

# Appendix 9.9:

## Long Term Capital Planning

Future parkland acquisitions, enhancements, and management will require strategic capital planning to ensure that they are cost-effective and efficient. This Appendix provides recommendations for future Bergen County Parks capital planning.

# 9.9 LONG TERM CAPITAL PLANNING

## CAPITAL PLANNING RECOMMENDATIONS

Capital facilities and infrastructure are important legacies that serve current and future generations. Playgrounds, walkways, ballfields, and historic sites are the physical foundations for providing services of a park system. The design, construction, maintenance, and operation of park assets are the critical activities the Department of Parks must undertake to provide these physical places. Capital planning is critical to public transportation, emergency services and other essential public services. Likewise, capital planning for parks is equally important.

Parks Department management and staff should use this Parks Master Plan to ensure capital improvements, acquisition projects, programs and services are consistent with this Plan and determine how to spend the County's limited resources in parks and recreation based on criterion. This Master Plan includes numerous initiatives to further enhance the value and quality of Bergen County's parks and recreation. To move forward projects should be based on the following broad criteria:

- Meets Master Plan needs: Projects should be prioritized based on their ability to meet park and facility needs as identified in this Plan (i.e., their ability to fill existing geographic gaps or satisfy relevant ADA or design guidelines).
- Expands recreation opportunities: Priority should also be determined based on the projects' capacity to expand the County's recreation opportunities (i.e., their ability to accommodate new activities in high demand or leverage potential for grant funding).
- Improves existing recreation resources: Priority should be determined based on the ability of proposed projects to maintain or enhance the condition of existing County resources, or to generate additional revenue.

- Enhances partnerships: Projects should be prioritized on their capacity to create or strengthen existing partnerships (i.e., their ability to forge cost-sharing, joint development, or programmatic collaborations).
- Strengthens the community: Proposed projects should be prioritized based on their ability to serve a diverse cross-section of the population, or those that have potential for positive economic impact on Bergen County residents.
- Maximize available resources – Seek to ensure efficient use of public funds to provide maximum benefit with limited resources. Investigate potential funding sources through grants, donations, or partnerships.
- Improve maintenance and efficiency – Give priority to projects that improve upkeep efficiency or that will reduce life-cycle costs.
- Resources for Parks Staff – Lastly, provide Park staff with the materials, education, and technology they need to do their jobs effectively.

### Capital Improvement Program

Implementing a capital improvement program (CIP) is designed to help the Parks Department achieve a level of management control over its parks, facilities and resources. The CIP is intended to provide an orderly approach for improving existing parks and facilities, as well as the development of new parks that is both cost effective and efficient. To properly undertake the CIP, the Department should align the development of its annual CIP with the County's annual budget schedules as provided by the County Treasurer. The annual planning and preparation of the proposed CIP and operating budgets begin in the fall of each year.

The Department should consider developing a prescribed planning process to effectively manage projects. A process could include establishing project phases to produce well-reasoned project scope, cost estimates, preliminary design that could include topographic surveys, conceptual site plans, schematic drawing, cost estimates and public input.

The Capital Improvement Program should be further prioritized on factors such as condition assessment of park infrastructure, priorities assigned by field staff, priorities assigned by senior park management, public needs and evaluation of whether a new project is needed versus the renovation of the park asset.

Consideration should be expended to balancing any backlogged capital maintenance projects with new priorities and needs. Also, consideration is needed to examine the Department's readiness to undertake projects as view by available resources, including staff and impact on operating budgets.

The capacity of the Capital Improvement Program is guided and limited by the fiscal capacity of the County government in terms of available funding sources (operating, capital bonding, Open Space Trust Fund and State grants). Also considered is the spending affordability as determined by the County Administration and Board of Chosen Freeholders as they are responsible to limit the rate of expenditures not to exceed the financial resources of the county government. This responsibility involves determining the level of county spending, new debt authorization, personnel and how any surplus may be used.

As part of the development of the Capital Improvement Program and operating budgets, the Department should consider conducting a formal outreach program to park users and the community of the county to understand citizen requests for the county park system.

### **Project Selection**

An important element to the Capital Improvement Program is the selection of the projects; based on needs studies, and corresponding impact of operations and maintenance costs. The Department should also consider developing profiles for each potential project, including basic information such as scope, estimated cost and schedule, funding sources, useful life and operating budget impacts.

