

Mount Tabor Interpretive Program

Telling the Story of the City's Water System and Historic Reservoirs at Mount Tabor

Design Advice Request - Historic Landmarks Commission

Project Overview and Goal

The Mount Tabor Interpretive Program (MTIP) will develop public education displays in Mount Tabor Park that tell the history of the Mount Tabor Reservoirs and the City of Portland's water system. PWB strives to develop an interpretive program that is inclusive, equitable and accessible to all park visitors.

Public education displays are planned at four key locations in the park (Reservoirs 1, 5 and 6, and the summit) to tell the story of the Mt. Tabor Reservoirs and the City of Portland's water system. Educational elements will include:

- History of the City's water system and conveyance to Mount Tabor.
- Development and role of the Mount Tabor reservoirs.
- Changes in use of the Mount Tabor Reservoirs

Background

To comply with drinking water regulations, PWB disconnected Mt. Tabor's original uncovered, open reservoirs from the drinking water system in 2015. The 2014 land use decision that approved the disconnection of the reservoirs required an interpretive program that *'tells the story of the Mt. Tabor reservoirs and the City of Portland's water system.'*

The interpretive project occurs within Mount Tabor Park in southeast Portland. The entire site is owned by the City of Portland and managed by the Portland Water Bureau (PWB) and Portland Parks and Recreation. Mount Tabor was first established as a distribution site for Portland's water in 1894, when Reservoir 1 was constructed along with Reservoirs at Washington Park. The reservoirs at Mount Tabor and, separately, Mount Tabor Park itself were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004.

PWB contracted with Historical Research Associates and Bryan Potter Design to develop historical content and designs for the proposed public education displays. PWB has also worked with and sought input from Mount Tabor community representatives and other key stakeholders on the project. In April 2019, PWB and Mount Tabor community representatives each presented design and content options to Commissioner Amanda Fritz for input and direction. To assist with the

development of project content and displays, Commissioner Fritz issued a list of project principles with which she would like the project to comply. The draft design panels presented before the Landmarks Commission are carefully created following the Commissioner's framework, and using professional historical interpretive best practices, stakeholder input, and equity and inclusion principles. The project is scheduled to be completed in summer 2021.

Interpretive Panel Elements

Narratives

Content was selected using themes and narratives developed by Mount Tabor community members. Each interpretive panel will contain two stories accompanied by a large photo to help tell the story.

Translations

All content will be translated into Spanish and simple Chinese, languages identified using census tract data east of Mount Tabor. The data show high numbers of people speaking Spanish and Chinese at home.

Braille

Since audio options are not proposed onsite due to cost and implementation barriers, braille will be included in all interpretive displays for low-vision park visitors. The City's Office of Equity and Human Rights recommended incorporating braille into each sign if other onsite non-visual interpretation methods are not used. The Parks Accessibility Advisory Committee recommended including braille if audio options are not used onsite. Each interpretive panel will include display content in braille on an angled lip at the bottom of the panel, making it accessible to low-vision visitors in a wheelchair. Braille will be produced in full conformance with currently applicable codes set forth by the Braille Authority of North America (BANA).

Content Readability

All content is written at a 6 - 8th grade reading level and each story is between 200-300 words. Text size is set at 3/16" x-height, as standard size used for content readability. White text is proposed to contrast well with the darker background of the panels. By keeping content at the selected reading level and length using legible text size and color, the content will better accommodate a wider range of literacy levels, language skills, concentration levels, and visual abilities.

Park Locations and Exhibit Materials

PWB and Parks are currently discussing optimal signage locations and is awaiting input. PWB proposes siting displays at park locations that consider accessibility in the broadest sense (see Figure 1 and the attached initial draft wayfinding panel for potential signage locations). Wider interpretive displays (8' X 2') have been chosen to allow multiple users with multiple abilities to access different parts of the display at one time. Low-profile interpretive panels are proposed at accessible locations at Reservoirs 1, 5, and 6, and the park summit and are designed to complement the natural park setting. Each interpretive location would also contain one low-profile wayfinding sign illustrating which site the park user is visiting and where other educational displays are located in the park. A programmatic wayfinding sign is proposed to be located at the visitor center, adjacent to the existing information kiosk, as a map and guide to interpretive locations in the park.

