

An open letter to Tukwila's new mayor from Foster's civics class

Nov 19, 2015 at 9:26AM

Dear Mr. Mayor,

We are seniors from Foster High School's civics class who have been given the opportunity to write an open letter to you. Throughout the past several weeks, we students have been empowered by the election. This is something that not many people our age felt, especially about a local election. Being able to truly dissect Tukwila's Comprehensive Plan, being the leaders of the Candidate Forum and having open-ended conversations with our classmates about the issues in our city have made a huge impact on our thinking. As of now, although we do not know who you are, whether you are Mr. Ekberg or Mr. Quinn, we still want you to pay close attention to these issues and we want you to address them during your time in office:

HOUSING

The Comprehensive Plan mentions that the quality of the housing in Tukwila is something that must get improved. We read this section of the Comp Plan in early October, but most of us have known that this is an issue long before October, because many of us call these apartments our home. People should not have to resort to living in apartments in Tukwila that are absolutely filthy, unkempt and also unreasonably overpriced. We hear about these apartments from our classmates, our friends. Knowing that they have no choice but to live in these harsh conditions is extremely unsettling. We cannot even comprehend how it must feel to do your homework in your home, while having tons of roaches running around. It is morally unacceptable to just let these apartments not keep their facilities up-to-par. Mr. Mayor, we need you to hold them accountable and make them maintain their housing. If Tukwila is meant to be the best city, apartments in these conditions should not exist. Not only are these apartments of low quality, but they are priced a lot more than their value.

PAC HIGHWAY/TUKWILA INTERNATIONAL BOULEVARD:

At the Candidate Forum, we had several questions about PAC Highway. One of the goals in the Comprehensive Plan is to ensure that Tukwila International Boulevard is a walkable corridor with places to live, work, shop and play. This is precisely what the students want for the Highway. As of now, the majority of us feel unsafe walking on those sidewalks. Imagine being a young girl, walking on the sidewalks of PAC Highway. The number of times that you will get harassed and catcalled by drivers and other pedestrians is alarming and frightening. How would we possibly be able to enjoy all the new amenities that come with the upcoming Tukwila Village if we do not even feel safe roaming through these streets?

SAFETY:

Mr. Mayor, you should emphasize to the City Council how important it is to have safer roads for pedestrians. Many of us, students, walk to school. There are some areas in Tukwila where we have no choice but to walk directly alongside cars because there aren't any sidewalks. An example is the street in

between the trailer homes and the Samara apartments on 141st street. This street is extremely narrow and hardly even has room for two lanes. Students walk right next to these moving cars because there aren't any sidewalks. Another issue is the fact that we have an insufficient number of crosswalks. This is a safety hazard because students and other pedestrians decide to cross the street unlawfully. The street in between Foster High School and the Foster library has only one crosswalk. We would be truly ashamed of our city if it has to take an injury or even a life to take these vital safety measures. We should not put this problem on the back-burner until one of our classmates, or anyone else for that matter, gets hurt.

TRANSPORTATION:

What is the point of having resources without being able to access them? We find ourselves wondering that many times regarding our city's transportation system. The majority of students do not drive. If we are working toward having all these great assets and programs in our city, we need to have an adequate transportation system. People think that Tukwila is a convenient place to live in because the Link light rail is at our front steps. But the truth is that it is not at our front steps. Tukwila is such a small city, but the transportation system makes everything not accessible and very far away. Unfortunately, the light rail is more beneficial to those who are commuting from outside of Tukwila and not those who live in Tukwila. Moreover, many other locations are difficult to access for students. Many of our friends are unable to join a new club or activity at the Tukwila Community Center because they live in places which do not have an adequate transportation system. It is important that the students are kept in mind when creating change in this system because we heavily depend on public transportation.

SCHOOLS:

As the overseer of the city, you should build a stronger alliance with the school district. Work alongside the School Board to help achieve goals, such as the in-school mental health counseling that students in our district need. Some things are harder to achieve, but having you there collaborating and helping to advocate for the district will be very powerful.

ENVIRONMENT:

Today, kids and teenagers – and even adults – are shackled to their technological gadgets. Because of this, there has been a nationwide emphasis on spending time outdoors and immersing yourself in the environment. Mr. Mayor, we need the residents of Tukwila to fall in love with the environment and the beauty that nature holds. Rather than viewing pixelated images of beautiful green scenery on our smartphones, why can't we have an equally beautiful place here, in Tukwila? We need to preserve our ecosystem to make sure that Tukwila will even exist for our children and our children's children. To achieve this, our city needs people to be more engaged in the environment and the importance of being green. We need residents to see areas like the Duwamish/Green River as an asset to the community. An idea that we suggested was hosting fun city gatherings by the river so that people can begin to even appreciate our natural environment, and eventually take it upon themselves to compost, recycle and go green. Make them fall in love with the environment so they can understand why we need to take care of it.

After reading this, you may think that we are too painfully optimistic and dream of some unattainable utopia. However, we just see the great potential that Tukwila holds. Although many other cities have failed to conquer the issues that we have mentioned, we truly believe that Tukwila can be the leading city to go above and beyond. We are sure that you, Mr. Mayor, hold just as high of a standard as we do. The last thing that we want to hear is that these things are too difficult to accomplish. Our last request for you is to not forget about us. Whether you are Mr. Quinn or Mr. Ekberg, you spent your entire campaign reaching out to the unrepresented – the youth, the immigrants, the elderly. Once you are officially in office, please continue to preserve these bridges that you have helped create. We are more than just a vote in your favor.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The students in Andrea Gamboa's civics class at Foster High School.