

Memorandum



PROJECT: Jefferson County Parks Master Plan
DATE: September 18, 2015
PREPARED
BY: Ann Toole (TRP)
To: Jennifer Myers (JCPRC) and Project Steering Committee
cc: Sean Garrigan (SGA), Matt Ward (S2), Logan Yeingst (SGA), Jessica Kartes (SGA)
SUBJECT: Recreation Opportunities Report

Jefferson County, West Virginia, is a recreation mecca. Rich with opportunities for people of all ages to enjoy the great outdoors and experience the culture and heritage of our country, the County is home to national, state, and local treasures. These include Harper’s Ferry National Park; the Appalachian Trail; important historical sites; the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers; state wildlife management areas; places to hunt, fish, hike, and ride bicycles and horses; a countywide parks and recreation system; charming towns with close-to-home parks; and educational institutions from kindergarten through university that serve as community recreation venues. In addition to public recreational opportunities, many private recreation businesses support participation in outdoor recreation, cultural and historic activities. In fact, tourism is the driving force behind the economy in Jefferson County. In 2015, Yahoo named Harper’s Ferry as the number one fall destination in the United States.

Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission’s Major Roles in Recreation

The Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission has three distinct roles in recreation in the 209 square mile county. These include providing facilities for self-directed recreation; facilitating recreation provided by other community-based organizations, and offering organized scheduled programs, activities and events. All three of these roles are essential to a high quality parks and recreation system.

Self-Directed Recreation

The majority of recreation opportunities experienced in Jefferson County are those in which people in the great outdoors. According to the West Virginia State Outdoor Recreation Plan, the top ten outdoor activities include the following:

1. Place Holder
2. Place Holder
3. Place Holder
4. Place Holder
5. Place Holder
6. Place Holder
7. Place Holder
8. Place Holder

As fully described in the parks and recreation facilities assessment of this plan, the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission offers a wide range of facilities for people to enjoy on their own including places to walk, run and get fit; playgrounds; ballfields; game courts; a dog park; picnic areas with pavilions; a camp ground; natural areas for de-stressing and experiencing nature; and an indoor recreation center with a fitness room, gym, walking area, and activity rooms. It is estimated that about 80 percent of recreational participation is self-directed. Making people aware of the extensive recreation opportunities throughout the county is an important aspect of Jefferson County’s parks and recreation commission.

Facilitating Recreation Provided by Community-Based Organizations

The Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission devotes a considerable amount of time to facilitating the recreational opportunities offered by other community-based organizations. The majority of the providers with whom the Commission works are sports leagues. There are ___ sports leagues in the County, many of which depend upon the use of Jefferson County’s athletic facilities and their amenities such as rest rooms, parking, and water fountains in addition to the facility scheduling and coordination provided by the Commission. Other organizations such as the Jefferson County Board of Education; Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; and families and social groups use county parks and recreation facilities for a wide range of activities such as sports, running races; special events, family reunions and weddings; and other celebrations. The Commission assisted Charlestown in providing swim lessons. While the Commission once directly provided the swim lessons, the arrangements changed regarding aquatics Programs. The Charlestown Recreation Board now provides the lessons while the Commission handles the administration of the summer program including registration. The Commission does not charge any fee for this service. The Commission schedules about _____ events a year offered by other groups. This includes providing customer service, scheduling coordination, and facility maintenance to provide an excellent experience by those using county facilities.

Organized Programs and Services

The Jefferson County Parks & Recreation Commission offers programs and services year round in aquatics, arts & crafts, athletics, camps, cheers and gymnastics, dance and fitness, day trips, martial arts, and special interest programs for learning a lifelong enrichment. Table 1 presents the inventory of programs by program category offered by the Jefferson County parks and Recreation Commission in Fiscal Year 2014-15. Table 1 shows that the Commission offered 219 different programs with a total of 715 sessions. Some of the programs were so popular that people were wait-listed due to lack of space. Aquatics had the highest number of unserved residents.

