



MEMORANDUM

Date: November 1, 2011

To: Parks & Community Services Board

From: Terry Smith, Assistant Director
Parks & Community Services

Subject: History of the Development of the Downtown Park

At the request of several Board members, we have attached a copy of the information that was provided by Lee Springgate (former Parks Director) and Cary Bozeman (former Mayor and City Councilmember) at the Monday, October 17, 2011 City Council Meeting.

Lee and Cary spoke as private citizens and past community leaders to share the history and evolution of the Downtown Park from their perspective. Lee was responsible for writing the materials presented.

July 12th, 2011

THE CREATION OF BELLEVUE'S DOWNTOWN PARK

The Vision to Reality

By: LEE SPRINGGATE—BELLEVUE PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIRECTOR 1978-1999



INTRODUCTION

This is the story of Bellevue's Downtown Park. It's told from the perspective of Bellevue's Parks Director from 1978 through 1999 and is intended to be a first person account of events that transpired to create one of the most important parks in the State of Washington. It's a story that needs to be told twenty seven years later because so many worked so hard for so long to create such a special place. This park is now a part of Bellevue's identity and it's time to set the record straight.

Of course, nothing of value is created from a vacuum. Critical events preceded and influenced the purchase, design and development of the Downtown Park. First, when Bellevue incorporated in 1953 it was an emerging bedroom community awakened by the opening of the Lake Washington floating bridge and a post-World War II economic and population boom. Over the next thirty years, after explosive residential growth, several annexations and the construction of a second floating bridge, Interstate 405 and State Route 520, Bellevue found itself very well positioned to become the prominent City on the eastside of Lake Washington.

Of course, this pace of change was accompanied by an intense community dialogue about the future of Bellevue. After prolonged and, often bitter, debate, the City Council decided to move in the direction of making Bellevue a viable and premier urban center. In the early 1980's, the Bellevue City Council, in what Park staff regarded as an enlightened and defining moment in the City's history, rezoned the Central Business District. The critical decision was to remove height limits in the core of the CBD and, in a "wedding cake" fashion, scale down heights and density as the CBD approached adjacent residential communities. The intent was to attract major commercial and high rise residential uses to the heart of the CBD, while simultaneously protecting abutting neighborhoods from haphazard sprawl and commercial encroachment. The ensuing economic development would, in turn, vitalize a sleepy downtown, create more jobs close to home and generate a vital income stream for public services.

A parallel concept was evolving during this timeframe regarding Bellevue's park system. Up to this point, Bellevue's park planning was consistent with that of most suburban communities, in that parks were dispersed geographically throughout the City as a means of creating equity. The City was also under intense pressure to accommodate skyrocketing demand for sports fields, community centers, sport courts and a host of other recreation facilities. This dispersed recreation model had captured suburban park planning for well over fifty years and, as a general rule, new park sites were expected to absorb as much of this recreation demand as possible.

A new/old planning approach was being advocated by park staff that called for creating a park spine through the heart of the City, running from Lake Washington to Lake Sammamish, with the vertebrae being comparable to Frederick Law Olmsted's "pearls on a string". Olmsted and his descendants inspired a host of City park systems, in which major parks were connected to one another via trails, parkways and green spaces. Examples ranged from Boston's "emerald necklace" and the "chain of lakes" in Minneapolis to the spectacular system in Seattle that connected Lake Washington, the University of Washington and Green Lake. Bellevue's comparable system would be called the Lake to Lake Trail and Greenway.

The special park spaces, or “pearls on the string” would draw inspiration from classic urban parks in Europe, Canada and the United States. This design approach was perhaps best articulated, once again, by Olmsted’s work on New York’s Central Park and Prospect Park, as well as numerous derivatives, from Boston to San Francisco. Olmsted’s parks were spacious, informal, unstructured and beautiful, similar in style and substance to parks he visited in Europe. Most of the space within these parks was open and accessible to all park users to engage in whatever activities they selected. The spaciousness, flexibility and beauty that characterized these early Olmsted parks become the standard by which major urban parks were developed throughout the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



The idea was not to ignore or denigrate the need for recreation facilities, but rather to superimpose this concept over the entrenched recreation facility model that was threatening to capture the entire park system. It should also be noted that this thinking was in a relatively embryonic stage and had not been publically aired in any significant fashion. It did, however, greatly influence the direction of the Downtown Park.

ACQUISITION

The purchase of the Downtown Park was perhaps the most unusual transaction in the history of the Bellevue Park system. The Bellevue School District owned a critical piece of real estate in the southwest quadrant of the Central Business District. The District had operated the 17.5 acre site for decades as a junior high school and administrative headquarters. Shifting demographic patterns compelled the District to close a number of schools during this timeframe and this site made the “list”. Given the rapidly increasing land values in the newly rezoned CBD, it made little sense for the District to retain their administrative headquarters at this location. Plans were made to purchase and construct a new headquarters at another location on Wilburton Hill, so the time was right to package this valuable asset and generate as much money as possible to achieve other District objectives.

