



Clark County Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 5000
Vancouver, Washington 98666

October 31, 2014

Re: 2016 Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the 2016 Clark County Comprehensive Plan.

Clark County Citizens United, Inc. Board members, representing approximately 6000 rural landowners, have continuously submitted information for the record since January, 2014, regarding changes to the rural lands in the 2016 update of the Comprehensive Plan. But, currently, the proposed plan does not reflect any of the concerns or solutions that were voiced. There is only *one alternative*, affecting the rural lands, in the DSEIS for review. Given all of the information submitted, that suggests that more and different options need to be considered by the public, CCCU, Inc. feels compelled to present two additional Alternatives for consideration in the DSEIS, and believe these documents better represent the concerns and needs of the rural people and community. These two Alternatives to the DSEIS comply with state SEPA requirements and accommodates the economic needs of the rural communities of Clark County. We ask that Alternative 4 and Alternative 5 be added to the proposed Alternative 1, 2, and 3, for public review and consideration as a desired Alternative in the DSEIS and the 2016 Clark County Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Rural and Resource Lands Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to the 2016 Clark County Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Alternative 4

Clark County, recognizes the importance of the rural lands and rural character to Washington's economy, its people and its environment while respecting regional differences. Rural lands and rural based economies enhance the economic desirability of the state, helps to preserve traditional activities, and contributes to the states overall quality of life. Alternative 4 differs from Alternative 1, 2, and 3 because it is a true reflection of existing rural development as well as current and future economic trends and needs of the rural community. This fourth alternative reflects the past history of the rural character and changes that have occurred in the last twenty years in all rural and resource lands in Clark County. It also addresses how the economic needs of these areas can be simply met by ground truthing and recognition of the historical patterns of development that took place prior to 1994. Because the majority of these lands have already been developed, there would be very little additional environmental impact. Any environmental concerns regarding new development would be mitigated and addressed within the building permit process.

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I. ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY

Large lot zoning for agriculture, forest and rural parcels have become a financial and economic burden on the rural and resource areas and it's people. Increased taxation, sales and purchase difficulties make large lots undesirable. The trend in the market is currently driven by small affordable rural parcels in all zones. Rural and resource parcels in Clark County are generally less than 20 acres in size and there is a predominance of small hobby farms and forests on small lots scattered throughout the rural area. But they are currently designated in a zone that is much greater than the size of the lots and does not reflect the actual use of the land. Recognizing these parcels for what they are, recognizes the rural character of Clark County and encourages continued use of the land for that rural and resource activity. There will be some increase in additional rural and resource parcels, but that increase is offset by the lack of lot creation that has occurred in the past twenty years and in the 2004 and 2007 Comprehensive Plan updates. This has resulted in a lack of housing for this type of rural farm, rural forest and rural residential lifestyle. As rural economic trends improve, and as the county has acknowledged that rural housing will be needed, additional parcels in the rural areas will be necessary.

Alternative 4 retains and enhances the job base in rural areas and gives flexibility to create opportunities for business development and opportunities to live and work in the rural and resource lands. Further, this alternative gives flexibility to retain existing businesses and allows them to expand. Not all business development in rural areas require an urban level of services and many businesses in rural areas fit within the definition of rural character. In defining the rural element, under **RCW 36.70A.070 (5)**, this alternative will foster historical land use patterns and develop a local vision that will, help preserve rural based economies and traditional rural lifestyles; encourage the economic prosperity of rural residents; foster opportunities for small scale rural based employment and self employment; permit the operation of rural based agriculture, commercial, recreational, and tourists business that are consistent with existing and planned land use patterns and would be compatible with the use of the land by wildlife, and fish and wildlife habitat; foster the private stewardship of the land and preservation of open space; and enhance the rural sense of community and quality of life.

II. RURAL ELEMENT

Under **RCW 36.70A.070 (b) Rural development** - Alternative 4 to the DSEIS, permits rural development, forestry and agriculture in rural areas. It provides for a variety of rural densities, uses, essential public facilities and rural government services, needed to serve the permitted densities and uses. In order to achieve a variety of rural densities and uses, this alternative will provide for clustering, design guidelines, and other innovative development techniques that will accommodate appropriate rural densities and uses that are not characterized by urban growth and are consistent with rural character. Alternative 4 will recognize existing development in the rural zone by using predominant

parcel size and land use designations consisting of 2.5 acre Community Rural and 5 acre Estate Rural. One acre Clustering would be allowed in all rural zones based on a 2.5 acre density, as a means to retain larger parcels. Five (5) acre segregation would be allowed in all rural zones.

