



Minutes

Board of Park Commissioners

100 Dexter Avenue North, Seattle 98109

Thursday, May 9, 2019

6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Commissioners:

Andréa Akita, Vice Chair

Dennis Cook

Marlon Herrera

William Lowe, Chair

José Ochoa

Tom Byers

Jessica Farmer

Evan Hundley

Kelly McCaffrey

Welcome and Introductions

Called to order at 6:34pm. The board introduces themselves. William asks for a motion to approve the consent items: May 9 Agenda and February 28 meeting minutes. Commissioner Herrera moves, and Commissioner Cook seconds, and the consent items are approved.

Public Comment

Margy Bresslour – Friends of Colman Park Vista; She hopes to receive an update on Colman Park. She feels there is a disconnect between what the department says and what they do. They were never notified about the publication of the Colman Park Vegetation Management Plan. SPR received over 80 letters from community members supporting their edits to the VMP.

Linda Phinney – SPR is required to follow a clear public involvement process. SPR rewrote the Colman Park VMP and violated the public trust.

Evan Wright – Thanks the Board for advocating to extend the public comment period for the Colman Park VMP. Vegetation management plans must be detailed, complete, take historic context into consideration, and follow public involvement policy; this VMP does not meet those requirements. Community values and forest restoration can coexist. During Jesús' appointment, Mayor Durkan during mentioned that he works collaboratively. They hope he does.

Superintendent's Update

Christopher Williams, Interim Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Colman park – SPR received the Colman Park letter and many others that echoed the sentiments of the community; SPR staff will incorporate the community comments into the VMP. The VMP will be an ever-evolving document. He will ask SPR staff to submit a written response to Friends of Colman Park Vista.

Web site: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkboard/>

NE 130th Street End – SPR has been negotiating with neighbors to buy back property at NE 130th and will open the beach for public access.

Parks and Rec Fest – SPR will be holding two outreach events to get feedback for the Strategic Plan: June 1 at Parks and Rec Fest at Green Lake Community Center and Park and June 9 at Yesler Terrace Community Center and Park.

Spray Parks and Wading Pools – SPR will operate 22 wading pools and 11 spray parks this summer.

Colman and Mounger, the two outdoor pools, will open on May 11.

Presentation: Olmsted Task Force Report

Presented by Danyal Lotfi, Community Engagement Advisor, Seattle Parks and Recreation; and, the Olmsted Legacy Taskforce

Danyal introduces and provides background on the Olmsted Taskforce. He introduces the members of the task force who will be presenting: Doug Luetjen, Jenifer Rees, Jennifer Ott, and Andy Mitton. Doug Luetjen – co-Chair of Olmsted Legacy Taskforce, identifies what the taskforce was asked to do:

- evaluate and recommend restoration;
- protect and expand the Olmsted Parks and boulevards; and,
- explore and develop strategies to enhance and preserve the Olmsted system through core principles of equity, access and inclusion.
- Lastly, research how Olmsted design principles could include other areas of Seattle.

The taskforce received information and briefings from many different stakeholders that informed their report.

Olmsted designed the Seattle system to be accessible for all. The Taskforce shared SPR's mission – Healthy Environment, Healthy People, Strong Community – and it drove their thinking and decision-making.

The Olmsted's designed a system of parks and boulevards; the taskforce wants to continue to develop this system of connecting parks and boulevards into all areas of the city.

The taskforce asks the Board to review and adopt this report and recommend to Superintendent Aguirre to provide adequate funding to protect, enhance and rehabilitate the Olmsted parks and boulevards.

Challenges to safeguarding the Olmsted system

Insufficient knowledge and recognition – no city-wide programs to educate the public; there is a perceived elitism – their audiences are typically white and wealthy.

Inconsistency and underrepresentation in planning efforts – keep historic elements integral to any restoration plans

Inconsistency in maintenance practices – communicate effectively with grounds to educate on proper practices; funding for capacity building and educational opportunities.

Inadequate resources – path degradation, blackberry conquest

Retaining landscape character over time – have a clear plan in place; people feel passionate about views and this has been an ongoing issue since the beginning.

