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North Kitsap Legacy Partnership: Why it may change the future of Port Gamble Bay

Right now a conversation is taking place that may change the face and future of Kitsap County.

The topic is the North Kitsap Legacy Partnership (NKLP), a public/private proposal between Kitsap County and developer Olympic Property Group (OPG). While proponents argue this project is a win for everyone, the NKLP is full of promises and vague on important details.

The NKLP involves 8,000 acres of undeveloped, OPG-owned lands. The first part of the proposal gives Kitsap County the option to *purchase* 7,000 of those acres. Contrary to some reports, the land would not be gifted. The discussion is usually about conservation and open space, but ongoing commercial forestry is a real possibility.

In return, OPG would acquire the right to intensively develop the remaining 1,000 acres with housing that *quadruples* current density limits. This development is centered around the town of Port Gamble and along Port Gamble Bay, neither of which are prepared for such an environmental and infrastructure burden.

While we definitely support conserving forests and open space in North Kitsap, the current NKLP approach is too uncertain. What the NKLP doesn't say requires consideration:

- Where is the County getting the money? If the land is conserved as community open space, who will pay for the upkeep?
- What guarantee is there that the lands purchased by the County will be conserved? Logging is still likely and current plans give OPG complete discretion to clearcut and sell NKLP properties beginning January 1, 2012.
- How many new homes? Some reports say "no more than 800." Conceptual plans put the figure closer to 1,500. That's a huge discrepancy!
- Can the County ensure it will receive a long-term net benefit from changing the rules for a private corporation? As proposed, land use changes that increase OPG's land value will supposedly result in a discounted purchase price for the County. The problem is there's no definition as to how the purchase price will be set and how the discount will be measured.
- What about water, noise, and air pollution impacts? The area around Port Gamble is largely rural. The infrastructure simply does not exist to support hundreds or thousands of new homes.
- What happens to Port Gamble Bay? Intense development on the shores of this community gem isn't something to be taken lightly. Let's protect what we know we have.

The Port Gamble S'Klallam and Suquamish Tribes are not alone in questioning the project's general approach and the wisdom of the County signing a Memorandum of Understanding with OPG. The Great Peninsula Conservancy and Futurewise recently submitted comments as well that take a realistic and careful look at NKLP's intentions.

While the County and OPG have said they're open to a reconfiguration of the project, they haven't said what alternatives that would consider or accept. The current MOU puts all the development in and near Port Gamble. The Bay is too environmentally sensitive and should not be forced to shoulder the entire burden of OPG's plans. The NKLP has not proposed new development in Hansville and Kingston, and they haven't explained why not. Wouldn't the County benefit from spreading the costs and impacts of development across several communities? The public needs to understand and have input in these critical planning decisions.

The MOU has been tabled for further review, so now is the time to act! If you have concerns about NKLP, write your Kitsap County Commissioner and ask them to define the real costs and benefits while considering alternatives. You can find their email addresses at <http://www.kitsapgov.com/boc/contact.htm>. The future of Kitsap County depends on it.