



Parks and Recreation Department Review and Recommendations

City of Miami Gardens, FL

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Contents

Background	2
Analysis of Current Budget	4
Staffing Analysis	8
Programming Analysis	11
A Plan to Leverage the City's Investment in Parks and Recreation.....	12
Manage Operational Cost.....	12
Maximize Non-Tax Revenue	14
Apply a Data Driven Approach to Programming.....	18
Expand and Build New Partnerships	19
Site Specific Recommendations	24
The Need for a Strategic Focus on Quality of Life.....	32
Appendix A: Benchmarking Analysis of Fees.....	34
Appendix B: Current Positions.....	37
Appendix C: Recommended Best Practice Crime Prevention Initiatives	38

Background

In 2014, Miami Gardens residents approved a \$60 million General Obligation bond referendum to support construction, renovations, and various improvements in the City's 18 parks. Of voters, 62 percent voted "Yes" for the bond which is expected to cost the average household in Miami Gardens about \$46.28 per year for 30 years. "Today, our residents have spoken. They've said that providing a safer community for our youth and improving the quality of life for our seniors is a priority," said Mayor Gilbert following the referendum.¹

In 2015, City Council unanimously passed the bond implementation plan which includes the construction of a culinary arts facility, an alternative sports complex, a recording studio, a science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) facility, and a senior center. Other improvements include renovated lighting systems, new playgrounds, ADA-compliant parking and walking trails, and new fencing. In addition, the plan outlines a number of public safety enhancements. According to the Mayor, "I think that people will look back on the time that we approved the bond 20 years from now and say this is when things changed in Miami Gardens. ...[M]y obligation right now is to make a city that's good and with the potential to be great – and you can only do that by investing in the future."² The City is nearing completion of the first round of facility improvements and is anticipating six of 18 proposed facility renovations will come online in FY18.

In April 2015, the City of Miami Gardens submitted a Request for Assistance (RFA) to the National Resource Network (Network). The Network accepted Miami Gardens' application and initiated an assessment of the City's core challenges and opportunities. Using a systemic approach to the assessment process that included data collection and analysis, on-site interviews with key leaders, and the development of a tailored set of findings, the Network proposed direct assistance that focused on three related quality of life issues in Miami Gardens:

- Addressing neighborhood level blight issues
- Supporting efforts to reduce crime
- Maximizing the benefits of the City's investment in Parks and Recreation

In 2016, the Network initiated engagements in each of these areas. The Center for Community Progress provided recommendations to the City on strategies to address blight and vacant property issues. The Trust for Public Land provided recommendations based on best practices on how to implement programs based at the City's parks and recreation facilities designed to prevent and reduce crime.

¹ Gilbert, Oliver. "City of Miami Gardens Residents Approve \$60 Million General Obligation Bond." (June 10, 2014). Miami's Community Newspapers. <http://communitynewspapers.com/miami-gardens/city-of-miami-gardens-residents-approve-60-million-general-obligation-bond/>

² Rummery, Marcus. "Growing the Future." Business in Focus. (October 2016). <http://www.businessinfocusmagazine.com/2016/12/growing-the-future/>

This report provides a programming and funding plan that includes site-specific activities and staffing levels, identifies ongoing funding needs, and outlines possible financing sources. Specifically, the report includes recommendations on how Miami Gardens can enhance programming and engage partners to leverage the \$60 million capital investment. The report provides analyses of the Parks and Recreation Department's budget, staffing, and programming currently offered at the City's parks and recreation facilities. In addition, the report offers recommendations grounded in national promising practices that can help the City maximize the impact of the \$60 million investment in a fiscally sustainable way.

Analysis of Current Budget

For FY17, Miami Gardens budgeted \$5.4 million for the Parks and Recreation Department's operating and personnel costs, or approximately 7.7 percent of its General Fund budget. The Parks and Recreation budget has been relatively flat, and FY17 appropriations represent a \$14,783 decline from FY12 actuals. The City anticipates that the Parks and Recreation Department will receive over \$700,000 in revenue for FY17, which includes income generated from a variety of sources, including facility rental fees, the youth sports programs, participant fees, and community center memberships.

Expenditures

Approximately 64 percent of the Parks and Recreation Department's budget is related to personnel costs with the remainder for operating costs and minimal capital outlay. Operating costs are primarily associated with contractual services (professional services, parks maintenance contractual services, and other contractual services) comprising 15 percent of the Department's budget.

Overall personnel costs for FY16, the last year of actual data, totaled \$3.2 million, representing a decrease of 15.4 percent since FY12.³ Much of the decline has been driven by decreased expenditures for base salary and benefits (a decrease of 6.1 percent) primarily due to a reduction in the number of FTEs over time. Between FY12 and FY16, however, overtime expenses increased eight-fold (from \$20,000 to \$160,000), with the majority of the increase occurring in FY15 due to vacancies and increased programming in the Athletics and Recreation divisions.

Contractual services as a whole have grown by 19.8 percent since FY12. The largest category of growth is attributed to other contractual services, which increased by \$500,000 over the past five years. In addition to contractual services, the City records expenses for contractual classes, which include the fees paid to service providers partnering with the City to provide programs through the Parks and Recreation Department. Such partnerships allow the City to provide recreation and athletic programs such as spin classes, ballet and tap classes, martial arts instruction, soccer, and tennis. The City is shifting from a 70/30 split (where the provider receives 70 percent of the participation fees) to a 60/40 split with new or renewed contracts. Neighboring cities such as Hollywood, Miramar, and Pompano Beach continue to apply the 70/30 contract split; Pembroke Pines has a 75/25 split. Expenditures for contractual classes have declined by 29.3 percent since FY12. Youth participation in contractual classes has increased steadily, from 553 participants in FY14 to 1,225 participants estimated for FY17, according to the City's budget documents.

The final major category of expenditures for the Department is rents and leases. These costs have increased from \$56,000 in FY12 to about \$187,000 in FY16, an increase of 35 percent. During this time, the City has entered into new lease agreements with both Florida Memorial University (FMU) and Miami-Dade County Public Schools for the construction and use of facilities on their properties (Risco Park, etc.). In addition, the Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for managing Council-sponsored events and renting tents, tables, and chairs causing some increase in rental costs.

³ If overtime costs would have remained constant at the 2012 level, personnel costs would have reported a decline of 22.1 percent between FY12 and FY16.

Benchmarking Parks and Recreation Spending

In local government, there are no “perfect twins” for comparative analysis; this is especially applicable to parks and recreation department analysis. In the Miami-Dade County metropolitan region, there are significant differences in the services provided by various parks departments; some departments provide traditional recreation and facility maintenance functions, while others include supplemental operations and maintenance of facilities such as a golf course or marina.

In order to compare Miami Gardens’ spending to other municipalities in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, the project team adjusted for expenditures associated with programs that Miami Gardens did not have in the 2016-2017 fiscal year, for example park rangers, golf and marina operations, and in the case of Fort Lauderdale, facility maintenance and solid waste. Debt service costs are not included in the adjusted expenditures in this analysis.

Table 1: Adjusted Department Expenditures (FY17)

	Population	Parks Spending Per Capita (Adjusted)	Adjusted Park Spending as % of General Fund	Adjusted Revenue to Expenditure Ratio
Miami	440,989	\$94.46	6.2%	30.1%
Hialeah	237,082	\$45.21	7.9%	5.7%
Fort Lauderdale	178,587	\$183.17	9.9%	2.0%
Pembroke Pines	166,624	\$51.36	4.8%	30.3%
Hollywood	149,721	\$59.77	4.3%	0.3%
Miramar	137,115	\$98.01	9.3%	13.8%
Coral Springs	129,502	\$109.23	12.6%	28.2%
Miami Gardens	113,199	\$48.42	7.7%	13.0%
Pompano Beach	107,771	\$72.16	6.3%	34.6%
Davie	100,894	\$45.37	3.8%	27.6%
Opa Locka	15,967	\$32.10	3.3%	5.7%
Median	143,418	\$65.96	6.3%	20.7%
Average	166,425	\$79.08	6.8%	17.8%
Variance from Median	-32.0%	-38.8%	13.1%	-26.9%
Rank	8	8	5	7

Based on the adjusted budget analysis, Miami Garden ranks near the bottom for parks and recreation spending per capita compared to cities in the Miami metropolitan region. This analysis does not indicate or suggest that the City should spend more in their Parks and Recreation Department and does not consider the potential or additional capacity for increased spending.

As a percentage of the General Fund, Miami Gardens does spend slightly more than many of its neighbors on parks and recreation operations; however, many parks departments in the comparison group have enterprise funds. It is possible that some of the more focused administrative costs may be allocated to those enterprise funds, which would reduce the percentage of spending of the General Fund.

Revenues

The Parks and Recreation Department recorded just over \$747,000 in revenue for FY16; the Department's two largest in-house sources of revenues are parks and recreation fees (39.2 percent of FY16 revenue) and youth sports fees (19.5 percent of FY16 revenue). Revenues from rentals at the Betty T. Ferguson Community Center, classes and programs, and community center memberships make up less than 10 percent of total revenue each.

Revenue generated from in-house parks and recreation activities resulted in \$747,000 in FY16, offsetting 14.4 percent of costs. In FY13, the Department reported in-house revenues of \$1.03 million. Since then, the City has observed a decline of about \$281,000 in revenues, a 27.3 percent decrease.

Trends in revenue over time vary depending on the revenue source. Most sources follow the same trend as the Department's revenue overall, although there are key exceptions. Revenue from the youth sports programs has remained relatively flat since FY12. Revenue from daily admissions fees has increased by \$13,321 (39.1 percent) since FY12. A portion of this increase has been driven by increased fees; the City updated fees in 2014 by about 15 percent on average. Increased participation, however, is probably the larger driver. Revenues from daily admissions fees and sponsorships totaled approximately \$84,000 or nine percent of non-festival revenues.

Meanwhile, revenue from facility rentals has decreased by 31 percent. Revenue from community center memberships has decreased by 47 percent, declining from \$115,000 in FY12 to \$60,000 in FY16. City leaders suspect this may be due to the reduction of membership fees and increased competition of new privately-operated gym facilities which offer the same amenities. Gyms such as Planet Fitness have recently opened in the area.

Miami Gardens charges user fees for the rental of park pavilions, community center rooms, membership to the community center, and fees for participation in sports and aquatics programs. The City updated fees in FY14. During the update of those fees, community center memberships were reduced by 38.8 percent, while most other fee areas were increased within a variety of ranges (a 10.3 percent increase in park pavilion rental fees, a 20 percent increase in swim lessons, and a 34 percent increase in summer camp costs). According to interviews with City staff, community center fees were reduced, in part, to become more competitive with newly opened private gyms and fitness centers.

Miami Gardens, like many others in Miami-Dade County, has a price differential between residents and non-residents. Unlike most cities in the region, however, Miami Gardens offers the price differential on the basis of county, not city, residency. In the comparison group, Miami Gardens is the only city to use county residency as the determinant of the differential rate. Because most of the City's facilities were former Miami-Dade County facilities and paid for by County residents' tax dollars, Miami Gardens does not differentiate between city and county residency. Of the cities used in the analysis, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Miramar, Davie, and Pompano Beach charge on a city residency basis. Coral Springs and Hollywood do not report a differential between residents and non-residents.

Variations in rate differentials depend on the type of service or program. Within Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, the smallest differentials appear to be among swimming lessons and summer camps; these programs have a residential differential of 24 percent and 29 percent respectively. Pavilion or park shelter differentials are slightly larger (33 percent), and the differential for community center membership is the largest (60 percent).

Based on a comparison of Miami Gardens' fees to the benchmarking group, Miami Gardens' fee differentials are generally in line with the group, except community center and pavilion rentals. Non-residents are charged a 6.5 percent differential for the rental of pavilions; the smallest differential of any community reporting a differential.

The results of the fees analysis can be found in Appendix A. Due to the wide variety in the types of fees, benchmarking is provided for a representative sample of each major fee categories that Miami Gardens charges: facility rental (park pavilion), active programming (summer camps), community center annual membership, and swimming lesson costs.

Staffing Analysis

Based on the organizational chart provided by the City, the Parks and Recreation Department has seven full-time exempt positions, 34 full-time non-exempt positions, and 41 part-time positions. Current vacancies include six full-time positions and 25 part-time positions. The parks maintenance division, now under the Department of Public Works, has three full-time exempt positions, 14 full-time non-exempt positions, and one part-time position. Current vacancies include one full-time exempt and two full-time non-exempt positions. Current positions and staffing in the Department can be found in Appendix B.

Between FY12 and FY16, overall staffing levels declined from a high of 96.2 to 80.3, a reduction of 16.5 percent. For FY17, the Parks and Recreation Department budgeted 70.0 full-time equivalent (FTE). These staffing numbers include parks maintenance staff, despite their classification as public works employees (in order to maintain comparability with other jurisdictions in the Miami metropolitan region). The primary drivers of the decline in overall staffing number have been in the parks maintenance and recreation divisions; maintenance lost six positions (25 percent of maintenance staff) over that time and recreation lost a net of 9.89 positions.

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) conducts an annual survey to determine trends in parks department staffing, operations, and facilities. In its 2017 survey, NRPA found that the typical parks department has about 7.3 FTE per 10,000 residents.⁴ Miami Gardens reports 6.2 FTE per 10,000 residents; the median for communities in the Miami-Dade County region is 6.3 FTE (see Table 2).

It is important to note, however, that many communities in the Miami metropolitan region have responsibilities beyond the typical parks and recreation functions making national benchmark analysis difficult. For example, golf operations and marina operations are more common in the Miami-Dade County region. Hollywood and Pompano Beach both have General Fund staff dedicated to golf operations, while Ft. Lauderdale and Hollywood both operate marinas under their parks and recreation departments. Finally, the City of Ft. Lauderdale functions more akin to a public works department, with staff for sanitation (solid waste) and building maintenance, in addition to the marina function. Despite these complexities, it is still possible, and important, to discuss how Miami Gardens compares to both the national and the comparison group.

According to NRPA's 2017 Agency Performance Review, the typical parks and recreation department allocated staffing accordingly: 27 percent of staff to operations, 31 percent to maintenance, and 21 percent to programming. Miami Gardens, as well as the comparison group as a whole, generally dedicated a higher percentage of staff to programming and lower percentage of staff to maintenance. Table 3 provides an adjusted staffing allocation; staffing totals are adjusted based upon variations in department responsibilities. For the purposes of this analysis, positions allocated to responsibilities not relevant to Miami Gardens, such as golf operations, were removed from the comparison group's staffing levels.

