

Needs Assessment

A community's needs assessment plays a large role in discovering the community's most critical recreation opportunities and developing an understanding of the exact needs of the community. The needs gathering process may also provide insight on how the existing recreation services are being utilized and/or which facilities or programs are being used or avoided.

Conducting a needs assessment generally utilizes two basic methods: public input and recreation standards. This plan has developed a thorough understanding of current recreation needs through a wide array of public input, including user group input, web site on-line surveys, and public meetings. Advisory Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee and staff input also provided hands-on information regarding several existing and proposed recreational needs.

Advisory Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee Leadership

The Advisory Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee advises the City Administrator, City Council, Plan Commission and other parks administration on all matters of administration and management relating to parks, recreation, and open spaces in the City of Marshfield. The Advisory Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee is comprised of six (6) members and one (1) council member who advise and assist in planning and developing the City of Marshfield Parks and Recreation operations to include parks, open spaces, forestry, fairgrounds, athletic fields, and other related areas. During the course of updating the Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, the Advisory Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee played a crucial role in seeking public comment, reviewing all information presented, and making final recommendations.

Stakeholder Surveys

Fifty-six (56) stakeholder surveys were sent out and sixteen (16) groups responded, providing input on facilities used, number of events and attendees per season, facility shortages and desired improvements, willingness to contribute financially, and other comments. The following is a short summary of the information received. Please see the Appendix Section for a complete list of responses.

Based on the information received, Steve J Miller Recreation Area, Braem Park, and Wildwood Park are by far the most widely used facilities, being listed by over half the respondents. The Fairgrounds Park, Griese Park, and the City trail system followed closely behind.

The number of participants in each group ranges from as small as thirty to 800 people for various events. Most of them produce few if any overnight stays from out-of-town guests.

User Group Identified Shortages included: Expanded bicycle/pedestrian trails with safe connections (26%), baseball diamonds (21%), lighted soccer fields (11%), and a dog park (11%). Other requests included resurfaced & lighted tennis courts, lighted G.P. Olson Baseball Fields at Steve J. Miller Recreation Area, and Open Green Practice Space at Steven J. Miller Park.

In addition to rectifying the shortfalls, the most desired improvements consisted of expanded bike/walking trails w/more connections (45%) and new and/or groomed cross country ski trails.

The majority of respondents (77%) favored online rentals while equal halves of the remainder (23%) were either neutral or opposed to the option.

When asked about fees, 46% feel they are “probably” or “possibly” willing and able to contribute, 31% indicated “not at this time”, 23% said “yes”, while 8% indicated they could help in other ways and 15% did not answer.

Public Meetings

The Parks Department hosted a public meeting on April 10, 2014 to get public comments for the future needs of the park system. Approximately (25) twenty-five people attended the meeting and (10) ten comment cards were filled out. (5) Five of the comment cards requested more trails and trail connections between parks.

Other miscellaneous requests included: more winter activity options, a mini park on the east side, a football stadium by the high school, a large sports center at the fairgrounds, a new pool. One comment expressed concern about the need to decide whether Wildwood Park should be a quiet nature area or an events and venue space.

On-Line Community Survey

The Parks and Recreation Department conducted an on-line community survey between April 14th and 30th. In an effort to promote the on-line survey, emails and phone calls were made, a story was published in the local paper, and links were added to the Parks and Recreation Department website and Facebook page.

A total of 464 responses were received. The survey included 16 questions regarding frequency of use and satisfaction with existing facilities, athletic fields, maintenance items and input on future park needs. The survey results also included over 152

individual comments regarding parks and recreation items throughout the community. The following is a summary of the information received.

The majority (about 66%) of respondents resided in Marshfield. The next most represented locations were the Town of Lincoln (7%), other (7%), Town of McMillan (5%), and Town of Marshfield (4%).

When participants were asked the number of times per year they use the city parks, programs, or facilities, responses were about even across the board: 100+ times (20%), 50-99 times (23%), 25-49 times (27%), 5-24 (24%), less than 5 (6%).

The idea of a city pool remains popular, with 70% of respondents supporting the idea of creating a splash pad water playground at Hefko and partnering with the YMCA to create an indoor year-round zero-depth family pool. However, comments made regarding the swimming pool question clearly supported the replacement or renovation of Hefko Swimming Pool at Wildwood Park.

A strong majority of those surveyed feel that Wildwood Park does not host too many special events and that these events do not negatively impact their use of the park. Desired new animal exhibits at the zoo in order of preference are: Grizzly Bear (52%), Badger (17%), Big Horn Sheep (13%), other (11%), and Porcupine (5%). People were also invited to comment on this question and the feedback ranged from not adding any new animals, to adding only native and Wisconsin climate-tolerant exhibits, to suggestions of elephants, pandas, monkeys, and peacocks. One idea was to add a native black bear rather than a grizzly, and to get two bears for socialization. Certain respondents were uncomfortable adding any animals if the exhibits weren't well designed and large enough to meet the animals mental needs as well. Most individuals responding are not members of the Wildwood Zoological Society and have no interest in joining. Views on non-motorized boating on the Upper Pond at Wildwood Park were less clear, with 54% supporting and 46% opposing the idea. Fishing was more popular on the same pond. 85% of those surveyed were in favor of the Parks and Recreation Department investigating options to improve fishing in the Upper Pond.

