



Attachment #1

Vienna Parks and Recreation Master Plan: Staff Focus Group #1 Summary (Mission, Vision, Values, & Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats)

Introduction

This memorandum summarizes the feedback received during an **Our Plan to Play** focus group meeting with Department of Recreation (DPR) frontline staff and leadership, which was held from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, April 4th in the Community Room of the Vienna Community Center.

The focus group included facilitated discussion using pre-prepared questions and prompts. The focus group was structured to provide an understanding of staff's perspectives on the department's current mission, vision, and values and how those three elements are expressed in day-to-day operations and long-term departmental planning and to provide an understanding of staff's perspectives on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of the Department.

The intended outcome of this focus group was to generate ideas to confirm/revise the mission, vision, and values for the next 10 years of recreation in Vienna and to deepen the understanding of existing conditions and community needs using the perspective of staff who directly support and interact with the community

The feedback from this focus group will be used to develop a draft mission, vision, and values for potential adoption within the Master Plan, and identify potential improvement areas to be addressed as part of Master Plan recommendations.

Focus Group Strategy and Overviews

The purpose of this focus group meeting was to gain staff insight into DPR's current and potential future **Mission, Vision, and Values**, as well as to explore its **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats**. These guiding conversational categories also provided space for staff to provide additional feedback on their perceptions of community needs. The meeting began with an introduction from Department leadership and the consultant team (Kimley-Horn) to review the planning process and the role of focus group feedback in plan development. Staff participation included representation from all levels of responsibility for the planning, maintenance, operations, and customer service elements of the parks and recreation system. A total of 18 staff members attended the focus group meeting, as shown on the following page:



Administrative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leslie Herman, Director • Nicole Falceto, Deputy Director • Amy-Jo Hendrix (<i>not present, but provided written feedback after the meeting</i>) • Joy Harrington 	Programs (all ages, types), Events, Teen Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brandy Wyatt • Kathy Blevins • Lily Widman • Lisa Shackelford • Derrick Cowles • Ianna Alhambra
Facilities Operations & Customer Service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick Jones • Michael Huard • Adonnis Barrera • Gagan Sandhu 	Parks Maintenance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jeremy Edwards • Brian Harrington • Matthew Fuller • Tim Koski

Following introductions, the project team facilitated the remainder of the meeting. Participants engaged in both full-group and breakout-group discussions. During the breakout group discussions, participants split into three (3) small discussion groups. Facilitators curated the discussion, assisted in notetaking, and helped report out the key talking points of each group.

DPR Staff were divided into two breakout groups. Facilitators sat in on each breakout group to curate the discussion, assisted in notetaking, and reported out key talking points of each group. DPR leadership met in a separate room to encourage staff to be more candid in their responses.

Both full and breakout group discussions were structured around an assistive Menti presentation—a virtual, interactive participation site—and the same set of curated questions while allowing facilitators the freedom to ask specific follow-up questions as needed. **Table 1** presents the focus group meeting agenda in full.

Table 1 – Focus Group Meeting Agenda

Time	Planned Activity
11:00 – 11:05	Opening, Introductions, and Ground Rules
11:05 – 11:10	Who's here
11:10 – 12:05	Mission, Vision, Values – Full Opening
12:05 – 12:35	Lunch Break
12:35 – 1:30	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats – Full Opening



Key Takeaways

Across both conversations, DPR leadership and staff demonstrated strong consensus in identifying the guiding principles and future potential for future operations and services. The following **Key Takeaways** reflect the essential themes shared between the two groups and will be reviewed in context with all engagement feedback to guide overall Plan recommendations.

Mission, Vision, and Values

- The **mission** statement must clarify who DPR serves while remaining concise and memorable
 - Language should be adapted to more intentionally center a high standard of care for the safety, health, and quality of life of its patrons
 - It should also integrate more extensively with daily operations, without necessarily changing public-facing language to do so.
- DPR's **vision** must balance the need to adapt to community needs with the need to preserve existing assets, both physical (i.e., ecological resources) and non-physical (i.e., strong relationships)
- DPR's **values** can be distilled into three themes: continuous improvement, ability to meet and exceed customer needs, and interpersonal care and respect
- Confirming/establishing a mission, vision, and set of core values could be a unifying element for all staff and an outcome of the Master Plan process.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

