



DATE: August 2, 2021

TO: Mayor and Members of the City Council

VIA: Peter Pirnejad, City Manager

FROM: Dante Hall, Acting Public Works Director

SUBJECT: DISCUSSION REGARDING ENGAGEMENT PROCESS FOR PARKS
SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND RECREATION CENTER
REPLACEMENT PLAN

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council, by Minute Order, receive the report on the Parks System Improvement Plan and Recreation Center Replacement Plan, and provide further direction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is intended to provide City Council with two updates. First, staff is proposing a plan for community engagement which will inform a CIP focused on improving our existing parks system. Second, staff is proposing a plan to engage the community with the goal of validating the existing Recreation Center plans and presenting a revised funding option based on more current financial assessment and potential partnerships.

On June 7, 2021, and June 9, 2021, respectively, the City Council received reports from staff on the status of the Recreation Center Replacement Project and the Park System Improvement Plan. Both initiatives began a few years ago with the assistance of consultants. Both plans had not been completed. Given the amount of time passed since the City assessed its park amenities and the likely shift in how recreational programs and space may be provided and utilized in a post-COVID environment, City Council directed staff to work with the Parks and Recreation Committee (PRC) to provide input on a community engagement strategy and a survey tool to validate the assumptions made by the consultants about future Recreation Center and park system needs. This report outlines a community engagement

strategy for validating current and future infrastructure and recreation needs in our parks as well as validating needs for a new Recreation Center. The results of the surveys and engagement will inform the creation of a CIP that will be included as part of the FY 2022-2023 budget for the parks system and validate the plans proposed for the Recreation Center.

In addition, this report also provides an update on the various financing strategies for replacing the Recreation Center. The strategies include a combination of City-controlled resources (such as the General Fund and Capital Asset Acquisition and Replacement Funds), new revenue sources (such as new taxes and fees), and borrowed funding (such as debt from bond sales of self-financed alternatives). Part of our efforts going forward are proposed to be to pursue opportunities for partnerships and collaborations with corporate partners as well as the local School Districts. Staff provides this information for City Council discussion and general direction.

BACKGROUND

Recreation Center Plan - City planning around a new Recreation Center began in 2016 when RJM Design Group collaborated with City staff to gather community input, provide an assessment of the current recreation programming capabilities, and study the effectiveness of the existing Foster City Recreation Center to provide adequate space for current and future recreation programs. The community engagement tools used included stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, an internet survey, and a community workshop meeting. A report on the findings of this outreach was completed and presented to the City Council on February 21, 2017 (the full report can be found [here](#)). Data from this outreach phase was used in the development of the Recreation Center Conceptual Designs by Burks Toma Architects.

On June 7, 2021, the City Council directed staff to validate that the space and programming needs identified in 2016 and 2017 are still applicable today and return to the City Council to discuss next steps. City Council also made it clear that they did not want to start from scratch and instead they wanted to validate the recommendations and, in addition, pursue corporate and School District partnerships if possible.

Park System Improvement Plan – The planning effort around the Foster City park system began in the fall of 2018 when the City hired Placeworks to assess our current parks system and develop a long-term vision and strategy to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse population for the foreseeable future. The Placeworks contract initially produced a comprehensive assessment of City parks, and a community survey was distributed to determine any unmet needs. The agreement with Placeworks included public outreach to be conducted in a few phases consisting of soliciting input from City staff, stakeholder groups, and community members through online engagement, community and pop-up events, workshops, and other opportunities for public involvement. However, the Placeworks contract was terminated in the spring of 2019 before several of the planned public engagement tasks were completed.

On June 9, 2021, the City Council discussed the benefit of developing a comprehensive plan for our park system versus identifying key amenities within our park system to be replaced or improved in the next 10 to 15 years and developing a financing strategy to pay for those improvements over time. City Council directed staff to develop a community engagement strategy and survey tool, and solicit comments and suggestions from the PRC on the outreach strategy before returning to the City Council for further direction. City Council directed staff to leverage the work that had already been done and to identify the amenities that were missing, needed enhancing and needed replacing/refurbishing. This collection of feedback was to be prioritized into a CIP, priced, validated by staff, and incorporated into the FY 2022-2023 budget for review and ultimate approval by the City Council.

