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Equitable Access for All

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Aurora/Saint Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation

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Executive Summary

The Aurora/Saint Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation (ASANDC) is a nonprofit organization that operates various economic development, social, and housing programs for the Aurora/Saint Anthony, Frogtown, and Summit-University neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Guided by its mission to enhance the economic and social well-being of the communities it serves, ASANDC focuses much of its resources on youth programming. While working first hand with youth in the community, ASANDC saw that many were unable to access the City of Saint Paul’s Recreation Centers because the fees charged were unaffordable to them.

The purpose of this report is to research ways to increase access for youth – and, indeed, for all residents – by reducing the financial barriers to these recreation centers. The report first presents resident demographic information in order to provide more detailed context for solutions that attempt to increase access. The economic conditions in the area may significantly impact access for residents. For example, there are substantial numbers of residents living below the poverty designation: approximately one third of all residents and a staggering 43% of youth live in poverty. High rates of residents receiving SNAP and TANF benefits and spending more than 30% of their monthly income on rent also may be contributing factors that influence access.

Additionally, Parks and Recreation Department plans and budget documents from the City of Saint Paul were analyzed to further establish context and to identify current trends in the City’s approach to the construction, operation, and maintenance of recreation centers and its financial viability to maintain such an approach. In order to more fully understand Saint Paul’s approach to financing the operations and maintenance of its recreation centers, the approaches of parks and recreation departments from other cities across the country were also studied and examined for best practices. An academic literature review examining the establishment of fee systems for recreation centers and their impacts on equitable access was also conducted. Finally, by incorporating the information referenced above, recommendations for creating more equitable access to Saint Paul’s recreation centers were made. They include the implementation of more stringent record keeping, adoption of a cost of service and recovery model, and the establishment of a nonprofit foundation.
Purpose of Study

The Aurora/Saint Anthony Neighborhood Development Corporation, or ASANDC, was established initially in 1980 as a neighborhood watch and crime prevention group. Over the years, the organization has evolved and now operates various economic development, social, and housing programs for the Aurora/Saint Anthony, Frogtown, and Summit-University neighborhoods in Saint Paul, Minnesota. ASANDC is guided by its mission to “improve the social and economic well-being of the communities [it] serve[s]” (Aurora St. Anthony, 2014). The organization offers, among other programs, business development programming and homeownership workshops. As part of the Stops for Us Coalition, ASANDC had been instrumental in securing three additional stations for the Green Line Light Rail and inducing change in the federal government’s transportation performance measures. And through its successful youth leadership program, “Vision in Living Life,” ASANDC has helped over fifty youth learn the social and communication skills necessary to become good stewards of their community (Aurora St. Anthony, 2014).

Like that of “Vision in Living Life,” the purpose of this study is to help the youth of the Aurora/Saint Anthony, Frogtown, and Summit-University neighborhoods. The purpose of this study is to identify the financial barriers inhibiting equitable access to Saint Paul’s recreation centers, (specifically Scheffer Recreation Center, Martin Luther King Recreation Center, West Minnehaha Recreation Center, Linwood Recreation Center, and Jimmy Lee/Oxford Community Center), examine why they exist, and suggest solutions for increasing access to the City’s recreation centers for the youth of these neighborhoods, and for all residents of the City of Saint Paul.
**Methodology**

Identifying the study area was the crucial first step in this research assignment. In order to have a study area that both encompassed the five recreation centers initially identified for study and that aligned with census tracts to allow for ease of data collection and analysis purposes, the following study area, as highlighted in blue in Figure 1, was determined.

The area, which includes thirteen census tracts, is bordered by the railway tracks just north of West Pierce Butler Route in the north, by Rice Street in the east, by Saint Claire Avenue in the south, and by Lexington Parkway in the west. Scheffer Recreation Center, Martin Luther King Recreation Center, West Minnehaha Recreation Center, Linwood Recreation Center, and Jimmy Lee/Oxford Community Center are the five City recreation centers that fall within the study area. After identification of the study area was determined, an analysis of the site was conducted to provide more detailed demographic context. Using American Community Survey five year estimates from 2012 for the thirteen census tracts within the study area, a resident profile featuring racial, income, poverty, receipt of government assistance, and rent burden data was compiled.

In addition to analysis of the demographic data, Park and Recreation Department plans and budget documents from the City of Saint Paul were analyzed to further establish context and to identify current trends in the City’s approach to the construction, operation, and maintenance of recreation centers and its financial viability to maintain such an approach. In order to more fully understand Saint Paul’s approach to financing the operations and maintenance of its recreation centers, the approaches of parks and recreation departments from other cities across the country were also studied and examined for best practices.

An academic literature review examining the establishment of fee systems for recreation centers, the impacts that such fees have on low-income users, questions of equitable access, and potential solutions for financial barriers, was also conducted. Finally, by incorporating the information referenced above and that gleaned from the Portland Parks and Recreation Department – a leader in creating equitable access for its residents – recommendations for creating more equitable access to Saint Paul’s recreation centers were made.
Demographic Context

Neighborhood Borders, Brief History, and Study Area

The study area is comprised of parts of both the Frogtown and Summit–University, or Rondo, neighborhoods. Frogtown lies to the north of University Avenue, with West Minnehaha Avenue as its northern boundary, Lexington Parkway as its western boundary, and Rice Street as its eastern boundary. It is one of Saint Paul’s most diverse neighborhoods, as it has long been a haven for recent immigrants to the area. During the nineteenth century, the neighborhood was home to mostly German, Scandinavian, and Irish immigrants; today, it is home to large Hmong, Latino, and Somali populations (Frogtown Neighborhood Association, 2014).

