

The University of Puget Sound

**The Swan Creek Restoration Project:
A New Beginning**

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Introduction

Swan Creek is a unique, and underappreciated asset in Tacoma. It is an equal blend of enigmatic city-grid streets, overgrown Doug fir forest, and lush valley with a yearly chum salmon run. While it is appealing for anyone interested in hiking, biking, bird watching, dog walking, and more, it is well known throughout the neighboring community as a dangerous place. (Wyman, per ob) The park's relative obscurity within the community has led to suspicious activities, squatting, and general misuse of what is otherwise a beautiful site. Beginning in September of 2010, Metro Parks Tacoma began the long, detailed process of restoring Swan Creek Park. Although they recognize they have a tight budget of only one million dollars, it has not played an important role in the first phases of the process. Instead, through a careful partnership between Metro Parks Tacoma, the MIG consulting agency from Portland, Oregon, Friends of Swan Creek Watershed, and the diverse community of Salishan, they have been able to explore, and be open to the wide variety of possibilities of Swan Creek Park, and it is due to this openness, and flexibility that the park is on its way being successfully restored.

In this paper I do not seek to make any definite conclusions or predictions as to how the restoration process will unfold. There are still so many directions and hurdles this project may face, and while I will argue Metro Parks is arming themselves for a successful restoration, there is so much that the future holds, I cannot make the typical conclusions often found in academic papers. I present a detailed exploration of Swan Creek Park and neighboring community's complicated history, a description of how the first two phases of the restoration process have unfolded (the third phase has not happened yet). I will conclude with an analysis of two interviews I conducted with professional environmental educators. By detailing the process so

far, and along with the comparative views of experienced educators, it is evident through the direction of Lois Stark, Metro Parks is taking the restoration project in a positive direction.

Swan Creek Park: A History

Swan Creek Park has a diverse history. Early on as a part of the Puyallup Reservation it was an important part of the Puyallup culture, with strong salmon runs every year. Similar to other parts of the Tacoma area, after the reservation system ended land was parceled off to the tribe. According to the Metro Parks website, a man named John Swan became the owner of what would eventually become Swan Creek Park. The lower valley portion of the park was logged for its valuable Western Red Cedar wood, while gravel quarries began to appear in the area. (MPT, Swan Creek History)

At the outset of World War II in 1937 the United States Congress passed the Housing Authority Act to jumpstart a suffering economy, and work towards a cleaner, safer city, free of slums. It provided jobs building houses, as well as cheap places to live. This was the first time Swan Creek faced development. Pipes, portable houses, and eventually, plumbing were placed in the area above the valley. Although it didn't last as a low-income housing site, in 1940 the need to provide for the influx of soldiers and military personnel in preparations for the United States entering WWII became apparent and creating greater demand for cheap housing. A plan was approved to build 1,600 new permanent houses, as well as 400 temporary houses, despite lacking materials due to wartime pressures on resources. After the war, when schools, churches, and other essentials had been built, the community remained; a reported 6,700 people were living in the Salishan community. (MPT, Swan Creek History)

Eventually, in 1951 the Tacoma City Council voted to restore over half of Salishan houses as low-income housing, and demolish the rest. All that remains of the original Salishan neighborhood is the city grid that was incorporated into the park. Throughout the 50s and 60s the area faced much contestation over how it would be used. Some believed the area could be useful as a landfill, and others believed it should become park. (MPT, Swan Creek History) Finally after years of bureaucratic tape, committee meetings, budget issues, and land acquisitions Swan Creek became an official park in 1966. Later in the 70s and 80s, after community initiatives had been solidified by groups such as the “Swan Creek Park Action Committee”, efforts to improve the health of the environment within and around the park increased. This included encouraging compliance with environmental protections for salmon, and campaigning to buy the gravel pit adjacent to the park. (MPT, Swan Creek History)

