



# Property Committee Vision, Duties, and Membership

The Property Committee was established by the Board of Directors of the Girl Scouts of Minnesota and Wisconsin River Valleys in 2010. Its charge is to provide ongoing oversight of the Council's property portfolio.

Council properties make it possible for girls to participate in creative and educational experiences, as well as to be challenged and have fun in an all-girl environment. The council objective is to optimize the property portfolio so that girl members have access to an exciting leadership experience that provides resources and skill development so they may become strong women leaders.

The Property Committee makes recommendations to the Board of Directors with a strategic focus on a long-range property plan that will meet the council's future programmatic goals and interests of girls, while balancing environmental issues and the council's ability to finance and maintain property assets.

## Vision

Provide facilities that support the Girl Scout mission and program, the outdoor experience, and connect Girl Scouts to the local community by engaging girls in a progression of relevant, high quality activities.

These facilities will be:

- Safe
- Affordable
- Sustainable
- Used year-round
- Flexible

## Guiding Principles

The committee's work will be guided by the following principles:

- Outdoor Program participant and market research
- Financial data
- National trends and best practices
- Input from members through Town Hall meetings and surveys

## Duties

The committee will:

- Conduct an annual review of property-related program needs
- Review and analyze utilization statistics
- Conduct maintenance/capital audit and recommend investment needs
- Develop an annual set of recommended actions to the Board of Directors for consideration.

## Membership

- Sarah Andersen, *chair*
- John Bina
- Karen Carlson
- Nancy Dana
- Don Lee
- Norma Porter
- Mary Selby
- Barb Shofner
- Debra Tenold
- Amy Kroll, *ex officio*
- Tisha Bolger, *staff liaison*

# Property Committee Timeline

## October 2013

- Convene new committee. Review current status.

## November 2013

- Review 2009 and 2012 recommendations and report on Land Use Master Plan/Assessment and Property Evaluation

## *January 2014*

- Define vision for future of Outdoor Programs and Property.
- Annual Meeting Property Report to membership.

## *February 2014*

- Capital, Utilization and Financial Review

## *March 2014*

- Program Overview Report on trends at current program sites.

## *April 2014*

- Board direction for committee consideration at Board meeting.
- Conference calls with Norma Porter, Wendy Friede, and Sarah Anderson, along with staff Tisha Bolger and Scott Schufman

## *May 2014*

- Design member market research. (Parent Guardian survey; Girl Survey; Volunteer Survey) Set criteria for recommendations.
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## *June 2014*

- Promote the Lakamaga Town Hall meeting with delegates and members.

## *July 2014*

- Review preliminary recommendations with Finance Committee for FY 2015 budget. Continue with member engagement.

## *August 2014*

- Prepare for member engagement events. Reviewed Service Center Proposal developed by the Board of Directors in June 2014.
- Committee and board members toured Singing Hills, Whispering Hills, Lakamaga, Edith Mayo, and Elk River camps. The focus of the tour was to understand and appreciate the general overall condition of the property, facilities and program areas, and to visually evaluate the assets of the property and the challenges of the property.

### *September 2014*

- Host member engagement events at 13 Service Unit and Town Hall meetings that were attended by 245 participants. Member survey opened and promoted.

### *October 2014*

- Review and analyze community member feedback. (Survey executive summary; Girl survey results; Volunteer survey results; Parent/Guardian survey results; Town Hall feedback summary)
- Begin drafting preliminary property recommendations.

### *November 2014*

- Prioritize committee recommendations and finalize document.

### *December 2014*

- Present FY15 preliminary property recommendations to Board of Directors.

### *January 2015*

- Present FY15 property recommendations to delegates and membership at the Annual Meeting; adjust or refine recommendations as needed.

### *February 2015*

- Present final FY15 property recommendations to the Board of Directors for consideration and action.

## **Property Committee Recommendations**

- Update: The Board of Directors voted at its February 21 meeting to approve property recommendations.
- Service Center and Retail Recommendations
- Camp Property Recommendations
- Other Recommendations
- 2015 Annual Meeting Presentation

## **Service Center and Retail Recommendations**

Since 2007, River Valleys has decommissioned or transferred four camps, yet has retained all service centers and retail outlets (though some retail is offered on limited dates/hours). The current portfolio of owned office, service center, and retail space prevents River Valleys from responding quickly to changing business pressures or shifts in demographics and consumer behavior.

Also since 2007, girl membership has decreased from 50,000 to 36,000 and council staff FTEs from 180 to 110. In addition, retail sales have declined 25% in the last four years.

The council merger, smaller council staff size, retail sales decline, and lower girl membership have led to service center and retail redundancy, as well as excess capacity in office space. Therefore, the committee recommends that River Valleys:

- **Transition from owned to leased retail locations**, modeled after the successful Mankato store. Leased shops in higher-traffic shopping locations provide better customer service and allow more cost-effective and flexible management of the retail service to members.
- **Sell the Northfield and Redwood Falls council-owned buildings.** Retail traffic does not justify current operating costs to own these properties.
- Explore **mobile shops or other alternate delivery of retail services to areas located at a distance from bricks-and-mortar shops.** Among volunteers responding to the Property Survey, 80% report they have visited a council shop to make a retail purchase at least once in the past 12 months, but only half of volunteer respondents have visited a council office to speak with a staff member.
- Support the **consolidation of administrative functions and staff currently housed in Brooklyn Center into the St. Paul Service Center** to increase efficiency of staff and reduce travel expenses. The committee understands this may require transitioning the St. Paul retail store to a leased location. The committee also supports **flexible use plans for the Brooklyn Center Service Center**, such as warehouse and/or retail fulfillment center to support retail and equipment checkout.

