



Minutes

Joint Board of Park Commissioners/Park District Oversight Committee

Via WebEx

Thursday, March 25, 2021

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

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting is called to order at 6:35pm and the Board members introduce themselves. Commissioner Akita calls the meeting to order at 6:34pm. She acknowledges that we are on traditional land of the Coast Salish people. The board members and staff introduce themselves.

Public Comment

Phil Vogelzang – Friends of Discovery Park – The Friends of Discovery Park request to do a 10-15 minute presentation about proposals and issues at Discovery Park. It is over 600 acres and Seattle's largest park. The park is about to have its 50-year anniversary.

Adrian Down – Uses he/him pronouns, is a member of Rainier Valley Greenways. His group is seeking long-term changes to make Lake Washington Boulevard Healthy Street a permanent change. It is a lovely change and allows for the community to enjoy it. It also provides a great bicycle route for commuters. To be successful it needs to respond to needs/wants of communities of color and implores SPR to outreach to these communities.

Celebration of Retiring Commissioners

Board of Park Commissioners – Tom Byers, Dennis Cook and William Lowe

Thank you for serving on the Board of Park Commissioners for the last 6 years. Your input and insights have helped create a better, more equitable Seattle Parks and Recreation system. The three of you started on the Board in the Spring of 2015, in the midst of several contentious issues. You came in, rolled up your sleeves, and got to work to understand the issues, reviewed the hundreds of public comments, and provided thoughtful and measured responses.

Tom, you are an impressive guy. You have improved your city in numerous ways during your career and your time on the Board. Your dogged determination and steadfast aim to improve the lives of our unhoused neighbors is commendable. As we look to solutions to the homelessness crisis, your voice will always be in our heads telling us to expand the conservation corps, because you're right, it IS a great program! We also know through your actions and words, that you are passionate about the environment and have provided excellent input on environmental issues and ensuring parks

and open space are preserved. Thank you for serving on countless retreat committees, letter writing committees, as a member of the Park District Oversight Committee and the Olmsted Taskforce.

Dennis, as a former SPR manager, your empathy and understanding of the department provided valuable insight and was much appreciated. You've been on this side of the aisle and therefore come from a place of understanding. Your support of staff and easy going demeanor were a pleasure to have on the Board. You have always been diplomatic in your approach to the issues, but that didn't stop you from speaking your mind. Your knowledge of athletics and recreation will be a big hole for the Board moving forward. Thank you for serving as the Park Board member on the Associated Recreation Council Board, the Park Naming Committee and participating in the recent strategic plan process.

William, the self-described dinosaur, the lens through which you view the many projects, programs and issues brought before the board is someone who has seen the city change over time and the cyclical nature of humanity. As chair, you provided great leadership, engaging community members of all kinds, in dialogue. SPR will miss your metaphors and your story-telling. Staff appreciate that you have always been very kind to staff, you are fair and pragmatic in your thoughts and comments about issues brought before you. We appreciate your candor and your sense of humor. Your reminders to look out for those less fortunate and to strive for parity, will always be in our minds as we continue to do this work. Thank you for serving on the Executive Committee, the Viewpoint Taskforce and in numerous other capacities during your time with the board.

Retiring Park District Oversight Committee Members: Dewey Potter and Patt Copeland

Patt and Dewey, thank you for your service on the Park District Oversight Committee since its formation in 2015. From the beginning, you were instrumental in shaping the new Seattle Park District and its initiatives. Your insights and ingenuity helped create a safer parks and recreation system, innovative programs that strengthen community, and center the needs of marginalized community members.

Patt, Thank you for the joyful presence you bring to the Park District Oversight Committee. You provided thoughtful consideration and considerable knowledge to the variety of issues brought to the Park District Oversight Committee. Your commitment to centering the accessibility needs of parks and recreation users has helped us create a better experience for all participants. You have been an incredible source of encouragement for staff and your fellow board members, reminding us to celebrate our successes as we strive for excellence. We will miss your infectious positivity and the care for community. Thank you for the time, expertise, and energy you have shared with us.

