

RESPONSE TO THE **SEIS** REGARDING THE UGA IN THE  
COLUMBIA VALLEY

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LONG RANGE  
PLANNING DIVISION

9-10-2008

Dear Mr. Aamot,

I am writing in regards to the proposed Balfour Village project in the Columbia Valley and the corresponding SEIS.

I live and have a business at milepost 25 on the Mt. Baker highway, just west of Maple Falls. My husband and I have lived on this property for 10 years now and plan on spending the rest of our lives here. We moved here for the clean air and water, the quiet, and the general quality of life that comes with the natural surroundings that are unique to this profoundly precious part of the world. We take seriously our role in preserving the natural habitat on our seven-acre parcel, and in our community.

It strikes me that a planning department, county council, and county commission that would allow a development the size of the proposed Balfour village, to be built in a rural area such as this, would not be acting in the best interest of the population that lives here and also the population that vacations and enjoys recreational opportunities here. For that matter, it would not serve the families that would be moving to the proposed housing very well either.

The Columbia Valley is a lot of miles away from any major city that provides services and employment. People who are attracted to living in a subdivision are going to want these things. They will probably oppose the values of most of the people who live here now, which will cause a lot of conflict. You already know the values of the present residents of the foothills from the workshops you did a couple of years ago in preparation for the sub area plan. We want to preserve a way of life that is uniquely rural. It is not an easy or convenient life, but it is rich and full and becoming more endangered all the time. I have personally come a very long way and worked very hard to get here. Now I find myself in a situation where I have invested everything in this little bit of land we have and I am not getting any younger. I'm not leaving, so I am choosing to fight the kind of development that has homogenized and polluted a large portion of the United States, and frankly, sent me running for the hills.

The idea of planting a small city out in the middle of a rural area is absurd. The Paradise and Peaceful valley developments that are located across from the proposed development are examples of the problems that occur when lack of foresight is applied to reality. In the Columbia Valley we already have a disproportionate amount of crime. We have a lack of police protection, fire protection, public transportation, and the traffic situation on the Mt. Baker highway and Kendall road intersection is sometimes perilous. Undoubtedly there was a lack of prudence in creating this community and if we repeat the mistake, we will have you (the county government) to blame for it.

Some of my personal concerns with the proposed development and the lack of attention the SEIS gave to these concerns are as follows:

**WATER-** We have no way of knowing how much water we have available to us. No Quantitative Groundwater Modeling has been done. I can tell you that our own well's output is dangerously low in the summer. Our well produces a very limited amount of water all year. Any decrease in flow could result in us not being able to live here. I know many of my neighbors have similar circumstances. Can you guarantee that pumping tons of additional water out of the aquifer will not effect the water flow of surrounding wells? The best way to assure water quantity is to limit development. The Water Quality and Quantity report that is used in the SEIS states this. I agree with this conclusion. It seems a LAMRID status would best protect our water supply.

Water Quality is an additional concern. The SEIS fails to include two dumpsites that exist, and fails to address the effects of storm water pollutants, increased water temperatures and sediment.

People who live in subdivisions will likely install automatic sprinklers and use more pesticides and insecticides in their yards than most of us do on our five, ten or twenty acre parcels. Suburban landscaping standards are very different from rural ones.

**TRAFFIC-** The Mount Baker highway is a windy, two lane mountain highway. It is sometimes treacherous in the winter. There is a lot of highway between Bellingham and the Columbia Valley. Are we really up for the alterations that would have to occur to make it safe for such an increase in traffic? What would come along with these changes and is it worth the sacrifice environmentally or economically to make such changes? How would that affect our air and water quality? Who is going to pay for the extensive

alterations that would have to take place to accommodate such a large traffic increase? I am concerned with the noise factor of so many extra cars on the road. The traffic report fails to address these concerns adequately. WSDOT recognizes these flaws and has asked for an updated report. I have read the report supplied to you by the Tilgham Group, and think the concerns laid out there should be taken into consideration by the planning department. The SEIS fails to do so.

**SCHOOLS-** Our property taxes are very high relative to our incomes out here. We cannot afford to build and maintain more schools. Would the developer be able to assure us that they would pay for schools and their continued maintenance? How would the county council and the planning department propose we pay for them? I'm all for education and I have usually voted in favor of increased property taxes for schools, but I will not continue to do so if this development is imposed upon us.

**FIRE PROTECTION, POLICE PROTECTION AND MEDICAL RESPONSE-** Where is this all going to come from? At the public Hearing on 9-04-08 we heard from a local firefighter who explained the difficulty in recruiting a volunteer fire department. We can't depend on a volunteer department. The SEIS assumes we will magically acquire more fire and police protection, but does not say how we will pay for it. Property taxes can only be increased so much before we all say, NO.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT-** Some things were not addressed at all in the SEIS. For instance: air quality, light pollution, noise pollution, protection for fish and wildlife, geological issues like the alluvial fan that is on the east side of the proposed town center, and the scarp that has recently been discovered in this very area. An earthquake on alluvial material could be catastrophic to a development. If you go and stand where this development is proposed, you will notice the steep hillside on one side of the valley. What about the possibility of landslides? It is a remarkably small space for a development of this size. Pollutants are already trapped there in the winter when everyone is using their woodstoves, and don't think that with the cost of energy that the wood smoke will go away any time soon.

I accept the difficulties of living in a rural area. These are small prices to pay for the benefit I receive everyday when I walk out my front door and find myself in one of

the most beautiful, life rich places on earth. During this time when we are realizing our place in nature, and the risk that we face if we continue to abuse that relationship, I ask you to consider your own place in history and to do the practical thing. Acting on behalf of our future and our children's future is vital. As the human population grows, we still have choices. We can be thoughtful and creative in our solutions. I realize that most people do not want more development in their backyard, but the proposed development in the Columbia Valley and the existence of the UGA for that matter, is **way too much in the wrong place**. There are lots of ideas out there, but putting a suburb out in the middle of Whatcom County is an awful one. **We have so much to loose**. The developers are the only ones who have something to gain, and once they are done they will likely take their money and run, leaving us with the atrocity that will be left behind. Maybe some politicians also have something to gain by shoving what they think will be low income housing out in the boonies where less constituents will complain about it. I have faith that most of you in county government intend to make good decisions on our behalf. Please do your jobs thoughtfully, with diligence and with an eye towards the future. We are very busy with jobs of our own.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



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