

Appendix : Focus Group Summary

Aquatic Center user organizations

(Astoria High School, Clatsop Community College, Columbia Memorial Hospital, North Coast Swim Club, US Coast Guard)

- AHS
 - The swim team would like to keep its current 3:30-5:00 PM schedule for the 3-month duration of their season.
 - This has caused schedule conflicts with North Coast Swim Club, who recommended staying open until 8:00 PM during the high school swim season to accommodate everyone. However, their ultimate priority is that the City can cover its costs.
 - Interested in seeing the green space on the west side of the AAC developed.
 - Happy with the facility and think it indicates that Astoria is a well-rounded community.
- CCC
 - Concerned with high costs. More information on discounts would be helpful, particularly for seniors.
 - Would like to be able to run an evening fitness class (7-8:00 PM).
 - Would like to see more adult programming, eg. kayaking, scuba, water polo.
- CMH
 - Would like to get American Arthritis Association certification, which requires a 93° F pool. Current rec pool is set at 86° F.
 - AAC should provide two sturdy wheelchairs for pool access. Existing PVC chair should be replaced.
 - CMH is satisfied with the existing partnership and very happy with the update to the fitness room.
- NCSC
 - Happy that AAC is able to do so much with limited space and time, and that the staff and leadership demonstrate pride in the facility. Communication is key to keep things running smoothly - it has been good and NCSC is grateful for the partnership.
 - Interested in seeing the consolidation of the AAC and ARC facilities at the AAC site.
 - Identified the lobby space and green space on the west side of the AAC as underutilized, and would like to see development in those areas. These are potential areas for rec center development. In the interim, providing easy access to the green space would be utilized by NCSC for gathering space during meets and dryland training.
- USCG
 - Happy with the staff, facility, and level of communication.
 - USCG feels that it pays a premium for the time it uses, but is happy to support such a key facility in the community.
 - Would like to see a 6-month or 1-year pass option.
 - More depth in the pool would be ideal for USCG rescue trainings, but it is understood that this may not be feasible.
- General
 - The group discussed and supported the idea of building a rock climbing wall in the AAC facility
 - Could be located in the north end of the lobby, on the west wall of the exterior of the building, or within the pool area (similar to Sunset Empire).
 - The group discussed the possibility of widening the lap pool to accommodate 1-2 additional lanes.

City staff

(Community Development, Public Works)

- Develop a plan for Ocean View Cemetery
- Identify underutilized parks that could be repurposed or sold
- Be sure to utilize the Master Plan as a guide over the years.
- Become financially self-sustaining
 - Consider restructuring fees for Astoria residents vs. non-residents
 - Evaluate a special district
 - Ensure sustainable maintenance and operations costs
 - Regular user fee updates
- Coordinate with other City departments through cross-marketing
- Collaborate with other City departments planning processes
 - Potentially: sustainability, stormwater/wastewater
 - Heritage Square

Downtown businesses

(Astoria Downtown Historic District Association)

- Continue to provide public restrooms and consider adding more along the Riverwalk
- Develop signage and wayfinding, brochure/park and trail guide

Historic & cultural preservation

(Clatsop County Historical Society, Clatsop Community College, Lower Columbia Preservation Society, other independent local historians)

- For designated historical parks and buildings, identify and understand the characteristics that led to their designations, and seek to preserve those values. Understand that some sites may be best preserved as “time capsules” (Customs House) and others may be more adaptable (Shively).
- Increase awareness of historical assets through additional interpretive signage.
- Train maintenance staff on preservation, restoration, and maintenance of historic sites (Clatsop College offers courses. Staff enrollment could strengthen that partnership)
- Increase volunteerism and stewardship. Rather than having groups “adopt” parks or create “friends of” organizations, create a live document of projects that could be completed through volunteer efforts, and make the document accessible to the public online.

Latino community

(Lower Columbia Hispanic Council)

- Provide information and marketing materials in Spanish, and coordinate with LCHC to distribute.
 - Include a Spanish language option on the Parks & Recreation website.
 - Communicate hours of operation and reservations.
 - Increase communication on scholarship opportunities, giveaways, and free events.
- Safety and accessibility:
 - Install lighting along the River Walk from the Maritime Museum to Safeway.
 - Provide ADA accessible play equipment.
 - Widen gate at Tapiola for large strollers to be able to pass through.
 - Provide fenced areas for off-leash dogs to reduce safety concerns.
 - Consider fencing the street edge at Fred Lindstrom to keep kids away from traffic.
- Provide more large outdoor party / gathering spaces.
- High-traffic parks should have a range of amenities that serve multi-generational users.
- Increase indoor recreation opportunities for all age groups.
- Restrooms
 - Provide clean, permanent facilities at Fred Lindstrom.
 - Keep Tapiola restrooms clean.

Parents clubs

(MOMS Club, Astor Parents Club, Lewis & Clark Parents Club, AMS Parents Club)

- Identify “key” parks and maintain those at the highest level.
 - Would rather have a few great parks than many unremarkable parks.
- Restrooms:
 - Add a restroom at Fred Lindstrom Park.
 - Keep Tapiola restrooms open, clean, and stocked.
- Provide something for parents to do at Port of Play
 - Cardio equipment was suggested
- Costs:
 - find ways to control costs and make memberships more affordable. Especially for larger families (current family passes only cover up to 5 family members).
 - Improve the scholarship application process for low income users, expand cost saving opportunities for low income users.
- Website:
 - Make it easier to navigate, pay online for registration, memberships, classes, etc.

