



February 5, 2013

City Council
City of Kirkland
123 Fifth Avenue
Kirkland WA 98033-6189

RE: Finn Hill Neighborhood Plan

Dear Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Finn Hill Neighborhood Alliance (FHNA) to encourage the City of Kirkland to work with FHNA in 2013 on an expedited neighborhood plan for Finn Hill. Developing an effective plan for Finn Hill is our community's highest priority.

FHNA has urged both the City Council and the Planning Commission to prepare a neighborhood plan for Finn Hill since it was annexed in June 2011. The need for a Finn Hill plan is pressing for several reasons; Finn Hill is the city's largest single neighborhood; it contains large tracts of land that remain undeveloped; it is comprised of many sensitive areas and limited transportation infrastructure; and the area has never benefitted from a planning process in which citizens have had meaningful input. The immediate need for a plan has been highlighted by recent land use actions that Finn Hill residents have questioned: the effort to select a suitable location for a new fire station, the revision of housing density limits in the Inglewood Business District, and the redefinition of the Holmes Point Business District as a result of the Howard private amendment request.

Furthermore, a neighborhood plan is critical for the proper resolution of two matters the City will face in the near future: the Chaffey private amendment request, affecting a large parcel of forested hillside on Simonds Road, and the Juanita Drive Corridor Study.

FHNA recognizes that the neighborhood planning process in Kirkland has been intense, slow, and demanding on City resources. We know that the City has struggled to complete timely updates for the neighborhood plans that it prepared before annexation, a challenge that has been exacerbated now that annexation has brought three new neighborhoods under Kirkland's jurisdiction. We are aware as well that the City is launching a Comprehensive Plan Update project that will require the commitment of several Planning Department staff members for the next two years.

Clearly, the City needs to develop an approach that will allow it to prepare and revise neighborhood or subarea plans on a regular basis, even as it tackles major projects like a Comprehensive Plan Update. FHNA would like to work with City staff on creating a new model, using Finn Hill as the planning area and stressing the principal issues that interest our community: long-term land use trends (residential and commercial), transportation, and open space. We think FHNA can relieve a significant portion of the administrative burden that City staff has previously shouldered in the neighborhood planning process by assuming the responsibility to publicize and organize meetings, prepare and disseminate minutes, and move the discussion forward in an orderly fashion. We are confident that we have the experience and the volunteer resources to do this.

We expect that we would need to work with Planning Department staff, the City Manager, Planning Commissioners and interested City Council members to outline a process that has a well-defined scope of work, list of responsibilities, schedule, and milestones that clearly specify what City resources will be required.

However, we do have initial ideas on how the process can be designed. In our view, it should begin with an educational stage that will acquaint our community with critical facts concerning our current zoning regime and transportation assets. Our hope is that City staff can summarize these matters effectively at one or two community meetings, following which FHNA would disseminate the essential elements of staff presentations to residents who are unable to attend those meetings. These meetings will help the community to understand what level of housing and commercial development and what traffic volumes have already been planned for the Finn Hill community, why those plans were created, and what constraints they impose on planning and land use decisions in the future.

With this information in hand, Finn Hill residents would be prepared to advance to a second step in the process, that of understanding how the neighborhood might develop in the future, given expected population trends. By the time the Finn Hill process reaches this second phase, in the latter part of 2013, we expect that the Comprehensive Plan Update will have advanced to a point where the City can present a general view of the population growth that Finn Hill may need to absorb over the next twenty years.

The Finn Hill community should then be able to articulate how it would like to handle development demands, knowing that it will need to make intelligent trade-offs among factors relating to residential density, commercial amenities, open space, and efficient transportation. We realize that this step in the planning process will be the most challenging. However, we believe Finn Hill can complete it efficiently if community members have a good grasp of current planning (step one), understand the requirements of the Comprehensive Plan (step two), and frame their discussions in the final phase in terms of essential values and principles, as opposed to addressing specific solutions (such as revisions to particular zoning regulations or the design of specific arterials). Our objective would be to complete the plan by the end of 2014.

As noted above, these are FHNA's initial thoughts about a Finn Hill neighborhood or subarea planning process. However, we recognize we have little expertise in community planning and we approach the initiative with both humility and a willingness to consider other alternatives – so long as we can plot a course toward having a useful neighborhood plan in the near future. We are ready to engage with the City Manager and Planning Department staff, as well as Planning Commissioners and City Council

Members, in creating a subarea plan process that will work not only for Finn Hill, but might well serve as a model for other areas of the City.

At this point, we would appreciate the Council's endorsement of our offer to work with the City on a Finn Hill plan and allocation of necessary resources, with the goal of starting the process by the middle of the year and completing it by the end of 2014, without overburdening City staff.

Thank you for your consideration of our views. Please let us know how we may proceed with our proposal.

Submitted on behalf of the FHNA Board of Directors,



Scott Morris
President

cc: Kurt Triplett
Planning Commissioners
Eric Shields
Paul Stewart
FHNA Board of Directors