

April 1, 2009

Mr. Kevin Patterson  
Manager, Department of Parks and Recreation  
201 West Colfax, dpt. 601  
Denver, CO 80202

Dear Manager Patterson:

The Recreation Center Task Force (RCTF) is honored to be able to present recommendations for a strategic management vision of Denver's recreation system for the next 5-10 years. After three years of assessments, an eight month Task Force process and 21 community meetings, the Task Force clearly recognizes the City of Denver must be flexible, adapt and must make changes to the core functions and organization of the recreation system. The current system is not sustainable.

In particular, the RCTF presented its final draft recommendation in five community meetings and modified the early draft to reflect the important feedback we received. These recommendations reflect the hard work of the committee, the staff and the communities we serve.

We are proud to offer **equitable solutions** and **prioritized options** to recreation services **throughout the City.** This new service paradigm shall be based on a geographic, amenity, program and fee tiered system enhanced and complemented with partnerships throughout the City of Denver.

These recommendations offer the citizens of Denver:

- More Hours
- More Flexibility
- More Programming
- Better Amenities

We recommend establishing a **tiered system** of recreation centers including:

- Neighborhood centers, to meet the needs of the immediate neighborhood
- Local centers, with more focused amenities
- Regional centers with broad programming and amenities, such as aquatics or fitness areas

We recommend a **tiered fee structure** based on the regional, local or neighborhood centers. These fees should also be tiered by financial needs, family, adult, youth, senior and people with disabilities.

We strongly recommend that the City actively pursue a full range of **partnerships** throughout the system and prepare to implement three to five pilot sites within 12 months. Having reviewed information about recreation systems and previous studies conducted by the Parks and Recreation Department we believe a systematic approach to developing a continuum of formal partnerships - ranging from individual contractors renting space in a center to partners taking on the full management of a location - is the future of recreation in Denver. We highly

recommend you immediately conduct a system-wide comprehensive assessment to explore partnership opportunities for all 29 centers.

You shall find in the enclosed packet a full scope of our recommendations, a suggested tier structure and an addendum which outlines the three year Departmental process including our Task Force and extensive public process over the past eight months.

Proudly:

### Signatures of the chairs

**Honorable Peggy Lehmann**  
***City Council, City and County of Denver***  
***Recreation Center Task Force co-chair***

**Florence Navarro**  
***Parks and Recreation Advisory Board***  
***Recreation Center Task Force co-chair***

### Task Force Members

Kim Bailey, Outward Bound USA  
Scott Bolt, Community member, Southwest Denver  
Dr. Jane Broida, Parks and Recreation educator, Metropolitan State College  
Erin Brown, Community member, Northeast Denver  
Lori Daniels, Aurora Library, Recreation & Cultural Services, NRPA Past President  
Dave DeForest-Stalls, Big Brothers/Big Sisters  
Pastor Jerry Demmer, The Absolute Word Church  
Christopher Dowden, Community member, West Denver  
Francisco Gallardo, GRASP (Gang Rescue and Support Project)  
Nita Gonzales, Escuela Tlatelolco  
Manuel Hernandez, Recreation Coordinator, Johnson Recreation Center  
Sharon Alexander-Holt, Community member, Northeast Denver  
Pierre Jimenez, Community member, West Denver  
Corey Jones, Brignac Education Consulting  
Veronica Montoya, Northwest Denver  
Karen Nakandakare, Community member, Dragon Boat Festival coordinator  
Dana O'Connor, Community member, Southeast Denver

Kris Rollerson, Sun Valley Youth Center  
Jake Schroeder, Police Athletic League  
Steve Tammaro, YMCA  
Darcy Varney, CU Denver  
City Councilman Doug Linkhart, Councilman At-Large  
Kevin Patterson, Manager of Parks and Recreation  
Dody Erickson, Interim Deputy Manager of Recreation

