Letter of dissent regarding Marymoor Design District Subarea Plan

It is my belief that the Marymoor Design District Subarea planning initiative is a vital step to activating the transformative influence of frequent, reliable high capacity transit as it comes to Redmond. I have looked deeply at the issues and opportunities surrounding the Marymoor Station site, its impact on current tenants in that area, and the potential of future development. This is a decision that has perhaps a century's worth of influence on the future of our community, yet there are some who would rush this process, owing perhaps to the realization that Link is coming sooner rather than later. I understand the concern, but do not believe the product before us adequately addresses the legitimate interests of the citizens of Redmond in neither in the content of the product reviewed nor in the transparency of the process in which that product was developed.

In reviewing our study of the Marymoor Design District proposal, I can distill down my areas of concern to four main topic areas:

1. Transportation
2. Land Use
3. Economics
4. Planning

Taking each in turn:

1. Transportation

<u>The cost of solving other people's problems</u>
The catalyst for almost all of this effort (or at least my concerns about this effort) is not the Southeast Redmond Neighborhood Plan, but rather the extension of Link Light Rail to Redmond generally and to a station site in the MMDD specifically. From the standpoint of meeting the needs of Redmond residents, the Marymoor Station makes almost no transportation sense, but is a brilliant political move on the regional stage. Creating an access point for Sammamish involves high cost and deflected impact, but it can be argued that it politically made the acceleration of the development of light rail to Redmond possible, so I'm fine with accepting some of this burden. Redmond has been an exceptionally cooperative municipal partner in facilitating Link review and approvals. Perhaps some of the significant efficiencies provided ST by Redmond can come back to us in the form of a strengthened commitment to mitigation.

Without question, placing a station five miles from the community (Sammamish) it purports to serve - a community that can neither physically support light rail nor which has the necessary density or proximity to support light rail operations - is little more than a gesture offered to a community which is paying into Sound Transit but which currently sees little real benefit. The consequence of this gesture is to force commute traffic onto East Lake Sammamish Parkway and SR 202. Of course, the impact and cost of mitigating this additional traffic will fall upon Redmond – this is a key consideration that must be addressed in our planning for the Subarea.

The proposal put before us described as necessary the requirement to have local streets take pressure generated by the station off of the principal arterial (SR 202). This was underscored by graphics showing a very specifically sized 1400 stall parking garage in a very specifically designated location on the west side of the MMDD. Such an approach familiar to 101 level traffic engineering and transportation planning students across the country. We got a refresher lesson in how that works recently when an overturned butane truck shut down the I-90/I-5 interchange in Seattle, and in turn shut down surface streets through the entire region. It is simply unsustainable and unacceptable to assert that local streets can accept 2-3,000 peak hour trips and still support a livable neighborhood, as envisioned by the City.

All that has been offered in this process (as opposed to the Link Record of Decision) in terms of mitigation is an opaque description of improvements on NE 70th to the Station from SR 202. That only addresses a fraction of the

impact, however. Just as much traffic should be expected to come to MMDD from the south on the recently rebuilt East Lake Sammamish Parkway from NE Inglewood Hill Road and even 212th Avenue SE. Access to the station from ELSP can be easily assumed to use NE 65th Street rather than NE 70th, with additional impacts on 176th Ave NE and other local streets. Developer contributions will be very hard pressed to keep up with the demands placed on these streets the day Link opens. The City has told us not to expect CIP programming to meet these needs for years after Link opens. What you see in the distance is not an oncoming train, but rather the headlights of thousands of new cars overwhelming the unimproved streets of the Design District – and this plan offers little in terms of hope in addressing this new traffic in anything resembling a timely or effective manner.

Parking Garage

Do we understand just what a 1400 stall parking garage represents? At a conservative cost of $40,000 per stall, it represents a $56 million (more likely $80 million including soft costs) expenditure dedicated to nothing more than the storage of automobiles.

Nothing more. It produces no discernable contribution to the economy of our community but rather will simply store a large number of cars sitting unused during the day. We will force that traffic to wind its way through a network of Redmond's local streets so as not to obstruct other traffic generated by Sammamish attempting to access SR 520. This is a debatable rationale for imposing such impacts on Redmond businesses and future residents.

I've always held that you can learn a lot about urban planning, design and flow management by looking at Disneyland, and the Imagineers have had to address this very issue in Anaheim. At least at Disneyland cars take an off ramp from I-5 directly into their enormous parking garage…direct from arterial to storage, and totally avoiding already-busy streets packed with pedestrians. Here, the proposal envisions a competition on NE 70th St (and elsewhere) between this induced traffic and pedestrians. I think we know how that competition usually ends.

We can't and won't stop the parking garage, but we can mitigate its impact. We can, for example:

- Insist that ST charge for parking (that alone can reduce the scale of the garage);
- Locate the garage closer to the arterials that are ostensibly designed to handle higher volumes of traffic; and
- Have Sound Transit serve the Plateau with meaningful feeder bus service so as to reduce the traffic impacts downstream.

