

# Enhancing the Value of Citizen Boards

**Adding value to our parks department, our elected  
leaders and our community.**

*Reflect – Renew – Revive*  
FRPA 2016 State Conference

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## About Our Speaker

John McCarthy is the former General Manager of Parks and Recreation for Sarasota County Government. Recently retired, John is now serving as the Executive Director for SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence). John is a former President of the FRPA Foundation, is a faculty member of the Joe Abrahams Academy for Leadership Excellence, and has been a frequent FRPA presenter.

## Learning Objectives

- \* Understand the value of citizen advisory boards and their role in a professional recreation and park program.
- \* Discuss and understand how an advisory board can be of value to the elected commission and the department.
- \* Develop a plan to implement small steps to improve advisory board relations and performance.

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## What do I know about boards?

- \* Sarasota County Historical Commission (1979)
- \* Historical Society Board of Directors/President
- \* Library Advisory Board
- \* Parks and Recreation Advisory Council
- \* FRPA Foundation Board of Trustees/President
- \* Goshen College Sarasota Advisory Board
- \* SCOPE 501c3 Board of Directors
- \* *35 years of positive experience with advisory boards*

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## Why I am here...

- \* I believe that parks and recreation, heritage, libraries and arts influences the community in many positive ways
- \* I believe that advisory boards are an essential compliment to well-run recreation parks and recreation department
- \* I believe that by engaging best practices that your value to the community is enhanced

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## Learning Objectives

- \* Learn how one county advisory board became engaged, active and influential
- \* Discuss how an advisory board can be of value to the elected commission, the department director and the community.
- \* Develop a plan to implement small steps to improve advisory board relations and performance.

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# What is your community's vision?



Let's talk about it...

SCOPE ART by Van Jazmin - Ringling College of Art + Design 2013

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## What is your community vision?



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Wordle “word cloud” from SCOPE High Tech – High Touch 2013

## Community indicators of the world around us

### *Domains of well being:*

- \* Education
- \* Economy
- \* Environment
- \* Transportation
- \* Recreation and Culture
- \* Civic Engagement
- \* Health

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## Community indicators of the world around us

### ***Look what parks, recreation and arts can do!***

- \* Education – early learning, after school, creativity
- \* Economy – tournaments, special events, camping
- \* Environment – green space, nature centers, wildlife
- \* Transportation – trails, hubs for services, marina
- \* Recreation and Culture – parks, festivals, art, heritage
- \* Civic Engagement – voting, library use, social space
- \* Health – physical health, mental health, rehabilitation

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- ## The role of an advisory board
- \* Provide insight based upon experience and engagement
  - \* Provide valuable information to elected leaders
  - \* Provide support and input to the director
  - \* Participate in activities and events
  - \* Engage with the community – plan for the future
  - \* Serve as an ambassador for parks in the community
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## An Advisory Board is not...

- \* ...a directive board
- \* ...an oversight committee
- \* ...a municipal services taxing board
- \* ...a “friends of parks” organization

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## Bringing value to your elected leaders

- \* Gather citizen input
- \* Filter smaller items with staff
- \* Provide valuable insight on larger issues
- \* Shift from “service” to “engagement”

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## Bringing value to the parks department



- \* Bring community input to the table
- \* Hear stories, the good, the bad and the ugly
  - \* Rev. Don Roberts
- \* Provide insight on difficult or sensitive issues
- \* Review revenue plans and fee changes
- \* Assist in preparation for accreditation review



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## Bringing value to the parks department...



- \* Review Concept Plans and Master Plans
- \* Bring forth new ideas and a diversity of perspectives
- \* Be an ambassador for parks and recreation
- \* Provide opportunities for staff to hone presentation skills

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## Bringing value to the community



- \* Share information about events and programs
- \* Attend special events and dedications
- \* Listen to community needs
- \* Seek solutions to complex challenges
- \* Help build a stronger community!



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## Let's look at some examples



### Historical Commission

- \* A “roll up their sleeves” advisory board
  - \* Many of the members were volunteers
  - \* Project committees conducted research, presented findings
  - \* A signature role – historical markers
- \* Highly valued by the County Commissioners
- \* Recognized by the public for markers

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## Provide value!



Commissioner Shannon Staub asked:

*“what did the advisory board have to say?”*

I quickly learned that nothing would get approval from Commissioner Staub without the input of the advisory board.

Advisory board comments were included in each board memo, particularly consent items lacking presentations.

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## Shannon's STARS *Students Taking and Active Role*

*“Let's seek the voice of our young people...”*

- \* Leadership program by non-profit Community Youth Development
- \* Trains high school students to be active board members in non-profits and government
- \* Full participation rights including voting
- \* Multi-year STARS are some of the most engaged members!

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## Seek to understand... the needs of the future...

