



Attachment #2

Vienna Parks and Recreation Master Plan: Staff Focus Group #2 Summary (BIG IDEAS)

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 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, September 19th in the Community Room of the Vienna Community Center.

The focus group included facilitated discussion and interactive activities using pre-prepared questions and prompts. The focus group was structured to have staff generate (unconstrained) ideas regarding the future state of recreation in Vienna and to imagine the future policies, projects, initiatives, and accomplishments that could be achieved in a 10-year timeframe as a direct follow-up to the Master Planning process.

The intended outcome of this event was to gather feedback on the initial survey findings, to identify and discuss potential milestone projects (*Big Ideas*), to collaboratively identify and discuss solutions to current challenges, and to understand potential prioritization for Big Ideas and other actions.

The feedback from this focus group will be used to develop and recommend potential Big Ideas that can be accomplished within the planning horizon as well as to identify smaller actions, strategies, and recommendations that can be detailed within the Master Plan.

Focus Group Strategy and Overview

The purpose of this focus group meeting was to review and discuss the **statistical and community survey** results and gain staff insight on DPR's potential **big ideas** for the future of the parks and recreation system. 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 DPR 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 programming, special events, maintenance, facility 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 next page:



Administrative

- Leslie Herman, Director
- Nicole Falceto, Deputy Director
- Amy-Jo Hendrix
- Joy Harrington

Facilities Operations & Customer Service

- Nick Jones
- Michael Huard
- Adonnis Barrera
- Gagan Sandhu

Programs (all ages, types), Events, Teen Center

- Brandy Wyatt
- Kathy Blevins
- Lily Widman
- Lisa Shackelford
- Derrick Cowles
- Ianna Alhambra

Parks Maintenance

- 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 four (4) small discussion groups. Facilitators curated the discussion, assisted in notetaking, and helped report out the key talking points of each group.

Both full and breakout group discussions were structured around a curated set of activities and prompts. **Table 1** presents the focus group meeting agenda in full.

Table 1 – Focus Group Meeting Agenda

| Time | Planned Activity |
|---------------|--|
| 10:00 – 10:05 | Opening, Introductions, and Overview of Ground Rules |
| 10:05 – 10:15 | Survey Discussion |
| 10:15 – 10:45 | Activity: Lightening Round |
| 10:45 – 11:25 | Activity: Challenge Accepted |
| 11:25 – 12:30 | Lunch Break |
| 12:30 – 12:40 | Activity: My Big Idea |
| 12:40 – 12:55 | Activity: It's About Time |
| 12:55 – 1:00 | What's Next |



Key Takeaways

Across all conversations, DPR leadership and staff demonstrated strong consensus on the importance of collaboration among staff, ensuring accessibility, and strategic planning and partnerships. The following highlights reflect the **key takeaways** shared between the two groups and can supplement other engagement feedback to guide overall plan recommendations.

Lightening Round

- Emphasis on creating multifunctional parks with unique features and all-abilities playgrounds to attract diverse visitors
- Interest in exploring how the Town could/should continue to expand the diversity and breadth of community events with limited resources and staffing to do more. This may require an appraisal of the current calendar of events
- A shared commitment to enhancing accessibility in parks and recreation facilities, ensuring all community members can fully participate in recreational activities
- Recognition of the need for partnerships with local businesses and organizations to expand event offerings and community reach
- Discussion on the importance of maintaining what we have, and strategically updating facilities or enhancing parks as time, budget, and priority allows. This will improve aesthetics, user experience, and community pride in our facilities and parks
- A forward-thinking approach, with both groups envisioning a parks and recreation system that fosters inclusivity, connectivity, and community wellness by 2035

Challenge Accepted

- Expanding the dog park and creating designated areas for different dog types will enhance engagement in the community
- Defining performance measures will effectively communicate the DPR's roles and accomplishments to the community
- Engaging the community in discussions about aging parks, facilities, and amenities will help prioritize necessary upgrades and improvements
- Identifying new and diverse funding sources is critical for maintenance and addressing the aging parks, facilities, and playgrounds



Key Takeaways (continued)

