

NORTHWEST SPECIAL RECREATION
ASSOCIATION

A REPORT
ON THE
FUTURE DIRECTION
OF N.W.S.R.A.

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INTRODUCTION

The primary reason for the formation of the Northwest Special Recreation Association was the concern of the member park districts with regards to the obligation they have to offer services to all the citizens of their community. Due to staffing problems, the cost of programming and the representation of a limited number of a given low incident population (Example - Visually Impaired) in each particular district, programs for special populations had in the past only been of minimal success. The concept of co-operation among park districts for serving special populations had proven to be successful in other communities. There seemed to be sufficient interest, population and assessed valuation for a co-op in the northwest suburban area to start an association.

The Association has been operating for a two year period. At the time of formation, there were many questions to be answered that in reality could not be answered at that time.

Since the passage of Senate Bill 220, additional questions have developed with regards to the future direction of the Association. In an attempt to answer these questions and establish an agreed upon direction, a special committee from the Board of Trustees of the N.W.S.R.A. was established. The committee was requested to present a position paper to be distributed to the Board of N.W.S.R.A. and the Boards of the Member Park Districts for their input. It is the request of the committee that any modification desired be submitted and that a final concensus of action for the future be established. It is believed to be in the best interest of the Association that the Member Park Districts and the participants establish an agreed upon direction for the future that would be formally adopted by each Member District. The committee dealt with eight (8) areas of concern. They were as follows: finances, the levy, location of office, Association's attorney, Association's Board make-up, staff and co-op agreements.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. FINANCES

The Board of Trustees of N.W.S.R.A. has had a very active concern with regard to the development of a reliable financial system for the Association. With little or no history, original financial planning was at best an estimate. The Association relied heavily on the administrative district for financial stability. The Arlington Heights Park District has for the past two years withstood a significant cash-flow problem. The cash-flow problem has occurred the past 2 years during the first quarter of the fiscal year. This is due to the current method of financing for the Association.

With the assistance of time and allowing for some history to be developed, the professional assistance of the auditing firm of Mr. Donald Bark, the counseling of the administrative district's treasurer and business department, the sharing of administrative and managerial skills by members of the Board for the Association, a well structured financial system has been developed.

Recommendations

- 1) Recommendation number one of the committee is that the Association maintain its own checking account to handle monthly accounts payable. When funds are available, the Association will develop an investment program.
- 2) Recommendation number two of the committee is that a suitable plan be implemented to reimburse the administrative district for revenue lost while handling our cash-flow problems.

- 3) Recommendation number three of the committee is that they strongly recommend funding methods be developed to insure no cash-flow problem remains with the beginning of fiscal year 1976/77.

II. THE LEVY

During the past two years, it has been of primary concern that a permanent funding method for the Association be developed.

The passage of Senate Bill 220 was a primary goal of the Association.

For the past two years the Association has been funded primarily through federal revenue sharing. The townships have regarded this funding to be seed money and have encouraged that a permanent base be established.

The passage of Senate Bill 220 will allow park districts to support the program through a separate fund and will eliminate the need to weaken the member districts operating Recreation Fund. With the creation of a new fund, the cash-flow situation will be greatly improved and a more adequate program development plan can be implemented with a more concrete financial program developed.

- 4) Recommendation number four of the committee is that all member districts pay their assessments from the levy in two (2) equal payments. The levy, by law, is the responsibility of the Member Park Districts. The fund balance will remain the responsibility of each district. When the rate is established by the N.W.S.R.A. Board, it will be submitted for approval by the Member Park Districts. The first payment will be due in May for June operation and the second one will be due in November. The payment will be based on the previous years equalized assessed valuation.
- 5) Recommendation number five is that if township funds are not sufficient for operation for FY 1976/77, the committee suggested that an inter-fund loan be considered until revenue from the new fund can be collected.

The committee is optimistic that a substantial amount of revenue sharing will be available. There is still uncertainty with the future of revenue sharing after December of 1976, due to the fact, this is the last year for the revenue sharing program under the current law. The second problem is that Wheeling Township is beginning a capital development program and funds from Wheeling may not be available. At this time we are not optimistic that funds from the new legislation will be collected until FY 1977/78.

III. THE ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT

The Association is an extension of the Member Park Districts. The concept of administrative district is a significant concept. The administrative district, Arlington Heights Park District, functions as a link between the Association and the park district system. The committee feels that the administrative district has more than served its function for the past two critical years of the Association. The committee does not believe that any district should be required to assume a disproportionate responsibility in the area of finance or support services in the future. With this in mind, the committee feels the role of the administrative district should be more clearly defined.

- 6) Recommendation number six is that the administrative district include the staff of the Association on its payroll. This will allow for I.M.R.F. and for a comprehensive insurance program. All cost for this will be reimbursed on a monthly basis by the Association to the administrative district.

