

Seattle City Council written question for Marshall Foster:

1. What prompted you to apply for this position?

I have long enjoyed working with the Seattle Center team, and I am personally inspired and motivated by the organization's mission to "create exceptional events, experiences and environments that delight and inspire the human spirit to build stronger communities." The entire focus of Seattle Center's mission speaks to me – but especially the power it has to build stronger communities through our work to engage people on the campus, to be a center for diverse cultures to come together and celebrate traditions, and also to re-connect people with the basic human experience of sharing public space.

I've spent my time and energy for many years on creating public places, and have seen in Seattle Center both a public space and a team that puts into practice a philosophy of creating safe, welcoming and inclusive places. I had the opportunity to work closely with Robert Nellams, the former Director, for the past several years and got to know the staff, the performing arts and cultural tenants, and the community around the Center through that work together. I appreciate what a unique place Seattle Center is, and at the same time felt that my skills and passions could be a great fit to help the Center move forward in its next chapter. When the opportunity came up to support the Center as Interim Director I jumped at the chance, and ultimately after a few months getting to know both the opportunities and challenges the future holds, I have decided that I would love to commit my time and energies to Seattle Center over the long term.

2. What will be your first-year and long-term priorities as Seattle Center Director?

My short-term priorities for Seattle Center are simple. First, I want to re-energize support for Seattle Center and ensure we play a central role in supporting Seattle's recovery from COVID. That is all about restoring our ability to operate at 100% with high-quality campus experiences that can support both the ways people enjoy and rely on the campus daily, as well as help us once again host incredible events and festivals that re-inspire people's love of and confidence in being together in public. Second, I am focused on helping us rebuild major partnerships on campus for events like The Bite of Seattle by CHEQ, Bumbershoot and others which have been struggling since the pandemic. Re-imagining these events, with new partners, new funding, and new challenges post-pandemic, has been a major challenge. Third, we have been focused on launching our new work as the City's lead department for operating the new Waterfront Park. This has involved Seattle Center learning to operate a major new line of business off-site from the 74-acre campus for the first time in its history, bringing on more than 23 new staff in a matter of months, opening new facilities, and building new partnerships with our waterfront stakeholders in time for our July 1st start of operations.

Thinking long-term, Seattle Center is poised to grow not only as a hub for arts and culture in the region, but to deepen our role in supporting the community through the arts, to expand opportunities for students and youth, and to help support the long-term sustainability of our performing arts and cultural organizations. We must look at these broader issues and how Seattle Center can be part of the solution. We also have to ask some hard questions about how

we fund and operate Seattle Center. The ability to grow our financial capacity to support our programs and maintain the campus is relatively constrained. I would like to be doing more to leverage commercial events, and event revenue, to fund our day-to-day operations and subsidize programs that support community.

To tackle these questions, I hope to launch a new strategic plan for Seattle Center's future, one that will be developed in partnership with the communities and organizations that are invested in the campus, as well as those who haven't benefitted equally from access. We need a new north star for Seattle Center, and we need to rally public support and imagination around how Seattle Center can expand its role as the heart and soul of arts and culture in our city. Ultimately my hope is that we can find a path to become a more financially self-sustaining organization over the next 5 to 10 years, with the capacity to invest in our programs and partners more deeply, and also to reinvest in our aging campus to ensure we can keep hosting incredible events and programs for our community over the long term.

3. How will you measure progress toward these goals?

First and foremost, we need to identify our goals for the future! We are coming to the end of the department's 2021-2023 Strategic Business Plan that focused on restoring our core operations after the pandemic. That has understandably been the focus. We have been measuring progress in concrete ways – attendance, revenues, and how well our partners are doing financially. Once we have a new vision and north star in place through our strategic plan, we will broaden how we measure success, assessing all aspects of how we're performing, both as an organization and as a community on the campus. We need to be looking at our economic performance, our effectiveness at bringing people from all walks of life together, and we need to be looking directly at what experiences our patrons are having on campus.

4. The Seattle Center is expanding significantly to operate and maintain the park and public spaces on Seattle's Waterfront. What specific challenges and opportunities have you identified for the next year and beyond in this capacity?

