Report to Dalton City Council on Municipal Waterparks

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Presentation Overview

* Introductions & Background
* Research Process Overview
* General Comparison of Municipal Waterparks
* Overview of Three Select Municipal Waterparks
  * Splash in the Boro
  * Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge
  * Point Mallard
* Further Comparison of Select Municipal Waterparks
* Best Practices & Lessons Learned
* Overview of Regional Family-Centered Activities
Web-based research on municipal waterparks in GA, AL, TN, NC

Seven waterparks identified—none in NC

Four waterparks selected for further research based on their size, success, and connection to complex

Interview questions developed in collaboration with City Manager and Archway staff

Phone interviews with:
  * Splash in the Boro
  * Wetlands Waterpark at Persimmon Ridge
  * Point Mallard
  * Chattahoochee Rapids Beach & Waterpark at Lake Lanier (incomplete)

Research compiled for report and presentation
General Comparison of Municipal Waterparks

**Municipal Waterparks**

* Splash in the Boro (Statesboro, GA)
* Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge (Jonesborough, TN)
* Point Mallard (Decatur, AL)
* Chattahoochee Rapids Beach & Waterpark at Lake Lanier (Buford, GA)
* Summer Waves (Jekyll Islands, GA)
* The Beach at Clayton County International Park (Jonesboro, GA)
* Guin Waterpark (Guin, AL)

**Basic Characteristics**

* Open from late May–Labor Day
* Slides, lazy river and kiddy pool/ splash area
* Day passes and season passes
* Single Adult pass ranges from:
  * $7 (Guin)
  * $31.99 (Chattahoochee)
## Comparison of Select Municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waterpark</th>
<th>City (County)</th>
<th>County Population</th>
<th>County Median Household Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splash in the Boro</td>
<td>Statesboro, GA (Bulloch)</td>
<td>approx 70,217</td>
<td>approx $33,838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge</td>
<td>Jonesborough, TN (Washington)</td>
<td>approx 122,979</td>
<td>approx $39,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Mallard</td>
<td>Decatur, AL (Morgan)</td>
<td>approx 119,490</td>
<td>approx $40,317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Splash in the Boro

• Opened in Mill Creek National Park in 2004
• Development, renovation and expansion paid for through 1% SPLOST
• Profitable almost every season
• Managed and operated by Statesboro-Bulloch County Parks and Recreation Department (SBCPRD)
• FT staff include Director, Assistant, Maintenance Supervisor and Guest Service Marketing Supervisor
• All other 80 staff seasonal
• $60,000 liability coverage through county policy
Splash in the Boro (cont.)

Successes

* **Attendance:** 90,000 guests in first season and about 160,000 thereafter
* **Tourism:** 25% of the guests local residents and 75% from outside the local area
* **Expansion:** A $4 million expansion in 2008 grew capacity and increased attendance (expansion financed by borrowing against the value of Splash)
* **Community Attraction:** The Park has drawn industry, businesses and residents which allowed the county to grow over the past eight years
* **Pride:** Community members and elected officials speak about the Park with pride.

Challenges

* **Staffing:** According to Aquatic Division Manager, Steve Brown, it would have been helpful to plan for more staff or streamline the process for hiring before opening
* **Maintenance:** Year-round maintenance, especially preventative maintenance is incredibly important.
Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge

- Built inside of 130 acre Persimmon Ridge Park
- Initial development paid for through 50/50 matching state grant; Upgrades and maintenance paid for using profits
- Profitable almost every season
- Managed and operated by City Parks and Recreation Department
- FT staff include Waterpark Director
- All other 80-100 staff seasonal
- Liability coverage through city policy
- Staff safety training a priority
Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge (cont.)

**Successes**

- **Public Benefit:** Park fulfills intended purpose of providing a positive, safe venue for family fun. Late day admission half price to give a break to local residents. Local non-profits and youth-focused government programs offered discounts or free admission.
- **Jobs:** 1 FT and 80-100 seasonal employees.
- **Revenue:** $100,000 last year
- **Tourism:** 20% of guests are from out of state and approximately 80% are from Tennessee.
- **Pride:** According to the Director of Parks and Recreation, constructing and operating a successful waterpark has “given our community confidence that we can achieve whatever we set our minds to.”

