

DRAFT

Town Council Work Session Minutes
February 7, 2012, 5:30 p.m.
Conference Room #10035
Cary, NC 27513

Present: Mayor Harold Weinbrecht, Mayor Pro Tem Gale Adcock, Council Members Lori Bush, Don Frantz, Jennifer Robinson, Julie Robison and Jack Smith

Mayor Weinbrecht called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan Update (PR12-21)

Consideration of issues related to the update of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan

STAFF REPORT

Town Council Work Session, February 7, 2012

Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan Update (PR12-21)

Consideration of issues related to the update of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan

Speakers: Doug McRaney, Parks Planning Manager, Anne Miller, GreenPlay (Consultant)

From: Danny Hopkins, PRCR Director

Prepared by: Doug McRaney, Parks Planning Manager

Approved by: Benjamin T. Shivar, Town Manager

Approved by: Michael J. Bajorek, Assistant Town Manager

Executive Summary

The purpose of this work session is to obtain direction from Town Council on the first draft of the goals and objectives of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan. This is the second work session with Council to review the status of the PRCR Master Plan. In October of 2011, Council reviewed the input and findings that had been inventoried during the summer of 2011. The Master Plan is scheduled to be completed by June of 2012. Staff requests council feedback and direction for continued development of the master plan.

Background

The PRCR Master Plan process was initiated in May 2011 with the hiring of "GreenPlay", a recreational planning firm out of Denver Colorado. The process was divided into three phases:

- Phase 1: Information Gathering - May/July 2011
- Phase 2: Findings – August/Oct 2011
- Phase 3: Plan Development – Dec 2011/March 2012
- Phase 4: Plan Review and Approval – April 2012/June 2012

During Phase 1 of the project, which extended from May to September, data was collected as part the Information Gathering phase of the project. This information was based on a comprehensive public participation process and included the following:

- Boards & Committees Input
- Focus Group Meetings
- Public Meetings
- Master Plan Survey
- Benchmarking Comparative Communities
- Citizen Input (Email)
- Facility Inventory (Indoor and Outdoor)

The information was reviewed and summarized as part of Phase 2 of the Master Plan project and these “Findings”, were presented to Council at a Work Session held in October 2011. Council indicated interest in the following areas:

- Interest in sustainable practices pertaining to park facilities.
- Interest in partnering with the high school and county for use of their outdoor tracks.
- Emphasis on needed facilities in the rapidly growing west Cary area.
- Emphasis on amenities for the senior population.
- Emphasis on improvements, renovations and upgrades instead of big, new facilities.

Discussion

The PRCR Master Plan process has now entered its final phase – Plan Development. Since December, staff has been reviewing the findings and has begun developing long term goals, objectives and action items which will form the basis of the Master Plan.

This plan is a result of the collective efforts of engaged residents, stakeholders, staff, and Council. At each stage of the planning process, community members and staff contributed their thoughts and ideas, helping to identify key issues and recommendations. Approximately 2,000 members of the public along with elected officials, staff, and other stakeholders contributed to the vision and goals laid out in this Master Plan. This community involvement affirmed that the parks and recreation system is highly valued by residents and contributes to their quality of life. Community input was gathered at each stage of the planning process.

The identification of needs and issues through the planning process provides solid ground on which the Department can strategically provide quality parks, recreation, and cultural resources facilities and services into the future.

At a public meeting held in July, 2011 as part of the master plan process, participants were asked to share what the value of the Town’s parks, recreation, and cultural resources system is to the Cary community. Following is a summary of that feedback.

- Creates a sense of community and place
- Makes Cary a desirable place to live and visit
- Promotes healthy living
- Provides connection to nature
- Increases property values
- Provides opportunities for all ages and abilities

Public meeting participants also expressed the following vision for future parks, recreation, and cultural resources in Cary.

- High quality
- Unique
- Proactive
- Connected
- Healthy
- Clean and green
- Sense of community
- Inclusive – something for everyone

Proposed PRCR Master Plan Goals and Objectives

The following is a first draft of the PRCR Master Plan goals and objectives, which is based on input received as outlined above:

- Parks & Open Space.
- Greenways & Trails.
- Recreation Programs.
- Community & Special Use Facilities.
- Best Management Practices.

GOAL 1: Maintain a diverse & balanced park and open space system:

- To continue to develop a high quality, geographically-based system of parks through-out Town. (Maintain high quality of existing parks)
- Update Master Plan Level-of-Service
- Protect areas that are ecologically important and have a high habitat value (e.g., riparian corridors, forests)
- Actively manage the Town's natural resources and stormwater.

