

# Letter from Highland Park Resident to City Officials

## Proposals for a New City Jail

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Subject: A New Jail

I understand that finding a site for a jail is no easy task, as Seattle has a large “Not In My Backyard” population. I am sure that you will hear a lot from those neighborhoods surrounding the Aurora and the Interbay sites. I would predict that you will hear less from the Highland Park Way and the Myer’s Way sites.

**I am writing as a resident of Highland Park to let you know that we are here!** We are a viable, strong, quiet neighborhood full of working Seattleites that do not have the resources or time to be able to fight this sort of decision.

**We do not want a jail as the gateway to our community.** The base of Highland Park Drive is our gateway—it is not an appropriate location for a jail. This site is less than a mile from our neighborhood. Of course nobody wants a jail so close to their house—so here are some thoughts on why the West Marginal Way site should be abandoned.

### **Geotechnical and Environmental Concerns**

I have several huge environmental concerns. This site is in a liquefaction zone, to build a jail in a liquefaction zone seems like the most socially and economically irresponsible thing to do. It seems that having people locked up in small cells in a liquefaction zone during an earthquake is a huge disaster waiting to happen—not only because of the lives that will be impacted, but also because of the political and social fallout should such a disaster happen. It also seems that economically, it would take more taxpayer dollars to build a safe jail in a liquefaction zone.

There are also healthy, vibrant wetlands to the east. Though not part of an official “riparian corridor,” I have seen all kinds of wildlife on this site, and quite a diversity of plant species as well. To build near this urban wetland site is environmentally irresponsible in a city that is trying to be a leader in green design. I would hope that a very thorough environmental assessment would take place to understand the impacts building on this site would have on wildlife and wetland degradation and impact both on and off the site.

This site is more than 6.5 miles from downtown—which, in Seattle, is a long way to go for a court hearing. The environmental impact of that commute is huge. Also, the commute would be on the degrading and soon to be defunct route of Highway 99. What will happen when the viaduct gets replaced, tunneled, or turned into surface streets? This is only a matter of time, and there is no question it will impact the day to day viability of this location as a site for a jail.

### **Proximity to Services**

When people get out of jail, or when people are visiting the jail, no amenities exist close by to help or cater to them. The only thing close by is our neighborhood- which doesn’t even have a grocery store, restaurant (even fast food), coffee shops, banks, pawn shops, jail bond shops, etc....and there are no centers for social services to help people out. I fear that we will see an increase in strangers looking for such services in our neighborhood. The site is relatively isolated in that respect, which seems a bit irresponsible to our neighborhood. If a jail goes into this site, those properties zoned appropriately for such services will start catering to that need—and personally, I don’t want my child growing up around the corner from jail bond stores, half way houses, or shelters. These types of services belong downtown. (not to mention the fall in property values that would accompany such developments).

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## **Proximity to residential areas and parks**

Riverview Playfield is less than a mile away at the top of the hill right above the greenbelt—this park is used heavily by kids, is currently considered safe, has basketball, a play area, restrooms, tennis courts, soccer, and baseball/softball fields, and woods. The Riverview neighborhood is right there, as well as the Highland Park neighborhood. These neighborhoods are considered the “last stand” of affordable houses left in Seattle. Young families are moving in and starting to breathe fresh life into the houses. Also close by are Highland Park Playfield, Highland Park Elementary School, and Westcrest Park. Please consider these families trying to make ends meet—it is already a questionable neighborhood as far as investing goes, why make it more so?

## **Transportation and Proximity to the City**

When people get out of jail, where are they going to go? The public transportation serving this site is horrible, for people coming to visit the jail, but more importantly - for people getting out of jail. The bus stops near the site only go two ways—to downtown and up the hill to our neighborhood. There is a beautiful greenbelt separating Highland Park from West Marginal Way. Occasionally we will see people camping out in the woods there—my fear is that when people are released from jail with nowhere to go and no easy way to get anywhere if they have anywhere to go, that they will filter up the hill to our neighborhood, go to the Greenbelt, or make the longer trek over to the Georgetown neighborhood (which has its own history of the city dumping undesirable things in it). Also, as already mentioned, this site is more than 6.5 miles from downtown—which is a long way to go for a court hearing.

## **Other undesirable things in our neighborhood**

Isn't it only fair to spread out the undesirable parts of a city instead of dumping a lot of these things in one neighborhood? Especially one that is demographically less white and economically less well off, and doesn't have the same amenities as other neighborhoods. This area already hosts a transfer station, hazardous waste disposal, and a Waste Management site.

This site would be the perfect location for a grocery store, which is badly needed for Highland Park and Georgetown residents—and which has the potential to help define the entry to the neighborhood. Our neighborhood doesn't have the economic benefit of being able to hire lawyers to fight this or time to devote to intense community protests to help our case, or the techno-savvy population needed to rally everyone—please don't let that determine the outcome—please don't let this be a case of the richest and loudest neighborhood wins, again.

Something to consider is that perhaps the jail shouldn't go into any of these sites, less than a mile is just too close to any neighborhood. Instead of pitting our neighborhoods against each other, consider putting the jail in an area without neighbors or other neighborhood-related needs such as SODO.

Please, please, get to know our neighborhood—it is not well known, which has been a blessing thus far; but when something like this is proposed it is a detriment to not be as well known, or as well off. Contact Highland Park Improvement Club or the Highland Park Action Committee; get to know us.

~ Carolyn Stauffer, Highland Park, Seattle