

CHEASTY TRAILS PILOT PROJECT

PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM



Meeting #4: January 29, 2015

--Meeting Report--

PAT Members Present

Connie Bown
Weston Brinkley
Melanie Coerver
Kathy Colombo
Darrell Howe
Curtis LaPierre
Tom Linde
Dan Moore
Phillip Thompson
Sarah Welch

PAT Members Absent

David Couture
Ed Ewing

Project Team Staff and Consultants

Doug Critchfield, Seattle Parks and Recreation
John Jainga, Seattle Parks and Recreation
Paula Hoff, Seattle Parks and Recreation
Margaret Norton-Arnold, PAT Facilitator
Casey Rogers, PAT Administrator
Lisa Adolfson, Environmental Science Associates
Donald Huling, HWA Geosciences

Meeting Overview

Margaret introduced the primary focus of the evening; an environmental analysis performed by Environmental Science Associates (ESA), and a geotechnical analysis performed by HWA Geosciences (HWA). Margaret reminded members that the goal of the PAT was not to achieve 100% consensus on a recommendation, but to discuss and advise the Parks Department on a series of issues related to the pilot project. Margaret will poll members individually regarding their opinions during the final PAT meeting scheduled for February 19.

Doug Critchfield highlighted next steps in the pilot project process. The environmental analysis is likely to result in some changes to the trail design. Those will be incorporated during the first-second weeks of February, and on February 13 Parks staff will walk the site and lay out the plan in the field. PAT members are invited to join in this. A presentation on the project will be made to the Parks Board on April 9, and a

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City Council presentation will be scheduled in May. After additional review and permitting, construction on the trail could start this summer.

Doug went on to explain the rationale behind Parks' decision to move forward with two parallel trail lanes, one for bikes and the other for pedestrians. He began by noting that a common theme from PAT members during the discussion of design features had been the need for safety and environmental protection.

Darrell Howe said he disagreed that PAT members had achieved consensus on the need for safety and environmental protection.

Doug responded that Parks believes the separated trails will provide a safer experience for both bikes and walkers. Additionally, the level of excavation needed for a wider, multi-purpose trail would likely be detrimental in terms of erosion and habitat loss. Slope tolerances between the two uses are different, and the trail surfacing materials are different, which would present significant maintenance issues for the Department. Signage and use controls are much easier to maintain and understand in a separated lane configuration. In all, the combined, single trail was not an acceptable option to Parks.

Kathy Colombo said she had understood that the task of the PAT was to look at a single multi-use trail, not a two trail system. Kathy also agreed with Darrell that PAT consensus had not been documented with regards to safety and the environment; a vote of the PAT had not been taken on this. Doug responded that Parks would not have considered the single trail, so it did not make sense for the PAT to discuss it.

Discussion ensued. One PAT member noted that the Washington Department of Natural Resources has moved almost exclusively to separated use trails for the same reasons Doug had described. Another member asserted that the City Council had directed a single lane trail, and that the two lanes went against that established law. A third member responded that, ultimately, the City Council will approve the pilot project, and that if they disagree with the two lanes they will let the public know. But because the two lanes seem better for both safety and the environment, the member urged that the PAT push forward with that option.

In response to another question, Doug said that portions of the trail would be ADA accessible. Margaret will send members the written explanation of Parks' decision to go with the two lanes, and will also distribute a letter that has recently been sent to the City Council from the Parks Board of Commissioners. That letter urges the Council to go back to the original bike trail plan and allow for cross trails in the interior of the Greenspace.

Discussion on Environmental and Geotechnical Analyses

Lisa Adolfson from ESA and Donald Huling from HWA presented their findings. Their powerpoint presentations have been posted to the Committee's OneHub site and to the public website. PAT members asked questions and engaged in discussion:

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Q: Should the Western Grey Squirrel be in the list of mammals? My understanding is that they are wiped out.

A: We will doublecheck on that.

Q: Could we get some overlays between the Seattle Housing Authority property, the wetlands, and the trail? At what point will we actually see wetland boundaries and a full delineation? When will you give the wetlands a rating? Wetland 4 and wetland 11, for example, are two separate wetlands. Can we get copies of the wetland ratings sheets?

A: For this initial evaluation, we were only looking at the wetlands that are located where the trail is proposed to go. We will continue to delineate those further and will provide that information to Parks. We can provide copies of the wetland ratings sheets.

PAT Comment: The question of property ownership comes up frequently. Could we get an overlay of the parcels around the area? It would be helpful to have the parcel boundaries.

