



CITY OF KIRKLAND

City Manager's Office

123 Fifth Avenue, Kirkland, WA 98033 425.587.3001

www.ci.kirkland.wa.us

MEMORANDUM

To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager

From: Marilynne Beard, Assistant City Manager

Date: December 5, 2008

Subject: LETTER TO GOVERNOR GREGOIRE CONCERNING SUPPORT FOR DISPUTE
RESOLUTION CENTERS

RECOMMENDATION:

City Council approves the proposed letter to Governor Gregoire supporting continued funding for dispute resolution centers.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Kirkland has an interlocal agreement with the City of Bellevue for neighborhood mediation services. Through the agreement, Kirkland residents can receive mediation services free of charge from the Bellevue Neighborhood Mediation Program (BNMP). Individuals are referred from the Planning Department (primarily code enforcement), Police Department and Public Works Department for resolution of disputes between neighbors and/or businesses. These are cases that are often long-standing conflicts that cannot be addressed through City enforcement mechanisms. Trained volunteer mediators help facilitate constructive communication between parties. In 2008, the BNMP worked on 32 cases for Kirkland. Not all cases referred to the BNMP end in mediation but are resolved over the phone through coaching and conciliation. Seven cases went to mediation, five of which resulted in agreements.

The BNMP is part of a larger network of dispute resolution centers that receive financial support from the State of Washington. The State's financial difficulties are putting DRC funding at risk. Kirkland benefits from both the BNMP and the King County Alternative Dispute Resolution Center which handles internal employee disputes. A number of Kirkland staff have been trained as mediators and serve as volunteers to these programs. The attached letter urges the Governor to continue financial support for these agencies.

DRAFT

December 16, 2008

The Honorable Christine Gregoire
Governor of Washington State
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire:

The City of Kirkland is writing to encourage you to maintain funding for Dispute Resolution Centers (DRC's) in the Community Trade and Economic Development Department's budget. Continued access to dispute resolution is more critical than ever in times of fiscal stress.

The City of Kirkland has been fortunate to have access to the City of Bellevue's Neighborhood Mediation Program for almost ten years. Mediation is an effective alternative to litigation and leverages the City's resources by helping to find constructive and enduring resolution to conflicts. The mediation program and DRC's in general serves to leverage local police and regulatory resources to resolve issues that may be long-standing and complex in nature. Bellevue's mediation program along with other DRC's rely on funding from the State of Washington for program support.

During an economic downturn, access to DRC's as an alternative to litigation is even more important as fewer citizens can afford to high cost of settling disputes through the courts. DRC's train and deploy hundreds of volunteer mediators that work in service to their communities.

Alternative dispute resolution is cost-effective and helps build stronger communities. We urge you to continue support for these vital services.

Sincerely,
KIRKLAND CITY COUNCIL

By James L. Lauinger, Mayor