



Denver City Council

Public Amenities Committee
Meeting Summary

Date: May 2, 2006 Time: 11:00 a.m. Location: Council Conference Room

Members Present: Robb, Johnson, Linkhart
Members Absent: Lehmann
Other Council Present: Garcia

1. Parks & Recreation's Buds-to-Blooms Garden Tours

Committee Action

The Committee suggested that:

- a press release be issued announcing that all 630 flowerbeds will be planted this year;
- the Department plan to accommodate more than 30 people on these tours; and
- outreach to neighborhoods and kids for volunteers needs to be increased.

Summary of Discussion

Angela Casias, Manager's Office, and Ron Neath, Horticulturalist, announced that starting May 15, all of the 630 flowerbeds in the parks and parkways will be planted for the first time in several years. They also announced the first annual Buds-to-Blooms Garden Tours, complete with planting, prodding and pruning tips.

- May 6: Free tour of the Department's Greenhouse, 2500 E. 23rd Ave; 10:00 - Noon. The first 50 visitors will receive a complimentary geranium plant.
- July 29: The Marigold Tour: Washington, Harvey, Ruby Hill, Harvard Gulch State House, Eisenhower, Bible, and Garland parks; 9:00 – Noon.
- August 5: The Rose Tour: Alamo Placita, Cheesman, Cranmer, Central Park Stapleton, Montbello Civic Center, Village Place, and Bluff Lake parks; 9:00 - Noon
- August 12: The Geranium Tour: Sloan's Lake, Inspiration Point, Berkeley, Viking, Centennial Gardens, Confluence, Shoemaker Plaza, and Commons parks; 9:00 – Noon.
- October 21: Putting the Beds to Bed, free volunteer event; 8:00 – Noon.

Transportation will be provided (much of the Geranium Tour will be on foot). Cost of single tours is \$15 for adults and \$7 for seniors and youth. A Bouquet Package can be purchased for \$40 for adults and \$21 for seniors and youth. Reservations may be made with Brenda Marquez, 720-913-0739 or Brenda.marquez@ci.denver.co.us. Space is limited to about 30 people. Committee members said the demand will far exceed that amount of space and suggested additional busses be engaged.

Sponsors for the bouquet of tours are The Park People, the Greenway Foundation, Denver Botanic Gardens and CSU Extension Service.

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2. Pioneer Monument Agreement with Denver Newspaper Agency

Committee Action

The Committee requested that the draft agreement be provided to members prior to finalization.

Summary of Discussion

Helen Kuykendall, Parks & Recreation Planner, and Steve Newman, architect with Newman Cavander and Doane, presented the plans for Pioneer Monument that the Denver Newspaper Agency (DNA) will implement. Annual requests for capital improvement funds to restore and enhance the Pioneer Monument and plaza have been submitted since 1997 but other priorities have deferred this project. The plaza improvements were then incorporated into the adopted Civic Center Master Plan. When DNA bought the site on Colfax and Cheyenne Place, it volunteered to help, partly because the plaza is virtually the front door to the new DNA building. Mosher-Sullivan, the developer, will coordinate planning, design, and construction. DNA will also fund some maintenance.

In order to accomplish private improvements on City parkland, a 10-year cooperative agreement is being drafted to specify City ordinances and policies and the responsibilities of DNA and the City. The fountain will be turned on in June, and renovation work will occur through the summer.

One of the goals of the project is to connect this urban plaza to the continuous ring of green space surrounding Civic Center Park. The existing trees will be retained; street trees will be added along Broadway. The grass will be retained and benches added under the large trees in the northern point of the triangular site, behind the existing RTD shelter. The chain around the monument will be removed, and a granite and steel base will be installed, carefully designed to look right with the monument. The grass in this area will be replaced with scored concrete pavers. RTD has agreed to cease laying-over the Mall shuttles on Cheyenne Place, which will be converted to one-way with metered parallel parking on the plaza side and drop-off parking on the DNA side.

The bus shelter will remain for the time being, although one option being considered in the Downtown Multi-modal Access Plan is relocating that bus stop south of Colfax. A new pedestrian signal will be installed for crossing Broadway at Cheyenne Place.

Councilman Linkhart expressed concern that grass was being replaced with hardscape and that being in and on the fountain is discouraged by design. Ms. Kuykendall explained that policy is largely a maintenance issue. When people are on/in a fountain, more debris, which plugs up the waterworks, tends to be introduced.

Councilwoman Robb said the Pioneer Monument plans meet the ideals of the Civic Center Master Plan, and she asked if the Parks Advisory Board had approved the plans. Ms. Kuykendall said the plaza improvements were discussed with the Board as part of the Civic Center Master Plan, and she added that they were approved by the Landmark Preservation Commission.

3. Recreation Survey Findings

Committee Action

The Committee stressed the need for more discussion with Council members and communities.

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Summary of Discussion

Daniel Betts, Deputy Manager for Recreation, introduced Teresa Penbrooke, GreenPlay, and Rob Layton, Design Concepts, who presented an overview of the findings from the survey work they have been performing. This is the first effort to obtain objective, quantitative, empirical data on the recreation centers and the users. Ms. Penbrooke stressed that for this overview presentation, she selected the information that affords the most overarching, representative findings. The complete set of data is contained in a report to the Department, which Council members are welcome to review but is too expensive to reproduce. The data is available on the Parks & Recreation website, and the executive summary is attached.

Ms. Penbrooke explained that no recommendations of any kind are being made at this point based on any of the findings. Recommendations are to be formulated in a later phase of the project.

The critical success factors for the study are to:

- establish an objective, complete and accurate inventory and analysis of all 29 indoor centers;
- determine needs for Denver residents;
- look at functionality of centers, gaps and inequities in services; and
- create five focus areas for capital funding for the next ten years.

Key findings from four neighborhood meetings with 113 attendees:

- attendees from centers are supportive of the “neighborhood feel” and convenient locations;
- seniors were the most highly represented;
- there is a strong desire for more fitness amenities;
- Denver needs to listen to “neighborhood voices”; and
- there are needs for increased operating hours and larger centers.

The city was divided into ten Neighborhood Recreation Service Areas (NRSAs), shown on the attached executive summary. These areas were created in order to:

- provide a context for analysis;
- identify priorities for each NRSA based on:
 - service equity;
 - planning longevity;
 - accurate information and data;
 - historic and current planning efforts; and
 - reasonable numbers for surveying the public.

In addition to the neighborhood meetings, a random survey was mailed to 15,000 residents (1,500 in each NRSA). With return of 531 (3.5%), the response was low but still statistically valid.

The consultants utilized the Geo-Referenced Amenities Standards Program (GRASP) methodology of determining level of service. The table presented in the attachment represents only one of 11 different analyses of the data collected on each recreation center. Based on the analysis, the NRSAs were ranked in terms of needs.

Another analysis was based on distance from a center. Only six percent of the population is within

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one-third mile, considered a walkable distance. Eighteen percent are within one mile of a recreation center. Ninety-five percent are within three miles, or drivable within 10 to 15 minutes.

Cost recovery is one aspect of the analysis. Overall, Denver's 2006 cost recovery is projected to be 21%. This compares poorly with several metropolitan area recreation centers and districts, which range from 67% to 146%. These included Arvada, Westminster, Longmont, and Boulder.

Councilman Linkhart noted that none of centers listed are really comparable to Denver, and he suggested that the consultants find more comparable cities, such as Aurora. He also disagreed with the boundaries of the ten NRSAs because they do not reflect real usage patterns. He also stressed that the technical data, while good to have, must be weighed against the political realities.

Councilman Garcia agreed with Councilman Linkhart. The data sets benchmarks, but the political realities in making decisions about capital improvements have to be considered. Any bond election could be five or more years away, and circumstances will change in the interim. He stressed the need for more review by the Park & Recreation Advisory Board and more discussion with Council members.

Ms. Penbrooke agreed that all of that must take place, but that this effort will provide the tools the Council members and the Department need to work with in making decisions. This is only the first phase, and there is much additional work to be done. The next steps include meetings with Council members, phasing of improvements in the system, and identification of opportunities for partnerships and/or development of centers.

Councilman Linkhart said partnerships are very important, particularly with the schools.

Mr. Betts said the Advisory Board has been involved in the process and will continue to be consulted. The Department is currently looking for the "low-hanging fruit", such as the addition of adult leagues and teams this summer.

Gretchen Williams
05-23-06