

## New Plan for Port Gamble: Develop 1,000 Acres, but Preserve 7,000 Acres

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PORT GAMBLE —

Kitsap County could become the owner of 7,000 acres of forested land currently owned by Pope Resources in North Kitsap under a plan unveiled Tuesday.

The partnership would protect the land as open space in public ownership and afford Olympic Property Group, the real-estate arm of Pope Resources, the opportunity to build a large-scale community near Port Gamble on the remaining 1,000 acres.

County Commissioner Steve Bauer and OPG President Jon Rose say they have agreed on principles to preserve the rural environment of North Kitsap, while allowing Pope Resources to realize a fair return from the 8,000 forested acres it owns.

“People value the rural environment,” Bauer said. “They value the forests, they value the wildlife habitat.”

Bauer and Rose have discussed the partnership in earnest since this summer.

Ultimately the entities hope to create a “master plan” that would concentrate residential development in and around Port Gamble with an undetermined number of houses in a new community south of the existing townsite. Density would need to be high enough for the community to be “self-sustaining,” with tax revenues to support roads, fire, law enforcement, water, sewer and other services. It will likely be a couple decades before growth is realized.

The remaining 7,000 acres of forested land would remain relatively untouched for public use.

The working name of new plan is “The North Kitsap Legacy Partnership.”

The partnership would give increased development potential to Pope Resources. In turn the company could transfer some of its land to the county, but the county would still need to find ways to buy property. Funding options include grant money, selling conservation easements and public grants, and loans to build a new sewage-treatment plant. A new plant would divert treated sewage effluent away from Hood Canal.

If the partnership goes through, the county would harvest trees from the 7,000 acres through selective cutting. Bauer believes this sustainable practice would raise enough

money to manage the land and maintain the trails.

The plan is likely to be the largest habitat conservation project in the history of the county, Rose said. Balancing equities so both parties get a fair deal could require a mediator who understands development potential and values for various uses.

Rose and Bauer agree this will be an extensive project requiring negotiations and the need for public input. Public comment will ultimately lead to a “development agreement” that will spell out each party’s responsibilities.

“This will be very challenging,” Bauer said. “It will have to stretch some people’s comfort zones.”

The idea of preserving the large swath of forested land that Rose calls a “big green carpet” has always been a part of Pope Resource’s plan, he said. He has favored the county’s Rural Wooded Incentive Program, which would allow the owner of forestland to build up to four times as many homes, provided development is clustered. Rose’s “String of Pearls” concept — an extensive trail network throughout North Kitsap — was based on this idea.

County commissioners put the program on hold with a moratorium.

Bauer doesn’t favor the program, saying development would be piecemeal and public benefits uncertain.

“I keep coming back to ‘What are the alternatives?’” Bauer said. “And frankly the alternatives don’t provide us with any of the advantages that this does.”

Growth is coming to Kitsap and without some sort of partnership, Pope Resources could sell off its land in 20-acre lots under the rural wooded program. The chance of the county preserving large blocks of natural forest would be gone.

Discussions will continue through this year, perhaps with a development agreement by year end. A change to the county’s comprehensive plan would then go through public hearings.

Bauer will present the partnership at Wednesday’s county commissioner study session and on Thursday at Kitsap Economic Development Alliance’s annual Decision Maker’s Breakfast.



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