

LAST COUNTY IN THE WOODS: THE YOUTH COMMISSION STUDY ON PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

Clark County Youth Commission 2010-2011



*Presented to the Clark County Board of County
Commissioners
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Introduction

Representing the voice of the youth and the future of Clark County, the Clark County Youth Commission presents the following report including the collection of data, analysis, and recommendations to the Clark County Board of County Commissioners regarding a parks and recreation public policy. Our hope is that the ideas we recommend will benefit and increase the usage of Clark County's parks as well as provide insight in to budget prioritization. We feel the issue of park use among citizens and youth in particular is a topic worth investigating.

In the fall of 2010 we received this year's assignment and got to work straight away. We met with the county administrator, Bill Baron, the Public Works director, Pete Capell, and Vancouver –Clark Parks and Recreation director, Pete Mayor. After we met with these key figures, and being on an accelerated schedule, we found ourselves immediately beginning our research. Over the next months we would conduct surveys and focus groups around the county, research through books, articles and other sources, interview various county representatives and spend hours at retreats developing our data. After countless hours of research and analysis we have formulated the following recommendations with hopes of benefiting parks and recreation as well as the county as a whole.

Academic Research

What is a park?

A park is any open or undeveloped land specifically for public use, where one can connect to nature, be engaged in their community and just relax. A park truly means something different to every individual, whether it is a place for serenity and calm or even a game of basketball with your friends.

Do parks restrict you from nature? Should the rules be different?

Restriction from nature varies from park to park. Though some parks consist largely of concrete and bark dust, others contain large expanses of natural environments. Such a natural habitat encourages creativity and innovation as well as promotes environmental education among youth. Rules and regulations are a necessity and should be implemented to ensure the safety of park users.

Source #1: *Economic Benefit of Parks and Open Space*, by the Trust for Public Land

Summary: Throughout this article the importance of greenbelts is made evident. A greenbelt has the ability to increase the worth of land by huge amounts. In Salem, Oregon the value of land just 1000 feet closer to greenbelts was found to be \$1200 more per acre. Similarly, in San Francisco properties near Golden Gate Park have values nearly twice that of other land, growing from \$500 million to almost \$1 billion. Such open space not only increases property values, but supports local economies through tourist attraction and the encouragement of outdoor recreation.

Recommendation: In hopes of enhancing the city as a whole, greenbelts need to be spread throughout the entire county. Greenbelts should be distributed as evenly as possible amongst communities to better distribute the wealth of our area. To gain the support of local business owners, address the multiple benefits of the nearby greenbelts. Such support will be both financially and encouragingly beneficial. Providing snack shops at highly frequented parks, such as Leveritch or Hazel Dell Park, during the summer months will also attract youth and families and/or encourage them to stay there longer. Not only does this get people outdoors, it also provides an employment opportunity. We recommend they sell only healthy snack options and beverages because this will reinforce a healthy lifestyle.

Source #2: *“I Love Outdoor Play Because...”* by Sue Atkins; loveoutdoorplay.net, 2011

Summary: It has been proven that just being outdoors benefits children in many ways. Through Atkins’ article we learn that outdoor play helps children’s motor skills, dexterity, physical stamina, and their balance. Outdoor play not only enhances children physically, but alerts children of their own capabilities, allowing them to experiment, explore and imagine. Through direct interaction with nature children also find themselves learning more and behaving more attentively in classes.

Recommendation: We believe the county needs to promote alternative education techniques in schools. By providing outdoor lessons and other mediums for hands on natural experimentation, students learn about their surroundings and therefore improve their overall performance. Park partnerships with neighboring schools enhance the use of parks, bringing more children outside.

Source #3: *Research Paper: The Benefits of Playgrounds for Children aged 0-5,* Commissioned by the Shasta Children and Families First Commission

Summary: The Shasta and Families First Commission article taught us about the importance play has on brain development in a child’s life. By allowing children to roam and “free play” without organized structure, natural instincts take over in the exploration process. This is important because through these adventures, they learn interaction, emotional, cultural, and language skills—all vital tools in later life. The motor skills gained from “free play” are also a key element in their health and physical fitness later on as adults.