Parks Foundation

- Provide more opportunities for pre-teens and teens (after-school hours: monitored open gyms / social gathering space)
- Provide an off-leash dog park area
- Provide access to indoor sport courts / open gym time.
- Consolidate and centralize the indoor recreation facilities.
- Connect the trail system.
- Expand volunteerism and stewardship through CHIP-in, community partnerships, and park adoptions / friends-of groups.
- Achieve sustainability in budget and staffing.
- Increase transparency of Department financials to the community.

Public health & social service

(Clatsop County Public Health, Astoria Warming Center)

- Improve communication on cost saving opportunities for low income and senior users, and consider expanding those opportunities.
- Build community partnerships by increasing communication and interaction with area organizations such as CHART, HEAL, Connect the Dots
- Achieve fiscal sustainability and independence by sustaining revenue, potentially implementing a regional parks and recreation district.

Seniors

(Astoria Senior Center board members, directors, and patrons)

- Seniors in the focus group stated that they used the Aquatic Center and local trails for recreation most frequently. Preferred trails were the River Walk, Shively Park, and the Coffenbury Trail at Fort Stevens State Park in Warrenton.
- There was a concern with the current conditions and maintenance of trails and facilities.
- There was interest in finding and encouraging new uses at underutilized park facilities.
- Outdoor social gathering spaces and places to walk were noted as the highest priorities. It was noted that places for walking should also provide places to sit and rest or enjoy views. Seating should be comfortable to get in and out of (the downtown benches were disliked because they are backless, too low and uncomfortable to use).

- The Senior Center patrons would like to see the development of Heritage Square into a facility that builds off of the themes at the Garden of Surging waves. It should provide social gathering space that the seniors can use, but primarily be the “welcome center of Astoria” for visitors, and represent the history and character of the city. A partnership could be developed between the Senior Center and Parks and Recreation to encourage use of new development at Heritage Square, such as recreational, social, and educational programs geared toward seniors. Suggestions for the design of the park included transforming the “pit” into a sunken amphitheater, and installing art/sculptures/memorials depicting the ethnic heritage of Astoria. The Garden of Surging Waves does a good job of honoring the Chinese heritage, and the rest of the park could be dedicated to the Native Americans, Scandinavians, Greeks, and others. Generally, the seniors supported improving the library, but keeping it at its current site rather than incorporating a new library into the design of Heritage Square.
- The seniors thought that they would be more likely to get involved in Parks and Recreation services if they had more information about what options were provided, especially programs specifically geared toward seniors, people in poor health, and low income users. Representatives of the Senior Center strongly encouraged improving communication between the Senior Center and Parks and Recreation Department. The Senior Center has about 500 members and sends information to its users regularly via email. There is currently little to no mention of parks and recreation opportunities. The Parks and Recreation department could send information directly to the Senior Center to include in their communications, and could also post fliers and newsletters in print at the Senior Center’s physical location.

Service organizations

(Kiwanis, Lions, Rotary, Boy Scouts, Friends of the Astoria Column, Friends of the Astoria Armory, Friends of McClure Park)

- Host or attend regular mixers / networking opportunities for service organizations where each group presents key projects, goals, needs, and skills they offer. See: CHART, Connect the Dots.
- Communicate to local service organizations what our priority projects are and where we could use help.
- Collaborate with the Armory to provide after-school opportunities for middle school and high school age youth.

Teens

(Astoria High School Leadership Class, Student Council)

- A presentation on the Master Plan process was given, and students were asked questions about how they recreate, indoors and outdoors, and what activities they would like to see offered by the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Favorite indoor activities included video games and indoor sports, or flexible “open gym” activities.
- Suggestions for new indoor activities that could be implemented included a giant trampoline room, video game area, a YMCA-type facility with multiple recreation and social opportunities and programs like drop-in basketball.
- Favorite outdoor activities included camping and hiking, as well as outdoor sports.
- Suggestions for new outdoor activities that could be provided included outdoor swimming, pickle ball (could also be indoors), more / improved trails, zip-lining, and drive-in movie nights.
- It was noted that many teens were unaware of some of the parks, trails, and programs already offered. There should be better information provided for regular programs and one-off events that are specifically geared toward teens. Coordination with the schools could be a key to getting more teens involved with Parks and Recreation programs.

Trails & natural areas

(National Parks Service, North Coast Watershed Council, North Coast Trail Alliance, NW Coast Trails Coalition, and other independent local horticulturalists, arborists, and trail builders)

- Connect the trail system, and consider walking and biking not only as a method of recreation but also transportation.
- Improve trail safety: more lighting on the Riverwalk; make wood sections of Riverwalk more bike-friendly; selective brush clearing along wooded trails; reduce hazards on Cathedral Tree Trail.
- Local trail organizations and users are willing to help map, develop, and maintain trails.
- Provide a comprehensive trail map.
- Continue to preserve and maintain natural areas that provide respite from the city.
- Utilize native plant species to keep maintenance needs to a minimum. Ensure that the maintenance staff is knowledgeable of these techniques.
- Educate the community on our native plant communities, trees, and natural landscape features through interpretive signage.

Youth & adult athletics

(Astoria Cal Ripken Baseball, Astoria Babe Ruth Baseball, Lower Columbia Youth Soccer Association, Sunset Empire Parks & Recreation District, coaches from Astoria Parks & Recreation programs)

- Participation has been declining. Find ways to stabilize and grow participation. Start with expanding marketing and communications.
 - Regional club/travel teams are a draw because they often offer a higher level of competition and quality
- It is also becoming difficult to find and retain coaches. The high school athletic programs could require service hours that could be satisfied by coaching a youth team or officiating.
- One way to retain and grow local teams would be hosting more end of season tournaments.
- Cross-promotion and increased communication between Parks and Recreation programs and programs provided by other local organizations.
- Improve coordination on areas where maintenance is shared.