

Cheasty Mountain Bike / Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project Project Advisory Team (PAT)

Meeting #1: October 2, 2014

--Meeting Summary--

PAT Members Present

Weston Brinkley
Melanie Coerver
Kathy Colombo
David Couture
Edward Ewing
Darrell Howe
Curtis LaPierre
Tom Linde
Phillip Thompson
Sarah Welch

PAT Members Absent

Connie Bown
Dan Moore

Project Team Staff and Consultants

Doug Critchfield, Project Manager, Seattle Parks and Recreation
Jon Jainga, Seattle Parks and Recreation
Margaret Norton-Arnold, PAT Facilitator
Casey Rogers, PAT Administrator

MEETING OVERVIEW

Margaret Norton-Arnold opened the meeting and welcomed the Project Advisory Team (PAT). Margaret provided an overview of her experience, and highlighted similar facilitation work for Warren G. Magnuson Park and Luther Burbank Park on Mercer Island. Margaret also introduced Casey Rogers, who will provide administrative support for the Team.

Margaret reiterated that the purpose of the PAT is to influence and shape the way in which the Cheasty Mountain Bike / Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project will be designed and monitored over its three-year life. Margaret made three suggestions based on her phone interviews with PAT members:

- 1) There has been a lot of labeling so far in the process; dividing people between *proponents* and *opponents*. Margaret asked the group not to label themselves and others in this way until the project has actually been defined. *We don't know yet what the project will actually include or look like, so please take yourself and others out of those boxes and remain open to discussion and collaboration.*

2) There have been mistakes in the process this far; communication and the overall process have not always been clear, and this has caused anger and frustration among a number of people in the community. Please put this aside now, though, and focus on the process ahead. *It's time to turn a new page and take a fresh approach to the PAT and public process.*

3) A number of PAT members said that they are upset about the anger and division in the community about Cheasty, and that they hope this process serves to heal those rifts. In fact, a police presence has been required at this meeting due to this extreme anger. *I know that is not what you want for your community. Please act as models; be respectful; look for opportunities to collaborate and achieve consensus.*

INTRODUCTIONS: PAT MEMBERS AND PROJECT TEAM

Project Advisory Team members introduced themselves:

Tom Linde is a social worker, and therapist, and has lived next to the Cheasty Green greenbelt since 1990. He has raised a couple of children here, and loves to mountain bike, backpack and be outdoors. *"Last weekend was the first time I had been in the Cheasty forest and I was struck – it's a wonderful place. I am very excited at the prospect of it being restored, and to make the forest available to people in South Seattle. I also hope that we remain a cohesive community at the end of this."*

David Couture teaches PE health and fitness at Orca. *"My goal is to get these kids out; many have never been in a forest before. I see Cheasty as a diamond in the rough and a completely underutilized space, something that we could use to move forward to create citizens and children who appreciate nature."*

Melanie Coerver works in environmental advocacy and social sustainability. *"I had the pleasure to lead a group in the Cheasty greenbelt last spring. I love the idea of providing more access and allowing people to be in the Cheasty Woods."*

Edward Ewing works with the Cascade Bicycling Club, and noted a project from the organization called "Major Taylor," which is focused on connecting young people with nature through bicycling. *"I am thrilled to be a part of this process. We are seeing worlds expand for these students and I see that possibility for the project in front of us. I'm confident we'll get there."*

Sarah Welch has lived on Cheasty Boulevard for nearly 40 years; she worked with public officials to acquire what is now the Cheasty Green Space. *"The city is growing up and the pressure for natural spaces is ever more increasing. I want to preserve the green spaces and natural areas for wildlife and for quiet solitude and enjoyment in perpetuity for generations to come."*

Darrell Howe lives in the Leschi neighborhood, and has been involved for the past 20 years in efforts to restore green spaces; he has been involved in about 25 acres of restoration work. Darrell has a background in construction management, and has worked on a variety of projects from commercial development to the installation of roads and trails for the Island Wood facility on Bainbridge Island. *"My biggest interest here is the connection to trails and natural areas and how that relationship happens."*



Weston Brinkley is the owner of a consulting firm specializing in natural resource policy and planning, and also noted that he is a Seattle native and passionate about parks. *“My biggest interest is the impact this pilot project will eventually have on the overall bike policy for our parks.”*

