



Fw: heights - fountain
Kathryn E Franks to: Heather M Aven

06/03/2010 10:03 AM

for planning commission

Kathryn Franks
Development Specialist II
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City of Bellingham
Planning and Community Development Department
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----- Forwarded by Kathryn E Franks/ncd/cob on 06/03/2010 10:02 AM -----

From: "Lee Posthumus" <lee@lesgo.com>
To: <KFranks@cob.org>
Date: 06/02/2010 09:50 PM
Subject: RE: heights

Hi Katie,

Hope things are going OK. Here are some comments I wanted to submit. The first word doc is the comments that I made at the planning hearing 2 weeks ago. The photos are low tech but show the idea of what 45 feet looks like from different vantage points.

Our neighbor, Elke, and I went out with a clinometer and tried to get some ideas of heights. The high cap utility poles along North St. may be 70-80 feet as your GIS person and the transportation planning guy (can't remember his name) had stated. But the tallest utility poles along Meridian itself are about 60 feet. We measured the one on the corner of Maryland and Meridian and the one that across the street from the engineering building. The tallest crossbar on the poles is at 40' and the lowest insulator at the top is about 50', so it is possible to estimate how tall 45' along Meridian is by looking at the tall utility poles from a distance and estimating the half way point between those two. You can get the idea from the pictures I have attached. They are not 3 dimensional representations, but again, they do give the idea of what 45' looks like.

After our walk with the planning commissioners, I realized the next morning that we didn't walk down Meridian in the Commercial Core at all! I remember you asking several times if anyone wanted to walk a different way or see anything else, so I know if I had thought of it then we could have. It was just such a surprise to me to realize that we didn't. Attached is additional comments for the planning commission from after that walk about.

Thanks Katie,

Lee

From: KFranks@cob.org [mailto:KFranks@cob.org]

I like some parts of this plan. I'm happy to support more small, local businesses in the area. I love the idea of a more pedestrian and bike friendly area. I appreciate the hard work of all involved in what has not been an easy or perfect process.

In discussions about heights, more than one person from the neighborhoods (but much farther away from the proposed height increases along Meridian), has said to me, "You have a view from Vallette St.?"

Yes we do. And so do the people along Peabody St. and Russell St. and Kulshan St. and other streets near the commercial core. It may not be the same view as those along Eldridge who look out over the bay, or those in the neighborhood who look out over Broadway Park. But we do have light and sunsets and some of us are lucky enough to have views of Lummi Island or Mt. Baker. And we treasure those views just as much as someone who may live in a more "upscale" place.

I like the idea (and so do many of my neighbors) of commercial spaces with one floor of residential above. Even 2 or 3 floors of residential above on opportunity sites like the Haggen site.

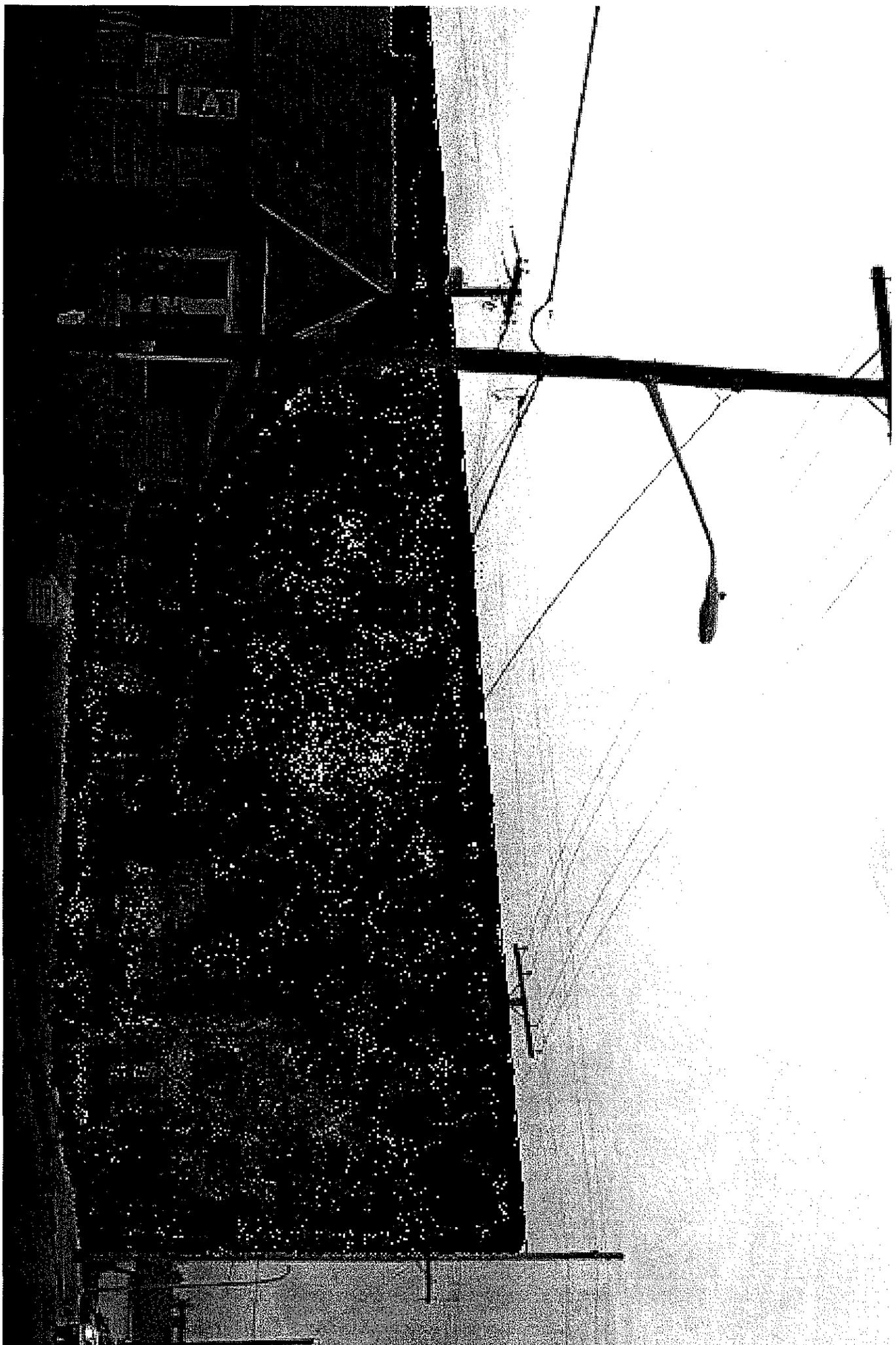
But 45' all along Meridian is too high, and 55' (or the potential of 7 or more stories mentioned by the neighborhood associations) at the Haggen site is too high and out of scale with our much loved neighborhood.

