



*Elevating the voices of those impacted by the Duwamish River pollution and other environmental injustices to advocate for a clean, healthy, and equitable environment for people and wildlife. Promoting place-keeping and prioritizing community capacity and resilience.*

March 7, 2023

David Butler  
david.butler@ecy.wa.gov  
Site Manager

Ian Fawley  
ian.fawley@ecy.wa.gov  
Public Involvement Coordinator

**Re: Duwamish Waterway Park Agreed Order, Public Participation Plan, and Local Considerations for Environmental Justice**

To Mr. Butler and Mr. Fawley,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Duwamish Waterway Park Agreed Order and Public Participation Plan. It is vitally important that community voices are heard on the issues that directly impact them. The Duwamish River Community Coalition (DRCC) has long been a community steward for environmental justice in the Duwamish Valley, which is one of the most polluted areas in the entire Pacific Northwest following over a century of industrial dumping and release of toxic waste. We seek to amplify the will and voices of community members harmed by the combined impacts of environmental, economic, and health inequities present in the Duwamish Valley.

The Duwamish Waterway Park (DWP) is an incredibly important asset to our underserved community, which has very limited access to green space available for public use compared to the other Seattle neighborhoods. The South Park neighborhood has about [half of the acreage per resident](#) dedicated to parks and open spaces as the rest of Seattle, which is as vital to mental health and well-being as physical. Studies have shown a strong link between time spent in outdoor spaces and decreased rates of anxiety, depression, lowered blood pressure and increased capacity to deal with stressful life events, such as the prolonged periods of social isolation associated with the COVID pandemic. The shared reality of the majority BIPOC, low-income, and immigrant communities that call the valley home is vastly different than

that of wealthier, predominantly white communities in other parts of the city .Our community needs a clean, safe and accessible Duwamish Waterway Park to take their children learn to swim or fish, to watch the salmon run or osprey hunt, to celebrate birthdays or enjoy a quiet moment of solitude watching Seattle's only river on its journey from the Cascades to the Salish Sea.

The DRCC thanks the Washington State Department of Ecology (ECY) for what it found to be a substantive and thoughtful attempt at genuine engagement with the community as it continues to adapt to and implement Environmental Justice mandates contained in the Healthy Environment for All Act (HEAL). Our community has shared their excitement at the prospect of turning this site from a contaminated, inaccessible area into a community asset with space for public use, and has also expressed a strong desire to be more involved in these processes. The DRCC has organized public events to engage with the community about this issue and we collectively offer the following recommendations on how The Department of Ecology can improve the current draft of the Public Participation Plan (PPP) and Agreed Order (AO) for the DWP, which are explained further in this letter. Our comments on the Public Participation Plan are centered around concerns for environmental justice and enhanced community engagement.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN COMMENTS**

- I. THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY SHOULD DISCUSS THE UNIQUE NEED FOR OPEN SPACE AND INCREASED ACCESSIBILITY IN THE DUWAMISH VALLEY.

Because South Park enjoys less green space than the rest of the City of Seattle,our community has an increased reliance on resources like the Duwamish Waterway Park.As a result, this plan should elaborate on how potential exposure to contamination and a lack of open space in South Park is of particular concern to this environmental justice community and should also address in more detail the cumulative health disparities experienced in the Duwamish Valley. The community has asked for specific examples of how the Department of Ecology and Liable Parties plan to communicate the risks associated with usage of the park, if and what signage will be erected, and if safety infrastructure will be installed to reduce any risk associated with normal use of the park for a community with few available alternatives to access green spaces.

The community has also long asked for hand and foot washing stations to be installed without a substantive response from city or state officials, and this park has already been in some process of investigation and cleanup for several years. This PPP provides little detail addressing these points, and Public Participation Plans should be tailored to address unique community concerns for each site rather than using a general plan that is used across all sites.

## II. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES NEED MORE ROBUST COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT FROM ALL PARTIES.

Mailers are insufficient on their own, and enhanced community engagement in overburdened communities requires community involvement that goes beyond the mailbox and engages community members in-person, in their preferred language, and according to the unique scheduling needs of a predominantly immigrant, working-class population with limited English proficiency. The Department of Ecology should partner with communities to design culturally appropriate outreach, education and risk communication lacking in the Duwamish Waterway Park Public Participation Plan, as written.

The Department of Ecology should expand its outreach efforts to include more in-situ community engagement activities like door-knocking and flier/poster distribution in the South Park neighborhood, and include how it intends to share this and future plans with the community members (~36 families) currently displaced by the January 2023 “King Tide” South Park neighborhood flooding event that live in close proximity to the Duwamish Waterway Park.

## III. THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY SHOULD MAKE PUBLIC MEETINGS MORE ACCESSIBLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITIES.

