

Chapter 4:

Community Input

Methodology

Community Mining Summary



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Deepening the understanding of past circumstances, present choices and future promise; strengthening the bonds of community; and facilitating solutions to common goals create the mission of Strategic Planning. As accomplishments and achievements evolve, wisdom comes from experience, and knowledge comes from new application. Understanding is instrumental in shaping the destinies of communities, while inspiration and motivation deepen the quality of community life. Strategic Planning commissioned to *PIVOT* Recreation Resources as a resource facilitator to implement holistic vision assisted the Cary Park District in a comprehensive planning process. The systematic approach applied with the District community, Board and staff defined short and long term operational strategies by reinforcing the continuous improvement efforts of the Park District through directed and measurable tactics that consider the constituency it serves, the community milieu, and the political environment.

Creating and enhancing successful civic spaces is achieved when residents are able to express their recreation desires. The Consultant garnered information from the Cary Park District staff, the Board of Commissioners, user groups, and designated community members and leaders to analyze current use, needs, and level of satisfaction of the Park District's services and amenities. A statistically valid resident mail survey took place of residents of the Park District. This allowed the community to articulate their aspirations and needs while jointly identifying problems and opportunities. Throughout the community mining process, many positive influences were noted such as the vast array and number of parks, the Foxford Hills Golf Club, and programs such as preschool and Extended Time, and overall pleasure with the manner in which the Park District is operated. A desire to expand quality programs and expand recreation facilities through the creation of a recreation center that encompasses aquatics were among issues to be addressed.

Demographic data conveys that the area is experiencing growth. The 1990 Census reported 12,700 residents in the Cary Park District, the 2000 Census reported 18,200 Cary Park District residents, and by 2010 a projected population of 25,600 is expected. Incomes are higher than the national averages in terms of per capita (28% higher) and median household income (88% higher). Median housing stock, \$254,485, is 80% higher than the national average. The Cary Park District is a young community in terms of age group trends. In comparison to the national average of 25.1%, the child population in the 0-3 mile radius of the administration offices of the Park District under the age of 17 is 29.4% which is equal to 13,222 children.

Area recreation providers in and around Cary include Chalet Hills Golf Club, Cardinal Fitness, Health Bridge and Lifetime Fitness. The public park and recreation providers near Cary include the Crystal Lake Park District, McHenry County Conservation District, McHenry Park and Recreation Department, Lake in the Hills Park and Recreation Department and Woodstock Park and Recreation Department. These providers exhibit high quality recreation. Although highly regarded, Lifetime Fitness is thought to be too far to travel and memberships are not always desirable to residents; many prefer the Park District to have a fitness center including indoor aquatics with a daily admission fee while charging substantially higher fees to non-residents. Raising taxes may not be an appropriate way to fund the endeavor at this

point, as most residents feel overtaxed. The goal of Strategic Planning determines what initiatives are desired when compared with those initiatives that can be accomplished given the available resources.

Staff and Board members participated in a Strategic Planning process designed to move the agency proactively into the future. Derived from the series of community mining activities, the resident survey, and the assessment of local influences, the stakeholders advised, suggested, and approved strategies to address the future development of recreation services for the community. Once strategies were created, they were rated by the entire planning team to determine the level of priority. After prioritization, the strategies were assigned to the staff person responsible for completing the strategy. To ensure that each strategy becomes a reality, tactics were taught in a workshop to provide a timeline as to when a strategy would be operational during the course of the next three years by the agency for completion. This report is written as a means to chronicle the process.

Methodology

Phase I: Identifying the Lay of the Land

Process Orientation

A workshop was conducted with the agency Board and staff regarding the proposed process. Discussions focused on the commitment of time and energy the process required; the projected amount of time the process would take to complete; and the role that staff, Board and the community would play.

Organizational Values

Board and staff were interviewed to document what they saw as necessary efforts for the organization to focus toward in the future. They were asked to identify and prioritize potential products that the District could offer in the future as well as concerns about the agency that needed to be addressed.

Focus Groups

Advertised public events gathered data from residents to learn how they and others, as current and potential park users, use leisure time. They were asked to identify and rank potential products the recreation district could offer. The information helped to prepare the staff and Board of consumer-oriented changes and to identify issues that needed to be addressed.

