



Minutes

Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

Via WebEx

Thursday, May 12, 2022

6:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Attendance

Present: Stafford Mays, Sophia Faller, Amy Brockhaus, Davon Thomas, Marlon Herrera, Jessica Farmer, Justin Umagat, Andrea Akita, Kelly McCaffrey, Sean Watts

SPR Staff: Paula Hoff, Ben Burtzos, Michele Finnegan, Christopher Williams

Welcome and Introductions

Board co-chair Herrera calls the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

Introductions of BPRC members and SPR staff

Consent items: 4/28/2022 Meeting Minutes & 5/12/2022 Meeting Agenda. Co-chair Farmer moves to approve both items, commissioner Faller seconds. There is no discussion. The motion passes by unanimous consent.

Adopted: 4/28/2022 Meeting Minutes & 5/12/2022 Meeting Agenda

Superintendent's Report

Williams thanks Board and members of the public for taking the time to be at this meeting.

Short update on Woodland Park encampment clearing and park recovery plan. The cleanup is going well and the park will be back open to the public on Monday. The City provided homes for over 30 people who were living in that park.

The Greater Greener local host committee kickoff was held at the Mayor's office yesterday. Thanks to Pasqual and Stafford for representing the Board at that event. The Greater Greener conference is the preeminent green spaces conference, and we are in line to host in 2024. This conference will focus on big city park issues.

Open Public Comment

Loria Yeadon – President & CEO of YMCA of Greater Seattle – The YMCA of Greater Seattle has served the needs of Seattle residents for 150 years. Our mission aligns with that of Seattle Parks and Recreation, and we are excited to continue and expand our partnership. By leveraging our organizations' strengths, we can serve Seattle residents while reducing redundancy and increasing impact.

Presentation of Co-Chairs Recommendation

Herrera outlines the Subcommittee process and the framing of Option B as highest-priority projects. After incorporating public comment, the chairs decided to recommend fully funding Racket Sport Maintenance & Expansion. Otherwise, the proposals reflect the recommendations passed along from the subcommittees. Farmer notes that the chairs incorporated the qualitative strategies and priorities from the subcommittee discussions into the final recommendation letter.

Park District Public Hearing

Rebecca Bear – CEO of Seattle Parks Foundation – The pandemic showed how important the Park District is. Unfortunately, there are several projects from Cycle 1 that are unfinished, and there is a backlog of projects. We implore the Board to provide the highest level of funding for the next cycle. In a statistically valid survey, Seattle voters overwhelmingly supported increasing funding for the Park District.

Jennifer Casillas – Downtown Seattle Association – Thanks to Park District funding, Occidental Park and Westlake Park were really activated. Usage has grown exponentially. Through this, DSA has worked with many community organizations. Positive activity in these parks helped keep negative impacts of pandemic to a minimum at these parks. Prioritizing positive programming will keep parks vibrant. DSA advocates the highest level of funding for programs that keep activities and staffing in downtown parks.

David Ward – Advocating for expanding/reinstating morning hours for programming at community centers. These hours are highly used by Lifelong Recreation and childcare programs. In 2019, Lifelong Recreation had 240 weekly programs. LR has rebuilt very quickly after the pandemic and is a model program for RSJI initiatives.

Kyle Serikawa – Ballard resident – Have always enjoyed parks, and now child does as well. Pleased to see expanded community center hours and park concierges in draft proposal.

Thatcher Bailey – Friends of Waterfront Seattle – Strongly urges Board to advocate for maximum funding capacity to maintain and improve Parks property and to use bonding capacity to complete backlog of projects.

Carrie Nolan – Magnuson Off-Leash Group Association – We have partnered with environmental groups to improve our park. 25 years of dog parks is coming up; we have missed an opportunity to steward our land. We are working to rectify that situation with thoughtful planting for drainage and wetlands preservation. We also aim to lead with education within the dog park. Specific parking lot concerns regarding ingress/egress routes.

Ardi Mekanik – Shortage of beach volleyball courts at Golden Gardens. Increase in players and leagues means that players who are not in league have nowhere to play. These players propose to self-fund two additional

sets of poles with a phased implementation to assess impact. After pilot program, assessment could be completed and poles could be left in place or removed, at player's expense.

Cassidy Giampietro – Washington Trails Association – Requesting that Park district funding be raised to maximum or at least 35 cents per \$1000 of assessed value. WTA partners with SPR to maintain trails and wants to expand partnership but needs SPR's funding to be raised.

Tim Motzer – Outlines corrective measures to implement Park District funding plan, including raising funding rate to \$.33/\$1000 and allocation of funds to complete projects that are backlog from Cycle 1.

