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January 5, 2006

The Honorable Antonio Villaraigosa, Mayor  
The Honorable Rockard J. Delgadillo, City Attorney  
The Honorable Members of the City Council  
City Hall  
200 North Spring Street  
Los Angeles, California 90012

Dear Mayor Villaraigosa, City Attorney Delgadillo and Members of the City Council:

Today I release the second in a trilogy of audits of the Department of Recreation and Parks; this one evaluates the recreation and community services offered the public. The first audit was a report on the financial operations and revealed that the Department runs a fund with an unexplainable, growing balance of over \$20 million dollars. The third audit, to be released next week, is of the maintenance of our many parks and facilities.

My focus on the Department of Recreation and Parks is designed to give our City leadership a road map to providing safe, attractive and busy parks and recreation centers, as well as programs that are available in all our neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, this audit revealed a startling and disturbing fact... we cannot evaluate the delivery of recreational services to the public because there just isn't enough information to do so. In 2006, we cannot and should not be running any City department, much less one that is so essential to our residents' quality of life, by groping in the dark. This Department must do the following:

- Conduct a thorough needs assessment of the desires and requirements of our diverse communities. To stay current, these assessments must be done every five years.

- Develop a performance based evaluation which can accurately measure the Department's success in meeting the public's needs.
- Adopt a long-term strategic plan which is a detailed guide to delivering first rate recreation and community programs to the people of Los Angeles.

The most recent needs assessment is six years old and missing key information. What that survey did find, however, was that 51% of respondents said they were reluctant to visit neighborhood parks due to safety concerns. LAPD drop-in centers, designated for the highest risk parks, were designed to address these concerns; but they remain scarcely staffed. With 26 Park Rangers assigned to patrol 15,710 acres and our Police Department grappling with their own lack of resources, we must find a more effective way to keep our parks safe. We will never be a truly great City until we can declare all our public places and spaces safe for our children and their grandparents.

My audit also cites studies that reveal that not all areas of the City have the same level of service in programs and activities. Lower income neighborhoods, including those predominantly populated by Latinos, African-American and Asian-Pacific Islander communities, have dramatically less access to park resources than more affluent areas. In addition, some economically empowered neighborhoods are able to offer more and better services through fundraising in the community often with the assistance of active Park Advisory Boards.

The message of this audit is clear: Offering the public an ample amount of quality activities and programs is too important to be left on automatic pilot. Next week I will release an audit on how we maintain the spaces and structures of our parks. I hope that these three audits will help draw a very clear picture for the leadership of our City to create a Department of Recreation and Parks befitting the second largest City in America in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura N. Chick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

LAURA N. CHICK  
City Controller



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January 5, 2006

Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager  
Department of Recreation and Parks  
1200 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 700  
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Dear Mr. Mukri:

Enclosed is a copy of our Performance Audit of Recreation and Community Services in the Department of Recreation and Parks. A draft of this report was provided to your office on December 15, 2005. Comments provided by you and your staff at the December 20, 2005, exit conference were evaluated and considered prior to finalizing this report.

Please review the final audit report and advise the Controller's Office by February 6, 2006 on planned actions you will take to implement these recommendations. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me at (213) 978-7392.

Sincerely,

FARID SAFFAR, CPA  
Director of Auditing

Enclosure

cc: Honorable Antonio R. Villaraigosa, Mayor  
Honorable Members of the City Council  
Honorable Rockard J. Delgadillo, City Attorney  
Robin Kramer, Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor  
Jimmy Blackman, Deputy Chief of Staff, Office of the Mayor  
Christina Sanchez-Camino, President, Board of  
Recreation and Parks Commissioners  
William T Fujioka, City Administrative Officer  
Frank Martinez, City Clerk  
Gerry F. Miller, Chief Legislative Analyst  
Independent City Auditors



**City of Los Angeles  
Office of the Controller**

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**Performance Audit of Recreation and  
Community Services in the  
Department of Recreation and Parks**

**January 5, 2006**

**Laura N. Chick**  
City Controller

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## **PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND PARKS**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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The City Controller's Auditing Division completed a performance audit of recreation and community service programs in the City's Department of Recreation and Parks (Department). The primary objective of this audit was to identify opportunities for improvement in the Department's management and approach to providing recreation and community services to the public. The scope of the audit covered services provided by the Department between fiscal year 2001-02 and the end of audit fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted between February 2005 and December 2005. This audit was conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS).

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Department's mission is to "provide the citizens of Los Angeles safe and beautiful parks and facilities, enriching and affordable recreation programs and human services for people of all ages, while building quality communities and caring for the environment." To meet this mission the Department provides recreation and community service opportunities utilizing 390 parks (totaling over 15,700 acres of parkland), 372 children's play areas, 306 sports fields, 287 tennis courts, 176 recreation centers, 59 aquatics facilities, 30 senior centers, 24 childcare facilities, 13 golf courses, nine lakes, nine dog parks, seven museums, seven camp facilities, seven skate parks, three therapeutic special recreation centers, and an "urban forest" of approximately one million trees.

During the four fiscal years ended 2004-05, the Department received an average of \$87 million from the General Fund specifically for recreation and community services, amounting to approximately 45% of the Department's total General Fund budget. During the same period, the Department generated an average of \$23.3 million annually through program fees designed to supplement or fully recover the Department's financing of recreation and community services offered through recreational facilities ranging in type from golf courses to recreation centers. Additionally, the Department received an average of \$2.7 million annually in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for supplemental youth programs and approximately \$ 1 million in grant funding from the City's Department of Aging to fund its Senior Nutrition Program. Over the four-year period, the Department received over \$458 million for recreation and community services.

## **SUMMARY OF AUDIT RESULTS**

This audit revealed that while the Department delivers recreation programs that are widely used, community needs should be reassessed which could result in the continuation, increase, or elimination of some programs. In general, we found there exists a demand for both an increased number of programs and more diverse programs. A more concerted, strategic approach is necessary to eliminate inconsistencies, identify and meet community needs, address park accessibility and safety, and correct inequitable conditions to maximize service delivery to all City residents. This audit focuses on several areas in which the Department could do more, and details several opportunities for improvement.

Our fieldwork revealed inconsistencies in the provision of recreation and community services at recreation centers. The audit disclosed that these inconsistencies were due to the initiative and innovation of individual center directors. Some center directors provided an adequate level of program services, while others did not because of the lack of guidance and oversight from Department management. Thus, this report focuses on opportunities for improvement at the management level. Successfully achieving the Department's mission requires that Department management ensure that:

- Its services are responsive to community needs;
- It delivers high-quality recreation and community services; and
- Its efforts are periodically evaluated to determine success and to identify opportunities for improvement.

These three requirements form a “feedback loop” whereby the identification of community needs leads to the development of a strategic plan and the provision of services that meet those needs. After the implementation of a strategic plan, the Department's efforts must be reevaluated to determine success, to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement, and to refine the strategic plan.

### **Section I. Responsiveness to the Community**

#### **The Department has not sufficiently identified community needs.**

The last citywide Community Needs Survey was performed in 1999 and focused on determining residents' satisfaction with recreation and community services and not community needs or expectations. The Department currently relies on Park Advisory Boards (PABs), patron satisfaction surveys, and informal communications with the public to identify community needs. Each of these methods present limitations: PABs at some community parks meet irregularly or not at all, and both patron satisfaction surveys and informal communication do not identify opinions of a vast array of residents that are non-participants. None of the three, individually or collectively, provide a comprehensive basis for identifying community needs. The 1999 Community Needs Survey revealed that

only 40% of respondents agreed that recreation activities met their needs. A comprehensive community needs assessment is required every five years, per the National Recreation and Parks Association, to ensure individual recreation centers have sufficient information to meet community needs through unique programming decisions. The lack of sufficient information about community needs, expectations and resources hinders the ability of center directors to ensure programs meet community needs.

**The Department has not adequately addressed issues of inequity regarding access to recreational opportunities, and the diversity of services provided.**

Numerous independent reports, as well as recently issued reports from the Controller's Office illustrate the persistence of inequities throughout the City with regards to parks and facilities. This audit revealed disparities in the quantity and diversity of programming offered at different community centers, as discussed in the next finding. The Department has developed some programs to address such inequities (e.g., Girls Play LA and the Clean and Safe Spaces programs), however, a more concerted, strategic approach is necessary to identify and correct conditions to maximize service delivery to all City residents. The Department should discuss in a comprehensive strategic plan specifically how it will address issues of inequity. The plan should include measurable definitions of equity and goals for improvement, such as dollars spent in each community, park acreage and facility square footage per community or resident, facility and park conditions, staff allocation, age and gender of participants, quantity and diversity of service programs, program quality, etc.

**The Department did not ensure that recreation programming equitably targeted communities' diverse demographics.**

Overall, the Department provides a wide range of services including recreational, cultural, educational, etc., programming that target diverse needs by age and gender. However, since programming decisions are left to the discretion of individual directors, we found gaps in services that may render some segments of the population underserved. Some facilities specialize in one type of service targeting a limited segment of the population (e.g., youth team sports) while not offering other types of services (e.g., classes or cultural programs). According to the Department, its high staffing vacancy rate and limited park space contributes to these programming challenges, but we believe more can be accomplished by establishing minimal programming standards at centers to ensure they address the diverse needs of diverse communities. Further, according to Department management, some centers don't offer a broad array of programming because the demand is not present. Without a comprehensive community needs assessment, however, it is impossible to know what neighborhoods want offered in their local (nearby) parks. It is also not possible to know if more or different people would use their local parks if different activities were offered.

**The Department's methods of informing the community of the services offered, opportunities for community input, and participation in Department services are insufficient.**

In 1999, only 32% of respondents believed they were adequately informed of recreation services. Marketing efforts have not dramatically improved since. While the Department maintains a marketing group, its resources are limited and its efforts are generally focused on Department-wide programs, special events, and a general awareness of Department services. Individual communities are reliant on the skills of park directors to inform them of available services and opportunities for community involvement. As a result, some communities benefit from such efforts, while others suffer. At the center level, a more coordinated, proactive marketing strategy and outreach to the full community is necessary to both inform the community of available services, and to actively solicit involvement to draw on previously untapped community resources.

