



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Park Commissioners
FROM: Mark Mead
DATE: February 8, 2010
SUBJECT: Viewpoint Vegetation Management

Requested Board Action

This is an informational briefing on viewpoint vegetation management, covering the recent history of managing park viewpoints, the findings of a 2009 review of viewpoints, and the current management of vegetation at viewpoints. No recommendation by the board is requested.

Project or Policy Description and Background

Seattle Parks and Recreation manages trees and vegetation at 16 parks designated public viewpoints and manages an additional 12 parks to provide and protect views. (See list, Attachment A) Parks traditionally managed viewpoint vegetation by topping or cutting down trees that would block views from the established viewing area. This work was done irregularly and eventually the demand to maintain trees for risk and health elsewhere in the system overtook the maintenance of viewpoints.

In an effort to develop more sustainable landscapes at viewpoints and thereby reduce maintenance, and to clarify viewpoint priorities, Parks and Recreation developed the Tree Management, Maintenance, Pruning and/or Removal Policy. Critical elements of this Policy are the prohibition of cutting trees solely for the preservation of private views and the prohibition of topping trees as it can cause permanent damage to trees.

Implementation of the Tree Management Policy began in 2002 with a series of landscape conversion projects funded by capital funds. Viewpoint work has been done at Kerry Viewpoint, Magnolia Boulevard, Admiral Viewpoint, Commodore Park, Hamilton Viewpoint, and Plymouth Pillars Park (Boren Pike Pine Park).

In response to the varied success of the individual projects a more comprehensive plan was completed in April, 2005, titled Vegetation Management for Seattle Parks Viewpoints. The primary goal of this program is to create a prioritized methodology that includes tree removal and replacement with tree or shrubs species that would not grow into views, thereby reducing maintenance costs and sustaining the highly valued public views. As landscape conversion requires significant resources, the intention of the program is to rely on capital project funding

for initial landscape conversion and operations funding to support long term upkeep of the sites. The first project under this program was the re-establishment of views at Betty Bowen Viewpoint on Queen Anne. The new landscaping at this Viewpoint is in the fourth year of establishment.

A similar project along Magnolia Boulevard has been underway since 2002 and has had substantial support from neighbors. The neighbors will be seeking Parks Levy Opportunity Funds to support the full scale landscape conversion in conjunction with larger stewardship efforts by the neighbors. Vegetation management for views has been part of the development of new parks such as Fremont Peak Park and Mt. Baker Ridge Viewpoint. Also, tree management to preserve views will be a critical issue for the development of Urslua Judkins Park.

In 2006 Parks developed the Viewpoint Designations Policy which defined how a park would be selected to become a designated public viewpoint. In 2009 a review of the status of vegetation blocking views at the 28 view-important sites was completed by Parks staff. This report was used to create the Viewpoints 2009 Review document. (Attachment B) Management recommendations are included in the chart. Some of the recommendations are to stop maintaining the site as a viewpoint, as the trees and vegetation have precluded reasonable landscape transition work to reestablish the view. Montlake Playfield and Riverview Playfield Park are two examples where continued management for views is impractical.

Goals and Objectives for Vegetation Management at Viewpoints

In finding a balance between natural resource conservation and view preservation, the primary goals for developing a Vegetation Management Plan for viewpoints are:

- to protect designated public views;
- to protect steep slopes and neighboring properties from erosion and surface water runoff;
- to protect and provide maximum native wildlife habitat, as is possible;
- to provide consistent, pragmatic management direction to establish and maintain sustainable and appealing vegetation for all viewpoints;
- to provide a baseline for the development of specific plans that address both neighborhood and citywide needs and concerns; and
- to develop VMPs that are consistent with applicable practices and policies.

Strategic Action Plan

The viewpoint vegetation program directly addresses how Parks will promote healthy native landscapes while maintaining the much treasured views across the city. Therefore it will directly address Goals 1B and 1B2 in the Strategic Action Plan (SAP). Partnerships with viewpoint neighbors address Goal 1E of the SAP.

1B Increase restoration of Seattle's natural ecosystem.

1B2 Plant and maintain trees to promote a healthy urban environment and reforestation.

- 1E Develop and maintain partnerships to enhance Seattle's parks and open spaces.

