

City of Tacoma

Mason Gulch Public Meeting

Meeting Notes

March 30, 2016

University of Puget Sound, Rasmussen Rotunda

Staff and Consultants

Claire Hoffman, ESA

Curtis LaPierre, ESA

Garrett Leque, GeoEngineers

Shannon Brenner, City of Tacoma

Mike Carey, City of Tacoma

Lorna Mauren, City of Tacoma

Desiree Pooley, City of Tacoma

Mike Slevin, City of Tacoma

Priya Singh, PRR, Facilitator

Tori Varyu, PRR, Note taker

Opening Remarks:

Priya Singh opened the meeting and gave an overview of the meeting agenda. Mike Slevin, Environmental Services Director, shared information about the mission and role of his team. He gave a brief overview of the primary goals of the Mason Gulch Management Plan: slope stability, a balance of use and function, and stormwater benefits.

Presentation:

July Meeting Recap and Survey Results:

City of Tacoma staff recapped the July meeting and reminded everyone the City distributed a survey in August 2015 to Mason Gulch residents to gather additional feedback.

City of Tacoma staff shared the survey results. Survey results indicated residents most highly prioritized public property views. Other values of importance included preserving slope stability, integrating natural vegetation, and providing more public access and trails into Mason Gulch. Between personal communication (phone and emails) received, survey results and meeting voting – it was relayed that both the sides of the trails (for and against) have been equally represented. A few meeting attendees disagreed with this assessment, noting the majority of attendees at the July meeting did not want trails.

City staff also relayed the findings of the Forest Landscape Assessment Tool (FLAT) findings for Mason Gulch which showed that much of the gulch is a category 8 and 9 having low tree diversity and medium to high invasive vegetation species presence. Category 8 and 9 are considered hard to restore and require a high level of effort.

City staff also shared the results of the wetland delineation by the consultant Grette and Associates. Grette mapped the wetland and buffers that showed that almost all of the bottom of the gulch is a wetland or wetland buffer.

Ongoing Geotech Research:

Curtis LaPierre shared information about the Mason Gulch slope and explained the gulch slopes shows signs of instability, due to soil composition, slope angle, and past mismanagement of vegetation. Tree cutting and density of the Big Leaf Maples in addition to physical characteristics led to decreased vegetation diversity and therefore a less complex, layered, root system. Curtis displayed a map that illustrated the critical areas of the Gulch per Tacoma Municipal Code 13.11. The map showed approximately 95% of the project area is critical and will need permits and a management plan to perform work.

Next Steps:

City staff reiterated this was the second of three public meetings, with the final meeting being held in late May (**now revised to mid-summer based on the addition of the public workshop). Environmental Services will release a draft of the Plan in mid-May prior to the workshop, and it will be finalized after the workshop and final meeting have been completed.

Questions and Comments:

Attendees shared their questions and comments throughout the meeting.

Ongoing communication with Mason Gulch residents:

- Some attendees expressed concern they did not receive the survey or meeting invitations. They recommended widening the outreach to include more residents. City staff responded they would look into expanding the notification area.
- Some attendees said they would like to be involved in developing the Plan. City staff shared their contact information and said they are open to a work session with residents.
 - **A workshop date has been set for May 25th – please contact Desiree Pooley 253.502.2126 if you are interested in participating.

Land use and ownership:

- Attendees asked why some properties to the north and west were in the wetlands map but not the parcel map.
 - City staff clarified that many parcels to the north and south are privately owned. Those that are to the north where the property boundaries extend down into the gulch; those properties will not be included in the management plan nor will they be worked on by

the City. City staff explained that those parcels were looked at with regard to the wetlands study in the event that any wetlands near the project area could have a buffer that extended into the project area. Although these properties are not in the City's management plan, they are still critical areas and subject to critical areas permitting and regulations regardless of ownership.

- Attendees asked if the City intends to install trails.
 - City staff clarified that is not an Environmental Services mission to create or plan for recreational trails. If recreational trails are to move forward it would be a Metro Parks Tacoma initiative as that is part of their mission. Environmental Services (ES) is not opposed to trails on open space property as they are public spaces, however, ES will not be taking the lead with regard to public trails. ES, however, does have a need for maintenance access to the property which may have a “trail-like” appearance in some areas.
- Many attendees expressed strong disapproval regarding the installation of trails.
- Attendees asked if the City is coordinating with local rail companies regarding land management of rail property along the Gulch.
 - City staff said the Plan only permits management of City-owned property and would not be coordinating with the rail companies.
- One attendee asked if Puget Park was City-owned.
 - City staff explained the majority of parks in the area are owned and operated by Metro Parks, including Puget Gulch Park.

Landscape Management Plans:

- An attendee asked how long a typical Landscape Management Plan takes to develop.
 - City staff explained the Schuster Slope Landscape Management Plan took two years and shared the Mason Gulch Landscape Management Plan is progressing more quickly. This is possible because the City now has a tried and true process in place, and the Schuster slope was more technically challenging.
 - City staff reminded attendees they can view the Schuster Landscape Management Plan online as a reference.
- Attendees asked City staff how they could have the most practical influence on the Plan.
 - City staff explained the Plan is driven by Tacoma Municipal Code and the permitting process, which emphasizes science-based best practices and using native plant species.
 - The City also said they would be willing to publish a draft of the Management Plan before the May meeting and could host a working session.
 - Attendees overwhelmingly agreed to a working session.

Views

- Attendees asked about the Vegetation Modification Request process.
 - City staff explained the process of Vegetation Modification Requests is still in development and initially realized during the creation of the Schuster Slope Landscape Management Plan. In response to public complaints regarding vegetation, residents will

- have a process to request to modify vegetation for private views on City owned property.
- The Environmental Services staff team have not decided whether a fee would be required.
- One attendee suggested the Landscape Management Plan explicitly remove certain properties from the list of 'view properties'. The attendee noted the Plan might impact views, and residents should not be subject to taxation related to 'view properties'.
 - City staff clarified the Pierce County Assessor's Office determines the status of 'view properties'. City staff offered to provide residents with the Assessment Office's contact information and also offered to invite them to the next public meeting.

Landscape

- Attendees asked the City if all new vegetation in the Gulch would be native. Attendees recommended some non-native plants might be better for slope stability than native vegetation.
 - City staff explained for all wetlands and buffer zones, the Tacoma Municipal Code mandates all vegetation must be native.
- An attendee referred to a picture of the trees with a curved trunk and asked Curtis if he could tell how long ago the soil was moved and by how much it had moved.
 - Curtis estimated the soil had moved 15 years ago but said he could not tell by how much it moved.
- One attendee asked if all Big Leaf Maples would eventually be removed.
 - City staff explained there would be shade-tolerant plants installed under the Big Leaf Maples to create a more complex root system. Once this has been achieved, City staff said some Maples could be thinned or shaded out to create room for conifers and a mixed canopy.
- Attendees asked about the process of how new plants would be installed.
 - City staff explained the consultants will use gathered data to outline the steps needed to achieve a lower slope failure risk. City staff added they will create palettes of vegetation that will be assigned to specific areas of the slopes. The palettes will be determined by slope condition, soils, and in-situ conditions. The work plan will be completed after the Landscape Management Plan is finalized.