



**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION  
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND, WASHINGTON**

9611 SE 36<sup>th</sup> Street | Mercer Island, WA 98040-3732  
(206) 275-7793 | [www.mercerisland.gov](http://www.mercerisland.gov)

DATE: **3/22 DRAFT for Commission Review**

TO: City Council

FROM: Parks and Recreation Commission  
Rory Westberg, Chair  
Peter Struck, subcommittee Chair  
Lyn Gualtieri  
Sarah Berkenwald  
Jodi McCarthy, Vice Chair  
Don Cohen  
Amy Richter

SUBJECT: Recommendation on Luther Burbank Dock and Adjacent Waterfront Concept Design

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The Mercer Island Parks and Recreation Commission is pleased to present our recommendation on the conceptual design for the Luther Burbank dock and adjacent waterfront.

**Summary Recommendation:**

The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) commenced review of this matter on November 5, 2020 and discussed this topic over five meetings. We consulted the adopted [Luther Burbank Park Master Plan](#) (Master Plan) and received feedback from the community to inform our recommendation. After giving general project guidance, the PRC appointed a subcommittee to evaluate design alternatives and provide a recommendation for the conceptual design. Over six weeks, the three-member subcommittee met four times and discussed design considerations. City staff and consultants attended as needed. A drafted conceptual design was presented to the full PRC on March 4. At its April 1 meeting, the PRC approved a revised product (Exhibits 1 and 2) as its recommended concept design.

The recommended concept design, further detailed below, provides general project guidance for replacing a portion of the dock as well as renovating the remaining portion and improving shoreline access. The design addresses capital renovation needs in an almost fifty-year-old waterfront, a park asset that is degrading and nearing the end of its expected useful life. Details of these improvements will be refined in subsequent design phases.

The scope of this concept design is intentionally comprehensive. In designing the new dock, we needed to consider how it would interact with the adjacent park. The master plan intended the waterfront to work together as a whole to support boating programs as well as non-boating uses. At the same time, we could not ignore the aging condition of the plaza between the existing dock and the old Boiler Building. We wanted a design that prepared this area for the next fifty years. While the input from the

public survey contained a wide spectrum of opinion, we tended to prefer practical and low-impact choices to complement the existing character of the site and the passive nature of the park. As a comprehensive design, it contains more work than the planned capital funding will support. Implementation will need to be prioritized and executed in phases as City and grant resources allow.

We recommend the City Council approve the concept design and authorize staff to proceed to 30% design using the approved concept as their guide. Upon completion of the 30% design, we strongly recommend the Parks and Recreation Commission be directed to solicit public input on the 30% design and prepare a final recommendation to the City Council.

**Background:**

The Luther Burbank dock and waterfront were constructed in 1974. They have been a recreational destination for the Mercer Island community and the region for almost 50 years. The dock has deteriorated to the point where it needs major repairs. However, the fixed-height piers do not serve the types of boats typically using the facility: small powerboats and non-motorized paddlecraft (kayaks, canoes, paddleboards). The dock is also popular with the non-boating public for sunbathing, fishing, viewing, and other unprogrammed uses. With the addition of a small (10'x 50') floating dock section, it has also served the City's popular sailing and kayaking youth summer camps.



*Figure 1: Project Location (shoreline orientation)*

In 2019, the City was awarded a Boating Facilities Program grant from Washington State to redesign the dock. The project start was delayed by the COVID pandemic until June 2020. From August 2020 until now, the public has been invited to give input on the project in several ways:

- August 2020: Online Design Charrette
- September 2020: Five week “Open House” event at Luther Burbank Park and reproduced on Let’s Talk with an Online Survey

- Meetings with City staff and interested organizations and individuals
- Ongoing Let's Talk project webpage
- Ongoing mailings to the email interest list, with commentary posted to Let's Talk
- Public appearances at Parks and Recreation Commission meetings

### **Design Principles:**

At the outset, the PRC established criteria that would be used to evaluate design alternatives. This resulted in a detailed list of evaluation criteria, which were also prioritized to ensure the critical elements received adequate consideration. The resulting criteria became the framework for the alternatives analysis City staff conducted towards the end of the design process (Exhibit 3). However, as we delved into the details of the design, we found that the themes of our discussions could be summarized by four guiding principles:

- **Environmental Quality** – We sought to protect environmental quality. The aquatic environment, the park environment (including trees and impervious surfaces), and the neighborhood were in mind when we discussed various design elements.
- **Intensity of Use** – We considered how different elements might affect use of the park. Our overarching concern was to respect the passive, open space character of the park.
- **Congruence with the Master Plan** (and other City plans) – We reviewed the Luther Burbank Master Plan to understand its vision for the developed waterfront.
- **Complement the Unique Character of the Site** – Luther Burbank's waterfront has historical, functional, and artistic elements that make it different from other waterfront areas. We considered how to highlight these features with the planned uses of the waterfront.

These principles express the overarching intent behind the evaluation criteria.

### **Concept Design Overview:**

The concept design encompasses the dock and the adjacent waterfront. It considers the needs of boaters, those seeking boating activities, and those who want to enjoy the lake without a boat. It assumes that the Boiler Building will be reused as a boating center per the adopted Master Plan, but it treats that as a separate project. The concept design is comprehensive in scope and represents what we believe to be the realization of the Master Plan's vision for this area. The elements of the concept design are divided into three functional areas: the dock, the shoreline access areas, and the waterfront plaza area (existing facilities shown in Figure 2.).

Individual elements within each of these areas are detailed in Exhibits 1 and 2, summarized below.

