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1	No in-person site visit was conducted, but the undersigned viewed the subject property	
2	and its environs on Google l	viaps.
3	Testimony:	to the state of th
4	At the hearing the following individuals presented testimony under oath:	
5	Ali Taysi, Applicant Representative	
6	Vicky Neufeld, Bellingham Reentry Center Manager	
7	Sara Ullman, Bellingham Planner II	
8	Exhibits:	
9	At the open record hearing, the following exhibits were admitted in the record:	
10 11	Exhibit 1 Planning and Community Development Department Staff Memo with the following attachments:	
12 13	Attachment A1	Digital archived record for 2014 Conditional Use Permit Hearing: Search Results: HE-14-PL-030 (cob.org)
13	Attachment A2	Hearing Examiner Order HE-14-PL-030
15	Attachment A3	2014 Conditional Use Permit Staff Report
16	Attachment A4	Certificate of Occupancy BLD2014-00116
17	Attachment A5	As-Built Plan 2015
18	Attachment A6	Approved Landscape Plan BLD2015-00116
19	Attachment A7	Documentation of Hearing Examiner Conditions Met Prior to Building Permit Issuance
20	Attachment B1	Hearing Request Letter
21	Attachment B2	Conditions Compliance Letter
22	Attachment B3	Conditions Compliance Analysis
23	Attachment B4	Owner Letter re DOC Lease
24	Attachment B5	Bellingham Police Department Call Data
25	Attachment B6	Bellingham Police Department Call Records
26	Attachment B7	Bellingham Police Department Memorandum 12.12.23
27	Attachment B8	Reentry Center Handbook July 2023
28 29	Attachment B9	Comprehensive Plan Goals and Policies

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29 30 Neighborhood and carries an underlying zoning designation of Residential Multi/Multiple, requiring a density of 1,000 square feet of lot area per unit. Surrounding properties are developed with single-family and multifamily residential uses, some of which are rentals, many inhabited by students from the nearby colleges. Exhibits 1 and 1.A2.

- At the July 2014 hearing on the CUP, there was extensive public comment both 4. in support of and opposing CUP approval. In their written comments and public testimony at hearing, project opponents submitted the following concerns (as stated in the September 2014 decision):
 - Neighbors opposed to the proposal generally felt that it was not appropriate to increase the existing impacts of having a work release program on the surrounding residential neighborhood that houses many families with children and many young college students. Some asserted that a smaller halfway house was better for their property values and their enjoyment of the homes. Some argued that property values have not gone up in the vicinity of the site as much as they should have given increases in other parts of the City. They felt there is less impact from student residents because they have not been convicted of crimes. Others commented that it is not fair to the existing residents to bring in new people expressly competing for local jobs.
 - Some comments expressed support for the idea and practice of work release programs but felt that this is an inappropriate location. Neighbors felt that the Sehome neighborhood is already bearing the brunt of impacts of a work release facility and that it is not fair to double the capacity of the existing facility instead of placing new capacity in some other community.
 - Some comments indicated that people feel compelled to avoid the front porch area of the existing facility due to feeling uncomfortable with people lounging there, and some have experienced stares or "cat call" types of comments from porch occupants. One person noted being "creeped out" by walking past the facility.
 - Several comments asserted a concern about increased risk of crime, particularly against females, students, and the inebriated who can be expected to pass this address. Some noted that the area already experiences a higher rate of crime, drug problems, and homelessness than other Bellingham neighborhoods and that adding more criminal residents was not warranted. Some expressed concerns that particular

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29 30 types of crimes did not render individual program applicants ineligible. Several comments expressed the desire to prohibit an increase in the number of convicted felons in the neighborhood.

- Some comments from property owners and real estate professionals asserted that the existing facility adversely affects the values of the surrounding properties. Some alleged that the work release program has had a chilling effect on their ability to rent their properties.
- The owners of 1123 N. Garden Street contended that the proposal negatively affects the livability, walk-ability, and desirability of the neighborhood and gives an increased perception of a crime problem. They stated that they always disclose the work release program's presence when showing their duplex to prospective tenants and have had potential renters decline to live there based on its presence next door. They personally have experienced, or stated they have heard tenants and neighbors of the facility complain of, harassing comments from participants, cat calls, parking congestion, delivery vehicle obstruction issues, smoking, noise, visitor trespass in their parking and on their parcel, and other concerns. They expressed the concern that when the proposed building no longer serves as a service care facility and is converted to multifamily housing, there would be insufficient parking. They asserted that the record contains no evidence of a need for expanded work release facilities at this location.

Exhibit 1.A2.

