

RESOLUTION NO. 183-2011

A RESOLUTION CLOSING OUT COMMUNITY CONSERVATION
PARTNERSHIPS GRANT PROJECT (BRC-TAG-16-10)

WHEREAS, the City of Reading has prepared a Reading Recreational Commission Project for the City of Reading area; and

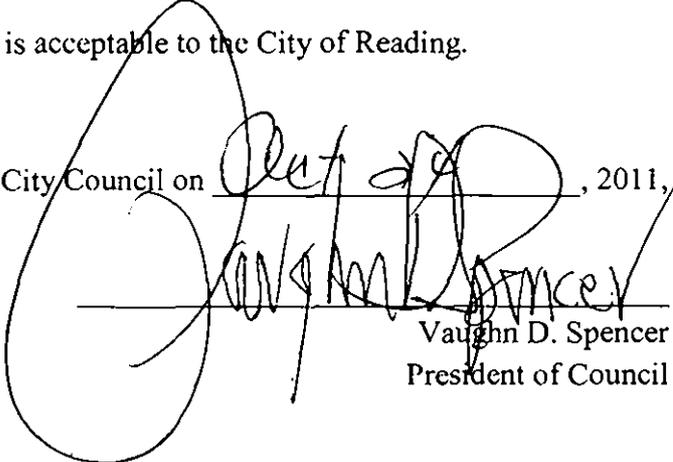
WHEREAS, the purpose of the Plan is to create a partnership between the City of Reading and Reading School District to provide affordable sports, recreation and learning opportunities to Reading youth at schools, parks and playgrounds; and

WHEREAS, the Plan was financed in part by a Community Conservation Partnership Program grant under the administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, under contract number BRC-TAG-16-10.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED by the City of Reading that:

- a. All project expenditures have been made and were in accordance with the grant contract.
- b. The completed project is acceptable to the City of Reading.

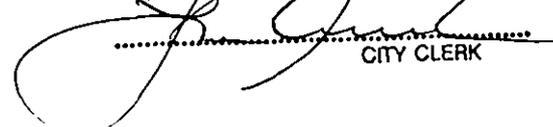
Adopted by the Reading City Council on Oct 29, 2011,

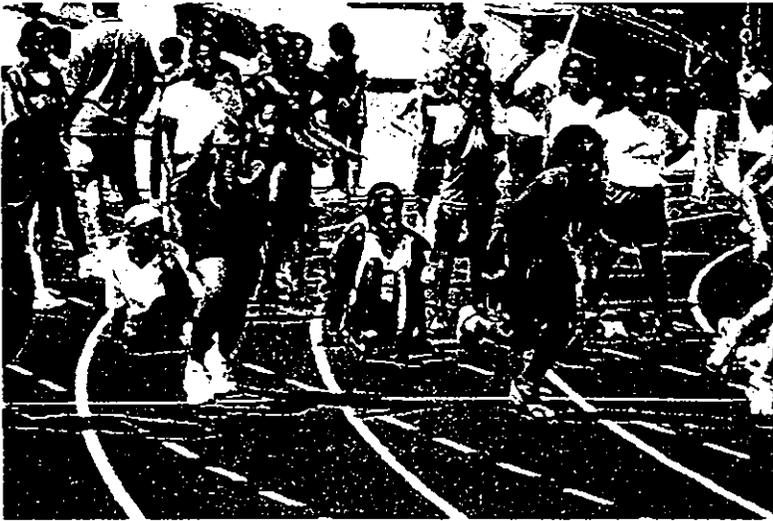

Vaughn D. Spencer
President of Council

Attest:


Linda Kelleher
City Clerk

I, LINDA A. KELLEHER, City Clerk of the City of Reading, Pa., do hereby certify, that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the original Resolution passed by the Council of the City of Reading, on the 29 day of Oct, A. D. 2011. Witness my hand and seal of the said City this 29 day of Oct, A. D. 2011.