The Rondo neighborhood, with similar eastern and western borders, is situated south of University Avenue. The neighborhood, like many subjected to mid-twentieth century highway construction, has experienced radical physical change in the name of progress. In the mid-1960s, the construction of Highway 94 through this thriving black neighborhood removed the successful commercial corridor along Rondo Avenue and displaced hundreds of residents. See Figure 2 for additional information.

In spite of, or perhaps, because of these challenges, the Rondo neighborhood has become a resilient place. Residents, and the local organizations that serve them, realize that positive change, more often than not, requires deliberate action. Community outreach and organizing are essential tools that residents in these neighborhoods have learned to utilize in order to create the positive changes they want their communities to experience – whether residents are encouraging additional stations along a light rail transit line, or looking to increase youth access to recreation centers.

Figure 2 - Geoff Maas’ Map of Central Saint Paul, 1935

This map, produced by cartographer Geoff Maas, uses as its base Dr. Calvin Shmid’s 1935 map of “natural areas” in Saint Paul. To this base layer, Maas then added the present-day highway system and other transportation infrastructure, including the Green Line LRT. The map is meant to illustrate the persistent racial segregation that exists and the impacts that the placement of transportation infrastructure has had on Saint Paul’s neighborhoods. Data Source: citypages.com
ASANDC requested that five specific recreation centers be analyzed in this report, and they include: Scheffer Recreation Center, Martin Luther King Recreation Center, West Minnehaha Recreation Center, Linwood Recreation Center, and Jimmy Lee/Oxford Community Center. In order to have a study area that both encompassed the recreation centers requested for study and that aligned with census tracts for ease of data collection and analysis purposes, the study area, as seen in Figure 1, was determined.

The area, which includes thirteen census tracts, is bordered by the railway tracks just north of West Pierce Butler Route in the north, by Rice Street in the east, by Saint Claire Avenue in the south, and by Lexington Parkway in the west.

The study area does not align perfectly with the Frogtown and Rondo neighborhood boundaries because of the inclusion of the five recreation centers and the census tract designations; however, attempts were made to align the neighborhood boundaries and study area as closely as possible.

Racial Demographics

More pertinent to this research than the study area designation is the demographic information for residents living within it. According to American Community Survey five year estimates from 2012, approximately 33,521 residents live within the thirteen census tracts in this designated area. The area has a relatively diverse population. Accounting for 45% of the population, white residents comprise the area’s largest single subset; however, they do not constitute the majority of residents within the study area. The majority of residents, approximately 55%, are non-white. Nearly one third of residents are black, nearly one fifth are Asian American, and the remaining 6% identify as Native American, other, or one or more ethnicities (See Figure 3).

Figure 4 illustrates the percentages of black residents living within the study area. The four tracts south of Summit Avenue have the lowest percentages of black residents; the four tracts north of Summit Avenue and touching Highway 94, have some of the highest percentages of black residents. Census tract 336, which falls within the Rondo neighborhood, has the highest percentage of black residents, with the black population comprising between 52% and 82% of the entire population within the tract. It is interesting to note that though tracts along University Avenue are home to more diverse populations, there are significant changes in the percentages of different racial group among adjacent census tracts. And while 30% of residents in the entire region are black, there are census tracts in which the black population percentage is substantially higher.
Average Household Income

Just as the racial profile of the study area is diverse, so too, is the income profile. Median household income levels extend across a very wide range. For instance, the tract with the highest has a median household income of $94,844; however, the median household income for the track with the lowest value is just $13,456 – an annual household income seven times lower than that of the highest.

The average median income for the study area is $41,178.00, while the median income for all of the City of Saint Paul is $46,305 – more than $5,000 higher than that of the study region. The relative closeness of the area’s median income to that of Saint Paul’s masks some of lower income figures. For example, approximately 5% of households within the area have an annual income of less than $24,999 – a total which qualifies children in a household of two for free and reduced lunch in the public school systems nationwide. See the Appendix for free and reduced lunch income guidelines. Figure 5 shows the variation in annual median household income across census tracts. The census tracts with higher annual median household incomes are concentrated in the southernmost part of the study area.

Poverty

Perhaps more telling than annual median household income is the poverty designation. Of the 33,521 residents that live in the study area, 9,382 are living below the poverty line – that’s 28% of the population in the region, or nearly 1 of every 3 residents (See Figure 6).
And perhaps even more staggering than the overall poverty rate, is the incidence of poverty among the area’s youth. Of the 9,016 residents under 18 years of age, 3,852 are living below the poverty line. Such numbers indicate that a staggering 42.7% of youth living in the area are living in poverty (See Figure 7). This finding has significant implications for policies and programming aimed at improving the lives of youth in the area and is an extremely important consideration in the design and development of such policies and programming. Such a large percentage of youth living below the poverty level may indicate that a significant number of these adolescents are unable to access, among other essential goods and services, recreation center programming that charge fees.

