Few know it exists. Surrounded by Interstate 5, commercial development, apartments, a mobile home park and residential housing, Wards Lake Park is an oasis of water, mature forest, wildlife habitat and is respite for the few privileged Lakewood citizens who have discovered this sublime setting in an otherwise densely urbanized corner of the City. The 22 acre park, with potential expansion, includes a freshwater marsh and uplands of Douglas fir and mixed deciduous forest. The park is home to a variety of wildlife, including a resident eagle at the southwest corner.

Existing development includes a small parking lot, shelter, restroom and play area at the northwest corner of the site. Some trails and a short fishing dock have also been constructed. In 2010 a subcommittee of the Park Board, along with the landscape architecture firm of Bruce Dees & Associates, conducted community workshops to develop a master plan for the park. The result of the effort is a master plan to guide future improvement while preserving the natural character and beauty of the site.
1 Wards Lake and Flett Creek Watershed

Wards Lake is actually a shallow marsh, receiving runoff from the Lakewood Cinema Plaza site and the Sylvan Park Neighborhood. Three large outfall pipes at the southeast end of the lake also introduce storm water from I-5, Hosmer Ponds, and as far away as Wapato Lake. Storm water entering the southeast corner of the lake currently flows through wetlands before entering the lake proper, then outfalls at the north center of the lake through the City of Tacoma’s storm water system. Eventually, it drains to Flett Creek, then Chambers Creek which drains into Puget Sound. Wards Lake is an integral part of the watershed, providing natural treatment, detention and opportunity for interpretation and education.

2 Oak Savannah

The oak savannah and the Garry oaks are unique to the glacial outwash of south Puget Sound. These trees provide an opportunity for education and interpretation special, forested areas within the park.

3 Invasive Species

Ivy, perhaps the most prolific of the invasive plants, is also found at Wards Lake Park. Ivy can choke out native plants and affect the health of mature trees. In order to maintain and enhance the natural character of the site, these invasive plants should be removed as part of any improvement plans.
4 Informal Trails
Informal trails through the site have evolved over the years. Some of these trails go through wetland areas and otherwise diminish the quality of the site and suggest, if not encourage illicit activities. These trails should be eliminated as part of any park improvement.

5 Existing Trail Entry Points on South 88th
There are two existing formal entries on South 88th, neither of which aligns with nearby street intersections. These entry points should be relocated to align with street intersections and should be identified more clearly.

6 South 88th Street Pedestrian Access
Currently, there are sidewalks on the north side of South 88th Street, but the sidewalk does not extend all of the way to the east end of the street. Extension of the sidewalk and increased opportunities for on-street parking along the north side of South 88th Street should be considered to provide access and parking for the park without negatively impacting the site.

7 Existing Open Space
With the removal of a house structure, an open space has been created and is now the only open space within the wooded area of the park.
Property Ownership

The northeast and southeast portions of the lake are on private property. Expansion of the park by acquisition or use agreements should be explored as part of the park improvement.
DESIGN CRITERIA

The design criteria is an assimilation of needs and concerns expressed by the Park Board subcommittee and community members at public workshops. The following criteria were used in guiding the design:

1. Design all facilities for safe and easy access and use for all people
2. Preserve natural character
3. Design to discourage criminal and inappropriate activity
4. Design to direct access to appropriate locations and provide appropriate control
5. Design for ease of maintenance
6. Identify projects that take advantage of volunteer efforts

Program of Activities

A program of activities and facilities was also developed with input from the community the subcommittee members. Their suggestions were incorporated into the plan.
Park Character
There was unanimous support by the Park Board subcommittee and the community to preserve the natural character of the park. Accordingly, emphasis is on opportunities for viewing the lake and enjoying the vegetation and wildlife. Importance is also placed on restoring disturbed areas, removing invasive, non-native vegetation and eliminating informal trails. Final design of plan elements will be developed to preserve the natural setting.

Open Water
A key desire of the community is to reestablish and maintain open water in portions of the lake. Historic photos reveal that the lake was mostly open water at various times over the years. Vegetation currently covers most of the lake to the south. Open water will also provide an opportunity for fishing and navigating the lake in small boats. The Department of Ecology has indicated that removing vegetation is permissible using herbicides or by mechanical means. Removing vegetation using either method will be an ongoing effort. All existing vegetation need not be removed. Channels could be created throughout the lake to facilitate navigation by small boats while preserving vegetation for habitat. The Department of Fish and Wildlife currently does not stock the lake with fish, but there is the potential for stocking the lake since the lake has public access.

