



MEMORANDUM

Date: October 6, 2008

To: Parks & Community Services Board

From: Dan DeWald, Natural Resource Manager
Geoff Bradley, Environmental Programs Supervisor

Subject: Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center Programming
(Informational, No Board Action Requested)

At the October 14th Park Board meeting, staff will present the programming model to be used at the Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center. This presentation is informational, and we welcome your questions and feedback.

Background

In 1993 the Parks Department and the Pacific Science Center (PSC) entered into a partnership agreement to develop the initial Mercer Slough Environmental Education Center (MSEEC). The purpose of the MSEEC was to synergistically utilize the resources of each organization to deliver environmental education programs to help build community support and increase citizen appreciation and understanding of freshwater wetland ecosystems. Parks relocated the Sullivan House from the Downtown Park and developed the White property on the eastern flanks of the Mercer Slough Nature Park for the initial MSEEC. Parks provided facility and site maintenance and PSC provided the equipment and staffing necessary for program delivery. Since that time, the MSEEC has reached over 130,000 citizens.

In order to reach more citizens the partnership embarked on a collaborative fund raising effort for the design and construction of the new MSEEC. With expanded facilities to reach larger and more diverse audiences the existing facility will open to the public on October 11, 2008.

Current Status

The new MSEEC expanded on the existing footprint to create an educational campus nestled in the forest canopy overlooking the Mercer Slough Nature Park. The MSEEC has applied for and is anticipating a gold LEED (*Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design*) rating. LEED is a third-party certification program developed by the U.S. Green Building Council and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. The MSEEC is designed as a multiple use facility with different buildings serving a different niche and audience. The MSEEC provides classrooms and wetlabs for environmental education, a visitors center for interpretation, and a community building for rentals, community gatherings, and other environmental programs.

A Joint USE Agreement (JUA) between the City and PSC is used to manage the facility. The JUA covers management, programming, scheduling, maintenance, and responsibilities of each party. The overall MSEEC is owned, maintained and managed by the City. The City retains primary scheduling and programming use of the visitor center and community building. PSC retains primary programming use of the classrooms and wetlabs. The original Sullivan House acts as an administrative building and is a shared use facility. Each party provides the staffing, equipment, and supplies necessary to run their respective programs. The City also provides scholarship funding so that economically challenged Bellevue youth can participate in PSC programs. The partnership allows both partners to bring unique resources and expertise to provide for efficient and effective public outreach.

The MSEEC has a regional focus attracting users from Bellevue and beyond. Programming at the MSEEC is a collaboration between the City and PSC designed to provide a seamless service delivery model reaching a myriad of audiences. PSC and the City work together to ensure that programs offered at the MSEEC do not compete with each other by differentiating products, primary focus and target audiences. PSC offers primarily in-depth, education programs focused on environmental, ecological and general science targeted at youth and families. The City offers primarily interpretive programs and exhibits focused on natural resources and the management of urban natural system targeted to more adult and family audiences. The facility is also available for programming to other departments or agencies with similar missions and goals.

The partnership between the City and PSC provides a seamless service delivery model for environmental programs that inspire lifelong awareness, understanding, and appreciation for stewardship of the natural world. Programs at the MSEEC have been designed under this model to support the mission and goals of both organizations.