

From the editor —

# Buying into affordable housing

Here we go again. Whatever the merits of Greg Ellis’ proposal to build six or so houses on the Washington Street lot behind Pioneer Market, he provides the opportunity for town and Skagit Valley residents to again wrestle with the complexity of gaining affordable housing in La Conner and throughout the county.

At his permit hearing Sept. 21, Ellis shared his pitch to offer “affordable housing, in the high 500s.” That is pricing affordable only to folks downsizing from Seattle or San Francisco. Ellis is offering the wish, like Dorothy clicking her ruby slippers together in her attempt to get home in “The Wizard of Oz,” as if a fervent hope will make it so. It will not. Putting the word affordable in front of the word housing – or placing it before a price, like \$500,000 – will not make it so. The town’s government, elected officials and staff, have the same habit and make the same mistake.

Better that the town council outlaw the term or create a penalty if it is used inside town buildings or at meetings. We are too civilized to put folks in stocks or to flog them, but some punishment is warranted.

Better that council define the term “affordable housing” in the municipal code or policy. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development sets income limits that determine eligibility for assisted housing programs at between 30% and 80% of an area’s median income. To buy a Skagit Home Trust home, you must meet specific income guidelines.

After outlawing that term, the town council will help low income housing advocates by putting in the comprehensive plan the terms “first time home buyers” and “starter homes.” Then, when developers share their plans for housing, our government can ask, “are you building starter homes for first time home buyers?” That means younger people with jobs as teachers, para-educators, fire fighters, law enforcement and, yes, grocery clerks.

The first need in developing affordable housing is to embrace the complexity of the issue while believing the mantra that it is one of the most significant and intractable issues our society faces locally, statewide and nationally.

It will take decades of year-in-and-year-out effort to move any community into the position of having a reasonable supply of starter homes housing stock.

Communities, led by visionary elected officials, will commit to long term planning, knowing the four pillars to gain first time home buyers starts with planning. The second pillar is funding. Face the reality that getting lower income people into local housing requires financial subsidies. Third, specific, detailed regulations provide a blueprint for staff, housing advocates and developers so everyone knows the targets to achieve and the rules for getting there. And fourth, control of property is the only way that starter homes stay in a price range that first time buyers can purchase generation after generation.

— Ken Stern

## LETTERS

### Ending Afghanistan war right

I fully support President Biden’s decision to end the 20 year war in Afghanistan and the presence of American troops in the impoverished war-torn country. Here is why: while the withdrawal was always going to “messy” and fraught with violence as in most evacuations, from Dunkirk to Vietnam, it was like finally pulling off the bandage. It needed to be done.

It was crazy, for sure. There were 15,000 allied lives lost in trying to evacuate those soldiers off that beach in France in 1940. Yet Churchill is considered a hero for his decision. So it never was going to go smoothly.

Truthfully, we never should have been in Afghanistan in the first place. Not to the level that we were involved. The 20 year history is fraught with deception, war profiteering, corruption, needless death, especially for the Afghanis who lost approximately 71,000 civilians and 170,000 military, and destruction.

“Truth is the first casualty in war.” We need some truth telling. No celebration or politically motivated finger pointing! We need to learn our lessons from the past. War should be the absolute last resort after diplomatic efforts have been exhausted. We lost the wars in Afghanistan and Vietnam because they were wrong.

I don’t think we should be killing people in other countries who posed no threat to me or you and who never attacked us. I could go on about the fact that the citizens happen to be brown and deemed to be more expendable.

To those who worry about the military hardware and other property we left behind I say, “it’s the cost of war,” an especially long, costly, unnecessary one.

Bully for Biden for doing the right thing!  
Doreen Sadler  
Anacortes

# If I ran the zoo

By MEL DAMSKI



These are very challenging times for so many reasons. Many of us have lost loved ones, some of us have lost our jobs or had them shut down, hopefully for the time being.

This are especially trying times for people like me who are very social and love to be out and about. Ironically, as much as I love directing television, my shpilkes makes it very difficult for me to hunker down at home.

“Shpilkes” is Yiddish for a playful gas and a fun way to describe being ADHD.

Fortunately, I chose this time to adopt a puppy, which I could not do when I was directing, going from movie to movie. I’ve got a wonderful companion who is by my side most of the day unless I’m playing golf or singing karaoke.

Rosie is now a year and a half old and like me she is very social. We rotate between several off-leash dog parks and we’ve both made lots of new friends.