Recommendation: Parks should be very appealing to the youth because of the many benefits for children. Large open spaces and colorful play structures can spark their imagination through “free play”—unorganized games and exploration. The children can make up their own stories and scenarios, which also leads to more interaction, helping the social development of these children as well as keeping them thinking.

Source #4: *Reclaiming the Outdoors,* by Luke Haokip

Summary: Children of this generation are often characterized by a “fear” of nature. Spending large amounts of time indoors and with electronic gadgets, environmental concerns are far from their minds. In order to provide children with knowledge of nature through positive experiences, Haokip encourages Outdoor Education programs. Through such education children will develop self confidence and provide challenges through nature.

Recommendation: We recommend the county offer outdoor school programs and make a campaign to get outside and play. By holding public events in our county parks we can

promote community awareness by bringing the people together for community fun, and providing a safe environment for children to play, rather than spending copious amounts of time in front of a screen.

Source #5: *People's perception of parks and recreation* Dec 2004, Joseph A. Panza and Robert E. Cipriano, Southern Connecticut State University

Summary: The more people know about the various benefits of parks, the more willing they are to pay taxes for such a purpose. The article argues that parks would benefit from discovering the opinions of active park users. Through the monitoring of “customers” perceptions and willingness to support the parks one can create policies which maximize the public’s support.

Recommendation: We recommend the county publicizes the benefits parks provide, such as health, educational, and economic. Campaigns for parks including pamphlets, posters, and other educational material would be very beneficial for citizens. By informing tax payers of the positive things parks provide, they will be more willing to support them.

Source #6: From MRSC.org (Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington)

Summary: Regular reviews need to be constructed regarding local parks. In order to enhance developments and public participation every couple of years such reviews should be formulated from both county and regional parks under our jurisdiction, receiving the maximal amount of grants, loans, and financial guarantees.

Recommendation: We recommend that in order to fulfill the growth management acts, every county and city should create an extensive review of their district’s parks plan and development. Review should include detailed information regarding progress and public participation throughout the park. Between each seven year period, smaller less detailed reports should be included providing information addressing yearly concerns and improvement. To achieve maximum comprehension, the reviews should be written in fairly simplistic terminology.

Source #7: Health Policy Research Brief, March 2007

Summary: Children all across the country are being found to get much less than recommended physical activity, a fairly large quantity also get none. Such problems often arise within teens who have limited access to local parks, as well as teenagers from low income neighborhoods.

Recommendation:

Source #8: Wikipedia

Summary: The Washington Growth Management Act is used to protect areas of natural resource lands, as well as set aside areas for urban growth. The planning and executing

these important areas is done so through investments and “development regulations.”

Recommendation: We recommend that Clark County should continue to adhere to the standards of the Washington Growth Management Act. Such regulation will provide protection to our county’s natural environments from threatening unnatural growth and harmful human contact.

Source #9: *News release from local government, Jan 11 2011*

Summary: A budget of \$9.4 million for 2011-2012 was approved by the Greater Clark parks District. 60 percent of this will be used for development of parks in “underserved areas,” and the 40 percent that remains will be allocated for maintenance. An additional \$3.1 million, similar to 2010’s spending, will be collected from a property tax levy; these funds will be used for maintenance, operation, and construction of parks.

Recommendation: A large number of parks in our county are not up to ADA standards. In order to meet the guidelines and ensure the safety of park users we recommend allocating more funds towards park maintenance rather than the construction of new parks. We also believe that the property tax levy should be included in maintenance, therefore contributing more money for maintenance rather than development.

Source #10: The Columbian, January 2011

Summary: The Blue Ribbon Commission will make recommendations Feb. 2011 in regards to the funding of parks and open spaces. Some ideas to generate income include usage fees for heavily used parks such as dog parks, sports fields. In order to save money, volunteers and mutual resources are being considered as well.

