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Introduction

Overview of the Conceptual Design Report

The conceptual design for the Lewis Park Natural Area provides a schematic-level view of the trails, overlooks, gathering places, site furnishings, and habitat enhancement that are at the core of the community-based vision for the park. It is an important step toward achieving the many objectives laid out by project supporters, and will provide a framework for upcoming design development, preparation of construction plans, and the actual construction of the design elements. However, the Park design will maintain its value to future generations only if park supporters — including neighborhood park users, community volunteers, and City staff — understand the conceptual design’s underlying thinking. This report is intended to provide that understanding, especially the fundamental assumption that a commitment to ongoing community support will be a necessary part of the park’s continuing success. The text and illustrations in the following pages describe the path taken to developing the conceptual design, including studying the park site and its surrounding neighborhoods, incorporating community needs and desires, weighing alternative opportunities for improvements, and addressing real-life considerations like safety, funding, accessibility, cultural inclusiveness, and preservation of natural resources.

Along with past technical studies that have been prepared to explain Lewis Park’s natural resources, this report is meant to guide the activities of the people and organizations whose commitment to the park will ensure that it remains a vital part of both north Beacon Hill’s diverse and vibrant community and the urban forest at the neighborhood’s front door.
Location of Lewis Park Natural Area

Lewis Park’s 5.2 acres are located near the intersection of Interstate 5 and Interstate 90 highways, on the north boundary of the densely developed north Beacon Hill neighborhood. The park is bounded by S. Charles Street to the north, the undeveloped right of way of South Judkins St. to the south, an alley to the east, and Golf Drive S. to the west. Adjacent nearby land uses include both single-family and multiple-family housing, Daejon and Sturgus parks, and the Pacific Medical Center.
Introduction

Understanding the Park - Inventory and Analysis

Before beginning work on the conceptual design the design team documented the existing conditions at Lewis Park and the surrounding neighborhood, including topography, geology, views, vegetation, community character, and potential connections with the City’s existing system of streets and sidewalks. Using this information, the design team prepared base maps, aerial photographs, sectional diagrams, and displays showing examples of development types that could be used as models for park improvements.

Plans and documents

The project team reviewed the following documents in preparation for the Conceptual design:

- Best management practices for Landscape, Horticulture, and Forestry, City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, 2005;
- Lewis Park Vegetation Management Plan; Natural Systems Design, 2010;
- Park Classification System, City of Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation, 2009.
Before beginning work the design team took a step back to look at the forces that have shaped the park site, both natural and human. They started from the ground up — literally — by studying the park’s geology and soils. The design team also looked at the forest that currently covers the park site, and worked with an ecologist to understand how it has changed over time. The design team also looked at the human history of Lewis Park, such as clearing vegetation, excavating into the park’s slopes, and developing the area surrounding the park.

Slopes and soil
To understand the origin of Lewis Park’s soils and steep hillsides one needs to look back about two million years, when the earth began to experience repeated periods of cooling. Glaciers that formed during these periods covered the Puget Sound region with vast sheets of ice that bulldozed the land beneath them, depositing huge piles of gravel and soil that became the hills of present day Seattle. In the Lewis Park site, the glaciers deposited a mixture of sand, silt, and gravel, with organic material coming from the trees and shrubs that later covered the site. Human activities have also had a hand in shaping the park’s physical form. Between 1907-1912 the hillside on the park’s north side was significantly altered by the ambitious Dearborn Street regrade, which created a wide road cut through the high ridge that once connected Beacon Hill and First Hill. More recently, fill soil has been imported to a few places in the site, either as excess material excavated from construction sites in other places, or as part of construction.
of underground utilities and roads adjacent to the park. Because the park’s steep slopes and soils are sometimes associated with landslides, a geological engineering company tested soils throughout the park for stability. The engineers found that although over time some surface soil had washed down the hillside and into the alley on the park’s east side, the park’s slopes were stable, and that landslides were not likely to occur (even from earthquakes).

**Lewis Park’s Evolving Forest**

Two centuries ago a person standing in what is now Lewis Park would likely have been surrounded by towering conifer trees, part of a vast lowland forest that stretched from southeast Alaska to southwest Oregon. Trees would have included Douglas fir, western hemlock, and western redcedar, undergrown in some places by bigleaf maple. Beneath the dense canopy formed by these trees would have grown a complex community of plants that included vine maple, dwarf Oregon grape, salal, red huckleberry, and sword and bracken ferns.

