

City of Bellingham Candidates

Candidate responses were not edited by Whatcom Watch.

Candidates were asked to keep their answers to 100 words or less.

Candidates reviewed their answers in the layout before the paper was sent to the printer.

Background: Washington State Initiative Measure No. 517 titled Protect the Initiative Act will appear on the general election ballot. The initiative establishes protections for citizens who participate in the initiative and referendum process. The final sentence in Section 4 of the initiative reads: "This section may not be construed in any way to impede the right to legal review of the sufficiency of valid voter signatures or post-election legal review; however, under no circumstances may an initiative be prohibited from submission to the people for a vote if sufficient valid voter signatures are submitted." If Initiative 517 is passed it will prohibit the city of Bellingham from challenging initiatives and preventing them from appearing on the ballot.

Do you support Initiative 517?

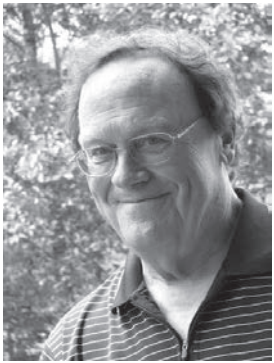
Background: The city proposes to build an \$8 million overwater walkway to connect Boulevard Park and the Cornwall Landfill area. The project has been on hold for two years because it will impact Lummi Nation treaty rights.

Are you in favor of building the overwater walkway?

Background: The public has voiced strong and fairly consistent objections to the proposed waterfront plan, regarding public process, habitat protection, working wage jobs, clean-up standards, parks, use of the ASB structure (former G-P treatment lagoon), and privatization of publicly-owned land.

Are you in favor of the waterfront plan as currently proposed by the Port? What, if any, issues do you think need to be addressed further before the waterfront plan is finalized?

Bellingham City Council — At-Large



Bob Burr

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Yes. There are some provisions related to paid signature gatherers that I wish were not there, but this will be the first Tim Eyman initiative I have ever supported. I am an unabashed supporter of the initiative process because it rests power in the people where it belongs. The City going to Court to block a vote on the Citizens Bill Of Rights signed by 10,000 of us was the precipitating cause of my candidacy. The City should have made its case to the voters, rather than denying us a vote. I-517 will put an end to such voter disrespect.

No. The \$8 million pricetag is too steep and the probability of negative environmental impact is too high. Mitigation is inadequate. The existing trail offers beautiful views, which would be obstructed by the walkway. The question is moot in any event. By treaty, traverse of the waters would have to be approved by the Lummi Nation. Unlike those of us who came later, the Lummi are stewards of the land and water. They are not going to approve the walkway. This is one more thing for which to thank the Lummi.

No. The waterfront plan is seriously flawed for all of the above reasons. The Port and the Mayor are trying to push this plan down our throats. It is a developers' wet dream, but a public nightmare. The Council needs to send staff back to the drawing boards. We need better plans to deal with the toxic waste, and a Community Benefits Agreement to assure that the jobs created are living wage rather than poverty wage. We need a working waterfront, not one for the wealthy. No marina. No high-end, high-rise condos. Habitat Plan? There is none. Connectivity is ignored.



Roxanne Murphy

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No. I stand united with the Washington State Democratic Party, Mainstream Republicans of Washington, the Seattle Seahawks, Safeway and others in opposing I-517 because I think it goes too far. It's too intrusive to government practices, the rights of businesses and organizations, and it's too self-serving to person who presented this initiative, Tim Eyman, whose for-profit business is initiative writing.

The current overwater walkway from Boulevard Park leading to the Fairhaven District has proven to be a tremendous and gorgeous recreation and community asset. That's why I would support such a project between Boulevard Park and the Cornwall Landfill. I also think this is another reason to elect me, as a member of the Nooksack Indian Tribe, who would work so hard to be the best and most respectful ombudsman between the City of Bellingham and the Lummi Nation.

I support the community input that's being provided to the Bellingham City Council and the Port Commission regarding ensuring that the environmental remediation of the property is completed to the highest standard. I like the way the current plan works to balance various interests in terms of park development, open space, environmental protection and maritime job development. Additional research should be done to see if the area is fit for residential development due to liquefaction considerations. I also support the Waterfront Redevelopment plans so our people can have the kind of living-wage jobs that are so needed in our community.

Bellingham City Council — Ward 2



Gene Knutson

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Mr. Knutson has taken a two-month leave of absence from the City Council for back surgery so he is not available to answer the questions.