My Big Idea

- Improved storage solutions and better organizational systems are essential for managing existing assets and optimizing space in community facilities
- Exploring diverse funding strategies, such as park and amenity rentals and revised fee structures, is crucial for long-term financial sustainability
- Enhancing customer experience and awareness of available amenities through comprehensive maps and staff training will significantly improve community engagement and accessibility to parks and amenities
- Creating unique recreational offerings to attract diverse populations and foster stronger local engagement within the community.
- Clearer guidelines for user groups to promote better utilization of shared resources and minimize conflicts regarding storage and facility access
- Developing unique facilities like an Arts Center that is currently missing in Vienna
- Notable big ideas:
 - Have strategically unique/themed parks to increase variety, keep people local, and draw new people in (ADA playground like Clemmyjontri)
 - Printed and online Trail Map with suggested routes
 - Maintain an inventory of parts, pieces, and assets to develop a repair or replacement program
 - Performing & Visual Arts Center
 - Combining all Halloween festivities into a single event
 - Create a Pedestrian Walkable Mall Along Church Street

It's About Time

- A commitment to prioritizing maintaining and enhancing existing facilities, playgrounds, and amenities before focusing on new developments
- Potentially designing, constructing, and opening an aquatics and fitness center by 2030.
- Potentially exploring other significant infrastructure projects, like the upgrade/expansion of Nutley property yard by 2035
- Recognition that investment in dynamic teen center programming, new recreational spaces, and opportunities for teens to be part of the decision-making process are essential for attracting younger residents to participate in the community



Surveying

Focus group facilitators provided participants with a brief overview of the surveying methods completed for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Big Ideas

Following the introductions, overview, and survey discussion, participants were guided through four main activities as detailed below.

Activity 1: Lightning Round

The goal of this activity was to promote creative thinking and gather diverse staff perspectives on Vienna on the following three prompts, generating as many ideas as they could within 5 minutes:

- Prompt 1: Vienna as THE Destination for Parks and Recreation in Northern Virginia
- Prompt 2: The next big community event
- Prompt 3: Our vision for Parks and Recreation in 2035

When discussing **Vienna as THE destination**, breakout groups emphasized the importance of inclusive and innovative facilities. Staff members highlighted ideas such as an innovative or themed playground featuring inclusive and accessible spaces, suggesting a push for multifunctional amenities that cater to diverse interests, needs, and abilities. All groups noted a desire for parks and playgrounds designed for all ages and abilities. There was a strong alignment on the need for diverse facilities as well (see full list in **Table 2**). The summary group discussion identified shared priorities, such as the need for tournament sports fields and ADA-compliant playgrounds, which underscore a common vision for enhancing accessibility and recreational opportunities.

When discussing the **next big community event**, breakout groups identified additional opportunities to effectively engage with the community. Staff members proposed a variety of event ideas, including a Senior Olympics, cultural festivals, and a Teen Wellness Festival, which highlight the need to serve underrepresented demographics. Staff also suggested creating an arts festival and combining smaller Halloween festivities into a single daytime event, emphasizing a desire to cultivate unique town traditions that foster community engagement and prioritize place-making. Combining smaller events would allow staff to operate efficiently with limited resources and potentially allow the Town to increase the variety of events without adding staff or resources beyond existing levels and bandwidth. When discussing this as a group, participants reiterated many of these ideas, especially the arts festival and Senior Olympics, reflecting a consensus on the value of diverse, community-focused events.

When discussing their **vision for parks and recreation in 2035**, breakout groups identified a commitment to accessibility and a desire for DPR to be responsive to an increasing share of the community. Staff also highlighted the need for more accessible facilities, renovated spaces, and a diverse community presence in parks. Participants emphasized a need to revitalize the Town Green, enhance connectivity and promote alternative transportation through a trails network, and update facilities to reflect a vision of an integrated and inviting recreational environment. Community art features, pool and fitness facilities, and connectivity were included in the staff's 2035 vision.

The breakout and full group responses are included in **Tables 2-4** below. Responses and ideas that were commonly expressed across multiple staff in attendance have been *emphasized with a “*”*.



Table 2: Vienna as THE Destination - Response

Prompt 1: What would make Vienna THE Destination for Parks and Recreation in Northern Virginia

- Fields/Infrastructure to support hosting a major youth sporting event or tournament*
- Innovative Playground or park features*
 - Parks with a variety of amenities and features to expand demographics served*
 - Parks and playgrounds for all ages and abilities*
 - Play and fitness structures for adults
 - ADA playground like Clemyjontri*
 - Unique structures like Hensen Creek Park, Watkins Regional Park Playground, Douglass Community Center Playground, or Tuckahoe playground
 - BMX course, ropes course, rock climbing
 - Natural Playgrounds*
- Multi-use sports fitness or adventure course facility
 - Rock climbing wall, zip line, ropes course
- Nature center, aquarium, aviary, learning garden, orchard
- Therapeutic Park/Healing Garden
- Spa or Sauna (in combination with fitness facility)
- Improved, well-maintained, and consistent park appearances*
- Online trail map with suggested routes, surface type, points of interest, and trail amenities*
- Robust gymnastics program with dedicated space*
- A facility for swimming and aquatics programs *
- Alternative sports activities, such as disc golf courses and drop-in futsal at the community center
- Performing & Visual Arts Center*
- Multi-sports fields
- Cedar Lane parking garage
- Community gathering locations that compliment Town Green*



