



**February 27, 2015**

**To: Christopher Williams**

**From: Cheasty Project Advisory Team**

**Re: Recommendations Regarding Cheasty Pilot Project**

Mr. Williams, the Cheasty Project Advisory Team concluded its work on Thursday, February 19. Over five meetings, the PAT contributed ideas for the pilot project design criteria and the evaluation criteria that will be used to monitor the pilot project over its three-year life. In addition, we reviewed environmental and geotechnical analyses associated with the Cheasty Greenspace, and commented on two iterations of the trail's schematic design. All of our meetings included public comment from audience members in attendance, and we have benefited from the perspectives provided through that forum.

On February 19 all twelve members of the PAT answered three questions: 1) Do you support the current physical layout of the pilot project trail; 2) Do you support the evaluation criteria as they have currently been developed; 3) Do you support the "next phase" of the pilot project, which would entail the assignment of a project manager from Parks, as well as additional oversight and involvement from Parks planning staff.

This memo contains our answers to those three questions. It begins with a summary of the results of PAT member feedback, and is followed by more detail regarding the perspectives of each member. We hope you will find this guidance useful as you continue with the process of design refinements, discussions with the City Council, permitting, and the possible eventual construction of the pilot project trail. We understand that there are more questions to answer, especially in relation to project cost and permitting. We have provided our comments to the best of our abilities, with the understanding that there is more process to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve on the Project Advisory Team. Although our work as a group has come to an end, as individuals we all look forward to continued future information and involvement in the pilot project.

### **Summary of Responses**

#### **Current Physical Design of the Trail**

**Eight** members of the PAT indicated that **they support the current physical design of the trail**. Primary reasons for this support include:

- The trail will provide recreational opportunities for currently under-served communities, providing families with the opportunity to experience nature and recreation.
- The second iteration of trail design responded to environmental issues such as wetlands, and has been designed to work with the geology of the greenspace. Members appreciated this level of response and flexibility based on the environmental/geotechnical analyses.
- There is strong community support for the trail, as evidenced by the preponderance of positive comments from the public, from social media measures, from petitions and from the surge in

volunteer workers. Given that PAT members were selected to represent the community, they believe it is their responsibility to respond positively to this public support.

- There is a clear, substantial increase in volunteer activity in the forest. This increase can be attributed to the project, and without it the forest is unlikely to ever be fully rehabilitated.

**Four** members of the PAT indicated that **they do not support the current physical design** of the trail. Primary reasons for this opposition include:

- The Greenspace should be preserved and protected; mountain biking is at odds with the fragile environment of the space.
- The PAT was not provided with options to select from; only one alternative was presented to the group. The PAT process was not fully complete as a result of this.
- The project has moved too quickly. The group did not have ample time to review the environmental and geotechnical work, for example, before being asked to render an opinion.

#### **Evaluation Criteria**

**Seven** members of the PAT **approve of the evaluation criteria** as currently written. In indicating their support for the evaluation criteria, members said:

- They appreciated that Doug Critchfield had been working with Seattle Public Utilities to understand and measure more baseline environmental criteria and ongoing monitoring. They want that level of scientific specificity included in the criteria.
- They believe that the criteria are thorough enough to perform the level of monitoring needed.

**Three** members of the PAT **do not approve the evaluation criteria** as currently written. Primary reasons for this opposition include:

- The criteria do not include enough baseline data for future comparisons.
- The criteria do not include enough quantifiable measures.

**Two** members who oppose the project overall, nonetheless **agreed that the evaluation criteria are important and that they are on the right track**.

#### **Support for the Next Phase of the Pilot Project**

**Eight** PAT members indicated that the Parks Department **should move forward** with the pilot project. The primary reason for this support was:

- This is a good project and should be taken to the next level; stronger oversight from Parks is important and necessary.

**Two** members were **opposed to a “next phase”** of the pilot project. The primary reason for their opposition was:

- This is not a good project and should not have any further consideration within the Parks department or other city agencies.

**Two** members, although **opposed to the project in general**, felt that the pilot should certainly have **stronger oversight and involvement** from the Parks Department.