And there is another new huge sea of change in my psyche. I’ve always been impatient, in a hurry to get from one place to another, in a hurry even if there was no reason to hurry. The people who hired me to direct projects with challenging schedules really appreciated my pace and efficiency as well as my storytelling ability.

Recently I had an epiphany and had a very serious talk with myself and decided that I ain’t in no hurry and it’s time to take a deep breath and smell the roses. Literally, as well as figuratively.

So one of the things I do now is to take a different route each time I go somewhere. One way there and another way back. That’s not always possible but I’m discovering wonderful new places and have moments of pure joy as I drive along the waterfront or head to Mount Baker or discover new lakes in Skagit and Whatcom counties that I didn’t even know existed.

I figured out how to get satellite radio in my car and I listen to a little news, but so much of it is sad and depressing that I tune into ‘60s on 6 or The Bridge and sing along with the music I grew up with and occasionally come up with a new karaoke song.

I’ve always been charitable because I grew up economically challenged since the holocaust kept my parents from getting an education. I got a wonderful education and found an occupation I loved that allowed me to live in beautiful places like La Conner. And I’ve doubled and tripled down on contributing to local people who are now jobless and homeless.

We are blessed to live in a place where we can keep away from crowded interiors and go boating and fishing and camping, exploring new horizons and for many of you, continue to work from home.

We just need to do everything we can to keep ourselves healthy, help out those in need, and appreciate the gift of life and the beautiful place we live in.

Okay, you’ll have to excuse me now as I place a classic LP on my turntable and plop myself down in my massage chair.

All together now – BREATHE!

A citizen’s view —

# Affordable housing and fully contained communities

By John Doyle

I guess we should have expected it, but it’s disappointing none the less. Since “affordable housing” is a critical issue for all our communities, it is now being used as a cudgel or enticement for what would otherwise be an unacceptable development options.

For Skagit county, the implementation of the Growth Management Act was particularly painful. We were delinquent in implementing the law and were at risk of sanctions from Olympia by the time we actually adopted our Comprehensive Plan. There was also significant tension between the county and municipalities. GMA calls for urbanization to occur within and/or adjacent to the existing municipalities to avoid spot development and sprawl.

For that reason, we did not include Fully Contained Com-

munities (FCC) as an option in Skagit County. FCCs in county areas would draw development away from cities, towns and urban growth areas. It would begin a process of chopping up county lands. Once allowed, FCCs will be given an opportunity to rationalize their existence to profit developers. This is exactly how affordable housing is now being used to rationalize FCCs and overlook the potential damage to rural farm and forest lands. Affordable housing does not need resource lands.

It is important to understand an FCC is an urban development strategy that specifically targets residential/commercial development outside Urban Growth Areas. The Revised Code of Washington that specifies the conditions of an FCC does require that the FCC offer housing to “a broad range of income lev-

els”. However, it does not specify: How broad or what range of income levels?

There is an underlying focus with single family affordable housing with regard to “first cost”. This leads to the addition focus on suppling new low cost housing to low income and first-time buyers. While this has been the strategy for the last 70 plus years, current demand has outstripped the market. Once the first-time buyers sell their home, it is no longer affordable to the target families.

This is a sad distraction from the actual issues of affordable housing. Like any development activity, affordable housing has to grapple with the costs of land, materials, labor and infrastructure development to name a few. An added issue is the escalation of the value of property over time. These are the driving forces of af-

fordability.

Development strategies, even if they include “affordable housing” as an element, are not a primary instrument to attain affordable housing. Jurisdictions have to start developing housing inventories that are only available to target family incomes.

There are some good models for local governments to adapt. The “land trust” model is a good start. Local governments can combine the “land trust” financing model with the development of “surplus lands”. The larger municipalities in Skagit county have significant inventories of “surplus lands”. These “lands” are properties that have been acquired by the municipality for infrastructure purposes such as parks and public works that are no longer needed for their original purpose. Municipalities are authorized under RCWs to dedicate these lands for afford-

able housing.

This will begin to create a separate market and inventory of single family housing. Entities like the Skagit Land Trust and Skagit Habitat are currently building these inventories within communities of Skagit County. Local jurisdictions can partner with entities like Skagit Land Trust and Habitat for Humanity to develop their surplus lands and establish affordable housing inventories.

