



Minutes|Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners

100 Dexter Ave N/Kenneth R. Bounds Boardroom

Remote accessibility via Zoom

Thursday, January 22, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Attendance

Present: Lerer, Werner, Stonecipher, Mays, Nakamura (co-chair), Bakker, Haile-Leul, Flinn, Meng, Diamond, Baum (co-chair), Chisholm Clare

Absent: Zhang

SPR Staff and Presenters: Finnegan, Sheffer, McGehee (SOJ), Hoff, Burtzos

Welcome, Introductions & Land Acknowledgement

Nakamura calls the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and provides logistical instructions for in-person and remote attendees.

Commissioners and SPR staff introduce themselves.

Nakamura reads the land acknowledgement.

Nakamura introduces the consent agenda: meeting minutes from the 12/11/25 BPRC meeting and tonight's meeting agenda. Lerer moves to approve both items; Mays seconds. Nakamura calls for a vote; the vote is unanimous in favor. The consent agenda passes.

Adopted: 12/11/25 BPRC Meeting Minutes

Adopted: 1/22/26 BPRC Meeting Agenda

Public Comment

The BPRC heard public testimony on the following topics:

- Wildlife monitoring at Cheasty Greenspace;
- Planned pickleball court project at Magnuson Park;
- Proposed athletic field project at Lower Woodland Park;
- Environmental education funding priorities;
- Park use at Denny Blaine Park

Superintendent's Report

Michele Finnegan, Interim Superintendent of Parks and Recreation, delivers the report.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day Activities:

The South Central District prepared Martin Luther King Jr. Park for the January 17th commemorations, ensuring walkways, shrub beds, and open spaces were clean and welcoming. The event, including the march from MLK Park to Garfield, was well attended, with Mayor Katie Wilson participating.

At Lincoln Park, Forest Steward Lisa hosted a successful Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service event with the West Seattle High School Earth Club. Lisa shared, “We had a gorgeous day and a great group to honor MLK’s legacy and care for the land.

Magnolia Community Center Renovation:

We were excited to welcome back the Magnolia community to the renovated Magnolia Community Center! There was a ribbon cutting on Saturday January 10th, followed by tours of the building, learn about the upgrades to the center, meet some of the instructors and provide input on future programming. And fortunately, our own Stafford Mays was there to celebrate!

South Park Community Center Play Area and Playfield: Great news for the South Park community! Starting this January, the South Park Playfield will be available for sports teams and community groups to reserve. [This pilot program](#) offers free field use for eligible local groups, creating new opportunities for practice, games, and community activities right in your neighborhood. To prioritize the community, the program focuses on groups with strong ties to the South Park area. Applications are now open for the 2026 seasons. Additionally, the play area is complete and open, however, the **community center and surrounding project area is still in construction**. We are planning community ribbon cutting celebration this spring when the project is complete.

Athletic and Event Scheduling Success: In 2025, Athletic and Event Scheduling achieved great success in both permitting and revenue. The unit's revenue exceeded \$7 million, surpassing the collective goal by \$531,772.

- Athletic Scheduling: As of January 13, 2026, generated \$4,245,577, issued 2,478 permits, and utilized 251,567 hours on athletic fields—exceeding 2025 goals of \$3,860,647, 2,400 permits, and 250,000 hours.
- Event Scheduling: As of January 13, 2026, generated \$2,756,794, issued 4,792 permits, and completed 21,293 bookings—exceeding 2025 goals of \$2,604,167, 4,500 permits, and 18,500 bookings.

Facilities Grounds Maintenance: The eight parks maintenance districts are focusing on crew projects to tackle winter work throughout the parks. While some leaf removal continues, the focus has shifted to pathway erosion control, pruning and mulching to prepare the parks for the upcoming season.

Meridian Park: Crews have been actively removing leaves using backpack blowers, shovels and a small walk-behind a tractor to ensure pathways and park areas remain safe and accessible for visitors.

Path work at Cal Anderson Park maintaining pathways by filling potholes to enhance the walking paths and pruning plants, removing scotch broom and work on the track at Queen Anne Bowl.