Ex-Officio members:  
Katherine Archuleta, Mayor's Office, Special Initiatives  
Heather Barry, Mayor's Office, Neighborhood Liaison  
Mike Barney, Director of Recreation  
Thomas Herndon, Interim Director of Recreation  
Dolores Moreno, Director of Recreation  
Jeff Stawicki, Management Analyst, Recreation Administration  
Jill McGranahan, Director of Marketing, Parks and Recreation  
Dr. Christopher Urbina/Jennifer Wieczorek, Denver Public Health  
Nancy Gilder, Mayor's Office of Education and Children  
Chantal Unfug, Denver Parks and Recreation

## **Vision Statement for Indoor Recreation Centers**

Created by the Recreation Center Task Force

The role of Denver Parks and Recreation, regarding recreation centers, should be to address gaps in each community, partner with other organizations, champion healthy and social activities, and promote community pride and togetherness.

Service should bring the community together by addressing language and transportation barriers, and providing programming and hours of operation based on the needs of the community. Where appropriate by community demographics, a focus should be placed on youth, seniors and people with disabilities, prioritizing space, staff, programs, and operating hours/days that serve those needs.

The system of centers should include updated, modern regional facilities and smaller easily accessible neighborhood-based facilities that operate through program and, potentially, operating partnerships.

Viability and vibrancy (considering financial sustainability, changing demographics and the economy) of each recreation center within the system are important, regardless of size.

Core amenities at the recreation centers should include:

- Equity in equipment and maintenance at all centers
- Appropriate programming for unique neighborhood needs in all diverse communities
- Great staff trained to maintain strong customer service

Regional amenities should include:

- Pools and sports complexes
- Collaboration between recreation centers, schools, libraries and health facilities

The fee structure for use of the centers should be responsive to both the community served and the type or level of service provided. It should be an amenities-based approach, considering financial need, with an emphasis on youth, families, seniors and people with disabilities.



**Denver Indoor Recreation Centers Study**  
**Recreation Center Task Force Recommendations**  
Final (prepared 3.30.09)

**INTRODUCTION**

The Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) of the City of Denver is challenged with the fact that there are not adequate financial resources currently identified to meet the expressed needs of Denver residents and sustain the current service model for the recreation center system. Many of Denver's centers are too small to satisfy public needs and the desired types of program spaces are not always provided equitably across the City's system. There is a need to increase the service level to all citizens, by improving operations and implementing creative opportunities and solutions to meet changing needs. The recent downturn of the economy has rendered the circumstances even more challenging, calling everyone to become part of the solution.

The Task Force reviewed previous efforts regarding the system of recreation centers including DPR Game Plan 2003, Game Time 2004, Center Needs Assessment 2006, and the Cost Benefit Analysis Study 2007, as well as demographic studies, projections and other important data points, and assessed the identified missing information needed to create a successful plan.

With 21 community meetings engaging over 1500 participants, as well as website comments and comment forms, the Task Force carefully considered the input, addressed concerns, and incorporated appropriate suggestions to better meet community needs in the final recommendations. The RCTF presented its final draft recommendation in five community meetings and modified the early draft to reflect the important feedback received. These recommendations reflect the hard work of the committee, the staff and the communities we serve.

The Recommendations below focus on four key topical areas and offer strong recommendations, suggestions and comments for improving the recreation system:

- The Service Model
- Programs and Opportunities
- The Physical System (Location/Transportation)
- Fee Structure

## The Service Model

The Task Force recommends the Department embrace a Service Model that provides facilities and service by collaborating with others to support local needs by engaging community members in Community Advisory Committees; pursuing formal partnerships; setting measurable targets; establishing standard levels of service; create better staffing models; and testing pilot sites.

### It is recommended that Denver Parks and Recreation:

- **Develop and train local Community Advisory Committees (CACs) to guide service provision and assist in holding the collaborations accountable for achieving key community needs.** (Consider the successes of the staff facilitated committee at La Alma as a starting point.)
  - Create CACs for all centers. Tie CACs to leadership of DPR and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB).
  - Define the structure of CACs and operating procedures; provide staff support, appoint participants that represent the target market area. CACs are intended to be advisory in nature, DPR will make all final decisions.
  - Select participants using an application process to insure representation through a diverse pool of candidates which may include registered neighborhood organizations, city council members, local business, users and non users, youth, and task force members, etc.
  
