



Friends of Bitsy Grant Tennis Strategic Plan

January 2012

Background/History

The Bitsy Grant Tennis Center is a historic tennis facility located in Atlanta Memorial Park. Famous patrons have included Arthur Ashe, Tony Trabert, Chuck McKinley, and Charlie Pasarell, as well as local greats like Ned Neely, Horace Reid, and Crawford Henry.

Volunteers have been an important part of the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center since its inception in 1952. When the tennis center fell into disrepair in the 1970s, the community formed the Bitsy Grant Tennis Association, Inc. to improve it. That group eventually became the Friends of Bitsy Grant Tennis (FBGT), an independent 501(c)(3) that maintains the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center in collaboration with the City of Atlanta.

For the past five years (July 2006 to July 2011), FBGT focused its energies on a major renovation of the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center facility. The renovation required a capital campaign to raise the more than \$1.3 million needed, \$540,000 of which came from the City of Atlanta Parks Department. The result was a beautifully updated facility for both Bitsy Grant tennis players and the broader community to enjoy.

Following the successful renovation, the FBGT Board engaged Cindy Cheatham, Senior Consultant and VP Consulting Services of the Georgia Center for Nonprofits, to help the Board review its mission and focus. From September 2011 to January 2012, Cheatham gathered information from key stakeholders to guide the Board's decision-making. This process included a survey completed by approximately 90 FBGT members, and consultation with a 10-member focus group consisting of long-time, active members and tennis players. Below are the results.

Revised Mission Statement

Friends of Bitsy Grant Tennis partners with the City of Atlanta to promote the game of tennis, and sustain and enhance Bitsy Grant's historic public tennis and recreational park.

Friends of Bitsy Grant Tennis Center SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Location

Bitsy Grant is easily accessible by car from many Atlanta neighborhoods. It's also located on the Atlanta Beltline, which will connect Bitsy Grant to 40 new and existing parks on the 33-mile trail system.

Tennis Courts

Bitsy Grant boasts 23 state-of-the-art tennis courts (13 hydro-clay courts & 10 hard courts), enough to host high-level tennis tournaments. Six of the clay courts and all of the hard courts are lighted for night play, with plans to install lights on the remaining seven courts in 2012.

Varied Funding Sources

Specific funding sources are an annual gifts campaign, a capital campaign, and special events like the Gala and the Bitsy Open. Special events are generally well-attended and lucrative; for example, FBGT hosted its first Gala in 2009, an event that raised close to \$70,000. And in 2011, approximately 240 people attended the Bitsy Open.

Brand

The Bitsy Grant Tennis Center attracts tournaments, and has received recognition from the United States Tennis Association (USTA) of Georgia. Specific USTA Georgia

awards given to Bitsy Grant Tennis Center include the Best Adult Tournament Award in 2010 (for the GA/State Adult Senior Open) and the 2009 Member Organization of the Year.

Supportive Membership

FBGT membership has grown steadily over the past few years and now boasts more than 1,200 Friends. Of this group, 425 (35%) have financially supported Bitsy Grant. In a recent survey given to members and patrons, a significant percentage of survey participants expressed willingness to give either time or money to the Center.

In a recent survey, member interest in supporting FBGT was high, totaling 88% of those surveyed. Twenty percent (20%) were willing to volunteer labor/time, and 32% were willing to make a small financial contribution. Another 32% were willing to give either time or money to help make a small project happen, and 3% were willing to give a substantial amount of money toward a worthwhile project.

Community

Bitsy Grant Tennis Center provides low-cost tennis court access for the surrounding community.

Weaknesses

Inadequate Financial Accountability

Survey participants expressed a desire to know how donated funds were spent, to improve financial accountability and increase the likelihood of future donations.

Opportunities

Strong Management Partner in United Tennis Management (UTM)

UTM has a reputation for running centers with great professionalism and for growing programs. UTM also demonstrated great

initiative in bringing in programming like the Cadillac promotional event, and in working with the City of Atlanta on improvement projects like the installation of lights on the remaining clay courts.

