

***STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS ON
RECREATION IN THE CITY OF YPSILANTI***

PREPARED BY THE RECREATION COMMISSION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document, created by the Ypsilanti Recreation Commission, outlines a set of intermediary recommendations to help guide the restoration and expansion of recreation services. The strategic recommendations contained within are divided into six sections:

- Roles and Responsibilities
- Self Sufficiency
- Wide Array of Programming
- Well Maintained Parks, Facilities and Infrastructure
- Communication and Marketing
- Effective Relationships and Partnerships

Within each of the sections a number of *issues* have been outlined, followed by *recommendations* to address the issue.

Though a number of ideas are contained in these six sections, a small number of recommendations kept reappearing and became apparent as the most significant and urgent in helping to restore and grow recreation. These recommendations are:

- Clearly define the Assistant City Manger's role in recreation
- Approve and hire a City staff position of Recreation Coordinator whose responsibilities would be to manage grants, partnerships, and contracts, support recreation staff and develop new programming
- Explore the establishment of a Recreation Authority through partnerships with Ypsilanti and Superior Townships, Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti Public School District, Lincoln School District, and Willow Run Community Schools
- Foster and support the proposed Salvation Army partnership to create a Kroc Community Center in the City
- Establish a regular and ongoing pattern and process for communication between the Recreation Commission and the City
- Begin to implement the City Recreation Master Plan by prioritizing and developing a time line of the improvements outlined in Chapter 1.

INTRODUCTION

The document was created by the Ypsilanti Recreation Commission, a six member board appointed by the City of Ypsilanti City Council. The purpose of the document is to outline several immediate and short-term recommendations to help guide the restoration of sustainable recreation services to the citizens of the community.

It is clear that there are limits to the City's immediate ability to reinstate recreation through its general fund due mostly to a general trend of budget reductions at State and Federal levels. These cuts have devastated support for many city entities, especially non-emergency services like recreation.

Though financial constraints have hampered current recreation planning and programming, it is still essential to examine community needs and set priorities through an intentional process. Part of this process was undertaken in 2002 with the development of the City's Recreation Master Plan. The Recreation Commission hopes to renew interest and focus on the Master Plan. The recommendations in this document outline a set of intermediary action steps to help guide the restoration and expansion of recreation services, as the city's financial situation improves and/or as new opportunities are created. These steps will move the City closer to implementing the visionary goals outlined in the Master Plan.

The strategic recommendations contained within are divided into six sections:

- Role and Responsibilities
- Self Sufficiency
- Wide Array of Programming
- Well Maintained Parks, Facilities and Infrastructure
- Communication and Marketing
- Effective Relationships and Partnerships

Within each of the sections a number of *issues* have been outlined, followed by *recommendations* to address the issue. Each of the recommendations has a group or person identified to lead the action and a proposed time line to initiate the recommendation.

We believe that recreation and parks should be an integral part of the City's image, character, and quality of life. Specifically, strong parks and recreation programs:

- ✓ Provide social benefits by connecting people with neighbors of all ages, incomes, backgrounds, and abilities.
- ✓ Provide economic benefits by improving the quality of life in the city and helping to attract businesses and residents to the City.
- ✓ Provide benefits to the environment by connecting people with and educating them about nature. In addition, greenways can provide alternative transportation opportunities.
- ✓ Provide benefits to individuals by promoting physical fitness and self-improvement. Opportunities for exercise and being outdoors result in greater physical fitness, emotional well-being, and connectivity to nature.

BACKGROUND

On July 15, 2003 The Ypsilanti City Council voted unanimously to reinstate the Recreation Commission to help address the critical issues surrounding the then recent elimination of recreation funding in the city. The charge provided to the Recreation Commission was to “seek sustainable alternatives and methods for making recreational programming available to the citizens of Ypsilanti”. Though the need to meet the charge an important one, the Commission found that because recreation was in crisis, the City was not able to offer much support or guidance to the Commission to accomplish its charge.

