

Park User Survey Findings

2010



Neighborhood Parks Council
Revitalizing Communities, Park by Park

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- Introduction from Neighborhood Parks Council Meredith Thomas, Executive Director.....2
- Letter from the Recreation and Park Department Phil Ginsburg, General Manager.....3
- Survey Respondent Data5
- Park Survey Findings & Recommendations.....6
 - Symbol Key6
 - Outreach & Communication.....6
 - Communication with the Recreation and Park Commission9
 - Budget Priorities11
 - Income & Revenue Generation.....14
 - Recreation Centers & Clubhouses.....18
 - Permits and Reservations.....23
 - Volunteerism25
 - Park Facilities28
- Appendix30

NPC RECOMMENDATIONS: COMMISSION COMMUNICATIONS

- Create greater clarity and process around public correspondence with the Commission that answers questions like “Are the Commissioners required to read what comes to them?”
- Use the updated RPD website to educate the general public and park users on how to communicate with the Commission using the recommendations presented in the previous section, including: posting information in the parks, utilizing RPD e-news and partners and having a clear and simple location on the RPD website that explains how to speak with the Commission (at meetings, via email, postal mail and phone).
- RPD Commission should help the public understand how to track their issues so that fewer people feel that nothing happened.
- Allow for greater dialogue with the Recreation and Park Commission via Town Halls and park user workshops.
- NPC supports the upcoming shift back to Commission committees for Operations, Capital and the Zoo. These committees will meet monthly outside of a full Commission meeting and provide more interaction between the Commission and park users as long as park users know to attend.
- NPC is interested in the small number of respondents who indicated that they do interact with the RPD Commission and seeks to understand better through future research.
- NPC will support understanding how to interact with the RPD Commission by also posting FAQs and contact information on the NPC website

RPD RESPONSE: COMMISSION COMMUNICATIONS

Both the Commission and the Department hope for the commission process to be accessible to everyone. Based on the responses, however, it seems that a small minority of park users are communicating with the Commission. In an effort to expand the ability for users to interact with the Commission, the Commission has moved to a committee structure, which should allow for more community input, and has launched quarterly town hall meetings with NPC.

The Commission also hopes to use technology to increase its accessibility. Examples of planned improvements are adding a FAQ page to the website, and improving e-mail communication. This will be done by responding to all emails, grouping emails by subject, and having responses that will include status, timeline, and critical decision points regarding the subject. All responses should also include the fact that all emails are forwarded to the commission, so that writers can be assured that their emails are landing in the right hands.

Budget Priorities

FUNDING PRIORITIES – AREAS TO FUND



Question 12: Generally, what are your top three priorities for our parks that you believe RPD should be sure to fund? Open-ended question. 643 respondents / 1,849 responses

Respondents were asked to list three priorities for park funding. They were not given any set options and produced 1,849 different responses and several themes emerged.



The following chart shows the top 4 ranked priorities from the respondents:

Rank	Funding Priority	Response (of 643)
1	General Park Maintenance	57.1%
2	More and better maintained athletic facilities	28.3%
3	Recreational activities and programs	21.5%
4	Safety	20.4%

Fifty-seven percent (57.1%) of the 643 respondents listed *general park maintenance* as one of their top priorities. The high percentage for this priority may be due to its being an umbrella category that could encompass other priorities, such as gardening and custodial staff. Other top answers include *sustainability/green initiatives* (18.8%), *gardeners/tree staff* (18.2%) and *recreation staff* (17.1%).

FUNDING PRIORITIES – SUGGESTED CUTS

 Question 13: Generally, what three types of expenses would you cut from the Rec. and Park Budget in order to fund your top three choices if needed? Open-ended question. 410 respondents / 910 responses

Respondents were asked to list three types of expenses they would cut. They were not given any set options and produced 910 different responses. Several themes emerged. Nearly half of the 410 respondents (48.5%) wrote about *high salaries and overtime pay*. The next two favored answers were *new parks and construction projects* (35.4%) and funding *regional attractions* (18.3%). Other frequent suggestions included the *reduction of miscellaneous costs* and any *wasteful spending* (17.1%), *golf expenses* (16.6%) and the *reduction of hours in underused facilities* (14.6%).

