

## **V.2 DRAFT Parks and Recreation Committee Report**

(Updated 02/16/06)

**V.2.1 Members** The Parks and Recreation Committee Members were:

- **Monty Knox** – Chairman
- **Jim Kallinger** – Member
- **Cesar Calvet** – Member
- **Don Ammerman** – Member
- **Jimmy Goff** - Member

### **V.2.2 Meeting Schedule and Presenters**

The Parks and Recreation Committee held its first meeting on August 18, 2005 and concluded its deliberations on \_\_\_\_\_, 2006. The Committee meeting dates and presenters are shown in Figure V.2.1.

### **V.2.3 Side-By-Side Comparison**

The Side-By-Side Comparison of Orange County and the City of Orlando Parks and Recreation Services is at Appendix VIII B. The Side-By-Side presents data the Committee thought relevant to their deliberations and conclusions.

### **V.2.4 Executive Summary**

(To be written after final decision on recommendations)

### **V.2.5 Findings**

The Committee finds that:

**V.2.5.1** The Level of Service (LOS) expected by residents would be an issue that must be addressed in any consolidation of parks and recreation services. The Committee noted that the City of Orlando provides parks and recreation for an urban environment, and that Orange County in the past provided those services for the mostly rural environment of unincorporated Orange County, but now provides those services for an increasingly urban environment being created within the unincorporated areas of Orange County.

**V.2.5.2** The Committee noted the ongoing cooperation that exists among Orange County, the City of Orlando, and the Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) Board. The City of Orlando, for example, through synergistic efforts with a number of school principals has established parks on OCPS campuses, thus giving those schools and the public needed recreational facilities at a savings to both OCPS (cost avoidance for the purchase, installation, and maintenance of recreational facilities) and the City of Orlando (cost avoidance for the purchase of land for the park). There is a need for continued coordination and problem solving among the three governmental bodies concerning current issues. The

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Committee realizes that the Commission's charge does not address considering consolidation of services with any other governmental entity; however, coordination with the School Board is essential to achieving the most effective utilization of the limited resources of the three governmental bodies for parks and recreation facilities and programs.

**V.2.5.3** The Committee discussed the potential benefits of a Parks Authority operating independently, with dedicated funding (possibly a special tax district). This would include the consolidation of the City of Orlando and the Orange County parks and recreation services and the associated City and County personnel.

**V.2.5.4** Consolidation of the parks and recreation departments might have direct and indirect benefits such as saving money by outsourcing provided services, combining and possibly changing the way purchasing is accomplished for the parks and recreation entities of the County and City, combining services to achieve fiscal efficiencies, and combining the departments to achieve overhead cost savings.

**V.2.5.5** Possible disadvantages of the consolidation of the parks and recreation departments include the necessity to duplicate the supportive roles already existing in both local governments including, but not limited to: payroll, accounting, personnel, budget, fleet, etc. Also, additional agreements or consideration would have to be given to finding other ways of handling the ancillary tasks that are presently the responsibility of the City of Orlando Family, Parks and Recreation Department that probably would not fall under a separate Parks Authority. For example, the City of Orlando's Parks Division is responsible for mowing of many local right-of-ways and for mowing and landscaping around other city offices, city hall, lots and water retention areas. (Source of example: City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation presentation to Parks and Recreation Committee, August 18, 2005)

**V.2.5.6** Both the City of Orlando and Orange County have a systematic approach to providing parks and recreational facilities.

- The City has a Recreation Element in its Growth Management Plan (GMP) that specifies level of service (LOS) standards for parks.
  - According to adopted GMP Policy 1.1.1, the City of Orlando uses a City-wide LOS standard of 3.25 acres per 1000 population of Community and Neighborhood parkland combined.
  - In addition to the Citywide standard, the City must also measure LOS for individual Community and Neighborhood park service areas. The Community Park Sector LOS is 1.3 acres per 1,000 of population, while the Neighborhood Park LOS standard is 0.75 acres per 1,000 population.