Finally, in 1995 a new management plan was introduced and would be the primary plan until Metro Parks released this year’s initiative to design a new Master Plan and restoration effort. The 1995 plan was the most comprehensive to date, and included everything from program development ideas, environmental checklist, maintenance details, to native plants found in Swan Creek. Acknowledgements for the completion of the document went out to over 40 people. (MPT 1995 Plan, pg iii)The plan called for the development of a varied recreation site, but to protect and restore the natural assets in the park. In the document the park is recognized for its history of citizen involvement, and the potential increase in citizen involvement in the future. Similar to the current restoration process, though with less intensive community outreach, participation was key in development of the plan. Phone surveys, public meetings, and interested stakeholders were involved at all “critical stages of the Management Plan development in... the communities adjacent...to gather input and comments.” (MPT 1995 Plan, pg 2) The immediate

importance of restoring anadromous fish habitat was recognized, and a section on public involvement notes was included.

Starting in 2000 the Tacoma Housing Authority began what it called the city of Tacoma's largest redevelopment plan. (THA) Hundreds of houses were torn down, infrastructure was completely redone, and among many other things new community centers were built. Today the neighborhood is still under construction, but the dramatic change the community has faced is evident. The new neighborhood is a "mixed-income, mixed use neighborhood of affordable and market rate rental housing, single family homes for sale, commercial and community buildings, and parks," (THA) The city is trying to encourage a de-homogenization of the neighborhood through an inclusion of mixed use housing. One of the biggest downsides to the immense amount of construction included the required shut down of the community garden, known as the Gathering Place, due to dust, debris, and construction materials. The Gathering Place for many years had been an important site for the Salishan community, and has since then had trouble reestablishing itself.

It is evident Swan Creek and the surrounding neighborhoods have undergone many changes throughout Tacoma's history. These changes are both what hinders and helps the success of the restoration of Swan Creek. As will become visible in the following pages, Swan Creek is located in a community that requires dedicated and patient effort to be able to hear their wealth of opinions and insight they have to offer, but it is also a community that will benefit greatly from a restored park.

The Process So Far: Scope of Work

Although the restoration process officially began in September 2010, and the steps they took at those early stages were almost invisible, they were a crucial part of building the base off of which they would begin to construct the restoration process. In October of 2010, the initial scope of work document was released and set the stage for how the official Master Plan would eventually take shape. The core of the development of the Master Plan would be the incorporation of 11 meetings (plus visiting specific sites) throughout the 8-month process, which encouraged and included community participation.

Scope of Work—Phase 1: Inventory and Analysis

Metro Parks Tacoma is designing the Master Plan for Swan Creek Park in three stages, each with distinct goals. The first phase of the Master Plan, titled “Inventory and Analysis”, the second “Development of Alternatives”, and the third phase, which has not yet been completed and thus will only be discussed briefly in this paper, “Master Plan Development and Approval”. (SOW, pg 1) The first phase encompassed the collection of technical, and more specialized details required for the Master Plan. This included, but was not limited to, “a review of regulatory constraints imposed by the City of Tacoma, State of Washington, and Federal agencies...The [architect and engineer] shall prepare a summary of existing conditions, goals, opportunities, and constraints.” (SOW, pg 1) At this point in the process the consulting agency had already been chosen for their unique ability to connect with, and keep in mind the needs of the community. (Stark, per com) The main focus of this phase was to create a public document detailing the context and history of the park, and the opportunities and constraints the restoration entails. Once the document and initial data gathering was completed several informative, open meetings were held for the steering committee, and community to begin familiarizing them with

the process, the goals of Metro Parks, the opportunities and constraints, as well as to open discussion of ideas. The steering committee was comprised of a variety of representatives of key stakeholders from local schools, Friends of Swan Creek Watershed, Metro Parks, Tacoma Housing Authority, Salishan community, and more. (SOW, pg 1) From the outset, Metro Parks was seeking to incorporate the community into the process, and to solidify the idea that they want more than to just fulfill the requirement of involving the community, but to actually use the opinions of the community.