## **Individual Responses from Members**

**1) Connie Bown** said *no* to the current trail design. If *she had to go along* with evaluation criteria, she would *agree* with the list of criteria that has been developed. She *does not want the pilot project to go forward*, but, if it does go forward, she agrees that it will need proper management and oversight from the Parks Department. Remarks:

- The PAT was only given one alternative to consider, and that alternative does not conform with the City Council ordinance. The PAT process was lacking in information and choices.
- I am concerned about parking; will trail users start parking on my block?
- I am concerned about where the money is coming from the pay for this project.

**2) Curtis LaPierre** said *yes* to the current trail design, *yes* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- The current design is thoughtfully composed and fits the site remarkable well given the slope and wetland constraints. Parks should consider adding cross trails as needed to enhance safety, circulation and potentially routes to schools. I am confident these trails can be built with little effect on the steep slopes and wetlands present. We should anticipate that cross trails will develop by default as social paths and plan those trails in the best places rather than let them happen haphazardly.
- Many kids in our neighborhood don't have the resources to drive out to hiking and biking places. I hope to see these trails used by kids who would otherwise be in front of a screen, and to know that they benefitting both physically and mentally from exercise outdoors in nature.
- We have heard that there are potential negative impacts to wildlife in the Cheasty Greenspace by increasing human presence. That is one reason this is a trial project. In a few years we will be able to see if the increased access and habitat restoration have improved the overall habitat quality to a degree where more sensitive wildlife adapt to an increase in the number of people.
- Cheasty Greenspace is a great place with even greater potential, but it needs our continued help to make that happen. The significant potential benefits for nature and the neighborhood outweigh the risk of potential impacts to some wildlife species.

**3) Dan Moore** said *yes* to the current trail design, *yes* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- I thought the original trail design was too intense; I was concerned about that. I am pleased at where the design has ended up. Two refinements would be to add in additional entrances and exits for people to escape if they feel unsafe on the trail for any reason. The appearance of social trails should be anticipated, so the design should include a few strategic cross trails. The latter will help connect Rainier Vista with the destinations up on Beacon Hill.
- We need to have faith that the geotech professionals know what they are talking about when they report that a trail system could have a positive impact on the area.
- We need to realize that this is not a pristine wilderness; people are negatively using the area already. A well-constructed trail, combined with habitat restoration, will be more protective of the environment than the current social trails. Our goal should be for a "Net Positive" result.
- The evaluation criteria look great, but they seem excessive to impose on a volunteer group.

- It's unfair to expect volunteers to pay for all of the pilot project. Southeast Seattle deserves more investment from the city.

**4) Darrell Howe** said *no* to the current trail design; *no* to the evaluation criteria, and *no* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- When I signed up for the PAT it was my understanding that we would be putting in a single use perimeter trail. We have missed the point on that and therefore the project should not go forward. It's pretty clear that the City Council did not want two trails.
- The important thing is whether or not we have a pass/fail on this project. We have never defined that. What will make this project be a "fail?" Is there any quantifiable data on that?
- Tonight I learned that the trails will be impervious surfaces. We have a long way to go.

**5) David Couture** said *yes* to the current trail design, *yes* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- I support the current design, but I would like to see more cross-trails for greater community connection. I am a teacher in the area, and I look forward to using this trail to interact with my students in nature.
- This process has been adequate; five meetings have been enough. We could "due process" this thing to death.
- This project is being driven by the community, not by large corporations.

**6) Ed Ewing** said *yes* to the current design, *yes* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- I am very encouraged by this proposed plan, but still have concerns about the lack of cross-space access.
- This green space is surrounded by youth and adults of color; however in the past five meetings on this project, I have been one of only about six people of color. I challenge the Friends of Cheasty to engage communities of color in a genuine manner, by being intentional, authentic, and transparent.

**7) Kathy Colombo** said *no* to the current trail design, *no* to the evaluation criteria, and *no* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- This project should be completed in stages -- start with a walking trail, then see whether or not a bike trail will work. We are protecting a fragile ecosystem.
- Five meetings are insufficient for this process. We are rushing through this and not looking at all of the opportunities available. If it took an entire year to do this right, who cares? We should be taking more time and care on the process.
- The evaluation criteria need to be more quantifiable.
- The pilot project puts too much pressure on volunteers who may or may not be able to perform the work needed in a professional manner.