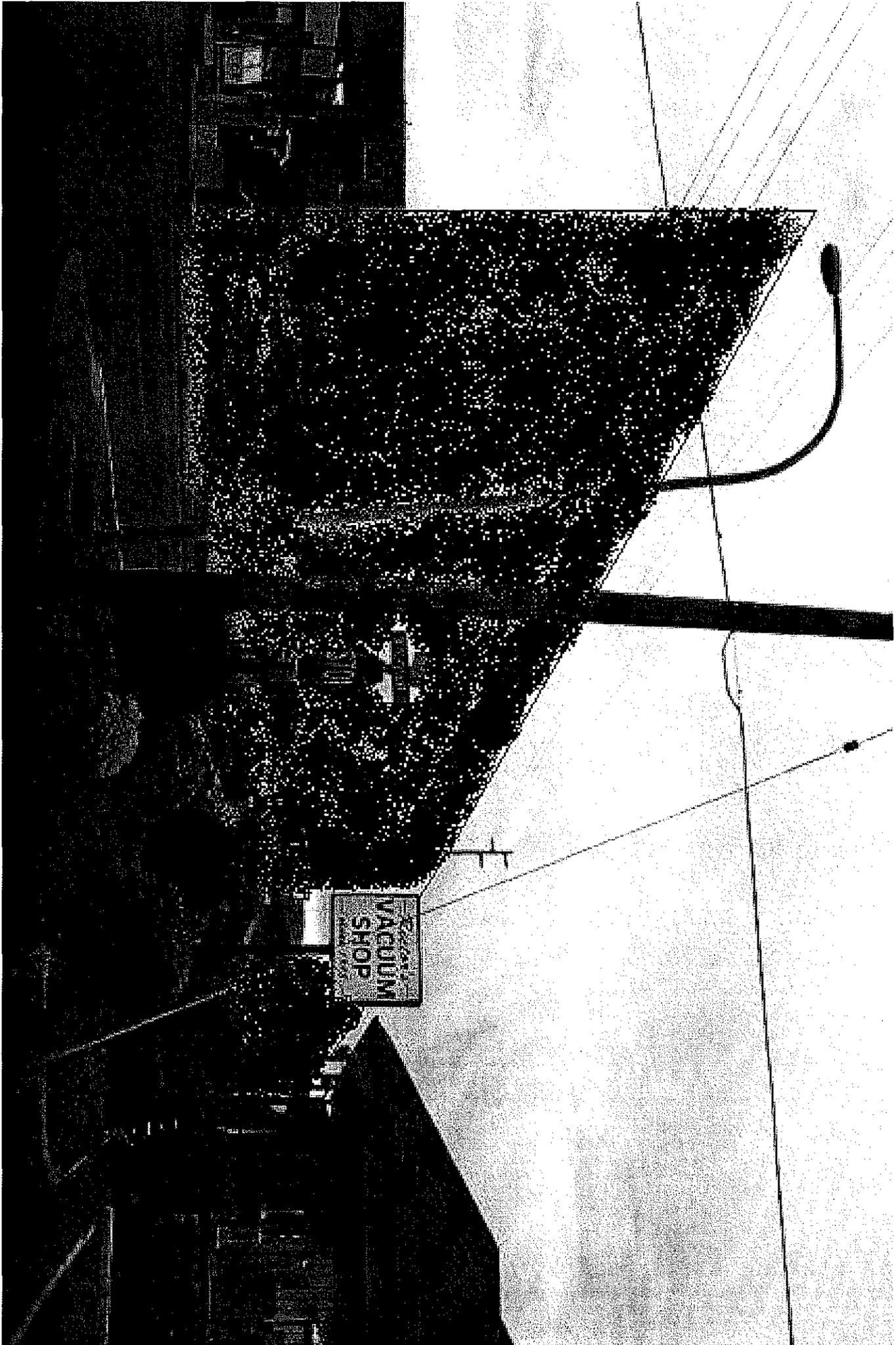
I request you keep the current 35' height along the commercial core and only go up to a maximum of 45' in the opportunity sites.

