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February 15, 2000

TO: Vera Katz, Mayor
Jim Francesconi, Commissioner
Charlie Hales, Commissioner
Dan Saltzman, Commissioner
Erik Sten, Commissioner
Charles Jordan, Director, Bureau of Parks & Recreation

SUBJECT: Audit of the Portland Bureau Parks and Recreation, Report #261

Attached is Report #261, an audit of the Portland Bureau of Parks and Recreation. The study was conducted at the request of Commissioner Francesconi, and was included in our annual Audit Schedule published in February of 1999.

As a follow-up to our recommendations, we will conduct a brief review of progress in six months. We also ask that the Bureau prepare a detailed status report on the steps taken to address the recommendations in one year. This status report should also be distributed to the Audit Services Division and the Commissioner in Charge of Parks & Recreation.

We appreciate the cooperation and assistance we received from staff in the Bureau and the Commissioner's Office in conducting and preparing the report.

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Summary

Government agencies are responsible for using public resources efficiently and effectively. Organizations should strive to achieve desired objectives, provide services at a reasonable cost, and safeguard and protect public assets. Good management helps provide reasonable assurance that these objectives will be achieved.

An important part of good management involves creating a structure of methods and systems to guide and control the activities of the organization. These systems are intended to help the entity achieve goals and objectives, control and monitor operations, and report on accomplishments.

At the request of the Bureau's Commissioner and in consultation with Bureau staff, we evaluated some of the management systems identified as critical to the Bureau's success. Specifically, we evaluated the methods used to:

- ✓ - monitor and report on performance
- ✓ - maintain buildings, and
- ✓ - communicate with employees and the public.

We worked closely with the Bureau to identify current practices and to assess strengths and weaknesses. We compared the systems used by the Bureau to those recommended by experts, proposed by national bodies and industry standards, and used by other organizations. We also spent time with managers and staff to develop practical solutions to problem areas.

Current strengths and weakness in management systems

We found both strengths and weaknesses in the Bureau's management systems. The Bureau compares favorably with other city parks organizations and has made significant efforts to improve the delivery of parks and recreation services. In fact, in many instances the Bureau has systems which are equal to, or better than, the cities we surveyed in our field work.

We found **strengths** in the following areas:

- developing strategic plans, mission statements, and program goals,
- ① recognizing the importance of building maintenance efforts,
- ① committing significant resources to parks maintenance,
- instilling employees with a good understanding of the Parks mission,
- implementing commonly used internal communication tools, and
- ① improving and refining public involvement techniques.

if these are the strengths we are in trouble what happened?

We also found a variety of weaknesses that affect the ability of the Bureau to meet its priority goals and objectives. While the Bureau is a national leader in many areas, opportunities exist to continually improve the management and performance of the organization.

We found weaknesses in the following areas:

- focusing efforts on an achievable list of priority goals and performance measures,
- gathering reliable and consistent performance data,
- ⊙ using performance information for accountability and decision-making,
- developing reliable information on building inventory, condition, and maintenance spending,
- ⊙ devoting sufficient resources to maintain parks buildings,
- helping employees be heard, improving communication flow, and
- ⊙ developing a clear and consistent strategy to involve the public in decisions.

1 No ~~Reorganization~~ analysis - They are now constructing something to respond to my request for cost benefit out!

Actions needed to address system problems

In order to address the problem areas we identified in our review, we developed a number of recommended actions in consultation with Bureau management and employees. In brief, we recommend that the Bureau:

1. Develop a clear framework for performance measurement and a set of performance measures that are supported by reliable sources of management data.
- ② Develop a more structured building maintenance system that contains complete information on inventories, physical characteristics, maintenance condition, and annually spending.
- ③ Request and reallocate sufficient resources to maintain existing parks and recreation buildings.
- ④ Develop and implement a communication plan that recognizes current communication problems and establishes a strong commitment to improve internal communication.
- ⑤ Implement an annual employee satisfaction survey to identify problem areas and track improvement.
- ⑥ Pursue and complete a public communications strategy that involves park stakeholders in Bureau planning and decision-making.

The public has repeated this message over & over →

See employee survey 05 + 06

We still do not have one as it would be so inconvenient to involve the public

These recommendations should be considered in context with the current Parks 2020 planning effort. The Bureau initiated Parks 2020 in the fall of 1999 to develop plans for the future delivery of parks and recreation services in Portland.

We also believe that other areas in the Bureau warrant additional analysis: parks grounds maintenance, recreation programming and costs, and workload and staffing analysis.

Capacity to change In order to address these recommendations, the Bureau needs leadership, commitment, and follow-through. Experience has shown that the Bureau has not always been successful in implementing recommendations from previous audits and internal improvement initiatives. To help support the Bureau's capacity to change, we believe help is needed in several areas:

- technical assistance to develop asset maintenance systems and to simplify performance measurement methods,
- staff training on the development and use of performance information,
- organizational development to address and improve internal communication, and
- additional resources to upgrade building maintenance efforts and initiate a public involvement strategy.

The Bureau should seek help to improve their capacity to change from the Audit Services Division, the Bureau of Human Resources' Organizational Development Manager, and the Bureau of Financial Management.

In coordination with Commissioner Francesconi, we will closely monitor the progress toward implementing the recommendations of this report and addressing the identified system weaknesses. We will issue a six-month monitoring report on implementation progress. We will also ask the Bureau to prepare a detailed status report one year from the release of this report.

*Where is the progress
follow up reports?*

"She handed out a form and I wrote 'Don't cut any trees.'" Soon thereafter, this person was asked to help the city select design consultants for the project.

Initial mailings around the park seemed to reach a broader circle. One neighborhood leader confessed that she and her group were ignorant of the project and grew upset upon hearing of the plan to cut trees. "Why wasn't I notified?" she asked. Parks staff showed her the mailings she had been sent and she recognized them. "I had to go back to my group and tell them, 'Hey guys, we are wrong on this one.'"

Outreach was aided because, as one official pointed out, "the community center was already there." This meant that the changes proposed at the site were not going to be as dramatic as building a new community center from scratch. Also, for purposes of outreach, an existing community center already has customers to be easily contacted for early involvement.

Perhaps due to this preliminary outreach, it was felt membership on the Project Advisory Committee was reflective of the broader community. "They cast a very wide net," reports one committee member.

4. Flexibility to Address Unforeseen Issues

In any public outreach process, issues arise that are unexpected. Nothing was more of a surprise to numerous members of the Project Advisory Committee than when they found themselves in the position to be contemplating removing trees from the park. "I never dreamed I would be talking about that," one committee member stated, recalling her desire to protect the trees was what drove her initial involvement.

When surprising issues arise like this, it may be time to pause and add additional outreach activities to the public involvement program. That is exactly what the bureau did in the case of Mt. Scott. The bureau added a public open house on the tree removal issue. This meeting allowed that Project Advisory Committee members could hear the views of more people and retrace for people the series of decisions that was leading them to favor a pool location that would remove over 20 trees.

Taking this extra time further ensured that committee members would take the lead, not the bureau, in defending their plan when fellow citizens advocating for not cutting the trees attempted to garner media attention.

CASE STUDY 4:

MT. TABOR PARK MASTER PLAN AND PHASE ONE IMPLEMENTATION – 1998 to 1999

Public Outreach:

Improvements to Mt. Tabor totaled \$2.3 million of the 1994 Parks Improvement Bond measure. A master plan for the park was to be developed, and from that plan a list of improvements.

The bureau seems to have been sensitive to the challenge of forming a citizens advisory committee for Mt. Tabor. First, the park is deemed a regional or metropolitan park, so stakeholders extend well beyond the immediate park neighbors. Indeed, for another regional

park project at Washington Park, the bureau shelved the advisory committee idea and relied instead on open houses and focus groups of key regional and local park stakeholders.

The Mt. Tabor community also had the additional controversy regarding an on-again, off-again off-leash dog area, leaving some stakeholders on edge.

For these and other reasons, the bureau hired an independent facilitator to run the citizens advisory group. The bureau director selected the 20-member citizens advisory committee, comprised of neighborhood representatives and park user groups.

In addition to the advisory committee meetings, the bureau held three well-attended and interactive open houses where the broader public could comment on hundreds of ideas for improvements to the park. Project newsletters were widely distributed with mail back surveys on possible features for the park.

Completed 1999

In the end, the committee working with the city and its consultants produced agreement on a master plan that is a 20-year vision for the park and also contains a framework for making decisions about the future of the park. In addition, a package of Phase One improvements was settled upon. A new "Friends of Mt. Tabor Park" was created to serve as stewards for the master plan.

