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Jefferson County Parks & Recreation Department
Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan 2008
November Town Meetings **Report**

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SUMMARY OF SHARED OUTCOMES

1) Parks and Recreation is a good value. It is popularly used and contributes to the health of the economy, the community, the environment, and the people.

2) There is support to raise existing vehicle tab fees and property taxes so long as they are dedicated to Parks and Recreation.

3) There is strong support for a new taxing district for parks and recreation.
    a. The change should be packaged as a new vision of what is possible, an exciting step forward.
    b. It should be marketed in recognition of the importance of the services that Parks and Recreation provides and how these services actually pay for themselves.
    c. Key to achieving and sustaining this new funding arrangement is to assure a high level of ongoing community involvement and "ownership."
    d. An explanation as to what would happen to the tax funds Parks and Recreation currently receives would be needed.
    e. The organization and the leadership should be developed so it is clear it has the capacity to operate independently.

4) Parks and Recreation could use the adopt-a-park volunteer maintenance model to a greater degree.

BACKGROUND

Parks and Recreation is a vital resource to the people of Jefferson County yet tax funding is inadequately structured for the present and the future. Funding shortfalls have already caused deferred maintenance to rise to unacceptable levels and community needs to go unmet.

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space (PRO) plan is a new strategy to solve these issues. This set of town meetings is part of the PRO plan, a one year community-involvement

process that began in the fall of 2008 and culminates in clear actions for the future. It also includes a survey and follow-up forums.

The usual citizen involvement process is consultative, where citizens offer "input" on draft plans. Professional staff members explain the problem and the specific options available. Citizens share their views on the options and then vote on which is best, seeking to influence elected officials. In this case, the consultative model is insufficient because it doesn't elicit the level of ongoing community support that's needed to address the structural financial problems of the department.

This situation requires a process that builds community understanding, interest, involvement, and ownership of the problem on a wide scale. Parks and Recreation seeks to empower the whole community beyond the idea that elected officials and government are the only ones who can solve this problem. This community meeting process is designed to help people step up and claim greater ownership of the parks and programs.

THE PROJECT DESIGN

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board designed a set of four public meetings to be held in Quilcene, Chimacum, Port Ludlow, and Port Townsend. These initial meetings will be followed by another set in the same locations in January.

The key ingredient for success is to establish the appropriate "quality of thinking" among a widespread audience. This quality of thinking, called "choice-creating," is when people own the problem; speak their views from the heart and listen to others with interest; and creatively seek a shared answer that works for all. It goes beyond "deliberation," where people weigh available options and vote, and beyond "dialogue," which rarely leads to a specific solution. The necessary quality of thinking can be forged through the technique of Dynamic Facilitation.

In Dynamic Facilitation each comment is framed as a valuable contribution to the group where all comments build into something clear and meaningful. The dynamic facilitator uses four charts—Solutions, Problems, Data, and Concerns to include all perspectives. Because the process is creative it sometimes seems chaotic, but works quickly, yields shared results, and builds the spirit of community. Also, it spreads this spirit of "We the People" beyond those directly involved, because people resonate with this kind of trans-partisan thinking and the unfolding "story" of group progress it creates.

THE MEETINGS

Each of the four November meetings began with introductions. For the next 40 minutes Jim Rough dynamically facilitated all attendees, including the public, staff, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board members, and elected officials. Matt described the problem openly and in-depth. People chimed in, and were facilitated so their initial reticence and resistances became part of the creative flow. Everyone saw the group perspective and specific areas of interest were identified.

Small groups were formed around the areas of interest, each with a dynamic facilitator. These small group conversations lasted about an hour and each small group determined conclusions, which were brought back to the larger group. After presentations from each small group, "threads" of shared perspective and outcomes were identified and

tied together. People also had the opportunity to reflect on the meeting process. The summaries of each meeting follow.

Meeting #1, Quilcene, November 5th, 2008

After Matt described the issues, people began to flesh out the problem and possible solutions identifying three areas of interest to explore:

a) *Funding*… This group suggested that the underlying way to solve this crisis is for the citizens to "own" their Parks and Recreation. They suggested strategies for involving people and changing the way people think, like using a Wisdom Council process.
b) "*Local to Quilcene*"… This group emphasized the prioritization of resources and intelligent allocation of funds to match the resources. They suggested using this issue of Parks and Recreation as a centerpiece for building community spirit.
c) *Citizen Engagement*… This group was particularly excited about adopt-a-park partnerships and recommended groups like the Lions Club as potential partners. Plus, they suggested looking for new opportunities like a river walk at the Little Quilcene River.

In combining the results of these groups all realized the need to build community ownership of this problem rather than thinking of Parks and Recreation as a governmental entity. They saw this meeting process as a way of building community.

