

Pamela Brown - Columbia Valley Planning Commission Decision

From: "Kathy Berg"
To: "Whatcom County Council"
Date: 2/17/2009 10:31 AM
Subject: Columbia Valley Planning Commission Decision
CC: "PDS" , "David Stalheim"
Attachments: "PDS" , "David Stalheim"

To the Whatcom County Council,

I have been following the planning process in the Foothills with interest since they have many issues in common with Birch Bay including having an unincorporated urban growth area at Columbia Valley. Attached please find my reaction to the Planning Commission conclusions of Jan. 29, 2009. These comments would also apply to the Whatcom 2031 EIS process, I think.

Is it the job of and allowed for the Planning Commission to just through away the results of a County-sponsored public planning process without so much as a how do you do and replace it with the commissions' own invention unrelated to existing Whatcom County code? Is it not at least morally incumbent on PDS to move forward to the County Council, in a timely manner, the results of a County-sponsored public planning process?

The draft Planning Commission Findings of Fact & Reasons for Action, Conclusions and Recommendations may be found at

<http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/pds/planning/commission.jsp>

Your consideration of this matter would be greatly appreciated.

-Kathy

The Foothills Subarea Plan

I am incredulous and appalled that the Planning Commission on January 29, 2009 has dismissed the Foothills Subarea Plan as developed by general community consensus over a 3-year period with

- 40 meetings of the County Executive-appointed 11-member volunteer Advisory Committee;
- the time, effort and funding of PDS staff, two consultants and an SEIS;
- 10 well publicized, well attended with actively engaged citizens of the affected area in workshops and meetings;
- and citizen participation in public hearings

as not having “demonstrated that there has been adequate public facility and service planning to serve urban growth in this (the Columbia Valley) location.” The Planning Commissions’ conclusion that Columbia Valley should be changed from a UGA to a LAMIRD is especially concerning when consideration of LAMIRDS was consciously and deliberately left out of the Foothills public planning process by PDS from the beginning in 2005.

UGAs and LAMIRDS

Urban Growth Areas as envisioned by the Growth Management Act seek to:

- Encourage development where adequate public facilities exist or can be provided efficiently,
- Reduce inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling low-density development,
- Manage infrastructure costs,
- Protect rural character,
- Provide certainty of development, and
- Lower per-capita CO2 emissions by providing sustainable access to goods, services, jobs, economic development and a mix of housing without having to go great distances (such as to Bellingham).

The Columbia Valley UGA as defined by the Foothills Subarea Plan must be studied in the Whatcom 2031 EIS study. The use of LAMIRDS, where appropriate, to solve the SEPERATE issue of how to comply with the mandates of the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board should be considered separately, especially since Whatcom County has not yet developed uniform criteria to evaluate LAMIRDS in time for consideration in this EIS study. In other words, the Planning Commission is recommending something that is not yet even defined!

Concurrency

The concurrency requirement in the Whatcom County Code applies to development in ALL unincorporated Whatcom County including fire service whether in a UGA or not. No unincorporated UGA has an adopted level of service (LOS) except as adopted by Whatcom County. Service providers have the opportunity to use impact fees if they so chose except for fire districts according to current State Law. If a fire district feels compelled to provide an urban level of service, they may require voluntary mitigation fees in the SEPA process as Fire District #21 is presently now engaged in establishing. A word of caution: Impact / Mitigation Fees are NOT the magic bullet / cure all as once commonly believed and are very tricky to administer.

Kathy Berg
2-17-09