

Synopsis of Public Meetings

Public Meeting #1 – District 1 (Hyatt Park)

4/26/12 @ 6:00 p.m.

1. Perception that some City facilities within District 1 are not given the same level of attention/maintenance as facilities in other districts. There is some concern regarding the age, condition, and/or attractiveness of existing facilities throughout the park system.
2. Programs right now are geared mostly toward children and the elderly only. Would like to see a new approach where there are activities for all ages.
3. Desire for the “community center” (Hyatt Park) to really be a “center of the community” serving what that specific community needs. Programs should galvanize the community.
4. The success of a specific facility like Hyatt Park overly depends on the leadership abilities involvement level of the Park Leader. Current leadership at Hyatt is strong, but there is inconsistency in the qualifications of park staff.
5. Areas around Hyatt Park have seen changing demographics (more young whites, fewer children, etc.). With these changes, recreation needs change as well.
6. Feeling that facilities should be open later than 6:00 pm on Fri/Sat/Sun as that is the time teenagers and young adults need activities/programs. (I.e., park hours are not aligned with the community needs).
7. Difficulty in determining exactly when the facilities are available and what programs are offered.
8. Desire that previous Master Plans (such as the ones done for Hyatt Park and for Lincoln Park) are taken into account in this planning process.
9. Accessibility to restrooms, particularly after hours, is an issue.
10. Park usage is dominated during the summer by Summer Camps, which are for younger children and not teenagers.
11. Recommended that more communication/advertisement of what is available and clearly posted park hours would be very beneficial in increasing park usage.
12. Community has a sensitivity to any potential rises in program fees, and there are many underprivileged children within the community. If fees are raised, attention would need to be paid to “scholarship” funding.
13. There is a total lack of coordination or resource sharing between the City’s parks & recreation and the local school districts (which have additional athletic facilities that are not available for use outside of school hours).
14. Felt the City should benchmark its facilities/programs with other cities.
15. Felt each community should have relatively equivalent facilities/programs that are within walking distance.

Public Meeting #2 – District 2 (Martin Luther King Park)

05/03/12 @ 6:00 p.m.

1. Noted that private groups and other leagues have over the years taken over activities that the City formerly provided.
2. Felt the City’s recreation/leisure services should be focused primarily on children (day care, afterschool programs, summer camps).
3. Not enough communication about what is available – difficulty in knowing what is available and where the programs are located.

4. Identified a lack of coordination between parks system and local school districts – particularly in regard to at-risk youth.
5. Felt there were not enough parks, nor where the existing parks of sufficient quality (i.e., expectations were for more equipment/better equipment). Also, not all parks have easy access or are ADA compliant (Lorick Park).
6. Perception that there are not enough activities at individual parks – there are children playing at the parks but are not supervised or participating in organized activities. Parks should have “stations” with organized programs.
7. Sensitivity to program costs – need for scholarship funding.
8. Identified a lack of record keeping to know who is using the parks and programs. Need the ability to understand who is coming in the door and what they are doing. Feel there are software programs available like RecTrac.
9. Felt a need for better activities/programs (not just basketball). Suggestions were Leadership Classes, Board Games, Reading Clubs, Hobbies.
10. Noted that St. Anna’s Park is 50 years old with little or no changes. Programs there serve youth and seniors only. Park is underutilized.
11. Big concern regarding bathroom access.
12. Voiced a desire for better access to and uses of the Three Rivers Greenway. There are few boat access points.
13. Lack of communication between the City and local school districts. Should establish a liaison w/ the schools to communicate what programs are available. Use the schools as information conduit.
14. The school district facilities mirror the City’s facilities but lay dormant much of the time. Other areas have City recreational staff running programs at school facilities.
15. There are some transportation issues associated with getting students from schools to the parks.
16. Information about programs is to segmented and fragmented – should be a “one source” place for program information (including funding/scholarship options).
17. There is no contact between City parks/rec with the Health Care nor the Religious/Spiritual community.
18. Desire for Community Center to be true “center of the community” with programs that attract people to the area. Columbia is not known at all for its recreational programs. Suggestions regarding hosting tournaments for cheerleading, softball, soccer, etc., as tourism draw.
19. Mentioned history of racism in the City and residual effects on certain aspects of recreation. I.e., perception that MLK Park is “crime-ridden”; programs limited to football, basketball, and step dancing.
20. Neighborhood Associations could get involved in the programming – let them drive what goes on at the parks. Must have bottom up neighborhood responsibility for how successful the parks are at meeting needs. Allow them to poll residents about what is wrong, what needs to be upgraded.
21. Park environments must be safe to the “grandma level” – but staffing is too low to assist in safety. Police substations at the parks are thought to be a good idea.
22. Vocal advocacy for the Double Dutch program – felt it is important for this particularly community.

