

City of Seattle

ANALYSIS AND DECISION OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
OF SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION

Proposal Name: **Cheasty Greenspace Mountain Bike Trail Pilot Project; North Loop Construction**

Address of Proposal: **2627 South Andover Street, Seattle, WA 98144**

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

Seattle Parks and Recreation is proposing to complete the second of two mountain bike trail loops that comprise the Cheasty Mountain Bike Trail Pilot project. The majority of the first loop, the South Loop, was completed in 2022 and the remainder is under construction. The proposal is to construct a 1.0-mile, one-way bike trail, a 0.4-mile multi-use trail, and a 0.1-mile pedestrian-only connector trail through a segment of Cheasty Greenspace and a publicly accessible parcel owned by Seattle Housing Authority, accessed from Cheasty Boulevard to the west and South Adams Street to the east. The trail will be three to four feet wide, predominantly constructed on native soils with some import of materials such as small boulders from local quarries for switchbacks and clean mineral aggregate for the modified dispersion trenches. Trail construction will be done by hand and using small, mechanized equipment. Trail clearing width varies depending on location. Cleared areas will be restored with native vegetation post construction. No exceptional trees will be removed during the proposed construction. There are identified Environmentally Critical Areas – Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas, Wetland and Wildlife Habitat located on the site.

SEPA DETERMINATION: Determination of Non-Significance (DNS)

BACKGROUND

Cheasty Greenspace (“Cheasty”) is a natural area located on the east side of Beacon Hill, below Jefferson Park Golf Course and Cheasty Boulevard and directly above the Rainier Valley and Martin Luther King Way. The greenspace stretches along a 1.5-mile north-south axis between South Bayview Street on the north boundary to South Angeline Street at the south extent. The project proposal extends from South Andover Street to the north margin of a large wetland located north of SPR’s Cheasty maintenance yard. The parcel(s) making up Cheasty Greenspace that are the subject of the current proposal were transferred to Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) from the Executive Services Department (now Seattle FAS) in 2000 with the only limitation being that they be used for “[o]pen space, park and recreation purposes.” These parcels total approximately twenty-eight (28) acres.

A vegetation management plan (VMP) was prepared by SPR for Cheasty in 2003. Since that time, forest restoration has been undertaken by volunteers, most recently through the Green Seattle Partnership. Cheasty Greenspace is characterized as a maturing upland deciduous forest consisting mainly of Bigleaf maple with Red alder and Black cottonwood in moister areas. Conifers are virtually absent. Snags and coarse woody debris present in the greenspace generally reflect the small-medium tree size found there as well. Non-native Norway and

Sycamore maples are present in most of the greenspace both in the canopy as mature trees and more abundantly as saplings and seedlings in the understory/shrub layer. The understory is also invaded to varying degrees by the typical suite of non-native species found in Seattle’s urban forests, English ivy is by far the most prevalent, followed by Himalayan blackberry.

Despite the presence of these non-native species, Cheasty greenspace has a fairly intact native shrub layer, both in terms of diversity and cover. Common native understory dominants found in the greenspace include: hazelnut, indian plum, snowberry, vine maple, red elderberry, rose, low Oregon grape, and oceanspray. Dump sites, encampments, and social trails are numerous. The VMP also noted that the site has wildlife value.

Within Cheasty are identified Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) – Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas associated with the sidehill aspect of the site sloping downward from west to east; Wetland due to the presence of hillside seeps/wetlands; and Wildlife Habitat due to the undeveloped and forested nature of the site.

PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION

SPR is proposing to complete the second of two mountain bike trail loops that comprise the Cheasty Mountain Bike Trail Pilot project. SPR will oversee and manage the construction of the project and it will be constructed to SPR’s standards. The actual construction will be undertaken using a combination of volunteers and trail contractor(s), with funds from a variety of grants and other sources. The bicycle trails are a pilot project. Their usage and durability will be monitored for a three (3) year period, starting once construction is completed. At the end of the monitoring period, SPR will make a decision as to whether the trails will remain open for bicycle usage.

As outlined in the Checklist, the North Loop Trail project is designed to avoid impacts to wetlands, and minimize impacts to steep slopes, wetland buffers, a watercourse, and the riparian management area (watercourse buffer). The proposed North Loop trail design provides a one direction bicycle loop, multi-use connector trail, and pedestrian-only trail that connects to an existing pedestrian-only trail. A portion of the trail on the eastern side of the greenspace will be constructed on Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) property with their permission and support. It connects to two existing SHA park spaces and pathways and SPR and SHA have executed a Temporary Use Agreement to construct the trail on SHA property. Cheasty Greenspace North Loop provides two public pedestrian-only access points, two bicycle-only access points, and three multi-use access points. All proposed trails will be soft surface, on native mineral soils. The trails have been designed to minimize impacts to wetland and watercourse buffers. The bicycle trails are for beginner to intermediate riders and are not anticipated to be a mountain biking destination. Below are the corresponding approximate trail measurements proposed for the North Loop Trail.