The Department of Ecology should continue to explore ways to overcome economic and technological barriers to outreach for in-person community meetings that acknowledge the special nature of the area. Translation services for in-person meetings currently require community members to bring cell phones to access them, creating a technological/economic barrier for a community earning well below the median income and possessing limited English language skills, and community has expressed that Ecology should strive to meet the community where they are by holding meetings in the South Park and Georgetown neighborhoods, scheduled during the evenings, and avoiding midday meetings that exclude many working families.

For community members unable to attend in-person and online, meetings should be recorded and made available to community members and local CBO's for review. Translation services for in-person meetings currently require community members to bring cell phones to access them, creating a technological/economic barrier for a community earning well below the median income and possessing limited English language skills relative to the general population in the region.

Further, our community has expressed that the public meetings for this comment period were not accessible. Holding an in-person meeting in West Seattle was inconvenient for many community members, especially since those most impacted by decisions about DWP live in South Park. Many residents also rely on public transportation, so having meetings in the

community is necessary. Therefore, in-person meetings should be held in South Park or Georgetown so that more community members can attend. Our community has also expressed the need for food and child care at in-person meetings. Providing such accommodations make these events more family friendly and make attendance less of a burden on community members.

Finally, for online meetings, our community would prefer evening meetings rather than meetings during the day. Having an online meeting at noon on a weekday was not accessible, and many community members expressed this to us. Many people have jobs where their lunch break is not consistently set at noon, and some do not have a full hour to spare in the middle of the day. Making these adjustments to the way public meetings are held will make the public comment process significantly more accessible.

#### **AGREED ORDER COMMENTS**

#### **IV. THE AGREED ORDER NEEDS TO INCLUDE MORE DETAILS ABOUT HOW OUR COMMUNITY CAN EXPECT TO BE GIVEN ACCESS TO INFORMATION BY ECOLOGY.**

In section 7.2 of the Agreed Order, it states that communities will be informed of significant changes. Due to this site being a public park and the aforementioned need for green spaces in this community, there is increased concern about being informed of significant changes. Ecology should specify how community members can expect to receive notice of any significant changes to the agreement.

Additionally, the Agreed Order should also be drafted with the needs of an environmental justice community in mind. Meaningful engagement requires consultation, community-driven involvement, and shared leadership. This should include more public meetings with Ecology representatives both in-person and online to address questions and concerns, hold conversations with the community about ways to make public comment more accessible, and solicit feedback from the public on what their engagement needs are for each site. Public meetings should be culturally relevant to our community which can be achieved by planning events with local organizations who have existing relationships with the community.

In Section 7 of the Appendix, there is discussion of how the Department of Ecology plans to comply with the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA). This would be a good place to also include a more in depth discussion of how the Department plans to comply with the HEAL Act. Ecology should explain in detail how the Healthy Environment For All (HEAL) Act informed and guided the creation of the Agreed Order as mandated by law. Additionally, the Department of Ecology should provide examples of how planning for this site meaningfully prioritizes vulnerable environmental justice communities outlined in the HEAL Act absent from previous site plans created prior to the passage and implementation of the Act.

## SUMMARY

In summary, we believe that the Duwamish Waterway Park Public Participation Plan needs to be revised to reflect an Enhanced Community Engagement approach that includes (1) a deeper analysis of the unique need to prioritize access to open spaces in the Duwamish Valley, (2) a more robust community outreach from all parties, (3) a plan to make meetings more accessible for environmental justice communities, (4) more information on how community can expect access to information given by The Department of Ecology. We request that the Department of Ecology revise their Public Participation Plan to include the aforementioned Enhanced Community Engagement approach.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide comments. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.



Christian Poulsen  
Policy Analyst  
Duwamish River Community  
Coalition



Jamie Hearn  
Superfund Program Manager  
Duwamish River Community  
Coalition

Susan I. Davis  
President  
South Park Neighborhood  
Association  
sirened030@gmail.com

Hannah Kett  
hannah.leigh88@gmail.com

Maria G. Ramirez  
moonflower2@mar.com

Jason Thoennes  
thoenje@gmail.com

Noelle Knapp-Lucero  
noellegkl@gmail.com

Melissa Banales  
melibanales15@gmail.com

Leah Wood  
leahwood086@gmail.com

Jamie Lucero  
prflsjn@outlook.com

Rebecca Parrish  
beccalparrish@gmail.com

Christina Gallegos  
manitaloca@yahoo.com

Summer Popelka  
smpopelka@gmail.com

Brian Murphy  
maslondo@gmail.com

Nancy Sackman  
nancys@duwamishtribe.org



7400 3rd Ave S.    contact@DRCC.org  
Seattle, WA 98108    www.DRCC.org  
206.251.2038    @DRCC\_org