

Overview of City Manager's Review Committee of the Library and Parks & Community Services Departments

Background:

Across the country, difficult economic conditions are causing governments and non-profit organizations to re-evaluate priorities and service delivery strategies. Local governments, due to their dependence upon property tax and sales tax, must focus on balancing the needs of residents while growing the tax base. Since Fort Worth has been the fastest-growing large city in the country for more than a decade, the City is struggling with the need to invest in maintenance and replacement of existing infrastructure while serving fast-growing parts of the community. Government services that create a great place for the workforce to live, work and play such as parks and libraries are critical to this balance. However, across the country, these are the services that are often scaled back when competing for funding with other core services.

During recent budget development processes, the City Council was faced with difficult choices. Beginning in the summer of 2010, pools in Fort Worth were closed and Forest Park Pool, which was the last to remain open, was closed prior to the end of its normal season due to failing infrastructure. The City Council has reduced operating hours and considered closure of three branch libraries. The community is not supportive of these types of reductions, but capital costs or refurbishment of these aging facilities is even more cost prohibitive than the operating costs that might be saved. There is not consensus across the community about spending priorities, whether the tax burden is too high or too low, or whether services ought to be preserved or eliminated.

As part of that discussion, the City Manager challenged departments to think about delivering services in new ways to create efficiencies and reduce costs where possible. While the proposed merger of the Library and Parks & Community Services Departments was abandoned during the FY2011 budget discussions, the consideration of overlapping services within the City and existing and potential partnerships with other agencies was worthy of review. This resulted in the creation of the City Manager's Review Committee for Library and Parks & Community Services Departments.

Project Overview:

A wide variety of stakeholders were assembled, including representatives from neighborhoods, schools, non-profits, Tarrant County College and various support groups. The purpose of the committee is to:

Advise staff on the formation of work teams to analyze the broad structure and the future opportunities for facilities and service delivery models of the Library and Parks and Community Services Departments. Prepare a written report to advise the City Manager on immediate and longer-term initiatives to provide appropriate services to the community.

Due to the broad topics to be considered, six work teams were appointed and led by City staff, to address the following topics and report back to the Review Committee for consideration.

1. Management Models for Parks Facilities and Operations
2. Management Models for Library Operations
3. Children's and Teens' Programming
4. Social Service Programs
5. Other Collaborative Services of the City and External Agencies
6. Process for Five-Year Capital Planning

Due to the short duration and the breadth of topics of this effort, many of the recommendations will involve prioritizing more formal evaluation of an issue with involvement of relevant stakeholders for the specific issue. These recommendations are intended to be a starting place for work and decisions that will span many years.

Significant Recommendations:

The work teams made a variety of recommendations that ranged from short term initiatives to longer-term studies. The Review Committee has received the following recommendations from the work teams and is evaluating their merit and their priority-ranking and proposed timetables. In some cases, the text has been expanded to reflect the ongoing dialogue and feedback from the Committee; however, they are in draft form until the final meeting of the Committee.

General

1. The City should continue to **operate separate departments** for Library and Parks & Community Services
2. The City should continue to **directly manage and staff a public library**. Presently, the Library is conducting an overall organizational review with the objective of re-allocating and re-assigning staff based on service needs and departmental functions, addressing classification disparities, salary inequities, and span of control issues. The department anticipates completion of the re-organization plan early fall with a fiscal year 2012 implementation. The City should implement changes that enhance services and reduce administrative costs that would allow any savings to restore services that have been reduced in recent years.
3. While the focus of this effort was not a detailed operational review of each department, it is imperative that the City continue to look at the efficiency and staffing of their operations to ensure that resources are being used to maximize service delivery. The City should use independent consultants to complete **operational reviews** of these departments and direct savings to restoration of services. Until this full review is possible, during the annual budget preparation process, the departments should evaluate administrative functions, programs, or services that are not considered core to the mission of the departments to determine if they should be reassigned, delegated or eliminated altogether. The City could also consider accreditation of the Parks and Community Services Department process as an effective efficiency review mechanism.
4. The City should adopt a fiscally-constrained **Five-Year Capital Plan** that prioritizes the City's capital investments from all funding sources to ensure reasonable expectations in the

community. This effort should occur by 2013 with significant community input on overall priorities. The City should amend the City's Financial Management Policy Statements to indicate that all capital expenditures for City facilities shall require an assessment of opportunities for **joint-use** that would improve how services are delivered to citizens. This could reduce construction costs and on-going maintenance and operating costs while maximizing programming space. The City should consider opportunities for City departments as well as external agencies and service providers where appropriate and feasible; however, the City's policy regarding use of City capital funds in facilities with outside agencies should be fully developed to ensure that the needs of the citizens are being served.

5. All studies resulting from this effort should include a **public process** for input and review.

Short-Term Actions for Implementation with the FY2012 and FY2013 Budgets

1. Improve participation and outcomes of programming at Parks and Libraries by:
 - a. Begin regular meetings with youth-centered agencies to develop/coordinate specific joint programs for youth, focusing on broad social issues such as bullying, school retention, etc. (2012)
 - b. Requesting that the T provide youth with free or discounted transportation to libraries or community centers during the summer months with their Library cards or PACS membership cards.
 - c. Cross-promoting programs at parks and libraries for children and teens with an effective guide for parents of all after-school and summer opportunities offered by the City. Jointly promote adult and senior programs such as ESL/GED, Tax Help seminars, and services provided by other agencies at City facilities.
2. Continue process for community to review, the City Council to adopt and the department to implement the Library's pending Master Services Plan, which address partnerships and joint ventures for facilities use, all of which could result in permanent savings. This should involve a very public process and should result in the implementation of best practices from across the country.
3. By Program Year 2012, merge the Housing and Economic Development Weatherization Assistance Program into the Parks & Community Services Departments Community Action Partners Programs.
4. All City of Fort Worth pools have been closed due to the deterioration of the infrastructure and the significant capital investment that is needed; this is in contrast to the public perception that the purpose was to save operating costs. Implementation of the Aquatics Master Plan should be considered as part of the Five-Year Capital Plan. However, in the meantime, a Park Board sub-committee should look at the feasibility of implementing the Master Plan in today's economy. They should review the cost per user of our original aquatics program and consider subsidizing the YMCA, who is offering interim services, in order to expand hours available to citizens. The community should provide input, especially on behalf of the children, about the priority of this service and to ensure that the public understands the financial investment that is needed for the infrastructure.
5. Establish a review process to assess which programs should be offered by Parks or Libraries. Criteria could include minimum attendance, cost per participant, cost and benefits to families, neighborhood input, etc.

6. Determine where computers should be located to provide the most efficient use and effective utilization for children, teens and adults. Computers, whether located in Libraries and/or Community Centers, should be well-maintained and supported by a trained staff. Coordination with school districts in terms of equipment availability and software compatibility should be pursued.
7. Plan, develop and fund ongoing joint training opportunities for Library and PACS staff at all levels in order to improve customer service, overall efficiencies and development of further collaborations.
8. Continue negotiations with YMCA for management, operations, programming and development of the Altamesa Youth Sports Complex by September 30, 2011, a 50-year old sports complex on Water Department property. The negotiations should ensure citizen needs are being served. Any costs for improvements that the City would bear, if any, should be included in the Five-Year Capital Plan.
9. Work with Botanic Garden support organizations to immediately hire a development officer to establish a formal fundraising program similar to other gardens around the country.
10. Update pro forma on golf system and clearly establish City Council objectives on the financial structure of the system. This should include a review of the viability of the current system as an enterprise fund which requires the system to support its operations through user fees. The City should determine the effect on the sustainability and equity of service delivery of remaining golf courses if any CFW golf course were closed. Specifically, staff recommends the evaluation the possible repurposing of the Z Boaz golf course into a community park and how that would affect the sustainability of the overall system.
 - a. Complete construction of the Ben Hogan Junior Golf Learning Center at Rockwood Golf Course in partnership with the First Tee of Forth Worth. First Tee will operate the facility upon completion.
11. Benchmark other cities and evaluate all Library and Parks & Community Services Departments to determine if there are additional ideas for outsourcing such as facilities management, infrastructure and information technology. More specifically, the Library should explore outsourcing opportunities in the areas of courier services, mailing overdue notices, and select areas of material selection. (2011-2012)
12. In FY2012 as the housing market recovers, the City should evaluate the current rate of developer participation fees and land dedication requirements for parks. They should be consistent with other communities at a level that ensures the construction of high-quality neighborhoods where new housing units are being constructed. This could occur in conjunction with the FY2012 review of transportation impact fees. A review cycle should be established to ensure the City remains current in future years.
13. PACS should be responsible for outside maintenance including Adopt-a-Park agreements for planting beds at libraries by _____.
14. As part of the FY2012 budget preparation, the departments should review meeting rental rates for consistency where appropriate. Standardization should be considered in cases where the objective is to make space widely available for the community at an affordable cost.
15. More fully investigate the Volunteer Center's Service Works program to determine if this is a program that would benefit all city departments.

