



Attachment #3

Vienna Parks and Recreation Master Plan: Stakeholder Groups Summary

Introduction

This memorandum summarizes the feedback received during three **Our Plan to Play** stakeholder focus group meetings held on Monday, September 16th, Thursday, September 19th, and Wednesday, September 25th, 2024 in the Community Room of the Vienna Community Center from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM.

The meetings were held with community stakeholder groups, as identified and invited to participate by Town staff. The meetings included a short presentation, a review of initial findings from the survey, a discussion focused on understanding participant's perspectives on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of the Department, and a discussion focused on understanding participants' perspectives on funding (i.e., how the town should fund parks and recreation).

The intended outcome of these focus groups was to create an opportunity for community stakeholders to participate in the planning of parks and recreation in the Town and to gain feedback needed to comprehensively document and interpret community needs.

The feedback from these focus groups will be used to inform the understanding and documentation of community needs and used to narrow in on the potential funding strategies that could support the to-be-developed Master Plan recommendations.

Stakeholder Group Strategy and Overview

The purpose of the stakeholder group meetings was to share plan progress, discuss key survey results, and obtain feedback reflective of the priorities and perspectives on the Town's parks and recreation needs and funding opportunities. Each meeting began with an introductory presentation from the consultant (Kimley-Horn) to explain the planning process and the role of stakeholder feedback in that process. This presentation consisted of group introductions, a review of DPRs existing assets and organizational structure, and a high-level overview of the results of previous public engagement efforts (i.e., the statistical and community surveys).

Following this introduction, participants were divided into two smaller breakout groups for the remainder of the meeting. Facilitators curated the discussion, assisted in notetaking, and helped report out the key talking points of each group. In both groups, the same set of predetermined discussion questions guided the conversation between two themes: recreational priorities/perspectives and funding opportunities.



Table 1 describes the organizations that were represented at each of the three meetings.

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Table 1 – Stakeholder Group Attendance

Meeting Date	Stakeholder Mtg. #1 Mon. September 16, 2024	Stakeholder Mtg. #2 Thu. September 19, 2024	Stakeholder Mtg. #3 Wed. September 25, 2024
Represented Organizations	Church of Holy Comforter	Bicycle Advisory Committee	Golden Girls Softball
	Emmaus United Church of Christ	Patrick Henry Library	Town Business Liaison Committee
	Greater Vienna Babe Ruth	Vienna Pickleball Club	Transportation Safety Committee
	One Neighborhood Foundation	Planning Commission	Vienna Arts Council
	Optimists of Greater Vienna	Rotary Club	Vienna Little League
	Vienna Art Society	Traffic Safety Committee	Vienna Moms
	Vienna Moose Lodge	Vienna Business Association	Vienna Youth Inc.
	Vienna Photographic Society	Vienna Girls Softball Association	
	Vienna Presbyterian Church		
	Vienna Theater Company		
	Vienna Woods Swim & Tennis Club		
	Vienna Youth Soccer		



Key Takeaways

Despite the diverse composition of Vienna stakeholders, each group expressed consistent themes regarding DPR successes, opportunities for enhancement, and supportive funding structures. The **Key Takeaways** from the stakeholder meetings are as follows:

Priorities and Perspectives

- The **exceptional quality of staff and events** creates a strong reputation for DPR as a group that works diligently to invest in the well-being and vitality of the community it serves
- Despite the breadth of recreational programs, the **amount of facilities is perceived to be lacking and facilities feel too rigid in their intended use** to adequately meet the diverse needs of the community
 - Refurbishing/Renewing the **Town Green** and the **Dog Park**, and expanding access to **pickleball** courts could better support these needs
 - Investing in an **aquatics/fitness** center and **arts and cultural** center could better support these needs
- **Pocket parks** are missing or lacking in the town, and parks overall could be better designed to increase access to **passive recreation and inclusive/accessible play**
- While Fairfax **County and private programs and facilities** at times compete with those offered by DPR, expanding **partnerships with local community organizations** can fill gaps in DPR facilities and programs

Funding Opportunities

- **Funding allocations should prioritize facilities** before programs
 - **Maintenance of existing facilities, especially outdoor and green spaces** should be funded before facility upgrades or new construction
 - **Upgrades or new construction of indoor facilities should be funded** before upgrades or new construction of outdoor and green spaces
- Broad agreement that **additional fees should not entirely be passed along to residents**
 - Instead, additional fees could be **charged to private developers**
- DPR should consider **formalizing opportunities and incentives for residents to directly contribute to specific DPR initiatives** by choice
- Stakeholders desire increased **transparency** on how DPR is funded



Priorities and Perspectives

The purpose of this discussion was to assess participants' perception of DPR strengths, weaknesses opportunities, and external threats (SWOT). Together, the analysis of these four themes (a "SWOT" analysis) identifies aspects of existing operations and resources that can be preserved or changed to better meet community needs.