Public Process Issues:

1. Use of Independent Facilitator

When a past project has created some pockets of distrust, it is beneficial for a public agency to hire an outside, independent facilitator to coordinate public discussions. The decision to do so with Mt. Tabor is subject to mixed reviews internally. One Parks staff member described it as an "experiment" that was "spurred by concerns raised by the off-leash dogs issue." Another bureau official recalls it was the neighborhood association who requested the step be taken.

Did the experiment work? Inside the bureau and City Hall, reviews are mixed. "Some people want to credit that things went well because we had a facilitator," one high ranking bureau manager stated. "If they want to believe that, that's fine, but we did the same things at Mt. Tabor we did at Mt. Scott and Southwest Community Center." Another official thought hiring a facilitator for the project was "overkill."

Others sensed a concern that the facilitator was not well integrated into the design team, and at times focused the committee on less important issues than faced decision-makers for a regional park.

To the community, the results are less ambiguous. Hiring a facilitator signaled seriousness, reports one community leader. Parks was going to do things differently and was really going to listen.

It may well have been the assistance of the facilitator that allowed the bureau early on to spell out a ten-month-long schedule of advisory committee meetings and open houses that allowed the public to understand the decision-making process and timeline for the project.

notes on 20 vision
→

That timetable, running from the first CAC meeting in June 1998 through final committee action in March 1999, was included in project information materials and reassured the public that there was a framework for the consideration of their thoughts and ideas.

One parks manager said that the facilitated process won over "the least trusting members" of the advisory committee, some of whom went on to form a Friends of Mt. Tabor Park.

2. Value of Broader Outreach

The bureau understood the need to make certain involvement in the Mt. Tabor planning process was broad and extensive because the park was a regional facility. One parks official spoke admiringly of the outreach done before the project started, indicating it helped make certain the bureau placed the right people on the advisory committee, including representatives of The Audubon Society, bike interests, concerts in the park, and the soap box derby.

There is some dissent about whether the committee membership reflected the region-wide audience of Mt. Tabor Park. "The only voice for regional interests were the consultants," recalled one participant. "The neighbors said they acknowledged it is a regional park, and then developed a plan for a neighborhood park," he continued, bemoaning a list of missed opportunities. "There were no visionaries in the bureau or on that committee."

Regardless, the committee and the neighborhood appear to have gotten what they wanted. The committee ordered up more work, recalled a parks official. "They had us survey 4,000 households around the park," a number that seemed to be greater than normal for the bureau. Attendance at the first open house neared 200 persons, a remarkable turnout. Turnout slowly declined over time, but that may be seen as a reflection of a renewed trust in the community. "I believe they saw we were listening to them," one parks official stated.

3. Feedback to Participants

→ One of the key principles in most successful public involvement programs finding ways to show participants they have been heard. This is a step often overlooked in the rush to move the project ahead to the next steps. The open houses for the Mt. Tabor Park Master Plan asked participants to share a vision for the park and ideas for improvements, grade how these ideas struck them when applied to the park, and then prioritize trade-offs to select a final list of improvements.

Literally hundreds of ideas were available for the public to examine and analyze at the open houses or through mail-in surveys. This let people know that all valid ideas were being considered.

→ In addition, with Mt. Tabor, reports and project newsletters summarized the results of open houses in a clear, succinct and understandable fashion. These results were conveyed back to those participating in the master planning process, giving them a record that their input had been heard.

Chapter 2 Managing for Results: Setting a Course, Measuring Performance

Government agencies are responsible for providing quality services at a reasonable cost, and reporting the results of their efforts to elected officials and the public they serve. To provide accountability, it is essential that government agencies clearly state why they exist and what they are trying to achieve. Moreover, they need to measure and report the degree to which they are able to accomplish the goals and objectives they have established.

Over the past decade, the Bureau of Parks and Recreation has made progress in developing a performance measurement system. The Bureau began reporting performance measures in the City budget in FY 1988-89 and in the City Auditor's annual *Service Efforts and Accomplishments (SEA): 1990-91* report. The Bureau adopted its first strategic plan in 1993 and integrated its performance measures with the mission and goals established in its 1995 strategic plan.

Our review of the Bureau's performance measurement system indicates, however, that additional work is needed to ensure the Bureau's performance information is useful and reliable for decision-making and public accountability. While the Bureau's performance measures are tied to a relatively strong foundation of mission and goal statements,

the Bureau has had difficulty establishing objectives and performance indicators that provide a simple, practical and reliable method for monitoring and reporting on performance.

In order to improve measurement practices the Bureau needs:

- clear program objectives that flow directly from the Bureau's mission and goals and that provide a sound basis for performance measures,
- a more complete but simplified set of performance measures that are clearly linked to the major objectives and goals of the Bureau,
- more timely and reliable data on the activities and results of major programs, and
- more acceptance and use of performance information by management and staff for decision making.

In this chapter, we discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the Bureau's performance measurement system, and make several recommendations for needed improvements. In addition, we have proposed a list of core performance measures to assist the Bureau in its efforts to improve and simplify its performance measurement process.

What is performance measurement?

Because government lacks the barometer of profit-and-loss to gauge success, government agencies have developed another tool for assessing their performance — performance measurement. Performance measurement is government's

Recommendations The Bureau needs to take several steps to strengthen its performance measurement system and improve the quality and usefulness of its performance measures. Specifically, we recommend the Bureau:

1. *Develop a clear and cohesive framework for performance measurement.*

The performance measurement framework should clearly define the following elements:

- the purpose of the performance measurement system and how performance information will be used to manage the organization and provide accountability,
- the relationships and connections between the Bureau's mission, goals, objectives, and performance measures,
- the link between organizational units, their goals and objectives, and associated performance measures,
- management and employee responsibilities for developing relevant measures, establishing timely data collection methods, and reporting reliable performance information, and
- the frequency and nature of periodic reporting of performance information for operational management and decisions, and for public accountability. See 136⁷⁴

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Chapter 3 Stewardship: Maintaining Park Buildings

Background The Bureau of Portland Parks and Recreation is responsible for maintaining over 200 buildings. These buildings include a diverse range of structures, from large, multiple purpose community centers, to park restrooms and service buildings. Park buildings have been acquired through the investment of tax dollars over the years and they are critical to the Bureau's mission which is "to ensure access to leisure opportunities and enhance Portland's natural beauty."

None more than the "Central" you "!"

Maintaining park buildings is particularly challenging because many of the Bureau's buildings are 30 to 50 years old, or older, and some were built for other purposes. While all buildings require maintenance, the effect of neglected or deferred maintenance becomes more apparent as facilities age.

The Bureau has recognized the importance of building maintenance in a number of ways. For example, it commits significant resources to provide daily maintenance and repair of park buildings. We believe the Bureau has a dedicated maintenance staff made up of individuals who are qualified and experienced in appropriate trades. Yet, for reasons that we discuss in this chapter, the Bureau has had a difficult time adequately maintaining park buildings.

Methodology

We reviewed the Bureau's building maintenance methods to determine if they ensure that buildings are maintained in good condition. To provide a context for understanding the Bureau's building maintenance program, we researched effective maintenance management practices as described in professional literature. To gain an understanding of the Bureau's maintenance procedures, we interviewed key managers and staff, and we visited selected sites to observe conditions first hand. We obtained and reviewed financial records pertaining to the maintenance of Bureau buildings, and we contacted officials in other jurisdictions to obtain comparable information about their programs. We also reviewed existing inventory systems and prior studies of park building conditions.

Building preservation requires effective procedures and enough resources

Professional literature suggests a need for structured maintenance management systems to ensure that buildings are properly maintained and taxpayers' investments are safeguarded. Building maintenance needs that do not receive adequate attention can result in the following consequences:

- ④ ■ poor quality buildings,
- ④ ■ reduced public safety,
- ④ ■ higher subsequent repair costs, and
- ④ ■ poor service to the public.

The National Research Council believes that the safeguarding of buildings should include a commitment to provide the maintenance needed to prevent deterioration and to ensure the continued use of buildings. In 1990, the

National Research Council's Building Research Board prepared a report titled "Committing to the Cost of Ownership, Maintenance and Repair of Public Buildings." This widely distributed report cited credible analyses indicating systematic neglect of public buildings at all levels of government. According to this report, the factors contributing to neglect include:

- difficulties in assessing building condition,
- use of short-lived, inferior materials and equipment, and
- ① ■ failure to allocate adequate funds for maintenance and repair.

Further, the report suggested that a major element of the building maintenance problem is the difficulty that public agencies face in trying to convince those responsible for public policy that maintenance neglect can lead to losses. The complete summary of the Building Research Board's 1990 report is reproduced in Appendix C.

**Many park buildings
need repairs due to
insufficient
maintenance**

For many years, Portland's citizens and Parks' staff have been aware of the need for improvements to existing facilities in City parks. In 1986, the Bureau initiated the Park Futures project. The project report was issued in November 1991, and made recommendations for improving specific parks. This report, and subsequent park facility assessments conducted by Bureau staff and outside consultants, identified approximately \$100 million of needed capital improvements. Similarly, a Bureau contractor, Barney and Worth, Inc. with architects Barrentine Bates Lee, stated

in a 1992 report that, "the Bureau's existing facilities are in extremely poor condition."

A \$60 million bond measure approved by voters in 1994 helped the Bureau address its capital deficiencies by providing money for new construction and maintenance. However, despite completing nearly all of the projects planned for this money, a large unmet maintenance need remains.

During our visits to Bureau facilities, we observed general deterioration in many buildings caused by age, weather, and insufficient or deferred maintenance. In some buildings, we observed serious problems. For example, at the Multnomah Arts Center a leaking roof has resulted in damaged ceilings, walls, and flooring in areas of the building. Other visible problems that we observed at this facility included sections of badly weathered siding and peeling paint on the exterior, deteriorated masonry, and windows that did not seal properly. At the University Park Community Center, exterior siding is chipped, rotted, and in need of paint. Maintenance personnel report other serious problems with this building, including electrical, plumbing, and structural deficiencies.

Even some newer buildings have maintenance problems. Maintenance staff showed us an exterior wall at the East Community Center that was not sealed during construction and now leaks. This facility also has a roof-top heating and cooling unit that has leaked since it was new. Altogether we visited a sample of twelve Park buildings, all of which had some degree of unresolved maintenance needs.

In fact, Bureau maintenance managers and staff readily acknowledged insufficient building maintenance which they attributed to an increasing workload and too few resources. In September 1999, the Bureau's building maintenance section faced a backlog of 250 work orders. This long list does not reflect the full extent of maintenance and repair needs because it does not include maintenance requests for all park buildings, such as the Bureau's 110 restrooms. Other deficiencies have not been added to the work order list because staff believed it is futile to add new orders when there is already such a large backlog.

**Structured
maintenance
management systems
are needed**

While the shortage of resources is a problem, the Bureau also does not have adequate information to properly administer its building maintenance activities. For example, accurate counts of basic items such as the number and age of buildings, and expenditures on building maintenance and repair, were not readily available.

Complete and accurate information on the physical condition of Bureau buildings was also lacking. While staff were in general agreement that a backlog of maintenance and repair work exists, the Bureau has not clearly identified the full extent of this problem or the cost to resolve it. Without an explicit, well-organized knowledge of facility conditions, it is impossible for the Bureau to plan, fund, and execute a meaningful building management strategy.

The National Research Council recommends that formalized condition surveys be used to improve the

→
*They are finally
 doing the inventory and
 assessment now
 2005-06* →

Recommendations

We recommend that the Bureau of Portland Parks and Recreation strengthen its systems for maintaining its buildings by taking the following actions:

1. **Complete and keep current a building inventory that accurately lists all park buildings and key features.**

At a minimum, the facility inventory should provide building number/name, gross square footage, date of construction, historical/acquisition cost, and original expected lifespan. The information in the inventory should be used to compute building current replacement values.

2. **Conduct annual or periodic condition assessment surveys to determine building maintenance and repair requirements.**

Condition assessments should focus on facilities that are critical to the Bureau's mission; life, health, and safety issues; and building systems that are critical to a facility's performance. Building condition inspections should be performed routinely, based on a developed schedule. Specific deferred maintenance items and the approximate cost to resolve them should be identified and tracked over time using a tool such as the "facility condition index."

Adopt standardized budgeting and cost accounting techniques and processes to facilitate tracking of building maintenance and repair funding requests, allocations, and expenditures.

Still don't have
this - The person
who began this
task was reorganized
in (04-05) (3)

Why do they continue
to "agine" and
not allocate a
reserve account for
maint - ?
pure incompetence

4.) Allocate funds to building maintenance in accordance with the annual 2 to 4 percent of replacement value recommendation by the National Research Council, or at a minimum to demonstrate that sufficient funds are allocated to maintain Park buildings in a stable condition.

5. Establish performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the building maintenance program, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4 Internal Communication: Listening and Conveying Information

Effective internal communication is a critical component of good management. Good communication helps organizations achieve goals, operate efficiently, and improve morale. Our assessment of communications in the Bureau revealed a number of strengths, including a willingness to adopt new technologies and employ a wide range of strategies for communication improvement. Recent efforts have also helped reduce communication barriers between some operating units. We found that methods and techniques used by the Bureau are consistent with many good practices identified in the literature and used by other city parks systems we contacted.

However, we also found a number of opportunities for improvement. Our discussions with 51 parks employees and review of attitude surveys returned by 103 employees showed that many employees feel unheard, and some lack information they need to do their jobs effectively. For many employees, poor internal communication is a priority issue facing the Bureau. This weakness has persisted over many years and has proven difficult to correct.

Good communication is often a matter of perception. While employees in any large organization will be dissatisfied to some degree with how management listens to, and

handles complaints and suggestions for improvement, negative perceptions can result in real problems: poor morale, a decline in customer service, and roadblocks to planned organizational improvements.

Methodology

In order to identify the importance of organizational communication and the characteristics of organizations with good internal communication, we researched applicable literature and spoke with several communication specialists. We interviewed 51 employees from various organizational units and levels to obtain their opinions about communication in the Bureau. We followed up these interviews by administering a written survey to an additional 103 employees. We also asked parks agencies in other cities about internal communication methods that work best for them.

In order to test the reasonableness of our preliminary conclusions, we asked the Bureau's Audit Liaison Committee to review our initial findings and to give their opinions as to whether our conclusions seemed appropriate and were in line with their expectations. Finally, to develop our recommendations we met with a group of twenty-three Bureau managers and line employees at a half-day retreat held at Pittock Mansion. The retreat was assisted by a meeting facilitator and the City's Organizational Development Manager.

Benefits and components of internal communication

An organization is critically dependent on its communication practices for a number of reasons. Effective internal communication improves morale, customer service, organizational problem-solving, and decision-making. It helps

an organization communicate goals and objectives to employees and the public, and to achieve them in an efficient and effective manner.

Modern communication literature and theory generally describes three basic lines of communication in an organizational hierarchy: downward, upward, and horizontal.

→ Downward communication involves the transmission of messages from upper levels to lower levels of the organization hierarchy. Downward communication is most often used to transmit directives, goals, policies, and announcements. The basic problem with most downward communication is that it is usually a "one-way street", not allowing for feedback from the employees.

Poor downward communication can create an organizational climate of suspicion and mistrust. Such a climate may have far reaching effects on employees and the decision-making process. Downward communication can be improved by managers getting out of offices and into the field, and by listening to upward communication.

Upward communication involves transmission of messages from lower levels of the organization. Upward communication provides a "two-way street" and promotes employee morale. Moreover, adequate upward communication is a prerequisite for employee involvement in decision-making, problem solving, and development of policies and procedures that work effectively. Establishing effective means for upward communication is problematic and may be only a token gesture in some organizations. Employee morale will suffer if solicitation of employee input is a token gesture, endorsed in word, but ignored (or perceived to be ignored) in practice.

Staff from Structures listened to Recreation staff issues and clarified their role in the maintenance of facilities. They also asked Recreation staff to prioritize their work to better show improvements versus actual maintenance work. In return, Structures staff promised to improve communication by returning messages promptly, informing Recreation staff about planned work, and educating Recreation staff about work priorities and the work order system.

Interviews with both Structures and Recreation staff indicate that communication between the two groups is greatly improved.

Weaknesses

Despite the Bureau's positive communication efforts, our interviews, surveys and meetings with employees showed that internal communications is viewed as a major problem facing the Bureau. Problems exist with both vertical and horizontal communication. We found that many employees feel the organization does not value their opinions, and there is a lack of understanding and teamwork among Divisions. Many of the comments we heard were pervasive and were similar whether the source was a line employee or a middle manager.