Downtown National Tournament

Since the Atlanta Tennis Championship (ATC) will move downtown in 2012, Bitsy Grant has the opportunity to partner with the ATC to promote its mission.

Bobby Jones Golf Course and Park Conservancy

The Bobby Jones Golf Course and Park Conservancy is currently creating a strategic plan to enhance the golf course and clubhouse. This presents an opportunity for FBGT to collaborate with Bobby Jones Golf Course and

Atlanta Memorial Park to create a master plan that includes Bitsy Grant Tennis Center.

The PATH Foundation

The PATH Foundation has plans to create a path connecting the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center to the Atlanta Beltline. This will bring more people to Bitsy and provide enhanced recreational opportunities. It may also position Bitsy to tap into support or money aimed at broader recreational appeal.

Threats

Donation-Dependent Revenue Stream

Although tennis court fees generate some revenue for the Center, the Friends rely heavily on donations to support its programs (the mean member gift is \$120 per year). Donation amounts are difficult to predict, and a donation-dependent revenue stream is hard to budget for.

Volunteer-Based Organization

The Center relies heavily on volunteer involvement to continue its operations. As with donations, volunteer involvement can fluctuate and is difficult to predict.

Potential UTA Withdrawal

If the Universal Tennis Academy (UTA) withdraws from the Center, there could be a significant decrease in patrons.

Bobby Jones Golf Course and Park Conservancy

If Bobby Jones Golf Course and Park Conservancy develops plans that encroach on the Bitsy Grant Tennis Center, it may limit the Center's potential to expand. Fortunately, the Chair of the FBGT sits on the Bobby Jones Golf Course Board, and can help foster cooperation and keep in close communication with that group to ensure a mutually beneficial agenda for the Golf Course and the Tennis Center.

Infrastructure

Although the clay courts attract tennis players, they are expensive to maintain. The clubhouse also needs significant upgrades to attract community members and transform it into a multi-use space.

Friends of Bitsy Grant Tennis Center Survey Analysis

Survey Participant Overview

The overwhelming majority (97%) of survey participants were players at Bitsy Grant, and nearly half (46%) were donors. Over half (54%) reported playing at least weekly, and another 20% play semi-regularly. While only 27% of participants live in the immediate neighborhood, at least 70% live nearby. Another 30% of respondents chose "other" and reported commuting long distances to play at Bitsy

Grant or even living out of state; 20 participants skipped the question altogether, indicating that a considerable percentage of participants may not identify with either living or working nearby.

Seventy-four percent (74%) had an alternative place to play tennis that is nearly as convenient as Bitsy Grant. They reported being drawn to Bitsy Grant for a number of reasons, with the most highly reported being:

- ALTA, USTA, and UTA presence
- clay courts and good court condition
- people and sense of community
- personal, family, and neighborhood tradition/history

Survey Results

Participants rated court enhancements as the most beneficial result of the recent improvements, as well as the most important priority going forward. In fact, **66% of participants indicated that 50% or more of resources should be allocated toward court maintenance enhancements** (versus landscape/outdoor enhancements, court additions, or facility additions/enhancements).

Below is the full list of enhancements discussed with survey participants; participants rated their interest in specific enhancements from 1 (“not at all interested”) to 5 (“great idea; this is a must”):

Enhancement	Average Ranking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancements to the courts (fixing cracks, more maintenance, etc.) 	4.2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancements to the bleachers or additional viewing areas (e.g. covered hang-out areas between courts) 	3.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating additional shady areas by planting trees or adding court awnings • Enhancing the aesthetics of the area surrounding the courts (e.g. landscaping, fixing walkways, improved maintenance, etc.) • Better and more extensive court lighting (e.g. lighting of clay courts and/or changing of lights to environmental to save energy and also be low-light emitting) 	3.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting more tennis tournaments or tennis events (e.g. round robins, etc.) 	3.4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making some of the courts indoor for more year-round or rainy day play • Fixing and/or adding drinking fountains 	3.3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclosing lower hard courts in fencing for greater control and potential addition of lower restrooms on courts 	3.1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further enhancements to the tennis center building (furniture, art, other additions to better enable events/parties) 	2.8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional community/event space such as a permanent outdoor structure for parties or gatherings (e.g. a concert/gathering pavilion) • Additional quickstart courts for youth 10 & under • Holding more community events (e.g. charity fundraisers, family festivals) 	2.5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional outdoor courts (regular – not quickstart) • Hire a professional referee in order to continue to hold major tournaments 	2.2

