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City Club report, Parks survey see different future for Forest Park - UPDATED

Posted by [Jonathan Maus \(Publisher/Editor\)](#) on May 24th, 2010 at 2:34 pm

Deciding how to move forward with improved and expanded biking opportunities in Forest Park got a lot more complicated last week.

On Thursday, the City Club of Portland released [a 65-page report on Forest Park](#) that, among other things, states unequivocally that there should be no additional bike trails or access of any kind until various studies are completed. But just a few days before that, the results of a Portland Parks survey on biking in Forest Park found that a majority of respondents favored more bike access (on new and existing trails) and funding for more trails was rated the #1 priority among a list of "management actions" while completing studies ranked at the very bottom of the list.

How Parks Commissioner Nick Fish and Parks Director Zari Santner interpret



Forest Park: A Call to Action



City Club information before 10:00 AM on May 24, 2010.
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the scope of these studies and how they balance the City Club report with the survey findings, will be key to the future of biking in Forest Park.

Cover of City Club's *Forest Park*:

In February 2009, when Fish first went on record in support of expanding biking in Forest Park, [he told me](#):

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"My interest is not in studying this to death, it's seeing what we can actually do...I am committed to finding ways to significantly expand our current inventory of singletrack trails."

And nine months later I again [asked him](#) about how he'll fulfill this promise without a major revision to the existing plan (which would require a lengthy public process):

"The plan is not the Bible. It has not been handed down by God. It is a plan that sets forth some basic parameters..."

Of course those things were said before this highly contentious process had played out and it remains to be seen whether or not Fish's tone changes in the coming weeks.

"I think it's a thorough report... But I think the picture in regards to bikes is incomplete."
-- Tom Archer, *NW Trail Alliance*

Fish has overseen [a committee on biking in Forest Park](#) that is set to forward their recommendations following a final meeting tonight. Many of those recommendations call for expanded bike access and all of them were developed within the confines of the existing Forest Park management plan.

Off-road cycling advocate and president of [Northwest Trail Alliance](#) Tom Archer is a member of that committee. He disagrees with how bikes were characterized in the City Club report.

The report states as fact (and with no citation) that, "off-road cycling can lead to rutted trails that gather water and create erosion and other potential ecological impacts." Archer takes issue with that statement and says, "There are sustainable ways to accomodate bicycles in the park... All users have an impact."

Archer feels the City Club did not adequately represent the cycling side of the issue:

"The only cyclists that were consulted were Erik [Tonkin] and I, and it was at the beginning of the process and they never came back to us..."

I think it's a thorough report, and I applaud them on that. But I think the picture in regards to bikes is incomplete. If they were going to go to that level of detail, we would have liked a chance to respond to their charges."

Archer is concerned that there is no ability for the public to comment on this report, unless you go to the City Club luncheon on Friday where an up-or-down vote will take place (*please see update below).

Archer's concerns are validated by a recent Parks survey which asked Portlanders directly how they feel about the issue of biking in Forest Park.

Over 1000 people took that survey. Of the respondents, 51% said biking is their primary activity in the park. Hikers, walkers and trail runners made up the rest of the respondents with 14.8%, 10.7%, and 16.7% respectively.

The survey showed broad support for biking in the park -- even among respondents who did not identify themselves as mountain bikers. When asked about trail sharing, 67% of *all respondents* said it should be

considered (unfortunately the committee didn't reach consensus on trail-sharing and therefore it's not likely to be part of the final recommendations they give to Fish and Santner). When asked how best to provide new cycling opportunities in the park, 91% of respondents voted for some form of expanded access. Only 8% chose the option, "Do not provide any more opportunities for biking"

After looking over the survey results, Archer says, "I was encouraged by them, I think it shows overwhelming support even among people that don't identify themselves as bicyclists... Many of them support trail sharing and expanding the network of bike trails in the park."

How and when that happens won't be an easy decision.

-- *City Club will vote to adopt this report at their Annual Meeting [on Friday](#) (6/4).*

-- *The Forest Park Single Track Cycling advisory committee [meets tonight](#).*

UPDATE: There's an opportunity for public input on the City Club Report this Wednesday (5/26) from 5:30 - 7:00pm. A [Town Hall on Future of Forest Park](#) will be held at City Club Commons (901 SW Washington St).

Join the study committee members who produced the report for a lively and interactive "town hall" discussion about the report's findings, conclusions and recommendations. The town hall is free and open to the public, but space is limited. Please RSVP to tony@pdxcityclub.org or call 503-228-7231 x103.



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