Johnson Creek Interpretive Boardwalk Design Details
Moving Forward

Background

On June 10th, a group of interested community members met at the Portland-Milwaukie Light Rail Project Eastside Field Office to discuss the design of the interpretive boardwalk planned for the Tacoma Street/Johnson Creek MAX station site. The boardwalk will complement the plans to create salmon habitat and replant native streamside forest along Johnson Creek at the station site.

Design meeting participants included representatives of the Ardenwald/Johnson Creek and Sellwood Moreland Neighborhood Associations, the Johnson Creek Watershed Council, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, TriMet and Mayer Reed (the landscape architecture firm designing the boardwalk).

There is a follow-up design meeting scheduled on Thursday, July 19th at 4p.m. Any one is welcome to attend. Please RSVP to Matt Clark (matt@jcwc.org).

June 10th Meeting Topics

The June 10th meeting began with a review of the proposed boardwalk alignment and materials, which had been discussed previously at a December 2011 kick-off meeting.

Alignment

The boardwalk will be located south of Johnson Creek and north of the station platform. It will be accessed from the concrete walkways that lead to the station platform and will follow a curvilinear path to lend a sense of mystery (you won't immediately see what's at the end).

It will pass over a stormwater swale, an opportunity for education about onsite stormwater treatment.
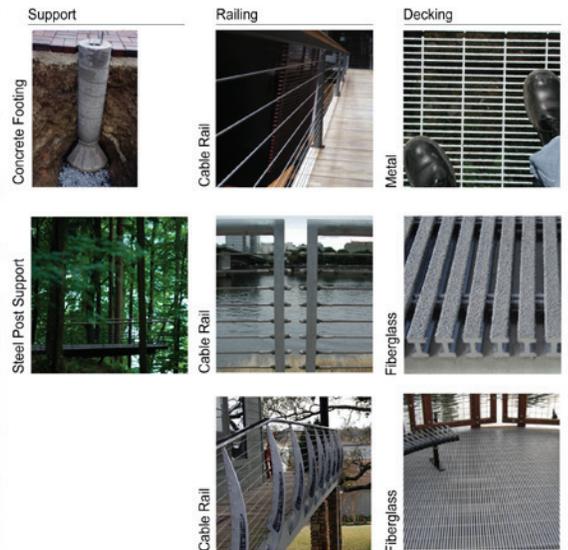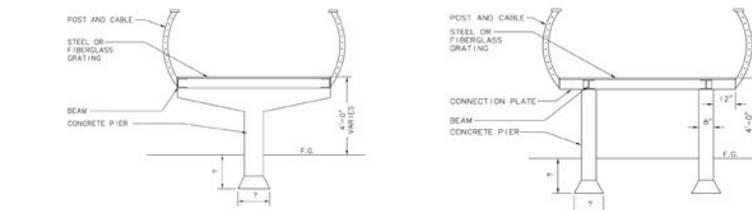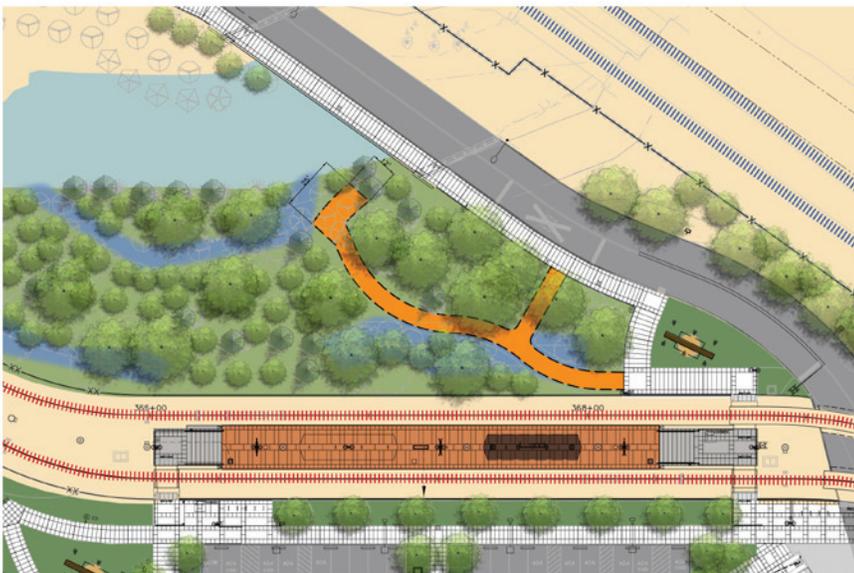
Latest rendering of SE Tacoma St/Johnson Creek station.

