

LARRY FREEMAN'S DEC 3, 2007 LETTER TO THE BELLINGHAM HERALD AND KEY COMMENTS FROM THE HERALD'S ONLINE BLOG @

<http://www.haloscan.com/comments/bellinghamherald/251525/>

“Says people want lake, ridge saved”

Once again, I believe The Bellingham Herald editorial board misleads its community, this time by conjoining the issues of Silver Beach and Chuckanut Ridge. It fails to meet the guidelines of Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan, which states the city shall:

a) “Increase community understanding of the natural environment, promote low impact development, ... (and) avoid adverse environmental impacts.” b) “Preserve the unique character of existing neighborhoods ... and protect critical areas.” c) “Recognize the requirement for and benefits of the best available science in the management of critical areas.”

The majority of citizens throughout the city wish to preserve Lake Whatcom and Chuckanut Ridge. The facts: The lake is suffering, the ridge, a “keystone property,” is the linchpin preserving the natural and human ecologies of both its neighborhood and the rest of the city. No wonder people wish to preserve both.

In contrast, Fairhaven Highlands, proposed by Horizon Bank, owner and developer, doubles the population in the south and impacts the natural ecology of the entire city. Traffic would become a nightmare.

What remains a “surprise” is The Herald's drumbeat of divisiveness and innuendo. This divisiveness fractures our community, leaving the values that define us tarnished and forgotten.

Larry Freeman
Bellingham

KEY COMMENTS FROM THE HERALD ONLINE BLOG

The issues surrounding Chuckanut Ridge are extremely complex and include zoning densities that were established more than 25 years ago under questionable circumstances and before the environmental sciences really appreciated the value of preserving mature forested wetlands, steep wooded hillsides and salmon bearing streams.

Since then, Goals 9 and 10 of the Growth Management Act were adopted to “encourage the retention of open space,” “conserve fish and wildlife habitat,” and generally “protect the environment.” Additionally, Bellingham's Comprehensive Plan adopted more than 15 land use policies (including FLU 1, 6, 7, 8, 24, 26, 34, 55, 126, 127, 128, 144, 145, 146 and 147) that were established to incorporate best available science to preserve neighborhood character, protect environmentally sensitive and critical areas such as streams, wetlands, urban forests, scenic vistas, and the steep hillsides that provide the natural backdrop for the city, and preserve fish and wildlife

habitats. The current zoning on Chuckanut Ridge violates GMA Goals 9 and 10 and each of these land use policies and results in an internal inconsistency between the city's Comp Plan and the South Neighborhood Plan. Such an internal inconsistency violates §36.70A.070 of the GMA and must be corrected to bring both these plans into compliance with state law.

It is important to understand that these land use policies are designed to protect resource land WITHIN the City of Bellingham. It is clear that not every parcel of land within the city will be developed. Many will be set aside as critical areas and parks and to provide for public facilities. In an ideal world, the parcels set aside would represent the most ecologically valuable ones to preserve. There is absolutely no doubt that Chuckanut Ridge places at the top of the list of land that deserves to be preserved. Would anyone actually prefer that 85 acres of brownfield within the city be preserved rather than Chuckanut Ridge?

In a way, it is ironic that what makes Chuckanut Ridge so valuable for preservation purposes actually detract from its value for development. Essentially, Chuckanut Ridge is a swamp with mature trees and steep hills, and while it provides a habitat for fish and wildlife that is unrivaled in our city, it cannot be developed effectively to yield maximum profit. Virtually all the land surrounding Chuckanut Ridge has been developed for many years. If Chuckanut Ridge was a good candidate for residential development, this land would have been built upon long ago.

It's time for the city to put its money where its mouth is. Preserve Chuckanut Ridge!

Larry Horowitz | 12.03.07 - 11:43 am | #

Larry,

Virtually everything you contend about Chuckanut Ridge also applies to most of the undeveloped lands on Samish ridge.....yet early on proponents of the "save Chuckanut Ridge" movement approached the city to trade the Chuckanut Ridge lands for city owned lands on Samish ridge. To me, that sounds like a classic NIMBY move.

Absolutely, a significant portion of the Chuckanut Ridge property should be and will be protected from development through existing laws and at little or no expense to the taxpayers. To expect the rest of us to buy more park lands for your backyard so you can be immune from growth issues is selfish to say the least.

If the City of Bellingham is going to accommodate growth, each neighborhood should accept their fair portion of the growth, not cram it down other neighborhood's throats.

HiGuy | 12.03.07 - 2:46 pm | #

HiGuy,

Thanks for your comments.

I had heard the rumor you mentioned about the Samish Ridge "trade", but when I checked it out, it turned out to be false. I believe the rumor was started by a developer; but I know that Tom Barrett was spreading it. No one I know would support such a trade. (If you have more info, I would be interested.)

No one is expecting "the rest of you" to buy parklands in my backyard. If you look at the Greenways tax revenues, you'll see that the revenue generated by taxpayers in the region surrounding Chuckanut Ridge (not including the Samish neighborhood) is more than adequate when combined with grants and private fundraising. I am not interested in your subsidy. Are you interested in a subsidy from me?

The South Neighborhood is currently working with the city to accommodate its share of growth and still preserve Chuckanut Ridge. In my opinion, that is the best way to approach this issue.

By the way, the term NIMBY is way overused. In fact, if you are not willing to protect your own neighborhood, how can you be expected to help protect our larger neighborhood, including the city and county? I am proud that I am active in protecting the quality of life throughout my greater community, including your neighborhood.

Larry Horowitz | 12.03.07 - 3:00 pm | <#>

NIMBY? NIMBYs only emerge in response to LULUs. LULUs? Locally Undesirable Land Uses. That certainly describes the proposed development of Chuckanut Ridge.

