



PROGRAMMATIC NEEDS

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Medford has a long history and strong reputation for its quality parks, natural areas and recreation facilities, and the diligent management and maintenance of its facilities is evident to most residents and visitors. To continue to earn the support of residents, the City will need to continue to steward its resources and engage the public in future plans to grow and manage the park and recreation system.

NATIONAL TRENDS & PERSPECTIVES

Over the past decade, park and recreation management has trended toward outcome-based management, which reflects the effect on quality of life of those who participate in or benefit from parks and recreation opportunities. Outcome-based management is useful in establishing the benefit to the community and to individuals. The level of subsidy for programs has been declining and more “enterprise” activities are being developed, thereby allowing the subsidy to be used where deemed appropriate. Agencies across the United States are increasing revenue production and cost recovery. Pricing is often done by peak, off-peak and off-season rates. Agencies are often structured into service divisions for athletics, seniors, facilities, parks, planning, and the like rather than by geographic unit, and they are partnering with private, public and non-profit groups. Generally, park and recreation professionals face many challenges including:

- Doing more with less, requiring partnership development
- Partnering between non-profit and public forms of service
- Increasing the quality and diversity of services
- Moving toward a more business-like model, while not directly competing with the private sector
- Increasing parks and open spaces in contrast to a decreasing ability to maintain them
- Providing support for the socially and economically disadvantaged through programs in areas such as childcare, nutrition, etc.
- Increasing responsibility for measurement and evaluation¹

In 2013, the National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) issued its first report using PRORAGIS, a geographic information system, to establish industry trends. The 2013 report gathered data from 383 park and recreation agencies across the country and compared changes over the last three years. According to the report, park and recreation agencies typically provide management of park and open space lands and operate recreational facilities and programs. Within these areas of responsibility, some growth occurred from 2010 to 2012 among the agencies participating in the survey, including conducting major special events, maintaining public jurisdiction areas and administering community gardens.

The NRPA report indicated that public park and recreation service providers continue to suffer from reduced funding levels. Agencies receiving higher funding levels generally experienced greater reductions, while smaller agencies (in smaller communities) were more stable over the last three years. Recreation programming experienced a significant drop in attendance from 2010 to 2011. While a slight rebound had begun in 2012, the NRPA 2013 report indicates that program offerings have declined in every major category since 2010.

LOCAL FEEDBACK

As noted earlier, Medford residents currently give the City high grades for the quality and maintenance of its parks. Nearly 80% of survey respondents noted that the City's neighborhood parks either meet or exceed their expectations. Also, approximately 75% of respondents had favorable views of the City's community parks. However, when survey respondents were asked for reasons why they do not use parks, approximately 40% of the responses were tied to personal safety or a sense of poor facility maintenance. Although the Department has made great improvements in its parks system in recent years with renovation and upgrade projects, the public perception of poor safety and poor maintenance persists.

1 van der Smissen, Betty. Management of Park and Recreational Agencies, 1999.

ASSET MANAGEMENT

To maintain a high level of public satisfaction, Medford must continue to place a high priority on proactive maintenance and the renovation of park facilities and amenities. The Medford community has made a significant public investment in the park system - most recently demonstrated through the redevelopment of Hawthorne Park. This and other investments require proper stewardship to ensure the park system continues to provide desired services for decades to come.

Life Cycle Planning

With limited budgets and on-going maintenance needs, many cities struggle to provide adequate maintenance and operation support. This often results in a situation where proactive maintenance is deferred, and assets are repaired, rehabilitated or replaced only when there is an urgent need. This situation can result in a loss of services, such as when a facility is closed due to a lack of funding for needed repairs; higher long-term maintenance costs, as assets in worse condition may degrade more quickly and be more difficult and costly to fix; and a loss of public confidence. Consequently, the City must consider and plan for long-term asset management needs.

The foundation of a holistic asset management program is a comprehensive inventory and assessment of existing facilities and unmet needs. The City should continue to maintain standardized and systematic inventory documentation of park system infrastructure, including quantity, location and condition. By tracking installation and the expected useful life of assets, the City can plan for proactive maintenance and replacement of assets in the future. This planning should be further supplemented by on-going condition assessments of assets – particularly those with a high consequence of failure. Such assessments can highlight urgent repair needs and can help the City fine-tune maintenance practices for Medford’s weather, wear and usage patterns. Such information can aid in future budgeting for capital repairs and overall asset management, as well as for predicting staffing requirements. The City will be implementing a new financial software package in the near future, and this software will be able to house and manage this asset data. Going forward, the Department should prepare for data management and utilize the software for life cycle planning.

