

Kitsap County Parks and Recreation Sustainability Task Force Report of Recommendations

Policies and plans

Observation #1

Current written policies and plans are inadequate to define and direct the Kitsap County Parks and Recreation Department in setting priorities, objectives and duties for property maintenance, planning and other functions.

The lack of established policy priorities and clarity of direction often leads to ineffectiveness and inefficiency including duplication of functions, lost revenues, inconsistent levels of service, adverse community relations and repeated changes of course and work plans to address “emergent” issues.

Recommendation #1

- Review and re-establish the Parks and Recreation Department vision, goals and objectives with the assistance of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Define the function, maintenance standards and expected level of service for each county park and facility classifications in the Park and Recreation Comprehensive Plan: (i.e.: heritage, regional, community, natural resource areas, partnership areas)
- Establish a level of service in the application of adopted standards for each of the park classifications relative to approved funding levels
- Create a master maintenance and operations plan for each of the county’s parks within approved funding levels to ensure lasting quality service for property maintenance, administration, project development and customer satisfaction
- Incorporate the park classifications, standards of maintenance, level of service and master maintenance and operations plans as the basis for the annual Parks and Recreation Department budget

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Budget accountability

Observation #2

Current budget and cost accounting practices do not provide a clear picture of all the costs associated with a park or program and limits the ability to determine level of cost recovery where it is planned.

An accounting system that segregates costs by program and function, along with defined revenue sources, would allow for clearer oversight, better management, strategic allocation of resources, improve tracking of the county's general fund subsidy and the department's rate and fee performance.

Recommendation #2

- A financial tracking and performance reporting process should be developed and implemented for parks and recreation programs, especially those designed for the highest level of cost recovery. (i.e. Events Center) similar to the Auditors office with public works
- The department should establish cost recovery targets for all park and recreation functions and track attainment of those targets as a performance metric
- Once the financial tracking and performance reporting process is established, the Park and Recreation Department's performance meeting their vision, goals and objectives should be reviewed and analyzed on a monthly basis

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Rates and fees

Observation #3

Despite the rising cost of doing business each year, rates and fees for renting and using county parks, facilities and programs have not increased since 2003.

The county currently allows parks and recreation general funds to subsidize county departments, public/private special interest groups and non-profit agencies use of parks and recreation facilities, thus current county fee and rate policies are not consistently applied to all user groups.

A significant level of fees for support of facility maintenance and operations are lost annually due to the lack of a process that qualifies and certifies the eligibility of groups for fee exemptions within current fee policies.

A clear policy does not exist establishing a fee and rate philosophy, strategy and plans for parks and recreation facilities, especially for special interest groups, revenue generating events and for facilities that operations and maintenance is based on user fees.

A significant portion of the county's meeting facilities and associated collateral equipment are within the parks and recreation facility inventory. The facilities are heavily used by other departments and agencies with minimal or no reimbursement, resulting in exaggerated park and recreation operating expenses.

Recommendation #3

- Review all fees and rates annually as part of the budget process, comparing market rates and actual cost performance in relation to operational goals and objectives
- Develop a fee and rate philosophy, strategy and plan for park and recreation facilities
- Review and revise the parks and recreation fee and rate policy with a view toward adopting Metro Parks Tacoma pyramid strategy that recognizes high general fund subsidy for broad general public use and less subsidy for limited special interest group use (Please note Attachment #1, "Metro Parks Tacoma Strategic Parks and Program Services Plan")
- Review all group facility use fees for compliance with current policy and adjust as needed
- Establish an appropriate expense allocation method to reduce costs to the parks and recreation department and properly align cost with agencies and departments within the county

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Web site improvements

Observation #4

The Parks and Recreation Department's web site is not intuitive or user-friendly, does not offer on-line registration, program location, application or reservations for programs or facility rentals, potentially impacting utilization and associated income.

The site lacks links to local websites featuring other parks and recreation opportunities.

Recommendation #4

- Provide web access that offers on-line applications for facility use, reservations, fee payments, program registrations and links to stewardship groups.
- Coordinate with cities, parks districts, schools and other parks and recreation providers to share information, offer cooperative web site links and work together to create a central shared community calendar website that provides information on parks, recreation program and events in Kitsap County

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Events Center

Observation #5

The Events Center provides and offers unique and varied functions that are different than operating parks.

The costs, staffing and resources to operate and maintain the Kitsap County Fairgrounds and Events Center are drawing resources from park and open space operations.

Parks maintenance, operations staff and equipment covered by general funds are being diverted to sustain special events at the expense of normal park maintenance and without adequate cost recovery.

Contracts and concession management on parks property lacks a clear plan, policy and operational oversight.

The Kitsap Public Facilities District funded facility improvements to integrate the fair grounds and athletic fields into a regional event center focusing on generating revenue.

Recommendation #5

Define the Events Center as a unique unit with its own cost center and dedicated revenue. Study the current and potential capabilities of the Events Center that would accomplish the following:

- Evaluate the feasibility of the center as a stand-alone enterprise fund that generates positive revenue
- Examine contracting for the management of the fairground and events center
- Examine desirability of partnerships to meet higher level of revenues

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Recreation and special event programs

Observation #6

The county provides and co-sponsors a multitude of recreation and entertainment programs year round throughout the county. Some programs and events are heavily subsidized, while others have modest community involvement or return.