To facilitate conversation, discussion questions encouraged participants to consider the importance of parks and programs to the Town, to identify recreational experiences that feel "uniquely Vienna," and to share changes to the existing system which would encourage greater participation from their constituencies.

Strengths

This discussion encouraged participants to reflect on the most successful aspects of the existing parks and recreation system which they would like to preserve on a ten-year timeline.

Across all breakout groups, stakeholders commended the overall quality and diversity of DPR recreational programs and events, and the employees who support them. The breadth of classes, athletic offerings, artistic and cultural affairs, and youth programs positions DPR apart from that of other communities. Stakeholders highlighted seasonal community events, such as Viva Vienna and Oktoberfest, as standout offerings, noting their appreciation for the distribution of these events throughout the calendar year. **These high-profile events promote the brand of Vienna as a family-oriented, close-knit community, while smaller events and ongoing programs provide opportunities for residents to define their own "community within a community."**

DPR staff maintain a widespread reputation for their exceptional customer service. Multiple participants cited the friendliness, professionalism, and knowledge of staff and DPR's commitment to continuous improvement as foundational to the system's strong reputation. **Participants noted that the strong investment in Parks and Recreation staff represents a strong investment in the health and well-being of the community.**

Weaknesses

This discussion encouraged participants to identify what aspects of the Parks and Recreation system need the most improvement, have become obsolete, or do not satisfy user needs.

The most commonly expressed weakness in breakout group discussions was the lack of physical space to accommodate the diversity of recreational offerings. Stakeholders shared that many existing facilities support only singular uses, decreasing their utility when used for activities or programs that they were not designed for. **A lack of flexible, multi-purpose facilities—in addition to the perceived shortage of facilities to begin with—creates unneeded competition between user types.**

Stakeholders also identified specific deficiencies in the availability of facilities to meet user needs. Several breakout groups highlighted that existing pickleball facilities cannot accommodate the significant and growing demand for court reservations. Other stakeholders expressed a desire for a dedicated arts and cultural center, noting that the Vienna Community Center is not designed to support the full range of desired artistic and cultural offerings. Multiple groups also reported that the Vienna Dog Park is poorly located, feels undermaintained, and does not balance the needs of



active/relaxed dogs and dog owners. Multiple groups, similarly, expressed that the Town Green, while a vital and cherished part of the parks and recreation system, does not provide all the anticipated amenities nor takes full advantage of the potential for year-round community use given its central and highly-visible location.

Above all other facility types, participants called specific attention to the lack of a public aquatic/fitness centers in Vienna, which would support not only recreational needs but, with regards to aquatics, allow for participation and instruction in an essential life skill. Private pools were described as not accessible to all residents given the long wait lists and likely could not accommodate the unmet demand, without causing both swimmers and the private providers themselves to feel overburdened by crowding. Even though Fairfax County aquatics facilities were cited as good alternatives, it was commonly expressed accessing Fairfax County facilities requires a driving trip which limits the access for younger and older community members who do not or cannot drive.

Stakeholders expressed a desire for stronger, improved access to and connectivity between recreational locations. The number of parking spaces at popular destinations, such as the Community Center, cannot always accommodate demand at peak use. While Vienna is a highly walkable community, potential pedestrian connections between parks and facilities are unclear and there is no supporting wayfinding.

Opportunities

This discussion encouraged participants to consider underutilized assets or strategies that could narrow the gap between DPR offerings and user needs.

Participants noted that DPR could better leverage existing green spaces for passive recreation, suggesting that not all parks necessarily need to fulfill a programmed purpose. Enhanced investment in or advertising of existing natural-area-focused parks, as well as the dedication of new parks of this type, could expand the accessibility of green spaces where users can merely connect with nature. Participants also suggested that these areas could be small format “pocket parks” that could include elements and amenities supportive of community activity (such as benches, fountains, smaller playgrounds, historic or cultural installations, or ecological features.)

Multiple stakeholder groups noted that as playgrounds are becoming outdated., Revitalizing the playgrounds presents an **opportunity to construct additional multi-purpose areas, ADA-accessible play spaces, or more modern “adventure” playgrounds.** Splash pads--either in specific parks or on the Town Green --could fulfill some of the expressed needs for community access to aquatic play at a reduced cost and footprint.

Should the cost of a dedicated arts and cultural space be prohibitive, participants suggested integrating the arts into existing parks and facilities. For example, public artworks along the Washington and Old Dominion Trail or painted crosswalks could imbue the Town with a more visible artistic presence while reflecting its culture and history.

