

SnoCo Meets Public Again on Park Project

Published: Woodinville Weekly February 4, 2013

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About 80 concerned citizens filled the Brightwater Education and Community Center conference room Thursday as Snohomish County unveiled its newly-revised master plan for what's now being referred to as Wellington Hills County Park.

County Public Works officials were also on hand to discuss roadway improvement projects associated with the project.

Using Brightwater mitigation funds, Snohomish County purchased 100 acres near Maltby from the University of Washington in 2011 and plans to build a sports complex, replete with seven soccer fields, an indoor mountain bike facility and 700 paved parking stalls among other amenities, where the Wellington Hills Golf Course used to be.

It was the fifth public meeting overall between the county and citizens, and Parks Director Tom Tiegen told the crowd its ad hoc committee, which has met 15 times over two years, had recently approved the latest master plan amendments. (The ad hoc committee is comprised of neighbors, stakeholders, community organizations and representatives of Northshore School District and the city of Woodinville.)

Essentially the latest changes made have been on the north side of 240th St. SE, with the realignment of two off-leash dog parks — one for active dogs, one for shy dogs — into the northwest corner of the property, with the reconfiguration of a paved parking lot adjacent to the east.

Members of the dog community will now be able to go directly from the parking lot into a containment area, consultant Bruce Dees said.

“It actually works better with the topography,” he said. “The other neat thing about this is that people will have a large area of open space for community use — zero (land) grade changes; the topography that exists will remain as it is. The other great thing about this reconfiguration is none of the trees have to be removed. The way it is right now is the way it will continue to look. We worked hard to retain the existing character of the site, to retain as many of the existing trees as possible, including a big maple as a focal point of the park.”

Steve Dickson, assistant to the Snohomish County Public Works director, then spoke about the plans for 240th St. SE both west and east of the park's two entrances. (240th St. SE basically bisects the entire property west to east at its midsection.) Public Works, he said, will widen 240th St. SE to include 12-to-14-foot-wide driving lanes and a 5-foot-wide sidewalk on the north end of the road.

The current road has 10-foot-wide lanes. The wider road will improve accessibility for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists.

Crews will also widen and restripe 240th St. SE at the intersection with Snohomish-Woodinville Road (Highway 9) to include a left turn/through lane and a right turn lane and will upgrade the signal to include a left turn arrow. A new sidewalk on 240th St. SE, he said, will connect to an existing sidewalk near Snohomish-Woodinville Road, which will create continuous access for pedestrians.

A new private-property owner, he added, will replace the failing retaining wall below the office complex near the existing sidewalk, and the current temporary fencing and barriers will ultimately be removed.

The Parks Department plans to build a roundabout near the park's west entrance to mitigate vehicular speed, as residents along 240th St. SE commented drivers typically surpass the posted 25 mph limit.

Public Works, Dickson said, will also add three speed humps along the roadway.

Tiegen said the county is now waiting for all the geotechnical studies to be completed, including the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) checklist, and anticipates a positive conclusion in March.

"That's the big document that will have the traffic studies, noise, lighting studies and all the environmental assessments," he said. "We believe we have all the elements in place and all our documentation supports that."

Once all the paperwork is in order, Tiegen will present it to the Snohomish County Council for final approval.

Todd Bailey, spokesman for Neighbors to Save Wellington Park and a member of the ad hoc committee, is not quite as sure as Tiegen that the county council will sign off on it.

To that end he drafted a letter to the council and it read, in part, like this:

"Given the magnitude of this project our group Neighbors to Save Wellington Park question the location, need and demand for such an industrial sports complex in a residential area. In these dire economic times an unnecessary cost to Snohomish County, the community and tax payers is not fiscally responsible. Not only is the site selection inappropriate, the project is NOT WARRANTED and the community can't afford this. It will not only place a burden on residents, but also neighboring cities, businesses in the area, environment, traffic and State Route 522 and Highway 9. The tax payers will find it hard to see good money spent on a poorly thought-out hasty initial decision committing our community to an unwanted, unwarranted disruptive costly imposed intrusion into our community." Bailey went on to ask council to "do the right thing," which was to build the complex somewhere else, suggesting Marysville, where, he said, studies showed it was needed. Further, he urged council to use Brightwater mitigation money as it was intended — to lessen the "damage" created by the \$1.8 billion sewage treatment plant and develop a green, natural community park in the Wellington area.