



**PORTLAND PARKS BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
September 7, 2016  
8:00 – 9:00 am  
Lovejoy Room, City Hall**

**Board members present:** Jeff Anderson, Judy BlueHorse Skelton, Tonya Booker, Kendall Clawson, Kathy Fong Stephens, Patricia Frobes, Jenny Glass, Meryl Redisch, Gladys Ruiz, Ty Schwoeffermann, Paddy Tillett, Sue Van Brocklin

**Board members absent:** Aubré Dickson, Ian Jaquiss, Dion Jordan, Tony Magliano, Jim Owens

**PP&R Staff present:** Mike Abbaté, Maya Agarwal, James Allison, Eileen Argentina, Maximo Behrens, Pooja Bhatt, Jenn Cairo, Jaime English, Margaret Evans, Art Hendricks, Elizabeth Kennedy-Wong, Trang Lam, Soo Pak, Kia Selley, Jeff Shaffer, Hun Taing, Jennifer Yocom

**Call to order, Welcome and Introductions** Judy welcomed the Parks Board, and invited everyone to the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual salmon celebration at Westmoreland Park on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, as part of the Sunday Parkways.

Judy and Mike also invited the full board to attend a disability awareness training that will be led by Parks Board member Ian Jaquiss on September 28th.

Judy noted that the Board had the opportunity to tour Ross Island in June for the annual retreat, and it is great to see what is happening at Ross Island.

Board members and guests went around the table and introduced themselves.

Mike Abbaté introduced new staff members in attendance, Soo Pak, Arts, Culture & Special Events Manager, and Maximo Behrens, Sports & Aquatics Manager. Mike noted that PP&R is in the middle of a big hiring push, including strategic leadership positions. He noted that Megan Dirks is moving to a new job. She will be the innovation project manager working for Deputy Director Trang Lam. Loraine Wilson will start next Monday as Mike's new executive assistant. Mike noted that the bureau is really committed to looking at how we do what we do better. He said that through employee dialogues, we are focusing on innovation and change.

Mike noted that Mary Anne Cassin, our bond program manager, has retired. We have a short and a long version of the bond report to council as handouts near the door, and Mike encouraged everyone to pick up a copy. Mike noted that Kia Selley brought in Lauren McGuire, who has been overseeing our capital improvement projects. She has shifted to take on our bond projects as well. Lauren is a landscape architect, will be terrific in her position, leading the bond team.

Eileen Argentina gave an update on PP&R's Recreation Services Division, noting that our recreation program looks very different than it did a year ago. We moved from a geographic configuration – zone managers who oversaw services in different areas of the city. Eileen said that when Land Stewardship came under James with the recent reorganization, we took the opportunity to reconfigure our recreation

leadership positions. Eileen noted that they created a new program – Arts and Culture, and Special Events – which includes the Multnomah Arts Center, Community Music Center, Laurelhurst Dance Studio and the Interstate Firehouse & Cultural Center, as well as the Summer Free For All program, and programming for Urban Parks like Holladay Park, Director Park and the future Gateway Discovery Park. Soo Pak has been hired to lead that group.

Eileen noted that we also had an unexpected vacancy when Doug Brenner passed away last year. Sports and Aquatics Manager – Maximo Behrens has been hired for that position.

Eileen gave a brief update on Recreation Arbitration, noting that there is a lot going on there. She says she is in a great place to rebuild the management team, and be ready for some great accomplishments in the future.

Soo Pak, Arts, Culture & Special Events Manager, introduced herself, and discussed her non-profit arts background in Boston and New York. In her last role at Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), she was VP of marketing and communications, and managed their film program. Soo noted that she loves managing complexity, and she is very happy to be here.

Maximo Behrens, Sports & Aquatics Manager, introduced himself and discussed his background in aquatics (he started his parks career as a swim instructor and life guard) and sports (tennis, college scholarship). At PP&R, Maximo served as a recreation coordinator at SWCC for 4 years, and worked as the Alliance Coordinator, working with friends & partners groups and the expansion of the Citywide teen program, for 6 years in the Portland Building. He has been the Center Director at Matt Dishman Community Center for the past 4 years.

Mike Abbaté added that Maximo is a humble guy, but has been instrumental in our efforts with Equity, FEST group, and has had many conversations with Mike regarding the needs of bureau. Mike noted that he is grateful to Max for his role in the bureau, and it is great to see him get this well-deserved promotion as well.

