



**MINUTES OF COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS
NOVEMBER 18, 2024**

PRESENT: Andrea Smith
Matthew Mauer

REMOTE: Rosie Ayala

EXCUSED: Tim Reid
Aaron Pointer

IN THE CHAIR: Andrea Smith

PLACE: MPT Headquarters 4702 S. 19th St.

The meeting was called to order by President Smith at 5:30pm
Commissioner Mauer was appointed acting clerk.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

November 13, 2024 COW Minutes

It was moved and seconded that the minutes be approved as presented; seconded and passed unanimously.

2025-2026 PARKS & RECREATION BUDGET

Shon Sylvia opened the presentation, providing an overview of the agenda. Tania Wink followed with a detailed breakdown of the Parks and Recreation budget, explaining that it is comprised of two primary funds: the Point Defiance Marina and Meadow Park Golf Course enterprise funds, and the Community Parks and Recreation general fund. She noted that the general fund is supported by several foundations and highlighted key revenue sources, which for the general fund primarily include Parks and Recreation. A handout detailing specific revenue sources was distributed, and tables showing department allocations by fund were reviewed.

Tania Wink then covered expenditures, linking them to the budget drivers and assumptions outlined in earlier presentations. Key expenditure categories included salaries and materials and supplies. She briefly summarized revenue sources by division across all funds, providing an overview of how these sources contribute to the budget framework.

Libbi Lovshin provided an overview of key budget considerations, noting that pages 4 and 5 of the handouts detail the current activities and the level of service needed to accommodate growth. She highlighted that the budget includes \$106 million for this biennium, reflecting an increase in customers, users, and the corresponding support and resources required to maintain services. She noted that the budget framework incorporates the four "Ps" (as detailed in the District Strategic Plan).

Libbi Lovshin then discussed revenue sources, which include community center memberships, aquatic programs and admissions, school break day camps, outdoor adventure trips, rentals at park facilities, preschool programs, senior programming, events, and agreements with the City of Tacoma (COT).

Commissioner Ayala inquired about the drivers behind merchandise and sales increases compared to the 2023/2024 budget. Ms. Lovshin explained that recent experience over the past two years helped refine the budget projections for this area. Merchandise revenue comes from general fund areas, including Fort Nisqually, the Tacoma Nature Center, and the Conservatory. Libbi Lovshin also provided an explanation of program fees and dues fees.

Commissioner Mauer raised a question about City of Tacoma Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Interlocal Agreements (ILAs). Joe Brady clarified that the MOUs pertain to properties negotiated after the ILA and involve areas managed on behalf of the City of Tacoma.

Libbi Lovshin noted that general fund expenditures reflect the levels of service and resources required to achieve the department's goals. Commissioner Ayala inquired whether projects with partners are tracked, and staff confirmed that they use project codes to assist with tracking.

Commissioner Mauer asked about increased costs in security. Staff explained that this includes more than just the contract with the security vendor; it also encompasses park guides and related expenditures, which will now be tracked department-wide under this category. He also asked about licensed vehicles, and staff clarified that these costs represent payments made to replenish the fleet and equipment fund.

Joe Brady spoke to the Parks and Recreation Department workplan priorities follows:

- Prioritize safe and secure parks, programs and facilities.
- Expand our conservation principles and environmental commitments.
- Focus on outreach, engagement and community needs.
- Focus on youth.
- Provide resourceful, equitable and productive employment and volunteerism pathways.
- Develop and maintain collaborative partnerships to expand service delivery.
- Focus on infrastructure and preventative maintenance.
- Provide quality, accessible and equitable parks, facilities programs and services to our diverse community.

Joe Brady highlighted the essential role of Parks and Recreation staff as the driving force behind how the department serves the community. He emphasized that supporting employees within the organization directly enhances service delivery to customers and the community. As part of this effort, the department has cultivated a culture of mentorship, promoting career advancement within the agency.

