



Department of Parks and Recreation

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners
Meeting Minutes
June 14, 2007

Board of Park Commissioners:

Present:

John Barber
Terry Holme
Jackie Ramels
Amit Ranade, Chair

Seattle Parks and Recreation Staff:

Christopher Williams, Interim Deputy Superintendent
Sandy Brooks, Park Board Coordinator

Commissioner Ranade called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Commissioner Holme moved, and Commissioner Ramels seconded, approval of the agenda. Commissioner Ramels moved, and Commissioner Holme seconded, approval of the May 24 minutes, as amended. Both motions were approved. The Acknowledgment of Correspondence from the April 12 to the June 14 meeting was approved.

Superintendent's Report

Interim Deputy Superintendent Williams reported on the following items. For more information on Seattle Parks and Recreation, please visit the web pages at <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/>.

Pacific Northwest Senior Games: The Senior Games saw attendance go from 300 last year to about 450 this year. Formerly called the Greater Seattle Senior Games, the name changed this year with the games' expansion to the Eastside cities of Redmond, Kirkland, Mercer Island and Bellevue. Events include 11 different sports and activities, from golf to kayaking to dancing. The games began June 1 in Renton with ice hockey and will end June 17 with tennis in Seattle. For more information, see http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2003741110_seniorgames09e.html. One of the competitors, 88 year-old runner Phil Flash, recalled his friendship with Bobby Morris. Mr. Morris played baseball for the Seattle Cubs in the late 1920s, was a Rose Bowl referee, coach, and advisor to young players. In 1980, a Seattle Park playfield was named in honor of Mr. Morris. For more information on Bobby Morris Playfield, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/bobbymor.htm>.

Pike Place Historical Preservation Board Meeting: Interim Deputy Superintendent Williams attended yesterday's meeting where Seattle Parks requested a certificate of approval to change the lighting from amber to white at Victor Steinbrueck Park, located near Pike Place Market. The Historic Preservation Board approved the change in the lights, which will produce less glare and increase visibility in the park. Approximately 60-70 people attended the meeting. For more information on Victor Steinbrueck Park, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/victorsteinbrueckpark.htm>.

Center City Parks Update: Staff removed encampments from park property at 6th and Seneca and initiated a meeting with Seattle Police and WSDOT to coordinate plans to block access to these areas. The next step is to assess the entire area between Cherry and Seneca Streets for Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) actions. Washington State Department of Transportation, Seattle Police Department, and Parks are also scheduling more frequent cleanups of these areas.

Pilot Photo Program at Japanese Garden: Parks is working on a pilot program to schedule wedding photos and special occasion portraits in the Japanese Garden during times when the gardens are closed to the public. The program is planned to begin on June 15. For more information on the Japanese Garden, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/japanesegarden.htm>.

Queen Anne Boulevard Improvements: The third public meeting to outline the scope, schedule, and budget for the project was a great success. The major goals of the project are to ensure pedestrian safety along the boulevard and to return a sense of identity to it. For more information on Queen Anne Boulevard, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/QueenAnneBlvd.htm>.

Youth Athletics: Seattle Parks' athletics unit is sponsoring free Summer Sports Camps this season for youth aged 6-14. Best Effort Basketball Camps are also taking registrations for the summer. Information and registration forms are available on the web site and at the community centers which are sponsoring clinics. For more information, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/athletics/youthsummer.htm>.

Rental Facilities Revenue Increase: For the month of May, Golden Gardens Bathhouse gross revenues were \$11,527. This is a significant increase from May of 2006, when gross revenues totaled \$4,349. Bookings at Ward Springs Pump House have increased with gross revenue for the month of May of \$534, an increase from \$179 in May 2006. Pritchard Beach bookings continue to increase (likely based on word of mouth, advertising in the facilities brochure and increased information and pictures on the website). It is steadily booked for weekends throughout the summer. For more information on facility rentals, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/reservations/facrentalguide.htm>.

Aquarium Grand Opening One Week Away! Next week is a busy one on the waterfront as the Aquarium closes its doors Wednesday at 5:00 p.m. for one day and then has a grand reopening on Friday, June 22. For more information on the Aquarium and the grand opening, see <http://www.seattleaquarium.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=183&srcid=-2>. The Aquarium's 2007 SPLASH! Fundraising was a fantastic success. With 600 eager bidders in attendance, the Seattle Aquarium Society's June 8 annual fundraiser brought in over \$1,300,000 during the one-night event.

Neighborhood Matching Fund: The following projects were awarded funding during the April 2007 Small and Simple Neighborhood Matching Fund cycle: Northeast Queen Anne Greenbelt-trails and reforestation; Dance for Peace-Alki event; Garden Gathering Place-Danny Woo; Water Exploration Zone-Jefferson Park; Orchard Street Ravine; Colman P-Patch irrigation repair; SUN pocket park (in Laurelhurst); and Bergen Place Enhancement. For more information on the Neighborhood Matching Fund, see <http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/nmf/>.

Upcoming Events:

Dahl Playfield Dedication: A dedication for this Neighborhood Matching Fund project will be on Saturday, June 30, at 11:45 am. The project includes four years hard work that has resulted in a new play area (designed by Siteworkshop), a wetland type planting designed by specialists at the Center for Urban Horticulture and the University of Washington, an art piece by John Hoge, and an improved ballfield designed by a volunteer engineer. The largest private donation was

\$100,000 from the Boeing–Mariner Foundation to renovate the largest ballfield. For more information on Dahl Playfield, see <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkspaces/dahl.htm>.

Oral Requests and Communication from the Audience

The Chair explained that this portion of the agenda is reserved for topics that have not had, or are not scheduled for, a public hearing. Speakers are limited to three minutes each and will be timed. The Board’s usual process is for 15 minutes of testimony to be heard at this time, with additional testimony heard after the regular agenda and just before Board of Park Commissioner’s business. Two people testified.

Jim Anderson: He is Loyal Heights Community Council president and referred to the Phase II results of the City Council requested audit of Seattle Parks’ public involvement policy. The Parks Department is now saying the only mistake it made [at the Loyal Heights Playfield project] was not explaining the process adequately to the public. He then read part of an April 24 article from the Ballard Tribune. His continuing concerns include: (1) Parks is now saying “let’s just move forward from here.” He wants the Department to slow down and absorb the lessons learned from the audit; (2) Parks is saying that if it lets the public know how previous decisions on a project were made, everything will be okay. He does not agree with that; and (3) There is still resentment in the Loyal Heights community on how they were treated by Seattle Parks. Mr. Anderson stated that he would also supply written information to the Board.

Donald Rowe: He referred to crime problems at Wallingford Playground and has sent correspondence to Seattle Police Department, Seattle Parks, and the Board of Park Commissioners detailing his observations.

