



Minutes | Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Webex

Thursday, March 23, 2022

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

Attendance

Present: Seyfried, Mays, Umagat, Farmer, Watts, Contreras, Stuart-Lehalle

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

Presenters: Foster, Melake

Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

Co-chair Farmer calls the meeting to order at 6:30 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 waters and 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.

Farmer introduces the consent item: the agenda for tonight's meeting. Umagat moves to adopt the agenda; Mays seconds. There is no discussion. Farmer calls for a vote. The vote is unanimous in favor. The motion passes.

Adopted: BPRC Meeting Agenda 3/23/23

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves around the table.

Public Comment

SPR staff received no requests for public comment before the deadline to sign up for the meeting. Farmer reiterates that written comments can be sent to benjamin.burtzos@seattle.gov at any time.

Superintendent's Report

Assistant Superintendent/Chief of Staff Christopher Williams delivers the report.

Williams thanks Watts for his years of service to the Board and reads a letter of thanks from Interim Superintendent AP Diaz to Watts.

Women's History Month: March is Women's History Month, and Seattle Parks and Recreation is proud of our history that honors the important contributions of women in our community.

Two examples of parks named after notable women:

- Flo Ware Park (in Central Area): Community activist Flo Ware was dedicated to improving public schools, health care for older adults, and employment opportunities for low-income individuals in the Central District and Leschi communities. In her lifetime, she was recognized with over 75 awards for her work. Flo also raised 20 foster children, served on the Seattle King County Economic Opportunity Board, and had her own talk radio show. A year after her death in 1981, Flo Ware Park was named in her honor.
- Myrtle Edwards Park is named for Myrtle Edwards, a Seattle City Councilmember during the 1950s and 1960s. Edwards promoted beautifying the City's park system, and during her tenure on City Council was elected as Council President.

Ballard Commons Park Opening: We successfully re-opened Ballard Commons Park on Saturday, March 11 and Sunday, March 12. You may have heard about protesters interrupting the speeches during the ceremony, but really the goal was to reopen the park to the public and there were a lot of families there to enjoy the space and enjoy the opening day activities, including music, games, and food. We plan a full slate of activation programs and events at the park this spring and summer. A big shout-out to SPR staff from nearly every division who worked hard over the past few months to make the park look beautiful and refreshed.

Waterfront Rules Update: The Board will be hearing a more in-depth briefing on this topic later tonight, but I wanted to summarize at a high level the transition of management of the Seattle Waterfront from Seattle Parks and Recreation to the Seattle Center, which begins this July.

- This included the authority to enforce park rules.
- A public hearing was held before the Central Waterfront Oversight Committee on this issue.

Spring preparation continues as we gear up for our busy season and an influx of park visitors to our regional and neighborhood parks. Work includes cleaning of restrooms; weeding, mowing, and edging; planting seasonal flowers and bushes; prepping and maintaining athletic fields; getting ready for the summer use of outdoor pools, wading pools and spray parks. As part of seasonal ramp-up 12 additional staff were recently hired and trained.

Alki Beach Tree replanting: Last week a palm tree was saved from South Park Community Center grounds and was replanted in a planting strip along Alki Beach. It looks great!

Hiawatha Playfield Synthetic Turf Replacement: SPR will begin construction for the Hiawatha Playfield turf replacement project in mid-May 2023 with completion in mid-August 2023. This project will replace the aging synthetic turf at Hiawatha Playfield in West Seattle and provide markings for baseball, soccer, football, and softball. Seattle Public Schools will provide safety fencing for the outfield when baseball and softball are in play. This project will include replacing the batting cage and resurfacing the rubberized three-lane running track.

Conservations Future Tax funding application: This week, SPR submitted three requests for land acquisition funding totaling \$3 million from 2024 King County Conservation Futures Tax Levy (CFT). Fifty years ago, Washington State authorized the CFT, allowing counties to collect a tax from landowners to protect open space. The County CFT Committee will recommend a slate of awards this summer. SPR's application includes:

- Hitts Hill additions in south Seattle (\$1M; 1.5 acres)
- Thornton Creek/Little Brook property in northeast Seattle (\$1M; .34 acre)
- Rainier Beach Residential Urban Village parcels in southeast Seattle (\$1M; .25-.35 acre)

Spring Egg Hunts, April 8: One of our most popular events of the year returning to a community center near you!

