

NT Comments on RSD Newcastle

To: Planner David Lee

Subject: RSD Newcastle, file # 14-PL-030/0318/3/14

Date: 8/4/2014

I'm writing on behalf of Newcastle Trails (NT) to place in the record our formal comment on the proposed RSD Newcastle development, application file # 14-PL-030/031. NT is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit volunteer organization that has worked since 1999 in close cooperation with the City of Newcastle to preserve and expand our local trail system.

Newcastle residents support our trails: from the City's founding in 1994 they have consistently given top priority to parks, trails, and open space in public meetings and polls. Trails are the number one recreational choice in Newcastle as in other cities. Trails are a triple bargain: recreation, health benefits, and pollution-free transportation at minimal cost. And trails sell homes: people want to live near trails, and developers advertise them.

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This document is organized as follows: **Section A** (pages 1-2) provides an overview of the topics below. **Section B** (pages 3-9) provides details with graphics for each topic.

- 1. Trail connections.**
- 2. Pedestrian access.**
- 3. Trail routes.**
- 4. Water retention ponds and open space.**
- 5. Traffic and pedestrians.**
- 6. Summary**

A. Overview

NT likes to cooperate with developers. The developer builds a section of trail that fits Newcastle's Comprehensive Plan; the development is more attractive; new and old residents enjoy an improved trail system. Everybody wins. We hope that NT can work closely with the developer of RSD Newcastle to address our concerns. Our comments for the record are given below.

- 1. Trail connections.** The preliminary plat places 30 homes on a 9.8 acre Renton School District tract known locally as the School Woods. At present two major (heavily used) trails traverse the Woods; a third trail will soon be completed from the Woods to

Lake Boren. All three are required by the Comp Plan, but the preliminary plat has no trails: the current plan would cut the existing trails in two, and cut off the third from residents of the Hazelwood, Olympus, and Lake Washington Ridge neighborhoods.

2. Pedestrian access. RSD Newcastle eliminates pedestrian access to the west (Lake Washington Ridge, Hazelwood Park) and the east (Residences at Lake Boren, Lake Boren Townhomes, Lake Boren Park), although such pedestrian access is required by the Comp Plan, the Non-Motorized Plan, and City codes. It's a strange omission: easy access to nearby parks makes developments more attractive and homes more saleable.

3. Trail routes. After reviewing several possible trail routes, the Newcastle Trails board agreed on this proposal: the Horse Trail should follow the west boundary of the plat from north to south; the CrossTown Trail, from the public open space south and east of the plat, should go west along the south boundary (detouring north through the central open space) and descend via the recreation tract to the Horse Trail; the China Creek Trail should extend south from the Residences at Lake Boren to the CrossTown Trail, with access to the eastern cul-de-sac. Section B includes a trail map. **Note:** The Horse Trail is named for historical associations, not current use.

4. Water retention ponds and open space. The retention pond in the northwest corner of the plat will apparently discharge onto the surface of City open space extending north almost to Donegal Park. But discharging street runoff with toxic chemicals onto public (and adjoining private property) is not acceptable, especially as the Horse Trail uses the open space. Moreover, fenced ponds are eyesores, and stagnant water breeds mosquitoes and health hazards. Lidded vaults are preferable: both ponds could be replaced with green open space to the benefit of the trails that traverse them and the residents of RSD Newcastle.

5. Traffic and pedestrians. The CrossTown Trail is remarkable for an urban trail because it crosses streets at only three points. The proposed extension of 126th Ave SE across the plat to Olympus would create a fourth street-crossing, with negative impacts on the trail: the level of traffic might require the trail to detour to a crosswalk; the elevation of the street might require steps or switchbacks; trail access would be less safe. Many of the 450 families in Hazelwood reach Lake Boren Park by following 126th Ave SE to the CrossTown Trail. Since there are **no sidewalks** on 126th north to Donegal Park, the extra traffic would endanger pedestrian access from Hazelwood to Lake Boren, and from RSD Newcastle to Donegal Park. Eliminating the street connection would benefit the trail (and RSD Newcastle residents) in several ways: the open space could be expanded, the trail improved, large trees saved, and a green corridor opened for wildlife.

