

Questions and Answers from the Whatcom County-wide Forum Held on October 5th, 2017

Question 1:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Washington University studies and many other recent press reports; show that the Whatcom County economy is under-performing. Do you believe that local government policy affects this? Yes or No?

WC Council Dist. 1: **Rud Browne**, Yes. The County could do a better job. There's a limit on what the County can do. **Phil Morgan**, Yes. They should allow more building in the county. The moratorium is bad for attracting new business and the local economy.

WC Council Dist. 2: **Todd Donovan**, No. Construction is up. Unemployment is at record lows. Wages are up. The problem's not due to the County. On the margins we can help. **Amy Glasser**, Yes. County needs change how we look at the County. Provide things in the rural area like broadband, rural work opportunity, offer the ability to build smaller homes, and promote economic development that will attract business such as the hemp and solar / wind industries.

WC Council Dist. 3: **Tyler Bird**, Yes. Business is struggling because of negative regulations. County needs to work positively with the farms and industries at Cherry Point. **Rebecca Boonstra**, Yes. County does have an impact on economic development. The moratorium on Cherry Point industries is helping to keep jobs in Whatcom County. They have a role but are not solely responsible.

Council At-large: **Mary Kay Robinson**, Yes. Failing to plan for business development. WWU report shows that it is difficult attract new business and to do business in Whatcom County. Businesses have not expanded here because they claim it is "just too hard." **Barry Buchanan**, Yes. The County Comp Plan changes should work closer with the Port of Bellingham on recruitment and retaining business. Land use policy and economic development programs have a lot to do with it. CAO affect our farmers, sometimes negatively.

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Ken Bell**, Yes. The Port of Bellingham turned down good business opportunities because of a lack of housing. We could positively affect the local economy with jobs if housing needs are met. The County needs to expedite development projects. **Barry Wenger**, Yes. Policies affect businesses. The county needs a balance of regulations that work. Bad laws don't work.

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, Yes. The County did not budget to pay for and provide the infrastructure to be able to build and develop. The county needs to focus and redesign for new business and attract hi-tech business. Too many of the votes for the Port have been defeated by 2

Question 2:

Everyone agrees that Whatcom County is a unique and beautiful place to live. The Department of Ecology has strong environmental laws to protect that. Whatcom County has many of the same redundant policies. Are Federal and State environmental rules insufficient?

WC Council Dist. 2: **Amy Glasser**, Yes. Local policy plays a big role. We need to listen and respect the State, work with the Hirst decision. Limited amount of water, we need to respect First-Rights users, and begin the work to measure water. **Todd Donovan**, No. No, it is not insufficient. No, local control is not redundant. The Critical Areas Ordinances are required by state law. It's complicated and we need to pay attention. We are obligated to implement them.

WC Council Dist. 3: **Rebecca Boonstra**, No. Council has a role to act as a firewall. Keep Whatcom County the way it needs to be and protect our environment. Our natural resources are not unlimited. **Tyler Byrd**, No. I believe they have far more resources available than we do locally. They have the science and data available. When we layer more regulations on top of those will cause hardship. The County needs to spend money on other things.

County At-large: **Barry Buchanan**, No. Environment is at risk. EPA dollars are at risk and we may need to fill-in with County funds and programs. The Dept. of Ecology did not do a good job on Hirst. **Mary Kay Robinson**, No. There are lots of regulations. The challenge is interpretation. When you go to the Planning Dept., too often you get a different answer

from different agents. There needs to be consistency within the County and State in interpretation. Need to spend the time and money to determine what the cause of water contamination is? Is it the farmers or some other source?

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Barry Wenger**, Yes. That's a good thing. Local entities work with both to work out issues for local issues. Consistency is needed. Rebuttal: Need predictability and balance for those people looking to make a living here. **Ken Bell**, No. Both State and Federal bookends are squeezing and leaving no local control. Environmental, business, and zoning needs more local control. Rebuttal: Used to spend 20% of time dealing with environmental regulations. That has grown to 60% of business time spent on redundant regulations and enforcement. Redundancy needs to be addressed and taken off the books. Enforcement has taken on a new level. Many citizen groups use them to harass and sue businesses.

