

July 13, 2005 Meeting Minutes
Whatcom County Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Open Space Plan
Steering Committee

Mike McFarlane reported results of the project review from the last meeting have not been posted yet. An E-mail of the uncompleted list will be sent to committee members next week for review and comment. We are still waiting on the maps to be posted on the website.

The consultant and staff are looking over the mapping we have. Items will be exaggerated in order to make it easier for the public to read. These maps (handouts) were created based on the workshops that were held with the public in the spring.

Mike McFarlane indicated that today's meeting will focus on funding and financial strategies and program pricing. A presentation on these topics will also be made on July 27th in a work session with the County Council.

Tom Beckwith passed out a handout showing three different funding scenarios and alternatives for regional facilities and an example for dealing with local park facilities. This is not complete and only an example of what the funding scenarios will look like. Not all numbers are available at this time.

The projection for population growth is 1.5% annually.

6 expense items were noted by the consultant:

1. Administration: What it cost for parks to run it. 25% of this goes to parks and facilities costs. 50% for managing the parks, interpretive centers etc.
2. Park management and interpretive expenses
3. Operations/Maintenance: land and park facilities.
4. Repairs based on value/replacement: An example is replacing siding roofing, which is not done on an annual basis. 1% of the value annually needs to be set aside for this type of maintenance.
5. PLOS land and facility additions: This is what we're proposing to add in the next 6 years.
6. O/M – PLOS addition value/O/M cost: Anything we add we must maintain

Tom Beckwith reviewed potential revenue sources:

Proposed revenues. Everything that generates revenue is listed. There are also other potential ways of generating revenue.

Right now the money is not flowing from the Conservation Futures Fund and others to the Park Department's management and control.

Where are the other places we can go to generate money

Option 1: General Fund Subsidy (GF)- Continue to tap from General Funds. Assumed a negative growth of 2% per year. This is if we leave things the way they are.

Option 2: Growth Impact Fee (GIF)- Did not impose impact fees, which if we were to do, would generate money. This was left out because of the political issue that it brings up. We would have to come up with a fare rate in each city. Right now they cannot impose these fees in the city however they could in the city.

Option 3: Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) 3- The REET 3 is paid by all buyers of new property and new homes. We currently are not using any of this. The use of REET 3 would go 100% to parks. REET 2 has not been designated to anything major as of yet. There is some money going to a jail and some small parks. Legal restrictions are different for each REET (1-3). The restrictions on use are tighter as you go from 1-3.

Option 4: Local Option Vehicle License Fee (LOVLF)- Add a fee to registration fees.

Option 5: Local Option Fuel Tax (LOFT) Most likely not a viable option at this time.

Option 6: Bond or property tax levy (GO/PTL)- At the bottom of the first page it shows the average cost to a home use the different Alternatives based on Bond or Levy

2nd Page:

This is a 20-year projection of scenario 1A.

Shows the impact of each of the Alternatives. Alternative 2 is probably a little bit more realistic than Alternative 1.

3rd Page

This shows us tweaking some of our alternatives. Leaving everything the same except for the highlighted areas in the proposed revenues. Now paying for things that are currently being funded through different departments.

Rand Jack noted there are benefits from doing this however there are downfalls to this as well. Can play the flexibility to advantage or disadvantages.

Tom Beckwith indicated right now the money is not flowing through the parks and this is what we are trying to get to so that the money is shown going through the park system.

4th Page

This is a 20-year projection of scenario 2.

5th Page

This is the 3rd scenario, which would not include the use of a Bond or Levy. License fee only takes 51% approval. Would be easier to pass than a Bond or Levy. Making this a sell to the voters is a matter on how it is presented to them.

(Tom) Not all Options can be used in the same way. Some of them can only be used for certain things. It is very possible to mix and match these scenarios.

(Lynne) Misc. Rentals are not a reliable source of revenue because they will not always be around.

6th Page

This is a 20-year projection of scenario 3.

7th Page

This is the start of the discussion of the Local Park Facilities using Birch Bay as an example.

