

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners  
Meeting Minutes  
April 10, 2014

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***Board of Park Commissioners***

Present:

Bob Edmiston  
Barbara Wright  
Brice Maryman  
Tom Tierney, Chair  
Mazohra Thami  
Diana Kincaid

***Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff***

Eric Friedli, Acting Deputy Superintendent  
Susan Golub, Strategic Advisor  
Joel Harte, Research and Evaluation Aide

This meeting was held at Seattle Park Headquarters, 100 Dexter Avenue North. Commissioner Tierney called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm. The meeting agenda was approved.

To hear and view the full meeting, see <http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.asp?ID=6517>

**Oral Communication from the Audience**

Mira Latoszek: Representing the Save Cheasty Greenspace Group, Ms. Latoszek is asking the Board to reconsider the Beacon Bike Park pilot project. Parks did not follow the usual public information process: the Board approved the project before there was a public process; therefore, people had not heard of the proposal. The March 25 public meeting on the project was extremely contentious, especially when people were told the pilot project was a done deal. Issues that have not been considered include:

- Cheasty was purchased in 1991 and 1992 with State funds dedicated to urban wildlife habitat restoration;
- Cheasty is a unique habitat with unique birds and flora;
- While the area is not pristine, it is unique; therefore we must consider what impact a bike park will have;
- Noise issues from a trail will have an impact on passive use of this environment.

Please reconsider the recommendation to have a pilot bike trail in the Cheasty Greenspace.

Donna Hartmann-Miller: Thank you for the performance measurement presentation that we will hear tonight. Please include public input standards as part of a public measurement program.

Charles Bowman: The Skatepark Plan is 7 years old. Skateparks provide value in Seattle. This is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of skateboarding and since it began the face of skateboarding has changed – now it is a 6-year old girl. It would be good to integrate skateboarding into other park activities – have varied activities in parks to bring communities together. Without a lot of money, you can put more skateable sculptures in parks to bring families together.

### Superintendent's Report

Deputy Superintendent Friedli gave the Park Board an overview of the changes in Parks and a summary of high visibility issues.

- **Cheasty Bike Trail Pilot Project** – Commissioner Tierney noted that at the March 27 Board meeting several people spoke during the public comment period about the bike trail pilot project. The Board would have liked to respond to the comments at that meeting but did not have updated information that Mr. Friedli will be providing tonight.

Mr. Friedli reported that the pilot project that the Board recommended is being implemented. The Board, at its January 9 meeting recommended not to amend the Bike Policy, but to begin a pilot project, which could then be evaluated after 3 years of operation to determine if the trail should be made permanent and if an amendment to the Policy is warranted. This process was similar to the Park Board's process with alternative use of tennis courts, which began with consideration of a policy change and resulted in a pilot project to use selected courts for bike polo and dodge ball.

Because the Cheasty project is the only one with a proponent group advocating for a trail, it was selected for the pilot. The first public meeting on the project was held March 25 and there was initial discussion of the pros and cons; issues were put on the table. At a subsequent meeting the technical design work will address where the trail will be located within the Cheasty Greenspace and how the design will address the impacts people raised at the March 25 meeting. The design work will include civil engineers to review the geo-technical issues. There is no City funding for the project. Proponents received a \$20,000 donation from REI and will be responsible for raising the total budget for the project, estimated at \$700,000.

- **City Council Select Committee on Parks Funding** – A public hearing was held before the Council's Committee on April 7; Commissioner Tierney presented the Board's letter. The next steps are:
  - Council staff preparing amendments to the Mayor's proposal;
  - April 14 meeting the council will consider the amendments;
  - April 21 meeting potential Committee vote; and
  - April 28 final vote in full Council.
- **Moorages** – Progress is being made on our moorages. Two Project Advisory Teams have been meeting, one for the Leschi moorage and one for Lakewood. The PATs will have recommendations within the next month and then the City will move forward with a Request for Proposal process for improvements to the moorages, with revenue paying the debt service. Thank you Parks staff Paula Hoff and Nathan Torgelson and to Board member Yazmin Mehdi who has participated on the Lakewood PAT.



