Bartlett Park District

Strategic Planning Process: 2021-2025

Strategic Area: Technology

Goal Priority 2: FY2022-23

Background

In the Technology Section of the District's Strategic Planning Process for 2021-2025, Goal Priority 2 is: *Identify equipment needed and costs associated to proceed with an increase in live-streaming programs and events.* The committee that worked on this goal was chaired by Katie Mix (Superintendent of Special Facilities) and Eric Leninger (Superintendent of Business Services) and committee members included Bobby Pierobon (Superintendent of Villa Olivia), Dale Erdman (Information Technology Manager), and Johnny Pacheco (Health and Fitness Manager). Work for Goal Priority 2 began in June 2022, and culminates with this report in January 2023.

At the outset, the committee identified specific action steps and committee members were assigned to each step. As we navigated through each action step and subsequent meetings, the committee brainstormed and came up with new ideas that might not have been initially identified, but have become relevant as the world navigates through the post-covid pandemic era.

The committee took the following action steps to arrive at this report:

- Identify platforms for live-streaming;
- Determine length of live-streaming posts and where to make available;
- Investigate applicability to staff training;
- Determine objective(s) for live-streaming; and,
- Identify equipment and staffing costs.

Implications

Action Step 1: Identify platforms for live-streaming

One of our discussions early on was the philosophy of live-streaming and how it has evolved in recent years. When the Board and Staff met with Carol Sente to devise the 2021-2025 strategic planning process, we were in the middle of the pandemic era. Live-streaming and virtual program participation were immensely popular as stay-at-home orders, limits on in-person engagements, and social distancing mandates were topics of daily news while infection spikes occurred every few months. For a long time, many people remained apprehensive about returning to social atmospheres. Now, we see people craving the social interaction we all thrive upon, which has led to a decrease in the popularity of live streaming and virtual programming. While virtual events still occur, they are typically viewed as more of a convenience rather than a safety necessity. Patrons are back in person for programming, and enjoying it (as are District Staff)!

Social media is a great platform for free live-streaming events to patrons. The district already utilizes Facebook and individual facilities (such as the **LIFE**CENTER) utilize Instagram. The committee felt that these platforms are a great option for live-streaming free opportunities or advertising a free class/trial. Examples include: live streaming a free fitness class to encourage patrons to register for the in-person class, or live streaming the beginning of a special event to encourage people to come out and join us. Using social media to live-stream is a great way to provide a free "teaser" but should not be used to give-away our programs without collecting a fee.

For programs which charge a fee, or those which a ticket needs to be purchased for attendance, the committee did not feel that live streaming on social media was the appropriate fit. For programs and services with a charge, we felt a platform such as Zoom would be the best option. Nutrition Counseling offered through the **LIFE**CENTER is an example of a program currently utilizing Zoom. Patrons register and pay a fee for sessions with a dietician. The patron and dietician select a time that works for their schedules, and they meet over Zoom. This provides the patron the flexibility to meet at a time convenient for them. While there are other opportunities for this to be explored across the District, the Committee noted Staff should do so carefully as to not detract from the benefits of being in-person. After all, we work hard for community members to have beautiful spaces to recreate, and want individuals to come enjoy these places in person.

Action Step 2: Determine the length of live-streaming/posts & where to make available

The committee discussed this action step and determined that the length of the post would depend upon the actual program or special event we are promoting. A teaser for a special event should be 30-60 seconds, but we can live-stream multiple times. We also can live-stream a segment of a special event in order to boost real-time community involvement. Facebook and Instagram were deemed to be the most appropriate platforms for a live-stream.

Another consideration is to be cautious of any copywrites for music and program titles. A prime example of this is the Recreation Department's annual production of The Nutcracker at the Bartlett Community Center. The District could not legally live-stream this event without paying additional monies due to copywrite laws. While it may seem trivial, large corporations such as Disney have many employees whose sole responsibility is to monitor content on social media platforms.

While brainstorming action step #2, the committee discussed utilizing a drone to capture content for live streaming. A potential fun opportunity was identified through Villa Olivia winter sports. For the purposes of a special event, or simply a specified time-slot offered and advertised, staff could utilize a drone to live-steam footage to the smart TVs near the bar area so parents can see their children in action on the slopes. Footage captured could be utilized by the marketing department at other dates and times in order to promote Villa Olivia operations. Providing virtual tours, overhead views, and rotating perspectives all would help offer a unique insight to programs offered by the District, even if they were not streamed live.   While this application was an offshoot of the committee's original goal, we investigated the cost of the District purchasing/owning a drone, as well as the cost of hiring a contractor to film content.

Action Step 3: Investigate the applicability to staff training

Microsoft Teams and Zoom are good options for holding virtual staff trainings and meetings. From late 2020 through early 2021, the District held multiple large seasonal staff trainings virtually. These trainings had between 20-50 participants, and operated quite smoothly. District staff that were presenting met in Conference Room 1 at the Administration building, and part-time staff connected remotely via their laptop or smartphone. The trainings were held via Zoom and recorded so participants could view/re-watch at a later date.

As in-person activities have resumed, staff trainings have all moved back to in-person. The committee discussed the benefits of adding a virtual option for some of the larger seasonal trainings to better accommodate staff who might be out of town, in college, or otherwise unable to attend. While the possibility of adding a virtual option still exists, staff has not received requests for a virtual format recently and as such all trainings have been in person. The Committee felt that staff training is another example of an exercise best completed in person, though the ability to conduct virtually still exists.

