

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN PUBLIC MEETING PHASE 1

Carkeek Environmental Learning Center: December 1, 2007

Total Participants: 19 Public, 4 Parks and Recreation Staff

Major Themes

There was considerable emphasis on maintaining assets, developing new properties and preserving and restoring the environment. There was a clear theme that management does not support the staff and generally is not accessible or available. The participants had very positive words for staff and wanted to see the frequency of staff changes reduced.

Other clear themes included:

- Preserve and restore Parks and Recreation's assets
- Strengthen partnership with the school district and take advantage of the sites they are closing
- Strengthen the partnership with volunteers and fix the partnership with Advisory Councils and Associate Recreation Councils
- Market Parks and Recreations programs, services and assets to increase utilization
- Restore the community's trust in Parks and Recreation
- Expand the quality recreation programs to also fill educational needs
- Be proactive, plan, get out in front of issues
- Manage Parks and Recreation's money

1. What could Parks and Recreation improve?

Public Engagement

- Marketing, people don't know programs and projects
- Improve communication between Volunteers & Facilities, Arc & Staff
- Make the turn around on communication-quicker
- Communication to volunteers is almost non-existent
- The public does not hear back from Parks and Recreation staff
- Never hear about Parks and Recreation in the news
- Lack trust
- More outreach, get the word out
- More creative marketing, draw people in based on specific assets and unique value
- Promote public ownership of Parks, advertise how many volunteer hours invested
- The driver is the public
- It is "our park", Parks and Recreation should exist for the public
- Expand Sense of Ownership
- Use larger fonts on materials

Finances

- Plan ahead, the Pro Parks Levy expires this year, Parks and Recreation should have started planning last year

Maintenance

- Parks and Recreation should fully disclose capital improvement plans and what will happen after the Pro Parks Levy ends
- Capital improvement plans do not address community interests and should mirror neighborhood plans, other community plans and tie in with Watershed Plans

Staff

- Parks management needs to be more available, accessible and visible
- Top management accountability
- Staff are on their own and get very little support from management
- Management needs to be more efficient—currently dysfunctional
- 10 Division managers is too many
- Management treat staff poorly
- Management treat staff fairly and well
- Staff turnover is too frequent
- Too many out of class situations
- Need to stabilize the organization
- Too much time is lost training new staff
- Work on retention
- Staff are fearful
- Sync staff up with talent, park needs, plan ahead; allow staff to use their expertise
- Staff are overloaded
- Promote being proactive
- Behavior depends on the superintendent and the culture he or she will develop
- Identify staff with clearly visible ID or uniforms
- There are too many talented people working upper echelons, not enough boots on the ground

Maintenance and Facilities

- Pay attention to ADA details and maintenance
- Parking and trails need right kind of disabled access
- Restroom access is a health issue, Parks and Recreation should consider the seasons and hours they are open, how they are maintained, and insure that there are sufficient facilities to support planned events
- Lack of maintenance
- Increase maintenance budget and number of staff
- Improve communication of need for money for maintenance

Parks and Facilities

- Large parks and parks in remote locations attract unruly behavior, it is hard to keep up w/enforcement
- Lack of staff in Parks
- Lack of attention and time from Seattle Police Department and Seattle Fire Department is an issue of public safety

Decision Making

- Advisory Council:
 - Approval Process for new member is too long; can take a year to approve a new council member
 - Quicker Turnaround

- Modernization is taking too long
- Parks and Recreation decision-making is slow and risk averse
 - Many layers of decisions making
 - From getting an idea for a project to project implementation takes too long
 - Every project and decision has to go to the top of Parks and Recreation for decision

Communication and Marketing

- Marketing what Parks and Recreation does and needs up to the Mayor and Council
- Use public needs assessment to leverage with decision makers to obtain more resources
- Vie against police and fire
- There is also a need to market to the public
- Be proactive not reactive

Education Programming

- Improve education programs
 - More staff and budget
 - Fill the gap left by Seattle Schools
- Education programs for seniors and adults

2. What does Parks and Recreation do well?

- Staff initiative—nothing to do with management—talented front line staff are not supported by management
- Website overall is helpful