Queen Anne Bowl: Staff pruned plants, removed scotch broom, and worked on the track.

These are just a sampling of the hard work SPR Maintenance staff perform each day!

Donald Graham Visitors Center: Seattle Parks and Recreation's Carpentry Crew responded quickly to a roof leak at the Donald Graham Visitors Center. The roof had accumulated heavy debris from this year's fallen leaves, creating drainage issues. The crew cleared and bagged all the material, stopping additional water intrusion and protecting the facility from further damage. Their prompt, safety-focused work helps keep our community functional and welcoming for everyone. Go team!

Jefferson Park Lighting Repair: The SPR Electric shop completed repairs on the pole-mounted security lighting at Jefferson Park. Their work restored reliable lighting to the area, improving safety and ensuring the park remains a comfortable space for the community. Thank you for helping keep our parks safe.

Helping Our Feathered Friends: In December, our amazing Parks staff rescued an owl from tangled kite string in a tree. The fully recovered great horned owl is ready for release!

Dr. Jose Rizal Park: Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) is happy to update the community on improvements at Dr. Jose Rizal Park, 1007 12th Ave. S. on north Beacon Hill. SPR has conducted extensive engagement with the community for improvements and is working to ensure that the park is clean, safe and welcoming.

The improvements include:

- Restroom renovation is underway and two single stalls should be open by fall.
- Removal of the deteriorated picnic shelter (that is in poor condition) is scheduled to occur in January.
- Park activation through Rec N' the Streets plans to have programming that will include painting classes and other opportunities for the community to utilize the enhanced space. More details on programming will be shared closer to the spring.
- A design is underway for replacement of the play area and enhanced seating to enjoy the view and make the park more accessible. SPR staff will be out in the community to get final feedback on the play area design.

Renovations at Westlake Park: On January 21, SPR and SPF hosted a community meeting to provide updates on the Westlake Park project. Updates included the removal of the Seven Hills art sculpture, construction plans for the area, and the extension of the Coast Salish basketweave tile design. Attendees asked about construction logistics, park lighting improvements, public art integration, and traffic safety measures. The meeting was attended by representatives from SPR, SPF, Sellen, Berger Partnership, and DSA. Overall, the community expressed excitement about the project and the removal of the sculptures.

Finnegan pauses for questions from the Board.

Stonecipher asks if Mayor Wilson has given any high-level plans for SPR. Finnegan provides insights from initial meetings with the Mayor's Office.

Stonecipher asks if Westlake Park renovations are on track to be complete before the World Cup. Sheffer confirms.

Flinn highlights themes from public correspondence concerning Alki Beach, rowing centers, and Lower Woodland Park, and asks SPR for additional follow-up on these topics.

Baum expresses interest in the upcoming South Park Plaza opening and asks if the pilot use program is a prelude to integrating new groups into historic use, or separate from that policy. Finnegan clarifies that this pilot will be separate.

Action Planning Update

Justin Hellier and Shanyanika McElroy, SPR Strategic Advisors, deliver the presentation.

Hellier frames the 2025-2028 Action Plan in the context of the Updated 2020-2032 Strategic Plan. The goal of the updated plan is to refresh our Strategic Plan for the second half of its 2020-2032 lifespan and create an Action Plan for the remaining years of Cycle 2 (2025-2028).

Key themes guiding the process:

- Equitable access and utilization
- Partnerships amplify opportunity
- Financial sustainability
- Responsiveness to emerging needs

The Action Plan takes broad goals and priorities from the Strategic Plan and provides tangible, quantifiable metrics to measure growth and success. Hellier provides examples. This Action Plan is useful in many ways, including guiding unit and employee work plans; providing a common language for performance reporting; and giving a template for budget proposals and other impacts.

McElroy outlines how the Action Plan is being implemented. SPR is implementing professional development surrounding the plan via project-based learning opportunities for mid-level executives. Trainings are occurring largely during pre-existing meeting times to avoid any additional loss of work time; additional 1-1 support time will be available.

