

Master Plan 1974 Revision

February 1, 1974

The Honorable Wes Uhlman
Mayor of Seattle
Municipal Building
Seattle, Washington 98104

Dear Mr. Mayor:

Submitted herewith is our report on the Revised Master Plan for Discovery (formerly Fort Lawton) Park. This report is a supplement to the "Fort Lawton Park Plan" report of November 1972 and incorporates revisions and additions to that earlier document. It is intended that all features and policies of the November 1972 report shall be still a part of the plan, except where revised or expanded by this current report. Therefore, this report can be brief and concise.

This Revised Master Plan represents our conclusions on the task assigned us in our contract, to "reevaluate certain plan-elements and recommendations of the Long Range Plan..." and to coordinate this work with others presently involved in the project.

We have made several visits to Seattle to determine current conditions and desires. This report makes recommendations that solve problems which arose regarding park access, Lawton Wood and Bay Terrace access, parking demands, Mall design, maintenance area location, uses of future acquisitions of Army Property, and the desired character of comfort stations and amphitheaters and other developments.

The currently proposed Main Entrance and the connecting access route to the Mall resulted from a separate study by other local consultants. Acceptance of that study by both the City and the Army followed months of meetings and negotiation this year.

We appreciate the active cooperation and help of the Park Board and Department staff in this work and look forward to early Park development.

Sincerely yours,

Dan Kiley
DISCOVERY PARK
Seattle, Washington

REVISIONS TO FORT LAWTON PARK PLAN

Published November, 1972

DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

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Prepared by Dan Kiley and Partners

Planners, Architects, Landscape Architects
Wings Point, Charlotte, Vermont

John Morse, Seattle, Associated Architect

February 1, 1974

PURPOSE

To reevaluate certain plan-elements and recommendations of the Long Range Plan in light of policies and developments that have materialized since the Plan was proposed.

SCOPE

To consult with the Department of Parks and Recreation regarding current programs and policies for the Park and any new planning constraints or conditions. To reevaluate and prepare plan revisions and additions for specific elements of the Long Range Plan of November 1972. To coordinate the Planner's work with the development of the Indian Culture Center and other activity centers, and with other local consultants doing project design or other work for the Park.

MAIN PARK ENTRY AND ITS RELATION TO CONTIGUOUS NEIGHBORHOOD

The new Army Reserve buildings and related site developments have postponed the possibility of making the proposed Main Entry via West Lawton Street within the foreseeable future. Six different solutions were examined in search of an appropriate and acceptable major vehicular access route from 36th Avenue West at West Government Way gate to the principal parking area in the Mall. A route was selected whereby park traffic could be routed consistent with the Park plan intent, preserving vegetation and using gentle grades along the easterly edge of the Rhododendron Glen. With the selected route, engineering standards and traffic capacities could be met adequately and at lower cost than with other routes; encroachment upon Army property and disruption of operations and security would be minimal. In addition, the selected route which would use a Government Way Entrance would have less detrimental vehicular impact upon the community alongside 36th Avenue West than would a route using a different main entrance.*

The planners feel strongly that the concept of a clear and strong Main Entrance from the city to the east on the axis of the Mall, via a direct noble landscaped Gilman Avenue West across a bridge at Kiwanis Ravine, should not be abandoned permanently. If and when the Army Reserve property becomes available at a later time, the plan to create a grand axis main entry should be adopted, and the first route from Government Way entrance retained as a secondary entrance to the Park. In any event, every effort should be exerted to make the Park approaches as beautiful as the Park itself. In particular, Gilman Avenue and Government Way should become tree-lined boulevards with underground utilities; the commercial zone near the East Gate should be unobtrusive as befits the character of a portal to a major park.

*(See report titled "Access Road Alternative, A Planning and Engineering Study for Fort Lawton Park," 9 July 1973, prepared by other consultants.)

THE MALL

Because of the significance, size, and location of the Mall, further study was desirable at this time, to gain a clearer definition of the philosophy of this special place, its purpose and component elements.

In contrast to the natural grandeur of the Park, the Mall is regarded as a formal landscape element, a welcoming green vestibule, a structured entrance to which the rest of the dispersed parkland is linked. Beginning at the western extremity of the parking area, the Mall extends along the existing broad level shelf of land, terminating at an amphitheatre built against the western ridge. The approach to the Mall is focused upon the Orientation/Nature Interpretive Center, its forecourt plaza with mini-bus terminal. This center on the other side overlooks an open plaza with fountain, which in turn leads onto a system of landscape courts of small-scaled spaces under a strong canopy of shade trees. In this location there will be exhibits and changing displays, featured at a pedestrian scale of sitting or strolling.