⁴ National Recreation and Park Association. 2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review. <http://www.nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-agency-performance-review.pdf>

Table 2: Parks and Recreation Department Authorized Positions (FY17)

Municipality	Population	Total FTEs	FTEs per 10,000
Miami	440,989	301	6.8
Hialeah	237,082	137	5.8
Fort Lauderdale	178,587	395.7	22.2
Pembroke Pines	166,624	55	3.3
Hollywood	149,721	150	10.0
Miramar	137,115	121	8.8
Coral Springs	129,502	106	8.2
Miami Gardens	113,199	70	6.2
Pompano Beach	107,771	60	5.6
Davie	100,894	49	4.9
Opa Locka	15,967	8	5.0
Median	143,418	113.5	6.3
Miami Gardens Variance from Median	-21.1%	-38.3%	-1.9%

Table 3: Percentage of Authorized Positions by Program, Adjusted (FY17)

	Recreation and				
	Administration	Parks Maintenance	Programming	Aquatics	All Other
Davie	12.2%	6.1%	23.5%	40.8%	17.3%
Pompano Beach	0.0%	N/A	80.0%	16.0%	4.0%
Miami Gardens	3.7%	22.4%	67.5%	6.4%	0.0%
Coral Springs	2.8%	52.3%	31.2%	13.8%	0.0%
Miramar	5.8%	23.1%	39.7%	22.7%	8.7%
Hollywood	14.6%	29.3%	41.5%	2.4%	12.2%
Pembroke Pines	13.4%	7.6%	51.3%	24.4%	3.4%
Fort Lauderdale	10.1%	41.9%	46.2%	0.8%	0.8%
Hialeah	4.4%	32.5%	41.2%	21.5%	0.4%
Opa Locka	25.0%	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Miami	8.0%	40.2%	44.9%	4.3%	2.7%
Median	9.1%	29.3%	43.2%	14.9%	3.0%
Average	9.6%	25.9%	47.4%	14.7%	4.9%
Rank	9.00	7.00	3.00	7.00	9.00

Based on the adjusted staff allocation, Miami Gardens, relative to cities in the comparison group, dedicated the bulk of its staff to recreation and programming, which includes athletics programs. Staff dedicated to aquatics are a function of number of pools and proximity to the ocean; it is understandable that Miami Gardens would rank relatively lower than other communities given its land-locked nature and number of pools.

The data suggest that Miami Gardens is generally in line with staffing patterns of both the comparison group and national trends, although the City and comparison group trail national trends. Compared to many of the comparison cities, however, Miami Gardens employed a relatively higher proportion of part-time staff. The analysis suggests that the City is not over staffed and, other things equal, can adjust the staffing numbers to accommodate increased needs when the construction and renovations of the facilities are complete. Furthermore, appropriate staffing may reduce overtime expenditures. The key is staffing in such a way as to maximize the City's ability to provide the services and programming that residents want.

Programming Analysis

Miami Gardens provides a variety of parks and recreation options for residents. The City maintains 18 public park facilities, covering a total of 179 acres (1.6 acres per 1,000 persons and 1.4 percent of the City's area). Through the Parks and Recreation Department, the City focuses its efforts to provide recreation-related activities for its residents.

The Betty T. Ferguson (BTF) Recreation Complex offers a variety of programming and recreational opportunities for seniors, youth, and families. The Complex hosts a community center, football stadium and multipurpose field, track, amphitheater, and outdoor green spaces. The amenities provided at the community center include an indoor gymnasium, a state-of-the-art fitness facility, an indoor pool, an exercise studio, an industrial-size kitchen, a community resource center and computer room, an auditorium, and various meeting spaces.

Miami-Dade County residents can utilize the BTF facility through a daily, monthly, bi-annual, or annual membership. Memberships for non-County residents are slightly higher; for example, non-resident adult members pay an annual membership fee of \$540 compared to the adult resident fee of \$270, double the resident cost.⁵ The senior and child membership rate is also discounted. Family memberships are also available. BTF is open Monday through Friday between 7am and 9pm and Saturday between 8am and 9pm; BTF is closed on Sundays.

According to the City's website, BTF offers "a variety of programs that engage the mind, body, and spirit through recreation." Youth programs at BTF include Get Up & Go, martial arts, a teen summer basketball league, ballet, tap, and jazz dance classes, drumline, and table tennis. For adults, BTF offers computer classes, martial arts, table tennis, group exercise and fitness classes, personal training, and Spinnercise. In addition, specific programs for seniors include Matter of Balance enhanced fitness program, Aquafit, and Silver Sneakers, among others. Many programs require an additional fee and are made available in partnership with a contracted service provider.

In addition to the activities at BTF, the City provides a variety of programs and amenities at its other park facilities throughout the City. Residents can take advantage of football, baseball, and soccer fields, basketball and tennis courts, swimming pools, playgrounds, and walking trails. The Department offers afterschool programs, summer camps, and specialty camps. Furthermore, all-purpose buildings, pavilions, and picnic facilities are available for rent through the Parks and Recreation Administrative office. Residents can reserve space online through the ActiveNet registration system.

Unlike many communities across the country, the City of Miami Gardens fully operates the youth sports program as a division within the Department. In contrast, many communities use a combination of nonprofit/private sector partnerships and city-operated facilities. The Miami Gardens' youth sports program is one of the largest programs in Miami-Dade County, serving 1,728 youth in FY16. The youth sports program consists of youth football and cheerleading leagues, a youth soccer league, tennis and baseball clinics, and the Miami Gardens Stingrays swim team. Families can register their children for sport programs, activities, and camps through the ActiveNet system.

⁵ City of Miami Gardens. Fee Manual, FY17 Budget, p. 257.

A Plan to Leverage the City's Investment in Parks and Recreation

As the new and renovated parks and recreation facilities provided for under the \$60 million bond program begin to come on line, Miami Gardens needs to be strategic in how those facilities are staffed and programmed. Given that the City's Parks and Recreation Department's staffing is already below NRPA recommendations and in line with the regional median, the City needs to explore efficient ways to provide new services. Given the number of new facilities, optimal programming and maintenance will likely require additional resources. Yet, City officials – and taxpayers – have already made a significant funding commitment to support the initial capital outlay for facilities.

The City would err if it sought to look at planning for the new facilities in a vacuum. A plan to leverage the value of the new investments really requires a re-thinking of the overall operations and budget of the Parks and Recreation Department. Based on our review of budget and operations for Parks and Recreation, we make the following recommendations:

Manage Operational Cost

With additional and renovated facilities coming on-line, the City needs to effectively manage operational cost. If Miami Gardens were to continue operating its parks and recreation facilities as it currently does, there would be increased tension between the need for quality programming and maintenance and cost. Steps to change operations to more effectively manage cost would enable the City to absorb the increase in maintenance and programming obligations at a reasonable cost. And this is the right time to examine the opportunities for change: 31 vacancies (six full-time and 25 part-time) currently exist in the Parks and Recreation Department and three in the parks maintenance division; the City should take advantage of the opportunity to “right-size” and “right-staff” the Department.

Reorganize Staffing

- Zone-based staffing models assign parks and recreation staff to a group of parks within an area, while facility-based models assign staff to a particular facility. Like Miami Gardens, many communities utilize a combination of zone-based and facility-based staffing models. Administrative staff members are assigned to the largest or most significant community center, while park maintenance and programming staff are assigned to cover multiple facilities by zone. In Miami Gardens, staff can be organized from a central location, such as BTF, the Alternative Fitness and Sports Exploration Complex, and Norwood Park and Pool. The three central facilities can serve as the hub of the zones.
 - i. Zone One, with BTF as the zone hub, could provide oversight and staffing for facilities and activities in parks located in the northwest corner of the City (bordered by NW 183rd Street and NW 27th Avenue). In addition to BTF, these include Buccaneer Park, Lester Brown Park, Brentwood Pool, Miami Carol City Park, and Vista Verde.
 - ii. Two, with the Alternative fitness and Sports Exploration Complex at Bunche Park as the zone hub, could provide oversight and staffing for facilities and activities in parks located in the south section of the City (south of NW 183rd Street). These include Bunche Park, Bunche Pool, Myrtle Grove, Scott Park, and A. J. King Park.
 - iii. Zone Three, with Norwood Park and Pool as the zone hub, could provide oversight and staffing for facilities in parks located in the northeast corner of the City

(bordered by NW 183rd Street and NW 27th Avenue). These include Norwood Park and Pool, Rolling Oaks, Andover Park, Cloverleaf, and Bennet Lifter.

- A single Recreation Supervisor would be required for each zone, reducing the number of Recreation Supervisors from six to three (an annual salary cost reduction of over \$108,000).⁶ Based on facility needs, Zones One and Three could each be supported by one Recreation Aide II; Zone Two may require two Recreation Aide II staff members, reducing the total number of Recreation Aide II positions from seven to four (an annual salary cost reduction of \$95,400). This zone-based staffing configuration may also reduce the number of Recreation Aide positions needed, as they can be dispatched to various locations within their zone based on programming needs. Organizing by zone is not only more efficient but can also garner a sense of pride and ownership among staff. Zone-based staffing also allows Recreation Supervisors to coordinate and plan activities at various sites accordingly.
- Parks and recreation departments should also maintain specialty teams that work in all zones as needed. For Miami Gardens, this may include staff associated with aquatics programming or specific fitness trainers.
- Facilities with unique, specialized, or ongoing programming, such as BTF, Alternative Sports Complex, and the AV/STEM Center, could continue to utilize a facility-based staffing model and maintain proposed staffing levels and configurations as needed.

Create a Standards-Based Approach to Parks Maintenance

- The park facilities in Miami Gardens offer a variety of amenities. The City should align maintenance standards with the individual facility's mission and vision, as well as usage level and intensity. For example, maintenance standards at Bennett Lifter Park will differ from those at Andover Park. Andover Park, a passive park with a sensory playground and basketball court, may require light grounds and landscaping maintenance and gardening. Bennett Lifter Park, on the other hand, has lake access and a proposed fishing dock, includes a recreation building, pavilions and picnic area, and will be enhanced with lush landscaping; these amenities will require a more intense maintenance schedule.
- Standards should be specific, realistic, and measureable. Standards should include efficiency measures, the costs to maintain or repair an acre of parkland, and metrics indicating the percentage of maintenance performed on schedule.
- The Department should seek public feedback and buy-in for landscaping and maintenance goals and standards. Community engagement in the process will encourage the public to play an active role in keeping the parks clean and safe.

Pursue Managed Competition for Maintenance Services

- The City of Miami Gardens employs 17 staff for park maintenance in the Department of Public Works. Of cities in the comparison group, Pembroke Pines utilizes contracted maintenance services. In its FY17 budget, Pembroke Pines identified 4.5 employees associated with parks maintenance; these staff are project managers associated with the

⁶ Excludes staff at BTF which could continue with a facility-based staffing model.

transition process from in-house to contracted maintenance. The associated staffing costs will be reallocated once Pembroke Pines completes its contracting process.

- If the City of Miami Gardens opts to transition to contracted maintenance services, it can do so within the span of a budget year or two, as Pembroke Pines did, or over time, relying on an aging workforce's retirements to slowly transition to a contracted maintenance provision. The City of Carlsbad, California, for example, began its outsourced maintenance contract by using the private sector for routine tasks, such as mowing, and relying on city staff for specialized tasks. Through attrition, the City began to add additional responsibilities to the contractor(s). As a result, the City has reduced ongoing maintenance costs by about \$125,000 per year. Palo Alto, California saves \$280,000 annually by contracting for routine landscape maintenance at its three largest parks and estimates additional savings of \$100,000 at three smaller parks in the community.
- The most appropriate services to outsource are those which are easily measured, well-defined, and competitive. The City should establish benchmarks based upon park acreage, park mission and usage, and adherence to the maintenance plan. Contractors can respond to requests for proposals (RFP) that define a specific geographic area, a limited list of maintenance tasks, expected frequency of services, and quality standards for evaluation. Or the City may issue requests for qualifications (RFQ) to identify a group of potential contractors. For example, the City of Chicago maintains a pool of certified contractors for maintenance projects at Millennium Park. Contractors respond to an RFQ. When maintenance projects are required, the City issues an RFP to its contractor pool.⁷
- A competitive process helps to develop and ensure that costs remain low. Even in cases where the initial cost for contracting is higher, research indicates that a price differential of less than 10 percent between government in-house costs and private sector contract costs can encourage the process of cost savings. Through a managed competition model, government departments compete with the private sector to determine who can deliver services more efficiently; the best "proposal" for services receives the agreement to perform the service on behalf of the government. For Miami Gardens, this (10 percent) would represent a savings of approximately \$119,000 from FY16 maintenance spending on current facilities.

Maximize Non-Tax Revenue

Even as it works to manage costs, the City needs to explore new revenue sources for the Parks and Recreation Department – both to meet programming and maintenance needs at existing facilities and provide for new needs as the City's \$60 million investment comes on line.

Implement Market-Based Revenue Opportunities (MBRO) – Advertising, Branding and Sponsorship

- Opportunities exist across the Parks and Recreation Department for monetization through advertising. Park benches, park fences, spaces in the community center, among others, can

⁷ Best Management Practices Used at Urban Parks in national and International Locations: A Background Report for the National Mall. Center for Park Management and National Parks Conservatory Association. (March 2007). <https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/National%20Mall%20Plan%20-%20Best%20Management%20Practices%20Used%20at%20Urban%20Parks%20in%20National%20and%20International%20Locations.pdf>

be used for paid advertising. Although the City will need to balance concerns of the public interest and free speech, advertising can provide a significant, steady revenue stream. If willing, the City could expand advertising options beyond the parks and recreation facilities and market advertising opportunities on the Miami Gardens' trolley, trolley stops, and trash receptacles. The Parks Foundation of Miami-Dade County has an Adopt-a-Bench program that offers residents an opportunity to personalize a park bench to honor the memory of a loved one, as a gift, or to advertise for a business. The City of Hialeah has an agreement with Navarro Discount Pharmacy; Navarro pays \$15,000 per year for on-site advertising at the City's Adult Centers and Hialeah Transit. Regardless of which department leads the process of pursuing advertising opportunities, it should still effectively free up General Fund tax and revenue capacity to fund parks and recreation programs moving forward.

