

Seattle City Council Written Questions & Answers for AP Diaz

1. What prompted you to apply for this position?

First, my deep love and passion for public parks and open spaces. Next, the abundance of committed investment to help make parks safer, more accessible and dynamic here in Seattle. And lastly, the deep support existing within the Mayor's Office, City Council, among staff and community members to be partners and collective stewards to our city parkland. Seattle Parks and Recreation is among the crown jewels of public park agencies, and I have enjoyed discovering our unique park, assets and varied communities. I love placemaking and thrive in environments requiring enthusiasm, optimism and advocacy.

What excites me most about this role is embracing Seattle's vision – that legacy building, preservation and transformation make life better and should serve as the foundational pillars of any great city.

My role at Seattle Parks and Recreation would allow me the opportunity to build on its history while improving its future by creating a community where people can be in motion - to live, play, work and thrive, with an eye on public safety and with compassion towards our most disadvantaged community members.

Additionally, when I think about whether I could embrace the City Council's goals, while enhancing mine, and aspiring to connect *ours*, I see strong collaborative potential which gives me great hope and anticipation.

Throughout my entire career I've worked hard to develop strategies to execute winning results for people, organizations, iconic treasures as well as how to employ new and innovative solutions and strategies – whether for large corporations, government agencies, non-profits or community-based stakeholders, groups or organizations.

I'm a West Coast native, educated on the East Coast with Latino roots, reflective of our nation's diversity and thriving community. I'm excited to lay new roots in Seattle a city which embraces diverse cultures and provides opportunity for advancement.

The Superintendent will wear many hats but should always be centered with a core of resiliency and best practices. This is what attracts me here. In this role, I will advance equity and inclusion by ensuring we are transparent, conduct comprehensive and continual needs assessments, develop distribution baselines and develop output/outcome driven metrics via performance objectives and strategic visions.

If confirmed, I will build strong alliances with the Council and staff to generate new revenue and leverage assets for growth. I will also foster an environment of collaboration, excitement and engagement.

Serving as Superintendent will also allow me to continue contributing to community, while sharing my skills and talents with those I respect and would work for. I have a unique background – a student of international relations, a trained lawyer, a skilled negotiator, a community advocate, a facilitator of public private partnerships, a government services member, a marketer, venue manager, brand awareness generator and experience leading multi-million-dollar portfolios.

I am a lawyer and understand the private and municipal process and the unique challenges and opportunities a large city like Seattle has within the local, state, national and international arenas.

In Seattle I can be a change agent while relating to people of all backgrounds. I teach Transformational Leadership and Adult Development Theories, Diversity and Cultural Awareness and enjoy accompanying people on their journeys towards becoming their best selves and to deliver strong, quality work products.

Therefore, if selected, I will work with you to build up staff, equip our park users and engage outside stakeholders to showcase the best of our city for generations to come.

2. What will be your first-year and long-term priorities as Parks Superintendent?

Among my first priorities will be instilling a sense of pride and purpose among our staff, just coming back to more normal operations after the pandemic. Without committed and inspired staff, all our goals are insurmountable. Next, I will focus on prioritization and implementation of the Park District's Cycle 2 mandates; regeneration and expansion of hygiene stations and the creation of equity-based recreational programs like *Swim Seattle* and *Seattle Mentors*.

a. How will you measure progress toward these goals?

Progress will be measured via data to track metrics with transparent, public facing dashboards. Results will also be measured by our elected officials' and community stakeholders' trust and feedback in our project performance - how many projects delivered, the quality of those projects and the amount of community members served.

3. How will your experience overseeing Parks Department operations in Los Angeles shape the way you approach stewarding Seattle's parks?

The magnitude of being the Parks Superintendent is large, however, my significant experience in LA (managing 500 parks in a city of 402 square miles with 125 Recreation Centers, 50 aquatic centers and an operating budget of \$350M) deeply shapes my approach to the protection and preservation of Seattle's vast parkland. Like Los Angeles, and all major cities, parks prove to be vital infrastructure to the trajectory of the city's health and wellness, and it will be my job to amplify this narrative and continuously improve and innovate our public spaces. I will also commit to making investments in human capital and employee professional development, recognizing continuous investments in people enhances staff commitments to be joint caretakers of our park system.

a. What similar challenges do you see in this role as your previous one? How did you address these challenges?

Managing public parkland in dense, urban environments requires nuanced approaches to the effective management of parkland (activation, site specific amenities, private/public partnerships). For example, it's important to get to know every community to best tailor programs and amenities which will be utilized and sustained by its park users. The worst management approach to parks is a "one size fits all" approach and implementing things which are never used, are not practical or which do not have long-term and sustainable system plans (e.g., maintenance or revenue regeneration strategies).

b. What are some differences between the two parks systems?

