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“One thing that happens across the board with these projects is that you get people who want to look at a little area and not look at the bigger picture,” Sarles said. “That’s happened with several areas in Parks and Rec. If it’s your passion, of course that’s where your focus is, but I think we’ve had some trouble gathering a team and leadership that really wants to look at the overall recreation issues in the community.”

In the case of the Siuslaw Vision, there were representatives from Siuslaw Youth Soccer Association (SYSA), the Mapleton swimming pool and the picklers.

Each organization was having varying levels of success, the most advanced being SYSA, which has built up a rather sizeable system of players and partnerships with educational organizations.

Still, the group of soccer volunteers have broader ambitions in mind, including creating a soccer center and hosting tournaments that could bring in players from across the country, even internationally. That’s what the picklers have in mind with their project.

“They’re not just throwing up some goal posts,” Sarles said. “They’re looking at a pretty major project.”

But these projects, different in scope and goals, were disparate, the visions too narrow.

“The energy was divided,” Sarles said.

So, the Siuslaw Vision Parks and Rec program went to the wayside.

“If you only want to do one thing, and you’re not inviting people into your fold, you’re going to fall on your face, eventually,” Beaudreau said. “You can get something going, but if you’re not including other people, your vision is going to die out. Nobody’s going to help because you’re narrow-minded. It depends on what you’re doing, but I still think it’s super sustainable if you work together and invite people in the fold.”

For these projects to really become successful, Sarles and Beaudreau believed looking at a broader project could really get the pickleball rolling again.

“I would like to see some sort of indoor recreational facility, and that’s personally as a parent of a

young child,” Sarles said. “When it starts raining, there are not a ton of indoor opportunities to burn off energy from a crazy five-year-old. I grew up in a large city, and our rec centers had ceramics classes, painting, drawing, fencing, karate.”

She also envisioned a center that could host child care, while Beaudreau saw possibilities for bringing education from schools and the library system into the mix.

Commerce could also take off. Food kiosks, like a juice bar, could be introduced. Even the local farmers market could get involved, selling directly to a “local produce only” health conscious restaurant.

There could even be a satellite clinic that could help treat sports related injuries, among other needs.

“If you’re inclusive on all of those areas, you can get more people doing more cool things and having a really cool experience and having an educational experience,” Beaudreau said.

Going big would also get big funding, Sarles suggested.

“For example, someone threw out that maybe we could get a health improvement district and look at it from a healthcare point of view, instead of pure recreation,” she said. “That changes how we can look at that program. We could go through different healthcare providers, different grants.”

But getting to that grand vision will take some organization and leadership from the community — and thus far, no vocal leaders have come to the forefront.

CHAMPIONS

“We’re looking for community champions,” Sarles said. “We’re wanting volunteers who have a passion for a particular area and can jump in, gather a team and make something happen. That’s how the farmers market and our cooking skills education programs were both started. Someone saw that need in the community and decided to do it.”

Finding these people can be difficult, however. The picklers were finding issues gathering those with the know-how and wherewithal to take on even their own, smaller project. But with so much public interest in these types of programs, why is it so difficult to find people willing to take the reins?

“That’s a loaded question,” Beau-

dreau said. “There’s a lot of factors. They work full time.”

“Or they volunteer at 10 other places and tend to do everything,” Sarles added. “They burn out.”

Sarles and Beaudreau believe there are large pockets of individuals out there with the willingness, knowledge and connections to get these types of programs off the ground, but their voices aren’t being heard.

“That’s a challenge because we want more people involved,” Sarles said. “One phrase I liked from our gathering was the concept of ‘profound inclusion.’ We’re wanting to make sure we’re talking not just to the usual suspects that are involved in everything in the community, but the people who may not be hanging out at the coffee shop or the library or involved in volunteering.”

To get a recreation center going, organizations need to organize, plan, and then search out new voices to help out.

At that point, the team would have to decide to move forward, including designing the facility, settling on a place to build it and finalizing what will go in it. For something as potentially massive as a community rec center, it may seem like an overwhelming task. The solution to that is to take it slow, with the help of as many people as possible.

“Take the bigger picture and make it doable,” Beaudreau said. “Break it into steps.”

Sarles used the newly developed Florence Farmers Market as an example, an organization that grew out of Siuslaw Vision.