Q: It looks like the trail goes across three seepages. Will the trail need to be moved away from those areas?

A: Since there are so many seepage areas, you are never going to avoid all of them. But you do want to avoid most of them. You don't want to send mountain bikes down hills where there are huge seepages. You want to stay parallel with the contours.

PAT Comment: Thank you for your work. It's important to remember that the environmental and geotechnical factors work together. What we see at Cheasty is a lot of invasive English Ivy. It has a very shallow root that does not protect against erosion. This will change as we restore the forest with plants that can do a better job of slowing erosion.

Q: Are the wetlands seasonal or perennial?

A: We believe they are present year-round, although there is likely to be some drying during summer months.

Q: The retaining wall you discovered; I've never seen that before.

A: Yes, it was obviously placed to control soil erosion, and looks like it was built by a private entity.

PAT Comment: That wall is on SHA property, which extends approximately 100 feet into the Cheasty Greenspace Boundary. It's near Rainier Vista and the P-Patch. That's why it is so important to get this all mapped out.

Q: What is the real potential impact of erosion and potential slope failures? What if a seepage is missed, for example?

A: Slope stability issues will affect, and be affected by, the detailed trail design. When you put in a trail parallel to the contours you're going to intercept some water and change the orientation of some of that flow. A lot rests with the intricacies of the final design.

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Q: But if something does happen, say erosion or a landslide, is it a public safety issue, a habitat loss issue, or something else?

A: It won't be a life safety issue, but you do want to be confident that you've managed the trail in the best way possible in areas that are more volatile.

Q: Is it your professional opinion that a properly designed trail will not have any impacts to slope or wildlife?

A: I can't say that a properly-designed trail will have no impact, but I am saying that once we get to the final design, we could find that the trail will not have any significant impacts to slope or wildlife. You could even add design elements that would make the trail a net benefit. From a wetlands standpoint, if the crossings are on pilings and built correctly, you will not risk damage to the wetlands.

Q: But it is true that slope slides can be expected at this site.

A: Yes, that is correct. They have happened historically and they will happen well into the future.

Q: I am hearing that there are no red lights indicating this trail will have a substantial negative impact. I'm also hearing that any potential negative impacts could be mitigated.

A: Yes, from a geotechnical and environmental perspective, you could design this trail to have no significant negative impacts, and perhaps some positive impacts.

Q: My house on 20th Avenue is in one of the slide prone areas. We have underground springs; is that where the seepage comes from?

A: Underground springs and seepages are pretty much terms for the same thing.

Q: Do I understand that having a slide is not considered having an impact?

A: If you just let people ride their bikes through the space without addressing the steep slopes, you would have significant impacts. But if you design the trail properly, you could have no significant negative impacts.

Q: Couldn't all of the people coming into the forest track in invasive species such as the English ivy?

A: The surface of the trail will prevent those types of plants from taking hold. Also, there are many ways to keep invasive species in play; birds eat seeds and then excrete them, which is also a contributing factor. We could install a cleaning station for bicycles to minimize this possibility.

Q: What impacts will pedestrians and their dogs have on the wildlife in the area?

A: Different types of wildlife have different tolerances. The wildlife we found are tolerant of urban environments. The trail will not be bisecting their habitat, and presumably there are some active dogs in the area already. I don't think there will be a huge impact, because there will not be any additional access to the center of the Greenspace.

Q: When you describe mitigation through the addition of catchments, what would that look like?

A: Catchments could collect water and route it away from the trail. They can be designed and installed in a number of different ways.

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Q: Did the Parks Department provide you with any information about the Andover area? I'm curious as to why that was left out of the mix.

A: For this round of review, we looked at areas that were closest to the proposed trail. There are definitely areas that will require additional studies as far as the design goes, and Andover is one we might need to address.

Q: Parks has done some emergency restoration work in that area. Can we see the work plan from that, and any assessments that were done about that project?

A: (From Doug Critchfield) – That work was done through the Green Seattle partnership program and we can provide you with that information.

Q: In terms of the possibility of social trails; is there something in the geotech report that could inform that work?

A: We can identify areas where, from a geotechnical standpoint, we would definitely not want social trails to develop.

Q: One of the biggest concerns from Cheasty neighbors is the presence of human impact on wildlife. At some point people are going to cut through the center of the park. What's the real impact of the increased presence of human activity in this space, especially on birds?

A: Any species that are not tolerant of urban activity are likely to move to a different area. But from what we have seen, most of the bird and wildlife in the Greenspace are accustomed to the urban environment.

