

Master Plan Update Public Engagement Summary



Introduction

A critical component of the Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update is effective public engagement. The importance of public involvement in the master plan process cannot be underestimated, and is absolutely necessary if the plan is to effectively deliver community oriented park and recreation services to residents.

Overall, the public process must be balanced, open, and collaborative and as a result will build community-wide trust in the plan and the process. The process is developed carefully in order to create an outcome that will secure support for, and approval of, the Master Plan by City Council, advisory groups, city management, department staff, and the diverse user groups of the park and recreation department services. The ongoing public engagement will help refine core themes and develop strategic action items that represent the broad community needs and interests

Project consultants, the Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands (Eppley) provide a critical role in the public engagement portion of the Master Plan, using well-established strategies that have a history of success in public forums. The public involvement in Boulder includes the following strategies:

- A. Stakeholder Interviews
- B. Public Issues & Opportunity Open Houses
- C. Community Park and Recreation Random Mail Survey
- D. Online Sharing of Information and collecting feedback
- E. Park and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) study sessions and updates.
- F. Technical Advisory Group (TAG) reviews and input
- G. Other Community Outreach and Research
- H. Pathfinders Workshops

These public engagement methods are combined with other research and observations to develop a triangulation approach to public involvement. Triangulation is a concept which recognizes that no single public engagement strategy will accurately reflect the true preferences of an entire community. Repeatedly asking the same or similar questions in a variety of forums and then comparing the answers can identify common themes and issues. This combination of methodology results in a thorough understanding of the general public's views, which can then be incorporated into the Master Plan.

BPRD's commitment to public engagement in this Master Plan Update has been rigorous and included broad segments of the community. Continued dedication is critical to the department's ongoing commitment to serve the highest community priorities.

The following is review of strategies implemented to date:

A. Stakeholder Interviews

Early in the process, key stakeholders representing a wide variety of both active and passive user groups, community leaders, city staff, PRAB, and special interest groups were interviewed by members of the project team. The interview notes were analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods to identify recurring themes and early emerging trends.

Stakeholders are individuals who represent the community as a result of their position, involvement, interest, or identity in the community. The stakeholders of a community generally represent a cross section of the community and are interviewed in order to obtain a sense of overall public opinion.

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, conducted by Eppley staff in private with the stakeholders, and typically lasted one hour. Stakeholders were assured of confidentiality.

The findings from the Stakeholder Interviews are discussed in detail in the [Preliminary Public Engagement Findings-February 3rd, 2012](#). Based on this early analysis, Boulder stakeholders identified a number of important issues, which identified important themes that fall under the following broad categories:

- **Asset Management:** Asset and facility operations only marginally reflect a lifecycle management approach and there is demand in the community for additional facilities of certain types.
- **Recreation Programming:** Compared to other communities, the recreation programs provided to Boulder residents are more advanced and specialized. Also, there is demand in the community for additional facilities (i.e. aquatic facilities and little league fields).
- **Community Health and Wellness:** It is important to draw connections between parks and recreation and public health, but there is no emergent concept of how to articulate that connection.
- **Community Relationships and Social Good:** Innovation is needed to foster and manage partnerships.
- **Sustainability Goals:** It is imperative to integrate the City of Boulder's three-part sustainability model into the master plan.
- **Organization Preparedness:** Some of the feedback is related to how the organization operates and will be considered as the department evaluates how it provides the services the community values.

After more detailed analysis and meetings with PRAB, TAG, and city staff, additional specific information further clarified the initial categories as the core themes and issues affecting Boulder Parks and Recreation. These core themes include:

- Community Health and Wellness
- Asset Management
- Youth Engagement and Activity
- Recreation Programming
- Community Building and Relationships
- Financial Sustainability
- Environmental Stewardship
- Connecting Parks, Facilities and Trails
- Organizational Change

B. Public Issues and Opportunity Open Houses

Fall 2012: Over three different dates in late October, Boulder’s Parks and Recreation Department hosted public meetings focused on the department’s Master Plan Update. The meetings were an Open House format, with multiple stations set up to facilitate focused input on specific topics and to allow for one-on-one interaction with staff. Additionally, the meetings allowed the community to engage with one another in hearing the needs and expectations of the community through their own voice. There were stations for each of the seven key themes identified through research and public engagement to date, as well as an open station where people could discuss unrelated topics and new ideas. Total attendance at the three meetings was 75 participants.

