



Minutes | Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Webex

Thursday, March 9, 2022

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

Attendance

Present: Meng, Seyfried, Mays, Umagat, Herrera, Farmer, Brockhaus, Watts, Stuart-Lehalle

SPR Staff: Diaz, Finnegan, Sheffer, Jainga, Jones, Teeters, Cook, Burtzos

Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

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

Herrera reads the land acknowledgement.

Seattle Parks and Recreation acknowledges and affirms the indigenous Coast Salish as the original caretakers of our waters and landscape, who nurtured and shaped today's parkland. We honor their legacy with gratitude and appreciation and will safeguard their knowledge and stewardship as enduring treasures to promote community welfare, cultivate inclusive expressions of nature and recreation, and commit to land acknowledgment for each ensuing generation.

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves around the table.

Herrera introduces the consent items: meeting minutes from the 2/23/23 meeting, and the agenda for tonight's meeting. Meng moves to approve both documents without revision, Mays seconds. There is no discussion. Herrera calls for a vote. The motion passes unanimously.

Adopted: BPRC Meeting Minutes 2/23/23; BPRC Meeting Agenda 3/9/23

Public Comment

Don Loseff – Provides update from the Green Lake Inner Loop path. First, a thank you to Todd Burley for working with our group to create the signage for the trail. Most path users are using the path correctly, and no one has gotten hurt. However, the construction detour for the boathouse renovation presents a major barrier for wheeled use on the path. Please bring the detour up to the standard of the rest of the path so that wheeled users can enjoy the whole path again. Thank you.

Samantha De Abreu – Magnuson Park Advisory Committee – As MPAC chair and resident of Mercy Magnuson Park, advocates for expansion of Park Ranger program to Magnuson Park. Program could reduce some of the poor outcomes that can occur in low income communities and communities of color when a heavy police

presence is brought in. This could be a more balanced approach to deterring crime and providing a positive presence.

Tony Fragada – Alki Community Council – Seeking an extension of the Alki Trail between a heavily recreational site and Charles Richey Viewpoint. Alki is very accessible and receives many visitors; ACC would like to start engaging visitors to gauge support for this expansion. I also included in the materials I sent some information about climate change concerns that we should pay attention to.

Roshina Wilson – United Samoan Organization of WA – USO hosts events at Jefferson Park and wants to establish a relationship with the BPRC, and to learn more about park fees and use. The USO has been less active recently in the Parks discussion but wishes to take more of an active role moving forward.

Interim Superintendent Diaz responds to the public comment. SPR staff is working with the United Samoan Organization to improve coordination regarding summer programming and permitting. Thank you to Don for the information about the Green Lake path; that kind of information from the field is very useful to us and we will follow up to see if we can make improvements. Thank you also for calling in from Mercy Magnuson. I want to highlight the renovation project at Magnuson Community Center that is finishing up right now, and stay tuned for an update on the Ranger program. And I wasn't completely sure about the last commenter, but we would certainly encourage the caller to reach out to our email with any additional information.

Burtzos notes that Fragada did send supplemental information in writing which will be distributed to SPR staff and BPRC members, but was too late to be sent before this meeting.

Superintendent's Report

Interim Superintendent Diaz gives the report.

Japanese Garden Opens: I was thrilled to attend the annual re-opening of the Japanese Garden last weekend on a beautiful, sunny day. The garden is open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Swim Seattle update: Deputy Superintendent Christopher Williams and I recently met with Chezik Tsunoda, mother of a "silent drowning" victim. Tragically, her 3-year-old son, Yori, died by drowning in a friend's swimming pool a few years ago by silently slipping below the surface of the water. Ms. Tsunoda has now become a leading advocate for water safety and drowning prevention among children. We reached out to her about our new water safety/learn-to-swim initiative, Swim Seattle, and we are excited that she has agreed to help us promote this program.

