

Public Involvement Policy for Parks Planning Processes and for Proposals to Acquire Property, Initiate Funded Capital Projects, or Make Changes to a Park or Facility

--Adopted July 1, 1999

--Amended October 1, 2002

--Amended August 30, 2006

--Amended July 2012

Seattle Parks and Recreation Public Involvement Policy

I. Mission Statement

Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) will work with all citizens to be good stewards of our environment, and to provide safe and welcoming opportunities to play, learn, contemplate, and build community.

II. Purpose

This policy describes the role of park users and neighbors in park planning processes and in review processes for funded capital projects and other proposals that have the potential to change the look or use of a park or facility. It describes the planning processes that lead to the list of needed projects for which Parks applies for funding. It lays out circumstances in which Parks does not seek public input. It calls for a description of what factors have impacts on a given decision, how professional Parks staff incorporate, or do not incorporate, suggestions from the public in their recommendations, and identifies information to be presented to the Board of Park Commissioners.

The policy establishes procedures for soliciting and considering public input in Parks planning efforts that identify future projects. These processes can be updates to the latest version of a Seattle Parks and Recreation comprehensive plan, efforts to find sites for new park uses, development of designs or design plans for new park sites, or other efforts that result in a blueprint to use when requesting funding in the future for parks and recreation facilities.

The policy establishes procedures for the review of proposals to acquire property or initiate funded capital projects, including projects funded completely or in part by the Neighborhood Matching Fund, and for the review of proposals for a park property that will, in the judgment of the Superintendent, substantially modify the property's use or appearance.

III. Policy Statement

It is the policy of Seattle Parks and Recreation, in carrying out its mission:

- To invite and encourage direct public involvement in its planning efforts and in the review of its funded capital projects and any proposal that would, in the

judgment of the Superintendent, substantially modify the property's use or appearance.

- To field a staff of professional planners, project managers, landscape architects, and others who may conduct public meetings, who are well-trained in meeting facilitation.
- On occasion, to hire an outside meeting facilitator.
- To provide early and thorough notification of proposals and projects, through a variety of means, to users, user groups, neighborhoods, neighborhood groups, and other interested people, especially those who have not traditionally participated in park planning efforts, such as immigrant and refugee populations.
- When possible, to invite the community's ideas, e.g., for a park design or a site for a new activity, rather than to present a list of options or a proposed design.
- To complete the process by notifying involved and interested people and groups of final decisions, the impact of their input on those decisions, and the reasons for them.
- To consider exempt from this policy any proposal or project undertaken for legal or safety reasons (e.g., requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act), any proposal for which the public process is spelled out elsewhere by ordinance or by policy, or events protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
- To encourage funding to carry out this policy in communities in which 5% or more of the population consists of a specific language group other than English, based on the latest census data.
- To be clear that when Parks has listened to and heard every viewpoint, the Superintendent will make final decisions.

IV. People Affected

- Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks)
- Board of Park Commissioners if Superintendent so recommends
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Councils
- Associated Recreation Council
- Community Organizations
- User Organizations
- Neighborhood District Councils
- Department of Neighborhoods
- Park Neighbors
- "Friends of" Groups
- Seattle Community Council Federation
- Seattle Parks Foundation if appropriate
- Individuals and groups representing underserved populations, including immigrant and refugee populations.

V. Parks Staff Responsibilities

Superintendent of Parks and Recreation
Division Directors
Real Estate Manager and staff
Planners
Project Managers
Parks and Recreation Managers
Engineering and Design Professional Staff
Communications Manager and Strategic Advisor
Public Relations Specialist
Crew Chiefs
Board of Park Commissioners and Staff
Program Managers
Landscape Architects
Race and Social Justice Change Team
Other Project Managers as needed (e.g., Trails Coordinator, Senior Urban Forester)

For Planning Processes:

Parks Planner: can be a Project Manager, Planner, Landscape Architect, Engineering and Design professional, or any staff person acting as the de facto manager of a project): works with the communications staff as necessary to identify the responsible people, tools, events, and timelines that will be included in the public involvement plan, and carry out the approved public involvement plan for planning processes or funded capital projects.

