

CORP Public Outreach Workshop
Meeting Notes
Riverside 11/14/07
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

These notes were compiled from the Riverside workshop and represent the comments made by the participants. A “-“ signifies a participant’s comment and change in speaker.

Opening Comments

– We mostly work in small community parks. People have to take care of their kids on weekends and are not interested in traveling to a park. The education system has failed because teachers are being trained to only talk and have no hands-on experience. The government over analyzes and forgets the end user. The problem is that many educators have never worked in the park & recreation field. Universities have done a poor job of preparing students to work in the recreation field. Park users don’t care who the next director is. Park users don’t care if someone has a doctorate. Park users want access to parks. Park users want programs.

– When my son thought of pursuing a degree in the park & recreation field he was told he would only work on a cruise ship.

– Part of the college curriculum should include attending a city commission or park-planning meeting to see how it really works. Students don't learn how to run parks. CDF built the parks as a partnership with Valley Wide P&R. Valley Wide provided the materials and CDF built the facilities.

– Internships should be a calendar year and not a semester. Internships for university recreation students should be no shorter than one year. Students can’t learn anything in one semester.

- Agrees that internships need to be longer. Working in the recreation industry while in college puts the student leagues ahead of other students in understanding the process. Schools need to do a better job of preparing students.

– Our City developed a Youth Master Plan that includes internships with the local colleges.

– I agree that internships need to be a sufficient length to be meaningful. I sought out part time work in the profession while I was a student-in a landscape architect's office. When I did graduate, I was ahead of my peers because I understood how the experience applied. Student that are hired need a few years to get their feet under them. Schools need to do a better job at training students and any way the park profession can help would be good. As it stands, I don't have time to manage any interns at this time. We recently completed the recruiting process for a capital project manager and there were very few people who were qualified. It is difficult to find people who have experience in all the disciplines. Most organizations do not have the autonomy to do the things the way they would like. We have to deal with too much bureaucracy. Students need more exposure to the real world.

- We offer ‘Leader One’ and ‘Advanced Recreation’ Employee Classifications to the group of youth that come to our programs and some of them have graduated in Parks and Recreation. These guys went to council meetings on their own and start as volunteers when they are 13 years old. We need to start at the grassroots level – with the kids that are out there now doing the job.
- Need to come up with a way to make the experience work-study instead on an internship. We offer handicap accessible and multi-generational play structures. We need to find a way to do that partnership with universities, etc.
- We need to try to reach out to schools. The students who get out of school don’t know how to take a program and make it work on the ground. They just don’t go above and beyond. Graduates don’t know how to look at the bigger picture. They may be book smart but don’t have a clue about working on their own.
- Future parks professional would benefit from an educational and training path similar to that used by the medical profession – a period of “book learning” followed by an internship for hands-on experience, then back to more advanced “book learning”. It’s extremely valuable to have the opportunity to work in the profession as a student while still learning the profession. Graduates entering the profession often lack practical experience.
- Work-study? Financial assistance requires work-study, what about providing information on available scholarship funds? This would help provide access to work-study in our profession and then there would be a qualified labor force to pull from.
- Would California State Parks’ example of training students be helpful?
- It would be to me.

Multigenerational – Recreation is starting to look different, how are you addressing this?

- We need to install items that are attractive to kids in their 20’s. There are kids in their 30’s looking for skate parks. We are converting tennis courts into small skate parks, reducing local damage to park benches. Enough people are satisfied that you see a decrease in damage. Create areas that stimulate, with imaginary structures, so that adults can play with the kids.
- There is a group known as Shane’s Inspiration designing Universally Accessible Playgrounds, for visually, hearing and mobility impaired children, adults and grandparents. This is a direction we’re being encouraged to follow. Play areas designed for kids with disabilities as well as for their parents to allow able-bodied and disabled people to play together.
- We have a park that is currently making those types of accessible changes. It allows adults with wheelchairs to get around and within the play structures.
- The goal is to get kids of all abilities to play together and even allow parents with disabilities to access the playground equipment with their children and get rid of the sense that people with disabilities are “strange”.
- We also just have to adapt to people’s hours. That is our accessibility challenge. Some of our parks are available (lighted) until midnight. We have ball games going on at 11 o’clock at night. Some of our park users commute five

hours each day and only have the late evening hours free for recreating. We also need to provide skate elements; otherwise, they will find their own.