After working to support citizen groups who have stepped up to fill the recreation vacuum, the Recreation Commission felt that our second priority was to gauge community needs on recreation and to find out what people would be willing to support in terms of some kind of long range, sustainable plan. In January the Commission sent a survey to a random sample of 1000 residents. The effort was spearheaded by Vic Chiasson, Assistant Professor of Recreation and Park Management at Eastern Michigan University. Two-hundred and fifty six people responded to the survey. Some of the survey results include:

- After school programs at Parkridge ranked the highest recreation priority overall; the Farmers Market ranked second and health and fitness programs for seniors as third.
- A large majority (89%) of respondents would favor supporting new initiative to fund recreation. Most (62%) would favor supporting such a proposal in the \$25-\$75 per year range. An additional 25% favored spending between \$100 and \$125 per year.
- Respondents ranked swim lessons as the highest pool priority, with open swim a close second.
- People feel that recreation is vital to young people and seniors in the community; additionally there were a number of respondents who were concerned about the pool closing
- Some respondents feel that the parks need better maintenance, more lighting and are concerned about the removal of play equipment.

The surveys were followed, in early March, by three community forums held across the City. The purposes of the forums were to report on the results of the survey, to hear additional ideas, and to further sort out the kinds of programs and funding proposals the community would be willing to support. Approximately twenty people attended each of the forums, and some of their reactions and suggestions included:

- Work more closely with Eastern Michigan University to help increase recreation programs, as well as promote existing collaboration with Eastern (like activities at Senior Center)
- Support for some kind of additional funding (millage or fee increases) to support recreation
- Involve more young people in conversations, fundraising and decisions around recreation, including the possibility of a youth symposium or council

- Consider new programs, like outdoor ice skating (which used to exist) and new walking and biking paths
- Involve volunteer citizen efforts to help maintain recreation facilities and programs

On April 3rd a visioning session took place at the Senior Center. Over twenty-five local citizens attended, representing neighborhoods and facilities, Eastern Michigan University, County Parks and Recreation and the business community. The purpose of the session was to continue the conversation with the community about our future recreation needs and to brainstorm some additional ideas about possible directions for recreation. The input from this meeting further guided the strategic recommendations outlined in this document.

VISION

Through recreation, we enrich the quality of life and nurture the health and well-being of our people, our community, our environment and our economy.

THE VISION will be achieved by sustaining and growing recreation services, programs, facilities, parks and open spaces in our community and by developing:

- ✓ Clear *roles and responsibilities* in delivering recreation services and programs
- ✓ A *self-sufficient financial design* that supports our vision and goals and effectively guides our decision making process.
- ✓ A wide array of *programming* that meets the needs of all of the citizens in our community and provides them equitable access to these services
- ✓ Well maintained, safe and secure *facilities and infrastructure*
- ✓ *Communication and marketing* that facilitates accessible and accurate information to the public
- ✓ Effective *relationships and partnerships* with public and private organizations that enhance services and facilities available to our community

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Roles and Responsibilities

Issue 1: The roles and responsibilities of the Recreation Commission were never clearly defined. This has presented both the Recreation Commission and the City with challenges. Without knowing what authority lies with the Recreation Commission, nor having defined lines of communication with the City, City Council, Mayor and the Public, the Commission has had to spend a large amount of time and effort trying to chart its course.

Recommendation:

- Working with representation from Council and City staff, come up with a definition of our roles and responsibilities, by Fall '04.

Issue 2: Without a central staff liaison focused on coordinating recreation, there is no clear chain of command for the community, the Recreation Commission or for facility staff to follow regarding questions or concerns, or even for basic operation of facilities.

Recommendations:

- Clearly define the Assistant City Manger's role in recreation immediately
- City approve and appoint a Recreation Coordinator whose responsibilities would be to 1) manage grants, partnerships, and contracts; 2) serve as City contact for recreation staff; immediately.
- City Manager defines clear roles & responsibilities of DPW regarding Recreation and facilities by Fall 04

Issue 3: Friends groups have spearheaded fundraising and fiscal management from the City, but have no formal voice in policy and operation of facilities.

Recommendation

- Recreation Commission, representative from Friends' groups and City representative define roles and responsibilities of Friends groups, and their relationship to facility policy and operation, including volunteer support at facilities (and how those volunteer efforts may conflict with DPW roles) by December 2004.

Issue 4: Facilities staff needs to be intentionally recruited, trained, and supported, to meet local and state standards and best practices, to encourage staff retention.