Standing on the slopes of Lewis Park today, a visitor would see a very different picture. Beginning in the mid 1800s, the conifers that once covered Beacon Hill were cut, first for timber and then by the people who cleared the land to build homes, farms, businesses and the grid of streets that connected the growing neighborhood with the rest of Seattle. With no nearby native conifers left to reseed the park site, its slopes regrew with the few deciduous tree species that had been left on nearby land, predominantly bigleaf maples along with smaller numbers of red alders and cottonwoods. Many of these trees are now nearing the ends of their life spans, and as they gradually die off they threaten to leave a landscape mostly lacking trees. Closer to the ground, the complex native understory that had grown beneath the original conifer forest was replaced by mostly non-native invasive plants: holly, blackberry, English laurel, ivy, horsetail, and Scots broom. The result of these changes was a landscape with greatly reduced ecological diversity and visual appeal, and thickets of undesirable non-native plants that block views into the park and making it physically inaccessible to the public.
The community takes charge

With visibility and physical access limited by overgrown thickets, and a lack of recreational facilities that might encourage public use, the park began to attract both homeless encampments and crime - including drug distribution and prostitution - and became a base for criminal activities that targeted the surrounding neighborhood. With no outward signs that the park was valued by the public, the park also became a dumping ground for litter and yard waste. Lewis Park was unsafe, unattractive and largely unused by the public.

In response to these conditions park neighbors began to take action, creating a coalition of citizens, police, and staff of several City of Seattle departments to develop and act on plans for making the park safer. In 2007, concerned neighbors formed the Friends Lewis Park (FoLP), a volunteer group that represents the community’s interests in the effort to enhance the park’s natural and recreational resources. As a member of the Green Seattle Partnership, FoLP focused on clearing the park of invasive non-native plants, planting and caring for native trees, shrubs, and ground cover, clearing litter, and laying woodchip mulch.

In 2012, with the aid of City of Seattle Neighborhood Matching Fund, FoLP was able to hire the design team — Hafs-Epstein — to develop the conceptual design plan for the park, of which this report is a part. The conceptual design, completed in March 2013, formalizes the community-based vision for the park, and sets the stage for a detailed park design, construction documentation, and park construction, which will begin in summer of 2014.

Volunteers from Beacon Hill International School clearing invasive horsetails from the park
Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

Steep slopes
Between Golf Drive S., on the park’s west edge, and the alley along the park’s east edge, the elevation in Lewis Park drops as much as 80 feet, resulting in slopes that can be accessed only by way of stairways and steep trails. To ensure that the park’s natural resources and public amenities can be accessed by the widest possible range of visitors, the conceptual design includes ADA accessible elements such as a pathway system in the park’s most level area, an accessible outdoor classroom for ecological education, and scenic overlooks which bring visitors to the edge of the park’s steep hillside, and provide views into the park’s interior, First Hill, and the Seattle skyline.

City of Seattle Critical Areas
The City of Seattle has mapped parts of the city that it has identified as environmentally critical areas. These areas are protected from certain types of development because they include or are near to sensitive natural resources, and areas with steep slopes that might be prone to landslides. Lewis Park is a critical area because its steep slopes and the types of glacial soil found there are thought by some geologists to be prone to instability. However, testing in the park has shown that Lewis Park has no known slide area within it, and that its slopes are stable enough to support the improvements proposed as part of the project. To be on the safe side, park improvements – especially hillside trails – will be designed and constructed in a way that maintains the stability of the slopes on which they are located.

Invasive Plants
Although FoLP volunteers have done much to clear the tangle of invasive plants that once covered the park, removal of these unwanted species will need to be a regular part of ongoing park maintenance. With limited public funding available for maintenance, continuing this work will require a well-organized long-term commitment by community volunteers to ensure that undesirable plants don’t reestablish.

Safety
One of the greatest challenges of the conceptual design is restoring the park’s natural habitat while ensuring that none of the hard-won gains in neighborhood safety are lost. The design team worked with both a native plant ecologist and a Seattle Police Department crime prevention coordinator to plan for selection and placement of plants that will allow for clear views through the site, minimize hiding places that might encourage criminal activity, and support project habitat restoration goals. Additionally, good maintenance
practices, such as removing litter, repairing worn or damaged furnishings, and removing invasive plants, will send a message that the neighborhood cares about the park, and reduce the likelihood that it will be seen as place to engage in undesirable activities.

