



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **Legislature Says Yes to Ballfields Bill *Bill Awaits Governor's Signature***

[Everett, Wash.] Just in time for opening weekend at the North & South Snohomish Little League fields, the Washington State Senate passed HB 2241 late last night, which authorizes limited recreational use of agricultural lands. 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.

"It only took us three years to accomplish this small piece to the overall solution! While this it is far from a perfect solution, I am nonetheless pleased to see the legislature has finally taken steps to address our county's needs," stated Councilman Jeff Sax.

The bill allows for a narrowly defined exception to existing state law for ball fields in existence after July 1, 2004 and who apply for any applicable permits prior to June 30, 2006. The legislation also omits solutions for all sports not played on grass and does not allow for restrooms, concession stands or scoreboards. The County Council testified before the House and the Senate, requesting that the scope of the bill not be so narrowly defined and provided them with a legal opinion written to the Executive and Council outlining concerns with the legislation.

"I would like to thank all of our legislators from Snohomish County for engaging in this issue and working with us to finally see passage of legislation," continued Sax. "In particular, I would like to thank Senators Dave Schmidt and Val Stevens, who offered amendments recommended by our Prosecuting Attorney's office, which were not adopted."

Since 2001, the County Council has made interim conversion of ag lands one of their top legislative priorities in Olympia. The Council has been advised by the Prosecuting Attorney that the only way they can lift red-tags on the North and South Snohomish and Sky River ballfields was to pass legislation at the state level allowing for recreational use on designated agricultural lands.

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“We owe it to our kids to provide them with safe and predictable places to play,” continued Sax, a self-proclaimed “soccer dad.” “We still face a deficit of affordable, buildable lands that contain enough flat acreage, without wetlands or trees, suitable for recreational usage. I have requested that our analysts begin the arduous task of reviewing and recommending all land countywide which may be suitable for both passive and active recreational use.”

The legislation calls for lands eligible for designation as recreational land to be registered by the property owner or owners with the county no fewer than ninety days before being designated as recreational land. The Prosecuting Attorney cautioned Council and the Executive that it is unclear what is meant by “registering” with the county, what information must be provided, and what is to be gained by such requirement.

“I remain concerned that the bill is too narrow to accommodate all sports that are currently red-tagged and that the 90-day period may be too short of a time frame for property owners, depending upon the amount and type of information that must be provided in order to “register,” added Sax. “As such, I will request a presentation from the Executive and his Planning Department outlining the procedures that must take place internally to implement this law at the county level.”

The Council’s planning committee will immediately add discussion of changes necessary to its development regulations take advantage of the new legislation to its agenda.

For more information, please contact Councilman Sax’s office at: 425-388-3494.

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