



Whatcom County Planning Commission

Jan 28 2009

Dear Commissioners:

I thank you for hearing all the oral public testimony at your January 15<sup>th</sup> 2009 meeting. It was obvious that the members of the Planning Commission were truly interested in working through the complex array of issues (some of which are necessarily controversial) regarding the Foothills Sub Area Plan. The Balfour Village project and its potential impacts to both the environment and the Columbia Valley/Foothills community has been the subject of much debate. I hope that the testimony I gave at the public hearing began to clarify the current status, and future plans, for the Balfour Village project. In an effort to further clarify this matter, I submit the following brief overview of the project – from the developer’s perspective.

**Ownership:** Marble Falls LLC is the owner of the Balfour Village Project. My property development company, Tin Rock Development (formerly ThinkWell Development) initially acted as a consultant to Marble Falls. In 2008, Tin Rock became the development partner to Marble Falls for the Balfour Village project.

**Current Status:** Marble Falls LLC has a vested sub-division application (LSS2005-0007) for 289 single-family lots on approximately 265 total acres. Of the total acreage, approximately 140 acres are in a “reserve tract” and are reserved for future development, and approximately 125 acres are being developed (see attached).

Both the 125-acre parcel and the 140-acre “reserve tract” are zoned UR4 and are located within the Columbia Valley UGA. However, the 140-acre “reserve tract” is in long-term UGA, while the 125-acres of development are within the short-term UGA. As Mr. Stalheim confirmed to you last Thursday, the 289 unit application is vested. It will be processed under Whatcom County’s current regulations, and will not be affected by any future decision on the status or configuration of the Columbia Valley UGA.

**Prior Balfour Village Plans:** The 2005 Balfour Village Application package included requests for rezones from long-term to short-term (ZON2005-0003), and from UR4 to General Commercial (ZON2005-00004) and included a PUD application (PUD2005-0004) to allow for the creation of an urban village with a variety of residential opportunities. In response to SEPA discussions with Whatcom County staff and its new Planning Director at the time, David Stalheim, we decided to mitigate potential SEPA impacts by reducing the scope and size of the project – hence the 289 unit plan (the original plan was for 770 units). The Foothills Sub Area Planning process was ongoing as we amended our plans, and it seemed to make sense that subsequent phases of Balfour Village could await a resolution on the Sub Area Plan. County staff has been consistent in its commitment to complete the Sub Area Plan in 2009. Consequently, and in an effort not to muddle or confuse the process by having re-zone and PUD requests running concurrently with the Sub Area planning process, we withdrew all the applications with the exception of LSS2005-0007, the long plat.

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**Balfour Vision:** For some inexplicable reason, there is a 60-acre section of long-term UR4 (within the UGA) that cuts the Balfour Village Phase I project into three distinct development areas. There is nothing improper or nefarious in this plan; it is merely a response to the curious zoning. It is our intent and desire, in the near future, to be able to connect the three detached communities of Phase I, provide an urban village that will embrace the East County Regional Resource Center, provide a community focal point, and complete the master plan for the Balfour Village project (see attached Master Plan). The urban village would be developed by remodeling the area around the "Future Development Area" shown on the plan.

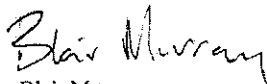
**Critical Mass:** It is undeniably reasonable to state that most Foothills residents, over half of whom live in the Columbia Valley would like a full-service grocery store, drug store, bank and other attendant services in their community. A 2006 Market Report by Northern Economics reports that the current market area population is 6,500, in excess of the 5,583 people needed to support a 40,000 sq. ft. grocery store in Kendall/Columbia Valley. However, while Brown and Cole has shown a significant interest in locating a store at Balfour Village, I am not, unfortunately, currently fighting off potential supermarket chains vying for the opportunity to meet the demands of this community. The raw numbers might suggest that a store is viable, but I suspect that two other factors play a role: firstly, there is not an adequate site with infrastructure and appropriate zoning; and secondly and probably more significantly, the average annual household income in the Foothills is appreciably lower than Whatcom County as a whole. It is also entirely probable that other providers that many of us take for granted would find their way in to the Columbia Valley if demographics were slightly different – more population, more disposable income, or more of both.

**Balfour Development Plan:** Marble Falls and Tin Rock have a vested interest in ensuring that Balfour Village's initial plat areas are developed and constructed in such a manner that protects and enhances the value of subsequent residential phases and a commercial development. The Columbia Valley is surely in need of services. It is also in need of a civic core, a hub, a soul.

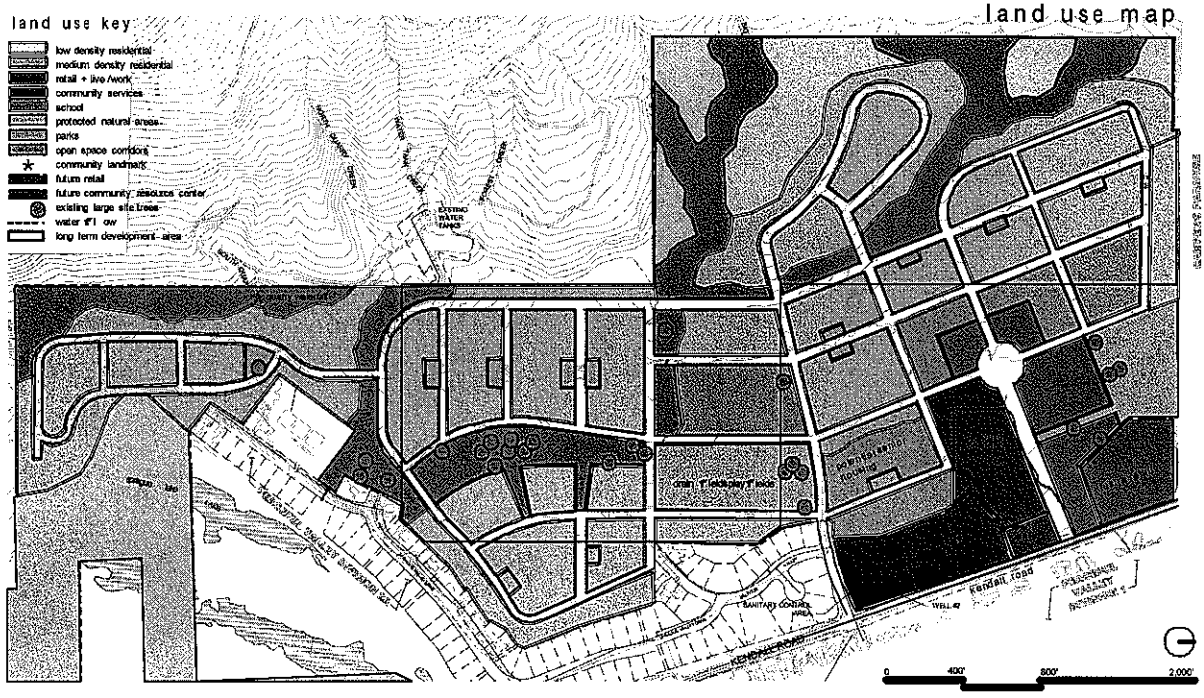
Marble Falls and Tin Rock are committed to working with state and local agencies, and with all providers of local infrastructure. Many of these service providers are strained or constrained with a lack of capital. They will continue to be strained without sources of additional funding.

I ask that the Planning Commission to support the work and recommendations of the Foothills Sub Area Plan Advisory Committee and its Draft Foothill Sub Area Plan, October, 2007.

Sincerely,



Blair Murray



*phase 1 development*

