



MEMORANDUM

Date: July 17, 2015
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Susan Golub, Manager, Policy and Performance Unit
Subject: Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines – Revisions

Requested Board Action

This briefing paper describes proposed changes to the Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines. No action from the Board is requested at the July 23 meeting; staff will request a recommendation from the Board in September.

Project Background

During the review process for the Cheasty Pedestrian and Mountain Bike Trail Pilot Project, it became clear that Seattle Parks and Recreation did not have established criteria to evaluate a use proposed for a Natural Area or Greenbelt. In order to have criteria in place for future proposals, Parks and Recreation initiated the process to develop Natural Area and Greenbelt Supplemental Use Guidelines.

The intent of the Guidelines is to evaluate the potential impacts of uses proposed for Natural Areas and Greenbelts. The checklist proposed for this evaluation requests information in the following categories:

1. Habitat
2. Environmental Preservation
3. Education, Access and Public Safety
4. Recreation, and
5. Acquisition

It is the underpinning of the Use Guidelines that a decision whether to move forward with a proposed use must balance all of these factors.

(Additional information, including a review of the public outreach process, was provided in the June 25, 2015 briefing paper, available at: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks-and-recreation/about-us/board-of-park-commissioners>)

Proposed Revisions

Based on comments received at the Park Board's June 25 meeting, and written comments, staff have revised the Use Guidelines.

Preamble Added: The City has been blessed by the incredible efforts of thousands of volunteers working to restore the urban forest, with over 700,000 hours spent caring for the land. A preamble has been added to celebrate this effort and make clear that Parks and Recreation’s promulgation of the Use Guidelines will not detract from past or future restoration efforts.

4.0 Policy Section: This section was revised to state that the Use Guidelines will *not* supersede adopted ordinances or policies. The Use Guidelines add guidance for implementing existing policies/regulations, but do not supersede them.

Process Illustration Added: To help explain the process for approving new uses in Natural Areas and Greenbelts, including review by the Park Board, the Guidelines now include a chart showing the path to approval/denial for a proposal.

Checklist Changes:

- Clarified the proponent’s responsibility to provide a detailed proposal description and explain how the “yes” responses are supported
- Added Environmental Preservation Section
- Added criteria to Recreation Section
 - asking about community support for the proposal, and
 - asking if alternate locations have been considered, including non-Parks and Recreation property

What Hasn’t Changed

A major point of those who oppose the proposed Use Guidelines is that the Guidelines are inconsistent with the City’s 1993 Greenspaces Policy. The 1993 Policy allows “low impact activities” in greenspaces, but does not specify what types of uses qualify as low impact. The proposed Guidelines interpret “low impact” to mean those activities with a low impact on the environment, leaving the decision on which uses will be allowed to individual proposal evaluation pursuant to the criteria.

Keeping the door open to a range of uses with a low impact on habitat and forest preservation remains consistent with the Parks and Recreation position, as stated in the proposed Preamble of the Guidelines, to balance:

- Preserving and enhancing forest habitat, tree canopy and water quality,
- Increasing environmental education and stewardship,
- Getting youth engaged and involved in their environment,
- Providing recreation opportunities for our changing needs,
- Ensuring equitable access to all park land, including Natural Areas and Greenbelts, and
- Enhancing positive use.

Schedule

July 23, 2015: Park Board discussion of Natural Area and Greenbelt Use Guidelines

September 10 or 24: Park Board recommendation

Additional Information

susanne.rockwell@seattle.gov

Project web site: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/projects/NaturalAreaGreenbeltUse/default.htm>