Weaknesses can be summarized in-four main areas:

Employees feel they do not have a strong voice in the organization. Employees we surveyed and interviewed do not feel their input is solicited consistently or used by top management. Of the five lowest rated items on our survey, three related to how well Bureau management listens to employees (Table 8, statements numbered 12, 13 and 16).

later - 7 years
nothing has
changed

Specifically, we learned from our interviews that employees feel their recommendations are not seriously considered. Frequent comments concerned recommendations made to the Planning and Development Division about capital improvement projects. Employees from the Operations and Recreation Divisions often felt their recommendations and comments on types of building materials to use to minimize operating and maintenance costs were not adequately considered in constructing GOBI projects. Representatives from the Planning and Development Division, however, indicated that while they offered Operations personnel opportunities for input, their responses were inconsistent.

In other cases, employees believe they were not asked for input before decisions were made. For example, Operations staff complained that Planning and Development and Administration staff don't ask their opinions on operating and maintenance costs for potential new facilities. One manager said that changes to capital funding and project scope have been made without consulting him or understanding the effects such changes may have on operating and maintenance budgets.

These experiences give employees the feeling that upper management and other Divisions do not respect or value their professional advice and opinions. Upper management staff, on the other hand, told us that while employee input is seriously considered, factors leading to how and why decisions are made may not be explained well to employees.

→ **Employees feel top managers are unaware of what's going on in the field.** The second most negative reaction to our survey items was to the statement, "Top

management is attuned to, and knows what is happening in the field" (Table 8, statement number 15). This reaction was common in personal interviews and in comments written onto survey forms, some saying top management "doesn't have a clue" as to what is going on in the field. Employees we interviewed said they feel disconnected from the downtown administration.

A frequently mentioned issue is the physical separation of working environments. Most managers and employees mentioned this as a cause of poor communication. However, field employees said they rarely see top managers in "the field" attempting to bridge this gap. Many employees feel that top managers, the decision-makers, occupy an "ivory tower", where decisions about how they do their jobs are made with little knowledge about what their jobs entail. Employees question how policies can be written by top management without their input and without top management knowledge of their day-to-day work.

In addition, the most negative reaction to any statement on our survey was "when processes are changed, the impact on employee satisfaction is measured," (Table 8, statement number 16). As a result, employees feel that top management doesn't know what is going on in the field, writes policies that may not be effective, and then does not ask the employees for feedback.

Some staff don't get operational information they need. Recreation staff complain they do not consistently receive information about construction projects to be done in their parks and facilities. This sometimes results in logistical problems and even cancellations of scheduled events. Sometimes critical information gets to one of the three recreation managers, but not the other two, who may

also need it. They also complain that they don't get enough information from each other. Grounds maintenance employees also voiced the need to have more timely information about the nature of events in parks and facilities.

Generally, not enough quality communication takes place. There is a feeling among staff in general that other Divisions don't understand or respect their work. Bureau staff in each of the major Divisions voiced this concern. This is also true between various levels in the organizational heirarchy. Staff in the field generally think of "downtown" employees as the "ivory tower" crowd who don't understand what they do on the job. Likewise, senior administrators in the downtown offices commented that people in the field don't understand how difficult their jobs are.

Employees are also frustrated by the perceived ineffectiveness of staff meetings. Members of our liaison committee, retreat participants, and others complained that staff meetings are frequently ineffective because the wrong people are invited, or because the meetings are a formality.

Recommendations

To formulate recommendations for improving internal communication, the Bureau scheduled a retreat held October 26th at the Pittock Mansion. Twenty-three Bureau staff attended the meeting. The purpose was to formulate practical ideas for improving internal communication based on the weaknesses we found in our survey and interviews.

Audit staff summarized information from audit field-work, discussed strengths and weaknesses of internal communication in the Bureau, and held a discussion ses-

sion led by a trained outside facilitator. In addition, the City's Organizational Development Manager participated in the discussion to add an experienced perspective to suggestions made by the group.

The following recommendations are a synthesis of ideas discussed at the Bureau retreat, and conclusions developed by the Auditor's Office:

1. *The Bureau should develop a comprehensive Bureau-wide internal communication strategy.*

A committee should be established to work out the details of this plan. This work can be coordinated with Bureau work on a public involvement strategy (see recommendation 1, Chapter 5). It should be developed with broad input from all levels of the organization. It should include:

- a recognition of the elements that make up good internal communication,
- a recognition of current Bureau conditions,
- a statement of the Bureau's commitment to good internal communication practices,
- a statement of Bureau values concerning internal communication, and
- a listing of both policies and new tools which can be used to implement the plan, such as the ones discussed below.

2. *The Bureau needs to include in the plan tools and policies which increase the likelihood that employees' opinions and input will be valued and considered.*

Such tools and policies could include:

- an employee suggestion system,
- universal e-mail access for field crews, providing employees with unfiltered access to top management,
- an explicit policy stating that employees will be notified of the disposition of ideas, suggestions and feedback given on all subjects,
- an explicit policy that commits decision-makers to solicit employee input on changes to Bureau policy, procedures and objectives, and
- regular roll calls at field offices where announcements can be made.

3. *The Bureau plan needs to include policies and tools to improve the flow and coordination of information across Divisional lines.*

These methods could include:

- a weekly calendar of major events and policy announcements taking place at Bureau facilities,
- staff meeting effectiveness training for all managers,
- the recording and distribution of meeting minutes to appropriate persons, and
- an on-line discussion group for the interactive posting of, and responses to, announcements, and general staff inquiries.

4. The Bureau should adopt policies and procedures to ensure the understanding of roles and responsibilities of staff among Divisions.

These methods should include at a minimum:

- standing cross-functional teams,
- job shadowing (short term learning assignments where staff members spend time with, and assist, other employees in completing their daily work),
- shared goals among Divisions when possible, and
- ad hoc team meetings of intensive work, where two or more Divisions are having particular communication issues. Perhaps using lessons learned by Recreation and Structures.

5. The Bureau should adopt methods which increase the visibility of top managers in the field. These methods should include at a minimum:

- regular brown bag lunches at field sites by senior managers,
- senior management meetings held at field locations so that field employees may participate to some degree, and
- field days where senior managers actually perform work at field sites.

⑥ The Bureau should measure the effectiveness of communication efforts through an employee satisfaction survey.

Read these to see

how this current

division is resolving this issue

Chapter 5 Public Involvement: Connecting with Citizens and Park Users

Reorganization and strategies going forward were done with no public knowledge much less participation

Much of the Bureau's work involves significant public involvement and communication. For example, long-term planning for developing new parks and facilities requires public input and advice to ensure community needs and wishes are adequately addressed. In addition, when adding to or changing the physical features of existing parks and facilities, the Bureau notifies neighborhood residents and invites public comment and feedback before building or work begins.

They do.

The Bureau also conducts general public communication efforts relating to marketing parks and recreation activities and special events, obtaining public comment on policies or management decisions concerning the use of parks, and responding to information requests and public complaints.

should include The key elements of the Bureau's public involvement and communication procedures involve 1) informing citizens, 2) inviting input, and 3) responding to comments. The goal of the Bureau's public involvement process is to invite participation and assure that programs and planning efforts are responsive to community and agency needs. A credible and meaningful public involvement process

should result in decisions that are both technically sound and have the support of affected stakeholders.

Recently, the Bureau has completed much of the work on a five year, \$60 million capital construction project (GOBI) which has improved park grounds and facilities. The Bureau has completed over 100 projects to improve and upgrade parks, sports fields, pools, and recreation centers. Two completely new community centers have been opened recently as part of the project.

The size of GOBI and resulting impact on the entire parks and recreation system generated public controversy about the development of, and use of parks in the City. GOBI placed a great deal of pressure on Parks staff to complete promised projects on time and on budget. Our 1998 audit of the GOBI program found that most projects will be completed on time and within reasonable budget guidelines (see Report #247, *Parks Bond Construction Fund: Status of Improvements*). In addition, most will be completed with the features as promised in the original bond proposal. We did not, however, study the quality of the public involvement process.

We issued a Request for Proposal for this portion of the audit because we felt it required professional public involvement expertise. We chose the firm of Barney & Worth, Inc., to conduct the review.

Barney & Worth, Inc. is a consulting firm with offices in Portland and Olympia, Washington, advising managers in government and business on public involvement, strategic planning and policy analysis for over 20 years.

The conclusions and recommendations presented in their report are the result of extensive interviews of Bureau employees and members of the public who were identified as stakeholders in various Bureau projects and policy decisions. Their work is also based on a detailed review of the public involvement process used by the Bureau in several recent high-profile cases, and of public involvement methods used by other government agencies both local and national. Details of the case studies and lessons from other agencies are described in the appendices to the consultant's report.

The Barney & Worth report is attached as Appendix A. We urge all readers to review the work in detail. However, we will present an overview of the findings and recommendations here.