Recommendations:

- City Manager establish City responsibility for staff recruiting; by Fall 04
- Recreation Coordinator/Human Resources re-examine and redefine job descriptions for recreation staff; by Fall 04

- Recreation Coordinator/Human Resources establish facility training standards, by Spring 05, including:
 - Customer Service
 - Age appropriate interactions
 - Problem solving (conflict management)
 - Health and safety training
- Human Resources examine pay and benefit equity with similarly sized communities by Spring 05.

Conclusion: Most of the above issues, would be addressed with the leadership and guidance of a full-time Recreation Coordinator and support staff. Therefore a sustainable solution demands finding a way to fund and support this position.

II. Self Sufficiency

Issue 1: Friends Groups exist for some, but not all facilities and parks.

Recommendations

- Recreation Commission encourages the creation of Friends groups or community boards for each facility and the parks at-large by Fall 04.
- Formalize relationships between Recreation Commission and Friends groups, by Fall 04, through:
 - Recreation Commission representation at Friends Group meetings
 - Friends Group representation at a minimal of three Recreation Commission meetings per year.
 - Establish two city-wide Recreation Summits per year, with representatives from: City Council, City Staff (DPW, HR, Mayor, City Manager), Recreation Commission, Friends Groups

Issue 2: The City is not using public money for recreation. There are also several differing recreation facilities and programs throughout the region, and the City, Townships and County are not formally working together, resulting in redundant costs/programs or gaps in services.

Recommendation:

- The State grants taxing ability to regional Recreation Authorities. The City should immediately explore the establishment of a Recreation Authority (in addition to the Salvation Army partnership currently forming), through partnerships with Ypsilanti and Superior Townships, Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti Public School District, Lincoln School District, and Willow Run Community Schools.

Issue 3: Though a number of successful projects and grants have emerged between EMU and the City they have come about as a result of crisis, as opposed to a coordinated/intentional plan.

Recommendation:

- Continue and improve sustainable and coordinated partnership efforts through regularly scheduled meetings, facilitated by a Recreation Coordinator and including representation from the Recreation Staff and Commission. An intentional planning meeting should occur by Fall 04.

Issue 4: Recreation was de-funded, and many operations are/have been essentially privatized. No long term plan has been made to reinstate recreation as a City function.

Recommendation:

- Make a plan for the return of funding for Recreation based on the Blue Ribbon Finance Committees long term recommendations, by March 05. Recreation Commission should prioritize and recommend programs (based upon the

Recreation Commission Survey and the City of Ypsilanti Recreation Master Plan) and City Manager should create budgets based on recommendations by February 05.

- Clearly define at what point the City will restore recreation funding, during fiscal planning for 06.
- Future efforts to privatize facility operations through RFP or other processes, must involve representation and approval from the Recreation Commission, as well as honor and sustain current activities.

Conclusion: Grant funding and privatization are short-term solutions to the current funding crisis. The Community, as demonstrated by the responses to the Recreation Commission Survey, as well as the emergence of “friends” groups, value Recreation services and facilities. As the Blue Ribbon Finance Committee helps the City define long-term financial solutions, Recreation funding needs to be reinstated to provide the services requested by the community through the survey.

III. Wide array of Programming

Issue 1: Programming is not designed to meet the needs of all citizens in the city. (i.e. minimal to no programming for adults, families, singles, non-Parkridge youth).

Recommendations:

- Recreation Coordinator, with recommendations from facility staff and drawing on ideas from survey and master plan, develop new programming ideas that would be utilized by all members of the community. Start in spring 05 and on-going on an annual basis.
- Recreation Coordinator, with support from Recreation Commission and community representatives, recommend programming that could take place in proposed Kroc Center that would expand to underserved citizens. Begin by participation on planning committee with Salvation Army.

Issue 2: Resources in the community have not been used to expand programming.

Recommendations: Through an authority and other formal partnerships, coordinate, continue and expand relationships. Example: Use of Eastern Michigan and School Districts resources (pool, tennis courts, gymnasiums, running tracks, etc.)

Issue 3: The City has no person to supervise program development and resource coordination for recreation.

Recommendation:

- Clearly define the Assistant City Manger's role in recreation immediately.
- Hire a Recreation Coordinator who can creatively use current resources immediately.

Issue 4: With the current budget crisis there has been a call for volunteers but no clear description or coordination of what is needed.