Changing climate and impacts – Think about how changes are going to stress the existing plants; how to adapt Olmsted vision to changing environment.

Adapting to meet contemporary needs – ADA, ECA; motorized vehicles, and modern infrastructure were not in use the way they are now. Apply Olmsted principles to meet modern needs.

Misuse and overuse – graffiti and vandalism; informal parking along the boulevards; increased demand from people; private encroachment – loss of public asset.

Jenifer Rees – president, friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks; steps up to the podium to present the next topic.

Recommendations for Preservation and Rehabilitation

- Create curator position at SPR – Boston has this position and they oversee all historic parks in the city; coordinate education programs; liaise with Landmarks Board; and, coordinate fundraising and planning efforts.
- Develop education resources and programming for SPR staff and for the public.
- Develop and maintain strong interdepartmental relationships – SPR should be involved in SDOT planning projects; foster better awareness of Olmsted landscapes in different departments.
- Develop programs for stronger community support organizations; more seamless interface and new Friends groups for planning and advocacy efforts;
- Assess adequacy of existing tools and policies and adopt revised/new policies; and revise GIS mapping system which doesn’t contain information regarding historic context.
- Assess current conditions of Olmsted parks and boulevards – create an inventory of needed work and use ‘Friends of’ groups to do this.
- Develop rehabilitation and succession plans to maintain integrity of landscape; using the Secretary of Interior standards on rehabilitating historic sites; revise VMP process, view policy; analyze equity

- Develop maintenance plans – prioritizing maintenance tasks; renovating historic features; and, expand on the system of interconnected parks and boulevards - creating and strengthening recreation areas citywide.
- Increase funding – address budget shortfalls; explore additional funding mechanism

Andy Mitton, Landscape Architect; Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks, President-elect, talks about expanding the Olmsted System.

Develop a plan for expansion

Andy reads an excerpt from the original Olmsted report.

- Develop a plan for expansion;
- Apply Olmsted design principles and strategies;
- Use ideas from previous plans, studies and drawings;
- Incorporate other infrastructure into the plan; partnership with other public entities is important and leverage other public lands;
- Build a plan upon principles of social and racial equity; providing access to within a certain distance to people’s homes.
- Create a clear process for designating new viewpoints. Capitalize on views that are left.
- Increase funding and develop new funding sources.

The report is written well and succinct; Commissioner Hundley mentions the lack of funding for maintenance. He asks about signage for Olmsted Parks – Donald Harris responds that the rainbow signs have a metal plaque; the street sign blades for historic boulevards are brown. Commissioner Hundley asks how much more funding they think is necessary.

15% of budget goes towards Olmsted parks; what funding is needed and how would projects be prioritized? Public partnerships with SPU or SDOT greenways project could be leveraged for funding. Commissioner Hundley encourages them to get into schools to teach the students about the Olmsteds.

Friends of Seattle’s Olmsted Parks (FSOP) could create educational materials and volunteers to teach if there were opportunities for them to engage with the public.

Commissioner Herrera mentions it appears there are two program buckets – maintenance and expansion with different policy implications for each. For the maintenance piece, Commissioner Herrera suggests a Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats (SWOT) analysis of current preservation mechanisms in the system and how to aim it towards equity and sustainability. Regarding system expansion, the City budget is tight but there is no shortage of money in the city itself. There needs to be a methodology for prioritization.

What are FSOP doing to diversify their group and be more inclusive? Jennifer Ott is prepared to do outreach to different communities. She wants to speak with a broader, more inclusive audience. She's trying to figure out how to draw different groups in to loving and wanting to protect the Olmsted Parks and Boulevards.

Doug Luetjen speaks about the stakeholder groups that they talked to during the information gathering process; met some of the "Friends of" groups, grounds/maintenance people, Historic Seattle, and listed in Appendix A in the Olmsted Report. There is a marketing narrative that needs to be told. There is a narrative around funding and the choices that need to be made.

Kelly attended a summit and spoke with a man who was talking about an Olmsted legacy. Many lands organizations were there to talk about equity and inclusion in parks and land management. The people of color on the panel talked about how they use the park differently and do not feel included in those planning conversations.

