Connecting
People, Parks
& Nature

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Recreation Advisory Committee
June 15, 2011
7 pm
Conestoga Recreation & Aquatic Center

Agenda

I. Introductions

II. Approval of Minutes

III. Tour of Facility

IV. Center Presentation

V. Update: City of Portland Bureau of Environmental Service Project/Community Benefit Fund.

VI. Policy Review Update – Family Assistance

VII. Set Next Meeting Date/Time

Connecting People, Parks & Nature

MEMO

DATE: May 16, 2011
TO: The Board of Directors
FROM: Doug Menke, General Manager

RE: **Family Assistance Program Adjustment**

Introduction

As the Board of Directors is aware, the Park District's Family Assistance Program serves qualifying families and individuals living within THPRD's boundaries. It provides opportunities to participate in classes, leagues, and activities to residents who would otherwise not be able to because of financial hardship.

The Board is also aware we have experienced sharply increased demand for the Family Assistance Program in recent years. This is due in part to the continuing weak economy and greater awareness of the program. While Family Assistance is of great benefit to qualifying in-District individuals and families, its rate of growth needs to be addressed.

The purpose of this memo is to update you on my plans to adjust the Family Assistance Program to assure that we still make it available to those most in need while also strengthening fiscal controls on the program's expenses.

Family Assistance Program Recent History

In fall 2007, the Board of Directors approved changes in the THPRD Family Assistance Program as a result of recommendations presented by a task force of community volunteers and Park District staff. The task force recommended that patrons be able to apply for assistance just once per year instead of quarterly. Income qualifications followed the THPRD-determined guidelines closely and documentation of qualification for the Beaverton School District free meals program and the Oregon Trail food stamps program were included, where appropriate, in the qualifying criteria. Qualifying patrons were given a gift card loaded with $200 per qualified person per household. This assistance was available for each household to use as desired for District programs and affiliated sports leagues for one year, and commingling of funds within households was allowed as needed.

The program grew steadily after these changes were put in place. The subsequent hiring of a bilingual Family Assistance administrator in the summer of 2009 also generated increased awareness of the program.

In January 2010, the qualifying income guidelines were updated in line with the Federal Free Meal Program guidelines. In July 2010, THPRD discontinued the ability of households to commingle funds; they were still given $200 per person per year, but parents, as an example, could no longer assign their allocation to their children. The assistance continued to be available for most District programs and affiliated sports leagues. Exceptions included private lessons, birthday parties, facility rentals and purchasing items from District facilities.

Family Assistance Program Growth

Usage through April for the current fiscal year totaled $442,000, compared to $354,000 through the same period a year ago, a 25% increase. What's more, we are now projecting a total usage at the end of this fiscal year of $571,000 minimum, which would be a 20% increase over last year's actual total of $483,000.

Clearly, these numbers show that we have not seen a peak in Family Assistance usage. April usage alone was $73,000, up 22% from the April 2010 figure of $60,000. Our Family Assistance administrator estimates she receives 10-20 requests for assistance every day.

Given the continued economic downturn, steady population influx, higher class fees per the fee policy, and increased awareness of the Family Assistance Program, it is prudent to seek further changes to the program.

Advisory Committees' Comment

A small team of staff members with programming and Family Assistance knowledge held several meetings earlier this year to discuss the issue and explore options. From those meetings emerged these recommended changes:

- Currently, qualified Family Assistance recipients are awarded $200 per person per household per year. Members of the staff team recommended that we change this to $50 per person per household every three months. Those who are already receiving Family Assistance would be grandfathered until they reach the end of their 12-month cycle.

- One additional change proposed is the prospect of each participant within the Program paying a small, non-refundable percentage (5%-10%) up front in order to gain access to funding support. Part of the review would focus on the possibility of segmenting those who would have to pay by income levels -- above and below the federal poverty line.

- THRPD will continue supporting affiliated youth sports leagues through the Family Assistance Program. To address the length-of-season concern (most sports seasons run beyond three months), consideration will be given to funding two quarters from the Family Assistance Program.

These recommendations were subsequently presented to THPRD's six program Advisory Committees. The purpose was to gather public feedback on the changes and their potential impact on program participants.

Following the review by the Advisory Committees, their comments were collated and reviewed. As you can see in the attached chart, the opinions shared by the Committees were quite diverse. There was no consensus, but each Advisory Committee brought forward valuable points, comments and insight.

Planned Program Changes

To assure that those Park District residents who qualify for the Family Assistance Program continue to be eligible, and to recognize that different families are capable of contributing to their participation at different levels, and to monitor the program in the most fiscally prudent manner possible, I intend to implement changes to the program as follows:

Effective July 1, 2011:

1) New or reapplying qualified Family Assistance Program participants will be eligible for $100 every six months.
2) Participants in the program will be placed in one of two tiers based on their household income.

Tier 1

- Participants will be those whose household income falls below the 2011 Federal Poverty Level.
- These program participants will be eligible for the $100 every six months and will not be asked to contribute to the class, program, or activity cost.

Tier 2

- Participants will be those who qualify for the program whose household income falls above the federal poverty level but below the 2011 Federal Free Meal Program Guidelines.
- These program participants will be eligible for the $100 every six months and will be asked to contribute 10% of the Family Assistance funds being requested. For example, if an individual was approved for Family Assistance funds, they would need to pay $20 or 10% of $200 to gain access to those funds.

Federal Poverty Level	
Family Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	$908
2	$1,226
3	$1,544
4	$1,863
5	$2,181
6	$2,499
7	$2,818
8	$3,136

Federal Free Meal Guidelines	
Family Size	Gross Monthly Income
1	$1,180
2	$1,594
3	$2,008
4	$2,422
5	$2,836
6	$3,249
7	$3,663
8	$4,077

We anticipate that these steps will help control the growth of the Family Assistance Program during these difficult economic times while still providing assistance to those who need it most.