

Minutes
Pro Parks Levy Oversight Committee
March 24, 2008

Committee Members Present: Doug Dunham, Chair, Alan Alabastro, Cindi Barker, Lisa Chun, Don Harper, Terry Holme, Cheryl Klinker, Joyce Moty

Staff: Christopher Williams, Deputy Superintendent; Kevin Stoops; Susan Golub; Lise Ward

Committee Business: The meeting agenda was approved, as were the minutes from the February 25th meeting.

Public Comment:

1. Frederica Merrell – Ms. Merrell spoke about the Jefferson Park project. Working with Park’s designer on the project, Andy Sheffer, the community has developed a list of priority items for additional funding from the Neighborhood Park Development Program. The total amount of the requests is \$3.9 million, with \$1.14 million for the Beacon Mountain and picnic area and the rest for the Great Meadow and other project components. Infrastructure needs, such as soil, grading, and water systems are major aspects of the project needing funding. Ms. Merrell stated that the Jefferson Park Alliance is committed to raising additional funds for the Beacon Mountain project.

Part of the need for additional infrastructure funding comes from the fact that Seattle Public Utility removed some soil from the project area that had been planned for the project, and soils costs are very high. Additionally construction costs have increased for all project components, including pedestrian lighting and pathways.

Ms. Merrell noted the need to improve Jefferson Playfield which is adjacent to a middle school and provides the only play space for the school. The Playfield is in sorry, unusable shape. She also stated the need for design work for the area of the Park along 15th, stating nothing is happening in this area.

2. Ryan McFarland – Mr. McFarland represents the Crown Hill Neighborhood Association. Last June the Crown Hill community came to the Oversight Committee to talk about the importance of Crown Hill Elementary. The community wants a park at the site and there is Pro Parks Levy funding dedicated to park development at the school. Now there is a possibility that the Levy money will be needed to acquire the site from the School District; the master tenant is working with the District to purchase the property. The community hopes the Levy money will be able to be used for park development, with other funding, including some from the State of Washington and a \$1 million challenge grant from the City and perhaps King County Conservation Futures Tax funds, enabling the property acquisition.

Ballard Property Acquisition: Lise Ward, from Parks Property Management Section, informed the Committee about a recent purchase in Ballard. The acquisition is the second site of a Ballard Levy Opportunity Fund project. The first site is Ballard Corners Park, which is scheduled for construction soon. The second site, newly purchased, is at 9th Ave. NW and NW 70th St. It is a 39,000 square foot property previously owned by a church. The City tried to buy the site during the Open Space Bond Issue project, but the church was not interested in selling. Now there are only two members of the church left and they agreed to sell.

The site fits very nicely into an area that is underserved with open space, according to Parks Gap Analysis, and is made up of 15 lots. The goal is to close on the property on April 30th. There will be a public meeting in later in March to discuss the purchase with the community, but all signs are that the community is very happy. There are two buildings on the site; one is like a dormitory and one is a single family house. Parks may try to move the house and will demolish the dormitory.

Doug Dunham remarked that this is a fabulous purchase.

Neighborhood Park Development Program: Kevin Stoops, Manager of the Planning and Development Division, described the Neighborhood Park Development Program (NPDP) and Parks recommendations for allocation criteria. The fund is \$5 million and Parks focus is to address known parks and recreation gaps and projects where there is strong community support. The minimum award from the Program is to be \$250,000 with the purpose of making meaningful investments. The Neighborhood Matching Fund is the appropriate source for addressing smaller needs.

Parks has developed a simplified process in order to reduce the effort of neighborhood groups. The proposed process starts with a letter of intent. Staff will screen the projects and make recommendations to the Oversight Committee. Staff will help community groups make full applications and do cost estimates for project components.

At the February Oversight Committee meeting the Committee voted to not tie up NPDP funds with projects that were not ready to be developed, specifically the Denny Triangle and International District/Chinatown. For the ID project, Parks owns the property, but we inherited a lease that is dedicated to post office use until September 2010 and could extend until 2013. While the post office is looking for an alternative site, they will not be ready to leave until 2010.

Mr. Stoops described projects that may be appropriate for NPDP funding, if the communities apply. These projects represent the beginning of a shopping list:

- **First Hill:** The existing Levy budget of \$139,000 would allow for grading and hydroseeding;
- **West Capitol Hill:** The Levy budget of \$200,000 may cover project costs if the design (process just underway) results in part of the area becoming a p-patch;

there is not enough funding to develop a plaza area at the park, which is the interest of some community members;

- East Capitol Hill: This property is a parking lot adjacent to a church on 16th and Howell; the plan is for part of the area to be a community demonstration garden, with part of the area reserved for future development when money is available;
- Jefferson Park: There are three areas where we have made cuts to planned Phase 1 development:
 - Concrete paths instead of asphalt;
 - Reduced or no pedestrian lighting for much of the site;
 - Reduced landscape installation resulting from the thin layer of soil that will be laid on the site and the limited irrigation (Parks usually lays 4 inches of topsoil, but are looking at two inches for this project because of the cost of soil and the huge amount needed);
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Park: The memorial area has been enhance but nothing was changed in the upper part of the Park as was envisioned in the planning for the Park;
- Meadowbrook Playfield: Two softball fields were improved but no improvements were made to the baseball field, as was planned for in the Levy;
- Brighton Science Park: The plan for the Park included a geology wall and other science elements that were not built because of a lack of funds; and
- Ballard Park Acquisition: Development funding for the new Ballard park acquisition.

Responding to a question from Cheryl Klinker, Mr. Stoops stated that the mounds shown in the Jefferson Park Master Plan are new additions to the project.

Don Harper raised a question about the presentation made to the Committee about a year ago about sportsfields. The Committee was told that the only remaining project in the Sportsfield category was Magnuson Park. This was regarding the allocation of \$900,000 of interest earnings in the Sportsfield category. Why was Meadowbrook not included as an unfinished field project, especially as the fifth field at Magnuson was not included in the Levy language and the baseball field at Meadowbrook was included? Mr. Dunham concurred with Mr. Harper, stating that at the time the Committee was told Magnuson was the only project eligible for the funds in the Sportsfield category, and the Committee should have been told about Meadowbrook.

Mr. Dunham stated that the Mayor put \$7 million into Parks budget to free up the same amount of Levy dollars, and gave the Committee a new mission to recommend allocation for this money. He believes neither the Mayor nor Superintendent understands the pressure on the public and the Committee if an open process is used to make these recommendations. There will be lots of criticism of Parks if the process is not transparent.

Mr. Dunham requested that an e-mail from Committee member Alec Stephens on the subject of transparency be included in the meeting minutes. The e-mail follows:

“Susan, Doug & Committee,

Unfortunately I will not be able to attend tonight’s meeting, but I wanted to send my comments which may be considered as you work to finalize the process for the Neighborhood Parks Development Program.

First, I appreciate Superintendent Gallagher’s memo on the subject. It helps crystallize some of my thoughts that I will share below.

While I understand the decision by Parks and Recreation and the Mayor to leave the door open for non-levy projects to apply, I am concerned that the process outlined in Kevin Stoops’ memo might serve to undercut “new” applicants, or at least present the perception that the process is so constrained that only certain projects ever had a chance for funding in any case. My concern is that the Evaluation Criteria serves as a series of “gates” that could potentially exhaust all funds before consideration of any other projects further along (down) the line. My real concern is how the criteria will be applied, and why there is “Basic Criteria” and “Evaluation Criteria” as opposed to deciding the minimum qualifications for consideration, and then evaluation criteria to score all eligible projects against. In that way, all projects that meet the minimum eligibility qualifications will be scored or ranked using the same criteria. I don’t think the evaluation criteria should be used to screen, rank, and fund, with the few highest scored projects potentially taking all of the funds available.

I also have some concerns that the process seems staff-driven, with the Committee serving in the role of a concurring body of recommendations. As I look at the process, Staff evaluates what the priority projects should be, submits those projects to the Committee for its recommendation, and then works with the recommended projects to finalize. Only by exception would a project come through that was not initially advanced by staff to the Committee based on staff’s evaluation. Now, I’m not looking for more work, but I wonder how comfortable my colleagues are on the Committee with the process.