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, No. Over reaching, too many Departments to sign-off on everything.

WC Council Dist. 1: **Phil Morgan**, No. EPA stands for Extreme Political Action. We are over regulated. There are too many special interest groups. **Rud Browne**, No. State and Federal regulations are given to us. We should not layer upon that with often contradictory rules. Standardize or harmonize them.

Question 3:

The Whatcom County Council placed a moratorium on the export of un-refined fossil fuels and restrictions on growth and development for a new deep-water pier. Does the County have the authority to supersede the Commerce Clause and do you believe it will protect jobs as claimed by many who support this moratorium?

WC Council Dist. 3: **Tyler Byrd**, No. The County does not have the authority. It is detrimental to jobs. The potential for a huge wage base loss for families, businesses, and non-profits. Huge loss to our tax-base. **Rebecca Boonstra**, Yes. Confused about the question and do not fully understand the question. I do not support exporting un-refined fossil fuels. I do support the jobs at Cherry Point.

Council At-large: **Mary Kay Robinson**, No. The moratorium violates the Commerce Clause, sets a dangerous precedent, and a bad message to the existing and future businesses, here. **Barry Buchanan**, Yes. It's complicated. Public health and transportation impact the safety of the community. Conversion from refining fossil fuels to exporter of fossil fuels, is not wanted. Does support the industries to expand for the purpose of refining fuels but does not support expansion to export fuels.

WC Council Dist. 1: **Rud Browne**, No. The County does not have the authority to affect commerce. I do believe the County has the authority to regulate for transportation as it relates to public safety, if Cherry Point becomes an oil exporter. The County has no authority to restrict commerce. Rebuttal: Exxon Valdez lawsuit is still ongoing, Deepwater Horizon damage. Train derailment is very costly to a community and companies filing bankruptcy leaves the community to shoulder the financial burden of environmental accidents. **Phil Morgan**, No. The moratorium is restraint of trade. I'm surprised there are no class-action lawsuits, yet? Whether by train or pipeline there is not that much danger. The moratorium suppresses expansion. As the only candidate who has worked with and for fossil fuel industries I do not see this as good for the industry or jobs. Rebuttal: Disagree that pier expansion would harm fish. Last time pier was expanded it resulted in attracting more marine life and increased fish. That is from personal experience.

WC Council Dist. 2: **Todd Donovan**, No. County cannot supersede the Commerce Clause. The moratorium does not attempt to do that. I question your question and wonder where you got it? It is the County's responsibility to look at public safety from increased train traffic and the potential for explosions. **Amy Glasser**, No. I agree with Donovan. Why should we export fossil fuels and send jobs overseas? The 4th Pier was stopped, these are not our waters or our piers, because it belongs to the Lummi Nation. The fish will not survive another deep-water pier.

Question 4:

The Port Commission is designated to promote economic development. Do you believe the 4th Pier at Cherry Point would have been beneficial to the local economy?

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Ken Bell**, Yes. Cannot see it happening with all the current opposition, but it would have been good for the economy. Our ports need to be fully utilized for the benefit of the local economy. **Barry Wenger**, Yes. I was involved in the initial development of the project when it was first proposed for dry bulk goods until it was changed to export coal.

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, Yes. Global Trade is important to the future of the county and nation. It is the last potential for a deep-water pier on the West coast. This is not Port property or a Port issue. This is a County issue.

Question 5:

Whatcom County Farming has a large impact on the local economy. Locally grown products benefit the local industry and the local economy. Do current and proposed regulations threaten the future of local farms?

