7 Funding and Priorities

7.1 Funding Sources

7.1.1 Residential Construction Tax

Neighborhood parks are currently funded through the General Fund, developer contributions, and the Residential Construction Tax (RCT). By state law Carson City is allowed to charge an RCT (park impact fee) of $1,000 per new residence. This Residential Construction Tax (RCT) falls short of the actual cost (both land and construction) of creating a new neighborhood park. For example, at a level-of-service of 2 acres/1000 population, the actual cost of creating a new park, including both land and park construction, is $1500 to $2,000 per house. Therefore, new park development is costing the city more than is recaptured through the RCT—and the gap increases at a higher level-of-service and as land costs and construction costs escalate.

In some cases, particularly for larger developments, astute developers recognize the value of a finished park in marketing homes and they will voluntarily provide the additional funding (or actually complete the park construction themselves), and the City will rebate the RCT to help offset the developer's cost. Through voluntary development agreements, the City has been successful in ensuring that developers dedicate land as well as pay the whole cost of developing neighborhood parks.

For smaller developments, developers typically either contribute just the RCT (which places a fiscal burden on the rest of the city), or they install small parks, which are not cost-effective for the City to maintain.

There is no comparable funding mechanism for the maintenance of neighborhood parks. Generally, once the park is constructed the City assumes the maintenance costs, often without a commensurate increase in the parks maintenance budget. The City will be implementing a requirement that in new developments property owners are assessed a fee for the maintenance of their parks.

For neighborhood parks in new development areas, as long as voluntary development agreements are successful in ensuring both land dedication and development of neighborhood parks, no other funding will be required. Because of the tenuous nature of these voluntary agreements it is recommended that this voluntary practice be formalized in development standards. If this cooperative environment should change, the City will be forced to seek other means of funding and/or providing neighborhood parks in new developments. If an increase in the RCT is contemplated, it will likely only be successful if approached in conjunction with other communities.

7.1.2 Question 18 Funding

In 1996 Carson City voters approved the Quality of Life Initiative that provided a ¼ cent sales tax increase to: acquire and maintain open space (40%), develop community park facilities and trails (40%), and maintain and operate the park facilities developed through Quality of Life Initiative (Q18) (20%). The completed projects from the initial list of projects are as follows:

- ☑ Aquatic Facility—therapy pool, enclosure of the outdoor pool
- ☑ Trails and bike lanes—off-street multiple use trails and on-street bike lanes
- ☑ Carson River—new trails, picnic areas, trailhead parking and handicapped fishing pier.
- ☑ Beautification—a street tree program established and landscape enhancement of public areas
- ☑ New facilities for youth sports—multi-use fields for soccer, T-ball, softball, etc.
- ☑ Boys & Girls Club—annual support for maintenance of a new facility

- ☑ Fuji Park—renovations, group picnic area, restrooms and parking
- ☑ Rifle/Pistol Range—range improvements and improved access
- ☑ Mills Park—landscaping, irrigation system, and sidewalk system

These projects have been a remarkable asset to the community and a legacy for future generations. There are still a few projects from the original "to-do" list that are remaining to be completed:

- ☐ Improvements to the Bob Boldrick Theater at the Community Center (currently plans include: orchestra pit improvements, new seating, and renovation of theatrical lighting/control systems)
- ☐ Additional sports fields at JohnD Winters Centennial Park (currently planned to include: multi-use softball/soccer fields)
- ☐ Multi-purpose gymnasium (currently evaluating the potential of a comprehensive recreation center)

7.1.3 New Ballot Issue

The Quality of Life Initiative (Question 18) issue anticipated using the funding stream in an ongoing manner for additional facilities once the original list was completed. The reality is that cost increases related to inflation have greatly reduced the purchasing power of Question 18 funds. The remaining projects have been scaled back from the original aspirations. Bonding will be required to assemble sufficient funding for currently planned projects, including the recreation center, which, combined with the other projects, will consume the remaining available funds for at least 15 years. Also, these new facilities may necessitate maintenance costs in excess of the amounts set aside in Question 18.

Therefore, the revenue stream from the Quality of Life Initiative will not be an available resource for additional facilities for approximately 15 years, by which time its purchasing power will have been further diminished.

In the meantime, there are a number of other facility needs identified in this Master Plan that will be needed before the Quality of Life Initiative funds are available again. These needs include: extensive improvements to the trails system, providing neighborhood parks in underserved already-developed neighborhoods, sports facilities needed for future growth as well as expanded tournament use, development of the additional Community Park, etc. To finance this level of park and facility development will require a significant source of funding.

