

PARKS GOVERNANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) manages the City's parks and natural areas, including trails, recreational facilities, community centers, and golf courses. Given the size and needs of the system,¹ various entities support DPR in making policy and use decisions, obtaining funding, and providing programming. These organizations include:

- Board of Park Commissioners
- Seattle Park District
- Parks District Oversight Committee
- Associated Recreation Council
- Seattle's School District

BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

The Board of Park Commissioners (DPR Board) is an advisory board made up of nine volunteers.² The DPR Board consults with the Mayor and Council and makes recommendations on policies, planning, development, and use of the lands and facilities under DPR jurisdiction. The DPR Board also provides input on the City's Comprehensive Plan as well as DPR's capital improvement plan (CIP), recreation programs, and annual budget.

Each member serves a three-year term. Four members are appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the Council. Four members are appointed by the Council, and the remaining member is appointed from the ["Get Engaged" Program](#).

SEATTLE PARK DISTRICT

Washington State law allows for voters within a city or county to create a metropolitan park district for "management, control, improvement, maintenance, and acquisition of parks, parkways, boulevards, and recreational facilities."³ Such a district is a municipal corporation distinct from the city or county forming it, and once formed, it has its own taxing authority. The City's intent in seeking voter-approval for such a district was to provide a long-term revenue stream to support the operation of DPR parks and facilities rather than relying on a continuing series of park levies, any one of which could be voted down at any time.

¹ DPR manages a 6,200-acre park system of 465 parks and extensive natural areas; athletic fields, tennis courts, play areas, specialty gardens; and more than 25 miles of boulevards and 120 miles of trails. The system comprises about 11% of the City's land area. Parks also manages many facilities, including 26 community centers, eight indoor swimming pools, two outdoor (summer) swimming pools, four environmental education centers, two small craft centers, four golf courses, and an outdoor stadium.

² RCW 3.26.010. Current Board members can be seen at the following link: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks-and-recreation/about-us/board-of-park-commissioners/meet-the-board>.

³ RCW 35.61.010.

On August 5, 2014, a majority of Seattle voters approved the formation of the Seattle Park District (District). The District's boundaries are the same as the City of Seattle's boundaries, and all nine of the City's Councilmembers serve *ex officio* as Seattle Parks District Boardmembers. Voters authorized the District to levy property taxes of up to \$0.75 per \$1,000 of assessed property value to fulfill its purpose, which is to "fund, maintain, operate and improve parks, community centers, pools, and other recreation facilities and programs." Currently, the District levies about \$0.33 per \$1,000 of assessed property value; this will generate approximately \$47.8 million in 2016.

To establish the parameters under which the District and DPR function, the City and the District entered into a formal agreement outlining the District's relationship with DPR.⁴ The agreement memorializes that DPR will retain responsibility for management and control of the City's public parks and green spaces. It also clarifies that land owned by the City will remain City property and any assets purchased with District funds will become the City's property. In addition:

- The District will not have its own staff, and the District will contract only with the City for implementation of any District projects, programs, or services.
- The District will only levy taxes to fund its budget, and any excess will be used to reduce revenues collected in the next year.
- DPR will provide staff and resources to the District using District funds.
- The City's annual budget will provide DPR with at least \$89 million in General Subfund revenues (2014 dollars adjusted by inflation) as a commitment to avoid supplanting the City's DPR expenditures with new District revenues.⁵

Separate from DPR's CIP, the District conducts a planning process every six years to determine spending priorities for the next six years. The current six year spending plan covers 2015 through 2020. Thus, spending for years 7 – 12 of the District will be updated as part of the 2021 budget process, years 13-18 will be updated in 2027, and so on.⁶

The District's current six year plan includes funding for the following activities:

- Clearing the major maintenance backlog, managing assets and performing preventative maintenance;
- Increasing recreational opportunities;
- Performance monitoring and strategic management;
- Increase funding for community centers; and
- The Get Moving initiative.

The District has its own budget in addition to the DPR budget, which is created annually and in accordance with the six-year plan. The Seattle Parks District Board reviews and approves the District's budget. Because 2016 is the first year the District can collect property tax,⁷ the District

⁴ Ord. 124468 (passed April 28, 2014).

