



Commission Members:

Chair Michael Mertaugh, Vice Chair Jaime Parker, Amy Segal, Jon Kachmar, Marie Gray, Zack Anchors, Beth Rabbitt, Stephen Bentsen, Michael Catania. Staff Members: Alex Marshall and Samara Ray

City of Portland **Parks Commission Strategic Planning Meeting** **February 15, 2022** **5:00 PM**

I. Welcome to the February Strategic Planning Meeting and Introduction (5:00-5:05)

Michael gave an introduction to the program for this evening. He thinks this is a great opportunity to look deeper at our parks with the new Commissioners and new City Council members. He gave an overview of the agenda.

II. Frederick Law Olmsted Bicentennial - (5:05-5:40)

a. The Olmsted Legacy and Portland's parks - (Kirk Mohnney, Maine Historic Preservation Commission)

Kirk Mohnney, chair of Maine Historical Preservation Commission gave comments on the Olmsted legacy. People have come to appreciate these spaces, he hopes that the parks continue on his legacy.

b. Parks Conservancy and Friends Group proposals (Nan Cumming, Portland Parks Conservancy)

Nan Cumming of the Parks Conservancy spoke to the Commission about their plans at this stage for the Olmsted Bicentennial Celebration. Frank and Sharon Reilly of the Friends of Lincoln Park brought this idea to the Conservancy and now they are working as facilitators. The celebrations do not need to be limited to certain parks. Framework is two collaborative events with a big kick off on April 26th which is his birthday- and a finale in the middle of September with a festival type event. Another idea was that each Friends Group could do events throughout the summer and they would be under this umbrella- people seem interested in celebratory events and some are interested in provocative events that examine history. Nan said it will be exciting to see what direction these ideas go in. The goals are, education, advocacy and fun. Nan can add people who are interested in coming to meetings to hear about the planning process; she encouraged people to email her if they wanted to attend.

c. Parks Commission events – a tree-focused Green Spaces Gathering? Other events?

Michael M. spoke of the Parks Conservancy planning meeting. One person at this meeting said that if there are formal activities that we have activities to engage young people that would typically not attend such an event. A GPS based scavenger hunt in the park may attract younger people? Maybe reach out to Tom Burns about a GPS hunt?

Beth said we want to think carefully and may want to engage the educational communities in schools. This could be an interesting way to engage B and A kids in parks.

Michael C said that a traditional hunt may be good for families but geocaching has become really popular. Jaime said Portland Trails does a City at your feet scavenger hunt every year, encouraging the use of Metro. This event is typically mid July. Alex said there are resources that the City has used before to hold scavenger hunts in the past.

Can they agree on a cooperative approach and the Commission assists the Parks staff? What outreach would be necessary to get those hard to reach involved. Beth said to be mindful of who typically comes and who we would like to have coming to these events.

Where do we start and what connections do we need to make to engage people who do not regularly engage in parks activities. Victoria is going to send Michael M. a list of organizations that represent communities of color Marie mentioned that community policing coordinators could be an asset in connecting populations who may not go to parks regularly. Zach said he thinks the parks are used by a diverse population already.

Avery - a resident of Bayside and founder of Portland Protectors mentioned that we need to recruit for Commission members that are diverse.

III. Green Spaces Gathering, 2022 (5:40-6:00)

a. Proposed focus on tree planting -- rationale, constraints, approach

Michael M stated that trees are a central feature of parks. Trees bring park benefits to urban streets. Portland was “the forest city.” Trees have multiple environmental and sustainability benefits. But trees also have requirements. Staffing is the key constraint (starting with a second forestry crew). Requires long-term operational budget commitment.

b. The importance of trees (Avery Yale Kamila, Portland Protectors)

Avery said thank you for the invite. She came into this work because so many trees are cut down and it is heartbreaking. Avery has been talking to Councilor Dion and he thinks it would be valuable to create a document that calculates the value of Portland tree canopy and each individual tree. Dion thinks this would be influential in creating a budget that supported tree canopy efforts.. He is in favor of these trees and wants to have a discussion based on value. Other councilors are enthusiastic about getting more trees in the City. It is about the budget and people to do the work.

Could we have an Olmsted event that was focused on trees?

Beth brought up the fact there was work that had already been started about the Green Space Gathering and she wondered how this topic was chosen for the Greenspace Gathering and how agenda items are chosen for a given agenda.

The Outreach Committee had been working on a couple of topics earlier for the Green Space Gathering and Beth had asked for guidance on how to bring this to the Commission; the guidelines for Committee meetings did not allow for them to meet and discuss as a Committee easily.

Virtual meetings have changed the game and the requirement that when 3 or more Commission members meet the meeting must be publicized and staffed has always been in place but the virtual meeting part of this makes it a challenge as Parks staff need to run the virtual these meetings.

Michael offered an apology when the proposal for trees came about because was not sure of the outreach committees work in the absence of their suggestions he made the suggestion of trees. He hopes that Committee members can work 1:1 to share information and bring that to the Committee chair and meet during regular scheduled Commission time.

Jon Krachmar said that it is extremely hard to plant trees and keep them alive and the City has been doing great with the resources available. In Boston there is an organization called GreenRoots that is doing some innovative things regarding tree planting and care.

c. Possible activities: speaker(s), promoting Portland's cooperative tree planting program, park scavenger hunt, other proposals

d. Timing and venue (an outside space with potential shelter in case of rain?)

e. Next steps

IV. Other Initiatives (6:00-6:25)

a. Informational signage on Native American legacy and Portland's parks

b. View protection for Portland's parks

c. Revising ordinances for Parks Commission and Land Bank

d. Educational materials and activities on Portland's parks

e. Outreach to develop more diverse participation

f. Committee roles and membership

V. 2022 Calendar (6:25-6:30)

a. Review of proposed calendar

Michael provided a brief overview on the Parks Commission Calendar that was attached to the Agenda Packet.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned.