



## Minutes | Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

1600 S Dakota St, Seattle, WA 98108/Seattle Parks and Recreation Horticulture Center

Remote accessibility via Webex

Thursday, January 26, 2022

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

### Attendance

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

SPR Staff: Diaz, Finnegan, Schulkin, Hoff, Burtzos

### Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

Co-chair Farmer calls the meeting to order at 6:31 pm and provides logistical instructions for in-person and remote attendees.

Farmer reads the land acknowledgement.

Seattle Parks and Recreation acknowledges and affirms the indigenous Coast Salish as the original caretakers of our landscape, who nurtured and shaped today's parkland. We honor their legacy with gratitude and appreciation and will safeguard their knowledge and stewardship as enduring treasures to promote community welfare, cultivate inclusive expressions of nature and recreation, and commit to land acknowledgment for each ensuing generation.

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves around the table.

Farmer introduces the consent items: meeting minutes from the 11/10/2022 meeting, and the agenda for tonight's meeting. Umagat moves to approve both documents without revision; Herrera seconds. There is no discussion. Farmer calls for a vote. The motion passes unanimously.

#### ***Adopted: BPRC Meeting Minutes 11/10/22; BPRC Meeting Agenda 1/26/23***

Commissioner Contreras joins the meeting and introduces himself.

None of the registered public commenters being present at this time, Farmer emphasizes that equal weight is given to written public comment submitted in advance.

### Superintendent's Report

Interim Superintendent AP Diaz delivers the report.

Welcome Board members, staff and members of the public. This is the first time I am presenting the Superintendent's Report to the Board, and I want to reiterate how excited I am to lead this great organization.

I am constantly amazed by our beautiful and vibrant park system and the incredible opportunities for people of all ages to recreate and enjoy activities and events in our parks. I am also incredibly impressed and proud of the hard and excellent work of our 900-plus parks and recreation employees who help our parks and programs thrive and shine.

I'm very much looking forward to working with the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners now and moving forward. I greatly appreciate the time, effort and expertise that you bring to the board on behalf of the residents of Seattle.

I also want to publicly acknowledge and thank Christopher Williams for his incredible leadership of the department over the years in several capacities including Interim Superintendent. I am grateful he is staying on with the department as Assistant Superintendent and Chief of Staff to be my partner in leadership and to help guide my early tenure at SPR.

I will be giving the Superintendent's Report today and later on in the agenda I will give another short presentation about the 2023 department priorities we are discussing with the Mayor's Office.

### **Winter Response and King Tides**

As you know, the weather was much in the news in Seattle in late December -- as it was elsewhere in the nation.

**Snow and ice response:** Before Christmas, snow and frozen rain combined to create a literal manifestation (and new meaning) of the "Seattle Freeze." Like the rest of the city, Seattle Parks and Recreation staff were very limited in where and how we could travel on city streets. Before and after the freeze event, our crews were busy de-icing community center entries and parking lots and helping SDOT crews with snow and ice removal. Our Tree Crews responded to several incidents involving fallen trees or tree branches blocking roadways.

**King Tides:** At the end of December, an historic "King Tide" combined with melting snow and heavy rainfall to cause minor flooding at some of our parks, particularly Golden Gardens in northwest Seattle and Alki Beach in West Seattle. Some water reached the interior of the Alki Bathhouse. SPR crews responded quickly after the tide receded to clean up minor damage. No other damage was reported, though debris that washed up on the beach will take several weeks to clean up. SPR's South Park Community Center was on standby to provide space to the American Red Cross and other organizations in case it was needed during the significant King Tide flooding event in that community.

### **2023 SPR Budget**

The City Council adopted the City's and department's budget in late November 2022 including the Park District.

Our combined adopted operating and capital budget next year is about \$329M with over 2/3 coming from the Park District and the General Fund.

Our other funding sources include the Park and Recreation Fund which receives revenues from program fees, space rentals, grants, and so on, Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) which supports our capital program, and you can see that the Waterfront represents a sizable portion of the budget next year given the timing of construction.

The rest of the budget is supported by smaller funding sources like Sweetened Beverage Tax and King County Levy resources, among others.

## **Park District Board Final Meeting**

After approving the City's 2023-2024 budget, City Council reconvened in its role as the Park District Board to approve the 2023 Park District budget.

The investments were identical to those the Park District Board passed in late September with when they approved the 2023-2028 funding plan (which you helped develop).

Since then, the SPR team has been hard at work preparing to ramp up these new investments, including project design, strategy development, preparing for hiring, and more. You'll hear more about our ramp-up activities from Michele later tonight.

