

At the invite of Liz Williams, Planner, and Dave Ward, Planning and Environmental Programs Manager, (both with the Kitsap County Department of Community Development) WSPS Legal Liaison Becky Hoyt and Executive Director Pamela Benson met to discuss the interim zoning ordinance recently adopted by the county. The focus of the meeting was to address some of the questions and concerns voiced by the entirety of the Kitsap community as to how to address Less Restrictive Alternative (LRA) housing Level III Sexually Violent Predators (SVPs) within the county.

This very complex problem is being addressed, not only by Kitsap County and the four cities within the county but by counties and cities throughout Washington State. The State (DOC and DSHS) are moving rapidly to relocate civilly committed SVPs from the Special Commitment Center on McNeil Island, to privately owned and operated LRAs throughout the state—basically minimal security jails in the words of one county official—leaving no choice to communities but to deal with the resulting problems and issues.

Chris Wright, DSHS media relation manager, reported that DSHS was purposefully looking for housing in Kitsap County for SVPs. He stated that the SCC has over a dozen SVPs from Kitsap County. DSHS has said that they prefer to return SVPs to their “home” county. However, the currently operating Poulsbo House has two SVPs from outside of Kitsap County.

The question of how to manage the locating of LRAs within the County was the focus of our meeting. Managing the siting of LRAs within incorporated Poulsbo, Bainbridge, Bremerton, and Port Orchard is at the discretion of those cities; the county zoning ordinance does not apply within city limits. Our meeting dealt only within the county. And the county can only, by state law, define land use—not if LRAs are allowable or not within the county. By state law, they cannot be disallowed.

The county is asking the public to comment on the ordinances as they are developing them, not only at the March 25 meeting in Port Orchard, but online as well. The online commenting is now open. But before commenting, please read the FAQ the county has developed. Realize that the map showing the approved zones does not necessarily mean that an LRA could be located in all of those zones—other requirements apply which may preclude an LRA in a particular location. And please realize--the county can only address this issue from a land-use position. The entirety of the issue and a permanent solution can only be addressed and solved at the State level.