**Opportunities**

**Bringing back the forest**

At the heart of the conceptual design is restoration of Lewis Park’s original forest. The planned habitat design for the park — with native trees, shrubs, and ground covers — will create wildlife habitat, help store and improve the quality of storm water, provide opportunities for recreation, and serve as a link in a system of natural landscapes that stretches across Seattle.

**Recreation**

Although Lewis Park has been a City of Seattle property since 1911, it has never included recreational amenities that would encourage public use. In addition to providing access to the park’s restored habitat, the conceptual design proposes many new elements that will make the park an enjoyable place for recreation.

**Neighborhood Connections**

Until now, the park’s steep hillsides have been a barrier between adjacent parts of the north Beacon Hill neighborhood. Proposed trails will create safe and convenient pathways that link the area west of Golf Drive S./15th Avenue S. and Sturgus Avenue S.

**Community cohesion**

In addition to physical connections between parts of the north Beacon Hill neighborhood, the park will improve community cohesion by providing places for public gatherings, creating opportunities for volunteerism, and supporting Beacon Hill’s culturally diverse identity with design elements that have been generated by the unique community that will use the park.

**Views**

The park’s steep hills overlook scenic views of nearby neighborhoods, the Seattle skyline, and the park’s wild interior. Overlooks located at strategic spots will be an enjoyable neighborhood amenity, providing a place to meet a friend, to pause to rest for a moment, or to stop and enjoy the park’s beautiful natural setting.

Project opportunities include habitat restoration, neighborhood connections, scenic views, and opportunities for nature play.
Public Outreach - Partnering with the Beacon Hill Community

The conceptual design process began with and continues to rely on the knowledge and local experience of the north Beacon Hill community. In September 2012, members of the FoLP steering committee invited both the design team and Seattle Parks and Recreation staff to tour Lewis Park. This meeting, along with several follow-up meetings with the FoLP steering committee, provided the initial direction for the project, helping to clarify project objectives and formalize a community-based vision for the park’s design.

In November 2012, after collecting information on the park site and developing initial design ideas, the design team met with members of the north Beacon Hill neighborhood at the Beacon Hill Library to discuss community desires and needs for the park. The design team presented a brief overview of the park site’s history, ongoing volunteer efforts to replace invasive plants with native species, safety concerns, and potential park elements — such as trails, habitat features, site furnishings and outdoor art — that might be included in the park design. People attending the meeting asked questions, raised concerns, offered a local perspective of project opportunities and constraints, and voiced preferences about the park’s form, character, and function.

At a second community meeting, in January 2013, the design team presented two alternative conceptual designs that incorporated community input from the first meeting and responded to opportunities and constraints identified as part of site research and analysis. Meeting attendees were asked to select a preferred design alternative; they provided both written and spoken comment, and also weighed in on proposed park improvements such as trails, overlooks, art installations, and a botanical collection.

At the third and final community meeting, in March 2013, the design team presented a final draft of the conceptual design for public review and comment. This final round of public comment was incorporated into the design, which has been posted on FoLP’s website for public viewing: [http://www.lewispark.org/](http://www.lewispark.org/).

Throughout the conceptual design process, FoLP remained a strong presence in the project. The design team met with FoLP after each community meeting to discuss project progress, get input on the latest version of the conceptual design, and to ensure design goals and objectives were being met. Additionally, on several occasions the design team and FoLP members met at the park to get an on-the-ground understanding of proposed design elements, and to discuss modifications that would make the design more responsive to the site, the project program, and the needs of ongoing community stewardship.
Developing the Conceptual Plan

Design Principles

The design team, in collaboration with the North Beacon Hill Community, developed a set of eight principles that helped guide the conceptual design. Based primarily on input from the Beacon Hill community, these principles also consider the practical needs that are related to specific amenities and infrastructure elements.

1. Enhance the park’s native plant community
   The conceptual plan lays the groundwork for the next phase of design, which will continue the habitat restoration efforts of community volunteers. The park’s final design will include a restoration plan that specifies clearing non-native invasive plants, and planting native species that will eventually grow to create an urban coniferous forest.

