

CHAPTER TWO - COMMUNITY INPUT

One of the most important elements of the Master Plan process is the community input process, which provides residents with an opportunity to express their perspectives of the City of Durango Parks and Recreation Department services. During the month of October 2008, PROS Consulting, LLC facilitated a series of focus groups, key leader interviews, and a public meeting. Specifically, this included:

- Seventeen key leader interviews
- Five focus groups, consisting of 69 people
- Two public meetings with 147 attendees
- Community Survey Summary (full report included in **Appendix A**)

During the month of December 2008, PROS Consulting, LLC facilitated three additional focus groups, consisting of 16 people. Presentation of the draft Master Plan in a community meeting occurred in March 2010. In addition, several additional residents completed comment cards and an online list of questions.

2.1 KEY LEADER, FOCUS GROUP AND PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

The following represents a summary of the information provided by the public and key leaders. Each question is listed with a summary of responses provided.

2.1.1 STRENGTHS OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT AND ELEMENTS TO BUILD UPON FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE MASTER PLAN

There were many strengths mentioned at the meetings, primarily the variety of programs offered, the trail system, the Recreation Center, and parks. The public was very happy with the range of activities for all ages and the fees for them. They feel the Parks and Recreation Department is well-funded and well-managed. Several people mentioned the staff as a definite strength as they listen to people, take their requests and suggestions into consideration, have a true desire to see the programs succeed, and are dedicated to their jobs. However, they do feel the staff has too much to do. The public also feels the facilities are well-maintained and are of good quality.

Other strengths mentioned:

- Sixty percent (60%) of the County is public and tribal land, which is a significant asset
- Lots of volunteer opportunities exist within the Department
- 2005 Open Space, Parks and Trails Fund (2A tax) is a great benefit as a funding source
- Animas River Trail was mentioned most frequently as a strength
- City and County continue to work together as part of land use effort
- Mother's Day Soccer Tournament generates \$900,000 for the City
- Parks and Recreation has more financial assets to work with than other cities

2.1.2 OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT/WEAKNESSES

There were also opportunities for improvement and weaknesses mentioned. The most prevalent comment related to the need for more multi-use athletic fields, and to make better use of the ones already available. The public would like to see improvements at the pool, with more space inside for spectators, a larger pool, and an outdoor pool of some kind.

The public mentioned frustration with previous planning on various topics with no visible progress. One specific example included renovations to Chapman Hill.

When asked, a need for a large community and/or regional park with more flat turf and athletic fields and facilities was frequently mentioned. Currently, there is a strong need to rely on other agencies for the use of flat turf and athletic fields, and the public would like to see a concerted effort to focus on strengthening partnerships with these agencies and adding additional capacity to the park system.

The Recreation Center was also brought up several times. People mentioned it is frequently overcrowded, and they can't get access to the classes and facilities because they are being used by other patrons. Many residents suggested the need for expanding the Center. This expansion was countered with a suggestion of working with the college to have the student recreation center made available to the public for a nominal fee. In regards to fees, many residents would like to see either non-resident charges or resident discounts.

Public input participants also mentioned they would like to see: (1) raised crosswalks at dangerous crossings and improved Animas River access with public transportation; (2) an underpass at Camino del Rio; (3) more strategically located river access points on a looped and signed trail system; and (4) the Animas River recognized as a major fishery.

Considerations should also be made for an environmental coordinator position to be created for the Department. This would perhaps instigate a vegetation policy that restricts becoming a wildlife magnet. Also, perhaps a person in the position of environmental coordinator would tackle the problem of the zebra mussels at the reservoir associated with the Animas La Plata Project. This is an issue that could eventually affect the City's water supply, yet no one has taken responsibility for it. The public would like to see some kind of environmental assessments done.

Additional comments included:

- Improve the balance of responsibility for maintenance of the fields
- Any new facility should be LEED and retrofit existing buildings to LEED
- Waste water treatment plant at Santa Rita – should be relocated
- The City infrastructure is not good and has been neglected – sidewalks, bike lanes
- Mason Center improvements are needed – or build new gymnastics facility
- Facility for indoor baseball is desired
- Park and recreation opportunities at Lake Nighthorse in cooperation with the Bureau of Reclamation

2.1.3 WHAT RESIDENTS VALUE MOST ABOUT DURANGO PARKS AND RECREATION

Residents value the variety of programs offered, and they appreciate the parks and recreation amenities they currently have. People participate in park and recreation activities to have fun, to relieve stress, for environmental education, to appreciate natural resources, and to spend time with family and friends.