Given the long history of collaboration between the District and the City, the District decided to approach the City with a proposal to dedicate 6 of the 17.5 acres for a public park, while leasing the balance of 11.5 acres for commercial development. Given that (1) this proposed dedication was probably worth millions of dollars (2) the City had no funding available to purchase expensive downtown real estate for park purposes and (3) there were other park priorities competing for scarce City funding, the City staff recommended acceptance of the District’s proposal.

With such compelling logic supporting the offer, how could anyone seriously look this gift horse in the mouth? Well, Councilman Cary Bozeman decided some windmills are worth tilting. In what can only be described in retrospect as an act of great political leadership, he argued for the purchase of the entire 17.5 acres—even if that meant forgoing the six acre contribution valued in 1983 dollars at approximately four million dollars. In Bozeman’s view, a very rare opportunity was being presented to the City. This was a chance to provide a truly significant downtown urban park. A park site almost three times in size over what was being offered by the District could make all the difference between a mediocre park and one that would be memorable, unique and impactful. If the City was truly headed for greatness, it needed a great downtown and a great park system. Settling for mediocrity at such a crucial juncture in the City’s history would, in his mind, represent a failure in leadership.



Fortunately, a majority on the City Council agreed to postpone action on the District's proposal until it could be determined how much it would cost to purchase the entire 17.5 acres and how it could be financed. A real estate expert was hired to establish a value that could be supported by the District and the City and he concluded that the site was worth 14.3 million. A financing plan was developed by City staff that called for the issuance of Council manic bonds (bonds that could be authorized by a majority vote of the City Council) to be repaid through a two tenths of one per cent increase in the local option sales tax.

In the final City Council meeting of 1983, the majority of the City Council voted to purchase the 17.5 acres for 14.3 million and raise the sales tax by two tenths of one percent to finance the purchase. This action was significant for a number of reasons. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the most money paid for a municipal park site in the State's history. It's hard to get any bolder than this. Second, park purchase decisions, particularly at that time, did not require a public process. This decision was squarely on the shoulders of the City Council and they would have to answer for their action. Third, it elevated parks to a much higher place on the municipal pecking order. This initiated Bellevue Parks golden era of park development that fulfilled its slogan of a "City in a Park".

Once the decision was made to purchase, considerable controversy ensued that dogged the project through the design and construction phases. Many people in the community were disturbed that the taxpayer had to pay fair market value to acquire this school site for public park purposes. In their view, this was public property that had already been paid for by the taxpayer. There was not full appreciation of the fact that these were two legally separate public entities, each with distinct fiduciary responsibility for their assets. Others were dismayed by the high cost of the land and regarded this purchase as further evidence that the City was unduly catering to its business and development interests at the

expense of the community at large. Still others were outraged that the Council had acquired the property through an increased sales tax—without a vote of the people. There were those who were not convinced that the site, located on the edge of Bellevue’s CBD was appropriately located to serve as a genuine “central” park. Finally, some people simply opposed taking 17.5 acres of prime downtown real estate off the tax rolls.

This park was precariously close, on numerous occasions, to being aborted at inception. It took leadership, political courage and great insight to get this project out of the starting gate. But, it was only the beginning.

DESIGN COMPETITION

Although the majority of the community appeared to support the Council’s action, there was enough negative reaction to suggest that something special should be done to entice the kind of private and public support that would be needed to get the park developed. In an effort to entice political and financial support and provide direction for the park’s development, Mayor Bozeman appointed a 28 member Downtown Park Citizens committee that represented a broad spectrum of civic and business interests. The Committee was chaired by John Ellis, CEO of Puget Power and a vocal supporter of the Downtown Park. At the suggestion of park staff, one of the first recommendations of the Committee was to conduct an international design competition. This recommendation was made for a number of important reasons. First, the traditional process used by Bellevue to select park designs would probably yield unimaginative results. This process transpired as follows: (1) City solicits requests for qualifications, (2) A preferred design firm is selected (3) Design firm organizes a public process to establish a design program that “informs” design alternatives, (4) Alternative design concepts are prepared based on physical characteristics of the site and public input, (5) Public comments on alternatives, (6) Park Board forwards preferred option (7) Council selects final design following yet another round of public comment.

While this process is a time tested and safe way to design a park, it can also yield homogenized, uninspired results. It’s generally a process that attempts to meet as many demands as possible, while minimizing impacts on adjacent communities. Design competitions were used numerous times in this Country, starting with New York’s Central Park and, more recently, the Viet Nam War Memorial. Design competitions have that delicious possibility of producing stunning, unanticipated results that stand the test of time. The competitors are free to approach the design challenge in a more artistic manner, without constantly modifying original ideas to accommodate ongoing input. Design competitions allow competing, original ideas to be aired and evaluated on their own merits. In other words, the job of staff, advisory boards and elected officials is to choose among competing, fully integrated design concepts. The chance of receiving unencumbered, fresh ideas was further enhanced by the decision to hold a blind competition. Those reviewing and recommending the finalists for the competition would have no knowledge of who submitted the various entries.

