

Port Gamble Project Seen as Potential Economic Boon for Kitsap

By Brynn Grimley

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NORTH KITSAP —

A tentative agreement announced last week between Kitsap County and the Olympic Property Group could lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in private investments over the next 20 years, according to business leaders.

Under the partnership [announced Tuesday](#), the county would take ownership of 7,000 acres of forest land while OPG would get increased development rights on property near Port Gamble. An undisclosed number of homes would be built just south of town.

OPG President Jon Rose said the Port Gamble project and Arborwood, another proposed development in the Kingston urban growth area, could lead to about \$600 million in private investment in Kitsap over the next two decades.

“It’s going to be an immense amount of money going into the county,” said Art Castle, executive vice president of the Kitsap Home Builders Association. “The potential is exciting. I think it could be great if they could do what they’re proposing it will do.”

The project, which is being called the North Kitsap Legacy Partnership, is a long way from becoming reality. The county will conduct a [lengthy public process](#) on the plans, and OPG parent Pope Resources still has to sign off on the deal.

But if everything works out, Kitsap’s economic development leaders see a lot of potential.

“I think Jon’s vision for the kind of community and its access to trails and recreation and what that brings to the county is real,” said Bill Stewart, executive director of the Kitsap Economic Development Alliance. “Absolutely it will bring strong economic development in the future.”

The partnership wouldn’t bring traditional economic development by way of luring large new businesses to Kitsap or a zoning change to allow more commercial use. But if the county approves development rights in Port Gamble, OPG can turn the historic townsite into a bedroom community, spurring growth in a concentrated area. That growth would generate more property taxes than what is currently collected on the property under a timber harvesting tax.

The new community's [proximity to the forest land](#) that is being turned over to the county is expected to be a major selling point. Miles of trails, which will be within walking distance of the new homes, are planned for the forest and nearby shoreline.

Kitsap County Commissioner Steve Bauer thinks those trails will be a major draw.

They will improve the quality of life in the area, which in turn will make people want to live there, which in turn will drive small- and medium-sized businesses to want to locate in the area.

Capitalizing on these opportunities will provide a significant economic boost, Rose said.

"Trails absolutely drive economics," he said. "We should be pumping millions of dollars into the north end through this trail system."



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