Superintendent Aguirre says that much has changed in thought processes about maintenance/design/expansion; are their core principles and are there other principles that need to evolve? Is there a way to modernize the principles?

Andy mentions that when the Olmsteds came here, he wrote home about the views, the lush vegetation and the rolling hills. Seattle is losing the native vegetation. There is a place for preserving native forests, but in some places, Seattle is losing historical context in other places. Doug says in the report there is the Olmsted design principles.

Commissioner Lowe gives a history of the area.

Commissioner Lowe asks whether the Board is ready to make a recommendation. Commissioner Akita says she would like time to review the report. The Board requests to have SPR staff come to the next meeting and work on priorities. Invitation from the Board to the Task Force to return.

Community Center Strategic Plan Update

Justin Hellier, Strategic Advisor, and Moshe Hecht, Sr. Recreation Program Coordinator, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Background – Park District made recommendations about where to allocate budget; community centers received half the money, pending strategic plan process; Superintendent Aguirre adds, this was an opportunity to look at how to steward the recreation system long-term.

Overview

The Community Center Strategic Plan was informed by a large demand study; researched best practices and performed significant public outreach.

Recommendations at a glance

- Increase staffing – hours and staff cut in 2008
- Launch innovations and pilot projects – hub programming; expand financial aid and free programs, and providing free programming in low-income communities
- Implement system-wide improvements creating greater access and improved service - Eliminate drop-in fees during operating hours; simplify the scholarship process; and, strengthen performance management and staff professional development

Implementation update: Expanded Operating Hours

Criteria for selecting which sites: usage, equity and geography; Increased hours and staff at six community centers, resulting in a significant increase in visitorship. Impact - greater community demand at each site had pretty sizable growth; system wide growth of 2%

Implementation update: System-wide Improvements

Simplified application process: increased multi-lingual outreach; honor utility discount program as income verification, which resulted in over 4000 people receiving scholarships.

Soda tax money provides \$150,000 more in scholarships in 2019 and 2020 budgets.

Implementation Update: Hubs

SPR hired two full-time Senior Recreation Program Coordinators to lead the analysis, planning, and incubation of Hub innovations. Identified core principles for the hub; community centers are focal points; respond to changing needs and promote social equity. Research hubs in other cities; program gap analysis and needs assessment; looked at class data; analysis of center usage; and racial equity toolkit.

Partnership Hub: Lake City Community Center

There is no senior center or services for teens and limited public resources. Piloting public benefit contracts with organizations, such as, Sound Generations; Hunger Interventions, etc... they provide a benefit SPR cannot.

SPR provides 25 hours per week of funded operations; 19 additional operating hours provided by partners.

Specialty programming hub: Destination Summer Camps

Recreation employees are here for youth. Everyone should have access to recreation programs; 27,000 registrations in summer day camps; childcare – supported by 1.5mil in childcare camps; camps help curb summer learning slide.

- Summer activity camps* are a proven program model, but the analysis identified a geographic inequity in who benefits from these programs
- Historically, activity camps in central and southeast Seattle have high cancellation rates due to low enrollment
- With our “pay-to-play” model, SPR believes cost is a barrier for many families

Innovation

Program at Garfield to leverage funding from Associated Recreation Council to fund scholarships and other program expenses, directly marketed to shelters and ethnic media. Offered free meals and snacks throughout the day. Piloted a change to the scholarship policy to give full scholarships to families who qualify for 80% or greater.

Impact:

- 40 separate camps, with 582 registrations.
- 80% of participants received full scholarships sponsored by Associated Recreation Council.
- Registrations as a percent of population increased more than five-fold.

Matrix Hub – Pickleball and adult sports pilot

The Gap Identified

- Growing demand for non-traditional adult sports competes for limited space and time with youth recreation and other programs
- Siloed system for scheduling leads to confusion, inefficiency, and opportunities to improve customer service

Innovation

Testing new models for engaging adult sports users:

- Identified time and space in non-peak and dark hours
- Created financial structure to allow access during non-operating hours
- Collaborated across silos (center staff, planning and development, and the community) to stripe 24 outdoor courts, with equipment available for check-out at community centers

Impact

- Growth in pickleball hours – 20 hours a week systemwide in 2009, to 106 in 2019
- Piloted after-hours, fee-based opportunities at 2 centers – ultimately underutilized
- Significant utilization of outdoor courts

Incubator of change to look for opportunities to make changes and support growing/changing needs of the city. Continue to do deep program analysis to identify efficiencies and disparities, and to incubate new Hub innovations.

