

IN CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION NO. 19-4989, FOR THE PURPOSE OF
APPROVING THE GABBERT BUTTE NATURE PARK MASTER PLAN

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Department: Parks and Nature

Presenters: Dan Moeller; Olena Turula
Length: 15 minutes

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ISSUE STATEMENT

This matter involves Metro Council consideration of the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan. Gabbert Butte is an ancient volcanic lava dome in the East Buttes and one of six buttes in Gresham. Gabbert Butte is important habitat for fish and wildlife and provides clean, cool water to Johnson Creek. It also offers opportunities to walk, run, bike ride or find respite and renewal in nature.

Metro and the City of Gresham both own land in the planning area and have partnered to engage the public and develop the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan. The master plan will guide future access and development of Gabbert Butte Nature Park.

The master plan was developed in collaboration with the Connect with Nature initiative, a partnership between Metro and a coalition of community organizations serving people of color. The Connect with Nature Resource Guide documents the initiative's engagement model, and is available as a resource for other agencies and to advance meaningful engagement with communities of color and historically marginalized groups. The guide will be highlighted in the presentation.

ACTION REQUESTED

Metro Council is asked to approve the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan.

IDENTIFIED POLICY OUTCOMES

Improved access and trail connectivity in the East Buttes, which include Gabbert Butte, was identified as one of the 2013 levy access improvement projects in the five-year work-plan. The Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan will guide development of access and trail improvements at Gabbert Butte, which is a key natural area for forest habitat and connectivity in the East Buttes.

Following adoption of the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan, Metro will enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for the development and management of the site with

the City of Gresham, and Metro will lead design and development of the nature park. Construction of Phase 1 improvements is expected to take place as early as fiscal year 2021.

Once it is open to the public, Metro will operate and manage the nature park.

POLICY QUESTION

This request is to further the Parks and Nature System Plan and mission by providing connections to nature close to home and deliver a project made possible by the 2006 Metro Parks and Nature bond and 2013 Natural Areas Levy.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR COUNCIL TO CONSIDER

There are three options for Council to consider: adopt the master plan as presented, reject the master plan, or direct staff to evaluate additional considerations.

If Council approves the resolution and adopts the master plan, staff would thereafter take steps to design, engineer, permit and construct the nature park.

If Council directs staff to evaluate additional alternatives, staff would undergo that effort and bring back an amended master plan for future Council consideration. Doing so would delay design and construction of the nature park.

If Council rejected the master plan, staff would not proceed with design and construction of the nature park.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends the Metro Council adopt Resolution No. 19-4989 and the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan

STRATEGIC CONTEXT & FRAMING COUNCIL DISCUSSION

This project represents a partnership between Metro and the City of Gresham. On June 4, 2019 the City of Gresham unanimously adopted the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan.

Parks and Nature System Plan

The Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan supports Parks and Nature's mission to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and provide opportunities for people to enjoy nature close to home through a connected system of parks, trails and natural areas.

Racial Equity Goals

The master plan was developed in collaboration with the Connect with Nature initiative, a partnership between Metro and a team of community organizations serving people of

color. Connect with Nature engaged with communities of color to learn how to more inclusively plan and design parks and natural areas so they serve the needs of communities of color.

Connect with Nature included multilingual workshops and site visits focused on planning for Gabbert Butte. The workshops were also designed to inform work throughout Metro's system of parks and natural areas. Outcomes of Connect with Nature are documented in the Connect with Nature Resource Guide, and helped shape the master plan for Gabbert Butte Nature Park. Lessons from Connect with Nature workshops also influenced and are reflected in Parks and Nature's Racial Equity Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The guide is intended to be a resource for agencies and organizations to lead with equity and center people of color in park planning and community engagement.

Known Opposition

1) Opposition to Title 10 Pet Policy:

Metro's Title 10 pet policy will be enforced consistent with all other Metro-managed natural areas. Some individuals have raised concerns about the Plan because the pet policy will be enforced and they want to be able to walk their dogs throughout the Nature Park.

There is City owned right-of-way within the site that will continue to be managed by the City, and where Title 10 regulations do not apply. Pets are and will be allowed on the City's right-of-way.

In November 2017, Metro's Title 10 Pet Policy was unanimously supported by a community stakeholder table composed of advocates for wildlife, dog walking and recreation as well as representatives from communities of color.

2) Opposition to allowing off-road cycling on trails:

The Plan recommends a system of multi-use trails that are designed and built to safely accommodate shared use by hikers and off-road cyclists. Concerns have been raised regarding the compatibility of off-road cyclists and hikers sharing trails. Individuals have voiced opposition to the Plan's proposal for trails that accommodate off-road cycling, suggesting that comprehensive planning for managing off-road cycling in Portland, Gresham and the Metro region is needed first. The nature of the concerns are public safety, impacts on wildlife habitat, and increased spread of invasive species.

Numerous examples of multi-use trails throughout the Pacific Northwest demonstrate that with good trail design, shared use trails can be safe and enjoyable for all visitors. By implementing best practices for trail construction, signs and promoting basic trail etiquette, most conflicts can be avoided and people can have safe and satisfying experiences.

There are always tradeoffs to consider when inviting public access in any natural area, and this tension is inherent in Parks and Nature's mission to protect water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and create opportunities for people to enjoy nature. Providing people with access to nature has well-documented benefits including physical, psychological and spiritual health. At the same time, recreational use of natural areas, whether on foot or by bike has increased impacts to habitat and wildlife. This Plan considers access to Gabbert Butte in context of nearby natural areas and urban neighborhoods, and proactively plans for trails that safely provide for these multiple uses at Gabbert Butte, while also continuing to limit public access to nearby natural areas.