– Many skateboarders we've encountered when in groups of their peers and away from adult supervision are disrespectful of public and private property. Part of the image the sport has long promoted is "having attitude". As a result, the kids often damage public property and do so on the way to and from facilities. Some of this may be a sense of rebellion, or because they are latchkey kids and don't have enough supervision. Public parks are being relegated to the role of babysitter. The sport could stand to take a lesson from Little League, and its significant parental involvement. With increased parental involvement, some of the "free-for-all" problems faced at many skate park facilities could be avoided; public agencies could also avoid the issue of liability. By design, these facilities must be unsupervised by the agency. If the agency actively manages these facilities, they in turn assume increased liability. This presents a significant deterrent to build such facilities if they have to be supervised by the agency. If more skate parks are to be built, there needs to be more parental involvement and supervision from the parents themselves.

– We have operations till 10 or 11 pm, late at night to accommodate people's time. It puts a strain on our operations. The grass needs to be green and we have to find the time to care for it. Little League goes from 10-10:30pm and soccer staff works from 6:30am-10:30pm, 365 days a year. Parents don't come along so we've become a babysitter for these kids.

– Sometimes you can't deal with the maintenance issues when parks stay open too late. We can barely get into some of our parks to mow the turf. Ball leagues are upset because the fields are so overused that we can't grow grass. One of our Leagues even raised the money to put in sod at their own cost, only to discover for themselves that the fields are overused. The sod was soon destroyed due to their own constant use. Our current park standard is three acres per thousand population, but existing developed parks is less than 2 acres per thousand. Consequently every park is heavily overused.

– We have the same issues. We would like to build a sport park but there's no land left, only hills. We are so impacted that we had to start shutting parks for 6 weeks at a time to grow grass, and the users hate that.

– There are alternative surfaces to grass; we offer a synthetic turf with a rubber base.

– Any place where kids play needs to be grass, anywhere they walk could be decomposed granite.

– A synthetic turf football field can cost \$750 grand! In addition, how do you disinfect the turf?

– We will soon be constructing a \$1 million synthetic turf soccer field. But the concerns we have are that these facilities can't tolerate things like bubble gum, excessive water or flammable material on the field. It can be very high maintenance – if field is vandalized due to being flammable, then this is a major concern.

– We put in a half acre of artificial turf around a pool in Hemet. It cut down on our water needs but we have to search people as they come in. The pool pays for

itself – ¾ of a million dollars in the last year. MTA paid for the park. It was mitigation for impacts a Hemet reservoir and included 20,000 acres of open space.

- We also get concessions from developers.

- We require our developers to do civic master plans. Developer plans should include developed parks and recreation facilities. If you condition (conditions of approval during the planning process) the maps upfront, before they submit them to the planning commission, you can get land dedicated and facilities built.

- We're really a built-out community, our population is stable.

- A problem in our community is there are so many small infill developments. It's unreasonable to require them to build a park. However, if you get one of the larger development companies, you can at least get dedication of the land and sometimes even construction of the facilities.

- We had a big grand opening for a trailhead that has created new interest in the trails in Diamond Bar. The new trail links to a county trail. This trailhead at Sycamore Canyon was built using LWCF and it has a sign illustrating all the trails, wildlife and floral resources. The community didn't know these trails were there until the trailhead was developed. We are now seeing an increase in use.

- We are seeing increased use on our "primary" trails, particularly the Santa Ana River Trail. We are also seeing increasing demand for trails on both a micro & macro scale. People want trails to connect to each park and some wildlife habitat areas too.

- What does my company do? We design new parks and add features to old parks. We can make a more natural environment if people are interested, like using recycled tires as mulch in autumn colors and for trails and playground surfaces. We use recycled materials like tires and milk jugs for the park furniture. Recycled materials are desirable. The Integrated Waste Management Board does recycled tire-related grants. Keep away from concrete elements.

- We received IWMB funds for playground surfacing and we promote this through grand openings and news releases. We posted the # of tires diverted to on the signs at the playgrounds as part of the grant requirements.

