



Agenda Item: Discuss and Consider Approval of Hiring Seawall Ambassadors and Cash Options in Lieu of Kiosks

Background: Per an Interlocal Agreement with the City of Galveston, the Park Board is responsible for managing the Seawall Urban Park program. This includes the daily operation of a Call Center to assist individuals with paying for parking, Seawall Ambassadors who assist with parking and general tourist information on the Seawall itself and the maintenance of the Loos, Port-o-Loo's, Bus Stops and Bollards for the entire Seawall Urban Park.

In early 2020 the Park Board responded to the financial challenges presented by the pandemic by modifying budgets. As part of the budget modifications, several Part Time positions were eliminated through the end of the budget cycle. While these reductions proved to be a strong recourse for lost revenue opportunities early in the pandemic, we quickly saw that demand for outdoor recreation was high and the Seawall saw record visitation.

Seawall Ambassadors

In 2020, Urban Park received 48,534 calls. This excludes the period in which the offices were closed, and parking was not being enforced. Of these calls, 14% went unanswered.

Presently, Urban Park has three Ambassadors who assist with phone calls. There are no Ambassadors deployed on the Seawall at this time. Staff proposes increasing the number of Ambassadors by 3 part time employees, reaching pre-pandemic staffing numbers. This will ensure coverage in the Call Center during peak times, and will allow Ambassadors to deploy along Seawall Boulevard to engage with visitors who are struggling to use the Pay by Phone application.

Seawall Pay Kiosks

In late 2016, two kiosks were purchased for the Seawall Boulevard, allowing patrons to pay cash or use their credit card to pay for parking. There was great hope for the effectiveness of these kiosks, but they have not proven to be valuable.

For the entirety of 2020 less than \$1000 was collected between the two kiosks. In addition, they are plagued by frequent breakdowns, that require service from the provider who is located in Austin.

Both kiosks have aged and need repairs at a cost of approximately \$2700. Replacing the kiosks would cost \$9600 each. The company who provided the kiosks and service them, has offered to buy them back at a price of \$1000 per kiosk.

Seawall Business Partners

Since assuming management of the Seawall Parking Program, the Park Board has partnered with several businesses to assist visitors and residents who wish to pay cash for parking or who are not comfortable with the phone app.

At present, there is one remaining business partner, Ohana Surf and Skate (OSS), located at 29th and Seawall. Since becoming a partner in 2013, OSS reports they have collected \$86,000 in parking fees on behalf of the Park Board. OSS has expressed concerns about their continued partnership with the Park Board. A majority of their concerns are related to communication, and Park Leadership recognizes significant improvement is needed in this area.

In addition, OSS would like to charge a service fee to cover labor and material expenses for processing the pass and would also like to be a paid agent to process payments. OSS also notes that they have seen little return for their involvement from a business standpoint stating “our product generally does not appeal” to the individuals seeking assistance with parking fees.

Park Board Leadership would like to do what we can to improve the relationship with OSS, but cannot provide financial incentives for them to remain a partner. We would also like to identify 2 to 3 new partners along the Seawall who would have an interest in assisting with this program before removing the kiosks.

Staff Recommendation: The Parks and Amenities Committee voted unanimously at their April 1, 2021 meeting to move forward with the staff suggestion of recruiting 3 Part-Time Ambassadors per budgeted headcount and seeking two to three new business partners to assist with cash payments for the Seawall Parking program.

Funding Source (if applicable): Urban Park Budget Personnel, UP-51-5000