

Letter to Whatcom County Council

February 17, 2020

Dear Councilmembers,

On behalf of RE Sources, I would like to thank you for your recent funding approval for our Sustainable Schools program in support of waste education in local K through 12th grade classrooms. RE Sources is honored to be the recipient of public funding for this work over three decades. Though we know the contract deliverables speak for themselves, we appreciate your vote of confidence.

I would also like to take this opportunity to clear up several misunderstandings about RE Sources that were reflected in concerning, inaccurate statements made by Councilmembers during the Council meeting on February 11th of this year. We'd like to provide an opportunity for the Council as a whole to become clearer on the facts regarding RE Sources' role in our community — what we do, and what we do not do.

First, we do not back candidates, ever. We engage on the issues that relate to our mission — climate change, water quality, protecting forests and farmlands, protecting threatened and endangered species, availability of clean water, community health and safety, jobs and local economies — in a nonpartisan manner. We never endorse, back, or campaign for candidates or party platforms. It is illegal for us to do so as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. I encourage you to read more about what nonprofits are legally allowed to do by the IRS on our FAQ page, Nonprofits' legal limitations during elections: re-sources.org/electioneeringfaq.

We do champion civic engagement, and facilitate voter registration and informed voting. We believe that civic engagement is our privilege in our democratic society, and we believe those who will be impacted by decisions should be aware of and involved in the decision-making process. To this end, we have led non-partisan Get-Out-the-Vote campaigns, hosted candidate forums and educational meetings, and distributed educational materials on public policy issues that affect the health of people and the environment.

Regarding the specific question of climate strikes and other youth-led efforts to draw attention to climate change, RE Sources has not organized these strikes. We will continue to publicize students' efforts on social media and encourage our community to

show support. Whether students leave school for these events is up to their parents to decide.

Most importantly, I would like to directly address with the Council the extremely concerning discussion during your last meeting and the dangerous, baseless accusations Councilmember Elenbaas leveled against RE Sources. First, to set the record straight on the Councilmember's statement that RE Sources, "interfered with the public process that set the way Councilmembers would be elected [and] who would then decide how the money was divvied up." It is false that we "interfered with the public process." What is true is that RE Sources supported Proposition 9 for 5 Fair and Equal Districts in 2015. You can learn the facts and outcome of that effort, and other ballot measures we have supported on our website.

More concerning, however, is Councilmember Elenbaas' statement that, "If you look at the definition of domestic terrorism you might even identify some of the stuff that they do as that." This is a baseless and irresponsible accusation made against fellow community members. In stark contrast to the Councilmember's threatening allegation, this is who we are:

RE Sources is a community-based, non-profit institution. We are a by-the-book, mainstream environmental education and advocacy organization as well as a reclaimed building materials business, The RE Store. We have operated in Whatcom County since 1982, and currently employ 35 people. We provided a comprehensive jobs training program for 34 out-of-work county residents last year, with an 80% completion and/or job placement rate plus and additional 63 volunteer and community service participants. We advocate for environmentally sound land-use, energy, and water policies in Whatcom County that support the long-term viability of our natural resource base and a diversified economy.

We do this through commonplace, established organizing tactics utilized by thousands of non-profit organizations across our country and across the political spectrum. This includes: social media and informational newsletters, online action alerts to email elected officials, letters to the editor and Op-Eds, public testimony and filing technical comments with city, county and state agencies on development proposals and policies, hosting public events and trainings, beach cleanups, citizen science programs and intertidal monitoring, pollution patrols of local waterways, litigation against major industrial polluters, lobby days at the state capitol, environmental education, and teacher trainings. We strive to provide fact-based information to inform our community, so they can make their own decisions.

That is who we actually are. You can learn more about our work at RE-Sources.org, or I would be happy to meet with any of you at any time to provide more information about who we are and how we operate.

In terms of Councilmember Elenbaas, it is safe to say that we generally do not align on policy, though we do hope to find areas of common ground during his term. Of more urgent concern, however, is that the Councilmember's groundless accusation puts our 60 staff, board, trainees, AmeriCorps members, interns, and their families at risk. Whether the Councilmember's use of this threatening term stemmed from his operating with extremely inaccurate information about RE Sources or out of some other motive, we do not know. We do know that the act of branding constituents with baseless, explosive labels in Council's chambers endangers them. It also chills civic participation.

We are all community members, even if we disagree strongly on policy positions. We all have families, even if we don't know each other. Even in these polarized times, it is critical that we operate with civility and respect, and I sincerely hope this Council will actively champion and defend those values.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Shannon Wright

Executive Director

RE Sources

www.re-sources.org