



Minutes

Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

Via WebEx

Thursday, March 24, 2022

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

Attendance

Board Members Present: Akita, Brockhaus, Herrera, Mays, Contreras, Farmer, Umagat, Thomas, Faller, Sivarajan, Watts, McCaffrey

SPR Staff and Support: C. Williams, Finnegan, Hoff, Burtzos, (Jacque Knight, Karen Royea - Hearing, Speech & Deaf Center)

Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Farmer calls meeting to order at 6:33 pm. Introductions of the Board Commissioners and of SPR staff. Thanks to Brian Judd, Shanyanika McElroy, Hazel Bhang-Burnett, and David Takami for their support of the subcommittee meetings.

Public Comment

Tim Motzer – 33 cent solution would eliminate the need for debt service financing. Both PD planning proposals do include debt service financing. The last four Park levies did not require debt service funding. The 33 cent solution offers an option that does not require payment of interest.

Peter Colino – Green Lake Community Center has badly deteriorated. The community needs a new facility. Additionally, please immediately allow non-motorized scooters, rollerblades, and bikes for youth under 16 years of age on the inner loop at Green Lake. Even when the Outer Loop is finished, it is unsafe for scooters and rollerblades. Third, please open the Green Lake Pool. The pool is a vital part of our community.

Sharon Kosla – Garfield Super Block coalition. This project sits at the heart of the central district, which was redlined, and is overdue for equity investment. We are asking SPR to increase its equity funding of this project; our goal is to fund 80% of this project through public funds. These investments are critical to making this project a reality.

Scott Shinn – Director of Parents for Skate Parks, advocating for a district skate park at Rainier Beach Playfield. We have developed a proposal and construction cost estimate for this skate park thanks to hard work during the pandemic and grant funding. Please keep the RBP skate park on your radar; this facility will fill a gap in the city's skate park system and provide access to healthy recreation and community space for the neighborhood.

Judy Tangen – Concerned about community outreach not reaching the most vulnerable members of the community, especially the immigrant population of Seattle. Glad to see that outreach is a priority on the

funding plan. Also, have followed Tim Motzer for a long time and support his comments; his heart is in the right place for Seattle's parks, and gives his support.

Gerry Ronningen-Fenrich – Representing neighbors along Lake Washington Blvd. Asking for SPR to partner with SDOT to create a raised(?) pedestrian crosswalk from the parking lot and to help slow traffic along the street. Consistent speeding is an issue. Also voices support for the Open Lake Washington Boulevard initiative.

Kristen Smith – Advocates conversion of community centers into climate resiliency hubs and smoke relief centers. Investing in upgrades to community centers will help give students and families, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, access to safe places to go during emergencies.

Amy Avnet – Speaking in favor of shared use of Green Lake Inner Loop. The wheels ban discriminates against kids, teens, families, and adults who use wheels by choice or by need. The current policy creates a monoculture of able-bodied adult path users. Please end the wheels ban and re-paint the path for clarity.

Robert Stevens – Curator and creator of Garfield Super Block project – Project grew from a clean-up and restoration project. We are shovel-ready but do not have the funds to move beyond the beginning here. We need funds to continue this work.

Neil Anderson – Last year's heat wave was deadly but it could have been much worse. Many people were able to seek shelter in community centers and libraries. Climate change increases the likelihood of multiple concurrent crises such as fires and smoke events. Advocates for the conversion of community centers into climate resilience hubs.

Don Harris – There is a backlog of dead trees in our developed parks. We are losing over 300 trees per year. At a rate of planting only 100 new trees per year, we cannot reach a state of no net loss or make a dent in the backlog. We need to plant over 500 trees per year and care for them over 5 years to reach a state of no net loss. Urges the Board to provide adequate funding for tree renewal in our developed parks.

Tom Skoog – Advocates funding for conversion of community centers into climate resiliency centers and decarbonization projects. Lifelong Seattle resident; thinking about the safety of the next generation of Seattle children. With extreme weather events becoming more likely, this work is more important now than ever. Asks Board to simultaneously fund projects that decrease electricity use and move buildings off fossil fuels.

Benjamin Osterland – Crown Hill resident; wants to see Community Centers become climate resiliency hubs, with 100% renewable heating, cooling, and HVAC. The centers in Seattle need to be places of refuge, especially in places that are disadvantaged. The Miller Microgrid program is encouraging. Asks the Board to help transition Community Centers to 100% renewable energy as soon as possible.

