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SEP 4 2008

LONG RANGE
PLANNING DIVISION

September 4, 2008

Matt Aamot, Tyler Schroeder, Martin Blackman, David Stalheim
Whatcom County Planning & Development Services
5280 Northwest Drive
Bellingham, WA 98226

Re: Public meeting at Kendal Elementary school in response to the SEIS

Dear Matt, Tyler, Martin, and David:

At 3am the fire/EMS crew is called to the scene of a car accident. They are at the scene for two hours and then return to the station for another hour where they clean and prepare all the equipment for the next call. At 8am they report to their day jobs on construction sites, in trucks, at schools, in offices, on farms, and at stores. The following night they get two or three calls and less sleep than the night before, but they still must return to their day jobs. In our district these firefighters and EMT's are volunteers: men and women who devote many hours and years to the service of others.

At 11pm the local deputy goes on a burglary call and catches a thief in action. While he transports the prisoner to Bellingham there is a domestic violence call. Unfortunately, this one deputy, the one who is responsible for the entire foothills area, will be unavailable for at least another hour. Our local deputy responds to an average of 60 to 80 calls per month and made over 300 arrests last year in the foothills. He is spread thin enough.

It sounds logical to simply add another deputy or two and recruit more volunteer fire/EMS people. New volunteers are recruited. They pass the physical, pass the driving test and meet all other requirements. They take a 160-hour firefighting class, a 160-hour EMT class if they want to be an EMT, and attend 2 mandatory meetings and 1 training meeting per month for 12 months, all while on a one-year probation. They also have to devote 4 hours of a Sunday afternoon every couple of months to check vehicles, clean the meeting room, sweep the floors, weed the yard, and scrub the bathrooms. All for the privilege of being called on at any time of the day or night to help people in an emergency. It's increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers and training each recruit costs the district \$2000. Unfortunately, after all this expensive training, many volunteers leave because the time commitment is overwhelming or often they just move away.

So why not hire firefighters, career EMT's and build a station to house them? Why not hire another deputy or two as well? I'm sure you know firsthand the budget problems the county is facing. The sheriff's department cannot fill the

positions they currently have open because they are being required to cut their budget like everyone else.

Where will the money come from then? Where will you get the approximately \$60-85 thousand a year salary and benefits per firefighter? The \$250-400 thousand per fire truck? The \$100 thousand per ambulance? Where will you get another \$100 thousand per deputy for salary and benefits, training, vehicles, and equipment? And at which fire/police station will these paid public servants work?

As it is now our volunteer fire/EMS district and law enforcement is understaffed, overworked, and under-funded. If the county wants to raise our taxes, pass bonds, and impose levy lifts, then they must convince a majority of us, the voting public, all this expense would be worth us paying higher taxes than we already pay now. I can tell you that most of us are not willing to fund improvements and services forced on us by new development.

I believe the SEIS does not sufficiently address the impact a large new development will have on our fire/EMS and law enforcement. Assuming costs will be mitigated is irresponsible and tantamount to counting your chickens before they are hatched. A large and unprotected population is reckless at best and dangerous at worst.

We appreciate our local volunteer firefighters, EMT's, and our one deputy who serves the entire foothills. They all do a good job, they work hard, and they make our lives better and safer. They deserve our thanks, our support, and the funding they need to continue to serve our community at its current capacity.

I support alternative 3.

Thank you,
Nori Zukerman
PO Box 727
Maple Falls, WA 98266

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nori Zukerman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "N" and "Z".