

October 2023



# Early Design Engagement Summary

*May – September 2023*

**Bitter Lake Reservoir Improvement Project**

## Project background

Seattle Public Utilities (SPU) is building a new drinking water reservoir in the Bitter Lake neighborhood. The new 21-million-gallon Bitter Lake Reservoir will replace the existing reservoir that is reaching the end of its service life. The new reservoir will be partially buried and hold the same amount of water as the old reservoir. More open space will be available for the community to enjoy after the project is complete.

Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) plans to turn the additional open space into a park, with park construction occurring after the new reservoir is built. The Seattle Office of Arts & Culture (ARTS) will use 1% of the project budget to install and maintain public art at the improved reservoir site.

## Engagement overview

The project team reached the early design complete milestone in May 2023 and conducted a spring early design engagement period from May 18 to June 12, 2023. Based on community feedback received during this engagement, the team initiated the summer early design engagement period to continue collecting feedback with a focus on personal safety and reaching a more diverse audience.

Over the course of these two engagement periods:

- 347 unique users visited the online open house
- 86 people visited our five in-person events
- 216 people responded to our feedback survey
- 145 people responded to the personal safety question during the summer engagement period

Refer to [Appendix A](#) for early design survey respondent information.

## Spring early design engagement

*May 18 – June 12, 2023*

In spring 2023, SPU held an engagement period to introduce the Bitter Lake Reservoir Improvement Project to the Bitter Lake neighborhood, share information on the early design plans, and collect feedback to refine design plans. Outreach activities during the engagement period included:

- Online Open House and feedback survey, available online May 18 – June 12, 2023
- Social media advertising, ran June 6 – June 12, 2023
- In-person Open House at the Broadview Public Library, held on May 25, 2023
- Staffed in-person information table at the Bitter Lake Community Center, held on June 3, 2023

- Staffed in-person information table at the Bitter Lake Reservoir Park, held on June 10, 2023

### Summer early design engagement

*August 1 – September 18, 2023*

In summer 2023, SPU continued engaging with the public to share the early design plans and collect feedback. The team reopened the early design feedback survey and added one new question, asking the community “what makes you feel safe in public spaces?”. Outreach activities included:

- Information table at Bitter Lake’s National Night Out, August 1, 2023
- Reopening the early design feedback survey with 1 new question on public safety, August 1 – September 18, 2023
- Information table at the Bitter Lake Reservoir Park, August 26, 2023
- Social media advertising, September 4 to 18, 2023

### Key Themes

Through surveys and in-person engagement, we consistently heard the following feedback from the Bitter Lake community:

- Neighbors feel concerned about personal safety at the Bitter Lake Reservoir Park. Reasons for personal safety concerns include public drug use, camping, lack of cleanliness, lack of lighting, and vegetation that reduces visibility.
- Neighbors want the new reservoir park to prioritize creating a family-friendly environment at the park by increasing park lighting, improving security, improving cleanliness by adding more trash and recycling bins, discouraging illegal activities, and promoting community activities
- Neighbors favor other park features including: a dog park, trees for shade, and public restrooms
- Neighbors have mixed feelings about the sloped land around the reservoir. Most neighbors feel neutral about the sloped land, while a quarter of neighbors have negative feelings about the varied landscape, often because it inhibits people of all ages and abilities from enjoying the site. A small group of people have positive feelings about the sloped land for its variety and the downhill kids’ activities (sledding, rolling, etc.)
- Improvements to nearby roads, sidewalks, and parking would improve the experience at the park
- The lowest priorities for the park design include: providing picnic shelter, incorporating outdoor exercise or fitness equipment, installing bike racks, and adding a multi-use sport court

- The best ways to contact the community include direct mail, targeted social media advertising, and information tables at the Bitter Lake Reservoir Park in the morning on the weekend
- Members of the Bitter Lake community feel that Seattle has not prioritized their neighborhood. They are excited about site improvements that consider public feedback.

See [Appendix B](#) for results from select survey questions.

## Feedback

Our engagement revealed common themes about neighbors' hopes for the project in the short- and long-term. Below is a summary of what we heard and how we are responding.