Council At-large: **Barry Buchanan**, Yes. Buffers impact farms and should be scaled to each farm. Concerned about the loss of farms and farmland. This will lead to too much development. **Mary Kay Robinson**, Yes. Table to farm program is good for the community. Why are we losing farms? It's become too difficult to farm. What is the incentive to keep them farming here? "Potential to harm," is unachievable with existing and added regulations.

WC Dist. 1: **Phil Morgan**, Yes. Too many regulations and setbacks, how to deal with manure...that's why they're selling out and leaving. 8,400 jobs in the farming industry that are under threat from over regulation. **Rud Browne**, Yes. The County needs to repeal the rule which removes the right to farm if not farmed for over five-years. Spent a lot of time talking to farmers and want to work with them to understand their needs.

WC Dist. 2: **Amy Glasser**, No. The regulations are needed. There are too high levels of nitrates in the water. Not enough water in the streams. Not enough water for the people who live in the rural county because little developments were built that used up the water in the aquifer. Good buffers are needed to protect from pollution. We cannot ignore pollution issues. Rebuttal: County needs to measure to verify good/bad farm/water issues. Our community is not too big to measure each farm as needed. **Todd Donovan**, Yes. The burden of impacts is concerning. Proud of the berry and dairy production in Whatcom County. Also concerned about clean water and nitrate balances. It's hard. Regulations needed.

WC Dist. 3: **Rebecca Boonstra**, Yes. I'm concerned, but I believe they are there for a reason so regulations are needed. Damage to fish populations are a concern. We need more farmers to make farm plans with a professional to make them safer. We need to work with farms. **Tyler Byrd**, Yes. The farmers are concerned about their continued ability to farm. These farmers are a unified voice of concern. Farmers are doing a great job, but get no benefit for doing a great job. The water going through the farming community is cleaner than when it came into the area and the farmers should be acknowledged for that.

Question 6:

Currently the Port of Bellingham has three Commissioners. Many issues are decided with a 2 to 1 vote. Does the Port Commission need to be balanced and impartial in deciding the economic future to the County?

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, Yes. The Commissioners are given the opportunity to consider all sides. The Port needs to maintain that balance. As a commissioner I can listen and look at all sides. This is an important thing for the Port Commission to do.

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Ken Bell**, Yes. Of course, we should be balanced and impartial. Port Commissioners need to understand business and economic development. Port needs to focus on business needs and issues? **Barry Wenger**, Yes. The Port needs to be transparent, truthful, integrity. People need to make a good living. That takes hard work and needs common sense to all who are impacted.

Question 7:

Bellingham has an affordable housing shortage and a growing population. Should Bellingham and Whatcom County focus on increasing the urban growth areas in Bellingham to address the shortage?

WC Council Dist. 1: **Rud Browne**, Yes. We need affordable housing. Expansion is complicated and the costs of *who pays* for the infrastructure needs to be addressed. Need to understand what is causing the increased pressure. But, yes, the urban growth areas in North Bellingham needs to be addressed. **Phil Morgan**, Yes. The County and City are pushing infill. People shouldn't be a moratorium on building in the County that forces them to move into Bellingham.

WC Council Dist. 2: **Todd Donovan**, No. Under current conditions the City of Bellingham believes it will harm them fiscally. Too costly to them. Who will pay for the infrastructure? **Amy Glasser**, No. It's not our decision. We're looking at Bellingham to be the only place that is looking at increasing growth. Need to look at other areas that have water associations. Increase the fees for out-of-state and foreign purchases, like Canada. Zoning and fees need to change to help develop and housing more affordable. County should freeze property taxes on low-income and seniors.

WC Council Dist. 3: **Tyler Byrd**, Yes. We have a housing crisis. County must plan for growth. Families need the ability to afford a single-family home. The people elect us to work on this and depend on local leaders to figure this out. **Rebecca Boonstra**, Yes. Definitely a difficult question. Bellingham needs to expand their boundaries. We need a wider variety of housing choices. I live in the Columbia Valley area and there are a lot of new developments happening there.

