

DAILY RECORD

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IN OUR VIEW

TDRs are worth thorough examination

The Kittitas County commissioners are embarking on a very worthwhile endeavor to determine if a transfer of development rights program would benefit the county.

Transfer of development rights, called TDRs, allow individually negotiated transactions in which a rural landowner and a developer identify the value of housing development on rural lands and quantify them as a number of rights.

A developer would buy a certain number of rights from the rural landowner and transfer them to a receiving area — lands designated for higher density developments close to existing cities or in designated rural development areas.

TDRs become popular in area where resource lands are facing development pressures. Under the best-case scenario TDR help conserve resource land, while directing development to areas better suited for residential growth.

The beauty of the system is it's a private-market solution. Tax dollars aren't used to buy development rights. It's a way for a county without significant financial reserves to protect the natural landscape that attracts residents to the area.

It is a significant program, though, that deserves careful evaluation to determine if it is a good fit for this county.

The county commissioners hired the Cascade Land Conservancy to research and develop a voluntary TDR program. This past week CLC presented some initial recommendations. Those recommendations are available for review online at www.cascadeagenda.com/tdr/kittitas.

The commissioners want to get more public comment from large-tract landowners on the proposals. That's a good idea since if the program doesn't appeal to the people most likely to use it then it doesn't make sense to go forward.

It's hard to see huge drawbacks to a voluntary TDR program. It would just be another tool available. This county needs a variety of land-use tools to help preserve some of the agricultural and forested nature of the land.

In theory, the same level of growth would occur in the county, just in more appropriate locations.

The question in this county is if development rights are taken off one property, where would they go? What county land is suited to more intense development?

That might be the tougher half of the TDR equation than finding land that should be saved.

Public comment is being sought until 5 p.m. on May 8. For the many people interested in working to preserve the county's rural and natural landscape it's well worth the time to review what's being proposed and weigh in with an opinion.