Table 1. Organized Program Inventory FY 2014-15				
Program	Number of Programs	Number of Participants	Number of Sessions Offered	Number on Waitlist
AQUATICS	11	161	20	50
ARTS & CRAFTS	42	661	94	18
ATHLETICS	31	628	100	19
CAMPS	45	1,222	123	32
CHEER / GYMNASTICS	17	626	91	3

DANCE / FITNESS	14	344	107	4
DAY TRIPS	3	63	3	4
MARTIAL ARTS	9	295	75	0
SPECIAL EVENTS	21	984	39	0
SPECIAL INTEREST	26	278	63	7
TOTALS	219	5262	715	137

Who Participates in the Commission’s Organized Programs?

The majority of the participants in the Commission’s organized programs are children age 12 and under and females, including adult women.

Where Are the Programs Located?

The majority of the organized programs are held in Sam Michael’s Park and the Community Center. This is the hub of county parks and recreation services and operation. The Commission management team has expressed concern about providing more services throughout the County and is exploring ways to do that.

How Are the Programs Supported?

The Commission charges fees for participation in the organized scheduled programs. The fees cover the direct expenses of instructor wages or fees. The Commission also generates about ____ sponsorships for programs annually.

How Are Programs Planned and Managed?

The Commission offers three program seasons that correspond with the school year: fall, winter/ spring and summer. The recreation staff develops the program guide for each season. The program guide serves as the basis for program planning for the impending season. There is no formal planning or evaluation process in place. The orientation of program planning is providing programs in the Sam Michael’s Park area of the County with an emphasis on children under 12 and females. No formal evaluation system is in place for recreation programs. Programs are advertised in the program guide, on the website and through social media.

What Is the Commission’s Staffing Capacity for Recreation Programs?

The Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission has limited staff for planning, organizing, implementing and evaluation organized, scheduled programs. The Director, Assistant Director, Marketing Coordinator, and even front desk personnel all pitch in with respect to programs and services. The Assistant Parks and Recreation Director has the most significant responsibility for organized programs. There is no dedicated recreation program coordinator on staff.

Other Recreation Providers

Jefferson County is fortunate in having major organizations, both public and commercial, that provide parks and recreation programs and services. They offer important opportunities for partnerships in the delivery of recreation services for people who live, work and visit here. These include the following:

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

The National Park Service and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy are headquartered in

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. Harpers Ferry and Bolivar are two tiny 19th century villages, side-by-side, which lie at the eastern-most point of West Virginia, bordered by the Potomac and Shenandoah Rivers. Harpers Ferry National Historical Park surrounds both towns, providing visitors with tours, museums, hiking and biking trails --- all within easy walking distance of the living history villages. Today, the majestic beauty of the two rivers and the cliffs surrounding Harpers Ferry draw visitors from all over the world. The Appalachian Trail goes right through the heart of town. Boutique shops offer a variety of beautiful items for our visitors and local eateries can satisfy the palate. Local outfitters can help with rafting, tubing or kayaking trips. As the eastern gateway to West Virginia, Harpers Ferry beckons visitors from near and far. The Appalachian Trail Conservancy Visitors' Center in Harper's Ferry is the psychological midpoint of the Appalachian Trail being approximately 1,000 mile north and 1,000 mile south from the trail's terminal points. Consequently, it is a major destination for hikers.

National Conservation Training Center. We have worked diligently to become a home for inspiring conservation excellence through learning and collaboration. We are committed to "conservation through learning"—building and sharing knowledge among Service professionals and our many partners who work to conserve and manage fish and wildlife resources. The National Conservation Training Center supports the mission of the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service in five critical ways:

1. **Home and Heritage** (<http://training.fws.gov/history>): NCTC serves as the physical and virtual "home" of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where the history and heritage of the Service are preserved and shared;
2. **Training for the Mission** (<http://training.fws.gov/courses>): NCTC provides exemplary training and professional development tailored to support Service employees and conservation partners in accomplishing the agency's mission;
3. **Youth in Conservation** (<http://training.fws.gov/topic/youth/>): NCTC helps the Service engage, educate, and employ the next generation of conservationists who reflect our diverse society, ensuring that our natural resource legacy is left in capable hands;
4. **Partnerships** (<http://training.fws.gov/programs/>): NCTC helps solve urgent conservation challenges, such as climate change, by bringing together diverse partners representing multiple points of view;
5. **Sustainability** (<http://training.fws.gov/campus/nctc-is-green.html>): NCTC is a national leader in the conservation community for its state-of-the art facility and green practices.