**The Department does not have a long-term strategic plan to guide decisions regarding how the Department plans to address future community needs.**

The Department has not developed a comprehensive strategic plan; nor has it developed a detailed plan that strategically allocates resources to address its greatest needs. The Department should create a strategic plan that includes (1) identifying community needs, (2) developing an explicit approach to addressing real and perceived inequities in the delivery of services, (3) addressing accessibility and safety concerns of City residents, (4) accumulating and allocating resources available to achieve success, (5) a step-by-step approach to putting information and resources into action in a concerted effort to achieve the mission of the Department, (6) marketing these services to the community, and (7) developing techniques to evaluate progress in implementing the strategic plan. Further, this plan must be finalized and must go beyond one year to encompass the Department's long-term vision for the future. Ultimately, this plan must not only be the Department's blueprint for the future; it must be the City's strategic plan to offer and provide better and more equitable recreation services to all Los Angeles residents.

**Section II. Internal Controls Over Program Services**

**The Department has not adequately addressed safety concerns in parks.**

In 1999, 51% of respondents were reluctant to visit neighborhood parks out of concern for their personal safety. While a 2002 study conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles found that more children felt their parks were safe, a substantial number, 29% of inner-city children and 20% of suburban children, continued to feel their neighborhood parks were unsafe. A 2005 study by the RAND Corporation suggested the same: while most believe parks to be safe, the most common write-in response for suggested improvements to neighborhood parks was safety. To address safety concerns, the Department

has increased lighting and installed cameras at some parks, established “LAPD Drop-In Centers” in Urban Impact parks, and employs Park Rangers to provide security services. However, the LAPD drop-in centers have not been as effective as they could be because the LAPD rarely participates in the program, and a shortage of Park Rangers results in “high-risk” centers being patrolled only two to three times per week. The Park Rangers currently have 26 peace officers deployed to respond to calls at 176 recreation centers and approximately 390 parks. After the close of audit fieldwork, the Department transferred all security services provided by its Park Rangers to the Office of Public Safety, Department of General Services in an effort to decrease vacancies and increase the presence of Rangers at City Parks; it is still too early to determine effect of these efforts.

**The Department has not maximized use of available facilities to provide community services, including the development of joint-use agreements.**

While it delivers recreation programs that are widely used, there exists both a demand for an increased number of programs and more diverse programs. Site visits to 35 recreation centers revealed that some directors maximized the use of available space with programmed services, while other centers remained idle for extended periods of time. At the same time, some facilities provide a broad array of programs, are heavily used, and still do not satisfy demand for services and programs due to finite space and limited resources. To address these limitations, according to management, some centers have utilized informal joint-use agreements with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) and other external organizations to increase the public’s accessibility to pools, gyms, or field space. Maximizing capacity at existing facilities and expanding the use of joint-use agreements at the Department level may be a sensible, logical, and cost-effective approach to meeting more diverse community needs.

**There are no formal training or staff development programs that equip personnel to provide quality recreation and human services.**

In many ways, the strengths of the Department lie in the initiative and innovation of individual center directors. The inconsistency in which these strengths are exhibited throughout the Department’s 176 community recreation centers indicates that the Department has not done an adequate job in harnessing these strengths to further develop the recreation directors of the future. We found that most training consists of on-the-job, informal mentorships. There is little formal training beyond the initial entry-level training for Recreation Coordinators and annual training offered on Municipal Recreation Program accounting is not effective. Individuals are dependent on supervisors to provide meaningful experiences and learning opportunities, and describe the process of becoming acclimated to a new assignment as a “sink or swim” approach. Finally, training assignments are not made to provide staff development; but are primarily designed to fill vacancies, resulting in a situation where the best center directors are not always training future directors.

**Policies and procedures have not been developed or updated to reflect current or best practices.**

Policies and procedures for general operations are outdated, ranging from 5 to over 25 years old, and in many ways do not reflect current practices, or management's and the Mayor's vision for the future. There are no policies and procedures for Leisure Services, thus, there is no correlation with current departmental practices or management's and the Mayor's vision for the future. This deficiency is exacerbated by the Department's "franchise" model of managing community centers, a model that allows significant flexibility to meet the needs of different communities. As a result, the ability to achieve the Department's mission throughout the City is hindered as management's vision is not clearly communicated and staff are left to their own discretion to improvise service delivery.

**Section III. Evaluation of Success**

**The Department does not evaluate the success of completed programs to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.**

The most critical question that must be asked of the Department is whether or not it has succeeded in providing quality recreation and community services that meet the needs of City residents. The Department cannot adequately answer this question. The Department inconsistently and irregularly solicited feedback from patrons and program participants, and is unable to adequately evaluate its success. The Department does not use outcome measures that are germane to its mission, and its marginal use of output measures, e.g. attendance records, do not correspond to formal goals against which to hold center directors accountable. In general, supervisors and park directors assume that the absence of complaints is an indicator of patron satisfaction. Evaluating the outcomes of community service and recreation programs requires the analysis of community indicators that go well beyond patron satisfaction. The Department has not sufficiently addressed factors reflecting the impact of its programs on the community.

**The Department does not monitor service delivery on an on-going basis to assure high standards of performance.**

The lack of adequate performance measures is exacerbated by the Department's informal monitoring practices, which sometimes results in inadequate communication between staff and management. Management and supervisory personnel appear at times to be disconnected from the day-to-day operations of recreation centers, partly because of the infrequency of site visits by supervisors, and inefficient and ineffective performance reporting. For example, management will not identify conditions, problems, and other areas of concern at centers unless staff takes the initiative to speak up; however, staff expressed hesitation to speak up due to a belief that any effort to do so will be fruitless or will be met with undesirable assignments. The Department's informal monitoring process

fails to systematically encourage initiative on the part of center directors, engage supervisors in the work of their staff, and foster responsibility and accountability for director and supervisory performance.

**The Department does not assess efficiency in providing recreation services by evaluating program and service delivery costs.**

The Department does not know how much it costs to provide specific services or programs. As a result, the Department cannot evaluate the efficiency of center operations, of one director in comparison to others, or of its operation in comparison to other municipal or private recreation providers.

Recommendations that address these issues are presented in Exhibit 1.

A draft audit report was provided to the Department of Recreation and Parks management on December 15, 2005. An exit conference was conducted on December 20, 2005, where audit staff discussed the findings and recommendations. The Department's comments were considered prior to finalizing the report.

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS	PAGE REFERENCE
<b>Section I: Responsiveness to the community</b>	
<p>1.1 Conduct a Community Needs Assessment every five years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This Assessment should include community demographic trends, the public’s perception of availability and access to parks and services, recreation activity preferences, usage patterns, the types and prevalence of non-City service providers, and school schedules and programs.</li> <li>• Partner with other City departments that conduct community research, such as the CDD, as possible sources for community information.</li> <li>• Needs should be identified at the recreation center level – not the region or community level – to ensure each of the 176 recreation centers meet the various or different needs of their immediate surrounding community.</li> </ul>	17
<p>1.2 Make identified needs a central factor in determining which services to offer.</p>	17
<p>1.3 Develop a strategic approach, in concert with the Mayor and City Council, to identify and mitigate real and perceived inequities to maximize service delivery to all residents. This will include developing a measurable definition of equity and monitoring progress.</p>	17
<p>1.4 Develop policies and procedures that require recreation directors to target diverse needs demographics through diverse programming.</p>	17
<p>1.5 Develop a departmental marketing and outreach strategy, in concert with the long-term strategic plan, that effectively informs the community of the services offered by the Department, opportunities for community input, and participation (both as donors and volunteers) in Department services.</p>	17
<p>1.6 Promote community outreach strategies including methods that directors can use to identify and partner with community resources such as local chambers of commerce, neighborhood councils, and other recreation service providers.</p>	18
<p>1.7 Develop a five-year strategic plan that allows the Department to identify short-term and long-term service needs.</p>	18
<p>1.8 Create a strategic planning group responsible for developing and implementing the strategic plan, and for conducting on-going analyses of community needs and expectations, Department performance, and independent studies.</p> <p>Develop relationships with research organizations and universities to conduct studies on the impact of services on the community.</p>	18

RECOMMENDATIONS	PAGE REFERENCE
<b>Section II:</b>	
2.1 Work with LAPD to address safety issues by increasing the visibility of officers at City parks, and by encouraging participation in parks' LAPD Drop-In centers.	24
2.2 Consider all available funding sources, including grant funds, to fund improved public safety by subsidizing LAPD costs for increased police presence as well as by developing a more proactive presence of Park Rangers and improving lighting at City parks.	24
2.3 Coordinate with community organizations and City programs, such as LA Bridges, to offer programs at City parks that are directed at reducing gang activity and violence at parks.	24
2.4 Identify the service-delivery capacity for all Department facilities and parks, and develop a reporting mechanism to evaluate the actual usage to determine if parks and facilities are under- or over-utilized.	24
2.5 Develop cooperative partnerships, including, but not limited to joint-use agreements, with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the business community, and neighborhood service organizations, to efficiently increase resident accessibility to recreation and community services.	24
2.6 Develop an intensive training program, including classroom, on-the-job and Continuing Professional Education (CPE) training by the Department's best performing recreation directors for all staff.	25
2.7 Update and develop policies and procedures to reflect current practices; industry best practices; work priorities; the Mayor's and Department's mission, goals and objectives; management's franchise approach to service delivery.	25
<b>Section III:</b>	
<p>3.1 Develop and implement appropriate performance standards, goals and measures (input, output, and outcome) for all programs and services for the purpose of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.</li> <li>• Determining the actual impact of the Department's efforts on the City's communities and residents.</li> <li>• Assessing success in achieving the mission, goals and objectives, both at the Department level, and the region and center levels.</li> </ul>	31
3.2 Evaluate the method, quality, and utility of the data collected so reporting mechanisms can produce meaningful data that can be used to develop long-term trend analyses. Consider new methods to improve efficiencies, such as developing intranet-based forms for reporting and compiling data.	31
3.3 Incorporate the results of all performance measurement and evaluation in the strategic planning process to ensure efficient service delivery.	31
3.4 Develop a formal monitoring process that requires the involvement of supervisors and Department management at the center level.	31
3.5 Assess the efficiency of center operations by evaluating the costs and the	32

**Exhibit 1**

<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>PAGE REFERENCE</b>
outcomes of specific programs, in comparison with benchmark or industry standards.	