Denny Awards: We couldn't do what we do without the invaluable help of volunteers. Hundreds of people volunteer for Seattle Parks and Recreation as coaches, board members, Associated Recreation Council members, groups and community members who pull weeds and plant trees in our parks. After a couple of years of hiatus, we are bringing back the Denny Awards event this fall to recognize the hard work and dedication of our great volunteers.

Open Houses Coming this Spring: I'd like to announce that, in partnership with the Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, I plan to hold a series of Open House meetings in the north, central and south areas of Seattle. The purpose of the open houses is to meet with community residents, hear their concerns and ideas, and answer questions they may have. Stay tuned for more details.

New Parks & Environment Division Director: I'm thrilled to announce that we've hired a new Director to head our Parks and Environment Division, Markeith Blackshire. Some of you may know Markeith from his current role as Deputy Director of the division. Markeith has a wealth of experience in ground maintenance, staff management, and leadership excellence. He has over 23 years of experience working for City and County Parks and Recreation Departments in Maintenance and Operations, including six years with the City of Seattle in various leadership roles. He also holds a master's degree in business administration. I want to thank Charles Ng for stepping up to serve during the interim period. We are incredibly grateful to Charles for his leadership over the past few months. Please join me in congratulating Markeith as the new Director. We will be sure to invite him to a future Board meeting.

Victory Creek Park Mulching: Pictured in the top 2 photos are crews working to spread 40 yards of mulch to shrub beds at Victory Creek Park. Grounds staff throughout the city are preparing shrub and flower beds for spring. Mowing, weeding and mulching are also under way.

Crews "De-Winterize" Restrooms: We are beginning to "de-winterize" and re-open our facilities that were closed for the winter, particularly restroom buildings that were shut for the season. We're taking into account recent freezing weather.

Athletic Field Prep and Scheduling: A big part of getting ready for spring is preparing our athletic fields, especially baseball and soft ball infields, dragging the dirt, weeding and cleaning the dugouts, and mowing the outfields. Our field scheduling office is also very busy scheduling the fields for club and community use seven days a week.

Spring Programs: Registration for spring programs began on March 7, including fitness classes, hobbies, arts, dance, virtual classes, English as a Second Language, and much more! Visit our website for more information: www.seattle.gov/parks

Environmental Education Programs: A great way to learn about nature and the outdoors is through Seattle Parks and Recreation's Environmental Education Programs. This spring, our Environmental Education naturalists are offering great outdoor programs including forest walks, low tide beach walks, pond explorations, and nighttime owl prowls. All classes are open to ages 5 and up; children under 14 must be accompanied by an adult.

Little Saigon Park: This land-banked project located in Chinatown/International District is out for construction bid. The 0.27 acre park will include a play area, plaza, amphitheater, lawn and park furniture.

Accessibility Work at Laurelhurst and Montlake Community Centers: Construction on accessibility improvements at Laurelhurst and Montlake community centers will begin this summer. Both community centers will be closed during construction.

Dogs Off-Leash Area Study: SPR is set to launch an Off-Leash Area (OLA) study, which will be led by department subject matter experts. The study will look at 30 sites across the city that may have the potential to become future OLAs. Staff will examine each site from an environmental, engineering, geographic, equity, and dog behavioral perspectives. At the conclusion of this study, by late spring 2023, SPR will be able to present to the community a list of sites that we believe are feasible and most suited for future OLAs. The

Seattle Park District provides funding for 2 new OLAs; from there the department will need to request additional funding to construct and maintain any additional OLAs.

Aqua Run Obstacle Inflatable, March 17 at Meadowbrook Pool: The Aqua Run obstacle inflatable returns to Meadowbrook Pool on March 17! Swimmers aged 6 and older, pre-register for an hour-long session; \$8 per user. Adults can play too, but kids 6-12 are more successful in getting across. Swim test required for all children.

Fire Pit on Pier 62: Sunsets over Puget Sound and a night out on Seattle's downtown Waterfront and a warm and cozy fire right on Pier 62 are a great way to spend a Sunday evening! Swing by Pier 62 on Sunday afternoons and evenings through March to enjoy an open wood fire in our new 10' diameter fire pit, designed by Berger Partnership. The fire pit will be available weather permitting.