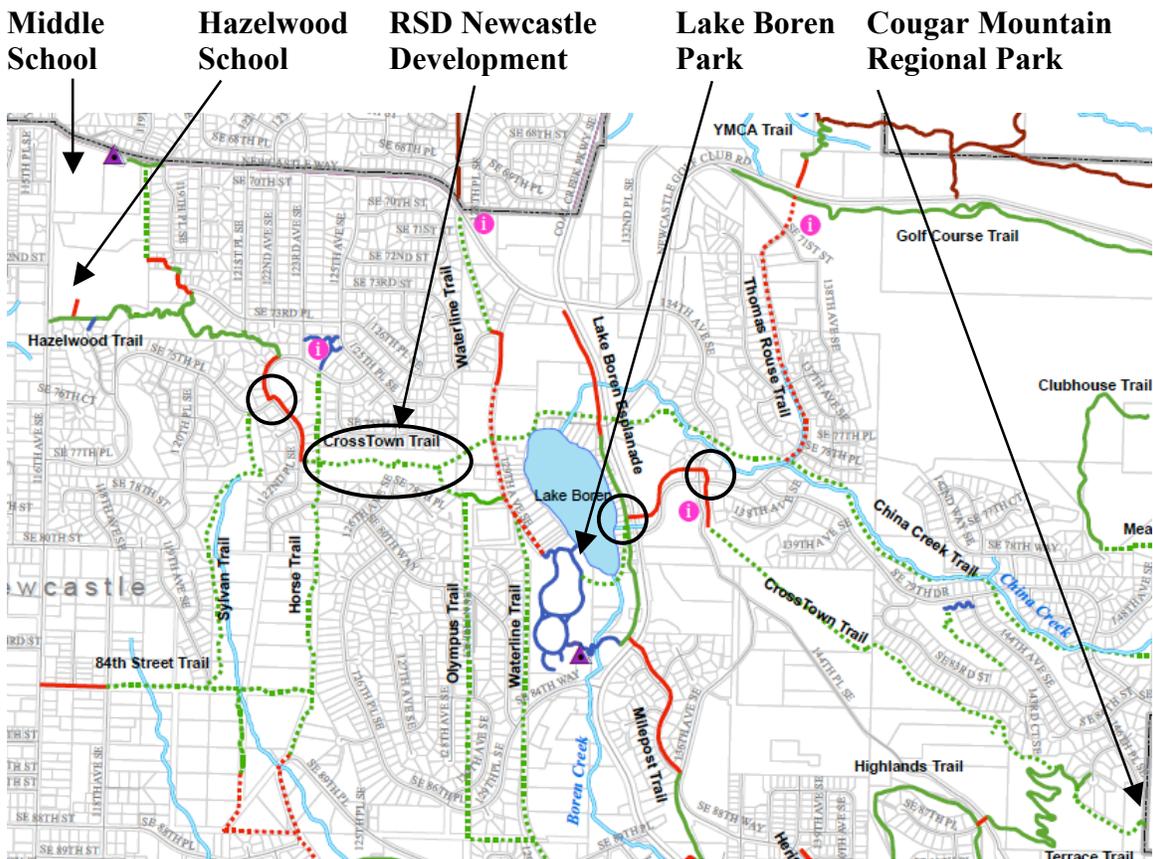
6. Summary. NT strongly supports trails and the green open spaces that enhance them. We hope that our suggestions will result in a better development, more attractive to potential homeowners, that advances the citywide trail system envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan

B. Details

1. Trail connections. A trail-free RSD Newcastle development will erase the much-used heart of our trail system, cutting in two the Horse Trail and CrossTown Trail, and cutting off the China Creek Trail from Hazelwood, Olympus, and other neighborhoods.

