

OPINION

Our View

Time to let Malkandi go

For nearly three years, Kirkland resident Sam Malkandi has languished in maximum-security prisons in the Puget Sound area. He has never been charged with a crime. Instead, the government has tried to depict Malkandi, whose family came here as Iraqi refugees in 1998, as a threat to national security and deport him. Two weeks ago, the 9th Circuit Federal court in Seattle heard his appeal. A decision is expected this year.

Malkandi, who worked at one point as a cook for the Northshore School District and ran his own janitorial business, is an unlikely candidate for the label "terrorist." He's a family man, and his wife and children are part of our community. His wife is a working mother: an assistant at an area dental practice. His two children are both students in area schools: Nicole at the University of Washington and Arvin at a local elementary school. Malkandi is also a convert to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and receives visits from a church elder on a regular basis. He even worked with Northrop Grumman as a cultural advisor for training Iraq-bound security contractors.

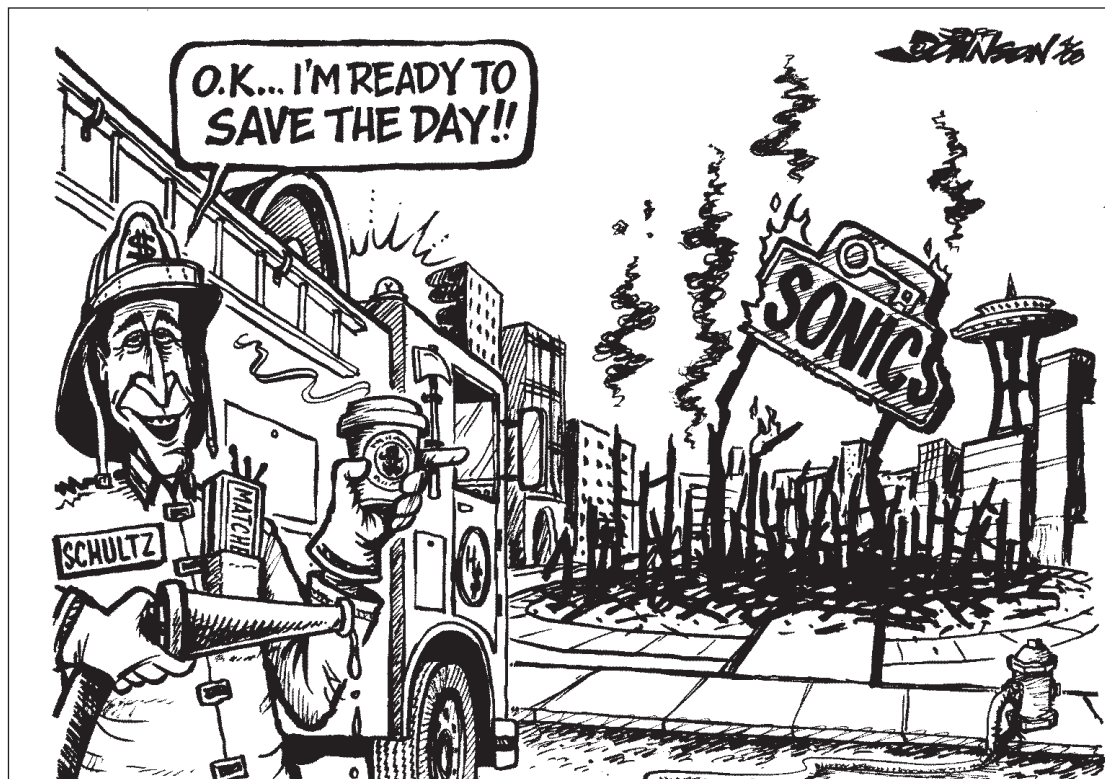
Authorities have focused on his friendship with a man he met in Northgate Mall in 1998, who asked Malkandi to help arrange a doctor for a friend in Yemen. That man turned out to be a member of al-Qaida. The government never proved Malkandi did any more for the man than have a phone conversation about getting a prosthetic leg and asking a health care provider the cost.

But a lie – made up to ensure he and his family had a way out of a refugee camp – on a refugee application 18 years ago has come back to haunt him.

It's this fabrication (a claim of being arrested in Pakistan for possessing books that clashed with strict Muslim thinking) that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) seized on, opting to deport him under provisions of the REAL ID Act, which since 2005 allows a lower burden of proof to deport refugees and deny requests for asylum.

We support our government's efforts to protect our nation and to keep us safe, but the Malkandi case is a step too far. Government prosecutors need to either bring a criminal case, find more compelling proof that he's a terrorist, or leave him be.

We hope the 9th Circuit will use their collective wisdom to see it's time to let Malkandi go home – to his Kirkland home.



Have your say on Parkplace

What's the difference between a five story and an eight story building? In general, it means some longer shadows in the mornings and evenings and more windows to clean for the janitors. In Kirkland, however, it means a different view coming down Central Way into the downtown and a "more intensive commercial character that would generally support the city's vision for this part of downtown as a focal point of Kirkland's vital employment base," according to a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released by the city April 4.

The document refers to the proposed Parkplace redevelopment plan, which makes a number of public amendment requests (PARs) to exceed the city's current zoning standards, hence the DEIS.

If you're feeling lost in the world of Bureaucratic Jargon Acronyms (henceforth to be known as BJAs), you're not alone – I've put in hours reading about said acronyms in the last few months, and all I got was a lousy T-shirt that reads "you're hip with the lingo."

Actually, no. But I've put in enough time to know that those letters actually mean something – that our democratic process is working, and we get a say, however small, in the way the Kirkland of five years from now will look.

As required by the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), an Environmental Impact Statement is created when a "major

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(in this case, municipal) action significantly affect(s) the quality of the human environment." It gives citizens a medium to protect their neighborhood, city, etc., by "providing ... a forum for the public and other government agencies to comment on the proposal so that changes may be made during the planning phase before construction begins, to reduce impacts."

That means your opinion on what the proposed Parkplace (a 1.8 million square foot office, retail and hotel development) would do to your "human environment" is actually considered. Do you think the redevelopment, as it's proposed, would help create in Kirkland a vibrant and needed downtown business district, a la Bellevue? Or do you find the proposal a bloated monstrosity that would destroy Kirkland's quaint character? Our input will affect how the final document appears (DEIS to EIS), and that document, although not binding, should affect how the City Council decides on the issue.

If nothing else, you should check out the DEIS for an extensive overview of how the

city would like to see the downtown develop. It can be downloaded from the city's Web site. Be sure to pack a lunch and clear your schedule, it's a 350-page MEGNUWHIR (My Eyes Go NUmB WHen I Read).

That doesn't sound fun? No time?

Here's a few snippets of what you'll find in the DEIS:

"In addition to the city's design guidelines, the following mitigation measures could be incorporated to reduce aesthetic impacts of Parkplace ... use vegetation to soften and screen built features ... incorporate a pedestrian plaza, public art installation or distinctive landscaping feature in order to identify the intersection of 6th Street and Central Way as a significant gateway into Downtown ... use low-sheen and non-reflective surface materials to ... reduce potential for glare."

Agree? Don't agree? Maybe you have another suggestion?

Just about everyone acknowledges Parkplace is in need of redevelopment. And whether you want it or not, redevelopment will happen in some shape or form (the developer has already submitted a second plan for an office park that meets current zoning standards).

You have about a month to put in your two cents. Comments on the DEIS are due no later than 5 p.m. on May 19. Written comments should be directed to Angela Ruggeri, a senior planner with the city, at aruggeri@ci.kirkland.wa.us.

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