

Distributed @ 2/26/05
BFM meeting

3632 Ashworth Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98103

24 January 2005

Re: North Lake Union Tank Farm Property

Dear Councilmember,

I was an appointed member of the Stakeholder Working Group to review the potential use of the King County-Metro owned upland site on North Lake Union. The overwhelming recommendation of the working group was that this property should be retained in public ownership for eventual public use. The majority opinion agreed that priorities for this site were community and regional recreation, meeting and education; preservation of the historic structures; and conservation of the rare and remarkable public views to the lake and city skyline. This recommendation is consistent with the Wallingford neighborhood plan, which is widely supported.

The property possesses unique qualities that particularly suit it to public use: it is located along a city-designated scenic route meant to preserve public views to the lake, and offers a critical link to Gasworks Park and the Burke-Gilman Trail. As the city and neighborhood densifies, consciously absorbing growth to inhibit rural sprawl, public amenities are becoming increasingly important to maintain urban quality of life. Privatization of this site for commercial use would be a shame, an irrevocable loss.

As a citizen on the King County-appointed Stakeholder committee I spent numerous evenings and special work sessions over the course of several months, in good faith deliberating the issues and opportunities of this site and collaboratively crafting the recommendations. It was naturally disheartening to learn that Metro had ignored our report and was going ahead with the RFP. The current form of the RFP makes transparent Metro's intentions, which seemed all along were designed to achieve the deal they were working on before the committee was convened. The request's conditions clearly favor the developer that initiated Metro's interest in relocating the facility, and our public process was *pro forma*, a sham. It is deeply disappointing to know that our paid public servants disregard the value of volunteer citizens' time, and may be operating with dubious ethics.

It appears that both RFP options are based upon the offer by Touchstone, the first (A) to provide a replacement facility of certain parameters, and the second (B) to provide a cash amount that is grossly higher than any property value figure discussed in our Stakeholder meetings. The RFP is tailored to one eligible bidder, discouraging any competition. Can an agency legally require *more* than fair market value for its property? Has an impartial assessment been made? Again, this seems to be clear favoritism, a manipulated form of insider trading.

At no time during the Stakeholder meetings was a case made for needing to move the existing facility. In fact, in our quest to explore the site's possibilities the Wallingford community was told on numerous occasions, as recently as one year ago, that the facility was working well for the agency and that Metro had no immediate plans to relocate. It is irrational that the proposal calls for a replacement facility that is larger than their current site, yet that site is not even fully used and has been considered by its manager more than adequate. Won't a larger facility cost more to staff and operate in the long run? What will it cost to move? These questions pertinent to taxpayers are unanswered.

As an active citizen, representative of hundreds of households in the Wallingford neighborhood who expressed enthusiastic support for this site to serve as a community facility, and representative of the majority opinion of the Stakeholder Working Group, I strongly urge the following:

1. Honor the Stakeholder Working Group's recommendation. Defer the issuance of the RFP. Work with the community and city to establish a long-term plan that responds to the actual needs of Metro maintenance operations, and allows Seattle residents time to align the funding required to fairly purchase the property.
2. If the RFP is to be issued, then offer a "dual track" option that gives the community precedence and additional time to find the resources to make the purchase.
3. In any case, make the RFP fair. Justify and publicly substantiate the minimum amount required, and the real needs for Metro's operations. In addition, add conditions that will serve to preserve the public views across the site, the last remaining such opportunity along 34th, a designated scenic route.

While these are austere times for government budgets and Metro's mission of providing services is strongly supported, it is important that the desire for financial gain does not undermine the agency's integrity of public purpose. Short-term gain is not worth irrevocable long-term loss—loss of public trust as well as public amenity. The role of government is to serve the people, and to operate with exemplary integrity and honesty. It is fortunate that in this great country we have a set of checks and balances. I urge you as the legislative branch to ensure that Metro treats this important, irreplaceable property with long-term public good, and use, at heart.

Respectfully

Nancy Rottle
North Lake Union Stakeholder Working Group
Chair, South Wallingford Open Space Committee