Survey

From the qualitative data collection, a survey was created from those findings and distributed in the community. Data was collected from a sample of 761 residents from which 244 responses were received. This is a response rate of 32%.

Phase II: Where Do We Want to Go?

Organizational Trajectory and Values

Staff and board members participated in a “Think Tank” session facilitated by the Consultant to garner the following information:

Historical Perspective: The role the District has played in the community.

Shifts in Values: The changing values of the community and the professional staff of the District.

Values Commitment: Expressed values to be committed to and memorialized throughout the Strategic Planning process to become a part of the published plan.

Park Board

The members of the Board were participants in the process as identified earlier. A special session was held with the Board on May 11, 2006 to review the findings of the data and to gather their thoughts before the Strategic Planning Visioning sessions began.

Feasibility Studies

Based on the vision, and the strategic direction as determined by the Board and staff, feasibility will be determined. Benchmarking was completed with similar products in other agencies of comparable size.

Phase IV: Creating the Plan

Strategizing

Strategic thinking was initiated by fully analyzing those obstacles that were in the internal and external environment. Strategic action plans called strategies were ranked and determined by the staff and Board. They were identified as Internal Strategies to be addressed by the staff to improve operations and External Strategies that are to be implemented to benefit the users of the District.

Tactics

Once these Internal and External strategies are finalized, obstacles to accomplishing them will be analyzed and written into tactics for change. Tactics will be written by the staff influenced most by the obstacle. The tactics are written to conquer those challenges.

System Preparedness Audit

The audit tested the ability of the system to handle the demands of growth and change indicated by the new line of business models. Systems Preparedness Audit included marketing, operations, protective services, finance, human resources, communication systems, financing alternatives, partnering capability, and program standards.

Contradiction Analysis

Business models were reconciled with the recommendations of the Systems Preparedness Audit in order to determine the final doable model with the attainable resources. The major internal and external obstacles to the plan were identified and clarified.

Phase V: Communicating the Plan

Staff Orientation

Orientation was used to introduce the major components of the new strategic plan for change. Team meetings were held for the staff to ask questions of the managers about the changes that may affect their position. The time was used to discuss with the organization new directions and anticipated barriers to future success to the new plan. Solutions to any barriers were identified and reviewed so the employees and Board could plan to adapt to those changes.

Community Presentations

Presentations will be used to express to the community ideas and results of the plan and to review the process and how their contributions influenced the plan. The meetings will include groups who participated in the formulation of the plan.

Community Mining Summary

The goal of community mining uncovers valuable information within the community while prospecting new and often unexpressed opportunities. This internal inventory assesses how the community and staff view and ultimately use the recreation offerings in the area. Community input is important to understand, as civic spaces are extensions of the residents who use them. Generating inter- and intra-agency support to determine the scope of programs and activities is best achieved when community residents feel that their thoughts are well understood and addressed in a proactive way. Mining this information reveals every facet of value, identifies which customers and prospects represent the best opportunities, creates an understanding of market potential for each product category, and determines how much market share is being captured.

The first segment of community mining is comprised of *interviews* with the Board and staff of the District. That work is followed by several *focus groups* with residents of the community. That work contributed to creating the *resident survey*. The Consultants gathered information from the Cary Park District staff, the Board of Commissioners, user groups, and designated community members and a statistically valid mail survey to determine needs, and level of satisfaction of the District's services and amenities. Fostering positive relationships between staff and participants will typically result in a sense of dedication and pride toward the community's parks and facilities. The key ingredient to that success is helping those groups feel that they are contributing to the improvement of their community recreation opportunities whether they are planting flowers in a park or taking a class at the activity center. Their voices are reflected throughout this study.

Interviews

Interview Findings-Board

Overall the Board would like to use the planning process to provide direction. The key will be to find agreement as to what that path will be and recognize the need to be visionaries for the future members of the community. There is a good blend of longevity and history on the Board and the Board members are pleased with the performance of the District in terms of product delivery and services. Employees are dedicated and the Board recognizes their dedication. The Board is satisfied with the accomplishments of the Board to date; however, there is a sense of urgency to accommodate additional needs of the community.

