

Kate Blystone - September 17 '09 Joint Planning Commission/County Council meeting -UGA recommendations

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September 17, 2009

Dear Whatcom County Planning Commission members Lesow, Menzies, Steensma, Wilson, Mann, Belisle, Melious, Hunter, and Burdge,

I am writing to you instead of sticking around to testify at the Joint Planning Commission / County Council meeting underway this evening, scheduled for the purpose of soliciting citizen input on Whatcom County's Urban Growth Area Review and Recommendations. I worked late and did not arrive at this meeting until after 7 PM, making me the very last person on the sign-up sheet scheduled to speak before you. After listening to others for an hour and a half, I decided to come home and email you instead. As I write this message, the meeting is still underway.

My name is Elizabeth Gross and I live at 1949 South Hills Place, located in the Yew Street/Lake Padden UGA. I wholeheartedly support the County's recommendation to remove this area from the UGA, for the same reasons put forth by the County. This recommendation is the natural culmination of the County's decision in 2007 to create a watershed protection overlay for the Lake Padden watershed, a decision the City of Bellingham is remiss in not emulating. The county is to be commended for its aggressive pursuit of watershed protection, and specifically in this beautiful area.

I would like to mention that there are many others who live in my neighborhood who feel as I do, and to briefly correct some erroneous information put out by Mr. Ali Tashi in his testimony tonight. He stated that the President of our Neighborhood Association – Alison Roberts, who also spoke before you – was representing the South Hills Neighborhood when she testified in favor of our UGA status remaining unchanged. However Mrs. Roberts, who is a friend, shared with me at the meeting that she came to speak as a private citizen. No formal solicitation of opinion process has occurred of late in our neighborhood on this topic. I just wanted to set the record straight on that.

You heard many reasons tonight why our neighborhood should remain in the UGA. Decisions made in the past were frequently cited; however these decisions were made when the City/County had less information about population growth, the worsening condition of Lake Padden, and less well understood science about the geomorphology of this area and about how watershed health is maintained in general. These arguments included:

- Wade King Elementary school has been built here and it should be in the City limits;
- We are close to the city but not "of the city", therefore we are inconvenienced by being

unable to vote for mayor/ receive city services;

- Maybe the golf course is the primary polluter of Lake Padden;
- Lake Padden is not our drinking water so we should not try as hard to keep it clean as we do Lake Whatcom

These arguments were made in support for potential urban development in the Lake Padden /Yew Street UGA. But I believe they are, instead, arguments *against* doing so. One does not go about rectifying the results of bad decisions by piling more bad decisions on top of them. Instead, one assesses their impact and makes decisions that ameliorate the damage or at least stop further damage.

I reject the argument that Lake Padden does not warrant the same protections as Lake Whatcom by virtue of the fact we do not drink its water. Lake Padden is the Jewel in the Crown of the City's urban parks. Tens of thousands of our citizens use this area for hiking, biking, dog walking, fishing, swimming, picnicking, boating, baseball games, bird watching, and public events of all kinds. The DOE has officially labeled this beautiful lake impaired. I get 'swimmer's itch' when I swim there. These facts support the decision that we should be making every effort to undo the damage already done by studying the lake to determine from whence the pollutants are coming and aggressively moving forward to rectify these problems. The County of Whatcom's recommendation to remove our area from UGA status supports this approach.

Tonight my heart hurt for both Lake Padden and for all of you. Almost everyone who spoke wants you to give them what they ask for. They want you to stop their suffering, now. So, what do I want? I want you to make sure Lake Padden is clean when my granddaughter, who is now only 18 months old, someday takes her baby there to feed the ducks and to go for a swim. I want her to be able to walk in the adjacent woods and hear the Flickers, Winter Wrens, and Bard Owls call and see the deer come down to Padden Creek for a drink of water. I want this beautiful place preserved for the generations to come.

We can do this. It just takes will, and a willingness to take the long view. Your job is to do the most good for the most people for the longest period of time.