



## Tukwila Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan

### Community Leader Focus Group May 29, 2013

## SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND & SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

As part of the City of Tukwila's efforts to gather broad and inclusive feedback to inform an update of its Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, the City held a community leader focus group to identify individual and collective viewpoints on the strengths, opportunities, and desired future of Tukwila's parks, recreation facilities, recreation programming, and open space resources. The main objectives of the community leader focus group were to:

- Identify strengths of Tukwila's Parks & Recreation system.
- Identify community needs and how those needs may be changing.
- Discuss how Tukwila's parks, recreation facilities, programming and natural amenities can best meet community needs and preferences.

The Community Leader Focus Group was held at the Tukwila Community Center on Wednesday, May 29, 2013, from 4 to 6 pm. Community leaders were identified by the City of Tukwila's Parks and Recreation Department program staff and invited to participate. BERK designed and facilitated the focus group. In this summary, participant' ideas, perspectives and comments are presented according to theme and discussion question, rather than the order in which they were originally shared. Comments are not attributed to individual speakers.

### ATTENDEES

- Sean Albert, Parks Commission and Land Steward
- Mike Arizona, BECU
- Scott Elston, Tukwila Skyway Soccer Club
- John Forsyth, Showalter Middle School
- Nicole Grubbs, Westfield Shopping Center
- Mike Hansen, Sabey Corp.
- Chuck Parrish , Former Parks Commissioner
- Todd Pietzsch, BECU
- Alice Russell, Parks Commission
- Deborah Salas, Community Schools Collaboration
- Donald Scanlon, Parks Commission
- John Sheller, King County Library System
- Mitch Stone, PacWest Little League
- Joe Tice, Tukwila Pantry

## DISCUSSION

### What are the strengths of the Tukwila's parks, recreation facilities, recreation programming, and open space amenities?

- **The community center is a quality, well-used community gathering place.**
  - Our Community Center building is amazing and award winning. It has great parking lot designs (Southcenter could use that!). The run off from the building goes into swales and trees.
  - We use the Community Center a lot: from a business prospective, we use it every year for scholarship foundation lunch. We have used it for last six or seven years. Others use it for fundraising events, lunches, and dinners.
  - Meetings and signups are easy to do here—and it's expected that they will be here in the community.
  - The city appointed library board and the rotary meets here (or did). This is excellent because it is transparent for other community members.
  - It is great that kids can walk here (to the community center).
  - The Community Center is great as a place for meeting.
  - The Community Center is a focal point, one thing you identify Tukwila with. It is a place for the community to get together.
- **Tukwila has some well-attended events that are a draw.**
  - We work with the Parks team and to the Dr. Seuss event each year – attendance is close to 1,000 people.
  - The wildlife fair was here about a week ago, about 2,000 people attended.
- **Tukwila has unique parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces amenities.**
  - My family comes down for the spray park; there really isn't anything of this quality nearby us. It is a unique feature of Tukwila.
  - Parks are a big draw for not only youth of this community but others.
  - Having Starfire in the community is great. We start lots of the kids there for indoor soccer leagues and then move them through the system. Starfire always gives financial support for the youth programs.
  - Tukwila has a great variety with picnic shelters, playfields, habitat, etc.
- **The connectivity and functionality of the river trail is an asset.**
  - The path is a huge strength. Having a trail is great!
  - The trail gets used a lot for walking and running. I use it all the time.
  - The Duwamish has a bad reputation as a river but the trail is pretty nice.
- **Parks and Recreation Department staff members are responsive to the community and committed to Tukwila.**

- Whether or not they live here, there's a strong commitment to Tukwila. They work their tails off. The City has also done a great job at retaining staff people.
- 10-15 years ago the Parks Department met with kids at the high school and asked what they wanted to change. I feel like they have done a great job at getting things going that the kids are interested in. But how safe is it for the kids to walk home at midnight on a Friday?
- They're accessible and responsive, one can get responses quickly.
- The staff people have a can do attitude. We work with Darren and Nate a lot. They always have ideas on how to pull things together, are always positive, and never say no. Not just Nate – I get that positive attitude from everyone. It must be the culture on Tukwila Parks and Recreation department.
- Some of the long time staffers were kids here. This was their first jobs for some of them – they've been here a long time. That has built a strong sense of community.
- I spoke to a youth recently who said that some of the staff are absolutely amazing – Nate, Darren.
- The staff have done a great job networking and finding partners in the community. Expertise in that brings a lot to the table. Rotary does Thanksgiving lunch – if it weren't for the staff here, that wouldn't happen. All groups rely on the staff to help them out. I think they do a great job, bring in all kinds of businesses and clubs and groups here. They'll get you involved one way or another.
- I was at the Forterra breakfast this morning and am so proud of the relationships with the City and Duwamish Hill.
- **The golf course is well-positioned, geographically, and accessible to novice golfers.**
  - People will drop off kids at soccer and go play golf.
  - I heard it's a good golf course to learn on
- Summer camps and basketball are the biggest draws for kids. Some are local kids, but others are parents that work in the community but don't live here.
- I do use the senior programs, they vary across the region. There's a hiking program, lunches, etc. I'm very pleased with what they do here. If something is lacking, I'm not aware of it. Also they are very reasonably priced. There's been a big push within the City for these programs to be self-sustaining, but the Idea is that these are subsidized so that they are affordable.
- Happy, healthy kids perform better in schools.

