



MAGNUSON PARK

GOVERNANCE OPTIONS ANALYSIS

MARCH 2025

Prepared by



BROADVIEW
PLANNING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Magnuson Park – Seattle's second largest at 350 acres – stands at a critical juncture in its evolution from former naval air station to vital public asset. While the park serves as an essential community resource – offering athletic fields, a boat launch, swimming beach, wetlands, and community spaces – its aging infrastructure and complex management needs present significant challenges for Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR).

Current Context

- The park encompasses historic military structures, diverse recreational facilities, and provides accessible open space to the residents of neighboring affordable housing developments on the Sand Point peninsula.
- Operations are constrained by multiple regulatory frameworks, including federal and local land use restrictions.
- Current annual operating costs exceed \$2.2 million, with significant additional capital needs.
- Existing facilities, particularly in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District, require substantial renovation.
- Community engagement revealed strong support for the park alongside concerns about safety, access, and maintenance.

Key Challenges

- Aging infrastructure requiring significant capital investment.
- Complex regulatory environment limiting development options that meet SPR's departmental vision, mission, and goals.
- Limited funding sources under current operational model.
- Mounting maintenance needs exceeding available resources.
- Safety and accessibility concerns associated with Magnuson's location on the Sand Point peninsula.

Governance Options

The study identifies five potential governance models, divided into two categories based on their approach to the existing Federal Lands to Parks Public Benefit Conveyance (PBC):

Options Retaining Current PBC:

- Maintain current SPR governance and operations
- Create a supporting nonprofit organization within existing framework

Options Requiring PBC Amendment:

- Amend PBC while maintaining SPR governance
- Establish nonprofit partnership with amended PBC
- Create Public Development Authority (PDA) with amended PBC



Key Findings

- Retaining Magnuson current operational model is unlikely to generate sufficient resources to address the park's mounting capital needs and maintenance requirements, particularly in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District.
- Amending the Federal Lands to Parks PBC could unlock significant new investment opportunities.
- Alternative governance models could provide additional resources and operational flexibility.
- Public-private partnerships offer potential for increased revenue generation.
- Any governance changes must balance public benefit and SPR's departmental vision, mission, and goals with financial sustainability.

If pursued, transforming Magnuson Park's governance will require careful consideration of regulatory constraints, community needs, and operational capacity. While several options exist, each presents distinct tradeoffs between operational control, financial opportunity, and implementation complexity.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Located along the shores of Lake Washington in northeast Seattle, Magnuson Park encompasses 350 acres and is the City's second largest park. Originally the site of the Sand Point Naval Air Station, the park has evolved into a unique public asset that draws visitors from across the Puget Sound region with its diverse offerings: athletic fields, boat launch, swimming beach, picnic areas, walking trails, playground, dog park, wetland habitat, and community center.

In late 2023, Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) commissioned this study to identify and assess potential governance models that could guide Magnuson Park's operations and development over the next 25 years. This analysis comes at a critical juncture: while the park serves as a vital community resource, its aging infrastructure and complex management needs present significant challenges for SPR, which must balance Magnuson's requirements with those of the 380+ other park and recreation sites under its purview.

Project Framework and Equity Considerations

This study applies the Toolkit for Health, Arts, Parks and Equity (HAP-E) framework to ensure that future governance decisions advance equity and community wellbeing. This approach acknowledges that:

- Communities of color, immigrants, refugees, low-income families, and people with disabilities stand to gain the most from an equity-centered park transformation.
- Any governance changes must prioritize:
 - Cross-sector collaboration between public health, parks, arts/culture, and community development partners.
 - Community-driven approaches that build local capacity.
 - Activation of park spaces as inclusive cultural hubs.
 - Sustainable funding models that support equitable access and programming.
- Historic and ongoing inequities have shaped access to and decision-making power involving Magnuson Park.

Study Methodology

Historical research, community engagement and survey work, case study review, and analysis of Magnuson's existing conditions resulted in the identification of five potential operational models that could be applied at the park. While this report stops short of providing recommendations, it does identify the benefits and challenges associated with each option as well as a road map for potential next steps.



SITE CONTEXT + HISTORY

Current Context

Magnuson Park occupies a significant position both geographically and culturally within Seattle's park system. Located between Sand Point Way and Lake Washington in northeast Seattle, the park's 350 acres lie in proximity to several major institutions and diverse residential neighborhoods. The University of Washington, Seattle Children's Hospital, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) operate nearby, while the surrounding residential areas range from affordable housing developments to waterfront estates.

Magnuson's built environment reflects its military heritage, with dozens of early 20th-century structures from the former Sand Point Naval Air Station now serving diverse community purposes. These repurposed facilities host recreational, cultural, and educational uses, including:

- Athletic facilities and sports fields
- Community arts and theater spaces
- General recreation and open spaces, including a beach, picnic areas, playground, and boat launch
- Limited commercial activities, such as a brewery/restaurant.

Historical Development

The land now known as Magnuson Park has undergone several transformative periods that continue to shape its current use and management challenges:

Indigenous Lands and Early Settlement

The area was originally home to the Xacubš people, who lived along the shores of Lake Washington. European settlement in the 1800s led to their displacement, with the land initially converted to agricultural use. By the early 1900s, the completion of the Montlake Cut and Seattle's northward expansion brought additional development to the area.

Military Era (1920-1970)

In 1920, local officials began developing a military facility at Sand Point, though initial construction preceded official federal funding. The Navy formally leased the property in 1922 and by 1926 had established full ownership of 413 acres for the Sand Point Naval Air Station. The facility played significant roles in:

- The first aerial circumnavigation of the globe (1924)
- World War II operations, employing over 8,000 military and civilian personnel
- Post-war naval aviation training and aircraft repair
- Cold War-era Naval Reserve operations

Transition to Public Use (1970-present)

As military operations wound down, the site began its transformation into public space:

- 1970: Flight operations ceased
- 1972-1975: Initial transfers of property to the City of Seattle
- 1977: Site renamed as Magnuson Park
- 1991-1995: Complete closure of Naval Station Puget Sound



- 1999-2005: Final property transfers to the City (Seattle Parks and Recreation, Office of Housing, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light) and University of Washington.
- 2011-2015: Establishment of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District.

Table 1. Key Dates in Sand Point and Magnuson Park History: Early 1900s-Present¹

Year	Event
Early 1900s	The Montlake Cut is constructed and Lake Washington is lowered 9'; King County begins acquiring small farms in northeast Seattle to assemble a site they hope will attract a new military airbase.
June 1920	Local officials and Navy officers host a groundbreaking ceremony for the new air station despite a lack of official funding for the project.
July 1922	The Navy leases 268 acres at Sand Point from King County for \$1 per year.
1924	Sand Point is selected as the beginning and ending points for the first circumnavigation of the globe by air. Planes depart on April 7 and return on September 28.
1926	The U.S. Congress authorizes the Navy to accept 413 acres at Sand Point as a naval air station.
1926-1953	Now known as the Sand Point Naval Air Station, the site serves as an air base, aviation training center, and aircraft repair facility. At its peak during World War II, the facility employs more than 5,600 Navy personnel and 2,400 civilian workers.
1953-1960s	After the Korean War, operations and staffing at the Sand Point Naval Air Station decline. The facility becomes a Naval Reserve training base.
1970	End of flight operations at Sand Point; facility renamed as Naval Station Seattle and, later, Naval Station Puget Sound.
1972-1975	The Navy surpluses 325 acres at Sand Point and the City of Seattle acquires a portion of the property for a new park. Naval Station Puget Sound remains operational on a portion of the former Sand Point Naval Air Station site.
1977	The Sand Point property conveyed to the City is named Magnuson Park in honor of U.S. Senator Warren G. Magnuson.
Late 1970s	NOAA establishes its western headquarters at Sand Point.
1991	Naval Station Puget Sound identified for closure under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Act.
1995	Naval Station Puget Sound closes.
1999-2005	Approximately 100 acres of land previously associated with Naval Station Puget Sound is conveyed to the City of Seattle. Much of this property is occupied by former military facilities that date from the 1920s-1940s.
1990s-2019	Former military housing at Sand Point is converted into hundreds of units of affordable housing, creating new residential communities adjacent to Magnuson Park.
2011-2015	The City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board approves designation of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District and associated controls and incentives are enacted by the City Council (Ordinance 124850).

¹ Consulted sources include histories of Sand Point prepared by HistoryLink, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Friends of Magnuson Park, NOAA, and Solid Ground.