Without a doubt, this is a radical departure from tradition and should be used sparingly and with discretion. The staff and Advisory Board recommended a design competition in this instance for the

following reasons: (1) The Downtown Park would become a signature park in the Bellevue Park system; (2) The site was relatively flat and mundane. A design solution was not dictated by obvious physical limitations or opportunities and the site lent itself to a wide array of creative ideas, (3) A process was needed that would generate unusual excitement and enthusiasm. An approach that captured the public's imagination and support was vital--given the skepticism and angst that accompanied the purchase decision. (4) There were no prior commitments made to special interests regarding future park development.

It should be noted that the site itself included many of the elements already coveted by organized recreation interests, including sports fields, tennis courts, track, gymnasium, performing arts space and classrooms. A traditional design process would probably have resulted in a final design that rearranged and upgraded this existing recreation complex. A design competition would at least create the opportunity to consider some refreshing alternatives.

Following City Council authorization to proceed with the competition, the first order of business was to develop a competition program. Obviously, the entries would require some general guidance and design parameters. To aid in this process, the City distributed a survey to some 55,000 households and businesses asking them what they envisioned in a downtown park. A significant majority of the 5,000 respondents indicated a preference for a pedestrian oriented green space that would remain relatively free of buildings and special recreation facilities. Therefore, the competition program was clear about providing "large, open, clean and flexible space". It also specifically prescribed the preservation of three historic elms commemorating three soldiers from Bellevue who lost their lives in World War 1.

A professional consultant with experience running competitions was hired to manage the entire process for the City. The competition was advertised via a specially designed poster in major trade journals throughout the United States and Canada. A thorough competition program was prepared, with the guidance of the Park Committee, that included demographic information, description of the site, questionnaire results, surveys and other pertinent design information.

Through the leadership of John Ellis, President of Puget Power, \$140,000 was raised from the private sector to fund most aspects of the competition. The City elected to finance the \$30,000 required to conduct and tabulate the survey and receive initial professional assistance in establishing the competition process.

A total of sixty seven entries, each of whom paid \$100 to enter the competition, were received from throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. These entries were judged by a jury consisting of eight members of the Downtown Park Committee, the Parks and Planning Directors from the City and the chairpersons of the University of Washington's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. The jury advisor was Vincent Scully, Sterling Professor of Art and Architecture History at Yale University.

Prior to the beginning of jury deliberations, Professor Scully gave two ringing presentations to the community on the history of urban park design. To quote from a newspaper article written on Professor Scully's lecture "Scully is farsighted, articulate, impassioned and above all erudite. A slide show lasting more than one hour traced the antecedents in history of the Bellevue Park, ranging from the Greeks,

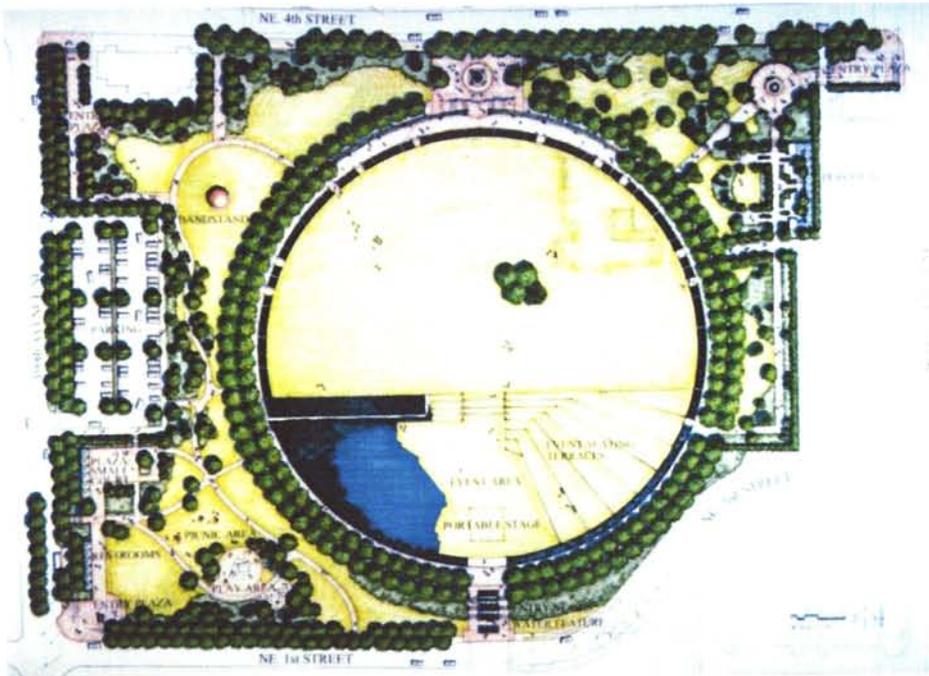
Romans, French and English, even including the Mayans of Latin America. Scully's lecture made the park committee realize the opportunity confronting Bellevue. Few communities still have space of any size in their center that can be transformed into a park that can be utilized to show the relationship of humans to nature. New England communities had it when they included a village green or commons in their plans. But that was more than 300 years ago. New York grasped a similar opportunity in 1858 when Central Park was designed. The mall in Washington D.C., which grew out of the French tradition, may be the world's greatest park, but the nations' capital was designed almost 200 years ago. Scully discussed Bellevue's embryo park at that level—as important space that could help transform a sprawling suburb into a community with a heart and a focus, as a way of demonstrating to other cities that the decay and collapse of our urban fabric can be reversed.”

