

Applying the Rational Planning Model to Recreation Planning in Soul City

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INTRODUCTION

In February 1987, Floyd McKissick, Sr., the developer of Soul City, the federally assisted Title VIII new community, approached the Department of City and Regional Planning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for assistance. Specifically, he requested that graduate students seek sources of funding for the Soul City Parks and Recreation Association (PRA). The PRA, which operated a pool and recreation complex for Soul City and the surrounding area, regularly sought money to cover deficit operating expenses. Without a long-term solution, the best alternative seemed to be the leasing of the facilities to Warren County.

During the preliminary stages of our investigation, the PRA Board of Directors voted to lease their recreation facilities to the County. Therefore the original direction of our study, namely to secure funds for continued PRA operation of the facilities, had to be modified. This paper describes the resolution of the PRA crisis in the spring of 1987, and suggests new roles and future directions for the PRA now that a lease has been arranged with Warren County. Finally, this paper looks at long term issues for the "post-lease period," including the possibility of the incorporation of Soul City.

Soul City Parks and Recreation Association in Crisis, 1987.

In the spring of 1987, the Soul City Parks and Recreation Association (PRA) found itself at a crossroads. Since the 1979 foreclosure of the Soul City New Community by HUD, the PRA had been responsible for the administration and maintenance of Soul City's recreation facilities. These include a pool and bathhouse; outdoor basketball, volleyball, and tennis courts; bicycle trails and common areas

within the Green Duke Village; a lake with surrounding picnic tables and grills; and the eighteenth century Green Duke House. An entrance fee of one dollar per person was collected at the pool, while all other facilities were free and unmonitored. The PRA also was responsible for street lighting and mowing of common areas, and assessed fees from the Soul City homeowners at a rate of thirty seven and one half cents per one hundred dollars assessed valuation to pay for these particular services.

Because Soul City had grown to an estimated population of only two hundred, the PRA suffered a deficit of approximately twelve thousand dollars per year. Pool fees and assessments had not been nearly enough to cover operating costs of lighting, mowing, and maintaining the recreation facilities. The little maintenance that was performed was often done on a volunteer basis. Warren County had covered the deficit of the PRA for several years, since the pool and recreation complex had been used by the larger county community, and was the only such public facility in the County. The members of the PRA Board were not paid, and had little time to devote to management of the facilities.

A solution to the problem of restoring the Green Duke House was implemented in 1986. The first floor of the facility was leased for ten years to a Montessori school, the Creative Learning Center, with 501-C(3) non-profit status. The school then was able to receive a grant from the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation to restore the first level. Work has now been completed, but unfortunately the upper level remains unfinished and inaccessible to the community.

A long term solution to several other aspects of the financial problems of the PRA is now being formulated. At a Board meeting on March 18, 1987, the PRA voted to lease the pool and recreation facilities to Warren County. The details of the lease have yet to be determined. Two



Utilizing community facilities.

years ago, Warren County created a Recreation Commission; these Soul City facilities will represent the first recreation assets to be acquired by the Commission. Floyd McKissick, Sr., will represent the PRA in negotiating the terms of the lease. As of yet, there are no plans to lease the streetlights to the County, and the responsibility of mowing the common areas will remain with the PRA.

The anti-lease minority fears that leasing will be risky, since in the long term a future County Commission could close or curtail maintenance of the facilities. The pro-lease majority contends that once the Warren County Recreation Commission controls the area, political pressure from all of the county's citizens would prevent its closing. They also feel that the County government has the necessary technical, financial, and administrative resources to manage the facilities properly, unlike the PRA Board.

When this proposed lease expires, Soul City may have an opportunity to once again regain control of its recreation facilities. This can only occur if, during the interim period, the Soul City PRA examines new roles for the future and redirects its efforts.

Defining a New Role for the PRA

With the leasing of the Soul City facilities to Warren County, the PRA has an opportunity to redefine its role and functions now that it has been relieved of major responsibilities. What follows are sets of specific recommendations for ways in which the PRA can work in several new directions.

Involvement in County and Regional Quality of Life Issues

- The PRA should strengthen its role in regional development through lobbying efforts at the county and state level to promote public investments in the area which will enhance the quality of life. The quality of education, recreation, and cultural facilities is becoming more important to industries seeking to decentralize or relocate. The PRA can adopt the role of activist and local government watchdog, following the activities of the School Board and County Commissioners to make sure that such services which improve the quality of life are enhanced in Warren County.
- The PRA should closely monitor the proceedings of the Warren County Recreation Commission, insuring that the PRA facilities which they have leased to the Commission are well operated and maintained. The PRA should support efforts to expand recreation opportunities anywhere in Warren County, which could serve to attract new employers to the area.
- The PRA Board should seek the appointment of one of their members to the Warren County Recreation Commission, to aid in the implementation of the above recommendation.
- The PRA Board should approach regional youth councils and the Recreation Commission about the possibility of a summer youth program at Soul City, to provide recreation opportunities for local children.

