



Attendees

In-Person

Denise Retz, Park Superintendent

Pam Denning

Cathryn Dickman

Mike Foley

Beth Fields

Joe Hellrung

Keith Morey

Scott Siefker, TSWDG

Maria Wainscott, TSWDG

Zoom

Mike Devine

Dakota Collins

Ron Itnyre

Meeting Summary

On Thursday, June 11th the project consulting team held a meeting with the Richmond Parks Master Planning Team. The meeting was held in the Hutton Community Room in the City Building from 2:00 – 3:30pm. As part of the COVID-19 social distancing protocols, TSWDG provided a flyer to participants prior to the meeting explaining precautionary measures for attendance. Those with fever or other symptoms occurring within the past 72 hours were asked not to attend in person. No common or shared materials, including sign-in sheets and input boards, were used to limit contact. TSWDG provided resources including hand sanitizer, tissues, disinfectants and disposable face masks for participants. Chairs were spaced 6-feet apart to maintain social distancing. The meeting was made available via Zoom for those who felt more comfortable participating from home. The Parks Master Planning Team received materials prior to, and following the meeting.

Introductions

The meeting began with an informal introduction of the consulting team. Members of the consulting team included Scott Siefker and Maria Wainscott of TSWDG. The Parks Master Planning Team members were also asked to introduce themselves.

Overview and Process

In an effort to re-orient the Master Planning Team to the planning process and the general schedule, Scott Siefker (TSWDG) outlined the overall process, which focuses on five key phases tied together with public engagement. While the consulting team was on track to finish the planning process by June, we have been forced to make adjustments based on the COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place orders.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Prior to the shelter-in-place orders, the team was able to work through the first three phases of the planning process. The only outstanding elements from those first three phases was the completion of a follow-up meeting with this Parks Master Planning Team. Based on the work remaining, the consulting team is now working towards a plan completion date of mid-late August.

Work to Date

Scott outlined the following work done or completed to date:

Planning Process

The planning process seeks to gather information throughout the early phases. What is learned regarding programming, research and analysis and park facilities provides the information needed to make appropriate decisions in the planning strategies phase. As the consulting team examined the existing system, we used three primary methods to gain information and analyze our findings, including field inventory, community input and data/ technical analysis.

Field Inventory

Maria Wainscott (TSWDG) outlined the field inventory process. Since the beginning of the year, the consulting team has been taking a close look at the Richmond parks system. We conducted a thorough review based on four categories, including park properties, specialty facilities, trails and supporting open spaces such as the Hayes Arboretum and the Cope Environmental Center.

For each property or facility that the parks department owns or maintains, the consulting team completed an inventory of the property, an ADA inventory and assessment, an assessment of community use and an identification of overall opportunities and challenges. This inventory has been reviewed by Denise and will be a component of what is shared with the Parks Master Planning Team following the meeting.

Community Input and Engagement

Maria outlined the community input and engagement process. Since the beginning of the year, the consulting team has focused on using a variety of methods to learn as much as possible about the system and how residents use what's available. Some of the methods used to engage the community include:

- A series of focus group meetings
- Several pop-up events with the help of Denise and her staff
- A project website
- Email and social media outreach with assistance from the City and parks department staff
- Community Input Survey
- Perceptions and Needs Public Workshop

Community Input Survey

The community input survey focused on identifying local perceptions and needs and generating an understanding of existing facilities. The survey was made available in digital and hard-copy formats. It garnered over 1,700 responses, with input from participants ranging in age from youth to seniors.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Throughout the survey, the consulting team received over 1,200 individual comments on the existing system and what was needed in the future.

Perceptions and Needs Public Workshop

The consulting team was able to facilitate the first public workshop prior to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 11, 2020 in Lingle Hall at Reid Hospital. Over 60 people signed in at the event, which included a variety of stations, each offering information and a chance for participants to weigh in on existing conditions, community aspirations, priorities or overall needs.