- **Set measurable targets for change for all centers.**
  - For example: maximizing use of facility, increasing memberships, consideration of additional program partnerships, consideration of operating partnerships, increased cost recovery target where appropriate, etc.
  
- **Actively pursue Collaborations/Partnerships to implement the Service Model.**
  - Seek formalized partners through Request for Information (RFI) and Request for Proposals (RFP) processes.
  - Assure partners are aligned with the Department's mission and vision for the system of recreation centers' service and programming.
  - Assure that partners are a good fit for the local communities.
  - Determine an approach to help non-profits get ready to take on this task, or "ramp up" to make it feasible.
  - Assure partners are culturally competent.
  - Contract with partners through formalized agreements.
  - Assure partnership agreements assist in defraying operating costs of centers
  - Provide training for partners.
  - Require the use of CACs by operating partners.
  - Cross promote partner's programs and services.

- **Establish a Standard Level of Service for all centers including a maintenance, operations, staffing and programming *baseline of care and quality.***
  - Identify recreation centers as “safe havens” and as well structurally create safe places
  - Provide staff training to maintain strong customer service (including addressing language barriers).
  - Perform a periodic across-the-system assessment, and engage the community in that assessment.
  - Establish a standard level of quality for operations staff at all centers and assure proper staffing support and a focus on customer service.
  - Identify equity and quality standards for equipment and maintenance for all centers.
  
- **Develop a staffing plan that:**
  - Allows staff to go beyond what they do now to meet the needs of the community, being leaders in quality and proactively reaching out to community members.
  - Supports efforts of staff to pursue new opportunities.
  - Provides for proper training.
  - Engages existing staff in the process to maximize improvements in quality.
  
- **Establish pilot sites for the service model to test processes for community input and engaging program and operating partners.**
  - Build on existing models such as the Head Start Program at Highland Senior Center, Silver Sneakers at Hiawatha Davis, and reuse of the former Montbello Recreation Center.

## Programs and Opportunities

The Task Force recommends the Department improve all levels of programs and opportunities by establishing a standard level of programming and by identifying and responding to community needs.

### It is recommended that Denver Parks and Recreation:

- **Establish a Standard Level of Programming for all centers.**
  - Provide drop-in activities (game room, gym) at all centers.
  - Collaborate with other City efforts to develop a strategic approach for youth programs and services for two age groupings (preschool to early teens, and high school ages 14 and up) to:
    - Assure youth programs and services meet the needs of each community with outcomes to promote skill building, social development, health and wellness, community pride, and mentoring.
    - Identify age-based program and service prototypes at specific locations that can be used as models for future program at other locations.
  - Collaborate with other City efforts to develop a strategic approach to broaden the overall opportunities available to senior citizens at centers and provide specific senior services and programs at some centers.
  - Collaborate with other City efforts to address programs and services for people with disabilities to assure inclusion at all recreation centers.
  - Include RCTF members, potential partners and potential funders in the development of the strategic program approaches.
- **Identify key community needs and opportunities**
  - Analyze additional neighborhood services in order to fill gaps and not duplicate services.
  - Engage community members and key stakeholders through CACs to help determine the best services and programs for facilities
  - Establish specific, tangible, and measurable outcomes for all programs and opportunities.
  - Consider programming and operating partnerships to provide spaces for non-profits to service communities.
  - Complement Denver Parks and Recreation facilities with others' services to provide more comprehensive service and programs.
    - Look to faith-based facilities
    - Partner with Denver Public Schools and private schools to use their facilities to better serve communities.
    - Seek new opportunities through existing unused capacity of others.
- **Establish a programming focus for some centers**
  - Respond to the advice of the CAC's and to the results of the strategic planning approaches for youth (various age levels), senior citizens and people with disabilities.
  - Work closely with the community to develop appropriate programming for unique and diverse neighborhood needs.

