



Comprehensive Plan Focus Group Summary

In the first phase of the Comprehensive Plan update process, the project team facilitated seven focus group discussions. The purpose of these meetings was to identify key needs and issues from those with direct interests in the future of parks and recreation in the region, while identifying other community leaders and organizations to engage. The consulting team developed an agenda and a set of questions to shape the discussion. A full set of these initial questions is included at the end of this document. Five of the focus groups were facilitated with direction by the consulting team to allow stakeholders to speak freely without District staff in the room¹. A sixth focus group of District staff, and a seventh focus group with representatives from the Central Oregon Coalition for Access (COCA), rounded out this step in the public involvement plan for the project. The focus groups were organized around the following topics:

- Non-profits
- Government agencies
- Economic interests
- BPRD Patrons
- BPRD Board of Directors
- BPRD Staff
- Central Oregon Coalition for Access

Focus groups are particularly useful for exploring topics of interest with participants who have experience with the District and a good deal of community knowledge but may not have a chance to share their thoughts at a larger public meeting.

During the introduction to the meeting, participants were told that the conversations, while not strictly confidential, would not result in quotes or transcripts attributed to the individuals. Instead, this summary will address themes that emerged from across the discussions and will distinguish if a topic was specific to one group or discussed in multiple groups. These themes, along with some clarifying statements are provided below.

What is Working? What is Not?

The District follows through with its plans

- The Comprehensive Plan is a regularly used and referenced document
- Major efforts have come together over many years

¹ A planned eighth discussion with representatives of organizations connected to BPRD's underserved populations, was cancelled due to weather emergencies. Invitees were provided the option of joining other focus groups, or responding to the discussion questions by email. Their responses are integrated into these themes.

play for life

The District has set a high standard of quality for parks and recreation in Bend

- Recreation programming (Kids Inc. frequently mentioned) is great
- The sheer quantity of parks is impressive
- Excellent staff
- Maintaining this standard and the quality of experience will be an ongoing challenge

There is room to improve the relationship between the District and the City

- There is a lack of clarity about the difference between the City and the District in the public's mind
- Showing a coordinated effort to address particular areas or issues
- Aligning Comprehensive Plan with the goals for denser residential areas

The District has the support and the ear of the community

- There is an opportunity for the District to lead on several issues:
 - River stewardship
 - Excellent trail system
 - Natural spaces
 - Coordination between government agencies
- Playbook cited as an important source of information, online information could be enhanced
 - Information about the accessibility/difficulty of trails would be a good addition

Some segments of the population are not benefiting as much

- Cost, transportation become barriers
- Missing programming options for teens (drop-in, employment options)
- Other populations to expand reach:
 - Working poor
 - Homeless
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - People with disabilities

Changes, Impacts and Responses

A larger, more densely populated Bend requires more and different opportunities

- Population is growing at both ends of the age spectrum, more seniors and more youth
- There is a high interest in endurance, challenge and emerging activities such as
 - Biking (mountain, cyclocross, etc.)
 - Running (individual, race, social)
 - Skateboarding
 - Pickleball
 - Winter sports (Nordic skiing, sledding etc.)
- Standards based on the relationship of land and population don't work well for densifying neighborhoods (typically not more land to acquire nearby)
- As vacant lands are developed, adapting to the inability to use that land for informal recreation
- Reinvesting in existing parks; finding the resources to do so

Increased demand for, and pressure on, parks and facilities

- Providing more space for events that doesn't overlap with already high-demand facilities (such as the riverfront)
- More indoor spaces such as gyms, pools
- Concern about damage to natural spaces due to over-use

Accessibility and affordability challenges

- Move toward an inclusion model for therapeutic recreation and more universal access across the system
 - There are more generations and a diversity of needs for therapeutic recreation
 - Expand inclusive programming with activity mentors/buddies, potentially teens looking for community service work
- Access also includes transportation to-from major facilities
- Scholarships are important, could there be an option for those who can afford little to no fees?