LA's park system is more spread out, disconnected and disjointed from the fabric of the city. Seattle has a similar number of parks, but they are more interrelated, due to its geography and Olmstedian legacy, and have more robustly connected and diverse sets of parkland - including trails, urban plazas, coastal areas, natural forests as well as urban community centers and a myriad of unique sites (like P-patches, urban farms, specialty gardens, a zoo, arboretum, aquarium and the Seattle Center). Seattle also relies more heavily on volunteers as integral partners in the cultivation and preservation of our parkland – which is a good thing.

4. How do you plan to resolve workforce shortages for seasonal workers, such as lifeguards?

This is a challenge faced by park agencies nationwide and to meet it here in Seattle, SPR has developed a series of initiatives to help bridge this gap: a) continued negotiations with labor to bring salary equity between existing, on call seasonal employees and new hires b) engaging more diverse communities to garner interest in City employment c) calling on past or retired community members who still have certification and would respond to a call to assist in volunteer or paid lifeguard positions and d) robustly marketing the positions and benefits of working for SPR and the City of Seattle. In addition to these initiatives, we are also exploring innovative grants to encourage our 50+ community members to become certified lifeguards. These ideas are already working, as we've hired in 12 new lifeguards since the first of the year.

5. How do you plan to resolve workforce shortages for full-time, permanent Parks employees?

Since the first of the year, SPR has hired 92 new staff. Thanks to the passage of the Seattle Park District, SPR can further prioritize and hire needed staff to close the gap in workforce shortages. To hire and onboard as many employees as needed, I'm equipping our HR division with tools to shore up our hiring efforts, including rebranded marketing and outreach materials, consultants when needed to assist in outreach and talent recruitment.

6. In the event of a decrease in overall department funding, how would you prioritize resources?

Ensuring our parks provide a healthy environment for both people and nature is essential to prioritizing the use of our resources (in good and tough times).

In the event of decreased funding, protecting access to programs and service for the neediest will be a leading consideration in apportioning resources. Examples of this include preservation of child-care for families or programs serving vulnerable communities, like seniors or BIPOC youth.

And, although no one plans to fail, they sometimes fail to plan. Therefore, it's important when managing government budgets to have a continuous eye on how a department might pivot if faced with decreased funding. To that extent, I will encourage our budget teams to continuously prepare contingency plans and budget reduction exercises in the event we need to enact them.

In those exercises (and in the real event), resources would be prioritized based on our core services and obligations under the City Charter; and the equitable reduction of services around the city would be enacted with an emphasis on programs that could return easily once funds were to be restored.

And, before reducing or eliminating an entire operation, I will look for ways to temporarily reduce or pause deliverables so that the revamp or rebuild is not too onerous or overly costly once budgets improve.

In the capital and environment arena, it's important to understand protecting the living green infrastructure for the environment is also a priority, as our parks are literally comprised of living things: trees, plants, vegetation and other living fauna and that there should not be a rush to cut all costs to maintenance or facility maintenance lest we risk destruction or loss of an entire product/site/buildings/fields etc. (Often, those regeneration costs could be higher than the actual reduction they were meant to offset).

While budget reductions are always challenging and never easy, through foresight and good planning, responses to them can be tempered and mitigated for the bluer skies ahead, and I look forward to preserving our assets with fiscal responsibility and innovative management.

7. In the event of an increase in overall department funding, how would you prioritize resources?

I would work with staff, community members and our Park Commissioners to determine where our core missions are lacking or could use extra support to increase services to underserved communities; provide new opportunities or capital projects in areas we haven't focused on in the past; and find ways we could leverage any increased funds with other funding opportunities (grants, local, state or federal funding, foundational or private/public partnerships) to leverage increased impacts further. (The latter strategy is also good in times of deficits).

8. What is your overall philosophy towards management of your team? Specifically, describe your philosophy towards managing a team, developing and implementing a budget (for your department), overseeing data collection and information systems, addressing internal personnel issues, and ensuring that work plans are followed?

Management of a team requires trust and buy in. My approach to cultivating innovation and enthusiasm for work is rooted in transformational leadership – ensuring that the vision is clear, and communication is given early so that people understand the direction and lean into common goals together. Good leadership fundamentally rests on mutual respect, confidence building and equipping others for success.

Management of budgets and data collection is crucial to being efficient and innovative. It's important as a government agency for us to realize our abilities and our limitations so we can appropriately apportion our resources.

That's why I will work hard to ensure our team measures our success through goal setting, output and outcome metrics and track data to appropriately apportion our resources, which can then be transparently accessible to elected officials and the public.