The percentages of youth residents living below the poverty level by census tract are illustrated in Figure 8. While less than 10% of youth residents in the two southernmost census tracts are living in poverty, over 55% of all youth are living below the poverty level in three tracts in, or bordering Highway 94. A significant amount of youth poverty is found in six additional tracts, which have percentages ranging between 25% and 55%. The remaining two tracts, though they have lower rates of youth poverty, still have a substantial amount, with percentages ranging between 10% and 25%.
Additional Indicators

Just as income varies widely across the census tracts in the study area, so too, does receipt of funds through government assistance programs – another indication of the economic health of an area. Just fewer than 19% of residents receive food stamps, or SNAP, but as with most average calculations, information can be distorted. A more accurate representation may be found in examining the tracts with the lowest and highest percentages of recipients. Tract 357 has both the lowest percentages of SNAP (2.7%) and TANF, or public assistance (10.8%) recipients. Tract 337, however, has a much different profile, with 56.6% of residents receiving food stamps and 33.7% receiving TANF (See Figures 9 and 10).

While poverty designations and receipt of government assistance are helpful in understanding the socio-economic profile of an area, they are not exhaustive indicators. Other measures, like rent burden, can also reveal much about the economic health of an area. Rent burden can perhaps reveal even more, as it shows how much of a household’s income is dedicated to rent, and as a result, how much cannot be used to pay for other goods and services. In the study area, nearly 50% (49.2%) of residents are paying 30% or more of their income on rent each month, with more than a quarter (26.9%) paying more than 50%. In tract 326, an overwhelming 60% of residents pay more than 50% of their income each month on rent payments! Figure 11 illustrates the percentages of residents who are officially rent burdened, or who pay more than 30% of their monthly income on rent. There are four tracts in which over half of residents are rent burdened. The tracts with the lowest percentages still have nearly one-third of residents being burdened.
So what?

Of course, this socio-economic and demographic data is pertinent for many policy considerations, including those that address education, housing, and economic development. It is also especially relevant when analyzing access to city recreation centers, as this project aims to do. Despite laudable efforts to make use more affordable, like that initiated by Saint Paul’s fee waiver program, significant financial barriers may still be inhibiting access for low-income residents. Discounts for recreation center programming may not extend far enough to benefit a household making less than $20,000 a year and spending more than 50% of that annual income on rent. Any city policies that aim to provide equitable access to parks and recreation centers for all residents will have to incorporate this information and the realistic implications such economic conditions have on access.

**Parks and Recreation Center Trends in Saint Paul**

Like many municipalities across the country, Saint Paul is experiencing an increased demand for its parks and recreation center services. The City’s population is increasing in both size and diversity, and such growth has significant impacts on the parks and recreation system. To accommodate such growth, additional facilities and programming, and different types of facilities and programming, will be necessary (City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2008).

However, funding for such expansion in Saint Paul is limited. Like municipalities across the country, with their discretionary budgets being decreased and resources diverted to other essential services like police and fire departments, Saint Paul’s Parks and Recreation Department is not sufficiently funded. According to the Comprehensive Plan 2020, “funding to support construction, operations, and maintenance has been woefully inadequate for years and will continue to be a major challenge in the future as the City struggles with an increasingly limited budget” (City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2008). To offset this budget shortfall, there has been an increased reliance on user fees. This emphasis on user fees, of course, has significant consequences on resident access to facilities and programming.

And because Saint Paul does not have the funding to build additional facilities and to provide additional programming, the Department admittedly will have “to prioritize well and find ways to deliver an efficient and equitable system” (City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2008). The City, in both the Comprehensive Plan 2020 document and the Parks and Recreation System Plan document, proposes achieving this end by having fewer, but higher quality centers. Of course, this strategy also brings up questions of access. Residents who use the facilities would be detrimentally impacted by the closure of a neighborhood recreation center and accompanying loss of programming; however, they may also be further impacted by an inability to travel to or access remaining recreation centers further from their homes.
This approach, as detailed in the Parks and Recreation System Plan, proposes a system of consolidation based upon facility quality. Recreation centers are to be converted to “community centers” that “appeal to all ages and abilities,” and expand “beyond the current primarily youth recreation role.” The plan also recommends consolidating the more than twenty-five recreation centers into a system of nineteen community centers, by removing low quality buildings for which a “viable partner cannot be obtained to take overall building operations, improvements, and costs” (City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc., Treeline, and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, 2010).

As seen in Figure 12, the map from the Saint Paul Comprehensive Plan 2020, shows the quality of recreation centers throughout the city. The quality determinations were based upon a structure analysis conducted by Miller Dunwiddie Architecture in the spring of 2010. The rating for each building was based on a scale of 1 to 45 and included nine criteria, one of which was city use/visitation data from 2009. For a complete list of criteria, please see the Appendix.