The Board is frustrated with the need to take future action on initiatives such as facility development. The sense of urgency is toward differing facility needs. Most all recognize the need to improve the standard of aquatics in the community. Some feel the need for improvement of fields for existing programs managed by associations. The key is determining the facility gaps and then create an approach to resolution that will meet the needs of the District and the community.

There is an interest among Board members for the staff to produce documents that report the activities of the agency differently. Planning with other entities needs to be initiated to gain a better understanding and support from other units of government. While there has been success at working with other units of

government, the real issues have not been addressed. Each entity appears to be isolated from the other. Relationships need to be nurtured to be effective in community development.

Some of the issues that are pressing with the Board are effective marketing of the District, developer pressures, high taxes, and meaningful intergovernmental agreements. While they recognize the need for consolidated planning to guide the future, Board members have differing approaches to resolving future needs. Most all Board members indicated the need for an improved aquatic facility. All indicated the inadequacies of the Community Center. All indicated difficulties in determining how to fund new development and facilities. Action at Hoffman Park is causing some stress. Strategies to use land in terms of sale or as barter for facilities is being contemplated. Some Board members feel there is a need for program accountability. While resources are limited, it is felt the agency is excellent and is able to work with the resources it has.

The Board feels it will be important to demonstrate accountability to the community through the documentation of success and activity growing with the needs of the community. All feel the work on this planning process will provide much needed direction and focus on the future. There is a desire to take action to meet the needs of the community; however, there are differences as to how to strategize for that direction.

Interview Findings-Staff

Staff for the most part is satisfied with their work environment. They like the idea that promotions take place from within the organization, which promotes a satisfied employee. They are frustrated, however, as most work is completed without assistance and some employees feel like they are working in a vacuum.

They would like more options for programming opportunities as facilities, storage and programming space would enhance their level of satisfaction. Lines of communication could be improved between departments and computer upgrades. Some staff would like to see the District approach the day to day operations as a business and improve financial reporting to reflect history and YTD / MTD. This strategy will help to understand trends and history in relationship to current operations. Refining relationships with GolfVisions purchasing reporting style would help to benchmark agency wide reporting. Once tools are identified, they can be used to benchmark performance in all areas in order to measure what is done.

The staff and Board recognize that there are high expectations for quality, making sure the baseline standards for park maintenance are cared for. There is a strong desire for program quality. Staff feels that the Board is respectful of the work that is done in the District. Role changes have caused some stress and people are sometimes unsure of reporting process across lines/departments. Relationships are great and all staff seems to get along.

Program shortcomings are due to the lack of space for increasing the class mix and indecisiveness of classes in terms of location and room they will be held in. There is the feeling of a lack of importance placed on the recreation programming functions of the District due to these shortcomings. Some staff would like to see innovation in the programs that are offered.

There seems to be some disconnect between departments and a need to have meaningful meetings. Meetings that have a purpose don't take place often enough. Meetings of purpose are those meetings that assess measurement and method to improve the success of measurement. Individual goals and objectives take place; however, they are not integrated to consider the concept of team; focus is on

individual accomplishment of objectives. Planning takes place in one's own cylinder; there is a need to incorporate others in planning programs (ideas, innovations, group think). Departments are not engaged currently in long range strategic planning. Once the planning process is started, a protocol can be created to gain continuous feedback from the community.

Debt and development issues with Hoffman Park continue to surface after six years of ownership. Questions regarding the ability to conduct land swaps and resource tradeoffs are being looked at to satisfy the facility shortcomings of the District. They would like to see something happen with Hoffman Park.

Inefficiencies that affect productivity include storage for parks and recreation staff. Not all staff is plugged in to the communication system, and the reporting systems of information (to Board from staff) need improvement. Too many times band aid solutions are offered to problem solving, resulting from the lack of planning. Lots of time talking about the big picture and yet not a lot is done to advance the ideas.

There is a need to engage in promotion sales and improving Park District awareness in the community, as they feel the District misses how to communicate how the Park District benefits the community. The brochure is too consistent with little change and diversity of presentation.

The new staffing structure has caused some frustration. There appears to be a need for the clarification of employee responsibilities. The District grew the management team without a backfill of the responsibilities thus staff feels the work was loaded up on entry level staff.

