



PARKS & RECREATION COMMISSION CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

PRC 25-03
March 6, 2025
Regular Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PRC 25-03: 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:	Review and provide feedback on the draft Parks Zone development regulations, draft zoning map, and draft hand-off memo.	

STAFF:	Jessi Bon, City Manager Carson Hornsby, Management Analyst II Alison Van Gorp, Deputy CPD Director Kellye Hilde, Deputy Public Works Director Ryan Daly, Recreation Manager Sam Harb, Parks Operations Manager Alaine Sommargren, Deputy Public Works Director
EXHIBITS:	1. Draft Parks Zone Development Regulations 2. Draft Zoning Map 3. Draft Hand-Off Memo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Parks Zone is a proposed new zone that will establish development regulations for most City-owned and/or managed parks. The purpose of the new zone is to ensure park 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 March 6, 2025 Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) meeting, the PRC will review and provide feedback on the draft Parks Zone development regulations (Exhibit 1), draft Zoning Map (Exhibit 2), and draft hand-off memo (Exhibit 3).
- A summary of the discussion and direction received from the PRC during the January and February 2025 PRC meetings is provided in the background section.
- Once the PRC has concluded their work on the draft Parks Zone, the staff will coordinate next steps and prepare for the hand-off meeting with the Planning Commission (PC).
- The PC will then commence the legislative review process and the City Council will undertake review and adoption of the 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 the creation of a new Parks Zone and development regulations for the new zone. In January 2024, a preliminary draft of the Parks Zone development regulations was presented to the PRC and PC. Following community and commission feedback, the legislative review was paused, and the draft was returned to the PRC for further review. In March 2024, the PRC recommended dividing the Parks Zone planning into two phases: creating a zone for City-owned open space lands and another for public park properties.

The PRC and Open Space Conservancy Trust (OSCT) Board held several joint meetings to develop legislation for the Open Space Zone. On May 8, 2024, PRC and OSCT Chairs presented a joint recommendation to the PC, which completed its review in June 2024 as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update. On September 25, 2024, the PC approved a recommendation for the Open Space Zone code amendment. The City Council adopted the [Open Space Zone](#) on November 4, 2024, with an effective date of December 31, 2024.

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

Establishment of the Parks Zone will require the following 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 adopt 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\(B\)\(3\)](#)).
- If the Comprehensive Plan requires an amendment for the Parks Zone, the City Council will consider the Parks Zone amendments with the City's annual comprehensive plan amendments, which are limited to once a year by the Growth Management Act ([RCW 36.70A.130\(2\)](#)).

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, code, and other work products should align with this policy framework, which includes development of the Parks Zone.

Development Code, Parks Code, and Park Operating Policies

As the PRC provides input on the draft Parks Zone development regulations, staff recommend commissioners consider the various tools used by the City to regulate development, operations, and allowed uses and activities in parks. The City's development code, parks code, and park operating policies and procedures each have a distinct purpose and consist of specific types of rules and regulations regarding parks. Rules and regulations applicable in areas other than the proposed new zone and its associated development regulations are outside the scope of the Parks Zone project. However, the PRC may wish to provide recommendations to the City Council to address other items in future work plans. The purpose and type of regulations included in the development code, parks code, and park operating policies and procedures are summarized below.

Development Code

The Mercer Island Development Code is established in [MICC Title 19 - Unified Land Development Code](#). Title 19 classifies land within the City into zones and regulates land uses and development permitted within each zone. Title 19 zones and regulations work together with the rest of the MICC, Parks Code, and park operating policies. For example, if the Parks Zone includes cycling as a permitted use, the City may develop traffic rules or regulations separately for speed limits or designated cycling areas. Similarly, picnic shelters may be included as a permitted use in the Parks Zone, but Title 19 would not include policies or rules regarding shelter use, rentals, or maintenance.