GOAL 2: Provide Cary citizens with a highly functional, safe, well-maintained greenway network that provides recreation, transportation and education opportunities:

- Complete a system of trails that serve the entire Cary community by linking parks, schools and other public facilities to residential, shopping, and employment areas.
- Connect to national, regional and adjacent jurisdiction trail networks.
- Provide high quality maintenance on all trails.
- Provide a seamless and safe trail user experience across the entire greenway network.
- Improve community awareness and increase use of trail network

GOAL 3: Provide a mix of recreation & cultural programs responsive to the Town's growing & diverse population:

- Continue to plan for the expansion of cultural arts programming based on current demand
- Expand festivals & special events
- Offer program variety at each Community Center (Fitness & wellness, cultural arts, active adults/seniors, environmental education, etc.)
- Expand heritage programming & interpretation
- Develop Specialized Programming for People with Disabilities

GOAL 4: Enhance program planning & market analysis to strategically deliver services:

- Review existing programs to determine most effective use of program funding.
- Expand market analysis for each service
- Consider peak and non-peak pricing strategies

GOAL 5: Provide an equitable distribution of public indoor recreation spaces that is sustainable:

- Consider increasing the size of future Community Centers and reducing the overall number of centers to achieve an economy of scale in center management.
 - Consider increasing the diversity of uses per citizen requests, including multi-purpose spaces, leisure aquatics, fitness components & gyms
 - Identify opportunities for indoor recreation space in west and south
- Explore feasibility of improvements or additions to existing Community Centers
- Explore feasibility of converting empty commercial spaces for use as public community center(s).

GOAL 6: Maintain quality cultural arts facilities that celebrate Cary's history & diversity:

- Maintain high quality Amphitheatres
- Renovate Cary Downtown Movie Theatre
- Develop strategic plan for Town-owned historic facilities & sites
- Incorporate public art in parks & facilities

GOAL 7: Manage the Town’s competitive Sports Venues so that they are financially sustainable, continue to attract regional & national events and are considered an asset by all citizens:

- Implement planned capital improvements
- Diversify and maximize use
- Explore funding, partnership, & sponsorship opportunities for existing & new venues
- Complete analysis of the most effective events (both regional and national) to attract to the Sport Venues to increase their financial viability

GOAL 8: Expand special use facilities in response to community requests, trends, and funding & partnership opportunities:

- Expand the mission of Stevens Nature Center at Hemlock Bluffs into a “center” of sustainability.
- Consider opportunities for new facilities such as a large flat floor ballroom space
- Develop new outdoor components (e.g., Dog park, disc golf, outdoor aquatics and spraygrounds)

GOAL 9: Incorporate best management and planning practices to ensure quality services and efficient use of resources:

- Track all costs to deliver services
- Expand partnerships for use of public school facilities – multipurpose fields, gyms
- Enhance strategic marketing and communications efforts
- Expand use of alternative funding (e.g., Sponsorships, volunteers, grants, & donations)
- Expand revenue generation opportunities (e.g., rentals, concessions, etc.)
- Continue proactive planning
- Integrate sustainable and “green” design and management approaches where it is economically viable.

Schedule - The PRCR Master Plan is currently in Phase 3: Plan Development. The Plan’s goals, objectives and recommendations will be refined further based on input received from Council during this Work Session (February 2012). A public meeting is tentatively scheduled for early March. The Public Hearing process for the Plan is expected to begin in April with a final Council review and Plan adoption scheduled for June 2012.

Public Art Master Plan Update - The Public Art Master Plan is midway through the planning process. As a reminder, this process is being lead by the PRCR Cultural Arts Division and consultants Brown & Keener, out of Philadelphia.

The planning process for the Public Art Master Plan and the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan (PRCR Master Plan) share a similar schedule. In addition to participating in the public input process of the PRCR Master Plan, two workshops specific to the Public Art Plan were held the first week of November. A work session with Town Council has been scheduled for April.

Fiscal Impact

There are no operating or capital impacts associated with this staff report.

Staff Recommendation

Staff requests council feedback and direction for continued development of the master plan.

- **Introduction**

Town Manager Ben Shivar said staff would like to check with council after each goal of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Master Plan is reached to ensure the plan is moving forward in the right direction.

Parks Planning Manager Doug McRainey said a council work session was held on October 26, 2011, at which time the key findings/issues were identified. Since then, goals and objectives have been set.

- **Draft Plan Overview**

Ms. Ann Miller, GreenPlay Consultant, reviewed the agenda and key questions for council consideration (see Pages 3 to 4 of staff's PowerPoint presentation attached to and incorporated herein as **Exhibit A**), and she outlined staff's report herein. She said the draft plan needs to be flexible to ensure sensible principles are captured. She said staff has had conversations over the past nine months with stakeholders and community members.

