Thank you,

...to imagine, advocate for, donate to, and be a part of Seattle's new waterfront and the new downtown that will emerge when we finally come together, “the city can accomplish great things.”

This is all happening on the lands and shared waters of the Coast Salish peoples, whose culture is more than 10,000 years old. Those of us who came later built an inestimable debt of gratitude to the tribal partners who have been, and will always be, central to the design, culture, and stewardship of this new park.

For 13 years, Waterfront Park has taken shape as an intensive collaboration with our elected leaders, public-sector institutions, businesses, nonprofit partners, community leaders, artists, and tens of thousands of other individuals who have weighed in and shown up to create and[...]

Our terrific staff has been engaging with and learning from individuals and groups from around the region to create community-driven cultural events, recreational activities, and educational opportunities that feel inclusive and safe for all people—particularly Black and Indigenous people and other people of color and underserved communities.

We are deeply grateful to the 680 community partners from around the city who helped shape public program offerings on Pier 62 last year. More than a quarter million people visited the pier in 2021, enjoying free programs led by musicians, artists, teachers, and cultural organizations from across the city—or simply using it to come together in the parks.

Thanks to all of you who have visited the waterfront. You are helping to create a space that feels vital and welcoming to everyone.

We are grateful to the many partners and friends who have worked with us and each other to make Pier 62 and the entire waterfront a safe and inclusive place: Seattle Parks and Recreation, Seattle Historic Waterfront[...]

On every page of this report are the names and contributions of the many people who have helped us—the individuals, organizations, and local governments who have stepped up with financial contributions, ongoing care and services to the place and its park-goers, and love for Seattle who are part of the DNA of Waterfront Park. Ultimately, the list is incomplete; many others have helped—and we will bring this place to life and give it meaning by contributing their ideas, passion, and presence. Thank you all for honoring the many histories of our waterfront and for helping to write and tell the new stories of this place we all love so much.

Thatcher Bailey
Interim Executive Director
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When Benton welcomes you over the threshold of the Columbia City Theater, you see that you’re in a special place. The building is more than 100 years old and has hosted a century of entertainment, from vaudeville and movies to indie rock and hip-hop. Given Seatlin-
tide’s rapid development and soaring property prices, it’s rare to step into a place that has so much unvarnished old Seattle atmosphere intact. There’s a high ceiling, an exposed brick wall, and a trim bar. Follow Benton through another doorway, and you step out into a double-height theater, with galleries along the walls, a wooden floor that invites dancing, and a gift-edged prosenium arch over the stage.

Benton started Rainier Avenue Radio in 2011. That commitment to community means Benton is an ideal partner for getting the news out about Waterfront Park. If you’re tuned to Rainier Avenue Radio, you may hear Benton’s voice on radio spots in English; ads in Fijian, Filipino, Spanish, or Vietnamese; or invitations to community events at Pier 62 that range from music shows to yoga classes.

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Benton’s dream for the theater includes everyone in the community, so he wants to have all-ages events that young people can attend. That’s not surprising given that Rainier Avenue Radio runs classes for middle and high school students in 21st-century communications skills such as app design, social media, digital analytics, photography and, of course, broadcasting.

Benton coordinates Make Music Day. It’s a way to mark the summer solstice—and the power of music to unite and uplift. Even during the first pandemic summer of 2020, Benton spread some musical joy around town on that date with a hybrid program of online and socially distanced events, including “tiny” marching bands along the downtown waterfront, a cappella singers in Westlake Park, and acoustic performances on Pier 62. Friends of Waterfront Seattle worked with Benton to put on Make Music Day 2022 with an all day event on the Waterfront this year.
In December 2021, Friends of the Waterfront Seattle received a generous $5 million gift from Amazon. Spearheading and facilitating this donation was Taylor Hoang, the company’s senior manager of external affairs at Amazon.

Hoang spent her childhood helping out in her hometown company, we wanted to be a part of it. And we, as a company, knew that this was definitely something that we wanted to support. Waterfront Park is going to transform Seattle—and as a hometown company, we wanted to be a part of that history...[It] is also important for us to get involved with improving our city and setting an example for our corporate partners to step in and do the same. Ultimately, there was no question for us whether we would get involved or not, it was just a matter of time and getting everybody together to make sure that we did it correctly.

How do you think Waterfront Park will change Seattle?

Waterfront Park is going to be the largest urban park district in the city in a long, long time. It’s going to bring the infrastructure development in our city to a whole new level. And we, as a company, know this was a project you whole team together. And we, as a company, knew that this was definitely something that we wanted to support. Waterfront Park is going to transform Seattle—and as a hometown company, we wanted to be a part of that history...[It] is also important for us to get involved with improving our city and setting an example for our corporate partners to step in and do the same. Ultimately, there was no question for us whether we would get involved or not, it was just a matter of time and getting everybody together to make sure that we did it correctly.

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On a cool, clear afternoon in March, environmental historian Jennifer Ott is on Seattle’s waterfront, leading a tour and evoking a vision of the past. Dressed in a pastel coat and sneakers, Ott strolls through the Alaskan Way Viaduct, pointing out key landmarks as she leads her group: the Alaskan Way Bridge; the long, wide pier of the Alaskan Way Viaduct that runs under Pier 62; and the distant, tree-lined waterfront view.

Ott shows the group old photos of the long, wide piers and railway tracks that shipping firms, timber barons, and industrialists built in layers of construction, destruction, and reconstruction over many decades.

