



## MEMORANDUM

Date: December 4, 2019

To: Park District Oversight Committee

From: David Graves, Strategic Advisor, Seattle Parks and Recreation; Sean Watts, Park District Oversight Committee; Andrea Akita, Board of Park Commissioners/Park District Oversight Committee; Ken Bounds, Former Superintendent and Seattle Parks Foundation Board member; and, Thatcher Bailey, President and CEO, Seattle Parks Foundation

Subject: Major Projects Challenge Fund Review and Recommended Update - Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund

### **Requested Board Action**

The Seattle Park District's Major Project Challenge Fund (MPCF), initiated in 2016, was an effort at partnering with community groups to make improvements to existing park facilities. Over the course of two rounds of the MPCF, there have been successes and areas that need improvement. At the same time, the City of Seattle began an increased focus on equity with the 2016 Comprehensive Plan update. The new round of Park District funding starting in 2021 affords us the opportunity to review and rethink the MPCF to better align it with the City's broader focus on equity.

**Our recommendation to the District Oversight Committee, the Superintendent and the Seattle City Council as the Park District Funding Board is to change and shift the focus of the Major Project Challenge Fund to a NEW Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund as outlined below and increase the budget available to \$2.5 million per year with two FTE staff; \$2M and 1.5 FTE devoted to the Equitable Park Development component (EPD) and \$500K and 0.5FTE devoted to the Community Response component. Staff associated with the EPD would spend the first six to nine months getting up to speed on the communities and meeting with community members/groups and City staff familiar with those areas in advance of launching any funding program. The fund would also be available in this initial phase in small increments to community groups to fund grant writing, community design and other pre-planning activities. The goal of this new fund is to **grow** the capacity of our underserved and underrepresented citizens and communities, **improve** SPR facilities in areas that have a history of racial disparities and that serve the needs of our underserved and underrepresented citizens and communities and **connect** our underserved and underrepresented citizens and communities with SPR staff and our facilities.**

## **Project or Policy Description and Background**

As noted above, the Major Project Challenge Fund was an effort at partnering with community groups to make improvements to existing park facilities. In partnership with the District Oversight Committee, Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) staff developed screening criteria in 2016 and announced the availability of the fund to community groups and generally across the city in 2017. Two rounds of the MPCF demonstrated successes in project implementation; but, also revealed gaps and setbacks in engaging and advancing projects in underserved communities.

On a positive note, the MPCF provided funding for SPR staff to undertake feasibility studies that could support future improvements (Madrona Bathhouse, Magnuson Field 12 development, Seward Park Clay Studio, Cascade Playground), and that led to current improvements at the Magnuson Community Center and Daybreak Star. The MPCF is also supporting the redevelopment of the Green Lake Small Craft Center, the South Park Community Center Campus development, Volunteer Park Amphitheater replacement and physical improvements and an updated Master Plan at Kubota Garden.

However, the “Major” in Major Project Challenge Fund was a significant barrier for most community groups to contend with. Not surprisingly, identifying a \$2+ million project and then having the capacity and/or resources to present a compelling case, secure a match through grants and/or fund raising significantly narrowed the field of potential applicants.

## **Public Involvement Process**

To date, this has been an internally focused review of the MPCF. Public involvement would occur as part of the Parks District Oversight Committee’s work on the next round of the Park District funding.

## **Discussion**

With the above MPCF issues in mind, SPR staff, Sean Watts, Andrea Akita, Ken Bounds and Thatcher Bailey met over the late summer and fall to review the MPCF and other City initiatives and prepare this recommendation.

As part of the City’s Comprehensive Plan update in 2016, the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) analyzed the potential undesired/unintended impacts of the City’s Growth Strategy, i.e.; how is our growth strategy encouraging displacement and reducing opportunities for our already marginalized populations. That analysis led OPCD to implement the Equitable Development Initiative (EDI) which builds on the Equitable Development Implementation Plan and Financial Investment Strategy that were adopted by City Council in 2016 as part of the Comprehensive Plan – Seattle 2035. More information is available here:

<http://www.seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/equitable-development-initiative>.