FCCs are not a solution to affordable housing. They do not maintain an inventory or supply of affordable housing. The overwhelming destructive potential of FCCs is not counterbalanced by a small affordable element that disappears after the first sale of a property.

John Doyle retired as La Conner’s town administrator and planner in 2017. His article is reprinted from the Skagit Scoop.

# Friday Harbor Film Festival guide is now online

Friday Harbor Film Festival’s online film guide, detailing the 30+ feature films and 30+ short films to be shown at the Livestream/Online Festival Oct. 14-24, is now available at FHFF.org. Students have submitted 10+ films that will also be screened.

In the film guide, click on a poster to access full details and filmmaker information. Trailers provide a glimpse of what’s to

come in the full show. While browsing you can star those films you most want to watch during the festival. All-Access and 5-ticket passes are available now at FHFF.org/passes. Single tickets will be available beginning October 15.

Feature and short films are categorized by theme: “Explorers and Adventures,” “Things to Consider” and “Tales from the Heart.” Winning films, both

feature and short, will be honored in these categories at the Audience Choice Awards at the awards webinar on Oct. 24.

In addition, the Film Festival’s most popular feature film will receive the Audience Choice Award – Best Overall. The most popular short will receive the Audience Choice Award – Best Short Film. These will be screened at the Oct. 24 awards webinar. Winning stu-

dent films will receive awards in two age groups: 13-17 years of age and 18-26 years of age. All award-winning films are determined by votes cast online by the viewers.

It is time to mark your calendar, choose your favorites in the film guide and purchase your pass for the Friday Harbor Film Festival October 14-24. Don’t miss it!

Source: FHFF

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From the editor —

## Time to agree on this change

Here is a nonpartisan issue that this community – and indeed, every resident in the state – can rally around in agreement: putting our Washington on standard time year round. That is right: ditching the semi-annual spring ahead fall back scenario of artificially changing sunrise and sunset by moving clocks ahead an hour in March and returning them to standard time in November.

Once again Yakima Valley Republican state Sen. Jim Honeyford has a bill in the Washington State Legislature for year round time. He has bipartisan support for it, but as of last week none of our District 10 representatives have signed on. They need to. Here is an opportunity for greater La Conner to join together in nonpartisan fashion in support.

Think of it: La Conner voices unified in their call for “natural time defined by the sun,” as Jay Pea, founder of the nonprofit Save Standard Time, testified. As he told legislators, federal legislation is not needed for this state law to take effect. Congress must approve permanent daylight time for states, one more bill they cannot pass.

Study after study has shown that standard time is healthier for all of us, young and old, urban and rural, Republican and Democrat. Senate Bill 5511 states:

“Research has shown that changing to and from daylight saving time twice per year has negative impacts on public health, increases traffic accidents and crime, disrupts agriculture scheduling and hinders economic growth. Scientific studies have connected a number of health consequences with the act of switching between standard time and daylight saving time, including greater risks of heart attacks, more frequent workplace injuries and increased suicide rates in the days immediately following the switch.”

“Standard time is much better than permanent daylight savings time,” University of Washington Professor Horacio de la Iglesia told the committee. He researches sleep and circadian rhythms and noted that later sunrises on winter mornings under permanent daylight saving time would be “particularly detrimental” for young people attending school.

The Committee on State Government and Elections held its hearing the legislature’s first week. A companion bill has not been filed in the House of Representatives. Reps. Dave Paul and Greg Gilday can show bi-partisan leadership and an example for citizens and fellow legislators alike by jointly sponsoring companion legislation.

The Senate bill has six co-sponsors, two Democrats and four Republicans, including Keith Wagoner, R-Sedro-Woolley. Co-sponsorship by Paul and Gilday will show regional cooperation on this issue.

Senator Liz Lovelett, D-Anacortes, advocated for standard time and was one of two votes against permanent daylight savings time in 2019. Area residents will increase momentum by reaching out to her for co-sponsorship and advocacy of the bill.

The 60 day legislative session is scheduled to end March 10. Here is a community good that benefits all of us that we can achieve together. It will be great to gain this victory this winter.

Heaven knows we need more sunshine in our individual and collective lives.

Time is of the essence.

— Ken Stern

## LETTERS

### Thank school board members

By proclamation of the governor, January is School Board Recognition Month. It is a great time to recognize our elected community members who selflessly give their time and energy in support of high-quality public schooling for our youth. School board members in La Conner are entrusted by this community with responsibility for an annual budget of \$14,070,000 for this year, fiscal year 2021-2022, an average of 555 students, 116 employees and nine buildings.

