

Keeping Momentum Alive on NK Trail Plan

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POULSBO

A sense of ownership is the next big step in a big North Kitsap plan for an extensive trail network.

Dozens of people around North Kitsap, including local leaders, are signing on to help bring to fruition a plan floated by Olympic

Property Group to connect the area's communities with a long network of trails — affectionately called the "String of Pearls."

"How can we design a route that touches every single pearl?" OPG President Jon Rose asked rhetorically during an interview in the Poulsbo company's conference room, scattered with large poster boards of the project.

One shows a rough idea of a network of new and existing trails like the Mosquito Fleet Trail that could connect Suquamish, Hansville, Little Boston, Kingston and Poulsbo, Bainbridge Island, Port Gamble and Indianola.

A recent meeting brought together representatives from those municipalities and interest groups that represent equestrians, hikers, kayakers and bicyclists to start the planning work.

It was a continuation of a June meeting when about 500 people showed up, largely to support the idea.

"A lot of folks put their hands up and said they want to be involved," Rose said of the first meeting.

The next step will be to develop a nonprofit to run the planning effort, he said.

The trails would largely be across about 8,000 acres of land owned by Olympic Property Group in North Kitsap. The company, a division of logging company Pope Resources, proposes clustering development in those lands, with some open space and some limited logging to continue on undeveloped land. The other option is partitioning most of the land into 20-acre parcels, which would likely over time eradicate an existing trail network on OPG logging land.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions, like where exactly the trails might go, how much they'll cost to build and maintain, and they will be paid for.

The idea of a metropolitan parks district has been tossed out.

When asked how a plan that will take decades to see through can keep momentum, Rose said there has to be visible progress. Another meeting with stakeholders is in the works.

On the Web:

Information about the trials plan, including research documents and maps are available at www.portgamble.com by clicking under the "Port Gamble's Future" tab.