Phillip Thompson has lived on Beacon Hill for the past 15 years. He is a professor of environmental policy, and the director of Seattle University’s Environmental Justice and Sustainability Center. *“This is a great chance to be a part of a group working on policy for the City.”*

Kathy Colombo: is a teacher and has lived on Cheasty Boulevard for the past 31 years. She is also a member of the original Friends of Cheasty. Kathy has been involved in trail construction, working with young people in the environment. She is interested in working with the Parks Department to keep Cheasty a natural area. *“I’m here because I see myself a representative of the neighborhood and I think it’s important that all voices are heard. I also have an interest in us being aware and on top of the citywide policy so we’re in alignment.”*

Curtis LaPierre has lived in Seattle for about 25 years, 10 of them on Beacon Hill. He is a landscape architect professional working for a private consulting firm. *“I’m not a mountain biker, but I walk the trails at Cheasty just about every day. I’m interested to see what we can do together as a group.”*

PAT members Connie Bown and Dan Moore were absent. **Margaret** briefly highlighted their backgrounds, and they will have the opportunity to introduce themselves in person at the next meeting on October 23rd.

Doug Critchfield, project manager for Seattle Parks and Recreation, thanked everyone for their time and willingness to participate in the PAT. Doug noted that he relocated to Seattle from California about a year and a half ago, where he worked in natural resources management. He noted his experience on the Tuolumne River Regional Park, which resulted in a significant economic benefit to the community. *“I am thrilled to be a part of this and help Cheasty be what it can be and also to work with Margaret – her professionalism can guide this project. I’ve received a lot of comments from you and look forward to hearing more.”*

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM

Christopher Williams, Acting Superintendent of Parks

Christopher noted that the mission of the Parks Department is to manage a very large urban parks and recreation system, and to provide “something for everyone,” *which is a tough notion to tackle sometimes*. He is looking for the PAT’s guidance on how to make the pilot project as successful as possible. He noted that one goal of the project is to *create community healing*, and asked members to *be open, allow other voices to permeate your thoughts, and meet your neighbor halfway*. Christopher reiterated that the pilot project is not aimed at providing a BMX dirt track or an event site, but will be a trail for families and kids. *I know you are approaching your work in a heart-felt way, and I thank you for being here.*

Tom Tierney, Chair, Parks Board

Tom described the Park Board Commissioners; it is a volunteer group of nine citizens who deal with parks issues and policy and who meet twice a month. The Board serves in an advisory capacity to the Mayor, City Council, and Parks Superintendent. Tom noted that the Commission had been reviewing possibilities for trails at Cheasty for about a year. He said that a core belief of the nine commissioners is that the Parks Department needs to do the best job possible of allowing for multiple uses in parks, experimenting where needed, and constantly striving to meet the emerging needs of the City of Seattle, which is growing and changing. *The old times of the past that say “no this park is for this use, that park is for that use” are just not a tenant that this Park Board wanted to hold firmly to. Cheasty has been designated as a pilot project so any impacts and benefits can be evaluated over three years. I’m thrilled to see the quality of people here who have volunteered their time to do this work. You are key to determining the right way to approach this, a way to move from just saying no to saying “yes, if we approach this as a community we can all enjoy this together.”*

PAT SCOPE AND SCHEDULE/GROUNDRULES

Margaret reviewed the scope and charter for the Project Advisory Team. All members were provided with a copy of this document. Members were in general agreement on the document, and **Sarah Welch** suggested that an additional ground rule be added to address the level of discussion that has been taking place on various listservs and through social media. She asked that the PAT agree to refrain from conducting the Team’s business on online media sources, limiting its discussions to the scheduled PAT meetings. Other members agreed with this recommendation and Margaret will add that ground rule to the document.

PROJECT OVERVIEW: HISTORY, TIMELINE, PRELIMINARY PROJECT CONCEPTS

Doug provided members with a copy of a fact sheet that describes the pilot project. In response to member questions, Doug explained that the role of the PAT is to provide comments and recommendations on phase one of the Cheasty pilot project, which is a perimeter loop trail that will be designed to accommodate both mountain bikes and pedestrians. The construction of that trail and the accompanying public participation effort, is estimated to cost approximately \$450,000.

Maggi Johnson of Johnson/Southerland landscape architects presented members with an overview of the Cheasty’s site characteristics, as well as some preliminary ideas for the way in which the trail(s) might be designed. To accommodate both pedestrians and bikes, some areas of the trail may need to be separated into the two uses; in other areas the uses might be combined.

