

City of Pigeon Forge

Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Executive Summary

Prepared for the
City of Pigeon Forge

May 15, 2009



Prepared by:

BWSC

BARGE
WAGGONER
SUMNER &
CANNON, INC.

City of Pigeon Forge

Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Executive Summary

Prepared for the
City of Pigeon Forge

May 15, 2009



Prepared by:

BWSC

BARGE
WAGGONER
SUMNER &
CANNON, INC.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Barge Waggoner, Sumner and Cannon, Inc. (BWSC) was retained in March 2008 to prepare a Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan for the City of Pigeon Forge over the next 10 years. The purpose of the study was to objectively review the existing parks, recreation levels of service and facilities offered to those citizens living within the City of Pigeon Forge and make recommendations for improvements including any required new facilities. Consideration was given to include the seasonal population of the large tourism-based economy of the community and the potential economic impacts of tournaments.

Existing Facilities and Condition Assessment

Currently, Pigeon Forge maintains 34.25 acres of parkland which includes City Park, Patriot Park and the Plaza at Riverwalk. Additionally, the Parks and Recreation Department maintains an 86,000 square foot Community Center and 7,080 feet of greenway trail along the Pigeon River and Butler Street.

City Park

City Park is the City’s primary active recreation park. City Park has not only been host to numerous local sports and recreational activities, but also has hosted several tournaments that bring players and their families into Pigeon Forge from as far away as Oklahoma and Michigan. City Park, although well maintained, is dated in function and appearance and does not function well as a top-notch tournament destination. The configuration of the central building, the terraced seating and the fields severely limits the space needed for the crowds who attend tournaments. The field fencing is need of replacement. The fields themselves are poorly graded and there are drainage problems. The dugouts are cramped and do not provide the space needed for today’s tournament teams. The lighting system on the fields is adequate. City Park is also in dire need of ADA upgrades.



Patriot Park

Patriot Park is a sixteen-acre site that is also the headquarters and hub for the City’s Fun Time Trolley system. The park is used to host soccer and football games from April through September. After September, the major use for the park is as the site of the light displays for WinterFest. In addition to the athletic uses and light displays, the park is also utilized as a venue for several special events. The use of the park for special events and its current condition limits its usefulness for pure recreation purposes. The open

grassed areas in the park are not graded properly for safe active sports use (soccer, etc.). The structures at Patriot Park are well maintained; however, once the trolley hub is re-located, significant modifications will be necessary to the main building to convert it to a use that is more conducive to a pure recreation mission.

Community Center

The center was built in 2000 at a site adjacent to City Park. This 86,000 square foot facility hosts a tremendous number of recreational activities for the people of Pigeon Forge. Since it opened its doors in 2000, the Community Center has tracked more than 1.7 million visitors. The Community Center is in excellent condition.

Greenways

Beginning with the completion of a Greenways Master Plan in 1999, the City has undertaken the planning and construction of greenways in the City. Thus far, two



phases have been completed. Phase I extends from Jake Thomas Road south along Butler Street to Patriot Park. Phase II extends north from Jake Thomas Road to the new city-owned parking lot. Presently, there are 7,080 feet of trails constructed. At the end of Butler Street, a parcel of land was purchased to create a passive ¼-acre trailhead/mini-park. Both completed phases of the greenway system are in excellent condition as they have been completed within the last two years.

Administration and Finances

Pigeon Forge has a population of 5,083. Comparing the size and quality of the facilities offered to the residents, Pigeon Forge has an infrastructure sized for a community of 45,000. The park and recreation facilities are operated and maintained with 55 full time and 47 part time staff. The department budget of \$2,429,970 is much higher compared to cities of similar size in Tennessee. This is primarily due to the budget for the Community Center; it is unusual for a City the size of Pigeon Forge to have such a tremendous asset. The budget allocates \$1,692,070 to administration and operations of the Community Center. The remaining \$737,900 is budgeted for parks maintenance. The average budget in Tennessee for similar sized municipalities is \$1,220,095. The City Council has demonstrated its commitment to maintaining a high quality parks and recreation department by approving an average of 3.04% increase in the department's budget over the last three years. Those increases account for a total increase of \$208,302 from the 2004/2005 budget year.

