

Minutes
Pro Parks Levy Oversight Committee
September 24, 2007

Committee Members Present: Doug Dunham, Chair, Neal Adams, Alan Alabastro, Cindi Barker, Don Harper, Terry Holme, Cheryl Klinker, Sharon Lee, Joyce Moty, Alec Stephens

Staff: Paula Hoff, Cheryl Fraser, Kathy Whitman, Carol Everson, Peter Lagerwey, from SDOT

Committee Business: The meeting agenda was approved, as were the minutes from the July 23, 2007 meeting, as amended.

Alec Stephens requested a future briefing for the Committee on the current escalation of construction and acquisition costs and the difficulty this presents for project bids.

Public Comment: There was none.

Trail Project Update

Peter Lagerwey from the Seattle Department of Transportation briefed the Committee on trail projects. He noted that the Bridging the Gap Levy which passed last fall raises \$6 million a year for 9 years for bicycle and pedestrian projects. Leveraged against other funds, this will make a significant difference in developing new projects. The City has put in about 20 new miles of bike lanes and “sharells” (bike areas not quite as wide as a bike lane).

There was \$5 million in the Pro Parks Levy for trail projects. Projects include:

- **Burke-Gilman Trail – 60th to Golden Gardens – \$510,000 Levy Funds:** Currently under construction; scheduled to open March 2008; significant additional funds were required for this project, primarily to stabilize the area with holding walls. The “missing link” to the Trail through Ballard between 11th and the Hiram Chittenden Locks is currently being designed and might be partly constructed in 2008.
- **Chief Sealth Trail – \$400,000 Levy Funds (originally budgeted for \$1 million in Levy funds):** Project completed; significant leveraged resources, including \$1 million From Sound Transit and \$6-10 million in-kind donation from the company that built light rail.
- **Lake Union – \$1,700,000 Levy Funds:** Project completed; all new plumbing and underground electrical was required, increasing the costs to approximately \$12 million. Transferred \$1.7 million from Chief Sealth Trail cost saving to this

project. Additional trail work at South Lake Union is proposed in the Mayor's 2008 budget.

- Ship Canal Trail – \$760,000 Levy Funds: Design has been ready to go for about a year, but construction is not scheduled until spring 2008; delay caused due to complicated issues with permits and adjacent property owners.
- Mountains to Sound Greenway – \$2,080,000 Levy Funds: First phase is primarily on Washington State Department of Transportation property east of I-5 and will be managed by them; design of this phase is expected to be completed in 2008 and construction may begin in '08; the 2nd phase will take the trail over I-5, however, there currently is not enough funding for the 2nd phase.
- Potlatch Trail (renamed Thomas Street Overpass) – \$700,000 Levy Funds: Part of larger effort to connect South Lake Union and Puget Sound; project tied up with Mercer and Aurora issues; Thomas street Overpass is a separate piece that will connect to the waterfront; costs have significantly increased because of inflation in concrete costs; the project will be designed in 2008.

Mr. Holme asked what guidelines are used for bicycle bridges. Mr. Lagerwey responded that Washington State guidelines are followed regarding height, width and Americans with Disability Act guidelines. The Thomas Street Overpass will be 12 feet wide and have touchdowns on both sides of Elliott Avenue.

Ms. Klinker asked about the high costs of the Thomas Street project and what priority the City gives this project among other bicycle needs. Mr. Harper noted that this project was proposed by the Lower Queen Anne/Uptown Neighborhood which is growing significantly and wanted to find a way for people without cars to have access to the waterfront.

Mr. Holme asked how SDOT will keep bicycle maps updated. Mr. Lagerwey responded that bicycle maps are updated yearly, both a paper copy and on-line. New way-finding signs are scheduled to be put up this fall. A new Bicycle Master Plan was developed and new projects are listed on-line. (The Plan has not yet been adopted by the City Council.)

Program Report – Cleaner Facilities

Kathy Whitman, Parks Aquatic Manager, and Cheryl Fraser, Park Resource Manager for the south half of the City, briefed the Committee on Pro Parks enhanced maintenance projects. Enhanced maintenance is one of three Pro Parks program areas (the other two are recreation and environmental stewardship). Enhanced Maintenance has an important place in the public's view of the success of the Levy. The maintenance occurs in both indoor and outdoor facilities.

There are 4 program areas within enhanced maintenance:

1. Cleaner Parks: This program includes extra litter pick-up;
2. Comfort Stations: Additional cleaning in busiest parks (60 comfort stations);

3. Community Center: Supplemental cleaning at 28 community centers; and
4. Swimming Pools: Enhanced cleaning at 10 swimming pools.

Mr. Dunham asked about the transition of these programs to the General Fund, a process that was planned when the Levy was developed. Ms. Whitman responded that this has been occurring and that the same level of enhanced maintenance that began with Levy funds is now occurring with a combination of Levy and General Fund money. Eighteen full time personnel are assigned to the enhanced maintenance program and this number has remained consistent throughout the Levy.

The swimming pool program provides weekend maintenance cleaning which was **not** funded before the Levy. This helps with cleanliness and emergency maintenance needs on the weekends; during the week the extra staff are able to work on special projects, such as tile cleaning or two person tasks, such as filter work. This has resulted in fewer overtime staff costs. Aggressive maintenance occurs at each pool every 18 months.

In the Community Centers Program the additional staff work along with regular maintenance staff and are able to accomplish more cleaning than previously. Users have commented on how much cleaner the centers are. Also, staff has been added to community centers during busy indoor seasons, such as basketball, to provide extra coverage during high use.

