



# Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission

## City of Bellingham

**June 15, 2022**

**Online Zoom Meeting** [video timestamps noted in brackets]

### Call to Order

Meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Janice Keller, Communications Director

### Attendance

Present: Chris Roselli (WWU), Louise Bjornson (Birchwood), Nick Kelly (Cornwall Park), Bill Liddicoet (Fairhaven), Christopher Grannis (South Alternate), John LaSpina (Cordata), Robin Thomas (Sehome), Jake Charlton (Happy Valley Alternate), Sheryl Russell (City Center), Kathryn Rismondo (Lettered Streets), Molly Foote (Samish), Tom Scott (York), William Beer (Edgemoor Alternate)

City Representatives: Mayor Seth Fleetwood; Janice Keller, Communications Director; Police Chief Rebecca Mertzig; Nicole Oliver, Parks & Recreation Director; Lt. Claudia Murphy, Bellingham Police

Guests: Kirsti Charlton, CAST presenter

### MINUTES

#### **Presentation by Kirsti Charlton about CAST (Coffee and Sandwiches Together) [00:02:00]**

CAST is a volunteer group that is affiliated with Interfaith Coalition. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 6-7 p.m. they provide food and toiletries to those in need. They serve 35-60 guests each night and currently have about 85 volunteers.

#### **Introduction, Chief Rebecca Mertzig, Bellingham Police Department [00:10:30]**

Janice Keller introduced Rebecca Mertzig as the new Bellingham Police Chief. Rebecca is local to Whatcom County and spoke about her first two weeks on the job. Staffing is a main focus right now. MNAC members had questions regarding the new treatment center on Northwest and future treatment centers, Chief Mertzig's vision for the future, and the differences and similarities between Bellingham and Stanwood.

#### **Parks Project Update and Summer Tour presented by Nicole Oliver, Parks & Recreation Director [00:22:16]**

Nicole will be visiting each of the smaller Neighborhood Parks this summer on Friday afternoons to talk to neighbors and see what can be improved. MNAC members had a couple of questions about specific Neighborhood parks. Nicole presented updates on a wide variety of completed, in progress, and future projects happening in Bellingham's existing and future parks. MNAC members had many questions, comments, and suggestions on the topics of accessibility, trail connectivity, ideas for future parks, shoreline improvements, specific park features, and timing and cost of projects.

## **Neighborhood Round Table [01:14:00]**

### **Birchwood**

Reminder of the International Festival on June 17<sup>th</sup>, July 15<sup>th</sup>, and August 19<sup>th</sup> by the old Albertsons Parking Lot, from 6-8. A thank you for looking into the problems by 7-Eleven and Rite Aid.

### **Lettered Streets**

A new MNAC rep named Brie O'Hare will be joining next month. Making plans to have a small gathering next month, and a larger neighborhood gathering next summer. Keeping tabs on the new plans for expansion of the Lighthouse Mission, which the neighborhood has a variety of opinions on. Would like more clarity on the zone around the Lighthouse Mission.

### **Samish**

Working on the picnic for the end of August. Discussing whether or not to raise their neighborhood dues based on the varied rates between neighborhoods. Making improvements to their newsletter.

### **York**

A lot of new people on the board and turnover in the officer positions. Looking to update website. Meeting with Chris Comeau regarding traffic issues. May combine their picnic with National Night Against Crime. Wants to get a recurring blood drive going in the neighborhood.

### **WWU**

WWU doubled the number of graduations they've had in the past with eight ceremonies and no restrictions on the number of guests. Less furniture was left on the sidewalk this year in response to outreach done by WWU. Working with the City on the bike and pedestrian plan. Will be doing a Juneteenth flag raising ceremony.

### **Edgemoor**

Concern regarding the Save Mudbay Cliffs development, the neighborhood will be keeping their eye on this.

### **Cordata**

Back to having meetings in person at the Presbyterian Church. Working on getting public art in the last roundabout in Cordata Parkway. Had a great presentation from the Fire Department on emergency preparedness. Taking a couple of months off from community meetings.

