



PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND, WASHINGTON
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DATE: March 5, 2026

TO: City Council

FROM: Parks and Recreation Commission
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SUBJECT: Deane’s Children’s Park Site Plan

Introduction

The Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) is pleased to forward its recommendation to the City Council for adoption of the proposed Site Plan, which consists of the Overall Site Plan and the Play Equipment Site Plan (Plan), as presented. At its February 5, 2026, meeting, the Commission voted to recommend the Plan following review of the public engagement process, design framework, and long-term vision outlined in the Site Plan Report. The PRC was not tasked with making a budgetary recommendation and therefore did not consider the feasibility of the proposed project budget.

The Commission believes the proposed Site Plan reflects extensive community input, thoughtful analysis, and alignment with the City’s broader parks and recreation goals. This memorandum provides context regarding the purpose, scope, and function of the Site Plan to support Council’s consideration of adoption.

The Commission approved recommending the proposed design to the City Council for adoption by a vote of 4 in favor and 2 opposed (with one commissioner absent). A minority of the Commissioners expressed concerns about whether the proposed design sufficiently preserves the forested natural character of the park and whether it includes play structures and equipment that would be expected to keep children in older age groups interested over time, while still substantially achieving the City’s inclusivity goals. The Commission felt these considerations should be among those referenced in this memo.

Background and Planning Process

The need for a Site Plan at Deane’s Children’s Park was driven by two key factors: the age and condition of existing playground equipment, and broader opportunities identified through a site assessment.

A systemwide assessment completed as part of the City’s 2022 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan identified Deane’s as one of five playgrounds prioritized for replacement in the six-year Parks Capital Improvement Program (Parks CIP). The assessment noted that much of the playground equipment across the park system was nearing the end of its useful life, and many sites, including Deane’s, did not meet current ADA or universal accessibility standards. What set Deane’s Children’s Park

apart was not only the condition of the equipment, but also the site’s relatively flat layout, which offered an opportunity to create a more inclusive and accessible play experience.

The on-site assessment conducted in 2024 confirmed that the needs of Deane’s Children’s Park extended beyond the playground itself. Most of the park’s amenities, including the restroom, picnic shelter, furnishings, paths and parking are outdated, in disrepair, or do not meet accessibility standards. The assessment also highlighted opportunities to integrate the nearby Bike Skills area, completed in 2023, improving circulation, amenities, and programming to serve all park users more effectively.

Given this combination of planning needs, staff made the decision to pause the playground replacement project and instead pursue the development of a comprehensive Site Plan for Deane’s Children’s Park.

The City Council directed staff to develop the Site Plan on March 18, 2025, ensuring that improvements are coordinated, strategic, and reflective of community priorities. As part of that direction, Council identified the Parks and Recreation Commission’s role to review proposed alternatives and forward a recommendation to the City Council for consideration and adoption.

Community Engagement and Planning Process:

- April–May 2025: First round of outreach – online survey, open house, school visits, and community event booths. Key input: inclusive and accessible play, preserving natural character, nature-based play.
- May – June 2025: Developed two preliminary concepts: *The Quest* and *Woodsy Wonders*.
- July–August 2025: Second round of outreach via survey, community events, and Friends of Dragon Park meeting. Strong support for *Woodsy Wonders*.
- September 4, 2025: Commission site tour; PRC recommended refining *Woodsy Wonders* into preferred plan.
- October 15, 2025: Arts Council review; supported Treehouse Adventure theme and recommended student engagement for art elements.
- November 6, 2025: Refined preferred plan presented to PRC, highlighting inclusive design, play features, parking improvements, and phasing. PRC affirmed plan direction.
- February 5, 2026: Site Plan presented to PRC; Commission voted to recommend the Site Plan, as presented, to City Council for adoption.

Data Collected:

- Reached over 1,200 students across 54 K – 5 classes at four elementary schools to vote on play features and park themes.
- Collected nearly 160 ‘Design Your Own Park’ submissions from elementary students providing insight into students’ park ideas and vision.
- Led one Open House at Island Park Elementary, attended by approximately 20 community members.
- Conducted two online community surveys, received a total of 174 responses:
 - Survey #1 available April 21 – May 23, 2025, and received a total of 102 responses
 - Survey #2 available July 12 – August 12, 2025, and received a total of 72 responses
- Hosted project booths at four community events to gather input and vote on design concepts and play equipment themes; engaging over 500 attendees.
- Engaged an inclusive design consultant to inform Site Plan development using universal design principles and evidence-based best practices for inclusive playgrounds, applying key design considerations and inclusive design principles throughout equipment selection and site layout refinement to remove barriers to participation and support development across physical, social-emotional, sensory, cognitive, and communicative domains for a variety of ages and abilities.

