



Mayor Katie Wilson
Seattle City Council
Seattle Parks and Recreation

Re: Concerns regarding Cal Anderson Park

We, the undersigned organizations, are a group of small businesses, nonprofits, local advocates, and community members write to highlight a series of issues that impact Capitol Hill's Cal Anderson Park and encourage investments in stewardship and infrastructural support for the park.

Located in the heart of the neighborhood, Cal Anderson Park is one of Seattle's most significant public spaces and a symbol of the city's LGBTQ+ community. Its history reflects Seattle's ongoing commitment to inclusion and community, making it an important cultural landmark for residents and visitors. Unfortunately, the current state of the park significantly reduces its capacity to serve the community.

1. Needed Improvements to Park Stewardship

Cal Anderson desperately needs increased investment in the stewardship and beauty of the park. A visitor to the area during Pride weekend would have seen a park full of trampled, yellow grass and dying flowers, an empty wading pool filled with the remains of a bonfire, tire treads along park pathways, litter, and more. The area looks less like a reflection of the community's character and more like a grassy hill with a water feature.

We encourage Seattle Parks and Recreation to increase investments in the beautification and maintenance of the park. Instead, community members have seen the opposite. Seattle Parks & Recreation trucks have been spotted driving across and creating tire treads in the grass. They removed a charred log from the wading pool after several weeks of neighborhood Find It-Fix it reports, but they did not clean the char off the surrounding concrete. Meanwhile, Cal Anderson Park Alliance has reached out repeatedly with efforts to increase communication with SPR, to little response.

Stewardship and beautification of Cal Anderson would provide an uplift for the whole neighborhood. Planting flowers, re-graveling pathways, watering the existing grass and trees, picking up litter, and activating unused areas of the park will revive Cal Anderson as a space people want to slow down and spend time in. Seattle Parks & Recreation has supported other parks, such as South Lake Union and Myrtle Edwards, with increased beautification efforts to great success. We hope to see this similar ethos applied in one of our city's most popular parks.



2. Needed Support for Public Safety

Neglected stewardship lends credence to the perception that Cal Anderson has been abandoned by the city. This attracts individuals who seek to use the park for illicit activities like selling drugs. Consequentially, community members have seen a large presence of drug use in and around Cal Anderson, especially around the side street of Nagle. Large groups of visibly intoxicated people congregate in the area, leaving behind needles, tin foil, and other personal belongings that are often picked up by community volunteers or business owners.

The lack of deterrence systems creates a feedback loop wherein perceptions of neglect lead to increased criminal activity. Meanwhile, community members that would otherwise visit the park on their lunch break or with their families prefer to avoid the area out of fear of being exposed to drug use. When community leaves the park, it makes the area safer for criminal activity to prosper, further perpetuating the spiral of cause and effect mechanisms at play. Many of the violent incidents that occur along Pike/Pine originate in Cal Anderson or around Nagle.

Illicit activity in Cal Anderson park creates a trickle-down effect that negatively impacts the local economy. Local retailers down Broadway and along Pike/Pine rely on Cal Anderson as a connector between the neighborhood's two biggest retail areas – visitors often start out on one end of the neighborhood, walk through Cal Anderson Park, take a break, and continue on to the retailers on the other side of the park. This route is disrupted when people view the park as an unsafe place to walk through. Instead, people only visit one end of the neighborhood, missing the rest of the area's vibrant retailers and restaurants.

The structural burdens of increased drug use in the park also disproportionately burden the neighboring small businesses. Businesses report consistent issues including overdoses in their bathrooms and behavioral health disturbances affecting customers. All of these issues come together to dissuade people from spending time in Capitol Hill, severely impacting economic turnout.



3. Needed Support for Unhoused Neighbors

The prevalence of encampments and drug use in and around Cal Anderson is exacerbated by insufficient outreach and resourcing for people in need. There are many reasons why an individual may not want to accept services upon initial contact with a service provider – the biggest being a lack of trust in our current supportive systems. Building trust requires consistent outreach to the area, meeting people multiple times to understand their individual experiences and needs. Once that rapport is built, folks are much more likely to access services and stay housed.

This system of support is not in place in Capitol Hill. Salvation Army has been contracted to provide outreach services for unhoused folks in the neighborhood, however they retain only two employees to cover the entirety of District 3. There is no consistent cadence of outreach to Cal Anderson. Meanwhile, a neighborhood volunteer who has begun gathering data on the issue has found as many as 80 unhoused people using the park at one time. The inconsistency of provider outreach prevents the creation of those lasting, trusted relationships that lead to the support needed to get folks into housing. District-wide outreach is the wrong geographic scope of the issue – instead, we need place-based, person-based outreach.

Conclusion

Fireworks activity that occurred in Cal Anderson over the Fourth of July weekend presents a microcosm of these issues at play. A group of 50-100 people gathered on the Bobby Morris Field to create a bonfire involving wood and multiple e-bikes and scooters. Seattle Fire Department's response was delayed as they awaited support from East Precinct officers. Community members rightfully ask: why was there no SPD oversight of Cal Anderson on that night? We recognize that SPD is stretched thin with staffing concerns, but we also understand that Seattle benefited from an influx of mutual aid support through the World Cup tournament – why wasn't that utilized here?



In light of these issues, we request the following support from city leadership:

1. Build relationships and communication between Cal Anderson Park Alliance and Seattle Parks and Recreation
2. Convene an inter-departmental group to address Cal Anderson Park issues
3. Support community efforts to incorporate a neighborhood-wide SNIF
4. Increase presence of housing providers, CARE team, Park Rangers, and Seattle Police Department where appropriate and communicate plans to community
5. Fund outreach efforts to support unhoused neighbors in and around the park

This work is essential to the successful revitalization of the historic park and surrounding neighborhood.

Sincerely,

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Cal Anderson Park Alliance (CAPA)

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