ANALYSIS

The planning processes for the Park System Improvement Plan and the Recreation Center Replacement Project incorporate the same elements, such as a current evaluation of recreational amenities, an assessment of future programmatic and space needs for recreation activities, a prioritized project list with cost estimates, and a financing plan to pay for the improvements. Some of this work has already been completed by staff and consultants as part of previous planning efforts. Chart 1 below summarizes a plan for validating existing data and engaging community stakeholders about future needs.

In the case of the Park System Improvement Planning, Placeworks completed all of the interviews and engagement with Parks staff to survey the existing parks to identify areas of needed improvement. This step is still necessary with the recreation staff since many of the parks are programmed with recreation staff. What was not completed was the community engagement. Therefore, staff is proposing a robust communication strategy that will capture the current and unmet needs of our park users, both in and outside the City. In addition, we will conduct table-top surveys at events held in park facilities to engage with actual users. All this information will be used along with the survey of the existing park amenities to propose a park system list of improvements that will be vetted, priced and incorporated into a CIP and ultimately brought to the City Council for review and approval. The PRC will be consulted for their recommendations that will be used to advise the City Council to seek ultimate approval as part of the FY 2022-2023 budget.

In the case of the Recreation Center Replacement Project, like the park system improvement planning, staff intends to engage recreation staff to identify programming and space needs. However, as part of the work with RJM Design Group, many elements of community engagement were already completed and only need to be validated. Therefore, it is recommended that recreation staff validate the recommendations through focused engagement efforts with a community wide survey. In addition, we will conduct table-top surveys at events held at the Recreation Center to engage with actual users. We are also anticipating adding a component of engagement with our corporate partners as well as with

the School Districts to find opportunities for collaboration and potential funding. The results will ultimately be used to validate the design.

Chart 1: Community Engagement Elements

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ELEMENTS FOR PARKS & RECREATION CENTER	
Task/Element	Description
STAFF FOCUS GROUPS (Parks System Improvement & Recreation Center Replacement)	Seek current input from staff knowledge about existing infrastructure, programming, facility management and maintenance, budgets, as well as an understanding of existing and anticipated community needs. This includes, but is not limited to, staff from Recreation, Parks and Public Works.
COMMUNITY SURVEYS (Parks System Improvement & Recreation Center Replacement)	Distribute two separate online surveys to seek current input on future programmatic and space needs for a new Recreation Center and a separate survey for park system improvements. Both surveys will seek to solicit responses from frequent park and Recreation Center user personas. Personas for park users will include groups such as parents of young children, passive users, adult sports, sports leagues, etc. Personas for Recreation Center users will include groups such as seniors, private events, conference and business meeting organizers.
POP UP TABLETOP SURVEYS (Parks System Improvement & Recreation Center Replacement)	For both Park system improvement and the Recreation Center replacement, conduct surveys of users during events at both the Recreation Center and park system. The surveys will be part of the community engagement effort.
COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS (Parks System Improvement)	Seek current input from the public on the vision for the park systems, as well as the identification of priorities and key issues of concern for current and unmet needs.
CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT (Recreation Center Replacement Only)	Engage business community partnership opportunities
SCHOOL DISTRICT	Engage the School Districts about partnership opportunities

ENGAGEMENT (Recreation Center Replacement Only)	
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Comments from PRC regarding Survey Questions – In general, the PRC supported the proposed survey questions proposed by staff. The following bullet points highlight some of the committee comments.

