

# **The Executive**

## **The Feasibility Study Process: Implications for Local Initiatives**

Local parks and recreation agencies are finding it increasingly necessary to prepare parks and recreation feasibility studies as a part of both short term and long range planning. The following article is a primer that addresses some of the basic questions that concern local agencies as they consider this important planning process.

**Craig W. Kelsey Ph.D.  
PlaySafe Planning Team Leader  
The University of New Mexico**

As an outgrowth of long range planning, the feasibility study process has become more of an essential undertaking than in times past. With a need to be responsive to constituent concerns, sensitivity to limited fiscal resources and assurances that both short term pressures and long range plans provide for a progressive and professional effort, agencies are finding that the feasibility study process has implications as a local initiative.

The parks and recreation feasibility study is defined as a process which provides a comprehensive analysis of a specific parks and recreation proposed project to determine if that project is appropriate (feasible) for that community. For example, should a community of 30,000 in population construct and manage a new eighteen hole public play golf course? A number of issues would need to be assessed to determine if, in fact, that proposed project is appropriate. Would the project be legally feasible, are there sites that would be appropriate for the course, will the course have sufficient usage, what would be possible design layouts for the course, is the project financially feasible, what administrative considerations must be made and what impact would the course have on the community as a whole?

As can be seen, a variety of questions must be answered and a host of issues resolved. There are at least six purposes behind a well thought out and prepared study:

	Purposes of a Feasibility Study
*	The feasibility study provides detailed research facts concerning the community and the relationship of the proposed project to the community.
*	The feasibility study is based on researched facts and not on opinion, bias or hearsay. Thus, the study can stand the test of special interest groups and political pressures.
*	The feasibility study provides a very specific statement of direction for immediate, as well as long range directions.
*	The feasibility study serves as a decision making tool to help other community agencies in their respective actions.
*	The feasibility study can be used by other community decision makers as a model for their feasibility study process.
*	The feasibility study, due to its research base, should be able to survive changes in governmental leadership.

The parks and recreation feasibility study may be prepared by the in-house professional staff from the agency, by outside appropriate consultants or by a combination of the two. There are a host of advantages and concerns based upon this in-house approach:

IN-HOUSE PREPARATION	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Already well established and knowledgeable community contacts	May not be trained in the feasibility study process
Sensitive to local community nuances	May not be able to complete task due to other existing work pressures
Has a vested interest in the community and the study	Some may suggest the study is self serving
Will have a great commitment to the results of the study	The issue of in-house objectivity and credibility may be raised

IN-HOUSE PREPARATION (Continued)	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Generally will make use of in-house personnel and resources	Time frames for completing the task may be continuously adjusted due to other priorities

Using outside consultants has proven helpful and cost effective but there may still be some concerns with using outsourcing. Each project and community finds themselves in different circumstances, and shifting between inside and outside resources is not an uncommon practice.

OUT SOURCE PREPARATION	
Advantages	Disadvantages
Will have had past and extensive feasibility study experience	Is not always from the local community and may not have a vested interest
Represents an 'outside' review and may provide the necessary credibility	May not be aware of local issues that are sensitive and drive local concerns
Provides resources such as personnel, time and expertise that is not found in-house	There is a cost element that may or may not be higher than in-house resources

The task is contractual and time and quality measures are adhered to	If the agency desires changes to the approach during the process then work order changes would need to be made
Finished project will be professional and defensible	Contractual arrangements are made and pre-arrangements are essential or the finished project may be off target

The length of time to complete the feasibility study will be based on a number of issues. Of course, the single greatest factor will be if the project is to be completed in-house or outsourced. If in-house, then the parks and recreation manager must set realistic time frames with existing personnel. If the use of consultants is the approach, then the agreed upon contracted time frame will be established and followed. The following are a few items that will impact both the in-house or outsource approaches.

NUMBER	ISSUES
<b>1</b>	The number of proposed sites that must be considered. If the proposed project is considered one site, the time frame will be less than if multiple sites are under consideration.
<b>2</b>	The population size of the community will effect the time required to prepare the study. The larger the population in size and in distance geographically will increase the cost (number of public input meetings) as opposed to a smaller sized community.
<b>3</b>	The monies allocated to complete the project will effect the time requirement. Generally, the more money available, the faster the process. More personnel can be applied to the task if there are dollars to support this resource. Also, if the budget must be spread over multiple budget years, this will impact the time requirements.
<b>4</b>	The community support will have a small impact on time sequences. If the community leaders and the public are helpful then the project moves faster.

	At times, advisory task forces (usually made up of citizens) are provided to assist in the project. Based upon the 'mood' of the advisory group, the project time frame may be impacted.
<b>5</b>	The time frame of the primary researcher for the project will effect the time necessary to complete the project. If an in-house person is used that must 'sandwich' the project in between other assignments, that will take longer than a contracted consultant.

It is difficult to determine the cost of a feasibility study without very specific details. However, here are a few that will impact cost. They are:

*	geographic size of the community	*	population size of the community
*	use of outside consultants	*	accuracy and detail of the study desired
*	depth and length of the study requirements	*	size and number of projects proposed in the study

There are at least six components that should be used as the frame work for a comprehensive, realistic and useable feasibility study. The following are those components:

<b>THE FEASIBILITY STUDY PROCESS</b>	
<b>1</b>	<b>LEGAL FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtaining Deed History and Recorded surveys</li> <li>• Determining Liens, Easements and Right of Ways</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>SITE FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing a Surface/Subsurface Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Surface/Subsurface Water Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Vegetation Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Meteorological Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Wildlife Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Utility Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Concept-Use Analysis</li> </ul>

<b>3</b>	<b>USER-USAGE FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing a Population Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing an Activity Usage Analysis</li> <li>• Preparing a Standards Analysis</li> <li>• Determining Facility Availability Usage</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>DESIGN FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing Concept Design Scenarios</li> <li>• Analysis of Best Design Scenario</li> <li>• Determining Final or Alternative General Plans</li> </ul>
<b>5</b>	<b>FINANCIAL FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining Development Costs</li> <li>• Determining Construction Costs</li> <li>• Determining Maintenance Costs</li> <li>• Determining Equipment Costs</li> <li>• Determining Operation Costs</li> <li>• Determining Projected Revenue</li> <li>• Development of a Revenue-Expenditure Chart</li> <li>• Determining Financial Options</li> </ul>
<b>6</b>	<b>ADMINISTRATIVE FEASIBILITY</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a Policy Plan</li> <li>• Developing a Management Plan</li> </ul>