

December 1, 2016

Christy Carr, AICP
City of Bainbridge Island
280 Madison Avenue North
Bainbridge Island WA 98110

Re: Rural American PLN15354 RUE VAR

Dear Ms. Carr:

I am writing to implore your department to NOT grant any reduction of wetland buffers or setbacks for the lots on Soundview Drive.

This wetland presents unique challenges. The property in and around this wetland was divided into tiny lots in the 1960's just before zoning was enacted that would have made such small lots impossible. In the 1990's, when the sewer plant was about to be built rendering previously undevelopable lots buildable, many contiguous lots were put into individual ownership in hopes of maintaining the maximum number of homes possible. Thus, the wetland covers or abuts dozens of tiny lots and even some roads. If each lot is allowed to reduce or eliminate the buffer, the entire wetland will eventually be developed and degraded to some extent.

Furthermore, this particular section of the wetland has already been compromised. The houses built on its east side (on Belfair) were permitted based on an inaccurate map (this is in the city record) and therefore there was no consideration of the setback or buffers. Thus, those lots were developed with no regard to the wetland and with no protection of the wetland.

Owners of home bordering the wetland on the east side, as well as those whose homes were built in other wetland areas in Fort Ward, have had to go to extensive and expensive measures to protect their property. They continue to rely on sump pumps and other measures to protect their homes from nature.

Other wetlands in the area, notably the on Kitsap, Soundview, and Fort Ward Hill, have already been compromised or eliminated. The soil in Fort Ward area is clay and thus the water either stays on the surface or runs off. One goal of the EPA's wetland management is to have no net loss of water in a watershed. With the degradation or loss of these wetlands, the water in this area has no place to go but down the surrounding slopes.

The road on south Soundview is in the wrong place. The center of the road should be 15 feet to the east, 15 feet into the already small lots on the east side of Soundview. The setback due to the road already gives a deceptive idea of the size of the building envelope. In addition, the current road will not support the trucks and construction vehicles needed to develop these lots, let alone the increased traffic of more homes. Will the developer bear the cost of rebuilding the road?

These lots on Soundview have changed ownership several times since they were first sold in the sixties. Previous owners have not been able to develop these lots and have eventually resold them. With each change of ownership, the price has escalated, yet these lots are still relatively inexpensive. They are inexpensive and basically unbuildable because of all the problems they have. The current owners were fully aware that they were buying substandard lots that were encumbered by wetlands when they bought them.

Other substandard lots on Soundview have been developed in line with setbacks and buffers. Property owners have built smaller structures, chose not to develop, or even in one case moved an existing building in order to maintain setbacks and buffers.

We all know the importance of wetlands and why they must be protected. Why even have wetland buffers if variances are allowed? Please do not allow any more degradation of wetlands, particularly the one between Soundview and Belfair.

Most sincerely,

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