Lee Posthumus

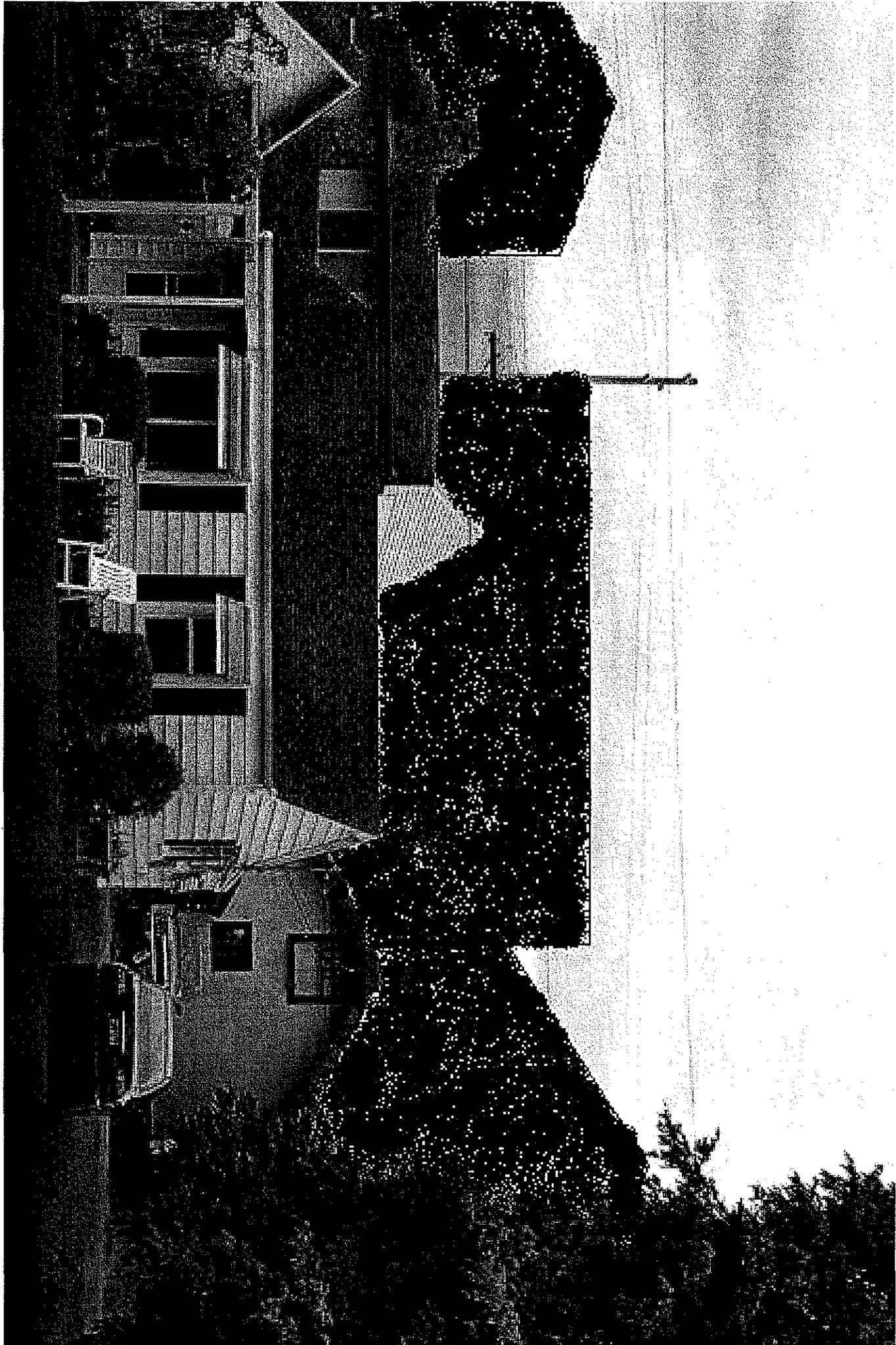
2716 Vallette St.