Recommendation: We believe that by enforcing fines rather than fees, and using student volunteers with educational incentives, funds can be allocated towards other revenues regarding parks. Paying a fee to enter a park creates a barrier between the benefits and the citizens of communities. A compromise that generates some income and still allows for maximum usage is charging for parking, not walk-ins or bikers.

Source #11: Notes from Richard Louv’s book “Last Child in the Woods” Part 1

Summary: Societal norms have shifted and parents are now weary when it comes to letting their children play outdoors. The idea that “outdoor play” now means sport teams rather than exploration in the outdoors is a sign of this cultural shift. The outcome measures lie in the increasing obesity rates.

Recommendation: Park play should be less restricted, and encourage children to pay outdoors and use their imagination. Through the “cars effect” children will gradually learn more and more ways to enjoy themselves outside. Promote the safety of playing outdoors, contrary to the frequently negative comments heard.

Field Trip

On an early, frigid morning, the Youth Commission, led by Pete Mayer and Jane Kleiner, embarked on a journey to learn as much about Vancouver parks as possible in a few hours. Patiently, Pete and Jane showed the Youth Commission multiple parks and explained them, in order for the Youth Commissioners to get a better understanding of the way our parks function.

Starting at Marshall Community Park, we examined the Chelsea Anderson playground, named after a young girl who had passed several years ago. We learned Marshall Park is extremely family-friendly often more accessible than Esther Short Park. Marshall is also very busy in the summer and has a partnership with about 15 schools.

The next stop was Carter Park, a lovely neighborhood park with a lot of integrity. Though it has 40 years of history and serves the neighborhood well, some drawbacks to the park include not being ADA compliant, not having enough monetary resources to update the playground equipment, and limited funds in general, making it difficult to maintain. Some questions raised at this park included the “fairness” of the community placing in a nice fence. How can lower income communities maintain their parks in an effective way like the Carter neighborhood? The Youth Commission did some brainstorming and thought of ideas such as community clean-up days featuring potlucks and community fun to increase involvement.



Leverich Park



The next stop on our trip was Leverich Park, a very popular park named after the Leverich family who donated the land to parks and recreation many years ago. Though it is one of the oldest parks, Leverich offers many modern resources, including the popular sport of disc-golf. After Steve Carson, an avid disc-golfer proposed the idea of having this game available in Vancouver, the city told him he could set it up in Leverich Park, where it now provides safety (because people are constantly in the park playing) and popularity of the park and surrounding area during tournaments. A major problem in Leverich Park is that of the homeless population. Though many stay at the park simply for shelter, some destroy facilities such as the restroom. This costs the city several thousand dollars to fix, like when the copper wire was stripped from the bathroom. Another issue is safety. Leverich Park is heavily shrubbed and many people do not feel very safe at this park because it is not visible from the main roads. All in all, Leverich Park is a park with rich history and a lot of variety in entertainment.

Hazel Dell Park



Hazel Dell park being the next stop on our trip, we learned about some of the challenges one of the oldest community parks faces. Hazel Dell Park is very heavily used, but unfortunately not very heavily funded. Lack of monetary resources makes Hazel Dell Park non-ADA compliant, not maintained well enough, and has limited resources to the number of people it serves. A plan for the park mentioned, it to drastically increase entertainment opportunities by providing 80 plots of community garden space, creating a community center, and classes for fitness, etc. Hazel Dell Park is recognized as a very

successful park that could use a little help.

Tenny Creek Park



On to Tenny Creek Park, a very young park that's used quite often. Featuring a skate spot, picnic opportunities, and some trees, but no creek despite the name, Tenny Creek Park is use often by the neighborhood. Unlike some other parks, all six acres of Tenny Creek Park is ADA compliant.