What is a Site Plan?

A Site Plan establishes the long-term vision for a park, providing a strategic roadmap for how the park can evolve over time. It is grounded in a comprehensive understanding of how the park is used today and how the community would like it to function in the future. Staff engaged the broader community, user groups, PRC, Arts Council, and City Council to evaluate opportunities, constraints, and long-term potential.

The result is a clear design program and framework to guide improvements over time. A Site Plan identifies desired park offerings and their general locations and relationships, but it is not a detailed design, construction document, funding authorization, or fixed implementation schedule. Detailed design, engineering, and permitting occur later, as individual project phases move toward implementation.

An adopted Site Plan is also critical for grant eligibility, enabling strategic pursuit of funding and phased, coordinated improvements. While adoption does not commit the City to specific funding or timelines, it establishes an aspirational vision and positions the City to advance improvements in phases as resources become available, ensuring future investments are intentional and reflect community priorities.

Site Plan Recommendation and Future Considerations

The PRC commends City Staff's extensive engagement with our community in the development of this Site Plan. The Commission recommends this Site Plan for adoption by the City Council and has identified a few key considerations to guide future detailed design and implementation of the Site Plan. These reflect PRC priorities to ensure that the aspirational vision is carried forward thoughtfully and is reflective of community desires. These considerations are organized into the following categories for City Council contemplation:

Preservation of Natural Character

- a. Preserve the forested character of the park, including mature trees and understory vegetation.
- b. Minimize impacts to tree roots and other natural features during design and construction.
- c. Limit the expansion of impervious surfaces where feasible to preserve natural habitat, to protect natural drainage patterns and ecological function.
- d. Consider future Island Crest road/sidewalk development to improve accessibility between Island Park and Island Crest Park rather than addition of a paved concrete pathway through Deane's Park between Island Crest Park and Island Park Elementary School.
- e. Utilize natural colors and materials for play equipment and surfacing to complement and integrate with the surrounding landscape.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

- a. Ensure the park is accessible and welcoming to people of all ages and abilities. Provide accessible connections to formal play zones and key amenities to meet project accessibility goals, while preserving the forested character of the park.
- b. Maintain a strong emphasis on imaginative, nature-based, and inclusive play experiences throughout detailed design.
- c. Incorporate play equipment that supports both early childhood development (ages 2–5) and increasing levels of physical challenge, height, coordination, and social interaction

for children ages 5–12+, thoughtfully organized to encourage movement-oriented and imaginative play (such as circuit play) and long-term engagement as children grow.

Design Review and Phasing

- a. The Commission requests the opportunity to review and provide input to the City Council on each phase of improvements at the 30% design stage to confirm alignment with community priorities and this memo.
- b. The Commission requests that the City Council consider providing additional community engagement opportunities at the 30% design review.
- c. For each phase of improvements, the project consultant shall prepare a report confirming the design meets accessibility requirements and inclusive design standards.
- d. Direct staff to seek and develop opportunities for alternative funding – to include grant and donor recognition opportunities, non-profit and corporate sponsorships, and establish ways to support community-led fundraising efforts.
- e. The PRC believes the “Forest Surprises” phase of the Site Plan should be reduced and substituted by using Organic ‘Found Objects’.

Conclusion

The proposed Site Plan represents a shared vision for the long-term evolution of Deane’s Children’s Park. It reflects extensive community engagement, careful site analysis, a strong commitment to accessibility and inclusivity, and preservation of the park’s natural character. Adoption of the Site Plan affirms this vision and establishes a clear framework to guide future improvements in a coordinated and strategic manner. Indeed, the PRC encourages the thematic aspects of the ‘Woodsy Wonder’ concept anchor the planning process as it moves forward.

The Commission recognizes that implementation will occur incrementally. Individual phases will advance as funding becomes available through the Parks CIP, grants, partnerships, and other resources. As such, the timing, sequencing, and specific scope of improvements may evolve to reflect funding realities, regulatory requirements, and emerging community needs.

Because the Site Plan provides a programmatic framework rather than detailed construction documents, certain elements may be refined during future design phases. Specific play equipment or materials identified conceptually may change due to product availability, cost considerations, or advancements in inclusive play design standards. Any refinements should remain consistent with the Plan’s guiding principles: fostering imaginative and nature-based play, enhancing accessibility for users of all ages and all abilities, preserving the forested character of the site, and integrating improvements thoughtfully within the landscape.

With these considerations in mind, the Parks and Recreation Commission is pleased to forward this Site Plan to the City Council for adoption, confident that it provides a durable and flexible roadmap for creating an inclusive, nature-centered, and community-supported park for generations to come.