Demographics

Pigeon Forge had an increase in the general population of 67.9% within a 10-year period, from 1990 through 2000. This is compared to the 39.4% increase in Sevier County and the 16.7% increase for the State of Tennessee for the same time period. It is projected that the population will grow in Pigeon Forge by 28.7% from 2010 to 2020. This is compared to a 12% projected increase for the state. Key components of the increase in population through 2020 include:

- The number of persons ages 1-19 is expected to increase by 28.7. Programs and facilities that involve active sports will need to increase to handle this growth.
- The number of persons in the 60+ age group will see an increase of 28.5%. This indicates a need for additional senior-friendly facilities and programs such as additional walking trails and more wellness and senior fitness classes.

These demographic projections do not take in account tourism-generated growth of seasonal residents. Growth in this area could have a major impact on the demographics of the region and, will also impact the need for recreational facilities, although the specific impact is difficult to project.

Public Input (Survey and Public Meetings)

The preparation of the Master Plan utilized an open planning process to gain public input and consensus on the results. Two public participation meetings were held in May 2008 to gain input on recreation needs and priorities in the City. The following needs were identified in the meetings:

- Improvements at existing facilities included upgrades and additional parking at City Park, a snack bar added at the Community Center, and additional benches along Phase I of the greenway.
- New recreation facilities included disc golf, a dog park, a skate park and football/soccer complexes.

A community attitude and interest survey was completed during June and July of 2008 to establish priorities for the future improvement of parks and recreation facilities, programs and services within the community. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 2,000 households in Pigeon Forge. The goal was to obtain a total of 400 completed surveys; a total of 401 surveys were completed. The results of the random sample of 401 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-4.9%.

Among the questions in the survey, citizens were asked to prioritize facilities that they would use if available. The highest priorities were walking and biking trails (81%), picnic areas and shelters (73%), small neighborhood parks (63%), indoor walking and running track (52%), indoor fitness and exercise facilities (51%) and indoor fitness and exercise

facilities (50%). Respondents indicated that the highest need was to acquire, develop and maintain property for both passive and active use.

89% either *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that they would be in favor of greenway development to interconnect the parks and school facilities. 88% of the respondents thought that it was either *very important* or *somewhat important* that use of greenways provide environmental protection (i.e., stormwater management and water quality). Participants were asked to prioritize programs that they would use if available. The highest priorities were adult fitness and wellness programs (54%), nature programs (39%), City-wide special events (35%), computer training (30%), water fitness programs (29%), and senior adult programs (25%).

The importance of recreation facilities and programs as a means to promote tourism was three times greater than the national average, suggesting that sports complexes are important. The need for picnic/pavilion space is 1.5 times the national average; this clearly suggests the need for neighborhood and multi-use parks.

Needs Analysis

The needs analysis was completed to compare the existing Pigeon Forge park acreage and numbers of facilities to a set of national standards based on existing and projected population. The national standards for park acreage are 6.25-10.5 acres per 1,000 people. Although Pigeon Forge is a community of a little over 5,000 people, the City's average daily population reaches over 45,000 people when tourists are included. For this reason, BWSC recommends the higher standard of 10.5 acres per 1,000 people for Pigeon Forge. Based on this standard and the current population, Pigeon Forge should have 52.5 acres of parkland; the current acreage is 34.25 for a net deficit today of 18.25 acres. Based on the projected population in 2020, Pigeon Forge should have 91.9 acres of parkland. Thus, there will be a net deficit across the City of 57.65 acres in 2020 if no new parkland is added to the inventory through that time period. The biggest need for additional acreage is for sports complexes and neighborhood parks.

In terms of the number of facilities, the most pressing needs are for additional football, soccer baseball/softball, and multi-purpose fields, basketball and volleyball courts, disc golf and a skate park.

Recommendations

The recommendations are based on a systematic evaluation of existing facilities and the needs assessment process blended with current and future demand for park and recreation facilities, public input, and standards development. The current or projected budgets for parks and recreation programs and facilities in the City have not influenced these recommendations.

