

# Teanaway residents: New guard rails an accident waiting to happen

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TEANAWAY – On Thursday, July 16, Kittitas County Public Works Director **Mark Cook** and County Commissioner **Gary Berndt** held a question and answer forum at the Swauk-Teanaway Grange to address concerns about the guardrails installed with the repaving of Teanaway Road, a project funded with \$5M state lawmakers allocated the county for tax revenues lost after the state purchased 55,000-acres in the Teanaway to establish Washington's first Community Forest.

Both Berndt and Cook agreed with residents that in places the guardrails were not far enough off the shoulder and created the feeling of being "squeezed," especially when larger recreational and agricultural vehicles are coming from the opposite direction.

They also agreed some of the guardrails would create problems for snowplows come winter and that

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...they are working on solutions with county road maintenance officials.

However, at the risk of losing the county's authority to manage its own state-funded construction projects the guardrails – and there are more to be installed, Cook said – must remain in place to fulfill state safety regulations.

Said Cook, “We can’t just remove them at this point. If we do we risk losing the state-granted authority to manage our own construction projects. By doing so we save upwards of 20% in administrative costs. Losing that authority would not be good fiscal management.

“On another note, we’re working with the contractor to have them dig up and repave about two miles of the road. Our expert opinion is that those two miles do not meet state standards.”

Reaction to the answers provided by Berndt and Cook covered the spectrum. At one end **Kelli Conner** speaking for an organized

group of neighbors said she wouldn’t have anything to do with the guardrails for a number of reasons and that they should be removed. She said if they were not she and the group would sue the county for a stay on the project.

At the other end of the spectrum were residents such as **Barb Hamel** who said she understood the importance of maintaining the county’s authority to manage its own projects.

“We just have to trust that Berndt and Cook will take care of the problem. They’re in a bind, too.”

Several residents complained the project was ramrodded and that not much thought was put into guardrail configuration.

Cook, a new hire who came into the project late, explained the configuration he inherited was, as required, engineered to state specifications in preparation for a projected increase in traffic volume as the Community Forest develops. He said the project seems ramrodded because

the \$5M had to be spent by June 31, the end of the biennium, or the dollars would go away for good.

“I believe mistakes were made but we had to keep moving quickly. State construction funds don’t come easy and although I was hired after this project was well underway, I would have elected to take the dollars, get the work done and deal with the issues later, which I promise you we’re going to do.”

## Residents weigh in

Outtakes from comments made at the forum appear here below with additional comments taken via phone interviews.

Resident **Bill Randall**: “The guardrails create a public safety issue. They’re a hazard in that they force traffic toward the center of the road. The speed limit is 50mph which makes matters worse.”

Resident **Sharon Alberg**: “It can be scary. When I’m towing my horse trailer and I meet big trucks I put my brakes on because I feel the squeeze.”

Kittitas County engineer **Doug D’Hondt**: “To move some of the guardrails fur-

