*Pride*

It was 6:45 and we had just pulled into the parking lot of the Loussac Library. We were there for the Planning and Zoning Commission public hearing of the Fairview Community Plan, which, in short is a plan to improve the neighborhood. As we walked into the library, Sharon, a fellow Fairview resident, stopped us. She noticed that my mom, Allen and I didn’t have community T-shirts on and went to grab a few from her car. She handed me one and I observed that there was a logo of sorts on the upper left hand corner of the shirt. It read “Fairview Pride.” Not thinking much of it, I threw it on over the shirt I was already wearing and continued on my way.

Once I arrived at the Assembly chambers, I started to unpack my camera gear. The Planning and Zoning Commission scheduled discussion of the Fairview Community Plan to take place at 7:00. Taking in to account the bureaucratic process, we figured it would be somewhere closer to 7:30. This gave me plenty of time to set up and check my camera gears functionality. Two cases were being presented before ours; the first was regarding the placement of a cell tower in Portage along the Seward Highway, and the second was about re-zoning a plot of land in the Tudor area. By the time everything was good to go, they had just started case number one. I stood, waiting by my camera, ready to shoot.

It was now 8:30 and the commission was still actively discussing the cell tower…with no end in sight. My mom gestured me to come take a seat. “The beauty of bureaucracy” my mom uttered with a sarcastic tone as I walked over. Sitting in the chair, I thought to myself, “why did I agree to do this…pro-bono?” The Commission went back and fourth on whether the cell tower had to be 160 feet for what felt like eternity. I almost felt inclined to bring out a bag of popcorn to enjoy the show, but then again that requires it to be entertaining. Finally at 9:00 they brought the cell tower to a vote. It failed.

After a ten-minute break, discussion was started on the second case. If it took as long as the first one, there would be no way that they would get to the Fairview Neighborhood Plan. Luckily, after the ten-minute presentation by the petitioner, it was voted quickly on and passed.

The time had come. 20 years of community meetings, and countless hours of community involvement had all led up to this very moment. I turned on my camera and pressed the button I had been waiting to press for the last two and a half hours, record. A staff member of the commission gave a brief description of the plan. I tried to follow along as best as I could but there were quite a few terms that went beyond my comprehension. Directly following, SJ, another member of the Fairview Community Council, gave a more comprehensive breakdown of the Fairview Community Plan.

Then, Jim Fergusson, head of the Planning and Zoning Commission, asked if there was anyone wishing to testify. I panned the cameras view towards the audience. In the 3 inch LCD screen I saw one person stand up…then two…three…by the time the whole audience was in frame, 15 proud people were standing with their heads held high. There were practicing certified planners, community council members, and even some UAA faculty. But there’s one thing they all had in common: all were proud members of the Fairview community. One by one, they stepped up to the microphone. Voicing their love for the plan and their passion for the neighborhood.

I had been living in Fairview for about three years and still carried inside me the “crime ridden” image of our neighborhood. I had never really stopped to examine it, to think what it meant to be a part of the place that I called home. When Sharon handed me that T-shirt, I never thought it represented anything more than some pieces of cloth sewn together by strangers in some foreign country. Listening to these people-my neighbors-speak their hearts out made me realize that “Fairview Pride” was not just some coined phrase stitched on the fabric of a few cheap T-shirts. It was a force that binds together a community, a community I am proud to be a part of.