Pigeon Forge is unique in that the infrastructure to serve as much as ten times the population is necessary in order to adequately meet the needs of the influx of visitors, particularly in the peak tourism season. The use of recreational facilities by tourists increase demand on the facilities that is not reflected in the needs assessment based on population. Much effort and funding is naturally expended in attracting visitors to the city through advertising, promoting and conducting festivals, and special events. Citizens in Pigeon Forge recognize the importance of recreation facilities to promote tourism as evidenced by the survey results. Given the attractiveness of the City as a potential tournament destination and its focus on tourism for economic development, the development of tournament grade facilities in Pigeon Forge should be a priority. These facilities can serve local recreation needs and provide for a significant economic impact to the City. Thus, the recommendations contained herein with regard to the renovations and expansion of City Park and the construction of a soccer/football complex are not simply to serve local recreation needs, they represent an investment in tourism infrastructure that is very important to the growth of the local economy.

Existing Facility Upgrades

City Park

A master plan was completed for City Park by BWSC in March of 2007 which resulted in a clear vision of what improvements and upgrades are needed to make City Park a first class recreation facility and tournament destination for the City of Pigeon Forge. The master plan was developed to be implemented in two phases. The recommended improvements to City Park include:



- Replacement of the restroom/concessions building;
- Reconstruction of the 150' baseball fields;
- New batting cages, shade structures over new bleacher areas, additional plaza space, planter/seat walls, and landscaping and renovation of Pavilion 1;
- Demolition and re-building of the existing tennis court and basketball courts and Pavilion 2;
- Replacement of fencing, bleachers, dugouts, and concrete pads for the three large existing softball fields and re-grading and renovation of the fields; and
- Addition of 97 parking spaces.

Patriot Park

The current condition and use of Patriot Park make it not fully conducive for active recreation use. BWSC is aware that the trolley station and facilities will be moved to another location. Assuming the relocation of the trolley station, BWSC recommends that a master plan be completed to maximize the recreational potential of the park. Several preliminary recommendations for the park include:



- Renovation of the existing trolley station office/restroom to be repurposed as a concessions and restroom facility once trolley operations are relocated;
- Construction of three (3) 180'x360' lighted soccer/football fields in the open space of the park;
- Reconfiguration of existing parking to add spaces once the trolley center is relocated;
- New picnic pavilion and playground;
- New centrally located structure between the soccer fields; and
- Upgrade of site lighting along the walking trail using the same fixture/pole that is used along the greenways.

Community Center

Fitness and fitness facilities rank among the highest priority from the results of the public meetings and survey of residents. Although a large fitness facility is available in the Community Center, demand has exceeded the space. In addition, other improvements are needed at the Community Center. The recommended improvements are as follows:



- Development of a fitness corridor in the lounge space outside of the wellness center;
- Upgrades to the gymnasium including the ceiling and fire sprinkler system to prevent accidental contact with balls and installation of a multi-sport flooring surfacing the wood for court 3;
- Renovation of the 3 multi-use meeting room spaces to create a permanent youth space;
- Construction of a teen center in the arcade area;
- Installation of a therapy pool in place of the baby pool;

-
- Installation of a snack bar in the pro shop area within the bowling center; and
 - A 4,000 square foot expansion of the Center to enable the After School Program to grow, expand the programs offered, and provide more programming space for additional classes and equipment.

Greenways

Walking and biking trails were at the top of the list of recreation facilities that were most important to responding households in the survey. Recommendations for greenways include:

- Completion of the Riverwalk trail to the Community Center to the north and the Parkway to the south.
- Connect the Riverwalk trail to Veterans Parkway by means of a segment starting at the Jake Thomas interchange extending to the entrance to Dollywood on Veterans Parkway. This segment of greenway is approximately 10,300 linear feet.
- Construct the Music Road Trail which extends from City Park to connect with the existing greenway near Sevierville.



New Facilities

Based upon the suggested parkland acreage to population standard, the City has a deficit of 18.25 acres of parkland today and will have a deficit of 57.65 acres by 2020. Based upon the analysis of acreage by park classification, the largest deficit in land is for Sports Complexes (15 acres currently and 26 acres in 2020). The recommendations for new facilities would serve the needs of the local community and will also serve as investments in economic development and tourism growth. The following new facilities are recommended:

- A new soccer/football complex to be built on the Jess Davis Property at River Divide and Music Road that the City is currently in the planning stages of acquiring. The complex should be a minimum of 35 acres in size and contain a minimum of four (4) lighted, multi-purpose fields with expansion space for two (2) additional fields. The park should also include sand volleyball, picnic shelter(s) and sites, walking trails, a playground, and horseshoe pits. As acreage will allow, the site should contain open play areas, as well as land that is left in open space to be used for un-structured recreation activities. This park could have the potential of a tournament destination location with its proximity to the many hotels and additional recreation and amusement activities in around Pigeon Forge.

-
- A new top-notch baseball/softball complex should be constructed adjacent to City Park, the current city garage and wastewater treatment plant when these uses are relocated. The complex should contain a minimum of four (4) lighted, baseball/softball fields. These fields should consist of (4) 300' softball/baseball fields. A minimum of 280 new paved parking spaces should be constructed to allow for adequate parking from tournament participants. The park should also include sand volleyball, picnic shelter(s) and sites, walking trails, a playground, splash pad and horseshoe pits. A disc golf course should be designed into the new site as well as the existing City Park site. As acreage allows, the site should contain open play areas, as well as land left as open space.
 - It is recommended that a minimum of two sites be acquired and developed into neighborhood parks to satisfy the shortage of the parkland type and to meet expressed stakeholder needs. The first potential park site is located south of City Hall in an area known as Vickwood Hills. The second potential site is known as Thurman Heights and is located at the north end of the Parkway. The exact location of the sites within these neighborhoods is to be determined, but they should be on land currently vacant. Depending on the acreage that can be acquired, park elements could include a walking trail, a major pavilion/shelter along with smaller ones, picnic sites, sand volleyball, possibly a small splashpad and open play areas. The exact mix of uses should be determined through the development of master plans for both parks which should include public input.

These recommendations would add a total of 55 acres of parkland, bringing the total to 89.25 acres.

Budgets

The recommendations for new parks and facilities included in this section are based on the deficiencies in total acreage of parkland and the various facility types identified in the needs assessment process and the community-wide goal of increasing tourism revenue. As previously mentioned, the needs assessment was developed based on the blend of a number of factors. As with the recommendations for upgrades and improvements at existing parks, the current or projected budgets for parks and recreation programs and facilities in the City have not influenced these recommendations. *Therefore, the recommendations contained herein may be beyond the City's financial ability to accomplish, given other fiscal and political priorities; this is particularly true given the current economic climate.* These recommendations do, however, present a systematic path forward with respect to the development of a quality recreation and park system for Pigeon Forge to meet the needs of current and future residents.

The following table outlines the costs associated with upgrades to existing facilities and the development of the recommended new facilities. The estimated costs should be viewed as initial budget estimates only. They are based upon limited information regarding existing

conditions. The estimates are in 2009 dollars without escalation; if they are to be used in the future for budgetary purposes, an inflation factor should be applied. The recommendations are prioritized based on criteria developed during the planning process.

Prioritization For Funding of Recommendations				
Category	Top Priority	Second Priority	Third Priority	Totals
Planning				\$90,000
Soccer/Football Complex	\$25,000			
Revised City Park Master Plan		\$25,000		
Neighborhood Park Master Plan		\$40,000		
Existing Park Upgrades				\$18,254,224
City Park	\$5,458,604	\$0	\$0	
Patriot Park*	\$0	\$1,569,925	\$1,019,061	
Community Center	\$340,288	\$209,313	\$1,240,008	
Greenways System	\$1,941,928	\$2,941,449	\$3,533,647	
New Facilities				\$11,257,319
Youth League/Tournament Baseball/Softball Park	\$0	\$0	\$5,526,979	
Soccer and Football Complex	\$0	\$5,730,340	\$0	
Subtotal	\$7,765,820	\$10,516,027	\$11,319,695	
Total Cumulative Costs	\$7,765,820	\$18,281,848	\$29,601,543	

In addition to the capital costs for upgrades and new facilities, operations and maintenance costs must be considered when renovating and adding new facilities. The following table illustrates the estimated increased operations and maintenance costs for the recommended park system improvements.