Recommendation:

- Each facility and the City clearly define the volunteer needs, responsibilities and restrictions by Fall 04.

Conclusion: The programming that has been offered by the City does not meet the needs of all members of the community. It also does not utilize the resources in the community as effectively as possible. A Recreation Authority and the proposed Kroc Center would greatly address these issues. Additionally the City needs to find a more effective way to utilize the resources in the community to best serve the recreation needs of the community.

IV. Well Maintained Parks, Facilities, and Infrastructure.

Issue: The City Recreation Master Plan is a document that has not been used as a resource to guide the planning and maintaining of recreation.

Recommendation:

- Recreation Commission, with representation from the City, should begin to prioritize and develop a time line based on improvements outlined in Chapter 1 of the City Recreation Master Plan. This process can start in January 05.

Conclusion: Everyone wants well-maintained parks and facilities. The City Recreation Master Plan outlines what needs to happen.

V. Communication and Marketing

Issue 1: External and internal communication between City Council, Mayor, City Managers office and Recreation Commission has been poor.

Recommendation:

- The City and Commission should establish a regular and ongoing pattern and process for communicating which includes: Recreation Commission update to City Council every 90 days; a designated staff member from City attending all meetings; and a representative from City Council attend Recreation Commission meetings. All of these processes should be established immediately.

Issue 2: Coordinated marketing does not exist to communicate about recreation facilities and programs in the community.

Recommendations:

- Staff member at each facility will post a documented schedule of facility events and all of the facilities will create a common calendar listing events. This can happen immediately.
- A marketing plan needs to be developed that begins in November 04 and includes:
 - Web sites for each of the facilities
 - Calendars and schedules available for each facility on the web
 - Brochures sent out to public – city-wide. (i.e.home with students from school district or bulk mailings across 48197/8 zip codes.)
 - Utilize more Radio / TV-Cable / Newspaper opportunities to publicize events

Conclusion: The communication between the City and the Recreation Commission needs to improve. Additionally external communication needs to be formalized to market recreation in a more effective and planned manner.

VI. Effective Relationships and Partnerships

Issue: The City, though not providing money out of its general fund for programming, currently supports recreation through maintaining insurance, covering utility bills and maintaining other facility costs and upkeep. Without such continuing commitments from the City it will be difficult to sustain current partnerships and grow new ones.

Recommendations

- The City should adopt a Council resolution stating its commitment to supporting “Friends” groups and to existing partnerships. Such a resolution should outline the City’s intention to maintain basic facility costs (insurance, utilities, basic upkeep).

Issue: There are a tremendous number of community resources available to support recreation, but there is no coordination to manage relationships on a city and region-wide level. Additionally, there is no structure to how these relationships should be built and focused upon.

Recommendation:

- The city should immediately hire a full-time person to coordinate efforts and manage relationships to ensure the continuation of ongoing programs, as well as the development of future programs.
- The city, with support from the Recreation Commission, should catalog existing and potential partners / programs / and organizations, whose support can help fulfill the goals of the City of Ypsilanti’s Recreation Master Plan. Fall 04
- Once an Assistant City Manager and/or a Recreation Coordinator is hired, the Recreation Commission will spend time helping prioritize the focus of recreation programming and facility needs, based upon the City Recreation Master Plan and the Recreation Commission survey and community forums.
- Begin exploratory meetings to establish a Regional Recreation Authority to manage relationships and partnerships immediately.
- Recreation Coordinator begin to explore relationship with Public Schools for the sharing of facilities, and other collaborations. Such as: Rec. & Ed. Programs (leagues (children and adult), indoor pools, gyms)
- Recreation Coordinator build and support youth involvement in recreation policy, programming, and advocacy, beginning with:
 - Parkridge Youth Board
 - Ypsilanti Youth Empowered to Act
 - High School community service requirements.

Conclusion: A number of successful partnerships have been developed over the past. In order to maintain such partnerships, minimize duplication of services, and to take full advantage of new opportunities (Eastern, Business Roundtable, Salvation Army) three things need to occur. First, the City must make a formal commitment to supporting the facilities and their very basic maintenance. Without this commitment current partners will be reluctant to fundraise or make grants to continue recreation. Second there needs to be intentional coordination from City staff. Without such coordination the City risks losing current partners and failing to attract new ones. Finally, existing and new partnership opportunities should be prioritized and deliberately developed. Without such a plan a piecemeal or opportunistic approach will be the modus operandi, which does not appropriately serve the community and their interests.