- **Central Waterfront Program Office** – The Mayor has created this new office to coordinate all city department work on the waterfront. Jared Smith is the head. Parks staff person Victoria Schoenberg will be our representative to that office and is currently working ½ time at her Parks office and ½ time at the Waterfront office. This office will enable greater coordination between City departments.

Commissioners raised a question about the amount of park space there will be along the waterfront, as opposed to the amount that is for transportation, and requested an update briefing on the waterfront so that the Board can have input on this issue of concrete v. green spaces. They noted that other downtown open spaces are stark concrete and more natural spaces are needed to positively change the dynamics of the space.

- **City Comprehensive Plan** – Susanne Rockwell is taking the lead for Parks on the current process to revise the City's comprehensive plan. We are looking at the goals and policies related to parks and recreation in the current plan and will come back to the Board with an update in 6-8 weeks.
- **Cascade Bicycle Club Building 11 Lease** – Next week the City Council will be considering a lease with Cascade Bicycle Club in building 11 at Magnuson Park. The lease is for 30 years and requires CBC to provide \$1.2 million in investments in Magnuson over the first 7 years of the lease.
- **WRPA Conference** – The Washington Recreation and Parks Association held their annual conference at Magnuson Park – the first time in 40 years that the annual conference has been in Seattle. It was a joint conference with the landscape architects association, which led to some rich presentations and discussions. Kudos to Parks staff who helped organize the conference and to our maintenance crews who got the park looking terrific.
- **Thank You Chair Kincaid** – The Board thanked Diana Kincaid for her leadership, passion and the enormous amount of time spent as Board chair for the past two years. Current chair Tom Tierney noted it was an honor for him to follow in her footsteps.

### **Performance Measurement**

Joel Harte, Parks Research and Evaluation Assistant, presented the Board with the department's work in performance measurement and initial thinking about future accountability measures and performance evaluation.

### **Benefits of Performance Measurement**

Performance measurement improves:

- Accountability
- Responsiveness
- Proactive operations
- Innovative planning
- Flexible execution of plans
- Customer focus.

Parks has a strong desire to increase measurement. We have staff with a high level of expertise; our main constraint has been staff capacity to do this valuable work. We have also been building better ways to

collect data, but haven't had the funds to comprehensively use that data to improve the department's operations. Second, we want to improve our accountability to the public. This is a theme we have heard throughout the Legacy Plan process—the public wants us to be accountable, proactive, and efficient. By creating a customer-focused performance measurement plan, and feeding the results back into our operations, we expect to become more innovative, more agile in responding to public needs, and simply provide better service to the public.

In order to increase measurement, Parks is proposing an internal audit team be located in the Superintendent's Office, reporting directly to the Superintendent and Deputy, and to the Park Board and ballot measure oversight committee, as well as reporting to the City Council. The benefits of an internal audit focus are:

- Rather than a one-off report, creates an ongoing process that continually feeds back into Department operations
- Integrates with upcoming implementation of new asset management, class registration, and financial systems
- Uses existing staff expertise to create accurate, useful baselines
- Increases staff accountability and buy-in through in-house metric development (with Park Board/Oversight Committee approval); staff are more likely to implement changes they helped build the foundation for.

There are established standards to ensure that internal audits are rigorous, fair and meet professional audit standards. These are the International Professional Practices Framework – the Red Book. Oversight and reporting to independent boards is one of the standardized safeguards. Another standard requirement is the Washington State audit of park district financials. The City's Department of Finance and Administration will be coordinating this audit, as they do with the City's Transportation Benefit District. Additionally, there may be programs that we conclude need external review. These may be programs with complex computer systems where only the direct users have access to the information. Also, following the standard audit guidelines, we would have an external assessor perform an independent external validation of the team's competence every 5 years.

Performance measurement is a continuous process – another reason we favor internal versus external review. Rather than a one-time report that sits on a shelf we propose to a circular process with these steps:

- Set objectives
- Plan the program
- Allocate resources
- Run the program
- Measure results
- Report results
- Evaluate and analyze the program
- Set new objectives.

