

Public Involvement Policy for Parks Planning Processes and for Proposals to Acquire Property, Initiate Funded Capital Projects, or Make Changes to a Park or Facility

--Adopted July 1, 1999
--Amended October 1, 2002
--Amended August 30, 2006

Mission Statement

Seattle Parks and Recreation will work with all citizens to be good stewards of our environment, and to provide safe and welcoming opportunities to play, learn, contemplate and build community.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this policy is to describe the role of park users and neighbors in park planning processes, and in review processes for funded capital projects and other proposals that have the potential to change the look or use of a park or facility. It describes the planning processes that become the assemblage of needed projects for which Parks applies for funding. It lays out circumstances in which Parks does not seek public input. It calls for a description of what factors have impacts on a given decision, how professional Parks staff incorporate, or do not incorporate, suggestions from the public in their recommendations, and identifies information to be presented to the Board of Park Commissioners.

1. To establish procedures for soliciting and considering public input in Parks' planning efforts that identify future projects. These processes can be updates to Seattle Parks and Recreation's comprehensive plan (its name changes); efforts to find sites for new park uses; formulation of park master plans; or other efforts that result in a blueprint to use when requesting funding in the future for parks and recreation facilities.
2. To establish procedures for the review of proposals to acquire property, initiate funded capital projects, including projects funded completely or in part by the Neighborhood Matching Fund, or undertake changes to a park property that will, in the judgment of the Superintendent, substantially modify the property's use or appearance.

People Affected

- Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks)
- Board of Park Commissioners
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Councils
- Associated Recreation Council
- Community Organizations
- User Organizations
- Neighborhood District Councils
- Department of Neighborhoods

- Relevant Neighborhood District Council
- Park Neighbors
- “Friends of” Groups
- Seattle Community Council Federation

Policy Statement

It is the policy of Seattle Parks and Recreation, in carrying out its mission:

- To invite and encourage direct public involvement in its planning efforts and in the review of its funded capital projects and any proposal that would, in the judgment of the Superintendent, substantially modify the property's use or appearance.
- To field a staff of professional planners, project managers, landscape architects, and others who may conduct public meetings, who are well-trained in meeting facilitation.
- On occasion, to hire an outside meeting facilitator.
- To provide early and thorough notification of proposals and projects, through a variety of means, to users, user groups, neighborhoods, neighborhood groups, and other interested people.
- When possible, to invite the community’s ideas, e.g., for a park design or a site for a new activity, rather than to present a list of options or a proposed design.
- To complete the process by notifying involved and interested people and groups of final decisions, the impact of their input on those decisions, and the reasons for them.
- To consider exempt from this policy any proposal or project undertaken for legal or safety reasons (e.g., requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act), any proposal for which the public process is spelled out elsewhere by ordinance or by policy, or events protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Responsible Parks Parties

- Superintendent of Parks and Recreation
- Division Directors
- Real Estate Manager
- Planners
- Project Managers
- Parks and Recreation Managers
- Engineering and Design Professional Staff
- Communications Manager
- Public Relations Specialists
- Crew Chiefs
- Board of Park Commissioners and Staff
- Program Managers
- Landscape Architects

References

- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 18.12 (Park Code)
- Seattle Parks and Recreation Plan 2000

- Policies and Procedures
- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 25.05 (State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Rules)
- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 3 (Administrative Code)

Responsibilities

For Planning Processes:

Parks Planner, the person who works with the Operations Division representative, a public relations specialist, the communications office as necessary, and other Parks staff to carry out the approved public involvement plan for each planning process.

For Funded Project Processes:

Parks Planner or Project Manager (can be a Project Manager, Planner, Landscape Architect, Engineering and Design professional, or any staff person acting as the de facto manager of a project): works with the Operations Division representative, a public relations specialist, and the communications office as necessary, to carry out the approved public involvement plan for planning processes or funded capital projects.

Parks ProView Team: comprised of managers, technical staff (landscape architects), crew chiefs, and facility coordinators: reviews the public involvement element of each design program, goes over the response to Attachment A, identifies the responsible people, tools, events, and timelines that will be included in the public involvement plan, and recommends a public involvement plan to the Parks Project Steering Committee.

Parks Project Steering Committee: comprised of division directors and attended by the CIP Budget Manager and various project managers: reviews and recommends changes in the scope, budget, or schedule of capital projects; gives final approval of public involvement plans recommended by the ProView Team; makes recommendations to the Superintendent on how to proceed following the public process.

