

**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
CITY OF BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON
PUBLIC HEARING**

THURSDAY
May 20, 2010
Video-taped & Audio-recorded

7:00 P.M.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
www.cob.org

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order by Sharon Robinson, Vice-Chairman of the Planning Commission.

ROLL CALL:

Tom Barrett, Jim Bishop, Sharon Robinson, Kurt Baumgarten, Edie Norton, Allen Matsumoto, and Danne Neill.

Present: Jim Bishop, Sharon Robinson, Kurt Baumgarten, Allen Matsumoto, Edie Norton, and Danne Neill

Absent: Tom Barrett

Staff Present: Tim Stewart, Planning and Community Development Director; Tara Sundin, Special Projects Manager; Katie Franks, Development Specialist II; Brian Smart, Planner II; and Heather Aven, *City Recording Secretary*.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

No minutes submitted for approval.

15 MINUTE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD:

No testimony given.

PUBLIC HEARING:

ZON2009-00001: A public hearing to consider the adoption of the Fountain District Urban Village Subarea Plan and implementing development regulations. This includes new zoning for portions of land use Areas 3 and 8, and all of Areas 6 and 10 of the Columbia Neighborhood Plan; Areas 9, 10, 11, and 11A of the Cornwall Park Neighborhood Plan; a portion of Areas 3 and 8, and all of Areas 2 and 5 of the Lettered Streets Neighborhood Plan, and amendments to the Land Use Development Code. The area included in the proposal is generally located west of Meridian Street to Elm Street/Northwest Avenue, east of Meridian Street to Broadway Avenue, and south of W. Illinois Street to Broadway Avenue.

STAFF PRESENTATION

Katie Franks provided a PowerPoint that displayed an overview of the Fountain District project and touched on some of the process followed to date. She noted that this area was identified in the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan as an urban center, with the potential to become an urban village. She pointed out that the Columbia, Cornwall Park, and Lettered Streets neighborhoods have all been working on making this area better. She discussed the benefits and challenges that were discussed at the public meetings staff held.

Katie Franks compared the proposed boundaries, brought to the public in February 2009, with what is currently being proposed. She discussed the importance of an urban village offering multi-modal opportunities and discussed some of the constraints that this neighborhood presents. She explained how staff decided which areas would have more emphasis on the pedestrian, which areas would be focused on the bicyclist, and which areas would remain auto-centric.

Katie Franks pointed out that Elm and Meridian have some similar challenges when it comes to being pedestrian and bicyclist friendly. She stated that this challenge was addressed in the proposal by including language that provided for:

- wider sidewalks by encouraging building setbacks.
- pedestrian scaled features through the inclusion of lighting, seating, and signage.
- the addition of marked crossings and bulb-outs on the streets.
- street trees and landscaping, as well as striped bike lanes wherever possible.

Katie Franks continued her presentation and discussed some of the solutions staff is proposing along the Elm and Meridian corridors. She also talked about the parking and bike lane striping that would be added along Elm and the inclusion of bike boulevards along some of the low-traffic neighborhood streets.

Katie Franks acknowledged that although staff has tried to maximize parking in some areas, the proposed removal of parking along Elm/Northwest has been an issue for some of the residents. She stated that staff proposes diagonal on-street parking be added to the Commercial Core and the ½ block side streets that connect to it. She discussed the possibility of creating residential parking zones, providing secured bike parking infrastructure, and placing the parking to the side and rear of buildings. She also explained that, in an effort to encourage the re-use of existing buildings, the proposal includes a reduction to the minimum parking ratio for commercial uses. She discussed some of the objectives for the Fountain Plaza Park, as well as the parking surrounding it.

Katie Franks provided an overview of the Fountain District and explained the proposed zoning and what uses would be allowed in each of them. She also discussed the proposed height limits, the proposed setbacks and stepbacks for new development, and the different opportunity sites that staff identified. She commented on some of the development regulations that will be part of the Fountain District Urban Village.

PUBLIC HEARING OPENED

Sara Snow expressed her concern about the parking being removed from Elm Street. She noted that some driveways are not wide enough for more than one car. She commented that if parking was not allowed on the street, it would prevent friends from visiting and garage sales from being held.

Jim Straetmann commented that the plan is great. He wanted to advocate for the insertion of traffic calming devices on Halleck, at the south end of Peabody.

Mark Keller, President of Columbia Neighborhood expressed their support for the proposed Fountain District Urban Village Plan. He stated that the Columbia Neighborhood Association is especially supportive of the proposed design standards and staggered setbacks and step-backs for new development. He stated that streetscaping and other public realm improvements envisioned in the plan, will encourage more pedestrian / bicycle traffic which will mitigate pollution and traffic congestion. He encouraged the Planning Commission to consider greater residential density than proposed by staff.

Elke Daugherty submitted written comment. She expressed her support for the encouragement of biking, the provision of attractive street-scaping, revitalizing the Fountain Plaza Park, and requiring design standards on new development. She stated that she participated in two of the focus group discussions, and recalls most participants felt the overall height of 45' and 55' allowed on the Hagen Site were too extreme for the neighborhood. She conducted her own survey and reviewed the results with the Commission. She commented that her neighborhood should not be used as a buffer to the residential neighborhood, and stated that development in the commercial core should consider that when building. She stated that the majority of the households she independently surveyed supported the

cottage and attached dwelling unit housing forms, but did not support duplexes. She suggested that the Commission impose a 35' height limit and only allow ADU and carriage housing forms be allowed from the infill toolkit.

Mark Tucker expressed his support for the bike route along Peabody Street. He stated in an effort to avoid lot consolidation, he encouraged the Commission to deny the inclusion of the duplex housing form. He noted that spreading out the density on a more equal level (including the 4 blocks east of Meridian and the 4 blocks east of Elm Street) would be a more effective way to plan for the Urban Village.

Lee Posthumus expressed her support for the increase in density; however, she would like the height limit to remain at 35', in the Commercial Core, in an effort to preserve the views along Vallette, Peabody, and Kulshan streets. She commented that, in her opinion, limiting the height to 45' should be acceptable for the Haggen Site.

Jim Green, Owner of Diamond Jim's Grill. He expressed his concern about the reduction of on-street parking and how it will affect his employees and the residents of the rentals above his establishment. He supported the revitalization of the Fountain Plaza Park, but pointed out that parking will still need to be provided.

Peter Roberts, President of Eldridge Historic Society. He submitted written comment; as well as page 2 of the petition Sara Snow circulated to preserve parking on Elm street. He read a letter written by Louise Bjornson and emphasized the danger to pedestrian traffic in areas that do not currently have on-street parking, because of the increased vehicular speed. He submitted her letter into the record. He cautioned the Commission to consider the unintended consequences of removing the parking along Elm and Northwest, and instead consider the concept of shared lanes. He requested that the recommendation, contained in the original draft plan, be used when it comes to Elm Street.

Caryn Simmons stated she would like to see height limited to 25' due to the character of this established neighborhood. She pointed out that anything higher would invade her privacy, cause light pollution, and produce shading, cause property values to plummet, and the character of the neighborhood will be effected. She commented that Kulshan and Peabody Streets need to be protected, and recommended a reduction in the height limit, in the Commercial Core, to 25'.

Roger Spero represented both Gloria Harden and the Deets family, both business owners in the neighborhood. He commented that, in his opinion, a two-story height limit should be imposed on new development along Peabody and allow height to go to 55' on the Meridian side. He suggested that a portion of the alley, behind Fountain Drug, be developed as a pedestrian corridor.

Lee Walkup commented on a past group of residents who had created a redevelopment plan in response to the City's efforts to remove parking; however, they were not supported by the City Council. He stated that, in his opinion, the removal of parking in the Fountain District, is a repeat of what happened along Broadway several years ago. He pointed out that the business owners do not feel they have the assurance from the City that local businesses are supported and the parking will not be removed; therefore they do not expand or re-develop.

BREAK – 10 MIN

Norm Chamberlin requested that his property at 1911 J Street be included in the Commercial Core, thereby staggering the boundary line. He owns the property adjacent to this site (1409 J Street), and wanted to have the same density and zoning on both.

Mary Varco expressed her concern regarding height along Meridian. She stated that, in her opinion, and increase in the height limit will compound the troubled parking situation that currently exists.

Dan Moore suggested that the bike route proposed to run along Elm street be relocated 3-4 blocks west, off a busy street. He suggested that new development be required to build the first floor underground, which would allow them to remain at a 35' height limit above ground.

Aaron Booker expressed his concern that sprawl will occur if the increased height limit is not implemented. He commented on the public process, and pointed out to the Commission that many people that attended the many meetings held, were in agreement with the plan; even though they all were not able to attend the public hearing.

Frank Ordway, Chairman of Transportation Commission stated that they are in support of all three transportation elements described in the plan. He clarified that despite the accusations that there are speeding and accident issues along Cornwall; both the Public Works and Police Departments have stated that evidence does not exist that speeds have increased, nor have accidents increased, along that corridor. He commented on other areas of the City where parking has been removed, and noted that the business owners have reported dramatic increases in their business. He pointed out that the goal of an urban village is to have a multi-modal mix of transportation opportunities, as outlined in the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan.

Jim Bishop wanted to know if Frank could explain why the bike lanes should not go on a parallel street rather than then a busy arterial street.

Frank Ordway replied that the Transportation Commission would like to see the main corridors have the focus due to the commuting aspect of these streets.

Therese Kelleher pointed out that cars already travel faster than the posted speed limit along Northwest; and the bicyclists she has observed in the past are not comfortable sharing the lane with those cars. She noted that Northwest is utilized by cyclists for connections to the county and downtown Bellingham, Whatcom Community College and Bellis Fair Mall, as well as Shuksan and Birchwood Schools, and the different employment opportunities in that area. She stated that studies have shown bicyclists are more apt to share the road with automobiles when the bicycle lanes are marked. She also commented that one existing parking stall on Northwest would accommodate 7-9 bicycles.

Cliff Palmer stated that, in his opinion, a height limit above 35' is inappropriate for this area. He explained that, based on his observations, the natural flow line for bicyclist ties in from Girard and Dupont (lower portion of Elm) and travels up Northwest; therefore, the proposed bike path along Peabody may not be that effective. He mentioned the concept of unintended consequences and how new development could result in both the loss of the existing neighborhood character; as well as, an increase in traffic. He commented on the fact that the Columbia Neighborhood Association does not represent the views of the entire neighborhood.

Bill Henshaw expressed his support of the overall plan; however, he recommended that the 45' height limit should be only allowed at the Haggens and Fountain Drug sites. He stated that structured parking is not feasible in this economy, and instead suggested that the neighborhood and Planning staff work together to identify some parking lots that could be utilized in an effort to phase out parking in front of businesses. He expressed concern over the east/west connector streets and would like to see specifics included (sidewalks on both side of the street) in the plan for the arterials that run these directions.

Public Hearing continued to June 17, 2010.

COMMISSION QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION:

Sharon Robinson wanted to know if shared parking lots were considered.

Katie Franks replied that it was discussed at the public meetings, and the Fountain Galleria site was identified as a potential site.

Danne Neill noted that the Fairhaven Merchants had successfully implemented a parking district, and suggested staff consider that.

Sharon Robinson recommended that sidewalks be included along Illinois Street.

Katie Franks pointed out the place in the Sub-Area Plan where that concern was specifically addressed.

Tim Stewart commented that it is important to have it noted in the plan, since that is what feeds into the 6-Year Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP).

Sharon Robinson wanted to know how the sidewalk issue might get prioritized since the Sub-Area Plan is a 20-Year planning document.

Tim Stewart explained that the TIP is modified through an annual review process between the Public Works Department and the City Council.

Kurt Baumgarten wanted to know if any modeling of view corridors were done prior to the height limits being determined.

Tara Sundin responded that public territorial views were not raised as issues during the public meetings; therefore the main studies were concentrated around the height and bulk of the potential development that could happen. She clarified that Old Town view issues were centered around public view, not private resident views.

Sharon Robinson requested that the same views seen in the presentation be brought back again from different angles and directions, in a effort to gain a more comprehensive view.

Danne Neill wanted to see more information related to the general disagreement of the duplex and cottage housing forms if staff has that from their public meetings.

Tara Sundin stated that the topic of duplexes did not come up much in the public meetings.

Katie Franks clarified that only Residential Transition Area 1 (RT1) at Cornwall Park and the RT1 along Elm in the Columbia Neighborhood will allow for duplexes.

Tara Sundin explained that when a duplex is proposed for development in the RT1 Area, they will need to adhere to the design standards outlined in the Infill Toolkit.

Edie Norton wanted know how high the current buildings are that exist between the Haggen's and the Fountain Drug sites to help determine how significant a change in the height limit would be.

Alan Matsumoto stated that he would like to have the Transportation Commission materials in their entirety as soon as possible. He wanted to know if there was an economic analysis done for the Fountain District Urban Village height limits.

Tara Sundin stated that based on the information gathered through the Old Town and Samish Way Urban Village projects, staff felt confident that the proposed Floor Area Ratio (F.A.R.) was not high enough to justify additional analysis to be done.

GENERAL BUSINESS:

Planning Director's Report

Tim Stewart stated that when the Transportation Commission was created, their charge was to review all proposed plan amendments prior to it coming to Planning Commission, and forward their recommendation of approval or denial.

Tim Stewart announced that David Stalheim has been hired as the new Community Development Block Grant Manager, and he will begin his duties on June 21, 2010.

Staff Discussion

Commissioner Discussion

Jim Bishop requested that Tim address the serious accusations regarding the fact that height was never discussed during the public meetings and that the City is attempting to eliminate parking from all over Bellingham.

Tim Stewart replied that a memo can be prepared that he will include in the worksession materials.

ADJOURNED: 9:35p.m.

NEXT MEETING: May 27, 2010 in City Council Chambers

Minutes prepared by:

Heather Aven, Recording Secretary

Minutes edited by Planning Commission members and various Planning Staff.