

Appendix E - Table of Recommendations

Department Mission	1.0	Review and revise as needed an effective "mission" and "vision" for the Parks & Recreation Department with commensurate objectives/goals with measurable outcomes and implementation steps with specific timelines/budgets. The mission/vision should reflect an understanding that Parks and Recreation are integral parts of the City's overall Safety, Land Use, Economic Development, and Tourism planning initiatives.
	1.1	The Parks and Recreation Department's facilities and service offerings must show an understanding of the unique overlap of recreation providers within the Columbia area, both public and private, including Richland County, Richland County Recreation Commission, Irmo-Chapin Recreation Commission, Lexington County, Fort Jackson, University of South Carolina, YMCA, etc.
	1.1.1	The City of Columbia should primarily provide facilities and programming for recreational and leisure needs of the community. In areas that private organizations desire to provide services, service contracts renewed yearly should be developed.
	1.1.2	The City of Columbia should meet quarterly with other Recreational providers in the region to coordinate, solidify, and communicate roles of recreation providers in the Midlands.
	1.1.3	The City of Columbia should meet with all service providers using City facilities to set goals and parameters of use. Those goals should include access by all segments of the community.
	1.1.4	Athletics Programs was listed as a recreational desire in the public surveys. Desire for more athletic programs ranked 1) Soccer, 2) Basketball, 3) Volleyball, 4) Football. The City of Columbia should focus programs in those areas. Missing from that list was baseball which is supported by a strong private and County system.
	1.1.5	The City of Columbia must balance the desire for athletic programs with the inherent good that youth athletics present. While in the community survey, athletics only ranked ninth behind items like outdoor recreation, arts and crafts, environmental, etc., its need in some communities is much greater and its impact more important. The City should balance its limited athletics resources more focused areas rather than City wide.
	1.2	Focus on national trends toward "green recreation" and "passive" recreation areas that do not require the level of maintenance and upkeep as active recreation areas/facilities.
	1.2.1	The City of Columbia should remove under utilized facilities at current Parks and replace with passive green recreation to include: 1) Walking Trails 2) Picnic Areas 3) Natural Woods areas with limited trails
	1.3	Develop partnerships with other recreation providers to share resources – examples could be the coordination with school districts serving the City, other recreation providers such as Richland County Recreation Commission, and tangentially related service providers such as the Richland County Public Library.
	1.4	Pursue "Accreditation" in accordance with the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) "National Accreditation Standards."
	1.4.1	The goal is to achieve accreditation from CAPRA within 2-3 years.
	1.5	The City of Columbia professional staff must take the lead in "system-wide" programming of recreation globally throughout the park system for the City. (I.e., view the system's facilities and programs in their entirety as a recreational delivery system rather than focusing on making each park "all things to all people."
	1.5.1	Establish a global plan for the park facilities in the system identifying lead functions/services to be massed at each of the parks. The goal is to establish each park/facility as a primary recreational provider for a major recreational service (or services) and to eliminate (or reduce) some facilities/programs not aligned with the lead function(s)/service(s).
	1.6	Establish a criteria for evaluating existing parks based on needs, location, facilities, and potential users. The result of the evaluation could include eliminating, repurposing, or consolidating some existing parks within the system based on a rating/prioritization system of the current park/facility inventory.
	1.7	Establish a criteria for evaluating proposed acquisitions and/or land donations and other gifts into the park system as these come with commensurate O&M costs. The goal is to limit shrinking maintenance cost versus the value of additional park spaces. Where possible, limit acceptance to only natural green spaces requiring limited maintenance, or additions to existing facilities.
	1.8	Parks and Recreation must be considered as a larger part of the overall economic development effort of the City. While the current system's "top level" facilities are competitive with peer communities, the current state of the facilities and programs overall put the City at a competitive disadvantage in prospect recruitment.
	1.8.1	Focus funds and resources on two or three major parks to transform them into show parks for use in economic development and set an expectation for the remaining upgrades. The most logical candidate parks are Finlay Park and Riverfront Park. See recommendation 2.4.

