



Comment from
Ridgefield
Open House

3/25/15

From Friends of
CC

**To: Board of County Commissioners of Clark County
County Community Planning Staff
From: Friends of Clark County
For the Record: Open House at Ridgefield, 3/25/15**

Friends of Clark County is a 501 (C) (3) with a "smart growth" mission. We are "watch-dogs" who are concerned about violations of both GMP process and GMA laws. These can have large financial consequences to the County.

We worry about procedural flaws in the process for forming the Clark County's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan (CGMP or Comprehensive Plan). Most of them involve Alternative 4, called a "Rural Alternative", but which we call a "Suburban Sprawl Alternative".

One councilor seems to have taken over the process, making a "wish list" alternative. This seems to have been built from asking individuals who testify and come to outreach meetings "What can I do for you to solve your problem or make things better"? Development of the Alternatives is usually accomplished within the executive branch of government. The co-option by the legislative branch is far out of the usual process.

Secondly, only one "special interest group" (CCCU, Clark County Citizens United) has been included at the table for discussion and it has been treated as the only representatives of the rural community. The agricultural community has been ignored. Further, we (FOCC) have asked to be at the table as representatives of financial and process concerns. We are supporting staff recommendations and disagree with the reductions in minimum lot sizes. The agricultural community sees the decrease in agricultural lot sizes as destructive to the future of agriculture, especially in the increased cost of farmland. (See the 3/3/15 BOCC hearing for lots of input from our farmers and fans of local foods).

Further, the 4th alternative is not yet fixed and defined well enough to do an EIS. It must predict the # of potential new residences to inform the basis for an EIS. It needs a staff report that includes # of parcels, # built, # possible new houses. Exactly how "executive action" will add parcels to prevent "spot zoning". It needs sums of acres for each category plus overall total, and a list of possible legal problems as presented at the last open house.

The GMA required (past tense) a well-defined Alternative 4 at least 10 days before the first public open house. The public open houses are March 25 and April 1. The last inadequate version was issued on 3/20/15. Thus, this Alternative 4 is already out of compliance with the GMA, which is currently Washington State Law.

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1. How will you provide the services and infrastructure in the rural area under Alternative 4?
2. Have Alternatives been reviewed and recommended by Planning or attorneys to determine best approach and recommendations?
3. For all cities, especially Battle Ground, Ridgefield and LaCenter, creating the smaller agriculture zones around the perimeters of the cities will break up large parcels of land that future employers will need to create jobs. Specifically at the Ridgefield I-5 Junction, our solid businesses are there in large part because of big farms, under single ownership, and were brought into Ridgefield's urban area. For future expansion, employers have been and are still looking for these large parcels next to the city's infrastructure and urban growth area. The large parcels surrounding the cities are few in quantity, making the situation worse. If you make smaller plots and zoning, then the cities will be hemmed in. There will be less ability to support future businesses and employers beyond what is already in place within the urban growth area. JOBS, JOBS, JOBS. Don't break up the land to sacrifice the large adjacent agriculture acreage.
4. For the Alternative 4, and those rural (non-agricultural) parcels to be re-zoned, there might be no new lots created, but there are also no new rights created. There's no clear benefit that we can see for the landowners the County is targeting. Danger of future rezones of other rural parcels, creating more, and smaller, lots will surround the City, kill redevelopment potential, and tax our collective services without compensating for them to move more people to the rural areas where there are not currently services to support them. Ridgefield is aggressively pursuing options and paths to support more people and employers with the services needed.

An unfortunate piece of writing was published March 25th by Ken Vance, the Editor of The Reflector. What he declares front page news has many of us at Friends of Clark County flipping beyond page A3 to find the rest of the story. The two page article titled "Rural landowners push for alternative", attempts to educate the north county folks with tales of unlawfulness, misrepresentation and antiquated policy. The article weighs in at 1252 words, 844 of which are quoted from three members of Clark County Citizens United and David Madore. Furthermore Vance leaves six statements without end quotes, which this author presumes is a new journalistic style that I'd like to call Op-Said.

It's not surprising that Vance wouldn't contact FOCC for comment. After all, it's clear what he wants the message to be. Sensational and scary. He also didn't report the voices of planning staff, County legal or the County Assessor. What's much closer to the truth is CCCU has been camped out at the Councilors' offices demanding de-designation of our resource land for the last two decades. This same land that preserves the rural character as, well, rural. The three members of CCCU quoted in the article are representing their own interests, not all or even most rural landowners.

Our open spaces, farmland and resource lands are being pressured by development, not to the benefit of the landowner, but quite the opposite. Since Vance didn't ask us for our facts, I'll tell you now. Higher taxes for all county residents? You bet. Either that or reduced public services. There will be an estimated 20% higher cost for infrastructure, emergency services and schools to support homes that are built outside of the urban growth boundary. The people in the rural areas of the county cannot, by themselves, support 6,500 acres of residential development as proposed in Alternative 4. There isn't the water availability for thousands of new wells. The remaining water is necessary to grow what food our community is capable of raising for our security. And to be completely fiscally responsible, one must look at the lawsuits the county will face for noncompliance to the Growth Management Act.

Let The Reflector know you're onto them. Vance has misrepresented his readership and has a request for correction in his inbox for all the egregious editing mistakes.