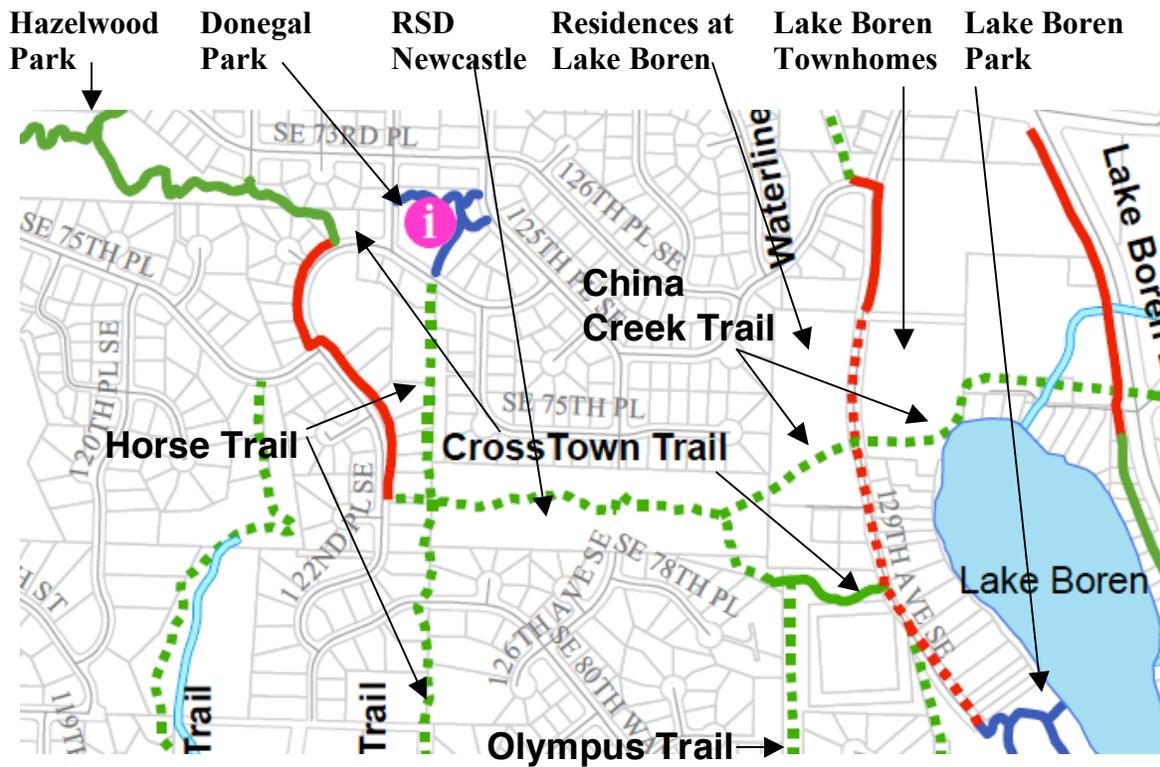
The CrossTown Trail is Newcastle's longest trail. It crosses Newcastle from the planned Middle School to Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland park, linking 2 schools and 3 City parks, with only 3 street-crossings (marked by circles in map below). The informal segments are mostly in use, or complete (built to standard) or will be complete in the near future. And there are alternate future routes that bypass the two long sidewalk segments.

Figure 1. Trail overview from Newcastle Comprehensive Plan



2. Pedestrian access. The map below (a marked-up excerpt from the Comp Plan) shows how planned and existing trails provide easy access from the RSD Newcastle site to four major trails - Horse, CrossTown, China Creek, Olympus - and three parks: Hazelwood and Donegal parks to the northwest, and Newcastle's largest park, Lake Boren Park, to the southeast. When the Residences development is completed, the China Creek Trail will extend from the RSD site to the north shore of Lake Boren (where a lakeshore bench has been installed). It will also provide access (via trail and sidewalks) to downtown Newcastle and the new library. The other trails have been in use for years; they're heavily used in and near the RSD site.