- Advertising and branding on city property is a trend which is strong on the West Coast, with many cities in California partnering with local businesses and major retailers for sponsorship opportunities. Huntington Beach, California recently entered an agreement with Hurley International in which Hurley International would provide and install two lifeguard stands, valued at \$45,000 each, in exchange for exclusive advertising rights on those lifeguard stands for two years. In addition, the City also partnered with Yoder Mobile Market in 2012 to install free to use wi-fi access points in locations downtown and on the beach, in which the City receives between 14 and 20 percent of advertising revenues. Additionally, the firm provides advertising design services to the City, a value of approximately \$60,000 per year.
- Most cities in the comparison group offer some form of sponsorship for major, special events hosted by the City. Miami Gardens relies on sponsorships primarily to support the annual Jazz in the Gardens event. The City should look into expanding the sponsorship program for smaller city events. Typically, event sponsorships have multiple tiers, with the highest tiers limited to a few sponsors. In exchange for paying for sponsorship rights, sponsors receive recognition at the event and prominent advertising during the event.
- The City of Davie hosts the Festival of Americas, a rodeo-themed event. Various sponsorship opportunities include Title Sponsor (\$10,000), Stage Sponsor (\$3,000), Kids' Corner Sponsor (\$1,000), and Festival Sponsor (\$500). Pompano Beach has three sponsorship tiers for the Yuletide on Atlantic; the sponsorships range from \$1,000 to \$250. The \$1,000 sponsors receive advertising on all event materials and an advertisement during the parade. For its Fourth of July parade and festivities, Hollywood offers several levels of sponsorships ranging from \$5,000 to \$1,000. Fort Lauderdale draws sponsorships for a variety of events including their Sunday Jazz Brunch, Riverwalk, Golf tournament, and Transportation Summit. For FY17, the Fort Lauderdale expects to receive over \$400,000 in revenue from more than 50 sponsoring organizations.
- Dovetailing with sponsorships and exclusivity contracts, the City should actively pursue opportunities for naming rights (branding) on city assets. Many localities, including those in the comparison group, have some form of naming rights program. Hialeah has leveraged both the local business community and national corporations for funding local programs. In exchange for their funding, the companies receive naming rights. Coca-Cola is named the official drink of the City. Leon Medical Centers is named the City's official wellness partner and has naming rights to a room within the Milander Center. The City of Hialeah will receive a total of \$115,000 over three years from Leon Medical Center for these rights. These sponsors receive benefits at a minimal cost to Hialeah, which include title sponsorship of

events and advertising space on city-produced materials. Options for naming rights within Miami Gardens include the Betty T Ferguson Center, the AV/STEM Center, the Alternative Fitness and Sports Exploration Complex, the Culinary Center, the Senior Center, various pavilions, ballparks, playgrounds, and even the sensory garden.

- The City of Coral Springs offers a veterans brick program, in which community members can purchase bricks from the City and Friends of Veterans Group to place in a memorial to honor veterans' service. These bricks are personalized with engravings; newly purchased bricks are installed twice a year on Veterans' Day and Memorial Day. The World War II museum in New Orleans, Louisiana sold engraved paving bricks for \$250. The City of Miami Gardens has an opportunity (especially during construction) to sell paving stones for sidewalks leading to the new facilities.
- In order to successfully implement a citywide advertising, branding, or sponsorship program, City officials should clearly define the policies for the program. Some cities, such as Nashville, Tennessee established a \$25,000 threshold in which sponsorship opportunities below the threshold amount would not require approval from the City Council. City decision makers should identify restrictions that balance public decency with free speech concerns. Finally, the City should attempt to determine locations where advertising is and is not acceptable.

Introduce Other Market-Based Revenue Opportunities (MBRO)

- The City of Miami Gardens should consider adding vending machines stocked with healthy snacks in parks and recreation facilities or contracting with vendors to sell concessions during events. Glendale, California generates about \$500,000 per year in revenue from vending machines located in their parks. In 2016, the Glendale City Council voted to offer only healthy snacks such as fruits, nuts, juice, and water in vending machines located in parks and libraries. Chicago was one of the first cities to stock vending machines in parks with healthy snacks, through their 100% Healthier Snack Vending Initiative. Within the first year of the initiative in 2014, monthly sales per machine increased from \$84 to \$371.
- The Fairfax County Park Authority in Virginia provides permits for food trucks to operate in their parks. Vendors pay a \$150 application fee for each park requested, and the City receives the greater of \$150 or 15 percent of gross revenue each month. The Park Authority specifically seeks food trucks that offer specialty food items and an affordable menu. In 2015, Metro Parks Tacoma launched its "Picnic in a Park" series in response to community interest. Metro Parks Tacoma approves up to three food trucks per designated location. Vendors pay a \$25 application fee and \$75 per day per site. Tacoma also hosts the Food Truck Fest each July. Participating food truck vendors pay a \$150 application fee and 10 percent of gross sales.
- Broward County regularly holds native plant sales in their parks. In addition to the sale, gardening information and other activities are included at the events. The Texas Discovery Gardens Butterfly House hosts a butterfly plant sale. Prices range from \$4 to \$9 for plants; prices of trees and shrubs vary. Although hosting food truck rodeos, farmers markets, and native plant and tree sales require additional manpower and heavy reliance on volunteers, they would provide excellent opportunities to engage with the public in support of the City's park facilities.

Increase Revenue from Parks and Recreation Fees

- The City should adopt a policy that provides for annual increases in parks and recreation fees, based on inflation and other related cost metrics. In addition, on a regular – though not necessarily annual basis – the City should conduct a study of parks and recreation fees that benchmarks Miami Gardens against neighboring cities. Many cities across the country utilize a benchmarking strategy that ensures that fees are reflective of both the local and national economic environment. The City of Miami uses a formula to set fees of specific programs that equal the costs of labor and supplies plus a 20 percent administration fee markup divided by the expected number of participants. Opa Locka sets fees to either match or fall no less than 15 percent below neighboring cities. Compared to rates of neighboring communities, Miami Gardens has relatively lower rates for swimming lessons and summer camp fees.
- Fort Lauderdale considers the scale of benefit when setting its fee structure; services that have a large community benefit are priced differently than those that benefit a select few. In 2014, Tacoma’s Board of Park Commissioners revised its Cost Recovery Policy based on the idea that “equitable pricing requires the establishment of a program/service subsidy schedule that allocates tax and other revenues available to subsidize the highest priority programs or services not capable of recovering the cost of service through earned revenue.”⁸ They developed a “cost recovery pyramid” that identifies a fee schedule with the following target cost recovery amounts for various categories of services:
 - i. highly individual benefit (private lessons, reserved use of facilities, merchandising, and concessions) with 125 percent cost recovery;
 - ii. mostly individual benefit (adult leagues, advanced or competitive adult classes, and reserved use for nonprofits) with 100 percent cost recovery;
 - iii. individual and community benefit (youth and family camps, beginner and intermediate adult classes, and recreational and competitive youth leagues) with 45 percent cost recovery;
 - iv. community and individual benefit (drop-in/ staffed gated admissions and beginning and intermediate youth classes) with 15 percent cost recovery; and
 - v. community benefit (intergovernmental reserved use, central administration, and parks support) with up to a 15 percent cost recovery.
- The City of Miami Gardens’ fee structure should be adjusted to improve cost recovery and reflect the actual cost of providing services using a process similar to that employed in Miami or Tacoma. The formula can be used to determine rates for classes, youth sports programs, facility rentals, and summer camps. Increased fees, however, may prevent many lower income residents from participating in activities, exacerbating health and other inequities; therefore, if fees increase, Miami Gardens should consider subsidizing the costs of participation for their lower income residents.
- Miami Gardens’ staff have indicated that the Department has an increasing number of cases where families are not able to pay for programs, specifically summer camps. In these cases, the Department “writes off” the amount due, taking a loss. One way to capture this lost revenue is to provide waivers based on family income or need. Currently, the fees for

⁸ Metro Parks Tacoma. Biennial Budget 2017-2018 Presentation. <http://www.metroparkstacoma.org/budget/>

additional children are discounted; yet, in many cases, this does not seem to be enough. Miramar and Fort Lauderdale provide fee waivers and scholarships for children who qualify. In Miramar, the Miramar Cultural Trust funds scholarships for children to attend the Arts Summer Program. Fort Lauderdale provides for a Youth Enrichment Scholarship to Broward County Public School students that are eligible for the free or reduced lunch program. The City of Miami subsidizes between 25 and 100 percent of the cost of programs depending on gross annual household income and household size.⁹ Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Park and Recreation Department has a detailed policy on program and facility rental fee waivers. The City has a clear policy on which events are eligible for waivers or reductions and outlines a variety of ways waivers can be granted. For example, an organization or group may receive a waiver if the organization provides an in-kind or other contribution, including service projects that benefit Mecklenburg County.¹⁰

Launch a Crowdsourcing Campaign for Miami Gardens Parks

- Crowdsourcing has quickly become a strategy for entrepreneurs to obtain capital for projects or new ideas. The website, Citizinvestor, has been created specifically to connect local investors with civic projects. Government entities, or their official partners, can post projects on Citizinvestor. Tampa and Gainesville, Florida are leveraging crowdfunding to support various parks and recreation projects. Florida's most successful Citizinvestor project is Summer Heatwave in Tampa; to date, the City successfully raised \$20,000 for the program, which is a summer enrichment program for youth.¹¹ The additional funds will enable Tampa to double program participation, from 500 to 1,000. In addition to Citizinvestor, fundyourpark.org, a site sponsored by NRPA, is dedicated to crowdfunding for parks and recreation departments.

Apply a Data Driven Approach to Programming

The City needs to adopt a more strategic approach to how it provides programming in its parks and recreation facilities. These are critical assets for the City and the Miami Gardens' investment in new and renovated parks and recreation facilities is particularly noteworthy for a city of its size. To maximize the value of these investments, the City needs to ensure that they provide programming that both maximizes utilization based on resident demand and helps the City to achieve its broader strategic goals.

Focus on Crime and Violence Prevention for Youth

- The Trust for Public Land identified a series of parks and recreation-based initiatives designed to address one of the major issues identified in the Network assessment report for Miami Gardens – the City's relatively high crime rate. While crime is not necessarily an issue

⁹ <http://www.miamigov.com/parks/docs/FeeReductionApp.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/ParkandRec/InsideTheDepartment/Documents/Fee%20Waiver%20Guidelines.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.citizinvestor.com/project/summer-heatwave->

in parks and recreation facilities, programming can be targeted to address crime and violence issues, particularly among the City's youth population.

- The City should assess the recommended best practice parks and recreation-based programs outlined in the Trust for Public Land report (see Appendix C) and implement one or more of them as part of an overall strategy of community crime control.

Use Data to Evaluate Programming

- More generally, programming should be informed by a formal feedback process. The City has made the right step in calling two visioning sessions, involving public feedback in the development of its parks master plan and the city-wide strategic plan. While that information may be sufficient for driving initial programming plans, the City needs a continuous feedback loop to ensure that programming matches the needs and desires of the community. The City has multiple strategies to achieve this goal: post-event or participation surveys and/or surveys using ActiveNet, participation rate data, and revenue analysis.
- The Parks and Recreation Department should regularly collect and analyze data on participation rates, membership counts and usage rates, costs, and revenues. Decisions to expand, cut-back, or initiate new programs and vary times and locations of current programs, should be based on real-time data, as much as possible. In addition to informing management, a 2006 study found that residents who trust and believe in the competency of park administrators (based on publicly shared data) are more likely to support efforts to raise revenues.¹²

Expand and Build New Partnerships

As a result of its location within a major metropolitan area, Miami Gardens has at its disposal many powerful and useful community partners. The Miami Dolphins' Hard Rock stadium and the Calder Race Track, both located in Miami Gardens, are among the City's largest taxpayers. The City has leveraged its relationship with the Miami-Dade Public Schools to develop Risco Park on Carol City Middle School's campus and its relationship with FMU for the development of the West Miami Gardens Sports Complex. While the City has leveraged these partnerships for facilities, the City has the opportunity to develop more extensive partnerships with these and other stakeholders.

Live Healthy Miami Gardens (LHMG), a nonprofit co-located in City Hall, receives funds from the City and a six-year \$3.75 million grant (2014-2020) awarded by the Health Foundation of South Florida to fulfill its mission to "foster and maintain a community culture of health and well-being for all residents of the city through access, information, activities and services."¹³ The City of Miami Gardens, as the host agency for LHMG, serves as the primary convener, coordinator, and capacity builder, and is ultimately responsible for the success of the program. LHMG hosts a variety of programs, including cooking classes, fitness instruction, healthy lifestyle programs, and directs volunteers to make improvement throughout the City such as a tree planting campaign. Given the

¹² Borrie, William T.; Mowen, Andrew J.; Kyle, Gerard T.; and Graefe, Alan R., "Public Response to Park and Recreation Funding and Cost-saving Strategies: The Role of Organizational Trust and Commitment" (2006). Society and Conservation Faculty Publications. Paper 9. http://scholarworks.umd.edu/soccon_pubs/9

¹³ <http://livehealthymiamigardens.com/about-us/>

City's support and responsibility for the program, there are ample opportunities for collaboration and coordination.

The Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, in partnership with the Children's Trust, provides grant funding to myriad summer enrichment opportunities and camps for youth. The Summer Arts and Science Camps for Kids (SAS-C) grant program supports camps that provide opportunities for children and youth with disabilities. All Kids Included (AKI) promotes inclusive arts and cultural programming throughout the community so children of all abilities and their families can participate in the arts. Miami Gardens' 2017 recipients of grants from the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs include: Diva Arts Dance Studio and Pawley Creative Arts Center (youth symphony).

FMU and St. Thomas University and Miami-Dade Public Schools are natural partners for collaboration. Additionally the many churches that are located near parks and recreation facilities offer opportunities for partnerships.

