

Wellington Golf Course Neighbors Reach Out

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“Neighbors to Save Wellington Park” fully understands Snohomish County now owns the nearly 100 acres where Wellington Hills Golf Course sits and that a recreation park will be built. And they’re OK with that. It was built in by law five years ago via Brightwater mitigation monies destined for parks.

They just strongly object to the type of park Snohomish County has in mind: Now nine lighted soccer fields, a 60,000-square-foot mountain-bike building, a 50,000- square-foot indoor soccer facility and paved parking for up to 720 automobiles.

But they’re hoping and working for something much less invasive.

Frustrated by the county’s master planning and lack of oversight, the neighborhood group — organized hastily in response to the May 8 announcement — recently hired an attorney to counter plans by the county to convert the golf course into a regional sports complex with the capability of hosting major “pay to play” youth soccer tournaments.

At Tuesday’s spirited grass-roots NSWP meeting held in the old golf course clubhouse and attended by about three dozen concerned neighbors, group organizer and spokesman Todd Bailey provided some history: “Originally (Snohomish) parks said there there would be four fields. Later it was five and then six. Currently we’re up to nine fields. Imagine putting Costco up here with its parking lot and wrapping nine soccer fields around it. That’s what we’ll have here if the plan goes through.”

He then spoke about the objectives of NSWP. “First I just want to make sure you guys understand we’re not anti-sports,” he said. “We just feel that this overbuild is just the wrong location for a sports complex.” He said the goal was for a “thoughtful developed park in harmony with the neighborhood, making sure the county follows all state and federal laws.”

He mentioned serious potential traffic and noise impacts, particularly on weekends, as well as concerns for local flora, fauna and the environment.

To that end NSWP recently retained J. Richard Aramburu, the same attorney who represented Concerned Citizens of Wellington in its originally victorious case against Phoenix Development, though the decision was later overturned in appeal and remains in flux.

Aramburu’s first order of business was sending a letter to Snohomish County Council and Snohomish County Parks and Recreation Director Tom Teigen, stating opposition to the adoption of a proposed master plan for the property.

In it he wrote the following: “NSWP believes that public participation and review of the master plan has been insufficient and that the scope and intensity of this master plan is inconsistent with both its surroundings and a wide variety of local and state laws and regulations.

Accordingly, NSWP asks that no action be taken on the proposed master plan until there has been complete and thorough compliance with planning and environment laws and rules.”

The basis for NSWP’s position, he wrote in summary, were four-fold: Planning for a new park has been incomplete and inadequate; Failure to follow the terms of the Snohomish County comprehensive plan, especially its capital facilities and parks and recreation elements; The intensive nature of the proposed master plan violates Snohomish County comprehensive plan policies regarding the protection of rural areas; Failure to comply with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) for the master plan decision.

Added NSWP core group member Ted Pankowski: “The bottom line is the county’s supposed to protect the public from the kind of arbitrary action we’re seeing right now.”

That said, NSWP treasurer Margaret Philip, who raised three boys in her home along the golf course, then spoke with more than a little emotion. She implored her neighbors in the room — some she knew and some she did not — to join the advocacy group in its process by making a financial contribution to offset the cost of legal fees, but it wasn’t all about raising money.

“Because this is our legacy, protecting this as part of our community,” she said before pausing to regroup. She said she thought all the different county alternatives still needed to be studied.

“We need all types of support: time, energy, ideas and passion. I just know this community could have a beautiful vision and come up with something better than what’s being forced down our throats.”