

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners
Meeting Minutes
November 14, 2013

Web site: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkboard/>
(Includes agendas and minutes from 2001-present)

Also, view Seattle Channel tapes of meetings, June 12, 2008-most current, at
<http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/watchVideos.asp?program=Parks>

Board of Park Commissioners

Present:

Bob Edmiston
Barbara Wright
Jourdan Keith, Vice-chair
Brice Maryman
Yazmin Mehdi
Tom Tierney
Mazohra Thami

Excused:

Antoinette Angulo
Diana Kincaid

Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff

Christopher Williams, Acting Superintendent
Rachel Acosta, Park Board Coordinator
Susan Golub, Strategic Advisor

This meeting was held at Seattle Park Headquarters, 100 Dexter Avenue North. Commissioner Keith called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. Commissioner Keith asks for approval of the Agenda, the October minutes and the Acknowledgment of Correspondence; Commissioner Keith requests a change to the minutes and the minutes are approved pending the change; moved by Commissioner Wright moves and Commissioner Maryman seconds.

Acting Superintendent Williams requests a change to the Agenda to remove the Superintendent's report in order to leave time at the end to discuss the retreat during Old/New Business. The Park Board commissioners accept the change and the report is available here.

To hear and view the full meeting, see <http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.asp?ID=5591331>

Oral Requests from the Audience

Don Harper – Don sits on the Queen Anne Community Council and was on the Parks Levy Committee. He researched the Metropolitan Parks District and different funding mechanisms during his time on the Parks Levy Committee. He feels the MPD is a great funding option and understands the tax benefits but feels the citizens miss the ability to give input into decisions SPR makes. MPD would mean the citizens would rely on the “goodness” of the City Council. Requests that the Park Board and the Legacy Committee NOT get blinded by the money.

Sharon LeVine – the MPD is a revolutionary form of Parks management. Please look at this website: metropolitanparkdistrict.wordpress.com. The MPD are not subject to any of the initiative and

referendums of the city. The land must be auctioned instead of going back to SPR if the MPD is dissolved. There is no jurisdiction for Seattle's boards and commissions. City Council would act as a state chartered body and therefore would be subject to state laws. The tax capacity is junior to taxing entities (ie. school district, police).

Bill Farmer – Friends of Athletic Fields – 200 fields and ½ are in good shape. 70% of grass fields are youth only. 90% of synthetic fields are youth only. One could double the amount of play if the fields were converted to synthetic. It is important to have more fields available.

Legacy Committee

Funding Mechanisms – Ben Noble, Director of Council Central Staff and Hall Walker, Deputy Director of the Central Budget Office presented the funding options available to SPR.

The General Fund covers 66% of the operating costs of Seattle Parks and Recreation. Most parks revenues do not grow (ie. fees). With inflation, the GF has to grow faster than inflation in order to cover the same percentage of the operating costs. SPR's general fund fluctuates more than other departments because in a recession cutting the Parks budget makes more sense than Police, Schools or Human Services.

Options for voter-approved funding:

- Property taxes – also known as City Levy Lid Lift
 - Requires 50% approval
 - Used solely for operating and capital projects
 - Can be permanent or short-term
 - Permanent levies can only grow 1% per year this means inflation could rise higher than the levy
- Bond
 - Require 60% voter-approved
 - Only be used for capital projects
 - Taxes collected for the term of the bonds issued
 - Example: seawall
- Increase in utility taxes
- Tax on sugar-sweetened beverages
- Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) - limited to capital and fluctuates a lot
- Metropolitan Park District
 - Requires 50% voter approval
 - Under state law authority - Legally separate taxing authority from the city
 - Revenue is raised from property taxes but can be at a higher rate because it is not subjected to city rules regarding caps on property taxes.
 - Can be used for both capital and operating expenses
 - Maximum of \$.75 per \$1000 of the assessment value then the cap grows at 1%
 - The governing body would decide the amount taxed. This would allow them to change it depending on the needs of the department.
 - There are no legally binding obligations of the governing body.
 - Junior taxing authority to the city taxes – given AV growth experienced recently, it is hard to see Parks would face issues but it is conceivable.

Disadvantages to MPD:

- How much are voters willing to spend?

- Accountability – MPD does not expires therefore there is no opportunity for voters to renew or reject
- There are no legal obligations for the MPD board to give the money to the Parks department.

Advantage to MPD:

- Parks works well with other branches of city government
- City council acting as governing board means if the voters don't like what the MPD is doing; they can use their vote to hold the councilmembers accountable.
- The Mayor has no role in the MPD
- SDOT has a similar structure to the MPD called the Transportation District, which is governed by the City Council who act as the Transportation District board. After approving the budget for the city, the City Council switches hats, approves the budget for the Transportation district, and then gives the money to SDOT. Upon approving the budget, the Transportation District board illuminates how the money will be spent.

