



**CITY OF KIRKLAND**  
**PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES**  
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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Kurt Triplett, City Manager

**From:** Lynn Zwaagstra, Director of Parks and Community Services  
Jodie L. Galvan, Interim Park Planning and Development Manager

**Date:** April 23, 2025

**Subject:** **Juanita Bay Wildflower Meadow Pilot Project Update**

### RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the City Council receives an update on the Juanita Bay Wildflower Meadow Pilot Project.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

- No action by the Council is needed.
- The Juanita Bay Wildflower Meadow pilot project was initiated in 2020 with funding from the Washington Native Plant Society and City Forestry Account. The first phase of the project included planting approximately 100 native Garry oak trees in the open grass on the west side of Juanita Bay Park and seeding two, approximately 20,000 square foot areas with native grass and wildflower seed.
- In the four years since the project was initiated, staff and contractors (using a combination of operational and City Forestry Account funding) have maintained the trees and expanded the size of the native grass and wildflower patches experimenting with different seed varieties and sources as well as different site preparation techniques.
- In the fall of 2025, staff will use approximately \$17,000 in Waste Management *Green 4 Good* grant funding to expand the native grass and wildflower patches to cover most of the 10 acres of open grass on the west side of Juanita Bay Park.
- In the spring and fall of 2026, staff will use the remaining (approximately \$17,500) *Green 4 Good* grant funding to enhance the native grass and wildflower patches on the nearly 10 acres of open grass space.
- Following the two years of intensive seeding, staff will maintain the wildflower meadow with strategically timed annual mowing and occasional overseeding of annual wildflower species as needed.

## BACKGROUND:

In 2019 and 2020 park usage, especially within the more spacious and lesser used natural parks such as Juanita Bay, was at an all-time high. As such, community feedback about Kirkland's parks was also at an all-time high. An idea was brought forth to Parks staff from a longtime community member with an enduring passion for Kirkland's open spaces and natural areas. The community member encouraged staff to discontinue the practice of mowing the approximately ten acres of open grass area on the west side of Juanita Bay Park for the following reasons:

- Enhance upland bird habitat;
- Enhance pollinator habitat;
- Protect nesting turtles;
- Reduce noise for wildlife and park users seeking a peaceful, natural environment; and
- Enhance park aesthetics by providing a unique, tall grass environment.

The suggestion was shared broadly with the Parks Management team and was well received. Staff agreed that reducing mowing at the site would provide the identified benefits and would provide the added benefits of reducing wear and tear on equipment. The open grass area on the west side of Juanita Bay Park functioned as a nine-hole golf course from 1932 to 1975. As such, it is a highly undulated surface with historic sand traps that have grown in with grass and require mowing, making it Park's roughest, and most jarring, site to mow.

Parks Management staff discussed the recommendation with Parks and Community Services leadership and decided to move forward with a pilot project in spring 2021 using \$1,050 in Conservation Grant funding provided by the Washington Native Plant Society and \$6,150 in funding from the City Forestry Account. These funds were used to plant two, approximately 20,000 square foot areas with native grass and wildflower seed and plant approximately 100 native Garry oak trees in strategic, high visibility locations within the open grass area. Parks staff also ceased mowing the open grass area in 2021 with the following caveats:

- The perimeter of the entire open grass area was mowed regularly to provide a buffer between the neighbors and the park as well as between the asphalt pathways and the tall grasses.
- Pathways through the grass were mowed to the tables and benches located in the open grass area and the perimeter was mowed around the tables and benches to make them more accessible.
- The entire site was mowed at the end of the summer, after the native wildflowers and grasses have gone to seed, to provide a tidier looking aesthetic. Annual mowing provides the added benefit of mimicking historic grazing or wildfire regimes that would help the native grasses and wildflowers regenerate the following spring.
- Neighbors with property abutting the park were notified in advance of initiating the project so they could understand the intent behind the change in site maintenance and have direct contact information for a staff person they could reach out to with questions or concerns.

The initial implementation of the project was successful and well received by the community. Therefore, the practice of forgoing most mowing until the end of summer has been continued since 2021, and staff have continued seeding additional patches of native grasses and wildflowers each spring and fall experimenting with different species, seed sources, and site preparation techniques to determine what is most successful at this unique location.

In 2024, Parks was awarded \$34,500 from Waste Management's *Green 4 Good* grant program. This program is available to Waste Management customers as part of the City's new contract and it uses tax credits to support environmental projects in the City's customer service area. The \$34,500 is sufficient funding to seed most of the ten acres of open grass area with a mix of native, perennial bunch grasses and wildflowers including blue wildrye, tufted hairgrass, Roemer's fescue, meadow barley, prairie junegrass, common camas, yarrow, globe gilia, heal-all, sea blush, riverbank lupine, Oregon sunshine, and several *Clarkia* species.

Staff will use the *Green 4 Good* funding to implement three rounds of intensive seeding (fall 2025, spring 2026, and fall 2026) after tilling the site with a tractor mounted implement in late summer 2025. Flowers from the fall 2025 seeding will be visible in spring and summer of 2026. Flowers from the spring 2026 seeding will be visible in summer 2026. Flowers from the fall 2026 seeding will be visible in spring and summer of 2027.

All of the grasses that will be seeded are perennial species that should sustain, and expand, indefinitely with annual mowing and selective weeding to reduce competition from non-native species. The majority of the wildflowers that will be seeded are also perennial species that should sustain, and expand, indefinitely with the same maintenance required by the perennial native grasses. Some of the showiest wildflowers are annual species that are able to reseed themselves but will likely diminish over time (due to competition from the perennial species). Therefore, staff anticipate needing to overseed the annual wildflower species every two to three years to sustain their presence in the meadow.

#### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:**

The transition to the low-mow maintenance regime has been well received by the community, especially with the addition of native grasses and wildflowers that flower throughout the spring and summer. Local chapters of the Washington Native Plant Society and Eastside Audubon Society host informal tours of the flowers and birds in the area and photographers are often seen taking pictures of individuals and families posing in the tall grasses and flowers.

The meadow has succeeded in its goal of enhancing bird habitat and pollinator habitat, protecting turtle nests, and creating a more serene and aesthetically pleasing atmosphere for the park.

Concerns from the community have included wildland fire risks and the presence of foxtail grasses whose seeds pose a health risk to dogs that can get them lodged in their noses and ears. To address these concerns, staff mow a wide perimeter around the entire open grass area, mow the entire site in the late summer when grasses are driest, and selectively mow or brush cut patches of foxtail as they are identified.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

Staff have ordered seed from two regional suppliers for fall planting and will continue the current practice of mowing a perimeter around the entire ten acres of open grass as well as around tables and benches.

Staff will mow the entire ten acres of open grass in late summer and will then use a tractor-mounted implement to till much of the area (avoiding the trees and patches of established perennial grasses and wildflowers planted in prior years) to prepare for fall seeding.

Staff will seed additional annual species in spring 2026 and then will overseed the entire area in fall 2026 focusing on areas with the poorest establishment after the fall 2025 seeding.

Staff will continue to maintain the area with annual mowing in the late summer and with occasional overseeding as needed.

#### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1 - Juanita Bay Park Pollinator Meadow Site Location and Photos - Spring 2025



### Juanita Bay Park Wildflower Meadow

Project location and site photos from implementation of this pilot project between spring 2021 and summer 2024.





