



TO: City of Bellingham  
Department of Planning and Community Development

ATTENTION: Nicole Oliver, Communication Coordinator

FROM: Susan Kaun, Fairhaven Resident  
613 Donovan Avenue

DATE: November 30, 2010

SUBJECT: Comments on Draft Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan Update

As a resident of Fairhaven, and a neighbor who worked with other neighbors, residents and members of the business community on the Draft Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan Update of 2007, I would like to offer the following comments:

**1) Fairhaven is the only neighborhood of its kind in the City of Bellingham**

The original Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan, adopted in 1980, recognized the neighborhood as "one of three pioneer settlements around Bellingham Bay'.... 'once a thriving fishing, lumbering and coal mining community with waterborne access to adjoining settlements and the outside world".....and, "while the smallest in physical size, is the only neighborhood to have all of the land use signatures of a complete city -- retail core, heavy industry, rail, ship and truck transportation centers, and separate, identifiable residential areas". (Page 1)

The Draft Update Plan of 2007 was written to support and honor this unique and authentic historical place that was once a town of its own. With the juxtaposition of retail, heavy industry, rail, ship, truck, and residential areas, the Draft Update Plan of 2007 was written with a vision to carefully preserve the natural environment, residents and businesses of the neighborhood: "to seek a balance of environmental stewardship, quality of living and economic well-being".

As pointed out in the 1980 Plan, this is the only neighborhood of its kind in Bellingham. I am deeply concerned about the separation of the planning process for the residential, industrial, and commercial areas of

the neighborhood. I doubt my neighborhood can be pulled apart for planning purposes, then successfully reassembled to fit the Vision.

## **2.) The semi-rural character of the residential neighborhood**

The 1980 Plan pointed out: "The semi-rural character exists in the residential neighborhoods in Fairhaven. Opportunities exist to direct development and preserve a portion of the open space amenity." (Page 1)

Prior to drafting the Draft Update Plan, a Questionnaire was sent to over a thousand residents and business interests. The Update was written with answers in mind to the Questionnaire, such as: "The large majority (75%) said the impact of a 10-story building on neighborhood character would be Bad or Very Bad." (page 10)

I worry that with a separate planning process for commercial areas of the neighborhood the 'opportunities to direct development and preserve a portion of the open space amenity' will be lost forever. Additionally, the 'semi-rural character' of the neighborhood in which I live, where my family's home and largest financial investment is located, will be irrevocably damaged by very large city-type buildings that loom over the commercial and residential areas.

## **3.) Padden Creek**

The 1980 Plan stated: "Padden Creek could be restored to a producing salmon stream with opportunities for pedestrian use along the shoreline". (Page 1)

After suffering over a hundred years of neglect from short-sighted planning policies within its watershed, Padden Creek remains desperately in need of restoration. There have been so many missed opportunities to restore a once vital salmon fishery. What is the point of the Neighborhood planning process if the City ignores the citizens, as well as its own planning reports?'

"Padden and Whatcom Creeks offer the most estuary area for improvement and or restoration, with Padden having more area. Due to existing conditions, Padden currently offers better habitat opportunities. Padden should receive priority for habitat restoration and overall preservation." ( \*Page 22)

*\*Management Recommendations for City of Bellingham Pocket Estuaries, February 2006(Revised September 2006); Prepared for City of Bellingham Planning and Development Department; Prepared By, Northwest Ecological Services, LLC.*

It's depressing to think about how many citizens have worked tirelessly for years to encourage the City to plan and restore Padden Creek, and have failed.

## **Conclusion**

**"Village:** (vil'ij). n. 1. a small rural community, usually smaller than a town. 2. the inhabitants of a village." (Websters Desk Dictionary, page 502)

I believe a great deal of the success of an authentic urban village is due to its location within a natural and a compatibly built environment. In similar places, such as Carmel, California, the charm and viability of the village area would be greatly diminished if surrounded by tall buildings, signaling a busy and hurried urban center.

A restored Padden Creek, adjacent to commercial and residential areas, could become a model for how the natural and the built environment can co-exist in harmony.

Therefore, in my opinion a separate planning process created mostly for short term commercial interests could drive the discussion for the short term financial viability of a few, rather than long term financial sustainability for all. There have always been competing interests in the Fairhaven Neighborhood, but until now it has been an essential part of the planning process to work together for the benefit of all.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide my comments regarding the Draft Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan Update.