



Civic Athletic Complex Master Plan – WMTP Feedback

November 20, 2024

WMTP's comments below apply to the four Options currently presented by the City's design team. Our comments cover urban/facility planning issues, not just trees at the site. Variations and adjustments to each Option may be possible that could solve some of the issues we identify below. A blending of features from two or more Options may end up ultimately as a superior result. For this reason, we do not explicitly recommend any Option as a favorite or a discard.

The forest area on this site contains many Landmark Trees which provide ecological, resiliency, and buffering functions. We support high intensity public development in this key recreation hub and believe it can be achieved while protecting and expanding the natural systems benefits of this public space.

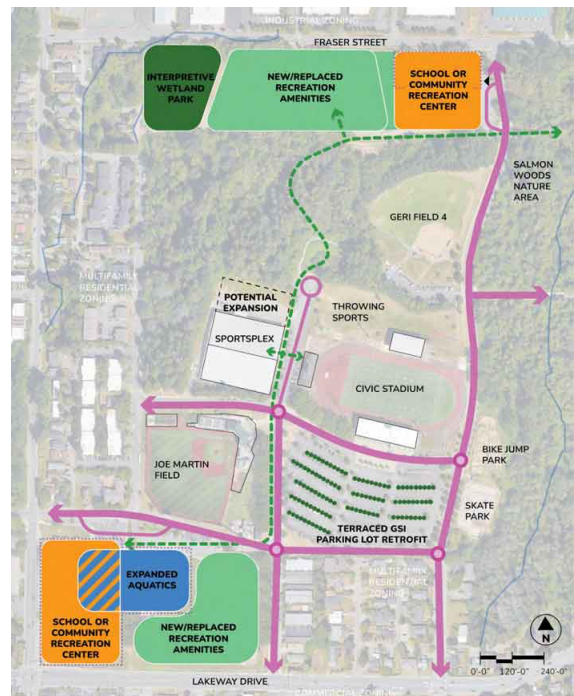
Option 1:

Issues/Problems

1) Option 1's northeast corner location is only reasonable for a school, not a community center. Why? A community center there would be too remote to synergize with the Aquatic Center and non-ballfield open recreational amenities. Secondly, the community center would bring continuous high car traffic onto Puget St., possibly creating the need (now or later) for signal lights at the Lakeway/Puget intersection, which is very close to the already very busy/congested Lakeway/Lincoln intersection.

2) Option 1 locates new/replaced recreational amenities along Lakeway, which is very undesirable due to high noise and air pollution levels from Lakeway traffic. Other options provide better locations for these amenities.

(3) Due to school traffic needs, a signal intersection at Puget/Lakeway would likely be required to facilitate left turns.



Advantages

Terracing the Civic Field parking lot to mitigate runoff is a fine idea. Please keep in mind that that large parking lot also has enormous potential for solar parking canopies, which many cities nationally are implementing to convert (and shade) large parking lots. The solar could directly power (or at least offset a portion of the power needs) the adjacent civic facilities. It's also an opportunity for the City to provide

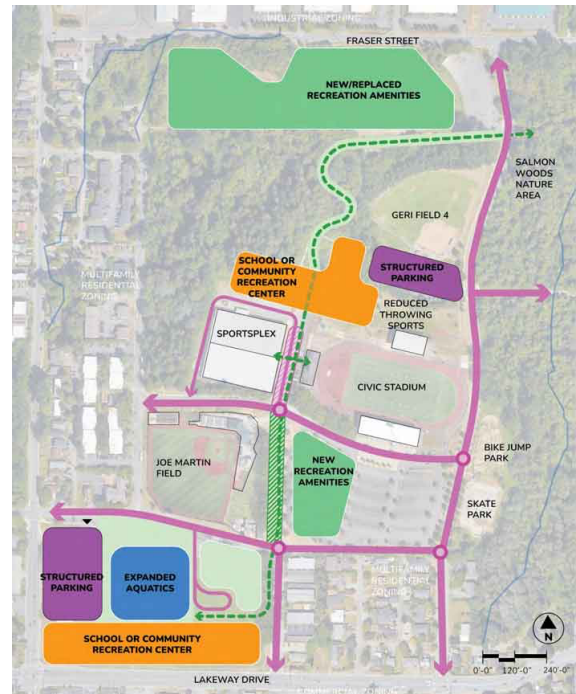
more community solar. With extreme summer heat effects becoming an increasingly critical issue, shade solutions (trees and/or solar canopies) will be critical to bring down the summer temperature of the entire complex and adjacent neighborhood.