As the county becomes more urbanized, cities, private and non-profit organizations, schools and churches are offering a host of recreation programs that duplicate county programs.

Recommendation #6

The county should shift from being a direct recreation program provider to a regional coordinator, contractor or facilitator. Review all recreation programs and events for necessity, non-duplication and subsidy level.

- Analyze current recreation programs and rate them for need, attendance, objectives and ability to achieve desired outcomes
- Conduct inventory of recreation programs offered county wide and compare for duplication with county programs
- If duplicate programs exist, consider coordinating or contracting with the other program provider to offer joint programs
- Review the costs and subsidy for all events, weighing costs and subsidy against community participation, support and overall benefit
- Suspend the Holidazzle event for 2007 – saving \$20,000 – and review the program for higher cost recovery in 2008

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Prioritizing parks inventory

Observation #7

The county has an impressive inventory of parks, ranging from expansive Heritage Parks to tiny and obscure pocket parks. Maintaining and protecting every park – especially the smaller pocket parks – is challenging the department’s resources and time management of the limited number of staff, a situation that could become more acute if new park land is added to the county inventory.

A trend in county parks shows a shift toward transferring neighborhood parks, playgrounds and facilities (i.e. swimming pools) located within municipal or special tax districts boundaries to those agencies.

Recommendation #7

Review park viability, prioritize support and explore options in accordance with policies developed from Recommendation #1

- The Kitsap County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board should consider reviewing the current inventory of all parks; analyze the viability, maintenance costs and overall community benefit; and offer recommendations on the future use and/or options for shifting maintenance responsibilities through community stewardships, agreements with other public entities
- Consider investment in “smart” features (i.e.: automatic locks, programmed gates and lighting timers) to help reduce maintenance costs and vandalism

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Staffing issues

Observation #8

The county is fortunate to have a dedicated and passionate parks and recreation staff.

The scope of park maintenance and operations are being expanded without consideration to staffing requirements or the impact on current park maintenance and service levels within the existing inventory.

Alignment and classification of positions appear inconsistent with operational requirements. Work schedules are being driven by emergent issues or areas of special interest rather than by the realities of current park staffing levels and maintenance standards, and in some cases labor is applied to projects or programs outside of county assets or responsibility.

Standards of maintenance are not defined for the various categories of parks, and lacking such standards provides no basis to define manpower requirements or to accurately measure operational performance.

The vacant planner position has limited resources to focus on planning, grant applications and other administrative functions, and there is a great potential for cost recovery and increased revenue that offset taxpayer costs by building community partnerships and park stewardships.

Workspaces and storage for equipment and materials appear inadequate.

Recommendation #8

- Fill the vacant planner position, who would strategically focus on developing and enhancing those parks, facilities and programs that have the greatest potential for cost recovery and other strategic planning efforts
- Create and hire a stewardship coordinator, who would facilitate implementation of community partnerships for parks and communities; promote, organize and coordinate community based partnerships to supplement or supplant parks maintenance efforts and increase parks vigilance to deter vandalism; monitor and seek grants to support stewardship maintenance efforts; and aggressively market facility use
- The recreation program positions should be redefined as program facilitators that support the stewardship program, focus on community partnerships and community events, and support county-wide use of the web site
- Review and analyze the current working environment and space for staff and equipment to consider its impact on department efficiency and effectiveness

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The role of the Kitsap County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

Observation #9

The number and variety of Kitsap County's parks, recreation programs and facilities make them one of the county's most actively utilized and visible community resources.

The Kitsap County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board – comprised of 12 dedicated citizens from throughout the county – appears to be the logical body to serve as a conduit and community representative to the Board of Commissioners to provide timely advice and response for the public's wishes, concerns and comments on parks and recreation programs, policies and facilities.

By county ordinance, the role of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board is limited "to provide timely advice to the Facilities, Parks and Recreation Director and the County Commissioners regarding the acquisition, development and administration of various park properties. The County Commissioners may also request the group to create sub-committees to address specific issues related to park improvements and recreation programs."

Should the Board of Commissioners choose to implement Recommendation #8 to expand community participation through stewardships, partnerships and other community groups, it will likely require a focal clearinghouse to coordinate the numerous ideas, plans and programs.

General public input and comments related to issues that are not under the limited purview of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board go directly to the director of the Parks and Recreation Department and/or the Board of Commissioners. The lack of current policies and standards as noted in Observations #1, #3, #7 and #8 regarding park operations, fees, special exemptions, resource allocation and other emerging issues – coupled with the narrow focus of the advisory board – limits the availability of a citizen advisory resource for key parks and recreation operational policy issues. The county's current case-by-case decision making process may not be strategic, efficient and consistent or reflect the overall vision of the community.

Recommendation #9

The role of the Kitsap County Parks Advisory Board should be expanded to serve as the public's sounding board and advocate for parks and recreation programs and policies

- The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board would work and coordinate with stewardship groups, community organizations, appropriate staff and the public at large to provide advice, comments and recommendations to the Board of Commissioners and the Parks and Recreation Department director
- The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board should review the task force's Report of Recommendations to help define their future role and involvement