



## F R I E N D S   O F   G U E M E S   I S L A N D

### **Skagit County Community Workshop on Extended Guemes Ferry Hours**

**February 10, 2008**

Good afternoon.

My name is David Wertheimer. I am a resident of Guemes Island, and Secretary of the Friends of Guemes Island, a membership organization dedicated to the preservation of the rural character of Guemes Island. We have more than 230 dues paying members. Unlike another organization that claims to support expanded weeknight ferry operations, we are a visible, transparent group that maintains a known Board of Directors, an accessible website, and an active membership. That other organization has never made the real size or composition of its membership known, has never established a visible presence on the island or on the internet, and seems to prefer to operate by stealth in a clandestine, manipulative fashion.

FGI believes that the rights of the 75% of islanders whose opposition to the late weeknight ferry runs has been repeatedly documented have been disregarded, trampled and overrun by the whims of a small and vocal minority of self-serving individuals who seek to gain both economically and personally from the extended ferry hours. Those who favor late hours seem not to be concerned about the concerns of the majority, the extraordinary waste of limited taxpayer funds that extended hours creates, or the damage that is being done to the island's environment.

Friends of Guemes Island has been openly, assertively active on the legal front to protect the interests of the island we call home. We believe that extended ferry hours will promote development of the island that will permanently compromise the island's only water supply and irrevocably alter the fragile ecosystem that has kept the island in balance for centuries.

In November, 2007, Snohomish County Superior Court Judge James Allendoerfer he ruled unequivocally that the county must conduct a comprehensive environmental review before the two year "trial period" for the late night hours can be extended, even by a single day. In his decision, he wrote:

*"At the end of the two-year trial period, on June 30th, 2008, the ferry schedule will automatically revert to its former 6:00 p.m. cut-off, and no weekday evening extension will again be considered unless and until there is a new, thorough, and SEPA compliant environmental review, including,*

*among other issues, the probability of induced growth, and the direct and indirect adverse environmental impacts resulting from the same.”*

The County now bears responsibility for production of a report that meets the threshold of an environmental review compliant with the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act.

Judge Allendorfer’s decision was based in part on a careful analysis of the anticipated impact of late weeknight ferry hours that was completed by a land use expert as part of the court proceedings. Her report was filed with the court, and, I assume and certainly hope, the contents of this report are well known to those the county has hired to complete their own environmental review.

The extensive research in this report, dated May 2007, clearly described and carefully documented the specific impacts of expanded ferry operations. These included:

- The ferry schedule extension is a transportation improvement that that will be growth-inducing to Guemes Island
- Improvements to transportation links have a history of adverse impacts to land uses
- Ferries, like road and bridges, promote growth
- Environmental analysis of the San Francisco Ferry System expansion confirms a ferry extension is growth inducing
- Kitsap County voters rejected a proposed ferry to rural landings due to acknowledged growth inducing impacts to rural areas
- The Anderson Island Ferry schedule failed to alleviate congested traffic as predicted and produced dramatic adverse impacts to the island and its population
- The ferry schedule extension will remove an obstacle to access and will increase demand for property on Guemes Island

Furthermore, this report clearly documents that:

- Current Washington State growth rates indicate strong demand for homes on Guemes Island
- Despite limited resources and no plan for accommodating new growth without significant adverse impacts to the island water supply, existing lots and zoning allow for significant growth on Guemes Island
- Even if the county were to adopt a complete moratorium on building permits, the island population could easily triple if vacant units were fully occupied
- A waterfront or island home available on Guemes Island is in high demand among home buyers

In relation to specific water-related adverse impacts, the report documented that:

- Growth will have probable significant adverse impact on the failing Guemes Island water system and remediation of damage to island aquifers would take years or decades to take effect
- Desalination plants would offer a solution with high costs to residents and potentially adverse impacts to the shoreline “critical areas” of the island
- Draw down of ground water may result in lowering or disappearance of existing island wetlands and the one stream on the island. This would have a probable adverse impact on island wildlife, including bird-nesting areas.
- New development will result in loss of green open space, increased impermeable surfaces, increased runoff and the need for surface water collection facilities
- Skagit County has failed to do state required watershed resource planning and assessments for Guemes Island and they have developed no strategies to provide sufficient water for existing and future residential populations on the island.

Finally, the FGI report documented these additional adverse impacts:

- 1992 nitrate levels in wells indicate that septic systems are contaminating potable water and that increased population without a sewer system will have a probable significant adverse impact on the health of marine habitat and residents
- Nightly traffic and parking on residential streets in Anacortes creates an adverse impact to local residential areas
- Increased population from induced growth will increase demand for commercial and public services now unavailable on Guemes Island, including public safety, first responders, garbage and recycling services, school-related transportation, to name just a few. The costs of these services will further burden an already thinly stretched county budget.

Although we are pleased that the county is taking the court order seriously – as legally they must – FGI believes that more study is unnecessary. The documentation is clear. Extending weeknight ferry hours – whether to 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., will have irreversible negative effects on this fragile island environment.

So, please listen to science, listen to reason and listen to financial concerns. And even if you select to ignore all of these, then at the very least listen to the voice of democracy: End the late night ferry hours that few people here want, that cost too much, and that are destructive to both the island’s environment and way of life.