The tour is leading, hosted by HistoryLink and Friends of Waterfront Seattle, is not just for tourists. This group also includes longtime residents and new arrivals from all points of the compass. Some have spent a lifetime in Seattle without realizing how much of the waterfront is the product of human engineering— including the ground beneath their feet as they walk north along Alaskan Way toward Pier 62. This is all in, created by regaled hills and vast amounts of dirt (and other things) dumped into the harbor to build up land for streets, warehouses, and businesses.

What held all that in place was Seattle’s first seawall, constructed in stages from the 1910s through the 1930s. Despite additions and improvements over the decades, it was in dire condition by 2013, when work began on its replacement. Ott points out the location of the seawall beneath the walkway as people pass under traffic cones and fencing that are part of ongoing construction and landscaping for the new seawall.

The new seawall, completed in 2017, was designed with careful consideration of both human activity and the natural environment. Environmental scientists from the University of Washington who had done seawall research since the mid-2000s were brought in as advisors during the planning process. They included Jason Toft, a principal scientist on the Wetland Ecosystem Team in the UW’s School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences. Ott shows the group old photos of the long, wide wall, with overshooting piers. That wasn’t the best environment for the marine species, like Chinook salmon, that were abundant here before settler colonization and industrial development.

Toft and his colleagues knew that when young salmon migrate seaward from their inland hatching tributaries, they stick close to shallow water near shore and avoid the ledges of shadows under piers, where they can’t see well enough to feed on the small invertebrates that make up most of their diet. The new seawall design mimics natural shallow water habitat, with a “bench” in the wall, not far from the surface. Post-construction research has shown that this has improved habitat for juvenile salmon, increasing feeding behavior and dispersion along the shoreline.

The seawall face itself looks more like a climbing wall,” says Toft. “There’s crevasses and ledges, and that’s really good for invertebrate and algae attachment. You want to give those smaller invertebrates a place to grow and live.” The wall’s concrete texture was designed by artists Laura Haddad and Tom Drayan to mimic the forms of the creatures and plants that Toft describes. Haddad and Drayan describe the seawall as “the dynamic seam between land and sea,” but it can also be described as a meeting point between art and science.

Another waterfront design feature that’s a result of the UW team’s involvement is glass bricks in the sidewalk that allow natural light to get under the piers. Pedestrians strolling along the waterfront may be unaware that tiny salmon could be swimming in the water just a few yards below them.

There’s plenty of other surprises under the water, too. Most Seattleites don’t realize that shools of herring swim close to the waterfront. But then, not many of those people live in the cool waters of Elliott Bay, Toft and his team do. The researchers don drysuits for an annual “survival survey” of fish and invertebrates near the seawall.

“If you see someone on the waterfront this spring walking around in a drysuit, it could be one of our team members,” Toft says. The scientists are glad to see their research and ongoing data collection contribute to environmental improvements. “Even though Seattle is a huge city, and there’s big problems with trying to improve habitat for salmon, it is possible,” says Toft. “Salmon still migrate back and forth along our shorelines. This connection, where freshwater meets saltwater, is just hugely important.”

The new Tidelands Promenade and seawall were carefully designed to create shallower-water habitat for native marine life. IMAGES BY JASON CORFIELD / FIELD OPERATIONS COURTESY OF THE CITY OF SEATTLE
Names, ages, and years as professional musicians?

HG: 21, less than a year.

THEM: Thompson Whitehead, 17; Hudson Steers, 19; Ellie Vann, 20; Maia Schinkel, 20.

We have all been professional musicians and a band for the past four years.

Haley, is what it about pop punk that captures your imagination and sparks creativity for you?

HG: I love the energy! Let's out all my anger and aggression, but in a playful way!

THEM: It was truly an unreal experience. The Black Tones will always be one of our top Seattle bands. THEM actually formed as a band at a small music school in West Seattle where [Black Tones front woman] Eva Walker was the instructor. She taught us cover songs as a group every Sunday evening when we were 12, 13, and 14 years old. We've learned so much from everyone in The Black Tones over the years, and to share the stage with them was surreal.

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THEM: I feel like I'm in a unique position with pop punk making a comeback and seeing more Black people come to the front, especially Black women like Willow Smith and Meet Me @ The Attic.

Pier Sounds was the first series of large-scale concerts held at Pier 62 since 2004, when Summer Nights at the Pier ended. There was a big demand in Seattle for these concerts to come back. How did it feel to be a part of the return of live concerts on Pier 62?

THEM: Seattle's music community is so supportive, and we're lucky to be a part of this historic concert series joined by our favorite artists; the show was truly unforgettable.

What are your thoughts on free concerts for the public in parks and public spaces?

HG: I feel like it's very important. I would assume that the girls in THEM can relate to this, but I have a lot of friends under 21 or about to turn 21, and many of them wish they could come see a show of mine, and having more all-ages spaces could help with that.
“What is it then between us?” —Walt Whitman

There are 20 million pounds of gold suspended in normal seawater, spread out in parts-per-trillion. Gold is a good conductor of electricity, but seeing how it’s sought, I’ll bet it’s the best conductor of a heart’s deepest want. I once had a conversation with my daughter in which she asked, “Do you believe everything is connected?” “That depends,” I said. “On what?” she asked. “On whether you’re being spiritual or conspiratorial.” “Spiritual,” she said. “Then, yes,” I said, “everything is connected.” “How can everything be connected spiritually, but not conspiratorially?” she asked. Considering it, I believe the spirit conspires against our errant belief that we are separate. I might be you. You might be me. We might be the living sea with 20 million pounds of gold shimmering, suspended between us, conducting our hearts’ deepest wants across frolicsome crests and glistening, and what else could it be, if not a spiritual conspiracy?

Rena Priest is an enrolled member of the Lhaq’temish (Lummi) Nation. She currently serves as the Washington State Poet Laureate.