



PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC SPACE FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

During the Equity & Environment Agenda creation, residents strongly voiced a need for more community gathering space, green space, places to grow culturally appropriate food, and places to play, learn, and worship. Parks and green space have long been a necessity to create healthy neighborhoods for residents in any area. Seattle is the traditional homelands for Native peoples and an important honored place for ceremony, gathering, and other cultural connections to lands and waterways. However, quality public spaces tend to be in wealthier areas with the resources to maintain parks and open spaces.

Despite new investments in Seattle, opportunities for communities of color to access and “claim” public spaces are quickly diminishing due to rapid development fueled by new industries that contribute to displacement. Indigenous peoples, and communities of color, have perpetually experienced impacts to and displacement from their natural surroundings.

Public spaces represent an important bridge between the physical and symbolic capacity for critical civic engagement. Today, these spaces continue to be where communities of color can gather to exercise their civil rights through meetings, rallies, teach-ins, demonstrations, and celebrations of religious and cultural festivals with (minimal) fear of being targeted by law enforcement or explicit acts of racism.

The City of Seattle, Communities of Color, and the private sector must collaborate to identify strategies that directly invest in community members, Native peoples, immigrants, refugees, people with low incomes, residents with limited English proficiency, and community-based organizations so communities can define and implement local, multi-year, environmental solutions around access and quality of public spaces. This collaborative approach ensures unique spaces created, co-owned and maintained by communities of color that also support communities remaining in Seattle. As urban areas continue to experience rapid growth it is important for park planners, city officials, and residents to be creative about public space and for communities of color to reclaim these spaces in their communities.

Seattle’s Environmental Justice Committee informed the development of the following principles in partnership with staff of the Equity & Environment Initiative.



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Adopted by Seattle's Environmental Justice Committee | Fall 2017



ENVIRONMENT & HEALTH

Communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native people, and people with low incomes are most affected by environmental hazards, climate impacts, and socio-economic conditions; they stand to benefit most from public space improvements that enhance environment, health, and quality of life. Open spaces that include greenery, permeable pavement, and green infrastructure also create social, psychological, and physical health improvements for residents, children, and workers who use these spaces. Public spaces where communities live, learn, work, worship, and play should serve as resources that deliver multiple benefits while addressing environmental hazards by increasing air quality, mitigating impacts of toxins, supporting access to healthy food, and preparing for climate change.



PARTNERSHIPS

Strong partnerships in public space planning are essential to place-keeping. Community based organizations, community groups, and community members are experts in identifying public space opportunities. Spaces designed in deep partnership with communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native people, people with low incomes, and limited English proficient individuals will better serve and advance environmental justice. These partnerships must also create a feedback loop with community members, so resources and information are being shared regularly.



CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

Communities of color in Seattle have strong cultural traditions. Incorporating art, music and cultural celebrations into outdoor spaces allows people to participate in and connect to public spaces while centering their experiences. Public spaces built with and for communities of color will encourage events that include cultural performances, festivals, storytelling, and ceremonies. These spaces can create more connected communities by incorporating physical and programmatic elements that reflect the history, culture, and lives of communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and Native people.



COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

Creatively funded public spaces that pull together public, private, and non-profit dollars can create pathways for co-ownership models so community based organizations have decision-making power over spaces utilized by their communities. Public spaces can create economic opportunities for small businesses to sell local food, provide pathways into green careers, and opportunities for vendors to set up temporary stands. Public spaces can also support environmental education activities and career pathways for young people by intentionally creating outdoor classrooms.



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Cultural hubs come in many forms including restaurants, locally owned shops, and open spaces. These spaces serve as community hubs because they are welcoming and inclusive of communities of color, immigrants, refugees, Native people, limited English proficient residents, and people with low incomes. Funding community based organizations or existing cultural hubs to house amenities, rental equipment, and facilities will create easily accessible and co-owned public spaces.



INFRASTRUCTURE

Communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and Native people utilize public spaces for family gatherings, cultural events, holidays, and to connect with their surrounding community. Public spaces that center communities of color needs have adequate infrastructure such as park benches that fit more than two individuals, grills and shelters that allow for large groups to sit and eat together, flexible activity fields, and gardens that allow for growing food together and foraging. Because many of Seattle residents are un-housed, public spaces must support inclusion of those who are experiencing homelessness through intentional design. Public space infrastructure improvements and maintenance should center communities of color needs to play, gather, live, learn, and worship.



NATURE

Communities of color, immigrants, refugees, and Native people who live, learn, work and play in Seattle have strong cultural connections to the nature, wildlife, and waterways of the region. The restoration and cleanup of the Puget Sound, Duwamish River, and Lake Washington are opportunities to reconnect communities to nature and increase their access to waterways while supporting the region's wildlife, native plants, salmon and other sea life. Public spaces that connect to nature, recreational activities, and cultural traditions of fishing and foraging support our urban ecosystem and the wellbeing of all our residents, including urban wildlife.



EQUITY & ENVIRONMENT

An Initiative of the City of Seattle

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