Mr. Brady shared that 43% of career recruitments have been internal promotions. Since January 2023, 158 full-time career positions have been filled, with 72 of those positions coming from within the existing workforce. Looking ahead to the 2025-2026 biennium, the department plans to build on this success through various work plan initiatives. These include expanding the volunteer program, CHIP IN, which focuses on park maintenance and safety; growing internship opportunities through Jobs 253 and partnerships with local universities; and launching the Compass Crew pilot program, aimed at expanding recruitment opportunities for candidates facing employment barriers at Metro Parks Tacoma.

Hollie Rogge emphasized the critical role Parks and Recreation staff play in driving the department's ability to serve the community. She noted that supporting employees within the organization leads to enhanced service delivery and highlighted the department's intentional efforts to foster a culture of mentorship that promotes career advancement.

Joe Brady emphasized that safety and security are a top priority, which is well reflected in the Parks and Recreation Department's budget. He outlined the department's three-tiered approach to addressing safety and security. This includes visitor education and engagement through the Park Guides program, which has been so successful that it will expand from four positions to seven, including a dedicated supervisor. The second tier involves voluntary compliance through contracted security services, and the third tier focuses on enforcement through the Tacoma Police Department, with whom the department has developed a strong operational and tactical partnership.

Joe Brady acknowledged that while criminal and illicit activities cannot always be prevented, the department can control its response to emergencies. To this end, the department will roll out a comprehensive Emergency Response System in the first quarter of 2025 for all employees, both full-time and part-time. Developed in partnership with Tacoma Police and Fire Departments, the school district, and South Sound 911, this system includes emergency response training, a full refresh of emergency plans for all programs and facilities, and a tiered response workflow. This initiative is designed to empower staff to manage emergency situations with confidence and clarity, regardless of their role within the organization.

Hollie Rogge shared that as the Parks and Recreation Department moves beyond the pandemic recovery phase, the focus for the 2025-2026 biennium will shift to normalizing and sustaining operations. She stated that this will be achieved through the development of long-range strategies designed to align with industry recreation trends and deliver programs intentionally tailored to community needs.

Hollie Rogge continued by commenting that to guide this year's budget development, each work group created a biennial work plan informed by industry data sources such as the Aspen Institute

State of Play Report, prior-year program data, recreation industry trends, and community feedback. She noted that a significant effort will be directed toward creating and updating the six-year Parks and Recreation Business Strategy, aligning operations with the District's long-range goals. It was further explained that this plan will integrate with the District's broader system and strategic plan, as well as the Capital Improvement Plan overseen by the Planning Department.

Hollie Rogge also emphasized the importance of partnerships with community organizations that deliver programming in District facilities, such as Special Olympics, Pierce County Specialized Recreation, and the City of Tacoma's Senior Programs. Ms. Rogge summarized that these partnerships bring valuable expertise and expand program offerings to meet community needs. The proposed budget includes resources to support and leverage these partnerships, further enhancing the services provided to the community.

Joe Brady emphasized that earned revenue is a critical factor in the Department's ability to provide the programs and services that the community expects. Mr. Brady continued by commenting that this biennium, several revenue streams—including corporate sponsorships, philanthropy, rental fees, program fees, and membership rates—will need to be managed consistently to meet these demands. As part of this effort, the Department is focused on growing its staff's capacity to lead in the business of parks and recreation, a challenge Mr. Brady assured the Department is ready to face head-on.

Mr. Brady pointed out that many program fees have not been adjusted since the Covid outbreak, as external and internal funding sources helped offset costs during the pandemic. With much of this funding now concluded, he noted that it will be necessary this biennium to assess current fee and rate structures to ensure they align with the Department's cost recovery policy. He further stated that the recreation program planning processes, described by Hollie earlier, will likely reveal the need for increased earned revenue through rate and fee adjustments. To address this, Mr. Brady shared that the Department is developing a plan for these adjustments, which will be implemented in the first six months of 2025. Looking ahead, he mentioned that an annual rate increase timeline and process will be established to ensure that earned revenue projections and expenses remain aligned. Additionally, Mr. Brady stated that \$400,000 has been allocated for financial assistance programs to support community members facing financial barriers. If the demand for assistance exceeds expectations, he assured that the Department will remain flexible and make adjustments as necessary.

