



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2018.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: _____

Program Title: _____

Program Category: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Title: _____

Department: _____

Telephone: _____ Website: _____

Email: _____

SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

VACo Award Nomination 2018
Chesterfield County, Virginia
Category: Parks and Recreation
Title: River City Sportsplex Operational Overhaul

Executive Summary

In 2012, Shaw Industries Group, Inc. (Shaw) took control of River City Sportsplex as the largest creditor of record during the bankruptcy proceedings of the original owner, however, operation of an athletic complex was not part of the core business of Shaw. Chesterfield County was well acquainted with the facility and did not hesitate to purchase the site when it became available in December of 2016.

When management of the facility was turned over to the County's Parks and Recreation Department (Department), the partially completed facility was in a state of disrepair. Thousands of pounds of debris were removed from the location, long ignored maintenance tasks were addressed, and a plan for the completion of the facility was developed. The Department altered job responsibilities to operate the facility. The Department's Sports Tourism and Finance divisions worked collaboratively to analyze existing contract terms, set up a compliance and payment tracking system, and collect past due accounts.

In the one year since the County's acquisition of the property, the collective efforts of the Department have established River City Sportsplex as the premier destination for youth sports tournaments in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The Problem or Need for the Program

In December of 2016, Chesterfield County acquired River City Sportsplex. The facility, funded in part by tax payer dollars, was unavailable to the public for recreational use and in a state of disrepair. Key elements of the facility had never been completed. The existing fields and

surrounding area were littered with debris and in need of major maintenance. The terms of the existing contracts transferred with the sale had not been enforced and payments were late or had not been made.

With the Department's assumption of management for the property came the task of addressing the previously mentioned issues, increasing public availability of the recreational amenities, convincing event organizers to return to the location for scheduled tournaments, and scheduling future events at the venue.

Description of the Program

River City Sportsplex is a 115-acre multi-sport athletic complex that is home to one of the largest pods of synthetic turf fields in the U.S. with 12 synthetic turf fields, nine of which are lit. The facility includes concessions, restrooms, a plaza, and parking to accommodate all sorts of groups at the facility. The operational overhaul began immediately upon Chesterfield County's acquisition of the property. The Department's Division of Planning and Construction Services and Parks Maintenance staff evaluated the immediate safety and maintenance issues at the facility. The District 5 Park Maintenance Manager and his staff were tasked with correcting the issues of greatest concern. That group removed tons of construction debris, trash, and other materials from the facility. Maintenance activities such as mowing, weed control, mulching, erosion control, sign maintenance, field grooming, painting, and building systems maintenance began in earnest.

In addition to the immediate maintenance and upkeep issues of the facility, several key elements of the property were left in a partially completed state at the time of the original owner's bankruptcy filing. The Department's Planning and Construction Services Division worked

closely with the County's Budget and Accounting departments to devise a plan to provide for the completion of unfinished facility components and installation of additional amenities to raise the level of citizen service and improve the overall utility of the location. In 2018 lighting, signage, and fencing is being installed to complete a group of four unfinished fields at the rear of the property. Additionally, a turn lane from the main road serving the facility has been completed. Additional landscaping projects are funded for this year. A long-term plan to install the remaining three fields originally planned for the location is in place, with completion expected by 2021.

The improvements made to the appearance and usability of the athletic complex have been well received by event organizers utilizing the facility for their tournaments. Several of these groups have extended their contracts or signed new contracts to hold their events at River City Sportsplex primarily due to the improvements in both the venue and the management of the facility by the Department.

The physical condition of the facility was not the only element of the complex that needed improvement. The management company hired by the previous owner had a haphazard system of invoicing and payment collections. At the time of acquisition over \$123,000 in contracted payments were outstanding. Event organizers were hesitant to book additional events, customer service was abysmal, and user satisfaction with the location was low. The Department's Sports Tourism and Finance divisions, in cooperation with the County Attorney's office, reviewed the contracts that had been transferred as part of the property acquisition and developed a collection schedule for the unmade payments. Contract content was evaluated and new contract documents were developed for many of the existing events. As of January 2018, there were no outstanding payments due to Chesterfield County and all monies owed were paid in accordance with the

contracts in place for the River City Sportsplex. All future events are now contracted in accordance with a new fee schedule developed by the Department and approved by the County Board of Supervisors. What had once been a hazy quagmire of incomplete payments and vague contract documents has transformed into an efficient and transparent system. An RFP for the concessions contract at the facility was conducted in 2017. As a result, a new concessionaire is now operational at the complex which has provided for increased customer service and an additional revenue stream for the County. The establishment of a sponsorship program offers area businesses an avenue to advertise their services to facility users. This has added yet another source of revenue to the site.

