

**York Neighborhood Association  
Community Forum on Housing Concerns**

Sept. 14, 2016, 7pm.  
At Garden St. Methodist Church

President Don Hilty-Jones called the meeting to order at 7pm

*Formal minutes of the meeting were not taken. The following report was submitted to the Board by Anne Mackie, Secretary/Treasurer.*

Dear YNA Board on Sept. 20, 2016:

**1. Neighborhoods attended:**

Sunnyland, Sehome, Lettered Streets, Birchwood, Samish, Edgemore, Happy Valley, Puget, Fairhaven, Whatcom Falls, Lake Whatcom/Northshore, Columbia, Cornwall Park, Central Business District, and of course York.

**We had approximately 120 people (maybe more).** We had 100 copies of the sign-in slips and ran out. Many did not sign in but are familiar folks, so I was able to recreate the list.

**2. Dignitaries & Celebrities in attendance:**

- 5 council members: Terry Bornemann, Michael Lilliquist, Pinky Vargas, Gene Knutsen, and Dan Hammill.
- Director of the Opportunity Council was there, Greg Winters (also lives in York).
- Former City Councilmembers Joy Keenan, Tip Johnson and Louise Bjornsen (she served on council for about 28 years)
- Former Deputy Mayor, Don Keenan.
- Planning Commissioner, Lisa Anderson.
- City of Bellingham, Senior Planner Greg Aucutt.
- The editor of The Cascadia Weekly, Tim Johnson.
- The editor of Northwest Citizen, John Servais.
- Program Director, Whatcom Civil Rights Project, Junga Subedar.
- A few builders, developers, realtors.
- Building Industry Assoc. of Whatcom County paid staff person, Linda Twitchell, who got to speak at length, twice!

**3. The "themes" of the forum:**

- We challenge the City to take on a "new attitude" that seeks out community wisdom, participation, and recognizes that the public possesses expertise and knowledge that can strengthen plans, policies and decision making.
- The City has failed to enforce its zoning regulations.
- Need inspections and a clean-up of the rental housing.
- We need an accurate inventory of ADUs before any new ones are permitted.

- We are not anti-renter; we support renters' rights to good, affordable housing.
- We support students and their involvement in improving better rental housing; and we support students getting more involved with their neighborhoods to have a positive relationship.
- What about the Urban Villages? These are areas for development.
- There's too much density in older, single family neighborhoods. Stop renting houses by the room.
- Neighborhoods feel ignored.
- Need to set aside affordable housing to last in perpetuity

#### **4. Differing points of view expressed:**

- There's no problem with higher density.
- More people are moving here so we need more housing.
- Single family zoning is exclusionary, biases, racist zoning.
- York and Sehome are wealthy, exclusionary neighborhoods.
- No one is against diversity, or anti-ADU, or anti-students.
- Parking is a big problem.
- Safe housing needs to be enforced to prevent fires; that's the city's first obligation.
- Dorms are too expensive so students need to live in the neighborhoods.
- What has WWU done to house its students? How have students raised this housing issue with WWU?
- We need more responsive government to provide crosswalks and safe streets for elderly at Lakeway Estates across from the new student mega-plex.
- We need to do a block-by-block analysis of what's on the ground.
- Absentee landlords are creating problem houses.

#### **5. Take-aways:**

- This community wants to have a discussion, not a top-down format.
- We showed this can be done in a civil, fair manner and listen to one another.
- People are looking for common solutions to complex problems.
- With only a few exceptions, people were not labeling others and were being respectful.
- York took the leadership on hosting this open forum because over the past few years the style of the City has been to host very controlled, top-down meetings related to planning. Years ago, the style was much more open -- such as the Visionary Forums held years ago at Sehome High School. People are tired of being put in a room, broken up into little groups, and given a stack of yellow stickies to put their ideas on.

*Notes submitted by Anne Mackie, Secretary  
Approved October 12, 2016*