

# Landmarks Preservation Commission

## Planning and Development Services Department



747 Market Street ❖ Room 345 ❖ Tacoma WA 98402-3793 ❖ 253.591.5220

## TACOMA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION FORM

This form is required to nominate properties to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places per Tacoma Municipal Code 13.07.050. Type all entries and complete all applicable sections. Contact the Historic Preservation Office with any questions at 253-591-5220.

### PART 1: PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	
Historic Name	Common Name
<u>Wapato Park</u>	<u>Wapato Park</u>
Location	
Street Address	Zip
<u>6500 S. Sheridan Ave, Tacoma, WA</u>	<u>98408</u>
Parcel No(s).	Legal Description and Plat or Addition:
<u>0320292027</u>	<u>Section 29 Township 20 Range 03 Quarter 21 (WAPATO) THAT POR OF NW LY E OF PLAT OF WAPATO LAKE VIEWS EXC E 300 FT OF N 1/2 OF S 1/2 OF SE OF NW EXC RDS ALSO THAT POR OF S 128.22 FT OF L 3 &amp; L 4 THRU 16 SD WAPATO LAKE VIEWS LY E OF S ALASKA ST EXC S 72ND ST ALSO BEG ON S LI OF SEC 20-20-03E 150 FT E OF E LI OF SD WAPATO LAKE VIEWS TH W ALG SEC LI 150 FT TH NLY ALG E LI OF L 3 &amp; 2 OF SD PLAT 100 FT TH E 150 FT TH SLY TO POB ALSO THAT POR OF TR A OF WAPATO LAKE VILLA SITES LY SLY OF N 25 FT OF L 33 IN SD PLAT EXT WLY TO W LI OF SD TR A APPROVED LOT COMB BY CY OF TAC BLUS DEPT 12/10/09 COMB OF 2-000, 2-015, 2-020, 2-009, 2-024, 2-008, 2-012, 2- 016, 2-022, 2-021, 2-023, 2-025, 03-20-20-3-073, 934500-007-0, 018-0, 019-1, 029-0, 030-0, 038-0, 039-2, 043-0 &amp; 935000-026-3 SEG 2010-0491 JU 5/10/10JU</u>
Nominated Elements	
Please indicate below significant elements of the property that are included in the nomination by checking the appropriate box(es) below. These elements should be described specifically in the narrative section of this form.	
<input type="checkbox"/> Principal Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Site
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic Additions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Historic Landscaping, Fencing, Walkways, etc.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Accessory Buildings/Outbuildings	<input type="checkbox"/> Interior Spaces/Other (inventory in narrative)

12/22

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### Owner of Property

Name Metro Parks Tacoma

Address 4702 South 19<sup>th</sup> Street City Tacoma State WA Zip 98405

Is the owner the sponsor of this nomination? If not, please provide evidence that the owner has been contacted.

Yes  No

Owner Signature, if possible:

### Form Preparer

Name/Title Claire Keller-Scholz/Planning and Asset Management Administrator Company/Organization Metro Parks Tacoma

Address 4702 S 19<sup>th</sup> Street City Tacoma State WA Zip 98408

Phone 253-305-1003 Email clairek@tacomaparks.com

### Nomination Checklist—Attachments

- |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Filing Fee (payable to City Treasurer)                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation Sheets            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Site Map (REQUIRED)                                                                                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Historical Plans               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photographs (REQUIRED): <i>please label or caption photographs and include a photography index</i>                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please indicate): _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Last Deed of Title (REQUIRED): <i>this document can usually be obtained for little or no cost from a titling company</i> |                                                         |

FOR OFFICE USE

Date Received \_\_\_\_\_  
Fee Paid \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative (continued)**

## **Wapato Park**

### **PART 2: PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

#### **Present Condition**

Wapato Park in South Tacoma is a public park consisting of 88 acres of wetland and park space, with a walking trail around the lake itself as well as multiple trails taking users to a dog park, playground, picnic areas, restroom, pavilion, and open spaces. This site conveys its historic use as a location for recreation dating back to the establishment of South Tacoma streetcar/railroad connectivity in the late 1880s and 1890s and the beginning of the residential neighborhoods at the turn of the century. The main area of the park as it is laid out today reflects the work performed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1936. It houses the best surviving collection of WPA built environment and infrastructure improvements of any of Tacoma's parks. The work crews at that time created the general layout of the park along the east side of the lake that park users see today, and established the three entrances at S. 64<sup>th</sup> Street, Sheridan, and 72<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The central feature of the park is Wapato Lake, a naturally occurring wetland pond which has been modified over time. Today, there is a paved and gravel walking path around the perimeter length, providing a 0.9 mile loop trail, in addition to unpaved paths throughout the park, concentrated on the east and north sides of the lake. Park amenities include pavilion, picnic shelters, restrooms, playground, fishing docks, and a fully fenced off-leash dog park. A maintenance shop with support buildings also occupies the northeastern-most section of the park, accessed only by staff.

Park goers enter through paved drives at S. Sheridan Ave and 72nd Street, and park in designated lots. The scenic entryway at Sheridan highlights the Pergola, built during the WPA park improvements in 1936-37, as well as the alpine water feature created at the same time. Walking past the plantings at this park entrance, visitors will notice a stone drinking fountain just beyond the pergola, also installed by WPA workers. If park patrons continue directly toward the lake they come upon a playground, upgraded in 1996, with the WPA bathhouse pavilion to their left further down the path, and the 1936 picnic shelter to the right with another rustic drinking fountain located nearby.

Circa 1910, sections of the southern end of the lake were deepened by park developers under the direction of property owner R.F. Radebaugh.<sup>1</sup> At that time, large quantities of peat were dredged from the lake and laid over park grounds, which served to increase the lake dimensions and at the same time build up the park area. Originally, there were two "lakes" in the area that now forms the park, Wapato Lake and "Little Wapato" to the east. Little is known of the early history of the lakes. The U. S. Government Land Office's field notes and map make no particular mention of the larger of the two other than to note its existence at the time of the original township and section survey in 1862.<sup>2</sup>

Wapato Lake is part of the wetland and prairie system that once covered South Tacoma. The shoreline around it was developed into a resort-like park and recreation space beginning in 1881, though Little Wapato was left largely untouched until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The northern half of "Little Wapato" was filled during construction of Ainsworth Street in the 1950s and 1960s, and the southern portion was converted into a baseball field in 1971. (The baseball field was then transformed into an off-leash dog park complex in 2014.) Also in the early 1970s, approximately two acres of shallow marshland on the southern shore of Lake Wapato was filled in and a picnic area built over the fill and the 72nd street entrance moved a few yards westward.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the primary Wapato Lake is monitored for water quality and regularly stocked for recreational fishing, and the wetland area to the north remains predominantly in a natural state despite its proximity to the neighborhood. Parcels just to the northwest of the park adjacent to privately owned neighborhood parcels are owned by the City of Tacoma – Tacoma Public Utility (TPU), and TPU manages a "pipeline trail" boardwalk extending along the right of way of 64<sup>th</sup>

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street. Beyond the boardwalk is the neighborhood identified as “Wapato Lake Villa Addition” on mid-20th century plat maps, and was part of the southeastern border of the “Excelsior” area in the 1890s.

The park today bears much of the character of the park as it was developed in 1936-1937, a landscape created by the major improvements conducted by the Works Progress Administration: the walking trails, covered picnic areas, Bathhouse/concessions building, Pergola, waterfall pond rockery feature, and stone entrance markers are still present and in use.

### Changes Over Time

The park was first established in 1889 and operated as a private attraction until the 1920s. At that time, 20 acres of the original 80 acres of park land was sold to Metro Parks Tacoma. Over the following decades, additional parcels were transferred to the park district, and the public park area expanded until the full lake shoreline was acquired.

The growth of Tacoma’s south end and the area around Wapato Lake was originally dependent upon the construction, in 1888, of R. F. Radebaugh’s narrow gauge streetcar line to Fern Hill. He purchased 80 acres on Wapato Lake, building a home in the undeveloped area yet to become a true neighborhood. Soon after, he purchased an additional 280 acres, and hired Ebenezer Roberts to develop the lake area into a “resort” accessible to the public. The park opened in 1889 and featured the lake for bathing and swimming with a sandy beach area for children to play at, as well as walking trails through the woods. The built improvements included dressing rooms, “summer houses” for guests to rent, and a “bathing raft with dressed lumber”. Two greenhouses at the southern end of the lake cultivated flowers for sale as well as populating the park, and the caretaker had a cottage next door. Additionally, news articles described a dance platform and boat house at the park in 1890 to round out the recreation offerings.<sup>4</sup>

None of these structures have survived, likely due to the impacts of the 1891 depression which caused Radebaugh substantial losses. It wasn’t until the park district was donated the first parcel in the 1920s that it became a public amenity and local government support could be applied to enhance the park. At that time, the district discussed the need to build a caretaker cottage, store for concessions, boathouse, dressing rooms, a sandy beach, and benches and lockers for swimmers.<sup>5</sup>

The most dramatic park improvements occurred during the 1930s, as the Great Depression led to the creation of the Works Progress Administration and civic projects put unemployed laborers back to work. At this time, the Park District closed the park entirely for extensive renovations, and in 1936-1937 WPA workers built extensive infrastructure and amenity elements in the park.<sup>6</sup>

They created three defined entrances, one to the north off of S. 64<sup>th</sup> Street, one to the south via 72<sup>nd</sup> Street and one to the east via South 68<sup>th</sup> and S. Sheridan Ave. The work crews also dredged 180,000 cubic yards of mud from the lake leaving a sand and gravel bottom. The muck [was] used as top dressing for 65 acres of park land. Connecting Wapato Lake and “Little” Wapato was the other significant modification made to the wetland areas of the park.