Geographic and Physical Context

Magnuson Park's location and physical attributes make it unique within Seattle's park system:

- Extensive Lake Washington shoreline
- Mix of natural and developed areas
- Historic district with 42 contributing structures dating from the early 20th-century (over a dozen non-contributing structures are also located within the park)
- Adjacent to residential communities
- Proximity to major institutions and employers

Map 1: Warren G. Magnuson Park Boundaries

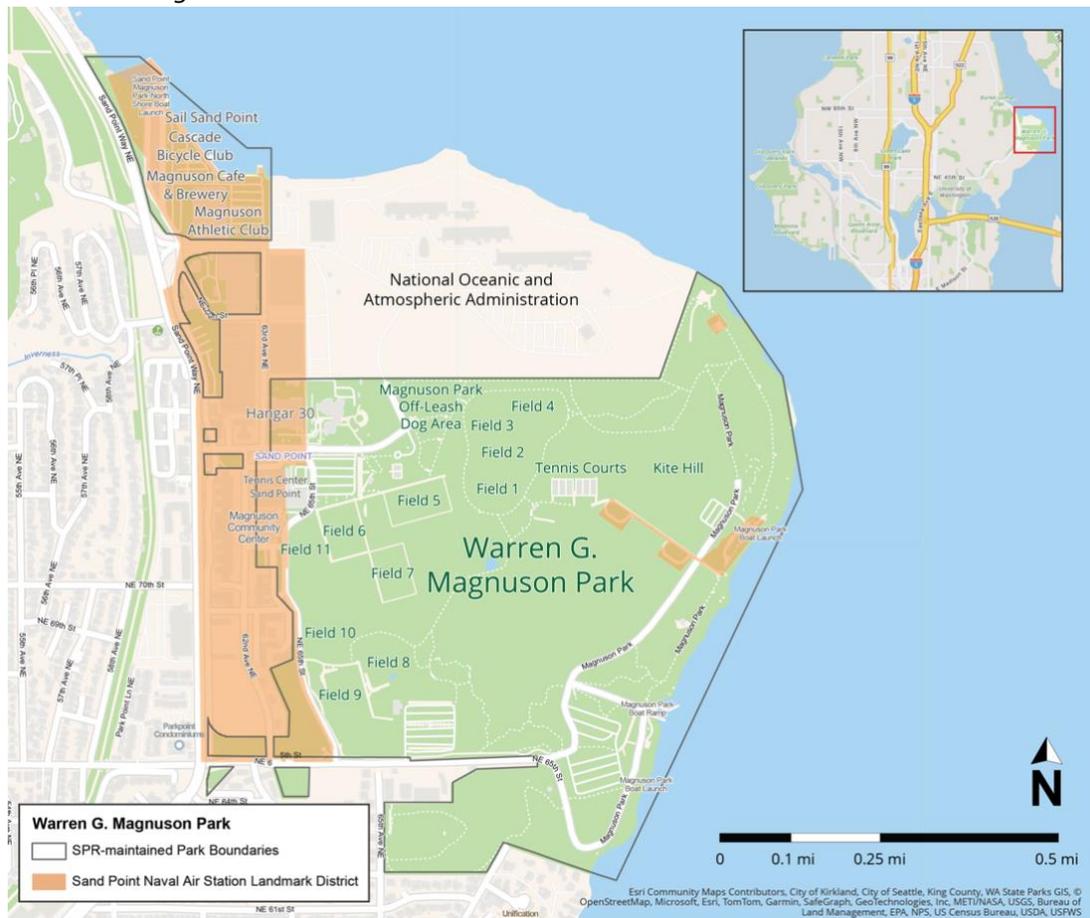


Photo Source: City of Seattle, Seattle Parks and Recreation; City of Seattle, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods.

Legacy Challenges

This complex history creates several ongoing management challenges:

- **Infrastructure Needs:** Some historic structures require significant renovation or repair, with some currently unsafe to occupy.
- **Regulatory Complexity:** The site's conveyance requirements and historic designation create multiple layers of oversight and use restrictions.



- **Diverse Stakeholders:** The park must serve multiple user groups with different needs and expectations, including business/artist tenants, residential neighbors, and visitors ranging from bird watchers to boaters to members of recreational sports teams.
- **Resource Requirements:** Operating and maintaining such a large site with historic structures, high park visitation rates, and unique attractions requires substantial staffing and financial resources.

Understanding this context is crucial for evaluating potential governance models, as any future management structure must address these inherited challenges while preserving the park's public benefits.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Magnuson Park's financial structure reflects the complexity of operating a large-scale historic property within Seattle's broader parks system. The park's operations and maintenance are primarily funded through the City's General Fund and Park Fund (backed by earned revenue), with additional capital funding flowing through the City's Capital Improvement Program, which is primarily funded by Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) revenues and Park District funds. Understanding these financial mechanics is essential for evaluation of future governance options.

Operating Budget

SPR's operating expenditures for Magnuson Park demonstrate the resource-intensive nature of managing this unique facility. For 2024, direct operating costs are projected at \$2.2 million, with more than half allocated to debt service payments for past facility investments. The second highest expense is labor, supporting four full-time positions dedicated to park operations: an administrative specialist, two contracting and concessions roles, and a site manager.

Table 2. 2024 Magnuson Park Administration + Operating Expenses

Expense	\$ Amount
Labor (Park Management, 4.0 FTE)	545,899
Fleets	9,710
Debt Service	1,346,322
Utilities	259,785
Other/Discretionary Costs	29,194
Total:	\$2,190,909

The park's actual operational costs exceed some of these budgeted amounts, as many SPR services are managed and staffed at a district, "shop" or crew level. Groundskeeping, tree maintenance, Park Ranger support, and facility maintenance work (e.g., custodial services, plumbing, electrical repairs) utilize SPR staff, equipment, and supply resources that serve multiple sites, making it challenging to calculate the true total cost of individual park operations.

SPR does recoup some of its Magnuson-related expenses through revenue generation. In 2024, the department anticipated collecting about \$1.5 million through property agreements, event fees, and other facility use charges. While substantial, this revenue stream falls short of covering the park's full operating costs.

Capital Budget

SPR has consistently invested in Magnuson Park's infrastructure, averaging \$1-2 million annually in capital projects through the City's Capital Improvement Program. These investments support essential improvements such as roof replacements, accessibility upgrades, and recreational facility enhancements. However, the park's size and built environment make it unique among Seattle parks, requiring capital investments that far exceed the needs of most SPR facilities.

Indeed, the scale of Magnuson Park's capital investment needs becomes clear when examining specific structures. Building 2 is an aging airplane hangar in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District



encompassing 144,000 square feet of space. In 2019, the estimated cost of just replacing its roof was \$2.8 million. Complete remediation and renovation of the building would cost tens of millions more. While Building 2 is the most complex structure at Magnuson with significant capital investment needs, Building 18 (a former fire station), Building 41 (a former gas station), and Building 138 (the gatehouse) also require substantial renovation to be viable for public use.

Financial Implications for Future Governance

This financial landscape creates both challenges and opportunities for future governance models. While SPR has accomplished a significant amount of building investment and site activation work at Magnuson over the last 25 years, the park's current funding structure leaves a significant gap between available resources and remaining capital needs, particularly for major renovation projects. Magnuson's operating budget, weighted heavily toward debt service, must also support ongoing cultivation and oversight of the multiple public-private partnerships put in place by SPR to help expand and enhance park services and programming.

However, Magnuson's size, location, and unique built environment suggest potential for increased revenue generation through enhanced facility utilization and new programming models. Implementing an alternative management structure could open additional pathways to address the park's substantial capital needs while maintaining public benefits. This includes balancing Magnuson's financial realities with the SPR's mission to provide public service and access, as well as the technical requirements associated with historic preservation and property conveyance regulations that apply within the park.



REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Multiple regulatory layers govern Magnuson Park's operations, from federal property covenants overseen by the National Parks Service (NPS) to local zoning ordinances (see table below). In addition, the property located within Magnuson Park is owned and/or managed by multiple City departments, including SPR, the Seattle Department of Transportation (road network), the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods (community gardening/P-Patch and historic resources oversight), Seattle Public Utilities, and Seattle City Light (utility infrastructure and streetlights in the rights-of-way). This complex framework shapes both day-to-day management decisions and long-term development possibilities. Understanding these regulations is crucial for evaluating potential changes to park governance, as any new management structure must operate within – or successfully modify – these established parameters.

Federal Regulations: The National Parks Service's Federal Lands to Parks Program

The most significant regulatory constraint on Magnuson Park stems from its transfer from federal ownership in the 1970s. When the Navy began conveying portions of the former Sand Point Naval Air Station to various entities, the federal government placed specific restrictions on future land use. For property transferred to the City of Seattle, these restrictions included a Federal Lands to Parks Public Benefit Conveyance (PBC) overseen by the NPS.

The Federal Lands to Parks PBC requires that transferred properties "be used and maintained for public park and recreation purposes in perpetuity." While this covenant helps protect parkland from privatization, it can create significant financial challenges for local governments, particularly when managing large sites with complex built environments like Magnuson.

2015 SPR Analysis of NPS Deed Covenant Amendment Options

In 2015, SPR initiated a review of the NPS deed covenant in place at Magnuson Park. Specifically, SPR wanted to explore redevelopment opportunities for Building 2. A former hangar designed to accommodate up to two airplanes, Building 2 was (and remains) the largest unrenovated building at Magnuson Park. Building 2's immense size and maintenance needs make it a bigger redevelopment undertaking than SPR can finance on its own. And the presence of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC further complicates matters by limiting the types of uses potential investors and development partners could place in a renovated structure.

The analysis identified five potential approaches for amending the covenant:

1. Convert the existing Federal Lands to Parks PBC to a Historic Monument PBC
2. Purchase the site at market value to remove the covenant
3. Transfer the existing covenant to another property
4. Return the site to federal control and repurchase it without the covenant
5. Pursue congressional action for covenant removal

Much of SPR's 2015 analysis focused on Option 1 as the remaining options carry significant risks, including the federal government deciding to sell the property to a different owner (Options 2 and 4), required regulatory transfers that SPR may never have the property or financial resources to complete (Option 3), or unpredictable timelines and outcomes that could take several years to advance (Option 5).



Although Option 1 has not been actively pursued by SPR in the intervening years, converting some portion of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC in place at Magnuson to a Historic Monument PBC continues to hold promise for its potential to unlock additional leasing opportunities and income streams that could support new investment in the park. According to the General Services Administration’s property disposition guidance,

“Property conveyed for historic monument purposes may under certain circumstances be used for revenue producing activities to support the historic monument. All income exceeding the cost of repairs, rehabilitation, and maintenance shall be used for public historic preservation, park, or recreational purposes.”²

A Historic Monument PBC conversion could also, potentially, be structured to only apply within the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark district. All other Magnuson property currently subject to the Federal Lands to Parks PBC could remain as such.

