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Supreme Court No. 1037899 Court of Appeals No. 85756-8-I King County Superior Court No. 23-2-09498-1 SEA

CITY OF SAMMAMISH,

Appellant,

VS.

WANTHIDA CHANDRRUANGPHEN,

Respondent,

and

DANIEL BLOOM,

Intervenor/Respondent.

RESPONDENT WANTHIDA CHANDRRUANGPHEN'S RESPONSE TO PETITION FOR REVIEW

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Court of Appeals, Division One, issued a sound decision in this case that is wholly consistent with precedent, and presents no constitutional or substantial public interest issues. Division One fairly and correctly rejected the City of Sammamish's ("City") contortion of service of process statutes and caselaw.

The case before the Court involves assertions by the City that service of process on the City was ineffective, twice. Wanthida Chandrruangphen ("Ms. Chandrruangphen") properly served the City with a Land Use Petition Act ("LUPA") appeal of the City's attempted cancellation of her Short Plat Alteration application ("Application"). This appeal is yet another attempt by the City to avoid processing Ms. Chandrruangphen's Application.

As Division One appropriately determined, both of Ms. Chandruangphen's process service attempts were valid and effective. The City's petition for review does not raise a question

of conflict with precedent, a constitutional issue or a matter of public policy. Simply, the City does not agree with Division One and asks for further judicial review. However, the standards under RAP 13.4 do not support discretionary review of this matter. There is no basis for this Court to engage in discretionary review.

II. STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Ms. Chandrruangphen offers the following pertinent facts omitted from the City's Statement of the Case. The City issued its letter canceling Ms. Chandrruangphen's Application (the "Land Use Decision") on May 8, 2023. The Land Use Decision was dated May 3, 2023, but the City did not send it until May 8, 2023, when it emailed a PDF of the Land Use Decision to Ms. Chandrruangphen's attorney. The Land Use Decision letter attached to the email was addressed to Ms. Chandrruangphen's attorney at the attorney's mailing address, implying that it was to

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¹CP 112.

be mailed as well as emailed. However, the Land Use Decision was never mailed and never made "publicly available" in accordance with City Code.²

Ms. Chandruangphen's first service upon the City was made on May 24, 2023, sixteen days after the City sent the Land Use Decision via email. The process server delivered copies of the LUPA petition and summons "into the hands and leaving same with Julian Brave [sic], Office Assistant II, who is authorized to accept service on behalf of the above."³

Upon receiving a declaration of service from the process server on May 26, 2023, a paralegal at Ms. Chandruangphen's attorney's firm, Benita Lamp, noticed that the process server had not served the City Clerk herself, as directed, but rather the assistant who was sitting at the front desk of the City Clerk's Office. Ms. Lamp promptly called the City Clerk, Lita Hachey,

²SDC 21.09.010.L sets forth the requirements for notice of decisions. None of them include a private email to an attorney. ³CP 168 (declaration from process server); *see also* CP 91 (declaration of Julian Bravo).

and left a voicemail.⁴ Ms. Hachey returned Ms. Lamp's call several minutes later and explicitly told Ms. Lamp that the service by Seattle Legal was sufficient, and "explained that she had received the pleadings, signed off on them and given them to Cynthia Schaff who is the City of Sammamish's Hearing Examiner's Clerk." Ms. Lamp immediately emailed Ms. Chandruangphen's attorney giving her contemporaneous account of the conversation:

Lita called back and she said she received the pleadings, signed off on them and gave them to Cynthia Schaff who is the HE [Hearing Examiner's] clerk now. She said process service was sufficient.⁶

Following a call from the City attorney claiming the service was ineffective, Ms. Chandrruangphen served the City again. Because LUPA provides that mailed decisions are not "issued" until three days after they are mailed, giving 24 days

⁴CP 163.

⁵Id.

⁶CP 170.

total for service,⁷ there was time to execute a second service of process. Ms. Chandruangphen engaged another process server who personally delivered Ms. Chandruangphen's land use petition and summons to Scott MacColl, the City Manager, on June 1, 2023.⁸ June 1, 2023, was 24 days after the Land Use Decision's transmittal date of May 8, 2023.