Strengths and weaknesses

In general, Barney & Worth concluded that the Bureau learned a lot from the GOBI experience regarding public involvement. In the firm's view, the Bureau got much better at obtaining and using public input during the final large GOBI capital projects. Specifically, the Bureau has made progress with these projects in:

- devising public involvement plans for most, if not all projects, based on public outreach strategies that increasingly fit the sweep and scope of each project,
- reaching key project stakeholders with information about the substance and decision making process for projects,

- offering multiple opportunities for public participation in project decision making,
- showing citizens they were heard, making adjustments to Bureau proposals to reflect public input,
- being flexible with public outreach approaches, responding to new issues as they emerge.

On the other hand, Barney & Worth states the Bureau still faces challenges which will require a greater commitment to public involvement if significant progress is to be made. Barney & Worth point to at least four areas which need to be addressed:

*7 years later
there is still no
policy!*

→ ■ Bureau public outreach strategies and plans need to address policy and program decisions as well as capital projects. Recent efforts to achieve public consensus on Bureau policy and programs, covering such issues as off-leash dogs in parks and development of memorials in parks, have suffered in part due to a lack of clear Bureau strategy and plans for approaching the public on these potentially controversial issues.

- The Bureau has inadequate skilled resources to assure effective public involvement results. There's only one experienced public outreach specialist on the Bureau roster. Heavy reliance for delivery of public involvement is placed on

project managers. Some are highly effective, but others are often insufficiently trained or not appropriately cast for dealing with the public.

- ① The Bureau must build strong, ongoing relationships with all its stakeholders, not just vocal park users or next-door neighbors. Connections to community residents beyond neighborhood association networks are limited, and connections with many business leaders at the district level have not been made.
- The Bureau has no standard approach or yardstick to evaluate the effectiveness of its public involvement efforts and capture what's to be learned from its engagements with the public.

Recommendations The Barney & Worth report describes criteria for developing public involvement plans and evaluating their effectiveness. It calls for the creation of a partnership with all of the Bureau's stakeholders in planning, designing and making other key decisions about the programs, facilities and long-term future of the community's parks and recreation resources.

Five specific recommendations are made and detailed in the full report. They are:

- ① ***Pursue and complete a Bureau Public Involvement Strategy.***

This document should articulate the Bureau's level of commitment and the general principles it will apply in its approach to public involvement, broadly describing the process to be followed. The Strategy is intended to guide Bureau management and staff as it engages the public, and assure the public it will be informed and involved with key decisions on the community parks and recreation resources. A representative from the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) should participate in the strategy development, both to add their experience, and to inspire ONI to pursue such strategies with other Bureaus.

2. Create individual public involvement plans, responsive to the agency's Strategy, for each policy, program and capital project the Bureau undertakes.

Each plan, developed after research and deliberation at the outset of any public engagement, will include identification of all stakeholders, anticipated issues to be addressed, resources required, public involvement roles of assigned staff or consultants, outreach techniques and tools to be utilized, and evaluation measures.

3. Expand Bureau staff capacity for effective public involvement by adding two skilled and experienced full-time employees and assigning them to a team of community relations specialists.

Members of this specialty team, with a nucleus of personnel currently assigned public involvement

responsibilities, would be active participants in each Bureau undertaking with a public involvement plan.

4. **Develop an evaluation system to guide both the Bureau Public Involvement Strategy and each public involvement plan. The system should be based on the criteria presented in this report.**

Where is this ^{5.} group? certainly
The Parks Board is not their idea of public involvement.
ie see Rev. T Bethel
see how S were reappointed in Aug 06 at a 5 min w/o meeting w/out public notice - for three more years.

Develop the steering committee of the Parks 2020 program as the foundation of a "cabinet" group of citizens to advise the Bureau on long-term policy matters after the 2020 process is completed.

Appendix 1

November 19, 1999

TO: Ken Gavette

FROM: Tim Dabareiner and Don Barney

RE: Memorandum: Analysis of Case Studies
City Auditor Review of Public Outreach – Portland Parks and Recreation

Purpose and Methodology

One component of the review of Portland Parks and Recreation public outreach is an examination of the bureau's public involvement in six recent projects or programs. The six case studies selected in consultation with your office, bureau staff and staff of Commission-In-Charge Francesconi are:

- Southwest Community Center siting
- Lincoln Park
- Mt. Scott Community Center and Park Improvements
- Mt. Tabor Park Master Plan and Phase One Implementation
- Off-Leash Dogs
- Holocaust Memorial

Information about these projects was gathered through several channels. For each, we interviewed the bureau's project manager and key community stakeholders. At these interviews, beyond attempting to reconstruct through people's memories a factual record about steps the bureau took in dealing with the public, we also probed for perceptions about the effectiveness of the measures. In addition, we reviewed documents and public information materials made available to us by both the bureau and citizens.

These six projects reflect a portion of the diverse activities the bureau has engaged in over the last years. By no means can an analysis of only six case studies allow universal conclusions that apply to all Parks and Recreation programs.

This memo provides a short synopsis of the bureau's public outreach in each case study. This is followed by a discussion of key public outreach process issues raised by each project. Tied to criteria or guidelines for effective public involvement, these topics were raised in interviews with participants and include the strategies and the mechanics of public outreach for the project.

This memo is not an analysis of the product of each process. For example, whether Gabriel Park is the best site for the Southwest Community Center is irrelevant for purposes of this report. The process of the site selection, and the perceptions of key bureau staff and community leaders, is the topic at hand.

Report: Review and Evaluation of Portland Parks & Recreation Public Outreach

A. INTRODUCTION

This audit of the public outreach program and practices of the Portland Parks and Recreation Bureau over the past five years is an opportunity to look at the effectiveness and limitations of a City agency with a community-wide constituency engaging its publics under both normal and extraordinary circumstances. All City of Portland bureaus can benefit from what the Parks and Recreation Bureau has learned and applied as it faced many decisions during this period involving major physical changes to well-used and much-loved community facilities.

The Bureau's traditional approach to its publics in policy, program and project decisions underwent a major and necessary adjustment in 1995 as the agency began implementation of a voter-approved general obligation bond measure. The \$60 million measure financed capital improvements in 114 park and recreation areas in the City system over a roughly five-year timeframe.

As the Bureau assumed the role of big-time developer, it sought community support to facilitate its work throughout Portland. The Bureau encountered a high level of community interest, rising in some cases to insistence, in participating in the implementation decisions.

The high level of interest from parks users, neighbors of parks and recreation facilities, environmental and land use activists, and general taxpayers strongly tested a bureaucracy of employees dedicated to the facilities they manage, operate and maintain, but not used to intensive demand for public involvement, requiring significant time, resources and energy.

In general, the Bureau responded in 1995 with a broad plan for managing and conducting public involvement that is carrying it through most of the 114 General Obligation Bond Improvement (GOBI) engagements effectively, with the exception of several early, high-profile, ultimately controversial GOBI projects. The plan was amplified and detailed in a 1998 report to the City Council.

However, in concurrent policy making efforts of the Bureau, Parks has operated without a public involvement strategy, and has not fared well. The problem cases required virtually all criteria for effective public involvement to be met to carry the Bureau through controversy, and some were not.

This report begins with a listing of criteria for effective public outreach based upon the practices of other public agencies and discussions with internal and external stakeholders about Portland Parks and Recreation's practices.

The report next recounts the Bureau's public involvement efforts of the past five years and examines them against the criteria to determine the agency's strengths and weaknesses.

The analysis is based on qualitative data developed through six cases studies of Bureau outreach activity within the GOBI implementation and outside it (see Appendix 1 for details). Interviews with three dozen stakeholders enriched the audit. More than one-third of those

interviewed were key City officials and managers in or associated with the Bureau. The balance was parks and recreation users, neighbors of parks facilities, participants in recent Bureau outreach process, and civic activists.

In addition, the audit encompassed a review of public involvement procedures and practices of eight public agencies. These agencies are inside and outside the Portland metropolitan area and with and without responsibilities for parks and recreation programs. The consultant worked with the Auditor's Office to gather reports and materials these agencies use in public outreach efforts. The results are summarized in Appendix 2.

The final section of this report contains recommendations to improve Portland Parks and Recreation public outreach.

B. CRITERIA

Drawing on this consultant's review of the Bureau of Parks and Recreation's own public involvement plan for GOBI projects, other public agencies' criteria and guidelines, and Barney & Worth's own 20 plus years experience consulting with public agencies on outreach programs, the consultants developed the following criteria for effective public involvement:

1. *Develop a public involvement plan at the start of all policy, program and facility projects.*

An agency needs, at the start of a project, to plan how to involve the public in each of the key decisions for a project and to integrate public outreach activities into the overall work plan of the project. This is the focal point of the most detailed public involvement policies, such as those that Seattle Parks and Recreation, Metro and Multnomah County have developed.

