

Better Uses for Seattle's Priceless Fort Lawton

By Gretchen Taylor and Elizabeth Campbell, guest columnists

The surplused Fort Lawton Reserve Center near Discovery Park is back on the City of Seattle's radar again with their previously rebuffed plans to house the homeless in an area which might eventually be integrated into Discovery Park. There is public meeting tonight (June 21) at 6:30 p.m. in the Magnolia Community Center where you have a rare opportunity to speak out against this ill-conceived proposal.

In short, the City wants to pander to homeless industry activists and build 85 units of housing for the homeless, 100 "affordable" rent apartments, and 50 privately owned homes for low-income households. All of this to be built upon some of the most precious land in the city. At the risk of being called "rich, white, NIMBYS," we say there are better uses for the property.

You may remember back in 2009 when the Magnolia Neighborhood Planning Council won their lawsuit against the city – fought all the way to the Washington State Supreme Court – to stop this plan. It was a clear victory for the residents of the area when the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal. As a result, reconsideration was denied. Now the city is back some eight years later to push through much the same plan. We say STOP RIGHT THERE.

Seattle must not overlook the importance of preserving open spaces in an urban landscape that's been called the fastest growing big city in the country, according to *The Seattle Times* (5/25/17). Construction of homeless housing in Fort Lawton robs all residents of the opportunity to save one of the few precious green spaces left. The city's quick-fix decisions have a far-reaching impact on livability for us all. In general, we do not favor building anything in Fort Lawton. We prefer park spaces for people and wildlife. There is so little of this habitat left. Let Fort Lawton be annexed into Discovery Park and go from there.

Having said that, if there must be repurposing of Fort Lawton, let this land serve children by building a high school, as suggested in an editorial by Brier Dudley (*The Seattle Times*; 6/7/17). His opinion piece outlines arguments for constructing a campus based on the size of the Fort Lawton property and proximity to Magnolia/Queen Anne/Downtown, and considers the negative aspects of plans to locate it on a much smaller plot near Memorial Stadium and the Mercer Mess. Although not ideal for us, we see the benefit of such a use to the city at-large and generations to come.

With Seattle's growing population, it's even more important to have parks and open spaces – or perhaps a new high school – to best use some of our city's most cherished land. Open spaces or schools benefit everyone and should be a major part of Seattle's planning for the future.

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