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Ground 'officially' broken for new South Lake Union park

By: Russ Zabel



Outgoing Seattle Parks & Recreation Superintendent Ken Bounds wears the ceremonial blanket he was given by United Indians of All Tribes Foundation CEO Phil Lane during a groundbreaking ceremony. Photo

Work actually began two months ago with the early arrival of parts for a new seawall, but an official groundbreaking ceremony for Lake Union Park took place amid much fanfare and during freezing weather last Wednesday, Feb. 28.

The 12-acre park was a long time in planning, said Karen Daubert, executive director of the Seattle Parks Foundation, which spearheaded the \$20-million project on the south shores of the lake.

"As our first major project five years ago, we selected a South Lake Union park," she said, adding that the city was a key partner in the process.

Speaking at the ceremony, Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis offered some perspective. "You know, up the street from here is a monument designating the geographic center of Seattle," he said.

But the city's newest park on Lake Union creates a new center of open space that is just as significant as the Olympic Sculpture Park, he said.

Daubert trumpeted the fact that \$16.2 million of the \$20-million cost of the park has already been raised. "That's 80 percent of our goal," she said.

Doug and Maggie Walker, Parks Foundation board members and donors of \$500,000 for the park, were impressed.

"To get 80 percent before ground-breaking is awesome," said Maggie, who urged those at the ceremony to donate money, too. She also said the park wouldn't be possible without the support of Vulcan, the development company founded by

Microsoft billionaire Paul Allen.

Ada Healy, from Vulcan Real Estate, spoke of the company's approach to development. "One of the really important things about the urban environment is to have open space," she said, mentioning all of the projects Vulcan has tackled in the blocks south of Lake Union.

But Healy also gave a nod to other corporate donors that included, among others, PEMCO Insurance, Saltchuck Recourses Inc., Puget Sound Energy and the Callison architecture firm.

She also noted that the Boeing Co. kicked in \$300,000 for the park project, which was significant from a historical perspective. "Bill Boeing built his first plane here," Healy said, with reference to a floatplane.

Seattle Parks and Recreation Superintendent Ken Bounds also spoke at the ceremony as his "last official act" before retiring, said Daubert, who added that the parks department - which ponied up \$5 million in Pro Parks Levy money for the project - was a key partner.

"One hundred years ago, the Olmsteads had a vision of a park here," Bounds said. And the century-long delay in seeing a new park built on the shores of South Lake Union was not all due to Seattle's much-vaunted "process," he joked. The groundbreaking ceremony acknowledges that "we're bringing Lake Union into the center of the city," Bounds added.

Phil Lane Jr., United Indians of All Tribes Foundation CEO, offered up an American-Indian prayer for the new park, then concluded his part in the ceremony by giving an appreciative Bounds an Indian blanket and making him part of the tribe. Lane also urged Bounds to come work for United Indians.

The new park will include a history trail with interactive stations that will include a look at early lumber mills and early streetcars and one that marks the Indians' presence on

the lake's shores for thousands of years, Daubert said. A longhouse and carving shed are also planned for a third phase of the project, but that will involve a separate capital campaign, she said.

The Center for Wooden Boats also stands to get a boost from the new park, said Dick Wagner from a 30-year-old organization that teaches maritime history and maritime crafts.

The Center for Wooden Boats makes sure that approximately 2,000 children a year get to go out on the lake in boats, he said. "When the park opens, you can probably multiply that by 10."

There are already something like 65,000 visitors to the center each year, and that number should grow to around 200,000 when the park is completed, Wagner added.

The Lake Union Park has been a complicated project, and the discovery that the seawall needed to be replaced added almost \$5 million to the costs, Daubert said in a later phone interview.

But the effort has been worth it, and the new park will be "significant in terms of its impact" on the city, she said.

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