

February 19, 2010

Mr. Larry Cort  
Planning Director  
City of Langley  
Langley, WA 98260

Larry:

Both Sue and I want to thank you for taking time to speak with us Wednesday night regarding the comprehensive rezone of Langley and how it affects our property, along with the relationship of our property to the Brackenwood neighborhood as well as the overall community in general.

First, let me say both Sue and I appreciated your professionalism and expertise in dealing with us. We are, however, somewhat troubled by the process that you and the Planning Advisory Board and our elected officials have chosen to use in the completion of this effort.

### **PEOPLE NOT PROCESS**

We understand that the principal objective of the rezone process is to align land use and zoning with the current comprehensive plan. However, it seems the City has forgotten one extremely important element of that process and that is the people – land owners and resident citizens who should be center stage here. In the end, it is not the land that elects and hires our leaders to guide the community -- it is our 1,000 plus citizens who do.

Your team, the PAB and our elected officials have not provided our citizens with the level of communication, access or time considerations that must be a part of any comprehensive rezone process. Every citizen and property owner in Langley is affected. To try and fast track the process for a self-imposed deadline shows the City's disrespect for the citizens who must try and assimilate the proposed changes almost overnight. To hear comments from our town officials like "So, why didn't you volunteer if you are so concerned?" or "Why didn't you come to the meetings way back when?" just confirms a level of arrogance that permeates the process, which I might add, goes back to the development of our current comprehensive plan as well. It doesn't matter if those involved are paid or unpaid elected officials, city staff members or volunteers, it should be all about community and people first -- not process.

### **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

1. **Avoiding unwanted compromises.** It seems that there are other flaws in the process that your team also encountered. By your own admission,

you stated that when the PAB began to reconcile their draft zoning decisions with the comp plan, they encountered problems which led to “shoe-horn-zoning” areas into the comp plan even when it didn’t make the best sense. Shouldn’t you have taken a look at possibly amending the comp plan, even though it might be considered an “inconvenience” by City officials, since legally you can only do that once per year? That should have at least been put on the table for discussion with our citizens.

2. **Confusing jargon.** Renaming the zoning areas from generally accepted real estate terms like *RS15000* to terms like *Environmentally Sensitive Design* and *Conservation Community Design*, while well meaning, are terms that are steeped in nuance, misperception and not well understood by average citizens. Even the more lengthy descriptions in the draft plan are not understandable by anyone except for those that drafted the original language. How about something more people centric rather than land-centric like *Clustered Residential 2000* or *Light Residential 1500*. The numbers indicate the square footage that would be permitted per parcel size or acre.
3. **Side-by-side comparisons.** People need to know what those jargon designations mean in simple terms like the 70/30 designation (70% cannot be residentially occupied and 30% can be occupied but must be densely clustered in ESD and CCD zones. Or only X amount of livable square footage per acre will be permitted but must be clustered on 30% of the land in those zones.) I am sure the other zone designations are just as vague. A solution would be an easy to understand matrix with all of the relevant detail broken down into two columns -- what the restrictions are now and what will they be under the proposed rezone changes. Let’s face it: there is no upside to this. It is all about what you **can’t** do on your property. So let’s characterize it like that so people can understand it easily. Really simple stuff always assures accurate communication. How about an easy to read citizen-friendly executive summary that codifies the major changes and recommendations as it pertains to each new zoning designation.
4. **Awareness building.** This is a critical pre-rollout component of any major town-wide proposal. It is an essential part of the process so citizens can understand and can adapt to the proposed recommendations. Time for citizens to talk with their neighbors and public officials should mean plenty of one-on-one meetings and small group sessions to educate folks on the proposed decisions that are on the table. Your teams pre-rollout, proactive, due diligence and relationship building efforts with affected citizens was virtually non-existent.

## CONSERVATION DESIGN AND THE FRAUSE PROPERTY

As Sue and I pointed out in our meeting, the selection of the *Conservation Design* designation for our parcel left us feeling disenfranchised from the rest of the Brackenwood neighborhood. Furthermore, the designation of *Environmental Sensitive Design* for the rest of the neighborhood seemed too harsh, given the existing configuration of dwelling spaces already existing on the property in question. The terms in themselves make the Brackenwood neighborhood sound like some kind of wilderness preserve. The color scheme also seems like we're considered outsiders from the rest of the community and that we are paying a price in having our property designated differently than other residential neighborhoods within the city. Here are our specific concerns:

1. From our point of view, the **70/30 configuration is extremely harsh** for both CDD and ESD areas. We would suggest you reconsider a **50/50 mix** to provide more flexibility for those who may want to take advantage of natural environmental elements or views from their property. Expecting a homeowner to give up 70% percent of their land for conservation purposes is ludicrous.
2. With regard to the amount of actual dwelling square footage allowed per parcel, it is **very confusing to understand** what each property owner could and couldn't do under the proposed new zone regulations. Even after Wednesday night's meeting, I really don't get what I will be permitted to do with regard to potentially creating a couple more lots on my property. In our opinion, we are being singled out to donate open space for the betterment of the community. What is the upside for us? Nothing! It's a down zone – we lose.
3. At this point I am **not willing to "take one" for the community** until I have the opportunity to study the full implications further. Please consider the following recommendations so all Langley citizens can have some immediate peace of mind.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

As we discussed at our meeting I believe that an appropriate action for your team and the City in general would be to:

1. **Take a process time-out.** Say 2 to 3 months, and really listen to the real concerns of Langley citizens. This is their community, not yours or anyone else who is not a Langley citizen or property owner. Fifteen minutes in the Planning Director's office is hardly enough time for anyone. The fact that you had 19 meetings with property owners shows that there is a lot of concern here. Nineteen (19) meetings are just the tip of the iceberg. A read on public attitudes can be expressed in a 7-1 ratio. For

every person who is vocal, there are at least 7 others who have the same feelings but are afraid or unwilling to speak up. It is time City leaders read community feelings and take some real leadership here.

2. **Apologize to Langley Citizens and the community.** Your team's (the City's) submission of the proposed zoning changes to the State before citizens had the chance to comment was arrogant and definitely not the way respectful public process should work. Langley citizens should get an apology for that presumptive action.
3. **Communicate the results of community conversations** and concerns with all citizens on a weekly basis. It's all about transparency and open communications.
4. **Be prepared to honestly address real concerns** and be prepared to accept citizen requested changes. Don't allow the process to overtake legitimate citizen input.
5. **Be pro-active in building support and relationships.** Don't expect people to come to meetings and admonish them when they do not. How about a little pro active relationship building here. Many of us old timers (we've been Langley residents since 1974) would be more than happy to discuss your intentions one-on-one or even in small groups. That is the way consensus is built, not through *public process*.
6. **Don't be defensive.** Our comments and the comments of all others are important elements of this entire process. Don't try and defend your positions. Be respectful, take input, make corrections and or concessions where they seem appropriate, communicate always and you will get the support from the community that you desire.
7. **Act in the best interest of all Langley citizens.** In our judgment if the Planning Director or the PAB is unwilling to heed the suggestions made in this letter or the voluminous input from other citizens then we believe that the Council has the duty to vote against the proposed changes until an acceptable community consensus can be reached.

Respectfully submitted,

BOB and SUE FRAUSE  
189 Brackenwood Rd., Langley, WA 98260  
[bfrause@frause.com](mailto:bfrause@frause.com) | [sue@suefrause.com](mailto:sue@suefrause.com)

cc: Mayor Paul Samuelson  
Langley City Council Members