

Attachment B

Biography Summary: Jim Ellis Councilmember Conrad Lee

He was a tremendous family man, a community leader, and visionary. He was totally focused on this community, which was his life.

Jim Ellis never held office in his 98 years, but his legacy as a citizen – cleaning up Lake Washington and preserving public land for King County residents – rivals that of the most public-spirited citizens and most accomplished public officials.

Former Gov. Dan Evens acknowledged, “He didn’t look for credit, he didn’t look for anything other than to get the job done. He was a contributor to the very best of what we have now in our community.” Mr. Ellis was known as a visionary but was also dedicated to doing the grunt work. He worked weekends and took on practical matters. Despite his success, he didn’t engage in partisan politics. He even turned down an offer from President Richard Nixon to become the first director of the Environmental Protection Agency, thinking he would be more useful in Washington state.

In 1960, the Seattle-King County Municipal League named Ellis an “outstanding citizen” and went on to elect him its president twice. He was also a regent of the University of Washington for 12 years.

Among Mr. Ellis’ leading accomplishments, I highlight the following.

- Leading the charge to clean up Lake Washington in the 1950’s, which was polluted with sewage and unsafe for swimming. “The lake was like a split-pea soup,” said Richard Sandaas, executive director of Metro from 1988 to 1993.
- Advancing “Forward Thrust,” a series of bond measures that paid for expanding the parks system, cleaning up natural areas, funding highway improvements, and improving public amenities including the Kingdome, fire facilities, public swimming pools and a youth service center.
- Founding the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving 1.5 million acres of land – most of it public – around the Interstate 90 corridor between Seattle and the Kittitas foothills. “The scale of the task is enough to challenge anyone. Indeed, some say it is more than can be practically done,” Mr. Ellis said in a 1992 speech to the Downtown Seattle Rotary Club. “The longer we work on this dream, the more opportunities we find for doable tasks, for practical projects, for broad participation and for win-win solutions.”
- Leading in the successful passage of sales tax for a bus system that would become King County Metro and earned him the moniker, “Father of Metro.”
- Encouraging development of the convention center in downtown Seattle.

“I don’t like the ‘I’ word,” Mr. Ellis told the Seattle Times in 2013. He said his accomplishments “were very much a committee thing. It’s fascinating to see how everything we’ve undertaken... has met expectations and is serving us well today.”