- There's a lot of trash in the area.
  - ➔ **How we've responded:** We elevated the concern to SPU's Clean City Division and they've added two sets of public litter and recycling cans along Linden Ave at N 130th St and N 135th St. Through initiatives within the Clean City Division, as of October 2023, we've cumulatively removed 30,540 pounds of garbage and debris from the neighborhood and 28,473 sharps from the Bitter Lake Playfield collection box.
  - ➔ We've elevated the concern regarding lack of public litter and recycling cans in the park to Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) with the intent of having more cans installed in the park.
  - ➔ During in-person events, we encouraged neighbors who go the extra mile to clean up the park to utilize the free trash bags and trash pickup that SPU's [Adopt a Street](#) program provides. We will continue promoting this program in future engagement to make the resources more accessible to the community.
- Overgrown bushes reduce visibility at the site and make neighbors feel unsafe.
  - ➔ **How we've responded:** We've elevated the concern to SPR maintenance groups with the intent to have a crew trim the vegetation.
- Neighbors feel unsafe when people camp or participate in illegal activities at the site.
  - ➔ **How we've responded:** We've elevated these personal safety concerns to the City of Seattle's Unified Care Team (UCT). The UCT brings together more than a dozen city departments and partners to coordinate a data-driven approach to ensuring Seattle's public spaces, sidewalks, and streets are open and accessible to all. To learn more about UCT and their work, please visit [seattle.gov/UnifiedCareTeam](https://seattle.gov/UnifiedCareTeam). *Please note, public safety response is outside the scope of the UCT, and neighbors are encouraged to always call 9-1-1 for dangerous or emergency situations or Seattle Police Department (SPD)'s non-emergency number (206) 625-5011 for other criminal activity or incidents.*
  - ➔ SPU and SPR will be touring the site with SPD to learn about ways to make the site design safer. Members of the project team will be evaluating the reservoir space by

participating in a *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* (CPTED) review. CPTED strategies aim to reduce crime by deterring offender decisions that precede criminal acts.

## Next steps

While continuing to refine the design plans, the project team is coordinating with other City of Seattle departments to address feedback gathered from the neighborhood. SPU is continuing to listen to the community and find ways to address public feedback and concerns in the short term and through the reservoir design.

- Refine the reservoir design using public feedback and share feedback with SPR and ARTS to help their projects align with what the community wants
- Engage with the following organizations, as suggested by neighbors and survey respondents:
  - Nearby apartments, senior living spaces, and low-income housing (Tri-Court, Tressa, SHAG, the Cambridge Apartments, Amesbury Apartments, Bellwether Housing)
  - Downtown Emergency Service Center
  - Seattle Police Department
  - Broadview Bitter Lake Community Council
  - Broadview Thomson K-8
  - Bitter Lake Food Pantry/North Helpline
  - Aurora Reimagined Coalition
  - Black Lives Matter Seattle King County
  - Duwamish Tribe
  - Haller Lake Community Center
  - Seattle Metro Pickleball
  - Sound Generations
- Update outreach methods based on results from the early design comment periods
  - Continue using social media advertisements to share information and collect feedback with a larger and more diverse audience
  - Focus in-person outreach on engaging specific communities who we haven't heard enough from yet, including Black and African American communities, Hispanic and Latino communities, and youth
  - Prioritize smaller and more frequent in-person events instead of one comprehensive open house
- Work with community liaisons from the Department of Neighborhood to reach underserved residents

## Appendix A – Early design feedback survey respondent information

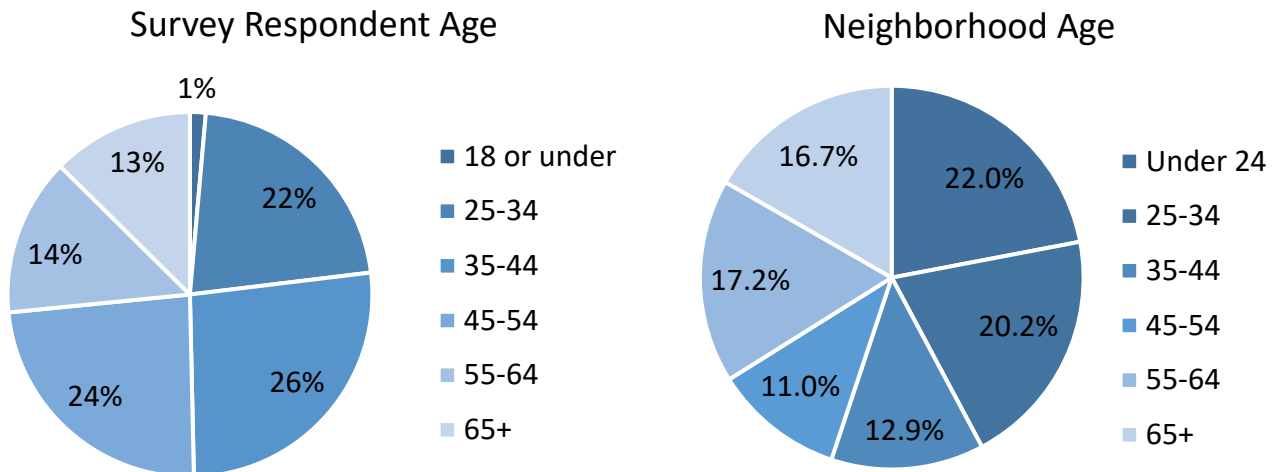
The following charts display the demographics of survey respondents compared to neighborhood demographics from the [2017 – 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Narrative Profile of Census Tract 4.04, King County, Washington](#).

