



MEMORANDUM

Date: December 11, 2017
To: Board of Park Commissioners
From: Holly Miller
Subject: Denny Park Off-Leash Area

Introduction

Denny Park is the Seattle's oldest park. Pioneer David Denny gave the land to the city, first as a cemetery in 1861, and then as a park in 1884. By 1904, the area had become residential and the park was improved with formally designed planting beds, swings and other play equipment, a sand lot and a playfield. Denny Park's design is an example of the classical formalism seen in the late-19th-early-20th Century in urban squares.

In March 2012, the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation (SPR) opened the Denny Park Off Leash Area (OLA). At one-tenth acre in size, the Denny Park OLA was intended to help provide services to the estimated 900 dogs in the vicinity. Many of these dogs were running off leash in Denny Park, causing concerns for non-dog users and children in the park, not to mention hygiene issues. The OLA has been a success and is constantly in use by workers and residents who walk their dogs.

The Denny Park OLA was intended to be temporary until construction of the South Lake Union Substation was completed. The Denny Park Substation, located at 1250 Denny Way, includes a 6,000 square foot OLA in its design.

Denny Park and the OLA are wheel chair accessible. A four-foot tall fence encloses the Denny Park OLA with double gates to ensure safe entrance and egress from the OLA. Surfacing is gravel. Funding for the Denny Park OLA included \$50,000 from Vulcan Inc. and \$45,000 from Amazon.com. The OLA was constructed by the Seattle Conservation Corps.

In 2017, SPR re-opened Denny Park, including the OLA, after substantial renovation and replanting. The presence of the OLA has allowed SPR staff, including Enforcement, to direct dog owners to the OLA rather than running their dogs in the park where damage to newly planted vegetation is a danger. More visitors are using the Park and the presence of an OLA in small Denny Park helps to avoid dog-people conflicts.

Since 2012, dog registration at Amazon alone has increased from 300 to 4000 dogs. While Amazon has installed dog-appropriate landscaping and has built a small dog play area, the demand generated by Amazon and other dog-friendly businesses in South Lake Union, is obviously large. Seattle City Light is building another small off leash area as part of the construction of the South Lake Union (SLU) Substation due to be completed

in 2018. That OLA will be located some five blocks to the east and up a steep hill on Denny Avenue. That will help serve businesses and residents in east South Lake Union, but it is unlikely that many people will trudge up the steep hill from west South Lake Union during lunch breaks to walk their dogs. If Denny Park OLA is closed when the SLU substation OLA opens, old conflicts related to dogs running off leash in Denny Park would likely recur.

This memorandum provides some background and context for a recommendation to the Board of Park Commissioners that the current temporary OLA at Denny Park be made permanent.

Background

Addition of a Children's Play area

A restoration plan for Denny Park was inspired in 2005 and 2006 by the Friends of Denny Park (FODP), a diverse neighborhood coalition of churches, businesses, school groups, representatives of low income housing and others. FODP was the convener, advocate and organizer for a children's play area for Denny Park. The City Council appropriated \$100,000 for the play area in the SPR Capital Improvement Plan and instructed FODP to use funds from the Neighborhood Matching Fund for design.

The resulting site analysis required looking at the whole park to determine the best site for the play area. The concept plan emerging from the site plan consisted of a new play area, safety improvements such as vegetation management and lighting, an expanded central area, a history plaza, improved irrigation and planting, restroom renovation and curb bulbs. A site for the play area was identified in the northeast part of the park. A history plaza was designated for the current site of the Denny Park OLA. The history plaza was not defined but there were ideas from public input including showing how the park looked before the regrade, stories of the early Native people and the Denny family.

The public process included three well-attended public meetings, three in-park open houses, children's workshops, and partnerships with Real Change Newspaper vendors and other community groups.

The restoration was plan was presented to the Board of Park Commissioners as a briefing in February, 2007 and construction of the children's play area followed in 2007-2008 as the only funded element of the restoration plan.

Development of Denny Park Temporary Off Leash Area

In 2011, responding to community requests and concerns, SPR considered locations for a temporary OLA in the South Lake Union neighborhood. Three sites were analyzed: Denny Park, Cascade Park and South Lake Union Park. Both Cascade and Denny Parks were proposed as small fenced OLA's and South Lake Union Park was proposed as an unfenced OLA available for unleashed dogs before 7:00 am and after 7:00 pm.

