INTRODUCTION

Parks and recreation systems are known to provide a critical role in transforming cities into vibrant, healthy communities. Parks provide opportunities to improve physical and mental health, a place to meet up with family and friends, or reconnect with nature. Beyond delivering high-quality recreation opportunities, park and recreation systems play a critical role in protecting and celebrating the environment through the conservation of public lands, investing in green infrastructure, and advocating for proactive management of land and water resources.

Why Do We Need a Recreation and Park System Plan?

Much has changed since the 1997 Ten-Year Park Improvement Plan was implemented. Brooklyn Park is now the sixth largest city in the state of Minnesota, with a population of 81,460 (2016). The City is expected to exceed a population of 95,000 by the year 2030. Brooklyn Park is one of the most diverse cities in Minnesota, with over 50 percent of our population being persons of color, 20 percent born outside of the US, and 25 percent of our residents speaking a language other than English at home.

As Brooklyn Park is getting close to being fully developed; now is the time to evaluate if open land needs to be identified for future parks and recreation facilities. To stay relevant to our changing community, it is important to assess the current needs and interests of the community. The Recreation and Parks System Plan process is built on the priorities identified in the 2012 Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the Brooklyn Park 2025 Community Plan.

The 2012 Park Master Plan provided a good overview and direction for the recreation and parks system. However, the plan did not identify where within the parks system the City should reinvest or what specific types of facilities should be developed. To move forward on any of these efforts, the City needed to initiate more input from the community and stakeholders on what specific facilities, amenities, and locations should be considered for accommodating new or updated facilities.

What Does this System Plan Include?

This 10-Year System Plan has engaged our community, particularly our multi-cultural community to address equity issues within the system. This System Plan also continues to build on the information and recommendations of the 2012 Recreation and Parks Master Plan and incorporates Brooklyn Park 2025 goals, along with the following initiatives:

» Reaffirms community priorities and identifies current gaps in the system;
» Identifies opportunities for development or redevelopment within all 60 parks in the system to ensure equitable distribution and access to facilities and services throughout the community;
» Validates priority trail system enhancements and gaps as identified within the currently proposed Brooklyn Park Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan, along with other emerging connectivity needs;
» Identifies specific locations within the community that would best accommodate improved or expanded amenities and special use facilities;
» Identifies specific natural areas within the system to be proactively managed; and
» Identifies specific properties within the City as inholdings for future park land acquisition and/or potential land to sell.
OUR EXISTING SYSTEM

Brooklyn Park has a well-established parks and trails system comprised of 53 miles of trails, 60 parks with more than 2,000 acres of land containing more than 400 amenities including park shelters, playgrounds, athletic fields and environmental areas. It also includes the following special use facilities:

» Brookland Golf Park
» Edinburgh USA Golf Course
» Community Activity Center
» Zanewood Recreation Center
» Eidem Homestead Historical Farm

Other notable and unique features within the park system include:

» The first and only dedicated competitive wheelchair softball field in the five-state area that includes an adjacent all-inclusive playground
» Skate park facility
» Off leash dog parks
» Community gardens
» Disc golf
» Fishing pond

Prior planning and community foresight resulted in a park system that ensures all residents have convenient access to parks, 95 percent of neighborhoods are within half mile radius (approx. 10-minute walk) of a park. Together the parks, trail system, specialized facilities, regional amenities, and proximity to the Mississippi River add to the unique character and richness of our parks system that exists today. Our parks system is adequate and meets the needs of many user groups, but it could be even better. There are still gaps within the system, park amenities and facilities in decline, and equity issues to be addressed.

This will require the City to reinvest in parks and trail systems to improve the quality of existing infrastructure, address changing needs and trends, and reaffirm a sense of pride in the community about the benefits parks and trails provide for improving the quality of life for all residents.
How Do We Compare?

After comparing Brooklyn Park to six other representative sized communities, many of the benchmarking categories for comparing number of parks, total parkland acreage, and total miles of trails were all in the median range with other communities. The only category where the City did not compare favorably with other communities was accommodations for splash pad or interactive water fountain facilities which were present in five of the six inventoried communities.

