



## MEMORANDUM

Date: February 19, 2015  
To: Board of Park Commissioners  
From: Susanne Rockwell  
Subject: Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines

### **Requested Board Action**

No action is requested at this time. Following the public involvement process, the Board will be asked to make a recommendation on draft Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines.

### **Staff Recommendation:**

There is no staff recommendation at this time. This will be a briefing on the public engagement and outreach process. The intent of this engagement effort is to gather public input through a variety of techniques to inform the development of the Natural Area and Greenbelt Use Guidelines.

### **Project Summary**

Seattle Parks and Recreation is developing values-based guidelines to inform the appropriate use of Seattle's Natural Areas and Greenbelts. Consistent with the City's Greenspaces Policy, summarized below, this process will result in a vision for Natural Areas and Greenbelts that will:

- Meet or exceed forest and habitat restoration goals,
- Increase environmental education and stewardship,
- Provide for low-impact recreational opportunities,
- Enhance positive use.

Relevant Parks Legacy Plan Goals include:

- *Connect teens and young adults to nature by providing outdoor and environmental opportunities.*
- *Ensure a variety of programs that foster awareness, knowledge, and appreciation of nature in their neighborhood and across the city and region.*
- *Engage people in activities to protect our environment.*
- *Improve the environment and wildlife habitat by restoring forests and expanding the tree canopy.*
- *Protect habitat and other wildlife areas for use, education, and interpretation by increasing capacity for professional wildlife management programs.*
- *Ensure a safe and well maintained system of walking trails.*
- *Preserve and reclaim Parks' property for public use and benefit, and ensure continued access to parkland for a growing population.*
- *Look for innovative ways to approach major maintenance activities so that environmental sustainability is maximized.*

- *Pursue partnerships with other organizations that have compatible values and goals, and which result in mutual benefits.*

### **Existing Policy Summaries**

The City's 1993 Greenspaces Policy as a part of the City's Open Space Policy identifies priority parcels for Natural Area and Greenbelt acquisition, uses and intent. Parks does not intend to amend the existing City Policy, but to develop Supplemental Use Guidelines for appropriate uses and incorporate the Guidelines in the Parks Code. Listed below are brief summaries of the 1993 Greenspaces Policy and Parks' Use Management Guidelines. Additional resources are listed at the end of this document.

**1993 (Resolution #28653) Greenspaces Policy and Designated Greenspaces as part of the City's Open Space Policies.** As a major component of the City's comprehensive open space system, greenspaces [included in this definition are natural areas and greenbelts] help to create an interconnected system of open spaces throughout Seattle's neighborhoods. Natural areas and greenbelts, with their natural environmental character, will be used only for low impact activities, and will complement the City's parks and recreation system where open spaces may be used in a more active manner. Natural areas and greenbelts are important natural or ecological features that may be preserved through acquisition, donation or voluntary conservation efforts. The preservation of these spaces and development off an interconnected system of trails are effective measures to provide open space in an urban environment, and to maintain the quality of life in Seattle; and the preservation of natural areas and greenbelts in Seattle and development of connecting trail systems are two of the City's highest priorities.

The purpose of the 1993 policy is to establish priority areas for preservation to:

1. Help preserve areas of natural landscape and habitat for wildlife,
2. Provide natural buffers between land uses of different intensity or areas of distinct character or identity,
3. Help mitigate the effects of noise and air pollution,
4. Help reduce the necessity for constructed storm water systems,
5. Help preserve the quality of natural drainage systems.

Sites should contribute to the visual and physical continuity of the entire natural area or greenbelt, and increase the opportunities for providing wildlife corridors, enhance water quality and reduce the effects of storm water runoff. Areas have significant vegetation, including extensive stands of trees, unusually large individual trees or plant species on the property, and may include a stream, watercourse, or wetland.

Uses called out in the policy include:

- low-intensity recreation,
- walking trails,
- connections to existing or future components of the urban trail system,
- nature study,
- informal play areas,
- P-patch gardens, and
- are publicly accessible.

### **Parks' Use Management Guidelines for Parks and Recreation Facilities, Policy #060-P 7.13.1**

Parks Policy 7.13.1 provides direction in the development of supplemental use guidelines. Based on this policy, supplemental use guidelines augment the Parks Code and approval of use guidelines does not require City Council action. There are currently 13 park sites that have individual Supplemental Use Guidelines. The Natural

Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines would apply to parks that are categorized as such in Parks Classification Policy.

The purpose is to supplement the Park Code by providing guidelines for use management practices which will minimize the adverse impact of use activities on park grounds and facilities and the surrounding environment, and to provide criteria for determining the compatibility of proposed activities with Parks' facilities, their design character and level of use.

