

III. Key Issues for Strategic Planning

This assessment is designed to specifically identify the views, needs, and voice of the public – the external stakeholders. Much internal staff planning has been completed. Now, identification of Key Issues and related potential strategies from this Needs Assessment enables the opportunity to provide the residents of Broward County with quality parks and recreation facilities and services, a connected system of community greenways, and wise stewardship of natural resources that the public has identified as important to them. This can then be integrated into Strategic Action Planning for staff to follow.

Overall, the Needs Assessment indicates that the County is doing a **very good job** in providing coverage from programs, services, and facilities. The majority of residents' expectations are being met through current operational and capital strategies. From the summary of Findings and the Visioning Workshops, the following Key Issues have been identified as the primary priorities and opportunities for Broward County Parks and Recreation, based on this Needs Assessment.

Key Issues to Address

- ❖ Marketing and Communications
- ❖ Identified role in continued development and expansion of the Greenways Program
- ❖ Maximize partnerships and minimize duplications of service in Broward County
- ❖ Address safety and perception of safety issues
- ❖ Complete a Pricing, Cost Recovery, and Revenue Policy
- ❖ Develop strategic plan including updated level of service and asset management plan

A. Key Issue 1 – Optimize Marketing and Communications

Marketing and communications is always a challenge for a large overlay County system such as this one. There are many types of media channels, hundreds of competing voices, and many ways in which residents can obtain their information. Feedback from stakeholders suggests a lack of awareness in the community regarding parks, trails, and programs, despite a strong presence by the Division on the internet and consistent use of available social and print media outlets. Collaborative promotions (in new channels), increased marketing campaigns, and targeted messages are possible tools for consistently getting the word out and increasing awareness of the County's programs and services, parks, and natural areas and available trail system.

81% of survey respondents report having used Broward County Parks and Recreation Services at least once in the past year. 70% think that the County does a satisfactory or better job of informing them about the offerings.

The County has a comprehensive Marketing and Communications Plan and dedicated staff resources working on these tasks; however, there are many factors that make it challenging to reach the community with information. The County is geographically large, with a sizeable population and 31 municipalities. There are dozens of local media outlets, and not all are as responsive as could be desired in terms of releasing submitted information. Paid advertising is costly with so many varied media channels. Fortunately, 57 percent of respondents indicated that their preferred method of communication from the County is by web or email. This provides strong opportunities for improvements as the County moves forward. The Visioning sessions garnered many ideas for potential strategies (see **Appendix E** for summaries of those sessions), with the priorities indicated here.

Strategy 1.1 – Enhanced Web Presence

The highest amount (33%) of residents would prefer to receive their information from the internet and/or websites. This indicates that a primary focus should be on ensuring that the Parks and Recreation website and all divisional website pages should always be current and fully integrated for ease of use. Enhancements can be made to provide more detail and easy registration for all aspects. Rentals should be fully available to reserve online, and availability should be reflected “in real time.” The future inventory and level of service analysis studies should be component-based and completed using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) so that all components of the Division’s system can be integrated into a point and parcel based “click through” website.

Strategy 1.2 – Fully Utilize Email and Online Social Dialogue Channels

In addition to a great website, 24 percent of respondents indicated that they would like to be notified by email. A strong focus on continued email list maintenance and full development of online social media should be integrated. Possibilities include enhanced use of email and registration lists, Facebook pages, Twitter, www.Meetup.com, Virtual Town Hall systems such as www.MindMixer.com, and/or other options.

Strategy 1.3 – Partner with Other Organizations to Cross Market

Broward County is not the only agency that faces challenges in reaching citizens and potential participants. In addition to its own efforts and strategies, the Division would benefit from formal cross-marketing arrangements with other organizations, including other governmental, HOA, faith-based, schools, non-profits, convention and visitors bureaus, and tourism organizations. This can be integrated with partnership agreements.

Strategy 1.4 – Utilize Celebration Tactics in Addition to Marketing Points

The County provides so many positive aspects and opportunities for residents and visitors. Many of the stakeholders are not aware of all of the benefits provided by the County. In addition to providing releases and advertising related to upcoming offerings, staff should focus on informing the community about all positive aspects of the Division, including the environmental, economic, social, and health benefits.

Strategy 1.5 – Measure and Evaluate Resources and Impact of Communication Efforts

This strategy may require additional staff and advertising resources dedicated to this type of communication channel. In the commercial markets, marketing and communications budgets can be up to 25 percent of a company’s budget. In the public sector for parks and recreation, they are typically less than five percent. Broward County should track what percentage of the budget is made available for marketing and communications, and work to enhance the budget available for staffing and other resources as possible to improve awareness within the County.

