

We can balance economic prosperity and environmental stewardship

By Tony Larson, President
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Most reasonable people understand there are trade-offs on most important decisions. Few decisions provide all benefit with no costs. Decisions that impact our community are typically no different. Particularly when the goal is to balance our economic prosperity and environmental stewardship. Many believe it is one or the other.

We can have both. Not perfectly. But as a community, if we make the right choices, we can preserve and protect the natural resources and amenities we all enjoy, while building a reputation as a place that welcomes entrepreneurship and economic opportunity.

The Cherry Point heavy industrial zoned Urban Growth Area has many tenants. Three large ones get the most attention. Two of them, BP Cherry Point and Phillips 66, export fuel refined from crude oil. 85% of the jet fuel used at Sea-Tac is produced at BP Cherry Point.

Whether you approve of the fossil based products they produce or not, they have been producing them legally, responsibly, under a very stringent regulatory regime, and bringing value to thousands of Whatcom County families for a long time. The Phillips 66 facility was built in 1954. The BP facility in 1971.

Remember, Cherry Point is the job center of the County with 11% of all County jobs either directly or indirectly related to Cherry Point industrial activities. Cherry Point companies directly support over 2,100 local families with an average salary of over \$144,000 annually. They pay over \$200 million dollars in annual tax revenues that fund our schools, infrastructure, first responders and other services, give back millions to non-profits, and support numerous environmental stewardship programs.

The companies at Cherry Point are also environmental leaders. They've reduced greenhouse gas emissions, water demand and improved the environment at Cherry Point.

That's why I am disappointed that the Whatcom County Council is planning to spend \$150 thousand of your tax dollars to study legal ways to limit the ability for our Cherry Point

businesses to do what they do. They've inserted the study directly into our Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan that will likely be voted on sometime in March.

The Council argues that the study is just a benign study and it only affects the possible new movement of fossil fuels – not the current industries at Cherry Point. That point of view shows either a complete misunderstanding of how businesses determine future investment, or it's a disingenuous attempt to close down the current quality businesses at Cherry Point by squeezing their ability to adapt and grow in the ever-changing marketplace.

Approving and conducting this study will send a chilling message to any current business in the County or anyone thinking of relocating a business here.

Regardless of whether or not it is in the County's purview to legislate the flow of interstate commerce (it's not), the owners of the current Cherry Point industries will reconsider before investing capital into their current facilities because they see a political environment that makes those investments risky. New business interests will do the same.

As part of the same Comprehensive Plan language, the County Council will be eliminating the possibility of developing a fourth pier at Cherry Point - the last developable deep water port on the west coast. That means if a clean energy company wanted to locate to Cherry Point and build a pier to ship their products around the world, they would not be permitted. This is a short sighted example of throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Why would the Council put this economic engine at risk?

Our elected officials should promote business development and allow a democratic process to determine if the public welcomes any specific new development. The checks and balances for all kinds of industrial proposals are already in place.

Make no mistake, this is not just a study. It's a message. A shot across the bow that says Whatcom County is only open for the businesses that the Council deems acceptable.

That's why the Whatcom Business Alliance, its members and their employees are banding together and asking the County Council to remove this study from the comprehensive plan and focus on ways of supporting local business.

We can balance environmental stewardship with economic prosperity, but these actions don't do that. There are better ways. We hope you will join us at whatcombusinessalliance.com to send that message to the County.