

Minutes

Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

Via WebEx

Thursday, April 14, 2022

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

Attendance

BPRC Members: Mays, Brockhaus, Faller, McCaffrey, Contreras, Herrera, Farmer, Umagat, Akita, Thomas, Watts

SPR Staff: Judd, Finnegan, Sheffer, Furuto, Cutler, Jones, C. Williams, A. Williams, Hoff, Burtzos, Grabowski, Takami

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Herrera calls the meeting to Order at 6:32 pm. Introductions of Commissioners and SPR staff.

Commissioner Herrera introduces public comment segment. Provides reminder that there are several avenues to submit questions and comments, and to provide other feedback. Burtzos and Hoff direct public comment.

Public Comment

- Don Losseff: Green lake inner loop wheels ban – Although SDOT gave information regarding the outer loop construction at their open house 2/22, the March 2022 wheels ban and signage along the inner loop seems to contradict that messaging and creates a less-inclusive space. Asks for return to pre-ban rules and signage.
- Lee Swedin: Thanks Commissioner Watts for his work for D5. Urges Board to allocate funding to convert Community Centers to resilience centers for extreme heat and smoke/air quality events.
- Alice Mar-Abe: Advocates for increased funding to convert Community Centers to resilience centers for extreme heat and smoke/air quality events, and to outfit them with solar capabilities to provide power during outages.
- Tueng Shen: Sail Sand Point – Advocates for increased funding to refurbish and refit Building 31 (boathouse) at Magnuson Park, emphasizes SSP's importance in community safety.
- Greg Maass: Green Lake inner loop – Emphasizes that safety concerns involving bicycle/pedestrian incidents are a non-issue, and if anything, the path has become less safe

under the wheels ban. Additionally, points out that pedestrian crowding on the path could be mitigated by utilizing the gravel “shoulders” of the path and putting up signage encouraging pedestrians to make use of this space.

Superintendent’s Welcome

I want to welcome Board members and the viewing public to an important part of the Park District Funding Prioritization Process: a Community Check-In for folks to learn more about what we are proposing and to provide them with an opportunity to ask questions.

My heartfelt thanks for the work the Commissioners are doing, giving up evenings and weekends, to participate in this process that will lead to their recommendation for funding for the next six-year cycle of the Park District on May 19.

It’s important to remember that the slate of possible investments the Board is considering is guided by the robust engagement we have done in advance of our strategic plan, through a statistically valid survey and through extensive efforts in 2021 to hear from the communities we serve – particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

We want to build on this learning and partner with the community to advance priorities.

I appreciate the work you are doing and I look forward to hearing your recommendations in May.

Parks District Planning Cycle 2 Community Check-In

Brian Judd hosts and shares PowerPoint presentation. Judd introduces and explains procedure for Q&A box to attendees. Judd underscores that this not the only avenue for feedback; PDPlanning email, survey links, public hearing, etc., and briefly outlines 2019 and 2021 community engagement processes.

SPR staff Andy Sheffer, Joey Furuto, Carson Jones, Donnie Grabowski, Justin Cutler, and Michele Finnegan (collectively “Subject Matter Experts” or SMEs) briefly introduce each funding proposal that the subcommittees are reviewing.

Community Check-In Q&A

David Takami moderates questions from public via Webex Q&A window. Brian Judd hosts.

Blanket comment addressing large number of pickleball comments. Sheffer emphasizes need for preventative maintenance.

Q: Why is the [parks district funding] plan being pushed through so quickly?

Christopher Williams: Research for strategic plan began in 2019 with survey of 10,000 community members before pause for COVID pandemic. Statistically-valid survey of over 900 respondents in 2021. Further opportunities for engagement still forthcoming.

Q: Why isn’t there a focus on developing or converting poor grass fields into turf fields?

Andy Sheffer: Relates to asset replacement cycle; funding must tie in directly to this type of project.
Michele Finnegan: Several sites are already in the works for restoration.

Q: What are the plans for rehabilitating the north section of the Burke-Gilman Trail?

Sheffer: Additional paving projects for the BG have been identified in the asset management system and some of those areas will be addressed. A number of departments are responsible for the BG, including SPR.

Q: In increasing training lifeguard training requirements, will this slow down lifeguard hiring and slow re-opening of pools? How will SPR increase hiring and retention?

Justin Cutler: Shared information on lifeguard training. Employee retention is tied directly to training, especially when considering young people.

Q: Why is there no funding plans for additional pools, given their popularity?

C. Williams: Pools are very expensive to build and maintain, so SPR has taken a program-oriented approach to aquatics rather than a geographic one.