### **Proposed Dock Project Elements:**

**Breakwater/Small Powerboat Moorage** – An outer breakwater is proposed that would provide small (less than 26 feet) powerboat day-use moorage as well as protection from waves for both power and non-power boats. Two finger docks would provide disability access and added security for those staying for a few hours. The breakwater would be anchored to the lake bottom under tension providing a stable, ten-foot-wide platform for general enjoyment of the lake as well.

**Non-motorized Dock** – The existing float is proposed to be relocated for continued use by City programs, with an added low-freeboard float for kayak and other non-motorized boat access. Four finger docks provide extra stability for disabled and novice boaters.

**North Pier Renovation** – The north pier is proposed to be renovated for use by large (greater than 26 feet) powerboats. Non-boaters may continue to use it, as well as the new breakwater, to enjoy the lake.



Figure 2: Footprint and Functional Areas Considered for the Concept Design (Figure shows the existing facilities. Refer to Exhibit 2 for details of the conceptual designs for each functional area.)

#### Proposed Shoreline Access Project Elements:

**Cobble Beach** - The beach north of the dock is proposed to be accessed by a new ADA path to the high-water level, and removable mats will provide additional access into the water from the beach during the summer. The path will be constructed with natural materials to blend in with the shoreline. A short section of beach is proposed to be widened to allow kayaks to launch and land during high lake levels, while limiting impacts to existing trees. Tree impacts will be evaluated in 30% design and considered by the PRC before moving forward.

**Bulkhead Steps** – New seating steps are proposed next to the **Handsome Bollards** leading to the water. These steps will avoid the need for a railing on the bulkhead (a railing would detract from the public art). The steps will also reduce congestion in the passageway between the Boiler Building and the lake. This new overwater coverage will likely require mitigation, depending on design. Cost, environmental, and aesthetic impacts will be evaluated in 30% design and

considered by the PRC before moving forward. (it should be noted that Clarke beach has bulkhead steps, so this design concept is not new to Mercer Island parks.)

### **Proposed Plaza Project Elements:**

**ADA Access** – A “missing link” accessible path to the waterfront is proposed at the north end of the plaza, just inland from the cobble beach. This would provide a continuous ADA path from the main parking lot to the waterfront via the existing switchback trail connection next to the off-leash area. A more direct accessible path to the waterfront is contemplated with the future renovation of the Boiler Building but is not part of this concept design.

**Pavement Renovation** – The plaza is proposed to be repaved with a material and style to be determined in 30% design. This design would resolve failing pavement, ADA access, drainage, and tree root issues associated with the current pavement.

**Outdoor Classroom** – The roof of the restroom annex is proposed to be decked, and a railing is installed. This provides space for outdoor classes, boating programs, and general public use. An ADA ramp on the backside of the building would provide access to the classroom from the plaza. The space would be furnished with portable seating and equipment, depending on the season and operational needs.

**Trees** – One or two trees are proposed at the south end of the plaza to replace three existing trees. The tree(s) are designed in conjunction with the pavement. The existing trees are not healthy and retaining them will complicate repaving the plaza for a questionable outcome. A new installation would provide sufficient soil volume under the pavement to allow the same tree species to achieve greater size, live a long time, and prevent roots from lifting the pavement. The PRC will review the proposed location(s) at 30% design.

**Seating** – One or two benches are proposed on the east side of the Boiler Building, and a picnic table is proposed in proximity with the new trees. These allow for social distancing and unimpeded traffic flow through the plaza.

**Signs** – Sign installation is proposed to be limited and placed to avoid visual clutter. The existing kiosk will be removed, and a new kiosk is located south of the restroom in the visual line of people walking off the dock. One or two interpretive signs are proposed along the pavement edge and/or on a building or wall.

**Lighting** – The plaza area would continue to include lighting for safety purposes to help park users pass through the area in the evening and early morning. Lighting would not be designed to support nighttime activity.

**Public Art** – The *Handsome Bollards* installation is proposed to be retained if the bulkhead steps are feasible. The Mercer Island Arts Council and PRC will be consulted in the 30% design phase to consider the available options.

### **Alternatives Analysis**

The PRC considered [three] design alternatives (Exhibit 4) in preparing this recommendation. We utilized an alternatives analysis process to objectively compare this design to the others that were considered, see Exhibit 3. Each alternative was scored, on a scale of one to five based on how well it met the evaluation criteria, with five being strong alignment with the criteria. A color ramp was added to provide

graphic representation of the scores. The result illustrates that the preferred option best aligns with the project priorities. This analysis will also be useful to support grant applications and a Department of Natural Resources aquatic lands lease amendment as we move forward.

**Next Steps – Public Engagement at 30% Design:**

We strongly recommend the Parks and Recreation Commission facilitate another public input process to review the 30% design. As noted above, there are several design elements that we feel need additional public input once that level of information is available. Those elements include, but are not limited to:

- Tree impacts from widening the cobble beach
- Impacts and benefits of installing bulkhead steps next to *Handsome Bollards*
- Plaza pavement design
- Plaza tree location(s)

The Parks and Recreation Commission will work with staff to facilitate this process and provide a final recommendation on the 30% design to the City Council. The design team estimates that this would happen in the fall of 2021.

**Acknowledgement**

The Parks and Recreation Commission wishes to acknowledge the effort of the Luther Burbank Dock Subcommittee which led this design process. Subcommittee Chair Peter Struck, as well as Commissioners Lyn Gualtieri and Rory Westberg demonstrated exceptional commitment to the future of our parks in taking on and advancing this important, time-sensitive work. The four scheduled subcommittee meetings were in addition to an unusually heavy commission workload due to the COVID pandemic.