Data and Technical Analysis

Scott provided an overview of the data and technical analysis. In order to balance out the public perception, the consulting team examined data and statistics around national and regional recreation trends. These elements help the team anticipate what might be emerging as a local interest. The team also looked at local trends and conditions to better understand what the parks department might need to address or respond to locally. The system itself was examined in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of level of service (LOS) and how the parks department compares to its geographical peers.

In order to complete the comparison, the team used the NRPA's Park Metrics database. This allowed for the comparison of Richmond-specific data against organizations of the same size. In total, the team was able to gain information on 20 peer organizations in the Midwest with similar population sizes to Richmond. The analysis focused on park facilities, staffing and funding. During this portion of the presentation, one team member asked:

- **Mike Foley** – Did you compare our maintenance department from a staff and capability standpoint? Did you speak with our maintenance staff? We need to ensure that we have the capability to handle the facilities that we have.
- **Maria Wainscott** – Yes, we had a meeting with the maintenance staff during one of our focus group sessions and received feedback that influenced the creation of the vision statement, goals and short- and long-term initiatives for the parks department.

Park Facilities

The typical agency within the twelve Midwest states manages 23 parks and 12 miles of trails. On average, this offers one park for every 1,528 residents. By comparison, the Richmond parks system includes 23 parks and approximately 8 miles of paved trails and offers one park for every 1,573 residents. This keeps the City on track with its regional peers.

Staffing

Currently, the Richmond Parks and Recreation Department employs 23 full-time staff members, which is above the regional average of 15 full-time employees. However, if you examine staffing in comparison to overall population, Richmond falls short. Richmond employs nearly 6.5 full-time staff members per 10,000 residents, a number that is within the lower 25 percentage when compared to the system's regional peers.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Funding

Through its primary fund, the Richmond Parks Department has an annual operating revenue just over \$2.4 million, which is considerably below average. This represents a significant decline since 2009. Approximately 93% of the funding came directly from local taxes. In comparison, Richmond's regional peers have only 38% of funding coming directly from local taxes. A greater diversification in revenue sources would provide the parks department with greater flexibility and resiliency. During this portion of the presentation, Denise explained:

- **Denise Retz** – One of the things we are currently working on is to figure out if this information is something we want to share. We feel it's a bit of a misinterpretation, as revenue from non-reverting accounts wasn't included as part of this analysis. We are trying to come up with a significant way to hone everything together to realize if this is a parks system that can generate revenue. These recommendations might accompany other plans in the future. There will be a decision-making tool and a list of capital improvement as a result of this planning process to help guide the parks department in the future.

Key System Findings

Community engagement and analysis can be broken down into system strengths, or elements that can be leveraged in the future, and system challenges, or elements that need to be addressed as the parks department moves forward. The system's primary strengths include:

- Richmond's parks and recreation system is valued across the community and is considered an essential component to the community's quality of life.
- Richmond residents' value multi-use trails and city-wide connectivity.
- The City's flagship parks and events offer history, amenities and a sense of community.
- The Parks Department currently markets programs to a variety of age groups.
- Richmond celebrates its history, culture and community by offering a variety of festivals and events tailored to the City's diverse population.

While there are many strengths that currently exist, there are elements that need to be considered as the parks department moves forward. If these challenges aren't addressed, they may continue to grow and could undermine the department's future success. Challenges include:

- The responsibilities of the Parks Department are numerous, and residents worry they have too much on their plate.
- The general public remains unaware of certain park properties and program offerings.
- The City's flagship parks need repairs and improvements.
- Departmental resources are constrained.
- Some existing park properties, amenities and programs are still unknown to members of the community.
- Improved maintenance practices system-wide are needed.
- Strategic and well-planned investment is needed to ensure long-range success.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

Vision and Goals

To guide the work of the department over the next five years, the consulting team has prepared a Vision Statement:

- The City's parks, open space and recreational programs will continue to serve as critical building blocks for improving the overall quality of life for Richmond residents. Over the past decade, the Richmond Parks and Recreation Department has worked to establish a sense of park pride with the community. Our focus for the future is to leverage our park pride to create a resilient and sustainable parks and open space system which features active public spaces, inclusive recreational amenities and diverse recreational programs.