I look forward to hearing how tonight’s meeting went.....

Alec Stephens

Alan Alabastro asked whether there were non- Levy projects in the community that are ready to go and would be interested in money from the NPDP fund. Mr. Stoops responded that one example is the City-wide Skatepark Master Plan which was approved by the City Council in 2007, but which has no funding to implement. Another example is the sports community which is interested in converting sand fields to synthetic turf and upgrading field lighting.

Cindi Barker noted that there are ten existing Pro Parks projects without set budgets, including the Morgan Junction project and others that have not yet started. For these

projects that are the last to be undertaken in the Levy, there is no other pool of money to turn to if their design elements exceed the allotted budgets. Careful analysis should be done so that these projects are not short-changed. Mr. Stoops responded that the challenge to staff, for these projects as with all Levy projects, is to hold the line within the existing budget, and that there is \$650,000 in contingency money remaining should these projects encounter unanticipated problems.

Mr. Harper commented that he was surprised that the list of potential projects provided by Mr. Stoops is so short. He is aware of other Levy projects, such as Queen Anne Boulevard and Counterbalance Park that are in need of more funding to be completed. He also noted that Jefferson Park is not in a gap area according to the City's gap analysis, so if we use gap assessment as part of our criteria it should not be allotted so much money.

Mr. Stoops responded that the list is just the priority projects for Parks staff. Other applications will come in from the public; the nominations the Committee will review will be from all over the City and will be from citizens or community groups.

Ms. Chun expressed a concern that a lengthy public process to allocate the funds would eat up a substantial part of the \$5 million and that would be a waste. Mr. Alabastro expressed a concern that the list of potential projects would be very long if the process is opened up beyond Levy projects. He suggested a compromise that would allocate a set amount of the \$5 million for Pro Parks projects and a set amount for the open category; perhaps a split of \$4 million for Pro Parks Levy projects and \$1 million for non-Levy projects.

Ms. Barker cited a concern about creating ill will in the community with a lengthy process with applicants having to do a lot of work. She requested staff revise the list with more Levy projects that would meet the criteria, and she recommended removing the Denny Triangle and International District from the list, as neither project would be able to develop for several years.

The Oversight Committee, by consensus, concurred with Ms. Barker's recommendation to remove the Denny Triangle and International District from the list of projects eligible for funding from the Neighborhood Park Development Fund.

Mr. Holme stated a fundamental issue exists – the difference between the Executive's desire to make the fund open to non-Levy projects and the Committee's desire to restrict the funding to Levy projects only. More well-defined direction is needed from the Executive. He stated that it is a disservice to the Committee to insist on an open process months after the Committee first began expressing their opinion that the fund be limited to Levy projects. At this point it is important to get back to the fundamentals of the criteria. As the criteria are proposed, non-Pro Parks Levy projects won't realistically get funded. If the Executive wants these projects funded, the criteria should change or money should be set for the open category as Mr. Alabastro suggested; for example, \$4 million for Pro Parks projects and \$1 million for non-Pro Parks projects.

Mr. Dunham expressed a concern that a full Opportunity Fund process for \$5 million will take many months, is staff intensive, and will not be transparent as the funding will be used for the first categories of projects. Mr. Holme suggested using the 2nd Round of the Opportunity Fund as a model where there was a \$100,000 minimum award. He noted that staff involvement is part of the choice the Executive is making regarding opening the process to non-Levy projects.

Mr. Alabastro outlined three choices for the Committee to consider for fund allocations:

1. Pro Parks Levy projects only (the Committee's preference);
2. Allocate separate amounts for Pro Parks projects and non- Pro Parks projects; and
3. Wide open opportunity fund where all projects compete equally.

The Committee concluded they would write a letter to the Mayor expressing their concerns about opening the funding to non-Levy projects, citing the amount of staff work required with this type process; the transparency issue of the funding probably not extending to non-Levy projects if the criteria favor Levy projects (as the proposed criteria do); and concerns about the cost of the process eating into the available funds. The letter will ask for a meeting with the Mayor to discuss these issues.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00.