

Central Waterfront Oversight Committee

Pier 62 License Agreement

Annual Report for First Year of Operations

September 2020 - September 2021



CENTRAL WATERFRONT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The Central Waterfront Oversight Committee (CWOC) was established in 2019 by [City Council Ordinance 125761](#) [PDF]. The committee's role is to advise and provide feedback to the City and Friends of Waterfront Seattle on the ongoing operations and maintenance of the Waterfront Park and Public Spaces, beginning in 2020 with the Pier 62 Pilot O&M License Agreement between Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) and Friends of Waterfront Seattle (Friends). The committee's oversight work includes maintenance, public safety, outreach, communications, partnerships, and programming and activation.

Committee co-chairs

Gerry Johnson, At-Large

Maiko Winkler-Chin, At-Large

Committee Members

Donny Stevenson, At-Large (Environmental)

Katie Garrow, At-Large (Labor)

Ashraf Hasham, At-Large

Eric R. Howard, At-Large

Michelle Rusk, LID Residential Tenant

Jim Rowe, LID Commercial Tenant

Craig Schafer, LID Hotel Property Owner

Emily Hooper-George, LID Condominium Owner

Edward M. Leigh, LID Residential Apartment Property Owner

Lindsay Pasternak Wolpa, LID Office Property Owner

Shawn Jackson, LID property on or within one block of Pike/Pine Street owner

Brett Phillips, LID Commercial/Retail Property Owner

Mary Bacarella, Pike Place Market Public Development Authority (Permanent)

Robert W. Davidson, Seattle Aquarium Society (Permanent)

Jon Scholes, Downtown Seattle Association/Metropolitan Improvement District (Permanent)

Bob C. Donegan, Seattle Historic Waterfront Association (Permanent)

Lisa Dixon Howard, Alliance for Pioneer Square (Permanent)

Ex-Officio Members

Marshall Foster, Director, Office of the Waterfront and Civic Projects

Jesús Aguirre, Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Christopher Williams, Deputy-Superintendent, Seattle Parks and Recreation

Sam Zimbabwe, Director, Seattle Department of Transportation

Staff

Tiffani Melake, Operations and Management Advisor, Office of the Waterfront and Civic Projects

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The [Waterfront Seattle](#) Program is a series of large-scale capital projects that will remake Seattle's central waterfront. Key elements of the Program include the reconstruction of the Seawall, the Alaskan Way corridor, and the creation of more than 20 acres of new and rebuilt waterfront parks and public spaces.

The Mayor and City Council endorsed an overall design vision and strategic plan for funding / implementing the Program in August 2012 based on widespread community and stakeholder engagement. This vision and strategic plan were developed in partnership with the Central Waterfront Committee, a group of civic and community leaders which was established in 2009 by the Mayor and Council to guide the project, and which continue to function as a smaller Central Waterfront Oversight Committee (CWOC), established by Mayor and Council appointment in 2019, and staffed by Office of the Waterfront and Civic Projects.

The rebuilt Seattle Waterfront will provide a high-quality, urban park to serve the city and region, with a focus on arts, culture, and recreation programming to serve Seattleites of all stripes as well as visitors.

With the considerable public and private investment in the waterfront, as well as the foreseeable high park use, the committee's work is based on the goal that our waterfront will serve as a model for a higher standard of maintenance, and a dedicated maintenance team, to help ensure a great experience for everyone using Seattle's waterfront. The City committed to this higher standard through several pieces of legislation, including the formation of the City's Waterfront Local Improvement District.

The City and Friends of Waterfront Seattle (Friends) have a two-year license agreement for the operations of Pier 62, which was intended to serve as pilot to assess the viability of a partnership approach to park operations on the waterfront, and to serve as a basis for the long-term management agreement for the entirety of the new waterfront. In this agreement Friends is responsible for special events, programming, and activation; Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) is responsible for daily and preventative maintenance. The City and Friends have a shared responsibility for public safety.