## **RFP for Seasonal Concession**

We were pleased to release a Request for Proposals (RFP) for Seasonal Concessionaires in Parks on January 13. The department is seeking proposals for both food concessions and non-food concessions. Permit locations will include many Seattle parks including Alki Beach, Cal Anderson Park, Carkeek Park, Jefferson Park, Lake Union Park, Lincoln Park, Mounger Pool, Magnuson Park, Seward Park, Volunteer Park, Golden Gardens, along with several lifeguarded swimming beach locations. Proposals are due on March 3 and we encourage small businesses, women and/or minority businesses to apply. More information is available on our website [www.seattle.gov/parks](http://www.seattle.gov/parks)

## **2 Pieces of Legislation**

**Japanese Garden Renewal:** In early January this year, the City Council approved the renewal of a long-term agreement between the City and Arboretum Foundation for the operation of the Seattle Japanese Garden. As you may know, SPR owns, operates and maintains the Garden. The Foundation fundraises and organizes programs, volunteers and events. The new agreement is for 10 years and includes a new section on public benefits to ensure and enhance public access to the Japanese Garden.

**State Route 520 Agreement:** In December the Council passed legislation approving an agreement between the City and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) regarding WSDOT's project to improve State Route 520 adjacent to the Washington Park Arboretum. The agreement involves property transfers from the City to WSDOT and 27 acres from WSDOT to the City, expanding the Arboretum.

## **Park Maintenance**

**Wheelchair mats at Golden Gardens Beach:** SPR maintenance staff recently installed wheelchair mats at Golden Gardens Beach that proved to be a big hit with the public. A "Rave" about the mats was published last Sunday in the Seattle Times.

**Comfort Station Cleaning:** SPR maintenance staff have developed a schedule for comfort station cleaning to ensure each facility is getting a deep clean at least twice a week, and the extra attention has made a significant difference! Pictured on the slide is the men's restroom at Seacrest which gets a lot of traffic. A deep clean covers the entire space from ceiling to floor and all fixtures. The new schedule has also been helpful for reporting graffiti and anything broken in the comfort stations.

**Spruce Street Mini Park Play Area:** Construction of a new play area and accessibility improvements are now under way at Spruce St. Mini Park in Seattle's Central District. The work is expected to be completed in June of this year. The neighborhood is encouraged to use the nearby Pratt Park play area during the park closure.

Also part of the design is the gorgeous and colorful mural created by artists Hasaan Kirkland and Damon Brown, pictured in this slide. The artwork will be celebrated with the completion of the park renovation.

Montlake Playfield Turf Replacement: Construction started last week.

### **Other Project News**

Hiawatha Playfield Turf Replacement bid opening on 1/18 - the apparent low bid was almost exactly the Engineer's Estimate. Construction will start in May 2023.

Recent bid openings are now pending final award and notice to proceed (NTP) which is anticipated later in February:

SDOT-SPR I-90 Trail & Judkins Station Access Lighting & Stairs Improvements (installs 77 new pedestrian lights along I-90 Trail and new staircase to connect Hiawatha PL S with the trail (associated with new light rail station).

Pathways Park (Burke Gilman Playground) MAJOR redesign of the park; this will be our flagship facility for Universal Adaptive Play in partnership with the Seattle Parks Foundation and community.

Don Armeni Boat Ramp and Pratt Center Roof Replacement projects are being advertising for bid.

I'd be glad to answer any questions Board members may have.

### **Q&A**

Umagat asks whether the concessions RFP includes diversity goals. Diaz clarifies that the RFP process is public, but SPR outreaches specifically to minority-owned and women-owned businesses. Diaz is working to make DEI a larger part of all SPR contracting, whether formally or through targeted networking.

Watts thanks Diaz for the presentation and asks what level of coordination SPR has with Seattle's emergency hub shelters and plans, given the recent flooding and other possible disasters. Diaz shares that following the flooding in January, city leadership was able to debrief and do some learning together regarding emergency management. We never know when major events will happen, but it is likely that SPR will be involved in any major emergency relief planning. Watts follows up by sharing that the current emergency procedure is not transparent or well-communicated to the public; he shares that he would not know where to go in his own neighborhood in the event of a disaster. Farmer adds that there is a system of community hubs but believes that much of that work falls on the shoulders of volunteers, which may lead to uneven service and support across the city. Diaz will check with SPR communications staff regarding spreading this information more widely.