Opportunities and Constraints

In this early phase the MIG consultants and engineers created a comprehensive opportunities and constraints document covering essentially everything one needs to know about Swan Creek to begin forming opinions. This included sections varying from what Metro Parks is hoping to achieve from the Master Plan, contextualizing the site, an overview of natural systems, regulatory considerations, the actual opportunities and constraints within the park, next steps, and a series of maps in the appendices elaborating on more technical details. The document clearly identified the four zones Swan Creek is typically broken into: Zone 1—Swan Creek Canyon, Zone 2—The Gathering Place/community garden, Zone 3—City grid, Zone 4—The Doug Fir Forest. Overall, the focus of the opportunities was to improve the pre-existing natural resources.

In Zone 1 the identified opportunities included: restoration of habitats and ecological resources, through restoring native conifer trees, removing invasive plants such as ivy and Japanese knotweed, and incorporating an “upper management zone, especially in the transition area from terrace to canyon...to prevent migration of invasive species into the canyon.” (MIG

Opp/Con, pg 23) They also noted the potential for improved salmon habitat, but believe that “Long-term improvement of fisheries habitat will involve restoration of not only the stream channel itself, but of the creek uplands and canyon slopes as well.” (MIG Opp/Con pg 23) This area is represented as one of the most valuable in the park in terms of natural resources.

In Zone 2 the identified opportunities include reestablishing the community garden. They also suggest the Gathering Place could serve as a good setting for a farmers market, and microenterprises which, “would allow low income residents the opportunity to develop small businesses and support themselves.” (MIG Opp/Con pg 26) The opportunities presented for Zone 2 seek to unite the community and provide a place where they can use their hands and experience the benefits of gardening.

The City Grid zone is by far the most unique of all the zones. They suggest that Zone 3 would be suitable for an urban campground and would, “broaden the range of outdoor experiences available to the public in Tacoma and Pierce County and make use of existing infrastructure that is presently underutilized.” (MIG Opp/Con pg 27) They also suggest that there can be continued use as an Emergency Services Training site, though more work would need to be done to maintain the road system. This is also considered the most suitable area for CSA programs which could expand on the community garden.

In Zone 4 there are fewer opportunities, but all hold great potential. They encourage implementing a much needed management program the Doug fir forest. Because it is second growth its health would be greatly improved with carefully planned thinning, which would in turn generate revenue. They also suggest, creating official mountain biking trails, which would provide a “unique opportunity to further develop recreational opportunities...” (MIG Opp/Con

pg 27) Thinning the forest is the primary concern, as it also presents a fire hazard if left in its over grown state.

There are also several park-wide opportunities noted. These include increased numbers of trails throughout the park to allow park users to more successfully access all zones. (MIG Opp/Con, pg 24) Another possibility includes increasing environmental education for the use of the neighboring schools for field trips, after-school programs, and day camp and youth programs. (MIG Opp/Con, pg 26) They also suggest providing resources for picnicking such as shelters, trash and recycling bins, tables, and even barbeque pits. (MIG Opp/Con, pg 28) Potentially one of the most important park-wide opportunities is the volunteering activities that can take place throughout the park. The new additions to the park will eventually require greater dedication from the community to be stewards and volunteers to the park. (MIG Opp/Con, pg 29) Gaining greater numbers of volunteers will hopefully help create a stronger sense of ownership amongst the community.

The opportunities are numerous, and the MIG consultants, and Metro Parks were careful to point out the document is not trying to limit the opportunities the park holds, and continue to be open to other ideas. Some of the constraints highlighted include the topography, which is often steep and too unstable to safely traverse. On the east side of the canyon, though a trail there would be ideal, it is unlikely they could be built. The engineers and architects noticed much of the water in the stream comes from run off on the east side of the canyon meaning erosion of new trails would be a constant threat in our moist climate. The lack of access, visibility and circulation within the park is also an evident weakness. The existing entrances are inconspicuous, and often missed, and the more obvious entrances appear to be barriers to entry rather than welcoming access points. They also note the lack of a clear sightline prevents visitors