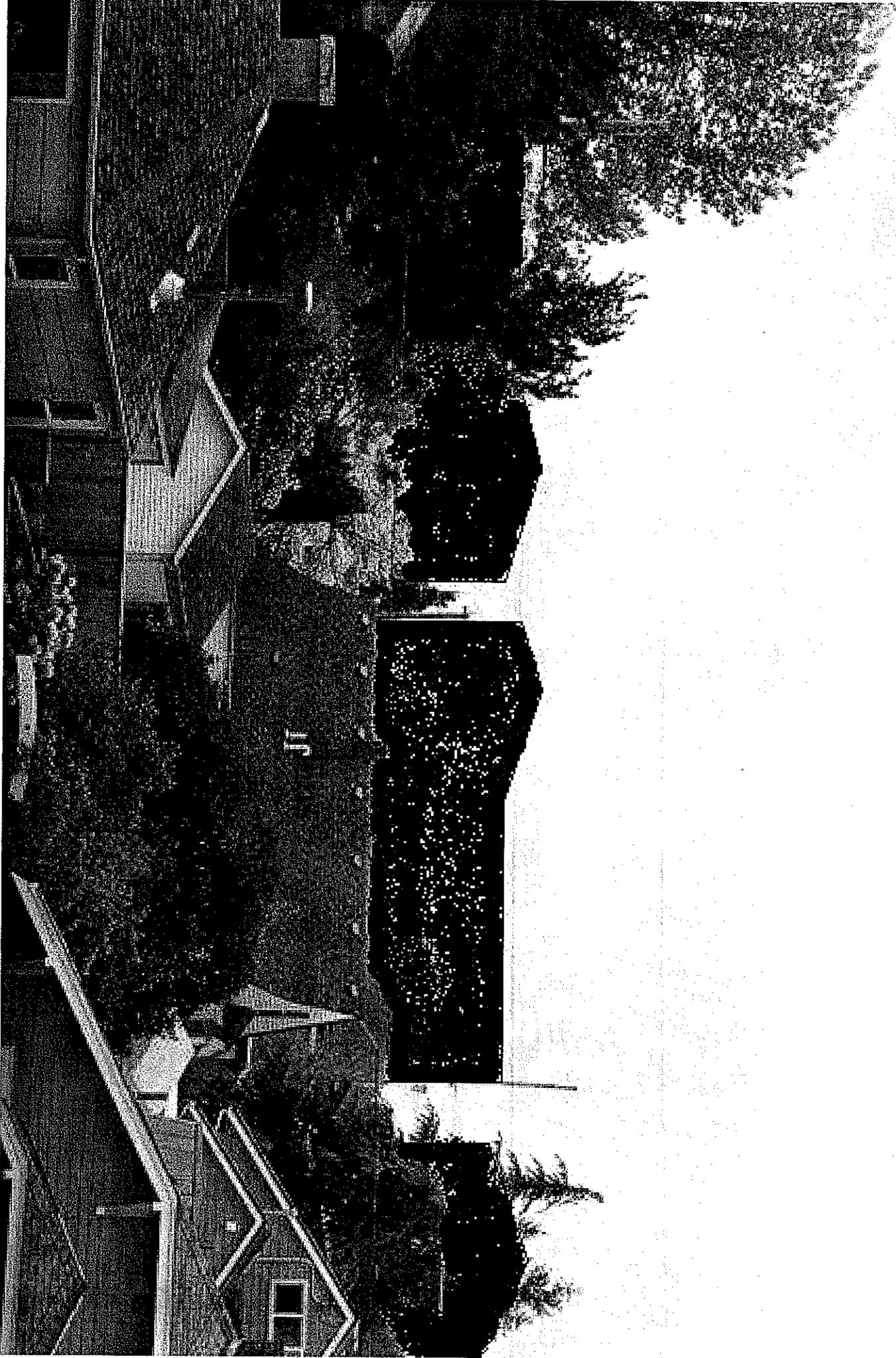
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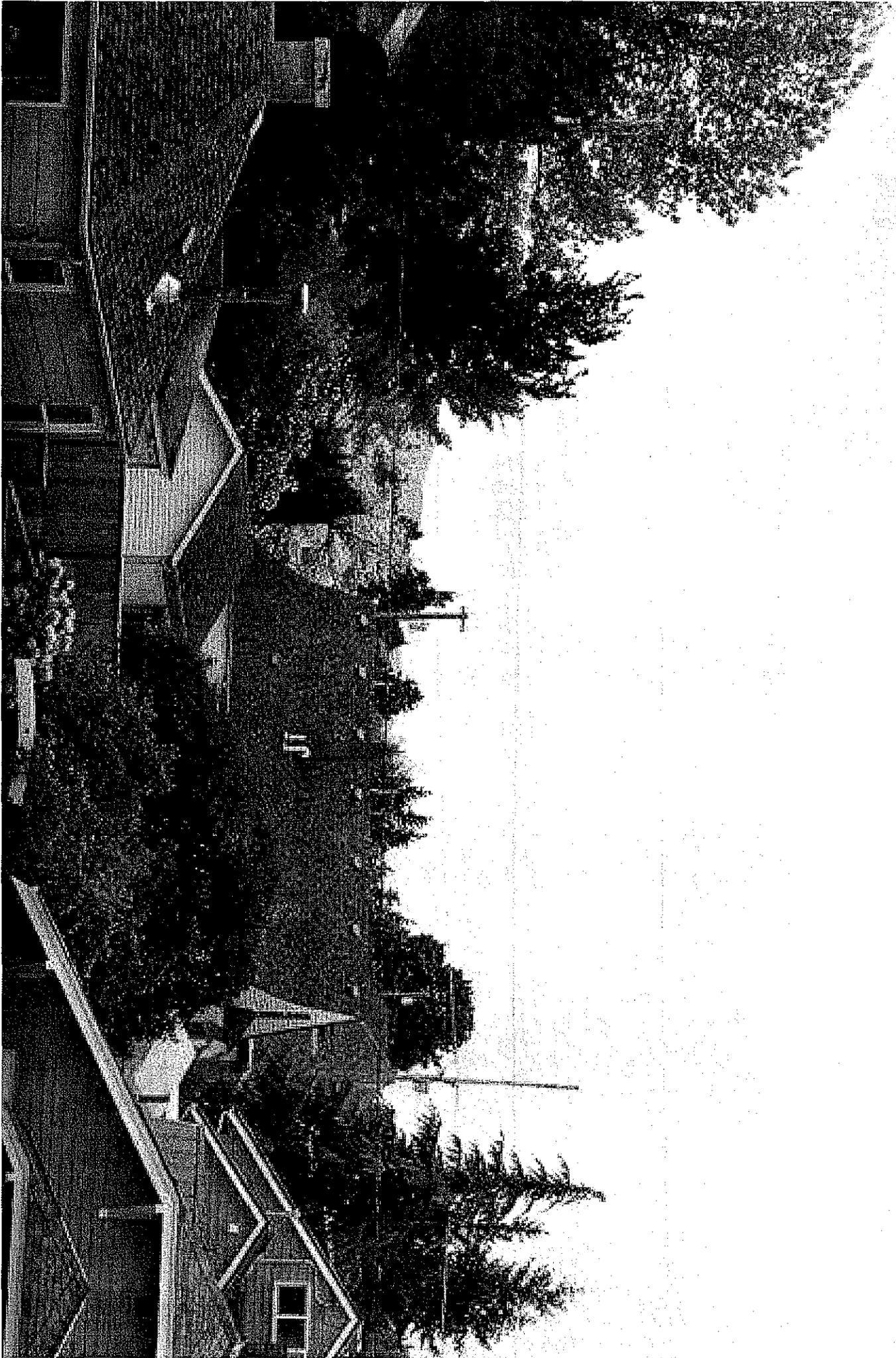




VACUUM
SHOP







June 1, 2010

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I wanted to submit some additional comments to you after recently attending the public hearing on May 20th and the walking tour of the Fountain District urban village area.