The CWOC had two main charges this year, the first was to develop a performance standard for the overall 20-acre park operation. This work is well underway, and the committee had several highly engaging meetings, including guest speakers from national peer parks to learn about their best practices and lessons they learned in park management. The second charge was to review SPR and Friends performance under the license agreement and provide guidance and recommendations. SPR and Friends submitted annual reports outlining their performance for the CWOC to review.

This document summarizes the first year of joint operations of Pier 62. It aims to assess candidly what worked from the partnership and what did not, and to make recommendations where changes in the operating model would potentially result in a better outcome in terms of the quality of park maintenance and programming. This assessment gives us the opportunity to evaluate if the operations model is fulfilling the commitment to operate the waterfront as a high-quality park and the ability to do so once the entirety of the park opens in 2024.

FRIENDS OF WATERFRONT SEATTLE

Friends grew tremendously in 2020-2021 to build up their program, event, and operations teams. Due to the onset of COVID-19 at the same time Pier 62 opened to the public, Friends had to be extremely flexible and adaptive in programming and activation. Friends hosted numerous successful programs and events during the summer of 2021, which elevated the park's visibility in the community and demonstrated an ability to attract diverse audiences for events. They also experimented successfully in providing several creative outlets for culture and arts to be highlighted virtually and provided invaluable support to Seattle's arts and cultural community in a challenging time.

As part of the public safety strategy, Friends has contracted with a non-profit service provider to provide outreach and referrals to services and housing and respond to situations in real time. This is a valuable service on the waterfront. We have learned that across various partner organizations, services are not provided on the weekend and Friends has started a pilot program to help fill this void.

Friends has contracted with a security service provider to provide a 24/7 safety team onsite. They monitor Pier 62, help monitor park use and park violations, and report incidents that are requiring urgent attention to the City. They are not able to enforce park rules but call SPR Park Rangers and SPD patrols as needed. There were 99 incidents recorded that required SPD calls overall throughout the first year. Data showed that the park rule violations with the most violations was graffiti, with high spikes during the winter months.

Friends established a regular operations meeting with waterfront stakeholders and businesses, where day-to-day issues around public safety and programming were discussed and where each group's efforts could be better aligned. This operations meeting was valuable and should be continued.

This last year of operations also presented some challenges for Friends. There were several areas where they were not able to deliver on commitments made to partners or the City as part of the license agreement.

A vending program was important in providing an opportunity and process for vendors to obtain permits to legally sell merchandise in front of Pier 58 and on Pier 62. A coordinated strategy was put into place between partners and the City for Friends to provide this process to the public and activate in front of Pier 58 to help deter illegal vending. Friends was not able to deliver on this program and there were several vending issues, especially throughout the summer.

Through legislation, Friends was charged with gathering community input on programming and activation from Seattlelites through the creation of a Community Connections Committee and Park Programming Panel. Friends has charters developed but has not implemented either. Regular recreation programming and amenities were on the lighter side, with most of Friends focus on cultural and arts programs and events.

Friends is continuing to grow as an organization and developing a new staffing model to support the larger scale events and programming.

SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION

The Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) was approved by Seattle voters in 2014. Within the MPD \$3.5M in funding (plus 2.5% inflation annually) was dedicated for waterfront maintenance in perpetuity. This translates into an annual maintenance budget of \$4.3M when the new public spaces are fully open in 2024.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an increased use of public spaces and parks. SPR went through numerous challenges that required them to be nimble and continue to provide services to the public, while constantly adapting to new public health guidance. The reopening of Pier 62 required SPR to add an additional asset to its responsibilities, while facing resource and staff shortages throughout the Department.

