

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Winter Weather Response, February 2019



Seattle Parks & Recreation: Mission/Role

- **MISSION:** Provides welcoming and safe opportunities to play, learn, contemplate and build community, and promotes responsible stewardship of the land.
- **VISION:** Programs, services and stewardship through our vision for *Healthy People, Healthy Environment and Strong Communities*.
- Provides “human services” such as child care, pre-school, before-and-after-school care, job preparedness, job training for formerly homeless people
- Provides “resiliency and recovery” services as part of City’s Emergency Response Plan



SPR 2019 Winter Weather Response: Summary

- Setup and operation of 2 shelters open 24 hours/day, 7 days/week:
 - Garfield Community Center (Central Seattle)
 - Bitter Lake Community Center (Northwest Seattle)
- Snow clearance and removal; de-icing; in partnership with SDOT and other public agencies
- Garbage collection support: in partnership with Seattle Public Utilities
- Downed tree response



Garfield Community Center Shelter

- Opened Friday, Feb. 8 and operated through Feb. 22, 24/7, 384 hours of continuous operation.
- Average number of people at shelter (overnight) was 95, with a low of 8 (first night) and high of 120.
- Set-up included delivering cots, blankets, and food to designated shelter sites.
- SPR offered 3 meals per day – **4,380 total meals**; showers (after 2nd day), towels and personal hygiene products for shelter guests; 24/7 custodial & maintenance support (refrigeration, plumbing, electrical).
- Staff worked through operational issues such as lights-outs procedures, security concerns, storage, services such as visiting nurses, ID of who we could NOT serve (people w/severe health issues)
- Operation required 12 staff working 12-hour shifts to support kitchen, gym/sleeping area, showers, cleaning, checking in guests, monitoring entrances. Staffing was almost exclusively SPR staff.
- Outpouring of community support with donations of clothes, blankets, shoes, socks and other items.



Bitter Lake Community Center Shelter

- Opened Monday, Feb. 11 and operated through Feb. 19, 24/7, 216 hours of continuous operation.
- Average number of people at shelter (overnight) was 25.
- Set-up and operations similar to Garfield.
- For both sites, shelter closure required demobilization--including, cot and debris removal, cleaning and sanitizing, identifying transportation for shelter residents.
- Extraordinary level of service: example of helping a diabetic Bitter Lake shelter resident recover insulin left in encampment under I-5



Snow clearance

After the snow storms began, SPR grounds crews shifted focus from clearing park walkways and sidewalks to supporting SDOT and citywide emergency response efforts.

This included clearing:

- Roads
- Library parking lots
- Bike lanes
- Sidewalks
- ADA pathways
- Entryways
- Walkways
- Storm drains
- Sidewalks near certain schools so SPS could re-open (shoveled 3-block radius around 11 elem. schools)



Other responses

Garbage Collection Support

SPR was also called upon by Seattle Public Utilities to provide four drop sites (Lower Woodland, Magnuson, Interbay and West Seattle Stadium) for containers for missed garbage pickups. These sites were plowed and/or graveled for safe public access and staffed by SPR staff.

Downed Tree Response

SPR responded to tree failures citywide throughout the storms. SPR crews cleaned up hundreds of downed limbs across the city.



Challenges/Lessons Learned

Shelter Set-Up and Operations

Despite overall success – saving lives! – it was very challenging for our staff to set up & operate shelters.

While SPR trained to operate “general population” shelters and have done so when people were displaced by fires, etc., we are NOT trained to run 24/7 “low-barrier” shelters for people experiencing homelessness.

Some issues to consider:

- **Taxonomy:** Identify types of shelters so we can prepare for proper level of service/operation
- **Security/Safety:** Security and safety was an ongoing concern.
- **Staffing:** Staffing the facility under short notice and changing closure dates was a challenge.
- **Pets**
- **Drug/alcohol use**
- **Medical/mental health support:** Many guests were experiencing health issues that didn't necessarily require a trip to the hospital, but could be resolved with some attention.
- **Demobilizing:** Connecting departing guests with services and transportation were issues.



Challenges/Lessons Learned (continued)

Next Steps

- After debriefing with our staff involved in the snow response, we are developing winter weather protocols to better prepare us for a snow event next time, both for shelters and for snow removal
- We have started meeting and will continue to work with the Human Services Department, Office of Emergency Management, other City and community agencies to strategize services, agencies, resources and training needed to expand “emergency shelter” to shelters serving people who are experiencing homelessness.