Klineline



A very popular park for swimming and fun, Klineline Park was visited next. the favorite thing the Youth Commission encounter was the Bird Fish, a made-up name for a cute bird that waited around until it could snag some fish. That was the greatest thing about this park - the extensive amount of wildlife present. With updated benches, grills, and signs, Klineline park remains a popular venue for families during the summertime, as well as multiple youth.

Jack Fazio Park



Jack Fazio Park is a neighborhood park that is a year old and five acres large. Neighbors love it, but didn't want sport games to be played in it, so teams go across the street to the church that loans its field to the cause. This raised an interesting question, Is this a violation of church and state? Though the community is merely using the field, some think using church property is questionable.

Vancouver Lake Park



Our very last park, Vancouver Lake, was one of our favorites. The 200 acres provide practice area for the Vancouver Lake Rowing Club, and a lot of water fun for citizens. Many people exercise frequently here, and REI even holds events at the lake to test out equipment for citizens! Though without lifeguards, the beach front is quite beautiful with buoys to indicate safe swimming areas. A wetland wonderland, Vancouver Lake is a wonderful asset to the community.

Jorgenson Park



One park we did not get a chance to visit during the field trip was Jorgenson Park. This park is a particularly interesting one because of the history that surrounds it. When the idea of a park was being brainstormed, neighbors resisted the idea of a developed park that would ruin the natural appeal they had grown to love. Rather than go against the neighborhood, a plan was brought about that included both the natural elements as well as playground equipment. The final product intertwined both aspects. For example, the marshes were kept safe by installing a bridge, and the playground was situated in a way that enhanced the surrounding natural features. This compromise was one of the highlights of our findings because the county and neighborhoods were able to work together in a positive manner.

This field trip showed us the many faces of the Vancouver Parks and recreation system. Pete and Jane showed the Youth Commission a side of parks we would have otherwise never seen.

Focus Groups

In order to broaden our youth perspective, we held focus groups at three schools in the county. After writing a script and scheduling times, a set of facilitators went to Ridgefield and Hockinson High Schools, as well as Hockinson Middle School. During these focus groups, we hosted classroom discussions in which the opinions and perspectives on the parks the students frequented were explored. From these, we developed this set of recommendations.

Construct more sports areas in newly developed parks, as well as update existing sports areas. In order to encourage organized activities among youth, more sports areas in newly developed parks should be constructed--as well as the updating of existing sports areas. One way to lower costs would be to provide basic structural necessities, for example provide the volleyball poles but require users to bring their own nets.

We believe that the highly frequented parks that do not have water features should include seasonal water features such as a fountain. Based on the response gathered from focus groups, highly frequented parks that do not have water features should include seasonal water features such as fountains. Due to the success of Klineline and Esther Short, we believe water features will increase the number of people who frequent parks during the summer season.

In order to encourage activity at parks, drinking fountains should be included more often. A large number of youth expressed interest in increased amounts of drinking fountains in local parks. Hydration is essential amongst active children, and the access to facilities such as drinking fountains will encourage activity at parks.

To account for the varying ages which frequent parks, provided play equipment needs to be accessible for children of all ages. Separate play structures for toddlers and younger children can enhance brain development and provide assurance for parents of the youngsters. Diversity in equipment can foster interaction as well as expand a child's imagination. Tire swings, teeter totters and merry-go-rounds are prime examples of alternative play equipment.

We should see what parks are lacking in bike racks and rectify those parks. In order to increase park accessibility to all community members, bike rack should be included in parks which find themselves with fewer racks. For citizens who choose other forms of transportation or live further away, bus stops should be created within a reasonable walking distance from the park.

In order to increase the visitation of adults in local parks, gazebos should be

included to enhance the appearance and functionality. Such gazebos can also be used for profit through private enterprises which rent the facility. Gardens might also increase the likelihood of adult visitation. Also, to accommodate older citizens who would like to use trails, benches should be placed strategically around the park trails.