- Approved CUP2014-00006 contained five conditions, stated in full in Exhibit 5. 1.A2. After requesting a hearing for the required review of the CUP, the Applicant submitted a letter detailing compliance with the conditions imposed in CUP2014-00006 addressing ongoing compliance. This finding contains subparts (following the numbering of the conditions) addressing each condition, regarding which the Applicant offered the following information.
 - 1. [Maximum service care facility capacity] The proposed additional structure was built pursuant to CUP2014-0006 and BLD2015-00116 (along with plumbing, mechanical, electrical, and other associated permits) and has been operating as a service care facility since receiving occupancy certification. Known as the Bellingham Reentry Center, capacity of the combined two structures has at no time exceeded 50 residents. Neither building has been, or will in the foreseeable future be, converted to any other use. Washington

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State Department of Corrections recently signed a lease renewal extending through 2027 and plans to operate the facility at least until that date.

- 2. [Required review of CUP after five years] The required review of the approved CUP is under consideration in the instant proceedings.
- 3. [Operations requirements]
 - a) During the course of operations since certificate of occupancy was issued, neither the operator nor the property owner have been made aware of any complaints from surrounding property owners, residents, or guests. The Applicant submitted that the fears expressed by project opponents at the 2014 public hearing have not materialized. Service care facility residents on-site are advised of and required to abide by a strict code of conduct while residing in the facility, where they are under 24-hour on-site supervision and can only enter/exit the facility with approval of the operations manager. There is no evidence of occurrences of residents engaging in harassment of passersby. Noise from the facility is limited by the required rules of conduct and is believed to be less than that from surrounding multifamily and other rental properties.
 - b) Condition No. 3b required compliance with the resident handbook offered at the hearing and included in the record of the 2014 proceedings at Exhibit 1, Attachment G. Since the Department of Corrections (DOC) has taken over management of the facility, residents have been required to abide by a similar set of rules that is implemented at all DOC reentry programs. The current Reentry Center Handbook (July 2023), which is in the record at Exhibit 1.B8, meets the intent of this condition.
 - c) There is a sign posted in a prominent location between the two structures, visible from the N. Garden Street sidewalk, that informs that the structures on site contain a service care facility and that provides contact information.
 - d) When the CUP was approved in 2014, the existing service care facility was managed by a private agency contracted with the state DOC. Since the expansion of the facility occurred, DOC has taken over direct supervision of the reentry center. Staffing at the facility was increased when DOC took over and has been consistent with state-adopted standards for reentry center facilities, which exceeds the specific supervision levels imposed by Condition No. 3d.
 - e) Currently the reentry center is not operating; it is under a "warm closure" and will reopen as soon as staffing is hired to fill all positions. Since

approval of the 2014 CUP, at no time has resident occupancy exceeded 50 residents for both buildings, nor 25 in the new building addressed as 1125 N. Garden Street.

- 4. [Design requirements intended to ensure the new structure would be compatible with the essential character of the neighborhood]
 - a) Condition No. 4a required changes to the exterior of the Dellinger House should meet the National Parks Service Secretary's Standards for Rehabilitation. The Applicant indicated that the only change to the exterior of the Dellinger House was removal of one window on the south facing façade and installation of two new windows next to the former window location. The new windows matched the design of the existing windows. The Applicant submitted that this minor change was not in violation of any applicable rehabilitation standards and was conducted under building permit BLD2017-0426. Any future changes, if made, would continue to comply with this condition pursuant to the City building permit process.
 - b) Condition No. 4b addresses future potential uses of the new building; however, no alternate uses have been made nor are planned; the DOC has indicated that the Bellingham Reentry Center is a high priority facility and that it intends to continue its operation.
 - c) Condition No. 4c prohibited windows in the new building from looking directly down on or directly into the windows of the building to the southwest. Compliance was ensured through the building permit process. Additionally, since construction of the new building, the former single-family residence on the lot to the southwest was demolished and a multifamily structure was built.
 - d) Condition No. 4d established parking and fencing requirements. Eleven striped parking stalls were provided along the alley when the second structure was developed, which remain in use. These stalls remain in place today. A fence was built along the south property line adjacent to the alley.
 - e) The historic stone wall along Garden and Chestnut Streets was preserved, except that a five-foot wide opening was created in it to provide sidewalk access to 1125 N. Garden Street.
 - f) The second structure was reviewed and approved pursuant to building permit BLD2015-00116, which review included ensuring adherence to

