

Kaiser Woods Park – Trail Development Plan

Responses to themes from comments

Comments/Concerns: What is the need for a park with mountain biking trails?

- Why is this needed here?
- Who proposed it, who is pushing for it, who went along with it?
- Already plenty of biking trails “back there” (timberland property). There is little need of this park at the current moment as they have hundreds of acres at present that they dominate.
- Isn't mountain biking supposed to be rough with hills and all and in a natural state? There are already graveled paths everywhere in this beautiful forest. Who will ultimately benefit from all this and why couldn't the money be used for something that ALL citizens can benefit from?

Response

The popularity of mountain biking is growing nationally and across the Pacific Northwest. Many Washington cities are providing opportunities for mountain biking in their park systems to expand and diversify recreational amenities for residents. Olympia parks provide around 23 miles of hiking trails but currently there are no designated mountain bike trails in the park system.

The 2016 Parks Plan described finding a location for mountain biking trails within City limits to increase access and use by placing trails closer to where people live. The 2016 Parks Plan also identified Kaiser Woods as a potential location for an off-road bike park and it was selected as the preferred location after an internal feasibility study.

There is a large user-built trail network on timber land property adjacent to Kaiser Woods Park. Those trails are on private property and at any point could no longer be available due to logging operations or a change in policy by the owner. Many of those trails are not designed for beginners and other components of the trail design (signage, erosion control, safety, etc.) have not been designed to meet trail standards. One of the goals of this project is to provide a permanent and safe location for people to learn a new sport on trails designed to meet their current skill level.

In addition, some bicyclists are currently using the park. This can present hazards where bicyclists and hikers share a trail that has not been designed for that specific use. Installing trail signage and designating some trails for only biking, some for only hiking and some for shared use will increase the safety for all park users.

Comments/Concerns: User Groups

- Current main use is hiking and changing that to biking.
- Why can't all the trails be shared-use?
- Hikers limited to outside borders

- Mt bikers are already loud and dangerously fast; unconcerned about safety for other users

Response

This project has gone through several rounds of community feedback. There have been many discussions regarding the pros and cons of shared-use trails for hikers and bikers. Many survey respondents stated that hikers wanted more access to trails and not be limited to the outside borders of the park. The proposed site plan shows a compromise of uses including more hiking trails than previous concepts. The majority of hiking trails in the plan are shared-use trails that both hikers and bikers can use to accommodate hikers request for more access to trails. The shared trail sections will be climbing only for bikers so the bike traffic will be slower moving. The downhill sections will be biking only to avoid collisions and maintain a safe distance between trail users of different speeds. In this proposed plan, hikers will have more trail mileage (2.9 miles) and access to the park than the existing trails provide (2.4 miles).

Comments/Concerns: Environmental

- Concern about what is going to happen to wetlands and streams
- Wet conditions on site
- Impact on wildlife concerns – wildlife sanctuary for deer and other wildlife
- Devasting to have even ONE tree removed.
- If you inspect the private land and park bike trails, they are damaging the soil composition, and exposing the root structure of beautiful old and second growth trees, furthering the likelihood of the need to remove the trees.
- There needs to be a full year analysis of the creatures, woods and waterways of the park as I am 100% positive that there are protected species residing there that will be drastically impacted by the park.
- The wetlands are larger than the map has accounted for. There is a stream that is also at the top of the park unaccounted for as well as a second seasonal pond missing from the map. There are areas within the proposed bike pump park that are too close to the winter wetland ponds etc.
- There are trails laid out that will impede on areas of the wetland and infringe well within the 150 boundary that is to be established on either side of the wetlands.
- We are asking that the trails be designed to be less impact full as the erosion and runoff will affect the slope we live on.

Response

There will be a 150-foot buffer along the northern and eastern park boundaries. This buffer will exceed the permitting requirements and will provide the requested buffer between trails and residential housing along the east boundary. The trail runoff will be fully dispersed on site with no new off-site impacts after development is complete. The buffer restrictions only apply to the building of new trails and not existing trails (the trail along the northern park boundary will remain in its current location).

The entire site has undergone a critical areas assessment (wetlands, streams, and geological hazards) by a certified wetland scientist and geotechnical engineer. Per the City of Olympia code, there is a 180-foot

buffer on wetlands and 150-foot buffer on streams. If the buffers overlap, the larger buffer is used which in this case is the wetland buffer. There will not be any new trails added to the buffers of the wetlands or streams. Any existing trails in the buffers will likely remain. There are certain criteria that are used to identify and categorize a wetland or stream. There may be wet areas or seasonal drainage within the park but if they don't meet all the criteria of a wetland or stream then it will not be classified as such.

The code does not require a wildlife impact assessment so that was not completed for this project.

From the beginning of this project, one of the goals of the trail development was to try to avoid removing trees for trail building unless they posed a threat/hazard to park users. Unfortunately, it has been discovered that there are several areas within the park where the trees are infected with Laminated Root Rot (LRR). LRR mostly affects Douglas Fir trees and causes root decay which will eventually cause the tree to die (and eventually fall over). The trees with LRR that are within striking distance of trails will need to be removed and that number is estimated to be approximately 40 trees. LRR spreads along the tree roots and may require other trees to be removed in the future if they become hazardous. In addition, approximately 30 additional trees are hazardous due to other causes and will be removed. Only six healthy trees have been identified to be removed where the parking lot will be located. These affected trees have been documented in the Soil and Vegetation Plan which is part of the permit application. The plan estimates that there are over 23,000 trees in the park so the proposed removals represent less than 0.5% of the trees.

