



Minutes|Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Zoom

Thursday, August 14, 2025

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Attendance

Present: Diamond, Lerer, Meng, Mays, Baum (co-chair), Chisholm Clare

Absent: Flinn, Nakamura (co-chair), Leonor, Haile-Leul

SPR Staff and Presenters: Diaz, Sheffer, Merriam, Lunney (Arboretum Foundation), Judd, Burtzos

Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

Baum calls the meeting to order at 6:30 pm and provides logistical instructions for in-person and remote attendees.

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves.

Baum reads the land acknowledgement.

Noting that a quorum has not yet been achieved, Baum defers approval of the consent agenda.

Public Comment

The BPRC heard public testimony on the following topics:

- Pickleball at Magnuson Park
- Future Blue Angels (fighter jet) SeaFair permitting
- Use of Denny Blaine Park

A quorum of members now present, Baum introduces the consent agenda: meeting minutes from the 7/10/25 BPRC meeting and tonight's meeting agenda. Mays moves for a vote to approve the consent agenda. The vote is unanimous in favor.

Adopted: 7/10/25 BPRC Meeting Minutes

Adopted: 8/14/25 BPRC Meeting Agenda

Superintendent's Report

Anthony-Paul (AP) Díaz, Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, delivers the report.

SPR Reorganization

I am pleased to share some exciting "Good Things are Happening Ahead" news for the Superintendent's Executive Team and SPR.

The Next and Best Chapters for Christopher Williams: After 33 years of service, our cherished and beloved Chief of Staff Christopher Williams is retiring! Christopher's last day in the Department will be October 15, 2025. I will be sharing more accolades and appreciation of Christopher in weeks ahead, as well as information about opportunities to celebrate his service. In the meantime, feel free to reach out to him and congratulate him.

Welcoming Our New Chief of Staff and Assistant Superintendent, Alex J. Vaughn: I am pleased to announce the appointment of Alex J. Vaughn to serve as our new Chief of Staff and Assistant Superintendent (starting October 15, 2025). Alex comes to us with a wealth of policy, legislative, and administrative experience and will make a great addition to our Executive Team and SPR. Alex's first day was this past Monday and he began working in tandem with Christopher as an appointed Deputy Chief of Staff through October 15 to oversee the transition to his new role where he will provide administrative leadership over our Executive Team and assist in the overall oversight, governance, and management of our Department.

Elevation of Michele Finnegan to Senior Deputy Superintendent: I am equally pleased to announce the elevation of Michele Finnegan to serve as a Senior Deputy Superintendent. In this elevated role, Michele will continue to lead our Policy and Finance Branch while also guiding and providing focused matrix management in the development and oversight of our highest priority policy, legislative, administrative and fiscal duties.

New Planning and Capital Development Director: As of July 30, Jessica Murphy is our new Planning and Capital Development (PCD) Division Director. Jessica brings a wealth of public-service experience to our Department. She began her career as a lifeguard with SPR in the late 1990s and has led exciting capital projects such as Waterfront Park, the Elliot Bay seawall, and the First Hill Streetcar. We are happy to have her on the team.

Environmental Stewardship Division: I recently announced the creation of the new Environmental Stewardship Division to support and lift up SPR's approach to land management, assessing environmental risks, long-term planning, and seeking funding for environmental initiatives. This division will also provide leadership across the City to enhance efforts in carbon sequestration through tree planting, stormwater management, and other key areas. This new position will post soon.

Legislation Highlights

On Wednesday, SPR took three exciting pieces of legislation to the Parks, Public Utilities, and Technology Committee for consideration and potential, future votes from the full City Council:

The Kite Café at Golden Gardens: A 5-year Concession Agreement with Kite Café to activate the Golden Gardens Bathhouse with food and drink service.

Magnuson Café and Brewery: A 10-year Concession Agreement continuing our relationship with this popular restaurant at Magnuson Park. The public benefits include decarbonizing the premises from natural gas to electric within the initial term, maintenance of a shared public restroom, and support of Magnuson Community Center programming serving neighboring residents.

Proposed Westlake Park Improvements: This legislation authorizes SPR to accept much-needed, donated improvements, services, and project management from the Seattle Parks Foundation. These improvements include, removal of the fountain and arch, renovation of electrical infrastructure, installation of planting areas, paving restoration, modifying the stage for accessibility and functionality and installation of perimeter vehicle crash mitigation measures.

Seafair Preparation

Preparing Natural Areas for Seafair & Lake Washington Boulevard Restoration Work: In the lead up to the Seafair Hydroplane events, the Parks Ecology Team's Natural Area Crew completed important restoration and maintenance work along Lake Washington Boulevard. Staff focused on repairing fencing and reinforcing restoration sites. The team also worked diligently to trim and clear the slopes along the boulevard to clear sightlines, enhance public safety, and keeping the area looking welcoming for the thousands showing up to enjoy Seafair.

One Seattle Day of Service

Parks Rangers Supporting the One Seattle Day of Service: On July 12, several Park Rangers proudly supported the One Seattle Day of Service event at Hoa Mai Park, hosted in collaboration with Friends of Little Saigon. The Rangers played a central role in maintaining a safe and welcoming atmosphere for volunteers and supporting Mayor Bruce Harrell's visit and speech to attendees. His words underscored the importance of community partnership and shared responsibility for public space care.