Structures with a score of twenty or below were rated low quality or below average; those with a score of 21 to 35 were rated average quality; and those with scores of 36 or above were rated high quality. The quality ratings for the five recreation centers analyzed in this study can be seen in Figure 13 (City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc., Treeline, and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recreation Center Building</th>
<th>Building Rating (1 to 45 scale)</th>
<th>Quality Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scheffer Recreational Center</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King Recreational Center</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Minnehaha Recreational Center</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linwood Recreational Center</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford/Jimmy Lee Community Center</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total visitation for the five recreation centers has increased substantially since 2007, due, in large part, to the significant increase in attendance at the Jimmy Lee/Oxford Community Center resulting from the opening of the Great River Water Park there. Illustrated in dark blue in Figures 14 and 15, attendance at this recreation center more than tripled from 2008 to 2013. Attendance at all five of the centers also increased significantly, though not to the same extent: total attendance doubled from just fewer than 300,000 visits in 2008 to well over 600,000 visits in 2013. Attendance at the other four centers has remained relatively stable: Linwood has experienced a slight decrease since 2006; West Minnehaha has experienced a slight increase; and both Martin Luther King and
Scheffer have seen their numbers fluctuate slightly back and forth. Attendance at Martin Luther King and Scheffer was highest in 2011; since then, however, attendance has returned to the lower levels seen in 2006 and 2007.

A more detailed map illustrating the quality of proposed “community centers” can be seen in Figure 16. Closure is not recommended for any of the five recreation centers highlighted in this study. The System Plan recommended that the ownership and operation of all five recreation centers remain under the City’s purview.
The System Plan presents a few recommendations for making the parks and recreation system “more relevant, more connected, and more sustainable” (City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc., Treeline, and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, 2010). The plan proposes an approach of consolidation and an emphasis on quality over quantity by maintaining fewer, but higher quality buildings throughout the city. The plan suggests expansion of those recreation centers that have been rated average or high quality and adaption of these centers into more community oriented places that appeal to residents of all ages and abilities. Expansion is proposed for the Linwood, Martin Luther King, Oxford/Jimmy Lee, and West Minnehaha Centers; a new building is recommended for the Scheffer Center. These centers are slated to remain under the ownership and operation of the City of Saint Paul.

Other recreation centers will have a different fate. Partnerships with private and nonprofit organizations are proposed for many of the remaining buildings. The plan suggests that these partnerships be enhanced to such an extent so as to “facilitate removal of all city parks and recreation staffing from these buildings” (City of Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department, Hoisington Koegler Group, Inc., Treeline, and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, 2010). The plan also suggests that “eventually, partners would take on full operation, maintenance, and upkeep of high and moderate quality buildings, while low quality buildings would be removed when current partners depart or when significant upgrades become necessary.” A third approach, closure and building removal, was suggested for only one center, the Duluth and Case Recreation Center.

In addition to the recommendations for expansion, consolidation, and closure, the System Plan presents projections for significant cost savings. For each of the more than forty-five recreation center buildings addressed in the System Plan, annual soft costs, annual hard costs, and capital maintenance costs are identified. Annual soft costs include salaries, services, and supplies; annual hard costs include maintenance and utilities; and, lastly, capital maintenance costs include HVAC, roof, exterior construction, and flooring. Capital maintenance costs are incurred once every twenty years. The annual soft costs, hard costs, and capital maintenance costs of all recreation center buildings and the projected savings introduced by the System Plan can be seen in Figure 17. The total costs savings, if the recommendations are implemented, are estimated to be $19,758,122.00 over a twenty year period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5 years</th>
<th>10 years</th>
<th>20 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total soft cost reinvestment</td>
<td>-$2,674,884</td>
<td>-$5,349,767</td>
<td>-$10,699,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total hard cost savings</td>
<td>-$5,197,543</td>
<td>-$10,395,086</td>
<td>-$20,790,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total financial effect (method 1)</td>
<td>$3,859,157</td>
<td>-$4,013,269</td>
<td>-$19,758,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total financial effect (method 2)</td>
<td>-$4,939,531</td>
<td>-$9,879,061</td>
<td>-$19,758,122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Assumes all capital improvement costs in Year 1; assumes 25% capital improvement and HVAC etc., at 5 years, 25% at 10 years, 50% at 20 years.
2 Assumes one time capital improvement costs (new building construction, additions, renovation, and demolition) of $16,218,804.
Because four of the five recreation centers analyzed in this study are recommended for retention in the City’s system, there are no changes in annual soft or hard costs associated with these centers. However, because the Plan recommends that the Scheffer Center be retained in the City’s system, but that there be a new building and park renovation, there will be capital maintenance cost savings associated with the Scheffer Center. An approximate $235,050.00 in future capital maintenance costs is expected to be saved with a new Scheffer building and park renovation alone, as seen in Figure 18.

Figure 18 – Current annual costs and projected annual financial effects from System Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Soft Costs</th>
<th>Hard Costs</th>
<th>Capital Maintenance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current annual costs</td>
<td>$3,019,764</td>
<td>$4,126,745</td>
<td>$21,702,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected annual financial effects of System Plan</td>
<td>-$534,977</td>
<td>-$1,039,509</td>
<td>-$4,487,220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though it is true that a substantial amount of money is projected to be saved with the System Plan recommendations, questions regarding the social costs of the plan must be asked. If public recreation centers will be owned by and operated as private organizations, can they really be considered providers of a “public good?”

In an attempt to increase equitable access for its residents, the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation Department has instituted a fee assistance program. This program, which helps qualifying families pay for youth programs, covers up to 50% of the cost of a majority of activities offered through the Parks and Recreation Department. Fee assistance cannot, however, be applied to season passes, membership, or admission fees. It can also only be utilized residents of Saint Paul who are 18 years of age or younger and who qualify for free and reduced lunches (Stpaul.gov, 2014.)