Parks and Facilities

- Emphasis on environmental and forest restoration – stewardship efforts appreciated
- Great Playgrounds for Small Kids – need something for bigger kids
- Great success with Don Harris & Open Space Acquisitions
- Public Safety
- Regular police patrols

Programs

- Lifelong recreation programs, tours, classes keeps older drivers off the street
 - Crackerjack staff supporting program
 - Expand the staff , the senior population is growing
 - Add transportation so people don't have to drive, especially those that should not be driving
- Great Senior Volunteer Program for 50+ yr olds
 - Lots of people want to get their fingers dirty
- Lots of support for salmon program since 1999
 - Good staff support
 - Demonstrates respect for the environment and good stewardship
 - Good coordination with Seattle Public Utilities
 - Outstanding, big program
 - Significant concern about impact of runoff, particularly when the drainage can't keep up
- Recreation is done well but Parks and Recreation needs to do more and expand into education

Public Engagement

- Volunteers like autonomy
- Trust between parks & volunteers is good , volunteer program is efficient and a lot gets done
- Volunteers feel welcome and supported, they can see the results of their work and they keep the parks going
- Parks and Recreation is getting a monthly volunteer opportunity from volunteer listserv, they should market this opportunity

3. What are the issues and challenges that Parks and Recreation will face in the next five years?

Financial

- Budget cuts
- Potential for economic recession
- Expiration of levy , lack of plan and support from the mayor
- Americans hate taxes; no taxes, no service
- If Parks and Recreation links growth with the budget through impact fees, then growth will pay for parks

Maintenance

- The decline of forests is occurring due to old age of trees and climate change; Parks and Recreation needs to asses the decline's impact on maintenance
- Aging infrastructure and facilities
- Invasive species
- Water quality will result in loss of salmon and health issues and have financial impacts
- Increased development is a threat; there will be sewage treatment impacts and overflows will hit parks

Community

- Changes in demographics should inform funding model and affect service and product delivery:
 - Population growth means more users
 - Increased number of seniors
- Stay on top of opportunities
- Opportunity may be missed due to complacency; “government job equals complacency”

4. What are the emerging trends that will drive how Parks and Recreation does business over the next five years?

Parks and Facilities

- Lots of real estate – 11% of city
 - Need plan – accommodate demographic changes? Can work together
 - Asset management
- Preserve open space for quiet reflection
- Use closed school properties
- expand/change use agreement

- Finish ARC modernization plan
- update constitution
- opportunity for new management to prod “goose’em” along
- Expressed frustration with how long modernization was taking
- Re-establish habitats
- Signage for public at watershed awareness – education opportunity

Programs

- More intergenerational activities – mixed age
- Transportation for all – cut driving
- Partner with Metro possibly
- Need to use comp. plan & other info “stuck” in archives or shelves as part of SBP process

Public Engagement

- Re-invent purpose of parks
- reach out to non-parks users or new users
- look at national cutting edge ideas/trends
- Partner with schools for programs – global climate (picture of a triangle) – teacher program
- Environmental education for whole city
- Believe this referred to City government with expectation of including elected officials
- Partner with dept. of planning & development
- No more boondoggles

Funding

- Managing the money
- Hire grant writers to pursue grants and other funding
- Avoid commercializing the parks
- Examine and audit allocation of resources compared to other cities, Parks and Recreation has a lot more money than other city parks departments
- Examine ratios for administration, overhead, and maintenance, etc.

5. What is your vision for Parks and Recreation?

Funding

- Reduce reliance on tax money

Facilities

- Be able to walk to open space without crossing major arterial

Community

- Something for everyone across city-regardless of differences – be a welcoming system
- Balance and equity-important and should be applied to all components of vision

6. Other Comments on Specific Projects

- Waited a long time for disabled walkway at Carkeek
- Replace handicap sani-can on ADA trail with a permanent facility

SEATTLE PARKS AND RECREATION STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

- Carkeek closed restrooms and had only 1 sani-can available for 300-400 people
- Over 4,000 volunteer hours at Carkeek in 2005
- Community at Magnuson does not want privatization