from being able to “anticipate the variety of experiences that Swan Creek holds.” (MIG Opp/Con pg 30) The circulation is an important issue because the only true existing trail is short, steep, and on fragile ground, and is not appropriate for all users. They point out that the salmon habitat is missing important logjams, and often has large sediment erosion-causing deposits. Similarly, there are a number of springs coming in at different parts of the canyon that have not yet been directed, causing frequent erosion and making it difficult to maintain existing trails. Finally, the park's current identity, as a “hidden treasure”, offers little to the surrounding communities, though they hope, “A stronger community identity (or identities)...will result from a clear vision for the park, more programming and opportunity to use the site, and better linkages to the surrounding neighborhood.” (MIG Opp/Con pg 32)

Overall the identified opportunities and constraints show the park's strongest attributes as being the ones that will continue to shine through, but may also present challenges in the future. While the canyon will provide a unique opportunity to the surrounding community, there is work that needs to be done to ensure its sustainability and success. Furthermore, the unique city grid features, and the potential the Doug fir forest offers a chance to unite a community that has undergone significant change in the past decades. The Opportunities and Constraints document successfully reveals the general direction Metro Parks is taking of improving the natural assets and increasing the usability of unique parts of the park.

Scope of Work—Phase 2: Development of Alternatives

This phase was a much more participatory phase, and one which I was much more involved in. The focus of this phase was to use all of the information previously obtained, share it, and spread it throughout the community in order to gain as much insight and ideas from the

community as possible. Although community involvement is generally a required step in planning a restoration, Metro Parks at the initiative of Lois Stark, and Metro Parks intern, Meghan Howey did more than just hold open community meetings, they sought out different groups within the community. They gave their full attention to all groups and stakeholders, from the Hispanic, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Korean communities, as well as different children's groups such as Brownies, Girl Scouts, and the Boys and Girls Club. In order to successfully reach out to these diverse groups they went to where it was convenient for those groups, rather than asking them to come to where was convenient for Metro Parks. This, along with the promise of follow-ups, and further communication enabled them to gain the trust, and interest of communities who would otherwise continue to be unattached, and uninterested in the project. Through their intensive outreach they were able to gain a comprehensive and well-rounded understanding of what would make Swan Creek Park a site the community could be invested and excited about.

Along with the direct outreach done by Stark and Howey, there were a number of scheduled workshops for different stakeholders interested in Swan Creek. The workshops included an Environmental Educators Workshop focused on obtaining ideas about the potential for environmental education programs in the park from experienced professionals. This meeting allowed Metro Parks to see and better understand what makes Swan Creek an excellent site for environmental education, as well as what is needed to make programs viable. Some of the citizens present at the meeting were representatives from anticipated groups such as, Metro Parks, Tacoma Audubon Society, Friends of Swan Creek Watershed, and the City of Tacoma. But there were also several people attending who brought unique, unexpected perspectives, including experts on permaculture, Puyallup Tribe members, and the Girl Scouts. The meeting

focused on attendees' environmental education perspectives, for example their favorite environmental program they had experienced, what worked, what didn't. They also provided a site overview, and open discussion. The discussion resulted in the vision draft of a program titled, "Build a culture of stewardship one step at a time." (MIG Envr Edu, pg 1) This idea stemmed from an agreement within the group that an "incremental, site-appropriate development and programming...would yield the best opportunities for meaningful community use and long-term stewardship...development should be the result of a partnership between the most capable and willing volunteer groups." (MIG Envr Edu, pg 1) The group was in agreement that stewardship would be a vital part of enabling environmental education programs in the park. Although the meeting concentrated on the benefits of thinking in the long-term, they also looked at what options there were for short-term programs. Some the program ideas from this discussion were, implementing a trail system with youth, promote Swan Creek in school-based programs, and the Girl Scout programs, restart the community garden, create park ranger position, connect with Lincoln High School existing science programs, "nature-mapping" programs in schools, and connect with Puyallup child care center. (MIG Envr Edu, pg 2) Similar to the results of phase 1, this meeting encouraged improving the existing resources of Swan Creek, rather than trying to implement outside resource heavy programming. This was the first meeting that promoted incremental and community-inclusive restoration.