CONCLUSION

The Commission has studied, surveyed, questioned, and reported. And we have given what we believe are our best suggestions for the future direction, and long-range funding, of recreation programs in the City of Ypsilanti.

It is now the responsibility of City administration to take leadership to act upon the recommendations of the Commission. Without immediate, demonstrable, commitment, by the City Manager, Mayor, the new Assistant City Manager, and City Council, the work of the Recreation Commission risks becoming a forgotten report. Indeed, many of the recommendations within this report, came about through an inadvertent duplication of work that had been performed for the 2003 – 2007 Recreation Master Plan, including discussions at that time of funding alternatives. The apparent shelving of that plan is a direct measure of the lack of will on the part of the City to address these problems until we were in a crisis.

With action though, comes a desire by the members of the Recreation Commission to continue to serve and assist as we are able. The Recreation Commission sees the following items as requiring urgent attention:

- Clearly define the Assistant City Manger's role in recreation

With the filling of this vacancy, the City has begun to meet the most basic Recreation needs of city residents. Unless there is a clear understanding, by all parties, as to the exact and ongoing Recreation roles and responsibilities for this position, it is unclear to what extent this person will be able to fulfill the needs of this report.

- Approve and appoint a City staff position of Recreation Coordinator whose responsibilities would be to manage grants, partnerships, and contracts, support recreation staff and develop new programming.

*The City has spent the last **several** years eroding the positions within the Recreation department, to the point where it is no longer possible for one part-time appointment (as Assistant City Manager **and** Recreation Director) to even begin to meet the needs of the community. The funding, partnership, programming, supervision, planning, and choreographing of efforts can simply not be done with anything less than a full-time Coordinator and staff. This is the only long-term solution to the demands of the community.*

- Explore the establishment of a Recreation Authority through partnerships with Ypsilanti and Superior Townships, Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti Public School District, Lincoln School District, and Willow Run Community Schools.

A Recreation Authority is political in nature, and the Recreation Commission, being made up of resident volunteers, has no political power of its own to form such

relationships. This must be carried forward by the Mayor, City Manager, Recreation Director, and City Council.

- Foster and support the proposed Salvation Army partnership to create a Kroc Community Center in the City.

The exploration of this project comes at a fortuitous time, but we must not assume this project will replace services historically provided by the city, as there is no guarantee the project will actually happen, nor that it will be finished any time soon.

- Establish a regular and ongoing pattern and process for communication between the Recreation Commission and the City

With more open and direct lines of communication, as well as articulation of expectations on all sides, we hope to present a uniform “face” to recreation goals and objectives for the City.

It is our sincere desire to see the City move forward with these recommendations, as well as continue to add new ideas and to provide new solutions as they become available. The residents of the city have made it clear in responses to City Council’s original action to cut recreation funding, in responses to the Recreation Commission survey, and in the outpouring of support to the various “Friends” groups and their fundraising efforts, that they are willing to fund continuing recreation programming.

It is now up to you to act upon their wishes.

Sincerely,

John Weiss
Recreation Commission Chair, Ward 2

Judy Lucchetti
Recreation Comm. Vice-Chair, Ward 3

Brian Filipiak
Recreation Commission, Ward 3

Patricia Horne-McGee
Recreation Commission, Ward 1

Kerry Winkelseth
Recreation Commission, Ward 1

Lisa Zuber
Recreation Commission, Ward 2

Appendices

Appendix 1: Memorandum: February 2004 – Update on Progress

MEMORANDUM

To: Cheryl Farmer, John Gawlas, Trudy Swanson, Lois Richardson, William Nickels, Barry LaRue, Sandi Schulze

From: Recreation Commission, Chair John Kenneth Weiss

Re: Update on Commission Work

Date: 25 February 2004

CC: Ed Koryzno

This memo provides you an update on the current work and future goals of the Recreation Commission. Specifically we want to provide you some information regarding our accomplishments to date, planned future events, challenges/issues, and overview of some of the revised ways we plan to operate in the future. We feel that it is important to provide you this update in order to keep you informed of our work and to raise some issues that require your consideration.