Should good citizens stand idly by while their community gets wrecked? I guess our Founding Fathers were NIMBYs, too??

Tip Johnson | 12.03.07 - 3:45 pm | <#>

Just a few comments to set the record straight. Protecting Lake Whatcom and protecting Chuckanut Ridge are very similar goals. I was there for Lake Whatcom as those of you from this community will recall, likewise we all need to be here to protect Chuckanut Ridge and King and Queen Mountain and the Samish area. It is not a trade off that pits one neighborhood against another. That is a false dichotomy. The rumor that the CR folks were selling out the Samish Ridge folks is a classic example.

It is also crazy to think that preservation in town pits the city against the county. I am currently sitting in Hong Kong. 90 % of the land on this island has NOT been developed at all, just trees. The movies you see of the city is the most dense (and largely very pleasant place) you could imagine. The lowest density in our town is the Central Business District and Old Town EXACTLY where development should be taking place. It is where the jobs are and where people could live and not have to put our road system further into failure! Why not be rational and stop pandering to "developers" who simply want to take the cash out of our community based on the high quality of

life we have built here and give us back a town that has been trashed and land values that plummet when the quality of life is gone.

Let stop fighting amongst ourselves and begin the real battle with those that would take our quality of life from everyone in the city and pave over every inch of it for profit and then move to a gated community in California. It is time we had rational long term planning that followed the neighborhood plans that many worked very hard to develop.

It is time to stop the pork barrel politics of allowing developers to destroy our community for easy money like when The Mall was built on land that had been set aside in perpetuity. Like when the up zone of Chuckanut Ridge was done by a real estate agent at the end of a long night after the public had gone home. Like the selling out of the solid zoning for King and Queen Mtn. Like the mega development that will plunge the Guide into total collapse as a roadway in Larrabee Springs.

It is time for the people to say ENOUGH!

We have a small window of opportunity to save our quality of life here. People from all over the nation want to move here because it is such a lovely place. We are losing that quality and will lose it entirely to become just another over grown suburban jungle if we don't come together as a community now.

Join the hundreds who already have spoken out. Go to your neighborhood meetings. Don't let those who want to destroy our community pit us against each other. Don't listen to those cowards to afraid to sign their own name to their emails. Speak up and get active today, the opportunity is now, once the building and roads are built there is no going back. Save the places that we love and put housing where it belongs, in our central downtown core.

Frank James | 12.03.07 - 4:51 pm | <#>

Larry,

Thanks.....this is the first I have heard of activity in the South Neighborhood to accommodate growth other than the Chuckanut Ridge property. Want to share any details? I believe that is the crux of the issue....we all have to share equitably both in accepting growth and providing open space, or some of our neighborhood "characters" aren't going to survive.

As for the Samish Neighborhood, the neighborhood plan update due for final passage tonight accepts development in accordance with current zoning. Obviously, if Bellingham has to accept the amount of growth that is predicted the current zoning will be modified and probably re-modified.

Frankly, I think we are all going to feel the sting of Tip's LULUs before it's done.

HiGuy | 12.03.07 - 4:57 pm | <#>

Does anyone think that when the forefathers in Vancouver set aside Stanley Park, or in New York City when they set aside Central Park, that there was unanimous support from the developers and building trades and realtors?

We are hearing the same complaining now.

Is there anyone, who does not have a financial interest in development, who is opposed to saving Chuckanut Ridge?

We realize that as crowding and congestion increases, people become more stressed and aggressive in their behavior.

Some of these opponents to Chuckanut Ridge have already shown that in their comments above.

I wonder how increased crowding can be of any benefit to them?

With all the new condos in Fairhaven, we need Chuckanut Ridge as open space and recreation for all residents.

I still am waiting to hear a valid argument from anyone, as to why saving Chuckanut Ridge is not a good thing?

Craig Moore | 12.03.07 - 6:08 pm | #

HiGuy,

Thanks for continuing our dialogue. I appreciate that we are able to communicate openly without calling each other names.

I am concerned that you have swallowed the city's bureaucratic nonsense that "each neighborhood MUST accept its fair share of growth." This situation results from the city's ridiculously ass-backward process for adopting its growth projection. Ideally, city staff, working with neighborhood input, would determine our "livable capacity" – the population target we could accommodate without crowding or inconvenience and without destroying our key habitats of local importance. Because neighborhoods would be involved from the start, this process eliminates the inter-neighborhood infighting we are now experiencing.

Unfortunately, the city adopted a growth projection that exceeds our livable capacity and forced upon its residents excruciating growth pains which could have been avoided, including the destruction of highly valued ecological treasures. I have been impressed with Dan Pike, and I hope he will change the city's process when we adopt our next population forecast (which I believe will occur in 2008).

As you may know, the adopted growth projection for Bellingham of 31,601 is roughly twice the

number needed to meet the State Office of Financial Management requirement. In other words, the city and county could have legally accepted about half the growth. As you might expect, there is substantial pressure by realtors and the building industry to adopt high-growth planning models. In fact, the WA Assn of Realtors contracted with well-known land use attorney Sandy Mackie to brief them on doing so (see links below).

Regarding the South Neighborhood, I have no information to share with you at this time; however, keep in mind that the primary urban village in southwest Bellingham is Fairhaven. Based on the number of buildings going up, it is likely that Fairhaven will end up accommodating significantly more than its fair share. The local recreational opportunities for these new residents are primarily in the South Neighborhood (Fairhaven Park, the Interurban Trail, Hundred Acre Wood, etc.). As a result, the final population accommodation in southwest Bellingham will likely involve some inter-neighborhood balancing between the Fairhaven and South neighborhoods.

