

Public Meeting #1



PROJECT: Tacoma DeMolay Sandspit Park Master Plan

PROJECT NO: 1001.06

MEETING DATE & TIME: December 13, 2023 from 5:30pm – 7:30pm

MEETING MINUTES NO: 1

MEETING LOCATION: Nichols Community Center – Main Hall, 690 9th Ave, Fox Island, WA 98333

COMPILED BY: Derrick Eberle, Baumwelt

PURPOSE:

This was the first public meeting for the project to solicit input of the public's ideas, concerns, and priorities for both the existing park and desired amenities for the future.

DISCUSSION:

PenMet Parks presented a background of this project as well as an overview of the accompanying shoreline restoration project being led by Pierce Conservation District. Baumwelt introduced the project team, reviewed the project schedule, process, extents, and preliminary project components. Baumwelt and Boe Architects then discussed some preliminary project considerations and opened the meeting up for public discussion.

The following is a summary of the comments provided from members of the public in attendance in person (approximately 65 people), online (approximately 25 people), and follow-up emails with comments sent to PenMet Parks. The comments were provided both verbally and submitted in writing. The comments are grouped into categories to which they pertained. In some cases, multiple comments were made about the same topic. The comments were summarized as follows:

Project Information Communication

- Request to provide updates throughout the project from PenMet parks.
 - PenMet should work with FICRA.org to relay information to Fox Island community members as the project progresses.
 - Communication and transparency with community members is critical.
 - PenMet to host a project tab on PenMet website with updated content for this master plan process as it becomes available.
- Consider including local first nations' interests to serve on the stakeholder group.

Park Security

- Park access should be closed at night.
 - PenMet should secure gate entrance to the parking lot nightly.
- Adequate fencing should be installed to control access to the park.
 - Fencing should be designed to secure the site after hours.
 - Fencing should be complimentary to the landscape / aesthetically appealing.

Bicycle Parking

- Provide an area to park bicycles.

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Site Access

- ADA accessible walkways should be provided throughout the entire site.
- Kayak / human powered watercraft access down to the water should be provided.
 - A drop-off zone for said watercraft could be helpful.
 - Parking lot route to water access should provide gradual descent to water.
- Emergency vehicle access to the park should be direct and not impeded by park activities.
 - Consideration of this access is paramount, especially when roads are filled with parked cars in the summer.
- No beach access for motorized watercraft.

Blockhouse Area

- Questions were asked about the future of the blockhouse.
 - A response was given that replacement or renovation is still to be determined.
 - The existing structure is degraded, and restoration may not be possible.
- Renovation or replacement should provide covered picnic space at a minimum for park visitors.
- The blockhouse / covered park structure should be fully accessible (covered recreation space, restrooms, etc.) during bad weather.
- A well-drained, useable lawn area should surround the blockhouse.
 - The lawn area should be able to accommodate casual sport activities.
 - No permanent sport courts of any kind.
- The lawn should be open and programmable for a variety of activities.

Nature / Environment

- Some past park visitors have negatively impacted the natural condition of the park. These activities should be discouraged and eliminated. Some examples include:
 - Breaking nests onsite.
 - Removing clay babies.
 - Throwing driftwood and logs into the water.
- Effort should be made to preserve the site and protect wildlife.
 - Provide balance to also allow for human activity on-site.
- Increased human presence on-site can lead to more chances for environmental degradation.
- A few comments stated a desire to not improve anything in the park and leave it as natural as possible.

Camping

- No open/general public camping is desired for the park.
- Washington Water Trails Association (WWTA) shared their camping relationship with the site.
 - Campers arrive via human-powered watercraft from the water's edge (no drive-in).
 - WWTA requires registration which helps limit undesired camping consequences.
- Design should look at a way to provide a separate area for this type of camping, to avoid interference with general park visitors.
- Purchase agreement with the DeMolay Chapter permits that organization to sleep in the blockhouse up to eight times a year.

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Signage / Park Rules

- Signage on-site needs to be improved/increased for consistency and clarity.
- Consider the following signage elements for the park:
 - Rules of the Park.
 - No parking along public roadways.
 - Expand/improve current No Parking Signs.
 - History of the site.
 - Importance of the site.
 - To community members as well as wildlife.
 - Preservation of the sandspit in its natural state.
 - Protection of sandspit.
 - Camping (WWTA) rules.
- Enforcement of new signage rules should accompany the new improvements.
- Restrictions should be enforced on having uncontained fires (on the spit, etc.)
- Prohibition of fireworks within the park should be enforced.

Boy Scouts Organization

- The Boy Scouts have a long history and partnership with the site.
- Many site amenities were constructed by Scouts, including trails and picnic tables.
 - It is desired to retain some, if not all, of these amenities.
 - There is currently a bench at DeMolay that is dedicated to former member of the community (built by the Boy Scout troop that the individual was involved in)
 - Can the bench stay?
 - If the bench doesn't remain at DeMolay, can the family be notified and have the option to receive the bench?
 - Scouts and other volunteer interests will likely continue to be involved with the park, and should be considered, if possible, to assist with certain park improvements.
- Scout crossover ceremonies have been held at the park and may continue to be held there in the future.

Other

- Be sure to follow covenants on the property.
 - Consider access for DeMolay group – what are those?
 - Bathrooms, shower, overnight, etc. were mentioned.
 - Are there kitchen needs? Outdoor? BBQ?
- Coordination with the simultaneous shoreline restoration project is critical.
 - Do not separate the shoreline work from the park work done with this project.
 - There should be a cohesive design for the entire site.
- Coordination with the adjoining two parcels to the south (potential acquisition) is critical.
 - Even though there is not an agreement in place, if there is a possibility that adjoining parcels could be purchased by PenMet, they should be considered in the planning of any improvements.

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Non-Design/Master Plan

- How will these park improvements impact taxes for residents of the island?
- The former park host's presence provided maintenance and security of site benefits in the past.
 - Desirable to have someone on-site 24/7 to maintain and take care of the park.
 - Consider accommodation in the parking lot for a potential temporary Host trailer stall.
- Increased speeding has been observed in the summer, during times when non-residential use of the park is at a peak.
 - A traffic assessment should be considered to analyze the current and anticipated traffic impacts on the park.
- Speedbumps should be considered near the park (and possibly on the entire stretch from the bridge to the park) on Bella Bella Drive to slow traffic and promote pedestrian safety.
- Concerns were stated that by updating the site, specifically the parking lot, there will be an increase in the demand of the park and lead to overcrowding of the natural areas.
 - This would also have a negative effect on residents - do not want to attract more traffic into the area.
 - As such, improvements should be scaled accordingly to fit the current size and nature of the park.
 - Careful balance should be sought to relieve parking overflow on street, but not over-scale the amenities.
- A comment was made asking if other interventions should be considered, such as a pass to park in the lot?
- Access should be restricted for powerboats and jet skis to get close to the sandspit.
 - Suggested restriction 100+ yards offshore.

NEXT MEETING

The next public meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 24 at 5:30pm at the Nichols Community Center on Fox Island.

The next stakeholder group meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 10 at 1:00pm at the Nichols Community Center on Fox Island.

These are the minutes, as we understand them. If you have any comments or corrections, please contact Baumwelt immediately.