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DATE: September 21, 2017

TO: Housing, Land Use, Environment, and Transportation Committee (HLUET)

FROM: Robb Courtney, Director of Parks and Recreation Department

SUBJECT: Report on the Status of the Strategic Plan

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report from the Parks and Recreation Department relating to an update to the Department's Strategic Plan.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report from the Parks and Recreation Department relating to the development of an update to the Department's Strategic Plan.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There is no current fiscal implications to the County General Fund or Park Charter Fund as a result of this action.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The 2003 *Strategic Plan for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation System* ("Strategic Plan") sought to present a road map to guide the following 10-20 years of acquisition, planning, development, programming, management, and funding of regional parks and recreation in Santa Clara County. The 2006 abbreviated update re-assessed the 2003 park planning priorities and updated them as part of the 2006 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Action Plan.

At the September 15, 2016, HLUET meeting, Department staff provided the committee with an overview of the forthcoming Strategic Plan Update process, at that time envisioned to include carrying out background research and analysis, an abbreviated visioning process, a countywide Needs Assessment, facilitating public and internal Department input, and developing a final Strategic Plan document including an updated CIP. The intent was to maximize the efficiency of the planning process while producing an inclusive and innovative update to the Strategic Plan in under two years.

At the May 30, 2017, HLUET meeting, the Department reported that work on the Needs Assessment was just concluding, and that a presentation on the outcomes of that work, including emerging themes and strategic goals, would be brought back to the Committee in the fall. With the public facing components of the needs assessment complete, the Department seeks Committee review of the Needs Assessment outcomes, emerging themes and preliminary strategic goals.

CHILD IMPACT

The recommended action will have no/neutral impact on children and youth.

SENIOR IMPACT

The recommended action will have no/neutral impact on seniors.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The recommended action will have no/neutral sustainability implications.

BACKGROUND

The County General Plan provides the basic principles that guide the actions of the Parks and Recreation Department. The "Regional Parks, Trails and Scenic Highways Plan" of the County General Plan provides the basic planning vision of "a necklace of parks" for the regional parks, trails and open space system, where this "...vision remains alive as a positive blueprint for meeting current and long-term recreation needs and for preserving portions of our county's 30 unique open space heritage."

In 2003, the original Strategic Plan further refined this vision and sought to present a road map to guide the next 10-20 years of regional parks and recreation in Santa Clara County. In 2006, the Parks Department completed an abbreviated update of the Strategic Plan, where the 2003 planning priorities were re-assessed and updated as part of the 2006 Capital Improvement Program Action Plan. A program to review and update the Strategic Plan is intended to be carried out approximately every 10 years; as such, the Parks Department has undertaken this recent effort.

The development of the 2017/18 Strategic Plan Update document has been underway for several months. The majority of the needs assessment (the public facing components) have been completed. The Department brings a summary of the information gathered and emerging themes and goals for review.

The Needs Assessment

Work to carry out the Needs Assessment included a series of data and information collection efforts performed from January to June, 2017. The first effort was a mapping activity performed primarily via Geographic Information System (GIS) software by Department staff.

This was intended to result in a “snapshot” of the existing physical conditions of the Department including Parklands, Trails, and Facilities, and their accessibility to County residents. Statistics documented in this portion of the work included the following:

- Overall land area
- Proportion of land open to the public
- Total publicly-accessible open space in the County (including ownership by others)
- Percent of total publicly-accessible open space land managed by the Department
- Breakdown of acreage by Land Classification Type (Classifications created by 2003 Plan)
- Miles of Trail documented in the Countywide Trails Master Plan (CWTMP)
- Miles of Trail in the CWTMP that remain incomplete
- Total miles of internal trails
- Breakdown of internal trail miles by user type
- Distance to Park access points for County residents
- Percent of population with transit access (within ¼ mile) to a County Park

The next focused effort of the Needs Assessment was public outreach. This outreach was performed via a number of channels, including an online engagement tool [interactive website], live outreach by the Project Team at five existing events throughout the County, at a Public Workshop held prior to a Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, and lastly, via a phone survey of registered voters carried out by the firm EMC Research. Advertisement and outreach to the public informing of the engagement tools and live events were through the Department website and e-blasts, social media, Board of Supervisor offices, and our open space and park partners. The total number of participants generated via this outreach was over 1,800 individuals.

The public was engaged specifically around a) the strategic vision, by being asked to help select the appropriate priorities for the Department moving forward, and b) what Department facilities (parks and trails) they currently visit and how they envision those places being changed or improved in the future. Additional questioning asked responders to rate their experience of parks and/or trails, note how often they go there, and offer other suggestions and comments. Other questions posed during the outreach process centered on the public’s awareness of, and satisfaction with, the overarching work of the Department.

Summary findings include:

- County residents are generally satisfied and supportive of the work of the Department.

