

SAINT EDWARD SEMINARY HOTEL PROPOSAL DRAWS STRONG OPINIONS FROM COMMUNITY

15 Feb 2016

Written by Briana Gerdeman

An hours-long, standing-room-only public hearing on a proposal to build a private hotel in the middle of Saint Edward State Park showed there are strong opinions in the community both for and against the proposal.



At a packed public hearing at Kenmore City Hall, the public spoke on the merits of a proposal to turn the run-down seminary at Saint Edward State Park into a private hotel.

(Photo by Briana Gerdeman)

The hearing last Tuesday night, Feb. 9, gave the public a chance to express their opinions on the proposal for State Parks to exchange 4.99 acres of land, on which the former Saint Edward

Seminary sits, with development firm Daniels Real Estate in exchange for a 9.77-acre piece of land, known as the McDonald property, to expand the park's borders.

Some people spoke in favor of turning the seminary into a hotel, saying it would save the deteriorating historic building, provide a gathering place for the community and incorporate more natural land into the park via the land swap. Those who oppose the hotel focused on the traffic, light and noise it would bring; the philosophical implications of using a state park for profit; and how the hotel would detract from people and wildlife enjoying the natural environment.

Several speakers quoted the song "Big Yellow Taxi," originally by Joni Mitchell and covered by Counting Crows: "You don't know what you've got 'til it's gone, They paved paradise and put up a parking lot."

"We cannot let private commerce and development destroy what is currently a safe, healing, educational experience for the multitude of people and families who seek an escape from commercialism and frenzy, an oasis where one can go, turn off the phone, hike, walk, think, free their spirit and open their hearts," Kenmore resident Janet Hayes said.

Washington State Parks Planner Michael Hankinson said the land exchange and proposed hotel development are intended to preserve the seminary building, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, while also gaining land for the park — the McDonald property, adjacent to the northwest corner of the park. The park's trail system passes through the McDonald property, so people walking and biking on the trail are currently doing so on private property.

"Our goal is very simple. We want to save the building," Hankinson said. "But we also want to protect natural resources, so we're trying to do both things with this project." This isn't the first suggestion of redeveloping the crumbling seminary building, which State Parks can't afford to renovate.

McMenamins considered renovating it before going to the Anderson School in Bothell instead. "Every time we go to Bothell, we think of McMenamins and we think of the lost opportunity that we had a few years ago," Kenmore resident Paul Hess said at the public hearing. "I love our City Council, I love our mayor, but I want to say something: that is the worst public policy decision made in the history of this city in the last 17 or 18 years."

He said Daniels Real Estate, which specializes in historic preservation and rehabilitating historic buildings, are capable of doing this project well.

Debra Srebnik, a Kenmore resident who was one of the earliest members of the Friends of Saint Edward State Park, said she opposed the McMenamins proposal, but is in favor of this hotel proposal. She said the hotel would be compatible with park use, whereas a brewery would not have been.

“When I walk into a park lodge at a place like Mount Rainier or Yellowstone, I feel humbled, calm and quiet, and very much at one with the park setting,” Srebnik said. “I think this type of lodging is very compatible with park use, and completely different than a routine hotel.”

Eric Murray spoke on behalf of the Bothell Chamber of Commerce (where he’s an executive committee member) and Cascadia College (where he’s the president), as well as a resident of Lake Forest Park who uses the park himself. He said the Chamber Board of Directors has voted to support Daniels Real Estate’s proposal, which would be an investment in the economic success of the community. He also said the hotel would provide job opportunities for college students, while enhancing the environment and park users’ experience there.

State Parks and Daniels Real Estate are in the process of negotiating deed restrictions, including perpetual public access to the land between the seminary buildings.

Hankinson said a third-party appraisal of the two properties, as well as an environmental impact statement, should be done by July. The State Parks Commission could make a decision as early as September. After that, National Parks will have public hearings and will have to approve the project before it can go forward.

For more information, and to provide public comments on the proposal, visit parks.state.wa.us/857/Saint-Edward-Planning---Seminary.