Hope this helps. And thanks for keeping this dialogue civil.

Links to Sandy Mackie's briefs for the WA Assn of Realtors:

Part I: http://www.warealtor.org/governm...die_mackie1.asp

Part II: http://www.warealtor.org/governm...ndie_mackie.asp

Part III: http://www.warealtor.org/governm...die_mackie3.asp

Best,

Larry Horowitz | 12.03.07 - 6:55 pm | #

I, too wish to endorse the credible analysis by Larry Horowitz of the reasons why Chuckanut Ridge deserves to be preserved and for absolutely no development be permitted. Here is an opportunity for the newly elected mayor Dan Pike to REALLY show the citizenry of OUR FAIR CITY how well he will endorse the vision for which he has been voted in to represent us.

John D Stephens MD | 12.03.07 - 6:57 pm | #

Chuckanut Ridge is the ONLY property that could allow Fairhaven Park to expand to meet the City's own park standard consistent with the population targeted for the area.

And yet it is zoned for intense development.

Chuckanut Ridge is the only property that can connect Fairhaven Park with our substantial Interurban investments and leverage their value into a Gateway to the Chuckanut.

And yet the City failed to review the zoning after City planners called the public record of the rezone, "...a mystery at best."

Chuckanut Ridge might have at most fifty reasonable home sites, yet was zoned for 1500 units without any public notice or hearing, in contravention of numerous adopted neighborhood and citywide policies.

And so neighborhood plans were stripped of any authority in the land use code.

The City has repeatedly sustained Chuckanut Ridge by doing things they shouldn't and not doing things they should've.

Chuckanut Ridge began as a blind Delaware corporation officed in Lynden, reportedly involving elected officials of the time.

Chuckanut Ridge is either a comedy of government error and ineptitude, or something much worse.

Yet NO ONE will investigate! Horizon Bank is just the tip of this big rotten iceberg.

Tip Johnson | 12.03.07 - 7:54 pm | <#>

One more fact for the record is that the most dense neighborhood in the city is on the south side already. Happy Valley has the highest density in the city already.

Another is that these 'developments' are highly subsidized by tax payers. See the study by Eben Foder on the Responsible Development website for the entire set of facts (rdnow.org). We will subsidize Chuckanut Ridge with over \$12 million in public spending and even worse for Larrabee Springs where the public costs will run over \$30 million in public spending. Find out the fact before your tax bill goes up even higher.

Frank James | 12.03.07 - 8:01 pm | <#>

Larry,

Thank you. Life is too short and precious to waste time on name calling. Also, for the record, I have no interests whatsoever in the development sector.

I couldn't agree more with your take on the growth projections that were adopted. That is the real villain. That's why people are taking sides. They are scared. Sadly, as it stands at the moment we are about to become obligated to meet those projections and I wonder if we can act fast enough to turn it around.

Maybe our neighborhoods need to spend more time as a single powerful force to demand a more

reasonable approach to growth projections and requirements instead of what currently appears to be a focus primarily on defending our individual turfs.

HiGuy | 12.03.07 - 8:57 pm | <#>

The best available science is clear that if we want to preserve the Puget Sound and the salmon bearing creeks such as Padden and Chuckanut that flow into it, we must preserve their water sheds. Chuckanut Ridge is an undisturbed wet land forest with no human habitations or roads in its water shed. Any roads or development in the water shed will degrade the wetlands on and off the Fairhaven Highlands property, Chuckanut Creek, Padden Creek and to some extent, the Puget Sound. The Puget Sound Partnership is being put together at the state level to preserve such water sheds. It makes no sense to destroy Chuckanut Ridge with a high density development. Development should go where the natural environment is already destroyed, where adequate infrastructure and services already exist.

Christopher Grannis | 12.03.07 - 9:23 pm | <#>

HiGuy,

You hit the nail on the head when you said, "Maybe our neighborhoods need to spend more time as a single powerful force..." If we allow ourselves to be divided, we will easily be conquered.

We should not allow certain members within our community distract us from, and prevent us from achieving, our common vision and goals. Let's work together to preserve the quality of life for all of Bellingham and Whatcom County and honor the legacy of those who came before us.

Best,

Larry Horowitz | 12.03.07 - 10:15 pm | <#>

The notion of each neighborhood accepting the number of units as assigned by the the Planning department is as ludicrous as the overall numbers that the city submitted to comply with GMA. Our town and our earth do not make a checkerboard to be filled in mathematically. Our earth is a living system - a large organism that is critically ill. In order to heal her, we must treat her with new medicine, not the old carcinogenic snake oil of endless destructive growth. First step in the treatment is to look at ways to remove the malignancy of our current property laws. They allow an undemocratic concentration of power in the hands of a few large landowners. Until these laws change, we may achieve remission of the cancer here and there, but the disease will ultimately kill all of us.

Michael Chiavario | 12.03.07 - 10:27 pm | <#>

I live in the County, but replacing mature forested wetlands on Chuckanut Ridge with tons of asphalt, manicured lawns, and high density development when there is more appropriate land elsewhere on the southside makes absolutely no sense--environmentally, socially, or ethically. Eben Fodor estimated that \$12M will be needed to pay for the infrastructure of this ill-conceived development. I would rather see our tax dollars spent on acquiring this urban forest, not subsidizing another developer while our quality of life is compromised.

I hear the argument, "If not there, then where?" If increased density is required in the south after all the density already planned for Fairhaven is factored in, then "brownfields" should be developed, perhaps on Old Fairhaven Parkway where the infrastructure already exists, not in the middle of a forest!