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## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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The mission of the Department of Recreation and Parks (Department) is “to provide the citizens of Los Angeles safe and beautiful parks and facilities, enriching and affordable recreation programs and human services for people of all ages, while building quality communities and caring for the environment.” This mission statement reflects an awareness of the impact that recreation and community services have on residents in urban environments, including:<sup>1</sup>

- promoting stronger communities while providing spaces for active, healthy lifestyles;
- improving academic performance and decreasing juvenile crime;
- enhancing personal benefits such as fun, wellness, formal and informal learning, social interaction, self-development, quality of life, and perceptions of safety and connectedness;
- promoting conservation and interaction with nature, and helping mitigate the impact of pollution in large urban settings;
- increasing municipal revenues and real estate values for property adjacent to parks, as well as advancing overall economic benefits to individuals and communities;
- offering after school programs that can help close educational achievement gaps; and
- introducing children to the benefits of community participation and civic duty.

The Department’s efforts are increasingly focused on providing recreation and community services to impact the City’s communities in these ways. This report will focus on improvements that the Department can make in its internal operations to facilitate such efforts.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Department has a vast array of assets to provide recreation services to the public. As of August 1, 2005, these assets included 390 parks (totaling over 15,700 acres of parkland), 372 children’s play areas, 287 tennis courts, 306 sports fields, 176 recreation centers, 59 aquatics facilities, 30 senior centers, 24

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<sup>1</sup> See the “City Parks Forum Briefing Papers” issued by the American Planning Association, “Re-Examining the Role of Recreation and Parks in After-School Programs” by Peter Witt of Texas A&M University, and “Positioning Public Recreation and Park Offerings Using Importance-Performance Analysis” by Hunt, Kindle *et al.*, in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, Fall 2003.

childcare facilities, 13 golf courses, nine lakes, nine dog parks, seven museums, seven skate parks, seven camp facilities, three therapeutic special recreation centers, 92 miles of hiking trails, and an “urban forest” of approximately one million trees. The Department also utilizes some facilities, swimming pools, sports fields, etc., through an estimated 200 joint-use agreements between individual recreation centers and local schools and other organizations.

The majority of Recreation Services are offered through a network of 230 autonomous community centers, (including recreation, senior, and childcare centers), which are decentralized into five regions: Valley, Griffith, Metro, West, and Harbor. The Department’s governing philosophy is that each community has unique needs and interests, so each center should be capable of responding to unique demands. Directors-in-charge of these centers are responsible for community outreach, soliciting input from the public, marketing services, evaluating the success of services including determining whether they should be continued, and establishing registration fees and policies for their center.

The Department has also centralized the management of some specialized programs, including:

- The **CLASS parks** program: a program designed to revitalize Urban Impact parks<sup>2</sup> through increased maintenance funding and additional staffing to provide after-school activities for teenagers.
- **Park Rangers**: serve as peace officers providing security at parks and as educators providing outreach services in some of the City’s parks.
- The **Aquatics** program: operates 59 swimming pools for recreational use.
- The **Camping** program: operates seven camps in and outside the City.
- **Municipal Sports** is responsible for issuing permits for field use by adult sports leagues throughout the City.
- Other miscellaneous recreation and educational programs such as **pay tennis courts, concession agreements, museums, etc.**

During the four fiscal years ended 2004-05, the City Council authorized an average of 1,978 full-time positions and 1,109 full-time equivalent (FTE) part-time positions. Of the full-time positions, an average of 784, or approximately 40%, were dedicated to delivering recreation and community services. Although the total number of authorized full-time positions has declined throughout the four fiscal years, the number of full-time positions dedicated to recreation opportunities has increased from 728 to 821. In addition to authorized staffing levels, the Department manages an average of 2,100 active volunteers at any given time, with approximately 13,000 registered volunteers.

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<sup>2</sup> The term “Urban Impact Park” comes from a Department program started in 1988 to increase recreation opportunities and improve facility conditions at inner city parks that have been neglected or negatively impacted by factors such as gangs or indigent persons.

During the same four fiscal years, the Department received an average of \$87 million from the General Fund specifically for recreation and community services, amounting to approximately 45% of the Department's total General Fund budget. During the same period, the Department generated an average of \$23.3 million annually through program fees designed to supplement or fully recover the Department's financing of recreation and community services offered through recreational facilities ranging in type from golf courses to recreation centers. Additionally, the Department received an average of \$2.7 million annually in Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for supplemental youth programs and approximately \$ 1 million in grant funding from the City's Department of Aging to fund its Senior Nutrition Program. Overall, the amount from each funding source has fluctuated each year with the exception of general funds allocated for recreational opportunities, which has been steadily increasing over the past five fiscal years. Over the four fiscal years, the Department received over \$458 million for recreation and community services.<sup>3</sup>

### **NOTABLE EFFORTS**

The Department provided the following examples of notable efforts:

- Camping: ACA accreditation serves as external control driving performance based results; additionally the program regularly solicits feedback to direct alterations to existing programs.
- CLASS teen program: incorporates representative member councils who vote on activities and services as part of the planning process.

An independent study conducted by RAND of selected parks/communities found that over 90% of residents and park patrons that were familiar with center staff rated their performance as "A" or "B" – though between 21% and 59% of those surveyed, depending on the center, did not know center staff and therefore could not rate them.<sup>4</sup>

### **OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY**

The scope of the audit included recreation and human services provided by the Department during the three fiscal years ended 2003-04, as well as activities occurring during the course of audit fieldwork (through FY 2004-05). The primary objective of this audit was to identify opportunities for improvement in the Department's management and approach to providing recreation and community services to the public, and, consequently, to make recommendations to address these areas of improvement. Detailed objectives included:

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<sup>3</sup> For Fiscal Years 2001-2002 through 2004-2005, General Fund monies totaled \$351,131,871; Program Fee revenues totaled \$93,010,511; and, grant funding totaled \$14,778,021.

<sup>4</sup> See "The Role of Parks in Physical Activity and Health" conducted by the RAND Corporation 2005.

1. Determining if the Department delivers recreation programs that are widely used and meet internal attendance and “customer satisfaction” performance objectives.
2. Determining if the Department offers the appropriate mix of recreation programs, dependent on identified needs, and distributes such programs in an equitable and consistent manner to ensure equal access to all citizens.
3. Determining how the Department measures output and outcome success for recreation programs, whether such outputs and outcomes are germane to the Department’s objectives for recreation programs, and determine whether programs are monitored so that adjustments are made to program planning depending on the achievement (or lack thereof) of related performance objectives.
4. Determining if resources are properly deployed to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of recreation program services in order to achieve similar outcomes at parks and facilities citywide.
5. Assessing internal management controls to determine if sufficient guidelines are in place to operate recreation programs in an effective and efficient manner.

This audit resulted from a preliminary survey of the Department’s operations, which was conducted in late 2004. From this survey, three areas of the Department’s operations were selected for audit: financial activities, maintenance activities, and recreational and community service programming. The report on the Department’s financial activities was released on November 10, 2005; and the report on maintenance activities will be released later in January 2006. This report on recreational programs represents the second of these three reports.

This review focused on the full range of recreation and community services offered by the Department, as well as the administrative and management oversight of these services. However, as a result of a risk assessment process, we focused audit fieldwork on those services provided through the Department’s 176 recreation centers.

To evaluate the Department’s current practices, we conducted approximately 50 interviews with Department and City personnel ranging in positions from the General Manager to facility directors. We conducted site visits at 35 of the Department’s 176 recreation centers.<sup>5</sup> We obtained and reviewed relevant documentation relating to the Department’s practices, including, but not limited to, policies and procedures, various best practices, pertinent audit reports,

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<sup>5</sup> Department management provided data on all recreation facilities/centers. Based on our assessment of audit risk, we selected 35 sites for detailed review and analysis. We chose our sample to provide a cross-section of large and small facilities, and facilities of different types. The selected sites include those chosen as a result of selection criteria and random selection procedures, as well as some identified throughout the course of our planning phase.

customer surveys, various accreditation standards, and other background materials.<sup>6</sup>

Audit fieldwork was conducted between February 23, and December 8, 2005. This audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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<sup>6</sup> Best practices used include information from the National Recreation and Parks Association, the Journal of Park and Recreation Administration, and The California Park & Recreation Society. Independent studies cited include academic studies conducted through the University of California Los Angeles, University of Southern California, and Texas A&M University. Additional studies were conducted by the RAND Corporation, the American Planning Association, and consultants previously hired by the Department of Recreation and Parks.

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## AUDIT FINDINGS

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The services provided by the City's Department of Recreation and Parks has been the subject of numerous studies throughout the past decade. Most address both the positive results of the Department's efforts as well as areas in need of improvement. This audit is no different. As noted above, the Department has made notable accomplishments in its delivery of services. While our own fieldwork revealed inconsistencies in the performance of center staff, it is our overall opinion that many of the strengths of the Department lie in the initiative and innovation of individual center directors. Thus, this report focuses on areas of improvement at the management level.

In accordance with the detailed objectives of our audit, we found that:

1. The Department does not have adequate internal attendance and "customer satisfaction" performance objectives. Further, while it delivers recreation programs that are widely used, there exists both a demand for an increased number of programs and for more diverse or different programs. (Sections I, II, and III).
2. In general, the Department offers a wide array of recreation programs, including team sports, various classes and activities, and special programs. However, we found that (a) some centers neglected certain types of services while focusing exclusively on others, (b) programming decisions were not sufficiently tied to identified needs, and (c) the Department has not adequately addressed how it will deal with issues of inequity throughout the City. As a result, certain segments of the communities served by these centers may be underserved. (Section I).
3. The Department does not use outcome measures that are germane to the Department's mission, and its marginal use of output measures, e.g. attendance records, cannot be used to evaluate success because they do not correspond to formal goals against which to hold center directors accountable. The lack of adequate performance measures is exacerbated by the Department's informal monitoring practices, which results in inadequate communication between staff and management. (Section III).
4. The Department has not formally determined the proper deployment of resources to achieve the Department's mission by developing a detailed plan that strategically allocates resources to address its greatest needs. (Section I).
5. Policies and procedures do not reflect current practices, nor do they reflect the Mayor's or management's vision for the future. (Section II).

