

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PUBLIC MEETING PHASE 1

Bitter Lake Community Center, December 8, 2007

Total Participants: 20 Public, 3 Parks and Recreation Staff

Major Themes

The Department's lack of communication or failure to inform and notify the public about this meeting in reasonable advance was a strong, recurring complaint throughout the meeting. Communications issues generally were of great concern to the attendees. Many attendees believe Parks and Recreation has a poor record in communicating actions and decisions. Environmental concerns came up often, both in praise for Parks and Recreation and suggestions of ways and opportunities for Parks to improve. Issues not directly under control of Parks, but affecting the public's parks experience (e.g., homeless/transient problems; policing needs/issues; drugs; social service needs, particularly ESL), were often mentioned.

1. What could Parks and Recreation improve?

Public Engagement

- Parks and Recreation needs to reach out to others, not just the usual customers
- Parks and Recreation needs to work better with volunteers and expand stewardship efforts.
- Need to get more people involved in Advisory Councils
- Seniors should have more input into what programs are offered
- Combining the community centers' catalogs of programs will help get the word out about what programs are provided at the various locations

Programs and Services

- Need more senior programs
- More service to diverse populations, specifically more support for the black community, for kids at risk, for the Free Lunch program, and more youth programming with professional full-time staff who could nurture youth volunteers
- Parks and Recreation should provide information, such as a flyer or leaflet to refer homeless people to resources.

Maintenance

- Parks and Recreation needs to respond to vandalism and graffiti/tagging
- Parks and Recreation needs to take better care of what it has before more land is acquired

Finances

- The City needs to increase its investment in Parks and Recreation, and fund acquiring more parks, more space and facilities, more staff, and more supplies, like tools for volunteers

Staff

- Parks and Recreation needs to hire more maintenance workers, gardeners, recreation staff, and community liaisons

- Parks needs to foster long-term employees and staff at the various facilities, there is too much staff turnover or reassignment to other facilities

2. What does Parks and Recreation do well?

Programs and Services

- Summer concerts in the parks are great
- Parks and Recreation offers a diversity of programs, serving all ages and many cultures
- Parks and Recreation offers space to many and varied groups; it has saved lives through offering ESL classes
- Buses and vans that take seniors to and from activities saves on gas
- Parks and Recreation does a good job of connecting kids with programs and services, like connecting economically disadvantaged youth to job readiness programs

Parks and Facilities

- There is a good variety of park types; kids can learn about science

Maintenance

- Parks is environmentally conscious and acts accordingly (examples: organic gardening at Rose Garden, green cleaning products)

Public Engagement

- Parks and Recreation finally listened to people and is having these meetings
- Parks and Recreation website is good and helpful
- The City strives for consensus-building, but that doesn't always happen in Parks and Recreation

3. What are the issues and challenges that Parks and Recreation will face in the next five years?

Public Engagement

- People may be told that there is no money, but they still want the programs; these are potential public relations issues
- Inadequate communication from Parks may result in reduced use and eventually to elimination of some programs
- Conflicts with the community tend to alienate people and make them distrust the public process. Parks and Recreation often shows lack of sensitivity
- There is a lack of respect for facilities and no sense of "ownership" of parks

Safety and Security

- People need to notify the authorities when vandalism occurs
- There needs to be a police presence in parks, but police should not intimidate park users
- Public safety issues, including transients and illegal activities are a problem

Parks and Facilities

- The Seattle Public School District's plans may threaten parks

- New park sites are being designed by “amateurs” without regard for how Parks and Recreation can maintain the facilities, the design process should be collaborative
- Swimming pools and use of them, the demand for them and the equity of their distribution is a concern

Finances

- Parks and Recreation is prioritizing fee activities over passive uses, many activities now require a fee, even use of the gym to shoot hoops
- Some fees are already high , especially for families; these fees limit attendance and participation

4. What are the emerging trends that will drive how Parks and Recreation does business over the next five years?

Finances

- Some portion of the fees collected should be put back into the specific facility where the fee was generated
- Parks and Recreation needs to look at fundraising opportunities such as allowing tasteful advertising on ball field fences
- Adult sports participants should pay more and be required to volunteer more
- Parks and Recreation should look into grant writing opportunities; it should create a grant writer staff position
- Parks and Recreation should work to increase business contributions through sponsorships, donations, and corporate volunteers

Public Engagement

- Parks and Recreation needs to promote the concept of local responsibility and community consciousness for neighborhood parks. Community members should have a vision for their own residents. “It takes a village . . .”
- Outreach to students to get them involved and participating in stewarding parks and recreation activities
- Parks should have a larger presence on the Seattle Channel
- Parks should do a better job of measuring and publicizing successes, which could be used as to help justify requests for funding

Partnerships

- Parks and Recreation needs to work with coalitions to expand community services
- Parks should work with Seattle film industries to promote parks

Programs and Services

- Parks and Recreation should work with Seattle Metro to provide free transportation to youth events
- Parks and Recreation should do more to educate people on the history of Seattle’s parks, such as the Olmsted display at Volunteer Park
- Formalize student service learning opportunities through internships, stipends, and career ladders

Parks and Facilities

- Healthy parks develop healthy, happy children.

- Parks and Recreation should unload the boulevards to SDOT and give SDOT the financial responsibility for maintaining them
- Destination parks should have destination dining opportunities
- Parks needs to expand number of days and hours facilities are open to utilize facilities to the fullest and be more efficient and stable

Staff

- Parks and Recreation should support workforce housing so that its staff can afford to live in Seattle

Environment and Green Practices

- Parks should be aware of global warming concerns and try to reduce travel associated with activities/sports and make more provisions for carpooling

5. What is your vision for Parks and Recreation?

Public Engagement

- Be honest and follow through with promises

Partnerships

- Strong public/private/community partnerships

Organization

- Don't move the budget around
- Balance and equity

Parks and Facilities

- Safe, cared for open spaces

6. Other Comments on Specific Projects

Safety and Security

- Need quicker response from police to this park and the immediate area
- There are problems with people living in cars along Linden Avenue.
- There is fear and concern, particularly for children and the many seniors living very nearby.
- Need bike patrols in the area.
- Problems on Linden Avenue trigger many calls to the police.
- Need a social worker at the Bitter Lake community center again
- Bitter Lake Community Center needs a crosswalk across Linden before there's a death

Public Engagement

- Volunteer groups are doing a good job at Bitter Lake Reservoir site
- Recent zoo parking garage issue not handled well; reflected poorly on Parks and Recreation

Parks and Facilities

- Part of what appears to be Bitter Lake Park is actually owned by the School District
- U-District does not have enough parks, less than fair share of open space