

Magnuson Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

September 13, 2023

Attendance

MPAC Members: Mary Bicknell, Jan Bragg (co-chair), Evan Briggs, Samantha De Abreu (co-chair), Ruth Fruland, Gabrielle Gerhard, Aaron Hoard, Bladimir Recinos, Lara Watson

Absent: Lhorna Murray

SPR and Presenters: AP Diaz, Brian Judd, Kim LeMay, Ben Burtzos, Aaron Olson, Brian Hawker

Attendees: Diana Kincaid, Lynn Ferguson, Elisa Law, Cynthia Mejia Giudici

Welcome and Introductions

Bragg calls the meeting to order at 6:00 pm. MPAC members and SPR staff introduce themselves and share their constituency and passion for advocacy at Magnuson Park.

Bragg introduces the items on the consent agenda for the day: today's meeting agenda, and the revised meeting minutes from the June 14 and July 10 MPAC meetings. Bragg calls for a vote to approve each item in turn. There is no debate. Each vote is unanimous in favor of approval.

Adopted: MPAC Meeting Agenda 9/13/2023

Adopted: MPAC Meeting Minutes 6/14/2023

Adopted: MPAC Meeting Minutes 7/10/2023

Public Comment and Information Sharing

Fruland announces the upcoming 99th anniversary of the first around-the-world flight. This anniversary is on September 28th, 2023. Fruland will offer two historical park tours on that day, likely at 10:00 am and 2:00 pm. More information will be available on the [Friends of Magnuson Park website](#).

Seattle Parks and Recreation Departmental Report

Anthony-Paul (AP) Diaz, Esq., Superintendent of Seattle Parks and Recreation, presents to MPAC and responds to pre-submitted questions from committee members.

Diaz thanks MPAC members for their passion and caring and provides a brief professional biography; prior to SPR, Diaz was an attorney for the City of Los Angeles, and specifically for LA Parks. Diaz notes that we all love parks because parks and recreation touch all aspects of life; SPR is in the business of growing children, helping to sustain adults and the aging population.

Now is the time to amplify parks as an element of *crucial infrastructure* on par with transportation and other, more traditional aspects. The pandemic taught us the true importance of our parks and open spaces, for our physical and our mental health as a community.

Diaz expresses affection for the state of Washington for the emphasis and availability of parks and open space throughout the state; in his words, the whole state is in some ways “one big park.” Seattle and its park system exemplifies these statewide values well, and Magnuson Park is particularly exciting because it is so unusual in a geographically constrained urban area to find such a large, natural, recreation and open space. At Magnuson, there is a huge variety of recreation uses, including boating, cricket, a brewery, and many more.

Diaz shares two additional stories. First, he notes that one pleasantly surprising element of learning Seattle’s parks has been meeting passionate advocates of various causes. Magnuson represents a unique confluence of advocates and is in this way a microcosm of the whole park system. Diaz also shares his first exposure to Magnuson Park, driving around with Councilmember Alex Pedersen. On this first visit, Diaz was fascinated to gain an understanding of the relationship of the park and its neighbors, particularly the housing programs and other partnerships that share the Sand Point peninsula.

Magnuson Park manager Brian Judd moderates Q&A session with Diaz.

Judd: What does SPR view as a path forward for renovating the remaining historic buildings at Magnuson Park?

Diaz: This is a big question. We don’t have the resources to just renovate the buildings. I believe the path forward is some kind of public-private partnership (PPP). We’re the public side; the private part is what is yet to be determined. This could be the University of Washington, or a non-profit, but we need to be judicious. What we have to offer is space in a beautiful park!

I’m also a big proponent of art in the park, including exploratory purposes – curation, installation. Remember, we are not looking to restore these buildings to their original uses. We’re not going to bring back airplane construction here, so we need to be creative. But it pains me, here and at Discovery Park, when I see these vacant buildings, and then they get broken into. It’s the broken windows theory. I would love, for instance, for an educational center to come and invest and renovate a building, or several buildings, and have a presence. And I have to believe we can get there and make that happen.

J: What is SPR’s current policy and approach for encampments and RVs located in parks?

D: As a whole, I think the City is improving since the pandemic. I know that it’s hard to hear from an “outsider” [Diaz has been a Seattle resident for less than 12 months], but I think we have a very clean downtown and our parks are getting better. It’s important to have a strategy, and SPR has a part to play in that. But parks can’t be de facto space for dumping garbage and so on; “open space” has to actually mean something.

Additionally, the City has its Unified Care Team now. SPR is not out there tearing down tents; our role is to come in after encampment removal and clean up the area. We’re also in ongoing efforts to curb behaviors like street racing and partying, especially after park closing.

J: What is the most surprising thing you have learned about Seattle Parks and Recreation since taking this job?

D: The level of partnerships we engage with! I don’t know how familiar you all are with ARC, the Associated Recreation Council, which partners with us to provide recreation programming at our community centers, but it took me a little bit to understand the relationship of ARC and SPR, for

example. That was a learning experience for me. But again, the partnerships at Magnuson Park are another example of this same thing; just yesterday, I met with representatives of the United States Tennis Association here at Magnuson, and had the opportunity to emphasize not only our partnership but to experience the position that land ownership gives us in partnership negotiation.

J: What are the biggest challenges SPR faces in the next 10 years?

