

The Parks & Community Services Board approved these meeting minutes on November 6, 2019.

**CITY OF BELLEVUE
PARKS & COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD
RETREAT MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday
October 8, 2019
6:00 p.m.

Lewis Creek Park Visitor Center
5808 Lakemont Blvd. SE
Bellevue, Washington

BOARDMEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Trescases, Vice-Chair Hamilton, Boardmembers Heath¹, Kumar, Synn², Unger

BOARDMEMBER ABSENT: Boardmember Clark

PARKS STAFF PRESENT: Betsy Anderson, Shelley Brittingham, Toni Esparza, Laura Harper, Nancy Harvey, Jammie Kingham, Curtis Kukal, Shelley McVein, Camron Parker

MINUTES TAKER: Michelle Cash

1. **CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Trescases at 6:17 p.m.

2. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Motion by Boardmember Unger and second by Boardmember Hamilton to approve the meeting agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously (4-0).

Boardmembers expressed their appreciation to Boardmember Kumar for her recent leadership as the Board Chair and Vice-Chair. Boardmember Kumar was presented with a token of appreciation.

3. **RETREAT DISCUSSION ITEMS:**

A. Park Ranger Program/Safety in Parks

Ms. Harper provided an overview of park safety. One of the key components of park safety is the Park Ranger Program. Ms. Harper discussed the following about the Ranger Program:

- Who are the Park Rangers?
- Who are the Summer Rangers?
- What do the Park Rangers do?

¹ Arrived at 6:24 p.m.

² Arrived at 6:19 p.m.

Park Rangers oversee the following programs:

- Family and adult programs
- Community farms and gardens
- Volunteer programs
- Special events (i.e., Arbor Day, MLK Day of Caring, etc.)
- Well-KEPT
- Ranger patrol tasks

Ms. Harper clarified that Park Rangers are not law enforcement so they partner with other enforcement agencies when needed. The Park Rangers focus primarily on voluntary compliance through education. There are also security contractors that patrol specific areas, particularly after hours, as well as Parks Caretakers.

Some of the common issues that Park Rangers typically address include:

- Dogs (particularly off-leash and in beach parks)
- Illegal overnight camping
- After-hours activities
- Cars and parking
- Wildlife

Discussion:

- What to do when approached by wildlife. *Response: staff demonstrated the various techniques used when encountering wildlife.*
- Have there been any wildlife attacks? *Response: there was an incident with a coyote and off-leash dogs last year. In 2006 there was an incident where a coyote bit a child, but this was not in or involving Bellevue Parks.*
- How do the safety statistics compare with last year? *Response: there were a few dog-related incidents last year but no serious attacks were documented. Similar issues have been addressed this year.*
- Do Park Rangers feel safe? *Response: each situation is evaluated to determine if it will benefit from outreach and education. Sometimes a coordinated response with police is necessary. Staff also has experience with de-escalation training.*
- Are there many needles in the parks? *Response: Park Rangers and other staff are specifically trained for sharp objects. Any encampments with hazards such as sharps or biohazards are cleaned up by an outside contractor.*
- Are there any specific areas where encampments are reoccurring? *Response: there are areas that are used more frequently for camping but not consistently used by the same camper.*
- Have car prowls in parks increased or decreased? *Response: statistics have decreased this year. There has been a lot of outreach made to discourage people from leaving valuables in their cars. In addition, Park Rangers have increased their presence in problematic areas.*

B. Recreation Program Plan and Parks Strategic Plan

Ms. Anderson explained that the Parks Department is in the process of updating its Recreation Program Plan and its Strategic Plan. The Board received information about each plan update at its April and June 2019 meetings. Ms. Anderson explained that public outreach for the Recreation Program Plan was conducted between April and September 2019. The outreach and engagement process consisted of a public survey; two focus groups; meetings with City boards, commissions, and advisory groups; and a review of relevant plans and outreach activities from other City departments.

The following questions were asked during outreach efforts:

- Demographics:
 - Which of the following applies to you (in regards to living, working, or attending school in Bellevue)?
 - Are you the parent or guardian of any children living in your household?
 - What is your age?
 - What language do you speak at home?
 - Race/Ethnicity
 - Gender Identity
 - Type of disability (if applicable)
- Recreation Preferences
 - What are your current recreation activities? In other words, how do you spend your free time?
 - Where do you normally participate in recreation activities?
 - With whom do you normally recreate?
 - Which Parks & Community Services recreation activities have you participated in?
 - Where do you normally find out about recreation activities?
- Barriers to Access
 - Are there any recreation activities that you have not been able to find, but would like to participate in?
 - Think about the last City of Bellevue Parks & Community Services activity that interested you that you weren't able to attend—what barriers prevent you from participating?