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Facility Needs	2.0	Modernize the entire park system (existing facilities)
	2.1	Establish criteria for "minimally adequate" facilities and leisure services by park type and focus on "retrofitting" those parks that currently do not meet that standard. This stems from a demand from all sectors of the community for equity and uniform quality in the provision of park and recreation resources, facilities, and programs. I.e., some parks in some areas of the system are less well maintained and offer fewer resources/programs than others and do not meet the "localized" recreation needs of those areas of the community. The initial prioritization of "retrofits" should be geared toward improvements related to safety and/or liability.
	2.2	In conjunction with maintenance and upkeep of existing parks and facilities, focus on retrofitting to comply with the requirements of the 2010 Americans With Disabilities Act (as amended). Initial focus should be on measures and upfits that can be accomplished quickly and inexpensively.
	2.2.1	Partner with Disability Action Center to evaluate each facility and program for compliance with ADA and develop a capital improvement task list and budget for each facility and a program modification task list and budget for each program.
	2.3	Update/develop a systematic Operations & Maintenance program that includes all parks/facilities and schedules for performing tasks.
	2.4	Establish at least one signature, landmark recreational destination for the City. This might include: a significantly upgraded Finlay Park, a completed Riverwalk, or another unidentified feature (e.g., a dedicated water park or other destination-type facility).
	2.5	Focus on more system-wide park "linkage" via greenway space. Optimize existing waterway features such as Rocky Branch, Smith Branch, Gills Creek, and other logical areas for greenway expansion.
	2.6	Currently, there is not adequate access to the river provided by the City of Columbia. In conjunction with current plans to establish river access, the City should ultimately identify three to four locations within the park system along the riverfront to establish public access points with appropriate facilities.
	2.7	Over the years many of the neighborhood parks have added facilities that are normally provided in regional facilities. Where possible parks should be restored to their designated roles. This restoration may include adjusting program and facilities in order to provide the best usage at each facility and each park, which will assist in improving existing facilities and decrease total costs for maintenance.

Level of Service	3.0	Establish written services descriptions and corresponding levels of service for each park and facility.
	3.1	In conjunction with the current ParkTrac initiative, the City must develop a system-wide means for accurately tracking park and program usage statistics. One means (currently in development) is the issuance of "park cards" that are scanable upon entry to all City residents utilizing staffed buildings/facilities. Other means for tracking (or estimating) usage of passive parks should also be established. Without these statistics, it is currently impossible to complete an accurate Level of Service (LOS) analysis.
	3.2	The City should encourage via land use planning, economic development, etc., the establishment of commercial/retail venues in close proximity to key park facilities such as the Three Rivers Greenway and Finlay Park. The intent is to better serve park users with goods/services available within the marketplace in conjunction with park usage.
	3.3	The hours of operation for the parks do not currently match the public desire for access based on community input. Hours of operation need to be aligned with the public's desires for park/facility access.
	3.3.1	Facilities by type should have consistent hours of operation each day of the week throughout the parks and recreation system (for example, until 9:00 pm for recreation centers). Based on community input, weekends are especially important and should be primarily available to the community with a focus on adults 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm and on weekends 10:00 am to 9:00 pm. Youth should be focused between the hours of 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm. Facilities should be open to the public as much as possible during these times.
	3.3.2	Outside entities wishing to rent or book facilities must do so through the administration, rather than through the local parks.
	3.3.3	A minimum charge for facility usage should be set by market conditions that take into account total costs for usage. There needs to be an understanding that some facilities/functions should be revenue generating or at least revenue neutral. For example, it is estimated the per hour cost for meeting space is in excess of \$25/hr. The fee charged for usage needs to be significant enough to cover costs and (in specific cases) generate revenue.
	3.3.4	Policy should be developed for premium centers versus neighborhood centers for rental fees, costs and availability. Such policies could include the following: 1) A maximum booking time should be established for each type of facility (meeting space, basketball court, tennis courts, etc. for each type of use. No outside bookings should be allowed during peak usage times.

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Programming	4.0	Tailor programming to meet the needs of each area of the City while providing centralized services at existing facilities that make logistical sense.
	4.1	In certain areas of the City (primarily areas of higher population density, lower income, and/or higher crime rates, and based on expressed community desires), the City should increase focus on athletics and more heavily structured activities. Passive recreation should not be ignored in these areas, but the community desire for teen programs and programs offered after school and on weekends is important.
	4.1.1	The Department must balance the need for structured programming and passive, unplanned recreation. The balance must be constantly evaluated and adjusted based on community feedback.
	4.2	In any City owned public facility or land where a private entity is providing recreational services, the City should develop a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with that entity, renewable each year, that outlines the specific obligations and responsibilities of each party. The MOUs should be specifically reviewed to ensure minimum barriers to access (i.e., financial, time constraints, etc.)
	4.2.1	The MOU should include costs contributions by each party (including debt service for the City, O&M, utilities, etc.) and contributions by the organization. It should include how access by the public will be provided to the maximum extent possible (i.e., minimization of financial and time barriers to that access).
	4.3	Each program at the various facilities should be examined, and out-of-date or low attendance programs should be eliminated. There is insufficient budget to continue offering the number of programs offered throughout the system.
	4.3.1	Develop a comprehensive list of programs at each facility and look for overlaps. Remove overlaps where practical.
Staffing	5.0	Develop a uniform set of education, qualification, and experience standards for positions within the Parks & Recreation Department and adhere to those standards for evaluating existing staff and hiring new staff. Standards should include criminal background checks and drug testing.
	5.1	Build pride in the staff by establishing dress codes and providing uniforms and improved equipment. It is essential that park users can easily identify Parks and Recreation staff members from the general public.
	5.1.1	Match personnel skill levels with job description requirements - this is especially important for the Park Directors
	5.2	Develop an accurate organizational staffing chart that defines chain of command and job roles
	5.2.1	Many of the larger facilities appear overstaffed. The primary purpose is to ensure appropriate staff levels at each facility, but it is recommended as a general rule that no more than 2 unassigned personnel be at any site at one time. Other assigned (i.e. an aerobics instructor, life guard, etc.) should be added as needed.
	5.2.2	Peer communities have personnel costs ratio between 60-70% of the overall P&R budget. The City has an 80% staffing ratio. Much of this is due to the reduction of the overall budget leaving little except staffing. When additional maintenance budget is added back, this percentage should reduce.
	5.2.3	Staff reorganization will likely be required moving some Operations staff back towards maintenance and to new functions including outdoor education and recreation opportunities. There are areas that are overstaffed that can be redirected towards new functions.
	5.2.4	It has been noted throughout this study at safety and security is a concern in parks, particularly after hours. The city should coordinate between departments to provide this needed service.
	5.3	Finlay Park is in need of full-time oversight via a combination of Park Staff and security/police personnel - perhaps 24 hour
	5.4	Other parks need to be evaluated for either restricted access (fence), restricted vehicular, or policing during off hours

