



ARTS COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

AC 25-05
October 15, 2025
Regular Business

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

TITLE:	AC 25-05: Deane's Children's Park Site Plan – Public Art Opportunities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Discuss opportunities for public art integration as part of the Deane's Children's Park Site Plan.	
STAFF:	Kellye Hilde, Deputy Public Works Director Shelby Perrault, Capital Parks Manager	
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a	
EXHIBITS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Project Location Map2. Phase I Community Engagement Summary3. Preliminary Design Concept – The Quest & Woodsy Wonders4. Phase II Community Engagement Summary	

SUMMARY

PARK FORMATION

In 1962, the Mercer Island Preschool Association (MIPA) proposed a children's park at Island Crest Park, which was owned and operated by King County. After the plan was approved, MIPA solicited support from local organizations to purchase equipment and enlisted community volunteers to build the children's play area. The City acquired Island Crest Park in 1968 and renamed the play area Deane's Children's Park in 1985, in honor of Lola and Phil Deane, Mercer Island residents who were instrumental in the park's creation. MIPA has continued to partner with the City to improve Deane's, including a major park renovation completed in 2005.

2022 PARKS LEVY

In November 2022, Mercer Island community members voted to renew the parks levy that was set to expire at the end of 2023. The renewed 16-year levy provides continued funding for parks operations and maintenance, in addition to funding Pioneer Park forest management and the replacement of 15 play structures. Deane's Children's Park was prioritized for early replacement due to the age and condition of equipment and the desire to provide universally accessible play opportunities.

DEANE'S CHILDREN'S PARK SITE CONDITIONS/EARLY ASSESSMENT

A preliminary assessment of existing conditions was conducted from 2023-2024. Key takeaways from these findings are divided into three categories:

Play Equipment

Play equipment at Deane's Children's Park was installed in 2005 and 2012. Except for the "dragon," the existing play equipment is nearing the end of its useful life. The timber curbs framing the play areas do not meet accessibility standards and the existing play equipment is not truly accessible. Additionally, the park's play equipment lacks diverse and inclusive play opportunities for all users.

Park Amenities

In addition to the play equipment, the park includes several amenities that require replacement. The original restroom that was decommissioned and converted into a storage shed is nearing the end of its useful life, as is the picnic shelter. The single-user restroom serving Deane's Children's Park and the Bike Skills area is located at the eastern edge of the property next to the parking lot, making it difficult to access. Site furnishings, including picnic tables and park benches, do not meet accessibility standards, and many are in disrepair.

Site Circulation

The park lacks clear wayfinding to the various play areas, which are spread out and do not offer clear sightlines, making overall site navigation confusing. The existing trails and pathways throughout the park require upgrades to meet accessibility standards and should be clearly defined to distinguish between accessible and non-accessible paths. Furthermore, the parking lot lacks parking spaces that comply with accessibility standards.

Along with the key takeaways from the preliminary assessment, it is important to note the relocation of the Bike Skills area to the northwest quadrant of the park, adjacent to the play area. The park amenities and overall site circulation will need to consider both user groups, ensuring restroom facilities and picnic shelters are centrally located, providing clearly defined paths for riders entering the Bike Skills area versus play areas, and developing amenities that meet accessibility standards. For these reasons, the scope of the playground replacement needs to be broadened to include the Bike Skills area, ensuring a cohesive plan for Deane's Children's Park.

SITE PLAN OVERVIEW AND SCOPE OF WORK

In the fall of 2024, the City engaged Berger Partnership as the design consultant to facilitate the development of a new Site Plan for Deane's Children's Park. The plan will address cohesive integration of the Bike Skills area and the playground structures, with the goal of modernizing the park area to meet universal play standards. The plan will also address improvements to pedestrian and bike circulation, restroom and picnic shelter replacement, parking, and other potential park improvements. The final Site Plan will include a cost estimate, phasing plan, and funding strategy.

