

EUGENE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Work Session: State of Parks and Recreation Facilities

Meeting Date: October 29, 2014
Department: Public Works;
Library, Recreation, and Cultural Services
www.eugene-or.gov

Agenda Item Number: A
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ISSUE STATEMENT

This is a summary report to the council regarding conditions of Eugene's parks and recreation system. In 2010, the council reviewed a report which described the funding gap to operate and maintain City parks and recreation facilities. At that time, the council passed a motion requesting the City Manager to develop funding options to sustainably maintain parks and recreation facilities for FY12 budget consideration. Due to increasing budget pressures for that fiscal year, no specific funding options were brought back to the council for consideration. This report updates the 2010 report to current conditions and looks ahead to future challenges and opportunities.

BACKGROUND

For over 100 years, Eugene residents have demonstrated strong support for parks and recreation by donating land, raising funds, and approving measures that expanded parks and recreation facilities. The results of this support can be seen from the establishment of Hendricks Park in 1906, and Spencer Butte Park in 1914, to the passage of a series of levies in the 50s and 60s that built more parks, pools, and community centers. In 1972, a bond measure created the 12-mile riverfront path system, and in 1976, voters passed a \$5 million levy for park improvements and acquisition. By the 1980s, Eugene's growing population of 100,000 enjoyed 1,500 acres of parks that included developed playgrounds, swimming pools, sports fields, and community centers.

In 1998, voters passed a \$25.3 million parks and open space bond that significantly increased the number of parks, turf fields, and land for future parks and natural areas. The bond also renovated Echo Hollow Pool, constructed 11 new parks, and made the expansion and renovation of Amazon Pool possible. In 1999 and 2002, local option levies passed that provided more funding for after-school recreation programming. In 2006, voters approved a \$27.5 million bond focused primarily on acquiring land for future neighborhood and community parks in growing areas, as well as the expansion of Eugene's natural areas including the Willamette riverfront system and Ridgeline Park.

Overview of Current System

Today, Eugene enjoys and benefits from over 3,800 acres of parks which includes: playgrounds, sport fields and ball courts, trails and pathways, gardens, and natural areas, as well as six

community centers, three swimming pools and six satellite recreation facilities that extend services by leveraging local partnerships. These assets provide essential social, environmental, and economic services that contribute to the overall health, safety and well-being of the community. However, in order to sustain these values and benefits, adequate maintenance for this system is necessary.

Operating and maintaining parkland is the responsibility of the Public Works Parks and Open Space Division (POS). The services to operate and maintain (O&M) parks and facilities are performed by staff, and are supported by contributions from volunteers and partnerships. Some of the types of O&M services routinely performed include: cleaning of parks and facilities, turf care and irrigation, tree and landscape work, repairs to infrastructure such as lighting and pathways, prep for sports field play, inspecting for playground safety, enhancing natural areas for wildlife and recreational uses, and building maintenance and repair. Management of community centers and pools is the responsibility of the Recreation Division within the Library, Recreation, and Cultural Services Department. Recreation works through the Central Services Facilities Maintenance Division for maintenance and repair of its community centers, pools, and satellite recreation facilities.

O&M History and Trends

Over the last five years, both Parks and Open Space (POS) and Recreation Services divisions have contributed to reducing the City General Fund budget deficit by restructuring and operating more efficiently, reducing operating budgets by trimming services, increasing revenue targets, shifting funds out of the General Fund into other dedicated funds, and pursuing partnerships and grants. Some of the specific cost reduction strategies have included: reducing and restructuring FTE, reducing numbers of vehicles and equipment from the park maintenance fleet, closing park restrooms, eliminating some community special events and activities, reducing neighborhood park irrigation by 75 percent, reducing mowing frequencies, eliminating landscape beds, removing garbage less frequently, and delaying the development of new parks until additional O&M funding is secured. Successful revenue strategies include raising fees within the market value, and converting low-revenue-producing programs into higher-cost-recovery programs. Specific to Recreation Services, the greatest challenge continues to be maintaining accessibility to services for all residents while also reaching increasing revenue targets and cost recovery goals. This is an ongoing balancing act with variables that shift seasonally and annually. In POS, the greatest challenge is meeting the annual operating and maintenance needs of a system that has experienced funding reductions while infrastructure ages, park acreage grows, and pressure from illicit uses increase.

The City of Eugene now has a much leaner organization providing park and recreation services throughout the city. Working better together staff from POS, Recreation, the Eugene Police Department, and Facilities have helped make the organization stronger and better able to meet the demands of maintaining the parks and recreation system. However, successive years of budget cuts, and absorbing cost increases, while still meeting the changing needs of a growing community, has resulted in many critical maintenance needs not being met.

Current Conditions

Since the 2010 report to the council, a trend of deteriorating park infrastructure throughout the

system has been documented (see Attachment A), and the aging community centers and pools struggle to keep up with community needs (see Attachment B). Assessments made on these facilities show a steady decline in critical components and infrastructure within this system. These conditions, combined with the growing pressure on parks and recreation facilities from illicit behaviors such as graffiti, vandalism, and illegal camping, have accelerated deterioration of the system over the past five years.

A consequence of inadequate O&M is that safety, usability and appearance also decline over time. As this decline continues, the cost of repairing deficiencies grows, until eventually the infrastructure must be replaced. These replacements and renovations include projects like energy efficiencies, seismic improvements, mechanical systems, addressing accessibility improvements related to the Americans with Disabilities Act, replacing aging lighting and electrical systems to improve their safety and efficiency, and renovating old restrooms that are unsafe and challenging to maintain. This backlog in needed park and recreation assets, together with the growing gap between available maintenance funding and the current maintenance funding need, has created an impediment to development of new neighborhood and community parks. Currently, there are 14 neighborhood and community-park sites in need of development, but these projects are delayed due to the lack of O&M. Adding new parks now would simply spread the existing inadequate resources even thinner, exacerbating the issues described above. For this reason, future park sites the City has acquired are sitting idle, rather than being designed and developed to provide parks to underserved neighborhoods.

Beginning in 2015, POS and Recreation Services divisions will initiate an update to the current PROS Comprehensive Plan by engaging the community in discussions about the future of the parks and recreation system and establishing a new strategic vision for the next ten years. During this process, there will be a review of funding strategies available to help implement this new vision. The intended outcome is for the council adoption of this update by the end of 2016.

In conclusion, the update to the PROS plan will help to look at the long-term needs for the system after 2016, but immediate needs to operate and maintain the parks continue to go unfunded and conditions will remain in a state of decline until addressed.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

- Council goal for Accessible and Thriving Culture and Recreation (*a community where arts and outdoors are integral to our social and economic well-being and are available to all*).
- Council goal for Fair, Stable and Adequate Financial Resources (*a government whose ongoing financial resources are based on a fair and equitable system of revenues and are adequate to maintain and deliver municipal services*).

COUNCIL OPTIONS

1. Do nothing at this time; accept that the park and recreation system will continue to decline.
2. Request the City Manager bring back funding options for City Council consideration to sustainably operate and maintain current parks and recreation facilities.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager recommends that the council request the City Manager to develop funding options for City Council FY16 Budget consideration to sustainably maintain Parks and Recreation facilities.

SUGGESTED MOTION

Move to request the City Manager to develop funding options for City Council consideration for the FY16 Budget to sustainably maintain Parks and Recreation Facilities.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Parks O&M Summary
- B. Recreation Summary

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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