Discussion of Potential Land Exchange at Smith Cove

Public Meeting Summary

March 3, 2011, 6:30-8:30 pm (Presentation at 7:00 pm)
Magnolia Community Center, Catherine Blaine Cafeteria
2550 34th Ave W, 98199

Overview

Approximately 40 members of the public attended this meeting to discuss the future of Smith Cove Park. King County needs to site an underground tank to prevent combined sewer overflows (CSO) in the vicinity of the park or the adjacent Port of Seattle property. This became a catalyst to renew discussions between Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation and the Port of Seattle regarding a land exchange between the two agencies, swapping the Terminal 91 West Yard area for the Seattle Parks Smith Cove athletic field. The City, Port and County believe there may be mutual public benefit in the exchange. The City would gain additional shoreline and potential water access and preserve the playfields. The Port would obtain a site more suitable for creating jobs and economic development. The County would secure a location for a critical project to protect water quality. This meeting was coordinated to provide community members an opportunity to express their opinions about the potential exchange, and to learn about King County's Magnolia CSO Control project.

Presentations

The Port of Seattle provided display boards illustrating potential concepts for development of existing parcels in the Smith Cove area, with or without a land exchange. King County presented displays on the Magnolia CSO Control Project and provided informational handouts on the project, the county's regional wastewater system, and educational information.

Linda Sullivan (King County Wastewater Treatment Division) described the need for CSO control in Magnolia and the process that led to identifying the Smith Cove Park area.

Don Harris (Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation) and Mark Griffin (Port of Seattle) described the history of discussions regarding a potential land swap and the objectives each agency hoped to meet by exchanging property. They then described four concepts for how the property could look in the future with or without a swap. All included shoreline for Parks and a new office building and parking lot on Port property. Seattle Parks and the Port of Seattle would prefer an exchange of equal value, with no funds exchanged and hope to develop a land swap that can meet everyone's needs.

Summary of Discussion and Comments

King County's CSO Control Project

In response to a question, King County's Engineering Consultant Allen deSteiguer described what can be placed on top of the underground CSO tank. There will be four to six feet of soil on top of tank. The County would need access at two ends of tank for periodic maintenance, which would require some hard surface to support maintenance equipment. Otherwise, 80-90 percent of surface area could support a soft surface (like grass or landscaping) or a hard surface (like a parking lot).

The CSO tank could be about 190 feet by 110 feet. However, the geometry can change depending on location. It could be narrower or longer.

In response to questions about where the tank will go if there is no swap, presenters said that that would lead to complex negotiations, since King County must site an underground CSO tank under one of the properties. The Port has indicated it prefers not to have a tank on its property since it could reduce flexibility for future development. An underground tank can be compatible with park uses, and would include restoration of site and revenues from an easement on the underground storage, but the City of Seattle has protective ordinances that must be addressed if facilities are sited on City of Seattle park properties.

One participant asked for assurance that the facility would not cause odors. She also suggested that any above-ground structures be carefully placed and designed to fit in with the park.

Another person clarified that the little beach at the end at the end of 32nd Avenue West would not be impacted by the CSO diversion structure construction.

Zoning issues associated with the proposed land exchange

In response to questions about zoning, speakers provided the following details. Under current zoning, any buildings built on Port property would not exceed 45 feet tall; however, under some scenarios, the Port of Seattle might seek a variance to build a larger building. Industrial shoreline zoning currently allows sports fields (but not lighted fields); upcoming revisions to the codes will make this clearer. In response to a question about use limitations related to a nearby marine sanctuary, Don Harris indicated there do not appear to be restrictions on water access from this site. One participant asked for more detailed information and numbers on shoreline setbacks for sports fields. He indicated that resolving the issue of sports fields and water access made him more supportive of the swap concept.

Value of land proposed for exchange

There were a number of questions and perspectives about the value and size of the land to be swapped. Port of Seattle and Seattle Parks presenters indicated the square footage proposed for exchange is not yet known at this conceptual stage, and that the agencies have to conduct a formal appraisal as well as determine a conceptual plan before making final decisions on configuration and value.

An attendee asked whether the Port's existing Smith Cove Park be included in the swap. Since it is already public open space, including it in the swap could limit amount of public space ultimately available under the swap.