- \* Welcome youth to the conversation
- \* Engage your teen board members
- \* Reach out to youth during planning initiatives
- \* Listen to your own children's comments on parks



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## Typical agenda items

- \* Park plans
- \* Revenue plans/fee adjustments
- \* Land acquisition priorities and workplans
- \* Park policies/operating hours
- \* Requests for alternative uses
- \* Open to the public
- \* Staff reports

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## Sarasota County: A Case Study!

- \* Long tradition of advisory boards
- \* Deliberately bring varied voices to the table
- \* *The way we do things*

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## Getting to know your parks



Raymond Verheul said *“I’m going to visit all the parks”*

- \* Took the map of parks and treated it like an Audubon Bird “Life List” – checking off parks as he visited them. (almost 200 parks at that time!)
- \* Amazed at what he discovered, served several years and then transitioned to volunteer with the Friends

*...do you have a parks “life list”?*

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## Experiencing the parks



Millie Small said *“John let’s have lunch one day a month in a different park.”*

- \* Built a relationship between board chair and director
- \* A chance to observe “life in the park” together
- \* A chance for each to learn from one another

*Picnic Lunch + Park Discussion = Time Well Spent!*

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## Getting to know the parks...

- \* Host advisory board meetings at various parks
- \* Learn about new areas and observe the parks in operation
- \* Allow park staff to lead tours or present
- \* Example: Annual City of Venice Bus Tour

*sunshine – wish list - priorities*



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## Lifelong Learning



Terry Redman said *“lets take the whole advisory board to the FRPA conference”*

*So we did!*

- \* Stay in the sunshine!
- \* Learn together – discover innovation – understand the trends
- \* See and experience new products

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## Benefiting from collaborations



Dren Geer said... *“lets hold joint meetings with other advisory boards”*

*So we did!*

- \* Historical commission
- \* Senior Advisory Committee
- \* Keep Sarasota Beautiful Advisory Committee
- \* Municipal advisory boards

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## Benefiting from collaborations

*What happened when we did meet?*

- \* Historical commission – proper treatment of historical resources
- \* Senior Advisory Committee – aquatics, fitness for all
- \* Keep Sarasota Beautiful Advisory Committee – ban on smoking at beaches
- \* Municipal advisory boards – land acquisition needs

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## Governance

- \* Expectation of attendance and participation
- \* Skillful sequencing of important items
- \* Seek public comment – avoid direct debate
- \* Identify guests at start of meeting
- \* Efficient/effective staff participation
- \* Written motions for greatest clarity of intent

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## Run a professional meeting *see your value increase*



Jon Thaxton – County Commissioner

*“I never attended a more professionally conducted advisory board meeting”*



- \* Follow the agenda in an expeditious and courteous manner - Kevin Bruning, Historic Preservation Chair
- \* Properly handle motions, discussions, amendments and vote taking
- \* Ensure all have a chance to speak

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## What advisory boards should expect from staff

- \* An annual calendar of meeting dates, time and places
- \* Meeting minutes well in advance of the next meeting
- \* Being kept informed of initiatives and issues
- \* An action list detailing intentions of staff and/or the board

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## Sequencing for success

- \* Avoid advisory boards advocating ahead of the agency (or elected leaders) nor too far behind the need of the issue
- \* Help members understand that issues emerge quickly, requiring staff to insert additional items into the agenda as needed
- \* Understand the sequencing of the city administration's agenda process to ensure timely input to enhance staff reports

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## Celebrating success – creating an annual report



Nancy Pike\* said *“John can you help the library board with their annual report?”*

- \* Assemble content as a group, with support of staff
- \* Utilize a simple format
- \* Always keep an eye on the future...

...and the advisory board said,

*“wow look what we have done and have “in the works!”*

\* Miss Nancy from Romper Room

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## Annual Report Framework

- \* Members – appointed/served/depended within year
- \* Meetings – how many held, where
- \* Joint Meetings – allied advisory boards
- \* Training – orientation, sunshine, seminars
- \* Major Discussion Items – park plans, policy changes
- \* Special Events attended
- \* Trends – future issues/concerns/opportunities

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## What concerns do you have about your advisory board?

- \* Issues?
- \* Concerns?
- \* Opportunities?

IT STARTS IN  
**PARKS**  
Coaching. Connecting. Community.

Logo courtesy FRPA

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## Worksheet

- \* What steps can you take to improve your advisory board relations?
- \* 5 minutes and be prepared to report out

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## Engage & Experience: a key role for advisory board members

- \* Attend and be visible at special events and programs
- \* Actively seek input from friends, neighbors and colleagues
- \* Be a user of the parks
- \* Look for innovation when they travel – bring home great ideas!
- \* Share what they have learned – be an ambassador!

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## Help the board understand how important their role is!

- \* Parks are vital to your community
- \* Community input is vital to good parks
- \* They serve as an important link to the community
- \* Elected leaders, professional staff and citizen advisory boards form a ***triangle of success!***

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## Thank you for what you do!



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