Herrera adds that as extreme weather events become more common, climate resiliency will continue to grow in importance. Herrera would like to hear updates about upcoming climate resilience projects that are in the works. Diaz defers on details for now, pointing out that Finnegan will be giving an update on the Park District investment progress. Diaz will also be pursuing federal funding for climate improvements and has begun conversations with Senator Murray's office.

Mays asks about the wheelchair accessibility mats at Golden Gardens Beach. Have similar mats been placed at Alki Beach? Should SPR look into marking these mats with disability decals (such as for accessible restrooms)? Diaz confirms that mats have been installed at Alki but is unsure about labeling use and practice.

Umagat suggests that clear signage might help make the purpose of the mats clearer. Farmer concurs with Umagat and Mays regarding signage and expresses support for expanding the program further. Finnegan mentions that Matthews Beach also has a wheelchair accessibility mat.

## Public Comment

Farmer calls for public comment now that technical concerns have been worked out to some extent.

Peter Breyfogle – maintenance concerns on Burke-Gilman Trail – The Washington Supreme Court just issued a decision abandoning the "standing near" test under the Recreational Use Immunity Statute. Under prior case law, so long as a dangerous condition on a recreational trail could be seen while "standing near" the condition, the trail owner was immune from liability. The Court in *Schwartz v. King County* ruled that the issue of whether a condition is "latent" must take into account what the user of the trail perceives while engaged in the recreational activity itself, and is not determined simply by being able to see the condition while standing near it. This decision should motivate public and private entities to fix known, dangerous conditions on their recreational trails. As I informed you of at a recent meeting, a group of us entered 13 Find It/Fix It trail surface safety issues on the northernmost 4 miles of the Burke-Gilman in Seattle. Since then, these have all been marked CLOSED on the Find It/Fix It application with no further comments or communication. I do not think this is an appropriate use of the system or response to citizen's safety concerns.

Diaz acknowledges and emphasizes the importance of trail maintenance for both safety and recreation purposes, and thanks Breyfogle for his advocacy. The Burke-Gilman Trail is on the maintenance schedule for this year and emphasis will be placed on the area pointed out in the comment.

Farmer asks if there is any way to improve two-way communication to users of the Find It/Fix It app. Finnegan explains that SPR is working closely with the Finance and Administrative Services Department to integrate the Find It/Fix It app with the Asset Management Work Orders system, which will hopefully improve overall communication. This change is slated to occur in February.

## Metropolitan Park District Update

Michele Finnegan, Deputy Superintendent of Policy and Finance, gives the presentation.

In September, when Council acting as the Park District Oversight Board passed the Park District budget, they did so with what is called Resolution 51, so get used to hearing that term. Resolution 51 had policy direction, reporting instructions, funding restrictions, and so on for us. A few of the things we have coming up, including a report about the Park Rangers, follow this resolution. Our next big deadline is by March 31st, we are to supply performance metrics for each of the initiatives included in the plan.

We also want to take this opportunity to be more clear about what people can expect from us and how we want to be accountable to the public and our elected officials. Some of our accountability metrics will continue to improve after March 31, but we want to provide clarity so people know what to expect. We will also provide ramp-up information about our work in 2023 on the detailed line of business level. Our vision of the report for March 31 is to have a reporting plan that talks through our lines of business and provides budget, performance metrics, and so on.

Not every question will be answered by March 31. For example, our new vandalism response program is establishing a baseline this year, so we may not know exactly what the goal is yet. Some of the lines of business are actually citywide, so we're participating in the planning effort, but we won't be reporting on how we support the citywide plan until the citywide plan is actually written. Some things changed a little bit in

Resolution 51, so we do need to go back and do a little bit of re-scoping. Finally, we'll be hoping to share with people where they can stay updated. We'll be coming to you directly with those updates, but more publicly where those updates will be available.

Finally, these are a few topics that we potentially come and do a deeper dive with the BPRC even before we get to that March 31 deadline, if not soon after:

- Park Rangers
- Equitable Park Development Fund
- Comfort Stations
- Urban Forestry
- Climate Conscious Buildings
- Resolution 51 Responsiveness

We're doing a lot of refinement and planning internally right now, as well as engaging with the Mayor's office on certain issues. We will continue to update you all and bring issues to these meetings. And then we also have a few early deadlines with Council and we also want to check in with Councilmember Lewis, making sure that the March deliverable meets expectations from his side.

Watts asks to view timeline again. Finnegan clarifies that SPR leadership is already scheduled to present the March 31 deliverable to Council (PD Oversight Board) on April 3. Follow-up from that meeting would likely be in June.

