

# A Master Plan For Clearwater

*"A blueprint for the future"*

This is an exciting time for the City of Clearwater's Parks & Recreation Department. The North Greenwood Recreation and Aquatic Complex is currently under construction with a completion date in mid-November and Ross Norton Recreation Center is slated to be replaced with a new \$2.5 million center in 2003. Planning for these projects began several years ago when residents supported the funding through Penny for Pinellas.

Now Parks & Recreation is taking the planning process

to the next level. For more than two years the department has been working to create a Master Plan that will provide a blue print for the future; a road map that will include the vision, goals, specific recommendations, and strategies for implementation.

"The Master Plan will provide a philosophy of how to proceed over the next 20 years," Department Director Kevin Dunbar told the City Commission at the May 13, 2002 Work Session. "This process revealed that the citizens of Clearwater are very happy with Parks & Recreation and the quality of life being provided; however, the future cannot be ignored."

Challenges facing the department range from overcrowding due to non-Clearwater residents using the

city's facilities to the fact that many of our facilities are between 20 and 40 years old. The Master Plan will help the department maintain our current level of service while meeting the challenges ahead.

## Your Voice is Heard

The Master Plan effort was managed by a steering committee whose members included representatives from business, governmental and non-profit organizations; the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board; Parks & Recreation management and staff; and personnel from other city departments. All of these groups needed to be part of the plan since they were direct stakeholders in the outcome. Without them the plan was doomed for failure or at best, mediocre results.



In addition to input from the Steering Committee, extensive public input was solicited from residents who attended five public workshops. Focus groups of seniors, teens and sports co-sponsored groups were organized, and written surveys were distributed at recreation centers, libraries and other city buildings. Internally, information was gathered through three staff workshops, interviews with the City Manager and Commissioners, and written surveys. All the information gathered was evaluated and then an independent firm conducted a telephone survey to verify the results.

"The Master Plan is a living, working document that is doable and can be updated throughout time to reflect the vision of future generations of Clearwater residents and leadership," Dunbar said.

## Strategies

The plan outlines four stages of implementation. Priority Actions are defined as goals for fiscal years 2003 through 2008, Medium Term Actions for 2009 through 2014, Long Term Actions for 2015 through 2022 and continuous policies and actions throughout the lifetime of the plan.



Residents enjoy many festivals and concerts at Coachman Park

## "The Master Plan is a living, working document ..."

-Kevin Dunbar, Director  
Parks and Recreation Department

**Priority Actions** included the redesign of Coachman Park tying in Bayfront Park, Memorial Park, and Harborview while incorporating Drew and Cleveland Streets and constructing a new amphitheater. With construction of the new library and bridge, the new park would further enhance the downtown area.

Addressing the shortage of soccer fields is another priority. "Based on state and national standards there are currently enough soccer fields for residents," said Assistant Director Art Kader, "However, there are not enough facilities to become the provider for north county. The City has a good reputation and great facilities, so residents from county enclaves, sister cities and residents from north county come



Teams from all northern Pinellas use Clearwater's soccer fields

to take advantage of these facilities and programs."

Completing the system of recreation trails and bikeways is one more priority action. The pursuit of areas for walking, running, biking and roller blading ranked highest in outdoor recreation activities in the state of



Clearwater East-West Trail

Florida, as well as the nation. The local survey and input from public meetings also supported this fact. Completion of the Clearwater East-West Trail, Pinellas Trail East, Druid Road Trail, Landmark Drive Trail and building a system of trails to connect recreation centers to neighborhoods will satisfy that need.

One of the most important items in this plan at all levels was funding to maintain the current infrastructure. Lighting, park amenities, buildings, fencing, parking lots and signage require



*Maintenance is an important function for the Parks and Recreation Department*

constant attention to ensure their usefulness. Maintaining current and future capital infrastructure is an on-going priority for Parks & Recreation.

**Medium Term Actions** identified in the Master Plan include construction of a new senior activity center, development of vacant parkland and green space, and construction of an Aquatic Center in the Countryside area.