Increase Service Coordination and Cost Sharing

- Given Miami Gardens' small size and proximity to other municipalities, there may be opportunities to partner with municipalities to coordinate and share services and programming. Cost sharing agreements and intergovernmental cooperation can be an effective way for local governments to reach certain economies of scale. The State of Florida has cooperative agreements with over 300 suppliers; cooperative purchasing contracts range from agricultural and lawn equipment, office supplies and furniture to pest control services and security officers.¹⁴ Cooperation agreements between cities and schools districts on the use and upkeep of athletic fields is relatively common. For example, the City of Lacey, Washington and North Thurston Public Schools share joint use of the City's baseball/softball facilities. The City charges the District a fee for the use of the facilities, retains a portion to cover the costs of maintenance and upkeep, and then reimburses the District \$31,000 per year. The City of Merced, California and Union Merced High School collaborated on the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of a regional sports park. The park includes soccer and baseball fields, hard surface courts, amphitheater, playgrounds, trails and pathways, picnic areas, concessions, and restrooms. The City is responsible for providing maintenance and upkeep but invoices the School for 47 percent of the total cost.
- Miami Gardens has an agreement with Miami-Dade County Public Schools to collaborate on programming at the AV/STEM Center to be built at Risco Park. With the proximity of many of the City's park facilities to public schools and churches, the City should continue to pursue collaborations and partnerships. Miami Gardens should explore and develop cooperative agreements and coordinated efforts with local colleges, nonprofits, and other private sector entities. For example, Myrtle Grove Park is located across the street from Job Corp Center. The City should consider coordination in ways that would be mutually beneficial.
- Most parks and recreation departments, Miami Gardens included, use outside contractors or non-profit organizations to provide specific programming, especially for specialized services,

¹⁴ https://www.procuresource.com/coop_profiles/state-of-florida/25?results=10&sort=LOWER%28contracts.name%29&results=All

such as martial arts, Spinnercize, and youth ballet. It is generally more cost-effective to use a part-time contractor to teach these classes rather than hire a staff member. The City of Pembroke Pines has a hybrid system for youth sports programming. Local Optimist clubs administer their youth baseball, football, and cheerleading leagues. The City has responsibility over swimming, racquetball, and tennis; both the City and local Optimist clubs operate a soccer league. Davie, Florida uses private contractors for its jazzercise classes, while Coral Springs uses an outside vendor for their ACT/SAT boot camp and some of the cheerleading and tumbling classes. Fort Lauderdale uses in-house staff for water aerobics but private companies handle their swimming and diving teams. Hollywood uses private sector contractors for its swimming team and specific arts programs, such as glass blowing and jewelry making classes, and partners with YMCA to provide free fitness classes for people over the age of 55 years. In addition, martial arts, adult flag football, sailing (gulfstream sailing program) are conducted by either private sector or non-profit organizations. Many cities in the Miami-Dade metro area (Hollywood, Miramar, and Pompano Beach) continue to apply the 70/30 revenue split for contractual classes. Miami Gardens is implementing a 60/40 revenue split.

Coordinate Activities and Programming with Existing Partners

- Keep Miami Gardens Beautiful (KMGB), a program administered by the Department of Public Works, seeks to “instill pride and positive behavior changes regarding littering, natural resource conservation, recycling, and beautification through the implementation and development of effective public education, landscape projects and community involvement programs which will improve the quality of life of the community,” according to the City’s website. KMGB hosts an anti-litter campaign, an adopt-a-road program, and community beautification grants. KMGB seems perfectly poised to partner with the Parks and Recreation Department. Their website includes a link for “Volunteer Opportunities” and a volunteer agreement and release form. The Director of KMGB should meet routinely with representatives from the Parks and Recreation Department to coordinate activities and support park facility needs.
- Live Healthy Miami Gardens (LHMG) and the Parks and Recreation Department share many of the same goals and support similar activities. These two organizations are co-located in the same space. There should be regular communication, coordination, and collaboration. As a funder, the City should leverage their influence.
- Parks conservancies, or friends of parks organizations, can be extremely powerful tools to leverage community resources in ensuring a well-maintained park system that provides access to all residents. Miami-Dade County officially sanctions the Miami-Dade County Parks Foundation and provides dedicated space on the County’s website for information about supporting the conservancies directly. The Foundation provides support by assisting with park maintenance, fundraising for capital improvements, and fundraising for scholarships to ensure that all children can enjoy park programs and activities. Friends of Miami Gardens (FMG) contributed \$25,000 to improve facilities at BTF. The City should continue to engage FMG to advocate, fundraise, maintain, and assist in the planning and programming of their associated parks and recreation facilities.

- Through the NFL Play 60 program that encourages kids to be active for at least 60 minutes each day, the Miami Dolphins donated fitness stations to the walking track at Lester Brown Park. Miami Gardens should strive to be like Arlington, Texas, home of the Dallas Cowboys. The Cowboys franchise sponsors a variety of events, including football and cheerleading academies, a coaches clinic, youth health and wellness programming, and even a parents clinic. As part of the Cowboys' commitment to the City of Arlington, the Gene and Jerry Jones Family Youth Foundation pledged to donate \$16.5 million over 33 years to organizations supporting youth football and athletics, health and wellness, and education. The Youth Foundation recently donated \$1 million, with an additional \$1 million match from the NFL, to provide educational, athletic, and arts enrichment during afterschool and summer camps. In addition to the Miami Dolphins, there is a strong NFL presence in Miami-Dade County; there are 51 NFL active players who played high school football in Miami-Dade County schools; these players can be a potential resource to Miami Gardens, especially for the youth sports programs.

Engage Local Education Institutions to Provide Additional Support for Programs

- The AV/STEM Center's proximity to the elementary and middle schools establishes a natural partnership with the school district. Although Miami Gardens has already partnered with the school district in creating and officially sanctioning the park, the City should continue to leverage that partnership. Together the City and District could establish a community garden in the AV/STEM Center's facility; this community garden would primarily be for the benefit of students at Carol City Elementary and Middle Schools. All students are required to take biology courses and environmental science courses; a community garden on the property could encourage more hands on learning experiences for those courses.
- Miami-Dade Public Schools has a technical-focused curriculum which prepares high school students to start careers in various industries, including hospitality and tourism, business management and administration, and A/V technology and communications. Given the nature of District's career and technical education (CTE) program, the City should be able to leverage the District's curriculum for programming. This can include things such as internships for students in the (CTE) program.
- The SEED School of Miami is the first public boarding school within the Miami metropolitan area. As a relatively new organization, the City has the opportunity to forge a new partnership with the SEED School and develop programming which may benefit students at the school as well as the children in Miami Gardens.
- Both Florida Memorial University (FMU) and St. Thomas University are located within Miami Gardens' borders and should be looked at as key community partners. The addition of the STEM/AV Center at Risco Park presents a valuable opportunity to leverage the university's media and communications programs. The City may be able to offer an internship to students from those universities to provide instruction to children who sign up for classes at the AV/STEM Center.

Utilize Volunteers to Augment Maintenance and Gardening Services

- Providing and coordinating volunteer activities can enrich the maintenance program and create a genuine community interest in supporting the parks. A 2013 survey conducted by

the League of Minnesota Cities found that one-third of cities surveyed used volunteers to supplement city-supported services; volunteers for parks and recreation services and projects were used most often (after volunteer fire departments).¹⁵ Furthermore, a recent study of the use of volunteers in nine parks in Austin, Boston, Brooklyn, and Houston quantified the impact of volunteers over a five year period. The findings indicate that the number of volunteers, donated hours, and monetarized value increased each year. In 2016, for example, 18,727 volunteers donated 67,541 hours for a value of \$1.75 million (32.47 FTEs).¹⁶ Central Park utilizes over 3,000 volunteers each year through corporate and school groups and field day events. Atlanta's Piedmont Park boasts a volunteer workforce of more than 1,000, including off-duty police officers who routinely volunteer for park patrol.¹⁷

- One of the most common parks volunteering programs in the nation is the adopt-a-park program. Adopt-a-park programs allow organizations or private entities to provide funding or support to parks and recreation departments, provide effective ways to keep parks clean, and develop a sense of pride and ownership in the community. The City of Miami Gardens has an adopt-a-road program that offers residents an opportunity to maintain a section of road by removing litter at least four times each year. The City should consider an adopt-a-park program. The Parks Foundation of Miami-Dade County, along with corporate sponsors that include Home Depot, Kingsford, Chevrolet, United Healthcare, and Miller Construction Company, offer residents, groups, and businesses an opportunity to adopt a park. Residents can provide financial or in-kind donations for park improvements such as playground equipment, picnic tables, landscaping, and trees, as well as maintain and clean up their adopted parks areas.

¹⁵ Cities Using Volunteers: Analysis and Case Studies. League of Minnesota Cities. (2013).

https://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/sotc13_volunteers.pdf?inline=true

¹⁶ McCabe, Charlie. The Importance of Volunteers in Parks. City Park Blog. Center for City Park Excellence. (April 28, 2017). <https://cityparksblog.org/2017/04/28/the-importance-of-volunteers-in-parks-continued/>

¹⁷ Best Management Practices Used at Urban Parks in national and International Locations: A Background Report for the National Mall. Center for Park Management and National Parks Conservatory Association. (March 2007). <https://www.nps.gov/nationalmallplan/Documents/National%20Mall%20Plan%20-%20Best%20Management%20Practices%20Used%20at%20Urban%20Parks%20in%20National%20and%20International%20Locations.pdf>

Site Specific Recommendations

Although specific programming and events offered at the new parks and recreation facilities will be determined by the wants and needs of the community, the following include examples of site specific options to explore for programming, funding, and sustainability.

A.J. King Park

Renovations planned for A. J. King Park include new lighting, reconditioned baseball field and outfield fencing, ADA-compliant paved parking lot, installation of a large pavilion, landscaping, and a video surveillance system. The park currently has a multipurpose room and hosts a summer specialty camp.

A. J. King should continue to offer Summer Specialty Camp for children ages 9–12 years old. The camp runs from Monday through Friday, beginning June 12 through August 11. The cost is \$90 per session and includes a T-shirt.

- Seek sponsorships for the specialty camp to provide scholarships and t-shirts for the campers. T-shirts could have the company's logo.

The City should consider an Adult Softball League for adults 21 years and older. South Florida Club Sports charges \$800 per team or \$65 per individual. There is currently a waitlist for individuals interested in joining a team.

- Organize a local league and recruit local business to form teams. Fees could be comparable to area leagues.
- Potentially reach out to the South Florida Club Sports organization to expand their program using Miami Gardens' facilities.

The City offers free youth baseball clinics for children ages 6-14 years old on Monday and Friday evenings in May through July.

- Evaluate participation rates (by age, location, and day). Based on findings, consider expanding the program.
- Consider using the free clinic as a “hook” to organize a youth baseball league. Doral Little League offers summer baseball camps – two one-hour practices per week for a monthly fee of \$100. Teams play in spring and fall seasons. The organization is self-sustaining supported by registration fees, fundraising, and sponsors.
- Partner with a neighboring league to host a Little League championship game, tournament, or exhibition game. Possible revenue from admissions (gate fee) and concessions, tournament entrance fees, sponsorships, and cost-sharing can help offset the costs.

Sponsorships and advertisements can provide support for ongoing costs. The renovated ballfield presents an opportunity to pursue naming rights, branding, or sponsorships. Examples of sponsors from Miami's youth baseball league include Rock Candy Miami, Marca Hispanic, Ganley Ford, Power Pizza, The Insurance Doctor, and Dick's Sporting Goods. Banner sales are another alternative. In Douglasville, GA, companies pay \$250 for a 3'x4' banner with their company's logo that is displayed on the outfield fence.

Bennett Lifter Park

Proposed renovations at Bennett Lifter include new playground, resurfaced basketball court and new lighting, replacement of tennis courts with a new pavilion and renovation of existing pavilion, remodeled restrooms to be ADA-compliant, installation of sidewalks to the lakeshore and a fishing dock at the edge of the lake, landscaping, and a video surveillance system. Currently, the pavilion rents for \$122 and the indoor meeting space rents for \$107.

The renovated basketball court can be utilized for basketball clinics and leagues. The park's location near a school can be leveraged to attract youth. Midnight basketball programs have gained popularity in many cities, providing youth with alternatives to drugs and crime. Generally, the games are played between the hours of 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and include informative or inspirational programs.

- Clinics can be staffed by contract coaches with the 60/40 split. The league can be organized in-house or with volunteer (parent) coaches.
- The midnight basketball program can be offered in partnership with the Miami Gardens Police Department.

With the pavilions, lake, and fishing dock, Bennett Lifter Park can become a popular venue for weddings. Jackson Square, a public park in New Orleans, is often used as a location for wedding ceremonies. For fewer than 25 guests, the City charges \$250 and for between 26 and 100 guests, the City charges \$500; there is a \$50 processing fee.¹⁸ The Square stays open to the public during the ceremony. A few venues in the Miami-Dade metropolitan area offer very similar amenities to Bennett Lifter Park. Jupiter's Out of the Blue, a privately-owned venue, accommodates 100 guests and offers a gazebo, reception room, and outdoor patio with a waterfront view. Reception rental fees range from \$2,500 to \$5,000.

The pavilions (new and renovated) and the fishing dock present excellent opportunities for naming rights. The sidewalk can be lined with personalized engraved bricks for a fee. Bennett Lifter Park also seems like a prime candidate for the adopt-a-park program. Sponsorships may be offered. Based on the nature of the park, Bennett Lifter may not be suitable for an advertising campaign.

Bunche Park (Alternative Fitness and Sports Exploration Complex)

The City is developing an Alternative Fitness and Sports Exploration Complex at Bunche Park. The fitness and sports facility will feature updated basketball courts, sports fields, and other outdoor venues. The City aspires to use the Alternative Fitness and Sports Exploration Complex to begin developing a unique identity for the City.

The new fitness and sports complex can offer fitness classes which follow current trends in the fitness industry.

- The City has expressed concern about declining community center memberships due to competition from newly opened gyms in the region. The City should program fitness classes which reflect general trends in the industry, in an effort to win back community center memberships. Memberships should be competitive, yet reflective of the demand for alternative fitness programs.

¹⁸ <https://www.nola.gov/parks-and-parkways/event-rules-regulations/weddings-in-jackson-square/>

- Two of the largest fitness trends of the past decade have been functional fitness. The City should look into hiring a staff member, or finding a contractor, who is cross fit-certified to help attract clientele.