The 1930s work included:

- Park pavilion (toilet rooms, dressing rooms with shower, boathouse, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor open air shelter
- Stone arch bridge
- Modern ball fields



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- Three entrances with stone columns
- Dredged mud and built footbridge across lake<sup>7</sup>
- Constructed a sandy bathing beach
- Community shelter with kitchen
- Pergola
- Alpine garden and lily pond
- Cherry trees, roses and native plants
- Kiwanis picnic shelter
- Caretakers cottage<sup>8</sup>

The following WPA-era structural elements still evident in the park today include:

- Entrance plinths, described as “masonry pillars” in the WPA report, remain at two of the three entryways established by the WPA in 1937;
  - The rectangular plinths measure approximately 4’ x 4’ x 8’ tall, made of stone and mortar in the typical Rustic style often employed by the WPA and CCC (reflecting *Parks and Recreation Structures* and NPS principles)
  - Each set of plinths has a carved dedication plaque with the WPA letters and dated 1937.
  - A matched pair originally marked the entrance drive at 64<sup>th</sup> Street and Wapato Lake Drive, the S. Sheridan Ave entrance, and a 72<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance. The exact location of the 72<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance has changed since it was first established, moved from S. Cushman Ave west toward S. Alaska Street, during the project creating the parking lot area to the south of the lake, which began in 1966. The plinths were also moved and continue to mark the relocated entrance.
  - The set of plinths that marked the S. Sheridan Ave entrance was moved to Point Defiance Park, and now mark the “Rustic Gate” location, near the turn-off to Animal Loop Road as visitors progress around Five Mile Drive through the park. (They were likely moved to that location during 5 Mile Drive improvements in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup>) The gates at S. Sheridan Ave are bordered by stonework in a different style today, including a stone marker installed in 1951.<sup>10</sup>
  - The Wapato Lake Drive entrance at S. 64<sup>th</sup> Street was a vehicle access point leading to a parking area at the northern part of the park. This was the primary entrance to the park for most locals up until the 1930s, as visitors could take the streetcar from downtown Tacoma and be dropped off near S. 56<sup>th</sup> Street and S. Hosmer Street to make their way down Wapato Lake Drive to the park proper.<sup>11</sup> After the neighborhood was built up in the 1950s, it was used as a pedestrian and vehicle entrance. Concerns by the neighbors were expressed as early as 1972 regarding the high traffic volume to and from the park.<sup>12</sup> This entrance was closed to vehicle traffic in 1988.<sup>13</sup>
  - The northern-most parking area – in between Wapato Lake and Little Wapato – was finally closed in

2014 when the dog park was installed, and a new area designated for vehicle parking directly adjacent.

- 1930s Alpine garden and lily pond feature
  - The pond measures approximately 40' x 20' in an oval shape, built into the hillside.
  - Near the pergola off to the side of the S. Sheridan Ave entrance, WPA workers built a waterfall feature and pond, using the Rustic style as seen throughout the rest of the park. The hill around the waterfall feature was planted with "alpine garden" representing local flora.
  - Very little modification has been conducted on this feature, though the waterfall pump system was restored in 2001 when the Pergola was restored. At that time, a cover was added for the utilities which also serves as a viewing platform at the end of a trail up around the back of the alpine garden hill. Plantings now consist of a variety of native Pacific Northwest species as found throughout the rest of the park.
- 1936-37 Pergola
  - A decorative feature, described as "main entrance colonnade" in the 1938 WPA report, measures approximately 87' x 12' x 12' with two rows of 8 columns influenced by Greek Revival architecture.<sup>14</sup>
  - A 1938 newspaper article announcing the park reopening describes it as a "pergola"<sup>15</sup>
  - The 1981 Historic Property Inventory form completed as part of a citywide Cultural Resource Survey described the pergola as "a curvilinear column-supported wooden arbor with scrolled lentil ends and scrolled cross-bracing."<sup>16</sup>
  - Repaired in the 1980s after a car severely damaged four of the columns, and fully restored in 2001 using the original WPA structure as a guide, the deteriorating wooden columns were replaced with fiberglass pillars filled with cement for greater durability and vandalism prevention, and beams of the wooden arbor were repaired or replaced as needed.<sup>17</sup>
  - Stone drinking fountain nearby, also typical of WPA structures, described in the 1938 report as part of the work creating a "fountain, platform, and steps".
- 1936 Stone "masonry" bridge
  - Measures approximately 60' x 22'
  - Part of the Wapato Drive route, from S. 64<sup>th</sup> Street entrance to the main beach and picnic area.
  - The bridge also marks the course of a small "creek", an outlet dredged by WPA to connect the primary Wapato Lake with "Little Wapato Lake". Today, the creek routes water into the wetland area to the north of the park, flowing alongside the area filled in for a baseball field in the 1970s and transformed into a dog park in 2014.
  - Built using local stone, in an arch shape, overall, in a style reflective of the "rustic" architecture
  - Missing the original carved plaque identifying it as a WPA structure, but the space clearly shows where the plaque was removed.

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- Has not been substantially modified since it was built; the earliest photograph is from 1952 when it was featured on the cover of "Parade, and it bears the same shape and quality.
- The road was closed to vehicle traffic in 1988 when the northern-most entrance was designated an emergency exit only route.
- 1936 Walking paths to the bathhouse pavilion, from the three entrances
  - The access routes to the water from the new entrances were created by the WPA, and many have remained in place with only very minimal revisions.
  - The path along the lake shore was paved and modified during the 1990s project that created a walking loop all the way around the lake, however access trails to this path follows closely the original access points developed by the WPA work.
  - The routes to the north and east of the current bathhouse are historic, the drive of S. Cushman Ave that takes you from S. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street to the main parking lot closest to the pergola, is historic, but the southern end of the park is all more recently modified. The S. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street driveway location was moved westward from S. Cushman Ave. The last of the privately owned houses wasn't removed until 2009, though most of the houses had been acquired and demolished by the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>18</sup>
- 1936 Picnic shelter
  - Very typical of the architectural style of the time for parks, the shelter included the typical "facilitating equipment [which] consists of one or more picnic ovens, sinks, and a supply of table and bench combinations" as described in the 1938 *Parks and Recreation Structures* guide.<sup>19</sup>
  - The covered 20' x 40' picnic shelter was described in the 1981 Historic Property Inventory form as an open kitchen constructed "with field stone supports and low walls...these shelters have gabled roofs and shingles in the gable ends."<sup>20</sup>
  - Modified – the outdoor kitchen stove element was removed in 2005 and the structure-reroofed; this was part of a districtwide effort to remove the cooking elements from the park shelters for greater safety and lower costs of maintenance and repairs. At this time the gable ends were opened up to expose the crossbeams of the roof section.
  - Drinking fountain nearby, also typical of WPA structures, is made of local fieldstone.
- 1937 Bathhouse pavilion, identified as "shelter and boathouse" in the WPA report
  - A concession stand wing was added circa 1960, a one-story addition on the south end of the building.
  - WPA plans are available in MPT records, with dimensions, original layout<sup>21</sup>
  - The original layout reflects the principles of parks and recreation architecture as laid out in the 1938 guide, though most of the bathing structures in that manual were single story rather than double.
  - The 1981 Historic Property Inventory form completed as part of a citywide Cultural Resource Survey described the pavilion/bathhouse structure as a "brick [building] with hipped bell-cast eaves, and a recessed second story porch with simple balustrade. There is a single-story addition with hipped roof on

the south side of the building."<sup>22</sup> This building envelope remains consistent even after the 2007 renovations, which removed the boathouse storage space on the western face of the building, after it was severely damaged in the 2005 fire.

- The boathouse was modernized in the 1960s and 1990s as part of overall park improvements, and underwent significant renovations completed in 2007 following a fire at the boathouse portion facing the lake.
  - 21<sup>st</sup> century upgrades included: upgrades to the building shell including roof, exterior walls, new windows and doors. Modifications and remodeling of concession space, improved ADA access to ground floor and restrooms, improvements to heating, plumbing, ventilation, security, also added an elevator for handicap access to the second floor.
- The updated building serves predominantly as a space for summer programs with availability to rent it out for special events by the public as well.

Additional physical changes to the park include:

- 1949, another land parcel was acquired from City of Tacoma
- 1953, maintenance buildings, tool shed, and garage added to the behind-the-scenes section of Wapato Park, to the north of the S. Sheridan Ave park entrance.
- 1971, "Little Wapato Lake" was filled in to create a playfield.<sup>23</sup>
- 1969 - 1970, approximately two acres of shallow marshland at the southwest corner of the lake was filled in and a picnic area built over the fill.
- 1977, playground equipment donated for Wapato Park
- 1981, dike added to separate the northern drainage basin from the southern recreational area of the lake, a few years later a pipeline was added to provide fresh water
- Between 1994-1996, a walking loop around the lake is graded and graveled.
- In 2004, 2007, and 2009 private real estate along the boundaries of the lake was acquired by the park district and incorporated into the publicly accessible recreation areas.
- 2006, police substation built at the southeast corner of the park property.
- 2011-2014, capital improvements were conducted, a dog park replaces the baseball field with several fenced enclosures, and new fishing docks are built.

### PART 3: HISTORICAL OR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

#### Criteria for Designation

Tacoma Municipal Code recognizes seven criteria of eligibility for inclusion on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places. Please select any that apply to this property, for which there is documented evidence included in this nomination form.

- A Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B Is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D Has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history; or
- E Adjoins a property that is already listed on the Tacoma Register of Historic Places and was constructed within the period of significance of the adjacent structure; or
- F Is already individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places; or
- G Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristics, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood or City.

#### Historical Data (if known)

Date(s) of Construction 1936-1937 Other Date(s) of Significance 1889  
Architect(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Builder WPA Engineer \_\_\_\_\_  
Architectural Style(s) Rustic Material(s) Wood, stone, brick

#### Statement of Significance

Describe in detail the chronological history of the property and how it meets the criteria for the Register of Historic Places. Please provide a summary in the first paragraph that lists the relevant criteria (use additional sheets if necessary). This section should include a thorough narrative of the property's history, context, occupants, and uses. If using a Multiple Property Nomination that is already on record, or another historical context narrative, please reference it by name and source.

#### Summary

Wapato Park fits Criteria C and G due to the fact that this is park dating back to 188 built around an urban lake, and the lake itself is a landmark which has been a visual feature of the neighborhood since this part of Tacoma was developed. Historic patterns of use (Criteria C) relate to the site as a place of recreation, and the impact of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the years of the Great Depression. There are two periods of significance – the first privately operated “resort” period in the 1890s, and then the period that began in the 1930s through the work relief improvements. This second phase concluded in the early 1940s as the WPA program drew to a close.