Cesar Garcia – Lake City Collective goal is to have a park that fits the needs of their families. People from many cultures and languages participated in meetings to share their vision for a renovated Little Brook Park. This culminated in a formal renovation plan. Our community deserves a better park because it has been underserved for so long. A renovated Little Brook Park will make it right for hundreds of families who dream to have a place for recreation in their own neighborhood. This is a matter not only for equity, but also for what we call "recreation justice."

N. – Young resident of Lake City neighborhood. Sometimes Little Brook Park is covered with dog poop and I can't enjoy the grass field. The playground is really old. I want a park that everyone can enjoy again and where someone can feel at home. We also need a fully funded park because the neighbors cannot put together the money to renovate the park.

Guadalupe – Long-time neighbor of Little Brook Park. Over the years, the neighborhood population grew a lot. Most are BIPOC and low income. Because of park pollution, kids cannot play safely, and adults cannot exercise. We ask you kindly to fully fund the park renovation so everyone can enjoy the only open space this community has.

Nancy – Retired children's librarian at Lake City Library. Partnered with Lake City Collective and other groups to bring community programs to Little Brook Park. These groups have had to make do with spaces in a park that is not fully usable. Only a small part of the park is usable and there needs to be engagement of neighbors of all stages of life. This potentially wonderful green community space needs to be fully funded and developed along the lines of the plan that Cesar mentioned.

Approvals

Consent items: March 10, March 24, April 14 meeting notes. Commissioner Farmer asks for motion to approve all items. Commissioner Herrera moves; Commissioner Umagat seconds the motion to approve. There is no discussion or question about the material. The motion passes without opposition.

Approved: Meeting minutes from the 3/10/22, 3/24/22, and 4/14/22 meetings of the Board.

Superintendent's Report and Response to public comment

Thank you to Jessica, the Board, and everyone who is here to provide public testimony tonight.

Green Lake Loop Trail: The trail is available for users who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices for accessibility.

Lake Washington Boulevard: I'm asking Andy Sheffer, who is on this call, to investigate a raised crosswalk on Lake Washington Boulevard. We plan to bring this issue back before the Board of Commissioners sometime in the late summer or early fall.

I want to echo Jessica in her words of thanks and praise for Board members who worked in subcommittees during the past few weeks to come up with their recommendations for Park District funding. They worked hard and they worked collaboratively to review the 41 funding proposals that will help move our department forward over the next six years. Congratulations!

A big shout out too to Seattle Parks and Recreation Directors, Subject Matter Experts and the team of subcommittee facilitators who guided and supported this process. This process continues tonight and over the next few weeks before I send our recommendations to the Mayor.

We've got a packed agenda tonight but I did want to highlight a few events last week in celebration of Earth Day.

Last Thursday, Seattle City Light and Seattle Parks celebrated the completion of a rooftop solar array and solar microgrid at Miller Community Center. The microgrid will provide backup power to this important community center during electrical outages. Among the special guest was Washington Governor Jay Inslee.

On Friday, we were honored to host President Joe Biden at Seward Park where he signed an executive order to protect old-growth forests on federal lands. Seward Park is home to a stand of old growth trees. A big shout-out to our grounds and maintenance crews for getting the park “Presidential-ready”.

Also on Friday, we celebrated Earth Day at Denny Park where an electrical pedestal has been installed to allow food trucks to hook up to electricity rather than using generators. We also provided music from buskers and lawn games.

Subcommittee Reports

Finnegan provides brief refresher on subcommittee Target A (\$30M) and Target B (\$15M).

Commissioner Umagat speaks on behalf of Subcommittee 1: Enhancing Access and Services. After establishing consistent vocabulary and definitions, the subcommittee worked collaboratively to set evaluation criteria for proposals. These criteria included: return on investment, measurable performance metrics, impact on customer experience, and does the proposal add, maintain, or pilot an effort, as well as baseline funding. Subcommittee members created independent versions of their Option A proposals, which were then reconciled into the final proposal presented today. A similar process was followed for Option B.

Commissioner Contreras speaks for Subcommittee 2: Restoring Clean, Safe & Welcoming Parks & Facilities. Subcommittee 2 used a quantitative-driven prioritization process. Many of the proposals considered were scalable. Commissioners prioritized based on percentage of total requested funding, with highest consideration given to safety and critical infrastructure needs. Medium priority was given to proposals that could be incorporated into larger initiatives or capital projects.

Commissioner Sivarajan speaks on behalf of Subcommittee 3: Investing for the Future. Prioritization based on qualitative measures, including equity scores, how well the proposals adhere to the mission of the parks levy, opportunities for additional funding, whether projects could serve as pilot projects, and unintended consequences of projects (i.e., green gentrification).

Board Discussion of Subcommittee Proposals

Contreras and Sivarajan both aver that each proposal was worthy of funding and express desire for increased funding.

