



DISHMAN HILLS NATURAL AREA ASSOCIATION
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LIGHTS AND SHADOWS from the Dishman Hills, November, 2001

BATTLE ZONE

The hearing on commercial rezonation of land on the north side of the Natural Area, was held on November 13. Present was a reporter from the Spokesman Review and a journalism class from Whitworth College, to cover what was perceived as a landmark event for community growth versus natural areas. An article about the hearing in the Spokesman Valley Voice on November 17 is reproduced here in its entirety with the permission of the paper.

ZONING BATTLE ZONE by Lorie Hutson

It is just the kind of change they feared a new road would bring. When the new Spokane Valley couplet was built, stewards of the 530-acre Dishman Hills Natural Area worried that new developments lining the road were not far behind. They were right. A proposed zone change on Appleway Blvd. is drawing opposition from advocates for Dishman Hills. Mike Hamilton testified against the proposed zone change in a recent County Commissioners meeting. Land owners were given a change in zoning this summer that could bring businesses closer to the northern boundaries of the natural area and the Dishman Hills Natural Area Association is fighting it. Spokane County Hearing Examiner Mike Dempsey approved a request to change land zoned for houses to allow business uses on almost 10 acres along Appleway Boulevard. Most of that land is between Appleway and Sprague Avenue and the Dishman Hills Association isn't protesting that part of the change. What they're concerned about is a small triangle of land -- about three acres -- just east of Park Road and south of Appleway. It would allow a business within 500 feet of the northern boundary of the natural area, said Mike Hamilton, president of the Dishman Hills Association. "The city is growing and the Dishman Hills (Area) is being surrounded by development so we are trying to put in an effort to make sure that we can co-habitate. I believe we can," Hamilton said. "The community has to decide whether they want another car lot or if they want a pristine natural area." If the change is allowed, it could destabilize the area -- other land owners would line up to ask for the same business zoning, he added. Noise, air pollution, bright lights, noxious weeds and the garbage and chemical dumping could hurt the natural area, which is home to several threatened and endangered species, Hamilton said. The Dishman Hills Association has appealed the hearing examiner's decision. Spokane County commissioners heard arguments in the case this week and will make a decision in early December. But owners of the land said there are more than enough regulations in place to protect the Dishman Hills. Dwight Hume, a senior planner with CLC Associates, said the hearing examiner imposed special conditions that they will have to follow if the land is developed. Hume is handling the zone change request for the landowner, Associated Restaurants. When the owners decide what they want to put on the parcel, they must submit a detailed plan to the hearing examiner, Hume said. Then a public hearing would be held before they were finally approved. "That decision would have to be made at that particular time," he said, adding that the hearing examiner could impose more conditions to protect the natural area. Arguing right now that the Dishman Hills would be threatened by the change is not based on fact, Hume told the county commissioners. "How can it? There isn't anything there," he said. When the land is developed, Hume said, the natural topography also will help buffer the Dishman Hills from the

business. A basalt bluff rises on the land not far from Appleway. Only the flat triangle of ground along the road would be developed for a business, Hume said. He also pointed out that the current zoning on the land would allow homes and apartment buildings to be built there. "That, to me, would be far greater of an impact," Hume said. He urged the county commissioners not to second guess what others will do if the zone change is approved. Each case should be considered separately, he said. Hume said the Dishman Hills Natural Area will not be ruined by one small business. It is already surrounded by development. "If the Dishman Hills are that fragile, it should have fallen apart long ago due to what surrounds it," Hume told the hearing examiner at a hearing earlier this year. But Hamilton said the community has to be willing to draw a line somewhere to protect what volunteers have built over the years. The Dishman Hills Natural Area was established in 1967 under the leadership of Spokane Valley naturalist Tom Rodgers. It is managed jointly by Spokane County, the Dishman Hills Natural Area Association and the Washington Department of Natural Resources. An environmental impact statement prepared when the Valley couplet was built called for that land to be maintained as a buffer between the Dishman Hills and the new road, Hamilton said. He also pointed out that the land on Appleway is part of the area commissioners recently set aside as an "aesthetic corridor." "This section of Appleway is just about as aesthetic as it gets. It's a very scenic spot," Hamilton said. "If you can't apply it here, I don't know where you could." There is only one natural area, Hamilton said, but there are plenty of other places to put a business. "You can't stop development, but you can steer it," he said.

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