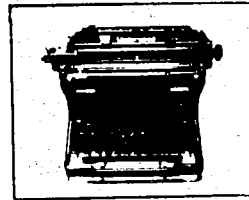


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Comment & Opinion

Local issue, local rights

There are times when it is tempting to give more credence to those who warn of a "plot" by state and federal bureaucrats to turn Skagit County into a huge park.

Most recently, the bureaucratic Bogey Man has entered the scene in Burlington, where plans for a shopping mall have given rise to thinly-veiled blocking efforts packaged around alleged concerns for wetlands known as the Gages Slough.

Burlington residents and elected officials are justified in their response to suggestions that zoning be established to prohibit development in the Gages Slough area. Much of that area has been zoned commercial and industrial by city officials.

Why bother establishing land-use plans at the local level if state and federal bureaucrats repeatedly swarm around development proposals of any notable size to demand changes — or ultimate rejection of the plans?

Angry and frustrated Burlington residents — like many others in surrounding communities who have faced similar situations — have the right to assert themselves in the Gages Slough issue.

Today, residents of several communities in the Skagit Valley contact their elected officials only to find they are as confused and frustrated about government programs as they are.

All too often, state and federal land-use plans are a mystery until they appear as sketchy references made in newspaper articles.

We applaud members of the Burlington City Council for expressing a strong desire to hear from their constituents before making land-use decisions at the city level.

We fail to see what role Skagit County officials have in Burlington's land-use issue — and we object to special interest influences against proposed development as strongly as we would special considerations to a businessman.

Considering the dramatic influence they wield here in Skagit County, we believe we are worthy of more "visitation" time from state and federal officials — especially those from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

FEMA is not a private agency working for a select special interest group — it is a public agency funded by tax dollars and assigned the task of protecting the interests of the taxpayer.

It is certainly not too much to ask that local people be given the right to face a government official when that official is involved in a decision-making process that will directly affect him.

Ever-expanding government controls will always be an issue of concern to citizens. Where government intervention is deemed necessary, it is best accomplished at the nearest point possible to the grassroots level.