Performance Evaluation of the Parks and Recreation Department

CITY OF SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

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Project Overview

◆ This review was undertaken to provide an assessment of select areas of the Seattle Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR).

◆ Specific focus areas included:

➔ Performance evaluation of routine park maintenance,

➔ Department-wide performance assessment, and

➔ Longer-term performance review agenda.

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Project Methodologies: Park Maintenance

- **Current state assessment of park maintenance activities** through staff interviews and data collection documenting existing staffing levels, operational practices, and use of technology.

- **Maintenance Employee** Survey to enable staff to provide additional input regarding current service levels, staffing, and opportunities for improvement.

- **Stakeholder Input** through personal interviews with users of randomly selected parks of various size and type throughout the City.

- **Park Condition Assessments** consisting of physically visiting parks to assess current maintenance level and condition of the parks.

- **Comparative Survey** completed to compare Seattle DPR staffing and operational practices to other comparable municipal parks and recreation operations.

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Project Methodologies: Performance Assessment

- **Review of each DPR division** through staff interviews and data collection to understand current service delivery and performance measurement approaches.

- **Review and evaluation of the Performance Management Framework** under development by the DPR.

- **Comparative research** to evaluate best practices and performance management approaches employed by other parks and recreation operations and the applicability to Seattle DPR.

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Findings – Parks Maintenance

- Park condition assessments found generally well-maintained parks with the most common concerns being graffiti and bathroom cleanliness.

- Park conditions exceeded what would be expected based upon current performance against defined maintenance standards.

- Park maintenance standards are excessive and not sufficiently tailored to meet the needs of specific parks.

- Tracked maintenance hours are significantly below what would be expected based upon budgeted staff allocations.

- Current staffing allocations result in inconsistent levels of park maintenance across districts and type of park.

- Budgeted staffing levels appear appropriate when compared to other comparable entities.

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Findings – Parks Maintenance

- The DPR does not have a comprehensive asset management program in place.

- Work activities are not sufficiently prioritized.

- Park condition assessments are not being conducted frequently enough or in enough detail to evaluate current performance or to plan future maintenance needs.

- No publicly available information on DPR's website concerning: current park condition ratings, planned improvements, scheduled maintenance activities, and the targeted condition level.

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Recommendations – Park Maintenance

- Establish updated standards for specific maintenance activities that are based upon specific criteria such as:
  - Type of park (passive use, active use)
  - Intensity of park usage (high, medium, low / passive)
  - Time of year (summer versus winter),
  - Existing condition (poor, good, excellent)

Example of Maintenance Standard Modified Based Upon Park Condition

Maintenance Activity	Level of Service – 1 (Poor Condition)	Level of Service – 2 (Good Condition)	Level of Service – 3 (Excellent Condition)
Comfort Station Cleaning	1.0 hour	.75 hour	.5 hour
Edging / Trimming	1.25 hour / KLF	1.0 hour / KLF	.75 hour / KLF

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Recommendations – Park Maintenance

Example of Maintenance Standard Modified Based Upon Intensity of Usage

Maintenance Activity	Level of Service – 1 (High Intensity)	Level of Service – 2 (Medium Intensity)	Level of Service – 3 (Low / Passive Use)
Comfort Station Cleaning	At least daily (2x for highest use locations)	Daily	Every other day
Garbage Collection	Daily (2x for highest use locations)	Daily	Every other day (or lower frequency based upon experience)

Example of Maintenance Activity Modified Based Upon Season

Maintenance Activity	Level of Service – 1 (Summer)	Level of Service – 2 (Winter)
Turf Maintenance - Mowing	Weekly	Biweekly
Turf Maintenance – Edging	Weekly	Biweekly

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Recommendations – Park Maintenance

- Reevaluate and modify staffing allocations between districts and maintenance activities once new maintenance standards adopted.

- Implement clear communication regarding new maintenance standards and priorities between supervisors and staff.

- Longer-term, develop an on-going comprehensive park condition assessment program conducted at least once every two years:

  - To assess current park condition,

  - Develop data for use in planning infrastructure replacement or maintenance requirements,

  - Measure impact of investments in parks, and

  - Assess impact of new maintenance standards.

