

Chapter 4: Organization

I. Governance

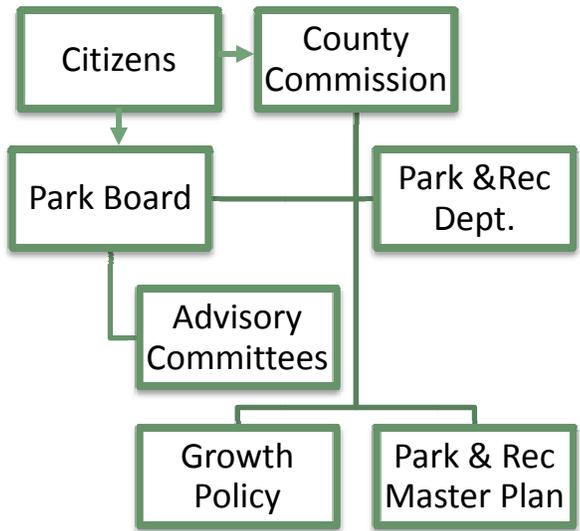
The Flathead County Parks Board oversees park and recreations services for the county. The board is comprised of five members appointed by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners to serve three year terms. The Board meets monthly and has responsibility for administration of the Parks and Recreation Department.

In July 1997, the County Commission merged the Parks and Recreation Department with the Weed Department. The two boards were merged and the Parks & Recreation Director currently acts as the noxious Weed Coordinator as well as the Facilities Manager in charge of grounds maintenance for the county.

The Parks Board advises staff and the County Commission on community needs and provides input related to parks and recreation issues. The Board is also responsible for long-range park planning. Park Boards are authorized under Section 7-16-2301 of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Under these provisions, the Park Board has authority to employ the department director and make rules for the use of parks and impose penalties for the violation of rules.

The Park Board does not have by-laws but must follow State law for open meetings, record keeping and decision making. By-laws could be adopted to establish more formal procedures for appointing committees, voting, meeting format and defining roles and responsibilities. (See appendix for sample by-laws.)

Figure 1: Organization Chart



II. Staffing

The Parks Department is comprised of two divisions: Parks and Facilities Maintenance Division and the Recreation Division. The Parks and Recreation Department employs nine people comprised of both full-time and seasonal employees. There are three building maintenance workers. The park maintenance staff consists of one full-time employee plus one seasonal employee. There is also a full-time recreation supervisor. In FY 2008 and FY2009, the budget for park maintenance and recreation has been approximately \$300,000 dollars while the budget for the recreation division has been approximately \$130,000.

Compared to other Park and Recreation programs in Montana and in the intermountain west, the Flathead Parks and Rec program has a significantly lower per capita expenditure for its parks program. Additionally, the staffing levels to maintain a comparable amount of park land ranges from one-half to one-tenth of the staffing levels of other park programs. Flathead County currently owns more than 70 parks and/or park sites. Approximately 32 parks are fully or partially developed.

Poor maintenance was cited by 31% of survey respondents as a reason for limiting their use of county parks. As the population in the County increases, there will be more use of parks resulting in more wear on facilities that will add to upkeep costs. In addition to lowering the quality of experience at county parks, deferred maintenance often requires more expensive repairs at a later date and can create liability issues.

More than half of residents said maintaining existing parks and recreation should be a top priority of the County ranking only behind acquiring land for future parks. In order to keep up with demand on existing parks and maintain new parks that are required to meet the needs of a growing population, it will be necessary to increase park maintenance staffing levels.

Table 1: Comparison of Staffing to Other Park Programs

	Flathead County	Bozeman	Missoula	Silverbow County	Average (CO, ID, WA)
Acres Developed Parks Maintained	383	425	500	276	1466
Maintenance Staff (FTE)	2	6	26	3	33.3
Staff per Developed Acres	1:191	1:20	1:19	1:92	1:37
Maintenance Budget Per Capita	\$5.61	\$33.84	\$21.03	\$19.62	\$48.68

Source: Information compiled by Applied Communications from budgets and park plans

III. Advisory Committees

In 2006, the Park Board established Advisory Committee's in Lakeside and Somers to provide input on park and recreation issues in their respective communities. The Advisory Committee's are comprised of five voting members with two alternates. The members are appointed by the Park Board. Since the first two committees were established, the Park Board has created three more Advisory Committees. The Committees and their primary accomplishments are listed below.

- **Big Fork** – The Committee has completed an inventory of the county parks in the area and has made recommendations on improvements for each park.
- **Lakeside** – The Committee has prepared plans to develop Ben Williams Park and has conducted fundraising for playground equipment. The Committee is working with the community on a proposed waterfront park in Lakefront that would be acquired through a donation of land.
- **West Glacier** – The Committee was established to assist with the planning for developing Belton-Stage Park. There have been suggestions that the committee's function be expanded to include park issues in the entire canyon area from Hungry Horse to Essex.
- **Herron-Foys** – The Committee focuses on operations at Herron Park and Foys Lake as well as related projects such as the Foys to Blacktail Trail. The Committee works with the equestrian groups that use Herron Park on maintaining the various facilities.
- **Paths Committee** – The Committee was established to develop and implement a recreational trails plan. The plan is anticipated to be completed in the Fall of 2009.
- **Proposed Committees** - It is the goal of the Board to establish these types of committees throughout the county. During the public process there was support for additional committees to cover the Columbia Falls, Kila and West Valley areas. An Advisory Committee targeted to recreational programs and leagues is being created.

The roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Committees include:

1. Meet regularly to discuss local park issues.
2. Facilitate public input
3. Assess local park needs
4. Make recommendations to Park Board on improvements and programs for parks (See budgeting procedures on following page.)
5. Help identify funding opportunities for improvements
6. Have a representative attend Park Board meetings to report on Committee activities.

Procedure for Evaluating Advisory Group Project Requests

The Park Board and staff develop an annual budget for the county park system, After the budget is adopted, it is difficult to allocate additional funding for new projects that have not been included in the budget. In order to accommodate requests from the Advisory Committee, it is recommended that the following budget process be adopted.

1. Advisory Committee conducts assessment of Park system in its service area and compiles list of proposed improvements.
2. Advisory Committee prioritizes needs.
3. Advisory Committee works with staff to develop cost estimates for improvements that rank as top priorities.
4. At the annual budget meeting with the Park Board, the Advisory Committee submits budget request to Park Board on a form to be provided by the Park Board.
5. The Park Board ranks the budget requests according to evaluation criteria and determines which projects to include in the next fiscal year budget.

Ranking Criteria

- This is a high priority project for the Advisory Group
- This project will improve safety and reduce liability
- This project will reduce overcrowding
- This project will fulfill needs for service as identified in the Level of Service analysis
- This project has a low cost to implement
- This project will leverage other funding sources such as matching funds, grants, in-kind services or donations to make the project more cost effective
- This project can be a successful pilot or model for other park projects
- This project has low maintenance costs or will lower current maintenance costs
- There is a high degree of public support for this project
- This project provides multiple benefits regarding recreation, conservation, social and economic assets
- The area of the proposed project has been underrepresented in past expenditures of park funds
- The project will advance other goals and objectives of the Park Master Plan

IV. Partnerships

The Flathead County Growth Policy notes the importance of establishing partnerships with other government agencies, civic organizations, non-profit groups and private businesses to accomplish the goals of the plans. Partnerships can create cost efficiencies through pooling resources, sharing costs, and joint programming. Multiple partners can generate a broader base of community support for projects. Grant makers are more likely to fund projects that are leveraging community resources from several partners.

There are a variety of partnership models that are available to local governments. Flathead County already has several examples of successful partnerships that are providing parks and recreation services. Types of partnerships are described below.

- **Intergovernmental Agreements** – Agreements with other government agencies may range from leases, maintenance agreements, joint purchase programs to joint development of park and recreation facilities. The Park and Recreation Department has arrangements with a number of school districts in the county to use gym space. Formalizing the arrangements through a lease or intergovernmental agreement may help avoid potential use conflicts. The lease with the Conrad Cemetery Association to use land for the softball complex is another example of an intergovernmental arrangement. These leases must be renegotiated periodically and securing long-term commitments is an issue.
- **Public –Private Partnerships** – These often include partnerships with other government agencies or private organizations to develop new facilities. Financing arrangements, maintenance responsibilities, and other roles and responsibilities are set forth in a contract or memorandum of agreement. Development agreements are sometimes used to construct new facilities as part of a large subdivision. The Kidsport Complex on the north side of Kalispell is an example of a sports complex that was developed through a partnership between Kalispell, Department of Natural Resources and Conversation and a non-profit sports organizations.
- **Foundations** - In some jurisdictions, citizens have formed non-profit foundations to raise fund for park projects. Foundations that are formed as a 501(c)(3) organization can accept donations, apply for certain grants, and conduct fundraising activities. The Foy's to Blacktail Trails and Rails to Trails groups are examples of non-profits that are raising funds for a specific projects in the County.
- **Intergovernmental Coordination** – Within the County all three municipalities, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Montana Dept. of Natural Resources, Flathead National Forest, and Glacier National Parks all provide recreation facilities and programs. Montana Department of Transportation administers the CTEP program. Coordinating with the agencies to identify common issues and goals can suggest ways to work together to achieve these goals. As part of the planning process it was suggested that the agencies have regular joint meetings to facilitate such efforts.

Keys to a Successful Partnership

1. A Commitment from Executive Leadership:

A successful partnership can result only if there is commitment from leadership of both the government and private sector organization to work together. Well-informed leaders play a critical role in developing effective partnerships.

2. A Statutory Foundation for Partnering:

There should be a statutory foundation for the implementation of public and private partnerships.

3. Direct Public Sector Involvement:

Once a partnership has been established, the public-sector must remain actively involved in the project. On-going monitoring of the performance of the partnership is important in assuring its success.

4. A Well-Crafted Plan:

A carefully developed plan will substantially increase the probability of success of the partnership. This plan should clearly describe the responsibilities of both the public and private partners and have provisions for dispute resolution.

5. Effective Communication with Stakeholders:

More people will be affected by a partnership than just the public officials and the private sector partner. It is important to communicate with and involve all stakeholders. These may include affected employees, the portions of the public receiving the service, the press, and relevant interest groups. Successful implementation should positively affect the work environment and relationships with sponsoring organizations, employees and other stakeholders.

6. The Right Opportunity:

Not every situation is ripe for a true partnership. Partnerships should be carefully evaluated and both parties should set reasonable expectations.

7. The Right Partner:

The "lowest bid" is not always the best choice for selecting a partner. The partner's experience, long-term viability, and willingness to work with local governments are important factors in identifying the right partner.

8. Well-Defined Management Processes:

It is critically important that both public and private sector parties agree on key management processes early in the formation of the relationship. These include management responsibilities, quality assurance, reporting requirements, and financial arrangements.

V. Volunteers

During the community meetings and focus group sessions, citizens suggested that volunteers could assist in certain park operations and should be used as tool in maximizing limited resources. Benefits of using volunteers include contribution of in-kind services to perform tasks not within the county budget and boosting the number and types of various programs that can be offered. Additionally volunteerism engages citizens, help build supports for programs and can foster leadership skills in young adults. Adult volunteers often bring specialized skills to a project.

The recreation programs rely heavily on volunteer coaches and officials. Montana Conservation Corp provides trail construction and maintenance services. Often service clubs, businesses, or private individuals will offer to help construct playgrounds or maintain park facilities. Various challenges, however, limit the ability of the Parks and Recreation Department to utilize volunteer resources. The following table outlines typical practices to address these challenges.

Challenge	Recommended Best Practice
Staff time to manage volunteers	<p>Monitor the number of volunteers and the amount of volunteer hours as compared to staff time to manage volunteer programs as a measure of effectiveness of program.</p> <p>Identify appropriate activities for volunteers in advance so they can be used most effectively</p>
Liability and insurance issues if volunteer gets injured	<p>Civic group or workplace of volunteers provides proof of insurance for their participants</p> <p>Coverage provided through non-profit park foundation</p> <p>Cover through County insurance</p>
Quality control of volunteer projects	<p>Written policies and procedures</p> <p>Background checks for volunteers in youth programs</p> <p>Screening and training for volunteers</p>
Recruiting volunteers on an on-going basis	<p>Volunteer Recognition</p> <p>Assign staff person as volunteer coordinator and train accordingly</p>

Resources:

- National and Community Service Agency, www.nationalservice.org
- UPS Foundation, www.community.ups.com