**The Long Term Actions** focus mainly on the maintenance and replacement of capital infrastructure facilities. The Long Term Actions will provide for keeping parks current and attractive.

Throughout the life of the plan there is an emphasis on partnerships with schools, churches, non-profits and other governmental agencies to facilitate a total delivery system. There is a continuous action plan for building sidewalks and maintaining current recreation facilities. Parks & Recreation will work closely with Public Works to

design and construct passive areas at storm water projects to maximize the potential for recreation. Other priorities outlined in the plan are to expand programming at the Long Center and continue using the Martin Luther King facility as a community center.

**RECURRING NEED IDENTIFIED BY WORKSHOP ATTENDEES:**

***Stronger promotion of parks and recreation opportunities.***

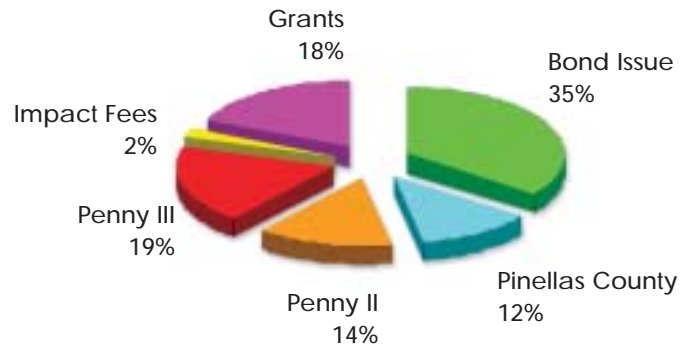
The department needs to better inform the public of the great things we have to offer through:

- continued publication of the FITS program guide,
- announcement of FITS publication and distribution points,
- expanded coverage of activities and programs by means of
  - local and regional newspapers
  - C-VIEW 15
  - city's internet site ([www.clearwater-fl.com](http://www.clearwater-fl.com))
  - schools, Chambers of commerce, civic organizations, Welcome Centers.

## Implementation

This ambitious plan isn't cost free. More than 70 initiatives were identified with cost projections totaling more than \$88 million. Projected funding sources are:

Bond Issue	\$ 31,178,000
Pinellas County	\$ 9,800,000
Penny II	\$ 12,700,000
Penny III	\$ 16,938,000
Impact Fees	\$ 1,725,000
Grants	\$ 16,533,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$88,874,000</b>



Seventy percent of those surveyed indicated that they would support a bond initiative. The public was receptive to bonds if and only if the projects were well defined and follow up was guaranteed. Quality of life is important to residents as well as non-residents of the city of Clearwater and they are willing to pay for top-flight facilities. This was found to be true when user fees increased for non-residents from \$10 to \$70 dollars, without a decrease in participation.

This plan calls for Pinellas County participation. Currently over 50% of youth sports participants are not residents of Clearwater. The county will be asked to support the plan by providing capital, as well as operating funds, to allow continued and increased used for all county residents.



Projects currently outlined as Penny II projects will be revisited to ensure conformity with the plan, and the possibility of a Phase III of Penny for Pinellas would fund a portion of new projects.

Impact fees paid by new developments are a small portion of the projected revenue but it is important in that it makes new residents pay their fair share for the quality of life already enjoyed by current residents. Grant monies are the most desirable funding source, with the state and federal government paying from 50% - 75% of project costs.

## Operating Expenses

All of these great facilities and projects require continuing maintenance. Once all of the projects are completed the annual operating costs are projected to be \$3.9 million per year. Revenues are projected to be \$2.5 million per year, leaving a deficit of \$1.4 million. Everyone is working hard to develop a strategy to generate the needed additional revenue. The primary source of operating revenue will come from user fees and Pinellas County.

## Ready, Set, Go

Individual projects will be brought back to the City Commission in the annual budget cycle. Most will be funded through bond issues, Penny III and county participation. One of the responsibilities of the Parks & Recreation department will be to educate and inform the public about the projects so that they can make the best decision possible.

The past has been glorious, the future is unlimited and the present is the key that unlocks it all.