Miller outlined Pages 5 to 11 of Exhibit A. She said community input has been received from various avenues, one of which was a comprehensive park and recreation system survey. She said Cary has a high level of service to uphold.

Miller said the public is interested in maintaining the current park system (not just building new), striking a balance in protecting natural areas and open space as the Town grows, active recreation and cultural resources.

- **Highlights, Priorities and Options**

Miller said the goal is to maintain a diverse and balanced park and open space system within the master plan. One of the objectives in reaching that goal is to continue development of the high quality geographically spaced park systems. She stated Cary has a lot of new parkland that provides opportunities for strategic development and funding. She said part of the plan promotes proactive management of that land.

Robison asked about the base of the survey. Miller said 5,000 randomly selected Town of Cary households received surveys via first class mail that was hopefully reflective of the demographics in Cary. She said there was a 13 percent response rate from the survey, and the results provided were statistically valid.

Miller outlined the first steps of each priority's goal as follows:

- Goal 1 – Parks and Open Space: Maintain a diverse and balanced park and open space system. (Refer to Pages 12 to 18 of Exhibit A.)

Frantz asked if there are plans for a large park in the downtown area. McRainey said there is so much undecided at this time, but staff should include that in the discussion. Frantz said council has been clear that they expect a good portion of the downtown opportunity site to be used for a park. Shivar said staff looked at this as a separate issue because of the variables surrounding that property. He said even though it was not officially incorporated into the plans, council adopted a concept plan that included a large park. He thinks they may need to revisit the opportunity site. The most important thing for downtown is a pocket park approach.

Miller said as part of the scope of this project, general concept plans have been done for 11 undeveloped sites. She said one is for the Maynard Loop that includes concepts to guide some of

the downtown. She said there are opportunities to maximize Town-owned properties, such as the Town hall campus.

- Goal 2 – Greenways/Trails: Provide a highly functional, safe, well-maintained greenway network that provides recreation, transportation and education opportunities. (Refer to Pages 19 to 21 of Exhibit A.)

Frantz asked for clarification on “curve widening” mentioned on Page 21 of Exhibit A. McRainey said it refers to the need for existing greenways to be brought up to current standards for improved sight lines around curves.

Robinson asked about the mileage amount of greenway/trails constructed each year. McRainey said the minimum goal is two miles per year, but more than two miles per year is being done. In 1998 there was approximately 10 miles of greenways/trails, and now there are 60 miles.

Weinbrecht said the amount of mileage is not as important as the connections. McRainey said staff’s goal is to start making connections within the next couple of years.

Robinson said the expensive things left are the gaps, so keeping the bar low may be helpful.

Weinbrecht said a good goal is to have a long stretch of greenway in each section of Town.

Robinson said council has said in the past they would like to see more grade separated crossings. McRainey said in the past few years there have been eight to ten grade separations done.

Robinson said the policy is that if an engineering project moves forward (i.e., road widening), grade separation needs to be considered. McRainey said the standards are being applied for proposed greenway crossings. PRCR and engineering coordinate the design and construction of grade separations on crossings.

Robinson said several years ago council talked about having an east/west and a north/south route, but that never became formalized in a policy. McRainey said as part of the PRCR Master Plan, a primary trail systems that include various segments will be identified. He said total grade separation is trying to be achieved. He said there should be about 200 miles of greenway trails with peak coordinates identified.

Bush stated there are dangerous parking areas off of New Hope Church Road for the American Tobacco Trail (ATT). She said sufficient parking for greenway trails should be a policy perspective within the plan. McRainey said a short-term parking solution is underway. He said grant funding has been awarded to the Town for construction of a trailhead on 25 acres of land on the north side of ATT. He said construction on the trailhead should begin this year.

Adcock said council is asking for the same consideration for greenway trail parking that is given to retail parking, etc. Shivar said the Town is limited in what it can do, because a good portion of the ATT is outside of corporate limits.

Robinson said as developers participate in building greenways, it might be helpful to encourage them to put one or two parking spaces next to the greenway. Robison said a good example of that is on Evans Road near Weston Parkway.

Weinbrecht asked if there are any grade separated tunnels that will not be used. McRainey said there are two or three under Cary Parkway that were built to a different standard. As the trail is extended south, those will have to be considered; none of them have been abandoned.

Robinson would like information on the four spines of the greenway system. McRainey said staff has information to show existing trails and those that are being planned. Staff is trying to coordinate with adjacent communities for connections.

Robison asked the time line of the current plan. McRainey said 20 years. Robison asked whether people will want to use the greenways after dusk in 20 years. Frantz likes the idea of using the greenways after dusk, and he would like to know more about issues and problems.

