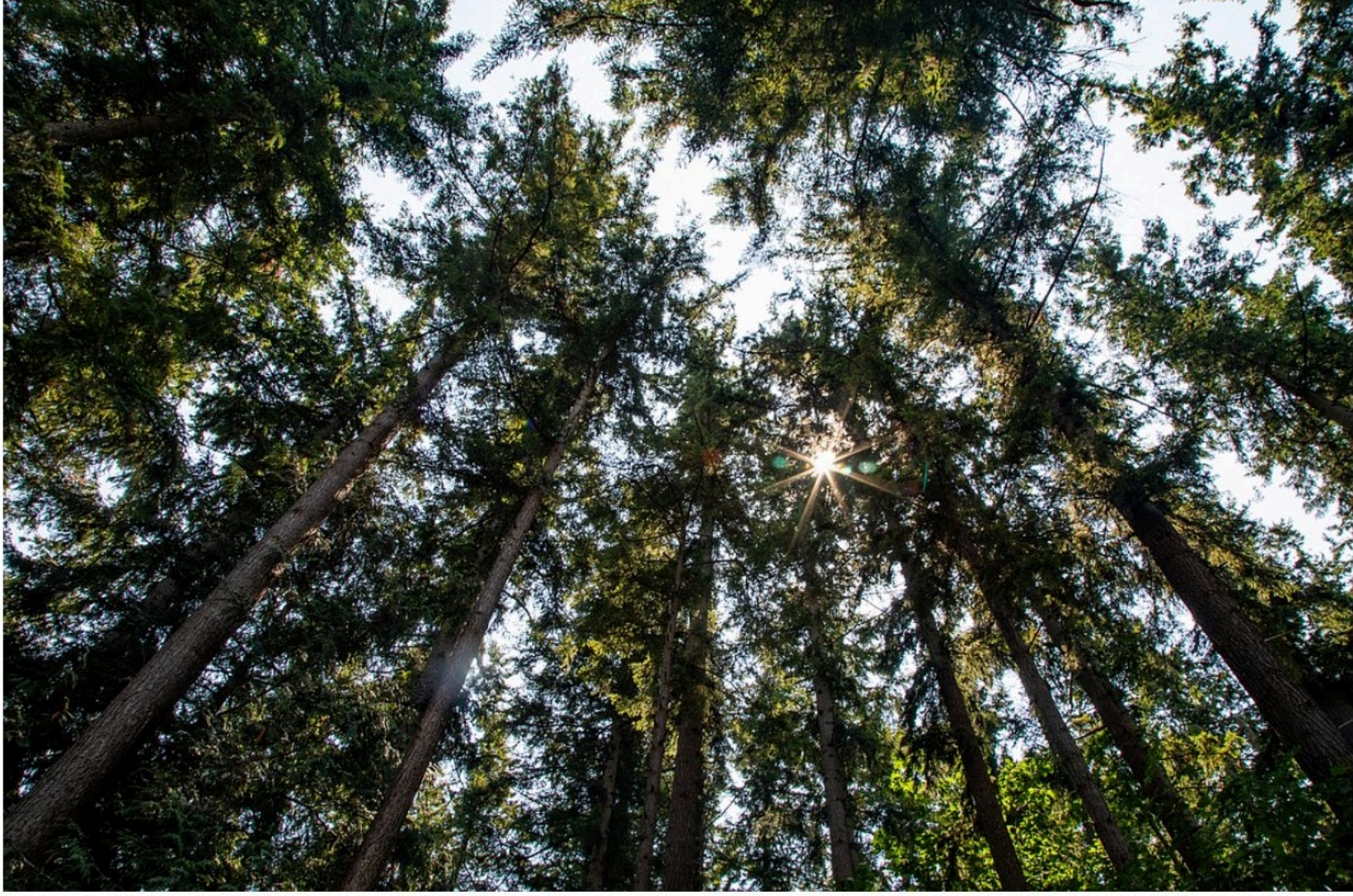


NEWS  
Environment

## Bellingham housing proposal has environmentalists calling foul

68-unit infill housing proposal will remove 300-plus trees

July 6, 2023 at 12:43 p.m.



A proposed development along Meridian Street has local environmentalists concerned about tree canopy loss, while developers say they are attempting to provide more housing in a low-vacancy city. *(Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News)*

By **JULIA LERNER**  
Staff Reporter



A proposed 68-unit townhouse development has drawn ire from local environmentalists concerned with the developer’s plan, which would require the removal of more than 300 trees from the surrounding area.

