

May 2005

Volume 1, Issue 1

# BELLINGHAM TOMORROW

a newsletter for citizens who want to know about tomorrow today

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## Special Interest Articles:

- Review the survey results.
- Meet Brian and Glenn.
- Read about Articles 18 and 26 at the May Town Meeting.

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## TO OUR READERS

*WELCOME* to the new annual Planning Board newsletter. How often have you passed a development site in town and wondered, “What in the world is that?” or “How can they allow that kind of business in this space?”

*Bellingham Tomorrow* will attempt to enlighten the reader on this and other “mysteries” of development in Bellingham. Our goal is to provide readers with a

better understanding about the role of the Planning Board and how decisions are made. We will break the process down and include an overview on the roles of various boards and departments as well.

Decisions are not made arbitrarily but after careful evaluation of several factors. Does it meet town bylaws, subdivision rules and regulations, and state laws? What is the

environmental impact? Is it safe? Does it fall within the guidelines of the Master Plan?

Planning is just a piece of the development puzzle. There is a great deal of involvement with various town boards and departments as well. The newsletter is meant as a tool to help educate citizens on how things happen and what role citizens play in the process.

## The Role of the Planning Board – The Basics 101

In Massachusetts, each one of the 351 cities and towns controls the use of land within their municipal boundaries. The municipalities enact regulations, granted through state enabling legislation, to promote the general welfare.

In Bellingham, the Planning Board’s role as defined in the Town’s Home Rule Charter, calls for the Planning Board to:

- make careful studies of the resources, possibilities and needs

of the town

- make plans for the development of the town
- regulate the sub-division of land within the town by adoption of rules and regulations governing such development
- make recommendations to the town meeting on all matters effecting land use and development, including the zoning by-laws of the town

The Planning Board is an elected Board made up of your friends and

neighbors. There are five voting members and one associate member, each one elected for a term of three years. The Board elects a Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Secretary.

In addition, the Town of Bellingham has professionals—the Town Planner and Planning Board Coordinator—that handle the day-to-day management of the Planning Board office and projects.

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## Meet the Members – Brian Sutherland and Glenn Wojcik



Monument in town center

*“We are taking a proactive, not reactive, role in protecting our town from the pitfalls made by other towns.”*  
--Brian Sutherland



Old Town Hall

	Brian Sutherland	Glenn Wojcik
<b>Q. How long have you been a member of the Planning Board?</b>	<b>A.</b> 4 years. My first year was served as a one-year term candidate, filling the vacancy left by Valerie De Angelis. I was then elected to a three-year term.	<b>A.</b> Almost 5 years as an alternate up until this January when I replaced Art MacNeil, who resigned. Next May I'll be running for a full term of three years.
<b>Q. Why did you want to be on Planning Board in the first place?</b>	<b>A.</b> I was concerned about the amount of industry and growth in town, and in particular the prospect of three power plants in town. Friends encouraged me to join one of the boards to affect change from "within the system". I chose the Planning Board because I thought it was where I could be most effective.	<b>A.</b> Civic Duty. I felt it was a great opportunity to do something to help the town. My experience and education seemed to be a good fit. My undergraduate degrees in Economics, Political Science and Geography, and my graduate education in Finance would help in making good decisions.
<b>Q. What do you feel is the most important role of the Planning Board?</b>	<b>A.</b> Shaping the future of Bellingham. We are trying to address growth by modifying the by-laws and regulations to allow for intelligent, managed growth; approaching residential, commercial, and industrial growth with a minimum impact on the community where possible. We try to make it a "win-win" situation for the town and the applicant, attempting to make it the best it can possibly be.	<b>A.</b> Ensuring development is done in the best way possible. This involves working with many departments: the DPW to make sure development meets future plans; Inspectional Services to make sure conditions of an approved plan are kept; ConCom to make sure they are aware of and reviewing any environmental issues. Each proposal has its own issues that can affect any department or person in town.
<b>Q. In your opinion, as part of the Planning Board, what are the important issues facing Bellingham today?</b>	<b>A.</b> Traffic, open space, water resources, and future development are some of our greatest challenges.	<b>A.</b> Traffic congestion, getting to the 40B 10% requirement, and infrastructure being pushed to its limits.
<b>Q. How can we avoid potential pitfalls of over development with existing infrastructure?</b>	<b>A.</b> Working to modify the regulations in town to find ways to improve the infrastructure. We are continuing to reexamine and modify our regulations. We are taking a proactive, not reactive, role in protecting our town from the pitfalls made by other towns.	<b>A.</b> Listen and learn. Applicants are not always as forthcoming with the full details of a project. We need ask the right questions and bring out as much information as possible. We are limited by the by-laws, so we need to make sure the by-laws are fair with as little ambiguity as possible.

