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**Maintain parks' legacy with Seattle's Prop. 1**

*By Barbara Wright and Mark Okazaki, Special to The Times*

UPON first seeing Seattle in 1903, famed landscape architect John Charles Olmsted noted, "I do not know of any place where the natural advantages for parks are better than here." Hired by civic leaders to design our parks, Olmsted's vision was based on a belief that parks improve society when they serve all people equally and provide a respite from the stress of daily life.

While Olmsted's work still shapes our system today, we as a city are falling short on one key part: We are not serving all people equally.

Seattle has one of America's great parks systems, comprising more than 465 parks, 180 ballfields, dozens of community centers, swimming pools and other facilities that together account for more than 10 percent of our city's geography.

But for years we've neglected this extraordinary legacy.

The truth is, our current way of funding parks and community centers is failing.

Daily maintenance has been cut back at virtually every park and community center. Our park system now faces a \$267 million maintenance backlog — and it's growing.

Community center hours and programs have been cut, disproportionately affecting those who most depend on these services. For example, private donations keep community centers open 60 hours per week in wealthier neighborhoods, while in poorer neighborhoods they are open 25 hours per week.

It's time to invest in our parks again, so they are open, well-maintained and accessible to all.

To meet this goal, the City of Seattle convened a diverse 15-member Parks Legacy Citizens Committee to study and recommend how to steward the parks system to meet the needs of all residents. After nine months of work, the committee voted overwhelmingly to recommend a Seattle Park District.

Gabriel Campanario /The Seattle Times

The members concluded that a park district, already in place in 17 cities around Washington, would provide stable, dedicated funding for our parks, ballfields and community centers.

Mayor Ed Murray, as well as former mayors Charles Royer, Norm Rice, Paul Schell, Greg Nickels and Mike McGinn, endorsed the park district proposal, which also received unanimous support from the City Council and the Seattle Board of Parks Commissioners.

As the current \$146 million, six-year levy expires, Seattle voters will have a chance to show their support for our parks and community centers on the Aug. 5 ballot with Proposition 1.

If supported by the voters, Proposition 1 would provide greater citizen engagement and oversight of our parks department than ever before. Nearly two-thirds of the new funding would be used to take care of our existing parks and community centers, replacing roofs, boilers and electrical systems and providing ongoing maintenance, such as cleaning restrooms, picking up trash and mowing lawns.

Funding would also be used to restore hours and programming at community centers for kids and seniors, develop 14 parks in neighborhoods across the city and address major maintenance backlogs at Woodland Park Zoo and the Seattle Aquarium.

In short, Proposition 1 would help restore balance and equity to our parks system, moving toward the Olmsted ideal of equal access for all people.

At the levy rate of 33 cents per \$1,000 of assessed home value, all this work would cost the owner of a \$400,000 home about \$4 a month more than the expiring parks levy, which costs 20 cents per \$1,000 of assessed home value.

Proposition 1 is endorsed by dozens of respected organizations, such as the Seattle Human Services Coalition, the Sierra Club, the Friends of Athletic Fields and many others.

Seattle's system of parks and community centers is one of the city's greatest democratic institutions, bringing together people from all walks of life.

Everyone loves our parks. The real question is: How we do take care of them for the long term, and how can we be sure that our kids — and their kids — have access to well-maintained, safe and beautiful parks and community centers?

A Seattle Park District would provide stable, dedicated funding for our parks and community centers. Please vote yes on Proposition 1 on your Aug. 5 primary ballot.



*Barbara Wright was co-chair of the Seattle Parks Legacy Citizens Committee. Mark Okazaki is executive director of Neighborhood House, a Seattle social-service nonprofit. More information: [seattleparksforall.com](http://seattleparksforall.com)*