Accomplishments to Date/Future Events

Overall we are only somewhat satisfied with our progress to date. One of the Commission's seminal projects was the development of a survey to gauge community needs on Recreation and to find out what people would be willing to support in terms of some kind of long range, sustainable plan. The project was initiated so that we could collect information to help guide the future actions and recommendations of the Commission.

The survey project got underway in the fall with assistance from Vic Chiasson, faculty member at Eastern Michigan in the Department of Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. The Commission spent a lot of time and energy from August – October planning and fundraising for the survey's dissemination. Unfortunately a series of postal and other mishaps (see *Challenges/Issues* section below) delayed the dissemination of the questionnaire. The survey was finally sent to a random sample of 1000 voters throughout Ypsilanti in late January. Mr Chiasson, who has been very generous with his time, is currently processing the results and expects to have some summary data very soon.

The survey project serves as a springboard for the Commission's two other major planned events. First, we have scheduled a series of three open community meetings in March. The purpose of these meetings is to delve deeper into the issues raised in the survey results. It is an opportunity to engage the community in a conversation around recreation and to provide stakeholders a voice in stating their priorities and desires.

Second, the Commission has scheduled a day long strategic planning event for Saturday April 3rd. This forum will be open to the public as well, but will focus on bringing together stakeholder groups (Friends of the Freight House, Senior Center users, Friends of the Pool and community

members who use the Parkridge Center). Our goal is to facilitate a conversation with stakeholders in order to shape a vision around the City's main recreation facilities. Our plan is to establish four working groups at that event who would each outline a strategic plan for the facilities through identifying needs and setting priorities.

The other accomplishment that the Commission has been able to carry out over the past nine months is beginning to work and support the Freight House and Rutherford Pool "Friends" groups. Each of these groups has rallied strong community support and involvement. Their fundraising efforts have been encouraging and the attention each has been able to draw to their facility has helped create some positive momentum in what would have otherwise been grave circumstances. The Commission has just recently begun interfacing regularly with the Freight House group. In the case of the Rutherford Pool group, one of the Commission members has been instrumental in helping to initiate the group's activities.

Challenges/issues

The Survey: Early on in our process, in August, we identified a survey as an effective way to explore the desires of the community and to begin a conversation that would help us develop and recommend some ideas for sustaining recreation services. The survey was completed in early September and Council approved its dissemination on 16 September. By October we had secured a majority of the funds for the survey's dissemination. Focus groups were set for early December.

In November, Shannon Stumbo Bellars reported that the surveys were dropped off at the post office. The Commission also learned that one of the supports for the survey, an in-kind donation of postage from the United Way, had not been utilized. As a result private donations to Recreation were used to reimburse the postage cost.

Within about a week the Commission discovered that the surveys were not being received. Stumbo Bellars took charge for looking into why the surveys were not being delivered. In December it was reported to the Commission that the post office took responsibility for what appeared to be a misplacement of the surveys. They had agreed to send them again, free of charge. A new plan was made to have the Commission members package and get the surveys out, just after Christmas. The Commission members divvied up stuffing and mailing assignments, but were never able to get a hold of Stumbo Bellars to carry these out. In early January the group was told again that the surveys went out.

Through mid-January the surveys had still not reached citizens. The Commission contacted the Mayor to discuss the survey project and to raise some other issues. In late January the surveys were delivered to the post office and began reaching the constituents on the mailing list. In February the incident was discussed at the Commission meeting and an inconclusive explanation was provided as to what had occurred. A conversation with employees at the post office revealed that Stumbo Bellars had delivered the surveys in late January.

Follow-through: Follow through from City staff has been inconsistent. As an example, early on in the process the Commission was not receiving agendas or minutes in a timely fashion. The issue was broached and a request that the minutes and agenda reach members at least a week in advance of meetings was set. Additionally an offer was made to turn those functions over to the members of the Commission, but was turned down. Minutes and agendas still have not been reaching members consistently a week in advance of meetings.

