



# Minutes|Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Webex

Thursday, April 27, 2022

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

## Attendance

Present: Contreras, Meng, Mays, Herrera, Farmer, Brockhaus

SPR Staff and Presenters: Diaz, Bazinet, Schulkin, Hoff, 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 agenda: the agenda for tonight's meeting. Brockhaus moves to approve the agenda; Meng seconds. Herrera calls for a vote to approve; the vote is unanimous in favor.

### ***Adopted: BPRC Meeting Agenda 5/11/23***

## Public Comment

There is no public comment.

## Superintendent's Report

SPR Superintendent AP Diaz delivers the report.

Happy "Summer": Happy early summer and early Mother's Day! I hope everyone is enjoying this beautiful weather that will extend to the weekend and beyond.

Park Hours: With the warmer weather heading into the weekend, we are expecting larger crowds at our parks and particularly at our beaches. A reminder that beach fires are NOT allowed until Memorial Day weekend and only in designated fire pits. Amplified sound, alcohol & fireworks are also not permitted.

In addition, beginning Memorial Day Weekend, we will be conducting a pilot program again this year to shorten the hours at Golden Gardens and Alki Beach during summer months to address problematic behavior typical of summer evenings at these two parks. Beach hours will be 4 AM – 10:30 PM from May 26 – September 3. This year's pilot adds an additional 30 minutes in the evening, from last summers' pilot program (the parks will close at 10:30 instead of 10). After September 4, the hours will return to 4:00 AM – 11:30 PM.

The pilot will be reviewed by the Board this fall.

Summer Programs: Speaking of summer, registration for our in-person and virtual summer programs and activities begins on May 23. Summer camp registration began last month. Scholarships are available. Go to [www.seattle.gov](http://www.seattle.gov) for more information.

Summer Hiring: As part of the ramp-up to summer, we are actively hiring staff to operate outdoor programs and facilities across our beaches, spray parks, wading pools, day camps, and ballfields. Please help us spread the word! We need cashiers, camp counselors, boat ramp rangers, and recreation staff to implement a range of programs with youth and the public citywide! For more information see our blog at [parkways.seattle.gov](http://parkways.seattle.gov)

Lake City Community Center Fire Response: I wanted to follow up on our response to last month's tragic fire at the Lake City Community Center. Considering the extent of the damage, we are opting to demolish the building and accelerate our plan to rebuild the facility, which would include affordable housing on the upper floors. We've been working closely with the Mayor's Office and the Office of Housing on the revised plan and timeline. We are now working on obtaining a permit for demolition from the Seattle Department of Construction and Inspections and hope to demolish the building by the end of summer.

In addition to all the mowing and regular grounds and facilities maintenance our crews are doing every day in our parks, here are some examples of recent work by our crews and volunteers out in the field.

- Staff worked to improve the running track in Lower Woodland Park
- On Earth Day at the Washington Park Arboretum, more than 180 volunteers helped us weed and pulled more than 80 yards of blackberry and ivy to help beautify this special park. This event was managed jointly by the Arboretum Foundation, Seattle Parks and Recreation and UW Botanic Gardens, with support from the Student Conservation Association (SCA)
- As part of the Clean City Initiative, our crews picked up litter on the I-5 northbound onramp at NE 45th St.
- A shout out to our Heavy Equipment crew who recently helped remove large plant roots outside South Park Community Center with a large excavator to prepare for new plants

Gas Works Park fencing: SPR has contracted with All City Fence Company to repair, replace and enhance the existing fence and gates around the Cracking Towers at Gas Work Park to help make it more difficult to cut or climb the fence and access the towers – which is prohibited. The towers are not safe to climb on and they continue to attract graffiti and other acts of vandalism. We expect the work to be completed by mid-June.

Meanwhile, the project to renovate Gas Work Park's east entry and restroom is progressing well with the new restroom facility anticipated to be open this summer.

I'd be glad to answer any questions Board members may have.

Farmer asks for the rationale for the change in summer beach hours. Diaz explains that staffing concerns are part of the reason for the change, as is fire safety. The earlier closure time enables SPR staff to ensure that all fires are extinguished before the end of the night.

Farmer asks about programming plans for the Lake City community while demolition and redevelopment of the Lake City Community Center is ongoing. Diaz shares that SPR is working to find alternate programming sites and thanks Seattle Public Schools and Seattle Public Library for their coordination. Other programming will shift to nearby community centers.

Farmer notes that SPR has done well recently with new hires and that this is fantastic! Additionally, SPR social media before and after maintenance posts have been great to see. Diaz thanks Farmer for her feedback.

Brockhaus asks how SPR navigates jurisdictional and funding concerns when cleaning up state rights-of-way, such as the I-5 onramp. Diaz acknowledges this difficulty, especially near highways, where land ownership is often in small parcels. The City is coordinating with state agencies and other partners to find workable solutions to keep these spaces maintained and clean, particularly around downtown.

## Parks & Open Space Plan Report

Diaz introduces the presentation.

Seattle Parks and Recreation is updating the Parks and Open Space Plan, and we are in the process of seeking community and City department input. The plan is required by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office to maintain the City's eligibility for state grants that will help realize outdoor recreation development and open space acquisition projects; as such the plan needs approval by the Superintendent and must be adopted through resolution by City Council. The last update to the plan was in 2017.

As part of SPR's input, we want to make sure we are getting input from our key stakeholders – which includes the Board. We have also invited the community to participate at an upcoming virtual open house and are hosting in-person workshops at six of our community centers in late May and early June. The plan will come back to the Board for review and recommendation in late 2023 and go to the City Council for adoption in early 2024.

Today you will hear a briefing on the plan status and upcoming engagement events and have an initial opportunity to provide feedback.

Oliver Bazinet, Senior Planning & Development Specialist, gives the presentation.

Thanks again for letting me join you all virtually this evening. I'm here to provide a short update the parks and open space plan update and also to put in a plug for some engagement events that we are kicking off next week.

First, a little bit of context. I know I went over a lot of this in November, so I'll try to keep it brief this time. The Parks and Open Space Plan is a plan that we update every 6 years to maintain our eligibility for several state grants with Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO). The purpose of the plan is to examine recreation trends and demand in the city and lay out a capital strategy for meeting those demands.

Many of you were involved in all of engagement and planning work we've done in the past 2-3 years including the strategic plan, strategic action plan, and park district financial plan. Our intent is to showcase what we've learned and prioritized based on that work in this plan as well.

But the timing is a little bit strange, and we realized in kicking off this work that to be doing this plan each six-year cycle in the year after renewing our largest source of capital funding is a little out of order. So for this time around, we are focusing on doing a lighter update—again, building off of what we heard in engagement efforts in the past couple years and showing what we have planned as a result—and then we will be coming back earlier in 2026 and 2027 in time for the next update to inform the next park district financial plan.

Another benefit of doing this is that we'll be able to use the growth strategy that will be adopted in the new comp plan that will be finalized in late 2024 – there may be new designations for growth beyond the existing urban villages that we would want to incorporate into our planning.

So where are we on this one?

Here's a high-level schedule for the project:

- The project has been kicked off – we have our consultants on board and we attended the comp plan meetings in November through January
- We also have a great internal steering committee, also with representatives from OPCD, SDOT, SPU and leadership committee to guide the project
- We're polishing off the walkability and access analysis, and the real exciting part is that we're about to kick off a lot of engagement
- After this engagement and even during engagement, we're also beginning the preparation of the plan itself
- We'll be coming back to this group with a draft and around the time of our second open house and comment period, and then again to request your recommendation for adoption

We have our first public open house next week – where we'll be doing a public intro to the plan, some of our analysis and also showing the ways that some of the previous engagement has informed action items and capital projects, and inviting people to attend the workshop. This will be online, and we'll be including a recording on our website. We're also working on getting our engagement hub live on the 18<sup>th</sup>. We're working hard to get the word out on these, so please help us if you can.

Farmer shares excitement for the engagement hub. Bazinet clarifies that this feature is being developed with CitizenLab Engagement Platform.

Herrera asks for an update on population growth projections and how Seattle's recent growth may impact this and future open space plans. Bazinet does not have that data readily available. Diaz notes that Seattle recently ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation on the metric of acreage per 1000 residents, and asks for that information to be available at the next meeting.

Meng asks what the purpose of the public engagement process is – whether information gathering or sharing with public. Bazinet affirms that two-way dialogue is important in this engagement process, and the open houses and workshops provide an opportunity for accountability and feedback.

## Seattle's Downtown Activation Plan

Diaz introduces the presentation.

Mayor Harrell recently announced his Downtown Activation Plan to bring people back downtown and revitalize the neighborhood for residents, visitors and workers. It is still a work in progress, and our Public Affairs Director Rachel Schulkin has been working on an interdepartmental task force to further develop the plan. Strategies include a combination of activities, events, programs, arts and culture, maintenance, enhanced safety, and parks. In fact, an important part of the activation plan is the reopening and activation of City Hall Park.

Rachel Schulkin, SPR's Public Affairs Director, gives the presentation.

As Superintendent Diaz said, I am working on the Downtown Activation Plan with the interdepartmental task force. We are at the midpoint of this plan development, and the point at which the group wanted to do more briefings and outreach with community groups, including with the Board, to have a more robust public engagement campaign. There will also be three neighborhood listening sessions as well as a survey, which should have been shared with you all as well. SPR, the Mayor's Office, and other City departments are briefing a variety of stakeholder groups on the plan.

The purpose of the Downtown Activation Plan is to bring people back to Downtown Seattle now while designing a future of Downtown Seattle that works for you – working people, families, and small business owners.

One early discovery that has guided discussions emerged from a poll about who was not feeling represented downtown. This poll showed that small business owners, families with children, and working class & low income residents feel less well served by Seattle's downtown, while tech professionals, tourists, and visitors generally feel well served. The discussion has focused a lot on how to make downtown work for these first three groups.

