



City of Santa Barbara
Parks and Recreation Department

Memorandum

DATE: May 31, 2011
TO: City Council
FROM: Lesley Wiscomb, Chair
Parks and Recreation Commission
SUBJECT: Recommendations – FY 2012 and 2013 Budgets

The Parks and Recreation Commission discussed the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 and 2013 Parks and Recreation financial plan at two meetings in April. At their regular meeting of May 25, 2011, the Commission developed the following recommendations to City Council.

Recommendation #1: The Parks and Recreation Commission unanimously recommends that Council approve the Parks and Recreation Department FY 2012 and 2013 budgets as proposed, including the Creeks Fund, Golf Fund, Capital Program, General Fund and Fees and Charges Schedules. Additional recommendations and comments follow.

GOLF FUND

The Commission recognizes the challenging fiscal condition faced by the golf course, and although the proposed plan has some risk, the Commission appreciates the work of staff and the Golf Advisory Committee in developing the fiscal plan and supports the budget and fee changes as proposed.

CAPITAL PROGRAM (GENERAL FUND)

Recommendation #2 – Chase Palm Park Playground: The Commission continues to be concerned about the long list of unfunded Parks and Recreation deferred capital projects in the Six-Year Capital Program. If Redevelopment Agency (RDA) funds become available for the Chase Palm Park Playground Project (\$200,000), the Parks and Recreation Commission strongly recommends the General Funds be used for the repair and re-construction of the Mesa Lane Steps. These funds would enhance the opportunity to leverage grant funds. The Commission noted that ongoing deterioration of the Lower Mesa Lane Steps puts the highly popular beach access steps in jeopardy of being closed to the public until the project can be completed. Since the steps are not in the RDA zone, the project should have priority funding consideration.

Staff Note: Current funding for the Lower Mesa Lane Steps will complete project design and permitting (December 2011). Project construction, which could be scheduled for fall 2012, is estimated to be \$600,000. The department will pursue grant opportunities to complete the

project; having \$200,000 in additional General Funds for the project will ensure a higher likelihood of grant funding.

GENERAL FUND

Recommendation #3 – Park Volunteer Program: *The Parks and Recreation Commission recommends that Council approve the Administration Division budget as proposed, particularly as it relates to staff support to develop a Comprehensive Park Volunteer Program. Further, the Commission recommends that additional staffing to implement and support this program be a priority in future years.* The Commission appreciates the many hours community volunteers have spent helping with maintenance in City parks, especially in light of the reduced workforce. Although volunteers are not a substitute for a skilled workforce, the Commission places a high priority on development of a broader, more comprehensive park volunteer program which is sustainable in the long term. Operating such a program requires staff resources beyond what is in place given the reductions over the recent years.

Recommendation #4 – Standard Landscape Design Guidelines for Public Spaces: *The Parks and Recreation Commission recommends that Council initiate a plan to implement standard landscape design guidelines and modifications to the design review process such that projects in public spaces achieve an appropriate aesthetic quality while meeting the challenges of reduced City resources for maintenance. Further, for projects in public spaces, the Commission recommends that maintenance costs and sources of funding for these costs be identified before said project receives design approval.* The Commission expressed frustration that the City is wasting money to put in landscaping recommended by the various design review boards which cannot be adequately maintained within the City's resources. The Commission understands that the design review boards are fulfilling their role; however, the current process results in unrealistic expectations and poorly maintained public areas. As well, the Commission notes that resources devoted to areas requiring higher maintenance result in deferring regular maintenance in our parks

Recommendation #5 – IPM Program: *The Parks and Recreation Commission recommends that Council direct staff to review the City's IPM Program to identify potential practices or policy modifications that could potentially reduce maintenance costs without substantially compromising the City's achievements in reducing use of toxic materials.* The Commission acknowledged the City's tremendous success in reducing the use of toxic pesticides since the implementation of the City's IPM Program in 2004. In recognition of the increased work effort to implement the program, Council added resources to the Parks Division over several years. However, the Commission has seen recent budget reductions undo all of the additional funding for staff, equipment, and park improvements. In fact, from FY 2005 to FY 2012, the number of Parks Division field staff (permanent and hourly) has declined by 28%. While community advocates of the program have pledged volunteer support over the years, little has been accomplished. While the IPM program has many benefits, the reality is maintenance costs increase with green practices. To think and plan for long-term maintenance of our parks and civic spaces, a thorough assessment of the IPM Program may be in order.

Recommendation # 6 – Recreation and Neighborhood Programs: *The Parks and Recreation Commission joins the Santa Barbara Youth Council in recommending that*

Council make no further reductions to recreation programs or neighborhood services. Those limited resources should be maintained and expanded as much as possible. While the Youth Council and Commission appreciate how staff has modified or reduced programming and resources to meet the City's fiscal challenges, both boards recognize the important role recreation and neighborhood programs play in preventing youth crime and strengthening neighborhoods. In these tough economic times, the Commission is concerned that the department is experiencing an increased demand for free or reduced cost services, yet those services have been reduced. The Commission emphasized the importance of maintaining Neighborhood and Outreach Services, social programs, and recreational programs directed to the less fortunate; the City should not balance the budget on the backs of the less fortunate. Commissioners commented that maintaining and/or implementing Parks and Recreation programs now will save costs in the future (police, jails, drug rehabilitation, etc.) and can help put many of our youth on a productive path towards adulthood.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Commission wishes to acknowledge their pride in the Department and the hard work of both parks and recreation staff to move programs forward, be innovative, and keep our parks safe and clean for residents and visitors alike.

cc: Parks and Recreation Commissioners
Nancy Rapp, Parks and Recreation Director
Jill Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director
Jim Armstrong, City Administrator
Bob Samario, Finance Director
Paul Casey, Assistant City Administrator