The last 2 months have been our first as the City's lead department for waterfront operations. We are off to a strong start, but it has been challenging to recruit, hire and train a high-quality team quickly, to build new relationships, and to get all the resources in place for the team to be effective. Over the next year park construction will continue to advance and more park elements will be finished. Expanding our operating footprint to include these new areas will be a challenge. We also have more work to do to fill out the waterfront team with key support roles, and to get a permanent operations facility on-line to support our staff there. While the next year will bring many challenges, it is also very gratifying to begin see the public enjoy the culmination of both a vision for the waterfront and many years of work shared by the City Council and the Mayor, Friends of Waterfront Seattle, city staff and the community.

5. What does a fully-functioning Waterfront look and feel like to you after construction is complete on the Central Waterfront projects?

For me, the most important measure of our success is not just getting to opening day. While that's important, a key measure is how well we manage the new Waterfront Park over the long term. My hope, now that the project is on track to completion, is to ensure the park is not only beautiful on day 1, but that it feels safe, welcoming, and inclusive to everyone who wants to use it over time, and that we have the team and the resources lined up to continue that commitment well past opening day. I am confident Seattle Center has the right philosophy and approach to grow into its new role on the waterfront, and with our dedicated on-site team, to build a culture of high-quality management and of ingrained, continual efforts to work with our partners to make sure everyone feels a sense of belonging on the waterfront. Achieving that is of course about how we approach maintenance and public safety, but also helping to ensure we continue to host a broad, varied and unique program of events that bring the whole city, in all its diversity, to the waterfront.

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

Since arriving 8 months ago, I've been amazed at how much Seattle Center does with a limited budget. We have only about 33%, or \$15M of our \$47M budget coming from General Fund; the rest of the funds supporting Seattle Center comes from other sources, primarily from earned revenues which support our programs and maintain the campus.

If we could increase our budget, my top priority would be to restore our staffing levels. We reduced staffing through attrition initially as part of the Key Arena agreements and then through the pandemic, and have held many of those positions vacant as events and patrons return post pandemic. Now that we are returning to hosting the public at pre-pandemic levels, we do not have adequate staff to maintain the campus properly, keep it safe, and support major events. This summer's festival season, as successful as it has been, has been a strain on staff, with many approaching burn out and forcing us to rely heavily on overtime. Restoring our staffing levels to something closer to what we had before the pandemic is job #1, which will then support our ability to keep growing quality events that support downtown recovery and expand event revenue.

If we are presented with a reduction scenario, we will have to parse what is absolutely essential to our mission vs. what is not. We do not have discretionary programs of the sort you may see in larger departments. We would have to look hard at whether we can afford to provide programs that aren't core to our mission of providing great events, experiences, and environments. I would prefer to look for ways to replace General Fund support with other fund sources, with other event-related funding, with philanthropy, and with more revenue from events. We need to think ahead, beyond just the next budget cycle, to do that. There are of course tradeoffs there, especially if it would require more commercial events on campus. More philanthropy would also come with more partnerships and some shared say over our priorities as an organization.

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

One thing I've been happy to see at Seattle Center is deep, long-standing relationships between the department staff and the partner organizations that call the campus home. We have the benefit of working every day in very direct ways with all the communities around Seattle Center. A high point for me has been coming to our Festál events and meeting the community volunteers who work with our cultural programs team to organize and host these events. They have been working together for years and in most cases are close friends as well as colleagues. Similarly, we work intensively with our resident organizations on critical campus issues, whether it's a smoke/weather event or a major capital project like Memorial Stadium. We're lucky to have a strong foundation from many decades of close working relationships and a shared mission.

One area we need to expand on is how we engage with and learn from the general public visiting the campus. How can we improve the experience? I would like to identify what demographic trends are affecting our audience for programs and events, and what we can do to make our work more relevant to those who are not using the campus today. We need to grow beyond our own 'known' community to think about how we grow our relevance, to think about who's not enjoying the campus but would like to if we could help them overcome certain barriers.

