Statement of Robert Henry

Renton City Council Meeting

September 17, 2018

City Council members, County Council member:

My name is Robert Henry. Our family is a resident of the SE corner of Newcastle.

I want to speak regarding a proposal to log a 35 acre privately owned parcel which is entirely within the City of Newcastle and abuts Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park. The parcel drains into May Creek on the North end of Renton.

Logging operations on this parcel will impact the sediment load into May Creek, and the aesthetics of the view from Renton north to Cougar Mountain, to name just a few deleterious effects.

This parcel contains the DeLeo Wall, where hikers can get a regional viewpoint to Mt Rainer. The DeLeo wall has long been reached from the Newcastle Trail system or the County trail system.

On May 3 the DNR comment period for this Forest Practices Application closed. On May 7, an interdisciplinary team of 22 government affiliated professionals met on site, including representatives from King County, Newcastle, DNR and the owner. On May 17, DNR, very carefully following their processes, approved the permit application, pretty much as written.

The City of Newcastle immediately appealed to the PCHB (that’s the Pollution Control Hearing Board, a 3 judge panel with oversight of DNR), and has a full week on the docket next March, 2019.

There were 220 public comments filed with DNR, many outraged, none positive. The City of Renton also filed a comment, as did the county.

At the same time a group named SaveDeLeoWall has formed, of which I am a founding member. Our initial goal is to educate ourselves, the public, various governments and other outdoors-focused citizen advocacy groups. Our web page has had 4400 visitors since April. In late April we had posters at most trail heads describing the logging proposal.

On the basis of our ground work, strong public response, and strong response of existing advocacy groups, the local non-profit land trust Forterra has agreed to take up the case, and negotiate with the owner to buy the property….assuming the owner will sell. Forterra will act as a bridge until the various non-profits, the city and/or county raises funds to purchase the parcel.

The City of Newcastle negotiated with the owner for no logging until early October, and indeed there has been no logging. But this just buys time incrementally… In the meanwhile:

* Legal appeals, government and institutional reviews are ongoing.
* Public and private negotiations are occurring, albeit much more slowly than I would like.
* The ultimate goal is to work with Forterra to create a public-private partnership to purchase the property as permanent open space for King County or Newcastle.

The SaveDeleoWall group will raise funds in order for Forterra to cover their immediate costs of negotiation and getting an “Opinion of Value”, and work in all future fund raising efforts to acquire the parcel.

In my opinion it is absurd (and outrageous) that DNR can ignore or override the May Creek Basin plan, a collaboration between Renton, Newcastle and the county. It is also absurd that the DNR can also ignore the City of Newcastle’s planning authority (and, for that matter, its copious existing research and documentation) simply because the owner attests to keep the parcel as forest land for a period of 10 years.

Councilman Dunn: Please use your skills from the Squak Mountain experience to secure funding to buy the parcel. It would be great if you could speak to the owner that logging isn’t the best use for the parcel.

Thank you for your interest, your ongoing efforts, your outreach to Newcastle, your technical expertise and your political expertise.