In order to successfully achieve its mission, the Department must ensure that:

- Services are responsive to community needs;

- High-quality recreation and community services are delivered; and
- Efforts are periodically evaluated to determine success and to identify opportunities for improvement.

These three requirements form a “feedback loop” whereby the identification of community needs leads to the development of a strategic plan and the provision of services to meet those needs. Efforts must also be evaluated to identify strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement that should be used to refine the strategic plan.

The remainder of this report is divided into three Sections that correspond to these requirements.

## Section I: Responsiveness to the Community

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The Department should approach the provision of recreation and community services through a strategic plan that lays out the tasks it must undertake to efficiently and effectively deliver services. These will include regularly identifying community needs and expectations, using that knowledge to develop a variety of programs that equitably targets and serves the City's diverse population, and creating a marketing plan to inform the community of those services offered.

### **Issue No. 1: The Department needs to improve the method and frequency with which they identify community needs and expectations.**

Meeting the recreation and community service needs of residents through 176 recreation centers requires a strategic, coordinated effort to identify community needs, particularly when faced with limited resources. An analysis of demographic, social, cultural, and political or legislative trends is an essential step for any recreation provider to offer programs that will have a positive impact on the community.<sup>7</sup> The Department has established different methods to obtain community input, including a 1999 Community Needs Survey, patron satisfaction surveys issued by individual centers, Park Advisory Boards (PABs), and informal communications with park patrons. An evaluation of these methods, however, revealed that the Department has not consistently or sufficiently identified community needs.

Currently, the primary method of obtaining community input is through PABs. PABs are comprised of volunteers who represent the community on issues regarding facility use and fundraising. However, PABs meet irregularly, some bi-monthly and some quarterly and are ad-hoc committees. Some centers do not have an active PAB at all. In addition, while PABs inform programming decisions where they are active, they do not possess the wealth of information that could be obtained through a comprehensive community needs assessment.

In addition to obtaining input from PABs, center directors mail satisfaction surveys to existing park patrons on a periodic basis and communicate with park patrons to obtain input; the frequency of each depends solely on center directors. While center directors have individually been engaged in both practices, either formally or informally, for some time, and while the Department's centralized efforts at identifying satisfaction rates are currently being enhanced (see Finding 1 of Section III), current satisfaction surveys have an inherent weakness: they do

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<sup>7</sup> "Creating Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Action Plan For Parks and Recreation in California" published by The California Park & Recreation Society 1999.

Van Der Smissen, Betty, Merry Moiseichik, and Vern Hartenburg. Management of Park and Recreation Agencies. Ashburn, VA.: The National Recreation and Park Association. 2005.

not identify the opinions and needs of non-participants. Further, informal communication with the community is affected by how well the community knows park staff. A recent survey revealed that between 21% and 59% of residents and park patrons do not know the staff at their local recreation center.<sup>8</sup>

A 2003 independent assessment commissioned by the Department found that “staff members tend to identify with their individual work unit instead of the facility and the community they serve.”<sup>9</sup> Our fieldwork revealed similar conditions; in many cases, directors-in-charge assume a passive role in which they expect residents to contact the center with requests or concerns. We also found that some center directors have successfully networked with community resources such as church groups, parent-teacher associations, and local businesses to establish partnerships or sponsorship programs, while others actively engage neighbors and parents to market program offerings. These notable accomplishments are the result of individual initiative, not Department policy.

According to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), “A comprehensive community study based on population shifts and economic conditions should be conducted *at least every five years with interim updating*” (emphasis added). The Department last completed a citywide Community Needs Survey in 1999. This Survey recommended a more expansive needs assessment to be conducted in 2002 after the new census data was released; the Department did not implement this recommendation. Rather, the Department has commissioned various needs assessments for specific projects, programs or recreation centers. For instance, some needs assessments were conducted when considering new sites for parkland or the construction of new facilities, and the Department is engaging a firm to conduct a needs assessment at its Exposition Park Intergenerational Community Center (EPICC). While these certainly represent a move in the right direction, the Department should conduct a comprehensive citywide community need assessment to supplement the formal and informal input already obtained from PABs and park patrons.

Ultimately, the information obtained by individual recreation centers on which to base programming decisions is not comprehensive, and lacks sufficient information about:

1. Other recreation and community services offered in the community by other City and non-city agencies (Little League, YMCA, Boy and Girls Club, etc.).
2. School schedules, to identify breaks between semesters and holidays when demand for recreation services is most likely to increase, and a

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<sup>8</sup> See “The Role of Parks in Physical Activity and Health” conducted by the RAND Corporation 2005.

<sup>9</sup> “Organizational Assessment of Recreation and Parks Department” conducted by A.C. Lazzaretto & Associates on March 20, 2003.

- listing of school activities such as after school clubs and team sports to prevent duplicative effort by providing the same services.
3. Population/demographic trend data that enables forecasting service needs in the short and long-term.
  4. Current surveys of resident needs for services such as after-school programs, physical fitness, tutoring, etc.
  5. Community needs assessments are periodically conducted by various City and non-City agencies, which assess needs of various types, but the Department has not included such assessments to obtain insights into community service needs of City residents.

At best, the Department has a “decentralized” process for identifying community needs and expectations. Information about the needs of City residents is insufficient and inadequate to provide individual recreation centers and the Department as a whole with what is needed to develop a comprehensive strategy to provide recreation and human services throughout the City.

Further, as important as conducting a community needs assessment is actually using its results to effect programming decisions. Internal procedure manuals address the importance of evaluating community expectations as the first element of program planning, and place this responsibility with individual recreation directors. As noted above, PABs, patron surveys and informal communications are relied upon to identify community needs, but the Department does not have a comprehensive plan for incorporating community expectations and resources into program planning. A significant number of directors characterized their programming decisions as trial and error. Typically, a director will continue to offer programs that have historically proven to attract sufficient enrollment numbers. Occasionally, centers experiment with new options that may have been inspired by ideas in industry publications or based on programs that have succeeded at other similar facilities. Without comprehensive community needs information, center directors are limited in their ability to base programming decisions on the greatest needs of the surrounding communities. This issue is compounded in areas where PABs are inactive or non-existent, and where center directors are less apt at identifying community needs and expectations through patron surveys and informal communications.

**Issue No. 2: The Department needs to strategically address issues of inequity regarding levels of service provided at parks citywide.**

Numerous studies have critiqued the Department and its allocation of resources. A more concerted, strategic approach is necessary to identify and correct conditions to maximize service delivery to all City residents.

Studies have found that:

- Lower income populations and Latino, African-American, and Asian-Pacific Islander populations have dramatically less access to park resources.<sup>10</sup>
- Residents' access to adequate recreational opportunities is dependent upon their proximity to parkland, available modes of transportation, and hours of operation; use of parks is most intense in areas of low accessibility.<sup>11</sup>
- While there is a significantly higher demand for park space among inner city residents, suburban residents have access to approximately twice the parkland.<sup>12</sup>
- Suburban and non-inner city communities tend to have better maintained facilities than their inner city counterparts.<sup>13</sup>
- Females tend to be underrepresented in parks and recreation programs, particularly team sports.<sup>14</sup>
- Additional resources, whether through registration fees, Quimby Fees (fees paid by developers of new properties), or any other source often exacerbate inequities unless they are strategically allocated to decrease such inequities.<sup>15</sup>

The Controller's November 10, 2005, "Financial and Compliance Audit of the Department of Recreation and Parks" identified differences in the method for estimating costs and revenue generated by fee-based programs, which has resulted in different fee structures for recreation programs and services. City residents in different communities can pay as little as \$35 or as high as \$110 for the same program - boys baseball. Centers that can charge more for team sports programs are able to accumulate MRP funds that can be used to subsidize more diverse programs than can centers in poorer neighborhoods.

The third Controller's Office audit of the Department entitled "Performance Audit of the Maintenance Activities of the Department of Recreation and Parks," which

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<sup>10</sup> "Parks and Park Funding In Los Angeles: An Equity Mapping Analysis" issued in May 2002 by the Sustainable Cities Program at the University of Southern California (page 15).

<sup>11</sup> "Children In Los Angeles Parks; A Study Of Equity, Quality, and Children's Satisfaction With Neighborhood Parks" by Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Orit Stieglitz of the Department of Urban Planning at the University of California at Los Angeles, issued in 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Children In Los Angeles Parks; A Study Of Equity, Quality, and Children's Satisfaction With Neighborhood Parks

<sup>13</sup> Children In Los Angeles Parks; A Study Of Equity, Quality, and Children's Satisfaction With Neighborhood Parks

<sup>14</sup> Children In Los Angeles Parks; A Study Of Equity, Quality, and Children's Satisfaction With Neighborhood Parks

<sup>15</sup> "Parks and Park Funding In Los Angeles: An Equity Mapping Analysis"

will be issued later in January 2006, found inequities in the manner in which the Department allocates staffing resources. Specifically, there is little relationship between the Department's staffing levels and park acreage (or, for golf courses, staffing levels and rounds played). For example, the Pacific Region is responsible for maintaining 8% of the City's developed park acreage, yet approximately 17% of the Department's maintenance personnel are assigned to the Pacific Region.

Our fieldwork revealed inequities in the diversity and frequency of programming offered at some parks. Auditors visited numerous facilities during the day and evening to observe facility use. Certain facilities provide a wide variety of programs and maximize the use of facility space to the point they have had to turn away interested participants. Some facilities provide a minimal number of programs and services. At these facilities, we noted some rooms were vacant or used for open gym time and no activities were scheduled.

Directors and supervisors acknowledge that not all centers equitably target the diverse needs of surrounding communities and suggest that such inequities are a consequence of economic conditions. For example, less affluent communities are more dependent on Department subsidized programs and are less likely to offer as many programs because patrons simply cannot afford to pay additional registration fees. Such conditions limit the variety of programs available. The Department has attempted to address this by allocating additional part time staff hours to Urban Impact centers, but the Department recognizes that an increase in staffing does not necessarily increase programming options.

Further, some directors attributed inequity between recreation centers with the fund raising ability of communities and PABs. More affluent communities are capable of raising the necessary funds to increase programs and improve facilities, resulting in higher quality within such communities.