Parks Planner or Project Manager (can be a Project Manager, Planner, Landscape Architect, Engineering and Design professional, or any staff person acting as the de facto manager of a project): works with the Operations Division representative, a public relations specialist, and the communications office as necessary, to carry out the approved public involvement plan for funded capital projects.

Operations Division Representative: Department staff who can be recreation or park resource managers, crew chiefs or facility coordinators, or a combination of these: works with the project manager, the communications office, and a public relations specialist to help carry out the public involvement plans.

- Facility Coordinators
- Communications Office
- Public Relations Specialists
- Special Events Coordinator
- Contracts and Business Resources Manager
- Core Team Members
- Volunteer Coordinators

- CIP Budget Manager
- Environmental Programs Staff
- Gardeners
- Golf Director

Parks Public Relations Specialists: work with the project manager, the Operations Division representative, and the communications office to carry out the public involvement plans, and bear primary responsibility for the plans.

Board of Park Commissioners and Staff: review projects that are of sufficient scope and community impact or interest to warrant the input and recommendations of the Board of Park Commissioners.

Procedures

For capital projects the opportunity for direct citizen involvement, participation and public input comes at two points in the life of a proposal or project. The first opportunity is associated with a Parks planning process during which Parks determines future needs for park acquisitions, development, and facilities. Plans are almost without exception the source and basis for requests for project funding. The second begins life after project funding is approved.

Planning

Samples of planning processes are:

- A comprehensive citywide process for gathering input about the park and recreation system as a whole. Example: Parks' comprehensive plan.
- A citywide process for gathering input about where to locate new park uses that, because of public demand, need to be integrated into the system. Examples: off-leash areas and skateparks.
- A process conducted in a region of the city, intended to identify appropriate sites for a park use in order to achieve geographic balance.
- A comprehensive citywide process to determine integrated funding, operations, and capital actions to meet recreational demands within the City's financial capabilities over a set period of time.
- A process conducted to formulate a master plan for an individual park.
- A process conducted to craft a policy that has an impact on park users. Examples: Public Involvement Policy, Use and Scheduling of Outdoor Athletic Facilities, Sports Participation Policy, Tennis Court Use and Rules, Exceptions to Park Operating Hours, and Use Management Guidelines.

For public involvement in planning processes, Parks relies heavily on the City's Neighborhood District Council network and City Neighborhood Council structure, newspaper advertising, and existing e-mail groups. An example is the Seattle Parks and Recreation Strategic Business Plan, which will determine integrated funding, operations, and capital actions that will align services, programs, and facilities to meet recreational demands within the City's financial capabilities over a five-year period. The public involvement process will use newspaper ads, news releases, information on Parks' web

site, e-mails to known neighborhood organizations, park user groups, neighborhood district councils, and the City Neighborhood Council, and existing e-mail groups; an online survey, focus groups, and public workshops; and a public hearing before the Board of Park Commissioners.

2. Specific Project or Proposal

Once funding for a capital project is approved, the next step is the development of a design program (which includes scope, design, schedule, and impacts), a document drafted by a planner/project manager and reviewed by the Program Manager that lays out the steps required to complete the project. The ProView Team then reviews each program plan at one of its regular meetings.

Attending the ProView meeting, depending on the skills and expertise the project calls for, are the Parks staff most knowledgeable about the facility or park and about its users, neighbors, nearby community organizations, and active issues. Also attending ProView are the project manager and skilled trade, volunteer coordinator, or other staff bearing some responsibility for or knowledge of the project.

At the ProView meeting, where the design program is reviewed, Parks develops the proposed public process for the project. To arrive at an appropriate public process, staff will answer a series of questions designed to identify characteristics that are intended to help indicate the breadth and range of public interest. The list of questions is shown in Attachment A. The recommendations of the ProView Team are then referred to the Project Steering Committee for review and approval. The public involvement plan is an element of the design program, and includes:

1. **Sign.** If no public meetings are planned, the project manager will, within four weeks after Project Steering approval of the public involvement plan, install a 4' x 4' sign at the site, except in cases where installation would be hazardous or the sign would not be visible. If one or more public meetings are planned, the 4' x 4' sign will be installed three weeks before the public meeting. Parks staff will also post the notice on the web site, and include the contact person for any adopt-a-park agreement, the chair of the nearest Advisory Council, and the community council for the area as shown on the Department of Neighborhoods map. The sign will include the following information:
 - A description of the proposal, its source (neighborhood plan, park master plan, etc.), budget information (amount and source), how the project would change the park, whether it responds to a neighborhood plan element, and why Parks believes it meets citizens' and community needs;
 - An explanation of the steps necessary to carry out the proposal, and a timeline;
 - The name, telephone number and e-mail address of the knowledgeable contact person (usually the project manager);

