

Luther Burbank Park Master Plan



City of Mercer Island, Washington

Prepared by:

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Introduction:

Luther Burbank is a great city park! The park is a destination for all Mercer Islanders and will increasingly be a destination for residents of Mercer Islands growing downtown. The park has become a favorite location for celebrating special events, for families, young children, seniors and more.

The intent of this master plan is building on the success of the existing park and looking to the future, to identify how the park can best serve the city and its residents for decades to come. The timing of this master plan is logical, with the City having acquired the Park from King County, it is an opportunity to make Luther Burbank Park Mercer Island's park, a place that reflects the city and its citizens.

In its later years as a King County Park, many elements deteriorated as the County Parks System dealt with shrinking budgets. Since the park was acquired from King County by the City of Mercer Island, it has been maintained with many improvements. However, many of the park's elements are aged and in need of improvement or replacement. Work done to date has been completed without a long-term plan for how the park will function as a whole. This master plan is intended to provide a long term vision that ultimately ensures that all future improvements will work toward creating a park with better functionality, increased recreational and social opportunities, and an improved aesthetic experience.

The goals of this Long Range Master Plan are to:

- Create a memorable park experience.
- Provide strong park recognition and identity.
- Guide future maintenance and capital improvements to the park using a holistic approach to the planning process.
- Respond creatively to current park uses and facilities while anticipating future uses and facility needs.
- Provide adequate budget figures for proposed improvements, so that the Master Plan can be used as an effective decision-making tool to prioritize and justify the importance of required funding and guide the implementation of projects.
- Allow for phased construction to work within budgetary realities.



The Planning process:

The master plan is the result of a multi-step public process that is described in the Public Process Summary Prepared by Norton Arnold & Company (NAC), and included as an appendix to this document.

The design process consisted of 3 phases. The first phase, an inventory and analysis, assessed physical conditions of the site, as well as existing and future program opportunities. Information gathering included first hand observation, input from Park representatives, and site review with shoreline and wetlands ecologists. Included in this phase was a wetland reconnaissance, shoreline assessment, and permitting review. Based on this inventory and analysis, three preliminary master plan concepts were developed for the site and presented to the city and a community Town Hall for review and comment. In the next phase, these plans were consolidated into a preferred Master Plan concept based on feedback received during the initial presentation. This preferred plan was again presented in a second Town Hall and presentation to the City Council, once again receiving valuable input. The design was honed again to reflect these comments, resulting in a final master plan design. This master plan report includes plan graphics, description of the design elements and cost allowances for its implementation.

The master plan design has been completed to an adequate level of detail to identify proposed improvements and assign costs and priorities. Significant design remains as elements of the master plan are pursued, during which more cost details can be generated. It is important to note that proposed design improvements are based on GIS data and aerial photography and have been completed to a degree of detail appropriate to these sources.



Master Plan Option 'H1'



Master Plan Option 'R3'



Master Plan Option 'T2'

Guiding Principles:

In addition to the visioning elements developed prior to the master plan start-up (included in the NAC summary report) the following principles emerged through the master plan process as key elements shaping the park into the future:



