

Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee (ABGC) Minutes

Web site: <http://depts.washington.edu.wpa/abgc/>

The Arboretum and Botanical Garden Committee is a Joint effort of the Arboretum Foundation, Seattle Parks Department, and the University of Washington, and designated by Seattle City Council Ordinance 65130, approved December 27, 1934, and Ordinance 116337, approved September 8, 1992.

The ABGC is closely monitoring the WSDOT SR520 project for impacts to the Washington Park Arboretum. Please see <http://depts.washington.edu/wpa/520.htm>

Meeting Location: Graham Visitors Center, April 13, 2011

Voting Members

Present:

Arboretum Foundation

- Della Balick, Arboretum Foundation Board President
- Paige Miller, Arboretum Foundation Executive Director

City of Seattle

- Jack Collins, Mayoral Appointee
- Donald Harris, Seattle Parks Property Manager
- Kjris Lund, Mayoral Appointee

University of Washington

- Fred Hoyt, University of Washington Botanic Gardens (UWBG) Associate Director
- Iain Robertson, University of Washington Associate Professor, Department of Landscape Architecture

Washington State

- Dave Towne, Washington State Governor's Appointee

Absent:

- Theresa Doherty, University of Washington, Assistant Vice President for Regional Affairs

Other Staff Present:

- Sarah Reichard, UWBG Director
- Michael Shiosaki, Seattle Parks, Planning & Development Deputy Director

ABGC Staff: Sandy Brooks, Coordinator

Standing Committees

Building Committee:

Paige (AF); Donald (City); TBD (UW)

Partners Committee:

AF: Paige Miller & Della Balick

City: Donald Harris & Christopher Williams

UW: Tom Hinckley & Sarah Reichard

Master Plan Implementation Group (MPIG):

Michael (lead), Rick Nishi, Fred, Paige, Sarah, & Tom

SR520 Technical Committee:

David Graves (City); Theresa Doherty & Fred Hoyt (UW)

This meeting was held at the Graham Visitors Center. Theresa Doherty, Chair, was out of town. Jack Collins, Vice-chair, called the meeting to order at 8:30 am. The April 13 agenda, two sets of retreat minutes, and the March 9 minutes were approved. Introductions were made around the room.

Seattle Parks Foundation Presentation

Thatcher Bailey, Executive Director of the Seattle Parks Foundation (SPF), briefed the ABGC on the park funding study sponsored by Seattle Parks Foundation and seven partner organizations. He has been Executive Director of SPF for six months and is studying how dollars come into the park system, especially park levies that provide no future maintenance and operations (M&O) funding. The study found inadequate M&O funding at park systems across the country. [For more on the study, see http://www.seattleparksfoundation.org/Sustaining_Parks.html.] The study found that Seattle Parks Department must increase both its volunteer base and philanthropic donations. The eight partners are looking at what park systems are doing across the country to determine the most effective funding models.

He noted that, according to the Trust for Public Lands, parks bring both soft and hard dollars to a city, including health benefits. Seattle's park system brings approximately \$500-600 million in benefits to the city. City leaders who make budget decisions must consider not only what a park system costs to maintain, but also what benefits it brings.

Seattle Parks Department is now in M&O funding crisis, with a \$200 million backlog for its existing parks. This is a problem owned by the entire community. The Parks and Green Spaces Levy – approved by Seattle voters in 2008 – included no funding for maintenance and operations. A number of new parks have been completed from the Levy funds and are now open, with more scheduled for future development. Another example is the new waterfront park which will be built as the Viaduct is replaced, and Parks will be responsible for its maintenance and operations. This is happening as the Department's budget is being cut and its staff reduced.

Survey: As part of the study, an initial survey was available to the public on SPF's web page, with 1,500 people responding. Those who took the survey responded they use parks primarily most for passive recreation use. Off-leash areas, athletic fields, community centers, and wading pools were least used. 96% of respondents agree it is urgent for the City of Seattle to adequately fund M&O.

Next steps: Determine which recommendations from the eight partners will have "pushback" and why. The partners have met with Mayor McGinn, professional polling will begin in July, and stakeholder meetings are being held throughout the city, including community meetings and roundtables. The Board of Park Commissioners has voiced interest in holding public events. The stakeholder meetings will continue through much of the year, with the partners making recommendations at year end.

ABGC Discussion

Della has attended several of the partner's meetings and finds them significant and very interesting. The partners look at the big picture together and determine what is now being done. They have created a coalition and meet with schools, King County, and others. Thatcher stated the eight partners want to bring more groups, such as the sports field committee, into the partnership.

Responding to a question from Jack on the Mayor and City Council's response, Thatcher answered the partners have met with several City Councilmembers. They appreciate that the partners are handling the funding study; however, their current focus is on the Parks Department's community centers. The Mayor doesn't want to focus on public funding for parks, but he does want to be involved in the next round of public polling. He has assigned high-level staff to work with the partners, either Ethan Raup, Director of Policy and Operations, or Beth Goldberg, City Budget Director.

Suggestions from ABGC members

- Choose a highly effective leader. Forward Thrust was very successful and had a strong coalition and strong leader.

- Ensure that the effort has a grass roots approach. “The Commons” effort failed partially from the public’s perception that it was an “elitist” proposal.
- Consider pairing a wanted amenity with what is already essential, e.g., a successful partnering with another community need.
- Partner with low-income, disabled, health and social justice agencies.
- Promote sustainability and not ornamental gardens and focus on keeping maintenance needs down.
- Partner with P-Patches.
- Use Cascade Land Conservancy as an effective model.
- Develop a strong long-term vision.

Donald and ABGC members applauded SPF and its partners for taking on this role and invited Thatcher to present an update report at the January 2012 meeting.