Discussion/Recommendation: Wallingford Playfield/Hamilton Middle School Project

At its May 24 meeting, Terry Dunning, Parks Manager of Major Transactions, and Patti Petesch, Youth and Teen Programming Manager, presented a briefing on the Hamilton Middle School project and the impacts of the project on Wallingford Playfield. Tonight the Board is asked to discuss and vote on a recommendation regarding the proposal.

The May 24 briefing was immediately followed by a public hearing with approximately 30 people testifying, The Commissioners accepted written testimony through June 13. Following the briefing, Commissioners submitted a list of questions to Seattle Parks and Seattle Public Schools staff. The questions and answers were posted to the Board’s web page at <http://www.seattle.gov/parks/parkboard> and copies were made available to the audience for tonight’s meeting.

Written Questions and Answers

Hamilton Middle School Remodel Project at Wallingford Park
Park Commissioners Questions from May 24 Meeting

The Board of Park Commissioners members asked the following questions at the May 24 meeting, during which the Board took testimony from the community on the Hamilton Middle School remodel project. Answers that relate to the park have been prepared by Parks staff. Answers that relate to the school have been prepared by School District staff.

Questions answered by Parks staff

- 1. *What is the construction staging area?***
Construction will be staged in the parking lot at Lincoln High School, on the current Hamilton property, and probably on a small part of the street.
- 2. *Regarding the 27 feet of pavement – what could Parks do with this space if it is not used for the school?***
Parks does not have any plans or funding for the area.
- 3. *If we do not allow the 27 foot Lot Boundary Adjustment, specifically what condition will the area (the 27 feet) be in?***
It would be left as it is.

4. How high off the street is the gym where it abuts the garden? How high off the pavement and off the garden?

The gym is 18 feet high at the east edge, or street side, and 31 feet at the highest point above the sunken garden.

5. Will the geo-thermal wells create soil instability issues for the playfield?

No, the wells will not create any soil instability issues.

6. Is it correct that there will be no impact on the part of the park that was improved with Pro Parks Levy funds?

The Pro Parks project included construction of a new perimeter walking path, renovated park entrances, pool and play area, new play equipment, new overlooks at the west entrance of the tennis courts and new site furnishings including picnic tables, benches and lamp posts. We do not anticipate that construction on the middle school would disrupt any of this work; however, closure of the field for installation of geothermal wells would temporarily restrict use of a portion of the walking path.

7. What are the benefits/deficits of resurfacing the field with sod rather than seed?

Parks standard procedure is to seed the field. Although it extends the time the field needs to be closed, we believe that seeding develops a better root system and lawn. With this practice, the field would be closed for one growing season. One growing season is March to October. Sod, while it appears playable immediately, is not. It is playable sooner than seeded turf, but our experience shows that sod root growth is not as strong.

8. How many instances exist now of buildings that immediately abut park properties?

There are several instances. Examples include Garfield High School, which is immediately adjacent to the south side of Garfield Playfield; and the Southshore school building, which is immediately adjacent to Rainer Beach Playfield and Rainier Beach Community Center. Other examples of co-located schools and parks where the school building abuts park property include Meadowbrook Community Center and Playfield and Nathan Hale High School; Southwest Community Center and Denny Middle School; McClure Middle School and Queen Anne Community Center; and Alki Elementary School and Alki Community Center.

9. How would questions of shading and safety be addressed?

Parks staff requested a CPTED (crime prevention through environmental review) review of the sunken garden area. The review from the Seattle Police Department is as follows:

From a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) standpoint Option B (the Plaza) is much preferred. The area known as the "sunken garden" is hidden from view from both the school grounds and the grass playfield in the park. One of the main tenets of CPTED is to create, maintain or enhance natural surveillance measures. Criminals or troublemakers tend to gravitate towards areas that conceal their activities. In an uncontrolled environment like a park (as opposed to private property), this kind of space promotes loitering; property damage including graffiti, drug sales and drug use; and related crimes. Due to the proximity of the school and the popularity of the children's play area in the park, this spot may also attract child predators.

Questions answered by School District staff

1. What consideration has been made for design alternatives?

The School District considered many alternatives in an effort to avoid a lot boundary adjustment. We did, in fact, consider alternative locations and orientations for the gym, none of which we found to offer any advantages. However, in response to the recommendations of the community, the District did shorten the gym by three feet, thus eliminating the need for the school to extend beyond the retaining wall. The School District commissioned architects to articulate the façade in a manner that reflects the character of Wallingford.

2. *What is the history of the School District's project at this location? Was there an earlier plan for a larger project?*

The School District originally endeavored to relocate Hamilton to the nearby Lincoln High School site. In 2006, when the District identified other uses of the Lincoln site, we engaged our "School Design Team," a group of volunteer stakeholders how advise the School District on design choices, to devise a plan for Hamilton at its original site. The original plans submitted by the District included a request for 11 feet in addition to the 27 feet of vacated street right-of-way to accommodate the larger gym and to allow for a setback. The community objected and the project was reduced, thus eliminating the District's need for the additional 11 feet, and restricting the property needed for the remodel to the vacated street right-of-way.

3. *Can you please provide more information about the geothermal wells and this technology?*

There will be 132 wells, which includes several additional wells for redundancy -- should a well fail. The wells will be spaced 22 feet apart and 345 feet deep. This spacing is based on the thermal conductivity of the soil. Information about the thermal conductivity of the soil is based on a test well drilled on the Hamilton property, and the geotechnical report. The number of wells is determined by the heating and cooling needs for the building. Further information is provided in the attached pdf document (Hamilton Ground Source Slideshow). This technology has successfully been in use at MADISON MIDDLE School since 2005.

4. *Both the Wallingford Neighborhood Plan (1996) and the School District's Facilities Master Plan (1999, revised January 18, 2006) call for a different approach for the future of Hamilton (International) Middle School: move the School to the current Lincoln High School complex. What process was undertaken to change the plan?*

Previous School Boards did intend to move Hamilton to Lincoln. It was a long-standing idea that underwent review in early 2006 when our planners began to collect information for the Building Excellence III Bond Package. Upon reviewing the demographic data that points to a possible need for additional secondary education facilities in the North End, and realizing that Lincoln is the only appropriate interim site, the current School Board voted to include Hamilton in the Bond Package and retain Lincoln for these more appropriate uses. The School Design Team (SDT), a group of teachers, students, staff, and community members, were asked to consider designs for Hamilton to remain at its original site. At the end of this design phase, the new Hamilton design was compared with previous designs for Lincoln, and the SDT found that the design for Hamilton was superior.

