

October 10, 2006

Dear neighbors and friends of Orchard Street Ravine:

I want to let you know my decision about pedestrian trail options for Orchard Street Ravine, and how I reached that decision. I have decided to proceed with “Trail Route B,” connecting “upper” 38th Ave. SW through the ravine to “lower” 38th Ave. SW. I also have allotted an additional \$140,000 of Pro Parks funds to begin designing and constructing the trail connection. What follows is a more complete explanation of my decision.

Background

The Pro Parks Levy allocated \$175,000 to “develop trails to access” Orchard Street Ravine. After researching the ravine—its condition, history, and wildlife—and holding two public meetings, Parks staff concluded that a through trail was not recommended due to concerns about site conditions and long-term maintenance. They recommended at the February 23 meeting of the Board of Park Commissioners to (1) develop a loop trail system at the lower south end of Orchard Street Ravine and (2) create an extensive vegetation management plan to restore and preserve native habitat. Members of the community—represented by Orchard Ravine Community Association (ORCA) and the Morgan Community Association (MoCA)—questioned the staff recommendation, and requested a more detailed technical feasibility study. The Park Board asked me to consider building a through trail in the future, and to explore options for trail funding.

Following that, I decided to proceed to create the Vegetation Management Plan and implement it as soon as possible, including the loop trail construction. Also, I directed Parks staff to hire a consultant to conduct a more detailed technical evaluation of connecting trail options. We selected SvR Design, who has civil engineering expertise. SvR evaluated (1) two connecting trail routes, (2) Americans with Disability Act applicability, (3) City of Seattle Environmental Critical Areas code requirements, and (4) construction methods and maintenance considerations. The study also provided project cost estimates. Foremost among the criteria we provided was that the chosen option should have “minimal impact on the land.”

Direction

SvR evaluated two trail routes. Both routes were technically feasible but had different pros and cons, site impacts, and short- and long-term costs.

- Trail Route A connects through the ravine from the SW Orchard St. unopened right-of-way to the “lower” 38th Ave. SW cul-de-sac.

- Trail Route B connects through the ravine from “upper” 38th Ave. SW to “lower” 38th Ave. SW.

The study concluded that Trail Route B would cause the least impact to the ravine and be most cost-effective.

- Impact—As the shortest connection, Trail Route B causes the least site disturbance to vegetation and wildlife. This has been a high priority voiced by many throughout the planning process.
- Cost—As the connection nearest existing vehicle access, Trail Route B is the most cost-efficient for construction and long-term maintenance. Construction will require no extraordinary measures such as an elevated stairway.
- Connection—Although Trail Route B is not as strongly linked, visually, to neighborhood facilities east of the ravine, its connection could be strengthened by wayfinding signage like that used along the Longfellow Creek Legacy Trail.

The two options were reviewed with the community, and discussed with the Board of Park Commissioners at its September 14 meeting. The Park Board recommended that Trail Route B, the option with the least impact and the least expense, be constructed when funding is available.

I concur with the Park Board’s recommendation. To accomplish the trail project, I have allocated an additional \$140,000 of Pro Parks funds from unallocated interest earnings.

I recognize that this is not the preferred option of ORCA. However, MoCA in its August 29 letter to Karen Galt stated: “We believe that both of the final alternatives...meet the original intent to do the project as described in the Morgan Junction Neighborhood Plan. As such, we would support either alternative.” We will work with the community and Seattle Transportation to improve signage to make the connections identified in the neighborhood plan.

We expect trail construction to begin in 2007 and, depending on permitting and construction requirements, be completed next summer or spring 2008.

I am grateful to all who have shown their interest and care for Orchard Street Ravine by attending meetings, writing letters, and volunteering at work parties. Together we will continue to improve the health of this open space.

Sincerely,

Kenneth R. Bounds
Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation