NEWS RELEASE

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Seattle Parks and Recreation brings in its millionth conservation rebate dollar!

Over the past few years, Seattle Parks and Recreation has been keeping more than just the grass "green"-- by making significant investments that are reducing operating costs while upgrading the quality of parks and facilities.

Parks recently celebrated bringing in its one millionth conservation rebate dollar. This funding has been provided by Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light and Seattle Public Utilities. The rebate dollars come from 59 energy and water conservation projects Parks has completed over the past five years.

The benefits are compounding each year. In addition to one-time rebates, the projects and other conservation work are saving Parks more than $1.5 million each year on utility costs. Parks has reduced the amount of energy consumed per square foot of building space by 14% since 2005, and has also significantly reduced water use.

"We're moving beyond the concept of re-inventing government to green-inventing government," says Christopher Williams, Acting Parks Superintendent. In addition to the investments, Parks has reaped substantial savings from no-cost and low-cost projects. "It isn't just one or two people who generate these savings," says Williams. "Parks has been working to create a culture of conservation across all of our work units."

For example, when challenged to reduce fuel use by 10%, work groups held brainstorming sessions to identify specific savings ideas that could contribute to the effort. The result: fuel use is down more than 11% compared to before the effort began. This will save Parks more than $122,000 in 2011.

"When budgets are tight, it's important to be creative," says David Broustis, Parks' Acting Facility Maintenance Manager. In 2006, we looked at the $6 million a year spent on utilities, and began to question whether there were savings to be captured." A close look at the bills and an

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examination of the buildings and parks revealed numerous opportunities. These included inefficient equipment, parks where irrigation systems were overwatering landscapes, and buildings that were heated at night. “It wasn’t that we were asleep at the wheel,” says Broustis, “We just didn’t understand the degree to which inefficiencies were driving our costs until we ‘peeled the onion’ and figured out how to reduce costs while still meeting public expectations.”

The larger investments Parks is making have been very cost-effective, generally paying for themselves in five years or less, and sometimes paying back the cost of the project in less than a year. Most of the savings are resulting from work that happens behind the scenes: high efficiency boilers, variable speed fans that ramp down at night, toilets that perform exceptionally well with less water, and sensors that shut down irrigation systems when it rains.

“The best projects are the ones that provide multiple benefits and cost reductions,” says Broustis. An example is the high efficiency T-5 gymnasium lighting Parks has been installing. The new lights have higher light levels, better quality light, lamps that last twice as long as the old ones, and less need for maintenance. The gym light projects are extremely cost-effective because occupancy sensors reduce lamp burning hours by up to 70%. When bidding the work, Parks often finds that in-house staff can do the work at a lower cost than outside contractors, and at a higher quality. Other successful projects have been lights being installed in playfields across the city that reduce energy use by 40% and integrate shielded fixtures to keep light away from neighbors and the sky.

Beyond looking at its existing building stock, Parks takes great pride in making environmentally responsible decisions from the onset. “During tough budget times, it’s important to continue to think in the long-term,” says Broustis. Constructing inefficient buildings and parks would only cost the City more in the long run.

Recent Parks levies have resulted in investments in parks and community centers across the City. “We make sure these investments are economically sound,” says Broustis. While it often costs more to buy efficient equipment, the savings pay off for years. For example, Parks chose to design three spray parks that will open in 2012 and 2013 to recirculate the water rather than drain it directly to the sewer. The recirculating systems are significantly more expensive, but will pay for themselves many times over during the life of the parks. The recirculation systems also allow for more water flow while using less water than a non-recirculating system or wading pool. More water equals more fun for kids. Parks has also just begun begin construction on the new Rainier Beach Community Center and Pool, which will be a LEED Gold building.

Parks continues to test new technologies as they emerge. The department starts small by testing unproven technologies. When the savings and performance are proven, Parks installs it everywhere possible. After the installation of new underwater pool lights was shown to be successful at one pool, Parks installed them at the rest of the pools over the next two years. The lights use 90% less energy than the old lights, and last 10 to 20 times as long.

Parks is far from resting on its successes—2012 will see a continuation of new projects such as efficient boilers, lighting systems and other technologies that will further reduce costs. “It is great to realize that being stewards of the environment can happen at the same time we are being stewards of the public’s precious dollars,” says Broustis. “We’re trying to prove that government not only works, but can work hard to make sure every dollar spent is going to a good use.”

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