### **Key Policy Issues**

Policy issues that the community raises during the public involvement process will be addressed at Park Board briefings in late May-early June.

### **Public involvement process**

The public engagement strategy consists of several major components:

1. Media announcement and Interactive Community Blog/Survey
2. "In reach" events with Historically Underrepresented Communities
3. Invitational Focus Group sessions
4. Mini-Summit - Panel Discussion and Open House
5. Public Hearing and recommendations by the Board of Park Commissioners

#### **1. Media announcements and Interactive Community Blog/Survey using the MindMixer platform**

Media announcements will be through electronic mailings to Parks database and constituent groups, press releases, community newspapers, news letters, social media, twitter and facebook.

- MindMixer platform launched in early-February and will be open through April 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Topic Areas will focus on values and priorities.
- This platform has been used very successfully by King County, the City of Tacoma, the National Park Service and hundreds of other municipalities across the nation.
- It is not a survey in the traditional sense, but a means for the public to converse on what they value.

#### **2. "In reach" events with Historically Underrepresented Communities**

These events will occur in February – March 2015. The intent is to initiate a dialog on awareness, current issues and priorities for Seattle's natural areas/greenbelts. Goals are to solicit priorities, encourage representative attendance at a Focus Group, and to achieve broader attendance at the April Open House.

- Discussions would occur at the groups existing meetings/locations and would be approximately one hour in length.

#### **3. Invitational Focus Group sessions**

These events will occur in mid-late March and last for approximately 2-3 hours. Organizations/groups will be encouraged to send a representative to one of four available dates.

- The process will ensure that an appropriate variety of stakeholder ideas are represented, bring a city-wide perspective, and contain a mix of people with technical expertise, passion, and experience in the topic, and that have an interest in ensuring Greenbelts and Natural Area parks are managed in a way that ensures their health and vitality; serves the open space and 'breathing' room needs of the City.
- Facilitated small group discussions
  - Identification of overarching priorities

- Development of supporting action items that reflect/incorporate the groups overarching priorities.

#### **4. Mini-Summit - Panel Discussion and Open House**

This event will be a 3 + hour event. The intent is to engage the broad public in a dialog on priorities for uses in Greenbelts and Natural Areas. Organizations/Groups will be encouraged to participate in the Open House with displays, posters and handouts.

- Panel Presentation and Q/A – 5-7 member panel discussion with guest speakers with varying viewpoints on Natural Areas and Greenbelts
  - Facilitated large group discussion (1 hour+)
- Open house – informational boards and comment sheets
  - Maps showing existing Natural Areas/Greenbelts, trails and off-leash area locations
  - Summary of existing policies and applicable goals from the Parks Legacy Plan
  - Parks Legacy Plan survey summary
  - Participating Organization/Group displays.

#### **5. Public Hearing and recommendations by the Board of Park Commissioners**

These meetings are expected to occur in late May and early June and entail the presentation of Draft Supplemental Use Guidelines followed by a public hearing and recommendations from the Board. The Draft Supplemental Use Guidelines will reflect priorities identified in elements 1-4 above.

#### **Project timeline**

- January 21 – June - Media announcements and email notices
- February 6 – April 10 – Interactive Community Blog/survey questions through MindMixer platform
- February – March - “In reach” events with Historically Underrepresented Communities
- March 19, 21, 26, 28 – Invitational Focus Group sessions
- April 4 - Mini-Summit - Panel Discussion and Open House
- May – June - Public Hearing and recommendations by the Board of Park Commissioners

#### **Additional Information**

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#### **Website**

<http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/NaturalAreaGreenbeltUse/default.htm>

#### **City Council Resolutions**

1. 1993 (Resolution #28653) Greenspaces Policy and Designated Greenspaces as part of the City’s Open Space Policies.
2. 1991 (Resolution #28350) Urban Trails Policy Adopting the Urban Trails Policy as part of the Open Space Policies.
3. 1988 (Resolution #27852) Adopting Comprehensive Plan policies relating to open space throughout the City.

**Important links**

Parks Classification Policy [http://www.seattle.gov/parks/Publications/policy/parks\\_classification\\_policy.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/parks/Publications/policy/parks_classification_policy.pdf)

Citywide Planning Documents <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/docs.htm>

The Urban Forestry Commission is a City commission, making recommendations and advising City Council and Mayor (Staff from Office of Sustainability and Seattle Public Utilities)

<http://www.seattle.gov/urbanforestrycommission/>

Forterra and Nature Consortium are two of our City partners in the Green Seattle Partnership

<http://www.forterra.org/>

<http://www.naturec.org/>

<http://greenseattle.org/>

Cheasty Mountain Bike/Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project

[http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/cheasty/gs\\_bike\\_trail.htm](http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/cheasty/gs_bike_trail.htm)