The development of Wapato Park follows the trajectory of many park spaces – it was first developed as a picturesque retreat away from the pressures of urban life, a pastoral resort where guests could stroll, picnic, swim, and enjoy the serenity of the woods and pond. Over the course of the first decades of the new century, activities such as boating, fishing, ice skating, and playing organized sports such as volleyball became more commonplace, as a new generation of active recreation park advocates emerged. By the 1920s, Wapato Park had gone from privately operated resort park to a public amenity within a Parks and Recreation system. Despite the modifications of the early landscape architects and park designers, as late as 1976 observers noted "Wapato Lake has suffered far less from recent urbanization than one might expect considering its location. Indeed, historical documentation indicates that many of its environmental characteristics may have changed little during the course of suburban and urban development of the area."<sup>24</sup>



The modern Wapato Park largely reflects the built improvements conducted at the park 1936-1937 under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) work relief program, which allowed the Metropolitan Park District to open the wooded area to a larger audience of neighborhood park users and add multiple picnic areas and better amenities. The work of WPA (and the Civilian Conservation Corps, a distinct but parallel program) was instrumental in improving access to natural public spaces like State and National Parks and also helped shape natural areas at the neighborhood level, particularly in Tacoma.<sup>25</sup>

The 1930s WPA improvements resulted in American “parkitecture” being recognized nationwide as symbolic of public park spaces.<sup>26</sup> The style itself emerged out of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the appeal of “rustic” and idealized “wild” landscapes using natural materials with an unfinished appearance. With the work relief programs of the Great Depression, the government sponsored park improvements in national, state, and local parks, creating a uniform look during this period. Among the principles of the National Park Service guidebook, *Park Structures and Facilities* (1935), the following five guidelines consistently appear:

- a) Don't disrupt the landscape any more than necessary, choose locations in clearings or on the site of previous buildings where possible
- b) Trail head structures are designed specifically to mark the beginning and the end of the park space
- c) Bathhouse and toilet buildings were to be designed for efficient light and ventilation; sometimes this meant open air enclosures, in locations where seasonal weather was conducive to such a design (i.e., not the rainy Pacific Northwest)
- d) Use primarily natural materials, such as heavy wooden beams and masonry rock elements from local sources, wherever possible
- e) Employ a "Rustic" design aesthetic, intended to blend into the natural surroundings rather than stand out as obvious manmade additions<sup>27</sup>

Among Tacoma's many parks, Wapato Park contains the most intact examples of WPA work and stands as an excellent example of the breadth of their work, which included trailheads, paths and road building, addition of recreation structures such as the Bathhouse/Boathouse /Concession building, amenities such as drinking water fountains, and decorative touches such as the pergola and pond features at the S. Sheridan Ave entrance.

### **The Origins of Wapato Park**

The establishment of a park system in Tacoma in the 1880s and the appointment of its first governing body in 1890 were very much in keeping with the emerging national American trend in the second half of the nineteenth century. Planning park spaces and designing their landscapes for public use and enjoyment were advocated by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903), designer of New York's famed Central Park and considered to be the founder of American landscape architecture, along with A.J. Downing. Olmsted's philosophy - in a very small nutshell – was the improvement of American society through harmonious landscapes and public spaces, which would be open to all people, and which would serve as an antidote to the increasing urbanization of post-Civil War America. Parks were to be graceful, democratic, pastoral and rejuvenating, separate from the intrusions of daily life, and sheltered as much as possible from conflicting uses. This was a fairly dramatic concept when it was new.<sup>28</sup>



The American Romantic movement of the first half of the nineteenth century promoted the scenic and aesthetic aspects of nature as important to people's physical and spiritual health. These ideals inspired the conservation movement and the urban park movement of the second half of the century. As industrialization increased in cities and towns across America, communities began to develop large tracts of land typically on the outskirts of cities to create "pleasure grounds" – open, charming, thoughtfully landscaped areas whose primary purpose was to allow city residents, especially workers, to relax in nature. These parks were active with basic amenities but the design also allowed for a certain kind of mental appreciation or contemplation of the landscape. The establishment of New York City's Central Park in 1857 inspired the creation of many other parks and park systems across the country including Chicago's Lincoln Park, Brooklyn's Prospect Park, Boston's Emerald Necklace Park System and Minneapolis-St. Paul's metropolitan park system.

During the creation of Boston's Emerald Necklace, Frederick Law Olmstead worked with Henry Hobson Richardson, a famous American architect who is credited with changing the way architects thought about how embellishments worked with the whole exterior of a structure, and integrating buildings into their surroundings. His rustic elements were more substantial than those advocated by landscape architect A.J. Downing, credited with developing the concept of publicly accessible pleasure gardens in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Where Downing envisioned aethereal, picturesque architecture in parks, Richardson's vision involved durable, earthy materials in a sturdy form. From Olmstead and Richardson emerged the recognizable "rustic" park architecture still seen in many green spaces today.<sup>29</sup>

At this time, private entrepreneurs were opening holiday resorts and seaside getaways to attract guests seeking respite from their urban enclaves.<sup>30</sup> While not quite beside the sea, Mr. R. F. Radebaugh saw in Wapato Lake an opportunity not to be missed.

### **If You Build It, They Will Come**

Little is known of the early history of Wapato Lake. The U. S. Government Land Office's field notes and map make no particular mention of the lake other than to note its existence at the time of the original township and section survey in 1862, it was also sometimes referred to as "Arrowhead" Lake. The name is credited as being of "Indian" origin, the word associated with a native edible bulb compared to a potato, and early records note "Wappato" or "Wapato" as the spelling for the name of the plant.<sup>31</sup>

A newspaper article from 1881 describes the area as being overgrown with tall fir trees, with only a clearing for Frank Alling's farm to interrupt the forest. The visitor describes walking from Alling's farm to "the Wapato Lakes, two sheets of water situation within less than a mile from Mr. Alling's farm. The two lakes come to within about six rods from each other in once place and Mr. Alling has...cut a canal across the ridge of land which separates them, so that he can shove his boat from one into the other. The larger lake is nearly twice as large as the smaller one. Both sylvan sheets rest like quiet beauties, mirroring the tall forest trees."<sup>32</sup>

The growth of Tacoma's south end and the area around Wapato Lake was originally dependent upon the 1888 construction of R. F. Radebaugh's narrow gauge streetcar line to Fern Hill, a small community located six miles south of Commencement Bay. This line ran in the vicinity of South M Street near the Indian Henry Trail. Radebaugh came to Tacoma in 1881 when he and H. C. Patrick started the *Tacoma Weekly Ledger* newspaper. That same year he purchased 80 acres on Wapato Lake where he built a cottage. At that time there were only two families living between his Wapato home and his workplace in downtown Tacoma. Radebaugh was "carried to and from his office by horse". In addition to his many investments and business interests, Radebaugh made many judicious real estate purchases, including the purchase of an additional 280 acres surrounding the lake.



Radebaugh bought out his streetcar partners and continued the Fern Hill line to Wapato Lake where he planned to build a fashionable residence district. He platted the land, sold large tracts, and developed Wapato Lake Park. He hired Ebenezer Roberts to oversee the development.

By late June 1889, the park is open to the public. On June 24, 1889, the newspaper reports that the Tacoma & Fern Hill streetcars are now running to Hosmer Avenue, near the present 64<sup>th</sup> Street and Wapato Lake Drive entrance to the Park. The streetcar ran from Pacific Ave to Hosmer Street. and cost 20¢ for a round trip ride. Passengers would disembark at S. 56<sup>th</sup> Street and walk down Wapato Lake Drive, enjoying the lush greenery of the park.<sup>33</sup> Ebenezer Roberts describes the “beautiful wooded driveway” leading down to the lake, per a newspaper article of the time.<sup>34</sup>

As part of the early modifications to the park area, large quantities of peat were dredged from the lake and laid over park grounds. The historic records did not indicate whether it was to specifically increase the lake, or to build up the park area.<sup>35</sup>

The glowing reports and articles about the wonderful resort at Wapato Lake Park stop appearing in newspapers in 1891. Ebenezer Roberts leaves Radebaugh’s employ in late 1890 and is hired by the City of Tacoma’s Board of Park Commissioners to oversee the development of Wright and Point Defiance Park. The nation-wide depression which began in 1891 hit railroads especially hard. Radebaugh sold the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* and apparently suffered extreme financial loss during the depression which lasted throughout much of the 1890s. Although the park was open through the next few decades, improvements were few and far between in this period.<sup>36</sup>

The early days of the park were described nostalgically after the turn of the century, as grown men reflected on the swimming holes of their youth at places like Wapato Park. A later report on the origins of the park noted, “it is of interest to note that agitation for the development of a park came from men who had first used the lake as natural swimming hole. They felt that development of a manicured park all the way around would preserve everything that was best about Wapato Lake for generations to come.” This very much describes the viewpoint of many park advocates at the turn of the century who believed that a park should reflect nature, albeit in a more organized, improved way.<sup>37</sup>

### **Private to Public**

The Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma was incorporated in 1907 and as early as 1910 the topic of acquiring Wapato Lake property for a public park was under discussion. Unfortunately, economic realities being what they were, it was not until private land owners donated parcels to the District that Wapato Park as a public amenity was born. The first 20 acres of parkland were donated by Horace and Helen Scott in 1920, and momentum built over the next few years as the Park Board approved the purchase of the 20 acre Cady Tract and then 17 additional acres from Ms. Caroline Menzel, a local “spinster” and philanthropist.<sup>38</sup>

By 1926, the Park District added utilities to Wapato, and designated the creation of a “swimming hole” at the lake, complete with lifeguard during the summer months and police protection for park users’ safety. A 1927 newspaper article notes the work had transformed Wapato Lake “from cheerless muddy shore to a most popular gathering place.”<sup>39</sup>

As in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century public park spaces were seen as a “safety valve” for society, to help the average working person find relief from the stress of the daily grind. The philosophy had





changed somewhat, however, in that by the 1920s there was an argument by some park proponents to provide more structured activities, and guides for the personal improvement parks could offer.<sup>40</sup> For all this, Wapato Park still more closely reflected the “pleasure grounds” of the previous century than the urban playgrounds that were growing in Tacoma, with their organized summer programs led by trained Playground Leaders that emerged in the 1920s. At the same time, the improvements discussed by the Park Board during this decade indicated a growing sense of responsibility to provide things like playing fields, swimming pools, picnic shelters, and toilet buildings” in all public park spaces.<sup>41</sup>

Wapato Park continued to grow, as the private owners who had purchased lots from Radebaugh and his estate were courted by the Park Board. In 1935 the Park Board accepted another 15 acres around Wapato from J. H. Easterday, and 12 more from Joseph Kemp, the President of Oakwood Cemetery. The Park District now owned 62 acres around the lake, primarily on the east and northeast sides. Although it was still not yet the full 80 acres of park that Radebaugh had operated as a private resort, the park offered recreation and relaxation opportunities to Tacomans in the South End that were unmatched except perhaps by the woods and beaches of Point Defiance Park. Many church groups, trade associations, and companies held their seasonal picnics and gatherings at Wapato Park, and it was a popular location for fishing, swimming in the summer months and ice skating in the winter, conditions permitting.<sup>42</sup>

At this time there was still only one entrance to the park, via Wapato Lake Drive at the northern end of the park. Private residences bordered the slopes to the west of the lake, and along the southeast corner as well. The City of Tacoma owned the southernmost banks and would transfer that property to the park district in 1949.

### **Enter the Great Depression**

On October 24, 1929, everything changed. With the crash of the stock market, America entered a period of economic stress with record unemployment and challenging circumstances for millions of people across North America. Though individual communities and families experienced the fallout at different levels over the next decade, all were touched by the Great Depression. Wapato Park, and many of Tacoma’s parks, in the end benefited from the era due to the federal government’s creation of work relief programs.

The Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma, like many agencies, faced difficult decisions in the 1930s. They had to adjust staffing levels and policies, trying to balance the needs of the district with compassion for those needing employment. The District worked with local relief groups to allow “indigent of the city” to cut limited quantities of wood from Point Defiance Park for fuel to get them through the winter. They hired twice as many playground supervisors to spread the wages around, breaking up the summer period into two employment periods, reducing hours but employing more people. As the depression continued, they chose to prioritize hiring men with families, in order to provide support to those most in need. They also reduced fees to rent boats at Point Defiance Park so as to make sustenance fishing more accessible, and rejected a proposal to make the small aquarium at the pavilion restricted to paying customers.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, they welcomed attractions such as the Funland amusement park to Point Defiance as the operators paid lease fees and a portion of ticket sales to the District. Another example of this delicate balance of cutting costs while responding to local need was the project that almost demolished Titlow Lodge and ended up just taking off the top two floors due to community outcry.

Wapato Park represents a success story of the Great Depression – it put people to work and revitalized a park that hadn’t experienced significant investment since the Park District took it over in the 1920s, two decades after it’s heyday. Federal programs to put people back to work emerged as a response to the Great Depression, and by 1933 had reached Tacoma in the form of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC were put to work in



Point Defiance Park, redeveloping the entryway bowl, planting for erosion control, and doing all sorts of trail building and forest maintenance projects. They also supported the construction of the historic fur trading post Fort Nisqually in the park, moving two mid-1800s buildings piece by piece up from DuPont, WA to preserve them from destruction. The programs went by many names, including but not limited to WERA, FERA, CCC, and WPA, and by the end of the 1930s more than twenty-nine park district properties throughout the Tacoma area had been directly impacted by crews hired through work relief spending.<sup>44</sup>

### **Wapato Park Improvements, 1936- 1938**

The official Works Progress Administration project at Wapato Park was conducted beginning in 1936 and concluding in 1938. The plaques on the buildings and structures in the park cite 1936-1937 as the construction dates. The park was closed during those two years of work, and reopened in 1938 with great fanfare. Park visitors now had three entrances to choose from: the original Wapato Lake Drive entrance, with stone pillars now marking the park boundaries at S. 64<sup>th</sup> Street, one on the east via S. 68<sup>th</sup> Street and S. Sheridan Ave, and an entrance at S. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street and S. Cushman Ave, leading to the main parking area still in use today.

The WPA report provided to the Park District as part of the project documented a list of improvements valued at \$28,938.00, thru July 1938. The full project, including both district funds as well as government grants, totaled \$228,000 in costs. That report described the project in detail, and provided this summary:

“A diving platform, a few cheaply constructed concession buildings and bath house, and outdoor kitchen, a few tables and swings, a small amount of road construction constituted about the extent of the improvements until 1933, when some grading and filling was done by the C.W.A. This work was carried on in a more or less desultory manner by men on work relief under the W.E.R.A. and C.W.A. When the W.P.A. was authorized by Congress and funds became available for work programs the Park Board sponsored a real work program for this park. A park improvement plan was laid out and followed. Hundreds of men were put to work building bridges, boat and bath house, a modern kitchen, with hot and cold water, outlets for the use of electrical cooking equipment, grading, leveling and seeding large areas to lawn, constructing a modern baseball field, providing a sandy bathing beach, clearing underbrush and removing decaying logs and stumps, building roads, pathways and stone entrances, constructing Alpine gardens, lily ponds, and planting flowers and shrubs, until within less than two years the 70 acres comprising the park were, as if made by magic, transformed from almost a primitive state into a beautiful and well equipped park and recreational area, exceeding the fondest hopes of those who for years had carried on for the establishment of a park around the shores of the lake.”<sup>45</sup>

As described in the initial section of this historic nomination, a number of these landmark infrastructure improvements still stand in Wapato Park today:

- Pergola (1936) – Arts & Crafts movement (1900-1916 was the height<sup>46</sup>) brought pergolas<sup>47</sup> back into fashion, creating an inviting outdoors, partially covered human space that was in harmony with nature.
  - The pergola was restored based on original plans. The uprights of the new pergola were made of concrete and fiberglass to help it last longer, and the top lattice remains wood.<sup>48</sup>
- Boathouse/Bathhouse - built with similar principles as the bathhouses identified in the WPA structures book<sup>49</sup> customized to fit the specific need of Tacoma and Wapato Park, in this case. The brick design of the structure is reminiscent of the Arts & Craft style of other parks structures such as the comfort stations at Wright Park and Point Defiance Park streetcar station (known as the Pagoda, for it’s Asian-

inspired decorative features and roofline).

- In 2005, an arsonist set fire to the boathouse area closest to the lake. The Park District took the opportunity to repair and improve the overall facility.<sup>50</sup>
- Picnic shelter – very typical of the WPA structures built at other Tacoma parks as well as nationwide, good examples in the WPA structures guide showing how and why the design was chosen.
  - The drinking fountain next to it is also typical of the style, and can be seen at Titlow Park, Jefferson Park, and other sites.
  - The picnic shelters at Lincoln Park and Point Defiance Park are the other WPA structures that survive.

A dedication event for the newly re-opened park was held on June 4, 1938, and with social and improvement clubs, children, dignitaries giving speeches, music from community bands, and an accordion solo featured on the program.<sup>51</sup> Glowing newspaper accounts described the occasion, and the new facilities available for park users from near and far to enjoy. Access was by bus or private car, the era of the streetcar having faded, but 2,000 people were reported as having attended the opening. Toward the end of 1938, the Park District added gates to the entrance added by the WPA, completing the new set up for the park.<sup>52</sup> The 1940s saw Tacomans enjoying the fruits of the WPA's labor to the fullest, with swimming lessons, structured sport activities in the summer, and numerous company picnics, family outings, and seasonal gatherings such as the Easter Sunrise Service reported on regularly in the local newspapers.<sup>53</sup>

This period of significance ends by 1940, with the draw-down of the WPA program overall. The next significant change to the park was Little Wapato being filled in as part of the construction of the neighborhood to the north of the park land in the late 1950s, early 1960s. Further impacts to this wetland area occurred in 1971 when the low-lying "Little Wapato" wetland within the park boundary was filled in to create a baseball field. This is now the location of the dog park amenities. Additional fill was used to create more land at the southern end of the main lake in order to enhance the park's picnic area.<sup>54</sup>

These renovations were the last major changes to the park that impacted how visitors interacted with the space, though the heart of the park along east shoreline of the lake remained essentially the same from the time of the WPA improvements.

### **The Modern Park**

The work conducted by the WPA brought Wapato Park into the "modern" park and recreation world, and the capital improvements of the following decades did not significantly change the amenities offered or general layout of the park. In the 1960s, park bonds provided for "beautification" projects across the district, including at Wapato Park, and periodic upgrades to the facilities were conducted but beyond adding new playground elements for the children, until the 2005 Master Plan, no park-wide planning or capital work was conducted.

Increasingly, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus of the park district was on the health of the lake itself. In the 1940s and '50s the lake had to be closed to swimmers several times due to bacteria levels, and the Park District and City negotiated outflow and pipe routes to maintain clean water access. As the neighborhood around the park was built up, "Little Wapato" was increasingly encroached upon, the northern most section being filled in by private developers to create the Ainsworth neighborhood. In 1971 the Park District filled in the



lower end to create a baseball field. A 1976 report concluded that “Little Wapato Lake should more properly be referred to as a marsh” and the remaining wetland at the north of the park today does indeed reflect this description.<sup>55</sup> In the 1970s a series of environmental studies were commissioned to identify the challenges facing Wapato Lake, and significant investment sought to address the issues throughout the 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Even through the 1990s the Park District was still trying to find the right balance of treatments to ensure a healthy lake environment for fish, plants, and humans, hindered by the omnipresence of the Canada Goose that had become a hallmark of Pacific Northwest park maintenance challenges at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The southern end of the park experienced the greatest physical changes beginning in 1966, with capital improvements funded through bond sales and federal grants. By the early 1970s, approximately two acres of shallow marshland on the south shore was filled in and crescent-shaped a picnic area built over the fill.<sup>57</sup> This is also when the S. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance developed by the WPA was moved westward along the street, and a new parking area put in along with a restroom.

Up until this time, the entrance was at S. Cushman Ave and S. 72<sup>nd</sup> Street and provided access to the main parking area via drive along behind the private residences located at the southeast corner of the lake. These private property owners were generally tolerant of park users, providing access via a handshake agreement with the Park Board, however discussions were underway for many years regarding the eventual sale and disposition of the properties around the lake. The last private home was sold to the park district in 2007, and as part of the 2008 capital improvement project, the final privately held parcel surrounding the lake was purchased. This major capital program created new walking paths, open space, shoreline enhancements and an off-leash dog park.

Large sections of the built environment of Wapato Park are historic, though there are several non-contributing elements as well, such as the walking path, a 10’ wide 0.9-mile loop around the lake constructed in 1996; the Police Substation built in 2006; the two fishing docks which have been rebuilt over the years; and the dog park and shop/maintenance yard amenities.

### **Conclusion**

As the Industrial Revolution caused the resulting parks movement on the East Coast, on the West Coast of the United States, boomtowns like Tacoma had the opportunity to plan for parks to be incorporated into the city’s growth. Private entrepreneurs like R.F. Radebaugh could see how important parks were going to become, even as he set up a resort attraction in an area still naturally wooded and undeveloped. His electric streetcar and railroad took Tacoma residents to the outskirts for recreation, and despite his capitalistic motives, successfully protected the natural area around Wapato Lake for decades. Additionally, Wapato Park is the only park today that best represents the breadth and diversity of improvements work relief conducted at park sites throughout Tacoma.<sup>58</sup>

From one man’s dream of a restful retreat in nature emerged a community landmark. As early as the 1890s the “Wheelman’s Club” of bicycle enthusiasts sought opportunities to support the park, and future contributions of funds and support for picnic shelters and fishing floats were provided by volunteer groups like the Kiwanis, Tacoma Sportsman Club Auxiliary, and the Rotary Club.<sup>59</sup> From the early era of shady strolls and swimming hole frolicking, through the “modern” park amenities built by the WPA, Wapato Park has a rich history that deserves recognition through a formal listing on the City of Tacoma Register of Historic Places.

## Narrative Continuation

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Continued from page \_\_\_\_\_.

