

**PORTLAND PARKS BOARD
MEETING MINUTES**

March 12, 2019 | 8:00 - 10:00 am
City Hall | Lovejoy

Board Members Present: Paul Agrimis, Kendall Clawson, Pat Frobes, Michelle Dedeo, Bonnie Gee Yosick, Randy Gragg, Katy Holland, Tamara Layden, Jim Owens, Lorena Nascimento, Mary Ruble, Gladys Ruiz, Paddy Tillett

Board Members Absent: Tonya Booker, Jenny Glass, Ian Jaquiss, Joe O’Leary

PP&R Staff Present: Eileen Argentina, Claudio Campuzano, Katie Dunham, Margaret Evans, Brooke Gardner, Art Hendricks, Brett Horner, Elizabeth Kennedy-Wong, Adena Long, Lauren McGuire, Jason Smith, Jennifer Yocom

Commissioner’s Office & Other City Staff Todd Lofgren, Linda Law

Call to Order/ Approve February Minutes Board Chair Pat Frobes called the meeting to order at 8:05am.

She reminded members of the need to recruit new Parks Board members. This year the Board will have at least one vacancy next year there will be four vacancies to fill.

Public Comment Quinn Segal: Mr. Segal is a local artist and muralist. He shared his concerns regarding the prevalence of graffiti in parks, specifically in skateparks. He was recently invited to paint a mural in the Saint Helens Skatepark bowl. Mr. Segal indicated he was interested in beautifying parks and volunteered his time to paint murals in city parks in an effort to discourage graffiti.

Mary Ruble suggested Mr. Segal contact the Regional Arts and Culture Council which might be interested in supporting his work.





Edith Mirante: Mr. Mirante lives near the Springwater Trail Gap. She is concerned about the planned tree removal along the path site. She suggested suspending the work until another plan can be found.

Assets & Development Manager Lauren McGuire shared details about the mitigation effort and the work that was done to align the desires of the stakeholders interested in the project.

Board member Jim Owens thanked Ms. Mirante for bringing her concerns to the Board's attention and encouraged them to work with Parks staff.

Director Introduction

Pat introduced Adena Long the newly appointed Portland Parks & Recreation Director. Pat noted that Adena did a wonderful job on the panel at the Portland Parks Foundation event.

Director Long shared that in the four weeks she has been with the Bureau she has met with many staff and several Board members. She thanked the Board for its work on the Parks Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) and acknowledged the difficulty of the task given to the BAC. She noted the Bureau Budget Work Session will be on March 19. She is looking forward to working with the Board on the challenges ahead.

Director Long also talked about her experience working as a Park Ranger in NYC Parks and how her career developed within the New York parks system. She indicated that her experience in dealing with the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy taught her a lot about personal and professional resilience and the importance of being prepared for major emergency events. Director Long plans to work to ensure the Bureau is prepared for emergency events, including a major earthquake and that each individual staff member is personally prepared.

Katy indicated that the Native American Community Advisory Committee would like to invite Director Long to attend one of



their meetings. Mary indicated that she is looking forward to Director Long's participation on the Parks Foundation Board. Pat indicated that she would like to schedule some small group coffee meetings with individual Board members.

Budget Next Steps

Claudio summarized the March 6 BAC meeting and reiterated the concerns regarding the proposed reductions, stressing the importance of the request for transition funding. He indicated that the CBO had outlined the city-wide community engagement process: on April 2, there will be a general budget hearing; on April 9, there will be a community forum focused on the PP&R budget. The Mayor's proposed budget comes out on May 1. Claudio noted that between these key dates staff will be engaging with Council. As there will be some near-term impacts to the community, the sooner staff confirms Council's support for the PP&R budget request, the sooner staff can notify customers about service changes.

Board member Paddy Tillett asked for details regarding the Bureau's personnel costs. Claudio responded that about \$68 million of the Parks budget is personnel costs, which is roughly 70%. Paddy applauded Kia's presentation at the March 6 BAC meeting but shared his disappointment in the lack of clarity of where the shortfall came from. Paddy stressed his concern about the personnel cost associated with the transition funding and the perception that the Bureau is proposing eliminating jobs to solve a PERS problem. He stated that as long as PERS increases are not controlled, the Bureau's budget will be unsustainable. Whatever recommendation is made by the BAC, Paddy suggested that it be prefaced with a statement that a sustainable budget will not be possible until the PERS problem is addressed.