The competition entries were wildly divergent. Some tried to cram everything but the kitchen sink onto seventeen and a half acres, while others were the model of simplicity. It was probably at this point in the competition process that the design professionals, with their considerable expertise, were able to guide remaining jurors toward the most legitimate entries. It was by no means easy, but, ultimately, the jury selected three designs, including one from Bellevue (Jongejan, Gerrard, McNeal), one from Seattle (EDAW) and one from Milwaukee (Beckley-Myers). All three designs emphasized a more natural approach and all three eliminated existing buildings, athletic facilities, and the road that traversed the site.

While trying not to clutter this overview with minutia, it does need to be noted at this point that the City asked all three finalists to illustrate what the ultimate park would look like if the City were to acquire the various private in holdings that existed on the Parks' edges along N.E 100th, Bellevue Way, N.E. 4th and 102nd N.E. Originally, all entrants were asked only to submit proposals that covered only what the City had purchased from the School District. But, upon further reflection, it made sense to inquire about how each design would deal with these additional properties. It would be particularly helpful in evaluating each submission because the thinking at that time among most park proponents was that these additional properties would need to be acquired over time. If they were all privately developed, the park's visibility, aesthetic appeal and pedestrian access would be greatly compromised.

After reviewing the revised submissions, the Jury recommended the concept submitted by Beckley-Myers. The lead architect was Robert Beckley, a very well regarded architect and urban designer who would later be named Dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Michigan. Mr. Beckley was also an articulate, persuasive advocate for the park design. To assuage fears over turning over the design of the park to own of town architects, Beckley-Myers recruited MacLeod/Reckord, a landscape architectural firm from Seattle to handle much of the detailed design work. This firm would also serve as a conduit between the City and Beckley-Myer during those times the primary architect was out of town and provide much needed local knowledge about conducting business in Washington State. The recommendation, as with every other aspect of the Downtown Park, was arrived at after impassioned debate. But once a decision was made, the Jury unanimously supported the recommendation. The design's central feature is a large circular meadow, defined by a canal, walking path and a double row of London Plane trees. It also featured a 240ft waterfall, pond, formal garden, belvedere, and a small amphitheater. In a nod toward historic preservation, and in

keeping with the competition program, the design also included the preservation of three memorial elm trees in the center of the meadow that commemorated Bellevue residents who died in World War 1. It also included concrete “sets” that delineated the boundaries of the old school site. Professor Scully described the design as “beautifully presented and deceptively simple. It will shape a memorable place in the center of the City, creating a clean and beautiful image and offering remarkable flexibility of use.”



After circulating the designs from the three finalists throughout the City and conducting a formal public hearing, the City Council voted 4-3 to accept the Jury’s recommendation. Again, as with most historically important public projects, controversy nipped at the Park’s heels every step of the way. As is so often the case with public parks, there is a strange symmetry at play. As difficult as it is to get the approval to build a park, it would be equally difficult to remove the park once it’s developed and used by the public. That’s generally because future beneficiaries are not as invested as those who don’t want to pay for the improvements or who fear adverse impacts. In the case of the Downtown Park, opponents were concerned about long range cost, elimination of the access road, recreation buildings and athletic facilities, a perceived lack of parking and, believe it or not, a truncated public process.

A comprehensive final report on the design competition, containing reproductions of all 67 entries, history of the competition and reports and jury comments was distributed to all entrants, Downtown Park Committee, City Council, Park Board and professional associations. A copy of this report is available at the Bellevue Historical Society.

The competition generated an inordinate amount of newspaper, radio and television coverage. The excitement associated with the opening and displaying of the design concepts, the interest in knowing the identity and location of the three finalists, the drama of selecting a winner, the lectures delivered by an East Coast “celebrity,” the mall displays and, simply, the uniqueness of the event created a major media happening that rarely occurs with park design projects.

This public attention translated eventually into a level of financial and political support for other park projects that was unparalleled in the City's history. Between 1984 and 1987, the City Council and/or voters authorized the expenditure of an additional \$31 million for park acquisitions, development and renovation.



PHASE 1 ORGANIZATION

The initial estimate to develop the Downtown Park was between four and five million dollars. The first attempt to secure funds for the park's development occurred the following November. The City Council embraced an innovative strategy to request two million from a general obligation bond issue that would only be accessed only after two million was raised from the private sector. This was a very novel and creative public financing approach for a major park site. Since the City had a backlog of other important park projects in need of funding, staff originally proposed that the Downtown Park be packaged with these other projects in a single bond issue. This was the tried and proven method of getting bond issue approval for park projects because, while each project has a constituency, it's not typically broad enough to secure sixty per cent approval independently. If your project is under the umbrella, it can't be singled out for defeat.