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adding a playground area near courts | 1.8 |
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In addition to the above enhancements, participants suggested creating additional security and safer parking lots, a recycling program, and more membership incentives.

2012 Goals & Priorities

Based on the results of the survey, SWOT analysis, and two planning meetings, FBGT will focus on the following goals for 2012:

Long-Term Master Plan

Create a long-term master plan that will enable FBGT to:

- Create a sustainable 501(c)(3) organization with a strong board, and enough staff and volunteers to fulfill its obligations.
- Maintain the tennis park (the newly renovated facility, tennis courts and surrounding areas), as well as improve upon it (improve courts, landscaping, spectator seating, etc.).

FBGT should research how similar groups (e.g., the Piedmont Park Conservancy) carried out master planning, and form a master plan task force for Bitsy. The resulting master plan should create a prioritized list of future improvements and maintenance concerns, and include the **Board Development & Management Plan** and **Annual Budget & Financial Plan**, both detailed below.

Board Development & Management Plan

Create a board development & management plan (as part of the Long-Term Master Plan) that will:

- Outline the right structure for board leadership and committees.
- Define clear roles and responsibilities for board members, staff, and volunteers. This includes identifying who coordinates partnership with City of Atlanta, UTM, etc., to complete the current build-out and future maintenance plans (hard courts resurfacing, future clay courts work).
- Create a process to recruit strong candidates.
- Identify additional volunteer roles needed, and create a volunteer recruitment strategy.
- Develop processes to evaluate the board's work, including an annual survey of FBGT supporters.
- Develop conflict-of-interest policy and have all Board members complete this required 501(c)(3) document.

Annual Budget & Long-Term Financial Plan

Create an annual budget & long-term financial plan (as part of the Long-Term Master Plan) that will:

- Educate and involve the entire Board on FBGT's financial situation.
- Develop a viable, forward-looking fiscal year budget for the organization.

- Compare ongoing costs (paid staff, contractors, eTapestry, website costs, telephone, accounting/audit), and forecast income.
- Ensure restricted funds are held in proper accounts with spending controls (e.g., funds donated to the building fund should only be used for building).
- Develop a long-term financial plan which includes budgeting for current annual operation costs, as well as the creation of a maintenance endowment fund to pay for future renovations or enhancements.

Events

Plan and carry out all 2012 tennis center events, including the 60th anniversary celebration and the Pro Am tournament (hosted in memory of Jerry Kirk).

Important Partnerships

Work with Bobby Jones Golf Course and Park Conservancy and Atlanta Memorial Park to create mutually beneficial strategic plans. Continue successful relationship with UTM for programming, improvements, and customer service support.

Tennis Center Maintenance & Enhancements

Complete the building and minor finishes (if not included in current contract). Install lighting on remaining courts. Use master plan to determine further maintenance and enhancement priorities.

Priority Long-Term Enhancements

Courts

Consider expanding the number of courts. Also consider adding indoor tennis courts for players during inclement weather. Look into partnering with a university or other organization that needs indoor court access.

Spectator Seating

Survey participants rated improvements to spectator seating as their second highest priority after court improvements. Specific improvements mentioned included adding more shaded and covered areas, and replacing the rails with a design that improved sight lines.

Aesthetic Improvements

The third most important enhancements cited by survey participants were aesthetic improvements to the tennis center, courts, and surrounding areas. Specific improvements include better landscaping, improved walkways, and timely maintenance of existing structures.