



MEETING SYNOPSIS

December 12, 2019

The following is a summary of the third meeting of the Elevate Advisory Council Parks and Recreation subcommittee. The attendance sheet is attached to this summary. The agenda and other meeting materials can be found on the Elevate Tuscaloosa website under Advisory Council > Meetings.

A discussion was held on the following topics:

Overview of statistical survey

Brendan Moore (City of Tuscaloosa) introduced Dr. Jane Daquin with the University of Alabama (UA) Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR). At the previous subcommittee meeting, members advanced the idea of hiring a third party to conduct polling of citizens regarding the existing park system. ISSR has no vested interest in the park system, which will allow for unbiased results.

Subcommittee focus group comments

The subcommittee served as a focus group to interact with Dr. Daquin in order to develop survey content. Dr. Daquin discussed three general objectives for the survey.

1. Who is using the facilities?
2. For those who are not using the facilities, why not?
3. What can be improved, added, removed, or changed with regard to facilities and programming?

Dr. Daquin described the numerous demographic data that will be collected. In order to determine which sectors of the population are hard to reach, a two-phase distribution plan will be used. Phase one will widely distribute the survey and analyze which demographics are underrepresented. The second phase will redistribute the survey in order to reach the missing demographics. Electronic distribution is ideal for phase one. Advertising methods include apps (such as the Nextdoor app), word-of-mouth, local news, newspaper editorials, emergency management agency automated phone messaging, and other media outlets. Dr. Daquin noted that there will be individuals who cannot access the survey electronically. Providing a paper survey to reach those individuals will be another method of distribution, which could be circulated through water utility bills. Face-to-face paper distribution is another method that could be used; this might allow individuals to understand that their participation will have an impact. The goal is to reach current PARA users, as well as members of the public who are not using PARA facilities.



Lesley Bruinton (subcommittee member and Public Relations Coordinator for the Tuscaloosa City Schools), noted the increasing Latinx population in the school system and suggested having a Spanish translation of the survey to ensure that this demographic can participate. Ms. Bruinton also mentioned a service called Peachjar, an electronic flyer that could be used to reach the parents of over 11,600 students. Gary Minor (subcommittee member and Executive Director of PARA) mentioned that the survey could also be distributed to PARA's database of 10,000 members. The group expressed a desire to include a question in the survey to find out which facilities outside of Tuscaloosa have most impressed the survey respondents.

Dr. Daquin discussed the survey timeline. The process is expected to last ten months. The group discussed opening the survey in the spring in order to engage PARA members who participate in youth athletics at that time of year. The surveys will include both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The latter allows for qualitative data to be gathered. A typical online survey contains approximately 60 questions, takes 15-20 minutes to complete, and will be online for a month. There was concern about survey fatigue with the 2020 U.S. Census being distributed next year. Dr. Daquin plans to differentiate the park survey by emphasizing its local impact and avoiding administering the survey at the same time the census is distributed. The parks survey will also be fully voluntary and participants can stop at any point.

Dr. Daquin explained that, in order to conduct research through the University of Alabama, an institutional review board (IRB) must approve the survey to verify that it is ethical. Since the subject matter of the park survey is not very sensitive, the IRB approval timeline should be brief. The ISSR also has access to national park standards that will be used to compare the survey results to the national average.

Members discussed the importance of reaching the University of Alabama students. Dr. Daquin mentioned utilizing the UA Office of Research and Economic Development to distribute the survey to all students. Gary Minor noted that the UA student usage of PARA parks and facilities is low. The two most utilized facilities include Ol' Colony Golf Course and passive parks, such as Snow Hinton Park. Dr. Daquin suggested that the low student usage could be the result of lack of knowledge. She can provide students with information on Tuscaloosa's parks and facilities at the end of the online survey.

Walt Maddox (City of Tuscaloosa) discussed the need for practice fields and the idea of leaving facilities open to the public on weekends. Mr. Minor explained that, for example, Snow Hinton Park is not used as a practice facility due to irrigation issues and the family's intention that the land be used as a passive park. In the past, PARA rented fields for practices, but that was discontinued because it did not generate revenue and in order to



increase participation in the organized sports programs. Ms. Bruinton discussed the opportunity to utilize city school amenities in order to maximize all facilities and engage more youth. Mr. Minor noted that this arrangement had been used previously and was discontinued because of funding issues. Although this partnership was cost-prohibitive in the past, creative thinking could lead to a new partnership.