#### **Park of the Month**

Judy BlueHorse Skelton gave an update on Park of the Month, Whitaker Ponds, noting that funding was put aside for a new entry to the park. Instead of off Columbia, it will be off 42<sup>nd</sup>. Project Manager Allison Rouse visited the Native Advisory Council to talk about native plants. There is a great outdoor classroom, a lot of us bring students out there. The new entry will make buses for students, access much easier for that site. Whitaker Ponds is one site where you can see blue heron, osprey, king fisher. Judy noted that the site is adjacent to Columbia Slough, and is an example of when industrialized waterways are juxtaposed to wildlife, children and classes. If you are interested, Judy added that she just got the plant list. There are some plants (ponderosa pine, dogwood, Oregon crab apple) that don't usually show up in Portland Parks, and it is exciting to see what parks is doing with adding back native species.

#### **Commissioner's office update**

Judy noted that Pooja Bhatt is not here, so there will be no briefing from the Commissioner's office.

**Approval of the Minutes** The Board reviewed the minutes from the July meeting. Paddy Tillett moved to approve, Kathy Fong Stephens seconded, and the Board approved the minutes.

**Director's Update** Mike's Director Report included updates on issues that have been covered recently in the news. Mike noted that there were two recent tragic drownings at Kelly Point Park. Two weeks ago Sunday, he noted that he and Deputy Director Trang Lam went out to the site. We have had 6 drownings at Kelly Point Park since 2002. This is very troublesome. In 2011, two brothers drowned. We put up warning signs at that time. Recently we had 2 drownings within 21 days. A 21-year-old male, and 2 weeks ago a 10-year-old female. Mike noted that he and Trang went out to site, met with the sheriff and came to the conclusion that it is a very dangerous spot. Sediment from the slough gets deposited at the mouth, the sediment creates a long shallow shelf. This shelf, we believe, is the location where a month ago a 21-year-old drowned. He was probably mid-thigh. The boundary of the shallow area moves, and we believe he took one more step, and it was off an underwater edge. The force of the Willamette river, has holes and pockets, we believe the 10-year-old girl may have stepped sideways, and fell into a hole, and got stuck in the mud. We decided to close the park, until we were able to do some extensive outreach and education, and put up signage.

The young girl was a Karin speaker. Her mother did not speak English. When Trang and I went out there, the place was packed. There were kids hundreds of feet, out in the shallow water. We told moms, you've got to get your kids out of the water, it's not safe, it looks safe because the water is just up to your knees, but it is not safe for wading or swimming.

We are talking about increasing our free swimming lessons. As schools have fewer and fewer resources, things like swimming lessons are not happening. We are looking at ways, in conversations with Portland Public Schools, to increase swimming lessons. We have put up signs in 15 languages. We have put an extensive effort, using media and other methods, to get the word out that it's not safe to go in the water. It's 100 acres, with over a mile of beach. We are going to take a longer term look to see if there are places that we would allow swimming, under certain conditions. There are people who want to donate life jackets. I want to commend James Allison and his staff, who worked to get 36 new signs on site. It is clear, you can not get to beach at Kelly Point Park without encountering one of these signs.

Mike added that he and the commissioner did a press conference last week. He said he is happy to answer questions the Board may have. The Board did not have questions.

Secondly, Mike gave an update on the Springwater Corridor cleanup. Trang and Parks staff have been coordinating with the mayor's office, who is leading this effort for the city. PP&R and Police Bureau have been coordinating since early August. The focus has been along the trail, 14 miles that are within Portland city boundaries, also cleaning up adjacent properties, we manage some properties for Metro and the Bureau of Environmental Services (BES). Mike noted that it's about 4 – 5 phases. September 1<sup>st</sup> was the first day. Over labor day weekend, clean up didn't happen. Started again this week. James Allison's team has been great. Galina Burley and

Vicente Harrison, managing our rangers, have been the leads for working with the mayor's office on security. Teams of 3 rangers each, one with cleanup crew, and the others monitoring. They are on the trail 6 days a week, police bureau has been really helpful. It is going well. It's not a happy situation, but it is as compassionate as possible. There have been phases, when they come to assess, if people are not able to move, they can go, and come back.

Kathy Fong Stephens said that she would really like to get a bureau and commissioner report on the whole regarding people experiencing homelessness, impacts on parks, facilities, natural areas, budget, Galina and the rangers. She added that she can't imagine that this is going to be wrapped up anytime soon. Not just the Springwater, but the whole issue. It's complex, and includes equity and compassion, but also impacts on the parks. She said that she would like to know from our Commissioner and Mayor what kind of feedback they want from this Board. I think it is an appropriate thing for us to weigh in on.

Judy added that the parks rangers are to be commended. They are why this is going well. Their compassion is why this is going so well. If you haven't been on the trail, our rangers are on trails engaging people, and it makes a difference. Judy added that they have expressed interest in more training to support their skill set. What they already bring to it. This will not be over in September, but to recognize that they are the ones to be on the Springwater, wetlands, Johnson Creek, and they are the ones helping people get help, get services. The police have been hands off letting the rangers do this work. Judy added that we need to have more, fully trained park rangers. They would like to see training at the level of complexity at the national level, like National Parks. They are incredible.

