

**BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT
PUBLIC HEARING BLAKELY HARBOR PARK, SEPTEMBER 12, 2013
STRAWBERRY HILL CENTER**

CALL TO ORDER: A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm by Chair Swolgaard.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Lee Cross, Jay Kinney, Tom Swolgaard. Absent: Ken DeWitt, Kirk Robinson.

INTRODUCTION: Chair Swolgaard welcomed the public to the meeting on the proposed amendments to the Blakely Harbor Park Concept Plan. He said there would be an initial presentation of the proposal with an opportunity for public comment afterwards. No action will be taken tonight.

BACKGROUND: Senior Planner Perry Barrett provided a recap of the park, saying the first 20 acre portion was acquired in 1999 with subsequent portions acquired in later years. He said that while there are no conservation easements on the property, there are limits on what can be done with the property due to partial funding of the purchase through two WA State grants and the restrictions that came with these, as well as CC&R's that came with the property's acquisition. In addition to the grant funds, there was a significant fundraising effort to purchase the park, with almost \$1 million brought in through Land Trust donations. The south jetty was not a part of the initial purchase and was acquired later as a donation to the Park District. In 2010 the Yama portion of the park was conveyed by the City of BI to the Park District, a historical site with tremendous archeological significance. Perry Barrett emphasized the historical significance of the park as a former prominent Native American site that later became the site of the former Port Blakely Mill. The landscape architect firm, the Portico Group, developed the concept plan the District is currently operating under in 2001. During this meeting proposed changes to the plan will be addressed. As originally envisioned, trails in the park have expanded substantially with two trails developed to connect the park to Fort Ward Park and the nearby historic Blakely Cemetery. Restroom development as called out in the plan has been limited by archeological prohibitions. The bridge originally proposed at the mouth of Mac's Dam Creek in the 2001 plan has been determined to be too large and too costly to incorporate into this location. The Generator Building is included in the current plan for adaptive reuse and as an interpretative resource. Perry Barrett said it is a complex iconic structure, however the archeological studies done in 2008 and this year don't indicate it's a significant structure in terms of historical and archaeological value. He noted the significance of the pond area which was used to store logs during the time period of the historic mill town and has since gone into restoration mode. It is currently considered an Aquatic Conservancy.

PROJECT PRESENTATION:

As part of the vegetation plan, Landscape Architect Maryann Kirkby with Island Garden Design said she's been asked to look at the existing landscape on the north side of the park, and assess whether the effort to remove invasive species on the other side of the road can be duplicated on this side. She said the vegetation in this area of the park consists of native, historic ornamental and invasive plants. She said the challenge is to remove the invasive species without upsetting the native and historic ornamental vegetation. She believes it is feasible to do this and that this effort will open up and accentuate the viewpoints along the trail. Barb Trafton, who runs the Student Conservation Corps project, spoke about the work students have done to remove ivy from over 4000 trees in the park and said they will continue to provide help removing invasive species from the north area of the park.

Local landscape architect, Tim Goss, spoke about the work he has done with the Park District based on the original plan developed by the Portico Group. He said it is a good plan that recognizes the assets of park such as the significance of its history and the variety of its micro-climates. He said efforts have been modest to this point and have gone towards initial restroom efforts and circulation in the park resulting in two new parking areas and trail work directed towards a possible loop trail. Proposed revisions to the plan include: opening up vegetation through removal

of invasive species, following through with access to the overlook points (number slightly reduced), moving the location of the bridge over Mac's Dam Creek to a portion of the creek that is not so wide, spanning the jetties with a bridge in order to create a full loop trail, and creating barrier free trails that will accommodate wheelchairs.

Landscape architect Johnpaul Jones of the firm, Jones & Jones, discussed the bridge proposed for the jetties. He noted his personal love for the park, saying he has lived on the island since 1967 and knows it well. He said the rocks of the jetties would provide a good base for the bridge, and recommended that the bridge stay low to keep the view open. An arch would block the view and require a ramp. A pre-made bridge would eliminate the need for construction on-site; he recommended a wood deck with open sides. Kayakers would be able to pass under the bridge most of the time. He said this is a unique site, and that simple is best at this location. It would be best to make it look like it's been there a long time.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Kim Bottles, immediate neighbor to the park, spoke in strong support of the proposed plan amendments. He is very supportive of the jetty bridge, wants a bridge over Mac's Dam Creek, would like to see the Generator Building used, and thinks the loop trail is very positive. As the neighbor with the most exposed house to the park, he does not think the changes will affect the neighbors. He considers the park to be a positive asset to their property.