According to the City’s Comprehensive Plan, the Parks and Recreation Department intends to “fully develop and implement a comprehensive fee-waiver program to aid individuals where fees are a barrier to parks and recreation participation (City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2008). Though the existing fee-waiver program has been quite helpful in increasing access for many of the City’s residents, it can be improved through expansion to adults and applicability to membership and admission fees. The Comprehensive Plan also indicates the need for a review of “access and user fees to determine where increases are market appropriate and where raising or imposing fees would not significantly impact access” (City of Saint Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development, 2008). Such an analysis would be a crucial step in raising necessary funding for the Department, without decreasing access for residents who rely on the services it provides.
Literature Review

The literature review consists primarily of academic articles that analyze the impacts that park and recreation center fees have on users, the barriers to equitable access that fees may create, governments’ responses to budget cuts, and the general appropriateness of fees.

Establishment of Fee Systems

Park and recreation fees have long been a debated topic. Since the introduction of the first fees for park users at Mount Rainier National Park in 1908, the appropriateness of both the establishment and extent of fees charged for public parks and recreation centers has been analyzed (Watson & Herath, 1999). Though often justified from economic and operational management standpoints, fees have come under fire for the disparate impacts that they create for those who cannot pay them. They are often lauded for their greater economic efficiency than taxes, as they are charged directly to users; however, economic efficiency cannot provide the complete justification for the implementation of fees for the provision of social goods, largely because of their discriminatory effects on the disabled, elderly, impoverished, minorities, and other marginalized groups (Fretwell, 1999; Martin, 1999). Those who are opposed to the issuance of fees emphasize that “exclusionary pricing raises fundamental questions about the social purposes of public recreation” (More, 2000). For how can a good be truly public in nature if it excludes large segments of the public?

Despite this reluctance to accept fees wholeheartedly in the theoretical sense, studies have shown that actual park and recreation users have shown support for fee systems. More, in his survey of New Hampshire and Vermont households, found that user fees are widely accepted across income distinctions. Approximately 40% of the sample studied indicated a preference for fees over other methods of fundraising and – most notably – even low-income respondents preferred fees to reductions in service (More, 2000).

In determining the public’s response to user fees, it appears that the perception of fair pricing is more influential than the establishment of the fee system itself (Ajzen & Driver, 1992; Kahneman et al., 1986). Those prices that are regarded as fair rarely receive attention or incite resistance; however, as McCarville contends in his study of user assessments of first-time fees for public recreation service, “unfair prices may generate considerable hostility and subsequent displacement” (McCarville, 1996).

Effect on Low-income Users, Equitable Access

As More has shown, low-income users may favor fees over reductions in services. However, it cannot be inferred from this preference that fees would be preferred if service reductions were not being considered, or, more importantly, that fees would not inhibit access for low-income groups. As Dustin noted, issues regarding fees are ultimately issues regarding access. It is the potential change in access accompanying fees that determines participation.

Numerous studies have shown that low-income are affected by fee systems, though they differ in the estimated extent of impact. In his 1985 study analyzing the potential discriminatory impacts
resulting from a fee increase, Cordell found that people with annual household incomes of less than $20,000 were significantly underrepresented in the thirteen of the fifteen outdoor recreational activities studied (Reiling, 1992). In More’s study, it was determined that fees have a substantially discriminatory impact on people of low-income and that these impacts are “clear, consistent, and significant” (More, 2000). It was found that a greater percentage of low-income users changed their usage patterns because of fees, that a great percentage of low-income users preferred fundraising and donation solicitation to fees, and that low-income users were much more likely to favor taxation over direct user fees for financing public lands.

As Reiling contends, a fee in and of itself may not have a discriminatory impact. Other factors can influence the formation of a discriminatory impact, including the presence of low-cost alternative recreational activities, the total cost of participation, and the percentage of total cost for participation that the fees comprise. Some studies have shown that travel and equipment costs have a much greater discriminatory impact on low-income users than fees do (Gibbs, 1977).

However, studies have shown that low-income users are much more sensitive to the size of a fee and to an increase than higher-income users are (More, 2000; Schroeder & Louviere, 1999). More found that while only 11% of the higher-income group in his study indicated that fees were a major factor in their participation, nearly 20% of low-income residents did (More, 347). Studies analyzing the possible effects of user fees have shown that there are relatively low price elasticities of demand for recreation facilities, meaning that changes in price have a relatively small effect on the quantity of the good demanded (Reiling, 1992). However, there is a caveat to this finding: in response to a fee increase, some low-income users may stop using the recreation facility completely, and thus remove themselves from the potentially studied user population. An especially important consideration is the finding that sites most likely to experience decreased demand in response to a fee increase were those sites “used mostly by the surrounding community” (More, 2000).

Government Budgets and Responses

Because there is much debate surrounding the potential effects of recreational user fees, it is important to consider the reasons why they have been implemented. There are several conditions, that were they to be isolated, would still have a negative impact on park and recreation center financing; however, their combined presence has significantly, and in some instances, fundamentally altered financing structures for these places. Neoliberal trends, including “federal devolution, increased localization of service provision, and limited intergovernmental transfers” had lead to a decreased distribution of funds and resources to park and recreation departments (Jossart-Marcelli, 2010).

