

CHAPTER SIX - OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT

6.1 PROCESS

The Operational Assessment includes an analysis of the internal business practices of the Fair Oaks Recreation and Park District (“District”). This assessment is of vital importance as an agency’s ability to implement a Master Plan is heavily dependent upon the internal business processes, culture, and leadership qualities of the organization. In addition, the ability of the District staff to learn, grow, and develop competencies, aligned with strategy, is significantly important to the Plan’s success. The intent of the Operational Assessment is to provide feedback and recommendations about District’s operations and to provide suggestions about continuously improving and strengthening internal operations. Having good internal controls and practices in place provide the District with an opportunity to efficiently and effectively deploy excellent external customer service.

Recognizing the importance of staff involvement in a planning process, the Assessment significantly relies on thoughts and perspectives from staff members. The operational review included six staff focus group/interview meetings. In addition to the employee focus groups, existing Departmental documents were reviewed as well, including the existing performance appraisal form, personnel policy manual, the community input summary from the September public meetings, the previous District Master Plan, safety inspection forms and safety committee information, organizational structure, a review of the Human Resource Audit conducted in 2007, and the previous Operational Assessment completed in 2008.

All of the staff members were involved in responding to a series of questions addressing internal operations. Topic areas included:

- Direction setting
- Staffing
- Work schedules and work loads
- Organizational structure
- Departmental performance
- Technology
- Resources to do the job
- Financial systems
- Ensuring quality of operations
- Sustainability practices
- Human Resource requirements

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The description of the District can best be characterized as an organization that is in transition, moving from the leadership of a long tenured administrator to the leadership of a new administrator who is interested in driving accountability and developing more sophistication and efficiencies throughout operations. Historically, many processes have been sorely neglected, and as a result, remain far behind contemporary practices. For example, the budget process has been completed manually until recently, many policies are outdated, and the use of standards has not been deployed throughout the District. The brand and image needs a makeover as well, as there are elements of outdated practices as evidenced by the website, the logo, and a lack of uniformity of signage.

The District's culture is in a state of flux. This change is a difficult endeavor for leadership to manage successfully, as some employees have familiarity and comfort with the way the District used to be, while others embrace innovation and the desire to use more contemporary practices. The result is a clash of culture, in which competing forces exist between what was and what can be. The consensus of the employees' perspective was that the District has improved during the last couple of years. In addition, during the community input process, many participants expressed great appreciation to staffs' commitment to providing good services, which speaks well to the leadership of the District. However, while the District has improved, there are still many other opportunities for improvement, similar to what all organizations experience.

Specific attention to the overall work culture, the deployment of mission, vision and values, and continuously improving processes are all important foundations to the implementation of the Master Plan. The implementation of the Plan should begin with attention given towards further refining and clarifying the work culture and mission. Absent the development of this framework, the constancy of effort and discipline required for the implementation of planning will be difficult to achieve.

The starting point for this Assessment begins with a review of the previous Operational Assessment that was completed in early 2008. Areas of review for the initial assessment included:

- Strategic Planning
- Management/Leadership
- Performance Evaluations
- Training
- Organization
- Clarifying Duties
- Communication
- Documentation
- Compliance with the Law

- Human Resources
- Physical Work Environment
- Park Maintenance Standards and Best Practices
- Facility Needs
- Staffing Needs

While improvements too many of these have occurred, some of the issues still remain. Improvement has occurred in management/leadership, performance evaluations (a new form is currently being developed), communication, documentation, law compliance, and human resources. Others, such as physical work environment, strategic planning, training, and clarifying duties still remain. These are detailed further within this Operational Assessment.

6.3 INDIVIDUAL AREAS OF FOCUS

6.3.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING

The District continues to have a need for institutionalizing a strategic planning process as there currently is no strategic direction. The employees are hopeful the current Master Plan process will result in the District's ability to become more strategic in its approaches. Institutionalizing a strategic planning process includes the need for prioritizing strategic recommendations and annually tracking progress and measurement of results. Along with this, the District needs to have its strategies aligned with the needs of its residents, which suggests continuous efforts in system wide customer satisfaction measurement and needs assessments.

The Administrator and the direct reports to this position should be involved in operationalizing strategy. In addition, the Board needs to be involved in overseeing strategy. Strategic direction should be the primary focus of the Board. Some of the elements of successful deployment of strategy include the development of short, mid, and long term objectives, the assignment of responsibility to specific employees, updating the staff and board on the progress and completion of strategies, planning for human resource needs, and tying the strategy process to the budget process. After having successful experience with the development of organizational strategy, the next step is to cascade the strategy to individual departments.

6.3.2 MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP

This is another area that has improved, yet is still in need of further development. There is no prevailing leadership style in the District. A suggestion is to develop leadership guidelines that describe the desired leadership model. Currently, there is significant variation in the accountability exerted by various leaders. This inconsistency results in frustration for employees. There is a leadership vacuum at the supervisor level of the District. Specifically, these positions should be dedicated more towards the development of their staff, developing accountability, improving processes and operations, and reflecting the needs of the greater good of the District rather than focusing on day to day operations.

