

Seattle Board of Park Commissioners Solicited Legal Opinions, 1905-1933

Overview of the Collection

Creator	Seattle (Wash.). Board of Park Commissioners
Title	Seattle Board of Park Commissioners Solicited Legal Opinions
Dates	1905-1933 (inclusive) 1905 1933
Quantity	0.2 cubic foot, (1 box)
Collection Number	5800-04
Summary	Correspondence between the Board of Park Commissioners and the City's Law Department.
Repository	Seattle Municipal Archives Seattle Municipal Archives Office of the City Clerk City of Seattle PO Box 94728 98124-4728 Seattle, WA Telephone: 206-233-7807 Fax: 206-386-9025 archives@seattle.gov
Access Restrictions	Records are open to the public.
Languages	English
Sponsor	Funding for processing this record series was provided through a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

Historical Note

Legislation in 1887 (Ordinance 874) created the Board of Parks Commissioners, consisting of three members to be appointed by City Council; these members served three-year terms. This unpaid body was charged with all management responsibilities for Seattle's parks and was expected to report to the City Council as often as each quarter, making recommendations for improvements and for the acquisition of new properties.

Seattle's first home-rule City Charter, adopted in 1890, expanded the size of the Board of Parks Commissioners to five members and greatly expanded the Board's authority to include control over public parks and squares, as well as play areas, boulevards, parkways, and park facilities. The Board was the only agency authorized to spend Parks funds, and was authorized to designate land for use by the Parks Department, to plan parks, make improvements to existing parks, and to censor any artworks or monuments presented to the City. Although the Board had the authority to appoint a superintendent and to negotiate for property, Council retained the authority to purchase property.

The failure of the highly regulatory 1890 Charter led to adoption of a new home-rule charter in 1896. This charter abolished the Board of Parks Commissioners and established the Park Committee, a five-member unpaid body with significantly curtailed authority. All management responsibilities for the parks, including the authority to obtain new properties, were vested with the City Council. The Superintendent of Parks position was eliminated and its responsibilities were assumed by the new Superintendent of Streets, Sewers, and Parks, one of the three members of the Board of Public Works.

In 1903, City Council adopted the Olmsted Brothers plan to expand and develop a system of parks and boulevards. At the same time, the City Charter was amended, re-establishing the Board of Parks Commissioners and giving it the kind of independence that park commissions in the metropolitan cities of the East enjoyed. While the City Council retained the authority to approve the purchase of property, the Board assumed all management responsibilities for the parks, as well as the exclusive authority to spend park fund monies.

A 1948 City Charter amendment required the Board of Park Commissioners to appoint a park superintendent to administer the department; this official managed parks and department employees. A Charter amendment in 1967 reconstituted the Board of Parks Commissioners as an advisory body to the Mayor, City Council, the renamed Department of Parks and Recreation, and other City agencies. The amendment placed the fiscal and operational administration of the department under the control of the Superintendent of Parks, who was now appointed by the Mayor. City Council approved an ordinance in 1968 (Ordinance 96453) which established the current structure of the Board as a seven-member body with each commissioner serving a three-year term.

Content Description

Correspondence between the Board of Park Commissioners and the City of Seattle Law Department regarding requests for legal opinions and clarifications of laws pertinent to matters before the Board. Issues broached include zoning, tax laws, departmental boundaries with municipal, state, and federal entities, and jurisdictional authority, among others. Records are arranged chronologically.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

[Item and date], Seattle Board of Park Commissioners Solicited Legal Opinions, Record Series 5800-04. Box [number], Folder [number]. Seattle Municipal Archives.

Administrative Information

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms :

Parks--Washington (State)--Seattle

Playgrounds--Washington (State)--Seattle

Corporate Names :

Seattle (Wash.). Board of Park Commissioners

Seattle (Wash.). Dept. of Parks
Seattle (Wash.). Dept. of Parks and Recreation
Geographical Names :
Seattle (Wash.)

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