whatcom Helpers, we are curious what do they provide and what do they do? Is there another group overlapping with this?

Mayor stated he will inquire about the Whatcom Helpers and their mission. Jill MacIntyre Witt said there's a good coordination of needs and volunteers as well as assisting with the food bank needs.

Gordon Durham used his hand signal to make a comment. Coming back to the tennis pickle ball court potential solution, maybe we can reach out to Parks Operations and see if there's any staffing or Greenway Funds to expand the Park Steward program to staff.

South Hill

South Hill seems to be doing reasonably well with the quarantine and social distancing. Many neighbors go out for evening walks and people seem to be really looking out for each other, like shopping for elderly neighbors and contributing to the tiny house encampment which is not far away from here. Also, the Neighborhood Association have made donations of hundred dollar gift cards to children of Lowell school who are homeless. That's an effort to fill a little bit of a gap of resources that are perhaps not being provided.

We share concerns raised by others about the future of small businesses in Fairhaven and all of Bellingham. They are was such an important part of the social fabric here as well as the economic life of the community. It was good to hear about what the City is already doing to prepare to assist these businesses as they try to revive.

A somewhat related concern in reviving business and social activity is how to do it carefully. It might be a useful presentation at some point soon to hear the thoughts from Whatcom Unified on what we should be thinking about and doing to prevent a second outbreak. We're trying to schedule and hold a virtual neighborhood association meeting at some point before too long. It would be wonderful if Mayor Fleetwood could join us at some point, or perhaps have somebody from the City present about reviving business or efforts to do that will help forestall a second outbreak.

Mayor mentioned the City Council meetings, starting on March 23, have had presentations from five or six people, usually in the first hour of the meeting on response and recovery. Links to Council Meetings may be found on the City of Bellingham website at <https://meetings.cob.org/>. Also, feel free to reach out about your meeting. I look forward to getting to those days again where we can come together.

Sunnyland

On the topic of Safe Streets, we're curious if the City could identify streets that may be better closed since there may be some types of streets would be better to close. As we've heard from other neighbors, we're learning how to be creative.

For the most part the neighborhood has been supportive of Drop-In Center, but we're interested to see the statistics on crime in the area; we're curious about the policing around the center.

We're not having meetings currently but looking for other ways to reach out. Mayor stated he will ask Chief Doll to look at the data to give people some idea of what is being seen. Jessica also mentioned we know there are crime seasons and maybe this is just the time of year an increase happens.

WWU

Winter commencement has been cancelled. Students and services will be online all spring and summer. Approximately 300 students are still on campus and approximately 6,000-8,000 students are still living in the community and doing classes online. We are not doing Move Out Madness this year. During COVID having a pickup and drop off of couches and other furniture and exchange proved to be very difficult with social distancing guidelines in place. We are working on a social campaign of education and to help students understand the different rules as well as the resources that are available to them. In essence, if you've packed it, you need to take it with you on your way out. We are working with our neighborhoods to continue to ensure that this is a community-wide effort, not unique to WWU students. WWU is looking at a variety of budget scenarios. Regarding response to Dick and questions about the safety of our community and staff, Chris stated WWU has workgroups looking at a variety of scenarios and how to have a safe community. There are no final plans yet.

Phoebe DeMeerleer chimed in stating many students are supporting our community and hopes as Bellingham looks at future that students will be considered. As far as new student housing coming, we think by condensing it means less sprawl. Many of us feel that housing that is not affordable is not helpful.

Please consider pricing when considering student housing and the cost of units. Many students she knows that are still in the community are staying hunkered down. They also love Bellingham and she is encouraged by this group of students are also making an effort to be conscious about social distancing as well as being involved as social movements and volunteer activities. Students enjoy and also contribute to this community.

York

We're referring to Whatcom Unified Command all questions about COVID. There have been voiced opinions about availability for all to have access view City meetings. We still see students out and about and a band in the neighborhood is doing well (he can tell by their practice sounds). Regarding crime, they spoke with law enforcement and this is the higher cyclical time of year traditionally; but it may be up a little. They had an annual General Meeting just prior to shut down. The board has been able to meet pretty close to schedule, using Zoom. The executive committee elections were tabled because of the need for a signature update at the bank, no other reason. As mentioned, the WWU Move Out Madness was cancelled so we also cancelled our Dumpster Day. The dumping won't be just in York, we're working with WWU and Public Works to address the trash from students and others leaving the community this time of year.

Whatcom Falls

We haven't had a meeting this year due to weather and now the virus. We're waiting to see before planning an August meeting. Jenny stated she walks each day about 7:30 and is seeing 50/50 masks, but there's lots of room on trails. The neighborhood has development projects happening and neighbors appear to be happy with the current plans.

Other

Greg Hope from Bellingham Fire/Emergency Management mentioned he is available through the City to help with Map Your Neighborhood emergency preparedness planning.

Mayor thanked all for providing a picture of the neighborhoods in Bellingham. He will work to get information back to all questions. He will continue to monitor the Governor's order for moving into the next phase.

Please feel free to email the Mayor's Office to express any feedback. Please feel free to give your opinion if you'd like or not like to have another Zoom meeting next month. Thank you all and I hope to see you all soon.

Meeting adjourned at 8:52 PM

Our next meeting is scheduled for June 17th at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom