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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH KIRKLAND PARKS AND RECREATION USERS

Conducted September 26, 2007

Prepared for

**Kirkland Parks and Community Services
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by

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FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION WITH KIRKLAND PARKS AND RECREATION USERS

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The City of Kirkland is working with Triad Associates of Kirkland on the 2007 Update of the Comprehensive Park and Open Space Plan. The update includes a current inventory of parks and facilities and an assessment of possible options for future park service and facilities improvements.

As part of this update process, the City of Kirkland contracted with Carolyn Browne Tamler of Carolyn Browne Associates to conduct a focus group discussion with city residents to learn more about their usage of park facilities and services and their attitudes about future improvements.

The discussion was held in the Rose Hill Room at Kirkland City Hall on September 26, 2007, from 7:30 to 9:00 PM. GMA Research of Bellevue recruited the participants. People were screened to assure they had visited a Kirkland Park or participated in a Parks and Recreation activity within the previous year. They were also chosen to represent a range of ages, Kirkland communities. There was also an intention to have the group equally divided between male and female heads of households.

Facilitation of the discussion and preparation of this report were done by Carolyn Browne Tamler.

PARTICIPANTS

The discussion participants included four men and six women from several different communities in Kirkland. Several have lived in the City for 25 years or more, while three have been residents for less than 10 years. Their ages range from under 35 to 55 and over.

Name	Community	Years in Kirkland	Occupation	Age Range
Rita	Houghton	38	Retired	55+
Candice (Candy)	Totem Lake	35	Evergreen Hospital	55+
LeAnne	Highlands	8	Teacher	35 - 54
Tim	Market	31	Attorney	35 - 54
Ed	Totem Lake	25	Interpreter	55+
Shane	Houghton	5	Teacher	35 - 54
Mike	Juanita	15	Apparel sales	35 - 54
Debbie	Totem Lake	11	Nurse	Under 35
Shirley	Juanita	40	Retired	55+
Susannah	Norkirk	8	Homemaker	35 - 54

DISCUSSION THEMES

The participants were uniformly enthusiastic about Kirkland Parks and Recreation. All visit parks, and most have participated in park classes and activities. They especially praised the variety of parks and park activities for all ages and the excellent maintenance.

Three ideas dominated the discussion:

- Provide more advertising/education about the parks and the activities provided by Kirkland Parks and Recreation;
- Improve the web site to make it easier to find and to use; and
- Plan for the increasing and older population in Kirkland--providing more security at the parks, having more access for older people, and developing new facilities and services that respond to the needs of the larger population.

There is concern about the increasing growth of the area and the increasing traffic as a result. They understand that it may be necessary for Kirkland to seek more money from taxpayers to pay for improvements to the parks to meet the increasing demands.

Many note that the population of Kirkland is aging and that the parks need to provide more facilities for older citizens. Several mentioned the need for more wheel chair access for parks.

The new facilities most desired include (in order of highest priority):

- Year-round covered pool
- New boat launch
- Dog park
- Centrally located indoor gym
- Lighted tennis courts
- More accessible activities for older people
- Improvements to the Downtown Park
- Improvement to and additional restrooms
- Larger skating park
- More covered activity areas
- Wheel chair access in more parks

New services desired include (in order of highest priority):

- Better advertising and education about the parks and park facilities
- Increased security in the parks
- Improved web site
- More Saturday classes
- System-wide pass, good for any Kirkland recreation classes
- Improved lighting in the parks
- Babysitting service during classes
- Nutrition classes and programs

- Language classes

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If Kirkland Parks adequately presents its case to the public about the necessity for more funds to pay for added facilities and services, discussion participants believe the public will support a tax increase to cover the needs.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

AWARENESS AND IMPRESSIONS OF KIRKLAND PARKS AND RECREATION

Impressions of Kirkland Parks

The participants were extremely enthusiastic in their praise of Kirkland Parks. Most have visited parks in other cities. They were eager to share their responses. A young mother, with two preschool-age children, commented, "It's amazing! I love the parks here. I'm walking distance from five parks. It's wonderful." Many nodded in agreement. Another person said she is walking distance from four parks, and she is always impressed with how well maintained they are. Someone else added, "The Kirkland parks are fabulous." One older man said he has lived in Hawaii and Australia, and he never saw the kinds of parks that are in Kirkland. Another shared, "I seek out parks wherever I am, and it's easy to find lots of interesting parks in Kirkland." A woman participant said she especially appreciates the waterfront parks: "They are very special." A man who grew up in West Seattle where he was surrounded by many large parks added, "Living here is like being home for me; there are great similarities between the parks here and those in West Seattle."

Parks visited and park impressions

A young mother said she takes her four-year old boy to the Downtown Skate Park every day: "It's so convenient." A father said that he has taken his sons to the park by Bridal Trails, and "My sons really enjoy going there." Several noted that the parks they visit are well maintained and are well supervised. A young woman described using the stairs at Crestwood Park to train for mountain climbing; she said there is a whole community that uses these stairs for training.

At Waverly Beach Park young mothers take turns watching each other's children. A woman said she is very pleased with the classes she takes at North Community Center – I take classes four days a week.

