

## City of Tacoma, Mason Gulch Public Meeting Meeting Notes

November 16, 2016

Center for Urban Waters

### Staff and Consultants

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Mike Carey, City of Tacoma  
Lorna Mauren, City of Tacoma  
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Aris Efting, City of Tacoma  
Claire Hoffman, ESA

Brett Houghton, PRR, Facilitator  
Tori Varyu, PRR, Note taker

### Opening Remarks:

Brett Houghton opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and walking through the agenda.

### Presentation:

#### Landscape Management Plan (LMP) Update:

Desiree Pooley provided background on the Mason Gulch LMP. She then reviewed topics that attendees have identified as important at prior public meetings, such as, personal and public views and plant height, and the effects that those concerns have had on the final plan.

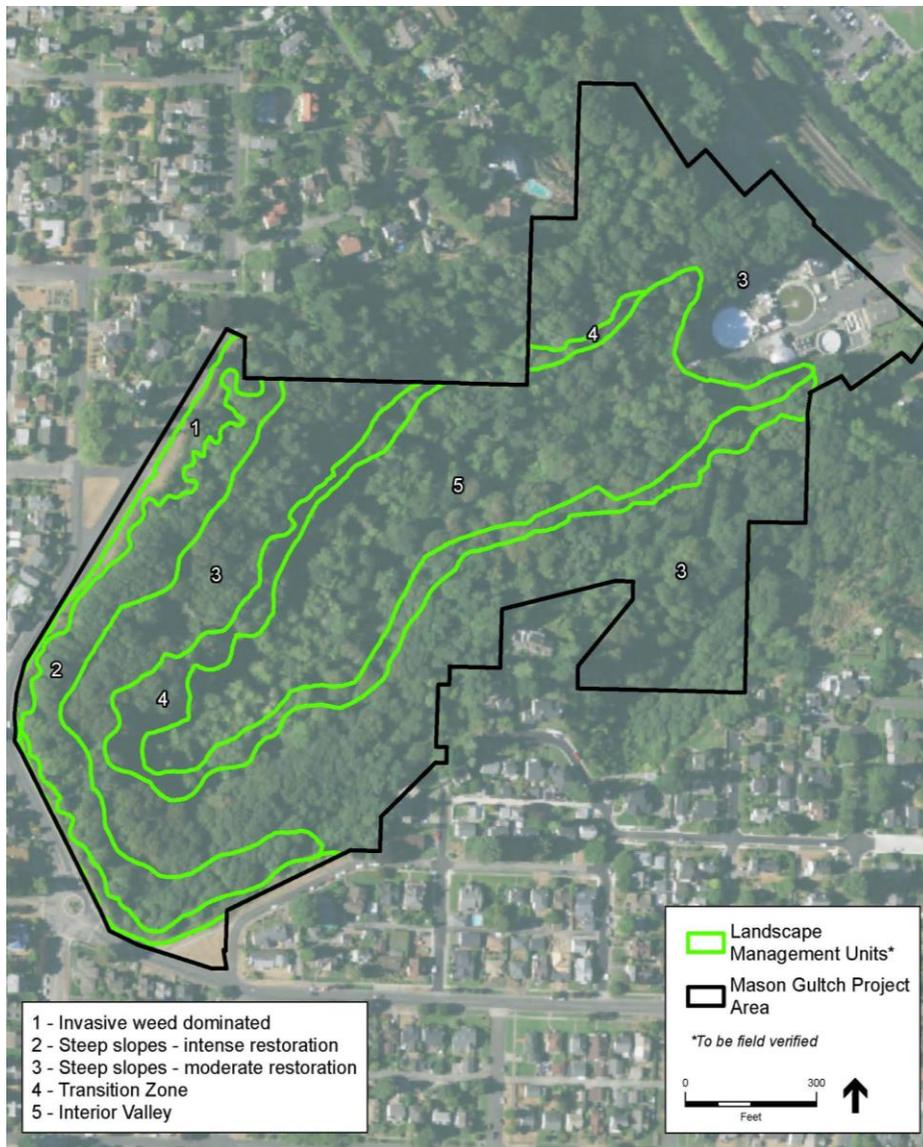
Desiree then reviewed the public process timeline, including the permitting process and the public comment period.