Council At-large: **Mary Kay Robinson**, Yes. It's long overdue. Some local officials have said that housing prices are not affected by supply-and-demand. That is not true. The infrastructure is needed. The County Comp Plan requires the County and City to do that. We are required to set aside the funding for this. Rebuttal: Urban Villages are too costly due to things like underground parking mandates. The higher a building is, the costlier it is to construct. County does not have the jobs that could afford a high-rise apartment. Land Trusts are also currently priced out of the land market in Bellingham. Tax deferrals have only happened for "multi-family public housing," not for the private markets. The developers want to build but it has to pencil-out to qualify to be financed and built. **Barry Buchanan**, No. I don't believe it'll lower prices. I believe that will only allow for more houses to be built at the same price levels. Need more private/public projects, and to work with Land Trusts. Bellingham needs more infill. Bellingham needs to take more infill. There's too much nimbyism. Urban Villages have not been utilized enough. We need to look at more public housing. Old Town and Fountain Districts need higher-density zoning to take on more infill to meet the affordable housing needs.

Question 8:

Does the Port of Bellingham have the appropriate Whatcom County Council commitment to attract new business?

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Ken Bell**, No. New business need housing. New business need places for their employees to live. We are losing and have lost opportunities because of this issue. Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham need to help. Things that help are to streamline permitting to speed-up the process. **Barry Wenger**, Yes. It's team-work with the Port, the City of Bellingham, smaller cities, and the County. There's too much arguing. Rebuttal: Address the Commerce Clause asked earlier. Voters need to understand what that is. It's about commerce between states and nations. The Federal government has the power to regulate that. But, local government has the authority on locating the commerce and land use.

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, No. Not good enough. There is an EDO (Economic Development Organization) that needs to be focused on to go after economic development opportunities. We need to put together an Economic Development Committee to define what *Economic Success* looks like. It is hard to measure. But we know that if you cannot find an employment base or housing base, we need to work on that. Rebuttal: It is important to understand that each of the Port of Bellingham races has cost \$75k, for a total of \$300k. My opponent is not here and has not had to answer any of these questions for the voters to know how he will work and represent the Port on these issues.

Question 9:

The Futurewise – Hirst decision has resulted in a huge loss of property value to the County. People have lost their ability to develop their land and other property owners not affected by this decision will see significant increases in their property taxes. Whatcom County has not developed a work around. Do you support a Legislative solution that will return the Department of Ecology as the authority on water permit issues?

WC Council Dist. 2: **Todd Donovan**, No. Hirst, Foster, and Postema has forced us to look at the scarcity of water. Don't support a simple fix, because it's a complicated issue. Whatcom County does not have enough water in the summer. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Mitigation and water banking needs to be considered. It's complicated. **Amy Glasser**, No. We need money to implement the Court fix. The Court said what the Court said. We must deal with the fact that in August and September there's not enough water going into the streams. It's been two-years. We have enough money to deal with this. Shouldn't have to shift the tax burden to others. We need to freeze taxes.

WC Council Dist. 3: **Tyler Byrd**, Yes. We're too polarized in state government to deal with this, so I don't believe they'll do it. The County should be working on it. The County needs a reservoir and to look for long term solutions that will accommodate growth. How will the County deal with this issue as we grow if we cannot deal with it now? *Rebuttal:* Where is the data that suggest that a reservoir would flood out the South Fork? She hasn't attended the Council meetings on this and we need to bring solutions to this issue. Why do we continue to dump water into the Bay rather than to reuse it if water is not a renewable resource? There are a lot of solutions that we should be looking at and we need to start today. **Rebecca Boonstra**, No. We need to have the County figure this out. Current system is broken. Whatcom County is not a blank check for water issues. Water is a limited resource. A reservoir wouldn't work because it would flood out the South Fork and be a land grab.