### Zip code

78% of survey respondents live in the 98133 zip code, 16% live in the 98177 area, and 6% of respondents live in one of the following zip codes: 98122, 98103, 98134, 98115, 98125, 98155, 98143, 98112.

### Age

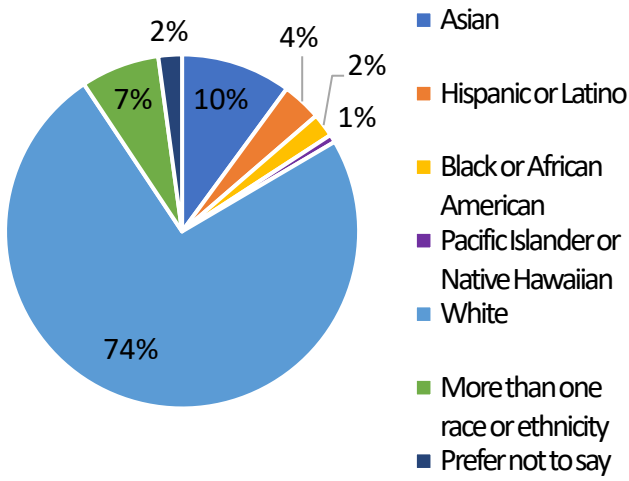
Through surveys and outreach online and in person, we successfully engaged with most age groups. Our survey results do not reflect the opinions of Bitter Lake’s youth community, so future engagement will include ways to engage youth.



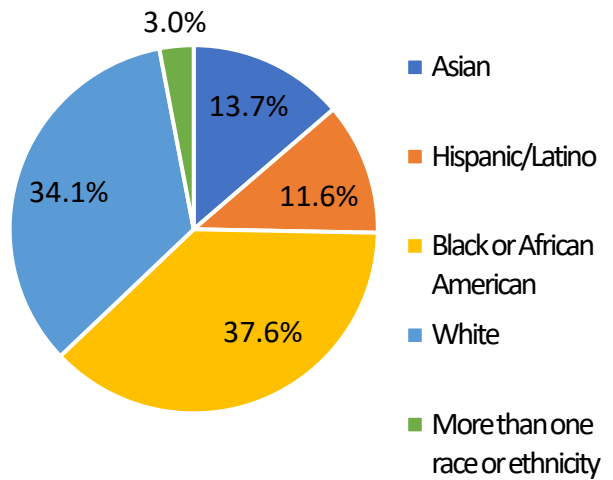
### Race and ethnicity

Despite providing all materials in English, Spanish, Amharic, and Traditional Chinese, we did not successfully engage with all prominent racial and ethnic groups in Bitter Lake. Our next engagement period will prioritize engaging people who identify as Black or African American and people who identify as Hispanic or Latino. We plan to partner with community liaisons who will help us reach these communities where they are.