Participation in classes offered by Kirkland Parks

Most of the participants have taken classes, or has someone in their household who has taken classes, offered by Kirkland Parks and Recreation. A woman is currently taking classes four days a week at North Community Center, and she is very satisfied with her experiences there.

Participants have taken a wide variety of classes through Kirkland Parks including: tennis, kayaking, swim lessons for children and adults; aerobic and strength and stretch, volleyball, and preschool classes.

What is valued most about the Park system?

The participants are very satisfied with just about everything in the current Kirkland Parks and Recreation system. The qualities that are most appreciated are the level of maintenance, very reasonably priced classes and the variety of parks and activities for all ages.

CHANGES IN THE COMMUNITY THAT IMPACT PARKS

There was agreement that the whole Kirkland area has changed a great deal in recent years, and these changes naturally impact Kirkland Parks. The largest impact to Parks and Recreation is likely to come from the increased traffic as more people travel to and from the parks. There is considerable concern about possible development scheduled to happen at Juanita Beach. One

person commented, "I have concerns about the traffic as the parks attract more people traveling from the Totem Lake Area to Juanita Beach.

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One person noted he really misses Moss Bay Days and he was sorry to see this celebration end.

Several expressed the need for more boat launch areas. The current boat launch is too small and cannot handle the demand.

Some make the effort to use the parks during times when there are fewer people there.

ISSUES/CONCERNS ABOUT PARKS

Members of the group raised several questions about the future of Kirkland Parks and Recreation: Will the parks survive the growth changes that will occur in the next 10 to 20 years? How will they respond to the population and traffic increases? How is Kirkland Parks going to cater to the aging demographics of the area? How will older or disabled people have access to the parks? What kinds of activities will be offered to people when they are less mobile? Will Parks and Recreation have the budget to handle the increased needs of the community in the future? While some were concerned about the needs of the aging population, a person who works at the Senior Center was able to describe many of the services currently being provided.

Some wanted to talk about problems in particular parks they frequent. One person noted a particular problem at Juanita Beach where he twice this past summer observed boats hitting railings because they were allowed to be too close to the dock. He believes that better marine policing is needed, and/or boundaries need to be extended to protect the dock area. The young mom in the group said that there is a toy in the sandbox at Turtle Park that is too heavy for children to use. Someone else has heard a rumor that the swings will be taken away from Spinney Homestead Park, and she doesn't want to see this happen.

Someone asked, "Is there a dog park in Kirkland?" Several agreed that one is needed.

Several were concerned about the cost of maintaining the parks in the future. While members of the discussion group felt positive about the ways their tax dollars are used for parks, they said they know some people who are resistant to any increases in taxes for any purpose. All noted that Kirkland is changing a lot. One man summed up the feelings in the group: "I don't want to see Kirkland ruin a good thing." In commenting about the growth in the area, a man talked about "core values" of the city and asked whether development would be allowed near the parks that would impact the look and feel of the parks.

DESIRED NEW PARK FACILITIES AND SERVICES

Two lists were created from participant suggestions for new park facilities and services. Then, the participants were asked to prioritize by choosing five items on each list that were most important.

Several times people would ask about whether a particular service or facility existed, or they would simply suggest a need for something new, not realizing that the service or facility already exists within Kirkland Parks and Recreation. As the discussion continued, a major theme evolved relating to lack of information about what is offered. The participants were offered a current map of

Kirkland Parks, and several were excited to see that the map is available. One person suggested, "I'd rather have this great map than go on line for information."

NEW FACILITIES DESIRED

Four items were given priorities by half or more of the participants:

Facilities Suggested (In order of number of priority ratings)	No. Giving It Priority
• Year round covered pool	7
• New boat launch	6
• Dog park	5
• Centrally located, indoor gym <i>(There does not seem to be a good gym owned by Parks and Recreation, although the schools are currently being used. There is also a need for a facility to keep kids busy after school.)</i>	5
• Lighted tennis courts <i>(There was considerable discussion and confusion over where tennis courts are located and which are lighted.)</i>	4
• More accessible activities for older people <i>(This will be needed as the population ages.)</i>	4
• Improvements to the Downtown Park <i>These would include a larger pool, a climbing wall, and other new facilities. There will be a need for more activities for an increasing population.)</i>	3
• Improve/add restrooms	3
• Larger skate park, or second one, to provide more space for older and younger users <i>The current skate park is used by teenagers after 3 PM and is not appropriate at that time for younger children.)</i>	3
• More covered activity areas in parks <i>(The need is especially for children's activities like a play area; someone commented that none of the parks have covered activity areas at present.)</i>	2
• Wheel chair access in more of the major parks <i>(There was special concern voiced about Juanita Beach.)</i>	2

NEW SERVICES DESIRED

Nearly all of the participants strongly favor having more advertising or education about what facilities and activities are provided by Kirkland Parks and Recreation. Four other services were given high priorities by half or more of the discussion participants.

