

City of Seattle

ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
OF SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION

Proposal Name: **Cheasty Greenspace Pedestrian and Bicycle Trails**

Address of Proposal: **2627 South Andover Street, Seattle, WA 98144**

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) is proposing to construct a bicycle and pedestrian perimeter loop trail system in the Cheasty Greenspace. Work will occur within identified Environmentally Critical Areas – Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas, Wetland and Wildlife Habitat.

Seattle Department of Planning and Development Reference No.: 3020881

SEPA DETERMINATION: Determination of Non-Significance (DNS)

BACKGROUND

Cheasty Greenspace (“Cheasty”) is a natural area located on the east side of Beacon Hill, below Jefferson Park Golf Course and Cheasty Boulevard and directly above the Rainier Valley and Martin Luther King Way. The greenspace stretches along a 1.5-mile north-south axis between South Bayview Street on the north boundary to South Angeline Street at the south extent. The subject proposal extends from South Andover Street to South Columbian Way. The parcel(s) making up Cheasty Greenspace that are the subject of the current proposal were transferred to Parks from the Executive Services Department (now Seattle FAS) in 2000 with the only limitation being that they be used for “[o]pen space, park and recreation purposes.” These parcels total approximately twenty-eight (28) acres.

A vegetation management plan (VMP) was prepared for Cheasty in 2003. Since that time, forest restoration has been undertaken by volunteers, most recently through the Green Seattle Partnership. Cheasty Greenspace is characterized as a maturing upland deciduous forest consisting mainly of smaller Bigleaf maple with Red alder and Black cottonwood in moister areas. Conifers are virtually absent. Snags and coarse woody debris present in the greenspace generally reflect the small-medium tree size found there as well. Both non-native Norway and Sycamore maples are present in most of the greenspace both in the canopy as mature trees and more abundantly as saplings and seedlings in the understory/shrub layer. The understory is also invaded to varying degrees by the typical suite of non-native species found in Seattle’s urban forests, English ivy is by far the most prevalent, followed by Himalayan blackberry.

Despite the presence of these non-native species, Cheasty greenspace has a fairly intact native shrub layer, both in terms of diversity and cover. Common native understory dominants found in the greenspace include: hazelnut, indian plum, snowberry, vine maple, red elderberry, rose, low Oregon grape, and oceanspray. Dump sites, encampments, and social trails are numerous. The VMP also noted that the site has wildlife value.

Cheasty Greenspace has no official trails (Parks constructed and sanctioned), but is criss-crossed by numerous social trails, many of which lead to encampments or dumping sites. Human abuse of the greenspace is evident in the number of encampments and quantity of yard waste and trash. Roadside dumping is also a common practice.

Within the park are identified Environmentally Critical Areas (ECA) – Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas associated with the hillside nature of the site sloping downward from West to East; Wetland due to the presence of hillside seeps/wetlands; and Wildlife Habitat due to the undeveloped and forested nature of the site.

PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION

Parks is proposing to allow the construction of a bicycle and pedestrian perimeter loop trail system in the Cheasty Greenspace. Parks will oversee and manage the construction of the project and it will be constructed to Parks' standards. The actual construction will be undertaken by a citizens group, using a combination of volunteers and trail contractor(s), with funds from a variety of grants and other sources. The bicycle trail is a three-year pilot project. Its usage and durability will be monitored for a three year period, starting once construction is completed. At the end of the monitoring period, Parks will make a decision as to whether the trail will remain open for bicycle usage. The Schematic Design consists of a soft-surface bicycle (mountain bike) and pedestrian trails. The proposed bike trail will be one to three feet (1' - 3') in width; the proposed pedestrian trail will be four (4) feet wide. The approximate length of the perimeter trails are: 1.5 miles for the mountain bike trail and 1.3 miles for the pedestrian trail. Six entry points are proposed along the perimeter of the greenspace to allow public access to the trail system.

As noted in the Checklist, the project will follow applicable State and local standards to reduce and control erosion during construction such as the required use of silt fencing, wattles, and/or gravel filter berms. The project will also follow the Seattle Parks and Recreation Pedestrian Trail Standards and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Mountain Bike Trail Standard during design and construction to prevent and reduce site erosion and yield more sustainable trails that withstand the weather and usage with minimal maintenance.

