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Mr. Jeff Thomas, Planning Director
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham, WA 98225

February 24, 2012

Dear Mr. Thomas:

**Re: DRAFT FAIRHAVEN URBAN VILLAGE PLAN
COMMENTS FROM HASKELL CORPORATION**

In response to the City's invitation for comment on the staff draft Fairhaven Urban Village Plan (UVP) published December 21, 2011, we are providing additional comments to our verbal testimony on February 16, 2012 on behalf of The Haskell Corporation, owners of the undeveloped property along the south side of Harris Avenue at 6th Street in the Fairhaven business district.

The Haskell family has lived in Bellingham for over one century and The Haskell Corporation has owned the Harris Avenue site for more than 35 years. The City of Bellingham current zoning is Industrial, as designated in Area 4 of the Fairhaven Neighborhood Plan. The site is presently afforded the right to develop for a broad mix of commercial and industrial uses in accordance with the Bellingham Municipal Code. Located in the proposed Fairhaven Urban Village Plan boundary, the Haskell site is one of the very few undeveloped parcels that is flat, fronts on an existing arterial, has immediate access to all utilities, is adjacent to the regional transportation hub (rail, intercity buses, ferries), is buffered from residential areas to the south, and has prominent views opportunities in all directions. The site is a great opportunity for the economic vitality of Fairhaven and all of Bellingham.

Several aspects of the current staff draft plan require additional work so that a complete document will obtain community support to insure adoption by the City Council. A critical component for the Haskell Corporation is the need for a very clear set of development regulations and a very clear review procedure. The current 31 year old Neighborhood Plan coupled with the existing City Code (BMC Title 20) is a complex and contradictory set of regulations. Over the years, our client has spent many hours at great cost to design projects compliant with City zoning, only to meet significant challenges to minor design details that stop the permit review process.

The Fairhaven UVP provides the opportunity to correct this problem if it will 1) define a clear Fairhaven vision, 2) adopt clear land use plans, 3) adopt clear development policies, 4) adopt clear development regulations, and 5) define a clear permit review process. The City's approach should incorporate a proscriptive design palette as an

*Comment Letter on behalf of The Haskell Corporation
To the City of Bellingham regarding the
Staff December 2011 Draft Fairhaven UVP*

incentive for good design, instead of another set of punitive regulations that stifle good design and development.

The Haskell Corporation continues to support the Fairhaven planning effort. The next version of the UVP should confirm Fairhaven's status as a Tier 1 Urban Village; be developed according to professional planning and engineering standards; comply with the City Comprehensive Plan and the goals of the State Growth Management Act; be internally consistent; and should encourage investment in Fairhaven. Areas for specific improvement include:

- A. Storm water management – City and State regulations create obstacles for urban village development as more land is consumed for on-site storm water facilities. Fairhaven is a good candidate for regional detention or water quality treatment facilities to benefit multiple properties. Alternatives should be considered and proposed within the UVP utility section and the capital improvement section.
- B. Transportation – Public Works staff stated the current arterial system is adequate to serve Fairhaven. Language in the Transportation section should more clearly affirm this conclusion. Additional language should be added confirming the importance of the existing truck route serving the waterfront.
- C. Mixed Uses – Haskell supports a broad mix of commercial, industrial and residential uses on their site. The current staff draft encourages mixed uses in other locations, such as Port property, however the Haskell site is best suited for new development of this type. The next version of the draft UVP should reflect this opportunity and provide a broad range of all uses.
- D. Building Heights – Regulations adopted in other urban villages (Fountain District, Samish Way) allow building heights taller than those proposed by staff in the Fairhaven UVP. More appropriate building heights for Fairhaven should be provided within the proscriptive design regime recommended above.

Additional comments will be offered at future hearings. The Haskell Corporation should remain designated as a Party of Record as the City continues its work on the Fairhaven Urban Village Plan. Their mailing address is PO Box 917, Bellingham, WA 98227. We look forward to reviewing a more complete staff draft soon.

On behalf of The Haskell Corporation,



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Cc: Bellingham Planning Commission
Mayor Kelli Linville