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LONG RANGE
PLANNING DIVISION

From: Heather Swanson

To: Whatcom County Planning Commission

Regarding: Foothills Subarea Plan Public Comment

Date: January 12, 2009

Please consider the following comments and concerns as you prepare to make recommendations to the County Council regarding the Foothills Subarea Plan (FSP):

Many good and constructive comments have already crossed your desks during the year since the 2007 Draft FSP first was rolled out by the Foothills Subarea Advisory Committee, including the recommendations of the Minority Report, results of community surveys, and comments from individuals who reside in the Foothills. These comments have expressed a strong desire to retain rural character, to adopt the lower population projection, to be as thorough as possible in identifying funding for required mitigations, to make good use of all available traffic studies, and to comprehensively study the effects of the proposed FSP on the natural environment.

I believe that all of these Subarea-wide impacts and concerns could be mitigated to a very large degree with one action: Adopt the portion of Alternative III in the Draft SEIS which recommends redesignating the Columbia Valley UGA as a LAMIRD.

The bottom line is this: The continued existence and development of the CVUGA negatively impacts rural character, levels of service, tax rates and quality of life for the *entire* Foothills Subarea, without providing any assurance that the residents of Columbia Valley will see and increase in jobs or services. This is a lose-lose situation. In contrast, redesignating the CVUGA as a LAMIRD would protect the Foothills from the impacts associated with a non-city UGA while still allowing for an appropriate amount of development to increase services to the *existing* population.

The density of this existing population is not the result of an urban community expanding, or even of a traditional crossroads economy

becoming trendy housing. It is instead an anomaly caused by the rampant speculation of real estate developers aided by poor policy on the part of the County. What began as just another recreational development for seasonal use became zoned for year-round use. When the inevitable social, environmental and economic problems associated with this zoning change came to pass, the County re-zoned the area as a UGA – again, trying to grow out of a problem created by growth.

With the current version of the FSP, we are poised once again to try to grow out of this growth problem by adding more high-density, commercial and industrial zoning to this non-city UGA. *Can we not learn from history?* The CVUGA has been in existence for 10 years now, and no businesses have flocked here to support the population or take advantage of the available work force. Community recreation centers have closed and the green belts have recently been logged and sold to private developers. The County has poured funding into planning, public transit, animal control and public safety and still... Where is the thriving urban area that was envisioned by proponents of the UGA?

Let's seize this moment in history to *correct* our past mistakes, not compound them. Rather than charge ahead with the reorganizing of a UGA that will, at best, continue to attract real estate speculators and encourage high-density residential housing, let us take the opportunity to designate this anomalous, non-self supporting population for what it is: a LAMIRD.

This action would by default mitigate many of the primary concerns regarding the FSP, and the people of the Columbia Valley will be better served for having public safety and services brought into concurrency with the existing population before allowing additional growth.

Thank you for your consideration,

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