The Department has developed some programs to address such inequities (e.g., Girls Play LA and the Clean and Safe Spaces programs) as described below. The Clean And Safe Spaces (CLASS) program seeks to revitalize parks by providing additional staffing hours to improve maintenance and to organize a CLASS parks teen club that provides activities related to community service, sports, life skills, education, and social activities. CLASS teen club activities are developed within the governing framework of a program that seeks to develop youth as community assets and seeks to connect youth to their communities.

The goal of Girls Play Los Angeles (GPLA) is to achieve gender equity in youth sports, by providing additional resources for girl's basketball and softball teams. The GPLA program was instituted as part of a settlement to a gender equity class action lawsuit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union in response to alleged discriminatory practices that favored boy's team sports. Participating recreation centers are routinely evaluated by the GPLA program to ensure that

sufficient resources have been allocated for girl's sports and that the facility is involved in recruiting women from the community to volunteer with girls' teams.

Although CLASS and GPLA provide examples of programs targeted to address inequities, such programs have a limited impact; for example, there are 97 Urban Impact parks in the City but only 47 are beneficiaries of the CLASS program, and GPLA only addresses gender inequity at 40<sup>16</sup> of the City's 176 recreation centers.

The Department should address in a comprehensive strategic plan specifically how it will address issues of inequity, including developing measurable definitions of equity, and indicators such as dollars spent in each community, park acreage and facility square footage per community or resident, facility and park conditions, staff allocation, age and gender of participants, quantity and diversity of service programs, program quality, hours of operation contributing to accessibility to centers, cost of programs, etc. Addressing issues of real and perceived inequities will be a difficult and long-term endeavor. To work, the Department must first identify the many factors that contribute to real and perceived inequities and take steps now to identify such inequities and develop a strategic plan in concert with the Mayor and City Council to mitigate inequities and measure progress.

**Issue No. 3: The Department should ensure that programs at each center equitably targets the City's diverse demographics through recreational, educational, cultural, and human service programming.**

In order to fulfill its mission to provide "affordable recreation programs and human services for people of all ages," each center must offer programs that target a given community's diverse needs. We found that, in general, the Department provides a wide array of recreation programs, classes and educational programs, and special programs that target diverse needs by age and gender. However, because programming decisions are left to the discretion of individual recreation directors without sufficient guidelines or standards, some centers do not adequately target programming to address the recreation and community service needs of the surrounding communities.

Some facilities specialize in one type of service targeting a limited segment of the population (e.g., youth team sports) while not offering other types of services (e.g., classes or cultural programs). Some centers provide low levels of programming by offering open gym time during after-school and evening hours while other rooms at the center remain vacant and no activities are scheduled.

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<sup>16</sup> The number of centers offering GPLA team sports varies according to seasonal enrollment numbers; for example, if one facility is budgeted for four basketball teams, but there are only enough girls enrolled for two teams, resources will be shifted to another Urban Impact center to provide two more teams elsewhere.

According to the Department, one factor hindering centers' ability to provide a wide array of diverse services is that some centers cannot support additional programming beyond the limited revenues generated from their own programming fees and Department subsidies.

Team sports for youth are the most popular programs offered at recreation centers, and are the most used by City residents. Despite this, studies show that residents are interested in other recreation programs as well. The 1999 Community Needs Survey found that respondents desired enhancements in the following recreational opportunities: fitness/exercise, performing arts, aquatics, cultural programs, arts/crafts, senior citizen programs, after school programs, and individual sports. "Youth team sports" was listed as the ninth most desired enhancement in recreation programming.

While studies have indicated public desire for more cultural events, classes and more age-appropriate programming, there is an economic disincentive for the Department to offer these programming options. According to Department management, a measure of a director's success is the closing balance of the center's MRP accounts. As a result, it appears that Centers that cannot produce excess funds from team sports do not have sufficient resources to offer more diverse, but less profitable, programming. Ultimately, we found that the Department does not apply minimal programming standards at recreation centers to ensure that centers address the diverse needs of diverse communities. As a result, some centers neglect some of the recreation and community service needs of their surrounding communities.

According to the Department, its high employee vacancy rate and limited park space contributes to these programming challenges, but we believe more can be accomplished by establishing minimal programming standards at centers to ensure they address the diverse needs of diverse communities. Further, according to Department management, some centers don't offer a broad array of programming because the demand is not present; however, the lack of a comprehensive community needs assessment makes this difficult to demonstrate.

**Issue No. 4: The Department could improve the methods with which it informs the community of the services it offers, opportunities for community input, and participation in Department services.**

In general, we found that the Department does not adequately communicate with City residents to inform them of services offered and to solicit input and participation. In 1999, only 32% of respondents believed they were adequately informed of recreation services. Marketing efforts have not dramatically improved since. While the Department maintains a marketing group, its resources are limited and its efforts are generally focused on Department-wide programs and special events. Individual communities are reliant on the skills of

park directors to inform them of available services and opportunities for community involvement. In the absence of an expanded centralized marketing effort, directors are left to improvise and employ individualized marketing methods. As a result, some communities benefit from such efforts, while others suffer. A more coordinated, proactive marketing strategy at the center-level is necessary to both inform the community of available services and to actively solicit community involvement to draw on previously untapped community resources.

While the Department's marketing group focuses on Department-wide programs and special events, when it comes to the everyday activities of parks operations, individual recreation centers employ their own marketing strategies. Center directors typically mail quarterly programs to park patrons already using recreation facilities, and tend to rely on "word of mouth" to publicize center programs and opportunities for input and participation and to reach the wider community.

A minority of directors at the 35 selected centers has developed their own marketing relationships that require active engagement with the community. Some have entered into partnerships with area businesses and community organizations, such as church groups and local parent teacher associations. Other directors of facilities situated in densely populated areas have canvassed surrounding neighborhoods or collaborated with their PAB to publicize center events and solicit input and participation. These "best practices," however, are inconsistently applied because efforts are decentralized and are left to the discretion of individual directors.

The most commonly employed methods for promoting services at individual centers, mailing lists and word of mouth, are passive and limited.

- Mailing lists of prior patrons restrict the Department's ability to promote its services beyond those already aware of and using recreation centers.
- Word of mouth relies on patrons to promote the center, does not allow the Department to speak for itself, and restricts communication to the social networks of current patrons.
- Improvisation by each individual director has resulted in inconsistent priorities and degree of community involvement.

Best practices require recreation and parks agencies to not only conduct a community needs assessment, but to develop a more comprehensive marketing strategy that communicates to constituents how their needs will be met – particularly regarding the recreational, economic, educational, health, or other community services provided by the Department.<sup>17</sup> To do this the Department

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<sup>17</sup> "Positioning Public Recreation and Park Offerings Using Importance-Performance Analysis" by Hunt, Kindle et al., *The Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, Fall 2003.

must engage the community on a Department-wide centralized basis to promote community involvement at individual community centers.

**Issue No. 5: The development of a long-term strategic plan is necessary to ensure that recreation and community service programs not only address current and future needs and expectations.**

The Department has not developed a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan to serve as a roadmap to enhance the Department's status as a world-leader in providing recreation and community services. The Department must develop a strategic plan that addresses the purpose and intended outcomes of its recreational and community services.<sup>18</sup> This plan must be finalized and must extend beyond one year by encompassing the Department's long-term vision for the future. Ultimately, this plan must not only be the Department's blueprint for the future; it must be the City's strategic plan to provide better recreation service to Los Angeles residents.

A strategic plan establishes an approach designed to utilize pertinent information about community needs and available resources to achieve the Department's mission. Developing a successful strategic plan must involve (1) identifying community needs, (2) analyzing pertinent community information and studies, (3) developing a clear mission, goals and objectives at the Department, region and center levels, (4) developing an explicit approach to addressing real and perceived inequities in the delivery of services, (5) addressing accessibility and safety concerns of City residents, (6) accumulating and allocating available resources, (7) a step-by-step approach to putting information and resources into action in a concerted effort to achieve the mission, (8) marketing these services to the community, and (9) developing evaluation techniques to evaluate progress in implementing the plan. This issue is also discussed in detail in the Controller's report on maintenance activities, which was performed by the Matrix Consulting Group and will be issued later in January 2006.

Furthermore, the development of a strategic plan is not a one-time effort; rather, it requires ongoing monitoring and refinement even after its implementation. To facilitate this effort, the Department plans to bolster its Planning and Development Group which, according to current job descriptions, will focus mainly on capital improvement projects and park acquisition, and should include coordinating with other City departments and nongovernmental organizations. In doing so, the Department should be prepared to adapt to changing needs, priorities, and opportunities for service.

Based on our fieldwork, it is apparent that the efforts put forth by the Department's recreation directors are not always congruent. Interviews with personnel and auditor observations suggest that management styles vary

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<sup>18</sup> Also discussed in the Controller's performance audit of maintenance activities conducted by Matrix Consulting Group, released January 2006.

between regions and each appears to operate according to different guidelines. For example, some directors develop cooperative relationships with other recreation service providers, while other directors view other service providers as competitors; some facilities are used so heavily they must turn away patrons, while other facilities are underutilized; some directors are personally motivated by a desire to impact the community, while others expect the community to affect the facility. These differences affect centers' efficient use of resources, connectedness to the community, and their ability to meet community needs. A comprehensive, long-term Department-wide strategic plan is necessary to resolve these issues.

### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that Department management:

- 1.1 Conduct a Community Needs Assessment every five years.
  - This Assessment should include community demographic trends, the public's perception of availability and access to parks and services, recreation activity preferences, usage patterns, the types and prevalence of non-City service providers, and school schedules and programs.
  - Partner with other City departments that conduct community research, such as the CDD, as possible sources for community information.
  - Needs should be identified at the recreation center level – not the region or community level – to ensure each of the 176 recreation centers meet the various or different needs of their immediate surrounding community.
- 1.2 Make identified needs a central factor in determining which services to offer.
- 1.3 Develop a strategic approach, in concert with the Mayor and City Council, to identify and mitigate real and perceived inequities to maximize service delivery to all residents. This will include developing a measurable definition of equity and monitoring progress.
- 1.4 Develop policies and procedures that require recreation directors to target diverse needs demographics through diverse programming.
- 1.5 Develop a departmental marketing and outreach strategy, in concert with the long-term strategic plan, that effectively informs the community of the services offered by the Department, opportunities for community input, and participation (both as donors and volunteers) in Department services.

- 1.6 Promote community outreach strategies including methods that directors can use to identify and partner with community resources such as local chambers of commerce, neighborhood councils, and other recreation service providers.
- 1.7 Develop a five-year strategic plan that allows the Department to identify short-term and long-term service needs.
- 1.8 Create a strategic planning group responsible for developing and implementing the strategic plan, and for conducting on-going analyses of community needs and expectations, Department performance, and independent studies.
  - Develop relationships with research organizations and universities to conduct studies on the impact of services on the community.

## Section II: Internal Controls over Program Services

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Having first accomplished the primary task of planning to meet community needs and expectations, the Department must employ internal controls to ensure that standards exist and are adhered to throughout the process of providing recreation and community services. The internal controls discussed in this section impact park safety, increasing accessibility to recreational opportunities, and personnel training. Policies and procedures should provide guidelines and standards, to help ensure service levels and quality are offered to park patrons.

### **Issue No. 1: The Department must improve their response to safety concerns in parks.**

Park safety is a central element in the Department's mission. However, the 1999 Community Needs Survey revealed that approximately 51% of respondents are reluctant to visit neighborhood parks out of concern for their personal safety. A 2002 study of equity, quality, and children's satisfaction with parks conducted by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) revealed that while most children felt safe at City parks, a substantial number, 29% of inner city children and 20% of suburban children felt their neighborhood park was unsafe. Gangs, gun violence, and public intoxication were among the most often cited risks by the children surveyed. A 2005 study by the RAND Corporation suggested the same: while most believe parks to be safe, the most common write-in response for suggested improvements to neighborhood parks was safety.

Directors-in-charge have commented that gangs and homelessness are the greatest challenge to ensuring a safe and inviting environment for the community. Department supervisors acknowledged that incidents such as random shootings and violent crimes scare people away from parks and recreation programs. Although individual directors have developed approaches to the problems confronting their facility, none of the supervisors we interviewed presented plans for assisting directors who must contend with gangs or restore community trust in a facility after an incident such as a shooting has occurred.

The Department has attempted to address security concerns by establishing "LAPD Drop-In Centers" at Urban Impact parks, and by deploying park rangers to patrol "high-risk" areas. During fieldwork at 22 Urban Impact parks, the audit team did not encounter an officer at a single drop-in center. Department management indicated that the presence of officers at drop-in centers depends largely on the relationship between the park director and the lead officer. The Department's attempt has not been as successful as it could be because of a lack of support, primarily from LAPD, for the program.

Additionally, the Park Rangers currently have 26 peace officers deployed to respond to calls at the city's 176 recreation centers and approximately 390 parks.

Park Rangers focus their efforts by patrolling “high-risk” parks two to three times per week. Parks are classified by risk level according to their history of prior incidents. Aside from these infrequent visits, Park Rangers may only see a facility when there is a reported incident. Response times to these incidents are characterized as “soon as possible” or “at once.” The Ranger’s current approach toward safety is primarily reactive, rather than proactive.

After the close of audit fieldwork, the Department transferred all security services provided by its Park Rangers to the Department of General Services in an effort to decrease vacancies and increase the presence of Rangers at City Parks; it is still too early to determine the effect of these efforts. The Department has also attempted to mitigate problems associated with lewd conduct and public intoxication by identifying problem parks and coordinating the efforts of Park Rangers, maintenance personnel, and LAPD. This combined effort to clean up and secure parks involves dedicating personnel to keep the facility clean and keep a visible law enforcement presence, without infringing on patrons’ ability to recreate. Although the Department has implemented a plan to prevent lewd conduct in parks, the threat of gang violence remains a problem for which the Department has yet to develop countermeasures.

The Department does not have an adequate plan to address safety risks resulted from gangs or violent crime. Directors-in-charge do not feel they have enough support to handle security problems and some feel that exercising their authority to keep people from engaging in inappropriate behavior, such as consuming alcoholic beverages on park grounds, could invoke violent reprisals.

**Issue No. 2: The Department should maximize the use of available facilities and provide more recreation and community services by developing joint-use agreements.**

As noted previously, an independent study found that 60% of City residents did not believe there were sufficient facilities, programs, or activities to meet their needs, and 67% of respondents believed that some of these needs could be met by using school facilities for recreation purposes. Despite this, the Department has not formally assessed the ability to meet demand by increasing service levels at underutilized recreation facilities, and has not sufficiently engaged in Department-wide partnerships with other organizations, such as the Los Angeles Unified School District, to provide additional recreation and community service opportunities.

The Audit Team observed conditions and usage patterns at 35 recreation centers at a variety of times throughout the day. The auditors identified certain centers that provide a wide variety of programs and maximize the use of facility space to the point they have had to turn away interested participants. Other centers are underutilized, with vacant rooms and no activities scheduled in the evening, when most recreation centers are most heavily used.

Some individual recreation centers have engaged in informal, cooperative or joint use agreements with neighboring schools to increase access to basketball courts or swimming pools. Such arrangements are initiated by center directors and are not a result of formal Department policies. The Department estimates there are nearly 200 agreements with individual entities such as schools, non-government agencies, and faith-based organizations. Expanding the use of joint-use agreements on a Department-wide basis would increase the Department's ability to provide services to a greater number of constituents.

Achieving the Department's mission involves maximizing recreational and community service opportunities for residents given available resources. This requires a concerted, intensive effort on the part of Department management to identify areas where it can increase recreational and community service opportunities utilizing its current assets, as well as to identify partnering opportunities that could increase the Department's overall capacity to provide services.

**Issue No. 3: There are no formal training or staff development programs to equip personnel to provide quality recreation and human services.**

Department resources such as training programs and operational manuals are essential management tools for any comprehensive plan that seeks to mitigate potential legal liabilities, establish quality standards, and ensure a degree of consistency in service delivery.<sup>19</sup>

The primary resources for staff development include training programs for entry-level personnel, continuing professional education (CPE) programs, and operational manuals. Entry-level recreation coordinators attend a mandatory three-day training academy, which serves as an orientation to Department policies and procedures. Three days is insufficient. Directors, supervisors, and training personnel all acknowledged that new personnel acquire their most valuable training through on the job experience. Furthermore, there are no formal training programs for subsequently higher positions in the Department, such as directors-in-charge or supervisors. On the job training lacks a standardized curriculum and renders staff entirely dependent upon a director's willingness to expose staff to new tasks that challenge and increase their skills and abilities. Without centralized controls, it is difficult to ensure minimal standards of quality.

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<sup>19</sup> The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) emphasize the importance of an up to date administrative manual as the "repository of official guiding documents of the organization" (see Van der Smissen, Betty, Marry Moiseichik, and Vern Hartenburg. *Management of Recreation and Parks Agencies*. Ashburn VA.: The National Recreation and Parks Association, 2005 (Page 68)).

Continuing Professional Education (CPE) programs are developed by the human resources section (HR) and by a training committee. HR develops training programs to mitigate risks that may expose the Department to legal liability, such as workplace safety, sexual harassment, and discrimination. The training committee develops programs based upon needs identified through their collective experience, responses solicited from training program participants, and Department-mandated topics. CPE classes are presented to groups as large as 100. While this is more efficient than one-on-one or small group training, this approach treats each center director as though they perform the same job at each location, and appears incongruent with management's approach that emphasizes the uniqueness of each recreation center. Mass produced training programs designed for large groups may not allow for the level of specialization that meets the unique needs of directors in various centers and communities.

Recreation coordinators and directors primarily rely on prior work experience, informal mentorship with senior Department personnel, and personal experience patronizing recreation facilities as the basis for establishing and conducting recreation facility programming. As a result, facility directors approach programming and operations with varying skills and abilities and do not have the benefit of adequate guidance. Without formalized training and guidance, the Department cannot ensure minimal standards of quality.

An example of ineffective training provided by the Department is the annual training on Municipal Recreation Program (MRP)<sup>20</sup> accounting that each director is required to attend. Even though MRP training is a routine topic, between fiscal years 2001-02 through 2004-05, 17 out of 176, nearly 10% of recreation center MRP accounts had a negative closing balance. As another example, communicating with patrons and the community is part of a recreation director's job description, but according to a Department commissioned study, "staff members tend to identify with their individual work unit instead of the recreation and park facility and the community the serve."<sup>21</sup>

The Department does not dedicate sufficient resources to training program development and implementation. Both HR and the training committee attributed scarce resources as the single greatest constraint on the training options that are available to Department personnel. However, it is detrimental to the Department's ability to fulfill its mission in the long-term if sufficient resources are not provided to develop effective staff training and development programs.

**Issue No. 4: Policies and procedures have not been developed or updated to reflect current or best practices.**

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<sup>20</sup> The Municipal Recreation Program (MRP) account is the account that centers deposit registration fees and from which centers draw funds to pay for program and operational expenses.

<sup>21</sup> "Organizational Assessment of Recreation and Parks Department" conducted by A.C. Lazzaretto & Associates on March 20, 2003.

Policies and procedures are essential management tools to provide guidance and administrative support for recreation service providers to ensure that center directors are working toward the Department's goals and objectives.<sup>22</sup> However, the Department's policies and procedures are outdated and do not reflect current practices, the Mayor's vision, or management's vision for the future.

The Department provides directors and supervisors with a variety of operational manuals, addressing topics such as general operations, MRP account management procedures, and safety. The general operations manual has not been updated recently; in fact, most sections are over 25 years old. The auditors reviewed one operations manual that, although hundreds of pages in length, included an empty section titled "Leisure Services" that was to provide guidelines for recreation programs. The MRP manual is more current; most sections have been updated within the past five years, but some managers have described the MRP manual as cumbersome and vague, and ultimately fails to serve as a quick, user-friendly reference. As a result, some facilities developed their own operational manuals by compiling the most useful topics into an abridged and user-friendly text.

We also found that the existing manuals did not address present work priorities expressed by management. In many cases, these manuals describe how tasks were to be performed, but provide no instruction for the prioritization of various tasks, or how the performance of such tasks would be measured and evaluated. According to Department management, such standards were learned during the initial training process, and through everyday experience. But the absence of specific standards by which each task is evaluated makes it difficult to evaluate performance overall.

According to the Department, recreation centers comprise a system of independently operated facilities that are bound only by the provision of a common service: recreation programs. Each recreation center is unique and must be treated as a franchise. Directors rely on their own discretion to determine the mixture, type, and quality of programming offered. Given this approach, the Department, acting as a corporate headquarters, must provide adequate guidance to directors regarding franchise operations to achieve a consistent level of programming. While a franchise model is touted by Department management, the Department lacks the stringent guidelines to direct all aspects of service delivery that characterize successful franchises. Instead, the Department's franchise philosophy permits decentralized decision-making and inconsistent monitoring and reporting.

The Department's franchise approach toward managing recreation centers has resulted in a decentralized operation lacking any centralized management

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<sup>22</sup> Van der Smissen, Betty, Marry Moiseichik, and Vern Hartenburg. *Management of Recreation and Parks Agencies*. Ashburn VA.: The National Recreation and Parks Association, 2005 (Page 68).

controls that can ensure minimal standards of quality. This decentralized operation has resulted in:

- Individual directors improvising the methods and frequency by which they identify community needs and expectations, resulting in irregular and often passive interactions with the community.
- Individual directors improvising those methods they assume are appropriate for informing the community of the services offered and opportunities to participate in Department services.
- Some directors-in-charge engaging in cooperative joint-use agreements with neighboring schools to increase access to park facilities and services or collaborate with other recreation service providers to avoid duplicative efforts and provide a greater variety of services for the community. Other directors-in-charge view neighborhood institutions and other recreation service providers as competitors.
- Quarterly reports, which are the primary source for monitoring a center and its' director, vary by region in format and content thus limiting its utility as a tool to analyze and compare centers from various regions.
- Patron feedback is acquired through a decentralized ad hoc process that varies in technique and frequency depending on the center director.

### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that Department Management:

- 2.1 Work with LAPD to address safety issues by increasing the visibility of officers at City parks, and by encouraging participation in parks' LAPD Drop-In centers.
- 2.2 Consider all available funding sources, including grant funds, to fund improved public safety by subsidizing LAPD costs for increased police presence as well as by developing a more proactive presence of Park Rangers and improving lighting at City parks.
- 2.3 Coordinate with community organizations and City programs, such as LA Bridges, to offer programs at City parks that are directed at reducing gang activity and violence at parks.
- 2.4 Identify the service-delivery capacity for all Department facilities and parks, and develop a reporting mechanism to evaluate the actual usage to determine if parks and facilities are under- or over-utilized.
- 2.5 Develop cooperative partnerships, including, but not limited to joint-use agreements, with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the business community, and neighborhood service

organizations, to efficiently increase resident accessibility to recreation and community services.

- 2.6 Develop an intensive training program, including classroom, on-the-job and Continuing Professional Education (CPE) training by the Department's best performing recreation directors for all staff. Training should incorporate outreach techniques and public communication.
- 2.7 Update and develop policies and procedures to reflect current practices; industry best practices; work priorities; the Mayor's and Department's mission, goals and objectives; management's franchise approach to service delivery.

## Section III: Evaluation of Success

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The Department must evaluate its efforts to determine success in accomplishing its mission, identify areas of improvement, and to ensure it provides quality services to the community. The ability of the Department to make such an assessment depends on whether it monitors, on an ongoing basis, the performance of field staff as they deliver services to the community. In addition, it depends on whether the Department implements sufficient performance standards and measures to evaluate the actual impact of its efforts in the community.

Performance standards and measures should address Department-wide needs (e.g., standardized team sports programs and a safe recreational environment), as well as the needs faced in specific communities and facilities. Adequate performance measures should address (1) input measures, such as the monetary and staff resources dedicated to the provision of recreational and community services; (2) output measures, such as the number of participants enrolled in particular programs; and (3) outcome measures – the results of recreation and community programs to achieve specific goals, such as increased community satisfaction or improved performance in schools. In addition, efficiency measures – measuring costs per participant, time period, geographical region, etc. – are essential in determining whether the Department achieves its desired effect in an efficient manner.

In general, Department management has not implemented the monitoring or performance measurement tools necessary to determine if it is meeting the recreational and human service needs of City residents. The performance data discussed in this chapter should be developed to facilitate the ongoing assessment of performance and should be incorporated in the overall community needs assessment and strategic planning processes.

### **Issue No. 1: The Department should systematically evaluate the success of programs with the purpose of identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.**

The most critical question that must be asked of the Department is whether or not it has succeeded in providing quality recreation and community services that meet the needs of City residents. The Department cannot adequately answer this question. Certainly, there are signs of success, as well as opportunities for improvement. For instance, a 2005 survey revealed that over 90% of park patrons gave Department staff an A or B grade for overall performance, though between 21% and 59% of those surveyed did not know center staff and could not respond.<sup>23</sup> However, another independent study found that 60% of City residents

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<sup>23</sup> “The Role of Parks in Physical Activity and Health” by RAND, year one findings released February 2005.

did not believe there were sufficient facilities, programs, or activities to meet their needs. Other studies have indicated that patrons are generally satisfied with recreation centers, staff, and services, but surveys not limited to patrons suggest that residents are not well informed of Department services and feel there is insufficient access to parks and services.

Department management does not adequately evaluate the performance of their divisions' operations, and does not have adequate performance standards or measures in place to determine if its recreation and community programs meet the Department's goals. The Department's lack of sufficient output and outcome performance measures hinder management's ability to evaluate programs, divisions, or the Department as a whole. As a result, the Department, and the auditors, were unable to determine whether the Department achieved its objectives, goals, and mission.

The absence of complaints was the most commonly cited measure of satisfaction by directors and supervisors. Generally, it was assumed that the absence of complaints is indicative of patron satisfaction, an assumption that disengages staff from the community and its concerns. For instance, according to the Department, less affluent communities tend to be less vocal, leaving the Department with little insight into their concerns and excluding them from an evaluation of programming success. While center directors occasionally solicit feedback through informal communication with patrons and through patron satisfaction surveys, there are no Department-wide efforts to survey patrons or engage the community to determine the actual impact of its services. To address this, the Department recently developed a web-based satisfaction survey to solicit feedback at the Department level.

The only formal method used to monitor the success of recreation and community service programs is through routine quarterly reports. Quarterly reports call on directors to provide qualitative assessments of center performance, recommendations from the director for self-improvement, and goals for future development. In addition, quarterly reports require quantitative assessments of center performance, normally in the form of output measures of participant enrollment in each of the programs offered during the prior quarter. The reports vary in format and content, depending on the region, but typically include a schedule of activities, and the number of classes and team sports for each age group. Weaknesses to this approach include:

- While the Department accumulates enrollment figures for programs offered at centers, these figures are not typically compared against target enrollment numbers as a performance measure.
- Descriptive metrics such as drop out rates or actual versus targeted enrollment rates are not consistently applied Department-wide.

- These reports do not provide data enabling program performance measurement, evaluation of patron satisfaction, or reasons for nonparticipation.
- Reports are rarely retained for more than one year; therefore, if trend analyses do occur, the data used represents such a short time span that identifiable trends render little value.
- The Department is unable to analyze enrollment trends, or statistics relating to age and gender of participants, due to the absence of adequate or reliable data.
- The Valley region collects their own data, specifically, hours of programming per category instead of number of activities per category, thus rendering an analysis across all regions impossible.

In addition, the Department does not employ technology to facilitate timely reporting of information, storage of data, and easy retrieval of data. The Department routinely requests information from centers in areas ranging from hazardous material reports to summaries of services offered. Typically these reports are submitted on paper forms and are not retained for very long, in most cases less than one year. Information is not stored on computers or submitted through electronic forms that could be entered into a database. As a consequence, whenever information is requested, the center director will typically manually generate a new report. As such, Department personnel are spending more time than necessary to perform rudimentary tasks, such as generating reports that could be simplified with computers. Best practices require “the right tools for staff to effortlessly access and store the information required to manage or provide service.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite noted deficiencies, the audit also revealed notable exceptions where the Department as a whole is actively engaged with the community and patrons to identify satisfaction and diagnose areas for improvement. These tend to occur in programs that are centrally managed by the Department, such as camping and aquatics programs, rather than those that are decentralized to the community level.

Nevertheless, to monitor operations at 176 facilities throughout the City, the Department must have reporting mechanisms that demonstrate progress towards measurable objectives and provide sufficient and pertinent information regarding facility operations. This requires:

- evaluating programs and service delivery in terms of format, activity selection, and structural components and characterize such an evaluation

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<sup>24</sup> Van der Smissen, Betty, Marry Moiseichik, and Vern Hartenburg. *Management of Recreation and Parks Agencies*. Ashburn VA.: The National Recreation and Parks Association, 2005 (Page 299).

as a mini feedback loop that enables targeted adjustments to individual programs.<sup>25</sup>

- setting specific target goals for each performance measure when work plans are developed, then gathering quantitative and qualitative data to provide information on the programs success.<sup>26</sup>

The Department is currently unable to identify weaknesses in program planning, diagnose areas for improvement, or ensure a satisfactory level of service to the community, because it lacks performance standards to be measured. Without these, the Department cannot determine its own success, and is impaired in its ability to identify opportunities for improvement.

### **Issue No. 2: The Department needs to improve internal monitoring of processes and practices at the service level.**

In addition to evaluating the Department's ultimate success in meeting community needs, the Department must ensure quality and efficiency in providing these services. Ongoing and continual monitoring of field operations is required for management to have a reasonable assurance that its 176 recreation centers are providing quality services in an efficient manner. This audit revealed that the Department does not sufficiently monitor the daily performance of its recreation and community service providers.

We found that management's knowledge of conditions at the service level is dependent upon a disconnected and inefficient flow of information.<sup>27</sup> As previously discussed, while routine quarterly reports do not facilitate on-going, continuous monitoring, they serve to provide a periodic assessment of center performance, recommendations from the director for self-improvement, and goals for future development. To address on-going, continuous monitoring, the Department utilizes informal communications between, and initiated by both, management and center directors. Changes in conditions at the facility, problems, and other areas of concern that may impact service delivery are not captured and will go unreported unless a director takes the initiative to speak up. However, we found that center directors were not always eager to speak up, due to a belief that any effort to do so will be fruitless or will be met with retaliation. Specifically, some directors expressed concern that reporting accurate though unfavorable conditions may unintentionally make their supervisors look bad and invoke reprisals through reassignment to less desirable locations.

