

In October, 2017, the City of Virginia Beach Parks & Recreation Department began work with Pros Consulting to update the 2014 Strategic Plan. The goals and objectives associated with the Strategic Plan included:

- Engage the community, leadership and internal/external stakeholders through varied public input to build a shared vision for programs, technology, and customer service and retention.
- Utilize a wide variety of data sources and best practices to predict trends and patterns of recreational facility and program uses for current and future Virginia Beach residents.
- Focus on community priorities that include access, the environment and outdoors, healthy lifestyles, and stewardship.
- Shape financial and operational preparedness through innovative and “next” practices to achieve the strategic objectives and recommend actions to deliver core services.
- Develop a dynamic and realistic strategic action plan that creates a road map to ensure programs and services are aligned with the departmental mission and City Council goals, as well as action steps to support the family-oriented community and businesses that call Virginia Beach home.

By March, 2018, a new vision and mission statement were affirmed; and goals, outcomes, responsibilities, and performance metrics were developed for implementing the strategic plan. Since then, actions have been taken toward achieving the goals, and measurements are under way for evaluating them. In addition, leadership is conducting studies to lay the groundwork for additional initiatives to take place over the next five years.

Vision: To be the national leader in providing enriching and memorable lifelong experiences.

Mission: Exceed community expectations in an inclusive, innovative and sustainable manner.

Community priorities:

- Protect the environment
- Promote healthy lifestyles
- Provide community access
- Ensure stewardship of funds, facilities and public lands

Goals:

1. **Customer Service:** To consistently provide legendary guest experiences.
2. **Parks, Trails & Facilities:** Continue to enhance the tiered levels of service and grow (be accessible.)
3. **Technology:** To enhance efficiency and user experience through updated hardware and software tools
4. **Programs:** Increase participation, provide tiered levels of service and meet cost recovery targets

Customer Service:

Quality customer service requires employees who are prepared, inspired and empowered to exceed expectations. Meanwhile, customer feedback is vital for determining how to measure and improve the guest experience.

Actions:

- New employee and volunteer orientations were revamped to focus on organizational values and the values and goals of legendary customer service.
- Salary adjustments are in progress for hard-to-fill and hard-to-keep positions to lessen turnover rates and attract qualified candidates, particularly groundskeepers and part-time recreation specialists.

- Standard scripts were developed for use by recreation center staff to create a consistent welcoming environment for new members and potential new members across the system.
- A Customer Service Initiatives team was formed to analyze business intelligence, including customer feedback on key performance indicators (hassles and uplifts). The analysis results in a Net Promoter Score (how likely are you to recommend this facility?), which is updated each month.
- Recreation center staff are briefed on their scores, how they have increased or decreased, and how their actions affect it. (Greeting customers when they enter, clean locker rooms, etc.)
- A Customer Retention Action Plan was implemented, which surveys existing customers at touchpoints (new member, 30-days, before renewal, at renewal time) for their insights and motivations
- Online reviews (Google, Yelp, TripAdvisor) from 24 locations (rec centers, parks, athletic fields) are regularly collected by marketing staff. Issues are reported to leadership as they arise and a compilation is updated for analysis each month.

Parks, trails and facilities:

The department is analyzing ways to increase access to its parks and facilities. It is evaluating ways to maximize use of parks and facilities during non-prime time – or underutilized hours -- and to host more community programs. It is also actively addressing a need for more consistency in tree and landscape maintenance between neighborhoods and community parks, for meeting citizen desires for bike trails with better connectivity and for improving the aesthetics at older recreation centers.

Actions:

- The Park Maintenance and Landscape Management staff were merged to create “Park and Landscape Services” with a goal of improving consistency of maintenance and creating staff efficiencies.
- A new permanent outdoor stage and boardwalk are being constructed at Mount Trashmore signature park to increase capacity and quality of events hosted there.
- The Office of Cultural Affairs collaborated with the department to conduct contests for local artists to display murals in park and recreation areas, resulting in a painted stairway on the hill at Mount Trashmore and murals under way on the inside walls of three recreation centers.
- Unpopular fees were eliminated at city dog parks and skate parks, starting April 1, 2019, an action aimed at increasing usage.