- DPR staff serve as one of the greatest areas of both **strength** and **opportunity** for future investment to promote retention and expansion of dedicated and diverse talent. Staff is responsive, knowledgeable, collaborates well, takes pride in the work, and is open to new ideas and feedback, and the creativity with which staff can accomplish tasks even when time or resources are limited.
- Other **key strengths** include:
 - Collaboration with other departments to “get it done together”
 - The variety of recreational and cultural offerings
 - The ability to fund multiple programs and community-wide events that satisfy the diverse needs of the community and regional visitors
 - The ability to attract volunteers
 - Ability to pivot (“drop what we are doing”) to address an urgent community or Council need.
 - Ability of staff to “play out of position” and take on new roles and responsibilities as needed



Key Takeaways (Continued)

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

- Requests from community and Council, alongside day-to-day duties, that force DPR into a reactive position **weakens** DPR's ability to adapt to evolving community needs and to proactively plan for and manage the Town's recreational resources
- Other **key weaknesses** include:
 - The limited amount of space to support the community's diverse interests
 - The lack of clear pathways for staff to grow within the department
 - Ability to onboard and retain qualified and passionate temporary/seasonal staff
 - Limited "four-season" operations and facilities
 - Aging equipment and playgrounds
- One **unique opportunity** that staff expressed is reimaging Church Street as a festival street/pedestrian mall
- Other **opportunities** that DPR acknowledges include:
 - Internal and external training for staff
 - Undeveloped Town-owned properties that could be future recreational sites or revenue generators
 - External partnerships with regional agencies and community stakeholders (to generate funds, maintenance support, or to share recreational responsibilities)
 - Using the Parks Master Plan process as a vehicle to identify, prioritize, and address critical community needs
- One **key threat** is DPR's ability to provide competitive salaries and growth opportunities that keep long-tenured and deeply knowledgeable staff in Vienna.
- Other identified **threats** include:
 - Budgets that limit the ability to be proactive and plan for future improvements while meeting the current expectations of the community
 - Finding the appropriate balance between maintaining and improving assets,
 - Pivoting between day-to-day tasks/roles and addressing urgent community needs or Council requests
 - A perceived slowness in adopting new technologies that could improve efficiency and customer experience
 - Unique relationship and proximity between the Town of Vienna and surrounding jurisdictions/recreation providers



Who's Here

The goal of this activity was to share aspects of their role that they attract and keep in DPR, as a means to contextualize their responses to the communal and breakout group discussion questions.

When asked to describe what aspects of their role attracted and have retained them with DPR, the leadership team emphasized the breadth of their responsibilities and support from a team of dedicated staff. Frontline staff emphasized the appeal of a fun and dynamic position with growth opportunities.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Focus group facilitators provided participants with the following guidance to define and differentiate the three concepts:

- The **mission** statement focuses on today and what DPR does to achieve it
- The **vision** statement focuses on tomorrow and what DPR wants to become, giving direction to the organization
- Core **values** are clearly stated principles and beliefs which guide how you treat your customers and each other; how you live your mission and work towards your vision; and what your culture is

Mission Statement

The goal of this activity was to gauge staff familiarity and agreement with the existing mission statement, assess who DPR serves and how, and establish the primary objectives of daily operations.

The existing mission statement for DPR is as follows:

The Town of Vienna parks and recreation department is committed to creating a community through people, parks, and programs.

Both leadership and staff appreciate the concise language, clarity, and alliteration of the statement, which makes it easy to remember. Both groups also agreed that the statement is less successful in defining a course of action, nor towards whom that action will be directed; participants noted that “people” is not specific enough to accurately reflect the range of their internal and external customers.

Leadership instead proposed **residents, visitors, and patrons**. Staff centered on the importance of **inclusion** to build a sense of togetherness, noting the importance of external partnerships and non-resident participation. When asked to identify other keywords that resonated with DPR's objectives, multiple staff members proposed **health, safety, care, quality of life, play, environment, culture/cultural, and community**. Leadership also endorsed the addition of **safety**, in particular.

When asked how well the statement embodies day-to-day operations, both groups noted that it does not capture the bulk of administrative efforts for which leadership and staff alike are responsible. Leadership suggested that residents are less concerned with these logistics so long as they perceive organizational efficiency and excellence in public service. While staff agreed that pleasing the public is a top priority, they expressed a lack of recognition for their “behind-the-



scenes” efforts to maintain this high level of satisfaction. To better align the mission with daily tasks, leadership proposed posting the statement in workspaces or adding it to staff lanyards.