#### Types of Measurement

There are various ways to measure performance effectiveness and efficiency. The method used depends on the type of data available.



1. **Unit Cost Measurement:** This type of measurement assesses the cost of providing services by the per unit cost. The Parks Legacy Plan includes an analysis of every Recreation Division program and a cost per person amount. The analysis included direct plus indirect costs and found a wide range in program costs per person. The range went from our outdoor pools which make a profit to our Specialized Programs for disabled people which cost the most. Looking at cost efficiency doesn't mean we eliminate the most costly programs; but it might mean we ask the programs with the highest costs per person to be more aggressive in developing partnerships and seeking grants to increase their programs' cost efficiency.
2. **Quantity/Output Measurement:** This type of measurement assesses accomplishments – how much is getting done. Parks maintenance PLANT data records the completion of task and the time it takes maintenance staff to perform specific tasks. Assets for each park are in the system and we record how much time it takes to maintain each asset, for example cleaning a bench.
3. **Productivity:** Using the output measurement data, can be used for productivity measurement: how much is being accomplished in a specific time period. A productivity measure takes the level of service achieved (for example, a clean bench) and divides it by the time it took to accomplish it, giving a measure of efficiency.
4. **Timeliness:** Another type of measurement is timeliness. For example, Parks records the work of our paint crew in cleaning graffiti and strive to meet the standard of graffiti removal within 2 business days.
5. **Program Quality Assessment (PQA):** Several of Parks recreation program staff have been trained in and use the Program Quality Assessment model of performance measurement. This is a model designed to increase program quality which researchers have found to have a direct correlation to increasing outcomes – kids do better after being involved in a high quality program. The PQA approach focuses on what is termed 21<sup>st</sup> century skills –soft skills such as confidence, determination and creativity. For example, when assessing a child care program, PQA looks at whether the environment is safe and supportive and if the children are engaged. Doing the PQA evaluation allows us gauge how well we are doing at achieving program outcomes.

In summary, performance measurement:

- Provides a basis for productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness
- Provides measures for performance budgeting
- Focuses on outcomes that affect stakeholder
- Documents our response to stakeholder expectations
- Documents the effective, efficient use of funds

The Commissioners thanked Mr. Harte for his presentation and continued to discuss performance measurement.

Deputy Superintendent Friedli noted that the Board would be very involved over the next 6-8 months in the department's development of a performance measurement system. Parks anticipates a public process in the fall to help develop a performance measurement charter addressing:

- What we should measure
- What is meaningful to measure for staff and the public
- How we use the information.

Commissioner comments included:

- It is important to use measurement to define best practices and increase program quality. The process should include an in-depth look at programs with the intent of making them the best possible; this is a different technique than simply counting/measuring. One avenue would be to determine the outcome or goal first and then figure out how to evaluate or measure to achieve the goal.
- Mentoring and succession planning to ensure Parks retains historic knowledge is important.
- There is a challenge to make the process unthreatening to staff.
- Knowing what outcomes we are trying to fulfill is critical; for example, better health and tranquility as a goal leads to difference measurements than the outcome of clean benches.
- A higher level question is what is the accountability program trying to achieve: public transparency; a change in how Parks conducts business?
- It is important to show we are using public money as we've said we would and that we've used the funding efficiently.
- Collect data that will be useful to inform decision-making and increase effectiveness and efficiency.
- How to improve what we do – improve quality – is the important aspect of performance measurement.
- A survey on why and why not people use parks would inform what Parks could do differently to serve the public better.
- Before and after measurements could give both quantitative and qualitative information; an automated trail counter could be used for one aspect of measurement.
- Lessons learned from others would be good information for Parks to have.

#### **Old/New Business**

Commissioner Tierney reported that he read the Park Board's letter regarding the legacy ballot measure at the public hearing before the City Council's Select Committee on Parks Funding. There are two additional Select Committee meetings, April 14 and 21, where Commissioners could speak.

**Commissioner Tierney moved the meeting adjourn; the motion was seconded and the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:15pm.**

APPROVED: Gazmin Mehdi, Vice Chair DATE 05/22/14  
for Tom Tierney, Chair  
Board of Park Commissioners