Coming soon:

- A modernization study is being contracted for four recreation centers (Bayside, Princess Anne, Great Neck and Seatack) as well as the feasibility of new center in another geographic area.
- A 2019 update to the bikeways and master trails plan is under way to increase the bike trails and connect them throughout the city.
- Recreation center space is being evaluated to determine best programming for existing space to maximize utilization of rooms for fitness, sports, childcare, etc.
- An RFP is being drafted for a feasibility study to analyze outdoor special events and nature programs and to identify resources needed to enhance them.
- Continue to identify off-peak public use times that can better support the programs and not conflict with other public uses and/or impact park system use/rental revenue

Technology:

The plan identified a need for the City’s IT Department and Parks and Recreation IT staff to collaborate on developing a consolidated needs assessment and action plan. Goals were established for upgrading Wi-Fi connectivity in major facilities and parks, improving access with point-of-sale technology, online registration opportunities and increased use of mobile devices for customer service improvements.

Actions:

- Point-of-purchase technology was installed at Lynnhaven Boat and Beach Facility allowing credit card payments for use of the facility. Plans are to also install it at Little Island Park and Fishing Pier.

- The department is evaluating ways to use technology to collect attendance/use data at public parks. A SOOFA Unit was installed to pilot outdoor charging stations and provide free Wi-Fi to collect customer statistics. The limited value of the data collected was outweighed by the costs when scaled across all facilities and other options are being explored.
- A new IT Budget Unit was created to streamline purchasing and better manage inventory and achieve efficiencies
- Online registration and payments was implemented for almost all programs and a robust website is constantly updated with programs and activities. Digital marketing efforts direct current and potential customers there.
- Guest Wi-Fi was already available in all recreation centers and efforts are under way to provide it at Princess Anne Athletic Complex, Mount Trashmore, Little Island Park and City View Park.
- Large TV Monitors were installed at all recreation centers in prominent locations to promote department programs and events with informational graphics.
- An online connection to equipment monitors at all of the rec centers was created to allow marketing staff to upload and update information graphics about programs and activities.

Coming soon:

- A group fitness software program is being purchased to allow instructors to update their classes and make them available to patrons in real time.
- IT staff are acquiring a technology to allow the large prominent recreation center monitors to be updated by marketing staff, to replace a manual process that requires recreation center staff of manually upload it using a flash drive.

Programs:

As trends emerge and demographics change, the department is evaluating what new core programs should be offered, how to expand popular programs currently offered, how facility spaces can be used more effectively and how to expand programs offered in parks. Community desires for more membership tiers and expanded hours of operation are also being addressed.

Actions:

- A family membership package was launched in September, 2018, as a pilot project.
- Early opening (5 AM) is being piloted at two recreation centers and usage is being evaluated.
- Recreation centers are now open on New Year's Day, the day after Thanksgiving and Veteran's Day.
- Assessments of competing private-sector programs are used to adjust pricing and program offerings (ie. closing of ceramic studio, elimination of sports leagues handled by other community providers)
- Reorganization of Parks and Landscape Management to allow reallocation of park staff to focus on park events and community programs.
- Therapeutic Recreation and Inclusion Units were combined to leverage staff efficiencies and expertise. Low sensory aspects are being added to many programs.

Coming soon:

- Plans to update current and future recreation centers to be E-sports compatible, as viable.
- Early childhood plan updated to include marketing component (work with city's GrowSmart team)
- Investigate possibility of Indoor Adult Athletic League Games being held at the Recreation Centers to utilize available space.
- Creation of welcome packets for new Recreation Center members to highlight or coupon other programs and facilities offered by the department.
- Development of business plans for each recreation center to reflect the neighborhood it serves.
- Expand collection of user data for non-registered programs (free walk-in program and events attendance).