Kendall Clawson added that she thinks this is an opportunity for us to have purpose. That's an issue. We keep coming to this meeting every month, and listen. She added that people here want to be engaged. Portland has hundreds of acres of park land. If you have access for enjoyment it is terrific. Parks land as options for housing for people. Kendall added that we need to break systemic addiction to compartmentalization, and have collaboration between bureaus. Put energy into supporting staff do the great job they are doing. She said she would love to take this issue on. Parks board is interested in peoples' lives. Affecting how people are living in our city.

Judy asked about the Parks Board work plan, which is on the October agenda. We may want to make sure the homelessness crisis is on that, and we may want to move that up front and center. Megan e-mailed out the work plan last week for review.

Meryl Redisch said she concurs, and wondered about engaging the public around some of these issues, noting that we have an agenda item with Public Involvement Manager Elizabeth Kennedy Wong. Meryl asked if Mike Abbaté foresees that next year's budget would include a greater ranger force. What do you think in terms of budget? She asked if it would be good to have a robust discussion with incoming Mayor Ted Wheeler, to have his attention before January.

Mike noted that we did get some additional funds, we've had this on the table for

ongoing funding for a number of years, and have not been successful. There will be a change in the mayor, which may change the dynamic. Mike added that he is certain that in the budgetary process, needs for homelessness will come up.

Mike added that in response to Kathy's original comment, maybe the place to begin, engaging the mayor, is to identify what are the key questions that the parks board has. That would help channel that conversation. For the current and incoming mayor, if you could generate some sort of written list of questions. That could potentially get some traction. You can talk about it next month in the work session, but if you want to get something moving sooner, you can send a letter.

Trang Lam noted that we have great support from our Commissioner's office, and mayor's office, asking for additional funds this year. We are asking for a package that allows us to have additional rangers for this fiscal year. Also, looking at the displacement from Springwater, people need a place to go. We are already seeing people moving to other areas. There are not enough resources. We will add an ongoing ask in the budget.

Pooja Bhatt added that obviously there is a shortage of rangers. 12 rangers for all the city, plus the park managed properties. There is a need for additional support east of the river. Some of those rangers have dedicated funds to the west side of the river. Pooja added that the Commissioner is especially supportive of ranger requests.

Judy added that it is incredible to have the capacity to do that work, and it is not what they signed up to do.

Kendall asked, how can we help? I think we can keep talking, but if there are specific insights that we can put in front of the commissioner's office, or mayor's office that might motivate a more collaborative dialogue.

Judy noted that we are running long on the agenda, and we need to move to the next item and reports from committees. She added that there will be a new member orientation at 9:00 am and everyone is invited to join.

**Parks Foundation Update**

Jeff Anderson gave an update for the Parks foundation, noting some of you may have seen Jim Owens email, and he was asked to provide an overview of the Foundation – the Parks Board's sibling organization, which also came out of the 2020 process. Our mission is to mobilize support, healthy accessible park system in the city. Number of parks, that the PPF has been very involved with. In recent years, it has taken on volunteer coordination in collaboration with PP&R on Parke Diem, a large volunteer event.

This year, the board has said it wants to revitalize the fundraising function of the Foundation. It had been more passive, didn't actively go out and seek donors. Over the last 10 months they have adopted a more aggressive budget, revamped website, making it more user friendly, with more information, blogs, articles that are interesting to the whole field of parks nationally. They have brought in new board members, and are focused on diversifying the board. Jules Bailey has joined the board. They recently signed a collaboration with Verde, for the final push with Cully

Park. They have raised ½ million dollars for the footbridge over Burnside. Near the ½ way point for funding for the footbridge.

Jeff added that we are having a 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration on Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup>. He hopes you all received an invitation. This is not a fundraising event, it's a thank you and acknowledgement. Both city side and donor side. We will have some interesting announcements. Good food, drink, company.

**New Approaches  
in Public  
Involvement**

Judy introduce Public Involvement Manager Elizabeth Kennedy Wong and Community Engagement Coordinator Hun Taing.

Elizabeth Kennedy Wong updated the Board on new strategies in Public Involvement. She said that how you build a park matters. When we work with project managers and planners, they within their education could design and build a beautiful park. She noted that she would argue that that park does not reflect the community if they were not involved in the process. When you engage the community in the planning & design process, the identification of the park is transferred to the community. When we deliver a park to the community they own it. Over the past few years, we've had some good examples of how you engage the community. Others, we have engaged, but not as deeply.

Lents was a good example of spending a lot of time with the community, Dawson Park is illustrative of the process that went into time spent with community leaders. Khunamokwst was one of the better examples of creating a park that when it opens, it's their space.

