

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Department of Parks and Recreation



Department of Parks and Recreation
Fiscal Year 2016 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Keith A. Anderson
Director

The Honorable Councilmember Mary M. Cheh
Committee on Transportation and the Environment
Council of the District of Columbia

Friday, February 10, 2017
11:00 a.m. Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Introduction

Good morning Chairperson Cheh, members of the Committee on Transportation and the Environment, and members of the public here today. I am Keith Anderson, Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR). I am pleased to testify before you on behalf of Mayor Muriel Bowser and discuss DPR's activities and accomplishments during Fiscal Year 2016.

I would like to thank Mayor Bowser, City Administrator Rashad Young, and Deputy Mayor Jennifer Niles for their continued support and leadership. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to all of the DPR employees who serve the District's residents on a daily basis.

Mayor Bowser's administration remains committed to investing in *Pathways to the Middle Class* by investing in education, infrastructure, public safety, and people. The Fair Shot Budget for Fiscal Year 2017 (FY2017) was the first budget developed wholly under Budget Autonomy. For the first time since Home Rule was passed in 1973, the District was able to spend our local dollars without having to wait on Congress to pass the federal budget. This brings us one step closer to operating like the 51st state.

Mission & Vision

DPR's mission is to promote health and wellness; conserve the natural environment; and provide universal access to parks and recreation services. Through our parks, recreation facilities, and programmatic offerings, DPR encourages residents to **Move**, **Grow**, and **Be Green**. This is the Department's mission, vision, and philosophy. It frames agency decisions and underpins the agency's vision for the future.

- To **Move**, DPR provides all residents affordable, enjoyable opportunities for physical fitness and recreation;

- To **Grow**, DPR supports personal development among residents through self-enrichment activities – like classes, clubs, tours, and lessons; and
- To **Be Green**, DPR promotes practices that connect residents to their local environment.

Inventory

As a nationally accredited agency by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), DPR boasts an impressive inventory with something for just about everyone. We have more than 900 acres of green space, 34 urban gardens and 5 partner urban farms, 375 parks, 12 dog parks, 95 playgrounds, 135 athletic fields, 336 courts, 76 recreation facilities, and 50 aquatic facilities and features. Additionally we provide over 100 unique programs across the city in the following categories: sports, health and fitness; aquatics; early and middle childhood programs; teen programs; senior programs; therapeutic recreation; environmental education; and personal enrichment.

Notable Accomplishments

DPR is gaining momentum and making significant progress. We continue to increase the number of guests we serve each year, and we continue to be a national leader in all things Parks and Recreation. By the numbers, we:

- Served more than 2.4 million customers in 2016;
- Increased recreation center attendance by 9%;
- Increased program registration by 16%;
- Increased summer camp enrollment by 21%
- Increased participation in Roving Leader special events by 90%; and
- Increased outdoor pool attendance by 38%.

We also broke several records; for example:

- We broke DPR's record for the largest outdoor pool attendance in recent history with more than 261,000 guests;
- We also broke the record for the largest contingent of minority swimmers in the 30-year history of the Annual Black History Invitational Swim Meet, with more than 1,100 swimmers from 25 teams from around the country.

We are also winning awards. In 2016, DC was named:

1. The Most Fit City;
2. The 6th Top Swim Metropolitan Area;
3. The 3rd Best Park City; and
4. A Playful City by national organizations.

In addition, we:

- Implemented new fee-based use regulations resulting in greater equity and access to DPR amenities as well as opportunities for expanded programming;
- Introduced new programs and initiatives.
- Increased volunteer participation; and
- Dedicated the brand new Ryan Zimmerman Field at Randall Recreation Center in Ward 6;
- Opened the newly renovated Ridge Road Recreation Center in Ward 7;
- Modernized the Benning Stoddert Community Center in Ward 7;
- Broke ground at the Marvin Gaye Recreation Center in Ward 7;
- Renovated the Oxon Run Pool in Ward 8;
- Installed two solar-powered Wi-Fi Soofa benches at the Columbia Heights Plaza and the Eastern Market Plaza;

- Installed the first concession stand at Banneker Pool in Ward 1;
- Upgraded five fitness centers and three playgrounds;
- Installed lightning protection system at several indoor pools, which will now remain open during inclement weather;

Continued Momentum

In addition to these notable accomplishments, I want to highlight the continued momentum DPR is experiencing in becoming a national leader in Parks and Recreation. We are doing great work making new organizational changes; providing guests with new and expanded program offerings; improving community engagement; and reducing DPR's carbon footprint.

New Organizational Changes

In Fiscal Year 2016, DPR streamlined its reporting structure to include three (3) divisions: Recreation Services; Community Engagement; and Administrative Services. This new reporting structure allows us to be more responsive to constituent needs and concerns. In addition to recruiting the Deputy Director of Recreation Services, which is a new position, DPR is in the process of recruiting several new management positions to improve overall agency efficiency and accountability. Specifically, the new management positions under recruitment in Fiscal Year 2017 include: a *Parks and Environmental Conservation Manager*—to directly manage DPR parks and environmental programming; two *Regional Managers*—to directly manage the site managers for recreation centers; *Recreation Center Site Managers*—to directly manage two (2) to four (4) recreation centers to improve accountability and reduce spans of control; *Aquatics Site Managers*—to directly manage DPR aquatics facilities; a *Park Ranger Manager*—to directly manage the park ranger program; and a *Community Programs Manager*—to directly manage the development, implementation, and quality assurance of agency programs.

