



Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

Public Hearing for Proposed Renaming of Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park

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Title

Public Hearing for Proposed Renaming of Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park

Recommended Action

Hold the public hearing and make a recommendation to the City Council to approve the proposed name of "Squaxin Park" for Priest Point Park.

Report

Issue:

This is an opportunity for PRAC to hear from the public and consider the Squaxin Island Tribe's proposed name of "Squaxin Park" for the 314 acre park known as Priest Point Park located at 2600 East Bay Drive NE.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Sylvana Niehuser, Director of Parks Planning and Maintenance, Parks, Arts and Recreation,
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Background and Analysis:

The Squaxin Island Tribe's habitation of what is now Olympia spans thousands of years. The ancestral families who lived and thrived here named the area Steh-Chass and occupied prosperous villages all along the shores and inlets of lower Puget Sound. Archeological findings of ancestral artifacts in the area suggest habitation by Squaxin ancestors since the retreat of the glaciers during the last Ice Age.

Squaxin Island history also indicates that the Tribe valued the area that is now Priest Point Park for ready access to fresh and salt water, the abundant salmon from the creeks, and rich clam beds. The Tribe frequented the shorelines and woods to gather, meet, and trade with other Tribes and Coast Salish peoples from the many inlets and waterways of Puget Sound. The Tribe's concern for stewardship of the park's natural and cultural resources continues today.

Despite its importance to the Squaxin Island Tribe for thousands of years, Priest Point Park was named after a small group of Catholic missionaries, the Oblate Fathers, who came to the area in 1848. They cleared the land, planted a large garden, built a chapel, and established the St. Joseph d'Olympia mission. The mission operated for just 12 years, until 1860.

Renaming Priest Point Park with a placename chosen by the Squaxin Island Tribe will be a reminder that this land was home to the Steh-Chass people long before it served as a mission or became a park. A Native name for the park will reflect its deeper history and enduring cultural significance, and appropriately acknowledge the Tribe's continued and valued presence in our community.

In October of 2021 the City of Olympia permanently raised the Squaxin Island Tribal Flag above City Hall and signed a renewed Accord between the Squaxin Island Tribe and the City of Olympia. The Accord demonstrates the commitment the two government bodies have made to working together toward common goals with honor and respect for each other's cultures. The renaming of Priest Point Park aligns with the Accord and the City's commitment to honor the Squaxin Island Tribe. The renaming to Squaxin Park will recognize the area as a place of importance to the past, present and future of the Tribe.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Priest Point Park is a well-known and cherished community space that both the Squaxin Island Tribe and Olympia community members value. The Squaxin Island Tribe's ancestors inhabited and utilized the resource rich area where the park is since the retreat of the glaciers during the last Ice Age. The Tribe has continued interest in the Park as a significant place to the people and culture of the tribe.

Options:

1. Hold a public hearing. Close the hearing and write a recommendation to Council to rename Priest Point Park to "Squaxin Park."
2. Hold a public hearing. Close the hearing and write a letter to Council that does not recommend renaming Priest Point Park to "Squaxin Park."

Financial Impact:

Update print materials and signage to reflect "Squaxin Park."

Attachments:

Resolution 21-74 of the Squaxin Island Tribal Council
Squaxin Island Tribe and City of Olympia Accord