



P.O. Box 1517
Bellingham, WA 98227

November 23rd, 2010

Bellingham City Council
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

Dear members of the Bellingham City Council,

SUBJECT: Urban Village Vehicle Trip Reduction

Futurewise Whatcom is the local chapter of statewide land-use advocacy organization, Futurewise, whose mission is to promote healthy communities and cities while protecting farmland, forests and shorelines today and for future generations. We focus our local efforts on protecting rural and resource lands and promoting compact, livable cities, so as to prevent sprawl in Whatcom County. Our work ensures the state's Growth Management Act is adhered to and that citizens' interests are upheld by local planning decisions. Our chapter has over 600 local supporters, and is funded entirely by Whatcom County donations.

According to Whatcom County's 20 year planning process carried out last year, entitled 'Whatcom 2031,' Bellingham needs to demonstrate how it plans to accommodate roughly 4,000 more people in the next 20 years than it currently has the land capacity to do so.

Bellingham city officials and staff are addressing the gap by demonstrating an intent to implement zoning changes and planning policies that can accommodate additional population growth through Urban Village areas and a revitalized downtown core. We couldn't be more enthusiastic for this type of smart growth planning that will create vital, dense urban areas which are walkable, connected and affordable. Policies like these can help reduce pressure to convert valuable agricultural, open space and other resource lands into housing. Cities in Whatcom County need to take steps to prevent sprawl by encouraging infill and changing our current growth patterns that reward expensive and environmentally destructive development.

In our conversations with the development community we consistently hear about barriers to development and redevelopment within existing city limits. One primary barrier is cost. Bellingham has implemented an excellent Transportation Impact Fee system in the past to encourage development to pay for itself, but the fees exists within the larger context of Whatcom County. Outside of the city, there are no transportation impact fees. This is one of the factors that makes greenfield development in rural areas and around the urban fringe much cheaper than smart development inside the city. This disparity in impact fees creates incentives to development outside of cities and onto rural county land.

From a growth management perspective, the Urban Village Vehicle Trip Reduction proposal that city staff have put forward is an important example of integrating transportation and land use planning. It ties further implementation of an infill land use strategy to multimodal transportation policies adopted in the Transportation Element of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan:

Protecting Rural & Resource Land + Promoting Compact, Livable Cities = Preventing Sprawl

Steering Committee: Ramona Abbott, Allison Aurand, Vanessa Blackburn, Todd Donovan, Wendy Harris, Dan McShane **Chapter Director:** Cathy Lehman
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Transportation Vision – 2: Development patterns that encourage walking, biking and transit use are fostered through incentives and zoning regulations, including provisions for developments which allow people to live within walking distance of shopping and employment.

Transportation Goal – 32: Emphasize and commit to the implementation of infill and Urban Village land use strategies to create residential densities that will support safe, viable and convenient opportunities to use transportation modes other than the private automobile.

Transportation Policy – 1: Consider revision of land use plans to allow densities and mixes of uses that reduce the number and length of vehicle trips and increase the opportunity to use public transportation and non-motorized modes of travel.

Transportation Policy – 2: Reinforce the link between land use and public transportation by encouraging transit-oriented development along and within ¼ mile of WTA Primary Transit Network corridors and near urban villages, town centers, and neighborhood centers.

Transportation Policy – 4: Provide development incentives (such as increased density, increased square footage, and parking requirement reductions) for new development located within Urban Villages and along and within ¼ mile of WTA Primary Transit Network corridors when amenities for transit users, bicyclists and pedestrians area included, while minimizing impacts to surrounding residential neighborhoods.

This proposal is also supported by the first 4 goals of Washington State’s Growth Management Act, including: focus urban growth in urban areas, reduce sprawl, provide efficient transportation, and encourage affordable housing.

Ultimately, it will facilitate three fundamentally important things:

- Make urban development more competitive with rural sprawl,
- Reward urban development that reduces trip generation,
- Help spur development in Urban Villages, where we can accommodate the city’s future population growth most wisely and efficiently.

This proposal demonstrates an excellent understanding of the barriers to infill and incentives necessary to move us toward livable density. It incentivizes smart growth alternatives to sprawling, expensive development patterns, and makes it easier for the right kind of development to occur.

We heartily support the proposal drafted by staff regarding vehicle trip reduction in urban villages, and enthusiastically recommend Council adoption.

Sincerely,

Cathy Lehman
Chapter Director