

Kate Blystone - Fwd: Larrabee Springs and Bellingham's Urban Growth Area

From: Council
To: 2009 Councilmembers; Becky Boxx; Kate Blystone; Rebecca Craven
Date: 11/23/2009 1:24 PM
Subject: Fwd: Larrabee Springs and Bellingham's Urban Growth Area

>>> <newhorz@comcast.net> 11/23/2009 12:13 PM >>>

Dear Mr. Kremen and County Council Members:

We wish to write to you to express our concerns about the direction the County Council is taking with regard to the delineation of Bellingham's future Urban Growth Area.

In particular, we are expressing our concerns about the recent vote of the County Council to remove the Larrabee Springs project from the Bellingham Urban Growth Area, which in our view is a vote which is not in the best interests of the County, the environment or the City of Bellingham and it's future.

The Larrabee Springs project is an integrated urban community project which dovetails nearly perfectly with existing infrastructure and existing urban growth in the City of Bellingham. The Larrabee project looks to create a modern urban environment using mass transit and bike paths, with community parkland and facilities as principle amenities in the community. It will curtail urban sprawl and environmental impacts of growth, not contribute to them!

We would hope that the County Council can reconsider it's position on including Larrabee Spings in the Bellingham Urban Growth Area, in view of the benefits and common-sense fit this project would be to the aims and aspirations of the the County growth objectives, and the positive benefits this project can offer to the City of Bellingham.

Our reasons for supporting this project may be enunciated as follows:

1. Growth should be focused on Bellingham where infrastructure, jobs, services and people already are and will be in the future. Larrabee Springs is serviced with water and sewer. Most all of the County is not serviced, and there are no impact fees to offset infrastructure costs.
2. Larrabee Springs is serviced by major arterials like Cordata Parkway, Guide Meridian and Smith Road. Pushing growth into the hinterlands will impact county roads that are already overwhelmed. Roads exist with the Guide being newly expanded and Smith Road being a cross-county corridor. A dramatic example of this is Birch Bay. The County Council approved hundreds and hundreds of new lots in the Birch Bay area over the past several years without requiring roads to be upgraded, leaving the Birch Bay/Lynden road to be upgraded by county taxpayers at a cost estimated to be nearly \$100 million.
3. Growth should not go into Agricultural and Resource lands. Larrabee Springs is not agricultural land, rather it is poor soil that cannot be

farmed (as was documented as far back as 1945) but is adjacent to Bellingham and not located deep in the county.

4. Some people will reason that the lifestyle choice of living on rural 5-acre gentlemen farms negates the efforts like Larrabee Springs and therefore smart growth greenfield projects are futile. However, the vast majority of families moving into rural areas do not live on 5 acres. In fact, they buy into subdivisions and live on lots. This reasoning is a negative fabrication, because if cities can provide lots that family want and like, such as in the Larrabee Springs proposal, they will not be compelled to live on lots in the county.

5. Mr. Kremen, you and the Council should not use a population project that is 50% less than our historical growth rate. Choosing to use bad data can never be the basis of good policy decisions. It is unreasonable to assume that Bellingham or Whatcom County will grow at less than 50% of historical rates in future, even with the current recession. Remember, the current growth rates include the recessions of 1993, 2000 and 9/11.

6. This new 2009 Plan more than doubles the allocation of growth to the rural areas of the County that was targeted in the 2004 Plan (from 6% to 15%). Such a reallocation is completely inconsistent with an anti-sprawl policy. Why would anyone that cares about the environment or resource lands of the county increase rural growth while reducing Bellingham's growth? Even King County manages to keep rural growth down to 5%, why would Whatcom County not be able to replicate such success?

7. Bellingham will have nearly 2/3 of all county jobs, but it is being allocated less than 1/2 of the county population. This is a very simple equation for sprawl. The Council should allocate population in proportion to jobs in order to reduce commutes, prevent sprawl and environmental impacts.

8. In 2006, the Bellingham City Council voted to bring Larrabee Springs into the Bellingham Urban Growth Area as a component of our Comprehensive Plan. This was a sound and vetted decision based on five years of analysis and public process. Importantly, Bellingham's growth plan calls for very high levels of infill urban growth, frankly more than any other city in the United States of America. As part of this exceptionally aggressive infill strategy, the Bellingham City Council determined that Larrabee Springs was necessary and appropriate. Why would the County Council decide, in the face of this past intense planning process and decision-making, to remove Larrabee Springs and instead increase growth allocations to our County rural areas?

Thank you for your attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,
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