Staff feels that recreation programs could be facilitated with a new, full service recreation center that would foster growth in a number of program areas. Future outdoor athletic facilities need to be developed in fours rather than threes due to scheduling challenges. The preschool facility is a former garage. The facility is small with no growth potential and a limited schedule. It is adjacent to the maintenance facility and the uses are not compatible.

There is a need to reduce non-productive programming and determine the costing models to understand how programs are to perform economically. Facility spaces are not supporting the economic engine. There is little cooperation or extension into the community to promote the generation of new revenue streams.

Sports programs generate cash from park assets without consideration of equitable payback for the use. The fitness facility is small with poor planning of the recreation spaces in terms of size and fitting the needs of staff. There is little or no access to gyms; however, the rental cost is low when use is allowed. Anticipate future challenges from Cardinal, Health Bridge, and Lifetime Fitness.

Staff feels that the existing system offers significant park and open space diversity that is continuously experiencing rapid population growth. There is a desire not to get too big at the expense of quality. However, they feel there is potential for more through facility development. A lot is done for the community and yet people don't know the PD did it. The staff remains sincere, loyal and hardworking focused on people, dedicated to the work of the Park District.

The words desired to describe the agency in the future include professional, cutting edge facilities, and being the first choice among people who desire park and recreation services in the region. Facilities of

the future will be innovative, state-of-the-art and a place where people will want to go for high quality programming that generates revenue to curb the need for additional tax revenue.

Staff feels the process will give them a greater understanding of what the Park District does and how it stands with the community. It may help to change focus of the District to benefit need of users. The process will help to place all Board and staff on the same page and the ultimate gain of the process is that it will provide direction to the agency and bring staff and Board together in terms of direction and purpose.

Staff feels that community growth has outgrown the center. There are unfortunate spaces in the current building and until new spaces are created it will be necessary to promote partnership relationships. Can the Community Center become a single purpose facility?

Focus Groups

Cary focus group participants answered a questionnaire and participated in discussion regarding their Park District. Qualitative responses were quantified and reported in several categories. The level of satisfaction was measured from 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest level of satisfaction. The average length of residency of those surveyed was **17 years**. A summary of the results by topic is as follows:

Parks

The parks in the system ranked very well among the respondents. Many of the respondents indicated that the current level of parks is sufficient.

Facilities

While facilities are maintained and are in good condition, there is a shortage of facilities in the community to allow for recreation programming. Existing facilities that are used for programming are inadequate, outdated and small to meet the needs of the participant.

Programs

While programs rated respectably well, there is an interest in the community to increase the type, diversity and quality of programs that are offered.

Funding

According to the respondents in the focus groups there is little interest in an increase of the tax base for the creation of facilities. Funding will need to come from fees and charges and revenues generated from memberships in a given facility and assistance from partnerships.

Personnel

Personnel are knowledgeable in their work and provide good customer services. However, a new staff position needs to be created to manage marketing the department. Staff experiences challenges with space that is available to them to complete their work.

Partnerships/Relationships

Focus Group participants felt the need to engage in partnerships and other relationships that will be used to provide services to the community.

Public Relations

The community feels the most effective way to communicate the activities of the Park District is through the quarterly brochure and schools. There is the desire to see program cancellations communicated with the community more effectively.

Community Survey

In June, 2005, the Cary Park District worked with Pivot Recreation Resources and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to develop and implement a community recreation needs assessment study. An eight-page questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions was developed to examine:

- 1) Attitudes toward the Park District;
- 2) Use of Park District facilities, parks and programs;
- 3) Satisfaction with parks, facilities and programs;
- 4) Effectiveness of staff;
- 5) Preferences for amenities in a proposed community recreation center;
- 6) Attitudes toward funding options for a proposed community recreation center;
- 7) Selected demographics.

A random sample of 800 households was generated electronically from the Park District's database. The questionnaires were mailed first class on October 5, 2005 and a business reply envelope was included in the survey packet to facilitate their return. A second survey was mailed to non-respondents and was distributed November 5, 2005.

The final sample size was 761 since there were 39 surveys returned due to invalid addresses. Overall, a total of 244 questionnaires was returned, yielding a 32% response rate. A typical response rate for direct mailed surveys is 20 to 35%. This random sample had a 93% confidence level. Results for the closed and open-ended questions are summarized as follows.

