

**City of Vladimir Recreation Project
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INTRODUCTION: Project Overview, and Stakeholder Wants and Needs

Vladimir, Russia, population 375,000, is located approximately 115 miles northeast of Moscow. This large industrial city has not only a rich history dating back to the 12th century, but has parks and open spaces with excellent potential for recreation. Unfortunately, young people in Vladimir currently have little to do in the summer besides drink beer, smoke, and get into trouble - facts that are widely recognized. Failure to deal with these problems will place demands on law enforcement resources, and will ultimately interfere with economic development in the city.

One effective way to address problems faced by youth is through the provision of recreation attractions in city parks. Numerous communities in the United States and other countries have used organized recreation programs and the development of safe, but exciting recreation facilities to foster a sense of resiliency among youth. Since 1992, the American Home in Vladimir has earned a reputation for addressing community needs by "getting things done." Operated by Dr. Ron Pope through his firm Serendipity-Russia, the American Home began working with the Vladimir City Administration in 2003 to address the recreational needs of Vladimir youth.

Grant monies were obtained in 2003 by team members, Drs. Marta Moorman, (University of Nebraska at Kearney), and Barbara Schlatter (Illinois State University) to visit Vladimir in July 2004 and assess the need for a recreation facility that could serve as a model for other parts of the city as well as the rest of Russia. The results of the assessment are reported below.

This report represents the first step in the development of a multipurpose recreation facility for Vladimir youth. Listed below are the stakeholder wants and needs as perceived by the team members.

The stakeholders for a multipurpose recreation facility in Vladimir want:

- a free facility (or attractions) that is open seven days a week and easily accessible
- the facility (or attractions) to have few if any equipment requirements for participants

- the following recreation attractions are desired by youth and youth professionals in a central location with easy access from the city:
 - a skatepark, surrounded by a secure fence to discourage would be vandals
 - a disc golf course constructed of sturdy materials that are not easily vandalized

The stakeholders for a multipurpose recreation facility in Vladimir need:

- financial and moral support from the Vladimir City Administration
- the installation of several recreation attractions (skatepark obstacles, disc golf course) at the 850th Anniversary Vladimir City Park
 - provided through grant funding and/or
 - through construction plans provided by the U.S. team.
- installation of a disc golf course at the Dobroselsky Park or “Village Where Kind People Live Park” under the direction of Ms. Natalia Petrushina.
- counter-vandalism procedures/structures

OBSERVATIONS: What the Team Concluded

The basic elements for a multipurpose recreation facility already exist in Vladimir.

Consider the Following Assets:

- *Yelena Bychkovskikh, International Affairs and Tourism, Vladimir City Administration*
This well-connected young woman spent her formative years in Vladimir so she knows first hand the problems experienced by youth. Moreover, she has excellent rapport with the project’s stakeholders (American Home staff, park directors, sports complex directors, presidents and club members for skateboarding and cycling). She speaks English fluently and knows how to make things happen.
- *Other Key Players*
Ms. Olga Chapurina, Director, Druzhba or “Friendship” Park
Ms. Natalia Petrushina, Director, Dobroselsky or “Village Where Kind People Live” Park
Mr. Andrey Tsirulev, Director, Molodezhny or “Youth” Sport Complex
Mr. Sergey Kirilov, Director, Vladimir Youth Committee

These individuals showed genuine concern about the problems faced by youth and expressed a strong desire to assist with this project.

- *850th Anniversary of Vladimir City Park*
There are four large city parks in Vladimir. Of the four, the park in the city's center – the 850th Anniversary of Vladimir City Park – offers the best overall accessibility for youth due to its location and accessibility to public transportation and is the team's first choice for the recreation attractions.
- *Two Organized Sport Clubs*
There are two well-organized youth groups (outdoor/bicycle club and a skateboard club) that are eager to help develop facilities or attractions.
- *City Beautification Improvements*
The city is actively taking beautification steps mostly along Bolshaya Moskovskaya. These steps include flowerbeds, new sidewalks, and lawn care.
- *Mass Transportation System*
There exists a reliable and relatively low cost city bus and tram system whereby youth can safely travel throughout the city.

