



September 21, 2019

Proposed Municipal Park Code Updates Public Comment Summary

Metro Parks conducted a 3-week public comment period for the proposed park code updates from Aug. 7-28. Copies of proposed code changes and the review process are available on the District's website. The proposed code changes and the invitation to provide public comments were promoted using the following methods:

- News release sent to local media and posted online, which resulted in news coverage on KING, KIRO and the News Tribune, as well as district and news media social channels.
- Information and documents posted on the District's homepage.
- Metro Parks e-newsletter sent to 15,000+ subscribers.
- Messages sent directly to the 8 Neighborhood Councils, Associated Ministries, Tacoma Housing Authority, Centro Latino, Hilltop Action Coalition, Tacoma Urban League, The Black Collective, MDC, Comprehensive Life Resources, Tacoma Chamber of Commerce

Comments Received

Electronic Comment Form:	340 survey responses received through Sept. 18
MPT Facebook:	Reach 2,226 /Engagement 204/
KIRO Facebook:	392 comments/168 shares
Emails & Parks CARS	17 emails and Community Action Requests received by MPT

Relative to this Report

While survey respondents have a chance to weigh in on all five proposed areas of change the one with the greatest level of public interest centered on the changes proposed to temporary structures in parks.

Responses Relative to Permissible "Structures":

Limiting permissible "structures" in parks to only those specifically authorized or are temporary and have only a roof and no walls:

Support - 153 - (42%)

Oppose - 82 - (22%)

No Comment - 99 - (27%)

Questions/Comments – 33 - (9%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Structures

- Drug use and paraphernalia littered throughout several parks pose a threat to safety of kids.
- When community members have reported concerns they are advised police can't do anything about it without visibility to the illegal actions.
- Behaviors, including: public urination and defecation, accumulations of trash surrounding tents, and drug activity in parks is creating a public health and safety concern.
- Supporters and those opposed to the ban alike speak to the need to provide resources and services for those who are homeless.
- Parks need to be restored to safe conditions where children can play without fear.
- Some respondents expressed concerns that while they are in support of this change in principal, they and others have skin conditions which require limited exposure to sun. They've requested consideration to allow at least 1 side walls to protect those with medical conditions.
- Common theme of need for enforcement relative to all proposed code revisions; this is voiced most strongly relative to this item.
- Several comments pleading "do not allow Tacoma to become the next Seattle."
- Many expressions of frustration about investing tax dollars for parks they no longer are able to use and decreasing interest in supporting park bonds based on the illegal uses and unsafe conditions they perceive to be unaddressed.

Summary of Comments Opposed to the Proposed Changes to Structures

- A number of opponents expressed concerns over criminalizing poverty and homelessness.
- Some community members are concerned that without resources for placement, those occupying tents in parks will simply move out into neighborhoods. At least one respondent stated this is happening in Hilltop alleyways.
- Others are concerned that it is inhumane to displace those who are homeless without providing alternative resources for drug rehabilitation and/or to meet basic housing needs.
- A handful cited concern that the proposed language is in conflict with the Federal Court's determination in *Martin v. Boise*.
- The National Law Center on Homeless & Poverty based in Washington, D.C., opposes proposed changes on the basis that it is ineffective, cruel, and expensive public policy to punish sheltering oneself in public space when there are not adequate alternative locations to meet the basic human need for shelter. They urge at minimum, to delay adoption of the proposed changes until the City of Tacoma identifies adequate alternative locations where its homeless residents can shelter themselves during the daytime hours.

Responses Relative to Smoking & Vaping in Parks:

Support - 137 - (37%)

Oppose – 42 - (12%)

No Comment 168 - (46%)

Questions/Comments- 20 - (5%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Smoking/Vaping

- Several individuals with asthma or children with asthma strongly support this.
- Many commented that although banned by state law, the use of marijuana in parks is of even greater impact than vaping, the smell is a concern at many locations and folks are asking this to be added.
- Health concerns relative to secondhand smoke.

Summary of Comments Opposed to the Proposed Changes to Smoking/Vaping

- Several who oppose do not believe there are any secondhand health risks related to vaping.
- Believe it's a better alternative than cigarettes as no butts are littered when vaping.
- Including all nicotine products would ban gums and patches used by those trying to quit smoking.
- Several suggested that there should be designated areas away from playgrounds where this is allowed.