The goal of the EDI is to make public investments in neighborhoods that support those most in need and that consider past history and current conditions so that future outcomes are more equitably distributed, both for those currently living and working in Seattle, as well as new arrivals. OPCD identified five target areas that have a high risk of displacement – Bitter Lake,

Westwood-Highland Park, South Park, Rainier Beach and Othello as primary target areas and is also considering groups in other areas such as the Central and International Districts that work with communities that have a history and/or high risk of displacement.

In addition, OPCD created the Outside Citywide Initiative to help focus the City's investments in open space; Outside Citywide is an interdepartmental initiative to envision and create an integrated, equitable, and inspiring public space network for a thriving, green Seattle. As noted in the Outside Citywide Vision document, in the past, the City (predominantly SPR) has focused on an acquisition-based strategy to grow our public space network. However, with our rising population density and land values, this single-pronged strategy is no longer feasible. Public space within the City goes beyond just SPR property and SPR facilities and includes properties owned by other City departments and Seattle Center, school grounds and college and university campuses and even privately-owned open spaces. Again, from the Outside Citywide Vision: Our public space network can and must continue to provide the full range of critical benefits to our communities. This will require a more innovative and collaborative approach guided by three overarching principles to Grow, Improve and Connect. Outside Citywide has been focusing this strategy in the South Park Neighborhood and this can serve as a model to be used in other neighborhoods within the City.

Outside Citywide noted that past City policies and investment decisions have helped create and perpetuate significant racial disparities in access to green space and in safety from environmental harms. Environmental and health challenges, including vulnerability to climate impacts, disproportionately impact communities of color and lower-income residents. Future investments in public space must center the voices and needs of communities of color and other historically disadvantaged communities to start addressing these disparities and build a more just future, with clean air and water and culturally appropriate places for everyone. While Outside Citywide has focused primarily on open space, we can expand Outside Citywide's principals to include SPR facilities that serve these underserved and underrepresented communities in the communities within which they are located.

Rethinking the MPCF affords us an opportunity to better align this initiative with the City's focus on equity and better serve those communities with underserved and unrepresented populations. Aligning the MPCF with the City's equity initiatives would better support community groups that are focused on park-related issues in communities that have a history of racial disparities in access to green space and in safety from environmental harms and/or high risk of displacement and discrimination. Consistent with the City's initiatives, we must be thoughtful and intentional as we look to fund investments in parks and park facilities, helping to ensure that they don't increase displacement risk for residents facing higher rents and property values. As we seek to improve SPR's facilities and address environmental disparities, we must simultaneously work to expand capacity and increase our connections to these neighborhoods and communities. Communities must be supported to thrive in place with better access to recreation and services through continued investment in parks and park facilities that serve the communities within which they are located.

### ***Staffing***

A key reason that the MPCF was hamstrung in its efforts to serve these communities was a lack of dedicated staffing. One staff person was assigned to create and administer the MPCF representing approximately 0-20% of their workload, depending on the time of year. In

comparison, OPCD's EDI has six staff dedicated staff and the Outside Citywide initiative takes advantage of OPCD staff and staff from other departments. For SPR to build trust and rapport with community members/groups and to gain a deeper understanding of their park-related needs we recommend having dedicated staff who can become a trusted presence and advocate in the identified neighborhood(s) of need.

### ***Other City Funds***

To date, the avenues for entry into our system has been through the Department of Neighborhood's Neighborhood Matching Fund or through the MPCF. The NMF funded small planning project up to \$25,000 and provided construction funding for small projects up to \$100,000. These were community driven projects that were relatively simple and easy to accomplish that provided significant benefit to the community without the requirement of a large cash match; volunteer hours are the typical match with some limited cash or in-kind contributions. The \$100,000 large project award is no longer available through the NMF and this has left a void with no other avenue for community groups to fund these smaller projects that can serve as a catalyst for community capacity building and cohesion. As noted above, one of the successes of the MPCF was the ability to fund staff time to work with community groups on feasibility studies of SPR facilities. Refocusing the MPCF to fund smaller projects would expand the reach and impact of the fund with quick wins and increased community engagement. In tandem with aligning the MPCF with the City's broader focus on equity and expanding it to include smaller projects, there is the opportunity to provide a vehicle to take community-initiated ideas, fund projects from across the city and shepherd them through SPR's review and approval process – the Community Response component.

