

FAIRHAVEN NEIGHBORHOOD QUESTIONNAIRE

April 24, 2007

Background

In late February and early March of 2007, the non-profit Fairhaven Neighbors association mailed over one thousand questionnaires to the residents, landowners, tenants, and business owners in the Fairhaven neighborhood, with a high response 36% of all questionnaires. The purpose of the questionnaire was to guide the neighborhood and the city in planning and updating the neighborhood's Land Use laws and Neighborhood Plan.

Following the city's Planning Academy program for the neighborhoods in the fall of 2006, Fairhaven Neighbors proposed a revision of the Fairhaven Design Review code, a law which concerns the size and appearance of buildings in the area in and around the historic district of Fairhaven. The Planning Commission and then the City Council will consider this proposal in the summer and fall of 2007. In addition, the Fairhaven neighborhood is also working on a proposed update of the 25-year-old Neighborhood Plan, which is due to be submitted for consideration in December of 2007. The results of this questionnaire will serve to inform both of these planning processes.

Executive Summary

When asked to rank aspects of Fairhaven that are most important to *preserve*, residents, property owners, and business owners all gave the highest ranking by a considerable margin to Historic Character. This was followed in importance by Pedestrian Emphasis, then Natural Habitat, Views of the Bay, and Waterfront Access, in that order. When asked to rank what aspects of Fairhaven they would most like to see changed or *improved*, respondents gave the highest ranking to Adequate Parking, Pedestrian Emphasis, and Natural Habitat. These were followed next in ranking by Thriving Businesses and Neighborhood Character, and Affordable Housing. These results indicate that a pedestrian friendly environment is considered both of central importance and in greatest need of improvement.

The large majority of residents, land owners, and business owners of Fairhaven are generally satisfied with many of the basic services provided by the city, such as our parks and trails, public facilities, recycling program, transit system, police, fire and emergency medical services. In addition, the majority of respondents endorse the preservation of the neighborhood character and historic character of Fairhaven, in agreement with the planning priorities established in the city's Comprehensive Plan. The clear majority of people also support the use of height limits to protect the character of Fairhaven and

height limits to protect views. A strong majority would like to see improved access to the Bay from the core of Fairhaven, as recommended by the Waterfront Futures Group.

Opinions of the parking and traffic situation in the residential areas of Fairhaven were mixed, evenly split between those who say the situation is bad and those who say it is good, with the largest number of people answering that it is neither good nor bad. In contrast, a large majority of respondents say that the parking and traffic situation in the commercial core of Fairhaven is bad.

The majority of respondents to the questionnaire said that the city's Planning Department was too lenient on development, particularly development in Fairhaven, and they felt that neighborhood character and views are not adequately protected by current city practices. The majority of respondents supports a strengthening of rules to protect neighborhood character, and also supports the idea of maximum density limits, to limit in-fill beyond a certain level. The vast majority also supports assigning high priority to the protection of Padden Creek's salmon population, and people were split or neutral on the matter of whether the city does an adequate job of protecting Padden Lagoon from stormwater run-off.

A large majority of respondents (3 out of 4 people) felt that a large building (10-stories) would have a significantly harmful impact on the area overall, particularly on neighborhood character and on parking and traffic conditions. The great majority of respondents (4 out of 5), both residents and business owners, support a 35-foot height limit in the Fairhaven commercial core area. Support for a 54-foot limit in the core, which is currently allowed with City Council approval in some parts of the core, is supported by half of all respondents. Importantly, the great majority (83%) of those people who disagree with the 54-foot limit support the 35-foot limit instead. Thus, there is far greater support for the lower height limit than for the higher limit. In fact, the great majority of people (84%) agreed with one or both of the two suggested height limits, while only 5% of respondents disagreed with both height limits.

Questionnaires were coded by geographic region, and respondents were asked to indicate whether they were resident owners, tenants, business property owners, or business tenants, and how long they have been in Fairhaven. In general, the pattern of answers was similar for all categories and regions. In other words, opinions varied only a little depending on where people lived/worked, whether a person is a resident or a business operator, and whether a person is new to the neighborhood or a long-time member of the community. One exception was in the ranking of aspects of Fairhaven most in need of improvement. People in the residential areas tended to rank "pedestrian emphasis" highest and "parking" the next highest, whereas people in the commercial areas ranked "parking" first and "pedestrian emphasis" second.