Another large area of interest is Marshfield's trail system. 83% of those surveyed said they currently used the city bicycle and pedestrian trails to bike, walk, or run. The idea of placing exercise equipment along trails was less popular- 54% of responding individuals were not interested in this option. The top three most favored improvements in order of interest are: Construction of the Wildwood-McMillan Connector Trail (4.8 average ranking), Extension of the bicycle/pedestrian trail on Adler Road from Sycamore Ave to Weber Park (3.79), Completion of the Hewitt-Marshfield Connector Trail (3.63).

City athletics are quite popular and maintaining current facilities is becoming a priority. The top five most desired athletic improvements are: renovating Braem Park tennis courts with new surfacing and lights (4.92 average ranking), adding lights to one or both G.P. Olson youth baseball diamonds (4.77), adding lights to A.J. Reeths baseball

diamond (4.26), partnering with the school district or another organization to create a new artificial turf multipurpose field within Marshfield (4.05), and renovating the ball diamond at Braem Park with new infield, lighting, and scoreboard (3.95).

Additional comment space was provided and 152 people provided a large range of comments. Some of the suggestions included: providing pickle ball opportunities, porta-potties, a more varied terrain dog park, new programs to existing activities, various trail connections not listed above, indoor tennis, a Wildwood Park map, upgrading park playgrounds, omitting the bear park and using the money for a pool, more garbage cans and recycling bins, and much more. The full list of comments can be found in Appendix B.

Youth Surveys

The Parks and Recreation Department conducted an Elementary School survey as well as an online Teen survey, also in April.

Teen Survey

The teen survey encompassed Columbus Catholic Middle and High Schools (grades 6-12), Marshfield Middle School (grades 7-8), and Marshfield High School (grades 9-12). The survey was comprised of thirteen questions and 236 responses were received.

24% of the teenagers surveyed are very familiar and 63% are somewhat familiar with the programs and facilities Marshfield Parks and Recreation Department offer to the community. 14% have never heard of the department.

When asked how often in the last year they have used city provided parks, facilities, or programs 17% indicated 100+ times, 15% indicated 50-99 times, 28% indicated 25-49 times, 30% indicated 5-24 times, and 11% indicated less than 5 times.

Top ten activities by interest level are as follows: (1) Hanging out with friends, (2) Swimming, (3) Movies, (4) Trips (Great America, Paintball, etc.), (5) Dodgeball, (6) Music Events, (7) Bowling, (8) use of Trail System, (9) photography, (10) video games.

When looking for information about current activities, teens tend to look online first (53%), then their personal friend network (31%). Printed media (9%) and other (7%) brought up the rear.

Over 69% of the teens surveyed use the city trail system to bicycle or run and unlike the adults most of them (65%) would use outdoor exercise equipment if placed along a trail.

An overwhelming majority (80%) of teens support the construction of a new city pool, whether partnering with the YMCA or not.

Elementary Survey

Teachers at Washington, Lincoln and Grant elementary schools presented a survey to approximately 150 of students. The following is a summary of the results:

The top five facilities most used by elementary aged residents are: Wildwood Zoo (21%), Hefko Swimming Pool (17%), Biking/Walking Trails (17%), Pickle Pond Ice Rink (9%), Soccer Fields (9%).

Most popular programs included: Swimming at Hefko Pool (32%), Ice Skating (21%), Wild Wednesday Zoo Programs (17%), Baseball (14%), and Trick-or-Treating in the Zoo (9%). Interest is high in: Zookeeper for a Day (27%), Ping Pong (22%), Dodge ball (21%), Photography (15%), and Bowling (9%).

Wildwood Park (34%) and Griese Park (29%) are the favorite parks by a large margin among the elementary age students surveyed. Other favorites are: Hamus Nature Preserve and Recreation Area (9%), Pickle Pond Park (7%), Steve J. Miller Recreation Area (7%), Grant Mini Park (5%), and Weber Park (4%).

Only half the students favored a splash pad for replacing Hefko Pool.

The Badger (57%) was a clear favorite among North American mammal nominations for Wildwood Zoo exhibits. Runners up included: Grizzly Bear (19%), Porcupine (15%), and Big Horn Sheep (9%). Fish, Hedgehogs, Moose, Bats, and Snakes were honorable mentions.

For more information and the rest of the questions and comments, please see appendix B.

Additional Feedback

Meetings were also conducted with the Park and Recreation Maintenance Staff and Park and Recreation Administration Staff on March 13, 2014 to get their perspective and hands on knowledge of park use and needs. In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department received numerous suggestions by email and telephone contact.

All of the above tools were used to compile a complete record of public feedback that was used to identify citizen concerns and capital improvements.

Recreation Standards

Recreation standards are another method to determine a community's recreation needs. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has developed standards for both public open space and actual facilities.

Suggested Outdoor Recreation Facility Development standards are provided in the appendix section of this manual. These standards were reviewed during the development of the need assessment. The standards are based on a park service area approach. A concern with this method is that it does not take into account user preferences and physical barriers between actual park locations. Therefore, these standards should be used to review specific identified needs along with public input to assist in prioritizing and justifying real needs for the community.