John McGarrity

June 4, 2003

Per your recent email request for neighborhood input regarding environmental planning and the waterfront planning (passed on to me by Richard Maneval) and per our conversation on Monday, please find below a quick note on some of the concerns I have regarding the waterfront that I hope future redevelopment can address and resolve:

There are neighborhood concerns that are concerns of a greater area than just the "Bay-side" neighborhoods. Access to water is of course one of them.

Another concern is the utility infrastructure of Bellingham. An industrial waterfront requires, among other things, an industrial utility infrastructure. This infrastructure has significant safety problems and is also a nuisance. The people of Bellingham find themselves living with the following problems:

1. Two large high-pressure gas lines that begin at Britton Gate and then later divide and, as three high-pressure lines, snake their way through the neighborhoods down to the waterfront. They pass right behind Northern Heights Elementary School (under the car junkyard) and cross the Mount Baker Highway behind Squalicum High School. They make their way to Squalicum Creek and separate at James Street.

There, one line goes under the freeway alongside of the creek, which it follows down to the waterfront, eventually rejoining the other line at Cornwall Ave. to serve both GP and the PSE power plant. This first line was laid in the early 1990s to help serve this power plant.

The other line goes south to Sunset Drive, crosses the freeway, goes down to Illinois Street to about 60 feet from Sunnyland School, then goes down Illinois Street to Broadway (in front of the Roeder home) and then along Connecticut Street through the Columbia neighborhood to the waterfront.

A third high-pressure line splits off the second one back at the corner of Illinois and Franklin streets. The third line goes down the middle of Franklin Street (passing Bellingham High School, Options High School and Explorations High School) to State Street, goes along State Street, then drops down to Cornwall Avenue and the waterfront industrial complex.

Besides the danger of using the westside neighborhoods as utility corridors for heavy industry, the risks are greatly increased by the practice of using these lines to service the homes, schools and businesses along the lines. The gas in the lines connecting these locations is not stepped down from the high-pressure until it reaches the users' meters. The main line is buried 6 feet down, but the access lines in the front yards of these users are less than 1 foot underground. So when a backhoe dug up a gas line in a yard at the

corner of Connecticut and Elizabeth streets (during the city's sewer line replacement project a couple of years ago) and yanked on it, the line separated at the main line, blew a crater out, deposited the earth across the street on the roof of a two-story house and the line spewed gas for four hours.

2. A power plant located on the waterfront requires fuel lines and also an electric grid to service the plant.

3. An electric grid on the west side of the freeway laces the westside neighborhoods with high kV power lines, one of which is dead. Again, neighborhoods on the west side of Bellingham are used as utility corridors to service this industrial area.

So if the use of waterfront area is to move away from heavy industry (including power generation), can the utility system be redesigned to minimize both its use of neighborhoods as corridors and also to minimize the danger this use brings to any area?

In the last several years there have been several neighborhood meetings regarding the above concerns called by and attended by the Columbia, Cornwall, Letter Streets and Sunnyland neighborhood associations. The newly formed Association of Bellingham Neighborhoods (an organization of our city's neighborhood associations) will be taking up this and other issues regarding the waterfront.

Best regards,

John