

**IRMO CHAPIN RECREATION COMMISSION
STRATEGIC PLANNING
TASK FORCE MEETING**

Saluda Shoals Park - River Center

February 9, 2009

6:00pm

Task Force Members Attending: J.B. Brown, Julia Lee, Jimmy Addison, Barbara Willm, Lynn Willis, Stan Shealy, Nickie Dickson, Gary Reinhart, Lee Parker, George Duke, Danny Brabham, David Edwards, John Holladay, John Taylor, Glenn King, Cynthia Robinson, Byron Roberts

Task Force Members Unable to Attend: Steve Gantt, David Wright

Non-Members Attending: Irene Tyson, Elizabeth Taylor, Eve Mittendorf, Jay Downs, Jack Terrell, Jim Wellman, Ashley Smith

At 6:00pm Elizabeth Taylor welcomed guests and introduced Jack Terrell, Program Focus Group leader and Jay Downs, Facilities Focus Group leader.

Jack Terrell reviewed the purpose, program inventory and conclusion of the program focus group. The conclusion included identifying future programming needs for an aging population and a diverse population. In addition, the conclusion included the importance of accessibility to parks and recreation for everyone. The focus group also identified 26 different groups/organizations in the community providing the same type of services.

Jay Downs presented the purpose, objectives and conclusion of the facilities focus group. Mr. Downs communicated that the facilities focus group completed an inventory of existing facilities, identified condition and improvement recommendations of existing facilities, developed a level of standards criteria and identified future facility needs. The benchmark level of standards was from an Aiken master plan that included seven similar agencies throughout the state of South Carolina. The focus group then identified an ICRC standard by comparing each facility inventory line item and determining if the facility should exceed or meet the benchmark standard or remain below the benchmark. In addition, the focus group members examined existing facilities and recommended future improvement needs over the next five or ten years. Last, a usage and capacity level report was reviewed by the focus group and identified facilities near or full capacity.

Irene Tyson reviewed the responsibilities of the task force and encouraged open dialogue, opinions and experiences. Ms. Tyson requested review and approval of the January 26, 2009 minutes. A motion to approve was made by Jimmy Addison. Seconded by Gary Reinhart. Vote taken. Motion approved.

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT) – Irene Tyson

The following is a summary of the discussion during the February 9, 2009 Task Force Meeting. The discussion focused on eight primary issues: 1) Programs vs. Activities, 2) Facilities, 3) Serving Out-of-District Residents, 4) Accessibility, 5) Different Market Areas, 6) Diverse Park Opportunities, 7) the Former BC Components Property, and 8) Funding. This report provides a summary of each issue with documented Task Force comments related to the issue. Where applicable, Task Force assignments are noted.

❖ PROGRAMS VS. ACTIVITIES

There was consensus that the Task Force should focus more on programs rather than determining specific activities over the next ten years. In order to forecast future programs, the program needs of each user group should be defined. The user groups were categorized as seniors, families, youth, and ethnic minorities. There was very good discussion about whether low income residents should be

considered a separate user group. The consensus was that low-income residents, regardless of their demographic group (seniors, families, youth, ethnic minorities), should have access to all programs and facilities. Programs should not be developed just for low-income residents.

Identifying ethnic minorities as a separate user group is debatable. There was recognition that some ethnic groups enjoy sports that are not common to the majority of district residents, such as Indians playing cricket. However, cricket is a specific activity. If activities are provided for each ethnic group within the district, this could overwhelm ICRC staff with research, staffing and administration. Furthermore, ethnic minority groups have seniors, families and youth. What is most important is that each age group, regardless of income level or ethnicity, has programs that address their needs and the facilities to support the programs.

