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City Council

Approval of a Resolution Approving a Change of Name for Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park in Recognition of the Squaxin Island Tribe's Historical Habitation Of Olympia's Environs

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Title

Approval of a Resolution Approving a Change of Name for Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park in Recognition of the Squaxin Island Tribe's Historical Habitation Of Olympia's Environs

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Move to accept the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) recommendation to approve the Resolution to officially rename Priest Point Park at 2600 East Bay Drive NE as "Squaxin Park."

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve PRAC's recommendation to approve the Resolution to officially rename Priest Point Park at 2600 East Bay Drive NE as "Squaxin Park."

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve a Resolution to officially rename Priest Point Park at 2600 East Bay Drive NE as "Squaxin Park."

Staff Contact:

Sylvana Niehuser, Director of Parks Planning and Maintenance, Parks, Arts and Recreation, 360.753.8068

Presenter(s):

Sylvana Niehuser, Director of Parks Planning and Maintenance, Parks, Arts and Recreation
Charlene Krise, Squaxin Island Tribal Council Vice Chair

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 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.

On March 17, 2022, PRAC held a public hearing where comments given were in full support of renaming Priest Point Park to a name chosen by the Squaxin Island Tribe.

Following the hearing, PRAC voted unanimously to recommend renaming Priest Point Park to Squaxin Park as proposed by the Squaxin Island Tribe. Prior to the public hearing, staff received comments that were mostly in support of renaming the Park, however some community members expressed a desire to keep the name the same or focus resources on other issues.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The 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.

All public comments at the PRAC Public Hearing expressed support of the renaming of Priest Point Park to a name chosen by the Squaxin Island Tribe. Written comments received were both in favor and opposed to the renaming. The advisory committee's support was unanimous.

Options:

1. Approve the Resolution to officially rename Priest Point Park as Squaxin Park.
2. Do not approve the Resolution to rename Priest Point Park as Squaxin Park.

3. Request additional information or process to discuss the renaming of Priest Point Park.

Financial Impact:

The renaming of the Park has financial cost in signage replacement and staff time, however the cost is minimal as signage periodically needs updating and replacement as part of regular operating and maintenance costs.

Attachments:

Resolution
Squaxin Island Tribal Council Resolution
Accord
Presentation
Public Comments