All displays and signs will be fabricated using the most durable materials and securely installed. Materials under consideration include:

- ImageLoc or Screenprint Porcelain Enamel Sign Coating
- Display materials and colors will be designed to blend harmoniously with the surrounding park environment. A gloss level will be selected that provides optimal clarity and sign visibility in conditions ranging from bright sunshine to shade.
- Exhibit bases are proposed to either use double-post or cantilever designs to accommodate the wider, rectangular panel designs favored by our stakeholders.
- Exhibit bases and frames will be constructed of durable, long-lasting materials such as powder-coated aluminum alloy. It is a common base material used for interpretive signage and is corrosion resistant (see Figures 2 and 3).

Land Acknowledgment/Indigenous Story of Water

In coordination with Commissioner Fritz's office and the City's Tribal Relations Program, PWB is committed to providing a land acknowledgment for this project to develop a meaningful acknowledgement of our region's first peoples. PWB proposes to include the land acknowledgment on a sign in the park once language is available. At this time, it is unknown when adopted language will be available for use or where in the park the land acknowledgment would be placed.

Additionally, consultation with the Native American Community Advisory Council (NACAC) has created additional space and opportunity to tell the story of our water system from the indigenous perspective. A sub-committee of NACAC has convened to develop content to include in an additional interpretive panel to be placed at one of the proposed interpretive locations in the park. This work is on-going and is expected to be drafted this fall.

Zoning and Compatibility

Mt. Tabor Park is a 196-acre public park located in a residential area of southeast Portland. The park encompasses most of a volcanic butte. The tallest summit rises to an elevation of 643 feet and includes scenic views of inner east Portland and downtown. The park is zoned OS, OSc – Open Space base zone with Environmental Conservation overlay zone. The historic reservoirs and associated resources are set against the backdrop of a coniferous forest and sprawling open spaces used recreationally by many. The park's landscape consists predominantly of managed Douglas fir. Deciduous trees include choke cherry, vine maple, bigleaf maple, red alder, dogwood, oak, birch and hawthorn. Shrubs include western hazel, red huckleberry, willow, rhododendron, juniper, forsythia, azalea, cedar and spiraea. The herb layer is comprised of about 80 percent mowed lawn, yet in the less cultivated areas, sword fern, bracken fern, orchard grass, Oregon grape, salal, twisted stalk, fringe cup and poison ivy are common. The non-cultivated areas include a native shrub layer absent in other parts of the park; shrubs include wild rose, snowberry, oceanspray, serviceberry and thimbleberry.

The land use review (14-218444 HR EN) that permitted disconnection of the reservoirs in 2015 noted that *“educational programming is needed for the reservoirs to truthfully remain a record of their time, place, and use, recognizing the proposed alterations at this period in their history.* The proposed interpretive program is designed to support the historic character of the reservoirs and associated resources. Interpretive panels are proposed to be placed at key interpretive locations that will enhance the park visitor's experience through compelling photos and site-specific short stories about what the viewer is experiencing. Each panel's content is curated to connect a park visitor to the significance of the place and why it is unique.

Interpretive panels are designed to create a sense of place in the urban park environment and historic district, while remaining unobtrusive to the outdoor space and historic resources. Low-profile panels with muted colors are proposed to complement the historic resources and park environment without hindering scenic view opportunities in the park. The proposed interpretive panel design references the baroque castle motif used by each reservoir's gatehouse, creating a coherent interpretive design throughout the park.

Interpretive displays would primarily be clustered around key, accessible locations to respect the outdoor space and its recreational use, creating a public interpretive realm that honors and enhances the pedestrian experience.

The proposed project is within the boundaries of two historic districts, the Mount Tabor Park Reservoirs Historic District and the Mount Tabor Park Historic District, both listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2004 (see attached nominations).

The Mount Tabor Park Reservoirs Historic District is eligible under Criterion A, for its association with significant historic events in the areas of community planning and development,

engineering, architecture/landscape architecture, and recreation. It is also eligible under Criterion C, as a distinctive and early example of concrete construction and romantic eclectic architectural and landscape design. The Mount Tabor Park Historic District is eligible under Criterion A, for its association with early park planning achievements in Portland, and Criterion C, for its landscape architecture and association with John Charles Olmsted.

