



PLANNING COMMISSION CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

PCB 24-02
February 8, 2024
Special Business

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	PCB 24-02: Update on Parks Zoning Code Development Process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Discuss the revised process for review and revision of the Parks Zone preliminary draft.	

STAFF:	Jessi Bon, City Manager
EXHIBITS:	n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This joint meeting serves as an opportunity for the Parks and Recreation Commission and Planning Commission to meet with the City Manager to discuss the revised review process for development of the new Parks Zone.

- The City of Mercer Island adopted a new [Parks, Recreation and Open Space \(PROS\) Plan](#) on March 1, 2022 (see [AB 6023](#)).
- The PROS Plan update process spanned multiple years and was led by the Parks and Recreation Commission with support from the Arts Council and the Open Space Conservancy Trust.
- The PROS Plan established goals and objectives, which serve as the policy framework for the provision of parks and recreation services on Mercer Island.
- PROS Plan Objective 1.1 (see Chapter 4, page 20) includes the following: Retain publicly owned parks and open spaces in perpetuity. Actively pursue options to permanently protect parks and open space through conservation easements, zoning changes, or other strategies. Evaluate the transfer of some or all open space to the Open Space Conservancy Trust.
- The City of Mercer Island is updating its Comprehensive Plan as part of the periodic review required by the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA). The City Council added the creation of a new Parks Zone to the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update scope of work with [Resolution No. 1621](#).
- A preliminary draft of the new Parks Zone was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission on January 4, 2024, and to the Planning Commission on January 24, 2024.
- After receiving extensive feedback from both commissions and the community, the City Manager has directed staff to pause the legislative review process and return the draft Parks Zone to the Parks and Recreation Commission for review, comment, and revision. Upon completion of their work, anticipated for later this spring, the Parks and Recreation Commission will hand off their recommendation to the Planning Commission.
- It is still the intent that the Parks Zone work will be completed this year and included as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update, as directed by the City Council.
- All comments received to date will be provided to the Parks and Recreation Commission as they begin their review work. The comments and questions submitted on the preliminary draft of the Parks Zone will also be included in the record.

BACKGROUND

PROS Plan Background

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.

As directed by the City Council in September 2019, City staff, in collaboration with the Parks & Recreation Commission, began the process of updating the PROS Plan. The prior PROS Plan expired in 2019 and the decision was made to undertake a wholesale rewrite of the plan.

Work was suspended on the PROS Plan update in April 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and then resumed at the end of 2020.

After nearly three years of work, the City Council adopted the new [Parks, Recreation and Open Space \(PROS\) Plan](#) on March 1, 2022.

PROS Plan Community Engagement

The Parks & Recreation Commission served as the lead advisory board on the PROS Plan update process with support provided by the Arts Council and the Open Space Conservancy Trust. The 2022 PROS Plan included an extensive community engagement process, some of the highlights are summarized below:

- Two statistically significant mail-in surveys were sent to Mercer Island residents with concurrent versions available to the public online (February 2020 and August 2021).
- Two virtual open houses were held that included project presentations, live polling, and facilitated discussions in breakout groups (March 2021 and September 2021).
- A project webpage was maintained throughout the planning process to provide access to key dates and milestones, background data, and draft materials.
- Numerous meetings of the Parks & Recreation Commission, Arts Council, and the Open Space Conservancy Trust Board were held, dedicated to the development of the PROS Plan.

PROS Plan Guiding Policies Related to Park Preservation

Listed below are some of the 2022 PROS Plan objectives related to stewardship of public park land and open space areas.

- [Objective 1.1 \(see page 20\)](#): Retain publicly owned parks and open spaces in perpetuity. Actively pursue options to permanently protect parks and open space through conservation easements, zoning changes, or other strategies. Evaluate the transfer of some or all open space to the Open Space Conservancy Trust
- [Objective 1.4 \(see page 20\)](#): Identify and prioritize the need for master plans to guide all significant park development projects, achieve cohesive designs, and ensure project phasing is efficient and in alignment with community needs and priorities. Utilize management plans or other adopted strategies to guide the stewardship and maintenance of parks, open space, and trails.
- [Objective 1.8 \(see page 20\)](#): Pursue and implement strategies to maximize use of existing park and recreation assets.
- [Objective 3.1 \(see page 23\)](#): Preserve and protect open space and park land areas with significant environmental features such as wetlands, forests, steep slopes, and plant and animal habitats from development impacts.
- [Objective 3.5 \(see page 23\)](#): Continue to support the Open Space Conservancy Trust and the planning, development, and management of Pioneer Park and Engstrom Open Space. Promote

Pioneer Park as a demonstration site for best practices in forest management and environmental education.