To insure that disabled and handicapped park goers have equal accessibility to picnic tables, pathways need to be constructed leading to and from the tables. Such improvements will bring parks up to ADA standards and make the parks more family friendly.

Although the academic research clearly shows that parks are essential for a healthy community those in our focus groups believed otherwise therefore we should promote the health benefits. Through the use of pamphlets and educational promotions such as assemblies and partnerships with after school programs, youth will be alerted of the various benefits of parks and nature.

In order to ensure the safety and security of parks, rules should be enforced more often and efficiently. This will allow children to partake in outdoor activities while still remaining in a safe environment, reassuring both children and parents.

Because of the constant precipitation that Clark County receives, park usage is minimal during rainier seasons. Therefore, by implementing more undercover areas, perhaps seasonally, park usage will be maximized. With quite a bit of precipitation year round fields often become soggy with rain water. In order to permit outdoor sports activities year round field irrigation should be improved.

To reassure the public of their safety while attending parks, it needs to be made clear that community service maintenance crews and other workers are not dangerous felons, and often merely charged with minor misdemeanors. They are not to be feared or criticized, as they are simply repaying their debt to society and helping the community as they do so.

In order to enhance the aesthetic appearance of parks and trails, as well as overall safety, running trails and paved areas within parks need to be well maintained and repaired. Pot holes can become a hazard and need to be addressed as soon as possible. In order to keep parks as clean as possible and encourage park users to clean up after themselves, garbage cans and recycling bins should be more numerous and accessible. To increase community involvement and park cleanliness neighborhoods should hold regular park clean up days, in which community members participate in picking up litter and other tasks around the park. To enhance cleanliness on park play structures hand

sanitizers should be provided.

To increase revenue and park attendance, organized events should be held by the public. By decreasing the initial cost of the rentals, and implementing a fine if maintenance is required, people will be able to more easily hold organized events increasing more revenue and usage.

Due to the fairly rural location of all of our focus group participants, the following considerations have been taken into effect, though may not contribute to the county as a whole:

Fees should be charged for parking at regional parks, while walk-ins and bikers can enter for free. Focus groups found that people were willing to pay more for more attractions; however they didn't specify which type of park they were referring to. Many of the parks which our focus group participants attend must be reached by vehicle.

Park to home distances varies by region. All of our focus groups were conducted in considerably more rural areas where residents live on more special acreage, and less parks within walking distance. Most agreed that they would attend parks if they were within walking distance from their homes.

Youth Surveys

We created a 16 question survey to be handed out among youth in the community. After distributing the questionnaire to numerous schools we received feedback from King's Way Christian, CAM High school, Hockinson Middle School, and Union High School. The surveys included multiple choice and free response questions in hope of determining the opinions of youth around Clark County. Questions ranged from how often you frequent parks to improvements one would hope to see. After seeing a variety of answer we formulated our recommendations to include the common voice of youth.

Something to take into consideration while analyzing survey information is that more than 70% of all surveys collected were from Union High School, potentially skewing our data. Any recommendations formulated from the surveys were done so after considerable scrutiny and understanding of the situation.

Offer more yearly regional park passes. Based off of the surveys and information the Youth Commission learned during the parks field trip led by Pete Mayer and Jane Kleiner, Vancouver-Clark park needs to offer more yearly regional park passes. Mayer and Kleiner said regional park passes were such a success that they ran out early on. This, our surveys and our focus groups show people are willing to pay money for parks which offer more than the typical neighborhood park such as swing sets and play equipment.

54 of the surveys recommended that parks be open later. Because of this, Clark County should experiment with a limited number of highly frequented parks. In order to fulfill the requests for a park which stays open later, a sample of a few parks should be created in which their hours are extended. Observations should be made regarding the extended hours of usage and based off of such observations rules should be implemented pertaining to the hours which all parks are open year round.