NCTC could potentially be a critical partner for advancing conservation efforts, parks, recreation and stewardship in Jefferson County. One of the NCTC's core objectives as shown in their strategic plan specifies:

Increase the number of partner organizations using the NCTC facility. Evaluate the partnerships analysis and implement a marketing plan to increase the number of new partners using the facility for training and special events, while maintaining priority for Service employees.

STATE ORGANIZATIONS

The Wildlife Management are in the southern part of Jefferson County also serves as the home to FLOC (For the Love of Children). The Outdoor Education Center has been giving many children the opportunity for hands on learning through a variety of activities. Expert staff runs daylong to weeklong programs and summer camps where people of all ages are free to learn and grow. FLOC's programs have grown to include youth development, professional and organizational development, adventure programming, facility rental, and retreats and trainings - all serving clients' needs.

Additionally, the Center has also been able to establish a highly successful After School Program, Leaders In Action, in two local Jefferson County Middle Schools. The Outdoor Education Center continues to grow and serve the local and regional schools, non-profits, businesses and municipalities.

JEFFERSON COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL ORGANIZATIONS

Related county and municipal recreation providers in Jefferson County include the following:

- **Jefferson County Board of Education.** The District offers facilities for community recreation and sports. The use of school facilities for public recreation falls under the purview of the principal of each school.

Jefferson County Schools has sponsored an Adult and Community Education Program for over 30 years. The program has grown to over 100 classes per session. A great variety of choices is offered for lifelong learning for all members of the community. The program also provides members of our community, who do not have children enrolled in the school system, a chance to use school facilities. The courses offered each session are based on community needs and interests. Individuals, as well as business and industry, use the occupational and educational training courses such as computer application classes. Special Interest classes are also offered in several areas, including arts and crafts and fitness. Tuition is based upon the instructor's fee, the cost of supplies or textbooks needed, and at times the cost of using facilities other than school buildings. Two full sessions and a summer mini-session are held each year, allowing Adult and Community Education to run year-round.

- **Jefferson County Public Libraries.** There are three public libraries in Jefferson County. They are the Southern Jefferson County Library located in Summit Point; the Shepherdstown Library, and the Harpers Ferry-Bolivar Library.
- **Jefferson County Senior Center and the JCCOA (Jefferson County Council On Aging) Jefferson Center.** The Anna Mae Reedy Senior Center is located in Ranson. Our mission guides us in supporting and providing services to Jefferson County Older Adults. JCCOA is here to help older adults remain independent and to stay in their homes as long as possible. We are a non-profit agency dedicated to community outreach and committed to enhancing the quality of life for older adults through social, health and wellness, education, nutrition, recreation and various other supporting programs.

The JCCOA Jefferson Center opened in 2010 to provide day habilitation, pre-vocational and supported employment services to adults with disabilities. The center is currently providing

services to 21 individuals with a ratio of 1 instructor to 1-6 consumers. The center is open Monday-Friday from 9am-3pm and provides a very active training schedule. Individuals are learning functional academics, health, safety, communication, social, and job readiness skills. Individuals are also learning how to access their community resources by going to the local library, participating in dances and other activities at the Senior Center and buying their lunches in the community. Community activities are also brought into the center such as line dancing instructors, service dog visits, and community volunteers who provide craft classes. The center has also started a Special Olympics group and has taken on contract work, such as bulk mailing for the Circuit Clerk, promotional brochures for the Bloomery Distillery Plantation, shredding for Jefferson County Parks and Recreation and water bottle design and labeling for Senator Herb Snyder.