In 2017 Metro completed a comprehensive recreation ecology literature review, analyzing over 500 articles researching the effects of trails and trail uses on wildlife, habitat, and trail quality, including comparing the impacts of trail use by hikers, off-road cyclists, and equestrians.

The recreation ecology literature review found that while the specific impacts from hikers and off-road cyclists are nuanced, the level of impacts are similar, the most impact is caused by initial trail construction regardless of use. Good trail design minimizes impacts to habitat and wildlife, as well as conflicts between trail uses.

As standard practice, Metro uses the most current trail design and construction best practices and works with professional trail designers and contractors to build trails that are safe, long lasting, minimize impacts to habitat and wildlife and create a quality visitor experience. Metro aggressively and effectively manages invasive species.

Based on concerns from the public about the Plan, the narrative was revised to more explicitly describe these standard best practices.

Known Support

Gresham City Council unanimously adopted the plan by resolution on June 4, 2019.

Gresham Butte Neighborhood Association

Connect with Nature participants

Gabbert Butte Stakeholder Advisory Committee:

Whitney Bailey (East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District)

Regina Blake (East County Windwalkers)

Jim Buck (Gresham Butte Neighborhood Association)

Kat Conard (neighbor)

Louise Dix (East County Windwalkers)

Jason Howard (Johnson Creek Watershed Council)

Isatou Jallow (Connect with Nature)

Ruth Jensen (Connect with Nature)

Francis Kham (Connect with Nature)

Micah Meskel (Portland Audubon)

Daisy Nguyen (Connect with Nature)

Phil Nosler (neighbor, West Bliss Butte site steward)

Brent Sullivan (Northwest Trail Alliance)

Hoan Tran (Connect with Nature)

Urban Greenspaces Institute

Johnson Creek Watershed Council

Northwest Trail Alliance

Portland Audubon support the plan overall, but noted opposition to two of the trail segments.

Legal Antecedents

East Buttes is identified in the 2013 Parks and Natural Areas Levy as an access project. Completion of this project is an effort to complete the obligation of the levy.

Anticipated Effects

Following adoption of the Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan, Metro will enter into an IGA with the City of Gresham, and Metro will lead development of the nature park, including working with a consultant team to produce design and construction documents, pursue land-use approval and site development permits from the City of Gresham, and construct Phase 1 improvements which are expected to take place in fiscal year 2021/22.

Financial Implications (current year and ongoing)

The 2006 Natural Areas Bond Measure and 2013 Parks and Natural Areas Levy funded this access master plan and upcoming design and construction work.

Preliminary cost exercises estimate that construction of all elements in this access master plan will cost approximately \$4.9 to \$5.7 million. Parks and Nature has identified \$2 million for land use approval, design and construction from the 2006 Natural Areas Bond Measure. Alternative funding sources, such as grants, may also be pursued to help provide additional funding for construction. When design and construction documents are complete, a phase 1 construction plan will be developed to match available dollars.

The addition of this nature park to Metro's portfolio will increase overall park operations costs. The costs of ongoing operation and maintenance are expected to be on par with other nature parks in Metro's portfolio.

BACKGROUND

Gabbert Butte is an ancient volcanic lava dome in the East Buttes and one of six buttes in Gresham. Gabbert Butte offers opportunities to be in nature, to walk, run or bike ride, or find respite and renewal.

Natural areas like Gabbert Butte protect important forest habitat. Water from upland springs and rainfall on Gabbert Butte flows into tributaries of Johnson Creek. The region's most urban stream, Johnson Creek is a focus of salmon and lamprey recovery in the region and the natural area forests in the East Buttes are critical to this effort.

Gabbert Butte is surrounded by single-family residential neighborhoods to the east and west and natural areas to the north and south. Near the edge of the growing urban area,

Gabbert Butte offers opportunities for improved trail connectivity between urban neighborhoods and natural areas.

The Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan is critical to guide increased public access to the site and to proactively protect water quality and wildlife habitat. The master plan looks at Gabbert Butte as part of a broader system of open space, trails, and neighborhoods and aims to protect a regional resource, provide opportunities to experience nature, and celebrate the Gabbert Butte landscape.

In early 2017, Metro and City staff began working with community members, stakeholders and regional partners to create a master plan to guide public access improvements at Gabbert Butte.

The plan was shaped by Metro Parks and Nature and City of Gresham staff along with extensive public outreach, open houses, stakeholder meetings, Connect with Nature workshops, presentations, tours and surveys. These outreach efforts specifically engaged people of color, members of the community and regional stakeholders.

The master plan establishes project goals and objectives, describes site resources and conditions and summarizes the planning process. It outlines the site conservation strategy and identifies approximate access and trail locations. Recommended improvements include an entrance, including a gated parking lot, restrooms, picnic tables and shelters and an abilities trail, proposed on a parcel owned by the City, and a recommended network of unpaved trails for hikers and off-road cyclists that traverse parcels owned by both agencies. Also, opportunities to discover, learn about and experience nature at Gabbert Butte are identified. Metro intends to develop access to Gabbert Butte in a sensitive way that results in healthy habitats and continued protection of the many ecological benefits the site provides for the region.

Metro will fund the design and construction of the Nature Park and lead these efforts in partnership with the City. Once the Nature Park is built and open to the public, Metro will manage and maintain the developed park facilities, trails and natural resources.

The East Buttes provide scenic views and important wildlife habitat and are treasured natural landmarks. The Gabbert Butte Nature Park Master Plan is the next step in inviting visitors to walk or ride through the forest, listen to song birds, view native flowers and enjoy being outside with family and friends.

ATTACHMENTS

None