Table 3: Next Big Community Event - Responses

Prompt 2: Next Big Community Event

- Large-scale events like Viva Vienna/Okttoberfest
 - Festival on or along the W&OD Trail- The W&OD trail is the biggest thing we have.
 - Variety of event types, occurring at different times to attract broader target audiences
 - Amazing Race Vienna
- Senior Olympics /Special Olympics event in Town – a population we’re not serving
- Festival of Lights in a park similar to Enchant at Nationals Stadium
- Teen Wellness Festival
- Community-wide event focused on supporting local businesses at Town Green or in the Community Center
- A cultural event that works with members of the community we are not reaching – identifying need and serving more people
- Food Truck Festival
- Arts festival (visual, performing)*
- Community Yard Sale/Flea Market
- Combining all Halloween festivities into a single event
- Arts Festival
- Supportive ideas
 - Create a Pedestrian Walkable Mall Along Church Street*
 - Cedar Lane Parking Lot is a good event space for a cultural event
 - Potential partnerships with Economic Development to hold events out of empty/underutilized buildings



Table 4: 2035 Vision - Responses

Prompt 3: Vision for Parks and Recreation in 2035

Big Picture

- Overall vision: a more diverse representation of community in the parks and recreation system (more people coming together from different backgrounds and perspectives).
- DPR continues to support opportunities for social participation, recreational, health, and cultural engagement that motivate people to live and work here.
- A more accessible community (expanding or improving trails, playground improvements, expanding into other Town facilities)

Specific Elements

- Swimming Pool and Recreation Center*
- Updated Facilities
 - Fully renovated teen center
 - Town Green revitalized for events, better gathering space, movie screen, artificial turf,*
 - Improved Community Center, supportive of more programs / play spaces*
- More accessible facilities and amenities, especially parks and playgrounds*
- Unique structures at playgrounds related to relevant historical, cultural, or environmental features that are unique to Vienna
- Diverse community events*
- Pedestrian bridge over Maple Avenue and other locations where the W&OD intersects with roads.
- Amphitheater that could support the American Ballet Theatre or other major productions.
- Visual & Performing Arts Center and/or Black Box Theatre*
- Carriage rides during holidays

Staffing to support the Vision

- Continued focus on recruiting and retaining parks and recreation professionals who align with the Town's values and are focused on the goal of building community*
- Maintain or expand staffing levels to meet current and future service levels. (or allocate funding to secure contracted services)*
- Ensure the appropriate number of staff and resources to carry out the work we need to do*
- Ensure that expectations of staff are aligned with job descriptions, training, and available resources*



Activity 2: Challenge Accepted

The goal of this activity was to collaboratively identify and address the current weakness and challenges the DPR experiences, and to establish potential actionable solutions and strategies to improve parks and recreation in Vienna.

Each group was asked to independently discuss and document weaknesses, challenges, or issues that DPR currently experiences. The lists were then passed to a different group that was tasked with discussing and documenting solutions, ideas, and strategies to solve the challenges listed. A full group discussion was then held to share and discuss the challenges and their respective potential solutions.

This activity highlighted the importance of **coordination with internal and external partners**, **community engagement**, and **proactive planning** to address the various challenges identified by participants. Participants noted the importance of expanding the dog park and exploring sponsorship opportunities to enhance community facilities. Parking solutions included the development of a new garage at the library and partnerships for additional spaces. To tackle staffing limitations, the focus was on **expanding professional development opportunities**, onboarding, and offering additional benefits to current and potential hires with more competitive compensation. Additionally, the need for partnerships to optimize equipment storage and community engagement in the maintenance of aging parks was highlighted. When discussing the challenge of managing expectations, staff discussed developing benchmarks and launching educational campaigns detailing DPR's roles, responsibilities, and projects. Overall, the discussion reinforced the importance of strategic planning and collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of the parks and recreation system.

The documented challenges and proposed solutions and strategies are shown in **Table 5** below.