Play Area Renovations

SPR has issued a Notice to Proceed to Kessel & Associated for construction on a three-play-area renovation package at View Ridge Playfield (Northeast Seattle), Ward Spring (Queen Anne), and Bryant Neighborhood Playground (Northeast Seattle). This bundled project allows us to efficiently deliver improvements to three neighborhood play areas in a coordinated way.

Garfield Super Block Project

SPR has also issued a Notice to Proceed (NTP) to A-1 Landscaping and Construction for the Garfield Super Block project. The contracted work addresses the unfinished portion of the 2005 Garfield Super Block Master Plan. The scope of work includes a 0.34-mile accessible loop path (promenade) around the playfields, earthwork and footings for future artwork, tree protection, and replacement of the playfield turf. The scope also includes demolition of the existing restroom building and other site features, construction of a new restroom facility, renovation of the play area, and installation of a multi-use sport court for tennis and basketball. A climate-adaptive garden will also be added, and existing on-site memorial boulder will be removed and reinstalled.

Swim Seattle

The Swim Seattle initiative aims to remove barriers to swimming opportunities, centering the communities who need it most through the combined efforts of SPR, YMCA, No More Under, Associated Recreation Council, and other drowning prevention partners. Our 2025 outcomes for the first 6 months of this year include:

- 1,118 scholarship-eligible participants taking a FREE beginner swim lesson series when offered early registration.
- 951 participants signed up during this early access, priority registration period.
- 186 participants mastered all swim competency skilled to move on to advanced lessons.
- Over 1,000 FREE teen swims during our Teen Late Night program.

I look forward to providing ongoing updates from this important initiative.

Fall Program Registration

Seattle Parks and Recreation's Fall 2025 program brochures are out, and registration began this past Tuesday, August 12. Please consider signing up for one of our programs and help us spread the word about all of our program offerings.

Invitation: Big Day of Play

SPR has hosted the annual Big Day of Play since 2007 as a celebration of our city's diversity, and to encourage neighbors, community, and families to build relationships and be active together. It is a day to truly play your way! We are hosting this year's event at Rainier Playfield on Saturday, August 16 from 12 – 5 p.m. I would like to personally invite each BPRC commissioner to join us for this event and have some fun with us this weekend.

Diaz pauses for questions from the Board.

Chisholm Clare asks if the City is still experiencing a lifeguard shortage. Diaz notes that this issue seems to be largely alleviated.

Baum notes that the Board would like to extend its thanks to Williams in person. Diaz assures the Board that they will have a chance to do so.

Partner Spotlight: Arboretum Foundation

Elizabeth Lunney, Interim Executive Director of the Arboretum Foundation, delivers the presentation.

The Arboretum Foundation promotes, protects, and enhances the Washington Park Arboretum for current and future generations by strengthening and building a diverse and engaged community of donors, volunteers, and advocates.

The Arboretum is a highly treasured, widely used community asset and a horticultural, environmental, recreational, and cultural resource for the region.

The Arboretum Foundation is the nonprofit heart of the Washington Park Arboretum and Seattle Japanese Garden. As one of three managing partners, alongside Seattle Parks and Recreation and the University of Washington Botanic Gardens—we help sustain this unique, 230-acre living museum.

The Arboretum is a public park that is free and open every day. It's also a botanic garden, an outdoor classroom, and a global conservation site, with more than 40,000 plants from 107 countries.

The Foundation raises money to fund plant care, science education programs, and volunteerism. We also support accessibility and community engagement efforts, produce cultural programs, and advocate for urban green space.

How the Foundation Supports Seattle Parks

Master Plan Projects

- Duck Bay restoration
- Pacific Connections garden
- Japanese Garden gatehouse
- Arboretum Loop Trail

Visitor Connections

- Educational & Horticultural Programs

- Talks & Tours

Japanese Garden Cultural Programs

- Free First Thursdays & Family Saturdays
- Moonviewing, Hatsumomiji
- Tea House

Washington Park Arboretum has been managed as a public-private partnership since 1934.

The 2001 Arboretum Master Plan purposes:

- Education, both formal and informal
- Conservation of plant species
- Recreation experiences

Maintenance and operations responsibilities are shared across partners. The Arboretum Botanic Garden Committee (ABGC) provides coordination and collaboration at leadership and project level.

The Arboretum Foundation and University of Washington Botanic Gardens are in discussions about the potential to consolidate operations under one new, united organization.

- Create a better experience for our visitors
- Support more opportunities for learning and engagement
- Unlock a new level of fundraising support

UW would remain a key partner, as owner of the collections and a key stakeholder in the Washington Park Arboretum. The Arboretum Foundation, transformed, would be a stronger partner for Seattle Parks.

