



Community Relations Plan and Policy



Policy

Community Relations Policy

The Community Relations Plan serves as a guide to inform the public about activities, facilities, initiatives, parks, programs, and special events offered through the Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation (PRC). The plan includes strategies to promote interest in the department, the benefits of parks, recreation and conservation, participation in our programs and visitation to our parks and facilities. The Community Relations Plan is reviewed by the Marketing Director with Senior Staff and the Commissioner annually.

Our Mission is creating life-enriching experiences at safe, clean affordable parks through responsible leadership and preserving our natural resources. PRC is a public service agency providing county residents and visitors with over 18,000 acres of green space with more than 50 parks including pools, beaches, nature preserves, recreation trails, golf courses, a working farm, an interpretive farm, an arboretum, Playland, Westchester's premier family amusement complex, and the Westchester County Center, the county's oldest and largest public entertainment/sports arena and meeting facility.

Our Vision for this plan is to define our relationship between the community and our department. Our goal is to provide quality programs and services to the residents we serve, and this plan aids us in achieving this goal. With competition from outside agencies, it is in our best interest and the best interest of the citizens to engage the community as a whole as to what we provide on a daily, monthly, even yearly basis.

Communication plan goals

- Solicit feedback from the public as to their recreation needs and requests
- Plan programs/facilities/services that meet these needs
- Provide mechanisms for communication between PRC and the public/provide accurate and timely information about all activities, facilities, parks, programs and special events.
- Partner with community organizations and businesses
- Keep up to date with the latest trends in recreation and parks

Methods for gathering feedback from the public

Citizens Advisory Boards - These civic-minded individuals volunteer to act as liaisons between the PRC and the public, to provide feedback from residents and community organizations. • The Westchester County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board consists of ten volunteer citizens

appointed by the Westchester County Executive with approval of the County Board of Legislators. The board meets monthly and provides feedback on recreational interests, conservation of natural resources, and advise on regulation of fees and policies. By utilizing our board members and their area of expertise, we are able to tap into additional groups and organizations.

- **Friends Volunteer Organizations:**

PRC works in conjunction with its several friend's groups, including the Westchester Parks Foundation, which is the department's largest advocate. Through the Foundation's work, they tap into the community by working with individuals, organizations and companies to work and donate to bettering and maintaining our parks system.

In addition to the Foundation, our conservation division has several friends' groups that cater to the needs of each facility's conservation efforts. Friends groups include: Friends of Lasdon Park, Friends of Muscoot Farm, Friends of Read Sanctuary, Friends of Marshlands and Friends of Trailside.

The aforementioned groups and foundations are an extension of PRC and a built-in way to seamlessly reach outside community organizations and groups.

Residents' Surveys - Recreation Surveys are conducted by an outside contractor and provide information about what programs and services residents want and need. In 2022 the most recent comprehensive resident recreation preference user survey was conducted. The survey was commissioned to update prior results in an effort to respond accordingly and help guide the department in strategic planning, future investment, maintenance and improvements. The survey also obtained information from residents regarding current use of County facilities, what they think of those facilities, and how more residents could be attracted through needs assessment.

Public Meetings are held throughout the county to provide information and solicit feedback about an issue or proposed program.

Constituent/Customer Service Initiatives

- **Customer Service Representatives**
 - Answer all inquiries, comments, concerns and suggestions that come into the department in a timely and accurate manner.
- **Tracking of phone calls, email and written correspondence from the public**
 - Help discern trends in recreation and services and assists with problem solving

Planning and Implementing Facilities/Programs/Services

- **Inter-municipal Agreements** are employed when a joint need is identified between PRC and the surrounding community, in which PRC funds and accomplishes a facility, local municipality managing and maintaining it.
- **Corporate Sponsorships** - Civic-minded individuals and businesses donate time and/or services to provide programs or facilities that are outside the PRC operating budget for the enrichment of our residents.
- **Cooperative Programs** - Special interest groups join with PRC to provide programs to promote awareness of their interest to the general public.

