

Bellingham Neighborhood Coalition

Bellingham, Washington
BhamNeighborhoodCoalition@gmail.com

September 26, 2017

Mayor Kelli Linville
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
Via Email: MayorsOffice@cob.org

cc via email: Bellingham City Council
Bellingham Planning Director Rick Sepler
Bellingham Planning Commission

Re: *Questions to consider when addressing growth and affordable housing*

Dear Mayor Linville:

The *Bellingham Neighborhood Coalition* (BNC) is an alliance of community members working together to ensure that:

- The vitality and character of established single-family and multi-family neighborhoods are preserved as the city accommodates additional growth and development;
- Bellingham's urban villages are targeted for future infill projects; and
- Existing residents and taxpayers are not unfairly burdened with the costs associated with growth and development.

The majority of BNC members have been active participants in citywide planning processes for many years and have developed strong working relationships with you, members of City Council, and staff. We hope to build upon those relationships as the City continues to plan for the future.

The BNC has been closely following how the City has been planning for growth and the provision of affordable housing, and we are concerned that the City has not fully considered a number of critical issues. As a starting point, we are especially interested in these eight issues that we hope you and your staff will take the time to address.

Questions to consider when addressing growth and affordable housing

- 1) Considering the findings of the City's Comprehensive Plan, isn't it true that the City can accommodate anticipated growth over the next 20 years without any zoning changes or changes to the ADU ordinance? If so, what is the purpose of citywide zoning changes being contemplated by the Planning Commission?

- 2) Is the planning paradigm now dictated by the assumption that unlimited growth is possible, let alone necessary? How is that sustainable? Is there any truth to (or supporting evidence for) the implicit assumption that we can grow forever - or the explicit assumption that growth will make the City more affordable?
- 3) How does the City of Bellingham plan to deal with its contradictory dilemma? Namely, that the city works hard to make the city desirable, then tries to mitigate an "affordable housing" problem that can never be mitigated unless the city is less desirable.
- 4) What problem exactly is the City of Bellingham trying to solve in terms of affordable housing? Has any government, either alone or with developers, ever solved this problem?
- 5) If a person who lives elsewhere cannot afford to live in Bellingham, what responsibility does the City of Bellingham have to provide a place that is affordable?

What will be the cost burden of that "responsibility" on existing property owners?

Is it fair to displace someone who currently lives in Bellingham with someone who wants to move here but cannot afford to live here?

- 6) Isn't the discussion about growth more nuanced than the dualistic division into NIMBY vs. urbanist - or pro-growth vs. anti-growth - factions?

Is it possible that people who have been wrongly labeled 'anti-growth' have legitimate concerns about overcrowding, traffic congestion, neighborhood character, loss of open space, loss of non-subsidized affordable housing, and lack of enforcement of development regulations and existing zoning laws?

Is it possible that these people are primarily concerned about the City's approach to growth, including the City's top-down, cookie-cutter approach to neighborhood planning and the City's failure to:

- Enforce its own laws that prevent boarding houses and illegal units (including unpermitted detached ADUs) from proliferating in single-family neighborhoods; or
 - Complete an inventory of all existing ADUs (both legal and unpermitted) as required by the comprehensive plan before proceeding with the ADU update that will allow more; or
 - Require developers to pay the full impact fees that are allowed by state law; or
 - Require "concurrency," so that services such as transit keep pace with growth; or
 - Impose meaningful design standards, so that new growth helps create attractive neighborhoods?
- 7) Why doesn't the City charge impact fees that actually recover the "full proportionate share" of costs associated with growth?

- 8) Isn't it true that to significantly increase capacity in single-family neighborhoods, these homes would need to be torn down and replaced with higher density multi-family, which is what places like Ballard have experienced? Is that the City's intention? Is that what the City wants?

We look forward to working collaboratively with you, Council and staff, and we are very interested in your reply to these questions. We hope you will take the time to respond at your earliest convenience.

The BNC can be reached via email at BhamNeighborhoodCoalition@gmail.com, and we look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully yours,

The Bellingham Neighborhood Coalition