

North Kitsap Trails Plan Applauded

Nearly 500 turned out in Kingston to support a development plan for 8,000 acres of private land.

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Originally published 07:14 a.m., June 28, 2007

KINGSTON

About 500 people turned out Wednesday night in support of keeping thousands of privately owned acres in North Kitsap open to bicyclers, hikers and horseback riders.

They packed the warm gym in Kingston Junior High School, and clapped, whistled and cheered as Jon Rose, president of Olympic Property Group, went over the proposal.

The company maintains about 8,000 acres of trails and logging area near Port Gamble, Kingston and Hansville. Rose said the company has two basic options now: sell that land off, wholesale or in lots, or develop clusters of homes that would leave the rest of the area open for recreational use and wildlife, perhaps permanently.

"It's something on the order of Central Park in its impact, vision and longevity," Rose said of the second option.

Olympic Property Group is a subsidiary of Pope Resources, a timber and real estate business. Rose said told the audience that even with clustering, the proposal had to deliver value to his shareholders.

The company would need public support, and perhaps money, to maintain such a large network of trails, he said. Compared to dividing the property into 350 individual 20-acre lots, most in the audience seemed willing to supply both.

"It's so obviously the right choice," said Suquamish resident Jay Robertson, who regularly hikes and bikes on the trails.

He said he would gladly pay taxes to support the trash collection, tree trimming and maintenance the proposal would likely require, because it would benefit the entire region.

"Otherwise, it's just going to serve 300 people," he said.

A few people had concerns about the details, especially the cost, but were still enthusiastic about the concept.

"What a dream!" said Sally Laidlaw, who lives near Port Gamble. She liked Rose's idea of an interconnected series of parks and wildlife, she said.

But she said she was skeptical of the company's intentions, and wondered about the idea of using public money to support private property.

"They want us to invest in their land," Laidlaw said.

Afterwards, Rose said the turnout exceeded his expectations. The company will hold town meetings in Kingston, Hansville and other cities over the next few months, he said, and continue to look all of its options.

Return to www.kitsapsun.com later for more information on Wednesday's meeting.