Q: Why is trail maintenance funded at such a low level? Proposal does not seem to keep pace with need.

Joey Furuto: Maintenance budget does not include volunteer work that is done yearly. Additionally, reactive work primarily addresses wealthier areas; this budget proposal will provide better maintenance and access to underserved areas.

Finnegan: Major maintenance is separate; that maintenance deals with permitted projects and capital projects.

Sheffer: The proposals really support one another.

Q: How will you clean up parks from homeless encampments? How will you provide equitable access to Parks property when encampments impede that access?

Furuto: Part of this is not really about the PD proposals. We do have a process in place to determine what kind of restoration is in place once an encampment is removed. Safety and security, restoration, recreation, etc. all tie into this issue; it's not as simple as allocating more funding to one program.

Q: Seattle is in desperate need of more pools, especially where population growth has been most significant. There is also a need for pools near transit. What is SPR's plan to address this need?

C. Williams: This merits the same response; we take a programmatic response to pools and try to allocate pool access across the city and allow for access to pools within a reasonable drive. We are sensitive to the fact that there is always a need for more pool access and that pools are very expensive to build and maintain.

Q: "I'm an elderly lady without air conditioning or anywhere to go during heat and smoke. I live midway between Bitter Lake, Northgate, and Green Lake Community Centers. Will they be available as cooling centers next summer? And if not, will other community centers?"

Cutler: Also, Magnuson Park B406, Rainier Beach, and Chinatown/ID Community Centers all have cooling centers. This is part of the Community Center electrification proposal.

Sheffer: Any HVAC conversion to heat pumps also introduces cooling. Additionally, we introduce better air filtration during that process. The electrification proposal addresses larger buildings.

Q: [Sheffer] Related to leveraging state and federal grant funds.

Sheffer: We have been diligent about utilizing our match funds at the state and county level from grant programs and during the last two years we were awarded a high level of match funding.

Q: What is the base line funding numbers for programs and projects budgeted in 2022 with park District sales tax revenue of \$56,035,590 as a starting point for 2023 going forward?

Finnegan: About \$58.3 million.

Q: In the proposals, there is a high and low ask, but the high level is below the maximum. Can you explain?

Finnegan: We have asked the Board to help us prioritize, based on community input and their own experiences. These may not be the final numbers, but they are a guideline.

C. Williams: We don't have unlimited funding and need to exercise some guardrails.

Q: Does the Park Board and Seattle Parks and Recreation understand the crisis that is facing the trees in its Developed Parks (as distinguished from the Greenspaces / Natural Areas which have an on-going funding base)? There is a backlog over 2000 trees needing to be replaced with close to 300 being lost annually. Newly planted trees which are critical to providing equitable parks where people can find respite from heat islands and climate change now need to be watered for 5 years.

Furuto: Not sure if I understand completely, but we are certainly aware of the issue broadly. We are getting around 20,000 trees and shrubs planted, but my numbers suggest we're losing about 500 trees each year. This is another area where we are able to leverage volunteer service successfully.

Sheffer: We recognize that the tree canopy is shrinking and it's incumbent on all of us to plant trees, including and especially within developed parks. We also need to partner with private entities and volunteers.

Q: Are the Commissioner's and the Parks and Recreation Superintendent willing to meet the Mayor and his budget team to reach agreement on a property tax rate to meet the funding needs of the Park District with the current all-time low tax rate of 20.4 cents?

C. Williams: I need to commend the new [Harrell] administration, who was willing to meet with SPR right away and moved this conversation forward. There are lots of factors to consider when we talk about tax burdens; for instance, there is a housing levy and the Families and Education Levy. The good news is the Mayor's office is deeply engaged.

Q: Why are you Leasing Porta potties put next to functioning bathrooms and water fountain at Myrtle Edwards Park next to Expedia? Why no proper cleaning and safety patrols?

Furuto: We lease over 130 Sani-Cans, so I couldn't specifically answer for that park, but we have a lot of SCs for a lot of reasons. One of the major reasons is capacity. A good comparison is Golden Gardens. With antiquated plumbing, ease of access, etc. there could be a lot of reasons. I could look into that park specifically.

Judd ends Q&A; shows upcoming BPRC Meeting Schedule. Emphasizing May 12 public hearing. Commissioner Herrera reminds BPRC members that this process represents a big task and thanks Commissioners and SPR staff for the ongoing hard work and care given to this process.

There being no other business, Commissioner Herrera adjourns the meeting at 8:24 p.m.