



Vision 2030

Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan

Arts Focus Group Notes
Department of Recreation Office
April 20, 2010

Hadiyah Jordan from Justice and Sustainability Associates welcomed the participants and gave an overview of the Vision 2030 project and the purpose of the focus group. Following are the notes from the discussion held by the seven (7) art focus group attendees.

1. What are the key strengths of the parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services in Montgomery County?

- Green space, the abundance; great foresight in preserving forestland/natural spaces
- Well-distributed green-space; it is spread out throughout county
- Physical proximity to users
- Facilities are numerous, but sometimes a little “shabby” (capital expenditures)
- Soccerplex UpCounty
- Facilities are used
- Facilities are accessible
- Democratic mixture of diverse groups using facilities together is one of the things that works great

2. What do you believe to be the most essential (of critical importance) public parks and recreation services in the community? Why do you see it/them as essential?

- Drop-in and after-school programs. If the doors were closed, “children would be finding other things to do” and not necessarily positive things to do.
- Recreation offers many programs in the arts.
- Accessibility through location and pricing brings the arts and art programming into the communities.
- The Recreation Department’s arts programs do not need to compete with other arts programming and organizations. There can’t be too many painting programs.
- Classes are right there where people live. The Recreation Dept. has partnerships with arts organizations.
- People are often less intimidated using Parks/Recreation art programs than using programs of other art organizations.
- Serve as a point of entry for people to try arts activities. There are other arts organizations in the county that serve the needs of those who are pursuing a more serious level of learning (non-profits, etc.).
- The proximity of facilities makes it easier for parents to transport children to activities and easier to motivate children to participate and travel (walking, biking) on their own to activities.
- The proximity of facilities encourages pedestrian traffic and pedestrian culture in the county.
- Recreation as it relates to art and arts activities is essential and the inclusiveness of recreation to arts needs to be publicized.

- When we think of recreation, as it relates to Montgomery County Parks & Recreation, we don't necessarily think of art.

3. What community issues or problems can the services of parks and recreation address?

- Stronger and more programs for young teens, middle-school students
- Never sure if a building is a Parks facility or Recreations facility. Resources need clearer demarcation of function and ownership.
- Parks and Recreation are two separate organizations, but are not commonly thought of as separate and people do not understand where the divisions are. Uniting them would allay the confusion and streamline people's ability to use the facilities.
- Recreation offerings can off-set the gaps in the schools (athletics, arts, etc.)
 - Offerings are lower in cost than private programs
 - Allows families with children to try new activities
- Recreation can provide the venues for arts activities beyond the European traditions largely covered in the schools. Recreation is serving a diverse county population.
 - Provide more of a variety of multicultural arts, culinary, and sports programs.
 - Increase the cross-cultural experiences.
 - Make the activities more reflective of the diverse communities.
 - Provide inexpensive and low-risk socialization opportunities for youth and citizens from different cultures.

4. What improvements/changes would you make to the parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services in Montgomery County today?

- Parks facilities (fields, playgrounds, etc.) are under-utilized, aside from the peak times such as Saturday mornings.
- There are the facilities standing unused and there are people that want to do things. Why is it so difficult for people to arrange for use of facilities?
 - Look at Arlington County as a model for use of "dead-space."
- Consider multi-use facilities. One facility can serve more than one function or population at a time.
- Programming may be weak. Plan relevant programs that people want to do. Get to know the communities and their needs.
- More programming for seniors and older adults (55+).
 - Seniors are available during the day.
 - Older adults can get to facilities in their local communities ("aging-in-place").
 - Targeted programs improves county services for older adults and also improves usage of facilities.
 - Provide transportation for seniors in concert with offerings.
- More programming (exercise/sports/etc.) for young and middle aged adults (30-45). It provides opportunities to meet, exercise, and use facilities
- More programming for adolescents and young adults (18-25). It provides opportunities for real-world socialization, networking with peers, activities, etc.
- Streamline and simplify the navigation of the two-departments system.

- Make it easier for people to find out about spaces available, to reserve and use spaces. Minimize the bureaucracy; make the rules for reservation more user-friendly, less confusing, and less restrictive.

5. How do you think the Departments can work to responsibly address these improvements/changes given its resources? What opportunities exist?

- Look at Arlington County facilities as a model for use of “dead-space.”
 - Multi-use facilities: one facility can serve more than one function or population
 - Cross-generational / cross-cultural opportunities
- Streamline / simplify the system
 - Make it easier for people to find out about spaces available, to reserve/use spaces, etc. Minimize the bureaucracy; make the rules for reservation more user-friendly, less confusing, and less restrictive.
- Allow, encourage, and welcome community groups to use facilities, especially arts groups for rehearsals and performances.
 - Inform groups that spaces are available. Availability is not common knowledge. Accessibility of space addresses budget issues, use issues such as facilities and buildings standing empty, and community outreach.
 - Provides opportunities for year-round programming; winter/indoor programs help to build momentum for larger activity seasons in Spring and Summer.
 - Look to Atlas Theater (DC) as model for outreach to organizations to inform them of availability of spaces.
- Create more user-friendly websites.
 - Websites are difficult to navigate and it is hard to find information for facility reservation.
 - Streamline Parks and Recreation into one website.
 - Study other good website models for outreach to emulate.
- Make the reservation procedure *physically easier*.
 - There are only two places to pick up a key for a facility/building (up-county & down-county)
- Deal with language and cultural barriers. Websites are not the best method to reach certain groups, such as the Latino community.
- In the building of parks, the Parks Department is at the forefront of integrating public art in the designs of its facilities.
 - Sculptures, landscaping, fixtures, etc.

6. Do you believe there are populations/geographic areas that do not have access or who have limited access to parks and recreation services? If yes, please explain. What are solutions to address?

- Senior and older adult residents
- Immigrant populations. There are language, cultural, and technological barriers.
- The general population has access difficulties. Educate the public through mapping: How many facilities? Where are they? When are they available? What are the capacities?
 - Address pricing for rentals and reservations. Offer some facilities, venues for free. Offer scaled pricing based on size of space / type of use (e.g. not everybody needs a whole auditorium).