2. Provide opportunities for public access and recreation
   The park will include a system of pathways – accessed by well-marked entries – that will invite the public into the park’s interior, providing opportunities for exercise, play, and enjoyment of nature.
3. **Strengthen neighborhood connections**  
The park’s trail system will provide direct east-west pedestrian connections between the neighborhoods west of Golf Drive S./15th Avenue S. and the neighborhood along Sturgus Avenue S.

4. **Create a safe and secure public place**  
The park’s design incorporates CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) principles that include: clear site lines that minimize hiding spaces; recreational amenities that draw the public into the park and ensure neighborhood surveillance; and maintaining the alley along the park’s east edge to allow police patrols to keep an eye on the park.

5. **Ensure the park is accessible**  
Although the park’s steep slopes may not be accessible to all visitors, the park will still accommodate all levels of ability with scenic overlooks into the park’s interior, pathways with gentle grades, and a design that locates most park amenities along the relatively level area on the park’s west edge.

6. **Preserve and enhance the park’s natural character and functions**  
In the last few years ecologists have begun to understand the value of what has been called “urban wilds”, natural areas that provide important functions such as filtering of run-off from streets, storing and slowing the flow of stormwater, and helping to improve the temperature and quality of urban air. By preserving and enhancing the park’s native plant community and soil health, and carefully introducing public amenities like trails and overlooks, the conceptual design will ensure the ongoing health of the park’s natural resources.

In addition to functional benefits of nature, urban wilds also provide a haven in which people can enjoy the quiet, solitude, and beauty of nature. The park’s design will invite visitors into its interior with pathways, overlooks, seating, and gathering spots, creating opportunities for visitors to enjoy the benefits of a native forest located in the middle of a thriving urban neighborhood.
7. **Promote Cultural Inclusiveness**
Lewis Park will serve one of the region’s most culturally diverse neighborhoods, and design elements that will support Beacon Hill’s unique multiculturalism (i.e., a gateway structure, interpretive signs, kiosks, outdoor art) were an important focus of discussion during the three public meetings that helped shape the conceptual design. This focus will continue into the next phase of design, helping to ensure that the park’s character and form are shaped by the Beacon Hill’s unique personality.

8. **Encourage ongoing and meaningful community stewardship of the park**
Dating back to the earliest community efforts to transform a neglected greenbelt – overgrown with invasive non-native plants and sheltering illicit activities – into a well-used public park, Lewis Park’s most valuable asset has been the many volunteers who have planned events, raised funds, cleared invasive thickets, and started the difficult work of planting native conifers and shrubs on the park’s steep hillside. The strength of this commitment is based on the project’s organization and leadership being entrusted to the north Beacon Hill neighborhood, resulting in a sense of community ownership that extends to park’s oversight and upkeep. The conceptual design benefited from this ownership, too. Its form and process are the result of extensive community input, which translated into a park that will be appropriate for the people who use it, and that will be an integral part of the community of which it is a part.
Project elements

During the three community design meetings, the residents of the north Beacon Hill neighborhood identified and weighed the merits of many ideas for the park. These were refined to the following:

- Trails — into and through the park’s interior, and an ADA-accessible path along the bluff top, parallel to Golf Drive S.
- A centrally located park gateway
- Easy-to-spot entry points into the park’s interior
- Interplant native species in the existing deciduous forest
- Overlooks, with views both into the park’s interior and out to adjacent neighborhoods
- Seat walls at overlooks
- Opportunities for nature play on logs, boulders, etc.
- An outdoor classroom
- Maintenance staging area
- A community gathering area
- Outdoor art
- Limit alley traffic to one-way travel to discourage cut-through traffic
- Habitat features (habitat logs, snags, bird boxes)
- Botanic collection (native plants, medicinal, ethnobotanical)
- Signage (interpreive and wayfinding)
- A stairway in S. Judkins right-of-way, creating a pedestrian connection between 15th Avenue S. and 16th Avenue S.
Alternative Concepts

One of the basic questions that was addressed as part of the conceptual design process was how to balance proposed park enhancements with preservation of the park's natural resources. As part of exploring that question, the design team developed two alternative concepts with different levels of development.
Alternative A

- Emphasize the park's natural character
- Limit the trail system to a single path along the park's hillside;
- Provide a pathway through plant collection along Golf Drive S.
- Install a wooden fence at overlooks, along the edge of the hill top
- Create an outdoor nature classroom in the park's interior
Alternative B