CITY CLERK



Reading Recreation Commission Project

A DCNR Peer-to-Peer
Technical Assistance Project
Summary Report
Susan E. Landes, Peer Consultant

This project was financed in part by a grant from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, under administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation

August
2011

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Recreation and Conservation Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance Project. Special appreciation is extended to these people who served on the project committee:

Frank Denbowski, Chief of Staff, City of Reading

Marsha Goodman-Hinnershitz, Member, Reading City Council

Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk, City of Reading

Linda Kelleher, City Clerk, City of Reading

John Santoro, Jr., Member, Reading School Board

Mike Schorn, Education Coordinator, City of Reading

Otis Smith, Chair, Reading Park and Recreation Advisory Council

Vaughn Spencer, President, Reading City Council

Yvonne Stroman, President, Reading School Board

Frank Vecchio, Former Acting Superintendent of Schools, Reading School District

Jim Washington, Vice-President, Reading School Board

Summary

The City of Reading has a long history of providing quality recreation services for its residents.

Less than 15 years ago, the City staffed 28 summer playground programs for children. By 2010, only five supervised playground sites operated. In 2011, the playground program was not held due to lack of funding. The City's parks are also beginning to fall into decline. The City's current financial situation calls for alteration in its approach to recreation programming in order to continue to provide public recreation for its citizens, in particular its children. Presently the City Recreation Division has just two full-time staff positions left, and few recreation programs are offered.

The long-term sustainability of basic services provided by Pennsylvania cities – police, fire, water, sanitation, public health, streets, parks and recreation, traffic control and so on – is in jeopardy. Dwindling resources are leaving cities such as Reading unable to deliver those basic services needed to support economic vitality and quality of life for residents.

Mayor Tom McMahon convened a municipal recreation work group in 2009 to explore forming new community partnerships to share the cost of providing high-quality, accessible youth recreation programming in Reading. In February 2010, the work group released a preliminary report recommending that the City pursue the establishment of a Reading Recreation Commission in partnership with the Reading School District. The non-profit status of a recreation commission will open up grant possibilities, business support and donations that government cannot access. A recreation commission would also be able to keep the revenue earned by programs to fund its operation and expand and improve its programs.

The other reasons to create a recreation commission are all quality of life reasons. Investing in public recreation is investing in solutions to help alleviate community problems, such as low high school graduation rates, inadequate early childhood care and education, crime and gang activities among youth, truancy, drug and alcohol use and teen pregnancy. When youth are involved in positive, constructive activities, these problems are lessened.

The City and School District realized that they had a special opportunity to foster a collaborative funding and facility relationship for public recreation, to primarily benefit City children.

With the help of DCNR, a preliminary meeting was held in October 2010 to discuss undertaking a peer study in order to sustain City-wide recreation opportunities, particularly for youth. The first meeting of the project committee was held in December. It was agreed that this was to be an action-oriented project, not a study-oriented project.

The purpose of the project committee's work was to explore forming a community partnership between the School District and the City, with a focus on sharing resources, to provide expanded youth recreation programming. The overall goal for the committee was to establish

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the Reading Recreation Commission as a 501 (c)(3) intergovernmental non-profit agency. An aggressive six-month timeline was set for completion of the project.

Six goals were adopted for the project committee's work:

1. Make it possible to expand, enhance and deliver City public recreation services more effectively through coordination between the City and School District.
2. Keep the effort as simple and straight forward as possible.
3. Focus the effort to form a recreation commission on expanded youth programming.
4. Create an agency with the structure and ability to keep the revenue earned from programs to fund the agency's operations and expand and improve the programs.
5. Share use of City and School District public facilities to provide more sports and recreation opportunities for youth at better maintained facilities.
6. Foster a close, collaborative working relationship among the City and School District to benefit the City's youth.

The project committee agreed upon the purpose of the potential recreation commission as follows: "Through a partnership between the City of Reading and the Reading School District, provide affordable sports, recreation and learning opportunities to Reading youth at schools, parks and playgrounds."

The project committee also identified how forming a recreation commission would benefit the City and School District, and ultimately, the residents of the City of Reading. These benefits were shared with City Council and School Board members:

1. City and School District community recreation facility assets will be better used. For example, a recreation commission could operate the School District's indoor swimming pools for youth swimming lessons and community use.
2. Neighborhood-based sports and recreation program opportunities will be offered at school locations and City park and playground facilities. Continuing the programs that exist and expanding programs at school locations and City park and playground facilities throughout the City's neighborhoods will help to make the programs accessible to children (within walking distance).
3. Youth will have a purpose through expanded sports and recreation programs. Programs will be a "hook" to keep kids in school. Problems such as crime and gang activities, low high school graduation rates, truancy, drug and alcohol use and teen pregnancy are lessened when youth are exposed to and involved in positive, constructive activities. Research has shown that children who are involved in sports and recreation programs perform better in school, helping them meet state standards in academic areas and reinforce classroom learning. Sports and recreation programs help to meet children's needs for belonging, recognition, achievement, adventure, excitement, creativity and

competition. They also help children develop self-confidence, increase self-esteem, improve social and communication skills and be more physically active.

