



Minutes

Board of Park Commissioners

Via Webex

Thursday, January 14, 2021

6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Commissioners:

Andréa Akita, Vice Chair

Dennis Cook

Marlon Herrera

William Lowe, Chair

Jessica Vu

Tom Byers

Jessica Farmer

Evan Hundley

Kelly McCaffrey

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Akita calls the meeting to order at 6:35pm; the Board members and staff introduce themselves.

Public Comment

None

Superintendent's Update

Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Winter Weather Preparation-

- Tree crews are prepared to respond to fallen trees that block paths and landslides;
- Preparing to support the Human Services Department as they provide emergency shelter for unhoused; planning for what it would look like.
- Support citywide snow efforts – hauling salt and supporting SDOT in snow and ice control; SPR facilities crews are checking on the generators;

Cougar sighting – Cougar sighting at Discovery Park; it has not been confirmed. SPR contacted Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and they are prepared to help trap and relocate if this proves to be true.

Cal Anderson – SPR staff have been busy restoring the park - removing graffiti, seeding the lawn to bring turf back. They are implementing activation developed with community feedback – through festive lighting and concierge services.

Clean City Initiative – This is a citywide program to clean up the city. To find out more please visit the website by [clicking here](#). It is a collaborative effort to help the city keep the parks clean.

Web site: <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkboard/>

Covid-19 tracing – SPR staff continue testing positive for Covid-19. SPR set up electronic systems to create contract tracing logs at the facility that integrates with HRIS system. This helps to quickly identify who may have come in contact.

All-staff meeting – SPR is reorganizing its' divisions. The Enterprises, Partnerships in Community (EPIC) division will be rolled into other divisions. The Facilities Division will roll into the Parks and Development Division. These changes will reduce the management footprint and allow the department to use those resources to prioritize equity. SPR staff will start a planning process for spring and summer – communities are looking for support.

Status of the encampments and homeless crisis – SPR is continuing to keep the parks safe and clean through the Clean City Initiative. Solving the homeless problem is a citywide issue. SPR staff asked the Deputy Mayor and a representative from HSD to come to an upcoming meeting and speak with the Board.

Miller Playfield encampments – Seattle City Light is installing some solar panels on the roof and it required they relocate part of the encampment to allow for the construction.

Little Brook Park - Cesar Garcia spoke about Little Brook Park at the December meeting. SPR staff are doing regular maintenance. Jesús is scheduled to meet with Cesar and tour the area.

Presentation & Discussion: Green Lake Pathway Use Change

Presented by Selena Elmer, Strategic Advisor, Seattle Parks and Recreation

- Throughout pandemic, SPR has deployed multiple strategies to deter crowding and discourage transmissive behaviors, including:
 - Signage reinforcing public health guidance and social distancing
 - Social media messaging campaigns (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)
 - Social Distancing Ambassador program
 - Physical barriers (e.g., closing parking lots, removing basketball hoops and tennis court nets, locking amenities, etc.)
- Through the Keeping Parks Open Initiative (briefing on August 2020), staff monitored activity at busiest regional parks and adjusted interventions in response

Green Lake Loop Use Change in effect since April 18, 2020.

- One-way foot traffic only
- No bicycles
- Went into effect April 18, along with bicycle restrictions on Seward loop
- 3 shorter loops (~2 miles) and 2 accessible loops (<1 mile) identified

There are 2 pathways for moving forward:

1. Continue practice to date (emergency rule amendments expiring every 60 days)
 - *No Park Board action required. SPR staff would file another amendment before the existing expires on Feb. 4.*

2. Temporary rule change
 - *SPR's Supplemental Use Management Guidelines at Green Lake Park (Policy 060-P 7.13.1.1 Section 4.3)*
 - *Would only be in effect temporarily, until the Superintendent deems it safe to resume normal use*
 - *Amended policy to be filed with the City Clerk after public process*

Board Feedback:

Jesús says this started as an emergency and if they go through the process, it could be confusing. Having a public hearing to temporarily change a rule that has already been implemented could feel like a waste of the Boards' and the public's time. Conversely, 8 months to a year doesn't feel like an emergency anymore.

