



**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

**Item (1)
April 26, 2022
Regular Business**

AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION

TITLE:	Bike Skills Area Assessment	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Receive the Bike Skills Area report; provide feedback on the options and recommended improvements; endorse staff's recommendation for Council approval.	

STAFF:	Jason Kintner, Chief of Operations/Public Works Director Alaine Sommargren, Deputy Public Works Director
COUNCIL LIAISON:	Craig Reynolds
EXHIBITS:	1. Upper Luther Burbank Park Bike Skills Area Assessment report

SUMMARY

On October 7, 2021, the Bike Skills Area in Upper Luther Burbank Park was temporarily closed due to significant operating challenges and safety concerns. Challenges included repeated unauthorized expansion of the course, damage to soils and established vegetation, and construction of jumps that exceeded park rules. The closure allowed the City to ensure the park area could operate safely and sustainably.

At the April 26th Special Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, staff will brief the Commission about the outcomes of the Bike Skills Area Report, provide additional options for discussion, and provide the Commission with a recommendation for the Bike Skills Area.

BACKGROUND

The Bike Skills Area (BSA), formerly known as the BMX park, was originally created by neighborhood riders in the 1970's. At the time, the area was owned and managed by King County. Use of the area continued over the years, with users creating and shaping jumps and trails within the ravine area. The name of this location was changed in 2021 to reflect changes in the use of the facility over the past five decades to include other biking styles.

Over the years, increased use and unauthorized expansion of the Bike Skills Area caused damage and degradation to the surrounding hillsides and vegetation. Recognizing the need for professional consultation, the City retained Action Sports Design, LLC (ASD) in October 2021 to perform a full assessment of the site and make recommendations to improve the operations and safety of the Bike Skills Area while minimizing environmental impacts. The final report is attached as Exhibit 1.

During the closure, staff also completed necessary improvements to the site including:

- Parks Maintenance staff removed the unauthorized jumps and regraded the site,

- Undermined hillsides were backfilled and stabilized,
- The BSA was professionally surveyed to record site topography, and document the area impacted by the existing BSA,
- Staff completed a tree risk assessment and addressed degrading trees, and
- A volunteer event was held on March 14, 2022, to plant new native trees and shrubs along the BSA boundary areas

DISCUSSION

Since the closure of the BSA, public comment and discussion regarding the facility has been impassioned and divisive. Concerns about the abrupt closure, length of the course closure, and potential reopening of the facility have been well voiced. While opinions about the future of the facility have been divided within the community, the BSA is recognized as a unique recreational amenity for kids and teens on Mercer Island.

The BSA Assessment report provides several recommendations for the re-design of the BSA in Upper Luther Burbank Park (ULBP). Included below are several long- and short-term options for next steps, each with a brief analysis, for consideration and discussion. Although BSA users were previously allowed to construct jumps without City oversight, this action will no longer be allowed in any option discussed below. While unauthorized digging and construction will not be allowed, volunteer events in which the community can assist with construction under the professional guidance of the engineer/architect/project team will be permitted.

LONG-TERM FACILITY OPTIONS:

1. *Re-design the ULBP BSA per ASD's recommendations*

The re-design of this facility, as outlined in the report, can be completed. It will require additional funding to complete an environmental review and permitting, and a professional design will be required to engineer the final bike flowline and drainage system. Completion of this option will include additional input opportunities for both riders and park users to balance the needs of different park uses.

Due to the complexity of the site (topography, lack of existing stormwater infrastructure) and anticipated permitting requirements, this option will not be a "quick fix," and will likely take 12-24 months for full environmental review, project design and construction.

2. *Re-open the ULBP BSA with new jump layout, but no drainage improvements*

In this option, a newly designed jump layout is constructed, but without any drainage improvements as suggested in the final BSA Report. Due to standing water during the rainy season, this option would likely convert the BSA to a three (3) season facility and necessitate closure during the rainy season.

This option would not require significant drainage improvements and would limit the stormwater design requirements which would likely entail quicker design, review, permitting and construction processes. Staff anticipate this option could be completed within 6-12 months. Due to the seasonal closure of the facility during the wet season, the site would require increased, ongoing monitoring to ensure that the course is not being used or altered.

