



# Minutes

Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom, 100 Dexter Ave. N/remote via WebEx

Thursday, September 22, 2022

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

Present: Umagat, Farmer, Brockhaus, Contreras, Thomas, Mays, Watts, Herrera

SPR Staff: Williams, Finnegan, Burley, Hoff, Burtzos

## Welcome and Introductions

Commissioner Farmer calls the meeting to order at 6:31 pm.

Farmer welcomes the Board, guests, and audience members, and gives land recognition.

Every community owes its existence to generations past who contributed to making the history that led to this very moment. We recognize that our parks and recreation facilities are on the traditional, ancestral and unceded land of the Coast Salish peoples. We express gratitude for their stewardship of this land – today and tomorrow, since time immemorial. We acknowledge the oppression and dispossession of Indigenous communities and remain committed to racial, social, and environmental justice as we reflect on the past. We honor the resilience of the First Peoples and the land itself.

Approval of consent items – 8/11/22 Meeting Minutes; 9/22/22 Meeting Agenda. There is no discussion or suggestions for these documents. Commissioner Brockhaus moves to approve both items. Commissioner Umagat seconds. The vote to approve is unanimous. The motion carries.

### ***Adopted: 8/11/22 Meeting Minutes; 9/22/22 Meeting Agenda***

Commissioner Farmer leads introductions of BPRC members and SPR staff.

## General Public Comment

Annie Tegen – Lower Woodland Park – Lincoln High School does not have its own fields and relies on SPR space for athletic activities. We have a need for a new pitching mound at Lower Woodland. We would like to partner with SPR to raise funds for a turf mound.

Susan Foley – Green Lake inner loop – Advocating to reinstate wheels around Green Lake. My son has special needs and benefits from the inner loop, and while the outer loop is a step in the right direction, there are some wheels that really need access to the inner path. Pedestrians only is leaving a lot of people out.

## Superintendent's Report

Acting Superintendent Williams responds to public comment and asks Paula Hoff to connect Christopher Powell (SPR) with the information about Lower Woodland Park pitching mound effort.

Welcome Board members, staff, and members of the public. A lot has happened since our last meeting in August.

Teachers' Strike assistance: Last week, Seattle Parks and Recreation distributed sack lunches to more than 2,000 school age kids over two days in response to the teachers strike and delayed school start. We also provided drop-in recreation activities at 8 community centers. Students returned to school on Wednesday, Sept. 14. Thanks and kudos to the amazing mobilization effort by our staff in a time of need.

Tsutakawa Gate reinstalled at Arboretum: We were thrilled attend a ceremony last week to mark the installation of the refabricated Tsutakawa Memorial Gate in the Washington Park Arboretum. Made from bronze and featuring an intricate design, the original gate was created in 1976 by internationally renowned Pacific Northwest artist George Tsutakawa. In mid-March, 2020, just two days after the pandemic-related closure of the Arboretum's Visitors Center, the beloved Memorial Gates were stolen and cut up for scrap. damaged beyond repair.

Pools to Reopen: This week SPR will reopen Evans Pool (Green Lake), Queen Anne Pool, and Medgar Evers Pool to the public for open swim, lessons, and programming. The pools had been closed for repairs or improvements.

Senior Staff appointed: I am very pleased to announce that that our two Acting Deputy Superintendents have become permanent in their positions. Andy Sheffer will serve as Deputy Superintendent of Operations and Michele Finnegan will continue as Deputy Superintendent of Policy. In addition, I appointed Desiree Tabares to the role of Human Resources Director.

#### Park District Process Continues

The process to develop a Six-Year Spending Plan for Cycle 2 of the Seattle Park District is nearing conclusion. On Sept. 6, Mayor Harrell presented his Proposed Plan. (Some highlights are listed on the slide.) He kept most of the BPRC recommendations intact. City Council consideration and modification of the plan continued throughout this month and Park District Board President Andrew Lewis presented his proposed plan on Monday, Sept. 19. A discussion meeting of this plan and possible amendments is set for this Friday, Sept. 23 with a potential vote scheduled for next Tuesday, Sept. 27.