- Top priorities for the Department are: maintenance and improvement of existing facilities, rather than adding new, and preservation of natural resources including water quality and wildlife habitat.
- Lesser priorities included: provision of recreational programs and opportunities to stay fit and healthy, and employing technology to enhance the visitor experience.
- Another notable trend is an increased awareness of the role of the Parks Department in lessening the impacts of climate change.
- Some areas noted for improvement included: more access for mountain bikes, more areas for dogs / dogs off-leash, more restrooms, and additional parking.

Alongside the outreach efforts of the Plan, the consultant team performed a general market analysis to serve as an informative comparison to the input received from residents. The market research primarily reviewed three publications, including *Santa Clara County Parks Annual Activity Report – 2015* by EMC Research, *Public Opinion Survey Results – 2014* also by EMC Research, *Outdoor Recreation Participation Report – 2016* by The Outdoor Foundation, and the *Survey on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California – 2012* by the State of California, Natural Resources Agency, and California State Parks.

A summary of key takeaways from this research is as follows:

- The most common activities in outdoor recreation participation include walking/hiking, running/jogging and general outdoor enjoyment and play.
- Other popular activities include cycling (including mountain biking) and camping.
- Some growing trends include Stand-up Paddling (SUP) and Multi-sport / Adventure activities and races.
- Other areas of note are a growing trend towards more social or group camping and picnicking, and an increased desire for wi-fi access in campgrounds.
- In alignment with the above, the two top motivators for people to engage in outdoor recreation are to “get exercise” and to “be with friends and family.”
- Over the last decade (since the 2003 Strategic Plan) outdoor recreation trends have remained largely stable.

Another major area of research and analysis as part of the Needs Assessment was that of Customer Demographics. The planning team collected and summarized a considerable amount of data as part of this portion of the work. Data and statistics were gathered from the

US Census, California Department of Finance, the American Communities Strategy, and from the County Department of Health and Hospitals.

A summary of outcomes of the above includes the following:

- The current population of the County is 1.9 million. Santa Clara County is growing faster than the State as a whole. By 2060, the projected population is anticipated to be 2.5 million.
- Population density in the County is focused in the urban core, in the northern part of the county around the City of San Jose. All of the County's largest cities are located in the northern portions of the County.
- Lowest density and smallest cities are located on the west side of the county.
- Morgan Hill and Gilroy in the south are projected to increase considerably in coming years.
- The ethnic and racial makeup of the county is very diverse, with the three largest groups being Asian, Hispanic / Latino, and White.
- An increasing portion of the population are foreign-born, and that number is expected to increase.
- Within the Asian heritage category, the break-down is about even between Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Filipino, and Chinese; with Japanese, Korean and others making up the remainder.
- Within the Hispanic / Latino category, the majority are of Mexican descent with less than 16% 'other Hispanic or Latino' making up the remainder.
- Racial and ethnic distribution is not equal in the County: a greater proportion of the northern cities are Asian, while Morgan Hill and Gilroy have greater Hispanic populations. The west side of the County is predominately White.
- Different racial and ethnic groups use parks and open space in different ways, although research on this topic is somewhat inconclusive.
- The overall population is aging. By 2030, more than one in four residents will be over age 60.
- A greater concentration of that age group resides in the western cities of the County.
- The County has a more educated population than the National or the State average, with a high percentage of graduate or professional school graduates residing here.
- The County population is generally healthy when compared to the State and Nation, but cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure remain a challenge.

- Those in racial / ethnic minority groups, and those with less education and lower income are more prone to illness and have higher rates of obesity.

Lastly, a survey of the major trends in Natural and Cultural Resource Preservation was carried out by the project team. In this work, the group looked at existing regional, partner and other planning efforts, as well as publications from the industry. A basic inventory of existing natural resources within County Parks was documented.

A summary of the outcomes of the above are as follows:

- County Parks are home to a diverse collection of flora and fauna, including numerous special-status and threatened species.
- There are seven major habitat types that occur in County Parks.
- Healthy ecosystems are critical to the overall health of our community and our planet; but they are also highly dependent on a number of key items, including: protected corridors for wildlife movement, maintenance of biodiversity, clean air and water, control of human access/interaction, and human awareness.
- Threats to natural resources include:
 - Development encroachment- resulting in habitat fragmentation, invasive weeds and animals, infestations and disease, disruption of wildlife movement corridors, and increased wildfire potential.
 - Climate change- resulting in drought, fire, floods, sustained weather and temperature changes, etc., and
 - The Urban Setting- resulting in air pollution, water quality impacts, increased demand for access, etc.
- Some focus areas particular to the region, including within County Parks, are: protection of coastal redwoods, addressing sea level rise, protection of groundwater supplies, riparian habitat restoration/enhancement, forest health management, and grassland management (i.e., grazing management, invasive species control, etc.).
- Regional and industry solutions for management include: taking a landscape or regional-level approach, utilizing adaptive management strategies, addressing issues from a multi-species perspective, improved community education and engagement, and improved inter-agency partnerships.
- In regard to Cultural Resources, protection, preservation and education is highly important and expectations are high, but resources for management, particularly funding, are challenging.