5. *Is the density issue proposed by using the Hamilton School site (Hamilton Middle School to be at 410 to 455 students per acre, while other middle schools have much lower densities) an indication of future planning or disposition of middle school facilities? This could have an impact on open space and outdoor recreational amenities in other neighborhoods.*

Seattle Parks and Recreation and Seattle Public Schools have a historical partnership. Parks and schools have historically been built adjacent to one another to offer the most possible amenities to the community. When calculating the relative size of our sites, SPS frequently takes into account the adjacent park acres because the properties of both agencies are within the public trust and both agencies have the primary purpose of serving the citizens of Seattle. SPS and Parks have established procedures to govern the sharing of public space and working together to offer the students and the community the best outdoor recreational amenities.

6. *Building Excellence Levy # 2 (2001) stated that Lincoln High School would be renovated to accommodate Hamilton Middle School. Then, Building Excellence Levy # 3 (2007) committed the renovation of the current Hamilton School building for Hamilton International Middle School. How much of the work on Lincoln High School was accomplished to meet middle school requirements? How is the apparent redundancy explained?*

When BEX II was conceived, it was thought that Ballard High School would spend its interim time -- while the school was being renovated -- in facilities at Warren G. Magnuson Park. When that plan failed to come to fruition, Ballard was sent to Lincoln, as Lincoln was the only appropriate secondary facility in the north end. The funds committed to renovating Lincoln for Hamilton were used to renovate Lincoln for use as an interim site, and also transferred to other projects. Although Lincoln was intended to become the new home for

Hamilton, the current Board voted to keep in at Hamilton based on the new student population projections, and the new need for an interim site. The Board has clearly stated that it does not intend to revisit the issue.

- 7. *Is the ultimate plan to eventually move Hamilton International Middle School to the Lincoln High School building after the needs for an interim site for various school populations while renovations of other school properties are undertaken? If so, what is to be the long-term use of the current Hamilton School site?***

Once Hamilton is renovated it is expected to serve as a middle school for the next 50 years. Lincoln will serve as an interim site for at least the next 12 years, and then will likely be renovated to be a secondary education facility.

- 8. *Is it possible to rotate the gymnasium ninety degrees, even if such a change would require a smaller lobby or re-oriented or re-sized wash rooms? Is it possible to design the gymnasium in an interior location, as we understand some neighbors are proposing? One advantage cited for this design modification is preserving the informal use of basketball hoops next to the Playfield. Comments?***

The District has explored every possible orientation of the gymnasium and has not found an adequate alternative. Rotating the building 90 degrees would eliminate natural light and sight lines for the entire north end of the building. Studies have repeatedly shown the benefit of natural light to classroom learning and the District has made a commitment in its renovations and new construction to maximize natural light. The primary reason for the larger lobby is so that Parks can schedule the gymnasium for community programming. If the gymnasium were located inside the building it would pose security and utility liabilities that could limit the flexibility Parks would have with scheduling the facility.

- 9. *The Qwest utility easement runs just south of the centerline of the vacated right-of-way. It is reported that Qwest strongly discourages building over its buried cables, and if such is to occur, Qwest would require an alternative easement for future use. How does Parks envisage an easement across Wallingford Playfield property, or is there an alternative route for the easement?***

The District has proposed placing the Qwest duct bank easement under the pathway of the Sunken Garden so as to minimize the impact of construction. This would not cause additional disruption to the garden, as it would be placed under the existing pathway and would occur concurrently with the building and/or thermal well construction activities. The School District is legally bound to provide Qwest with access to the duct bank. The alternative is to make the gym another six feet shorter further reducing the utility of the gymnasium.

- 10. *Some neighbors indicated willingness to support a variance to reduce the on-site parking requirement to zero. It appears that there is ample on-street parking available within the block or two around the school. Will the District consider pursuing this alternative?***

The District would be perfectly amenable to eliminating the parking structure. It was included in the design because we are required by law to include parking in our renovations and new construction. In addition, the Hamilton staff numbers approximately 75 and we sought to ease the burden on the surrounding neighborhood by providing 45 stalls. If the Department of Planning & Development grants the departure to allow zero parking on site, we will be happy to comply with the community's recommendation.

- 11. *Is it possible to locate the wells around the periphery of the current school building under the planting strips and under the on-site parking areas?***

This land belongs to SDOT, and SDOT does not allow easements. In addition, 132 wells located 22 feet apart are needed, and there simply isn't space to accommodate this.

- 12. *It is understood that construction of the wells would take the playfield out of commission for a season or two. What assurance is there that if once built, repairs of any of the wells would again force closing down the playfield? And, what assurance is there that sinkholes will appear, making the playfield unsafe and/or unusable?***

The geothermal heat pump system is highly reliable and has an excellent record of requiring minimal maintenance and repair. However, should a repair needs to be made to a well, a 4-foot by 4-foot square would be cut into the playfield to access the well, which would result in minimal impact to the playfield.

Addendum – The following questions were submitted to Parks staff from Park Board member John Barber late last week. Parks staff asked the School District to answer the questions, as they are not park related. The following answers have been provided by School District staff.

1. How essential are the bleachers, and how much space is justified for a reasonable gymnasium facility for a middle school of this size?

The bleachers are essential to serve the International program. It is important to be able to have all students be able to assemble in one place. In addition, middle school best practices call for gymnasiums to be able to hold several gym classes concurrently to meet the needs of a student population of 900-1000.

2. Are there facilities in the Lincoln High School building that could address the need for occasional class assemblies or sports events?

No.

3. Could a utility vault be constructed under the new parking and gymnasium?

No. The existing duct bank would be under the parking structure and gymnasium, which is why Qwest has required a new duct bank be built without a permanent structure obstructing access.

4. Has SDOT officially rejected a request to utilize street right-of-way for geothermal wells?

Yes, SDOT said it would not allow the easement.

5. Has a qualified engineer determined that placing some of the geothermal wells under the parking is infeasible?

Yes, several engineers have confirmed that placing the wells beneath a permanent structure is against best practices for the system.

6. Have other methods of energy conservation been explored -- solar panels on roof, insulated windows, passive solar techniques, etc.?

Yes. The District's plans call for the existing windows to be removed and refurbished which would make significant efficiency improvements. In addition, they are currently researching placing solar cells on the roof. However, the solar cells would not have the capacity to heat and cool the building.

Board Discussion & Recommendation

Several Seattle Parks and Seattle Public School staff introduced themselves and answered questions. Staff from Seattle Parks included: Terry Dunning, Manager of Major Transactions; Patti Petesch, Manager of Youth and Teen Programming; and Joe Neiford, Senior Landscape Architect. Staff from Seattle Public Schools included: Eleanor Trainor, Capital Projects Community Liaison; Don Gillmore, *Building Excellence (BEX)* program manager; and Michael Romero, project manager and consultant from Heery International.

After the May 24 meeting, Park Board Commissioners submitted an extensive list of questions to Parks and School staff. Written answers to the questions were sent to the Commissioners and posted to the Commissioners' web site. Copies were also made available to members of the audience at tonight's meeting.

Commissioners' questions/observations at tonight's meeting are listed below and grouped or reflected by subject:

How much effort has recently been done to improve this park?

During the past four-five years, Wallingford Park has been the site of a Pro Parks Levy renovation, Neighborhood Matching Fund project, and ballfield renovation.

Ballfield/drainage problems

Commissioners asked a number of questions about the ballfield.

General information on the ballfield: Ms. Petesch, Interim Superintendent Williams, and Mr. Neiford explained that the ballfield was renovated four years ago at a cost of \$200,000. It has a history of poor drainage.

Use of the park and drainage problems: All athletic fields are generally in use 8 months each year and are closed to play from the third week in November to the first week in March to allow the grass to recover from usage. Parks' mowing policy is to leave grass clippings on as mulch. This can build up over time, making it difficult for water to percolate through the soil. At this field, water drains to the southeast corner and with the slope of the park, there is some standing water. Mr. Gillmore stated that SPS determined that the field also has a slightly wavy surface, which causes pooling of water.

If the proposal moves forward, how long would the ballfields be out of use? Mr. Gillmore answered that SPS would want to install the geothermal wells as quickly as possible, making the field unusable for one year. The one year would include the scheduled winter closure. No sports teams would be able to use the field during that year; however, the tennis courts would be usable.

Is it reasonable to expect that the field would drain better after the SPS renovations? Once the geo-thermal wells are completed, SPS would completely renovate the drainage system, re-contour the field to remove the wavy surface, and add crowning to the fields to improve the drainage and deal with the settling of soil. They would scrape the field down six foot and re-build. They would keep the field's current 3-1/2 foot of sand and re-spread it during the renovation. Mr. Dunning stated that if the proposal is recommended, Seattle Parks would require clear language on the measures SPS would use to return the playfield to equal or better condition than what is now there and the dollar value of these measures.

Could sod be used instead of seeded grass to bring the fields back to play sooner? As a rule, Seattle Parks' athletic fields are seeded grass. Sod does not hold up as well and can be a trip hazard to players. The one exception to this in Seattle Parks' athletic fields is a sand-based sod from Canada used at West Seattle playfield that, so far, has been successful. Eventually seeded and sod grass will develop the same root depth; however, sod requires more maintenance during the period the roots are developing.

School gym

Windows — replace them to conserve energy and decrease the need for geo-thermal wells: The school and current small gym was built in the 1920s and are landmarked, thus the windows cannot be replaced. The heating system will be completely rebuilt and roof insulation used to help bring the building up to State energy code. If replacement window kits were installed, it would reduce the number of geothermal wells by only six. He cited Garfield High School as another landmarked site where the kits were installed on half the windows at a cost of \$1 million. Following a suggestion that SPS appeal the landmark designation, Mr. Gillmore briefly explained the appeal decision process. Commissioner Barber suggested SPS prepare information on cost savings of using non-historic windows to assist in the appeal process. Commissioner Barber asked Parks staff a two-part question: Did Parks show the Police Department for the plans showing how the gymnasium would be constructed right up to the boundary of the Parks Property? If so, what was the Police's recommendation? Interim Deputy Superintendent Williams answered for Parks, saying yes, the Police were shown the plan. The Police recommended that the gymnasium should be pushed back. Commissioner Barber asked the question again and received the same answer.

Intended future use: During school hours, the gym can be divided in half to accommodate two full size gym classes. Seating for 1,000 would be accommodated by retractable bleachers, while still allowing a full size court for play. In answer to a question on whether bleachers are safe for middle school students, Mr. Gillmore answered that bleachers are standard for middle and high school but are not used in elementary schools. Parks would have use of the gym after school hours with its Citywide Athletics staff handling the programming. It would be used during the non-school hours for adult basketball, volleyball, free play, performances, public meetings, guest speakers, and other uses.

Height: In answer to a question on whether the gym's vertical elevation can be adjusted, Mr. Gillmore answered that the Qwest duct bank is underneath the site and the new gym can only be built so far below the current floor level. ADA accessibility to the lobby would be much more difficult if it is lowered. The interior height of the gym is dictated by the sports to be played; 26 foot is the minimum regulation ceiling height for volleyball.

Geothermal wells

Cost benefit of the wells and field renovation: Mr. Gillmore answered that the geothermal wells would have an 8-year payback for their installation. This figure does not include the cost of the ballfield restoration. He believes the investment is good for both SPS and for Parks.

Did SPS approach the appropriate and best City staff to determine if the asphalt strip and planting strip could be used for the geothermal wells? Mr. Gillman answered that there are a number of public utilities under the areas. Removing them would be very costly.

Joint use agreement

History of the Seattle Parks/Seattle Public School System Joint Use Agreement at this park: The agreement has been in use since the 1920's. The school gets use of the ballfields during school hours and Parks has use for the other hours. SPS' agreement for Hamilton requests use of the field 750 hours per year for physical education classes and after school programs. The school does not use the fields during the winter closure (third week of November to first week of March.) Although the school may not use the fields 750 hours every year, Seattle Parks still gets credit for that amount under the Joint Use Agreement.

Retaining wall/right of way

Staff clarified that of the 66' of asphalt area, both Parks and SPS have 27' each. The remaining 12 feet is street right of way. The retaining wall is on the south end of this area.

Crime concerns

Crime concerns/information at sunken garden: Staff did not have statistics for any crimes committed at the sunken garden. As part of the proposal, Seattle Police Department was asked to look at the project as part of its CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) program, with the following summary: "From a CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) standpoint Option B (the Plaza) is much preferred. The area known as the "sunken garden" is hidden from view from both the school grounds and the grass playfield in the park. One of the main tenets of CPTED is to create, maintain or enhance natural surveillance measures. Criminals or troublemakers tend to gravitate towards areas that conceal their activities. In an uncontrolled environment like a park (as opposed to private property), this kind of space promotes loitering; property damage including graffiti, drug sales and drug use; and related crimes. Due to the proximity of the school and the popularity of the children's play area in the park, this spot may also attract child predators." In addition, SPD's North Precinct recommended that SPS engineer the wall next to the sunken garden out of the final design, as it could be an attractive nuisance for crime. Mr. Neiford commented that the sunken garden is lighted. Mr. Romero walked the park with one of the North Precinct "beat cops" and the officer stated that there should be a clear line of vision from the park into the playfield.

Concerns with underground parking area: In response to the concerns, Mr. Gillmore stated that there will be 45 parking spaces for school staff. Entrance is by key card only, with no other way to access the area. Parks can use the area after school hours, upon request.

What happens next: Mediation/facilitated discussion

Where is SPS in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process? Mr. Gillmore stated that the appeal period is over. Alternatives to move the gym were considered, and the current proposal was chosen as the best alternative.