City of Seattle Regulations

Property use and management at Magnuson Park is also governed by a complex web of local regulations, including zoning rules, long-range planning documents adopted by City resolution, historic preservation protocols, and other City development standards. The following table identifies critical components of that regulatory framework, including applicable legislative references.

Table 3. Local Regulatory Frameworks: Magnuson Park + the City of Seattle

Year	Title	Legislation/Regulatory Authority
1993	Community Preferred Reuse Plan for Sand Point	Resolution 28832
1997	Physical Development Management Plan for Sand Point	Resolution 29429; last amended by Resolution 31905 (2019)
1997	Design Guidelines Manual for Sand Point and Magnuson Park	Resolution 29624
1997	Sand Point Overlay District	Ordinances 118622 and 118624
1998	Sand Point Historic Properties Reuse and Protection Plan	Resolution 29725
1999	Magnuson Park Concept Design	Resolution 30063; amended by Resolution 30293 (2001)
2004	Magnuson Park Wetland/Habitat and Athletic Field Complex Master Plan	Ordinance 121502 (superseded Resolutions 30063 and 30293); amended by Ordinance 122318 (2006)
2015	Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District (Establishing legislation, City of Seattle)	Ordinance 124850

While planning documents adopted by resolution serve a variety of important purposes, including setting project priorities, timelines, and expectations, they are not codified in any way. Ordinances, in contrast, establish the fixed legal frameworks in which a City, together with its residents and visitors, must function.

²General Services Administration property disposition guidance, <https://disposal.gsa.gov/s/PBC>.



Development and change at Magnuson Park is governed by the three key regulatory frameworks adopted by City ordinance:

- Zoning (Sand Point Overlay District)
- Historic Preservation (Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District)
- Wetland/Habitat Restoration and Athletic Field Development (Magnuson Park Wetland/Habitat and Athletic Field Complex Master Plan)

The zoning and historic preservation frameworks are the most relevant to this assessment of potential governance options for Magnuson as they have a direct impact on the range and scale of new development and investment that could occur in the park. While critically important to the health, maintenance, and protection of the park’s open spaces, the rules governing habitat restoration and athletic field development may be less germane to the conversation about how the park should be operated and financed over the next 25 years, depending on how the site is operated and managed going forward.

Seattle Parks & Recreation Policies + Procedures

Magnuson Park also operates within a policy framework created by SPR to apply consistent governance across all City of Seattle parks. For the purposes of this analysis, key elements of that framework are policies and procedures that establish parameters for working with external partners and funders, including:

- SPR Sponsorship Policy
- SPR Park Naming Policy

In addition, SPR established Supplemental Use Management Guidelines for Magnuson Park in 2005 that instituted conditions for hosting, managing, and permitting special events in the park.

Advisory Documents

While not legally binding, several planning documents have significantly influenced park development and community expectations over the past three decades. These range from master plans to focused studies on specific park elements:

Table 4. Magnuson Park Planning Studies

Year	Title
1988	Magnuson Park Master Plan
1994	A Vision of Magnuson Park
1999	Sand Point Blue Ribbon Committee: Report to the Mayor and City Council
2004	Sand Point Magnuson Park Signage and Wayfinding Master Plan: Inventory and Analysis
2012	Warren G. Magnuson Park Strategic Development Plan
2020	Magnuson Park Master Plan and Site Improvements Implementation Plan
2021	Magnuson Park Circulation Plan



Implications for Governance Changes

This regulatory and policy framework has important implications for any potential changes to Magnuson's governance model:

1. Any proposed governance changes must be evaluated against existing regulatory requirements. This includes assessing potential conflicts with:
 - Federal land use restrictions
 - Washington state law
 - City zoning requirements
 - Historic preservation standards
 - Environmental protection measures
2. Modifications to the current framework would require:
 - Careful evaluation of proposed changes against existing rules (e.g. Revised Code of Washington, Seattle Municipal Code)
 - Development of processes for necessary amendments
 - Coordination across multiple jurisdictional levels, City departments, SPR Superintendent's Office, Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, Mayor's Office, City Council.
 - Significant time and resource investment
3. The success of any new governance model will depend on its ability to:
 - Navigate complex regulatory requirements
 - Balance preservation mandates with operational needs
 - Generate sufficient, additional revenues and development opportunities within existing constraints
 - Maintain public benefits while pursuing necessary changes
 - Increase efficiency and success for SPR to meet opportunities and challenges over the next 25 years of park development.
 - Maintain community connection and engagement with Magnuson Park

Understanding these regulatory parameters is essential for developing viable governance alternatives that can both preserve the park's public character and address its substantial capital needs.



OUTREACH + ENGAGEMENT

This assessment of potential governance models for Magnuson Park required extensive community input to understand how the park serves diverse stakeholders and what improvements could enhance its value as a public resource. The engagement process was guided by the Health, Arts, Parks, and Equity (HAP-E) framework to ensure historically underrepresented communities had meaningful opportunities to shape future park governance.

Equity Framework

Historic and ongoing inequities have shaped access to and decision-making power involving Magnuson Park and its surrounding neighborhoods. Communities of color, immigrants, refugees, low-income families, and people with disabilities stand to gain the most from an equity-centered park transformation. The HAP-E framework guided this engagement process through its emphasis on:

- Cross-sector collaboration between public health, parks, arts/culture, and community development partners
- Community-driven approaches that build local capacity
- Parks as inclusive cultural hubs that promote community wellbeing
- Arts-based community engagement to build trust and participation
- Metrics for evaluating equity impacts

Engagement Process

Community engagement served a critical role in the assessment effort. More than 1,000 people who use the park and care deeply about its future participated in interviews, focus groups, an online survey, and/or outreach events in and around Magnuson. Sand Point residents, Magnuson business/artist tenants, neighbors, and visitors all provided thoughtful feedback on what they believe is working well at Magnuson today and what they think could be improved. While the input received varied in topic and perspective, one common theme emerged across all engagement efforts: Magnuson is a beloved public resource and Seattle residents want to see it flourish as a recreational and cultural facility for generations to come.

Interviews + Focused Conversations

Interviews of Magnuson Park business/artist tenants, neighboring residents, and staff provided important insight into the day-to-day realities associated with operating and maintaining a 350-acre public facility. The professional and personal associations of the interviewed individuals include the following:

- **City of Seattle:** SPR, Department of Neighborhoods, Office of Economic Development
 - The interviewed departments are among those that play a role in Magnuson Park's day-to-day operations.
- **Magnuson Park Advisory Committee (MPAC):** City-appointed committee led by two co-chairs that provides voluntary advisory services related to operational and development activities and Magnuson Park.
- **Friends of Magnuson Park:** Non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Magnuson Park's historic resources.



- **Earth Corps:** Non-profit environmental leadership program headquartered at Magnuson Park.
- **Outdoors for All:** Non-profit recreation program provider for children and adults with disabilities.
- **Sand Point Arts and Cultural Exchange (SPACE):** Non-profit arts organization that hosts a gallery, radio station, and a variety of fine arts events in Magnuson Park.
- **Tennis Center Sand Point:** Indoor, privately operated tennis facility located in Magnuson Park.

BvP also convened thematic, focused conversations with key stakeholder groups. These discussions offered time space for deeper conversations about the rewards and challenges Magnuson Park presents to major user groups.

- **Sand Point Property Owners:** NOAA, United States Geological Survey, University of Washington, Mercy Housing, Solid Ground, Low Income Housing Institute
- **Recreation Organizations:** Arena Sports, Cascade Bicycle Club, The Mountaineers, Tennis Center Sand Point
- **Arts and Cultural Organizations:** Broadway Bound, SPACE, Thistle Theatre
- **Environmental Organizations:** Magnuson Environmental Stewardship Alliance, Magnuson Community Garden, Seattle Parks Foundation, Beavers Northwest, Green Seattle Partnership
- **MPAC** (full committee)

Key Findings from Interviews + Focused Conversations

Interviews and focused conversations generally engaged representatives from organizations working in or adjacent to Magnuson Park. These included park business/artist tenants, housing providers and institutional neighbors in Sand Point, and a variety of recreational and environmental stewardship groups doing programmatic and service work in the park. Key themes and findings that emerged from these discussions include the following:

- Safety concerns
 - Need for additional security services, including staff, cameras, and improved response times for non-emergency requests.
 - Specific concerns about gun violence, overnight camping, and inadequate lighting.
 - While these concerns extend beyond the park boundaries and involve all Sand Point landowners, SPR is nevertheless perceived as a responsible entity due to the City of Seattle’s regulatory limitations on security cameras in parks. Additionally, Magnuson Park business/artist tenants feel they are not allowed to take the security precautions necessary for them or their customers/clients to feel safe (e.g., installing fences, further securing buildings).
- Access concerns
 - Need for expanded/improved vehicular access; the main entrance at 74th Street does not adequately serve the park, particularly on high-use days (this falls under SDOT’s purview).
 - Support for opening another vehicular entrance in the northern portion of the park (including discussion of access connections through NOAA’s property).
- Openness to a broader variety of facilities and resources in the park
 - Nearly unanimous support for more commercial activities.
 - General support for more food-related commerce (e.g., restaurants, grocery store, farmers market).