8. How will you work with Council to ensure Council priorities are reflected in Seattle Center operations?

My approach has always been to get to know the Councilmembers and their priorities, to make sure my staff and I are engaged in the broader issues facing the City and the Council, and be always available as partners to help address those issues. I am very interested in how Seattle Center can grow and expand how it supports the City's broader priorities, be it community development, job and wealth creation, or public safety. For me the best path to this has always been to build strong working relationships with Councilmembers as well as their staff and the Central Staff, and aim to be a trusted partner and problem-solver when the time comes.

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

Working closely with Councilmembers, their staff and the Central Staff is key to making sure information is flowing in a timely way and to the right people. One of my focuses as Interim Director has been to keep 'situational awareness' around our issues and be first to think about how information needs to be shared, who needs to give input, and ultimately how we can work together early on how we can advance a particular solution. I am quick to reach out when our elected leaders need awareness on an emerging issue, and find that early, strategic communication is key to help ensure alignment as we move to resolve it. I also work to instill the importance of that in staff and have been working to expand our communications with the Council as well as with the Executive and other departments.

10. What racial inequities do you see in the Seattle Center Department and its operations? How will you plan to address these inequities?

I see many opportunities for Seattle Center to do more to address racial inequalities. Fundamentally, I think our outward-facing work is a strength to build on – we have a strong commitment as an organization reflected in how we support bringing a range of ethnic and

racial groups together for community events and celebration, and the work we do to build capacity and agency in those communities through that work. We just finished a major push to seat new positions on the Seattle Center Advisory Commission, with a focus on expanding diversity and bringing new points of view and experience to their critical work. Seattle Center and campus organizations are also working with Seattle Arts and Culture for Antiracism (SACA) to explore how to support and advance anti-racism in arts and cultural organizations at Seattle Center and throughout King County. This work strives to build community, break down barriers and build collective power.

Internally we have a relatively diverse staff by the numbers. But while we have strong leaders of color, we also need to ensure that opportunities are available at all levels of management. We have a robust 'Equity in Hiring' program focused on expanding the diversity of our hiring across the organization. My hope is that we can continue to invest in that effort, and can expand on that to include more intentional efforts to grow diversity in our management, and to continue to grow it in leadership positions. As a white male leading the department, I feel a unique responsibility to ensure we have a racially diverse organization that reflects the diversity of the City as a whole, that our staff have strong advocates in leadership, and an opportunity to grow.

Lastly, it's critical that we center our new strategic plan around the question of equity – how do we support Seattle Center as an open, accessible and inclusive public place for all? As we manage growth and change, how do we make sure that the needs of the entire Seattle Center community are core to that work, as well as expanding the way we welcome communities who aren't using the campus? One key opportunity is with the new Memorial Stadium, where we and SPS leadership have formed a bond around the project's potential to transform the way we support students and youth – opening doors to partnerships with our arts organizations, to apprenticeships and training, as well as serving student athletics.

11. How did you incorporate racial equity work at the Office of the Waterfront?

OWCP is a project office leading completion of what is one of the largest capital projects in the City's history. As the Director of OWCP from 2014 to earlier this year, my approach was to be clear-eyed about where we can affect change and focus on the best possible outcomes. The two primary ways we tackled this were through our community engagement around the project and its design, and secondly in how we could create opportunities for BIPOC and underserved communities through our contracting.

If you look back at the community engagement we did around the project design, we engaged broadly with communities across the city to get ideas and input on a project of citywide impact. We engaged literally with tens of thousands of people through a variety of means – large in-person workshops and small table-top conversations in communities in every corner of the City, as well as online and via social media. We invested deeply in the 'trusted stakeholder' model, as well as in translation and supporting investments like childcare, when this was rare for City departments to do.

Since then, OWCP has overseen a large scale of public works contracting – for professional services and for the construction itself. We set goals for WMBE engagement in those contracts

and partnered early with major firms pursuing the work to challenge them to dig deeper than normal in terms of how they bring in WMBE firms to the team – and increasingly to lead the team. OWCP has been a leader in developing the City’s Community Workforce Agreements and Project Hire programs, ensuring construction jobs are creating opportunity where it’s needed most. Fortunately, at OWCP we were able to build a very strong, experienced construction management team and approach committed to delivering on the potential of those programs, and ensuring that our partners (such as Pike Place Market and the Seattle Aquarium) did so as well.