Several people noted that the land exchange would provide the Port with a parcel that could be completely developed without shoreline zoning limitations present on the existing parcel. They felt that the value of this property when completely developed would be higher, especially if it

were surrounded by a park and marine views. People felt the potential for future increase in value called for equitable compensation to Seattle Parks.

Two attendees expressed a concern that the Port would gain a valuable property and Parks would have inadequate funding to develop a park. They suggested the additional value of the land the Port obtained could become a funding source for park development.

Maintaining Existing Status or Increasing Public Access on Existing Property

People expressed concern that the Port could sell the property to a private developer. Several suggested that the Port of Seattle should develop industrial property located closer to the Interbay area, rather than the shoreline area.

One attendee pointed out that the existing Smith Cove athletic field had poor conditions due to lack of irrigation. Don Harris of Seattle Parks said that restoration or funding from an easement for the CSO tank could improve irrigation and the athletic fields in the future.

There were a number of suggestions that the Port create more open space on their property at Smith Cove, without exchanging land. People suggested that some or all of the West Yard should become public open space:

- The Magnolia Community Club and Queen Anne Community Council have sent a letter suggesting the Port create a 50 foot public access area on the shoreline portion of the West Yard property.
- Elizabeth Campbell of the Magnolia Neighborhood Planning Council distributed a handout and opposing a land swap that could lead to an office building on the site and suggesting the entire area become a park corridor. People proposed this would provide mitigation for the impacts of the cruise ship terminal and provide a more attractive view for cruise ship passengers. It would also preserve views and shoreline property for the public. One person suggested that development of the Port property include a community center to take advantage of the spectacular views.

Don Harris from Seattle Parks provided perspective on potential outcomes if the land exchange does not occur at this time: without the land exchange, the Port may develop or sell its West Yard property and the public could lose the opportunity to for a new waterfront park and additional shoreline access. Mr. Harris emphasized that the Port's mission is not focused on increasing park lands.

Proposal for park features, configuration, and amenities

Two of the four concepts presented included athletic fields. Two attendees expressed concern that moving the fields closer to the water should be evaluated to make sure it didn't result in weather interference of play, or balls entering the water from the fields.

Participants suggested that any parking built on Port property be made available to sports fields users on evenings and weekends, and perhaps be built before the rest of the property was developed. Mark Griffin indicated that this may be a possibility since Port development would be focused on businesses that operated during weekdays.

Several participants spoke passionately about preserving views of Puget Sound, the Seattle downtown, Mt. Rainier, and the annual fireworks display from Smith Cove and the Ursula Judkins viewpoint. People expressed concern that development on Port property could impact views.

One participant discussed the advantage of having the ability to walk through the port facility and from park to park at low tide to Myrtle Edwards and ultimately to Salty's in West Seattle and invited the group to insist on protections for the waterfront and views of wildlife, specifically herons and ducks.

Process

Community members thanked King County Councilmember Larry Phillips for protecting this site in past.

One participant invited the group to endorse the concept of the land swap and then delve into the details. He suggested this is a wonderful opportunity to increase amount of shoreline available to the public and improve the quality of the open space. "Let's endorse the concept and fight over the details!"

Another expressed support for the various concepts and asked the agencies to make the process transparent and provide details on fiscal responsibility and financial returns. He encouraged the agencies to consider which option provides the best return for the taxpayer.

Attendance

Approximately 40 members of the public attended.

Rosie Courtney, Manager, Cruise Public Affairs; Mike Merritt, Local Government Relations Manager; Mark Griffin, Real Property Manager, Peter McGraw, Media Relations Officer

Seattle Parks Department: Don Harris, Property and Acquisitions Service Manager; Karen O'Connor, Public Relations Specialist

King County: Linda Sullivan, Capital Projects Managing Supervisor; Monica Van der Vieren, Community Relations Specialist; Sharman Herrin, Government Relations Administrator; Annie Kolb-Nelson, Media Relations; Erika Peterson, Community Relations Specialist; Allen deSteiguer Lead Engineer(Carollo Engineers), Kristine Cramer,Community Relations Support (Triangle Associates); King County Councilmember Larry Phillips BrynDel Swift, Assistant to Larry Phillips