

COPY

BEFORE THE WASHINGTON STATE
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

CITY OF FIFE,
Petitioner,

DOCKET TR-100098

v.

PREPARED TESTIMONY OF RUSSELL
BLOUNT

UNION PACIFIC RAILROAD,
Respondent.

Summary of Testimony: I, Russell Blount will testify regarding the reasons why the City wants to construct a pedestrian at-grade crossing at this location, and the reasons why a grade separation crossing is impracticable.

1. Please State your full name and job title.

Russell Blount, City of Fife Public Works Director/City Engineer.

2. How long have you worked for the City in this capacity?

8-1/2 years.

3. Please describe your work duties.

I manage the public works department, with responsibility for maintenance, operation, planning, design, and construction of streets, sidewalks, storm drainage, potable water, sanitary sewer, and non-park buildings and land owned by the City of Fife. To this end I prepare and monitor

1 budgets and performance of approximately 20 full-time employees supplemented by up to 10
2 seasonal employees and various professional consultants and construction and maintenance
3 contractors. As City Engineer, I am specifically responsible for the engineering evaluation, design,
4 and review of public and private civil construction projects in the City of Fife.

5 **4. Please briefly describe the crossing that the City is requesting.**

6 The City is proposing a pedestrian-only at-grade crossing of the Union Pacific Railroad track
7 at 54th Avenue East, at mile post 149.08 of the Union Pacific railroad.

8 **5. Why does the City want to construct a pedestrian-only crossing at this location?**

9 The proposed crossing is necessary to accommodate a dramatic increase in pedestrian use in
10 the past ten years. The 54th Avenue vehicular crossing is too narrow to accommodate both pedestrian
11 and vehicular traffic. At the time that the 54th Avenue vehicular crossing was created, there was only
12 scattered farm housing on the south side of the railroad right of way, as the entire area was located in
13 unincorporated Pierce County, and the primary use was for agriculture. Thus, the primary use of the
14 crossing was for vehicular use, with very little, if any, pedestrian use.

15
16 Currently, all of the land south of the 54th Avenue Vehicle Crossing has been annexed into the
17 City and is thus now designated urban. A map of the City's current zoning of the area is attached
18 hereto as Exhibit No. _____ (RB-2). In the last 10 years there have been thousands of homes
19 constructed south of the railroad right of way. This, combined with in the same time frame the
20 opening of the Columbia Junior High School and a joint school district and City of Fife sports field
21 complex north of the railroad right of way and adjacent to the 54th Avenue vehicular crossing, has
22 created a situation where the pedestrian use of the 54th Avenue vehicular crossing has increased
23 exponentially. An aerial photograph of the area, showing the school and sports complex north of the
24 tracks, and the residential development south of the tracks is attached hereto as Exhibit No. _____

1 (RB-3). The children have chosen the most direct, and but for the current crossing being designed
2 for vehicle travel, the safest route to the play area and junior high school. The children have also, on
3 a regular basis cut the fence along the rail road right of way and adjacent to the park, to gain direct
4 access from the housing development to the play area. At the sports field complex I have seen kids
5 crawling under the fence as well as climbing over the fence to cross the tracks. This is an unsafe
6 condition that needs to be addressed with the pedestrian crossing

7 **6. *Where is the nearest alternate pedestrian access across the tracks from the proposed crossing?***

8 The only legal option that pedestrians have to go from this major residential area south of the
9 tracks to the school or the park on the north is to walk approximately 1.5 miles to the crossings
10 located at either 70th Ave East or Frank Albert Rd East. The crossing at Frank Albert Rd East would
11 take pedestrians on a 0.6 mile stretch of Levy Road that has no sidewalks and no shoulder on which
12 to safely walk. The crossing at 70th Ave East has no sidewalks, forcing pedestrians onto the roadway
13 and would take them along 1.1 miles of Valley Ave. which is a very active street at all hours of the
14 day.

