



Snohomish County Council

## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Council Says Yes to Ballfields Bill, Looks to Ag Code Change**

The Snohomish County Council has reaffirmed support of ordinance changes that would allow for recreational use of idle agricultural land. Currently, state law does not allow for land designated for agricultural commercial use to be used for recreation. This conflict led to ballfields erected outside of Snohomish, Monroe and many other cities across Washington to be “red-tagged” or shut down by local planning authorities.

“We owe it to our kids to provide them with safe and predictable places to play,” continued Sax, a self-proclaimed “soccer dad.” “Snohomish County currently faces a deficit of affordable, buildable lands that contain enough flat acreage, without wetlands or trees, suitable for recreational usage. Agricultural land best suits the description of affordable and available lands, suitable for interim recreational use, until it becomes economically viable to farm again.”

Ordinance 04-130 was drafted by the Council in response to public input and seven-year compliance review as required under state law. The ordinance repeals the General Policy Plan (GPP) LU Policy 7.B.3 of GMACP that had previously allowed noncommercial playfields without permanent improvements to be operated on “designated farmlands” because such uses are no longer authorized as a result of the Washington State Supreme Court’s decision in *King County v. Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board* (*Green Valley* decision).

The ordinance amends the same section and provides for the encouragement of recreational uses on designated farmlands to the extent allowed by the Growth Management Act, so long as uses are consistent with the *Green Valley* decision, where the implementation of development regulations are compatible with surrounding agricultural uses and where the loss of prime agricultural soil is limited.

“Interim use of fallow agricultural lands for limited recreational use under certain conditions makes perfect sense to almost everyone, but not those extremists whose priorities do not include ballfields for kids,” stated John Koster, Council Chairman.

Farmers, unable to make a living farming, are faced with the potential sale of their land for housing or opening it up to other non-agriculture uses such as ballfields. Over thirteen farmers have come to the county and expressed their desire to sell or lease portions of their land to allow ballfields, which would greatly improve recreational opportunities within the county.

“For two years now, the County Council has made interim conversion of ag lands one of our top legislative priorities in Olympia. Snohomish County desperately lacks the availability of suitable and affordable lands for our kids to play ball,” added Council Vice-Chair Nelson. “Unfortunately, we have been advised time and time again that the only way we can legitimize situations such as the North and South Snohomish and Skyview ballfields situation is to pass a law at the state level allowing for recreational use on designated agricultural lands.”

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