



Legislation Text

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An Overview of the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Community Center Operations

Presenter:

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Summary:

During the past two years, the community center operations overseen by the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department have received a great deal of attention due to the Request For Proposal (RFP) activity surrounding the Westside Community Center. With the successful conclusion of a community engagement process, a new operational model for the Westside Center is being put in place effective September 1, 2022. With the operation of the Westside Center under a new format, it seemed appropriate at this time to provide an overview of all four community centers currently operated by the Parks Department.

Background:

The Parks Department has four community centers located in areas impacted by marginalized socioeconomic conditions with each center striving to effectively develop creative solutions to improve the quality of life in their respective neighborhoods. Unique partnerships between neighborhood associations, private businesses, non-profit agencies, churches, schools, and military installations allow the centers to create an unparalleled environment for learning, recreation, and personal growth for youth, families, the elderly, and those with disabilities. While each community center has its own personality and unique space, all the centers are considered places that strengthen their respective neighborhoods as well as the larger community. The following provides additional information illustrating the characteristics of each site.

When the privately built and operated Deerfield Hills Community Center began to falter in the 1970's, the City of Colorado Springs acquired the building and began development of the City's first true community center. Situated in the heart of the Deerfield Hills neighborhood, the Center is in the southeast section of Colorado Springs serving Harrison School District 2 including Turman, Giberson and Soaring Eagles Elementary Schools as well as Panorama and Carmel Middle Schools. Built in 1970 and located adjacent to Deerfield Hills Park, the approximately 6,000 square foot facility offers rental space, a mobile food pantry, a community garden, and a variety of programs for all ages.

A unique element for the Deerfield Center is its extremely successful free spray ground which opened in 2007 after it was determined the pool adjacent to the building was no longer functional. During the typical summer season, the spray ground receives between 20,000 and 30,000 visits.

Hillside Community Center, built in 1989, is one of the Parks Department's newer facilities and is the only location originally designed and built by the City to be a community center. Situated in the

Hillside neighborhood, the Center is located just east of the downtown core serving School District 11 including Adams and Columbia Elementary Schools as well as North Middle School and Pikes Peak Prep School. Known for its diverse programming, the 13,700 square foot center also offers a full-size gym, commercial kitchen, mobile food pantry, community gardens and multiple spaces available for rent.

With the addition of the El Pomar Bike Park in Fountain Park in 2018, the Hillside Center provides bike-oriented programs in partnership with Kids on Bikes to take advantage of this fantastic feature located next door.

When a summer youth recreation program began to outgrow its headquarters in a fourplex in a southwest Stratton Meadows neighborhood in the early 1980s, space was made available in a nearby shopping center. Thus, was born the Meadows Park Community Center. The City eventually acquired all the shopping center space and opened a completely renovated community center in 1987. Situated in the Stratton Meadows neighborhood, the Center is in south Colorado Springs by the Broadmoor Towne Center and the South Nevada Business District serving Stratton Meadows and the Van Guard School as well as Harrison High School. The approximately 11,400 square foot linear building includes a half-sized gym, food pantry, and community gardens as well as programs and services for all ages.

Along with services provided onsite, Meadows Park conducts programming across the community including overseeing multiple youth summer camps at park sites including Venezia and Pinon Valley Parks. Meadows Park also coordinates the Blue Moon Trail Run series, now in its 11th year, at Pinon Valley and Ute Valley Parks. The series offers runs for both youth and adults with proceeds benefitting the community centers. And finally, Meadows Park is celebrating its 40th anniversary with programs and special events planned throughout the year.

The Westside Community Center initially began through the Pikes Peak Community Action Agency's (PPCAA) establishment of the Billie Spielman Community Center in the 1980's. Its mission was to provide emergency services, financial assistance and counseling, a food pantry, case management, and more for families in need. In 1993, the Agency partnered with West Middle School and the City to establish the West Intergenerational Center to include the Spielman Center. In June 2009, the Center relocated to the former Buena Vista Elementary School site. In 2010, in response to an RFP process initiated due to a national economic downturn, Woodmen Valley Chapel's Center for Strategic Ministry LLC took over operation of the three-building site. With the end of the latest contractual agreement, the Westside Center is being operated once again by the Parks Department.

The Westside Center's total footprint contains over 32,000 square feet of space, with the three buildings ranging in age between 50 and 100 years old. Due to the unique layout of the site, covering an entire city block, the operational plan moving forward will encompass traditional community center programs and services in the most ADA-accessible building as well as striving for an entrepreneurial focus for the other two buildings. This focus may include options for leases or long-term rentals as well as opportunities for incubator, retail, or maker spaces.

The City's community centers are currently staffed with two to four full-time employees and a number of seasonal employees. Seasonal staffing varies based on the programs being offered at the time. For instance, during the summer, the centers offer day camps onsite or at other city park locations. During the school year, before and after school options are offered. In the case of Deerfield Hills and

Meadows Park, a contractual partnership with Harrison School District 2 is allowing free before and after school care at six elementary school locations with staffing and oversight being provided by the two centers.

The Centers are supported by the General Fund, with estimated annual budgets for 2023 averaging between \$375,000 and \$600,000. Based on the significant amount of staffing associated with center programs and services, at least 75% of each center's annual budget is associated with salary and benefit costs.

The City supports center operations through its General Costs and Services which include utilities, payroll, legal, human resources, facility maintenance, grant writing, IT services, public communications, fleet maintenance, construction management, and volunteer recruitment.

As the services and programs provided by the centers are typically considered to contribute to a greater social good and produce a benefit to the community as well as directly impact low income/underserved neighborhoods and populations, fees are set to recover between 10% and 20% of direct costs. Other opportunities for funding offsets include grants, partnerships, and rental income.

Programming drives staffing demands. Each site adjusts programs and services to meet the needs and desires of its service area. A typical annual turnstile count for a center is between 40,000 and 60,000 visits. Programming hours average between 2,500 and 3,000 annually. Examples of programs include the following:

- Early childhood programs incorporating social skills development, art, literature and movement activities
- Elementary student programs including after school, full day and holiday programs that provide a safe and supervised setting when school is not in session
- Teen programs providing a safe place to learn and recreate when school is not in session
- Recreation programs for individuals with disabilities through the City's therapeutic recreation program
- Senior programs and senior meals
- Emergency services including food and clothing for families in need
- Recreational drop-in programs such as pickleball, table tennis and yoga
- Neighborhood events including outdoor movies, trunk or treats, and school backpack giveaways
- City-wide celebrations and events
- Rentals and neighborhood usage

Centers are able to greatly expand what they can provide and do through partnerships with both for-profit and non-profit organizations. These partnerships can take many forms, from providing services at a location to donating supplies and funds for development and staffing of a program. Examples of the groups the centers currently partner with include:

American Trail Running Association
Care and Share Food Bank
Catamount Institute
Colorado College
Concrete Couch

Council of Neighbors and Organizations (COCO)
El Paso County Public Health
First Tee of the Pikes Peak Region
First United Methodist Church
Food to Power
Girls on the Run
Green Box Arts
Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) - Generation Wild
Harrison School District 2
Hillside Advisory Team
Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region
Josh & John's Ice Cream
Kids on Bikes
Kona Ice
Peak Vista
Pikes Peak Library District
RISE Southeast
School District 11
Silver Key
Solid Rock CDC
UCCS-Beth-El School of Nursing
UCCS-Theatreworks
US Olympic & Paralympic Museum
Westside Cares
YMCA of the Pikes Peak Region

Looking at the evolution of our community centers, each has a unique history shaped through interactions with its respective neighborhood. These differences not only create the personality of each center but also serve to inform how each center meets the specific needs and desires of their user groups. From critical needs such as food insecurity and afterschool care to recreational offerings such as Silver Sneakers and pickleball, meeting the needs of our existing participants and attracting new community members is vital to successfully navigating the path forward for the City's community centers. Through collaboration and innovation, all four community centers are able to excel in the months and years ahead.

Previous Council Action:

N/A

Financial Implications:

N/A

City Council Appointed Board/Commission/Committee Recommendation:

N/A

Stakeholder Process:

N/A

Alternatives:

N/A

Proposed Motion:

N/A

N/A