- **Incorporated Towns.** Charles Town and Ranson offer municipal parks and recreation services. As small communities, their programming is limited. Bolivar and Shepherdstown offer close-to-home recreation facilities and attract many visitors traveling to the area for Heritage Tourism.
 - The **City of Charles Town** Parks & Recreation Commission (CTPR) was established in 2005 by the City of Charles Town Council. CTPR currently owns and operates three City parks, open daily from dawn to dusk, for public use and enjoyment. Aquatics programming is provided at the community pool in Jefferson Park with support from the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission.
 - In 2004, the **Ranson City** Council authorized the creation of the Parks and Recreation Commission to resolve a serious deficiency in parks and recreational opportunities within the City of Ranson. The city did not have any public parks prior to 2004. In the subsequent years, and with the help and hard work of many people, the City of Ranson now has multiple parks and many assets for citizens and visitors to enjoy.
 - The **Town of Bolivar** has two recreation facilities: Bolivar Children's Park, which is closed on Sundays and the Bolivar Community Center, which is available for rentals for activities and events.
 - **Shepherdstown.** Note: This is a placeholder for parks and recreation which will be inserted in the next draft.

PRIVATE, NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY

- **Jefferson County Convention & Visitors Bureau.** The Bureau's mission is to promote the economic development of the County through tourism. In fulfillment of their mission, Visitor Bureaus typically rely on extensive parks and recreation opportunities to draw tourists, especially visitors making overnight stays. In order to promote parks and recreation facilities for tourism, they must be of high quality design and construction and maintained in premier condition.
- **Shepherd University.** The University is an important source of public recreation support. The University offers the use of its facilities to the greatest extent possible for public recreation. The University is an important partner in aquatics by providing use of its indoor pool for the

competitive swim teams. However, the University is limited in its capacity due to university demands on its pool thus enabling the swim teams to use the pool for three hours weekly.

- **Museums.** The Jefferson County Museum is located in historic downtown Charles Town and shares a building with its partner organization, the Charles Town Library. Since its founding in 1965, the museum has been dedicated to fostering the understanding and love of history. The museum is committed to the acquisition, preservation, and exhibition of objects of historical value and relevance to the county and the region. The historic Shepherdstown Museum is located in the Entler Hotel. In 1983 the Historic Shepherdstown Museum was founded to preserve and display artifacts, furniture, and historic documents that might otherwise have been lost.
- **Sports Leagues.** There are about ____ sports leagues in Jefferson County. It is anticipated that leagues for rugby and lacrosse will be formed in the near future.

Note: This is a placeholder for information about the leagues. When the leagues provide information via a sports questionnaire they received as part of this planning project, it will be incorporated here.

- **Potomac Valley Audubon Society.** The Society offers a wide range of programs and activities that are aimed at promoting greater understanding and appreciation of the natural world for youth, adults, and families such as field trips to natural areas, summer camps, monthly lectures, school programs and many others.

COMMERCIAL RECREATION PROVIDERS IN JEFFERSON COUNTY

- **Outdoor Recreation Outfitters.** The tremendous outdoor recreation features of Jefferson County have stimulated economic development in the form of ____ businesses related to outdoor recreation, These include _____ outfitters. They offer white water rafting, zip-lining, hiking, camping, tours, bicycle and boat rentals etc.
- **River Riders Adventure Park.** The park offers white water rafting, tubing, Zip Line Canopy Tours, Aerial Adventure Parks, kayaking, canoeing, stand up paddle boards, mountain biking, and fishing adventures on the beautiful Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers (class I-III).
- **Bloomery Plantation Distillery.** The Distillery offers tours and programs. It is an important tourism venue.
- **Hollywood Casino and Thoroughbred Horse Racing Track.** The Casino is a major tourist attraction. Revenues from the Casino and the overnight stays in hotels that it generates provide support for Jefferson County operations including a portion of the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission budget.
- **Golf Courses.** Two golf courses are located in Shepherdstown: Cress Creek and Locust Hill. One golf course is located in Charles Town: Sleepy Hollow.

Strengths

Jefferson County, WV, is outdoor recreation heaven. There are very few counties blessed with the quality, variety and extent of outdoor recreation opportunities available here. People travel from all over the world to visit here and experience, the heritage, culture, recreation opportunities and scenic beauty of the area.