**8) Melanie Couerver** said *yes* to the current trail design, *no* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- There are a lot of positives associated with this project. I brought over 100 volunteers out here last year, and they had a great time enjoying nature without having to drive to the mountains to experience it. Cheasty used to be covered with ivy and encampments and we are changing that through volunteer restoration efforts.
- I am very excited about the possibility of children playing in the woods. It's important for everyone to have access and fun in the space.
- The current evaluation criteria do not have the right quantitative data, baselines, or definitions. I will provide some ideas on how to improve those. They also do not acknowledge that a lot of restoration work has already taken place. The education program needs to be formal and supported with outreach.
- It is not fair to put the single cost of this project on a single group. There also needs to be a budget for evaluation and mitigation.

**9) Phil Thompson** said *yes* to the current trail design, *yes* to the evaluation criteria, and *yes* to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- After hearing the geotechnical and environmental assessments, I believe it is possible to design and build a safe trail that will meet the intended uses while preserving habitat. I also believe that a managed "cut-through" pedestrian trail that uses boardwalks should be added to the design. This will circumvent the creation of potentially damaging social trails while providing a useful route for Rainier Vista residents to Beacon Hill schools and businesses.
- Evaluation criteria that establish baselines and continued monitoring of wildlife habitat, water quality, and parking availability should continue to be prioritized.
- The proposed project will have no significant environmental impact, and it has the potential for providing neighbors will increased access to outdoor activities and green spaces.

**10) Sarah Welch** said *no* to the current trail design. She believes the evaluation criteria are *a good start in the right direction*. Even though she is opposed to the trail, she believes that *Parks should have more direct responsibility and oversight for the pilot project*. Remarks:

- The wetlands and geotech information were incredibly informative, but the PAT did not receive that information until its fourth meeting. We need to lead with the science on this, and we don't have enough science yet to move forward.
- The area is permeated with steep slopes and slide prone areas, which have not yet been fully defined, nor have the wetlands been delineated. The type of infrastructure that will be required in order to accommodate the trail through the slopes and wetlands is overwhelming. There is potentially more work and money needed for the project.
- It is not true that the Cheasty forest is overrun with invasive species. The maintenance yard has some significant impacts and drainage issues. The tree canopy and quality of wildlife habitat are work preserving.
- The evaluation criteria have come a long way. I have other data ideas that I will forward to Doug.
- It's critical that Parks assign a project manager to this effort. It has become increasingly complex and additional potential costs have been identified. Volunteers can only go so far in ensuring that the project is designed and built as professionally as possible.

**11) Tom Linde** said yes to the current design, yes to the current evaluation criteria, and yes to the pilot project moving forward. Remarks:

- Public comments favoring the new trail significantly outnumber those opposed. As a community representative, I need to respect that public support and endorse the trail. My only concern is that the original plan has been diluted; connecting trails should be added to help make the communities more interactive and the overall plan more robust.
- Cheasty has garnered a significant amount of citizen participation in terms of volunteer restoration time; second only to the Burke Gilman Trail. This level of citizen activism is the biggest endorsement for the trail plan.
- It's time for a new relationship with our urban forests; they should not be looked at national wildlife preserves or specimens in a petri dish; it is there for our community and our community should be there for the forest.
- Although I am supportive of the evaluation criteria, we run the risk of having too many measures and too much discussion. I'm in favor of a few, choice monitoring mechanisms; I do not want the project to be sandbagged by protracted meetings and costly study.
- This project deserves to be a line item in the Parks budget.
- I want Parks to study alternative locations for the utility yard; this is currently a far bigger impingement on the forest than any proposed trails.

**12) Weston Brinkley** said yes to the current design, yes to the evaluation criteria, and yes to moving forward with the pilot project. Remarks:

- Trails are not hindering wildlife or destroying ecological integrity; this is evident at both Schmitz and Seward Parks. In fact, the case could be made that those trails are helping to support wildlife.
- There will always be a trail through Cheasty, no matter what the PAT decides. We cannot change the fact that the Greenspace is in the middle of a city.
- Although I support the current design, cross-trails should be added as a refinement. We've heard a lot about connecting communities, and the current design does not do that. People will continue to do that on their own through social trails.
- I'm pleased that Doug has been in conversations with Seattle Public Utilities regarding the evaluation criteria. I am also pleased that Parks personnel will take on additional oversight as the pilot project moves forward.