Data collection will also assist us in developing budgets to meet the needs of our citizens and helps departments be good fiscal stewards of our resources.

I've just completed my first round of work plans and have been able to help staff prioritize their goals by ensuring each piece of their plan is achievable and compliments our larger, organizational mandates. I've also asked each division and branch head to ensure that every initiative or project they or their team works on, points back to one of our departmental core missions and gets tracked within our master plan, community commitments and Cycle 2 Ramp Up Plan.

Further, we are placing a focus on accountability and guidance between managers and their teams to ensure staff members have clear direction and we set achievable expectations.

9. The culture of an office or organization is critical – what will you do to ensure that SPR is an inclusive, supportive work environment where employees feel safe to voice concerns?

In leading our department, I think it's important for a leader to be vulnerable and authentic. I'm not afraid to share with staff my own story and journey, as I've had the benefit in working at all levels of organizational structure - from the proverbial "mail room" all the way up to the Executive Office. That breadth of experience has not come without personal struggles and challenges, but that exposure has also cultivated resiliency and the ability to learn from others, model exceptional behavior, share laughter, grow, be inspirational and be open to honest dialogue – as was taught to me along the way.

These core tenets will be the foundation of my role as Superintendent to create a supportive and caring organization that celebrates diversity, welcomes change, fails forward, fosters growth and where others are encouraged to find ways to lift one another up and to work professionally and with strong emotional intelligence. Our culture will be one where we hold one another in mutual respect, professionalism, honesty and kindness. With that as our guiding light, I'm confident the best is yet to come.

10. How do you plan to balance the need for robust, thorough, and equitable community engagement with the need for timely project and service delivery?

Prioritized management is key to efficient use of time, planning and delivery of capital projects and is a seminal part of the Cycle 2 Ramp Up Plan we will transmit to the Council on March 31.

The Park District funding mandates are crystal clear. We have entrusted taxpayer money to spend and an obligation to deliver quality programs, projects and services in a timely fashion. To that extent, within my first 60 days, I implemented a department reorganization to create a series of branches which oversee divisions. One new branch is our Planning and Capital Development Branch where I created a Deputy Superintendent position to oversee and focus solely on implementation, management and innovative delivery of quality, capital projects.

This heightened emphasis provides focus while alleviating oversight and management by other branches to better develop policy and service operations. This structure will be strengthened by all the Deputy Superintendents who are working with me as a team to ensure this objective is on our daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual radars.

It's also important to note that while robust community engagement is important, not every project mandates the same level of community engagement time or approach.

As such, we have categorized outreach into four different typologies:
Inform, Consult, Collaborate, Elevate.

Inform is used when there's an emergency work item or 1-for-1 replacement. **Consult** is required when the replacement or site work will affect accessibility or programming.

Collaborate is for any project involving changes to existing services, layout, or assets within an SPR site. **Elevate** will be utilized for sites with unique characteristics requiring a more community-driven outreach process as these projects have larger or more complex scopes and/or more time has been allowed for additional outreach. Elevate can include projects that originate within the Equitable Park Development Fund, those appropriate for a more unique design process (Dr. Jose Rizal Park) or those led by a project advisory team (Green Lake Community Center). Each typology has been expanded to include additional channels for outreach (CitizensLab, QR codes, community center kiosks, etc.) and touch points carefully coordinated for the needs of each project.

Finally, to ensure the department is accessible and open to community input, I have asked SPR staff to: 1) plan three geographic open houses across the city which will also serve as a listening tour with the community and our senior leadership. 2) plan a pickleball open house (I want to ensure we're taking every opportunity for stakeholders on both sides of this issue to feel heard and to find common ground); 3) plan and facilitate an athletic field user group summit meeting; (public demand for our athletic fields continually outpaces available resources); and 4) plan a volunteer recognition event this winter to honor the commitment and support of the many volunteers who make Seattle Parks among the best in the country. This approach is informed by the multiple community listening sessions and site visits I've done over my first six months on the job.

11. Seattle will soon consider a major overhaul of its urban forest management policies and regulations. A [recent study](#) confirms Seattle suffered a net loss of 255 acres of trees, including many in our parks. As we consider the increasingly negative impacts of climate change and heat waves, along with the public health and environmental benefits of trees, what is your approach to tree management on city park lands and in collaboration with the City's Urban Forestry Commission and interdepartmental teams?

To preserve or enhance tree canopy on parkland, there must be a robust and multi-pronged approach via proactive policies, programs and resources. That's why I'm proud to further support SPR's existing efforts to find solutions in concert with our internal Forestry Team, the Urban Forestry Commission, OSE and other citywide departments and external partners such as the Green Seattle Partnership and Trees for Seattle Parks to implement best practices to mitigate tree reductions and to support tree expansion.