I fervently hope that every citizen and all our neighborhood associations will get behind a movement to demand that City officials revise the population projections previously and erroneously adopted before it is too late. Not acknowledging this error is the real problem.

It is disgraceful that the neighborhood divisiveness created by Mayor Asmundson with his false "north-south" dichotomy continues to be perpetuated by the Herald at every possible turn. We are ONE community. Traffic congestion, air pollution, rising taxes, loss of urban forests and wildlife, and the pollution of our lakes, streams, and Puget Sound will affect us ALL, not just one neighborhood. We need to listen to each other's legitimate concerns, and stop using labels like NIMBYs. It's dismissive and intellectually lazy.

What we should be doing is letting Mayor Pike (and the Herald!) know that it is possible to preserve the "green lungs" of our city and still accommodate reasonable growth if the growth projections had not been set in the stratosphere!

Remember:

"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."-- Native American proverb

"You don't know what you've lost till it's gone...They paved paradise and put up a parking lot"--
Joni Mitchell

Anne Botwin | 12.04.07 - 12:02 am | #

Thanks to Larry Freeman for the excellent letter and thanks to many for the excellent dialogue.

As a member of the South Neighborhood Association (the neighborhood that surrounds Chuckanut Ridge) we have been working for months on a neighborhood plan amendment that strongly emphasizes urban conservation. It has to be acknowledged that to attain this we have to find suitable areas for growth within the city limits and within the neighborhood. Christopher outlines the basic thrust of the plan amendment above. While the plan amendment that was submitted to

the City today is lacking in detail, it does provide enough overview so that as it moves forward, increase density can be found in appropriate areas. It has always been our, or at least my intent to do it this way. As a brief overview, areas just south of Fairhaven Parkway, that are already highly impacted are proposed for increase density. The southwest corner of I-5 and Fairhaven Parkway is proposed for an “urban village of mixed use higher density housing and neighborhood commercial center. We don’t want this area squandered for no stinkin freeway based fast food joints. Other areas have been proposed for possible increased density as well.

Sprawl is usually caused in a market economy by a decline in the perceived quality of life in urban areas. People have a strong passion for quality green space. As the City grows, preserving unique areas like CR, Samish Crest, Lake Whatcom and King Mountain and restoring, to the extent possible areas like Whatcom Creek, Squalicum Creek, Connolly Creek and Sehome Arboretum is critical to a more compact urban design. Without this connection to the natural environment, more people will want to leave the city in favor living in rural areas. It’s one thing to plan, but it is quite another to make your more compact urban design work in the context of that market economy where home buying decision are made by tens of thousands of people. As strange as it may seem, we still have a chance to save all of those areas. They each complement one another.

As for the myth about wanting to trade Samish Crest properties for Chuckanut Ridge, one individual who lived in the Samish Neighborhood and also has been associated with RD had briefly suggested that one parcel that connects Lake Padden to Samish Crest might be traded for CR. The suggestion received the same strong negative response from RD and Chuckanut Ridge supporters at the time that it received from the Samish Neighborhood. It was a bad idea that was briefly aired and quickly died. That should have been the end of the story. Urban myths and regional resentments seem to have a life of their own however.

Personally, during the Greenways controversy and debates, I put a fair amount of time into trying to get the Greenways allocation for the Samish Crest area increased. I recognize that that Greenway needs significant support since it is also a valuable natural area. By being persistent, it was one of the areas where the Legacy group had some significant success and the 2006 group was willing to make some concessions before the issue went to council. I found it odd that almost no one from the Samish Neighborhood stepped forward at that time to advocate for that Greenway. While we did not get everything we were asking for, we were able to significantly raise the acquisition allocation for that area. More is needed I think. A fair amount of the critical land in that area is outside the city limits. This is an area where the CMPD can help out, especially since it would be taxing the residents of the Yew Street area outside of the city limits where many of the important environmental areas exist. I also remember being strongly in favor of including Samish Crest in the first Greenways levy in 1991. To some at the time, it seemed a long way out of town. Somehow it stayed in that levy proposal which is why we are even discussing it today. I would suggest that advocates for that Greenway should make it known to the city that they want the city to aggressively pursue additional acquisition dollar for that area through grant sources. This would allow for a wider, more complete corridor. Use of Park Impact Fees for acquisition for that area is also possible.

Gerry Wilbour | 12.04.07 - 12:19 am | #

What a great outpouring.

Due to letters to the editor constraints, I was unable, along with the Herald's editing, (so that the by-line was changed from "Misdirection 101") to stress the point that the Herald's own voice was itself ANTAGONISTIC to the city-wide set of principles that had been articulated to guide planning. The editorial did not "increase community understanding" in the issues pertinent to the "natural environment", did not advocate for the "preservation of the unique quality of neighborhoods", and does not respect "the best available science in the management of critical areas."

As a result we must ask" why not?"

The view that one should not expect more, while understandable, suggests that we should all just pack up and go home. But this is the whole issue: divide and conquer. Isolate the citizens. Encourage them to feel they do not share common values. Play upon their fears and old antagonisms, and let city planning, values, respect, and science be damned.

WHEN THE VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY DOES NOT SPEAK FOR THE COMMUNITY VALUES, IT MUST BE CALLED TO ACCOUNT.

Is the Herald the voice for the community? Not always, that is for sure. Yet it should speak truthfully. And if the position taken in an endorsement for policy is based on values NOT statutorily endorsed by the city's residents, and misrepresents the issues, the organ of communication that binds us as a community is no longer working.

What if the Herald announced that there were no issues re pollution in the Bay as the City plans its approach to the waterfront? There would be no doubt that this is a falsehood.... And so is conjoining the issues of the Lake and the Ridge.