- Consider the most sophisticated approach in gathering data. For example, multiple surveys for a greater response rate overall.
- Consider the feasibility of focusing not simply on planning around the existing Recreation Center, but rather multiple facilities.
- Consider questions surrounding the frequency and type of use of the lagoon.
- Consider questions related to accessibility and potential needs of seniors and disabled, stating that it was important to include a gathering space for seniors, and mentioned the importance that any new Recreation Center be ADA compliant.
- Consider using the survey to explore other amenities, besides traditional parks and recreation centers uses, such as gyms, golf courses, theaters, etc.
- The types of programs, the type of facilities, what kinds of spaces are needed are all inter-related questions, and knowing what is available is important

Staff has incorporated many of the suggestions into the final survey questions. A full copy of the meeting minutes has been attached (Attachment 1). The final survey may vary slightly after we engage with Zencity to ensure the survey is balanced and neutral in its approach.

Recommended Survey Questions – In consultation with the PRC, staff has developed two separate survey questionnaires to confirm future recreation needs. The surveys will build on those responses received in previous planning efforts and help capture public sentiment and comments about recreational amenities right now, instead of issues they had pre-COVID. One set of survey questions is devoted to the parks system planning effort, and the other set of questions is devoted to assessing future needs for the Recreation Center and can be found on Attachments 2 and 3.

Community Engagement Schedule – Staff believes all elements of the community engagement process for the Parks System Improvement Plan and the Recreation Center Replacement Plan can be implemented before the end of the current calendar year.

Attachment 4 – the Community Engagement Schedule provides details of each of the tasks and targeted completion dates. Based on the schedule presented, staff will be able to build out the scope of work to begin the design of a new Recreation Center and prioritize future park improvements starting with the FY 2022-2023 budget.

Funding Plan - Attachment 5 – Staff revised and updated the last funding options worksheet that came to the City Council in 2019 to provide an updated breakdown of several options to finance the replacement of the Recreation Center in categories that range from existing City funding to new revenue sources and bond funding. These options can be used by the City Council in a number of viable combinations, depending upon the City Council’s assessment of the costs, limitations, risks, and parameters of each funding type. Funding for improvements to the park system can be prioritized and incorporated into the capital project budget on a pay as you go basis.

FISCAL IMPACT

Staff understanding of City Council direction at the June 7 and 9 meetings was to leverage work that was already done and not enter into a comprehensive contract to complete either of these tasks. Instead, staff was to do the work in house and supplement, as needed, those elements that staff did not have the necessary expertise or tools to complete. In keeping with that direction, staff will be using some limited engagements of professional facilitators that will conduct the town hall meetings and compile reports. Although staff has not received cost proposals, we anticipate the cost for the community engagement event to be well within the City Manager’s signing authority. In addition, staff is anticipating the use of Zencity for a statistically accurate survey based on personas for both the park system and Recreation Center. The two surveys are estimated to cost \$30,000 and will include a complete report for incorporation into future work. The costs for the assistance with community meeting facilitation and survey distribution are already included in the adopted budget. No additional allocation of funds is needed.

CITY COUNCIL VISION, MISSION, AND VALUE/PRIORITY AREA

This item directly relates to City Council’s "Facilities and Infrastructure" Value/Priority Area which prioritizes maintaining, “a standard of excellence with regards to infrastructure, including ... City facilities to preserve and enhance quality of life for future generations.” Depending upon the solutions pursued, it could also further City Council’s "Innovation and Sustainability" Value/Priority Area to “Continue to lead in employing modern solutions to current day problems with a focus on and consideration of climate change” and "Public Safety and Social Equity" Priority Area to “Continue to promote diversity and inclusive policies within the City organization and seek social equity in all City policies including public safety.”

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 - Meeting Minutes from the July 13, 2021 Foster City PRC Meeting
- Attachment 2 - Recommended Survey Questions for the Parks System Improvement Plan
- Attachment 3 - Recommended Survey Questions for the Recreation Center Replacement Plan
- Attachment 4 - Community Engagement Schedule
- Attachment 5 - Funding Options for the Replacement of the Recreation Center