Often perceived as a non-essential service, park and recreation departments often see their funding diverted to police and fire services, transportation infrastructure, and economic development initiatives (Jossart-Marcelli, 2010). Parks and recreation departments are, in essence, the low men on the totem pole. Coupling this decrease in funding is an increase in demand, further stressing government agencies and departments. Cities governments across the county, particularly those facing substantial budget cuts, largely have been closing their recreation centers or selling them to private or non-profit operators (Van Arnum, 2014).
Potential Solutions

Though the literature has presented much information regarding the imposition of fees, perceptions of fairness of such fees, and their effects on equitable access, the literature has failed to produce substantive, effective, and realistic solutions to the problems that fees may present to low-income users. Most solutions involve outsourcing programming, operations, and or maintenance, and changing financing structures in an effort to reduce costs. As Jossart-Marcelli noted, some states, like California, have adopted bond measures in order to support the development of new recreational facilities in underserved sections of the state (Jossart-Marcelli, 2010). Another common practice, according to Jossart-Marcelli, is the introduction of the nonprofit sector, which has been “increasingly involved in the planning and acquisition of park land, the development and maintenance of facilities, and the management of recreation courses” (Jossart-Marcelli, 2010).

While there is little information regarding how governments may alter their approaches in order to reduce fees or increase access, there are even fewer suggestions made for how low-income recreational center users can access parks despite the financial barriers presented by fees. And, unfortunately, those suggestions that are made are not realistic recommendations. While More’s suggestions for partial fee waivers, reductions, and rebates may be the most feasible option for governments to enact, they may not be the most beneficial for users. Partial fee waivers and reductions, though they are well intended, and in theory, may reduce the price for using recreational centers, may not be substantial enough to make the fees truly affordable. Rebates, while also potentially helpful, may not make a difference to a person who doesn’t have the money to pay for recreation center use in the first place.

Another suggestion presented by More – though it is much less realistic – is for governments to provide admission to recreation centers in exchange for voluntary labor (More, 2000). Not only does this suggestion fail to consider the social effects such a program may have, it, as Rubin notes, does not account for the fact that many “working-class families have both limited leisure time and inflexible schedules” (More, 2000).

What next?

The Innovative Approach of Portland, Oregon’s Park and Recreation Department

Like most parks and recreation departments in municipalities across the country, Portland’s Parks and Recreation Department has been moving toward a fee-for-service based model over the past 30 years. However, unlike most departments, Portland has adopted an innovative approach in ensuring that this fee-for-service model does not inhibit access for the City’s youth and low-income participants. The Parks and Recreation Department has been able to do so through its cost of service model, cost recovery model, and scholarship program.

In the City of Portland, a cost of service (COS) study is required by city policy “for bureaus that provide service-for-fees and that receive public subsidy” (Portland Parks and Recreation Department, 2014). A COS identifies the total expenses for providing a service to the public and compares them to the total revenue generated by that service. These studies are essentially
departmental balance sheets, providing a breakdown of what percentage of the costs are covered by fees, donations, taxpayer money, etc.

Portland’s COS studies are especially extensive in that they not only consider direct costs of programming, but that they make very strong efforts to include indirect costs, which are much less easily identified. This more sophisticated model attempts to include all costs, like the direct costs of instructor wages, and the indirect costs of facilities maintenance, of utilities, and of central services like human resources. The model also includes a built-in budget for capital replacement projects, as it is assumed that the facilities will generally require some level of improvement. The costs associated with the provision of free activities are considered as well, and are reflected in lower cost recovery rates. Cost allocation, however, can be the most challenging part of this process. As only a few costs can be directly allocated to a single activity because most costs incurred support various activities, the allocation process can become complicated.

The City’s Cost Recovery Model is another crucial component in ensuring access for all. Many city departments across the country assign cost recovery goals based on the “public good” ratio. This approach compares the public benefit to the private benefit provided by a service. In its 2005 COS study, the Parks and Recreation Department implemented a new approach for cost recovery, citing “participation, and reducing barriers to participation, [as the] current focus of public interest” (Portland Parks and Recreation Department, 2014). In order to advance this interest, and to reduce financial barriers for all participants, the Department supplemented the public interest targets with much more tangible targets – specifically, those based on user age and neighborhood income. The Department’s financial management staff also recognized the real and significant pressures that exist when making funding decisions in the face of decreasing discretionary budgets. The cost recovery model provides a transparent process for guiding funding decisions for both city officials and the public at large.

Cost recovery rates are calculated by dividing total revenue by total costs. Rather than simply based on the public good ratio, the targets for these rates of cost recovery fluctuate in accordance with age and neighborhood income levels. For example, recreation centers in low-income neighborhoods have lower cost recovery targets than do recreation centers located in median-income and above neighborhoods. Recreation centers and programming that serve mainly youth also have lower cost recovery targets than those that serve adults and those that serve youth and adults. The lower the cost recovery target, the more a center or program is subsidized by the City’s general fund. See Figure 19. For a detailed example of cost recovery documentation, please see the Appendix.
The Parks and Recreation Department’s scholarship program has also been instrumental in increasing access for all. Unlike most scholarship programs, Portland’s extends to all qualifying residents—not only to qualifying youth. And unlike most programs, qualification for the scholarship is not based on a candidate’s qualification for government assistance or the public school system’s free and reduced lunch program. Rather, when applying, a candidate must list why he or she is unable to pay the full fee.