School boards are charged with making decisions that can sometimes be quite difficult, or require sifting through a great deal of information. They also bear responsibility for developing a vision that will guide the school district for years to come. Through collaboration as a team and with school district staff, their governance and advocacy are building the future of education in Washington state.

This January, we’re encouraging all members of the community to thank a board member. Please thank them for volunteering their time and playing a critical civic role that helps form the bedrock of our democracy – public education. As a crucial bridge between the local community and the school district, their efforts are instrumental in helping all of us realize the hopes and dreams we have for the children of our community.

The men and women serving La Conner School District are:

District 1: Director John Agen took his oath of office on Dec. 16, 2019.

District 2: Director Amanda Bourgeois took her first oath of office on May 18, 2020.

District 3: Director Jeremy Wilbur took his first oath of office on Aug. 10, 2020.

District 4: Director Dr. Lynette Cram took her first oath of office on Oct. 24, 2016.

District 5: Director Susie Deyo took her first oath of office on March 25, 2019.

Student Representative Delaney Cobbs took her oath of office on June 28, 2021.

Student Representative Eleanor Drews took his oath of office on June 28, 2021.

For more information about the La Conner School Board, visit <https://www.lcsd.wednet.edu/domain/5>.

Sincerely,  
Will Nelson  
Superintendent



I was really surprised to read that the WHO were deciding what to name each new strain of the coronavirus. I loved the WHO, they were one of my very favorite bands, although I had trouble both times I went to see them in person.

The first time was at the Flushing Meadows in the Queens, New York outdoor arena, when they opened for The Doors. I had asked a high school friend to join me and I promised her mother that it would be safe to attend a rock concert.

When the Who finished the first set, the curtain closed and the stage went dark. After about twenty minutes, the curtain reopened and the spotlight showed Jim Morrison sliding toward the audience on his stomach, beckoning the band to join him on stage.

The crowd started to rush toward him and all hell broke loose, as the rent-a-cops formed a human wall to keep the fans away from the stage. I took my date’s hand and headed out the back way to honor my pledge to her mother.

Years later I told my musician son the story and he informed me, “Dad, you missed a great concert. They came back on stage after the riot settled down and played for hours!” Oy vey!

My second misadventure was in New York City when they played their rock opera “Tommy” at the Fillmore East. I went with my college roommate, who I was now living with in NYC while he went to medical school at Columbia University and I was a cub reporter for Newsday.

I was the designated driver because I didn’t do drugs, but my med school buddies loved to. They insisted that I take a toke of what I thought was hashish in a pipe and, stupidly, I agreed.

When the curtain opened at the Fillmore East, we could hear the overture to “Tommy” and it sounded WAY too loud for me. I got up and asked one of the ushers to please turn down the volume. He rolled his eyes. I sat back down and my head lifted off my body and looked down at the crowd and I realized I had to get out of there.

I deserted my friends and got in my car and drove to our apartment in Washington Heights. When they got home, I was sitting in a dark room and they gave me some meds that sobered me up. Oy vey!

Fade out, fade in. So why are the WHO now managing COVID-19? It turns out it was not the rock group but the World Health Organization deciding to choose different letters of the Greek alphabet to name the strains. Not very smart of me and I ain’t even smoking weed.

Speaking of rock groups, one of my favorites is coming to a local casino, the Blood Sweat and Tears. I first saw Al Kooper when I was working a summer job in a record store in Greenwich Village and he would come in, not say a word, shuffle through all of the albums, beat his hands like a drummer and leave.

When he quit the band, he was replaced by David Clayton Thomas. I was very excited to check out how many members of the original band were playing and found the answer is NONE.

I am pissed. How can it still be called that if there are no original members? Shouldn’t it be designated as a cover band? Can another bunch of guys call themselves the Beatles?

Calm down Mel. Go see them play. And don’t smoke weed before you drive down there.

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# Planning Commission hears demolition was a mess

By Bill Reynolds

Demolition of the old garage behind The Slider Café on a January Sunday drew plenty of attention.

What was missed, however, were conditions spelled out on the Town demolition permit allowing the structure to be torn down on property eyed as the site for a 20-unit apartment complex.

Planner Michael Davolio told the La Conner Planning Commission, during their monthly Zoom meeting two days later, on Jan. 18, that a stop work order was placed on the demolition because representatives of property owners KSA Investments had not conferred with the town’s public works department beforehand.