16.8% of respondents offered a suggestion that was put into the *Other* category. This category included statements that were incomplete or unclear as well as some ideas that didn't fit with any of the above themes such as "Keeping [parks] wild," having "Less policy," and getting free labor from volunteers.

BUDGET CUTS – HOW PARKS AND PARK USERS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED

 Question 14: What should RPD and your elected officials know about how the RPD budget affects you or your park? Open-ended question. 343 respondents

When asked to fill in what RPD and their elected officials should know about how the RPD budget affects them or their parks, respondents provided detailed answers stressing the importance of a healthy park system. The following are major themes that arose:

- All respondents feel that parks are extremely important for residents' quality of life. A number of respondents noted that the parks in San Francisco are the reason families stay and why people retain their mental/emotional/physical health.
- Most respondents noted negative trends with budget cuts including decreased maintenance, fewer programming options for the community, and reduced safety. Many respondents noted that they were less likely to use their park if it is not well maintained.
- Some respondents felt frustrated by the budget choices and want greater community input and more transparency. Some want to volunteer to help but either they do not know how to do so, or feel that RPD does not include volunteers enough.

"Effective recreation programs have a tremendous impact on public safety. Engaged kids are less likely to hang out and get into trouble. Landscaping and trash pickup also help to maintain a perception of safety and community-building."
Respondent 1177



Q10: How well does the Commission listen and respond to concerns and ideas from the public?	Not accurate	Somewhat accurate	Accurate	Very accurate	Total
The Commission took my concerns seriously.	64 (34.2%)	56 (29.9%)	45 (24.1%)	22 (11.8%)	187 (100%)
Some progress was made on my issue.	72 (39.3%)	51 (27.9%)	42 (23.0%)	18 (9.8%)	183 (100%)
Nothing happened.	83 (59.7%)	29 (20.9%)	16 (11.5%)	11 (7.9%)	139 (100%)
I am not sure what happened.	67 (49.6%)	34 (25.2%)	18 (13.3%)	16 (11.9%)	135 (100%)
I am not sure how to find out.	65 (51.2%)	27 (21.3%)	21 (16.5%)	14 (11.0)	127 (100%)

Q11: Have you ever invited a Commissioner to attend a meeting or activity where s/he might learn about an important issue?	# (% of respondents)
Yes	64 (32.8%)
No	131 (67.2%)
Total Respondents	195

Q11a: If yes, what was the response? The Commissioner...	# (% of respondents)
Did not respond to the invitation	11 (17.2%)
Responded but was unable to come	15 (23.4%)
Attended	33 (51.6%)
Listened, showed interest	30 (46.9%)
Carried our concerns to the Commission	13 (20.3%)
Got something done for us	13 (20.3%)
Nothing happened.	13 (20.3%)

Multiple response question with 64 respondents giving 128 responses

Q12: Generally, what are your top three priorities for our parks that you believe RPD should be sure to fund?	# (% of respondents)
Park safety	131 (20.4%)
Access for disabled and disadvantaged and general public	48 (7.5%)
Pool maintenance and staffing	60 (9.3%)
More and better maintained athletic fields, courts, and facilities	182 (28.3%)
Maintain, renovate and build children's playgrounds	60 (9.3%)
Recreational activities/programs	138 (21.5%)
Dog areas	37 (5.8%)
Park cleanliness	67 (10.4%)
General park maintenance	367 (57.1%)
Adding more park space	55 (8.6%)
Open space maintenance, acquisition and development (green space, plazas, etc.)	52 (8.1%)
Gardeners, tree experts, park designers, horticulturalists, custodians	117 (18.2%)
Sustainability (efficient infrastructure, habitat restoration, conservation)	121 (18.8%)
Clean and accessible public bathrooms	35 (5.4%)
Capital projects to create, develop, improve and maintain parks	35 (5.4%)
Recreation staff	110 (17.1%)
Waive or lower fees for low-income users	16 (2.5%)
Events to encourage people to use parks while promoting stewardship	20 (3.1%)
Regional parks, facilities and activities (e.g. GGP, Botanical Gardens, Zoo, Camp Mather, etc.)	71 (11.0%)
My neighborhood park or playground	13 (2.0%)
New facilities and facilities repair or upgrade	42 (6.5%)
Other	72 (11.2%)