Management of the Fire Station Community Room and the Green Duke House

- The PRA Board should expand its role in managing and promoting the Green Duke House and Fire Station facilities. At this time it appears that Warren County will not lease the Green Duke House or the Fire Station Office and Community Room from the PRA. These remaining facilities can become the target of renewed efforts by the Board to provide more programs and services for the community.
- The Board should seek reorganization as a private, non-profit corporation under section 501-C(3) to increase its options for fund raising.
- The Board should consider changing the name of the PRA to the "Soul City Community Association," to better reflect the new roles of the organization.

Economic Development and Marketing Efforts

- The PRA should assume a more active role in promoting the physical and economic development of Soul City and the surrounding area.
- The PRA Board should work with the Agricultural Investment Fund and other owners of developable parcels

to create a joint marketing strategy. If all of the potential sellers in Soul City and the surrounding area joined forces, perhaps some effective marketing efforts could be designed. No one will develop land in Soul City if they are not made aware of the opportunity.

- Soul City has enough land and resources to support the establishment of a summer music festival or other outdoor cultural events with region-wide appeal. Such events could bolster awareness about the community, and aid other economic development and marketing efforts.

aid the Board during this period:

- (1) Division of Archives and History
North Carolina State Historic Preservation
Department of Cultural Resources
Raleigh, NC 27611
- (2) Division of Community Assistance
Department of Natural Resources and
Community Development
Raleigh, NC 27611
- (3) Industrial Development Division (or)
Economic Development Division



Meeting recreation needs.

Application for Financial and Technical Assistance

- The PRA Board should only pursue outside funding sources after it decides on a course of action. It is difficult to apply for financial assistance with only a vague notion of the community's needs and goals.
- The PRA is fundamentally limited in its search for financial assistance, because Soul City lacks a governmental body or non-profit entity to receive funds. Most available federal and state grants are targeted to counties and municipalities. However, a variety of agencies provide grants and assistance in planning which could

North Carolina Department of Commerce
Raleigh, NC 27611

- (4) Private Foundation Grants and Corporate Giving
if the PRA obtains 501-C(3) non-profit status.

Until recently, economic development efforts and outcomes have depended on the infusion of funds from outside of Soul City. Now that several years have passed since the HUD foreclosure and no large single source supply of funds is in sight, the question for Soul City should not be "Where should the funds come from?" but rather "Where and how can we obtain technical assistance to help

us decide how to focus our economic development efforts?"

Toward A Rational Plan For Soul City

The PRA Board should not be satisfied with directing its energies to implement short term solutions only. The present situation presents an opportunity for the Board to step back and reassess its long term goals and objectives in an open and productive way. The following section illustrates how the Board can use the Rational Planning Model as a way to plan for Soul City's future, looking beyond the present crisis.

In its classic form, the Rational Planning Model contains five basic steps:

1. Inventory and Analyze Existing Conditions
2. Formulate Goals and Objectives
3. Identify Possible Alternatives to Achieve Goals
4. Choose the Best Alternatives
5. Evaluate the Success of the Effort

In the following passages, we have made a preliminary effort to take stock of Soul City's resources, define the PRA's goals, and suggest some long term alternatives. In



Rational planning for Soul City.

a most basic way, the resources can be defined as what you have to work with, the goals are what you want to achieve, and the alternatives are possible courses of action to achieve the goals. It is up to the Board to elaborate on these efforts, discuss its goals with the community, and eventually make the long term decisions which will affect Soul City.

Taking Stock of Community Resources

The first step in the rational planning model is to inventory resources and analyze existing community conditions. The PRA should consider the following resources which it has at its disposal:

Infrastructure

- Well maintained roads (except for Pleasant Hills subdivision and AIF industrial road).
- Adequate water and sewer capacity.
- Fire station with two firetrucks, run by Volunteer Fire Department
- Community Room and PRA office in fire station.
- Health facilities.
- Large, serviced, vacant parcels zoned for industrial uses.
- Recreational facilities, with guaranteed maintenance by Warren County under the terms of the long term lease.
 - Pool
 - Bathhouse
 - Basketball Courts
 - Volleyball Courts
 - Tennis Courts
 - Lake
 - Picnic Tables and Grills
 - Bike Trails
- Green Duke House
 - Cultural, historic focus
 - Potential Community Room upstairs
 - Montessori School, directed by Janice Crump

Human Resources

- Human Resources of dedicated PRA Board members.
- With leasing of the recreational facilities to Warren County, PRA Board members will be freed to pursue new roles and directions.
- Visible PRA organization exists with established community respect and support.
- Baptist Church organization brings the Soul City community together, giving residents a sense of belonging and fellowship.
- Soul City has a good track record, and has contributed

to the County tax base and enhanced regional development.

