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Purpose and Goals of the Plan

The Cary Park District produced and approved its first Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) in August, 1994, titled the “Cary Park District Park & Facilities Plan”. The 1994 CMP was prepared by Land Design Collaborative and Donald Wirth with direction and assistance from the Cary Park District.

The Park District engaged Hitchcock Design Group and Pivot Recreation Resources to assist with an update of the CMP in 2005. The CMP has been updated to expand beyond parks facilities and address programming, financing, and other administrative and operational issues. This update also takes into consideration new data, demographics, trends, and jurisdictional boundaries. Some of the information and narrative from the 1994 plan has been retained in the updated plan where applicable.

The 2006 Comprehensive Master Plan is intended to be a tool to help guide the Park District in its decision making over the next 10 years. Strategic plans will be developed in three year increments to identify the work plans necessary to accomplish the CMP.

As with the 1994 CMP, this updated plan is intended to respond to the community’s needs and be consistent with the Park District’s mission statement. The 2006 CMP is a cumulative effort of the Cary Park District, community, Hitchcock Design Group, and Pivot Recreation Resources.

Contributors

Many individuals and organizations played significant roles during the CMP development process.

First, we wish to acknowledge those who contributed to the 1994 Park and Facilities Plan that forms the basis of this effort. Board of Commissioners who guided the 1994 Plan included Sandra Bury, President and Commissioners James Alwill, Timothy J. Eagan, Sandra J. Krenz and Philip W. Stanko. The Executive Director was Eric E. Burns. Consultants to the 1994 Plan include Land Design Collaborative, Inc. and Donald Wirth, Recreation Specialist.

Those contributing to the 2006 CMP update include William Harvey, William Krueger, Michael Renner, Philip Stanko and David Williams of the Board of Commissioner. Management team members include: Steve Cherveney, CPRP, Executive Director; Dan Jones, CPRP, Director of Operations; Claire Glenn, CPA, Director of Finance and Administration; Dave Raica, RLA, Director of Planning & Development; Christine Cannon, Administrative Assistant; Susan Mayer, Superintendent of Recreation; Ben Rea, Superintendent of Park Maintenance; and Connie Nesler, Assistant Director of Finance and Administration.

Consultants to the CMP team include Pivot Recreation Resources (PRR) and Hitchcock Design Group. The Davenport Group provided assistance to the Park District in preparing the maps included with CMP.

Comprehensive Master Plan Approach

The purpose of this project is to develop a 10 year vision for the Cary Park District’s facilities, programs and operations using information gathered from Park District staff, the Board of Commissioners, user groups, designated community members and leaders and other relevant sources.

The Comprehensive Master Plan (CMP) project was developed in four phases:

1) Program Phase

This phase included the project kick-off in which the Park District and its consultants reviewed existing documents, identified the information that needed to be gathered, established project goals and prepared a final project schedule.

2) Research and Analysis Phase

During this phase, relevant project data and materials were gathered and analyzed, focus group interviews and a resident survey were conducted, land resources and facilities were inventoried, interviews with key Park District staff were conducted and a draft “needs assessment” was prepared identifying existing and future Park District needs.

3) Strategic Plan Visioning Phase

Information gathered in the first two phases was summarized and presented to the Park District staff and Board. The staff and Board then participated in a 10 year “visioning” exercise at a meeting facilitated by Master Plan consultants. Preliminary discussions regarding Strategic Plan development were conducted in a follow-up meeting.

4) Strategic Plan Preparation Phase

Using the information gathered in the above phases, Park District staff will use the identified External and Internal Needs to develop a three-year Strategic Plan that will include a prioritized action plan to attempt to meet the identified needs. The Strategic Plan will be inserted into the Comprehensive Master Plan document and updated on an annual basis.

Comprehensive Master Plan Benefits

With the service area population projected to increase by nearly 30 percent between 2000 and 2010, the Cary Park District recognized the need to undertake a comprehensive analysis to determine future facility and programming needs.

In May, 2005, the Park District contracted Pivot Recreation Resources and Hitchcock Design Group to assist in updating and expanding the 1994 CMP to include new data, techniques and recommendations. An updated CMP provides the Park District and its stakeholders with many benefits, including:

- 1) An in-depth understanding of demographic changes within the Park District's service area.
- 2) An analysis of current Park District facilities and programs and how they compare to industry standards.
- 3) An opportunity for community stakeholders to provide public input regarding the future needs of the Park District.
- 4) A clear set of goals and objectives to guide Park District work plan development and identify budgeting priorities.
- 5) A planning process that presents a unique opportunity to seek out and establish new levels of cooperation between government agencies that might lead to broader quality of life enhancements for Park District stakeholders.