Public Meeting #3 – District 3 (Capitol Senior Center)
05/10/12 @ 6:00 p.m.

1. Suggested specific “workshops” on possible activities – athletics, arts, marble, lawn bowling, bocce ball, reading rooms, walking space, outdoor painting, photography, checkers, etc.
2. Would like senior programs not just at “senior centers.”
3. Climate change and/or heat of the summers makes equipment at some parks unusable at certain times of the day. Need upgrades/retrofits to make them usable again.
4. Suggested partnerships with schools for children’s activities such as movies, performances, dance, etc.
5. Supportive of community gardens and their recreational benefits.
6. Felt several parks in the District were very good – Heathwood, Hollywood/Rose Hill, Emily Douglas, Melrose Heights. But Sims is in need of upkeep and updated/safer equipment.
7. In town parks considered good, but old and in need of maintenance.
8. City boundaries have grown further than the existing parks can fully serve.
9. Noted an underutilization of the river properties and lack of adequate river access for boating.
10. Desire for coordination w/ Innovista’s master plan – particularly for the river frontage park.
11. Identified multiple communication issues associated with Parks & Recreation Department. Information services like “311” are not effective/up to date. Calls to the Department go unanswered. Emails don’t seem to be read. Hard to contact the right people for answers. Particular criticism of web-based information. Parks & Rec staff try to be helpful, but are thwarted by City bureaucracy.
12. Neighborhood associations are the de facto information conduits, but that dissemination is not consistent.
13. Noted that there is no pedestrian access to Maxcy Gregg Park from the neighborhoods behind the park – which is greatly limiting use of the park.
14. Concerns regarding the City’s planning process and the potential biases of Steering Committee members. Potential for another good plan that is not implemented.
15. Noted that Owens Field is the only park in the system with significant multi-use green space. Other single-use facilities require more maintenance and preclude multiple uses.
16. Some complaints about the wrought iron fence at MLK Park that keeps people from enjoying certain areas of the park.
17. Desire for Parks & Rec Department to be more proactive in maintenance, not merely reactive to complaints. More active park inspections.
18. Suggested Parks & Rec could develop its own capability to communicate with the public outside of the City’s web site (i.e., social media, Facebook, blogs or other means).
19. Noted the lack of communication among City departments, especially Parks & Recreation and Beautification/Forestry – i.e., ones with similar purviews. Possible combination of those efforts.
20. Mentioned a lack of confidence in the City’s ability to successfully spearhead this MP effort or implement fixes/improvements.
21. Desire for organized/guided activities to learn about the natural environment at parks – walks in the park with park rangers; experience the rivers; educational sessions; history sessions.
22. Desire for more security measures – presence of rangers, emergency call boxes, security cameras, coordination with police patrols – particularly for off-hours.
23. Vision/aspirational plan for full connectivity of “water fingers” or “necklace connections” – Rocky Branch, Smith Branch, Gills Creek to the 3 rivers. Pathways and greenspace.
24. Desire for Bull Street property to be taken into account for Park/Rec uses.

Public Meeting #4 – District 4 (Hyatt Park)
05/17/12 @ 6:00 p.m.

1. Emphasis on deteriorating condition of Hampton Park. Age of facility, ADA issues (including warnings from the Feds), upkeep/maintenance (roof leaks), safety issues, etc. Likely needs an entirely new building as facility is relatively unchanged/unexpanded from the 1930s. Must meet the new demographics (vibrant, re-growing neighborhood; shift of demographics from old to young; high usage of park; after school and summer programs are at capacity).
2. Specific needs for Hampton Park include covered picnic areas, better walking trails to take advantage of natural environment, and ADA compliance. Currently, Ward 26 has to implement “curbside voting” because of lack of ADA compliance – no ramps, handrails, ADA bathrooms. Are there intermediary steps that can be taken?
3. General consensus that programs are not advertised or communicated sufficiently. Public doesn’t hear about or know about what is available. There is confusion about when different parks are open. Could start w/ just a bulletin board or brochure. Or on-line resource like Irmo-Chapin has implemented.
4. Mentioned Garners Ferry Road as a significant barrier – certain neighborhoods in the District do not have access to a City park without crossing this major road.
5. Mentioned shift of soccer programs from City-run leagues to private (SC United) run leagues – and the significant increase in costs (from approximately \$20 to over \$100 per child). City allows private groups to use facilities but has no control over how the leagues are operated or how much they cost. Question about whether the P&R budget has changed as programs/leagues have been dropped.
6. Mention of undiscovered/underutilized “gem” of Southeast Park – multiple opportunities are available there, but only one neighborhood abuts the park, and other neighborhoods were unaware of what is or could be available there.
7. Mention that District 4 is one of the largest population centers, but has the fewest number of City parks. Requires travel to other Districts to use facilities such as Drew Wellness. Fort Jackson facilities do not fill the gaps.
8. Desire for P&R Department to revamp its land management/property management and landscaping programs to become much more environmentally friendly.
9. 10-20 year vision for more linear, connected Parks – primarily along waterways such as Gills Creek Watershed. Utilization of “fingers” for connectivity. Could require holistic planning for large areas (corridor plans, overlays, bridge/pathway structures). Also would need to be coordinated with other long-range planning documents.
10. Mention of some security issues – primarily after park hours. Noted that police substations at parks do not appear to be staffed.
11. Discussion of pet waste issues and resultant water quality issues. Desire for more signs, waste bags/mitts, pet stations, violation enforcement.