I have been thinking about when we were standing at Gifford's Market and looking at the home kitty corner and Tara explained how the FAR of .6 and the cost (around a million) would help to discourage teardowns along Elm St. Then later, when we questioned why the FAR needed to be 1.5 along Meridian St., she said that was in order to make it economically feasible for a developer to redevelop. It seems that Elm St. is being "protected" from tear downs, while the charming houses along Meridian St. are not. All through the public meeting process, many residents and planners have voiced not wanting to change the funky feeling and the neighbors have mostly wanted to not change the scale of the neighborhood. If you look at the East side of Meridian between North and Jefferson, there are 5 small, charming craftsman homes in a row that have been converted into local businesses. Purchase prices for these small lots and small, old existing buildings may be low enough for a developer to consider purchasing all of them and having the potential to tear them all down and build quite a large, 45' tall building with an FAR of 1.5. This is not what we want to happen!

I am very concerned about parking issues increasing with the proposed heights and FARs. I was shocked to hear the Diamond Jim's business owner talk about the need for parking for his 19(!) employees as well as his customers. The impact of that business is being expressed by other nearby business owners and can easily be seen if you pass by. Why won't those parking issues be exacerbated by the increased density? Of course they will, and it is being proposed all along the Commercial Core. As someone who tries to use the bus in this neighborhood, I can tell you that twice hourly bus service on weekdays and less at other times makes it difficult to not have a car. So parking issues will be bound to spill over into residential streets nearby. Even if we keep the 35' height, we will need to encourage alternative transportation and find additional parking. I would love to see a parking district formed and would like to see the parking lot behind the fountain drug purchased for public parking (and repaved with permeable pavers or the grass-filled pavers to help with stormwater issues). With good, downward facing lighting and landscaping, it would be much more attractive than the lot that exists now and would serve a need for the neighborhood businesses.

Speaking of the neighborhood businesses, we love them! It seems to me that redeveloped buildings with a height of 45' and a FAR of 1.5 would out of necessity have to charge more rent than the existing older buildings currently do. How many of the small, local businesses that are in the neighborhood now would be able to afford those rents? Would the tiny Asia Market? How about the brand new bike shop or the dive shop or music school in the former Brown's Beauty space? Or any number of the hairdressers, clothes shops, restaurants, repair shops, etc. There is a reason why those businesses are not located in Fairhaven or even downtown. And part of that reason is pure economics. We are a

pretty good, accessible location for businesses and even a bit of a destination for the music shops and restaurants, but we attract smaller, local businesses that can afford this area.

I still am unclear why a higher density of infill is being pushed on us. Are the planning staff trying to meet some quota the city needs to meet to comply with the GMA? If so, why is it OK not to push for taller buildings and larger FARs on Elm? It seems to me, the large numbers for growth will come from Old Town and the Waterfront redevelopment project, as well as the increased taller buildings downtown, in Fairhaven, in Barkley and perhaps along Samish Drive. We can add a few numbers just by planning for 2-3 story buildings (35') along the Meridian Core—realizing this is a huge change from the existing, mostly single story buildings there now. Isn't 45' asking for a really big change, when nothing but a few facades and the peak of one building are over 25' currently? Please protect our neighborhood, our views, our light, our sunsets, our sunshine, our small, local businesses, our funky, eclectic feeling, our scale. Don't sacrifice us for the potential profits of future developers or to squeeze, what, a few dozen more infill slots?

Sincerely,

Lee Posthumus

2716 Vallette St.

734.0525

RECEIVED

June 11, 2010

JUN 11 2010

Dear Planning Commissioners:

City of Bellingham
Planning

We're writing to express our deep concern over the four-story mixed-use commercial district being proposed for Meridian Street. We hope you'll take seriously the impact on the people who already live there.

This is not some blighted neighborhood in need of urban renewal. It is a good, moderate-income single-family neighborhood whose stability is threatened by the prospect of a row of four story commercial/mixed use buildings lining each side of Meridian Street.

We have tried to raise the following issues with planning staff:

- * Shadowing (light blockage) of properties one alley-width from the proposed four-story buildings.**
- * Loss of privacy, with new apartments and condominiums directly overlooking the back yards of scores of existing single-family homes on both Kulshan and Peabody Streets.**
- * Light and noise pollution from the mixed-use, multi-story buildings only a few feet away.**
- * Diminishing property values as homeowners find their sightlines blocked by the back sides of four-story buildings.**
- * Increased traffic and loss of parking on all streets, resulting from the new commercial district and the increase in density that's being proposed.**
- * "Commercial creep;" spot by spot commercial intrusion onto existing residential streets, restarting the same process that made Meridian Street what it is.**

In attempting to raise these discomfoting issues, we have felt stonewalled at public meetings where no serious questioning of the Fountain District Urban Village concept was possible.

