

This may be difficult for me. I'm probably going to be emotional. I don't like to be, and I don't really want to be up here, on camera, blubbing. But I feel compelled to speak.

I'm glad that I'm standing up here at the podium, because who I really want to speak to now is you, my colleagues. After tonight I'll be limited to 3 minutes when I stand up here so I want to use this time to talk about Suzuki, because it's been almost 13 years since the idea of an affordable housing community at Suzuki was proposed, and almost 6 years since the City Council picked the idea up again.

I want to be very clear that I'm not here to "shame" anyone -- I know that some will claim that's what I'm trying to do, but I'm not. I just want to talk about the reality of what's going on here, and if anyone feels ashamed, insulted or upset because of what I say, then perhaps it's time for little introspection.

When we talk about affordable housing, we distance ourselves from it by talking about various levels of area median income and I would like us to stop doing that. I would like us to stop thinking that we are doing this to serve nameless, faceless members of our community -- past, present or future -- because I think that makes it too easy to continue to not do anything.

I want to share with you some of the people I think about when we're talking about percentages of median income: I think about the people that drilled your well, installed your drain field and framed your home. I think about the people who installed our infrastructure so that we have water systems, sewer systems, roads and power. I think about the people who, literally, built Bainbridge, but can't live here.

I think about the Planning Department employees that process the permits for someone's dream home, and the Public Works employees that are out in the rain and snow keeping our roads safe.

I think about the teacher that took a painfully shy and anxious child and transformed her into the star of her first play.

I think about the retiree-turned-coach that keeps a calm, positive outlook no matter how high the error count goes or how often the umpires make a bad call, who leads by example and demonstrates that teamwork and good sportsmanship are more important than titles.

I think about my friend who, through no fault of her own, isn't physically capable of working anymore and has no family but is able to survive here because of Island Volunteer Caregiver's, Helpline House and Housing Resources Bainbridge. I worry about what would happen to her if she had to leave this Island and that support system behind.

I think about the young officer who comes across a senior on paint night, with a paint brush in one hand and a can of paint in the other, and, instead of scolding her and shooing her away, he tells her that whatever she paints, to make it big so it lasts a long time.

I think about the baristas at the Safeway Starbucks who know your drink by heart and greet you with an extra kind and sympathetic smile because they know that one of your loved ones is ill.

And I think about the firefighters, paramedics and EMTs that pull your broken body out of your crumpled car or take some extra time to listen to your mother share memories after your grandmother has passed away.

These people are not points on an affordability spectrum. They are members of our community who touch our lives -- And when it takes us more than 5 years to get a single project off the ground, what we are telling them is that they aren't important enough for us to deal with the discomfort that comes with change.

We can say that we support affordable housing until we're blue in the face, but it doesn't matter because what we are showing people, through our inaction, is that it's not as important as we claim it is.

Who would ever think that in a left-leaning, progressive, inclusive community, like we proclaim to be, that so much time and energy would be spent fighting an affordable housing community?

I hope that those of you who have supported Suzuki will continue to do so. It's going to take a lot of persistence and it won't be easy -- you know that.

There will be malicious cartoons and memes posted on Facebook and emails that will keep you up at night feeling a whole host of emotions – confusion, sadness, anger.

There will not be a middle-aged fan club for you to call upon to come and sing your praises when your egos are bruised. But please, don't let that dissuade you.

I do the Decodaquote puzzle in the newspaper and back in September there was very timely quote and I immediately thought about Suzuki and made a note of it. It read "The way to not solve a crisis is to avoid all complaints". Those who oppose Suzuki have had the Council engaged in a never-ending game of whack-a-mole that has dominated this effort for the last few years. You need to disengage from that game.

The other game you need to disengage from is the delay game. It is real and it is in overdrive.

It's been recommended that we sunset an affordable housing ordinance and then take time to establish an interim affordable housing ordinance, based on the ordinance that was sunset, that will be in place while we take more time to create a comprehensive affordable housing ordinance. Just today we heard from someone who was around the last time this was proposed, and it took five years and resulted the very ordinance that the Planning Commission wants to sunset.

The latest talking point in the delay game is this idea that we need an "affordable housing strategy". We don't need a new strategy, we already have one and it has three elements: Delay, Delay, and Delay.

Why is the delay game so effective? Because you have 18 months before this becomes a campaign issue again. 18 months sounds like a long time, but you've all been here long enough to know that 18 months in City Council time is a pretty tight window.

If you don't make significant movement on this before then, you will be here, in this same place exactly 2 years from now, in a position to make a decision, just like now, but you delay it until the new Councilmembers are seated. Do you all remember what was happening in this room 2 years ago?

Where are we now? I wonder where we could have been. Come January, I hope you resist the pressure to jump back on the hamster wheel.