



YOUR CITY YOUR PARKS

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT
2022 STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN UPDATE



This Plan was officially adopted by
the City Commission on January 25, 2022.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THANK YOU, Grand Rapids residents, for sharing thousands of stories and ideas that made this plan a vision created by, and for, our community. The future of our city is bright because of your continued commitment to the health and sustainability of our parks.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

January 25, 2022

The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department is pleased to share the 2022 5-year Michigan Department of Natural Resources plan update. Residents of Grand Rapids continue to emphasize the importance of parks and recreational opportunities as an essential public service. This has been even more evident in the midst of our global viral pandemic.

Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation has had several years of rebuilding, creating a strong internal team culture, and strengthening a positive external identity within the community. Residents have had the opportunity to engage and build on big vision ideas from the 2017 adopted master plan, in addition to several rounds of park repair and improvement projects using the 2013 dedicated parks millage funding. With strong support of the 2019 dedicated parks millage, this updated plan reflects resident's continued desires for safe, engaging, and inviting park spaces across the city.

Driven by community priorities and our mission, the Master Plan will serve as a guiding document for policy decisions, prioritizing and balancing demands and opportunities, and providing a framework for evaluating future land acquisitions, park improvements and recreation programs. Implementation of the Master Plan will contribute to Grand Rapids' continued physical and economic growth with innovative park projects that are distinctly Grand Rapids by leaning into our distinct ecology and always lifting up our local culture.

The endeavor of planning for the future of our public spaces is one that requires ongoing and intentional elevation of resident voice. Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is committed to continued meaningful engagement with every park and recreation project moving forward to build on the great momentum we have seen in the last several years.

Grand Rapids will continue to see important improvements made to our valued park spaces across the city. The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan supports Grand Rapids' reputation as a healthy, active, sustainable city. Thank you to all those who contributed to this plan, and to those who remain committed to ensuring this community vision for our public park spaces becomes a reality. This is your city, these are your parks!

With inspiration and admiration for all of Grand Rapids,



David Marquardt, Director
Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation

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MOMENTUM AND COLLABORATION

Where you live affects how you live. Location matters because our neighborhoods can affect our access to education, jobs, social support, transportation, and healthy foods as well as influence our physical and mental health. The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department (“the Department”) understands the important role public green spaces serve in supporting the health and wellbeing of the City’s residents and local wildlife ecologies, allowing us to connect with each other and our surroundings in meaningful ways. City parks have resources that can support the local economy, create jobs, provide safe connections to and from home, improve water quality and native wildlife habitat, and build community through classes and events.

The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan Update (“Master Plan”) builds on the aspirational vision created in 2017. With the passing of the permanent Parks, Pools, and Playgrounds millage in 2019, the Department now has a baseline of dedicated funding to sustain maintenance, safety, and improvement costs. However, the community has emphasized the need for investment beyond what the millage alone can cover. The Master Plan is an adaptive tool to help the Department prioritize future park improvements in a way that elevates the role of the parks and recreation system in the daily lives of all Grand Rapidsians in the years to come.

The global pandemic has brought a major shift in how we see and use public space from when the previous master plan was adopted. Parks have been especially important spaces for our community as we navigate new social norms as now, more than ever, residents use park space

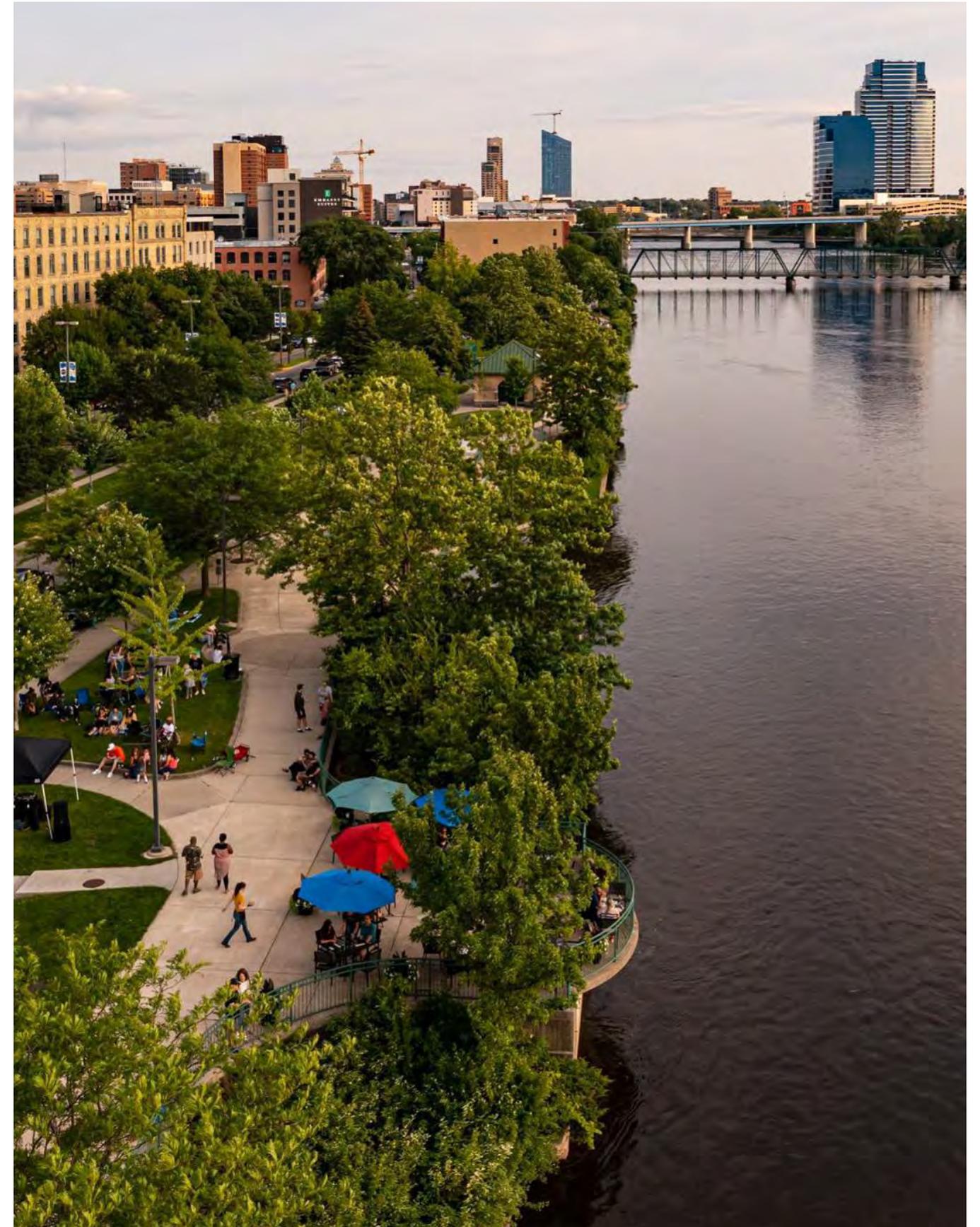
“Take this moment as a call not just to elevate our momentum but to do it in a way that is more just and equitable, so that Grand Rapids is a place where everyone is cared for and thriving.”

Mayor Bliss, State of the City 2021

as an extension of their home and daily routines. The Department remains committed to evolving alongside our community and intentionally fostering inclusive and welcoming havens within our city.

POISED TO THRIVE

Strong advocacy for the role of parks and recreation in the advancement of the city continues from City leaders as growth and investment in Grand Rapids flourishes. In the Mayor’s 2021 State of the City Address, she reflected on momentum of the vision for a stronger, more innovative, equitable, and resilient city despite the past year and a half of adversity. Identified as one of the top most attractive cities to live in the United States, Mayor Bliss shared how Grand Rapids is poised to thrive in terms of elements such as population growth, educational opportunities, environmental quality, and transportation. Parks and green spaces play a central role in supporting such components by offering shared community spaces that foster vibrant natural systems and ecologies that, in turn, benefit residents’ physical and mental health.