Because the noon to 8 p.m. is a time of heavy trafficking of our surveyed youth, patrol should be making rounds between these hours, as well as activities should be held between these hours during the summer (3 to 8 during the school year and adjust to weather and season) Through the responses we received to our surveys, it has been discovered that the greatest amount of park activity occurs between noon and 8 p.m. To assure safety to all residents during these hours patrol should be increased. Similarly, activities should also be held between these hours in order to obtain the maximum level of involvement. During various seasons, hours may be slightly adjusted.

Slides should be widened and lengthened for older and larger children. In order to

accommodate children of all sizes, slides need to be widened. For older children's interest, slides should also be lengthened.

We feel that parking is often limited at Clark County parks therefore more spaces should be allocated for vehicles. Parking is often limited at parks throughout Clark County, ranging from regional parks, to neighborhood parks as well. Therefore, more spaces should be allocated for vehicles creating more accessibility to parks.

Much of the public is unaware of how to report graffiti. In order to remove vandalism as swiftly as possible signs should be created explaining the proper technique to alert maintenance crews. As we learned on the field trip with Pete Mayer and Jane Kleiner it is the counties goal to have all vandalism and graffiti cleaned up within 24 hours of its occurrence. By making it easy to report, dealing with such incidences will become a quick and simple task.

More skate spots should be built for younger children just learning how to skate. There should also be a training section with ramps of various sizes for skaters of different levels. Creating such an environment will enhance children's motor skills and encourage interactions between community members.

Last Child in the Woods Book Club

At the recommendation of Bill Barron, a number of Youth Commissioners read Richard Louv's award winning book, *The Last Child in the Woods*. An extremely informational novel, we were able to gain the research of numerous studies and scientists, as well as countless examples of how our world is quickly moving indoors. It was Louv's key point that children are experiencing the harmful effects of "nature deficit disorder," spending more and more time indoors, hooked up to electronic screens or cellular devices. He fears for the child who never gets to go camping, or hiking in the woods, the child who never experiences nature or the wonders of the great outdoors.

Not only does Louv provide example after example of the ways nature, or a lack of, is changing children's lives, but he shows multiple benefits to getting some fresh air. Among other assertions, he proves that children not only have better imaginations when outdoors, but also improved motor skills, enhanced interactions with their environments, and a better attentiveness when trying to learn in the classroom as well.

Louv's book eliminates all excuses as to why so much time is now being spent indoors. He is easily able to outweigh the negative aspects of nature with the numerous advantages to finding time for a more natural habitat. Through reading such an interesting resource, we were able to expand our own horizons regarding nature and its effects on children today. *Last Child in the Woods* contributed greatly to the overall capacity of our report and inspired us to work that much harder on our task.

My Perfect Park

The majority of the youth commission believes there should be more community gardens that include fruits and vegetables as well as flowers.

Among the other information we learned on the parks field trip, the idea of community gardens was discussed. Currently there are very few gardens around Clark County which are openly shared by neighbors, however where gardens were available all land was quickly filled and the benefits could be seen in many ways. Not only do the gardeners reap benefits from their plants and being outdoors, but in some communities the wealth was shared and families in need were given a share of the crops output. With such a positive effect resulting from a simple garden, the public is demanding more. We recommend that more land be allocated for shared gardens throughout the community. Some believe parks should be more activity based and include facilities for different activities such as horseback riding.

A park has different values to each user. Though some may enjoy the serenity and simplicity of more natural parks, many have expressed interest in a more activity based park. It has been recommended that parks include various opportunities such as horseback riding trails, and boating if water is available, among others. Though the inclusion of such activities may increase park use overall, it also may introduce new liabilities to the park as well.

In order to be more environmentally friendly, solar powered lights should be included. These lights can be charged in the sunlight, preserving energy.

Both within the Youth Commission and the communities we received feedback from, there was strong belief that parks need to be open later. Unfortunately, people also believe that parks can become dangerous and frightening after dark. In order to alleviate fear as well as remain environmentally friendly we recommend that solar powered lights be installed in parks. Though perhaps expensive to install, their extended use over time will outweigh their initial cost. Absorbing light during the day, the solar powered lights would provide assurance and security to park users after dark.