Elizabeth and Board members discussed some of the challenges, when engaging people. It can be hard to get people to show up: childcare, jobs, transportation, language. She said that we all know the big list of barriers. The list includes language and culture, not just the words we use, as well as income, and education. She noted that planners speak a language that not everyone speaks. She said that many board members have participated in advisory committees. Thank you for doing that, and hopefully you will all participate again in the future. Gladys, Judy, and Jenny are participating on current advisory boards. Using some of this information, and knowing the policies and protocols are now 8 years old

Elizabeth introduced Hun Taing, who gave a presentation on recent engagement efforts. Hun discussed removing barriers to participation. The main barriers they identified were income, education, language and culture  
We focus on removing barriers to participation.

Hun discussed current projects, working on with Project Managers Jaime English and Maya Agarwal on Mill and Midland master planning in East Portland. She noted that the surrounding community is predominantly low income, more folks of color, more immigrant and refugee populations. In addition, she added that a lot of the neighbors have access and disability issues that affect access to the park. She said they focused on how to make our meetings accessible, and focus on making them want to come back. Hun talked about partnering with Community Engagement Liaisons (CELs), elders in the community.

The Community Engagement Liaisons (CELs) are identified through an Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) program. She noted that Ronault "Polo" Catalani has really lead this effort. Polo is a legend in terms of his work with community engagement liaisons, elders from the community, training them on the government/bureaucratic system, paying them to be our liaison, not just as language interpreters, but in cultural competency. There are so many nuances to the communities within our city. The refugee situation is not going to end anytime soon. This year, Syrians, next year, who knows. They (CELs) have changed our whole process. They are helping to interpret for our committee members. We have Burmese speaking CEL, Nepali speaking CEL, Viatnemesse speaking CELs, and more. Not just interpreters for language, but also helping our lens on making our meetings more accessible. We are relying less on language. Even if we translate materials, many because they spent so much time in refugee camps, are not literate in their own language. We are focusing on avoiding jargon, acronyms, and being more thoughtful about how we engage the voices in the room.

Hun noted that for one meeting, Som Subedi brought World Cup Soccer. The design consultant did a model of the neighborhood that kids could touch, and identify their homes next to it. We partnered with outgrowing hunger, community garden on that site. What is key about community gardens for refugees, Hun noted, especially elders, is that they don't have a sense of purpose when they arrive. What they do know from their countries, is learning to grow, access to a garden is their livelihood, and saving their lives. They are feeling isolated with a different language, culture, this is their way to feel a sense of purpose in the community.

Another strategy they have used is instead of separating children and having childcare, we engage the children in activities that inform the park design. We feed them real food, not just snacks. As an ice breaker, we asked folks to demonstrate their favorite thing to do at parks, and learned a little bit about each other. For Mill/Midland, we are opening the doors to teens. The youngest member of the advisory committee is 13 years, and part of our Teen Force program.

What we've learned, Hun noted, is that collaboration with our planners, our project managers, talking though with design team, and making our information more accessible, not just for one group at the table, but for everyone, when they show up, they feel like they belong.

Pat Frobese commented that it sounds great, and the pictures are fabulous. She asked about feel the energy, and how do you measure success. How do you measure how it's working?

Hun said that she measures success by who is at the table now, who has not been at the table historically. Establishing that long term relationship in the community. Having people feel more engaged. Retention is a strong measure of success.

Elizabeth talked about an engagement ladder. If someone shows up for one thing, it's a valuable experience. Helping people understand the relationship between this process and the budget process, and warm handoffs for people who participated, getting them engaged in activities at our community centers.

If they participate in this, it may lead to their participation or engagement in a new process – warm handoff to another program in parks.

Art Hendricks noted that connecting people to a park is part of building community. How you measure that can be challenging, but in the past, it has tended to be an exclusive group who designs park for the community. If we are looking at challenges in east Portland, how do we connect people to people, parks are a great opportunity to do that. For folks who have historically not been a part of the process, it can be a powerful statement – I built this.

Meryl Redisch noted that she was a part of the advisory committee for Beech (now Luuwit View Park). Though she missed a couple of meetings, she said she thought it was a really powerful experience. You asked folks, what are your concerns, fears, park safety, access, you kept those comments going, planners and the architects made sure those concerns were addressed in a consistent way throughout that process.

Mike Abbaté noted that Elizabeth and Hun are trying some new approaches. We have to have collaborative design consultants, and they have jumped in and embraced this. You have to have design consultants who are willing to try things differently. Shifting to less words, more ideas, models, other approaches to get meaningful commitment. Creating the space for the community to give their input so the design team can give it physical form.

What we achieved at Khunamokwst is a great example. Neighborhood ownership is key. People are so appreciative of the work, and attention.

Mike invited everyone to stay after the meeting for the Parks Board new member orientation, noting that it is a completely new presentation with an overview of our entire operation.

**Meeting** Judy adjourned the meeting at 9:16 am.  
**Adjourned**