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- GMP Recreation Policy 1.1.1 states that, in addition to the City's adopted acreage standards, the City has developed guidelines for activity-based amenities including ball fields, pools and courts. While not used for concurrency management purposes, these guidelines are to be used to guide park acquisition and development through the planning period. (Source of City information: Dean Grandin, Director, Planning and Development Department and Linda Rhinesmith, City of Orlando Economic Development Manager)
- Orange County also has a Recreation and Open Space Element in its Comprehensive Plan that specifies their park standards.
  - According to Policy 1.1.1, Orange County uses a LOS standard of 1.5 acres of publicly owned activity-based parkland and trails per 1,000 residents of unincorporated Orange County.
  - In all planned unit developments and developments of regional impact, park set-asides are mandated.
  - The County Comprehensive Land Use Plan sets minimum standards for the number of active and passive areas required for the County to stay in compliance with its recreation and open space element of the Plan. (The County is greatly in excess of that standard.)
  - The County does not require a specific quota per thousand of population for specific components of parks (e.g. tennis courts per thousand) as the City of Orlando does; rather, the County has a more flexible process for acquired park land. The County direct mails a user survey to every residential household that will be served by the particular classification of the park to be developed. The County park classifications are: pocket, neighborhood, community, district, regional, and special park in ascending order of size and component complexity. Residents are informed of the future park and asked to list any and all amenities that they wish to see sited at their park. For example, the County surveyed over 20,000 residents in the planning for Dr. Phillips Park. From the resident responses, the County develops a prioritized list of park amenities and develops a preliminary site plan for the future park. The County then usually holds two town hall meetings on the proposed park design with the residents who are notified about the meetings via direct mail and published ads. At the meetings, the park plan is fine-tuned and future input is solicited from residents. The County then develops a final site plan for the project and a project budget and places them in the County Capital Improvement Plan. The Board of County Commissioners appropriates funding at

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the appropriate budget cycle. Finally, a finished site plan is direct mailed to all of the residents to be served by the park to ensure that they know specifically when and what the park in their service area will be like. The County process has been recognized by planners nationally as especially effective and innovative. (Source for County information: William Potter, Manager, Parks and Recreation)

**V.2.5.7** The Orange County Parks and Recreation Division, with a staff of 276, has 94 parks. Their total park acreage is 15,687 acres with 1,602 of those being maintained acres. (Source: Orange County). The City of Orlando Family, Parks and Recreation Department, with a staff of 268, has 104 parks. The total park acreage for the City is 3,287 with 1,189 of those being maintained (Source: City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Parks Division, August 18, 2005)

**V.2.5.8** The Orange County Parks and Recreation Division has gone to the faith-based community asking for land to establish public parks under fifty-year lease agreements. This approach to providing recreational facilities and services makes use of property, owned by the faith-based community, located in an area where the Parks and Recreation Division needed to place such services for the community. As with Orlando's partnership with OCPS principals, there are benefits for both Orange County and the faith-based organization. The County can place a facility where otherwise no land would be available, and the faith-based community benefits from the facility and recreation services that otherwise wouldn't have existed. (Source: Orange County Parks and Recreation Division)

**V.2.5.9** Orange County, through its Parks and Recreation Division, has created a "Field of Dreams" program that provides grants for capital improvements to facilities used by eligible youth sports organizations. To date, over 50 organizations (serving more than 14,000 youth) have received nearly \$4.5 million in Field of Dreams grants. This program has been recognized by the National Association of Counties as an outstanding example of partnering with the community for the benefit of youth. (Source: Linda Akins, Orange County Director of Government Relations)

**V.2.5.10** Orange County Parks and Recreation Division has developed a youth initiative called "The Club" to encourage and provide incentives for youth of all ages and interests to get involved and stay involved in recreational activities of their choice. The program partners with hundreds of public, private and nonprofit recreational and entertainment providers (including the City of Orlando) throughout Orange County. All children in Orange County, ages 5 to 19 are eligible to join. The only requirement for membership is ongoing participation in recreational programs provided by the many partner agencies. Membership benefits, ranging from free transportation on LYNX mass transit to free or deeply discounted special events, and discounts for goods and services provided by the many business partners are provided to those who participate. More than 20,000 youth are "Club" members. Qualified low-income families are provided vouchers to help offset the financial costs of participation in provided partner programs.

