



Sakai Park Development

The Bainbridge Island Metro Park & Recreation District would like to clarify specific points regarding the purchase and possible development of Sakai Park.

Sakai Park was purchased in 2015 with a nearly \$6 million voter-approved bond and was later awarded a \$1 million grant from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The RCO grant funding was applied retroactively to the property acquisition, not the development, of the Sakai Park property. Since that time, the Park District has been audited by the State of Washington, which found no misuse of funds. RCO has determined that the Sakai Park grant is compliant with their criteria and has no concerns about the use of funds.

The plan for the development of the Sakai Park property, from the time of purchase to the present, has always included a mix of passive and active recreational uses that meet the community's needs. No specific uses or amenities were planned or promised at the time of purchase. Thus, a Sakai Park planning process was initiated following the purchase of the property. This planning process ultimately identified various community recreational needs and how those might be met there. This process began in 2016 and culminated in a feasibility study in June 2019. The feasibility study identified potential projects with rough-cost estimates for construction and operation.

The cost for the build-out of Sakai Park facilities was estimated at that time (2019) at \$52 million, including \$30 million for a stand-alone fieldhouse. Built features, such as the fieldhouse, are not eligible for RCO grants and would require the Park District to return to voters for a significant bond levy.

In early 2020, the Park District prepared to set up a citizen advisory committee to review the plan and determine the next steps of what would be feasible to move forward with. Shortly after beginning to solicit for committee membership, COVID-19 became a central focus of the entire world. The Park District put many protocols in place to protect staff and patrons and keep as many recreational opportunities in place as possible. The committee solicitation was temporarily suspended due to the pandemic. The Park District felt that discussing large, bond-dependent projects at that time was impractical and inadvisable.

In 2021, the Park District took the opportunity to purchase the Bainbridge Athletic Club on Koura Road, creating the Bainbridge Island Recreation Center (BIRC). BIRC met many community needs for \$13 million, a fraction of the projected facilities cost at Sakai Park, which would be paid primarily from fees paid by BIRC's regular users without needing to complete another bond levy.

Today, BIRC meets many needs identified during the Sakai Park planning process, including indoor tennis and pickleball, multi-purpose sports courts (such as volleyball, basketball, and other fieldhouse activities), exercise and fitness gyms, meeting rooms and rentable space, plus an outdoor swimming pool. The facility is more accessible to the public than it was previously, with changes that include eliminating sign-up fees, reducing restrictions on day use, adding park programming for kids and open gym times, increasing accessibility for seniors, and participating in the Helpline House program.

The Park District has always maintained its commitment to developing passive and active uses at Sakai Park. With the pandemic subsiding and given the recreational offerings at BIRC and elsewhere, discussions are underway for the potential construction of tennis courts at Sakai Park. At the next Board meeting, there will be an update on Sakai Park, including ideas for possible future active uses there. Consistent with its original intent, the Park District remains committed to developing Sakai Park for passive and active recreational uses that complement other parks and amenities to meet community needs.