Public Involvement Process

A minimum of three public meetings were held for each of the six landscape conversion projects mentioned above. Two citywide meetings were held regarding the creation of the Vegetation Management for Seattle Parks Viewpoints in 2003 and the SEPA review process continued through 2004.

A majority of the public comment has been positive regarding viewpoint re-establishment. At Betty Bowen Viewpoint and Kerry Park, there was significant concern from downhill neighbors regarding potential slide issues and impacts on their privacy. Overall attendance for meetings has been low with no meetings having more than 20 attendees. When resources are available for major landscape conversion, Parks will hold site specific meetings to address concerns. Louisa Boren Park is the next planned project for this level of effort and public meetings will be held.

Issues

Generally stakeholders are uphill and downhill neighbors. The typical concern from uphill neighbors is that the definition of the intended view be expanded to include enhancements to their private views. The downhill neighbors' concerns are for the impact of the work on slope stability and on their privacy. In limited cases there has been concern for the loss of tree canopy and its impact on wildlife.

Environmental Sustainability

Parks has done preliminary studies on the stability of the slopes at each viewpoint. As part of the Vegetation Management for Seattle Parks Viewpoints program a process was developed to identify the slopes requiring further geotechnical investigation prior to major landscape changes and methods were developed to address a list of potential concerns. The impact of viewpoint conversion has been reviewed for impacts to wildlife. The movement toward more stable native species composition on the sites is seen as a net positive impact on wildlife.

Budget

CIP funding for the major viewpoint landscape conversion projects varies annually. Regular tree work at the viewpoints is funded by the operations budget, at between 50,000 to \$120,000 annually.

Schedule

Operations maintenance tree trimming and removal is done when the schedule allows. The schedule for the Louisa Boren Viewpoint landscape conversion will be determined when the CIP funding for the work is established.

Additional Information

- Mark Mead, 684-4113, mark.mead@seattle.gov
- Please see :
<http://seattle.gov/parks/horticulture/VMP/Viewpoints.htm>

Attachment A

List of Designated Viewpoints and Parks Managed for Views

(Excerpt from Viewpoint Designations Policy)

Viewpoints	
<i>Park</i>	<i>Address</i>
Bagley Viewpoint	10 th Ave E & E Roanoke Street
Banner Place/Rainbow Viewpoint	Banner Way NE/5 th Ave NE
12 th Avenue South Viewpoint	12 th Ave S & S McClellan St
Belvedere Viewpoint (Admiral Viewpoint in Belvedere Park)	SW Admiral Way & SW Olga St
Betty Bowen Viewpoint (Marshall Park)	7 th Ave W & W Highland Dr
Charles Richey Sr. Viewpoint (Alki Beach Park)	1702 Alki Ave SW
East Portal I-90 Overlook	1400 Lake Washington Blvd.
Hamilton Viewpoint	1531 California Way SW
Kerry Viewpoint (Kerry Park)	211 W Highland Dr.
Louisa Boren Lookout (Louisa Boren Park)	15 th Ave E & E Garfield St
Mt. Baker Ridge Viewpoint	1403 - 31st Ave. S
West Seattle Rotary Viewpoint	35 th Ave SW & SW Alaska St
Emma Schmitz Memorial Overlook	4503 Beach Dr SW
Sunset Hill Viewpoint (Sunset Hill Park)	NW 77 th St & 34 th Ave SW
Ursula Judkins Viewpoint	W Galer Street & 26 th Ave W
NW 60 th Street Viewpoint	6001 Seaview Ave NW

Parks Managed for Views

<i>Park</i>	<i>Address</i>
Bhy Kracke Park	1215 - 5 th Ave N
Commodore Park	3330 W Commodore Way
Dr. Jose Rizal Park	12 th Ave S & S Judkins St
Fairview Park	2900 Fairview Ave E
Fremont Peak Park	4357 Palatine Ave N
Kinnear Park	899 W Olympic Pl
Kobe Terrace	221 - 6 th Ave S
Lakeview Park	340 - 37 th Ave S
Mt. Claire Park	Mt Claire Drive S
Plymouth Pillars Park (Boren Pike Pine Park)	Boren Ave & Pike St
Victor Steinbrueck Park	2001 Western Ave
Volunteer Park (Water Tower)	1247 - 15th Ave E

