

MEMORANDUM



Bellevue Parks &
Community Services

Date: November 9, 2021

To: Parks & Community Services Board

From: Pam Fehrman, Planning & Development Manager
Camron Parker, Park Property and Acquisition Manager
Parks & Community Services

Subject: Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center Renaming Proposal
Board action requested

Action Requested: Recommend to City Council whether to rename the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center to honor Jim Ellis, Jim and John Ellis, or the Ellis Family.

SUMMARY

At the November 9th meeting, we will review the City Council's direction for the Parks & Community Services Board to recommend whether to rename the Mercer Slough Environmental Center (MSEEC) to honor Jim Ellis, Jim and John Ellis, or the Ellis Family. To support the discussion, more information is provided on the Council's direction, the existing park naming policy, and park and facility naming context.

POLICY CONSIDERATION

Council Resolution No. 8229 sets forth policies and procedures for naming public parks and recreation facilities (Attachment 1). The City Council designates park or major facility names. As part of their decision process, the Council may seek a recommendation from the Parks & Community Services Board and may solicit public input. Per policy, candidate names are to meet the following criteria:

- a neighborhood or geographical identification;
- a natural or geographical feature;
- a historical figure or name of historical or cultural significance; or
- a corporation, non-profit organization, or an individual (living or deceased) who has made a significant land and/or monetary contribution to the park system and who has a compelling connection not Bellevue and/or the park system.

COUNCIL DIRECTION

On September 14, 2021, Council Member Conrad Lee provided a Management Brief to the City Council (Attachment 2) asking the Council to consider renaming the Mercer Slough Environmental Center (MSEEC) in honor of Jim Ellis. Councilmember Conrad Lee additionally provided a biography summary of Jim Ellis (Attachment 3) to Council. As Councilmember Conrad Lee states, Jim Ellis' contribution to our region is "profoundly positive and enduring". Specific to the MSEEC, in 2006 Jim Ellis committed to support the development the MSEEC and co-chair the steering committee for the private fundraising campaign. Jim Ellis is currently recognized for his contributions on a commemorative plaque (Attachment 4) with other funding contributors at the MSEEC.

All Councilmembers were appreciative and recognized the incredible contributions of Jim Ellis to our region and MSEEC and felt naming the facility in his honor could be warranted. Council further discussed the care needed when naming places after people and questioned the rename from a perspective of ensuring diverse and equitable representation in place names. Council further recognized the need to update the park naming policy, however agreed a policy update should be considered as a separate issue.

All Council Members supported the motion to transmit to the Parks and Community Services Board a request for a recommendation to the Council whether to rename the MSEEC in honor Jim Ellis, Jim and John Ellis, or the Ellis Family. The name options are:

- Jim Ellis Environmental Education Center at Mercer Slough
- Jim and John Ellis Environmental Education Center at Mercer Slough
- Ellis Family Environmental Education Center at Mercer Slough

PARK NAME CONTEXT

Bellevue's parks and open space system includes over 90 named properties and facilities. These names fall roughly into these categories:

- Approximately one-third of the names use words derived from the natural environment
ex: Cherry Crest, Deer Run, Evergreen, Meadow Wood, Robinsglen, Sunrise, Sunset, Wildwood
- Approximately one-third of the names use words derived from specific place names, many of which match the surrounding neighborhood name, school name, street or subdivision. It is worth noting that within this group, two-thirds evoke place names from Northern Europe
ex: Clyde, Highland, Ivanhoe, Killarney, Newcastle, Somerset, Stratford, Tam O'Shanter
- Approximately one-third of the names are derived from other sources
 - At least seven parks include names of late 19th century to early 20th century homesteaders or settlers for whom areas or natural features were named
ex: Burrows, Kelsey, Lewis, Mercer, Meydenbauer, Richards, Wiburton
 - At least six parks are named in honor of specific individuals or families. These include:
 - *Chism Beach*: Chism family donated property
 - *Goddard Park*: Goddard family donated property
 - *Kenney Park*: Keeney family donated property
 - *Lattawood Park*: Latta family sold property to city, name suggested by community
 - *McCormick Park*: named for Robert McCormick, city's past Public Works Director and Acting City Manager
 - *Georgia Zumdieck Park*: named for Bellevue's first female councilmember and the only park named specifically for a woman
 - Three parks or facilities are derived from indigenous words
ex: Enatai Beach Park, Enatai Neighborhood Park, Tyee Community Gym

Naming and renaming parks is approached with deliberation to avoid confusion and controversy. Typically, the naming of a park or park building occurs when design work with the community is initiated. Opportunities for community input occurs throughout the stakeholder engagement process. Suggested names are screened against the Council's naming criteria (Resolution 8229) and often additional community surveys are used to narrow name options. If directed by the Council, the Parks & Community Services Board considers a short list and recommends a preferred name back to the City Council for consideration.

Proposals to change existing park names are rare. Staff research identified the following three examples of park or major facility renaming proposals:

1. In 1994 and 2015, the City was asked to rename Bovee Park, which was named for Bellevue's first mayor. The requests were made by survivors of alleged abuse by Mr. Bovee. After a public outreach process and Park Board recommendation, the Council renamed the park Georgia Zumdieck Park in 2015, honoring a community activist and the city's first female City Councilmember. Due to the nature of the issue, significant and extensive staff time from multiple departments was necessary to prepare for and administer the re-naming process.
2. In 1999, shortly after the city of Newcastle incorporated, it was suggested that Newcastle Beach Park be renamed to avoid confusion regarding which municipality operated the park. Community feedback did not support a name change. The Parks and Community Services Board recommended against changing the name and the City Council concurred.
3. In 2015-16, the Parks & Community Services Board received public comment suggesting that the Crossroads Community Center be renamed to honor Nan Campbell, a former Bellevue City Councilmember who had recently passed away. Under the guidelines of Resolution No. 8229, the board was obligated to wait for City Council direction to process the renaming request. The City Council did not ultimately proceed with the renaming proposal and took no action.

NEXT STEPS

The Parks and Community Services Board will discuss the direction received from the City Council and decide on a recommendation. That recommendation will be documented and transmitted back to the City Council.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Resolution No. 8229 – Park Naming Policy
2. Councilmember Lee's Management Brief
3. Councilmember Lee's Biography Summary of Jim Ellis
4. MSEEC Recognition of Support Plaque