The trial court ruled that neither the May 24, 2023, nor the June 1, 2023, service was effective. Ms. Chandruangphen appealed and the Court of Appeals reversed, holding that both instances constitute timely and proper service on the City. The Court of Appeals held that the first service was effected through secondhand service on the City Clerk and the second was effective because LUPA treats mailed and emailed decisions the same when it comes to the deadline for service.

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⁷RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a).

⁸CP 163, 174.

⁹Chandrruangphen v. City of Sammamish, 32 Wn. App. 2d 527, 530, 556 P.3d 1137 (Wash. Ct. App. 2024).

The City moved for reconsideration of the Court of Appeals decision, erroneously arguing in part that the Court had relied on a version of the LUPA statute that was not yet in effect. Also in its Motion for Reconsideration, the City introduced a wholly new theory: that there was insufficient evidence that Bravo had delivered the documents to the City Clerk. The Court of Appeals denied the City's Motion for Reconsideration. The City now asks this Court for discretionary review.

III. ARGUMENT

Rule of Appellate Procedure (RAP) 13.4 governs this Court's determination regarding whether to accept review. Here, the Court of Appeals decision does not rise to the level of concern under any category that would support review by this Supreme Court. As discussed below, the decision is not in conflict with a decision of this Court or any Court of Appeals. There is no significant question of constitutional law. The decision does not involve an issue of substantial public interest that would warrant further review by this Court. Instead, the decision at issue is well

considered and consistent with precedent and recent legislative amendments. The decision is a reasonable application of service of process and LUPA statutes, particularly in light of the City Clerk's actions. Finally, the decision is tied to its particular facts and would have limited precedential value on that basis given legislative amendments to the statute after the fact.

A. The Court of Appeals Finding of Effective Secondhand Personal Service is Consistent with Applicable Statutes, Court Rules and this Court's Rulings.

Disagreeing with this Court's caselaw, the City argues that secondhand service should not be allowed when a party serves a municipality. The City disagrees with this Court's ruling in *Scanlan v. Townsend*¹⁰ that secondhand service is personal service. In making this contorted argument, the City confuses LUPA's strict procedural compliance requirements with RCW 4.28.080's substantial compliance requirements. The City also

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¹⁰181 Wn.2d 838, 849, 336 P.3d 1155 (2014).

claims that the Court of Appeals applied language of a LUPA amendment that was not yet in effect.

The City has failed to show that the Court of Appeals decision is in conflict with a decision of the Supreme Court. Nor has it shown that, as a matter of public interest, this Court should newly opine on its *Scanlan* decision. This Court should therefore deny the City's Petition for Review.

1. The Court of Appeals Decision is Consistent with this Court's Scanlan Ruling that Secondhand Service is Personal Service Under RCW 4.28.080.

The City argues that secondhand service is not permissible because LUPA mandates strict compliance with its procedural requirements. The City claims that LUPA's strict procedural compliance requirements are more exacting than the substantial compliance requirements of RCW 4.28.080, and thus LUPA should prohibit certain types of personal service such as secondhand service. The Court of Appeals properly rejected the City's arguments.

The City confuses LUPA's procedural requirements with the requirements of the statute governing service of process, RCW 4.28.080. LUPA requires that service be made in accordance with RCW 4.28.080. The RCW 4.28.080 are the officials who must be served to effectuate service of process on a municipality.

LUPA does not create a <u>higher</u> service of process standard than RCW 4.28.080. Nothing in LUPA purports to change the service standards under RCW 4.28.080. The requirements of RCW 4.28.080 may be met in the manner set forth in the statute and case law interpreting the statute. As the City itself says, the requirements of RCW 4.28.080 are "true for all types of actions against state and local governments, not just LUPA." Rules related to service should be applied consistently for all service

¹¹RCW 36.70C.040(5).

¹²City's Petition For Discretionary Review ("City's Petition"), p.12.

under RCW 4.28.080 because, thereunder, all service is personal service.

Courts have long interpreted what constitutes service under RCW 4.28.080. In Scanlan, this Court ruled the use of secondhand service effective for personal service under RCW 4.28.080.13 The City takes issue with the Court of Appeals' reliance on Scanlon. Citing Overhulse Neighborhood Ass'n v. Thurston County, 14 the City asks the Court to create a new implication that the requirement regarding municipal officers enumerated in RCW 4.28.080 supersedes the Supreme Court's rulings on what constitutes personal service. In Scanlan, this Court did not hold that secondhand service is permissible in all instances except when serving municipalities. This Court ruled that delivery of a summons and complaint to one person who then delivers the documents to the person ultimately required to

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¹³Scanlan, 181 Wn.2d at 856.