PAT members asked for more clarity about the pilot project, especially in relation to a “perimeter trail” concept, vs. a concept that would allow for the mountain bike trails to cross the forested space. There was confusion on what the City Council had approved for the pilot project, as well as the subsequent direction to the Project Advisory Team.

This was clarified in a conference call with PAT members on October 7th. **Christopher Williams** had conferred with the **City Council**, and emphasized their direction during the call that the pilot project is to

allow for a perimeter trail only, and not cross-property trails. During the conference call Christopher said:

- We expect the PAT to make a recommendation on the layout of a pedestrian/bicycle *perimeter loop trail*, as well as help to establish the criteria that will be used to measure the success of the pilot project.
- We are open to parallel bike and pedestrian trails where this makes sense, and are also open to a combined trail where this makes sense. We want the Project Advisory Team to work on a perimeter loop trail system that allows for both pedestrian and bicycle use.
- We also ask that the Project Advisory Team be creative in their work, exploring through the design process what makes the most sense for Cheasty, and also assisting in the development of the monitoring criteria for the pilot project.

PAT “SCOPING” FOR THE CHEASTY PILOT PROJECT

PAT members participated in a “scoping session,” in which they highlighted the issues and opportunities they believe need to be addressed through the pilot project, as well as other concerns, issues, and comments they wanted to share about the PAT process and the design and monitoring of the pilot project.

- The suggestion was made for the PAT to look at environmental/technical factors first, before considering a preliminary project design. This would mean that the October 23 meeting of the PAT would focus on environmental issues, with the design discussion occurring at the November 20 meeting.
- Several members commented on the importance of forest restoration, noting that trees can be killed from invasive species such as English ivy. Members were excited about the restoration opportunities that exist at Cheasty, and urged that these be pursued. Of particular note is that Cheasty is located in such a dense urban environment, and that it offers respite from the city’s crowds and noise.
- A number of members expressed concern about the lack of representation from several neighborhoods in the area, with communities of color mentioned as a particular area of concern. Representation from Rainier Vista was raised numerous times. Members felt that the issues and interests of Rainier Vista should be listened to and included in the pilot project, with several members urging that a representative from Rainier Vista be added to the project advisory team.
- This concern was further highlighted with the comment that “communities of color have been marginalized for years – there have been some well-intended initiatives from non-profits that have not been successful over the long term. This is not just an agenda for bikes; this should be viewed as a benefit for the entire community – connecting people to nature, teaching environmental stewardship, expanding their world and the greater impact that has on their life.”

- Also mentioned as an opportunity was the ability to clean up the park and discourage the unlawful behavior that has been present in the past.
- One member expressed concern about the presence of law enforcement at the meeting, noting that it was alarming that the controversy over the project had escalated to that point. He asked that PAT members be honest and open about their concerns, and that the pilot project be carried out in a manner that is authentic and transparent.
- Another comment was that any trails designed at Cheasty should allow for the peaceful enjoyment of citizens, as well as the preservation of the rich diversity of plants and wildlife in the area. Contrasts were made between the concept of a “bike skills area” vs. a trail that could accommodate children and families with bikes but also cater to the needs of pedestrians. The concern was that a skills area could attract too many people and/or have negative environmental impacts.
- Another member noted that the draft evaluation criteria in the project fact sheet included very few criteria that relate specifically to the community; most relate to the environment. The suggestion was that more metrics be included in this regard. What are the use implications? Which communities are we catering to, and who will benefit?
- A couple of members suggested that other forested bike trails had been constructed in the region, and that those should be looked at for lessons learned/successful examples. Two of these include Swan Lake Park in Tacoma and Pioneer Park on Mercer Island.
- Another suggestion was that the Parks Department conduct surveys, such as was done for the Major Taylor project, to help pinpoint the populations most likely to use the new trail.
- Another benefit mentioned was the opportunity to connect families, children, and the community as a whole with the park – “young people need a place to do dumb things. If they could experience the park in exhilarating ways, it could introduce the benefits of volunteering/stewardship in the park.”
- One question raised was whether or not mountain biking skills/activities might be better accommodated at a location such as the Chief Sealth trail, where those activities could be carried out without disturbing the natural space.
- Members suggested that a “baseline assessment” be conducted to document the plant and wildlife species that are present in the area. Although restoration is underway in the Cheasty Forest, the concern was that any existing habitat also be preserved to the extent possible.
- The concern was expressed that the new trail could attract schools in the area for field trips. The question was whether or not the Cheasty space could manage busloads of school children, should these field trip opportunities be pursued.

