

TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT.)

• **Safety and Security**

- **Improve security in the parks.** The City should fund a new Park Ranger security force of uniformed, unarmed Parks staff. Rangers would provide year-round, all-day, every day coverage in the nine downtown destination parks. The Rangers would be friendly and firm, would provide information about plantings and other park features, and would provide security. The Rangers would patrol the parks on foot and bicycle, and would notify SPD through radio contact of illegal activities. Supplemental SPD support for the parks would be provided through a contract between Parks and SPD, who would work together to determine the areas of SPD emphasis in the downtown parks. The program should be flexible and targeted to the areas of greatest need, which will vary by season and time of day.
- **Coordinate Police Department operations in the downtown parks.** More coordinated operating procedures for improving security in downtown parks is needed. The coordination should encompass coordination between SPD and the Park Ranger team; uniform approaches to enforcing City codes and ordinances, including the prohibition against camping; effective communications protocols between Parks and SPD; and enforcement of the Code of Conduct to be posted in the parks.
- **Consider installing decorative fencing around the exterior of selected parks.** The City should consider installing ornamental fences around a few key parks and opens space. Particularly in small “beauty spots” or parks where late-night illegal behavior is a persistent problem, fences may provide considerable benefits without compromising the downtown parks’ aesthetic or civic values.



Maintenance

- **Develop a major maintenance improvement program for downtown parks.** The plan should encompass major maintenance needs for each park and implementation of new practices such as urban wildlife management (rodents, pigeons, geese). It should also address park restroom needs and improvements to their operations and maintenance.
- **Coordinate downtown parks maintenance across agencies.** Some park properties in downtown are maintained by a mix of agencies, including Parks, SDOT, Seattle Public Utilities, the Port of Seattle and the state Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Because some inefficiencies exist in coordinating maintenance by multiple agencies, a coordinated plan for efficient service delivery should be developed, including development of cross-agency service and maintenance standards.

3 **Develop a Multi-Year Funding Plan for Investments in Park Improvements and Operations**

Parks should develop a long-range plan to fund both enhanced operations and capital improvements/major maintenance in the downtown parks. Operational cost categories include improved park security and assistance through development of a Park Ranger program, and implementation of proactive programming and special events services. Major maintenance needs include repair and upgrading of park infrastructure and public art, landscape and hardscape improvements, and refurbishment of park furniture and amenities. Funding could come from multiple sources, including a new parks levy focused on capital and reinvestment projects, open space impact fees, neighborhood matching funds, Real Estate Excise Taxes (REET), and a public-private partnership focused on revitalizing and upgrading the parks.



Seattle Downtown Parks & Public Spaces Task Force Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DOWNTOWN PARKS RENAISSANCE

A strategy to revitalize Seattle's public spaces

TASK FORCE CHARGE AND VISION FOR DOWNTOWN PARKS

This report presents the findings and recommendations of Mayor Greg Nickels’ Downtown Parks and Public Spaces Task Force, charged with making recommendations to the Mayor on strategies to revitalize and activate the city’s downtown parks and public open spaces. The Task Force’s charge encompassed recommendations in five key areas: parks maintenance; safety and security; programming, events and commercial activities; management; and funding for capital and operating improvements. The nine-member Task Force met 15 times over 10 months, and brought a rich mix of perspectives and experience to the project, including local and national retail and public spaces expertise; on-the-ground familiarity with key parks and their use patterns; City policies and practices; and experience creating successful urban public places. The group toured the parks, and engaged in many hours of thoughtful – and at times spirited – discussions.

Situation Assessment and a Call to Action

Seattle’s Downtown Parks Are Great, Underused Assets

Seattle’s downtown parks and public spaces are potentially great assets for the whole city, and will play an especially important role in the City’s efforts to enhance downtown’s livability and distinctive urban quality of life. Today, however, most parks sit relatively unused. Many people in the city don’t know that they exist, much less spend time in them, and there are virtually no organized programs to attract people to them. In the daytime, the downtown community largely passes them by, and in the evenings they more or less become ghost-towns. While some parks are gathering places for transients, predominantly men, others sit vacant on both weekdays and weekends. Some of the furnishings and amenities are old and worn. There is little public art and engaging amenities—such as playgrounds, dog runs and chess tables—are uncommon. Many of the fountains are in disrepair, the landscape could be improved in some parks, and there are limited seasonal plantings. The parks don’t feel safe or welcoming and there are few reasons for people to visit them, especially in fall and winter months.

It’s Time for a Renaissance in Seattle’s Downtown Parks

The downtown area offers a potentially remarkable collection of parks—quiet gardens, social commons, waterfront viewpoints and refreshing green spots—that promise to enrich the lives of the downtown community and visitors to the city. But today this promise is not being fully realized. Too many parks are underused and under-valued – not safe, clean or inviting enough, despite the efforts of dedicated City staff who work in the parks. As rising numbers of individuals and families look to downtown as a livable and active residential area, it’s time for Seattle to make its downtown parks the beautiful, vibrant and welcoming public spaces they were meant to be. As downtown booms, the parks should bloom.

Vision for Downtown Parks and Public Spaces: An Interconnected System of Unique Parks and Public Spaces

Seattle’s downtown parks and public spaces are a system of vibrant, convivial, people-filled gathering spaces reflecting the city’s diversity, history, urban character, and cultural and environmental values. The parks should have individual personalities, yet be connected together into an integrated network of open spaces and recreational places that are well-cared for and well-loved. They should be fun, beautiful, restorative and memorable places to spend time, through all four seasons, day and night.