Services Suggested (In order of number of priority ratings)	No. Giving It Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better advertising and education about Kirkland parks, including where they are located and what they offer; and what kinds of plants, birds, marine life are at the different parks <i>(Note: many in the group were surprised and pleased to get a copy of the Park system map; there was considerable discussion about people not knowing a lot of what Kirkland Parks currently provides.)</i> 	9
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased security in parks as number of people using the parks and number of activities increase 	8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the web site and make it easier to use. <i>(Several mentioned problems with using the current password system; they would like to see better on-line services for getting maps and other information about the parks; someone commented that it was hard to find the web site)</i> 	7
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Saturday classes for youth and adult. <i>(The current catalogue seems to have few offerings for Saturday and it is difficult for working people to go to, or take their children to classes)</i> 	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System pass that will be good for use with any Kirkland classes. 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve lighting system in the parks <i>(There needs to be an on-going evaluation about lighting; running paths and other spaces need to be lit.)</i> 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Babysitting service during classes/drop-off <i>(A reference service would also be helpful; if a parent cannot find babysitting classes during day, many may not be able to take classes.)</i> 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition classes and programs <i>(A person asked if any are being offered.)</i> 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language classes (in addition to Spanish) 	2

ATTITUDES TOWARD INCREASING TAXES, IF NECESSARY, TO PAY FOR IMPROVEMENTS

The moderator asked the group members how they believe the public will respond if they are asked to approve a bond issue to provide more money for park improvements. There was consensus that the public will support a bond issue as long as there is a need. One person quickly commented, "It's all about the presentation. The public in Kirkland has the money; if the information is presented properly, it should be fine." Most of the Kirkland residents use the parks, and if they believe something will really help improve the park experience, they will support the city. Group members agreed with a person who commented: "We are content and we are proud of our community."

One person added that there is always resistance to more taxes, especially with the cost of so many things going up.

When asked what will encourage people to vote for a tax increase to pay for additions to Parks and Recreation, the participants repeated, "If the City can prove the need, people will support it." The City needs to show how the money will be used. People will appreciate knowing that the City is planning adequately for future growth.

SUMMARY: IF YOU HAD TO PRIORITIZE THE FUNDING TO ATTEND TO THREE MAJOR FUTURE NEEDS FOR THE CITIZENS OF KIRKLAND, WHAT THREE IMPROVEMENTS OR ADDITIONS WOULD YOU MAKE TO THE FACILITIES OR SERVICES?

Asked to summarize their opinions about what improvements were most needed by Kirkland Parks and Recreation, six items were mentioned most often:

- Better advertising and education about Kirkland Parks and Recreation;
- New boat launch;
- Improved web site;
- Activity areas that are lit at night;
- Greater wheel chair accessibility; and
- Year-round covered pool.

Shirley: New boat launch; better advertising about what is in the parks and where they are; and improving the web site, especially the password system.

Debbie: Accessibility for wheelchairs; improve the web site; and provide lights for activity areas to make them accessible in the evenings.

Shane: More Saturday classes; indoor gym; and year-round covered pool.

Ed: Better advertising; improve the web site; and more wheel chair accessibility.

Susannah: Improve the web site; have lit activity areas at night; and covered pool or play area; also a boat launch is very important.

Tim: Dog park; more areas lit at night; and better advertising so people will understand what is offered.

Mike: Better advertising; boat launch; and wheel chair accessibility.

LeAnne: Better education/advertising; boat launch; and year round pool.

Candace: More education about the parks and park facilities; Saturday classes; and better security and maintenance (suggestion for funding: have neighborhood associations partner with businesses to help with maintenance).

Rita: Continuation of waterfront walking areas as much as is possible; dog park; covered pool; and more tennis courts.

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Discussion Guide

I. Introduction

- a. Opening remarks – CT
- b. Name, community, years living in Kirkland, occupation

II. Overall, what is your impression of Kirkland Parks and Recreation, especially compared with the parks and recreation services you have experiences in other cities?

III. I'd like to know about the Kirkland Parks and Receptions facilities you and your family are using.

- a. What are parks you and your family visit most often? What do you especially appreciate about these parks?
- b. What activities or classes have you participated in? What impressed you about the way these activities were fun?

IV. What do you value most in the facilities and services provided by Kirkland Parks and Recreation?

V. I'd like you to think about the changes you have noticed in the City since you first moved here, particularly those changes that affect the services provided by Parks and Recreation. What changes or new trends have you observed?

VI. What do you believe are the most pressing issues or concerns relating to Kirkland Parks and Recreation?

Thinking about your concerns...

VII. Are there any new facilities that you believe are needed? (Make a list.)

VIII. Are there any new services that are needed? (Make a list.)

IX. I'd like to ask you to prioritize the new facilities needs and the service needs that you listed. (Ask the people to come up and select 3-5 items as priorities for facilities and services.)

X. I notice that several of you see a need for some facilities or services which would require a major investment of public money. Do you believe voters would be willing to approve a park bond issue to pay for these new facilities? What would make this issue most acceptable to voters?

XI. Summary: Imagine you are the Director of Kirkland Parks and Recreation and you have been given the funding to attend to three major, future needs for the citizens of Kirkland. What three improvements or additions would you make to the facilities or services?

Thank you very much for sharing you ideas and opinions tonight.