

A Joint Letter from Three Unincorporated Area Councils

September 14, 2011

Growth Management Planning Council
c/o King County Department of Development and Environmental Services 900 Oakesdale Ave. SW
Renton, WA 98057-5212

Attn: Paul Reitenbach

We're writing in strong opposition to the proposal to allow the School Districts' 19 existing sites in the Rural Area to be developed under existing policies; exempt from the GMPC-proposed prohibition of sewer extensions to schools sited in the Rural Area (PF-12).

With an 18% decline in rural area school age population over the last 10 years, these schools sites, seven of which are inside or immediately adjacent to our service areas, are intended to serve an urban population. Developing these sites with urban-serving facilities will be permanently devastating to the local rural character, rural-related infrastructure, and rural community plans.

Pressure on rural road infrastructure could easily be impacted by increased bus and car traffic. Since schools are also gathering places for day, after-school, and evening meetings and activities, demands on road capabilities and safety will be further increased over rural requirements. Large footprint, impervious surface replaces pastureland and other rural uses. This means the sensitive, natural hydrology of the rural area will be altered with practices used in the urban areas.

Urban-serving schools do not align with rural character and local community plans. Winterbrook Farm, for example, an Issaquah School District site, is an 80-acre open area assessed as A-1 Pastureland. Winterbrook Farm was the last of the dairies that existed in May Valley which, like all the others, re-purposed their infrastructure from cattle to horses. Today, May Valley, a fertile valley of the western foothills of the Cascades, includes an obvious equestrian character and economics component.

In support of equine recreation and economics, local community interests include the creation of an intra-valley soft trail system connecting boarding and grazing sites along with connections to the surrounding regional trail systems: the largest concentration of soft trails in King County. The State Supreme Court has acknowledged the validity of the urge to urbanize being a natural result of placing urban serving facilities in the rural area. Urban-serving schools on the Winterbrook Farm site will easily be the tipping point for the eastern half of May Valley. It wouldn't be surprising that eventually urban thinking would demand residential development near the school sites justified by walkable-community and youth health policies.

We risk losing the rural area through "creeping normality". Approving a school site, overflow of facilities for a Master Planned Development, a Transfer Development Right receiving site, a tight-line sewer, a stormwater retention facility, or a number of other examples of land used for urban purposes seem insignificant when viewed individually. But there's no doubt that current Countywide Planning Policies and King County Comprehensive Plan policies have allowed these uses in the Urban Growth Boundary fringe areas thus creating an urban/rural ecotone intended to eventually expand the Urban Growth Area.

It's time the county-wide policies move in opposition to the rural area as a "land bank" for urban-related uses. Please reject any proposal to exempt existing Rural Area school district sites from proposed CPP policies and support proposed policies DP-45 through DP-51 intended to protect the Rural Area.

Thank you.

Steve Heister, Chair, Greater Maple Valley Unincorporated Area Council