Jim Brennan, island resident and marine scientist, said he came primarily to listen but cautioned the District about going too far down the road with the project before engaging the City and the State to determine what the constraints will be. He has a long history of working in this region in the areas of salmon recovery and watershed planning; his focus is marine shorelines. This area has been identified as one the last best places on Bainbridge Island for its conservation and natural resource values. He questioned the accuracy of the map saying it does not delineate where the areas of high marsh are. He encouraged finding a way to merge this plan with the City's plans which designates this area as the number one area for its restoration plan. He said this is one of the best options for recovery in Puget Sound. He encouraged the District to relocate the Generator Building saying the salt marshes are the most sensitive area in this park. He is not opposed to the bridge across the jetties and encouraged the District to consider sea level rise since it currently overtops the jetties. At the same time he would love to see the jetties come out. Environmentally this is a very sensitive area that was heavily disturbed historically. It has since gone through 70-90 years of no disturbance and is healing itself. He realizes he looks through a different lens when he looks at sites like this, but felt it important to share his comments. Executive Director Lande asked if removing the jetties and building a bridge is an option. While not opposed to this, Jim Brennan said this would need to be discussed with the regulatory agencies. Commissioner Kinney asked what benefits there would be if the jetties were removed. Jim Brennan said removing the jetties would create more shallow water habitat for salmon recovery and promote salt marsh vegetation. Salt marshes have historically been damaged through development and are now known to have tremendous value environmentally. When asked his opinion about the removal of only one jetty as a compromise, he asked, "Why do restoration if you're only going to do it halfway."

Maryann Kirkby, island resident and landscape architect, said she thinks Jim Brennan is making some very valid points that should be paid attention to when analyzing this project.

Karen Salsbury, island resident who works for IslandWood, the nearby environmental education center, said the park is well used by the children attending their programs, many who come from King County and have had limited contact with the natural environment. She spoke about the benefits the park offers these children, saying they benefit from getting outside where they can move in conjunction with their observation of ecological movement, looking at artifacts and exploring the historical significance of the site, participating in conservation efforts with the Park District,

and learning about the importance of preserving wildlife and its habitat. She said the park is a magical place for these children.

Nate Thomas, island resident who participated on the citizen's committee as its chair during the development of the 2001 concept plan, said the master plan didn't present a particular recommendation for the Generator Building or the bridge spanning the jetties because more community conversation was needed prior to making a determination about these items. It was exciting for him to see this discussion begin tonight. He commented on the following things he would like done at the park: find more ways to keep people out of the salt marsh including repurposing the Generator Building as a possible way to reduce traffic; protect wildlife elements by developing viewpoints in a way that discourages people from getting to the beach; enhance the cultural aspects of the site; consider a bridge across the jetties with possible additional bridges in the future as the jetties are removed.

Johnpaul Jones confirmed that additional bridges are an option should the jetties be removed in the future. He commented on how this site is an example of how nature will heal itself when left alone and emphasized the importance of allowing this natural process to continue.

Robert Dashiell, island resident, said he generally likes what is on the plan and offered the following comments. Because the Generator Building is sitting on the salt marsh and attracts beer cans and the expression of all levels of art, he strongly encouraged that it be removed. He does not want to see the jetties removed and encouraged the District to do whatever it can to keep them. He would love to see the bridge across the jetties with a slight arch so rowboats and kayaks can go under it. He supports a bridge across Mac's Dam Creek so people don't have to go out into the road to access the other side of the park. He encouraged clean-up efforts of WA State Fish & Wildlife to focus on the beach's dead zone in front of the Generator Building saying this is a much higher priority than the jetties or the estuary.

Nate Thomas, offered clarification about the jetties saying they are not historical. The rocks were placed there in the 1970's by Port Blakely Tree Farm to prevent further erosion.

Frank Stowell, island resident for 30 years, said his family has always loved the Blakely Harbor area. He has a long history with the harbor saying shortly after he moved here he became involved with the South Bainbridge Community Association which fended off the Port Blakely Mill project. If this effort had not been successful in stopping the development, this park would not exist today and in its place there would be many houses. He then became involved with the Land Trust and its efforts to purchase the property. Once the property was acquired, he served on the citizen's committee that developed the 2001 concept plan. He stated the following concerns: 1) Environmental: better protection of the salt marsh is needed by making the trails more clear, blocking access points, and educating people on the importance of salt marshes; 2) Historical: teach people not only about the history of what happened there but also about the social context of a mill town that consisted of so many diverse immigrant communities; 3) Recreational: promote movement around the park to facilitate walking, fishing, birding, boating; the bridge across the jetties (which he supports) is an example of this.