Parks and Facilities Usage

The majority of parks selected to be rated (12 out of 19) are never utilized by over 75% of the respondents. This correlates well with the fact that a large number of respondents indicated that they have not used these facilities when asked about the conditions of Park District facilities. It appears that the respondents are not familiar with the extensive park system or what activities are available. Thus, the CPD might consider improving marketing efforts to better promote these parks and their amenities.

Activities

Using the playground and walking/running were the most popular outdoor activities; each was participated in by over 40% of the respondents. Swimming was also a well-liked activity with a 34.3% participation rate indicated by those surveyed (It would be expected this number would climb significantly if a pool were available year round). On the other hand, less than 6% of respondents participated in racquetball or volleyball, utilized fitness equipment, and utilized the Foxford Hills Restaurant. Considering the low participation rates, the CPD might not want to invest any additional resources into these activities without modifying the physical facilities that support them.

Condition of Park Facilities

Overall, the respondents indicated the majority of the parks were of good or excellent quality through both the survey questions and open-ended feedback (Foxford Hills Golf Course was especially singled out for praise). However, the two exceptions were the Community Center and the center pool with ratings of 15% and 18.4%, respectively, of fair or poor. Examination of open-ended feedback indicated that respondents were unhappy with the current size and upkeep of the pool. For example, respondents stated:

“The pool is an embarrassment to the community and needs to be renovated.”

“The pool is outdated, too small, overcrowded.”

“Community pool too small, not enough chairs, locker rooms dirty, concession is always out of food.”

Satisfaction with Programs

Special events organized by CPD attracted the highest proportion of the respondents. Approximately 40% of the respondents attended special events and over 75% of these people were satisfied with the experience. Overall, the majority of respondents indicate they are satisfied with the quality of the recreation programs offered by CPD. However, relatively few respondents participated in preschool, young adult, and adult (ages 50-64 and ages over 65) programs. Since the quality of these programs seems satisfactory with those who participated, additional information would be helpful to determine whether these programs should be scaled back due to lack of interest or whether they need to be better tailored to fit the needs of the community. In addition, examination of open-ended comments indicates that there are not enough programs available for youth, adults, and seniors.

Satisfaction with Staff

Overall, the respondents are satisfied with the performance of the staff in reference to being knowledgeable and friendly. However, there was a perception among the majority that the supervisory staff was not observing the various CPD programs.

Overall Attitudes toward Park District

Overall, respondents valued the importance of recreation programs, facilities and parks to their quality of life. They are satisfied with the number of parks available to residents and most respondents tended to agree that it is important to have a park within walking distance of their homes. Opinions about most other issues are rather mixed, including marketing strategies, responsiveness, distribution of resources, allocation of space, etc. Thus, the Park District may want to invest more resources into improving these areas of operation. And it should be noted that a slight majority of respondents would be willing to support new CPD activities through participation fees.

Addition of New Facilities

Overall, the highest interest for additional facilities as indicated by respondents was for an Indoor Aquatics Center with Leisure and Competition Pool, a multi-purpose Recreation Center, and an outdoor Leisure Pool. The facilities which drew little interest from the public were additional softball/baseball diamonds, football fields, and batting cages.

Multi-Purpose Recreation Center

A majority of the respondents (71.9%) support the development of a multi-purpose recreation center. Over half of the public would obtain good usage from such a facility with the three most important features needed being walking/running track, indoor leisure pool, and an indoor athletic space.

Funding Options

Overall, the respondents would like to see the CPD generate funds by selling part of an existing park rather than an increase in personal property taxes.

Future Needs

From examination of open-ended feedback, a large number of respondents suggested expanding the pool facilities including increased size for both an indoor/outdoor pool. Several respondents were interested in seeing additional bike and walking/hiking trails in the CPD. Finally, there were additional comments to increase the number of programs available to adults and seniors.

Marketing

Mailings and the seasonal brochure appeared to be the most effective channel to reach residents. Over 50% of the respondents collected information about park programs through these methods. E-mail and the website did not appear to be utilized as often while methods such as the newspaper, school flyer, and word of mouth were relatively ineffective. Note that negative public perception could be addressed by keeping the community better informed. For example, there were several disapproving comments about the golf course but if the public knew that usage fees cover most of the maintenance expenses and not their tax dollars (assuming that is the case), they would find the situation more tenable.