



Park and Recreation Commission findings and recommendations

May 14, 2018

Introduction

In 2017 the Camas Parks and Recreation Commission was tasked by the Mayor and City Administrator to explore funding options for the parks and recreation system. An ad-hoc committee made up of representatives from City Council, the Commission, City and Camas school district staff, was convened to assess the long-term funding issues and recommend a solution. The goal was to address funding challenges to the year 2035.

Camas Park and Recreation Growth Assessment Ad Hoc Committee (PRGA)

Name	Affiliation
David Gast	Parks and Recreation Commission
Jerry Acheson	City Parks and Recreation
Melissa Smith	City Council
Pete Capell	City Administrator
Randy Curtis	Parks and Recreation Commission
Steve Marshall	Camas/Washougal School District Staff
Tim Hazen	Community Member

The Problem:

Camas has insufficient operations and maintenance funding to support the existing park system. As we look to the future, the development of new park, trail and facility development will be constrained by the lack of new funding.

- Over the years, the community has come to expect a high level of park, trail and open space maintenance. Current resources and staffing levels are struggling to maintain this level of service.

- The escalation of City costs, particularly for operations and maintenance, exceeds the (capped) growth in tax and fee revenue. Parks and recreation funding has not grown enough to cover the increase in staffing costs and the additional acreage in the system.
- The City Council has chosen to avoid making this problem worse by not using city resources to build more parks and facilities until additional resources for maintenance are identified.
- Expansion of the system, both south and north of Lacamas Lake, will require additional maintenance and operations resources.
- Park revenue derived from user fees, rental and donations only covers approximately 18% of the total baseline budget costs required to operate the park and recreation system.

What is an MPD and how would it impact the City?

After looking at multiple funding options, a Metropolitan Park District (MPD) is the only tool identified that can commit new operating resources to the long-term support of the parks and recreation system. The biggest challenge in creating an MPD is the willingness of taxpayers to vote in a new tax. Other considerations and benefits include:

- The MPD is subject to compression as a junior taxing district.
 - An MPD offer dedicated park and recreation funding.
- The district boundary should be contiguous with the city limits. **This allows the City Council to serve as the district board.**
- Creation of an MPD gives the Council a new tool to fund major capital projects i.e. aquatics or community center, using voter approved bonds.
- The MPD would be formed by a (50% +1) vote of the citizens
- Funds can be used for both operations, maintenance and capital projects.
- The initial MPD vote could include a tax rate of up to \$0.75/\$1,000 assessed value.
- A \$0.75 tax rate would generate \$2,832,525 annually.
- **The MPD will have authority to issue bonds in addition to the \$0.75 rate. Construction bonds could be authorized with the formation of the MPD or funded at a later date in a separate election.**
- There will be an initial surplus of funds between what is needed to maintain the system now and what will be needed to maintain the future system. This could be used to pay for selected capital improvements in the meanwhile, reducing capital spending as maintenance costs increase.

Key Considerations for City Council

The PRGA committee halted its work on this project because they felt it was vitally important to obtain City Council direction and feedback on the MPD concept outlined in this report.

There is considerable detailed work yet to be done by city staff and the committee including defining the taxing structure, policies and projects that would benefit from the creation of an MPD. The PRGA committee submitted a preliminary report (including resource documents) to the Parks Commission and requested that we forward our findings and conclusions to the City Council. On their behalf, the Commission conducted our review on May 14, 2018, and hereby forwards it to the Council for guidance and direction.

Listed below, are some of the critical issues that we would like the Council to address:

1. Based on the information provided in this report, does the Council support the efforts of the Parks Commission to proceed with work necessary to take a proposed MPD to the Camas voters?
2. Should all or a portion of the current general fund support for parks and recreation be committed to Parks or reallocated for other non-park programs?
3. ~~Should current capital funding sources (such as Real Estate Excise Tax) continue to be committed to park projects?~~
4. ~~Are there specific projects or service levels that the Council feels should be included in the MPD funding?~~
5. ~~Public education and polling is critical to gaining community support. Do you have specific ideas or interests that should be included in this effort?~~
6. Election timing for proposing an MPD may be important to success. The Commission recommends a vote in April of 2019. This will give us time to finalize the MPD project list, taxing structure and the educational campaign. It will also coincide with a projected reduction in the property owners 2018 tax bills and precedes a planned school bond measure in 2021. Do you agree?
7. **Does the Council have any specific concerns or interests that should be addressed by the PRGA committee?**
8. ~~The MPD will have its own additional authority to issue bonds. This could be authorized with the formation of the MPD, if the cost of said projects were available, or funded at a later date in a separate election.~~
9. ~~Are there any projects that are currently under consideration, but are on hold because we lack either capital dollars or operation and maintenance funds to complete the project?~~

Proposed Action

Subject to receiving additional feedback and guidance from the City Council, we recommend the following steps to move forward.

1. Direct staff to refine the specifics of projects and costs, final details of the MPD tax structure and a strategy for public information campaign in collaboration with the commission and the PRGA committee. This is an opportunity to inform and draw additional stakeholders into the discussion.
2. Direct staff to conduct recommended public opinion research to learn more details about support for an MPD.