### **What needs or preferences of the community are not being met?**

- **Embrace the community's diversity and make programs and facilities more accessible for its myriad linguistic and cultural groups.**
  - A lot are having a hard time with language and they have their young kids interpreting. You deal with it using a lot of patience, making sure the child understands basic English, so that they can easily interpret. You're not there to take advantage, that's the perception. A lot are refugees, and were just sort of dropped here. They're trying to figure it all out.
  - There are cultural issues, stigmas with other cultures, divisions within cultures.

- The mall has it figured out, there are all kinds of people there! The mall use the language line, but the stores don't really need it. It's hard to tell what a lot of people are doing [at the mall], but it is there is lots of diversity.
- You can use what we call "tour guides" – one quasi-English speaker brings in a group and points things out. We work with them. We have a paid subscription to language line, and ask them to help us. Some cultures don't even have a library. They have pretty distinct needs: immigration, law, computer access, etc. Make use of the schools, they have key people they can turn to for communication. We provide a space for people to come and watch Americans. They can hang out without doing anything. There are low barriers to participation. Passive participation is an option with the Culturefest.
- We used to have a vibrant outreach program. Some things we learned: first, never say you speak for the community. We used to bring in various groups and all the conversation would be in the target language. If you didn't speak it, you had an interpreter that could interpret for you in English. We'd do a presentation first, an orientation, and then we'd allow more of an open conversation, instead of a facilitated-type. [The participants] would all yell and talk and in the end come up with an agreement, often not at all on the topic you needed.
- **Engage the community in staffing the Tukwila's Parks and Recreation department, and providing service delivery to the community.**
  - Budgets are tight everywhere, but we have a huge resource of youth here. There are many without jobs. It would be great if there were summer jobs programs. Seniors need their lawns mowed, jobs done; there are lots of youth that could do all that. Not sure where funding comes from, but that could be done through the Parks Program. I think this would give them a sense of ownership in their community.
  - We try and encourage kids to apply for the summer camp jobs; we have probably five or six who actually do it. We are trying to get more of the diverse kids to do it.
  - We need to make things accessible and available. When we started the food bank, it was all middle class white people. Now it's a diverse community – making them feel comfortable, allowing them to just participate and then not ask them to do a lot. Let them slowly take ownership. No one wants to take over.
  - We should provide more opportunity to participate and volunteer.
- **Leverage the excellent parks to improve Tukwila's image regionally.**
  - Starfire is a point of community pride.
  - Starfire does a lot for the community in allowing the kids opportunity to be in that park and through its after school programs.
  - Starfire has really successfully marketed itself as a regional soccer facility.
- **Make the Community Center inviting for children from all backgrounds.**
  - The Community Center is a focal point, what you identify Tukwila with. But what we heard in the Strategic Plan was people on the other side of the Tukwila can't get here.
  - For the most part, kids on other (East) side of Highway 99 are minorities and isolated from this center.
  - This facility is seen more as an adult facility, because most of the groups that use it are adult driven. A lot of the youth don't come down this far.