3. *Re-open the BSA with no proposed improvements*

The benefit of this option is to fully support the BSA users, who would be able to quickly begin using the course once again. This option does not take any proposed improvement into consideration and reopens

the facility “as-is.” Consequently, the facility remains unimproved and long-standing issues remain unresolved. Although an option for PRC consideration, staff does not recommend this option.

4. *Keep BSA closed while a full public engagement process is undertaken to determine needs, desired locations*

Divergent public opinions on the status and impact of the BSA have been prevalent, well before the temporary closure of the BSA. The question as to whether the BSA “fits” in Upper Luther Burbank Park remains a contested discussion amongst different members of the community. One option for consideration is to keep the BSA closed while a full public engagement process is undertaken to identify current and future needs, desired locations, and amenities.

A robust public engagement process will likely span 6-12 months with additional project design, permitting and construction to follow once a permanent location is determined. This option likely keeps the BSA closed for two (2) years or more. Given the significant impact of a prolonged closure on BSA users, staff does not recommend this option.

5. *Consider Deane’s Childrens Park as a potential BSA location*

During the closure, staff began evaluating other park facilities that could potentially be considered a new “home” for the BSA. Consideration of parks included whether the addition of a bike area would negatively impact actively used park spaces or the ecological health of open space areas, and whether a park could provide users with similar characteristics as the BSA established in Upper Luther Burbank Park, including terrain and overall size.

For many years, part of Deane’s Park was home to the City’s Adventure Playground. Surrounded by gently rolling terrain and a blend of deciduous and coniferous trees, the park provided an environment for kids to imagine, build and create their own adventure. Although the site has many trees, the site lacks healthy understory vegetation and has already been significantly impacted by active recreation. The City no longer offers the Adventure Playground program. Construction of a new BSA in this location would not adversely or negatively impact the site.

Additional benefits of this location include its mid-island location, nearby park amenities such as restroom facilities and utilities for constructability purposes, as well as parking and easy park access. Although the site does not have the same topographic diversity as Upper Luther Burbank Park, design considerations could be made to accommodate the BSA at this location.

If Deane’s Park is considered an option for the long-term location for the BSA, public engagement, design, permitting and construction is anticipated to take 12-18 months. Additional funding would also be necessary.

Given the long-term potential success at this location, staff recommends pursuing this option.

SHORT-TERM OPTIONS:

None of the options for next steps identified above are considered short-term or immediate. As noted, any project including construction will require additional design, permitting, and physical construction. Staff have identified two additional short-term options for consideration, including:

1. *Keep the BSA closed until a new plan is identified and adopted*

While this is an option for consideration, it is not recommended by staff. The BSA has been closed for an extended period and measures have been taken to address damage in the areas surrounding the course, including regrading and replanting. Although the new plants are not “established”, staff feel that the recent improvements and corrective measures will limit negative impacts in this location on a short-term basis.

2. *Re-open the ULBP BSA in a limited fashion during long-term planning/build.*

The temporary closure of the BSA has lasted nearly 7 months. Significant steps have been taken to restore the site boundaries, and unauthorized jumps have been removed. Re-opening the BSA in a limited fashion would require the importation of jump building soils, as native soils are neither available nor appropriate for such use and require additional monitoring by Parks maintenance staff. Unlike the prior use of the BSA, no digging or jump building would be permitted without City approval and supervision. The site has been surveyed to evaluate any potential expansion. Should any issue arise, such as unauthorized jump or trail building or site expansion, the City would once again close the facility until the permanent BSA is constructed.

Staff recommends re-opening the ULBP BSA in this limited and highly monitored fashion while the long-term planning efforts are completed.

NEXT STEPS

Staff seeks the PRC feedback and discussion regarding the Bike Skills Area Assessment report and recommendations, as well as staff’s recommendations regarding the short- and long-term options.

As previously discussed, no funding for improvements to this facility has been approved in the City’s adopted 2022 Capital Improvement Plan. A budget appropriation will be necessary for the re-opening the facility in limited fashion and the development of a long-term plan (public engagement, design, permitting, construction bidding).

Staff anticipates taking a recommendation to the City Council in May, including a request for a budgetary appropriation.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Move to endorse staff’s recommendations for short- and long-term options for the Bike Skills Area and recommend to the City Council for budget appropriation and approval.