

Skagit County Board of Commissioners
December 26, 2018

Dear Board of Commissioners,

At the October 16, 2018, meeting of the Skagit County Planning Commission (PC), I was the only Commissioner present in favor of docket item P-12, the rezone proposal for South Fidalgo Island. I am not re-arguing the Commission's recommendation to the Board nor appealing the Board's decision to follow that recommendation. I am saying that our deliberations about P-12 were inadequate. A major reason for this was that we remained silent about a misinformation campaign. We treated false statements as if they were true and thus enabled confusion instead of promoting understanding.

The 2018 P-12 proposal was the result of public input, made in good faith to the County. The proponents made two points about South Fidalgo Island: water supply needs to have a plan and commercial/industrial development needs limitations. In 2017, specific objections to P-12 arose, map borders and agricultural processing, for example. Proponents, in conjunction with the Planning Department and at the direction of the Board, amended P-12 to address those problems. Those changes formed the 2018 proposal.

That new proposal attracted even more support than it had in 2017, when the majority of testimony at the Planning Commission already was in favor of P-12. In 2018, about 350 people signed a petition encouraging the Board to pass it. But in 2018, the opposition had changed. Instead of testimony discussing actual, resolvable issues with the proposal, and whether or not the new version of P-12 successfully addressed those issues, the opposition this year mostly expressed generalized fears manufactured from the repetition of false claims.

We heard over and over that P-12 would take away rights, ruin futures, and deprive posterity of a homestead. How those injustices would be enacted was never clear. Rather, the public seemed to generate their fears from inaccuracies: I won't be able to fly a plane, ride motorcycles, raise and sell flowers, sell wine, or walk my dogs, among others.

Before and during our deliberations, we never acknowledged this problem. The public's repetition of falsehoods seemed to make them think that those falsehoods were true, and significantly, to promote the expression of false outrage, a groundless and purely political indignation that served no purpose at all except to obscure a real discussion of policy. By not acknowledging this issue, let alone addressing it, we crippled our deliberations and did a disservice to the public, who counted on conscionable and honest consideration from the County.

The issues of P-12 remain: water supply needs a plan, as do large-scene commercial and industrial activities. When those issues appear again, I hope the Planning Commission takes a different approach to their deliberations.

Sincerely,

Mark Lundsten

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Skagit County Planning Commissioner

cc: Hal Hart
Stacie Pratschner
Kathy Jewell
Ellen Bynum
Tom Glade
Roger Robinson
Patty Wasson
Marlene Finley
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