

## Kitsap County Commissioners Offer Tentative Support for Port Gamble Plan

By Christopher Dunagan

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PORT ORCHARD —

With the blessing of his fellow Kitsap County commissioners, Steve Bauer has launched a process that could ultimately bring 7,000 acres of private forestland under county ownership.

The plan includes development of a [new community near Port Gamble](#).

In a meeting Wednesday, Bauer told his fellow commissioners that he is driven by the desires of North Kitsap residents. He said they want a system of trails and open space without the large clearcuts of industrial forestry.

Pope Resources, the largest property owner in Kitsap County, is no longer interested in managing its North Kitsap holdings for forestry, Bauer said. His comment was confirmed by Jon Rose of Olympic Property Group, the property-management arm of Pope Resources.

Pope is selling its lands close to population centers and buying lands in Oregon and Southwest Washington, Rose said.

The current lull in housing construction provides a window to plan for the future of the North Kitsap, he added. The outcome could benefit the company with new housing and commercial development while providing the county both open space and economic growth, Rose told the commissioners.

“Just because we are interested does not mean we will agree to everything that happens,” Bauer stressed. “We will make sure the public interest is protected.”

“What I need, to go back to our board,” said Rose, “is to say we are not the only people who care about this concept.”

County Commissioner Josh Brown said it will be critical for the county to perform due diligence. But, done correctly, Port Gamble could become a tremendous tourist attraction.

“It’s amazing to me the number of people who drive through North Kitsap on the way to the Olympics,” he said.

Rose said the design of future buildings would remain in the style of a New England town, a style chosen for Port Gamble in the 1850s.

County Commissioner Charlotte Garrido urged Rose to “bridge the national historic value of Port Gamble while looking into the kind of business styles and industries that are visionary for this area.”

Rose noted that a growing number of marine-oriented businesses are choosing to locate at the old mill site. His vision is for a campus environment that stimulates intellectual interests while providing nearby trails and other opportunities for exercise as well as the chance to commune with nature, he said.

“You have some things that no other area has,” Garrido noted.

Nobody has spelled out the number of new homes that might be built, but Brown broached the subject Wednesday by pointing out that Pope Resources could build 400 homes on its 8,000 acres if development occurs under current zoning.

The Rural Wooded Incentive Program, blocked by a county moratorium, would allow for up to four times that number, with the property remaining in private ownership.

Eric Baker, special projects manager for Kitsap County, was assigned logistics. Outside the meeting Wednesday, Baker said the project will involve a new subarea plan consisting of two components. One area would come under a special zone called a National Historic Town, which the Legislature wrote into the Growth Management Act specifically for Port Gamble. That would allow the 120-acre townsite to regain its population at the height of mill activity.

The second component would be a housing cluster consistent with a revised Rural Wooded Incentive Program or similar land-use designation.

Early steps include initial work on a “development agreement.” Also, a “scoping” meeting will be scheduled to launch a full-blown environmental review, including an environmental impact statement.

“This is a very exciting project, and all three commissioners are dedicated to it,” Baker said. “I feel very fortunate to be part of this.”



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