The vision statement is intended to serve as a broad umbrella for ideas and actions for the next five years. To support the broad vision, the idea has been broken down into 6 key actions, or goals, for the future that represent the department's specific role within the community. Over the next five years, the department should focus on:

- Serve our community.
- Enhance our parks and open system.
- Activate our public spaces.
- Promote our offerings.
- Optimize our resources.

Discussion

As the consulting team considers the final tools within the master plan, each recommendation made will serve one of those specific action goals and will work to move the department forward in alignment with the broad vision statement. As such, the Parks Master Planning team was asked to provide feedback on the vision and goals. Responses included:

- **Denise Retz** – Change, “Promote our offerings,” to, “Promote our programs and places.” This would be a great way to let everyone know what we do.
- **Denise Retz** – Remove, “Over the past decade,” from the vision statement. We don't need to state how long we've been working on this.
- **Mike Foley** – Consider starting just the underlined portion of the vision statement, rather than the first sentence. Also, the term “leverage” is an odd word choice. Maybe promote, or capture?
- **Denise Retz** – Parks and open spaces are one in the same. Instead, just say parks system.
- **Mike Foley** – Should we add something about the department having the capacity to maintain our parks system in the vision? Maybe create and support?
- **Beth Fields** – The vision statement doesn't feel very aspirational.
- **Scott Siefker** – The vision statement can be aspirational, but shouldn't be your marketing campaign.
- **Pam Denning** – Consider something along the lines of, “Richmond Parks and Recreation's focus on future resiliency and sustainability to serve, enhance and develop.” Send the vision statement out as a separate document for people to respond to. This discussion gives us a starting point for those conversations and thoughts.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

- **Mark Devine** – The wording is a bit cumbersome for a focus statement. We have the opportunity to change that. The introductory statement could stand a little more definition and wording change.
- **Denise Retz** – One of the board members expressed interest that future surveys be shorter and more concise.
- **Keith Morey** – We are a growing senior population and have more spaces than most parts departments. Why couldn't we have a volunteer group of retired people who "adopt" a park and take personal pride in that space? They could weed planting beds, keep up the parks and be another "set of eyes" for maintain and keeping our parks safe. Would it be worth including a volunteerism question on the second survey?
- **Denise Retz** – We included a question about volunteering on our first survey. Can TSWDG provide a list of volunteer's names and emails?
- **Pam Denning** – Can we provide a document with the vision statement on a sheet by itself?
- **Scott Siefker** – We will provide this, as well as a series of other meeting materials. We ask that participants send any comments back by the end of June so the existing conditions document can be revised. This will give us a chance to incorporate these comments.
- **Denise Retz** – There will be five chapters altogether. What's in the comprehensive parks master plan needs to be understandable by everyone. If there are any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to ask.

Master Plan Tools

The consulting team has started to consider the specific tools that will be needed to move forward and would like to propose a layered approach including:

- **Ongoing Decision-Making Guidance.** Criteria statements that assist in making everyday decisions following the plan's completion.
- **Short Term Project Initiatives.** Identification of lighter, quicker and more affordable options to improve activation, programming and department efficiencies.
- **Long-Range Capital Improvements.** Identification of long-range capital improvements to improve park properties and facilities.

Next Steps

For Our Team

Following the meeting, the consulting team will be providing some materials to the Park Master Planning Team for review, including:

- Chapters 1-3 are completed and ready for review.
- Survey #2 will be posted to help guide project prioritization.
- As project lists are developed, the consulting team will also be taking a closer look at financial resources including general revenue streams, bond programs and grants.

MEETING SUMMARY DOCUMENT

For You

The consulting team asked the Master Planning Team to assist in reviewing those initial documents to make sure they are accurate and understand. They were also asked to help share and promote the second community survey to ensure we get as many responses as possible.