Kathleen Connor – Advocates even higher request than Option A. Feels that Racket Sports Maintenance funding may be too high, and some should be reallocated for OLAs, Equity Fund, and park beautification. Also advocates pay-as-you-go model instead of debt financing.

Clark Bailey – Amy Yee Tennis Center – Supporting pre-commitment to AYTC. The AYTC has deteriorated badly and needs repair as an equity concern, as well as a safety concern. Increased demands on infrastructure will place additional wear on facilities. The time to act is now.

Larry Hubbell – Friends of Arboretum Creek – FAC seeks to restore native plants, birds, and fish, and our engineering study has been funded by King County. A relatively modest investment from SPR will be enough to complete this project. FAC advocates for maximizing revenue to the Park District, and recommends more than Option A.

William Suarez – Advocating for Smith Cove Phase 2 capital project. Right now, must drive to Juanita Bay to play volleyball. SPR does not offer fully set-up courts. This creates an equity issue, because people who do not have a net, lines, and antennae cannot access this sport. When trying to establish the first queer volleyball league in Seattle, discovered that only one court was available, and for only one hour per week.

Josh Dickson – Washington Park Arboretum – Advocating for funding for life safety and accessibility for Graham Visitor Center at the Arboretum. Although the Arboretum does have additional funding, that funding is limited when it comes to things like deferred building maintenance.

Commissioner Herrera thanks commenters for their participation in the discussion.

Old & New Business

Next week will be final discussion and vote on chair recommendations. The Board takes this opportunity to share their thoughts and responses, knowing that there will be time for further conversation next week.

Brockhaus points out consistent support for adding to proposals, rather than restricting budget. Why not go big and fund everything?

Watts concurs. Good to hear consensus around increasing the levy. We should think about recommending increases to the budget.

McCaffrey seconds Watts' comments. Seeks clarification regarding historical pushback on increasing Parks District funding.

Umagat shares questions regarding increases to budget. Points out that budgeting process is important to see where priorities stand.

Akita underscores public comments and emphasizes that Option B is not really a viable option for the Board. Highlights discussion of debt financing.

Thomas asks for clarification regarding the procedure for the Board's recommendation after the 5/19 meeting. Herrera clarifies. Thomas voices recommendation that public commenters could also be sending their comments to the Mayor's office, since Mayor Harrell will have the final say on the budget proposal. Thomas also recommends to push for more funding and to forward advocacy to the Mayor's office, as well. Herrera adds that the City Council would be another great place to make one's voice heard on the matter.

Mays voices support for beginning work as soon as possible on recommendation package A.

Faller concurs with consensus around increasing budget. Voices additional support for public comment and engagement at all levels of discussion, not just BPRC meetings.

Watts cautions that public commenters only represent a slice of the population that may have a vested interest in increased funding for the Parks District. Recommends seeking information/presentation from budget office regarding increasing Parks District revenue.

McCaffrey expresses understanding that Parks District tax must be balanced against several other revenue measures under a certain cap and asks for clarification regarding potential conflicts.

Williams affirms that SPR would certainly benefit from increased funding, and acknowledges that in line with Mayor Harrell's One Seattle vision, SPR must keep a balance with its own ambitions and the needs of other departments and divisions within the city. There is a Families & Education Levy, a Transportation Levy, a Housing Levy all upcoming, so this is the context we must operate in. This may not be exactly what people want to hear, but those are the facts.

Herrera acknowledges the difficulty faced by city administrators and executives, including the Mayor, and highlights that we are in one of the most regressive taxation environments in the country. The people who will, in a sense, pay the most for any services will be the people who can least afford it. The Park District, at passing, was not a landslide vote, and maintaining public trust in the Park District must be a priority.

Herrera also points out that in 2014, it was through a coalition of all the nonprofit organizations that help keep the Parks system running that the Parks District was able to get off the ground in the first place.

Finnegan reminds the group that baseline funding and precommitments are not included in the Option A calculation. There is much more investment than this prioritization exercise. The combination of all these commitments works out to approximately \$.37/\$1000 of assessed value.

Herrera inquires about possibility of seeking a higher funding level later in Cycle 2. Williams affirms that lines of communication to the Mayor will always be available. That kind of feedback to elected leaders can be convincing.

Farmer thanks SPR staff for the context and information and highlights the difference in framing between spending proposals and taxation rates. It has been helpful to bring those perspectives together in this discussion.

Herrera and Farmer agree that some of the input received may be reflected less in dollars and cents, and more in framing of letter to Mayor and City Council.

Akita reemphasizes the importance of communicating in letter how parks, community spaces, and SPR services help create strong communities.

Herrera recommends seeking partnerships with Departments of Housing and Transportation, etc. to help collaborate on projects.

“This ain’t easy work, you know?” -Commissioner Herrera

There being no further business, Herrera adjourns the meeting at 7:24 pm