#### Budget Process

The Mayor will submit his Proposed Budget to City Council early next week. The final vote on the budget will occur in late November after City Council review and public hearings.

I wanted to let you know about 3 upcoming community events to mark the start or completion of 3 SPR projects.

Groundbreaking for the new Green Lake Small Craft Center will take place this Saturday. The new 10,800 SF boathouse will increase capacity for programs through expanded boat storage and additional instructional space. It will be fully accessible, which makes possible the launch of Seattle's first public adaptive rowing program and expansion of a para-canoeing program. The new facility will provide restrooms, locker facilities, and areas for off-water instruction and a community meeting space.

SPR and the Morgan Junction Community Association invite the community to celebrate the renovation of Lowman Beach Park on Saturday, Sept. 24 at 10 a.m. This project removed the remainder of the seawall at the park and created new shoreline benefitting the natural environment, the park and the visitors who can access the beach in a much easier way.

On Oct. 1 at 10 a.m., SPR and the community will celebrate the completion of phase one of the new Cheasty Mountain Bike and Pedestrian Trails. This community-initiated project created Seattle's first forested mountain biking trails. Led by the Friends of Cheasty Greenspace at Mountain View and built under the guidance of Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, the trails offer new opportunities for families and neighbors to access nature through our urban park greenspaces. This three-year pilot project has been split into two phases, the south and north loops. SPR will be monitoring the south loop trail usage while constructing the north loop. SPR is collecting data to better understand trail usage and people's experience using the trails.

Williams responds to a question from the room regarding security for the Tsutakawa Gate. SPR is looking into security cameras and other options.

Brockhaus asks whether the success at Cheasty Greenspace will lead to other programs elsewhere. Williams acknowledges that the Cheasty program was a pilot, and that Seattle's green spaces are not the same as Olympic National Park – we live in a dense urban area, and land does need to be used and activated thoughtfully. This is precisely the kind of issue that the BPRC could productively debate. Brockhaus is excited to have this discussion. Watts contributes that the Cheasty project was unique in restoration efforts, particularly since mountain biking can be very destructive to the environment. However, with the proper safeguards in place, this kind of program can really be a win-win.

Farmer thanks Williams for the report and is excited to possibly attend some of the upcoming events.

## **Updated Tree Policy: Public Hearing and Possible Vote**

Acting Superintendent Williams introduces the discussion.

At the July 14th meeting we presented our draft update to the Tree Management Policy. You (the BPRC) supported the changes incorporated, which brought our policy in line with industry standards and incorporated climate change and equity considerations, among other updates.

Since we presented, there has been even more support for our urban forests. The recent proposal for the Park District includes additional funding for the Green Seattle Partnership and \$4.2 million in new funding for tree replacement in developed parks. Today we are holding the official Public Hearing and asking for your vote in support of this updated policy.

### **Public Hearing**

Sharon Levine – It is important that SPR follows the city guideline that two trees be put in for every tree that is destroyed or removed. Additionally, there needs to be some kind of tracking system in place to measure if new trees will match or exceed existing canopy of replaced trees. It should also be a policy that replanting plans be carried out in a reasonable time.

David Moehring – The 2035 city plan calls for a citywide tree canopy of 30%; currently the canopy cover is at 28.1%. That difference represents approximately 1,000 acres, or 150,000 medium-sized trees. This goal is a big challenge, and I am hoping SPR can budget more for urban canopy renewal.

Todd Burley, SPR Sustainability Advisor, quickly reviews the presentation that was originally given at the July 14 meeting of the BPRC.

Watts asks about details regarding climate-resilient tree species for repopulation and coordination with other departments and entities. Nich Johnson, SPR lead arborist, replies that coordination and outreach is ongoing.

Research into climate-resilient species is coming from southern Oregon and central Washington; however, to preserve native species planting, we are looking not at bringing in different species but at seeds and seedlings that are already acclimatized to hotter, drier summers. Burley adds that a group called the Forest Adaptation Network is actively working on this question, as well.