Regrettably, the park had become just a little too controversial and the Council decided to separate the two million requested for the Downtown Park from a number of other park projects seeking funding at the same time. The results were agonizingly predictable. The Downtown Park proposition failed by four tenths of one percent. It received 59.6% approval, but required 60%. The other park propositions passed handily and the Park's supporters were left to scramble for financing.

A coalition formed by Bellevue's civic and business leaders remained undaunted, quickly organizing a fund raising drive to obtain \$1.8 million needed to complete Phase 1 of the park. This group, lead again by John Ellis, formed a nonprofit corporation to lease the seven acres of the site needed to complete

Phase 1,, hire the architect and build the first phase of the park. The first phase would include a portion of the canal, promenade and lawn area. It would also include the belvedere/plaza, formal garden and restrooms. To assure that the first phase was built in accordance with the approved design, a public Oversight Committee was formed to review and approve design development drawings, specifications and actual construction. This committee included the City Manager, Park Director, Park Board member and Mayor Pro Tem. Upon completion of the park to the City's standards, it was turned back over to the City for maintenance and operation.

The site was leased to the private corporation for \$1 per year for a two year period. The corporation assumed exclusive responsibility for liability, maintenance and development for the term of the lease. The corporation had to comply with all applicable state, federal and local laws; obtain all required permits and secure high levels of insurance coverage. Provisions were included in the lease for the City to receive monthly status reports and suspend work that didn't comply with approved plans and specifications.

As one could imagine, any arrangement that was such a departure from the norm would generate yet more controversy for this beleaguered project. It was not a simple arrangement by any means. To quote from a Journal-American article "when the city undertakes a construction project, public scrutiny is an integral part of the process. Decisions are made publicly, contracts are awarded based on competitive bidding and records belong in the public domain. In private enterprise, the safeguards are more subtle and the process less public. Trust and business reputations take the place of laws and ordinances. Corporations don't have to divulge what they don't want to or do business with someone just because they're the lowest bidder." It goes on to say "the corporation can and does conduct its decision-making in private. The lease allows the corporation to keep names of donors secret on request. But the lease also allows the developers to keep secret any other information or records of a confidential nature."

Some newly elected Council members, as well as other community activists, were appalled by the secrecy provisions that could theoretically thwart safeguards designed to prevent fraud and kickbacks. They also saw potential conflicts of interest between the private corporation and the City's Oversight Committee. They were also uncomfortable with what they perceived as a subversion of the public bidding laws. There was a fear that the park would never actually be built if the corporation failed to achieve its fund raising goals or that the City could inherit a half built project. According to one dissenting Councilmember "the corporation has no responsibility. They can wash their hands of the whole thing." Another Councilman tried to get the Council to require a ten million dollar bond to guarantee the work, but his motion failed.

Proponents of the lease took a more pragmatic and far sighted view. In their opinion, it would unleash the private sector to do what the City couldn't accomplish at this stage in the park's evolution. This lease could protect anonymous donors, assure contributors that the park would be built quickly and efficiently and demonstrate that the private sector could be trusted to protect the public interest. The lease was truly an exercise in trust and goodwill, something very difficult to replicate in today's acrimonious, polarized political environment. Councilman Donald Van Blaricom thanked the "public

spirited business people who have come forth to develop the park. I've watched this process from outside and inside the council with astonishment. This city has not only been looking a gift horse in the mouth, they have been trying to break its jaw."

THE CAMPAIGN

So now what? The park's advocates had pushed the "envelop" every step of the way, defying convention, opposition and widespread skepticism. Could they really deliver on their pledge to raise over 1.5 million and build the first phase of the park? Will this funding approach really resonate with the community? Could they convince enough corporate, business and community leaders to direct contributions of this magnitude toward a PARK project? Shouldn't public parks in the Olmsted tradition be financed by the general public?

According to our admittedly cursory research, there had never been a widespread, private fundraising drive to build a major public park in Washington State history. There were undoubtedly instances of individual philanthropic support for acquiring or developing parks, but never a community wide private fundraising initiative. With a lot of reputations hanging in the balance, the Committee plowed ahead, undaunted by the challenge. Picking up the leadership baton from Cary Bozeman, John Ellis organized a multifaceted fundraising campaign.

The first, and certainly most important, target was the corporate community doing business in the greater Bellevue area. Mr. Ellis and other influential business associates focused on this segment of fundraising and concluded that the "ask" should be between \$30,000 and \$125,000. Mr. Ellis gave the campaign a jump start by announcing several large scale donations of \$50,000 to \$125,000. Once the largest corporations established a contribution ceiling, a subcommittee of influential business people systematically canvassed the business community to ferret out contributions. This committee classified corporations and business by category (i.e. hospitality, retail, development), matched committee members with appropriate prospects, organized funding breakfasts and developed a coordinated request strategy. For example, once the bank with the largest asset base contributed, say, \$100,000, other banks were approached to contribute an amount consistent with their share of the market.