- We try to use a lot of recycled products. We are looking at anything we can do to make the park more environmentally friendly. We use recycled water and carbon-based fertilizers and we do lots of things to build more sustainably and we promote this in our parks. We also promote what recycled products are used. Our city is only 16 yrs old, so we are still juvenile. We are land rich but park poor. We get some mitigation fees. Developers threaten to leave town; apartments are the big thing. They are a bigger impact for us because we are not built for that kind of density – our general plan stipulates that apartments can't make up more than eight percent of the city. We now have 100,000 people and we are land rich but park poor.

- Our community has increasing infill projects, so we're now going vertical. The student population is increasing as is the demand for public facilities. Downtown is trying to re-energize with condos and apartments. We are thinking of ways to provide "vertical parks", like rooftop gardens. A six story, 500-unit apartment tower was recently proposed next to the metro link station across from a small

2.5-acre older park serving a lower income area of the City. But the project does not make sense. The more affluent young couples and single the project is intended to attract will not likely want to live next to this older park and neighborhood. To mitigate the impact another park may need to be provided in another area of the community.

– Another trend our community is experiencing is a push to provide increased social services through the park system. We are actively building childcare facilities and social service centers into our parks. We've also recently built a youth opportunity center for socializing, training and gang intervention. It is a \$2 million facility. To fund projects like this we have to turn to other organizations for funding support. A few years back, a little town not far from us, was able to build a \$20 million facility with redevelopment funds. So now, we are looking at redevelopment monies as a different source of park funding.

– Most of our customers use California Recycled Tire grants – and we are an approved Kaboom vendor. Kaboom will provide \$4,000 in a grant or send volunteers to facilities within walking distance to build playgrounds. Kaboom Grant (Home Depot started) goal of providing a playground within walking distance to each child in America.

– We do get some grants from the state. It is hard for us to get kids to come and do outdoor projects. It is now more difficult to get them out of their house. We try to use Boy Scouts for our open space projects; and Kaboom makes for good Eagle Scout projects.

– A recent new article indicated that communities with park acreage below standard have higher obesity rates for kids. We see this problem in our community. It is a major issue to get kids outdoors. We just received an award for a childhood obesity program; "Body By Jake" just awarded us \$10,000 for a childhood fitness program.

– Kids today are 30% more obese than in the 80s. Our play equipment is designed to encourage physical activity.

– We are bringing in some exciting items to the playgrounds to get the kids out and using the facilities.

– Kids today don't have enough unstructured playtime. We tried to address this through our master plan by creating an open play area with a facilitator to help kids play.

Maybe an idea is to get the outdoor component into a kid's schedule?

– The idea of skate board facilities being built with moveable components is a good one; static skate parks get old after a while, so the kids get bored. The component systems give you increased flexibility – it is lower in cost, transportable, relocatable; our community is planning to move in this direction.

– It costs between ½ to a million dollars to build a skate park. Most towns can only do one. However, you can do many more smaller component parks that are easier to get to and able to address all skill levels. The cops love it because they can drive by to check and paramedics like it because it is easier to service. If kids are doing \$50 grand in damage a year, it's better to put those resources into building them a skate park.

- We do have one traditional concrete skate park. Small neighborhood parks scattered around are great, but now you don't have larger regional park for use. We spend \$120,000 per year for graffiti removal.
- We spend four times that.
- Graffiti can be removed more easily within the first 24 hours. After which it takes quite a bit of elbow grease or painting over.
- I like the skate park component approach, because you would be able to switch them out.
- My supervisors really want to control the kids instead of letting them do what they want. It is not working very well. We need to accept change. Skaters like the idea of component skate parks because they get bored easily and they know that it can change. The components are bolted separately onto a poured slab but also can be bolted onto an unused tennis court.
- Part of the reason some kids feel there are not enough skate parks is because the older facilities are in-ground and static – They feel they've 'been there done that' and so don't want to come back.
- Kids are not being heard, we are telling them what to do in parks. We need to ask the kids what they want.
- We do need to ask the kids 'what would you like to do?' However, we would need to give them some examples or else they don't think of things that end up getting missed if we just ask them open-ended questions. The kids in the focus group thought that they wanted a mall to socialize in with open seating, then one youth group visited other cities and saw a teen center with a climbing wall and now they want that.
- I am curious of what others are doing for baby boomers. We are planning for two new senior centers. It seems to me that there needs to be more senior programming and cultural resources. Seniors today are more affluent and more active. There are so many State Historic Parks that aren't finished, like California Citrus State Historic Park – it was a unique joint venture with the city. The State needs to refocus and be a role model for other municipalities for what a park could be. This (Ca. Citrus SHP) wasn't cheap but allowed State Parks to do more with less of their staff. Many municipalities would enjoy getting involved with something like developing Ca. Citrus SHP. We barely tapped Economic Development Initiatives and RDA grant sources. The historic core is not yet finished. Officials from "living history" parks like those in Canada and Colonial Williamsburg came and consulted on its development but its full development has been a missed opportunity. Ca. Citrus SHP needs to be completed and is a falling short of what it could be. State Parks missed an opportunity and this is only one example. The State needs to recognize and promote these opportunities for partnerships at local levels.
- You need your supervisor's support and can't go over their heads.
- Chino Hills State Park is right next to my City. Our trails could connect. Otherwise, local people don't know much about it. Connectivity needs to be communicated to the public.
- We have a 10-acre parcel with a lot of historical buildings and the original Murrieta elementary school. I would like to make it a historic element in the city.