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Recommendations – Park Maintenance

◆ Implement a simplified quarterly park condition assessment conducted by DPR staff to provide frequent and objective data on actual park condition levels. Options include an assessment:

➔ Similar to that used during this engagement, or

➔ Based upon the College Park example.

◆ Implement a comprehensive asset management program that includes and integrates the tracking of all hours spent on park maintenance activities.

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Recommendations – Park Maintenance

- Increase public education, DPR accountability and transparency, provide additional information on the DPR's website regarding:

  - Current park condition,

  - Planned improvements by park,

  - Scheduled maintenance activities, and

  - Targeted park condition level.

- Improve operational practices, including:

  - Enhanced work activity scheduling,

  - Increased accountability for staff (manager and line employees),

  - More robust training on equipment operation, and

  - Enhanced supervisory training

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Findings – Performance Assessment

- Proposed performance framework, if implemented substantially as proposed, would be "best in class".

- Framework outlines an approach to link departmental activities with high-level outcomes for participants / residents.

- The comprehensive nature of this framework coupled with the "best in class" approach will require:

  - Intensive training of staff for effective implementation,

  - Require more time and effort to implement than other approaches, and

  - Allocation of additional resources will be necessary for implementation and on-going maintenance of this framework.

- Existing data sources are insufficient to provide the quality and type of data necessary for implementation of the framework.

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Recommendations – Performance Assessment

◆ More actionable and less robust performance measures should be considered for initial implementation.

➔ To reduce required resources (staff time and financial resources) necessary to develop consistent and accurate data.

➔ More progressive outcomes can be implemented over time.

➔ Examples would include:

Park Maintenance (initial)
% of park trimming and blowing completed on schedule
% of park mulching and mowing completed on schedule
% of public rating park maintenance as satisfactory or better
Park Maintenance (longer-term)
% of parks maintained at adopted condition level
% of parks maintained at good or better rating

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Recommendations – Performance Assessment

Recreation (initial)
% cost recovery of recreation programming
% of program participants rating program as good or better
% of participants satisfied with program offerings
% of participants satisfied with affordability of programs

Recreation (longer-term)
% of participants reporting participation improved health status
Program participation representative of community demographics

- ◆ All data collected for use in the performance management framework is complete and accurate to enable decision-making.
  - ➔ Implementation of fewer measures supported by quality data will be more beneficial than a larger number of measures with less accurate data.

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Recommendations – Performance Assessment

◆ Outcomes should be time-based (i.e. – targeted for achievement in 1, 3 or 5 years).

➔ Will better manage public expectations,

➔ Enable the DPR to phase in the framework, and

➔ Recognizes the complexity and high-standards for performance measurement desired for implementation.

Performance Measure	Target		
	Year 1	Year 3	Year 5
% of parks maintained at adopted condition level	80%	90%	100%
% of parks maintained at good or better rating	75%	85%	100%
% of participants reporting participation improved health status	60%	75%	95%
Recreational Program Cost Recovery	65%	70%	75%

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Recommendations – Performance Assessment

Performance Measure	Target		
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Longer-Term Performance Review Agenda

- **Fleet / Equipment Maintenance Shop Evaluation:**

  - Comprehensive evaluation of fleet and equipment maintenance including staffing allocations, staff training, scheduling practices for maintenance activities, and fleet / equipment replacement schedules.

  - Cost Estimate of $75,000.

- **Asset Management Program Assessment / Technical Assistance:**

  - Review and assessment of asset management program currently under development with recommendations to ensure implementation of best practices in the industry and that maintenance activities and time tracking fully implemented.

  - Provide technical assistance to the DPR to effectively implement the program.

  - Cost Estimate of $85,000.

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Longer-Term Performance Review Agenda

- ◆ **Capital Project Management:**
  - ➔ Evaluation of staffing allocations, operational practices, and planning / scheduling of capital projects to ensure effective practices are utilized.
  - ➔ Study would specifically focus on two key areas: Project Selection and Development and Project Implementation.
  - ➔ Cost Estimate of $125,000.

- ◆ **Recreation Program Assessment:**
  - ➔ Comprehensive review of the Recreation Division's approach in developing the annual recreation programming done at community centers, pools, etc. Would include review of: ability to achieve diversity and inclusiveness in programs offered, linkage to performance management framework, and staffing approaches (including use of in-house versus contract providers).
  - ➔ Cost Estimate of $75,000.

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