A second level of support came from a host of smaller businesses and corporations located in the greater Bellevue area that contributed from \$1,000 to \$50,000. A third fund raising segment was comprised of major individual donors who contributed from \$1,000 to \$50,000. The fourth component, spearheaded by Carol James (Co-Chair), focused on the many smaller (some 2,000) donors who contributed anywhere from \$5 to \$1,000.

While over 2,000 businesses and individuals contributed to this effort, its success must be attributed to the generosity of the major corporate donors. Corporate executives were clearly receptive to the pitch from the Downtown Park Corporation because they had a strong sense of corporate responsibility. They knew quite well that Bellevue was on the brink of becoming a significant city, with over 45,000 projected employees. It was important to create a civic space that matched the City's emergence as a major urban center.

The simple fact that the private sector would actually be constructing the park had a remarkable bearing on the campaign's success. It was consistently reported that private contributors, particularly the corporate and business segments, were convinced that their dollars would be more efficiently managed and better spent than if they were filtered through the public bureaucracy. This confidence helped, in large measure, to offset the notion held by many of those approached that the public should finance any project managed and controlled by the public sector.

A number of other fund raising tactics were deployed in addition to one on one corporate and business contacts. First, and perhaps most significant, was the decision to inscribe the names of all donors who contributed \$100 or more on a granite monument to be located in the park's belvedere. As of the opening in September, 1987, over 1800 names are etched on this lasting memorial to the park's benefactors. The monument was the principal "hook" incorporated in both newspaper solicitation and direct mail brochures.

Second, a group of prominent women established a separate campaign that focused on the individual contributor. Given the fact that this effort began at virtually the 11th hour of the campaign, the \$100,000 netted from their networking approach was commendable.

Third, the Downtown Park Corporation was able to receive pro bono support from a very well-known public relations firm (McCann-Erickson) to devise a series of radio, television and newspaper advertisements that were both creative and effective. Although this process would be vastly different in this internet age, at the time, this firm churned out state of the art marketing materials. These comprehensive efforts resulted in the Downtown Park receiving far greater exposure and recognition than any other park in the City's history.

As an administrative aside, the accounting was provided on a contribution basis by a reputable C.P.A. firm and a process was developed to receive and discount pledges over a three year period. Funds were borrowed against pledges to complete the work on schedule. It should also be noted that it took less than \$30,000 to raise 1.8 million. Professional fundraisers were not used on this project, a testimonial to the hard work of the Downtown Park Corporation.

So, all these years later, a belated and much deserved round of applause to the Downtown Park Corporation. The fundraising success, in conjunction with the ensuing phase 1 construction, was, indeed, remarkable.

PHASE 1 CONSTRUCTION

So, now came the next installment of put up or shut up. If the first phase construction was not equal to, or greater, in quality than that typically provided by the City, there would be no end to the finger pointing and hand wringing. The whole construction process had to be managed and coordinated in a very professional manner.

The first victory for this endeavor was to coax Wright-Runstead Construction, a premier building contractor in the Pacific Northwest, to assume responsibility as general contractor. There was certainly

nothing about this project that was beyond the scope of what this firm could do, a comfort to everyone involved.

In an effort to calm the anxiety of so many skeptics who were convinced the City would inherit a substandard product, a number of safeguards were built into the construction process. First, the Downtown Park Corporation was bound by the terms of the lease to construct the park in accordance with the master plan approved by the City Council. All design and development drawings and specifications had to be approved in advance by the Oversight Committee mentioned previously.

Second, the Corporation was required to retain Beckley-Myers and its selected sub-contractors as the project architect. Any disagreement between the architects and general contractor would be arbitrated by the City Parks Director.

Third, the Parks Director and Mayor attended weekly meetings of the Corporation and participated in all policy discussions pertaining to development of the park. These meetings helped to establish trust and rapport so critical to the project's success.

Fourth, weekly construction meetings were held between representatives of the general contractor, architect, Corporation and the City. These meetings resolved the innumerable problems that emerged during the course of construction. It should be noted that Parks Department planners, led by landscape architect Roy Gatbunton, inspected the site at least once daily during the entire period of construction and kept a detailed log of all concerns and requests. A number of significant changes and corrections were made as a result of these inspections and subsequent meetings with the contractor.

A particularly unusual aspect of this project was the timing between fundraising and construction. This was truly a pay as you go proposition and fundraising was on an almost parallel track with construction. For example, building demolition and grading began soon after the first \$500,000 in pledges were received and subsequent construction phases related to the canal, belvedere, formal garden and the like were authorized only as pledges accumulated to cover expenses.

Talk about taking a risk! In today's turbo charged political environment, it would be the equivalent of walking through a minefield. At the time, this approach was used because it was essential, from a political perspective, to begin work and demonstrate visible progress immediately. There was still strong sentiment from some segments of the community to utilize the site as is until all the money was in hand to complete the entire design concept. This could have spelled disaster for the approved design. It was necessary to create a sense of urgency for fund raising purposes and leave no doubt in contributors' minds about how and when dollars would be spent.

Of course, this cozy relationship between funding and construction left everyone on pins and needles. The City was apprehensive about inheriting a partially finished site that could require an investment of City money to mothball. Also, because the general contractor had no assurances early in the construction phase that it would have enough money to complete the job, there was the latent fear that work could be funneled to marginal low bidders.

