



# Introduction

*I love the park near us, which is Northam Park. My only problem with it is the concrete sidewalks. They are not wide enough for the traffic of walkers, joggers, strollers, etc. that use it everyday. I know that they just re-surfaced and widened the asphalt walkways but need to make the concrete one that goes around the entire park 6' or wider too.*



Following completion of the successful first season for the Reed Road Water Park, the Pool Subcommittee of the Upper Arlington City Council met to review that project and continue discussions relating to the second pool in need of attention, the Tremont Pool. As those discussions progressed with input from staff and the public, the Subcommittee recognized that the Tremont Pool's location in Northam Park and its close proximity to the Northam Tennis Courts, Senior Center and other community facilities, meant that any decisions about the pool would have an effect on those facilities, as well as a ripple effect on the community's overall park and recreation system. As a result, in the fall of 2005, Council charged the *Parks & Recreation Advisory Board* (PRAB) with developing a comprehensive plan to identify general goals and specific action objectives for the City's parks and recreation facilities and programs.

Over several meetings in early 2006, the PRAB decided the best way to undertake the strategic planning process was to create a volunteer task force containing at-large community members who were representative of various segments of the community to produce the draft plan. The PRAB further recognized that as a part of the planning process, it would be appropriate to inventory all parks, facilities and programs, assess and determine needs for the future, and obtain extensive community input. With Council approval, the PRAB then issued an invitation for community members to apply to serve on the task force and ultimately selected nine residents to join the eight-member PRAB and three Council members to form the *Focus on the Future Task Force*.

The newly formed Task Force met initially on April 12, 2006 and each member was provided with a copy of the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Update 1990 entitled "Task Force 2000 Report," the last strategic planning effort relating to Upper Arlington Parks & Recreation. The *Focus on the Future Task Force* was then formally charged with the following tasks:

- *Clearly define the purpose of the Parks & Recreation Department.*
- *Complete an inventory and analysis of all parks, facilities and recreation programs.*
- *Benchmark the department using national standards.*
- *Identify community needs.*
- *Create an atmosphere of open communication among residents, Council, the PRAB and staff.*
- *Establish both long and short-term goals.*
- *Create conceptual plans identifying the needs identified during the planning process.*
- *Develop strategies for the allocation of resources that will allow the Parks & Recreation Department to meet the established goals.*
- *Identify threats and weaknesses that will prevent the department from obtaining the goals.*
- *Develop the plan in a way that will create ownership of it by the citizens, Council, Task Force and staff.*

The *Focus on the Future Task Force* set out to determine the best course to producing a 10-year strategic plan — a plan that would balance a long-term vision for the future with immediate and practical considerations. The group early on affirmed that the plan could and should be produced by community residents rather than being the product of an outside professional consultant. The rationale was that our residents are capable of articulating the needs and wants of the community and the Parks & Recreation Staff could provide a plethora of resources and best practice guidelines. Consequently, the Task Force took as its ultimate goal the production of a fact-based, action oriented and fiscally responsible plan without the considerable cost of a hired consultant. The group concluded that an appropriate course of action would be built on the Parks & Recreation Department’s 1990 master plan as well as the City’s Master Plan and other extant municipal plans. Finally, the document would balance the provision of specific recommendations with the identification of general guiding principles and goals to govern the long-term decision-making process of the Upper Arlington Parks & Recreation Department.

To this end, the Task Force held meetings twice a month during April and May to become familiar with the six divisions of the Parks & Recreation Department and to determine practical forums to generate public input. Subsequently, during the last week of May and first week of June, Task Force members served as facilitators and scribes for three general public meetings and five neighborhood meetings. Residents were encouraged to speak publicly, complete a half sheet comment card and fill out a two-page survey. The survey asked respondents to provide input on the following:

- *What are the strength of the Parks & Recreation Department?*
- *What are the weaknesses of the Parks & Recreation Department?*
- *What would you like to see in the future?*
- *Where do you recreate now?*

Task Force members also attended City summer events (i.e. Music in the Parks, Movies in the Park, Summer Celebration, Taste of UA, and Upper Arlington Labor Day Arts Festival) to solicit informal public comment as well as distribute the surveys for the public to complete.

To gain additional information and perspective, in late August Task Force members facilitated focus/user group meetings with representatives of city and private schools, community organizations, community indoor and outdoor athletic organizations and City boards and commissions. In addition, meetings were held with key Parks & Recreation staffers and City Manager Virginia Barney.

On October 11, 12 and 14, Task Force members conducted a last round of public forums for residents to provide input in the development of the 10-year strategic plan. Participants helped prioritize the previously identified needs and wants, spoke to funding options, and commented on possible project timelines.

*More organized activities in the evenings for parents with their children.*





And finally additional insight into citizens' thoughts was gained from the City-administered 2006 Community Survey. That survey contained several questions designed to gauge residents' views on the use of and need for park and recreation amenities, awareness, use and satisfaction with Reed Road Water Park, the future of the Tremont and Devon pools, and how best to improve the City's parks, recreation and leisure facilities/programs.



Over the course of many meetings during the fall of 2006 and early winter 2007, the Task Force and its sub-committees organized and analyzed the information gathered from all public meetings, focus/user group sessions, staff interviews and community survey. The Executive Summary of the Strategic Plan was presented to residents at the January 22, 2007 "State of the City Address." Task Force members presented a short PowerPoint version, provided a printed take-home pamphlet and hosted informal question and answer sessions following each of three presentations.

The 19-member Task Force held its final meeting on January 31, 2007 to review and discuss input from residents and staff regarding the State of the City presentation and collect feedback from members as the basis for making whatever minor revisions it deemed necessary to finalize the plan. Subsequently, the PRAB assumed responsibility to produce the full report documenting the plan for delivery to City Council on March 12, 2007.

---

*I feel the parks and rec program is very good at this time. Let's do what we need to maintain and improve where it is weak.*

---

