



# Minutes

Joint Board of Park Commissioners/Park District Oversight Committee

Via WebEx

Tuesday, May 28, 2020

6:30 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

## Welcome and Introductions

Jessica welcomes people to the first virtual meeting of the Joint Board of Park Commissioners and Park District Oversight Committee. She calls the meeting to order at 6:35pm. The Board introduces themselves.

## Public Comment

Leslie – Calling on behalf of all the tennis players in Seattle; she would like SPR to open the courts and put the nets up for them to play.

Philip Weiss – When working through the design process for the Roanoke Lid, SPR said no to a restroom. Seattle residents are very reliant on public bathrooms especially these days with stores being closed. He lives on Eastlake and there are few bathrooms nearby. It is burdensome for people to go too far for a bathroom. He requests SPR ask WSDOT to build a restroom.

Karen Rich – Magnolia resident. She requests SPR open the outdoor tennis courts. Driving ranges, golf courses, and putting greens are all open; tennis is free and allows social distancing. She plays both tennis and golf and she wants them to be open. USTA provided guidelines for tennis courts to allow them to be open nationwide.

Gordon Padelford – Executive Director for Seattle Neighborhood Greenways; SPR has closed some streets for driving and for recreation. They closed the driveway in Volunteer park and it creates a really lovely park setting and expands opportunities for recreating. He hopes SPR thinks about how these streets can be best utilized when the City moves onto the next phase.

Gordon@seattlegreenways.org

Rob Stevens – Friends of Maple Leaf Park – People are eager to volunteer to do some maintenance that is lacking and suffering from lack of attention. He asks SPR to consider ways volunteerism can maintain the parks.

Cesar Garcia – Lake City Collective – He is a neighbor to Little Brook Park. This park needs a lot of attention. He works with community members to pick up litter. There is a big concern with dog feces. Lake City Collective is working closely with their fiscal sponsors, Seattle Parks Foundation for

community visioning for this park. He asks for the Board and Jesús' support in making this park work for the community.

Jesús responds to the public comment.

- SPR is working hard to provide access while not creating situations that would jeopardize the health of our city. He wants to ensure that SPR does not do anything to mitigate the ability for the city to open up again.
- Complying with the Governor's orders and are looking at the rules regarding outdoor tennis courts.
- Volunteer events – Many people help SPR with maintenance and other things and SPR absolutely appreciates this. SPR is guided by the Stay Healthy, Stay home order and the phases will inform how these activities can be unfolded.
- Philip Weiss, SPR will follow up with you on this project. Jesús agrees there is a need for restrooms in Seattle. Currently, 226 public restrooms are available now. There is a need to find the right balance between having them available and needing to be able to maintain them.
- Neighborhood Greenways – This is an exciting opportunity for SPR. SPR meets weekly with SDOT Director to figure out how to increase open space and recreation opportunities.
- Little Brook Park – SPR staff will get more of an understanding and work with them to find a solution.

## **Superintendent's Update**

Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

### Superintendent's Presentation: SPR Pandemic Response

Immediately before this emergency began, SPR finished the strategic planning process and were about to start financial planning for Park District and 2021-2022 budget. SPR is managing a new parks and recreation system and trying to find a balance knowing the physical and mental health benefits are important but following the Governor's orders is important too.

Jesús provides a quick overview of the pandemic response timeline.

SPR started by closing programs to high risk groups, as more health information came in, the indoor facilities closed. Then, SPR closed high touch areas that caused people to convene and created unsafe situations. SPR opened a couple of homeless shelters, to create more space for residents of existing shelters at Garfield and Miller. In May, opened a shelter for youth at SW Teen Life Center. SPR closed a couple of the big regional parks for Easter weekend to avoid crowding and encourage folks to visit one of their neighborhood parks.

SPR started Social Distance Ambassador program, which builds on the Parks Concierge program to provide data on some of our parks and provide reminders to folks about social distancing. Recently, SPR started closing parks at 8pm to mitigate sedentary activities.

SPR activated already existing Continuity of Operations Plan in response to Covid-19. SPR is doing Mission Essential Functions. For SPR this meant supporting emergency food programs, childcare for essential workers, keeping comfort stations open, shower programs open, and picking up trash.

Several of our own employees were infected and one employee passed away from the virus; staff needed a lot of support.

Performance management went from measuring community center attendance to compliance with social distancing in parks. Proud of staff ability to pivot so quickly.

608 are working from home or working in different positions; 344 staff are on leave due to covid-19.

Closed parking lots at regional parks but are opening ADA only lots. City is rallying around keeping people safe.

Capturing the data to inform decisions moving forward.

Virtual recreation programming and reaching out to participants.

### **Recent updates**

- Stay at home order extended to May 31
- Golf reopened
- Boat ramps will open soon
- ADA lots open in four regional parks
- Appreciate your patience and understand the frustration but we are working to open in a safe way.

Phased recovery – SPR is relying on Seattle King County Public Health guidelines. SPR is considering equity for sequencing.

SPR has decided some things will remain closed or restricted through the summer. There are a lot of activities that will not be done due to social distancing guidelines and budget shortfalls. Typically, SPR hires many staff during the summer to assist with programming and maintenance during the growing season. SPR will not be hiring summer staff.

Social distancing requirements anticipated.