¹⁴94 Wn. App. 593, 972 P.2d 470 (1999), disapproved of by Durland v. San Juan Cnty., 182 Wn.2d 55, 340 P.3d 191 (2014).

be served (i.e., secondhand service) is personal service under RCW 4.28.080.¹⁵

This is precisely what the Court of Appeals ruled in the case at hand, that secondhand personal service via Bravo on City Clerk Hachey is effective service: "Our Supreme Court approved of the validity of what has come to be referenced as 'secondhand' service of process in *Scanlan*." The *Scanlan* Court did not rule that secondhand service "substantially complies" with the personal service requirement as the City wishes the decision had stated; the Court ruled that secondhand service is personal service for purposes of RCW 4.28.080.17

The City also relies on the unpublished *Covington Land*, *LLC v. City of Covington* ¹⁸ decision to argue that secondhand service should not apply to municipalities. In *Covington Land*,

¹⁵Scanlan, 181 Wn.2d at 856.

¹⁶Chandrruangphen, 32 Wn. App. 2d at 539 (internal citations omitted).

¹⁷Scanlan, 181 Wn.2d at 856.

¹⁸18 Wn. App. 2d 1014 (2021).

the process server served the City's Permit Manager, who handed the documents to a Senior City Planner, who then sent the documents to the City Clerk in an email. The Court stated, "Covington Land acknowledges that the Clerk received the petition 'ultimately by email delivery' and 'not by personal inhand service delivery." The Covington Land facts forming the basis of that Court's unpublished decision were entirely distinct from the subject case. Nor is Covington Land precedent under RAP 13.4 that would support discretionary review. To the contrary, that is the point of an appellate court concluding a decision should not be published, so it does not create precedent.

The Covington Land Court distinguished Scanlan, stating "The cases relied on by Covington Land in support of their secondary service argument are inapposite because they all concerned hand-to-hand delivery." As such, the City has failed to show a conflict with Scanlan.

¹⁹*Id.*, 18 Wn. App. 2d at 4.

²⁰*Id.*, 18 Wn. App. 2d at 5.

The City also claims that the Court of Appeals ruled erroneously because there is no evidence of hand-to-hand service between the Office Assistant and the City Clerk. This is not a basis on which this Court grants discretionary review: it does not raise a question of conflict with precedent, constitutional issue or matter of significant public interest.²¹

Motion for Reconsideration, where it claimed the "Court demonstrates a misapprehension of the facts" due to a lack of facts "about what Bravo did with the documents" once received or how the City Clerk came into possession of the documents.²² This could not have been a "misapprehension" of, or overlooked, facts because the City had never raised this argument before its Court of Appeals Motion for Reconsideration. The City is tardily asserting a new claim that it could have raised in briefing on its July 2023 Motion to Dismiss regarding the same issues on which

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²¹RAP 13.4 (b).

²²City's Motion for Reconsideration, p. 20.

two prior courts have ruled. RAP 2.5(a) allows the Court to refuse to review any claim of error which was not raised in the trial court. "Arguments not raised in the trial court generally will not be considered on appeal."²³

2. Court of Appeals Did Not Erroneously Rely on Recent LUPA Amendments.

The State Legislature recently amended the service of process requirements in LUPA, allowing service of a land use petition on the "office of a person" identified in RCW 4.28.080 rather than the "person" identified in RCW 4.28.080.²⁴ The City claims that the Court of Appeals relied on this new language in making its ruling. However, there is nothing in the Court of Appeals opinion that says service was effective because it was made on the City Clerk's office. The Court did not rule that service on Bravo amounted to service on the office of the City

²³Wingert v. Yellow Freight Sys., Inc., 146 Wn.2d 841, 853, 50 P.3d 256 (2002), citing State v. Riley, 121 Wn.2d 22, 31, 846 P.2d 1365 (1993).

²⁴RCW 36.70C.040(5).