There are definitely those who are not interested in abiding by the rules espoused in the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan. I simply assert that when the dominant, most prevalent voice of the community speaks it has a responsibility to follow those rules, or to say that it is choosing not to do so.

Larry Freeman | 12.04.07 - 12:23 am | #

Thanks to Larry F. for writing his well thought out and accurate letter. It saddens me to see from reading the letters in this blog that the North/ South divide is still flourishing in our city, to the point of being downright hateful. We are one city, and the preservation of Chuckanut Ridge is critical to the quality of life for ALL of the people of Bellingham. Anyone that believes the Southside is not accepting it's fair share of "infill" has obviously not paid a visit to Fairhaven recently. Not only do we owe our support to the wetlands/ wildlife to be good stewards by protecting this priceless

gem, but when we are through raping and pillaging the rest of our city, particularly Fairhaven, we better have some place for all of these Condo dwellers to go when they come out of their very expensive 800 sq. ft. boxes. People can only buy so much schlock, drink so much coffee and eat so much food before they require a little nature to balance all of the excess and still be decent human beings. And by the way, is the developer paying any attention to the landslides and devastation to poorly thought out developments in the news? Why did the Herald give front page coverage to one car in a ditch when near Chuckanut Ridge there were eight cars and a tow truck in the ditch just beyond 16th street on Chuckanut Dr.? If you are reading this, Mr. Edelstein, have these dangers been taken into account for your so-called "traffic study?" You might want to consider that we are already overburdened with newcomers that can't drive in some conditions on the existing roads while figuring out how you plan to access this High Rise development.

Kim Erickson | 12.04.07 - 10:22 am | <#>

Perhaps the most persuasive argument that I have heard in favor of developing all or part of Chuckanut Ridge is that we need to reverse the trend towards sprawl by providing for more growth and infill within city limits. If not here, the argument goes, then where?

The challenge before us all is to find and encourage attractive and livable forms of infill, and to do so in locations which are close to where people live, work, and play, and which are well-situated to take advantage of transit and alternative (non-car) transportation. Smart growth is pedestrian friendly and respects our natural environment and local character and sense of place.

So let's get this straight, if the forested wetlands of Chuckanut Ridge are built upon, it will be a case of growth and infill, but it will not be smart growth or wise infill. Rather, it will be an ordinary case of developer-driven suburban growth, and it will come at a high cost.

The old pattern of build and grow is unsustainable and is living on borrowed time. I believe it is time for us to get serious about preventing sprawl and encouraging smart growth. Permitting 700 houses on Chuckanut Ridge is a bad way to start.

Michael Lilliquist | 12.04.07 - 10:31 am | <#>

Michael,

Thanks for taking time to post your excellent comments. I would just like to elaborate on the 'sprawl' vs. 'infill' argument as it relates to Chuckanut Ridge.

You state, "if the forested wetlands of Chuckanut Ridge are built upon, it was be a case of growth and infill, but it will not be smart growth or wise infill." While I agree that this would not be 'smart growth', I suggest that such development actually represents 'sprawl' rather than 'infill'.

Many people believe that only development outside of the city limits can be considered sprawl; however, the WA State Dept of Community, Trade & Economic Development (CTED) defines sprawl

as,

“poorly planned URBAN development in the URBAN fringe that invades land important for environmental and natural resource protection.”

Since ‘urban’ means ‘of or relating to a city’, it is clear that CTED’s phrase “poorly planned urban development” relates to development WITHIN a city. It is also clear that Chuckanut Ridge is important for environmental and resource protection and that Horizon Bank’s Fairhaven Highlands project will destroy this land. Such destruction is the poster child for ‘sprawl’ and in no way represents or should be considered ‘infill’.

Let’s get this straight: Horizon Bank’s development is ‘sprawl’, not ‘infill’! Anyone who disagrees should take their case to CTED.

Link to CTED’s article, “Reducing Sprawl”: <http://cted.wa.gov/site/404/default.aspx>

Thanks again for your comments.

Best,

Larry Horowitz | 12.04.07 - 11:02 am | #

I join Larry Freeman in believing that the Bellingham Herald editorial board misleads its community again about Chuckanut Ridge when it conjoins the issues of this property with those of Silver Beach.

I continue to fight to save the mature forested wetlands, the wooded hillsides and the salmon bearing streams of the Chuckanut Ridge that would all be destroyed by its development. Both the Growth Management Act and the Bellingham Comprehensive Plan were written to encourage retention of open space, to conserve fish and wildlife habitat, and to protect the environment and critical habitat areas.

We continue to destroy wetlands and streams in this state and then pay millions of tax dollars to fix problems that occur after development to restore habitats. It is time the City of Bellingham save this property to prevent the destruction of its habitat and any adverse affects on its valuable wetlands and salmon bearing streams.

We cannot continue to cut down forests, cover wetlands, destroy steep hillsides, and put salmon baring streams into jeopardy without paying highly for our selfishness in the future.

Chuckanut Ridge is part if my "back yard" even though I don't live across from it or around it. It is there for me and you to enjoy and to save for future generations. Fighting for it is a very worthy cause and we should all continue to so.

Just for the record...the South Neighborhood has accommodated several hundred new units of housing since the adoption of its neighborhood plan in 1980. These have been built along our infrastructure corridor of Old Fairhaven Parkway, and include mobile home parks, senior residences, condominiums, assisted living complexes, apartment complexes and a smaller number of single family homes. We still have developable land along this corridor and would like to use the coming year to plan to accommodate our future growth in this area, in exchange for saving the wildlife and habitat treasure known as Chuckanut Ridge. Time will tell if we are successful.