15
16 **7. *Why is the City proposing to construct a new pedestrian crossing adjacent to the 54th Avenue crossing, rather than within the existing 54th Avenue crossing footprint?***

17 Unfortunately, the existing 54th Avenue vehicular crossing will not safely accommodate both
18 vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The 54th Avenue vehicular crossing is currently used daily for police
19 patrol, and is used on an ongoing basis for emergency response. In addition, the vehicular crossing is
20 used for general vehicular traffic use in times of area wide emergency. This occurred as recently as
21 January 2009 during Fife's voluntary evacuation of the area south of the UPRR tracks during a flood
22 event. Given that the levee that protects the City from Puyallup River flooding has now been
23 decertified by the U.S Corps of Engineers, and the fact that there is no funding for levy replacement,
24

1 the City anticipates that there will be continued need for utilizing the 54th avenue vehicular crossing
2 for general traffic use. A safe crossing design for pedestrian use involves the use of chicanes, as is
3 proposed for the new pedestrian crossing. Chicanes force pedestrians to look both ways before
4 crossing the tracks. The current vehicular crossing is not wide enough to accommodate both general
5 traffic flow and a pedestrian walkway that includes chicanes. Addition of pedestrian chicanes within
6 the limits of the existing vehicular crossing would reduce the vehicular crossing to one lane in width,
7 which is too narrow for emergency evacuations.

8 ***8. How much railroad traffic is there at the location of the proposed pedestrian crossing?***

9 At that location, there is a single main line track operated by the Union Pacific Railroad.
10 From October 19, 2009 through October 25, 2009, the City's police department conducted a train
11 speed and volume survey at 54th Avenue crossing using a speed trailer. According to the survey,
12 during that one week period, a total of 85 freight trains went by with an average speed of 18.4 miles
13 per hour. No passenger trains went by during that period.

14 ***9. Has the City considered construction of a grade separation crossing?***

15 Yes. The City hired David Evans and Associates to analyze potential grade separation
16 options at three locations between 54th Avenue East and 70th Avenue East. The estimated over-pass
17 costs ranged from \$2.5 million to \$6.5 million. The estimated under-pass costs ranged from \$3.5
18 million to \$7.4 million. The proposed crossing location is more desirable than any of these
19 alternative locations because it is more centrally located and has higher pedestrian use.
20

21 ***10. Has the City considered construction of a grade separation pedestrian crossing at 54th***
22 ***Avenue?***


23 Yes. The City has plans for a vehicular underpass at 54th, including adjacent pedestrian
24 facilities. Although the City is actively pursuing funding sources for the underpass project, funding is

