

The Vashon Park District has come a long way in its 25-year history. We can be proud of our island neighbors and predecessors who had the vision to form a park district encompassing the relatively small area and geographically isolated area of Vashon Island when many larger communities then and now have had nothing similar. Not for either the first time nor the last time, the island community “punched above its weight” in putting together such an organization. However, for all practical purposes it would cease to exist but for the continuing support in the form of levy approval every four years or so, putting us on a footing not unlike a private sector firm that has to look for the “wolf at its door” almost constantly.

Not that there have not been trials along the way. The levy very nearly failed in 2015, passing by fewer than 100 votes out of thousands of cast ballots. Even though the levy could have been resubmitted, many of us had the feeling that the future of Vashon Park District hung in the balance.

It was not hard to see why the levy almost failed after two decades of unfailing approval. As described elsewhere in this Plan, in the midst of the Great Recession and plunging levy income, the District continued an expensive controversial project, the Vashon Elementary School (VES) Fields initiative, that severely affected the financial health of the District and led to the postponement, restructuring or elimination of popular District programs.

In addition to the near failure of the levy, VPD elections have become much more competitive in subsequent years. Seven of the past eight commissioner contests have had two or more candidates. A couple of incumbents have been defeated and others have left the Board. By 2017, the board had turned over completely in the course of two election cycles. Moreover, in 2018 one commissioner resigned and the Board selected his replacement.

Thus, one can accurately say that the current commissioners comprise a “new Board.” Together with Executive Director Elaine Ott-Rocheford and the rest of the Park District staff, we have moved aggressively to regain the community’s trust. After financial restructuring and stricter oversight, we finished the VES project. We have ended years of annual short-term borrowing by means of tight budgets that effectively required surpluses to pay off debt. We have rewritten bi-laws after years of neglect. We have approved improvements to park infrastructure.

In summary, we are in good shape financially and organizationally. We face many challenges, both financial and demographic, as we survey the landscape of the 2018-24 period covered in this Plan. We commissioners have our disagreements of course, as reflected in “split-decisions” on several recent proposals, and expect to have more differences going forward, but we differ in a non-combative and respectful manner. Above all, we strive to represent the people who selected us, the people of Vashon Island.