Steve Wilson

President South Neighborhood Association

Steve Wilson | 12.04.07 - 3:37 pm | #

Well, there are certainly big questions with regard to the "chain of custody" of the Ridge property, and it demands a proper investigation.

Timelines of changing ownership, names of those involved in transactions hidden by corporations or LLCs should be exposed, as well as the activities of "public officials" in making the changes that affect us all.

It would seem that the horsepower behind this investigation should be the Herald, but something tells me that that there is no hope of that forthcoming from those quarters.

I guess we are left with our newly elected officials.

Will the land acquisitions and zoning changes be investigated by them?

Sadly, I must say that I would be shocked if such a thing were to happen.

But I have my optimistic bunny hat on: watching, waiting...waiting, watching.

Remigijus Biciunas | 12.04.07 - 5:09 pm | #

Chuckanut Ridge is an environmental treasure unique to Bellingham, and part of what makes Bellingham a wonderful place to live. Larry is correct. It is not infill to cut a thousand trees, destroy a wetland forest ecosystem, degrade salmon bearing streams, and the Puget Sound. It would be folly for Bellingham to let it be destroyed. According to the 2000 census South Neighborhood had

1550 people and the Central Business district had 806, just over half the population of South. Downtown has jobs, shops, services, and infrastructure. It would be beneficial for the CBD to have infill. Horizon Bank wants to build 739 units (1500 People) who would be isolated from jobs and services by inadequate roads. Horizon Bank and the developer should build 739 units downtown.
Christopher | 12.04.07 - 10:17 pm | #

In addition to its questionable zoning history, Chuckanut Ridge has repeatedly been documented to be a fragile wetland, critical to the health of several watersheds, ecological habitats and of course Puget Sound itself. It is essentially a swamp area that includes steep slopes, hardly appropriate for infill. Rather, as the city looks to secure GMA required parkland for our future, it is an obvious site for protection and preservation.

The second Greenways was passed with the clear understanding that Chuckanut Ridge would be purchased and protected. Logistical difficulties made this difficult and it was never accomplished. City officials committed funds toward purchasing it during the third Greenways campaign, and still that is questioned. The city has a moral imperative to step up and accomplish what all the studies and best available science conclude, and what they have been asked by voters and agreed to do in the past: it is time to preserve Chuckanut Ridge!

Pam | 12.05.07 - 10:48 am | #

I found the following Wikipedia definition of 'infill' enlightening:

"In the urban planning and development industries, infill is the use of land within a built-up area for further construction, especially as part of a community redevelopment or growth management program or as part of smart growth. It focuses on the reuse and repositioning of obsolete or underutilized buildings and sites. This type of development is essential to renewing blighted neighborhoods and knitting them back together with more prosperous communities."

This definition simply does not apply to Horizon Bank's planned destruction of Chuckanut Ridge. It is clear that the Fairhaven Highlands project represents 'sprawl' in its ugliest sense.

Infill vs Sprawl | 12.05.07 - 11:27 am | #

As every new development goes up, Chuckanut Ridge becomes more precious. It deserves to be preserved for its rare pristine nature and we, as a community, deserve to have it preserved that we might experience and learn from its beauty.

Sheila Nickerson | 12.05.07 - 12:09 pm | #

Great discussion. Yes, I do think the crux of the CR problem is a broad misunderstanding of the concept of infill. Even the media and a number of local electeds will often boil the debate down to infill at its most simplistic level--yer either fer it or agin it. If it isn't already paved over, built upon, or designated as a park or reserve area of some kind, then it must be vacant, and therefore, prime ground for infill. This kind of short-sighted thinking screws things up in at least three basic ways:

1. It ignores opportunities for redevelopment (consistent with neighborhood planning) as a means of increasing density in appropriate locations, as determined by the neighborhoods.
2. It ignores the need to protect high-value lands that provide significant benefits to the community other than density--density being just one key element of an overall neighborhood planning effort. Lands to be set aside for parks, trails, open space, habitat, stream and wetland protection, critter corridors, general open space, historic/cultural sites, lands for schools and civic services, etc., etc. all need to be identified, not just in terms of what is needed today or next year, but with a super-sensitive vision toward the kind of community we intend to leave for the bums who come after us. More simplistic concepts of infill do not account well for these diverse needs, particularly when you consider how limited the choices are.
3. Simplistic infill (and NIMBY) arguments also fail to account for urban environmental systems and connectivity--something that we could be addressing a little more aggressively through the city's greenways program. The environmental benefits available at CR are substantial and pretty well established through site studies and an objective rating system.

I don't live anywhere near Chuckanut Ridge but I know this city's dwindling natural landscape about as well as the next person and it won't be easy to convince me that this place isn't one of the last real gems we have left. Is it worth acquiring at any price? No. But it is darn well worth a serious public investment to acquire a major chunk of it, especially when you compare that with the multi-million \$\$ cost to taxpayers who get to bankroll the infrastructure needed to serve the development. Why aren't the antis freaking over that? I'm glad to see that southside neighborhoods remain committed to the cause.

Ken Wilcox | 12.05.07 - 12:49 pm | #

False information like HiGuy's suggestion of some kind of "secret" public land swap at the expense of the Samish Neighborhood is what created much of the so-called "controversy" over Chuckanut Ridge which has inflamed and continues to a small group of uninformed citizens regarding the best and highest use of this property--for both the landowners, taxpayers, and the community at large. I was a resident of the Samish Neighborhood when this false rumor started more than four years ago, when a meritless rumor was published as fact in the neighborhood newsletter and then republished and widely distributed on the front page of a local weekly newspaper.