Specific objectives of the Master Plan component of the public meetings were to:

- Present findings related to key issues or focus areas including background information and questions for the public to consider in their dialogue.
- Gather input regarding each of the focus areas to confirm and validate preliminary findings.

Each topic had a summary statement and questions to help facilitate the discussion. Public comments were recorded, either by staff or the members themselves, and are summarized by topic below. All of the feedback collected can be found [here](#).

Recreation Programs

Throughout the public outreach meetings, multiple comments were recorded during dialogue that identified needs and expectations of the community relative to the current offerings of recreation programs as well as goals for the department to consider in the master plan process. Multiple comments were recorded that identified a need to serve the aging population and changing trends in providing “on-demand” programs such as more drop-in classes and flexibility in locations of programs. Multiple comments expressed continued support of aquatics programs and facilities that promote swim programs. Another theme included the cost of programs to the community and public comments illustrate the need for affordable programs for all members of the community including scholarships for underprivileged participants. Finally, many

comments illustrated a desire for the City to provide more general programs in terms of skill level and not focus on advanced or elite programs.

Youth Activity

The public comments received demonstrate an alignment within the community about the need and desire to more actively engage youth with places, facilities and programs. One theme included the need for more capacity of facilities for youth sports such as baseball and swimming. Another approach from the community involves simply providing more access to nature through connectivity in the parks system relative to the multi-use path network. A strong desire for after school programs in partnership with BVSD was expressed through multiple comments that stated a priority for the department should be children.

Community

Multiple comments from the public indicate the desire from the community that the Department should focus on public health, community engagement and cultural activities through programs and initiatives that reach out to the community through volunteer opportunities and events. Several comments received indicate a focus on providing more access to parks and facilities that allow increased use from all sectors of the community by coordinating with transportation corridors and providing access. The public also stated desires to allow and encourage more community events in the parks and facilities that engage the community.

Environmental Stewardship

Several comments received throughout the engagement opportunities illustrate multiple new ideas and suggestions for the department to continue being a leader in environmental stewardship in the community. Major themes included water conservation, composting, resource management and alternative transportation. Additionally, the public provided comments relative to the Department partnering with other agencies in strategizing on environmental stewardship.

Finance

Multiple comments received indicated agreement that current fees should be reviewed and revised based on providing more program access to the community. Comments also indicated belief that elite or specialized programs should not be subsidized and should be charged at market rate. The public comments illustrate a desire to provide programs and services to members of the community that cannot afford it.

Asset Management

The main recurring theme in the asset management discussion indicated a desire of the community for the Department to focus on the facilities that we have and not provide more. Multiple comments illustrated a desire for better maintenance and use of existing facilities instead of building more new facilities. Many comments stated a need for better maintenance of facilities and not catering to special interests through

specialized facilities. The remaining comments discussed individual desires for more facilities such as dog parks in south Boulder, increased aquatics facilities and increased inventory of athletic fields.

Spring 2013: The department hosted an additional open house on April 11, 2013 at the East Boulder Community Center. At this meeting, staff shared the mission, vision and guiding principles that have been developed with community leaders, consultants, board members and staff. The meeting was also an Open House format, with stations for each of the six key themes and the related policy statements that will shape the department's response to community priorities. In addition, there was a station describing the master plan timeline and process and highlighting the critical research findings. The public had an opportunity to express interest in future master plan work, such as working groups for the athletic fields and aquatics feasibility studies.

C. Community Parks & Recreation Random Mail Survey

As the results of stakeholder interviews begin to represent the views of the community as a whole, the additional public involvement serves to adjust or help validate themes and draw out new themes that may not have been represented by stakeholders. Using this strategy, the community recreation survey instrument was developed. The survey used a combination of established, scientifically proven questioning and the identified core themes and issues, as a guide for developing specific questions that would provide the data to validate information.

A total of 663 useable surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 20.7%. This has produced a 3.8% confidence interval at a confidence level of 95%. The survey results are discussed in detail in Eppley's report "[Research Findings: Community Survey](#)".

The mail survey provided valuable information about Boulder residents' attitudes and preferences when it comes to park and recreation services. The objectives identified for the survey included:

- Awareness of community parks and recreation resources, including the Boulder Parks and Recreation Department and its facilities
- Use of those resources and facilities, Barriers (perceived and actual) to the use of parks and recreation resources, of the Boulder Parks and Recreation Department
- Association of parks and recreation resources to public health, environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and social sustainability
- Importance of having certain parks and recreation resources in the community
- Satisfaction with community parks and recreation resources, particularly those of the Boulder Parks and Recreation Department

- Opinion about the following specific issues:
 - Potential need for additional aquatic facilities
 - Potential need for additional baseball/softball fields
 - Trade-off decisions about subsidizing certain programs/operations with user fees
 - Trade-off decisions about acquiring new land/facilities versus maintaining existing infrastructure
 - Willingness to pay for certain programs

D. Master Plan Online

The project team will keep the public informed and updated about the Master Plan via several online methods.

