

August 17, 2022

RE: 8/17/22Public Comment Regarding the Sims Gateway and Boat Yard Expansion.

To whom it may concern,

I've moved to Port Townsend in 1977, with my husband James Roberts (who grew up here). We do NOT support the removal of the poplars on either side of Sims Way. We understand the needs of the Port and JPUD, but the City's inclusion on the Public Infrastructure Grant with the intent to replace the poplars is not appropriate use of these funds. If there are to be changes to the Gateway Plan of 1991, there should be a substantial public process including a SEPA review. understand the needs of the Port and particularly on the north side of Sims Way. Work on the north side does not meet the fit the intended use of these Public Infrastructure Grants (PIF) with it's restricted 'use for economic development'.

The Project Purpose slide presented at the open house on Aug 6th does include any list work items on the north side as 'purpose' for this grant work.

My specific comments/concerns are listed below to address the Alternatives for the South and North sides of Sims Way.

SOUTH SIDE – Partial Expansion is the preferred option.

I appreciate having the opportunity to view the various options being considered by the Port, JPUD and the City. I was able to speak to JPUD staff and was reassured to hear their plan is the trim the trees along the south side in 2022 and then proceed with undergrounding the utilities in 2023. Where they underground are the primary consideration in this process.

The "Partial Expansion" plan allows for both the removal of the risk from the power lines and provides an increase in the boatyard capacity. This option is an ideal compromise to meet the Project Purpose.

Project Purpose

- Expand the Boat Yard to provide space for larger boats (~65-ft) along the north boundary
- Underground power lines to avoid potential conflicts between boats and power lines
- Provide underground secondary power service to the Boat Yard to improve reliability
- Create a visually appealing interface between the Boat Yard and Sims Way
- Increase community resilience by sustaining economic vitality and health or marine trades

Project Assumptions

- Keep project work within City right-of-way and Boat Yard property
- Maintain the current roadway alignment (vehicle lanes)
- Underground power lines and Boat Yard service connections with Boat Yard expansion
- Honor the guidance provided by the Sims Way Gateway Development Plan
- Project Budget = \$1.97 million
- Construct improvements in 2023-2024

However, I have some questions about the stated "Cons" of the Partial Expansion plan.

Wednesday, August 17, 2022

Partial Expansion

Pros

- Preserves poplars – and “corridor” entrance into town

Cons

- Placing utilities underground could adversely affect individual tree health – accelerating tree mortality
- Vessels placed closer to poplar trees – creating challenges for refinishing and refit work
- Limits opportunities to expand marine trades and economic activity

Questions:

- a) Regarding the second bullet: “vessels placed closer to poplar trees – creating challenges for refinishing”. This could be determined if there was a real cost/benefit analysis with some of the proposed potential parkway trees – some of which have huge spreads (e.g., scarlet oak reaching 45’ wide) that negate the ‘con’ against retaining the poplars.
- b) Regarding the last bullet: the ‘job growth’ differences between Full Expansion and Partial Expansion are not well defined. Please be more specific on how the additional footage with full Expansion would influence these jobs.

NORTH SIDE

Our concerns regarding the proposed work on the North Side of Sims Way fall into three categories: 1) Proposed Project Goals – justification, 2) Environmental cost/benefit, and 3) City Fiscal Responsibility/Staffing Priorities?

1) Grant Goals

The city web page states that: “Project goals include, but are not limited to:

- Positive economic impact for the Port (job creation)
- Elimination of public safety issue (tree hazards)
- Enhanced accessibility to the boatyard
- Improved reliability of power infrastructure
- Replacement of Lombardy poplars, an emerging and eventual need for the City
- Environmental stewardship of Kah Tai Lagoon and support for growth of plantings of native species that has already occurred as recommended in the 1986 Landscape Plan
- Reduced water needs and include climate change considerations
- Improved bio-diversity and create an aesthetically pleasing gateway

I have not yet seen any real justification for why the City’s proposed work on the north side of Sims Way was included in a Public Infrastructure Grant. The first four bullets of the above Project Goals are specific to the south side (boatyard) of Sims Way and directly address the “Project Purpose”. The remaining four bullet points (highlighted) have no justification and do not seem appropriate to be included in this PIF grant. Any work on the

North side other than tree maintenance should be done after a substantial public process to the 1991 Gateway plan, with a complete SEPA evaluation.

The last bullet is very subjective and not documented. Many residents, and visitors, think the current legacy poplars provide a very 'aesthetically pleasing gateway' - though there certainly could be improvements with more care provided through pruning the current trees properly. Without substantial public process who is to decide what is aesthetically pleasing? The Stakeholders Group? The Parks Board?