Transportation - we have to say it again – must address from the earliest moments of the planning process the mobility needs of all users, with pedestrians at the top of the list of the vulnerable. The City proposal appropriately identifies the need for housing to support this station location, but forcing such volumes of traffic through the middle of this neighborhood undermines a fundamental obligation to make higher density residential and mixed use development work to the primary favor of pedestrians - be they commuters, be they local employees, or be they future Redmond residents. ***We must insist that the parking garage both serve transit directly while not creating mayhem in a residential area nor to users of Marymoor Park***.

2. Land Use

Including mixed use in this design area is not visionary – but its inclusion is both obvious and inevitable. It is a concept that I support wholeheartedly, as simply creating an enormous Park & Ride for people outside of our city would be an unforgivable squandering of the opportunity presented by the presence of rail transit in our community. It is unfortunate that the location of higher density residential development became a ping pong ball in the SE Redmond Neighborhood Plan, and that the desires of existing homeowners to keep multi-family development (and their residents) away has transferred a large burden onto local businesses who thought they were secure in their business park.

Resolution 1415

The Commission has done what it can to support the Resolution 1415 committee's work. At the end of the day, it is inevitable that the development of Link will create a windfall for property owners and uncertainty for existing business owners and entrepreneurs. I certainly understand the consternation of these small business owners in seeing the consistency and predictability of their existence in a business park affected by the whipsaw of 20 years' worth of changing residential policies. I do not believe that there is anything the city can do to change their plight short of imposing restrictions on land use (such as excluding the 1415 district from residential zoning), but that will be seen by others in the business community as an undue burden on "free" markets.

This is an unfortunate reality lesson in the hidden costs of economic vitality.

Impacts on Marymoor Park

Unresolved for me also are a multitude of issues associated with Marymoor Park. While it is true that the Park is located in unincorporated King County, it is also true that the Park has been offered by King County to the City of Redmond in the past. It is very true that average citizens of Redmond have had more opportunities for direct input into the planning and development of this park than they have had (for example) in the planning and review of the campus of our city's leading employer and generator of traffic. To advocate for a specific parking garage location on the basis that it can support special events at Marymoor is to fundamentally fail to understand how and why Marymoor Park is managed by King County. It is vital that City efforts to change land uses adjacent to the park remain particularly sensitive to the needs of the park management and of park users (who are to a significant degree Redmond residents). ***I'm not convinced based on testimony from King County Parks and from emails from park user organizations that this standard of care has yet been met.***

Impacts on the East Lake Sammamish Regional Trail

As noted in our discussions, the design concepts presented in this process if built would have significant negative impacts on the East Lake Sammamish Regional Trail, its users, and its neighbors. In the effort to force feed arterial traffic through neighborhood streets, not only do we introduce conflict to the trail, but we intensify that impact by through a questionable facility choice (rotary intersection). Similarly, while the set of initiatives will also have a large impact on local arterials, these same initiatives include rollbacks from visions and proposals made during city-wide planning efforts to provide a high measure of pedestrian safety at the very locations where people must cross these highways. While these rollbacks have themselves been scaled back during our deliberations, they have not been replaced with anything that supports the original vision of the public to provide safe, separated access to the new trail.

3. Economics

Money for Nothing

One of the major unanswered questions relates to exactly how the City intends to implement the changes envisioned in this initiative. We were told early in the process that the city would not be funding new infrastructure for some time, and that roadway and utility improvements generally would come from developer contributions.

This would be terrific were it not for the accelerated pace at which Link is coming to Redmond. It would be even better if the dedication of private revenues were underpinned by the incentive of better density and FAR provisions in the subarea. This was well-discussed in the central Issaquah plan shown us but only waved at in the materials presented supporting this package of potential actions. Ultimately, there has to be a reason for the private sector to invest if we are going to follow the path of Overlake and Downtown and create the environment transit requires to ***excel*** at its mission. It may be 5-10 years at the earliest after Link opens that the City can initiate any sort of meaningful Capital programming for needed improvements - this does not benefit current or future tenants of this district.

We must do more to activate and encourage productive development in station areas, especially if we expect it to pay the costs of accommodating other communities' traffic.

4. **Planning**

This really isn't a plan, but rather an amalgam of disparate issues and staff-generated wish lists, some of which represent a retreat from the policies and visions adopted in previous comprehensive planning exercises (Transportation Plan, Parks Plan, etc). Those efforts involved significant, city-wide citizen involvement and input. As applied to pedestrian facilities in particular, this proposal back-doors a significant rollback from these previous civic commitments through a process with comparatively limited citizen involvement. This to me is a profound concern in an effort that is intended to guide the development of infrastructure such as that represented by East Link, nor in one intended to guide development of new residential communities as envisioned by the City.

In our zeal to adopt, we are clearly jeopardizing some fundamental, foundational elements of the Comprehensive Plan. This plan is the primary reason this Commission exists, and to use a relatively obscure subarea plan to change elements of City-wide master plans is problematic and perhaps an unfortunate precedent.