- Desire for commercial uses that benefit Magnuson’s local, adjacent residential population and workforce, including individuals and households associated with neighboring affordable housing communities.
- Some interest in limiting commercial activity to the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District to reduce potential impacts on the park’s natural areas. More specifically, some advocates for the natural areas would like to see any new commercial activity limited to the existing built environment and limit any new developments to potential impact to natural areas and restored wetlands.
- SPR Management
 - Perception that SPR staff do not have the capacity or resources to respond to ongoing and emerging community and business/artist tenant needs at Magnuson.
 - Many stated the park needs Magnuson-focused leadership; SPR is too decentralized.
 - Strong desire and willingness among interview and focus group participants to be part of the solution and problem solve in partnership with SPR.
 - Events have an outsized impact: neighboring residents and business/artist tenants shoulder the burden without benefit; lack of response in a broad/public way or directly to the people that live/work nearby.

Community Survey

While interviews and focused conversations served the vital purpose of providing dozens of Magnuson stakeholders and neighbors with a platform for discussing their unique and varied experiences visiting, working, and volunteering in the park, the reach of those discussions was, inherently, limited. To ensure a broader span of Magnuson users – from nearby residents to infrequent visitors – had an opportunity to share their thoughts on what they like about the park today and what could make it better, an online survey launched in July 2024. The survey, which could be completed in less than 5 minutes, included a variety of multiple choice and short answer questions, which are summarized below:

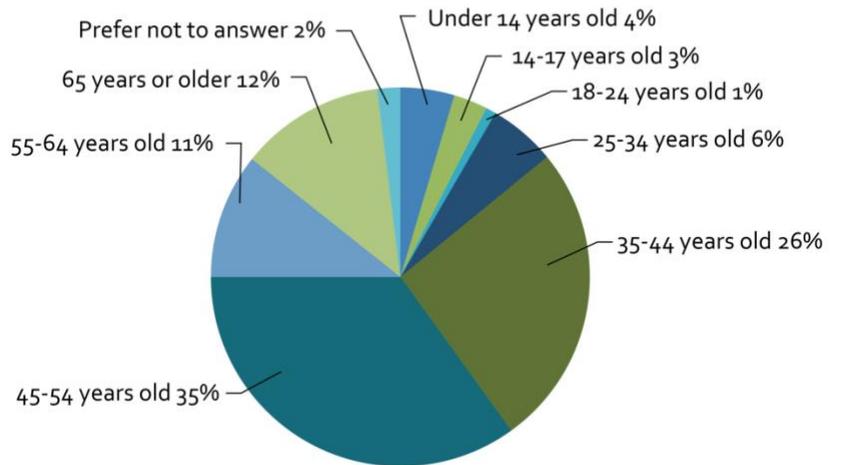
- How often do you visit Magnuson Park?
- What are the top three reasons you visit Magnuson Park?
- What is your favorite thing about Magnuson Park?
- What would bring you to Magnuson Park more often?
- If you could improve one thing about Magnuson Park, what would it be?

The survey also included demographic questions to collect information about each respondent’s age, race/ethnicity, and primary zip code. All surveys were submitted anonymously, with no identifying details (name, contact information) collected from respondents.



The survey received 1,278 responses before closing at the end of September 2024. Survey respondents were primarily between the ages of 35 and 54, with over 60% falling in that range. An additional 23% of respondents were over the age of 55, and 7.5% were under the age of 18. The majority of respondents identified as white (69.3%), followed by East Asian (5.48%) and Hispanic/Latinx (3.21%) individuals.

Figure 1. Survey Response Age Range



Nearly three-quarters of respondents (73%) visited the park at least once a week, a figure that rose to 74.4% when including those who live next to, or work in, the park. A significant portion of respondents resided in the immediate vicinity of the park, with over 40% coming from the same zip code (98115). A substantial number were also associated with neighboring zip codes, including 98105 (21%) and 98125 (11%).

Figure 2. How often do you visit Magnuson Park?

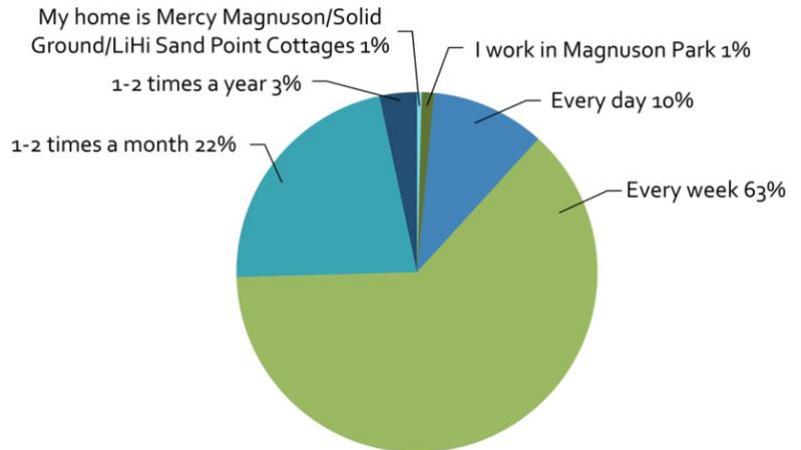
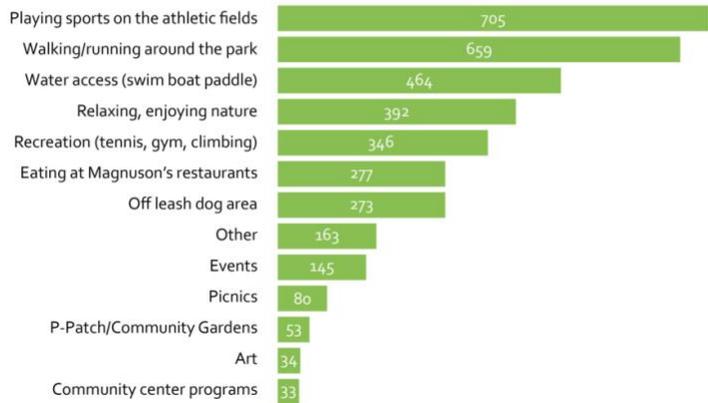


Figure 3 presents a breakdown of the primary motivations behind visits to Magnuson Park, illustrating the park's appeal as a hub for diverse recreational activities. Respondents had the opportunity to select up to three of the top reasons they visit Magnuson Park from a list. The two most common reasons for visiting were playing sports on the athletic fields and walking or running around the park. Respondents that chose "Other" listed playgrounds, children's activities, windsurfing, RC planes, cycling, bird watching, volunteering, and sailing as some of the activities that bring them to the park.

Figure 3. What are the top 3 reasons for you to visit Magnuson Park?



Figures 4 and 5 show word clouds of open-ended responses to questions about how respondents view the park. When asked about their favorite things about the park, respondents' answers included prominent themes of natural beauty, athletic amenities, and accessibility.

Figure 4. What's your favorite thing about Magnuson Park?



days to engage Magnuson visitors in conversations about how they use the space. These targeted, smaller scale, in-person outreach activities included:

- Tabling during three major events in the Park (e.g. , Urban Craft Uprising, fun runs
- Participating in five meetings and events for tenants and specific user groups: (tenant safety meetings and additional MPAC meetings)
- Engaging in five rounds of conversational, “outreach on foot” during peak visitor hours (soccer games, sailing events, etc.)

One specific event worth noting aimed to collect feedback from youth who use Magnuson Park, primarily those living adjacent to the park. On October 25, Magnuson Community Center hosted a haunted house event that presented an opportunity to reach young members of the Magnuson Park community. Over 70 people provided feedback, mostly kids aged 10-15. Community members were asked to write down, or mark on a map the things about Magnuson Park that they love, as well as areas for the park to improve. Their direct feedback included the following responses:

What do you love about Magnuson?

- Lake/beach access
- Soccer fields/basketball courts
- Sail Sand Point
- Playgrounds
- Arena Sports
- Dog park
- Birdwatching
- The wetlands
- Kite flying

What would you like to improve about Magnuson?

- Violence/safety
- Lighting on the fields and parking areas
- Trash in the park
- Indoor/outdoor swimming complex
- Doing something new with existing buildings

Findings from Survey Results + Community Event Outreach

Survey respondents and public event attendees raised many of the same issues as interview and focus group participants. They also highlighted their use and appreciation for Magnuson’s wide range of recreational amenities:

- *Recreational Value*
The park’s diverse recreational offerings draw regular visitors, with sports facilities and walking/running trails consistently cited as primary attractions. Over half of survey respondents identified these as top reasons for visiting, regardless of demographic background or visit frequency.



- *Water Access*
Lake Washington access emerged as a crucial park feature, with over one-third of respondents highlighting its importance for activities and relaxation.
- *Safety Concerns*
Safety across Sand Point, not just Magnuson Park, emerged as a primary concern, particularly among respondents over 55. Key issues included:
 - Inadequate lighting around athletic fields and parking areas.
 - Need for better security measures to feel safe and a strong perception that the park has become less safe over the years.
 - Nighttime activities; bonfires, campfires, and illegal camping make visitors and nearby residents feel unsafe.
 - Safety along Sports Field Drive; parking on both sides of the street feels unsafe for both drivers and pedestrians.
- *Facility Improvements*
Younger respondents (under 54) frequently commented on facility needs:
 - Better field drainage
 - Increased artificial turf
 - Improved lighting
 - Enhanced bathroom access
 - Additional shade structures
 - More parking near certain facilities, specifically the soccer fields

Representative community quotes illustrate these themes:

- *Park Assets*
 - "The natural spaces within an urban area, and its proximity to the waters of Lake Washington"
 - "Mix of nature and recreational facilities (turf fields and playground)"
 - "Water access, gym, dog park, brewery"
- *Desired Improvements*
 - "Safety and cleaner park, more private businesses like a cafe or another restaurant"
 - "Better bathrooms, more parking near beach front. Another restaurant next to the brewery to bring options and more customers"
 - "Lights on baseball fields and more turf options"

Collectively, these findings across all engagement approaches suggest any future governance model must balance preservation of valued park features with capacity for strategic improvements and enhanced safety measures.



