



Seattle City Council

Central Staff - Memorandum

Date: August 31, 2015

To: Sally Bagshaw – Chair, Seattle Public Utilities and Neighborhoods Committee
Kshama Sawant—Vice-Chair
Bruce Harrell—Member

From: Peter Lindsay, City Council Central Staff

Subject: **C.B. 118506– A bill amending Section 5 of Ordinance 124546 relating to the Cheasty Greenspace Bike and Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project**

Council Bill 118506 amends Section 5 of [Ordinance 124546](#) pertaining to the Cheasty Greenspace Bike and Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project and removes the design approval requirement to implement the \$100,000 Neighborhood Matching Funds grant.

This memo (1) provides background on the Cheasty Greenspace and the Department of Parks and Recreation’s (DPR’s) pilot project planned for the property, (2) explains the effect of the proposed legislation, (3) discusses a few of the policy considerations, (4) and recommends passage of CB 118506.

Project Background

The Cheasty Greenspace Bike and Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project (the Project) is a DPR-sponsored project scoped to create a bicycle and pedestrian trail system within the Cheasty Greenspace located between Cheasty Boulevard South, South Columbian Way and Rainier Vista – a Seattle Housing Authority mixed-income community (see Attachment A for context). DPR seeks to construct a separated bike and pedestrian trail system roughly fitting within and conforming to the perimeter of the greenspace. According to DPR, the trail system will give residents in the community:

- new recreational opportunities for all age levels;
- a connection to the environment;
- new connections to schools, parks and adjacent neighborhoods;
- more oversight of illegal activities such as camping and dumping and;
- exposure to restoration activities.

The Cheasty Greenspace is a 40+-acre, unimproved DPR owned property located in southeast Seattle between the Rainier Valley and Beacon Hill neighborhoods. The greenspace is a

remnant of a previously logged forest along the eastside of north Beacon Hill and contains habitat for a number of native plant and animal species. The greenspace also contains a number of wetlands, and steep slopes dominate the terrain especially in the vicinity of Cheasty Boulevard South.

The Cheasty Greenspace was purchased in phases during the late 80s and early 90s for the purpose of preserving green and open spaces in Seattle as part of the Open Space and Greenbelt Opportunity Fund in partnership with King County Council. In February 1993, Council adopted [Resolution 28653](#) recommending specific boundaries for a number of acquisition eligible properties throughout Seattle including the property known as the Cheasty Greenspace. The purpose of the resolution was to identify and preserve natural areas for habitat, open space and recreation. At the time, development pressure was quite high throughout the metropolitan area and local municipalities realized that a focused and sustained effort was required to preserve remaining natural areas and provide greenbelt corridors. The resolution stated that active uses for greenbelts were permitted as long as those uses were low impact in nature. Since the City's attention was primarily on preservation, the specific future uses of the properties were not well defined. Notably, the resolution is silent on the kinds of uses that would be categorized as low impact and conversely, the types of uses that would be categorized as high impact.

Initially managed by the Finance and Administrative Service Department, ownership of the 40+ acre Cheasty Greenspace was transferred to DPR in 2000 with the stipulation that the property be used for open space, parks and recreation. Subsequent to the transfer of the Cheasty, DPR developed a vegetation management plan to abate invasive plant species and restore the forest and habitat within the greenspace. Community volunteer efforts are focused primarily on restoring the natural habitat and removing invasive species. Until a community-sponsored proposal for a mountain bike trail system was initiated in 2013, little activity occurred except for volunteer restoration.

Ordinance 124546

In early 2014, the DPR submitted a grant proposal to the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) requesting \$100,000 from the Neighborhood Matching Fund (NMF) Large Projects program to fund a bike and pedestrian trail system in the Cheasty Greenspace. The NMF provides grant funds for community-backed projects throughout Seattle's neighborhoods. The Project represented one of ten NMF projects recommended in Ordinance 124546. At Full Council the legislation was amended to effectively proviso the \$100,000 in NMF funds until the following conditions were met:

- DPR was to develop and conduct a full public process around the schematic design. The Council expected more engagement with community and a diverse group of stakeholders both in interest and income levels.
- DPR was to treat the project as a pilot and establish evaluation criteria using the same public process developed for review of design options.

- DPR was to return to the City Council with a final schematic design for pedestrians and bikes that utilized the perimeter of the Cheasty Greenspace.

The amendment indicated that the \$100,000 NMF grant would be “implemented” once DPR presented the pilot project evaluation criteria and the schematic design was approved by the Council.

DPR Response - Clerk File 314317

Per Council direction, DPR submitted Clerk File 314317 in July of 2015. The Clerk File contains the recommended schematic design for the Project, the pilot project evaluation criteria and a report on the public process that formulated both deliverables. Effectively, the file represents the body of work required by the Council in Section 5 of Ordinance 124546.

Project Advisory Team Process

DPR was charged with creating a public process to develop a proposed schematic design for the bike and pedestrian trail system. DPR formed a Project Advisory Team (PAT) of 12 neighborhood residents. The PAT met five times to discuss the appropriate design criteria and review DPR’s pilot project evaluation criteria. DPR staff and consultants provided content and facilitated meetings to assist the PAT during their deliberations. On February 19 the PAT voted to recommend the schematic design and evaluation criteria to the Board of Parks Commissioners. The Board of Commissioners met on May 28 and recommended the pilot project and evaluation criteria to the Parks Superintendent.

