



# Minutes|Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Zoom

Thursday, July 11, 2024

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

## Attendance

Present: Steve Lerer, Ryan Baum, Joshua Seyfried, Justin Umagat (co-chair), John Flinn, Tricia Diamond

Absent: Amy Brockhaus (co-chair), Pasqual Contreras, Lauren Lanham, Phillip Meng, Stafford Mays, Whitney Nakamura

SPR Staff and Presenters: Christopher Williams, Lisa Nielsen, Kim Baldwin, Markeith Blackshire, Daisy Catague, Paula Hoff, Ben Burtzos

## Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

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

Umagat reads the land acknowledgement.

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves.

A quorum of members not being present, Umagat postpones tonight's consent agenda until the August 8, 2024, meeting.

## Public Comment

Public comment is offered on the following topics:

- Concerns about illegal parking and nuisance behavior at Denny Blaine Park
- Advocacy for improved athletic field maintenance, and suggestion that athletic field users have opportunity to present to and dialogue with Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

## Superintendent's Report

Christopher Williams, Senior Deputy Superintendent and Chief of Staff, delivers the report.

**Greater & Greener Conference:** The national Greater & Greener Conference hosted by Seattle and the City Park Alliance from June 21-25 was a phenomenal success – and the weather cooperated! It was sunny and warm for the more than 1,200 participants – a record attendance for this biannual event. Visitors experienced our parks and programs through “Weekend Tours” and “Mobile Workshops” and attended group and educational sessions at conference headquarters in the Westin Hotel. Opening and closing ceremonies were held at Pier 62 and Gas Works Park, respectively. The

next city to host Greater & Greener will be Austin, Texas, in 2026. Our thanks to the many staff members, community partners and volunteers (including several of you) who worked together to make the conference such a rousing success!

**Volunteer Service Day:** As part of the conference, Greater & Greener's Volunteer Service Day included a renovation of the play area and other maintenance-related projects at TT Minor Play Area. The project significantly increases the play value for the Capitol Hill community and beyond as the nearby school attracts kids from all over the Seattle region. SPR staff prepared the design, coordinated the prep work and made sure everything was in place for the big day!

**Thank you to grounds crews!** Our crews recently received a heartfelt letter of recognition from the Rainier District League. They wanted to give a shout-out to our amazing maintenance crews for their hard work in maintaining our fields. We couldn't be prouder of our dedicated team who constantly goes above and beyond to keep our fields in top-notch condition.

**Managing Japanese Knotweed at Wallingford Steps:** The NE District crew recently cut and wrapped the invasive weed known as Japanese Knotweed in plastic to isolate it and prevent spreading. They took it to the nearby transfer station.

**50 Years of Busking in Seattle:** 300 people enjoyed a free music event at Denny Park on June 15th. Included in the musical lineup were 3 talented buskers hired by Seattle Parks and Recreation. Buskers, including the legendary folk singer Jim Page, who in 1974 convinced the Seattle City Council to drop the requirement that street performers have a permit to perform.

**Parks Activation is in Full Swing:** We recently hosted a second movie night at Cal Anderson Park. Approximately 350 people attended a showing of the movie Chicago in the recently re-grassed sun bowl adjacent to the shelter house. Food trucks provided Chicago-esque themed food options. Two additional Center City Cinema events are scheduled at Cal Anderson.

**Jimi Hendrix Park:** Special thanks to the SPR Paint Shop crew, Steve Adams and Chris Ajeto repairing the Jimi Hendrix Wave Wall at Jimi Hendrix Park. Damage to the face was mostly due to vandalism, requiring the crew to do a lot of patch work due to divots made on the metal surface. It took a lot of masking to keep the details and lines nice and clean. An epoxy was used for the finish and the result turned out as good as new.

**Youth at Work (YAW) Interns Begin Building Tiny Home:** Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) Facilities Division Summer YAW Interns, Robel Gebrekidan and Kevohn Bolton began their internship this week at Westbridge Facility under the supervision of Facilities Supervisor, Deryl Bailey. For the next 7 weeks, they will be working closely with Freddy Mendoza in the Carpentry Shop to build a tiny home to learn and gain experience in the trades. Project tasks this week include installing the subfloors and floor insulation of the tiny home before they begin wall framing next week. Welcome Robel and Kevohn to SPR!