Survey Respondent Race and Ethnicity



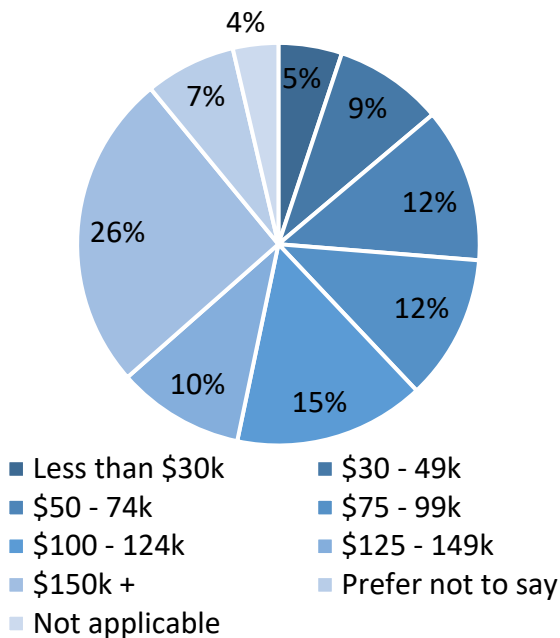
Neighborhood Race and Ethnicity



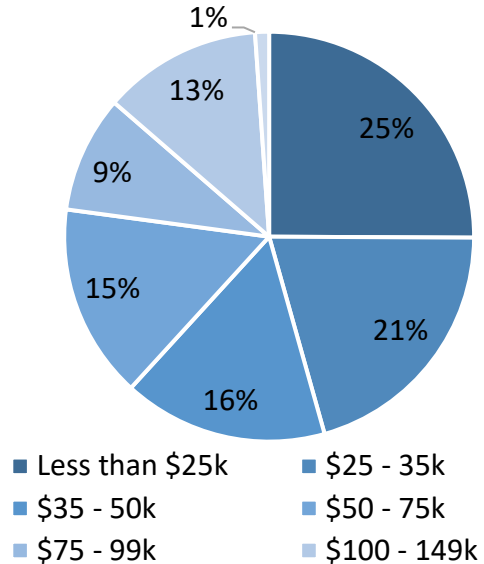
### Household income

Through social media advertisements, we reached people of all income levels. We plan to continue this and enlist new strategies to help our in-person engagement efforts reach a group of people with an income distribution that better matches the neighborhood.

