

# City eases size limits on stores

## Council votes 7-0 to allow expansions in some cases

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Some big-box stores will be allowed to expand to any size as long as they meet certain environmentally friendly development and landscaping standards.

The Bellingham City Council on Monday, April 12, voted 7-0 to allow some stores to expand if they meet certain standards. About 125 people attended the meeting, with many speaking on the merits or downsides of large retail stores.

Under the law, large retail stores that aren't defined as "superstores" (stores that use more than 10 percent of sales floor for nontaxable goods, such as groceries) may expand as long as they meet certain conditions. Also, membership warehouse club stores won't be considered "superstores" and will be allowed to expand, if they meet the standards.

The standards include scoring a silver in the Leadership

in Energy and Environmental Design rating system, or a similar rating under a different system, and score high enough in the city's landscaping standards system.

Stores would be allowed to expand only in specific areas along Meridian Street between Interstate 5 and Horton Road, and along West Bakerview Road between Northwest Avenue and I-5.

Resident Abe Jacobson said the fear that the large retail stores will leave Bellingham for Ferndale has been created by the big-box stores. He supported restrictions on large retail stores, which have created "pure gladiatorial combat" between communities like Ferndale and Bellingham.

"It's a contrived crisis, not a real one," he said. "We in Bellingham have plenty of places to shop for groceries near where we live." The big-box stores don't care about the community, he said.

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## Hearing draws heat, support for big stores

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"Bellingham is a community, not just another off-ramp in some corporation's business model," he said.

Duane Jager, executive director of the Appliance Depot in Bellingham, said city leaders were faced with a tough decision: They have the desire to support small and local businesses on one hand, and you have corporations owned by Wall Street black-mailing them on the other.

"They're blackmailing us to the tune of millions of dollars. I recognize that's a tough dilemma," he said. "But I don't think we should legislate out of fear."

He believes local businesses can make up for the loss in revenue, he said.

"I say: Let's roll up our sleeves and be that alternative community that we have that reputation to be," he said.

Others "who spoke disagreed.

"This is not small versus

big. The **both** exist in our community at the same time," said Ken Oplinger, president and CEO of the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce and Industry. "This is not urban villages versus the Guide. You can have both in the community."

These stores have been part of the community, and the fact that they're so busy shows people support them. By limiting those stores and not letting them meet their business models, the city will just drive them out, creating empty stores, blight and a loss of sales tax revenue, he said.

Resident Beverly Jacobs, a member of the board for the Guide Meridian/Cordata Neighborhood Association, said those large stores are part of her neighborhood. She's not trying to monitor the Hagen in Fairhaven, she said. Everybody should be able to shop in their own neighborhood.

"I think that since that area is designated for large box, I don't want it to be an empty place. I shop there. That is my neighborhood," she said. "I think you should be listening to the people who live there."

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