- There is a perception that the community center is not for minority children— more middle class, not something that's for lower income families. Not the first time I've heard that, but heard it again a few days ago.
- **Provide safe, direct access to the river for all community members, including children.**
  - We need to open up the river a little more. It is a tidal river, which has slowly been canaled. The shoreline has been ignored and made it so you can't get there. There is no connection to the river.
  - We miss out on great educational opportunity like the salmon run, which goes right through the City.
  - The river is an underutilized asset.
  - We set up boat access, it has been a five year project. We partnered with Forterra, a partnership which is ongoing. We are trying to get more businesses to join us. We have had a few others help fund us. We need more help – a lot of the volunteers had no idea it was there.
  - Part of the fun run was to plant trees at the end, in an effort to get the community involved. Not sure how successful it will be.
  - It is a jewel, still another thing that could be included in parks that isn't inclusive of the kids. Right now there is no place for them. They have no experience with it—how many of them will kayak?
- **Get people to services as well as locate programs and services where the people are.**
  - [Taking services to the neighborhoods and bringing users to the community center] needs to be combined, otherwise you will end up with a community of smaller communities with a 'you stay over there and we will stay over here' attitude.
  - Over the last summer, when there was one event [at the community center] there was not as many kids when they did the same event in different areas. You saw a lot more kids and integration.
  - When I'm around the High School and Middle School area, there are always kids playing soccer on the fields. Technically they're trespassing – it's funny because they aren't hurting anything and it's not enforced. Either the signs need to come down and the gate removed, or there needs to be another place where the kids can go and be and not be in the wrong place, even though it is technically there for them.
  - They're organizing enough to play soccer, so why kick them off? Where do they go?
- I think we need to maintain centralized service and programming because otherwise there won't be fair service (or the perception that service isn't fair).
- That community (around Cascade View) needs to be uplifted and safer.

**Do you have any concerns about the City's parks, recreation facilities, recreation programming, or open space?**

- **Access for those most in need.**
  - Transportation is the biggest issue, to get kids safely to any events in the City. It is simply lacking.

- It's true, there's no access for kids from low income families with working parents. They can't get here. They don't want to get on the bus, it is scary for kids. We need to make sure they have a same way to get here when they do not have any transportation.
- The Parks Commission had sent a letter to the mayor requesting more bus service – most bus routes run north south, need east west. When light rail came in, they got rid of some routes, so there is tension between these two issues.
- There is not adequate access; kids with low-income families or working parents can't get here. They don't want to get on the bus. It is scary for kids; we want to make sure they have a safe way to get here. Right now they have transportation.
- **Infrastructure for people using transit, pedestrian, and bicycle modes is lacking.**
  - Those crosswalks on Highway 99 are the most terrible design—you can't see those lights on a rainy date.
  - I have to ride or walk to the Rainier Beach stop – I don't ride across the bridge. It's a very dangerous road with no sidewalks and no shoulder.
  - Not great for kids to ride bikes. Lots of neighborhoods without sidewalks.
  - There is a walking path from Samara Apartments to Cascade View, that's why we put the food bank where it is, because one third of our clients walk to us. It is really dramatic how many don't have access to vehicles.
  - By the Foster Library, I am impressed by the amount of walking people do. Some cities spend so much money trying to create walkable communities to encourage walking, but here the walking is already happening. We just need to make it safer.
  - The Foster area is a tough place to walk to, but the kids want to go there and play.
- **The golf course uses a lot of resources, but is not optimized for its best use.**
  - It's subsidized. It's getting \$500,000/yr. [there was some disagreement here]. There will be no purchase of parkland if [the golf course] is using park funds. I've heard 94% of the customers are from outside of Tukwila. It's not being used by the community here, so it shouldn't be subsidized. Nothing will change here in the short term. Does the golf course qualify as open space? Or is it like the creek? Not a park, but a green belt. What is open space?
  - The golf course should market itself as a regional golf facility– when there's bad traffic, go play golf.
  - One of our best open spaces that we never use is the golf course. Even if you're not a citizen you get a cheap rate. Would love to see it used for other things. You could have all kinds of great things there – not JUST the golf course. Could be used for all kinds of things. Should use it for more of the population.
  - We do all our business events on bigger courses. Foster is not a big course. To make it better, it must be bigger.
- **There is a disconnect between neighborhoods and specific cultural communities; these pockets need to coalesce around Tukwila as a whole.**

- We are a community of 31 languages, from 70 cultures. As a volunteer, this is the most exciting part. Seeing the diversity in your own backyard. We need parks department staff to find the leadership in those groups and introduce themselves. The school district has been hosting different conversations to talk about different cultures. This expands into the city as a whole; people need to feel like they belong. We all live in the same neighborhood.
- It is ironic that groups we're targeting are not represented today [in the community leader focus group].
- A lot of the new community members were leaders at home, but they don't feel like they are in that position now.
- As a diverse community, we have little pockets. But we need to start an overall community, that isn't just based on culture. One thought is with the use of parklands, we can encourage one group or another to sponsor a fair. Encourage groups to mingle that way.
- **We don't know if senior's needs are being met.**
  - We haven't talked much about the senior program – is it meeting the needs? JoAnne is always commenting the community center is the only place seniors can do anything. They come from all over the place.
  - Some seniors aren't able to get here or don't know that there are programs here.
- **There is a need for partnership, understanding, and cooperation between the Tukwila School District and Parks and Recreation Department.**
  - The constraints to partnering are around the programming – schools are facilities, you just need to figure out joint use. The constraint is the lack of programming.
  - There is a long standing problem that both groups have between them, but they need to sit and talk about it.
  - People should be receptive to how making the parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces in the city more useful.
  - The incoming superintendent wants to create a productive relationship, to pull it all together. She wants the school district and city to come together a couple of times a year.
  - It would be a better use of resources if the Parks and Recreation department did more programs at the schools. It is certainly something they could do. There are elementary schools in all the neighborhoods, and they are very accessible.
  - Strikes me as you have some special groups that aren't pulling together to maximize their resources. Wouldn't it be great if it was required that all kids had to learn to swim? Same with little league and schools, that way they become lifetime users? Maximize those tax-paid resources, how do we do that in a way that it is not divisive. Seems to me that if soccer is the primary interest in the community then Starfire, little leagues, and schools could be good partners in that.
  - [The Library] used to have issues with kids and drugs after school. We had a lot of animosity between the library and schools. We started to meet quarterly and now have a unified approach. School relationships make it all run much more smoothly.

