

Attachment A: YMCA Rezone Applicant Comments

November 3 2022

Lewis County Board of County Commissioners
351 NW North St.
Chehalis, WA 98532

Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the YMCA of Greater Seattle, I want to thank you for your consideration of our application to redefine the use of 500 acres that the Y owns at Mineral Lake. I also want to express our appreciation for the thorough review and assessment conducted by the Lewis County staff and Planning Commission, which led to their unanimous recommendation for approval.

The issue before you concerns a change in the land use designation for this private property now owned by the YMCA. We recognize there are many questions about the project, as evidenced by comments at the Nov. 1 hearing. While these project-level issues will need to be resolved before the binding site plan is approved, they do not determine whether or not the proposed overlay is an appropriate land use for the site under state and county guidelines.

As a nonprofit organization, we have a responsibility to operate for the benefit of the broader community. We meet that responsibility by providing opportunities for youth to learn, grow, and thrive, and the proposed camp at Mineral Lake will be a new setting to offer those opportunities.

A project like the one we are proposing for Mineral Lake requires both significant investment and a long-term commitment. Our existing camps have operated in their current locations and maintained strong local community relationships for more than 100 years apiece. So the proposal at Mineral Lake is not something that we enter into lightly or take on without conducting research and due diligence to ensure that the project is viable. In identifying our Mineral Lake property, we spent more than five years analyzing other potential sites throughout western Washington for their capacity to accommodate the building and operation of a new youth overnight camp and outdoor education facility.

The application and review process has clearly demonstrated that the proposed use of the property for a youth camp is a viable use for this property and meets the criteria for approval for the proposed overlay. It will provide the youth and families of Lewis County, as well as from other parts of western Washington, with new camping and outdoor education opportunities. It also will help the state meet its goal of providing high-quality outdoor education experiences to all 5th and 6th grade students.

I encourage you to review the entire application and supporting materials we have provided throughout this process. It is also important to remember that the draft ordinance before you contains clear boundaries and restrictions. It would exclude the development of most of the

allowed uses within the “master planned resort” designation. The remaining narrow segment of facilities that would be allowed by the ordinance are consistent with the type of low-impact youth camp we are proposing, assuring that the bulk of the property is preserved in its natural state.

We also know that any creation of a new camp will require answers to additional questions that you and the community may have. While we have begun work in some areas and shared initial data gathered, the more detailed process and formal presentation of the answers to questions on water, septic treatment, transportation, and other issues will begin after an affirmative decision on the current land use question, as they would for any other land use project.

There were questions regarding the education aspect of the youth camp. The curriculum for Mineral Lake will be developed in conjunction with local educators, the Nisqually Indian tribe, and other subject matter experts. The curriculum includes hands-on, experiential learning opportunities that align with state standards for 6th grade science, incorporate specific attributes of the site, and foster an appreciation and love for the outdoors. The Y currently works with a number of schools across Washington to deliver outdoor education.

While we might not have all the answers to questions at this point, our ongoing commitment is to continue to involve the community, because as land owners in Mineral we want to continue to be good neighbors. We will keep reaching out and embrace open and respectful dialogue. We are confident that we can simultaneously meet our mission to serve youth, protect the beauty and natural environment of Mineral Lake and its surrounding forest land, and contribute to the health of the Mineral community.

There is a lot of work to be done before this camp can come to life. There are many questions that must be answered to your satisfaction before the binding site plan is issued and the physical work to create the actual camp can begin. The first step is to confirm that a youth camp is a viable use for this private property, as prescribed by state and county guidelines.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gwen Ichinose Bagley
SVP, Youth Development Officer
YMCA of Greater Seattle