

State Parks set virtual public process Miller Peninsula park planning

Plans to further develop Miller Peninsula State Park are getting revived this fall.

By Michael Dashiell

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Washington State Parks look to create a master plan for development of Miller Peninsula as the next "destination" state park. Map courtesy of Washington State Parks

A state effort of more than 15 years in the making to further develop Miller Peninsula State Park is getting revived this fall.

Washington State Parks officials are inviting the public to take part in the first of several meetings to define the future of the park property just east of Sequim, with the first slated for 6 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 6, on the Microsoft Teams platform.

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The meeting is designed to take into account community members' hopes for and concerns regarding the park's development at the 2,800-acre site on Miller Peninsula, between Sequim and the Clallam/Jefferson county boundary.

The planning process, park officials say, is expected to produce a park master plan, long-term park boundary, land classifications a “pre-design” report with details on the first phase of development, and an official park name.

The initial public process, park officials say, will also consider changes to the nearby Sequim Bay State Park “so that the two parks will provide complimentary experiences.”

The public can provide written questions, comments and suggestions during the meeting. After the meeting, share more comments via the project webpage at parks.state.wa.us/1187/Miller-Peninsula-Planning.

Project comments will be accepted through Saturday, Oct. 31.

Park background

Miller Peninsula State Park includes a trail system built and maintained by local hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians through second-growth forest. It also includes 3 miles of saltwater shoreline on the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Discovery Bay.

In 2005, the Washington State Parks system began a six-year project to establish one of Washington’s next destination state parks, but shelved those plans with a lack of secure funding.

“We did begin some work on developing Miller Peninsula in the mid-2000s; however, the effort was put on hold due to the economy,” Anna Gill, communications director for the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission, said in January.

Those efforts were reinvigorated in the following years, and in November 2019 staff recommended to the state parks commission that they select Miller Peninsula as the next full-service state park.

“The amount of space at Miller Peninsula that is suitable for development provides an unmatched opportunity to explore a full suite of potential state park facilities and amenities, making it the ideal site in which to craft the state park of tomorrow,” parks staff noted in its recommendation late last year.

Pre-design and master planning for Miller Peninsula's state park was slated for June while design and construction was tentatively planned for July 2021-June 2022, Gill said in January.

Design and construction, however, was contingent on funding.

In April, Clallam County commissioners said they would support a state effort to acquire the Jones Trust Property, a 21-acre parcel that includes a quarter-mile of shoreline that would provide Miller Peninsula State Park users with beach access.

"It is one of the few places in Miller Peninsula where it may be possible to build beach access, since most of the current property is high bank; access to the water will be important for park visitors," the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program noted in a list of proposed state parks project funding requests for the 2021-2023 biennium.

"There's not a particular easy way to get to the water," planning lead Nikki Fields said.

Park planning

State park board commissioners reviewed plans for Miller Peninsula's park from Fields and business development manager Todd Tatum at a Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission work session in Union in January.

Fields and Tatum said the vision is for the property to be developed as a "destination" park, with users drawn from across the state and region.

State park board commissioner Sophia Danenberg said Miller Peninsula could be a more passive park where users simply enjoy the ecosystem, or a more recreation-based park providing opportunities that Olympic National Park doesn't right now.

Parks commission director Donald Hoch said, "I'd like to think that the property is big enough to do both."

The property would be a compliment to what is offered at heavily-used nearby parks such as Sequim Bay State Park in Clallam County as well as Fort Worden and Fort Flagler in Jefferson County, state park officials said.

Since plans fell through to grow the state park in the mid-2000s, Miller Peninsula has seen some development. Volunteers added signage on the property's 20-mile trail system, one that is popular among hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians.

In 2014 and (finalized in) 2016, Hoch approved an interim trails plan for the peninsula property that included input from a Trail Advisory Group representing hiking, biking and equestrian trail users and neighbors.

In addition, the Peninsula Trails Coalition in 2017 developed a trailhead at the adjacent Diamond Point Road to go along with the addition of two more large sections of the Olympic Discovery Trail.

State park staff have done some work on a trailhead plan and some trail mapping, Fields said, but that there is plenty of work to be done in planning stages, including a site analysis and cost estimates as part of an overall master plan.

How to connect with the Olympic Discovery Trail will be part of the overall plan, she said.

“(We) also need a name for the park; Miller Peninsula is just a placeholder name,” Fields said.

State officials collected comments at several public meetings in the mid-2000s, Fields noted, and that staff would be considering those “core values” identified at that time as they develop plans for the park.

In the park's original concept, part of the State Parks' Centennial 2013 Plan, staff requested an initial \$12 million from the state budget to “plan, permit, and construct basic facilities for the park,” and estimated that “overall property development cost (at Miller Peninsula) could exceed \$40 million.”

The Miller Peninsula Vision report notes that public comments encourage park facilities, trails and other property changes to be restrained to 10-20 percent of overall site, with the remaining 80-90 percent left undeveloped.

“There are some members of the public who don’t want to see this property be developed,” Fields noted.

Tatum said state officials will look to host more information-gathering presentations in coming months, but following a question from Hoch, the parks commission director, Tatum noted that public comments gathered at meetings in the mid-2000s would also be utilized.

“We’re not looking to start from scratch,” he said. “There was a lot of good work done; a lot of it is still valid.”

However, Tatum said, staff will look to survey more park users throughout the state when considering a vision for Miller Peninsula.

“(We’re looking at) getting more voices of people throughout the state, not just local information,” he said.

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