The City can host annual tournaments for alternative sports, such as jai alai, gymnastics, or ultimate Frisbee.

- Establishing an annual sporting event or tournament is not out of line with cities in the Miami metropolitan region; both Davie and Hollywood have tournaments centered on equestrian sports and skating, respectively. Alternative sports events are likely to attract sponsorships.
- An Ultimate Frisbee League already exists, but they do not use any facilities in Miami Gardens; facilities in neighboring Miami, Pompano Beach, and Davie are used instead. The City of Miami Gardens should reach out to South Florida Ultimate, a nonprofit organization, to expand the program to Bunche Park.
- Martial arts and boxing clubs may attract high school students and young adults. The City should partner with nonprofit organizations that provide mentorship programs to provide complementary activities for youth.

Alternative sports exploration summer camps and afterschool programs for elementary and middle school students and pop-up clinics for high school students may attract youth to the Complex.

- Summer camps and afterschool programs can be staffed in-house. Fees should be set to offset costs to a degree; scholarships or waivers should be made available to families that qualify. The City may be able to secure outside funding for scholarships.

Senior Family Center

The 40 year old building will be demolished and replaced with a new building to include meeting rooms, a dining room and kitchen, classrooms, workout rooms, a dance studio, indoor track, and a pool. The facility will have an outdoor walking trail, new lighting, and an ADA-compliant parking lot.

The City should assess current senior programming and expand programming at the Center based on demand.

- Low impact exercise classes and Aquafit classes are natural fits. Utilize contracted instructors for classes as needed with the 60/40 revenue split. Because some of the alternative fitness trends may not reflect the desires of seniors, staff should rely on available survey data or conduct focus groups to understand additional needs of their senior residents.

A common theme in the City's master plan visioning sessions was the desire for more opportunities for civic engagement. Some options provided by residents included "meet and greets" with Councilmembers, and the establishment of a civic participation award.

- The City could host monthly community listening sessions at the Center, with city executive staff and Councilmembers hosting meetings on a rotating basis. These meetings would provide a forum for residents to meet their elected officials, express concerns, and get to know city staff better.

- The Center could host specialty activities, similar to summer specialty camps for children. For example, Miami's Haitian American Senior Center provides social, educational, and recreational activities for Haitian American seniors. The Center could host activities for Miami Gardens' growing Hispanic population. In addition, the Center could partner with the Latin American Business Association (LABA) to host one of their monthly meetings. This would engage the local Hispanic community and also bring positive attention to the new facility.

There may be the potential to partner with Miami-Dade Public Schools. High school students in the CTE program's certified nursing assistant could volunteer to assist during senior activities and events.

- High school seniors can spend time shadowing staff members to understand the types of activities offered to seniors. The students could help staff during snack and meal service, assist seniors in various activities, such as board games or cards, art, dancing, exercise, and just spend time with them in conversation. Students will gain valuable experience and exposure and the senior will benefit from the extra care and attention they receive.

Botanical Garden at the Senior Family Center

The botanical garden is a unique asset for the City and provides many opportunities for programming. A recent study found that urban botanical gardens provide communities with opportunities for new experiences and learning, are an excellent source of stress relief and relaxation, and contribute to improved quality of life.¹⁹ The botanical garden at the Senior Family Center poses opportunities for residents of all ages and partnerships with many organizations.

The garden can be a great resource for schools by providing educational, enrichment, and recreational benefits. In addition to field trips, Miami Gardens can partner with Miami-Dade Public Schools and the AV/STEM Center to host special events such as a science competition. Fairchild Tropical Garden in nearby Coral Gables hosts the Fairchild Challenge, an interdisciplinary, environmental science competition for students in grades preK-12.

- Through partnerships, the Parks and Recreation Department can staff and organize the science competition, calling on local celebrities, city officials, and teachers to judge the competition.
- Funding for the science competition can come from sponsorships and partnerships with other organizations.

The garden should be part of the summer camp experience. Whether the City chooses to host a specialty camp at Bunche Park or include the botanical garden in a day trip for summer campers, the garden provides youth with the chance to experience the natural environment and learn about ecosystems and even the history of South Florida.

- Church-based summer camps could have access to the garden at a discounted rate; privately operated summer camps could pay a small fee to utilize the garden in their camp activities.

¹⁹ Wassenberg, Christopher, Goldenberg, Marni, and Soule, Katherine. "Benefits of botanical garden visitation: A means-end study." *Urban Forestry and Urban Greenery*. Vol. 14, Issue 1. Pp.148-155.

A variety of classes can be offered through the botanical garden that appeal to residents of all ages. Horticulture and gardening, photography, and art are a few examples. In addition to classes, volunteer docents can lead walking tours explaining the park's history, various exhibits, and plant collections in the garden.

- Courses can be taught by volunteers or on a contract basis with the 60/40 split.
- The City could implement special botanical garden memberships (added to the community center membership), charge daily fees, or accept donations to provide residents with a walking tour of the botanical garden. At the New Orleans Botanical Gardens, visitors pay \$12 per person, with discounts available for Garden Club members and Friends of City Park, for a guided walking tour.

Partnerships will play a critical role in enhancing and maintaining the quality of the garden. The City should reach out to organizations such as the Botanical Society of America and the Florida Native Plant Society. Through partnerships with many botanical gardens in the area, Miami Gardens' staff can learn promising practices for programming and maintenance, as well as benefit from plant sharing agreements. The Education Fund of Miami-Dade dedicates a portion of its funding to programming in gardening. The City, in partnership with the school district, should reach out to them to explore opportunities to develop and fund programming.

Again, sponsorships, advertisements, naming rights, and branding can provide support for ongoing costs. The new facility presents an opportunity to pursue naming rights. Many local companies may be able to provide in-kind gifts and supplies. Organizations could be solicited to participate in service projects. Additionally, the botanical garden is a candidate for the adopt-a-park program where specific sections or exhibits can be "adopted."

AV/STEM Center at Risco Park

One of the specialized facilities will be the AV/STEM Center, scheduled to come online in 2019. The City envisions this facility as a location where children can develop their multi-media skills, and encourage science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education. The AV/STEM Center will be located on Risco Park, which is on Carol City Middle School's campus.

The City should recognize opportunity for economic and professional development at the Center. In addition to the many ways the Center will enhance the instructional capacity of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, the City should consider ways the Center can be utilized outside of the school day.

The AV/STEM Center can host a science and multi-media-focused summer camp and afterschool activities.

- The Center can offer two new summer specialty camps: STEM and multi-media. Opportunities abound for creating a successful program; efforts could focus on camp curriculum which results in a capstone project. Miami-Dade Public Schools should be consulted for their expertise.
- The City could pursue a partnership with the district to "borrow" a teacher during the summer to support STEM instruction and educational activities.

- Camp fees should be competitive yet reflect the nature and value of the experience. Scholarships or fee waivers should be made available to families who qualify. The City should solicit nonprofit organizations and businesses to secure funds for scholarships.
- The City should consider partnering with the school district and other nonprofits to apply for grants. The Florida Education Foundation targets funding toward programs in science, math, and communications. The Education Fund of Miami-Dade is another potential source of support.

The recording studio in the AV/STEM Center affords an opportunity to connect with young adults. The Miami-Dade metropolitan region has a rich musical history. From hip hop and southern rap to salsa and Latin rock, music and the opportunity to create music will draw many of Miami Gardens' youth to the Center.

- The City can provide access to the recording studio for a fee, offering a discounted rate to members. This will increase membership sales and revenue from daily visits, as well as provide residents with an opportunity to develop their skills and hone their talents.
- With the support of corporate sponsors, the City can organize and host a Miami-Gardens Voice Competition. Similar to the TV show, local promising musicians can try out for the competition. The culminating event could be the finale, emceed by DJ Khaled, co-host of "Take-Over" on WEDR. The event would most likely draw contestants from across the region. The City could consider collecting an entrance fee for the contest and charge an admission fee to the final competition event. The final event could be held at the Betty T Ferguson amphitheater. Concessions at the event will also generate supporting revenue. The event could be held in association with Jazz in the Gardens.
- Midnight jam sessions, similar to midnight basketball leagues, could provide a positive activity for young adults. With inspirations such as Miami Gardens own Flo-Rida, as well as Pitbull, Rick Ross (aka Ricky Rozay), Jason Derulo, and others, the City could play a role in developing the next big talent. Events such as this would generate interest from a variety of sponsors. Potential sponsors include Coca-Cola, Hard Rock, Clear Channel Cable, McDonald's, local radio stations (Power 96, 99 Jamz, 103.5 The Beat, etc.), Sports Authority, Allegro Music Center, and many others.

Create and support an AV Club or partnership with Miami-Dade Public Schools to develop technical skills in students.

- As the Club develops, the City may receive low-cost video and multi-media production it can use for the website, public access television, and Youtube. There may also be opportunities to provide low-cost services to business partners. The revenue can be used to support the Club.

Culinary Arts and Hospitality Institute

The City is constructing a culinary institute behind City Hall, which will host a multi-purpose banquet room. The Culinary Arts and Hospitality Institute can be a powerful educational and economic development tool for both the City and Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

The Culinary Center is likely to be a popular location for classes. The City should focus on healthy cooking programming that would reach a variety of demographics and age groups. The City can offer

cooking programs for beginners, youth, young mothers, and seniors. Youth cooking classes, in addition to health benefits, could specifically help develop new interests and passion for cooking. Also, the teaching of an essential life skill would develop independence and self-confidence in children who participate. Finally, cooking is multi-disciplinary, in that skills such as math, reading comprehension, and cooperation are necessary to successfully complete a meal. Healthy cooking would address overall concerns about food health and security and would most likely be popular by residents of all ages.

- Local restaurants may be willing to provide their expertise for classes. In New Orleans, some of the top chefs are recruited to teach a cooking class highlighting authentic New Orleans cuisine. Classes are limited to 10 people and the cost is \$139 per person, which includes all ingredients, a delicious meal, and souvenir apron.
- Additionally, with Johnson and Wales University less than 8.5 miles away from Miami Gardens in North Miami, the City may be able to recruit visiting faculty to provide instruction to groups such as summer campers, families, or seniors.
- Healthy cooking classes can be offered in partnership with Live Healthy Miami Gardens and with support from the Health Foundation of South Florida. Instructors can be volunteers or contracted to teach at the 60/40 split rate.

With its proximity to City Hall, the Culinary Center can become a popular lunch destination.

- The Center can provide restaurant entrepreneurs with an opportunity to develop and test their concepts. The Center can serve as a restaurant incubator. During lunch hours on Mondays through Fridays, potential restaurateurs can rent the kitchen and dining facility to develop their restaurant's cuisine and concept. The estimated average cost of operating a pop-up restaurant is \$2,000 to \$5,000, a portion of this includes rent for the space.²⁰ Patrons can visit each week, experience a different restaurant-in-development, and support this local emerging economy.
- A rotating chef's corner may assist with developing Miami Gardens' own culture or identity. Using chefs from locally-owned restaurants would serve two benefits; it would showcase unique restaurants in the region and also contribute to Miami Gardens' identity.
- Local restaurants and grocers are ideal sponsors for these programs. There is an opportunity to market naming rights for the facility; in addition, the City can pursue corporations such as Coca-Cola to be the official drink, among others.

The Center provides another opportunity to partner with Miami-Dade Public Schools. Miami-Dade County Public Schools' CTE program should also be leveraged to maximize usage of the facility. City staff and school administrators should identify ways the facility can be useful and the partnership mutually beneficial.

The Culinary Arts and Hospitality Institute can serve as an anchor for major events and fundraisers.

- The City currently hosts a Food Truck Invasion every third Friday at Rolling Oaks Park; this event is sponsored by Councilmember Rodney Harris. City staff should speak to

²⁰ Lander, Aaron. The pop-Up Business Model for Food Startups. <http://localfoodlab.com/blog/2013/12/9/the-pop-up-concept-for-food>

Councilmember Harris or other Councilmembers to gauge interest in sponsoring a similar event at the Center. There may be opportunities to collaborate with the Town of Davie to host a “food truck rodeo”—Davie, Florida is known as a rodeo town, and re-branding the event as a rodeo rather than “Invasion” may build in a natural opportunity for the two cities to collaborate.

- The City could host a Cook-Off for either a particular dish or cooking method that has cultural significance to either the City’s residents or the metropolitan region as a whole. Many cities, especially those with a rich culinary tradition, host annual cook-off programs. The City of Lexington, North Carolina, known for its variant of pulled pork barbeque, holds an annual cook-off for that dish. Throughout the spring, New Orleans hosts a variety of Crawfish cook-offs. Cooking teams pay an entrance fee; fees range from \$15 to \$550 based on the event. Admission fees range from \$15 to \$50 for all-you-can-eat; drinks are sold separately. The events draw a number of sponsors.
- The City could coordinate with local or regional restaurants to offer pop-up restaurants. Pop-up restaurants are a great way for young chefs to gain exposure and for experienced, well-known chefs to give back to their communities.

The City and partners should pursue opportunities to support the programming at the Culinary Center through grants. Publix Super Markets Charities provides funding through sponsorships, grants, and store donations. The charity supports programs focused on youth and education; Florida is a target state.²¹

²¹ <http://corporate.publix.com/about-publix/publix-faq/requests>

The Need for a Strategic Focus on Quality of Life

Shortly after its incorporation as a City, Miami Gardens adopted the motto: Striving to be the best.²² In his 2016 State of the City address, Mayor Gilbert vowed to improve the quality of life for the City's residents. He outlined plans to attract substantial businesses that will generate tax revenues to Miami Gardens, the state's largest predominantly black city. The Mayor spoke of the City's and its residents' ability and willingness to create a city "where you can shop, eat, entertain, and recreate."²³ Gilbert called on the Miami Dolphins, newly announced host of the 2020 Superbowl, to become more involved in the City. He described efforts to reduce crime, develop communities, and provide amenities that will make Miami Gardens a great city.

Parks and recreation facilities are an important component of the City's overall efforts. The health and wellness benefits of parks and recreation have been well-documented. Neighborhood parks and recreation facilities bring people together, nurture stronger social ties, and lead to more secure neighborhoods where residents support, protect, and care about one another. Athletic programs engage youth and help build the skills and competencies that allow them to become successful adults. New research shows that the presence of parks and green spaces helps to reduce crime, even in high-crime neighborhoods.²⁴

Across the country, parks and recreation departments partner with police departments, school districts, health organizations, nonprofits, and others to provide services, programs, and opportunities. Effective coordination of these partnerships is a critical means of maximizing the impact and sustainability of these efforts.