Spring Market at Occidental Square: Come celebrate springtime and support local at the Downtown Seattle Association's Spring Market at Occidental Square in Pioneer Square, Friday, March 24 from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Shop from 15+ vendors featuring handmade jewelry, art, gifts, flowers and more. Face painting, a craft station and live music will also be on hand. Rain or shine.

Meng asks about the timeline for the Little Saigon Park. Diaz will check on the project and have staff send information to interested commissioners.

Stuart-Lehalle asks about how the Swim Seattle program will address historic racial and social inequities. Diaz shares enthusiasm for equity focus of this program and highlights disproportionate impact of drowning on communities of color. SPR is focusing on removing cultural and other barriers to accessing this program with the goal of reaching as many children in the Seattle area as possible.

Brockhaus asks for clarification regarding the Denny Awards. Deputy Superintendent Finnegan clarifies that the nominating process is under review. More information will be available at a later date.

Ballard Commons Park Reopening Update

Deputy Superintendent of Operations Sheffer gives the presentation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share on the Ballard Commons Park reopening. Our three pillars for this process are creating a sense of welcome and safety, infrastructure enhancement, and park activation. We've been working closely with the community in regular meetings for the initial events this weekend.

We began the timeline for reopening in February of this year with community meetings. Facilities repair and capital project planning has been continuing throughout this time, along with grounds maintenance and enhancements. Events begin at noon on both this coming Saturday and Sunday, and then we will have ongoing welcoming and activation after the grand opening.

Sense of Welcome – Safety

- Library security will check on park daily
- Grounds Maintenance reports incidents 3x/daily
- REACH/LEAD perform outreach

- SPR and the City's Unified Care Team (UCT) are prepared to address re-encampment

Parks & Environment Response

- Litter, garbage, and hazmat removal
- Turf and shrub bed management
- Pressure washed all hard surfaces
- 2x/daily garbage pickup
- 2x/daily comfort station cleaning
- 3x/week grounds maintenance

Facilities – Repair Services

- Winterization of comfort station
- Upgrades to lighting
- Spray feature plumbing and electrical upgrades
- Skate bowl grouting
- 6 new park benches installed
- Irrigation system installed to support new trees
- Daily graffiti removal

Activation – Baseline Services

- Daily Park concierges
- Buskers
- Games (chess, cornhole, etc.); food trucks; coffee cart

Activation – Secured Programming

- Educational programming (SPL Storytime, Imagination Playground)
- Recreational programming (yoga, volleyball, Teqball, etc.)

Activation – Partners & Events

- Ballard Alliance developing "Friends Of" group
- SFD and SPD appearances for children
- Film series (SPR, Ballard Alliance)
- Nordic Museum

Capital Development – Play Area

We hope to begin construction in June on a new play area with a Nordic theme, climbing rocks, and new trees. Final bid docs will be completed in March; construction will occur between Q3 of this year and Q1 of 2024. The budget for that project is \$1M.

Outreach for the play area was done by the Ballard Alliance. An updated project sign will be posted onsite. We hope for a soft opening of the play area in February or March of next year.

Farmer asks for clarification on the weekend's scheduled events for the park reopening. Sheffer and Darryl Cook, SPR Partnerships Strategic Advisor, walk through the schedule of events.

Watts thanks Sheffer and SPR staff for the effort and care that has gone into this effort. Watts asks how the department is balancing being welcoming to all park users, including unhoused persons, with the desire to keep Ballard Commons Park encampment-free, and how SPR is navigating community messaging surrounding these differing interests.

Sheffer responds that SPR's efforts have two paths: first, frequent eyes on the park and reporting to a single point of contact at SPR so that responses can be made efficiently. Second, proactive communication within neighborhood groups that Ballard Commons Park is no longer available for camping. This second avenue is paired with connecting unhoused persons with alternative shelter and other resources that they may need.