2.1.4 THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT TRAIL SYSTEM

Connectivity and stewardship were two areas of importance identified by the community. The public would like to have more connections between parks and residential areas. As is, the natural surface trail system is world class with over 90 miles of trails. They would like to see more connectivity to the schools so that the youth can ride their bikes to school if they would like, but at the same time, they want to see the safety of the trails improved.

The Animas River Trail was prominently mentioned by many participants. They mentioned the trail's popularity, but also mentioned the fact that there were plans to link the trail across Camino del Rio to downtown by a spur trail connection, but this link has not occurred. The plans to finish the trail and connect it north to the Iron Horse and south to Escalante Crossings and on to Grandview area were popular with those interviewed. More consistent lighting, signage, and enforcement on the hard surface trail system were also encouraged.

Additional thoughts on the trail system were:

- Parking areas should not be overlooked
- Develop trails to accommodate biking commuters
- An improvement to the street crossing of 15th Street at Rotary Park is needed
- Better signage and connections to parks, open spaces, trails and the recreation center
- Improvements are needed at Horse Gulch, as the City is acquiring more of this property
- Mountain bike races including national championship events use the trail system
- New Transit Center needs to be tied in with the trail system
- Camino del Rio divides the downtown for pedestrians
- Creating either a Camino del Rio underpass or a pedestrian light is important

2.1.5 THOUGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS ABOUT OPEN SPACE

The main issues that came up regarding open space were the definition of open space and the actual use of open spaces. Many of those interviewed felt that the City should decide on a definition of open space and then inform the public.

Some believed that open spaces should be passive recreational areas. Some residents expressed the opinion that open spaces should be closed to the public. Others agreed that seasonally closing open spaces for habitat protection is appropriate, but otherwise agreed with passive public access. Most saw the need to preserve as much natural land as possible.

Additional comments included:

- Schools would access more open space for outdoor learning if there were better connectivity to the open space from the schools
- Provide trash cans and bags for pet waste
- Three different types of open space.....mountain parks, passive recreational areas, and wildlife habitat
- Work with developers to identify and dedicate open space
- Animas River Greenway, Horse Gulch and Twin Buttes should be Open Space preservation priorities
- Need scientific evidence of impact of trails on wildlife

2.1.6 RECREATION PROGRAM NEEDS

Many comments were made about Chapman Hill and the ice rink needing to have their winter time sports programming expanded. Reliable snow making was supported, parking should be improved, and the lifts are inadequate. The public suggested adding sledding and an amphitheater at Chapman Hill for outdoor concerts. It should be noted that other public input participants did not agree with spending money at Chapman Hill. They believed the investment would be better spent elsewhere.

As for the ice rink, those interviewed would like to see more facilities there, perhaps making it a multi-use facility. Adding an extra sheet of ice was suggested so that it could be utilized year round for tournaments which could bring in revenue for the City.

Other improvements suggested included better coordination with camp programs to link them together geographically; expanding the current programs and facilities due to current crowding; more scholarships for kids; and more programs for people with disabilities.

Additional comments included:

- Involve middle school kids in parks and recreation services (community service)
- Provide open gym programs at schools
- Consider charging non-resident fees
- Camping should be considered again--great for bike touring

- More gymnastics' programs are needed but with the current facility, this is not possible
- More ice time is desired, but with the current facility this is not possible
- More fitness and wellness activities at the Recreation Center were supported, though, there is not an ability to offer much more because of space limitations
- Better system to reserve bikes for spinning classes is needed
- Support more whitewater kayaking in-stream improvements

2.1.7 CHANGES/RENOVATIONS AND NEW DEVELOPMENT OF PARKS AND/OR RECREATION FACILITIES

There are new facilities that the public would like to see. A majority of meeting attendees mentioned the need for year-round ice and improvements/renovation of the Mason Center for gymnastics. Also frequently mentioned was expansion of the Recreation Center, due to its current use capacity.

