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Dear Girl Scout Members,

In fall 2016, Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania (GSHPA) initiated a multiyear, council-wide, strategic evaluation of our outdoor programs and properties. The Long-Range Property and Program Planning Committee (LRPPPC) was tasked with developing a girl-focused property and program vision as part of our long-range planning initiative, *Her Vision of Tomorrow*. This vision will promote the mission of Girl Scouts through engaging programs and identifying the best use of our properties to meet the program needs of today's and tomorrow's girls.

### **PLANNING PROCESS**

Using a nationally recommended review process, GSHPA developed a dynamic, 15 person committee of community experts, volunteers and board members, who conducted a thorough analysis of programs and properties. This comprehensive approach utilized quantitative and qualitative research methods, including surveys and town hall meetings to collect feedback from girls, volunteers and families, outside research and planning expertise, online webinars, and a variety of other data collection points that have helped us chart a course for a sustainable future.

As the LRPPPC completes this review, it is now time to communicate our reasoning and recommendations around outdoor programs and camps prior to a full GSHPA board review in November 2017. Since our formation, the LRPPPC has been thoughtful and diligent in our goal to ensure that recommendations will position the council to provide girls, leaders and families an optimal Girl Scout experience, one that creates lasting memories for girls and empowers them to develop meaningful skills to carry with them to adulthood.

### **INITIAL FINDINGS**

The LRPPPC's mission is challenging and the parameters are sobering. When the committee began its work, we did not know much of what we now know. Our research revealed vital information about Girl Scout preferences for outdoor experiences; parent and troop leader perceptions about the council's ability to provide outdoor experiences and key services; the condition of camp properties; current and potential future costs for the council to retain, improve and maintain council properties; and the opportunities and benefits of partnerships with other Girl Scout councils and outdoor experience locations.

Highlights of our findings include:

### **CAMP UTILIZATION**

- Camp is utilized by girls and troops about 20.1 percent of the time that it is available, which is primarily during spring and fall weekends, and throughout the summer months. When you factor in the nearly 535 girls who attend resident camp, Camp Small Valley has the highest camp utilization rate, while resident camp offered at Camp Archbald will serve only 278 girls through its residential camp offering in summer 2017.
- In addition to analyzing the utilization of camps, it was equally important to understand girl membership trends in our council. In 2013, girl membership was 24,207 members. Five years later, our girl membership has declined to approximately 17,000, representing a nearly 30 percent loss of girls. This trend impacts the financial position of the council and also requires us to evaluate how we allocate financial resources to serve all girls in our membership.

### **INPUT FROM GIRLS, PARENTS, AND ADULT VOLUNTEERS**

As part of the process, we engaged an outside consultant to facilitate a conversation with girl members and parents about their wants and desires from Girl Scouting, particularly as it relates to an outdoor experience.

In May 2017, eight focus groups consisting of Girl Scouts and parents revealed two critical findings. First, all participants expressed a desire for an ***increase in outdoor and camping experiences, but revealed that these experiences need not be delivered exclusively at Girl Scout facilities.*** Second, a majority of adult participants shared a ***strong concern about the organization's long-term sustainability and visibility.***

The research recommends the following strategic adjustments be made:

- Increase well-designed outdoor and camping experiences
- Provide richer training resources and support for troop leaders
- Design communications to celebrate achievement, support recruitment and share good news
- Expand STEM offerings to full geography of the council
- Develop resources to support the needs of rural troops
- Reduce cookie-cutter programming and events
- Establish a broader partnership to foster a richer Girl Scouting experience

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

As we studied Girl Scout councils across the United States, we learned that on average, a council maintains about one camp per 10,000 members. The Girl Scouts of North East Ohio council, for example, serves 30,000 girl members and maintains three camps, plus a single cabin housed within the Cleveland Metroparks system. Many councils across the United States are actively divesting of camps to re-allocate resources to provide more robust and varied outdoor programs.

We also have begun to develop a deeper relationship with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to understand how we can better tap into Pennsylvania's park, forest and trail systems. We have learned from conversations with members that many of our troop leaders currently use the DCNR system, especially in the North and Northeastern portion of our council. Feedback from both adults and girl members indicates that a drive of up to 1.5 hours for an outdoor experience is an acceptable travel distance from a Girl Scout-owned camp. According to DCNR, state park services are available within a 25-minute drive from nearly 90 percent of our members.

## **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

We have spent a considerable amount of time gathering data on alternative revenue sources to help diversify and stabilize the funding of our outdoor programs and camps. We have explored the potential for timbering, gas leases, selling part of parcels, and the income from the possible sale of camps.

While there is potential for revenue from timbering portions of three GSHPA camps, those revenue sources do not create the long-term sustainable revenue needed to support operating and capital requirements to ensure our current and future Girl Scouts have an exceptional outdoor experience. The process the LRPPPC has completed resulted in solid recommendations that balance the capital required to operate the camps safely and sustainably against our responsibility to the long term financial health of the organization.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- An early recommendation related to Camp Furnace Hills, which sustained significant damage during the February 2017 storm, will be made to the board of directors for a decision in August to align with the timeline set by the council's insurance provider. Given past experience, we know a final decision will take several years to implement. The LRPPPC will recommend in November that the board of directors re-invest a portion of the income from the sale of any property, in the short-term and long-term program and facility improvements at remaining camps.

- **Share your input.** Included with this letter is a high-level summary of our findings. Please take time to thoughtfully review and share your comments between now and Friday, August 4, 2017, through the portal on the GSHPA website ([www.gshpa.org](http://www.gshpa.org)). Consider what the Girl Scouting experience should look like for today's girls as well as future girl members. Provide us feedback by visiting <http://www.gshpa.org/en/our-council/LRPP.html>.

We appreciate your comments. Feedback will be shared with the Long-Range Property and Program Planning Committee and reflected back to the full membership.

Yours in Girl Scouting,



Kathy McCorkle  
Committee Chair  
Long-Range Property and Program Planning Committee  
Girl Scouts in the Heart of Pennsylvania



**Committed to helping today's girls become tomorrow's leaders in the following counties:**

Adams, Carbon, Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Luzerne, Lycoming, Mifflin, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Pike, Schuylkill, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Union, Wayne, Wyoming and York