Dissolution of an MPD

- City ordinance expires or citizen's initiative could end it which is the same as a permanent levy
- The governing body could terminate the MPD
- People could sign a petition forcing the board to take a vote
- MPD could not own assets- those would remain with SPR

Clarifying Mayor's role

- Continue to establish the budget and will still decide how the money is spent
- Has veto power

Levy v. MPD

- Voter knows specifically what they are getting prior to voting whereas with MPD that is not *necessarily the case*
- Levy can only grow 1% per year

Susan Golub – Parks Legacy Plan Citizens Advisory Committee

- The Committee explored SPR – received briefings by the managers and directors, and took tours of the facilities to see the maintenance needs.
- Decided on the assessment criteria for priorities - they looked at all of the investment initiatives through the lens of Race and Social Justice, as well as, the criteria they established.
- Formed sub-committees:
 - Existing - \$267 million maintenance backlog; programs for people – teens, seniors and special populations
 - New – providing staff money for outreach to underserved populations; acquisition funding
 - Partnership – legally required to fund the zoo and aquarium but Parks has many partners; opportunity fund- matching fund where partners can apply for parks money.
 - Estimated total at this time for the initiative is \$60million/year.
- During the public hearings, they had 73 people speak and the consensus was that people want more of the good things parks does.
- The report coming out in mid-December includes a discussion of the funding mechanism.

- There are public meetings in January for input on the latest iteration of the Plan.
- In February the final report will be done. It will include the following:
 - Size of package (\$\$)
 - Funding mechanism (MPD v Levy)
 - Priorities
- ARC or Seattle Park Foundation will do polling to get a sense of the public's opinion
- In March, the plan goes to the city council for approval
- Parks is working on the ordinance and companion resolution – they will list the projects and follow the same rules – whether they form an MPD or remain a city taxing entity.

Bicycle Use Policy Update

David is clear to state that the purpose of the revised Bicycle Use policy was to allow the possibility of mountain biking in Seattle parks. People could not mountain bike freely on existing paths unless they had been improved to meet Seattle Parks Mountain Bike Trail Design Standards. The significant change in the Bicycle Use policy is in section 3.7. This section allows bicycling in greenbelts or natural areas on trails less than 60" if the trails have been designed and constructed to Seattle Parks Mountain Bike Standards.

Commissioner Mehdi is unclear as to the impetus for the proposed policy changes. It sounds as though the Cheasty community is requesting a mountain bike trail, but the policy will impact the entire City. Commissioner Wright feel it was inappropriate for the Cheasty mountain bike community to be the impetus for SPR to change its entire Bicycle Use policy. They feel Parks should do a pilot project and see how it goes before changing the policy. It is at the Superintendent's discretion to try out a new Bicycle Use policy through a pilot project.

Another option brought by Commissioner Wright and Commissioner Mehdi was to have a short-term policy that would expire.

Commissioner Tierney and Commissioner Thami felt that the policy should be passed followed by a pilot project; Commissioner Tierney felt creating a pilot project prior to passing policy could be a slippery slope for the department. Commissioner Thami and Commissioner Maryman reiterate that this policy change only opens the door to mountain biking in parks and gives the sport legitimacy.

Superintendent Williams takes away from this conversation that Commissioner Wright, Commissioner Mehdi and Commissioner Keith would like a hybrid solution. These three commissioners feel that an outright change in policy is too hasty.

Commissioner Edmiston disagrees. He feels that the bicycle policy is opening the door to the possibility of mountain biking in parks. He states parks has always adapted to current trends in recreation and in that spirit, could revise and tweak the plan yearly as part of that adaptive attitude.

Commissioner Keith would like to walk the proposed trail. She explains there are many factors that go into where a trail gets located. She emphasizes that allowing mountain biking, even for a pilot project, would create irreparable damage to the natural areas.

In terms of criteria for a location, these questions should be asked:

- Who are the users?
- Are we excluding different types of users?
- What impacts occur

Superintendent Williams will suggest a list of potential sites for the first mountain bike trail and the criteria for choosing a location. At the January meeting, Parks staff will lay out more clearly the impact over the short-term. Superintendent Williams suggests a meeting ahead of time to vet the ideas and Brice volunteers to assist.

Old/New Business

Retreat: How does SPR do business? Superintendent Williams expresses an interest in having a higher level of accountability for the Parks department going forward and feels that the Park Board could have a role in that. He sees a cultural shift happening in Parks to become more user-focused and less bureaucratic. Some of the ideas he offered for the Park Board retreat and 2014 work plan have to do with managing the following areas:

- Performance management
- Hiring an internal auditor
- Annual/biennial customer satisfaction survey
- Publish an annual report card that details the following:
 - Earned income
 - Crime reduction strategies
 - Assets purchased
- Using Park Board as potential oversight for funding mechanism and/or the Opportunity Fund
- Develop strategic initiatives for 2014

Bicycle Master Plan

Commissioner Maryman is writing a letter expressing the Board of Park Commissioners feelings on the revised Bicycle Master Plan, which will be sent to the Mayor, Mayor-Elect Murray and the City Councilmembers. In the letter, Commissioner Maryman will emphasize the following points:

- The BMP needs to reflect an understanding the role Parks play in the community and with bicycle riders
- Plan should be for all users – young and old
- The BMP does not have any greenway routes through parks
- Policy implications – safe, all age use through parks
- Infrastructure in parks for bike riders – where can one park a bike at parks?

Commissioner Wright moves the letter be written and sent and Commissioner Edmiston seconds. It passes.

Commissioner Maryman moves the meeting adjourn; Commissioner Edmiston seconds the motion and the motion carries. The meeting adjourns at 9:01 pm.

APPROVED: Jourdon I. Keith, Vice Chair DATE 1/9/2014
Diana Kincaid, Chair
Board of Park Commissioners

