

The Honorable Bonnie Onyon, Mayor of Blaine
and Members of the Blaine City Council

September 23, 2020

City of Blaine
435 Martin Street
Suite 4000
Blaine WA 98230

Dear Mayor Onyon and Members of the City Council

I understand the council will be voting on a resolution to extend the use of the H street plaza by the Drayton Harbor Oyster Company (DHO) beyond the soon to expire date of October 1, 2020. First let me say thank you for your support of our use of the plaza over the past four months. Having the additional space helped DHO rehire its existing staff after the mandatory closure was lifted and eventually hire four additional folks to help carry the summer load. Without the expanded plaza space none of this would have happened and its likely that a good number of DHO's fifteen employees would be unemployed.

I imagine you are all familiar with DHO's history in Blaine and have perhaps heard the phrase from the 1909 edition of the Blaine Journal: "The oysters on the Jersey's Coast have justly won a name, but we grow better flavored ones yes sir right here in Blaine". My journey with DHO began in the mid 1980's farming oysters on the same lease our family farms today. It has been a journey filled with wonderful people who celebrated the magic of working on the waters of Drayton Harbor and persisted through the struggles to maintain clean growing water. The City has been a steady partner all these years. The story of reclaiming Drayton Harbor has been told many times and today my family and the Drayton Harbor Oyster Company are the humble beneficiary of the efforts of untold numbers of people, governments, agencies, and NGO's.

As we enter the fall and winter under the vail of COVID restrictions, DHO again is looking for ways to maintain a level of business which would allow the retention of as many employees as possible. I think we would all agree that the simple addition of planters, tables, and umbrellas to both plazas quickly transformed these somewhat plain, lonely spaces into a welcoming place of celebration and comradery while maintaining reasonable opportunities for social distancing. It certainly provided an opportunity to showcase what makes Blaine special, water, sunsets, harbor views, small town main street, and oysters. Hopefully, it has helped some crystalize their vision for a Blaine of the near future.

We have given a great deal of thought about our operations during the next six to twelve months. We made the decision early in the pandemic to open only if we could maximize protection to our staff and the public we serve, hence the shift to outside seating. Providing a comfortable, socially distanced arrangement for customers in the fall and winter is a challenging, fast approaching hurdle that most food

establishments will face. Under Covid restrictions, DHO inside seating would be limited to four, maybe five tables and expose staff to increase risk. The easy path would be to close or reduce service to take out and let two thirds of the staff go. It is important for you to know that DHO has fifteen employees, thirteen who live in Blaine and Birch Bay, three with children, and all of whom earn an average of \$18-\$25 per hour.

Our preferred path would be to continue to use the expanded plaza space and see if we can create a unique setting, again embracing what is special about our community and setting the stage for a " Winter in Blaine" experience. Visualize with me a moment-- A 30' x 30' heated canopy tent with ten tables, happily lit with strings of Edison bulbs and decorated for the fall and winter seasons while the surrounding planters await the emergence of spring bulbs. We have discussed the canopy idea with several other Blaine businesses and have commitments from Tiny Tap, Atwood Ales, and Kaisacole Seafoods to share the canopy space and help create a one-of-a-kind experience. We hope to add at least two more vendors to the "big tent".

We realize the plaza is a unique public space and DHO's use of an expanded area of the plaza could be viewed as giving DHO an unfair advantage or an unethical gift of public resources to a private entity. I am not sure how to address this concern other than to point to an April 6 memorandum by the state's Attorney General to Local Governments on the subject of Options for Supporting Small Businesses and Low-Income Individuals During a Public Health Crisis. The memo would appear to support local government actions to help keep people employed and improve the safety of its citizens. This has certainly been DHO's experience during the past 5 months.

DHO's investment in planters, tables, chairs, and umbrellas for both the H and G street plazas is approaching fifteen thousand dollars. Purchasing a canopy will add another ten thousand dollars. DHO has maintained both plazas since May, watering plants, hosing off the deck and tables, opening umbrellas and the like. Yes, the expanded plaza space has been good for business. DHO's investment has also created the opportunity to showcase a wonderful community asset which is drawing customers from well beyond Blaine and Birch Bay. Based on 8,550 actual transactions since May, an estimated ten to fifteen thousand folks have visited DHO since May, three quarters of whom were visiting for the first time. Has DHO use of the Plaza taken business away from others? Perhaps, although many of DHO's customers are here because of the farm to table experience around oysters and wave of positive reviews. Would they come to Blaine if oysters were not our signature item, I do not know? Currently DHO does not serve breakfast or complete dinners reducing the competition with those establishments that do. Many customers view DHO as a prelude to a dinner engagement.