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### APPENDIX A

#### Summary of Works Progress Administration (WPA) fixtures still remaining in Metro Park spaces

- Picnic shelters
  - Point Defiance still has two, Lincoln Park still has one, Wapato Park has one
- Drinking fountains
  - Titlow Park has one attached to Lodge, Jefferson Park has two freestanding ones, Wapato Park has two
- Stone bridge
  - Wapato has the only one in the system
- Stone plinths or “masonry pillars” marking entryways
  - McKinley Park has two sets
  - Point Defiance Park has a set of two from Wapato Park, four remain in place at Wapato Park
- Water drainage
  - Point Defiance has multiple culverts
  - Wapato Park work included improving Wapato Lake and Little Wapato connectivity
- Concession/general park building
  - Point Defiance Park, bathhouse at “Picnic Beach” (now Owen Beach) was built by WPA, today is used for concessions
  - Jefferson Park field house was also built by the WPA, but it has experienced severe damage after a series of fires and is soon to be demolished for public safety, Summer 2024
  - Wapato Park’s bathhouse is still used for recreation programs, community events, and rentals

APPENDIX B

Photographs – Historic and Modern – of Wapato Park assets

See file: [Wapato Park historic nomination - Appendix](#)

Wapato Park site map

Entrance pillars

Stone bridge

Picnic shelter

Alpine garden/water feature

Pergola

Bathhouse/boathouse

Entrance pillars



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### Wapato Park aerial views

Wapato Park aerial photograph, 1989

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park aerial photograph, c 1960

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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### Wapato Park historic photographs, recreation scenes

Wapato Park Opening, June 1938

Courtesy Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room, D7309-5, Richards Studio Photograph Collections





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Swimmers at Wapato Park, 1928

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Beach and Dock, 1928

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Drive to Wapato Lake, c 1891  
Washington State Historical Society collection



Wapato Park Pavilion, c 1900  
Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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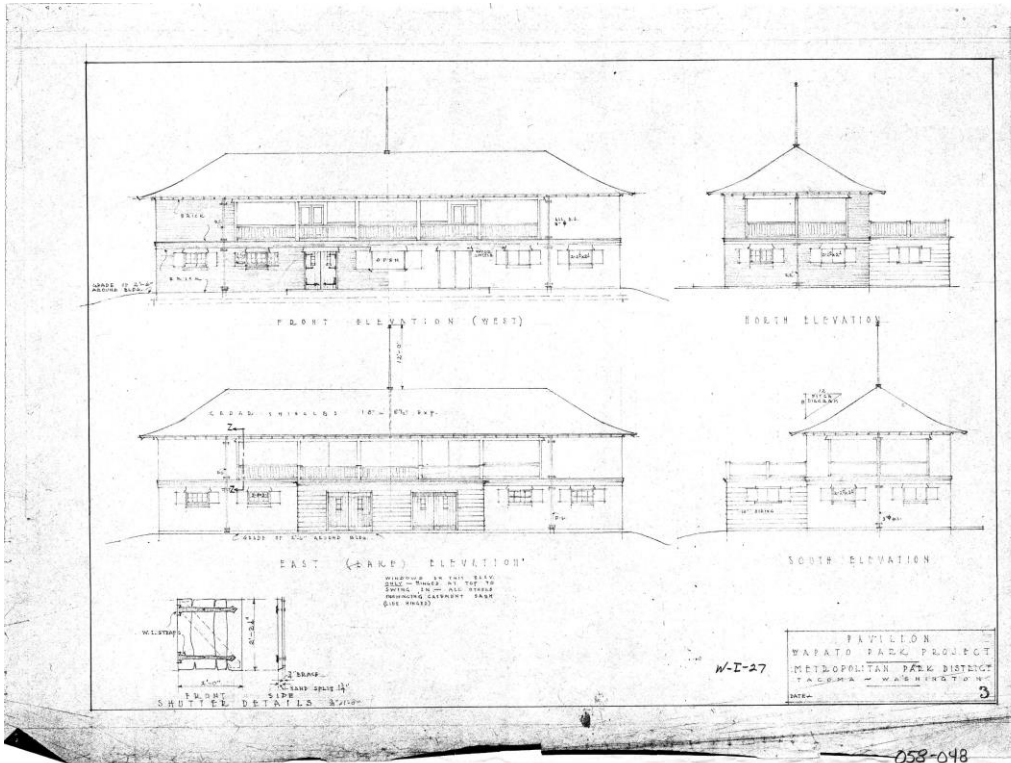
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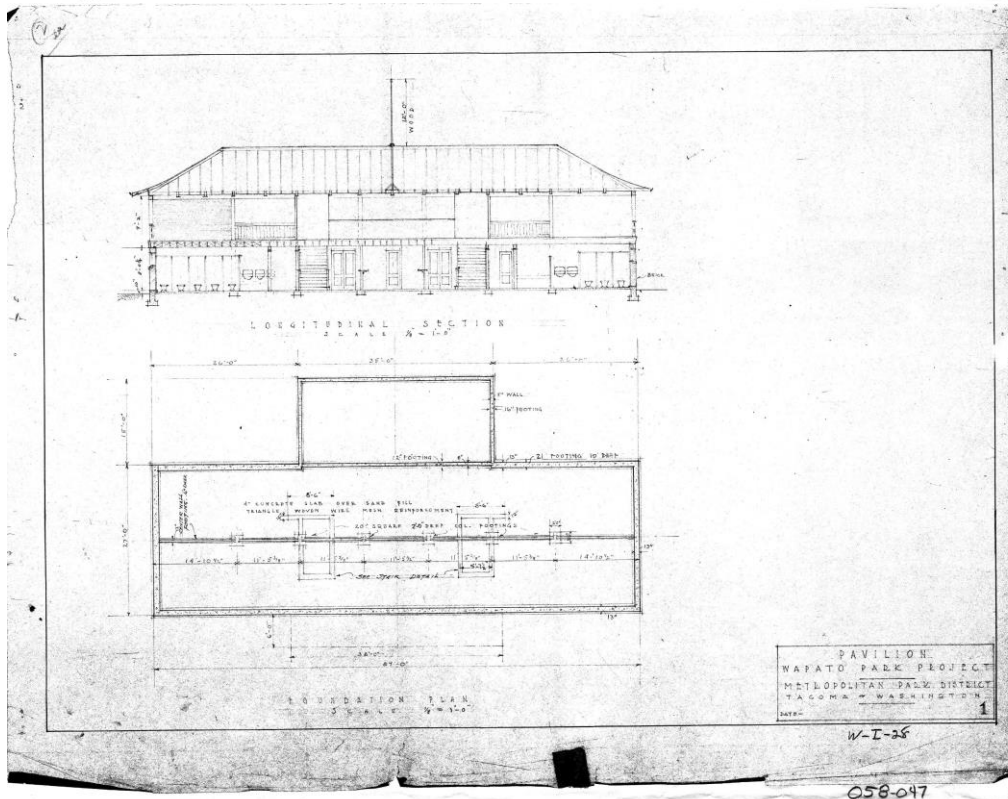
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### Wapato Park Blueprints, 1936-1938