New and Expanded Program Offerings

In order to continually be responsive to the needs of the community, DPR has expanded its program offerings. In particular, our Recreation Services Division added *The Greenhouse Cooperative*—where DPR is partnering with non-profits by leveraging \$250,000 in grant funding to renovate four (4) greenhouses across the District to provide free programming and donate seedlings; *Urban Beekeeping*—a free program for District residents to keep their personally-owned bee hives on DPR property with support from staff and volunteers; *Funky Fitness First Fridays*—a free event to showcase fitness opportunities and promote healthy lifestyles; the *Triangle Parks Series*—a pilot program where DPR activated its small parks with a variety of pop-up activities like music, dance, and karaoke; and the *Life Guard Training Academy*—a pilot program where DPR partnered with DCPS to train high school students how to become lifeguards while providing them with summer employment opportunities.

In order to improve program offerings for youths ages 13- 21, DPR's Teens Division has begun conducting several focus group sessions as a way to solicit feedback from teenagers and young adults throughout the city. DPR has learned from these focus groups what programming is desired, as well as the best way to engage with youth and attract them to DPR. For example, DPR has learned that more out-of-town field trips are wanted, in addition to other non-traditional activities like horseback riding and zip lining. As a result, this past summer, DPR worked to incorporate these elements into our programs. Youth went zip lining, bowling, go karting, horseback riding, and went on an intergenerational fishing trip.

Later this spring, DPR will start to hold "*Teen Sports Nights*". These events will be used as a vehicle to solicit more input from youth. As opposed to a traditional meeting to learn what programs and services youth desire, these events will include eight (8) sessions of interactive

games and activities. One of the sessions will focus on what programs and services youth desire, while the other sessions will be used to attract youth to gather their valuable input.

Finally, I want to highlight some of the great work DPR is doing to grow its *Community Gardens Program* and its *Community Compost Cooperative Network*. In fact, this past year, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) named the District the nation's leader for the number of community gardens per capita in 2015. DPR brought two (2) new community gardens online and revived an additional three (3), making our total inventory include 34 community gardens and five (5) urban farms. DPR also hosted 122 community gardens classes serving roughly 2,200 participants. Moreover, DPR now has 50 compost cooperative sites with a capacity 5,000 individuals actively composting approximately 50 tons of material. We are currently at 1/5th capacity.

Improved Community Engagement

DPR has worked to improve its community engagement through the use of news releases, social media, targeted media campaigns, and community meetings. Text-message and email alerts are sent by DPR using the Nixle system to proactively announce facility closures, program registration deadlines, and other important information. We have been increasing participation rates, and I am pleased to share that between the end of January, 2016 and the end of January 2017, DPR's Nixle subscribers increased by 35%.

In Fiscal Year 2016, DPR attended more than 70 community meetings to share and discuss various topics with residents ranging from capital construction, community programs and activities, and special events. Moreover, DPR held ten (10) Town Halls across the District to solicit feedback from the community regarding service needs.

I am also pleased that we have converted the 38 Customer Service Representatives from temporary employees to full-time employees. These team members are vital in DPR providing a

consistent customer service experience, and along with the other positions DPR is actively recruiting, we're support the Mayor's commitment to provide *Pathways to the Middle Class*.

Reduced Carbon Footprint

In Fiscal Year 2016, and as we look forward in Fiscal Year 2017, DPR's Capital Projects Team has done and continues to do great work on state-of-the-art projects—many helping to reduce DPR's carbon footprint.

As mentioned earlier, DPR installed two (2) Soofa Solar Benches with free public Wi-Fi powered completely by the sun, making the District the first in the nation to do so. We also planted 100 trees in partnership with Casey Trees and the District Department of Energy and the Environment. Looking ahead, DPR has many exciting projects planned, including: building the first Net Zero recreation and nature center in the Mid-Atlantic at Fort Greble in Ward 8; working with the DC Sustainable Energy Utility (DCSEU) to install solar panels on Trinidad Recreation Center in Ward 5 and the Hillcrest Community Center in Ward 7; working with Capital Bikeshare to add amenities to the Marvin Gaye Recreation Center and Edgewood Recreation Centers; designing and installing an urban farm on the roof of the Edgewood Recreation Center; and installing geothermal wells on the Turkey Thicket athletic field, heating and cooling the water used by the adjacent Brookland Middle School.

Conclusion

DPR is well on its way to becoming a world class leader in urban parks and recreation. We will continue the work that we have begun, and will continue to serve the residents of the District of Columbia. I'd like to thank you for your leadership and support. As always, we strive to operate with complete transparency, and I will ensure that the communication channels with your staff remain open and productive. That concludes my testimony today. I want to

thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to answering any questions you or members of the committee might have.