Established in _____, the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission offers programs year round. Given the organizational nature of Jefferson County with its four small towns, the Commission serves as the main provider of public parks and recreation countywide for the people who live, work and do business here. The Commission offers about 219 programs annually with a total of 715 sessions. About 5,300 participants signed up for the Commission's programs in Fiscal Year 2014 – 2015. Another 137 people were on the waiting lists for several programs, mainly in aquatics and camps. The programs are targeted largely to children under the age of 12 and adult women. Special events serve people of all ages including families. The Commission is fortunate in having an indoor community center complete with a full gym, activity rooms, a small fitness center and the extensive grounds and facilities of Sam Michael's Park in which the Community Center is located.

Although the focus of the Jefferson County parks and Recreation Commission appears to be on programs, the Commission also serves in the important roles of providing recreation opportunities for people to engage in on their own and facilitate the provision of recreation programs, activities and services provided by other community based organizations. The vast majority of recreational use in this county is through self-directed recreation such as walking, bicycling, enjoyment of nature, recreation in the great outdoors including water based recreation,

Challenges

The challenges listed below are intended to foster the evolution of the Commission into higher levels of program and service delivery as well as customer satisfaction. The Commission operates with a lean staff and limited resources. Just managing the day-to-day operation with its high demands precludes strategic medium and long-term planning. While the Commission is faced with a limited staff, it has also experienced expensive employee downtime due to health issues and part-time seasonal employees. Consequently, staff has pitched in to provide support for the department as a whole rather than on the primary function of the respective job. For example, front desk staff helps with pre-school programs and marketing helps with programming.

Information and Public Awareness

The major blocks to participation in programs and use of facilities appears the lack of information by the citizens, the type of facilities located in county parks, and the perceived location of parks being "too far away". While the Commission publishes a recreation guide several times a year, it is not mailed directly to households or businesses. The website and Facebook page serve as the primary source of promotion of programs and services. While the Commission pays an annual fee for newspaper advertisements, this type of advertising is passé and the newspaper actually needs the Commission for its human interest and news features to attract readership thus cancelling out the need to pay for paid advertising. The parks do not have a comprehensive signage system that would help to identify the parks as well as create a positive image for the countywide parks and recreation system. The Commission has been innovative in using videos on the website to convey information to website visitors.

Evaluation and Customer Satisfaction

No formalized system is in place for evaluation and determination of customer satisfaction. Developing standards and methods for evaluating programs and customer satisfaction and implementing them should be an important priority and will facilitate the Commission's movement into a higher level of service. The key is to consider evaluation and customer satisfaction as a system and a component of program planning and management. Various techniques can be used such as surveys, participant evaluations both during programs and upon completion, focus groups, interviews with participants as well as non-participants, and comment opportunities on the website. Obtaining testimonials during the evaluation process is key to successful advertising.

Program Planning and Life Cycle

Programs should be planned two seasons ahead. This is essential for advertising, introducing new programs and, most importantly, securing sponsorships. At present programs are planned following the creation of the program guide which does not allow sufficient time for advertising and no time for pursuing sponsorships in line with how businesses make their budget decisions on business functions such as sponsorships.

Program life cycle is not a formal part of program planning. The life cycle of programs would be a valuable component of programming for the Commission. By addressing where programs are in their life cycle, the Department would be able to adjust programs to give them new life, add new programs and terminate programs that have outlived community interest. For example, connecting children with nature is major nationwide goal but the Commission only provides very limited nature based programs. Some significant partners exist in the County that could join forces with the Commission to address this important program area. There appears to be major interest in special events. Perhaps abandoning certain low response or time-consuming program is to focus on special events would be a sound programming strategy. Consideration should also be given to securing a program coordinator with a specialty area of special events, which could also tie with revenue generation and sponsorships.

Staff Capacity

A major limitation in county programs and services is staff capacity. With a total of eight full-time employees who are responsible for every aspect of parks and recreation from building management to program implementation, there is no recreation coordinator. The Assistant Director serves as the primary program planning staff member while the Director also works in programming probably beyond the extent normally required of a director. Office and marketing staff also work on programs. A Director should not spend more than 20 percent of her/his time on programs unless it is a one or two person department in a small town.