## **The Physical System (Location and Transportation)**

The Task Force recommends the Department develop high facility standards for all recreation centers to assure customers and employees feel valued and important.

**It is recommended that Denver Parks and Recreation:**

- **Establish a tiered system of recreation centers including neighborhood and local service, supplemented by regional service, with focus on investment of additional resources through partnerships and collaborations.** The tiered system includes:
  - Neighborhood centers, open to meet the needs of the immediate neighborhood.
  - Local centers, open to serve a larger geographic area, with larger program offering and more amenities.
  - Regional centers with focused amenities (i.e. indoor aquatics, state of the art fitness area, gym), intended to serve a much broader geographic area, and to collaborate closely with other public services in the area. (such as libraries, schools, health organizations etc.)
  
- **Consolidate service and partnership opportunities to provide a high quality, improvement in service overall.**
  - Seek funding for community input processes to empower the community to help determine best use for each center.
  - Consolidate programs among centers within a reasonable proximity, as appropriate, to improve staff and operational efficiencies and services.
  - Adjust hours of centers as appropriate to accommodate service or program shifting among all sites.
  
- **Consider transportation barriers when developing improvement plans.**
  - Research and facilitate or provide transportation options if certain types of neighborhood or local programs or services are moved to regional locations in order to improve service overall.
  - Provide or arrange for, transportation options to access local and regional service that complements neighborhood service.
    - Align with Denver Safe Routes to Schools Initiative.
    - Add transportation opportunities (shuttles, bike & pedestrian trails, bus routes, etc).

## Fee Structure

The Task Force recommends the Department restructure the fee system to be more responsive to both the community served and the type of service provided.

### It is recommended that Denver Parks and Recreation:

- **Encourage staff to seek alternatives for generating revenue in order to keep fees affordable. These alternatives could include such things as vending, concessions, room rentals, and others.**
- **Offer financial-need discounts within the fee structure, as available currently.**
  - Turn no one away – offer scholarship/reduced fee based on need.
- **Establish a fee system based on amenities**
  - Neighborhood centers, having the fewest amenities, would have the lowest fee structure.
  - Local centers, having more amenities, would have a slightly higher fee structure.
  - Regional center fees, having the highest level of amenities, would have a higher fee structure yet, provide fee incentive for neighborhoods where regional center also serves as a neighborhood center.
- **Encourage participation by youth, seniors and people with disabilities through lower fees within the amenities-based fee structure.**
  - **Adult fee** should increase from the current fee model. Financial-need discounts will be available.
  - **Senior Citizens fee** should be a discount off of adult fee. Fee should increase from the current fee model. Financial-need discounts will be available.
  - **People with Disabilities fee** should be a discount off of adult fee. Fee should increase from the current fee model. Financial-need discounts will be available.
  - **Youth fee** should be a low fee (approximately \$5 per year) to encourage every youth to have a membership; this fee should not be collected on the first visit; youth should sign a commitment form with their membership; work service should be an option to cover the fee. Additional recommendations for youth:
    - Train staff to encourage youth participation in activities at the centers.
    - Continue “My Place” Program: If minimum of 75% of school is eligible for free or reduced lunch, all youth at that school are eligible for free membership.
    - Offer free admission at specific times for Denver resident youth (during non-school periods - Christmas, spring break, summer vacation).

- **Offer variety of payment options:**
  - Daily use fee
  - Annual Membership: discount off daily rates, discount off program fees; include some basic level fitness classes
  - Seasonal passes (3 and 6 month) as payment options – not to provide discounts like annual membership
  - Family memberships: annual basis only; offer child care service in addition
  - Offer volunteer opportunities to offset use costs
  
- **Offer additional incentives to use:**
  - Free days
  
- **Address administrative issues:**
  - Keep administrative overhead under control: limit options, keep it simple.
  - Offer monthly payments plans - bank draft plans, as a convenience, with a premium.
  - Tighten entry controls, particularly at regional centers.
  - Provide more accountable membership retention systems.

