



COMPREHENSIVE AUGUSTA RECREATION AND PARKS MASTER PLAN KEY LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

August 21, 2015

A. INPUT FROM KEY LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

Seven Commissioners and the City administrator were interviewed on April 15-17 and July 1, 2015, to gain their vision, input and understanding of the needs and wants of their constituencies regarding the Augusta Recreation and Parks system. Importantly, the interview also provided insight into the external and internal political context of the Augusta Recreation and Parks system and the Master Plan process.

B. INTERVIEW FORMAT

Each interview began with a review of the Augusta Recreation and Parks Master Plan process and key tasks presented by the Master Plan project team. Additionally, the planning team provided a map, which indicated locations of all Augusta Recreation and Parks community centers and parks within each District boundary.

The interviewees were asked the following specific questions:

1. What are the current “Strengths” of the Augusta Recreation and Parks System? (What do you want to keep?)
2. What “Opportunities” do you believe will improve the Augusta Recreation and Parks system? (What do you want to change?)
3. What is the “Single Biggest Priority” you would like to see as an outcome of the Augusta Recreation and Parks Master Plan? (What do you want to create?)

For each interview, notes were captured and transcribed (see Interview Transcripts for details), and the April sessions were videoed/sound recorded for a digital record.



C. SUMMARY OF KEY LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

	Facilities	Programs	Operations	Other
Strengths	<p>The abundance of park facilities with various amenities, i.e. lake and ponds that are dispersed throughout the City provide easy access for citizen use.</p> <p>Diamond Lakes Park is a great park with many amenities and showcases a partnership with the library and its location on the Parks grounds.</p>	<p>Programs for youth sports, i.e. Softball, basketball and football along with good programs for seniors that include field trips, and card games at selected facilities (Henry Brigham Park, Sand Hills Park and Carrie Mays Park).</p>		<p>Community neighborhood organizations' willingness to volunteer and provide support for parks and community centers.</p> <p>The riverfront is strength for the City and the park system.</p>
Opportunities	<p>Add additional regional parks like Diamond Lakes that can also positively impact economic development for the City.</p> <p>Lake Olmstead is very well positioned for conversion into a regional park, with amenities like Diamond Lakes including paddleboats, canoes and kayaks for rent. Dyess Park could also be converted into a regional park.</p> <p>Need major enhancement of River Walk and Boat House.</p> <p>Must review and "right-fit" parks and centers so they will align with the needs of the neighborhood and community.</p>	<p>Expand program offerings, to include more diverse sports including, dance, soccer, baseball, tennis, golf, bowling and competitive volleyball.</p> <p>Increase program offerings that integrate education/academics as part of sports and athletics to leverage teaching and learning opportunities for youth while reinforcing positive values and morals.</p> <p>Need more program offering for the "in between" youth and senior age segment.</p> <p>Provide mentoring programs that can meet in community centers and enhance the lives of youth.</p> <p>Partnership with board of education for after school programs and keep gyms open for weekend programming</p>	<p>Better organization and alignment within the Recreation and Parks Department for proper staffing to support and maintain the parks and community centers at a high standard. The parks and centers must be made safe and attractive.</p> <p>Augusta Recreation and Parks should be separated from their "Facilities" responsibilities to allow the organization to focus on just Recreation and Parks.</p> <p>Partner with community group organizations to provide volunteers. Many neighborhood community groups are willing but need training and support. Recreation and Parks could provide part-time staff coordinators to assist volunteer organizations in running small parks</p>	<p>Need more marketing and new branding of the Recreation and Parks and its amenities and program offerings to importantly spur more use by youth and keep them off the streets. The marketing must also be done to reach youth through non-traditional vehicles and partnerships including school system/PTO's, churches, Augusta Housing Authority, and neighborhood organizations.</p> <p>Transportation is an obstacle for some youth to take advantage of some of Recreation and Parks key signature offerings. Transportation could be provided to take youth to specialty program venues including the aquatic center, tennis center, golf course, etc.</p>