Current Planning Efforts

As part of the 2012 Recreation and Parks Master Plan, one of the priorities identified by the community showed a strong interest in developing more unique types of recreation facilities and programming. Over the past two years, City staff has been collaborating with stakeholders and the community to add or enhance new types of recreational programming, facilities, and trail systems. Planning efforts initiated include:

» Signature Event Area (SEA) Park Concept Plan
» Joint Master Plan for the Mississippi Gateway Regional Park and Environmental Nature Area
» Hometown Ball Field Concept at Noble Sports Park
» Eidem Homestead Historical Farm Master Plan
» Pedestrian and Bicycle Trail Master Plan
» Performing Arts Center Concept Plan

We are in an exciting period of growth and opportunity for Brooklyn Park with many new infrastructure improvements and redevelopment projects currently in the planning process. It is important that this System Plan can respond to future planned initiatives and respond to the changing needs of our community.

Relating to the Broader City Landscape

Partnerships with other agencies are being formed and being leveraged into shared use facilities and joint use projects. It is important that our future System Plan is structured to respond to these changes happening within our community. Some of the major drivers to change that will need to be integrated within the systems plan include the Blue Line Light Rail Transit line and associated station areas to be implemented along Bottineau Boulevard and West Broadway Avenue.
Currently Planned Parks

[Map of currently planned parks in Brooklyn Park, including parks like Noble Sports Park, Eide Homestead Historical Farm, and Environmental Nature Area.]

Legend:
- Current Planning Efforts
- City Park
- Three Rivers Park District
- Blue Line Light Rail Alignment
- Blue Line Light Rail Station
- School
**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**PROJECT MEETING SCHEDULE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017</th>
<th>2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APRIL</td>
<td>MAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPAC / CAT / COT MEETINGS</td>
<td>PARTNERS MEETING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY**

The overarching community engagement goal was to develop a framework that allowed community members, community organizations, and partners to engage in the planning process. This process also enhanced the community’s understanding of the existing recreation and parks system and having a voice to guide its future over the next 10 years. Community members and partners were engaged through the plan at three levels of the International Association for Public Participation’s Spectrum of Public Participation: to inform, consult, and involve. Electronic media was utilized to inform the community about the process. A 26-member Community Advisory Team (CAT), a 40-member Community Outreach Team (COT), and Youth Facilitators were actively involved in the process and helped facilitate meetings and solicit input from the community.

The community engagement process generated a total of 3701 surveys, of which 1,869 were completed online. The other 1,832 (approximately half) were conducted in person. A significant effort was made to protectively convene and reach out to the community where they were already gathering for an event. This allowed for a larger percentage of the community to be informed and engaged in the planning process and participate in survey outreach.

Here are examples of how we reached out to engage more community members:

- **Attended Rec on the Go events** at apartment communities;
- **Surveyed residents** at places like St. Alphonsus Church, Liberian Independence Day event, and apartment communities during National Night Out;
- **Conducted surveys** at two senior luncheons;
- **Student peers and fellow community members surveyed** by North Hennepin Community College students;
- **Conducted door to door surveys** and passed out flyers in the Lakeland Park neighborhood; and
- **Attended five Community-At-Large Meetings** in different neighborhoods with 140 residents attending.

- **Conducted pop-up meetings** at over 20 community events including Tater Daze, Summer Splash, Farmers Market, Dragon Star Grocery Store, the Library, etc.;
- **Contracted with community-based organization ACER** (African Career, Education and Resource, Inc.) to reach renters and immigrant residents who are traditionally under-engaged. They did this through pop-up events at 4 apartment communities, tabling at 2 events including Liberian Independence Day soccer tournament, and a family event at Central Park;
What did We Hear?

The overall cross-section of the community that replied to the survey represented the City’s demographic fairly well with over 52 percent of respondents being age 19-49 and 43 percent being people of color.

In general, the responses heard at the Community-At-Large meetings echoed or complimented the overall survey results. Survey questions and comments were asked and recorded within the following focus areas:

Barriers to Use

Survey respondents noted there being a general lack of knowledge and information available about the existing recreation and parks system. Safety and security concerns were the leading causes for the community not feeling comfortable using the parks and trail systems.

New Desired Indoor Recreation Facilities

High desire indoor facilities identified by survey respondents included adding an aquatics facility, a gym/fieldhouse building for year-round use, and a performing arts/studio arts facility.

