



2011 Seattle Parks and Recreation Budget Reductions
September 27, 2010

- \$10.2 million reduction.
- 103.33 full time equivalent (FTE) staff positions are abrogated, affecting 192 Parks and Recreation staff people (out of 1,002) by elimination of positions or reductions in hours.
- All facilities will be open to the public, some on a limited basis.

Tough choices and tradeoffs

We are pleased, in this economic climate, to be able in 2011 to continue to operate 20 of 26 community centers (Rainier Beach is closed for construction until the fall of 2012) in the traditional way and to keep all centers open. The budget preserves swimming pools, lifeguarded summer beaches, the Volunteer Park Conservatory, and the Amy Yee Tennis Center. Wading pools will operate on the same schedule and at the same level (15 of 22 will be open) as in 2010. It's also notable that we are absorbing the reductions without closing any parks. All this leaves us in a far better position than other parks and recreation agencies in Washington State and around the country that are facing massive closures. We originally faced cuts of up to 15% from 2010 levels, and our actual reduction is 7.8%.

This is a budget of unprecedented tough choices and difficult decisions. It includes tradeoffs that mean the difference between closing a facility and trying to keep it open, between maintaining our usual standard of park maintenance and allowing it to drop. It's a new situation, one in which we can't find one-time fixes and hope that revenues will increase any time soon.

The \$67 million revenue shortfall the city faces, combined with uncertainty about the future, forces us to think creatively and to find new ways to do business. We developed the budget using these guiding principles: ensuring equitable access to parks and recreation facilities, providing a diverse range of park and recreation opportunities, exploring new ways to deliver services and programs, strengthening existing partnerships and developing new ones, and preserving our living and built infrastructure.

We are not alone in this.

Detroit closed 77 parks on July 1. Colorado Springs' parks budget dropped in 2010 from \$17 million to \$3 million. They have cut maintenance, stopped picking up trash, and closed community centers and all pools. In Dallas the proposed parks budget lays off 260 employees and drops by a third. Baltimore's proposed budget includes closure of half the community centers, pools, and wading pools. Los Angeles last month laid off 125 people. Sacramento is cutting 145 positions. Closer to home, the city of Woodinville has shuttered its five-year-old community center.

To avoid some layoffs and other reductions, parks and recreation agencies are finding, literally, survival strategies in the form of new ways to provide services:

- Colorado Springs has entered a partnership with a private swim school to keep three pools open. Foundations, nonprofits, and volunteers have raised money to keep community centers open.
- Phoenix is looking at programs that could be managed by nonprofits.
- Rockville, MD is turning over some maintenance functions to private companies.
- Miami-Dade Parks is issuing RFPs to negotiate public/private partnerships to restore lost recreation, swimming, and arts and culture services, and contracting out some maintenance tasks.

A new reality

Seattle Parks is no exception. We are forced by the economy to make cuts that you will feel and see, and to change the way we do business. At the same time, our objective is to keep parks and recreation services available equitably across the city.

We were faced with closing community centers and pools. We thought creatively. We listened to ideas from all quarters. And we came up with ways to avoid any total closures. But there will be changes.

To continue to serve the public, our 2011 proposed budget contains a carefully balanced array of expenditure reductions, fee increases, and partnerships. These actions will keep all our facilities open by turning the operation of some of them over to community partners. Collectively, these changes will save the city about \$10.2 in General Fund expenditures.

It will mean layoffs. We will feel the loss of a “way of life” we have lived for many years, and dread the loss of dedicated, smart, effective staff in every area of what we do – recreation, park maintenance, and management. We will work with the employees who are affected by the budget to ease the shock to the extent we can.

We know some users of parks, community centers, and other Parks amenities will be upset and will believe their favorite facility or service has been singled out or that we don’t value it. We do value it; the reality we face means, simply, that we can no longer provide it all at today’s level.

We are fortunate to have a longtime and trusted partner in the Associated Recreation Council (ARC), a nonprofit organization that serves Seattle by partnering with Parks to offer a variety of recreation and learning programs, classes, and activities: <http://www.arcseattle.org/>. ARC will play a key role in keeping our facilities operating.

How the budget is balanced

Parks began the budget process with a “baseline” budget of \$131,911,000 for 2011. This figure represents the amount it would cost to maintain the 2010 level of service in 2011.

Changes to the baseline budget, developed over the summer, include:

Construction Reductions

The budget is reduced by \$1,729,000 and 11 FTE.

Capital Reductions

Because Parks will have fewer capital projects in the next two years, there will be \$613,000 in staff savings (3.55 FTE), and Parks will reduce planning support for Neighborhood Matching Fund projects.

Administrative and Technical Reductions

Parks will achieve \$1,222,000 in savings from reductions in management and administrative staff (11.37 FTE) that reflect the lessened needs of a smaller department. 5.5 are strategic advisors or managers.

Strengthening Programs and Partnerships

Because Parks will rely more on the development and sustenance of community partnerships to operate, the proposed budget adds \$243,000 and 1.5 FTE positions to support those efforts, to manage special events, and to provide teen job readiness programs.

Savings

Parks identified \$879,000 in savings from lower utility use resulting from the installation of energy-saving devices systemwide, fewer claims against the city for parks and recreation-related incidents, a reduction in the staff training budget, and the use of Parks' fund balance (savings from operating funds not spent in 2010). These savings are the direct result of diligent employee actions.

Cost of Living Increases

Parks will reduce the budget by \$837,000 to reflect no cost of living increase for directors, managers, and strategic advisors, and a 0.6% cost of living adjustment for all other employees, assuming the labor contracts changes are ratified by the Coalition of City Labor Unions.