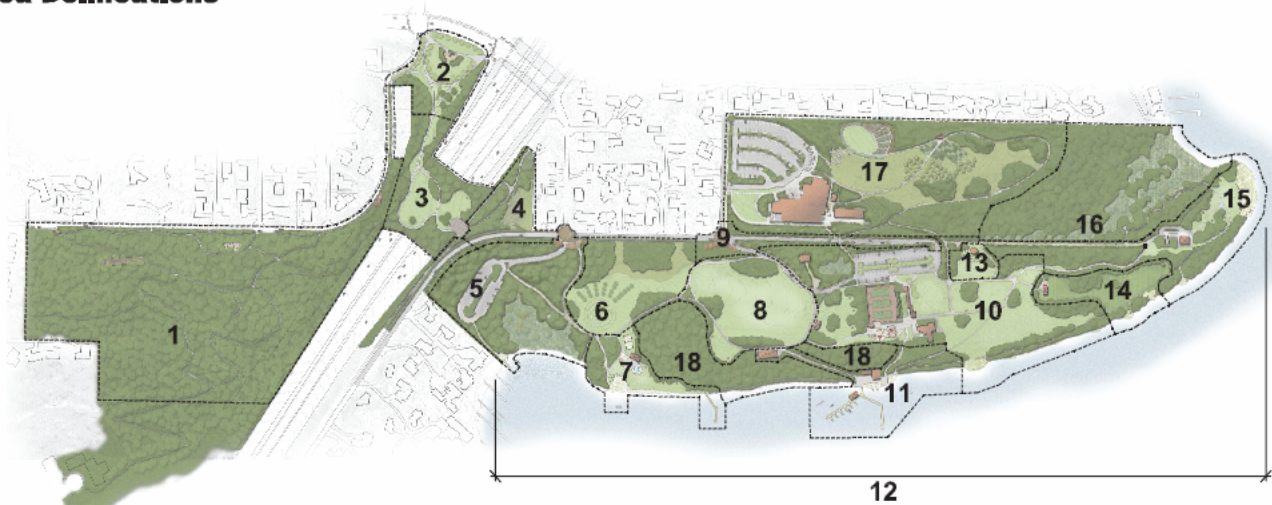
- Embrace natural systems: Improvements to the park should seek to protect and enhance natural systems in the park. These natural systems include forested steep slopes through the park. New areas of vegetation can weave existing habitats within the park together, improving both aesthetic and habitat function.
- Maintain the character: Luther Burbank is a much-loved park, and improvements proposed in the master plan should work toward maintaining the park's existing character, particularly the serenity of Upper Luther and Calkins Point.
- Manage vegetation: Significant stands of vegetation (Upper Luther, the hill adjacent to the fishing pier, and the west hill) should be preserved as important habitat areas. Vegetation and habitat in these areas can be improved over time through the low impact- high environmental reward practice of under planting of native species and the removal of invasives.
- Improve Park infrastructure: Many of the park's existing features – restrooms and irrigation for example are outdated and can be replaced or renovated. Other features, such as the park's path network, can be improved.
- Improve the arrival: Whether by foot, bike or car, the arrival at the park is not the quality of experience befitting such a great park. The arrival can be improved not only at the main entry, but countless other entries to the park as well, better unifying the park into a cohesive whole.



Proposed Improvements:

The following descriptions and recommendations are a companion to the project drawings. General descriptions by each area are listed in a south to north and counter clockwise order with site-wide issues and concepts being addressed last.

Luther Burbank Park Master Plan Area Delineations



- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Upper Luther Burbank | 10 | Campus Area |
| 2 | Downtown Entry | 11 | Dock/ Boiler Building Area |
| 3 | Burbank Lid | 12 | Shoreline |
| 4 | Burbank Lid Connector | 13 | Amphitheater |
| 5 | South Entry | 14 | Off-Leash Area (OLA) |
| 6 | The Source Area | 15 | Calkins Point |
| 7 | Swim Beach | 16 | The Ponds |
| 8 | Great Meadow | 17 | West Hill |
| 9 | Main Entry | 18 | Vegetation Management Areas |

Upper Luther Burbank:

Upper Luther is to maintain in its existing naturalistic character while receiving some improvements that can increase the public's enjoyment of the area, and tying it more directly to the Burbank Lid and larger park to the north. Highlights of the proposed Upper Luther improvements include:

- Continued vegetation management (removal of invasives and restoration of natives).
- Improvements along 84 maintain the existing "Country Road" character while providing new interior paths and (2) vehicle pullouts. The interior paths transition to sidewalk along 28th St. connecting to downtown entry, with a view overlook to the north.
- The southwestern-most corner of the park is highlighted with a woodland shelter, bench and interpretive and wayfinding signage.
- A series of hiking trails is integrated into the area's topography, including an interior loop trail with suspension bridge, an east west trail connecting to Shorewood Heights, and a direct connecting trail and stair to Luther Burbank Lid.
- The existing bike track would remain and a new canopy overlook/ tree house and new ropes course are added to the site.