Parks Code

The Mercer Island Parks Code (aka "Parks Rules") is established in [MICC Chapter 9.30 - Park Rules](#). The Parks Code is part of the Criminal Code, which is a collection of laws that define crimes and their punishments within the City's jurisdiction. The Parks Code consists of laws that apply to the City's public parks and are enforced by the Mercer Island Police Department. The Parks Code is where unlawful acts are codified, such as building fires in undesignated areas ([MICC 9.30.170](#)), posting unauthorized signs and posters ([MICC 9.30.040](#)), and riding horses in undesignated areas ([MICC 9.30.060](#)). The Parks Code is on the City's work plan to be updated in 2025-2026. Staff will assist the PRC in identifying and logging items for follow-up that are best suited for consideration as part of the Parks Code update.

Park Operating Policies and Procedures

Operating policies and procedures are established to guide citywide operations, including the City's parks and recreation facilities and programs. Operating policies and procedures include operational processes, activities, tasks, decision-making structures, levels of delegation, and responsibilities of staff. Some operating policies and procedures are intended for internal use, such as roles and responsibilities of parks and recreation staff or equipment repair and maintenance schedules. Some operating policies and procedures are public facing, such as facility rental or recreation program policies. Examples of operating policies and procedures can be found on the [Parks Information & Policies webpage](#).

Parks Zone Materials from Prior PRC Meetings

- [Tuesday, October 8, 2024](#)
- [Thursday, November 7, 2024](#)
- [Thursday, January 9, 2025](#)
- [Thursday, February 6, 2025](#)

Re-Cap of Direction Received at the January 9, 2025 PRC Meeting

The PRC reached consensus on the following topics:

- Public art is recommended to be included as a permitted use without additional development standards, based on the Arts Council's recommendation. The hand-off memo will include a recommendation to identify opportunities for collaboration between the PRC and the Arts Council.
- Island Crest Park is recommended for inclusion in the Parks Zone. The hand-off memo will include a recommendation to the City Council to consider subdividing Island Crest Park as part of a future project to include the critical and forested areas in the Open Space Zone, and the developed areas in the Parks Zone.
- Landings and street ends are not recommended for inclusion in the Parks Zone due to their primary use of utilities.

Materials from the January 9 PRC meeting are available [here](#).

Re-Cap of Direction Received at the February 6, 2025 PRC Meeting

The PRC reached consensus on the following topics:

- Wireless communications facilities are recommended as a permitted use in the Parks Zone with language similar to the Open Space Zone. The hand-off memo will include a recommendation to the City Council to limit wireless communication facilities in parks to the extent allowed in the MICC.
- Aubrey Davis Park is not recommended for inclusion in the Parks Zone due to WSDOT's preemptive authority over I-90 ROW, which has a primary use of transportation. The hand-off memo will include a recommendation to the City Council to prioritize renegotiation of the agreements with WSDOT to ensure the continued preservation and use of Aubrey Davis Park for recreation purposes.
- The Mercer Island Community and Event Center (MICEC) is not recommended for inclusion in the Parks Zone because it is a large multi-purpose facility that serves many uses in addition to recreation.
- Setbacks are recommended at zero feet if the adjacent property is zoned PI, OS, TC, PBZ, C-O, or B, and 20 feet if the adjacent property is zoned R-8.4, R-9.6, R12, R-15, MF-2L, MF-2, or MF-3. Fences, gates, culverts, trails, landscaping, furnishings, bollards, signs, kiosks, parking areas, and utilities are recommended to be exempt from setback requirements.
- Kiosks are recommended to be limited to 22 square feet in surface area and 10 feet in height.
- Trail width is recommended to be limited to 12 feet.
- Picnic shelters are recommended to be limited to 16 feet in height and 1,200 square feet of gross floor area.
- Parking standards are recommended to address design, ingress and egress, and minimum parking requirements only if a proposed use is expected to create demand for additional parking spaces beyond existing capacity.

Materials from the February 6 PRC meeting are available [here](#).

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

Draft Parks Zone Development Regulations (Exhibit 1)

Staff have prepared an updated draft of the Parks Zone development regulations. Follow-up items from the February 6 PRC meeting are outlined below in addition to the proposed building standards. The PRC will be asked to provide feedback on the final revisions to the draft development regulations.