April 17-23: We're excited for spring and the annual celebration of our natural world: Earth Day and Earth Week. For a list of events, please visit our website at www.seattle.gov/parks

April 28-May 1: City Nature Challenge: SPR is teaming up with Woodland Park Zoo and other regional organizations to host the 2023 City Nature Challenge, an international community science project. This three-day event from April 28 – May 1 offers people the chance to make science observations about the species in their local park using the iNaturalist app, adding to SPR's biodiversity knowledge. Anyone can participate! More information, including trainings, is available at: <https://www.zoo.org/conservation/naturechallenge>.

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

Stuart-Lehalle asks about the life cycle of artificial turf, and how SPR decides on the replacement schedule and allocation of these resources. Williams clarifies that artificial turf has a usual life span of about 10 years, and all of the synthetic turf fields in the system are replaced on a rotation.

Watts asks for clarification regarding the locations of parcels included in the CFT grant proposals. Williams does not have the exact descriptions in front of him but reaffirms that SPR tries to acquire contiguous plots of land when possible. Burtzos will send a map of the parcels out to members after the meeting.

Leaf Blower Transition Update

SPR Sustainability Advisor Todd Burley gives the presentation.

The Department would like to move away from using gas-powered leaf blowers, but there are several things to consider and resolve before that transition can fully occur:

- Blowers are essential tools to maintain safe, clean parks;
- Gas-powered leaf blowers create pollution & noise;
- Alternatives exist, but are not on par yet in function;
- Battery technology requires infrastructure support;
- A transition from gas is good for people and environment.

Blowers are used to ensure safety, maintain drainage, manage leaves, and support staff (both time and labor). Direction from Council, the Mayor's office, and internal policy have moved us closer to this transition in recent years, including a budget proviso in 2023 that SPR would not purchase any new gas leaf blowers.

Currently, SPR owns 252 gas and 38 electric blowers. The electric blowers are mostly being used downtown. We are in the process of piloting equipment options and testing management alternatives. The Mayor's office is seeking a citywide transition to electric tools, with SPR taking the lead; an implementation plan is coming later this spring.

So far, we have completed an inventory of our physical assets. We will continue:

- Hiring contractor for infrastructure assessment
- Identifying preferred brand/system
- Conducting training for grounds crews on sustainable practices
- Developing equipment transition plan

Looking farther into the future, we will be pairing the transition of the blowers themselves with advancements to sustainable landscape design, transition to an electric fleet, and electrical upgrades at our facilities.

Williams highlights that the community has been asking for this change for years, but the technology is finally at a place where this transition can be considered effectively.

Umagat asks if studies on electrical grid capacity are being considered in tandem with other capital improvements already in the works to improve efficiency of any new projects. Burley affirms that this is the case, although there are some nuances to work out regarding upgrades to the electric fleet.

Mays asks about the impact on the morale of laborers making the switch from gas to electric tools. Burley relates that feedback has been generally positive regarding the quieter operations and decrease in exhaust fumes. Some negatives include the weight of the battery packs and decreased force. The hope is that technology will continue to improve to alleviate these negative impacts.

Seyfried inquires about training or specialized skills needed to maintain the new machines. Burley relates that the maintenance burden seems to be less for the electric machines. Operationally, the machines function much the same, and the change should not affect overall training very much. Seyfried notes that intentional park planning and design is a great component to integrate and can help alleviate some strain on the equipment down the line.

Watts asks if projections exist for battery turnover, recycling, and other forecast figures so the department can plan for improvements to battery technology, as well. Burley notes that this is a consideration for brand selection and purchasing.

Farmer commends the department for focusing on the respiratory and hearing health of workers throughout this process. Farmer asks if SPR can coordinate leaf management with the city's street cleaning schedules. Burley clarifies that SPR reuses most of the leaves that fall in the parks, but there may be times where this coordination may be helpful.

Waterfront Transition Update

Williams introduces Marshall Foster, Interim Director of Seattle Center, and Tiffani Melake, who lead the presentation on the transition of Waterfront Operations to Seattle Center.

Foster introduces the project and gives a brief update on the current status. The construction and development of the Waterfront represents the culmination of two decades of planning and work. One consideration that has come up recently is a large scale of events that requires high levels of staffing and crowd control. Seattle Center is better organized than SPR to manage the day-to-day operations of major events, so we have spent the last several years, along with Council, figuring out how and when to make this transition happen.

