

# Preliminary Public Engagement Findings

Fri 03 Feb 2012

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## Background

The City of Boulder, Colorado, has engaged a team of consultants and subject matter experts led by StudioTerra and consisting of the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands at Indiana University (EPLY), Danica Powell Associates, and BBC Research and Consulting to prepare an update to the community Parks and Recreation Master Plan for 2013-2017. To initiate the planning process, the consulting team met with park staff and other key individuals in Boulder to gather information about the parks and recreation system, municipal policy, community affairs, and other reference information.

## Method

Meetings with City staff and community representatives took place at BPRD Administrative Offices during the week of January 30, 2012. Appointments were scheduled by BPRD staff and typically lasted one hour and were attended by Steve Wolter and Jeff Bransford of EPLY.

Specifically, the following divisions, departments, and organizations participated in interviews:

- Boulder Parks and Recreation Department Staff
  - Director and Leadership Team members
  - Recreation Management staff
  - Asset Management staff
  - Park Operations staff
  - Marketing and Communications staff
  - Planning staff
- Other City of Boulder staff
  - Deputy City Manager
  - Executive Director of Public Works
  - Director of Public Works for Transportation
  - Executive Director for Community Planning and Sustainability
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) members
- PLAY Boulder staff and board members
- Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau
- PLAN-Boulder County
- Boulder Valley School District
- Colorado Chautauqua Association
- Boulder Outlook Hotel
- Boulder County Public Health

Each discussion focused on matters of most relevance to the participating staff member(s) or stakeholder(s). There was not a consistent agenda of discussion topics among all participants; however, similar overarching inquiries were used for all interviews. These included:

- What is working well in Boulder regarding parks and recreation?
- What could be improved?
- What are some of the challenges facing BPRD?
- Are there opportunities that you think BPRD should pursue?
- What would make for a successful parks and recreation master plan?

## **Preliminary Findings**

After synthesizing notes from all interviews, several themes emerged. They are presented below in no particular order, categorized by topic.

### **Management and Administration**

- A. All departmental functions are significantly constrained by scarce financial resources.**
- Staffing shortages have led to either reduced levels of service and/or additional workloads for staff.
  - There is a widespread awareness of the organizational priority to generate revenue and recover as many costs as possible.
- B. There is a lack of clarity on how to plan and prioritize work.**
- Some form of prioritization scheme would assist staff in defending decisions or justifying requests.
  - Current methods used to prioritize funding or workplans do not fully reflect higher-level organizational strategies or principles, or are not translatable to all situations.
  - There are no clearly articulated core values or guiding principles for the department. Some workgroups have established informal ones, however.
- C. The City of Boulder has more planning documents than a typical community, and they are not well integrated.**
- Several stakeholders indicated the importance of acknowledging and incorporating findings and initiatives from other planning efforts.
  - Specific documents/themes to incorporate mentioned by stakeholders include:
    - Integrated Pest Management
    - Sustainability
    - Multi-modal transportation
    - Priority-based budgeting

## Operations and Service Provision

- D. Asset and facility operations only marginally reflect a lifecycle management approach.**
- There is no formal process for prioritizing assets to aid in management decisions.
  - Currently, work prioritization is driven primarily by the need to respond to short-term needs.
- E. There is demand in the community for additional facilities of certain types.**
- Aquatic facilities are in demand from individual users and organized clubs.
  - Some stakeholders believe the City should provide additional baseball/softball fields for Little League and other organized clubs.
- F. Compared to other communities, the recreation programs provided to Boulder residents are more advanced and specialized.**
- There are more advanced programs than basic ones.
  - Many of the programs offered are geared towards adults, not towards youth or families.
  - There is an associated concern that advanced programs are subsidized more in Boulder than in typical communities.

## Politics and Governance

- G. The PRAB could be more effective in advising on departmental policy.**
- Compared to other communities, the PRAB gives a disproportionate level of attention on operational oversight as opposed to policy guidance and direction.
- H. The City of Boulder has a tradition of rigorous review of planning documents.**
- Compared to other communities, the amount of time and attention given to the vetting and approval of planning and briefing documents by City management is intensive.
  - The time required to vet documents is longer in Boulder than in other communities.

## Social Issues

- I. It will be important to draw connections between parks and recreation and public health, but there is no emergent concept of how to articulate that connection.**

- Several stakeholders mentioned that drawing this connection should be a priority given Boulder residents' affinity for maintaining health.
- There is a potential opportunity to collaborate, or at least be informed by, the strategic planning efforts being undertaken by the Boulder County Public Health Department, especially given their focus on including metrics and indicators of healthy living.

**J. It is imperative to integrate the City of Boulder's three-part sustainability model into the master plan.**

- The three parts of the model include environmental, economic, and social sustainability.
- The Department of Community Planning and Sustainability will issue guiding principles to help other City departments incorporate sustainability into their planning documents.
- There seems to be a willingness among both staff and stakeholders to continue to subsidize some programming and facility operations that contribute to fostering community good.

**K. It is imperative to emphasize accessibility and connectivity into the master plan.**

- This includes the aspect of physical connectivity (with trails, greenways, and other corridors) in order to promote multi-modal transportation options.
- This also includes making social connections to additional residents and making programs and services available to all that wish to participate.
- A final aspect includes promoting integration of programs and services among divisions and departments in the form of resource sharing or management collaboration.

## **Partnerships**

**L. Innovation is needed to foster and manage partnerships.**

- Multiple partnership opportunities were identified by stakeholders and staff, and it appears that the primary reason many have not yet been developed is due to the lack of ability to invest time or funding.

## **Additional Research**

The findings summarized above are preliminary and require validation through a comprehensive public engagement process. Next steps include the development and approval of a Public Engagement Plan which will outline the intended methods to conduct additional interviews, develop and administer a public survey, and utilize the internet in collecting and disseminating information about the planning process.