

**TOWN OF
APPLE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA**

AGENDA MATTER

Subject Item:

UPDATE ON THE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN; DISCUSSION OF IMPLEMENTATION SURVEY FINDINGS AND PLAN APPROACH

SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Town of Apple Valley is entering the final phase of a 4-phased process to update its Parks & Recreation Master Plan.



At their September 27th meeting, the Town Council discussed the status of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and directed Staff to work with the Master Plan consultant, MIG, Inc., to continue with the planned scope of work for the project. Based on that direction, a statistically-representative Implementation Survey was conducted to test resident support for potential new fees or funding mechanisms; solicit community feedback on funding priorities for capital projects and programs; and identify potential areas for decreasing services.

The Draft Implementation Survey Research Report (on file with the Town Clerk) highlights findings from the telephone survey of 400 randomly-selected registered voters, as conducted by True North Research. These findings are significant for several reasons, but perhaps most importantly because they indicate voters' willingness to pay for parks and recreation services and note the types of facilities and services voters are willing to support.

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Recommended Action:

- 1) Identify the preferred implementation approach for the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. A specific funding plan with a variety of funding mechanisms (Option A) is recommended.

Proposed by: Ralph Wright, Parks and Recreation Manager

Item Number: _____

T. M. Approval: _____

Budgeted Item Yes No N/A

Council Meeting Date: 01/11/12

Statement Continued –

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Implementation Survey Findings

Over the last few years, the Town of Apple Valley has been facing decreased revenue and funding resources, while addressing increasing needs for parks and recreation services as the community grows and strives to become the premier destination in the High Desert. The Implementation Survey and a prior Park & Recreation Questionnaire both confirmed that many residents use Town parks and programs and appreciate the benefits they offer. However, what residents value most is the Town's sense of community, heritage, and character. Parks, recreation programs and special events are valued because they contribute to this sense of community and place.

When asked to identify the things they like most about living in Apple Valley that they would like to be preserved in the future, residents were most apt to mention physical characteristics of Apple Valley—including its rural character (17%), open spaces and scenery (15%), and large lot sizes (15%). They also cited the quiet, peaceful character of the community (14%) and its small-town feel (12%) as being among the traits they would most like to preserve about Apple Valley in the future.

With regards to specific parks and recreation priorities, survey results note a high level of support for maintaining existing assets and providing programs and events that support youth development and a sense of community. While minor improvements such as providing restrooms and replacing/upgrading worn equipment also show strong levels of support, there appears to be only moderate public support for larger-scale projects at this time.

When asked to prioritize 15 projects and services for future funding, voters assigned the highest priority to continuing to adequately maintain and repair parks and recreation facilities (96% high or medium priority), followed by maintaining the number and variety of recreation programs and classes for youth (87%), adding or improving restrooms at existing parks where needed (85%), upgrading or replacing worn-out recreation and playground equipment (83%), and continuing to provide a variety of special community events such as movies in the park, concerts, and festivals (82%).

At the other end of the spectrum, voters assigned substantially lower priority ratings to constructing a new, centrally-located Community Recreation Center (45%), adding smaller parks to serve neighborhoods (51%), and creating additional large parks to serve the entire community (54%).

It is important to keep in mind that providing programs and events will require new facility development. However, findings suggest that smaller-scale, community-oriented projects, such as upgrades to existing parks, are more likely to be funded through a voter-approved measure. In addition, voters clearly want Town leaders to re-prioritize funding, even cutting some services to be able to focus on maintenance, asset stewardship and enhancement, and programs/events.

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When asked to identify services they would be most willing to cut in the absence of additional revenue, voters were most apt to support reducing the frequency of watering grass in order to cut the costs of water (68%), followed by closing the Aquatics Center in winter months (64%), reducing the amount of grass in parks to cut the costs of water (62%), and closing underused parks (62%).

The survey demonstrated that there is at least moderate support for increasing fees to support services—particularly facility-use fees, fees for non-residents, and to a lesser extent, fees for programs, classes, and sports leagues. Just short of a majority of residents also indicated support for increasing the sales tax by one-half or one-quarter percent (46-47% of respondents). This is relatively high, given the fact that respondents were not given any additional information about the potential measure or why it is needed. A public outreach and information campaign for parks and recreation typically would increase the number of voters who are willing to support some type of funding measure.

Voters were presented with a variety of mechanisms for funding priority parks and recreation projects and services. On the natural, several mechanisms garnered majority support, including increasing the fees paid by non-residents for using Apple Valley's facilities and programs (76%), establishing/increasing the fees for using the pool, golf course and rental facilities (58%), and increasing the fee on new commercial developments (51%).

Although not quite a majority, support for several tax and fee options did come close to this threshold, including increasing the sales tax by one-half (46%) and one-quarter (47%) percent, and increasing the fees for recreation programs, classes and sports leagues (48%).

Parks & Recreation Master Plan Approach

MIG is in the process of drafting the Parks & Recreation Master Plan. The Implementation Survey findings are critical in creating an implementation plan that provides directions for City leaders and staff on how to carry out plan recommendations. We see three different options for this implementation plan, and we would like direction from Council on how to proceed. These options are briefly summarized below:

- **Option A: Create implementation plan around preferred future funding package.** The survey suggested support for a variety of funding mechanisms, including moderate support for a general tax measure. MIG could identify the potential amount of revenue to be generated by a conservative funding package that includes increased fees, impact fees, a moderate level of General Fund support, and an increased sales tax at one-half or one-quarter percent. Base on the amount of funds anticipated from this package, MIG would identify priority projects and services to be funded with these anticipated revenues.
- **Option B: Create implementation plan based on no additional funds.** If the Town does not want to consider moving forward with a potential funding measure at this time and wants parks and recreation to function without any General Fund support, MIG can identify a future funding budget based on this scenario. The implementation plan would focus on the cuts and actions needed to continue to maintain existing assets and programs to whatever extent possible.

- **Option C: Create a messaging plan that describes 3 potential implementation scenarios.** If the Town is uncertain on how it wants to proceed, the implementation plan could present an overview of the differences between 3 different funding scenarios: 1) Decreased funding support (no General Fund reserves); 2) Minor increase or continued level of current funding support; and 3) Increased funding via a financing package with a variety of mechanisms including some type of taxing measure.

Approaches A and B are more focused on identifying a specific funding budget and the associated projects/services that could be funded with these monies. Approach C would note a less specific range of funding available for each scenario, along with the types of projects/services that could be funded (and/or cut) through each scenario. Whereas Approach C provides a “wake-up call” about the funding decisions that are needed (and the consequences of these decisions), it postpones providing a strong answer for the Parks and Recreation Department about how the Town should move forward.

The Implementation Survey findings suggest that the community may be ready to consider a conservative funding package—if this package includes the right elements, is structured to incorporate broader Town priorities, and is preceded by community outreach and education to increase awareness of parks and recreation issues and funding needs.

A Parks & Recreation Plan with an implementation plan based on **Option A will provide the best direction** for Town staff, and a specific roadmap or game plan on how to proceed in carrying out recommendations.