- Appropriate maps or graphics;
 - An invitation to comment in any medium or ask questions with a specific due date at least two weeks from the date the sign is installed. The due date can be extended if groups or individuals who want to provide input say a deadline works a hardship on them; and
 - Public meeting information, if a public meeting has been scheduled, to include a description of the format, how people can comment (e.g., orally or in writing) and how Parks will use those comments, what planning process took place before that relates to the project, the elements, if any, that are not open to public comment, and the public process on the project to date.
2. **Fliers.** On or adjacent to the sign will be a holder containing fliers bearing the same information as the sign, if appropriate.
 3. **Web Site.** At the time the sign is erected, the same information will be posted on the web site (by link from the page for a specific park, under the "Projects and Planning" section, and on the Events and Meetings Calendar).
 4. **Other Distribution Fliers** will be distributed to the nearest branch library, community center, district council, community council, other neighborhood groups that ask to be notified, groups identified in the public involvement plan, neighborhood service center, fire station, and appropriate Department of Neighborhoods neighborhood service center coordinator.
 5. **News release.** A news release will go to the local community newspaper, all community newspapers serving ethnic, immigrant, and other specific populations, the Seattle Times and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

The project manager and the Operations Division representative, or other responsible staff, will review and assess the public input prompted by the site sign and received by the due date. They will then review the initial public process plan, recommended by the ProView Team and approved by the Project Steering Committee, and make a judgment on whether to schedule a public meeting if one is not already scheduled. If the project may generate or has generated controversy, or if it appears there may be disagreement about it within the community, Parks may at any point in the process hire an outside facilitator to conduct a meeting. (They may also decide to hire a facilitator for later meetings, if disagreement arises during the public review process.) If a public meeting and/or hearing is to be held, the project manager, the Operations Division representative, and the public relations specialist will make every effort to schedule the meeting at a time and date when no other public meetings or events are scheduled, and will invite the following, as relevant:

- Anyone who has expressed an interest in being notified;
- Residents within a 300' radius of the park boundaries;

- People who have identified themselves during previous processes gathered from Parks and Department of Neighborhoods databases;
- Local community organizations, including those identified on the Internet;
- Community center and activity-based advisory councils;
- Neighborhood planning groups;
- Local community newspapers;
- Groups that would have a natural interest in the site or project relating to their missions, such as environmental groups;
- User groups [who have contacted Parks during the past three years](#);
- "Friends of " groups;
- Adopt-A-Park groups;
- Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks, if appropriate;
- Appropriate neighborhood district council;
- Other City departments as appropriate;
- Relevant Parks staff;
- The local Block Watch Captain; and
- The appropriate Neighborhood Service Center Coordinator in the Department of Neighborhoods.

The project manager, the Operations Division representative, and the public relations specialist will design an invitation flier and distribute it to all invitees. The flier will contain the same information as the site sign and any other important information; and will be mailed at least three weeks before the public meeting date. The meeting site will be as close as practical to the project site and will be ADA-accessible.

Materials prepared for distribution at public meetings and posted on the web site will include:

- A history of the project that includes all factors that may have an impact on the nature and issue areas open to public participation. They may include safety issues, City Council actions, Mayoral priorities, voter-approved measures, inclusion in an adopted plan and the public process that led to that plan, the project's budget limitations, and regional need;
- An explanation of **how decisions are made** during the process, including how Parks uses information from the public and how it affects decisions, and how "majority" opinions will figure in decisions;
- A detailed description of the **process to date**, including milestones and decisions made to date and the number of people who attended previous meetings, so that the public is "caught up" on decisions possibly made at meetings they did not attend;
- A reminder that **written, telephoned, and e-mail comments bear equal weight with attendance at a meeting**;
- A detailed description of the **public process that led to the plan that is the source of the project**;
- A summary of **outreach efforts for the current meeting**;

- The **project budget** (amount and sources) and how it may limit the project scope;
- The **timeline** for the process;
- The **points at which comment has been/will be invited**;
- If applicable, the **elements of the project that are open to public comment** (e.g., required elements such as ADA-accessibility elements, are not negotiable; levy projects have been approved by the voters and adopted by ordinance); and
- A statement acknowledging that even if there is disagreement within the community, **Parks will need to make a decision** and move forward on the project, and that some participants may not be satisfied with the decision.