## Historic Survey Results Are In!

Thanks to everyone that participated in last month's historic survey. We were overwhelmed with the participation. Here's a quick summary of some of the results:

- *Village character of the Town Center* was the

most important feature in defining Bellingham's character. *Open space* was a close second and *historic buildings* third.

- *Archaeology and cemeteries* were the least important to defining Bellingham's

character.

- *Identification of historic resources and the definition of "historic"* were most needed in understanding how to protect Bellingham's natural and built environment.

## The Role of the Planning Board – The Basics 101

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The Board meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of every month to hear all types of development projects that impact the Town. Besides being a resident of Bellingham, there are no special educational or financial requirements to be a member—only the ability to devote about 10 hours a month and the desire to do what is in the best interest of the Town based on laws voted on by the Town.

Within the Town of Bellingham, the Planning Board is governed by a strict set of Zoning By-

Laws and Subdivision Control Law regulations. For a resident not familiar with the details of these laws, it may seem as if the Planning Board makes capricious decisions regarding development, but the reality is that the Board is constrained by decision criteria built into the legislation. If these decision criteria are clearly met, then the Board does not have the basis for denying a project.

However, also built into the regulations, is the ability for the Board to require a developer to mitigate the effects of a project. This mitigation

can come in the form of money (to help regulate traffic, for instance) or off-site improvements (such as sewer connections for existing residents on a street).

The most common types of projects are those for new construction and subdivisions. The Board also has review of certain special permits.

Sometimes a project will have multiple types of review. For example, a subdivision might also be a special permit for a major residential development because it is proposing to have over ten lots.



*New town hall under construction*

Subdivision Rules and Regulations (approved April 14, 2005) are online at:

[www.bellinghamma.org/planning](http://www.bellinghamma.org/planning)

## So You Wanna Know About...

### ...the Dunkin Donuts Northeast Distribution Warehouse project.

Many residents attended the Public Hearing for a Development Plan Review and Major Business Complex Special Permit.

Most were concerned with noise and traffic impacts. The Planning Board did not take these concerns lightly and many hours were spent reviewing this project and its anticipated impacts, not just in the immediate area but also to the entire Town.

Planning Board decisions are based on existing

laws, and a Development Plan project that meets all the zoning bylaws cannot be flatly denied. In this case, the developer did meet all of the zoning bylaw requirements without requesting any waivers or variances, therefore compelling the Board to approve the project.

Special Permits, however, allow more latitude and can be denied or approved with mitigation. The Board negotiated with Dunkin Donuts to provide money and/or services to compensate against the impacts of their project on the town.

Some conditions that the Dunkin Donuts agreed to included:

- Roadway improvements in the town center area.
- \$130,000 for the repaving of Depot Street.
- \$40,000 for future roadwork, analysis, improvements or noise mitigation in project area.
- \$40,000 for a Neighborhood Mitigation Allowance.
- 200' buffer zone around the perimeter of the property.
- Establishment of a "Good Neighbor Coordinator to encourage communication with neighbors.

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--Glenn Wojcik