Watts clarifies that one nuance to keep in mind is that while members of the unhoused community will not be allowed to camp in the park overnight, they will be able, like all persons, to enjoy the park during the day. Watts asks what messaging or feedback SPR has given or received on this message.

Sheffer notes that part of the function of a daily park concierge is to make the kind of distinction between camping and permissible park use that Watts is describing, and to elevate concerns where appropriate. The goal of this park reactivation is not to prevent park use, but to maintain the safety of all park visitors and to lead every interaction with an emphasis on humanity and compassion.

Park Ranger Program Expansion Briefing

Interim Superintendent Diaz gives the presentation.

We are here to discuss SPR's Park Ranger Program. Just to start off, for historical reference, at one time our department had a larger Ranger presence and program, and it sort of dwindled through the years for a variety of reasons. Now, the program will be re-established through a \$3M investment by the Seattle Park District to fund up to 28 Rangers (including the 2 positions in the baseline program budget).

To begin with, the Program will remain focused on downtown parks per the existing agreement with the Seattle Police Officers Guild but we hope that will be resolved so we can expand Citywide. SPR is excited to re-establish the Park Ranger Program in support of the Mayor's One Seattle vision of a thriving, healthy city with a vibrant downtown.

This program supports positive activation of our parkland and advances the commitments we have made to restoring safe and welcoming park space. This Program will be implemented in a "No Wrong Door" approach to community service that I've been discussing with the Mayor and internally with the SPR team.

As discussed, the Rangers will be focused on downtown parks until such time as the geographic restriction previously agreed to with SPOG (Seattle Police Officers Guild) is lifted. In our initial phase of deployment, we will have 3 two-person teams working each day from approximately 6am – 9pm. Cal Anderson Park and City

Hall Park will be emphasis locations. Beyond the two emphasis locations, additional historical hotspots include Westlake, Hing Hay, Victor Steinbrueck, and Occidental.

Rangers may also intermittently visit the other downtown parks pictured here (in grey) informed by these deployment considerations:

- Special events
- SPD incidents
- Public complaints
- Park Code violations
- Graffiti/vandalism hotspots
- Peer Ranger team needs
- Concierge/activation team observations

When at the parks, the Rangers may be engaged in any (or all) of the 3 E's: Education, Engagement, and Enforcement.

To get the right people in these roles we are focused on these desired qualifications and are being very intentional in our recruitment, including engaging with a recruitment consultant to ensure BIPOC representation in this and other priority title candidate pools. The position is currently advertised (closing 3/21).

Minimum Qualifications:

- Minimum of one year of experience in parks and recreation, security, or related field
- OR a combination of education and/or training experience which provides an equivalent background required to perform the work of the class

Desired Qualifications:

- Commitment to community oriented public safety approaches
- Excellent customer service skills and comfort with community relation building and enforcement of park rules
- Strong communication skills
- Education first approach with an emphasis on social equity
- Relevant experience or certifications
- Ability to pass a police-level background check

The Park Ranger uniform will be visually distinct from law enforcement officers but retain a semblance of authority. When the Rangers are deployed, we want to ensure they are visually distinct from law enforcement but that also have a more commanding presence than a maintenance employee or Recreation leader.

Our goal is to have our initial group of Rangers deployed in the field at the end of June. This timeline includes 6-weeks of training (classroom and in the field). This fall, after assessing the program for lessons learned, we would begin a second round of hiring.

Trainings delivered by SPR staff and partner agencies (i.e., SPD Communications Center, Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, Portland Parks & Rec, etc.). Primary curriculum topics include public

engagement, safety & first aid, enforcement protocols, and a “deep dive” into SPR. The training will be a mix of classroom and field work.

As examples:

- The “working with the public” section of the curriculum will include Management of Aggressive Behavior certification, Anti-Bias, cultural competency, and customer service trainings
- Enforcement protocols will be taught in partnership with the law department and SPD, including topics like radio etiquette and appropriate communication with emergency services

Part of the training will also be around collecting data. As you may recall, the Council acting as the Park District Board, included certain policy direction when they adopted the Cycle 2 funding plan. This included asking for quarterly reports related to Park Rangers. The top section here is their request.

