

**Mayor's column for
The Beacon
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There is an old saying that goes, "No good deed goes unpunished." That certainly has become reality with the City Council decision in 2006 to buy five acres from the Edmonds School District to create a neighborhood park in southwest Edmonds. Many will recall that the Council had much discussion about the feasibility of buying all eleven acres or just the five and a half that they eventually settled on.

The Council's decision to buy half of the available land was based on many factors, including the overall cost, the availability of grant funding, the need for a neighborhood park in that area, the future cost of maintenance/labor to take care of such a facility, and the citywide equity of what size parks are developed according the Council-approved comprehensive plan.

In the end, they voted to buy five and half acres from the District and directed City staff to begin the process of demolition of the aging school on the site and the planning of the new park. By the way, the negotiations with the District provided for a \$1 million reduction in the purchase price because the City was now responsible for that demolition of the buildings. Snohomish County provided an additional \$1 million grant to buy the property with the provision that a park be built there. And the City applied for a State grant of approximately \$500,000, also for purchase of the land and creation of the park.

The Council also went to great lengths to not only buy land for a park but, knowing that homes would inevitably be built on the other parcel, also bought a strip of land on the north side of the other parcel to keep it in its current wooded configuration. That action not only keeps the existing trees in place, but also provides a buffer for the folks who live to the north of the proposed development.

Throughout the process, there was a vocal group of citizens who wanted the Council to buy all eleven acres. The Council did the hard work required of them in the decision-making process. They listened to the group's concerns about lack of sports fields, saving the trees, keeping the school and renting it out, keeping the gymnasium, and many other novel ideas for the use of all of the property. But the Council was not convinced. They decided that a five-acre park was the prudent thing to do financially and from a planning point of view. The Council decision was not unanimous. Some Councilmembers dissented with the majority view; however, a majority always prevails, and the die was cast. Staff had their marching orders.

The City Council made a tough decision. They often are tasked with making decisions that are not necessarily popular but are done in the greater public's best interests. Sadly, they seldom hear from the folks who agree with their decisions; only the dissenters. This is a case where neighbors who actually want a neighborhood park could be penalized by the actions of a few. Hopefully, the actions you will read about next won't cost that neighborhood the park they so rightfully deserve.

So why am I bringing this up now, a year later? I have often thought that the citizens of Edmonds should know how much we pay to attorneys on a yearly basis to respond to citizens' actions. Since the time the Council finalized their vote, the neighborhood group that I spoke of earlier has fought the City every step of the way and taken the City to court on several occasions. For a group that just wanted ball fields, their actions certainly speak louder than their intentions. It appears that they are more interested in stopping construction of the park as well as the housing development than "creating ball fields for our youth."

These actions, led by a former Councilmember and her husband who live near the proposed park, have cost the City over \$20,000 in legal fees to date. Countless hours of staff time have been spent gathering information for the attorneys. Would you consider this a good use of your tax dollars? The “cautionary heads-up that good citizens provide for local government,” as referenced in The Beacon last week, is hardly “free of charge,” as was also reported.

The City Council made a difficult decision to build a five-acre park in a neighborhood that desperately needs one, and a small fraction of the residents in the neighborhood are not only fighting the City to keep from developing the park, but forcing the City to use valuable budget dollars to defend the well-intended action of the City Council.

These actions are supposedly in an attempt to force the City to buy all eleven acres rather than the five and a half that the Council authorized. The other parcel has already been sold to a developer who will build homes on their land. They have already started the process with the City’s Development Services Department. They are moving ahead with their plans for the parcel they purchased for significantly more than the City did.

This citizens group has attempted to stop the City from building a park at every step. With every conceivable argument. Sometimes even with the help of the dissenting Councilmembers. I doubt they’ll stop anytime soon. It is, after all, their right to do so. They are already taking on the developer and the proposed project. Again, it’s their right to do so. But at what cost?

This is the first installment on what it costs to do the right thing for the citizens of Edmonds. No good deed goes unpunished.