4. Kids will stay active and keep learning during the summer months at neighborhood playground programs. By working together, the City and School District can bring the summer playground programs back to many locations, getting thousands of children out of the house and involved in constructive activities.
5. Youth sports programs will coordinate with the School District athletic programs to better prepare youth for middle and high school sports. Reading youth have tremendous athletic potential which isn't being developed to the extent it could be. School District teams could be dominant if children were involved in structured sports programs at younger ages. Some of the volunteer youth sports groups are struggling. With support from the recreation commission with items such as fundraising, scheduling use of facilities and recruiting and training coaches, the existing youth sports groups could continue to operate and strengthen their programs.
6. The operation of youth recreation programs will be supported through revenue earned, business support, grant funding, donations, and other sources rather than rely heavily on tax support. Intergovernmental cooperation increases the City's chances of receiving future grant funding for park and recreation facility improvements, plus a state grant is available to hire another full-time employee once a recreation commission is officially put in place. Obtaining 501(c)(3) status will open the doors to many more grant and foundation sources. A partnership with the School District will open up more grant possibilities. Businesses and individuals will donate funds to a non-profit agency that is not considered 'government.' The ability to spend the revenue earned to improve the programs offered for children will give the staff the incentive to raise money. Many programs will be able to be self-supporting.

In January 2011, work began on a list of 23 decisions that would need to be made to draft an intergovernmental agreement of cooperation. The items were discussed at length and consensus agreement was reached over the next few months. The peer consultant met with the School Board to present the Recreation Commission concept and answer questions in March 2011. The intergovernmental agreement was reviewed by City and School District solicitors, and suggested changes were incorporated. In July 2011, the School Board and City Council approved the intergovernmental agreement to create the Reading Recreation Commission. In large part, this was made possible by the great work of the project committee members, who remained focused on the goal and positive throughout the process. They kept the City and School District elected officials well informed, answering questions and addressing concerns about project progress. Above all, the project committee members were very willing to compromise and work together.

Recommendations

These recommendations to the City of Reading, Reading School District and Reading Recreation Commission are not in order of priority, and are not meant to be a comprehensive listing. The recommendations should be used as a guideline to begin operations. The Recreation Commission is expected by DCNR to develop a strategic plan with goals, objectives, action steps, timelines and success indicators. These recommendations should be used as a starting point to develop a strategic plan. Each recommendation should be evaluated and prioritized by the Recreation Commission, and specific actions to accomplish the tasks should be developed.

Administrative Issues

1. Create three executed, original copies of the intergovernmental agreement that are signed and sealed by the City and School District. Provide original executed copies to the City, School District and Recreation Commission. Make additional copies for Recreation Commission members, and City and School District administrative staff.
2. Submit the Circuit Rider grant application to DCNR for the executive director position.
3. Appoint the 11 members to the Recreation Commission and coordinate the first meeting. The citizen appointees should be qualified individuals who are supportive of recreation and are willing to give their time and talents.
4. The City should determine if its Park and Recreation Advisory Council will be needed once the Recreation Commission is functioning.
5. Finalize the salary ranges for the executive director and full-time program staff positions.
6. Draft a job description for the executive director, and review and revise job descriptions for the full-time program staff positions.
7. Run clearances on all existing full and part-time staff, if they have not been done.
8. Determine benefits for the full-time staff, such as vacation, sick leave and holidays.
9. Obtain health insurance, life insurance and pension plan for full-time staff.
10. Obtain worker's compensation insurance coverage.
11. Determine if the two existing full-time Recreation Division staff want to be employed by the Recreation Commission.
12. Recruit and hire an executive director with the help of the City or School District personnel department. Utilize DCNR staff for assistance and advice throughout the hiring process.
13. Join the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society (PRPS). Include the costs for the executive director to attend the PRPS State Conference in the budget.
14. Apply to the IRS for a federal employer identification number.
15. Open a bank account for the Recreation Commission.
16. Transfer the City Youth Fund and the City Tennis Fund to the Recreation Commission.
17. Contract with a payroll processing company. Develop timesheets and timekeeping policies.