Strategy 1.6 – Continue with Existing Marketing Channels per the Marketing Plan

The Division’s Marketing and Communications Plan is comprehensive, and should be continued, followed through by annual staff workplan integration, and updated annually, including results from future Needs Assessments at least once every five years.

Additional strategies, such as a potential direct-mail outreach to all residents at least one time per year, should be analyzed for cost, potential reach, and return on investment.

B. Key Issue 2 – Identify Role in Continued Development of the Greenways Program

This Needs Assessment validates the desire for additional emphasis on a County-wide coordinated Greenways and Trails program and effort. For clarity, this study defines greenways as connecting regional trails, typically connecting various parts of the County. The County does a pretty good job on trails that are within parcels and parks. However, County-wide, there is a need for trails that provide connection and can be used for alternative transportation (walking, biking, skateboarding, etc.). Nationally, trails and greenways are the number one priority in most communities, and Broward County is no exception. Bike paths and trails are the number one identified amenity to be added or improved.

While there have been a variety of efforts and groups working toward improving greenways in the County, along with some preliminary maps and descriptions, there is no formal “trails department” or identified governmental staff resource tasked with bringing these efforts together. There are currently efforts within the Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department, Planning, Transportation, and Water Management Divisions. The Parks and Recreation Division would benefit from having an assigned staff resource to work on these priorities. At this point, it is unclear under which Division the responsibility for Greenways should ultimately lie, but it is clear that the public is supportive of improvements for this focus area, and the Parks and Recreation Division should play a key role.

Strategy 2.1 – Assign a Parks and Recreation Staff Liaison Specifically for Greenways and Trails

While final responsibilities are not yet identified, it is important to focus the duties and task for greenways and trails, and to create a staff advocate for potential partnering, projects, and/or funding procurement. This may be a full-time position, or part of an existing position, but for a County this large, some focused staff resources are recommended.

Strategy 2.2 – Include a focus on connectivity and Greenways in the Upcoming Inventory and Level of Service Analysis

This Needs Assessment did not include an inventory of the greenways and trails, but the community did identify that there are many gaps in connectivity. The upcoming County-Wide inventory and Level of Service analysis should include greenways and trails as key components for analysis, including connectivity, trailhead and gaps analysis, accessibility, and functionality of the system. This should provide a prioritized list of capital improvements and connections for Greenways and Trails over the next 10 years. This should be done in conjunction with other partners and organizations.

Strategy 2.3 – Work with Other Relevant County Divisions and Local Governments to Improve County-Wide Connectivity and Access through Implementation of a Cohesive Action Plan

The Parks and Recreation Division cannot, and should not, be solely responsible for a County-wide greenways and trails system. However, through the use of staff resources and leadership, the Division can create a formal network with other Divisions and agencies, and work to fully identify appropriate leadership and collaboration efforts. The findings from this Needs Assessment concur with focusing resources to enact the identified Action Plan summarized by the Environmental Protection and Growth Management Department and the Water Management Division.

Identified Action Plan for Greenways

The main purpose of this Greenway System planning process has been to create a plan that can begin to be promptly implemented. To this end, the following general actions are recommended:

- Adopt the Broward County Greenways Master Plan
- Continue the Mission of the County's Greenways
- Create a Technical Advisory Committee
- Establish Greenway Funding Sources
- Establish an Implementation Schedule
- Promote Greenway and Trails within Broward County
- Construct Greenway Corridors

C. Key Issue 3 – Maximize Partnerships for Service in Broward County

The Broward County Parks and Recreation Division works as an overlay system. As outlined under Strategy Two, there is a strong need to collaborate with all other alternative providers (municipalities; other governmental agencies; schools; and larger faith-based, for profit, and non-profit organizations) to maximize available resources and minimize duplication of services.

With the new Division leadership in recent years, there has been a stronger focus on partnerships within the community. A specific staff person has been assigned to facilitate the outreach efforts. This Needs Assessment supports and validates that the move toward ongoing formal partnership arrangements, and coordination is highly warranted to improve service provision.