When asked why parks and recreation is important in Vienna, staff expressed that DPR **creates a playful community, enhances the quality of life, allows residents and visitors to find their fun, creates lasting memories, and overall makes people happy and want to live in Vienna.**

When asked about one goal staff hopes to accomplish each day, staff expressed bringing smiles, engaging with the community, and improving the quality of our parks.

Departmental Vision

The goal of this activity was to assess what participants would like to be maintained or changed on a ten-year timeframe, to define what a successful parks and recreation system looks like, and to establish bold pursuits that will steer the direction of future investments and operational strategies. DPR did not have a standalone vision statement at the time of this meeting.

When asked to imagine what would be the same about DPR in ten years, both staff and leadership focused on the reputable strength of its interpersonal relationships: between staff members, to community members, and with external agencies. Staff also expressed a desire to preserve the close-knit, neighborly, “small town” feel created through these relationships, which creates a unique and attractive reputation.

When asked to imagine what would be different about DPR in ten years, leadership proposed stronger maintenance of existing facilities and stewardship of existing ecological resources, a more consistent brand and quality of facilities, and improved accessibility of facilities and programs for a more diverse user base. They expressed that these improvements would foster a greater sense of pride among residents and create a reputation of excellence among other jurisdictions. Leadership also expressed that DPR would have a better way of planning for and addressing external influences and community requests that contribute to inefficiencies today, that people would know when they are in a Vienna facility through consistent signage and equipment, and that Vienna would be recognized as a benchmark in parks and programs for other jurisdictions.

Staff focused their proposed improvements on expanding financial resources to better invest in and retain talent, reduce staffing shortages, and expand the capacity of facilities and programs. Ultimately, the vision is to rival, if not exceed, the quality of recreational amenities and services provided by other nearby jurisdictions.

When asked to define what success looks like for DPR, leadership used words like healthy community, diverse offerings, safe and fun, fiscally responsible, and protection/preservation of natural environments.

When asked to think boldly about transformative investments in DPR, both leadership and staff proposed major infrastructure projects. Leadership prioritized building on undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels—namely the Annex, Buelah, and Robinson properties—and both Leadership and staff suggested specific amenities, such as new playgrounds, an arts center, or an aquatics center. Both groups’ responses articulate an ongoing challenge of balancing a desire to innovate and adapt to changing community needs and the necessity to preserve and maintain existing assets.



Departmental Values

The goal of this activity was to explore the core values which currently define and differentiate DPR from other communities, and to distill the culture and philosophy of peer and customer treatment into key themes. DPR did not have a standalone statement of values at the time of this meeting.

This exercise revealed alignment of values along three primary axes: continuous improvement, ability to meet and exceed customer expectations, and interpersonal care and respect.

Leadership and staff both listed continuous improvement as a foremost guiding principle, reflecting an aspiration to the highest possible quality of service, an ability to adapt, and a commitment to growth. This axis of values encompasses recurring themes of **accountability, flexibility, resilience, creativity, innovation, teamwork**, and **learning**.

Several of the values that leadership and staff both rated as highly important reflected DPR's competence and capacity to meet and exceed customer needs. These ideas include **reliability, dependability, sustainability, safety, excellence, accountability, fiscal responsibility**, and **integrity**.

The greatest consensus between leadership and staff centered on a long list of values reflecting interpersonal care and respect. These themes included **belonging, empathy, equity, community, compassion, connection, inclusion, kindness, respect**, and **trust**.

While leadership and staff exhibited a strong level of consensus in identifying DPR's values—there were no values included in one group yet entirely excluded by the other—leadership focused slightly more heavily on meeting customer needs while staff focused slightly more heavily on supporting internal staff needs.

As part of the Master Plan, Kimley-Horn will develop and synthesize this discussion into a short list of values that DPR Leadership can collaborate with staff to arrive at a final list of values (no more than 5) that can be published as part of the Master Plan, on the DPR website, and incorporated into day-to-day activities.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

An analysis of DPR's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (a "SWOT" analysis) helps identify aspects of existing operations and resources that can be preserved or changed to better actualize the mission, vision, and values defined in the previous exercise. Together, the analysis of these four themes enhances the above discussion of guiding principles by exploring DPR's ability to uphold and embody them.

Strengths

This conversation centered on the best and strongest qualities and the resources that DPR can leverage.

Leadership identified staff as a key strength due to their knowledge, resilience, passion and pride in their work. They also cited DPR's openness as an essential strength, noting that they are keen to accept new ideas, reflect on constructive feedback, and pivot to new action in response.



