

Staff Writer

On a drive around Kirkland's Highlands neighborhood, Karen Story plays tour guide to her neighborhood. Over here is Highlands Park, where the community picnic will be held on Sunday. On the south end by the railroad tracks is the patch of land community members will landscape soon. This trail required more than 300 volunteer hours. That park is kept crisp and clean thanks to frequent community weeding parties. And over there is the house that "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" built for Connie Chapin so she could continue her Angel-fish Swimming business in her backyard pool.

As communications chairperson for the Highlands Neighborhood Association, Story knows quite a bit about her neighborhood. She e-mails announcements and work-party notices to more than 400 homes in the Highlands, a tight-knit neighborhood that has about 1,000 homes on the hill above downtown Kirkland.

Story's story with the Highlands began six years ago, when a developer wanted to build on a vacant lot near her home with views of Lake Washington. Story wanted it to be a park instead. She took the matter to the city and found that Kirkland supported her



Karen Story stands at the entrance to Cedar View Park in Kirkland. Story asked the city to allow her to turn the vacant lot into a park rather than sell it to a developer.

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vision of having more parks. "The city believes — and so do I — that there should be a park within walking distance of every home," Story says. "There wasn't one at our end of the neighborhood."

That's how Cedar View Park came into being — with some city funding and lots of volunteer sweat. "It's just mostly a quiet place you can go and just sit and look at the view," Story says.

The city of Kirkland is an ally for Story and her neighbors. "They do have a really progressive attitude toward citizen involvement," she says. "They really encourage it strongly and they do a lot to facilitate it."

Story's activism is firmly grounded in civic pride. "I feel a sense of pride and accomplishment when I see all the projects that we've worked on, and I love feeling

that people can get so much done if we work together. But also I really like the sense of community," she says.

The neighborhood recently came together to clear invasive plants from Cotton Hill Park — with a little help from goats. The association hired 60 goats from Rent-a-Ruminant to chomp through pesky vegetation in April. Then came the building of a 500-foot-long trail through the woodsy park. In October, University of Washington ecology students will help the community restore part of Cotton Hill Park, using resources from the college's Restoration Ecology Network program.

"We chose Cotton Hill Park as a location because it provides ecological restoration challenges of the scope and complexity that

we feel will challenge our students," says Warren Gold, co-director of the UW-REN program. "We were especially impressed with the commitment of both the surrounding community and the city of Kirkland to the restoration efforts."

Debra Sinick, a real estate agent and resident of the Highlands since 1994, credits Story for much of the cohesiveness of the neighborhood. "Karen has changed the involvement of the people," she says.

Sinick moved to the neighborhood because of all it offered. "I love the location. I am half a mile from Park Place, a mile from downtown. I actually walk to movies, I can walk to restaurants, I can go to parks. It's just easy to get everywhere," she says.

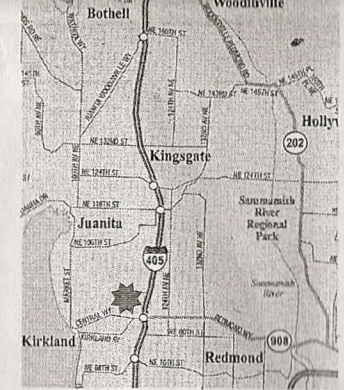
Just down the hill from

the Highlands is downtown Kirkland, brimming with eclectic boutiques and restaurants. There's also an expansive waterfront park that is a magnet for sun worshipers, walkers and people-watchers.

But up in the Highlands, residents have a sense of being away from it all. "It's 100 percent residential," says Bob Kamuda, the chairperson of the Highlands Neighborhood Association. "There isn't a 7-Eleven or a gas station within our (boundaries). We have essentially one way in and one way out. We have no connectivity with the other communities, so it makes us like a peninsula with the railroad tracks on one side, I-405 on the other side, wetlands in the north end and the entrance and exit at the south end, so we really are one of a kind when it comes to Kirkland."

"It's a little bit of a small-town feel in our neighborhood, so you just feel more connected," Story adds. "It's a very green, quiet neighborhood with lots and lots of character, and it's close to I-405 so you can get where you're going really quickly. You don't have to go on surface streets for a long time to get to the freeway."

The diversity of the houses adds to the character, says Sinick. "It's a real eclectic neighborhood. You've got high-end new construction, you've got little Kirk-



Back in the day

Kirkland was the first city incorporated on the East side and was named after businessman Peter Kirk.

Check it out

The annual Highlands Picnic runs from noon to 4 p.m. Sept. 7 at Highlands Park, 11210 N.E. 102nd St. Pizza, dessert and beverages will be provided; side dish contributions encouraged. The Cotton Hill Park trail grand opening is at 10 a.m. Sept. 13 at 110th Avenue Northeast and Northeast 98th Street.

Find out more

www.kirklandhighlands.org.

land bungalows, you've got little ramblers, you've got big houses. It's just a huge variety of different things and different price ranges," she says.

Prices range from the \$400,000s to more than \$1 million. "It isn't inexpensive to live in Kirkland, but at the same time there is a variety (of home prices)," Sinick