

Seasons Greetings

IN KEEPING WITH SKAGIT COUNTY'S RURAL CHARACTER

from the President's Pen

NEW YEAR APPEAL. Enacted in 1990, the Washington State Growth Management Act provided an opportunity for Skagit County citizens to participate in a visioning process that resulted in adoption of the County's Comprehensive Plan in 1997. Friends was involved then — and still is today — to make sure that growth management is working as it was intended to do. To that end, we have appealed to the Growth Management Hearings Board to review recent Comp Plan revisions that appear to conflict with GMA statutes. The hearing is scheduled for March 2008.

RURAL ADVICE. During the recent Comp Plan Update process, the County relied on guidance from a citizen-based steering committee as well as local agriculture and forestry advisory boards. Friends of Skagit County was on the committee, but nobody was appointed to represent the people who live in the Rural Reserve. Zoned one dwelling per ten acres, the Rural Reserve comprises approximately 70,000 acres and is generally located

between designated resource lands and urban growth areas. Friends recently asked the County Commissioners to consider establishing a Rural Lands Advisory Board. They recognize the need and we are hopeful they will act accordingly.

CaRD TRICKS. Meanwhile, Friends is attempting to persuade the County to set some limits on excessive rural development resulting from expanded use of a permit known as the "long CaRD" (Conservation and Reserve Development). We are happy to report that the planning department is currently looking into the possibility of doing a lands inventory/analysis to help staff identify potential problem areas and adjust regulations so the 80:20 urban-to-rural growth ratio is realized.

STAYING FOCUSED. Looking forward, more donations to our SmartGrowth program and our Legal Fund are essential to carrying out Friends' mission. Your help, as always, is appreciated.

— June Kite

DIRECTOR'S REPORT . . .

ELLEN BYNUM

"TIME-OUT FOR CaRDs?" Conservation and Reserve Development permits are not what they appear to be. Landowners use CaRDs to build more homes than are normally allowed on rural parcels by clustering them. And the word "reserve" is misleading because it suggests that land is protected from future development. In fact, it means the undeveloped portion of the land is reserved for future development. No conservation easement is filed with the title.

Friends suspects that the use of CaRDs is creating pockets of urban development throughout the County. At least one CaRD in the Rural Reserve is the same size as Conway, which is designated a Rural Village. By allowing this permitting process to continue, approximately 50,000 acres of rural lands are vulnerable to CaRD development.

Therefore we have requested county officials to stop accepting CaRD applications in order to allow planning staff some time to evaluate the impact of this type of development and report their findings to the Board of County Commissioners.

RURAL LANDS ANALYSIS. Friends has also asked the County to address one of the "trailing issues" associated with the 2005 Comp Plan Update. Without a lands analysis there is no way of knowing how much rural land has been developed since our Comprehensive Plan was first adopted in 1997. Pressure from other groups has helped put this project at the top of the priority list and we understand that County staff is currently pursuing the possibility of obtaining State grants to fund the project in the New Year.

POTENTIAL LOSS OF RESOURCE LANDS

A number of permit applications currently on file with the County indicate a continued loss of acreage in rural Skagit County. Following are some examples:

- Nookachamps Basin — Approximately 500 acres of farmland.
- East Big Lake — Approximately 150 homes planned in Rural Reserve and Natural Resource zones.
- Big Rock Area — Seventy acres in the vicinity of Knapp & Baker Heights roads.
- East end of Stackpole Road — Approximately 590 acres in Secondary Forest and Rural Reserve zones.
- North of Sedro-Woolley — Approximately 260 acres in Secondary Forest and Rural Resource zones, including mineral overlay.
- Granstrom Road Area — Twenty-acre residential sites planned for 1,120 acres of Industrial and Secondary Forest lands.

Opportunity To Get Involved in County Planning

The Skagit County Board of Commissioners is seeking applicants to fill a vacancy on the Planning Commission. Applicants must reside in County Commissioner District 2. (See boundary map online at www.skagitcounty.net)

• Growth Board Hearings •

Friends has filed 28 appeals with the Western Washington Growth Management Hearings Board over the years and has prevailed in most cases. Decisions often require action on the part of interested parties to reach settlements, causing lengthy and sometimes expensive delays. These include:

- Bayview Ridge Stormwater Management Plan and Plan for Independent UGA (1997) – Final plans and review due in Spring of 2008.
- Open Spaces and Greenbelts in Urban Growth Areas (2002) — Settlement discussions with County currently under way.
- Expansion of Public Water Systems into Rural Areas (2007) – Addresses development regulations that conflict with the County's Comp Plan and the Coordinated Water System Plan. Hearing scheduled for March 2008.

IMPLEMENTING SKAGIT'S INSTREAM FLOW RULE

The Skagit River Water Resources Advisory Committee has been asked to review regulations set forth in the amended Skagit River Instream Flow Rule and make implementation recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners. The BoCC adopted the Rule in 2006 in accordance with a settlement reached with the State Department of Ecology.

The Rule establishes a water resources management tool to ensure adequate instream flows for future protection of fish and wildlife while providing enough water for agriculture, industry and domestic use. From Friends' perspective, urban sprawl is often relative to the availability of water in rural areas, so the findings of this advisory committee could have an impact on rural growth patterns in the future.

Friends Board member Diane Freethy is on the committee which meets the first Wednesday of each month at 6:15 in the Commissioners' hearing room at 1800 Continental Place in Mount Vernon. The public is welcome to attend.

COMMENTARY

Impact Fees On the Rise

Even though Mount Vernon and Burlington have decided to raise the impact fees for new homes, these fees will not cover the cost of providing fire protection, schools, roads, water, sewer, etc. to these new residents. You and I, as taxpayers, foot the outstanding bill.

Isn't it time we ask the cities to charge the full cost of services for new development?

— Ellen Bynum

Looking for a Unique Gift?

A great selection of local artwork remains in the Friends office following a recent show and sale organized by long-time Friends member Debbie Aldrich. Please call the office and leave a message if you would like to view the paintings, or call Debbie at 360-757-0610. Her email address is saldrich@gte.net.