Farmer clarifies that tree management and tree replacement policies are separate, though related. Farmer also expresses gratitude for the addition of equitable services language into the revised policy. Finally, Farmer relays message from group Trees for Seattle Parks, who wishes to be included by name in the new policy. Burley expresses that Trees for Seattle Parks has engaged in great advocacy but their relationship with SPR has not solidified to the point of inclusion in a high-level policy statement. However, general recognition of the group's positive impact and work. Williams and Farmer agree.

Herrera moves to adopt the updated tree policy. Umagat seconds. The vote to approve is unanimous. The motion carries.

***Adopted: Tree Management Policy 5.6.1.2 (September 1, 2022)***

## **Green Lake Inner Path Use: Public Hearing and Possible Vote**

Acting Superintendent Williams introduces the discussion.

After our presentation to you on July 14th about SDOT's Green Lake Outer Loop project and the Inner Loop discussion, you asked us to come back to move forward with a decision on what to do for the use guidelines on the Green Lake Inner Loop. Since that time, we held six Listening Sessions to hear from different user groups – pedestrians, small wheel users, and cyclists. We also received about 200 emails and had many phone conversations with the public. People appreciate and care deeply about the Green Lake Inner Loop!

You should have all received a memo describing what we heard and some options to discuss today. In short, we shared one option that keeps the current wheels restriction and another option that returns to the historic shared use nature of the path. Various considerations were also described for you to think about.

Today is the official public hearing of this policy change, and we look forward to your questions and recommendation on how to move forward with a possible vote.

### **Public Hearing**

Jim MacConnell – Speaking in support of returning the Green Lake inner path to pre-Covid usage while advocating for improved signage to help users adapt to the old rules. Although I was heartened by the beginning of the process towards changing the current policy, I was saddened by the presentation of a binary choice in the summary memo which presented keeping the current situation as equally valid with returning to the pre-Covid rules. This is a mischaracterization, and frankly belies a hidden agenda. We can do better.

Rachel Schaefer – I am policy manager with Cascade Bicycle Club. We support allowing bikes and other wheels on the inner loop. We appreciate ideas such as a speed limit and focusing resources on education and building community and norms around how to share the trail. Not everyone has the same needs, and that's the beauty of having multiple loop trails.

Don Loseff – Earlier this afternoon I submitted a petition with over 600 names calling for the immediate removal of the signs banning wheels from the path. However, I believe that the power of our cause comes not from the number of names on an online petition, but the logic and correctness of the arguments made by

members of the skating community, the adaptive cycling community, and even some of the Board itself. You'll still hear a presentation outlining several options, but I urge the Board to do the right thing tonight and simply restore the use of the path to the entire community.

Eleanor Bartolomeo – I am a beginner rollerblader, and the outer loop does not feel like a safe option. The outer loop has many obstacles and risks for small wheels. If you cannot bring back wheels unconditionally, please consider options other than an all-out ban. The park is not crowded at all days and times. Finally, suggested alternate sites are generally unsuitable or too far away to be practical.

Diane Ray – The 2021 outreach efforts regarding the inner path were doomed to fail because the pandemic prevented some groups from engaging in the outreach efforts. I represent the 1 in 100 Seattleites who are children. Currently, there is chaos at Green Lake because bikers and skaters no longer have any safe place to be. There is no oversight.

Trip Allen – I've lived at the north end of the lake for 20 years, and I can tell you that attendance at Green Lake is not close to its pre-pandemic levels. I'm a pedestrian on the path primarily. But my late wife and I agree that pedestrians tend to be the biggest problem on the inner path. When wheels were in the walking lane, it was because they were having to weave around people in the wheels lane. With better signage, I think you'd have a better outcome.

Kathleen Warren – I'm a long-time skater at Green Lake, all times of day. People generally know how to share. Putting skaters on the street with commuting bicycles is not safe, and enforcement on the outer loop is going to be a nightmare. What I really want to mention is equity. First, skating is inexpensive and inclusive. For older women, who grew up pre-Title IX, many of us learned to skate instead of playing organized sports. Finally, my physical therapist said to me, never stop skating.