Seven key goals will get us to that vision:

1. Create a Downtown that is safe and welcoming for all
2. Transform Downtown into a thriving residential neighborhood for people from all walks of life to enjoy
3. Re-envision Downtown as Seattle's hub for arts, culture, and entertainment
4. Commit to our ethos as the Emerald City by promoting a healthy, sustainable, and green city
5. Create a vibrant and diversified Downtown worker ecosystem that makes people want to work Downtown
6. Reinvigorate Downtown as the commercial heartbeat of the city
7. Make Downtown a top destination for visitors from the Puget Sound region and beyond

The plan includes actions in three distinct phases: Bold Actions Now (April to June 2023), an Action Plan (3 years), and "New Space Needle" ideas (big-picture, bold ideas for the future).

The City anticipates a peak level of downtown foot traffic in July, corresponding to the MLB All-Star Game, Taylor Swift concerts, and several other major downtown events. One goal of the Downtown Activation Plan is to retain as much of this peak level of foot traffic as possible through the rest of the summer.

**Bold Actions Now:**

- Executive order to address safety and reduce fentanyl and open-air drug use
- Mayor introducing omnibus bill seeking legislative changes to zoning, sign code, and other actions to stimulate investments downtown

- Return to office plans continuing for public and private employers
- The City is also putting resources towards beautifying and activating key public spaces right away, including reopening City Hall Park, installing and restoring public art and murals, activating retail and public spaces on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, converting part of Pike St. into a pedestrian zone, and much else.

Some of the Action Plan ideas involve Seattle Parks and Recreation more directly, such as:

- Expanded Park Ranger program – safe and welcoming downtown
- (Planned) new Mercer Community Center – thriving residential neighborhood
- Mercer Community Center childcare facility – supports diverse working population downtown
- Improving the downtown canopy – healthy, sustainable, and green city

What are some “New Space Needle” ideas?

- An arts, culture, and entertainment district built along a streetcar line
- Vertical neighborhoods along 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue
- Westlake Center – The Heart of the City (Seattle’s Times Square?)
- 24/7 district for nightlife and Seattle late-night activity
- Creating a Green Canopy above the rooftops downtown
- Building a massive all-ages play space
- Establishing a BIPOC community market around the heart of the city
- A Makerspace for innovation and entrepreneurship in partnership with our flagship colleges
- The world’s tallest cross-laminated timber high-rise

Schulkin clarifies that none of these latest ideas are more than proposals at this point but could be useful to generate creativity and further brainstorming.

SPR invites Board members to share their feedback, be downtown this summer, make a commitment to partner in advancing these initiatives, and support the Downtown Activation Plan when it is rolled out in June.

Schulkin pauses to take questions from the Board.

Meng asks if downtown street closures will codify on the current closures, or if there are other closures in discussion. Schulkin clarifies that SDOT is making the process easier to close certain streets for events to be held downtown. SPR is providing some support and proof-of-concept for this project.

Mays asks if the City Hall Park activation will be similar to the Ballard Commons Park activation. Schulkin responds that the activation plan will be similar, but likely much more involved and with a greater commitment to safety and ongoing programming in City Hall Park, including art installation, ranger presence, food trucks, etc. This park reopening is planned for mid-June.

Farmer asks for more detail regarding the concept of a vertical neighborhood. Schulkin shares that some of the discussion has centered on a mismatch between available downtown housing and affordability, which could lead to a great deal of vacancy in downtown buildings. Some of the ideas surrounding this problem have included locating grocery stores, schools, etc. on lower floors of residential buildings to provide support for residents.

Brockhaus thanks Schulkin for the hard work on this committee and the presentation. It seems like there is a lot riding on the reactivation of downtown. Herrera echoes thanks for Schulkin and re-emphasizes the resilience of multi-use neighborhoods.

Meng asks if any downtown neighborhoods are models that are being used for future planning, at least at this stage. Schulkin shares that the committee views Pioneer Square and the stadium area as doing pretty well; the Mariners' playoff run created a big bump of sustained foot traffic downtown into the fall. St. Louis and San Diego are also providing some model for successful downtown activation.

Mays asks if the Waterfront redevelopment ties in with this planning; Schulkin confirms that many of the same principles are at work in both projects, and they support one another.

Contreras asks if there is any concurrent push for policy or legislative change to ease tax burden on developers who are trying to build in alignment with this plan. Schulkin does not have details on tax credits specifically, but confirms that this is a multi-departmental initiative and that other departments (such as the Office of Housing) are working very directly to find ways to encourage residential development and growth downtown.

Diaz emphasizes that one of the opportunities from this committee is to reframe downtown as a neighborhood, rather than simply as a business district or an industrial core. After the pandemic years, we can see that the nature of office work and commuting has changed, and the things that attract people to live downtown have changed. Grocery stores, community centers, schools, and other quality-of-life institutions are necessary to sustain a downtown neighborhood.

## Old & New Business

Hoff reminds the Board of the upcoming summer schedule of meetings. There will only be one meeting per month in June, July, and August. Those dates are 6/8, 7/13, and 8/10.

There being no further business, Herrera adjourns the meeting at 7:43 pm.