Commissioner Herrera thanks subcommittee members and SPR staff for their hard work. Herrera asks for clarification on pre-commitments.

Finnegan explains that pre-commitments were often informed by the direction set by decisions made during the first funding cycle. Every effort was made to keep the decisions and priorities intact from that decision. Williams adds that SPR was in the position of making use of a sizeable gift of a building that would become a community center, and that dictated some actions.

Commissioner Farmer discusses perspectives regarding Option B proposals. Farmer and Herrera suggest de-emphasizing or even excluding Option B proposals in the initial recommendation to City Council.

Watts asks for clarification between the Parks District and the General Fund in terms of its mission and vision. Williams explains that the Parks District was set up to mitigate wild swings in the general fund budgeting. The Parks District does not require recurring voting; a levy would. The Parks District was not intended to fund flashy projects, but to be a stabilizer and to help with backlog of projects.

Herrera reiterates that the criticism inherent to the Parks District as a funding model is that it lacks oversight and accountability, so it is incumbent on the Board to act as responsible stewards of public funds, and to maintain the public trust. Williams reiterates this point; although the Parks District has a maximum \$.75 taxing limit, it is also beneficial to keep that figure as low as possible to maintain public trust.

Sivarajan advocates for the highest funding recommendation possible. Several proposals, especially related to capital projects, seem to fundamentally change character when funded at a scaled-down level. Contreras concurs with Sivarajan, and advocates for leaving Option B off the table.

Watts explains that Subcommittee 3 leaned very heavily on the possibility of additional funding from other entities to meet Option B budget limits. Asserts that SPR staff can also lean on BPRC for inter-agency outreach. Brockhaus concurs, and avers that it was heartbreaking to have to cut down funding to Option B. Proposes that some language could be added to recommendation to make clear why Option A was so highly preferred.

Akita concurs with Brockhaus and Watts. In the spirit of Parks advocacy, Akita would not want to see a lower level of funding proposed; it is the responsibility of the Board to make recommendations in line with the spirit and mission of the Parks organization. Mays agrees with Brockhaus and Watts.

Thomas prioritizes funding all the options. Underfunding a proposal almost seems like an insult. Option A seems like the only reasonable way to follow through.

Herrera emphasizes the flexibility of Parks District and General Fund dollars. McCaffrey requests clarity, possibly for the next similar project, concerning other potential sources of funding and flexibility of revenue. Umagat explains that this sort of clarification was basically what Subcommittee 1 did in their fourth meeting, in dialogue with SMEs. Farmer explains the responsibilities of the Chairs' Recommendations, which will incorporate the feedback from this meeting.

Finnegan explains that many of the proposals do include some leveraging of other funds. McCaffrey asks about current political climate regarding Parks funding and the general appetite for smaller, targeted projects as opposed to larger, ongoing ones. Herrera responds in his opinion that at this moment, with the city facing several crises (pandemic, racial reckoning, climate crisis), even Option A may not be enough to provide the services or keep up with the growing public demands on the Parks and Recreation organization.

Sivarajan highlights that Conservation Corps project offers opportunity to name one harm caused by SPR by way of sweeps and encampment clearing, and that while SCC is an opportunity to make some positive contribution, this is an area in which SPR engenders some distrust and ongoing harm. Brockhaus seconds Sivarajan's point and points out that the same budget constraints occur even with partner funds.

Brockhaus asks for clarification regarding Smith Cove development. Finnegan and Farmer provide details about the project. Sivarajan explains that low equity contributed to the subcommittee's decision not to fund this proposal. Williams offers perspective that waterfront/beach property are a little bit different than parks without water; these tend to have a more regional attraction.

Thomas asks for clarity regarding co-chairs' thought process on their prioritization. Herrera affirms support for subcommittee recommendations and explains that much of the next phase will involve finessing the recommendations and framing them in the best possible way to present them to the Mayor. Farmer adds that co-chairs have the additional time to consider public comment or other feedback.

Watts draws contrast between Gateway Park, Duwamish Waterway Park, and Smith Cove, asserting that the proposed funding for Smith Cove would have an even greater impact at either of the other locations given those neighborhoods' decreased regional abilities to fundraise locally. Additional funding, if available, should go to equity fund to help local fundraising efforts in all neighborhoods.

Old/New Business

Farmer outlines next steps: May 12 public hearing, May 19 BPRC proposal recommendation. NB: there will be NO MEETING on May 26th.

Farmer leads the Board in a round of applause to thank them for their hard work through this process.

There being no further business, Farmer adjourns the meeting at 8:17 pm.