The supervisor positions need to transform more to a higher level of leadership. Typically in recreation and park agencies, these are superintendent positions.

In addition, attention should be given to identifying the core competencies of leadership and developing leaders according to these competencies. Leadership competencies can include items such as managing budgets, development of strategy, supervision of staff, coaching and mentoring, working effectively through and with others, and communication skills.

Currently, the District is working on improving the level of accountability from all employees. This is of critical importance in moving toward a best-in-class agency.

During the 2008 Operational Assessment, much of the analysis included comments about role clarification and relationship issues between the Administrator and Assistant Administrator. This has greatly improved. However, some struggles still exist, with role definition. Clarifying leadership roles and responsibilities and ensuring longevity of leadership contracts would be useful for the long-term growth and sustainability of the District.

An important element of leadership is the deployment of mission. While a mission statement exists, it needs to be reinforced through the hiring and orientation process, the performance appraisal process, and reward and recognition process. The mission includes elements such as strengthening community, supporting economic development, strengthening safety and security, promoting health and wellness, human development and others. Some of the pieces of this mission are evidenced throughout the District, while others are not. The mission statement should be re-visited to ensure its applicability to today's times. Also, good mission and vision deployment includes visual management, or showing visual evidence of the mission throughout the District.

6.3.3 STAFFING

In discussions with employees, most felt the staffing levels are adequate. However, almost all of the employees mentioned a need for more maintenance positions. This may or may not be an accurate assessment. Development of data using standards and performance outcomes to support this notion is necessary. Some of the work performed by the parks staff could be done by more extensive use of volunteers to provide special event assistance. Some of the job responsibilities are in a state of flux as a result of position vacancies. There are examples of very disparate job functions being completed by individual employees. Within recreation, there is a need to align the structure of programs with the results of the household survey. It was good that Recreation added health and wellness to one of the coordinator positions, as health and wellness programs generally are the most needed program area within communities around the United States. Recreation staff and other employees mentioned the need for part-time facility monitors for rentals.

In addition, recreation staff mentioned their desire to continue to add interns for administrative program support. Interns could be used year round to help with distribution of program promotional materials, assistance with special events, program evaluation process, and general support. Interns could also be used for marketing and promotional support. Another area of support could be provided by an executive assistant, in support of the Administrator and Assistant Administrator positions. This could help with improved

follow-through, allowing the two above referenced positions to concentrate more on strategic issues, and to provide overall office support for other areas of the District.

6.3.4 TECHNOLOGY

Overall, technology seems to be in relatively good shape. Currently, a technology replacement schedule is in the works. Most of the hardware and software are new. The recreation staff mentioned their desire to have Photoshop or other Adobe programs. The District will soon send out an RFP for Website improvements. Online registration works well through active.net.

The area missing in technology is the ability to harness information for decision making. Good technology operations provide information for decision making. For example, human resources could use an information system to track personnel data, including salary history and performance reviews. Knowledge of overall performance results would be helpful, and information systems could help in providing useable data for decision making.

Currently, there is no work order system in place. This process can be automated and provide better tracking and cost allocation. It can also assist in helping District determine the appropriate staffing level for parks.

6.3.5 EMPLOYEE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

From a resource perspective, the District demonstrates a continuous commitment towards training for employees. This is greatly appreciated by the employees. In order to yield the best return on investment for training dollars, the District needs to align training dollars with the development of competencies and skill areas for employees. Most of the training dollars are geared toward conferences. These benefit individual employees greatly, while providing valuable networking opportunities. However, there generally is no relationship between skill development and conference learning.

A greater portion of the training budget should go towards training in areas such as computer skills, playground inspections, use of active.net registration systems, vehicle and equipment use, and leadership development. Many low cost opportunities are available in the form of webinars and online learning. In addition, the overall training opportunities should be evaluated on a regular basis to develop training improvements. It would be helpful to initiate individual career development inventories, aligning the career needs of the employees with the needs of the District.

Additionally, as a result of the smaller size of the District, it would be helpful to cross-train job responsibilities as much as possible to ensure coverage of duties while a staff member is out of the office. The front desk is challenged with coverage as a result of the part-time position being a 20 hour a week position and cannot always provide coverage for the full-time staff person when help is needed. When employees leave the District a huge void exists. Cross training may help to alleviate this situation when it occurs.

6.3.6 HUMAN RESOURCES

The human resource area has improved as a result of having a dedicated staff person overseeing HR functions. A few examples of this include greater attention to safety, the

significant revision to the personnel policy manual, work in progress to improve the performance appraisal form, and general employee relations. Some staff mentioned their interest in having a mid- year review in addition to the usual annual performance review. In addition, job descriptions are currently in the process of being updated, which will assist with role clarification and identification.

Human Resources would like to continue improving and expanding a commitment to safety through additional training, inspections, and an overall organizational commitment to safety within the District's work culture. The District now has a safety committee that includes employees from all areas of the organization. The committee is working on improving the inspection process. The committee also does the important job of analyzing employee and patron accidents, determines the causes of the accidents, and recommends improvements to safety processes.

