



## Letter from the President

Planners and engineers: can't we all just get along?

Some of you undoubtedly are having the immediate reaction of, "Of course, why wouldn't we?" And there are others, both urban planners and transportation engineers, who are thinking, "Yeah, but if only they would..."

Personally, I have experienced both of those reactions. On one hand, as a young city traffic engineer, some of my best workplace friends were the city's planners. In those days, I often found myself as the only public works person invited to the planning department after-hour socials, and I enjoyed being part of the interaction and



Jim Ellison, WA Section President

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## November Meeting

### Downtown Bellevue Transportation Plan Update

Downtown Bellevue is an increasingly complex and dynamic urban environment, where residents, employees, and visitors demand a high quality environment and multiple travel options. The update to the Downtown Bellevue Transportation Plan will address mobility issues and challenges and support downtown growth and urban livability looking out to 2030. By 2030, 19,000 residents and 70,300 employees will spend much of their time in the downtown. They will want mobility for many purposes throughout the day – commuting, errands, shopping, recreation, etc. So the capacity of the downtown transportation system to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and auto drivers will need to be expanded. The question is how to allocate right of way and resources to achieve optimum mobility.

Kevin McDonald, AICP, is Senior Transportation Planner with the City of Bellevue and project manager for the Downtown Transportation Plan Update. Kevin will provide an overview of the project, summarize ideas generated through community involvement, and introduce preliminary recommendations to support future downtown mobility.

**WHEN** Tuesday, November 13, 2012 from 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

**WHERE** Bellevue City Hall, Room 1E-108  
450 110th Avenue NE, Bellevue, WA 98009, 425-452-6800.  
Parking can be validated. Carpooling is advised. The Bellevue Transit Center is one block away. ([get directions](#))

**COST** \$15 for a boxed lunch. No charge if you bring your own lunch.

**MENU** Lunch box from Gretchen's Shoebox. Please choose from:

1. \*Farmers Market Salad: Candied walnuts, blue cheese, dried cranberries, golden raisins, & diced apples on spinach & romaine w/ raspberry vinaigrette.
2. \*Cobb Salad: Roasted chicken breast, bacon, avocado, blue cheese, tomatoes, scallions, & hard-boiled egg on garden greens w/ balsamic vinaigrette.
3. \*\*California Club: Oven-roasted chicken breast, crisp bacon, avocado, blue cheese scallion spread, lettuce, & tomato on sourdough bread.
4. \*\*Italian: Turkey, roast beef, salami, Pepper Jack, red & green peppers, onion, black olives, & pepperoncini on a baguette w/ balsamic vinaigrette.
5. \*\*Turkey Havarti: Oven-roasted turkey breast, havarti, cucumbers, lettuce, & tomato on whole wheat w/ mayonnaise & mustard on the side.

\* Choices 1-2 include a roll, butter, fresh fruit, oatmeal cookie, & water.

\*\* Choices 3-5 include chips, fresh fruit, chocolate chip cookie, & water.

**RSVP** Please register with Carla Nasr at [itewaregister@gmail.com](mailto:itewaregister@gmail.com) by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, November 9. Those who register and select a box lunch and do not attend will be billed \$15 to reimburse the caterer.

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camaraderie within both the engineering and the planning groups. On the other hand, I have also worked as a traffic engineer for an agency where, at times, the public works and the planning departments did not always philosophically see eye to eye on the joint issues that we addressed.

The gap between well-meaning urban planners and well-meaning transportation engineers seems to stem from their different perspectives, on issues such as how roadway infrastructure can best serve the public and its communities. These sometimes conflicting viewpoints can lead to each forming generalizations and stereotypes about the other.

Some traffic engineers may be perceived as rigid, doing things strictly “by the book.” When a planner starts eyeing recommendations for ten foot lane widths, on-street angle parking, or trees in the medians, the conversation with the engineer often leads to the subject of road standards, safety, or tort liability. As the planner strives for ways to build and enrich a strong sense of community, the engineer frets over safety and mobility, having to defend the agency on the witness stand, or worry about how to finance additional maintenance costs of newly introduced features in the road right-of-way.

Planning and engineering perspectives may collide in a variety of ways. Planning guidelines often prescribe planting trees in roadway planter strips at 30-foot intervals which, once the trees are mature, may compete with traffic signs for space and visibility. An increase in development density can generate pressure to widen streets for additional capacity, but can also enhance community vitality and use of alternative travel modes. Community planning groups may not understand how, or even why, the MUTCD specifies the color and shape of traffic signs, or the letter sizes to be used, when the conversation turns to creating a system of downtown way finding signs.

More often than not, planners and engineers both have well-founded concerns. However, each group may sometimes fall short in its ability to articulate to one another the basis for its concerns, to understand each other’s perspectives, or to forge a reasonable compromise that works for both groups.

Enter the transportation planner. Transportation planners can find themselves in the middle, between the engineers and the urban planners. And therein lies a unique opportunity. Transportation planners have the background and credibility to understand the perspectives of both groups, act as a translator between them, serve as a conduit for information, and help facilitate compromise and reasonable solutions.