The value of undertaking this planning effort cannot be understated. A number of evolving national trends suggests proactive and well-funded parks and recreational programs will play an increasingly significant role in a community's health at a variety of levels.

Physical Health

Thanks to the rise in internet access and the coverage provided by popular media, information about healthy lifestyle options and benefits has never been more widespread than it is today. Despite this, authorities are seeing some emerging personal health trends that are a major cause for concern. For example, the National Center for Disease Control has identified the dramatic rise in obesity over the past two decades, especially among children, as a nationwide health problem that has reached epidemic proportions.

Studies have consistently shown that even mild exercise can have significant health benefits. By providing programs and services that are convenient, accessible and appealing to a wide variety of residents, community parks and recreation departments can play a vital role in improving the health of community residents of all ages.

Economic Health

Personal health concerns are not the only reason to invest in quality parks and recreational facilities. In our new economy, an increasingly well-educated, technically-savvy and mobile work force is picking and choosing where they want to live based on quality of life opportunities. Employers, often with some of the highest paying jobs, are finding they must follow and locate facilities where the talent chooses to go.

Amenity-rich communities seeking to sustain themselves economically find themselves at a competitive advantage in their ability to attract employers with well-paying jobs. Where cities and towns once focused on recruiting companies by offering incentives such as tax breaks and other subsidies, progressive communities are now investing in lifestyle-enhancing amenities such as bicycle/pedestrian trails to lure a high-quality work force. At this level, parks and recreational resources become strategic development investments that help support a healthy local economy. While the focus of this planning effort is improving the quality of recreational facilities and services, every opportunity to leverage these enhancements into broader community benefits should be aggressively pursued.

Social Health

Healthy communities have strong social networks facilitated by thousands of formal and informal personal interactions that occur each day. This interaction is facilitated by the presence of a vibrant public realm. The public realm includes common streets and sidewalks, schools, public libraries, plazas and park facilities. Parks facilities are especially important because they provide the places where social interactions can take place in the form of structured and unstructured play and other recreational pursuits. One might say that communities that play together stay together.

Despite the social benefits that a quality parks and recreation program provides a community, those responsible for managing its well-being find themselves competing ever more intensely with other entertainment options for the time and attention of “recreational consumers,” and especially with the growing number of easily-accessible electronic media choices. Bricks and mortar retailers have long understood this and have invested millions of research dollars over the past three decades to trying to find ways to attract customers to their stores, keep them there, and make them want to return. The savviest retailers fully understand they are not just competing for a customer’s dollars; they are competing with the countless ways people can choose to spend their time other than to shop in their stores.

Recognizing the valuable role parks and recreational programs play in providing community-strengthening social activities while acknowledging the “competitive environment” in which they must operate underscores the need for quality planning and resource management. Municipal parks and recreational programs must continuously find innovative ways to reach their “markets,” investing finite public resources in the most strategic manner possible.

Cary Park District Mission

The mission for the Cary Park District is:

Providing exceptional recreation, parks and open space opportunities.

Cary Park District Vision

The Cary Park District is committed as an organization to provide exceptional parks and lifelong recreational opportunities.

Recreation

Provide non-discriminatory leisure opportunities for the region to participate in active and passive, supervised and non-supervised, for-fee and free, parks and recreation programs, facilities and services.

Preservation, Heritage and Community Character

Lead the community in efforts to maintain and preserve the open space, natural and historical heritage, and “rural-suburban” character of the communities that we serve.

Service, Meeting the Needs of the Community

Provide services that are proactive where possible that meet or exceed the current and future needs of the community.

Excellence and Value

Work with a commitment toward excellence and value as recognized by the community.

Cooperation

Accomplish more for the community than our own individual efforts may allow, through cooperation with other governmental, non-profit and private sector agencies.

Progressive Innovation

Lead the field in parks and recreation for communities our size through progressive and innovative practices.

Long Range Goals

The Long Range Goals of the Cary Park District are to provide exceptional services in the following areas:

Parks and Open Space Operations

Provide park maintenance and open space preservation services to the community.

Recreation Programs and Facilities Operations

Provide recreation programs, facilities and services to the community.

Community Information

Provide communications, information and public relations services to the community.

Administration

Provide support services in administration, finance, personnel, technology, risk management, planning and development to the agency.