

*“First we build our structures, and then our structures build us.”*

~Winston Churchill

November 14, 2007

Tim Stewart, Director  
Dept. of Planning and Community Development  
City of Bellingham  
210 Lottie Street  
Bellingham, WA 98225

Re: Fairhaven Harbor application DRC2007-00021

Director Stewart,

One of the guiding principles of Bellingham’s Comprehensive Plan is to accommodate growth and infill “in a manner that complements neighborhood character.” It is in this spirit that we respectfully but strongly request that the Planning Department condition approval of Fairhaven Harbor’s latest design review permit application upon a reduction in the height of the southeastern tower.

Section 20.26 of the Municipal Code is clear in its call for new development to be in harmony of scale with the existing historic buildings, in order to prevent adverse aesthetic and other impacts. The proposed southeastern tower would be several stories taller than even the largest existing historic building, and would be over *twice as tall* as the average height of the historic buildings. It is our opinion that the new proposal, while an improvement over the previous two submissions, is still harmfully out of character and not in harmony of scale with Fairhaven, and would result in a material degradation of the local community if approved as submitted.

This opinion is widely held and supported within our community. As you will recall, Fairhaven Neighbors recently surveyed over one thousand stakeholders in Fairhaven, including hundreds of local business operators, property owners, and residents. The clear majority of people supported the imposition of height limits to protect the character of Fairhaven and height limits to protect views. The large majority of respondents (3 out of 4 people) felt that a large (10-story) building would have a significantly harmful impact on the area overall, particularly on neighborhood character. The great majority of people (84%) supported either a 35-foot or a 54-foot height limit, with most preferring the lower limit; only 5% of respondents disagreed with both height limits. In other words, the people of Fairhaven are in agreement with the Design Review code in insisting that size limits on new buildings are essential to the preservation of community character. We ask that the City uphold both the purpose of the Design Review law and the democratic will of the community, by requiring a further reduction in the scale of the southeastern tower.

Our city is changing and we recognize the need to provide for growth in a way that avoids sprawl by providing for denser districts of development that encourage ecologically sustainable, pedestrian friendly, work-live-play opportunities. The reality is that Fairhaven is well on the way to this goal and already approaches 20 residential units/acre. Moreover, reducing the height of the southeastern tower would still allow residential densities approaching 30 or more units/acre on site. Put simply, reducing the scale of this one building will allow Fairhaven to satisfy multiple Comprehensive Plan goals without sacrificing one goal to another goal. We can have infill and density, without overshooting the mark and damaging the invaluable character of Fairhaven that so many people cherish and which is the key to its economic and social success.

We would like to compliment the applicants for many fine features of their proposal. The mixed-used buildings along Harris and 9<sup>th</sup> Street will create and sustain a more vibrant and prosperous Fairhaven, and the architectural character of the western residential buildings is widely admired. We appreciate the substantial underground, on-site parking included in the plan. We are also glad the proposal honors the agreed-upon closing of the 8<sup>th</sup> Street right-of-way, which will help to preserve the life-sustaining qualities of Padden Creek.

We were extremely impressed with the clarity and vision expressed by Dan Pike, as a mayoral candidate. We believe the cogent argument he made in his letter of April 26, 2007, eloquently supports our request for height limits, and therefore, we have attached his letter in its entirety. (Portions of his letter can also be found on page 8 of 11 in the Public Comment Tracker -- Fairhaven Design Review Proposal, previously submitted to City.)

We look forward to your decision, in the belief that the City will uphold the letter and spirit of the Fairhaven Design Review law and will act in the best long-term interests of our community.

Respectfully,

Vince Biciunas  
President, Fairhaven Neighbors

CC: Bellingham City Council  
Mayor-elect Dan Pike  
Bellingham Planning Commission

Attachment: Letter from Dan Pike to Planning Commission, April 26, 2007