



City of Seattle
Mayor Edward B. Murray

April 17, 2014

Seattle City Councilmembers
City Hall, 600 Fourth Avenue, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Councilmembers:

First of all, thank you for your thoughtful consideration of the Seattle Park District proposal I transmitted to you in March. Through your leadership in creating the Parks Legacy Committee last May, you provided all of us and the people of Seattle a healthy dialogue around the future of our parks and recreation system. As you approach a final decision on the proposal we will send together to voters this summer, I wanted to take a moment to reinforce my vision and goals for creating the Seattle Park District.

With its many, many athletic fields, tennis courts, playgrounds and playfields, community centers, miles of shoreline and pedestrian and biking trails, I think we can all agree that Seattle's park system is a tremendous resource for the people of this great city. Our parks are where we go to meet friends, play with our children, exercise, relax, play ball, or take a relaxing walk. And now is the time to take care of them. These widely treasured activities deserve a robust funding plan for the preservation of our parks that adheres to four simple principles:

1. ***A dedicated, sustainable funding source.*** The fact is, Seattle does not have sufficient dedicated funding available to address our parks maintenance needs and our other priorities as a city. Prior levies, with their focus on new acquisitions, have left a maintenance backlog of \$267 million across 300 different existing projects. We must address this backlog. That's why I've proposed a Seattle parks district similar to what Pullman, Tacoma and a dozen or so other cities across Washington use successfully to ensure that their parks do not fall into neglect.

I have heard concerns that a parks district would be unaccountable to the public, would not be transparent, or would siphon funds from the general fund. These are unfortunate myths: My proposal provides for citizen oversight and public accountability, requires a six-year spending plan and explicitly prohibits replacement of parks general fund dollars with park district funds. The City Council is elected by the people of Seattle to be responsible stewards of a \$4.2 billion annual budget. I am confident that the Council should be entrusted with fiduciary responsibilities as the governing board for the Park District. Furthermore, I trust the people of Seattle to hold all of us as elected officials accountable for spending public funds wisely.

A robust, dedicated, sustainable, funding source for our parks is our best opportunity to take the park legacy that has been entrusted to us and pass it on to future generations to enjoy as we do today.

2. **Fix it first.** The expansion of the Seattle parks system has been a remarkable accomplishment, but it has run ahead of our ability to maintain it. And unless we can maintain our existing parks, our open spaces and community centers will become unsafe, unkempt or obsolete. That's why over half of my proposal – 53 percent – invests in major maintenance, restoration or rehabilitation of existing facilities, which was represented in only 25 percent of the 2008 parks and green space levy, and was only 13 percent in the 2000 pro parks levy. Now is the time to focus on repairing, maintaining, and preserving the civic treasures that we have.
3. **Provide for existing demand for parks programming and services.** People in Seattle love and use our parks. But we've significantly reduced hours at our community centers – leaving seniors, families and young people facing closed doors instead of the safe, welcoming centers we would like to provide. Programs for people with disabilities and for seniors have waiting lists of people in need we cannot serve.

Nearly 20 percent of my proposal is dedicated to basic maintenance, operations and programs for children, people with disabilities and seniors – investments that were not included at all in the 2008 levy. We need to make sure that our parks and community centers are able to meet the demand for the great recreational programming they provide to their communities, including underserved populations – which my proposal does.

4. **Anticipate future demand.** My proposal focuses on the preservation of our parks and fixing what we have, but the reality is, we cannot ignore the need for inevitable growth and expansion. We purchased 14 sites for parks in the 2008 levy, but we have never developed those parks; my proposal provides funding to finally do so. Also, I am very interested in innovative and new models for future parks activation and partnership in the urban core. My proposal recognizes these opportunities and 25 percent of my overall package provides funding that can act as seed dollars to engage potential partners and to make investments that anticipate future demand for our parks system.

In addition, I made it a priority to dedicate funding for Community Center Rehabilitation and Development. The centers are often referred to as our “community living rooms.” We still have many community centers in need of major renovation. By creating this fund, we also preserve the flexibility to examine and potentially build new centers in neighborhoods where we experience growth.

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We can preserve the jewel that is our City's parks system today – and we can provide robust, dedicated and sustainable funding to maintain this jewel over the long term. I am very much looking forward to the proposal you send to me in the coming days.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward B. Murray". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mayor Edward B. Murray
City of Seattle