Risk Management

Although many playgrounds across the city have been replaced in recent years, the City should continue to ensure regularly scheduled safety inspections and repair of play equipment. In addition, the City should assess the likelihood and consequence, in terms of financial, community and environmental impact, of the future failure of its assets, such as shelters and other structures. Such an assessment can provide key information for the strategic prioritization of limited resources toward those assets whose failure would have the greatest negative impact on the Medford community.

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. Titles II and III of the ADA require, among other things, that newly constructed and altered state and local government facilities, places of public accommodation and commercial facilities be readily accessible to, and usable by, individuals with disabilities. Recreation facilities, such as play areas, are among the types of facilities covered by Titles II and III of the ADA.

The U.S. Department of Justice 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design provide guidelines that are intended to address design conditions to ensure that barriers or obstacles blocking outdoor recreation facilities are prevented or removed, such that all park patrons have reasonable access to site amenities. As older facilities are in the process of renovations and replacements and new facilities are added to the system, Medford will need to stay in compliance with ADA accessibility requirements. Initiated in the spring of 2016, an ADA Transition Plan is currently being prepared to more specifically document barriers and obstacles to outdoor recreation accessibility and will include planned phasing, cost estimates and implementation over a reasonable time period to address identified ADA compliance issues.

Site Design & Development

Site master plans and individual development projects should address long-term maintenance and operation costs. Where possible, site design and facility choices should consider the impacts to and affects on on-going operations and maintenance budgeting. The Guidelines for Site Selection and Development (see Appendix E) could be expanded to include specific park design details or standards to address continuity in amenities, furnishings and construction materials. This consistency can make the system more efficient to maintain and may improve aesthetic appeal and safety.

The City can also make intentional choices in the design and development of parks to reduce energy and water use and lower the intensity of maintenance required. Both high- and low-tech strategies, ranging from high-efficiency machinery and equipment to planting native plants and reducing lawn areas, can help reduce long-term maintenance and operating expenses. Additionally, the City should consider conducting an irrigation system audit to identify existing issues and plan for phased renovations.

Maintenance Facility

The City's Parks Maintenance Division services parks and greenways through two functional zone maintenance teams - both of which operate from the same facility. To better serve eastside Medford parks, the Department should continue to plan for and utilize a maintenance facility on the eastside of Interstate 5.

ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT

Staffing Resources

Medford’s Park and Recreation staff are a critical component of the future success of the parks system. To effectively plan, develop, maintain and operate a high-quality park and recreation system, Medford will need to continuously reassess and reinvest in its staff. Potential staffing needs identified during stakeholder sessions and other outreach include:

- Ensure adequate recreation and maintenance staffing resources
- Provide sufficient training for part-time, new and/or seasonal maintenance or recreation program staff

In addition, the City should continue to allocate staff time and resources to programs and activities that can leverage external resources. This includes managing volunteer programs, event coordination, partnerships with local schools and organizations, along with grant preparation and administration.

The City should continue to support and encourage staff development and training to include the completion of certifications and training relevant to staff roles and functions. Such training could include life safety courses (e.g., CPR), play equipment safety (e.g., CPSI) or continuing education offered through the NRPA.

Program offerings should be evaluated periodically to ensure that staff resources are allocated appropriately to meet customer demand. As appropriate, the City also should continue to make use of part-time, seasonal and contract employees for select functions to meet peak demands and respond to specialized or urgent needs.

CAPRA Certification

National accreditation from the Commission for Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) assures the public, policy makers and taxpayers that the Medford Parks and Recreation Department delivers a high level of quality and operates in accordance with industry standards of excellence. The Department should continue to renew its CAPRA certification and promote the benefits of certification with residents, staff, the Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council.

