



City of Seattle
Edward B. Murray, Mayor

Seattle Parks and Recreation
Jesús, Aguirre, Superintendent

Date: April 5, 2017

To: The Board of Park Commissioners

From: Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Re: Retreat Summary and Next Steps

Thank you for participating in last week's board retreat. I thought the discussion was lively and productive and very helpful in clarifying the relationship between the board and the department – now and moving forward.

This memo provides a summary of what we heard, the strategic issues we face, our operating principles, and proposed next steps.

SUMMARY OF RETREAT DISCUSSION

Park Board members expressed a desire to engage in larger, more strategic discussions that will help guide Seattle Parks and Recreation's stewardship of our system and serve all Seattleites. The board also showed interest in weighing in on issues that have become controversial with a neighborhood or a user group and may have received media coverage.

The board expressed a preference for fewer information-only presentations (e.g., tree propagation) and more topics related to the strategic, long-term direction and focus of the department. Board meetings need to be structured in a way that allows the board to think and act strategically on an ongoing basis outside of formal strategic planning processes.

We discussed the need to determine when, where, and how the *interest* and work of SPR and the board align and diverge. We were in agreement that we should leverage the capacities of board members to make the best use of board energy – especially on controversial issues, e.g., SAAM. The board should be viewed as serving and acting on behalf of the public's interest.

Park Board agendas and presentations need to be structured to foster consistent focus on strategic, new and emerging opportunities. This includes ensuring agendas and presentations are structured to provide the board with an early opportunity to engage in strategic discussions on priorities, core values, and public engagement on issues that will be before the board.

The department and the board should develop benchmarks to measure success and to test assumptions and the effectiveness of changes described here.

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STRATEGIC ISSUES

While the board and the department must deal with the occasional “fire,” our joint challenge is how to remain focused on the bigger picture and not be consumed by the issues of the moment. The following issues are part of that big picture, and we would like to discuss and explore the board’s role and/or interest in each of these areas.

Long-term Planning (What will SPR look like in 2045 and beyond?)

- What is our alignment with Seattle’s livability goals?
- What type of programs and services will allow us to serve a changing city?
- What is our open space plan in a rapidly densifying, and increasingly unaffordable city?
- How do we approach land use issues in a rapidly changing city, addressing I-42 implications?

Public Engagement

- Are we reaching *all* Seattleites?
- How do we develop ongoing, deliberate discussions with our communities to ensure we are meeting their needs?
- Are equity and social justice considerations part of all decision-making processes?

Building and Leveraging Advocacy and Resources

- What is the role of community partnerships in assisting us in our mission/outcomes?
- Is there a role for sponsorships and advertising in our work?
- How do we better leverage contracts to support our mission, especially our equity strategy?
- How do we better support and leverage our volunteers and interagency collaborations?

Building a Results- and Mission-driven Organization

- How do we better tell our story to our myriad stakeholders?
- How we clearly connect our efforts/investments to achieving clear outcomes?
- What types of technology and data systems do we need?

Sustaining a Healthy Organization

- How do we ensure that we are an employer of choice so we can continue to attract the best employees in our field?
- What is our human capital plan to retain, support, and hold accountable, a great staff team.
- What type of management/leadership structures do we employ to build a great staff team?
- How do we ensure our budgeting reflects our mission/values/outcomes?

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

At the retreat, we discussed the various ways in which the Board and SPR will interact, and the ways the Board will interact with the public. As such, it is also important to discuss and clearly articulate a set of operating principles to ensure success. For discussion, the following is a list of proposed shared statements:

- SPR and the board will work from a sense of shared mission, vision, values
- SPR and the board will continue to refine what it means to work together with a clear sense of future direction and purpose, including become clearer on the role of the board in the community.
- SPR and the board will commit to continuous improvements related to public engagement.

- SPR and the board will devote attention to the external environment, for example: trends or political and regulatory changes, and changes in the needs and service expectations of our users and stakeholders.
- SPR and the board will develop a shared vision of the future, and the way this vision is communicated to the public.
- SPR will provide the board with accurate and timely information.
- Board members will read material in advance of meetings and come prepared to engage in discussion.
- Agenda items will be strategic and discussions will occur over a longer multi-meeting time horizon.
- Meeting agendas will be structured for ongoing conversations outside of SPR’s formal planning processes.

The following table, also open for discussion, outlines the roles of the department, the board and the work we do together.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Shared SPR /Board Core Values</u></p> <p>SPR and the board should agree on a set of core values that drive the work we do together. These may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPR and the Park Board are in a partnership. • We support access and inclusion for all. • We are working toward the long-term future of the system – the next 40 years. • We have a duty to ensure the system is protected. • We are responsive to community concerns. • We ensure choices are made in the best interest of the public, to protect the system while balancing use. • We value partnerships that benefit park users. • We will proceed from a set of community priorities adopted by SPR. • We will ensure alignment of priorities between SPR and the board. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>What the Department Does</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for day-to-day operations • Responsible to ensure a safe, clean accessible park system. • Builds community. • Acts as a good neighbor. • Manages employees and builds organizational culture. • Promotes and supports community-driven initiative around park development. • Develops long-range plans. • Work directly with elected leaders. • Ensures compliance with local, state and federal laws and statutes. • Develop and support partnerships.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>What the Board Does</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises SPR on land-use issues and any changes that affect the public’s ability to use the system. • Conducts public hearings. • Advises the Superintendent. • Writes op-ed responses to newspapers. • Provides written responses to the Mayor and Council on Board priorities. • Serves as a liaison to other stakeholders partners, e.g., the Park Foundation, ARC, the Seattle Park Alliance. • Focuses on strategic, long range planning 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>What SPR and the Board do together</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make SPR the best park system for Seattle. • Plan for the future while protecting the system. • Engage in long-range strategic planning. • Deal with urgent neighborhood issues requiring a public hearing with board. • Solve problems. • Ensure public access and the equity of access. • Promote Parks for All thinking in everything we do. • Communicate a future vision for the system. • Establish norms around new partnership opportunities and new park uses. • Identify, recommend and support pilot opportunities.

NEXT STEPS

1. Schedule a future Park Board meeting using this memorandum as a discussion guide.
2. Discuss and get agreement on the proposed broad strategic areas described earlier in this document, e.g., long-term planning, building and leveraging advocacy and resources, etc. This discussion could result in agreement on a multi-year Park Board work plan.
3. Discuss and agree on a set of shared core values to drive SPR and Park Board process and decision-making.
4. Review and revise proposed roles for SPR and the Board.
5. Establish a strategic agenda through year-end.
6. Establish benchmarks and milestones to measure success.

Ideally, these discussions would occur over a series (7-8) of regular board meetings, as there is a benefit for the public to see the board engaged in this kind of discussion with the department.