City of Tacoma

City Council

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

December 11, 2024

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 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, as these routines often support their overall well-being. 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. 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.

- ***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 rely on the current Senior Centers for information about activities, resources, and services, especially those who may not be tech-savvy or have regular access to digital resources. 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 know that Metro Parks understand how to engage with diverse populations and will provide variety in 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 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.

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Thank you,

[Council signatures to be added if approved]

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