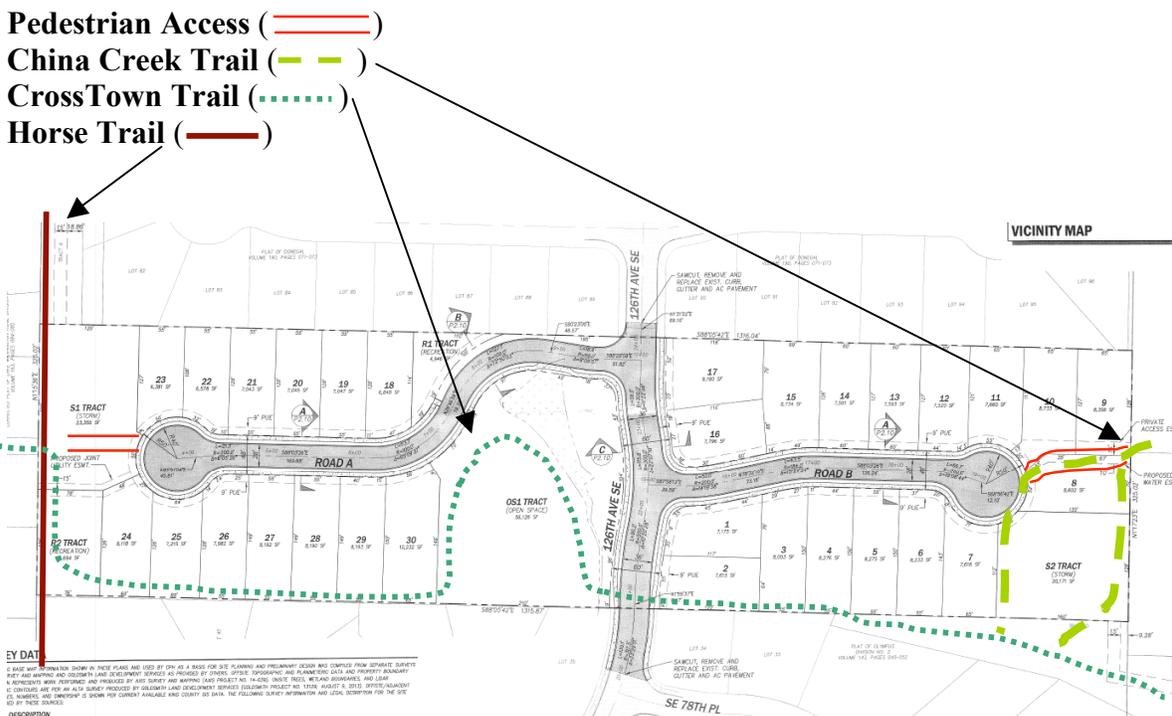
Figure 2. Trails joining on RSD Newcastle plat



3. Trail routes. After reviewing several possible trail routes, and the Public Works Director's notes on pedestrian access, the NT board agreed on this proposal:

- The north-south Horse Trail should follow the west boundary of the plat. **Note:** The Horse Trail is named for historical associations, not current use.
- The east-west CrossTown Trail runs westward from the cemetery through the public open space south and southeast of the plat. It should continue inside the south boundary of the plat from lot 4 westward, and then cross the open space, where it should arc generally northwest and then southwest. It should continue west just inside the south boundary to the recreational tract, where it should descend to the Horse Trail.
- The China Creek Trail is completed east from 129th Ave SE to Lake Boren, and is platted to extend west from 129th to the southwest corner of the Residences at Lake Boren. It should be extended from there to the CrossTown Trail by one of two routes: south just inside the eastern boundary of the plat; or west beside the platted two-lot driveway to the east cul-de-sac, then south past the retention pond.
- Pedestrian access should be provided at the west cul-de-sac to the Horse Trail and CrossTown Trail and nearby parks, neighborhoods, and schools; and at the east cul-de-sac to the China Creek Trail, Lake Boren, and downtown Newcastle. The map below shows the pedestrian access (parallel red lines) and the proposed trail routes.

Figure 3. Trail routes proposed by Newcastle Trails



4. Water retention ponds and open space. The map below indicates discharges (blue arrows) from two stormwater retention ponds at the northwest and southeast corners of the plat. It also shows an optimum combination of trails and open space resulting from two changes: (a) replacing the SE retention pond with a vault, and (b) not continuing 126th Ave. SE through to Olympus (see Section 5, **Traffic issues**).

- The northwest retention pond will apparently discharge onto the surface of City open space extending north almost to Donegal Park. But discharging street runoff with toxic chemicals onto public (and adjoining private property) is not acceptable, especially as the Horse Trail uses the open space. The apparent target of the discharge is a grassy area crossed by the Horse Trail that blends seamlessly into residents' back yards.