Signs

Signs were identified as a follow up item from the February 6 PRC meeting. Staff confirmed the largest sign in the park system is the noticeboard at Mercedale Park, which has 21.5 square feet of surface area. However, the Mercedale noticeboard is a unique sign in the park system. Staff recommend limiting the size of signs to 16 square feet of surface area, which encompasses all other existing signs in the park system. Externally lit signs are proposed to be prohibited except for park entry signs and signs required for public health, safety, or maintenance purposes.

Scoreboards

Staff measured the scoreboard at Island Crest Park to include the arched letters on the top of the scoreboard. Staff recommend limiting the size of scoreboards in the Parks Zone to 250 square feet of surface area. The scoreboard standard was also revised to specify that electronic scoreboards are permitted in addition to externally lit scoreboards. The scoreboard at Island Crest Park is both electronic and externally lit.

Buildings

Building standards are proposed to establish all existing buildings in the Parks Zone as legally conforming and not subject to the standards for new buildings. Uses established in existing buildings prior to adoption of the Parks Zone, including uses not otherwise permitted in the Parks Zone, are proposed to be allowed to continue. This provision will allow the City government uses of the Luther Burbank Administrative Building, Boiler Building, and Caretakers house to continue.

New buildings in the Parks Zone are proposed to be categorized into the following types: restrooms, park maintenance facilities, recreation facilities, and multipurpose facilities. Restrooms, park maintenance facilities, and recreation facilities are proposed to be limited to 500 square feet in gross floor area. Multipurpose facilities, which combine two or more uses, are proposed to be limited to 3,500 square feet in gross floor area. Picnic Shelters are limited to 1,200 square feet in gross floor area and 16 feet in height (approved at the February 6 meeting and subsequently moved to this section). Staff will present a photo slideshow of park buildings at the March 6 PRC meeting to provide context on these recommendations.

Impervious surface

A few additional exemptions from the no net new impervious surface standard were proposed at the February 6 PRC meeting including playgrounds, small park amenities, and emergency construction or maintenance. These exemptions have been added to the list. In addition, new text has been added addressing a separate process to establish amenities and impervious surface coverage at new parks should the City acquire new park land.

Lighting

A question was raised at the February 6 PRC meeting about the proposed exemption from the lighting standards for lighting within a public right of way (ROW) or easement for the purpose of illuminating roads, trails, or pedestrian ways. This exemption has been removed because ROW areas are regulated elsewhere in the MICC.

Definitions

New definitions for *Multipurpose facility*, *Playground*, and *Restroom* have been added to the draft.

Draft Zoning Map (Exhibit 2)

The draft Zoning Map was prepared based on recommendations from the PRC. The draft Zoning Map lists the following parks proposed to be included in the Parks Zone:

- Bicentennial Park
- Clarke Beach Park
- Deane's Children's Park
- First Hill Park
- Groveland Beach Park
- Homestead Park
- Island Crest Park
- Luther Burbank Park
- Mercedale Park
- Roanoke Park
- Rotary Park
- SE 28th Street Mini Park
- Secret Park
- Slater Park
- Wildwood Park

Draft Hand-Off Memo (Exhibit 3)

The draft hand-off memo to the PC was prepared based on input from the PRC and reviewed by the PRC Chair and Vice Chair. The draft hand-off memo summarizes the draft Parks Zone development regulations and draft Zoning Map, supported by references to applicable PROS Plan goals and objectives. The draft hand-off memo includes additional recommendations for consideration by the City Council.

The PRC will be asked to provide feedback on the draft hand-off memo at the March 6 PRC meeting. Staff will coordinate with the PRC Chair and Vice Chair after the meeting to review and approve final revisions to the hand-off memo.

NEXT STEPS

Once the PRC has concluded their work on the Parks Zone (anticipated for this meeting or the April meeting if more time is needed), the staff will coordinate next steps and prepare for the hand-off meeting with the PC. The PC will then commence the legislative review process, and the City Council will undertake review and adoption of the Parks Zone by the end of 2025.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Review and provide feedback on the draft Parks Zone development regulations, draft zoning map, and draft hand-off memo.