- The suggestion was made that the PAT establish a common understanding and use of the term “green space.”
- Another concept was the idea of “precedents,” that is, the measurement and evaluation of the pilot project, and the ways in which the project might lead to longer-term care and stewardship from community members. Measurements for environmental justice and accountability were also mentioned.
- One member pointed out that the forest is not degraded throughout; it is degraded mostly in the perimeter areas, and elsewhere the forest is in great shape.
- The presence of schools in the area was mentioned, with the thought that there is a rich corridor of students in the area, and it would be nice for them to benefit from environmental education opportunities once the trail makes the area more accessible.
- The concern was expressed that Cheasty could become an area for off-leash dog use.
- Wetlands and wet space were also highlighted as important. The suggestion was that these be evaluated as liberally as possible, and that careful consideration also be given to those areas that are greater than the 40% slope.

INFORMATION OF INTEREST

PAT Members noted that a number of documents and videos exist that will serve as helpful background information these included the video from the January 9 Park Board meeting, the August 11 City Council meeting, the Cheasty Green Space Vegetation Management Plan, the letter from Christopher Williams to the City Council, and a letter from the Urban Forestry Commission. Doug said that all of these links and documents would be posted to the project website.

NEXT PROJECT ADVISORY TEAM MEETING

Date: Thursday, October 23, 2014

Time: 6:00-9:00 p.m.

Location: Rainier Community Center

4600 38th Ave South, Seattle WA 98118

(206) 386-1919 ([map it](#))

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- Thanks everyone for coming, it's a great group of people and thanks to parks for working through this. I've been an advocate for accessing the green space for quite some time and am with the group that has raised money. I want to talk specifically about the need to know us as a group, and the vision that we've put forward as a volunteer voice. We've gotten 900+ volunteers out; please take a closer look at the Department of Neighborhood (DON) grant.
- I need to second the comments about the lack of representation, we need more youth and color and women. I suggested increasing the number to 15 but was told it had to be 12. I'm a liberalist when it comes to the English language. I read the City Council ordinance and see only references to the perimeter trail, and now that I come here and see this expanded scope and things that were not supposed to be part of this project. We can't be identifying new elements. We need to do the pilot and do that for three years. We need to stick with the program.
- The irrational fear of mountain bikers is palpable. We are not a threat to your neighborhood or your green space. Rather, we are a huge force that can be mobilized to help your green space. Touching on the diversity issue – nobody is concerned about the fact that it's 8% bikers, nor that anyone spoke out in favor of the cross trails, because I've been following this for two years and it's always been part of this process.
- I am one of the Friends of Cheasty and we have been working to restore the 10 acres at the edge of the forest. We are looking at the same data. Before, the southern 10 acres was like the conditions of the other portion before restoration. I want to reiterate what Joel said -- take a look at the DON grant. I respect the role of the PAT to discuss future uses of this trail.
- Today I walked past three of my neighborhood youth, two girls and a boy, all of color. I am disappointed at not seeing any of them represented here on the PAT. I ask that the PAT be considerate of my home, and the environment, and of the social impact of this project. Rainier Vista and the park are currently divided by a tall cyclone fence. The community is divided, and the kids are playing in the street.
- I am the president of the New Rainier Vista homeowners association. This is my daughter; she has been going to meetings for this project since they were in Beacon Hill and she was tottering around. I grew up in the NW and the forest is so important. My dream is that we will be able to walk to Kimball through that forest. Our youth need a safe space, we need more activity and we want to see the project move forward with the vision that has originated in the community. Thank you for joining this project, it is so important.
- I'm one of the stewards for Cheasty. I'm also a mountain biker, and am a little concerned that there is not a big representation of mountain bikers on PAT. After hearing your qualifications I'm

encouraged, and I am also encouraged because this is a well-run meeting. There should be representation from Rainier Vista here.