A network of walks lines the edges and subdivides the Mall, with trails leading off on either side to other parts of the Park: to the Indian Culture Center, Wilderness Trails, family picnic areas, Rhododendron Glen, nature trails and overlooks beyond the banked seating of the amphitheatre.

AMPHITHEATRE AT THE MALL

Since the time of Epidauros there have been few opportunities to fuse a large amphitheatre into such a situation dramatized by wide water, cliffs and crenellated distant peaks. A backdrop for audiences of possibly a few thousand people, accommodated on the banked terraces of the ridge or sitting on the gently sloping open land to the south, is provided by the natural slope of the land. Entertainment ranging from folksinging to large concerts with moveable stages can be sponsored in this verdant bowl. Various activities can be housed in this space and contribute to making the Mall a more vital center.

ORIENTATION/NATURE INTERPRETIVE CENTER

The question has been posed as to what this center is, what is its purpose and function. Certainly it should be a structure providing shelter and enclosure from inclement weather, housing basic services of toilets, telephone, first aid and information. But of paramount importance it should have a message, a theme going beyond even any interpretation of this particular park.

The Park is in a naturally beautiful state with hills, broad and narrow valleys, forests, meadows, tidelands and bluffs. It has a wide variety of wildlife – trees, flowers, animals, birds, fish. The weather and the seasons in their variations add the excitement of constant change. Unsurpassed panoramas explode toward the Olympics and Mount Rainier.

However, the quality of the Park landscape is due not to nature alone. Man and nature together have created much of the visual attraction of the Park, with a sense of continuity, evocative of the past. Today, better than ever before, we appreciate that no landscape is static – today's is a legacy from previous generations of Seattle. Our readings of history have acquired a special dimension from our understanding of past settlement patterns. The concern of previous generations for community values, economy and conservation of land resources is relevant to us today.

Thus the center provides an ideal vehicle for the propagation of a land ethic, the sustenance of an environment of the highest quality in which neither Man nor Nature dominates, as exemplified in the beauty, diversity and vitality of the Discovery Park landscape.

Architecturally the building should be simple, light and of design sympathetic to its siting and functions. There should be adequate display space for changing exhibits and permanent guide material for environmental study, as well as maps and announcements of each Park feature and activity. This should be the place to start to learn about the Park plan – identify the areas of casual recreation, entertainment and social activities, and activities requiring particular openness or topographical features. Land, water, air – it's all together here; it's simply a matter of exploring with direction and curiosity.

PARKING AREAS

Comprising two units, each holding 200 cars, the major parking area has been established in close proximity to the Mall. Each unit has been treated as a garden for cars, with plentiful canopy trees and aisles of dense shrub screens and ground cover. Anticipating the acquisition of the land to the east of the entry circle some day, the planners propose to install a third unit of parking if and when needed, treated in the same manner. Mall parking could thus be developed in three phases to a total capacity of 600 cars, although present projections suggest that 400 will be sufficient.

An area to accommodate 250 cars has been located at the East Gate. Snug against the hillside, it is well screened by existing vegetation and the addition of bermed islands with dense shrubs and canopy trees will blend this utilitarian space into the hill slope.

At the South Gate there is parking area for an ultimate total of 400 cars. Set well back from West Emerson Street with good perimeter screening from Magnolia Community, this area will be constructed in two phases. Initially in Phase I served directly from Emerson to accommodate 150 cars, the lot will be modified by the addition of another 250 cars in the Long Range Plan. At that later time the connection off Emerson will be replaced by a loop swinging up from the South Gate.

On the plateau above and east of the existing Metro plant there will be a provision for 150 parking spaces. This point will be the furthest ingress into the Park by automobile, serving as a holding area for visitors allowed to drive this far on low patronage days, who are bound for the South Beach or West Point; it is also a vehicular or pedestrian collecting place for possible scheduled guided tours to the Metro complex.

The total anticipated parking requirement of the Park is 1200 cars.