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Financial	6.0	The funding available for maintenance and upkeep of existing parks and facilities is not adequate to meet desired standards.
	6.1	Develop specific measurable maintenance standards each facility within the park system.
	6.2	Develop a comprehensive budget for Parks and Recreation Department that is based on the full requirements of operating the number of existing parks and facilities within the system as it stands now. I.e., "bottom up budgeting" – to determine not what can be done with the amount currently budgeted, but to determine what it realistically would take to meet "minimally adequate" requirements for parks/programs.
	6.2.1	Currently, the approximately \$300,000 available for operation of facilities is not sufficient to keep the number of facilities operational at acceptable levels. Additional operations funding from an increased overall Parks and Recreation budget or a re-allocation of the existing Parks and Recreation Budget is needed to effectively operate existing facilities.
	6.2.1.2	It is difficult to exactly determine cost of maintenance and percentage of the budget attributed to maintenance because the personnel costs are not separated by function. The City should establish cost centers through the financial system to account for each park/facility's total O&M cost.
	6.2.2	Currently, the approximately \$300,000 of revenue from recreational user fees is directed towards the City's general fund. This revenue should remain within the Parks and Recreation budget (or reserved for park and recreation uses).
	6.2.3	The staffing budget is approximately 80% of the recreational budget. The staffing percentage is out of line with other similar peer communities. Some staff reductions are likely required to divert funds to other functions, including maintenance, etc. Other staff should be redirected from operations towards other duties such as maintenance.
	6.3	Increased funding or redirection of funding from capital projects towards O&M is required (i.e., in the near term, funding for the maintenance and upkeep of existing facilities should be emphasized over funding for construction of new facilities).
	6.4	Increased funding through user fees for Parks and Recreation programs/services should be considered. Other peer communities realize much higher revenue from recreation user fees than the City of Columbia.
	6.4.1	Establish a first year goal of 1% of the overall budget to be funded by user fees, increase by 1% each year to a overall goal of 10%.
	6.5	Consider the inclusion of "impact fees" for new residential development within the City limits to accommodate park and recreation needs of a growing population.
	6.5.1	Consider establishing a percentage of the overall development cost with a cap as an impact fee for recreation. Consider a fee of 1% of the overall project capped at a number to be determined to be contributed towards capital improvements for recreation.
	6.6	Other revenue streams could include corporate sponsorships at local facilities - renewable for one year; Working agreements with companies that would pay the costs of repairs to facilities in exchange for advertising on each repair; Working with Telecommunications companies to locate cell towers in existing ball fields as large flag poles to blend into the recreational landscape;
	6.7	Continue the staff work in securing and chasing grant monies. This will not be a large revenue source, but from time to time may allay some costs.
	6.8	Include initiatives such as local (City) tax breaks or business license rebates for local businesses "donating" design or construction time and materials
Communication	7.0	Develop a comprehensive information and marketing initiative to better communicate the facilities and programs (and park hours) that are already available so that all sectors of the community are aware of these offerings.
	7.1	Create a marketing plan that covers communication initiatives and includes mailings, website content, branding, and other information distribution geared both for City residents and a potential larger (tourist) market.
	7.2	Establish a "Midlands Recreation" clearinghouse mechanism to advertise/communicate the programs and facilities available throughout the Midlands region (i.e., City, County, County Rec Commission, Private Entities, School Districts, USC, Fort Jackson, etc. etc.). Could be tied to recommendation 1.1.1
	7.3	Create a standardization (design guidelines) for parks that includes common fencing, equipment, painting, and especially signage.
	7.4	Equip each major regional park with a scrolling marquee sign (or equivalent) to inform the public about services and events at the park.
	7.5	Social Media should play a larger role in communicating programs/services provided, and access to facilities. Accuracy and timeliness is the key to being successful.
	7.6	Create a landmark/identity statement for recreation (a Destination) that defines recreation for the City of Columbia and market heavily both locally and nationally. Ties to recommendation 2.4