

Memo to the City Council  
August 20, 2019

### Bainbridge Island Community Bill of Rights

The Bainbridge Island Community Bill of Rights is born from the international movement to grant legal rights to nature and reaffirm the fundamental rights of people to a sustainable future. This movement is in response to the current mass extinction event and accelerating collapse of our life support systems driven by human-caused climate change.

The first laws establishing legal structures that recognized the Rights of Nature were adopted by local municipalities in the United States in 2006. Tamaqua Borough, Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania, was the first community to enact the Rights of Nature. Since then, more than three dozen communities have adopted such laws. In November 2010, the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, became the first major municipality in the United States to recognize Rights of Nature. In 2014, Mendocino County approved a Community Bill of Rights. In September 2008, Ecuador became the first country in the world to recognize Rights of Nature in its constitution. More recently, in February 2019 the citizens of Toledo, Ohio, voted to grant legal rights to Lake Erie, stating that “the lake has the right to “exist, flourish, and naturally evolve”.

Bainbridge Island has demonstrated its commitment to Climate Change and the environment through numerous actions and takes pride at being forefront and center of our region’s progress towards addressing our worsening environmental crisis. **To this end, the City of Bainbridge Island** has adopted the following Resolutions to implement the City’s Comprehensive Plan, promote Intergenerational Equity, and emphasize Bainbridge Island’s commitment to local, national, and global environmental causes and concerns: Resolution No. 2016-21, declaring the second Monday in October as Indigenous Peoples Day in the City of Bainbridge Island; Resolution No. 2017-13, declaring the month of April to be Celebrate Trees! Earth Month Bainbridge Island; No. 2017-18, adopting the *Bainbridge Island Community Forest Plan*; Resolution No. 2017-20, affirming the City of Bainbridge Island’s commitment to meet or exceed goals established in the *Paris Climate Agreement*; Resolution No. 2019-12, affirming the importance of the Southern Resident orca whales to the identity and values of Bainbridge Island and the broader Salish Sea region. Most recently, the City Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2019-14 in support of the *Green New Deal*, further declaring our City’s support of progressive environmental legislation. Through these actions, the City has demonstrated its commitment to fully implement its Comprehensive Plan to further effectuate rights of natural communities and ecosystems of the City of Bainbridge Island.

The proposed Ordinance, titled the *Bainbridge Island Community Bill of Rights*, seeks to promote the City’s Comprehensive Plan and the Sustainability Plan contained within; establishes Rights of Nature for the Natural Communities and Ecosystems of Bainbridge Island and Puget Sound; and asserts, protects and promotes the fundamental rights of Bainbridge Island citizens,

both present and future, to clean air, clean water, clean soil, and a sustainable future.

Several other cities in Washington State are currently working to draft similar Rights of Nature Ordinances, including Island County and Clallam County. Bainbridge Island is currently positioned to be the first City in Washington State to adopt Rights of Nature through the proposed Community Bill of Rights Ordinance, should the City Council vote to support the adoption of the Ordinance in the very near future. Thus, our City has the unique opportunity to join our international and national leaders in this global effort to address the most pressing crisis of our time.

Councilmember Nassar

Councilmember Peltier