Given the City's capital investment in their parks and recreation facilities, it should take the next step by strategically focusing on these assets. Because this partnership approach goes beyond the day to day operations of the Parks and Recreation Department, there needs to be an individual designated to function as a citywide coordinator (preferably a senior member of the city management team) with broad authority to work with the Department, other city departments, the school system, and other community stakeholders to organize and direct efforts toward improving the quality of life.

The Quality of Life Coordinator (QLC) would be responsible for connecting the various departments of city government and partners and coordinating efforts. Responsibilities of the QLC include:

- Providing strategic guidance.
- Coordinating aligned activities of partners, including the City, Miami-Dade County government, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, non-profit groups, higher education institutions, faith-based organizations, businesses, and other community stakeholders.
- Establishing common goals, shared measurement for accountability and transparency, and a commitment to performance management.

²² Community Vision Matrix. City of Miami Gardens. (September 2005). <https://www.miamigardens-fl.gov/planning&zoning/Documents/Miami%20Gardens%20Vision/Miami%20Gardens%20Community%20Vision.pdf>

²³ Miami Herald Editorial Board. Miami Gardens Making Progress. Miami Herald. (May 22, 2016). <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/editorials/article79193142.html>

²⁴ Spector, Julian. Another Reason to Love Urban Green Space: It Fights Crime. The Atlantic CityLab. (April 13, 2016). <http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/2016/04/vacant-lots-green-space-crime-research-statistics/476040/>

- Cultivating community engagement and ownership.
- Mobilizing resources.

The QLC creates a culture of collaboration and accountability. By establishing a city-wide strategic direction, the City and its partners will better understand how their coordinated efforts contribute to the overall goals, how impact is being measured, and how they can be more engaged in the mission. The QLC fosters a culture of innovation among city departments, as well as external partners, and provides the structure that encourages their collaboration. Most importantly, the QLC holds the City accountable to the public and ensures that their investment makes a lasting impact on the residents of Miami Gardens.

This focus on quality of life would not be unique to Miami Gardens.

- The City of New Orleans, Louisiana has an Office of Performance and Accountability (OPA). The office is responsible for working with various city departments to set goals, track performance, and improve outcomes leading to improved quality of life. OPA leads the City's efforts to connect the activities and performance of the various city departments to the City's overall strategic plan. Each departments' goals are aligned to the City's overall direction and citywide goals.²⁵
- The Mayor of Houston, Texas serves as the Chair of the Council Committee on Quality of Life. The Committee meets monthly to discuss issues and provide collaborative solutions. The City's Parks and Recreation Department, the Public Library, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Planning and Development Department work together to improve the quality of life for Houstonians.²⁶ For example, in a recent meeting, the members reviewed the goals, milestones, and strategies of My Brother's Keeper, a cradle-to-career initiative targeting minority males, and discussed the various ways they can contribute to the initiative.
- In Fairfield, California, under the direction of the City Manager, the Quality of Life Task Force brings together city department heads, community stakeholders, and a robust volunteer network to address priority issues. The taskforce is the result of a city-wide planning process. The taskforce stresses the importance of utilizing existing city resources in collaboration with community resources to create a "desirable and thriving community."²⁷
- In Alexandria, Virginia, through the City Manager's office, the Mayor convenes a Quality of Life Committee. The Committee is made up of two Council members, representatives from the Department of Community and Human Services, Code Administration, the Police Department, the Sheriff's Office, Alexandria Public Schools, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, and the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority to focus on issues related to Quality of Life. The Quality of Life Committee meetings are held bi-monthly. During the meetings, City Departments and other agencies discuss issues related to quality of life and the ways they can work together to address the issues. Each department provides the Committee with an update and they hold each other accountable to agreed-upon outcomes. Their motto is One Team, One City – Our City.²⁸

²⁵ <https://www.nola.gov/performance-and-accountability/>

²⁶ <http://www.houstontx.gov/council/committees/qualityoflife.html>

²⁷ https://www.fairfield.ca.gov/gov/depts/manager/quality_of_life/default.asp

²⁸ https://www.fairfield.ca.gov/gov/depts/manager/quality_of_life/default.asp

Appendix A: Benchmarking Analysis of Fees

	Fee Differential	Resident	Pavillion Non-Resident	Differential	Community Center Membership Resident	Non-Resident	Differential	Reservation Policy
Davie	City Basis	\$105.00	\$160.00	52.4%	\$125.00	\$125.00	0.0%	Mail in or in office
Pompano Beach	City Basis	\$75.00	\$135.00	80.0%	\$300.00	\$480.00	60.0%	Not Indicated
Miami Gardens	County Basis	\$107.00	\$114.00	6.5%	\$270.00	\$540.00	100.0%	Reservation website or at BTF
Coral Springs	None	\$52.50	\$52.50	0.0%	\$250.00	\$250.00	0.0%	Reservation website for both
Miramar	City Basis	\$65.00	\$78.00	20.0%	\$175.00	\$350.00	100.0%	Reservations via the City Webpage
Hollywood	None	\$110.00	\$110.00	0.0%	\$5.50	\$11.00	100.0%	Via email to City staff
Pembroke Pines								In person at Pines Recreation Center
Fort Lauderdale	City Basis	\$75.00	\$110.00	46.7%	\$245.00	\$368.00	50.2%	In person at Parks and Recreation
Hialeah		N/A	N/A	N/A			N/A	In Person or Call
Miami	City Basis	\$15.00	\$20.00	33.3%	\$3.00	\$7.00	133.3%	In person
Median		\$75	\$110	33%	\$175	\$250	60%	
Variance from Mean		42.7%	3.6%	-80.4%	54.3%	116.0%	66.7%	

Notes:

Analysis assumes fee rates for adult (defined as non-youth or non-senior) resident. Each community has residency requirements which Miramar Regional Park is not included in Miramar's fee analysis due to the nature of the park.

Pavillion, Baseball, Soccer/Football, field rentals are on a hourly basis

Ft Lauderdale pavillion rental appears to be for entire day

City of Miami has great class fee formula on pg 225 of FY17 revenue manual

	Fee Differential	Swimming Lessons			Summer Camp		
		Resident	Non-Resident	Differential	Resident	Non-Resident	Differential
Davie	City Basis	\$80.00	\$80.00	0.0%	N/A	N/A	0.0%
Pompano Beach	City Basis	\$76.00	\$150.00	97.4%	\$35.00	\$45.00	28.6%
Miami Gardens	County Basis	\$36.00	\$48.00	33.3%	\$67.00	\$85.00	26.9%
Coral Springs	None	\$58.00	\$58.00	0.0%	\$92.00	\$92.00	0.0%
Miramar	City Basis	\$35.00	\$45.00	28.6%	\$105.00	\$126.00	20.0%
Hollywood	None	\$44.00	\$44.00	0.0%	N/A	N/A	0.0%
Pembroke Pines							
Fort Lauderdale	City Basis	\$80.00	\$120.00	50.0%	\$280.00	\$530.00	89.3%
Hialeah		\$84.00	N/A	N/A			N/A
Miami	City Basis	\$45.00	\$65.00	44.4%	\$60.00	\$90.00	50.0%
Median		\$58	\$65	29%	\$99	\$92	20%
Variance from Mean		-37.9%	-26.2%	16.7%	-32.0%	-7.6%	34.3%

Notes:

Swimming Lessons indicate classes for groups of at least five.

Appendix B: Current Positions

The following are the current positions represented in the Parks and Recreation Department's organizational chart.

Parks and Recreation Department

- Director
- Assistant Director/Strategic (vacant)
- Administrative Analyst
- Information Officer
- Business Manager
- Administrative Assistant Recreation

Under the Recreation Division

- Recreation District Supervisor
- Recreation Supervisor (4)
- Recreation Aide II (3)
- Recreation Aide I (3)
- Recreation Aide PT (9)

Under the Athletic Division

- Athletic Manager
- Athletic Coordinator (2)
- Athletic Supervisor (3)
- Recreation Aide II (1)
- Recreation Aide (1 FT and 1 PT)
- Lead Tutor PT (2)
- Tutor PT (18)

Under Betty T. Ferguson Community Center

- Community Center Manager
- Assistant Community Center Manager
- Administrative Assistant
- Health and Fitness Facilitator PT (3)
- Janitorial Crew (3 FT and 1 PT)

Aquatics

- Aquatics Facility Manager
- Lead Lifeguard
- Lifeguard (2 FT and 3 PT)

Recreation

- Recreation Supervisor (2)
- Information Officer
- Recreation Aide (2 FT and 4 PT)

Maintenance/ Department of Public Works

- Parks Maintenance Superintendent
- Landscaping
 - District Supervisor
 - Landscaping Supervisor (2)
 - Landscape Crew Worker (4)
- Janitorial/Maintenance
 - District Supervisor
 - Janitorial Supervisor (2)
 - Janitorial Crew Worker (3)
 - Trade Worker (3)



Appendix C: Recommended Best Practice Crime Prevention Initiatives

**The Strong Cities, Strong Communities National Resource Network
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

**The Park System of the City of Miami Gardens, Florida
and
An Analysis of Public Safety Benefits through Park and Recreation Programs**

Appendix Details on the Six Programs

1. Ashland/Cherryland, California: Hayward Area Recreation and Park District

The communities of Ashland and Cherryland, unincorporated areas south of Oakland in Alameda County, Calif., have a collective population of 38,000 (23,000 in Ashland and 15,000 in Cherryland). The two working-class communities used to be relatively prosperous although that changed since the late 1970's due to job outsourcing and Proposition 13, a tax measure that reduced local property taxes in California. Today, with average household incomes of \$47,900 and \$51,500 respectively, both have poverty levels higher than the national average.

[\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#)

Recreation-oriented crime prevention in the area began in 2005 with a program called the Deputy Sheriff's Activities League (DSAL) within the Alameda County Sheriff's Office. Created by Lieutenant Martin Neideffer and Hillary Bass, it began as an after-school and summer recreation program to help underserved youth resist gang involvement. Today DSAL has 15 full-time staff members; it is partially funded by the Sheriff's Office and partly through outside grants

According to Bass, now executive director of DSAL, the goals of the programs evolved over time based on shifting needs from reducing crime to revitalizing the local economy. "Crime was a problem," she said. "Studies showed that sports were effective in reducing crime, so we added sports programs. Realizing that we couldn't address mental health issues through sports, we hired therapists and added a health component to the program. Realizing that if there are no jobs then people will commit crimes, we created Dig Deep Farm. We knew we needed more local businesses, but we knew that we had to create a safe space to incubate those efforts, so we created Eden Night Live."

A decade later, the DSAL soccer league was serving more than 7,000 at-risk elementary and middle school students and also providing 20 referee opportunities for older youths. The DSAL basketball leagues serve both girls and boys and also operate "Pick-up and Play" Basketball, an open gym program.

The DSAL Dig Deep Farms, for ages 16 and up, started in 2011 as a partnership with the Alameda County Fire Department and a local landowner, using funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and a community development block grant. A former fire department lot was transformed into a six-acre farming enterprise offering paid internships for more than 50 formerly incarcerated youths and adults annually to grow, harvest, package, and sell produce.

The REACH Ashland Youth Center, serving 4,000 youths (and employing a staff of 70) is managed by Alameda County Health Care Services Agency in conjunction with La Clinica de la Raza, San Lorenzo Unified School District, the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District, the Alameda County Library, and the Alameda County Deputy Sheriff's Activities League. A group called Soulcity provides employment and educational opportunities with life skills training, art activities, homework support, tutoring, leadership opportunities, mental health counseling, fitness, social gatherings, and special events. The facility's annual budget is about \$8 million.

Lastly, the site of a burned-out auto dealership has been converted into Eden Night Live, a weekly gathering place for recreation and play, food, social cohesion, relationship building between the community and the police, beautification of space, local vendors, live music, moon bounce, beach volleyball, haunted Halloween event, ice skating, and more. "It's a symbol of exactly what we want to do," says Ms. Bass. It takes place every Friday and Saturday from July until December and attracts 100-400 people each night. Funded partially through a California Department of Justice grant, it is supervised by 10 county staff members in partnership with several nonprofit organizations.

Ashland/Cherryland programs were offered year-round except for the soccer league, which is on a six month schedule. Program hours of operation for sports leagues ranged from six to nine hours a week. The Dig Deep Farm program provides 40-hour-per-week jobs. Eden Night Live runs on Friday and Saturday evenings. As of this writing, the youth center was open 36 hours a week, but has mainly been utilized after 3:00 pm (21 hours a week).

Additional programs

Although the Alameda County Sheriff's Office was the initiating agency for all these activities, in 2007 it asked the Hayward Area Recreation and Park Department (HARD) for help in providing facilities and resources. (Although Ashland and Cherryland are in unincorporated Alameda County, and the county has a parks and recreation department, there is an agreement whereby the two communities' parks are the responsibility of the city of Hayward.) HARD agreed, and the partnership has flourished.

HARD and DSAL have also partnered on swim lessons, summer camp programs, special events, and cross training of staff. The agencies share the mobile recreation unit, a hitched trailer that houses bounce houses, inflatable sumo suits, an inflatable bungee run, and sports equipment and craft items. The unit is a fixture at DSAL/HARD programs.

Programs are promoted through fliers in schools and at community events. Sheriff's deputies also give fliers to youths they've caught misbehaving or getting into fights. An effort is underway to allow schools to provide physical education credits for DSAL-led programs.

The program seems to be having a positive effect. From 2008 to 2014, youth crime incidents were down 21 percent and arrests were down 25 percent. (There was a 10 percent rise in 2014.) Noel Munivez, acting recreation superintendent, explained: "Crimes pertaining to vandalism at our park areas went down. We used to receive calls about stabbings, robberies, and other crimes but that went down due to implementation of the program." Kerrilyn Ely, recreation superintendent, added that the improvement is partly due to "better open communication between deputies and the community."