Dewey, Thank you for providing much needed institutional and historical context as we established the Seattle Park District and its initiatives. You offer a wealth of knowledge from your time working with City Council, the City Budget Office and as our very own Communications Manager. Your

experience addressing parks and recreation issues, establishing new policies, and implementing new processes were instrumental as we entered uncharted territory. The relational approach you bring to solving issues helped create a positive board experience for us all. We will miss you. Thank you for extending your Seattle Parks and Recreation legacy to the Park District Oversight Committee.

You have dedicated countless hours to learning, thinking and improving the lives of Seattle residents through your lived experiences, your historical knowledge and your unique perspectives. The last few years, SPR has asked all of the Park Board and PDOC members to take on a lot of responsibility and required a great amount of flexibility and thoughtfulness to create a strategic plan. You have all been incredibly patient, creative and responsive in your work as board members.

Thank you very much Patt, Dewey, Tom, Dennis and William for listening to the presentations, reviewing public comment, and sharing a love for SPR's mission to provide welcoming and safe opportunities to play, learn, contemplate and build community, and promote responsible stewardship of the land.

Commissioner Akita echoes the sentiment of Superintendent Aguirre and shares the board members have appreciated their commitment, stewardship, advocacy, and wisdom. It has driven all the board members to be better.

Dewey says it was an honor to be on the committee during its origination and helping the department with its important work.

Patt says she has learned a lot about SPR and the park system. She is grateful that SPR has emphasized accessibility and really enjoys working with Get Moving. It has been an interesting and enriching 6 years.

Dennis was surprised to be asked to join the Board. He has really enjoyed being on the Board. He asks the Board members to remember to be inclusive to ensure all voices are heard.

Tom will be sad to leave. He will miss this group, he thinks the board members are all really great. The parks are the common ground of Seattle and the most democratic idea. He hope the Boards continue to defend them and advance their cause in what will be a challenging and exciting future.

William says he has really enjoyed meeting everyone. SPR is the greatest parks system. He reminds the Boards that parks are for everyone, even those who may not fully yet appreciate it. There is help available and with the Boards help/spirit/dedication, they will make the city better.

Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Aguirre responds to the public comments:

He thanks Phil for coming and his work at Discovery Park. There have been calls to decrease the footprint of the FAA tower to allow for more recreation. SPR expressed support through a letter. There are some traffic issues and they are discussing closures and circulation.

Adrian spoke about the Lake Washington Boulevard closure to increase access to residents; SPR is opening the Boulevard for Spring Break and they will talk about summer. Access is key but have to think about traffic and other considerations. Superintendent Aguirre has regular meetings with SDOT Director Zimbabwe.

With the warm weather, SPR staff are getting anxious about preparing for opening during a pandemic. SPR staff have done a great job pivoting to help with vaccinations and covid testing.

Deep dive in April with what SPR will or will not be able to offer this summer.

The Recreation division and the entire department suffered a great loss this week with the passing of a beloved friend and colleague Brenna Clausen who was the Community Center Coordinator at the International District/Chinatown Community Center. Brenna was a fun-loving and kind-hearted member of the SPR family, always centering the needs of the community and advocating fiercely for the IDCCC neighborhood. She brought laughter and love to everything she did, and made a difference in the lives of so many people across Seattle. She will be missed dearly.

The City is stepping up its efforts to help vaccinate more people as the COVID-19 vaccines become more available. Mayor Durkan announced this week that the Seattle Fire Department COVID-19 Community Testing and Vaccination Hubs will transition to vaccinations full-time beginning Wednesday, March 31. By transitioning to full-time vaccination hubs, Rainier Beach and West Seattle will be able to vaccinate an additional 3,000 people per week, each, adding approximately 6,000 vaccinations to the City's total weekly capacity. The Rainier Beach site is at SPR's Atlantic City Boat Ramp.