- Many of Soul City's residents are professionally skilled, and have much to offer the community.

Housing Stock

- Green Duke Village has an excellent stock of well kept single family homes.

Retail Space

- Four small retail spaces exist, with ample room to be enlarged into a major shopping center.

New Housing

- Fourteen elderly units are under construction, and will bring additional community residents and visitors and add to Soul City's social diversity.
- The Pleasant Hills subdivision has ninety one vacant housing lots ready for development, with complete infrastructure in place.

Industries

- The Purdue Company is constructing a new hatchery facility, and owns other land around Soul City.
- Swing Trucking, Owens Illinois, and Central Sportswear now have plants in Soul City.

Transportation Access

- Soul City is on US 1/US 158, and convenient to I-85. Railroad tracks cross the north end of the site.

Goals

The next step in the Rational Planning Model involves the formulation of goals and objectives. Goals are more general in content; objectives, however, should be specific and measurable. We have identified six goals for review by the PRA Board. The Board should discuss these goals with the community and develop a consensus. Additional goals may be desired, as we have only provided a first attempt here. We have not developed any measurable objectives; these should be set by the Board once goals are established.

Goals:

- Retain, as much as possible, the character and identity of Soul City as a "new community," carrying forward the vision of its origin.

- Promote economic development for Soul City and Warren County.
- Create a community with socio-economic, racial, and age heterogeneity; a truly balanced community offering new opportunities for its citizens.
- Expand the population of Soul City so that existing services can be delivered more efficiently and new services can be offered.
- Improve the management and administration of Soul City, so that residents can effectively participate in community life and control their environment.
- Improve the quality of Soul City's community facilities and recreational complex.

Alternatives for the Post Lease Period

The next step in the Model is the exploration of alternatives. These alternatives represent a few possible ways that the PRA Board could try to achieve its long term goals.

- (1) *After the lease expires, dedicate the PRA facilities to the Warren County Recreation Commission.* Our prediction is that the County's behavior as an owner of the Soul City recreation facilities would hardly differ from its behavior as a lessee. The only difference is that, as a lessee, the County is bound to the terms of the lease. As an owner, the County would be free to manage the property as it sees fit, or even to dispose of it (an unlikely circumstance). After dedicating the facilities to the County, the PRA would be free of its responsibilities as an owner and would be able to focus its attention on other community concerns.
- (2) *After the lease expires, the PRA retains the recreation facilities and operates them.* This alternative would return the PRA to the exact situation it was in during March 1987, before an agreement was made to lease the facilities to Warren County. Alternative 2 is only feasible if the PRA somehow comes up with adequate funding and management capabilities before it takes back the facilities. With this alternative, the PRA may again find itself stuck with an operating deficit. However, if the PRA could hire a paid manager or director, it is more likely that Alternative 2 could work.
- (3) *Once the lease expires, the PRA works with the Warren County Commission to establish a County Service District for financing PRA recreation facilities.* It can be argued that one of the main reasons that the PRA ran a deficit is because it had too few residents to assess. A possible solution to this problem is the creation of a County Service District (CSD), which would be able to assess a broader base of residents for utiliz-

ing Soul City's recreation facilities. A CSD is an area within the county whose boundaries are set by the County Commissioners, within which the County levies a property tax additional to the countywide tax. It then uses the proceeds to provide one or more services that it either does not provide countywide or does not provide countywide at as high a level as the residents of the district desire. Establishing a CSD is totally within the control of the County Commissioners, and no petition or referendum of district residents is required (Lawrence 1982).

Policy-making for the district would also remain in the hands of the Commissioners. Under this alternative, then, the PRA would give up ownership and once again relinquish control of their facilities. The advantage, however, is that the County Commissioners could justify providing higher quality recreation facilities in the Soul City District, since it would be collecting extra funds to provide such facilities from district residents. This alternative may prove attractive if, during the next several years, other Warren County residents complain that the Commission is giving Soul City residents preferential treatment by financing the Soul City recreation facilities from general revenues.