For Funded Project Processes:

Parks Planner or Project Manager (can be a Project Manager, Planner, Landscape Architect, Engineering and Design professional, or any staff person acting as the de facto manager of a project) identifies the responsible people, tools, events, and timelines that will be included in the public involvement plan, and carry out the approved public involvement plan for funded capital projects.

Parks ProView Team: comprised of managers, technical staff (landscape architects), crew chiefs, park planners/project managers, and facility coordinators: reviews the public involvement element of each design program and goes over the response to Attachment A, Factors to Consider in Creating a Public Involvement Plan, and approves the design program.

Board of Park Commissioners and Staff: review projects that the Superintendent believes are of sufficient scope and community impact or interest to warrant the input and recommendations of the Board of Park Commissioners.

VI. Procedures

A. Public Involvement Plan. Parks staff prepare a customized public involvement plan for every proposal that meets the threshold in Section III.

1. General Planning Processes

For capital projects, the opportunity for direct citizen involvement, participation and public input comes at two points in the life of a proposal or project. The first is associated with a Parks planning process during which Parks determines future needs for park acquisitions, development, and facilities. Plans are usually the source and basis for requests for project funding. The second begins life after project funding is approved.

Samples of planning processes are:

- A comprehensive process for gathering input about the park and recreation system as a whole. Examples: Parks' Strategic Action Plan and Parks 2011 Development Plan.
- A citywide process for gathering input about where to locate new park uses that, because of public demand, need to be integrated into the system. Examples: off-leash areas, skateparks, and dodgeball.
- A process conducted in a region of the city, intended to identify appropriate sites for a park use in order to achieve geographic balance. Example: process to identify sites for off-leash area in the Queen Anne and Magnolia neighborhoods.
- A comprehensive citywide process to determine integrated funding, operations, and capital actions to meet recreational demands within the City's financial capabilities over a set period of time. Example; Parks 2011 Development Plan.
- A process conducted to formulate a long-term plan for an individual park.
- A process conducted to craft a policy that has an impact on park users. Examples: Public Involvement Policy, Use and Scheduling of Outdoor Athletic Facilities, Sports Participation Policy, Tennis Court Use and Rules, Exceptions to Park Operating Hours, and Use Management Guidelines.

For public involvement in planning processes, Parks includes the City's Neighborhood District Council network and City

Neighborhood Council structure and existing e-mail groups and neighborhood blogs. The public involvement process will use some combination of news releases, information on Parks' website, emails to known neighborhood organizations, park user groups, neighborhood district councils, and the City Neighborhood Council, and existing e-mail groups, blogs and social media; an online survey, and public workshops; and if the Superintendent so decides, a public hearing before the Board of Park Commissioners. For notification purposes, there now exists an extensive outreach list that is usable and update-able by all City communications staff.

2. Specific Project or Proposal

- Once funding for a capital project is approved, the next step is the development of a design program, a document that identifies scope, design, schedule, and impacts. It is drafted by a planner/project manager and lays out the steps required to complete the project. The Program Manager reviews it, then the ProView Team reviews and approves each design program at one of its regular meetings.
- Attending the ProView meeting, depending on the skills and expertise the project calls for, are the Parks staff most knowledgeable about the facility or park and about its users, neighbors, nearby community organizations, demographics, historic landmarks, and active issues. Also attending ProView are the project manager and skilled trade, volunteer coordinator, or other staff bearing some responsibility for or knowledge of the project.
- ProView reviews the proposed public involvement plan for the project.
- To arrive at an appropriate public process, staff will answer a series of questions designed to identify characteristics intended to help indicate the breadth and range of public interest.
- At this point the planner/project manager uses the appropriate tools available to engage Seattle's diverse population. The Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Toolkit is at <http://inweb1/neighborhoods/outreachguide/>, and the Racial Equity Toolkit is at <http://inweb/rsji/communication.htm>.
- Staff will gauge the need for outreach to underserved groups and how best to use the available tools. The list of questions is shown in Attachment A. The public involvement plan is an element of the design program.

