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Water supply near Brightwater site in dispute

By Christopher Schwarzen
Times Snohomish County Bureau

A dispute over a Brightwater agreement to protect a public water supply has King County and the Lake Forest Park Water District in mitigation talks.

The two sides met last week for the first time after months of back-and-forth correspondence over how each side reads the carefully worded agreement signed in 2005.

At issue is whether King County is expected to construct a backup water system as a preventive measure before it begins underground drilling through the area.

The county's tunneling for piping connected to the Brightwater sewage plant, located close to the intersection of Highways 9 and 522 immediately north of Woodinville, will run over the water district's aquifer, which is clean enough not to need chlorinated treatment before being sent to the district's 860 residential customers.

Lake Forest Park Water District officials fear tunneling could permanently damage the aquifer and the water quality its customers have come to expect, said Dan Mundall, an engineer for the water district.

"We expected they would preemptively drill us a new well when they initiate construction," Mundall said. "They're trying a bit now to assault the permanency of the backupwater-supply measures."

The agreement calls for either drilling a new well or connecting to Seattle Public Utilities' water system, which is chlorinated. While the second option would provide water to the district's customers, it would not be at the level of service those customers have come to expect, Mundall said.

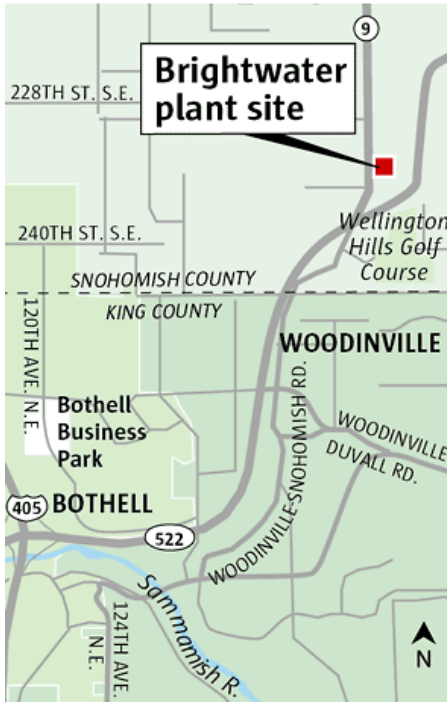
The agreement specifically calls both options "one form of community incentive and mitigation for this essential public facility."

The word "incentive" makes it seem to the water district that a permanent well should be constructed before tunneling. Mundall says this agreement was signed in lieu of a monetary payment such as most municipalities received, including Snohomish County, which received nearly \$70 million for parks, sidewalks and other infrastructure projects near the sewage plant.

The water district gave up its right to appeal the environmental-impact statement that came under intense scrutiny by grassroots groups challenging the project.

The biggest concerns raised were how King County would deal with seismic issues at the plant site and along conveyance routes. A failure at either could send raw sewage into drinking-water aquifers.

But King County officials say that after studying the issue, a new well is not feasible and have leaned more toward an intertie with Seattle to provide water in case of contamination. They also suggest in correspondence that either option is not precursory but only to be completed should there be some issue with the aquifer.



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"We put together an agreement, and now there is a dispute," said Gunars Sreibers, the Brightwater project manager. "Right now, we're really trying to understand any concerns the water district has."