Our approach starts with data-driven, best-available science and professional practice frameworks to understand the current state of knowledge in urban forestry management and its interface with climate change, as demonstrated in Mayor Harrell's recent Executive Order setting replacement guidelines for tree replacement under the *One Seattle Tree Plan*.

This also includes tapping our internal and regional subject matter experts, pulling from current research, and engaging with practitioners nationwide and then implementing best management practices around responses to heat increases, invasive infestations or sustainability of non-native species.

With additional resources provided through the Park District, SPR will further tree planting and maintenance in both urban forests and developed parks including shifts to SPR's tree composition to long-lived, climate-resilient species, while balancing culturally appropriate

greening with species selection that meet anticipated temperature changes and support species diversity. Specific actions include planting additional trees annually, expanding establishment care, and providing adequate mulch and water.

Addressing tree canopy also requires both short, medium, and long-term actions. In this urban environment we are actively managing these forests for a future condition that improves habitat and increases resiliency.

Therefore, to be successful we will act with multiple approaches. For example, we must recognize our natural areas are dominated by deciduous trees like Red Alder and Big Leaf Maple, that are reaching the ends of their natural lives. Coupled with the impacts from climate change like drought, this means we are seeing many of our larger trees die off, which is shown in the tree canopy assessment. In other instances, we are also removing some deciduous trees to create growing conditions that are favorable for the evergreen trees that will make up our future forests.

Finally, we are excited to learn from the next canopy study phase that will look at forest volume. Seattle's natural areas currently have an 82% canopy cover, a high percentage compared to other land areas throughout the city. However, the recent analysis only looked at aerial images, and did not account for vertical forest volume (i.e., plants under the tallest trees). Most of the restoration activities since the GSP program started are still smaller trees that are not necessarily showing up in the current canopy assessment.

We have a lot of good work ahead of us that will make a difference in both our developed parks and natural areas.

12. The adopted [Resolution 32064](#) and recent budget proviso [SPR-004-B-001](#) affect the Parks Department's use of gas-powered leaf blowers. The Parks Department has the largest number of gas-powered leaf blowers among city government departments and research shows they can contribute to environmental and public health challenges. Will you confirm your support for rigorous and timely implementation of these established policies? (More here: <https://pedersen.seattle.gov/plan-to-phase-out-harmful-gasoline-fueled-leaf-blowers-in-seattle/>)

I am happy to confirm my and my leadership's support for phasing-out gas powered leaf blowers at SPR for the health of staff, our community members and for the environment. SPR is proud to lead a City Interdepartmental Team on the Resolution's goals with the Mayor's Office, and we'll be releasing a comprehensive plan on our findings soon (which will discuss feasibility, challenges, timelines, infrastructure needs etc.) for effective electrification implementation.

Internally, I am proud to report SPR is already leading the charge on this issue, with electric-powered leaf blowers now accounting for 10% of our current inventory with a strong commitment and a robust plan to get to full transition within three years. To further this timeline, I have successfully enrolled SPR in a nationwide innovation lab study, which partners with other select, key cities to discuss the best and next practices for electrification of equipment, infrastructure, and functional concerns necessary to electrify park operations.

13. How will you work with Council to ensure Council priorities are reflected in Parks Department operations? How will you balance requests from Council and those from the Mayor should those priorities differ?

First, I am pleased we have such clear policy direction from Council in Resolution 51 adopting the Parks District Funding plan. Going forward, I will utilize my 25 years of public service experience to work with the City Council and your staff to help prioritize your needs and effectuate community expectations.

The successful implementation of Council priorities is rooted in personal relationships, trust, open dialogue, robust communication and being accessible – first and foremost with the Superintendent and next with staff. My job will be to understand our Council; its individual members; your geographic districts and to help ensure that, together, we are building trust and confidence among our constituents and reflecting the best of government for the City of Seattle.

As part of this pledge, I will continue to be available to meet with Councilmembers, staff or constituents to do walking and listening tours, which I've enjoyed doing with several members already.

Balancing requests between the Mayor's Office and the City Council will be handled through open and thoughtful communication. I pledge to seek counsel from both entities as we do good work together for the people of Seattle.

However, in our efforts to advance a "*One Seattle*" culture it's important to understand we may not always agree or find the same paths *at the same time*. But I am firm believer in finding *common ground*. My training in government, law, diplomacy and communication has equipped me with skills to build consensus, and I believe not shying away from challenges is always the best, first approach.

Through this type of collaborative relationship, it will be my job to lead SPR with aplomb so all our electeds have confidence that whatever decisions, directives or compromises are made, good work will always be done for the benefit of the public.

14. How will you ensure that Council members and Legislative staff receive timely information needed from your department for Council to make sound policy and budgetary decisions?

This will be accomplished by ensuring that the right people are chosen to do the communication. Next, there should always be clarity of expectations and delivery. For example, during the budget process there is a clear expectation about responding to questions with 48-72 hours. My understanding is SPR has an excellent track record of meeting that expectation and if at any time, we falter, I would want to know immediately to remedy any delays. Although communication and information sharing are ultimately my responsibility as Superintendent, I am cognizant that information must be shared through a variety of channels, and it's important to have control over the message and the way it is shared. As such, I'm working closely with staff to identify and prioritize who delivers messages and how they are delivered so the Council receives information promptly, accurately, and transparently.

15. What racial inequities do you see in our Parks system and its operations? How will you plan to address these inequities?

Although the City of Seattle is often lumped as one big geographic area, it's really 37 *unique* neighborhoods, each with their own character and personality, needs and concerns. Therefore, my goal will be to manage a system that is responsive to the unique needs of the diverse neighborhoods across Seattle, while managing all our citywide obligations.

What's clear in this wonderful City is the need for more social, justice and environmental equity. While I'm impressed with the many efforts to make our parks system more equitable, I'm fully aware that we have much more work to do in this space. Not unlike other large cities, it's easy to see where past resources, development and planning occurred and where they did not occur. My plan is to ensure whatever new initiative, project or program we envision, starts by analyzing how it advances equity; how it corrects injustice; how it promotes a better Seattle or appropriates resources fairly and in new ways to serve long-time residents or our newest immigrants or most recent community members -- wherever the need is greatest is where we should show up.

To further address these inequities, I've developed and implemented a series of guiding affirmations and commitments to outline our vision, mission, land acknowledgment and commitment to racial equity and will work hard to ensure our internal SPR staff is equipped for success, professional development, enrichment and personal wellness.¹

16. How did you incorporate racial equity in your work in Los Angeles?

Personally, I educated myself more about what racial equity is; understanding the differences between inclusion and exclusion, bonding and breaking "othering" and "belonging." Professionally, I incorporated those positive practices in my work as a colleague/mentor and in my responsibilities as a manager and leader. To support that in others, I teach a course on Diversity and Cultural Awareness for the National Recreation and Parks Association.

In Los Angeles, I worked to implement our city's racial equity program and helped develop and oversee our racial equity initiatives within my department. Most importantly, I took the time to try and see each diverse community from their perspectives and to understand that Los Angeles is large metropolis with many needs, wants and perspectives. It was important to me to see communities, hear communities and provide changes for them and *with* them – and I plan to do that here in Seattle. Parks and recreation are a wonderful platform on which to implement

¹ **Land Acknowledgment:** Seattle Parks and Recreation acknowledges and affirms the indigenous Coast Salish as the original caretakers of our waters and landscape, who nurtured and shaped today's parkland. We honor their legacy with gratitude and appreciation and will safeguard their knowledge and stewardship as enduring treasures to promote community welfare, cultivate inclusive expressions of nature and recreation and commit to land acknowledgment for each ensuing generation.

Vision: Seattle Parks and Recreation envisions an accessible and sustainable park and recreation system, led by a dynamic workforce, where visitors and residents come together to play, recreate, strengthen our environment and build community; a place which fosters collaboration and where everyone is park proud! **#ParkProudSeattle**

Mission: Seattle Parks and Recreation equips employees and the public for well-being as we support healthy people, a thriving environment and vibrant community. We provide safe and accessible spaces for residents and visitors to work, recreate, rejuvenate and enhance quality of life and wellness for children, teenagers, adults and seniors. **#SeattleShines**

Equity & Inclusion: Seattle Parks and Recreation commits to advancing equity and social justice in our department and in every neighborhood by growing a dynamic and diverse workforce, developing strong investments, growth opportunities and beneficial partner strategies as we acknowledge and pledge to close disparities created by historical practices which often hindered workforce development, **environmental justice, access to quality open spaces, programs and facilities.** **#OneSeattle**

meaningful and long-lasting programs, services and projects that improve quality of life and the human condition.

17. How do you intend for Parks to work with Seattle's underrepresented communities, including those with low English proficiency?

As a local government and as a parks department, we have a duty and obligation to meet our residents at their level and need. I'm proud of our communication and HR teams and the work we do to support access and inclusion and the provision of care and welfare for our neighbors and staff.

To further these efforts, I'm working across our department to improve information delivery and to make it more accessible to non-English speakers and to people with sensory and sight needs. I also speak Spanish and have a desire to learn another language and will support and encourage my staff to do the same. To further this objective, I've reached out to our City IT Department to help SPR realize, envision and implement new branding, marketing, website development and outreach materials which are engaging, inviting and embody the spirit of *One Seattle*.