CASE STUDIES + BEST PRACTICES

To envision Magnuson Park's potential future, this analysis examined how other jurisdictions have successfully transformed large urban parks, particularly those with complex built environments and historic significance. The challenges facing Magnuson Park—aging infrastructure, regulatory constraints, diverse stakeholder needs, and limited public resources—are not unique. Across the country, local governments have developed innovative approaches to operating and financing significant public spaces while preserving their essential character as community assets.

This section focuses on four West Coast facilities that offer particularly relevant insights: The Presidio in San Francisco, Liberty Station in San Diego, Great Park in Irvine, and Marymoor Park in Redmond. While no single site presents a perfect parallel to Magnuson Park, each demonstrates creative solutions to common challenges in park governance. These case studies were supplemented by research into the governance models developed for other notable public spaces, including Millennium Park in Chicago, Central Park and Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City, and Fort Worden in Port Townsend. Special attention was also paid to successful adaptive reuse projects involving former military structures, particularly airplane hangars transformed into vibrant community and commercial spaces.

Table 5. Case Studies Summary Matrix

Case Study Site	Municipal Ownership	Former Military Facility	Large Site (100+ Acres)	Offers Park + Recreation Facilities
Golden Gate National Parks/ Presidio, San Francisco Bay Area		X	X	X
Liberty Station, San Diego	X*	X	X	X
Great Park, Irvine	X	X	X	X
Marymoor Park, Redmond/King County Parks	X		X	X

* Partial municipal ownership



The Presidio

San Francisco, California

The Presidio is a 1,480-acre park in San Francisco, California, that is home to more than 800 historic military buildings. Opened in 1994, the park is collectively managed by the three-point Partnership for the Presidio: the interior 80% of the park managed by a federal agency called the Presidio Trust, the coastline managed by the National Park Service, and visitor services and programming is managed by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. The Presidio Trust is a wholly owned government corporation subject to chapter 91 of title 31, United States Code, overseen by a Board of Directors that includes the U.S. Secretary of the Interior.



Photo Courtesy of James Corner Field Operations and the Presidio Trust

With the Presidio Trust's portfolio of residential, commercial, recreation, and hotel properties in the park, the Trust became financially self-sufficient in 2013, within 20 years of the park's opening. Prior to achieving self-sufficiency, the Presidio Trust received around \$20 million in appropriations each year. The Presidio Trust's 2023 revenue was \$185 million, including \$66 million in lease revenues associated with 1,400+ residential units and \$4.2 million from 84 tenants leasing 2 million square feet of commercial space.

The Presidio has seen several transformative projects since 1994, including the Crissy Field ecological restoration in 2001, the 23-acre Letterman Digital Arts Center that is home to Lucasfilm in 2005, and the Tunnel Tops Park in 2022 which was supported by \$98M in funds raised by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.



Liberty Station

San Diego, California

Liberty Station is a 365-acre development on the site of the former Naval Training Center (NTC) in San Diego, California. In 1995, the City of San Diego entered into a master lease agreement with the Navy following the announcement of its planned closure to ensure that activity would continue on the base. The City then negotiated with the Navy to transfer the bulk of the base to City ownership via Findings of Suitability for Transfer (FOSTs). While much of Liberty Station is now privately owned and managed, the adjacent, 46-acre NTC Park is a facility of San Diego Parks and Recreation, which maintains the park's playgrounds, basketball courts, restrooms, picnic facilities, and multipurpose fields, including a special event field.



Photo Courtesy of NTC Foundation

Liberty Station is also home to a 100-acre creative district that is operated by the NTC Foundation, a 501(c)(3). The NTC Foundation manages the 26 historic buildings within the district, which are home to community organizations, performing arts and studio spaces, and restaurants that receive more than 800,000 visitors each year. In 2023, the NTC Foundation brought in \$6.4 million in revenue and had \$6.9 million in expenses. The NTC Foundation receives no City operating subsidy and is required to meet its operating obligations through tenancy, venue rental income and philanthropic support.



Great Park
Irvine, California

Great Park is a 500-acre park on a portion of the former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro in Irvine, California. Opened in 2007 following the site's decommissioning in 1999, Great Park is owned by the City of Irvine and managed by the Orange County Great Park Corporation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Orange County Great Park Corporation was established in 2003 by the Irvine City Council following the approval of Measure W by

Orange County voters in 2002, which amended the County's General Plan to allow for non-aviation use at the site for the purpose of establishing a park. Since 2013, infrastructure funding for Great Park has been supported by a Community Facilities District.



Photo Courtesy of Metrolink

Great Park is home to a 10,000 square foot hangar that serves as a museum and event space, as well as arts and cultural spaces and an urban agriculture demonstration garden. Major park sponsors include UCI Health, a presenting partner that provides public health services in the park and contributes \$500,000 annually, and the Anaheim Ducks NHL team, which opened a 270,000 square foot Community Ice Facility in the park in 2018.



Marymoor Park
Redmond, Washington

Marymoor Park is a 640-acre park in Redmond, Washington, that is owned and managed by King County Parks. King County Parks oversees a diverse network of partnerships within the park, including with tenants that handle the maintenance and operation of specific park facilities, e.g., Marymoor Community Garden Association, the Marymoor Velodrome Association, the Marymoor R/C Club, and Save Our Dog Areas.



Photo Courtesy of King County

Marymoor Park generates revenue from a \$1 daily parking fee that increases to \$20 during events (total receipts of approximately \$1.8M per year), an annual concert series (the event manager, Cascade Music Collective, provides 10% of concert revenues to King County Parks), concessions from events, and rental of the park's historic Clise Mansion for private events.



Case Study Findings

Case study research, supplemented by in-person visits to key sites, led to the identification of the following characteristics of successful, large scale, multi-use public park facilities located in urban areas:

Characteristics of Success

- Access to significant, ongoing revenue streams.
- Diverse revenue sources.
- Openness to commercial activity.
- Openness to paid parking.
- Innovative redevelopment projects drawing private investment.
- Partnerships with external management entities; outsourcing.

In addition, some clear findings emerged from review of former military and industrial sites that have been repurposed as park and recreation facilities, specifically:

Repurposed Military + Industrial Sites: What Works

- Sites subject to less expansive federal regulations appear better able to expedite redevelopment efforts.
- Large, active urban sites with complex built environments are often managed, at least in large part, by an external entity (or entities). These include large nonprofit/conservancy organizations and public corporations, such as a local development authority.



OPTIONS ANALYSIS

Magnuson Park's size, complex built environment, and layered regulatory framework make it unique among Seattle parks. Beyond the City's boundaries, though, other jurisdictions have successfully transformed large urban sites that previously functioned as military or industrial properties into thriving recreational spaces.

In general, there are three models of parks management utilized by urban governments in the United States:

1. Fully public approach
2. Conservancy/nonprofit partnership approach
3. Public corporation approach³

SPR currently applies a fully public approach at Magnuson.

Fully public approaches or models are generally defined as those in which park assets are owned, managed, and largely funded by a public entity (often a parks department or park district). While Friends of Magnuson Park, the Seattle Parks Foundation, and other local entities have a history of supporting the Park's operations through fundraising and volunteer activities, they do not play an active, daily role in the site's management. Rather, SPR, in addition to owning hundreds of acres upon which Magnuson is located, is fully responsible for all maintenance, leasing, landscaping, contracting, capital improvement, and property management work associated with the park.

One alternative to the fully public approach to parks management is the **conservancy/ nonprofit partnership model**. Under this approach, public park agencies retain full ownership of a facility but partner with a nonprofit entity on revenue generation and operational responsibilities, such as programming. The size and scope of the nonprofit entities associated with this model vary widely, ranging from small organizations that provide local governments with supplementary financial and programming support to large entities that oversee the complete, day-to-day operations of complex park properties in addition to leading significant fundraising activities. A local example of the public-conservancy/nonprofit model is Friends of Waterfront Park. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Millenium Park Foundation, and Central Park Conservancy also fall into this category. In many cases, the nonprofits and conservancies associated with these public-private partnerships were borne from a need to generate significant private funds in order to finance a high-profile public project.

The third park management model this report will explore is the **public corporation approach**. In Washington state, public corporations are more commonly known as Public Development Authorities (PDAs). PDAs are created by local governments and have broad statutory authority to perform public functions. Often, PDAs are established to undertake a specific project or activity requiring focused staffing and resources. PDAs also tend to be more entrepreneurial and less risk-averse than their municipal sponsors.

In Seattle and across Washington state, there is a history of PDAs playing a critical role in the preservation and management of properties in historic districts. Local examples include Pike Place

³ Framework adapted from E.F. Boamah, R. Shibley, and B. Hovey, "Managing High Quality Park Environments: Models and Lessons from Selected Parks in New York City, Chicago and Cincinnati," University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning, State University of New York, 2020.



Market and the Chinatown-International District. PDAs have also been created to assist in the repositioning of former military facilities with diverse historical resources and complex preservation needs, such as Fort Worden in Port Townsend. Many PDAs also operate in areas with complex public ownership. For example, the Pike Place Market Historical District encompasses property and facilities owned and/or operated by the Pike Place Market Preservation and Development Authority (PDA), SPR, SDOT, and various public utility agencies. PDAs can also enter into agreements with property owners to manage facilities they don't own. For example, the Fort Worden Public Development Authority was authorized to operate a portion of the site's campus under an agreement with Washington State Parks (property owner).