- [Objective 3.12 \(see page 24\)](#): Steward waterfront and shoreline properties with the goal of protecting and enhancing critical shoreline habitat while preserving safe water access for recreational use.

Taken together, all the goals and objectives included in Chapter 4 of the PROS Plan serve as the policy framework for the provision of parks and recreation services in Mercer Island. Development of master plans, policies, codes, and other work products should align with this policy framework.

2024 Comprehensive Plan Update

The City of Mercer Island is updating its Comprehensive Plan as part of the periodic review required by the Washington Growth Management Act (GMA). The City Council added creation of a new Parks Zone to the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update scope of work with [Resolution No. 1621](#).

In addition, the 2022 PROS Plan will be incorporated into the 2024 Comprehensive Plan substantially by reference through the adoption of a Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element, see City Council approved [Resolution No. 1621](#), Subtask Number PRO-1.

The 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update, including the new Parks Zone and the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element, is expected to be adopted before the GMA deadline at the end of 2024.

Zoning Code and Legislative Review Process

Zoning is a method in which land is divided into “zones,” each of which has a set of regulations describing allowable uses. For Mercer Island, specific zones are established in [Title 19.01.040 Mercer Island City Code \(MICC\)](#). Any amendment of Title 19 MICC must proceed through the legislative process established in [Chapter 19.15 MICC](#). This means that the legislative review, gathering of public input, and making a recommendation to the City Council regarding the parks zone follows a formal process facilitated by the Planning Commission.

The legislative process outlined in Chapter 19.15 MICC directs the following steps:

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

City Manager Pausing Planning Commission Legislative Review Process

A preliminary draft of the Parks Zone was presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission on [January 4, 2024](#), and to the Planning Commission on [January 24, 2024](#).

After receiving extensive feedback from both commissions and the community, the City Manager directed staff to pause the legislative review process and return the draft Parks Zone to the Parks and Recreation Commission for review, comment, and revision. Upon completion of their work, anticipated for later this spring, the Parks and Recreation Commission will hand off their recommendation to the Planning Commission.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

As previously noted, the City Manager withdrew the preliminary draft of the Parks Zone from the legislative review process and is returning the draft document to the Parks and Recreation Commission for review, comment, and revision. The Joint PRC/PC Meeting provides an important opportunity for the two advisory boards to connect and discuss the collaborative work ahead. Staff will provide a brief presentation with additional background information in support of the upcoming review process.

The comments and questions submitted on the preliminary draft of the Parks Zone by commission members are being tracked and will be included in the record, and provided to the Parks and Recreation Commission as they begin their review work.

NEXT STEPS

Preliminary Parks and Recreation Commission Review Schedule

It is the intent that the Parks Zone work will be completed this year and included as part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update, as directed by the City Council. Staff are currently working to align calendars to ensure deadlines can be met and tentatively anticipate the following schedule for Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) review:

- **PRC Meeting #1 – March 7:**
 - Public Comment
 - Confirm PRC Review Schedule
 - PRC Review of background materials
 - Discuss Parks Zoning Code approach and framework
 - Identify areas requiring more research and follow-up
 - Discuss key issues and identify areas of consensus
 - Review public engagement plan

- **PRC Meeting #2 – March TBD:**
 - Public Comment
 - Deliberate and review revised draft of Parks Zoning code, identify areas of consensus and items needing further research and revision

- **PRC Meeting #3 – April 4:**
 - Public Comment
 - Deliberate and review revised draft of Parks Zoning Code

- **PRC Meeting #4 – April TBD:**
 - Public Comment
 - Finalize recommendation on Parks Zoning Code and Hand-off Letter

- **PRC Meeting #5 – May 2:**
 - Meeting reserved for follow-up work if needed

- **PRC Hand-off to PC – May TBD**
 - Joint Meeting
 - PRC to present recommendation on Parks Zoning Code to the Planning Commission

Staff will engage with the Chairs of the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Planning Commission over the next several months and will adjust the schedule as needed.

Public Engagement

The City established a [Let's Talk page](#) to facilitate community engagement on the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update. Currently, the parks zone information is included on this page as well. Given the high community interest in the Parks Zone, a separate/standalone page will be created to track the work associated with the Parks Zone. The new Let's Talk page is currently under development and will launch no later than the week of February 12.

The PRC will also review and discuss the public engagement plan for the draft Parks Zone at their meeting on March 7, 2024.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Discuss the revised process for review and revision of the Parks Zone preliminary draft. No action necessary.