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- the CUP plans and drawings, conditions, and other all applicable standards.
- g) During construction several large evergreen trees were removed. The developer's landscape plan, reviewed and accepted by the City through BLD2015-00116, provided for replacement trees. Trees and other landscaping were installed pursuant to the approved plan.
- h) No street trees on Chestnut or Garden Street were removed.
- i) Condition No. 4i was imposed based on a preliminary design that contemplated a parallel ADA parking stall on N. Garden Street in front of the building. During building permit review, it was determined that no ADA stall was necessary. The plans were amended, and all constructed improvements were installed consistent with the approved plans.
- i) Reentry center site lighting was reviewed during the building permit process. The current lighting on site was installed pursuant to the approved building permit plans.
- 5. [Police/Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)]
 - a. Through building permit review, City Staff routed project plans to the Bellingham Police Department (BPD) for CPTED analysis. The plans were approved, and the project was built consistent with the approved
 - b. Lighting, which was included in the CPTD analysis, was installed consistent with the approved lighting plan.
 - c. A member of the Bellingham Police Department participates in screening potential residents for placement at the center, and the facility maintains regular communication with the Police Department.
 - d. Bicycle storage is provided on a level pad between the two buildings in a well-lit area that is accessible from on-site pedestrian walkways.
 - e. When the permit was applied for, the facility was operated by a contractor who performed services for Washington State Department of Corrections. However, since permit approval, DOC has assumed direct management of the reentry center. Because the State is the operator, there is no license, contract, or other legally binding written approval document between the State and the operator.

Exhibits 1.A4, 1.A5, 1.A6, 1.A7, 1.B2, 1.B3, 1.B4, and 2; Testimony of Ali Taysi and Vicky Neufeld.

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Exhibits 1.A4, 1.A5, 1.A6, 1.A7, 1.B2, 1.B3, 1.B4, and 2; Testimony of Ali Taysi and Vicky Neufeld.

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- The City issued a certificate of occupancy for the expanded facility on August 6. 21, 2017. Exhibit 1.A4. BPD call records requested from BPD and submitted in evidence show only eight calls to the Police regarding incidents at the facility since the new building has been occupied. The majority of these incidents resulted from calls to BPD by the operator for things happening on-site involving or among residents and employees; none were for incidents involving alleged crimes by residents against other members of the community. The Bellingham Reentry Center Manager Vicky Neufeld testified at hearing that the BPD call records may not reflect all calls, because she believes she personally called BPD on at least one occasion in 2021 or 2022, which is not reflected in the exhibit. However, she testified that the number of calls is very small. On several occasions, staff at the facility have called the Police and/or been relied upon by the wider community for assistance with incidents unrelated to the facility, on at least one occasion providing first aid to a passerby in need. Additionally, due to the nature of the use, residents are under 24-hour on-site supervision and can only enter/exit the facility with approval of the operations manager. To the best of the knowledge of management, there have been no occurrences of residents harassing passersby (as was testified to during the 2014 CUP public comment). Exhibits 1.B3, 1.B5, and 1.B6; Vicky Neufeld Testimony.
- As submitted by the Applicant, the Washington State Department of Corrections 7. has indicated that the Bellingham Re-Entry Center is one of their high priority facilities, not least because it is the only facility they operate north of Seattle. DOC's current lease extends through 2027, and the agency has indicated the intent to continue to operate the facility at this location for the foreseeable future. Exhibit 1.B4; Vicky Neufeld Testimony.
- In sum, Applicant representatives submitted that operation of the facility has 8. been in compliance with all conditions of the issued permit and that the facility has functioned better than anticipated without any complaints from the community. Based on these facts, the Applicant submitted that no new or additional conditions are required to ensure compliance with the issued CUP and the criteria for CUP approval. Given this successful demonstration of operations and compliance, the Applicant requested to be excused from future re-review of the CUP and also suggested that Condition No. 2 requiring re-review be stricken. Exhibits 1.B2 and 1.B3; Testimony of Ali Taysi and Vicky Neufeld.
- Planning Staff indicated there have been two Code Enforcement matters at the 9. property since the 2014 CUP approval; both related to expired electrical permits that had been issued but never received final inspection (CIA2015-00178 and

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- Planning Staff reviewed the ongoing operation of the facility pursuant to the 2014 10. CUP for compliance with the criteria for conditional use permit approval, the first of which requires a proposed conditional use to promote the health, safety, and general welfare of the community. Citing information that was admitted in the 2014 CUP record, Staff called out studies that document lower rates of recidivism for persons who transition out of incarceration through work release facilities and indicated that the facility, as a safe, supported option for individuals re-entering the community, provides a significant benefit to the local and regional community exceeding the cost of the program. The Bellingham Reentry Center provides residents computer access, transportation to Narcotics Anonymous, transportation to local church services, and a Community Resource Binder with information about available assistance programs in the community. In addition to support for formerly incarcerated individuals, public benefits of the program include (but are not limited to) reduction in crime, both in the immediate vicinity of the subject property and in the lower rates of recidivism for participants, and the economic benefits from a more educated workforce that enjoys employer-paid health insurance. Exhibits 1 and 1.A1; Sara Ullman Testimony.
- 11. Further addressing the CUP criteria for approval, Planning Staff submitted that the transitional housing facility, which constitutes a dense housing form near the Downtown Urban Village served by four Whatcom County Transit GoLine routes, remains consistent with the intent of the underlying Residential, Multi/Multiple zoning designation.² Further, Staff submitted that the lack of neighborhood complaints and the low rate of 911 calls evidenced in the BPD records together support a conclusion that the potential detriment feared at the time of the 2014 CUP hearing has not manifested and also support a conclusion that the initial CUP conditions of approval were adequate and remain adequate to ensure the conditional use functions well at the subject property and does not result in detriment to the community. Staff submitted that the service care use is adequately served by public facilities and utilities in North Garden Street and

