



**PORTLAND PARKS & RECREATION™**

Healthy Parks, Healthy Portland

March 30, 2023

House Committee on Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice Chairs Lewis & Tran, and Members of the Committee:

Portland Parks & Recreation is submitting testimony from Seattle Parks & Recreation, sharing how a city-governed district has successfully served the Seattle community.

Sincerely,

Adena Long  
Director, Portland Parks & Recreation

**Administration**

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**PORTLANDPARKS.ORG**  
Commissioner Dan Ryan  
Director Adena Long



*Sustaining a healthy park and recreation system to make Portland a great place to live, work, and play.*



To: City of Portland Commissioner of Culture & Livability Dan Ryan  
From: Michele Finnegan, Deputy Superintendent of Policy and Finance, Seattle Parks and Recreation  
Date: March 29, 2023  
RE: House Bill 3515

I would like to share with the Committee how a park district and a local governance option has successfully served the Seattle community.

For background, we are fortunate in Washington State that the legislature updated Washington statute to allow for a local government park district similar to what is proposed in HB 3515. This allowed Seattle voters to approve the Seattle Park District, a metropolitan park district authorized by Chapter 35.61 of the Revised Code of Washington, in 2014. This voter-approved District collects property taxes to fund City parks and recreation services: parkland and facility maintenance, recreation facility and program operation, and new park development on previously acquired sites. The Seattle Park District has the same boundaries as the City of Seattle, and Seattle City Council members serve as the Park District's Governing Board. The 15-member Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners provides oversight to ensure that Park District funds are administered equitably and transparently and engages the public to prioritize projects and services for each six-year plan (as described in an inter-local agreement between the Park District and City of Seattle outlining policy direction). Again, thanks to the updated local government park district statute, Seattle voters don't have an independent elected board in conflict over park services, but rather unified policy direction.

Before the Seattle Park District was established, a Citizens Committee debated whether to create a Park District or continue the model of proposing temporary levies with specific named projects for voter approval every six years. The decision to create a Park District has proven critical in building resiliency in Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) service delivery. In the recession that followed the 2008 financial crisis, the rigidity of SPR's funding sources resulted in layoffs and significantly reduced public access to facilities and services, slowing our staff and our community's ability to recover in the subsequent period. Conversely during the pandemic, the stability and flexibility of Park District resources allowed SPR to creatively reprogram resources to mitigate General Fund and revenue shortfalls and allowed us to adapt our services to support emergency functions, respond to shifting community need, and retain our skilled and dedicated workforce.

While this flexibility proved critical during the emergency, SPR has also been able to recover quickly and return to providing the services and projects envisioned with the Park District funding including performing critically needed repairs to recreation facilities, play areas, playfields, irrigation systems, trails, and more; restoring our urban forest; funding recreation programs with a focus on equitable access, serving individuals and communities we may not have served before, and increasing maintenance in our parks and facilities.

As we are now starting our second cycle of the Park District (2023 – 2028) we are building on the lessons learned during the first cycle and continuing to challenge ourselves to leverage data, lead with equity, and be accountable to our community and elected officials.

In case you'd like to learn more, I've included link below to our Cycle End Report from the first cycle and the press release describing the cycle 2 funding plan. I am also happy to answer any additional questions.

[New Seattle Park District 2015-2020 report details Park District accomplishments - Parkways](#)  
[Park District Governing Board Passes 2023-2028 Financial Plan - Parkways \(seattle.gov\)](#)