

# SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES TASK FORCE

## TASK FORCE MEETING #7 SUMMARY: JULY 8, 2005

### Task Force Members

Ken Bounds, Co-chair (absent)  
Catherine Stanford, Co-chair (absent)  
Bruce Bentley  
B. J. Brooks  
David Brewster  
Tina Bueche  
Kate Joncas  
Jordan Royer (absent)  
Ron Sher

### Consultant

Bonnie Berk

### **Welcome and Announcements**

B.J. Brooks opened the meeting by sharing some information about recent events. The City Hall Park project team has been formed and work is underway on that project; the Occidental Park planning process is continuing; the Freeway Park vision document and action items have been developed along with a budget for improvements; and four parks have been wired for WiFi: Steinbrueck, Freeway, Westlake and Occidental. Parks will work with the City's IT Department to develop banners announcing this new service.

### **Discuss and Finalize the List of Priority Parks**

The Task Force reviewed a working framework for managing downtown parks, involving categorizing the 21 parks under study into three groups:

1. Priority parks: larger parks that are more complex to manage, are community assets of communitywide interest due to their scale, location and potential; that are appropriate for partnerships between the community, the City and businesses; and where there are opportunities for communitywide programming;
2. Neighborhood parks: those that could have more neighborhood involvement in programming, including partnerships between the City and neighborhoods; and
3. Quasi-parks: public spaces that aren't quite parks but pose opportunities for greenery and beauty in the City.

The preliminary list of priority parks included: Steinbrueck, Freeway, Myrtle Edwards, Occidental, Hing Hay, Westlake Park and Waterfront Park. Task Force discussion included the following points.

- Regarding the framework, let's focus on the parks we can really lift up to be great urban places – where we can devote real attention to the opportunities available. We are putting these spaces in categories so we can put money where it belongs best, where it can make the most impact.
- We need to move these parks up in the public consciousness and make them very active places. They are really destination parks.
- We need to define “community” in this context as the broader Seattle community.
- We would expect different levels and types of programming between community and neighborhood parks.

- We need to ask: why are we programming parks? We should look at the goal for each park, asking how we use it and work to get the parks activated to be the kind of places we desire.
- The list of parks should have flexibility over time – some parks may move from one category to another.
- In addition to organizing the parks into categories, we should come back at a later meeting and address our priorities for the parks in Category #1.
- Waterfront and Piers 62-63 should really be considered together; it doesn't make sense to separate them. P 62-63 will eventually be designed for something, however the future of this site will be influenced by the nature of the Viaduct project and its not clear yet what its future holds.
- Category 3 parks are transitional spaces, people pass through them, and as such they are opportunities – they should be designed to be part of an attractive downtown landscape. They are really “beauty spot” opportunities – for ornament and greenery, and to help define the downtown character. In Vancouver, such places are call “respite spaces.”
- We should also talk about open spaces (public and private) at another Task Force meeting. How they relate and could integrate. A City staffer is now mapping these as part of the City Center strategy.

In addition to the initial group of seven parks identified, the Task Force specifically discussed including three other parks in Category #1: City Hall Park, Kobe and Pier 62-63. It was decided to add City Hall Park to this priority category, and to also include Pier 62-63. In time, City Hall Park and Prefontaine could conceivably be linked. There is a big question about what to do at City Hall Park, how to make it a better place. Kobe Terrace was categorized as a neighborhood park, since there is already a lot of neighborhood ownership, involvement and events there. It doesn't need a lot of investment, and is really “programmed” already because of the garden. There is “softer activation” there, and the park has evolved very organically over time.

The Task Force agreed that Fortson Square should be taken off the list of 21 parks. It is a public space, but the Parks Department doesn't maintain it.

The group also talked about parks not on the list of 21 being studied.

- South Lake Union Park: need to acknowledge why this park isn't included in the study. It is a major park, which will play a greater role in the City over time. It can serve as the large open space that every city needs.
- Denny Park: this park will likely to have new roles as residential development in the surrounding area increases. It is an important park given expected residential growth in that part of the City, and especially given the relatively small supply of parks in the downtown. It will likely become a Category #1 park in the future, however today it is too early in the evolutionary process. So it really belongs in a fourth category – will be important and will need attention in the future.
- Seattle Center is also a major park in the city – a place of significant activity and programs.
- Boren/Pike/Pine Park (the “Four Columns Park”) and Cascade Park also need to be acknowledged in our report. However, the public doesn't consider them downtown parks.
- The Sculpture Park also needs to be mentioned. It won't be managed by the City, but it will also be an important downtown park.

The group talked about standardization of the parks look-and-feel, versus individualization. Standardization offers some benefits in terms of operations – maintenance, safety, and standards of care. Regarding individualization, there are opportunities for the surrounding businesses to play a role in the character of the park – to make the park reflect the character of its surroundings. Ron Sher said he was opposed to standardization, each park should have its own personality and character. There can be standardization of wayfinding – that would be an improvement – and individuation of the parks. The group agreed to discuss this further at another meeting.

## **Discussion of Draft Guiding Principles and Findings**

The Task Force reviewed a first draft page of principles and key findings, making the following points:

- Key finding: downtown parks have not been a priority, and they need to be!
- Downtown parks need a champion. And each park needs a champion.
- There needs to be a specific point of contact in the City for the downtown parks.
- Key finding: parks need to be places of civil behavior and public order (and they are not always that now). The City has a “Jensonia complex” – allowing incompatible uses to be located near parks.
- Many of downtown parks are not safe. All of the major parks – Occidental, Freeway, Westlake, Victor Steinbrueck, Waterfront – are not considered safe by the public. The City has put some tools in place regarding safety management (trespass and admonishments). These are better than nothing, but are still reactive. We need to really address the safety problem directly, including encouraging and requiring civility in the parks.
- Regarding maintenance: the more that deferred maintenance is addressed, the less challenging the routine maintenance becomes. We should frame the maintenance issues as one of “standard of care.”
- Regarding kids, the best opportunity for kids and family-friendly activities is at the Waterfront.
- The Guiding Principles should include management principles. Downtown parks need to be managed differently, treated differently.

## **Vision Statement Brainstorming**

The Task Force addressed their vision for downtown parks, in part by answering the query: In the future, the City’s downtown parks will be...

Clean, clean, clean

Clean, safe and will have supporting infrastructure (plumbing, electrical)

People friendly and diverse

A vibrant gathering space for a broad, urban democracy

- Vibrancy means that there are enough people there to be interesting at all times
- Support conviviality and interaction among people
- A place for many cultures
- Reflect city life
- Bustling, affordable and totally democratic
- Encourage a broad set of events and options
- A visual, outdoor art gallery
- Fun!

An expression of how the City cares for its people

A beloved feature of the City’s landscape

Have visual appeal and be visually pleasing even as you are passing through

Be individualized and have individual character

Be a rich tapestry of uses

The backyard for downtown residents

- A place for a picnic, barbecue or glass of wine

Reflect our commitment to the environment

Be distinctively “Seattle”

- Expressive of Northwest values – authenticity, genuineness
- Know that you are in Seattle, with a connection to nature and the water
- Be funky, not staid

Be part of everyday life, everyday. The parks are used in all four seasons and beyond daylight hours.

- Not just in the summer!
- That park design and programming acknowledges our (wet) climate

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place 8-10 a.m. on Friday, July 29, in the Boards & Commissions Conference Room on Level 2 at City Hall. The group also discussed adding two additional meetings in September, to work towards recommendations and concluding the project.