Downtown Entry:

The downtown entry makes use of existing green space to create an iconic entry to the park and improve pedestrian connections to the Burbank Lid, Upper Luther and the greater park. Portions of the downtown entry abut or are on WASHDOT property, so any improvements will take careful coordination. Highlights of the proposed downtown entry improvements include:

- A focal element, possibly art or a fountain, creates an icon and increased visibility for pedestrians drawn from the growing downtown.
- A gathering plaza invites increased activity at the park while buffering park users from the concerns of the adjacent traffic. Seating, tables, a chess board and bocce court all provide new activities for park visitors.



Burbank Lid:

The Burbank lid provides an excellent opportunity to better tie Upper Luther, the Downtown Entry and the greater park into a single cohesive park experience with improved pedestrian connections. The Lid is WASHDOT property, and is entirely over structural slab, so any improvements will take careful coordination and implementation.

- Because the lid is entirely constructed over structural slab there are serious consideration on any changes that might impact weight or the underlying structure (it is assumed no weight increase). For this reason, the proposed improvements improve circulation, visibility and way finding, but are relatively simple, including new benches and tables along the route, the new connection to Upper Luther Burbank Park.
- The existing overlook at the north side of the lid offers great views to the park and shoreline below and is improved with new paving, seating and interpretive signage.



Burbank Lid Connector:

The Burbank Lid Connector is a critical link between the Burbank Lid and the greater park. Creating such a pedestrian connection requires crossing steep topography and is handled through a series of stairs and terraces, while the existing east west trail remains, providing wheeled access down the hill. The connector also provides a link of native planting from Upper Luther, across the lid and down to the greater park. Highlights include:

- A direct hill climb connection from the Lid to 84th meanders through several layers of terraces which provide the opportunity for seating or to display art.
- A “promenade” of specialty paving leads from the base of the hill climb to the intersection of 84th SE and 26th SE, making a cohesive park experience for pedestrians.



South Entry:

The South Entry to the park is highlighted as an important pedestrian and vehicular gateway. Once inside the park, improved pedestrian paths lead to the existing path system, while parking remains in its current configuration. Highlights include:

- The south entry is marked with specialty paving treatment at the intersection of 84th SE and SE 26th, slowing traffic, improving pedestrian safety and highlighting the park entry. The entry is further highlighted with iconic pedestrian entry and wayfinding signage.
- A new kayak/canoe “car-top” boat launch is added at the eastern border of the park. Path, beach and dock improvements allow easy access for boats to water, while maintaining woodland character appropriate to the site.
- The south wetland remains with a more active approach to vegetation management to improve wetland/habitat quality. A new overlook and interpretive signage are added on the periphery of the wetland with views to the interior.



The Source Area:

The Source Area, in addition to being home to one of the best earthform artworks in the region, is an important link within the park, connecting several different areas. This master plan does not add new programs to this site, but improves its passive quality as a connector. Highlights include:

- The Source is a living artwork and restoration is never ending, including mechanical maintenance and upgrades, repairs of erosion, and the instillation of irrigation to reduce erosion during the summer months when its grasses traditionally go dormant.
- The vegetation immediately surrounding the source includes an added backdrop of small and intermediate sized trees, improved grading and drainage in lawn areas connecting to the great meadow, and removal of invasives along the west edge of the park with direct physical and visual connections into the park.
- The primary north/south path through the source area is upgraded to asphalt paving, for ease of maintenance and use, particularly during the wet winter months.



Swim Beach:

The Swim Beach is maintained as one of the most active areas of the park with improvement or replacement of some of the existing amenities and introduction of some new elements. Highlights are:

- The Swim Beach itself is improved with imported aggregates to provide a nice walking surface while reducing erosion (also addressed in the shoreline section of this document). The improved swim beach provides on-grade access to the beach; an enlarged swimming/ buoy zone and a floating swim dock with ladders
- The lifeguard shack and restroom building are combined into a single new structure with possible additional amenities such as vending and showers.
- New amenities include an upland sand area for kid's play, a sand volleyball court (as shown on plan or further west), a small water spray park and arbors that offer shady areas for those at the beach.
- The fishing pier to the north remains and is replaced/ upgraded as needed. The current shoreline path from the fishing pier to the boiler building area remains with the same character that exists today.