Following collection and analysis of the above, the Department held a series of meetings to present and discuss the outcomes with internal managers and supervisors, and with key partner agencies, jurisdictions, and other County Departments. The meetings invited discourse around notable emerging themes, strategic focus areas, actions, and goals. As a result of these meetings, the following emerging themes and preliminary strategic goals emerged:

1. Theme: Natural resource protection in the form of landscape-level management

Large areas of contiguous healthy wildlife habitat are of critical importance to the overall ecological health of the region, and are related to resiliency to climate change. Unified management practices and protection of critical movement corridors are both ways in which preservation of landscape connectivity can be achieved.

Goals: Increase Departmental focus on the landscape- or regional- level landscape both internally and in work with partners; consistent with the Department's approved Acquisition Plan. Help to increase awareness of the importance of this approach for resource protection.

2. Theme: Various implications of a changing population / customer demographics

An increasingly foreign-born, ethnically diverse, aging, and educationally and economically disparate population has a variety of needs in regard to regional parks and open space. Ethnic distribution in the County is not geographically equal. Although intercept surveys show visitor demographics closely track that of the general population, the Department does not fully understand the needs of various demographic sub-groups.

Goals: Strengthen Departmental understanding of the needs of demographic sub-groups through additional data collection and research for improved understanding of how parks are used, or under-used, by diverse groups. Develop Departmental efforts to better communicate, provide services and facilities, and remain relevant to all Parks users.

3. Theme: Importance of Regional Trails network

The regional trails network is increasingly pivotal in providing an option for non-motorized transportation and commuting, meeting public health needs, and as urban green space; offering "nature nearby" to otherwise highly urbanized areas of the county. In some cases, regional trails link with wildlife corridors and improve connectivity of open spaces.

Goals: Play a more active role in the build-out of the Countywide trails network through advocacy, partnerships, increasing awareness, funding, and acquisition; with a specific focus on critical gaps in the network.

4. Theme: Role of climate change, and the resilience of parklands for future generations

The impacts of climate change have become increasingly obvious in the Parks System, especially in recent years. Public awareness of the issues and the role that County Parks plays in mitigating the impacts of climate change is growing.

Goals: Embrace and improve awareness of the key role County Parks play in protecting clean air and water, carbon sequestration, etc. [ecosystem services], especially within the urban-wildland interface. Work to address ways in which the Parks System itself can be more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

5. Theme: Importance of planning for fiscal sustainability

With fewer financial resources than the demand for facilities and services, the Department must set priorities that a) ensure maintenance and retention of existing facilities through investments in those amenities, and b) construction of only those additional facilities that can be adequately maintained and operated.

Goal: Enhance/Integrate Capital Improvement Program (CIP) planning to include consideration of operational and maintenance costs.

6. Theme: Role of technology

The role that technology plays in modern society is ubiquitous and undeniable. It can greatly enhance operational and communications efficiency, and is requested more and more often by parks users. However, parks have historically been a place to escape to a more natural setting, where communications and technology are [seemingly] absent.

Goal: Utilize technology to enhance the visitor experience, improve education and communications, and make Departmental operations more efficient. At the same time, continue to offer an escape from technology for those that enjoy parks as a place of respite.

7. Theme: Importance of partnerships

Discussion: As population increases and demand on the Parks System, and on natural resources, rises, financial and talent resources may not climb accordingly. Partner relationships can provide opportunities for: leveraging resources and information, improving effectiveness in communications, and combining efforts to achieve greater levels of innovation.

Goal: Increase partner cooperation and collaboration with other County Departments, open space and parks organizations, and other related agencies, institutions, and community groups.

8. Theme: Protection, preservation and education of archeological, historical and cultural resources

Protection, preservation and education/understanding of archeological, historical and cultural resources are of critical importance to the overall understanding and preservation of the history of Santa Clara County.

Goals: Assure the long-term preservation, restoration, conservation and management of cultural and historic resources, while balancing public access and the enjoyment of those resources.

Other themes: other emerging themes of note include:

- Need for research and data-driven decision making
- Importance of organizational flexibility / adaptability
- Ongoing tension between user groups in parks and open space
- Need for balance between access for outdoor recreation and resource protection (including natural, cultural and historic resources).

Following input from HLUET regarding the above, the Department will continue to develop draft Strategic Goals and Actions through internal meetings and partner input, and through additional review and input from the PRC and the BOS. The Department will also work to hone the new 10-year CIP list and operating plan and will further break down priorities on that draft list to create a 3-5 year near-term Action Plan. These various draft pieces will be compiled in a full draft document and presented to the PRC, HLUET, BOS in Fall – Winter 2017, and revisions coordinated promptly. Approval of the final Strategic Plan document is projected for Spring 2018.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Without the HLUET Committee's acceptance of the report, the Parks and Recreation Department would not be able to include HLUET feedback as it moves forward with completing the update of the Strategic Plan.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

No additional steps are required of the Office of the Clerk of the Board.

LINKS:

- Linked To: 82894 : 82894
- Linked To: 86420 : 86420

ATTACHMENTS:

- Strategic Plan Update-HLUET 9-21-17 (PDF)