This budget constraint created a number of construction problems, ranging from timely ordering of supplies to appropriate coordination of various subcontractors. Despite the inevitable glitches that occur with pioneering projects of this kind, the final result was spectacular. The workmanship, materials, and consistency with approved plans were exemplary.

A grand opening of the first phase occurred on September 12th, 1987. It was a spectacular success. But, everyone knew it would be, right?



PHASE 1 LESSONS

Some lessons regarding this first phase process are worth sharing with future generations. While each public project has a distinct life of its own, perhaps what we learned from going through this experience will be of some value to those struggling with their own park dreams.

1. Vision

Major public works projects seeking private support must be selective, competitive and exciting. Proponents must create a sense of place, importance and vision. A strong need must be clearly articulated with energy and enthusiasm. The project should be viewed as a one of a kind, cutting edge opportunity that will reflect favorably on both the community and anyone enlightened enough to make it happen.

2. Flexibility

To what extent is a community willing to alter its normal decision making and implementation process to accommodate a major private partnership? It was our experience that private sector executives have little respect and patience for the public process that elected and appointed officials endure on a routine basis. Are key administrators, politicians and community leaders genuinely prepared to yield many of their design and approval prerogatives?

3. Trust

It was our experience that a truly successful partnership with the private sector is based on mutual trust and respect. Both parties must have confidence in one another and be willing to compromise. Rapport needs to be established between all levels of the partnership and everyone needs to pull in the same direction. This is largely achieved through painstaking communication and sharing of responsibility and credit.

4. Participation

Projects that require a major infusion of private money must broaden their support base by reaching out aggressively to all segments of the community. The Downtown Park had more layers of community involvement than any project in the City's history. Strategies must be developed to effectively involve and motivate large numbers of people. This diffusion of responsibility and visibility can be challenging to those unaccustomed to this style.

5. Control

Certainly, from the perspective a public agency, some measure of administrative control is desirable. The Downtown park project relied on a lease agreement to spell out roles, responsibilities and consequences and, to a large extent, it was successful. The City lacked authority over certain construction decisions that left staff just a bit queasy. The financial constraints faced by the Corporation at the onset resulted in a very difficult pay as you go construction sequence. If we could change one aspect of the project, it would be to retain architectural control during construction and have the fund raising completed and a firm construction budget in hand before work began.

6. Leadership

The Downtown Park's first phase would have been impossible without strong leadership. This project, in particular, required exemplary leadership from both the public and private sectors. Both Mayor Cary Bozeman and Mr. John Ellis accepted this challenge admirably and the project's success is due primarily to their extraordinary efforts. Influential and committed leaders provide the accountability and direction essential to any major partnership.

PHASE 11 DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

As exhilarating as the ride was to this point, only about one third of the park had been completed. The City still needed to complete the promenade, pathways, waterfall, pond, parking, landscaping and play area. Was there still enough in the tank to reach the finish line? Had enough been done to entice

support for the balance of work? Was it obvious enough to the public that the park needed to be completed? Was the next phase going to have to get at the end of a very long line of needed park and recreation projects? Obviously, the work was far from done and a strategy needed to evolve that would push the park to completion.

While there was still lingering resentment over the Downtown Park, the first phase of the park was viewed by the vast majority of residents as a success. The private fundraising capacity for the Downtown Park had been tapped and there was no returning to the well. The City would need to decide whether the next phase of the Park was a priority and how to secure the necessary funding.

In large measure the result of the hoopla over the Downtown Park, the Bellevue park system was experiencing a major renaissance. There was a plea for equity between the Downtown and residential neighborhoods in park spending. Major components of the Lake to Lake system were competing for attention, such as Lake Washington waterfront, Wilburton Hill Park and Botanical Garden, The Lake Hills Greenbelt and the Mercer Slough. In other words, the attention of decision makers and the public was on a wider range of park needs and the next phase of the Downtown Park would have to be evaluated in that context.

Fortunately for the Downtown Park, there were just too many people in the community, at all different levels, invested in, and, committed to, its completion. In other words, there was a viable constituency still in place and prepared to advocate for the park's completion. One critical lesson had been learned from the 1984 bond issue fiasco, don't split the projects into separate propositions. The Park Board recommended, and the Council authorized, the placement of a 16.5 million general obligation bond issue on the ballot in the fall of 1988. This Bond issue included 3.5 million to complete the next phase of the Downtown Park---the waterfall, pond, pathway, lawn areas, parking and play area. The bond issue passed handily and the City went about its business in the usual way to complete the next phase of park development.

By the time the second phase of design work was ready to begin, Beckley Myers had been purchased by a much larger architectural firm. The City was unable to negotiate a palatable Phase two fee with the new firm and elected to retain MacLeod/Reckord as the prime consultant for Phase 11, with Robert Beckley serving as a sub consultant. The work was bid through the normal public bidding process, the job was completed within budget and the second phase was dedicated on September 3rd 1990.