**Greater & Greener Maintenance:** I also want to give a shout out to our facilities staff for ensuring that our park facilities were looking their best for the Greater & Greener Conference. Making our system shines for almost 1,200 visitors from across the Country and internally requires a lot of work and they knocked it out of the park!

**Be'er Sheva Park Phase Two Community Engagement:** On June 30th, SPR is invited the community to help shape the Phase II Improvements of improvements at Be'er Sheva Park. Phase II of the Upland Renovations includes three main elements:

- Play Area Renovation - Renovate the existing play area to SPR standards and enhance accessibility and install new equipment for ages 2-5 and ages 5-12
- Fitness Zone - Installing a fitness zone with exercise equipment and an accessible lit walking path loop
- Basketball Court - Resurfacing the basketball court and replacing any damaged or missing equipment

The in-person engagement for the initial community feedback of Phase II Renovations at Be'er Sheva Park in June clearly demonstrated Seattle Parks and Recreation's commitment for a community's influenced project direction. This engagement, which included both online and in-person opportunities, allowed the community to share their vision for the next phase of renovations.

PCD staff utilized four existing community events in June and met the community where they are! Events included supporting the Recreating Henderson Street, BE SAFE Block Party, and Atlantic Street Center Juneteenth Celebration at the Rainier Beach Community Center. Additionally, staff partnered with the community for a Chocolate Sunday event at the end of June, a part of the summer series at Be'er Sheva Park that collaborates with a community committee for Be'er Sheva's new cultural stage and SPR's Activation team. Staff collected feedback from over 100 local community members, including youth and older adults.

Our primary goal is to create an urban space that that provides a sense of inclusivity and community, with opportunities for all to enjoy and recreate in this treasured park. As we move forward, the community's feedback will continue to be a crucial part of the design process.

By the end of August, we will present several design options from the design consultant Site Workshop, all of which will be based on the community's feedback. In late summer or early fall, residents will have the chance to weigh in on the initial design schematic selected by the Seattle Parks and Recreation.

**Lake City Floodplain Park Development** was awarded \$500,000 on June 28 from Department of Ecology's Centennial Clean Water Program 2025 Fiscal Year Funding Cycle. With this project, Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) is partnering with Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) and the non-profit Mid Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group (MSFEG) to develop a floodplain reconnection project benefiting water quality, in-stream, and riparian habitat, managing on-site stormwater, and creating an accessible natural area for the Lake City community, a heavily urbanized and underserved area.

**Park District Update:** On June 24, the City Council met as the Park District Board for the first time with the new Councilmembers. We provided a thorough "Park District 101" to orient new Councilmembers to the role, and also gave an update on 2023 financial and operational performance. This update aligns with our just-released 2023 Annual Report, which gives elected officials and the community a progress report on the first year of Cycle 1. We highlighted the following initiatives from 2023:

- The relaunch and expansion of the Park Ranger program

- Efforts to increase downtown activation through the Concierge program and through partners
- Strategies to keep park restrooms clean and accessible, and to accelerate the renovation and replacement of older restrooms
- Planning and quick wins on facility decarbonization
- The 45 completed capital projects, and our efforts to innovate project delivery

**Illegal vending in parks:** Our Contract and Administration Support Office has been working with the Park Rangers to address a rise in illegal vending and business operations in parks. With a full Park Ranger team, we are able to address illegal vending quickly and support the Concessionaires and Vendors who are legally permitted to operate in our parks through our peak season. Prior to this year our ability to follow up on illegal vending was severely limited. Thank you to our Park Rangers for being in the parks and supporting our Concessionaires and Vendors who are following the laws.

**Online picnic scheduling:** After two months launch of online self-reservation picnic options, 291 permits have been created for a total revenue of \$40,405. In addition to this revenue, this has saved our Event Scheduling team countless hours processing physical applications and has allowed their time and energy to go towards our more complex reservation applications.