Though the entire cost of a program fee cannot be covered by the scholarship, a substantial amount of aid is awarded to recipients. Often, for example, $50.00 program fees are reduced to $10.00 through the scholarship program. According to department staff, the median amount received per person per year is $50.00, with 85% of participants awarded $200.00 per year. In addition to program fees, scholarship funds can be applied to membership plans to recreation centers. For example, an annual family membership to an aquatic center is $500.00; however, if a scholarship is awarded, the membership can be reduced to approximately $100.00 (Smith, 2015).

Scholarships can vary significantly, as they are awarded on a site-specific basis and are not given a line-item in the budget. Rather, they are simply absorbed by each recreation center. Though this approach may provide a temporary solution for increasing access, it is most likely not a sustainable one. Having neither a dedicated source of funding nor a line-item in the budget means that these scholarships are particularly susceptible to discontinuance—and those that rely on them susceptible to the negative impacts their absence would create. The Parks and Recreation Department is currently considering altering the current scholarship program by potentially capping the amount of aid that an individual can use each year to $200.00. The Department feels that by identifying a maximum amount of aid, it will be able to make its scholarship program more unified among all the recreation centers without having a significant impact on users, as the overwhelming majority of users currently are awarded $200.00 annually (Smith, 2015).
Recommendations and Next Steps

Adoption of cost of service and cost recovery models is a significant undertaking that requires staff willingness and participation and substantial data collection and analysis. Implementing these programs in Saint Paul’s Parks and Recreation Department may be feasible, as they have a fairly large staff who may be able to absorb the duties that such a program would entail. However, it may be likely that additional staff would need to be hired to meet the FTEs needed in order to conduct the more nuanced data collection that such programs would require. For example, the Department keeps records of recreation center attendance, but does not break it down by program or activity. Nor does the Department record any data regarding attendees. Age and place of residence (so as to determine neighborhood income level), which would be required if adopting Portland’s approach, are not currently measured.

Another way to increase access for youth may be to increase access for all ages. Because Saint Paul’s current fee waiver programs applies to youth only, adults are not able to benefit directly from the waiver. Households may be inclined to participate in family-friendly activities at recreation centers, but may be prevented from doing so because, while fees may become affordable for children, they may remain unaffordable for the household’s adults. Of course, expanding the scholarship to all residents, regardless of age, will also expand the amount of funding required for the program.

Amidst the trend of decreasing discretionary budgets, it is highly unlikely that parks and recreation departments will be able to secure additional funding allocations from city general funds. Raising fees to fund the scholarship fund may only serve to decrease affordability – and thus, increase the number of residents applying for scholarship funds. One way that cities have been able to fund their scholarship programs, in spite of these challenges, has been through the establishment of a public foundation. Often, these public foundations, usually 501(c)3s, partner with the local city, to help provide the necessary funding.

The Kent Parks Foundation, based in Kent, Washington, is one such example. The foundation, whose mission is “to support Kent Parks, Recreation, and Community Services’ efforts to better the community, now and for generations to come” has been instrumental in providing scholarships to low-income youth. Its “Access to Recreation Initiative” has raised $46,500 to date. In 2012, 1,114 scholarships were awarded – an increase of 66% from the 690 awarded in 2011 (Kentparksfoundation.org, 2014). The Associated Recreation Council (ARC), based in Seattle, Washington, is another example of a 501(c)3 organization partnering with a city parks and recreation department. Like the Kent Foundation, the ARC awards scholarships based on participant need; it also, however, uses donations to construct or renovate facilities and to begin or expand recreation programs (Seattlefoundation.org, 2015).

Recommendation is made for the establishment of a nonprofit foundation to supplement funding to the Parks and Recreation Department. In fact, a similar partnership already exists in Saint Paul! The partnership of the Como Zoo and Marjorie McNeely Conservatory with the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society has been able to help maintain free access to the facilities through the Society’s extensive fund raising and investing efforts. The Parks and Recreation chapter of Saint Paul’s Comprehensive Plan for 2020 makes specific reference to the increased use of
supplemental resources through the establishment of a non-profit foundation, similar to the Como Zoo and Conservatory Society, which would provide additional financial support for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Another possible, though unproven, avenue for filling park and recreation department coffers has recently been proposed in California. The City of Oakland’s Park and Recreation Department is considering a policy that would allow corporations to purchase naming rights to city-owned parks and recreation centers if they pay for beautification and maintenance of the sites (Kane, 2014). Oakland, which doesn’t have enough money in its budget to cover the $112 million in capital improvements and repairs necessary for its park and recreation facilities, has been trying to propose creative solutions for raising the money – without having to raise program fees. The system, which would mimic donor recognition, like those on hospital and university buildings, is thought to provide unique benefits. The policy, however, is still in its infant stages. Many components regarding sponsorship details, like length, quantities, and qualifications, are yet to be determined.

Another general fundraising approach that may be tailored to Saint Paul’s Parks and Recreation Department involves harnessing the city’s star power – especially that tied to athletics. Saint Paul has a slew of professional athletes born and raised within its limits. Likely users of the city’s recreation centers when they were growing up, these athletes may be inclined to lend their support to a fundraising campaign. Leveraging the celebrity of these athletes to raise awareness of the fee waiver program and money to fund it, may be an effective approach for raising the initial funds necessary to begin a foundation.