We believe there should be rock paths because of its proven therapeutic effects. To encourage more physical activity, we believe there should be stationary exercise equipment and suggested usage for public use. In current economic times, fewer people are able to afford the luxury of gym memberships and find themselves heading outdoors for exercise. While parks and trails offer excellent running paths, we recommend that exercise be encouraged through the inclusion of various workout recommendations along popular trails. Perhaps every mile or so, a sign should be posted suggesting exercises which will complement the cardio of running. It might also be beneficial to include

simple stationary equipment to enhance the overall workout. For example, bars and stools may be constructed for arm and leg workouts.

General Recommendations

The county should prioritize the maintenance of existing parks before constructing new parks. Since the Vancouver Parks and Recreation system is seeing some tough times in regards to funding, the most important thing should be maintaining and preserving the parks that are in use most often. Many citizens use parks frequently and taking our wonderful parks system away from them could prove to be quite detrimental. Before new parks can be built, existing parks must first be brought up to ADA standards.

Park development should be determined through need, as well as take into consideration the population in the surrounding area. First and foremost, areas which are currently lacking in the number of parks within the region need to be addressed. Also while constructing parks, the local community needs to be involved. Ultimately the park is for them, so their perspective needs to be taken into consideration. A prime example of this successful interaction between park developers and the neighborhood can be seen in Jack Fazio Park, a neighborhood park which was firmly against having sports played in their small open field. To compensate both the community and the potential athletes, an alternative field was found to host sports events.

Within our county's parks clarification is needed as to the type of park you are in, as well as the hours between which the park is open. The public is often unaware whether they are in a community park, regional park, or some other sort of land while using parks. At the same time, these users are also often clueless of the parks operation hours. Signs should be posted clarifying both of the matters previously discussed to prevent any potential confusion.

A specific park building code should be enacted to enable equal quality across all socioeconomic neighborhoods. Every child deserves a park up to standards, regardless of their socioeconomic status. A park building code would require all parks to be enhanced at an equal level, allowing the lower income neighborhoods to receive just as much maintenance and care at their parks than at the wealthier neighborhoods across town.

Parks need to be made accessible to all citizens. ADA regulations require that parks contain pathways and easy accessibility to parks, however many of our counties parklands have been unable to attain such standards. In order to meet the needs of all community members, ADA standards need to be met, making parks a feasible option for the handicapped as well as all other citizens.

The county should develop an “app” for finding the perfect park. “Is there an app for that?” Nowadays, applications on smart phones are used for virtually everything. Either continuing with the current “NatureFind” application or creating one specifically for Vancouver-Clark parks will make it easier for those with smart phones and who are interested in going to a park, more willing to go because with a few entries, it would make it easy for them to find out where the nearest park that suits their needs are. Is there a Frisbee Golf park nearby? Is there a park with a Merry Go Round within walking distance from my current location? Is there a park near me where a patrol is going around every hour or so? If a smart phone user can check a few boxes of the things they need from a park they want to visit, it would make it easier than having to Google it, which takes more effort and is discouraging.

Outdoor school and summer camps should be made more affordable for low income families. Such examples of outdoor education are essential in the development of a healthy child. Children need to experience nature first hand, but often cannot due to financial barriers. If the county were able to partner with organizations to provide scholarships to lower income families, the entire county would be better off from the child’s environmental education.

Adopt-a-park could be extremely successful, similarly to adopting a highway. There is not one park in the county which could not benefit from increased maintenance. Through the adopt-a-park program clubs, organizations, or even families would be able to work directly in the park which they care about, helping to pick up litter, clean up the area, and overall improve their local park. Such a program would not only enhance the park, but could also save parks and recreation the resources which might have been used on the park

Utilize the abundant number of potential student volunteers to park and recreation’s advantage. There are thousands of teenagers within Clark County, many of which already enjoy being outdoors. Whether students volunteer themselves, or have ulterior motives such as school credit, their help should be welcomed. Though young and

perhaps inexperienced, they can do wonders to enhance the park by cleaning up trash, helping educate younger children, or some other useful tasks.

