



**COUNTY OF SAN MATEO**  
Parks Department



**DATE:** January 22, 2015

**COMMISSION MEETING DATE:** February 5, 2015

**TO:** Parks and Recreation Commission  
**FROM:** Carla Schoof, Community Programs Specialist  
**SUBJECT:** Report on Volunteer and Community Programs

**RECOMMENDATION**

Review and comment on plan.

**BACKGROUND**

Parks Department Community Engagement Plan

**DISCUSSION:**

**Background**

The 2013 Strategic Plan approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Board of Supervisors reflected much of what the community identified as its priorities during the assessment process. The areas of recreation opportunities, environmental protection programs, interpretive and education programs, and volunteer and community engagement are reflected in Plan goals 18 through 23. In order to put the Strategic Plan into action, staff assessed current programs within these categories and identified areas of expansion or development that would should to be undertaken.

**Department Community Engagement Plan**

This plan serves as a roadmap for the Department to engage the public in numerous ways and by doing so develop community partners who value parks, use them and support our efforts in protecting and preserving the lands we manage on their behalf.

Staff considered education, stewardship, volunteerism, relationship management and outreach as methods of engaging the public and therefore developed the Community Engagement Plan that encompasses each of these areas. This plan outlines steps to implement the strategies and reach each goal. In some cases staff recommends alternate strategies or further evaluation before implementation. In addition, there are

strategies that must be assessed to determine if we have the staff capacity to implement.

A communications strategy that supports implementation of the plan is equally important. Our focus will be to position the Department as the source of information about parks, and facilitate information sharing among park stakeholders and the broader community. We can accomplish through:

- Existing and new communication vehicles
- Interpretive programming
- Expanded volunteer programs
- Strengthened partnerships

We have identified the following as a measure of our effectiveness: The Department will be successful if in 2018, through a survey process, community members are able to identify at least two San Mateo County Parks and name the special features or resources of at least one County Park.

## **San Mateo County Parks Community Engagement through Communications, Partnerships and Programs**

### **Introduction**

In 2013 the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors approved the five-year strategic plan which reflected priorities identified during the community needs assessment process. Survey respondents identified a need for more recreational opportunities, environmental protection programs, interpretive and education programs, volunteer programs and community engagement. In response, the Strategic Plan identified 12 goals in the categories of stewardship, environmental literacy and community engagement that are directly connected to communications, partnerships and programs. This plan provides steps that can support the Department in achieving the stated goals, proposes alternative strategies and identifies those strategies that may require additional staffing in order to implement.

### **What Will Success Look Like?**

Through consistent communications, strong partnerships and relevant programs, San Mateo County Parks will be appreciated as community resources that offer special environmental features, unique outdoor recreational locations and opportunities, and be considered important places for learning, relaxation and exercise.

Measurable Outcome: The Department will be successful if in 2018, through a survey process, community members are able to identify at least two San Mateo County Parks and name the special features or resources of at least one County Park.

### **Developing Park Supporters through Programs and Events**

Existing programs and new or further developed programs as outlined in the Strategic Plan are effective ways to develop strong supporters of park lands and the work San Mateo County Parks is undertaking to protect, preserve and improve the land. By educating the community about the unique resources found in our parks, community members come to understand the importance of the natural wonders that surround them and recognize them as a value to their own lives and communities. They essentially become our partners in our efforts. In turn, the community is much more likely to volunteer, donate to the Foundation and potentially support any further funding needs or initiatives to establish a dedicated funding source. A supporting Interpretive Plan has been developed.

### **Communications: A Strategy to Support Strategic Plan Implementation**

A well-planned communications strategy is necessary to promote education and interpretive programs, engage new and current volunteers, educate the public about natural resources efforts, support successful project planning and implementation, build and strengthen relationships among Friends and other support groups and park stakeholders.

Strategy: Position the Department as the source for information about parks, facilitate information sharing among park stakeholders and the broader community. This can be accomplished through:

- Existing and new communication vehicles
- Interpretive and education programming
- Expanded volunteer programs
- Strengthened partnerships

Through consistent communications, strong partnerships and relevant programs, San Mateo County Parks will be appreciated as community resources that offer special environmental features, unique outdoor recreational locations and opportunities, and be considered important places for learning, relaxation and exercise.