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The program has received national recognition. (Source: Orange County Parks and Recreation Pamphlet, Parent's Guide to the Club and Linda Akins, Orange County Director of Government Relations)

**V.2.5.11** The City of Orlando undertook a new parks initiative in 1999. This initiative was the largest effort to design and construct new park and recreational facilities in the City's history. Initially, it was presented as a 3-year program that would increase green-space by 30% and add 24 new ball fields. City Council approved a budget of \$30M. The directive from the Mayor and City Council was to create "extraordinary and unforgettable" green-spaces that would meet the City's recreational needs until the year 2015. The Parks Initiative was so well received by City leaders and citizens that it was extended in duration for six years (1999-2005). The final result was the completion of 30 park projects; a 65% increase in total park acreage, and the addition of 60 new baseball, softball, soccer, tennis, or basketball courts. The City received grants totaling \$3.6M and approved additional funding. The final cost to the City was \$38M. (Source: City of Orlando)

**V.2.5.12** The City of Orlando Family, Parks, and Recreation Department maintains 110,000 trees located in right-of-ways (ROWs) and on public properties. It also is the primary force in the 10,000 Trees Initiative designed to replace trees lost to the hurricanes of 2004. For the County, the Health and Family Services Department provides a similar service. (Source: City of Orlando, Parks Division Services and Accomplishments, August 17, 2005 [handout])

**V.2.5.13** Plans for the provision of new parks and recreation facilities should be coordinated among all departments on which the provision has an impact (e.g. Public Works, Planning, Real Estate, etc.), identify all costs and funding sources associated with land acquisition, capital equipment, and operating and maintenance services, and be consistent with the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. (Source: Linda Rhinesmith, City of Orlando Economic Development Manager)

**V.2.5.14** Dedicated funding for parks and recreation is important for fiscal stability over the long term. Orange County recently implemented a Parks Impact Fee that will provide funding for the acquisition of parkland. In addition, the County has dedicated a portion of both the countywide ad-valorem millage and the public service tax to be used for operations, maintenance and capital expenditures. The City of Orlando Family, Parks and Recreation Department does not have a dedicated funding source beyond general revenue. (Source: Linda Akins, Director of Orange County Government Relations)

**V.2.5.15** Advantages and possible difficulties of a consolidated parks and recreation services user-friendly website were discussed, and at the Committee's request, the technology staffs of the County and City looked at what would be needed to create and sustain a combined website. Both jurisdictions indicated that this would require dedicated staff resources to accomplish and sustain. (Source: City of Orlando)

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**V.2.5.16** The Executive Director provided the Committee with the website ([http://www.topeka.org/pdfs/parks\\_rec\\_merger\\_plan.pdf](http://www.topeka.org/pdfs/parks_rec_merger_plan.pdf)) for The City of Topeka and Shawnee County Parks and Recreation Proposed Consolidation Plan, dated July 11, 2005.

### **V.2.6 Conclusions**

Upon conclusion of deliberations the Committee unanimously determined:

**V.2.6.1** Both Orange County and the City of Orlando have professionally run parks and recreation services dedicated to providing exemplary service to residents. They provide complementary services that reflect the diverse needs of a diverse community.

**V.2.6.2** A thorough audited budget analysis of the possible fiscal and service efficiencies gained through the creation of a Parks Authority would take far more time and resources than this Commission has been given.

**V.2.6.3** The citizens' level of service expectations would have to be considered in any consolidation of parks and recreation services.

**V.2.6.4** Continued and expanded participation in the successful partnerships that exist among Orange County, the City of Orlando, and their partners (e.g. OCPS, the faith-based community) would be of benefit to those governmental entities and their citizens.

**V.2.6.5** Dedicated funding sources, both for acquisition and for operations and maintenance, would be of great benefit to Orange County and the City of Orlando's parks and recreation departments.

**V.2.6.6** Joint planning between Orange County and the City of Orlando to provide parks and recreation locations and services should continue to ensure that greatest value services are provided to citizens. With growth as it is and is projected to be, more collaboration is necessary.

**V.2.6.7** A user-friendly parks and recreation website that links to Orange County, City of Orlando, other providers of services, and eventually all cities in Orange County, would be a real asset to all Orange County citizens.

### **V.2.7 Recommendations**

Consolidation of the Orange County and the City of Orlando parks and recreation departments was studied for efficiencies in service delivery, economies of scale, opportunities for enhanced intergovernmental cooperation, and other related issues. The Committee recommends:

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**V.2.7.1** That, based on the information examined by the Committee, within the time allowed, resources allowed, and constraints of the Consolidation of Services Study Commission, the parks and recreation services not be consolidated.

**V.2.7.2** That the Orange County and City of Orlando parks and recreation departments and their partners (e.g. Orange County Public Schools, the faith-based community) continue efforts to create common parks and recreation areas with.

**V.2.7.3** That Orange County and the City of Orlando establish and/or maintain dedicated funding sources for acquisition, construction, and maintenance of park and recreation facilities and services, and further ensure that their respective Capital Improvement Elements of their Comprehensive Plans address future park needs.

**V.2.7.4** That Orange County and the City of Orlando explore opportunities to achieve a coordinated effort in planning for the provision of parks and recreation facilities and services, particularly for large, community based parks.

**V.2.7.5** That Orange County and the City of Orlando Parks Advisory Boards meet jointly at least semi-annually to discuss future planning and short-term and long-term community needs.

**V.2.7.6** That Orange County and the City of Orlando parks and recreation departments continue to provide linkage between existing and proposed trails.

**V.2.7.7** That the Orange County and the City of Orlando implement a Joint Parks and Recreation Website as a user-friendly “One-Stop” place for citizens to find the closest park, all parks in their area, parks that have a particular amenity, etc.; recreational services available; and the costs (if any) for using a facility or participating in recreational activities. Such a website would be worth the cost in terms of customer “ease of use” benefits.

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| PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE MEETING DATE | PRESENTER(S)  | FORMAL PRESENTATION(S)   |
|---|---|--|
| August 18, 2005                             | <b>Robert Bowden</b> - Interim Director, City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department; <b>William Potter</b> - Manager, Parks and Recreation Division, Orange County   | City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department Presentation; Orange county Parks and Recreation Overview Presentation |
| August 31, 2005                             | <b>William Potter</b> - Manager, Parks and Recreation Division, Orange County; <b>Rodney Williams</b> - City of Orlando Recreation Division; <b>Robert Bowden</b> - Interim Director, City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department   |  |
| September 20, 2005                          | <b>Robert Bowden</b> - Interim Director, City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department; <b>Matt Suedmeyer</b> - Orange County Parks and Recreation  |  |
| October 20, 2005                            | <b>Chris Testerman</b> - City of Orlando Planning and Development; <b>Melvin Pittman</b> - Orange County Community and Environmental Services; <b>Dean Grandin</b> - City of Orlando Planning and Development; <b>Matt Suedmeyer</b> - Orange County Parks and Recreation; <b>Stephen Koontz</b> - Orange County Parks and Recreation | Executive Director's Workshop with Orange County and City of Orlando Parks and Recreation Staffs                                 |
| December 8, 2005                            | <b>Robert Bowden</b> - Interim Director, City of Orlando Families, Parks and Recreation Department; <b>Matt Suedmeyer</b> - Orange County Parks and Recreation  |  |
| January 12, 2006                            | Committee Discussion  |  |
| January 24, 2006                            | Committee Discussion  |  |

**Figure V.2.1**