Ms. Anderson also discussed the focus group findings for people with children under 13 and people with no children under age 13. Highlights included hobbies, barriers to access, and marketing and program awareness.

Ms. Anderson noted that the Recreation Program Plan will be revised to reflect community feedback and input with hopes of a Plan endorsement in early 2020.

Discussion:

- There should be a way to customize a search when looking for classes (i.e., specific to a child's age). *Response: staff is working on a customizable brochure with this feature.*
- Do we evaluate what other cities are doing, particularly regarding barriers to access? *Response: there is ongoing work and collaboration to evaluate recreation trends.*
- How does current outreach integrate or supplement other outreach and survey efforts? *Response: a regular survey is conducted for the Parks & Open Space System Plan. The next survey is scheduled in advance of the 2022 plan update. This survey is a statistically valid survey and the results are included in the Parks & Open Space System Plan. The survey conducted for the Recreation Program Plan will help guide current work and inform any survey revisions for the 2022 Parks & Open Space System Plan.*

Boardmembers broke into two groups to discuss overarching questions to help inform the Parks & Community Services Strategic Plan. Staff will consider the ideas generated during these discussions as the plan update is drafted. Boardmembers first had the opportunity to brainstorm answers to the questions below and then had the opportunity to rate their preferred ideas using dot stickers. The following are the discussions for each station:

Question 1: What is the purpose and value of parks and community services?

- Build community! [*Three dots added*]
- 3rd place [*One dot added*]
- Gathering place
- Neighborhood gathering + character [*One dot added*]
- Play, fun [*One dot added*]
- Play with kids
- Safety in the outdoors: water, animals
- Probation services [*One dot added*]
- A sense of ownership, pride (“our parks”)
- Service
- Opportunity to indulge/engage in “non-mandatory” events; enrichment
- Enrichment: both building up (okay to great) and very bad/hard to okay; i.e., Probation, Youth Eastside Services, swim lessons
- Reminder of a non-urban world [*One dot added*]
- Engage with and understand relations to nature: trees, animals, wetlands [*One dot added*]
- Stewardship of resources: natural, historic and cultural [*One dot added*]
- Open space (convenient to Downtown)
- Quality of life (value) [*Two dots added*]
- Well being

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- Get active (improve health)
- Be outside

Question 2: What strengths should we build on as a department over the next five years?

- Approachability and transparency. *[Two dots added]*
- Use community outreach strengths to address some of the barriers expressed in the survey. *[Two dots added]*
- Community building—bringing the community together—build upon this (e.g., Grand Connection, Easttrail, etc.). *[One dot added]*
- Take community input and use it for programming decisions.
- Ranger Program is fabulous—use this and volunteers to enhance the park experience.
- Continue future visioning—identify needs throughout the community. *[One dot added]*
- Build on public/private partnerships, particularly creative funding partnerships and programming. *[One dot added]*
- Programming for cultural interests.
- Build on great programs—communication/community outreach.
- Human service outreach to nonprofits/small agencies (less developed or experienced) with information about available/potential resources.
- Find a way to broaden the sphere of what community members are being informed about—need to improve on communication.
- Communicating to the public all that we already do. *[One dot added]*
- Continue growing center of excellence—Parks Department is known as the “best of.” *[Two dots added]*
- Parks Department is politically savvy. Continue to grow Council relationship.
- Keep setting the bar high for who is hired—so far...outstanding!
- Continue to stay true to charter; offer programs that are relevant.
- Community is impressed with the guidance the department offers...continue this.
- Continue investing in open spaces: non-concrete, especially with significant development. *[Four dots added]*
- Trail system.

Final thoughts:

- Great session—like informal meeting with alternate location.
- Value ability to get away from office setting—continue this focus.
- Community gathering is important—need green spaces but also plazas and other community gathering spaces.
- Partnerships are important.
- Need to zone parks separately so what we have now is protected not sold to developers.
- A parks foundation, led by the community, is a great idea.
- Need stable funding solutions.

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- Need to enhance the vitality of our parks system—protect it.
- People expect great parks—Bellevue is a “City in a Park.”
- Continue to stress how critical parks are to the quality of one’s life—essential services.

4. **ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.