

## Neighbors, Government Officials Debate Merits of Wellington Park

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The debate isn't over about Wellington Hills County Park, where Snohomish County Parks and Recreation plans to build seven sports fields, trails and more on what used to be a golf course.

Neighbors, who have formed a group called Neighbors to Save Wellington Park, say Snohomish County Parks Director Tom Teigen is misleading about how the park will affect people nearby and is unwilling to take the community's input.

"Our parks director tends to make a lot of statements that are only half true," said Tina Stewart, a member of NSWP.

Teigen says the park's critics make up a small percentage of the community.

"Most people believe this is a great community asset," he said. "...They're quietly and patiently waiting for us to get done, and they don't want to engage in the big fight with their neighbors."

Still, Teigen says he's met with the community repeatedly, at more than 20 meetings, and has changed some aspects of the park design that people didn't like. The Parks Department has reconfigured the sports fields to increase buffer areas and reduce light glare, reduced parking area and impervious surfaces, increased traffic mitigation and road improvements and reduced the number of fields from nine to seven, he wrote in an open letter.

"They took two fields out because they couldn't fit them," Stewart says. She and other neighbors are most concerned with the four lighted, synthetic turf fields planned for the park. "That's not a really significant accommodation."

She cites a 2011 community survey about Parks and Recreation in Snohomish County. Respondents listed "trails" and "leisure" as their highest priorities; "sports facilities" and "special use facilities" were the lowest priorities.

One point of contention is how much of the park will be developed and how much will be left as open space. Teigen says 25 acres of the 104-acre park will be developed, and 79 acres will be left as open space.

However, the Parks department's Land Disturbing Activity permit (obtained from NSWP) for the park asked permission to clear 47 acres. (Teigen says that much land is already cleared for the golf course, and that the permit is to grade the land for parking and fields, not to clear it.)

Another problem, Stewart says, is that the Parks department's financial assumptions don't match the traffic projections for the park. The pro forma about financial assumptions leaves out key assumptions about number of games, visitors, or trips, so it's hard to compare the two.

"Without the assumptions explicitly stated, it's hard to ensure that all of the studies were based on the same overall projections for site usage," Stewart said.

But she and other neighbors estimate that the financial documents assume high usage of the park, bringing in lots of money, while the traffic analysis assumes a lower usage of the park.

Neighbor Mike O'Grady wrote a letter to Teigen and Snohomish County Executive John Lovick evaluating the park's traffic impact analysis. Using the average daily trips in the traffic study, O'Grady estimated that usage for the fields would be extremely low, with an average of less than one full practice or game per day.

"Either the traffic numbers are low or the fields are significantly under-utilized," O'Grady wrote. "I believe the usage will be much higher, certainly on a Saturday, but because the [average daily trip] numbers were averaged between weekdays and Saturdays it is not possible to develop an accurate assessment."

Neighbors, including many who spoke last month at a public hearing hosted by the city of Woodinville about the park, are concerned that the Parks department only plans to widen 240th Street, not 75th / 156th Avenue or other surrounding roads.

The traffic analysis justifies that by predicting that 85 percent of traffic will come from the west on 240th Street. That estimate is based on enrollment in the Northshore School District, as well as existing traffic patterns, the study said.

But in a letter to Teigen, several local residents (Bill and Katherine Stankus and Darran and Janet Littlefield) calculated a different number. Looking at the enrollment of Northshore schools to the east and west of the park, they found that 74 percent of the school district's enrollment was to the west and 26 percent was to the east.

Stewart points out other errors in the traffic study — such as describing Woodinville-Snohomish Road as a "five-lane urban minor arterial" although it only has five lanes at the intersection of 240th Street. It narrows to two lanes about 0.1 mile south, and narrows to four lanes north of the Brightwater Sewage Treatment Plant.

"We really feel that the infrastructure isn't here to support the park," Stewart said. She adds that she would love to have a "true community park" at the site, but thinks the sports fields should go elsewhere.

Teigen says the state supports the traffic study, and that the Parks department's use patterns and traffic counts are conservative.

The City of Woodinville has also weighed in on the problem. Tom Hansen, Woodinville's Public Works Director, wrote in a letter to Snohomish County Project Manager Tom Barnett that documentation for the park is "deficient," especially in regard to traffic and transportation, but based on what is known, the project will result in "significant unmitigated adverse impacts to the city of Woodinville and its citizens."

The two-way left turn lane on Woodinville-Snohomish Road that the Parks department has proposed to mitigate traffic is "a dangerous non-solution to a significant problem," Hansen wrote.

Peter Eglick, a special land use counsel for the city of Woodinville, wrote to Barnett with similar concerns. He added that "the Parks Department proposal for Wellington is not simply for a public park" and questioned whether that type of development is appropriate outside an Urban Growth Area.

But Teigen believes the location is actually an asset, with the park creating a buffer between the commercial and industrial area to the west and the residential area to the east.

“They say we’re ruining the rural character, but we’re actually preserving it,” he said. “...We are creating this amazing buffer that insulates you from any development.”