Recreational Service Area: This is an opportunity for a local community to go to the County Council and say we want to impose a tax so that there can be a local park facility.

Impact fees cannot charge the new guys for something that is already there. It has to be related to the impact of growth.

SEPA: Used for raw environmental resources. Cannot be used for a playground or ball field. SEPA can only be used for something that is not and will not be developed.

Tom Beckwith- At some point we have to decide what the parks mission is. Is it regional or local? We will have to go through the local sites and decide if we're going to make them regional park sites or whether we'll get rid of them if the local areas or groups will not pick them up. If we are going to drop some of them because of the cost of upkeep, we need to see if we can pass them to the local areas or groups. Need to sometimes use these groups as stewards. The County can't expect to maintain all the local facilities.

The Range is currently not represented in the first 6 pages. It is being viewed as an enterprise because it is currently very close to paying for itself as a special use facility. This was done because excepting capital costs, revenues offset its operating expenses. This is a special use facility used by a small cross section or special use group of the community.

9th page

This page shows Recreational Programs, which we have shown as one scenario with 3 alternatives. There are virtually no sources of funding for this area except for user fees and the general fund.

Senior Programs are not included in this financing strategy because the Council on Aging, Nutrition and others pay most of the programming expenses. The County's role is primarily as a facility manager.

Options for the Cultural Arts, Outdoor, and Teen Programs

1. Increase program fees to make up for the cost of the programs. Direct costs include paying for the instructor to lead classes as well as transportation of the equipment. Indirect costs are the costs in order to do all the administrative work for getting the class to go.
2. General Fund subsidy – we know that this will decrease over time.
3. Property tax levy: Near impossible to sell to the general population. This is because only a small portion of the population actually uses these programs.

10th Page

Shows the 20-year projection of this scenario.

Lee Springate passed out a handout on pricing strategies for programming. He indicated that there are a number of options and that much has changed in the industry over the past several years pertaining to recreational programming. The majority of

governmental agencies no longer provide these services due to limited budgets. He reviewed the pages.

Power Point (PP) Page 2: Ways at looking at the recreational programs

PP Page 3: Is the program benefiting the public or individual?

PP Page 4: 4 different ways public agencies are pricing things out.

PP Page 5: Shows how much of the budget is going to recreational programming.

PP Page 6: Shows how the expenses are broken down between the direct costs and department overhead as well as the revenue.

PP Page 7: Breaks it down between the program costs and program revenue for the different programs we currently have.

PP Page 8: Need to fill in the blanks before it goes before the commission.

PP Page 9: Policy options

PP Page 10: Recommendations: Shows options to get the programs more focused toward the mission of the Parks Department. Getting the programs aimed more toward the interpretive and environmental education direction seems to be more inline with the present mission. Need to decide how much we value the programs that are offered. Should we offer the classes if the demand isn't there or should we put the money into more promotion? The programs are shifting from going outside the county to locations that are at our parks within the county. Story time at Hovander is an example as well as classes that are held at the Interpretive Center. Looking at tradeoffs to the current programs.

Lynne Givler- We shouldn't limit the cultural arts programs to the Roeder Home. We could have painting at the Fragrance Garden as well as the current Story time at Hovander.

Del Lowery expressed that eliminating the traditional Outdoor Programs could be a problem because we're taking away the opportunity for a small amount of the population that they might not otherwise ever have that opportunity.

Lee Springate- The current trend is for the public organizations to get out of recreational programming. The role of the County could be to match persons with the programs and services being provided by other organizations, agencies and the private sector. If you're offering too many programs, the quality is going to be lower than if you join with other organizations, which may be able to bring more to the table. Combining and partnering with some of these groups and organizations could create higher quality programs at an affordable cost.

Lynne Givler indicated that we are not looking to get rid of the recreational part of Whatcom County Parks and Recreation. We are looking at localizing and focusing our recreational programs to be more directed toward our parks mission.

Meeting adjourned. Next meeting July 27th, 2005 Bellingham Senior Center.