
Memorandum

To: Tim George, Acting City Manager

From: Greg Varda, Recreation Director
Megan Searing Young, Museum Director

Date: December 29, 2021

Re: Recreation Department Proposed Merger with the Greenbelt Museum

Proposed Merger with the Greenbelt Museum

As Greenbelt Recreation's arts and cultural programming have expanded, the Department has enjoyed many opportunities for both administrative and programmatic collaboration with the Greenbelt Museum. These have included stand-alone events such as Greenbelt's 75th Anniversary celebration, as well as annual programs such as Black History Month, Greenbelt Day, Juneteenth, Celebration of Spring, and the Fall Festival. The Museum has contributed educational content to Creative Kids Camp (CKC), made the Museum house available for CKC movie musical filming, and lent artifacts for use in theatrical productions. The Museum has carried reproductions of a Greenbelt-themed art installation in their gift shop, and raised funds through the Art and Craft Fair. Museum, Arts and Community Planning staff have collaborated in the development of interpretive materials for Greenbelt's public art holdings. Greenbelt Recreation has provided ongoing promotional support for Greenbelt Museum programs through quarterly activity guides, the arts website, arts email blasts, alignment and cross-promotion of Artful Afternoons with Sunday Museum hours, and ongoing verbal recommendations.

The Recreation Director and the Museum Director agreed to explore the possibility of merging the Greenbelt Museum with the Recreation Department, following several conversations in late 2021. The proposed merger will make our collaborations easier and more seamless as well as making additional new collaborations easier in the future. This transition would bring value to both the Recreation Department and the Museum at minimal cost to either department. The Museum's current position within the City's Administration Department is not a natural fit as that department is not an outward facing entity, nor is it involved in programming.

The remainder of this memo outlines many of the benefits that such a move would bring about. For the reasons outlined below, the Recreation Director and Museum Director recommend that the Greenbelt Museum should move from Administration to the Recreation Department.

Benefits of Rearrangement

Expansion of Both Departments' Reach

In the past, the Museum has participated in some of the annual events that the Recreation Department sponsors at Springhill Lake Recreation Center and Schrom Hills Park, but needs to do much more to be sure that residents of all areas of Greenbelt are learning about the community's significant history. The combining of resources will increase the amount of outreach that both departments can achieve as well as expanding the content of that outreach. Greenbelt Recreation can offer the Museum the benefits of our powerful RecTrac database, while the Museum can offer Recreation reciprocal exposure through its highly successful blog, walking tours, and the future Visitor and Education Center.

Staffing Advantages

The Recreation Department employs many part-time non-classified staff. The Museum, with just one full time employee, the Director, and one 15-hour per week part time staffer, the Education and Volunteer Coordinator, struggles at times to fully staff events and programs. Museum volunteers and Friends of the Greenbelt Museum Board members have helped frequently in the past, but the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the limitations of relying too heavily on volunteer help. After training, Recreation Department staff could help fill the gaps that the Museum experiences. Staffing needs will become more acute for the Museum once it doubles in size when the Education and Visitor Center comes online. Non-classified staff could be trained to be front-line staff at the Education and Visitor Center. The cross training will also be applied to other areas in the department since many non-classified staff have multiple job duties. Providing training and knowledge of Greenbelt history can only improve service to the public.

Incorporation of 10A Crescent as a City Facility

Following successful fundraising and the completion of the new Education and Visitor Center, that project will need to be incorporated as a fully functioning city facility. Recreation Department staff already manage a variety of city facilities, and they have the necessary skills and knowledge to incorporate 10A and 10B Crescent more fully into city protocols regarding facilities. When issues unique to museum environments arise, the Museum Director can offer specialized guidance in line with best practices for such spaces.

Improved Services to Residents, Patrons, and Visitors

Moving the Museum to the Recreation Department will have the effect of improving services to residents, patrons, and visitors. Adding Museum content to the Recreation Department's current offerings addresses Greenbelters (and others) expressed desire for cultural diversity and equitable programming. With additional staffing help, the Museum may be able to offer more regular programmatic contributions to existing Recreation offerings, such as Spring and Summer camps, Springhill Lake Recreation Center programs, content for seniors, crafts at Artful Afternoons, access to research materials for artistic projects, and potential classes which could be advertised in the Recreation Activity Guide.

Institutional Knowledge

Finally, moving the Museum to the Recreation Department has the benefit of providing a base of institutional knowledge about Greenbelt history. Greenbelt prides itself on embodying the Living Legacy of the New Deal, and the proposed merger will help us to move forward creatively and collaboratively with an even deeper sense of mission.