Claudio noted that the personnel costs increase every two years – not annually. The Bureau has received additional General Fund allocations to cover increased personnel costs. The problem mainly stems from the current business model that requires for every dollar in cost, the Bureau needs to raise 27 cents in revenue with the General Fund covering 73 cents. In the Recreation Division the ratio is 50:50.





Paddy asked what the plan is if the transition funding is not in the city's final budget. Claudio responded that if the transition funding is not allocated, the affected programs and community centers will be terminated or closed.

Mary asked if there are other areas where cuts could be proposed. Claudio responded that the majority of the cuts are in the Recreation Division because that is where the majority of the shortfall is. Todd Lofgren added that allocations to other divisions have been reduced to the lowest possible level to still provide minimum service levels. No cuts to Urban Forestry and limited cuts to maintenance (trash, bathrooms, playground maintenance) were proposed as there is a high level of service expected in these areas. These have already been cut significantly in the past and cannot be cut any further. It is time to solve the structural problem where it exists. Claudio added that the facilities closures that are being proposed in the requested budget carry a high level of maintenance needs and safety concerns. Eileen noted that we cannot close open park spaces and those need to be maintained. She added that the Central Services work group under the Assets & Development division maintains parks and recreation facilities. Cuts to Central Services would reduce service in both parks and recreation facilities. Recreation services cannot be delivered without other foundational pieces. This is the time to fix the structural issue, have realistic budgets, define level of service, and reset. In the past, other divisions have had to step in to fill in the gap in recreation, and that is not sustainable.

Kendall stated that in her five years on the Parks Board the Bureau has not communicated with the community about the seriousness of the budget problem. She stressed that she would like to hear more from the Commissioner about his plans for the future of PP&R. She shared her concerns about the lack of transparency from the Commissioner who is the principal advocate for PP&R on the City Council. Todd responded that the Commissioner is in full support of the proposed budget the staff have submitted and this process has been more transparent than in previous years.





Director Long noted that this year's budget is truly a reset and a correction of a systemic problem. Staff are rethinking the business model and planning for financial sustainability in the level of service going forward. She said that the immediate focus is to get through the next few months, to understand the decisions on the table now and how to mitigate and communicate the impacts. The conversation about how to avoid this issue in the future has begun and the process will be more transparent going forward.

Jim added that until the personnel and PERS costs are addressed, there is little confidence that there will be a balanced budget. These are issues that are brought up every year. He suggested that they look at better and different ways to fund parks. He noted that this needs to be communicated with the public and engagement with the public on this issue is needed.

Board member Bonnie Gee Yosick stated that a new paradigm with budgeting is needed. She suggested that one-time cuts will not solve the problem and smart investments in the budget are needed. She stated that recreation should not be cut just because it has the problem. She suggested that other divisions should receive cuts because recreation more directly serves the equity mission.

Board member Paul Agrimis echoed the concern regarding cuts to level of service. He noted that the Board can advocate for a solution to the personnel cost issue.

Randy Gragg suggested that Board members go to Salem to advocate for a solution to the PERS issue. Randy noted that revenue is the other issue and a conversation with the Commissioner is needed to understand his vision for solving the revenue problem. He suggested that parks funding cannot be from one source, rather it must be a package of public and private partnerships and/or a parks district. This conversation needs to start immediately, so they are ready when the next budget cycle begins.





Paddy proposed a motion to submit a letter to Council stating that the Parks Board will not be complicit in the cutting of Parks services and programs year after year.

Mary echoed Bonnie's statement that the Board has been presented with a false premise that cuts must occur only in recreation. She would like to look at other areas of the bureau where cuts could occur that would not affect communities in the same way. She noted that when she was on the Board in the past, they faced the same issues. She does not want to be part of the cutting conversation but part of the conversation about finding creative solutions to the problem.

Kendall suggested reaching out to and partnering with other parks agencies and districts in other cities around the state. They are dealing with the same issues. She suggested forming two groups: one that works on strategy and one that takes action.