Option 2:

Issues/Problems

1) Option 2 pulls more vehicle activity into the center of the complex. This is a recipe for periodic traffic congestion and may discourage pedestrian/bike circulation through the center of the site.

2) We applaud that the City has largely preserved the central mature forest within the Civic Athletic Complex from becoming a facility site. That forest area contains many Landmark Trees. If Option 2 is pursued, we hope its detailed design will preserve all healthy Landmark Trees on the site rather than remove some of the trees and try to offset that loss with new tree plantings, which won't truly begin to offset the loss for many decades. The City should follow the same rules in its public developments that are required of residents and private developers.



3) Option 2's pedestrian "framed gateway" through the middle of the new building is problematic. "Framed gateway" is architect jargon -- for everyone else this is essentially a wall and tunnel. If the location is used for the new school, it likely could not meet school site security needs, especially during a lockdown event. The location is also weak for synergy potential of school programs/kids with the new community center located near the southwest corner of the complex. If the mid-site location is instead used for the community center, the center plus the proposed adjacent parking garage will still visually wall off the north end of the complex, which is undesirable for many reasons.

4) Option 2's mid-site location disconnects the school (or community center) from the urban fabric of the community. We believe that would be a mistake. Isolation of that site is not desirable, especially off-hours.

5) The long, linear proportion of the Lakeway corner location is only potentially feasible for a community center, not an elementary school. But it's still not ideal even for a community center.

6) As the presentation identified, this Option may limit expansion of the Sportsplex.

7) Due to school traffic needs, a signal intersection at Puget/Lakeway would likely be required to facilitate left turns.

Advantages

(No additions to what the presentation already identified.)

Option 3:

Issues/Problems

(1) Due to school traffic needs, a signal intersection at Puget/Lakeway would likely be required to facilitate left turns.

Advantages

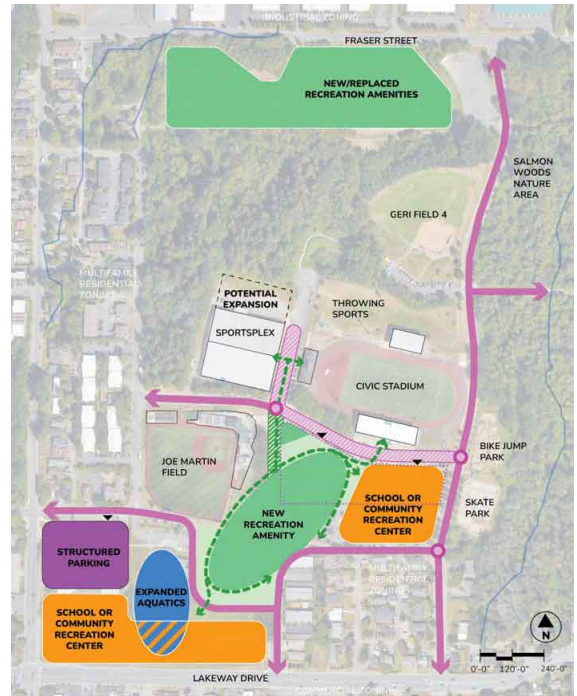
(1) Option 3 creates a potentially world-class collective open space with pedestrian linkages into all surrounding facilities. It is the only option that feels visionary in its design potential. It goes beyond merely fitting the new facilities in available locations.

(2) Option 3 appropriately keeps higher volume vehicle circulation towards Lakeway instead of into the central or north areas of the site.

(3) A school located as shown in the southern portion of Puget Street allows an appropriate area and site shape for the school. The location also is an appropriate balance of staying away from Lakeway (noise and pollution) but not being as far as Option 1's northeast corner of the complex.

