



OPEN SPACE CONSERVANCY TRUST BOARD MEETING MINUTES JANUARY 21, 2021

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chair Bender called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM

Chair Marie Bender, Vice Chair Thomas Hildebrandt, Secretary Craig Olson, Trustee Carol Lynn Berseth, Trustee Ethe, Trustee Geraldine Poor, and Council Liaison Lisa Anderl participated remotely using a video teleconferencing platform by Zoom.

Staff participating remotely included: City Clerk Deborah Estrada, Deputy Public Works Director Alaine Sommargren, and Natural Resources Specialist Kim Frappier.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES: There were no public appearances.

REGULAR BUSINESS:

(all) Review and Consider Approving Minutes of the January 21, 2021 OSCT Regular Meeting

It was moved by Berseth; seconded by Thomas to:

Approve the minutes as amended.

Agreed by unanimous consent. Motion passed: 7-0.

(III) 2021 Annual Report and Work Plan

Natural Resources Specialist Kim Frappier presented the draft *2021 Annual Report to Council* for review and discussion. She noted that the 2021 Annual Report will be presented to City Council on the consent calendar on March 16, 2021 and will include the 2021 Work Plan.

Discussion and Board Direction:

2021 Annual Report

Regarding the section on volunteers, Trustees inquired how the bulk of community engagement was conducted. Natural Resources Specialist Frappier reported that this was all conducted remotely through social media and direct emails from City staff and EarthCorps to their volunteer base. Chair Bender requested that in the section titled "Background", additional information be included to describe the plans referenced for the benefit of those that are new to the work of the Trust. She asked for further explanation to be included about the purpose of the Open Space Vegetation Management Plan versus the Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan and 2008 Forest Health Survey. Council Liaison Anderl suggested that a footnote or appendix be added that defines the restoration tasks listed in the report. Trustees also suggested including hyperlinks to all the external reports referenced in the Annual Report so that readers could easily access them for more information. Natural Resources Specialist Frappier will make the suggested revisions and submit to Chair Bender for final review.

2021 Work Plan

Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren presented the updated draft of the 2021 Work Plan. Trustee Poor requested that the wording be amended in the Letterboxing item to read "reaching out to volunteers about *potential* for launching the program" given that we do not yet know whether this will be feasible. Staff will update this language and finalize the work plan to present to City Council.

(IV) Fire Management Plan

Deputy Public Works Director Alaine Sommargren provided an overview of the history of the fire management plan which was adopted as an appendix to the Pioneer Park Management Plan in 2003. She explained that the fire management plan was reviewed by both Fire Chief Steve Heitman and Deputy Chief Mike Mandella as well as Public Works staff. Staff provided logistical updates to the plan that included the addition of Engstrom Open Space, firefighting resource updates, hose reach information and map, and an evaluation of mitigation and risk factors. There were no substantive additions or changes made, mainly updates to existing information.

Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren presented information about facets of the original plan in need of further Trust discussion and consideration particularly within the vegetation management section of the plan. Topics included (1) an education campaign, (2) park patrols, (3) neighbor partnerships, (4) removal of logs and branches adjacent to boundaries, and (4) whether Trustees would like staff to do further research on fire mitigation strategies.

- (1) Education Campaign: Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren reported that staff will implement an educational outreach effort this year to those private property owners who share a boundary with Trust properties. Staff will work with the Wildfire and Forest Resiliency Coordinator from the King Conservation District (KCD) for consultation and to acquire educational resources. She will share the educational resources to be used with the Trust at the March or July meeting. Trustees suggested that this information also be shared on the City website.
- (2) Park Patrols: Sommargren noted that staff are already currently doing park patrols. Natural Resources and Parks Maintenance staff as well as the Seasonal Trails and Restoration Crew conduct regular site visits addressing issues regarding party pits and encampments. This does not require a change to current operations.
- (3) Neighbor Partnerships: The plan section that discusses “neighbor partnerships” under the vegetation management section, requires revision and clarification. Staff will revise this section to clarify expectations and the role of City staff versus the homeowner. The City does not want to give private property owners permission to cut and prune City trees at will or conduct other vegetation management tasks on City property. Instead, we would follow our Forest Stewardship program model with those homeowners that expressly reach out to the City with a request to steward the park property adjacent to their property. These property owners would then work under the supervision of City staff in accordance with the Pioneer Park Forest Management Plan (PPFMP).
- (4) Removal of logs and branches: The Vegetation Management section includes a statement that calls for the removal of logs and branches from the boundary of Trust properties. This section requires revision as it is not consistent with the PPFMP, does not reflect the size, type, or benefit of downed wood for retaining soil moisture, and does not designate the size of the area to be included. Staff propose doing additional research on this issue so that we develop a plan that is grounded in fire and forest management science – versus an arbitrary prescription to just remove all downed wood and snags.
- (5) Further research on fire mitigation strategies: Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren noted the importance of identifying specific restoration strategies and practices that could also mitigate fire risk. Staff would like to research this further and include in an update to the vegetation management section. This would build off the City’s current forest management practices with integration of recommendations from the KCD Wildfire and Forest Resiliency Coordinator.

Trustees provided staff with some general edits for grammar and clarity within the plan. There was general discussion about fire management and the role of the fire department.

Board Direction: Staff shall draft an update to the Vegetation Management section of the Fire Management Plan as noted in the five issues outlined above. This will be presented to the Trust at the May 20th meeting.

(V) Engstrom Open Space

Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren reported that the Engstrom Open Space title is still held by the City of Mercer Island. After reviewing the minutes from 2010 and 2011, it was reported to the Trust that the title had been transferred, so there was some error that occurred 10 years ago. City leadership is committed to doing a legal review of this issue. Due to the current workload of the City Attorney, this is not likely to happen until the end of the year. She noted that despite this discrepancy, the management of Engstrom Open Space is still under the purview of the Trust as it has been during the past 10 years.

Board Direction: Staff will present an update on the Engstrom Open Space title during the September board meeting.

(VI) Quadrant Reports

NW Quadrant: Trustee Poor and Secretary Olson

NE Quadrant/ Engstrom OS: Vice Chair Hildebrandt and Trustee Berseth

SE Quadrant: Chair Bender and Trustee Ethe

Trustees discussed the impacts from the storm on tree failures and trail closures and the excellent work done by Parks Operations staff. Trustees noted concern over a truck that has been parked along Island Crest Way adjacent to Pioneer Park filled with wood. The truck continuously drives off the shoulder and is creating muddy ruts along the grassy area. Staff will monitor this situation and report back to the Trust.

(VII) General Updates

Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren reported on the extensive efforts by Parks Operations staff to clean up after the most recent storm event. Trails Specialist Andrew Prince cleared 32 trail obstructions and worked 23 hours at Pioneer Park alone clearing trails and moving and bucking downed trees. It was a tremendous effort and wanted to recognize his hard work.

Deputy Public Works Director Sommargren noted recent staff changes including her promotion from Parks Operations Manager to Deputy Public Works Director. She reported that the City is currently hiring for the new Parks Operations Manager. She said that for now she will continue to be the staff liaison to the Trust, but eventually this role will transfer to the new Parks Operations Manager.

(VIII) Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2021 at 5:00 PM.

Adjournment: 6:22 PM

Olson moved; Berseth seconded to: **Adjourn the meeting.**

Agreed by unanimous consent. Motion passed: 7-0.

Marie Bender, Chair

Attest:

Kim Frappier, Scribe