

Yvonne Fischbach
Notes to Economic Relief and Recovery Task Force
(3-4 Minutes Allowed)

I am here representing the Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District and other park and recreation districts across Colorado where, collectively, the essential nature of our work has been heavily impacted by Covid-19. We are honored to serve people from all walks of life through our work, where we recognize the essential benefits of parks and recreation on the physical and mental well-being of our communities. While most of our facilities were shuttered during the pandemic, the importance of our work was demonstrated in the overflowing use of parks, trails, and all outdoor venues throughout the region. People relied on these facilities as free public use amenities where they could go for the exercise and mental health breaks that were so badly needed.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this task force with information that will inform your policy recommendations on the importance of our fee-based operations that support our public parks and recreation initiatives.

Based on the importance of these services to the community, we encourage you to include our challenges in any potential recommendations for ARP Act reimbursement funding, due to the significant lost revenues we endured and continue to endure because of the pandemic. Reimbursement funds will enable parks and recreation to work through the continued challenges, losses, economic gaps, and even unforeseen challenges as we try to rebuild, recover, and continue our essential work for the people we serve.

The pandemic swept across our operations and devastated budgets, facilities, operations and most importantly, PEOPLE. When I was invited to speak to this body I reached out to many colleagues from similar Districts, including Foothills Park and Recreation District, South Suburban Park and Recreation District and APEX Park and Recreation District who all shared similar effects of the pandemic in their Districts and even unique losses each suffered as well. Let there be not doubt that the impacts I describe for you today are indicative of the setbacks experienced by park and recreation districts across this great state of ours.

I will present my remarks in three categories: How the pandemic affected our fee-based operations, the revenue loss impact, and the ongoing impact of that loss of revenue:

1) How the pandemic affected fee-based operations:

In our case, Hyland Hills was established in 1955 as one of the very first park and recreation districts in the state of Colorado. Our charge ever since then has been, and continues to be, providing essential park and recreational services to our District and to operate as a quasi-municipal corporation and governmental subdivision of the State of Colorado.

As a way of funding and supporting our commitment to provide the very best we can in parks, recreation programs and facilities, we operate a few fee-based Enterprises – some very well known – such as Water World, one of the world’s greatest waterparks. This self-sustaining facility contributes largely to our District’s operating budget and enables us to provide exponentially more recreational programming to our Residents than we ever could with the small property tax revenues we receive.

In total, these Enterprises provide 81.9 percent toward our entire operating budget.

This Enterprise is also listed among Colorado's best tourism assets, bringing in hundreds of thousands of guests during the summer season who visit our park and who contribute to the local economy.

Our Enterprises were severely impacted by the pandemic. Case in point, Water World, the largest source of revenue for our District had to close for the entire season in 2020 – something that had NEVER happened in its 42 years of existence.

2) The revenue loss impact:

Fees not collected due to the pandemic will have a monumental impact on the continued operations in parks and recreation districts.

Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District, registered losses representing roughly half of the \$32,705,702 total losses reported in the Special District Association survey which showed non-utility fee revenue loss for park and recreation districts.

It took only one pandemic year for Hyland Hills Park and Recreation District to lose half of our emergency reserve fund amount that it had taken us more than twenty years to accumulate through good stewardship.

Other districts reported similar losses such as Foothills, which suffered a loss in operating revenue of more than \$4 million in 2020, and Apex reporting \$4.3 million - with everyone anticipating 2020 losses in the millions as well.

In addition to facility closures, park and recreation districts suffered through required reductions and furloughs in full and part-time staffs and were unable to provide expected raises for retained staff - though everyone was asked to do more and work longer hours for less pay.

Capital projects were put on hold across the board including much needed park, trail, and infrastructure improvements.

Revenue losses will impact millions of people who use our facilities and so many others, like the 1000 young workers that Water World hires each year who were unable to work in 2020. Also, there is a major impact to businesses that surround park and recreation facilities, like the ones around Water World, that benefit from the park's summer operation and who undoubtedly experienced a decrease in business.

3) Ongoing Impact of the loss of revenue:

Collectively, park and recreation districts anticipate a continued negative impact on fee-based operating revenues in the next few years due to potential facility closures, attendance restrictions and staff shortages.

We will continue to do our best to serve our communities with hard work and integrity, but we need your help. The major losses I have only touched on today will continue to affect what we provide individuals and families in the most personal way, through free family recreation options and healthy mental health outlets.

As we emerge from the cloud that the pandemic has cast upon us, we've found that through this experience, sometimes it's just a family meal in a beautiful public park, or a brisk walk on a scenic trail

or maybe even casting a fishing rod in some moving water that can do wonders for people. These are the kinds of things we are tasked with providing our communities in the parks and recreation business.

We appreciate your listening to us today. ###