

17 September 2009

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LONG RANGE
PLANNING DIVISION

Whatcom County Council
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 105
Bellingham, WA 98225

Whatcom County Planning Commission
5280 Northwest Avenue
Bellingham, WA 98226

Dear Honorable Council and Planning Commission,

About 12 years ago I served on a committee for the Bellingham School District that made recommendations to the school board about its district wide policy for sizes and locations of elementary schools. We were assured by the City of Bellingham planning staff that the Yew Street urban growth area would be one of rapid growth. The school board took our recommendations and was also assured by the City and County that services would be extended to the area. The board purchased land on Yew Street Road for an elementary school. They then asked the voters to support a long term district wide tax increase to construct what is now called Wade King Elementary School.

The County completed a good portion of the improvements to Yew Street Road, and plans were prepared to complete the sewer, water and traffic improvements to fully serve the area. As a part of this the County was to widen the rest of Yew Street Road and add sidewalks so that children could safely walk to the school, improvements that have not yet been completed.

The Yew Street/Padden area was and is a logical place to provide for population growth, close to town without expanding out into the county. As recently as two years ago the City was slating the area to be one of its urban village centers.

Now the county executive wants to remove the land around Lake Padden from the Bellingham urban growth area. The new school will be left as an island away from any population centers and will continue to be one of the most difficult schools to reach in the district. I have to ask, if the school board had been told that the area around the new school would be limited to 1 house per 10 acres, would they have purchased the land and built the school in that location? Would they have asked the voter to approve a tax increase to build there? Would the voters have approved such a measure?

The County executive and staff are concerned about the health of Lake Padden, and rightly so. However, this lake is not an alpine tarn, nor is it a public water supply. It is an urban lake in a city park next to a public golf course, a facility that probably has more to do with the health of the lake than any potential development in the area.

If the Lake Padden area is removed from the UGA as recommended, there will be no way to include the promised public improvements in the 6-year improvement plan and Wade King Elementary School will continue to be unsafe to walk to, accessible only by car or bus, and distant from the population it is intended to serve. Yes we should address the water quality of Lake Padden. But, we also need to address the welfare and safety of our children, and to keep in mind the historical, and well considered planning commitments already made to the area. Keep the Padden area in the UGA, and complete the promised improvement to Yew Street Road.

Thank you,



David New
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