Munivez and Ely reviewed their own experience in the necessity of interagency communications. Early on, DSAL bought a huge climbing wall and placed it without notice on a HARD facility. Since HARD insurance doesn't cover climbing wall incidents, the wall had to be moved elsewhere. HARD also had to inform DSAL that no direct-contact sports, such football or rugby, could be allowed, again because of insurance limitations.

Ms. Bass stated, "For the last 12 years we have recognized that public safety cannot be achieved when parties responsible for services in the community are isolated from one another. You can't have a safe community if you don't have jobs for people or if you have unhealthy eating options or no social gathering areas. All of these are connected, which thankfully pushes us to connect with other entities with power and influence."

Contacts

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Hillary Bass, Executive Director, Alameda County Sheriff's Office
510.225.5954; HBass@acgov.org

2. Brooklyn Park, Minnesota: Brooklyn Park Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (YPVI)

Brooklyn Park, with a population of 79,000 on 27 square miles, is the sixth largest city in Minnesota. Although its median annual income of \$44,010 is in the mid-range for Hennepin County, it has the second highest percentage of people living in poverty (12.8%).

The Brooklyn Park Parks and Recreation Department employs 44 year-round staff plus 300 seasonal and has an annual budget of \$4,000,000.

Brooklyn Park has a Youth Violence Prevention Initiative run jointly by the Police Department and the Parks and Recreation Departments. It was conceptualized in 2006 when Mayor Steve Lampi's administration found that crime rates were higher during after-school hours. Community groups, elected officials, and other agencies realized they weren't working effectively together to solve this problem.

The Initiative was begun in 2009 by the police department's Juvenile Unit, staff at the Zanewood Recreation Center, individual police officers, school resource officers, school counselors, principals, social workers, and community groups in order to address juvenile crime issues, gang prevention, and violence reduction. In 2013 these entities formed the [Brooklyn Bridge Alliance](#), a joint-power authority. Because of this, the alliance was eligible for more authority and more funding; it could also assume greater liability for actions it takes, allowing it to act more boldly.

The goal of the Prevention Initiative is to provide high-quality after-school programs run by caring mentors at safe places. It has four objectives:

1. Connect every youth with a trusted adult who is always accessible if and when needed.
2. Intervene at the first sign that a youth is at risk for violence.
3. Restore youths who have gone down the wrong path. Juvenile Unit staff are trained to talk with parents about the risk factors of breaking the law and to then inform families about programs that can help.
4. Protect youth from violence in the community and help them unlearn the culture of violence.

According to Jan Ficken, Brooklyn Park Recreation Services Manager, "Since the inception of this program, the investment in youth in our community by the City of Brooklyn Park has grown 526%. That's impressive, I think."

The programs take place at Zanewood Recreation Center as well as a dozen parks, two golf courses, three schools, five apartment complexes, and via one mobile recreational vehicle that serves apartment complexes and isolated neighborhoods without safe places to store recreational equipment. The hours of operation are weekdays from 2:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m., weekends from 12:00 p.m.–4:00 p.m., summertime from 8:00 a.m.–8:00 p.m., closed on

Sundays. The facilities host sports clubs, hobby groups, leadership opportunities, boys' and girls' clubs, career exploration, and mentoring. Healthy snacks, evening meals, and summer free meals are provided through the federal school lunch program.

The Initiative has been serving 5,000 youths per year. Depending on the season, it's run by seven full-time staff and between 16 and 42 seasonal staff from Parks and Recreation, plus three to five full-time staff from the police department.

The annual budget from the city is \$1.1 million, with about one-quarter contributed by the Police Department and three-quarters from Parks and Recreation. Additional funding is provided by 21st Century Learning Center Program, Hennepin County, community fraternal organizations (including Rotary, Lions Club, and Elks Lodge), and businesses (including Walmart and Sam's Club).

The Youth Violence Prevention Initiative had numerous challenges:

- The City Council was skeptical of its efficacy,
- Many youths arrived hungry,
- The program was oversubscribed, and
- Partner organizations often didn't have a clear understanding of expected outcomes.

In response, the Initiative involved the school district in administering a food program; it hired and trained additional staff; and it prevailed upon Hennepin County to levy a sales tax on sports stadiums for youth sports and to also provide a grant to acquire the mobile van. Program managers also realized the need for very specific and clear outcomes of all the partnerships – in writing.

In the program's first four years, the number of participants increased by 62 percent while juvenile crime decreased by 39 percent. Juvenile crime in Brooklyn Park declined an additional seven percent between 2012 and 2015.

When asked if the program was successful Ms. Ficken responded, "Very much so. Think of the number of opportunities offered that weren't there before, that's huge! Traditional programming is cranking out a flier offering programs teens don't like -- we don't do that. Youths tell us what they want. And we use the Youth Program Quality Assessment tool that involves outside assessors in observing programs and determining their level of quality. That's why our program is successful. Youths are involved. We listen to them. We provide high-quality programs. Youths have fun and spread the word."

As for some take-away lessons from this program, Ms. Ficken recommended, "Be intentional in your program planning but be nimble so you can make changes quickly. Provide high-quality programs and train all staff on what high quality looks like and how to do it. Engage with mayors, elected officials and upper management; communicate your successes

upwards and outwards. Build strong political will by using all communication opportunities (newspapers, social media) to inform taxpayers what their investment has done for the community and thank them. You have to be in this for the long haul. This is no longer a short term initiative. In the past it was used when we needed to rally a community to deal with a crime epidemic. Now it's an established way of doing business in order to give youth a safe place to learn, grow and be connected to their community through recreational activities. "

Other building blocks for success include:

- Hiring young people to conduct research and attract their peers.
- Helping adolescents build relationships and social connections.
- Recruiting employers to provide internships.

Rebecca Gilgen, executive director of the Brooklyn Bridge Alliance, "Hire a broad spectrum of young people to conduct research, do needs assessment, and engage other young people. That way, young people and adults can collectively understand the problem and develop a solution. For instance, we had youths administer surveys to other youths on barriers they experienced when accessing programs. As a result, we not only got double the number of surveys we were hoping for but, after analyzing the responses, the adults realized we were approaching some of these issues the wrong way."

She continued, "If programs are only focused on providing a physical outlet, then they're missing the point in terms of best practices for adolescent development. We must also help adolescents build relationships and social connections. When developing youth programs, you must deliberately design them to support adults connecting to youth 'where they are.' If participants don't feel connected to authority figures, then they won't have a sense of urgency to do anything different."

"We have learned through implementing a citywide youth summer internship program that it's also important," Ms. Gilgen said, "to recruit employers to offer professional internships for young people. You need to work with employers to create a space for young people to be competent. How do you talk to a kid about being late for the 100th time? How do you ignite a kid's career ambition? You need adults who are not just caring but are actually *influential*. Kids mimic and listen to adults they respect. How do you create a community where cops and teachers are an influence like that?"

"Youth violence prevention," she concluded, "is about adults doing something differently, and it's about adults working together, and thinking differently about young people – not fixing their problems, but igniting their aspirations to keep them on a good path. It takes a lot of partners to make these programs work."

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Sources: [\(Source\)](#) , [\(Source\)](#)

3. Chicago, Illinois: One Summer Chicago Program

Chicago, with 2.7 million people, is the third most populous city in the U.S. Though an international hub for finance, commerce, industry, technology, telecommunications and transportation, the city's median annual household income (\$47,830) is below the national average, and 22.7 percent of its population (over 600,000 people) live in poverty. The city's overall crime rate, especially violent crime, is substantially higher than the U.S average.

Chicago had had disparate summer job programs for decades. In 2012, Mayor Rahm Emanuel's administration unified all of them into one platform: One Summer Chicago, a city-wide summer youth jobs initiative. Through this program, the City recruits various agencies to hire young people, providing oversight for the program at large.

The program scaled up from 14,000 youths in 2012 to 31,000 in 2016. The total number of participants since the program's inception is roughly 125,000. Recruiting and advertising are done through schools, radio broadcasts, and billboards, and the mayor also mentions the program on television. In 2016 its budget came to about \$2,000-2,200 per youth or a total of \$68 million. This includes the mentor positions which are contracted out to nonprofit organizations such as the Boys' and Girls' Clubs and the YMCA, as well as program supervisors, transportation, supplies, and participant salaries. Half the funding comes from the city, the rest from charities such as the Magic Johnson Foundation.

The three "One Summer Chicago" programs most oriented toward violence reduction are coordinated by the Department of Family and Support Services (DFFS). Collectively serving 8,700 young persons in 2016, they are Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), One Summer Chicago Plus, and Greencorps Youth Program. Chicago's Park and Recreation Department, with an annual budget of \$385 million and a staff of nearly 3,000, intersects with DFFS-led programs in two ways: by providing space for participant work at many of the city's 580 parks and 200 facilities, and by offering up to 6,500 summer employment opportunities.

Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP)

SYEP is open to any Chicago resident between the ages of 16 and 24, with the bulk of jobs appropriate for ages 16-21. The goals are to:

- Assist youth to develop transferable skills,
- Provide professional guidance, training and supervision,
- Offer meaningful summer work experiences, and

- Help develop basic understanding of money management.

Younger participants work for a minimum of 140 hours (20 hours per week for seven weeks), including time spent on education, soft skills, service, and financial literacy. Participants age 21-24 are hired as coaches and mentors, with responsibility for 20 youths. Funding for SYEP comes from the City of Chicago, supplemented by a grant from the CITI Foundation.

One Summer Plus

The One Summer Plus program targets youths who have gone through the judicial system. In partnership with the Cook County Juvenile Probation Center, the Cook County Sheriff's Department, the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice, and the Juvenile Intervention Support Center, it serves 3,000 young people annually. The goals are to:

- Identify meaningful work experiences for justice-involved youth,
- Provide intensive social and emotional skill building to address barriers to success,
- Educate in financial literacy, and
- Reinforce or re-engage youth in educational and employment pathways.

The program provides youth with paid work 15 hours a week for seven weeks, plus 10 hours a week of paid social and emotional learning skill development. There is also one mentor hired from the community for every 20 participants. Half of the funding comes from the city and half from private sources, including the Magic Johnson Foundation, Emerson Collective, the Union Pacific Foundation, and the McCormick Foundation.

In a 2012 study on "One Summer Chicago Plus," Dr. Sara Heller of the University of Pennsylvania determined that the average participant is 16-17, with a scholastic average of C, and had missed 29 days of school during the year. Twenty-two percent of participants had been arrested. As for the program's efficacy, Dr. Heller's study concluded that it resulted in a 43 percent reduction in violent crime among disadvantaged high school youth over a 16-month span. However, the program appeared to have no effect on other types of arrests, including property crime and drug crime.

Greencorps Youth Program

Greencorps is a partnership between DFSS and Chicago's Department of Transportation (CDOT). Over a seven-week period, 900 youths participate in two educational modules – horticulture (gardening) and bike repair. Youths receive 12 hours paid work experience and 8 hours of instruction per week for seven weeks. There are also mentors who are paid \$20 per hour for 25 hours a week for eight weeks. Green Corp is funded by the city and the same foundations that fund SYEP.

Tim O'Connell, assistant director of recreation for the Chicago Parks and Recreation Department said, "These shouldn't be tedious photocopying jobs. It's best to have young

people working with other young people. For instance, 16 to 22-year-olds can be recreation leaders for sports camps and day camps for 6 to 12-year-olds. Nearby sports stadiums can provide usher, concession stand, or sports services positions. You can have street marketing teams involving youths. Create mentoring programs for 13 to 16-year-olds where they play half the time and work half the time.”

O’Connell is very supportive of One Summer Chicago Plus even despite the well-publicized rise in Chicago’s crime rate. “I’ve experienced first-hand the value of youths making their own money and taking pride in what they do. When it’s hotter outside, there’s more violence, but these acts tend to be committed by the same individuals. We have thousands of teens who are well-intentioned and unaffiliated with those violent acts who need these jobs.”

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4. East Palo Alto, California – Fitness Improvement Training (FIT) Zones Program

East Palo Alto, a city incorporated in 1983 in San Mateo County, California, has a population of 30,000 on 2.6 square miles. Located in the middle of Silicon Valley, the city's median annual household income is \$52,716, making it one of the poorest sections of the region, with 16.6% of its population living in poverty. At one time, East Palo Alto had one of the highest crime rates in the county.

[\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#)

According to former Police Chief Ron Davis, many East Palo Alto parks experienced high rates of crime and violence and were therefore underutilized. In 2012, the Police Department implemented Fitness Improvement Training (FIT) Zones, a program that seeks to use innovative public health strategies to reduce crime and violence, upgrade residents' health, and improve the public's attitude toward the police.

FIT Zone sites were chosen through the use of "ShotSpotter," a system of acoustic sensors that track gun shots by neighborhood. Neighborhoods with the highest numbers of gunshots were selected.

The program, initially offered in two parks (and later expanded to four), brings police officers and residents together in sports such as basketball, Zumba, soccer, and volley ball. There is also a high-profile biking activity through which police officers give riding lessons and go on bike rides with residents around the city. (There was also initially a component on community health and cooking, but it was eventually discontinued because they ran out of topics to cover with the same people attending week after week.) Hours of operation for FIT are 4:00 – 7:00 p.m., Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Attendance at FIT went from about 6,000 participant-days in 20102 (an average of 52 participants per session at one park and 26 at the other) to a total of 16,000 participant-days in 2015. Two members from the East Palo Alto Police Department serve at each park, one sworn and one civilian. Other officers sweep and patrol the vicinity of the park before and during the program. The annual budget for FIT Zones, including, personnel time, supplies, and programming, is \$190,000. Originally, funding came primarily from the California Endowment. In 2016, when the Endowment's grant was greatly reduced, the City of East Palo Alto covered the shortfall.

The FIT Zone Program was not problem-free. In the beginning, many people didn't feel safe in the parks. Police park sweeps improved perceptions of safety and attendance increased. Some officers were also hesitant to participate because they didn't know and feel comfortable with the residents. The first attendees were mainly mothers and toddlers, so the city made more of an effort to reach out to all demographics. Maintaining the momentum throughout the year was difficult. Since winters were cold and wet enough to deter some participants, the program partnered with schools to offer indoor activities.

East Palo Alto decided that the FIT program would be run only by off-duty officers to ensure they would remain focused on supporting participants rather than monitoring their radios. This added to the cost, since off-duty police are paid overtime.