Classifying projects into categories can help define park projects. New or major park renovations could be defined as those projects that have budgets over \$25,000 and having a useful life greater than fifteen years. A second category could be those smaller replacement or maintenance capital projects that do not require extensive planning and design, and is under the \$25,000 threshold. Contained within the categories is the need to identify those projects that have been deferred and acutely need to be completed due to life-safety considerations.

In addition to the various needs studies, projects considered for inclusion in the Capital Improvement Program evolve from various sources, including but not limited to approved facility plans, citizen requests, directives from County Administration and Board of Chosen Freeholders, and the Park Master Plan.

Executing the Capital Improvement Program involves the sequencing of activities or phases to bring a project from the concept and prioritization period, to the next logical phases that are separate and distinct steps, such as: Planning, Design, Construction and open to the public.

### **Long Range Planning**

It is extremely important for the Department of Parks to address the current and long-term park and recreational needs of county residents. In Chapter 2.03 Demographics, current demographic analysis and future population projections are provided. From this analysis population trends and demographic shifts should be monitored to discern trends that should inform future park and recreation needs of the community.

Park planners need to develop a planning analysis to assess park acreage and recreation facility needs throughout the county on an ongoing basis. Demographic data along with a continuous update of the park inventory allows park planners to determine the amount of park and open space acreage per thousand people in the community. Planners need to put each community in rank order of need, with those that have fewer acres per thousand population showing greater immediate need for acquisition of additional park acreage.

A similar type of analysis should be conducted for recreation facility development countywide. While using standards, such as one baseball field for every X thousand people, a carrying capacity analysis should be undertaken to determine

the carrying capacity to be assigned to facilities. These figures would represent the maximum number of people who can use a facility in a day without significant degradation in the quality of the experience due to crowding.

The facilities inventory will aid in determining the number of recreation facilities in each community. This analysis will consider not only county park facilities, but also municipal and state parkland. The facility totals are to be converted into carrying capacities and then the communities are ranked according to need.

Those communities with lower total carrying capacities per thousand populations show a greater immediate need for additional development of recreational facilities. This level of service methodology is utilized to encourage the equitable distribution of park and recreation resources based on need.

The Level of Service Program analysis should inform the Department's annual capital improvement program as well as the Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland & Historic Preservation Trust Fund program to give consideration to those communities that are ranked according to parkland needs.

Based on the foundation of a Parks Master Plan, a sound multi-year capital plan that identifies capital needs, funding options, and operating budget impacts is a critical component to master planning. A properly prepared capital plan is essential for the future financial health of the Department of Parks and its continued delivery of services to its park users.

To translate the Parks Master Plan into action, the Department of Parks should prepare and adopt a comprehensive, fiscally sustainable, and multi-year capital plan to ensure effective management of capital assets. This multi-year plan will identify and prioritize expected needs based on the Parks Master Plan, establish project scope and cost, identify sources of funding and estimate future operating and maintenance costs.

### **Organizational Processes:**

To help guide the work of the Department of Parks staff, several administrative planning documents and systems should be developed in addition to the multi-year capital plan. Consideration should be given for the Department of Parks to formulate plans; such as:

- Four-year Implementation Plan that is a blueprint for achieving the strategies, goals, and vision of the Parks Master Plan. Updated yearly, the Implementation Plan will reflect the specific tactics, timetables, measures of success and resources that are required for the four-year period.
- Annual Work Plans will help manage workflow and ensure daily work that corresponds to the direction set forth in the Parks Master Plan. Actions set forth in the plan should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-framed.
- Annual Budget allows for spending in the Department of Parks that relate to the Implementation plan and the Park Master Plan.
- Park Planning Foundation Plans such as a habitat management plan, forest stewardship plan, sustainability plan, physical system plan, communication plan and a recreation activity plan; along with other park planning documents.

It is recommended that the Department of Parks develop numerous methods to measure if it is achieving the desired outcomes it seeks to achieve; allow for corrections in its strategies to achieve its goals and to celebrate successful outcomes when they are achieved. Additionally, the Department of Parks should develop the capacity to measure community impact with the activities taken to meeting park and recreation needs of county residents. Key indicators should be developed and tailored to Bergen County and monitored over time; thus, enabling the implementation plan and work plans to be adjusted to achieve the vision of the Department and County government

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