These options were presented to the Board of Park Commissioners in October, 2011 without a staff recommendation. The Board held a well-attended public hearing at the same meeting. Most speakers favored an OLA in the South Lake Union neighborhood or at Denny Park. Those in opposition to Denny Park were concerned about siting an OLA in an Olmsted – influenced park. At their November, 2011 meeting the Board of Park

Commissioners voted to approve the use of Denny Park as a temporary off leash area with several conditions including:

- Cost of construction, operation and maintenance must come from outside public funds;
- Establish evaluation criteria and remove the OLA after the three years of maintenance funding has expired;
- This must be a firm pilot with a designated timeframe. A permanent site must be located and, when it is, the temporary one removed.
- The cost of restoration should be paid for from non-Park budget sources. The rest of Denny Park must be protected and dog owners respect the rest of the park.
- COLA should provide stewardship of the new off leash area at Denny Park.

The Denny Park temporary off leash area was constructed by the Seattle Conservation Corps in 2012 using \$95,000 in funding from Vulcan, Inc. and Amazon Corporation. It opened for public use in March, 2012 and has remained open with constant use by the public except during the period when Denny Park was restored in 2017.

Restoration of Denny Park

The 2006 plans to restore Denny Park, apart from installation of the children's play area were never implemented because funding was not available. In 2016, building on the 2006 park restoration plans, SPR held public meetings to present project options and gain community feedback. By combining funding from three separate major maintenance improvement projects including pavement replacement and enhancement, drainage and sanitary sewer replacement and irrigation system replacement and upgrade, SPR identified several opportunities to make improvements to the park. The attached plan was developed after a community survey and community meetings to reviewed the proposed improvements. The attached plan identifies the temporary Denny Park OLA.

Construction was completed in 2017 and the park was reopened in May, 2017.

Discussion

SPR has been considering whether to recommend that the Denny Park OLA be made permanent. Several key factors argue both for permanent retention of the OLA in Denny Park and for its retention at its current location in the Park.

The Denny Park temporary OLA has been in use steadily since 2012 except for the closure period for Park restoration in 2017. During that closure period, the children's play area located next to the OLA was open for public use and SPR saw a big increase in dog feces in and around the play area. Once the OLA reopened, the problem was resolved.

The Denny Park OLA receives steady use throughout the day and evening and appears to be used mostly by individual dog owners rather than by dog walkers. It is rare to see large packs of dogs in the OLA's limited space. Recent efforts to activate the park with food trucks, music and café tables and chairs tends to influence behavioral norms towards keeping dogs on leash and under control except when they are in the OLA.

SPR staff report a dramatic reduction in conflicts between dogs and people when the OLA is available. The increase in dogs registered at Amazon, the increase in development in South Lake Union, the increase in people and dogs in the neighborhood and accessibility challenges of the City Light Substation OLA (when it opens in 2018) to people and businesses on the west side of south Lake Union argue for making the OLA permanent.

As noted above, some object to an OLA in an Olmsted – influenced park and others have argued for moving the OLA to another location in the park. No funding currently exists to pay for the OLA to be moved.

Options

Options to retaining the OLA include **closing it permanently, moving it to another location in the park, or retaining its temporary status until the OLA at the City Light Substation opens in 2018.**

Closing the OLA

Cons:

- Would likely increase the numbers of dogs off leash in the park.
- Would likely result in an increase in dog-human and dog-dog negative interactions, particularly given Denny Park activation and the increase in numbers of dogs and humans.
- The presence of dog owners in the early morning and evenings activates the park during these hours when other active uses are gone.
- Having positive activities occurring in the park throughout the day discourages illicit behaviors that have been challenging to manage in Denny Park over the years.

Pros:

- Consistent with Board of Park Commissioner’s previous direction.
- Would allow other uses of this area of the park.

Moving OLA to Another Location in the Park

Cons:

- There is currently no funding to reconstruct the OLA at another location within the Park.
- It co-exists peaceably with adjacent uses now, including the children’s play area and the food trucks and café tables in the center of the park.
- The OLA activates a portion of the park which traditionally has been more difficult to monitor, darker and more subject to criminal activities.

Pros:

- Some neighborhood interests would like to retain the OLA but in another location in the Park.

Retaining the Denny Park OLA temporary status until the City Light Substation OLA opens and then removing it is

Cons:

- Would probably result in a return to an increase in conflicts in Denny Park and problems with park hygiene.

- Improbable that dog owners in west South Lake Union will walk the distance to the Substation, including up the steep hill east of Westlake Avenue on Denny Avenue resulting in more dogs off leash in Denny Park.
- Absence of an OLA may challenge some of the recent Park activation success.

Pros:

- Consistent with the original Board of Park Commissioner's recommendation for this facility.
- Would allow other uses of this area of the Park.

Recommendation

As indicated above, SPR recommends retention of the OLA in Denny Park as a permanent facility in its current location and current dimensions.