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## Samish neighborhood plan in limbo

■ *Plan expected to be presented to council prior to Dec. 1.*

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**BELLINGHAM** – The Samish Neighborhood Plan failed to pass the Bellingham Planning Commission after a lengthy hearing on Oct. 25. The meeting, which took place in the City Council chambers, drew a crowd of roughly 20 residents, developers, and city planners.

The greatest overall concerns for the plan from both advocates and opponents were the process and the land use map. With no procedure in place to create the plan and limited time for doing so, the land-use map attached

to the plan was left untouched, meaning zoning in place since the 1980s will remain in place until amended. These larger issues were given a wide berth, and the planning commission decided there would be progress soon, but the

plan itself needed to be passed as quickly as possible to meet a Dec. 1 deadline for submission.

All agreed the plan will act as a blueprint for further neighborhood plans, and the learning experience

in its creation will prove invaluable for further attempts by neighborhoods to have an input in their growth.

Tim Wynn, president of the Samish

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Neighborhood Association (SNA), began comments on the plan by giving the history of its creation and subsequent tweaking process. Step by step, he went over the plan as it had been and how it had been revised to address concerns of both the commission and the neighborhood residents late to the table. Following his summary, and a short number of clarifications,

the meeting was opened to further comments on the plan.

One concern voiced by Planning Commissioner David Auer was the addition of the words "and residents" throughout the document. Auer felt this wording in some way compromised the representative nature of the SNA, and seemed to disagree that the document covered the needs of the Samish Neighborhood.

"You should tack on business owners, developers, and property owners to be truly inclusive," Auer stated in response to the mention of residents in the plan.

Members of the planning department also expressed concerns about the plan's statements regarding traffic flow, especially

for the road that continues east of Old Fairhaven Parkway up the hill past I-5, known as

the "stair steps". Here, the road climbs the hill from 36th Street to 40th Street where it enters Samish Way from Wilkin Street. The narrow road with multiple 90-degree corners lacks sidewalks and bike lanes.

In response to concerns the road was becoming a de-facto

arterial for high traffic flow, planner Chris Comeau stated it was an official arterial that simply hadn't been mentioned previously. All suggestions of slowing traffic through the area were dismissed, aside from a remote possibility of a single electronic sign if funding, time, and the electrical power in the area permitted. In response to the need for sidewalks, Comeau stated that such things would be considered in the same manner already in place, which they felt addressed needs adequately. As a concession, he said they would work with the neighborhood to make sure basic safety measures such as bus stops for neighborhood children were put in place. There was a general sense of distaste for the plan, and Co-

meau frequently reasserted the plan held no regulatory power, but was strictly

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**"You should tack on business owners, developers, and property owners to be truly inclusive,"**

**- David Auer, Planning Commissioner**

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advisory.

Developer David Edelstein, a property owner in the Samish neighborhood, voiced his anxiety the plan would stand in the way of his business interests. Pointing to an editorial from the

## 4 • SAMISH

local daily, he stated neighborhood residents should not be involved in the planning process. His view was that affordable housing, as he saw it, would not be put in place unless such development was forced by the city in areas such as his land.

Planning Commissioner Jim Bishop attempted to alleviate Edelstein's worries that development would be discouraged by pointing to lines within the neighborhood plan that appear to actually encourage responsible development and growth.

"If it is not specifically allowed, it doesn't have any teeth," Edelstein scoffed, unsatisfied with anything short of explicit approval of his plans to develop.

Developer Brian Dagneault took a different approach, having joined the neighborhood association and continually attended meetings to become involved with the community and their plans. Representing the largest single land owner in the Samish Neighborhood, he questioned the Planning Commission to make sure they too viewed the neighborhood plan's language as open to "forward looking development". Dagneault then stated how much he enjoyed working with the neighbors, and said he felt comfortable with the support of the community.

Unfortunately, time ran out on the evening meeting, and despite progress, many present felt there was still information to be ironed out before the document is given to the City Council.

The neighborhood plan was referred to a work session that occurred Nov. 1. The results of that meeting have not been fully released, and city planners were unavailable for comment on the plan in the days following the meeting. Presentation of the Samish Neighborhood plan to the City Council is still expected later this month. ■WI