The meetings following the environmental educator workshop included the aforementioned Cambodian and Vietnamese meal site visitations, and a community and family workshop. While they revealed similar insights, the meetings were conducted in an original way worth discussing here. In order to allow the most people to access and understand the questions Metro Parks, and the MIG consultants were asking, they created visual questions. Anyone who

entered the Family Investment Center, where a majority of the meetings were held, encountered a row of posters, someone asking for their name, and handing them a sheet of sticky dots. They were instructed to use as many dots as necessary on the posters to answer the visual questions. The first poster started with the basics, such as, “Place a dot where you live in East Tacoma, or I live somewhere else,” and “Have you been to Swan Creek in the last 3 months? Yes or no?” The next poster asked basic questions about Swan Creek experiences, “When you were last in Swan Creek did you: Hike, bike, run, walk your dog, play in the stream, etc.” Each activity included a picture upon which attendees could place a dot. Similarly, the next several posters asked people to place dots on the pictured activities they were interested in seeing in Swan Creek, with expanded options to include different kinds of gardening and farming, camping possibilities, more built options (like a play fountain, play structures, info center), informational options (more signs for entrances and trails, informational signs on trails). This made sharing opinions accessible to the people who attended the meeting who may not be able to read, or who cannot speak English.

The second half of these meetings continued to incorporate interactive elements. The people present were divided into tables with large print outs of posters, a wealth of symbolic stickers (bikes, cars, buses, signs, bathroom, etc), and the sticker form of the activities on the posters from the first half of the meeting, markers, sticky notes, and more were provided to give the adults and children a chance to show where they would like to see what activities and resources. After a half an hour of letting the creative juices flow, the groups reconvened to discuss what their tables came up with. The table I facilitated wanted more trails, and especially more signage highlighting both entrances, and where what features were located within the park. One mountain biking expert present in the group suggested expanding mountain biking trail,

pointing out that if they are made properly they are mainly self sufficient. Overall, the workshop shows the growing agreement amongst the community and stakeholders of enhancing the resources already present, and utilizing the city grid for gardening, and farming programs.

From the community meeting and workshops the consultant team, along with Lois Stark began the process of sifting through and synthesizing all the personal testimonies, and data gained from the visual questionnaires. With that information they created three alternatives that grouped categories of improvements. In other words, they sought to filter the most common desires of the community into groups. The alternatives were titled, “Highest Intensity Park and Recreation Focus”, “Urban Agriculture Focus”, and “Creek Enhancement Focus”. The goal of these options was not to make people choose which option they liked best, but to centralize some of the key ideas being presented. In future meeting attendees were encouraged to mix and match their favorite features from each option, to help Metro Parks and MIG generate the final alternative.

From the presentation of these alternatives, at the second steering committee meeting, members were able to generate some concerns and new ideas to help sustain the project’s gaining momentum. As has been reiterated multiple times, they want to keep the footprint of the park, but special attention needs to be paid to the structure of the park. For example, the top and bottom of the park will be difficult to connect, and the proposed addition of a trail on the East side of the park is probably impossible. They also wanted to make sure groups who have been involved in the past, but currently don’t play a role are given a chance to contribute. One member of Friends of Swan Creek Watershed felt their inclusion has not been sufficient, though he wasn’t specific about what groups he was referring to. They also suggested a stronger buffer between trail and stream. Members of the Puyallup tribe pointed out in a previous meeting that