#### Bathhouse elevations



058-048



058-047

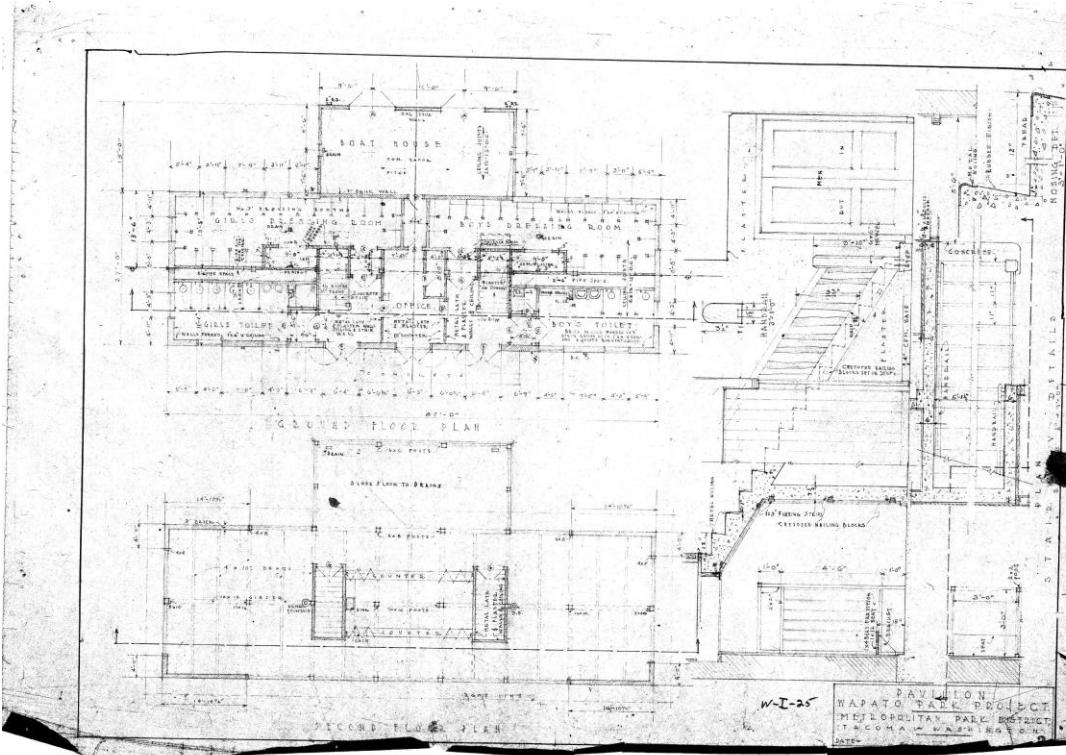
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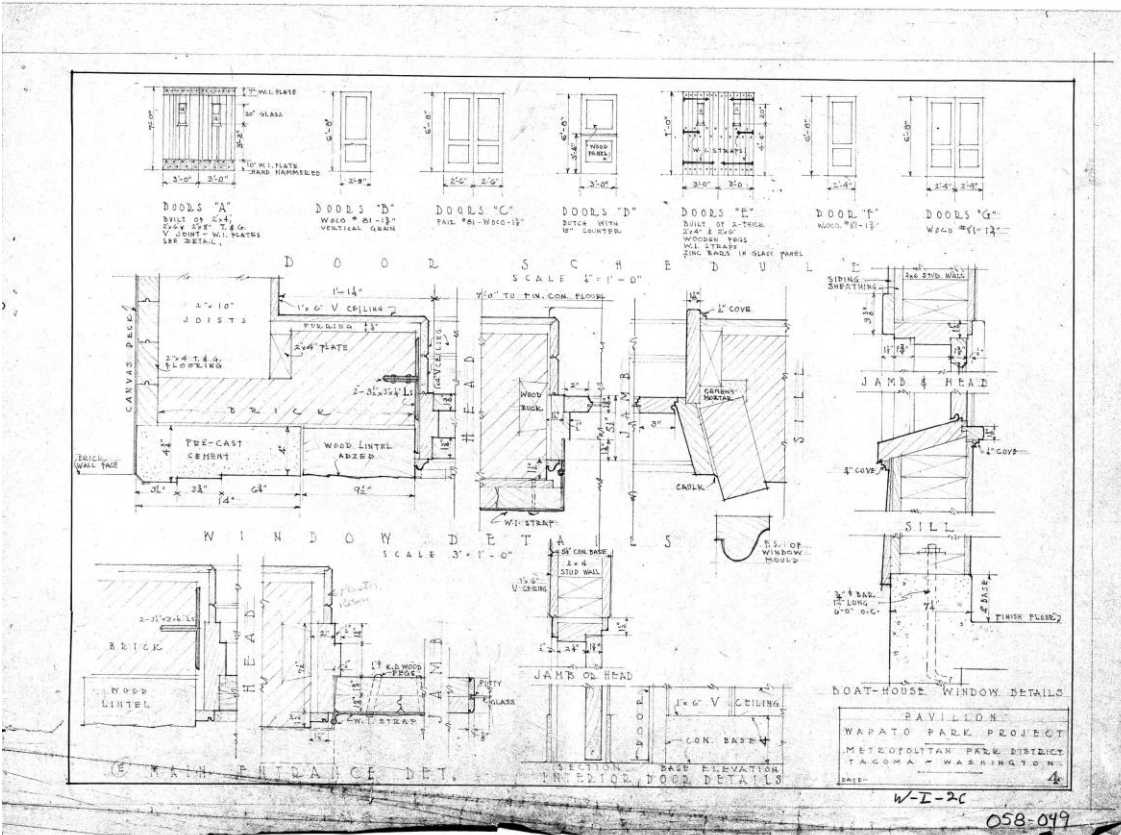
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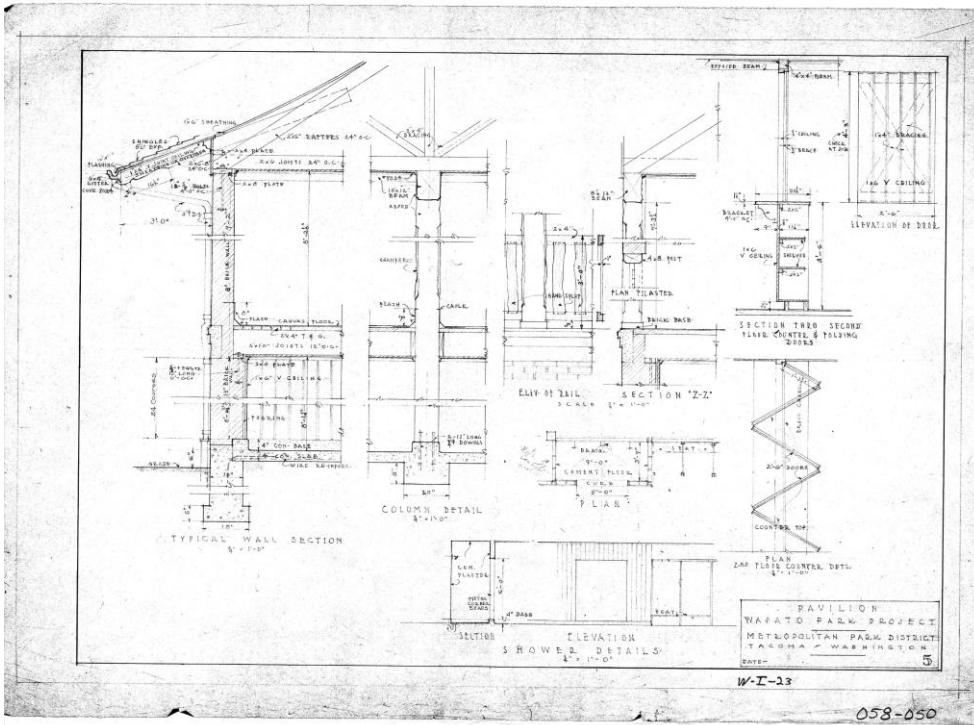
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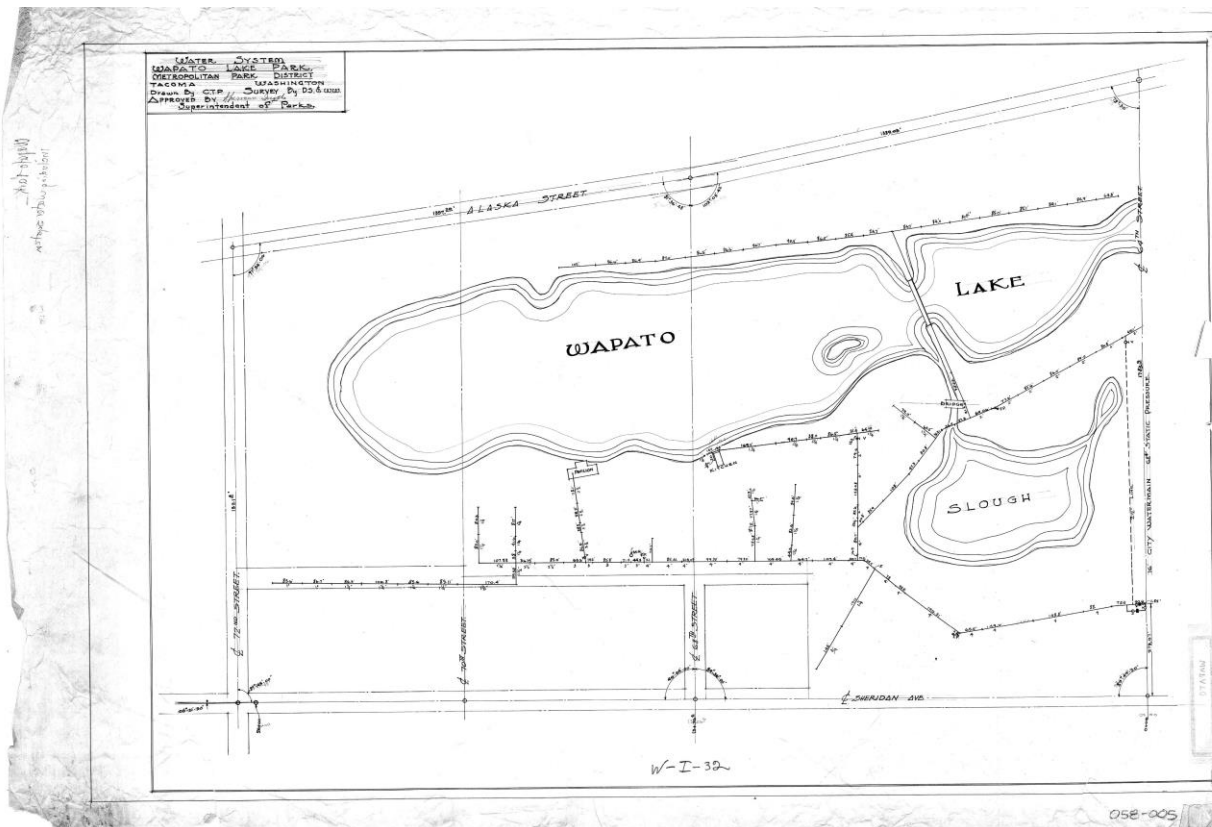
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Wapato Park water system plan, c 1938



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### Wapato Park historic photographs, built environment

Wapato Park bathhouse, detail, Easter Sunrise Service 1958

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park bathhouse in background, Kids Fishing at Wapato Lake, c 1950

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park bathhouse, 1974

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park bathhouse, 1986

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park bathhouse, 2007 arson damage

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park bathhouse, 2007 post-arson renovation

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park bathhouse, 2024

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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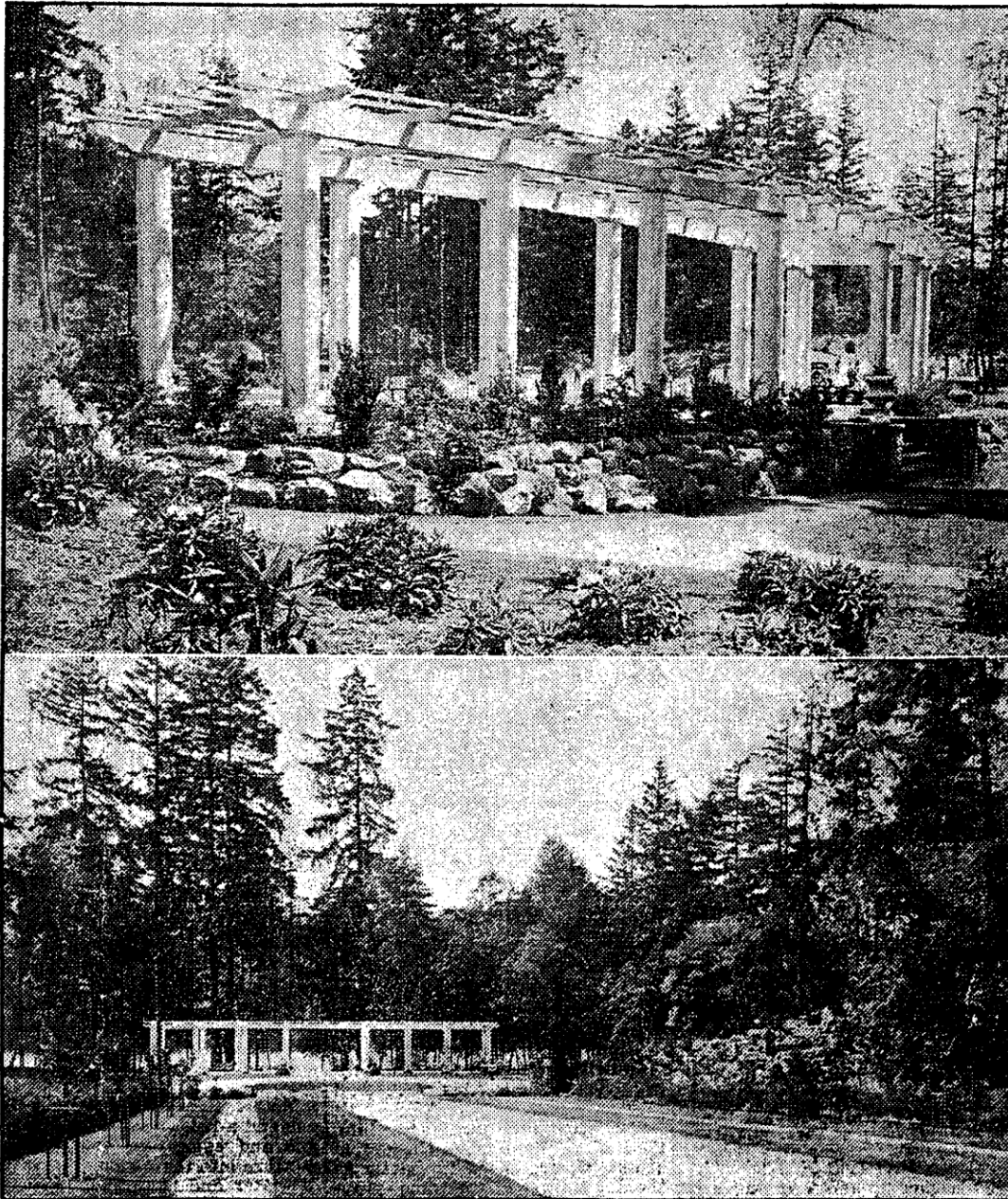


Wapato Park pergola, newspaper coverage of opening, 1938

JUN 2 1938

THE TACOMA TIMES

## Remodeled Wapato Park Opens Soon



The striking pergola, shown above, features the entrance to Wapato lake park, which has its long-awaited reopening Saturday afternoon. The lower view looks toward the lake from the new 68th st. entrance to the park. Dedication ceremonies will take place in front of the colonade.