I personally contacted the elected neighborhood association leaders and newspaper editor responsible for publishing without verifying the accuracy of the so-called information, and

although one elected Samish board member eventually apologized for such reckless disregard for the truth, both the board and the newspaper refused to publish a correction or disseminate the facts regarding alternative proposals the South Neighborhood Association, the Greenways Legacy Committee, the Coalition of South Neighborhoods, and other concerned citizen-based community groups were actually proposing to the city regarding the Chuckanut Ridge property. The only remedy on behalf of the community for the publishing and continued spread of this rumor was through letters to the editor, which are regarded as opinion.

The heart of this issue for all involved is based on:

The identified nature and public value of the property as a high-quality, locally significant habitat, as confirmed by the Bellingham Wildlife & Habitat Assessment, the Department of Natural Resources best-forest management practices, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wetlands regulations, and our own Shoreline Master Plan public comment, Critical Areas Ordinance testimony, Greenways and Parks public surveys, and the past two decades worth of advances in watershed and forest science, riparian ecology, full-cost environmental accounting, and wetlands and indicator species studies.

A comprehensive fiscal study of the specific cost to taxpayers of developing Chuckanut Ridge was undertaken at great volunteer expense, and its conclusions were clear: The best return on investment for taxpayers is to preserve this significant habitat block (the last remaining mature forest wetlands habitat on the edge of the city) as the keystone it is for the entire southern region of the city and public investments already incurred here which will otherwise be devalued, including: Sehome Arboretum, the Interurban Trail system, southernmost urban Greenways corridor, Fairhaven Park, Padden Gorge, Padden & Chuckanut Creeks (salmon and cutthroat trout spawning grounds), Chuckanut Bay, Connelly Creek, to name a few of the most commonly known.

All available economic, scientific, social, recreational, and real estate research shows that this property will only retain its high public value if its integrity is protected so that it will continue to function as the air producing, soil stabilizing, water filtering, salmon spawning ecosystem that it is.

The record also shows what the South Neighborhood Association (in which this property is entirely situated) has been attempting for three years to implement on the ground in the form of an updated neighborhood plan which reflects modern economics, science and public values: that there are many suitable locations within the South Neighborhood itself which can collectively provide the dense infill (739 residential and mixed-use commercial units) Fairhaven Highlands development proponents are advocating, but without the adverse impacts on the most ecologically significant portion of the neighborhood.

What seems to be conveniently forgotten in this rush to create division and controversy is that the landowners have a basic property right to sell this parcel at fair market value--at far less cost to taxpayers than the infrastructure required to build in this environmentally sensitive location. And the city has an obligation to taxpayers to work with the landowners and ensure this property is placed permanently in public ownership and that the landowners are provided with every reasonable opportunity to invest their development millions at a profit elsewhere within the boundaries of this neighborhood.

This is the only reasonable and feasible option for us all--regardless of what was considered viable land use 10, 20, 30, 100 years ago. We know better now!

Cathy McKenzie | 12.05.07 - 1:41 pm | <#>

How fortunate Bellingham and Whatcom County are to even have the opportunity to debate which--if not all--of its open spaces to preserve. On a recent trip to San Francisco, I was talking to folks there about the efforts to create more green areas *and* respond to population growth. Most opportunities for new parks are on near or near Superfund sites or other pretty nasty industrial areas. Things are better in outlying counties, but not great. Compare that to here.

The neighborhoods can work together to get beyond the Us vs. Them mode of operating (which of course only plays into the hands of those wishing to develop natural areas for their own financial gain) and protect all the areas threatened by unchecked development.

Shannon Wright | 12.05.07 - 2:37 pm | <#>

I suppose I should read what everyone else has said, so I don't repeat, but I feel like writing "off the cuff". That we are even still discussing this Chuckanut Ridge development is beyond comprehension. With numbers coming out in the press like, 70% decline in average populations of common birds, 70-90 % reduction in world fishing stocks by 2040. I am surprised they are not paying us to protect the 100 acre woods. Not to mention global warming. Lisa Marcus

Lisa Marcus | 12.05.07 - 4:11 pm | <#>

Shannon has it right, these are indeed unique opportunities for an urban area to even consider saving.

Gerry Wilbour | 12.05.07 - 10:36 pm | <#>

I'm surprised that Whatcom Land Trust is never mentioned when these discussions arise. It seems like this would be a logical undertaking given their track record and credibility. Anyone have any knowledge if it's an acquisition they are considering? Or if not, why not?

HiGuy | 12.06.07 - 9:17 am | <#>

The few people that are opposed to protecting Chuckanut Ridge - in my opinion - are not thinking clearly about the future of this city. Imagine if Houston, Phoenix (substitute your "favorite" city that has stumbled into sprawl) had preserved some sizable chunks of natural land inside the city

and controlled growth in intelligent ways. They would be different places today - not the poster children of unplanned sprawl development run amok.

With Chuckanut Ridge we have a real gem - a beautiful natural forest with wetlands, old growth trees, wildlife, hiking trails, etc. right here within city limits. So back to the future - imagine Bellingham in 10 years. We will continue to grow - hopefully with Dan Pike in office we will do so with more intelligence. And in 10 years as Bellingham grows Chuckanut Ridge will, even more than today, be seen as an incredible resource where any citizen can take a stroll through a real, functioning forest, see an owl, hear coyotes howl, where your children can try to catch frogs, build forts, play hide and seek....

What would other cities that have nothing like this left give to have a natural area like Chuckanut Ridge within their city limits? A lot. And everyone living in Bellingham will be thankful to the legacy that protecting this incredible piece of land will leave.