Pat noted that the letter from the BAC states there is a PERS problem and as long as it exists, there will be an unsustainable budget issue at Parks. This needs to be addressed. Pat suggested that the Board could send its own letter to follow up with action in Salem. She stated that the current involvement in the budget process isn't working. She noted that this was a challenging year due to the Mayor's new process and compressed time frame. She stressed that the Board needs to be involved in a partnership at the beginning of the budget process. Pat noted that this is the first year that the Board received a full budget. She asked what pieces are missing from the financial sustainability puzzle and what partners can support in finding funding opportunities? Pat suggested that during the community outreach for the Vision 2035 plan messaging about the community's valuation of parks and the importance of parks funding can be developed.

Jim suggested adding to the BAC letter the need to start looking for new funding sources now and not later. The Board discussed creating an additional letter from the Board.



Jim noted that this has been a healthier budget discuss than was had in the past seven years he has been on the Parks Board. He thanked staff for providing the vehicle to have these conversations.

Pat added that this was a herculean effort for staff, and a lot of effort was made to include members of the Board. The frustration is around the budget situation and not with staff's engagement of the Board.

Level of Service

Pat introduced Brett Horner, Parks Planning Manager. Brett shared that his team plans and develops the Level of Service (LOS) studies. The team was asked to move the LOS for community centers work forward to help inform budget discussions. The work is not complete, but Brett shared what they have to help inform how decisions were made in recreation.

The LOS goal in the 2020 Vision was to have a community center within three miles of each household. 76% of houses in Portland are within three miles of a full-service community center. 95% of houses are within four miles of a community center. Lauren McGuire added that if you take out those proposed in the budget reductions, 69% of houses are within three miles of a center.

Brett noted that the community is changing so the needs are changing as well. When the Vision 2035 plan is being developed a new LOS for community centers goal will be developed with input from the public, Commissioner and Director. Brett noted some planned increases in LOS for community centers including adding a pool at Charles Jordan Community Center, building a community center in the central east side Washington Monroe area, and creating a center in south east to fill a gap that is currently there.

Randy asked to see the metrics for usage of the facilities and suggested adding the number of visits to the map.





Katy shared her concern about the proposal to close the Columbia pool. Eileen shared that this was the only cut in sports and aquatics. The Columbia pool is the only indoor pool not attached to a community center. The annual number of visits at this pool is less than some outdoor pools in the 10 weeks they are open. Eileen added that this is the least damaging option in this portfolio. The concerns about the affects on the community is why the bureau is asking for transition funding. She noted the amount of deferred maintenance at the pool is significant.

Mary encouraged looking at partnerships with other public entities that could support community centers at the boundaries of the city.

Art Hendricks, Equity & Inclusion Manager, noted that those who visit centers are not always neighbors but those who have built community there before being forced out to other areas due to gentrification.

Board member Gladys Ruiz noted that LOS of centers need to be looked at through a racial equity lens and urged staff to do community outreach earlier. She also noted that many facilities were not originally community centers and suggested thinking about other options than building new facilities.

Ex Officio member Lorena Nascimento noted that community members with higher incomes have greater access to outdoor spaces. This human geography should be looked at when doing LOS studies.

Randy noted that the upcoming Metro Bond is looking not only at outdoor spaces but also at urban development. He encouraged the Board to think more actively about how to use SDCs. There may be funding through Metro or private partnerships to repurpose retail facilities.

Jim asked where Brett's team is looking at alternatives in geographic distances. Brett answered that LOS will be more robust as they will be working with Jason and Claudio looking





at the five-year sustainability plan. The three-mile LOS was set around a time – 15-minute walk to a park or 15-minute drive to a center.

Jim noted the importance of looking at density and underrepresented populations gaining access as staff look at LOS and planning going forward.

Bonnie emphasized that many members have mentioned the issue of density. If community members cannot get into a class or access services, the proximity to a center doesn't actually result in access. She echoed Katy's concern about the proposed closure of the Columbia pool and the already over subscribed nearby center, Matt Dishman.

**Parks Board
Meeting Adjourns**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:06am.

Next meeting is Tuesday, April 9, 2019.