Stakeholders expressed openness to partnering with DPR to lend their spaces or properties, such as churches, for recreational purposes.



Despite the strength of youth programs, stakeholders reported that they feel under-advertised and, in turn, under-utilized. A targeted advertising program, such as through schools, could promote engagement levels with older children and teenagers, in particular.

Several breakout groups encouraged DPR to more extensively advertise and integrate ecological education, stewardship, and amenities, such as composting, free mulch givebacks, or e-bike charging stations.

Installing additional lighting at outdoor facilities could improve their accessibility and expand the hours of facility use year-round.

Threats

This discussion encouraged participants to identify resources and programs offered by other providers that both complement and compete with those offered in Vienna, as well as external considerations that could hinder the future success of DPR.

Participants centered on the relationship between the Town and the County. As a product of scale and increased funding, County offerings often exceed the capacity (e.g., Pickleball) and specialization (e.g., BMX tracks) of DPR offerings. In addition, the presence of County parks within Town borders can be confusing to residents and visitors about DPR offerings, maintenance responsibilities, and facility expectations (image/upkeep/amenities).

Private clubs and facilities within Town limits serve a limited amount of Vienna residents and offer (in a limited capacity) access to programs and facilities that are not present in Vienna (such as aquatics).

One breakout group expressed concern that outdoor spaces without consistent and connected pedestrian infrastructure that supports foot traffic, adequate lighting, or security measures can facilitate antisocial behavior, especially for youth and at night.

Funding Opportunities

The purpose of this discussion was to assess how participants would like the Town to fund DPR to emphasize its strengths, to improve upon areas of weakness, to take advantage of new opportunities, and to fortify against potential threats. Discussion questions asked participants to reflect on where they felt resident tax dollars could make the largest impact and what other revenue sources could further support DPR recreational amenities and programming.

Funding Allocations

This conversation gauged how participants would allocate Town spending on Parks and Recreation assets by prioritizing common project types for investment. To stimulate conversation, facilitators presented the following list of example priorities:

- Ongoing maintenance of existing parks and facilities
- Upgrades to existing parks and facilities
- Development of new parks and facilities
- Introduction of new programs
- Expansion of existing program hours



Facilitators also encouraged participants to explore other priorities which were not presented.

Participants indicated a strong preference to prioritize funding for facilities over funding of programs and a mild preference to prioritize maintenance of existing facilities over upgrades or construction of new facilities. For existing facility maintenance, participants prioritized funding the maintenance of existing green spaces and outdoor facilities over the maintenance of existing indoor spaces. Conversely, for facility upgrades and construction, participants expressed a slight preference to fund the construction of new formalized structures and indoor spaces over new parks and green spaces.

Multiple participants encouraged the development and publication of a facility investment plan to increase transparency of the scale and timeline of capital projects to residents and users.

Within such a plan, specific facility needs that arose across multiple breakout groups included an aquatics center, a dedicated arts and cultural center, and multipurpose outdoor fields and courts.

One business owner noted that while they enjoy the variety and cultural contributions of Town events, they feel the return on investment to local businesses is minimal.

Multiple breakout groups prioritized continued financial investment in DPR staff; increasing staff compensation will encourage retention and attraction of top talent, helping to maintain a high standard of excellent customer service.

Funding Sources

This conversation assessed what additional sources participants would like the Town to pursue to increase funding for the above allocations. To stimulate conversation, facilitators presented the following list of example funding sources:

- New or increased user fees
- New bonds or tax levies
- New one-time assessment fees
- Reallocation of existing Town funds
- Local, state, and federal grants
- External partnerships, including private sector partnerships
- No additional funding

Facilitators also encouraged participants to explore other funding sources which were not presented.

Participants were mixed on how to consider additional user fees for residents:

- Some stakeholders expressed that they do not want to feel further “nickel-and-dimed” for every additional facility they use or program they participate in, and they feared that increasing fees could discourage participation from a wider user base.



- Other stakeholders suggested that the Town could charge more for classes and programs and that they perceived Town Fee to be lower than comparable providers.

Participants also suggested externalizing revenue streams to the increasing number of private developers within the Town. Alternatively, they recommended that DPR consider providing opportunities for more community members to contribute to specific facilities or programs of their choosing, such as by instituting a formal crowdsourcing program, creating a “friends of” sponsorship group, or selling naming rights to unnamed or future spaces.

Regardless of the funding sources pursued, stakeholders expressed a need for increased transparency for DPR funding (i.e., where funds are coming from, how they are being allocated, and when residents can expect to see returns on these investments). In particular, multiple breakout groups requested improved transparency regarding the Vienna Meals Tax.