We need to understand and preserve the history of items before they go away. A lot of history is being lost because kids don't go to museums or understand the historic significance of things anymore. We need to tie natural/cultural/recreation into the K-12 curriculum.

– At our Diamond Bar Day at the LA County Fair, the Fair Kids Club focuses on different cultural and historical items. They work with teachers and the school curriculum. They provide cultural and historical exhibits matched to the K-12 curriculum and bus school kids to the Fair. This is not recreated in the community but could be because there is a demand for it. We also have a city birthday party where we bring out the historic city sign showing its origin as a historic ranch.

– Our city tried to foster an Orange Blossom Festival working through a variety of vendors but it evolved into more of a general street fair. It lost its original focus on the history of citrus and of the community. One problem is that in most organizations museums and parks are really two separate silos. Parks aren't often involved with the Arts in Public Spaces program either. There is not much cross-pollination. Right now, we're trying to start art in public spaces within our park. However, funding is always an issue. The recreation staff is working with physical education and on after-school programs. They are operating under joint-use agreements with schools and fitness facilities. We are moving into building more multi-generational fitness facilities in the parks for youth, adults and seniors. I think people's attitudes are changing and they want more multi-generational integration.

– Our Youth Master Plan has been adopted by both school districts and the city council. One school has a shared public park on its property and runs preschool and summer day camps.

–The fees for Summer day camps were increased this year despite the fears of some staff who thought this would be an issue. However, the perceived value actually increased the attendance and we had to turn folks away.

– We also have joint use agreements with schools. We also rent their facilities for events and use their classrooms during the evening. In turn, schools use our fields during school hours. Some of the schools don't have any grounds so this really helps them. So as a trade off, we have given up some of our parks during school hours.

– Our community has undertaken a major “renaissance” throughout the community with total costs approaching \$2 billion. This initiative includes over \$150 million in park improvements. As a part of this initiative, we've actively sought out partnerships. For example, instead of the city building an aquatic facility on its own, we've partnered with the local community college district and the one of the local K-12 School Districts to build two complexes, at a total cost to the City of \$6 million. The two districts will build them and we help fund them and can use them. The local K-12 school district is also building a pocket park as a part of their pool complex that the community can enjoy. The community will jointly use the two school swimming pools. The K-12 project will be located at the perimeter of the school so the facilities are more accessible to the local community.

Closing Comments

- This was worth the time because I got some ideas.
- My boss asked that the CORP focus on trails because last time they focused on camping. Trails need a higher focus.
- A focus on trails is a real hot button for our city council. There are maybe 20 miles of existing trails in our city, but many more miles still planned. Trails seem to be an issue statewide. Even if they are along the side of a street, this sort of “greenway trails” are desired by our community. Some of our residents feel that such “greenways” are what separate a desirable city from an undesirable city and really make for a livable community. Separate from our trails systems, bikeways are planned and managed by our Public Works staff, and can be paid for with transportation funds, while the other trails can be paid for through sources available to parks and recreation. Our multi-purpose trails are built for recreation, while bikeways are designed as alternative means of transportation, and the two aren’t as coordinated as they should be. All trails should be considered an alternative form of transportation and therefore be eligible for transportation funds.