

February 9, 2014

To: Haines Borough Planning Commission

Re: Heliport Conditional Use Permit Public Hearing  
Lot 10, Sundberg Subdivision II

Planning Commission,

As property owners within 200' of the above listed property, we appreciate you taking our comments into consideration while deciding on the conditional use permit (CUP) requested for a helipad. We are disappointed to see that this issue has arisen once more as it is quite divisive for the community in the 26 mile area. While attending the Planning Commission meeting on March 14, 2013, the general attitude was that the proposed zoning change was a direct response to the previously proposed CUP, and is indicative of the opposition to this CUP. It seems unlikely that general opinions on the CUP have changed. That said, when revisiting the Borough Manager's Report (January 19, 2012) recommending that the CUP be denied we see it states that:

"1. The use is so located on the site as to avoid undue noise and other nuisances and dangers."

I believe this condition has not been met and that heliport operations at this particular site are a use which produces undue noise as that phrase is used in the CUP criteria no matter where the proposed use is located on the property. I do not believe the Esker Ridge will provide sufficient sound dampening for adjacent residential properties.

...

"4. The specific development scheme of the use is consistent and in harmony with the comprehensive plan and surrounding land uses."

The Borough's comprehensive plan did not directly address the issue of siting of heliports within the Borough, but did conclude heliski companies like SEABA should be "encouraged to develop areas away from residences through creation of a commercial recreation zone where heliports associated with heli-skiing operations would be a use by right". Comprehensive Plan p.72. The proposed conditional use is inconsistent with encouraging heliski operations to be located "away from residences" as this operation would be literally next door to residential property. Furthermore, there are neighboring lots for sale with similar dimensions as ours, and of others in this zone, which suggests the primary use of the area will continue to be

residential. Regardless of where the proposed use is located on the property, I do not believe development of a heliport at this location is consistent with and in harmony with surrounding uses which do not produce equivalent noise and levels of activity.

“5. The granting of the conditional use will not be harmful to the public safety, health or welfare.”

I believe granting the conditional use will be harmful to the general health and welfare of the community by introducing a use disturbing the peace and quiet valued by nearby property owners. I have considered whether dispersion of impacts associated with SEABA operations amongst 3 rather than two locations is an improvement to public welfare. In my opinion it is better for the public welfare to concentrate impacts rather than disperse them amongst an expanding number of permitted heliport sites.

...

“8. Comments received from property owners impacted by the proposed development have been considered and given their due weight.”

I have reviewed comments which not surprisingly fall on both sides of the issue. I believe consideration of public input is much more appropriate for the Commission than for the Borough Manager. So what is “due weight” for me is probably different from what is “due weight” for the Commission. I have placed relatively little weight on the comments as opposed to my own assessment of the collective community interest in heliport operations within the Borough in general based on hearing from residents for well over a year regarding this controversial interest. Segments of the community will not be happy regardless of the specific recommendation I make or the decision made by the Commission. This is partly the reason why I suggest an additional permit limitation should the Commission decide to grant the permit.”

Further the Haines Borough 2025 Comprehensive Plan states on page 94 that:

*“In 2011 one business proposed development of a heliport on its land on the Chilkat Lake Road, which raised concerns about neighborhood character, noise and safety. The planning commission and assembly denied the permit based on health, safety and welfare issues, but this raised a larger question of whether a heliport on public land should be developed to consolidate helicopter activity. To effectively plan for future heliport use the Borough should work to establish a criteria that clearly defines the public health, safety and welfare issues it desires to address, define the characteristics a suitable site would have such as acceptable noise levels and distance from residences, systematically evaluate possible sites,*

*and if a site is identified and developed, offer incentives (e.g. increased skier days) and disincentives to encourage its use.”*

We are not aware of any criteria has been defined for determining public health, safety, and welfare issues. There has been limited activity of the Borough working to examine or establish a public heliport site that will meet the needs of current and future heliport activities (Haines Borough Planning Commission Meeting Minutes from February 9, 2012), and there does not appear to be much that has changed for this CUP, aside from moving the proposed location by a small distance.

As we have stated in previous letters on this matter, we are active skier and take no issue with heliskiing in general; however after consulting with a number of our neighbors and reviewing prior emails from SEABA where they indicated that up to 16 takeoffs and landings would occur per day between the hours of 0800 and 1800 (roughly every 45 minutes) from February until April, we feel that this endeavor will be counter to the generally quiet and residential aspect of the neighborhood. Lastly we feel that granting this CUP will negatively impact the value of our property (CUP condition # 2) in both fiscal and “quality of life” terms, due to noise (not just decibels, but the type of noise as well). At this time we ask that the CUP be declined, again.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ben Williams & Gretchen Roffler  
Lot 2, Big Salmon Subdivision