

To: Sharon Rice, Hearing Examiner

From: Tonni Johnston, Thurston County Citizen

RE: Opposition to Project 2022103702

- Project 2022103702 would alter Sense of Place
- Project 2022103702 is premature prior to decisions being made about the effects on property value and taxes
- Project 2022103702 allows inconsistent disturbances to upland residents compared with other permits

The shorelines and waterways of Puget Sound hold aesthetic, cultural, social, recreational, environmental, and commercial values for us all. Reigning over the what, when, where, and how is a task I commend you for taking on. I hope you'll consider two fairness issues I bring forward today that hold deep meaning to me. Please also join me to see what I mean about the sense of place I hold in Henderson Inlet.

The inlet as a place is a natural resource. It is multilayered and rich in subtleties. All its personalities, partnerships, feuds, compromises, and newcomers make it what it is. Henderson Inlet, with its unique history of stewards, inhabitants, and visitors defies definition, categorization, and measurement, but it seems that I cannot explain what I fear this project will take away from our inlet's sense of place without resorting to numbers, and for that, I apologize.

On the way to Henderson Inlet, let's stop at this house on Totten (feel free to contact me for its address if needed).



This is the place my husband and I very nearly bought and where we might be living now if we had. After watching the sunset one weekend evening from its deck, we were ready to make an offer. Now that we'd experienced what evening was like, I only needed to test one last hunch which required me to be there first thing in the morning.

I was stunned by what I saw and mostly by what I heard. By 5:50 a.m. marine engines were already in work mode – there was a chugging motor ten doors to the North sitting at moorage while small high-pitched outboards, still in darkness, hurried to the west, then south, and all around, *zing zing zing*, like busy bees. I knew the cabin lights and headlights represented hard workers who provided food for my

community, but our goal in relocating was to escape the sights and sounds of the city, and we would not get that here.

People couldn't believe we were choosing to make our home way over on Henderson Inlet instead. It was SO FAR out there. And so much more expensive, but we hung on the word realtors use to describe Johnson Point: pristine. The value to us was to live in close proximity to neighbors but to reside with as little industrial sound and lights as possible. We desired a sense of place where nature could offer its nourishment and protection. What this place has grown in us is an uncompromising conviction to protect and give back.

The place we are fortunate enough to call home has increased by 207%. Yes, we've been here a long time, almost 14 years now, though we're still called newbies. We're not the only ones to find home in the sense of place Johnson Point gives and to never want to leave. The place we almost bought, in the vicinity of shellfish industry over on Totten, has increased too but has grown 15% less over the exact same period of time.

The diminished value caused by nearby shellfish industry is not a new discovery. The Thurston County Resource Stewardship Council, which now seems to be called the Thurston County Planning and Economic Development Department, states that the way to achieve the balance between industrial geoduck farming and its impact on property values is to reduce the value of properties in the vicinity of industrial geoduck farms. I quote the council, ***"Affected property owners may request a change in valuation for property tax purposes."***

It is nice to offer homeowners the option to ask for reduced taxes, but where is the discussion about allowing industrial companies into our neighborhoods in the first place which is causing the devaluation? Residential land is being compromised by having industry so close to private property which wouldn't be allowed if you were doing residential zoning. You wouldn't let industrial companies move into our residential neighborhoods and just say, "Live with it. You'll like it."

Then there is the issue of how much taxes are owed on these lands once they become commercially producing entities. The council cited examples of industrial-farmed geoducks from Nisqually Reach, the Carlyon Beach area, and Eld inlet, noting that the county collects only hundreds from some large commercial acreages while other similar pieces pay in the tens of thousands. Shouldn't the taxes that are to be collected and how that will affect county and state budgets be decided before issuing any more brand-new permits?

That the council has discussed industrial geoduck farming and its impact on property values in the vicinity of industrial geoduck farms shows that there have been attempts to make things fair and equitable. What is not fair or equitable is that properties that are nearest Henderson Inlet commercial geoduck tract #16150 have better protections than the ones that are included for this (also near) proposed project #2022103702. Over on tract #16150, ***"Harvest is only allowed during daylight hours to minimize disturbance to residents, and no harvest is allowed on Saturdays, Sundays, or state holidays."*** Whenever harvests are happening there, I see them from the shore and hear them from my house, just as I will if project #2022103702 is allowed to move forward. It's unfair that those of us within sight and earshot of a closer geoduck harvest area, project #2022103702, will be expected to live with a set of less stringent rules when it comes to disturbances.

As I close this memo, I again thank you for your careful consideration of Sense of Place and why it has value for all of us touched by Henderson Inlet and the greater Puget Sound, as you also weigh the fairness of property values and harvest rules. Please know I also have concerns about:

- The rights of upland residents.
- The pattern of every application getting approval.
- Documented forage fish sandy beaches which are supposed to be protected are getting converted to industrial use.
- The unprecedented and unsupervised introduction of plastics when the world is trying to stop them from going into our marine water.
- The removal and entrapment of natural life.
- The questionable accuracy and reliability of research including effects of non-native seeds and water filtering vs water cleansing.
- Boater rights, recreational access, navigable waters, and right of way.
- The fact that industry is allowed to hinder the growth and existence of some of the planet's most valuable rooted plants such as eelgrass and kelp.

Tonni Johnston's credentials include that she is a

Henderson Inlet and Johnson Point Resident at 9105 Otis Beach St NE, Olympia, WA 98516.

Her BMUS degree is from WWU. Her MA degree is from UW. She taught in our public schools for 30 years. She is a member of SPSCC Orchestra. She is a past board member of NTEF and currently serves on ProtectHendersonInlet.org. She can be contacted at tgjohnston80@gmail.com