

Study will look at transferring development rights to protect rural areas

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PORT ORCHARD — How to protect rural properties in Kitsap County through legal procedures, such as “transfer of development rights,” will be the focus of a \$40,000 study conducted by Forterra, a regional land-conservation organization.

Forterra will look specifically at preserving more than 7,000 acres of privately owned forestland in North Kitsap by buying the development rights, perhaps keeping the land in forest management, said Eric Baker, special projects manager for the county.

Legal methods of transferring development rights, known as a TDR program, would allow a developer to build more intensively in an urban-growth area — such as building a taller structure than normally allowed, Baker said. In return, the developer would pay a rural landowner, who would agree to never develop his property.

The program must be set up to fairly balance the more-intense urban development against rural protection, and it needs a method of exchanging credits.

Alternatively, one might just raise the money needed to buy up the development rights, protecting rural lands through conservation easements, he said.

Kitsap County’s comprehensive land-use plan allows for transferring developments rights into the county’s urban growth areas, including Silverdale and Kingston, but no developer has stepped up to use the program, Baker said.

“Forterra is the expert when it comes to transfer-of-development-rights programs,” he said.

“We hope to learn from them and develop a robust system in Kitsap County.”

A market analysis, which is part of Forterra’s study, will consider what developers are willing to pay for the “bonuses” in a TDR program; what the rural trade-offs could be; and how to

measure “exchange rates” to complete the legal transfer.

More intensive development could be targeted to the cities of Kitsap County, if city officials wish to participate, Baker said.

The Forterra study also will look into the prospect of joining a regional TDR program involving King, Pierce and Snohomish counties, he said, although the first priority would be for exchanges within Kitsap County alone.

The \$40,000 Forterra study was approved Monday by the Kitsap County commissioners. Money for the study will be taken from a \$270,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to characterize ecosystem values across 7,000 acres in North Kitsap. That final study, due early next year, will determine which areas are best suited for preservation, forestry or development, if necessary.

The analysis is based on inputting information about natural resources into a computer model, Baker said. Great Peninsula Conservancy, a land trust, and Arno Bergstrom, the county’s forester, have been “ground-truthing” the computer analysis to make sure it is accurate. They also are using money from the grant to develop management plans for properties acquired by the county — such as the Port Gamble “shoreline block” — as well as other properties scheduled for acquisition.

Money for the Forterra study came from dropping a plan to study the concept of “cluster developments,” or concentrating houses in a small area while preserving surrounding forests.

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