Task Force Comments

- *Need more programs for seniors – particularly in regards to the population projections.*
- *Youth needs will grow with more young families moving into the district. There will be continued growth in Richland County. How will this impact ICRC facilities and programs?*
- *Although the COG population projections state that seniors will be the majority in the Chapin over the next 20 years, many believe that younger, median income families will be the majority. They will have lower housing values.*
- *Is the activity as important as the program?*
- *Define the needs of different population groups such as seniors, Hispanics, low income, youth, etc. Hard to plan activities for each group without knowing what percentage of each group is using and what their needs are. For example, Indian residents use the ICRC fields for playing cricket. Does this mean the ICRC needs to provide cricket as an activity?*
- *The ICRC should think more globally – have programs that appeal to diverse groups. Focus of the Task Force should be on programs rather than specific activities.*
- *Can the ICRC users be divided into four groups: 1) seniors, 2) youth, 3) diverse ethnic groups, and 4) low income? Can activities be provided that address each of these groups? Discussion followed about whether or not low income is a user group or if they are a part of the other groups. Define the needs of each group.*
- *There are two kinds of seniors: 1) active and 2) those requiring services.*
- *Low-income boils down to discretionary money – Low-income families do not have the discretionary income to participate in many of the ICRC programs and activities. The real question becomes: how to increase access and participation for low-income residents?*
- *Focus on the kids*
- *How to balance between race and income? What will bring low-income residents to the programs?*

Task Force Assignment: Define the user groups and their program needs. (Note: a program is a broad category that can encompass many activities. For example, wellness is a program that has the following activities: aerobics, yoga, Weight Watchers®, water aerobics. Youth competitive sports are a program with baseball, tennis, soccer, and softball.)

- Seniors
 - Active Seniors
 - Elder Care Services
- Youth
- Families

❖ FACILITIES

To borrow an old cliché, “If you build it, they will come.” This is the truth within the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission. One Task Force member stated that he and his children drive from facility to facility to find available space to practice. Most anyone who takes advantage of the ICRC programs and facilities can confirm the findings of the Facilities Focus Group: most of the facilities are at a maximum

occupancy. To continue to provide the quality programs and the level of service residents enjoy, the ICRC must balance programs with facilities. Without new facilities, residents of the district can become frustrated with lack of available space or convenient times to practice and can question the participation of those out-of-district. With the right programs and adequate facilities, a plethora of activities can take place that meet the needs of a broad diversity of residents, both in and out of district.

Task Force Comments

- *Goal? Have enough fields to promote diverse activities – multi-purpose fields and facilities*
- *Crooked Creek on Sunday – not enough facilities for the diverse groups of people who are there – the facilities and the fields are over-crowded.*
- *ICRC needs the facilities – don't have enough now.*
- *Big picture – get people there, get them participating. They will see kids and adults participating and having fun – this will draw others to participate.*
- *Do we need new facilities in the growth area?*
- *Was available land surveyed in the facilities focus group? Do we know where new facilities could be located?*
- *Too focused on organized activities – what about access and opportunities for participating? ICRC should provide the facilities – the residents and other users will participate if the facilities are there.*
- *Many will drive from park to park until they find available facilities.*
- *At the end of the day, it's the product. Whether seniors, youth or families, whether low income or high income or black or white or Hispanic in these age groups, they all want the same. If the facilities are there, they will be used.*
- *What about a large complex to host league teams, host tournaments – can contribute to local economy.*
- *ICRC can't be something for everyone or provide for everyone. For example, in every town or every corner of town, there can't necessarily be a drugstore or library or restaurant. But there can be these things nearby.*
- *How can the ICRC serve the community for the next ten years? What can each property be? The different areas don't need to one-up each other – too much of a history with that in the district. Look at White Rock area.*
- *Swimming was listed as a priority, a great need. Discussion about where local swimming teams practice – only one in an indoor pool at the Y in Richland County. Others must practice in outdoor pools.*

Task Force Assignment: Based on the Facilities and Programs Focus Groups reports, what facilities should be provided by the ICRC? How would you prioritize these facilities? Where should they be located?

❖ **SERVING OUT-OF-DISTRICT RESIDENTS**

This issue is, as one member stated, the elephant in the china shop. ICRC staff confirmed that out-of-district users account for one third of user fees; therefore, their participation in ICRC programs is critical to the financial health of the Commission. The perception among many district residents is that they are paying taxes for Richland County residents to use the facilities and participate in the programs... is this fair and equitable?

The obvious location for new ICRC facilities is in the middle of the two areas of the district, which is Richland County. How can the ICRC best provide new facilities and programs for a majority of district residents in a location that is accessible? Are there Richland County facilities that can be tapped for use by the ICRC? With the high percentage of Richland County users, is it possible to consider partnerships with Richland County Recreation Commission that will benefit all residents, regardless of political boundaries?

Some concern was expressed over bringing this issue up with the legislative delegation; however, many believe that the time has come to address the issue and to develop a mutually beneficial partnership.

