



November 13, 2012

Planning Commissioners
Planning Department
City of Kirkland
123 Fifth Avenue
Kirkland WA 98033-6189

RE: Howard Private Amendment Request

Dear Commissioners:

The Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance (FHNA) has previously requested that the Commission refrain from making substantive amendments to the County's zoning regulations and map for Finn Hill until the development of a neighborhood plan that addresses Finn Hill's housing, commercial, transportation, and environmental needs in a coherent manner. FHNA is concerned that, until a neighborhood plan reflecting the input of Finn Hill residents is created, the City will not be able to resolve land use issues in the context of the community's planning goals. Without a neighborhood plan, the City will be forced to make decisions in a vacuum, creating a significant risk that it will choose outcomes that compromise Finn Hill's long-term interests.

The Howard Private Amendment Request is a good example of why zoning decisions should await the creation of a neighborhood plan. This request will have a significant and permanent impact on the southern half of Finn Hill. FHNA urges the Commission to recommend that the request be denied until a neighborhood plan – or at least a plan focused on the Holmes Point Business District – is developed.

Mr. Howard has asked the City to relax the requirement for retail space on one of the two adjacent properties he owns because it does not appear that retail development on the property would be economically viable. According to Mr. Howard, this is due to the difficulty of accessing that parcel given the current configuration of Juanita Drive. This assertion may be correct. However, so far as FHNA is aware, no studies have been undertaken as to whether the junctions of Holmes Point and 122nd Place with Juanita Drive could be redesigned to alleviate the present access constraints. Evidently, King County re-configured these intersections some years ago in ways that have made access worse; perhaps these can design decisions can be reversed.

Admittedly, it is possible that, for other reasons, neither of Mr. Howard's parcels should be subject to a retail development requirement. It may even be the case that commercial development of the parcels comprising the Holmes Point Business District on the western side of Juanita Drive would not ultimately be supported by Finn Hill residents. What is clear, however, is that if Mr. Howard's request to remove the retail development requirement is granted, there will be little prospect for retail

construction on the western side of Juanita Drive at the Holmes Point intersection. Since the Holmes Point Business District is one of only two such areas on Finn Hill, a decision to cut the district by half should not be taken for the sake of expediency. The consequences are significant. The City would forego sales tax revenues that might have come from shops in these parcels. Local residents would lose the chance to enjoy an attractive commercial area within walking distance of their homes.

FHNA believes that the Commission's original recommendation to defer action on the Howard re-zoning request was correct. We recognize that the City Council subsequently directed the Commission to address the request this year. Nevertheless, the Council's instruction does not compel the Commission to grant the request. The Commission can still conclude that the consequences of granting a request are sufficiently important that further analysis is justified.

FHNA recommends that the Commission take this position. In so doing, we are not asking that the City to postpone acting on Mr. Howard's request indefinitely. FHNA offers to work with both the Planning Department staff and Mr. Howard to convene community meetings during the first half of 2013 to explore the ramifications of Mr. Howard's request and to assess the viability of the Holmes Point Business District zoning as it exists today. Following the community meetings, Finn Hill residents will better understand what trade-offs the re-zoning request entails, and the City and Mr. Howard will better understand the community's priorities.

These meetings may serve to validate the Planning Department's recommendation that all of the properties in the study area be re-zoned PR 2.4. But, whatever the outcome, the community will have had an opportunity in the first half of 2013 to assess the potential of the Holmes Point Business District and the ramifications of changes to the present zoning for that district. That can only have long-term benefits for Finn Hill and for Kirkland.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Submitted on behalf of the FHNA Board of Directors,



Scott Morris
President

cc: Eric Shields
Paul Stewart
Teresa Swan
Kurt Triplett
Kirkland City Council
FHNA Board of Directors