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## Implementing Department Strategic Plan Goals: Communications, Partnerships and Programs

**Goal:**

**Goal 18: Provide volunteer and educational opportunities that foster discovery and engage the community in environmental protection and stewardship efforts.**

Strategy	Implementation Plan	Timeline/ Notes
Strategy 18.1: Involve the community in the care and preservation of our park lands.	<p>Develop a communication plan that supports Department’s efforts in educating public about the value of parks through interpretive information and programs (see Interpretive/Education plan).</p> <p>Educate the public about how park lands are cared for, preserved and restored in order to engage community as care-takers.</p>	Need staff position dedicated to communication
Strategy 18.2: Grow corporate and private organization volunteer programs	<p>Develop special recognition for corporate and group volunteerism</p> <p>Cultivate relationships with corporate social responsibility directors to identify corporate goals that align with Department needs/goals.*</p> <p>Establish an engagement program for corporate audience. This has the potential of benefitting Foundation as well.</p>	Assess priority and staff capacity to implement
Strategy 18.3: Develop varied opportunities that fit volunteers’ needs and park needs.	<p>Fully implement new volunteer management system that will provide greater automated capability in volunteer recruitment, scheduling and recognition.</p> <p>Use survey capability on volunteer management system to assess volunteer interests and satisfaction with volunteer program; identify areas for improvement and track effectiveness. Establish on-going monitoring process.</p>	<p>2/15</p> <p>Consider short-hour staff/intern position to complete</p>

**Goal 19: Formalize partnerships and strengthen relationships with existing Friends groups and expand into other parks**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Timeline/ Notes</b>
Strategy 19.1: Develop Memorandum's of Understanding with Friends groups enabling them to seek grant funding from outside agencies and to outline both the County and the Friends group's responsibilities.	<p>Meet with and complete MOU process for all friends and associated groups. Establish MOUs with all new or incoming Park support groups.</p> <p>Coordinate annual work plans and calendars with Park rangers and Natural Resource Manager.</p>	<p>5/15</p> <p>2/15 – ongoing</p>
Strategy 19.2: Coordinate County's efforts with those of Friends and support groups via regular communication.	<p>Request Friends/support groups to share Park information and distribute e-newsletter to volunteers so informed of Department activities.</p> <p>Plan/attend regular meetings to inform Friends/support groups of major Park developments, projects, updates; develop calendar for meetings.</p>	<p>5/15</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Strategy 19.3: Convene special work groups as needed to discuss special issues and opportunities.	Establish information sharing opportunities among Friends/support groups to identify best practices among docents, naturalist, hike leaders, weeders, and youth-focused programs. Collaborate with partners to identify and prioritize special training.	6/15

**Goal 20: Continuously enhance and create volunteer programs**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Timeline/ Notes</b>
Strategy 20.1: Provide additional support to volunteer groups via training and/or special events	<p>Provide volunteer management system available to all partners to support recruitment efforts; assess to determine if expansion of system is warranted.</p> <p>Explore relationships that may support volunteer recruitment among Parks, Friends/support groups, such as Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).</p> <p>Conduct volunteer program assessment, needs of Friends/support groups and identify Department capacity to provide additional support.</p>	<p>2/15</p> <p>Expanded support may increase demand on staff and resources. Identify funding sources</p>
Strategy 20.2 Celebrate the success of volunteer efforts through volunteer recognition.	<p>Hold annual recognition event and provide special recognition for volunteers who excel in roles and service as identified by each Friend or support group.</p> <p>Explore methods of recognizing corporate volunteer groups who consistently volunteer with Parks.</p> <p>Identify ways to recognize volunteers with long-term service or exemplary level of service.</p>	<p>Annual/ongoing</p>
Strategy 20.3 Develop a recruitment strategy that supplements the existing program, fulfills County Park objectives, and increases volunteer hours by 10% over the next 5 years.	<p>Identify needs of parks and develop new or expanded volunteer roles to fill needs.</p> <p>Test capacity of existing staff, including field staff to assess how much growth can be managed while maintaining integrity of program and support to volunteers.</p>	<p>Expanded support may increase demand on staff and resources. Identify funding sources</p>

**Goal 21: Provide timely and accurate information to the public in a variety of formats to meet diverse community needs:**

Strategy	Implementation Plan	Timeline/ Notes
<p>Strategy 21.1: Enhance Park’s website to provide timely and relevant information about activities, programs and opportunities to be involved in park planning activities.</p>	<p>Identify website in communication plan. Establish website: <a href="http://www.SMCoParks.org">www.SMCoParks.org</a> as the source for park information by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Maintaining regular review and update of website postings to ensure that current information about park news and projects, and services, programs and activities offered to public.</li> <li>- Regular evaluation of layout, content, effectiveness</li> </ul> <p>Establish internal process to keep project status current on website and delivered to stakeholders. (Review conducted weekly; project lead updates Systems Manager)</p> <p>Develop project planning template to identify stakeholders, appropriate communication vehicles, and milestones when stakeholders should be engaged.</p> <p>Establish regular publication of e-newsletter and direct featured items back to website tabs: Parks, Things to Do, Reservations, About Us, Get Involved. Sub categories: What’s New, Events and Closures. Newsletter links back to website.</p> <p>Identify social media use in communication plan. Regularly employ social media to push out timely and brief Parks information and in special circumstances, such as emergencies, high fire danger, flooding, trail or road closures.</p> <p>Coordinate communications with neighboring agencies and appropriate County departments</p>	<p>Identify staff to create content on a regular basis.</p> <p>12/14</p> <p>2/15</p> <p>January March, May, July, September, November</p> <p>Identify staff to manage content</p> <p>Ongoing</p>