The FIT Zones have been successful. Gunshot surveys pre- and post-FIT revealed that shooting had decreased by 60 percent at Jack Farrell Park and 43 percent at Martin Luther King Park. Outside the parks, gunshots decreased by 30 percent. FIT's community engagement success was demonstrated through its increasing attendance and improvement of the relationship between police officers and the community. One officer was quoted as saying, "I get nervous about missing a day of FIT Zone because I don't want my kids to think I left them." Officers are now on a first-name basis with many of the program participants.

Jaime Zarate, city grant coordinator said, "What came out of the program is this: you now hear folks who once distrusted the police say they aren't that bad. If you empower residents to be FIT Zone leaders, then they feel comfortable telling officers about activities they want and equipment they need. It instills within residents a sense of park ownership so that they want to maintain the park's integrity – by picking up litter and not littering in the first place. If you get officers involved who understand they're there to serve community and not just lock up residents, it generates a more positive outcome."

Sarah Lawrence, former director of policy analysis and program evaluation at the Warren Institute of Berkeley Law School, put it this way: "Community input matters – when selecting activities, where they happen, and the times they take place. You need an advisory board made up of community residents where they help shape program efforts. Using data matters- to target parks with high crime and low utilization. Pick the right people to run the program – officers who like working with kids and who like physical activities."

Mr. Zarate explained further, "In the beginning of the program it was hard to get the right officers to be a part of the program. Although we aimed for officers that we thought had a good sense of community and understood the importance of building bridges of transparency, reliability, and trust in community, in reality some of them weren't interested in interacting with residents. They were quickly discouraged from staying with the program and now we have officers who reflect our community policing goals at a higher level."

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5. Flint, Michigan: Youth Empowerment Solutions (YES) Program

Flint, Michigan, located 60 miles northwest of Detroit, is a former automobile manufacturing hub experiencing hard times. With an area of 34 square miles and a population of 98,000, it is the seventh largest and ninth poorest city in the state. Most recently the city was rocked by a drinking water lead emergency, but since the mid-2000s it has also been known for a high crime rate, once being ranked among “the most dangerous cities” by the FBI. Twice in the past two decades, Flint has been placed under a state-appointed financial control board.

In 2004, the Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities program (YES) was developed and initiated by the University of Michigan School of Public Health and the Prevention Research Center of Michigan under a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The program has two main goals: (1) to empower youths by having them carry out neighborhood improvement projects with adult support, exposing them to community assets, and providing a curriculum that teaches them about African-American culture; and (2) reduce crime by changing the physical and social design. The CDC grant was awarded to develop and evaluate the YES program effects on community level change. A subsequent grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) was awarded to study the effects of the program on the individual youth involved in the program.

A total of 207 students were served in the CDC project, and over 325 were served in the NICHD project. The specific activities included:

- Artwork,
- Sessions focusing on teamwork, leadership, violence causes and prevention, culture, and community, and
- Field trips to city hall, judicial courts, and museums to teach about local community assets and cultural heritage.

Over the program’s first two years, interesting, achievable, safe projects were developed with youth involvement, analysis and planning. From 2006 to 2008, projects were carried out at four sites:

- 1. Serenity Park** – Participants transformed a vacant lot into a park, installing benches, shrubs, flowers, and stepping stones. Program partner Urban Community Youth Outreach offered plant growing lessons in community gardens.
- 2. Rosa Parks Peace Park** – Participants cleaned up lots, created walking paths with artful walking stones, installed gateways and benches, planted several flower gardens, and with the help of a local artist, designed and painted a large mural.
- 3. Clara Hillborn Park** – Participants collaborated with the Heart-to-Heart Neighborhood Association to paint playground equipment, remove trash, plant flowers, cut weeds, and mow grass.

4. W. Carpenter St. Mural – With the help of a local artist, participants painted a wall mural and a poem on a strip mall located off W. Carpenter Street. Youths did the prep work, designs, and painted most of the images, including a poem written by a participant. A volunteer artist helped participants lay out and draw the mural.

Each year, three staff members recruited, supervised and mentored approximately 50 middle schoolers (from three schools) who were struggling in school or in their family lives. The program typically operated from January/February until mid-summer. Students met after school twice a week for 1½ hours. From 2004-2008, the CDC provided \$450,000 for personnel and equipment.

The results of the program were mixed. A before-and-after analysis of violent crimes against victims younger than 25 years old within 200 meters of each site revealed that one site improved, one experienced no change, and in two, assaults increased. (The program effects dissipated after about 200 meters.) Crime at Rosa Parks Peace Park decreased by 50 percent, Serenity Peace Park remained about the same, Clara Hillborn Park's rate doubled, and at West Carpenter Street it quintupled. The evaluation indicated that the sites where crime increased were not as intensively programmed as Rosa Parks Peace Park.

Dr. Marc Zimmerman, the program's principal investigator, noted that these mixed findings may be due to the small sample of sites. "It's important to keep in mind that with the small number of sites it is easy to focus on what didn't work, but one of four sites, or 25 percent improved, and that was the site that has the most sustained activity by youth and their supervising adults. This was encouraging to us, and we looked at other factors that supported the findings from the Rosa Parks Peace Park." The program's lack of success at three of the sites may reflect the complexity of youth violence causes and resource challenges in Flint. At one site, according to Susan Morel-Samuels, the YES project director, "Crime data were heavily influenced by rising gang activity that occurred during early stages of one of the mural projects. It was so bad that students couldn't go back to the site for months." Yet, Zimmerman notes that eight years later the mural remains intact with no graffiti tags.

"At Clara Hillborn Park," Morel-Samuels continued, "aesthetics were hard to maintain because there was no access to water to keep plants nourished." Without consistent upkeep, Clara Hillborn Park may have discouraged responsible residents from utilizing the park, thus perpetuating its susceptibility to crime.

Early in the program development the managers found that some participants had more psychological and disciplinary issues than the program was designed to address. In one case, a student had to be removed from the program for hitting another student. This led to adding some modules focused on developing group norms of behaviors and expectations. (This was successful -- with rules and enforcement defined and owned by the students, behavioral problems became much less significant.)

Despite some negatives, Ms. Morrel-Samuels was enthusiastic. “I’m very pleased with the individuals in this program!” she said. “Participants did a great job beautifying the parks. The program was well accepted by schools and the public because it engaged young people while empowering them to get involved with their communities.”

Principal Investigator Zimmerman, concurred. “People love this program because they see kids working with adults to beautify their neighborhoods. Local businesses lent their support. One owner even donated flowers to a garden project because he loved the idea of youths gardening. On a hot summer day, a middle-aged gentleman biked past the participants, then biked back. Staff supervisors were initially concerned when they noticed he was coming back, wondering why -- but they relaxed when they saw he was just bringing back water for the youths to drink.”

Based on feedback from youth and adult participants, the researchers identified some needed changes to the program:

- Youth noted that their work and ideas were being overruled by adults, so they were not feeling very empowered. Group leaders needed more than a single training event in order to apply the fundamental goal of empowering youth to have control over the projects they design and implement.
- The researchers also found field staff needed more support for obtaining needed supplies and equipment.

The program was revised to increase adult training, emphasize the idea of youth empowerment, and provided more direction for project implementation. Researchers now emphasize that the role of adults is not to control but to be facilitators of young people’s ideas and to help them get implemented.

During the NICHD-funded evaluation (2010-2016), the hours of operation and program duration remained the same, but the focus was on youth behaviors. In this study, youths were randomly assigned to the YES intervention or comparison group (i.e. YES or regular afterschool program). These evaluation results have not yet been published, but they have been presented at professional conferences and are currently under peer review. The results indicate that the most highly engaged participants were more likely to report feeling empowered and engaging in more positive (e.g., academics) and less negative (e.g., violent) behaviors than youth only minimally (or not at all) involved in the program. The evaluation and implementation budget for the program was \$500,000 per year, but most of the costs were for the scientific evaluation of the project. The actual implementation costs are for teachers (or other adults) to implement the program and minimal costs for the community change project (e.g., paint, plants, tools). Students grow produce and flowers, taking home what they harvest. They learn about trees that are native to Michigan and then plant them. They improve and even install basketball backboards. In one school they put up a pavilion. Occasionally, projects are still done at parks.

Ligon Land for Learning Park, for instance, is used by teachers to host learning labs, so participants improved it by building picnic tables. (The park is owned by the school district.)

“We don’t have money to extend the program beyond the evaluation period,” explained Dr. Zimmerman. “If the program works, the community or schools or both need to provide ongoing funding. Maybe it can become a part of the school curriculum instead of being just an afterschool program. We have seen this happen in some communities across the country.”

He continued, “If we can help stop only one kid from going to prison, that will pay for the entire program, but our findings so far suggest it helps far more youth than that. It doesn’t take very much for this program to be cost-effective. Not every youth who went through the YES program is doing great, but the program has either been neutral for them, or they have done better. One graduate from several years ago was hired by colleagues to help with another research project. Another graduate talks about his experience on a website, reporting that it made him think about his community more. Before, he just wanted to get out of Flint, now he wants to stay and help. Today he is in college.”

Overall, YES has been successful enough that it has spread to the cities of Boston, Houston, Salinas, Calif. and Portland, Ore. (and even a community in Lagos, Nigeria). The team has also helped groups in Baton Rouge, La., Covington, Va., and Milwaukee implement the program.

In summing up what he has learned, Dr. Zimmerman said, ““Training is really important – making sure adult leaders know this program is about helping kids, not controlling them. We also have to make sure kids are trained in injury prevention when using equipment, such as washing hands after painting, or holding a shovel properly. Make sure that they stay hydrated and nourished while under the program’s care. We also have to pay attention to the context where participants’ safety is paramount, because we’re working in real places where real violence can occur.”

Contacts

[Visit the program’s website to download the curriculum for free, watch youth talk about their experience in the program, and link to other project resources: YES.sph.umich.edu.](https://www.yes.sph.umich.edu)

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6. Los Angeles County, California: Parks After Dark Program

With more than 10 million people, Los Angeles County is the most populous county in the United States. Its median annual income of \$55,870 is above the national average, but 18.7% of the population (1.9 million people) lives in poverty. The county also has a well-publicized problem with gangs and violence.

The County of Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, with a staff of 2,500 (permanent and temporary) and an annual budget of \$152.6 million, seeks to use some of its facilities and programming to counter the gang culture, promote social cohesion and community wellbeing. Under its Parks After Dark (PAD) program, the county keeps parks open during summer evening hours when crime rates are high and youths have fewer social and recreational opportunities.

Begun in 2010, PAD was first implemented in three parks that had high crime rates, gang-related violence, and high rates of obesity in the surrounding neighborhoods. The goals of the program were to

- Promote community solidarity,
- Increase residents' physical activity, and
- Reduce violent crimes.

In 2012, under a federal Community Transformation Grant (awarded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention), the Department of Public Health (DPH) helped double the program's size. In 2015, Supervisor Hilda Solis, First Supervisorial District, added three more parks, and in the summer of 2016, funding was increased to incorporate an additional 12 parks with funding from the Probation Department. Today there are 21 PAD parks. PAD is an eight-week summer program that offers a mix of free programming for community members of all ages, including sports, walking clubs, cooking and educational classes, arts and crafts, games for kids, teen events, swimming, concerts, movies, resource fairs, public safety patrol and community engagement. Programming is tailored to the needs and interests of each park community. PAD staffing is significant – at a minimum it requires, at each park:

- A full-time recreation manager,
- Full-time supervisor,
- Five part-time recreation leaders,
- Two part-time groundskeepers, and
- Two Deputy Sheriffs.
- (If the park has a pool, it also requires a pool manager, four lifeguards, and two locker-room attendants.)

In addition, community volunteers, and county and community organizations provide in-kind staff support. As of this writing, hours of operation were Thursday through Saturday, 6:00-10:00 p.m.

The average annual cost per Park After Dark is \$87,000 (or \$97,000 if there's a pool). Since 2010, the program has been led by the Parks and Recreation Department in collaboration with the Sheriff's Department, Department of Public Health, Board of Supervisors, the Chief Executive Office, Probation Department, other county departments and community organizations.

PAD has demonstrated success. From 2009-2015, serious and violent crimes surrounding the original three parks declined by 31 percent; from 2012-2015, crime in the three parks from 2012 shrank by 20 percent; and crime in the three parks added in 2015 was reduced by 30 percent. In comparison, parks without a PAD program showed an increase of 18 percent between 2009 and 2013. Results from a participant survey in 2015 showed that a remarkable 94 percent of attendants felt safe when they attended PAD programs; 98% said they would participate again and recommend PAD to a friend, 83% of participants engaged in physical activities including those who indicated sedentary lifestyles, and 91% said PAD improves relationships with neighbors.

It hasn't all been easy. Because of federal budget cuts, funding from the Choose Health LA initiative was cut off in 2014, two years early. Fortunately, thanks to a Health Impact Assessment Report demonstrating the program's success, along with strong support from community members, the County CEO allocated local funding into the budget to sustain the program. As of this writing, the county only has funding for about half the costs of the 21 PAD parks until 2019; it is seeking matching funds from county departments, foundations, corporations and other partner organizations.

Also, the PAD program has experienced difficulties identifying appropriate administrative mechanisms and strategies to incorporate the services of Gang Intervention Outreach Workers -- social professionals who help connect troubled youth and their families to rehabilitation services and mediate conflicts in the community. "These paraprofessionals would help create a safe environment in and to/from the parks through safe passages, and also help connect gang-involved youth and families to the PAD program," says Kelly Fischer, a Staff Analyst for the Department of Public Health.

Nevertheless, stated Faith Parducho, Special Assistant at the County Department of Parks and Recreation. "This is a very successful program that benefits underserved communities. It started out mainly as a violence prevention strategy but grew into more of a social cohesion program that encourages families to spend quality time together while being physically active. It has transitioned into a partnership more focused on promoting equity and advancing health. As more new partners get involved with PAD, more and more sectors are seeing the benefits of collaborating with parks to serve communities."

Ms. Fischer added, "We hope to expand PAD to parks in communities with high crime rates and obesity prevalence. We are in the process of hiring full-time staff to oversee implementation, leverage and sustain partnerships, and identify funding. This year, we have

allocated resources for a formal evaluation of the program. We are also working with county departments to develop innovative approaches to providing services on site at the parks. ”

[\(Source\)](#) [\(Source\)](#)

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