The public involvement plan needs to embody the additional criteria for effective public involvement listed below. To ensure a fully developed plan, it may be beneficial to require a review by either agency community relations staff and/or citizens advisers. The planning step can also assist the project manager in estimating the resources in time and staffing needed to execute an effective public outreach plan and incorporating costs into the project budget.

The exercise of taking the time to think through the basic elements of public outreach for a project – identifying stakeholders, delineating key decision points for a project, and finding good ways to involve citizens in these decisions – has value in and of itself. It allows the project manager to integrate the public involvement tasks and timetable into the project work program.

An agency needs to require a public involvement plan for all its projects and programs, from facility construction to policy setting.

2. *Devise public outreach strategies appropriate to the projected magnitude of community impacts and numbers of citizens impacted.*

Not every project requires a full-scale public involvement campaign. Reseeding a lawn in a park does not carry the equivalent impact to a neighborhood as constructing a new

community center. The length and level of disruption must be a consideration in judging the scope of a public involvement plan. In addition, successful public involvement attempts to reach all persons a project may effect. A regional facility requires outreach on a broader scale than a small, local facility.

Making these calls is equally part art and science, and experience in community relations can prove very helpful. Judging the match between the level of outreach to the project's impacts and stakeholder community should be part of the review of a project public involvement plan.

3. *Invite at the start of the project the participation of all citizens potentially interested in the project.*

It nearly always pays dividends in the long run to attempt to reach as many citizens as possible at the very start of a project. Involving people at the beginning helps guard against persons getting involved later and attempting to revisit past decisions. This means contacting a broad range of citizens living or working around facilities, far beyond the communications most municipal planning codes require.

Groups using parks facilities and the recognized civic organizations are a point of departure, but an agency needs to also include groups and individuals tied to schools, churches and other special interests such as environmentalists, open space advocates and the disabled.

4. *Involve community in all key project decisions.*

Interested citizens need to have an opportunity to express their views in all decisions in a project that carry a significant community impact. Closing off discussion of key decisions breeds mistrust of the decision-making process.

At times, project managers need to resist the temptation to rush ahead with decisions. The risks here are of getting too far ahead of the public, leading to a backlash. Involvement is the basis for developing in the community a sense of ownership in the project, as well as a sense of trust in the decision making process.

5. *Offer multiple opportunities for involvement.*

Citizens need to be able to participate in project decision-making in many ways. Leading up to a key decision for a project, an agency needs to offer more than one channel for a citizen to make his or her voice heard. For example, if an agency is holding a public workshop to discuss a key project decision, it should also offer other opportunities for public input. The agency could sponsor a multiple-day open house with comment forms or a mail-back survey on the question at hand. The aim is to make participation as convenient as possible for interested citizens.

6. *Offer choices and options.*

Whenever possible, an agency needs to offer to the public options and choices at each decision point. Part of the role of staff is to explain the pros and cons of each option in detail. If an agency presents choices and trade-offs, the public gets involved in thinking

through the problem and comes to a more thorough understanding of the issues. If the agency presents only one recommended choice, the public can feel left out and mistrust can develop. Citizens often respond by trying to shoot holes in the plan.

7. Show citizens they were heard.

When people take the time to share their thoughts and ideas, the agency needs to show it listened. This does not mean doing everything citizens suggest. What it does mean is getting back to people and explaining why their idea will or will not work. Citizens report distress when they see no trace of their thoughts shared at one meeting in presentations at later meetings. "Why waste our time?" is the common reaction. This action of closure is an essential element of interpersonal communication that people understand in their social lives, but is often lost in public involvement.

8. Evaluate effectiveness.

No agency has a 100% effectiveness rate with its public outreach. An agency should always be examining how successful its involvement efforts are to learn for the next outing. There are many techniques for evaluation. For example, ask workshop participants how they learned about a meeting and for ideas on how to improve the next meeting. For large projects, it is wise to conduct interviews with community leaders at project's end to gain their perspective on public involvement efforts.

Effective involvement does not mean consensus on the issue. It does mean people feel they have an opportunity to participate in decision-making. Evaluation also allows the agency to make adjustments to its public involvement strategies in the course of a project to make improvements.

9. Be flexible.

Effective public involvement allows for an agency to try different outreach tools to find the best fit for a project's stakeholders. For some projects, meetings might be best. For others, mail-in surveys are the way to go. Do not be locked into a set strategy if the community is requesting a different approach. Obviously, the public involvement strategy should be flexible enough to accommodate change and new emerging issues in the course of a project. When the public sees an agency adjusting its public outreach mechanisms in response to evaluations of effectiveness, it sends a message to citizens that it is really trying to hear them.

10. Signal commitment to effective public involvement.

An agency must signal to its employees and its constituents that it is serious about involving the public. Agency management needs to reward staff who conduct public involvement plans that follow the criteria for effective public outreach.

Developing a written public involvement policy is one way some agencies have selected to establish an ethos of community input with staff. This, in turn, can help the agency communicate to the broader public that it believes that the only way for its projects to succeed is to work in partnership with citizens.

C. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Background on Parks Bond Projects Public Outreach

The Bureau developed written guidelines for community involvement for the Parks Bond projects approved by Portland voters in 1994. These guidelines apply only to GOBI projects, not to other bureau activities. The guidelines first offered in May 1995 community involvement instructions for four different gradations of projects, from major renovations to regional facilities down to small-scale improvements to neighborhood parks. Later that year, the Bureau collapsed the program to two different levels of projects.

For major projects involving redevelopment of regional parks or facilities, the Bureau proposed forming a Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) to establish priorities and make design recommendations. Members were to live in the region the park served and represent park neighbors, neighborhood associations, park users and resource people with a regional perspective.

In addition, for such projects, the Bureau committed to a series of public meetings, in the context of neighborhood association general meetings, at various stages in the project development.

The Bureau's public involvement program also specified the role of a project public involvement consultant and specified that the Bureau's Project Manager serve as the convener of the CAC.

The community relations scope for the less intensive projects, "moderate-scale project involving renovation of neighborhood parks and facilities," was correspondingly more narrow. For these projects, there were fewer options in the design. The Bureau proposed a newsletter on the project, to be sent to park neighbors and stakeholders, inviting input through a feedback form. The Bureau would present the conceptual plan at a neighborhood meeting, and then develop a fact sheet on the final design.

→ The Bureau did acknowledge the need to do more than this minimum with projects that were of greater importance to the community or carried additional partnership opportunities. These projects could require "a series of up to three meetings" with the community.

In our review of Parks Bond projects, Portland Parks and Recreation did indeed follow its guidelines. Public involvement for early, smaller-scale GOBI projects was handled well. For example, the Bureau steered "close to a textbook" public involvement process for improvements to the Sellwood Park pool, according to a citizen committee member. Citizen input drove the final design of the pool on both shape and depth.

The challenge came with what emerged as higher profile, more complex projects, such as Pier Park or aspects of the Southwest Community Center siting. For these, the public involvement program elements were not specific or varied enough to identify all key issues early, or reach all key stakeholders. The written program did not provide project managers with adequate instruction to handle the wide variety of public response encountered in more controversial projects.

In May 1998, the Bureau drafted an Interim Report to Council on the bond projects. In this report, one of the goals of the Bond projects is public involvement. The Bureau lists a variety of strategies it has implemented on behalf of the 114 Bond projects for planning, notifying, involving, informing and celebrating.

The additional steps for public involvement in this report are instructive for they elaborate on the directions of the initial guidelines. For example, the report says Bureau reviews the public involvement strategy for a project with neighborhoods or neighborhood coalition offices. This indicates that the Bureau was moving toward a formal public involvement plan for each project.

The Bureau publishes and distributes broadly an initial informational newsletter, and informal advisory committees and open houses join the mix of involvement activities along with CACs. As the Bond Projects progressed, the Bureau moved into the broader array of outreach activities good public involvement requires.