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² Per BMC 20.32.020(C): The residential multi multiple designation is intended to accommodate development in those areas which are better suited for higher concentration of population than other residential land use designations. Generally, the high-density residential designation should be used for land near existing or potential high-frequency transit service and/or adjacent to or near employment and commercial areas and not used primarily for the development of detached single-family dwelling units.

Chestnut Street, and that stormwater review through the building permit process ensured compliance with City and state regulations. Because residents are not allowed to drive or to have vehicles on-site, the facility generates fewer vehicular trips and less parking demand than similarly sized residential buildings. The CUP condition requiring BPD involvement in the resident screening committee has been met, and to date no resident has created a hazard to the community. Because the facility does not produce odorous, mechanical, or electrical influences, and its lighting and noise impacts have been compliant with conditions imposed in the CUP and building permit, there have been no detrimental influences from its operations. Further, all residents are required to sign a copy of and abide by the facility's anti-harassment program, and there have been no neighbor complaints. Staff submitted that the facility as operated since expansion has remained consistent with the criteria for conditional use permit approval. *Exhibits 1, 1.A1, 1.A2, 1.A3, 1.A4 1.A5, 1.A6, and 1.A7; Sara Ullman Testimony.*

- 12. Planning Staff supported the Applicant's request to be excused from additional future review of the CUP. Additionally, Staff recommended that because the handbook in effect at the time of the 2014 permit hearing (available in the archived records at Exhibit 1.A1) was replaced with the Washington State Department of Corrections Reentry Center Handbook, which applies uniformly to all state operated reentry centers, it would make sense to amend CUP Condition No. 3b to reflect the current handbook. *Exhibits 1 and 1.B8; Sara Ullman Testimony*.
- 13. Notice of the Hearing Examiner review hearing was published consistent with the requirements of BMC Title 21 on December 8, 2023, being mailed to owners of property within 500 feet of the subject property, neighborhood representatives, The Bellingham Herald, and all parties of record from the 2014 CUP. Notice of the hearing was also posted on-site. Additionally, the required notice sign was installed on the property. *Exhibit 1*. The notice established a 14-day comment period; however, there was no public comment submitted following notice of the requested CUP review. *Sara Ullman Testimony*.

CONCLUSIONS

Jurisdiction:

The Hearing Examiner is granted authority to hold hearings and make decisions on conditional use permit applications that would expand, enlarge, or increase the intensity of an existing legally nonconforming use pursuant to BMC 20.14.020.E and 20.16.010.D.

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- 1) The contemplated additional building was built in conformance with CUP and building permit conditions, and occupancy of both structures has at all times complied with the maximum occupancy limits imposed. While fulfilled, this condition will remain in place to guide any future renovations or changes.
- 2) The instant decision is the result of the required re-review. Having been fulfilled, this condition will be lifted by the instant decision.
- 3) As built and operated, the expanded service care facility has proven compatible with the surrounding neighborhood. There have been no noise or harassment complaints about the facility. The handbook in place at time of the 2014 CUP approval has been replaced with the more stringent Department of Corrections state-wide handbook. A new condition will acknowledge and authorize this handbook's use. The required contact information is posted. Supervision levels were increased by DOC when it took over the facility, satisfying (if not exceeding) the requirement of Condition No. 3d. As concluded above, occupancy has complied with the imposed limits.
- 4) Construction of the new building met, exceeded, or was excused from the various improvements specified in Condition No. 4 though the building permit process. As built, the facility has satisfied Condition No. 4, but the condition will remain in place to guide any future renovations or changes.
- 5) The facility's design underwent CPTED review through the design stage and at building permit. CPTED design elements were approved, and the facility was built consistent with the approved CPTED measures. Condition No. 5 has been satisfied but will remain in place to guide any future renovations or changes.

Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

The record demonstrates that the expanded facility, as designed, built, 2. maintained, and operated, continues to comply with the criteria for CUP approval and promotes the public health, safety, and welfare. Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13.

DECISION

Based on the foregoing findings and conclusions, the requested review of the issued CUP2014-00006/HE-14-PL-030 for compliance with conditions and for ongoing

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