Clerk. The Court ruled that secondhand personal service was made by delivery of the summons and land use petition on Bravo, who then effected service by delivering the documents to City Clerk Hachey, thereby causing "the summons and petition to be timely served upon the city clerk to properly secure review pursuant to LUPA."²⁵

The recent legislative amendment evinces the legislature's intent to expand who may be served: not only the specific people identified in RCW 4.28.080 (mayor, city manager, city clerk) but also their entire offices. This recent amendment to LUPA, along with other amendments to RCW 4.28.080,²⁶ demonstrates a legislative policy to more readily allow service on municipalities. The Division One decision in the instant case is consistent with the direction in which the legislature is moving.

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²⁵Chandrruangphen, 32 Wn. App. 2d at 541

²⁶The legislature had previously also amended RCW 4.28.080 to add city manager, and, during normal office hours, the mayor's or city manager's designated agent and city clerk. Laws of 1987, Ch. 361, Sec. 1.

As illustrated by the case at hand, service on municipalities has become increasingly difficult, particularly in the new "work from home" era. It is clear that the legislature intends that service on municipalities be easier, not harder.

RCW 4.28.080(2) is premised on the pre-Covid 19 notion that city clerks are at their desks in City Hall for the duration of "normal office hours." In decades past, it was much more straightforward for a LUPA petitioner to personally serve a city clerk within the extremely tight 21-day service window. In the modern era, as this case demonstrates, city clerks — like so many other employees— work remotely since their jobs now exist primarily in the digital domain. It is no longer a straightforward matter for a city clerk to be personally available during regular business hours.

Here, as the Court of Appeals noted, "Hachey, the city clerk, was working from home and, therefore, was not present in the city clerk's office during the City's official normal office hours.

She was thus not available to receive service as provided for in RCW 4.28.080(2)."²⁷

It is imperative that a petitioner have a reasonable opportunity to effectuate service and have its case heard on the merits, particularly in light of LUPA's 21-day statute of limitations. As the Supreme Court directed in *Confederated Tribes & Bands of Yakama Nation v. Yakima County*, LUPA "should not be so woodenly interpreted as to prevent judicial review on the merits."²⁸

Finally, any further review by this Court would be of very limited application because, effective June 6, 2024, anyone in the city clerk's office can be served. Although the Court of Appeals did not improperly rely on the amended version of the statute, as the City concedes, "the new version appears to allow service on

²⁷Chandrruangphen, 32 Wn. App. 2d at 540, n. 7, stating "That the city clerk effectively 'set up shop' at home was at plain variance with the expectation of the legislature in enacting RCW

4.28.080(2)."

²⁸Confederated Tribes & Bands of Yakama Nation v. Yakima County, 195 Wn.2d 831, 838, 466 P.3d 762 (2020).

the City by delivery of the documents to the City Clerk's office."²⁹

B. The Court of Appeals Ruling that Email Constitutes

Mail for Purposes of LUPA is Consistent with this

Court's Ruling in Confederated Tribes.

The City also takes issue with the Court of Appeals' reliance on this Court's ruling in *Confederated Tribes* that "There is no dispute that this e-mail correspondence satisfies the 'mailing' requirement of RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a)." The City again fails to show that the Court of Appeals decision is in conflict with Supreme Court precedence.

LUPA requires that an appeal from a land use decision be filed within 21 days of issuance of the decision. The date of issuance is three days after a written decision is mailed, or, if not mailed, the date on which the municipality provides notice that a written decision is publicly available.³¹ In 2020, this Court,

²⁹City's Petition, pp. 21-22.

³⁰Confederated Tribes, 95 Wn.2d at 836, n.2.

³¹RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a).

sitting *en banc*, concluded in *Confederated Tribes* that an emailed land use decision is equivalent to a "mailed" decision under LUPA.³²

As such, the 21-day statute of limitations begins to run three days after the City emailed the Land Use Decision. The Court of Appeals held, based on the *Confederated Tribes* precedent, that

e-mail transmittal of a land use decision constitutes a mailing and, therefore, is governed by RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a). Thus, we hold that, for the purpose of obtaining LUPA review, a land use decision is "issued" three days after a written decision is e-mailed by the local jurisdiction.³³

The Court of Appeals decision is consistent, and not in conflict, with a decision of this Court.

