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Whatcom County P&DS

To:

The Honorable Pete Kremen
Whatcom County Executive
311 Grand Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225

Whatcom County Council
Carl Weimer, Chairperson
311 Grand Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98225

Copy:

David Stalheim, Director
Whatcom County Planning and
Development Services
5860 Northwest Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98227

Whatcom County Planning Commission
Ken Mann, Chairperson
5860 Northwest Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98227

WWGMHB
c/o Paulette York, Executive Assistant
P.O. Box 40953
Olympia, WA 98504-0953

Whatcom County Growth Management
Coordinating Council
c/o Jack Louws, Chairperson
5860 Northwest Ave.
Bellingham, WA 98227

Dear Whatcom County Government Officials:

The undersigned Foothills Area Residents, Organizations and/or Landowners, respectfully demand that Whatcom County fulfill its responsibilities to our unincorporated Urban Growth Area in the Columbia Valley.

Community members have patiently waited nearly a decade for our local government to meet its obligation(s) as administrator of this UGA and urge Whatcom County to provide the planning leadership, resources and support to which our community is entitled and desperately needs, without resorting to costly legal reviews and litigation. Tax dollars are better spent providing necessary improvements.

The major concerns are Whatcom County Government's failure to:

1. Encourage jobs and supply appropriate commercial/light industrial zoning within the Columbia Valley UGA.
2. Appropriately plan for capital facilities and urban infrastructure within the Columbia Valley UGA.
3. Set aside greenways, parks and public spaces within the Columbia Valley UGA.

Under current law, Whatcom County Government is charged with the responsibility for facilitating and ensuring all three activities.

For the past several years, local residents and community groups have devoted hundreds of hours reviewing conditions in this unincorporated Urban Growth Area. They have volunteered their time and resources, generally seeking to gain the support of Whatcom County Government to address the disparity of conditions that have emerged through neglect, lack of leadership, budgetary shortfalls and inadequate planning. Issues have ranged from lack of jobs and economic development, blighted properties, and crime, to the need for urban services planning and the creation of community green spaces and parks. Many of these same voices were heard throughout the recent effort to update the Foothills Subarea Plan.

Most of these conditions can be traced to a lack of appropriate zoning and capital facilities planning and a failure to implement the intent and vision of the Whatcom County Comprehensive plan as it pertains to the Columbia Valley UGA.

Some obvious examples of neglect are the lack of any light industrial zoning to encourage development and jobs in our UGA, little in the way of capital facilities, parks, trails or open spaces planning. The exception, of course, is the preparatory work for the Resource Center that all residents appreciate. Yet this much needed facility does not relieve the County of the statutory responsibilities to do appropriate capital facilities planning required to support a healthy and viable community in the Columbia Valley UGA.

The one area where commercial zoning exists, Kendall, is removed from the population center, includes various transportation and public safety constraints, contains few non-contiguous and irregular parcels, and is deficient of the necessary infrastructure to attract and retain businesses. Thus, this sparse commercial zone cannot possibly meet the basic needs of a healthy community the size of the Columbia Valley.

This neglect has had the cumulative effect of rendering County Policies as outlined in the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (January 2005) irrelevant and left to the discretion and interpretation of County Planning staff in ways that have proven ineffective and detrimental to the economic and social health of our urban community. For example, currently less than 100 jobs exist in our UGA for a population of nearly 4000 residents!

Since the designation of the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area in 1999, numerous improvement opportunities have presented themselves. Landowners and developers wishing to appropriately locate housing, commercial, and small business ventures within our UGA have been denied, delayed and economically dissuaded from creating anything beyond single-family lots. This inaction has contributed to the community's unemployment and social health problems.

Time and time again these private sector opportunities have been undermined by inconsistent and ineffective decisions and policy interpretations. Such action appears to directly oppose the county's comprehensive plan directives to *"Study Columbia Valley/Kendall to identify the factors necessary to create an economically viable city."* and *"Work with all parties to resolve infrastructure and public service issues so that the Columbia Valley/Kendall area can develop to its full potential."* The plan further states that the county will identify, *"special needs with respect to unique non-city industrial sites ... and County areas for which the County will actively support incorporation ... such as ... Columbia Valley.* (Emphasis added)

Residents are unaware of any study or coordinated effort undertaken by Whatcom County to implement these policies or to ensure that such improvements would ever be realized, other than the recent effort to update the Foothills Subarea Plan. That update is currently 5-years overdue and appears to be under scrutiny that threatens to disregard 2-years of public process and deliberation in favor of a Whatcom County Planning and Development Services' authored alternative plan that may again prove unresponsive to residents' needs.

There were several recent development proposals in the Columbia Valley UGA that could have initiated healthy revitalization and financial investment to our community. Approximately three-hundred local residents submitted a petition in support of one of these projects that included a centralized commercial district within the population center! Most of these proposals have been delayed, modified and hindered over so many years that it isn't reasonable for an investor to pursue completion.

Recently, 115 members of the Slavic community living within the UGA submitted a petition generally supporting the creation of jobs, economic development and long overdue services and amenities necessary for an urban community. We adamantly believe the success of this community is dependent upon coordinated zoning and policy directives from Whatcom County Government supporting and encouraging development appropriate for an Urban Growth Area within the Columbia Valley.

The future of the Columbia Valley UGA community is at risk due to the lack of effective leadership and these planning discrepancies. An Urban Growth Area is required by law to have zoning and planning that supports realistic opportunities for jobs, economic development, appropriate capital facilities and urban infrastructure, services and amenities that support the basic needs of its resident population.

Our local county government, to date, has failed to adequately plan for our community, and we respectfully demand that our elected leaders and civil servants, ensure that Whatcom County Government immediately begin meeting their statutory and civic obligations to the Columbia Valley Urban Growth Area and its citizens.

Respectfully submitted by;

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