

RE: SHD19-0005, Cowlitz River Public Access Project Hearing

September 29, 2020

Good Morning and thank you for this opportunity to testify on this matter of significant importance to the town of Packwood as well as the greater Lewis County Community.

My name is Lee Grose I am currently President of the Packwood Improvement Club (PIC). My address is 372 Craig Road in Packwood.

I am speaking this morning on behalf of the Packwood Improvement Club. The Packwood Improvement Club or PIC began in the mid 1950's as an organization with the purpose of providing a facility for community events. During this time, Packwood was pretty much the end of the road as the White Pass Highway (US Highway 12) was not yet completed and the 75-mile trek to Chehalis took over two hours. The Community Center in Packwood was built on property donated by Packwood Lumber Co. and constructed with volunteer labor and donated material. In spite of the ups and downs, the all-volunteer Club has survived the past 70 years and as such is the oldest volunteer organization in town. I would like to address several issues that have been raised regarding this project; The ability of the PIC to manage the site, flooding, impact on the neighboring development, river access, and safety.

I mention these things because the PIC has agreed to be a partner with the county in the maintenance and operation of the proposed project. The integrity of the club has been placed in question as to whether or not the members were fully aware of the commitment we are making to manage the day to day operation of the proposed day park, which includes assuring that trash is properly disposed of and the property is secured; locked at night and opened in the morning. The answer is yes, we were and, along with the local fishing community, are committed to the project and will endeavor to the best of our ability to honor that commitment.

I have lived in Packwood most of my life. In my 60 plus years there, I have witnessed at least two 100-year floods and one 500-year flood. I have witnessed flood waters washing out Johnson Creek and Smith Creek bridges on Highway 12 and Skate Creek and Butter Creek bridges on county roads. The town of Packwood, was not inundated by flood water in any of these past events. It is my belief that the prospect of that being more likely to happen because of this project is unfounded. The proposal has allowed for and sufficiently addresses proper precautions and construction to prevent flooding.

A negative impact to the adjacent community, particularly the Skyline Vista development, has also been raised. While I would agree that some of the adjacent property owners will experience some impact, I would contend that the positives far outweigh the negatives. This park will provide easy access to the river and will be effective in keeping unwanted visitors out of adjacent private properties which has been a problem in the past. Proper official signage will be provided to warn park users where the property boundary for the park will be as well as fencing along property lines. While this will not deter the most persistent offenders, it will certainly serve as notice to visitors where the boundaries are and where visitors are and are not welcome. I would submit that the impact of this project will impact adjacent private properties less negatively than the additional houses (currently 2 with 4 additional under construction) that have been and are being constructed on the property just below Skyline. In my opinion, this park would have a positive impact on those new property owners as it would also provide them with easy access to the river.

The growth of Packwood over the years from a town of 500 to a town of 2500 residents has brought with it many “growing pain” issues. In years past, the ability to get to the river was limited to knowing an adjacent property owner who would allow you access. As the river has become more popular for kayaking, swimming, fishing and other recreational activities and as new owners have taken up residence, access to the river has become more and more restrictive. At least three of the local developments provide points of access for their members but not for the general public. The average tourist is not an owner in the development so their access is denied. On numerous occasions, I was asked in my previous business where visitors could gain access to the river and I am with the understanding that this question has become more and more prevalent. The answer was that there was no public access. This project would provide that much needed public access.

The Franklan Bridge over the Cowlitz River adjacent to the site, is the drop site for Tacoma Power to introduce salmon in to the upper Cowlitz. Currently, local property owners have allowed for Tacoma Power to have access for this activity through their property for this function. Whether this would be allowed to continue into the future is possibly in question as times and property ownership changes. The proposed park would give Tacoma Power an assured site for this activity. Because this is a drop site for the fish introduction, fishermen currently park on the shoulder of Skate Creek Road. This creates a severe safety hazard as the road travel volumes continue to increase. This day use park would eliminate this hazard by giving fishermen a place to park off of this primary thoroughfare.

In summary, the Packwood Improvement Club is committed to this project. We feel that the benefits to our community far outweigh the negative impacts and fully support this project moving forward.

THANK YOU