Stephanie Spence – No matter your age, family status, ability, or which wheels you use, we all deserve a safe space to recreate. The temporary use restrictions take that opportunity away from a lot of people. Many people rely on the inner loop for health and safety and fun. We haven't seen any data on collisions or other accidents. I believe that updates to signage could go a long way towards making the park welcoming and activated for the largest group of Seattleites.

William Yardley – My 20-year-old son is an adaptive cyclist. We support restoring wheels on the inner loop. We have never had a safety issue. The ban on wheels discriminates against people with disabilities and anyone who cannot ride or bike elsewhere. However, there's more to it than just the ban itself. The inner path offers birdwatching, sunsets over the lake, and space for quiet reflection. Not everyone rides and rolls just to get from Point A to Point B. Please tell me Seattle is still about the journey, not just the destination.

Debbie Keith – I live in Wallingford and work up north. I use the outer trail to commute. And I don't go rollerblading anymore in Green Lake because it is too confusing, and I don't like the dirty looks I get from people. So I've kind of given up on rollerblading since Covid, which makes me really sad. I feel really strongly about bringing wheels back to Green Lake, and I never saw any issues when it was clearly marked.

Todd Burley, SPR Sustainability Advisor, provides general overview and update regarding feedback received since July 14 meeting.

Path use changes were implemented initially as emergency use changes beginning 4/17/2020; this required reauthorization every 60 days. The current interim use rules took effect 11/4/2021 and do not require

reauthorization. Currently, the usage rules permit pedestrian two-way traffic, strollers, and wheeled equipment by people with disabilities.

SDOT conducted a broad survey and worked with us to incorporate 4 questions related to the inner loop. From these responses, we saw that most respondents used Green Lake for exercise, the majority of respondents walked on the inner loop, and the majority would be satisfied maintaining pedestrian-only use on the inner loop. There was also strong support for allowing young children and families to bike and skate on the inner loop path.

We also conducted our own, less formal outreach. The majority of outreach to SPR expressed support for returning to pre-pandemic usage rules. Another consistent trend in this correspondence was a desire for enhanced and clearer signage. I also conducted six listening sessions with several different groups of path users. Generally, attendees seemed to believe that people could get along on the path.

After consideration, SPR came up with two recommendations to present to the Board for your consideration tonight.

#### Option 1: Return to Historic Use Regulations

- Non-motorized wheels (one-way)
- Pedestrians (two-way)
- 10 mph speed limit
- New banner signs to explain usage rules
- Code of Conduct emphasized

#### Option 2: Keep Existing Interim Regulations

- Pedestrians Only (two-way)
- ADA use permitted
- Would require new in-pavement signage

Williams thanks the members of the public and acknowledges the dedication and commitment of many commenters. With that context, Williams proposes a modification of SPR's recommendation: to return wheeled users to the Green Lake inner path, based on the extreme level of support for returning the path to its former use [*BMB – this revised recommendation essentially offers only Option 1 above to the Board for consideration*].

Thomas asks whether there was any effort to alter the path's usage in 2018-2019, or whether the Covid-19 pandemic was the primary driver of the usage change. Burley clarifies that Covid was the primary cause. Thomas inquires about enforcement. Burley explains that enforcement would fall to SPD, but formal enforcement is limited to nonexistent. Thomas thanks Burley and voices his support for Williams' revised recommendation.

Watts expresses some difficulty reconciling the data collection methods used by SDOT and SPR and points out that the way information is gathered can influence the outcome of a survey. Watts identifies speed limits and wheel size as two areas for nuance. Generally, Watts is in favor of returning wheeled use, but is cautious and sees an opportunity to promote decorum and civility and advocates better signage and an intentional transition back to the pre-pandemic use.

Herrera relates an anecdote about how community enforcement of the current use rules decreases inclusivity and advocates greater collection of data before permanently instituting a drastic change as banning wheeled use long-term. Herrera also expresses concern about precedent and supports reinstating wheeled use to the inner path, while reminding the Board that community enforcement is the mechanism for communicating the Code of Conduct.

