

Seattle Urban Forestry Commission

Leif Fixen, Chair • Tom Early, Vice-Chair

Gordon Bradley • Donna Kostka • Richard Martin • Joanna Nelson de Flores • Jeff Reibman • Erik Rundell • Steve Zemke

May 6, 2015.

Mayor Ed Murray and Councilmember Sally Bagshaw
Seattle City Hall
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98124

RE: Cheasty Greenspace Wetland Hydrology Issues

Dear Mayor Murray and Councilmember Bagshaw,

The Commission sent a letter of recommendation on April 2014 sharing some concerns about the Cheasty Greenspace Mountain Bike Trail Pilot Project. Since then, the Commission has received public input on the project and on March 11, 2015, members of the Commission participated in a site walk of the Cheasty Greenspace in the general vicinity of the proposed bike trail on the western side of the area. Numerous small wetlands were observed, along with periodic groundwater seepage on the upslope side of the wetland areas.

The Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation contracted ESA to review and classify wetlands in the Cheasty Greenspace, which is described in a letter dated January 22, 2015 (revised date of February 11, 2015). The City also contracted HWA GeoSciences to perform a geotechnical evaluation of the proposed project.

Although the Geotechnical Report describes soil and groundwater conditions, the focus was on slope stability and construction considerations for the proposed trail, and did not directly address project impacts on the wetlands. For example, drainage features were recommended in the Geotechnical Report to reduce the potential for slope instability and trail erosion, which may affect the hydrology of the wetlands. It is the Commission's opinion that there is a need to better understand the hydrology of the wetlands to ensure compliance with Environmentally Critical Areas regulations as established in Section 25.09 of the Seattle Municipal Code.

It is the Commission's opinion that as a "pilot project" additional study and consideration of potential impacts that may not be evaluated in a typical project are necessary. Prior to moving forward with project design and engineering, the Commission recommends the following actions:

- Performing geotechnical exploration to evaluate soil and groundwater conditions in the vicinity of the proposed trails and assess the wetland hydraulics;

- Monitoring of wetlands for an appropriate period of time as recommended by an experienced wetland biologist to understand the variability in wetland hydraulics, which would then serve as a baseline to evaluating the effects of the project on the wetlands; and
- In addition to establishing the baseline for the pilot project impacts to the wetlands, there should be a mechanism for feeding that information into the project design process.

Wetlands play an important role in the function and value of the urban forest and appropriate measures should be taken to preserve the wetlands in their natural state. Affecting the hydrology of the site's wetlands could negatively impact the urban forest.

Sincerely,



Leif Fixen, Chair



Richard Martin

cc: Council President Burgess, Councilmember Godden, Councilmember Harrell, Councilmember Licata, Councilmember Okamoto, Councilmember Rasmussen, Councilmember O'Brien, Councilmember Sawant, Jill Simmons, Christopher Williams, Doug Critchfield, Jon Jainga, Eric McConaghy.

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