

Sophia Cassam

From: Rick Eggerth <rickeggerth@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 15, 2022 11:47 AM
To: Comp Plan Update
Cc: WASHINGTON-CHAPTER-MTBAKER-GROUP@lists.sierraclub.org; Alexandra Gayek
Subject: Please Add a Climate Change Element to the Comprehensive Plan

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June 15, 2022

VIA EMAIL

San Juan County Planning Commissioners
San Juan County Department of Community Development Staff
San Juan County Council Members

compplancomments@sanjuanco.com

Re: Addition of Climate Change Element to Comprehensive Plan Update

Dear Commissioners, DCD Staff, and Council Members:

In anticipation of the June 17 meeting of the Planning Commission, the Sierra Club, through its Mt. Baker Group, voices its strong support of the addition of a Climate Change Element to the current San Juan County Comprehensive Plan Update. The Mt. Baker Group encompasses Whatcom, Skagit, and San Juan Counties, collectively home to more than 4,000 members and supporters, of whom at least 584 reside in San Juan County.

A Climate Change Element is critical to county planning anywhere now, especially island counties. Flooding from severe rain events and sea level rise, and severe winds that increase wave action and topple trees, have damaged private property, agricultural and forest lands, and public infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and electric lines. These events have also created public health and safety hazards, and created huge expense for the county's residents. Smoke from fires, both wild and managed, and extreme temperatures have threatened or damaged the health of residents and visitors – human and non-human.

The risk of wildfire damage to life and property increases with the spread of development into remote forested areas and on steep hillsides difficult to access by local firefighters. The risk that residents and visitors will be stranded and without access to electricity, food, medical care, and other essential resources due to flood, landslides, fire, and extreme winds increases with the spread of development in remote areas.

All of these things are uncomfortably familiar and real to us all in this region. Failure to plan appropriately for the inevitability of these happening again, and with greater frequency and severity, is illogical and irresponsible.

The threat to San Juan County is even greater due to its dependence on both ferries and on the mainland for its supply chain of food, fuel, workers, and nearly all else that the human residents require.

It is without doubt that what is required for a stable climate goes far beyond the reduction of use of fossil fuels. Science shows that the role of both biodiversity and healthy populations of wild, native species, with adequate natural habitat in healthy ecosystems cannot be overstated. This means that appropriate planning must include restoration, conservation, and protection of wild lands, wetlands, streams, shorelines, and our marine environment.

Regardless of one's belief in the reality or level of threat of "climate change," a Climate Change Element is the logical section of the Comprehensive Plan to best set the goals and policies for the above issues that have thus far been inadequately addressed.

Further, because the Climate Change Element proposed by Friends of the San Juans simply uses already adopted and published language from multiple documents, it should not require difficult or time-consuming debate to formally incorporate this language into the County's Comprehensive Plan. Thus, while future improvements are needed in this and other elements of the Comp Plan, immediately adopting the Friends of the San Juans' proposed Climate Change Element should not interfere with County Council's goal of rapid completion of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

This action will bring San Juan County into the fold of neighboring counties (Whatcom and Snohomish counties, for instance) that are taking initiative to protect the lands, waters, health, and economies of their people.

Thank you for your prompt and serious consideration of the points raised in this letter and our request to include the proposed Climate Change Element into the Comprehensive Plan Update. And please feel free to reach out to the Mt. Baker Group, especially its members and supporters in San Juan County, if we may be of assistance in updating the Comprehensive Plan. In particular, Sierra Club member Alexandra Gayek (gayek07@hotmail.com) on Orcas Island would be an excellent local liaison for future communication (or you could contact me as well).

Respectfully,

Rick Eggerth
Chair, Mt. Baker Group Executive Committee

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Be curious, not judgmental.
Walt Whitman