2) Environmental - cost/benefit

As we are facing regional climate changes and uncertainties, the third bullet in the goal list above seems counter intuitive. A full environmental cost/benefit analysis needs to be done before you cut down fully mature and well-established trees and replace them with trees that will need some sort of irrigation and nursing until they reach maturity.

All materials presented at the Open House state the plan is to replace all the legacy poplars over time with different 'preferred' species. This does not appear to be up for discussion.

*Retain poplars where
no established tree
stands in Kah Tai
Park are adjacent.
Plant tree species
consistent with
long range planning
documents. Remove
poplars when other
plantings mature*

This proclamation/plan for the replacement of the legacy poplars on the north side of Sims Way is not acceptable without due process. Especially with such little justification. A long-term plan of this magnitude requires substantial public participation. The 1991 Gateway Plan that clearly states the community preference to retain these legacy poplars and that the city needs to follow certain protocols before making changes to this plan.

3) City Fiscal Responsibility/Staffing Priorities

The justification for including the north side of Sims Way in this PIF Grant is not stated in any of these materials. Many questions remain before committing city resources (funds, staff, equipment) to a poorly justified project.

The city's webpage on this topic states:

Fiscal Considerations

The funded project budget is \$2,000,000 Total Project Cost including in-kind resources.

- Jefferson County PUD: \$700,000 for tree removal, undergrounding power lines and installing a walking path
- Port of Port Townsend: \$900,000 for expansion of the boatyard
- City of Port Townsend: \$370,000 total for replanting the Boat Haven side of Sims Way (estimated \$170,000) and for Lombardy poplar tree removal on the Kah Tai Lagoon side (estimated \$200,000)

A successful Jefferson County Public Infrastructure Funding grant for \$1,000,000, is restricted to use for economic development in Jefferson County and helps to offset half the total project cost.

- How does the proposed work on the north side of Sims Way provide any benefit for economic development in Jefferson County?
- How much of the total \$370,000 of the city budget is grant funded and how much is in-kind costs provided by the city?
- What happens to the grant money if the city doesn't spend it on replanting? By accepting the grant is the city required to spend all the grant money regardless of what the community wants?
- I understand the awarded funds can only be spent on the project described but what if the work isn't warranted after doing the full cost benefit analysis?

The budget on the grant application (below) shows that the city is on the hook to match the grant funds with \$185,000 which includes public funds and/or in-kind labor and equipment use (see below taken from the grant application).

What other funding will you use for this project: What source, how much, & what status?

Funding Source	Amount	Status (spent, secured, applied for, or future request)
Port of Port Townsend	\$450,000	Secured
Jefferson County PUD #1	\$350,000	Secured
City of Port Townsend (Including In-kind Labor/Eq.)	\$185,000	Secured

Note: The City of Port Townsend's in-kind match reflects the work to maintain plant establishment, irrigation and replacement of trees following the project to account for typical mortality rates of new plantings.

- Where is the \$185,000 of in-kind contributions coming from? Current city staff time or does the grant provide funding for hiring additional staff?

- f) How will the city meet this staffing obligation if using current staff time? (e.g., what won't get done?)
- g) Is this really a priority and best use of city staff time and money?

We are concerned that current city resources are already stretched thin and that taking on a new project without full consideration of need to justify addition burden on staff time is a bad idea. There have been numerous articles in the Leader about the difficulty employees are having filling current vacant positions and meeting work needs. Current work needs should be prioritized. There are roadside enhancement projects already in place that need city attention – the downtown raingardens and Water Street plantings are a mess and desperately need some love and care after the pandemic shut down.

Yes, the legacy poplars need maintenance, but so do many other street side plantings that the city is responsible for. As a retired limnologist I know there are quite a few studies that show raingardens lose their ability to reduce stormwater flows and take up pollutants if not well maintained. In addition to the need to maintain functionality, the lack of maintenance in raingardens and other street plantings are creating a hazard to pedestrians and drivers at some intersections due to reduced visibility.

In April 2022 I contacted the city to inquire about the maintenance of the downtown raingardens and sidewalk plantings. I was interested in volunteering to adopt a raingarden or two as they were clearly suffering from neglect. At the time of my call, I was told the city preferred to leave this work to the professionals and they had currently hired a crew to address these issues. It is now August and I've seen no evidence of any maintenance. I am assuming this is due to a lack of staffing capacity to finish their current priorities to maintain previous enhancement projects.

Please take a step back and carefully reconsider the inclusion of the north side of Sims Way before committing to this work. At the very least, defer initiating the work until completing the appropriate public input protocols and cost benefit evaluations.

Respectfully submitted,

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