

From: [CSD - Frank Chmelik](#)
To: [mayorsoffice@cob.org](#); [Rud Browne](#); [Barry Buchanan](#); [Jack Louws](#); [mlilliquist@cob.org](#); [dchamill@cob.org](#); [alice@downtownbellingham.com](#); [michael_parker@whatcomhsc.org](#); [robinm@nwys.org](#); [guy@bellingham.com](#); [hanse@thelighthouseemission.org](#); [Dana Brown-Davis](#)
Subject: RE: Low Barrier Homeless Shelter
Date: Friday, February 16, 2018 10:08:52 AM
Attachments: [FMJB Letter 02152018.pdf](#)

Members of the Committee,

Enclosed, please find a letter from my wife and I concerning Site G.

As an aside, last night, as I was leaving work about 7:00, I stopped and shot the attached photo with my phone. It is looking south from Champion Street down Railroad. It is simply amazing the amount of activity and commerce that occurs at this end of Railroad every night. The restaurants are open and doing well. Parking is hard to find.

Thankyou

Frank

Frank J. Chmelik
Chmelik Sitkin & Davis, P.S.
1500 Railroad Avenue
Bellingham, Washington 98225
C: 360.223.5633
O: 360.671.1796
E: fchmelik@chmelik.com
W: www.chmelik.com

Legal Assistant Heather Nash
hnash@chmelik.com

FMJB, LLC
1500 Railroad Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98225

February 16, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Jack Louws
Whatcom County Executive
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225-4082

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Kelli Linville
Mayor
City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham WA 98225

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Members of the Homeless Strategies Workgroup
c/o City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham WA 98225

RE: Site G – Downtown Parking Lot Site

Dear Executive Louws, Mayor Linville and Members of the Workgroup,

In 1994, we bought and redeveloped the long red brick building on the north end of Railroad Avenue. Since then we have been part of and witnessed the transformation of this end of the downtown commercial core from a collection of abandoned and underutilized structures to a vibrant and growing urban village which is fulfilling the *“Renewed Vision for Downtown”* articulated in the City’s 2014 Downtown Bellingham Plan.

We think we can best illustrate this transformation with three stories. Our first story took place in 1994. Before buying the building (which was then unused and in a state of disrepair), the project architect and Frank went to City Hall with a scale model of the proposed project to meet with then Mayor Tim Douglas. The Mayor was excited about the investment in downtown, encouraged us to rehabilitate the building and spoke of the City’s commitment to

revitalize downtown Bellingham. He asked what the City could do to help, and the architect mentioned that a delay in approving the building permits would be problematic. Mayor Douglas jumped up and said, "follow me." He walked Frank and the architect out of his office and downstairs to "building and codes" and asked that when our completed plans are delivered to City Hall if the plans could be processed to permit within thirty days. Frank recalls to this day, the young man behind the counter saying, "Well yes Mayor, if that is what you want you are the Mayor." We bought the property in November 1994 and now the law firm tenant, where we both work, employs twenty-five people.

Back then, Railroad Avenue was what people now call "in transition." We had to deal with drunk and drugged people who deposited needles, condoms, trash and human excrement on our property and the surrounding sidewalks. They made walking down the sidewalk an unpleasant experience. Fights and arguments amongst these folks was almost a daily event. The police were frequently called to respond. We could not leave cars in our parking lot after the office had closed for fear of break-ins. Many nights we walked staff to their cars. Our building had a covered loading dock on the south end which we had to enclose to prevent it from being used as a hangout during the day.

Over the years things have dramatically improved on Railroad Avenue. We credit the leadership of the City in developing the 2014 Downtown Bellingham Plan and the Development Standards, the attention of the Bellingham Police officers, the hard work of the downtown business coalition and the commitment of the businesses and property owners. The north end of the downtown urban village – Railroad Avenue - has turned around. It is now a vibrant place on the upswing where increasing numbers of people live, work, shop, eat and visit. It still is fragile and has issues, but with its well preserved historic buildings and the new businesses we are moving in a positive direction. We recently saw Tim Douglas and told him that we are well on the road to seeing his vision realized.

