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Bellingham mayor proposes new standards for big-box stores

Livable wage, 'green factor' among criteria

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BELLINGHAM - Big-box stores could be regulated more lightly or more heavily, depending on whether they pay their workers enough, sell items made regionally or are located in a mixed-use urban village.

Mayor Dan Pike's administration on Monday, Jan. 25, presented City Council members with a menu of options for addressing new big-box stores and existing ones that want to expand.

The city currently has a 90,000-square-foot cap on new stores, and last fall Pike proposed relaxing that cap in areas of north Bellingham as long as they met certain green landscaping and development standards. The council held a hearing but decided to wait until the new council was seated in 2010.

On Monday, council members decided to mull over the options and wait until the next meeting, on Feb. 8, before providing direction on which options they like.

City Chief Administrative Office David Webster delivered an outline of the proposal to the council. It would apply only to stores in areas along Meridian Street and Bakerview Road, where large stores are already located, and to those over the size cap or wanting to expand beyond the cap:

Large stores would fall into one of two categories. They're level one if they meet one of the following three criteria or level two if they don't meet any of the following:

- **Economic justice:** They pay a certain percentage of workers a "livable wage," considered by the city to be \$11.82 an hour if benefits are included or \$13.02 an hour without.
- **Cascadia production:** A certain percentage of their products are from the Cascadia region, including Washington, Alaska, Oregon, Idaho or British Columbia. Those result in lesser environmental impacts because they don't have to be shipped as far, Webster said.
- **Urban village:** They're part of a mixed-use urban village, where the city wants to encourage much of its growth.

Level one retailers that already exist but want to expand would have to meet the following standards:

- They'd have to get a certain "green factor" score. Green factor, based off Seattle's law, is a set of environmentally friendly development and landscaping standards.
- Their workers would have to participate in a commute reduction program for five years. The Smart Trips program, where people get online at WhatcomSmartTrips.com and log trips in which they carpooled, took the bus, rode a bike or walked, would qualify.

New stores would have to meet the following standards, in addition to the two above:

- **Building subdivision standards:** Buildings would have to be designed so they could be divided up for smaller businesses if the major retailer leaves.
- **LEED standards:** They'd have to meet green-building standards known as the silver level in Leadership in Energy

and Environmental Design.

Level two stores face tougher standards. Those that are expanding have to meet the following:

- A higher green factor standard.
- Seven years of Smart Trips or similar participation.
- Sign a community benefit agreement with a community group or the city. It would spell out how the company must give back to the community.
- Conduct an economic/fiscal impact study of their project's impacts to the community.

New level two stores would have to meet the above, except they'd face the highest green factor score and they'd have to include spaces for small businesses in the store.

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