The planning, design, and construction of Deane's Children's Park will include multiple phases:

- **Phase I:** Develop a Site Plan in 2025 through a community engagement process that will address universal play standards including a new park layout and phasing plan for the replacement of equipment and amenities. The Site Plan will also include cost estimates and a funding strategy. The Parks and Recreation Commission will review the proposed alternatives and present a recommendation to the City Council for adoption.

- **Phase II:** The Site Plan will identify the first phase of capital improvement work, including anticipated replacement of one or more playground structures. The project will advance through detailed design, permitting, and phased construction that is anticipated to take place from 2026-2027.
- **Future Phases:** The anticipated scope of improvements for Deane's Children's Park likely exceed the initial budget allocation. Future capital improvements will be recommended for implementation in phases, to include continued opportunities for community fundraising and grants.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY - INITIAL INPUT GATHERING

From April to May 2025, the project team conducted a multi-faceted first phase of community engagement, gathering broad input to inform the Deane's Children's Park Site Plan. Outreach efforts included an online survey, an in-person open house, project booths at two community events (MIPA Circus and Leap for Green), and school-based engagement activities across four elementary schools. These efforts were designed to gather feedback from a broad cross-section of the community – including families, children, and longtime park users – on their experiences, priorities, and ideas for the future redevelopment of the park.

Key themes and takeaways included:

- Strong support for inclusive and accessible play features, including improved paths and restrooms
- Desire to preserve the natural, wooded character of the park
- Continued enthusiasm for the park's dragon legacy, with interest in incorporating imaginative elements
- Preference for a unified theme, with top choices including *Treehouse Adventure* and *Fairytales Kingdom*
- High interest in active and diverse play features such as swings, climbers, spinners, and ziplines
- Support for phased improvements, starting with a new restroom facility, followed by a picnic shelter and access upgrades

A detailed summary of this engagement is provided in Exhibit 2.

PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONCEPTS

Community feedback gathered during the first phase of engagement directly informed the development of two preliminary design concepts: *The Quest* and *Woodsy Wonders*. These concepts reflect the community's priorities for inclusive, accessible play; a natural, forested setting; and imaginative elements rooted in the park's identity. Both designs incorporate features such as improved circulation, a variety of play types for all ages and abilities, and a centrally located picnic shelter and restroom. These concepts are provided in Exhibit 3 and summarized below:

The Quest

The Quest builds on the dragon legacy and fairytale themes expressed by many children and families, featuring castle-like play structures, a sense of adventure and discovery, and playful storytelling elements.

Woodsy Wonders

Woodsy Wonders emphasizes the natural woodland character of the site, and incorporates treehouse-like play structures, quiet spaces for reflection, and nature-based play that supports creative exploration.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY - PRELIMINARY DESIGN CONCEPTS

The second phase of engagement focused on presenting the draft design concepts developed in response to initial community input. This phase invited community members to provide feedback on the overall look, feel, and character of the concepts – particularly the play equipment – and to respond to more specific questions related to different types and categories of play. From July to August 2025, the project team conducted a community-wide survey via the Let's Talk Mercer Island project webpage, held a focused discussion with the Friends of Dragon Park, and hosted project booths at four City events: Summer Celebration, Mostly Music in the Park, National Night Out, and Pride in the Park.

Key themes and takeaways included:

- Broad support for *Woodsy Wonders* as the preferred concept, with appreciation for its alignment with the park's natural setting
- Desire to meaningfully integrate Kenton's Dragon into the updated design
- Continued support for unstructured, imaginative play that fosters creativity, exploration and open-ended play experiences
- Emphasis on inclusive features that support a range of ages and abilities, while preserving the park's forested character
- Climbing and sliding were the most desired play elements in larger structures, with clear support for elevated, open spaces and a unique structure that reflects the park's character

A detailed summary of this engagement is provided in Exhibit 4.

