

Dear Mr. Stalheim:

As a member of the Foothills Economic Development Association, I wish to go on record fully supporting the Mt Baker Foothills Subarea Plan as developed by the members of the Advisory Committee.

While much of the Columbia Valley was originally designed for recreational purposes with many properties being owned by citizens of Canada who enjoyed relaxing in the Foothills, that is no longer the case. The falling value of the Canadian dollar nearly a decade ago and the dissolution of the Paradise Lakes Association led to the sell-off of the Canadian properties. People purchased lots designed to be recreational *get-aways* to use as permanent residences. Currently, the population density is urban, that is, 4 houses per acre, and the Columbia Valley contains nearly 4,000 full time residents. That is larger in population than most of the small towns in Whatcom County.

With a growing population and that kind of housing density, the County Council wisely created the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area (UGA) in the late 1990s. Whatcom County is growing and the Growth Management Act requires the county to plan for that growth. All newcomers will not just live in Bellingham; areas across the county will have to assume a share of that growth. The Mt Baker Foothills Subarea Plan recommends that, to the extent possible, growth in the Foothills be funneled into the Columbia Valley UGA. That helps alleviate the pressure on the rural region on the Foothills.

The Advisory Committee also reduced the size of the UGA for two reasons I can see: to protect the rural nature of the Foothills and encourage the growing visitor trade of the upper end of the Nooksack Valley, the Ski Area, Mt Baker and environs. By moving the southern boundary of the UGA away from the Kendall Small Town Commercial zone, any further commercial development that might join the UGA and Kendall is effectively prohibited. Thus, the rural environment of travel along SR 542 is maintained and with growth, both residential and commercial taking place in the UGA, the rural character of the Foothills is maintained.

Some years ago, most residents were employed in the Foothills, but today many commute to Bellingham and to Sumas for work. It is important to develop and implement plans to bring jobs back to where people live. The cost of gasoline is a growing hardship for all Foothills residents, let alone those that have to travel 20 or more miles to work. The economic development section of the Subarea Plan provides a framework for improving the number of family wage jobs in this area. Minor infrastructure improvements will be required, which are outlined in the plan, but a number of positives exist to utilize in the development of new jobs. This plan will help bring people together to accomplish this end.

I encourage you and Planning and Development Services to support the Mt. Baker Foothills Subarea Plan and to place it before the County Council as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Carole S. Sharpe
Chair, Cell Phone Committee,
Foothills Economic Development Association

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PLANNING DIVISION