Mays asks if there is a mental health component to the Action Plan. Hellier notes that SPR has partnered with DEEL to provide some mental health connections in Community Centers and Teen Life Centers.

Lerer asks if the Board will be able to see more detail about the actual training sessions for mid-level leaders. Hellier loosely confirms that a follow-up presentation should be possible.

Werner requests a progress update on the first half of the 2020-2032 Strategic Plan, and asks how much, if any, these planning documents reflect changing input from various mayoral administrations. Hellier and Baum note that the BPRC have a standing subcommittee to oversee these questions and invite Werner to join this subcommittee if interested. Hellier adds that the Strategic Plan felt outdated and required some updating, regardless of administration. Finnegan notes that other longitudinal data will be largely reported at the end of 2026 and the beginning of 2027.

Proposed Athletic Field Addition at Lower Woodland Park: Briefing

Andy Sheffer, Deputy Superintendent, Planning and Capital Development Branch, and Paige McGehee, Project Manager (Shiels Oblatz Johnsen – Seattle Public Schools contractor) deliver the presentation.

Sheffer introduces the presentation. Seattle Public Schools (SPS) is here and proposing the addition of a synthetic athletic field because SPS and SPR have a shared mission to serve our youth and to provide opportunity and pathways to healthy living in athletics. We understand that this topic is

controversial; any time we are trying to add an asset within the city, there is going to be controversy. I've attended and appreciated all the public meetings, and all the conversations around this project. SPR has reached capacity with our fields, so an additional asset in the way of a rectangular field does fulfil our mission as well.

Finnegan clarifies that there is no request for further BPRC action at this meeting.

Paige McGehee (SOJ) delivers the briefing.

Since the 1920s, SPR and the District have pooled their resources to meet youth and community demands for recreational opportunities, and to cooperate in planning and joint operations of these separately owned facilities and grounds. This collaborative approach benefits both students and the broader Seattle athletics community.

While the supply will never meet the demand, this partnership has maximized the use of their respective facilities to meet student and community needs, far beyond what either could do alone. In addition to creating more opportunities for their respective constituent groups, sharing facilities has led to greater efficiencies in cost and operations.

McGehee outlines priority field use under the Joint Use Agreement (JUA).

McGehee presents timeline of events 2019-2026:

- 2019: Lincoln HS opens without a field.
- 2020: SPR requests SPS to mitigate impact of increased use at Lower Woodland fields.
- 2022: Voters approve funding for a new athletic field.
- 2023–2024: SPS reviews 20+ potential sites using criteria around walkability, non-displacement, field size, and required amenities.
- Fall 2024: Wallingford Playfield considered but faces significant neighborhood opposition.
- Fall 2025: SPS shifts focus to Woodland Park and refines options based on outreach with park user groups.
- Nov 6, 2025: Updated Woodland Park options presented at a public meeting at Lincoln HS.

The benefits of the current proposal include that it is within walking distance of Lincoln HS, it would benefit both the school and the community, it is informed by community feedback, and it avoids displacement of core users.

The proposal includes a track and field renovation at field #7, and a new field on the footprint of the existing field #2. This proposal would also require storage and restrooms and would impact several trees. We also need to understand any increased demand on parking.

We have a couple of options for storage, including two pre-existing structures nearby. A small storage facility would be needed to accommodate the day-to-day track and field needs.

Proposal Strengths

- Closest walkable location for Lincoln; reduces bus use/emissions
- Uses existing multi-use field with lighting/utilities; cost-efficient
- Precision LED lighting reduces glare/spill; improves safety
- Tree stewardship: minimal removal (8 trees); 3:1 planting
- North / South orientation better for competitive game play

- Retains walking loop
- Opportunities for increased parking
- Minimal environmental impacts utilizing existing turf

Proposal Challenges

- Construction closure→ schedule coordination, maintain park access around site
- Parking→ increased need for parking
- Path impacts→ replace with accessible routes in final design

McGehee acknowledges that the proposed design likely is not final, noting that the design shows some bleacher seating but that her team is still working on ways to incorporate bleacher seating. This is a minimum requirement of the project to accommodate junior varsity games. McGehee also notes the importance of tree replanting and canopy coverage, and the continuous walking path surrounding the fields, but does not have details to share. McGehee emphasizes several times that “there’s work to do” before the planning is complete. McGehee describes tree planting options, noting opportunity to increase tree canopy in the long run and acknowledging that canopy takes time to develop.