New Desired Outdoor Recreation Facilities

High desire outdoor facilities identified by survey respondents included adding an aquatics facility, splash pad water play features, and natural play areas.

Desired Improvements for Existing Park Facilities

High desire improvements identified by survey respondents for improving existing park facilities included adding shade provisions, picnic areas, lighting, updated and expanded playgrounds, athletic fields, and court facilities.

Trails

High desire trail improvements or additions identified by survey respondents included enhancing trail access and connections to parks by filling in existing trail gaps and sidewalks, expanding internal walking loops within parks, increasing access to the Mississippi River and along Shingle/Bass Creeks through the creation/addition of urban greenway trail systems, and adding trail identification and wayfinding signage.
THE FIVE EMERGING THEMES

Based on the review and analysis of all public comment and feedback, reoccurring themes evolved which began to represent new programming and park features important to the community. The following five themes and corresponding facilities and amenities emerged as priority initiatives to be considered as part of this System Plan:

1. Build or expanded special use facilities
   » Indoor Aquatics (water park, splash pad)
   » Senior Center
   » Teen Center
   » Field House
   » Adult Recreation Facilities
   » Performance Venue, Amplified Music
   » Large Gathering Spaces
   » Visual/Performing Arts
   » Indoor Gym

2. Increase Connectivity of Trail System
   » Connections to key destinations (LRT, River)
   » Increase Walking Loops
   » Connections to Schools and Parks
   » Grade Separated Crossings on Busy Streets
   » Connect Trail Gaps and Sidewalks
   » Add Signage/Wayfinding

3. Add/Improve Athletic Field/Court Facilities
   » Pickleball
   » Field Lighting
   » Cricket Pitch
   » Synthetic Turf Surfacing
   » Bathroom Facilities
   » Additional Soccer/Lacrosse Fields
   » Indoor Sports Courts

4. Improve Access and Connections to Natural Amenities
   » Mississippi River
   » Shingle Creek
   » Bass Creek
   » Natural Areas
   » Fishing Pond
   » Open Space
   » Prairie
   » Forest
   » Wetlands

5. Improve Safety/Conveniences for Park Users
   » Better Signage/Wayfinding
   » Park Patrol/Cameras
   » Lighting Improvements
   » Access to Restroom Facilities and Drinking Water
   » Kitchen Sink Access in Picnic Shelters
   » Better Maintenance of Parks
   » Shade Shelters and Benches
   » Improved Trail Conditions
The Planning Process

MOVING FORWARD IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

After hearing from the community and identifying emerging themes, a planning process was undertaken to determine where in the system to best address these emerging themes and identifying more specific gaps and needs to be studied within the current park system. The following needs were evolved to be addressed within the current system and included:

» Adding an aquatics facility
» Expanding or adding park activity buildings
» Increasing the number of nature play areas and community gardens
» Adding or replacing sport courts (pickleball, tennis, and basketball courts)
» Addressing emerging sports within the System (cricket, lacrosse, and takraw)
» Expanding the Zanewood Recreation Center
» Expanding the Community Activity Center (CAC)
» Adding facilities to accommodate the visual and performing arts (studio and dance)
» Adding an indoor field house with gymnasium and synthetic turf for year-round sports programming

Determining Equitable Distribution and Access

The number of people of color in Brooklyn Park has increased rapidly over the last 20 years, from 10 percent in 1990 to more than 50 percent today. To better understand how this change in demographics impacts how existing park and recreation facilities should be improved to better meet the needs of all residents, a city-wide equity analysis was completed to determine whether any areas of the City are currently underserved by park facilities and amenities. Using equity evaluation criteria developed by the Trust For Public Land, outcomes of this study found the following key findings:

» On average, People of Color (POC) and Lower Income (LI) households are better served by recreation centers than the average non-POC and higher income households.
» On average, census block groups defined as People of Color and Lower Income (POCLI) have playground level of service that is 90 percent that of non-Lower Income block groups.
» On average, census block groups defined as POCLI have basketball court level of service that is 68 percent that of non-Lower Income block groups.
» Income seems to be a more powerful determinant of inequity in park amenity distribution than race/ethnicity.