Survey Respondent Household Income

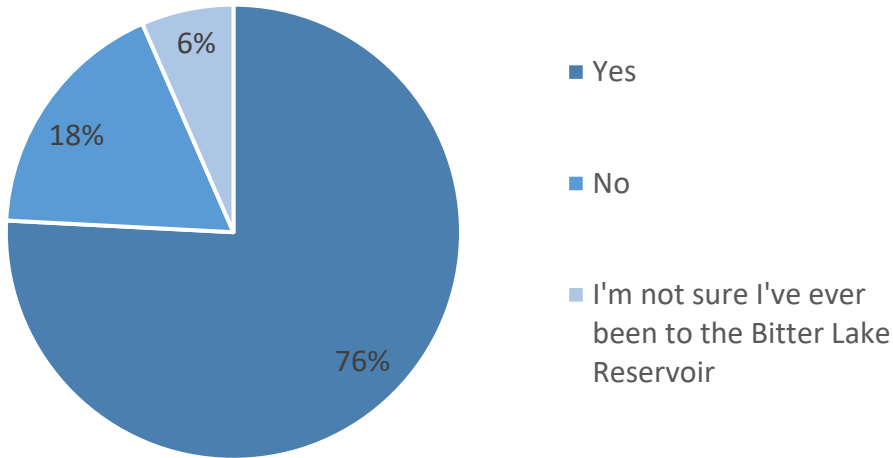


Neighborhood Household income



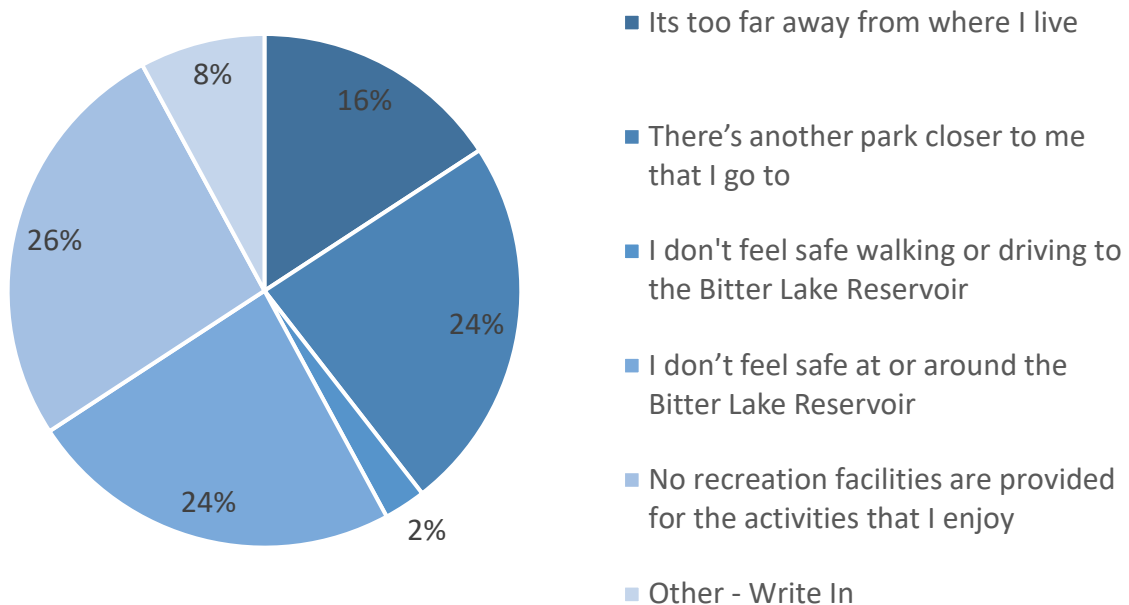
## Appendix B—Select survey results

Do you currently visit or use areas around the existing Bitter Lake Reservoir?



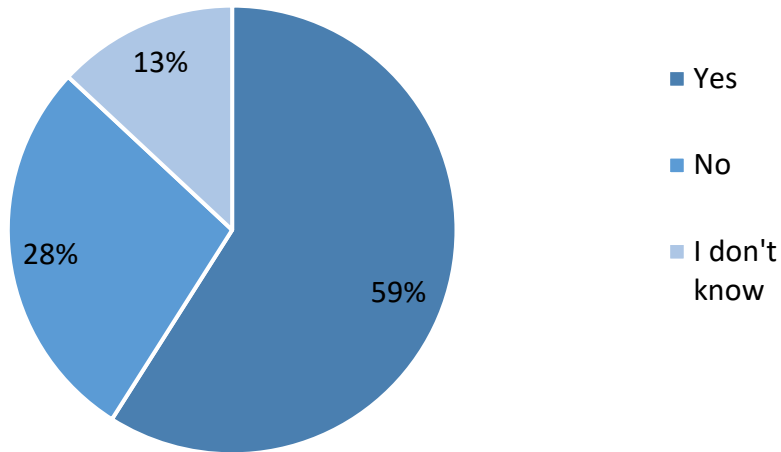
Why don't you visit the open space or park next to the Bitter Lake Reservoir?

*We only asked this question to people who responded that they do not visit the site.*





Do you have any concerns about personal safety at the site?  
*We only asked this question to people who responded that they visit the site.*

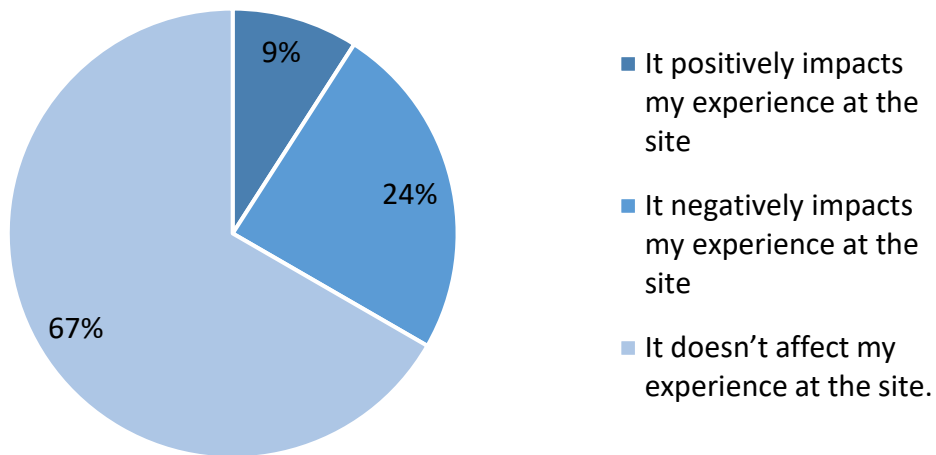


Please detail what your personal safety concerns are.  
*We only asked this question to people who responded that they visit the site.*

**Responses included:** homeless encampments, public drug use, public drug dealing, littered needles, furniture, trash, crime, low visibility, lack of lighting at night, public indecency, physical fights, nearby traffic and roadway conditions, graffiti, broken glass, nearby break-ins, recent violent crime incidents, loitering, high vegetation, nearby housing projects, gang activity, unleashed and/or aggressive dogs, dog feces, speeding on Linden Ave N

Does the sloped land around the reservoir affect your experience at the site?