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18. Develop an accounting system with the help of an auditing firm familiar with nonprofit agencies. Decide whether to use the accrual or cash method of accounting. Establish a system of controls (checks and balances) for collection and deposit of funds and paying of bills.
19. Purchase accounting software and set up purchase order system.
20. Set up email and voice mail systems.
21. Obtain an auditor to perform the yearly audit.
22. Develop a record-keeping system to save Recreation Commission documents, minutes, financial statements and other important documents.
23. Develop a letter to send to the City and School District requesting contribution payments on a quarterly basis for the Recreation Commission.
24. Develop a detailed first-year operating budget for 2012. This will include complete breakdowns of hours and staff needed to operate existing programs. Start the budgeting process by figuring out how much money there is to spend – the total income the Recreation Commission will have to work with.
25. Have Recreation Commission added to City and School District general liability insurance policies as a named insured.
26. Obtain general liability insurance coverage and directors and officers insurance coverage as needed.
27. Process paperwork to obtain nonprofit 501(c)(3) status. Seek the assistance of the City or School District solicitor when preparing this application.
28. File for state and local tax exemption with the help of solicitors or accountants.
29. Apply for a nonprofit mailing permit, which will allow for reduced postage rates on bulk mailings.
30. Develop employment application form.
31. Develop process for criminal history and child abuse clearances to be obtained for all Recreation Commission employees.
32. Develop employee performance evaluation system.
33. Revise all existing forms used by the Recreation Division – such as accident reports, incident reports, rental forms, program evaluation forms, and registration forms – with Recreation Commission as the agency name.
34. Develop a mission statement for the Recreation Commission. It should be a concise one or two-sentence expression of who the organization is, what it does, for whom and where. It should be compelling and portray how the Recreation Commission is distinct from other organizations.
35. Inventory the supplies and equipment owned by the City Recreation Division.
36. Determine the supplies and equipment that will transfer to Recreation Commission ownership. Determine where equipment will be stored.
37. Develop a personnel policy manual to include items such as employee conduct and disciplinary action, leaves of absence, work conditions and hours, timekeeping and payroll, employee benefit programs, employment status and records, etc.

38. Begin the strategic planning process shortly after the executive director is employed.
39. Establish a process to keep lines of communication with the City Council and School Board open. Ask for a standing report on their meeting agendas. This can be done as a written report, introduced by Recreation Commission member(s) who represent each entity, or as a verbal report.

Recreation Commission Board Development

1. Set monthly meeting dates, times and locations for the Recreation Commission and place a public meeting notice advertisement in the local newspaper.
2. Elect officers for the Recreation Commission.
3. Draft and approve by-laws for the operation of the Recreation Commission. Have them reviewed by the City or School District solicitor prior to approval.
4. Prepare a contact list for Recreation Commission members. Include the term expiration dates for members on the contact list.
5. Activate the Recreation Commission committees (program, property, finance, personnel) and divide responsibilities among members.
6. Identify the roles and responsibilities of Recreation Commission members.
7. Adopt a communication and decision making outline for Recreation Commission members and staff members to follow.
8. Adopt a code of ethics that Recreation Commission members must sign.
9. Have Recreation Commission chair and executive director meet prior to each Recreation Commission meeting to develop the meeting agenda.
10. Have executive director provide a written report for each Recreation Commission meeting.
11. Develop an orientation manual for new Recreation Commission members and implement an orientation process.
12. Keep politics out of the operation of the Recreation Commission. Put the community and cooperative effort first.

Recreation Programs

1. Evaluate the existing City-sponsored recreation programs and determine what changes need to be made.
2. Track program enrollment and attendance.
3. Place a priority on resurrecting the supervised summer playground program at as many sites as possible.

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4. Meet with all existing recreation providers in the City to develop a thorough understanding of what programs currently exist and how many children are being served.
5. Meet with all organizations that use City-owned facilities to run recreation programs, such as BlackTop Summer Basketball, Rising Sun Athletic Association, etc., so that it is clear who is using facilities and who is responsible for maintaining facilities.
6. Identify days and times when School District facilities may be available for community recreation programs.
7. Meet with School District representatives to coordinate use of school facilities including the supervision required and how the Recreation Commission will access the facilities.
8. Visit all City and School District recreation facilities and determine what programs may be possible at each facility.
9. Begin discussion with the School District to assist with any recreation-related programming currently sponsored by them.
10. Implement a scholarship system to allow those who are in financial need to participate in fee-based recreation programs.
11. Explore state licensing for summer day camps and after school programs.