One example: a well-publicized meeting which, according to planning staff, was to be devoted to discussing the future of Kulshan and Peabody streets. A large number of neighborhood residents were there to ask questions. Instead, the evening was given over to a slide presentation on the history of Bellingham, and a redundant briefing by planning staff. The history presentation was well done, but the questions residents hoped to ask were not allowed to be asked.

This was not the only time we felt the meetings to be orchestrated in order to avoid uncomfortable questions. We try not to become alienated from the civic process, but it isn't easy to maintain trust under these circumstances. We know Kulshan Street residents who felt so manipulated by the process that they stopped attending the public meetings.

We hope you'll consider seriously the impacts of the Fountain District Urban Village proposal, and ask the staff to respond to at least these basic questions:

Is Bellingham in need of more apartments and condominiums? Is there a demand for more multi-story dwelling units? If not, why do we need to increase the height limit on Meridian Street at this time?

Is this plan driven by the State's GMA density assignment? How many new dwelling units would the Fountain District need to provide, in order to meet the GMA target? How many times that number of DU's does the FDUV plan provide?

Will developers invest in the Fountain District Urban Village, lacking a multi-story parking structure? Where would such a parking garage be built, and at whose expense? Without such a structure, where do we propose to park the hundreds of cars brought to the district by the new stores and shops, by new apartments and condos? Will they not be parked on adjacent residential streets? Is there no problem with that?

If we are striving in common to protect the vitality of our downtown commercial district, why are we promoting three more “mini-downtowns” at Old Town, Samish Way and Meridian, to compete with downtown commerce? Is there no way this staff time and effort might be devoted to improving the commercial heart of our city?

We understand why increased urban density is the holy grail of community development, and we share your desire to curb sprawl and protect the countryside from strip malls and subdivisions.

But in our desire to promote citizen acceptance of increased density, why create a “Berlin Wall” of multi-story buildings, totally out of scale with the neighborhood? Currently the proposed Urban Village section of Meridian is comprised mostly of one and two-story buildings, one of three stories and none with four stories. This plan almost seems designed to generate hostility toward increased density, among those who already live there. When their current lifestyle becomes untenable behind the four-story Village, do we expect them to move into the new, upscale condos of the FDUV? Is it not more likely they will move to other single-family neighborhoods in the suburbs or at the city’s edge? In what way does this promote density?

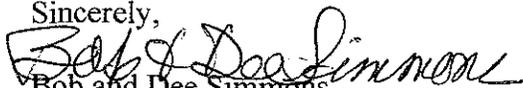
What sort of mitigation should be built into the Urban Village plan to compensate for its impact on adjacent residential areas? What’s been offered so far is a tentative design requirement for stair-step setbacks, beginning at the second story of the four-story buildings. This seems questionable, given the lack of depth of some of the lots along the west side of Meridian. At any rate it hardly can be said to compensate for the impact of forcing this project onto the residential neighborhood.

Planning staff have also suggested that we make use of the “tool kit” of increased density, including accessory backyard dwelling units. In what way does that ameliorate the Urban Village’s physical impact on single-family residential streets?

It has been suggested (not formally by the planning staff, so far as I know) that residents of Kulshan and Peabody could compensate for any loss in property value by applying for commercial zoning, and selling out. This spells death to the residential neighborhood and spreads the hit-and-miss commercial /residential use that has characterized Meridian Street for decades. In this scenario we respond to the effects of poor planning on Meridian Street by expanding the same result onto and past Kulshan, Peabody and Vallette Streets. This may not be what you wish, but it seems unlikely that you can proscribe such an outcome in a way that will bind future Planning Commissions.

Finally, is it unreasonable to expect that Planning and Community Development staff might have concentrated on ways to mitigate the affect of the Urban Village on the neighborhood that’s already in place? Might they even now more systematically gauge the concerns of adjacent residents, before claiming community support?

Sincerely,


Bob and Dee Simmons

924 Highland Drive

(752-0803) simmonsrc@comcast.net



Re: Fountain District height limits 
Kathryn E Franks to: Shirley Zuanich, Heather M Aven

06/11/2010 02:46 PM

Hi Shirley,

Thank you for your comment. I'm ccing Heather Aven, the Planning Commission Secretary, who will forward on to the Planning Commissioners.

Katie

Kathryn Franks
Development Specialist II
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kfranks@cob.org

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Shirley Zuanich Hi Katie, I am leaving town on the 15th, therefor...

06/11/2010 01:30:59 PM

From: Shirley Zuanich <shirley-z@comcast.net>
To: kfranks@cob.org
Date: 06/11/2010 01:30 PM
Subject: Fountain District height limits

Hi Katie,

I am leaving town on the 15th, therefore I cannot be at the next meeting which I believe is scheduled for the 17th of June. I cannot find the place on the web where I can submit my comments, so I am asking you to pass these onto the planning commissioners ASAP, and cc me when you do. Thanks in advance for this.

My husband and I think that the height limits on the Guide Meridian should be 35 feet, with 45 feet for the Haggen's property. My husband came slowly to this conclusion, because he is one to try and 'walk his talk', and he felt that if not here for urban density, then where? I was more quick to think that the 35 and 45 limitations were appropriate. We try to be thoughtful citizens. I think our neighborhood has taken these proposals graciously, and in good spirit.