“A demolition permit was authorized on Dec. 17,” said Davolio. “There were conditions for the permit that the applicant ignored.”

Demolition work began at

8:30 a.m.. Sliders Café staff recounted.

Public Works Director Brian Lease later said he immediately drove to the work site. “Some concerned residents called when they saw what was happening,” he said. “I had to shut them down for a few hours because before they started; they were supposed to meet with us so we could go over safety issues and the other details of what was going on there.”

Lease said that Brandon Atkinson, a KSA Investments principal, was there and apologized for the snafu.

Lease said it is not uncommon for applicants receiving permits to not read through all the conditions that are attached.

Davolio said issuance of demolition permits is an administrative process and that the demolition site, which borders single-family residences on Center and North Fourth streets, met Town code.

“But it required a pre-demolition conference before the work started,” said Davolio. “That didn’t happen. Brian got that cleared up to the best of his ability.”

Davolio assured Commissioner Marna Hanneman, who was concerned with any mess that might be left behind, that the applicant is responsible for debris removal.

“With demolitions,” Davolio said, “there’s always a mess. If they don’t clean it up, Brian will, and he’ll bill them for it.”

Most of the 35-minute meeting was spent preparing the commission for applications for the Center Street apartment building and the housing development proposed by Greg Ellis off Whatcom and Washington streets, behind Pioneer Market. Each will require multi-tiered public hearings.

“I like that kind of public input,” he stressed.

Ellis provided information to

the Town regarding his project on Jan. 18. In September Ellis had pledged to submit required details for the development for the October commission meeting.

But without agenda items, commission meetings in November and December were canceled. The sole task last week was reviewing their work from the fall – proposed municipal code changes and a Parks Element draft for the Town Comprehensive Plan.

Hanneman noted the municipal code – specifically section 2.45 – requires the Town’s Parks Commission to include a non-voting high school student, a provision that caught chair Ollie Iversen by surprise.

“Someone will have to explain that one to me. I’ve never seen it,” said Iversen, among residents logged onto the meeting.

Davolio said he would get clarification from the mayor and town administrator.

Davolio brought up updating the sign code to align it with court rulings. “I’ve been looking at the code through that lens,” he said. He said he has years of developing sign codes and suggested a committee– including members of the business community – draft a proposal.

The commission is short a member since Rick Dole was elected to the town council. Davolio is hopeful the vacancy will be filled by March. He encouraged seeking out town residents to serve.

Bruce Bradburn turned over the gavel after his year as chair. Hanneman succeeds him, as the commission’s most senior member. Hanneman accepted the responsibility, if not the criteria.

“As long as it doesn’t say (I am) the senior member,” she quipped. “I don’t want to be a senior anything.”

Carol Hedlin will be vice-chair.

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## LETTERS

### Smart, with a heart

Wow, what a time to be alive, so much to see and experience, a worldwide pandemic, international tensions, inflationary pressures again causing our hands to be out to the legislature, thank you, please. Please dear benevolent overlord, can't you appreciate our need and pleas? Another \$625,000, I'm sure we won't have to ask for anymore, it'll help us pay for the doors and windows of our new library.

I'm sure that it will create more tourist income, it'll make us cooler than we already are. Maybe someone will come in and read about our missing salmon and protective dike and hand us a substantial wad of cash. Maybe they'll read about our town's waterline problems and sewage treatment plant upgrade needs. Heck, we'll only need about \$20 million to "get er done." Yeah, I'm quite certain that we can get some wealthy person to invest in our castle walls to keep our moat from "swamping us."

As a person who lives and breathes the security of our little seaside town, I find it difficult to keep pushing. A friend recently sent me a text that read, "What I observe is that you create unnecessary suffering and struggles for yourself. Life gives us enough true challenges; the trick is to not add our own difficulties. The first step is deciding that you don't want to suffer anymore. I'm sorry I can't help with that part; I certainly can't change other people". P.S, you are smart, well educated, and tied with my dad for the kindest man I've ever known".

When I read this, I was humbled. I don't really think I like to create difficulties for myself; however, I think most of my difficulties are on behalf of the future and they aren't helped by being ignored. Nobody wants to hear my strategies for recreating the once great salmon runs of the Swinomish Channel or how to get the tourists to leave a bit more money when they come, stay and leave.