SCENIC LOOP

The manner of public access to the Park and circulation within it has been a most important consideration. The plan had proposed that all vehicles be prohibited from going deep into the Park except on weekdays or similar times of low patronage; on high use days they were to be limited to the parking areas, with mini-bus service looping through the Park and down to the shore. The City requested that a study be made of the possibility of a limited length loop road, primarily for Park access for senior citizens, handicapped persons or other persons of limited mobility. Two alternatives were examined. Alternative No. 1 would be to enter by the East Gate and proceed up Washington Avenue, making a circle at the existing flagpole, where there is a magnificent overlook down over the parade ground, and then returning to the East Gate. Alternate No. 2 would be to once more enter by the East Gate, proceed up Washington Avenue along Idaho Avenue to the base of the parade ground and out by the South Gate along Oregon Avenue. The conclusion is that these two be combined into one Scenic Loop -- giving access to East and South Gates and top of the hill.

In light of the previous recommendation not to open the Park to the automobile, the Planners do not strongly endorse the Scenic Loop. The Park cannot aspire to be all things to all people. Competing demands must be sorted out and determinations made about which should be encouraged and which sacrificed. The problem is to avoid easy compromise between competing forces but rather make the hard choices between them. This is a difficult dilemma for the Planner because the climate of public attitudes (favoring, opposing or neutral to growth) will, in the future, determine the overall development pattern of the Park.

At this point it is important to recall the prime considerations of the Park design philosophy, namely to combine the rich attributes of the site into a unified whole and to balance and relate its parts and features. The resultant continuous evolving experience would be varied and ever -changing as the conditions direct. The site should be kept as open as possible, to be perceived as a logical and informal succession of spaces, activities and plant growth, without defined boundaries. To achieve these ends, certain prohibitions, corrections and limitations have been proposed. Vehicular restriction is considered one of the paramount issues.

METRO ACCESS

In the planning restudy, it was first proposed that the Metro vehicular access be via the Park Entrance Road, along the Mall, thence southerly by the North Bluff picnic area to the vicinity of the Capehart

housing and then down to West Point. Since such a route was circuitous, having three significant elevation changes, and traversing almost the entirety of the projected heavy use area of the Park, another route was sought. Discussions with Metro showed greater use of trucking to move sludge than had been anticipated. The optimum choice seems to be to designate the present Metro access road as a restricted service road, with limited use by public vehicles and mini-bus service, and used in part also for the Scenic Loop (see below). It would appear that this alignment cannot be improved upon. In the future the possibility of another method of sludge disposal can be hoped for – by barging or piping, for example.

METRO

From a design standpoint and because the shores and beaches belong to the scene and character of the Park, all Metro development should be considered as a part of the Park environment. No Metro plant development should take place on the South Shores; the present sludge lagoon should be removed as soon as possible and any future Metro plant expansion limited to the north side of the present treatment plant. The rip-rap edge along the north side should be available to the public as an important promenade connecting the two proposed Park water access docks and the trail system leading from them into the hinterland. The South Beach is broad and spacious at low tide. Its great expanse, backed by high bluffs, together with its isolation, dramatize its grandeur and its mystery. The beaches need to be open for public walking along the entire outside of the peninsula.

WATER ACCESS

There are shown two access points from Shilshole Bay, with landing accommodation within Park property. The main access is regarded as essentially for water taxi or water bus, part of a system linking all the parks around the Sound and Downtown. It is a small scale element allowing limited access by public boats. The docking facility located between West Point Lighthouse and Metro is directly related to the mini-bus terminal and trails running northeast and southwest. The dock is limited in size because of high current and wave movement, together with a rapid falloff in bottom depth at a distance of 200 feet from shore. A heavy duty hinged flotation dock system with a rigid pier would be an ideal combination in these conditions. The secondary access is located below the Indian Cultural Center at the base of the elevated zigzag trail. This area can be expected to have low use, tucked away from major Park functions. Nevertheless it opens up a potential ferry point to Shilshole Marina and will be a useful adjunct to boats berthed or beached along this segment of the North Beach.

THE BLUFFS

The steep bluffs should be untouched with trails or developments since they are dangerous to traverse and are of supreme interest to the geologist. On the north a zigzag trail has been developed, by elevated boardwalks to preserve the terrain, to scale from the smaller water dock up to the trail system linking the Indian Cultural Center, the overlooks, picnic areas and the Mall.

The sloughing South Bluff might accommodate a single trail to connect the Point and beach with the uplands, but its location needs further study on-site.

UPLANDS

The uplands are windswept in quality with a pleasant open character, appropriate in scale to Elliott Bay with the panoramic backdrop of the Olympic range. The high heath plateau would be made into a “Sea Garden,” rich in plants adaptable to such an exposure. Tall evergreens would enclose a series of rooms and modify the micro-climate to suit less hardy plant communities. It all would overlook the Sound and open to spreading meadows to the south and to the north. Together with the Parade Ground, these meadows are superb open slopes for informal play, kite flying or casual strolling.