12. Top priority should be to take care of and maintain/upgrade the parks already in place before building any new ones. Tap into the history of existing parks – but improve facilities, equipment, resources, and programs.

**Public Meeting #5 – District 1 (Eau Claire Print Building)
05/21/12 @ 6:00 p.m.**

1. Voiced disappointment in the fewer number of programs/activities that were offered through the system. Thought it may be a staffing or budgetary problem – but it has led to underutilization at several parks.
2. Noted that Earlewood Park is not staffed during evening events (such as kickball) – and there are no restroom facilities open at that time. Desire for parks to be staffed for the hours people would like to use the parks. Currently, there is no seasonal adjustment of hours – i.e., parks aren't open later in the summer when there is daylight later into the evening.
3. Voiced desire for Vista/3 Rivers greenway to be completed. Sense that the Natural Resources of the Rivers are the most logical place for expanding Rec opportunities for all age groups. Perception that Riverfront Park is the most heavily used park in the system – but no way to gauge usage. Felt that this Park has huge potential that is not being realized – including revenue generation opportunities. It could be an economic driver, but there are no commercial activities – the greenway is mostly used by exercisers (no concessioners or public/private partnerships). Questioned whether there is a full plan for the greenway that includes commercial and residential uses. The greenway should include the Zoo and connect across the Rivers to Cayce/West Columbia side.
4. Consensus that senior programs were pretty good, but not much available for those aged 18 to 30 ish. The programs cover youth/seniors but not ages in between. There is nothing for certain ages to do, which is a particular problem for teenagers/young adults in District 1.
5. Mention that the Farrow Road Corridor is often neglected in relation to park facilities.
6. Vocal advocacy for better River access – the City currently provides no access to the river. The only access on the City side is informal through the Riverbanks Zoo. The Saluda is already heavily used – particularly for white water running. Richland County rowing center isn't full available to the public.
7. Concerns about ADA access/compliance. Older facilities tend not to be ADA compliant at all (buildings and restrooms). Questioned whether there is a Compliance Officer employed by the City. Access includes both to physically get into the facilities, but also to participate in the various City programs.
8. Mention of the success of “community gardens” but frustration that they are now basically full and unavailable.

9. Distinction between the creation of facilities for passive versus active recreation. In general, passive facilities are less expensive to build (one time expense) and do not require as much continuing staff/budget to operate. Felt desire is there for the more passive facilities – allow the community to use/exercise as they see fit.
10. Specific mention of the explosion of interest in activities such as kickball and disc golf. Mostly spearheaded by private groups in spite of (not in conjunction with) City facilities. Desire for City to “hold up its end of the bargain” by offering more programming for leagues/events, offering concessions, maintaining what is there for use, and providing access to restrooms).
11. Perception that the City has not historically taken good care of its resources and facilities. Felt Earlewood and Lorick Park have been ignored. Playgrounds are a generation or two out of date and require updates. Equipment and programs are outdated.
12. Desire for a better integration of the Arts into the recreation offerings. Support for the Arts Center and the ceramics offerings.
13. Consensus that it is extremely difficult to determine what is available through the City system. This significantly deters participation. Communication must be improved. Suggestions included access TV, better website information, better dissemination of info to neighborhood associations, use of smart phones, social media, survey tools, web portals/blogs, water bill inserts.
14. Frustration with bike path/pedestrian friendliness of entire City.
15. Discussion that other City priorities/goals are not trickling down to P&R – for example, sustainability programs, recycling programs, stormwater quality programs. Priorities determined by elected officials should be evident in how Parks are operated.