Yeah, I feel as though people roll their eyes and hide when they see me coming. Being kind is not getting the job done, sometimes I need to hear a good word and maybe see a story about my efforts in the local press. Just because I'm smart and well educated, doesn't mean I don't have a heart.

Glen S. Johnson  
Skagit Valley

### CORRECTION

Mary Wohleb and Annie Taylor were wrongly placed at the November Gilkey Square demonstration of the marketing icon in the Feb. 16 story. Both attended the December parks commissioner meeting, but Scott Thomas did not. The editor regrets these errors.

### Promoting our special town

I am sure a marketing "icon" in Gilkey Square was proposed for the best of reasons, but it strikes me as wrong-headed in a number of ways:

Goal. It's been suggested to me that the icon will provide a great place for visitor photo ops. If that's the goal, the icon will probably achieve it, at considerable expense. But if the goal is to attract more visitors and more return visitors, I don't see how it does that. I don't see people saying, "Hey, let's run up to La Conner and get some pics with that icon thing!" It is just not an attraction in and of itself.

Marketing concept. Good marketing requires differentiation, making your product, service or town different from all the others on the market. La Conner attracts visitors because it isn't like every other place. It's got a waterfront boardwalk, unique shops and galleries, lots of good restaurants, excellent inns and B&Bs, three museums, an artist community, the neighboring Swinomish community and culture, a thriving marina and maritime community, tulip and daffodil festivals, a classic car and boat show, an art auction, a poetry festival, historic buildings and so forth. To attract more visitors and to have them return, promote this differentiation! Don't spend money and effort on an icon that could be anywhere with just a name change.

Aesthetics. Gilkey Square is designed to be wide and spacious, inviting visitors in with its openness, with shops on each side, with the waterfront directly ahead. Its layout is fundamentally horizontal. Take a look at it from a block down Morris Street. A metal 11-foot vertical icon disrupts this design. It is out of place in the setting.

Finance. Assuming the goal of spending \$21,800 is to promote La Conner and attract more visitors, I don't think the icon, no matter where it is placed, is an effective way to do that. That money would go a long way toward a well-designed and informative Love La Conner website linked to a vibrant and always-current social media campaign or some other marketing approach that actually promotes what makes our town special.

Jim Airy  
La Conner

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### Love La Conner

The quaint town of La Conner has drawn people from the world over. The Skagit Valley, on the whole, is a very special place. The location, climate and the beautiful vistas that come with the changing seasons bring people here every year.

What vision are we seeking for the special area that we live in? Do we want to be memorable for what is here? What is the memory we want our visitors to take away from here? When I first heard of the plans for the apartment building going in on Center Street behind The Slider Cafe, I found myself disheartened. I wondered if the property will look like the rest of our charming little historic town, or if it will distract from that charm.

I became alarmed reading of the "marketing icon" plan that was put forth, and I had to let my mind be known. I decry the idea of placing an 11 x 5 foot letter in Gilkey Square, to show that La Conner is loved, as ludicrous. How will this structure be in harmony with the town that I love? Wasn't the selfie display used last year much more appropriate in style and size with the rest of the surroundings?

I have to wonder why some individuals want to take away from the aesthetics of this area. When making plans for permanent changes here please consider that people come to Skagit Valley and our little town for the simple splendors they discover here. They remember these treasures, come back to enjoy them again and to search out more.

Laural Stevenson  
Shelter Bay

### Sculpture possibilities

What a good idea to have a marketing icon for La Conner! And kudos to First on First committee for putting in the thought, time and energy.

But we must be careful that the design is reviewed well so we don't end up like Mount Vernon with an icon of a uterus and fallopian tubes. Have you seen that one across from the food co-op?

If the large "L" mock up was supposed to engender our "brand" of Love La Conner, I think it fails. As a cold, sterile, stainless steel, hard-angled, out-of-human-proportion structure it is unattractive. Furthermore it's a one directional symbol; a selfie would only show the bottom half that looks like a side lying "T;" it might attract would-be drummers with its hollow echo chamber or be an attractive nuisance for kids to jump and play on and could break.

Our waterfront and Rainbow Bridge are icons in themselves. How could you improve on its natural beauty?

\$21,800 could buy a lovely graceful curvy sculpture that truly conveys' Love La Conner'.  
Joan Cross  
La Conner

(letters continued on page 3)

*A citizen's view —*

## Bravo arts and parks commissions

By Nancy Crowell

Thank you to the voice of reason presented by the arts and parks commissions regarding the placement of a giant "Love La Conner" sign in Gilkey Square! I am baffled that anyone would want to change the character of our charming square by installing an oversized ad in the space.