Based on the mapping results shown in the Equity Analysis Map on page xvii, geographic areas highlighted in red are the census block groups which are mostly underserved by park facilities. When evaluating the implementation of new amenities or reinvestment within the overall park system, these areas should be considered high priority investment areas to achieve more balanced city-wide equity and access to park facilities and amenities.
Census Block Equity Analysis Map

LEGEND
- Areas of Majority People of Color & Lower Income
- City Park
- Three Rivers Park District
- Underserved Census Blocks

Blue Line Light Rail Alignment
- Blue Line Light Rail Station
- School

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
How Did We Identify Specific Parks for Reinvestment?

DETERMINING PRIORITY PARKS FOR REINVESTMENT

After completing a comprehensive review of the entire existing park system and recognizing all 60 parks have needs for investment, evaluation criteria were established and applied to determine what parks should be prioritized to support more significant reinvestment. Criteria used to evaluate park properties included:

- The parks capacity to support additional or new programming based on existing building and parking facilities already present at the park
- The parks total land acreage and its capacity to support new site, building, and parking facilities.
- The overall condition of the parks existing facilities and its need for updates and investment
- The geographic location of the park and its capacity to improve equity and access to underserved parts of the City.

Park Improvement Recommendations

Based on outcomes of applying the park evaluation criteria, seven parks were selected which offered the best opportunities for addressing gaps and needs in the system. Each park was studied in greater detail to explore reinvestment and redevelopment opportunities through the development of park concept plans. The following parks were evaluated as part of a design charrette workshop process for generating ideas, concept plans, and cost estimates for implementation working with the community and stakeholder groups:

- Lakeland Park
- Hamilton Park
- Hartkopf Park
- Community Activity Center (CAC)
- Central Park/Brookdale Golf Course
- Norwood Park
- River Park
- SEA Park

Multiple concepts were created for the CAC and SEA Park to evaluate alternative scenarios for accommodating different types of aquatics facilities at each park. All individual concept plans and recommendations can be found in Chapter 4 of the document.

As a part of Appendix A, all 60 park properties are listed and summarized in alphabetical order and include an existing amenity map, a summary of current use, facility conditions, and site improvement recommendations.

Trails System Recommendations

Key gaps and priorities for increasing the connectivity of the local trail system in the City have been identified as part of this systems plan. These new priorities were vetted through the community process and focused on removing gaps for establishing better connections to parks, residential neighborhoods, safe routes to schools, light rail and bus stop transit stations, and regional trail corridors. Recommendations for establishing grade separated trail crossings with high traffic volume roadways are also included as part of proposed trail system improvements.

Natural Resource Recommendations

To help identify specific natural resource areas to be proactively managed within the City, vegetation and water resource areas were mapped and evaluated from a regional perspective to gain a better understanding of their ecological context and connectivity as natural resource corridors. Three conceptual habitat corridors were identified: along the Mississippi River, along the Rush Creek Regional Trail, and along the Shingle Creek corridor. Additional park land “patches” were also identified to provide wildlife habitat connections to the Mississippi River.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
MOVING FORWARD WITH A PLAN FOR REINVESTMENT

With many recommendations and initiatives identified to be implemented as part of the systems plan, developing funding strategies which can guide short and long term investment for updating and improving park properties, recreation facilities, and trail systems is an important component of this plan. Operations and maintenance funding considerations also need to be to be addressed to ensure new proposed facilities and programming can be sustained within the City’s overall operating budget.

How is the Park System Currently Being Funded?

The City’s park system is currently being funded through three main sources of funding which include the following:

» General Fund (Levy) – The City general fund (tax levy) supports the annual on-going recreation programs and services of the Recreation and Parks Department, including support for the operations and maintenance of the park system.

» Heritage Fund (Capital Asset Replacement Fund)
  • The heritage fund is an asset replacement fund for all parks and city owned facilities;
  • As part of the City’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), staff is responsible to develop a 5-year asset replacement plan for each facility/park. Staff conducts an annual inspection of existing parks, city owned buildings, special use facilities and trails. Priorities are based on life-cycles replacement schedules and facility condition reports. The heritage fund is supported through tax levy with an average investment of approximately $1.6 million annually.

» Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) fund
  • The OSLAD Fund is designated for the acquisition of park property and development of park and trails.
  • OSLAD funding is provided through two primary sources, park dedication fees and cell tower lease revenues.