In addition, residents would like to see more fields and parks, more river access, more restrooms and recycling/trash receptacles, more connectivity, and more trees. They liked the idea of a cycling park and improving the dog park with places to dispose of the dog droppings and more grass for the dogs to play on.

Additional comments included:

- Improve or move the BMX track and create a multi-purpose cycling park
- Make the parks functional for families
- Parks should not have chemicals used
- Don't want to see fields along the river
- Provide on-street bike lanes that connect to schools and other bike routes
- The splash pad does not get sufficient use
- More emphasis on neighborhood parks
- Pocket parks need a crowning jewel
- Would like community and botanical gardens
- Provide an indoor facility to accommodate outdoor activities during the winter months
- Would like additional tennis courts with the ability for four season use
- Provide a community park with a concentration of sports facilities with lighting (this was also reinforced with several emails from residents not able to attend the meeting)
- Need more multi-use fields
- Improve condition of the sand volleyball courts at Santa Rita Park
- Drainage issues at many of the parks and fields need to be improved

- There is no time for fields to recover between programs
- Have to convince aging population to support parks and recreation
- Lack of shade at playgrounds and tot lots
- Refresh playground equipment
- Additional bathrooms at the parks are needed
- There are green spaces throughout Durango that may be able to accommodate practice sessions for youth sports
- Include indoor recreation space within new convention center

2.1.8 OPERATIONAL AND MAINTENANCE ISSUES

As the City continues to grow, there will be more demand for services. The program usage will increase, as will the need for more fields and parks. This will increase the need for maintenance workers. Concern has been raised that some of the current parks and fields have not been maintained as well as they could be, the examples being drainage issues at several parks and fields and the Recreation Center needing some updating. In addition, the heavy demands created by so many users at the Recreation Center create maintenance and cleanliness issues.

The Animas La Plata project was also mentioned as a future active recreation spot. There will be maintenance and operations that will need to be taken into consideration.

2.1.9 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The residents had a good awareness of Parks and Recreation programs and services through the program guide. Other general marketing comments included:

- Programs are well publicized
- Inform community of needs
- Decide on a definition for open spaces and educate the public

2.1.10 AREAS NEEDING MORE FUNDING

The community input participants generally had comments as follows:

- Citizens do not know how things are funded
- Keeping up with recreation trends and allocating resources accordingly
- Maintenance of current and future areas including parks, open spaces, and trails
- Deployment and prioritization of resources is challenging
- New trail development

2.1.11 THE MASTER PLAN SHOULD ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING

The following general comments were mentioned as part of the focus for the future:

- Identify where funding is coming from for improvements

- More multi-use fields are needed, and a large sports complex should be considered as a way to accommodate athletic field needs
- Improve quality of current and future fields and parks
- Connect parks and recreation areas via trails, current and future
- There will be continued growth and changing demographics and the City needs to be ready for expansion of services
- Definition of open space is needed
- Place public art to enhance the connections among parks and facilities

2.2 COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY

The following section of the Plan provides an overall summary of the household survey. The entire survey results are included in **Appendix A**. The Community Attitude and Interest Survey, developed during the winter and spring of 2009, helps to establish priorities for the future development of parks, trails, recreation facilities, programs and the preservation of open space in the community. The survey was designed to obtain statistically-valid results from households throughout the City of Durango. The survey was administered by a combination of mail and phone.

Leisure Vision worked extensively with City of Durango officials and Master Plan Steering Committee, as well as members of the PROS Consulting project team in the development of the survey questionnaire. This work allowed the survey to be tailored to issues of strategic importance to effectively plan the future system. Leisure Vision mailed surveys to a random sample of 1,650 households throughout the City of Durango.

The goal was to obtain a total of at least 325 completed surveys. This goal was far exceeded, with a total of 568 completed surveys. The results of the random sample of 568 households have a 95% level of confidence with a precision of at least +/-4.1%.