Park Operation and Maintenance

1. Evaluate park and recreation areas and facilities for safety concerns and maintenance needs.
2. Meet with the City Parks Superintendent to gain a clear understanding of staffing levels for maintenance, what maintenance is currently being provided, and where help may be needed.
3. Standardize rental costs and procedures for City park facilities such as recreation centers, field houses, ball fields and picnic facilities.
4. Determine who is responsible for reservation, scheduling and permitting of ball field and park facility use.
5. Determine who is currently using and maintaining each City recreation facility.
6. Undertake a thorough study of the maintenance of City-owned parks, grounds and recreation facilities, with the aim to make decisions about who can best operate and maintain the facilities.

Public Relations

1. Secure a domain name that matches the name of the organization - Reading Rec if available.

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2. Develop a website for the Recreation Commission. Include links to City and School District websites and ask the City and School District to include links on their websites to the Recreation Commission website.
3. Develop a logo for the Recreation Commission. Create letterhead, envelopes and business cards.
4. Develop a tag-line for the Recreation Commission that represents its mission and distinguishes it from other organizations.
5. On all written materials, highlight the partnership between the City and School District.
6. Develop a seasonal recreation guide to inform the public about Recreation Commission programs. Strive to produce two editions each year, Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter.
7. Post program information at all City offices and school buildings.
8. Distribute flyers for recreation programs through the schools.
9. Hold in-school assemblies to promote programs.
10. Set up a schedule for the executive director to attend City Council meetings and School Board meetings to provide status reports on the Recreation Commission.

Partnerships and Citizen Involvement

1. Identify those citizens who are currently active in their neighborhoods. Meet with these citizens to inform them about the Recreation Commission and ask for their input on recreation programs they feel are needed. Begin to involve citizens in parks and programs and to help spread the word about new programs.
2. Identify potential partners to help maintain parks and playground sites.
3. Meet with all City youth and adult sports associations and determine how the Recreation Commission can assist and support their efforts.
4. Schedule meetings with civic groups, neighborhood groups, church groups, youth serving agencies, school athletic booster clubs, school parent-teacher organizations, etc. to get their input on recreation opportunities and to discuss possible cooperative efforts.
5. Establish a network of park facility and recreation program providers to improve communication and help them understand their role as part of the City's recreation and parks system.
6. Coordinate public-private partnerships with area businesses to benefit recreation and parks opportunities for the City.
7. Schedule regular meetings with key City and School District staff to keep partners well informed about Recreation Commission.

Revenue Development

1. Expand sources of revenue through business sponsorships, donations, in-kind contributions and fund raising activities.
2. Set cost recovery goals for each recreation program and service offered.
3. Evaluate facility and equipment rental fees for the potential to increase them.
4. Institute a non-resident fee for recreation programs that is at a minimum 25% higher than City resident fees. This would include the existing youth tennis program.
5. Meet with hospitals and colleges/universities about program funding possibilities.
6. Produce more recreation program revenue through existing programs and by adding new programs.
7. Consider instituting a per child/adult fee for sports groups and associations utilizing City outdoor recreation facilities, to assist with providing proper maintenance.
8. Evaluate summer swimming pool admission fees for potential increases.

Final Thoughts

The new Reading Recreation Commission has many challenges ahead.

While the City and School District have agreed that cooperation for recreation makes sense, developing a new agency isn't going to be easy. There is much work to do internally, before improved programs for the City's children can even be considered.

New recreation programs and better maintained park areas and recreation facilities won't happen overnight. The Recreation Commission should be patient and move slowly. It's best to do things right, rather than fast! Growth needs to be at a pace that will allow new recreation programs to be of high quality and will start partnerships to maintain facilities on a solid foundation.

To attract the caliber of candidates with the experience and know-how to successfully develop the new Recreation Commission, offer a competitive salary for the executive director position. Hiring an experienced, professional leader is extremely important.

Sharing resources is also critical to the success of the new Recreation Commission. The agency should be considered as an extension of the City and School District. In-kind support should be provided whenever possible. This reduces the costs for the Recreation Commission, which ultimately reduces costs for the City and School District.

Lastly, keep the focus on the benefits to the City's children and to the quality of life in the City through expanded and improved recreation programs. Always highlight the positive partnership among the City and School District that is making this Recreation Commission's services possible.