Melake provides an overview of the geographic area and projects involved in the transition. Pier 62 opened in 2020; the rest of the improvements are ongoing and scheduled to complete in the coming months and years.

David Graves, SPR Waterfront Liaison, outlines Waterfront Park operations. Friends of Waterfront Seattle (non-profit group) has been a key partner for the past few years. Pilot agreement with Friends: Friends responsible for social services, special events, programming, and activation. City responsible for daily and preventative maintenance. Shared responsibility for public safety. Waterfront Oversight Committee provides accountability and reporting to Council and the Mayor's Office. Melake notes that Friends is far exceeding what was expected of the group in the initial agreement; attendance for passive and active programming is outpacing expectations.

Starting July 1, the Waterfront will shift to Seattle Center for management and operations. Seattle Center is accustomed to M&O of an ongoing highly programmed and active public space, and has a full-time dedicated staff that can deliver a high-quality and inclusive experience. This shift was recommended by the Central Waterfront Oversight Committee in their 2021 annual report.

The 2023 Waterfront Operations Delegation Legislation (passed this January) does several key things:

- Delegates Waterfront operations and management to Seattle Center;
- Delegates authority to Seattle Center Director to enforce Waterfront Park rules;
- Extends the current License Agreement with Friends on Pier 62 Park operations

With the transfer, Seattle Center's Emergency Service Unit (ESU) will be onsite beginning 7/1. Additionally, Friends has contracted with REACH for services to the unsheltered population, and there will be increased safety coordination between SPD, DSA, SWHA, PPM, and the Aquarium.

The operations management agreement is a 6-year agreement aligning with the Park District cycle and the CEN/SPR interdepartmental agreement. It will expand to Waterfront Park in phases, and integrates a new performance standard as well as lessons learned from the pilot agreement.

Foster emphasizes the ramp-up in hiring for Seattle Center, especially as this transition nears. This is an exciting development for public safety in downtown Seattle.

Williams thanks the presenters, emphasizes that SPR is grateful for the collaboration, and feels that this transfer is coming at an excellent moment for the City and for SPR.

Mays asks how this management transfer will affect Greater & Greener 2024. Williams does not anticipate that the 2024 conference will be greatly affected, and this partnership may even be highlighted for that event.

Watts asks if plans are in place to expand pedestrian access and activation from the north end of the Waterfront to South Lake Union and Seattle Center. Graves explains that several capital and wayfinding projects, including the Overlook Walk and improvements to Victor Steinbreuck Park, are in process. Part of the goal of these projects is to ease pedestrian access. Foster notes that several major events are coming to Seattle in the next few years, and these events could help bring momentum to more projects.

Seyfried asks about how the transfer of responsibilities will affect staffing for Seattle Center, particularly regarding gardeners, horticulturalists, and other staff. Foster acknowledges the difficulties that Waterfront management will bring. The management model will need to be flexible and adaptive. Graves notes that the

opening will be in stages, so best practices can be incorporated as pieces of the Waterfront come online. Melake notes that new hires are budgeted and planned for in stages.

Farmer asks for clarification regarding central communication pathways for the Waterfront. Foster clarifies that the Waterfront Oversight Committee serves to focus on the equality, consistency, and inclusivity of the Waterfront programming and management.

Old & New Business

The Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners traditionally elects its leadership in March for the following year. After two years of serving as co-chair, Commissioner Farmer is stepping down from her position. Over the past several years, it has become a tradition for one co-chair to stay on for a second year to provide continuity.

Farmer reads rules for nomination and election of new co-chairs for the 2023-2024 year.

Contreras nominates Marlon Herrera and Justin Umagat for one-year terms as co-chairs of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners. Mays seconds the nomination of Herrera and Umagat. There is no substantive discussion.

Farmer calls for a vote on the nomination of Marlon Herrera to the position of co-chair of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners. The vote is 7 in favor, none opposed.

Farmer calls for a vote on the nomination of Justin Umagat to the position of co-chair of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners. The vote is 7 in favor, none opposed.

Adopted: The Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners elects Marlon Herrera and Justin Umagat to the position of co-chair, to a term through March 31, 2024.

Farmer thanks the Board and SPR staff for their support during her time chairing the Board, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The April 13, 2023, meeting of the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners is canceled by concurrence of SPR and the Board.

There being no further business, Farmer adjourns the meeting at 8:13 pm.