

# Neighborhood Parks Task Force

## - Final Report -

### Origins and Background

Council Member Peggy Henson requested the appointment of the Neighborhood Parks Task Force because of the issues occurring in some parks that have a diminished family friendly environment, while criminal and unwanted activities increase. When changes are made to a park, there is a need to evaluate its infrastructure and programming opportunities that promote greater neighborhood use. The park is left with a void when these elements are not considered. That void becomes an opening for unwelcome behavior to take place, which creates an unsafe perception of the park and therefore discourages activity.

Council Member Henson wants the community to feel comfortable and safe when they go to their park. Parks users should feel their neighborhood park is open and available with opportunities that serve our community in its entirety, whether that is the playground for children or space to exercise in the outdoors.

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The Neighborhood Parks Task Force was appointed on May 20, 2013 by Vice Mayor Linda Gorton. The task force held seven meetings between June 25, 2013 and February 5, 2014, meeting for about 10 hours total. Business was conducted by parliamentary procedure and all substantial decisions were made by motion and majority vote. Meetings were open to the general public, with public comment held at the end of each meeting.

The task force was comprised of:

- Council Member Peggy Henson, Chair
- Council Member Chris Ford
- Council Member George Myers
- Geoff Reed, General Services, Commissioner
- Laura Hatfield, Partners for Youth, Executive Director
- Sergeant Andrew Daugherty, Police Department
- Captain Ron Watson, Sheriff's Office
- Chris Cooperrider, Parks and Recreation, Deputy Director
- Tyler Scott, Legislative Aide to Vice Mayor Gorton
- Staff: Hilary Angelucci, Legislative Aide to CM Henson

Representatives from the Department of Law as well as additional individuals from the Division of Police and the Division of Parks and Recreation participated in many of the task force meetings.

### Goal

To develop strategies to make Lexington's neighborhood parks safe, while improving the quality of life and health for citizens and ensuring a plan is in place by the Division of Parks and Recreation when a park faces a decline in its family friendly environment, such as when an amenity or program is removed leaving the park with a void.

## Recommendations

### 1. Barring Policy

The Barring Policy allows for the temporary or permanent banning of an individual from Fayette County Parks and/or Parks and Recreation Programs, based on inappropriate or illegal behavior by individuals while participating in or while attending parks or Parks programs.

This policy will be a tool for the Divisions of Police and Parks and Recreation to further prevent unwanted activities from taking place in parks and will allow parks to maintain a safe and family friendly park environment.

The Chief Administrative Officer, Sally Hamilton, the Fayette Count Attorney, Larry Roberts and the Parks Advisory Board have all reviewed and are in the process of approving the final draft.

### 2. The Plan for Opportunity Parks

Definition of an Opportunity Park:

A park with a recognized void or need that has experienced criminal behavior or has a perception of being unsafe and therefore presents an opportunity to enhance more positive activity and strengthen the surrounding community.

The Plan for Opportunity Parks is to create a support system for parks that have the potential of becoming an Opportunity Park. The plan identifies three approaches; communication, infrastructure and usage. Focusing on these three areas simultaneously creates a more cohesive effort in enhancing a family friendly park environment throughout Lexington.

The creation of a communication team, led by each District Council Member, is suggested to support the Division of Parks and Recreation's effort in strengthening communication between the community, the Divisions of Parks and Recreation, Police, and Council Members. Formalized communication is crucial in recognizing early signs of an Opportunity Park and provides the community a voice to support the needs of our neighborhoods.

Facilities and amenities that are perceived negatively due to deterioration, display a lack of use or near the end of their expected life will be identified by the Division of Parks and Recreation, designating a park with such amenities as an Opportunity Park. This will assist Parks in prioritizing their annual budget requests for repairs, replacement, removal or repurposing their facilities and amenities.

The implementation of SAFE Parks will increase recreational opportunities throughout the community, which helps extinguish negative perceptions associated with underutilized parks that are more vulnerable to unwanted activities. Increased

activity in a park improves the community's perception and therefore creates a more family friendly park environment that neighborhoods feel safe and want to use.

### 3. SAFE Parks and Creation of (1) Full Time Position

SAFE Parks, or Strategies for Accessible & Family Engaged Parks, is a program under the Division of Parks and Recreation managed by a program supervisor to create more family friendly parks by increasing leisure service programming opportunities in neighborhood and community parks, with a particular focus on underutilized parks.

Creating more recreational opportunities for adults, children, and families to come enjoy their park helps extinguish negative perceptions associated with lightly used parks that are more vulnerable to unwanted activities. This new programming model provides a wider range of programs that complements the Division's current programming resources and growing interests in our community.

SAFE Parks targets three groups of stakeholders: community leaders, third party leisure service providers, and neighborhoods. The program supervisor leverages third party leisure service providers and connects them with the community leaders to provide additional programming opportunities in our neighborhoods.

The operation of SAFE Parks does require the creation of one full time position within the Division of Parks and Recreation. A central point of contact for stakeholders is essential to the success of SAFE Parks. The Program Supervisor's primary responsibilities are to identify and develop community partnerships, perform due diligence on third party leisure service providers, and market the programming opportunities to all three stakeholders driven by the needs of the neighborhood.

### 4. Pilot Program

The pilot of SAFE Parks began in January 2014 and will finish in May 2014. The pilot is testing three different scenarios in which SAFE Parks can be applied to better understand how this new programming model will operate. The three areas include:

- (1) A certified leisure service provider offering a program, Stroller Strides, that the Division of Parks and Recreation does not already offer in an area that supports the desire for this program, in this case Veterans Park.
- (2) Assist an Opportunity Park, Green Acres, by implementing neighborhood desired programming with the leadership of the neighborhood association to improve the perception of the park making a more family friendly environment.
- (3) Establish community interest and leadership in an Opportunity Park, Wolf Run, to learn what the surrounding neighborhood's interests are for the eventual creation of programming partnerships.