Consider the Following Challenges:

- *Money*
Currently there is no money available through existing park budgets to fund the development of such attractions. Park directors are already being as creative as possible in terms of generating revenue through existing attractions and using that money to pay employees.
- *Director, 850th Anniversary of Vladimir City Park*
This director, *Oleg Barabanov*, did not display significant interest/enthusiasm for the proposed project compared to the other park directors. He seemed indifferent to his job and about our project. While the park presents the best location for these attractions, the team is not confident that Barabanov is a reliable and positive player in this project. The team recommends that another park official from the 850th Anniversary Park ultimately oversee this project. The determination of this individual will be made under advisement with Dr. Ron Pope, Ms. Yelena Bychkovskikh, and Mr. Yuri Fedorov. This park is clearly the best location for the project. Moving the attractions to another park would make them inconvenient to the youth, as they are used to skateboarding at the Vladimir Oblast building about 1 km away. In the event that personnel changes can't be made at the main city park, the project could move to the Druzhba or "Friendship" Park under the direction of Ms. Olga Chapurina.

- *Free versus Fee Attractions*
While youth want free attractions, park officials will likely view such innovative and novel attractions as an excellent way to generate income for their parks by charging a nominal fee. If some of the new attractions can be kept free and if the fees charged for the other attractions can be kept truly nominal, and, therefore, affordable, charging fees does not need to be a problem.
- *Separate Multipurpose Facility versus Attractions within an Existing Park*
To develop a separate multipurpose recreation facility is likely not feasible. Instead, the team believes it would be better to place said recreation attractions in an existing park such as the 850th Anniversary Vladimir City Park.
- *Vandalism*
Every park director we interviewed told us that vandalism is a major problem. Unless attractions are secured, or built with strong materials that will stand up to vandalism, there is no point in providing attractions. This also feeds into the City Administration's reluctance to offer funding.

NEXT STEPS: Stage 1 2004-2005

To achieve the goals or *needs* noted above, the following steps are suggested.

1. Grant Proposals

Ms. Kristina Saxon and Dr. Barbara Schlatter, Illinois State University, will prepare and submit grant proposals by the end of 2004 to secure funding for the construction or purchase of recreation attractions in the form of stakepark obstacles and a disc golf course for the 850th Anniversary Vladimir City Park. Ms. Saxon is an undergraduate recreation major completing an independent study with Dr. Schlatter. She will immerse herself in skateparks and disc golf by visiting local parks that have such attractions as well as visiting with park personnel responsible for purchasing, managing, and maintaining such attractions. Concomitantly she will conduct searches for grant funding from many sources, although the Tony Hawk Foundation and Sister Cities International are currently primary target sources.

2. Construction Plans

Dr. Marta Moorman, University of Nebraska at Kearney, will research and provide step-by-step construction plans to the American Home staff and Yelena Bychkovskikh in Vladimir so that basic skatepark obstacles and disc golf baskets can be built right away for the 850th Anniversary Vladimir City Park. Careful attention will be placed on the need for basic materials that are relatively inexpensive and easy to obtain.

3. Counter-vandalism Measures

In both items 1. and 2.above, counter-vandalism measures are essential for the overall success to this project. Schlatter, Moorman, and Saxon must communicate their counter-vandalism findings with each other and ensure that the highest quality / cost effective measures will be incorporated into the project.

STAGE 2 2005-2006

The next stage of this project, once Stage 1 is completed, is to seek significant funding and construction plans for outdoor basketball courts, sand volleyball courts, mini soccer and a covered area for table tennis.

STAGE 3 2005-2006

The final stage of the project will be to seek significant funding and construction plans for a protected (from vandalism) outdoor climbing wall, and possibly other attractions, depending on funding.

EVALUATION:

An evaluation will be conducted upon completion of each stage. The evaluation will solicit opinions and attitudes of the stakeholders (park personnel, American Home staff, City Administration staff, and the participants). The results of the evaluation will be communicated to all stakeholders and funding sources (if applicable).

SUMMARY:

The provision of exciting and challenging recreation attractions can steer youth away from negative influences in their lives (such as alcohol and smoking). The problems faced by Vladimir youth are not unique. Cities in the United States, as well as in other countries, have used recreation successfully to address such problems.

This report has detailed the goals for the project, identified the assets and challenges faced by Vladimir City in the realization of those goals, and set forth a plan of action to address the goals.

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