The proposed locations for the interpretive signs and wayfinding signs are adjacent to contributing buildings and structures in the Mount Tabor Park Reservoirs Historic District. These include Reservoir 1 and Gatehouse 1; Reservoir 5 and Gatehouse 5; and Reservoir 6. Likewise, proposed locations are adjacent to the contributing Mount Tabor Park site in the Mount Tabor Park Historic District, with signs bordering the parking lot (near the Visitor's Center), Reservoir Loop Drive, SE Harvey Scott Circle, and the vicinity of the historic lighting system.

The proposed project meets the applicable approval criteria under 33.846.060.G, as follows:

Historic character: The project will not alter the historic character of the property. The property will remain intact. Alterations to the features and spaces that contribute to the property's historic significance are minimal. No buildings or structures will be touched by the project. The proposed signs will be installed within the contributing Mount Tabor Park site in the Mount Tabor Park Historic District, however they will not impact the park's landscape architecture. The proposed interpretive and wayside signs will not obstruct view of historic features nor change the feel of the park site, which has been updated over time with modern Park Bureau and Water Bureau signs.

Record of its time: The historic resources will remain a physical record of its time, place, and use. The proposed installation of signs will not create a false sense of historic development.

Historic features: The historic features of the property will not be impacted by the project. The proposed interpretive signs will be adjacent to significant historic features and will be freestanding. The proposed wayfinding signs will be located at each interpretive location with one overall programmatic wayfinding sign located adjacent to the information kiosk at the visitor center. No buildings or structures will be touched by the project.

Historic materials: Historic materials will be protected. The proposed freestanding interpretive and wayfinding signs will be adjacent to historic features. No building or structures will be touched and alterations to the features and space that contribute to the property's historic significance are minimal.

Archaeological resources: The proposed sign installation will require minimal ground disturbance at each sign location. The Park Bureau does not anticipate encountering archaeological resources.

Differentiate new from old: The proposed alterations will not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The signs will not touch historic buildings or structures, nor alter the historic design of the park.

Architectural compatibility: The proposed alterations will be compatible with the resource's massing, size, scale, and architectural features. The signs will be positioned adjacent to contributing features of the property (Reservoir 1 and Gatehouse 1; Reservoir 5 and Gatehouse 5; Reservoir 6, and places in the Mount Tabor Park site. The signs will be positioned so as to be accessible yet not obstruct view of the historic buildings, structures, and landscape. Display materials and colors will not detract from the character-defining features of the historic property.

Preserve the form and integrity of historic resources: The installation of the signs will be undertaken in such a manner that if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic resource and its environment would be unimpaired.

Hierarchy of compatibility: The proposed interpretive and wayfinding signs are designed to be compatible with the original resource (Mount Tabor Park and Mount Tabor Park Reservoirs).

Stakeholder/Public Outreach

During the project design phase, PWB consulted with the following stakeholders:

- **Commissioner Amanda Fritz**
- **Mount Tabor community members** – John Laursen, Stephanie Stewart, Bing Wong, Kim Lakin
- **Office of Equity and Human Rights (OEHR)** – Nickole Cheron, Tatiana Elejalde, Jonathan Simeone
- **City Tribal Relations Director** – Laura John
- **Native American Community Advisory Council (NACAC)**
- **City of Portland Land Acknowledgment Advisory Committee**
- **Portland Parks & Recreation** – George Lozovoy
- **Parks Accessibility Advisory Committee (PAAC)**
- **Public Utility Review Board (PURB)**
- **Citizen Utility Board (CUB)**
- **Public Open House** (April 2018)
- **Online Survey** (April 2018)
- **Education Outreach** - Zoo Animal Presenters (ZAP) and Franklin HS Cross Country Team

Project Team

Portland Water Bureau

Robert Fraley – Senior Planner/Project Manager

Lisa Vieno – Technical Writer

Katy Asher – Senior Communications Specialist

Mount Tabor Community Members

Stephanie Stewart

John Laursen

Bing Wong

Kim Lakin

Historical Research Associates, Inc.

Morgen Young – Senior Historian

Libby Provost – Architectural Historian & Interpretive Specialist

Bryan Potter Design

Bryan Potter

Eldon Potter

Key Questions

Does the Commission see any immediate barriers to meeting the Historic Resource Approval Criteria found under 33.846.060 G - Other Approval Criteria of the Zoning Code?

Figure 1: Potential Interpretive Locations Mount Tabor Park



Figure 2: Typical ADA Interpretive Sign



National Park Service Drawing of ADA Interpretive Sign Installation

Figure 3: Example of Display Frame and Base



Style of Sign Frame and Installation