- Aquatic plant management by mechanical cutting and aquatic herbicides published by the Department of Ecology are included in a separate appendix to this report.
A Car Top Boat Launch

There is a designated car top boat launch area at the existing park improvement site, though the gravel pad is overgrown with vegetation and is no longer visible. The new car top boat launch will be a floating dock that completes a loop at the northwest corner of the lake. The floating launch will allow park visitors to carry their boat from the parking lot and place it in the lake without having to walk into the lake to board their boat. The floating dock will also provide separation from the open water of the lake and enclose the space that could serve as a model boat basin. Because the lake is intended as a wildlife habitat and is visited by large numbers of waterfowl, the lake is not suitable for swimming. Swimming should be discouraged by signs and other public information.
B Family Gathering Area

This area will serve group gatherings such as family picnics. It will be developed in the existing clearing left by the private residence. The improved area is set back from the slope to provide open space and viewing of the lake.

Entry

The entry will occur at the existing access point at the east end of South 88th Street. An entry sign of columns of river rock are suggested with a substantial vehicular gate to control access.

Parking

The access road will lead to a turn-around and parking for 25 cars. Set at the high point, the parking lot will afford overviewing of the lake. All runoff from the parking lot will be treated and infiltrated adjacent to the lot.

Structures

A small restroom building and shelter would be located on either side of the parking lot so views of the lake are unobstructed from the lot. A hard surface area between the two structures will provide a gathering space and access between the two. The restroom doors will face the shelter and parking lot for security.

Open Lawn Area

The open lawn area will serve informal uses and be accessible by the disabled. This informal area could be used for gatherings and games, such as croquet and lawn bowling.

Shoreline Access

A walk and series of stairs will provide direct access to the lake loop trail and fishing dock. ADA compliant ramps will provide access to the lake for the disabled.

Fishing Dock

The floating fishing dock will provide access over the water. The ‘L’ shape end will be wider to accommodate a small gathering. The dock will be constructed with floats encased in plastic tubs. The dock will be anchored by guides placed out of sight below the dock.

C South 88th Street

Improvements to South 88th Street will serve the park and address the concerns of the Sylvan Park Neighborhood.

Parking

Existing travel lanes will remain the same. Parallel parking will be added on the north side of the west bound existing travel lane by expanding paving toward the park and a new sidewalk constructed abutting the parallel parking. The two existing trail entry points will be relocated to center on the street intersections at Gayle Avenue South and 26th Avenue South. Those entry points will be further emphasized by the extension of the sidewalk to the edge of the travel lane (bulb outs). This will provide both a safer crossing point for pedestrians from the neighborhood and help identify the new trail entry points. The entry points will be further emphasized with columns of river rock and a park map of the trails with distances of each trail.

Street Lights

Street lights will be added at the two entry points and the entry to the family gathering area at the end of South 88th Street. Consideration for speed bumps or other traffic calming measures at each of the trail entry points were recommended by the community.
### ESTIMATED COSTS

**Trails & Boardwalk**
- Lake Loop Trail, Boardwalk & Directional Signs: $226,000
- Upland Trail Loop & Directional Signs: $39,000
- Oak Savannah Loop Trail & Directional Signs: $15,000
- Improve Existing Trails: $16,000
- Remove Informal Trails: $4,000

Sub Total: $300,000

**South 88th Street Improvements**
- Road Widening for Parking
- New Sidewalk
- Trail Entrances and Signs

Sub Total: $150,000

**Docks & Bridges**
- Car Top Boat Launch
- Fishing Bridge
- Fishing Dock

Sub Total: $230,000

**Family Gathering Area**
- Entry Improvements
- Parking Lot
- Restroom & Shelter
- Access to Lake
- Open Lawn

Sub Total: $720,000

**Aquatic Plant Management**
- Initial Removal: $18,000 - $25,000
- Annual Maintenance: $8,000 - $12,000

Construction Total: $1,400,000
City of Lakewood
Park and Recreation Advisory Board
Roger Laybourn - Chair
J. Allan Billingsley
Jim Charboneau
Gary Fowler
Jason Gerwen
Tanja Scott
Vito Iacobazzi

Wards Lake Subcommittee
Roger Laybourn
Jason Gerwen
Terry Love
Dawn McGinnis

Lakewood Parks,
Recreation and
Community Services
Director
Mary Dodsworth

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