

Seattle Parks and Recreation Fact Sheet

September 2011



Seattle Parks and Recreation work with all citizens to be good stewards of our environment, and to provide safe and welcoming opportunities to play, learn, contemplate, and build community.

SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION: CONTRIBUTING TO A VIBRANT COMMUNITY

Parks are an essential element of any healthy and vibrant community, providing individual, social, and economic value. Seattle Parks and Recreation is a community-held legacy that encompasses one-ninth of all the land in Seattle, 6,200 acres of park lands and more than 1 million square feet of buildings. These assets, when well cared-for and operating at full capacity, return value in many different ways. Our parks help to clean the air we breathe and the water we drink. They bring us closer to our neighbors, and help break through barriers of language, class, religion and culture. They strengthen neighborhoods and property values and generate tax revenue for city government. They create an overall quality of life that makes Seattle one of the nation's highest rated cities for living and raising a family.

In terms of economic benefit, in 2010 the Seattle Parks and Recreation system provided the city with annual revenue of \$19.2 million, a municipal cost savings of \$12.4 million, a resident savings of \$511.6 million, and a collective increase of resident wealth of \$110.8 million¹. Key factors contributing to the economic value of Seattle's parks include increased property value, increased net income from tourist spending, medical cost savings, "know-your-neighbor" social capital which reduces the city's police, fire, prison, counseling and rehabilitation costs, and cleaner air and water.

THE ECONOMIC CHALLENGE WE FACE

Despite the many benefits to our community and strong public support for new programs and offerings, Seattle Parks and Recreation lacks a consistent and sustainable source of funding to pay for operations, maintenance, rehabilitation and repair of facilities. Further, Parks absorbed a \$10 million budget reduction in 2011 and new revenue sources are severely limited due to caps imposed by voter initiatives and limits imposed by state law.

With this as the backdrop, there is a corresponding desire for new open spaces to make urban neighborhoods more livable, greater demand for recreation and physical fitness opportunities as the nation wrestles with an epidemic of obesity, and public aspirations to replace the Alaskan Way viaduct with a great new waterfront park, and to create bicycle and pedestrian trails as "Bands of Green" through Seattle's neighborhoods. If the City is to meet these demands and aspirations, new funding strategies must be found and/or state-imposed limits on existing fund sources must be lifted.

The combination of increased public demand and reduced funding requires a long-term, sustainable solution that will enable Seattle Parks and Recreation to continue to contribute to the strength and vibrancy of our community.

¹Source: The Trust for Public Land, "The Economic Benefits of Seattle's Park and Recreation System," March 2011.

SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION AT A GLANCE

Seattle Parks and Recreation operates a range of facilities devoted to providing a diverse health, recreation, and education opportunities. These facilities include community centers, teen life centers, environmental learning centers, arts venues, athletic facilities, pools, tennis courts, golf courses, and fishing piers. Recreational programming and special events offered at these venues enrich the lives of all citizens and provide special benefits for at-risk youth, people with disabilities, immigrant and refugee populations, seniors, minorities, and families.

- Based on sign-ups, over 120,000 people participated in Seattle Parks and Recreation programs in 2010. This equates to over \$150 of expenditures on park funding per citizen.
- Parks operates nearly 7,000 programs. Some of the many programs and activities offered include life-long recreation opportunities to for people fifty and better, a job readiness program for teenage youth, and a free supervised drop-in program for elementary and middle school aged children. In 2010, Seattle Parks and Recreation supported nearly 100,000 children in various programs.
- Parks maintains 430 parks, 185 athletic fields, 112 neighborhood play areas, 26 community centers, and eight indoor and two outdoor pools. It also provides 151 outdoor tennis courts, four golf courses, and 11 off leash areas. Along the 24 miles of shoreline, Parks has nine swimming beaches, 18 fishing piers, and many moorages and boat launches.
- Parks operates six performing and visual arts facilities, three environmental learning centers and two museums.
- Parks supports two Asian gardens, patches of old growth forest, a heron rookery, forested hillside greenbelts, boulevards and bike trails, and even salmon streams running through urban neighborhoods.
- Seattle Parks and Recreation employs 17.1 people per 10,000 residents.
- Partnerships with non-City organizations have expanded the Parks' capacity to maintain and reforest the City's natural areas through the Green Seattle Partnership and the Cascade Land Conservancy. The National Audubon Society helped build and now operates the Seward Park Environmental & Audubon Center. The City's community art centers—Pratt, Madrona's Spectrum Dance Theater, Seattle Public Theater at Green Lake and Seward Park Art Annex— are operated exclusively by nonprofits. The Asian Art Museum in Volunteer Park and the Museum of History and Industry are park-owned buildings operated by major nonprofits, and the Washington Park Arboretum is operated through a partnership with the University and the Arboretum Foundation. Non-City partners operating the Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle Aquarium are credited with bringing major expansions of those institutions.

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