## **Challenges**

Supporting homeless population; the navigation team is still participating; however, the future of the navigation team is uncertain.

Concerned about people gathering on sunny, beautiful days. Safer outdoors but not when everyone is crowding public spaces. Equity driven decision-making and ensuring SPR staff have personal protective equipment.

Learning a lot about telecommuting and technology.

SPR does not know how or what is happening moving forward. SPR follows whatever the State and City tell SPR to do.

Budget driven by revenue from rentals, permitting and programming and this money is dried up.

Supporting SPR partners is a concern – SPR provided rent abatement and deferrals so partner organizations can survive until they return. SPR provided stipends for grants and community-based organizations to keep them afloat until they can get back to work.

Note to SPR staff: This is not easy or ideal. SPR will continue navigating this the best they can. SPR staff step up and do the work. Jesús couldn't be prouder of how the department has stepped up.

## **Discussion**

Data for crowding: Commissioner Herrera mentions everyone is sticking to the circles that were mowed into the lawn. Social Distancing Ambassadors give assessment about crowding and an estimated head count. Commissioner Herrera hopes SPR continues to find ways for residents to be outside.

Equity and access questions are big for the department, which is why SPR encourages people to stay home and/or stay local.

Commissioner Sivarajan – Could SPR dig a bit more into the equity lens; how was it considered during the process to direct to mission essential work and how will SPR use the equity lens moving forward.

Jesús responds – the Mission Essential Functions were about serving the neediest folks by providing shelter and hygiene access. Superintendent Aguirre is reviewing all of the things SPR does with the guidelines from Public Health. When SPR starts to open more programs, they want to ensure the programs are affordable. Staff called and spoke with scholarship families regarding childcare and ensured they do not need before opening it up to the public.

Commissioner Watts – What is the internal process and how is SPR connecting with state level feedback and recommendations and how it will be tracked as SPR moves forward through the various phases. What is the connection between different levels of government? What efforts are in place to maximize or minimize public input through this forum and social media. The engagement question and technology piece is huge. SPR is committed to find a format to allow for phone access and the ability to take public testimony. This raises issues about SPR programming. Doubling our commitment to technology and ramping up SPR programming.

Childcare is only offering 1/3 spots during the summer so SPR will serve the neediest first. Open the community centers that have the greatest need.

Commissioner Hundley – He feels for SPR employees with potential layoffs and program cuts; what's the overall philosophy to figure out what to do.

Working on the budget. SPR needs to rebalance the 2020 budget, given huge revenue challenges there is a huge gap there. Looking forward to 2021, it will be a very different approach. The Mayor is working on her budget and it is a significant concern for all the city. SPR will work with communities to communicate decisions. Mayor is committed to keeping staff; the City understand all employees will be needed when this is over.

SPR will not be able to get their economy back up and running if there is another spike in infections.

Commissioner Ramsey – Disruption of capital projects that were underway and what will happen to future capital projects?

SPR has stalled some projects to maintain compliance with the Stay Home Order. Staff redeployed to mission essential functions. Capital projects are funded by taxes and if there is no budget; the focus will be on paying staff. There will be projects put on hold. SPR is very fortunate to have the Park District funding. Revenue fund from general fund is reduced and permits and rentals are gone.

Commissioner McCaffrey is excited about the diversity of questions; everyone has something different to ask. She noticed there are no phone numbers on the signs around the parks and suggests adding a phone number to the signs. Questions around mental health of people being inside; especially with summer coming and the pools and spray parks closed. Kids and families in apartments across the city will need to get out, why not open the spray parks? She wonders if SPR is exploring creative ways to get kids outside and away from screens.

Jesús replies that staff are creative and are thinking of ideas. First, in terms of spray parks and pools, they are not sure how to keep kids away from each other, but the state is giving guidance on

pools. Second, SPR did not hire anyone for the summer work due to the hiring freeze. SPR will focus on swimming beaches and protecting life but does not encourage crowding at beaches.

Commissioner Cook says SPR is doing a fantastic job. He sees the crews working hard, people cleaning the restrooms; and he thanks them. People seem to get it. SPR is essential workers and he's very appreciative.

Commissioner Herrera emphasizes the importance of capital projects for boosting the economy and hopefully they will pick back up soon.

Status for Park District 6-year financial planning – proposals for how to restart that and how to emerge from this from a financial standpoint. That plan was designed to meet the needs of the residents of the city and it will probably be very different moving forward so there will need to be more public engagement.

SPR staff are working hard. Jesús thanks the Board members for their commitment to working through this together. Because of the dire financial situation, people will need to be open and flexible in the long-term. He wants to ensure they stay focused on equity and the needs of community members.

## **Old/New Business**

Next meeting is scheduled for June 11, 2020.

Commissioner Watts asks for meeting information to be included in a calendar invitation.

Jesús asks the Board to help SPR with engagement ideas.

Commissioner Watts says people are focused on how they used parks in the past and are upset about not being able to do things they did before. Work with community members to determine ways to fulfill the needs and invite them to provide feedback.

Commissioner Herrera says he had two projects that went out to bid and came back way under budget; he implores SPR to continue to pushing capital projects.

Adding survey or contact information to signs around parks to ask for feedback.

There being no other business, the Board of Park Commissioners adjourns.