

SEP 9 2008

LONG RANGE  
PLANNING DIVISION

I would like to voice my support of Alternative One of the D.E.I.S. MINUS THE MITIGATION MAPS.

As a resident and homeowner in the Columbia Valley, I have participated in the sub area planning process for one reason and one reason only and that reason is the substandard conditions that have existed in my community (Paradise Lakes).

Efforts during the past five years to bring some change and possible revitalization to the area have proven to be only marginally successful. It has become painfully apparent that we cannot achieve the goals that we have set which would bring our community to a functioning state, without getting them into the budget process through the sub area plan.

We had been desperately seeking more services and help from various county agencies until the stark realization hit that we cannot fix our problems by reliance on county government. Even if we were to get our need for services added to the budget process, we will still be at the mercy of the county's time frames and fiscal ability to provide what is so desperately needed here.

It is well documented that much of the demographic of my community is that of working class and working poor along with a good dose of those living below the poverty line thrown in for good measure. It is a fragile community that struggles with the stigma (not necessarily deserved) of being a haven for criminals and drug dealers.

I served on the Meth Action Team and was a board member for STAR as a means of trying to get to the truth about what is really going on in my community. It turns out that there is a very small number of "bad guys" here in contrast to the much larger majority of people who get up and go to work every day and struggle to make ends meet. That small minority has been able to become entrenched in the community and create havoc because they could blend in with the properties that have been allowed, through lack of code enforcement, to stockpile garbage and junk cars. That small minority found a safe haven here and we have been working diligently to root them out.

I have been down in the trenches and have little time for flowery speeches so will always speak from my heart in plain and simple truths. Some of those truths are that the population center in the Columbia Valley is one of the largest and one of the most dense in Whatcom County. We exist out here with minimal to no services. People say that if we want urban services we should move to Bellingham.....would that we could, afford to that is. People who exist at the lower end of the socio-economic scale generally do not CHOOSE where they live. They live where they can afford to live and frequently get stuck in less than desirable locations with no way of getting out.

It seemed like such a “no brainer” to me to serve on the sub area committee which would allow us to articulate the dire need for some of the basic services necessary to a population of the size that exists in the Columbia Valley. It seemed as though we would, at long last, get at least some of our needs into the budget for the short and long term planning cycles and possibly set the stage for the bigger step of incorporation.

Imagine my surprise to find out that there were some people who are actually opposed to the process that could bring revitalization to the Columbia Valley. The majority of the opposition do not live in my community but I would like to invite all those who are opposed to more services and an incorporation study to come and live here for six months. I already know the answer but the invitation is open

I would also like to ask those opposed to ANY growth in the Columbia Valley, what is it that they oppose? Jobs? A better quality of life for the residents who live here? Services and shopping that require less travel time and expense for the hard working families who already struggle with high gas prices? It is guaranteed that the population will grow. How will denying a full service grocery store, a bank, or any other modern services benefit anyone? . What is everyone so afraid of? That we might succeed? How can revitalizing an area that is in such distress do anything but benefit the entire region? And, please remember a large population already exists here no matter what projections are made.

Actually, I know what the opposition is afraid of. They are afraid of what these changes will do to their lifestyles and the rural character that exists in other parts of the foothills. I am all in favor of preserving rural character but that rural character and pristine nature has long since disappeared from the Kendall/ Columbia Valley UGA. Being afraid of change is a natural thing, after all many people were opposed to indoor plumbing when the concept was first introduced but change does not have to be a negative thing.

We cannot continue to beg the county for services. We would like to be able to create our own destiny. We may not be able to create jobs for everyone who lives here but we could create a sense of place that has the potential to reverse the downward spiral that has occurred. It is for these reasons that I believe it is necessary to approve an incorporation study for the Columbia Valley.

Imagination and an open mind are necessary for new ideas to be born and my hope is that an incorporation study (which is just that - a study) would possibly tell us if incorporation is possible or feasible and if not, perhaps some viable alternatives might find their way to the surface that no one has even thought of yet. At least give us the chance to study the potentials that might bring lasting positive change. A lasting positive change that could create a community that is a benefit to the whole rather than the constant drain on the county budget that has us all chasing our tails trying to fix one problem after another.

The decision makers can either allow this and provide us with the tools to achieve our goals or they can deny us the opportunities we ask for. The later option would maintain the status quo of stagnation. It's just as simple as that.

The necessary tools would first and foremost be the retention of the UGA status without which incorporation cannot happen. I support planned and managed growth that would reduce rural sprawl and include the zoning designations required to allow commercial enterprise and some light impact industrial. With these elements in place we could work toward securing a tax base that would support incorporation.

Thank you  
Norma Otto  
8519 Bluebell Ct.  
Paradise Lakes