Communication/Involvement: The following provides an example of challenges around communication as it relates to Commission involvement in critical decision making. In January, the Commission received an oral report on the holiday activities that had taken place at Parkridge. In further conversation, and in reflection of an article in the Ann Arbor News, the Commission had learned that there were community members who felt bitter about the event both because of its cost and the fact that it was run by a group from Ann Arbor. Because of funding urgencies, the activity was hastily planned. However, the Commission felt uncomfortable by the negative ramifications of the project. We also felt some responsibility as a “Recreation Commission”, that a major recreation event had taken place that upset members in the community. In reflection, the Commission had wished that we had been a part of the conversation and planning around this event (and subsequent ones) so that we could help to identify and address issues that might arise.

New Approach to Recreation Commission Work

The set of challenges outlined above were discussed with the Mayor in January, conveyed in a letter, dated 29 January, to Shannon Stumbo Bellars, and discussed as a group during its February meeting. After reviewing the challenges, the Commission laid out a new approach to its work by planning strategies to engage more directly and consistently in its various tasks. Commission members are now serving as conduits to “sites” and “friends” groups, maintaining regular contact and communication with these stakeholders. Furthermore, the Commission has decided to take over the administrative functions of meetings and follow-up tasks.

Furthermore, it is important for the Commission to better understand its formal duties and responsibilities around newly emerging recreation plans, activities, and donated funds. As Recreation has moved from a budgeted City service to one that is being sponsored by private funds and donations, new systems of operation and accountability must be established. We are not clear what our role is in this process. The City too has to shift its way of operating. A conversation is urgently needed around this issue so that we can best serve the community around its recreation needs. What is the most appropriate way to explore this issue?

In conclusion, based on the changes, challenges and issues cited in this memo, it appears that the Assistant City Manager position has far too many responsibilities to realize everything that needs to be accomplished. This position needs additional support. We recommend that the support position for the Assistant City Manager be filled. Furthermore, Council, the Mayor and the City Manager need to evaluate the responsibilities of the Assistant City Manager around recreation. We would assume that a member of the Recreation Council would be involved in that process.

Although we have encountered a number of challenges we now feel that we have some events to help solicit thoughtful and community informed plans and recommendations. We are happy to be on track and are grateful for all of the support we have gotten from the “Friends” groups, Eastern Michigan staff, and the many citizens and corporate sponsors that are providing funds to help keep recreation activities going in the short term. We do, however, feel a responsibility to focus on the long term and hope that the plans we have made will help to initiate some sustainability. We look forward to your feedback and the opportunity to have a conversation around the points raised in this memo.

Appendix 2: Current and Potential Partners and Resources

Eastern Michigan University

University of Michigan

- Independent study projects
- Interns
- Use of University facilities
- Practicum projects
- Research – opportunities to bring in researchers and studies.

Community Churches

4-H / MSU Extension

Growing Hope

Parents Together

Ypsilanti Health Coalition – health and wellness

Gateway community

Ozone House

SOS

The Corner Health Center

Hope Clinic

Appendix 3: Primary Findings from Recreation Survey

Our Respondents

Younger residents (1-5 years) were the largest segment of citizens who responded to the survey

Senior citizens comprised 20% of the respondents to our survey

63% of the households that responded did not have children at home

Homeowners made up 85% of the total sample from this survey

Females made up 72% of the respondents to the survey

Effective Promotion Techniques

The traditional brochure is still the preferred method of promoting programs and facilities

The local newspaper is now becoming an equally recommended outlet for citizens to be informed of your services

Utilizing e-mail to inform residents of programs is a suggestion from our respondents

Community Swimming Pool

Residents want swim lessons, open swim and family swim programs

Aqua aerobics is a highly recommended new program to include in programming

The results show new interest in purchasing a Family Pass to the pool and their responses indicate that their expectation is to pay between \$50-75 for the pass

Parkridge Community Center

After school programs received a CPI*¹ ranking of 89 of the citizens who responded with senior citizens giving it a CPI of 93 as an essential program

Educational programs (CPI – 72) ranked as the next high priority of the citizens responding

¹ CPI=Citizen Priority Index, which measures the percentage of survey respondents who rated program and facility as “Top or High Priority”.