Hollie Rogge shared that the 2025-2026 workplan includes an expanded youth sports program in partnership with Tacoma Public Schools. This initiative responds to the growing demand for local sports opportunities, aiming to address the healthy lifestyle deficits in youth as highlighted in the Aspen State of Play report. Ms. Rogge commented that to support this expansion, the Department will leverage all available gyms, sports fields, and complexes, facilitating the growth of community leagues.

Ms. Rogge noted that this expansion will create additional scheduling needs for both Metro Parks and Tacoma Public Schools' facilities. To manage these needs, a joint facility scheduling

office will be established, with staff from both agencies working together to coordinate schedules.

Joe Brady emphasized that the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the maintenance of regional, signature, community, and neighborhood parks, as well as open spaces, facilities, and facility grounds. Given the large and diverse nature of the Department's system, preventative maintenance will be a priority in the 2025-2026 budget.

Mr. Brady explained that by scheduling and completing routine preventative maintenance, the Department can reduce unplanned service and program interruptions, allowing community members to plan their routines around these maintenance schedules. As an example, each of the Department's centers will be closed for approximately one week per year to facilitate unhindered access for staff and contractors.

With in the area of Level of Service Joe Brady shared updates on the evolving approach to maintaining parks and facilities in 2024. He explained that staff have redefined maintenance plans by refining area boundaries, establishing a dedicated facility crew, and focusing on leadership development among new team members. Mr. Brady highlighted that managers now have the ability to evaluate maintenance efforts at the park level by allocating specific resources and budgets. While acknowledging that the system is not perfect, he emphasized the department's commitment to continuous improvement. This budget reflects these priorities and includes the addition of five full-time employees (FTEs) to support these efforts.

Mr. Brady noted the significant internal promotions and new hires within the maintenance crews, expressing pride in their achievements. He described the upcoming biennium as a time for the team to "settle in" and normalize operations. Additionally, he reiterated the department's rededication to maintaining and restoring natural areas. The Urban Forestry and Wildfire Protection Plan, scheduled for completion in 2025, will provide clear strategies to safeguard these spaces. Complementing this, the Guides and Volunteer teams will continue to reintroduce community programs in natural areas to ensure long-term sustainability.

Looking ahead, Mr. Brady explained how the department will implement the Board's Climate Action Plan and ADA Transition Plan, ensuring alignment with broader organizational goals. He underscored commitments such as maintaining pesticide-free parks, conducting utility audits, and transitioning to electric tools and vehicles. Examples include replacing aging equipment with electric alternatives, introducing three electric vans to the fleet, and replacing traditional pickups with smaller, more efficient vehicles.

Commissioner Mauer asked for more information about safe routes to parks. Shon Sylvia noted plans and priorities with other agencies along with work with UWT to assist us. Mr. Sylvia followed by noting this could become a JMAC initiative and staff will be coming to the Board to ask for support these areas.

Finally, Joe Brady shared the Board's vision to establish the department as Tacoma's horticultural experts. The transformation of the Wright Park building into a hub for horticulture

programming is underway, with a detailed plan scheduled for refinement by the Nature and Environment Advisory Council in 2025.

Ms. Rogge emphasized the department's goal of creating welcoming, safe, and enjoyable spaces that serve as escapes from the everyday. She explained how activating the parks and facilities helps enhance safety and discourages illicit activities, making these spaces more desirable for community use.