An important area mentioned in the previous Operational Assessment was the office space configuration and lack of sufficient space for employees. This still remains as an issue as employees continue to work in cramped spaces. In addition, there are no areas within the administrative building that foster good communication and dialogue or allow privacy for employees doing performance reviews or meetings.

6.3.7 COMMUNICATION

It has been PROS' experience that invariably, the relationship between parks and recreation is problematic. However, in the case of District, this does not exist as the relationship has been characterized as being extremely good. Parks staff provides a high level of support for athletics and special event activities. The District deserves high praise for exemplifying good relationships. This exists not only between parks and recreation but among other areas of the District as well. Employees believe cooperation and teamwork is generally very good. This is important as many organizations experience significant process waste by the inability to work well with one another.

Communication is helped by quarterly employee meetings with the Administrator. In addition, the Administrator has weekly meetings with supervisors. This is repeated within Administration and Recreation. The only comment for improvement included a couple of staff mentioning that while communication is generally good, they are not always informed of important information they need to know. They feel there is an environment of them being told just what they need to know and nothing more.

6.3.8 OPERATIONS/PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

There were many comments related to District operations, processes, and policies. Most employees commented about a lack of policies, as well as having very outdated policies. Many examples exist in the accounting and payroll area. There is a need to improve payroll and accounting policies and procedures and develop separation of duties to ensure good checks and balances of staff having cash handling, payroll, and accounts receivables and payables. The invoice process goes through many steps, is touched by many levels of inspection, and can be streamlined. Many accounting and payroll policies are currently being developed or improved.

Within recreation, the staff developed a recreation program manual that outlines recreation programming processes. This is good practice and should be repeated in other areas of the District.

Special events are a significant part of the District's service delivery system. There is no cost benefit analysis done, as true costs for the events including park maintenance labor are not identified. All events should have an expense and revenue detail and include all labor costs associated with the event. There may be opportunity to have volunteer support to help with event labor costs. An analysis should be completed every couple of years to ensure that events match community needs. Many times events are offered and continued to be offered solely because they have been held for years. There may be an opportunity to decrease the total number of events and concentrating on those events that produce the greatest monetary and nonmonetary benefit to the District. In addition to developing cost of service analysis for special events, this analysis should also be completed for core programs. This should include developing a pricing policy and guiding the recreation staff in using a more sophisticated approach to pricing.

As mentioned previously, the use of data for decision making is needed in order for employees to make good decisions for the District. In addition, a performance measurement system should be developed in order for the staff and Board members to know how the organization is performing. After an organizational measurement system is put into place, measures could also be developed for recreation, parks, and administration. A good rule of thumb is to have no more than 12-20 organizational measures and fewer than 10 departmental measures for each department.

The District should use recreation, design, and maintenance standards in its operations. Park maintenance should have a certified playground inspector on staff. Until the time someone is certified, the District should contract with an individual to perform inspections, as well as general routine park inspections. On a less frequent basis, an ADA assessment should be completed.

Another area reviewed included sustainability efforts. The District has just begun developing more of a commitment to green practices. A sustainability audit is attached as an appendix to the report to provide an overall framework for the development of sustainable practices. The development of practices should begin with a Board adopted policy. Then, complete the sustainability audit and develop an action plan for improvement areas.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- **Develop an ongoing strategic planning process** to implement the new Master Plan. This includes assigning responsibilities, developing timeframes, reviewing strategic objectives on an annual basis to determine any changes in the process or in priorities
- **Develop a performance measurement system** to determine organizational performance results and share these results with board and staff on a quarterly basis, using technology for data mining

- **Develop a list of guidelines** that outlines the desired leadership competencies of the District that result in greater accountability from all leaders
- **Deploy the mission of the District** that includes visual management (showing visual evidence of the mission statement) and reinforce in hiring, orientation, and performance appraisal process
- **Continue role clarification between the Administrator and Assistant Administrator positions**
- **Further review the staffing level of park maintenance employees** to ensure adequate numbers of parks staff
- **Consider adding an executive assistant position** to assist with overall administrative support
- **Develop cross training opportunities**, where appropriate
- **Provide more strategic focus** from the supervisor positions
- **Develop cost of services** for key programs, facilities, and special events
- **Develop a pricing plan** for the District
- **Develop core competencies for District positions** and align training dollars around the development of these competencies
- **Develop an evaluation process** for training and development
- **Develop better office space** for employees
- **Perform a policy review** and identify policies that need updated, and identify policies that do not exist and need to be developed. In addition, develop a documented process to continuously review existing policies
- **Develop standards** for recreation programming, park maintenance, and design, including signage
- **Ensure a staff person becomes a certified playground inspector** and improve overall inspection processes of playgrounds, facilities, and parks, including maintaining a regular process for inspections and documentation of results
- **Develop an organizational culture that supports sustainability efforts**, develop a sustainability policy, and complete a sustainability audit