We Need a Long-Term Vision for Wise Use of Jefferson County Fairgrounds

Dear Commissioners Dean, Brotherton, and Eisenhour:

We are a collective of concerned Port Townsend citizens who’ve witnessed unremitting dilapidation, illegal habitation, and unregulated, destructive land use of the fairgrounds under the mismanagement and neglect of the Jefferson County Fairgrounds Association (JCFA). We believe it’s past time for the County to engage a competent, professional team to design and implement a Master Plan for the use and management of the property.

The JCFA was involuntarily dissolved by the State of Washington Secretary of State in 2022 and has therefore lost its nonprofit status. We are concerned that the organization may lack legal standing to sanction events of any nature at the site. We are especially concerned about uses that may violate County code and State law.

Therefore, we request that the County Commissioners immediately halt any and all abusive land uses (such as mud drags and any other activities that require excavation or alter the natural topography) of our precious County Fairgrounds. We ask that you begin the process of developing a long-term management plan that brings our community together around a positive vision for ecological and economic sustainability.

Once part of an interconnected system of prairies and wetlands extending from Kai Tai Lagoon to North Beach, these county lands can serve as a vital socioeconomic resource for Jefferson County by showcasing our ecological and agricultural heritage, training youth leaders to be wise stewards of our land, and providing a gathering place for arts, outdoor education and cultural events—all uses the legislature and the State Fairs Commission have intended. We envision the restoration of the land itself, using such methods as regenerative agriculture and native plant landscaping to help our community adapt to climate change.
Decades of mismanagement have left a legacy of land deeply scarred with ruts, mud, and polluted water, dilapidated buildings, and an increasing number of surrounding residents dismayed by the general state of disrepair and repeated exposure to high-decibel noise pollution, dust, and fumes. No permit has ever been issued for these events, nor has any environmental review been completed.

What lessons do mud drags teach our children—that it’s ok to scar public land, pollute its waters and leave the mess for someone else to clean up? Before any further damage occurs, we respectfully ask that you take the following actions:

1. Initiate the development of a long-term master plan for the Fairgrounds as other counties in Washington and across the U.S. have done to unite communities around a shared vision. The planning process should be open, transparent, and conducted in compliance with the State Environmental Policy Act to ensure that the rich ecological heritage of this parcel is protected and restored.

2. Pass a resolution declaring that mud drags and similar activities involving unpermitted groundwork and infrastructure, excessive noise, and environmental contamination are incompatible with Jefferson County’s Unified Development Code for this parcel and the intent expressed by the legislature and State Fairs Commission.

3. Seek funding from the State Fairs Commission to fund the master planning process, clean up the damage already incurred, restore sensitive areas, and remove, repair or replace dilapidated buildings to serve a broad range of community events.

We trust that as our elected officials, you will take this matter seriously and initiate these actions as soon as possible. Thank you for your leadership.

Respectfully,

Fair Vision Citizens Action Committee, joined by the following Port Townsend residents:

Lisa S Thomas  Mark Schlenz  Patricia A Drolet
Tom Buell  Wendy Chapman  Jane Freeburg
Sarah Frankel  Peg Masters  Maureen Reichmuth
Michael Hilt  Beth Kissinger  Kathleen Hartmann
Linda Egan  Ann Weston  Terri Alexander
V. Keith Fleming, Jr., PhD  Michael Weston  Janet Burr
John Perkins  Patricia Barrett  Mary Lakes
Christina Nelson  Patricia Rossi  Kathleen Turaski
Pam Gilbert  Sylvia Bowman  Peter Hornsby
Patricia Johnson  Patti Reynolds  Amanda Stone
Lisa Greenfield  Ron Burian  Judy Romano
John Talberth  Maureen Reichmuth  Sandra (Sandee) Johnson
Jamie Elsbury  Daphne Wysham  Carla Jean Pugh
Catherine Kapp  Kelly Weld