Table 5: Challenges and Solutions - Responses

| Challenge | Potential Solutions |
|------------------------------|--|
| Dog Park | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and divide areas for large/small or active/relaxed dogs |
| Parking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New parking garage at the library Partnerships with property owners for shared parking Parking garage at Giant with programming on the roof (solar panels, BMX, soccer field) Additional parking enforcement |
| Limited / Overburdened Staff | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More hands-on training Improved onboarding experience Connecting positions through cross-training Create educational pathways for staff to learn and acquire needed skills to support DPRs growing responsibilities. Hire more people in all divisions Create sustainable workloads Clear boundaries for work tasks, narrowing job descriptions. Job audit to right size positions and teams Ensure compensation matches workload Additional Benefits (Discounted gym memberships, childcare, pet care, Family Leave, Cafeteria Plans) Staff forums to express needs to the council. Identify strategies to prevent projects or tasks from growing beyond the initial ask and absorbing more funding, time, or resources than was originally allocated Identify additional funding to support staff duties |



| Challenge | Potential Solutions |
|---|---|
| Equipment Storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership with private providers for storage options • Audit equipment (age/use) and reallocate unneeded equipment • Identify a location for a storage facility |
| Managing Expectations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining performance measures to tell our story • PSA campaigns to educate the town on our roles, responsibilities, and accomplishments |
| Partnerships / Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find new ways to collaborate on initiatives with private, non-profit, and other government organizations • Partner with businesses, organizations, and individuals for sponsorships |
| Aging parks /playgrounds | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify new or alternative funding strategies • Set up park proffers so developer can support the systems • Community engagement on the types of parks and improvements desired • Establish a unique theme/identity for each park |
| Maintenance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify new or alternative funding to support regular maintenance • Work with Council to establish maintenance expectations and priorities and a mechanism to filter or prioritize incoming community requests • Create park visit opportunities with the community and council to identify park needs |
| Uncoordinated projects at the same site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a Project Manager or Chief Planner for capital projects • Consolidate efforts so that parallel tasks are completed at the same time whenever possible |



My Big Idea

The goal of this activity was to collaboratively identify and refine participants' **big ideas** for enhancing parks and recreation in the Town over the next decade. Specifically, discussions focused on addressing unmet needs, improving asset management, enhancing customer service, fostering community engagement, and developing sustainable funding strategies. This activity aimed to gather suggestions and identify potential initiatives that align with their vision and goals for the future.

Each group was tasked with discussing their **big ideas** to improve parks and recreation over the next 10 years in the Town, responding to the prompts provided or inspired by a list of considerations.

My (big) idea prompts:

- to address unmet needs...
- to better maintain and protect our assets...
- to improve customer service...
- to engage everyone in the community...
- to create uniquely Vienna experiences...
- to make our jobs easier and more productive...
- to fund our ideas...

Considerations:

- Which big ideas do you most align with?
- Have we left anything off the table?
- What challenges do you see in accomplishing any of these ideas?
- Which are your top 5 priorities?

This exercise revealed alignment on several key priorities for the parks and recreation system.

Technology utilization, funding source identification, enhanced communication, asset optimization, and community engagement were all key themes in the ideas shared by participants.

Several unmet need categories were identified by staff, including storage availability, access, and organization, accessibility for services and programs, diverse activities and facilities, and public-friendly town maps.

Participants highlighted the need for **strategic partnerships** and **funding initiatives** to enhance the quality of services and facilities. This emphasis on collaboration underscores a mutual understanding of the importance of fiscal responsibility and sustainability in achieving long-term goals. Furthermore, the discussions around proactive programming revealed a **shared vision for developing dynamic, engaging activities** that cater to various age groups, particularly teens, showcasing a commitment to fostering a sense of belonging and connection within the community.

Participants emphasized the importance of **engaging with the community where they are**, demonstrating a shared commitment to involving residents in decision-making processes and ensuring that recreational offerings meet the diverse needs of the community. This alignment reflects a strong aspiration to create a vibrant and inclusive environment where all voices are heard.



Table 6: Big Idea Responses

| Prompt | Big Ideas |
|----------------------|--|
| Unmet Needs: Storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hire a company to digitize records • Better organize existing files, archives, and records • Better storage systems for equipment and supplies; more shelving and organizational systems • Set clearer boundaries for user groups using storage for space allowed and what can be kept and how long • Improving spaces in the building for more storage (high-tiered shelving, etc.) • Better access to the roof to store things in the attic • Dumb waiters from basement to first level in Bowman House (make it easier to store and transport 50lb bags of clay in the basement) • Motivation for getting rid of items in storage: Pushing to get revenue back from Gov Deals sales to help offset costs |
| Unmet needs: General | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating more access or information about how to connect with senior services • Increase access to restrooms all year round (this is also an accessibility improvement) • Improve playgrounds • Nature Center, Learning Garden, or Orchard • More information to residents about community spaces • Online Trail Map with suggested routes • Intentional Photo Opportunity Sites • Tractor/Farm Type Activities • All Ages/Abilities Playgrounds and Parks • Disc Golf, Mini Golf, and other alternative sporting activities • Facilities or programs to activate nightlife • Outdoor volleyball court • Robust gymnastic program with adequate space • Cultural Center • Including trees as part of our documented infrastructure |



