Testimony Before PC July 19, 2024

Good Morning…my name is Fred Klein, I live in Eastsound…I appreciate and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Planning Commission.

I'm here at the invitation of Brooke Sullivan of DCD to plead my case for my Docket Request which would add language to our Comprehensive Plan at SJCC 18.35.100.A.2. …it involves buffers for wetlands which fall within Urban Growth Areas.

There are two types of buffers…water quality, and habitat.

As you well know, one of the principal reasons we've opted in to the Growth Management Act is to reduce pressure for development in our rural landscape by increasing our ability to develop within our UGAs.

The existing CP includes a provision whereby the water quality buffers for wetlands **within UGAs** may be reduced by 50% subject to certain mitigations. Presumably this provision exists in order to allow for the more intensive development within UGAs envisioned by the Growth Management Act.

However…whatever community benefits this reduction in water quality buffers to wetlands in UGAs may be, they cannot be realized without a commensurate reductions in the habitat buffers…a subject upon which our Comprehensive Plan is silent.

Thus…I come before you with my Docket Request which suggests specific language which would empower the Director of DCD to reduce habitat wetland buffers within Urban Growth Areas commensurate with the **existing** reductions for water quality buffers…I see this as a simple ask requiring nothing more than the stroke of a pen by the County Council.

There is…however…a problem.

In 2019, I made a similar request…and it was recommended to be part of a supposedly upcoming review of the Critical Area Ordinance…something which has yet to happen.

Now, five years later, DCD has characterized my Docket Request as “obsolete” and redundant…and has once again recommended that it await a revision to the CAO…a review which staff had told me is unscheduled and unfunded. All they could say is that it would happen sometime in the indefinite future.

At your June 21st hearing, Brooke stated that funding for the CAO revision has been allocated and that she would be consulting with the interim director to schedule the work. As far as i know, that has yet to occur.

As I said back in June, Justice delayed is justice denied.

I have a five acre parcel on Mt. Baker Road within the Eastsound UGA which, I believe at your recommendation, the Council has recently increased the allowable density from 4 to 12 homes per acre. The parcel is impacted by a small isolated Class II wetland which, in itself presents no problem.

However, the 150 foot wetland habitat buffer so severely restricts the development potential that the site cannot sensibly be used to create affordable, workforce housing.

So…if you are serious about addressing the affordable housing shortfall…some would say crisis…please recommend to Council that they override the staff determination and approve this Docket Request…now.

I make this request as an architect and planner whose 40 year career has focused on affordable housing…I was a founding member and first board president of OPAL.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Fred R. Klein