- (4) *The PRA seeks municipal incorporation for Soul City, so that the residents can directly control the recreation facilities and other local government services.* If Soul City becomes incorporated, its residents will be able to directly determine the types and levels of municipal services delivered. Although this alternative is the most complex, it offers Soul City the greatest chance of achieving its goals in the long term. A summary of issues surrounding municipal incorporation follows, prepared with the help of Jake Wicker of the UNC Institute of Government, and the IOG publication, *Incorporation of a North Carolina Town*, by David Lawrence.

Municipal Incorporation Issues

Legal Procedures:

Under North Carolina law, a town may be incorporated only by act of the General Assembly. The decision to incorporate is essentially political, because the General Assembly is not bound to any set standards of population or tax base. If a community wishes to incorporate, it must enlist the support of its legislative delegation to the General Assembly. If the local legislators support the effort and introduce a bill to incorporate the community, it usually passes without difficulty. Effective July 1986, a new Joint Legislative Commission on Municipal Incorporations was formed for the purpose of reviewing local

bills requesting new incorporations. However, such a review by the Commission is optional, since any legislator may introduce a bill of incorporation directly on the floor of the Assembly. Even if Soul City were reviewed for incorporation by the Commission in the near future, it would probably meet their criteria. On a practical level, the town must include with the bill a definition of the town's limits; the total value of taxable property; a charter establishing the method of governance of the town; and a preliminary budget. Usually, the local legislators wish to have some concrete evidence that a majority of the residents are in favor of incorporation, although strictly speaking, the approval of residents is not required.

Services Provided by a Town

Streets—Once a community is incorporated, its officials negotiate with the State DOT over which roads will become town streets and which roads will remain state streets. Once the town accepts responsibility for streets, it will become eligible for a share of state street aid, to help pay for maintenance (see below).

Enforcement—Sheriffs' departments usually do not operate in incorporated towns. Most new towns employ one or more police officers.

Fire Protection—Incorporation need not have any effect on the existing Volunteer Fire Department arrangements.

Water and Sewer Services—Once again, incorporation need not change existing arrangements.

Town Regulatory Powers

Any town in North Carolina has the full authority to adopt ordinances regulating zoning, subdivision, building code enforcement, etc.

Revenues Available to Towns

Property Tax—A new town usually contracts with the county to assess property values and collect property taxes within the town. These revenues provide the main funding for town services.

Sales Tax—The one percent county sales tax is collected along with the state's three percent, and proceeds are then returned to the county by the state. Part of those proceeds are shared by the county with the towns in the county according to the property values or population within each town.

Intangibles Tax—The state intangibles tax (stocks, bonds, etc.) is redistributed to the counties and towns according to property tax levies.

Beer and Wine Tax—About twenty-five percent of the beer tax and fifty percent of the wine tax collected by the State are returned to the counties and towns on a per capita basis.

Franchise Tax—Half of the state taxes on electricity, gas and telephone services collected within a town are returned by the State.

State Street Aid—One and three-eighths cents per gallon of the state gasoline sales tax is distributed to cities and towns for street maintenance. Municipalities receive about thirteen dollars per person and about 850 dollars per street mile annually from this source.

Revenue Sharing—In the past, the federal government has shared a portion of its revenues with state and local governments. It is unclear how recent cutbacks in the program will affect future communities.

It is obvious that incorporation creates new burdens on the community, but it also opens up tremendous possibilities for economic development, independence, and citizen involvement in Soul City's future. The PRA Board should consider these issues, as well as the short term solutions discussed earlier. □

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NOTES

Interviews:

Janice Crump, Chairperson, Soul City Parks and Recreation Association, Soul City, NC, 10:30 AM, March 30, 1987.

Jane Groom, Treasurer, Soul City Parks and Recreation Assoc., Soul City, NC, 5:00 PM, March 11, 1987.

Ms. Kirkland, Secretary, Soul City Parks and Recreation Assoc., Soul City, NC, 5:00 PM, March 11, 1987.

Evelyn McKissick, Soul City, NC, 3:30 PM, March 11, 1987.

Floyd McKissick, Sr., Developer of Soul City, presentation to Planning 239, a graduate course on New Towns, Department of City and Regional Planning, UNC-CH, 2:00 PM, March 3, 1987, 5:30 PM, March 25, 1987.

Warren "Jake" Wicker, Faculty member, Institute of Government, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC, 3:30 PM, April 7, 1987.

Charles Worth, County Manager, Warren County, Warrenton, NC, 4:00 PM, March 25, 1987.

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