Our second story occurred about two weeks ago. Our long-term warehouse tenant on the south end of our building is moving out, so we have hired an architect to begin developing plans to create a restaurant space, with an outdoor dining patio, fronting Champion Street. The word had gotten out and one afternoon Frank was showing the space to a young couple that was interested in opening a restaurant and their contractor. They were excited when they opened the large black doors on the enclosed wooden porch and could see across to the recently remodeled Adagio Coffee House and then down Railroad Avenue with the busy street scene. They asked, "but what about the homeless shelter?" We had no good answer.

Our third story occurred last Friday night. A contractor came by our office at the end of the day for a meeting. After our meeting he and Frank decided to have dinner. Frank suggested that rather than driving somewhere, they just walk down Railroad Avenue. They walked past the new business where people were playing board games and into the pub/restaurant aptly named "The Local." The Local, which recently expanded, was full. They had to sit at the bar. Frank noticed that the City had installed a bike rack and was struck that the rack was full as

were most of the parking spaces on Railroad Avenue. We must say that even ten years ago this would not have been possible. It sounds overly dramatic, but simply stated it would not have been entirely safe or pleasant to walk down Railroad Avenue at night and not much better during the day.

Make no mistake – the transition has not been easy. We remember the City investment in the burned-out building at Railroad and Holly as part of its efforts to rehabilitate the buildings at that intersection and the redevelopment of the Whatcom Transit facility into a modern safe depot (with a police station). We now see a steady stream of students each morning from the depot to Bellingham High School. We have watched the steadfast determination of the old and new business owners as buildings were repurposed and new businesses opened. We applauded when the Bellingham Housing Authority demolished a largely unused and dilapidated warehouse and built Walton Place I and II for low-income and moderate-income families (some recently homeless). These folks are welcome residents of our urban village. In the summer evenings, when we leave our office, it is nice to see and hear children playing on the Walton Place balconies and riding bikes in the parking lot. We welcome the new Mercy Housing facility, which was just completed, providing housing for low-income elderly residents and redeveloping an unused car dealership. Downtown is still fragile, but the trajectory is positive. The City's vision of an urban village where people want to live, work and visit is alive on Railroad Avenue.

We, individually and as a society, need to continue to understand that people and families find themselves homeless for a variety of circumstances – many not of their making. Most want a safe place to live and raise families. The importance of compassionately helping these people and families by providing emergency, transitional and low-income housing cannot be overstated.

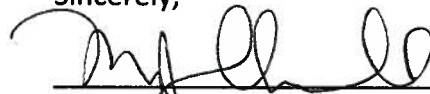
But, we also need to be realistic that some are homeless because they struggle with addiction or mental illness and because of this they cannot or will not follow even the basic rules of a society. Our community must be realistic that a low barrier shelter will serve and be attractive to this population and this population will have a significant impact on the surrounding neighborhood with negative and dangerous behaviors that have real adverse impact on other citizens. Indeed, one only has to listen to the people that speak at City council meetings demanding tent camps because they believe the shelters to be unsafe to appreciate this issue.

We must keep in mind that, as stated in the Downtown Bellingham Plan, a vibrant downtown Bellingham is *"an economic engine for the City and region"* and without this essential and vibrant downtown economic engine there will be no capacity to do good. Our compassion and obligation to our citizens experiencing homelessness and those homeless new to our community cannot and should not extend to locating a shelter where it will have a tremendously adverse impact not only on the surrounding neighborhood but the economic vitality of downtown Bellingham.

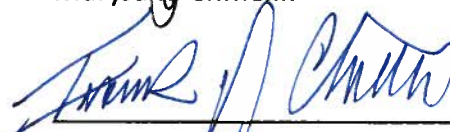
We can unequivocally say, with 24 years of first hand experience, that locating a low barrier homeless shelter on the Site G will be a massive step backwards and undo much of what has been accomplished by many over the last 20 years. Simply stated, locating the most challenging homeless population in our Downtown Bellingham urban village will result in an unfair and predictable slide backwards for our downtown as it becomes less safe, definitely less pleasant and less attractive for the further investment needed to continue our upward trajectory. It will no longer be the place one would want to live, work or visit.

The uncertainty around this possibility has already caused great concern and angst. Please recognize Site G as unsuitable and remove it from the list.

Sincerely,



MaryJane Chmelik



Frank Chmelik