### *Service Center/Retail Change Business Impact*

The shift from owned properties to leased and mobile services will allow River Valleys to reach girls in a broader range of communities and incorporate a variety of types of facilities and services. The consolidation of administrative staff will create efficiencies of time, travel, and travel expenses while optimizing staff time and collaboration.

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## **Camp Property Recommendations**

Outdoor opportunities are an essential part of the Girl Scout experience, and River Valleys is fortunate to have varied facilities that allow us to develop and offer outdoor programs. However, as girl membership, percent of girl members attending resident camp (from 11.3% or 5,026 girls in FY12 to 10.3% or 3,705 girls in FY14), and cookie program revenue has declined, it is imperative that we closely analyze information to make strategic decisions about investments in these properties.

Location ranked among least important factors in choosing a summer program. Schedule and type of programs offered were consistently rated as most important to River Valleys' parent and volunteer stakeholders. Although a majority (80%) of volunteers report they travel less than 30 miles to a shop or service center, nearly half are willing to travel further than that — 1 to 2 hours — to reach a River Valleys resident camp. Therefore, the committee recommends that River Valleys:

- **Invest in Edith Mayo to develop it as an urban camp.** The Edith Mayo Lodge will mark its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2016. The Rochester area, our jurisdiction's third largest city, is exploding with growth and investment. The 40 acres of Girl Scouts property there can — with appropriate investment — provide a strong base of support for service to girls in that region. The committee supports FY15 investment and long-term growth planning for Edith Mayo so that those facilities can support girl program, events, and camps (potentially both day and overnight camps).
- **Maintain Camps Lakamaga and Elk River as core four-season camp properties.** Lakamaga and Elk River make up 70% of all camp utilization. Lakamaga enjoys prime lakeshore facilities on Big Marine Lake, a variety of four-season accommodations, significant rental activity, and is located close to a major population center. Elk River is the most updated of the River Valleys properties, and includes an equestrian facility, sand-bottom swimming pond, and multiple four-season buildings and accommodations. It is also located near a major population center and enjoys significant rental activity. These properties should be maintained and their utilization maximized.
- **Maintain Singing Hills as a core three-season camp.** Singing Hills lacks year-round facilities, and its highest use is in summer, spring, and fall.
- **Diversify rental revenue and opportunities to increase revenue.** Compress Girl Scout council programming at resident camps to a six-week schedule to allow for market-rate rentals for two prime season weeks. Northwoods has high potential for non-Girl Scout long-term rental and the outdoor program offerings there can be compressed into a shorter season. Compressing the Singing Hills camp season by one week to allow for outside/market-rate rental during the prime summer season is also recommended.
- **Decommission Whispering Hills** with the intent to sell the property through the Trust for Public Land. Flood and safety risks — combined with deferred maintenance dating back to 2001 — would cost \$3.2 million to abate and upgrade. The Trust for Public Land would broker a market-value sale that would increase

the River Valley's camp property endowment while protecting the land as a public natural resource.

- **Negotiate positive terms with the Met Council for Lockeslea** with a possible lease-back option for Girl Scout use. The Met Council's long-range capital plans for the region include building a new sewer lift station where the sewer crosses the Mississippi. They have identified Camp Lockeslea as one of the locations for this improvement and have the ability to exercise eminent domain to complete the project.

### *Camp Properties Changes Business Impact*

It is not easy to consider decommissioning or selling a camp property, and these recommendations were considered very seriously and thoughtfully. They represent the changes we think will make the biggest impact to River Valleys' future strength. The proceeds from any potential sale will bolster the property endowment fund, and the operating expenses, depreciation, and other expenses associated with those properties can be reinvested in delivering the mission.

The significant new investment in Edith Mayo facilities and the continued operation in Lakamaga, Singing Hills, Northwoods, and Elk River called for in these recommendations allow us to continue to improve, enhance, and grow our programming and service to girls through diverse locations, facilities, and amenities. The potential revenue opportunities that prime-week rentals may produce can also help offset some of the cost of providing subsidized outdoor programming.

### **Other Recommendations**

The property committee has these further recommendations for consideration, raised through the course of its evaluation phases and member engagement strategies.

- Explore fundraising for monetary and in-kind gifts for all approved capital improvements.
- Revise rental policies and procedures to increase utilization and revenue.
- Develop partnerships with neighboring councils and other youth-serving organizations, churches, or outdoor program service providers to support troops and members developing and executing outdoor program activities. This could include identifying locations in certain geographic areas and pursuing partnerships or reciprocity and/or sharing such information with members.