#### Landscape Management Plan Overview:

Claire Hoffman explained key goals of the Mason Gulch LMP, including:

- Improving stability
- Maximizing stormwater benefit
- Protecting public infrastructure and public safety
- Achieving a sustainable target ecosystem
- Improving wildlife habitat
- Developing a program for stewardship and public involvement
- Preserving public views

Claire explained how the LMP is organized into five management units (MUs), each with specific characteristics that require different treatments.



**Management Unit 1** is mostly flat and is currently covered with invasive species, including blackberry and knotweed. The LMP calls for this area to be treated first in order to control the invasive population and likelihood of spread. Then, in areas where the invasive species have been removed, installing both native and climate-adapted shrubs that are known for stabilizing soil on slopes.

**Management Unit 2** has the most complex plan, largely due to the steep unstable slope and past mismanagement of the vegetation. To phase the work and maintain slope stability throughout the restoration process, Management Unit 2 is divided into 25'x25' squares that are also phased in order to control the area of disturbance on the slope. Previously coppiced trees will be trimmed keeping only the healthiest stem helping to maintain the root system and some soil binding root mass while the new

vegetation establishes. This is a departure from the direction the City discussed earlier in the process, to remove these trees entirely. The team will then install native plants to average five conifers and two deciduous trees per grid cell with dense shrub and groundcover layers to help with slope stabilization.

**Management Unit 3** is better vegetated than MU2, partially sloped and needs moderate restoration. To start, the City will identify and remove weeds and install five species of deciduous shrubs and four species of conifer trees to help with slope stabilization.

**Management Unit 4** is a transition zone located mainly at the toe of the slopes. The LMP calls for weeds to be removed from this area and replaced with six species of native shrubs, four species of groundcover plants, and two species of coniferous trees to help with slope stabilization.

**Management Unit 5** is mostly flat and wet and needs enhancement by diversifying the vegetation. The City will remove any invasive species and replace with three native shrub species, two emergent species, and five tree species to help with slope stabilization.

#### Site Work Plan Implementation

Desiree Pooley reviewed the permit process and the project timeline.

- Permit anticipated on March 19th
- Winter 2016 – 2017: prepare work plan and set up grid system
- Summer 2017: treat invasive species/install erosion control
- October 2017 – March 2018: Treat MU1 and start on MU2 as resources allow
- Offer Vegetation Modification Request process when approved and available

Desiree explained that this timeline misses the 2017 spring planting season. The City will continue to invest resources on Schuster Slope this spring. Crews have been cut by 25% so the extra time on Schuster will be helpful.

#### Question and Answer:

Attendees had a chance to ask questions and share comments once the presentation wrapped up.

#### *Schuster Slope*

- Attendees asked about the details of Schuster Slope, including the timeline and why the work started there before Mason Gulch.
  - City staff explained Schuster Slope was identified for work first because of the grade of the slope, its stability/safety issues and its proximity to downtown. This area also has a permitted 20 year work plan. After work on Schuster Slope and Mason Gulch is underway, the City will begin work in the Western Slopes/Salmon Beach area.
- One attendee asked when the Schuster Slope Landscape Management plan was implemented.
  - City staff responded that it was put into action starting in late 2015.

#### *Landscape Management Plan Implementation:*

- One attendee asked if the surface water rates are an ongoing funding source for the project.