enhancing to the Pioneer entrance too much puts the salmon habitat at risk. One issue that had not arisen previously, was the fact that the city grid, where the urban agriculture would be located, has no top soil, and thus would require either raised beds, or bringing in entirely new soil for the site. It was in this meeting the old tensions between the Tacoma Housing Authority (whose representative was not present at the meeting) and Friends of Swan Creek was brought up. One of the Friends of Swan Creek representatives pointed out that Tacoma Housing Authority may be less than helpful in the future of the project because of old desires to purchase the deeds to Swan Creek. In the past Metro Parks was almost convinced to sell the deeds, but at the last minute backed out from community pressure. Other ideas brought up included, a student summer employment program as a part of the segmented restoration. This would give youth a chance to gain responsible independence while gaining a sense of ownership in the park. They also pointed out the need for a security plan, but recognized a police patrol is unlikely, and vouched instead for a well-developed community watch plan. Overall the meeting was extremely positive, members seemed to like the direction Metro Parks was taking with the alternatives, and were excited to see what the next steps were. Like all the previous meetings, Metro Parks was open to any and all comments, questions, and (constructive) criticisms.

After the completion of all the meetings that took place in phase 2, to round out the end of the phase, Metro Parks presented a final revision of the three alternatives. They held one final open meeting to present the revised alternatives, before combining the feedback into one final alternative. The results from this meeting, and from an online survey are still being synthesized (as of 5/11/2011).

Overall the two phases for which I was present ended up being very cohesive. The first phase sought to learn what Swan Creek had offer, and what the barriers there are to achieving

those goals, it provided a good base for the community to glean an understanding of Swan Creek and a venue where they could add their input. While there were some unexpected ideas, it seems as though the community and Metro Parks—without initially knowing it—want the same things. They want to preserve the natural resources, such as the creek, improving only its health, sustainability, and making it more accessible. Similarly, there seems to be a consensus the park would benefit from urban agriculture development, especially in the Zone 3. Neither the community nor Metro Parks expects there to be any grand construction projects such as a visitor’s center, or play fields. On both sides they agree, Swan Creek is beautiful as it is, it just needs to be safer and more accessible. Because both sides of the process, which were likely to be at odds with each other, are actually working together in a reciprocal relationship. They (and I say ‘they’ because the community will be essential in the restoration) are building the base of a successful restoration *together*. As momentum continues to build, it will be interesting to see how the restoration plays out. Questions such as, “Will Metro Parks continue to show a genuine interest in the community’s needs once the final Master Plan is released?”, “Will the community step up and take the stewardship role they seem to be interested in taking when the time comes?”, and finally, “Will Swan Creek become the park it has the potential to be?” Although I leave these questions full of hope for the future, there are still many hurdles that Metro Parks and the Salishan community have to overcome.

Scope of Work—Phase 3: Master Plan Development and Approval

Although this phase hasn’t begun Metro Parks is beginning to unify the three alternatives into a single alternative. Once the three alternatives are unified they will seek approval from the stakeholders and groups who have been involved in the process. Another citizen meeting, from

that meeting and steering committee input a draft Master Plan will be developed. They will then seek approval from the committee and other stakeholders. The plan will then be revised and presented. After presentation of the Master Plan, MIG and Metro Parks will work on how they can improve company partnerships and bonds in order to ensure sufficient funds for the project. MIG will continue to play a role in the meetings until the final Master Plan has been approved. (SOW, pg 5)

Case Studies / Interviews

In order to better understand, a what role environmental education in Swan Creek could play, and what is needed to make those things possible, I conducted two in depth interviews with professional environmental educators, one who has had experience educating in Swan Creek, and one who hasn't. In the following section I will go over their opinions about Swan Creek, and how the challenges and benefits of environmental education.

Briana Charbonnel – Tacoma Nature Center Environmental Educator¹

As an environmental educator for Metro Parks, she has a lot of experience in what has become a central way of using nature in environmental education, interpretative environmental education. The Tacoma Nature Center, along with other program throughout Metro Parks prefers to use interpretive teaching methods. This entails creating programs allowing students to explore in ways that work best for them. For example, she explained with younger students you can't try to convey concepts they do not yet possess the tools to understand. Younger students need to engage in the physical activities of touching, seeing, smelling, and hearing. They need to

¹ This interview was not recorded, and is based off of my personal notes.

acclimatize and create their own experiences within nature to come to their own understandings, rather than being told what it is they need to understand. To do this at Snake Lake Park, they use all areas of the park, all the trails, streams, and natural features, but also include field games, because often those are a first step in encouraging kids to go outside. They try to have a variety of activities so each child can have an experience that works best with their interests.