Any of the above three approaches could be applied at Magnuson Park. However, if SPR's priority is to attract the level of investment required to address Magnuson's immense capital needs, the Department will likely need to pursue an amendment to the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC that applies to the SPR-owned portion of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District. Recognizing this, the following analysis explores five potential governance options for Magnuson Park, separated into the following two categories:

Options Set #1: Retain Federal Lands to Parks PBC

Option A: SPR retains current PBC and governance model and continues to oversee all operations, maintenance, and capital improvement work at Magnuson Park.

Option B: SPR retains current PBC and governance model with a separate nonprofit organization providing modest fundraising and operating support.

Options Set #2: Amend Federal Lands to Parks PBC

Option C: Federal Lands to Parks PBC is amended and SPR retains current governance model.

Option D: Federal Lands to Parks PBC is amended and SPR operates Magnuson Park in partnership with a nonprofit entity.

Option E: Federal Lands to Parks PBC is amended and a Public Development Authority is created to oversee operational and redevelopment activities at Magnuson Park.

While SPR has indicated it is open to exploring a variety operational and governance models for Magnuson Park, it has also made clear it has no interest in selling any of the property it currently owns at Sand Point. Thus, all five options considered in this analysis assume SPR will retain full ownership of all affected parkland for the foreseeable future.



Options Set #1: Retain Federal Lands to Parks PBC

The two options that comprise Options Set #1 present operational scenarios for SPR to consider should it choose to retain the federal PBC currently in place at Magnuson Park. Retention of the current PBC will likely result in the department maintaining full managerial control of the park, regardless of whether that is SPR’s preference. Without significant restructuring of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC – and particularly its application within the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District – the likelihood of attracting the level of additional, new investment that would justify the creation of a new operating entity is low.

Option A: SPR retains current PBC and governance model and continues to oversee all operations, maintenance, and capital improvement work at Magnuson Park.

This option would generally maintain the status quo, with SPR continuing to serve as the primary funder and administrator of Magnuson Park, along with providing recreation and park maintenance services. As such, pursuit of this option would require little to no implementation work and is not expected to precipitate any policy or regulatory changes.

Table 6. Option A Summary Matrix

Governance Model	Public
Federal Lands to Parks PBC Status	Retained
Operational Lead	SPR
Policy Changes	None
Implementation Complexity Level	Low
Potential Financial Upside	Low

Potential Benefits

- **Ease of implementation.** As this option would retain the governance model currently in place at Magnuson Park; no regulatory or other policy changes would be required.
- **Retention of SPR’s operational and decision-making authority.** Continuing to take a fully public approach to operating Magnuson would allow the City to retain decision-making authority over all lease, event, programming, development, and maintenance responsibilities and agreements in place at the park and to evaluate all new proposals for alignment with SPR’s mission and values.

Potential Challenges

- **Insufficient revenue generation.** Over the past 30 years, SPR has been unable to secure sufficient revenues or other funding to rehabilitate and restore all the structures in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District that have fallen into disrepair. Continued pursuit of this status-quo option is unlikely to generate revenues sufficient to cover Magnuson’s mounting capital improvement needs.
- **Limited tenancy options.** This option would continue to limit leasing opportunities in SPR-owned structures at Magnuson (except for Building 11) to parks- and recreation-oriented uses. This restriction constrains the pool of potential tenants, which impacts SPR’s ability to attract organizations with the capacity to renovate, program, and invest in the ongoing maintenance of the Park’s leasable spaces.



- **Unsustainable staffing model.** Given SPR’s current staffing and capital resources, and its responsibility to balance and address park and recreational needs across Seattle, it is not clear the City will be able to advance a significant reinvestment effort at Magnuson Park in the foreseeable future without a ballot measure or other significant infusion of public dollars. This means responsibility for managing and maintaining Magnuson – a complex and underfunded real estate asset – will continue to be placed on a small group of SPR staff working across several teams and in coordination with other City departments that own and/or operate facilities at and elements of the park (e.g., Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Public Utilities, Seattle City Light, Seattle Department of Neighborhoods).

Other Considerations

If SPR elects to retain its current operational model for Magnuson and not pursue an amendment to the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC, there is still some untapped potential for revenue maximization within the park. While these options are not expected to generate revenues sufficient to cover Magnuson’s capital needs (which are likely over \$50 million), they could help finance some modest operational and facility upgrades, such as additional security and janitorial services, and investments in the public realm (e.g., signage, seating, landscaping). Examples include:

- **Charge for parking:** Historically, SPR has refrained from charging for private vehicle parking except in very limited circumstances. However, the practice is not uncommon in other jurisdictions. Across Lake Washington, parking in Marymoor Park, which is operated by King County Parks Recreation, costs \$1/day except for during events, when the charge is \$20. This practice currently generates about \$1.8 million in annual revenues. Other large, regional parks in the Pacific Northwest where municipalities charge for parking include, but are not limited to, Stanley Park in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Washington Park in Portland, Oregon.
- **Engage an events management company to market and book event spaces in Magnuson Park:** Magnuson Park is home to a small collection of unique event spaces, including the Officer’s Club, Hangar, and Workshop in Building 30. SPR may want to consider hiring an events management firm to assess the Park and implement a more aggressive approach to marketing its rentable assets to event planners and promoters, and other key parties. One example of a local facility owned by a government entity and managed by a third-party event firm is Clise Mansion, which is located in Marymoor Park and owned by King County. Opportunities might also exist to expand entertainment offerings (e.g., outdoor movie nights, concerts, regional festivals) for which SPR could either charge admission fees or collect permit-related payments from vendors.
- **Explore ways to delegate additional site maintenance work to Magnuson Park tenants:** While negotiated agreements with City labor unions limit how much maintenance work associated with public property can be delegated to external parties and volunteers, SPR, in partnership with other City departments that own or manage facilities at and elements of Magnuson, may want to explore whether there are additional tasks park tenants could handle in support of the site’s day-to-day operations; for example, litter collection and minor landscape maintenance. Providing tenants with greater authority to engage in site maintenance activities – particularly in the vicinity of their leased spaces – would free up limited City staff and budgetary resources to address larger issues while also deepening tenants’ connection to and investment in Magnuson Park.



Addressing Magnuson Park’s larger capital needs will require more than parking and event revenues, though. If SPR is committed to retaining full operating control of Magnuson and wants to attract well-resourced tenants and other investment partners to help cover the cost of the needed facility improvements, the Department will likely need to consider amending the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC that applies to the SPR-owned portion of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District.

Option B: SPR retains current governance model with a nonprofit organization providing fundraising and operating support.

This option calls for the creation of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to provide fundraising support for Magnuson Park. Such a nonprofit could also be set up to handle specific operational activities within the park, such as community events, special programming, and/or the implementation of small-scale site improvements (e.g., signage, landscaping projects, art installations). As this option assumes retention of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC, which limits the scope of investment opportunities available within the park, a nonprofit organization deployed under this model would likely be relatively small in size.

Table 7. Option B Summary Matrix

Governance Model	Conservancy/Nonprofit Partnership
Federal Lands to Parks PBC Status	Retained
Operational Lead	SPR, with support from a nonprofit partner
Policy Changes	None
Implementation Complexity Level	Low-Medium
Potential Financial Upside	Low

Potential Benefits

- **Ease of implementation.** Implementing this option would require few to no regulatory or operational changes, other than establishing a relationship with a new 501(c)(3) organization.
- **Retention of most of SPR’s operational and decision-making authority.** Under this option, SPR would retain primary operational control of Magnuson Park with the new nonprofit partner providing modest fundraising and program/service delivery support. All decision-making authority over lease, event, programming, development, and maintenance agreements in place at the park would continue to rest with SPR.
- **Some opportunity for additional revenue generation.** It is difficult to estimate the annual amount of fundraising revenue a Magnuson-focused conservancy could generate for the park under this option model; however, without a transformational redevelopment project on the horizon, SPR should probably not anticipate more than a couple million dollars per year. For context, just south of Magnuson Park, the total annual revenues collected by the Arboretum Foundation, which provides stewardship support to the 90-year-old Washington Park Arboretum, are generally in the range of \$2 million to \$4 million.

Potential Challenges

- **Ceiling on fundraising opportunities.** Without a major redevelopment project on the horizon to draw philanthropic resources, it could be challenging to sustain an effective, nonprofit conservancy organization for Magnuson Park. Many large-scale nonprofit organizations that exist to provide



fundraising and operating support to a single urban park were borne from a need to generate third-party financial support for a major public project. For example, the Millennium Park Foundation was created in Chicago in 1998 to help facilitate the development and ongoing stewardship of Millennium Park, which opened to the public in 2004. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the organization now known as the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy was established in 1981 to assist with the reimagining and redevelopment of multiple former military properties in the City of San Francisco and Marin County that were decommissioned in the 1970s. Capturing philanthropic interest sufficient to address Magnuson's redevelopment needs without a transformational vision or plan for the site could be extremely difficult. And creating such a vision would be a time- and resource-intensive undertaking that, at least initially, would likely need to be led by SPR staff or consultants.

- **Limited tenancy options.** Similar to Option A, this option assumes retention of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC, which limits leasing opportunities in SPR-owned structures at Magnuson (except for Building 11) to parks- and recreation-oriented uses. This restriction constrains the pool of potential tenants, which impacts SPR's ability to attract organizations with the capacity to renovate, program, and invest in the ongoing maintenance of the Park's leasable spaces.
- **Unpredictable funding resource.** The annual revenues realized by small nonprofits can vary widely from year to year. Staffing changes, evolving administrative practices, and board composition can all have a huge impact on a small organization's bottom line – to say nothing of larger issues like the local and national economies. These dynamics could make it difficult for SPR to develop and implement project plans for Magnuson that rely on a set amount of support from a small, external conservancy organization.