Ms. Lee commented that there often seems to be a problem, such as a shower not operating, when she uses the swimming pools, and asked why these weren't fixed in a more timely way. Ms. Whitman responded that they should be; that repair does not fall into the enhanced maintenance program, but is the responsibility of our regular maintenance plumbing shop.

Mr. Harper asked whether pools were moving away from chlorine. Ms. Whitman responded that State law requires some chlorine disinfectant use at public pools. At two locations we are also using an ultraviolet disinfectant system which will burn off the chlorine and bacteria that is in the air and not in the pool (that creates the chlorine odor). This results in having to use a lot less chlorine to disinfect the pool. In addition, Parks uses clean, green products whenever possible.

The Peak Use Maintenance Program has four goals:

1. Litter and garbage collection on evenings and week-ends;
2. Annual winter cleaning projects, such as wading pools, picnic table pads, athletic field dugouts, play equipment;
3. Beach fire enforcement program at Alki Beach and Golden Gardens;
4. Emergency requests from citizens to park employees.

There are 13.5 employees in this program, assigned geographically throughout the system. Additional benefits of this program are the extra safety people feel when there are more Park employees in parks, and the customer service value of these staff.

Ms. Lee asked whether Parks has a policy regarding homeless people living in parks, and whether Parks was using sprinklers to clear people sleeping in parks. Ms. Fraser responded that the Department does not use its equipment for law enforcement – Parks does not use sprinklers to displace people sleeping in the parks. She noted that there is a very large homeless encampment problem, with the largest being the jungle on Beacon Hill; currently there are encampments in Lower Kinnear Park and in a part Discovery Park. She noted that camping in parks is illegal in the City of Seattle and becomes a police/Parks issue to clear the encampments.

Enhanced maintenance is servicing 68 comfort stations with a second cleaning during peak season. The Pro Parks employees wear uniforms which have helped the public and police identify the employees and has increased employee safety. Many of the comfort stations are worn out, but there is no budget for replacement, although we refurbish one per year from the regular maintenance budget. Interest was expressed in knowing how many comfort stations are in bad shape.

Mr. Adams asked if Parks has a way to measure cleanliness. Ms. Whitman stated that evidence is basically anecdotal – citizens commenting that they think the facilities are cleaner and are using them more. Attendance counts are available for registered programs, but we do not have accurate data on drop-in use; although drop-in users are counted on random days, but it is difficult to extrapolate how much of the use can be attributed to cleaner facilities.

Ms. Klinker asked about maintenance of natural areas, especially regarding illegal dumping. Staff responded that Parks works with Seattle Public Utilities under a garbage contract to clean large illegal dumping sites.

Mr. Stephens remarked that enhanced maintenance leads people to support building more parks and questioned whether we could better describe the change between maintenance that was possible before the Pro Parks Levy and what we can now accomplish. He noted that perhaps the Board of Park Commissioners should address the issue of how to better address the major maintenance needs.

Strategic Business Plan and Budget Briefing

Carol Everson, Parks Finance Division Director, briefed the Committee on the Strategic Business Plan and its relationship to the Mayor's 2008 budget. When Ms. Everson previously briefed the Committee on the Strategic Business Plan (SBP), the focus of the effort was the end of the Pro Parks Levy and the financial shortfall that would result. Two changes have occurred that have redirected the initial effort.

- A new Park Superintendent, Tim Gallagher, will be starting soon and will have a focus and leadership over the Strategic Business Plan; and
- The Mayor's budget, as it evolved over the course of the summer, changed the focus of the Strategic Business Plan, by allocating funds to cover the Pro Parks shortfall.

The budget continues the practice of transitioning Levy Enhanced Maintenance and New Facility costs to the General Fund. In the 2008 budget almost all Levy maintenance and program costs are included in the General Fund budget, an addition of \$6,985,179 to Parks General Fund budget. This is good news for Parks because these costs have now been established in Parks baseline budget for future years' budgets. (The only piece that is not included is the Enhanced Maintenance which is on a path to be gradually absorbed into the GF.) Inclusion of the Pro Parks maintenance and programming costs provides confidence that these programs will continue and job security for program staff. There will be some cut backs in Pro Parks staffing: as the development projects wind down, we will be cutting back on project management staff.

The Mayor is proposing moving the \$6,985,000 in Levy Programming funds that are being covered by the General Fund into an opportunity fund to be used for development and acquisition. The process to decide how the money will be spent has not been developed, although there is a desire to focus on existing Pro Parks projects that are struggling to find funds to complete the scope envisioned by the Levy. For example, there are no funds for development of several acquisition projects such as 12th Avenue park project, or for the Denny Triangle, Pioneer Square or Gateway. Or there are projects, such as First Hill, which have some development funds, but not enough to complete park development.

Questions were raised by Committee members regarding how the new opportunity fund would be allocated and what categories of projects would be eligible. Ms. Everson noted that the City's Law Department is working on how the actual of transfer of funds would occur, and noted that the process for allocating is being left open, with the anticipation that the Oversight Committee will be the forum for the public review.

Mr. Holme suggested the Committee approve a resolution supporting the Mayor's proposal. Mr. Dunham noted the benefit of this proposal to Pro Parks projects and encouraged the Committee to endorse the proposal. There is no need at this time to recommend how the money is allocated as this will be the subject of Committee discussion at future meetings.

Cheryl Klinker made the following motion:

If the Mayor's proposal gets adopted, Program dollars that are freed up get allocated for acquisition and development to complete underfunded projects. The Pro Parks Committee would like to continue in its existing role to make recommendations on how the money is spent. Any project in Pro Parks will be eligible to receive funding.

The motion passed with all in favor and one abstention.

Ms. Everson noted that there will be a public hearing on the budget, including the Pro Parks spending plan, on October 10.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.