

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 25, 2007

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO #70: PARKS & RECREATION PER CAPITA EXPENDITURES

This memo is in response to Mayor Euille and Councilman Smedberg's question about how the City of Alexandria's per capita expenditures for parks and recreation activities compare to neighboring jurisdictions.

For the purposes of this memo, OMB staff gathered rough data from several Northern Virginia jurisdictions. Due to differences in reporting/budgeting style, type of service provider (i.e. local government vs. park authority), and type of service delivered, it is difficult to quickly compile true "per capita expenditure" figures. However, utilizing the best available information, OMB staff compiled "per capita expenditure" estimates for parks activities and recreational activities. These data include FY 2006 actual expenditures and population figures based on Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) estimates. Because other comparable departments' available data are limited, we do not include attempts to measure cultural and other activities that may or may not be performed by other parks and recreation departments as they are by RPCA. These data also do not include potential contributions to the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority, capital expenditures, or overall departmental administrative expenditures.

OMB staff compiled data from several surrounding jurisdictions for both recreation costs per capita and parks costs per capita. For recreation costs, the City falls within the same range (around \$64 per capita) as other inner jurisdictions (i.e. Arlington, Falls Church) and is slightly higher than the outer jurisdictions in per capita costs for recreation activities. In parks activities, Alexandria is spending a little more per capita (\$40) than most jurisdictions, but is still in the same general range, except for Arlington, which spends \$58 per capita for parks.

Parks and Recreation Per Capita Expenditures - FY 2006 Actuals

	Population*	Total Rec Exp.	Recreation Exp. per capita	Total Parks Exp.	Parks Exp. per capita
Alexandria	137,000	\$8,778,461	\$64	\$5,507,227	\$40
Fairfax County	1,041,200	\$46,932,966	\$45	\$35,817,181	\$34
Loudoun	242,000	\$12,751,776	\$53	\$7,128,463	\$29
Prince William	354,383	\$9,966,500	\$28	\$12,081,000	\$34
Arlington	198,300	\$12,299,469	\$62	\$11,433,482	\$58
Falls Church	10,500	\$697,420	\$66	\$331,242	\$32

* Based on COG estimates

The per capita expenditures vary by jurisdiction for a number of reasons. All of these communities have special circumstances that cause them to choose to deliver certain types of services and to decide upon the means to fund those services. Specifically, some communities, like Alexandria, choose to invest significantly in neighborhood-based community recreation centers, while other communities may decide that larger, fee-based recreation center complexes, golf courses, water parks, or even nature preserves are more appropriate. Each community has historically decided what to provide with their own parks and recreation resources (e.g. funding, land, community support, etc.) as they have also chosen the means to deliver those services.

Another reason that per capita expenditures vary by jurisdiction is the differing demographics. For instance, Alexandria has a larger low-income population as a percentage of the total population than the outer suburbs. The City's recreation centers largely serve this portion of the population while many of the outer suburbs do not necessarily. The outer suburbs also tend to see a much higher occurrence of private subdivision homeowners associations providing services like open space management, swimming pools, and ball courts, whereas in Alexandria these services are almost exclusively provided by the City. Services like these drive per capita costs up.

Furthermore, Alexandria's recreation centers provide after-school programming, whereas in Arlington and Fairfax they do not. The City has historically chosen to provide these services through RPCA. However, it does cost money and that is reflected in the per capita data presented above. Other jurisdictions may choose to provide after-school programming through other departments or their school systems.

On the parks side, per capita expenditures are influenced by population density. Simply put, the City has more people utilizing less space (parks, trails, athletic fields, etc.) than the outer suburbs. This additional strain on our parks and open space drives maintenance costs up and, consequentially, per capita expenditures as well.

Benchmarks are a quick and easy way to examine the delivery of services to the public. However, exclusively utilizing “per capita expenditure” benchmarks often tells just part of the story. Levels of service quality and effectiveness are not communicated through these types of measurements. Some communities may spend half of what a neighboring jurisdiction spends, but their survey benchmark might show a poor service delivery or product that does not highly satisfy residents. Measures of customer satisfaction and service quality should be considered along with measures of efficiency like “per capita expenditures.” The Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities services are rated among highest of all Departments within the past two City-wide Resident Surveys.

Using “per capita expenditures” is one way of examining efficiency, but “per household expenditures” is arguably an equally valid method. Alexandria (2.04) and Arlington County (2.15) have the lowest average household sizes in the region. The other jurisdictions average in the 2.75 to 3.0 range for household size. Alexandria falls right around the middle of these Northern Virginia jurisdictions in terms of average recreation expenditure per household. The City is close to the bottom for average parks expenditure per household. Overall, examining the data in this manner shows an increase in relative efficiency over looking at “per capita” costs. In other words, the City is comparably more efficient by household than by individual.

Parks and Recreation Per Household Expenditures - FY 2006 Actuals

	Households*	Total Rec Exp.	Recreation Exp. per household	Total Parks Exp.	Parks Exp. per household
Alexandria	61,889	\$8,778,461	\$142	\$5,507,227	\$89
Fairfax County	350,714	\$46,932,966	\$134	\$35,817,181	\$102
Loudoun	59,900	\$12,751,776	\$213	\$7,128,463	\$119
Prince William	94,570	\$9,966,500	\$105	\$12,081,000	\$128
Arlington	86,352	\$12,299,469	\$142	\$11,433,482	\$132
Falls Church	4,471	\$697,420	\$156	\$331,242	\$74

* Based on 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data

The City’s Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities is currently in the beginning phases of an efficiency and best practices study, which among other things, will provide additional benchmark comparisons for RPCA’s many activities. In the past, RPCA has used benchmarks when undergoing the National Accreditation process, as well as the Strategic Master Planning process that took place in 2001-2002, both of which use best practices and National benchmark comparisons. The Department has also used benchmarks to regularly compare its services to neighboring jurisdictions. They have not, however, previously used “per capita expenditures” or “per household expenditures” as methods of comparison. The current study, and the use of MFRI as a reporting and management tool, will enable RPCA to more fully examine its activities using performance measures of efficiency, effectiveness, and service quality in the future.