- If the southeast pond is replaced by a vault, the lid will provide a flat surface for recreation space. The proposed recreation space is inadequate. It consists of two fragments: a steep parcel in the southwest corner, and a small triangle on the north boundary of the plat. Fenced ponds are eyesores; and standing water breeds mosquitoes and health hazards. Putting a mini-park on the vault kills three birds with one stone: more recreation space, no ugly pond, and a better trail - surrounded by parkland rather than houses and fences.

- If 126th Ave. SE is not continued through to Olympus, enough space is saved to allow a wider green corridor for the CrossTown Trail, with many benefits: the chance to save huge old trees; a green buffer between homes; room for a better trail route, buffered by vegetation; a wildlife corridor between the central open space and Lake Boren; preserving a section of the old ox-cart route to Lake Boren. In this corridor, the trail slopes gently down from the central open space, descending below the level of homes and decks on both sides. To make room for the additional open space, lot 2 has been moved to the west of lot 1 (and the lots renumbered). The trail proposals here (and in Section 3) require lot sizes to be reduced slightly, but not below the required minimum.

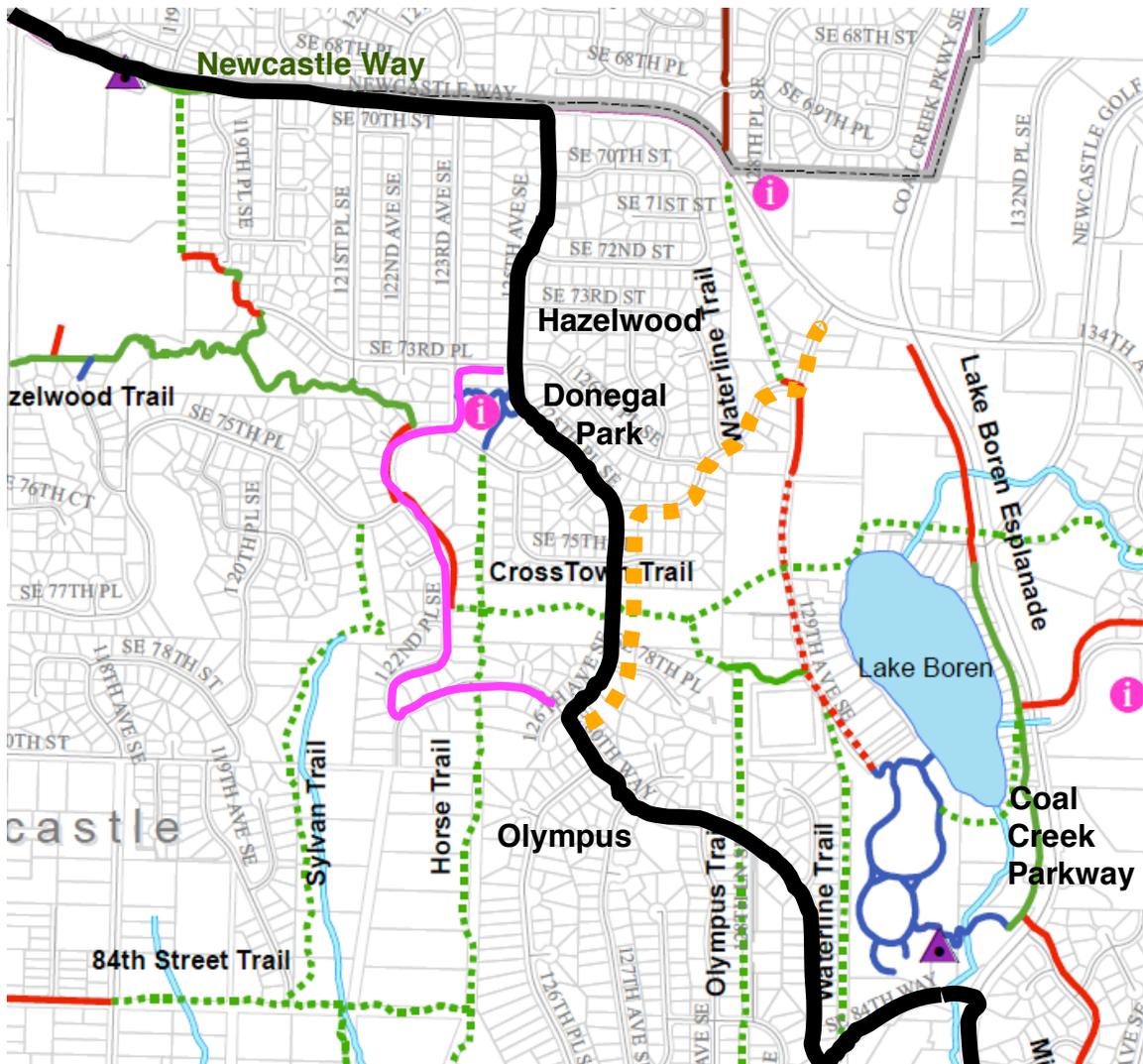
Figure 4. Plat with water flows and expanded open space.