In the proposed 2025–2026 budget, Ms. Rogge highlighted the prioritization of maintaining and enhancing current activations by building upon the success of existing programming. These programs are provided by various teams across the district, including the Park Guides, the Nature Center Outdoor Education team, Outdoor Fitness, Outdoor Adventures, and volunteer programs.

Ms. Rogge described the success of the Park Guides' initiatives, which include guided nature walks, community talks, craft activities, and newer programs such as "Tots on the Trail" and "Babies on the Trail." These activities foster a sense of safety and community through group participation. Additionally, the outdoor education programs operating from the Nature Center provide district-wide activities like "Pier Peer" at the marina, "Tip-Toe through the Tidepools" at Titlow Beach, and camps and preschool programs, which continue to grow due to high community demand. Ms. Rogge also noted significant growth in the Outdoor Adventures and Outdoor Fitness programs, with increased participation in trips, excursions, run series, and fitness classes in 2024. She expressed excitement about further expanding these programs to engage more people in the parks.

The volunteer program was highlighted as another critical aspect of activation. In 2024, Point Defiance Park Watch volunteers alone logged over 3,200 hours, participating in initiatives such as native plantings, beach cleanups, and the Blueberry Park tree expansion. Ms. Rogge extended gratitude to neighbors and community members for their dedication to preserving and maintaining these spaces.

Ms. Rogge concluded by discussing plans for indoor space activations, which will bring diverse programs catering to different cultures and age groups. She noted that annual events and programs are offered through partnerships with community organizations, leveraging their expertise to deliver culturally relevant programming at locations like community centers, the Nature Center, Fort Nisqually, Meadow Park Golf Course, and the WW Seymour Conservatory.

Joe Brady provided an update on key projects within the Regional Attractions portfolio. He began by discussing the plan for a reimagined Meadow Park Golf Course, highlighting its goal to redefine the role of a community golf course. The project aims to create a state-of-the-art municipal facility that prioritizes families and children, leveraging the game of golf as a tool for community transformation. Mr. Brady noted that this initiative introduces an innovative funding model, where revenues from the facility will be used to repay the associated debt, ensuring that the financial burden does not fall on general taxpayers.

Shifting focus to the Point Defiance Marina, Mr. Brady emphasized the strides made toward achieving operational and fiscal sustainability. Looking ahead, he shared plans to refine the marina's business strategy to incorporate new programs and facilities, such as the Breakwater Marina, which will return to MPT management in 2026. He reiterated the marina's mission to serve as the gateway to Puget Sound for the community while aligning future developments with this core purpose.

Hollie Rogge emphasized the importance of accessibility to parks and green spaces, aligning with priorities outlined in the System and Strategic Plan. She highlighted that the fourth "P" – Pathways – plays a crucial role in ensuring the community can fully enjoy these natural areas.

Ms. Rogge discussed ongoing efforts to build strong partnerships with the City of Tacoma to improve pathway connections along the waterfront and advocate for safe routes linking neighborhoods and parks. These efforts include supporting the implementation of expanded pathways to enhance accessibility and connectivity. As part of the proposed 2025–2026 work plan, Ms. Rogge noted the inclusion of trail management initiatives and the development of safe right-of-way routes to schools and parks. Additionally, she emphasized the continued collaboration with partners to support these critical projects.

Referencing earlier comments from Joe Brady, Ms. Rogge reinforced the department's commitment to the development and implementation of the Urban Forestry and Wildfire Management Plan. This plan aims to expand tree canopy coverage by planting and maintaining forests, addressing environmental disparities, and mitigating climate impacts such as urban heat island effects. She concluded by underscoring that these efforts are not only about providing the necessary infrastructure but also about fostering a healthier, safer, and more connected community where residents can access and enjoy their natural spaces.

Commissioner Mauer asked to receive stats and data that P&R presented tonight.