3. Park Board

If, in the judgment of the Superintendent, the project is of sufficient scope and community impact or interest to warrant the input and recommendations of the Board of Park Commissioners, the project manager will work with the Board staff to schedule the issue for Board consideration and to follow all Park Board notification protocols.

VII. Materials for Public Meetings

A. Signage

If no public meetings are planned, the project manager will, within four weeks after Proview approves the public involvement plan, install a 4' x 4' sign at the site, except in cases where installation would be hazardous or the sign would not be visible. If one or more public meetings are planned, the 4' x 4' sign will be installed three weeks before the public meeting. Parks staff will also post the notice on the website, and include the contact person for any adopt-a-park agreement, the chair of the nearest Advisory Council, the community council for the area as shown on the Department of Neighborhoods map, and other identified groups.

The sign will include the following information:

- A description of the proposal, its source (neighborhood plan, park plan, etc.), budget information (amount and source), how the project would change the park, whether it responds to a neighborhood plan element, and why Parks believes it meets citizens' and community needs;
- An explanation of the steps necessary to carry out the proposal and a timeline;
- The name, telephone number and e-mail address of the knowledgeable contact person (usually the project manager);
- Appropriate maps or graphics;
- An invitation to comment in any medium or ask questions with a specific due date at least two weeks from the date the sign is installed. The due date can be extended if groups or individuals who want to provide input say a deadline works a hardship on them;
- Public meeting information, if a public meeting has been scheduled, to include a description of the format, how people can comment (e.g., orally or in writing) and how Parks will use those comments, what planning process took place before that relates to the project, the elements, if any,

that are not open to public comment, and the public process on the project to date; and

- Information about translation resources available on request.

B. Meeting Notices

If a public meeting and/or hearing is to be held, the project manager and the public relations specialist will make a good faith effort to schedule the meeting at a time and date when no other public meetings or events are scheduled (this may not always be possible), and will invite the following, as relevant:

- Anyone who has expressed an interest in being notified;
- Residents within a 300' radius of the park boundaries;
- People who have identified themselves during previous processes gathered from
 - Parks and Department of Neighborhoods databases;
 - Local community organizations, including those identified on the Internet;
 - Community center and activity-based advisory councils;
 - Neighborhood planning groups;
 - Local community newspapers;
 - Groups that would have a natural interest in the site or project relating to their missions, such as environmental groups;
 - User groups who have contacted Parks during the past three years;
 - "Friends of " groups;
 - Adopt-A-Park groups;
 - Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks, if appropriate;
 - Appropriate neighborhood district council;
 - Other City departments as appropriate;
 - Relevant Parks staff;
 - The local Block Watch Captain;
- Individuals and groups representing underserved populations, including immigrant and refugee groups; and
- The appropriate Neighborhood Service Center Coordinator in the Department of Neighborhoods.

The project manager and the public relations specialist will design an invitation flier and distribute it to all invitees. The notice will contain the same information as the site sign and any other important information, and will be mailed at least three weeks before the public meeting date. The meeting site will be as close as possible to the project site and will be ADA-accessible.

Materials prepared for distribution at public meetings and posted on the website will include:

- A history of the project that includes all factors that may have an impact on the nature and issue areas open to public participation. They may include safety issues, City Council actions, Mayoral priorities, voter-approved measures, inclusion in an adopted plan and the public process that led to that plan, the project's budget limitations, and regional need;
 - An explanation of **how decisions are made** during the process, including how Parks uses information from the public and how it affects decisions.;
 - A detailed description of the process to date, including milestones and decisions made to date and the number of people who attended previous meetings, so that the public is up to date on decisions possibly made at meetings they did not attend;
 - A reminder that **written, telephoned, and e-mail comments bear equal weight with attendance at a meeting**;
 - A detailed description of the **public process that led to the plan that is the source of the project**;
 - The **project budget** (amount and sources) and how it may limit the project scope;
 - The **timeline** for the process;
 - The **points at which comment has been/will be invited**;
 - If applicable, the **elements of the project that are not open to public comment** (e.g., required elements such as ADA-accessibility features, are not negotiable; the existence of levy projects have been approved by the voters and adopted by ordinance); and
 - A statement acknowledging that if there is disagreement within the community, **Parks will need to make a decision** and move forward on the project, and that some participants may not be satisfied with the decision.
- C. **Website.** At the time the sign is installed, the same information will be posted on the website (by link from the page for a specific park, under the "Projects and Planning" section, and on the Events and Meetings Calendar). The project page links to the park page on the website.
- D. **Other Distribution.** Fliers will be distributed to the nearest branch library, community center, district council, community council, other neighborhood groups that ask to be notified, groups identified in the public involvement plan, fire station and appropriate Department of Neighborhoods neighborhood service center. Parks staff who work in the neighborhood, and RSJI Change Team members may also have contacts to offer.
- E. **News release.** A news release will go to the local community newspaper, all community newspapers serving ethnic, immigrant, and other specific populations, the Seattle Times, all known relevant neighborhood blogs, Parks blog, and social media.