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Wapato Park pergola, 1974

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park pergola, 1986

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato park pergola, 2005, post restoration

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park picnic shelter, 1986

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park picnic shelter, 2005, undergoing roof renovation and removal of kitchen element

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park picnic shelter, 2023

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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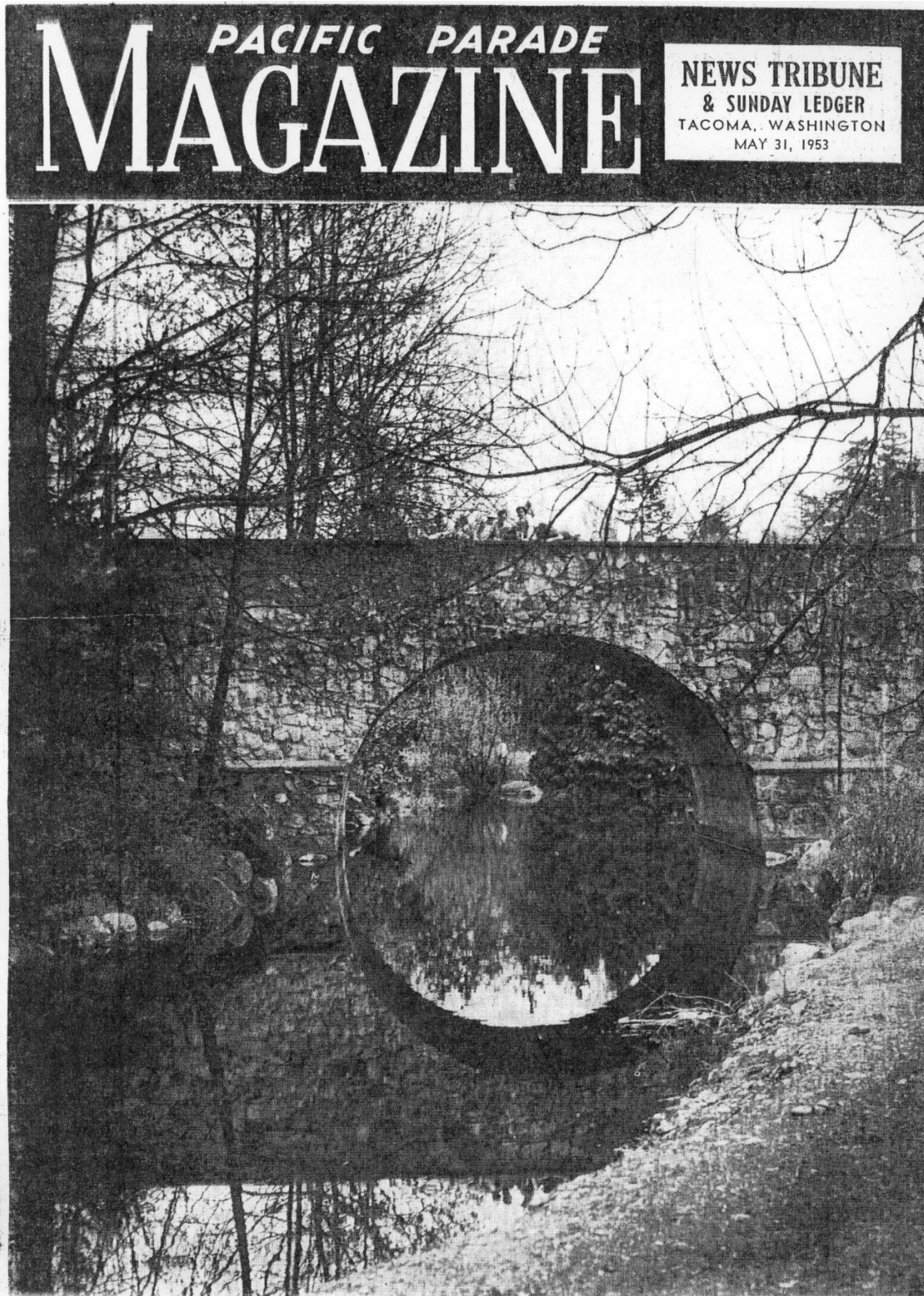


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Wapato Park masonry bridge, 1953 News Tribune insert



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Wapato Park masonry bridge, 1986

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park masonry bridge, 2015

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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### Wapato Park masonry bridge, 2021

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



### Wapato Park entrance “masonry pillar” plinths, 72<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance, 2018

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park entrance “masonry pillar” plinths, 72<sup>nd</sup> Street entrance, 2018

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



Wapato Park entrance “masonry pillar” plinths, 64<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, 2015

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma



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Wapato Park entrance "masonry pillar" plinths, 64<sup>th</sup> Street entrance, stone plaque, 2015

Courtesy Metro Parks Tacoma





### APPENDIX C ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "Wapato Lake: An Environmental Study on the Effects of Urbanization" by Douglas J. Canning, Robert W. Wisseman, and S.F. Jerry Cook with assistance by students of Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington, 98505. Final Report to the Washington State Department of Ecology, March 1976.
- <sup>2</sup> Canning, Douglas, et al, "Wapato Lake: An Environmental Study" pp 10;
- <sup>3</sup> The new picnic area is evident in aerial photographs (tmap [City of Tacoma](#), 1973 basemap); Picnic area renovations also visible in an aerial photograph map featured in Wapato Lake: An Environmental Study", pp May 1970; work is cited in the 2005 Wapato Park Master Plan timeline as well, "1966 - Urban Beautification Grant awarded for lake rehabilitation, storm drainage improvements and landscape enhancements. \$76,786 from the G.C. Casebolt Co. received for beautification landscaping and dock."
- <sup>4</sup> "A New Utopia: The Magnificent Park Projected for Tacoma" The Daily Ledger, June 5, 1889; "Sunday at Wapato: An Arcadia Where One Can Find Rest in Safety" The Daily Ledger, June 24, 1889;
- <sup>5</sup> March 1927 Park Board meeting minutes describe direction for Wapato Park, including the addition of row boats moved from Point Defiance Park.
- <sup>6</sup> The entrance plinths have a dedication plaque carved with the date "1937", the picnic shelter plaque reads "1936", and the bathhouse plaque reads "Built by the WPA 1936-1937". Site visit by author, 10/31/2023;
- <sup>7</sup> This footbridge was removed due to deterioration 1952. A new dyke and walkway over it was installed in 1981, separating the northern section, more of a drainage pond, from the larger southern recreation area, per Park Board minutes and resolutions;
- <sup>8</sup> Later demolished, as part of early 2000s parkwide improvements.
- <sup>9</sup> February 10, 1964, Park Board Minutes note that Wapato and Wright Park crews are working in Point Defiance Park, thinning Alder on Five Mile drive and cleaning up Fort Nisqually area; it seems probable that the plinths were moved at this time though this has not been confirmed to date.
- <sup>10</sup> The marker recognizes the donation of the park land by Mr & Mrs Horace Greeley Scott who had purchased it from R.F. Radebaugh, and donated the first public park parcels in 1920.
- <sup>11</sup> Newspaper reports describe getting to the park by streetcar, a significant investment by Radebaugh was built on this premise. Aerial photographs from 1930 shows a well used path from 56<sup>th</sup> to the entrance at the north of today's park, along Wapato Lake Drive, and there is also a "deer trail" path into the park from 72<sup>nd</sup> as well. No other entrances besides the Wapato Lake Drive entryway was built prior to the WPA improvements. <[www.tmap.cityoftacoma.org](http://www.tmap.cityoftacoma.org)> Accessed 05.24.2023; The intersection of S. Hosmer Street and 56<sup>th</sup> Street was demolished with the construction of Interstate 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Park Board Minutes, October 16, 1972; conversation with Parks M&O staff, 08.03.2023 (re: when the parking area was closed off, sometime in the 1990s (aerial photograph from 1989 shows cars still using that lot). It was officially removed during the construction of the new parking area next to the dog park off-leash enclosures.
- <sup>13</sup> Park Board Minutes, April 25, 1988 – "Wapato Park North End Entrance Closure - Al Rasmussen explained that he received a petition from residents along Wapato Lake Drive requesting that the north end exit be closed and used as an emergency exit only. They are afraid that if this road is turned into an exit only, it will turn Wapato Lake Drive into a drag strip for hot rodders leaving the park. The Board was in consensus with the petition. The north exit will be closed and will be used as an emergency exit only."
- <sup>14</sup> *Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma: Abstracts, Plats, and other Data*, Tacoma, Works Progress Administration, 1938.
- <sup>15</sup> Tacoma Times article, photocopy in MPT archives (06.02.1938)
- <sup>16</sup> Tacoma Cultural Resource Survey (Census Tract 631), Wapato Park, 31283. Form prepared by City of Tacoma, Office of Historic Preservation, March 1981.
- <sup>17</sup> Mina Vedder, "Wapato Lake Park: Restoration gives it new lease on life" The News Tribune, 08.12.2001 (Newspaper column)
- <sup>18</sup> Cite MPT files and aerial view
- <sup>19</sup> National Park Service, *Parks and Recreation Structures*, 1938, pp. 71.
- <sup>20</sup> Tacoma Cultural Resource Survey, Wapato Park, 1981.
- <sup>21</sup> Attached to this narrative as an appendix
- <sup>22</sup> Tacoma Cultural Resource Survey, Wapato Park, 1981.
- <sup>23</sup> Little Wapato, a shallow, marshy 22 acre "lake", drained into Wapato via a short channel. The northern half of Little Wapato was filled during construction of Ainsworth in the 1950s and 1960s. The southern portion was filled by MPT to make a baseball diamond in 1971. Metro Parks Tacoma, *Wapato Park Master Plan*, 2005.