On the operations side, OWCP set the bar for our waterfront programming and operations partners in terms of engaging racially diverse organizations in programs and events. Our 2020 operating agreement for Pier 62 set a minimum level for the engagement of BIPOC organizations in producing events and providing services and concessions. We helped ensure diverse communities were supported in bringing their communities into the new park. Thankfully this was a commitment that Friends of the Waterfront has shared from the beginning, and we are seeing now an incredibly positive range of BIPOC-led events in the new Waterfront Park, adding diversity and richness to the cultural offerings of the park.

12. How do you intend for the Seattle Center to work with Seattle’s underrepresented communities, including those with low English proficiency?

Language access should be core to everything we do. Seattle Center has a strong commitment in place to overcoming language barriers and not allowing those to keep people from engaging with and benefitting from what Seattle Center has to offer. To use the Seattle King County Clinic as an example, we engage dozens of real-time interpreters and an extensive online platform to ensure those in need can access health services in their own language. In many ways our team has set a standard for how to do this well, and now many private health providers look to us for best practices. In hiring, our HR team recently spearheaded efforts to introduce real-time language interpretation into our hiring processes when we discovered that some applicants, while well-qualified, were struggling with responding to questions in English. We have adopted procedures to support staff where English is not their primary language to be full, effective team members. We will continue to innovate wherever we can to not let language be a barrier to belonging at Seattle Center, whether for staff or for the public that enjoys our programs and public spaces.

13. How do you plan to ensure Seattle Center facilities are open and accessible to all Seattle residents?

Accessibility is something that our staff and leadership care deeply about. As the Director, I will continue to emphasize that every experience at Seattle Center, whether one we host or those of our clients, are accessible and model best practices around ADA and Universal Design.

This can be a challenge given so many of our buildings are older, and the costs for capital upgrades are quite high. My primary focus will be on ensuring all our major venues are fully open

and accessible. This means not only literally accessible in the physical sense (ramps, etc.), but that we're thinking about the full picture of what it means for someone with accessibility challenges to enjoy the experience our programs and services aim to provide. For example, we are working with major venues on campus for "companion tickets" to be made available free of charge to those supporting someone with a disability. We are pressing to ensure the new Memorial Stadium project will fully meet ADA requirements, which the current facility does not, and which has posed challenges for the public for decades. Another major opportunity will be renovation of the 1962 Seattle Center monorail station, which is desperately needed, to meet ADA for access, and to open up new opportunities to enhance the entry to the campus along Thomas Street.

14. What do you want your legacy to be as Seattle Center Director?

I believe Seattle Center is at an inflection point. On the one hand it is a much-loved, almost sacred space in the City. Nearly every Seattleite has a heart-warming, personal story to share from Seattle Center – a summer afternoon at the fountain, an iconic Bumbershoot show, a day immersed in culture at a Festál event, or an evening cheering on one of our local sports teams. At the same time the campus and the community are running largely on this history, ready for a clear picture of what's next, and how we can build a bridge between that legacy and what the City around us needs Seattle Center to be today and tomorrow.

Now more than ever, Seattle Center needs a new vision for itself, and it needs to come together as a community to advance that vision. We need to reinvest in the department, in the resident organizations that bring art and culture to the campus, and in the physical campus itself. We need to re-affirm our core values around creating exceptional events, experiences and environments for the public, and explore how we deepen that mission given the urgent challenges Seattle is facing today. We need to give the department of Seattle Center a more stable financial footing, with the ability to leverage revenue and partnerships to support our core mission in new ways, and over time rely less on traditional funding from the City's budget.

I hope my legacy will be to lead the Seattle Center community as we ask these hard questions and define this next chapter for ourselves. Unlike my past roles at the City, I don't see this fundamentally about planning and big projects. Those are important, but Seattle Center is much more than those. I see this as rooted in stewarding our strong core values of community and belonging, while enabling us to grow and change into a more dynamic organization that can rise to new challenges.

I feel like the team at Seattle Center, and the community around us, are poised and ready to take this challenge on. I am far from sure what the outcome of that effort will be, but I feel now is the time for it. The Seattle Center Director is the right person to lead it, and I am excited to take it on.