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Bellingham City Council — Ward 4



Clayton Petree

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Yes I support Initiative 517. Our State Constitution says, "The first power reserved by the people is the initiative." Washington citizens have had their first power threatened in recent years and I-517 protects this citizen gathering process. Additional time given for signature gathering will reduce mistakes or fraud. It is disturbing we have to define what interfering is with words such as, "shoving," "spitting," "screaming," From section one of our State Constitution, "All political power is inherent in the people, and governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and are established to protect and maintain individual rights."

My family enjoys the existing overwater walkway tremendously on our frequent walks from Downtown to Fairhaven. However, I question the need to spend \$8 million tax dollars on a second overwater walkway while many growing neighborhoods remain underserved. Also, the city is now spending \$400,000 to improve the rail crossing in Boulevard Park to the existing walkway. I propose we plan habitat restoration along the water's edge, remove the extensive invasive blackberries impeding the view from our current walkway along the bluff, and create interspersed parklets to provide the near water experience and views of Bellingham Bay we all value.

Cleanup should remain at the "unrestricted" level on port and city property to assure a more complete cleanup and ensure public and environmental health. We should improve wildlife habitat where possible. The log pond, Cornwall Beach and shores along the railway offer tremendous habitat opportunity.

Bellingham must avoid industrial gentrification; the displacing of important living-wage jobs for other things better located in nearby downtown or Old Town areas. If the ASB pond is used as a marina we should consider purposing it as a working (fishing fleet, etc.) marina. The existing marina could be expanded to accommodate the recreational fleet.



Pinky Vargas

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"No, I don't support I-517. While the initiative process itself is a fantastic opportunity for citizens to engage in the governing process, I don't see a real benefit here for voters or property owners. It would prevent property owners from having control over signature gathering on their property. It puts signature gathers in an unusual elevated protected status only shared by funeral mourners. It enacts brutal penalties on business owners who just want the signature gathers to stop bothering their customers. We managed to pass Death with Dignity, Gay Marriage and Legalize Marijuana without it."

"Yes, the walkway would provide continuous waterfront access from downtown to Fairhaven with amazing shoreline views of our spectacular bay. The people of Bellingham crave access to our waterfront. Look how busy Boulevard Park and Taylor Dock are. This is an incredible opportunity and we've done a lot of the hard work already, including funding. This project has gone through extensive feasibility plans and I believe it makes sense for our city. I truly hope we are able to work with the Lummi Tribe to determine a resolution that will permit all our people to enjoy the waterfront."

"The council has a big challenge in learning all the elements in the plan and ensuring we are using our tax dollars wisely while creating a draw for our city that is economically and environmentally sustainable. I'd like to see complete and proper cleanup, and more than one option being proposed for the ASB lagoon. I am saddened that we lost so much park area around the log pond. I believe we should be repurposing the pier and not spending tax dollars on removing it. It's a very practical space, let's get creative with it."

Bellingham City Council — Ward 6



Michael Lilliquist

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The case law on voter initiatives is a legal tangle, and the law would certainly benefit from reforms. As things stand, the court requires some objections to be dealt with prior to the ballot, while others can be taken up only after the vote. Initiative 517 would simplify matters by consolidating all challenges after voting. I support this. Section 3, however, is written so broadly that it raises concerns in my mind. For example, it outlaws "maintaining an intimidating presence" even when standing a considerable distance from petition gatherers. This is not the standard we apply in similar matters.

Like the walkway from Taylor Ave dock, an overwater walkway from Boulevard Park to the future Cornwall Beach park on the waterfront would be a great public benefit. This project has been publicly vetted for several years. Designed well to minimize impacts on shallow-water eelgrass, it would help to achieve the Waterfront Futures vision of reconnecting Bellingham with the Bay, yet keep people off vulnerable tidal lands. I support this. The Lummi Nation has legitimate concerns about impacts on fishing access near the shoreline, and these concerns must be addressed first. A proposal to restore fishing access is in progress.

It's impossible to say all that should be said on this topic within the 100-word limit. The current proposal is close to striking the right balance among many goals, but there are a number of shortcomings I would like to address prior to approval. I see problems in shoreline management, transportation, and financial planning. I also see shortcomings in infrastructure planning, and the environmental review process under the auspices of the Port and state agencies. In addition to the plan itself, city council must also consider four additional agreements and regulatory documents, which need equal scrutiny.