### ***Reframing "Major" and "Challenge"***

If we are going to distribute funds more equitably, we believe the MPCF can be more appropriately named. Every project important to a neighborhood may not always be "major". During the two MPCF funding cycles, some community suggested projects such as kitchen improvements and a reader board at Garfield Community Center were not recommended for funding because they were too small. Smaller projects like these can be simple and quick to implement, directly serve community needs, build trust with SPR, and serve as "wins" that keep community members positively engaged. We also recognize that not every neighborhood project is a physical improvement, and recommend the fund be available to meet a community's program-related needs.

Framing this as a "challenge fund" is also antithetical to achieving more equitable outcomes. Groups that have the capacity to tap into other funding sources are inevitably groups that are least likely to live in communities that have a history of racial disparities in access to green space and in safety from environmental harms and/or high risk of displacement and discrimination. That said, SPR also needs to develop partnership protocols that make it easier for well-resourced groups who want to bring funding to priority CIP projects. It is important to recognize that the development of such enhanced partnership protocols require a separate strategy from the kind of equity-based community focused fund we are recommending be established.

### ***Recommendation***

Based on the above, the recommendation is to reform the MPCF into the Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund with two distinct focuses; the Community Response component is focused on responding to community driven requests city-wide and the Equitable

Park Development component is focused on partnering with communities and community groups to make improvements to parks and park facilities in neighborhoods that have a history of racial disparities in access to green space and in safety from environmental harms. The primary focus of the fund would be the Equitable Park Development aspect which would align the fund’s goals with the City’s broader focus on equity through a park and recreation focused lens. The goal is to make dollars available such that SPR can make improvements to SPR facilities that are needed by underserved and underrepresented communities in those neighborhoods with a history of racial disparities. It would also help build capacity to ensure that the voices of those communities are heard, and their needs are met. There should be no match required.

The secondary focus is the Community Response component. This is where a feasibility study or other pre-project analysis would be undertaken to begin a future large capital project. Once the feasibility study is completed, the project would enter the CIP queue with an opportunity to partner with well-resourced group(s) who want to bring funding to priority CIP projects.

See the below table for a comparison between the current MPCF and the proposed Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund.

*Table 1. Comparison of the MPCF & CREPD Fund*

| <b>Factor</b> | <b>MPCF</b>  | <b>Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund</b>  |
|---------------|--|--|
| Goal          | To leverage private funding to make significant improvement(s) to an SPR owned building or facility              | To partner with communities and community groups to make improvements to parks and park facilities in neighborhoods that have a history of racial disparities in access to green space and in safety from environmental harms and to respond to community driven |
| Process       | Funding cycle is announced, and staff is available to answer community questions                                 | Dedicated staff works within targeted communities to identify needs and opportunities in advance of any funding requests and recommendations.  |
| Equity        | City-wide focus but proposals are screened through an equity/RSJI lens as part of the overall screening criteria | Focus on neighborhoods that have a history of racial disparities consistent with the City’s broader equity focus   |
| Match         | 50 – 50 match is the goal for projects   | No match is required but SPR staff is available to pursue grants and other funding sources   |
| Project size  | Target is a “major” project with a value in excess of \$2Million.  | Minimum project size could be as low as \$100,000 to produce quick wins that serve the community, build capacity and build trust between SPR and the community.  |

| Factor   | MPCF               | Community Response and Equitable Park Development Fund  |
|----------|--------------------|---|
| Staffing | No dedicated staff | \$2M and 1.5 FTE devoted to the Equitable Park Development component (EPD) and \$500K and 0.5FTE devoted to the Community Response component. |

**Budget**

Currently, approximately \$1.6Million is allocated to the MPCF each year and includes staff time. The recommendation, if adopted as proposed, would increase this amount to \$2.5Milion per year and add 2 FTEs to the budget.

**Schedule**

Changes to the MPCF could be undertaken as part of the 2021 Park District update. The PDOC could direct SPR staff to prepare a schedule for community engagement and also prepare an updated engagement process and grant process for review and approval by the PDOC. The initial engagement and process definition could be undertaken in 2021 along with the announcement of the updated fund accepting proposals starting in 2022.

**Additional Information**

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