2025-2026 ZOOLOGICAL & ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION BUDGET

Alan Varsik, Sarah Oliver, and Rick Dietz were introduced during the meeting. Alan Varsik provided a detailed overview of the organizational chart and presented key slides, including the Operating Budget Summary and the Revenue Summary. He clarified that no new FTEs are being added for the upcoming biennium and explained the summary tables of revenue and expenses.

Commissioner Mauer inquired about the changes in services and charges between the 2023–2024 and 2025–2026 budgets. Alan Varsik noted that liability and property insurance will now be covered by BAP and highlighted some reclassifications within accounting areas, including debt services and transfers out. Additionally, the summary of revenue and expenses by division was reviewed, and Commissioner Mauer requested data from the previous biennium for comparison.

The discussion provided a comprehensive overview of the financial structure and changes for the upcoming biennium.

Alan Varsik then spoke to the following ZEED Departmental priorities:

- Prioritize relationships with all communities by growing our partnerships, creating meaningful connections, and actively reducing barriers to access.
- Recognize our environmental impact and how we are interdependent with the environment and our communities.
- Engage people in the care and protection of nature by taking a collaborative approach to identifying and addressing the challenges facing Wild Life and their ecosystems, both in expert human care and the wild

Sarah Oliver then commented on Cultural alignment within the area of People. Ms. Oliver outlined key initiatives, including the development of a ZEED Community Collaboration Plan in alignment with MPT efforts. She also emphasized the creation of a departmental plan with clear criteria and metrics to advance accessibility and foster a sense of belonging for both guests and staff. Additionally, Ms. Oliver highlighted the continued growth of the Nature Engagement Fellowship in partnership with the Nisqually Tribe.

Within the area of Program, Rick Dietz emphasized the importance of refining events to strengthen community belonging, foster a deeper connection to wildlife, and enhance marketing efforts. Both PDZA and NWT have successfully facilitated a diverse range of events throughout the year, but there is an opportunity to align these more closely with primary organizational goals.

Rick Dietz discussed the exploration of potential future lodging opportunities, including group scouting and RV options. Commissioner Mauer joined the discussion to provide input and insights.

Rick Dietz then spoke to ZEED Safety and Operational Advancements. Within the area of Place, Mr. Dietz highlighted efforts to advance safety within ZEED practices, operations, and facilities, emphasizing the importance of guest and staff safety. With the introduction of a new Safety Administrator role, he outlined plans to review and refine existing safety protocols to ensure a secure environment.

Mr. Dietz also discussed initiatives to improve operational efficiency, effectiveness, and revenue generation. He noted that key focus areas include operational refinements that enhance guest experience, animal care, and financial sustainability. Specific projects mentioned were the operation of new electric trams, exploration of overnight lodging opportunities, opening a new animal commissary and hay barn, enhancing the perimeter fence, creating a conservation-based maze for guests, updating the PDZA facility plan, and considering dynamic pricing models.

Within the area of Pathways, Alan Varsik spoke of the work in ZEED in Mobilizing Community Connectedness and Conservation.

Alan Varsik highlighted the importance of mobilizing efforts to foster connectedness within the community and the natural world. He introduced the ZEED Care and Protection of Nature Committee, which will oversee the implementation of a strategic Care and Protection Plan. This committee will focus on identifying conservation Signature Initiatives that serve as guideposts for selecting and supporting impactful projects.

Mr. Varsik also emphasized exploring community-initiated conservation opportunities to maximize public engagement. To further enhance transparency and outreach, he proposed the publication of annual Impact Reports that will showcase ZEED's contributions to the care and protection of nature, both locally and globally.

Tania Wink outlined the upcoming steps for the budget presentation. The Board was informed that a mini budget book will be prepared for the Board meeting on 11/25/24, accompanied by a presentation for the first reading. Ms. Wink noted that the current version of the budget book is incomplete, as it is missing ZEED's administrative budget table.

OTHER

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, Commissioner Smith adjourned the meeting at 7:02 p.m.

APPROVED:

President

Clerk

Submitted by:
Jennifer Bowman, Secretary