The Growth Management Act states that Rural lands are not designated for urban growth, agriculture forest or mineral resources. The rural element shall consist of GMA goals and local circumstances, according to established patterns of rural densities and uses and considering local circumstances. Alternative 4 will produce a plan that regards the realities of existing rural development in direct support of the terms of the GMA, and meets the requirements of how the rural element harmonizes the planning goals in RCW 36.70.A 020.

III. RESOURCE ELEMENT

Large lot agriculture and forestry is no longer viable, nor is it the norm in Clark County. With the increased cost of real estate, it is not financially attainable for most Clark County citizens. In order to preserve hobby farms and the part time agriculture and forestry activity that is still remaining, the county must look at the farming and forestry trends that are defining these resources in the county and throughout the state and nation. In Alternative 4, zoning will be applied in such a way as to encourage their continued maintenance, economic existence and use. Industrial farmers and foresters have moved away from Clark County or retired from commercial resource activity, without having a replacement. Industrial and commercial markets, suppliers and processors have moved to other areas of the country. This prevents the large scale sale of commercial resource products, necessary to support large commercial farming. Small parcel hobby farms and forests have become the norm in Clark County and have been in place for decades. But Rural and Resource zones continue to reflect what was adopted twenty years ago in the 1994 Comprehensive Plan. There has been very little, if any change, since then. By ground truthing and reducing the existing lot sizes in the zones to reflect what is actually in place, it will encourage the purchase, continued stewardship and economic prosperity of these types of resource lands.

Alternative 4 will recognize existing development in the agriculture zone by using predominant parcel size and land use designations consisting of 2.5 acre Neighborhood Farm; 5 acre Rural Farm and 10 acre Commercial Agriculture. One acre clustering would be allowed in all agriculture zones based on 2.5 acre density as a means to retain larger parcels. Five(5) acre segregation would be allowed in all agriculture zones.

Alternative 4 will recognize existing development in the forest zone by using predominant parcel size and land use designations consisting of 5 acre Family Forest; 10 acre Transition Forest; and 20 acre Industrial Forest. One acre clustering would be allowed in all forest zones based on 2.5 acre density as a means to retain larger parcels. Five (5) acre segregation would be allowed under certain circumstances in all zones.

Resource soils maps in the 1994 Comprehensive Plan did not have the technological ability to use the best available science at the time of their creation, and so depended on aerial photography to determine where agriculture and forest lands were located. In order to update and correct these maps with current data and to allow internal consistency with the 2016 Comprehensive Plan, resource soils maps for agriculture and forest lands will be digitally corrected, using the latest available science, GIS technology and information according to **WAC 365.190-040 Process**. This will accurately demonstrate prime and unique Class I and Class II agriculture soils with less than 15% grade consisting of Cloquato, Newberg, Hillsboro, Sauvie, Hesson, Olympic, McBee, Semiahmoo, and Tisch Soil Series; and Prime forest soils with less than 30% grade consisting of Cinebar soils series as discussed on pages 47 and 48 of the **Soil Survey of Clark County, Washington, United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in cooperation with Washington Agricultural Experiment Station issued November, 1972 and in accordance with RCW 36.70A.130 and WAC 365.190.050 through 365.190.130**. The soils information, along with the other criteria listed in the GMA for the designation of agricultural and forest land, will then be used to affirm and determine appropriate productive agriculture and forest land of long term commercial significance according to **RCW 36.70A.170**. All other land, not suitable for productive resource land of long term commercial significance will be designated as rural.

IV. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Alternative 4 adheres to the **Clark County Comprehensive Update 2016 - Planning for Growth 2015-2035, Board of Clark County Commissioners, Principles and Values** as it applies to the rural and resource lands. It meets the **Housing goal #2**, to maintain a mix of housing and a variety of housing densities, large, medium and small lots; **Employment Lands #6**, Lands that are most likely to provide family wage jobs; **Community Design #1**, new growth needs to blend well with existing neighborhoods; **Rural Lands #1**, minimize the conversion of productive farm lands, and address the question, is it being used today for commercial agriculture? It will maintain a mix of housing options, a variety of housing densities with large medium and small lots, as well as address **Other land use #1**, ensure good geographic distribution of commercial lands; and #3, use and integrated view of examining the proposed boundaries and plan map.