Q: Are there established Best Management Practices (BMPs) for wetlands?

A: Yes, there are Federal, state and local regulations regarding wetlands, and the City of Seattle has a wetlands code as well. There are also general standard BMPs for work within a wetland. We can send you links to those documents.

Discussion on Evaluation Criteria and Pilot Project Monitoring

The Project Advisory Team has had several discussions regarding the evaluation criteria and monitoring that will be used for the pilot project. Members had offered suggestions previously, and Margaret and Doug had developed drafts outlining the monitoring effort. The PAT engaged in additional discussion on this. Key points included:

- If we are going to measure success, then we need to know what “success” looks like. We should look at performance standards for trails and wetlands. We could monitor a number of things, for example, the development of social trails.
- There will be social trails, that's all there is to it. I don't want to consider those a mark of failure. Are we looking at impacts just on the trail corridor, or impacts beyond that direct area? Those could be significant, both positively and negatively.

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- Field studies, random interviews and surveys are valuable resources, but the funding for those has to come from somewhere. We already have lots of volunteers in the area who can provide us with information.
- We should use the Vegetation Management Plan as a filter; look at that in comparison to the current condition.
- The sign-in box has merit. That will help us better understand, and get information from, trail users. We can't rely strictly on the volunteers. We need the qualitative rating of the trail experience from those who are using it.
- We need to be working with quantitative measures. Begin with a baseline, and compare against that as time goes along.

Doug noted that he was very interested in establishing a baseline, and will develop both tangible measures and qualitative assessments. And, he wants to evaluate positive and negative impacts to the entire site; not strictly to the trail corridor.

Margaret and Doug will incorporate comments into a final version of the monitoring plan. Margaret urged PAT members to send her written suggestions, so their own language can be used as much as possible in the document.

Next Steps

The next PAT meeting will be on Thursday, February 19 at the Rainier Community Center. This will be a combined PAT/public meeting, and will be the final PAT meeting. The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m.

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Public Comments

Public comments offered at the meeting included:

I've worked on Beacon Hill for 25 years and what we have here is a conflict between two public goods: natural open space and active space. I am all for having a mountain bike area in the city, but there has been no alternative analysis about this. It was a project executed by the advocates, and that is the most frustrating part. I have come to accept that this is going forward to City Council, and those of us that would rather follow a different path are out of luck. They have already started calling this the Beacon Bike Park, go to beaconbike.com. It's too bad that this is what it has come to, and that we don't have both values represented in the community. *Roger Pence*

I have children at Mercer Middle and Orca K-8. For many years I have driven past Cheasty and had no idea it existed and I am so excited to see this project is happening. It's really frustrating to hear the rhetoric that preserving nature is in conflict with this project, by having people in contact with a new trail system they will learn to take care of the forest. There is incredible work going on in the forest and it will continue to get better because of the trails. I look forward to this being the first phase of the comprehensive trail pilot project. *Becca Allie*

I am excited to be here in support of the trails. I want to clarify the active slide area mentioned on Andover. It's important to document this in the geotechnical report, because it can't be a source of distraction. I would be happy to email the records to anyone who wants them. *Scott Amick*

The City Council ordinance passed into law last August, and is a directive to the Parks Department. The ordinance is not being followed by the Parks Department. It allows no interior trail, but only a perimeter trail, and not a dual trail. The Parks Department says a multi-use trail is not feasible. There is an interior trail in the design, there are dual trails. Where there is such aggressive energy to go against a legal directive, there is money at stake. There is an elephant in the room. We are mostly white people talking to white people about an activity that only a selected group of people would use. *Cameron Justan*

I live in Rainier Vista. My house backs on the Cheasty Greenspace and I love living there; I think my house may back onto one of the wetlands. I am very excited about adding the bike path and I think it's a great idea to separate it from the pedestrian path. I am glad you are all here doing this work, thank you. *Judith Shoshana*

This project is coming out of a selection of space without looking at the wider context. It's a process that is looking at things in minutia. One of the consultants just said that some of the wildlife would move with more activity in the area. As a green city we should be placing value on the wildlife and looking at ways to preserve it. *Mira Latoszek*

One example of a bike trail on the Cheasty web page is Saint Edwards Park in Kirkland. I went there recently. In most places of that trail, the steeper/higher areas are pedestrian only, and what you see is bollards that say "no bicycles." I would like to see something more like that in this trail design. When we