Eppley is managing an external website to share information and collect feedback. The site is www.boulder.parksandrecplan.org and contains:

- General information about the park and recreation master planning process.
- A project timeline and information about major milestones.
- Information about the consultant team.
- Information about how to participate in the public engagement process, including an online form for submitting feedback.
- A portal to access the community survey.

The department is also posting background research documents, public engagement findings and draft documents to a Master Plan page on the department's external website. The page can be found here: [Master Plan](#).

In addition, the department hosted a topic focused on the Master Plan update on the City of Boulder's virtual town-hall, www.inspireboulder.com, with the intention of broadening the reach of participants in the planning effort and engage the public in questions, polling and idea submission related to the Master Plan update.

E. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB)

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB) plays a major role in the master plan process. PRAB's responsibilities include the following:

- Attend public meetings to listen to community input
- Promote the participation of all segments of the community
- Review topical reports that build a foundation of current conditions and provide input
- Advise the department on preliminary direction for the master plan update
- Adopt the final master plan and make a recommendation to council.

The PRAB has held eight study sessions related to the master plan update, in addition to the updates and discussions that have occurred at the monthly board meetings. These discussions, along with community engagement and research to-date, resulted in key themes that were the basis of study sessions with PRAB in October and November, as well as a joint PRAB-City Council study session in November, 2012. PRAB's involvement is reviewed in the [Summary of PRAB Engagement](#). The PRAB's guidance has been instrumental in shaping the policies of the master plan.

F. Technical Advisory Group (TAG)

The technical advisory group (TAG) for the Park and Recreation Master Plan update is comprised of various cross team members from the park and recreation staff working with varying degrees of responsibility and involvement. Responsibilities include review of progress reports for accuracy and content. The TAG also participated at public meetings and with PRAB and other advisory groups up through City Council. The primary role will be as subject matter experts in their area of expertise. The role of the TAG members will also be to serve on various committees related to their expertise and share information with coworkers and the public. There will also be a senior level work group comprised of the various other departments in the City of Boulder that will meet as special needs are identified.

G. Other Community Outreach and Research

In addition to the above public engagement, the department continues outreach to minorities, youth and other special populations. Staff presented to the Youth Opportunities Advisory Board (YOAB) in November and December of 2012. In addition, the project team met with the Human Relations Commission on November 19, 2012 and received that group's input and suggestions regarding outreach to minority populations. Staff had met with members of various groups, including Targeted outreach to minorities, youth and other special populations is ongoing and will continue as the department seeks to build relationships with underparticipating groups.

Staff is committed to continuing the public engagement in this process and this section will be continually updated as additional public engagement efforts are conducted.

There is other research available, not conducted as a part of this update, which the project team is considering. That research includes:

- [Growing Up Boulder Survey](#)
- [2011 City of Boulder Community Survey](#)
- [2011 City of Boulder Capital Bond Issues Survey](#)

H. PathfindersSM Workshop

PathfindersSM is a facilitated workshop of stakeholders who gather together to focus on the role, functions and priorities of the organization. The workshop is designed to form consensus around choices that are part of the Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan

Update. On February 9, 2013, a group of community leaders were invited to join senior city staff for a PathfindersSM event and a similar workshop was conducted on February 12, 2013 with BPRD staff. Both workshops were facilitated by the Epley Institute and resulted in prioritization of these six themes:

- Community Health and Wellness
- Asset Management
- Financial Sustainability
- Community Building and Relationships
- Youth Engagement and Activity
- Organizational Change

The remaining three (Recreation Programming; Environmental Stewardship; and Connecting Parks, Facilities, and Trails) were broadly recognized as important but appeared to be regarded as values that the community already prioritizes and/or as methods for achieving success in the prevailing six areas.

The six themes will shape the development of strategic action areas, which will be further explored and expanded as the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update is finalized.

The proceedings and results of the PathfindersSM workshops may be found online [here](#).

Conclusion

The department's commitment to community engagement will continue beyond this master plan update, as the process has clarified the department's role in serving the community. Stronger and ongoing relationships with the community will aid the department in meeting its mission of promoting the health and well-being of the entire community.