

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

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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 March 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/August 2011
- Phase 2: Findings – Sept/ Dec 2011
- Phase 3: Plan Development – Jan 2011/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 (E-mail)
- 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
- Ensure protection of adequate open space with future developments

- Protect areas that are ecologically important and have a high habitat value (e.g., riparian corridors, forests)
- **Actively manage the Town's natural resources.**

GOAL 2: Provide Cary citizens with a highly functional, safe, well-maintained greenway network that provides recreation, transportation and education opportunities. In achieving this overarching goal particular focus should be given to the following specific objectives:

- 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 & 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 & spraygrounds)

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

- Track all costs to deliver services
- Expand partnerships for use of public school facilities – multipurpose fields, gyms
- Enhance strategic marketing & 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.