

FINDINGS OF FACT, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION
BELLINGHAM PLANNING COMMISSION
June 17th, 2010

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

The Bellingham Planning Commission has held a public hearing and deliberated on the proposed Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan and implementing development regulations. The Planning Commission has determined that the proposal complies with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan by allowing for the creation of an urban village with increased infill opportunities while protecting the character of the adjacent single and multi-family neighborhoods.

I. Findings of Fact

I. Project Summary

This proposal implements City of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan Goal FLU-15 by facilitating and promoting the re-development of a 90 acre area surrounding Meridian Street and Elm Street/Northwest Avenue, generally located south of W. Illinois Street and north of Broadway Avenue into a mixed-use urban village. The proposal includes the following actions to accomplish this strategy:

- A. Adoption of the Draft Ordinance and corresponding changes to the Columbia, Cornwall Park and Lettered Streets Neighborhood Plans, Zoning Tables, Land Use/Zoning maps, and the Land Use Development Code (Bellingham Municipal Code Title 20) **(ATTACHMENT 1)**.
- B. Adoption of the Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan **(EXHIBIT A)** to:
 - a. Encourage redevelopment in the area;
 - b. Establish a policy framework unique to the Fountain District Urban Village;
 - c. Encourage a healthy mix of commercial and residential uses;
 - d. Guide development to provide a safe, convenient and attractive environment for bikes and pedestrians;
 - e. Provide predictability for stakeholders; and
 - f. Decrease automobile dependence.

Adoption of development regulations **(EXHIBIT B)** to implement the Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan.

II. Procedural History

In 2007, a group of interested neighbors and business owners initiated a process to develop a vision for the future of the Fountain District as an urban village. Leaders from the three relevant neighborhood associations – Columbia, Cornwall Park, and Lettered Streets – conducted a two-year outreach effort to gauge the interest and preferences of residents and business owners in creating a more walkable, mixed-use community along the Meridian Street corridor. Outreach efforts included contacting area residents and business people by distributing flyers door-to-door, and inviting all those interested to visioning and discussion meetings. Concurrently, the ReStore (a retail salvage store run by the nonprofit ReSources organization located at 2309 Meridian Street), initiated a public process to plan for the revitalization of the Fountain Plaza Park located at the southern end of the Fountain District.

In April 2009 city staff launched the master planning process, the first step of which was for staff to invite the public to attend a series of four workshops to discuss the future vision of the area. The purpose of these workshops was to gather input on how the area should redevelop over time to achieve the goals of an urban village. Each workshop focused on a different subject:

Meeting #1 - Introduction and Character: Discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the area and the potential boundaries of the commercial core.

Meeting #2 - Public Realm: Streets, Trails and Plazas: Discussion of circulation, street design, trail connections, parks and plazas.

Meeting #3 - Development Character: Permitted Uses, Design and Scale: Discussion of future development regulations, such as permitted uses, design standards, floor area ratio and height limits, and identification of the different types of commercial areas.

Meeting #4 - Summary of Input and Discussion of Alternatives: Presentation and discussion of concepts developed at the previous meetings.

An average of 80 people attended each of the four meetings, including residents, business and property owners, developers, real estate agents, land use consultants, and other interested stakeholders.

Over the summer months a historic resource survey and parking study were completed to provide information upon which planning proposals would be based. In September and October 2009 staff held additional “focus group” meetings to address specific issues that had been raised in the previous public meetings. The three additional meetings focused on the following:

Focus Group Meeting #1 - Fountain Plaza Park: A “place-making” party in the street was held to help neighbors and businesses envision new uses for the plaza-like park and the adjacent Monroe Street right-of-way.

Focus Group Meeting #2 - Elm Street Commercial Transition / Historic Character Preservation: Discussion of appropriate new uses proposed for Elm Street, and which aspects of the existing neighborhood character were important to preserve.

Focus Group Meeting #3 - Meridian Street Commercial Core and Alley Interface: Discussion of how to maintain compatibility with adjacent residential areas by limiting building heights and developing special alley design standards for the Meridian Street commercial core.

Over the following months, staff hired an architectural firm to analyze the feasibility of development concepts generated at the workshops. Staff from relevant city departments and other external agencies such as Whatcom Transit Authority were also consulted regarding the feasibility of specific proposals.

On February 18, 2010, staff presented the draft master plan concepts and regulations for public review during a pre-application meeting, and then to the relevant City boards and commissions, City departments, and small stakeholder groups. After preliminary review by Planning Commission and the City Council, the plan was finalized.

III. Public Comment

See Exhibit A, Public Comment Tracker.

IV. SEPA Determination

A Determination of Non-Significance was issued on April 8, 2010 and mailed, along with the Notice of Public Hearing, to property owners within the project boundary and within 500 feet of the project perimeter, parties of record and published in the Bellingham Herald.

V. Consistency with Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies and BMC Review Criteria

The Comprehensive Plan states that the City should accommodate anticipated population growth primarily through the creation of a series of urban villages while preserving the character of existing single and multi-family neighborhoods (FLU-15). The proposal is consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and countywide planning policies. The proposal has long-term benefits to the community by encouraging residential and commercial growth within the City limits in a location that has existing infrastructure and was previously developed.