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BERK & ASSOCIATES



SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS & OPEN SPACES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Foster a Downtown Parks Renaissance Through a New Partnership Between the City and the Downtown Community

Seattle's downtown parks are underused assets that can help transform the city center into a vibrant urban place of day and night live-work-play activity. Cities across the country with successful downtown park systems have recognized the catalytic role of parks in creating people-friendly, livable downtowns, and are investing significant maintenance, capital, security and programming resources in those spaces. Recognizing the complexity, special operating needs and funding requirements for a vital, active downtown park system, many cities have designed new management systems and structures to effectively meet those needs. In particular, activating the parks through lively events and programs, and creating an energetic parks advocacy and support network within the downtown community are two needs that are best met through a new management approach. Specific activities included in this approach would be:



Programming and Events

- Creating exciting activities in the parks, and publicizing and marketing them
- Managing special events, including the design and management of new events
- Promoting small-scale activity, such as entertainers and craft carts that rove from park to park
- Providing help to organizations and individuals with the events permitting process, including coordination with the permitting agencies
- Working with City staff to reinvent the existing Special Events Handbook as an attractive, user-friendly resource

Community Organizing and Capacity-building

- Enhancing relationships with existing park-specific advocacy groups and building relationships with new ones
- Organizing and building community support for neighborhood-focused parks
- Engaging with the surrounding downtown community, including organizing volunteers
- Developing new partnerships, relationships, and sponsorships

Implementing a new management approach could be accomplished by starting a new organization, partnering with an existing organization(s), or a combination of the two approaches. The Downtown Seattle Association (DSA) has been active on the Task Force, and sees downtown parks as an important element of a livable downtown. The DSA is interested in discussing this opportunity further and in potentially taking on a role in the implementation of these recommendations.

Fundraising and Advocacy

- Fundraising to support capital improvements and identified maintenance needs
- Advocating for downtown parks, including potential new parks

Liaison with Businesses

- Rejuvenating the adopt-a-park program and coordinating with adjacent businesses
- Working with building owners and managers to improve and publicize the city's privately owned but open-to-the-public spaces
- Participating in the development of park concession concepts and the selection of retail sellers, in coordination with neighborhood groups



2 Implement a Coordinated, Citywide Action Plan to Improve Downtown Parks

The City should realign and focus existing resources and make strategic investments to improve park operations, safety and security. In undertaking the strategies recommended below, the City will involve all downtown stakeholder groups.

Management, Coordination and Planning

- **Create a Parks Department Downtown Division.** Create a new Downtown Parks Division within the Parks Department ("Parks"), similar to the recently designated Enterprise Division, to focus exclusively on the maintenance, operating, security and programming needs of downtown parks.
- **Designate a staff member in the Mayor's Office to coordinate across departments.** A go-to position in the Mayor's Office is needed to troubleshoot and coordinate activities across City departments, including Parks, Neighborhoods, Human Services, Planning and Development, Police, Transportation (SDOT) and others.
- **Implement a Collaborative Effort to Provide Human Services Assistance in the Downtown Parks.** Develop collaborative relationships between the City's Human Services Department, existing resources such as the Metropolitan Improvement District Ambassadors, and the newly established Ranger team to identify services for people in the parks that are in need of assistance. Identify the service providers in downtown that can provide support and engage them in this collaborative effort.
- **Address interdepartmental parks governance issues.** In several parks, management and/or maintenance responsibilities are split among City departments, particularly between Parks and SDOT. All SDOT properties that abut downtown parks should be reviewed, with the assumption that management responsibilities will reside with Parks, as they relate to special event permitting and park design.
- **Integrate publicly and privately owned open spaces with Parks to create a downtown public spaces network.** Non-park open spaces are an important and often overlooked component of the city's network of public spaces. The City should prepare an updated inventory of downtown's publicly and privately owned open spaces, including those owned by public agencies other than the City, and work with property owners to make those spaces accessible and part of a well-publicized system of downtown parks and open spaces.
- **Create a downtown parks and public spaces wayfinding system.** This system should include improved signage at each site, and new brochures and maps that connect and explain how to access the network of downtown public spaces.
- **Develop a long-range downtown parks plan and update the parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for Downtown.** This Plan would address park needs and issues, including implementation of park-specific improvement strategies; acquisition of new downtown park properties; and implementation of the new parks and open space impact fee program. This Plan would integrate with the updated parks component of the City's Comprehensive Plan for downtown, which is also needed.

Policy and Legislative Changes

- **Amend Parks policies and procedures to increase park use and enjoyment.** The Parks Superintendent should develop a Parks Code of Conduct, to be posted in each park. The Code should be developed through a public process, informed by stakeholder input and by best practices nationally. Parks also should complete the update and streamlining of the Supplemental Park Use Management Guidelines, a process that is already underway.
- **Implement legislative changes to regulations that impede parks revitalization.** The City should take legislative action to: extend the City's panhandling ordinance to parks; revise and simplify the fee structures for events; amend the City's noise ordinance for special events held in downtown Parks; and authorize the Parks Superintendent to issue five-year agreements for concessions and retail activity in the parks (compared to the one-year agreements currently authorized).