This Court's *Confederated Tribes* ruling does not, as the City claims, conflict with precedent established by this Court or create "confusion about how such deadlines should be calculated

³³Chandrruangphen, 32 Wn. App. 2d at 538.

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³²Confederated Tribes, 195 Wn.2d at 836, n.2

in the context of notices transmitted via email."³⁴ The Court was clear: email is the equivalent of regular postal mail for purposes of RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a).

Nor is this Court's discussion of email in *Confederated Tribes* dicta. The *Confederated Tribes* ruling would not make sense without the finding that email is the equivalent of mail for the purpose of LUPA. In *Confederated Tribes*, the Yakama Nation opposed permits issued to a mining operation and appealed to the county board of commissioners.³⁵ On April 10, 2018, the board passed a written resolution affirming a hearing officer's decision and granting the permits.³⁶ On April 13, 2018, county staff emailed the Yakama Nation a copy of the written resolution and an explanatory letter.³⁷ The Yakama Nation appealed under LUPA, filing its appeal 19 days after the April

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³⁴City's Petition, p. 31.

³⁵Confederated Tribes, 195 Wn.2d at 834.

³⁶*Id.*, 195 Wn.2d at 837.

³⁷*Id.* at 837-38.

13 staff email, and 22 days after the commission's vote approving the written resolution.³⁸

The issue in *Confederated Tribes* was which "written decision" started the LUPA appeal clock. This Court held that the April 13 email was the written decision because the emailed decision was the same as a mailed decision.³⁹ If the Court had not equated email with mail, the county's decision would not have been deemed issued, and the resolution passed by the board on April 10 would have been the triggering issuance date. However, because the decision was later "mailed" (*i.e.*, emailed) on April 13, the April 13 issuance date took precedence.⁴⁰

The *Confederated Tribes* Court embraced the full consequences of equating email with mail, noting that "LUPA's 21-day filing period began 3 days after this mailing."⁴¹ This conclusion is consistent with *RST Partnership v. Chelan*

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³⁸*Id*. at 835.

³⁹*Id*. at 836 n.2.

⁴⁰See RCW 36.70C.040(4)(a).

⁴¹Confederated Tribes, 195 Wn.2d at 838.

County, 42 an earlier Court of Appeals ruling that acceptance of service via email was adequate service for parties under RCW 36.70C.040(5). Despite the passage of time since *Confederated Tribes* and *RST*, the Washington legislature has not adopted a provision in LUPA addressing email, leaving these holdings as the last word. An emailed decision is treated the same as a mailed decision for purposes of calculating the total number of days under LUPA's statute of limitations.

The City argues that Confederated Tribes conflicts with Continental Sports Corp. v. Department of Labor and Industries. ⁴³ That case predates Confederated Tribes by two dozen years, and was decided long before email became the primary method of correspondence in commerce and government. Moreover, Continental Sports was neither a LUPA case nor did it deal with email.

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⁴² 9 Wn. App. 2d 169, 176-77, 442 P.3d 623 (2019).

⁴³128 Wn.2d 594, 910 P.2d 1284, 1286 (1996).

The City also claims that *Confederated Tribes* conflicts with *Habitat Watch v. Skagit County*. ⁴⁴ It is clear that this Court, in Confederated Tribes, was well-aware of its prior ruling in Habitat Watch, particularly because the Court cited Habitat Watch in its decision. Like Continental Sports, Habitat Watch does not deal with the issue of email, or even when a land use decision is issued or in what manner. In *Habitat Watch*, the petitioner attempted to use a belated public records request to appeal earlier-issued land use decisions regarding grading permits. This Court expressly declined to decide when the land use decision was issued or in what manner because the petitioner did not appeal until well over 21 days from the date the decision was made publicly available.⁴⁵

In the case at hand, the Land Use Decision was emailed, not mailed. If *Confederated Tribes* does not control, then there is no provision in RCW 36.70C.040 that recognizes email as a

⁴⁴155 Wn.2d 397, 120 P.3d 56 (2005).