Contreras shares his experience that the Green Lake inner path is frequently a high-use asset, but that the current rules create an environment where some users feel that they might have to identify themselves as having a disability. Contreras suggests that expanding the width of the path and varying path texture could help create a better experience for all users. Contreras supports reinstating wheeled use on the path, as well as expanding the trail and providing better signage and textures.

Brockhaus thanks the commenters and acknowledges the varied viewpoints she has heard in the debate. Brockhaus also supports returning wheeled use to the Inner Loop path, specifically mentioning children and others learning new skills. Brockhaus also mentions that the SDOT outer loop is outstanding and brings a new state of the world to Green Lake, particularly for commuting. She highlights Watts' suggestion to promote positivity and inclusivity as part of the transition back to pre-pandemic usage rules.

Mays mentions his long history of recreating at Green Lake and supports reinstating wheeled use on the inner path.

Farmer echoes the need for clear and visible communications; people are very on edge for many reasons right now, and this usage change should be a cause for celebration, not greater distress.

Burley shares that he repeatedly heard a desire for positive messaging in the listening sessions leading up to tonight's meeting.

Williams acknowledges that if the Board votes to return pre-pandemic use to the inner loop path, there will be people who complain, but notes that those people by and large did not come to the meetings to make their voices heard. Williams suggests that park ambassadors can help remind users of the change in rules, but it will take a little longer to change signage.

Umagat emphasizes the importance of intentional signage, both with regards to messaging and placement. That said, Umagat is in support of allowing wheeled use back on the inner path.

Contreras notes that if the path usage reverts to pre-pandemic rules, there will likely be an outpouring of people who will say that they wanted to have only pedestrians on the path. The rollout and messaging of this change is especially important for this reason.

Farmer agrees with Contreras; the Board must try to be mindful of all park users, not just those who are loudest by virtue of being in the room.

Umagat proposes a broad motion to allow wheels back on the Green Lake inner path.

Farmer asks if the motion should contain greater nuance and direction for the Parks Department.

Burley suggests that a parameter, such as a speed limit, can always be lowered but never exceeded. For example, a 15 mph limit can be lowered to 10 mph by the department without another vote by the Board.

Williams suggests that SPR staff can return to the Board with an implementation plan.

Watts asks for greater clarity in the motion to anticipate and head off incivility in the transition from one usage to another.

Williams reiterates his idea for an implementation plan, which would include ideas for communication to the public, signage, staff intervention, park ambassadors, and so on. Watts appreciates the clarification.

Farmer asks Williams for a timeline if there is going to be an implementation plan.

Williams commits to presenting ideas for implementation at the next meeting of the BPRC and acknowledges that even this small delay will be disappointing to the members of the public who have advocated in favor of returning to pre-pandemic usage rules at Green Lake. Watts expresses his hope that the win of returning wheels to the path will soften the blow of another short delay.

Farmer confirms that the next BPRC meeting will be Thursday, October 13.

Herrera is fine with the chaos of Green Lake and compares it to New York's Central Park as an example of democratizing use. Herrera sees very little real risk with returning to pre-pandemic usage immediately. It would be nice to let wheels users know that they can use the path tomorrow.

Brockhaus suggests that the Board follow SPR's lead on implementation, since SPR staff will be the ones to hear any complaints. She acknowledges that three weeks [before the next meeting] is actually a very short time to develop a new policy.

Williams suggests November 1 as a final deadline to implement any change in policy regarding the Green Lake inner loop path.

Thomas asks for clarification regarding the October 13 meeting. Will there be a second vote on an implementation plan? Williams responds that it will likely just be a short briefing.

Watts moves that the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners requests Seattle Parks and Recreation to create an implementation strategy to return wheeled use to the Green Lake inner loop. Contreras seconds. There is no discussion. The vote to approve is unanimous. The motion carries.

***Adopted: The Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners requests Seattle Parks and Recreation to create an implementation strategy to return wheeled use to the Green Lake inner loop.***

## **Old & New Business**

Farmer asks for a look ahead at the upcoming schedule.

Thomas asks if the BPRC calendar is accurate. Burtzos will update and remove meetings that are canceled due to holidays.

There being no further business, Farmer adjourns the meeting at 8:19 pm.