The proposal, submitted to the City of Bellingham’s Planning and Community Development office in August last year, will create about 68 townhouses – a mix of one-to-three story homes and duplex-style housing – with 134 garage parking stalls, a surface parking lot for guests and extended sidewalks on the Guide Meridian alongside the Bellingham Golf and Country Club.

In order to build on the land, though, Seattle-based developer Stream Real Estate and Bellingham-based developer AVT Consulting LLC will have to remove approximately 327 trees, many of which are 70- to 100-year-old conifers and are among the tallest trees in city limits, said Michael Feerer, executive director of the Whatcom Million Trees Project.

The developer has promised to replace the trees on the chopping block with 474 new saplings: 216 trees to replace 72 trees with a trunk diameter greater than 30 inches, and 258 trees to replace 258 trees with a diameter less than 30 inches.

But Feerer said new trees are no match for the mature trees.

“Two-year-old seedlings, even if planted at a three-to-one ratio, will not match up” with the much older conifers, which Feerer said are carbon storage powerhouses and can help prevent flooding in the region. “The seedlings have to be planted in the right place, too. They’re proposing to plant these around the golf course ... and that’s a totally unreliable way to plant trees, even if they were somehow able to make up for what’s being lost.”



The StreamRE Townhomes, proposed by Seattle-based Stream Real Estate and Bellingham-based AVT Consulting, will require developers to remove more than 300 trees from Meridian Street. *(Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News)*

The proposal says about 73 trees will be preserved on-site, but the smaller lot leaves little room for large trees around the townhomes.

“We hired a professional arborist, and then we surveyed and catalogued all of the mature trees or significant trees,” AVT’s Ali Taysi said Thursday, July 6. “It’s hard to design a project that preserves a significant number of the trees. You’d just be severely limiting the density you could achieve.”

Taysi said AVT is looking at mitigating the impact from the loss of trees, and will replant as many of the 474 new saplings on-site as possible.

New, multi-family developments are vital in Bellingham, where significant housing shortages and rising property values have left people homeless or forced them to move out of town.

The proposed 68 units will be a mix of two- and three-story homes and will include several larger “luxury” townhouses. Those larger structures, Feerer said, are part of the problem: They’ve “squeezed” the development too much, and don’t leave enough space for mature trees between different properties.

If the developer removes those properties from the proposal, the remaining 60 units can be spread out a little more, and reduce the number of trees to be felled, Feerer said.

“The right way to do a nature-integrated development is to pull out those eight units and distribute the remaining units in a way that allows those older trees to stay,” Feerer said. “There’s a need for infill housing, and we totally support that ... but there’s a right way and there’s a wrong way, and this way reduces the climate resilience of our city.”

Taysi acknowledged the idea of removing some of the units from the development, but said the loss of density would be a greater challenge than the loss of older trees.

“We feel like the net benefit in tree preservation by [removing units] does not outweigh the net impact of the loss of density that would need to occur to accomplish that,” he said. “The more supply we can get into the market, the more that will help stabilize rents and push back on the demand issue we’re having, which is really just there’s more people who want to live here than we have housing for.”

The Whatcom Million Trees Project has several concerns with the proposal, including the “garage ghetto” and the submitted State Environmental Policy Act evaluation.

The city’s public comment period on the proposal recently closed, meaning city staff will take time to evaluate the proposal and the development will go in front of a hearing examiner in the next few months.

If all goes well, Taysi said, developers will be putting the shovel in the ground in the middle of next year.

Have a news tip? Email [newstips@cascadiadaily.com](mailto:newstips@cascadiadaily.com) or Call/Text **360-922-3092**

### e-Edition



#### Register for email newsletters

\* indicates required

Email Address \*

First Name

Last Name

##### Preferences:

- ☐ Daily Updates
- ☐ Weekly Top Stories
- ☐ Monthly Business News
- ☐ Breaking News Alerts

Subscribe



### Latest Stories

#### ENVIRONMENT

**Bellingham housing proposal has environmentalists calling foul**

68-unit infill housing proposal will remove 300-plus trees

#### BASEBALL

**Mariners fan travels to Giants' ballpark, fondly remembers time there with late son**

Keith Beach's son was killed while attending softball tournament in Long Beach

#### SCHEDULE

**Sports calendar: July 7 – 16, 2023**

Upcoming recreation opportunities as well as professional and college sports

#### WEEKLY WATCHDOG

**Weekly Watchdog: July 6 – 12, 2023**

This week's meetings, hearings and opportunities for public input

#### FOOD

**Dinner with a view on Bellingham Bay**

Crab, cocktails and coastlines make for a stellar staycation aboard the Salish Express