

## Proposals to Increase Access to Housing for All Income Levels – City of Bellingham

Dear Mayor Fleetwood,

The Housing Subcommittee of the Whatcom Business Advisory Council had participation by a wide spectrum of community members - from funders to builders to sellers and suppliers of homes, both non-profit and for-profit. We came together as people who care about the present and future livability of our community. We did not find complete agreement on every point, but we all agree that many more permanently affordable homes are needed. Many of the following ideas support housing supply generally, based on the belief that availability of housing will ease housing affordability at many levels. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these ideas with you and help implement them.

Affordable housing is defined as a household spending 30% or less of its income on housing costs. This includes costs such as principal and interest, rent, utilities, and insurance. We believe that everyone, at every income level, should have access to a full range of affordable housing types, from studios and apartments to detached single family homes.

Overall, the City should:

1. Reduce the complexity and the cost of compliance of code.
2. Prioritize density in existing city boundaries while supporting limited annexations.
3. Provide incentives for permanently affordable home ownership and rentals for occupants whose incomes range from 50% to 150% of area median income.

We request that you:

Budget:

1. Add an FTE planner to focus on affordable housing in Bellingham, paid for through the Homefund, in addition to the Planning Director's request for an additional planner and permit tech.
2. Hire staff to manage the Multifamily Tax Exemptions of 8 and 12 years, and add an exemption of 20 years for permanently affordable housing.
3. Prioritize filling the vacant admin position to coordinate and enforce rental inspections, and fill the other vacant positions in Planning.
4. Use EDI funds as a long term, low interest loan to pay for onsite infrastructure for affordable housing.
5. Administer all the Bellingham Housing Levy locally, instead of shifting the homeownership portion to the Washington State Housing Finance Commission.

Land Use/Building permits:

1. Approve land use permits within 4 months, and building permits within 3
2. Adopt voluntary inclusionary zoning, with incentives for permanently affordable homeownership and rentals.
3. Adopt as a pilot program, an ordinance similar to Spokane C36232 to allow ADU, duplexes, and up to 4-plexes in all single family zones.
4. Allow building permits to be approved by 3rd party outside sources
5. Enact digital permitting for land use permits.
6. Infill Toolkit (ITK)
  - a. Allow residential with binding site plan
  - b. Simplify and expand the ITK to all residential zones including urban growth areas

- c. Remove the Floor Area Ratio from the ITK.
  - d. Remove greenfactor requirements from ITK
  - e. Make ITK a Type 1 process (up to 4 units), allow by right, and reduce design review by adopting Form Based Code.
  - f. Reduce design standards in ITK, especially the ones that are consistently modified by the Planning Director or Hearing Examiner.
7. Allow single staircase in multifamily buildings
  8. Measure floor area to exterior of stem wall not exterior of siding (especially for ADU, or those using exterior insulation).
  9. Extend all city and county land use permit timelines to a minimum of 5 years to align the Infill Toolkit with stormwater permits, development agreements, and wetland permits.
  10. Extend Critical Area Permits and Consultant reports with the Preliminary Plat or Infill Housing Permit.
  11. Allow applicants to bond clearing, grading, and stormwater permits before Public Facilities Construction application approval.
  12. Expedite permitting for permanently affordable housing (complete permit sets approved within 90 days).
  13. Preserve existing mobile home parks.
  14. Increase the earned density bonus in BMC 20.29 (the demonstration ordinance) to 200%
  15. Add back-up signers at the City for the subdivision final plat mylar.
  16. Create a minimum 7 day notice for a Hearing Examiner date.
  17. Eliminate "Rule of 3" in regards to the number of unrelated people living together in a home.
  18. Increase the notice period for rent increases to 90 days.

#### Planning Department Staff

1. Schedule informal monthly meetings between Planning director, staff, land use consultants, tenants, and for-profit and non-profit developers for feedback in both directions.
2. Require phone calls and emails to be returned within two business days.
3. Tighten coordination between Public Works and Planning to avoid conflicts and confusion.

#### Comprehensive Plan/Consolidated Plan

1. Support the following annexations in the 2026 Comp Plan: South Caitac UGA Reserve, Yew St, and Alderwood.
2. Create a wetlands mitigation bank available to developers.
3. Expand the analysis of cost burdened households by income, to 200% of MFI.
4. Target an average rental vacancy of 3-5% for all income levels, and available housing supply of 4-6 months for all income levels.

We also request that you support the following items in your interactions with our State Legislators:

1. Legalize ADU's across the state
2. Change single family zoning to allow higher density and more housing types
3. Reform condo law to appropriate limit liability to condo developers and builders.
4. Increase flexibility for funding and incentives for workforce housing.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to hearing your feedback on these proposals.



The following organizations support these proposals:

	Organization Name	Signed By	Title	Date
1.	CAZ Construction		Manager	8/17/22
2.	Kvishan CLT		Executive Director	8/18/22
3.	MULSAT Group Inc.		President	8/29/22
4.	Allsop, Inc		President	8/30/22
5.	Port of Bellingham		Commissioner	8/30/22
6.	AVT CONSULTING LLC		PRESIDENT/OWNER	8/30/22
7.	Birch Equipment		CEO/OWNER	8/30/22
8.	AGC OF WASHINGTON		N. DISTRICT MANAGER	8/31/22
9.	MELLS ELECTRIC Co		CEO/OWNER	8/31/22
10.	Faber Construction		Owner / BD	8/31/22

DANSON CONSTRUCTION CEO/OWNER 8/31/22

Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce President/CEO 9/1/22

Rob LEE BRAWE EXECUTIVE OFFICER 9/15/2022