

Residents for Preserving Quality of Life on Hood Canal
P.O. Box 205.
Tahuya, WA 98588

Chairman Bob Gilbert
Commissioner Brenda Hill
Commissioner Cynthia Olsen
Port of Tahuya
P.O. Box 90
Tahuya, WA 98588

August 14, 2003

Re: Port of Tahuya: Public Access Plan.

Dear Chairman Gilbert, Commissioner Hill, and Commissioner Olsen:

This letter is being submitted in OPPOSITION to the proposed Port of Tahuya Public Access Plan. We question the need for and desirability of some of the proposed capital improvements contained in the proposed plan and we object to the process that was used to arrive at the proposal. It is our opinion that our properties, our privacy, and our quality of life are at risk if the Port of Tahuya Public Access Plan is adopted and implemented.

As residents and property owners in the Port of Tahuya district, we wish to express our strong opposition to approval of the proposed Port of Tahuya Public Access Plan as published in draft version, February 2003. The plan articulated in the February 2003 draft document is not clear, and therefore, it is difficult to evaluate specific plan elements, to determine their desirability, or to offer meaningful comment. Since specific locations for some of the proposed capital facilities are not identified, it is difficult to know the potential impacts the construction of such facilities would have. These potential impacts might include effects on property ownership and property values, expected patterns of use, and any intended or unintended consequences of the development of the proposed elements. Without these specifics, the plan cannot be intelligently analyzed, evaluated, or commented upon.

The laws of the State of Washington are very clear in their intent that planning and land use actions be conducted using a fair and open process that includes early and continuous public participation. Adequate public notice and the opportunity to participate and to comment are central to this. As residents and property owners of the affected plan area, we have a vested interest in any plan developed and implemented. As owners of some of the properties that may be directly affected, we also have legal rights pertaining to the use of our property and the conditions under which it can be appropriated.

One of the goals of the Washington State Growth Management Act of 1990 is to "encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process" RCW36.70A.020 (11). The Growth Management Act also states:

"Each county and city... shall establish...procedures providing for early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans. The procedures shall provide for broad dissemination of proposals and alternatives, opportunity for written comments, public meetings after effective notice, provision for open discussion, communication programs, information services, and consideration of and response to public comments."

RCW36.70A.140

We believe that the process used in formulating this plan did not meet the Growth Management Act's goal of citizen involvement in the process of formulating a plan that is intended to become part of the Comprehensive Plan. We do not believe that citizens were afforded reasonable and clear notice that such an effort was underway and, as such, were not given the opportunity to participate in any meaningful way in determining the elements of the plan itself. Even after some of us became aware of the planning effort, we were not allowed to make any comments at the Port District meetings that we attended. We also wish to call into question the means utilized to obtain input relevant to the formulation of the proposed plan. We do not believe that the methods used constitute a valid sampling of community opinion or that there was adequate opportunity for citizen participation in the formulation of the plan.

Some of our specific concerns include:

1. Insufficient efforts were made to inform the community that this process was being undertaken. No notice of this planning process was mailed to property owners or residents. The public notice published in the papers did not clearly identify that a public access plan was being formulated. The public notice did not appear in the same form in the different papers in which it was published, so readers of one paper did not receive the same notice as readers of another. One publication did not identify the notice as a legal notice, nor did it mention that a plan was being formulated. The notice as published in the SHELTON JOURNAL on January 24 and 31, 2002, simply stated:

"The Port of Tahuya Commissioners are requesting proposals to update the Port of Tahuya Comprehensive Plan. Interested parties please send proposals to P.O. Box 90, Tahuya, WA 98588. Must be postmarked by Feb. 15th 2002. For further info call (360) 275-4573."

2. No attempt was made to survey residents and property owners specifically or directly. No phone survey was conducted; no survey forms were mailed to citizens. Conducting such surveys of at least a representative or random sample of residents is a conventional approach that is used frequently to sample citizen opinion in the formulation of public policy and the development of capital priorities.

