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June 15, 2005

Mr. Robert Tull  
Dr. Frank James  
Mr. Larry Horowitz  
Mr. Dana Lyons

Re: Fairhaven Highlands

Gentlemen –

I have been the recipient of copies of some correspondence that has been passing between you and felt it appropriate to provide you with information that I have obtained since my meeting with Dr. James approximately 3 weeks ago.

During our meeting, Dr. James indicated that the informal organization which has come into being since the announcement of intention to develop the Chuckanut Ridge property, now known as Fairhaven Highlands, was to prevent the development of this property through public purchase. I indicated that from my perspective the only practical way in which public funding would potentially be available for such an acquisition would be through a voter approved bond issue. It was my belief that a regular levy would not provide adequate resources for purchase of the property and that only a voter approved bond issue would be capable of providing funding for such a purchase.

Since this time I have become aware of another option which, while also requiring a vote of the people, might be more successful and would address concerns about this development which have been primarily voiced by immediately surrounding neighbors of the Fairhaven Highlands property.

This option is the creation of a Metropolitan Park District pursuant to state law, RCW 35.61. This statute provides that a park district may be formed by a vote of the participating property owners in a designated area. The geographical area of the district may include both City and County territory. Such a district could incorporate parts of the Happy Valley, South and Edgemoor neighborhoods, as well as areas of Chuckanut that are outside the city limits. Doing so would form a district which would have the legal capability of entering into an acquisition arrangement with the owners of the Fairhaven Highlands property. It would

involve participation for its formation and operation by voters who are most interested and concerned about the property proposed for development.

In the intervening time, I have also reviewed several documents including the Bellingham Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan update adopted in 2004 and the annual program review of the Greenways Advisory Committee. I have spoken with Greenways Advisory Committee members, longstanding Greenways supporters, Parks Advisory Board members, and representatives of local environmental organizations and have found virtually no support for including the acquisition of the Fairhaven Highland property in a citywide Greenways measure.

I was further made aware that many people are opposed to including this property in a Greenways measure because neither the Parks Master Plan, nor the priorities for acquisition outlined by the Greenways Advisory Committee includes the Fairhaven Highlands. People said that including the Fairhaven Highlands property in a Greenways measure would put them in the unfortunate position of opposing the measure and could jeopardize voter support for the Greenways program in general.

Apprehension with regard to the Greenways program itself and any appropriateness of the acquisition by the City of the Fairhaven Highlands property with Greenways funds was not the only concern raised by many people. Many people expressed serious concern about the effect of removing this property from the available developable lands within the City limits that would result from such an acquisition. As we all know population growth continues in Bellingham and will in all likelihood continue for some period of time. Presently nearly two thirds of the 3,200 plus acres of land owned by the City of Bellingham and managed by our Parks Department lies in south Bellingham. The need for additional "green space" in our community does not lie to the south, but lies to the north. In some cases the need in the northern part of the City is quite extreme.

In addition to making you aware of these concerns, I also want to correct what appears to be your misunderstanding of my position on this issue. In the first letter addressed to Mr. Tull, of which I received a copy from Dr. James, Mr. Horowitz and Mr. Lyons, there were two references to my personal support of the acquisition of this property by the City of Bellingham. My expression of possible pathways through which public ownership could be achieved was not an endorsement of those pathways.

Clearly if the voters of Bellingham are interested in acquiring this property it is appropriate for the City to acquire it. However, as much as I have lamented the loss of many of the forest and open areas that I played in as a child in north Bellingham resulting from population growth and development activities, I am strongly and firmly committed to the goals and policies of our comprehensive

plan and the recommendations that arose from the intense growth forum process that was undertaken in our community last year. These goals and policies state, in a nutshell, that focusing development within the existing City limits of Bellingham is a superior path to that which would result from sprawling development. The removal of substantial parcels from within the City limits that are developable, that do not pose environmental concerns, and that are consistent with the comprehensive plan and the recommendations from the growth forum, are the appropriate choice in the face of population growth pressures. As I have stated repeatedly when asked about the issues of growth, we must be wise in the choices that we make. It is my intention and hope that Bellingham will prove itself to be a community that believes and acts on what it says it believes, rather than one that merely states fine sounding ideals with regard to growth management and responsiveness to growth pressures but does not follow through on those goals, visions and stated values but instead follows the path of least resistance: sprawl.

The City of Bellingham is a wonderful and dynamic place. We have seen many changes occur over the past two decades and particularly in the last decade as more and more people around the United States discovered Bellingham and have come to recognize the outstanding quality of life that exists here. I believe that our community response to the population growth that has occurred over the last two decades has been prudent, rational, and that we have improved our community while at the same time accommodating more people who choose to live here. I don't believe that our community's ability to be creative and prudent has come to an end. I believe that we can continue to respond to the inevitable changes that any community faces in a fashion that will result in continued enhancement of the community as a whole and our neighborhoods in particular.

The primary purpose of this letter is to make my position absolutely clear to all involved in the current rounds of correspondence with regard to the Fairhaven Highlands property. To summarize, given the goals and policies adopted by the City Council, the goals and objectives articulated by the Greenways Advisory Committee, and the fiscal realities facing the community, the only appropriate path that I can envision which would result in public acquisition of this property would be via the establishment of a Metropolitan Park District in the geographic area surrounding the Fairhaven Highlands and the purchase of the land by such an entity. It would be the responsibility of the interested individuals and groups to pursue creation of such a district.

Very truly yours



Mark Asmundson  
Mayor, City of Bellingham