



(GENERAL)

FILE NO. 256584

PETITION  
OF  
ALLEN G. OSTROM

FOR CHARTER AMENDMENT TO CHANGE THE PARK  
BOARD--PARK DEPT. STRUCTURE.

*10/6/66 - Ref. Mayor's  
Charter Edum  
8-29-67 - file*

SEP 19 1966

FILED

C. G. ERLANDSON  
COMPTROLLER AND CITY CLERK

BY *W. A. Bessant* DEPUTY

**ACTION OF THE COUNCIL**

REFERRED SEP 19 1966	TO <del>Secretary</del> <del>Public Safety</del> Judiciary
REFERRED	TO
REFERRED	TO
REPORTED AUG 28 1967	DISPOSITION On File
RE-REFERRED	TO
REPORTED	DISPOSITION

## REPORT OF COMMITTEE

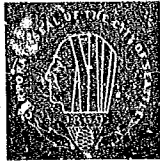
Mr. President:

Your ..... Judiciary ..... Committee  
to which was referred the within ..... petition  
would respectfully report that we have considered the same and respectfully recommend that .....  
the same be placed on file.

CHAIRMAN

*Alapsoit*

CHAIRMAN



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR - CITY OF SEATTLE

J. D. Braman, Mayor

August 18, 1967

The Honorable C. F. Massart  
Chairman, Judiciary Committee  
City Council  
City of Seattle

Dear Mr. Massart:

I am returning herewith File No. 256584, being the petition of Allen G. Ostrom for Charter amendment to change the Park Board-Park Department structure.

Please refer to my letter of August 7, 1967 addressed to your Honorable Body, in which I have made a recommendation concerning a proposed amendment to Article XI of the City Charter pertaining to the structure of the Park Department and the Board of Park Commissioners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. D. Braman".

J. D. Braman  
Mayor

JDB:rd  
Enclosure



October 7, 1966

Mr. Allen G. Ostrom  
10734 2nd Avenue Northwest  
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Mr. Ostrom:

This will acknowledge your letter to the City Council recommending a Charter amendment to change the Park Board-Park Department structure, which was referred to the Judiciary Committee for its consideration.

At its meeting yesterday, the Committee approved the Mayor's request for the establishment of a Charter Amendment Advisory Committee. Your communication was then sent by the Committee to Mayor J. D. Braman to be turned over to the Advisory Committee for its consideration and report.

All further inquiries concerning your petition, or additional suggestions you may care to make, should be addressed to the Charter Amendment Advisory Committee, c/o The Mayor's Office, 12th Floor, Seattle Municipal Building.

Very truly yours,

W. C. Heib, Jr.  
Legislative Assistant

WCH:ej

October 7, 1966

Mr. Allen G. Ostrom  
10734 2nd Avenue Northwest  
Seattle, Washington 98177

Dear Mr. Ostrom:

This will acknowledge your letter to the City Council recommending a Charter amendment to change the Park Board-Park Department structure, which was referred to the Judiciary Committee for its consideration.

At its meeting yesterday, the Committee approved the Mayor's request for the establishment of a Charter Amendment Advisory Committee. Your communication was then sent by the Committee to Mayor J. D. Braman to be turned over to the Advisory Committee for its consideration and report.

All further inquiries concerning your petition, or additional suggestions you may care to make, should be addressed to the Charter Amendment Advisory Committee, c/o The Mayor's Office, 12th Floor, Seattle Municipal Building.

Very truly yours,

W. C. Heib, Jr.  
Legislative Assistant

WCH:ej

October 6, 1966

Honorable J. D. Braman  
Mayor of Seattle

Dear Mayor Braman:

Attached is File No. 256584, petition of Allen G. Ostrom for Charter amendment to change the Park Board - Park Department structure.

The Judiciary Committee, at its meeting this morning, recommended that this petition be referred to the Mayor's Charter Amendment Advisory Committee for its consideration, report and recommendation in duplicate.

For your information, the Judiciary Committee has requested the preparation of the necessary legislation for the establishment of a Charter Amendment Advisory Committee in accordance with your request of September 29, 1966.

Very truly yours,

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Clarence F. Massart, Chairman

NCH:ej  
Att.

C.F.M.

September 13, 1966

Mr. Clarence Massart, president  
Seattle City Council  
Municipal Building  
Seattle, Washington

SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL

SEP 14 10 26 AM '66

Dear Mr. Massart:

When a city department admittedly is operating with a 50% shortage in facilities and admittedly is operating under a multiple million dollar maintenance deficit, it is time for us all to take a serious look at this department.

As a vitally interested citizen, one who has spent a number of years studying the problems that exist in the Seattle Park Department, I am completely convinced that the underlying causes of these and other Park failures stem from the Seattle City Charter governmental system under which the department operates.

The Park trustee system, as written in Article XI of the City Charter, has never and does not now serve our city intelligently and efficiently. It fosters little but mediocrity in the field of public recreation.

It is not reasonable to expect five local citizens, usually appointed without regard for Recreational experience or knowledge, to wisely administer the operation of a \$4 million-plus city department.

The governing, guiding philosophy is not and cannot be that of public recreation, but more often the outcroppings of a five-pronged civic activity motivated by the collection of private-citizen, personal opinions and observations.

It is folly to expect wise, far-reaching, progressive policies from people who serve in volunteer, part-time, no-pay capacities.

There are too many people, young and old alike, involved in Seattle Recreational activities, and too many millions of dollars expended annually to be left to the discretion and judgment of non-professional, albeit well-meaning administrators. It has long been, and still is, a matter of convenience for the Board to crutch-up its failures due to "lack of money and manpower", when a more realistic reason might be a "lack of recreational knowledge and understanding". Recreation funds must be spent with recreation wisdom.

It is not enough to have a superintendent serving beneath the Board of Park Commissioners. This position, as dictated by the Charter, serves to offer the Board an "out" on matters they cannot or dare not tackle. On the other hand, the Board becomes a similar, convenient "out" for the superintendent on matters he cannot or dare not tackle. It becomes an endless chain, often to the complete frustration of an interested citizenry.

Further, the superintendent can never speak with complete license as the Park Department's top-paid officer in his role on the Planning Commission and other designated committees, or in appearances before the Mayor and City Council. Being subservient to the Board of Park Commissioners only, the superintendent is in a veritable "no-man's land" with regard to city business.

The present Charter system provides for no final departmental authority, no end responsibility. Thus, it becomes administrative mish-mash.

Specific, well-defined responsibilities simply are not possible under the present commissioner system, and this vagueness is reflected in the years-behind condition of our playgrounds, fieldhouses, restrooms, tennis courts, athletic fields and most other recreational facilities.

As one Park officer recently confided:

"Our Park system is so run down we could spend \$3 million on maintenance alone and just scratch the surface."

National Recreation Association reports, plus every study made in recent years suggest, our city is upwards to 50% short of having adequate Recreational facilities. Not in 1975. Now!

In 1965, the then Director of Recreation said:

"It is criminal that a city of this size has but 51 playgrounds, or one facility for each 10,000 residents."

Perhaps the most obvious and graphic illustration pointing out Seattle Park failures is that Seattle has but one all-year, indoor public swimming pool for its half-million residents, and a second summer-only outdoor pool which at this time requires upward to \$75,000 for repairs and rehabilitation.

This does not speak well of the system which channels vast civic authority into the hands of five "well-meaning, public-spirited citizens."

To properly analyze today's Park Department, one should judge not what is promised, but what is. The condition of the department as it exists today should be the basis for judgment and future action, not what is "promised", "planned", and "hoped for".

It is common for people to assume that the Board of Park Commissioners serves as a "sounding board" between the public and professional staff. Ostensibly, this is why the present arrangement was devised.

This has proven false.

The Board trustee system, to the contrary, has created much animosity. An understandable lack of basic Recreational philosophy prevents this hoped-for rapport between citizens and staff. Thus, the commissioners become not "sounding boards", but more often unwitting "barriers".

The all-powerful authority of the Park Commissioner system places a high-rise screen on Recreational progress. It deters planning because, coupled with their general lack of knowledge in this specialized field, few appointees remain on the Board long enough to begin to understand the past and present, let alone the future.

This lack of professional guidance at the top reflects in the Department's inability to maintain reasonable growth, to keep pace, to plan, to dream.

A city department, as in any business, is only as strong as its leadership.

The present system allows for second gear activity in an era tuned for the freeway. Vital communications bog down to exit speeds when five otherwise busy-at-other-jobs commissioners must quorum to act on Park matters...large and small.

The Charter provides for no well-defined guidance on what constitutes Board action and what can be handled at staff level. For instance, the Charter says, "...the board shall delegate to the superintendent... the general management of the Park and playground system, and supervision of the employees thereof, subject to the control of the board".

This is obviously an "out" for both parties, and a prime example of the "endless chain".

To play safe, the superintendent often jams the Board agenda with minor and trivial business matters, items which in normal operation might be handled as staff routine determined by Recreational philosophy, policy and common sense.

As one Commissioner once said:

"Our agenda is from 'dullsville' and much of it of a nature that should be handled by staff."

It is hoped that the Seattle Park Department one day will be looked upon in the true light of its contribution and importance to the city. Our Park and Recreation system touches almost every resident in one manner or another and shares mightily in the city's sociological atmosphere.

In this light, the Recreational structure of our city can well be held: at the same level we hold our Police, Fire, Lighting, Building, Engineering and Water Departments, all of which operate efficiently under professional, one-man leadership as appointed by the Mayor, approved by the Council.

To achieve this ideal will require an amendment, or series of amendments, to the City Charter, to be voted upon by the people as a referendum.

I would request that the City Council take this matter into consideration with an eye toward placing such a referendum on the November 1967 ballot.

My principal suggestion in the re-writing of the Charter which pertains to Park Department operation would be that the control be placed in the hands of the Superintendent, as in the aforementioned departments, and that said Superintendent be selected by the Mayor from among the three highest ranking candidates in a competitive examination conducted by the Mayor.

And further, that the present Park trustee system be abolished, to be replaced by a five-man Board of Park and Recreation Commissioners, selected by the Mayor, but to serve only in advisory capacities.

The foregoing suggestions and observations are offered in a spirit of honesty and dedication, born of a desire to improve on a situation I feel is critical.

Respectfully,



Allen G. Ostrom  
10734-2nd Avenue N.W.  
Seattle, Washington