<u>Concerns with quality of technical work</u>
I feel obligated to call out some singularly troubling work presented to the Commission on the transportation elements of the project. When work done in my field of expertise is this consistently and demonstrably poor, it only generates sincere concern over the quality of the product on topics in which I don't have the same level of expertise.

I cannot determine (nor do I care) if the issue rests with the consultant, the internal City review, or some other administrative influence, but again we have had design concepts presented to us that profoundly contradict adopted state and federal guidelines and which frankly fall short of commonly acknowledged best practices in transportation facility planning and design. I am deeply concerned when a fundamental element of design (scale) is misrepresented in an effort to downplay the impact of a particular proposed street cross-section. I am unconvinced that what was shown to us was a simple mistake. If lay Planning Commissioners are discovering basic errors in the printed product on Wednesday night, then something has gone seriously sideways in the development of that product.

That simply is not an acceptable performance level for the citizens of Redmond to expect in work conducted in their name and on their dime.

<u>Station Area Planning Is Important Outside Urban Centers, Too</u>
The Planning Commission has worked under the direction from staff that we are not trying in Marymoor to "compete with our urban centers". It is my belief that this as an issue effectively ended with the regional adoption of not ST3, but ST2. ST2 lays out clearly where future transit stations are to be located, including Overlake, NE 40th (Overlake Technology Center/Microsoft), Marymoor, and Downtown. The presence of Marymoor as a station site has been known since 2008 (9 years ago), and , truth be told, several years before that as planning concepts were developed.

During these intervening years, the City has responded to the coming of light rail to **downtown** in a number of ways, all of which have incorporated significant public, capital investment:

- DEWCS
- Redmond Downtown Central Connector acquisition, planning and development
- Uncoupling Cleveland Street and Redmond Way
- Redmond Downtown Park acquisition, planning and development

This has resulted in a virtual avalanche of new residential and commercial development, <u>as the City intended</u>.

In Overlake, a similar pattern has played out:

- Redevelopment of Group Health site
- Major surface water and storm water initiatives
- Major urban design and planning program for 152nd Ave and station area

- Support for design and development of three (3) bridges across SR 520

This has also resulted in a virtual avalanche of new residential and commercial development, as the City intended.

In stark contrast, at Marymoor we have a late start, direction not to compete with the urban centers, and no identifiable public infrastructure projects or funding for same. Transit is an investment whose depreciation can extend for at least 80-100 years. We can't make the world safe for business in Marymoor, nor can we unilaterally ban the flow of automobiles from Sammamish. What we can do – what I believe we must do – is lay the groundwork to use this unique opportunity to create a district that serves the residents of this community at least as much as we are subsidizing transit access for other communities. This effort represents in many respects a good start, but that effort is crippled by an indefensible traffic management strategy, poor development (or understanding) of transportation facility design concepts, an awkward initial proposed relationship between parking infrastructure and housing/walk routes and perhaps a lack of complete understanding of the needs of our partners and community associations which exist in and adjacent to the district.

This needs repair.

Summary

There is a rush to the finish line which troubles me here, as it has occasionally on other issues before the Commission. We've known (as the City Administration has known) for almost a decade that Link was coming to Redmond, and we knew pretty clearly where the stations would be. We have bent over backwards to channel time and dollars to the two urban center station areas (totally justified), to a station surrounded by ONE private enterprise that is only partly in an urban center - and then there is Marymoor. This station is – make no mistake - designed to serve the needs of the City of Sammamish. Our city has had lots of time to bring a fully developed station area plan to the public, one which addresses legitimate needs and concerns in our community - yet that is not exactly what we have before us. We never got a "whole plan" - a document in which the specific technical recommendations could be readily assessed against the foundational goals and visions for this increasingly critical area of our city. What we have instead is a somewhat byzantine collection of disparate elements of past plans which the City wanted to correct. It reads more like an errata sheet than a plan.

The mere act of giving this package a Yea recommendation is not itself a measure of success, neither for the material before us nor of us collectively as a Planning Commission.

I do believe the situation is salvageable, but it will require the City to recommit to fundamental principles of planning, public involvement, design, and development to activate this vision. Marymoor cannot and will not compete with an economically boiling Overlake and Downtown for development. As such, it would appear as though the time has long passed for the City to be viewing the provision of clearly needed infrastructure and fiscally sustainable development to support Link as in any way being "competitive" with Overlake and Downtown.

If this is to become something more socially and economically vital than a parking lot for the benefit of people living outside Redmond, we need to do better. This is not a case of the perfect getting in the way of the good. If it were good, I would have voted aye on the proposal. Better (good) to me means that we provide a higher level of fiscal performance in allowable development, a commitment to fulfilling the vision of Redmond residents in the development of affordable housing, development of truly pedestrian friendly streets, effective management of high levels of induced traffic, application of design best practices in the development of the East Lake Sammamish Trail, protection of the existing business environment, and ultimately to the creation of a neighborhood that takes full advantage of its location and proximity to transit to meet our collective expectations for work, living and mobility.

We simply aren't there yet.

Phil Miller
Commissioner