I appreciate the complexity a decision such as this may present to elected officials. We probably all share a vision of downtown Blaine full of bustling shops, eateries, open spaces, music, and laughter. The Plazas were built fifteen years ago to be the centerpiece of downtown redevelopment. It may be that DHO's experience on the Plaza the past four months have given us all a renewed vision of what is possible. The challenge, from my perspective, is how do we keep the positive energy moving forward, not only this winter but into the post covid future.

Yes, DHO is interested in working with the city on a fair and equitable arrangement for future plaza use which would resemble the current layout. Towards this goal I would hope the council could entertain a motion to approve DHO's continued use of the plaza until the covid crisis passes and approve DHO's plan to purchase and install a high quality 30'x30' canopy in the space we are currently using to provide a unique customer space for participating businesses. I also ask Council to consider a motion to have staff begin an effort to identify a fair and equitable process to provide opportunities for Blaine businesses to use plaza space in such a way as to bring life and energy to both plazas while supporting the unhindered use of these spaces by the public.

Thank you again for supporting our efforts and please do not hesitate to contact me or my son Mark if you have questions or concerns which we may be able to address.

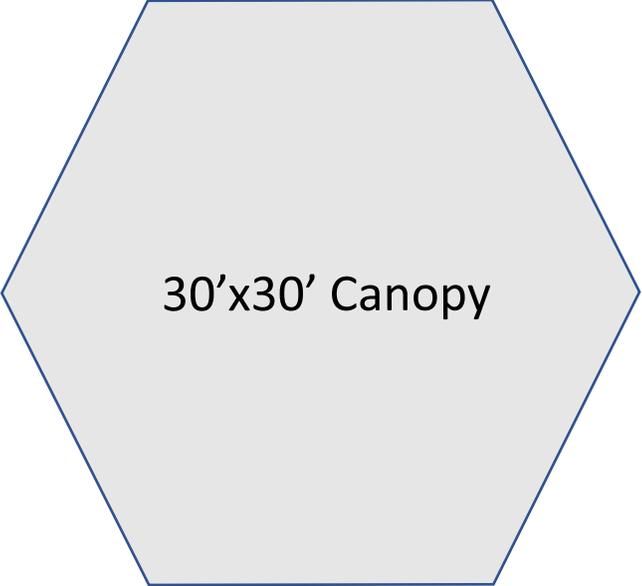
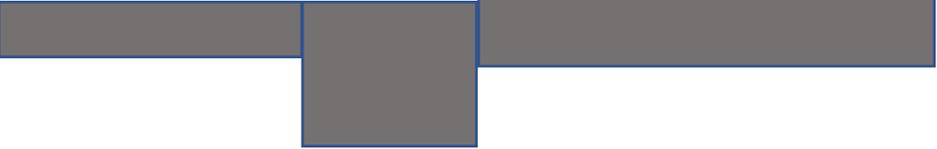
Respectfully

Steve Seymour

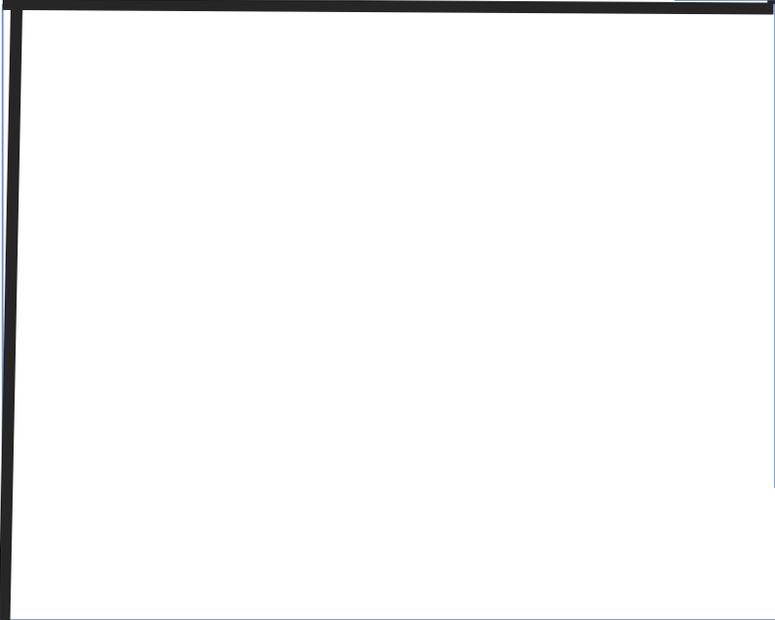
Steve Seymour
Drayton Harbor Oyster Company

Attachments;

DHO Kaisacole



30'x30' Canopy



H Street Plaza

Peace Portal







