

New Park is 'Gateway to Community'

TED OLINGER, KP NEWS

Gateway Park will open to the public Sept. 30. The new 72-acre park extends west along State Route 302 from near the Harvest Time Country Store at 97th Avenue NW to the eastern edge of the 360 Trails Park on 144th Street NW.

"I think that Gateway Park has the potential to be a community builder," said Scott Gallacher, Key Pen Parks executive director. "Huge spaces bring community together. It's a gateway to the Key Peninsula and a gateway to community."

The original Gateway property was 39 acres, but Key Pen Parks jumped at an unexpected chance to buy two neighboring parcels totaling 33 acres on both the west and east sides of the park in September 2016. "With that and 360 Trails right next door, it's one massive 432 acres of recreational opportunity for the Key Peninsula," Gallacher said.

"We didn't have any parks on the north end of the Key Peninsula; we jointly operate Horsehoe Lake, but that's seasonal," Gallacher said. "Our need was for playgrounds, picnic areas and restrooms; this is what people asked for. Access points

to 360 Trails and an off-leash dog park. We don't have a dog park, but we're looking at it."

The original five-phase plan for Gateway is being revised to include the 33 acres added last year.

"We've done phase one and two—general purpose field, parking, horse trailer parking, concrete pad, playground with zip lines, restrooms; the pavilion is being assembled," Gallacher said. "The thing we're working on next is phase three, which is the splash pad, amphitheater and another shelter or pavilion.

"The 360 Trails map is also being redone because we're adding trails now constantly," he said.

Little Minter Creek runs along the north side of Gateway near 360 Trails before joining Minter Creek south of 118th Avenue NW. "It's this great natural habitat; there's a beaver dam and a heron rookery," Gallacher said. "We've got culvert blockages in a couple spots, but once those culverts are removed, we could have salmon all the way up

in here eventually.

There's nothing like it anywhere nearby."

The original concrete pad at Gateway was torn up and replaced at the end of August, a development that brought many queries and complaints to the Key Pen Parks office, Gallacher said. "It wasn't up to spec, so the contractor had to redo it at their expense. That concrete pad that's there now, I can put a tent there and rent out 2,000 square feet of covered space. We've got event boxes so food trucks can come in and hook up to power and water." Key Pen Parks plans to market the park for paid events to generate revenue.

"Phase one and two for this development is about \$1.8 million," Gallacher said. "We've been successful in two large state grants: one in acquisition of the property and two in this development phase. We've gotten almost a million

dollars in grant money for this property so far."

The Key Pen Parks Foundation and other donors have contributed to the project as well, Gallacher said. "The Rotary Club of Gig Harbor has paid for the pavilion; the park makes up the balance with property tax dollars from our capital budget."

Volunteers have also been a significant factor, Gallacher said. "We've got these volunteer parties that have stepped up to do a lot of work; we're probably north of \$10,000 in volunteer labor already," he said.

"We developed this park economically; there's not a lot of flash here," he said. "Gateway reflects the style and the needs of the community. People like trees, they like open spaces and they want their kids out there. Open space brings the community together."

(continued back page)





Key Pen Parks bought two neighboring parcels totaling 33 acres called the Manke property on both the west and east sides of the park in September 2016. Courtesy Key Pen Parks

Key Pen Parks: A Story of Growth and Collaboration

SARA THOMPSON, KP NEWS

Key Pen Parks has come a long way.

In the mid-1970s, Volunteer Park was the only local public park under the supervision of the Key Peninsula Parks and Recreation District. The two fields, still in active use and visible from the KP Highway, were developed by volunteer residents.

Two more properties were acquired in the 1990s. Rocky Creek was leased from the state and the land for Home Park was given to the park district. Kip Clinton, now a parks commissioner, described the Home property as a "dirty dozen dump site," with artifacts including refrigerators, car parts, two buses and old carpet. Even with abundant volunteer labor, materials required money and the special bonds and levies to

raise funds often did not pass.

Clinton began attending parks meetings in the 1990s, in part to learn more about protecting the land she loved to roam. She would horseback ride for up to 20 miles at times, often along the roads. She started to limit her road routes when newcomers would honk as a warning, not realizing it would startle her mare and make for a dangerous ride.

In 2001, the county passed the zoo trek tax, a 0.1 percent sales tax to fund park departments that met certain criteria. The existing parks and recreation district did not qualify. A special election was held in 2004 to replace the old district with the new Key Pen Parks to make it eligible for funding.

Key Pen Parks then purchased Volunteer Park and the Home Park property. Scott Gallacher was hired as executive director in 2005 with one additional

halftime employee.