Council At-large: **Mary Kay Robinson**, Yes. I've always supported a Legislative fix. Water banking only works if you have volunteers willing to sell their right to water. It won't work because it distorts the market and will cause price gouging. I support net-zero mitigation; using a catchment system for non-potable water because I don't believe the Legislature will fix it. *Rebuttal:* I'd like to look at a way to give water credits for a water catchment system. Needs to have a licensed hydrologist and everything being offered is expensive. Having the PUD pipe water out to the rural areas would require a lot of expense and vacating rights-of-way. Very time consuming and expensive. **Barry Buchanan**, No. The County fought this case. The Council supported the Whatcom County Executives decision to put the moratorium in place, because the Executive and Prosecutor's office told us that we needed to do this. The PUD is a source for a solution to provide water to rural land owners. It is impossible to work with the Hirst-Foster-Postema cases when you cannot affect even one-molecule of water negatively.

WC Council Dist. 1: **Rud Browne**, Yes. That is only a temporary fix. Individual mitigation is needed for water use in rural areas. Opponents do not like individual mitigation or metering. Alternatives: A dam built up river, a reservoir, or a water intake at the mouth of the river before it hits the salt. A reservoir is not viable. *Rebuttal:* Whatcom County was sued and is why we put in a moratorium, the other counties did not. I didn't like the Hirst decision but believe that we must uphold and follow the law. **Phil Morgan**, Yes. I don't believe there is a water shortage. I question how the instream flow is measured and needs to be looked at. When Georgia Pacific was here and taking millions of gallons, there was no water shortage. Why is there one now? The Hirst decision was a political one.

Question 10:

Shipping and transportation is expensive and more global shipping opportunity is needed. Will you actively seek more import opportunities for the Port?

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, Yes. That is happening now because we did the environmental cleanup and dredging needed to make it happen. I voted for those things to happen and helped to make this happen. *Rebuttal:* For four-days a ship and product sat outside while it was inspected and re-inspected by all the different agencies. That is over regulation and shouldn't have happened.

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Barry Wenger**, Yes. But, we must use caution, because the ships must be clean and honest to ensure environmental security. We need to promote imports and exports. **Ken Bell**, Yes. It's amazing that the Port of Bellingham has finally made it happen after 15-years. I will encourage more of this and work to bring more activity to the water front. The regulators are on top of ensuring that things are clean and safe, already.

Question 11:

Stream-buffers are a big issue for Whatcom County farms. Would you support flexible buffers for farmland?

WC Council Dist. 3: **Tyler Byrd**, Yes. The County needs to reward good farmers and needs to look at the regulatory impacts to those affected. Are they having an intended or un-intended consequence? We need to address past and present regulations. **Rebecca Boonstra**, Yes. On a case-by-case basis is a great way to do that. Water quality is important.

Council At-large: **Mary Kay Robinson**, Yes. Need flexibility. Drainage ditches are now being identified as salmon bearing waterways or wetlands. There needs to be common sense approaches and flexibility put into policy. **Barry Buchanan**, Yes. Done carefully to ensure that it is not affecting water quality. Done on a case-by-case basis. We need more partnerships like the farmers and Lummi Nation, looking for mutual benefit.

WC Council Dist. 1: **Rud Browne**, Yes. I desire that all regulations are based on best available science. The County needs to work with farmers on purchase of and removal of development rights on farm land; to lessen regulations and in exchange for more habitat in critical areas. **Phil Morgan**, Yes. Whether it works will be dependent upon who does the scientific analysis. We should be very careful about telling experienced farmers what to do.

WC Council Dist. 2: **Todd Donovan**, Yes but I don't like the way this question is worded, but I like the idea. We need to use best available science. I cannot say yes until I understand how the program would work. **Amy Glasser**, Yes. There should be some flexibility, but we must ensure that the farmers are doing the right thing.

Question 12:

The Port of Bellingham deals with multi—global and economic issues. Do you have the experience to oversee this type of activity?

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, Yes. I believe a great way to measure that having worked in the private sector and signing paychecks and bills, is the real test and best experience available for Port Commission qualification. Need to know that when you sign a contract that it is good for business.

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Barry Wenger**, Yes. I've had business experience. I helped develop a shell fish operation. Just because you don't own a business doesn't mean that you're not qualified to worked as a Port Commissioner. I have also been a grant writer for both government and business. **Ken Bell**, Yes. I'm running for this office because of my business experience. I understand development and job growth and have worked in Ports around the world, which is what I will bring to the Port of Bellingham.

Question 13:

The Wildlife Committee recommendations are to re-establish wildlife habitat and riparian corridors. Do you support this recommendation?

Port of Bham Dist. 1: **Dan Robbins**, No. This is not a Port issue. It is important to understand the water rights issues, the wells, and how they impact the shifting of property taxes. It is going to cost us all.

WC Council Dist. 1: **Phil Morgan**, No. Whatcom County has enough park land already. You lose tax money when you convert land to parks. I am for hiking and biking, but we have enough park land already. **Rud Browne**, Yes. I approve with qualifiers. If you're talking about **PSNERP**, I didn't support the process or how we found out about it. When a species is going to extinction we need to provide protection and compensation to the individual.

WC Council Dist. 2: **Amy Glasser**, Yes. Our ecosystem is fragile. Everything relates to everything else. I know that sounds too environmentally groovy. “Animals – Planet – People, and all of it relates to our Critical Areas Ordinances.” **Todd Donovan**, No.

WC Council Dist. 3: **Rebecca Boonstra**, Maybe. Needs to be looked at. I agree with Amy Glasser, I am a very strong environmentalist. Extinction is forever. **Tyler Byrd**, Maybe. The question is not specific enough. I will tell you how I was raised. I look at it as if I were to borrow someone’s car...I need to return it in as good or better shape than when I borrowed it. That’s how I’m raising my kids. If it is an extinction issue or a property rights issue, then that’s how we need to look at it.

Council At-large: **Barry Buchanan**, Yes. It needs to be balanced. Property owners need to be made whole. Restoration is important but so are property rights. PSNERP (Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project) blindsided the Whatcom County Council. **Mary Kay Robinson**, No. We need to be careful of supporting recommendations, they are used as lawsuits. It is a very slippery slope. Science continues to evolve...it takes an enormous amount of effort to undue those recommendations.

Port of Bham Dist. 2: **Ken Bell**, No. We’re blindsided by a lot of exterior causes. The idea that we control our destiny is a long-lost-concept. The Port works on jobs and economic development and that’s what I’ll be focused on. **Barry Wenger**, left before the forum was over.

Closing Comments:

Each candidate was given an opportunity for a closing comment.



Dan Robbins: The Port deals with a \$400 million public asset and a \$30 million annual budget. The Port is not a Red Team or Blue Team.

Ken Bell: We work for the people and we need to focus on developing the Georgia Pacific site to produce economic opportunity.

Barry Wenger (left before forum was over).

Barry Buchanan: No new tax for Whatcom County Jail...it’s all wrong.

Mary Kay Robinson: We need to look at the issues, measure them and quantify the cost to the community’s economy.

Rebecca Boonstra: Thank you for being here.

Tyler Byrd: Thank you for being here. It is difficult to discuss big issues in limited time.

Amy Glasser: Thankful to be here. It is exciting to be involved with you and to dialogue with people.

Todd Donovan: These are complex issues. It is an honor to serve on the Whatcom County Council. The top issues we need to work on are Lake Whatcom, the economy, and Public Health. I do not support the Jail tax.

Phil Morgan: Thank you. I will work for Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness for the people of Whatcom County. This cannot happen with too many regulations and it’s running people out of Whatcom County.

Rud Browne: My goal is to listen to all sides, using best science to base my decisions on. I’ve been overwhelmed with endorsements. I know how to create jobs and hope to continue to serve the people.

THE END