

Complaints may force change in PAC picks

by Darlene Himmelspach

Verbal fisticuffs, frustration and anger may lead to a change in the selection method for a group that represents local interests in airport policy and development.

Some say the problem stems from deep-rooted personality conflicts. Others blame community apathy.

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) was established to oversee implementation of the Sea-Tac Communities Plan. Among the members are representatives from the Highline School District, local businesses, the airlines, port, county and FAA staff and the Zone Three Committee. The remaining four members are selected by the Highline Community Council from areas surrounding the airport.

The process used by the Highline Community Council to recruit and seat its representatives has drawn criticism from several sources. There are no iron-clad rules the community council has to follow in making those appointments and critics claim that's the problem. "The Highline Community Council has not taken the time and means available to it to get good representation on the committee. Somebody has to speak up. We've complained every time they have had a selection," says Jean Pihlman of the Zone Three Committee and PAC.

Pihlman said the PAC members appointed by the HCC often "have no idea what they are doing or what the PAC is or where it is going. You can't represent people that way. It is not possible."

"Sometimes we use a public forum and sometimes we publicize it and sometimes we don't," HCC president Ken Selander said.

He said the community council itself is elected from the four high school areas in Highline and "as such, they are very knowledgeable about who is available and who is competent to serve."

One person who does not agree is Marjorie Currie. Last fall, Currie applied to the community council for one of the vacant PAC posts. "I went through all the steps and stages and I think the community council didn't want me," Currie suggests.

She may be right. Her request for the post is remembered with disdain by Selander and Carole Berwald, a council member. Selander said Currie's approach was "too militant. We didn't have confidence that she'd do a good job."

Berwald said Currie was among a group of women who "came to a meeting and just raised all kinds of havoc. They created such harassment at the meeting complaining that they didn't like the boundaries. So we changed them at their request. They didn't like that either. Their

behavior was such that I wouldn't have voted for her. It was a negative tirade; it is awfully difficult to be polite to people like that."

Currie said she thinks the council had someone in mind for the job before she made her pitch. "I don't think that's the way a community group should operate. I reside directly in the area immensely affected by airport noise and we have not had one, single representative from that area on the (PAC). It's distressing, depressing and makes the blood pressure go up."

The charge of "backroom" politics in the first years of the selection process is leveled by former HCC member Irene Jones. She said the only official requirement for selection by the HCC was that the person be a registered voter. "Some of us had hoped that they would select people with knowledge of the community and bring involvement to the PAC. It was not the person selected that I objected to; I had no knowledge of them. They came out of the woodwork. It was just not done well, I thought."

Jones said some of those initial appointees may have been well qualified but did not live in the areas affected by airport noise and development—Shorewood, for instance.

Reforms of the selection process changed some of that about four years ago.

Jones said the HCC has conducted a lot of business free of public scrutiny. Regular elections often fail to fill a spot on the council, Jones said. "When they have an election and nobody comes, they just appoint people to the job. I feel a lot of the community don't know them (community council members), don't care and don't feel they represent them." That creates a problem, Jones feels, when that group is charged with selecting four people to serve on PAC.

She is adamant that the PAC serves a useful function and that the appointments are important. "It needs to be more dynamic but, if there is a noise study update, the citizen committee needs to be involved and aware and the PAC is the only vehicle we have now. We don't recognize the Highline Community Council and Zone Three (Committee) is virtually non-functional."

Jones does not accuse the HCC of running a popularity contest in naming people to the PAC. "It's an unpopularity contest. They think 'We have to keep this person or that person off the committee.'"

It's time to reform that process, Jones says. "Finally, there is a committee to make some changes in the selection process." Jones and Berwald will both be serving on the six-member sub-committee that will investigate the current selection process and try to suggest alter-

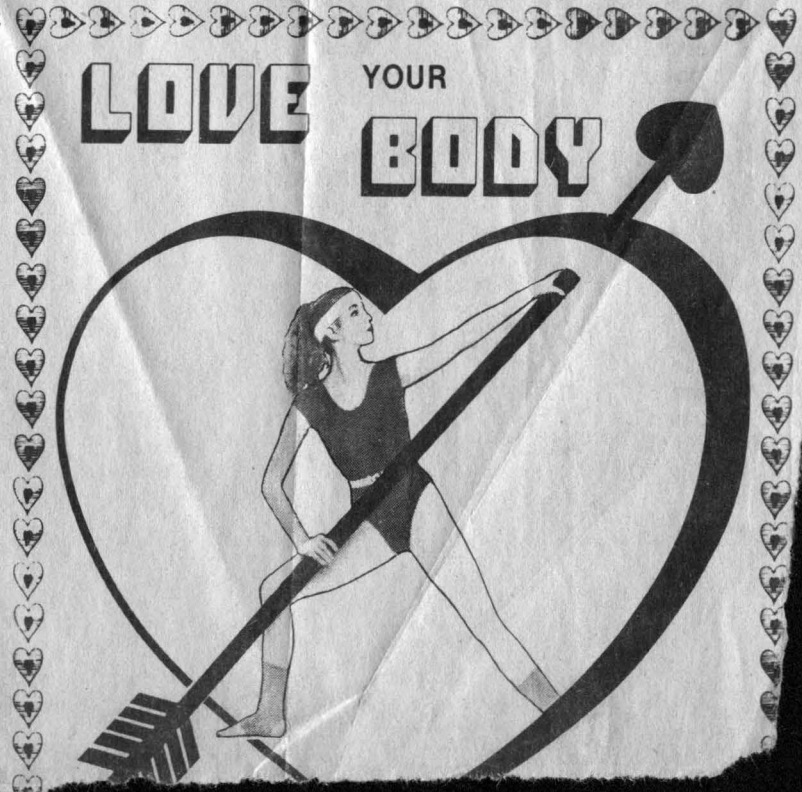
natives to the current dilemma.

Ed Parks of the Port of Seattle, who heads the committee, said "citizen representatives are to be picked by the community council. There has been criticism of their methods but you can't necessarily dictate the way they select those representatives."

Although the PAC is only an advisory body, Parks believes it has some political clout, at least with the port. "It has no clout per se on funding but its advice is

recognized by the port. I can't say there have been many battles over the years. Usually, a consensus has been reached and that's encouraging."

Before Weyerhaeuser built its general aviation facility and the Boeing Company announced plans to locate its headquarters on the westside of the airport, Parks said "there were discussions between the port and PAC that changed some of the development guidelines. That is clout."



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