Even though not directly related to the current goal, the Committee did want to highlight one virtual training that combined the technology strategic planning goals from the prior and current fiscal year. Last year's fiscal-year technology goal was *Explore District-wide technology opportunities to enhance how the District operates, serves, registers, programs, and maintains our facilities and*

parks with the goal of increased operational efficiency. The District applied this while attending a live-streamed training event for software that was used in the District's successful bid for re-accreditation in 2022. The Executive Director, Assistant, and Department heads all attended a virtual training in Admin Conference Room 1 where the trainer conducted operations from her home. District staff each had their laptop and utilized the tv in the conference room to view the trainer and see examples. This training set the groundwork for successful use of the software during the reaccreditation process. As previously noted, the Committee's general consensus for District operations was that in-person trainings are preferred wherever possible. However, we have also put necessary technology infrastructure in place to be able to utilize virtual trainings when necessity or convenience arises.

Action Step 4: Determine objective(s) for live-streaming

The committee next discussed objectives for live streaming: what are the District's goals? Rather quickly, two main objectives became apparent: revenue-generating registration, and community-engaging interaction.

As noted earlier, registration for virtual programs (such as virtual nutrition counseling) is one potential for live-streaming that the District currently utilizes. Programs that can be conducted virtually for the necessity or convenience of patrons are also offered as demand requires. However, the Committee noted that nearly every program/event offered by the District has not only returned to in-person, but is more fun that way, also ☺.   So, while the District is able to offer virtual programming should the demand arise, the Committee was careful to note that too-much promotion of virtual programming could detract from in-person operations.

Community-engaging interaction is a second objective for live-streaming, and this was the objective the Committee felt would best serve the District. Adding teasers, or real-time following of events are ways that staff can engage the public and create interest in future events. Live-streaming ongoing events, such as a log-cutting at the Lumber Jack n' Jill event or the Bartlett Parks Foundation Turtle race are free ways that Staff can engage the public and create public interest in District events without sacrificing revenue.
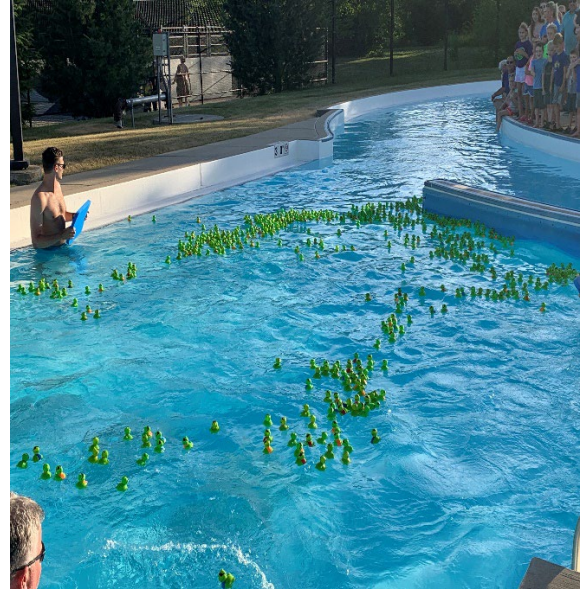
Imagine logging-in to Facebook or Instagram to watch either of the activities above! Moreover, videos taken "live" can also be edited, stored, and used for future marketing purposes, including promotion of the following-year's event. For these reasons, the committee felt that streaming free events to engage the community would be the most useful objective for the District.

Action Step 5: Identify equipment / staffing costs

As technology evolves, it is intriguing to note that many of the equipment costs necessary to live-stream have already been paid. Gone are the days of having to purchase expensive video cameras, stabilization devices (tripod), and editing materials. For the most part, District staff can utilize equipment already in use. The largest cost would be the Smartphone, which the District already maintains for many managerial staff. District-issued iPhones have the ability to take high-quality video while maintaining audio integrity and picture stabilization. Items such as phone stands, selfie-sticks, and additional lighting can be purchased for a combined total of approximately $500.00 - $1,250.00, which can be budgeted in operational accounts. Purchasing 1-2 sets of this equipment could be done so that a specific operational area could check them out for use at a program or event.

The purchase of a drone would be the most expensive equipment cost, but could also yield the most fun and exciting product! Drones vary widely in terms of price, but a quality drone ranges from $2,500.00 - $5,000.00. As a one-time purchase, this could be budgeted for in operational accounts. As noted above, a drone could be used for both live-streaming and for creating content that can be used at a later date by the marketing department. Last season, a drone was utilized

in creating a short video to highlight winter sports operations at Villa Olivia. This video will be played on the Boardroom TV screens at the meeting. The Committee unanimously agreed that further investigation of drones, and potentially purchasing one, is something the District should consider.

The Committee identified two ways that staffing a drone could be completed. First, the District could train a staff member to operate the drone, obtain a license, and attend events to create content. Or, the District could hire an independent contractor to attend events and create content on an hourly basis. These options would be explored further in the event the District decides to begin utilizing a drone for live-streaming and/or content footage.

Conclusion

The committee determined that in general, demand for live-streaming programs and events has decreased in the past couple years, but still remains relevant. While the reasons behind demand for live streaming have changed more from necessity to convenience, there are opportunities to increase public exposure to District operations. Marketing and community engagement are the biggest benefits to utilizing live-streaming technology for the District, and there are several fun ways to do this without spending large amounts of money. Many technology requirements for live streaming are already in place so that staff could begin doing this, and then potentially purchase additional equipment later on. While not initially identified in the goal, the Committee strongly felt that further investigation into the use of a drone for marketing purposes should be considered and utilized as it could provide a fun and exciting view of District programming to the public.