

Amber & Andrew Borner

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November 19, 2019

San Juan County Council Members
350 Court St. No.1
Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Dear Council Members,

I recently learned of your consideration to close the Shaw County Park to overnight camping, eliminating its *only* revenue stream. I urge you to keep our campground open to campers. ***The Shaw County Park is the one county service, outside of Public Works and Fire, that we have physically on Shaw that benefits our residents, property owners, visitors, businesses, and tourists alike.*** Your simple decision to wipe out overnight camping on Shaw has far-reaching consequences to our island community, the county, and beyond.

I believe you may have underestimated the value Shaw Islanders, as well as county residents, put on camping at Shaw County Park. The campground is precisely the type of low-impact tourism that our small community can sustain and support. Closing the park to overnight visitors would:

- eliminate the one place on Shaw where visitors can stay overnight
- eliminate one of the best campgrounds in Western Washington easily accessible via ferry to county residents from all islands (and easily bike-able for families!)
- eliminate an integral link to the Cascadia Marine Trail - Shaw Park is a centrally located stop with a dedicated campsite for those traveling through our county by human-powered boats, making paddling distances between various points in our county reasonable and achievable
- completely wipe out Shaw's limited tourism
- hobble our General Store
- impact our farmers who sell their goods to campers from their farm stands and the Store
- affect local artisans whose only local outlet is the General Store.

Closing down our campground goes against the Parks Mission to “protect, promote, and enhance our County Parks and recreational opportunities...for the benefit of current and future generations.” In fact, when the county opens its reservations to county residents in March, 30% of the reservations made are at Shaw County Park. This is evidence of the value of our park not only to Shaw Islanders, but also to county residents. Outside tourists frequently use this centrally-located island to make day trips to other islands during their visit, or they tack on overnight stays on other islands before or after their visits, bringing tax dollars to other islands as well. Campgrounds are the last affordable way for families to visit our islands, and by my count you have removed 16% of the county campsites (that are close to 100% full in the summer), which is directly in opposition to your mission.

Furthermore, making Shaw Park day-use-only does not eliminate the need for the park to continue to staff the park to maintain the park buildings, outhouses, mow, and remove trash and recycling. In addition, it would require staff to open and close the park in the morning and evening each day. However, you have removed the one source of revenue, making Shaw County Park a permanent red stain on the budget. Having the park closed at night would require some sort of enforcement, as squatting, fire danger, and vandalism would likely increase as a result. As you know, we do not have any law enforcement on Shaw, so calling the off-island sheriff to respond to issues caused by overnight nuisances could likely cost more than you save in the long run.

When you consider what to cut, I hope you take a step back and consider the direct services you provide to Shaw. Take a look at the property tax revenue that Shaw generates from its assessed property value (\$191,110,955 in 2018). Then consider the amount of services the county provides *directly* to Shaw Island - we do not receive senior services, public health services, even the Land Bank has not spent a single cent on Shaw! I do not have access to these numbers/answers, but I assume that we receive a disproportionately lower number of county dollars and services relative to what we generate for the county.

I recall in a not too distant election we voted to pass the levy lid lift, increasing the levy rate from 78 cents to 85 cents per \$1000, which among other things was touted to secure funding for county parks. We just voted to increase funding to the Parks, Recreation, and Fair by \$477,000* which accounts for more than 28% of the levy increase! Shaw is already excluded from and/or has reduced access to many of the services served by the levy, but we share an equal burden. The park is one place we could benefit directly from the levy and you have stolen it away. You have conducted a bait and switch on us, waiting to discuss this until after the election and levy has passed, and quietly adding it to the agenda during a holiday week.

I know that in times of budget shortfalls it is difficult to decide which services to cut, and there is never an easy answer. You have vastly underestimated the value Shaw Islanders and county residents place on our campground. While eliminating overnight camping on Shaw erases many of your Park budget woes, it creates cascading problems for our small community. I am certain you can consider more creative strategies to keep the Parks budget in the black without wiping out our campground. This seemingly simple decision has far reaching consequences. Don't take away this valuable resource from our residents, visitors, tourists and county. I hope you carefully reconsider your approach to the Parks, Recreation, and Fair budget shortfall.

Sincerely yours,

Amber Borner

Andrew Borner

*\$100,000 for parks and fair maintenance, \$326,000 for maintenance and operation of county parks, and \$51,000 for general fund support of the San Juan County Fair.