

From: [Jane Mills](#)
To: [Kelly Bacon \(CD\)](#)
Subject: Fwd: Hidden Point Ltr
Date: Monday, January 4, 2021 11:23:03 AM
Attachments: [Hidden Point comment ltr. Drais Mills. 010421.pdf](#)

Dan keeps getting messages that his emails to you are bouncing. Our apologies if we are flooding you!

Jane

Jane Mills
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Begin forwarded message:

From: Dan Drais <dandrais1@gmail.com>
Date: January 4, 2021 at 10:37:15 AM PST
To: kelly.bacon.cd@co.kittitas.wa.gov
Subject: Hidden Point Ltr

Dear Ms. Bacon:

Here is our letter in PDF, which probably works better for the County.

Dan Drais and Jane Mills

Dan Drais and Jane Mills
3480 Emerick Road, Cle Elum
6808 Phinney Ave N., Seattle 98103

January 4, 2021

Ms. Kelly Bacon
Staff Planner
Kittitas County Community Development Services
411 N. Ruby St., Suite 2
Ellensburg, WA 981926

Re: Hidden Point Conditional Use Application (CU-20-00005)

Dear Ms. Bacon:

We own a vacation home (parcels 796436 and 416136) not far from the proposed Hidden Point development. Our place is the first structure past Unionville Ranch on the south side of Emerick Road. We have a home in Seattle but for 15 years have enjoyed spending time during all four seasons in the peace and wilderness of Lookout Mountain. We have come to know and respect our neighbors who, like us, treasure the abundant wildlife on Emerick such as migratory songbirds, owls, hawks, ravens, deer, bear, large gatherings of elk, coyotes and, of course, wild turkeys. We experienced firsthand the devastation of the Taylor Bridge fire as our own cabin was lost, We also saw so many others lose their beloved places. We were fortunate to be insured so we could rebuild immediately. Through this experience we have deepened our connection with neighbors who, like us, attended educational programs provided by Kittitas and the State to teach us Firewise building maintenance as well as the care of the natural habitat all around us, including personally replanting hundreds of trees.

We joined in the letter from Unionville Ranch dated December 14. We write separately to emphasize a few of our concerns. Please do not interpret any statements in this letter to mean we disagree with any of the concerns expressed by Patricia Galloway.

Fire safety. The Taylor Bridge fire broke out while there was a full-time, trained fire inspector *at the construction site* to ensure that nothing would go awry. A water truck was *at the construction site*. And yet, 60 homes and some 25,000 acres later, those precautions proved inadequate. Nor was the State's liability insurance sufficient to cover the immense cost of damage. Good intentions during construction are not enough to prevent fire in our increasingly dry summer and fall. Given that the Hidden Point applicant has not even acknowledged the severe risk of fire safety during construction, we cannot help but be seriously concerned about the likelihood of another conflagration. The project's projected construction period (five years, five days a week) aggravates the problem. If that startling claim is accurate, we can expect repeated turnover among the workers and supervisors and a dilution of the impact of any fire safety training. Even if most are initially well trained and cautious, the facts of the Taylor Bridge fire tell us some will not be. In fact, the current work force has apparently left fires unattended. We were startled that the application didn't include a detailed construction management plan for fire suppression, or even a standard list of best management practices in wildfire country. Given the recent learning from Taylor Bridge and other nightmarish fires of how difficult and expensive

it is to suppress and fight wildfire in the steep hills surrounding Emerick and Hidden Valley roads, we think this would have been step one. It's a telling failure.

And the project creates even greater fire hazard *after* construction! Without knowing the anticipated turnover rate for each "bunkhouse," one can imagine that a single week in July might easily bring some 100 people to the site, most of whom are likely to be new to this relatively remote wildland location and unused to the extra care demanded during our frequent burn bans. Inexplicably and unforgivably, Hidden Point proposes no onsite staff to monitor the guests and prevent unsafe behavior that could lead to a fire.

If a bachelor party or a couple of dozen kids from CWU celebrating their graduation, or any inattentive guests ignore the burn ban signs ("C'mon, we need a campfire, we paid money to stay on a ranch!") and light a campfire, the proprietors of the "ranch" have no plan – or way – to ensure that fire is not started or is safely extinguished. *Hidden Valley LLC apparently has decided that it does not need a plan even after a wildfire breaks out*, perhaps because the unstaffed facility would not be able to implement any plan or to take any actions, from calling 911 to responding immediately to an outbreak to supervising the evacuation of residents down the road as emergency vehicles are coming up. Whether the fire endangers the occupants of the bunkhouses or spreads quickly to other Emerick Road inhabitants, Hidden Point has not identified any mitigation or response measures.