DESIGN REFINEMENT

On September 4, 2025, the project team facilitated a site tour with the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) during its Regular Meeting to provide an on-the-ground perspective of the two draft design concepts under consideration. During the visit, staff presented an overview of each concept, highlighting how design elements would be experienced in context and how they reflect community feedback.

Following the site visit and discussion, the PRC expressed support for the *Woodsy Wonders* concept and recommended moving forward with refining this option into the preferred plan. The project team will return to the PRC on November 6, 2025, to present the refined design and proposed equipment features for review and consideration. Staff will also share input received from the Arts Council regarding public art recommendations.

PUBLIC ART INTEGRATION – OPPORTUNITIES

As part of tonight's presentation, staff will provide the Arts Council with an overview of the project and seek input on opportunities to integrate public art and/or placemaking elements using the 1% for Art in Public Places funding generated by this project. The Site Plan is expected to be implemented in multiple phases, and at this stage, staff are presenting a selection of potential public art opportunities for consideration during the first phase of development. Additional recommendations for public art in future phases will be documented in the Site Plan Report, which will be presented to City Council in early 2026. The first phase of this capital project is expected to generate approximately \$10,000 - \$15,000 in 1% for Art revenue.

During the initial community engagement phase, participants were asked to select a theme that could complement *Kenton's Dragon*. Among the options presented, "Treehouse Adventure" emerged as a community favorite and was carried forward in the *Woodsy Wonders* concept. This theme celebrates natural materials,

woodland creatures, and a treehouse-inspired aesthetic, offering strong opportunities to integrate nature-based public art into the park environment.

Staff are seeking the Arts Council's input on potential art forms and media that would align with the "Treehouse Adventure" theme and could be integrated into the first phase of development. Initial ideas include:

- Sculptural elements that define entrances or specific areas of the park, reflecting the theme
- Tile, paint, or other graphic media integrated into seat walls or building facades
- Functional design elements such as custom benches, an informational kiosk, wayfinding features, etc. that reinforce the treehouse/natural woodland aesthetic

The preferred type of artwork may influence the implementation method. Staff have identified three potential approaches to incorporating art into the design process:

- Design team-led integration: Creative elements are designed directly by the design team during 30% design.
- Artist collaboration: A selected artist joins the design team and works collaboratively as the design develops.
- Independent artist commission: A selected artist works semi-independently using the Site Plan and 30% design to guide the development of standalone art elements.

The type of art preferred may influence the process that is utilized. For example, functional elements (e.g., custom benches or wayfinding) would likely benefit from closer coordination with the design team, whereas more standalone pieces (e.g., sculpture) may offer more flexibility in timing and process.

EXISTING PUBLIC ART INVENTORY – KENTON'S DRAGON

Kenton's Dragon is an approximately 44-foot-long concrete structure situated in the southeast portion of Deane's Children's Park. It was re-built in 2013 after staff inspections revealed that the original, beloved dragon was deteriorating significantly and nearing the end of its useful life, with large cracks and extensive decay. Due to the dragon's artistic value, staff contacted original artist Kenton Pies – who agreed to come out of retirement to create a new version. Because this project was not a planned replacement, the Mercer Island Arts Council approved funding from the 1% for Art in Public Places Fund to pay for the new dragon, a request later approved by City Council.

During community engagement, the project team received feedback that *Kenton's Dragon* is beginning to show signs of age and may benefit from restoration in the future. However, staff recommend that any work related to *Kenton's Dragon* be addressed separately from the current phase of improvements, as restoration is expected to be a larger and more resource-intensive effort - likely to exceed the 1% funding generated by this project. If the Arts Council would like staff to explore this further, staff can include it as a potential item for the 2027 work plan for future consideration.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will compile Arts Council input on preferred public art opportunities for the first phase of development and will further evaluate these options during the 30% design effort, which begins in 2026. Staff will return to the Arts Council during that phase to present updated options for further review and feedback.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discuss opportunities for public art integration as part of the Site Plan for Deane's Children's Park.