Annual Operations and Maintenance Costs			
Project	Operations Costs	Maintenance Costs	Total Combined Costs
City Park Upgrades	\$0.00	\$37,750.00	\$37,750.00
Patriot Park	\$10,000.00	\$101,140.00	\$111,140.00
Community Center Additions	\$0.00	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
Greenway System	\$0.00	\$8,750.00	\$8,750.00
Youth League/Tournament Baseball/Softball Park	\$20,000.00	\$132,950.00	\$152,950.00
Soccer and Football Complex	\$60,000.00	\$137,000.00	\$197,000.00
Neighborhood Parks (Assuming 2 Acres)	\$0.00	\$10,716.00	\$10,716.00
Overall Totals	\$90,000.00	\$430,806.00	\$520,806.00

Organizational and Operational Recommendations

The City of Pigeon Forge Parks and Recreation Department has had an increase in budget for each of the past three years to provide facilities and services for the citizens of the city and adjoining areas. It is important that funding levels continue to be maintained to provide the quality of services offered by the parks and recreation department. Overall, the department is well organized and professionally operated. There are however, several recommendations regarding the department as follows:

- Addition of an Athletics Supervisor position responsible for scheduling all of the athletic facilities;
- Development of a structured job classification and pay plan;

-
- Updating of the City’s website to provide more user friendly access to information about the department’s facilities and programs and allow on-line reservations and registrations;
 - A review of the agreement with Fort Sanders for operation of the fitness area in the Community Center to determine if revenues would be increased if it were operated by the Community Center staff;
 - A review of the membership fees at the Community Center with adjustments as necessary to reflect increased operations and staffing costs;
 - Consider the development of an agreement with the school system for joint use of each other’s facilities; and
 - Require each volunteer coach working with youth at any public recreation facility to participate in the training program in order to be eligible to participate as a coach. These training programs are available through a variety of sources including the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA).

Funding

The funding of a comprehensive and quality parks and recreation program should be a priority of the City. The value of a good parks program to the community’s economic growth and vitality is often forgotten when difficult budget deliberations take place. Funding for parks and recreation must be considered a good long-term investment, particularly to increase tourism in Pigeon Forge. This section examines some of the means to potentially fund the recommendations included in this report. It does not discuss funding at the local level through routine yearly budget appropriations and the issuance of debt. These are two obvious potential means of funding that do not need further explanation.

The following is a listing of potential sources of funding for the projects outlined in the plan: Fees and Charges; Property Tax Allocation; Lodging and Sales Tax; Impact Fees; Federal Grants including the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program; Tennessee Grants including Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF) Grants, Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) Grants, The Natural Resources Trust Fund, and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Grants; as well as the establishment of a Parks Foundation.

Conclusion

This study has identified a significant investment that will need to be made in order to bring Pigeon Forge’s parks and recreation facilities and programs up to national standards and to make Pigeon Forge an even more popular and successful destination tournament location. It is possible that the level of investment identified will not be able to be accomplished over the planning period due to competition with other important priorities for funding. The fact remains, however that investment will be necessary in order to provide for the recreational

and leisure time pursuits for an ever expanding population of tourists and residents in Pigeon Forge. Therefore, it will be important for the City government to include the recommendations into its yearly planning and budgetary discussions, placing priorities for funding on the Top Priority categories. The expansion and upgrade of the park and recreation system can be a catalyst to enhance what is already a wonderful quality of life, resulting in even more quality growth (economic and otherwise) throughout the Community.

The recommendations in this study should be re-visited and updated at least every five years. The update will be necessary to account for recommendations that are completed, changes in economic, political and demographic conditions, public attitudes and changes in the demand for different park and recreation facilities and programs.

City of Pigeon Forge
Comprehensive Parks and Recreation
Master Plan Executive Summary



an equal employment opportunity/affirmative action employer