Bush would like support from a map technology perspective, such as Google layers for the trails. She said the layers should also include parking locations.

Miller said staff has considered connection of a bicycle plan with the greenways.

Robinson thinks the low rating survey results on sufficient open space communicates that more awareness of parks and their locations are needed.

- Goal 3 – Programs: Provide a mix of recreation and cultural programs responsive to a growing and diverse population. (Refer to Pages 22 to 25 of Exhibit A.)

Miller said the wellness portion of this goal could be yoga, and the fitness portion could be working out on machines (i.e., a treadmill).

Robinson said it would be good to have specialized programs for Cary residents with special needs. Adcock said Cary residents with special needs are using recreational programs in Raleigh, because Cary is not meeting their needs. Robison said providing specialized recreational programs in Cary should be a priority.

- Goal 4 – Programs: Enhance program planning and market analysis to strategically deliver services. (Refer to Pages 26 to 34 of Exhibit A.)

Miller stated staff wants to explore the opportunities to grow a program without duplicating services. She reviewed the survey of indoor facilities on Page 28 of Exhibit A. She said track, aquatics, nature centers and fitness are standard components countrywide for indoor facilities.

Weinbrecht asked the price difference between small and large facilities without water recreation. McRainey said a small facility would range in cost from \$6 to \$10 million, and a large facility would range in cost from \$15 to \$20 million, depending on the amenities.

Robinson asked if public community centers compete with the private sector. McRainey said community centers are like an entry point for people who cannot afford the more specialized gyms. Miller stated community centers are usually seen as a complimentary service.

Robinson said she would view an indoor recreational pool as an indoor park, but she does not want to compete with existing private sector pools.

Miller said through benchmarking, Cary was found to have less indoor recreation than other communities. Bush asked if Cary has more outdoor space on the average. Miller said yes.

- Goal 5 – Community Centers: Provide an equitable distribution of public indoor recreation spaces that is sustainable. (Refer to Page 35 of Exhibit A.)

Miller said the last park plan recommended six indoor centers and it is being revisited. She said gaps have been identified in west and south Cary areas, but that does not mean the Town has to fill those gaps; they could be filled by private sector services.

Weinbrecht asked the feasibility of using empty commercial spaces for public community centers. Miller said she will do some research, and bring information back to council.

Miller said the language “complimentary services” could be used in the plan. Robinson suggested getting input from private facilities on the competition issue.

- Goal 6 – Cultural and Historic Facilities: Maintain quality cultural arts facilities that celebrate Cary’s history and diversity. (Refer to Page 36 of Exhibit A.)

Bush said there has been a lot of public comment that Cary does not have enough events. Cultural Arts Manager Lyman Collins said event opportunities are being considered in the downtown strategy.

- Goal 7 – Sports Venues: Manage the Town’s competitive sports venues so that they are financially sustainable, continue to attract regional and national events and are considered an asset by all citizens. (Refer to Page 37 of Exhibit A.)

Miller stated feasibility is a key driver to sports venues, but visionary elements will remain in the plan.

- Goal 8 – Other Facilities: Expand special use facilities in response to community request trends, and funding and partnership opportunities. (Refer to Page 38 of Exhibit A.)

Miller stated the Rafferty Park is undeveloped, and there is an opportunity for a disc golf course there at little or no cost.

- Goal 9 – Best Management Practices: Incorporate best management and planning practices to ensure quality services and efficient use of resources, enhance strategic marketing and communications efforts, continue to track all costs to deliver services and expand partnerships for use of public school facilities – multipurpose fields and gyms. (Refer to Pages 39 to 41 of Exhibit A.)

Miller said current marketing and communication elements are effective tools for conveying information to the public, at a low cost.

- **Next Steps**

Miller reviewed the next steps. (Refer to Page 42 of Exhibit A.) She stated the March meeting was rescheduled for Tuesday, March 20th. After that meeting the plan will be updated and placed on the Town’s website.

Bush asked about gathering questions and comments about the PRCR Master Plan from the general public through a technology resource. She indicated there is software available that will compile and sort citizen input, with the most common questions listed first for efficient viewing.

Weinbrecht said he feels good about what was presented.

Frantz struggles with the possibility of competing with private sector fitness and aquatics facilities. He said based on the survey results, he does not think many people know about the Triangle Aquatic Center. He would like more information on this matter. He said senior wellness programs are appealing programs for recreational facilities.

Robinson said any discussions for capital expenditures should include discussions about operating costs.

Robison asked for a map of all Town-owned property. Staff will provide this.

Weinbrecht adjourned the meeting at 7 p.m.