Responses Relative to Vehicular Standards in Parks:

Support - 127 - (35%)

Oppose - 37 – (10%)

No Comment - 174 - (47%)

Questions/Comments- 29 -(8%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Vehicle Standards

- Integral part of reducing carbon footprint and providing transportation options to get to and enjoy parks.
- Individuals with disabilities who don't use wheel chairs use as alternative transportation .
- We have modernized as a society so if these vehicles pose a safety threat then make them in a designated area within the park.
- Enforcement is not going to happen.

Summary of Comments Opposed to Proposed Changes to Vehicle Standards (cont.)

- A number of people report concerns with the conflicts between wheeled devices and pedestrians on the sidewalks along Ruston Way.
- Surrey operators speeding down hillsides and on walking paths.
- E-scooters concerns with lack of rules and unsafe conduct in the operation of e-scooters. The majority of these reports were for operations in Point Defiance and on Ruston Way:
 - Riding through and around pedestrians at high rates of speed
 - Multiple riders on single unit, including young children
 - Operating speeds up to 15 mph, no helmets
 - Pedestrian hospitalized when struck by scooter traveling at high rate of speed.
 - Scooter related cliff rescue
 - Reports of scooters thrown over seawall and others parked in
 - Rental scooters left in paths blocking those with disabilities from safe travel
 - No signage re: rules or expected conduct for operation of scooters within pedestrian areas
 - Lacking safety enforcement

Other:

- Be sure motorcycles, mini-bikes, go-carts, and ATVs are included in definition of prohibited vehicles.

Responses Relative to Adopting a Code of Conduct:

Support - 116 - (32%)

Oppose – 37 - (10%)

No Comment - 177 - (48%)

Questions/Comments- 37 -(10%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Code of Conduct

- Behaviors, including: public urination and defecation, accumulations of trash surrounding tents, and drug activity in parks is creating a public health and safety concern.
- Parks need to be restored to safe conditions where children can play without fear.
- If enforced will restore safety, common sense of decency and usability of parks.
- Remove unlawful actions and ban them from parks.
- Recommendation that the millions invested in McNeil Island be repurposed to support rehab for those who need it.

Summary of Comments Opposed to the Proposed Changes to Code of Conduct

- Concerns about equity - avoid policies rooted in, or that can be used to further racist policing and community engagement practices.
- Dehumanizing individuals by criminalizing poverty.
- Consider it far-reaching.
- Questions about whether it will be enforceable.

Responses Relative to Certain Types of Equipment (Drones etc):

Support - 108 - (29%)

Oppose - 33 - (9%)

No Comment - 200 (55%)

Questions/Comments- 26 - (7%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Code Relative to Certain Types of Equipment

- Dangerous behaviors by those using in several parks scaring visitors and their dogs.
- Needed for privacy, safety and peaceful park experiences for people and wildlife.
- Sky lanterns are a big public safety risk.
- Causes anxiety for children and pets.
- Noise.

Summary of Comments Opposed to the Proposed Changes to Code Relative to Certain Types of Equipment

- Parks have no control over air rights over parks; that is FAA responsibility. Restricting take offs and landings within parks increases safety risk as operators are farther away from the air craft when operating.
- Parks are the best place for this – wide open spaces, some of the most scenic areas of the city.
- Only place where many kids have enough space to use these kinds of “toys.”

Other:

Both those in opposition to the ban and some who favored it recommended providing designated areas similar to off leash dog parks set aside for drone ops and remote operated car racing, etc.

Questions about permitting process for authorized use.

Responses Relative to Moorage:

Support - 67 - (19%)

Oppose - 4 - (1%)

No Comment - 280 - (78%)

Questions/Comments- 16 - (2%)

Summary of Comments Supporting Proposed Changes to Code Relative Moorage

- In general respondents those who responded were generally indifferent to this topic; however a handful commented that it's good to ensure a limit to allowable days.

Summary of Comments Opposed to the Proposed Changes to Moorage

- Need to provide options for those who live on the water.
- Need to impose greater restrictions.