Under previous facility ownership, public recreational use of the facility had been limited to blocks of time assigned to recreational organizations with a formal relationship with the Parks and Recreation Department. There was no provision for public access to or use of the facility. At the insistence of the County Board of Supervisors, fields are now available for general public use whenever the facility is not scheduled. The operating hours for the facility were increased to meet public demand. Passive uses such as dog walking, running, fitness walking are encouraged. Use of the all-weather synthetic fields by local school athletic teams, athletic associations, and other groups has expanded considerably. In addition, rental of the fields by adult users and other groups has provided an additional revenue stream for the County.

Aside from the maintenance, facility construction, and financial aspects of the project, there were recreational programming and customer service issues that had to be addressed by the Department. The County provided an additional full time maintenance staff position to assist with facility upkeep, but no such provision was made for programming or facility operations. The existing Sports Tourism Coordinator and Athletics Senior Recreation Specialist adjusted the

breadth of their position duties to assume responsibility for the operation of River City Sportsplex. Part time staff were hired and trained to provide superior customer service and improve the overall visitor experience at the facility. The addition of the athletic complex management to already full schedules taxed Department staff, but through creative and dedicated work, the Department transitioned to seamless operation of both tournament and non-tournament operation of the venue.

The Department successfully assumed operational and maintenance responsibilities for River City Sportsplex only through a willingness to look beyond traditional roles and historic means of interdepartmental interaction. The acquisition of the athletic complex forced staff members to break down silos and work collaboratively across division lines to further the goals of the Department. This department-wide effort has resulted in the provision of additional recreation opportunities to the general public, the establishment of several sustainable revenue streams for the County, and the culmination of the River City Sportsplex as an industry leader in the field of sports tourism.

The Cost of the Program

Capital outlays and operating expenses for River City Sportsplex in FY17 totaled \$309,027.00. Total revenue generated at the facility exceeded expectations at \$461,816.00. While the funding required to operate the facility is substantial, the revenue generated through the multiple revenue streams in place at the location are sufficient to offset the operating costs. The County has approved additional capital improvement funds to complete the installation of fields in future years and make additional improvements to the location.

The Results/Success of the Program

The successful balance between citizen and sports tourism use resulted in a total of 523,000 visitors utilizing the complex in Fiscal Year 2017. Of that total, 190,000 of those visitors were the result of sports tourism and the remaining 333,000 were local residents. In addition, River City Sportsplex was named the busiest sports tourism destination in the metro region by the Chesterfield Observer in 2017. Community use of the facility has exceeded expectations with over 22,000 hours of recreational group, athletic team, and public use in 2017.

The influx of out of town guests to River City Sportsplex has had a tremendous impact on the local economy. In Fiscal Year 2017, tournaments at the facility generated over \$38.6 million of economic activity for Chesterfield County businesses. Regionally, River City Sportsplex had approximately \$76 million of economic impact, which generated more than \$1.4 million in direct, local tax revenue for Chesterfield County. Tournament organizers have been impressed with the improvements to the appearance and management of the facility. Lee Corrigan, President of Corrigan Sports Enterprises, has said, [River City Sportsplex] “is the premiere public venue of its kind in the Mid-Atlantic.” Pam Hixon, Founder of College Connection, stated [River City Sportsplex staff] is the BEST I’ve ever worked with.” The Department has enjoyed an increase in retention rates for tournaments. Several tournament organizers have extended their existing contracts through the year 2022 and revenue projections for future years on are track with the performance experienced in 2017.

Worthiness of Award

The Department’s ability to react quickly and think outside of traditional roles played a huge part in the success of the River City Sportsplex acquisition. Were it not for the willingness of everyone involved and staff’s creative solutions to complex problems, the outcome of the project could have been far different.

Acquisition of such a substantial asset presented both an operational and maintenance challenge for the Department. Employees at every level of the organization embraced the task and forged new alliances within the agency, broke down separations between divisions, and collaboratively created a more fully integrated system of venue management, financial oversight, construction, and facility maintenance that has spread to other areas of operation within the Department. The innovation and creativity of staff was tested as previously unforeseen challenges presented themselves. The opportunities offered by the operational overhaul of River City Sportsplex benefitted not just Departmental solidarity and cooperation, but also youth sports, the citizens of Chesterfield County, and the region as a whole.