Charbonnel actually has previous experience leading programs in Swan Creek, and is currently planning a two-week program for the summer of 2011. In her first experience leading programs in Swan Creek she based it out of the Tacoma Nature Center, with a very limited number of kids (I don't have the number of kids from the earlier program, but the current program she is planning will have a 26 student limit) and everything had to be transportable. They operated out of a van, used the bathroom in the neighboring schools, and used hand-sanitizer when washing hands for lunch. Everything was outside, rain or shine. From her experience leading camps in Swan Creek, and in outdoor environmental education in general, she said there were several features missing from Swan Creek that make it easily accessible for educational purposes: bathrooms, running water, some covered tables and benches, a place to store supplies that can be locked, garbage cans, trails, and signage. She said some of the more significant barriers to implementing education programs in the Park is that it would be almost impossible to breakeven. Right now the program she is planning is geared towards children of the Salishan community. One week for 8-12 year olds, and another week for 12-14 year olds. Metro Parks understands the fact that it is an underserved area as far as environmental programming. In order to increase interest in programming in the area their primary goal will be to fill the program, not to make a profit. She explained that gaining interest and trust from the

families in the Salishan community is a hurdle they rarely face in the communities around the Tacoma Nature Center where more families have more disposable income.

She has been reaching out to the community in several key ways. She started an after school environmental science program at Lister Elementary and was met with a lot of enthusiasm. She mans an interactive station at nearly all of the community meetings held at the Family Investment Center, with pictures, animal costumes, and other objects (animal horns, pine cones, branches, etc.) By establishing a presence in the schools and in the restoration process, Charbonnel is starting the process of changing Salishan from an ‘underserved’ community for environmental education, to a ‘served’ community.

Donna Chang – 6th and 7th grade Science Teacher, and Environmental Science Club Supervisor at First Creek Middle School

In contrast to Charbonnel, Donna Chang has not run educational programs out of Swan Creek, and only recently visited the park before the steering committee meetings began. I conducted this interview much later in the process, when phase 2 was quickly progressing (Charbonnel’s interview was in October). The interview focused more on how the process was going, and what the barriers to environmental education are in Swan Creek, and in the community in general.

She believes Swan Creek can be a valuable resource for classes looking to do outdoor education, or environmental education. She explained earlier this year they went all the way to Kitsap to see the salmon runs, when really they could do it in a half-day (much less expensive) program at Swan Creek. In order for the park to be a walk-able trip from First Creek an entrance at 56th Street would need to be developed. Another important opportunity she sees in Swan creek

is service-learning opportunities. She said they are not only where the most grant money is (an important part of field trip planning in many schools) but it is the best way for the students to see the practical applications of whatever they are learning. They see they can use their knowledge to make a visible difference; this in turn lets them feel a sense of ownership. She said that while she doesn't currently take students to Point Defiance, because it feels too built—too much like a city park. But it could provide a contrasting field trip with Swan Creek to compare some of the remaining old growth there with the primarily second growth in Point Defiance.

For Chang, in order to successfully use the outdoors, a good plan is vital. She starts with the standards she hopes to cover, and looks at how going outside could enhance those standards. Then she looks at what money she has available, and if she can write a grant. Next she asks, “what kind of experience do I want the students to have? She explains that often she just wants them to have an experience, because so many of the students haven't had outdoor experiences. Then she tries to connect the places they are going to places they know and understand, or have experience in. For example they were studying phytoplankton and the effects storm water pollution on the First Creek stream. Then they went on a sailboat trip in the Sound where First Creek empties, and on the boat they examined phytoplankton. This not only gave them the memorable experience of being on the water (which many students hadn't experienced before), they could also see how their small stream was connected to a larger system. She explained that Swan Creek could be useful for this kind of programming providing students with visible connections. She said, if they have a chance to fall in love with a place and how it sounds, and how it smells and feels to be there, that is where the attachment comes from. She continued, you can't be invested in something you don't know and don't understand, which is why she so often seeks to simply provide an experience.