D: Well, how do we grow our workforce, certainly. This is a challenge for organizations all over the state and the country, public and private. One area that we've been successful and I'm proud of our work is the expansion of our park ranger program. When I started here, we only had two park rangers for over 400 parks! Eventually, my goal is to have 50 rangers throughout the system, mostly in ambassador and educator roles, obviously with some enforcement element as well. In fact, I would like for there to be a dedicated ranger presence at Magnuson Park. I think having rangers as a continuous presence in the park can help create a real sense of place and be beloved figures in the community, much like National Park Service rangers do.

J: What does stewarding a "healthy environment" mean to you?

D: I'm impressed with what's going on in Seattle. We're coming under more and more mandates to do things certain ways, and I'm glad that SPR is in a position to take part in this work going forward. However, there's still some work to be done. For instance, when the City began having recent conversations about urban tree canopy, SPR wasn't initially invited to those discussions.

We also need to be aware of climate change as we install new plants and trees. Some traditional native plantings may not be appropriate as we adjust to new climate norms.

Being a steward and caretaker of the land is an awesome responsibility. I'm proud and excited that we here in Seattle are leaning into the knowledge of our indigenous Coast Salish peoples.

J: How does SPR determine its priorities?

D: To a large extent, we rely on our community partnerships. We have very informed and engaged people that we partner with, although we can sometimes talk ourselves to death. This [MPAC] is a great example. Even our brief introductory question opened my eyes to the diversity of lenses that people bring to this park. We're realizing that one-size-fits-all solutions are not satisfactory, and we need to be willing to adapt and grow along with the times.

J: Would you share how SPR and SPD are working together to create cohesion?

D: Park safety is important, and it is important to me. People trust us with their children every single day. My own son goes to a park near our home nearly every day. We can't take basic trust in the safety of our parks for granted. I'm concerned every day about employee safety, and I'm concerned about visitor safety.

In addition to coordination with our security partners, we have a responsibility to maintaining safety in our parks through other means, like maintaining proper lighting, being smart about environmental changes, and landscaping changes. And as we saw recently at Cal Anderson Park and City Hall Park, positive and thoughtful park activation and improvements to lighting can make a big difference.

De Abreu notes the difficulty of fostering interdepartmental coordination, especially regarding lighting improvement issues with SDOT, SCL, DON, and other City departments. Does Diaz have any advice to aid De Abreu (and MPAC generally) with their ongoing advocacy work?

Diaz thanks De Abreu for the question and agrees that this sort of coordination can be particularly challenging. Mayor Harrell has instituted the One Seattle program and moniker partially with the intent of making the City government feel more inclusive and approachable, and part of that mission is to be responsive to exactly this kind of concern. We're doing a similar thing in the Parks department with our new No Wrong Door policy. What we're finding is that in situations where SPR may not be the landowner for some of these issues—maybe something is happening across the street, or next door—SPR is still affected, so we need to be the biggest advocate for park-adjacent spaces.

Bragg thanks Diaz for the ongoing responsiveness from Judd, Diaz, and the Superintendent's Office, specifically noting the newly-painted crosswalks in the park and the temporary barrier on Lake Shore Drive NE.

Fruland notes that Diaz's legal background is likely beneficial for the administration and negotiation elements of his job; Diaz concurs.

Gay Bowl XXIII: October 5-8

Brian Hawker (United Sports Seattle) introduces the upcoming event.

The annual Gay Bowl is the premier event of the National Gay Flag Football League (NGFFL). United Sports Seattle helps facilitate larger programming for smaller leagues and helps bring together the logistics for a large regional event such as Gay Bowl.

Gay Bowl XXIII will be the largest event in NGFFL's history, and the largest event of its kind. In addition to the competitive nature of the flag football tournament, this event is all about the creation of safe spaces for players to express themselves in a sporting venue.

Aaron Olson (United Sports Seattle) provides an overview of event logistics.

The opening ceremony for Gay Bowl XXIII will take place on October 5 at Lumen Field, thanks to our partnership with the Seattle Seahawks. The impact to Magnuson Park will primarily be from 10/6-10/8, from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm. Since most guests are going to be from out of town, we anticipate that most people will be staying offsite and will shuttle in, so additional cars will be minimal, maybe 50 or 60 more cars than usual, mostly locals.

The tournament itself is free to spectate and is open to the public. We will have several food trucks and a beer garden, which we will be monitoring very closely.

Hoard asks if there is an estimated number of spectators anticipated. Olson shares that spectator numbers are difficult to anticipate and that previous events did not keep good records of this. However, about 400 spectators throughout each day is a fair guess, making the total guest count about 2000. There is no plan for bleachers, etc.; spectators will need to bring their own seating or plan to stand.

Bragg asks if communication can be sent to participants reminding everyone to keep their dogs on-leash at Magnuson Park. Olson affirms that this can happen.

Hawker and Olson thank MPAC for the time to present. Both emphasize the cultural and personal importance that a visible and inclusive gay sports league can have for both youth and adults. Gay youth often feel excluded or unable to participate fully in organized sports. The group broadly concurs that events like Gay Bowl have the power to positively transform lives.

MPAC members thank Hawker and Olson for the presentation.

Meeting Wrap-Up; Old & New Business

There is no further business to discuss.

Gratitude & Adjourn

Bragg adjourns the meeting at 7:30 pm.