Fortunately, there are several feasible and proven approaches to increasing access to recreation centers that the City may adopt. As is the case with most initiatives or programming reliant on funding, dedicated and diversified sources are best because programs using diversified sources of funding are less susceptible to interruptions if a source is reduced or discontinued. It is because of this susceptibility, that it is recommended that the City adopt the above approaches in conjunction with each other, rather than adopting only one suggestion. It is in this way that the City will be able to increase access for its low-income residents to its recreation centers in a substantial and sustainable manner.
Works Cited


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Fretwell, H. L. (1999). Paying to play: The fee demonstration program (No. PS-17): PERC.


All data used in graphs and maps, other than those in works cited as completed by other authors, are from the American Community Survey five year 2012 estimates and were accessed from: http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/index.xhtml. Shapefiles used for maps are TIGER/line files and were downloaded from www.census.gov.
Appendix

Free and Reduced Lunch Income Guidelines
(From The U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service website)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household size</th>
<th>Federal poverty guidelines—100%</th>
<th>Reduced price meals—185%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>$11,670</td>
<td>$973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>15,730</td>
<td>1,311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>19,790</td>
<td>1,650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23,850</td>
<td>1,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27,910</td>
<td>2,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>31,970</td>
<td>2,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>36,030</td>
<td>3,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>40,090</td>
<td>3,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each add’t family member</td>
<td>+ 4,060</td>
<td>+ 339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48 Contiguous States, D.C., Guam and Territories

Criteria Used in Determining Recreation Center Building Ratings
(From the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation System Plan)

“Evaluation of existing recreation center buildings was performed in spring 2010 by Miller Dunwiddie Architecture. Each building was rated based on the following categories:

- Flexibility of use
- Visual character
- Indoor/outdoor relationship
- Condition
- Energy efficiency
- Code compliance
- Core function/amenities
- Quality of building systems (City ratings of HVAC, roof, etc.)
- Use/visitation data (2009 City data)

A total of 45 points were possible based on the nine rating categories. Recreation center building ratings range from a low of 13 points to a high of 43 points. Buildings with rating score of 20 or less were categorized as low quality buildings, buildings with rating score of 21-35 were rated as average quality and buildings with scores from 36 to 45 were rated as high quality buildings. The evaluations and ratings were part of many factors, such as location, proximity to other centers, service area, etc. that went into the recreation center building recommendations.”
### Examples of Cost of Service Study

(From the Portland Parks and Recreation Department Cost of Service Report: Fiscal Years 2010-2011 & 2011-2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Center</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland Community Center</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose City Community Center</td>
<td>$80,000</td>
<td>$90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Communities Center</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$240,000</td>
<td>$280,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Center</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland Community Center</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose City Community Center</td>
<td>$120,000</td>
<td>$130,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Communities Center</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$370,000</td>
<td>$390,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Income Streams**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Stream</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Registration Fee</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>$220,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Dues</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>$160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donations</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Income</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$440,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Expenses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expense Item</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenses</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$210,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Net Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2010-2011</th>
<th>2011-2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>$440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenses</td>
<td>$180,000</td>
<td>$210,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Income</td>
<td>$220,000</td>
<td>$230,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

- The data presented is a summary of costs and revenues for each community center during the fiscal years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.
- The figures represent budgeted amounts and actual results may vary.
- Further analysis and detailed financial information can be found in the complete report.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
<th>Column 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data1</td>
<td>Data2</td>
<td>Data3</td>
<td>Data4</td>
<td>Data5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Data1 is the primary data source.
- Data2 is a secondary data source.
- Data3 is calculated based on Data1 and Data2.
- Data4 is derived from Data3.
- Data5 is an aggregate of Data4.

**Legend:**
- Data1: Primary Data
- Data2: Secondary Data
- Data3: Calculated Data
- Data4: Derived Data
- Data5: Aggregate Data
Fact Sheet

There are some economic conditions in the study region that may be significantly limiting residents’ access to the City of Saint Paul’s Recreation Centers.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>What We Find in the Study Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Income</strong></td>
<td>Median annual household income is $41,178 – just $5,000 less than Saint Paul’s average.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>But</em> median annual household income in the tract with the lowest value is just <strong>$13,456</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– an annual household income <strong>seven times lower</strong> than that of the highest in the study region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poverty</strong></td>
<td>Of the 9,016 residents under the age of 18, 3,852 – that's <strong>over 40%</strong> – <strong>live below the poverty line</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rent</strong></td>
<td>Nearly <strong>50% of residents are “rent burdened.”</strong> or pay more than 30% of their monthly income on rent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In some tracts, nearly <strong>70%</strong> of residents are rent burdened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TANF and SNAP</strong></td>
<td>In some tracts, <strong>over a third</strong> of residents receive TANF benefits and <strong>over half</strong> receive SNAP benefits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, what can we do?

Low-income residents in other cities across the country have faced similar problems of decreased access. Cities have taken a few measures to try to reverse that trend. Many have tried to decrease costs directly and to increase the funding available for scholarships.

For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City, State</th>
<th>What They Have Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kent, Washington</td>
<td>Established a nonprofit foundation that raises money to fund scholarships for recreation center programming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle, Washington</td>
<td>Established a nonprofit foundation that raises money for scholarships and for recreation center operation and maintenance fees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, Oregon</td>
<td>Instituted a Cost of Service and Cost Recovery Model, which aims to recover less money from youth and from residents of low-income neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakland, California</td>
<td>Is attempting to fund its parks and recreation centers through corporate sponsorships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>