If the Board and Superintendent don't recommend the SPS proposal, what will SPS do next? Would SPS go to City Council with the current proposal? Mr. Gillmore answered that SPS has held many meetings with the community on this proposal. It includes a lobby with restrooms that can be used when the school is closed and the gym that can be utilized for many community events — both requested by the community. It is possible that the plan would be revised to remove the lobby and move the gym back to the SPS lot line. The restrooms would then no longer be accessible when the school is closed. Construction costs are increasing at a rate of 2% each month and SPS cannot afford to delay on this project. If SPS thought it would get a positive result by going to City Council, it would do so. If not, it will move ahead and plans to bid the project in February 2008.

Is there a precedent for the mediation proposed by the Wallingford Community Council? Mr. Dunning answered none that he is aware of. Ms. Trainor stated that she was at the meeting where the Community Council voted on the resolution requesting the mediation. SPS is amenable to work more with the community. Mr. Gillmore clarified that SPS is willing to have a facilitated discussion, not mediation. Wallingford Community Council is asking for a full-fledged mediation process to include the Department of Planning and Development, Seattle Public Schools, Seattle Parks, and the community. SPS staff must take this back to District staff for consideration. A facilitated discussion is one thing; mediation is an entirely different matter. SPS must move ahead with this project.

More detailed Commissioner discussion of the mediation/facilitated discussion proposal: **Commissioner Ranade** is an attorney and clarified that mediation is a legal and binding process, where a facilitated discussion does not include legal ramifications. Interim Deputy Superintendent Williams commented that it is premature in the process to consider mediation and recommended that the normal process be followed. **Commissioner Holme** answered that there is much process ahead. The proposal still must go before City Council and there are design issues to resolve. He doesn't want a negative perception that concerns will be answered later in the process. He is trying to get answers to concerns into the public record.

Commissioner Barber stated that mediation makes sense to him. Wallingford adopted its neighborhood plan and it was exceptional in that the plan addressed school and park issues. Most neighborhood plans did not include these elements. He believes from written testimony he read that there is a varied understanding of the SPS proposal in the community. He believes the City is honor bound to uphold the neighborhood plan. He referred to a last minute, alternative plan submitted by the community that he doesn't believe SPS has yet seen.

Commissioner Ranade asked what Seattle Parks plans to do with the 27' of asphalted property if the lot boundary adjustment is denied. Mr. Dunning answered that Parks has no plans for the property.

Commissioner Ranade reminded the audience that the Board is being asked tonight by SPS to recommend the lot boundary adjustment.

Commissioner Ramels stated that this proposal is a complex issue. The Board of Park Commissioners is a volunteer, unpaid advisory board that makes recommendations to the Superintendent.

Since the public hearing, she visited the park and found it to be beautiful. It is a fabulous park with lots of work and effort to make it that way. There was lots of activity in the park during her visit. She is sorry the level of discourse on this issue has degenerated and disturbed that the Board of Park Commissioners is put in the position, at this time, to make a recommendation on this proposal. Who would vote against schools and who would vote against the public who have worked so hard at this park? She believes the City Council should decide issues like this. And she thinks a facilitated discussion with people in the community who have worked in the park should have been held before this proposal came before the Board. She stated that, given the great amount of work that has taken place in the park – the ProParks Levy project, the field renovation and the NMF project (sunken gardens), and given that we are the Board of Parks Commissioners, it is the Board's responsibility to protect and preserve parks. Park land is not disposable.

Motion

Commissioner Ramels moved to recommend [to the Interim Superintendent] to deny the lot boundary adjustment and field disruption necessary to install the ground wells. Commissioner Barber seconded.

A lengthy discussion followed.

Commissioner Holme spoke against the motion. He doesn't believe the Board has had adequate time to process the amount of information received on this proposal. The Board has received heavy volumes of testimony on previous projects; however, he does not recall any with this volume of well thought out and articulated testimony. He believes the Board of Park Commissioners has not had enough time to process the amount of information it received and should defer a decision on the proposal. With respect for the sunken garden in the park, he feels it is poor urban park design, [especially from a standpoint of public safety.] The survey results showed that some neighbors are concerned with future density of the area and the uses of the park area. He would be less hesitant to not approve the proposal if not approving would protect an amenity [27' strip of asphalted area] with long-term prospects. If the park received full compensation from Seattle Public Schools to change the design that would be a plus to the park; if the project were built to the property line, Seattle Public Schools would pay mitigation for using park property as staging area and the park could be restored to a better condition than it is in now. The long-term benefits would be a better park design, improved drainage for the ballfield, environmental gains from the geo-thermal wells, and the school would benefit. Two to three years after the completion of this project would result in a better park than is now there.

Commissioner Barber referred to the mediation process asked for by the Wallingford Community Council and stated that he was referring to some process between a facilitated discussion and a formal mediation. In response to Commissioner Holme's comments about the parks' safety, he visited the site on two occasions and did not feel the sunken garden posed a safety risk. The shrubbery was overgrown; however, it could be trimmed and other efforts made to improve visibility into the sunken garden. His neighborhood had good results working with Seattle Police to lessen crime issues at a neighborhood park. He is also concerned that all the geo-thermal wells and whether the engineering has been fully explored.

Commissioner Ramels, in response to Commissioner Holme's concerns about safety, commented that a feeling of safety and a sense of beauty can be subjective. Her goal is to honor and protect the community effort and the Park Department's efforts at this park. Both those processes have worked well to create a fabulous park.

Commissioner Ranade asked if a facilitated discussion takes place, how quickly could that happen. Ms. Trainor answered that it could be scheduled within 3-4 weeks, once the discussion process was determined. She asked that a recommendation to have a facilitated discussion have some clear objective included. Mr. Gillmore stated that Seattle Public Schools has already held 40 public meetings on this proposal and must move forward. He believes that the request from Wallingford Community Council is to have a third party to facilitate a discussion and not have a legally binding mediation. An outcome where Seattle Parks is left with 27' of asphalt is the worst possible result.

Commissioner Holme moved to table the motion on the floor, pending results of a facilitated discussion, to be held as quickly as possible. The motion to table failed for lack of second.

Commissioner Barber made a friendly amendment to Commissioner Ramels' motion to add two additional parts: (1) recommend third party facilitated mediation, (2) with the Board of Park Commissioner's willingness to revisit the question after the mediation is completed. Commissioner Ramels accepted the friendly amendment. The vote was taken, with Commissioners Ramels and Barber voting in favor of the motion. Commissioner Holme opposed. Motion passed.

The Commissioners thanked Seattle Parks and Seattle Public Schools staff for the briefing and answers to questions.