2019 Hub Focus:

- *Lake City Community Center* – Senior Hub and increase teen access; continue engagement with partners.

- *Destination Summer Camps* – Offer again in 2019, assess impact and sustainability.
- *Magnuson Community Center* – explore “Strategic Impact Coalition” Hub to better support Solid Ground, Mercy Housing, and other neighborhood residents. Working with Seattle Public Schools, the YMCA and other partners to develop a plan and programs for the community.

Lessons learned

For many of SPR’s programs and services, demand exceeds capacity.

Innovation can achieve results

Some are self-sustaining

Some require continued investments – dedicated scholarships for low-income neighborhoods

“Pay to play” model sustains significant program opportunities, but by itself does not deliver equitable program distribution.

Hub investments have given SPR the capacity to understand the problem in more granular ways and to identify solutions.

Continued opportunities for innovation – system’s complexity requires deep analysis and strategic planning.

Partnerships is important to add more resources and hours. Data is equally important for funding and advocacy.

2019 Destination Summer Camps – expanding day camps in Southeast Seattle to Rainier Beach; each camp is half day with a supervised lunch. It provides full-day coverage with

Commissioner Akita asks about other funding initiatives. The sweetened beverage tax is the only revenue source. Associated Recreation Council is interested but cannot sustain it right now. They will look for other funding sources.

Presentation: Sports Diplomacy in Israel and Seattle

Justin Hellier, Strategic Advisor, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Justin took part in an exchange program sponsored by the U.S. State Department, using sports and youth programming to build cross-cultural understanding; women and girls’ empowerment; and peace-building.

Israel Delegation –

15+ participants from a variety of organizations engaged in “sports diplomacy” in Israel, including: youth development organizations, Bedouin girls’ basketball team, Jerusalem community center youth program director. Participants from various ethnic and religious groups visited a variety of similar organizations in Seattle.

The Seattle Delegation –

10 participants from a variety of organizations engaged in similar fields from Seattle, including Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Storm Social Responsibility Manager, Seattle United Youth Soccer Coach, UW Center for Leadership in Athletics, and Cultures Connecting.

About Israel:

75% Jewish, although it is their ancestral home, they are relatively new to the area and coming from all over the world to live in Israel. They range from Secular to Ultra-Orthodox.

21% Arab – Muslim, Christian and Druze religions represented.

Justin discusses some of the challenges Israel faces in trying to create social cohesion: there is strong residential, linguistic and academic segregation; compulsory military service; borders and geography; and politics.

Justin shows the Board pictures of the parks, off-leash areas in Israel that he saw. Almost all major parks had fitness zones for adults. There is a sense of vulnerability coming out of the holocaust so there is a culture of wellness and strength in the community.

He visited an Arab soccer team for girls, the only one, and they practice on Fridays while religious people are praying so they will not get harassed.

They met an integrated Jewish and Arab soccer team; they do not discuss the politics but play together.

They visited an Arab community center - emphasis on families, youth development; and, a health center.

They visited a Jewish community center on the edge of the Jewish section of East Jerusalem. Most profound thing they saw was seeing the affluent Jewish neighborhood directly adjacent to a poor Palestinian neighborhood. A group of Jewish women are learning Arabic and a group of Arab women are learning Hebrew and they meet for weekly facilitated conversations, which is so simple and incredibly powerful.

Takeaways – There is a vibrant movement in Israel and beyond - to use sports as a vehicle for social impact. Justin questions whether building relationships is enough if the power dynamics and equity

between the communities is so disparate. Or, maybe through the building of relationships, the communities will be able to work towards a more equitable society.

Old/New Business

Saturday – May 25, celebrating our cultures at the Woodland Park Zoo.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourns at 8:40pm.

APPROVED: _____ DATE _____
William Lowe, Chair
Board of Park Commissioners