Herrera thanks Finnegan for the presentation and commends the department for the exciting work. Herrera asks what the biggest challenges for delivery of the constellation of Park District projects are at this point. Finnegan responds that hiring and the interconnectivity of finite resources are two concerns. However, "it's a good kind of stress." Diaz notes that these challenges are not unique to SPR and remains confident in the delivery of the projects. Herrera asks if SPR is considering alternative project delivery methods. Diaz confirms.

Contreras asks if outside contractors or consultants would be considered if SPR cannot meet hiring thresholds to complete some projects in-house. Diaz cannot provide a specific answer right now but that is an option that is on the table. More clarity will be available after the city concludes labor negotiations. Generally, SPR wants to keep as many options open as possible.

Meng asks for clarity regarding what organizations SPR asks for budget review. Finnegan clarifies that the City Budget Office is the primary review organization.

Farmer thanks Finnegan for the presentation and offers the BPRC as a sounding board for the department's presentations.

Farmer requests a change to the agenda to accommodate Rachel Schulkin, who has just arrived. There are no objections.

## Communications Update

Rachel Schulkin, SPR Communications Manager, leads the presentation.

SPR Communications includes: media and press releases, branding, internal and external communications, social media, phone and email correspondence, speaking event coordination, and periodic reporting. I'm going to give just a brief overview of our 2022 Communications statistics since it's so early in Q1.

The SPR website received over 3 million views last year. The most popular pages were the community pools, toddler gyms, and Discovery Park. There is higher web traffic during the summer months and less during the winter, when people tend to stay inside.

Our Twitter followers decreased this year, thanks to new Twitter leadership. The Mayor's office and Seattle IT are working on an exit strategy if Twitter were to fold or become unusable for ethical reasons. Our top tweets of the year were emergency announcements and spotlights on staff projects.

SPR maintains over 40 Facebook pages, and we gained over 1,000 followers this year. Our most popular Facebook posts included job postings and event highlights.

We are also active on Nextdoor and Instagram; Instagram seems well-suited for SPR since it is a picture-based platform. Event posts also did very well for us on Instagram.

Our blog received over 350k views, with the most popular posts being those about programs, schedules, and events. We also have a regular newsletter that reaches over 39k subscribers.

We answer 200-500 calls per month, though this number is declining. We are looking into text and chat features in the future. When we get a call, we try to provide information or connect the caller with the right person to help them. We also receive about 200 emails per month, and this number is not declining.

We receive 1-3 media inquiries per day; top stories of 2022 included:

- Beach hours
- Pickleball/court sports
- Lifeguard shortage/hiring
- Park District budget
- Climate change and urban canopy, etc.

The Communications team accomplished a number of great things in 2022:

- Added alternative text to all social media posts, newsletters, and blogs
- Made all new PDFs on the website accessible for screen readers
- Reimagined our internal communications strategy
- Revived tools shelved during the pandemic
- Piloted new marketing and advertising strategies, such as radio ads and print cartoons
- Improved commitment to language access and accessibility

This year, we hope to accomplish several exciting goals:

- Establish SPR presence on Tik Tok and LinkedIn
- New Logo and branding guide
- Next level staff engagement
- Updated Sharepoint (City of Seattle internal website)
- Increase Instagram following
- Other short form video projects
- Promoting good/positive news stories to established media outlets

Farmer congratulates Schulkin and the department on the accessibility accomplishments and the great public engagement in 2022. Farmer asks if Board members could be included in some level of SPR internal communications, and if there is a central site to find SPR events that is consistently maintained. Schulkin

points out that SPR does maintain an online department-wide calendar but confirms that it could be better utilized.

Umagat asks about how SPR handles phone calls or other communications regarding homelessness. Schulkin clarifies that right now, all communications regarding homelessness route through the Customer Service Bureau for an inter-departmental response. Schulkin reports that this unified communications setup does seem to have led to a reduction in complaints to SPR direct lines. Schulkin also emphasizes that communications response regarding difficult issues such as homelessness can be emotionally draining for SPR staff. She relates that some complainants must be reminded that Seattle's Park system is for all people to enjoy, even those that do not have a permanent residence or are acting in a way that might make some people uncomfortable.

Herrera asks if there is any coordination between the expanding park ranger program and direct non-emergency public communication options. Schulkin clarifies that this conversation hasn't happened yet, but some changes to SPR emergency response are under way. After George Floyd's murder in 2020, SPR altered its instructions for when to direct complainants to call police; now, complainants are told to call 911 when they observe "dangerous illegal activity" rather than any illegal activity. There are ongoing conversations about how to foster community-based conflict resolution, rather than resorting to calls to SPR or SPD for enforcement. In the past several years, there has been an uptick in conflict reports to SPR for minor incidents that may have been handled between park visitors prior to the pandemic. Schulkin shares her hope that the expanded Ranger program can fill a need here.