	Approximate Length (Linear Feet)	Approximate Area (Square Feet)
3-ft Wide Trail (1-way bike trail)	4,061	12,199
4-ft Wide Trail (2-way multi-use trail, bike access trail and pedestrian-only trail)	2,749	10,947
Total	6,810	23,146

The design adheres to International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) trail guidelines and the principle of minimizing trail footprint within the site. The trail grade will be constructed at 10% or less on the trail and followed the “half-rule”: that a trail’s grade should never exceed half the grade of its side slope. The trail will be constructed using full bench-cut where possible, cutting from the existing slopes in order for rainfall to drain off the side of the trail rather than along it, partial bench cut will be used in other areas. In addition, flat areas will be avoided to prevent the collection or pooling of water. Where possible, the project will use pre-existing social trails on the site when constructing the new trail. The mountain bike trails are intended for beginners and have no technical trail features. Technical trail features are objects that have been introduced to add technical challenge (e.g., elevated bridges, logs, or jumps). Trees larger than 6 inches at diameter breast height (DBH) along the proposed north loop trail alignment have been located and are shown on the plans. No exceptional trees (as defined in Director’s Rule 16-2008) will be removed during the trail construction.

Trail construction will be conducted in part by professional trail builder(s) and in part by volunteer trail building crews, all overseen by SPR. Work will be both by hand and by small machines. A diesel or gas-powered small engine grader, tractor, excavator, and/or trencher (with tracks that can be narrowed to 4’) will be used in areas across the site and near the existing soldier pile wall. The trail may be constructed in phases.

The trail and greenspace is open dawn to dusk, like other Seattle parks. After construction, SPR will monitor the trail pilot project, including how trail construction and use are affecting drainage and the surrounding greenspace. After three (3) years following the opening of the bicycle trails, SPR will decide if they will continue to allow mountain bikes in Cheasty Greenspace.

The North Loop is the second phase of the pilot proposal, the first phase is called the South Loop and access from Cheasty Boulevard South and South Columbian Way. Construction of the bulk of the South Loop was completed in 2022 and the loop was opened to the public with the exception of the Snowberry Loop segment. Completion of the Snowberry loop will occur in 2023. Pilot monitoring of the South loop began once the trail was open.

ANALYSIS – SEPA

Initial disclosure of potential impacts from this project was made in the applicant’s environmental checklist, dated April 2023 and signed on April 20, 2023. The basis for this analysis and decision is formed from information in the checklist, graphics and additional studies attached to it, familiarity with the site and the lead agency’s experience with review of similar projects.

The SEPA Overview Policy (SMC 25.05.665) discusses the relationship between the City’s code/policies and environmental review. The Overview Policy states, in part, “[w]here City regulations have been adopted to address an environmental impact; it shall be presumed that such regulations are adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation”. The Policies also discuss in SMC 25.05.665 D1-7, that in certain circumstances it may be appropriate to deny or mitigate a project based on adverse environmental impacts. This may be specified otherwise in the policies for specific elements of the environment found in SMC 25.05.675. In consideration of these policies, a more detailed discussion of some of the potential impacts is appropriate.

Short Term Impacts

The following temporary or construction-related impacts are expected: hydrocarbon emissions from construction vehicles and equipment; increased dust caused by construction activities;

potential soil erosion and potential disturbance to subsurface soils during site work; increased traffic from construction equipment and personnel; increased noise; consumption of renewable and non-renewable resources and greenhouse gas emissions.

Adopted codes and/or ordinances provide appropriate mitigation for the identified impacts. The Stormwater, Grading and Drainage Control Codes require that soil erosion control techniques be initiated for the duration of construction. Erosion will be minimized by implementation of the required Temporary Erosion Control and Sedimentation Plan. Best Management Practices, such as mulching and seeding will be implemented at the site to minimize erosion during construction. Puget Sound Clean Air Agency regulations require control of fugitive dust to protect air quality. The Noise Ordinance regulates the time and amount of construction noise that is permitted in the city. The project has been designed to minimize the project's impacts to the underlying identified Environmentally Critical Areas. Required construction permit(s) also afford an additional opportunity to impose conditions on the project to address the potential site impacts. Construction activities will follow the recommendations contained in the Geotech report to minimize the potential for construction related impacts to the steep slope areas. Compliance with these codes and/or ordinances will minimize the potential for any environmental impacts associated with the construction of the proposed project.

Construction Traffic and Parking

Construction parking can be accommodated in the adjacent maintenance yard. New landscape and fill materials may need to be imported over the course of the construction period. The site is close to Beacon Avenue South, a city arterial which provides truck access consistent with the requirements of the Street Use Ordinance. Since the proposal calls for the limited import of materials to the site, the likely additional construction truck trips are not anticipated to perceptibly decrease the Level of Service (LOS) on the surrounding street network. Construction traffic and haul route(s) will be designated, if necessary, and notices and signage will alert pedestrians and drivers to times of day and peak activities as part of SPR's standard specifications for construction access.

Trail Construction

As noted in the Checklist, the project will follow applicable State and local standards to reduce and control erosion during construction such as the required use of silt fencing, wattles, and/or gravel filter berms. The project will also follow the Seattle Parks and Recreation Pedestrian Trail Standards and the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Mountain Bike Trail Standards during design and construction to reduce the potential for site erosion and yield trails that withstand the weather and usage with minimal maintenance. Areas on both sides of the trail tread will be cleared as necessary to construct the trails. Once the trails are constructed, cleared areas will be replanted with native vegetation. Trail location(s) will be adjusted in the field to avoid trees larger than six (6) inches DBH.

ECA

Across the project site are areas which are considered Environmentally Critical Areas associated with the steepness of the hillside (Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas); hillside seeps/wetlands (Wetlands); and Wildlife Habitat due to the undeveloped and forested nature of the site. The trail construction methods will be implemented to minimize the disturbance of the subject ECAs and limit the potential for stormwater to adversely affect the site stability and the ECAs. The Geotechnical Engineering Report identifies the following general strategies related avoiding, minimizing and or mitigating the potential impacts to steep slope areas due to construction and/or stormwater:

- Avoiding wetlands and their buffers,
- Routing the trail outside of the identified areas of instability,
- Avoiding steep slopes (greater than 40 percent, or 2.5H:1V) where possible,
- Avoiding ground water seepage zones where possible,
- Minimizing cut heights where the trails must traverse steep slopes,
- Minimizing steepness of trail grades, and
- Installing and maintaining suitable drainage features.

The report further identifies specific strategies which will be implemented during the trail construction.

The proposed mountain bike trail will also span the water course on a bridge structure to minimize potential impacts to the water course. The water course is regulated by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and construction of the bridge will require review and approval by WDFW.

All short-term impacts have less than a moderate impact on the environment and compliance with applicable codes, ordinances and regulations will be adequate to achieve sufficient mitigation. No further conditioning is warranted.

Long Term Impacts

Noise

Once the project is constructed, noise emanating from the site will likely be limited to low level sounds by individuals and groups of park users. Bicycles are not significant noise generators and their use on the trails is not anticipated to generate any long-term adverse noise impacts.

ECA

As noted above, within the project site are areas which are considered Environmentally Critical Areas: Steep Slope, Potential and Known Slide Areas, Wetlands, and Wildlife Habitat. The principles associated with impacts to ECAs is first to avoid any impacts, then minimize the potential for any impacts and finally to mitigate any potential impacts. The trail layouts have been designed to avoid all the wetlands and their associated buffers. Most of the steepest slopes have also been avoided. Other steep slope areas are crossed by trails but the potential for impacts will be minimized by following the recommendations contained in the Geotechnical Engineering Report. Unavoidable impacts related to the water course crossing will be mitigated by enhancing the surrounding riparian buffers by removing invasive species and planting native plants in an area larger than the area of the impacts. No long term adverse ECA related impacts from the trail use are anticipated.

Historic Resources

Cheasty Boulevard, located to the west of the Cheasty Greenspace was designed by the Olmsted Brothers and is a City Landmark. The proposal connects to existing crossings on the boulevard. Three access points to the trail system are proposed along the east side of Cheasty Boulevard. No changes to the west side of Cheasty Boulevard or the sidewalk are proposed as part of this project. Proposed trail signage will be reviewed by Landmarks Preservation Board staff/Historic Preservation Officer to determine the extent of impact(s) to the historic character of the boulevard and appropriate level of review and approval. There will be minimal excavation

and limited clearing for trail construction which will not impact the character of the boulevard. Again, any proposed changes to the boulevard and/or signage for the trails will require review and approval by the City's Landmark's Preservation Board staff.


General Impacts

Once the construction activities for the North Loop are complete, Beacon Hill and Columbia City residents and visitors will have additional recreational opportunities in the neighborhood with the development of the new trail system. Ongoing reforestation activities will continue to benefit the overall health of the site and provide additional tree canopy. The park will serve predominantly local residents without the need for on-site parking. There is on-street parking adjacent to the park and at the nearby Jefferson Park. The area is also well served by many forms of public transportation. No long term adverse environmental impacts are anticipated and thus no conditioning is necessary or warranted.

DECISION

This decision was made after the responsible official, on behalf of the lead agency, reviewed a completed environmental checklist and other information on file with the responsible department. This constitutes the Threshold Determination and final decision on application of SEPA's substantive authority and mitigation provisions. The intent of this declaration is to satisfy the requirement of the State Environmental Policy Act (RCW 43.21.C), including the requirement to inform the public of agency decisions pursuant to SEPA.

- Determination of Non-Significance. This proposal has been determined to not have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. An EIS is not required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(C).
- Determination of Significance. This proposal has or may have a significant adverse impact upon the environment. AN EIS is required under RCW 43.21C.030(2)(C).

Signature: 

David Graves, AICP, Strategic Advisor
Planning and Capital Development Branch
Seattle Parks and Recreation

Date: May 2, 2023