

MEMORANDUM

To: Councilmember Debora Juarez, Chair
Councilmember Sally Bagshaw and Councilmember Bruce Harrell
Parks, Seattle Center, Libraries and Waterfront Committee

From: Eric McConaghy and Lish Whitson

Date: July 14, 2016

Subject: Seattle 2035: Parks and Open Space Element

On July 21, the Parks, Seattle Center, Libraries and Waterfront Committee will discuss the Parks and Open Space Element of the Mayor’s Recommended Comprehensive Plan, also known as “[Seattle 2035](#).” The purpose of this memo is to provide an initial discussion and preliminary issue identification related to changes to this element of the Comprehensive Plan that are within the scope of the Committee’s oversight.

Overview

The Parks and Open Space Element provides goals and policies that would guide Seattle’s acquisition, development, programming, and maintenance of parks, open space and recreational facilities, including regional parks and facilities. The element is a new addition to the Comprehensive Plan.

In the current Comprehensive Plan, parks and open space are addressed in the Urban Village Element, the Urban Village Appendix, the Capital Facilities Element, and the Capital Facilities Appendix. Washington State Growth Management Act¹ (GMA) requires that jurisdictions planning under GMA include a Parks and Open Space Element if the State has provided funds to cover the applicable costs of incorporating the element. While the State of Washington has not allocated funds to the City, the Mayor has recommended including a Parks and Open Space Element in Seattle’s Plan. This allows the City to consolidate relevant policies from other functional parks plans into the planning document that governs management of the City’s growth.

Two other parks and open space planning documents, which are distinct from the Comprehensive Plan, inform the content and this discussion of the Mayor’s Recommended Parks and Open Space Element:

1. *2014 Parks Legacy Plan (PLP)*: The City developed the 2014 (PLP) with significant contribution by members of the community beginning in 2012. The priorities and goals recommended in the PLP informed the successful ballot measure in 2014 establishing

¹ Growth Management Act, [Revised Code of Washington 36.70A](#)

the Seattle Park District, which functions “to fund, maintain, operate and improve parks, community centers, pools and other recreational facilities and programs.”²

2. *Seattle’s Parks and Recreation 2011 Development Plan (PDP) and 2011 Gap Report Update (Gap Report)*: The PDP provides goals and policies guiding Seattle’s acquisition and development of parks. The Gap Report describes areas of the city where Seattle’s goals for the distribution of parks and open space are not yet accomplished. By resolution, the Council, with the Mayor concurring, approved the 2011 PDP in 2011.³

The resolution also authorized the Parks Department to submit the PDP to Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in order for the City to remain eligible for state grants for parks and recreation, trails and open space.

Discussion

Central Staff has identified the following for possible discussion based on a review of the Mayor’s Recommended Plan, internal discussions, and testimony and letters provided to the Planning Land Use and Zoning Committee at a hearing on June 27.

Parks and Open Space Level-of-Service Standards (LOS)

In this memorandum we use the phrase, “level-of-service standards” (LOS), to describe the aspirational goals for the amount (acres), location and geographic distribution of parks and open space in Seattle.

The Executive has stated that “the existing Comprehensive Plan recognizes ... that the City’s parks and open space, which total approximately 10% of the city, are more than adequate to serve any future projected population, and this continues to be true through the 2035 planning period.”⁴ The Executive proposes to generally maintain the LOS found in the Urban Village appendix (see attached) of the current Plan in the Mayor’s Recommended Plan. LOS are significant: they have guided the City’s acquisitions of new parks and open space; informed capital investment planning; and were assumptions for the environmental review of the Mayor’s Recommended Plan. Moreover, if the City were to establish a GMA-authorized impact fee program to help fund new parks necessitated by growth, that program would have to be based on LOS established in the Comprehensive Plan.

The results of the environmental analysis of impacts of housing growth on meeting the current LOS anticipated under the Mayor’s Recommended Plan indicate that the following areas would have outstanding parks and open space needs⁵:

- Urban Centers: Downtown, First/Capitol Hill, University District, and Northgate

² Proposition Number 1, <http://your.kingcounty.gov/elections2/contests/measureinfo.aspx?cid=53060&eid=1261>

³ [Resolution 31336](#)

⁴ Director’s Report on the Mayor’s Recommended Comprehensive Plan

⁵ [Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Seattle Comprehensive Plan Update, May 5, 2016](#)

- Hub Urban Villages: Ballard, Bitter Lake, Fremont, Mount Baker and West Seattle Junction
- Residential Urban Villages: Greenwood-Phinney Ridge, Morgan Junction, Westwood-Highland Park and portions of Mount Baker and 23rd & Union-Jackson Urban Villages near the future I-90/East Link light rail station
- Other Neighborhoods: Morningside, Jackson Park, Cedar Park, Arbor Heights, Beacon Avenue S and Beach Drive areas

The new Parks and Open Space Element does not provide LOS, nor are they found elsewhere in the Mayor's Recommended Plan. Instead of including LOS, Policy P 1.2 of the Recommended Plan points to the priorities and LOS established in Seattle's PDP:

Policy 1.2 Provide a variety of parks and open space to serve the city's growing population consistent with the priorities and level-of-service standards identified in the City's Park Development Plan.

In general, LOS in the 2011 PDP are consistent with the desirable levels found in the current Comprehensive Plan. Key differences include:

- ¼ acre per 10,000 jobs in Downtown Urban Core in the PDP versus 1 acre currently
- PDP does not include LOS for Hub Urban Villages or for Residential Urban Villages current Comprehensive Plan does
- PDP includes "acceptable" and "desirable" measures while the current Comprehensive Plan LOS does not

Policy 1.2 does not specifically refer to the adopted 2011 PDP. This means it would not be necessary to amend the Comprehensive Plan after the adoption of an updated PDP. The Parks Department has begun updating the parks and open space gap analysis. A significant aspect of the gap analysis update is to re-evaluate the measurements used to specify LOS. The Department expects to begin engaging with the community in the fall of 2016 with a target of Council adoption of the updated Parks Development Plan by resolution in November 2017.

Council may wish to amend the policy language in the Recommended Plan in order to make clear that the "priorities and level-of-service standards", identified in the Park Development Plan are aspirational, are part of the Comprehensive Plan and have been reviewed by the Council.

Or, Council may wish to maintain the current LOS in the updated Comprehensive Plan until revised LOS are established via the development and adoption of the 2017 Parks Development Plan or amendments to the Comprehensive Plan in 2017.

Attachment A: Urban Village Appendix, Seattle Comprehensive Plan, Urban Village
Figure A-1 and Figure A-2

CC: Kirstan Arestad, Central Staff Executive Director
Dan Eder, Central Staff Deputy Director