Location

While the Commission offers recreation opportunities throughout Jefferson County via its parks and recreation facilities that are well distributed, about 80 percent of the programs are offered in Sam Michael's Park. The Commission would like to be able to offer programs in locations throughout the County.

A major limitation is the lack of access to Board of Education facilities. Permission to use school facilities is decentralized with permission to use facilities granted or not granted to varying degrees by school

principals. Getting more access to the schools could help to create community hubs that would reduce the need for additional recreation facilities.

Policies

The Commission has historically operated without policies governing the development and use of sports facilities. Consequently, significant donations of time and money by community-based organizations into county facilities have come with certain expectations regarding ownership and use. Some of these informal agreements regarding expectation of use of fields based upon the group's investment go back decades and have not taken into consideration the fact that county parks belong to the public estate and must serve the overall good of the community not only the interest of a limited organization, That said, partnerships and public private investment are crucial as government cannot do all that citizens would like to do. Consequently, managing partnerships, joint capital improvement projects and public-private financing is crucial.

Opportunities

The Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission needs to recognize that there are three main roles for the Commission in providing parks and recreation opportunities: providing facilities and support for people to engage in self-directed recreation; facilitating recreation provided by others; and planning, offering and evaluating organized scheduled recreation programs. The Commission is not all about organized programs; providing for facility planning and development is a major responsibility that must be under the purview of parks and recreation professionals. With the wide range of community based and commercial organizations in Jefferson County with a recreation related focus, figuring out how to harness these resources to work together toward the common goals of providing more opportunities for people who live, work and visit here is a worthy goal. The following list offers ideas for consideration regarding programs and services:

- **Continue to focus on children and families** until more staff resources are available.
- **Focus on identifying and meeting the needs of customers of the Commission as the driver in program planning rather than focusing on what programs to offer.** By identifying the needs of the customers first, the programs and support services will fall logically into place.
- **Focus reporting on outcomes and benefits rather than input and features of programs.** That is rather than reporting on numbers of programs alone, monitor and track the outcomes and benefits of the Commissions work with the citizens.
- **Consider securing a new staff position that would focus on special events and revenue development and partnerships.**
- **Decide on what the core programs are that the Commission should be offering.** This could include health & fitness, nature and stewardship, youth development, and special events or some other variation that the Commission feels makes sense. These core areas should be the heart of recreation opportunities in Jefferson County.
- **Develop and implement a program management plan with an annual work program.** Consider taking a "re-building year" for programming. That means deciding which programs could be

eliminated in order to focus on developing a program management plan; maintaining the same schedule as the previous year with no new additions and perhaps some reductions in programs; and strive to create a program management plan in which the Commission is planning two seasons ahead. This would need to be phased in by taking the re-building year, then planning most of the programs one season ahead and then in the next year or two, two seasons ahead. Defining an annual work program will help with time management, accountability, revenue generation, sponsorships, and partnerships. Consider forming a technical support committee of related recreation providers in order to develop a program management plan that takes in to consideration other providers. This will help to reduce duplication of services; provide services where there may be a gap right now; reduce costs; and potentially generate more revenues. Obtaining the wisdom and advice from national caliber organizations is something that most parks and recreation departments can only dream of.

- **Develop and implement a formal evaluation system.** Use the information from the evaluations to enhance quality and plan programs in the public interest. Include securing testimonials in the evaluations in order to promote the Commission.
- **Develop and implement a strategic promotional program.** The program guides are developed with major time and effort but are not mailed. While we are moving in to the social media age, the hard copies of the program guides continue to be valuable to parks and recreation departments for programming as well as image enhancement and increasing public awareness.
- **Review the organizational structure and staffing in order to ensure adequate staffing in terms of functions and numbers.**
- **Position programs and services to align with tourism goals.** This is especially important for special events.
- **Recognize that the Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Commission cannot be all things to all people.** Limitations of staff and budget require the Commission to focus on programs and services that matter most to the public and help to sustain the long-term financial viability of public parks and recreation in Jefferson County.