- I live in the neighborhood above Cheasty, and have been volunteering for 10 years. There seems to be a tone that maybe the Cheasty green space as a whole should be protected, so I want to read something by John Olmstead: "The primary aim should be to secure and preserve for the use of the people as much as possible of these advantages of water, water views, mountains, and woodlands, well distributed and conveniently located." The plan for Cheasty was for it to be used, and I encourage this committee to allow us to use it.
- I was at a parks board meeting and Christopher Williams said this was only for a perimeter, multi-use trail. I see parks as active, and green space as passive. I'm all in favor of a multi-use trail but going beyond that would be against the vision.
- I feel like we keep slipping off the point of the cross trail, and the amendments of City Council. Their amendments are contingent on a successful completion of the public process. One thing is the gender and diversity imbalance in this team, it's really obvious. It needs to be addressed. It would be easy to add 4 women of diversity to this committee to address the current imbalance.
- I apologize for my outburst earlier. I noticed that somebody got hit by a golf ball, and it's an example of how sports can subvert the public process. I feel like this is a land grab by a special interest athletic group. I was at that City Council meeting, and they all said no cross trails.
- I've lived in Rainier Vista for eight years; my neighborhood is bordered by Cheasty for several blocks. I'm disappointed that some of my neighbors, even though they applied for a position on the PAT, are not here. There's a chain-link fence and a pile of blackberries between me and the park, which means that I can't go to those woods. 300 families live in Rainier Vista and cannot use the park due to this limitation. The forest has trash, prostitution, drugs; the police even go looking for bodies there on occasion. I want an access point within Rainier Vista, I want the opportunity to take a walk in the woods after a stressful day, I want to let my 9 year old daughter go play in the woods, and know that she won't be attacked.
- I live in the neighborhood adjacent to Cheasty Mountain View. I have seen the transformation from wild dark woods, to what it should have looked like before all the transports came from Europe and took over. I got wind of a lot of negative feedback about this project, and I don't understand it. The restoration thus far has been wonderful in my opinion. I'm afraid that fear and anger get people to meetings, so I'm representing people who aren't coming because they're quietly looking forward to this. I am worried that only angry people are going to come to these meetings.
- In talking about using other parks for evaluation purposes, I can't speak for the other parks but here, it's an environmentally critical area for slopes and slides. I hope you look carefully at the geo-tech aspects of this. The other thing is that the City Council delayed movement twice on the \$100k, and they conditioned it, and before they did that they put out a questionnaire. One thing

these stipulated was that there should not be a second or third phase to this project. Do look at the January 11th video; parks gets that it is an evaluation period once the park is installed.

- I live on Beacon Hill and apparently I'm the reason the police are here. First I want to address the idea that mountain bike parks are going to address homelessness and graffiti. Look at this photo at Colonnade Park under I-5; I was there for about two hours and saw only two mountain bikers and many homeless people. In this map of the Cheasty Forest you see what's there – the yellow is ivy, and the green is quality habitat. I would like you all to read the vegetation management plan and take a look at these maps.
- These meetings have been organized in reverse of what they should be. I was on a PAT and we developed a design and had open houses in between meetings, then re-evaluated. I would ask parks to restructure these meetings. You're being asked to make a decision not just for Cheasty, but for all parks. This is a roadmap for the future. Get the tech data, your decision here will affect Seattle for a long time. I'd like to speak for kids who would like to enjoy woods and understand nature, not on a bike. I walked into Cheasty and there was a Spotted Towhee about 10-15 feet up on a tree. He was very upset that he saw us. So our children who want to understand nature, and see birds, will they be able to? What will the environment be when there is a cross trail and people are experiencing it with an adrenaline rush? Will it be the same? We have a lot of recreational area already, so why do we need to take the last few places and make them into what we already have. We should preserve the little spaces that we have and really cherish them.
- Parks' underlying philosophy has a fatal flaw: they think that for any park-owned property to meet its objective it has to be developed. There should be no human invasion. It's been spoken to about the citywide implications that were moderated in April. They made a commitment that the outreach for this project would be citywide. If it is to be a citywide convenience, it should be something that's accessible to citywide involvement. 5:30pm is not a good time for the meeting. They should do that park in a 100 foot grid up and down. If you haven't walked the project, then how would you be able to do the project? I urge you all to go out and walk the park. I encourage you all to go out and walk the park. You can't start something and let it be, folks came with no homework done, some people had seen videos and others hadn't, I would encourage others to take another look.