The following summarize major survey findings:

- In the past year, eighty-nine percent (89%) of households have used walking, hiking, and biking trails and 88% have used the Animas River Trail. The other most frequently used City recreation activities include: Community Recreation Center (74%), natural surface trails (67%), hard surface trails (64%), and natural open space areas (57%).
- In the past year, eighty-eight percent (88%) of households have used trails and 84% have used parks. Seventy-nine percent (79%) of households have used recreation facilities while 69% have used open space, and 42% have used recreation programs.
- Parks, open space, trails, recreation facilities and recreation programs each had between 89%-95% of respondent households rate their physical condition/quality as either excellent or good, which reflects excellent satisfaction levels.
- The open space opportunities that the highest percentage of households value or desire include: river and stream corridors (90%), trails for hiking and biking (88%),

wildlife habitats with trails (77%), picnic facilities (73%), and view sheds/scenic vistas (70%).

- The open space opportunities that meet the values/desires of the highest percentage of households include: trails for hiking and biking, river and stream corridors, picnic facilities, and wildlife habitats with trails.
- Based on the sum of their top choices, the open space opportunities that are most important to respondent households are: trails for hiking and biking (73%), river and stream corridors (69%), and wildlife habitats with trails (44%).
- Based on the sum of their top three choices, the areas that respondents feel are most important to preserve as open space include: Animas River greenway north of town (69%), Ridgeline property within and around Durango (62%), Animas River greenway south of town (46%), and Horse Gulch (43%). It should also be noted that Ridgeline property within and around Durango had the highest percentage of respondents select it as their first choice as the area they feel is more important for the City to preserve as open space.
- The most frequently mentioned ways respondents learn about the City's recreation programs and activities include: newspaper articles (76%), City of Durango Activities Guide (73%), and from friends and neighbors (69%).
- The parks and recreation facilities that the highest percentage of households support or desire include: neighborhood parks (89%), bike and pedestrian hard surface trails (87%), hiking and biking natural surface trails (85%), indoor fitness and exercise facilities (80%), and indoor recreation centers with aquatic areas (77%).
- The parks and recreation facilities that meet the value/support of the highest percentage of households include: indoor recreation centers with aquatic areas, indoor fitness and exercise facilities, skate park, golf courses, and playgrounds.
- Based on the sum of their top four choices, the parks and recreation facilities that are most important to respondent households are: hiking and biking natural surface trails (53%), bike and pedestrian hard surface trails (44%), neighborhood parks (28%), indoor fitness and exercise facilities (21%), and indoor recreation centers with aquatic centers (21%).
- The recreation programs that meet the value/support of the highest percentage of households include: biking events, running events, water fitness programs, adult fitness and wellness programs, and adult sports programs. The recreation programs that the highest percentage of households support or desire include: adult fitness and wellness programs (72%), special events/festivals (66%), Youth Learn to Swim programs (64%), youth/teen sports programs (64%), and nature and wildlife interpretive programs (62%).
- Based on the sum of their top four choices, the recreation programs that are most important to respondent households are: adult fitness and wellness programs (31%), special events/festivals (22%), before and after school programs (18%), youth/teen sports programs (16%), biking events (16%), and Youth Learn to Swim programs (16%).

- In terms of level of support for actions to improve the park and recreation system, there are three actions that over 50% of respondents are either very or somewhat supportive of: fix-up/repair older park buildings/shelters/playgrounds/trails (61%), develop an interconnected hard surface trails network beyond Animas River Trail (60%), and purchase land for parks, recreational facilities and trails (53%).
- Based on the sum of their top three choices, the actions that respondents are most willing to fund with their City tax dollars are: develop an interconnected hard surface trails network beyond Animas River Trail (46%), purchase land for parks, recreation facilities and trails (45%), and fix-up/repair older park buildings/shelters/playgrounds/trails (42%). It should also be noted that purchase land for parks, recreation facilities and trails had the highest percentage of respondents select it as their first choice as the action they are most willing to fund with their City tax dollars.
- From a list of six actions the City of Durango could take to improve the open space and natural surface trails system, respondents were asked to rate their level of support for each one. The following summarizes key findings: there are three actions that over 50% of respondents are either very or somewhat supportive of: purchase land to preserve open space (54%), expand the natural surface trails network (52%), and purchase land for natural surface hiking and biking trails (51%).