

January 29, 2010

To: Burien City Council
Burien Planning Commission

Re: Proposed Shoreline Master Program

To Whom It May Concern:

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CITY OF BURIEN

I first moved to Burien about 25 years ago, attracted by its quiet out of the way bedroom community feel where neighbors were more likely to see their neighbors than anywhere else. Burien seemed unharmed by the growth, noise, traffic, crime, and natural environmental destruction that accompanied growth in other nearby communities to the north and east where they are overrun with population and its impacts, but with a more functional community feel than our neighbors to the south. During most of almost any day in the neighborhood, we were more likely to see people out working or recreating in their yards, walking alone or with family or friends, with or without dogs, jogging, or riding bicycles on streets that by virtue of a lack of car traffic were safe for foot traffic without the need for the increased pavement and its costs caused by vehicular traffic.

Fortunately, in my 25 years here, spread across 3 homes in differing communities, I have continued to appreciate my community for what it still is, an out of the way quiet bedroom community which has been self preserved by the residents in the quest to preserve the qualities they moved here for: safety; privacy; low population density; minimal traffic in the neighborhood; natural beauty (if even only in ours and our neighbor's yards); and proximity to plenty of places to safely walk, run, or ride a bicycle where we could enjoy rather peaceful and quiet public access to the more or less intact northwest outdoor experience, even while in the heart of the populated county and mere minutes from Seattle. Over the years, I turned each property where I lived into a more natural, clean, quiet place where people and nature could exist hand in hand to the betterment of each other, making each property better off than I found it from a preservation perspective, and in the sort of condition anyone from the future would consider a place where nature was respected and preserved even though someone did have the footprint of a home and human existence on it.

Recently, I became aware of the Burien Shoreline Master Program related documents, documents whose framework should serve as a guide for preserving our natural environment and quality of life, just as many Burien citizens have striven to do with their own private properties, but on a public scale. Comments I have seen in response to the document demonstrate that many Burien residents value preservation, understand the effort and priority it requires, and the reward to be found in preservation of the communities we moved to because of what they were, not because of what someone from outside thought they could be or they could profit from.

CFTR: 2-1-10
CC: Scott Greenberg
PC: 1-27-10

The documents start off well, stating that it should establish a comprehensive vision of how the shoreline areas will be used and developed over time, and goes on to state that the program would indeed be the guideline for that comprehensive vision of how areas will be used and developed. Unfortunately, the documents are really just a collection of broad direction statements which lack any significant definition and clarity from which a person can discern any clear, real description of how the shoreline areas will be developed and used over time, a set of limitations and procedures for what private citizens can do on their property, environment survey type documents, and a single actual plan for the restoration of Seahurst Park and Eagle Landing. The documents say absolutely nothing about what the city has to do to intake, evaluate, approve, plan, and execute any public projects which it desires to undertake in the spirit of the program (preservation, access, minimizing negative impacts to private property and the environment).

For a program to be a program, it should be a collection of specific definitions, activities, and projects which collectively achieve the goals of the program. There should also be a process spelled out for how such definitions, projects, or activities, both private and public, are brought forth for consideration, considered, brought into the governance mechanisms of the program, planned according to requirements of the program, implemented (including mitigating negative impacts and identifying funding mechanisms), measured for success, and remediated if success was not achieved. Without that additional foundation as it pertains to public projects and activities, this set of documents should not qualify as a program. This program only includes one project, and none of the process definition for how new projects will be added. I sincerely doubt if the intent is to have no more public projects once Seahurst and Eagle Landing restoration are completed. What are those projects? What is the process for adding them? What is the process for clarifying the intent of the overly generalized verbiage used in the direction statements which appear throughout these documents?

Here are examples of overly generalized statements that can easily be misused:

In section 20.30.035 item 2 – Regulations it states “a. Public access provided by shoreline street ends, rights-of-way, and other public lands shall provide, maintain, enhance and preserve visual access to the water and shoreline in accordance with RCW 35.79.035.”

In fact, RCW 35.79.035 has only to do with the “Limitations on vacations of streets abutting bodies of water.”

Statement a. should either be stricken altogether or modified to state that actions to shoreline street ends, rights-of-way, and other public lands shall comply with RCW 35.79.035.

In section 20.30.035 item 2 – Regulations it states “c. If a public road is located within shoreline jurisdiction, any unused right of way shall be dedicated as open space and public access.”

There is no definition of “unused right of way” or how to deal with property owner’s rights to access and use their property through which the road (wherein people pass through their property) passes.

Lastly, I go back to my original reasons for moving to Burien. I'm reminded of the closing of "Field of Dreams". The expression of "build it and they will come" hangs in the air. Darkness settles. An endless line of tightly packed headlights appears in the darkness and stretches for as far as the eye can see. They came from far and wide, some didn't even know why, but they came to find something. End of story. Not quite. Then they were there, no place to park, no facilities, teeming with people, too many in too small of a space. Eventually they would have to leave, and when they did, what did they leave behind - only a mess to be cleaned up and paid for by the very people who had the "vision". What the visionaries had before was gone forever. No more Iowa as they knew it.

Burien has only successfully survived as a desirable place because our individual and public vision has been to preserve our communities through commitment to our neighborhoods and encouraging vast public access only to places where non-residents ought to go - the business districts and organized, containable, maintainable park facilities such as Seahurst. Encouraging a stream of cars circulating through our neighborhoods will be the end of Burien. It will be the antithesis of preservation of what we came here for and of the intent of the program. Let's get this right. Let's get this all defined and clarified so people with ill-conceived or detrimental private or public agendas can't hide behind ambiguous words. Let's save Burien from those outside who have no interest other than taking something from someone who has been preserving it for decades as a bastion of quiet, peaceful, safe, close to nature existence among a sea of ever increasing insatiable appetite for consumption and its associated destruction of even the slightest bit of nature, even if merely through simple overuse with no negative intent. Let's work together to achieve a meaningful program that has a chance of accomplishing what the state intended. Let's make sure that the city fulfills this obligation and corrects this set of documents to actually establish a comprehensive vision with exact wording that portrays true meaning, includes potential public projects and plans and a process for enabling their consideration and implementation, and with full and open inclusion of impacted communities in the process.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.



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