1. STRENGTHS

The Bureau has learned from its experience with implementing GOBI-approved projects, becoming more and more responsive as the implementation continues to criteria for effective public involvement. Compared to 1995, the Bureau today is moving, with increasing improvement, toward:

- Developing a thorough public involvement plan for most, if not all, of the projects (Criteria #1)
- Devising public outreach strategies that fit the sweep and scope of each project (Criteria #2)
- Involving the community in all key project decisions (Criteria #4)
- Offering multiple opportunities for involvement (Criteria # 5)
- Offering choices and options (Criteria # 6)
- Showing citizens they were heard (Criteria # 7)
- Being flexible with public outreach approaches (Criteria # 9)

Parks mounted solid public involvement processes in the later GOBI stages with the large-scale Mt. Tabor Master Plan and Mt. Scott Community Center projects, and with most of the smaller GOBI projects.

The Mt. Tabor Master Plan and Mt. Scott facility projects both featured strategies for public outreach that matched their scope. Each involved citizen advisory committees with clear charges and solid support from Bureau staff and consultants. A facilitator was employed for the Mt. Tabor public process. Each included strong public outreach efforts from the beginning, reaching broader audiences, including those with community-wide agendas relevant to a regional facility. Mailings and survey work were extensive and the materials were clear and informative describing the issues, choices, and progress of the project and decisions ahead.

Open houses for Mt. Tabor featured input stations and comment cards to respond to choices for improvements. Mailings included feedback forms. Many citizens involved in the two projects felt they had been heard.

Unexpected issues emerged in the Mt. Scott process – whether trees might have to be removed – and the Bureau with its citizen advisory committee adjusted the process to accommodate them, adding a public open house on the tree issue.

Top City and Bureau management views on GOBI project implementation are mostly sanguine. The GOBI public involvement plan worked “beautifully”, one Bureau official feels, complicated only by “politics and political solutions”. Several other Bureau managers say they don’t see how they could have done things much differently in trying to work with the public on GOBI projects, especially the controversial ones.

“We got a good mix of people to testify on projects, including people who had not before been involved” in public affairs, says a City official. He adds that citizens were also involved in selecting consultants for some of the GOBI projects.

Another official holds the view that the Bureau has grown more sophisticated in dealing with the public during the past five years. Staff has the bruises and scars to show with Parks as a major developer and mass builder of public facilities, a new role for the Bureau. Parks was out there making visible, physical changes, and no public process will always produce consensus or make all people happy when those kinds of changes are involved, says another official.

Some project managers connected with GOBI projects feel there was room for improvement in the Bureau’s performance: greater up-front efforts to scope out public issues and stakeholders were needed, and staff should have been more flexible and responsive to public input during the project.

Bureau staff feel a range of factors has influenced the successes or failures with the public on GOBI implementation projects:

- Limits on Bureau resources;
- Level of individual project manager’s commitment to citizen participation in the project decision making;
- Effectiveness of project managers in communicating to citizens the limits and opportunities attached to individual projects and the overall program;
- Skill level of individual project managers in listening to stakeholders and assimilating views into their work;
- Effectiveness of Bureau efforts to identify, reach and involve stakeholders;
- Pressure from citizens to expand the planned or prescribed scope on some projects;
- Whether projects impacted land use issues, especially use of open space; and,
- Whether the projects involved development of new buildings or facilities or redo of existing facilities.

Lessons that the Bureau's staff draws from the GOBI experience are important to future outreach with the public, and often parallel the same lessons outside observers would have the Bureau learn. These include:

- Ask what are the vision and goals for parks, recreation and open space in Portland. Be clear about where the parks system is header, and what customers – users, neighbors, and other stakeholders – want from their parks.
- Give thoughtful consideration in proposing physical change in the parks system to what citizens can handle and what their expectations. Match planned change with aggressive public communications and outreach to raise awareness, inform and gain public investment.
- Be more aware of the environmental ethic in Portland, and the intense competition for land uses.
- Build trust, remembering that the Bureau's job to create, operate and maintain community resources in partnership with the community.

For all that, a good number of citizens interviewed remain unimpressed with the Bureau's public involvement efforts, then and now. The Bureau stumbled on several big, early GOBI projects (i.e., Pier Park, Southwest Community Center), in these observers' view, for one or more of the following reasons:

- The Bureau did not develop a complete public outreach strategy, including thorough understanding of who are the stakeholders and what are the potential issues;
- The Bureau did not have good (or any) working relationships with some stakeholders as the project began, or build them as work progressed;
- The Bureau did not cast a wide enough net for public information to reach all stakeholders, leaving some neighbors and users in the dark for too long;
- The Bureau was not open enough in the selection process for choosing citizen advisers to the project; and,
- The Bureau projected a sense of exclusiveness to some citizens in the way public meetings were organized and conducted, giving them a sense of an uphill battle to make their views known.

*Typical for Bureau
w. of
disc process
- Mt. Tabor
, location*

in the case of the Southwest Community Center, a City-appointed Citizens Task Force recommended a siting decision that was unpopular with a segment of the involved. Opponents and even some supporters of the decision attacked the task force as "handpicked" to deliver its decision, as evidence of a rigged process. Voices are still raised in anger two years later. Some of these problems are still in evidence now, say these critics, especially if the Bureau's current foray in attempting to make policy on off-leash dog sites is considered.

Look at the way it has handled the off-leash dogs issue and the memorials-in-parks issue, says one citizen who watches the Bureau closely. "After doing so well with Mt. Tabor, they've reverted to form – no strategy, poor public process," he argues. He and others cite these policy and program issues, which are not part of the GOBI implementation. They are discussed under "weaknesses" in the next section.

2. WEAKNESSES

Key Bureau problems related to public involvement remaining unaddressed go to at least three criteria of effective public outreach:

- Develop public outreach plan for all policy, program and projects (Criteria #1)
- Signal commitment to effective public involvement (Criteria #10)
- Evaluate effectiveness of public outreach (Criteria # 8)

(a) Public outreach for policy and program development.

While the Bureau has made progress on public involvement approaches on *projects* with an assigned, skilled resource and a strategy framework, it remains without a compass for public outreach on making or changing Bureau *policy or program* direction. Thus, the criteria for public involvement plans and strategies appropriate to the magnitude of the issue are not met in this arena.

In the Bureau's policy and program area, especially, there's debate about whether the criterion of involving community in all key decisions is met.

Other criteria appear acknowledged by current Bureau outreach activity in attempting to develop policy for off-leash dogs, or establishing memorials in parks, but the efforts seem incomplete and half-hearted.

The Bureau's record on public information and involvement in the Holocaust Memorial controversy was faulty, as it took a back seat for too long, and then applied too little public outreach activity too late. The selection process of members for the current citizen task force at the center of the continuing struggle to resolve the off-leash dogs issue was random, "not the best for the job" in the view of one Bureau staff member.

There is no public involvement plan to guide interaction with citizens on policy or program matters. Handling of the public on what has developed into highly controversial matters has been ad hoc, and as some observers would say, chaotic. The City Council member in charge of the Bureau and the Bureau Director have moved in and out as the situation heated up on the off-leash and Holocaust Memorial issues, creating churn. The bureau hired an outside consultant to mediate the memorial controversy. His efforts came to naught.

A citizen advisory committee is now at work attempting to craft a recommendation to resolve the off-leash dog issue. Past efforts on the issue have produced proposals but no clear and enforceable policy.

The Holocaust Memorial issue was a different sort of public involvement challenge for the Bureau. The proposal did not originate with the City, but with a group of citizens. Bureau staff were not proactive in taking the lead in public outreach for an outside project. By the time they got involved, the proposal had already been blessed in broad fashion by the City Council, proponents pursuing to implement the proposal were attempting public outreach with mixed results, and an opposition group was in operation.

Controversy on these policy questions has eroded public trust in the Bureau.

Bureau staff views run from "if there's a formula now, it's not specific enough," to "not enough guidelines, so we invent a process" for each event, to "I know there is a process, but I'm just not sure what it is because I've only worked on GOBI projects."

City officials say a senior Parks staff person has been assigned the task of developing a public involvement strategy for all Bureau outreach activity.

(b) Bureau commitment to public involvement.

Questions arise around this criteria in three areas:

- Adequacy of resources
- Willingness to involve the community in key decisions
- Attitude of Bureau personnel

(1) Adequacy of Bureau resources:

Voter approval of the GOBI bond measure for capital improvements to the Parks system brought the Bureau a public mandate on where and how to spend the money on 114 projects over roughly five years.

The Bureau moved into this new mode, benefiting from an umbrella public involvement plan for GOBI projects. However, only one Bureau staff person was on board to provide skilled direction about engaging the public to the entire undertaking.

Bureau project managers, often landscape architects or other technically based people, received initial consultation from this resource. These managers were also expected to carry the public involvement and political components of their project, along with all the technical and fiscal issues. They proceeded after launching mostly on general management experience and instincts in dealing with the public, without uniform training in effective public involvement approaches.