Members discussed the locations of facilities and the possibility of eliminating duplicated services. Providing a service (e.g. tennis) at only one facility could entice individuals to cross geographical boundaries; however, the group noted that public transportation would be an important consideration. By reducing duplicated services, long-term maintenance costs could be reduced. Mr. Minor noted that PARA would like to incorporate emerging sports and tournaments but a limitation at each individual park is availability of land. The only facility that has the infrastructure to build additional fields is Sokol Park, which is already near capacity. Mayor Maddox discussed the city's growth of 25,000 people and the expansion to the east and north. This growth poses the question of whether or not facilities are located in the appropriate area for the future. Facilities that are located on the periphery, like the Tingle Center, are not ideal because they are not as accessible to all. Furthermore, some facilities were built too close together, such as the McAbee Center and Belk Center.

Members discussed PARA's organizational model, board structure, funding, and assets. Walt Maddox mentioned PARA's unique funding model and explained the city's portion of funding. The City currently contributes about \$4.3 million toward PARA operations each year. Of this, \$4.1 million is not directly derived from any particular thing but has grown each year as the city's budget grows. The remainder is a special appropriation to subsidize the operations of the Tuscaloosa Tennis Center. The city also pays \$1.4 million each year to service debt for PARA and makes other miscellaneous contributions occasionally. Mayor Maddox noted that PARA's funding model causes confusion due to the three different government funding sources: the City of Tuscaloosa, the City of Northport, and Tuscaloosa County. Due to this model, everything is defined by geographical or political boundary. Mayor Maddox stated that the 50-year old model is not sustainable and does not have adequate accountability. Each government has built new capital assets that are operated and maintained by PARA but not all of them have adequately increased funding to pay all of the rising operating costs of its own facilities. Over time, this has resulted in financial losses that are not subsidized by the government agency that built the facility that generates the loss. Instead, funding from a different government or another source has had to increase to offset the losses.

In order for the community to grow, a new model is crucial. A recommendation was made that if the City of Tuscaloosa upgrades a facility, the City should take over the capital



maintenance and pay PARA to operate the facility under a performance-based contract. This model is used for the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater and has proven to be successful. Over time, the City of Tuscaloosa has developed expertise in operating recreational and entertainment facilities – the Riverwalk, the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater, the River Market, and various city parks and other facilities.

Mayor Maddox suggested that the proposed \$48 million of Elevate funding for parks and recreation facilities be deferred until the subcommittee receives the survey results. Once the data is received, the subcommittee can prioritize projects as funding becomes available. The subcommittee members agreed that this suggestion is appropriate.

Review of parks map and inventory

Brendan Moore introduced Dakota Whitten (City of Tuscaloosa) to discuss an interactive map that includes all public parks and recreation facilities in Tuscaloosa County. Mr. Whitten explained that the map will be continuously updated with new information as it becomes available. The current map features include: hours, location, amenities, facilities, and drive times. The color of the park location on the map indicates if it is owned by the City of Tuscaloosa, City of Northport, or Tuscaloosa County. A work-in-progress includes a feature that will provide individuals with directions to parks and facilities. The map is available to the public and is located at Tuscaloosa.com > Live and Play > Things to Do > Parks Interactive Map.

Next steps

Dr. Daquin will develop survey questions based on information gathered at the meeting, design the survey, and begin the process of obtaining IRB approval.

The subcommittee advanced the idea of postponing additional recommendations for Elevate funding for parks and recreation until survey data is received and analyzed.

The subcommittee would like a better understanding of the financial operations of PARA in a future meeting. They would also like to understand different options for operating models that are used successfully in other communities.

The next Parks and Recreation Subcommittee meeting will be held February 13, 2020 at City Hall.

December 12, 2019

First Name	Last Name	Signature
✓ Karen	BROOKS	
✓ Lesley	BRUINTON	
✓ Blake	CORDER	
✓ Terrance	DEDRICK	
✓ Amy	ECHOLS	
Chris	ENGLAND	
David	GAY, JR.	
✓ Scott	HOLMES	
✓ Shelley	JONES	
✓ Jarrod	MILLIGAN	
✓ Gary	MINOR	
Tim	PARKER, III	
✓ Steven	RUMSEY	

First Name

Last Name

Signature

Jane
Sarah
Eddix
John
Russell

Daquin
Dunlap
Pugh
Earl
Ware



Eden
