



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 its two-year support of Senator Dave Schmidt, Representative Dan Kristiansen and former Senator Aaron Reardon's bill that would allow for recreational use of idle agricultural land. In addition Councilmember Jeff Sax, who authored the resolution, says he will be bringing forward an amendment to the county's agricultural code that will mirror the provision at the county level.

"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."

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.

"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."

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. More than a dozen 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.

“Interim use of ag lands for recreational use makes sense to everyone, except for a few environmentalists who appear to be against growth period,” stated Council Chairman John Koster. “They’ve even proposed that they won’t sue the county if we spot-zone the North and South Snohomish fields and leave the state law alone. This is an attempt to illegally manipulate the law.”

Other recreational groups and private landowners have expressed their dismay to the county about the proposed exemption by 1,000 Friends of Washington. While the county’s comprehensive plan could be re-opened to allow such a measure, there is no guarantee that the state growth boards or Governor would allow the decision to stand or that similarly situated organizations who would be excluded might sue.

Sax, Nelson and Koster will hold a ballfields summit on August 5th with State Representative Dan Kristiansen and Senator Dave Schmidt to outline a course of action for the legislative session. The summit will be open to the public and will take place in the auditorium of the Everett PUD building from 6:00 PM until 8:00 PM. For more information, please contact Councilman Sax’s office at: 425-388-3494.

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