Strategy 3.1 – Continue and Enhance the County-wide Parks and Recreation Leadership Meetings

In recent years, Division leadership has initiated an informal “Director’s Roundtable,” to invite parks and recreation directors from the local municipalities in to talk about topics and challenges that all are facing within the County. This Needs Assessment included a “Leadership Summit” focus group that brought members of this group and related public officials together. Consensus from that meeting indicates that it is highly desirable to continue these types of meetings in a formalized quarterly format. The Division should lead in hosting and organizing these meetings, as the County-wide “umbrella” organization. Support and hosting of the meetings can be shared by participating organizations.

Strategy 3.2 – Support County-wide Studies that Include Alternative Providers

Though the County Parks and Recreation Division should not do all of the planning or fund all of the studies needed for agencies in the County, there is strong support to have the Division take the lead in organizing County-wide planning efforts that include the primary alternative providers. Some key county-wide planning efforts currently suggested are:

- Continuation and support of the “Facilities Survey” that would include all parks, recreation, natural areas. This can be accomplished through a county-wide digital composite values methodology (CVM) inventory and level of service analysis, if the alternative providers participate and provide their datasets.
- Conducting a “field usage study” to help coordinate availability, fee structures, and usage of sports fields for neighborhood practices, regional games, and tournament uses and minimize duplications.
- County-wide studies on environmental practices and issues.
- County-wide Greenways and Trails planning (see *Key Issue 2*).

Strategy 3.3 – Promote integration of Broward County Schools (BCS) as a Key Partner

In most communities in the County, the engagement of BCS is sporadic and dependent upon individual school leadership. There were challenges with this study in terms of engaging “the right people” from BCS to participate as stakeholders. BCS provides many amenities in the County that are also publicly funded, and can help meet the need for additional amenities if they are included as partners and their separate mission (education) is acknowledged. In reality, the public does not care whether amenities are owned by schools or parks agencies; they just know that these amenities are funded by their tax dollars. Key components that can be shared, if managed well, include playgrounds, sports fields, gyms, aquatics facilities, and classroom space. The Division would do well to focus efforts on identifying the key agents within BCS and establishing a culture and protocols for strong and well-managed partnerships for facilities and programs.

Strategy 3.4 – Create and Implement a Division-Wide Partnership Policy

The Division already partners with hundreds of different service providers. Some are more formally identified, and many operate on a “handshake” basis. In order to fully organize and better manage this area for shared services and resources, the Division should create, adopt, utilize, and manage a formal Partnership Database and Policy. This type of policy can help staff understand which partnerships are deemed most beneficial for the Division based on the agency’s mission and goals, and it includes guiding questions to be explored and documented for any partnership. A **Sample Partnership Policy** is included in *Appendix B*.

D. Key Issue 4 – Address Safety and Perception of Safety Issues

In Broward County, the Needs Assessment indicates mixed results relative to the perception of safety from residents. In focus groups, many reported that a perception of unsafe conditions may preclude their usage of various facilities. There are many reports of “smash and grab” car break-ins at parking lots, and often the media does not help perception, as they tend to use public lands for news conferences when crimes occur, even if they occur on private property. **If people feel unsafe, they are less apt to use an area for physical activity.**

There is crime in Broward County. This study does not have the capacity to fully explore the issue, but does show that regardless of the real levels of crime, this topic area can and does affect participation and usage. The statistically-valid survey shows that sixty-eight percent (68%) rated safety while using parks as good or very good. The Division can focus on methods for action that help to increase that percentage, addressing ways to minimize opportunities for crime, along with media coverage that may exacerbate fears.

Regardless of whether or not perceptions are accurate, they have the power to affect individual actions and motivations, because, **“What is perceived as important is important.”**

Acknowledging that crime realistically happens, but not adopting a fear-based mechanism for dealing with it, can go very far in addressing concerns. The Division should continue to promptly identify and address any real crime, but should also train staff to not over-react and minimize gossip related to the event. Safety signage and language used in areas where there is crime should promote awareness and positive activation, not fear. It is critical to involve local public safety officers, increase visibility, and create a culture where public authority figures are seen as helping and positive role models.

Strategy 4.2 – In Areas Where Crime May be an Issue, Conduct a Safety Inventory

A “Safety Inventory” includes a formal review of the area, including addressing such areas as:

- Characteristics of the neighborhood and/or park
- Area population and needs
- Characteristics of the physical setting reflective of safety or lack of safety
- Identification of prevalent fears and causes
- Obstacles that need to be addressed in order to overcome perceptions and create a sense of safety again
- Indicators to define safety in the future
- Action Steps to reduce crime and improve the perception of safety