"It took a while to build public trust with the new department," Clinton said. "We fought hard to get everything we needed, but the visible changes and improvements in Volunteer Park and Home Park made a big difference."

Since then, Key Pen Parks has acquired nearly 900 acres of land with no-cost 50-year leases, including Rocky Creek, Maple Hollow and Key Central Forest from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, and 360 Trails from Pierce County. Gateway Park and property at Taylor Bay were purchased outright. Two playgrounds have been built (at Home Park and at the KP Civic Center); 3 miles of soft surface trails were developed; and the Maple Hollow shoreline restoration and trail access have been completed, as have the field and facility

renovations at Volunteer Park.

The most visible recent work is what Gallacher called "the big boy on the block," Gateway Park, a multiphase, multimillion-dollar project.

If the last decade has been one of acquiring land, growing from 245 acres in 2004 to managing or owning 1,232 acres currently, the next stage will be one of development. "Any further acquisition will be strategic," Gallacher said. "They will need to increase connectivity to the land we own or manage or meet critical aspects of our goals such as shoreline access or habitat protection."

Key Pen Parks has a full-time staff of five, including two who maintain the properties and five halftime seasonal employees. Five park commissioners are elected to six-year rotating terms to provide oversight and direction.

Each commissioner brings his or her own skills to the table.

Clinton writes grants for specific funding from public monies. Ed Robison has used his engineering background to design park picnic shelters. Mark Michel has been active in trail design. Shawn Jensen has used his landscaping background to help review park design proposals. John Kelly has extensive experience working with government contracts.

From an initial budget of \$150,000, Key Pen Parks has come a long way. The 2016 budget was nearly \$2 million dollars, almost a million dollars more than typical because of the work at Gateway. The vast majority of income comes from property and sales tax for operations and maintenance, but public

grants from the state and county have provided funding for the major improvement projects and for acquisitions. The Key Pen Parks Foundation acts as a liaison for contributions and also applies for grants.

Gallacher said that volunteers remain essential, helping with programs, Parks Appreciation Day, trail maintenance and more.

"It's important to partner and collaborate," he said. "I feel we have been successful in leveraging grants and partnerships to maximize our impact. We have partnered with the KP Historical Society, Red Barn, Farm Tour, Camp Easter Seal."

For more information, go to www.keypenparks.com.



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- **Zip lines for children and parent-toddler swings**
- **Pavilion (under construction)**

What's Planned Next

- **Splash pad**
- **Amphitheater with grass or stone bench seating**
- **Amphitheater pavilion or bandstand**
- **Horseback riding arena**
- **Synthetic playfield for soccer, football, lacrosse, and?**
- **Basketball court**
- **New park administration office including space for civic organizations**
- **Off-leash dog park**



Enjoy the Wealth of Local Parks

From playgrounds to sports fields, from a wheelchair-accessible path to a rugged trail in the forest, there is something for everyone in Key Peninsula Parks.



Gateway Park: A 72-acre park purchased in 2012. Following public workshops, the parks

commission approved a master plan including sports fields, playground, restrooms, a splash pad and an amphitheater. Its proximity to 360 Trails allows for a trailhead from Gateway Park. Located at 10405 State Route 302 in Wauna.



360 Trails: 360 acres that includes trails accessible to walkers, equestrians and mountain bikers,

just west of Gateway Park. The main trail is large and open and takes about an hour to walk. Smaller trails cut back and forth in the woods and intersect with the main trail. Located at 10905 144th St. NW in Wauna.



Home Park: A small park with a playground, picnic shelter and restroom facilities. Located at 17220

8th Avenue Court KPN in Home.



Key Central Forest: A 480-acre parcel including forestland and Vaughn Creek.

There are many trails, but they dead end and may be rough. Sturdy shoes with good ankle support are encouraged. Visitors are free to park at the gate and walk in. Located at 10527 Wright Bliss Road KPN near Vaughn.



Rocky Creek Conservation Area:

224 acres of woodlands, wetlands and two streams (Glee Creek and Rocky Creek) with 3 miles of walking trails, two benches and a trailhead kiosk. Parking available at the trailhead. Located at State Route 302 at 150th Avenue between Vaughn and Victor.



Maple Hollow: A 58-acre site with a circle trail and access to a stretch of beach with views of Mount

Rainier. It has a wheelchair-accessible trail and a picnic area. Located at 4411 Van Beek Road KPN in Lakebay.