**Challenges**

- **Safety:** Remaining vigilant to prevent accidents is a constant focus.
- **Skeptics:** Initially some residents were skeptical about this use of public funds, but they have been won over.
- **Capacity:** Other waterparks have a capacity that does not allow them to generate necessary revenue (see Appendix B).
Point Mallard

- Includes first wave pool in the US
- Land for Point Mallard Park donated by TVA in the late 1960’s
- Initial development paid for with federal grants from the Land-Water Conservation Fund (LWCF); Later, city raised bond to pay for expansion
- Waterpark profitable almost every season although complex is not profitable
- Managed and operated by City of Decatur’s Department of Parks & Recreation
- 2 FT
- All other 200-250 complex staff seasonal
- Liability coverage through city policy
Point Mallard (cont.)

Successes

* **Public Benefit:** The complex provides a fun, safe venue for family fun and serves as the, “focal point for the city.”
* **Jobs:** 2 FT and 200-250 seasonal employees.
* **Revenue:** $400,000 to $500,000 annually
* **Promotions:** An initiative where half-price season passes were offered for a day generated $220,000 in sales with only 40% of those who purchased passes entering the park.
* **Community Attraction:** The park attracts tourists and new residents.
* **Pride and Prestige:** People at national conferences identify Decatur with Point Mallard. The city is known for having the first wave pool in the US.

Challenges

* **Complex Revenue:** Although the waterpark has been in the black almost from the beginning, the complex overall is usually in the red.
* **Skeptics:** Some initially balked at the idea of the waterpark. While most skeptics were won over when they realized the federal government was paying for the project some residents continue to raise the issue of complex revenue expectations. This can cause problems, especially in terms of public perception of the park (see Appendix C).
## Comparison of Select Waterparks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Waterpark</th>
<th>Initial Start-up Cost</th>
<th>Estimated Average Annual Net Revenue</th>
<th>Waterpark Capacity</th>
<th>Estimated Average Annual Admissions</th>
<th>Number of Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Splash in the Boro</td>
<td>$5.4 million ($4.2 million expansion in 2009)</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>157,000</td>
<td>4 FTE 210 seasonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetlands at Persimmon Ridge</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>1 FTE 80-100 seasonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Point Mallard</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>$400,000-$500,00 for the waterpark while complex attempts to break even each year</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>150,000-180,000</td>
<td>2 FTE and 200 seasonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Best Practices

- Involve community members in the planning process to foster support.
- Maximize funds:
  - In-kind services from residents (e.g. architect designs)
  - Inter-government transfers
  - Municipal labor (pipe fitters, electricians, etc.)
- Ensure you have the capacity to meet revenue goals.
- Develop special offers geared toward local residents to foster continued support
- Use municipal staff from other departments for on-going maintenance.
- Invest in continuous staff safety training.
- Set aside park revenue to pay for maintenance, regular upgrades and expansions.
- Invest in marketing geared toward out-of-town visitors
- Follow up on group sales from year to year.
- Track and publish park outcomes to foster continued community support.
* Plan for flexible staffing in case park attendance exceeds expectations.
* Orient community expectations for the park toward quality of life rather than revenue.
## Survey of Regional Family-Centered Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Attraction</th>
<th>General Admission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sir Gooney's Family Fun Center</td>
<td>Chattanooga, TN</td>
<td>year-round</td>
<td>mini-golf, batting cages, go karts, bumper boats</td>
<td>admission free, activity fees vary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pin Strikes</td>
<td>Chattanooga, TN</td>
<td>year-round</td>
<td>bowling, laser tag, bumper cars, etc.</td>
<td>$18 per hour/lane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake Winnepesaukah Amusement Park</td>
<td>Chattanooga, TN</td>
<td>May-September</td>
<td>amusement park</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walnut Wall in Coolidge Park</td>
<td>Chattanooga, TN</td>
<td>May-September</td>
<td>climbing wall</td>
<td>$5 for one climb $10 three climbs per person $20 per person for the entire day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Georgia Amusement</td>
<td>Dalton, GA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Out Family Amusement Center</td>
<td>Dalton, GA</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions & Comments