We will be clarifying that SPR can report on trespass warnings issued but Park Rangers do not make arrests, so SPD would be source for that data. We are reaching out to see if they have the capability to provide this data.

We are looking forward to re-establishing the Park Ranger Program and I will certainly provide updates in future Superintendent Reports.

Herrera thanks Diaz and the department for the work so far on this initiative, and shares an anecdote from his work at Sound Transit to illustrate the impact that good customer service can have when addressing great need. Herrera asks how SPR will design training and implement enforcement protocols to avoid further criminalization of poverty (i.e., implementing anti-bias training?) while balancing the goal of maintaining safe parks for all.

Diaz acknowledges the difficulty of Herrera’s question. Parks need to be safe and welcoming, and too often the question goes unasked: safe and welcoming for whom? Parks need to be safe and welcoming for all people; there are no requirements for enjoying our parks and open spaces. But there are rules and a code of conduct that we all have to abide by. Unconscious bias is a part of our training program, for that exact reason that you mentioned. And again, as park professionals, we are not the primary deliverers of encampment clearing and the messaging surrounding that work. We have a city-wide Unified Care Team that is trained specifically to do that, with people who know best how to communicate with encampments and our unhoused neighbors to establish trust. I see the job of the Park Rangers as being to try to offer any immediate aid they can, but to prevent escalation of incidents, protect the park facilities and experience, and connect people with the UCT where needed. The Park Ranger program is not being created to solve the housing crisis in Seattle.

Stuart-Lehalle echoes Herrera’s call for anti-bias training in the Ranger training course. Stuart-Lehalle asks about the presentation of uniformed officers in a Parks setting. How are officers being trained to defend themselves without arming them? And how are the differing reactions to a uniformed authority presence being taken into consideration by SPR, even on a neighborhood or park-by-park level?

Diaz emphasizes that Rangers will not look “too law enforcement.” We know that a militarized appearance sends a clear message, and it’s one that we want to avoid. The uniforms for these Rangers are intended to be identifying, but not intimidating. Rangers will be trained to keep themselves out of dangerous situations,

and when to call emergency responders. However, Rangers will be trained to engage with the public, and this will involve de-escalation and other front-line skills.

Meng asks what prerogative Rangers will have to enforce violations. Diaz and Teeters clarify that enforcement capability ranges from voluntary code compliance, to citations, to referrals to SPD and, in rare circumstances, park exclusion. Situational awareness will dictate response, but the goal is to lead with compassion and education, rather than enforcement and punishment. One benefit of consistent assignment to specific parks will be familiarity with individuals and communities. Diaz shares that SFD and SPD Chiefs have been supportive of the purview of Rangers; SPD will also benefit from Rangers not overstepping enforcement boundaries.

Seyfried notes that negative engagement is easier to track, but that positive engagement and park use will be interesting to quantify and track, if possible, once the program is rolled out.

Farmer concurs that positive contacts and interaction tracing will be interesting to observe. Farmer is also interested in feedback from park concierges, who will get to see the impact of the Ranger program firsthand. Umagat agrees with Farmer's comment; this seems like a great support system for the concierges.

Brockhaus and Watts thanks Diaz and the department for the presentation.

Old & New Business

Farmer asks for an updated timeline on Interim Superintendent Diaz's confirmation hearing with Council. This hearing will take place on April 5. Public comments will be taken at this hearing.

Diaz has an update on the Little Saigon Park construction project. If the bid goes well, construction is scheduled to begin in mid-2023 and last 6-8 months.

Watts asks for clarification on Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners membership requirements:

- What are the rules governing the length of time a member must sit out after their term expires before re-applying for another term?
- Does a member need to be a resident of the City of Seattle (within the city limits)?
 - Watts notes that many former Seattle residents have been displaced in recent years

SPR staff and BPRC leadership will discuss these questions and determine whether there needs to be a revision to the BPRC Operating Procedures.

There being no further business, Herrera adjourns the meeting at 8:35 pm.