Taylor Bay: A 39-acre parcel with over 600 feet of shoreline access to Taylor Bay including

a pocket estuary, mudflats, lagoon, salt marshes, two creeks, forested uplands, riparian areas and open meadows. Current amenities are water access, nonmotorized boat access and picnic tables. Proposed plans include possible public access for kayaking, hiking and educational purposes. Located at 17916 76th Street KPS in Longbranch.



Volunteer Park: A 20-acre park with softball fields, picnic areas, skateboarding park, horseshoe pits,

half-court basketball, wheelchair-accessible walking trails, restrooms, concessions stand, 9-hole disc golf course and outdoor concert area. Located at 5514 Key Peninsula Highway N. in Lakebay.

For more information go to:
www.keypenparks.com.

Be a Park Partner

Volunteer Your Time

The Key Pen Parks volunteer program promotes a spirit of partnership with residents, organizations and businesses of the Key Peninsula.

Volunteers help enhance our parks, services and events by helping bring every part of the peninsula together to achieve a stronger, more connected community.

Adopt-a-Park Program

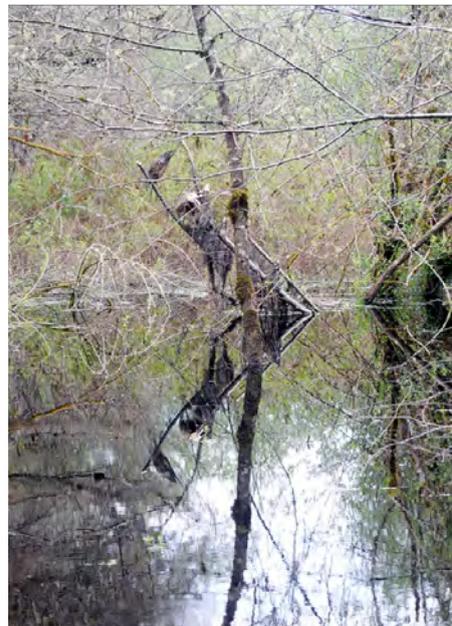
Volunteer groups and individuals support their adopted park at least four times a year to pick up any garbage and debris. Adopters help maintain a safe environment and act as an extra set of caring eyes for Key Pen Parks when you find conditions that need attention.

Donations

Contributions, memorials, designated gifts and planned giving are all ways to financially support your community park system.

Get Involved.

For more information, go to www.keypenparks.com/get-involved



In addition to new facilities like the playground and pavilion, Gateway Park offers an escape from development with trails through woodlands and wetlands. Little Minter Creek runs across the north end of the park, offering haven to all manner of wildlife. There is a substantial beaver pond on the eastern end of the creek and herons roost overhead.



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Key Peninsula Parks & Recreation Foundation

You can help make Gateway Park even better.

Donations are being accepted to help build the next phase of Gateway Park improvements – the Splash Pad and Grass Amphitheater with bandstand/shelter.

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Or securely donate online at:
www.keypenparksfoundation.org.

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(from front page)

Key Pen Parks will spend the next six months finalizing phase three, then applying for state grants by August 2018 to pay for development, including a grass or stone bench amphitheater and splash pad, Gallacher said.

Key Pen Parks will also review

its entire agency comprehensive plan to include "what people want to do and see on the Key Peninsula," Gallacher said, as it continues to develop other properties.

"All of our park lands are open; there might be gates on them, but they're open," Gallacher said. "We're

working on a trailhead access point at the 480 (Key Center Forest), redevelopment of the playground area at Volunteer Park, and we're looking to purchase a piece of property at Taylor Bay with a grant to expand the existing parcel."

Meanwhile, planning, paying for and completing all

of the work at Gateway Park will take years." A large part of it is funding," Gallacher said. "There are so many variables, I think the best thing to say is that this will be multi-generational—15 or 20 years. It's going to grow up with the community."



On behalf of Key Pen Parks, I would like to thank the Key Peninsula Community for your help and support in building this phase of Gateway Park. This project has taken a multitude of volunteers who helped spread wood chips in the playground area, stain wood for the pavilion, assemble the playground equipment, build and maintain trails, and serve refreshments and lunches. I would also like to thank Key Pen Parks Staff and Commissioners and the following groups and agencies who continue to support parks and recreation on the Key Peninsula.

Scott Gallacher / Executive Director
Key Pen Parks / 253-884-9240 ext 21

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|---|--|
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| Gig Harbor Rotary | Pierce County |
| Key Peninsula Business Association | State of Washington Recreation and Conservation Office |
| Key Peninsula Historical Society | 26th District Washington State Legislators |
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