⁵ SPD Res. 1 (passed Sept. 30, 2014), available at http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/ParkDistrict/ParkDistrictResolution1_S.pdf (interlocal agreement in effect as of Oct. 30, 2014).

⁶ See, e.g., http://www.seattle.gov/parks/legacy/files/background_parks_initiatives.pdf.

⁷ RCW 84.09.030 prohibits collection of property tax by a taxing district if boundaries are not set by August 1 of the year preceding collection.

was funded in 2015 through a \$10 million loan from the City.⁸ The District will pay back the loan from its revenues over 8 years. The District used the [\\$10 million](#) in 2015 to ramp up activities such as establishing performance measures, developing a process for allocating funds to other organizations, hiring, and an automated asset management system. For 2016, the District anticipates \$48 million in expenditures on DPR programs and projects.

PARKS DISTRICT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

In addition to District governance and oversight by the Seattle Parks District Board and advisory input to the City from the Board of Park Commissioners, the City also formed the Parks District Oversight Committee (Oversight Committee). The Oversight Committee advises the Mayor, the Council, and the Superintendent of DPR and also provides oversight of projects, programs, and services that the City and the District undertake. The Oversight Committee is comprised of 15 members, all of whom must be confirmed by the City Council. The Oversight Committee consists of four members from the Seattle Parks District Board; one member from each of the seven Council districts; and four additional members recommended by Seattle City Boards and Commissions. The Oversight Committee is responsible for:

- Establishing a Major Projects Challenge Fund application and evaluation process and making recommendations to the Superintendent of Parks on allocation of the Fund;
- Reviewing the DPR annual report assessing performance and expenditure of District funds and reporting on implementation issues, concerns, and necessary adjustments;
- Holding public meetings and making recommendations related to the six year plan updates; and
- Providing an annual report on the progress of expenditures, a mid-term report halfway through the six year planning period, and a final report before the six year update.

ASSOCIATED RECREATION COUNCIL

The Associated Recreation Council (ARC) is a non-profit organization recognizing, representing and supporting community advisory councils that provide programs and activities to communities across the City. ARC acts on behalf of the Superintendent to administer a process to recognize these advisory councils and appoint their members. DPR coordinates programming, registration, and facilities management while ARC, through its advisory councils, provides instructors, supplies, and sometimes equipment for recreational and lifelong learning programs. The ARC Board is made up of 16 volunteer board members and the DPR Superintendent. Two of the 16 members are appointed members of the DPR Board. The 37 advisory councils are comprised of community center councils, city-wide councils, and environmental education councils. ARC manages the advisory councils as a systematic whole and serves as the formal means by which the advisory councils and the Superintendent communicate. In addition, a Joint Steering Committee made up of staff from ARC and DPR facilitates communications, addresses resolution of issues that crop up, and serves as a forum for policy discussion.

⁸ SPR Res. 3 (passed Nov. 24, 2014), *available at* http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/ParkDistrict/ParkDistrictResolution3_S.pdf.

In 2008, ARC and DPR entered into an agreement structuring their partnership to better achieve goals related to delivery of recreational services: to increase the number of people served, develop sustainable financial resources, develop infrastructure systems to better market and conduct recreation programs, and to provide connections to Seattle's neighborhoods and communities. ARC provides a variety of services, including child care, youth and adult programming, and administering scholarships for those programs. For example, ARC runs a preschool program, camp for kids during school breaks, before and after school programs, summer day camps, and specialized programs for those with special needs. In 2014, ARC's total budget was over \$12 million, made up primarily of class fees, most of which was spent on programming.

SEATTLE SCHOOL DISTRICT

DPR and the Seattle School District have historically cooperated to benefit students and community members by providing developmental and recreational opportunities. This cooperative relationship has been in place since the 1920s. A [Joint Use Agreement](#) now memorializes the understanding that public grounds and facilities should be used in a unified manner to benefit the City's children, adults, and families. The purpose of this Joint Use Agreement is to encourage efficient use of each entity's facilities, giving each priority usage of the other's facilities, and to create procedures for effectively setting up a cooperative system. In addition, DPR and the Seattle School District have set up the ["Schools in Pools" Program. This program](#) sets aside DPR pools during specified times for priority school use.