- City staff confirmed this and explained that the City enacted a 0.5% surface water rate in 2015. The City is proposing another 0.5% rate in 2017 and 2018 which will help fund Mason Gulch Landscape Management Plan implementation.
- An attendee asked how much revenue the surface water rates generate and how much the Schuster Slope Landscape Management Plan costs.
  - City staff responded that the first rate produced about \$300,000/yr and the second will produce about \$385,000/yr. Schuster Slope restoration work costs about \$200,000 per two acres.
- One attendee asked when private action [through the Vegetation Modification Request process] could begin, assuming it gets approved.
  - Mike Carey clarified that the Vegetation Modification Request process is not final. It is still being reviewed by the City's legal staff. Everyone who received notification about the Mason Gulch Management Plan will be notified when a Vegetation Modification Request process has been finalized. If the City approves the Vegetation Modification Request process, it will be the first of its kind.
  - Assuming it is approved, there are two possible avenues for private action:
    - The City could create a bucket of money to which people could donate for work on a specific area in an expedited way.
    - A second option would allow the individual to get their own contractor to perform work in accordance with the approved Landscape Management Plan.
  - The City is not ready to commit to an exact date on when the process will be ready to implement. If approved, there would be an application/review period and if a resident met all of the requirements, presumably the work could begin in the next work window as appropriate for proposed actions. The City is working through details about how to provide this service.
- One attendee commented that the grid looks like it overlays some of the steep (over 80% slope) non-work areas of the slope.
  - City staff confirmed that many parts of MU2 are not safe. According to the LIDAR data used, 4 acres of the 39 acres is over 80% slope. Each square and slope data needs to be field verified and evaluated once the crews actually get out there.
- One attendee asked if the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC) will do as much work on Mason Gulch as they have on Schuster Slope.
  - City staff responded by saying that they hope to continue to use WCC crews for work on the slopes. The City currently sponsors one and a half Washington Conservation Corps crews as opposed to the two crews sponsored in 2015-2016.
- One attendee asked why the LMP proposes to leave one stem on the bigleaf maples in MU2.
  - City staff explained that it is to keep some of the soil binding root mass present and alive while the new vegetation gets established. The bigleaf maple need to be trimmed in order to allow some sun to the new plants.
- One attendee asked what percent of the funding stream goes into remediation itself versus overhead.

- Currently the program is spending more than the revenue from the rate increases. The rate increase will go toward closing the gap between funding and expenses, so virtually the whole funding stream goes directly to remediation. Currently staff costs are not included in the program costs.
- One attendee asked if LIDAR imaging was taken of the Gulch.
  - City staff responded by saying yes, the slope data and maps were created using LIDAR data. LIDAR shows the surface of the Gulch and does not indicate if there is fill vs native soils.

#### *Views*

- One attendee commented that the LMP goals should not include view maintenance because it creates an unnecessary constraint to maintaining views.
  - City staff clarified that maintaining views is not a priority in the City code, rather it is in the Comprehensive Plan. If The Plan included cutting down trees to maintain views, the permitting office would not allow it.
- One attendee commented that view loss could have a negative effect on the neighborhood leading to lower property taxes. The risk of damage to the neighborhood and City funding should be considered critical. This attendee called for the LMP to provide a way to rectify the problem of disappearing views.
  - City staff responded by acknowledging the importance of views. They then emphasized that public safety and slope stability are more important. The geotechnical evaluation indicated that the slope is dangerously close to failure and needs careful phased actions to reach the target ecosystem while long-term increasing public safety and slope stability.
- One attendee complained that his property taxes have skyrocketed. He proposed lower property taxes as an answer to losing views.
  - City staff responded that this idea has come up before. In response to this concern, the City invited representatives from the Tax Assessor's Office to a previous meeting. Information on their informative presentation can be found on the City's Mason Gulch webpage – [www.cityoftacoma.org/mason](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/mason) .
- One attendee asked if bigleaf maples are a view problem or an erosion problem.
  - City staff responded that the problem is that the bigleaf maples are not healthy because of past cutting and that the area needs evergreen vegetation to add diversity and protect the slope from erosion and instability.
- One attendee commented that slope stability should be prioritized over the view because if a slide were to compromise a road or home, fixing that would be much more expensive than revegetation.

#### *Trails*

- One attendee asked if there were any trails included in The Plan.
  - City staff responded that trails are not part of the scope of this project.
- One attendee asked if there was an amendment process to put in trails.

- City staff responded that there is nothing that would prohibit putting in a trail, but a project like that would be handled by Metro Parks or other entity's initiative that was recreation focused. The Plan is not opposed to trails unless they are unsafe.