



City of Tacoma

City Council

Metro Parks Board
4702 S. 19th Street
Tacoma, WA 98405

January 7, 2025

Dear Metro Parks Board Commissioners,

The City of Tacoma has initiated changes to our Senior Services programs in partnership with Metro Parks Tacoma, and we have heard from many seniors in our community that this change is difficult. While we recognize the challenges involved in transitions, we are also excited about combining our senior services, programming, and activities starting in 2025. Metro Parks is an invaluable partner and a pillar of our community. We have no doubt that this partnership will bring significant benefits to Tacoma's senior residents and that it is a wonderful opportunity to offer enhanced and expanded services to more seniors at more locations. We value your efforts and dedication to helping to care for our aging population and we look forward to seeing the great programs and offerings you have planned.

As we embark on this new direction, we would like to share some of the feedback that we have heard from seniors in our community. We have provided a summary of that feedback below.

- ***Desire for predictability and consistency in programming and spaces:*** Many seniors have expressed a deep attachment to their current routines and an appreciation for predictable locations and schedules for their activities. They have emphasized how vital it is for their daily stability to have the same spaces and times available for classes and events, particularly in the summer when youth programming is in high demand, as these routines often support their overall well-being. In addition, we have heard concerns that accidental physical injuries may occur from sharing the facilities with young people, and we are grateful that Metro Parks has high standards for safety. We hope to see Metro Parks maintain as much continuity as possible in the locations, times, and offerings of their programs, ensuring that seniors who rely on caregivers or public transportation can plan around stable schedules and locations.

- ***Need for ongoing meal services:*** The City appreciates that Metro Parks is working with us to make meals available at all four Metro Parks locations that will offer senior services, and we are thrilled to learn that the beloved cook who served seniors at Lighthouse will continue to serve seniors at the Eastside Community Center. We are also happy to hear that Metro Parks and Catholic Community Services reached agreement to have meals delivered to People’s Center. It is our intent that these meals will be provided at no cost to current senior center participants from our Beacon and Lighthouse locations. We know our seniors depend on these meals not only for nutrition, but also as an opportunity to connect and build community. We encourage Metro Parks to establish a predictable schedule for meal services to preserve these social bonds.
- ***Concerns with accessibility:*** Accessibility is foundational to equitable service delivery and is important for ensuring that no senior is excluded from participating in these programs. The City is working hard to help with transportation services for those seniors who currently participate at the Beacon and Lighthouse activity centers. We hope Metro Parks will also think creatively and proactively about solutions to ensure all seniors can easily access the facilities, whether through physical improvements, transportation support, or other measures. We have also heard concerns that outdoor areas where seniors may need to wait for transportation have seating and overhangs to protect from inclement weather.
- ***Tailoring programming to the specific needs of seniors:*** The current programming at the senior centers has been specifically designed with seniors’ needs in mind. Many seniors have shared that while Metro Parks plans to expand and diversify its offerings, it is essential to preserve the programs they are accustomed to and rely upon, such as strength training. We appreciate that Metro Parks has been gathering feedback on program offerings and hope that the opportunity for seniors to provide feedback continues throughout and beyond the transition.
- ***Maintaining effective communication:*** Many of our seniors, especially those who may not be tech-savvy or have regular access to digital resources, rely on the current senior centers for information about activities, resources, and services. We are certain that Metro Parks will continue to ensure clear, consistent, and accessible communication channels are available for seniors. Maintaining printed materials, in-person announcements, and other non-digital methods of communication will be essential to ensuring seniors remain connected and engaged.
- ***Advancing social inclusion and respect:*** One of the most consistent messages we have heard is that seniors want to be engaged in decisions that impact their lives and are eager to be collaborative partners. We know that Metro Parks excels in gathering community feedback and adjusting their work in response. We hope Metro Parks will work to engage seniors as advisors, actively soliciting their feedback and incorporating it into the design and delivery of services. Empowering seniors to be part of the conversation will build trust and confidence in the transition and foster a sense of ownership of the changes.
- ***Celebrating the diversity of our senior population:*** Tacoma’s senior population is varied in its backgrounds, experiences, and needs. We are especially excited about the robust experience and commitment to language and cultural diversity that Metro Parks brings to its programming and engagement efforts. We believe this will help ensure that programs are inclusive of seniors from all walks of life, while also creating opportunities to reach seniors who may not have been previously engaged. A deep and ongoing commitment to collaboration with seniors will

undoubtedly help ensure the programming is responsive, equitable, and reflective of the community's diverse needs.

We would like to thank Metro Parks for your outstanding partnership and all the seniors who have provided helpful feedback about this transition. We also want to stress that we remain committed to working with Metro Parks throughout this transition and beyond so that we can do everything possible to help ensure success. We have no doubt that our partnership will ensure Tacoma remains a city where all individuals, at every stage of life, feel connected and supported. Together, we can make sure that we are drawing upon the experience of our residents as we build the city for our experienced residents.

Thank you,

[Council signatures to be added if approved]