Upcoming Projects include:

- Waterfront Trail Restoration Project
- Ishigaki Wall & Accessible Walkway
- Pacific Pathway Accessible Trail

Per 2013 Cooperative agreement, the 28-acre Peninsula currently used by WSDOT for the SR-520 bridge project will be returned to the Arboretum in the coming years, now 2031. A 2022 MOU with ABGC partners set a funding mechanism for the first steps in reintegrating the Peninsula with the Arboretum, including mitigation dollars from WSDOT and dedicated City funds. Public support will be essential to Foundation efforts to raise additional funds from private sources. The peninsula's proximity to city and transit connections offers a chance to respond to what we've heard from the community about their desired experiences and connection opportunities.

A 2023 state-funded survey identified community needs and interests, with a focus on potential development of the Peninsula:

- 92% of respondents reported they are highly likely to recommend visiting.
- They most value the Arboretum's trails, wildlife habitat, and preservation of plant species.
- Most people visit to have a social experience in a beautiful place. It's also cited as a popular place to view plants and wildlife, to enjoy a bit of recreation, or to get away for a peaceful moment.

What Our Community Wants to See Next

A more accessible, more diverse Arboretum with:

- Improved sense of belonging and inclusion
- Better transportation options
- More accessible facilities and amenities
- Increased active and social programming
- Collaboration with and recognition of the Coast Salish peoples

The Montlake Peninsula provides an opportunity to meet many of these needs, coupled with other ongoing improvements through the Arboretum, including new accessible trails and improved wayfinding.

Join us!

- Music in the Arboretum - August 20
- Moon Viewing - September 5 and 6
- Talks & Tours: Arboretum Creek Watershed - September 9

www.arboretumfoundation.org

Lunney pauses for questions from the Board.

Mays asks if traffic accessing SR-520 interferes with Arboretum visitation. Generally, traffic impacts have been lessened through infrastructure mitigation, and the hope is that trend will continue.

Chisholm Clare and Diaz express their gratitude to Arboretum Foundation staff and for the Arboretum generally.

Golf Management Agreement Briefing

Andy Sheffer, Deputy Superintendent of the Planning and Capital Development Branch, and Patrick Merriam, Golf Manager, deliver the presentation.

The City of Seattle owns four municipal golf facilities: West Seattle Golf Complex, Bill Wright Golf Course, Jackson Golf Course, and Interbay Golf Center. The Future of Seattle Municipal Golf is a strategy of course enhancements, sustainable operations, community partnerships, and technology integration. The goal is to create a municipal golf brand that feels unmistakably part of Seattle Parks and Recreation's mission, vision, and values. We want to position golf not just as a sport, but as a community asset that shares the same DNA as the rest of the park's system.

Seattle Municipal Golf Courses provide one of the few low-cost options to participate in or learn the sport of golf in the city. Costs to play at Seattle Golf Courses range from \$21-50 for 18 holes; rates vary based on season and demand. There is a user fee to use the full golf course, but each course also offers practice facilities (e.g. putting, chipping) that are free to use by anyone during open hours. Additionally, discounts are available for seniors, military, juniors, and people with disabilities. Without municipal golf facilities, people seeking this type of recreation are limited to private clubs or more expensive and more distant local municipal courses.

Under current partnership agreement, SPR partners with Premier Golf Centers, L.L.C. (Premier) to operate the four public golf courses. SPR provides on-course maintenance for all four golf courses

(including 23 FTE/27 positions in PSIE Local 1239). The operator provides full management of other operations including retail pro shop operations, merchandise purchasing and sales, food and beverage operations, banquets and events, alcoholic beverage licensing and operation, golf instruction programs including adult and junior golf programs and clinics, and management of other amenities such as miniature golf.

Golf program revenues have steadily increased since the pandemic, and are sufficient to cover Premier expenses, SPR expenses and overhead. Excess revenue is directed to capital improvements per Financial Policies. This has been achieved with *di minimis* public funding. Premier continues to provide open access to courses while still meeting revenue goals, including non-golf access such as Sledding and skiing on snow days and BBQ Jazz Nights at Interbay Golf Center.

Merriam and Sheffer provides detailed comparison of current and new agreement terms, emphasizing public access requirements such as non-golf uses of the courses, bringing golf activities to community spaces, and discounted golf access for youth and seniors.

Sheffer and Merriam preview the road ahead for Seattle golf. SPR and Premier anticipate an increase in rounds played, planned investment in course upgrades, expansion of youth programs, and an increase in revenue generated, which is already ongoing.

Sheffer and Merriam pause for questions from the Board.

Chisholm Clare asks if equipment rentals are available and affordable at all locations. Merriam affirms and provides details, highlighting the First Few program. Additionally, the revenue from the new agreement will in part go toward new rental equipment. Chisholm Clare also expresses appreciation for the brand unification with SPR.

Baum notes appreciation for multi-use activities on courses, and asks what the total dollar amount for deferred maintenance is at present. Sheffer conservatively estimates \$20M. Baum recommends being very transparent in reporting these needs and advocating for future capital funding.

Lerer asks for clarification regarding how much annual revenue SPR receives for capital improvements from Premier. Merriam clarifies that this is about \$100k annually.

Old & New Business

The Board discusses the possibility of returning to a 6:30 start time for BPRC meetings. No decision is made at this time.

Baum adjourns the meeting at 7:53 PM.