

## Lisa Clausen

---

**From:** Public Council Inbox  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 23, 2010 4:51 PM  
**To:** 'borissieverts@gmx.de'  
**Subject:** RE: Lake Burien

Thank you for writing to the Burien City Council. Your message will be included in the Council's Correspondence for the Record for an upcoming City Council meeting.

Lisa Clausen  
City Manager's Office

-----Original Message-----

**From:** Boris Sieverts [mailto:borissieverts@gmx.de]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 23, 2010 2:54 AM  
**To:** Public Council Inbox  
**Subject:** Lake Burien

Dear City Council of Burien,

It is nearly a year ago now, that my father and I visited Burien, when my father was invited to come to your place to speak and discuss about the role of places like Burien in bigger agglomerations, that are in the process of working on their identity and character. We were quite impressed by the efforts that the community had done so far, until we got to know about a lake, that noone had spoken about before, although it obviously was the biggest potential in the struggle of the city for quality and character. At the time I was so irritated by the fact that noone did anything to bring that lake back to the city, that I made some notes that I finally brought into the form of an open letter to the Citizens of Burien. I would be happy if you could publish it in the one or the other form.

Sincerely,

Boris Sieverts  
Büro für Städtereisen  
Pellenzstr. 6  
50823 Köln  
Germany  
[borissieverts@gmx.de](mailto:borissieverts@gmx.de)

CFTR: 04/05/10



## AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CITIZENS OF BURIEN about their lake

written from notes after a visit in Burien on July 2nd 2009 on the occasion of my father Thomas Sieverts speaking in Burien.

I remember the unbelievable story of an invisible lake in the center of a town called Burien. There was no public access to the lake, but my father and I were introduced to one of the "owners" of the lake and she invited us to take a bath. She was talking about the good quality of the water that is due to the common not use of motorboats of the neighbouring properties and the renouncement of fertilizer in the gardens, which I found really impressive. She then said that when the lake would get a public access, all this would be gone. I wondered about that argument, because, apart from the bewildering strong conviction of a lack of responsibility of her common citizens that it showed, there are of course ways of controlling water pollution at public accesses, be it by neighbourhood control, by closing hours at night, by park wardens, by the arrangement of a public bath with attendants or other solutions, which she obviously had not ever even thought about.

The second line of her argumentation was, that if the lake would get a public access, the values of their properties would fall and then they would pay less taxes which could not be in the interest of the municipality, a fairly absurd way of thinking, which I will come back to later.

And the third line of her argumentation was, that there are enough lakes nearby. When I asked her, what nearby means, she talked of distances, that are only practicable by car, and of course this is a deep and profound difference, if you can walk from your own city center, maybe with an ice cream in your hands, in just 5 minutes to such a wonderful nature spot or if you have to go back home to get the car and drive there. As my father and I had just been shown before, Burien has made a big effort to become an urban, pedestrian friendly, sustainable and atmospheric place. I could only understand the inaccessibility of the lake as a kind of relict of other times, when there was maybe less citizen spirit or so, which I don't know.

When we got to know, that there would be a property to sell in the near future, and that if the city administration would buy it, they could get a public access, we looked at that property and it was just perfect in its position to the city center as well as in size and character.

Talking about the issue with council members, we got the impression that they were not willing to face the people that live around the lake and try to keep it exclusively their's. What, under these circumstances, did all the embellishments and structural improvements of the city center, that we had just been shown, mean? Were they just covering the real scandal of what was happening in this town?

To give away the unique chance of a public access to the lake after all these efforts would at least heavily affect everything that you, the citizens of Burien have done and reached for in the past years. The fact, that the vacant lot in question is just on the perfect location seen from the city center (you could even have a nice pedestrian's connection through the alley between 152nd and 153rd street, that leads right on the spot), to me was like a sign from above that this is a chance to fight for, because it will never come again.

I am convinced that, if it would be well managed, the neighbours of the lake won't be seriously harmed by a public access (except maybe that they have to give up the idea that the lake is "theirs", which in fact it is not) and that at the same time the overall image and value of Burien as a whole (not only in the city center) would rise remarkably. Close to Cologne, where I live, there is a small town called Haltern. It is close to a lake. A couple of years ago they changed their name to "Haltern am See" (Haltern on the lakeside). Property prices have nearly doubled since then!

The degree of hypocrisy of those who keep the lake for themselves now and thereby pretend to do it for the best of nature and the city of Burien is hard to bear. Municipalities need money to invest in the quality of life in their boundaries. For no tax money in the world, Burien will be able to invest in such a good improvement in the quality of life of its inhabitants as a public access to the lake on that spot

would mean. And for the nature argument: Public access must not necessarily mean pollution, there are enough good examples for that. People are a part of nature too. They must not deprive themselves from it just at places where it hurts them most! The inhabitants of the lake are the best example for that!

Lake Burien has enough space for everybody, those who live there and those who come to visit!!!

Imagine future Burien citizens talking about their childhood: "On summer evenings we got ice cream on main street, left the store by the backdoor terrace and went down the alley to the lake. There was a charming little boardwalk, a meadow, huge trees and a house to change clothes. It had all been there for decades. My parents said, that there were times when no one knew about it. Can you imagine?"

As far as I know there is a state law, that says that all water surfaces belong to the state and are thereby public property. If, because of the given fact that the whole shoreline is already private properties, that law is partially without consequence in reality, that is one thing. But if there is a chance and a public will to change that unhappy state of things by the legal and legitimate act of a municipality buying a property, and that process is heavily impeded by certain people, that former unhappy but maybe legitimate state of things finally loses its legitimacy and comes even close to illegality, because it actively tries to cross what the law wants.

I remember the mayor saying, that the municipality could probably even get funding from a state park program for the acquisition of a public access. But she was afraid of facing the influential people that live around the lake. I really liked her, but what kind of municipality is this, where a few influential people can deprive a whole town of one of its greatest treasures?

Imagine you and some others buy a house. Now the others place themselves around that house in a way that you can no longer reach it. If you ask them to let you pass, they say no. Then one of them sells his property. You try to buy it, to get access to your house in the middle, but those who have placed themselves around it do everything for that you can not buy the property that you would need to get to your house in the middle. During all that time they use the house in the middle for themselves. Isn't that robbery or at least something close to robbery? The house in the middle is the lake and you are the public. The lake is (also) yours. Don't let them steal it from you!

Get the municipality to buy the property in question!

Collect fundings and donations to buy it yourselves for the use of everyone!

Apply to the social responsibility of the Van Dyke foundation, that is the actual owner!

Start an idea competition on the future of Lake Burien and Burien on the lakeside!

Köln, Germany, March 2010

Boris Sieverts  
Büro für Städtereisen  
Pellenzstr. 6  
50823 Köln  
Germany  
[borissieverts@gmx.de](mailto:borissieverts@gmx.de)