

Growth brings opportunity

By: Lance Calloway & Guy Occhiogrosso

To grow anything, you must first prepare the ground. In Whatcom County, we are failing to do that. Instead of laying the groundwork necessary for a prosperous future, resistance to growth is too often worn like a badge of honor.

“No” to new employers. “No” to industry. “No” to change. While these intentions may be well placed, the consequences are clear: young people leaving, opportunities drying up, and a future that feels increasingly out of reach for the next generation.

Our intention to preserve and protect what makes Whatcom County special is one thing. But weaponizing environmentalism to repeatedly say no to growth, no to opportunity, and no to the next generation succeeding is something else entirely.

Faced with these realities, regional business and industry leaders have come together to form a new alliance called **Businesses United for Industry and Labor Development Whatcom**, or **BUILD Whatcom**. Our mission is simple: strengthen economic development in the County and support long-term growth, provide living wage jobs, and opportunity for the entire community.

BUILD Whatcom includes the Bellingham Regional Chamber of Commerce, Associated General Contractors of Washington, HARRIS, Future 42 and ALA Energy | AltaGas, among others. Together, we are asking openly: what if we said “yes” to growth? What if we said “yes” to job creation, investment, and opportunity?

Of course, an unguided “yes” is no better answer than a reactionary “no”. Getting to “yes” requires engaging early, setting clear expectations in a predictable way while also working collaboratively to ensure development aligns with community values. For decision-makers, it means replacing an automatic rejection with a more constructive question: “How could we make this work for everyone involved in a timely manner?”

Growth and preservation are not opposites. In fact, you cannot have one without the other. A strong local economy is what allows a community to protect its environment, fund education and recreation, support the arts, and care for its most vulnerable. Businesses in Cherry Point are a powerful example. They contribute more than \$200 million in tax revenue annually, pay wages 35% to 100% higher than the county average, and directly or indirectly support one in every 10 jobs in Whatcom County.

Our region thrives when our businesses, community groups, and public agencies work together toward a strong and stable local economy. By creating predictable, efficient permitting and partnering on smart environmental stewardship, we can support good jobs while caring for the natural resources that make our community special.

If you believe in saying “yes” to long-term growth, we invite you to visit BUILDWhatcom.com. You can also have your voice heard by attending the Whatcom County public hearing on ALA Energy’s Ferndale Terminal at Cherry Point, scheduled to start January 28 at the Whatcom County Courthouse. If you cannot make it in person, you can speak up by emailing your comments to hearingexamineroffice@co.whatcom.wa.us.

It would be naïve to think businesses, industry and perhaps most importantly, our youth, will choose to grow roots here if we continue to refuse to prepare the ground. Let’s show that Whatcom County can lead by example: protecting the environment while building an economy that strives to work for everyone.

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