

Karanne Gonzalez-Harless
August 31, 2018

Louisa Garbo
Kitsap County Department of Community Development
619 Division Street, MS-36
Port Orchard, WA 98366

RE: DCD – Planning Commission George’s Corner County sponsored amendment
Ms. Garbo,

During our review and deliberations on the 2018 comprehensive plan update docket, the Planning Commission received information from the Department that has at times been incomplete, inaccurate and false. This is troubling to me, as I’m sure it is to other Commissioners and the public in attendance at our hearings. This undermines the trust relationship that is vital to our working together to provide the Board of County Commissioners with informed and straightforward recommendations.

As a former employee of the Department, transparency and integrity of the public record have always been core values of mine. This is why when I see the Department omitting relevant information from staff reports and answering our questions with what turn out to be false information I have to call it out.

This is in the context of the Planning Commission’s review of the George’s Corner site-specific proposed plan amendment. Initial statements by staff did not fit with my memories of what took place with this property in the 2016 plan update process. The 2018 staff report focused on what had happened in 2004 and included findings about what had changed since then, but said nothing about the 2016 staff report, analysis, findings and conclusions adopted in Ordinance 534-2016 or the complete recommendation for both parcels.

When I researched the 2016 project, I learned that the staff analysis at that time was exactly opposite of what we are being told today and that a very different resolution was recommended, i.e. zoning of Rural Protection on one parcel and Rural Protection

on the residential portion of the other parcel. None of this was addressed in the 2018 staff report. Why does DCD now believe the opposite of what it believed two years ago? Why is the 2016 recommendation not on the table now as an alternative? And why the omission from the procedural history?

Before I looked into this, I was concerned with the fact that this site-specific proposal on the behalf of private landowners was sponsored by the Department with no fees, while others had to pay large fees and hire consultants. It is perfectly acceptable for staff, in a Q & A session, to say “I don’t know, let me get back to you.” What happened instead is that DCD staff made two affirmative statements in response to my questions that turned out to be demonstrably false:

1. I was told that the Department decided to sponsor this project because it bore responsibility for creating a split-zone situation in 2005. But the 2016 staff report includes a finding that the County does not bear responsibility for this action of the landowner.
2. I was told that this had been on the Department’s “radar” for some time and neither of the landowners had requested this change or “been pinging the County,” and had they been, DCD probably would not have sponsored the project. I am familiar with one of the landowners and he has never failed to “ping” the County to request something, usually with success. I obtained, through a public records request, a chain of emails between the landowners and DCD going back since the 2016 update. Both landowners were very much in the game requesting this change and that the County sponsor them.

The irony of all this is that, had the accurate story been told, the project itself would not have been less likely to be approved, but the recommendation would have been better informed. What has suffered is the ability of the Planning Commission to trust and rely on information supplied by the Department, whether in staff reports or in

answers to our questions. I understand that memories are imperfect, and it is possible to make a statement on the record that is true to your memory but turns out to be wrong. I also understand that junior staff will always be reluctant to correct their bosses in public. But in this situation, the facts were well known, and I waited for corrections to the record which never came.

I am not disputing that the county can sponsor an administrative amendment. What I am concerned with is transparency, integrity and the appearance of fairness in every application processed.

In closing I urge the department to withdraw the current application, resubmit a revised application with all relevant information and resubmit it through the public process. The application as it stands is fatally flawed and should not, regardless of a Planning Commission recommendation, go forward to the Board of County Commissioners. My intention is to correct an unfortunate situation and improve the process.

Respectfully,



Karanne Gonzalez-Harless
South Kitsap Planning Commissioner

Cc Jim Bolger