Task Force Comments

- *Issue: serving Richland County, balance between Richland and Lexington – should there be a Richland Lexington Commission? Commission and politicians need to address the issue of ICRC serving Richland County residents and the disparity of taxes. There needs to be balance. The political will must be there to work this out. Can no longer shy away from the real issues.*
- *Programs – what are stats on out-of-district users? Roughly 35% come from out-of-district.*
- *Need to survey the recreation fields (parks and schools) in Richland County and determine how to partner to use.*
- *There was a question about the item in the Facilities Focus Group report on ICRC buying property in Richland County. Jay Downs explained that this was an idea expressed by a member – exploring all possibilities.*
- *There was some concern over the political danger of special purpose districts and the legislative delegation's support.*
- *How much extra fee is received from out-of-district users? For baseball, about \$18. Richland County does not charge out-of-district fees.*
- *Unknown who is using – concern with in-district not having facilities to use.*
- *Why are out-of-district patrons allowed to participate in programs and use facilities? Out-of-district provides 1/3 of user fees – this is very important to the financial health of the Commission.*
- *There should be an MOU between the ICRC and the RCRC.*
- *Out-of-district vs. in-district taxes – disparity in financial support from out-of-district.*
- *Unusual set-up*
- *Out-of-district increases the burden on the facilities.*
- *Survey Richland County – use what's there; don't rush to build more if we can share with Richland County.*
- *Understand the financial threshold for in-district and out-of-district – what will and can residents pay?*

Task Force Assignment: Brainstorm ways to effectively partner with Richland County and bring ideas to the February 23 meeting.

❖ **ACCESSIBILITY**

Accessibility is defined in many ways - affordability, availability of facilities, ability to get to the facilities. All three definitions are important to the success of the ICRC's mission. The ICRC should explore additional avenues of scholarships for low-income residents. Also, as new facilities are planned, transportation should be a key factor in choosing locations with preference given to locations that can be accessed not just by car, but also by walking or bike trails or public transportation (future). All residents should be able to afford to participate, should have facilities available to them, and should have the means to get there (car, walking, bikes, other transportation).

Task Force Comments

- *Accessibility and affordability – being able to get there.*
- *How will we get kids to participate?*
- *What programs for below median income residents? Provide programs to all, then scholarships or financial assistance to low-income residents. Don't build programs specifically for low-income residents. Build to the needs of the population, and then make the programs accessible to all.*
- *In planning, include accessibility to all.*

❖ Define the needs, demographics and population projects of different market areas

Some in the Task Force suggested that the ICRC should focus planning on smaller areas such as neighborhoods rather than larger areas within the district, such as Irmo or Chapin (per the COG maps). Demographics change dramatically from neighborhood to neighborhood, something the COG maps are unable to illustrate. If the needs and population projections of smaller geographic areas are studied, the Commission may better serve the needs of the district. There was some discussion of supporting, individually, the unique interests and demographics of Irmo vs. Chapin, but consensus was that this might further divide the district.

Task Force Comments

- *What will the impact of the increasing number of multi-family housing units in the area be? These are typically lower to middle income people.*
- *May need to look at smaller neighborhoods as defined areas to forecast population and demographics – not as global as the COG maps. The many different neighborhoods have unique characteristics and trends that should be considered.*
- *Chapin is experiencing tremendous growth in young families. Should get the statistics on the number of free and reduced lunches in the Chapin area schools – not all high income moving into the area.*
- *Think of the market area rather than the political lines. Do a ring analysis.*
- *Keep Chapin's rural feel - this is important. Can accomplish by land planning and requiring quality construction.*
- *The reality is that water and sewer are the planners.*
- *Don't let Chapin be Lexington.*
- *There is a clear distinction between Irmo and Chapin. The ICRC should address each market's needs. However, there was some concern that this could further divide the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission and the communities. Look at understanding the dynamics of the three market areas: 1) Irmo, 2) Chapin, and 3) Richland County.*
- *The market should not be about competing areas, but important to provide like facilities in each major area. For example, a youth in Irmo practices baseball in Chapin. Practice ends at 10:30 p.m. The youth has a 25 minutes ride home late at night. What if this same youth could practice in Irmo?*

❖ DIVERSE PARK OPPORTUNITIES

The Task Force agreed that different types of parks are needed within the district. While active recreation programs and facilities represent the majority of ICRC activities, more passive recreation opportunities should be considered. The success of Saluda Shoals Park is a testament to this.

