



**PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**PRC 24-12
October 8, 2024
Special Business**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PRC 24-12: Parks Zone Development Discussion	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	No action. Review draft Parks Zone development process. Discussion and idea sharing on the Parks Zone purpose statement, designation requirements, and uses permitted.	
STAFF:	Jessi Bon, City Manager Carson Hornsby, Management Analyst II Alison Van Gorp, Deputy CPD Director Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager Sam Harb, Parks Operations Manager Alaine Sommargren, Deputy Public Works Director	
EXHIBITS:	1. Presentation and photo tour of park properties	

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parks Zone is a proposed new land use designation that will establish regulations for most City-owned and/or managed parks. Its purpose is to ensure these lands are preserved and managed appropriately, in alignment with the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan, City code, master plans, and similar guiding documents.

- During the October 8 Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting, staff will introduce the project and begin discussions on the framework, objectives, and timeline for development of the draft Parks Zone.
- Staff recommends that the PRC follow a process similar to the development of the Open Space Zone. Over the course of several meetings, staff and the PRC will collaborate on the draft text for the new Parks Zone, ensuring it meets all regulatory requirements.
- Crafting regulations that balance the built environment with the preservation and protection of parks will be particularly complex given the unique features in the park system. See Exhibit 1 for a photo tour of the Mercer Island parks system, highlighting the many different features and amenities across the various parks.
- For now, staff suggests setting aside the specific nuances of each individual park and focusing on drafting code language that aligns with stewardship and management plans, preservation goals, community feedback and desires, best practices, current and future uses, and other practical considerations.
- At this first meeting, the PRC will begin sharing ideas on the Parks Zone purpose statement, designation requirements, and permitted uses. These initial ideas will be incorporated into draft text for consideration at the next PRC meeting in November. This work is anticipated to continue through March 2025.
- It is currently anticipated that the PRC will hand-off a recommendation to the Planning Commission (PC) in Q2 2025 and the City Council will undertake review and adoption of the new Parks Zone by the end of 2025.

BACKGROUND

Parks Zone/Open Space Zone Background

The scope of work for the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update, adopted by the City Council in 2022 with [Resolution No. 1621](#), included creation of a new Parks Zone. A preliminary Parks Zone draft was presented to the PRC and PC in January 2024. After staff gathered feedback from the commissions and community, the legislative review process was paused and the draft Parks Zone was returned to the PRC for further discussion.

The PRC revisited the Parks Zone in March 2024 and provided a recommendation to staff to separate the Parks Zone planning work into two phases: the first phase to develop a new zone for City-owned public Open Space Lands, and the second phase to develop a new zone for City-owned public park properties.

The PRC and the Open Space Conservancy Trust (OSCT) Board held several joint meetings to provide input on the development of legislation establishing the Open Space Zone. At the [May 8, 2024 PC meeting](#), the PRC and OSCT Chairs presented a joint recommendation on the draft Open Space Zone. The PC completed the legislative review process related to the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update in June 2024. The PC approved a recommendation regarding the Open Space Zone code amendment at the [September 25, 2024 PC meeting](#). The City Council is scheduled to review the PC recommendations regarding the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and Open Space Zone code amendment in Q4 2024.

Now that the PRC's first phase of work is complete on the Open Space Zone, the PRC will shift focus to the development of the Parks Zone with the goal of presenting a recommendation to the PC in Q2 2025.

Establishment of the Parks Zone will require amendments to the MICC and Comprehensive Plan:

- Development Regulations – create a new subsection or subsection(s) under MICC 19.05, amend [MICC 19.01.040](#) to establish the Parks Zone, and amend [MICC 19.16.010](#) to establish new definitions (as needed).
- Zoning Map – amend the Zoning Map in the MICC to reflect where the Parks Zone applies.
- Land Use Designations – amend the Land Use Designation table in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (if needed).

Legislative Review Process

Once the PRC makes its recommendation to the PC, the PC will commence the formal legislative review process to gather public input and provide a recommendation to the City Council, as established in [Chapter 19.15 MICC](#).

The legislative review process includes the following steps:

- The Planning Commission holds a public hearing ([MICC 19.15.020](#)).
- The Planning Commission makes a written recommendation to the City Council following the public hearing ([MICC 19.15.260\(B\)\(2\)](#)).
- The City Council considers the Planning Commission recommendation during a public meeting, deciding to adopt, reject, or amend the recommendation ([MICC 19.15.260\(B\)\(3\)](#)).

Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan

The PROS Plan is a six-year plan that anticipates the programming and capital infrastructure investments necessary to meet the community's needs for parks, recreation, open space, trails, arts, and cultural events. The City Council adopted the [Parks, Recreation and Open Space \(PROS\) Plan](#) on March 1, 2022.

The PRC served as the lead advisory board on the PROS Plan update with support provided by the Arts Council and OSCT. The 2022 PROS Plan community engagement process included two statistically significant mail-in surveys with concurrent surveys available online, virtual open houses, a dedicated project webpage, and numerous board and commission meetings.

Chapter 4 of the PROS Plan establishes goals and objectives that serve as the policy framework for the provision of parks and recreation services by the City of Mercer Island. Development of master plans, policies, codes, and other work products should align with this policy framework, which includes development of the Parks Zone.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Parks Zone Development Process

Staff recommends that the PRC follow a process similar to the development of the Open Space Zone. Over the course of several meetings, staff and the PRC will collaborate on the draft text for the new Parks Zone, ensuring it meets all regulatory requirements. Staff will incorporate feedback from each meeting into the draft text and present it at the following meeting for PRC review. This process is anticipated to continue through March 2025.

The Mercer Island Parks System is Complex

Crafting regulations that balance the built environment with the goal of preserving and protecting parks will be particularly complex given the unique features in the park system. See Exhibit 1 for a photo tour of the Mercer Island parks system, highlighting the many different features and amenities across the various parks.

For now, staff suggests setting aside the specific nuances of each individual park and focusing on drafting code language that aligns with stewardship and management plans, preservation goals, community feedback and desires, best practices, current and future uses, and other practical considerations.

“Test Fitting” the draft Parks Zone

Once the PRC work is complete on the initial draft Parks Zone, staff will conduct an analysis or "test fit" to identify any non-conforming features or other potential issues with the proposed zone. How we address those issues will depend on what we find and will likely involve policy direction from the City Council.

Zoning Code Framework

Zoning code in the MICC generally consists of the five components summarized below, which were used to guide the development of the draft Open Space Zone. Staff proposes that the PRC use this framework again to guide the development of the draft Parks Zone.

1. Purpose

- What is the goal of the Parks Zone?
- Review PROS Plan goals and objectives (Chapter 4).

2. Designation Requirements

- What criteria is used to determine if land is included in the Parks Zone?
- Review PROS Plan classifications and inventory (Chapter 5).

3. Uses Permitted

- What are the allowed uses in the Parks Zone?

4. Development Standards

- What are the regulations for physical modification and structures in the Parks Zone?

5. Definitions

- What terms require further definition?
- Are the terms used elsewhere in the code? If yes, do the existing definitions meet the needs of the Parks Zone? If not, what revisions are proposed?
- Staff will develop a definitions list for key terms based on the draft code.

At the October 8 PRC meeting, staff suggest the PRC start with discussion and idea sharing on the purpose statement, designation requirements, and uses permitted. These initial ideas will be incorporated into draft text for consideration at the next PRC meeting in November.

NEXT STEPS

The PRC will provide input on the development of the draft Parks Zone and provide a recommendation to the PC. The PC will conduct the legislative review process and provide a final recommendation to the City Council regarding amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and MICC. The anticipated PRC meeting schedule for this work is provided below.

- Tuesday, October 8, 2024
 - Presentation: Parks Zone introduction and parks photo tour
 - Discussion and Idea Sharing: Purpose Statement, Designation Requirements, and Uses Permitted
- Thursday, November 7, 2024
 - Review Draft Text: Purpose Statement, Designation Requirements, and Uses Permitted
 - Discussion and Idea Sharing: Development Standards
- Thursday, December 5, 2024
 - Review Draft Text: Development Standards
 - Discussion and Idea Sharing: Definitions
- Thursday, January 2, 2025 (Meeting anticipated to be rescheduled due to holiday)
 - Review Draft Text: Full Code Review
 - Test Fit Analysis – Review Applicability of Draft Parks Zone to Existing Parks
- January 2025 - Potential Joint Meeting with City Council (tentative)
- Thursday, February 6, 2025
 - Follow-up Discussion on Test-Fit Analysis and Feedback from City Council (tentative), revisions to draft Parks Zone if necessary
 - Review draft Hand-Off Memo to PC

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- Thursday, March 6, 2025
 - Finalize All Materials
 - Discussion: Next Steps (hand-off to PC, legislative review process, timelines of the Comprehensive Plan annual update and code amendment)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

No action. Review draft Parks Zone development process. Discussion and idea sharing on the Parks Zone purpose statement, designation requirements, and uses permitted.