Trails and connections are critical

- East – west connections missing and are particularly important
- Major point of coordination with the City
- Canal trails and ditch rider roads present a huge opportunity
- Trails are an essential recreation facility, not just a way from A to B

Define and communicate the mission and vision for the future

- Clarifying the role and motivation for commercial activity and tourist attracting features, including existing and ideas about
 - Special events
 - Tournament facilities
 - Vendors in parks
- How does parks and recreation address major community issues that are not directly within the mission?
 - Affordable housing
 - Homelessness
 - Childcare and activities on schedules for working families
 - Tourism
 - Transportation

Essential Activities

As a final point of discussion, the project team asked each group to name the activities that should be considered essential (defined as what should everyone be able to walk to from home?). The common threads across these conversations included:

- Access and accessibility (getting there and being able to enjoy regardless of ability)
- Play
- Exploration
- Meeting, gathering, eating
- Natural and green spaces

- Physical activity and exercise

Participants across most groups also noted a desire for variety in the design and character of parks, as well as a sense of vibrancy balanced with places to relax.

Livability of Bend

While not specifically part of the questions or direction of these focus groups, the topic of livability in Bend was a common thread among the conversations. With rapid growth and affordability challenges facing the entire community, this section pulls together comments that provide insight into this multi-faceted issue.

- Concern that the attractiveness and growth of Bend is pricing out a growing segment of the population including many:
 - Seniors
 - Working families
 - People with disabilities
 - Veterans
- Services and places provided by the District are especially important to those with less disposable income
- Questioning the ability of parks and particularly natural spaces to absorb the level of use
 - Sites are under threat of being “loved to death”
- Areas of the City that might need additional consideration (mainly lower income) include:
 - Northeast
 - Southeast
- Transportation and parking is a concern and most participants were agreed that trail development to encourage alternatives to personal auto travel would help
- The District plays a role in many of the major community issues faced today, explaining and defining how parks, trails, programs connect to these issues will go a long way
- Some community issues may fall outside of the District’s mission but should be acknowledged

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEES

BPRD Board of Directors

- Ted Schoenborn
- Nathan Hovekamp
- Craig Chenoweth
- Ellen Grover

Government

- Peter Gutowsky, Deschutes County
- Ross Kihs, Oregon State Parks
- Karin Morris, City of Bend Accessibility
- Brian Rankin, City of Bend Growth Management
- Jane Barker, OSU-Cascades
- Rick Nichols, Central Oregon Irrigation District

Non-Profits

- Ted Taylor, Central Oregon Visitors Association
- Ryan Houston, Upper Deschutes Watershed Council
- Brad Chalfant, Deschutes Land Trust
- Jeff Monson, Commute Options
- Holly Remer, Healthy Beginnings
- Nelson Mathews, Trust for Public Land
- Kevney Dugan, Visit Bend
- Kelly Cannon-Miller, Deschutes County Historical Society
- Woody Keen, Central Oregon Trail Alliance
- Stacey McKinney, Central Oregon Trail Alliance
- Erin Foote Marlowe, Bend 2030

Economic Interests

- Karna Gustafson, Central Oregon Builders Association
- Carey Dod, Five Talent
- Jeff Cool, St. Charles Medical Center
- Tyler Neese, Central Oregon Association of Realtors
- John McLeod, Mt. Bachelor
- Dani Edgel, G5 Software
- Cory Bittner, Pahlisch homes
- Linsey Stailing, Mosaic Medical
- Katy Brooks, Bend Chamber of Commerce

BPRD Staff

- Zavier Borja
- Jeff Amaral
- Lindsey Lombard
- David Crowther
- Audrey Robeson
- Vickie Dawley
- Amy Crawford
- Annie Miller
- Jim Figurski
- Kim Johnson
- Sasha Sulia
- Sue Boettner
- Chris Zerger
- Danielle Bolanos
- Rebecca Curfew
- Eric Denzler
- Katie Bunce
- Matt Goetz
- Mari Houck
- Colleen McNally
- Bryan Longoria
- Quinn Kever
- Michelle Healy
- Ian Isaacson
- Steve Jorgensen
- Monica McClain-Smith
- Mike Cranmer

Patrons

- Thea Brown
- Karen Larson
- Paul Taylor
- Karen Moyes
- Scott Asla
- Pam Wilson
- Scott Wallace

Central Oregon Coalition for Access (COCA)

- Carol Fulkerson, COCA Chair
- Seth Johnson, Opportunity Foundation
- Sharlene Wills
- Leah Persichilli