With the help of urban planners and traffic engineers, transportation planners have played a vital role in the development of progressive innovations in our field, such as context sensitive design, complete streets, and transit-oriented developments, to name a few. Through their contributions to these concepts, as well as their continuing work in developing new approaches, such as multimodal levels of service and performance measures, the transportation planner is helping to bring planning and engineering functions together in a more cohesive manner to build stronger communities.

I salute those transportation planners who have helped bridge the gap between urban planners and traffic engineers. As a way of recognizing their efforts, I would like to dedicate this issue of our newsletter to transportation planners, in appreciation for their contributions to the transportation profession.



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# Technical Article

## Bellingham's Planners Win Award for Innovative Urban Village Transportation Impact Fee Reduction Program

By Chris Comeau, AICP, Transportation Planner, Bellingham Public Works

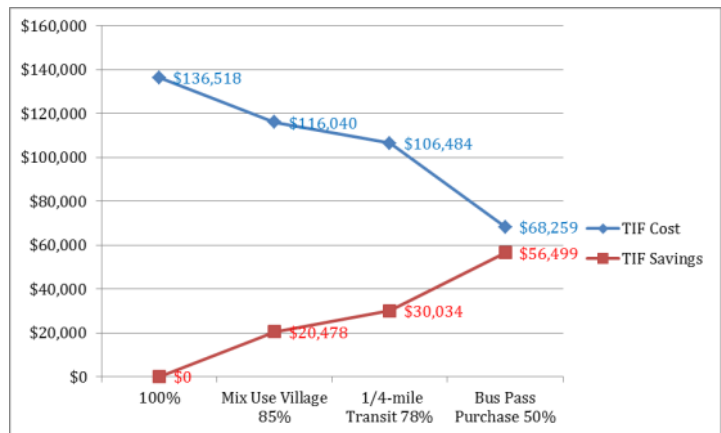
On October 12, 2012, at Washington State's American Planning Association conference in Olympia, Wash., Bellingham transportation planners received the 2012 APA-PAW<sup>1</sup> Award for Transportation Planning in Washington State for Bellingham's Urban Village<sup>2</sup> TIF Reduction Program.

Since 1994, the city of Bellingham, Washington has assessed development for transportation impact fees (TIF) to recover a proportional share of the city's investment in transportation infrastructure to accommodate growth. Despite regular complaints from developers, business owners, and community activists suggesting that TIFs are barriers to infill

development, Bellingham's TIF rate is low compared to the rates charged in other Washington cities. A [2010 study](#) of TIF rates in 66 other Washington cities revealed that Bellingham's rates were in the lowest 30% and far below the average rate in Washington State.

In 2010, in an effort to further promote comprehensive plan goals for mixed use urban infill and to create even more financial incentive and reward for new development in designated Urban Villages, Public Works transportation planners created Bellingham's [Urban Village TIF Reduction Program](#). Importantly, the program is based on legally defensible practices using ITE trip generation methodology, research, and widely-accepted practices within the field of transportation planning and engineering.

Citywide, Bellingham awards 100% TIF credit for previous uses. In addition, Urban Village development is rewarded with an automatic 15% trip reduction for mixed use location and an automatic 7 to 10% trip reduction depending on proximity to high-frequency (15 minutes) public transit. Vehicle trips, and thus TIF, can be further reduced, up to 50% total, through purchase of bus passes, car share memberships, or other transportation demand management strategies.



<sup>1</sup> PAW stands for Planning Association of Washington.

<sup>2</sup> An urban village is a mixed use urban center that concentrates development to a compact area.

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# Technical Article, continued

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In 2012, the TIF rate for downtown Bellingham and other urban villages is 25-50% lower than for other parts of Bellingham, 25% lower than Lynden's rates, and 50% lower than Ferndale's Main Street TIF rate. This means that TIFs in Bellingham's urban villages are lower than any other significant population center in Whatcom County.

City	Population	2012 TIF Base Rate	2012 TIF Per Square Foot of Development	2012 TIF Central Business District <sup>1,2</sup>	2012 TIF Central Business District 50% <sup>3</sup>
Bellingham	77,000	\$1,912	\$1,931	\$1,491	\$956
Lynden	12,125	\$1,997	\$2,016	\$1,997	n/a
Ferndale	11,681	\$2,783	\$2,811	\$3,243	n/a
<b>Notes:</b>	1. Bellingham CBD and Urban Villages = 22% to 25% automatic reduction				
	2. Ferndale charges higher TIF for 443 acre area including Main Street (CBD)				
	3. Bellingham CBD and Urban Villages can reduce TIF up to 50% by Transportation Demand Management				

Since its implementation in 2011, Bellingham's Urban Village TIF Reduction Program has [saved](#) developers and business owners tens of thousands of dollars in TIF assessments, simply by helping to fulfill the community's adopted vision and policy emphasis on mixed use infill development and multimodal transportation.

This award from the State planning organization is unlikely to silence local activists who have their own theories about TIF. However, the award is clear validation from the planning profession that Bellingham has integrated goals for mixed use infill development, multimodal transportation, and economic development to create some of the most progressive TIFs in Washington.

**Note:** Chris Comeau, AICP, can be reached at [ccomeau@cob.org](mailto:ccomeau@cob.org) or 360-778-7946. Chris presented "Bellingham's Experience with Transportation Impact Fees, 1995-2011" at ITE Washington's 2011 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Meeting at the City of Snohomish Library on October 11, 2011.

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