Similarly, staff identified their own strengths in their teamwork, adaptability, and diversity of areas of expertise. Staff shared that the response time in addressing community and council requests often exceeds expectations and that staff is nimble in the execution of formal and informal duties. Despite challenging workloads, the staff is often recognized as **having fun (enjoying work, being friendly and positive in their interactions)** by the community and feedback is generally positive.

They also noted a strong culture of volunteer participation, positive community perception of DPR, and the relatively high revenue streams they generate to offset operational costs and reduce reliance on taxpayer funding.

Weaknesses

This conversation centered around the barriers that prevent DPR from reaching its goals, areas where more support or improvement is needed, and gaps between what the community needs and what DPR can provide.

Leadership identified increasing levels of staff turnover as a primary weakness, which is associated with a loss of institutional knowledge. Recreational facilities are not designed for all-season operation, and many of these structures are aging to the point of obsolescence or unsafe condition. They also acknowledged that external demand and requests can force DPR into a reactive position and reduce the capacity to be proactive and innovative.

Staff also noted this resistance to change as a key weakness, especially as Town demographics and recreational preferences continue to evolve.

Staff reported that both the amount/availability of physical spaces and the current number of staff are insufficient to accommodate the growing size and breadth of facilities and programs.

Staff expressed that equipment is aging or may not meet modern expectations in contrast with what is offered by other recreational providers. Staff also noted that at times it feels as though year to year they are expected to do more, and adequate funding for staff and resources does not appear to keep pace with these increasing asks.

With respect to staff needs, the staff group noted that there was no structured on-boarding program to educate and integrate new staff, no structured department-wide team-building and that improvements could be applied in the hiring, retention, and culture of part-time staff. Full-time staff can feel disregarded or frustrated when their input is perceived to be undervalued. Other key weaknesses expressed include existing pathways to training and career advancement are not clear.

Opportunities

This conversation centered on external opportunities DPR can take advantage of to help achieve its goals, such as precedents from other communities, industry best practices, and new technologies or procedures that could improve efficiency or customer service.

Leadership expressed the potential to capitalize on undeveloped properties, leverage recommendations from the Town's Comprehensive Plan, and invest in staff training and professional development.

Staff agreed with this assessment, requesting additional opportunities to attain certifications, attend industry events, and support part-time employees. They also cited the strong culture of



volunteerism as a potential resource to support staffing needs. Staff expressed that training opportunities at local or national conferences are an untapped opportunity and expressed that rethinking Church Street as a festival street/pedestrian mall could create dedicated event space that would allow more efficient and safe event operations.

Key **opportunities** that DPR acknowledges include:

- Identifying strategies to support year-round operations and participation
- Internal and external training for staff
- Undeveloped Town-owned properties that could be future recreational sites or revenue generators
- External partnerships with regional agencies and community stakeholders (to generate funds, maintenance support, or to share recreational responsibilities)
- Using the Parks Master Plan process as a vehicle to identify, prioritize, and address critical community needs
- Cross-training staff to be proficient in multiple roles and having a clear plan for staff development, promotion, and succession planning.

Threats

This conversation centered around external factors that could potentially harm DPR or hinder its service to the community. This conversation was both present-focused—how existing threats are currently managed—and forward-looking—how to better prepare for potential threats in the future.

Leadership identified that more resources need to be in place to continue to achieve and exceed the responsiveness that the Community and Council have come to expect from DPR. Staff validated a need to have appropriate levels of budget and available staff and a clear understanding of how to navigate competing priorities to better address Council and community requests in competition with day-to-day duties and roles.

A key threat that DPR may face in the future is the perception that they are not proactive in their management of the Town's resources if they are mostly operating in a reactive manner. Other external threats include potentially uncompetitive pay for staff relative to local competitors and the industry and a lag in adopting and applying new technologies to improve the efficiency of services.

Staff also noted that the scale of Fairfax County Park Authority can detract from the success of DPR, especially as Vienna residents are also County residents and can easily opt to use their facilities and programs instead. They also noted that while the Washington and Old Dominion Trail passes through the Town, it is not owned nor maintained by DPR, which can create discrepancies in maintenance expectations between other facilities. Staff also cited not having enough or the right supplies or equipment, the inability to address community comments in a timely or organized fashion, the fact that staff cannot afford to live and invest in the community they serve, and the lack of formalized emergency planning as additional external threats.