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CHARLESTON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

ACCESSIBILITY INITIATIVE: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

FEBRUARY 11-13, 2020

Introduction

The Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission (CCPRC) retained the WT Group Accessibility Practice (WTG) to complete an access audit of all sites and develop a phased retrofit schedule, or transition plan. Other tasks included review of policies, program supports for inclusion, and the audit of communication methods, including the website. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires an access audit, or self-evaluation, of existing Commission facilities and sites.

The Community Engagement Mandate

Community engagement is an essential part of the ADA requirements. The US Department of Justice (US DOJ) published a regulation in 1991 that governs the ways in which cities comply with the ADA. That regulation was revised and published again in September of 2010, and became effective March 15, 2012.

Within that regulation, at section 35.105, the Department is required to involve the public in the access audit process. That involvement typically comes in the form of public forums, where the members of a community share their access preferences and priorities.

Community Engagement Events

The CCPRC and WT Group, planned and facilitated a variety of community engagement events. The CCPRC conducted sessions geographically throughout the county and at a variety of times to ensure a diverse representation from the community.

The first, Public Feedback Session was held on Tuesday, February 11, 2020, at 6:30 pm at the CCPRC Commission Headquarters in Charleston. It was facilitated by John McGovern and Heidi Lapin of the WT Group. Steve Hutton, Director of Recreation, Ashley Houdyschell, Recreation Administrative Manager, Laura Moorner, Recreation Administrative and Accessibility Aide were present. Three members from the public attended, including, Alex Jackson, Marka Rodgers and Anne Sanderson.

Another Public Feedback Session took place on Wednesday afternoon, February 12, 2020, at Roper Hospital. It was coordinated by Kim Aquino and facilitated by John McGovern and Heidi Lapin of the WT Group. Steve Hutton, Director of Recreation and Ashley Houdyschell, Recreation Administrative Manager were in attendance. Katie Hall, Jamie Hamric, Michelle Moore, Toshiya Beckman, and Chantel Ferguson whom all work at Roper provided feedback on behalf of their patients.



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The second Public Feedback Session took place on Wednesday, February 12, 2020, at 6:30 pm at the RI Jones Center in Mt Pleasant. It was facilitated by John McGovern and Heidi Lapin of the WT Group. Steve Hutton, Director of Recreation, Ashley Houdyschell, Recreation Administrative Manager, Laura Moorer, Recreation Administrative and Accessibility Aide and Mark Patrick, General Manager for Folly Beach, were present. Members from the public included Brenda Parent, Cathy Leeke with her daughter Meredith, a fifth grader.

The CCPRC and the WT Group contracted Green Play, LLC to conduct focus groups and a community survey. Three focus group sessions took place. At each session Tom Diehl, of Green Play facilitated the public feedback sessions, with Heidi Lapin of the WT Group in attendance to take notes. Steve Hutton, Director of Recreation, Ashley Houdyschell, Recreation Administrative Manager and Laura Moorer, Recreation Administrative and Accessibility Aide were also present.

The focus group sessions occurred on Thursday, February 13th. The morning session took place at 10 am at Palmetto Island County Park in Mt. Pleasant. Members from the public included Mary Tutterow, Queen Pringle, Michelle Helferich, Kayla Helferich (CRA), and Cristina Holtz-Crosby. In addition, Kevin Gillum, Palmetto Islands Manager was present.

The afternoon session was at 2 pm at the CCPRC Commission Headquarters in Charleston. Participants included Jane Marvin, Joe Moore, Pat Perry, Martetha (Yee) Goss, Marka Danielle Rodgers, Mariam Chinn, Laurie Yarbrough, Anne Sanderson, and Toni Catoe. Melissa Bernhardt, CCPRC, Manager was also in attendance.

The evening session took place at 6:30 pm at Cypress Hall at Wannamaker County Park in North Charleston. Members of the public included Maria Saxon, Alex Jackson, Michelle Howard, Darrell M. Bivens, Shirelle Bivens, Randi Earls Neideffer, Michelle Sarell, Jessica Vance, and Tristan Howard. In addition, Tina Ujcich, Volunteer Coordinator for the CCPRC attended.

The CCPRC solicited additional feedback through Survey Monkey.

In summary, the public has an overall positive experience at Commission parks and facilities, as well as positive experiences and interactions with staff. The public spoke very highly of the Commission.

Several strengths were identified including the programs, and special events, the existing accessible facilities, staff leadership, customer service and commitment to the community.

General opportunities for the Commission include increasing the frequency of existing, successful programs/events, in particular the Special Needs Swim Night. Suggestions included adding sensory friendly facilities and programs as well as more programs for adults and seniors. The community would like more adaptive equipment to be purchased including beach wheel chairs, hand cycles, adaptive bicycles, kayaks and paddle boards. Many members mentioned adding adult changing areas with water/rinse off capabilities in park sites. Feedback included improving the registration process for programs, events and equipment rental/use. The community would like the Commission to improve communications about accessibility and inclusion through improving the

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website, signage, offering information in Spanish, and creating a task force. Another opportunity is offering staff training at all levels.

As for accessibility priorities, the community indicated beach access as the number one priority. This included all elements at the beach, from access, parking, restrooms, and to work with conservation laws to get closer to the water. Next priority was high traffic/most visited sights should be made accessible, including trail systems at parks. And then the “basics” such as parking, an accessible route and restrooms.

Conclusion

Through the meetings, the community consensus was to start with beach access. This is what Charleston is known for. Next would be the basics, such as accessible parking, accessible routes, and restrooms. Additionally, the consensus was to make frequency of use of sites a retrofit factor. Consideration should also be given to sites that are accessible by public transportation. Discussion on adding adaptive equipment occurred in all forums.

It was clear in the discussions that community members believe that staff want their feedback, and listen to the concerns of the community. That is an achievement in itself, and one that the Commission can be proud of.



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