Fees and Charges

Parks will implement a new fee for plan review and modest fee increases for entrance to the Japanese Garden, room and gym rentals, picnics, revocable use permits (use of park property for a non-park use), and at Camp Long, Amy Yee Tennis Center, swimming pools, athletic fields, boat ramps, and the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center. These fee increases are consistent with Parks' new fee policy, which relies on comparisons with fees of other regional agencies, reflects the cost of providing a service, and weights fees in favor of activities that provide an overall community benefit. The new and increased fees are projected to bring in \$1.1 million.

Arts Funding

The proposed budget includes \$1 million in funding from the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs (from admissions tax revenues) to support Parks' arts programming downtown, in neighborhood parks, and at Langston Hughes Performing Arts Center.

Park Maintenance

The constraints of the 2011 budget will mean unprecedented reductions in park maintenance. The Parks Division budget will experience a 7% cut in funding, which will result in a 14% reduction in staffing levels (40.83 FTE). These reductions total \$2.4 million.

Ballfield maintenance and lining will be reduced significantly, meaning that user groups will need to step up and take on many of these duties. Our second shift that keeps comfort stations clean year round will be cut 40%. We will still have three crews to maintain limited evening service. Peak summer staff is significantly reduced. Our route-based maintenance program will be stretched: the size of routes will be expanded and the number of staff servicing them will be reduced. This means a reduction in both capacity and frequency in basic park cleaning: service levels will diminish in litter pickup, comfort station and picnic shelter cleaning, and turf and shrub bed maintenance. Our urban forestry program will be reduced, leading to a decrease in the frequency of tree pruning and a reduction in our capacity to maintain our 3,200 acres of forested parkland. Kubota Garden and the Arboretum will see a decrease in staffing levels.

Facilities Maintenance

Reductions to Parks facilities maintenance activities total \$772,000 and 12 FTE, and reflect a 10% reduction in the workforce. These cuts mean the apprenticeship program is eliminated, which will slow the completion of projects and work orders. The fence crew is eliminated and metal fabricator staff is reduced, resulting in deferred maintenance and a focus on safety-related work. The reduction of four positions on the Paint Crew will mean less frequent interior painting of buildings; the focus of the remaining crew members will be graffiti abatement and preventive maintenance.

Recreation Facilities

In recreation, we made efforts to maintain services in every neighborhood, and our recommendations reflect consideration of demographics and need, proximity of another center, and volume of child care and preschool programming, which we consider to be essential services. Five community centers will fall under new models of operation. This represents a reduction of 1,530,000 and 19.75 FTE.

ARC Partner Model

Alki and Ballard Community Centers will operate on a limited basis. ARC year-round child care, summer day camp, and preschool programs will continue, and the building will be open 15 hours per week for public use.

Queen Anne New Partner Model

Queen Anne Community Center will operate under a lease agreement between Parks and Biz Kid\$, the organization that produces the public television series that teaches kids about money and business. Biz Kid\$ will have exclusive use of parts of the building to teach financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills. There will be some programming for seniors and teens and some free and fee-based evening recreational activities. ARC will continue to provide year-round child care, summer day camp, and preschool.

Senior-Focused Program Model

Laurelhurst Community Center will be used as a satellite pilot program site for senior programs for possible duplication later at other sites, and for the Lifelong Recreation/Specialized Programs staff. There will be times available for senior drop-in activities and social gatherings and public operating hours 15 hours a week for general drop-in activities.

Visitor and Customer Service Center Model

This model changes the use of Green Lake Community Center to house the consolidated recreation operations of three geographic divisions and the event scheduling staff. It will serve as a welcoming site where visitors can pay for a program, resolve billing issues, and make

reservations for picnics, ballfields, tennis courts, building rentals, and special events such as weddings. It will be open during business hours on weekdays. The building will continue to serve as a hygiene center for people who are homeless; the gym will accommodate local youth basketball teams and adult basketball, volleyball, and table tennis sports leagues; and the center will still offer tot drop-in programs.

Aquatics Facilities

A reduction of \$268,000 and 3.83 FTEs reflects maintenance of the 2010 wading pool schedule and begins conversion of the Green Lake Small Craft Center and Mount Baker Rowing and Sailing Center to operation by ARC.

Environmental Learning Centers

The proposed budget includes a reduction of \$192,000 and 2.5 FTEs from the budget of the three environmental learning centers at Carkeek Park, Camp Long, and Discovery Park. The reduction includes the abrogation of 1.5 positions and eliminates public programs, which reach about 2,000 children and youth per year, but keeps school-based programs, which reach 10,000 children and youth per year. The Carkeek Park Environmental Learning Center, which hosts the fewest visitors, will be open only for rentals.

We pledge to do our best to keep providing competent, courteous service to all our customers and to provide the best experiences we can. In the coming years it will be our priority at Parks and Recreation to work closely with Mayor McGinn and his staff to identify and examine more innovative funding options for parks and recreation, as reflected in the addition of 1.5 FTE for this purpose. Our objective will be to deliver sustainable service models that serve the public well and preserve our assets.

Budget Schedule

Sept 27	Mayor presents budget to Council, 2 p.m., Council Chambers at City Hall
Sept 29	Council public budget hearing, Northgate Community Center, 5:30 p.m.
Sept 30	Parks presents budget overview to Council, 2 p.m., Council Chambers at City Hall
Oct 13	Council public budget hearing, 5:30 p.m., S Seattle Community College.
Oct 15 – 25	Council issue identification
Oct 26	Council public budget hearing, 5:30 p.m., Council Chambers at City Hall
Oct 28 – Nov 12	Council discusses and votes on options
Nov 22	Council adopts 2011 budget
Jan 4	2011 Budget position actions take effect