These are our concerns;

1. The 45 and 55 foot limits are out of proportion to this neighborhood, as we are flat, unlike the Samish and Old Town neighborhoods, where elevation goes a long way towards relieving the corridor like effect of taller buildings. The Guide cannot be widened, and this major entry to our city will look like one long dark, ominous hallway. I walked on the Guide, something that did not occur with the planning commission on the walk around meeting in May, and it appears to me that the 45 foot limit would seriously impact the panoramic view of Sehome Hill, WWU and our prized neighborhood big street trees. As a gateway to our city, a more panoramic view has a

lot of value. It is a neurological fact of life, first impressions are huge.

2. The Fountain District, as it is now, is a very vibrant incubator of small business in our city. Increasing the height limits will increase value of the land--will this result in higher rent costs, thus blunting the stimulative effect? Will the higher land values result in bigger businesses and real estate development companies being the ones to construct more uniform, monolithic and expensive buildings such as we see in Barkley Village, where much of the commercial space goes unused? I think the marketplace-like cacophony of architecture such as exists right now on the Guide is actually quite pleasing to people. There is a friendliness even beyond the fact that these Mom and Pop storefronts, carved out of houses and poorly designed 1970's buildings, are owned and operated by small business people. I recently was on a business trip to one of Los Angeles tonier neighborhoods; Tarzana and Woodland Hills. I was struck by how much those business districts looked like the Guide! This may be one of the reasons hat downtown struggles--the scale of things are too big for most entrepreneurs to get their feet wet, likewise people do not feel so comfortable particularly on Cornwall, especially in that crucial stretch between Holly and Commercial. It is instructive to me that Railroad Avenue, where the height limits are low, thrives, while Cornwall, where height limits are higher, stagnates. Is there a connection? I most definitely think there is.

3. The city puts great value upon getting us out of our cars. We personally support that. however we think that in reference to increasing the height limits, and therefore the number of potential residents and businesses along the Guide, while reducing parking spaces, is a little idealistic. How about the city work towards car reduction, and then give the Guide height limits another look/see in 10 or 15 years? If the traffic reduction schemes do succeed, and traffic per capita does go down, and the parking situation would justify it, then perhaps at that time, revisit raising the height limit to 45 and 55 feet? This is too much too fast.

Obviously we need taller buildings if we reduce urban sprawl, but given the fact that the Guide from West Illinois to Broadway is a main business entrance to Bellingham, especially one that reflects yesteryear, the fact it abuts one of Bellingham's oldest neighborhoods, the fact that the terrain is flat as a pancake, the fact that there are wonderful small businesses popping up and getting a toehold in the Fountain District, and lastly that city traffic reduction strategies are in their infancy, the height limits should remain at 35 and 45 feet, with a clause that allows for revisitation of this issue in 10 or 15 years.

Sincerely,
Shirley and Jim Zuanich
812 West Connecticut Street
360-510-2310



DeetsFarms@aol.com
06/11/2010 05:38 PM

To planningcommission@cob.org
cc
bcc
Subject Fountain District Urban Village

Bellingham Planning Commissioners:

My name is Allyn Deets. For many years my family operated Fountain Drug, which I reincarnated as Fountain Drug & Galleria when I changed the merchandise mix in response to competition from new chain stores. As well as an interest in the Fountain Drug building, I own a smaller and older building in the same block,

When the Urban Village discussions began for the Fountain District, they were initiated, as I understand it, by the Neighborhood associations. I thought this was an insightful, proactive, and forward thinking move. The district historically has been a mix of commercial and residential uses. This area is going to GROW. Maybe not tomorrow, but at some point in the future I believe more growth is inevitable. The Urban Village process seemed to be asking: how do we best accommodate this future growth, both commercial and residential? How do we plan ahead to gain some control over how this growth will develop and reshape our neighborhood? The growth will occur. We can participate, try to stop it, or just ignore it. If we choose one of the latter two options, growth will just be imposed upon us.

I have attended almost all of the Fountain district meetings, and over this time I perceive a trend that disturbs me. Initially the concern seemed to be the future of the "community as a whole." More recently, I am hearing "No, not in my back yard." "Not in my backyard" will, at best, slow the growth, not stop it. Worse, it may force the growth to happen in unintended ways we will not like.

One thing I am concerned about is the area where my business used to be located: the south section of Meridian Street, from Meridian to Peabody and Broadway and from Monroe to Jefferson. This is where Diamond Jim's is now located, as well as the Asia Market, the Veterinary Hospital, and of course, the Fountain Drug site. I am pleased to mention our new neighbor, Ed Lutz, who just opened a new business, Bellapalooza, in part of my smaller building in this block.

A big problem with Meridian Street in the Fountain District is that commercial development is restricted, for the most part, to the alley on the east side of Meridian to the alley on the west side. Where our business was located the depth of the site is only 100 feet from sidewalk to alley. Katie is talking about commercial building setbacks to soften and make the larger commercial buildings appear less monolithic and more aesthetically compatible with their residential surroundings. I agree with Katie. I am convinced she is correct from an aesthetic point of view. But this reduces even more the 100 foot depth of the commercial sites.

Many who have spoken here are concerned about building heights. Some want to reduce the existing height limits. I appreciate their concerns. They want a view of something other than a concrete wall. I will mention that my smaller commercial building has two apartments on the second floor, and in these units the feeling is light and airy, even when looking at the new two-story building across Meridian that houses Oltman Insurance. Kudos to Nick Tsoulouhas (of Cascade Pizza) for building an asset to the community.