## Upcoming Events

**July 11 and other dates:** Native Indigenous Presentations at City Hall Park: From June through September 2024 we are proud to present a series of noontime events and performances in partnership with Windz of Change Alliance. On July 16, Tony Bluehouse will perform Dakota Sioux powwow style songs and dances. See our blog for event dates: [parkways.seattle.gov](https://parkways.seattle.gov)

**July 16 and other dates:** Join us for the Dancing til Dusk program! A total of 17 evenings on various days of the week at various parks including Freeway Park, Hing Hay Park in Chinatown/International District, Cal Anderson Park, Westlake Park, Pier 62 and Ballard Commons. The summer schedule can also be found on our [Parkways blog](#).

Williams takes questions from Board members.

Flinn asks if BPRC could receive presentation or other information regarding Park Ranger scheduling and resource allocation, and congratulates Williams on the successful conference. Williams agrees to get Rangers program on a future BPRC agenda.

Umagat notes that the appendices and additional data underlying the annual report is available on the SPR website for those interested.

Williams introduces Ammanuel Haile-Luel, who recently passed through committee as the nominee for the City Council District 5 representative for the BPRC.

## John C. Little Award Presentation

Williams presents the 2024 John C. Little Award to SPR Recreation Leader Ron Brown.

John C. Little, Sr., served the community as a member of the Seattle Board of Park Commissioners from 1990 to 1997 and was known for his careful consideration of how proposed policies would affect youth. His motto was, "in order to improve the life of all people, you must improve the life of young

people.” Ron demonstrates that motto every day in his interaction with teens both in his role as a Recreation Leader at Loyal Heights Community Center and outside of work.

Ronald “Ron” Brown started working for SPR in 1983 as a temporary employee serving youth in the Kid’s Place program at Van Asselt Community Center. He then went to Rainier Beach Community Center, working for SPR and Seattle Public Schools as a Mentor/Hall Monitor when South Shore and Rainier Beach High School were on the same campus. From there, Ron went on to run SPR youth programs out of Hutchinson Field House and the Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing Center.

In 1993, Ron was hired by SPR as a permanent Teen Development Leader, serving teens at Rainier, Yesler, Miller, and Loyal Heights community centers, where he continues in this role today. Ron Brown has worked for SPR for 31 years now, serving as a youth-and-teen mentor his entire career. Ron has been a caring adult role model for thousands of Seattle youth and teens, going above and beyond, each and every day, for the youth at Loyal Heights Community Center.

“Throughout Ron’s career as a Recreation Leader, spanning over three decades, he has demonstrated an unparalleled dedication and unwavering commitment to empowering Seattle’s youth. From the numerous nomination letters that we received from colleagues and adults he mentored as youth, Ron has had a transformative impact on many lives and that working with youth is truly his calling,” said AP Diaz, Seattle Parks and Recreation Superintendent. This quote from a nominator says it all: “Ron is positive, honest, authentic, and extremely dedicated. Seattle parents couldn’t find a better role model for their kids. He is 110% committed to SPR, his job, and especially to the youth and teens he serves.”

This is the 21st year that SPR’s John C. Little, Sr., Spirit Award has been awarded. Past recipients of this award include Chukundi Salisbury, Pat Warberg, Elaine Dunn, Don Ganchorre, Dennis Cook, Tom Ostrom, Isiah Anderson, Patti Petesch, Folasa Titilii, Jr., Royal Alley-Barnes, Ron Mirabueno, Willie Rogers, Dave Gilbertson, Jean Lee, Johnnie Williams, John Hasslinger, Damien Hicks, Daisy Catague and Buck Buchanan.

[Brief gap in recording while BPRC members, SPR staff, and guests celebrate with Brown]

## Athletic Fields Presentation

Williams introduces the presentation and provides context.