<p>Strategy 21.3: Upgrade brochures to include more accurate trail information including length, degree of difficulty, accurate mapping health components and ADA facilities.</p>	<p>Assess current content of brochures to determine appropriate balance of information to meet user needs/expectations.</p> <p>Conduct Park user assessment to identify how visitors use brochures and other sources of information to select trails, parks, and activities.</p> <p>Determine if additional trail information as identified in strategy is best suited for print, electronic or kiosks.</p> <p>Identify health experts to consult regarding health components/features to be included in park outreach information.</p>	<p>Identify staff/consultant and costs to conduct research.</p>
<p>Strategy 21.4: Publish and provide information in multiple languages or universal symbols.</p>	<p>Determine language needs by analyzing visitor demographics and county demographics.</p> <p>Align demographic data to park locations and services to determine non-English language needs.</p> <p>Adopt/institute universal symbols to use to inform park users in print, in kiosks and on website.</p>	<p>Identify consultant/staff to develop language plan; weigh costs benefit vs. using universal symbols.</p>
<p>Strategy 21.5: Utilize public television and non-English outlets to disseminate information.</p>	<p>Revise strategy: use social media tools, such as YouTube to create content that is cost-effective and is delivered by Department. Identify local stations whose audience's language preference is other than English to use subtitled content to reach multi-language park users.</p>	<p>Identify staff/resources to complete action.</p> <p>Identify other County staff, perhaps in County Manager's Office who can assist</p>
<p>Strategy 21.6 Develop standard format for printed materials that meet ADA standards.</p>	<p>Identify resource to assess print materials to determine how to meet standards and related costs to revising materials</p>	

**Goal 22: Develop a community outreach program to promote community support and participation in parks**

Strategy	Implementation Plan	Timeline/ Notes
Strategy 22.1 Develop a comprehensive outreach and marketing strategy to target key groups including youth and seniors.	<p>Conduct an assessment to identify demographic needs and effective messaging.</p> <p>Develop and implement general communication plan which identifies audience, messages, best communication vehicles based on demographic needs assessment.</p>	Identify marketing research, funding and staff source
Strategy 22.2 Develop a marketing strategy to let other organizations and the public know what facilities, features, programs, and events are available in County Parks.	Until marketing assessment can be conducted, develop and implement a communication plan that positions the Department as <b>the</b> resource for information regarding County Parks.	
Strategy 22.3 Partner with health providers and agencies to connect Parks to fitness and well-being efforts.	<p>Collaborate with Health System to share Take A Hike announcements and support promotion of program.</p> <p>Continue role in Health Parks, Healthy People: Bay Area Collaborative</p> <p>Identify other prospective health partners re: health activities/programs in parks.</p>	<p>3/15</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Strategy 22.4 Provide informational materials to promotional organizations such as libraries, Parks Foundation, Historical Association and Convention Bureau	<p>Collaborate with library system to plan A Day in the Park at library program. (See Interpretive/Education plan).</p> <p>Plan communications/story lines with Foundation so both complement each other in terms of activities and general messaging</p> <p>Schedule meeting with Convention Bureau to identify materials that would be useful. Explore methods of delivering park event/activity calendar to bureau. (Currently, send select brochures per request)</p>	<p>Identify staff resource</p> <p>Identify staff resource</p>
Strategy 22.5 Hold special events in County Parks based on community interests	(See Interpretive/Education plan)	

**Goal 23: Provide relevant and accurate materials that meet the needs of park visitors for each of the parks that contain a recognizable park logo or “organizational identity”**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Implementation Plan</b>	<b>Timeline/ Notes</b>
Strategy 23.1: Develop literature in the form of books, photo collections, merchandise, and trinkets that educate and inform the public about the park system and create a positive image for the public.	Refrain from developing until marketing assessment has been completed.	
Strategy 23.2: Develop and implement a signage program that establishes standardized criteria for sign content, placement and maintenance.	(See Interpretive/Education plan)	Ongoing