High on the east slope, over the ridge of high ground, is an extensive flat plateau ideally suited to multi-purpose play, team games such as softball or football. This area should be laid out not in a formal arrangement of concentrated sports grounds but rather as ample relaxed green spaces, divided and screened through informal clusters of trees. Sufficient parking is provided in close proximity to this and the South Gate.

THE TOP OF THE PARK

Without doubt, the area within the 350 foot contour has an unsurpassed 360 degree prospect, from the Olympic range over the Sound to downtown Seattle and out to the distant industrial valley and Mount Rainier beyond.

FORT LAWTON HISTORIC MUSEUM

Upon this scenic topland there is a cluster of military buildings worthy of preservation. Individually some are of architectural merit. They vary in scale and function. Nevertheless, collectively they form a grouping that would be well suited to house and represent a Fort Lawton Historical Museum.

The concept of Museum should not be confused as a dingy center for dull documentation; nor should its purpose be conceived of as exclusively military in scope. Increasingly, museums are becoming cultural centers in the community, with educational programs developing in diversity and providing a yardstick for the measure of their vitality and public service.

The history of "Discovery" of Puget Sound is a fascinating subject in itself. Possibly the exhibits, both indoor and outdoor, could focus on the late 19th or early 20th century eras and interpret representative aspects of economic, social, political and cultural factors. A collection of memorabilia and artifacts should be begun and exhibits should be assembled, showing history "as it was," through color and nostalgia contributing to the Park atmosphere. Like the Park itself, underlying all Museum responsibilities is the great obligation to educate. Education is multifaceted. Uniquely within Discovery Park there is the opportunity to experience History and Natural History, and thus elevate the spirit.

WEATHER OBSERVATION

The Lighthouse, the Coast Guard radio relay station and the military radar equipment installation provide the basis for a park-wide weather observatory system. At the Orientation/Nature Interpretive Center and within these three areas educational exhibits and facilities, relating to all age levels, could be provided to stimulate awareness of the ecology of the Park and the Sound Region. The technology exists for measuring the various phenomena of the environment such as climatological and marine data which could be automatically recorded at monitoring stations and compared at a central facility located at the top of the uplands.

AMPHITHEATRE WITHIN NEIGHBORHOOD RECREATION AREA

Tucked into the easterly slope, up to 500 people could congregate upon tiered grassed terraces. Scaled to neighborhood demands, the space should be ample and flexible to function for puppet theater or brass band performances. The site is encircled by a densely wooded hillside, looking out onto wide playfields, within easy reach of parking areas to the north or the west

MAINTENANCE AREA

This facility has reverted to one of the terraces in the southeast quadrant after originally being located on the Master Plan in the northeast corner of the Park, and thus it occupies an area within the present boundaries of the Park. This complex fits snugly into the angle of the hillside, well screened by existing vegetation. The architectural handling of the open and enclosed structures should be low scale, cut into the slope, with berms, densely planted to reduce the raw paved and fenced quality of this utilitarian complex.

COMFORT STATIONS

In any discussion of the design of Park structures it is worth recalling that Architecture has been described aptly in terms of fitness, commodity and delight. Discovery Park will be enhanced by sensitively designed structures, subordinated to the natural environment, located compatibly with the site. Comfort Stations should be well built, vandal-resistant and utilitarian in terms of low maintenance. Use should be made of natural materials and neutral color. Astute site planning should combine simple structure with planting and screening in a manner that blends with the natural beauty of each site. The Master Plan locations for rest rooms have been determined on the basis of high use and accessibility, with maximum distance between

shelters of about 2000 feet. It is advisable to incorporate as many Comfort Stations as possible within building complexes to reduce the proliferation of small scale structural elements.

POSTSCRIPT

The Master Plan is a demonstration that a well designed urban park is in itself an example of an ecology fashioned by man to suit his needs and tastes. Nevertheless, it must remain primarily a place to enjoy outdoor pleasures. Educational features should not dominate but become an integral part – just as sculpture and small pavillions have enhanced parks traditionally. Responsibilities for operations and maintenance of the varied park programs could be shared by a number of agencies and private groups, such as the School Districts, Environmental Organizations, Nature Societies, Recreation and Outdoor Clubs, etc., participating with and encouraged by the Department of Parks and Recreation. Then the design will demonstrate man's relation to man, man's relation to society's patterns, and ultimately man's relation to his environment.