Create, a new parks impact fee, or updated the current one, that would be used to maintain existing parks rather than create many new parks. The current parks impact fee is beneficial when it comes to finding a revenue for creating parks. However, what good is a park to a community if it is poorly maintained? Unclean and unsafe parks detract people from visiting them. If Clark County were to propose a new parks impact fee that would be used to maintain parks, the county would have a valuable source of revenue for keeping parks safe, clean and well-maintained and will attract more visitors to parks. These park impact fees should be collected in the same manner as the existing park impact fees.

Downgrade parks in senior citizen neighborhoods, and reuse the equipment in less well off neighborhood parks. Elderly have much less use for the play equipment than a park near a lower income elementary school which may not be able to afford new play structures otherwise. In similar parks which are less frequented by young children, recycle the underused play equipment from one park to another where it will be used. Turn the original park into a more natural space.

Identify where people's money is being used, advertising the changes and improvements being made. People will be much more willing to pay if they know that their money is being put to good use, especially when the advantages are proven to positively affect their own community.

Install security cameras at high traffic areas in an attempt to reduce the crime in parks where it is an issue. It may also be beneficial to increase police patrol around low income, high crime areas to encourage parents of their child's safety, helping to disprove myths of kidnapping and calming fearful parent nerves.

Make parks more accessible by having nearby bus routes. For those who prefer a further park than their local neighborhood, nearby bus routes are essential for accessing other parks within the community. An increased number of bike racks would also be welcomed for the park users who select to ride to the park.

Educate youth about nature by labeling plants and flowers in parks. Provide signs which identify different types of insects and animals one might see and information about each, encouraging children and adults alike to engage their brain while seeking out the

wildlife all around them.

Build community centers at or in the vicinity of parks which are family friendly. In order to attract more families and young people to visit the park, having community centers near to local park-lands will increase the safety, awareness and overall usage of the park as a whole.

Designate areas of the county which are to exclusively be used for parks. No residential or commercial buildings should be permitted on these lands to ensure that the county maintains an adequate amount of natural environment for the growing population of our county's future.

Keep bathrooms available throughout park hours and improve the frequency of maintenance. Restrooms are often one of the first improvements we hear from community members regarding parks. We understand that it can be costly to maintain a bathroom year round, but in order to keep people attending parks a sanitary bathroom is a must. If unable or unreasonable to keep a facility open year round, restrooms could then be open at all times during peak park usage and maintenance increased during such times as well.

Conclusion

We as the Clark County Youth Commission find this report to be an honest and accurate representation of our fellow Clark County youth regarding parks and recreation. All recommendations were formed entirely on our research and community outreach. As individuals, we remain as objective as possible, voicing our opinion when needed but avoiding bias at all costs.

Our feedback, through surveys and focus groups showed quite a bit of variation in responses, yet every voice was considered. We recognize that not all opinions are able to be expressed throughout our direct recommendations, however each perspective was respectfully acknowledged and included in some way, whether through discussion or its acknowledgment within the report.

The various benefits of parks throughout our county have become apparent to us, as we have combed our way through heaps of research. After days of collecting data, followed by countless hours of comprehensive analysis we are pleased with the results, as depicted within this report. On behalf of our county's youth, we would like to thank the Board of Commissioners for placing such consideration into the opinions of the young people of our area. The Clark County Youth Commission also extends its greatest appreciations to the Board of Commissioners for the opportunity to become so involved in our community and the progress which is occurring. We are privileged to be entrusted with such influence and have done our best to fittingly and accurately represent our county. We hope that our recommendations can be found advantageous to you and we thank you for your time and commitment.

Appendix

- Focus Group Scripts
- Youth Survey
- Field Trip Itinerary