Mechanisms for Communication with the public

- Presentations - Staff are available to discuss any parks and recreation programs to businesses, civic groups, neighborhood association, non-profits, school groups and special interest groups.
- Press Releases - Marketing Division staff create and deploy releases regarding information about programming and services to the media.
- Social Media - We maintain an active presence on designated social media platforms. Information is posted in a timely manner promoting the department and our efforts. Feedback from the general public is encouraged.
- Printed Materials Marketing Division graphic artists design brochures, calendars, postcards/informational pieces about programs, facilities and services that are distributed to the public through various venues.
- Community Outreach/Information Booths Marketing Division staff members distribute printed literature at events presented by PRC and other organizations.
- Websites The Marketing Division maintains several websites on a regular basis and provide contact information on how to reach staff and facilities. We also update google searches to reflect accurate information. Our websites include:
parks.westchestergov.com countycenter.biz golf.westchestergov.com
- E-Blasts - Brief messages sent out weekly or on an as needed basis via the internet to target audiences about various aspects of the department including programs and services.
- Telephone Information Hotline -Recorded information available through (914) 864PARK 24 hours a day.
- Calendars of Events - Printed and distributed quarterly, the PRC Calendar of Events is distributed throughout our PRC facilities and the county. It is also available electronically on the Westchester County main website.
- Open Access - The public is welcome at all PRC facilities. The department is transparent in answering any questions and concerns the public may have. The Marketing Director is readily available to address any citizen comments or concerns.
- Partnerships - We work with a variety of organizations and agencies such as the Boy and Girl Scouts of America, the Westchester County Tourism Office, etc. in an effort to maintain open lines of communication.

Keeping Up with Current Recreation Trends

- Training

The Marketing Division is the official source of disseminating information to the community, however, our staff members out in the field converse with residents and park visitors constantly and are the face of the PRC. It is important that department wide training

is provided to ensure that staff across the board knows how to address constituent concerns and issues that may arise. In turn, all staff is made aware of the customer service policy and trained in accordance with the policy.

New employees receive this training so they can act as effective representatives of the department to the public. They also solicit feedback from customers and report findings to their supervisors as necessary. On-going training occurs once a year at our department-wide day-long training where the staff is cross-trained by participating in various learning sessions and activities that immerse staff into situations they may experience.

- **Staff Professional Affiliations**

Memberships in professional organizations in their particular field of expertise are encouraged.

Many PRC staff are members of National Association of County Park and Recreation Officials (NACPRO), an affiliate of the National Association of Counties (NACO) and the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).

Several PRC staff are members and board members of Westchester Recreation and Parks Society (WRAPS).

Both of these organizations encourage the highest standards of professional qualifications, training and ethics, through the promotion of ongoing professional education programs for all recreation and parks personnel.

NACPRO and WRAPS also provide great networking opportunities for our staff and a way to work with national and local organizations and groups, respectively, to provide services to our constituents.

- **Conferences/Seminars/Continuing Education**

Funding is provided for staff to attend periodic conferences in the fields of parks and recreation to further their education.

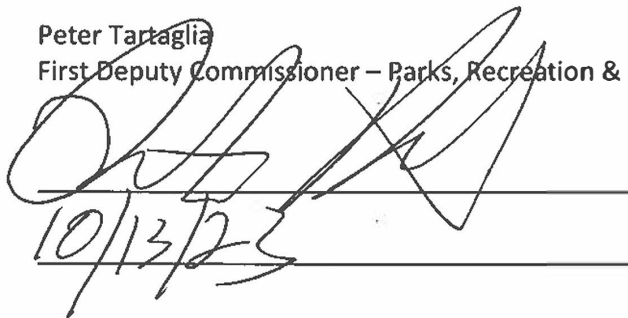
Approved by:

Peter Tartaglia

First Deputy Commissioner – Parks, Recreation & Conservation

Signature:

Date:

Handwritten signature of Peter Tartaglia and the date 10/13/23.

Last Review: October 2023

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