Multiple response question with 643 respondents giving 1,849 responses

Q13: Generally, what three types of expenses would you cut from the Rec Park Budget in order to fund your top three choices if needed?	# (% of respondents)
Administrators, high salaries and overtime pay	199 (48.5%)
New park land and new construction	145 (35.4%)
Close down or reduce hours for underused rec activities and centers	60 (14.6%)
On the ground staff (gardeners, custodians, rec staff)	33 (8.0%)
Inefficient/ineffective staff	20 (4.9%)
Regional attractions (Zoo, Arboretum, Candlestick Park, Marina Harbor)	75 (18.3%)
Work orders to other departments, contract workers, supervisors, attorneys	52 (12.7%)
Unnecessary maintenance (over watering, leaf blowers, annual plantings, etc.)	36 (8.8%)
Special events	20 (4.9%)
Park Patrol	21 (5.1%)
Golf-related expenses	68 (16.6%)
"Miscellaneous" costs from budget and other wasteful spending	70 (17.1%)
Raise revenue instead of cutting expenses	42 (10.2%)
Other	69 (16.8%)

Multiple response question with 410 respondents giving 910 responses

Q14: What should RPD and your elected officials know about how the RPD budget affects you or your park? (See Report Text)

Q15 What kinds of revenue generation activities are generally acceptable to you?	# (% of respondents)
Special major events such as concerts, performances.	582 (85.6%)
Neighborhood events such as North Beach Festival or Movie Night in Dolores Park.	607 (89.3%)
Park amenities like the boats at Stow Lake, bicycle rental.	624 (91.8%)
Vendors such as food carts.	556 (81.8%)
Markets or crafts fairs like the one at Civic Center or Chinatown Night Market.	577 (84.9%)
Subleasing to clubhouses organizations to provide RPD mission-focused services that may not be public at market value.	398 (58.5%)
Fees for recreation classes like photography, pottery & aerobics	558 (82.1%)
Fees for tiny tot programs, junior gym & other children's activities.	431 (63.4%)
Latchkey program or senior nutrition.	364 (53.5%)

Multiple response question with 680 respondents giving 4,697 responses.

Q16 When implementing new revenue generating activities, how well does the department..	Poorly	Fair	Good	Excellent	Total
Notify neighbors about upcoming special activities or changes that affect their neighborhood?	201 (35.8%)	192 (34.2%)	135 (24.1%)	33 (5.9%)	561 (100%)
Protect the physical environment of the park, open space or facility?	120 (21.3%)	183 (32.5%)	215 (38.2%)	45 (8.0%)	563 (100%)
Ensure safety and comfort of people involved with a special event?	46 (8.6%)	163 (30.6%)	261 (49.0%)	63 (11.8%)	533 (100%)
Respond to problems associated with that revenue generating activity?	96 (20.1%)	174 (36.4%)	174 (36.4%)	34 (7.1%)	478 (100%)

Q17: When the Department has a new idea for revenue generation, how well does RPD inform the impacted neighborhood in advance of making a decision?	# (% of respondents)
Poorly	290 (54.6%)
Good	160 (30.1%)
Well	59 (11.1%)
Very Well	22 (4.1%)
Total Respondents	531

Q18: What ideas do you have for improving the contracting process to better involve neighbors or maintain core services? (See Report Text)