Clean Cities Initiative

- 1,450 needles collected
- 59,546 lbs of trash removed from 60 park encampment sites and 2 park jamboree locations.
- The citywide effort involving several City of Seattle departments continues and SPR heard a lot of great feedback from residents and the City Council.
- In addition to the thousands of pounds of trash and hundreds of needles staff collect each week at parks and encampment sites, they also encounter other hazards including ammunition, gun parts and debris from fires.
- In addition to Clean Cities, SPR crews are out in the parks every day cleaning, maintaining, pruning, mowing, etc.

Division Updates

Parks and Environment Division: Tree crew is dealing with fallen trees. Landscape crews worked to resurface the trails at the Arboretum.

Facilities and Planning and Development Division: 4 projects nominated for landscaping awards; including Fritz Hedges Park, Rainier Beach Urban Farm and Wetlands, Alice Ball Park. They are also working to get all of the facilities ready to open for summer. The grounds teams are getting the ballfields ready for play.

Finance and Administration: Woodland Park Zoo agreement is working with SPR staff on a renewed Operations and Maintenance Agreement. The current agreement expires in February 2022.

Policy Performance and Property: Red Barn Ranch transfer ownership to a BIPOC organization. Increased crime at Magnuson Park, SPR is working with community and SPD to come up with some solutions.

Recreation: Ramping up for summer, heading into their busiest season. Registering for recreation programs and activities this Spring. SPR is still providing scholarships for programs.

SPR working with SPS to provide childcare during hybrid learning – potentially providing outdoor childcare where possible.

SPR served 301 unhoused neighbors at 5 sites around the city. The locations may change to accommodate summer/spring programming.

Follow-up from last meeting:

- On question of using unoccupied office space for re-housing of people experiencing homelessness:
 - The City is looking at all possible spaces and will look at this possibility again
 - Another idea in a State bill – providing SEPA exemption for temporary shelters and encampments – didn't make it out of committee but the City is still hoping to amend the policy in another bill in this legislative session

Commissioner Hundley commends the departments work to assist the schools in augmenting space for childcare.

American Rescue Plan – Commissioner Byers asks what SPR will do to bolster the resources by going after ARP funds? Superintendent Aguirre responds, they are looking to return the department to pre-pandemic levels for more people and more resources.

Update: Healthy Environment Action Report

Todd introduces his colleague, Lisa Ciecko, she is a plant ecologist and works in Seattle's Urban Forests. She is a wealth of knowledge. Todd acknowledges that Seattle sits on the traditional and

unceded land of the Duwamish people. SPR grounds the environmental work in equity and dismantling white supremacy culture.

Healthy Environment is defined as a thriving ecosystem where everyone has equal access to and responsibility for open space. This is a collaborative effort with members of all SPR divisions.

Healthy Environment Impact Report tells the story of what SPR does and aligns with metrics. 2020 was a different year so they added some stories this year.

2020 Accomplishments

Equitable access: 96% households have access to parks within ½ mile of people's homes. SPR opened 1 new park and had 3 park expansions. Added natural area space in 5 areas. 25 trails projects completed in natural areas, despite the pandemic.

Green Seattle Partnership: GSP supports through ecological restorations; community members, prof crews and SPR staff teams. They initiated 64 acres of invasive removal; installed 57,568 native plants; established and maintained 267 acres of established plants and maintained 25 restored acres. Total volunteer hours were about 1/3 of typical year. Forest stewards performed ½ the volunteer work and 157 parks containing restoration. Engaged 40 youth in job skills and access to nature.

Biodiversity Savings: Meadows left to grow due to decreased staffing and this was well-received by people, birds and bees. It is more ecological and less expensive.

Conservation: Using less water than estimated – 45% less water using smart irrigation, and due to well-trained staff, and maintaining equipment. Staff inspect and clean storm drains -1359 were cleaned to ensure pollutants are not getting into the streams. Removed 45,000+ yards of estimated waste through recycling and composting.

Reducing carbon emissions – SPR has a lot of buildings; many go through upgrades through city program. 9 buildings improved and reduced energy by 30%. SPR is using more electric tools and this is expanding. Solar projects – 30kw solar energy project at Magnuson Park's Building 30. It has a big impact on reducing energy needs.