Although there are many opportunities to Swan Creek as an educational resource, she points out an equal number of barriers to education in the park. For her some of the most important things include, maintaining trails, replacing the bridge, a place for buses to drop off and pick up kids (not necessarily parking), a rain shelter, flush toilets (they could be kept locked with a punch lock to limit use), a place to wash hands, tables and benches for lunch, signs, including naturalist signs so people who aren't trained naturalists can be guides as well. These are the physical things the park needs, but she says there is another important component, making it feel safe. She says the stigmas attached to park are going to be hard to break. From her experience in First Creek near the plateau of Swan Creek her and her students have seen All-Terrain-Vehicles, and they are never happy to see groups of kids. But more importantly the families know there is crime associated with the park. Many have seen police chasing people who then run into the forest because its easy to get lost amongst the trees, along with the rumors of homeless people setting up camp in park. These are real concerns parents have that only time, publicity, and a good marketing plan will begin to change. The restoration itself will help, but making people aware is going to be the most important thing they can do.

Overall Chang believes the restoration is heading in a good direction. She appreciates how open Metro Parks has been, especially in the steering committee meetings. She recognizes from many years of experience in the business world that in meetings like that, people come in with strong opinions, and set agendas. But the way in which Metro Parks and MIG have led meetings has opened people up to not only listening to other people's positions, but to changing their own. The steering committee meetings are made up of people who have been involved in Swan Creek since childhood, as well as people who are new to the park but are nonetheless passionate, and often people are unwilling to budge in that kind of dynamic. On the contrary,

everyone has been open to hearing people's ideas, and concerns, and this is largely because of how attentive Metro Parks and MIG has been to seeking out those opinions.

Recommendations and Reflections

From my experience in this process, I leave it shocked, and inspired, I truly believe Lois Stark with Metro Parks is leading this project in positive directions. While I lack the years of experience of some of my peers from which I can base this claim, I do have a recommendation, that will hopefully ensure the continued success of this project and others: do not forget, or push aside the connections being made with the community in the Swan Creek restoration process. This recommendation is directed towards Metro Parks as a whole. I think it is important to recognize the work that has gone into fostering new connections with a community that has in the past been left out of projects such as this one. Discussed earlier in this paper, and among leaders of this project, is the idea that Swan Creek can help introduce outdoor resources to the community, which has in the past, not been able to, been unaware of, or been nervous to use nearby parks. In order for Swan Creek to begin to changing ideas such as this, Metro Parks, beyond Lois Stark and Megan Howey, needs to follow through with connections that have been created, in this project and beyond. Although the community may not yet have the passion for Swan Creek that Stark and Howey hope to instill, it does not mean their opinions and ideas are any less valuable. Engaging in the connections that were created throughout the first two phases of the process can help create a more united community that not only uses its parks, but also takes pride in them.

Possibilities for Future Academic Exploration

Aside from Swan Creek's inherent qualities making it a good academic resource, because the restoration process is still underway and developing it will continue to be a valuable academic resource for study. Students will soon have the opportunity to see what the final Master Plan looks like, and how they plan on executing restoration. This provides an interesting opportunity for comparing the beginning of the process, and planning phases, to the resulting restoration. Students can explore how the community outreach done in the beginning of the process has turned out. Questions such as, "How important has the community been in the restoration since initial outreach?", "How has (or hasn't) increased stewardship affected the restoration?", "How are stigmas about the park changing?", and so many others can be the beginnings of new project. The restoration process is still wide open for change, and I hope students continue with this project.

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