There are different ways to value commercial buildings. Perhaps the principal one is floor space, the number of square feet of space available. Major retailers like Wal-Mart calculate the amount of business each square foot in their stores is generating. The truth of the matter is number of square feet determines the value of a commercial building. How much investment a builder can and will put into a building is determined by the number of square feet it will provide. When you decrease the footprint of a building with setbacks, when you reduce the height of a building, this lowers square footage and decreases what an investor can put into that building. Some people here have suggested that commercial buildings in the Fountain District provide parking within or under their structures. To provide this parking, the building will have to provide more square footage to pay for it.

With wide setbacks and limiting height to one or two stories, we may inhibit sustainable commercial development and force Meridian Street to become a strip mall in the Fountain District. If we want to encourage creative and compatible commercial buildings in the Fountain District, we must consider allowing some buildings to provide more useful square footage.

At our end of Meridian, the Peabody Street side of the alley behind Fountain Drug is underutilized. At this location, as for building heights' destroying residential views, there is little or no residential housing to the east, south, and west that would be affected. In this section of Peabody, to the south there is only one house, a rental, sitting by itself. If this property were zoned commercial and allowed to provide an adequate building footprint and good height, we might be able to stimulate development of something, residential or commercial, that would be attractive and functional, something that would complement Fountain Plaza Park. Right now it is an eyesore.

To sum up, I think the Fountain Urban Village plan needs to deal with the severe commercial space limitations placed on Meridian Street in this area, the alley to alley limitation. At our end of the Meridian corridor, making the underutilized section of Peabody available and allowing greater height limits could foster positive development in the area, development that would be compatible with the residential and commercial neighbors as well as the park.

Permit me two additional comments. Having lived in large city environments, I am positive about the Urban Village concept. Before returning to Bellingham, I was with the University of Pittsburgh, and I bought a home in Pittsburgh in a mixed-use city neighborhood called Squirrel Hill. Three major thoroughfares passed through this

neighborhood. It contained a sizeable old-fashioned, "non-mall" shopping district, accessible by walking, that was always bustling. There were commercial buildings and churches of all sorts, shapes, and sizes. The residences ranged from single-family houses, to duplexes and triplexes, to apartment buildings of all sizes, to large estates owned by well-heeled people whose families built Pittsburgh. Wide varieties of buildings were clustered together. It was a very mixed neighborhood -- financially, culturally, physically, and functionally -- and it seemed to work well for everyone. Squirrel Hill was an urban village before an Urban Village was cool.

My second comment. Does pedestrian safety really require elaborate crosswalk infrastructure? I have spent a lot of time in the City of Los Angeles. In LA the base speed limit on city streets is 35 miles per hour, not 25. The cool thing: as a pedestrian, at an intersection without a traffic light, if you step off the curb on to the street, all traffic stops until you have crossed, many cars stopping from speeds of 50 miles per hour which are common on arterial streets like Figueroa and Wilshire. Unlike speed limits, LAPD clearly enforces the pedestrian right-of-way. I feel safer as a pedestrian in crazy LA than I do anywhere in Bellingham. If car dominated LA can be pedestrian friendly, why not Bellingham?

Thank you.



S A HARDY
<shardy40@msn.com>
06/13/2010 08:34 PM

To: Katie Franks <kfranks@cob.org>, <planningcommission@cob.org>
cc
bcc
Subject: Fountain District Urban Village Master Plan

History:

 This message has been replied to.

Attached are comments from the Cornwall Park Neighborhood Association in preparation for the June 17 public hearing. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you for all the work you do.

Rick Qualls, CPNA Chairman
Sheila Hardy, CPNA Vice Chairman

The New Busy is not the old busy. Search, chat and e-mail from your inbox. [Get started.](#)

June 14, 2010

Planning and Development Commission
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, Washington 98225

Dear Planning and Development Commission Members:

The Cornwall Park Neighborhood Association (CPNA) is pleased to add its support to that of the Columbia Neighborhood Association for the development of the City's Fountain District as laid out in the Draft Fountain District Urban Village Master Plan currently under consideration for approval by the City Planning and Development Commission.

The CPNA actively participated in the two year outreach effort headed by City staff to solicit public opinion, ideas and preferences. The options and plan have been presented and discussed with the public in multiple venues. We acknowledge that not all meeting participants or residents are completely satisfied with the plan. Postings to the city's comment tracker indicates that issues such as removing parking on one side of Elm St, routing bike traffic and building heights are not yet resolved. The neighborhood associations and the city will need to with continuing collaboration and information as plans proceed.

We feel that the plan can guide urban village development in a way that enhances commercial and retail ventures, improves quality of the neighborhood experience of the area, and provides the potential of higher residential density in the district core which will provide more activity and support infill.

Strong positives for inclusion: 1) building design standards; 2) staggered setbacks of upper stories; 3) streetscapes that create emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle traffic; 4) safety measures at street crossings including bulb-outs, full crossing marking and control; 5) no new curb cuts and reduction where possible in old ones; 6) designation of safe routes to schools for neighborhood students, especially for those crossing Meridian and Elm.

Residential density and building height are sticking points with some neighborhood residents. We feel that a limited number of buildings of 55' or higher, especially at the two sites in the study area currently limited only by the discretion of the planning director may, with further study, be appropriate. In-fill opportunities could then be utilized and enhance project sustainability.

Some meeting participants expressed concern that their homes would be in shadow. It would be useful if City staff could estimate the actual shadow for the two study areas and proposed scenarios along Meridian that might impact Kulshan and Peabody neighbors.

We look forward to continued cooperative effort and implementation as the project unfolds.

Sincerely,
Rick Qualls, CPNA Chairman
Sheila Hardy, CPNA Vice Chairman

cc. Katie Franks, (kfranks@cob.org)