Since the 1920s, the City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools have operated under an agreement that allows for the joint use of each other’s separately-owned fields and facilities, expanding all users’ access to recreational space and prioritizing students and youth through a joint-scheduling process. Reviewed and updated every five years, the JUA covers:

- Scheduling of SPS Fields/Complexes, SPR Fields, SPR Courts, SPR Pools, SPS School Facilities
- Coordination on capital projects

SPR manages athletic field permitting, including:

- Scheduling Reservations
  - 89 SPR sites: SPS has priority until 5:45 p.m.

- 43 SPS sites: SPS has priority until 7 p.m.
- Collecting Reservation Fees
  - Fees collected at SPS sites transferred to SPS
  - SPS reimburses SPR for administrative costs

We've answered a lot of questions regarding baseball and softball recently in response to the questions raised by the Lincoln HS Softball player and the Seattle Times article. SPR has 17 synthetic HS softball fields, and 11 synthetic HS baseball fields. SPS provides the locations and needs of where they want their programs to play. They're taking into consideration what schools have certain facilities on site at their HS to use, and if not, then looking at fields that have close proximity to the school and travel time/transportation costs. We schedule to their requests as we're able, and help identify alternative fields when ours or theirs are offline due to a capital project.

Lisa Nielsen, Athletics and Events Scheduling Manager, presents.

In 2023 as part of our Strategic Action Plan, we performed a field use study to gain a better understanding of field utilization, historical users, and more demographics on the participants that make up our field user groups.

At this time, field schedules are quite rigid with historical use rollovers each season, year to year, that fields are not scheduled per gender, or age. It's rare that we have time open up on the scheduling calendar, and when we do, there isn't time or capacity to reach out to all user groups, see if they're interested in that time, get interest, then review and prioritize based on gender or age. For incoming, non-historical use requests, we are typically filling a one-off date versus multiple dates and times.

Our study also led us identify that where we have the most opportunity to provide new user access or expanded field use access for groups that have a minimal amount of field time comparatively, is when we convert fields from grass to synthetic. We can anticipate those projects, outreach to community user groups to submit a proposal for that new field time, and evaluate that on an established criteria that heavily weighted towards new users from underserved populations.

98% of our primary use hours are booked by historical users throughout the year; leaving 2% of field time for one-off users requesting fields, specifically during the primetime hours 4-10pm.

#### Athletic Field Scheduling: Weather Impacts and Field Closure Considerations

##### Least impacted

- Full synthetic fields are not impacted by rainy weather
- Hybrid synthetic/grass ballfields are rarely impacted by rainy weather (exception LW1 clay mound)
- Rectangle grass fields (soccer, football, ultimate) are rarely closed by SPR due to rain

##### Most Impacted

- Dirt infield/grass outfield ballfields are significantly impacted by rainy weather (baseball and softball unplayable in dirt infields)
- Capital improvement projects close fields for grass to synthetic conversions, lighting installations and/or repairs, synthetic turf replacement, natural turf restoration

- Improperly used fields - Off-leash dogs, etc.

In addition to the JUA with SPS, we also maintain field use agreements with Seattle Prep (Montlake), Seattle Academy of Arts and Sciences (South Park), and Seattle Pacific University (Interbay Stadium).

So, how many fields do we have? It might seem like a simple question, but it's more complex. Do you want to know by field shape (diamond or rectangle)? Do you want to know by sport (soccer, lacrosse, baseball, softball)? Do you want to know by high school field sport standards or just generally? Do we designate a site that has 3 overlapping fields as one field or 3? When we ask that question, we really need to define the criteria we are asking that question under.

Good estimate: SPR – 169 grass, 42 synthetic; SPS – 18 grass, 30 synthetic

[Nielsen walks through examples of playfield sites]

Kim Baldwin, Planning, Development, and Maintenance Division Director, continues the presentation to discuss asset management.

Our goal is to keep each asset in service for as long as possible. Depending on the asset class, every 1-7 years an inventory and assessment is completed. During this time, we collect information on the asset condition and update our data in the system of record (AMWO). Based on the collected information and assessments completed, we prioritize and recommendations to inform the scope of future projects and program funding.

