

New County Park's Impacts Concern Maltby Neighbors

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MALTBY -- A neighbors group and the city of Woodinville have filed formal appeals seeking to scale back Snohomish County's plans for a sports complex near Highway 522.

The two appeals filed Friday challenge the county's finding that developing the 100-acre Wellington Hills County Park would have limited environmental impact. Woodinville argues more study is needed to understand traffic and drainage. The nonprofit Neighbors to Save Wellington Park's concerns include added traffic, noise and artificial light from park facilities designed for hosting athletic tournaments.

"(W)e'd really like to work with the Parks Department to develop a park plan that could actually work for everyone, and we keep trying to get that message across," said Tina Stewart, a member of the neighbors group who has lived in the area for about seven years.

The county hearing examiner has scheduled a May 10 conference to determine procedural steps in the appeal. Woodinville and Neighbors to Save Wellington Park also filed their appeals with the county and with Skagit County Superior Court.

The land in question sits up a hill just east of the Costco in Woodinville. The Wellington Hills Golf Course operated there for 80 years before shutting down last fall.

The closure followed the county's purchase of the property for about \$10 million. Construction costs are expected to approach \$13 million, but that number could change after the county adopts a master development plan. The County Council will have to conduct a hearing to approve the master plan, but has yet to schedule one, Council Chairwoman Stephanie Wright said.

The county's vision for Wellington Hills calls for building four lighted synthetic-turf fields, three grass fields and 739 parking stalls. An off-leash dog park, paved jogging trails, playgrounds and picnic shelters are among other features parks planners hope to include.

About three-quarters of the land would remain woods or wetlands.

The earliest the county could break ground is May 2014, county parks director Tom Teigen said.

The parks department has anticipated the appeals, Teigen said, and will continue to work with the neighbors on shaping plans.

"We're thankful that the public has been actively involved in the process throughout," he said.

At the request of the County Council, the parks department has been gathering information about how often athletic fields at the complex are likely to be used.

Funding for the park comes from 2005's \$70 million settlement over King County's Brightwater sewage treatment plant. Snohomish County must use that money for specific projects, such as park, road and habitat improvements.

The park sits to either side of 240th Street SE, which the county plans to upgrade with wider lanes, sidewalks and a roundabout at the park entrance.