



MEMORANDUM

TO: City Council Select Parks Funding Committee
FROM: Christopher Williams, Acting Superintendent
DATE: January 23, 2014
SUBJECT: Parks Legacy Plan Update

Background

Seattle Parks and Recreation (Parks) began the Parks Legacy strategic planning process in 2012 with the goal of preserving the historic legacy of Seattle parks, which began over a hundred years ago with the Olmsted Plan. Now Parks manages a 6,200 acre park system of 465 parks and extensive natural areas. Parks provides athletic fields, tennis courts, play areas, specialty gardens and more than 120 miles of walking trails. The system comprises about 11% of the City's land area. Parks also manages many facilities, including 26 community centers 10 swimming pools, two small craft centers, four golf courses, an outdoor stadium, and much more.

Parks operates with a \$135 million budget, \$89 million of which comes from the general fund. Funding for capital projects comes from a combination of 2008 Parks and Green Spaces Levy (2008 Levy) funding and from Parks' allocation of the City's revenue from the Real Estate Excise Tax and King County Conservation Futures Tax Fund.

Parks Legacy Citizens Advisory Committee

Anticipating the end of the 2008 Levy, the Mayor and Council created a 15-member committee to evaluate the need for and composition of a new funding measure for Parks (Resolution 31454, May 2013). The Parks Legacy Citizens' Advisory Committee (PLCAC) completed an interim report in December. In the interim report they have recommended a prioritized list of projects and programs for funding—referred to as investment initiatives. The annual funding for all investment initiatives on the list totals \$54 million. Parks' vision for additional funding for a new ballot measure is to focus on fixing, maintaining and operating what we have, rather than providing a laundry list of new facilities. The PLCAC prioritized list of projects is consistent with that approach.

In addition to prioritizing the investment initiatives, the PLCAC is charged with recommending the total amount for the funding measure and a funding mechanism

(levy or metropolitan park district [MPD]) which they will do in their final report in March.

Parks Funding Challenges Identified in the Citizens' Committee Interim Report

- **Major maintenance:** When the 2008 Levy expires at the end of this year, Parks loses the \$24 million in annual funding it provided for capital projects. (The 2008 Levy did not provide any funding for operations and ongoing maintenance.) Even with the Levy funds, Parks' backlog of major maintenance projects—fixing leaky roofs, replacing outdated plumbing and aging boilers—has grown to \$267 million, and this does not include major maintenance needs at the Zoo and Aquarium or fully funding the Green Seattle Partnership.
- **Community Center Operations:** Parks' community centers—the living rooms for 26 Seattle neighborhoods—are the foundation for low-cost recreation and activity programs. During the recession, Parks reorganized the community center operating model, reducing redundancy and increasing coordination between centers. These efficiencies, however, were outweighed by reductions in funds that required significant staff reductions, which led to fewer operating hours, with some centers open to the public only 25 hours per week.
- **Routine and Preventive Maintenance:** Cleaning comfort stations and picking up litter were the highest priority maintenance activities in a survey done in conjunction with the Parks Legacy Plan. However, Parks maintenance crews are stretched so thin that these activities, especially during peak summer season, cannot keep up with the need and the high standard that both citizens and Parks staff expect. Preventive maintenance, the regular painting, roof repair and mechanical system maintenance that extends the life of facilities has been curtailed due to budget constraints such that staff are generally in reactive mode – responding the urgent needs rather than preventive care.
- **Programming Needs in a Changing Community:** The changing demographics of the City speak for the need for Parks to:
 - Provide programs to help the growing population of seniors lead healthy, active lives;
 - Keep teens and youth, our future leaders, safe, healthy and involved in the community;
 - Provide recreation programs for people with disabilities to allow them and their families to benefit as the regularly abled do from recreational activities;
 - Provide access and equity in parks' programs by providing services for historically underrepresented communities, such as the Women of the World Swims.

- Need for Increasing Parks' Assets: The PLCAC noted the public's desire for a continued increase in both the scope and quality of the City's Parks and recreation system.
 - One means to increase scope is to develop into parks 15 sites that have been acquired, but have not been developed due to the lack of funding.
 - The gem that will become waterfront park will need baseline maintenance and programming funding to keep it a vital central city asset;
 - And funding is needed for a challenge fund to match funds raised by community groups and to leverage partnerships, such as the recent redevelopment of the Mt. Baker Rowing and Sailing Center.

Public Input

Over 4,500 individuals have either participated in a public meeting, a survey or sent us an email or letter during the development of the Parks Legacy Plan.

1. Use and Opinion Survey - 3,457 respondents
Sept-Oct 2012
2. 1st Round of Public Meetings – 300 people signed in
May 2013
3. Parks Legacy Citizens' Advisory Committee (PLCAC) Meetings and Public Hearing
– 740 respondents
June-Nov 2013
4. 2nd Round of Public Meetings – number of attendees yet to be determined
January 2014

Race and Social Justice Highlights include:

- Survey, fliers and meeting announcements - Translated into 9 languages
- Partnered with Department of Neighborhoods to administer Parks survey through their Public Outreach and Engagement Liaisons
- Used the City's Minority Media list for outreach
- Partnered with Neighborhood House for additional outreach resulting in 127 postcards and increased meeting attendance
- Parks' Race and Social Justice Initiative Change Team conducted outreach to 16 groups in "backyard" meetings, briefed the PLCAC, submitted recommendations.

Council Parks Funding Select Committee Process

The final PLCAC report plus legislation will come to the Council in mid-March. The Select Committee will consider the key issues in the development of a Parks funding ballot measure:

- Need: Is there sufficient need for a Parks-funding ballot measure?
- Composition of the package: What is the right balance between maintenance, operations, programming, and new development?

- Size: Should the measure raise sufficient revenue to tackle a wide range of Parks' long-term needs or should it be renewed at the current level?
- Funding mechanism: Is a levy or metropolitan park district the preferred method for providing funding for Parks?

The Committee meeting dates are March 17, March 31, April 7 (public hearing), April 14 and April 28.