18. How do you plan to ensure that Parks and Parks facilities are open and accessible to ALL Seattle residents?

Through honest dialogue among our staff and our community members as we plan and provide services, programs and a healthy park system. I am working with staff to improve customer service at all levels of our organization. I plan to implement a "No Wrong Door" Policy and will ensure our parks reflect welcoming design, signage, and uniform maintenance standards. The best thing about parks is that they are open for everyone; require no special status or membership and serve as backyards and community spaces. My staff and I will be committed to ensuring we are stewards and caretakers to our land and seascapes and to the public we serve. My goal as Superintendent is to unleash a new level of "love of place" for our park system so that every person in Seattle is park proud. **#ParkProudSeattle**

I'm also proud of our department's work to lead out on ADA design and implementation to better serve our residents and families of all abilities. Among my personal passions is the development and implementation of universally accessible playgrounds. I have significant experience in this space and have encountered staff with similar passions who are currently working on and who look forward to growing this as a signature component of SPRs approach to the design of winning, fun and innovative playgrounds that provide robust and dynamic play spaces, sensory process learning elements and unique and fun attributes that allow all children to play in freedom and without fear.

19. What can Parks do to increase and diversify late night teen programming at community centers? Youth who use the Rainier Beach Community Center state that the programming has changed after Covid and feels unwelcoming to students of color.

Coming out of the pandemic, SPR is focusing on ramping up programs and staffing to support safe and welcoming teen environments. To support this, we have just hired a Teen and Youth Development Manager who is charged to ensure our programs are welcoming and accessible and who will be surveying youth, teens and parents for feedback for program ideas and

improvement. In addition, SPR has just hired a Director of Youth Mentorship as part of the *Seattle Mentors* Initiative, to increase opportunities for youth to have access to 1) group mentoring, 2) internships with mentoring business partners and 3) pathways to employment. In addition, the MPD Cycle 2 brings additional resources and staffing to enhance services, drop-in programs and special events specifically for Teens, Teen Life Centers and Citywide Late-Night programs, including the Rainier Beach Community Center.

20. What criteria/metrics will you use to evaluate the community center reservation process? We have a lack of sufficient community space, and some neighborhood orgs indicate they never get registration access because of “legacy” access by older groups.

This is a very important consideration in managing a public parks department and something my experience in Los Angeles has prepared me for.

As part of SPR’s Recreation Divisional 2023 workplan, staff will be conducting a survey to our customers focusing on our Community Center operations, including the reservation process to evaluate how “legacy” groups have access to field reservation or community center use. This survey will inform changes to our processes to better serve the public, including the development of better and easier on-line reservation systems, an app and modernized website and community engagement to help announce and make seasonal reservations easier. And while our community center reservation process prioritizes SPR and ARC programs (for example: GYM: Basketball Season), it’s important to ensure community groups are aware of how to enroll in department sponsored programs or find space with other community groups serving underserved youth.

I will also be open to developing more partnerships and consider requests for fee reductions if necessary to create more access and use.

To help better relations with the community I have asked our staff to host a community open house for the people living in the affordable housing units across the street from Magnuson Park after I learned during a walking tour with Councilmember Pedersen that members of those households didn’t feel a connection to the park directly in front of their homes. I will mandate all our community centers develop and implement similar welcoming events in advance of seasonal operations or reservation times.

Lastly, SPR is approaching a soft launch of community center expanded hours for evenings and weekends to occur in September 2023, and I am open to asking legacy groups to consider opening a certain number of slots for students who might not otherwise have access to specialized teams.

21. Similarly, how do we address the tension between renting out playfields to groups that can afford it and neighborhood kids who want to use their local playfield? (Private schools seem to dominate south end playfields in afterschool hours.)

I am very cognizant about the demand for field use and committed to ensuring SPR has meaningful practices in place which balance the need to provide space for school kids or community groups and further acknowledges that tension exists for community field space due to factors such as: limited supply of fields during peak times, accommodating both school and community users, and accommodating both long-term users (such as leagues) & one-time users.

Therefore, to make field use more accessible SPR is:

- A. Piloting a Community Drop-In Program at 10 athletic fields from 2-4 p.m. or 3-5 p.m. (after school). (Seven of ten playfields are in South and West Seattle).
- B. Allowing for unscheduled space around several main “playfields” that can be used for a few kids/individuals to throw/kick a ball around.
- C. Conducting a field use evaluation study (underway) to determine community needs, identify gaps, and inform SPR’s current scheduling policies/practice.
- D. Charging lower field rental rates for youth/public compared with adult/private entities.
- E. Specific to the question related to field use being dominated by private schools, in 2022 private school usage was <7% of all reservations.