3. Respondents to the survey taken at the Fourth of July celebration self-selected by volunteering to complete the survey. This methodology is universally recognized in research design to yield results that can differ significantly from data gathered from randomly selected participants. Respondents who volunteer to participate in research are themselves considered to differ from a randomly selected sample and are also commonly found to differ in their opinions and/or responses from a randomly selected sample of individuals. This fact calls into question the validity of the survey in its attempt to determine the needs and desires of the community residents and property owners.
4. The survey taken at the Fourth of July celebration questioned residents and nonresidents alike. Although those responding to the survey were asked to indicate where they lived, only half of the respondents indicated that they were Tahuya residents. In the published plan draft, no information is presented to differentiate the responses of Tahuya from other respondents. Since the survey forms asked respondents to identify where they live, the responses made by residents could have been compared to those made by others. Such analysis would give a clearer picture of the opinions of the citizens of Tahuya and of the Port District versus those of tourists and other visitors.
5. The survey instrument used at the Fourth of July event employed a “forced choice” method of posing questions. In both the section asking for ratings of the quality of the “existing conditions” in Tahuya and the section asking for ratings of “public access facilities that are needed,” there was no way for the respondents to indicate that conditions were satisfactory or to rate the facilities listed as not needed. This design flaw may have skewed the responses and suggests that a person wishing to indicate that the existing conditions were satisfactory or that they did not consider any of the listed public access facilities needed simply might not have completed or turned in their survey form. As it was, between 12% and 21% of the respondents left each item in the “public facilities that are needed” section of the questionnaire unrated. These responses also could be interpreted as attempts to register opinions that the listed facilities were not needed.
6. According to the plan draft document, the items rated as high priority were those receiving 40-49% responses (page 47). Since this is approximately the same percentage as nonresident participants in the survey, there is no way to determine (from the report in the plan document) if these responses represent the public will of the citizens of the Tahuya community and the Port District area.
7. In response to question #32 of the survey, “What do you recommend we work on?” A number of respondents to the survey indicated in the comment section of the survey that they did not want any changes made. Others indicated that they did not want any development that would compromise the character of Tahuya or its natural areas. Some respondents indicated concern for issues not addressed in the plan, such as adequate law enforcement and other possible negative impacts of bringing more people into the area to use the proposed facilities. Since responses are not identified as being made by residents or nonresidents, it is possible that the prevailing opinion of the residents is contrary to the facility “needs” indicated in the plan draft.
8. The “Open House” held on October 16, 2002, was not advertised as a public meeting for the purpose of obtaining public input. The message, “Port of Tahuya Open House October 16 6-8PM” which was posted on the sign near the Fire District #8 building would give a reasonable person the impression that the event was to be social or informational

in nature. It does not clearly communicate that this was a formal call for public participation and input on a plan that would become part of the Comprehensive Plan that Port District property owners might be assessed to fund.

9. The Plan draft reports that 22 persons attended the "Open House." According to the draft, "They represented a diverse group of interests: Port of Dewatto, Mason County Planning, Mason County Parks, Hood Canal Community Club, Department of Natural Resources, Fire District #8, Hood Canal Coordinating council, Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, as well as members of the community" (page 49). The specific number of community members attending is not specified. The number of persons representing the agencies or organizations is also not specified, but 9 groups or governmental entities are listed. There is no way to know from the report exactly how many actual "community members" attended. The draft further reports, "each participant received three votes to be placed on a large diagram of proposed plan elements according to their choice of the three highest priority projects" (page 50). Since the total number of "votes" cast were reported to be 58 (page 51) it appears that the representatives of the various agencies and governmental entities voted their preferences. This means that there is no way from the information contained in the plan draft to determine if the priorities and preferences indicated are the "will of the people" who are residents and property owners of the Tahuya area or not.

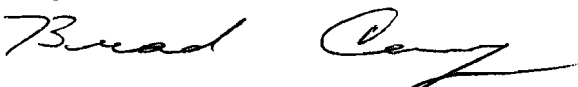
Tahuya is a rural community with a Rural Residential 5 designation. Such a low intensity designation is intended to preserve peace and quiet and to protect residents from development that would compromise the rural lifestyle. Those of us who live and own property here do so because of the rural and peaceful nature of the area, where we can enjoy natural beauty, peace, and quiet away from urban areas or commercial development. This perspective is supported by the Mason County Vision Statement contained in the Mason County Comprehensive Plan (1998):

"Mason County will remain a primarily rural county where residents will enjoy peace and quiet, privacy, natural views and rural enterprise. Although rural character means different things to different people, aspects of it include: natural vistas, wildlife, and natural ecosystems; fewer restrictions and more privacy than in an urban area; ...and the close ties of family and community to the land" (page 11-2.2).

As residents and property owners in Tahuya, we believe we are adequately served by the existing recreational facilities. Without a change in zoning, there is no real economic advantage to the people of Tahuya that would be created by increasing tourism in this area or by developing facilities designed to accommodate nonresidents. Therefore, we STRONGLY OBJECT to the proposed Port of Tahuya: Public Access Plan. We do not believe that the facilities proposed are needed, and we do not believe that an open, fair, or proper legal process was utilized in its formulation.

We urge you to vote against adopting this plan.

Sincerely,



Residents for Preserving Quality of Life on Hood Canal
Comments on Port of Tahuya Public Access Plan