The design provides mostly trails on grade where feasible with little disturbance other than scraping away the organic layer to expose the underlying mineral soil for use as the trail tread. The actual trail location will be adjusted in the field to avoid trees; native vegetation located within the trail alignment will be relocated. The proposed trail will traverse the steepest portion of the site on an elevated structure to minimize the site disturbance. The elevated structure will be supported on a series of piers supported on helical or pin piling. This approach minimizes impact to the existing slope and allows for support and installation of a trail without cutting into the face of the slope. Grading will occur during the course of development in order to meet ADA code compliance and to create the proposed trails. At the schematic design stage, grading area was approximately 52,000 sq.ft., with 340 cu.yds. of fill. Structural fill materials will be imported and placed per Parks' standards to meet the required design grade.

Due to the presence of ECAs, the proposed work has been reviewed by a Geotechnical Engineer. As noted in the Geotechnical Report, "[c]onstruction of the accessible trail and mountain bike trail is feasible from a geotechnical standpoint but will require some modifications to avoid areas of observed instability and seepage. If properly designed, it is not anticipated that construction of the proposed trail will result in increased slope instability. However, specific

attention will need to be paid to the final trail alignment, grades, drainage and surfacing to limit the amount of maintenance required to maintain a functional and environmentally friendly trail system.” Recommendations contained in the geotechnical report will be followed during final trail design, layout and construction.

ANALYSIS – SEPA

Initial disclosure of potential impacts from this project was made in the applicant’s environmental checklist, dated March 20, 2015. The basis for this analysis and decision is formed from information in the checklist, graphics and additional studies attached to it, familiarity with the site and the lead agency’s experience with review of similar projects.

The SEPA Overview Policy (SMC 23.05.665) discusses the relationship between the City’s code/policies and environmental review. The Overview Policy states, in part, “[w]here City regulations have been adopted to address an environmental impact; it shall be presumed that such regulations are adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation”. The Policies also discuss in SMC 23.05.665 D1-7, that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to deny or mitigate a project based on adverse environmental impacts. This may be specified otherwise in the policies for specific elements of the environment found in SMC 25.05.675. In consideration of these policies, a more detailed discussion of some of the potential impacts is appropriate.

Short Term Impacts

The following temporary or construction-related impacts are expected: hydrocarbon emissions from construction vehicles and equipment; increased dust caused by construction activities; potential soil erosion and potential disturbance to subsurface soils during site work; increased traffic from construction equipment and personnel; increased noise; consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources and greenhouse gas emissions.

Adopted codes and/or ordinances provide appropriate mitigation for the identified impacts. The Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control Codes require that soil erosion control techniques be initiated for the duration of construction. Erosion will be prevented by implementation of a required Temporary Erosion Control and Sedimentation Plan. Best Management Practices, such as mulching and seeding will be implemented at the site to minimize erosion during construction. Puget Sound Clean Air Agency regulations require control of fugitive dust to protect air quality. The Building Code provides for construction measures and life safety issues. The Noise Ordinance regulates the time and amount of construction noise that is permitted in the city. Compliance with the requirements of the City’s Environmentally Critical Areas Ordinance will address any potential impacts to the identified critical areas. Required construction permit(s) also afford an additional opportunity to impose conditions on the project to address the potential site impacts. Compliance with these codes and/or ordinances will lessen the environmental impacts of the proposed project. However, the impacts associated with construction traffic and noise, and the presence of identified ECAs, warrant further discussion.

Construction Traffic and Parking

There is on-street parking and there could be area(s) of on-site parking for construction crews to the extent possible, to minimize the potential for off-site parking impacts. The site is close to Beacon Avenue South, a city arterial which provides truck access consistent with the requirements of the Street Use Ordinance. While limited grading and fill is proposed, some hauling to and from the site will be necessary. New landscape and fill materials will also need to

be imported over the course of the construction period. The adjacent streets provide truck access to and from the site. Recent (2013) Seattle Department of Transportation information notes 9,400 Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) trips on Beacon Avenue¹. Since the proposal calls for minimal truck trips for importing or exporting materials from the site, the likely additional construction truck trips are not anticipated to perceptibly decrease the Level of Service (LOS) on the street network. Construction traffic and haul route(s) will be designated, and notices and signage will alert pedestrians and drivers to times of day and peak activities as part of Parks' standard specifications. No further conditioning is necessary or warranted