22. What do you see as your role, and the Department’s role, in the City’s response to the declared emergency of homelessness and what are your plans to coordinate with the City’s Unified Care Team and the King County Regional Homelessness Authority?

As the steward of our park system, my role, and of each SPR employee, is to ensure parks are safe, welcoming and accessible. Some immediate commitments will be to continue to support shower services and the great work and commitments to end poverty through the Seattle Conservation Corps. The challenges presented by the declared emergencies of Covid-19 and homelessness require us to be laser focused on improving basic needs while supporting a healthy and thriving park system. We have a duty to ensure parks serve as areas of respite but also areas of safety. These are big issues but ones I have experience working on which I will lean into for leverage and utilization of our collective local, county, state and federal resources.

At the end of the day, parks are essential infrastructure which support the city’s vitality and success and I’m committed to working on these challenges - with you all - as well as the other existing issues of the day and on those yet to be presented.

23. The Parks Board authorized funding for 26 new park rangers with the understanding that they will initially be focused on Downtown-area parks, with the goal that they would also expand to other parts of Seattle. Under the current labor agreement, Park Rangers are restricted to center city parks. How will you work to fulfill the goal to expand the park rangers to outer neighborhood parks?

First, by a demonstration of what the park ranger program can and will provide for the City of Seattle’s parkland. And second, by reaffirmation of what the park ranger program is and isn’t. (It is not the creation of an additional police force, but rather the establishment of a park-centric, community facing asset to help steward Seattle public parkland in the provision of safe and welcoming public spaces).

It will take time and thoughtful implementation to regenerate our park ranger program in 2023 and we are committed and underway on those efforts, consistent with the report back we provided to the Council earlier this year. Next, the city would need to successfully bargain with SPOG to modify the existing labor agreement which limits the focus to downtown parks. The city’s policymakers and labor teams would set those bargaining parameters, but I am happy to offer my personal and team’s expertise to anyone who seeks it. Under the current mayoral and council administrations, we are operating under a *One Seattle* mindset where our focus to find common ground and practical solutions to making the city safer and more welcoming are among the highest priorities and therefore I’m hopeful, together we can find the right way to grow and enhance this important park service.

24. SLI response [3-B-001](#) recommends dedicating a team of Animal Control Officers and SPR Rangers to focus solely on parks enforcement, combined into one unit and

independent from the daily assignments/tasks of regular ACO IIs and Parks Rangers and dispatched in ways that take advantage of geographic location. While the necessary work to see that Parks Rangers are expanded to all parts of Seattle occurs, will you implement the recommendation of SLI 3-B-001?

With the additional funding you approved, the Park District now funds three FAS Animal Control Officers (two more than Cycle One) who are fully funded to work in partnership with SPR staff members to patrol parks to educate and support leash/scoop compliance in parks across the city. From my perspective, this *One Seattle* approach leverages the subject matter expertise of both City agencies including an approach that it isn't dependent on Park Rangers working citywide as the enforcement authority is provided by the Animal Control Officers. Therefore, we are working with FAS right now to execute an agreement outlining this expanded partnership and to develop a plan to fully implement expanded patrols by the fall.

25. What do you see as SPR's responsibility in ensuring the availability of hygiene facilities to the public? How will you address ongoing public concerns about cleanliness, limited operating/opening hours, and maintenance issues in these facilities?

The provision and maintenance of public restrooms is one of the most challenging issues facing any public park system. SPR consistently hears from our community about the need to sustain and expand access to clean and safe comfort stations. These amenities are critical to park visitors and families, and maximizing their availability and accessibility is a priority for SPR.

SPR has heard you and the community, and my team is rising to this challenge. This goal will be met through a mix of capital programs focused on renovating comfort stations and through smaller projects to install heat and insulate pipes.

Our outdoor public restrooms ("comfort stations" in SPR parlance) are available to serve park visitors; we have more than 150 of these facilities across the city available for all community members. To address maintenance and seasonal uses, we are committed to winterizing the 60 comfort stations that traditionally close each winter, with a goal of having all these facilities available for year-round use by the end of 2026. I'd like to note this is two years earlier than discussed during the Park District planning process last fall.

Also, as of March 2023, we are now staffed and providing comfort station cleaning 7 days a week year-round and later into the evening with the recent onboarding of 12 new staff members focused on this work. To improve the user experience, we have also improved our equipment with the addition of steaming pressure washing systems (hot water systems) to ensure facilities are properly sanitized and built to mitigate and implement improved experiences to the realities of large, public restrooms.

