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TO: Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

THRU: Marty Heffernan, Director of CPRE
Craig L. Foreman, Manager of Park Planning and Development

FROM: Chris Dropinski, GreenPlay, LLC

RE: Parks and Recreation Policy Plan Update
Recommended Option for Build Out of the Park System

DATE: February 28, 2008

A downturn in the economy has impacted the City's General Fund challenging the ability to sustain the current level of service standards for City services, including parks and recreation, without consideration of new funding sources. As part of the Policy Plan Update, City Council has asked the Department to present three options for the construction of future parks, with different needs for General Fund support for future park operation and maintenance costs.

Three options were developed for this discussion:

A "**Current Level of Service**" option (status quo) calls for the development of parks at one every year through the build out of nineteen parks. This includes sixteen neighborhood parks and three community parks. Complete park build out would be in year 2024. This option includes the continuation of measures put in place to reduce reliance on the General Fund by \$1M over the past four years, due in large part to: use of Conservation Trust Fund (CTF); increased emphasis on reduced operation and maintenance designs; staffing reductions; lifecycle reductions; delays in equipment replacement; and energy savings, etc.

A "**Reduced Level of Service**" option calls for developing a park every other year and combining some park sites resulting in the elimination of five park sites. Complete park build out would be in year 2028. This option includes a more aggressive approach to reducing operation and maintenance costs, saving the General Fund about \$3.2M over the next ten years.

An “**Austere Level of Service**” option calls for developing a park every other year and combining some park sites resulting in the elimination of eight parks sites, including one community park. Complete park build out would be in year 2026. This option includes a much more aggressive approach to reducing operation and maintenance costs, including elimination of many facilities found in the parks. This option would save the General Fund about \$3.7M over the next ten years.

The exercise also included looking at new operation and maintenance revenues including:

- A shift in the use of the Conservation Trust Fund from trail development to operations and maintenance of parks as they come on-line
- Park and Trail Maintenance Fee
- Trail Impact Fee

Recommendation

The needs assessment identified that Fort Collins citizens are very satisfied with the current park service levels. Ideally, the current service level should be maintained, while controlling maintenance costs. To this end, GreenPlay recommends:

- Keeping options open for the future – use available funding to acquire land for needed parks and trail waysides
- Concentrate turf grass area within the system to areas of high use
- Increase alternative landscaping within the system to reduce operation and maintenance costs
- Pursue new funding sources to preserve current level of service

In light of the current economic situation, and provided that new revenue sources would not be adequate to continue the current level of service, GreenPlay recommends the “Reduced Level of Service” option for the build out of the park system. This option:

- Creates a substantial savings for the General Fund over the next 10 years
- Delays the development of some future parks and combines some future park locations
- Maintains an acceptable Level of Service for future residents – reducing the overall number of park sites can be offset somewhat through a more “connected park” system using linear trails with small “nodes” of development, such as park benches or a small piece of play equipment, at strategic locations. With a “connected” system, access to the system, and therefore individual park sites, is improved for everyone.
- Generally provides a balanced and fair park system – further reduction of the level of service would result in areas of the City without adequate park service, creating a system of haves and have-nots.
- Would help prevent the potential overuse of existing facilities that would occur with the “austere” option – with such a limited future inventory it is likely that residents would put additional pressure on what is available causing increased maintenance expense and loss of quality.
- Is sustainable with projected General Fund revenues
- May require use of a majority, if not all of, the CTF requiring new sources of revenue to further develop the trail system. Community interest in trail systems and in “connectivity” is very high, as shown by the survey. Other sources of revenue such as

grants and/or partnering are may offset some of the increased use of the CTF for this purpose.

- Can be combined with other measures to minimize maintenance costs including restroom construction design and materials options and the shifting of programmable game fields to community parks from neighborhood parks to consolidate expenses.

It is also recommended that the City should explore new revenue to support future park operation and maintenance costs. The need for parks operation and maintenance funding should be included in the City's "Price of Government" discussion with the community. Funding options should consider:

- Creation of a dedicated park maintenance fee
- Creation of a dedicated park maintenance tax (price of government discussion)
- Creation of a community wide trail impact fee
- Use CTF for operation and maintenance revenue stream keeping in mind that continued use of the CTF for operation and maintenance needs severely restricts a fund that otherwise has considerable flexibility. The Fund can be used for numerous recreation related projects such as seed money for future recreation centers, pools, etc. that is lost if funds are diverted to operation and maintenance.
- Focusing community park development on active, revenue generating areas in early phases