### **Fairhaven**

Had a special meeting in April to pass a unanimous statement expressing their agreement on their desire to adhere to the multi-modal policies laid out in the Fairhaven Urban Village plan 10 years ago, but that this wasn't reflected in the pedestrian master plan. They haven't heard a response and want to have a greater sense that they are being listened to.

### **Happy Valley**

Questions about the Happy Valley Park extension and what will become of the house on the property. South End Mobile Estates has some meetings coming up regarding MHP preservation and they would like to be kept in the loop. There have been some good Connelly Creek work parties. Considering having their August BBQ, Covid-dependent.

### **City Center**

Preparing for Downtown Sounds. New ambassador program downtown seems to be working well, have had good feedback from businesses. The security team at night has been helpful as well. New restaurants and shops downtown. There is a meeting tomorrow evening regarding 22 North, and a new committee has been formed in response. Issues with parking spaces and parking violations, new buildings are requesting less parking spaces than the code requires. Want to know who to talk to the city about this. There are open positions for parking enforcement at the City that aren't being filled.

- Mayor Fleetwood will reach out to learn more about why these parking enforcement positions aren't being filled.

### **Cornwall Park**

Working with Peace Health growth plan and moving the helicopter path, lots of neighborhoods complaining about helicopters not following the flight plan, which is to fly over Squaticum Parkway.

- Mayor Fleetwood will reach out to learn more about the agreement with the City about where the helicopter is supposed to fly.

### **Sehome**

This is Robin's last meeting with MNAC. Jack Wellman will be the new Rep and there will be a new alternate. Robin is sending this information to Janice. If we invested more in our neighborhoods, we could drive more engagement with other important things like the pedestrian master plan. Bend, Oregon has ongoing tools to train boards and new people getting involved, and has a baseline level of funding based on the number of people in the neighborhood. Lots of neighborhoods here are struggling to do basic functions like websites and newsletters.

### **South Hill**

South Hill is giving \$100 gift cards to families of elementary students from Lowell Elementary whose families are homeless. Neighborhoods should consider doing more to raise awareness for the need of blood donations. Members of the South Hill neighborhood are concerned about crime and the claim that the jail is full and criminals are being released early. Also shared that, while Bellingham has a competent police force, concerns remain about individuals and groups, possible would-be vigilantes, openly carrying firearms who reportedly claimed they were there to protect property and businesses. Wants Chief Mertzig to think about how to prevent a recurrence of armed vigilantes coming to Bellingham like there was in response to the George Floyd protests last year.

- Mayor Fleetwood responded to say that lack of police is not a funding issue but a staffing issue, which is a nationwide challenge. There are booking restrictions at the jail right now, and they are having to prioritize who needs to be in the jail. The interim solution is to find jail space at other jurisdictions in the region, which is being worked on.
- Lt. Claudia Murphy responded to South Hill's report. The incident noted was thoroughly investigated, and no violations of the law were determined by the incident. We cannot make assumptions about what groups people are a part of without evidence. Washington state has an open carry law. Several MNAC members had questions for clarification on this. In addition, Police Department hires are being made, but it is a slow process.
- After group discussion, during which several representatives asked for clarification of the legal concept of "threat" from parties openly displaying firearms, the original commenter reiterated that, while we cannot know the individual motives of anyone who came into Bellingham openly carrying firearms, it was reported at the time that the group claimed that they were there to protect private property and businesses. They noted that this is an arrogation of police functions without authority

that meets the definition of vigilantism, and that we have a properly constituted, highly professional police force and do not need private citizens openly carrying AR-15s to protect us.

### **South**

Last year South neighborhood applied for small and simple grants and won the grant, but don't know how to move forward with getting sign toppers. The Mud Bay issue is close to the South neighborhood and those who are interested should look at [mudbaycliffs.org](http://mudbaycliffs.org)

- If neighborhood reps are hearing of people who want to patrol their neighborhoods at night to prevent theft, tell them to be careful. It is better to prevent theft with lights and not having anything interesting in your car.

Mayor Fleetwood received confirmation from Nicole Oliver that the house on Donovan at Happy Valley Park will be torn down, but the garage will remain.

Meeting adjourned by Mayor Seth Fleetwood at 9:34 p.m.