Given the demand on the General Fund (general City tax revenues) of other community priorities , and recognizing that the identified parks and recreation priorities are important to the overall livability and success of Carson City, it is recommended that alternative funding be sought. Recognizing the level of community support for the Quality of Life Initiative, and its success in providing the current level of high quality facilities, another initiative comparable to the original Quality of Life Initiative ballot issue is recommended.

7.1.4 Implementation Strategies

1. Create local requirements to ensure that park dedications reflect the actual costs of providing finished Neighborhood parks. As one means, formalize the current voluntary development of parks by amending subdivision standards to include providing completed and dedicated neighborhood parks.
2. Provide a means of funding the additional maintenance required for new neighborhood parks, other new parks and recreation facilities, and additional buildings, grounds, and medians for which the Department may become responsible.
3. Adopt an ordinance to permit formation of landscape maintenance districts to maintain parks, trails, and other public landscape areas in new developments.
4. Work with other communities and state-wide organizations (such as the Nevada Recreation and Parks Society) to approach the state legislature to adjust the RCT.
5. Establish/utilize a non-profit organization to generate funds for endowments to help bridge the gap between Parks/Recreation/Open Space needs and revenues.
6. Pursue additional funding through initiative comparable to original Quality of Life Initiative ballot issue.
7. Utilize State Bonds for funding Parks/Recreation/Open Space projects. There has been a state-wide effort to provide funding for recreation, open space, and trail development. This effort is expected to continue. Carson City must be ready to use these funding opportunities as they become available.

7.2 Establishing General Priorities

Due to the general variability in needs and opportunities that occur each year, it is recommended that the specific activities and priorities of the Parks and Recreation Department be determined annually. In order to provide overall direction, the following general priorities have been established:

7.2.1 Tier I

The highest priority actions are based on the highest level of existing needs, projected significant needs related to growth, and strong preferences identified in the Public Opinion Survey. They are:

Trails—the highest ranked improvement, by far, identified in the Public Opinion Survey. Trails will provide the greatest cost/benefit ratio of any recreation improvement.

Arts—although participation is not frequent, the arts touch more households than almost any other activity (except trails) in Carson City. The recommended improvements to the Bob Boldrick Theater at the Community Center will greatly increase the efficient use of the facility—resulting in higher use, better productions, and a greater range of programs.

Recreation Center—relieving the pressure on the Community Center gym and other rooms will:

- Increase the number and range of indoor sports programs, especially targeted toward teens and families;
- Allow expansion of the Latch Key and Summer Camp programs, which are very popular and extremely beneficial to working parents, and that are constrained by a facility shortage.
- Make possible the improvements to the Bob Boldrick Theater;

Obtain land for a new Community Park—obtaining the land will allow greater predictability in planning future recreation facilities, and will establish the use of the land for general neighborhood planning, allowing better estimating of costs and finalizing design parameters.

Establishing additional long-term funding—Question 18 was highly successful and a model for future improvements. Unfortunately, current and future needs exceed the capacity of the Quality of Life Initiative. Due to the long lead time associated with ballot initiatives, groundwork for the next request to the voters needs to be established relatively soon.

Complete Question 18 projects—in addition to the fact that it is time to wrap things up, completing the three remaining projects is consistent with the other Tier I priorities, including Ronald D. Wilson Memorial Park.

Capture Key Neighborhood Parks—the few remaining vacant parcels in underserved neighborhoods will soon be developed unless action is taken immediately to secure them for the future.

7.2.2 Tier II

These tasks are a) only slightly less urgent than Tier I, b) less resource intensive (human and fiscal resources) and c) can be worked on while Tier I actions are being pursued. The initial list is:

- Annually prioritize 1-year and 5-year improvements program
- Provide additional sports fields to meet anticipated needs related to growth
- Expand sports tournaments
- Update the plan for Mills Park
- Revise dedication requirements to assure that parks and trails are provided in new development and redevelopment
- Work with the School District on improvements, use, and maintenance of specific school/parks
- Conduct studies to document maintenance efficiencies of improved irrigation systems
- Monitor growth and update projections and facility/program needs annually
- Create policies and procedures for expanded dog use in parks
- Consider community support in establishing a dog park
- Complete an ordinance that addresses funding for maintenance of new neighborhood parks
- Identify and pursue park sites that may be acquired through the Federal Lands bill

For annual prioritizing, the following criteria are recommended:

1. Will this action address a pressing recreation need?
2. Will not taking this action result in the loss of a unique opportunity?
3. Do we have the resources to maintain and manage this action over the long term?
4. Does taking this action set a precedent that is not consistent with existing policies?
5. Will this action result in a high cost/benefit ratio?
6. Can this action be taken/provided by any other organization?
7. Does this action offer partnership opportunities for sharing development and/or operating costs?