- Provide a higher level of access into the park’s interior, with multiple trails along hillside, connected to each other with side trails
- Create a broad, open plaza along Golf Drive S., with planting islands
- Install a wooden fence along the entire edge of the hill top
- Locate a nature play area in park interior
- Create an outdoor nature classroom in the park’s interior
Developing the Conceptual Plan

Final Conceptual Design

Lewis Park Natural Area
Seattle, Washington
Final Conceptual Design

March 2013
Final Conceptual Design

In general, members of the north Beacon Hill community, FoLP, and representatives of Seattle Parks and Recreation supported Alternative A’s focus on maintaining the park’s natural resources and character. They also liked the paths in Alternative B that lead to the park’s interior, and make it easier to access the single trail the runs along the park’s hillside. The final conceptual design does the following:

- Refines the single path from Alternative A
- Refines Alternative A’s single pathway along Golf Drive S. into a pathway network
- Strengthens the concept of a neighborhood gateway on Golf Drive S.
- Moves the outdoor classroom and gathering area to a more accessible spot on the north end of the park
- Provides connecting pathways between the Golf Drive S. pathway network and the park’s interior
Community Gateway and Gathering Area

Acting as Lewis Park’s front door, the gateway would be located at the midpoint of the park’s west edge (formed by Golf Drive /15th Avenue S.), and would open into a broad area with seating, plantings, and an overlook with views both into the forest canopy and out toward First Hill and downtown Seattle. A trail head, leading to the park’s interior, would be located here as well, providing convenient access to pathways leading to Sturgus Avenue S. below.
Pathway System and Botanical Collection

A system of ADA-accessible pathways would be located along Golf Drive S./15th Avenue S., on the park’s west side. The pathway would follow the top of the park’s hillside, providing views and allowing park visitors of all levels of ability to experience the park’s natural beauty. Side trails lead to the street, allowing for easy access to all parts of the trail, and allowing the neighborhood to keep an eye on the park. Broad planting beds would be spaced along the entire length of the pathway system, planted with low-to mid-height species that would allow for clear views into the park. The beds could support habitat plantings, or a botanical collection such as medicinal plants or an ethnobotanical garden.
Next Steps

**Park Design**
The next step toward building Lewis Park will be developing the final design, which will determine the specific form and location of improvements shown in the conceptual design. As part of this design, the design team will also guide the project through the environmental documentation process, through which the City will issue permits and ensure that the project complies with environmental laws. At the completion of the final design, the design team will develop construction documents, including plans, details, specifications, and an estimate of the cost for building the park improvements.

**Construction**
Construction of Lewis Park improvements will be a partnership between FoLP volunteers, who will install park elements that don’t require technical skill or special equipment (such as planting, laying a carpet of woodchips, removing invasive plants) and a professional construction contractor who will work on parts of the project that require heavy equipment and/or construction expertise (like installing retaining walls and boulders, excavating the trail bed on steep hillsides, and clearing debris from the alley on the park’s east side to make it compassable along its entire length).

**Acquisition of Adjacent Properties**
On the south end of the existing park, and along the alley that skirts the park’s east edge, there are two privately owned parcels of land that FoLP would like to add to the park. These parcels would increase opportunities for recreation, and expand the extent of planned habitat restoration. They would also provide ADA-accessible entry on the park’s east side, which is otherwise inaccessible because of a steep embankment. FoLP is currently documenting the need for these properties, and will continue to pursue the feasibility of adding them to Lewis Park.
Public Stewardship
Since its beginning, FoLP has successfully promoted community stewardship through use of electronic media, postcards mailings, doorbelling, tacking up posters, setting up tables at community events, and inviting the public to picnics. These efforts have resulted in volunteers donating substantial amounts of time, money, materials, and many hours spent doing the hard work of clearing and planting the park’s steep slopes.

More than ever, this stewardship will be necessary to the park’s future success; with public funding for parks having diminished in recent years, much of the regular maintenance work in the park — like removing invasive non-native plants, planting desirable plant species, removing trash, laying woodchip mulch, and resurfacing gravel paths — will need to be done by members of the north Beacon Hill community.

FoLP’s community outreach will help meet this need by promoting the park, organizing activities, getting out the word about opportunities for volunteerism, and telling the story of how north Beacon Hill came together to transform an unkempt and unsafe parcel into a beautiful natural area that will become an integral part of this unique community.