

August 28, 2024

Kittitas County CDS
411 N. Ruby St, Suite 2
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Re: RZ-24-00003 / CP-24-00003

Flying A Land Rezone & Comprehensive Plan, Environmental Review, Determination of Non-Significance (DNS)

Dear CDS Planning Manager,

Several landowners around the Flying A Land LLC / Schmidt House LLC land received notification last week regarding a Notice of Application by the applicant Andy Schmidt of Flying A Land LLC, to rezone 197.4 acres of working agricultural lands to high-density housing, outside the boundary of the Ellensburg City Urban Growth Area. As I have been reviewing the documentation, I am appalled at the serious logical and typographical errors throughout the application, and need to bring attention to several environmental issues that have been ignored, either accidentally or purposely. Some of the environmental issues with this application relate to domestic and irrigation water, flooding, local animals, and existing buildings much older than 50 years.

In the applicant's own words, he states that there has "been less water availability in Kittitas County, especially in areas with faster growth rates." Yet, he claims that there will be plenty of water available for the proposed 110 houses on his property. Unfortunately, at least one domestic well in the immediate area has already gone dry in recent years, requiring the owner(s) to drill another well, at significant expense to the owner(s). Adding another 110 households in this area will add much more stress than can be handled by our already tenuous water table. All of the currently-existing homeowners must have irrefutable proof that we will continue to have access to the water in our own water table levels for at least the next 50 years; the applicant must drill domestic wells on his property to a much deeper level, several hundred feet deeper than all of the wells on area properties, to ensure the viability of the rest of area's existing, as well as future, wells. The applicant claims that the 2 domestic water wells that are on the west side of the project will be used to supply all 110 lots, with a maximum of "250 gallons per day per unit." It is difficult to understand how 2 wells that currently service a few houses will be sufficient to service more than 100 additional houses, and that the neighboring area will continue to have enough domestic water with so many more houses pulling water from what the applicant agrees is "less water availability."

Irrigation water in this area has been restricted early in the growing season during multiple recent years. Again, the applicant claims that there will be plenty of irrigation water to provide irrigation and livestock watering for multiple lots in his proposed high-density housing development for "rural farming/ranch" usage. All of the currently existing lots in the adjoining areas must be able to receive our allotment of water, without interruption, for the entire growing season, without restriction, for at least the next 50 years; the irrigation water usage on the applicant's proposed 110 lots shall not interfere in any way with access and availability to irrigation water for any upstream or downstream users.

Over the last decade and more, this area has experienced flooding issues during multiple January and spring snow melt events. The agricultural lands, as opposed to impermeable surfaces, in the area have helped to alleviate some of the flood water ramifications. However, when much of the land in the applicant's 197.4 acres in this project become roads, sidewalks, driveways, houses, patios, outbuildings, park structures, and other impervious surfaces, the flooding will become immensely worse,

due to much less ground to take up the excess water. There is no indication on any of the maps in the applicant's documentation to show appropriate excess water run-off areas that will not cause human or animal health risks to standing water, algae, mosquitoes, and other pests or diseases.

The applicant's documentation makes light of the animals that make this area home. There are several small herds of deer who live just a mere few feet away from what will become 20 years of construction equipment, plus many more decades of lost habitat. Two species of owl also roost in the area, and need to be identified and allowed to keep their fragile habitats and nesting roosts without threat from urban perils in what should stay as a rural area. The species of eagle also need to be identified, and their habitat protected. Water animals, such as crawdads, muskrat, beaver, etc., live in the streams and ditches. Several land owners in the area drive their livestock, cattle and horses, along the roads discussed in the proposed project. Two additional housing development access roads just a short distance from the two recently created access roads, including one proposed access road on the side of a hill with low visibility, will create an increase in the possibility of livestock/handler and vehicle accidents. With 110 more houses, there is a potential for more than 1,000 additional daily vehicular trips along these roads, according to the applicant's documentation. With these extra road users, safe passage cannot be guaranteed for livestock and their handlers amongst the increase of urban and distracted drivers who may not know the rules of the rural road, perhaps causing horrific and devastating accidents. There have already been accidents in the area due to higher vehicular traffic rates. Buildings as tall as 45 feet, discussed in the applicant's documentation, could negatively impact flight patterns of birds, as well as the flight patterns of airport traffic, which flies directly over the property, some flying quite low.

Several current lots in the area contain buildings and structures that are greater than 45 years old, including at least 1 house and at least 1 building that are over 100 years old. Evidence of old ceramics pieces have been found on one of the lots, though age of the pieces is unknown. Several years ago, the author of this letter met a gentleman whose birth in 1929 occurred in one of these older houses. The historical character of the area must be preserved, not ignored or threatened.

Many environmental issues must be addressed before an Environmental Determination of Non-Significance can be finalized for the Andy Schmidt proposed development of 110 high-density houses in a rural location. The applicant has indeed stated that there is already "less water availability" in the area, yet he thinks that adding more houses to this area will somehow solve the lack of water, both domestic and irrigation, when in fact, this development will just exacerbate the water availability issue. The proposal documentation does not address any solution for safe excess water run-off during flooding events, though he states that part of the property is within the 100-year floodplain. Several species of animals will lose vital habitat: first, with the noise of construction, they will be driven out of the area, potentially into heavy traffic and be killed; and second, the agricultural land will be covered by roads, houses, and other buildings. Due to low-flying air traffic over the property, building height limitations must be imposed. The applicant claims that no views will be altered or obstructed for the neighboring lots, and that the rural character of the area will be preserved; however, any new buildings will alter and obstruct views of trees, wide open spaces, and hay fields; and 2- to 4-storey tall buildings will obstruct views of the hills and the lower sky, restricting current residents' hobbies of spotting wildlife in the valley and on the hills, as well as astronomical observations (which will also be affected by extra lighting in the area). The rural character of this area will be destroyed with this project: no more wide open spaces; instead, a sea of rooflines and walls obscuring views and ruining wildlife habitat. Further investigations must be conducted regarding the historical and cultural characteristics of some of the older buildings in the area, with arrangement with those land owners prior to any on-site surveys. A stop-work must be issued immediately for this project; there are too many environmental issues that have not been addressed adequately by the applicant.

Sincerely,
A concerned resident in the Game Farm Rd area