Comments/Concerns: Access

- Park Drive access; There have already been multiple incidents on our street not even in the park. These are vehicles moving at a high rate of speed.
- Access from Kaiser Road

Response

At the beginning of the planning and community engagement process, Park Drive was the only vehicle access option to get into the park. Many Westbrook neighbors shared their concerns about cars, bikes, and pedestrians using Park Drive to access the park. In 2020, the Parks Department purchased parcels off Black Lake Boulevard to provide a new primary access into the park. The proposed access lane and parking lot will be located off Black Lake Boulevard. The Park Drive access will remain open as a secondary access into the park.

The Regional Transportation Plan shows a future road connection from Kaiser Road to Black Lake Boulevard along the western and southern boundary of Kaiser Woods Park. The future road connection will likely happen after the Hwy 101 interchange is constructed (in 10+ years). This connection is not part of our park project because it will be a multi-million-dollar project and outside of the park scope and budget. The City of Olympia and Thurston County held numerous discussions on access into Kaiser Woods Park from the north entrance off Kaiser Road but unfortunately it was not feasible due to a portion of the road being privately owned.

Comments/Concerns: Neighbor Concerns

- Fencing / Sound barriers / General crime
- Map doesn't say how big the buffer is between trail and property line
- Ken Lake private trail – how to get others not to use it? – a fence?
- I am worried about the houseless population that is already attempting to infiltrate my community attempting to overrun the park.
- My concerns include environmental impact on my neighborhood including Ken Lake (feces and urine into our water stream), drug use (used needles), tampering with bathrooms (extra cost to taxpayers), general crime, and other issues.

Response

The City of Olympia Parks Department does not provide fencing or sound barriers between park properties and neighboring properties. Parks staff oversee almost 1,500 acres of parkland with over 50 miles of borders. The City is unable to provide barriers between public and private property. Park neighbors may choose to put up fencing or other barriers on their own property if they wish. There will be a 150-foot buffer between the housing on the east side of the park and the nearest trail. There is a trail that enters into the Ken Lake neighborhood in the northeast corner of the park through a private property. It is up to the property owner to decide how they want to mark and operate that trail entrance.

The City of Olympia Parks Department has three full-time Park Rangers that work seven days a week. They are extremely responsive and help ensure our parks are safe and welcoming. Camping is not allowed on park property and if an encampment appears the Rangers can quickly assist with its removal. If there is an illegal activity or emergency happening in the park, park users are urged to call 911.

A single stall restroom facility is proposed near the parking area at the south end of the park and will be maintained daily and locked when the park is closed (dusk to dawn).

Comments/Concerns: Ethics

- EMBA – conflict of interest because they are the bikers and hikers that use the park
- The Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, which I believe will be the ONLY organization benefiting from this with more sponsors.

Response

The Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance (EMBA) is the nation's largest mountain bike association and is located in Washington State (North Bend). Their mission is to create, maintain and protect sustainable mountain biking opportunities in Washington State. They have designed and built numerous mountain bike parks in Washington State and have proven mountain bike trail building expertise. The City of Olympia hired EMBA to provide a professionally designed trail plan for Kaiser Woods Park that includes hiking and biking trails. EMBA prefers to work closely with established local mountain bike organizations

within each project area and therefore have been collaborating with Friends of Capitol Forest (FOCF) on design ideas.

When the time comes to construct the trails, access lane and parking lot, a competitive bidding process will be used. The lowest bidder who meets the criteria for being qualified to construct the park elements will be awarded the contracts. There will likely be two contracts – one for the trail and one for the access lane and parking lot.

Comments/Concerns: Proposed Plan

- Northern trail should not be mixed use – hiking only.
- It is unreasonable to expect that our neighborhood should be subject to crowds and events in a woods that is too steep for the proposed plan.
- There also needs to be thorough evaluations of similar parks in the same slope and size because from what I've seen and heard from the surrounding neighbors it is unsustainable and difficult to manage the privileged attitudes of the bikers.

Response

The northern trail is a shared use trail because it is a beginner perimeter trail that provides an opportunity for hikers and bikers to access the entire outer loop trail. It will be signed as shared use and constructed to be wide enough for good visibility.

This site has been evaluated by trail building professionals who have deemed the steep slopes beneficial for biking.

Comments/Concerns: Impact of biking concerns

- It is the only bike park in Thurston County and will therefore be attended in larger and larger number as the population continues to grow and expand.
- The addition of a high impact vehicular sport on the park is more than the land can sustainably support

Response

Capitol Forest is in Thurston County (outside of city limits) and provides trails for hiking and mountain biking. These will not be the only trails available in Thurston County for mountain biking.

Some parks are small in size (typically less than five acres) and designated as neighborhood parks. This park is much larger (70-acres) and as such is appropriate for wider community use. Had the City not purchased the property, there would likely have continued to be development proposals on the property, as there have been in the past and eventually a housing development may have been constructed as that is what is allowed by the zoning. The use as a biking and hiking park preserves the majority of the park in its natural form and is less impactful than a subdivision in terms of impervious surface, tree canopy and vehicle trips.

When this project goes out to bid, the contract will stipulate that the Contractor needs to have expertise in building trails that follow the Federal trail building guidelines. Trails built to these standards will last longer, require less maintenance, shed water, and limit erosion.