Briefing: Seattle Parks' Public Involvement Process Audit, Phase II

Dewey Potter, Seattle Parks Communication Manager, briefed the Board on Phase II of the City Council-requested audit of the Department's public involvement process. Additional information on the audit is available at <http://www.seattle.gov/audit/docs/ParksPhase2041207.pdf>. Commissioners received both a verbal and written briefing.

Written Briefing

Requested Board Action

None.

Project Description and Background

The City Auditor undertook the audit at the request of Councilmember David Della. Phase II was completed in 2006 and Parks has implemented many of the recommendations (listed on Appendix B below.) Phase 2 was an examination of the public process for the Loyal Heights Playfield Pro Parks Levy project.

Public Involvement Process

The City Auditor conducted interviews with community members to learn what they thought might improve Parks public involvement processes in the future.

Issues

The Auditor believes that Parks should have:

- Contacted the community between 2002 and the 2005 beginning of the project.
- Included the words "artificial turf" in the levy language (drafted by the Law Department.) The language for each ballfield improvement project simply made references to "improvements."
- Hired a facilitator to improve the tone of the public meetings.
- Made clearer that the Superintendent was willing, upon hearing compelling reasons from the community, to reconsider the decision to go ahead with the project.

Budget

The Audit recommended a position be added to the Planning and Development Division to track the process for each project, in order to make sure every detailed step is carried out, and \$50,000 for a consultant to help with analysis of translation and live interpretation needs by sector of the city and by type of material. That request was denied in the 4th Quarter 2007 Supplemental Budget request, and Parks plans to submit a request for funding for the consultant in the 2008 budget.

Schedule

None. We continue to implement the recommendations.

Staff Recommendation (if applicable)

None.

Appendix B: Parks' Public Involvement Phase 1 Action Plan

This action plan was developed in September 2006 as part of the Phase 1 Parks' Public Involvement Audit. It represents a consensus among the Office of City Auditor, the Department of Finance, and Seattle Parks and Recreation. The status of each item is indicated below.

Reaching Hard-to-Reach Communities

Parks Action Items:

1. Use Census Information: Parks will use the results of a recent Parks report, Census 2000: A Demographic Overview of Seattle's Communities, prepared pursuant to Seattle Parks and Recreation Plan 2000, to determine the unique populations in various Parks service areas in order to identify and reach out appropriately to those populations.

Status: Underway. Parks has convened an executive team in response to the audit and to the Mayor's Executive Order and is in the planning stage of this work.

2. Consultant Study of Unique Populations: Parks plans to hire a consultant to examine unique populations in service areas and make recommendations about how to do effective outreach to each, based on study of cultural customs, traditions, and relationships with government. The results of the study would benefit all City departments. An example of a similar study performed in Boston can be found at:

http://www.barrfoundation.org/usr_doc/Immigrant_Engagement_in_Public_Open_Space_final.pdf

Status: Funding request was denied by the Department of Finance.

3. New E-Mail Lists: Parks staff have developed new e-mail lists that include the chairs of the city neighborhood councils, and are developing e-mail lists of contact people for community organizations, in an effort to increase participation in Parks processes, especially in neighborhoods where participation is sparse.

Status: Underway.

4. Citywide Effort on Public Engagement: Parks is participating in a citywide effort on public engagement, coordinated by the Office for Civil Rights, to include recommendations on translations and other efforts to reach out to underserved populations.

Status: Underway. Parks is continuing to participate in this initiative led by the Office for Civil Rights.

5. Citywide Effort on Translation: Parks is participating in a citywide effort now under way, led by the Office of Policy and Management, to draft and implement a policy and procedure to guide translation and interpretation by city departments.

Status: Underway. See #1 above.

6. Outreach to Organizations Serving Unique Populations: Parks will, after identifying the unique populations in various service areas, search for organizations representing these populations, and will contact them to let them know of Parks happenings in their sectors of the city.

Status: Underway. Parks is currently searching out organizations that represent unique populations.

Using Tools and Technology for Better Public Involvement

Parks Action Items:

7. Create E-mail Groups: Parks has already begun to expand and improve upon its e-mail lists, and plans a citywide survey that will invite citizens to sign up for e-mail groups for which they indicate interest: a group for each of the city's 13 neighborhood districts and a group for each major interest area (open space, athletics, etc.). Parks will post an invitation on its web home page, inviting citizens to sign up for one or more of the above-mentioned e-mail lists. These lists, along with contacts with city neighborhood councils and community organizations, will help with outreach for planning processes.

Status: Some are completed (generic community organizations, neighborhood district councils); others are underway.

8. Web-casting Park Board Meetings: Parks plans to webcast Park Board meetings and will be testing this at an upcoming meeting in the Boards and Commissions Room at City Hall, which also has the benefit of access to a "listen-line." Parks staff are currently exploring technical options. Some of the options would cost less than the average \$5,600 per year paid in overtime to the Park Board staff person to prepare detailed minutes.

Status: Working with Seattle Channel. Parks piloted this approach at a December 2006 meeting of the Park Board.

9. Electronic Polling Devices for Selected Meetings: Parks will test electronic handheld devices that "poll" meeting attendees on preferences, tabulate results instantly, and generate a report. These devices can be useful to draw out people

not used to talking in a public setting and to gather “outlying” opinions. Parks will also consider use of the Zoomerang web survey tool for planning processes that cross neighborhoods and areas of interest.

Status: Parks has not yet had occasion to use the devices, but will consider them as a part of their public meeting tool-kit.

10. Newspaper Ad to Announce Meetings: The Park Board has asked the Mayor to look into the possibility of a weekly paid ad in one or both of the daily newspapers, announcing all City-sponsored meetings and events taking place in the upcoming week. Parks found examples of other cities that do this. Should the City decide to do this, there would be a budget impact in the future.

Status: Parks has not yet followed up on this.

11. Scrolling Information on Seattle Channel: Parks will speak with Seattle Channel staff to investigate the possibility of a “crawler” tape running along the bottom of the viewer’s screen, much like CNN and other news channels do, with pertinent information about upcoming meetings.

Status: Parks has had an initial conversation with Seattle Channel and plans to follow up.

Maintaining the Integrity of the Process

Parks Action Items

12. Redesigned Public Involvement Tracking Tools: Parks has created a new template specifically to accommodate all of the written information the revised Public Involvement Policy requires in preparation for each public meeting: project history (source); factors that may have an impact on it (safety, City Council actions, voter-approved measures, prior adopted plans); an explanation of how decisions are made and how public input will be incorporated in them; how “majority” opinions will figure in decisions; details of the process to date on the project; a reminder that input is welcome in any form; details of whatever process(es) led to an adopted plan that was the source of the project (e.g., neighborhood plan, park master plan); and a summary of outreach efforts for the current meeting. This will be used in conjunction with a checklist for each project to identify completion of each element in a project’s Public Involvement Plan. These materials will be distributed at public meetings and made available on the web.

Status: In use for all projects.