These fee structure recommendations are found to be in alignment with the Department’s recent efforts to undergo a cost benefit analysis of its services and programs and develop a fair, equitable and defensible pricing philosophy and policy. That undertaking was the beginning of an ongoing effort to assure that all programs and services are equitably priced, that new programs and services are measured against the system, and that the tools identified during the process are used and refined, as appropriate. The recommended pricing policy is based on a clear understanding of what programs and services cost to provide as well as the level of benefit and exclusivity the user receives above what a general tax payer receives.

Fees are reviewed at least every other year and recommendations are made to adjust, as necessary, to meet cost recovery objectives and City policies. It is recognized that market, historical, and political factors play a major role in any fee change, and the sensitivity to these issues is paramount while the adjustments take place to meet the goals over time.

## Recreation Center Tier Proposal

**Neighborhood Centers:** smaller facilities with programming based on neighborhood needs and input.

- Ashland Recreation Center
- Aztlan Recreation Center
- Barnum Recreation Center
- College View Recreation Center
- Globeville Recreation Center
- Stapleton Recreation Center
- Highland Senior Recreation Center
- Johnson Recreation Center
- La Alma Recreation Center
- ML King Recreation Center
- Platt Park Senior Recreation Center
- St. Charles Recreation Center

**Local Centers:** medium sized facility with or without an indoor pool; standard level of programming for youth, adults, seniors that focus on fitness, sports, aquatics (if applicable), education and culture, outdoor education, social enrichment and special events and partnerships.

- Ashland Indoor Pool facility
- Central Denver Recreation Center (opening date/location/amenities undetermined)
- Cook Park Recreation Center
- Eisenhower Recreation Center
- Glenarm Recreation Center
- Green Valley Ranch Recreation Center
- Harvard Gulch Recreation Center
- Harvey Park Recreation Center
- Hiawatha Davis Recreation Center
- La Familia Recreation Center
- Southwest Recreation Center
- 20<sup>th</sup> St. Gym

**Regional Centers:** full service facility that includes gym, well equipped weight room, indoor pool, game room, multi-purpose rooms and classrooms; enhanced programming for multiple ages and abilities.

- Athmar Recreation Center
- Montbello Recreation Center
- Montclair Recreation Center
- New Center (Stapleton)
- Rude Recreation Center
- Scheitler Recreation Center
- Swansea Recreation Center with improved enhancements (indoor pool and updated amenities)
- Washington Park Recreation Center

**BACKGROUND:**

The Needs Assessment was a year long study to inventory our Recreation System. Throughout that process findings and analysis were compiled through a detailed process involving:

- Four Neighborhood Public Meetings
- DPR Staff and Existing Center Supervisor Input
- Interviews with all Denver City Council Members
- A Center Users Survey
- A Statistically-Valid Survey sent randomly to 15,000 homes
- Analysis of Demographics and Trends
- A complete inventory of all 29 of Denver's indoor centers
- Analysis of current usage and participation
- GRASP™ Analysis of current Level of Service for the existing facilities and their components

The Findings and Analysis Compilation was presented to and accepted by: PRAB in June 2006.

- DPR Senior Management Team and Supervisory Staff
- Indoor Recreation Center Supervisors
- Denver City Council

The RCTF was born from the Needs Assessment recommendations. The RCTF was comprised of citizens, community leaders and recreation staff to create recommendations to guide the planning and organization of our system for the next 5-10 years. Over a six month period, the RCTF developed recommendations thru the following process:

- Twenty One (21) Neighborhood Public Meetings
- Over 1200 Citizens participated
- DPR Staff including center supervisors, coordinators and on-call employees input in 2008 and 2009
- Interviews and briefings with all Denver City Council Members
- Analysis of Demographics and Trends
- Analysis of the Needs Assessment: our complete inventory of all 29 of Denver's indoor centers
- Analysis of current usage and participation
- Analysis of transportation options and gaps surrounding the centers
- Analysis of geographical location of centers and proximity to other centers
- Analysis of physical space including limitations and opportunities in each center
- GRASP™ Analysis of current Level of Service for the existing facilities and their components