

## Neighbors Near Future Park Complain About Traffic, Loss of Rural Atmosphere

Published: Woodinville Weekly February 25, 2014

Written by Brianna Gerdeman

Sharon Peterson held up a binder with 600 pages of complaints about the proposed Wellington Hills County Park.

"The Neighbors to Save Wellington Park has a name for this book," Peterson said at last week's City Council meeting during a public hearing about the park. "They call it the 'thud factor.'"

She dropped the volume on floor, and it lived up to its name.

Peterson was one of about 20 people at the public hearing who said they opposed the planned park, which would be built at the site of the former Wellington Hills Golf Course in Snohomish County on the border of Woodinville. No one spoke in favor of the park.

Many commenters worried the park would increase traffic on the area's two-lane roads and destroy the rural atmosphere.

Traffic from the park will make it hard to get into Woodinville to patronize the city's restaurants, grocery stores, hardware stores, dry cleaners and other businesses, Bill Stankus said. He predicts people will take their business to other cities.

"We moved here to be able to benefit from the amenities of Woodinville," Tina Stewart said. "We love to shop, we bank, we taste wine, we do everything down in Woodinville. But that's not going to be possible if our main route out of our development is completely blocked. ... Even though the Snohomish County Parks Department hasn't figured it out, that's going to be completely inundated with traffic."

Janet Littlefield, whose husband has an office in Woodinville, also said traffic from the park will hurt businesses.

"The bottom line is this: Residents from the Wellington area will have a very difficult time getting into downtown Woodinville to shop or to conduct business, no matter which route they try to use," Littlefield said. "Gone will be the days of a quick trip to the store or a last-minute decision to eat dinner out or to see a movie. Those excursions will need to be carefully planned around practices, games and tournaments. Shopping will move away to some place that's more easily accessible. Downtown commerce will suffer."

Snohomish County is planning a series of improvements for 240th Street, which runs through the middle of the park.

Snohomish County will widen the lanes of the road and add a sidewalk, a left turn lane at the intersection of Woodinville-Snohomish Road and a roundabout at the park entrance, according to the county's Public Works Department website.

But citizens are concerned that Snohomish County has no plans to improve the road — known as 75th Avenue, 156th Avenue or Bostian Road — on the east side of the park.

Anthony Grasso travels that road almost every day when he bikes to work in Maltby.

He says the road is a major cycling route that's used during several large, annual events, and that the additional traffic will put people in danger.

Tom Teigen, Snohomish County's Parks and Recreation director, said the county has done studies that show most traffic will come to the park from the west, using 240th Street, rather than from the east, using 156th Street. He added that the county hopes cycling traffic will move to the trail on the rail corridor, which Snohomish County recently purchased the rights to.

But focusing on the park's quantifiable impacts, like traffic and light pollution, doesn't capture the biggest problem, said Littlefield. She and other citizens are concerned the park will take away from Woodinville's natural atmosphere.

"Have you seen this land that you're preparing to bulldoze?" Andy Hale wondered. "I mean, have you truly looked with your eyes at the natural beauty of the site, with its unique rolling hills, towering trees of Douglas fir, western red cedar, pine, and maple, or do you just see a revenue that can generate money for the county coffers, with a flattened landscape, sports fields and asphalt? Are you truly so one-dimensional in your vision that you are prepared to destroy a tranquil neighborhood just to satisfy your thirst for revenue?"

Teigen disputes arguments like that. He noted that 78 acres of the 104-acre park, or about three-quarters, will be natural open space, and only five of the 97 historic trees on the fairway will be cut down. The site will not be flattened, Teigen said — there will be elevation steps between different levels of parking and between ball fields.

"We're the parks system," he said. "We're all about preservation of property." The park will include four lighted synthetic turf fields, three grass fields and 603 parking spaces, Woodinville City Manager Richard Leahy explained.

Future phases of construction may add a community activity center, an indoor mountain bike facility and additional parking.

At the heart of the debate is the park's purpose.

Teigen calls it "one of our greatest community parks." The many citizens who spoke at the public hearing insist it's a regional, commercial sports complex.

With seven sports fields, Wellington Hills County Park would be smaller than sports complexes like Starfire (13 fields) and Sixty Acres (18 fields), but it would be more developed than the land where residents remember playing golf, walking their dogs and riding horses.

Citizens thanked the Woodinville City Council for hosting the public hearing and giving them a chance to speak out about the park, something they say Snohomish County hasn't done.

But since the park is in Snohomish County, Woodinville's power is mostly limited to drawing attention to the issue, said Alexandra Sheeks, assistant to the Woodinville City Manager.

The city also filed a suit with the hearing examiner, saying Snohomish County hadn't followed the correct permitting process.

Teigen said the Parks and Recreation Department has met with neighbors and refined the plans for the park based on their input.

Still, he appreciates that they're involved and passionate, and wants to keep working with neighbors.

"We're probably never going to say we're done listening to people," Teigen said. "...They're going to be our neighbors for a long time, so we want to hear from them."