

Public Comment, Snohomish County Council Operations Committee Meeting, January 28, 2014

The resubmission of your Parks Department's request for a permit to move approximately 250,000 cubic yards of dirt has prompted me to appear before you today. The fact that this permit request precedes an approved park plan is just one in a long list of strategies attempted by Parks to circumvent GMA requirements in order to place a commercial use sports complex in a rurally zoned (R-5) area.

It is my hope today that as elected representatives on the Snohomish County Council you will understand why placing a commercial tournament athletic facility within a rural neighborhood is not only unfair to existing residents but also a poorly conceived and expensive idea. As a result, I hope that you will act to halt existing plans to place Snohomish County's athletic tournament facility in the southernmost part of the county and instead move the complex to a more suitable and welcoming location.

Last year, my husband and I took the time to meet with each of the five members seated on the council in order to convey our concerns. With the exception of one member (who is no longer on the council), each of you responded that you did not want to "destroy a neighborhood" in order to put in a park. Unfortunately, in spite of those meetings and all the other objections voiced by homeowners adjacent to Wellington Hills, Tom Teigen and the Parks Department were still allowed to proceed with their plan.

And this plan to place a sports complex at Wellington Hills has been fraught with attempts to ignore public concerns from the outset. Despite false assertions by Tom Teigen that he worked with neighbors to address our needs, his plans for an athletic facility at Wellington Hills Park have never realistically addressed any of those.

First, the design for the park was almost entirely completed prior to involvement of park neighbors. In fact, one of only two neighborhood representatives stated to my husband that when he attended the meetings, the features of the park had already been decided and the only question was how to arrange all those features within the park.

Keep in mind that the various clubs and special interests that were involved in the park's design have absolutely no financial responsibility or fiscal stake in the building, running or ongoing maintenance of the park. All in spite of the fact that the park is to be paid for by Brightwater mitigation funds that were earmarked to reduce the negative impacts of a sewage treatment plant on the surrounding community. And the question of who will bear the cost of subsequent building phases and ongoing maintenance has yet to be addressed.

Please also consider that since the time that the original SEPA documents were released over Easter of 2013 (and subsequently withdrawn for failure to properly follow county procedures) neither Mr. Teigen, his staff nor any County official used that time to contact ANY concerned citizens to discuss potential changes to the plans. Not once. Not ever.

Mr. Teigen has also deliberately mischaracterized the size of the athletic facility and other park features including the community center and mountain bike facility. He has repeatedly emphasized to the community and the media that the park features will only create about 20% new impermeable surface. What he has failed to convey to the public is that he will be required to move about a quarter of a million cubic yards of dirt on over 46 acres of this property, or about 90% of the total acreage that's actually considered suitable for development. That's quite a different picture.

To truly understand the extent of the "Land Disturbing Activity", go to the park location, stand on 240th Street and look around...just about everything you can see will be dug out, leveled or buried.

It is difficult to quantify the effects of this ill-conceived park plan within the confines of comments on a SEPA Checklist or permit application. These mechanisms are supposedly put in place to protect our environment and give affected homeowners an opportunity to protect their homes and investments. But while the Parks Department has had years to plan and document, homeowners (those most drastically affected by this huge sports complex) have but 14 or 21 days, respectively, in which to officially object.

And even more challenging is this question: How do I quantify the loss of my quiet, rural home for the sake of a massive tournament complex that brings with it noise, bright lights and traffic? The measurement of traffic usage against road capacity, the effects of 80-foot light poles blotting out the night sky, and noise levels generated by tournament games simply cannot justify the loss of a quiet rural neighborhood. Yet clearly, the effects of placing a tournament athletic facility in a rural neighborhood are far more insidious than having a sewage plant in my community.

However, as a council member, you have a rare opportunity to downsize the plans for a park, preserve the unique gem of green space known as Wellington Hills, and by doing so, protect our highly desirable rural neighborhoods. I ask you to stop throwing good money after bad in pursuit of building a tournament athletic facility in such a completely unsuitable location. Instead, by working with the community to design a park that is appropriate for the Wellington Hills site, you would still fulfill the requirements for spending the Brightwater mitigation funds as well as your obligations to your constituents.

J.L.