Senior Citizens Center

Health and fitness programs (CPI - 79) were the highest ranked priority for programming across all segments of the survey respondents

The programming of social activities (CPI – 74) is considered another essential program for seniors in out town

Freight House

The Farmers Market (CPI – 86) is viewed as the second most essential program offered by the department eclipsed only by after school programs

Residents had many ideas on new programs and improvements for the facility and the Farmers Market

Community Parks

Awareness and positive satisfaction levels from citizens are focused on Candy Cane, Prospect, Riverside and Frog Island

Senior citizens are the most satisfied of all segments with the current service delivery

Residents want clean, safe and well maintained park facilities

New Recreation Facilities

The results show that residents would be very supportive of bike/walk paths and playground equipment in the community

Sports facilities did not rank high as a priority for new development by our citizens

There is little interest expressed by the respondents for a skateboard park

Participation in Past Surveys and Planning Sessions

92% of the respondents did not participate in the survey for the Five Year Master plan conducted in 2002

83% of the respondents were not aware of the public design work session for the Rivers Edge project in 2003

Support For Funding Recreation Initiatives

A potential proposal to fund recreation programs and facilities is favored by 89% of those who responded to the question

The preferred amount for such a proposal would be between \$25-75 (62%) with the most support being in the \$25-50 (37%) range

25% of the respondents would be willing to pay between \$100-125 to support this initiative with families with children being the most supportive (39%) followed by senior citizens (27%)

To support a proposal to fund new recreation facilities, 86% of those responding would be willing to contribute with 59% willing to pay between \$25-75 and the most support coming in the \$25-50 (41%) range

20% would be willing to pay between \$100-125 for new facilities with the strongest support coming from families with children(30%)

Comments From Our Respondents

The most often mentioned comment was that recreation programs are very important and should focus on young children and seniors

Parks need better maintenance, more lighting and are concerned about the removal of play equipment

Respondents are very concerned about the pool being closed this summer

A number of residents want to stop providing services beyond the city's means and would prefer that new roads, safety, maintenance and removal of vacant buildings are more important

Residents feel that parks and recreation services are vital to the city and necessary to attract and keep families in the community

Appendix 4: Timeline of Action Items

Only those items with defined start or stop dates are included here. For full descriptions, please locate these items within the main body of the document.

For immediate action:

Clearly define the Assistant City Manager's role in recreation. (Page 4)

City approve and appoint a Recreation Coordinator. (Page 4)

Immediately explore the establishment of a Recreation Authority. (Page 6)

The City and Commission should establish a regular and ongoing pattern and process for communicating. (Page 10)

At each facility, post a documented schedule of events. Create a common calendar listing events at all facilities. (Page 10)

For action by Fall, 2004:

Working with representation from Council and City staff, come up with a definition of Recreation Commission roles and responsibilities. (Page 4)

City Manager defines clear roles & responsibilities of DPW regarding Recreation and facilities. (Page 4)

City Manager establish City responsibility for staff recruiting. (Page 4)

Recreation Coordinator/Human Resources re-examine and redefine job descriptions for recreation staff (Page 4)

Recreation Commission encourages the creation of Friends groups or community boards for each facility and the parks at-large. (Page 6)

Formalize relationships between Recreation Commission and Friends groups. (Page 6)

Continue and improve sustainable and coordinated partnership efforts. An intentional planning meeting should occur. (Page 6)

Each facility and the City clearly define the volunteer needs, responsibilities and restrictions. (Page 8)

City and Recreation Commission members should determine which partners / programs / and organizations, can help fulfill goal of the Recreation Master Plan. (Page 11)

For action beginning November, 2004:

A marketing plan needs to be developed for each facility. (Page 10)

For action by December, 2004:

Recreation Commission, representative from Friends' groups and City representative define roles and responsibilities of Friends groups, and their relationship to facility policy and operation, including volunteer support at facilities (and how those volunteer efforts may conflict with DPW roles). (Page 4)

For action beginning January, 2005:

Prioritize and develop a time line based on improvements outlined in Chapter 1 of the City Recreation Master Plan (Page 9)

For action by Spring, 2005:

Recreation Coordinator/Human Resources establish facility training standards. (Page 5)

Human Resources examine pay and benefit equity with similarly sized communities. (Page 5)

For action by March, 2005:

Plan for the return of funding for Recreation based on the Blue Ribbon Finance Committees long term recommendations. (Page 6)

For action by May, 2005:

Clearly define at what point the City will restore recreation funding. (Page 7)

For action beginning Spring, 2005:

Develop new programming ideas that would be utilized by all members of the community. (Page 8)