

Published: Wednesday, December 3, 2014, 12:01 a.m.

Bothell will ask lawmakers to help save forest

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Licorice ferns dot the forest. At least 110 species of native plants, trees, mosses and lichens have been identified.

By [Amy Nile](#), Herald Writer



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BOTHELL — Preservation of undeveloped space in the city is in doubt after voters rejected a bond measure last month.

Bothell now is counting on lawmakers in Olympia and Washington, D.C., to allocate money to save the North Creek Forest.

And city officials are back at the drawing board when it comes to paying for a massive makeover of downtown and other projects that were to receive money from [Bothell's failed Proposition 1](#). It would have provided for \$42 million in bonds for improvements to parks and acquisition of public space.

The measure included \$1 million to buy land to complete conservation of the North Creek Forest, a large natural area north of the University of Washington Bothell campus.

Since 2011, [the city has acquired](#) two-thirds of an undeveloped, wedge-shaped 64-acre tract of land along I-405. Now Bothell needs about \$1.3 million to buy a remaining 22 acres before the land is developed.

Landowners were poised to build on the property before the housing market crashed, said Jim Freese, the volunteer director for [Friends of North Creek Forest](#). The group helps the city find resources to buy land and preserve the woods.

Freese said it is critical that Bothell secure money soon, because a purchase option for two of the three remaining parcels expires next summer. After that, the owner is not obligated to delay logging and development.

The family that owns the third parcel also is looking to sell, Freese said. The retired electrician worries that once the woods are gone, they're gone for good.

“I'd like to see this forest here for generations to come,” he said.

The woods boast Douglas fir, red cedar, maple and western hemlock trees. At least 110 species of native plants, trees, mosses and lichens have been identified. There are black-tailed deer, coyotes, pileated woodpeckers, band-tailed pigeons and salamanders. The forest is buffered by a salmon stream that provides a spawning spot for chinook, coho, kokanee, sockeye and steelhead.

The city plans to keep the forest as a park, with a few trails altering the landscape. But if Bothell doesn't buy it soon, there could be two wide swaths of developed land within the preserved area.

Without the bond money, the city is depending on two grants, totaling \$1.5 million, to make the purchase.

The North Creek Forest [scored the highest](#) in the state when it was nominated for a \$500,000 [Land and Water Conservation Fund grant](#). The federal grant is administered by the state. Congress must

approve the funding before any of the projects receive payouts.

The city is also waiting to see if the Legislature provides money for a [\\$1 million local parks grant](#) for the North Creek Forest and other outdoor projects across Washington.

Freese said he hopes the state Supreme Court's mandate to fully fund public education will not mean fewer dollars in the budget for conservation efforts.

“It they raid parks funds for that money, that'd be disastrous for our work,” he said. “We're optimistic the Legislature will be able to include reasonable funding.”

While the forest effort has potential grant funding, the city is brainstorming new ways to pay for other projects that were to receive bond money.

“We don't have a defined plan B yet,” assistant city manager Peter Troedsson said.

One such project is the [city's downtown revitalization effort](#). The vision is to make improvements aimed at increasing outdoor recreation and boosting traffic to local businesses.

The city wants to increase the amount of park-like spaces in Bothell, but the land available to do so is shrinking, Troedsson said. Toward that goal, the City Council in May designated Multiway Boulevard and Main Street as “parkways.” That way, money from the bond could be spent on street projects.

Proposition 1 slated millions for improving Main Street and finishing Multiway Boulevard, a project to turn a 2.5-mile section of the Bothell-Everett Highway into a wide, tree-lined thoroughfare with pedestrian walks and bikeways.

That drew criticism from opponents. Some called the measure deceptive because much of the money went to streets instead of open space.

With the bond's failure, it might take longer for the city to pay for some of the projects, Troedsson said. Others, particularly those that required the city to buy land, might be lost opportunities.

The city, he said, continues to look for “innovative” ways to pay for parks and infrastructure.

“All those projects are worthwhile,” Troedsson said. “They remain in our plan for our future.”

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