My initial objection arose when I saw the photo in the paper. I reached out to town council with my concerns and was contacted by a member of council who told me the story in the paper was misleading and inaccurate. However, it was confirmed that the proposed ad/sculpture is indeed 11 feet tall. That's five feet taller than a six-foot person. Does council really think this is appropriate for the intimate space of Gilkey Square, which was so carefully and beautifully designed to fit our town?

I was told this intended "selfie spot" was inspired by a similar structure in Nice, France and that nothing in Gilkey Square says, "La Conner." I did an online search for "Nice, France, selfies" and found a few images of a giant, garish, # I Love Nice, France sign on the beach in Nice. I haven't been to Nice, but from my research I learned there is a population of over 300,000 in this city on the Mediterranean Sea along the French Riviera. Their sign is located on a promenade with an entire seascape in the background. In that location a massive scale might make sense. In a small, intimate square in a town of 900, not so much.

I also did a search for #ilovenice and #ilovenicefrance on Instagram. I mean, that is the point, right? To get people to take pictures and post them on social media? Guess what? Out of over 600,000 images tagged #ilovenice – hardly any are of their massive hashtag sign. There are just over 500 posts that use the entire hashtag #ilovenicefrance. Even among those, very few feature the so-called selfie spot. Maybe the selfie-station isn't that popular? It certainly stands out against the gorgeous architecture, azure waters and blue skies of Nice. And it seems people prefer taking pictures of those things.

Social media is ephemeral by nature. TikTok is already more popular than Instagram. We don't know what's coming next. Why spend so much money on something that will look tired and dated in five years?

What was a charming novelty during the pandemic lockdown – a low-rise set of pots and Love La Conner sign – has somehow been distorted into a monolithic ad. Why not create something smaller and easily relocated to feature different parts of town? Something that can be used temporarily while it's trendy. Something ... ephemeral.

For impact and longevity, look to Chicago's Cloud Gate, aka "bean" sculpture. It says nothing about Chicago and yet, it is an iconic sculpture that immediately identifies the location. It's also a wildly popular spot for photos. Great art can do that.

At the very least, there should be a design competition with more options presented. Apparently, the money has already been approved.

I hope the town council listens to the input of the two commissions and finds a more appropriate way to use that money.

*Nancy Crowell, a photographer, is a longtime resident of La Conner.*



Okay, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but sometimes as a journalist, you gotta tell it like it is, especially when people's lives are at stake.

The coronavirus ain't going away. The consensus of all the studies that I have been following is that, while the omicron variant is not as deadly as the delta variant, it is extremely pervasive.

My natural journalistic impulse to share the sad truth with my readers that has inspired me to do a lot of research and the results just confirm what I suspected.

I'm not a doctor and I don't play one on TV (although I did direct a few medical series), but I am an avid reader obsessed by these incredibly challenging times in our history and my suspicion is that we will be getting yearly shots for coronavirus and its future variants just as we have for the flu.

I'm guessing most of my readers have been vaccinated but there are still a lot of people out there who refuse to take this seriously. The problem with that is not only are those people endangering themselves, but everyone they come in contact with as well.

I passionately believe that we are doing a very good job of preserving lives by listening to the advice of most medical experts. Maybe I'm wrong and history will prove me wrong, but I very much doubt that. If I am wrong, sorry for the inconvenience. If the people that disagree with me are wrong, their lives and the lives of their friends, families and even strangers are at stake.

A lot of our thinking these days is influenced by the media we choose to follow. Sadly, many people only listen to what they want to hear from stations that reinforce their ignorance and that leads to many unnecessary deaths.

Sure, I like to listen to and watch CNN and MSNBC because they share my political and social biases, but I know that I have to also check in with NPR, BBC and the New York Times to make sure I am getting information from outlets that are devoted to telling the truth and not just telling their followers what they want to hear.

If you still don't agree with me, then I could say, "hey, it's your party and you can die if you want to." The problem with that is not only are you risking your own life, you are risking the lives of people you come in contact with.

Just as I'm wrapping up this column, NPR is talking about a new strain, BA.2, that could be as lethal as the delta variant. So let's put politics aside and do what the smartest people in the medical profession highly recommend and get vaccinated, boosted and pray for those who do not agree with us.

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