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Burke Gilman Trail in Lake Forest Park – A statement from Cascade Bicycle Club

Thursday, May 31, 2007

On Friday, June 1, Cascade Bicycle Club and King County will present arguments on Lake Forest Park Ordinance 951 to the Growth Management Hearings Board.

Cascade Bicycle Club believes that Ord. 951 violates the state Growth Management Act and will argue to have it invalidated. Cascade contends that the six Lake Forest Park City Council members who voted in January 2007 for Ord. 951 have turned their backs on federal, state and county trail development standards, and have disregarded three professional engineering reports that explain how to improve the corridor. In effect, the six council members have prioritized a few private driveways over the rights and safety of thousands of public trail users.

The Burke-Gilman Trail is in a state of neglect and disrepair through Lake Forest Park, and we want to see this addressed according to recognized safety standards, those that the Council chose to ignore.

In seeking to overturn Ord. 951, Cascade Bicycle Club is advocating that King County have the ability to redevelop the Burke-Gilman Trail through Lake Forest Park according to federal, state and county traffic safety standards. Ord. 951 would apply an arbitrary set of standards and require the trail not meet accepted guidelines in order for the City to permit its redevelopment.

According to King County Executive Ron Sims, Ord. 951 would make it "impracticable for the County to improve the trail to meet current and future demand." Kevin Brown, Director of King County's Parks and Recreation Division, wrote that should 951 pass, "King County will need to take a close look at the viability of this project -- i.e. whether to allocate funds elsewhere..."

The stakes are big here. Losing would open the door for any municipality to apply unsafe or non-standard conditions to regional trails, thereby impeding the development and maintenance of trails according to accepted, uniform standards. This case sets a precedent for all future trail development and reconstruction.

On Friday, Cascade and King County will argue that Lake Forest Park cannot frustrate the redevelopment of the Burke-Gilman Trail to such an extent as to make it impossible to reconstruct. As with other Essential Public Facilities, cities may put conditions on regional trails. However, under the state Growth Management Act they cannot deny their siting or redevelopment. Through Ord. 951, the Lake Forest Park City Council reserved the right to deny King County a permit to redevelop the Trail, which is strictly prohibited by the Act.

We don't want to see a sub-standard trail put in place. We fear that it's not inconceivable for King County to close this portion of the trail, which would leave it to fall into total disrepair.

Thousands of cyclists and pedestrians who use the Burke-Gilman Trail daily would ultimately suffer from this loss.

A decision from the Growth Management Hearings Board is expected in July.

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