

# **City Manger's Review Committee on the Library and Parks & Community Services Departments**

## **Final Report and Recommendations – May 2011**

### **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.

#### **I. GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The City should continue to operate separate departments for Library and Parks & Community Services. **APPROVED unanimously**
2. The City should continue to directly manage and staff the Library Department. **APPROVED unanimously**
3. The City should conduct independent management and administrative reviews outside of the budget process of the Library and Parks and Community Services Departments and direct savings to the restoration of services in those departments. **APPROVED by majority**
4. The City should adopt a Five-Year Capital Plan that prioritizes the City's capital investments from all funding sources to ensure clear commitments to the community. 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 impact delivery of services to citizens. **APPROVED unanimously**

#### **II. RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE SENT TO THE LIBRARY OR PARKS AND COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD FOR FURTHER STUDY AND/OR REVIEW:**

**All Studies should be a public process as defined by the respective board.**  
**APPROVED by majority**

#### **Aquatics - all recommendations APPROVED unanimously as amended**

1. Conduct an assessment of the 2008 Aquatics Master Plan to determine the feasibility and applicability of the proposed facilities and establish recommendations for amendments to the plan including the size and scope of the facilities.

2. Establish criteria to determine the most strategic location of future aquatic facilities that would effectively and efficiently serve the greatest number of citizens.
3. Review financial strategies that would realistically and efficiently enable the funding of the design, construction and operation of the proposed aquatic facilities.
4. Review the cost per user of former aquatics program and consider collaborating with other entities that provide similar programs and that have an aquatic facility.
5. Incorporate the updated Aquatics Master Plan should be considered as part of a Five-Year Capital Plan.

**Golf - all recommendations APPROVED unanimously as amended**

1. Determine whether the Golf Program should operate as an enterprise fund. Evaluate all golf courses for operational efficiencies, effectiveness, course locations and market competition.
2. Based on the findings and recommendations, the Park Board and the City Council may consider:
  - a. Repurposing one or more golf courses that have a negative cash flow, or
  - b. Subsidize the Golf Program with General Fund monies or
  - c. Take the courses that are losing money and move them into the General Fund and operate the other ones as enterprise funds.

**Social Services**

1. Given changing demographics and the economy, study further the City's role with social services; the involvement of multiple non-profit service providers in safety net services and the responsibilities for social services of various city departments. **APPROVED unanimously**
2. Continue working with the Cowboy Santas program to help them fully function as an independent non-profit or transition to an existing non-profit. The City's role would shift from a direct funder to being an active partner in accepting applications and encouraging employees to volunteer. **APPROVED unanimously as amended**

**Botanic Garden, the Nature Center and the Log Cabin Village APPROVED 11 to 4**

For each of the above named facilities, the following is recommended:

1. Review the current role of all support groups.
2. Study any possible changes that would enhance the operation for the benefit of the public.

3. In conducting the Review/Study for each facility the following criteria should be considered:
  - 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 while maintaining accessibility across diverse social and economic levels.
  - b. If the City decides to engage in any 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.
4. Forward the document from the LCHF to the Parks and Community Services Advisory Board for their review.

### **Library**

1. Initiate discussion with other library systems within the boundaries of the City, (public school districts and Tarrant County College) about shared resources. **APPROVED unanimously**
2. Continue process for community to review, the City Council to adopt and the department to implement the Library's pending Master Services Plan. **APPROVED unanimously**

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAFF IMPLEMENTATION:**

#### **Joint Staff (Parks & Library)**

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) **APPROVED unanimously**
  - b. Requesting that the T provide youth with free or discounted transportation to libraries or community centers with their Library cards or PACS membership cards. **APPROVED unanimously**
  - 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. **APPROVED unanimously**

2. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
3. 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, software compatibility and library subscription databases should be pursued. **APPROVED unanimously**
4. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
5. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
6. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
7. More fully investigate the Volunteer Center's Service Works program to determine if this is a program that would benefit all city departments. **APPROVED unanimously**
8. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
  - 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. **APPROVED unanimously**

#### Library Staff

1. Work with area libraries to achieve economies of scale in existing contracts or operations and services. **APPROVED unanimously**
2. 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. **APPROVED unanimously**

- b. Identify opportunities and consider impact for developers to provide space in new and existing 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. **APPROVED unanimously**
3. The City should initiate a dialogue with the County about their financial support for services provided to residents in unincorporated areas. **APPROVED unanimously**

#### Parks and Community Services Staff

1. By Grant Program Year 2012, merge the Housing and Economic Development Weatherization Assistance Program into the Parks & Community Services Departments Community Action Partners Programs. **APPROVED unanimously**
2. 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 that the impact on citizen needs is considered. Any costs for improvements that the City would bear, if any, should be included in the Five-Year Capital Plan. **APPROVED unanimously**
3. Work with Botanic Garden support organizations to explore the feasibility of establishing a development officer to establish a formal fundraising program similar to other gardens around the country. **APPROVED by majority**
4. The City should continue to evaluate the current rate of developer participation fees and land dedication requirements for parks to ensure that adequate land is set aside and funds are available for park development. **APPROVED unanimously**
5. PACS should place a greater emphasis on and expand the Adopt-a-Park program including planting beds at libraries by October 1, 2011. **APPROVED unanimously**