Smaller parks, such as Beverly Brandes and Boundary, serve limited residents but are assets to the adjacent neighborhoods. Some questioned whether the ICRC should own and maintain parks such as these and whether neighborhoods would take over the care and maintenance of them. Neighborhood parks serve an important function in the livability of a place. More neighborhood parks should be developed for they encourage more active lifestyles and wellness, contribute to the quality of life, and add beauty.

Hand-in-hand with neighborhood parks is the issue of connectivity. Neighborhood parks are successful when residents can walk or ride bikes to them. There is an opportunity to work closely, in partnership, with The Towns of Irmo, Chapin and Lexington as well as Lexington and Richland Counties, the COG, and local neighborhood associations to plan a series of neighborhood parks and a safe, well-designed system of sidewalks and trails/greenways to connect them to neighborhoods throughout the district and to the larger recreational parks and Saluda Shoals.

Task Force Comments

- *Question of maintaining school properties.*
- *Define the different types of parks and benefits: 1) active recreation, 2) neighborhood, 3) trails and green space, and 4) schools.*
- *Trails in Chapin – working on connectivity – this is very important... walking, biking, passive. Kids should be able to ride their bikes to parks, schools. Chapin is a great place to live – the community needs this. There is no reason why developers can't provide this or be required to provide.*
- *Saluda Shoals Park Greenway*
- *Need more community, neighborhood parks – not just parks like Crooked Creek. Parks where families can walk or bike – passive recreation.*
- *Need parks to be parks, i.e. Saluda Shoals Park. Not all recreation parks, but some neighborhood parks.*
- *Provide incentives to developers to donate land for parks, civic use, such as the land donations by SCE&G and The Mungo Company.*
- *What about land to sell, i.e. Boundary Park – look at the cost to maintain smaller parks vs. use and access? Look at the BC Component property – could this property replace smaller, less used parks in order to provide better and more accessible facilities? The Facilities Focus Group Report noted Boundary Park as one that could be sold and replaced with a multi-amenity site.*
- *Alternative Academy site – worthy of investment to maintain? Fields are owned by the school. Look at ICRC property vs. school property and the value of long-term investments into school property.*
- *Size of parcel: organized park vs. neighborhood park. Would neighborhood take on the maintenance of smaller parks such as Beverly Brandes since the neighborhoods are the ones who use them and they are less accessible to those who do not live in the area?*

Task Force Assignment: Define the different types of parks and benefits: 1) active recreation, 2) neighborhood, 3) trails and green space, and 4) schools.

❖ **FORMER BC COMPONENTS PROPERTY**

The Task Force wants to ensure that the BC Components property will be planned for the highest and best use to support the mission of the ICRC. The property is ideally located to support the planned greenway, to extend Saluda Shoals Park, and to house a major facility with parking as well as provide ample green space for passive recreation. The Task Force would like to know the assessed value of the entire property and is very interested in the process of master planning the property once the environmental testing and any necessary mitigation are completed.

Task Force Comments

- *What to include on the BC Components property?*
- *BC Components property: what is the cost of environmental testing and clean up? There is the possibility of insurance policy and the responsible party to pay.*
- *What's the appraised value of the land? Understand the value of the second and third layers or property (behind the front 40 acres to the river) before decisions are made. Need to plan for the highest and best use of the property.*
- *Are there any restrictions on the property? This needs to be considered in the planning.*

❖ **Funding**

Funding is the literal and figurative bottom line. Planning programs for the district residents and the facilities to support the programs is fine, but funding (and the political will to pursue the funding) is paramount. As one task force member stated, "The issues are money and money – bonding and money to support the programs." The purpose of the Strategic Master Plan is to build the case and establish a firm foundation for the programs and facilities of the Irmo Chapin Recreation Commission in order to

attract the financial and political support necessary to continue the pursuit of the Commission's mission. More discussion will take place during the February 23, 2009 meeting when the Financial Focus Group report is presented.

Task Force Comments

- *Money is the issue.*
- *The issue: money for bonding and money for the cost of activities*
- *Should do an optimistic plan and a pessimistic plan – address both realities due to the impact of the current market.*
- *This plan is long-term – planning for the next several generations.*

Meeting adjourned at 8:00pm.