

The Department of Parks & Recreation hosted a public dialogue Wednesday, November 5, 2014 at the Gahanna Senior Center. The meeting subject was Gahanna's Pools, Parks, and the future of Gahanna. 104 people attended the meeting and participated in a facilitated dialogue by the citizen members of the Gahanna Parks & Recreation Board. The group was asked a series of questions at each table. The following is the question followed by the main summary points discussed at each table.

Question 1 – Most visited parks.

We have 42 park sites throughout the community. What is the park you visit the most in Gahanna? Why? What do parks mean to you and your family?

Academy Park

Bryn Mawr Park

Creekside

- Movies
- 5K's
- Herbal trail

Friendship Park

- Open space
- Creek
- Playground
- Camp Friendship
- Shelters
- Story trail

Gahanna Woods

Hannah Park

- Trails
- Walking distance
- Lots of activities
- Walking trails

Headley Park

- Sports
- Soccer

McCorkle Park

- Recreations

Pizzurro Park

- Dog park
 - Great asset
- Trails

Pools

- Hunters Ridge
 - Pool
 - Park

Price Road Park (Southwest Flood Plain)

Rathburn Woods

- Walk to

Shull Park

- Good area for dog and less used than some parks

Woodside Green Park

- Fishing
- Neighborhood

Comments

- Parks kept up nice
- Adult & kid friendly
- Parks kept up nice
- Bike Trails – big Walnut
- Reserve
- Favorite park is the closest
- All parks
- Airing out the kids
- None on West side
- Bikes
- Running
- Trails

Question 2 - Connectivity and New Park Development

Our current proposed sustainable financial plan does include a significant amount of money for land acquisition and construction for off street trails that will complete the Big Walnut Trail and other such connections.

The Department has been working on a project to purchase land adjacent to the Big Walnut Creek from Rt. 62 to Price Rd (Just North of 270) for the purpose of developing a future park. The park is intended to resolve neighborhood traffic issues, provide natural areas and trails, provide athletic fields for girls softball, a partnership with St. Mathews school, and multipurpose fields to serve youth football, soccer, or lacrosse. The project would include a partnership with the VFW and St. Mathews. The park would serve the Gahanna community in the Goshen Elementary area.

In your group, where do you see the highest need for improvements related to park access and connectivity and trails?

Do you think the City of Gahanna should use tax dollars to build the project as soon as possible or given the scarcity of funds, do you think they should seek donations to complete the project knowing starting the project may be delayed for 5-10 years?

Connectivity/trails

- Fine
- Low priority

Connection to Creekside

Woodside to Creekside trail

Harrison Pond to Creekside

Important to connect to more than just parks

Rathburn –

- connectivity – not a big concern
- improvement of existing parks – Rathburn important

Connectivity not a high priority

Multi use park – high priority

Existing parks more input

Bike trail

Not a big concern

- Concentrate on what have not new build

Connection to Creekside

Pool to dog park connectivity is there a demand?

Trails off road

Can't bike to park

- Hamilton & Clark State Rd
- Out to Hannah
- Clarks State biking

Reasoning for VFW space and does that take money from the community pool

Creekside Parking

Improvement of existing parks

- Very important
- If developed fix connection, access, traffic
- the redo of the Rt62/Price Rd

Funding

- Tax money
- Wait to fundraise
- Fund raise money
- Seek private funding first
- Look for grants
- Grants – ok

Project funding

- Too many trails
- Don't fund park if can't maintain it
- Concern for cost to maintain

Veterans Memorial Park

If developed fix connection, access, traffic

Maintain what we have first

Big Walnut

Multi use park – high priority

Existing parks – more input

Events to attract
Very emotional
Rental facilities like Hannah on west side
If anything – pool to dog park connectivity – is there a demand?
Build vs. maintenance

- Where is maintenance funding?
- Not a one-time cost

Question 3 - Parks & Recreation In Gahanna

The current financial plan for the Department calls for more passive recreation opportunities like parks and trails. Recreation special events and activities are being reduced and eliminated.

In your group, how should the Department allocate its funding between recreation and parks?

Unclear question – difficult to answer
Balance
Highly attended/community valued
Private business
Need a good mix of activities and passive
Activities parks would add more funding for major events
Like all the activities in parks
Passive cost with active self supporting
Active pay – pay more for pools
If you use your should pay and non-resident rates higher
Money toward active
Want both – charge more
Do not eliminate special events
No activities park attendance will suffer
Activities make communities more live able
Could events be less expensive?
Active – maintenance
Pocket parks – why
Passive needs to be balanced
Active – cost
Continue to analyze level of maintenance
Disagree with natural areas, should be mowed?
Gardening groups to maintain
Do both
Like to see both events and trails

Question 4 - Different Models (Funding)

Some Cities in Ohio have dedicated funding sources to provide for Parks and Recreation services and facilities. Cities like Westerville and Centerville Ohio have dedicated income tax for Parks & Recreation services that are voted on by the citizens. For example, Westerville has a ¼% income tax dedicated to Parks & Recreation operations and improvements.

Given that Gahanna voters said no to a general tax increase, should the City consider a dedicated funding mechanism for Parks or and other aspect of the City?

Some communities in Ohio are served by another form of government. For example, the City of New Albany and the City of Canton have Recreation Districts. A Recreation District is a separate form of government under the State of Ohio that is focused on providing services to tax payers. It is typically funded through property tax voted and approved by voters in the jurisdiction. For example, New Albany provides parks and recreation services to the New Albany, Plain Township, and New Albany schools district.

In your groups, discuss this model and do you believe Gahanna should investigate this option?

Dedicated funding

Survey – why recent tax rejected - complicated

Very complicated

Not enough messaging

Very unclear

Make it P & R specific

Dedicated a % specifically for parks

District sounds complicated, harder to get agreement

66% to high for unspecific funding

Designated funds for P & R purposes

Pools are scapegoat

Direction of City – compare to Westerville

Allows folks to decide whether to pay for it

Cost vs. get

Parks District

- explore
- messaging
- marketing
- planning

Concerns about direction and perception of community when lose amenities

Cautions of pricing folks out of community

Best of both

Tax for Parks

Tax increase dedicated to Parks

Would support either one with money - direct money for parks

Levy might pass if district

A good link to property value increase

Too many taxes

Dedicated funding to Parks
Recreation district
Could see as end run on raising taxes

Question 5 - Privatization

There are areas where Gahanna has eliminated service in hopes that a private entity would provide the service to the community. For example, in 2002 the City of Gahanna provided 2.2 million dollars in land and infrastructure improvements to the YMCA in a partnership that enabled the YMCA to build a facility in Gahanna to serve our residents. If a private entity would request to lease the park land area planned to surround the Gahanna Swimming Pool and propose to take over the pool. However, the fields and facilities would be privately operated and fee for service.

In your group, discuss your feelings on this type of partnership?

Would it be attractive to a private entity?
City should maintain control of own property
Sky rocket pricing
Leasing could interrupt city use (residents)
Very complicated question
Revenue?
Ok to partner with private company
Gahanna pool is for the common good, profit not an issue. The point is the good of the community.
What if private fails? Hand back to city in worse shape
Have a guarantee there is a pool
Privatization = loss of control
Better privatization than loss of pool
Pools infrastructure/access to park who pays for it
Opposed to privatization based on the YMCA
Ok with privatization for the pool
Ok with contracting out services; want what's best for the community – do not want someone to take control of the pool, buy it
Ok with what we did this year, do not want a private entity to control gate fees, membership, hours, etc.
Price controls with private entities is it community building or building profits
Not without parameters
Is there possibility of incentivizing needs/benefits
Steering business models

Question 6 - Swimming Pools Alternatives

The City of Gahanna has developed a long term plan for financial sustainability. Currently, the pool operations and capital improvements are not included in the plan. The Department provided 4 alternatives for consideration, three of which we consider to have viable options. At this time, there has not been a proposal for D:

- A. Continue to operate the pool as was in 2013 with outside contractors. 2013 season resulted in a \$100,000 projected net loss to the Department and the City. This option would involve some type of funding needed for capital improvements.
- B. Mothball the sites until funding can be found to improve the sites.
- C. Permanently close the sites and turn the property into a passive park.
- D. Consider leasing the pools to a private entity, if possible, with no expense to the City.

In your group, talk about the options and what direction you believe the city should take. Do you have another option to suggest?

Add \$25 - \$30 maintenance fee for each membership

Increase early bird rate to help with the \$100,000

Add visitor passes for \$15 fee for early bird to help with \$100K

Like Hunter's Ridge availability for people to come during swim team

Continue as is - \$100k loss, no capital improvements

- Feel is best of limited options
- Feels is best – but close Hunters Ridge

Where has capital gone?

Was there any capital during planning?

Not making money should not be the focus

Create Option E

- Close front pool
- Hunters Ridge poll will increase

Create Option F

- Keep thinking of more options
- Dedicated tax

Create other option

- Close one pool, keep back pool open

Create other Option

- Build a new facility
- Scale back Hunters Ridge to water park

None palatable

- Seek out other funding options
 - State grants
- Other budget pull from other lines – Development
- Donations and partnerships
- Companies
- On-going
- Donor support
- Special events

Okay with operating at a loss
Vertical effect – where do kids go if not the pool?
Balance message
Offset costs – delinquent kids
Winterization still costs – net charge
What costs to one pool?
Reference parks levy to support pools
Sell advertising – along fence
Mothball one facility and only use Hunter's Ridge
Charge more money
Charge higher non-resident
Keep open the falls
Fee structure lower for low income residents
Not options B, C, or D

Question 7 – What else?

Is there something that didn't get covered that you wanted to speak to tonight? In your groups share with your table what you haven't had a chance to discuss or something that you want to emphasize from the evenings discussions.

Music in the Park

- Why stop
- Bring back
- Good for kids
- Why competitive with Friday After Five
- Separate nights to avoid conflict – alternate nights

Parks & Rec does a great job

Connectivity of bike trails

Collaboration with schools

- Murals
- Shop classes
- Mandatory school

Diversity

- Seniors
- Dog park
- Pools
- Great job

Rent out Senior Center more

- Utilize
- Meeting space

Pool

- Dog days
- 50 meter pool
- How does Foxboro do
- If the pools close, citizens will go to New Albany and Westerville and spend their money there.

- Once closed would we re-open
- Bonding – is this a possibility
- Heater at Hunters Ridge
 - Fix
 - Solar

Creekside

- Slow down capital
- Family restaurant

Balancing – utilize all options

Marketing benefits of these things

Revisit the City fleet

- Too many vehicles
- Especially – need Dodge Durango
- Yes we do

Funding for Freedom Festival

Camp Friendship – keep it strong

Think big picture about the community

- Activities
- Pools, etc

Get to know neighbors

Triathlon

There were six children in attendance. They were asked the following questions:

1. What park do you use the most?

Gahanna Swimming Pool

- On swim & dive team
- With school – year end
- Slide

Hunter’s Ridge

- On swim team – 1st time

2. Any where we should build we aren’t?

Make pools more noticeable

- Signs
- Advertising
- Directions
- Let people know about them
- Pool is hidden

3. What do you think about how we spend money or do differently with the money?

- | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| Fundraisers | Bake sales |
| Color runs | Sell cookies |
| Raffles | Walk a thon |
| More flashy | Big fundraiser |
| Pod parties | Make better stuff so it lasts longer |
| Swim a thon | Triathlon |

Comments:

We just want our pools – or candy

Don't spend money cutting down trees

Don't make stuff so fancy – keep to basics

A few people were unable to attend Wednesday night's meeting. They emailed or called and left messages for our department.

Comments received from people unable to attend the meeting:

1. My only comment is that I don't understand why two of the options have to be to mothball both pools. It does not seem logical to mothball Hunters Ridge. It only requires an \$18,000 upgrade to remain open. Closing the main pool I understand for cost for upgrades required. But Hunters Ridge has been run by the city before as a single pool, and it would be better to have 1 pool option instead of none.
2. I favor Plan A to keep both public pools open for the following reasons:
 - a. Survival swimming lessons: learning to swim should be a rite of passage for every child in Gahanna. Swimming skills are critical to save one's self and others.
 - b. National Security: knowing how to swim is critical to rank and leadership advancement in the United States navy and Coast Guard. Gahanna youth joining the Armed Forces will be a step ahead knowing how to swim. Even as a young Army Reserve Officer Corps cadet, I was required to enter water over my head and knowing how to swim gave me the confidence to complete the tasks at hand.
 - c. Civil Cohesion: our society is becoming increasingly alienated as our youth are hooked on internet access and electronic games in our air conditioned homes. Our youth increasingly go to different schools, many times separated by religion and economic resources available to parents. The public pools have been the social glue where youth of different economic and social status meet and learn to cope with others of diverse backgrounds.
3. Here are my thoughts on fundraising because what we hear from many is; they would love to participate with those.
 - a. Golf scramble - Benefits two places at once
 - i. Raffle
 - ii. Silent auction
 - b. Community garage sale
 - c. Is there any thought of having local Gahanna residents offered the option to help with the pool fixes?
 - i. Maybe donate time or donate materials.
 - ii. I feel like this is a community that would have many educated and well trained people that could take all or at least part of this task on for a volunteer basis.
 - d. I guess I do wonder about the 14k loss a year for the pools. I know that would have to be resolved as well.
4. Please bring Music In the Park back to Friendship Park. My child has a physical disability and Friendship Park was much more accessible and family friendly than Creekside.