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<sup>24</sup> Canning, Douglas, et al, "Wapato Lake: An Environmental Study"

<sup>25</sup> The Civilian Conservation Corps primarily worked in natural areas, removing underbrush and certain trees, creating trails and enhancing remote park areas, largely through unskilled labor. The Works Progress Administration often employed men from skilled trades, hiring them in their traditional roles for specific projects where possible, subsidized by federal funds; The workers were often locals, and were more likely to live at their own home and report for work daily rather than staying in designated barracks.

<<https://www.archivesfoundation.org/newsletter/if-you-build-it/>>;

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks/History/CCCYears/Pages/default.aspx>;

<sup>26</sup> Albert H. Good, *Park Structures and Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1935).

<sup>27</sup> Good, *Park Structures and Facilities*;

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see [www.nps.gov/frla/home.htm](http://www.nps.gov/frla/home.htm); At this time there was a belief, shared by Downing and Olmstead, that "fine art" including harmonious natural spaces, and could elevate the morals of the lower and middle classes who didn't have the "advantages" of the exposure to culture and refinement of the upper classes. In 1873, the Union Pacific Railway and Tacoma Land Company hired Olmsted to design a plan for Tacoma, ultimately rejected by the City leaders, and in it he called for several parks in the downtown area. The sketch of this plan can be found in the Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room collection, digitized here: [General Photograph Collection TPL-601](#);

<sup>29</sup> Cowing, Katherine E., "A Preservation Analysis of and Recommendations for WPA-Built Outbuildings in the Wissahickon Valley" (1997). *Theses (Historic Preservation)*. 515, pg 9. [http://repository.upenn.edu/hp\\_theses/515](http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/515)

<sup>30</sup> Dulles, Foster Rhea, 1900-1970. *America Learns to Play: a History of Popular Recreation, 1607-1940*. [New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, incorporated, 1940, pp 202-203;

<sup>31</sup> *Abstracts, Plats, and other Data*, Tacoma, Works Progress Administration, 1938; The Puyallup Tribal Language Program has confirmed that the name "wapato" is not a known Lushootseed word, and to date the etymology is unknown, per a conversation the author had with several of the program leads in June 2021;

<sup>32</sup> "A Trip to Puget Sound" by G.D., *The Vancouver independent*. (Vancouver, W.T. [Wash.]), 08 Sept. 1881. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87093109/1881-09-08/ed-1/seq-4/>>

<sup>33</sup> <https://tmap.cityoftacoma.org/>, basemap "1931 Imagery", Wapato Park, Tacoma, WA.

<sup>34</sup> "A New Utopia: The Magnificent Park Projected for Tacoma" *The Daily Ledger*, June 5, 1889; "Sunday at Wapato: An Arcadia Where One Can Find Rest in Safety" *The Daily Ledger*, June 24, 1889;

<sup>35</sup> Another report spoke to the early days of the park as well, identifying that at some time before 1910 an outlet structure was built at the south end of the lake; it is uncertain whether it was to raise the lake stage for recreation purposes or for flood control. October 1977 – Draft Environmental Impact Statement: (II-24)

<sup>36</sup> An April 9, 1899 Tacoma Daily Ledger newspaper article reports that the Wheelman's Club (bicyclists) is debating two local projects involving the improvements to local lakes. Both American Lake and Wapato Lake are being discussed. The group speaks of reviving the popularity of the park, which has slipped into decline. It is not known how much improvement the Tacoma Wheelmen did to Wapato Lake, but they were one of a number of community groups to contribute to the site at the turn of the century. By 1910 the newly formed Metropolitan Park District of Tacoma began discussing the possibility of incorporating the area into the park district. In 1911 they recommend purchasing 110 acres but funding was not available; Park Board minutes April 24, 1911, additional archival records;

<sup>37</sup> Cranz, Galen. *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America* (MIT Press, 1989, pp 101-103; Environmental Impact Assessment, 1976.

<sup>38</sup> Caroline M. Menzel is described in the property transfer paperwork as a "spinster". She appears several times in the newspaper for her charitable giving in the 1910s. A woman named Caroline Menzel was married in Seattle in May 2022, to Nate Cozey. No other records for either party appear in WA State digital archives.

- *The Tacoma times*. [volume] (Tacoma, Wash.), 15 Feb. 1913. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085187/1913-02-15/ed-1/seq-1/>>
- *The Tacoma times*. [volume] (Tacoma, Wash.), 14 July 1915. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085187/1915-07-14/ed-1/seq-1/>>

<sup>39</sup> July 17, 1927 – Tacoma Daily Ledger

<sup>40</sup> Galen Cranz, *The Politics of Park Design: A History of Urban Parks in America*. MIT Press, 1982. <<https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5469.001.0001>> Accessed November 2023;

<sup>41</sup> "Trends in park design had changed from romantic beauty to active recreation and Philadelphia had not kept up" as cited in: Cowing, Katherine E., "A Preservation Analysis of and Recommendations for WPA-Built Outbuildings in the Wissahickon Valley" *Nominations to the Tacoma Register of Historic Places are processed according to the procedures and standards described in TMC 1.42 and 13.07. Submittal of a nomination form does not obligate the City to place a property on the Register or to extend financial incentives to a property owner. Documents submitted become public record. Additional requirements may be imposed by other City, state or federal regulations.*



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(1997).Theses (Historic Preservation). 515. <[http://repository.upenn.edu/hp\\_theses/515](http://repository.upenn.edu/hp_theses/515)>; March 1927 Park Board meeting minutes describe direction for Wapato Park, including the addition of row boats moved from Point Defiance Park.

<sup>42</sup> "Methodist Pastors will Picnic Monday" *Tacoma Times*, July 18, 1941, for example, when the Tacoma Methodist Ministers union held their annual meeting picnic at Wapato; Periodically the lake would have to be closed to swimming due to contamination from City sewers or build up of unhealthy bacteria, and throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Park District was continuously problem-solving to keep the water healthy for swimmers and fish. Park Board minutes agency documents, and newspaper articles chart this process.

<sup>43</sup> Metro Parks Tacoma archives, 1933 Park Board minutes;

<sup>44</sup> Works Progress Administration project reports, Metro Park archives; Park Board minutes note that as of November 1933 there were 280 men at work in the park, paid through Federal Civil Work program funds; Projects took place at 29 park district properties, including sites like Spanaway Lake Park and Tacoma Tidelands parcels that Metro Parks no longer owns. Most were fairly light touches. Sometimes simply doing a document search and writing a summary of the park's history and how it came to be in the system was the only work conducted at a park. For example, Tacoma Tidelands, Fireman's Park reports just has plat map, property abstract and brief historical summary; most of the others have pretty significant projects. This count does not tabulate the WERA projects or necessarily capture all of the CCC work either, just those conducted under the auspices of the WPA funding.

<sup>45</sup> WPA report "Wapato Park" dated 7-14-38, W.P.A. Project No. 5891

<sup>46</sup> Mary Dutton Boehm, "The Arts and Crafts Movement in America" *The Journal of San Diego History: San Diego Historical Society Quarterly*, Summer 1990, Volume 36, Numbers 2 & 3. Accessed 10/18/2023 <<https://sandiegohistory.org/journal/1990/april/arts/>>

<sup>47</sup> Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "pergola". Encyclopedia Britannica, 31 Oct. 2023,

<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/pergola>. Accessed 14 December 2023>. "Arts and Crafts in America 1895-1920," Craftsman Perspective, <<https://www.craftsmanperspective.com/history/america2.html>> ; example of a [1925 pergola](#) in Ann Arbor park that was listed in their local historic register. <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/parks-places/Pages/west.aspx>

<sup>48</sup> August 12, 2001 – TNT

<sup>49</sup> Some sources differentiate between "National Park Service rustic" and "WPA Rustic", noting that WPA architecture frequently emphasized greater distinctions between the buildings and surrounding natural areas, whereas NPS integrated the buildings much more closely with the landscape. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WPA\\_Rustic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WPA_Rustic) ; <https://www.historycolorado.org/wpa-rustic> ;

<sup>50</sup> February 23, 2005 – TNT, Arsonist start fire in the Bathhouse.

<sup>51</sup> WPA report in MPT files records the text of the program, as well as transcribes the newspaper article covering the event that came out the next day;

<sup>52</sup> Park Board Meeting Minutes: November 14, 1938, "On motion of Mr. Henricksen seconded by Dr. Button, superintendent was instructed to have a chain or gate barrier constructed across Cushman Avenue at the south boundary of Wapato Park."

<sup>53</sup> "Festival Will be Wednesday" *The Tacoma times*. (Tacoma, Wash.), 28 Aug. 1939. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085187/1939-08-28/ed-1/seq-3/>; "Field Day" *The Tacoma Times*. (Tacoma, Wash.), 27 June 1939. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085187/1939-06-27/ed-1/seq-10/>; "Post Auxiliary to Have Party" *The Tacoma times*. [volume] (Tacoma, Wash.), 27 June 1939. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88085187/1939-06-27/ed-1/seq-7/>;

<sup>54</sup> Even as of 1944, "Little Wapato" was being marked on maps as a wetland rather than as a pond, per the US Dept of the Interior Geological Survey Map of Tacoma, South Quadrant, 1944 edition. Courtesy The University of Texas at Austin, University of Texas Libraries online portal.

<sup>55</sup> March 1976 – Wapato Lake study by Evergreen College: (page 15), April 1976 – Environmental Impact Assessment, also noted that City water is too high in nitrates to add to the lake water.

<sup>56</sup> May 4, 1986 – TNT Wapato Lake reopens to swimmers after 10 years of closure and \$2 million in changes. In 1981 the lake was emptied and tons of sediment containing oil and other pollutants were hauled from the bottom. A dike was built to separate drainage basin at the north end from recreational area to the south. Later a pipeline to carry fresh water was installed. During the summer an estimated 117 million gallons were added.

<sup>57</sup> Metro Parks Tacoma. "Appendices II – Annotated Park History" *Wapato Park Master Plan* (2005) pp II-25;

<sup>58</sup> Fort Nisqually reconstruction was started by CCC and finished with help from WPA, per Fort Nisqually records in MPT and FNLHM archives;

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<sup>59</sup> "Wapato Lake: An Environmental Study on the Effects of Urbanization" by Douglas J. Canning, Robert W. Wisseman, and S.F. Jerry Cook with assistance by students of Evergreen State College, Olympia, Washington, 98505. Final Report to the Washington State Department of Ecology, March 1976.

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