Other Considerations

As the public agency owner of the facility the nonprofit would be supporting, SPR would need to maintain an appropriate distance from the organization's day-to-day operations. However, establishing a new nonprofit organization requires time, money, patience, and other resources. Should SPR choose to pursue this option, the following questions might be worth exploring:

- ***Is there an existing organization or entity that has the capacity, interest, and relevant experience to successfully launch and administer a conservancy nonprofit for Magnuson Park?***
One way to simplify and streamline the creation of a small-scale conservancy organization is to house the associated body of work within an existing nonprofit organization rather than creating a new one. A handful of local charitable groups are already funding stewardship activities in Magnuson, and it is possible one or more of them may have an interest in administering a fundraising arm focused solely on that park.
- ***Would additional philanthropic resources of up to a few million dollars per year be sufficient to move the needle at Magnuson? Would that level of support allow SPR to move forward with high-impact operational and/or capital enhancements that have the potential to spur further, non-City investment in the Park?***
While a few million dollars per year would certainly help fund a variety of smaller stewardship projects at Magnuson, that level of support is unlikely to be sufficient to address the Park's biggest capital investment needs – including near rebuilds of several structures in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Historic District. In addition, managing an ongoing financial relationship with an external conservancy organization will require sustained use of SPR staff resources. Given all of this, SPR may want to consider whether the potential upside associated with



partnering with a small nonprofit focused on supporting Magnuson would outweigh the likely challenges.

It is also worth noting that the opportunities for revenue maximization described under Option A could potentially be pursued under this option as well. Those approaches include charging for parking, engaging an events management company to market and book event spaces, and exploring ways to delegate additional site maintenance work to Magnuson Park tenants.



Options Set #2: Amend Federal Lands to Parks PBC

The three options in Options Set #2 present operational scenarios for SPR to consider should the Federal Lands to Parks PBC currently in place be amended to allow for additional uses in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District. Without such an amendment, attracting and retaining tenants with the capacity to renovate, operate, and maintain the historic buildings within the District is unlikely to improve. Some buildings are in poor condition and few recreational organizations have capacity to take on capital projects at the scale of the gatehouse or former fire station, let alone the former airplane hangars in Building 2. Expanding the range of allowable uses in the Landmark District would enable SPR and/or an operational partner to assist with the management of Magnuson Park – to engage with organizations and business entities that have the resources to take on a large restoration project but don’t have a mission or purpose that directly aligns with parks and recreation uses.

One potential approach to amending the current PBC involves converting it into a Historic Monument PBC, which offers more flexibility on property use. Such an amendment could also, potentially, be structured to only apply within in the Landmark District. This would allow the balance of the site, which is currently utilized and programmed for a mix of passive and active recreational uses, to remain tied to the Federal Lands to Parks PBC and “used and maintained for public park and recreation purposes in perpetuity.” SPR staff previously considered pursuing a Historic Monument PBC for Building 2 but limited action was taken to move the idea forward. See the *Regulatory Frameworks* section of this report for more information.

Worth noting for all options in this set, is that shifting from the PBC to another covenant could affect the expense future tenants will need to expend on tenant improvements, at least for the initial round of tenants. Amending the PBC would, for example, allow a commercial tenant with access to resources to undertake a major renovation on Building 2 — at their own expense. The tenant would still have to work with the City’s historic preservation program, but use wouldn’t be as tightly regulated. Once the building was renovated and ready for occupancy, SPR (or a PDA, etc.) could theoretically charge higher rents because they would be leasing a higher-quality space.

Option C: Amend Federal Lands to Parks PBC and SPR retains current governance model.

Under this option, SPR would continue to function as the primary operator and manager of Magnuson Park following an amendment to the Federal Lands to Parks PBC. As such an amendment process would likely to take a year or more and require engagement of multiple levels of government, the implementation complexity level of this option is fairly high. However, if SPR is ultimately able to negotiate an amendment that allows for a broader array of tenants and property uses in the park, pursuit of this option could offer much more financial upside than Options A or B.

Table 8. Option C Summary Matrix

Governance Model	Public
Federal Lands to Parks PBC Status	Amended
Operational Lead	SPR
Policy Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Federal Lands to Parks PBC – Sand Point Overlay District
Implementation Complexity Level	Medium-High
Potential Financial Upside	Medium-High



Potential Benefits

- **Retaining SPR’s operational and decision-making authority.** Continuing to take a fully public approach to operating Magnuson would allow the City to retain decision-making authority over all lease, event, programming, development, and maintenance agreements in place at the park and to evaluate all new proposals for alignment with SPR’s mission and values.
- **Broader tenancy options.** Expanding the range of allowable uses in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District would also grow the pool of potential tenants eligible to lease space at Magnuson Park. This would enable SPR to engage with organizations and business entities that have the resources to take on a large restoration project but don’t have a mission or purpose that directly aligns with parks and recreation uses.
- **Financial upside.** Expanding the range of allowable uses in the Landmark District has the potential to generate additional lease revenues that could be used to support Magnuson’s ongoing operations and maintenance. Additionally, opportunities to engage with external entities that have the resources and capacity to take on major tenant improvement projects (see *Broader tenancy options*, above) has the potential to reduce pressure on City of Seattle’s Capital Improvement Program, which has limited resources to support renovation and redevelopment projects in Magnuson Park.

Potential Challenges

- **Complex and protracted coordination requirements.** Pursuing an amendment to the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC in place at Magnuson would require significant resource and coordination commitments from multiple City departments, potentially over a period of years. In addition to SPR, the Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR) and City elected officials would need to collectively prioritize the amendment effort in Seattle’s federal relations and lobbying work. This could include ongoing engagement with Washington state’s Congressional delegation as well as with staff and leadership at the National Parks Service.
- **City regulatory changes.** Amendments to City codes and policies may be required to better align with the range of uses permitted under an alternative PBC type. This includes Sand Point Overlay District regulations, which are part of the City’s Land Use Code. Amending the Land Use Code is a multi-step legislative process with environmental review and public hearing requirements, as well as opportunities for members of the public to file appeals. Taking even a simple piece of land use legislation from ideation to final adoption generally takes at least several months – and sometimes over a year.
- **Expanded staffing needs.** Amending the existing PBC, shepherding City policy changes through legislative and other approval processes, and developing procedures and protocols for engaging with new potential tenants and investors would all create new Magnuson-focused staffing responsibilities for SPR. The complexity and breadth of this work could necessitate hiring additional staff before any new revenues/resources materialize at the park.

Other Considerations

- **Opportunities for outsourcing.** As is noted above, while pursuit of this Option C would allow SPR to retain full authority over Magnuson Park’s day-to-day operations, it would also generate a variety of new staffing obligations – both long term and short-term – that the department would need to address. One potential response would be to engage external contractors to assist with specific



bodies of work. For example, a real estate consultant could be retained to help engage new tenants and negotiate the terms of lease and development agreements.

- **New revenues.** The opportunities for revenue maximization described under Option A could also be pursued under this option. Those approaches include charging for parking, engaging an events management company to market and book event spaces, and exploring ways to delegate additional site maintenance work to Magnuson Park tenants.
- **Combining options.** This option could also be pursued in tandem with Options D and E, below.

Option D: Amend Federal Lands to Parks PBC and SPR operates Magnuson Park in partnership with a nonprofit entity.

Like Option B, this option calls for the creation of a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization to provide fundraising and operational support for Magnuson Park. As this option assumes amendment of the current Federal Lands to Parks PBC to allow a broader range of tenants, uses, and development opportunities within the Park, the scale of the nonprofit organization contemplated under this alternative is likely to be larger than what is described in Option B.

Table 9. Option D Summary Matrix

Governance Model	Conservancy/Nonprofit Partnership
Federal Lands to Parks PBC Status	Amended
Operational Lead	SPR and a nonprofit partner
Policy Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Federal Lands to Parks PBC – Sand Point Overlay District
Implementation Complexity Level	Medium-High
Potential Financial Upside	Medium-High

Potential Benefits

- **Fundraising potential.** Amending the Federal Lands to Parks PBC could enable the kind of transformative redevelopment planning needed to encourage local and regional philanthropic partners to make significant, long-term investments in Magnuson Park.
- **Organizational flexibility.** Nonprofit organizations that provide stewardship support to an individual park can be set up in a variety of ways. While some organizations function primarily as fundraising partners, others take on a significant operating role. Below are a couple well-known examples:
 - **Central Park Conservancy, New York City**
Delegated authority from the City of New York to oversee Central Park’s day-to-day operations (e.g., site management, facility maintenance, architectural restoration, visitor services) in addition to raising tens of millions of dollars in private and corporate contributions every year.



- **Millenium Park Foundation, Chicago**
Provides supplementary fundraising and programming support for Millenium Park, which is operated by the City of Chicago’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events. In 2022, the most recent year for which financial data is readily available, the Foundation’s total support and revenues were just over \$2 million, ear for supplementary programming and special projects, and support of the City’s maintenance responsibilities.

Potential Challenges

- **Limited oversight.** While SPR would have a role in defining a nonprofit’s scope of services within Magnuson Park, it would likely have limited oversight of the organization’s routine operations, including day-to-day leadership and staffing decisions, and fundraising and programming priorities.
- **Complex and protracted coordination requirements.** As is described under Option C, pursuing an amendment to the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC in place at Magnuson would require significant resource and coordination commitments from multiple City departments, potentially over a period of years. Ongoing engagement with staff and leadership at the National Parks Service would also be required.
- **City regulatory changes.** Also referenced under Option C, amendments to City codes and policies may be required to better align with the range of uses permitted under an alternative PBC type. Developing City land use legislation and shepherding it through final adoption is a complex and time-intensive process that generally takes several months – and sometimes over a year.

