



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF BELLINGHAM-WHATCOM COUNTY

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Planning and Community Development Department
210 Lottie Street

May 24, 2016

To Planning and Community Development Dept., City of Bellingham;

Regarding:
Issues of Equity and Inclusion in the City Comprehensive Plan

The League of Women Voters of Bellingham/Whatcom County's (LWVBC) recent report on Women's Economic Security in our county found that when women have access to affordable, safe and healthy housing, expanded public transportation, affordable college education, along with child care and schools for their children, they are able to improve their lives and achieve economic security for themselves and their families. This economic security contributes to stability, increased productivity and a stronger local economy. Consequently, the entire community benefits.

Women cannot achieve economic security and be part of a strong vibrant future unless fundamental issues of fairness and equity for everyone are specifically addressed in the city's comprehensive planning process and in related policies and practices.

As individuals we must identify and address the issues of fairness and equity in our personal and family lives, at work and in our neighborhoods. And, we must also require our institutions, organizations, government agencies, community leaders and policymakers to address these issues as well.

The 2016 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan presents a unique opportunity to insure that we grow our community in a fair, just and inclusive way.

Currently the Land Use chapter introduction states: "The Land Use Chapter guides the future of land use in Bellingham, ensuring the City's high quality of life be retained and enhanced as our community grows". That high quality of life is not enjoyed by all. Specifically including the importance of equity would greatly benefit the comprehensive plan and therefore our community. Equity is also a part of the council's adopted Legacies Report, and should be reflected in this pivotal planning document.

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Further, on page 22 of the 2016 Bellingham Comprehensive Plan Land Use Chapter under sustainable Land Use it reads.... “Embedded in this definition is the idea that actions and policies can be crafted that will simultaneously create an equitable society, strong economy and healthy community.” Unfortunately, assuming that “fair and just inclusion for all” is apparent in the definition is not sufficient. Our community has work to do at all levels to become a truly equitable one. Issues of inclusion and equity must be clearly delineated and emphasized throughout the plan in order to communicate their level of importance. Equally critical, it is necessary to drive land use that is aligned with this adopted Legacy statement.

“Place matters.” Where people live impacts how well they will realize their goals, dreams and aspirations. When people are included, and provided access to housing, jobs, good schools, transportation, recreational opportunities and other necessities they need to live healthy, prosperous lives, everyone thrives. A recent video produced by The California Endowment (<https://youtu.be/Eu7d0BMRt0o>) illustrates the role our zip code or place has on our life expectancy. The zoning, infrastructure investments (or lack thereof) and other factors can have life changing impacts: for better or for worse. We have the opportunity to do better in Bellingham.

The LWVBWC urges the City Council and the Planning and Community Development Department to ensure that issues of equity and inclusion are emphasized in the Comprehensive Plan’s introduction, the Land Use Chapter and woven throughout the document.

THIS IS THE MOMENT. We must build our community together. Equity is the most essential element of the social compact on which our nation was built. Unless we support and realize the potential and contribution of each and every member of this community, we will not thrive. Our society and our democracy will be eroded to the detriment of all.

The LWVBWC thanks the City Council and the Planning and Community Development Department for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Judy Hopkinson
Co-President



Rebecca Johnson
Co-President