Volunteer Resources

Successful volunteer efforts – through volunteer groups, students, neighborhood groups, or sport and service organizations – can result in significant site improvements and can allow community members to gain a sense of ownership in the parks and recreation system. Volunteers can be especially effective at greenway and trail projects, such as restoration efforts along segments of Bear Creek or in the City’s natural area

parks. Volunteer contributions from sports organizations can be the key ingredient in the development, maintenance and operation of specialized facilities, such as sport fields, skateparks and mountain biking trails. Although volunteers require effective management at the City's expense, their contribution can readily result in a net gain for the City and community. The Department should continue to promote and update its listing of volunteer opportunities on the website and specifically call out the need for volunteers in the Recreation Program Guide or on the website in advance of major events or activities. The City should also expand its promotions of the Parks for Tomorrow initiative to share more information about the program, its relevance and its value for the Department and initiative participants.

COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH COLLATERAL

Strong parks communication, signage and marketing can improve the visibility and brand identity of Medford's park system. The City has a strong communications program, which will need to adapt in the future to accommodate new and more diverse residents, new means of communication and a growing and changing park and recreation system.

Wayfinding & Signage

A good wayfinding system can provide a consistent identity and display effective and accessible information to orient the traveler. This guidance system ensures efficient use of the trail, park or other public space and conveys safety to the user by translating the environment into a known geography. Signs, symbols, mapping, color, standardized site amenities combined with good design of the physical environment (i.e., trail or park) helps the user navigate the space and stay comfortably oriented.

Stemming from the inventory assessment conducted as part of this LSP update, Medford parklands need clearer, more prominent identification and signs located at multiple entry points. Such signage should identify the Medford Parks and Recreation Department as the provider, to be distinguished from school or private property, and offer methods for accessing additional information (e.g., contacts, volunteering, other facilities, etc.) to inform park users and visitors.

Medford should pursue a comprehensive wayfinding program that includes both visual graphic standards and site furnishing standards. The use of consistent graphics and a coordinated hierarchy of sign types and sizes can provide park and trail users with wayfinding information to enhance their access and knowledge of the recreational system available for their enjoyment.

Integrating Design Elements

The Monon Trail, a rail trail heading north almost 17 miles from downtown Indianapolis, illustrates some tools for helping visitors find the trail and find their way along the trail. The combination of a signature color, unified logos and icons, matching site furnishing, and signage styles help identify the location and direction of the trail and its support facilities, as part of a unified navigation system.

At crossroads and trailheads, the bright red colors used consistently in signs and furnishings mark the trail's presence. Kiosks and information signs help orient the trail user. Rule signs alert the user to trail behavior expectations and reinforce trail identity. The signage system helps identify place, provide information about trail distances and amenities, locate connections and interpret history and culture.



Web-based Resources

To broaden public awareness, the City's website should be expanded to facilitate quick links to popular destinations and also be designed with mobile internet users (iPhone, Android, Windows Phone, etc.) in mind, either through a mobile-friendly site or a web-based application. The website should be expanded to include easy-to-access park system and facility maps, trail maps and an up-to-date listing of park sites and amenities to enhance the experience of the on-the-go user. In addition, the City should ensure its GIS mapping resources are coordinated with web-based mapping applications, such as Google Maps and Bing Maps, to ensure park names and locations are shown correctly on these often used websites and mobile applications.

The website, in coordination with a social media presence and periodic email blasts, also should be used to promote events, recreational and education programs, and volunteer activities. The City should consider introducing and utilizing QR codes on signage as a means to share with or receive information from visitors about maintenance, restoration or monitoring data. In developing new materials, the City should continue its strong program of preparing visually-attractive materials (print and electronic) that have consistency of graphic style and theme.

Information on Recreational Opportunities

Community awareness and understanding about recreation offerings has been improving over time based on survey responses and program evaluations. However, there is still a need for additional promotions and awareness regarding recreational opportunities and programs. A lack of awareness of what programs are offered was the number one reason residents do not participate in City recreational programs based on survey findings. The recreation program guide is the most common way residents learn about programs and facilities in Medford, followed by 'friends and neighbors'. The City's website and social media are more popular sources than more traditional media, such as the Mail Tribune, radio and television.

With additional staff support, the City should continue to improve its website, use social media to promote its offerings and act as the local hub of information about recreational activities and events in the community. This involves continuing to strengthen existing partnerships with local businesses, sport leagues, the school district, Travel Medford and the Chamber of Commerce to facilitate the promotion and distribution of information to the community. The City should also coordinate with Travel Medford to include City park and recreation activities in visitor information and continue to utilize the recreation program guide and the online registration program to cross-market programs and highlight new and interesting capital projects.