Review criteria under BMC 20.20.060 states the City may amend the comprehensive and/or neighborhood plan only if it finds that:

1. The proposed amendment bears a substantial relation to public health, safety, and welfare;
2. The proposed amendment is consistent with the Growth Management Act;
3. The proposed amendment is consistent with the countywide planning policies;
4. The comprehensive plan will be internally consistent; and
5. The proposed amendment will result in long-term benefits to the community as a whole and is in the best interest of the community.

II. Conclusions

Based on the staff report, the proposed Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan, implementing regulations and the information presented at the public hearing, the Planning Commission concludes:

1. The proposal is consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan, countywide planning policies and the GMA.
2. The proposal satisfies the criteria for amending the Comprehensive Plan and Neighborhood Plans that is established in BMC 20.20.060 C and D.
3. The proposal provides appropriate transitions into the existing single and multi-family residential neighborhoods.
4. The proposal encourages infill redevelopment in an area that is well-connected, has adequate infrastructure, and will not adversely affect the natural environment.
5. The proposal allows for a healthy mix of residential and commercial uses and creation of useable public space.
6. The proposal guides development towards the creation of a safe, convenient and attractive pedestrian experience and fosters less dependence on the automobile.

III. Recommendations

Based on the Findings and Conclusions, the Bellingham Planning Commission recommends that the City approve the following:

Adoption of the Draft Ordinance and corresponding changes to the Columbia, Cornwall Park and Lettered Streets Neighborhood Plans, Zoning Tables, Land Use/Zoning maps and the Land Use Development Code (**ATTACHMENT 1**, which includes **EXHIBITS A – H**), with the following revisions:

1. *Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan (Exhibit A)*:
 - a. Add the following policy language to Page 30, "Public Parking Policies:"
 - "Development of on-street parking on side streets within the Commercial Core and Commercial Transition areas is encouraged, where space allows, through the creation of diagonal parking."
 - "Consider reclassifying Monroe Street between Meridian and Elm from "arterial" to "residential." Work with property and business owners, residents, and the City Fire Department to explore additional parking opportunities that could be created in this portion of the Monroe Street right-of-way."

- b. Edit the last sentence of the first paragraph on Page 23 to read as follows:
- “Transit Service is available along Meridian and Elm Streets. Meridian and Elm Streets both serve the City’s Fire and Emergency Response vehicles and Whatcom Transit Authority (WTA) bus service on a continuous basis.”
- c. Add policy language to Page 24 under “Circulation Policies:”
- “Consider creating traffic calming devices to discourage traffic from cutting through the residential area on Halleck Street at the south end of Peabody Street, if warranted according to criteria in Bellingham’s Neighborhood Traffic Safety Program (NTSP).”
- d. Add policy language to Page 26 under “Streetscape Policies:”
- “Construct sidewalks on the northern side of W. Illinois Street from Northwest Avenue to Lynn Street, and missing sidewalk sections on the southern side of W. Illinois between Northwest and Cornwall Avenues.”
- e. Add the following change to Page 39 of Chapter 6, *Capital Facilities*:

Plaza Park Construction & Monroe Street right-of-way	
Estimated Cost	\$300,000.00 \$490,700
Sources of Revenue	
City Funds (PIF, REET, etc)	
State and Federal Grants	

- f. Add the following changes to Page 21 of Chapter 3, *Development Character*:

Since the time of its inception the company has grown to regional size, but the Hagggen family company retains a special fondness for their flagship store. Hagggen has and while they have no current development plans at the increased allowable density, company leaders are excited to consider future opportunities that will benefit the surrounding neighborhoods beyond the use of the site for a grocery store. However, company leaders are open to considering future development opportunities for the site that will benefit the surrounding neighbors as well as further the company’s business goals, provided that the increased density and upper-story housing options are viewed by the City and community as an opportunity and not a mandate for future development.

- Encourage new construction to be built to the sidewalk edge (optimally with a two foot or more setback, if feasible, to allow for wider sidewalks), while recognizing that grocery stores have special needs such as location of patron parking, access for large major truck-delivery trucks, blank walls for storage space and other unique design constraints.

2. Bellingham Municipal Code 20.37 (EXHIBIT B):

- a. Change Section **20.37.220, Table .220-A Permitted Uses** "Land Use Classification #17. Parking Facilities" from Not Allowed to a Conditional Use in Commercial Transition areas:

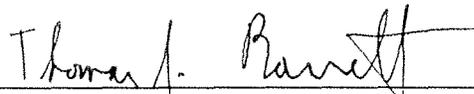
Table .220-A: Permitted Uses P = Permitted # = Permitted with limitations C = Conditional Use N = Not allowed				
Land Use Classification:	Commercial Transition	Commercial Transition	Residential Transition 1	Residential Transition 2
17. Parking facilities	P	N C	N	N

- b. Change Section **20.37.230, Fountain District Urban Village – Development** "C. Design Standards" to read as follows:

5. **Additions and Modifications to Existing Single-Family Buildings Forms**

- a. **Applicability:** The following provisions apply to additions and modifications to existing structures originally built for single-family residential use. The specific In the Commercial Transition area, the Urban Village design standards in BMC 20.25.070.B. do not apply to new development, except that the following applies to additions and modifications to existing residential buildings.

ADOPTED this 17th day of June, 2010.



 Planning Commission Chair

ATTEST:



 Recording Secretary

APPROVED AS TO FORM:



 City Attorney