Seattle
Parks & Recreation

Memo

Date	11/12/26
To	Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners
From	Andy Sheffer, Seattle Parks and Recreation
CC:	Michele Finnegan, Interim Superintendent; Amy Williams, Deputy Superintendent; Daisy Catague, Deputy Superintendent
Subject	Approval of Bench Adoption Program Partnership Agreement with the Seattle Parks Foundation

Recommendation: Staff recommend reinstating a bench adoption program in partnership with the Seattle Parks Foundation (SPF) as a pilot as outlined below and attached.

Background: Seattle Parks and Recreation and Seattle Parks Foundation have long operated a Bench Adoption Program, allowing community members to donate funds to place or refurbish park benches in honor of loved ones, milestones, or community organizations, However, managing the intake of public requests, processing tax-deductible donations, coordinating plaque inscriptions, and tracking donor requests strained administrative capacity with SPR to the point that the program ceased in 2017. Over its operation, from 2003 to 2017; 1,474 households participated in the program.

Seattle Parks Foundation (SPF) is a dedicated non-profit philanthropic partner that advocates for and invests in Seattle's green spaces. This partnership leverages SPF's strong fiscal sponsorship infrastructure, donor management platforms, and community outreach networks to formalize, scale, and streamline the bench program. SPF has continued to receive significant and ongoing interest from prospective donors; and currently has a waitlist of approximately 135 people.

Summary of Partnership: The proposed agreement outlines a clear division of roles between SPR and SPF:

- Seattle Parks Foundation (SPR): Manages the "front-end" customer and donor service. This includes operating the intake portal, managing donor communications, processing tax-deductible financial contributions, managing plaque proof's, collecting fees and most importantly keeping an up-to-date database of bench location coordinates and associated Identification thereby connecting the physical asset to a donor.

- Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR): Retains total authority over "back-end" operations. This includes supplying an inventory of bench locations, approving final bench locations, maintaining the master inventory of benches in G.I.S., procuring the standard structural assets, and performing the physical installation and maintenance.

Year 1 is a pilot program designed to validate core assumptions regarding how we bring in the work (intake and how we deliver it (execution). The pilot will start with "low hanging" replacements to insure an executable plan. The pilot will be evaluated in mid-year 2027 and if deemed successful will launch into a more robust plan including addition of new benches. We know that there is a significant need for more benches throughout our system based on use per square foot of parkland and the associated number of existing benches. The pilot will determine if integrating universal public seating as a donation-based program functions as a sustainable, budget neutral process to scale accessibility across parks.

Financial Considerations:

The restructured program is designed to operate on a full cost-recovery model, ensuring zero negative impact on the City's General Fund:

- Fee Structure: Updated tier pricing covers the exact cost of a standard bench, custom plaque fabrication, concrete pads, and administrative overhead.
- Fund Allocation: SPF will retain an agreed-upon administrative fee per transaction to cover processing costs and website and database upkeep. The remaining balance will be transferred to an SPR capital project code to fund materials, labor, and construction oversight.
- Endowment and Maintenance: A portion of each donation is funneled directly into a dedicated bench maintenance fund to guarantee upkeep and plaque replacement over the bench's standard asset lifecycle of 10 years.

Over the first year the program will document staffing time, installation process and capacity; as well as procurement and coordination needs in order to assess the pilot.

Labor and Workforce Considerations:

This partnership strictly protects and respects Seattle Parks and Recreation staffing with examples including but not limited to the following.

- Exclusivity of Installation: All physical asset handling-including pour concrete footprints, assembling the benches, and drilling plaques-will be performed exclusively by SPR staff.

- Capacity Mitigation: Program intake will be strictly capped or paced based on seasonal capacity. This ensures that bench installations do not pull staff away from core park maintenance priorities, safety repairs, or high-priority capital projects. Additionally, benches will be refurbished or new benches installed, in groupings, at single locations to maintain cost efficiency.

- Install Timing: By structuring the program around annual milestones: identifying new benches for Adoption, matching with donors, and grouping bench installs into batches, the program will allow SPR staff to install benches in tandem with other Park work, or use it to backfill schedules when during when fewer workorders are placed.

RSJI Considerations:

Historically, private bench donation programs inadvertently favored affluent neighborhoods, concentrating park amenities in areas with higher household wealth. To align with the City's RSJI goals, this partnership plans to embed equity directly into the program model. Note, the equity component will be more fully integrated into the program in year 2, after success of year 1 pilot.

- Inventory of desired bench locations: Mapping of desired bench locations is based on density of existing assets and OPCDs Equity Index GIS layer.
- Equity Fund Contribution: A mandatory percentage of every standard bench donation will feed into an SPR Equity Bench Fund.
- Targeted Allocations: The Equity Bench Fund will be used exclusively to install and refurbish seating options in under-resourced neighborhoods, parks in RSJI priority areas, and regions with low canopy or lack of park-amenity density.
- Bilingual Outreach: SPF will provide marketing and application intake materials in multiple languages to increase accessibility for diverse populations across Seattle

Next Steps:

If the Board votes to approve the staff recommendation, the department will proceed with the following timeline:

1.) **November 2026**: Superintendent formally endorses or disapproves of the recommendation.

2.) **December 2026:** If recommendation is endorsed by Superintendent, the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between SPR and SPF is finalized.

3.) **January 2027:** SPF launches the digital intake portal on the SPF platform and syncs spatial allocation with SPR's GIS asset tracking maps.

4.) **January/February 2027:** Re-open the public bench program and begin processing backlog requests under the new equity framework.

5.) **July 2027**: Midyear Evaluation of pilot program including assessment of coordination with donors/ public outreach (survey data), efficiency of execution and associated cost recovery. Do donor funds cover both the initial asset and its multi-year maintenance cycle.

6.) **August 2027**: If pilot deemed successful, SPF/SPR identifies locations for the next tranche of "Bench Replacements" and "New Bench" installations and presents its findings associated with the Pilot and the plan forward to BPRC.