For all intents and purposes, the heart and soul of the design was complete. The spectacular waterfall, double row of London Plane trees, circular canal encompassing a beautiful lawn, walking path, commemorative setts and Elm trees, sitting benches, parking lots and play area were now in place and functioning as the design envisioned. The design could now test itself against time but at least it had a fighting chance. From the perspective of park staff, this was a tour de force—a stunning urban park in the Olmsted/European tradition.

It took some time to be fully appreciated. Today, the park is the site for major 4th of July celebrations, political rallies, concerts, winter ice skating and movies in the park. On a day to day basis, it receives thousands of visits from people eating their lunch, swinging their kids, walking, reading, daydreaming,

flying kites, playing informal games of soccer or volleyball and just doing whatever comes to mind. At first, before so many people were working and living in the Downtown, the park was criticized for lack of use. This was a classic case of build it and they will come.

To quote from a Seattle Times editorial " a spacious downtown park is only wishful thinking in Seattle. This week it became a reality in Bellevue. The still unnamed 20 acre city park is an elegant collage of green space, passive and falling water and pedestrian promenade. Best of all, its smack dab in the middle of a growing city, adjacent to Bellevue Square. Bellevue's park director Lee Springgate is absolutely right when he responds to grumpy citizens who complain the park isn't getting enough use. He notes wisely:" it's a little ahead of its time". Bellevue intends to build up the density of its core with more businesses, apartments and condominiums. Plenty of Seattle residents who only dream of such as oasis in their downtown would be the first to agree with Springgate. Someday people who live and work in downtown Bellevue will be grateful for city officials who had the good sense to spend \$21 million over seven years to create a splendid downtown park."





ADDITIONAL PHASES

As discussed previously, the park designers had always envisioned that at least six privately held parcels that intruded into what they regarded as the park's natural boundaries should be acquired and integrated into the park. These parcels were along 100th N.E., NE 4th, Bellevue Way and SE 2nd. After considerable prodding by park staff and proponents, successive Councils very wisely purchased all but one parcel. Again, this required the investment of a couple of million dollars, mostly provided through contributions from the City's Capital Improvement Fund. Kudos once again to a succession of very far sighted City Councils. Two of those parcels have been developed as entryways at the NE and NW corners of the park. Several of these parcels are still undeveloped, the most important of which is the SE corner of the park. This parcel will eventually allow the canal and pathway to be completed as planned and eliminate the awkward connection between the pond/waterfall and the eastern section of park. Current park staff has secured funding for this work and are in the planning stages at this time.

The remaining parcels will be integrated into the park over time and a variety of improvements have been made to the park over the past ten years or so, such as an upgraded play area, restrooms next to the play area and the aforementioned park entryways.

DOWNTOWN PARK INSIGHTS

Here are some insights derived from participating in this unique project. First, be guided by a strong vision and have the courage of those convictions. Second, share decision making, credit and responsibility. Third, allow genius to emerge. A poorly conceived public process can cannibalize a coherent vision. Fourth, exercise political courage and muscle when necessary. Fifth, phase

implementation to match available resources and political will. The project needs to get started and it needs to honor the long range design intent. Finally, protect the vision from modern day poachers. Hold tight to the design concept and don't succumb to the relentless pressure to accommodate the latest "flavor of the day".



SUMMARY

Bellevue created something very special with this Downtown Park. This park helped shape and define Downtown Bellevue. It made a statement for the ages. A sizeable downtown park for an emerging urban center is a rare achievement in this day and age---particularly one that defied special interests and delivered a beautiful and flexible urban space. The City had the courage and wisdom to do things differently with this park space. Just look at the risks----increasing the sales tax to purchase the entire acreage, conducting an international design competition, removing existing recreation facilities, recruiting and empowering private interests to raise money and build the park's first phase. These are not the actions of the meek and timid. Rather, these are the actions of people who take the long view and appreciate what a great urban park can do for a City. In an article written by Daniel Gregory and Peter Fish of Sunset magazine, it was said that "the park's semicircular promenade, expansive meadow and canal help give Bellevue a strongly focused, easily identifiable center. Bellevue has an Oz inspired skyline whose jewel in its crown is its brand new downtown park."

Great parks really are timeless and irreplaceable. They matter to people in an infinite number of ways. They assume extraordinary importance when two conditions exist, population density and scarcity of open space. They provide respite, relief and the opportunity to re-create. They bring light, space and beauty to the urban core. If built properly, they allow for celebrations, spontaneous behavior, and opportunities to actually interact with other human beings. This park, with its brilliant design, coupled with the City's ongoing commitment to quality maintenance, delivers the goods. Bellevue should be proud.

In closing, the park staff in place during that time tips its hat to a very enlightened group of citizens and elected officials. You made a difference! You displayed genuine leadership, tenacity, courage and vision when it probably would have been much easier to succumb to doubt and cynicism. These same attributes will undoubtedly be needed in future years as special interests try to make claims for space in the Downtown Park. Unencumbered open space is always viewed as a holding area for some type of intensive use, so please remember that this park, with all of its pieces, is one sacred whole. They all work together to provide one of the best urban spaces in America.



