

METRO REGIONAL PARKS AND GREENSPACES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

April 1, 2003

Meeting Notes Summary

Chair Chris Noble called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Other committee members in attendance included Rebecca Banyas, Jay Hamlin, Jeff Kee, David Manhart, Sylvia Milne, Richard Reynolds and Aleta Woodruff. Also in attendance were Metro Council President David Bragdon and the following Metro Parks staff: Jim Desmond, Jennifer Budhabhatti, Dan Kromer, Jeff Tucker, and Pat Sullivan. In addition, Jack Peasley of Oregon Equestrian Trails was present.

Introductory comments and announcements

Aleta Woodruff read a poem she wrote called "The Columbia at Wahkeena" which was published in Columbia River United's newsletter. It celebrates the waterfall by that name in the Columbia River Gorge.

Jim Desmond reminded the committee of the Olmstead Conference being held at Portland State University on April 28 and 29.

A Conversation with David Bragdon

David Bragdon, recently elected Metro Council President, was invited to meet with the RPGAC to discuss Metro's priorities relative to parks and greenspaces and the challenges Metro faces in carrying out its goals. He began with remarks on Metro and its parks partners being at a turning point to become one of the best urban park systems in the country, building on what has been acquired through the bond measure. This is an area where the committee will be called upon to provide help in developing a vision for that system. In the next couple of years particularly, a strong political effort as well as a strong outreach effort will be necessary in defining Metro's role with local governments and non-profit groups, relative to parks and greenspaces.

With financial resources particularly limited, Bragdon's proposed budget to Council on Thursday will address putting Metro's "house in order" and building public confidence by handling existing resources in the best possible manner.

He referred to five objectives he requested staff work to achieve:

- To function within the existing resources rather than continuing to spend down the fund balance

He contended the latter creates a crisis mentality, which will not build public confidence in the program. The public will be supportive because Metro Parks has a successful program and is working within its existing resources.

- To regionalize the Parks Dept.'s visible programs

This will entail defining what a regional program is. In Bragdon's view, past budgets allotted a disproportionate amount of resources to the former Multnomah County Parks. He does not want to weaken those facilities, but he believes it is vital to get more of Metro's resources out to the other thousands of acres acquired throughout the region, so they are recognized as part of the regional system.

Operating changes will be created at Oxbow and Blue Lake parks that may not be optimal, but there are less than optimal resources to deal with, according to Bragdon, in referring to the consolidation of the two Regional Park Supervisor positions into one. He emphasized that he has confidence in parks staff at both locations to continue their good work.

- To attempt to hold harmless all those activities that build regional constituency, particularly outreach and environmental education

It is important to maintain those programs and to keep service levels as high as possible.

- To do a better job cultivating relationships external to Metro

A quality parks regional system would not be bounded only by what Metro owns. It is important to have the best possible relationships with all the local parks providers so that, regardless of which jurisdiction owns or manages a particular park, wildlife area or trail, the best possible experience can be accessible to the public.

- To study other successful programs throughout the country.

A group of local park providers (including some representatives from Metro) will travel to Minneapolis/St. Paul in May to learn about its system of regional funding and its facilities and programs.

Discussion/questions that followed included the following:

Bragdon:

- Preferences for tackling first - getting more open space/greenspace sites up and running, with signage, trails and parking areas to provide more awareness of what this agency has accomplished.
- 2004 may be as good a time as any to go to the voters with a revenue-raising measure; economic conditions will not improve quickly

Desmond:

- Parks staff received a mandate to propose a balanced budget and worked from there.

PAC:

- Reducing staff was not in keeping with Committee recommendations.
- Objected to PAC not being able to weigh this level of budget cut (staff reductions)
- How much weight will this Committee have in the future?
- Structure and purpose of RPGAC needs to be re-examined and evaluated.
- One of the biggest hurdles in educating the public about Metro is the difference between the UGB boundary and the Metro boundary.
- The Committee has the experience and desire to be involved in and could be of value as part of processes such as the work done by the Green Ribbon Committee.
- The manner of the announcement of changes in Metro department heads did nothing to build trust and improve relationships (both internally and externally) which was mentioned earlier as a major objective. The lack of expression of appreciation for the contributions of Charlie Ciecko, in particular, was a significant omission.

Additional update: David Manhart expressed his intention to continue his participation on the RPGAC in a second term.