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<sup>25</sup> Van der Smissen, Betty, Marry Moiseichik, and Vern Hartenburg. *Management of Recreation and Parks Agencies*. Ashburn VA.: The National Recreation and Parks Association, 2005 (Pages 148-55).

<sup>26</sup> "Creating Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: An Action Plan For Parks and Recreation in California" published by The California Park & Recreation Society 1999.

<sup>27</sup> "Organizational Assessment of Recreation and Parks Department" conducted by A.C. Lazzaretto & Associates on March 20, 2003.

While many of the Department's strengths lie in the initiative and innovation of individual center directors, we found that inconsistencies exist, in part, because the Department's informal monitoring process fails to systematically encourage initiative on the part of center directors, engage supervisors in the work of their staff, and foster responsibility and accountability for director and supervisory performance.<sup>28</sup> There has been an incomplete effort to implement organizational changes, but ancillary issues such as internal reporting and connectivity to the community have not been addressed. Furthermore, the span of control was discussed in a 2003 study, which described the organization as top heavy. This description is consistent with our observations, wherein layers of supervisory personnel diffuse individual responsibility and inhibit direct contact with field personnel.

We also found that performance reports are generally not valued by center directors or by mid-level supervisors as a management tool. Instead, reporting efforts seem to be viewed as an inefficient and cumbersome bureaucratic process that yields little value. When quarterly reports are completed and filed, they are done so manually, and must pass through multiple supervisory levels, which can obstruct the timely and accurate reporting of information.

The Department's internal monitoring process does not provide necessary information to allow oversight and evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

**Issue No. 3: The Department needs to develop standards and measures to assess efficiency in providing recreation and community services.**

As noted above, identifying the resources utilized to provide services is necessary to determining the efficiency of the department's operations. However, the Department does not capture program costs, and is thus unable to compare costs of individual programs between centers or against other organizations. Cost monitoring is not facilitated by the Department's financial system and has been delegated to field personnel outside of any centralized management control structure. The absence of service delivery cost data has implications for how the department establishes program fees, monitors the use of MRP funds, evaluates whether expenses are reasonable, and determines whether services are efficiently offered.

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<sup>28</sup> "Organizational Assessment of Recreation and Parks Department" conducted by A.C. Lazzaretto & Associates on March 20, 2003. Cited a "lack of overall on-site responsibility and accountability for the performance of staff at individual recreation and park facilities" and a "reporting structure that does not encourage initiative and creativity."

In addition to recreation center programming, the Department is unable to determine the actual cost of its golf operations. An external auditing firm<sup>29</sup> was hired to determine the bottom line of golf operations. While the study found that the Golf Division operated at a profit of approximately \$3.4 million in 2002 and \$3.5 million in 2003,<sup>30</sup> it was unable to provide indisputable cost figures.

The pay tennis program provides one example of an attempt to monitor costs and maintain a cost effective program. The tennis program monitors receipts and labor costs to identify whether any pay facilities are operating at a loss. While this analysis does not capture complete costs (e.g., revenue from pro shops and costs resulting from electricity and facility maintenance), it does represent positive steps the Department is making in its efforts to capture costs and measure one aspect of a program's success, its bottom line.

### **Recommendations:**

We recommend that Department management:

- 3.1 Develop and implement appropriate performance standards, goals and measures (input, output, and outcome) for all programs and services for the purpose of:
  - Identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
  - Determining the actual impact of the Department's efforts on the City's communities and residents.
  - Assessing success in achieving the mission, goals and objectives, both at the Department level, and the region and center levels.
- 3.2 Evaluate the method, quality, and utility of the data collected so reporting mechanisms can produce meaningful data that can be used to develop long-term trend analyses. Consider new methods to improve efficiencies, such as developing intranet-based forms for reporting and compiling data.
- 3.3 Incorporate the results of all performance measurement and evaluation in the strategic planning process to ensure efficient service delivery.
- 3.4 Develop a formal monitoring process that requires the involvement of supervisors and Department management at the center level.

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<sup>29</sup> See "Schedule of Revenues and Expenditures and Independent Accountant's Report" conducted by Thompson, Cobb, Bazilio, and Associates, PC Issued October 17, 2004.

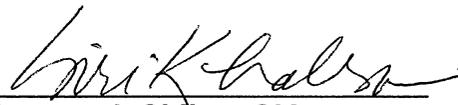
<sup>30</sup> According to the TCBA audit of golf operations, the Golf Division yielded \$3,372,985 in Fiscal Year 2001-02 and \$ 3,497,153 in Fiscal Year 2002-03.

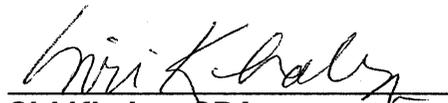
- 3.5 Assess the efficiency of center operations by evaluating the costs and the outcomes of specific programs, in comparison with benchmark or industry standards.

A draft audit report was provided to the General Manager of the Department of Recreation and Parks on December 15, 2005. An exit conference was conducted on December 20, 2005 at which time the audit staff discussed the findings and recommendations in the draft audit report with the General Manager and his staff. The Department's response during the exit conference was evaluated and considered prior to finalizing the report. Department management indicated they have taken or plan to take actions to correct the issues noted in the report.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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**Jeremy Schoech**  
Internal Auditor I

*For*   
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**George J. Skiles, CIA**  
Internal Auditor IV

  
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**Siri Khalsa, CPA**  
Deputy Director of Auditing

  
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**Farid Saffar, CPA**  
Director of Auditing

December 8, 2005



Section Number	Summary Description of Findings	Ranking Code	Recommendations
		N	<p>community input, and participation (both as donors and volunteers) in Department services.</p> <p>1.6 Promote community outreach strategies including methods that directors can use to identify and partner with community resources such as local chambers of commerce, neighborhood councils, and other recreation service providers.</p> <p>1.7 Develop a five-year strategic plan that allows the Department to identify short-term and long-term needs.</p> <p>1.8 Create a strategic planning group responsible for developing and implementing the strategic plan, and for conducting on-going analyses of community needs and expectations, Department performance, and of independent studies issued.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop relationships with research organizations and universities to conduct studies on the impact of services on the community.</li> </ul>
2.	<p>1. The Department must improve their response to safety concerns in parks.</p> <p>2. The Department should maximize the use of available facilities and provide more recreation and community services, by developing joint-use agreements.</p> <p>3. There are no formal training or development programs to equip personnel to provide quality recreation and human services.</p> <p>4. Policies and procedures have not been developed or updated to reflect current or best practices.</p>	<p>N</p> <p>D</p> <p>N</p> <p>N</p> <p>N</p>	<p>2.1 Work with LAPD to address safety issues by increasing the visibility of officers at City parks, and by encouraging participation in parks' LAPD Drop-In centers.</p> <p>2.2 Consider all available funding sources, including grant funds, to fund improved public safety by subsidizing LAPD costs for increased police presence as well as by developing a more proactive presence of Park Rangers and improving lighting at City parks.</p> <p>2.3 Coordinate with community organizations and City programs, such as LA Bridges, to offer programs at City parks that are directed at reducing gang activity and violence at parks.</p> <p>2.4 Identify the service-delivery capacity for all Department facilities and parks, and develop a reporting mechanism to evaluate the actual usage to determine if parks and facilities are under- or over-utilized.</p> <p>2.5 Develop cooperative partnerships, including, but not limited to joint-use</p>

Section Number	Summary Description of Findings	Ranking Code	Recommendations
		<p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p>	<p>agreements, with Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the business community, and neighborhood service organizations, to efficiently increase resident accessibility to recreation and community services.</p> <p>2.6 Develop an intensive training program, including classroom, on-the-job and Continuing Professional Education (CPE) training by the Department's best performing recreation directors for all staff. Training should incorporate outreach techniques and public communication.</p> <p>2.7 Update and develop policies and procedures to reflect current practices; industry best practices; work priorities; the Mayor's and Department's mission, goals and objectives; management's franchise approach to service delivery.</p>
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p>1. The Department should systematically evaluate the success of programs with the purpose of identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.</p> <p>2. The Department needs to improve internal monitoring of processes and practices at the service level.</p> <p>3. The Department needs to develop standards and measures to assess efficiency in providing recreation and community services.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p>	<p>3.1 Develop and implement appropriate performance standards, goals and measures (input, output, and outcome) for all programs and services for the purpose of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.</li> <li>• Determining the actual impact of the Department's efforts on the City's communities and residents.</li> <li>• Assessing success in achieving the mission, goals and objectives, both at the Department level, and the region and center levels.</li> </ul> <p>3.2 Evaluate the method, quality, and utility of the data collected so reporting mechanisms can produce meaningful data that can be used to develop long-term trend analyses. Consider new methods to improve efficiencies, such as developing intranet-based forms for reporting and compiling data.</p> <p>3.3 Incorporate the results of all performance measurement and evaluation in the strategic planning process to ensure efficient service delivery.</p> <p>3.4 Develop a formal monitoring process</p>

Section Number	Summary Description of Findings	Ranking Code	Recommendations
		N	<p>that requires the involvement of supervisors and Department management at the center level.</p> <p>3.5 Assess the efficiency of center operations by evaluating the costs and the outcomes of specific programs, in comparison with benchmark or industry standards.</p>

**Description of Recommendation Ranking Codes**

**U - Urgent** - The recommendation pertains to a serious or materially significant audit finding or control weakness. Due to the seriousness or significance of the matter, immediate management attention and appropriate corrective action is warranted.

**N - Necessary** - The recommendation pertains to a moderately significant or potentially serious audit finding or control weakness. Reasonably prompt corrective action should be taken by management to address the matter. Recommendation should be implemented no later than six months.

**D - Desirable** - The recommendation pertains to an audit finding or control weakness of relatively minor significance or concern. The timing of any corrective action is left to management's discretion.

**N/A** - Not Applicable