Balancing Conservation and Business: Gophers & the HCP

It is hard to tell anymore where conservation starts and personal property rights stop. Nowhere is that more clear than with the convoluted rules and processes that currently surround the issue of the Mazama pocket gopher.

Thurston County is working with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to create a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to protect the threatened Mazama pocket gopher and other species on the Endangered Species list. The plan is the result of USFWS rejection of the existing protections in the County's Critical Area Ordinance (CAO) with a primary focus on the gopher.

USFWS has called for an expansion of those protections to the land around a gopher hole and even the soils that lead up to it, further encroaching on private property and stifling business and commercial ventures desperately needed for our County.

I recently voted against the consulting firm and memorandum of agreement with US Fish and Wildlife, which set into motion the over-reaching building permit application process that determines gopher activity. It involves a gauntlet of bureaucratic hoops and application delays that will discourage owners' use, development or sale of their land.

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Opening Doors for Improved County Safety

It is hard to improve the safety within our communities here in Thurston County if we are bogged down in government stalemates and indecision.

Since taking office in January, I have worked to break down “fossilized” behaviors and bring people together, moving beyond roadblocks and producing actionable items.

As a result, two taxpayer supported public safety facilities that had been vacant and languishing in bureaucracy are now open.

The County’s Accountability and Restitution Center (ARC) and the Scott Lake Fire Station have finally opened their doors to help improve our County’s wellbeing and the safety of its citizens, making it a better place to live.

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Helping Veterans Transition

Honoring and assisting our U.S. Veterans who have served our Country is a high priority for me and close to my heart as I served in the military for 25 years until I retired in 2012.

Thurston County has a Veterans Advisory Board that helps homeless or low income Veterans. However, the County has other great programs that also serve our Vets.

In one particular is “Vet to Ag” that assists those transitioning out of the military and into a career in agriculture.

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Future Activities

What’s Next:

Bud hosts a Town Hall - Griffin Fire Department HQ, Sept 9, 6pm

Removal of School Size Limits in Rural Zones – August 19

Contact Commissioner Blake

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You can follow County updates at www.thurston.wa.us