Carbon cuts due to employees working remotely. 56,000 staff days are remote and resulted in big carbon savings. Transportation is responsible for 60% Seattle's greenhouse gas emissions. SPR employees worked remotely for a total of 56,143 days reducing carbon emissions.

Virtual Engagements – SPR environmental educators provided educational opportunities and connected with 374 children in Summer in the Parks program. Find out more here:

What we're working on now

- Strategic Plan implementation ideas – 10 working groups identified ideas
- Climate Resiliency strategy – deal with impacts of climate change
- New metrics on waste diversion and carbon – what is the carbon footprint and how can we measure
- Regular articles on Healthy Environment for the Parkways Blog
- Public Webinars on SPR’s sustainability work – Bring SPR expertise into the community; 1st one on sustainable landscape management – “your yard is a park”; hope to do more throughout the year.
- Turf Best Management Plan update
- Pollinator pathways project – how to support pollinators as they move through urban landscape
- Develop enviro justice continuum can be used with RSJ tools to ensure environmental justice is part of the conversation

Other plans

- 10 Minute Walk to a Park Campaign
- Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights
- Green schoolyard partnership with SPS
- Tree Management & Native Plant Policies
- Environmental education across the city
- Green Plaza Pilot
- Public EV charging stations in SPR lots
- Battery-powered blower transition plan

Office of Sustainability is doing some great work also to minimize fossil fuels.

Commissioner Farmer commends the staff and the department for the amount of work they have been able to accomplish during 2020. With opportunities for water savings, is SPR able to redirect that savings into the newly planted and more established plantings. Todd says Parks and Environment are targeting their efforts based on the tree inventory, using mulch, and not mowing directly around the trees to retain biomass.

Biggest challenge facing the work – Climate change is very visible in forested areas and developed parks; increased drought stress is very evident and it is challenging to know next steps. SPR is looking at new species and new places to buy trees that are from drier climates.

Time is a challenge. SPR is already catching up and SPR has a lot of old facilities and the current infrastructure requirements to support more efficient infrastructure is daunting.

Commissioner Hundley mentions that his 8th graders worked with Joelle on some work regarding water use. Explorer West would love to see follow up results to show how that's going. Todd will reach out to Joelle.

Commissioner Potter says it is great to see all this work in one place. She is glad to hear the gas-powered leaf blowers are becoming a thing of the past.

Is SPR trying to electrify the fleet? And, could all of the Magnuson roof space be used for solar? Todd replies, that he isn't sure the facilities can handle it, but this was part of the impetus for putting solar on the Brig. Solar microgrid is going in this year and is creating a power grid that can be used as an emergency shelter at Miller Community Center..

FAS is dealing with the larger vehicles, sedans have been converted, truck technology is not ready yet. Superintendent Aguirre mentions the trucks have reduced miles by altering routes to be more efficient.

Commissioner Byers suggests to dedicate ARP dollars to make roofs at Magnuson solar generators; might be a way to get some roofs repaired in the process.

Commissioner McCaffrey would like to hear more about the work with Seattle Public Schools. She appreciate the number of jobs specifically in metrics; they speak to impacts of their work. She would love to stay abreast of their plans to partner with SPS.

Todd and Lisa to send report link and GSP report.

Is SPR willing to look at remote work for employees who do not have to be in person? Superintendent Aguirre says yes, SPR is looking at this.

Old/New Business

Commissioner Byers updates the Board that SPR staff proposed having the Conservation Corps to building tiny homes for people currently encamped in the parks. Taking advantage of a budget proviso in the state budget. Senator Frockt is in a key position to help that along.

Commissioner Herrera thanks SPR for their emotional labor and for being so nimble and responsive to community needs.

Commissioner Herrera is appreciative of the retiring commissioners and really looks up to them and has learned so much. Commissioner Farmer agrees and really appreciates getting to know them all. Commissioner Hundley says they will carry the mantle moving forward. Commissioner McCaffrey echoes the sentiments of her fellow board members and says they will be missed and there will be a big hole moving forward.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourns at 8:15pm.