

## THE GRISTLE

**MILLION MORON MARCH:** While debate rages whether the weekend's TEA Party rally in Washington, D.C., exceeded the numbers who attended Barack Obama's inauguration in November (with some crowd estimates carrying a greater weight of being probable than others), the TEA Party event Sept. 11 in Bellingham did draw a larger crowd to the Mount Baker Theatre than attended Obama's inauguration there in November. By all measures, the event was a success—in terms of the numbers who came, the quality of events organized and the manner in which they were presented, to the evident enjoyment of the crowd. Former Bellingham Finance Director Lynn Carpenter and her fellow organizers put on a tremendous show.

Gate totals at the 1,500-seat theater were in excess of 1,300, making it one of the largest political rallies in Bellingham's recent history; and a great organizing event for what is to come—the calculated use of national malaise to trigger powerful consequences in local government.

It should not be mistaken as coincidence the event was emceed by Bill Quehrn, executive director of the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County; nor should the message Quehrn delivered be mistaken: *Channel the passion by registering to vote, then exercise that passion at the earliest opportunity at the polls in November.*

Staged on a date of national significance—the anniversary of terrorist attacks in New York and Washington (although having very little material devoted to those events)—Friday's event brilliantly sidesteps state reporting requirements for electioneering in local campaigns while creating a powerful organizing and funding tool for more of the same.

"Tea Party movement activists," observes *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins, "range from geeky Ron Paulists who obsess about the money supply to conspiracy theorists who believe that Barack Obama is a noncitizen brought here by people who hate this country and had the foresight to plant a birth notice in a Hawaiian newspaper 48 years ago, just in case they ever needed it."

"The one thing that unites them," Collins continues, "seems to be a sense of inchoate rage. Although mentioning it makes them really, really mad."

Inchoate rage was certainly an ingredient at the Mount Baker Theatre rally, peppered with similarly vaporish expressions of patriotism, love of God and guns, lots of vinegar, frosted over with a peevish bewilderment about how things got so terrible so quickly. After all, these are the people who had so little but praise as they watched President George Bush transform a \$236.2 billion federal surplus into a \$1.3 trillion federal deficit in a handful of years; who cheered through the warrantless wiretapping, the corrosive abuses of the Patriot Act, extreme rendition and torture, political prosecutions, and two ill-conceived wars; who gaped as economic bubbles and banking fraud and environmental and energy misadventure vacuumed value from their labors and lives; and who gawked as rising medical insurance costs pulverized their earnings. They equate divergent opinion with tyranny; loss and the political wilderness with apocalypse. These pensioners and laborers are truly the "put-upon generation," old white victims, who wear their entitlements on their sleeves and who weep and



# views

OPINIONS ↔ THE GRISTLE

BY CATHY LEHMAN

## Parsing the Parcels

COUNTY STRUGGLES TO COMPLY WITH STATE LAWS

**WHEN IT** comes to growth and development, two sides of the same shiny, speculative coin exist in symbiosis: rural and urban planning. Focus on one without the other and you could wake up 20 years down the road in the parking lot of Alderwood Mall. Hit them both in equal measure and you pack a simultaneous one-two punch against sprawl; working in tandem to encourage most people to live in existing cities and save the rural lands for better uses.

In Washington State, most land use protections are covered under the Growth Management Act (GMA), adopted by the state Legislature nearly 20 years ago. The GMA requires fast-growing counties (yes, that's Whatcom) to protect the character of their rural areas and prevent sprawling, suburban-type development in order to protect water quality, working farms, working forests and our environment.

Some of the most critical planning opportunities that will dictate the next 20 years of our growth and development in Whatcom County (i.e. livability) are going on between

now and the end of this year.

There's been some hubbub lately about the supposed "Land Grab" at the county level as staff, planning commissioners and citizens have been working to bring local policies and zoning into compliance with the GMA by reducing the spread of urban-style development in rural areas. That's the rural element of our comprehensive planning, and it's critical to preventing sprawl. But let's flip that shiny coin over; Whatcom County's got urban issues to clean up right now as well, and we're working on a state-imposed deadline of Dec., 1, 2009 to fix them.

The County Executive released his recommendations for the revision of UGAs this summer based on staff input from the last year of community and planning processes. The prognosis is pretty good, with his proposal citing four key values:

- Protect our water supplies and environment
- Agricultural land should be conserved
- Growth should emphasize infill
- Distribution of growth should be balanced

Some of the more interesting recommendations include:

**BELLINGHAM:** Removes sensitive watershed areas from the UGA and asks city officials to develop a strategy for filling in existing space within the city's current footprint. *Two points for recovery efforts of impaired Whatcom and Padden watersheds, and setting an expectation of wise infill in our largest city.*

**BLAINE:** Acknowledges the roughly 10 times oversized UGA Blaine currently enjoys by recommending a reduction of the entire "West Blaine" UGA area near Semiahmoo Spit. *Score one for shellfish.*

**EVERSON:** Allows for the swap-out of one piece of prime ag land for the addition of a different piece of prime ag land, representing no real gain for Whatcom County's ag preservation goals. *Plus one point for removing prime ag land from the UGA; minus one for adding prime ag land back into the UGA. This helps farms how?*

**FERNDALE:** Recognizes the UGA is twice as big as necessary for their projected future population, Ferndale's request to reduce their UGA modestly became the removal of nearly 2,000 acres. *Two points for preventing sprawl up and down the I-5 corridor.*

**LYNDEEN:** Reduces the UGA expansion into prime and currently farmed ag land from more than 300 acres to 172 acres. *Minus 1 point for half-heartedly supporting the local agriculture industry (which contributes approximately \$326 million annually to our county's economy) by allowing the paving of farmland; plus half a point for reducing the city's original request.*

While it's true the Executive's proposal does call for reduced UGAs in general, it still allows for some expansion of Lynden into prime ag land. It's about half of their request, but it's an expansion of urban development onto 172 acres of prime ag land nonetheless. That is