» Park Dedication Fees - Park Dedication Fees are generated in conjunction with community development. The city requires a minimum cash park dedication for commercial or industrial plats or waivers of 5% of fair market land value. However, where the City Council deems it in the public interest (i.e. comprehensive plan or flood plain ordinance), it may require a minimum land dedication of five percent of the commercial or industrial land to be subdivided in lieu of a cash dedication. The lands must be indicated on the city’s comprehensive plan or amendments, or must be designated on specific area plans for flood plain preservation, parks, trails, public open space or any combination thereof.
  • Park dedication fees shall be used only for 1) acquisition of land for parks and playgrounds; 2) development of existing park and playground sites or facilities; 3) redevelopment or rehabilitation of existing park and playground sites or facilities; or 4) debt retirement in connection with land previously acquired for parks and playgrounds.

» Cell Tower Lease Fees - Currently the City has cell towers located at ten (10) different sites throughout the community, including Bass Creek Park, Boone Water Tower, Central Fire Station, Edinbrook Park Tower, Noble Sports Park, Noble Water Tower, Palmer Lake Park, River Water Tower, Sunny Lane Park and Willowstone Park. The contract agreements for each of these tower locations is different as to the length of the agreement, lease cost, annual fee increase and renewal language. Currently, revenue generated from cell towers within park property is credited to the Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) fund (approximately $185,000/year) Potential Park Land Acquisition & Sales.

Acquisition and Sale of Property

The City has identified land parcels throughout the City to be acquired for expanding park and open space use or to be preserved as part of natural resource areas. Acquisitions will only be pursued through willing seller negotiations when opportunities are identified with private land owners. Consideration may also be given to selling park property if adjacent land uses are no longer compatible with park programming or it offers little or no recreational benefit to the City.
DEVELOPING A 10-YEAR CAPITAL REINVESTMENT PLAN

Within this plan includes high level cost estimates prepared to address all long-term investments identified and discussed during the community engagement process. These are to be implemented in the system over the next ten years. Priorities for investment will be determined by many variables including the pursuit of partnership opportunities, available funding sources, and outcomes of additional public comment and feedback.

Preliminary estimates include only capital investment costs and will require further refinement to determine more accurate costs for design, construction, and needed contingencies. Proposed projects requiring additional yearly operations and maintenance costs will also require identifying funding sources to support any required increases in staffing to support new capital investments.

Optional Models for Implementation

The included proposed 10-Year Capital Reinvestment Plan provides a “roadmap” to future investment in the System, but there are currently limited resources available for implementation of the Plan.

Current resources within the OSLAD fund will only support a portion of the projects the community has identified as priority improvements to meet the changing needs and vision for a quality parks and recreation system. The City, in partnership with the community, will need to identify other resources to fund the projects identified as priorities for the park system.

Within Appendix B are multiple models and scenario’s which outlines options the City may choose to take in balancing the interests of the community (survey results) with levels of financial commitment needed to implement proposed projects. A few of the models identify priorities based on partnerships that leverage other resources through grants and/or shared development and investment by multiple partners.

These models are to serve only as a guide for policy makers and the community as it considers the level of financial commitment the community is willing to make toward the future investment into the park system.

WHAT’S NEXT?

This System Plan provides recommendations for improvements, where within the system priority amenities could be accommodated, and costs associated for their implementation. However, it will be up to the community to determine the level of investment it is willing to support to make the park system relevant for all community members now and into the future.

Completing a Feasibility Study

The completion of a Feasibility Study which is included in Appendix B as a part of this plan, presents several viable local public options for funding park and recreation improvements in the City. The study also provides an analysis of which options and funding levels are feasible, economically prudent, and likely to be publicly acceptable.

Looking Towards Implementation

To assist in fully understanding the level of support for the community identified priorities, consideration for further public involvement should be considered for advancing the recommendations within this plan. Several options to consider include:

» Public Opinion Surveys – Issue surveys developed by expert polling firms to gauge public support for reinvestment and implementation priorities

» Building Public Awareness – Educate the community about referendums, investment choices, and tax impacts without advocating for support and approval

» Community Advocacy – It is up to the community to determine its level of involvement and advocating for support and implementation of plan initiatives.

» Other outside organizations including the Trust for Public Land could assist with raising public awareness and advocate about the important role parks and recreation facilities play in creating a high-quality living environments for residents and communities.