News and Updates

The meeting began with updates on an EERC presentation to the State Parks Commission in March. The state legislature included $750,000 for the renovation of the Gym Annex for the EERC in the state’s 2020-21 biennium capital budget.

Steve Brand spoke to State Parks process for managing this project: Once funds become available after July 1, State Parks will develop project scope and bidding documents. Bidding will likely go out in September, at the earliest. The construction schedule will depend on what bids are submitted and how the contractors work with State Parks. Ken Bounds also pointed out that there are $100 million worth of other projects queued up to get started; State Parks and others have backlogged projects that were not able to start on time during the last biennium because of delays in the capital budget.

Nancy Ousley asked how the design of the space will work with Daniels, who will have control over the remainder of the building. These are details that will need to be worked out during the contracting process.

Susan Carlson asked what the odds might be for a supplement budget request if the appropriated funds fall short of what is required. Steve Brand said there may need to be some prioritization and contingencies made as the project unfolds.

Vision, Mission, Strategies

The Planning Team shared a draft vision, mission and goals:

Vision: A living laboratory where experience transforms learning and stewardship takes root.

The mission of the St. Edward EERC is to provide integrated environmental education and research experiences to a broad and diverse community, with the purpose of advancing public understanding, connection with nature, scientific knowledge, and stewardship of Pacific Northwest ecosystems.

Strategies:
- Deliver environmental education along a continuum of learning from PreK-12 to university and beyond;
- Integrate university research and community science to engage through scientific inquiry, advance knowledge and increase environmental literacy;
• Use scientific information to inform habitat restoration and community stewardship of St. Edward State Park and its environs; and
• Connect and engage a diverse community with the natural, historic, and cultural assets of St. Edward State Park

These strategies reflect input from three public engagement meetings. Overall, the Planning Team heard a strong interest in the real-world science unfolding at St Edward State Park. Members of the community want to be involved in research on plants, birds, and wildlife and they see opportunities to use the environment of St. Edward State Park as means of teaching and connecting people with nature. Public meeting attendees felt there was an opportunity to build something that reaches across research, outreach, education and stewardship, using the strengths of each to create a more sustainable set of programs. They also felt the EERC should complement and coordinate with existing education providers and area nonprofits.

Integrated Model: Research, Teaching and Outreach
The Planning Team considered three models for delivering these programs, based upon its earlier research of other nature-based learning centers. At the final public engagement meeting, the Planning Team tested three focus areas: Outreach/Interpretive focus; Education focus with nonprofit partner; and a University-Led Research and Teaching focus. The conclusion from that meeting was that a model integrating all three approaches would allow the EERC to take best advantage of existing university study and field research, while leveraging this to create strong K-12 STEM instruction and volunteer engagement.

Potential Programs that might be fielded under this model include: students teachers (graduate and undergraduate) and mentors; formal preK-12 STEM instruction; EERC volunteers-led tours, teaching and interpretation; restoration and stewardship; family and junior ranger programs; and other programs that intersect with environmental education, such as community health education. Program outcomes would include: Robust STEM pipeline; activated park community; and resilient ecosystems.

Partnering with an institution like UW-Bothell would allow the EERC to tap into science and interdisciplinary foundations with community-based values. It may be possible to fundraise for the EERC through existing university channels for both research grants and private donations; or, the EERC may need to create a small auxiliary fundraising organization. There may be small, localized giving opportunities for the EERC, such as house parties or crowdfunding, that may fall outside the scope of a university advancement office.

A research and teaching model require UW-Bothell (or other institution) to take a strong lead role. In any situation with multiple partners, it is important that a strong lead partner be established. Ensuring that faculty have the bandwidth to participate and deliver programs would also require a substantial leadership commitment.

Business Plan
The Planning Team presented a high-level budget for a university-led model, as it might look once programs are up on running (in three- to five-years). A minimum budget for optimum programming would be $250,000, with revenue split between university contributions of staff time, earned revenue (program fees, rentals), grants and private funding.

This budget depends on approximately $100,000 in funding from grants or other private sources. The EERC’s success in securing this funding will largely determine its timeline for launch, as well as its prioritization among different program options. The Planning Team will need to work with faculty to develop compelling research questions, and the timing of delivery will also need to be aligned to the academic calendar.
This budget is written with the assumption that the lead partner manages K-12 education programs; there may be program or financial benefits to outsourcing this to a third party, depending on the ability of university students to meet EERC demand for student-led instruction.

2020: Next Steps
A key priority for the Planning Team moving forward will be to develop the EERC’s keystone funding blocks. This will inform initial program focus area and content and establish timelines for hiring and launch.

The Planning Team’s report will be sent to the Advisory Council for review and comment by the end of May. A final draft will be submitted to State Parks by June 30, and the Planning Team will present to the State Parks Commission in July.

If State Parks embarks upon a formal partnership to launch the EERC, there will be ongoing community engagement, beginning in the fall. This will likely include interpretive tours, fundraising events, an email newsletter and restoration events. The Planning Team will also continue to work on engaging formal education and developing curriculum.