- There are more people who work and leave than residents. So it is hard for people to invest time in parks and open space. There will never be enough dollars. I would like to see more of a push for **employers to be involved**, and getting employees involved on company time. Those are huge untapped resources. Otherwise they leave and focus on where they live.
- We live in an amazing area to be outside to take advantage of everything in the region. But it is hard to get people further from this facility involved.

## **Where would you like to see Tukwila's Parks & Recreation System focus over the next five years?**

### **Changes to Existing Facilities**

- **Improve and capitalize on the partnership between the City of Tukwila and the Tukwila School District.**
  - Always use assets wisely. Every community has a school – it's the one public space that's always there. I think that you have nice schools and fields, and should expand programming and use the spaces there where kids come. Work out plans to have ongoing programs around the school. Those are expensive buildings that aren't being used more than ½ the hours the entire year. Get more programs out to kids in the neighborhoods.
  - School Districts are really hard to work with. They charge for all kinds of stuff, but if they're willing why not use them.
  - There are schools where there have been facilities set up for both city use and school use. There are community rooms/facilities on school grounds. No need to create new infrastructure, use current assets. Much easier to add a gym or something as a joint use. Managed in a way that it's used in a respectful way so that it's both a district and school asset.
  - Want to see the school district and City resolve their issues and make this happen.
  - We used to have issues with the kids, drugs, etc. So the Library and Schools started to meet quarterly and now have a unified approach. School relationships to make it all run much more smoothly.
- There's a lot of caring in this community. Focus on inclusion and cultural identity. How do you take that perception and make it better? Make them feel like they are more accepted?
- Take the negative and turn it into a positive.
- Open up golf course to Frisbee, soccer, etc. It needs to attract more people.

### **New facilities**

- **Growth and development of Parks and Recreation facilities, especially in areas where there are gaps in service.**
  - There is a problem with people being underserved in terms of open space along the Pacific Highway corridor. It is a big population with limited facilities, so we need to add more facilities and services. There are facilities there that could be used.
  - The property behind Showalter is owned by City and should be developed for its best use.

TUKWILA PROS PLAN COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
COMMUNITY LEADER FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

- I would love to see some sort of youth facility in the Cascade neighborhood. A long time ago, we talked about doing something at Foster Library. We do stuff at the schools, but they close at a certain time. Just having a recreation space that's open late would help a lot more. Maybe a gym or center on that end of town.
- Would like to see something done about the soccer use, some sort of improvement to the parks-owned land behind Showalter.
- The more open space we have the better, once it's gone it's gone. You don't tear down buildings for parks.
- The turf field owned by the school district—In the summer you can drive by at any time and there are no less than 70-90 kids out there. As a soccer guy, it's cool, but the youth only know one thing. Kids are coming from places where soccer is super popular. Is it our value to offer them other opportunities in addition to soccer? Right now that is all they know. They need something they can expand into. These kids are all low income—mom and dad work, so they're out there all day. What do you do with these kids in the summer? They are the kids of the community.
- Focus has been on youth, but parks and open space are for all users. We need to talk about everyone—biking and walking trails would really help everyone.
- Wouldn't it be great if it was required that all kids had to learn to swim?
- There's been some discussion about a disc golf course at a park; appeal was that that's an activity that all ages would be able to participate in and it's very inexpensive.
- Would like to do low cost things. There's an anti-tax attitude, so much so that we can't get things funded anymore. Create a Parks District to pay for these things.
- Programming to get people out and about in the region.
- I want to see parks more wildlife friendly – get rid of grass and use native species. I also want to see better use of parks along the river.