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visited the Cheasty space a while back, a spotted towhee flew up and was making a racket, and I realized we had stumbled onto his nest. Mountain bikers are going to have an impact on the birds; we have also seen a pileated woodpecker and an owl in the space. *Mark Holland*

I am a Forest Steward at Seward Park. I have probably spent 5 – 10,000 hours down there and 5,000 hours working in the Cheasty Greenspace. I was working with Jillian Weeds, and she was one of the best employees at the Parks Department and she was fired. And I think this is due to incompetence by the Parks Department. We recently heard that the Parks Department was fined for this. *Alan Smith*

I am concerned that the maintenance yard will be used for parking and as a bike skills practice area. I am also concerned that parking and maintenance issues with the project have not yet been discussed, and I am completely bewildered that the soldier pile wall was not initially identified – it took me only a few phone calls to locate. Additionally, I am concerned that there was a slide above the soldier pile wall around 2004-05. *Patricia Naumann*

I am a 20-year Forest Steward and am speaking to you as the president of Thornton Creek Alliance. The proposed solution is not enough for the mountain biking community, OR for the nature-based group. Why are we putting ourselves through this when the Chief Sealth trails offers so much available land and are nearby? Why insist on bicycles? Why not binoculars and magnifying glasses? Rather than experiment with and slicing up natural areas, Cheasty should be reclaimed for enjoyment for all. *Ruth Williams*

I live at the bottom of the hill and I am a Forest Steward, and over the past 7-8 years I have been working at Cheasty. I can't believe the amount of change I've seen with all of the planting and crews in the area. I was recently helping to clear some area, and was working with a group of Mormons. The diversity of volunteers is amazing. There is a very vocal group at the top of the hill, and there is almost no opposition at the bottom. What I see is people working together, and there is value to that. If you're looking for a pristine wilderness, in the middle of Seattle, we're seeing a city that is growing very rapidly. *Paul Fairbanks*

As a neighbor who lives near Cheasty, I am excited for the opportunity to implement a project that doesn't just maintain status quo, but that also improves slope stability. I commend the PAT and I look forward to us continuing down the path and restoring the Greenspace and our community. *Jay Gairson*

Thank you for dedicating your evenings to this cause. I am a resident of New Rainier Vista and I am probably the second closest house to the east trail head. I am a proponent of this project. I am concerned that you are looking at alternatives that have no cross trails, but having additional trail access would provide a lot of connectivity, and people walking through here, walking up the hill – all kinds of things would become possible to connect our two communities. I would like not to miss the opportunity. *Martin Duke*

The EIS contains some flaws and I think you should consider it as this propaganda. The error regarding the Western Grey Squirrel was mentioned. Pileated woodpeckers have been encountered in multiple trees and snags across the site. Also, note that another bird on site is the Pacific Slope Slide Catcher. *No name provided*

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I am an immediate neighbor to Cheasty greenspace. When you are looking at the evaluation, you should consider triggers for making things better. Regarding social trails, you need to work with human nature not against it. The City Council said that at a minimum the perimeter loop needs to be considered. That's a minimum. *Celeste Gilman*

I live in the Rainier Vista neighborhood and my home backs up on the east side of Cheasty Greenspace. There are a lot of kids in our neighborhood of all ethnicities and they love riding bikes. They would love to activate the space. The one thing I would like to see is a cross trail, as I think that would make this a more successful project. I would like to see this project go. *Adam Porad*

Thank you for letting me talk as a citizen. I am disappointed in the process, a process that could have brought neighborhoods together. Restoration does not need a mountain bike park. When you touch one part of the ecosystem, another part of the ecosystem is affected. If we want the forest system to be sustained then we do not need a bike trail. I've been involved in environmental education since the 70s and there are many other ways to engage kids with nature. *Kathy Colombo*

I live in Mount Baker and I want to express my overwhelming support for this project. I can't wait for the trails to be built and to take my daughter there. *Stephen Bentsa*

Promises have been broken whether intentional or accidental I don't know. But at the North Beacon Hill Meeting, Mr. Critchfield agreed that this would be a citywide discussion and that Parks would try to bring healing to the communities. I don't know of a single thing Parks has done to make this into a citywide discussion. That is a black eye on the Parks Department and unfortunately on the good intentions of the people at this table. *AD "Skip" Knox*

This PAT was brought together by the City Council to look at mountain bike trails in the Cheasty Greenspace. We have now seen trail design and geotech, and all these green lights. I don't understand why you aren't working together as a PAT to put your heads together in the right direction. *Matt Neilson*