

Excerpts from DNR guideline booklet...

## ***Public Input Process***

In this section, describe the methods used to incorporate public input into your recreation planning process. Citizen opinion on recreation and open space priorities is a key consideration in plan development. It is important to involve the public early in the process, through public meetings, surveys, or other means. It is highly recommended that additional effort be put forth to solicit comments from residents living in the vicinity of future projects and from others who may be negatively impacted by the projects. Special efforts may be required to involve segments of the population whose concerns are often overlooked. If your community has substantial minority, low-income, disabled, or elderly populations, identify and address their needs and concerns.

The benefits of soliciting public input include:

- Increases “ownership” of the community plan by community members.
- Promotes democracy and equality with equal opportunity to share in decisions.
- Empowered citizens tend to be more active and to participate more fully in governance. An active and energetic public can offer much needed support for local governments.
- Creativity is enhanced by many ideas coming from people with diverse backgrounds, skills and abilities. In short, problem solving is enhanced when people work together as a team, not alone.
- When citizens are included in the problem-solving and decision-making process, they share in the ownership of the solutions to their community’s problems and are thus said to “buy in” to these solutions. These citizens are far less likely to oppose your efforts or a solution at the very end of the process, and the solutions you arrive at are likely to be more effective and longer lasting.
- By involving everyone who has a stake in a community issue, you reduce the likelihood of conflict, of “we-they” perspectives, and of coalitions forming in opposition to one another.
- Increases stability and commitment to management that central government cannot duplicate.
- Increases economic and technical efficiency because agencies have more clearly defined responsibilities for their actions.
- Citizens are likely to identify themselves as part of something larger than the sum of their individual relationships.
- Citizens are likely to commit themselves for the long term to their own, one another’s and the group’s well-being.
- Empowers citizens to make those decisions that most affect their own lives.
- Encourages support for citizen and grassroots initiatives.

**As you are developing your plan, you must solicit public input by at least two means. The first means of soliciting public input should take place within a year of adopting the plan and prior to adoption by the governing body.** Public input can be accomplished through your choice of methods, such as those listed in the box below or any additional method of equal effectiveness.

METHODS TO SOLICIT PUBLIC INPUT IN THE RECREATION PLANNING PROCESS	
Citizen Luncheons	Questionnaires
Community Workshops	Community Surveys
Focus Groups	Public Information Resource Groups

During the first input method, a typical public meeting format is discouraged whereas methods such as focus groups, visioning sessions or charrettes are encouraged because they facilitate more public participation. Describe the method(s) you used and justify why you believe the response you received represented the whole community, especially those groups that may not be likely to attend meetings, the potential users for special use areas (for example, skate parks) and those who may be greatly affected (positively or negatively) by the recreation and open space opportunities considered (for example, people living in nearby neighborhoods). This is an ideal time to include input from other recreational providers, private and public partners and regional organizations. Provide a copy of the survey, meeting agenda, etc., and a summary of the amount of response and the information and opinions received.

**Once the draft plan has been completed, citizens must be provided with a well-publicized opportunity of adequate length (at least one month) to review and comment on it before it is officially adopted.**

One convenient place to allow the public to view the draft plan is at your public library or municipal website. Describe the methods you used to notify the citizens of the opportunity to review and comment on the draft plan before it was officially adopted. The notification can be accomplished by a variety of means including methods typically used to make announcement by the governing body; posting at the government office, municipal website, etc. The announcement should include the date of posting. In addition, provide a summary of any comments received and how they were used to modify the plan.

**The second means of soliciting public input is an advertised public hearing held as part of the meeting of a planning committee such as a park and recreation commission or a meeting of the governing body. The public hearing must occur prior to passing a resolution for adoption by the highest governing body.** The public hearing and resolution for adoption can occur at one meeting of the highest governing body as long as they are conducted as separate agenda items and the public hearing occurs prior to the resolution for adoption. The public must be given the opportunity to provide comments prior to passing a resolution to adopt the plan according to the Open Meetings Act, Pa 267 of 1976. The final resolution to adopt the plan must come from the highest governing body. The notice of the time and place for the public hearing must be published at least one week before the hearing in at least one newspaper with a general circulation within all local units of government included in the plan. Plans will not be accepted if the public hearing occurs after the plan has been adopted by the local governing body(ies). When submitting the plan to the DNR, include a copy of the published hearing notice and the minutes of the meeting at which the public hearing was conducted and the plan was adopted by the governing body. If the plan was adopted at a separate meeting from the public hearing, provide the minutes of both meetings.

For Joint Recreation Plans, one public hearing can be held by one organization, such as a planning committee, as long as it is advertised for all of the communities contained within the plan and in a newspaper in general circulation within all of those same communities. The plan must be adopted by resolution at a public meeting of each of the individual municipalities covered in the plan.

## PLAN AMENDMENTS

Prior to the expiration date of a plan, a community may want to amend portions of the plan. An approved plan may be amended at any time during the five-year period of eligibility to reflect significant changes in community conditions or goals. An amendment does not extend the five-year life of the plan.

Amendment Adoption and DNR Approval: Plan amendments must be adopted by the same

governing body that adopted the original plan, unless the resolution adopting the original plan included specific language delegating that authority to another entity (see Appendix K for a sample resolution). Any amendments to a multi-jurisdictional recreation plan must be adopted by all participating communities to be approved by the DNR.

**Once the amendment has been drafted, citizens must be provided with a well-publicized opportunity of adequate length (at least two weeks) to review and comment on it before it is officially adopted.** One convenient place to allow the public to view the draft amendment is at your public library or municipal website.

**The notice of the time and place for the hearing must be published at least one week before the public hearing and in at least one newspaper with a general circulation within the community(ies) included in the plan.**

**As with the original recreation plan, you must hold an advertised public hearing at a meeting with the recreation committee or at a meeting of the highest governing body where the amendment may also be presented for adoption.** The amendment must be adopted by the same governing body that adopted the original plan. The public hearing and resolution for adoption can occur at one meeting of the highest governing body as long as they are conducted as separate agenda items and the public hearing occurs prior to the resolution for adoption. The public must be given the opportunity to provide comments prior to passing a resolution to adopt the plan according to the Open Meetings Act, Pa 267 of 1976. The final resolution to adopt the plan must come from the highest governing body. Plan amendments will not be accepted if the public hearing occurs after the plan amendment has been adopted by the governing body.

A complete plan amendment package that is submitted to Grants Management for approval must include a completed, *Community Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Plan Amendment Checklist*, which is located in Appendix J.

Amendment Deadline: Communities may prepare recreation plan amendments at any time during the year. However, for amendments to be considered during a grant application preliminary evaluation period, they must be approved by and on file with Grants Management by March 1.