PAT-recommended Schematic Design

The Project schematic design (see Attachment A) envisions a separated loop trail system for bikes and pedestrians. The bike trail will be one-way while the pedestrian trail will accommodate traffic in either direction. DPR used the International Mountain Bike Association design criteria for mountain bike trails to develop the native mineral soil design concept. The pedestrian trail parallels the bike facility except when it reaches the western edge of the greenspace where it crosses Cheasty Boulevard South and uses an existing trail to complete the loop. The pedestrian trail configuration is a design compromise driven by the steep slopes within the greenspace. Council’s included specific language in Ordinance 124645 requesting DPR design a multi-use trail that followed the perimeter of the greenspace. Due to a concerns over safety, DPR is recommending two separate trail systems--one for pedestrians and one for bicycles. Although a departure from the Council’s guidance for a single multi-use trail, DPR is able to meet many of its goals with the PAT-recommended configuration.

PAT-recommended Evaluation Criteria

As requested by Council, DPR developed a list of evaluation criteria to measure the impacts of the Project. DPR developed three key categories containing conceptual criteria to measure the impacts following the completion of construction. DPR estimates that a 15-month assessment period is sufficient to determine impacts related to the Project. Table 1 summarizes the

categories and elements approved by the PAT and endorsed by the Board of Parks Commissioners.

Table 1: Summary of Cheasty Bike and Pedestrian Trail Pilot Project Evaluation Criteria

as approved by the PAT on March 29, 2015

Environmental

Wetlands – DPR will look for evidence of damage to wetlands and any degradation of water quality. DPR personnel will provide inspection services.

Erosion control – DPR will monitor for erosion within the greenspace and near the project site. Slide events must be addressed within 48 hours following report to DPR.

Habitat disturbance—In general, DPR will look for evidence of damage to existing plants and animals within the greenspace that can be attributed to project related activities.

Social

Parking – Parking, especially along Cheasty Boulevard South was a significant concern to some residents. DPR will monitor and report on the project’s parking impacts on the local community.

Litter—DPR believes that activating the space will reduce dumping events and illegal encampments. DPR will rely on members of the community to report litter and vandalism. Volunteers have 14 days to address any damage or debris found in the greenspace.

Safety-- The nature and frequency of any accidents occurring on the trail system will be recorded by DPR and reported back to the Council.

Maintenance

Maintenance costs—DPR is responsible for collecting maintenance data on the structures and trails making up both bike and pedestrian facilities.

Council Bill 118506

As mentioned in the introduction, CB 118506 amends CB 124546, removing the requirement that the Council vote on the final schematic design proposed by DPR. Approval of the bill allows DON to implement the \$100,000 NMF grant approved in 2014. Disapproval of the bill means that CB 124546 remains intact and DPR would be required to return to the Council for a vote on the schematic design.

Policy Considerations

Compliance with existing greenspace and open space policies: One of the key policy considerations is whether the concept of a mountain bike facility is consistent with the City’s Greenspaces and Open Spaces policies articulated most clearly in Council Resolution 28653. The resolution is the Council’s guiding policy document for green and open spaces in the City and states that active uses are allowed in greenspaces as long as they are low impact in nature.

To date, DPR has not developed a bicycle facility within a categorized greenspace, however the resolution does not articulate a narrow and limited definition of allowed low impact uses. Instead, the resolution provides a few examples of allowed uses such as pea patches and walking paths.

Hearing the Council's concerns about developing recreational uses in greenspaces, DPR has developed a new tool to review future proposals. DPR's proposed [Supplemental Use Guidelines](#) are essentially a checklist of conditions to be noted and considered by any future project that may want to change the use of greenspaces. The Supplemental Use Guidelines are currently under review by the Board of Park Commissioners. It is difficult to say definitively whether bike trails are low impact in nature since there is no precedent for the activity in the context of a greenspace and ultimately it will be up to each Councilmember to decide if the facilities described in the schematic design go beyond the scope of intended uses for greenspaces.

Construction in critical areas: The Cheasty Greenspace contains a number of environmentally critical areas such as wetlands and steep slopes. [Seattle Municipal Chapter 25.090](#) defines the designated critical areas in Seattle, and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD) is responsible for enforcing the Code to protect these areas. Specifically, the Project calls for construction of a native soil trail system sufficiently wide to allow mountain bikes and pedestrians to travel through the greenspace. Since there are wetlands within the greenspace, DPR plans to construct elevated boardwalk structures on pin piles to span sensitive areas. Retaining walls are anticipated in some areas bordering steep slopes. Similar improvements have been made to other DPR greenspace pedestrian trail systems and are not unique to the Project. Construction within critical areas is allowed and DPD will be responsible for ensuring that DPR conforms to all applicable laws and requirements noted in DPR's permit conditions.

Staff Recommendation

Hearing the Council's concerns, DPR has made a faithful and responsive effort to comply with the requirements set forth in Ordinance 124546. Seattle is a growing City, with about 120,000 new residents expected by 2030. To meet the increased pressure for recreation opportunities in the built environment, novel uses of existing properties deserve consideration. Not all proposals will or should succeed and DPR understands they are breaking new ground, hence development of a pilot project and a 15-month evaluation period. The Project fits with the Council's desire to provide healthy recreational choices, connect neighborhoods and encourage habitat restoration. Staff recommends passage of Council Bill 118506.