Meeting #2, Chimacum, November 6th, 2008

At this meeting people took the next step. They recognized the need for creating an inspiring vision of what Parks and Recreation might be, aimed especially at young people. They imagined a separate taxing district, but felt that a clear positive vision was essential to make the case for a separate taxing district. They also focused on building partnership with agencies and nonprofit organizations. From this conversation, people identified four topic areas to explore:

a) *Vision*… The vision group wanted Parks and Recreation to build a stronger sense of identity, to become strategic in its involvement of citizens, and to highlight the beauty and uniqueness of our facilities. People focused on a survey as a way to communicate and encourage this vision and invite widespread community ownership.
b) *Local issues*… This group specified a key value being multipurpose trails for hiking, bikes, horses and transportation, especially since these link the various facilities. If this could be a focus, people might appreciate the importance of Parks and Recreation as a "Department of Un-motor Vehicles." They also emphasized building on the passions of elders to get youth involved. And they wanted to gain the help of the Sheriff's office to involve jail crews to help build and maintain trails.
c) *Funding*… This group again felt the key to adequate funding was connecting deeply with the community. They especially liked the idea of a film, which showed the state of Parks and Recreation. They expressed their vision for the new organization modeled on something like the Master Gardeners, a national model where "of course

we all want our facilities to look good." Similarly, "Of course, we all want our personal and social health maximized."

d) *Community Engagement*… This group sought more adult programs and also suggested a public relations effort. They suggested a regular article in the newspaper and especially focused on growing the existing organization: Friends of Parks and Recreation.

Summary points from the whole group were about the new taxing district, making public relations an emphasis, creating an overarching identity that emphasizes the role of Parks and Recreation in building economic and community viability in the region, orienting to bringing generations together, and building a stronger organization of "Friends of Parks and Recreation."

Meeting #3, Port Ludlow, November 10th, 2008

This group was smaller, but was experienced in fundraising and recreation management. They chose to stay together as one group rather than break into separate conversations. At first people expressed frustrations with the situation in which Parks and Recreation found itself. Much of this was resolved when people realized that the whole budget for county parks and programs was less than half the budget for similar activities and facilities within privately owned Port Ludlow. They also didn't want to increase taxes, especially to fund Port Townsend activities.

First, the group suggested existing programs should be audited, especially to assure that fee structures are adequate. Beyond that the new taxing district should be pursued. In order to make it work, people felt that Parks and Recreation needed a new identity, especially one where there was automatic trust and respect for the leaders. One concern was how to relate county programs to private programs like Kala Point and Port Ludlow. Another was to assure voters that their taxes would not be raised by this change, to let voters know that portions of the General Fund would be reduced by the amount going to the new Parks and Recreation division.

It was suggested that there needs to be a "hook" to make the new entity work… something to draw people and build excitement. Ideas for the hook were: to link with Make Waves and the many agencies working to build an Aquatic Center at HJ Carroll Park, or to link up Parks and Recreation with the school systems in some way. New partnerships would clearly be needed for this new entity and an orientation to marketing.

#4 Port Townsend Community Meeting, Nov 12, 2008

This meeting evolved the ideas and tone of the conversation another step forward. People further developed ideas like creating a separate taxing district, emphasizing the managing of volunteers; creating different kinds of partnerships with government agencies, private organizations, schools, etc.; transitioning to the new taxing district; and assuring that people understand the immense value of the services provided to the community. Attendees then split into four groups:

a) *Impact & Benefits*… This group recognized the importance of the community safety net being provided by Parks and Recreation, especially supporting activities across generations and to youth in times when parents aren't home. Parks and Recreation

programs save public money in the long run, especially by reducing criminal justice and public health needs in the community besides their impact on quality of life. They felt that the community needs to acknowledge these benefits.

b) *Budget Analysis*… This group stressed the importance of helping the community know what they are spending and what they are getting in comparison to other communities and to other agencies. People need to see what the budget would look like if a separate taxing district were implemented, especially with a new emphasis on partnering.

c) *Funding*… One novel idea emphasized in this group was for the County Commissioners to look at the overall tax structure with an eye toward making taxes more progressive. People also felt it important to share stories of how the existing parks came to be. There are many lessons in these stories that impart the spirit of public ownership and the need to take charge.

d) *Mission*… This group suggested a strategy to build both passive and active recreation activities, where youth aren't dependent on programs; to analyze the maintenance gaps and involve volunteers in filling them; and to create a budget that not only maintains, but builds quality of life for people.

In identifying the overarching threads, the entire group wanted to be sure youth programs were not cut, yet to also emphasize passive non-programmatic recreation. They wanted to assure that programs are available to all children as well as to expand adult programs, which can pay for themselves. Volunteers are especially needed in the new organization but creating a paid position to coordinate volunteers and a paid grant writer were encouraged. Attendees felt these positions will pay for themselves.

REVIEW AND NEXT STEPS

At the end of each meeting people realized that they had done far more than provide input. They were determining the issues and developing the ultimate decision, because they were reaching shared perspectives among all participants, staff, elected officials, and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. They had achieved a state of respectful listening and creativity and reached conclusions. There was an awareness and appreciation of one another and this approach.

All of the community gatherings fit together as a whole in an unfolding story of progress, each meeting building on the previous one. The next steps are for the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and others to build on what has been created. They will continue to build enthusiasm and involvement for this process and these ideas throughout the community. At the next set of meetings they will share what they came up with in response to this joint direction.