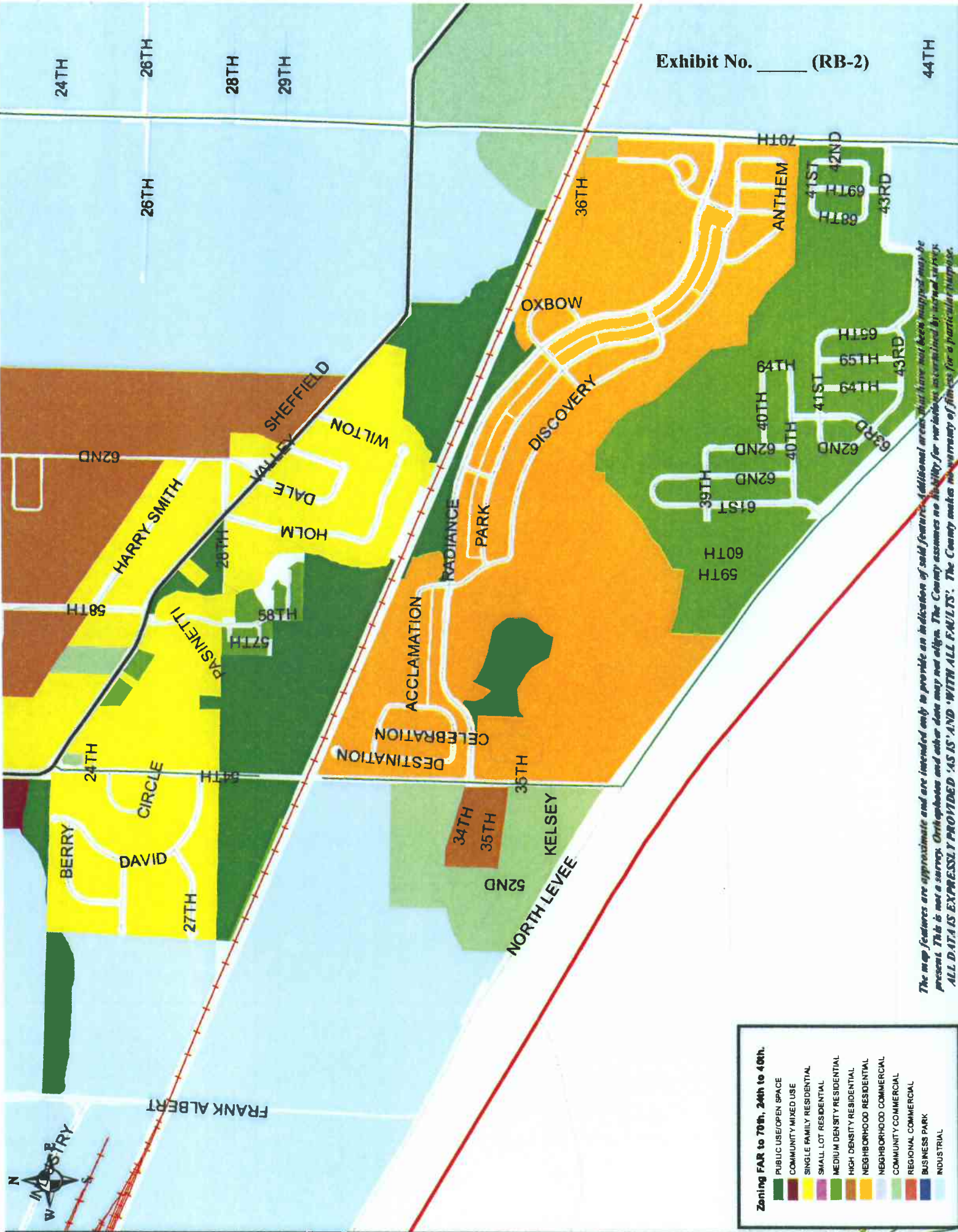
1 currently not available. Because of the high costs, it could take many years to obtain such funding.
2 However, a safe pedestrian crossing at the proposed location is an immediate need, and funding for
3 construction of an at-grade crossing is attainable now. Costs of a pedestrian-only grade separation at
4 this location would be similar to the cost estimates for the alternative locations set forth in the David
5 Evans study, and are much higher than the \$155,000-250,000 estimated cost of the proposed at-grade
6 crossing. It is not economically feasible for the City to construct a stand-alone pedestrian grade
7 separation at this time, nor would it be cost effective, considering the City's long range plans for a
8 vehicular/pedestrian underpass at 54th.

9
10
11 **Declaration**

12 I, Russell Blount, declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington
13 that the foregoing Testimony of Russell Blount is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and
14 belief.

15 Dated this 16th day of August, 2010

16 
17 Russell Blount



Zoning FAR to 70th, 24th to 40th.

Green	PUBLIC USE/OPEN SPACE
Blue	COMMUNITY MIXED USE
Yellow	SINGLE FAMILY RESIDENTIAL
Light Green	SMALL LOT RESIDENTIAL
Orange	MEDIUM DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
Dark Green	HIGH DENSITY RESIDENTIAL
Light Blue	NEIGHBORHOOD COMMERCIAL
Light Green	COMMUNITY COMMERCIAL
Dark Blue	REGIONAL COMMERCIAL
Red	BUSINESS PARK
Dark Blue	INDUSTRIAL

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Aerial photo, PAR to 70th, 24th to 40th.