	Facilities	Programs	Operations	Other
		also more summer camp opportunities for youth that's safe affordable and enriching.	and centers, however would need clear understanding and MOU's for neighborhood organization partnerships.	<p>Encourage people and organizations (i.e., Augusta Tech, Jessye Norman School of the Arts, Scouting, etc.) that offer needed programs to spread from their current locations into the Recreation and Parks' community based facilities. Collaborate and partner with others like the Boys Clubs, YMCA, and Salvation Army so not to duplicate services.</p> <p>Generate funding for Recreation and Parks through hosting regional tournaments and events.</p> <p>Seek companies and foundations to donate items for parks and center and also conduct fundraising campaigns to help provide needed funds.</p> <p>Parks and centers must be environmentally friendly.</p>
Most Important	More regional parks to align and support population distribution of City.	<p>A partnership with the sheriff/police department like the Police Athletic Leagues in other cities to build relationship with youth and community.</p> <p>Programs to encourage participation at an early age, a holistic approach that could include transportation to key parks and recreation venues</p>	<p>Better maintenance, appearance, and perceived safety of park and centers.</p> <p>Part-time staff on site to help and train volunteers.</p>	<p>Partnerships with community neighborhood organizations to run/operate small parks and centers along with more part-time Recreation and Parks staff to support and train volunteers.</p> <p>Create a positive perception of Augusta Recreation and Parks and become an economic development tool that will attract people to</p>



	Facilities	Programs	Operations	Other
				<p>move to or visit Augusta.</p> <p>River Walk and river-front economic development and connectivity of the two sides of river with a pedestrian bridge.</p> <p>Make parks user-friendlier with no hassle so people can enjoy themselves.</p>



D. COMPLETE LIST OF COMMENTS FROM KEY LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

STRENGTHS. What are the current strengths of the Augusta Recreation and Parks system? What are the things you want to keep? What does Augusta Recreation and Parks do well that you would like to continue over the next ten years and build upon?

Facilities

1. The abundance of park facilities with various amenities, i.e. lake and ponds that are dispersed throughout the City provide easy access for citizen use.
2. Diamond Lakes Park is a great park with many amenities, and showcases a partnership with the library and its location on the park grounds.
3. The Riverfront is strength for the City and the park system.
4. Add additional regional parks like Diamond Lakes that can also positively impact economic development for the City. Recreation Department should maintain and operate them.
5. Newman Tennis Center and Fleming Tennis Center are well kept. "Mach" Academy is good tennis program for under-privileged.
6. Augusta River Walk is a strength.
7. Frisbee course at Pendleton King Park
8. Amount of parks.
9. Brigham Park is a good facility.
10. Good examples of parks are Diamond Lakes – very good; Julian Smith; and Warren Road are good, too.

Programs

1. Programs for youth sports, i.e. softball, basketball and football along with good programs for seniors that include field trips, and card games at selected facilities (Henry Brigham Park, Sand Hills Park and Carrie Mays Park).

Operations

1. Community neighborhood organizations' willingness to volunteer and provide support for parks and community centers.

STRENGTHS
(Continued)



2. Top management has done a good job. Responsive.
3. Doesn't get many complaints about Recreation and Parks.
4. Good employees – motivated and energetic. Selection process not clear for new hires.
5. Recreation – good job considering their budget limitations,

Other

1. Parks give people a place to congregate.
2. An 'Age-Friendly" Community.



OPPORTUNITIES. What opportunities do you believe will improve the Augusta Recreation and Parks system? What would you like to change? What are unmet opportunities?

Facilities

1. Add additional regional parks like Diamond Lakes that can also positively impact economic development for the City.
2. Lake Olmstead is very well positioned for conversion into a regional park, with amenities like Diamond Lakes including paddleboats, canoes and kayaks for rent. Dyess Park could also be converted into a regional park.
3. Parks and centers must be environmentally friendly.
4. Need major enhancement of River Walk and Boat House.
5. Must review and “right-fit” parks and centers so they will align with the needs of the neighborhood and community.
6. Seek companies and foundations to donate items for parks and center and also conduct fundraising campaigns to help provide needed funds.
7. Re-think existing parks. Close underutilized ones and combine functions.
8. Add clay courts for tennis to reach out to statewide groups. Tennis is big.
9. Partnerships with Family-Y for programs and facilities
10. Partnerships for seniors
11. Have regional tournaments and promote outside groups to have events.
12. Should separate Facilities from Recreation.
13. Update Augusta Soccer Park to be more competitive.
14. Bernie Ward needs cosmetic work.
15. Improve Lock and Dam Park.
16. Improve maintenance in Pendleton King Park (example: paint falling off the walls in public restroom)
17. Promote the park further – brochures used now, but they are not available for those who do not come to a site.

OPPORTUNITIES
(Continued)



18. Diamond Lakes is too isolated, too far away; not served by transit.
19. No new regional parks. Opposed to a new regional park.
20. Need walking and bike trails throughout the community, extremely important.
21. Ascertain usage / condition of existing facilities.
22. Brigham Park needs a professional track.
23. Prefers creating pocket parks in neighborhoods (instead of more regional parks.)
24. Shelter over benches (shade trees, too.)
25. Designate a grandparent's park. Other cities have done this. Grandparents, grandkids and dog walkers.
26. ADA compliance and upgrades at all facilities.