As part of the commitment to a high-quality park, the City developed a detailed ongoing maintenance plan, schedule and staffing model based on best practices in other parks around the U.S. and the specifics of the waterfront park design, including anticipated programming and events and historical high and low seasons, with a dedicated on-site maintenance staff. This plan was critical for successful operations on the waterfront and SPR chose not to implement this fully in this initial agreement, given that Pier 62 was just one facility and utilizes their downtown crew to provide daily and routine maintenance on Pier 62. Without a dedicated team, waterfront needs were triaged based on other city park needs and priorities and were not adequately addressed in a consistent or timely way.

There were unanticipated maintenance needs that arose and SPR worked on finding solutions to provide maintenance to address and mitigate issues. Some examples include algae removal on the floating dock and graffiti removal on the handrails, as that was the highest park violation throughout the year.

Friends played host to several large events throughout the summer that required close coordination between SPR and Friends to provide support with various event production resources. SPR was able to work with their crews to coordinate assistance.

The waterfront assets are integrated into the SPR's main Asset Management Work Order system. Visibility into the system is limited to SPR staff and services the entire city. A system that is dedicated to the waterfront operations is more ideal for the long-term management of the assets.

SPR is currently developing a hiring strategy for its dedicated team so it can meet the higher maintenance standards that the City has committed to as the rest of the park opens.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety is critical to the success of waterfront park operations. Through our discussions with peer parks, we had the opportunity to learn how they implement their public safety strategies. We saw a great deal of success with the parks that had various layers of dedicated enforcement, from park ambassadors informing park users of rules, to public safety engagement teams and emergency response units.

Friends and the City provided the following resources to help provide a safe and welcoming experience to all.

- Friends has a contracted safety team onsite 24/7
- Friends has a contracted service provider to make contact and provide resources to individuals experiencing crisis, distress, or homelessness
- SPR has park rangers that can enforce park rules violations (citywide resource)
- Seattle Police Department has/had a bike patrol team (downtown core resource)

The 24/7 safety team presence on the pier had an overall positive impact on Pier 62, with majority of the park rules violations being nuisance issues - primarily graffiti on the wood railings. That said, there were some public safety challenges with threatening and/or aggressive behavior directed towards the safety team in the later nighttime hours, and the team was poorly equipped to respond to those challenges and remain safe. Friends is working on various strategies to help protect the safety team as well as protect the park assets at Pier 62.

Ultimately, Friend's safety team was able to issue warnings and discourage behavior that violated park rules but did not have the ability to truly enforce park rules. This lack of an ability to truly enforce park rules significantly impacted their ability to ensure safety at all times for the public visiting the pier. While a visual presence onsite does have impact, there were situations that occurred that required further enforcement from SPR park rangers or SPD, depending on the severity of the situation. SPR park rangers have limited capacity to respond as they cover the entire city. The waterfront SPD bike patrol was able to have a timelier response, but the bike patrol no longer exists, as it has been assigned into squad cars, which has impacted their response times.

We expect that the waterfront will have a consistent and continuous public safety strategy that is always implemented. The current operation leaves gaps in enforcement of rules and response times when additional city support is required and needs additional resources and support.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the first year of joint operations at Pier 62 between Friends and SPR was successful, especially considering the significant challenges faced with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pier provided a safe and inclusive space for visitors to enjoy the park. We saw more than 200,000 in person visitors on the Pier during the first year, with over 63,000 participants in programming and activations over the summer, with high attendance at special events.

That said, there were weaknesses in some key areas which we believe merit modifications to the operating model as we look ahead to opening and operating 20 acres of public space. The current model at Pier 62 is just over 1 acre. There was a disconnect between the City and Friends in communications and follow through that needs to be streamlined, ideally under one city department.

We are recommending the following strategies are implemented in 2022 and 2023, in anticipation of the full park opening in 2024.