There is an inherent difference between the care an individual gives to observe and follow fire safety when there is management present, and when there is none. And there is a factual difference in response times of emergency personnel, and how fast a small fire can become big, between a large commercial venture located directly off SR 970 and an unstaffed one situated miles off the highway in the woods on privately maintained gravel roads. It is unreasonable to think that over five years, or ten years, or 15 years, none of these thousands of guests would inadvertently trigger a wildfire with a campfire, or fireworks, or spark from a tow, or a careless cigarette.

The thought of another fire and the difficulty of exiting the valley safely for us and our fellow neighbors makes our hearts sick. The stakes of inattention or recklessness could not be higher.

Transportation. Other community members have described the shared private roads and how their gravel character helps define the area's rural character and helps protect that same character by being impractical for heavy uses. We would simply confirm their observations of the toll that the existing (unpermitted) construction traffic is already causing. On December 17, we were driving on Emerick Road below the construction site at dusk when we hit a deep pothole. The poor light and a covering of snow obscured it. It destroyed the tire, forcing us to change it in the cold sleet rain. We have never seen potholes like this in 15 years. We appreciate the kind folks who helped us.

Water. We share the concerns raised by Unionville about the project's impact on our aquifer. We also find the opacity about the intended amount of water consumption to be insulting to us and to the County. Moreover, we note the unfairness of allowing one commercial use to disproportionately draw down our low-density agricultural area's water for a high-density purpose that is neither residential nor agricultural.

Trespassing. The project location is a ridiculous choice for siting if the intention is to attract people to enjoy the recreational amenities of the Hidden Point property itself. The 39-acre site (which

includes unusable steep slopes, parking for 24 cabins, and the developed portion of the property) is simply not big enough on its own to accommodate the recreational desires of 40 or 48 people at a time. It would be like snowshoeing in the Fred Meyer parking lot! Guests of this commercial venture looking forward to a “recreational experience” will doubtless feel free to use the private lands and roads nearest their bunkhouse, whether for snowshoeing, rambling, “mushroom gathering”, hunting, motorcycling or other pastimes. Unionville has pointed out the very real concerns of the neighbors related to privacy and potential damage and/or crime that could arise from such trespassing.

Inadequacy of the SEPA checklist. SEPA checklists, as we understand them, are to be used for relatively small projects without the potential for a significant environmental impact. They are designed so that an applicant need not employ a raft of consultants and spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on them; the applicant is generally fine providing his/her best estimate or writing “N/A.” However, this case presents two problems: The potential impacts of overnight lodging for up to 48 people densely packed on 3 very rural lots zoned for one family each are not insignificant; and the SEPA checklist that was submitted is utterly confusing and includes information that is both inadequate and inaccurate. The first sentence states that the proposed use is “desirous to the community,” when in fact the community opposes it. It states that it provides “controlled, safe access” to recreation, when there is nothing controlled about it and the potential for fire in the unsupervised setting makes it dangerous in the summer. The rest of the checklist is similarly unhelpful or misleading.

Characterization of use. Finally, we simply do not understand how the County could allow this use in this zone. If we told our neighbors that we intended to build a large shelter on our 52-acre property that would sleep 48 people – with an adjacent pool, clubhouse, commercial kitchen, roads, and parking – they would rightly insist that the County stop us. The Hidden Point proposal is identical except that our property is 33 percent larger, Hidden Point is providing a less efficient use of land because it requires 24 separate bunkhouses, and their property would be free of any onsite oversight. The project proponents are not proposing “rural recreation,” or a “recreational ranch.” There is so little recreation available on their property that they must tout “stargazing” and “mushroom hunting” as recreation, as well as horseback riding with non-existent horses. They are simply looking to put an unmanaged motel on a beautiful site with lovely vistas, and they hope that the County will approve it if they refer to the rooms as “bunkhouses.” Their disinterest in working with the neighbors proves that they neither understand nor care about consistency with the community’s character or in creating a project “desirous to the community.”

We join with other property owners in opposing this project. Thank you for considering all of the information submitted regarding the Hidden Point project, and we trust you will insist on seeing a great deal more from the applicant.

Sincerely,

/S/ Daniel G. Drais

Dan Drais

dandrais@comcast.net

/S/ Jane D. Mills

Jane Mills

jdmills24@comcast.net