*We only asked this question to people who responded that they visit the site.*



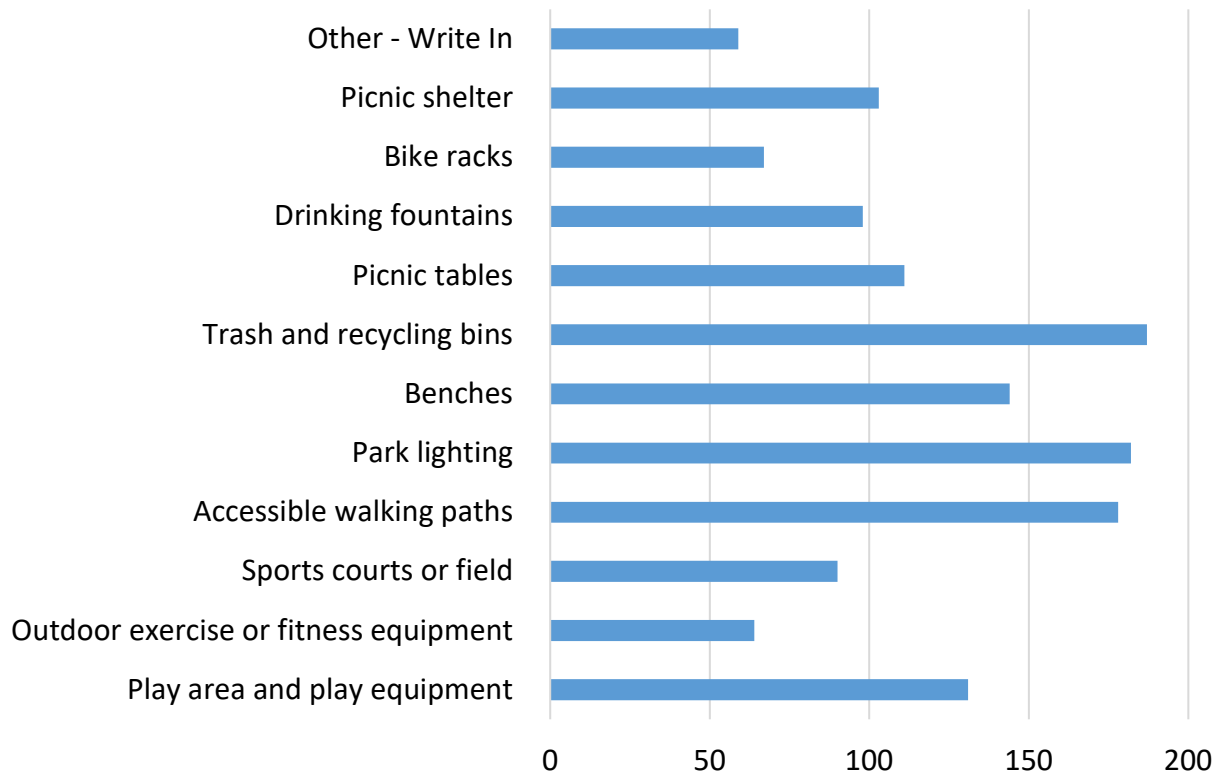
Please explain how the sloped land around the reservoir affects your experience.

*We only asked this question to people who responded that they visit the site.*

**Responses that reflect positive sentiments:** creating a place for kids to sled in the winter and roll down the hill in the summer, visual appeal, and diversity of landscape

**Responses that reflect negative sentiments:** inaccessibility for people with disabilities and senior citizens, making it hard for kids to run, making it difficult to see the open space from street level, making it difficult to push kids in a stroller, limiting space for recreational activities (e.g., walking, sports, picnics, play space, etc.), creates hiding places for people to sleep or use drugs

Seattle Parks and Recreation will soon begin designing the new open space as part of the Bitter Lake Reservoir Park. What kinds of amenities would you like SPR to consider in their design? (Check all that apply)



**“Other” responses included:** off-leash dog area, trees for shade, fruit trees, flowering trees, native plants, encampment deterrents, sharps collection containers, public restrooms, kiddy pool, wading pool, spray park, flat grass area, enclosures for kids’ safety, shaded play areas, angled parking, parking, bike service station, beach volleyball court, picnic grills, emergency button kiosk, bandstand, sledding hill, walk or run track, amphitheater, climbing wall, P-Patch, public restrooms, skatepark