At the public meeting, the project manager and the Operations Division representative, or other responsible staff, will use a format that is hospitable to questions, suggestions, and expressions of concern from the public, will listen carefully, and will answer questions in a straightforward and nonjudgmental manner. All project information will be available for review. The meeting could include a site walk-through, if not then than at a time that is acceptable to all. Because of concerns expressed about having too many city staff at public meetings will be only those necessary to facilitate, answer questions, and take notes in order to follow up with citizens with responses to questions they cannot answer at the meeting..

If the project comprises both a planning phase and a design phase, or if the manager and the Operations Division representative or other responsible staff agree that it is appropriate, a second and, if necessary, additional meetings will be scheduled.

If, in the judgment of the Superintendent, the project is of sufficient scope and community impact or interest to warrant the input and recommendations of the Board of Park Commissioners, the project manager will work with the Board staff to schedule the issue for Board consideration. The project manager will ensure that the information about the Board of Park Commissioners meeting at which the issue will be considered:

- Is placed in the project sign flier holder at least three weeks before the meeting;
- Is placed on Parks; web site at least three weeks before the meeting;
- Is mailed at least three weeks before the meeting to all who attended an earlier meeting on the project, or who have indicated they would like to be contacted about further development; and
- Includes a summary of the public involvement process to date that includes what public meetings were held, how the meetings were advertised, what the nature of the public comment was at the public meetings, and approximately how many citizens attended the meetings.

9. The project manager will make a project decision-making process chart and timeline available at all public meetings to explain the opportunities for public input and how and by whom the decision on how to proceed will ultimately be made.

10. The project manager will post on Parks' web site a summary of notes taken at each public meeting. The summary is intended to be a brief overview, not a set of detailed minutes.
11. Within two weeks after the public meeting, or after the last public meeting if more than one is held, the project manager, the Operations Division representative, and/or the public relations specialist will draft and send out to the accumulated mailing and e-mail lists a letter that:
 - Recounts the steps and participants in the public process;
 - Summarizes the community concerns that were expressed, the basis for the final decision, and whether it was consistent with existing policies and plans;
 - Notifies all interested people and groups of the decision on the proposal;
 - Describes amendments or changes that resulted from the public process; and
 - Includes a summary of the Board of Park Commissioners discussion and recommendation, if applicable.

A copy of the letter will be posted on the site sign and on the web site on the appropriate page.

ATTACHMENT A

Internal Parks questions to ask in determining the scope of a public process.

A. If the answer to any of the following is YES, the Public Involvement Policy does not apply.

Is the public process for the proposed project guided by a law or separate City policy? If yes, refer to that law or policy. (For example, City's State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) rules, SMC Chapter 25.05; Parks Policy and Procedure 3.9.1.1, Concession Contracts: Public participation in request for proposal; Non-Park Use Policies and Procedures.)

Is the proposal the result of a current emergency situation or a safety or health hazard? If so, no public process is necessary.

B. If the answer to any of the following is YES, there will be at least one public meeting.

- Does the proposal affect an Olmsted park?
- Would the completed proposal substantially change what the park looks like?
- Would the completed proposal substantially change what activities can occur in the park?
- Would the proposal involve construction or other activity that would substantially disrupt park activities, or require the closure of the entire park? (For example, would it displace a large scheduled event, close a beach for a summer weekend, etc.?)
- Was the proposal initiated by members of the community (i.e., is it a Neighborhood Matching Fund project or a neighborhood plan-identified project?)?
- Does the proposal add space to the park system?
- Would the completed proposal result in a demonstrable increase in an existing activity or use?
- Would the completed proposal result in demonstrable impacts on surrounding neighbors?
- Is the proposed project subject to the provisions of the Joint Use Agreement with the Seattle School District?
- Will the project affect people with disabilities or other special-needs populations?

C. If the answer to any of the following is NO, refer the issue to the Board of Park Commissioners for review.

- Is the proposal consistent with the current year Capital Improvement Plan?
- Is the proposal consistent with the park's Master Plan, if applicable?
- Is the proposal consistent with the Department's Parks and Recreation 2000 Plan

- Is the proposal consistent with the neighborhood plan, if applicable?
- Is the proposal consistent with the Use Management Guidelines for Park and Recreation Facilities (Policy and Procedure 7.13.1), or with specific use management guidelines for Green Lake, Freeway, Seward/Lake Washington Boulevard, Gasworks, Occidental parks?

D. Other factors to consider in deciding the scope of a public process:

- What are the "unintended consequences"?
- Does the proposal respond to a documented need?
 - Safety
 - Recreational
 - Routine maintenance/repair/replacement based on a condition assessment
 - Other
- Have scheduled activities (picnics, day camps, ball games, etc.) been cancelled?