



The City of Shaker Heights

Judith H. Rawson, Mayor

Dear Shaker Neighbor,

Thank you for your interest and concerns regarding the Recreation and Leisure Assessment. We're sorry it's taken a few days to respond, but we needed to check statements with various staff members.

Before addressing specific concerns about the task force's preliminary recommendations, we want to clarify the purpose of its work, and how that purpose affected the process. The purpose was to convene a broad community conversation about ways to enhance all aspects of Recreation and Leisure in Shaker for every resident. To date, the process has involved more than 525 residents of all ages from all neighborhoods. Early meetings included focus groups with community volunteers and leaders from the City's major sports leagues, recreation users, and neighborhoods. Area churches and community associations were contacted, as well. Over 120 middle school and high school students participated in sessions held at their schools and more than 350 residents attended the three public sessions. The 12-member task force includes six citizens, two elected officials each from the City and Schools and two appointed representatives from the Library. Two citizen members co-chair the task force.

Residents had the opportunity to express their values, their dreams and their creative ideas. The Task Force listened carefully and incorporated many of the ideas into a framework to guide our work over the next 10 years. The task force's achievement is this framework... a blueprint... a starting point; it is not a specific road map.

As you may remember, the City successfully followed a very similar process in developing its Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), which has been a powerful framework for revitalizing the City and strengthening its tax base over the past five years. From the SIP framework have come specific projects including the Sussex Courts development, the Shaker Towne Centre redevelopment, the new firehouse, the South Park Row and Kensington Station developments and the new energy-efficient homes currently under construction. Our 2002 Resident Survey showed strong support for the strategies that developed from the SIP process and framework. The Economic Development Plan, the Housing Revitalization Plan and the Recreation and Leisure Assessment have also been developed to complement the SIP.

Mayor

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This doesn't mean, though, that issues of more immediate interest, such as Recreation and Leisure, are not going to receive consideration, as well. While Council has maintained from the beginning of this process that spending parameters are necessary, we firmly believe that the short, medium and long-term recommendations allow for many creative possibilities. Balancing ALL of the City's short and long-term needs, keeping Recreation and Leisure as part of the equation, is Council's challenge.

So where are we now? The final task force report will include, as appendices, all data that informed its recommendations. The task force and Council will meet jointly, most likely in December or January, to review the recommendations and agree on priorities for further analysis. Because this was a framework, further analysis (as specifically noted in the preliminary recommendations) will be required for specifics such as: improvements at Horseshoe Lake Park; redesign of the Pool; field improvements or the addition or creation of anything new. Please do not presume that moving forward on any idea will take place without further analysis.

We will address concerns about field usage: we've clearly heard a request for better access to fields in better condition. For all priority action items within the preliminary recommendations, staff is already working to flesh out additional information and analysis. Fields are one of these priorities. This additional information will be presented to the task force and Council at their joint meeting. Therefore, we ask for your patience and support.

Finally, please be assured that we have, and continue to, welcome ideas for regional partnerships to address some of our more challenging capital items – such as a second sheet of ice or performing arts venues. Indeed, the City has made a number of overtures over the last year with non-profits and surrounding cities in an effort to create recreation opportunities.

Shaker is known for its ability to engage in strong, but respectful debate. Please help us continue this tradition. To avoid passing along misinformation, please call us with your questions or check the City's website at shakeronline.com to receive the most accurate, up-to-date information. This is a very complex set of issues and desires, but we believe we can successfully satisfy most of them if we all work together.

Thank you again for your interest and support.

Most sincerely,

Judy Rawson, Mayor
Dr. Laura Holmes, Council representative to the Task Force

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