The board discuss the pros/cons of both options.

They agree that keeping it an emergency measure without a public hearing is the way to go. It is clearer and since the pandemic is still raging, it is still an emergency.

Park Board Discussion

Board membership – Commissioners Byers, Cook and Lowe are retiring off the Board at the end of March. The Board will welcome new members at the April meeting. The Board hope to hear from staff regarding the future structures of the Park Board and Park District Oversight Committee.

Commissioner Byers' article – The Board discuss how to direct their energy around the topic of encampments. The article was posted in David Brewsters' newsletter that has a few thousand subscribers. He didn't send it to the Mayor/City Council because he wanted to get Board feedback. Several civic leaders have come together around several improvements for the unhoused and want to push the agenda.

At least 3 councilmembers are actively looking for sites for tiny house villages in order to take pressure off parks in their district.

It is clear that access to housing and homeless in parks are systemic failures. Important to frame the article to elucidate the crisis is a systemic failure.

Tom feels a sense of urgency and wants to send the letter out as soon as possible, there is good support from local politicians and he doesn't want to wait. He will hold off sending until Monday next and Board members can send their comments/edits ahead of time.

Commissioner Byers asks Superintendent Aguirre if there is a census of how many people are living in the parks? He says they have an idea of the number of tents but not people, and the number changes.

SPR works with councilmembers, the Mayor's Office and social service providers to find places for people to go. Strategic about which places make sense for moving folks around. 70-80 people living at Denny Park. SPR staff worked with United Indians of All Tribes and moved 9-10 people into housing. SPR is working with organizations to find housing.

Commissioner Byers asks Superintendent Aguirre for estimates on homeless encampments.

The Board discusses sending the letter to various other department heads to engage them in these conversations.

Specific questions/comments to Deputy Mayor/Human Services Division staff:

- Why did the Mayor propose 1000 tiny homes and only built 360? What were the barriers and how do we overcome those barriers?
- What are the numbers of homeless encampments, do they have any idea of how this will increase/decrease?
- If schools reopen, are there encampments close to schools that would cause issues?
- What's the plan for when the eviction moratorium ends? What measures are being taken to ensure the result is not more homelessness? What are the foreseeable barriers to enacting measures to keep people housed after the moratorium ends?
- They also want to hear responses from the questions/concerns raised in Tom's article.

Commissioner Akita confirms that the board doesn't want to move people around without finding them homes but inviting the unhoused to be a part of this conversation.

Opportunities to collaborate with other boards/commissions –

- Urban Forestry Commission asked if they could collaborate on anything as boards. Management Structure of urban forests is being questioned.
- Get broader perspectives on issues from a non-parks issue.

- Renters commission is discussing the eviction issues and a letter supporting the moratorium.
- Executive Committee can set up a conversation with boards/staff.

Future meeting priorities –

- Equitable access to programs – sharing resources and power to communities
- Challenges/struggles of the department
- Capital Projects
- Commissioner Byers wants to get the homelessness challenge on the road to recovery.
- Virtual Recreation programming briefing
- Nature/health connections – paula to follow up
- Interesting to hear about what other metro parks are doing during these challenging times.
- Internal departmental struggles such as the aging workforce.
- A compendium of all the work the board did over the previous year.

Old/New Business

By our next meeting, SPR should know more about the next planning cycle for the Park District.

Commissioner Akita reviews the next meeting dates: January 28 and February 11 both joint meetings.

Rachel to resend the letter to the Board members with the request they send edits to Commissioner Byers before Monday 5pm.

There being no further business, the meeting is adjourned at 8:22pm

APPROVED: _____ DATE _____
Andréa Akita/Jessica Farmer, Co-Chairs
Board of Park Commissioners