The outcome was uneven results with the public. Some project managers manifested strong skill in engaging the public, and/or developing process responses to public demands arising during the project. Others had less success, tending to emphasize scheduling or fiscal concerns in their project management, or not proving flexible or trained enough to hear what the public was telling them about the process and make adjustments when necessary.

One fallout of inadequate public outreach resources at the Bureau is limited capacity to develop a deeper understanding of localized issues, such as the residuals left in a neighborhood due to a previous, sour engagement between neighbors and another public agency.

It also meant that Parks had not established solid prior working relationships in some neighborhoods of the City, and project staff had a steep learning curve and limited

resources for public interaction when it brought a sometimes underfunded and always tightly scheduled GOBI project to bear in the area. In other cases, good relationships were in place between neighbors or users and Bureau operations or maintenance people, but those folks and their relationships were not always well utilized as projects were undertaken or policy crafted.

The Bureau appears now to be placing a higher budget priority on public outreach now, with more extensive public information mailings, and more liberal use of public participation opportunities, including open houses, workshops and focus groups. The challenge is to determine carefully at the outset of each outreach effort what level of resources is needed, avoiding overkill as well as inadequacy.

At the same time, the number of public outreach specialists remains inadequate at 1.5 FTE. The outlook for improvement is not bright: Bureau staff proposed four FTE for public involvement assigned to the Bureau's major new undertaking of Parks 2020, a visionary planning program with the community for the future of the system. However, budget cutbacks have reduced the capacity to one FTE for this program. With Parks 2020 expected to include a large citizen task force to steer it, the added staffing is likely to be absorbed, in practice if not assignment, by that group.

(2) Willingness to involve citizens in Bureau decisions:

→ The demand on the Bureau to engage and involve citizens in decisions about physical changes to the City's parks system and its operations has heightened remarkably in the past decade. Before GOBI implementation, the Bureau was in control of the pace, budget and decision-making process governing the limited number of improvement projects it undertook annually.

There was time to build public consensus around what a project should deliver. Bureau project managers had significant control over the final substance and design of their projects, current staff reports.

For GOBI, Bureau project managers — often landscape architects or other technically based people — received initial consultation from this resource. But these managers were then expected to carry the public involvement and political components of their project, along with all the technical and fiscal issues.

While the Bureau has consistently said the city parks and recreation system is "the people's resource", and in recent years expanded its efforts to reach citizens, there are questions around the level of the agency's commitment to including citizens in key decisions on policy, programs or even some projects.

Stern critics, citing in particular public outreach on the dogs policy or the denouement of the Southwest Community Center process, see a lack of city desire or know-how for bringing citizens into the decision-making process. Key City decision-makers for Parks are seen by these critics as either trying to keep people happy by finding a quick fix to controversy, or showing impatience with public process and stepping in to override citizens if progress is seen as slow or efficient.

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A City official does not buy this view, saying no public process, no matter how extensive is going to make all people happy with the outcome where physical change in public resources are involved. Ultimately, a judgment call has to be made in the name of good public policy by those designated responsible.

A top Bureau official proposes this scenario for letting more citizens in on decisions. It is the Bureau's job to say to citizens: "Here's the challenge and here are options. Tell us what you want for an outcome. Participate in the problem solving. Help find a solution that enjoys support for proceeding, if not total agreement." In short, he says, get government out of the decision-making equation as much as possible. Let the stakeholders have their hands on the steering wheel.

Part of the problem is that the Bureau needs to communicate the big picture, a vision of desired purpose, design and outcomes for the community's parks and recreation resources. Without this display, citizens asked to provide input may not feel they're serious partners of the Bureau when it comes to planning or developing individual policy, programs or some projects. Parks 2020 has potential for addressing this need.

Another apparent weakness that emerges from the interviews is a lack of business community understanding and involvement – and perhaps even interest – in the Bureau's resources and activities. Only one or two top City officials flag the need to inform the business community of the economic as well as social value of the parks system, and to gain business support for parks and recreation as a high civic priority.

Bureau management and City Commissioners in charge have wrestled with the question of developing a high-level, blue-ribbon citizen committee or "cabinet" to advise the City on the goals, objectives and long-term issues of the community's parks and recreation resources. A separate Parks Commission, as exists in several other large metro areas, doesn't fit comfortably with the City's commission form of government, officials reason. The electorate expects the Commissioner in charge and City Council to be the final decision-makers on use of the community resources.

More acceptable would be a group of advisers appointed by the Commissioner in charge to bring broad community perspectives to bear on operation and development of the parks system. Parks and Recreation Bureau Commissioner-In-Charge Jim Francesconi has proposed, and Bureau Director Charles Jordan has endorsed, such a group, or "cabinet", of advisers.

(3) Attitude of Bureau personnel:

Room still remains for further attitude adjustment among some Bureau staff. Some citizens complain, and some Parks staff acknowledge, that Bureau personnel has projected arrogance in the past, communicating that the agency is best skilled and positioned to be the real arbiters of what's right for the parks/recreation resource. When staff believes this, and/or when it gives even a hint of the perspective in public, there's a chilling effect on public involvement efforts, inhibiting development of solid partnerships with the public.

See ADMIN.

One close observer of the City's parks program sees the Bureau in a new world of public decision making that it may not fully appreciate, with citizens insisting on participation if not partnership. It goes this way:

In the 1970's, the City's parks system was a treasured community resource used by families, with demands for services and facilities filled with relative ease. The Bureau was viewed as the capable, competent operator and maintainer of this resource.

In the 1980's the resource deteriorated from lack of funding, raising questions about the City's and Bureau's commitment and passion for its parks. Citizens began to raise more serious questions about stewardship.

Now we are in a world with citizens acting out some of the steward's role and holding high expectations about their role in the decision-making process. The Bureau must absorb this change and listen patiently to citizens with an exploding set of demands on parks, related to new uses, public convenience and safety, and first-class operations and maintenance. The trick will be to bring these citizens to true partnership and shared accountability with the Bureau, not only on decisions, but on achieving the desired outcomes of those decisions.

A Bureau manager allows that Parks needs to come at our relationship with the public differently. There is some of the "we are the experts" in the Bureau, she observes, a tendency to present a plan and anticipate approval from stakeholders. Staff should contain expertise to designing and delivering the product the customer is seeking, she says, explaining as we work together the limitations of time and money and the tradeoffs we will jointly need to consider.

(c) Evaluating the effectiveness of public outreach efforts.

While the Bureau's GOBI public involvement plan provided good guidance on how to engage the public, it offered no help on how to evaluate effectiveness of the Bureau's effort. This is an important missing piece, leaving Bureau staff and the public to make their own judgments, case by case, or when called upon, as in interviews for this audit. Without a yardstick, the Bureau cannot measure success or discern clearly where it can and needs to improve. It is difficult to translate lessons learned into consistently improved results.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations to improve Portland Parks and Recreation public outreach spring from the criteria for public effective public involvement and the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Bureau's current practices and procedures.

1. Pursue and complete a proposed Bureau Public Involvement Strategy that will effectively guide management, staff and stakeholders on the process the agency will initiate when new or revised Bureau policy, programs and key projects are planned.

- Build on the existing framework of the Bureau's public involvement plan for capital projects.
- Develop the Strategy with the assistance of a designated working team representing Bureau management, staff, parks and recreation users, neighborhoods, business and other stakeholders.

A representative of the City's Office of Neighborhood Involvement (ONI) should also participate in the Strategy development, both to bring that agency's experience to the table, and to inspire ONI to pursue such strategies with other City bureaus.

- Preface the Strategy with a statement of commitment to public involvement, underscoring the Bureau's interest in a true partnership between the Bureau and its stakeholders.
- Include a component for building partnerships and expanding the reality of community investment and stewardship of the parks and recreation resources by working closely and consistently with the system's users, neighborhoods, business community, special interests such as open space and environmental interests, and other stakeholders.
- Describe goals, measurable objectives and priorities of the Strategy, and include an action plan for the first two years of implementation.
- Identify Bureau personnel resources and their roles for implementation of the Strategy.
- Include a clear component for evaluating the effectiveness of the Strategy. (See Recommendation # 4)
- Gain approval of the Strategy from the City Commissioner in charge of the Bureau and the City Council.

2. Create a public involvement plan, responsive to the agency Strategy, for each public undertaking of the Bureau to set or change public policy, to develop or modify public programs, or to launch a public project for new parks and recreation development.

- Begin with thorough research to identify the full range of stakeholders and public interest issues involved.
- Enlist Bureau support staff and representatives of stakeholders in the development of the plan.