5. Traffic and pedestrians. The map below shows potential traffic impacts if 126th Ave SE is connected south from the Hazelwood community to Olympus.

- Much of Olympus will use 126th as a shortcut downtown, as shown by the dotted orange line. But there are no sidewalks on this route from RSD Newcastle to SE 73rd St.
- As the heavy black line indicates, 126th will also provide a shortcut from Coal Creek Parkway to Newcastle Way and I-405 for drivers wanting to bypass downtown Newcastle and the traffic lights on the Parkway. There are no sidewalks between RSD Newcastle and Donegal Park.
- Adequate street connectivity between Olympus, Lake Washington Ridge, and Hazelwood is already provided by an alternate route (thin pink line) that is pedestrian-safe to Donegal Park, with sidewalks on both sides, stop signs, and crosswalks. Even this slower, longer route has created traffic problems within Hazelwood; the proposed shortcut would exacerbate the problems.

Figure 5. Traffic impacts from connecting 126th Ave SE south to Olympus



The proposed extension of 126th Ave SE across the plat to Olympus would create more dangerous streets for Hazelwood residents and negative impacts on the trail:

- The level of traffic might require the trail to detour to a crosswalk, and the elevation of the street might require steps or switchbacks.
- Trail access would be less safe for Hazelwood residents. Many of the 450 households in Hazelwood walk to Lake Boren Park by following 126th Ave SE to the CrossTown Trail, and taking the trail to the park. But 126th south of Donegal Park has no sidewalks.

Eliminating the extension would make RSD Newcastle more attractive by reducing traffic and replacing asphalt with trees and open space.

To the extent that extra traffic is placed on streets not designed for it, the developer should provide mitigation. For example, extending the new sidewalk on the west side of 125th Ave SE south past Donegal Park to RSD Newcastle. Better yet, Hazelwood streets that directly serve Olympus should be brought up to Olympus standards, with sidewalks, stop signs, crosswalks, and perhaps a traffic light at the outlet on Newcastle Way.

6. Summary. Newcastle Trails strongly supports trails and the green open spaces that enhance them. We hope that our suggestions will result in a better RSD Newcastle development, more attractive to potential homeowners, that advances the citywide trail system envisioned in the Comprehensive Plan. Hence our suggestions:

- Continue the three trails in the plan around the edges of the development with a loop into the open space as shown in Figures 3 and 4.
- Do not extend 126th Ave SE to Olympus. Use the space saved to create a continuous green corridor towards Lake Boren with room for the trail, mature trees, and wildlife, as shown in Figure 4.
- Use vaults instead of fenced ponds to provide more open space and recreation area; treat storm water before discharge in compliance with the Clean Water Act.
- Consider phased development, as in the Highlands at Newcastle, requiring the trails to be complete before the final phase of home construction.
- Finally, given the impact on the surrounding communities - loss of trails and open space, increased traffic - we'd prefer mitigation in the form of local improvements rather than the payment of mitigation fees. For many residents on the west and north sides of Olympus, the RSD Newcastle trails and open space would be by far the closest recreation area; a mini-park here would fulfill a Comp Plan requirement.