



TO: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
FROM: Michael P. Slevin, III, P.E., Environmental Services Department
COPY: **Infrastructure, Planning and Sustainability (IPS) Committee,**
Geoffrey Smyth, P.E., Assistant Division Manager, Science and Engineering,
SUBJECT: Passive Open Space Program - Update
DATE: August 10, 2016

SUMMARY:

The purpose of this memo is to update the IPS Committee, as requested by Deputy Mayor Mello, on the progress of the Passive Open Space Program managed by the Environmental Services Department.

BACKGROUND:

Passive open space properties are generally natural areas that are undeveloped and vegetated, providing many public and environmental benefits such as storm water quality and quantity. The majority of these approximately 500 acres are considered "critical areas" (wetlands, streams, and steep slopes) and regulated by state, federal and local laws. In 2014, passive open space stewardship was transferred to the Environmental Services Department and accompanied by a surface water rate increase to begin funding the needed maintenance to improve vegetation, habitat diversity, public safety and ecosystem functions. Typical work on-site consists of invasive and noxious vegetation control, debris/encampment cleanup, native vegetation restoration, and other maintenance activities.

In 2015-2016, Forterra and American Forestry Management (AFM) applied the Forest Landscape Assessment Tool (FLAT) to the City's Passive Open Space properties - this tool categorized and prioritized the acreage and forecasted a cost model to create a 20-year passive open space plan. The assessment identified that over half the acreage (56%) is experiencing a high presence and threat from invasive species and only 13% is in high value categories (i.e. low invasive presence). The plan anticipates a public stewardship component and additional resource allocations to help achieve the goals.

In addition to the planning and forecasting effort, restoration is underway on several high priority passive open space properties of the City:

- The Schuster Slope Landscape Management Plan has been approved and permitted and work has been completed on the first three-acre management unit. Ongoing work includes homeless encampment cleanup, selective pruning to improve tree health, and maintenance.
- The Mason Gulch Landscape Management Plan is nearing completion and will be submitted for approval and permit with work anticipated to begin in 2017.
- Julia's Gulch and Wapato Hills areas continue to be stewarded by Metro Parks Tacoma through MOUs that guide the volunteer efforts.



- Invasive species and noxious weeds continue to be addressed in areas such as: M-Street Slope, First Creek, 34th Street Gulch, and Joe's Creek as resources allow.

A budget enhancement request for the 2016-2018 biennium has been submitted to allow for an additional 0.5% rate increase for the Open Space program. This enhancement will bring the budget allocated to this program closer to the current expenditure rate.

ISSUE:

This is an information briefing only.

ALTERNATIVES:

This is an information briefing only. There are no alternatives presented.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an information briefing only. There is no fiscal impact.

RECOMMENDATION:

This is an information briefing only. There is no recommendation.