Noise

Construction activities are typically be confined to weekdays and there is no urgency associated with this project that would warrant evening and/or weekend work. Hours of construction are limited by the Seattle Noise Ordinance, SMC ch. 25.08, to 7:00 a.m. and ten 10:00 p.m. on weekdays (SMC 25.08.425). The reality of the local construction industry is that contractors typically work from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.; the likelihood that any construction activities will occur up to 10 p.m. is slight. The Noise Ordinance also regulates the loudness (dB) of construction activities, measured fifty (50) feet from the subject activity or device. The City has noise inspectors who respond to noise complaints and can monitor for noise compliance at construction sites. Compliance with the City's Noise Ordinance will prevent any significant adverse short term noise impacts and thus no further conditioning is necessary or warranted.

Compliance with applicable codes, ordinances and regulations will be adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation. No further conditioning is warranted.

Long Term Impacts

Noise

Once the project is completed, noise emanating from the site will likely be limited to low level sounds by individuals and groups of park users. Bicycles are not significant noise generators and their use on the trails is not anticipated to generate any long term adverse noise impacts. Ongoing forest restoration activities are also not anticipated to be significant noise generators.

ECA

Across the project site are areas which are considered Environmentally Critical Areas associated with the steepness of the hillside (Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas); hillside seeps/wetlands (Wetlands); and Wildlife Habitat due to the undeveloped and forested nature of the site. The trail construction methods are also designed to minimize the disturbance of the subject ECAs and limit the potential for stormwater to adversely affect the site stability and the ECAs.

The wetlands located on the site have been classified as Category III or IV wetlands. To minimize the potential for impacts to the wetland areas, the pedestrian and bicycle trails will be combined and the trail will span the wetland on a bridge or boardwalk structure to limit the disturbance of the wetland during construction and post construction during trail usage.

¹ Average Annual Daily Traffic (AAWDT) (5-day, 24-hour) for that section of roadway - Seattle Department of Transportation.

While not specifically part of the subject proposal, Cheasty Greenspace is part of the Green Seattle Partnership restoration program of restoring 2,500 acres of forested parklands throughout the City by 2025. Cheasty is subject to active ongoing forest restoration in conjunction with the subject trail proposal. Community volunteers have spent over 32,000 hours during the last ten years removing invasive plant material and planted over 10,000 native plants at the Cheasty Greenspace site. These ongoing forest restoration activities benefit the overall forest health and provide a more diverse habitat to the benefit of wildlife and birds in the area.

No adverse ECA related impacts from the proposed construction and subsequent use are anticipated. Compliance with the City's ECA Ordinance will adequately mitigate the potential for any adverse ECA related environmental impacts associated with this project and thus no conditioning is necessary or warranted.

Historic Resources

Cheasty Boulevard, located to the west of the Cheasty Greenspace was designed by the Olmsted Brothers and is a City Landmark. The proposal connects to existing crossings on the boulevard but there are no proposed changes to these crossings. Other than the ongoing forest restoration work, no work will occur adjacent to the boulevard and no long term adverse impacts to this historic resource are anticipated. Any proposed changes to the boulevard would require review and approval by the City's Landmark's Preservation Board.

Once the construction activities are complete, Beacon Hill and Columbia City residents and visitors will have additional recreational opportunities in the neighborhood with the development of the new trail system. Ongoing reforestation activities will continue to benefit the overall health of the site and provide additional tree canopy. The park will serve predominantly local residents without the need for on-site parking. There is on-street parking adjacent to the park and the area is well served by many forms of public transportation. No long term adverse environmental impacts are anticipated and thus no conditioning is necessary or warranted.

DECISION

This decision was made after the responsible official, on behalf of the lead agency, reviewed a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and final decision on application of SEPA's substantive authority and mitigation provisions. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirement of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21.C), including the requirement to inform the public of agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- (X) Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(C).
- () Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. AN EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(C).

Signature: _____


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Date: July 22, 2015