Diaz thanks Schulkin and the Communications team for the great work in 2022 and into the new year.

## Seattle Parks and Recreation Department Priorities

Interim Superintendent AP Diaz leads the presentation.

I want to share with you all a little bit about how we're going to move forward in 2023 with our department and our organization.

We've updated some of our taglines and come up with some identity statements to help guide our department. If you remember, our department was, "Healthy People, Healthy Environment, and Strong Community," and I wanted to see how we could use a new adjective, since everything could be described as healthy. So just an updated version of our goal is just to create and serve Healthy People, contribute to a Thriving Environment, and a Vibrant Community. And then just kind of guide our organization by defining principles: "Public-serving organizations work best when their purpose driven and guided by defining principles. For this reason, Seattle Parks and Recreation is proud to present organizational affirmations to drive our strategic direction and illuminate our commitment to be a shining park and recreation system for all residents and visitors."

I was so glad to see that the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners includes a land acknowledgement in your proceedings. This is a personal passion of mine, and not all cities and organizations include this yet. Our staff reminded me today that we needed to include "water" in the land acknowledgement, so that has been added now.

Our vision statement makes special note that we are a parks *and* recreation system. We often use "Parks" in the vernacular, but we want to continue to highlight the importance of recreation and the work and energy

that the recreation staff puts in. We're building community we're coming together to recreate, play, and I envision our department being a place that fosters collaboration.

Our mission is to provide employees and the public with safe and accessible places for residents and visitors to work, recreate, rejuvenate, and enhance quality of life and wellness.

And then equity and inclusion. It is very important to the work that we do in the City of Seattle, in our department, and in every neighborhood to focus on committing to advancing equity and social justice. We do that by growing a dynamic, diverse workforce and developing strong investments and growth opportunities. I also felt that it was important to include here, "we acknowledge and pledge to close disparities created by historical practices which often hindered workforce development, environmental justice, access to quality open spaces, programs and facilities." This certainly is a legacy in Seattle – redlining, uneven access to quality park spaces – so we work really hard to continue to acknowledge it and continue to do better.

I also want to go over some changes to our org chart. Christopher Williams now serves as our Assistant Superintendent and Chief of Staff, and then we've added another Deputy Superintendent. Michele Finnegan is our Deputy Superintendent of Policy and Finance; Andy Sheffer is our Deputy Superintendent of Operations, and Mike Schwindeller is our new Interim Deputy Superintendent of Planning and Capital Development. Rachel Schulkin continues to lead our Public Affairs Division and Desirée Tabares continues to lead our Human Resources Division.

Farmer thanks Diaz for the updates.

Diaz offers a sneak preview of conversation and plans for updated SPR-branded swag.

Umagat asks about the level of flexibility SPR has to customize its web page within the City of Seattle web pages. Diaz acknowledges that there are limitations, but the goal is for the department pages to be as fun, interactive, and easy to navigate as possible within the confines of that template. Diaz also shares his goal of piloting a Parks and Recreation smartphone app to make interacting with the department easier and to streamline communications. Umagat is excited by this notion. Watts notes that Washington, D.C., has an app that could serve as a model, especially in its focus on the health benefits of park use.

Watts expresses interest in helping craft or provide feedback on the new department mission and vision statement, as well as the statement on equity and inclusion. Watts would like to see a commitment to greater equity reflected in the department's mission and vision, instead of that commitment being something off to the side.

## Old & New Business

Contreras double-checks that meeting remotely will continue to be acceptable. Farmer assures the group that the hybrid meeting model will continue. Farmer also notes that this meeting is taking place away from the Superintendent's Board Room at the Dexter office, which has been a goal for some time. Umagat notes that the hybrid meeting option is a step towards greater accessibility. Burtzos affirms that IT infrastructure and programming scheduling are the two main limiting factors for remote site availability.

Umagat asks about Board member recruitment. Hoff updates that nominations have been submitted to Council for two new members, but there are still a couple of seats available.

Farmer asks if any of the Board members have connections to Seattle's indigenous community for possible outreach or Board recruitment. Farmer acknowledges that the indigenous community is far from monolithic, but feels that the Board could benefit from such representation and perspective.

Watts thanks Hoff for the update on recruitment and asks for clarity on his term.

The next meeting will be on February 9, 2023, at 6:30 pm at 100 Dexter Ave N.

There being no further business, Farmer adjourns the meeting at 8:25 pm.