Alan Black, long time resident who has lived on the island since 1931, spoke in support of the plan amendments and offered comments based on his experience of growing up in the Blakely Harbor area. As a child, he went to Pleasant Beach School in the latter part of the 1930's. On the way home, the children occasionally persuaded the bus driver to drop them off at the Port Blakely general store owned by Jack and Nora Seaborn. They were a wonderful couple, particularly Nora Seaborn, who would periodically sneak them an all day sucker. When they were dropped off like this, they would have to walk the rest of the way home. After buying their ice cream, they would try to avoid doing the walk all around the harbor to get home. If the tide was moderately low, the log booms that were brought into the

harbor for shelter during the winter became grounded on each side of the harbor. The children would walk across the water hopping from log to another. In those days, logs came from old growth trees and the large Douglas firs provided the best footing, but periodically they would hit the smaller ones that were predisposed to spin. "And that" he said, "was the challenge". He said their families hated them to do this, so they tended to lie a little. He said he has a lot of history with this pond and he loves it. One of the things he is most fond of is watching the water flow through the gap between the jetties. He said there is something magic about flowing water, and in this instance the flow of water is very different from that of a stream. This kind of an amenity along a trail is so special and unique it is unlikely to be found anywhere else. He said perhaps this is something we as islanders can offer to others.

Richard Swanson, island resident who lives near the park up from 3-T road supported a slight arch on the bridge so there would be more clearance underneath it. A flat bridge would prohibit access to the mill pond for paddle boards and other water devices. An arch to the bridge would also add beauty. He is in favor of the overall plan, the bridge across the jetties, and the circular walkway. He thinks the Generator Building is an attractive nuisance and should be taken down since it is in the salt marsh and also a destination causing people to travel across the salt marsh to it. He suggested relocating the building to a more appropriate place in the park, or building a new structure if one is needed. He suggested making the trail on the south side of 3-T road more evident so people will know where to walk.

Trina LaRoche, island resident and park neighbor for 18 years, said she uses the park everyday and loves this plan. She said a way to take pressure off the salt marsh might be to utilize the meadow more and encourage greater use of it by opening up the trees so there are better views of the water. She said it would be nice to have a vista of the park from Country Club Road and suggested removing the blackberry bushes along the street. This would open up the park and might encourage children to use the meadow to play ball and other games. She also likes the idea of clearing out some of the pilings in front of the Generator Building to make it more attractive.

Johnpaul Jones, commented on the plaques done by the Historical Museum for The Waypoint, saying they do much to preserve the richness of the island's history. If the Generator Building is torn down, he said it is important to do something that will preserve the site's history.

Susan Bottles, immediate neighbor to the park, said the area is much safer than it used to be since the Park District took on the park. She asked if the District would like to be contacted when there are things taking place in the park at the Generator Building or elsewhere that might be dangerous or unsafe. Executive Director Terry Lande indicated a definite yes to her question.

Executive Director Lande commented on the need to do something about the Generator Building and not put it off for future generations to deal with. He said removal of the building cannot be addressed as a possibility unless there is an amendment to the concept plan that indicates this is an option. He asked how many people were in favor of including the removal of the Generator Building on the plan as a possibility. There was enthusiasm for this suggestion and no one in the room expressed opposition to this. It was concluded that removal of the structure would be added to the concept plan as another option for the Generator Building in addition to the existing option of restoring it for interpretative purposes.

Executive Director Lande also asked who in the room likes the bridge across the jetties. All hands raised were in support of the bridge. No hands were raised in opposition to the bridge.

Commissioner Kinney asked how people felt about removing the jetties. People responded saying it sounds very expensive and could likely stop the entire project. They asked Johnpaul Jones for his thoughts on this. He said there could not be a bridge this long without pilings to support it. The cost to do a bridge this long with pilings would

increase the cost 3-4 times. He said the bridge he has suggested for spanning the jetties could accommodate a slight arch, but it cannot be too great or it will not be ADA accessible.

Robert Dashiell said signage can obstruct views and asked that interpretative signage be limited to specific areas like kiosks as opposed to being installed all throughout the natural areas.

Frank Stowell wondered if stories about the park's history could be accessible via Smart Phones. He also suggested developing stewards of the park who are informed of the park's history and could be available on the site to tell it.

Barb Trafton asked if the concrete steps on the jetties could be preserved since they provide swimmers with a good way to access the water.

Commissioner Cross expressed delight with everyone who attended the meeting saying many constructive ideas were offered.

Chair Swolgaard thanked everyone for coming. Executive Director Lande said the amendments to the concept plan will go to the Board for approval next Thursday on September 19.

MEETING ADJOURNED at 7:50 pm.

Elizabeth R. Shepherd
Terry M. Lande
BAINBRIDGE ISLAND METROPOLITAN
PARK & RECREATION DISTRICT

BY: 

John Thomas Swolgaard

BY: 

Jay C. Kinney


BY: _____

Lee Cross

BY: 

Kenneth R. DeWitt

ATTEST:


Kirk B. Robinson