| Prompt | Big Ideas |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand drop-in options to support more people/schedules (futsal, toddler time) |
| Maintain and protect assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire a chief planner/project manager for long-range planning and proactive strategy Continue to quantify and report on green infrastructure Inventory parts, pieces, and assets to develop a repair or replacement program Increase storage capabilities Training on how to properly use and care for equipment |
| Improve customer service | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creating a map of parks, amenities, and trails to help people find things Train frontline staff on projects and other active initiatives to be able to answer questions, or connect customers to existing resources (how to permit ballfields) FAQ/Quick reference flipbook that fits in staff's pocket Language translation services or technology for in-person and digital customer interactions |
| Engage everyone in the community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring programs, services, and engagement to people Use social media and signage Additional and better-planned volunteer opportunities Find new methods for reaching underserved or underrepresented groups within Vienna |
| Create uniquely Vienna experiences | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have strategically unique/themed parks to increase variety, keep people local, and draw new people in |
| Make our jobs easier and more productive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No specific strategies or solutions were documented during the discussion |
| To fund our ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rent Glyndon concession stand for snacks to private business or snack bar Pop-up businesses in unused spaces in Parks. concessions, snack coffee shops, park rentals, etc. Consider a new rate structure for the use of fields or facilities Stricter /more structured rules about charging user groups/service organizations Use of Annex Property for rental space or programs- to generate revenue until it is developed |



Activity 4: It's About Time

The goal of this activity was to envision actional strategies, major accomplishments, and transformative initiatives that could occur over the 10-year planning horizon of Our Plan to Play.

Participants were asked to identify up to three major accomplishments, actions, and game-changing initiatives that could be accomplished in or by 2029 and 2035. Following this, they were asked to identify up to three smaller strategies, steps, or improvements in the interim years. **Figure 1** below highlights the visions of individual staff for the next 10 years.

It is noted that this was strictly a visioning exercise and many of the initiatives shown in Figure 1 could not be completed in the sequencing that is shown. The worthiness of the exercise is in the understanding of how staff perceives the priorities for future actions and what actions feel attainable within the planning horizon of **Our Plan to Play**.

Broadly, staff anticipates a prioritization of actions that would support the implementation of an aquatic program in the Town of Vienna by 2030; this includes identifying and programming funding, hiring/training staff, and revising job functions/descriptions to accommodate an entirely new functional area of services.

In the theme of maintaining or upgrading existing assets, staff identified targeted facility upgrades to specific parks, renovation of the Town Green to support events, rentals, and community use, new and renovated playgrounds, and the development and implementation of a historic preservation plan.

Staff also identified a handful of actions beyond the planning horizon such as rebuilding the Nutley property yard, a senior center, a new parking complex, and a redesigned Town Green.

2024 2025 2026 2027 2028 2029 2030 2031 2032 2033 2034 2035

AQUATICS

Identify funding for new facility
Begin design work

Open new facility

Break ground on new facility
Hire aquatics staff

New scoreboard
New gym equipment
New musical play equipment
Identify funding for and purchase bucket trucks

Purchase new chipper and chip truck

ADMIN

Refine special events application
Create forum between staff and Council

Establish urban forestry program
Increase Department budget
Reconfigure activity fee structure
Redefine staff job roles and titles

FACILITY UPGRADES

Town Green stage

Meadow Lane restrooms
Meadow Lane tennis court lights
Southside Park basketball courts
Southside Park upgrades

Replace turf fields
Relocate Beulah mulch yard
Renovate Town Green
New playground at Community Center
Upgrade aquatics or Communnity Center with fitness center, rock wall

Renovate playgrounds
Renovate Dog Park

TEENS

Teen wellness festival

Teen center renovation

Teen leadership program
New center for older teens

HISTORIC SITES

Conduct Historic Assessment

Implement Historic Preservation Plan

FUTURE PROJECTS

New arts center
New senior center
Expand Town Green
Develop Beulah property
Rebuild Nutley Property Yard
New outdoor performance venue
New parking complex on Maple Ave