16. Safety and Security in Parks and Recreation Programs

Background

Safety and security for people visiting City parks and recreation facilities and for those enrolled in recreation programs are very important factors in public satisfaction and participation. People will not visit parks or recreation facilities or participate in programs if they do not feel safe. Results of a household survey (see the appendices) conducted by Boise Parks & Recreation (Department) in 2003 indicate that, regardless of activity, safety and security are of high importance to respondents. Survey results indicate that, for respondents not using City facilities, 12.2% do not because they don’t feel safe in parks. Of households in which people do not participate in recreational programs, 2.8% listed safety and security concerns as the reason for not participating. Further, of respondents who do not use Department aquatic facilities, 5.9% said they would be encouraged to use those facilities if safety and security were improved. When asked how the City could make the Boise Greenbelt more enjoyable, 25.1% suggested improving safety and security on the pathways, and 19.1% suggested lighting the path. Nearly 86% of survey respondents indicated that playground safety is very important.

Greenbelt Patrol

Patrol of the Greenbelt by the Boise Police Department was enhanced through increased deployment of bike and mounted patrols in response to several violent crimes committed along the path. Currently, the bike patrol is on duty from 7 A.M. to midnight on weekdays and in the winter and from 7 A.M. to 2 A.M. on summer weekends. The unit consists of six officers. Two to four officers are deployed at a time and patrol parks located near the downtown core, as well as the Greenbelt from Eckert Road to the Garden City limits. The officers are available to the Department’s police liaison via cell phone, e-mail, and personal contact. The mounted patrol consists of two officers who patrol each day from 7 A.M. to 5 P.M.

These uniformed patrols are supplemented with the ranger and volunteer patrols that operate from a building located in Shoreline Park. These ranger and volunteer patrols, available from noon to 9 P.M., focus primarily on the summer months because of high park use. In the winter, they have a skeletal crew from noon to dark. The primary purpose of these groups is to work as ambassadors for the Boise Police Department and Boise Parks & Recreation to educate, instruct, and assist park users. They also serve as “eyes and ears” for the police department’s mounted and bike patrols. The rangers carry police radios and can easily contact uniformed patrol when necessary.

Enforcement

The Greenbelt patrol units are part of the Community Outreach Division of the Boise Police Department. The focus of this division is on community policing, which allows police and community residents to work closely together in new ways to solve the problems of crime, fear of crime, physical and social disorders, and neighborhood decay. This collaboration affects the strategy for enforcement within our parks and recreation facilities. Boise Parks & Recreation
staff work with the Boise Police Department to listen to and address citizen concerns and specific crime problems, as well as educating the public about both departments. The most common issues addressed by police enforcement within the parks system are open container violations, consumption of alcohol by minors, dogs off leash, people in the park after dark, and vandalism.

As mentioned, Boise Parks & Recreation works in partnership with the Boise Police Department to improve safety and security within the City’s parks, buildings, and recreation facilities. Boise Parks & Recreation’s Superintendent of Administration and the Boise Police Department’s Mounted/Bike Sergeant serve as liaisons between the two departments to keep communications open and address mutual concerns and issues. The liaisons attend monthly Greenbelt Neighborhood Service Team meetings with bike, mounted, volunteer, and ranger patrol personnel and command staff within the Boise Police Department. The purpose of these meetings is to communicate issues of mutual concern, discuss and evaluate potential resolutions, and give feedback.

The Patrol Division of the Boise Police Department provides patrol and enforcement for parks outside the Greenbelt and downtown core. Officers respond to calls placed via dispatch or 911. Calls for service are prioritized by the Boise Police Department and responded to in priority order. The main challenge is that many officers are not educated on park rules and regulations because there are relatively few calls for service. So the Boise Police Department liaison works with Boise Parks & Recreation to educate officers as issues arise.

The City continues to acquire more open space reserve lands in the Boise Foothills and other areas, thus increasing the need for enforcement of City and park laws, rules, and regulations. The open space reserves involve different park rules and different enforcement and police-deployment requirements. Boise Parks & Recreation has been working with command staff from the Boise Police Department to increase patrol presence, particularly in its foothills open space properties that are within city limits, to affect such issues as dogs off leash (in “leash-required” areas), off-road driving, alcohol consumption, camping, theft, wildlife harassment, and vandalism. Boise Parks & Recreation desires to have an increased police presence oriented toward community policing in its open space reserves.

