

## Planning ahead

To the Editor:

It is every man's prerogative to change his mind when confronted with evidence contrary to his viewpoint. When I resided in Skagit Valley I advocated development to stimulate the local economy. Since moving to Macon County, Georgia, I have altered my thinking considerably.

I, like many others, bored of the seemingly endless permit process to begin construction of a house, or the hearings with the planning commission, then the commissioners on proposed land usage. I felt then that the zoning and rezoning laws were not flexible enough and the process too slow and expensive.

I now am thoroughly convinced you simply cannot plan too far ahead or too carefully when it comes to development and land use. The people of Skagit County will be protected against outside influences destroying the beauty of their valley and the rural atmosphere with unchecked development.

In Macon County there isn't any existing zoning regulations, the permit process is quick and easy and no building inspector is on the payroll of the county. Yet, houses are being built at an alarming rate. The beautiful mountains are literally covered with houses and the farmland is being covered with developments.

You can build however and wherever you choose. Ugly scars of red clay appear everywhere you look, such is the amount of roads being built into mountain building sites. There soon won't be any place to get away from it all. Strange as it may seem the local people have benefited very little since most sold their property to people from Florida before the values skyrocketed.

Sure, times have been good in the building and construction trades, but the handwriting is on the wall. In the long run prices will force less affluent people out and the quiet rural lifestyle will be forgotten as unchecked development simply takes over.

My folks wouldn't recognize most of it now. Franklin swells in population in the spring and summer until you simply can't find a parking spot. Billboards advertising everything from Gem mines to raft rides appear all along back country roads, and no trespassing signs miles back in the toolies.

I don't want to ever see the day come in Skagit Valley where those people who have invested a lifetime there are pushed out by outside interests.

So, I encourage my friends to support their local officials in the long range planning necessary for controlled growth. I think Macon County was totally unprepared for the landslide of development when it came. Skagit County is well prepared, work to keep it that way, beautiful and unspoiled.

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