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October 6, 2021

Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent
Seattle Parks and Recreation
100 Dexter Ave N
Seattle, WA 98109

RE: SPR Strategic Plan Feedback

Dear Seattle Parks and Recreation,

The Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) thanks Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) staff Selena Elmer and Danyal Lotfi and Board of Park Commissioners Jessica Farmer and Kelly McCaffrey for their September 1, 2021 presentation on implementing SPR's strategic plan. The UFC appreciated the opportunity to participate in a listening session to provide feedback on what SPR can do to support public health and well-being, racial equity, economic recovery, and climate action.

During the listening session, Commissioners provided thoughts and ideas to specific questions posed by SPR and Board of Park Commissioners. The discussion is summarized below, as well as additional thoughts and recommendations, which are noted in bold.

How can SPR support public health and well-being?

- *Identify gaps in services and prioritize investment in areas of greatest need.* Commissioners linked to the gap analysis in the [2017 Parks and Open Space Plan](#).
- *Improve wayfinding between parks.* Improved wayfinding between parks, and between parks and other community assets, can promote longer outdoor experiences by facilitating movement between spaces. Wayfinding and other signage should be in multiple languages.
- *Make space for community gardens.* Community gardening spaces are extremely limited in the city and in high demand, with some on P-Patch waiting lists for years. Evaluate if some park areas, like portions of lawns, could be transformed into community gardens.

- ***Reach out to Indigenous groups to expand existing programs that allow for foraging and cultural practices on park lands. Consider adjusting policies on foraging, particularly in cases of Indigenous use of plants.***
- *Incorporate more trees and other natural features into existing parks.* Nature contact and experience is increasingly understood to provide significant emotional and health benefits to people. Plan to add additional trees and natural features wherever feasible.
- *Tie park development to land development.* Consider how the development process can be used to create pocket parks. This could help increase housing density and create new park space really close to where people live.
- *Reduce or eliminate pesticide use.* Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (SGARs) are commonly used for rodent control in Seattle parks. SGARs have infiltrated the food web and have negative impacts on urban wildlife and pets. Trash containment, exclusion, fertility control, and other non- or less-toxic methods can be used.

How can SPR promote racial equity?

- *Staff events from within the community.* For culturally relevant programming, staff from within the community programs are serving should lead events. Where that is not possible, paying community partners to host events would make residents feel more welcome and also help with local outreach.
- *Improve wayfinding within parks.* Improved wayfinding within parks can help people navigate areas they are unfamiliar with and help individuals escape uncomfortable or unsafe situations.
- *Support community-led affinity group programming.* SPR could offer support and resources to Black, Indigenous, and people of color affinity groups that want to lead events in parks.
- ***Consider expansion of culturally relevant open space opportunities. Expand use of culturally specific plantings, art and recreation opportunities, to increase equity of benefits received by community.***
- ***Work with Indigenous communities on renaming parks and park features. Include Indigenous history and land acknowledgements in park kiosks and other informational materials.***

How can SPR support economic recovery?

- *Recruit and hire within the communities that parks serve.* Hire within the communities SPR serves, with an emphasis on BIPOC youth, to create job opportunities and more welcoming park environment for local residents.

- *Partner with SDOT and King County Metro.* Transportation can be a barrier to access to and participation in SPR programming. Advertise public transportation options to events and parks. Consider a free transit day to encourage ridership and visitation. This would leverage the combined strength of the parks and transit systems so people can take advantage of both.
- *Create a jobs program that pays for restoration and urban forestry work.* Volunteer stewardship programs tend to favor participation by people who have the means to volunteer. A jobs program with low barrier of entry for restoration and urban forestry work could bring in a greater diversity of people and provide a springboard to advance within SPR or elsewhere.
- *Fund and hire for maintenance and care of park space.* Recruit maintenance positions from communities close to parks and limit the range of maintenance duties for such positions. Maintenance doesn't need to be a centralized staffing model.
- *Consider remote work from park opportunities.* More people are working from home and more employers allow remote working. Some home environments aren't always conducive to work. Can SPR consider how to create opportunities for telecommuting from a park or community center?
- *Include local communities in conversations about budgeting for new positions and programming.* There are always competing priorities for budget dollars. If SPR moves toward supporting more paid people for maintenance/urban forestry labor, it may be a good idea include local residents in those conversations to discover what resonates with the community. Create spaces to have that dialogue with community about where budget goes, to ensure the needs of community are met.

How can SPR address climate change?

- *Establish cooling centers at SPR facilities.* Not a lot of homes in Seattle have air conditioning and it is expensive to retrofit a home. Places where people can find relief from heat will be important as climate change brings more frequent and intense heat events.
- *Asses the city-wide capacity for tree planting.* How many trees do we have spaces for in Seattle? Where can we plant them and how fast can we do it? Create an action plan for enhancing urban canopy. SPR can't solve this problem on their own, but could do an assessment of their assets and create a departmental goal for canopy cover.
- *Improve energy efficiency at SPR facilities.* Consider green roofs and other strategies.
- *Manage existing trees and vegetation for climate resilience.* Extended drought, high heat, disease and pest outbreaks, and other climate impacts pose a serious threat to trees. How can we plan now to help trees and ecosystems adapt to and persist in a changing climate?

- *Strategically plant new trees.* A lot of uses for park land (e.g., ball fields) will not be appropriate for trees, but SPR could consider how a strategically planted tree near such a site might shade and reduce heat island effect and provide benefits to the area.
- *Eliminate use of gas-powered trimmers, leaf blowers, etc.* Gas-powered equipment contributes to emissions and are noisy. Consider phasing out their use for renewably-powered tools.

Thank you again for your presentation and inviting our comments. The UFC is always available to you as a resource and looks forward to the implementation of SPR's 2020-2032 strategic plan.

Sincerely,



Weston Brinkley, Chair



Joshua Morris

cc: Mayor Jenny A. Durkan, Council President Lorena González, CM Lisa Herbold, CM Debora Juarez, CM Andrew Lewis, CM Tammy Morales, CM Teresa Mosqueda, CM Alex Pedersen, CM Kshama Sawant, CM Dan Strauss, Michelle Caulfield, Sharon Lerman, Urban Forestry Management Team, Urban Forestry Core Team, Selena Elmer, Yolanda Ho

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