Assets are prioritized based on the following six criteria: code requirements; life safety; facility integrity; improvement to operating efficiency; unique factors; and if the project needs to be done in the next two years (such as if there is already another project scheduled to occur onsite). These assets are weighted and prioritized in an Assessment Matrix and used to allocate funding for the cycle. This data is then reviewed by staff in athletic scheduling, planning and maintenance, and at times there are subsequent site visits to determine priorities.

During grass field renovations, we typically renovate irrigation systems, provide drainage upgrades that are needed, oftentimes we replace the topsoil and re-sod, replace the backstops, and provide accessibility improvements. In essence, bringing everything up to our current SPR standards.

Synthetic turf has a life cycle of approximately 8-12 years before the carpet has to be replaced, and we have to plan accordingly based on age and condition assessments of fields. Replacements are now being upgraded to our new standards, including the e-layer beneath the carpet and then the new cork infill, as opposed to crumb rubber. Many synthetic turf conversions were completed between 2008 and 2010 originally, so we just completed a big cycle of replacements. We will have a little bit of slowdown in replacements between 2026 and 2029, and then starting right back up again.

For conversion from grass turf to synthetic turf we the Joint Athletic Facilities Development Plan (JAFDP) which was developed with SPS in 2019. This document analyzes scheduled field usage, field lighting, and the number of sports the field can carry. Goals of the program are to provide quality, durable facilities, increase capacity, and respond to demands. Challenges for conversion projects are initial cost and commitment for future replacements. This program helps us to prioritize SPR

funding for athletic fields, but that we also are open to opportunities for outside funding to convert fields.

Nielsen notes that investments in field upgrades reduce rainouts and expand the usable playing season for many fields.

Markeith Blackshire, Parks and Environment Division Director, continues the presentation to discuss field maintenance.

SPR maintains natural and synthetic surface athletic fields including fields that are hybrid (natural infield, synthetic outfield). Natural and synthetic surfaces require different methods of maintenance and types of equipment. All fields require routine maintenance to keep the field and surrounding area safe for players and spectators including; trash collection, hard surface cleaning, graffiti removal, tree & shrub care, etc. All fields require repairs/replacements to plumbing, electrical, carpentry and other fixtures to keep facilities safe and functional.

Blackshire discusses the daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonal maintenance performed by SPR crews to keep natural and synthetic athletic fields safe and playable.

Blackshire ends the presentation and turns the floor over to BPRC members for questions.

Baum asks about SPR's process for adapting to emergent trends in sportsfield demands given the preferential scheduling given to historical use groups. Nielsen notes that the largest opportunities for new pockets of available hours on sports fields have come as a result of conversions to synthetic turf or from adding artificial lighting. Other opportunities do occur but they are rare; as rigid as the system currently is, building greater equity into the schedule is difficult, and from a practical standpoint, fields can only support so much multi-use striping before the field is no longer clearly usable.

Baum asks if Nielsen feels that SPR is getting clear and useful information from field use surveys. Nielsen answers yes, but notes that even the top-100 field users report that lack of available fields is the biggest complaint.

Flinn asks if SPR tracks data for overdemand – i.e., where does the department receive significantly more demand for field use than it can satisfy? Nielsen notes that her staff can probably give anecdotal evidence here, but this is a good suggestion.

Umagat asks if SPS has also performed an efficiency analysis and shared or centralized this information with SPR. Nielsen notes that SPR has significantly more fields relative to SPS; however, she does not have specific data outside of what has been gathered by SPR.

Umagat asks if there is a clear “winner” in terms of ownership costs between natural and synthetic fields, and if so, how that affects SPR's long-term strategic vision. Nielsen notes that daily maintenance are certainly less for synthetic fields. However, there are other costs associated, included the replacement of carpet and infill, and it's not possible to compare the two in an apples-to-apples way; synthetic fields have a year-round season and are less susceptible to rainouts, so there is value to these expanded hours. Williams reiterates that synthetic fields are a financial commitment ongoing into the future.

## Old and New Business

Umagat calls for any new or ongoing business for the good of the order.

There being no further business, Umagat adjourns the meeting at 8:30 pm.