**Signage**

The ability to notify park visitors of rules, regulations, directions, and safety hazards is important for the public’s safety and enjoyment of park and recreation facilities. The Department formed a Sign Team to address all sign needs and specifications. The purpose of the team is to ensure that all parks have the appropriate signage needed, information and grammar in signs are correct, and signs throughout the system are consistent and easy to read and interpret. The Sign Team reviews and approves all requests for permanent signs. This process has considerably improved the quality, consistency, and aesthetics of park signage. It has also improved efficiency by decreasing duplication and providing “one-stop shopping” for the requestor. The team has limited resources because of budget constraints; therefore, several large parks, such as Fort Boise and Municipal Parks, still need signage plans and complete signage overhaul. These, like many other challenges, are needed to address public safety concerns and improve service and convenience for customers.
**Design and Maintenance**

Because the Department seeks to provide and maintain safe and secure park experiences for its users, it firmly believes in implementing principles of crime prevention and public safety through its design and maintenance efforts. The Department designs all new parks with public safety and security in mind. The Department also tries to use major repair and maintenance projects to retrofit existing parks and recreation facilities to address potential safety or security needs. The Resource Unit’s primary responsibility is implementing site-based safety and security measures, which include both design and maintenance functions. Design measures include positioning park restrooms so that public access doors are clearly visible from the adjoining public street or park driveways, constructing single-entry unisex bathrooms (rather than multiple-stall restrooms), ensuring that grading and drainage features meet safety standards, and selectively using fencing near areas with natural hazards, blind spots, traffic hazards, or potential user conflicts. Maintenance activities include ensuring that limbs of mature trees are pruned to a minimum height of 8 feet above ground level, maintaining vegetation along pathways to retain sight distances and remove sight obstructions, conducting regular safety inspections of park and recreation facilities, and scheduling regular preventative maintenance of park lighting systems, playgrounds, restrooms, and drainage features, and conducting other site improvements that could pose public safety or security risks. These measures should continue to be implemented. The Department should also provide safety and security training to all senior maintenance staff so that they recognize potential safety or security challenges.

**Graffiti and Vandalism**

The Department is aggressive in removing graffiti and addressing other acts of vandalism at public parks and recreation facilities. The Department seeks to document, remove, and restore features that have been affected by graffiti within 24 hours of identification. Prompt graffiti removal is important since it restores public park values, reinforces appropriate public use, provides a sense of safety and security, and promotes a positive image of the community. Acts of vandalism are similarly handled; however, restoration can take longer depending on the extent of damage. Boise Parks & Recreation works with police patrols, neighborhood policing units, and school resource officers to investigate such crimes, find the perpetrators, and obtain restitution. The Department also works with the juvenile court system to allow youth offenders to work off their restitution requirements. This program appears to make a positive impression on most youth since few repeat their offenses. These efforts should continue to be fully funded and implemented to ensure that City parks and recreation facilities are designed and maintained for the benefit of public safety and security and to encourage appropriate park uses.

**Risk Management**

The Department has worked to become more proactive in addressing employee and public safety needs. The Department has emphasized training employees, reducing accident rates, providing a safe working environment, and prompting action on public safety needs by instituting regular facility inspections and adhering to national safety standards in design, construction, and maintenance of facilities. In addition, the Department requires certain employees to be trained and hold certifications for specific job duties that pose higher levels of risk or liability for public safety. The areas in which training and certifications are required include, but not limited to,
pesticide and herbicide application; pool operations, supervision, and maintenance; equipment operation; playground supervision; and daycare supervision.

**Recreation Programs**

The City will be implementing its first exclusion ordinance, which will allow the Department to bar a person from participating in recreation programs or visiting a public park due to illegal or inappropriate behaviors that endanger the safety of others or disrupt the City’s ability to deliver parks and recreation services. This tool will also allow City police officers to better enforce adopted laws and rules promulgated by the Boise Parks & Recreation Director. In addition to the exclusion ordinance, the City also seeks to ensure that its recreation programs are properly staffed by qualified employees who have received all necessary training and hold required licenses and certifications. For example, playcamp staff must hold valid daycare licenses, and pool lifeguards must be certified by the American Red Cross lifeguard program. Efforts to ensure public safety in City parks and recreation programs should be continued, along with requiring use of qualified, trained staff for service delivery.