The Association will be responsible for maintaining its own accounts payable, financial records and audit. Office space will be maintained by the Association. This space does not have to be in the administrative district area. The Association, when feasible, will be responsible for the cost of rent and utilities. The Association may continue to have the ability to joint purchase with the administrative district or other agencies. All expenses for operating cost will be paid on a monthly basis to the appropriate party.

The support of the administrative district in the past has been critical to the survival of the Association. However, the committee does not believe it to be appropriate or in the best interest of the Association or the administrative district for that member district to be more responsible than the remaining districts. The total operation of the Association is the equal concern of each member district.

IV. LOCATION OF OFFICES

The Association has currently maintained a central office and 2 or 3 branch locations for the program staff. This method has been effective with original development the major goal. The committee believes now it would be advantageous to have one location maintained for the Association. This will allow for a greater public identity of the agency. If adequate space can be found, office equipment will be required for five staff members and supportive office equipment. It is the hope of this committee that the office equipment can be assembled at little or not cost by gathering surplus equipment from each member district or from other sources.

The full-time staff needs for the Association are limited. It will be beneficial to have one location to work from on a day-to-day basis. There is a need for staff to utilize Association records that are maintained at one location. Communication between staff is also essential to adequately cover the large geographic area involved and to insure proper program development.

- 7) Recommendation number seven is that the central office need not be part of the administrative district. The Association will be responsible for the cost of the central office location.

V. ATTORNEY

- 8) Recommendation number eight is that the Association maintain its own legal counsel. The need for an attorney is limited and the Association should absorb the cost involved for an attorney.

VI. BOARD MAKE-UP

The committee does not believe that the Articles of Agreement should be changed with regards to the Board make-up.

Each park district has the option of designating their representative. *at annual meeting*

Communication back to the member park districts is very important so the monthly newsletter and the annual report will be continued. The committee feels that an annual meeting of the member park districts is important to directly answer questions that individual commissioners may have. Visitations to the member park district's Board meetings is strongly encouraged for the director of the Association.

- 9) Recommendation number nine is that the Board be comprised of the member park district's head administrator. This person is aware of the total plans of their individual district and has the best communication with the Board of Commissioners. With the total scope in mind, the committee believes that the head administrator of each district can best represent and inform the Board of Commissioners who are

ultimately responsible for the operation of the Association.

VII. STAFF

The committee feels that the present staff is adequate for the immediate future of the Association. Future needs may include additional secretarial help or program leaders if registration would indicate a need. The committee realizes particular job responsibilities will continue to be redefined, however, this is an administrative responsibility of the Director of the Association, subject to approval by the Board of Trustees.

VIII. CO-OP AGREEMENTS

The Association currently has structural agreements with the member park districts. These agreements should be continued on a three year basis. Currently the Association has program agreements with the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization, the educational co-op for low incidents. These agreements include summer programs for low incidents (visually impaired, physically handicapped, hearing impaired, trainable mentally handicapped and emotional disturbed.) These programs serve as our day camps for low incident handicapped. Sunrise Lake Camp is an agreement with N.S.S.E.O. that allows the Association to offer an environmental learning and outdoor recreation program at a camp site. The agreements are positive and they insure services without duplication. The agreement assists the Association in developing strong co-operation with the educational system. These agreements should be reviewed each year to insure their appropriateness.

Finally the Association has building use agreements for the Kirk Center and Gregory School. These are excellent agreements since there is no cost incurred and the facilities were developed for the individual needs of the various handicapping conditions.

In the future the Association would like to develop additional co-op program agreements with N.S.S.E.O. and additional building use agreements. This type of co-operation is beneficial to the Association with regards to program development, cost, site adequacy and program implementation.

CONCLUSION

The committee believes that the Association has proven to be effective. The final developmental possibilities are yet to be determined. A five (5) year financial plan is in the process of being developed.

The original purpose of the Association was to render services to the mentally and physically handicapped and this is still a valid concern and the responsibility of each member park district.

The committee fully acknowledges the fact that growing pains have existed. The support from the townships, member park districts, administrative district and the Board for the Association is deeply appreciated. Two years of history, education and development will lead to a greater competency level for the Association.

The past two years have caused some problems and certainly some concern but it has also caused a total network of services to be developed for handicapped citizens.

10) Recommendation number ten is that the committee strongly recommended the continuation of the Association. We must, as a group, determine what the future direction will be. Your input is essential.

The Member Park Districts should discuss, change and adopt a final report. The Association must stabilize its direction in order to develop increased quality in its

operation. The Northwest Special Recreation Association Board reviewed this report in February, 1976. All feedback from the Member Park Districts should be available during March of 1976. Along with the adoption of this report by the Member Park Districts, a financial report with regards to the remainder of FY 1975/76 and the operation of FY 1976/77 will be presented. This report will cover the projected operating cost remaining until revenue from the levy will be available. The report will include a position paper, a description of the populations served, overview of financial information, an overview of participation and sample legal information related to Senate Bill 220. Your suggestions are welcomed, your consensus is essential.