Todd Paglia | 12.06.07 - 9:43 am | #

It's interesting you mention the Whatcom Land Trust (WLT). Some years ago, WLT prepared an outstanding white paper to promote the preservation of large tracts of land in the Chuckanuts, funded by Paul Allen's foundation. Unfortunately for us, Paul Allen's sports franchises dominated his attention, and the funding dried up. I believe that WLT would be interested in pursuing this again; however, I expect they have no interest in taking hold of this political hot potato.

Part of the problem is that Horizon Bank substantially overpaid for this land and failed to do its own due diligence, over-relying on the seller's attorney who now represents the bank. It's quite astonishing that they actually stepped into this land mine at all. I guess Dave Edelstein must have said, "Trust me." Most of us would have known better.

There are some interesting comments on the Horizon Bank message board at Yahoo Finance (see link below). Look for the following topics:

"Chuckanut Ridge: Horizon Bank's own Waterloo"

"Chuckanut Ridge: Challenge or Opportunity"

"An Open Letter to Horizon Bank"

"Customers abandon Horizon Bank over Chuckanut Ridge"

My favorite comment is from a Horizon Bank investor who owned more than 15,000 shares before he dumped them all. He said:

"I had been accumulating for the past two years, until today, was up to 15,000 + shares, liked the indigenous population growth, the dividend, the almost non-existent npl's, and the steady growth and good management.

However, this [Chuckanut Ridge] land deal has soured me, not a word of it in the cc, called

investors relations never got a reply, try and email them can't be done. Started unloading today and will get out, how any community bank could be so stupid to stir up anything in a community giving them negative pub is too arrogant as to be beyond realm of reason.”

Link to this message:

<http://messages.finance.yahoo.co...t=2&frt=2& off=1>

Link to Horizon Bank message board at Yahoo:

<http://messages.finance.yahoo.co...hoo.com/mb/ HRZB>

Larry Horowitz | 12.06.07 - 9:55 am | #

The ongoing blog discussion--fascinating. Democracy in motion. I've followed the CR issue for several years now, and in that time, the Herald's editors have expressed no sensitivity to the problems that development on CR will entail. In the past year, Herald editor Scott Ayer has, to my mind, written very intelligently on the Nooksack River pollution (and WHO did that?), on traffic issues, on the waterfront. But he has penned nary a word showing that he's even a little informed about CR issues: traffic congestion, loss of wildlife habitat and green cover, pollution of streams, of the Bay, degradation of south neighborhoods.

Would Mr. Ayer like to expose himself to a bit of education? Has he the humility, the sense of responsibility, to meet with people who oppose the FH project? In the past two years, he could at any time have sought out these people for dialogue. Instead he and the editorial board of the Herald have stigmatized as foolish and hypocritical people who have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars trying to protect their city.

I call on Mr. Ayer to initiate contacts with people who want to help him.

John Brown | 12.06.07 - 10:10 am | #

The core issues about Chuckanut Ridge is that it will cost us all a great deal in tax subsidies for it to go forward, it will permanently destroy the support system for two of the three salmon streams in Bellingham and it will create a traffic nightmare for much of the south side by forcing the traffic beyond the ability of the roadways to handle the traffic. We need to say NO to this development BUT we need to say NO to all such developments EVERYWHERE in our community. There does need to be infill in Bellingham and there are literally thousands of places to do that infill that will not create these kinds of problems within the city, BUT they will not be as profitable for those who do the development, they will not be the 'easy' developments that make literally hundreds of millions of dollars in profits for those that have been able to send their land use attorneys to every Planning Commission meeting and every City Council meeting on the topic.

It is time for all of us in Bellingham to say NO to this type of public welfare for the few rich people who manipulate the process for their personal gain. If you doubt the analysis look at the study by Eben Fodor of the Fairhaven Highlands construction project on Chuckanut Ridge. Read it and then

post your thoughts here. The link to the first section is:
<http://www.rdnnow.org/Documents/F...pages%201-4.htm>

or just go to the www.rdnnow.org and use the search function with the word Fodor

Read that and then let's talk about why this project and any project like it anywhere in Bellingham should not be approved.

Frank James | 12.08.07 - 2:43 pm | #

Here are some details about why this is a bad idea:

There are three key reasons this building project should be rejected by the city. Taxes, Trees and Traffic.

Our taxes will go up dramatically; this project will require at least a \$12 million public subsidy. See www.rdnnow.org and search for the Fodor study to get all the details. Some other construction projects are even worse. Larrabee Springs will cost us all over \$38 million in subsidies for roads, fire, police, utilities, etc that the developer will push off on to the public.

Trees, well really the environment. Two of the three salmon bearing streams have headwaters on Chuckanut Ridge. What is proposed will destroy much of the natural support systems for those salmon and many other animals that live in the area. (see the slide show of the deer, owls and other animals that live in the 100 Acre Wood now on the www.rdnnow.org website). There is an endangered wild orchid that lives there and a rare type of shrimp that grows in fresh water marshes. The developer has refused to answer any questions about how they plan to make sure they will not injure the recovering salmon runs in Chuckanut Creek and Padden Creek or share any information they have about the rare animals that live there.

Traffic is one of the problems that everyone will feel. No matter which traffic plan is adopted everyone agrees that at least one of the major roadways in our part of town will go to 'level of service F', which is simply defined as "beyond the ability of the roadway to handle the traffic". Why do that? Whose interests does it serve to have our roadways so crowded they are not safe for those in the cars let alone the kids walking to school or trying to ride bikes on the shoulders.

This project and others like it are a bad idea for our pocket books, for the environment and for our safety. Send a letter to the City Council and Mayor. for sure send in a comment letter on the EIS, and if you have not been involved for a while reactivate, now is the time for action.

Frank James | 12.08.07 - 4:38 pm | #