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Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 10:30 AM
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Cc: Doug Quinn; Mitch.Kneipp@cityofwashougal.us; Jenna Kay; Rebecca Small; Anzalone, John A.; Denis Hayes; Kelly Moyer; Shari Phiel; Carrie Schulstad; David Stuebe; Trang Lam
Subject: THE CAMAS MILL CLEANUP, REGIONAL JOBS/HOUSING AND PUBLIC TRAILS: CONFLICTS AT THE FOUNDATION OF OUR COMP PLAN UPDATE

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THE CAMAS MILL CLEANUP. I have reached out to our neighbors asking the question embodied in this proposal to Washougal's Community Development Director. I have provided the proposal to Clark County and the City of Vancouver. I'll explain why all three entities, not to mention our school districts, should care about how the emergence of the Camas Mill's cleanup can be a positive change for all. Most importantly, if not properly done the mill property will be an anchor against required low-carbon growth.

The Post-Record's article on Camas' planning update provided three conclusions from Camas' planning consultant: (1) "Many participants expressed a desire to limit the height of downtown buildings to two stories, preserving the traditional aesthetic of the area," (2) "There was strong support for broadening the tax base with more commercial and retail developments to limit the reliance on Vancouver and neighboring areas for goods and services." (3) "Most participants expressed a preference for the hub model over the corridor model. Hubs were seen as more conducive to building community,"

What's not found in the article or plan? The 660-acre Camas Mill's future, Camas' historical heart and soul. Consider this: in 1980, 2/3rds of the mill's 2,300 employees lived beyond Camas. The mill was 4% of Clark County's total work force. The mill was a County-wide powerhouse.

Towards Camas' future, a word search of the plan's updated map for "mill" yields two references. First, as part of the word "million" and second, as part of the "Mill Ditch Trail." There is no other mention. In a faded color you can barely see industrial zoning continues.

This conflicts with many of the workshops I personally attended. Most in attendance asked questions concerning the mill being part of the plan update as a new alternative aspiration. A pathway for Camas being reunited with its riverfront and creating the jobs, services and housing Camas needs to meet state requirements and stay competitive with its neighbors. Being a regional partner including the two miles of shoreline never available to Clark County residents.

Camas just released the Preferred Alternative Land Use Plan for the 2045 update as shown in the attachment. Curiously, two public trails are proposed on the mill property. One is along the industrial shoreline and the second through the mill's heart, including along the heavily used railroad tracks. Public trails through the mill conflict with basic requirements of an industrial cleanup. This is pointed out in the Camas Mill District overlay plan. The city of Camas should understand this.

This isn't planning, this is continuing a slow decline of a great city.

Back to those three consultant quotes. They reinforce each other and demonstrate Camas' wrong direction. Olympia tells Camas 2045 requirements for how many dwelling units Camas needs to add: 4,226 housing units. Camas is told how many jobs to add: 11,645. That is a tall order for a town platted around an enormous mill. A mill today with just 5% of its work force remaining, 19 of 20 lines closed, and pulping operations shut down.

The Camas Mill today, extrapolating 1980 demographics, would have 10,000 jobs. 6,650 of those workers would live beyond Camas. The Camas Mill, remaining padlocked and having severe restrictions on its future use even after cleanup, might preempt 6,500 jobs going to Camas' neighbors including Washougal, Vancouver, Clark County and even Portland. Those jobs could link with developing major hubs in Washougal, (now including Pendleton Development), and the 192nd corridor. This is low-carbon development. This is a hub the community supported. This promotes transportation alternatives.

Camas needs more than 11,000 new jobs to meet state mandates. 3,500 of those potential Mill District jobs could go to Camas. A repurposed mill could represent 30% of these future jobs for Camas' state requirements. It hard enough to find a place for the 7,000 remaining required jobs on Camas' limited land. This, of course, beyond land needed for affordable housing.

For those who scoff at the mill's feasibility there is an element of wishful thinking to planning updates. There's no assurance in Camas, for example, that the North Shore will ever see grand, costly and impactful development now permitted in the plan. The North Shore's potential, regardless of feasibility, was used as the justification for the density in the North Shore plan. Sadly, the North Shore is no longer enough. Further urban growth expansions are proposed. All while the mill property can sit padlocked. When will Fern-Prairie be the next victim? Where will it stop?

The Camas Mill District Plan checks all of the boxes expressed at the city's event. It excels in generating tax and fee revenue. The current alternative to make up for an padlocked mill will come from households and businesses. These businesses will be fighting new and upscale retail and services, with parking, coming from both of Camas' borders. Camas citizens intuitively know this having told the city's consultants "to limit the reliance on Vancouver and neighboring areas for goods and services." Why doesn't our city see this future most already see, including most residents, as the light of an oncoming train?

Please heed the words of Camas native and National Director of the first Earth Day, Denis Hayes. Denis wrote of his hometown: "It is impossible to exaggerate the importance to Camas of the remediation of the paper mill...As we have seen throughout industrial America, nothing is more lethal to a community than a toxic abandoned industrial facility right at its core." This from a May 2021 Denis Hayes letter to Washington Department of Ecology's Director Laura Watson.

Which Camas do we want in Clark County? The dystopian one Denis Hayes wrote of, or a vibrant waterfront with public trails, not along an industrial shore and heavily used railroad track. A grand public trail through the restored shoreline and adjacent habitat envisioned by the Yakama Nation. We'll never know. Camas' planning consultants were told to not consider the Camas Mill. One told me so with a knowing shrug of the shoulders upon asking. This is wrong.

Thank you for considering this lengthy but hopefully conversation starting view of Camas', and SW Washington's future.

Randal Friedman, Camas, WA



Washougal Plan submittal
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