Other Considerations

- **Division of labor.** To directly manage its financial resources and provide transparency to donors, a well-resourced nonprofit partner may want to take responsibility for much of the high-profile public work that draws visitors and potential investors to Magnuson Park (e.g., events, programming, visitor services, design projects). This would leave SPR and other City departments responsible for the more staid, day-to-day operations and maintenance duties, such as facility upkeep and contract management.
- **New revenues.** The opportunities for revenue maximization described under Option A could also be pursued under this option. Those approaches include charging for parking, engaging an events management company to market and book event spaces, and exploring ways to delegate additional site maintenance work to Magnuson Park tenants.
- **Combining options.** This option could be pursued in tandem with either Option C or Option E. An Option C-D combination could, for example, be designed as follows: SPR remains the operational and redevelopment lead for structures in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District while a conservancy is created to oversee fundraising, programming, visitor services, and landscape-related matters across the park.

Option E: Amend Federal Lands to Parks PBC and create a Public Development Authority to oversee operational and redevelopment activities at Magnuson Park.

Of the five options presented in this analysis, Option E is likely the biggest departure from Magnuson Park’s current operational model. While SPR regularly partners with nonprofit philanthropic and



conservancy organizations to advance stewardship efforts in Seattle parks (e.g., Seattle Parks Foundation, Earth Corps, “Friends of” groups) it has not, historically, delegated park management responsibilities to PDAs.

In Washington state, PDAs are created by local governments and have broad statutory authority to perform public functions. PDAs are often established to undertake a specific project or activity requiring focused staffing and resources. As management entities, they also tend to be more entrepreneurial and less risk-averse than their municipal sponsors.

A PDA created for Magnuson would likely assume all (or nearly all) responsibility for the Park’s day-to-day operations – everything from leasing to site maintenance to construction management. While SPR would likely still need to provide some baseline level of funding to support Magnuson’s park and recreational functions, it would no longer function as the site’s primary manager. If/when a PDA is established, the extent of their purview would need to be negotiated with SPR. A PDA could, in theory, be set up to oversee the northern/developed part of the park, leaving SPR with operational responsibility for all the remaining property (primarily open space and recreational facilities/fields). This would, of course, reduce SPR’s financial obligations for Magnuson — but it would also leave the department with little to no access to any of the potential revenue. On the other hand, SPR would retain operational control of all of Magnuson’s recreation/open space facilities.

Table 10. Option E Summary Matrix

Governance Model	Public Corporation
Federal Lands to Parks PBC Status	Amended
Operational Lead	PDA
Policy Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federal Lands to Parks PBC Sand Point Overlay District
Implementation Complexity Level	High
Potential Financial Upside	High

Potential Benefits

- **Delegate risk.** As Magnuson’s primary manager, a PDA would take on much of the financial risk associated with facilitating future redevelopment efforts at the park.
- **Ongoing City oversight.** Although SPR would no longer oversee Magnuson’s day-to-day operations, City elected officials would have ongoing authority to establish and dissolve the PDA and to appoint members to its board. If desired, the City could also establish the PDA for a fixed period of time (for example, five or ten years) in order to review outcomes before deciding whether to sustain the enterprise longer term.
- **Potential financial upside.** To cover their costs and fulfill their development goals, PDAs tend to be more entrepreneurial than local governments. In the case of Magnuson, a PDA led by seasoned redevelopment and property management professionals may be better positioned than SPR staff to grow revenues and steer outside investment to the park. This could help generate new and expanded resources to support park operations, including additional security and maintenance services, transportation access improvements, placemaking enhancements, and other desired investments.



Potential Challenges

- **Operational shift.** Passing the operating reins for a large park facility to a PDA would be a big organizational move for SPR. While the potential benefits are significant, it could be challenging for SPR staff – as well as City leadership – to contemplate handing off the day-to-day management one of Seattle’s largest and most heavily used public facilities to another entity.
- **Potential for cultural and physical change.** A PDA would likely draw more private and commercial uses to Magnuson, which would be a big cultural shift for the park. New investment and redevelopment partners may also have interest in repurposing some of the historic structures in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District in ways that have not previously been contemplated, including, for example, for office, entertainment, or hospitality uses.
- **Complex and protracted coordination requirements.** As is described under Option C, pursuing an amendment to the NPS Federal Lands to Parks PBC in place at Magnuson would require significant resource and coordination commitments from multiple City departments, potentially over a period of years. Ongoing engagement with staff and leadership at the NPS would also be required.
- **City regulatory changes.** Also referenced under Option C, amendments to City codes and policies may be required to better align with the range of uses permitted under an alternative PBC type. Developing City land use legislation and shepherding it through final adoption is a complex and time-intensive process that generally takes several months – and sometimes over a year.

Other Considerations

- **Closed revenue loop.** Revenues collected by a Magnuson Park PDA would be used to cover the organization’s operating costs and, after that, be reinvested back into the park. Thus, SPR should not expect to realize much (or any) of the financial upside associated with this option. Additionally, a PDA would likely want to oversee the design and implementation of any new revenue-generating activities in the park, including paid parking.
- **Combining options.** This option could be pursued in tandem with either Option C or Option D. For example, under an Option C-E model, a PDA could be created to operate and manage SPR-owned facilities in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District, leaving SPR with responsibility for overseeing the recreational, open space, and other facilities that occupy the remainder of Magnuson Park.

Alternatively, under an Option D-E combination, a conservancy could take on fundraising, programming, site management, visitor services, and landscape-related matters across the park, leaving space for a PDA to focus on real estate development and facility management within the Landmark District. (Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City utilizes a similar corporation-conservancy management model.)

An Option C-D-E model is also theoretically possible, with SPR, a conservancy, and a PDA collectively negotiating and sharing operational responsibility of Magnuson Park. However, diffuse management structures come with their own set of challenges and can lead to confusion among the public, tenants, and even the primary operational partners about who is responsible for what.



NEXT STEPS

As SPR plans for the future of Magnuson Park, it faces a critical question: *will it generally continue on its current path or will it seek to amend the application of the Federal Lands to Parks PBC to City-owned structures within the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District?* The latter, if successful, has the potential to help draw significant, new capital investment interest to the park. However, if SPR chooses to pursue an amendment to the Federal Lands to Parks PBC, the path to success will likely to be long and require the engagement of multiple government partners.

Should SPR decide to pursue such an amendment, the following steps will be critical to advancing the process:

- **Define the goal:** SPR last explored amending Magnuson Park’s Federal Lands to Parks PBC in 2015. Much of that analysis focused on whether a Historic Monuments PBC could be a better regulatory fit for at least portions of the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District. Such an amendment has not been actively pursued by SPR in the intervening years; however, converting some portion of the existing Federal Lands to Parks PBC to a Historic Monument PBC continues to hold promise for its potential to unlock additional leasing opportunities and income streams that could support new investment in the Park.

To determine whether amending the Federal Lands to Parks PBC is a logical next step in planning for Magnuson’s future, SPR should consider convening an interdepartmental working group comprised of its own key staff as well as representatives from the Mayor’s Office, City Council, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, and OIR. This group would be tasked with engaging National Parks Service staff to help clarify an end goal (e.g., a portion of the existing PBC to another, specific, PBC type) and chart a path forward.

- **Develop City legislation (resolution):** Once the interdepartmental working group has established a clear and specific goal for amending the Federal Lands to Parks PBC in place at Magnuson, SPR will need to prepare a resolution – for City Council adoption *and* Mayoral concurrence – that describes the City’s interest in and planned approach to amending the PBC. Within City government, resolutions can be effective tools for establishing roles and responsibilities and coordinating multiple branches of government in pursuit of a common goal. Passage of a resolution with Mayoral concurrence would also help assure the amendment becomes a component of the City’s federal policy agenda, which is overseen by OIR.
- **Pursue intergovernmental coordination:** As is noted above, OIR would be a critical partner in any City effort to amend the PBC currently in place at Magnuson Park. OIR’s federal relations team is responsible for advancing the City’s federal policy agenda, maintaining relationships with members of Washington state’s congressional delegation, and collaborating with federal agency staff on issues of key importance to Seattle. City elected leaders – particularly the Mayor and members of the City Council (with a focus on those that represent portions of northeast Seattle and/or serve on the City Council committee tasked with oversight of SPR) – should also be well-versed on the issue and prepared to articulate Seattle’s position on any proposed PBC amendment in their meetings and conversations with relevant federal government leaders and Washington state’s congressional representatives.



Amending Magnuson Park's Federal Lands to Parks PBC will take a lot of coordinated work, potentially over a period of multiple years. To better assure a successful outcome, it will be critical for SPR to consistently and actively engage key, influential partners across multiple levels and branches of government.



CONCLUSION

The land where Magnuson Park is now located has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past 200 years, starting with the displacement of the Xacuabš people in the 1800s and extending through its resettlement as an agricultural area, conversion into a military facility, and current function as a multi-purpose City park facility filled with recreational and cultural uses.

As SPR plans for the next 25 years of operations and development at Magnuson Park, the outreach findings and options analysis contained in this report provide a critical framework for future decision-making. While it is clear the Park is a beloved and well-used public resource, significant opportunities for improvement remain. In addition to the poor physical condition of several structures in the Sand Point Naval Air Station Landmark District, Magnuson's neighbors and visitors have also expressed concerns about public safety, site access and transportation management, and constrained resource availability within SPR for the Park's day-to-day operations and maintenance.

Operational options exist that have potential to move Magnuson onto a more sustainable financial path. However, every option comes with trade-offs – financial, organizational, and conceptual. The challenge for SPR, upon reviewing those challenges, will be to select a future governance model for Magnuson that is both feasible for the City to pursue and addresses the diverse needs of the park's users.

