



Vision 2030

Montgomery County Parks and Recreation Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan

Senior Focus Group Notes

Holiday Park Senior Center

April 28, 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 thirteen (13) senior focus group attendees.

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

- Recreation has good programs for seniors, but parks could improve service.
- Broad spectrum of programs that target various ages, cultures, etc. There are well over 75 various offerings by Recreation. The Parks programs also look substantial. The printed guide is an important resource. Senior offerings at the centers are the premier offerings. Community centers can be very limited depending on the exact location and programs may not be as varied as they could be.
- Partnering with outside community groups has been effective, i.e. the Holy Cross and Parks relationship with Recreation.
- Golf resources in the area are very good. Seniors get a discount making fees reasonable compared to what a private club would require.
- There is a tremendous amount of resource from Recreation if you examine the programs, but services vary depending upon which location you utilize. The totality of opportunities for seniors is pretty tremendous.
- The amount, appearance and activities offered by the parks is a wonderful addition to the community.
- Recreation offers specialized programs to provide access to populations that may be overlooked.
- Availability of resources.
- Park availability and the various locations of parks throughout the county.
- Accessibility of recreation resources and facilities so that partner organizations can host meetings and programs. Example: CASA can provide programs free of charge because the facilities of Recreation are provided for free.
- Affordability of programs.
- Quality of teaching staff.

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?

- Classes and programs for seniors so that these community members remain engaged, growing and in a social environment.
- Parks need to stay safe, "I am concerned that some of our parks are becoming unsafe."
 - The quality of experiences has deteriorated. Some parks are abandoned by communities because safety has diminished – low maintenance and upkeep, graffiti.
- Park police patrols to keep parks safe.

- Exercise programs for seniors and the partnerships that make this programming possible, i.e. the Silver Sneaker program.
- Safe places to recreate. Adequate and clean places to have recreation experiences.
- Continue to seek and develop partnerships. Use volunteers effectively to support the needs of Parks and Recreation.
- Transportation for seniors to programs. Bus service for seniors to programs is being reduced. A great number of seniors will be lost if they cannot travel to the programs.
- Departments should look at maintaining the broad programming approach and maintain the high quality so that if you have to limit the breadth of choices in each demographic, then so be it. It is most important that each group have resources.

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

- Health and wellness for seniors results in the improved quality of life.
 - Keeps community members healthy and out of the hospital.
 - Individuals who remain healthy are able to stay out of nursing homes and continue to contribute to the community.
- Insufficient transportation. The area is so big and if you cannot drive you won't be able to get there.
- Social isolation – true for seniors, people with limited English ability, parents with young children, teenagers with no outlets for free time, people with disabilities.
- Lack of community. Parks and Recreation can help build community in the areas they serve. Use the facilities deliberately to build local community.
- Nutrition and the access to food. Many community members wouldn't have access to food without programs. When there is a national holiday, snow day, or school closure there are students and elders who do not have a meal for nearly a week.
- Age segregation.

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

- Cleanliness of facilities. Pools, restrooms, buildings are not clean. No toilet paper, hand towels, and soap in the bathrooms. When the facilities are being used there has to be maintenance.
- Assessment of the structure of the Parks and Recreation administrative structure. How efficient is the current structure of two individual entities.
- Consider placing some of the more service oriented programs under Health and Human Services where they were before. Run the actual programs through Parks and Recreation. This may afford more security financially. However, another person mentioned that tying senior resources to Health and Human services may create added stigma to participants.
- Be careful about age segmentation in program development. What does a free standing senior center communicate to the potential attendees? Plan so that in ten years there is a more integrated program approach. Age should not be overly defining. Do not limit senior programming to only senior centers. Programs could be better integrated into local community centers.
- Outreach and advertising strategy. People should be aware of what is available and what benefits there are.
- Program for senior driving to evaluate their capacity to drive. If they should stop driving then provide information on-site regarding transportation alternatives.

- New community centers need to have dedicated space for senior programs. This is particularly problematic in the summer when children’s programs displace senior programs for space.
- Look for opportunities to disseminate information to the community by hosting events that are useful to broader groups of community members
- Increase accessibility features of parks for seniors and disabled users. More benches, bathrooms, etc.
- Cleanliness and maintenance of facilities and other resources.

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

- Explore the possibility of partnering with business sponsorship for park resources.
- Create an, “adopt a park” program for local businesses.
- What will the budget for Parks and Recreation look like in the future? Be realistic about what is possible.
- Data collection is essential. More needs to be generated for decision making.
- There needs to be objective data informing strategic planning. This enables better decisions when cutting and/or developing programs.
- Cleanliness and safety have to be considered when creating budgets.

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?

- Anybody who doesn’t drive or have access to special bus services will not be able to participate. This is true for people who may live within a mile of the facility.
- Non-English speaking communities can have very limited access to information. They also have few teaching and program options in their native language.
- Users with disabilities (includes age and physical capacity).
- Parks are not set up for the people that live nearby. For example, Long Branch Park is getting a softball/baseball field but no one in that area plays softball or baseball. Most people nearby play soccer but the field is not laid out for soccer. The field is being destroyed by people converting it to a soccer field.
- The parks that have better funding, status or support from a “Friends of” group have broader service offerings.

7. Are there potential partners that the Department of Parks or Department of Recreation should consider working with in the future?

- Increased collaboration with public transit system.

Additional Comments

- Questioned what will be offered to seniors in 20 years. Participant stated that there are services and resources being cut or limited.
- Outreach isn't sufficient. Not enough seniors know what is available. Often people do not know what programs are available. They do not know if there is transportation available.
- Marketing of "senior programs" can be a problem because "senior" means old and therefore some folks will not participate.
- Engage senior volunteers more effectively.
- Department of Parks and Recreation need to do a better job of planning.
 - Internal collaboration between departments should be increased.
 - Better objective data to inform planning.
 - Evaluate and foster more partnerships (Head Start, etc.). There are so many premier agencies that should be leveraged to become advocates and resources for the Parks and Recreation programs.
- Develop a central resource for senior volunteer opportunities.