Hire a dedicated waterfront team, with the right culture to be successful

From its inception, the vision for the waterfront operations has been anchored on having a dedicated waterfront team that would address maintenance, public safety and programming together, build its own unique culture focused on excellence in helping Seattle’s diverse public enjoy the waterfront, supporting partnerships with non-profits in the area such as the Seattle Aquarium and Pike Place Market, and building positive relationships with volunteers and others. That dedicated team has not been created. First and foremost, the City needs to commit to build that dedicated team, including a management structure to oversee it, beginning in early 2022 as new elements of the park prepare to be opened. That dedicated team needs several years to be built up, and adequate funding has already been dedicated for this purpose in the Seattle Metropolitan Parks District. This is essential to meet the City’s commitments to the level of maintenance, and ultimately to help ensure park users from all walks of life experience a safe, inviting, and beautiful waterfront from the beginning.

As part of this, we strongly recommend the City consider re-assigning responsibility for waterfront operations to Seattle Center (SC). We studied Seattle Center’s operations model in detail as part of our work this year. What we found that that they have built a uniquely effective culture that address operations holistically – addressing maintenance (both landscape and hardscape), programming, and public safety in an integrated way, grounded in a deep commitment to inclusive programming and in partnership with many resident organizations. Looking at the long term, SC is well-positioned to take responsibility for managing the waterfront public spaces successfully. As important, this shift would free up the SPR to tackle critical work in supporting its core mission of providing parks to serve every Seattle neighborhood. This would require taking action to ensure that funding from the MPD originally identified for the waterfront remains dedicated to it, and available to SC.

Procure and implement a waterfront asset management system

The waterfront parks and public spaces have many complex landscapes, finishes and lighting – all in a high-use, saltwater environment. These assets need a proactive approach to inspection, routine maintenance, and capital replacement to help ensure they remain in good repair far beyond opening day. To do so, the waterfront needs an asset management system that is designed and dedicated

specifically around the waterfront and can streamline work. Several peer parks discussed software systems they utilize that are tailored to park management that could be effective for the waterfront. Such software could engage with the City's Find it, Fix it applications, and provide a way for the waterfront team to respond timely to maintenance needs reported from the public. The ability to easily access reports in relation to funding, asset management and accountability for the executive, council and CWOC is critical. We recommend the City research parks asset management systems to determine if there is a viable system to manage the maintenance operation.

Allocate Public Safety resources to the waterfront

With public safety a top priority, we strongly recommend the City consider creating a dedicated safety and enforcement team for the waterfront, focused both on providing real-time services to those in crisis, and ensuring park rules and codes of conduct are met. These staff can work in partnership with Friends safety team.

Enforcing Park rules and timeliness in response to situations is critical to the waterfront's success and we have seen throughout the last year that the gap in city resources to respond to real time situations resulted in numerous unsafe situations for park users and failed to provide proactive support for individuals in crises. This is not aligned with our vision of public safety on the waterfront and needs to be addressed as the operating model for the waterfront is refined going forward.

Ultimately, cities with the most effective public safety strategies had staff with authority to enforce park rules when needed and were part of a cohesive team in ensuring public safety in their parks. We recommend the City begin work now to start phasing in a dedicated safety and enforcement team before the entirety of the park is completed in 2024.

Next steps for the CWOC

The Central Waterfront Oversight Committee appreciates the hard work that Friends of Waterfront Seattle and Seattle Parks and Recreation have put into making Pier 62 successful over the past year. While there are always areas to improve, overall, this first year demonstrated the strong appeal of the waterfront as a venue for public recreation, arts and culture, and the overwhelming public desire to engage with our downtown as a public place, and to enjoy the remarkable natural setting of our city on the Salish Sea.

Looking ahead, we will turn our attention next to finishing our work to establish a clear set of standards for park maintenance, programming and security, and to establishing a transparent and accountable set of measures to help ensure the park is living up to that standard over time. This work will be invaluable we believe to create public confidence and appeal for the new waterfront park, and make the City, State, and private investment in its construction worthwhile.

We have a strong commitment to ensure we are delivering on our promise of a waterfront for all and continue to assess the ongoing performance of the park as it continues to be finished and opened to the public over the coming years.