The project manager may also decide to hire a facilitator for later meetings, if disagreement arises during the public review process.)

VIII. References

- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 18.12 (Park Code)
- Seattle Parks and Recreation Plan 2000 Policies and Procedures
- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 25.05 (State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Rules)
- Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 3 (Administrative Code)
- Parks and Recreation Strategic Action Plan
- Available City outreach guides (DON outreach guide, Racial Equity Toolkit (<http://inweb/rsji/communication.htm>), Immigrant Outreach and Public Engagement materials (<http://inweb1/neighborhoods/outreachguide/>), and City outreach list.

ATTACHMENT A

Factors to Consider in Creating a Public Involvement Plan

Internal Parks questions to ask in determining the scope of a public process.

A. If the answer to any of the following is YES, the Public Involvement Policy does not apply.

1. Is the public process for the proposed project guided by a law or separate City policy? If yes, refer to that law or policy. (For example, City's State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) rules, SMC Chapter 25.05; Parks Policy and Procedure 3.9.1.1, Concession Contracts: Public participation in request for proposal; Non-Park Use Policies and Procedures.)
2. Is the proposal the result of a current emergency situation or a safety or health hazard? If so, no public process is necessary.

B. If the answer to any of the following is YES, there will be at least one public meeting.

- Does the proposal affect an Olmsted park?
- Would the completed proposal substantially change what the park looks like?
- Would the completed proposal substantially change what activities can occur in the park?
- Would the proposal involve construction or other activity that would substantially disrupt park activities, or require the closure of the entire park? (For example, would it displace a large scheduled event, close a beach for a summer weekend, etc.?)
- Was the proposal initiated by members of the community (e.g., is it a Neighborhood Matching Fund project or a neighborhood plan-identified project)?
- Does the proposal add space to the park system?
- Would the completed proposal result in a demonstrable increase in an existing activity or use?
- Would the completed proposal result in demonstrable impacts on surrounding neighbors?
- Is the proposed project subject to the provisions of the Joint Use Agreement with the Seattle School District?
- Will the project affect people with disabilities or other special-needs populations?

C. If the answer to any of the following is NO, refer the issue to the Board of Park Commissioners for review.

- Is the proposal consistent with the current year Capital Improvement Plan?
- Is the proposal consistent with the park's Master Plan, if applicable?
- Is the proposal consistent with Parks' most recent planning documents?
- Is the proposal consistent with the neighborhood plan, if applicable?
- Is the proposal consistent with the Use Management Guidelines for Park and Recreation Facilities (Policy and Procedure 7.13.1), or with specific use management guidelines for Green Lake Park, Freeway Park, Seward Park/Lake Washington Boulevard, Gas Works Park, Volunteer Park, Magnuson Park, Lincoln Park, Stan Sayres Park, the Washington Park Arboretum, or downtown parks?

D. Other factors to consider in deciding the scope of a public process:

- What are the "unintended consequences"?
- Does the proposal respond to a documented need?
 - Safety
 - Recreational
 - Routine maintenance/repair/replacement based on a condition assessment
 - Other
- Have scheduled activities (picnics, day camps, ball games, etc.) been cancelled?