

## Commissioners Postpone Hearing on Forestland Program

By Christopher Dunagan  
Monday, February 11, 2008

### PORT ORCHARD

The future of 50,000 acres of rural forestland in Kitsap County was on the line Monday night, when property owners pleaded with Kitsap County commissioners not to convert working forestlands to public ownership.

Who would ultimately own the open space next to rural developments was the hottest issue during a public hearing on the county's revised "rural wooded incentive program."

In the end, the commissioners voted 2-1 to postpone a decision until Wednesday, when Commissioner Josh Brown would bring forth a proposal to remove public ownership provisions and offer a moratorium until further details can be worked out.

"Let's do the minimum that the hearings board is requiring us to do," Brown said, referring to a ruling by the Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board.

Approving the basics of the rural wooded incentive program would send a signal to the community that the commissioners support the "string of pearls" trail system proposed in North Kitsap by the Olympic Property Group, he said.

The central idea that remains on the table is to allow an average of one house on every 5 acres, provided the houses are clustered together and that 75 percent of the total property is kept in open space.

Where the incentive program is not used, the maximum density would remain one house per 20 acres under current zoning.

The revisions were required after the hearings board rejected the program twice, but endorsed the basic goals of protecting open space the second time around.

What caused the board concern was a provision that would kick in after 40 years and would allow development on a portion of the open space that was created under the program.

The proposal before the county commissioners Monday night was designed to satisfy the hearings board by eliminating the 40-year provision and making the open space permanent. But the proposal went a step further by requiring that the open space be put into ownership of a public entity or conservation group for stewardship.

Numerous owners of forestland, both large and small, argued that the program would offer no incentive if they were unable to continue managing their lands for forestry.

Rod Reid, president of Alpine Evergreen, reminded people that before 1998, rural areas were zoned one house for every 2.5 acres. The incentive program makes no sense if the open space moves out of private forestry.

"If the hearings board doesn't like the 40 years, take the 40 years away, but don't get rid of forestry," Reid said.

Property owners wish to keep their land in forestry with taxes going to the county, said Helen Daly, a forestland owner in Central Kitsap. An incentive program could further that goal by allowing well-planned development on a portion of the land, she said.

Jon Rose of Olympic Property Group said his company's plans to build connecting trails throughout North Kitsap has generated an excitement rarely seen in the county. Keeping the open space in private hands would further that effort.

Commissioner Steve Bauer said he was convinced by the testimony that public ownership may not be necessary. He said he's more concerned about how the open space is connected, one development to the next, so the habitat has functional value.

"I think we need to pursue an approach that's both fair to property owners and the public," he said.

Commissioner Jan Angel, who voted against the idea, said it would be better to repeal the ordinance and go back to the drawing board to develop a better plan.



© 2007 Kitsap Sun