Longer-Term Actions for Further Study and Work with Specific Community Groups

1. Improve long-term coordination of children and teen programming across the community by:
 - a. Conducting a comprehensive, independent study of community-based programs for children and teens in 2013.
 - b. Develop a comprehensive mission and strategic plan for children and teen programs provided by the City in 2014. This effort should include school districts and youth agencies/service providers. Partnerships could include joint-coordination of a series of teen programs with various organization such as the urban 4-H Club.
2. Continue working with appropriate support groups to consider appropriateness non-profit management of the Botanic Garden, the Nature Center and the Log Cabin Village. This issue needs further study to identify what need or void is being addressed by a change. In addition, the following criteria should be included.
 - a. Evaluate the financial benefit potential including increased revenue from fundraising, private foundations, corporations, trusts, memberships and fees for programs, special events, rentals, admissions and parking.
 - b. If the City decides to engage in these contracts, ensure that development of the facilities is consistent with a publicly adopted master plan.
 - c. Conduct appropriate market studies to understand origin of patrons and willingness to pay for services.
 - d. Identify appropriate partners for more effective education programs.
 - e. Ensure a mechanism for accessibility to students and low-income citizens.
3. Continue working with the Cowboy Santas program to help them fully function as an independent non-profit or transition to an existing non-profit by 2014. The City's role would potentially shift from a direct funder to being an active partner in accepting applications and encouraging employees to volunteer.
4. Conduct an economic impact study related to Library and PACS, their programs and services if appropriate funding is identified. The effort should focus on more than dollar value by including a review of the intangible benefits and comparing our services to best practices in livable communities.
5. In FY2013, work with various existing Parks support groups to determine the feasibility and appropriateness of establishing a 501(c)(3) non-profit umbrella support organization for the Parks and Community Services Department. The City should determine if we should have a separate organization that provides general support to the parks system and how that would affect existing support organization.
6. Work with area libraries to achieve economies of scale in existing contracts or operations and services. Initiatives could include Genealogy, Local History and shared facilities in fast-growing areas proximate to other facilities from other Cities, school districts or college districts. The City should initiate a dialogue with the County about their financial support for services provided to residents in unincorporated areas.
7. Evaluate opportunities to generate additional resources for the Library Department:
 - a. Investigate opportunities to generate revenue by offering fee-based operations and services to other libraries. This should only include staff expertise that could be

offered without a negative impact on Fort Worth citizens from a service or financial standpoint. An example is collection management by the Library.

- b. Identify opportunities for developers to provide space in new developments (residential, shopping, mixed-use) for library services in conjunction with other tax incentives and abatements. Consider alternatives for placing public libraries on new school campuses.
 - c. Initiate discussions with the school districts and Tarrant County College about shared resources.
8. Study further the city's role with social services given changing demographics and the economy; the involvement of multiple non-profit service providers in safety net services; and the responsibilities for social services of various city departments.