Arboretum Road Closure

Following a request from Paige to the Parks Superintendent, the Park Board has scheduled a briefing at its April 28 meeting on the Arboretum Drive road closure. The road was closed for construction in 2007 and in 2008 was permanently closed at the south end, with a soft closure at the north end. Most of the time, this has been a positive change for the Arboretum, as it resulted in few vehicles using the road. The Arboretum Foundation staff are pleased with the permanent closure at the south end of Arboretum Drive. However, when a large number of people visit the Arboretum, the public needs access to the 70-80 parking spaces that were lost when Arboretum Drive was closed. Another issue is that many people with mobility issues do not understand the signage and don’t realize they are authorized to drive to Pacific Connections or other destinations on Arboretum Drive. Instead, may turn around and drive away from the area.

Michael asked that MPIG work on this issue and bring a recommendation to the June 8 ABGC meeting. This approach was agreed to and the Park Board briefing will be postponed.

Memorandum of Understanding

All nine ABGC members have signed the Mitigation MOU with WSDOT. However, Mayor McGinn has directed Parks Superintendent Christopher Williams and Seattle Department of Transportation Director Peter Hahn not to sign, as he is concerned about transportation elements in the MOU. Donald suggested the MOU be sent to WSDOT with the missing signatures. He believes the ABGC should not get in the middle of any disagreement between WSDOT and the Mayor, and should keep moving ahead with its work for the Arboretum’s Master Plan projects. Parks staff could begin project scoping using \$200-500,000 in Levy Funds to help move projects forward. If the MOU is signed, he believes the Levy Fund will be reimbursed from mitigation funds. Christopher and Peter’s signatures will be required before project implementation. A downside is that this holds up the traffic calming and management measures, as SDOT cannot move forward on this without Peter’s signature.

Following discussion, it was agreed that Jack would talk with community member Fran Conley to try to help move the MOU forward.

Master Plan Implementation Group (MPIG)

Michael reported that MPIG met last Monday:

- Andy Sheffer is developing a donor recognition strategy for the Gateway to Chile, to standardize where and how donor recognition can be made.
- The New Zealand Plant Propagation continues to progress, but at a slower pace than the ABGC had hoped for. Staff will have to adjust the timing of the plantings. Paige and Fred visited Cistus Nursery in December and found the grower to be behind in both the size and number of expected plants.

- Parks staff will be the lead for scoping the new multi-use trail, and is holding interviews this week for contractors for schematic design and cost estimating. Funds aren't yet secured for the construction. Staff must also engage the public on this project, especially on impacts to Foster Island and Lake Washington Boulevard.
- The State will be the lead on Arboretum Creek scoping. Parks will work with a Seattle Public Utilities consultant on the creek project.
- A public meeting is scheduled for early June to review progress on the Master Plan and to discuss future tree removals at the Arboretum.
- Crews are working to extend the path at Azalea Way. Fred will contact Lisa Chinn for a cost estimate and then discuss with MPIG. He will also make sure the crews review any projects with MPIG.

Partners Committee Meeting

The Partners Committee met on March 17 and discussed budget issues and other matters regarding the Arboretum. Seattle Parks Real Property Manager Nathan Torgelson reported on the Japanese Tea House. For years, Urasenke was the sole source for managing the Tea House. Parks did an RFP for new management; however, no responses were received. Nathan is now working with a different group to hold teas. Donald is also working with the Japanese Garden Advisory Council regarding the tea house. Jack is pleased that the leaders of the three partners are meeting regularly, with a focus on the Arboretum.

Minka House

Paige reported on the donation of an historic Minka House from Seattle's sister city of Kobe, Japan. However, with the recent earthquake, this may be put on hold for a year or more.

Budget Update

City: Donald reported that, due to savings the Department has made, it most likely won't be affected by the mid-year cuts.

Arboretum Foundation: Paige reported the Foundation is working to develop its 2012 budget. It has received the UW's funding requests, which are based on the UWBG not receiving additional budget cuts.

UW: Sarah reported the UW's horticulture staff have developed a great idea for UW marketing students to focus their marketing ideas on the Arboretum. A second good idea that should be completed by year end is the GPS project for the Arboretum. This application will map all plantings in the Arboretum and be a helpful tool for both the staff and public. Tom Hinckley is paying for the research assistant who is developing the "app."

Old/New Business

State Lobbying Results: Kjris reported the State Senate has included two budget line items for the Arboretum of \$143,000 for 2012 and \$144,000 for 2013. The budget next goes to the State House for approval. Kjris hopes the UW respects this designation and does not take the money for other purposes. Sarah responded that this line item designation is a positive development and gives a message to upper UW administration that the Arboretum is important to the State.

Some ABGC members will continue to lobby State senators in support of the Arboretum and UW Botanical Gardens. Donald noted that Governor Gregoire's budget did not include any funding for the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WWRP). Good news is that the Legislature restored \$50 million to its budget. [For more information on <http://www.rco.wa.gov/grants/wwrp.shtml>.]

Parks Superintendent Honored: Parks Superintendent Christopher Williams was recently awarded the King County Municipal League's Public Employee of the Year award. Parks staff were extremely pleased with this announcement, as were ABGC members.

Earth Day: Fred reported that 200-300 volunteers from Qwest and the Student Conservation Corp will work at the Arboretum on Earth Day. Superintendent Williams, Dean Graumlich, and Mayor McGinn will speak at the Crabapple Meadow at 10:00 am.

Meeting with Tribes: In December, Fred and Tom Hinckley met with the tribes affected by the SR 520 project. They are working to schedule a second meeting.

There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

APPROVED _____ DATE _____
Theresa Doherty, ABGC Chair