V. ENVIRONMENT

The environmental impact of Alternative 4 to affected areas would be minimal, as the majority of these parcels have already been developed and have complied with any environmental concerns at the time of the development. In addition, new development would need to comply with existing development code. Parcels would have access to the Clark Public Utilities water purveyor, which provides a service area that is 92% of the overall county and is established throughout the rural area. In recognizing the smaller rural and resource parcels in appropriate zones, according to prime soils, primary use, and existing infrastructure, these existing small lots are well suited to protecting

aquifers with the use of public water and small on site drilled wells for minor irrigation needs, instead of large deep irrigation wells necessary for large lot resource activity that affects major aquifers. As the majority of the rural landowners in Clark County become educated over environmental concerns and natural and organic practices, these small rural lots and hobby farms protect the aquifers by using much less chemicals and pesticides than used for large lot commercial and industrial agriculture and forestry activity.

On site sewage systems use the latest scientific technology to design systems that are consistent with good environmental practices. Older on site systems are monitored regularly. Many of the new systems produce potable water and there is a trend for rural landowners to invest in these types of systems. According to recent studies, 80% of the water used to regenerate our aquifers comes from on site septic systems. On the contrary, another recent study indicates that 80% of the pollution of our rivers and streams come from the wildlife that frequent them.

Wildlife protection will be enhanced with the recognition of small rural and resource lots, with the use of design standards and voluntary programs that are consistent with preservation of the environment and wildlife habitat. The small orchards, gardens, ponds and natural and nursery landscape plantings on small rural and resource lots provide a host of food, forage and housing for deer, geese, rabbit, birds, raptors, eagles, raccoon, possum, and other types of wildlife. The additional use of natural landscape conservation incentives for rural lots help to prevent dust and soil erosion while aiding in effective storm water control. The existing parcelization provides scenic landscapes throughout the rural areas. By recognizing these parcels with correct and appropriate zones, historical rural activity within these zones and the rural character of Clark County can be preserved.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Berk Report, 2012, *Situation Assessment*, explains the changing face of agriculture in Clark County and how it has evolved over the past 20 years. The study reports that small lots give owners flexibility. In addition, only 17% of the parcels in the county conform to their zone. Farming in Clark County is no longer agriculture in the traditional sense of large farms. The same is true for forest lands, according to Rick Dunning, past Executive Director of the Washington State Farm Forestry Association. Scott Bailey, an economist for Washington Employment Division indicates that traditional agriculture is relatively small in Clark County and there has already been a great deal of turnover in resource land. Employment use in farming resource is negligible and was not included in the Clark County Economic Report. The current employment trends in the rural and resource lands in Clark County is predominantly home businesses that use telecommunication for commerce. The market supports the desire for more affordable housing to allow people the ability to live and work in the rural area. Clark County has fallen short of providing that type of rural lifestyle for it's citizens. Cities grow from their surrounding environment. The small rural cities of Ridgefield, Battle Ground, La Center, Yacolt, Camas and Washougal, within Clark County, need the ability

to grow and prosper economically, while serving the rural and resource communities. Present and future trends need to be acknowledged and appropriate changes to the rural areas of the county in the Comprehensive Plan will reflect those trends. Alternative 4 will recognize existing development and uses, while applying flexibility to the changing economic climate and desires of the county residents. It can be easily amended to reflect the citizens new ideas in future updates of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. This alternative has an inherent flexibility, which is responsible to the changing needs and desires of the people. It will be general enough to allow alternatives when applied to actual development and is designed to be revised as situations undergo great changes in the rural areas and within Clark County in future Comprehensive Land Use Plan updates.

Rural and Resource Land Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement to 2016 Clark County Comprehensive Land Use Plan

Alternative 5

A major economic engine being driven in the rural lands of Clark County, is land, rural housing, rural lifestyle, and the desire to live and work in the rural and resource lands. Those wanting a home business are looking for space to work at home in a calm and quiet environment. People who want to raise produce to sell from home or at Farmers Markets are looking for small parcels with good soil. Christmas tree farms only need a few acres to realize an income. Scott Bailey, economist from Washington State Employment Security, indicates that Clark County's best crop is land. The real estate market factors confirm that lots of one half acre and lots in the one to five acre range are the most sought after land of all parcels, and carries a premium price. According to realtors, Leah Higgins and Benjamin Moss, there just isn't any of that real estate available in Clark County at a price people can afford. Businesses wanting to establish in the area are also looking for desirable housing for their employees. If it is not available, the business will go to an area where it does exist and is readily available and affordable.

Alternative 5 addresses a more futuristic view of rural and resource land in Clark County. As traditional farms disappear and land lays fallow, it is economically prudent for the landowner to realize the most financial gain possible by selling the land within the most desired market. It is interesting to note that in the 1970's Clark County did have the ability to meet this type of market demand with the FX one acre land use zone. Many developed parcels in rural Clark County were created under that designation. Now the resource lands have come full circle. Buying land for agriculture or forest activity is expensive and buyers are wanting to save costs. To meet the market demand and realize economic viability in the rural and resource areas, creative land use must be used. Alternative 5 is different than the other alternatives because it focuses on the economic

viability of the actual land and not the product that is grown on that land. As the economy improves, more people will want to live a rural lifestyle. To satisfy the market, and yet attempt to preserve land for other uses, very small parcels need to be created which cause the least possible environmental impact, while meeting those demands.

Alternative 5 focuses on the rural economics of land and housing within the rural and resource areas that, do not meet the mandatory requirements of the Growth Management Act, under RCW 36.70A.030 (2), which states, "*Agricultural land" means land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, see, Christmas trees....that have long term commercial significance for agricultural production.*"

I. RESOURCE ELEMENT - LONG TERM COMMERCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Growth Management Act mandates that agriculture and forest land have long term commercial significance for the commercial production of agriculture or forestry. As farmers and foresters leave the profession, they also leave the land. The difficulty with maintaining a large lot parcel of land in a resource zone is that it is too cost prohibitive to maintain or rehabilitate and young buyers are simply not interested in making the investment. Instead, when these buyers consider resource land and housing, they are looking for just a small piece of land that they can raise a few animals or a little produce to sell occasionally. They come to Clark County, looking for that type of land and that type of housing. This is not land that has long term commercial significance and does not meet that test, under the mandates of the GMA. But, such parcels do have commercial significance as a rural farm home site or a rural forest home site.

Under this alternative, agriculture resource land that cannot demonstrate long term commercial significance, will be considered for much smaller parcelization than what is currently in the zone. Predominant parcel size would be used, along with using clustering of one half acre, one acre and two acre parcels, based on 2.5 acre density; with the remainder lot being reconsidered every two years. The parcel size chosen will depend on the topography, slopes, soil, infrastructure and proximity to urban areas.

Forest resource land that cannot demonstrate long term commercial significance, will consider the predominance of tree cover and use predominant parcel size, along with clustering of one half acre, one acre and two acres in the area, based on 2.5 acre density where there is minimal tree cover. The remaining lot would be reconsidered every two years. The parcel size chosen will depend on the topography, slopes, soil infrastructure and proximity to urban areas.

II. RURAL ELEMENT

There is no requirement in the Growth Management Act for commercial significance of rural land. The GMA does mandate that rural development not be urban in nature and preserves the rural character of the area.

Using vegetative buffers, all weather road surfacing and design standards, clustering again meets the requirements of the GMA while meeting the market demand for one half acre, one acre and two acre lot sizes based on 2.5 acre density, with the remaining lot being reconsidered every two years. In Alternative 5, the existing rural parcelization will be recognized, using predominant parcel size, with appropriate zoning. Remaining lots would have the option to sub-divide or short plat to the zone; boundary line adjust; or use clustering as a means to create additional lots. All rural lands within one mile of an urban UGB would be allowed to create 1/2 acre parcels via cluster, boundary line adjustment or short plat. Five acre segregation; or boundary line adjust to the smallest contiguous parcel size that existed prior to 2010 would be allowed in all rural zones.

III. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

Alternative 5 adheres to the **Clark County Comprehensive Plan Update 2016 - Planning for Growth 2015-2035, Board of Clark County Commissioners, Principles and Values**, as it applies to the rural and resource lands. As in Alternative 4, it meets the principles and values of the Housing goal, item # 2; Employment goal, item #6; Community design, item #1; Rural lands, item #1; and Other land use; items #1 and #3.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

The environmental impact would seem greater in Alternative 5, than in the other alternatives, but by using adequate vegetative buffering, infrastructure, and design standards, the environmental impact would be equal to traditional large lot rural and resource uses. The parcels would be smaller and condensed in one location, thereby allowing more environmental preservation to the greater remaining area. Small parcels would be more likely to use public water and more efficient or shared on-site sewage disposal systems. Roads and driveways would be shorter and shared by all of the parcels. The remaining parcel would then be comparable to open space, where a negative environmental impact would not be of concern.

V. CONCLUSION

Clark County cannot ignore existing parcelization and development, nor can it ignore the housing needs of the rural areas. While resource activity and resource land must be encouraged and preserved, the county cannot force landowners into attempting to create a resource parcel, into something that is primarily devoted to the production of and has long