

ESHB-1791 - 2023-24 SUMMARY

How and Why we LOST.

The 2019 law (SSB-5370) that formed the CACC restricted the Commission from recommending greenfield sites and existing airports in King County. The CACC utilized the unrestricted statewide aviation WSDOT study (WASP) in their evaluation which rated SE King County greenfield as among the favored sites due to proximity with the center of commerce. In October 2022 the CACC reluctantly announced their recommendation of 3 greenfield sites in Pierce and Thurston counties for continued Phase 3 analysis.

The SE King County site was restricted by law therefore CACC was unable to recommend it. However, WSDOT covertly continued their WASP Phase 3 analysis of the Enumclaw Plateau as a 4th potential greenfield site, undisclosed publicly. This subversive activity and lack of transparency misled and gaslit the rural Enumclaw community and Political Leaders to believe that Enumclaw Plateau was absolutely not under consideration, and completely “Off the Table.”

The CACC exclusion not only misled Enumclaw into complacency, but it also caused tremendous resentment against King County. The Pierce County leaders sited the “unfairness” of this position, yielding it as a weapon against Enumclaw. The CACC further disadvantaged the Enumclaw Plateau citizens by excluding them from the Phase 3 community outreach, keeping the Enumclaw community uninformed of the proceedings.

The two affected counties, Pierce & Thurston mounted substantial opposition efforts including support by their political leaders, tribal leaders, environmentalists, legislative lobbyist, as they railed against the CACC’s community outreach. Their opposition efforts caught the attention of Representatives Fey and Dent who seized their outrage, promising they would sponsor a bill to establish a new Work Group extinguishing the CACC before it could recommend a greenfield site, and would exclude Pierce & Thurston greenfield sites due to proximity of JBLM, and refocus the greenfield attention on the despised King County.

The resulting House Bill 1791 was introduced February 7th 2023, establishing a Commercial Aviation Work Group with an “emergency clause” to immediately replace the CACC. HB-1791 emphasized a comprehensive study with “No Exclusions”. However, HB-1791 contradicts itself by excluding consideration of “existing airports” in King County, similarly to the SSB-5370 except the statement excluding consideration of “additional aviation facilities” in King County was dropped. Therefore, the Enumclaw Plateau is 100% available for consideration and recommendation by the Work Group as a future commercial airport greenfield site.

Meanwhile, “**Save The Plateau**”, a small airport opposition group sponsored by the Enumclaw Plateau Community Association, developed the CARGO HUB Concept premised on:

SeaTac Airport capacity is the root of the problem, therefore logically should be included in the solution. Consideration of ALL existing airports allows study of optimizing SeaTac for “passenger only” service, and converting McChord airfield to a joint Military and Civilian Cargo facility. This optimization of existing facilities may be the key to eliminating the need for any greenfield site destroying rural a community. The solution will ultimately include several adjustments including optimizing existing Puget Sound region airports, expansion of Yakima and Spokane airports and modernization of rail service. The Commercial Aviation Work Group must be allowed to fairly evaluate All possibilities, **NO EXCLUSIONS**. Citizens deserve a fair and **UNBIASED SOLUTION** to the aviation capacity problem.

An 80 citizen **Save The Plateau** force mounted a 9-week email campaign to legislators, lobbying for an amendment to HB-1791. Their position stated that HB-1791 is BIASED toward Special Interests Groups. The intent of the bill is to fairly and “comprehensively” study the need for increased commercial aviation and cargo services. HB-1791 repeatedly states the word “comprehensive” 5 times. Therefore, consideration of **ALL EXISTING AIRPORTS** is essential and must not be subject to exclusion by special interests. The language in Section 3.3, to legally prohibit consideration of SeaTac and McChord airfield, is in direct conflict with the bill’s stated purpose of a comprehensive and inclusive study of ALL possible solutions, and therefore urge opposition to **HB-1791 unless AMENDED, STRIKING SECTION 3.3**

Unfortunately, the well-publicized CACC exclusion had successfully convinced the Enumclaw Plateau citizens and leaders to believe there was NO Airport Threat, thus **Save The Plateau’s** attempted defense during legislative session was largely unsupported. Sadly, every letter to legislators and political leaders went utterly unanswered.

Three weeks before the legislative session deadline, a King County Council representative emerged at the Senate Transportation Committee Public Hearing requesting an amendment “to exclude consideration of all sites in King County”. Eager to offer support, **Save The Plateau** immediately pivoted strategy attempting to support this hastily prepared amendment sponsored by Senator Fortunato, which unfortunately failed in the Senate Transportation Committee.

In the final week, **Save The Plateau** returned to their original position and doubled efforts to gain amendment sponsorship from Senators Mullet and Fortunato, and flood the legislative body creating awareness of the requested the HB-1791 Amendment Striking Section 3.3. In the final days remaining, Senator Fortunato non-committedly acknowledged the amendment his District 31 constituent were demanding. However, ultimately in the final 2 hours of the April 12th cut-off Senate Floor debate, he oddly introduced his own amendment “eliminating all greenfield sites previously identified by the CACC from further consideration”. This amendment fundamentally opposed the intent of HB-1791, therefore the unsupported erratically presented amendment immediately failed. Unfortunately, it preempted the citizen supported position to

CONSIDER ALL EXISTING AIRPORTS IN THE WORK GROUP STUDY, which was never presented on the Senate Floor.

HB-1791 was overwhelming supported by the ~7000+ citizen and political leaders of Pierce & Thurston opposition force, and easily passed the Legislature to become WA State LAW. The new Work Group will be required to submit an annual report to the Governor and Legislators starting July 1, 2024. As promised, the first report will eliminate Pierce and Thurston greenfield sites due to proximity to military operations. There is no end date to the Work Group study, therefore the fate of communities like Enumclaw will remain in perpetual uncertainty, indefinitely.

Going forward: The Work Group shall include several citizen representatives including 3 from Western Washington appointed by the Governor. This summary is intended to document the background serving the future representatives. Strong leadership will be needed to mount a defense of the Enumclaw Plateau's unique environmental resources, salmon spawning habitat, extensive agricultural conservation, and limitations (problematic airspace, isolation, excessive cost of development, lack of transportation and infrastructure, wetlands, and tribal concerns). Extensive King County assistance will be needed, providing administrative support, access to County departments and records including, growth management act, zoning, environmental, agricultural conservation, transportation, studies, reports and legal assistance.

The final move remaining is to appeal to Governor Inslee to VETO Section 3.3 of ESBH-1791. Unfortunately, this fatal Legislation was utterly ignored by SE King County residents, Community Leaders and Legislators who misguidedly believe there is no possible way an airport could or would ever be built in the Enumclaw Plateau. Let's pray they're right.

Respectfully submitted,
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Legislative District: 31
April 13th 2023



Thanks, Kym Anton

EPCA - SAVE The Plateau

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