Great Meadow:

The Great Meadow would remain aesthetically as is, with intended use not changed from current conditions of non-programmed informal use and scheduled special events. Highlights include:

- Improved grading, soils, irrigation and sub drainage in the primary lawn area to improve quality, maintenance and reduce wear and tear.
- The eastern edge of the meadow is revised, extending across the park trail to the southeast. Islands of vegetation along the trail are to be improved with vegetation management strategies to integrate more substantive evergreens and natives along the meadow edge and improve visual screening and habitat.



Main Entry:

The Main Entry to the park is improved to create an iconic entry visible from the crest of 24th with views into the park. The new community center landscape and edge is seamlessly integrated into the park to create a single cohesive experience. Highlights include:

- Specialty paving treatment at the intersection of 84th SE and SE 24th, slowing traffic, improving pedestrian safety and highlighting the park entry.
- The entry is further highlighted with an iconic overlook into the great meadow and beyond, with wayfinding signage.



Campus Area:

The campus area remains the park's historical core, the center of greatest activity, and the busiest parking area. Highlights include:

- The existing entry road alignment remains with improvements to widen the corridor, (possibly some walls to cut/support grade) to allow a sidewalk and adequate space for passing vehicles, while also improving the aesthetic of this road, primarily through new planting.
- Parking is treated as a shared facility with community center parking and the north parking lot as a common park resource that can be shared, typically with differing peak use times. This sharing is facilitated with improved pedestrian connections between the community center and the campus area, most notably the completion of the connector stair.
- The existing playground site character remains, with selective demolition to remove some undesired elements and to allow for the installation of new play structures. The new playground provides for separate age-appropriate play zones in a cohesive single playground. (The playground could also be considered an alternate location for a small spray park if not located at the swim beach.)
- New activities to be added to the campus area include basketball hoops and tetherball, which might be freestanding elements or integrated at the existing court area. A covered group picnic area is added to the south of the tennis courts, adjacent to the meadow.
- Improved trail connections tie the campus area to all other parts of the park, including the community center, the boiler building, Calkins Point and others.
- The existing maintenance yard, critical to park operations, is maintained at its current central location with operational upgrades and screening planting.



Dock/ Boiler Building Area:

The Dock and Boiler Building Area maintains much of its character and physical elements, but has added programming to return the area to its once active use. Restoration of the docks and boiler building to support a boating/rowing facility (primarily human powered boating) will bring a relatively low impact use to the area. Highlights include:

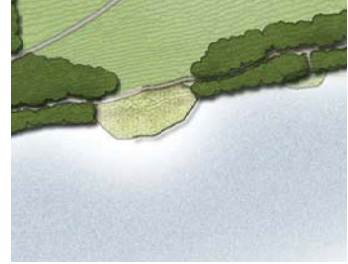
- A boating/rowing facility would make use of the existing boiler for maritime use including rental/storage of “human powered” kayaks, canoes, and small sailboats as well as being the operation center of any sailing/boating program that might be offered to serve the community.
- A shell house to serve rowing is located at the top of the boiler building access road, where it serves rowing as a functional location, but is remotely located from the docks, reducing shoreline impacts.
- Improved access from the campus areas is provided to the area with reduced grade paths (ADA access is a focus of these improvements, but may not be achieved due to site grades)
- The piers are to be restored with the north dock to remain as passive use (fishing, sunbathing, etc., no swimming) with addition of ladders. The south dock is to be replaced and straightened with lower floating dock with improved finger piers for small motor craft, “human powered” boats and motorized launch boat storage.
- The existing restroom structures receive plumbing. Security upgrades and utilities in this area present an opportunity to serve a mobile concessionaire.
- The shoreline is improved with an aggregate beach to provide direct access to the water (without bulkhead) for boat launching and a homeowner demonstration garden abutting bulkhead with interpretive signage.