**Discussion**

Citizens expect the City to ensure public safety and security in City parks and recreation facilities. Meeting that expectation should continue to be a top priority for Boise Parks & Recreation. The Department should continue to provide a safe and secure environment in all of its facilities and recreation programs. Safety and risk management initiatives and performance standards regarding the design of parks, staffing of recreation facilities and programs, and application of chemicals, should be continued. Expansion of the City’s open space holdings dictates that the Department must provide a sustainable and appropriate balance between public safety and security and the protection of open space values. The City should continue to require close coordination between Boise Police Department and Boise Parks & Recreation to address security issues as they arise. Also, Boise Parks & Recreation should support the City’s community policing program initiative. Finally, the City should look to develop, monitor, and track crime statistics for its parks and recreation system to help ensure that safety and security issues are constantly evaluated and addressed.

**Recommendations**

1. Continue to maintain the highest level of public safety and security in City parks and recreation facilities through coordination, communication, design, and maintenance efforts.

2. Continue to staff a liaison from Boise Parks & Recreation to work closely with the Boise Police Department liaison on deployment of uniformed, ranger, and volunteer patrol staff.
   
   a. Attend Greenbelt Neighborhood Service Team Meetings to address issues of mutual concern.
   
   b. Work with Boise Police Department on the following tasks:
i. Educate the Patrol Division on issues related to the parks system and recreation facilities.

ii. Increase patrol in public open space reserves, particularly those in the Boise Foothills.

iii. Track crime statistics for parks and recreation facilities to better understand the location of crimes.

3. Establish a staff liaison with the Ada County Sheriff’s Office to educate officers and address issues of mutual concern regarding parks and recreation facilities located outside city limits.

4. Increase funding to address signage needs within established parks.
   a. Ensure that all public parks and recreation facilities are appropriately signed to welcome visitors, allow for quick identification by emergency response personnel and the public, and promote adherence to adopted rules and regulations.

5. Maintain funding and staffing for graffiti and vandalism removal and repair.
   b. Continue to work with the juvenile court system to allow first-time offenders to work off their restitution requirements.
   c. Maintain a working relationship with police department units to address repeat vandalism acts.

6. Ensure that the design and maintenance of park amenities and recreation features promote public security and maintain user safety.
   a. Implement park design and maintenance standards that incorporate principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).
   b. Improve public safety and security through funding major repair and maintenance projects.

7. Continue to fund and implement proactive maintenance measures to better ensure that public safety and security needs are met.
   a. Conduct regular inspections and preventative maintenance of parks and recreation facilities, including playgrounds, Greenbelt lighting, trees that need pruning, and others.
   b. Increase training for park resource managers and staff regarding public safety and security needs.

8. Continue efforts to ensure safe delivery of recreation program services.
   a. Adopt and implement the exclusion ordinance for the parks and recreation system.
b. Ensure that recreation staff (lifeguards, daycare providers, bus drivers, and others) receive appropriate training and hold licenses and certificates necessary to comply with applicable laws and better ensure public safety and quality of service delivery.

c. Ensure that recreation programs are adequately managed and staffed to address safety needs of facility users and recreation customers.

9. Continue to implement proactive risk management programs, strategies, and projects that promote safety for the public, City staff, and environment.

a. Train staff to work safely, address public safety needs, and protect the environment.

   i. Maintain funding for the Department’s safety officer position to provide routine staff training, review work conditions, and provide advice on potential public safety challenges.

   ii. Monitor accident rates and types and provide follow-up to eliminate or reduce the potential for future accidents.

b. Require training and certification of appropriate staff for specialized activities involving potential safety risks, such as the following:

   i. Application of pesticides, herbicides and other potentially hazardous chemicals.

   ii. Design, maintenance, and inspection of playground equipment.

   iii. Use of power equipment (welders, high lifts, chainsaws, and others)

   iv. Operations and maintenance of pools.

   v. Animal care at Zoo Boise.

   c. Work with the City’s risk management staff to address public safety needs, plan for emergency response, implement major safety initiatives, and provide ongoing safety training for all Department staff.

**Sources Mentioned**

City of Boise’s exclusion ordinance