In that case, the market had different teams take on aspects of the project. One team talked to local farmers about getting enough produce. Another team took on advertising, while another looked into hiring a market manager.

“It’s just breaking it into steps to see exactly what is happening. You have things you get to check off and you feel like you’re moving — and that prevents burnout,” Sarles said.

But all the planning in the world won’t mean anything if funding for

the project, along with a reasonable budget, is not in place. This has been one issue that the Mapleton swimming pool has faced.

“The problem with that is it’s not energy efficient and they were spending \$8,000 a month just on heating, which didn’t even include staffing and maintenance,” Sarles said. “It was just their energy bills. That’s their challenge.”

While many organizations look to grants to start projects, they are generally limited to specific projects. In addition, it will take long-term funding through endowments to make it sustainable — “No foundation wants to fund you forever,” Sarles said.

Of course, there’s always taxes which could be used to fund a recreation project.

“People want these things, but are they willing to fund them and support them?” Sarles asked. “It’s really easy to say, ‘I want this, but just don’t raise my taxes.’”

But the more people get involved and search for funding sources, the less likely the need for a tax burden.

“I think that the more you can involve different people who invest in something, they’re more likely to value it and use it. I do think that the community investment piece is important,” she said.

It’s also important to expand such projects beyond city limits. While many recreation groups go straight to the City of Florence to help fund their dream projects, the city’s resources are limited in the best of circumstances.

“If you’re limiting everything to just the city, you’re missing a lot of people who are integral to our community,” Sarles said. “The people that we know and interact with don’t necessarily live in Florence. There are tons of people in Mapleton, Swishome, Deadwood and Dunes City. There’s people in unincorporated pockets of the region.”

“And many people come here to visit, shop and work,” Beaudreau added.

Getting community support can also help with “collective impact,” which funding organizations look

for when deciding a project’s worth. The larger the group of people working on a project that affects a broader population of people, the more likely it is to get investors interested.

Once an organization, funding structure and overall plan is put into place, proposals can be given to a city or county to create a partnership in furthering the project. Governments are more apt to take on a venture if the legwork and planning are done by those who already have a proven passion.

“The government helps make a foundation to help everyone do things with, but it’s the people that make a community livable,” Sarles said.

And it’s livability that makes projects like a recreation center so vital to a community like the Siuslaw.

“Do it”

Sarles pointed to ongoing complaints from young professionals that resources such as childcare recreation and options for food are limited in the community, which can scare off potential residents, including doctors and business owners.

“To have our community be able to survive in the next 50 years, we need to build a good foundation for professionals to be able to stay here,” Beaudreau said. “For the younger people, what do we want when we’re older? We want healthcare, we want more job opportunities. We may not go to the doctor frequently now, but 10, 20 years from now, we will want to go to the clinic and get an appointment right away with our doctor. We can make changes now to help people who are currently needing help or services, and make it continue into the future.”

The future is what the Siuslaw Vision is most concerned about. While many of the projects it is working on take a relatively short period to accomplish, like the Farmer’s Market, Vision is also ready to help out with more ambitious goals, like a recreation center.

The Vision has multiple resources, including partnerships with

state and local government agencies, schools, the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce and business generating projects such as the Oregon Regional Accelerator and Innovation Network (RAIN).

It can also look at other projects in the community, and match organizations with each other to ensure a greater chance of success.

“We don’t need four different groups trying to accomplish the same thing,” Sarles said. “Visioning is about trying to build all those players and attempting to get everyone to work together.”

Siuslaw Vision has also been working with other communities around the state, recently hosting a statewide event in Florence to listen to challenges other cities have been facing and the solutions that are being implemented to fix them.

“Even though each community is different and has different needs, we can still learn from each other and have a resource,” Sarles said.

In that session, the Vision found the Siuslaw region is not unique in its challenges, as other communities face housing shortages, employment difficulties and issues with getting sustainable projects off the ground. However, through listening to each other and building off ideas, the communities are finding unique ways to create a livable and sustainable future.

But to make that happen, members of communities need to band together and make it happen.

“If you want to do something, do it,” Beaudreau said. “If you have an idea, think of ways you can connect with your neighbors, family and friends to make something happen.”

Whether or not the picklers, along with any other community interest group that wants to put their stamp on the Siuslaw region and make it sustainable for generations to come, band together to make their dream sustainable is unknown.

The pickleball is now in their court.

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