(4) Option 3 honors the integrity of the retained central forest area, even if some Sportsplex expansion eventually occurs.

(5) Option 3's tuck under parking, while more expensive, is a great way to solve parking needs yet also meet recreational requirements of artificial turf fields.



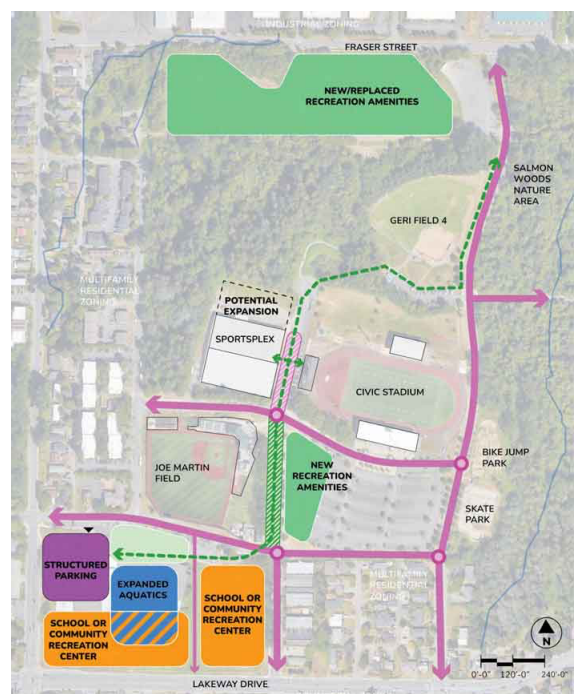
Option 4:

Issues/Problems:

(1) Option 4 underperforms in terms of tying the entire complex together into a diverse but cohesive whole. Perhaps a variation of Option 4 could better address that.

Advantages:

(No additions to what the presentation already identified.)



Additional Comments For All Options

a) Interpretive Wetland Park. All options can and should include the Interpretive Wetland Park that's shown currently only in Option 1. This is a desirable response to the inherent character of that site corner. It's good environmental stewardship. Installing an expensive engineered wetland solution there to incrementally gain some additional ballfield area seems like a poor choice. More ballfield space can be solved in other locations within Bellingham.

b) Walking/bicycling trail. All options can and should include the green dash walking/bicycling trail that meanders through the retained forest. It's currently only shown in Options 1 and 2. Similarly, Option 4's different trail that sharply turns eastward south of Geri Field 4 could also be in other options.

c) Correct synergy. An expanded Aquatic center best synergizes with the new community center, not the new elementary school. The latter is problematic from a security/lockdowns standpoint.

d) Pedestrian promenade linearity. A pedestrian promenade should be a feature of *any* final plan. Otherwise, it's a missed opportunity. Several other cities worldwide have *multi-directional/intersecting* promenades in their public spaces -- it doesn't need to be just one linear segment like you show. For example, it could also follow/curve along most edges of the grand central open recreational space of Option 3.

e) Energy-saving opportunity. Excess heat removed from the Sportsplex can feed heating/energy for one or more of the other indoor facilities.

f) Solar rooftops. Please plan and budget for solar on ALL new rooftops, as well as solar for the large existing roofs there (Sportsplex, Civic Stadium, Aquatics). With decreasing panel prices and thus relatively quick long-term payback, this is a no-brainer!

g) Multi-use ballfields. *Multi-use* ballfields are a must in ANY option instead of single-purpose. Recreational fields on the north bring much needed after-hours activity/eyes to adjacent industrial areas and can potentially share their parking during off-hours. (Maybe that already occurs?)

h) Parks Goals/Values. Other than Option 2 not scoring as well in the Preservation and Resiliency goals/values of COB Parks, all other goals listed (Inclusivity, Value, Connection, Play) could be equally met by ALL options. It will mainly depend on their design details. In our opinion, Parks goals/values are too general to be useful to score/compare the Options further at this early conceptual stage.

Thanks, COB Parks (and its consultants), for a well-run feedback process. We sincerely hope you will take these comments to heart and that an additional community feedback opportunity will occur once a singular 'best' conceptual option comes together.