13. New Position to Support Parks’ Public Involvement Processes: Parks is requesting the creation of a new position to support public involvement activities. The responsibilities for this position would include:

- Ensuring that elements of the public involvement process for each Parks project are completed in compliance with the Parks’ public involvement policy.
- Ensuring that information about public involvement for each public process (including information available on the web) is appropriate and of consistent quality.
- Ensuring that Parks staff have access to and utilize appropriate public involvement tools including e-mail lists, outside facilitators, translators, desktop publishing support, etc.
- Supporting Parks’ efforts to reach hard-to-reach communities.

Status: Funding request was denied by the Department of Finance.

14. Expand Notification through E-Mail. A 2004 study sponsored by the City’s Department of Information Technology indicated that 83% of Seattleites have access to the Internet, and 83% have a personal computer. In addition, the City is looking for efficiencies in paper use, staff time, and postage costs, so Parks will rely heavily on e-mail and will take extra steps to reach populations who do not have it.

Status: Please see #7 above.

15. Outreach for Citywide Planning Processes: In the revisions to the Public Involvement Policy approved by the Park Board on August 24, Parks added sections that address outreach for planning processes (the original policy spoke only to funded capital projects). These planning processes generate records of desired improvements by various constituencies, including neighborhood groups and user groups—often long before any of those improvements is funded as a project. Parks believes that this will provide citizens with an opportunity for public input earlier in the life of a project.

Status: Discussions are underway about public outreach for the Strategic Business Plan, Parks' vehicle for addressing issues resulting from the end of the Pro Parks Levy.

16. More Information About How Decision Are Made: Included in the revisions to the Public Involvement Policy recommended by the Park Board is language that calls for the presentation of a variety of information in documents that Parks staff present at public meetings and publish on the web. It calls specifically for:

- a. A history of the project that includes all factors that may have an impact on the nature and issue areas open to public participation including: safety issues, City Council actions, Mayoral priorities, voter-approved measures, inclusion in an adopted plan and the public process that led to that plan, the project's budget limitations, and regional need;
- b. An explanation of how decisions are made during the process, including how Parks uses information from the public and how it affects decisions, and how "majority" opinions will figure in decisions;
- c. A detailed description of the process to date, including milestones and decisions made to date and the number of people who attended previous meetings, so that the public is "caught up" on decisions possibly made at meetings they did not attend;
- d. A reminder that written, telephoned, and e-mail comments bear equal weight with attendance at a meeting;
- e. A detailed description of the public process that led to the plan that is the source of the project;
- f. A summary of outreach efforts for the current meeting;
- g. The project budget (amount and sources) and how it may limit the project scope;
- h. The timeline for the process;
- i. The points at which comment has been/will be invited;
- j. If applicable, the elements of the project that are open to public comment (e.g., required elements such as ADA-accessibility elements, are not negotiable; levy projects have been approved by the voters and adopted by ordinance); and
- k. A statement acknowledging that even if there is disagreement within the community, Parks will need to make a decision and move forward on the project, and that some participants may not be satisfied with the decision.

Status: All this information is now included in the Public Involvement Plan for each project.

Verbal Briefing

Ms. Potter briefly reviewed the information in the written briefing, Appendix B, and the current status of each recommendation from the audit.

Among her comments on results of the Loyal Heights Playfield Project audit:

- There frequently is a long lag from the time an idea for a project occurs and when it is identified as a project, funding is secured, and the project is implemented. Community members who may have initiated the project idea may no longer live in the neighborhood by its implementation. For each project, staff will now relay the full history of the project to the current stakeholders.
- It is regrettable that the Pro Parks levy language for the Loyal Heights playfield project included the words "improvement to the ballfield" and not wording that "artificial turf" was part of the improvements.
- Parks should have hired a facilitator as soon as staff realized things were not going well. A facilitator was recently hired to help guide the Lake Washington Boulevard Vegetation Management Plan.
- Project staff should make it clearer to the community when the Department might reconsider a project. The message didn't get relayed to the public by the project manager that the Superintendent was listening for compelling reasons to alter the project.
- Staff will follow new citywide customer service guidelines and provide clearer information on field schedules, such as who to contact when there are rainouts or the lights are off.
- Community center staff will be involved in projects that affect their centers.
- The audit recommended that a staff member track every detail of every plan to ensure that all steps are followed. This would be a fabulous addition to the process; however, Parks' first request for funding for this position was turned down by the Finance Department; it will be included again in the next budget request.
- The audit also recommended \$50,000 for a consultant to evaluate when the Department needs translations. The Mayor has identified this as a priority, but there is a cost to each project for doing so.

- Interim Deputy Superintendent Williams commented that the survey that was extensively distributed for the Wallingford Playfield/Hamilton Middle School project addressed some of the audit recommendations. In addition, the Board of Park Commissioners held its public hearing on the project at the Woodland Park Zoo education center, which is near the playfield and school. He noted that the Board is working to become more accessible by holding their regular meetings in the community from time to time.

Board Discussion

Commissioner Ramels asked whether previous translation efforts have proved effective. Ms. Potter and Deputy Superintendent Williams answered that the Department is working with a multi-cultural committee to help the Department determine the best outreach methods to different cultures. At a recent public meeting at Van Asselt, the meeting notice was translated into several languages and free pizza was offered. This seemed to garner a few more attendees.

Commissioner Ramels asked if the ballfield schedule is available on line. Deputy Superintendent Williams answered that the Department is working to include this information in its “Class System.” Commissioner Holme commented that there can be unintended consequences of posting the information online. Those who schedule the fields pay a fee. Some may be tempted to “drop in” for games if they see online that a field is unscheduled.

Commissioner Barber recommended that the Department seek local acceptance of a new use at a park or facility early in the process. Ms. Potter answered that a difficulty is determining when the project actually began. Many of the Pro Parks Levy projects came as a result of neighborhood plans developed 10 years or so ago. Commissioner Ramels noted that it was actually a prerequisite that ProParks projects reference an earlier planning process (usually, but not always, a neighborhood plan). Commissioner Barber suggested that each project have a separate planning process. Commissioner Holme commented that two plans, the Citywide Skatepark Plan and the Joint Athletic Field Development Plan, both had an extensive, citywide planning process.

Commissioner Barber referred to the lag period of a project idea and its funding and implementation. Perhaps a threshold of three-five years should be set. If a project idea hasn’t been funded and implemented by the end of that time, it should be revisited. Ms. Potter commented that there is broad acknowledgment that plans get stale and must be revisited. Commissioner Holme commented that even in the JAFDP, with its extensive planning process, that elements are changed.

The Commissioners thanked Ms. Potter for the briefing.

New/Old Business

Meeting with Councilmember Della: Commissioner Ranade, as Chair of the Park Board, will attend the monthly meeting on June 15 with Councilmember Della, who is Chair of the Council’s Parks, Education, Libraries and Labor Committee.