It will end near the excavated side-channel salmon habitat of Johnson Creek where slower water will provide a chance to see wildlife.

The creek overlook at the end of the boardwalk will be sized to accommodate a typical classroom of students. The boardwalk and station site will be an outdoor classroom, easily accessible by MAX and leading to other sites on Johnson Creek via the nearby Springwater Corridor Trail.

Materials

The proposed open top decking of steel or fiberglass will let water and light through. The slotted surface gap of the decking is ADA-approved (Americans with Disabilities Act) and the boardwalk will not be sloped. The proposed length is 150 feet and proposed width is eight feet to allow comfortable passage.

The proposed cable railing is 42 inches high (per code) and is thin and unobtrusive to "let the landscape through." The curved railing also makes it more difficult to climb, which is a safety concern.

Architecturally, using a single central pier would make it look like the boardwalk is floating, a feature that the meeting participants particularly liked.

Interpretive Themes

After reviewing the proposed alignment and materials, participants discussed potential interpretive themes for the boardwalk.

- There is broad interest in an overarching historical theme, showing Johnson Creek through a variety of historical lenses and exploring how different communities and peoples have interacted with and influenced Johnson Creek through the years and vice versa. Some of those historical lenses were touched upon during the meeting:

- Native peoples used Johnson Creek and continue to use the entire Willamette River ecosystem for sustenance, harvesting salmon and eels and other food resources, using cattails for baskets and alder and maple trees for spoons and dishes, and cedars for plank houses.

- Johnson Creek also played a prominent role in driving the area's early industrial development. For example, the town of Willsburg was located near the current station site and used Johnson Creek to power local mills.

In recent history, the focus has been on restoring creek habitat and ecological function that was damaged and lost over the years, particularly when the creek was channelized during the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s.

The meeting participants liked the idea of showing the changing attitudes toward water: from a source of sustenance to a commodity and an economic driver and finally to thinking about its restoration. We also wanted to be sure to place Johnson Creek in the context of the neighborhoods around it, showing it as a part of a larger whole.

Another important point made was that interpretive signage often focuses only on history. In addition to featuring the past, we have an opportunity to present a vision for the future. Also, we want to avoid clutter from too many signs placed too closely together which would detract from people's experience of Johnson Creek itself. To avoid clutter, the group advocated spreading out the signs along the length of the boardwalk, perhaps even installing signs at the station platform.

Donor recognition elements

Participants spent the last part of the meeting discussing project fundraising and donor recognition. One of the fundraising ideas discussed was name-engraved salmon plaques that could be installed on the boardwalk to recognize donors.

The group wanted to expand the idea beyond just salmon to include plaques of an entire ecosystem of herons, beaver, vine maples, salamanders, and ferns. "These interpretive projects always focus on salmon," one participant noted. "We have a chance to think more broadly."

Next Steps

At the July 19th meeting, the group will review and provide feedback on 2–3 interpretive concepts prepared by Mayer Reed based on the themes discussed on June 11th.

How You Can Help

- Participate in the July 19th design review meeting.
- Help spread the word about the project.
  - Forward this newsletter to a friend.
  - Write a Letter to the Editor.
  - Pass out information at a community event this summer (e.g. Ardenwald Concert Series, Milwaukie Daze, Sellwood Sundae in the Park).

Excited? We are! Join us...

If you would like to help the Creek Committee build this new habitat and also Connect the Dots with riparian restoration from the Willamette confluence to Tideman Johnson Park/Errol Heights, get in touch with Matt Clark (matt@jcwc.org).