

**Astoria Parks and Recreation Master Plan
Citizen Advisory Committee
December 17, 2015**

Ian Sisson called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.

Roll Call

Committee Members Present- Craig Hoppes, Ken Hageman, Jan Nybakke, Jim Holen, Ed Overbay, Brooke Stanley, Kassia Nye, and Zetty Nemlowill

Staff Present- Angela Cosby, Jonah Dart-McLean, and Ian Sisson

Excused/Absent- Patrick Wingard, Scott Tucker, Michelle Bisek, and Dulcye Taylor

Approval of Minutes

- a. The minutes of Meeting #2 on November 12, 2015 were approved as submitted.

Community Engagement Update

- a. Parks and Recreation Field Trip - Mr. Sisson gave an update on the December 5 tour of park facilities, which included a video that was recorded during the tour.
 - i. Board members who attended the tour agreed the event showcased the vastness of the park system. The community is largely unaware of the scope of the Park Department's work and how well the department operates with very limited resources. Key takeaways from the Field Trip and additional discussion included:
 - Costs incurred by just about every facility and program offered by the Parks Department is subsidized by taxpayers because revenues cannot cover expenses. This is due to several factors including the current fee structure, the way programs are structured, labor costs, facility operation and maintenance costs, and the maintenance of facilities not owned by the City.
 - Several ideas for reorganizing the entire Parks Department were discussed, including partnerships with public and private entities, consolidation of facilities and/or services, restructuring of programs and fee schedules, and more community involvement.
 - Committee members discussed the Adopt a Park program. Four parks are currently maintained to some extent by community groups, which reduces the City's costs.
 - Staff has drafted an information packet based in part on the tour, which includes fact sheets about each park. The packet would be part of the inventory and existing conditions section of the Master Plan once it is finalized. The Committee would be updated as the packet is refined. The information packet should include a list of properties owned by other entities, but maintained by the Parks Department because the City uses those properties.
 - The Committee discussed the pros and cons of charging higher fees to park users that live outside of Astoria. Visitors frequently come to Astoria to participate in programs. Astoria's parks are for local residents, so it seems fair to charge higher prices to visitors. However, this may reduce usage so much that revenues would not increase.
- b. Beers for your Health – Good input was received from the 48 attendees at the event, which focused on the history of six City parks. Attendees shared what they liked/disliked about each park and discussed future visions for the parks.
- c. Online Survey – The survey has received 309 responses as of December 16th and will remain open for a couple more weeks. The department would like 500 responses by January 1, 2016.

Mr. Sisson reviewed the cumulative results of the survey thus far, which indicated the facilities and services valued and used most by respondents. Staff is still reviewing the comments section of the survey and will provide an update on those later.

- It is important to communicate effectively about the department's programs and services. Promotion and marketing can result in a good return on investment. The Committee discussed ideas for improving community outreach.
- Staff has met with the Rotary Club and Astoria Downtown Historic District Association (ADHDA). Staff will meet with parent's groups and mom's clubs in January and continues to schedule meetings with other groups. Targeted feedback is being sought from each group.
- The Committee discussed ways to take advantage of social media and email in an effort to improve community outreach and gain more survey responses. Several Committee members agreed to share the link to the survey with community groups they are involved with.

Values/Prioritization Criteria

- a. The Committee participated in a group activity to determine a set of core values that would help the team prioritize and refine Master Plan recommendations. Staff would compile the results of the exercise to develop Core Values and present them at the next meeting.

Initial Recommendations

- Initial recommendations will be refined before presenting them to the public in the spring. Each Committee member stated a recommendation, which Mr. Sisson recorded for further discussion and refinement. The following recommendations were discussed:
 - Maintain only the parks and facilities used most.
 - Promote the Adopt a Park program and community outreach.
 - Increase operational efficiency by developing a cloud based database of department assets and critical information about each asset to be used by maintenance employees.
 - Consolidate services provided at the Recreation Center and Aquatic Center while exploring possible expansion of the Aquatic Center.
 - Educate the public about park facilities and aesthetics.
 - More City funds should be allocated to the Parks Department for operations and maintenance.
 - Develop partnerships with community groups, small businesses, and other entities.
 - Convert underutilized parks into natural areas that require minimal care.
 - Sell or lease underutilized parks.
 - Conduct annual reviews and incremental increases of fees.
 - Only add a new park or facility after a clear plan for long-term maintenance has been established.
 - Explore cemetery finances prior to developing the remaining 50 acres.
- Committee members not present at the meeting will be asked to forward their recommendations to Staff.
- The Committee and Staff discussed the suggested recommendations. Some of the initial recommendations could be implemented immediately, while others would take more time and planning.
- Staff discussed the pros and cons of working with community groups to maintain parks. Ideas for increasing community stewardship were shared. A community partnership program must be sustainable so that park facilities can continue to be maintained over the long-term because in the future, there will be changes in community group leadership as well as the availability of City staff and finances.
- Ideas for increasing revenue included an additional fee charged with business licenses, allocating a portion of the lodging tax to the Parks Department, use of Promote Astoria Funds, selling property, and consolidating facilities and services. Rising labor costs have put budget constraints

on every City department. The City does not anticipate any increase in revenues, so allocating more funds to the Parks Department would take funds away from another department. The Committee could consider a recommendation to leverage the regional scope of the department to generate more revenue from regional visitors.

Other Business

Next Steps

- a. Continue stakeholder and focus group interviews.
- b. The online survey will be open through January 1, 2016.
- c. Begin the Level of Service Analysis.
- d. Draft the initial recommendations.
- e. Citizen Advisory Committee meeting #4
 - i. 8:00 am –9:30 am Thursday, January 28 at the Astoria Recreation Center

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:43 am.

Next meeting will be held Thursday, January 28, 2016 at 8:00 am at the Astoria Recreation Center.