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October 14, 2009

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Whatcom County Council
Whatcom County Courthouse
311 Grand Ave., Suite 108
Bellingham, WA 98225

Whatcom County P&DS

RE: County Review of Bellingham Urban Growth Areas

Dear County Council Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Whatcom County Planning Commission's recommendations regarding potential changes to the Bellingham's urban growth area (UGA) boundary.

Back in September, the City Council and I submitted recommendations concerning the Geneva and Hillsdale portions of the City's UGA. The City has a long-term interest in the water quality of Lake Whatcom because we are responsible for providing the entire population of Bellingham with safe drinking water. It's one of the City's primary obligations to provide this essential resource, and there's an equal obligation to keep the source water clean. As a result, we felt that keeping these areas in Bellingham's UGA so they could eventually be annexed would be the most prudent course of action at this time.

Then on October 8th the County Planning Commission came to the same conclusion.

I understand that the Planning Commission has also suggested that the Geneva and Hillsdale areas be rezoned a rural density, perhaps R5-A. I strongly support this recommendation as it would, according to County staff's review, significantly reduce the ultimate development capacity in these portions of the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

I have reviewed the following policy language drafted by County staff to support the Planning Commission's October 8 recommendations:

Policy 2T-11: The Geneva and Hillsdale areas, located within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, are designated urban growth areas in order to allow the City of Bellingham to annex these areas. The City has a long-term interest in the water quality of Lake Whatcom because the City is responsible for providing Bellingham with safe drinking water from the lake. Whatcom County and the community also have long-term interests in the watershed based upon the special environmental sensitivity of the Lake Whatcom Watershed as a drinking water source and the Total Maximum Daily Load findings requiring a reduction of phosphorus inputs into the lake.


Therefore, only non-urban densities should be allowed in that portion of the Urban Growth Area within the watershed.

I fully support adding this policy to the County's Comprehensive Plan.

I wanted to also address one other issue relative to Geneva that came up at the last County Council worksession. The issue is the relative differences between City and County Shoreline Management Program requirements in the Lake Whatcom area. As I understand it from talking with our staff, the main difference between the jurisdictions shoreline rules is the buffer requirement. Currently, the County's buffer requirement is 100 feet. The City's is 25 feet. The City Council is currently reviewing an update to the City's SMP. Staff originally recommended increasing the buffer requirement to 50 feet. At their last worksession, the Council directed staff to further increase the buffer requirement to 100 feet. The Council is scheduled to adopt the new SMP rules in November.

Please contact Tim Stewart or Greg Aucutt if you have any questions regarding our comments.

Sincerely,



Dan Pike, Mayor
City of Bellingham

cc: Pete Kremen, Whatcom County Executive
David Stalheim, Director, Whatcom County Planning and Development Services
Greg Aucutt, Senior Planner