Mayor’s Vacant Position on Park Board: The Coordinator (Sandy Brooks) heard this week from the Mayor’s Boards and Commissions’ Coordinator that the interview panel is being convened to fill the Mayor’s vacant position on the Park Board. Commissioner Holme also spoke with Mayor Nickels recently about the need to fill the position.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

APPROVED: _____
 Amit Ranade, Chair
 Board of Park Commissioners

DATE _____

Dear Fellow Commissioners,

I offer here a more complete and balanced statement of my conclusions from the process of considering the Seattle School District's proposal for Hamilton School and Wallingford Playfield to provide insight into my recommendations about the issues, for inclusion in the minutes of the June 14 Board Meeting.

In my view, the School District's record at Wallingford School of opening recreational facilities to public use, while school is not in session, is very much a relationship to the public and to neighborhoods that I would like to see expanded wherever possible.

The recreational values of the proposed improvements -- a new, larger gymnasium replacing two older smaller gyms, wash rooms for public use, replacing the old asphalt basketball courts with a more compact concrete-surfaced basketball practice area and re-grading the Wallingford Play Field -- are positive aspects of the proposal.

If approved, the land transfer and use of the playfield would have construction stage impacts on Parks property, and use of the playing field, parts of the Sunken Garden, and the recreational facilities on School property would be withdrawn from public use during the construction period. At the end, the School District committed to restoring disturbed Parks property to equal or better condition.

Issues such as if or how to create a mid-boundary connection between the School and the playing field and whether to construct a utility vault under the path of the Sunken Garden were considered as to be dealt with in the future, although they had to have some consideration among potential impacts to Park property. Likewise, there is the swap of land, in which the School District replaces the Park land that would be taken, and undefined location of the land to be provided to Parks (in or near to the community affected?).

Caution signs went up for me when I saw the results of the Department of Parks and Recreation's survey which indicated strong opposition to surrendering any park land and to disturbance of the sunken garden, the vigorous objections and putting forth of alternative designs by the Friends of Wallingford Park, and finally the letter indicating a unanimous vote of the Wallingford Community Council to request third-party mediation of the proposal.

Frankly, when faced with a robust controversy at the neighborhood level, I am very reluctant as Commissioner to step in and decide a matter the community should have full voice in, especially when the neighborhood exhibits constructive ideas in the form of alternative designs and willingness to meet and hammer out the issues --also especially when there are affected the park volunteers, like Friends of Wallingford, who are very important as a continuing group that initiates substantial improvements to the park and provides regular maintenance both enhancing the usefulness and attractiveness of the park, and saving some of DPR's (inadequate) maintenance funds.

In my view, Friends of Wallingford Playfield have a stellar 8+-year record of initiating and funding a design process and renovation and construction of the playground, construction of restrooms, paths, extensive landscaping and the unique sunken garden. They are partners with DPR and ought to be treated as such.

Here are some more concerns that led to my vote to reject the School District's proposal and recommend third-party mediation:

- 1) Part of the DPR's mission is to help build community. We cannot be true to this goal unless the principle stakeholders were included in planning proposals before coming to the Board. In the case of the School

District's proposal, key stakeholders -- the Wallingford Community Council and (the School's next door neighbor) Friends of Wallingford Playfield -- were excluded from the citizens' advisory committee that developed the design. The result: a contentious division in the community. I don't think that it's our role to decide issues that have not been the result of inclusive planning. Also, I believe, unfortunately, that DPR has a broken relationship with Friends of Wallingford Playfield and we need to rebuild that relationship.

2) We should respect existing plans that were the result of inclusive planning and pertinent to the issues at hand. The Wallingford Neighborhood Plan speaks both to the future of Hamilton School and of lack of adequate public open space needed to accommodate increased density. This plan was vetted by city ordinance that obligated the executive branch to support it. Similarly, the concept plan for Wallingford Playfield was undertaken as a community initiative and developed by Department of Neighborhood requirements, including outreach and inclusiveness, and succeeded its way through DPR processing.

The Wallingford Community Council requested a way that would resolve the issues at hand. In my book, the third party mediation approach is the best method for updating the earlier planning process. The WCC promised speedy action.

3) It was important in our decisionmaking (I believe this is required by the City Ordinance enabling Initiative 42) that we consider if there were reasonable alternatives that would avoid the taking and use of park land. The School District, in my view, was not as helpful in this regard as it could have been.

In order to explore alternatives, interested parties needed an adequate design program that spelled out the functions of the various interior spaces. For instance, Friends of Wallingford Playground produced at first an alternate design for the gymnasium that would take no park land, but also would provide 250-seating capacity in the bleachers, assuming that assemblies could be accommodated in the gymnasium by adding portable chairs. When, late in the process, the School District said that its plan called for 1000-seat bleachers, the Friends came back with two alternate plans with full bleachers. But, that was on the day of our vote. There appears not to have been an open dialogue.

I saw enough in the alternative designs submitted to suggest that reorienting the gym and squeezing some of the lower priority spaces could result in a design that would solve the conflict by not requiring the property vacation.

To evaluate the justification of geothermal wells, adequate engineering data and comparisons of methods were necessary.

In sum, I don't think the School District demonstrated to us that there were no reasonable alternatives. The real test will be to present adequate information to the community to allow for local acceptance of a final design.

4) The Police Department recommended moving the gymnasium back from the edge of the former right-of-way. This supports a concern expressed by Friends of Wallingford Park that building the gym to the property line (as it seems now allowed by Department of Planning and Development) would create a shadowed and view-blocked area that would be a safety risk.

5) I do not see it our role to overrule at this point the process that resulted in the design of the sunken garden. Perception of safety is relative, but I think in this case the view that the sunken garden is unsafe, despite a police review that states it is, is very much a minority perception in the neighborhood. Design of the sunken garden, as in many similar park settings, is a balancing act between providing a gentle place that buffers its visitors with greenery from the hard surfaces of the urban surroundings, and providing both the sense and reality of safety. We found through polling how popular this feature is and the level for foot traffic by neighbors, which is significant in my observations, who routinely walk there is a factor in assessing safety. Friends of Wallingford Playfield should be involved in these conversations with Police and I think that a collaborative approach can address the safety concerns.

In conclusion, I think that placing the issue of whether to approve the land transfer and the use of the playing field for geothermal wells should be placed in a setting of the key stakeholders. I think the main issue can be resolved through an open consideration of the proposed design, alternative designs, and engineering, educational, and open space considerations. To avoid the perception of institutional bias that seems to affect similar controversies, it is important to bring in a third party facilitator. Some of the side issues should be handled by an agreed-upon mechanism that will bring together the appropriate parties.

Sincerely,

John Barber
Commissioner