Programs

1. Programs for youth sports, i.e. softball, basketball and football along with good programs for senior that include field trips, and card games at selected facilities (Henry Brigham Park, Sand Hills Park and Carrie Mays Park).
2. Expand program offerings, to broaden exposure to more diverse sports including, dance, soccer, baseball, tennis, golf, bowling and competitive volleyball, i.e., alternatives / choices beyond stereotypical offerings.
3. Increase program offerings that integrate education/academics as part of sports and athletics to leverage teaching and learning opportunities for youth while reinforcing positive values and morals.
4. Need more program offering for the "in between" the youth and senior age segments.
5. Encourage people and organizations (i.e., Augusta Tech, Jessye Norman School of the Arts, Scouting, etc.) that offer needed programs to spread from their current locations into the Recreation and Parks community-based facilities. Collaborate and partner with others like the Boys Clubs, YMCA, and Salvation Army Kroc Center so as not to duplicate services.
6. Provide mentoring programs that can meet in community centers and enhance the lives of youth.

OPPORTUNITIES (Continued)



7. Partnerships with neighborhood group.
8. Golf is getting more popular with youth.
9. Soccer is gaining popularity.
10. Every park should serve a difference purpose – define a mission for each facility.
11. Biking/walking trails are high priorities for industry people coming to Augusta. How are parks promoted to industrial prospects?
12. Senior services need to be strengthened.
13. 21st Century activities for seniors – more than just playing games. For example, providing projection screens to facilitate group meetings.
14. Provide mentoring programs that can meet in community centers and enhance the lives of youth.

Operations

1. Better organization and alignment within the Recreation and Parks Department for proper staffing to support and maintain the parks and community centers at a high standard. The parks and centers must be made safe and attractive.
2. Augusta Recreation and Parks should be separated from their “Facilities” responsibilities to allow the organization to focus on just Recreation and Parks.
3. Partnership with Board of Education for after school programs and keep gyms open for weekend programming; also provide more summer camp opportunities for youth that is safe, affordable, and enriching.
4. Partner with community group organizations to provide volunteers. Many neighborhood community groups are willing, but need training and support. Recreation and Parks could provide part-time staff coordinators to assist volunteer organizations in running small parks and centers; however, they would need clear understanding and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU’s) for neighborhood organization partnerships.
5. Generate funding for Recreation and Parks through hosting regional tournaments and events.

OPPORTUNITIES
(Continued)



6. In hiring staff, consider combination of education and experience which can be as good as a college degree.
7. Employing younger people for recreation-oriented careers.
8. Improve greatly on maintenance on all facilities.
9. Make fees affordable.
10. Provide training for parents interacting with young people – or partner with programs presented by the fire department, sheriff's department, AARP, etc. for example.
11. Use solar energy in our parks or facilities to reduce operational costs and in certain instances sell power.
12. Maintain all of the facilities better.

Other

1. Need more marketing and new branding of the Recreation and Parks and its amenities and program offerings to spur importantly more use by youth and keep them off the streets. The marketing must also be done to reach youth through non-traditional vehicles and partnerships including school system/PTO's, churches, Augusta Housing Authority, and neighborhood organizations.
2. Transportation is an obstacle for some youth to take advantage of some of Recreation and Parks key signature offerings. Transportation could be provided to take youth to specialty program venues including the aquatic center, tennis center, golf course, etc.
3. Possible partnerships with Columbia County and North Augusta
4. Promoting what we have better. If people know about things happening, they will come.
5. More advertising is needed.
6. We need to act like a new, progressive city, not a small town.



SINGLE BIGGEST PRIORITY. What is the single biggest priority that you would like to see as an outcome of the Augusta Recreation and Parks Master Plan? What is the one thing you would like to create? If you had to list your one top priority, what would it be?

Facilities

1. Develop more regional parks to align and support population distribution of City.
2. Consolidation of small parks programs with each other.
3. New facilities would be a good attraction. Located where the greatest need is. Be fair about the distribution.
4. Substantial amount of pocket parks. Provide places for kids and places for parents to go and network. Could convert blighted properties or Land Bank sites for these.

Programs

Operations

1. Perform better maintenance, appearance, and perceived safety of park and centers.
2. Partner with community neighborhood organizations to run/operate small parks and centers along with more part-time Recreation and Parks staff to support and train the volunteers.

Other

1. Create a positive perception of Augusta Recreation and Parks and become an economic development tool that will attract people to move to or visit Augusta.
2. Partner with the sheriff/police department, like the Police Athletic Leagues in other cities, to build relationships with youth and community.

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