⁴⁵*Id.*, 155 Wn.2d at 409.

legitimate means of issuing a land use decision at all. LUPA defines "issuance" as a mailed written decision, a written decision that is made "publicly available," a decision made by ordinance or resolution, or an unwritten decision. 46 The Land Use Decision was never mailed via postal service nor was it ever made "publicly available" under City Code. 47 If emailing the Land Use Decision was not its issuance, then the City has never issued the Land Use Decision and still needs to do so for purposes of judicial review. The practical implication of that holding would be that cities can no longer email land use decisions. This runs directly against public policy and the Court's trend of recognizing the ubiquitous nature of email.

The facts of the case at hand demonstrate the danger of the City's argument. The City emailed the Land Use Decision letter

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⁴⁶RCW 36.70C.040(4).

⁴⁷See SDC 21.09.010.L, outlining detailed procedures for how land use procedures are to be publicly noticed. None of these were followed. The only "notice" given was the email of the Land Use Decision to Ms. Chandrruangphen's attorney, which is not a permitted method of notification.

addressed to Ms. Chandrruangphen's attorney's street address as though it would be mailed. Ms. Chandrruangphen would have no way of knowing whether the City was sending the Land Use Decision through the post office, as was implied by the address on the letter, or if the email to her attorney was the only method the City would use to notify her of the Decision. The City holds all of the cards, and it can use this bait-and-switch tactic to muddle an applicant's appeal rights. The City unilaterally chose to email the Land Use Decision letter, and not send it through the post office, make it publicly available or provide any other notification, public or otherwise. As this Court noted in *Stikes Woods Neighborhood Ass'n v. City of Lacey*,

It is a well-accepted premise that "[l]itigants and potential litigants are entitled to know that a matter as basic as time computation will be carried out in an easy, clear, and consistent manner, thereby eliminating traps for the unwary who seek to assert or defend their rights."⁴⁸

⁴⁸124 Wn.2d 459, 463, 880 P.2d 25 (1994) (internal citation omitted).

The City should not be permitted to use its own lack of clarity to forestall applicants from their LUPA appeals.

Relying on *Confederated Tribes*, the Court of Appeals correctly deemed emailed letters and physically mailed letters alike, giving both the additional three days under RCW 36.70C.040(4)⁴⁹ This is harmonious with LUPA's purpose, which calls not merely for "timely" appeals, but also for "uniform," "consistent," and "predictable" judicial review of land use decisions.⁵⁰ The same uniform and predictable rule should apply so long as the City controls the method of delivery, unilaterally deciding if it will email or mail a decision.

The City cannot claim prejudice where it is in exclusive control of how a land use decision is issued. If the City does not like the holding of *Confederated Tribes*, it can send a decision via the postal service or make it publicly available.

⁴⁹Chandrruangphen, 32 Wn. App. 2d at 538.

⁵⁰RCW 36.70C.010.

IV. CONCLUSION

The City has failed to meet the review criteria of RAP 13.4. The Court of Appeals decision is not in conflict with a decision of this Court or any Court of Appeals; to the contrary, the decision is wholly consistent with precedent. There are no significant questions of constitutional law. The decision does not involve an issue of substantial public interest that would warrant further review by this Court. The Petition should be denied.

I certify that the foregoing Respondent Wanthida Chandruangphen's Response To Petition For Review contains 4,273 words, excluding the parts of the document exempted from the word count by RAP 18.17.

DATED this 12th day of February, 2025.

JOHNS MONROE MITSUNAGA KOLOUŠKOVÁ, PLLC

By: <u>√www. Oww</u>

Duana T. Koloušková, WSBA #27532 Vicki E. Orrico, WSBA #16849 Attorneys for Respondent Wanthida Chandrraungphen

DECLARATION OF SERVICE

I, Benita K. Lamp, am a citizen of the United States, resident of the State of Tennessee, that on this date, I caused to be served a true and correct copy of the foregoing RESPONDENT WANTHIDA CHANDRRUANGPHEN'S RESPONSE TO PETITION FOR REVIEW, with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will electronically serve all counsel of record.

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I declare under the penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Tennessee that the foregoing is true and correct.

DATED this 12th day of February, 2025, in Nolensville,

Tennessee.

BENITA K. LAMP

2025-02-12 Response to Petition for Review 01-318-1

JOHNS MONROE MITSUNAGA KOLOUSKOVA, PLLC

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