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Date: 5/3/2008 8:04 PM
Subject: Please place this in the public comments

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May 3, 2008

David Stalheim
Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98266
Re: Acceptance of Foothills SubArea Committee Recommendations (Majority Report)
Mr. Stalheim:

I looked with great interest at the Friends of the Foothills commissioned traffic report done by the Tilghman Group in Seattle. What struck me most was that FoF, a group whoÆs majority membership does not live in the Columbia Valley, had the funds available to afford to have this done. It leads me to believe that these same people probably have no trouble spending nearly \$3.80 a gallon for gas to travel all the way to Bellingham or Lynden or elsewhere to do their shopping, pick up their prescription medicines, keep doctors appointments, go to work, or buy clothes for their kids. That must be a good feeling to have to not worry and budget just to afford the gas to get groceries.

I moved to the Columbia Valley 6 years ago. Yes, partly because I wanted to. IÆve always had an affinity for this area since moving to Whatcom County 20 years ago. But I also moved here mainly because this is what I could afford. I bought my home, a three bedroom, two bath modular on a double lot, for \$85,000. I had looked at houses in other areas of the county, but I couldnÆt afford the mortgage on houses that were going for \$150-\$200,000 for a similar size home.

At the time I was also working for a Customhouse Brokerage firm in Sumas. So it was close to where I live. But 5 years ago they decided to downsize the Sumas office and gave us two choices: either travel to Blaine to work or find another job. I had 15 years in, a 401K, and medical and dental. I didnÆt have much of a choice but to make the hour drive to Blaine.

I drive a 10 year old car that my former roommate and her husband gave me for my birthday 2 years ago, replacing my other car (which was also 10 years old) which was in need of expensive repairs. I really canÆt afford a new car payment. I have a decent paying job and no credit card debt. But between the mortgage, the insurances, utilities, garbage pick up, gas, pet food, and groceries I basically live from pay check to pay check. I have about \$100 in my savings account; my only buffer if something goes wrong with the car or the house. And I still owe my parents \$3000. My washer and dryer are about as old as my car, and the dishwasher came with the house. I drive a teenage girl to Ferndale every Monday so that she can have a job (because thereÆs none for the teens up here). I donÆt buy clothes at MacyÆs, I go to WalMart, and the last time I bought some was about 2 years ago. My computer was bought for me by a friend 5 years ago and it has issues. I get my hair done at Master Cuts in mall every couple of months because itÆs cheap.

IÆm pretty typical of the people that live in this area. WeÆre not rich, weÆre just getting by. And some are barely doing that. Especially with the rising costs of food and gas. But weÆre good people for the most part. WeÆre hard working and we take care of our families and try to help our neighbors when we can. And there are nearly 4000 of us in this two square mile radius.

Yes, we have some bad apples up here. What place doesnÆt? And itÆs exacerbated by the fact that we have nothing up here for these people. There are no jobs, thereÆs no grocery store or pharmacy, thereÆs nothing for the kids to do (we donÆt even have a park for the nearly 1000 kids we have!), and we have one resident deputy for the entire foothills area.

KendallWatch has made a lot of progress in cleaning up this area and making it a better, safer place for people to live. ItÆs because of the efforts of KendallWatch that we even have a resident deputy. We are

not where we were 5 years ago, but we're not where we should be either. And Kendall/Wash can't do it all.

Those of you in Planning and on the Commission don't live up here. Heck, you barely even come up here at all unless you're on your way to Mount Baker. You don't see us. You don't know us. But I'm sure you've heard the things that others say about us. You don't have to listen to the snide comments made about us. You don't have to deal with the elitism, classism and outright prejudice against the people that live here. But we hear it all the time.

"They're all just a bunch of crack heads." "You can't put anything nice there, they'll just trash it." "I heard the Russian Mafia was up there." "If you build that Resource Center around that corner (meaning the corner west of the Kendall Elementary School) we won't use it. We won't go around that corner." "Those people scare me." "I don't want those kids in my place." "Parasite." "Peeful Valley." "Do they even have plumbing there?" "Trailer Trash." "Aren't you afraid to live there?" "Oh, that's where all those Russians live, isn't it." "They're all on welfare up there, you know."

I hear it when I go to work. I hear it when I go to Maple Falls or Glacier. I hear it down in Bellingham.

Others have heard it too, even from people who work for the county.

We're not asking the county to take care of us. We don't want to live on the public dole or keep coming back to you time after time after time begging for scraps. We are asking for a chance to make something of ourselves; to create a better quality of life for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors. We're asking you to allow us to have the tools we need to do that; to create jobs, to buy locally, to spend less money on gas and more on food for our families, to have something for our kids to do and a place for them to go.

Others are screaming "maintain the rural character!" But what is rural about 4000 people living in a 2 square mile radius? And it won't get any more rural if the UGA goes away in the Columbia valley.

Another 1200 plus people will still be able to move into new developments in this valley. And that's just 1200 plus more people having to travel outside the foothills to work and shop.

According to the 2000 census towns such as Blaine, Everson, Nooksack, and Sumas all have populations less than 4000. Elsewhere in the state towns such as Leavenworth, Long Beach, Oroville, and Westport have less than 4000. And all these places have local jobs, local shopping, local law enforcement, and parks for the kids.

Is it the consensus of Planning and groups such as FoF that, while we have the population to sustain the UGA with a commercial overlay, that a nebulous concept of "rural character" among 4000 people is more important? That, while you can't even see the Columbia Valley from the Mount Baker Highway, that the illusion of being rural must be maintained? That it's really not more ecologically savvy to have the majority of the foothills population walk, bike or drive a quarter of mile to work, buy groceries, fill prescriptions, or shop as opposed to driving 25 miles? That it's really in the best interest of the entire Foothills area to allow 4000 people to sit in a stagnant environment without services and amenities commensurate to the population?

Or does it really come down to "you can't put anything nice near those people; they'll just trash it" and "we won't go around that corner"?

No one wants to see strip malls up and down the Mount Baker Highway or "Golden Arches" lighting up the night sky. And that's not what we're asking for. What we're asking for is the chance to allow us, in the Columbia Valley, to do this right: to create a better quality of life for the residents that live here by having the opportunity to create jobs, shop locally, and give our kids a place to go and things to do. What we're asking to do is prevent urban sprawl and maintain rural character by keeping growth confined to one area where the majority of the foothills population is already located while providing the necessary services and amenities to accommodate the current and future population.

To deny us this opportunity by doing away with the UGA is to leave us in stagnation. It is saying to us that it is better that we "just get by with what we have" rather than allowing us the possibility of improving ourselves. It's also saying, "if you wanted a better life for yourself and your family you shouldn't have looked in the Foothills."

The Foothills SubArea Committee spent 2 years asking us what we wanted for ourselves up here. We told them. They coalesced it into majority recommendation that was presented to Planning. Do not allow a small, but vocal and well financed minority, most of whom don't live in the Columbia Valley, decide what is best for the rest of us. Don't deny us the opportunities that the rest of the county already has. We have one of the largest populations in Whatcom County; larger than Blaine, Nooksack, Everson, and Sumas. Don't tell us that means nothing compared to maintaining "rural character". Don't tell us that "we just have to settle for what we have."

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