

Location: City of Villa Park

Issue: San Pablo Avenue Specific Plan

Methodology: Facilitated Meetings

Davenport Institute: 2009 Public Engagement Grant Recipient

The City of Villa Park had no park acreage, but wanted to explore the possibility of purchasing land for a park using grant funds from the state. In 2002 the City established the non-profit Villa Park Community Services Foundation which works with the city to provide recreational activities, but which is funded through private donations. Both the Foundation and the City committed to seek public input on the possibility of developing a park in the city.

City Staff and Community Services Foundation members wanted to go beyond providing public information and receiving approval. They wanted the public to feel ownership of the park, and for that reason sought to determine levels of public interest in developing a park, public preference as to where the park should be located, what features the public would want to see in their park. They also wanted to determine whether the community would be willing and able to fund ongoing maintenance and operations through the Community Services Foundation.

Grant funds were used to provide information and facilitate small-group discussion to help the City dialogue with residents who would not attend typical public meetings. The City's goal was to receive input to guide their next steps, whether that meant continuing forward with park development or abandoning the idea if the public was not interested or enthusiastic.

The process moved forward in 4 phases:

- A survey was distributed door-to-door, in community meetings and online
- Committee members discussed the survey with key stakeholder groups
- Survey results were posted on the City-website and distributed via email to residents
- A Town Hall Meeting was convened on July 12 to get community feedback on the survey results and to discuss more deliberatively the planning options

On July 27, 2010, the final report was presented by City Manager, Lori Sassoon to Council, noting that there were very mixed opinions about whether to go ahead with the development of a rec center on the park property.