Shoreline:

The Shoreline and its interaction with Lake Washington is the dominant element that shapes the lower Luther Burbank Park experience. Specific shoreline reaches associated with program elements in the park are addressed in other portions of this master plan report (such as the swim beach and off-leash area). This section of the master plan report addresses the shoreline in its entirety:

- North and south wetlands are the “bookends” to the Luther Burbank shoreline. They are functional in their current state though there is the potential to improve function, primarily through vegetation management that eliminates invasive species, replacing them with natives. There are no proposed changes to the shoreline portions of the wetlands.
- Vegetation along the shoreline is a key element to improving habitat and potentially reducing erosion. New or enlarged native vegetation areas (from 20 feet wide and up) are proposed at the shoreline, notably at the reach of shore extending from the boiler building to the OLA.
- Existing vegetative reaches of shoreline, such as between the fishing pier and the boiler building, can be improved through long term vegetation management that underplants the existing forest with native trees and shrubs (such as western red cedar), gradually transitioning vegetation to a more native palette of greater habitat value.
- Creation of beaches will improve human access to water at defined points. These beaches are specifically located at the kayak/canoe boat launch, the existing swimming beach, to the north of existing boiler building bulkhead, at the morning lawn, the off-leash area (potentially two smaller beaches), and at Calkins Point. Details of each profile are provided later in this document.
- Erosion control “mini beaches” primarily focused between the dock and OLA (and elsewhere as erosion pockets dictate). Details of each profile are provided later in this document. Erosion control beaches at or below high water mark will reduce erosion, while trying to eliminate full access and the “beaching” of jet skis.
- Two homeowner demonstration gardens are included on the shoreline. The first, immediately north of the boiler building bulkhead, will illustrate environmentally responsible shoreline development when adjacent to a bulkhead and a second will be at the foot of the morning lawn illustrating how environmentally responsible shoreline can be integrated into sweeping shoreline lawn.
- The shoreline poses a great opportunity for interpretive signage that details ecological function of the lake, and human impacts on that function. The shoreline is also a key component of an environmental learning program that could be run through the community Center.



Amphitheater:

The Amphitheater is to remain with little aesthetic or programmatic change. Changes to the amphitheater will largely be the result of maintenance concerns as the facility, largely wood structure, continues to age. Highlights include: to remain with improved drainage

- Replacement of terraces, either though cast in place concrete, precast concrete or earth sculpting.
- Replacement of the stage, allowing improvement of stage elements including cover, performance infrastructure, and incorporation of an adjacent community fire pit.



Off-Leash Area (OLA)

The Off Leash Area is a heavily used park element that is to remain. It will be improved to create an attractive area that will lure dog owners to use it over other park areas for off leash use. The proposed OLA remains in the same general location, with continued shoreline access, though it is shifted to the south to avoid a potential wetland area, and could be enlarged to the south.

- The off leash area is to be fenced and gated, with fencing screened by planting whenever possible. The surface of high traffic portions of the OLA is to receive soil and drainage improvements.
- The off leash area incorporates many amenities including added benches, covered structures, improved access from parking and dog “hitching posts” and “cleaning station” adjacent to the parking.
- The beach area is to be restored (also addressed in the shoreline portion of this document) to provide an improved beach and possibly a secondary beach.



Calkins Point

Calkins Point continues to be a valuable habitat zone in the park, with a serene character. The master plan builds on this character with improved path access to the area without introducing significant new program elements. Highlights include:

- The existing wetlands remain and are enhanced through vegetation management and the creation of new ponds and wetlands upstream. The existing boardwalk is realigned to make it loop out to the park.
- The barn relic is to remain and will be made integral to the path system with adjacent pavement reduced. The barn presents opportunities for art installations, and permanent history/environmental exhibits. A covered shelter at the barn provides seating for picnics and an environmental learning annex.
- A partially recessed Calkins Point Beach is constructed (detailed in the shoreline section of this document) with interpretive signage for lake and wetland ecology.
- Restructured paths provide access to Calkins and benches and tables (buffered with vegetation) are added for park users.



West Hill:

The West Hill has the opportunity to become a highlight of the Luther Burbank Park experience and an icon for Mercer Island. The community center and west hill are integrated into the park with trails to make an “event” out of the existing high point adjacent to the community center with access to a more formal garden and overlook of the east channel. Highlights include:

- Path connections integrate the west hill into the rest of the park, creating a loop path to hill and community center and several smaller paths that pass through the area.
- The horticultural roots of Luther Burbank are included in the blackberry and grape thickets, fruit tree orchard and enhanced P-patch with demonstration gardens and storage shelter.
- Low buffer is enhanced by grading and native plantings along west property line.
- A more formal garden area tops the existing hill with maintained planting beds and open lawn, a terraced stair connection to the community center, and a water feature.