While our staff are responsible for maintenance and noticing maintenance needs, we also encourage members of the public to use the Find-It-Fix-It App to let us know when they come across a maintenance issue. Sometimes a member of the public is the first one to notice and the sooner we know, the sooner we can respond.

Lastly, I'm proud to report that SPR will continue to support hygiene services by offering a free public showers program during certain hours at 5 community center locations.

26. How do you plan to ensure robust accountability and transparency for both the general-fund dollars that support our Parks system, and the recently-expanded Metropolitan Parks District?

Our department realizes the magnitude and import of the Park District investments afforded to our park system. As Superintendent my job is to ensure confidence in the utilization and provision of those resources. As such, during this next 6-year cycle we will work closely and collaboratively with the Council, Mayor's Office and other stakeholders to provide access to understandable information and to utilize and implement new technologies to support easy and comprehensive knowledge dissemination (QR codes, dashboards, electronic updates, dedicated websites etc.). SPR will also lean into our partners for their help in keeping us accountable and assisting us in the provision of information (Council liaisons, Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, the Seattle Parks Foundation, the Associated Recreation Council, community stakeholders, friends of groups and other City Departments).

27. Are you active in any Parks Executive accreditation programs? How will you plan to work with and learn from regional and national partners?

I am an active member of the City Parks Alliance and serve in leadership at the National Recreation and Park Association and for World Urban Parks. I am firm believer in learning from others and equipping others for success. I love collaboration, learning and implementing "best practices" but also "next practices." To further this type of regional and national alliance, I've already taken instrumental steps to ready SPR as we host the Greater and Greener Conference here in 2024, where the City of Seattle will be able to showcase the best of our city commitments to equitable green spaces for all and learn from regional and international partners on the issues and solutions for thriving urban, park systems.

I've also successfully enrolled SPR in a national study program focused on electrification and better climate maintenance practices. And in our recreation space, I've developed a partnership with Teqball – an internationally emerging sport which is a candidate for the Olympic Games and who have donated equipment and agreed to teach staff and students about this new and fun sport, which also can serve children and adults with disabilities and/or mobility challenges. I'm also working with the USTA to establish stronger collaboration around Tennis and potential facility developments while we also continue to grow and expand Pickle Ball.

I'm also looking forward to creating a West Coast alliance of urban park directors from Vancouver to San Diego to better understand and support our mutual endeavors toward park equity, climate action and the provision of healthy people, a thriving environment and vibrant community (which just so happens to be our new Department tagline).

28. As you know, Seattle is preparing an update to the City's Comprehensive Plan to be adopted by the Council in 2024, as required by the State. The Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) is completing the scoping process for its required Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). What is your approach to working with the lead department (OPCD) to address Parks Department needs as part of the comprehensive plan?

Again, I'm pleased to share that SPR is actively involved in the *One Seattle* approach to Comprehensive Planning, led by OPCD, to ensure SPR meets eligibility requirements for grants administered by the State's Recreation Conservation Office. Beyond participating in monthly interdisciplinary team meetings to help inform the comprehensive planning process and provide feedback as it relates to open space, SPR staff participated in all the public engagement sessions from November through January that OPCD hosted.

We leveraged those engagements to solicit additional feedback for SPR work. As a result of that process, the SPR team modified the scope of work related to updating our own Parks and Open Space Plan to make sure the two documents will seamlessly relate to one another. To further this collaborative approach, we invited OPCD to sit on our Park and Open Space Plan steering committee to ensure continued coordination.

29. What do you want your legacy to be as Parks Superintendent?

When I think about legacy I think about impact and to one day being evaluated by the question "did he make a mark?"

I can assure you that a decision to confirm me will be honored, respected and held in the highest regard as I set out, each day, to take SPR to new heights of service, preserve its integral core and mission and advance our staff's sense of worth, happiness and well-being. What I have learned in my 25 years of city service is that leadership is not about being in charge but in how well you take care of those in your charge. With that as my North Star, I will continue to keep our staff close to my heart as I work hard to equip them for success, lead by example and provide a place where thriving personally and professionally is celebrated.

As Superintendent I will create and cultivate close relationships throughout our city and among you - the Council, as I know you too are excited for restoration and renewal, and that we share a mutual vision for our city's future and its verdant parkland. I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting to work alongside you all, as we accomplish our professional and personal goals.

Thank you for your consideration of my appointment and for your trust and confidence in my skills, talents and vision. I won't let you or Mayor Harrell down, nor our employees, community members or the important stakeholders and City leaders who share a collective responsibility and desire to be the best park stewards and caretakers for the City of Seattle, the nation and among the world - yesterday, today and forever. **#SeattleShines**