Field #7 would also receive upgrades, including dedicated jumping and field event facilities and a polyurethane 4-lane practice track. Vertical installations would be removable outside of track season. This part of the proposal has received little to no pushback.

We have heard from a wide range of community groups, including the Lincoln High School community, the Scouts, cross-country teams, BMX riders, the Wallingford Park Alliance, tree advocates, and neighbors through emails, SPS Let’s Talk, and online comments. Some of the themes from our outreach include:

- Strong preference for multi-use recreation over single-sport (e.g., football).
- Concerns about tree loss, parking, traffic, and conflicts with existing park events.
- Split between improving access for Lincoln students and preserving open public space.
- Passionate but constructive, offering helpful design ideas.
- Significantly less opposition than in Wallingford, with feedback centered on design refinements rather than organized resistance.

McGehee pauses for questions from the Board.

Baum asks for a summary of the challenges involved with the proposal to site this field at Aurora Ave N [SR-99] and N 50th St. McGehee notes site grading requiring additional retaining walls, lighting, tree removal, and concern from neighbors about losing the unpaved parking lot at that site. This lot is also used as overflow for the Woodland Park Zoo.

Chisholm Clare asks for confirmation that both proposed fields would be striped for multi-sport use. McGehee confirms.

Werner asks if SPS has conducted any site usage study or other quantitative study to inform this project, and if that could be shared with the Board. McGehee clarifies that no similar study has been performed. Sheffer adds that the City can use tools to gather some historical usage data.

Stonecipher asks if SPS and SOJ have considered [community-offered] Option C for development, and if that plan makes any improvements from other plans at Aurora Ave N [SR-99] and N 50th St. McGehee notes that Option C does not sufficiently improve on concerns for that site.

Lerer asks about next steps. Sheffer notes that SPS is waiting on a letter of commitment from SPR. Lerer asks if the BPRC will be asked to endorse this letter in the future. Finnegan clarifies that at present there is no request for BPRC action, but there may be pending future discussions.

Old & New Business

Nakamura brings up the proposed 2026 BPRC meeting schedule for discussion and possible approval by the Board, and asks for comments and questions on the schedule.

Lerer notes a concern that half of the designated BPRC meeting dates are reserved for subcommittee meetings, while his designated subcommittee has not met in the last 15 months. Lerer feels that the subcommittee work is unbalanced. Hoff notes that new BPRC member recruitment to fill vacancies is ongoing and subcommittee reassignment and work plan will follow those new member appointments. Baum asks if those new member appointments are on the City Council legislative calendar; Hoff clarifies that they are not. Baum reiterates Lerer's concern and encourages SPR to engage the BPRC subcommittees more equitably. Finnegan adds that subcommittee assignments will likely be a discussion at an upcoming retreat.

Baum moves to adopt the proposed 2026 BPRC meeting schedule. Nakamura seconds.

Mays asks for clarification on meeting start time. Members discuss the success and difficulty posed by the 6:00 PM meeting time, noting that the 1/22/26 meeting has the best attendance in a long time. Baum notes that consistency might be the best value at this moment.

With no objections noted, the motion passes.

Adopted: 2026 BPRC Meeting Schedule

Haile-Leul shares feedback he has received from community members. One suggestion from the Rainier Community Center group is for young adults (i.e., college-aged) to have access to some of the teen programming options, such as late-night programs. Another suggestion is to allocate additional scholarship funds for teen after-school programs, such as Bitter Lake Community Center's math tutoring program, where demand currently exceeds available scholarship slots. Haile-Leul emphasizes how rare it is to see teens seeking out additional math tutoring.

Baum asks for clarification regarding process if and when a public hearing or BPRC approval vote is required. Burtzos and Finnegan provide some clarification.

Nakamura adjourns the meeting at 7:36 PM.