Canal Park at Sunset

Equity, diversity, and inclusion within the context of recreation and parks is about ensuring all people have access to quality green space and programming. Momentum to improve the quality of life for Grand Rapids residents continues as intentional and strategic City initiatives are implemented.

GREAT CITIES HAVE GREAT PARKS

The 2019 Parks Millage passed with 70% voter support, creating a permanent source of funds for parks in the City of Grand Rapids. Along with supporting park and pool operational costs, this millage allows financial planning for longer-term, more expensive projects with the ability to issue bonds for the projects and pay them off over time. The average Grand Rapids homeowner pays about \$68 per year or roughly \$5.60 per month.

STATE PROCESS ALIGNMENT

In addition to coinciding with growth and the next stage of millage improvements, the Master Plan also aligns with the statewide planning process. Every five years, the Department is required to submit a master plan to the State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to become eligible for future grant funding. The Master Plan process incorporated community feedback toward the development of all DNR plan components and was submitted to the State in February 2022.

CITYWIDE COORDINATION

The Master Plan comes at a time of great citywide momentum around the future of neighborhood development, the Grand River, and enhanced connectivity. Key ideas from the Master Plan

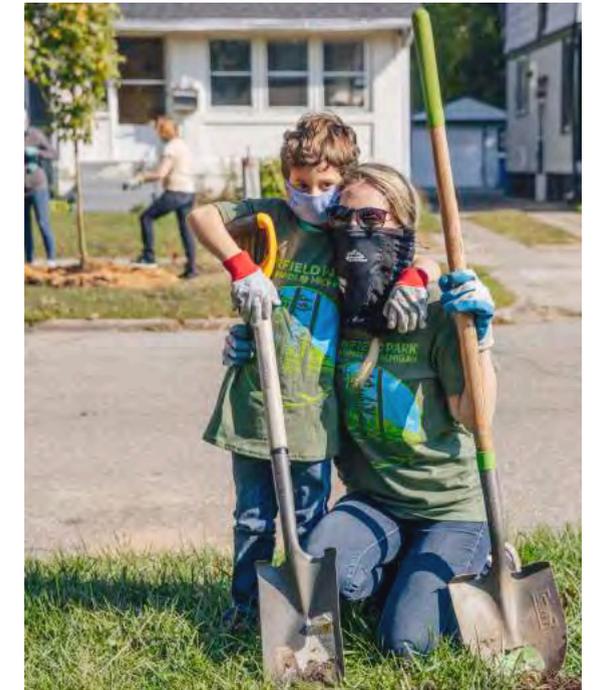
build on and reinforce energy around riverfront reinvestment and streets and connectivity improvements while seeking to ensure these investments build toward community health and equitable access to resources. The Master Plan builds upon the following recent citywide planning efforts that have established a strong framework for the future of Grand Rapids' public realm:

Grand Rapids Community Master Plan

The City's 20-Year Community Master Plan is currently in the process of being updated as we plan for Grand Rapids' future. The current Community Master Plan was adopted in 2002 and focuses on issues on which city policy can have direct impact such as land use, development, infrastructure, and other quality of life aspects. The community input phase will begin in January 2022, with formal adoption in early 2024. The Department's Master Plan will be an informative tool that plugs into the greater Community Master Plan for how city leaders approach public green space for the next twenty years.

GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan

In late 2015, the City of Grand Rapids and Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. completed GR Forward, a 10-year community plan focusing on strategies to promote the future development of the growing city. This process involved significant community input toward improving accessibility of the river, identifying key development sites along the river, and activating downtown's public spaces through the local culture. This downtown plan built upon the previous efforts of the River Restoration Initiative, a collaborative effort to bring the rapids back to the Grand River and



The Department continues to coordinate with multiple City initiatives. Pictured above: Vital Streets enhanced crosswalk across Michigan Street linking the River Edge Trail (L), Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Mayor's Greening Initiative (R).

provide white water recreation opportunities. This initiative shed light on the river's untapped potential as an amenity for both residents and tourists.

In 2020, Grand Rapids White Water completed the Biological Assessment for the Endangered Mussels process, assembled the Watershed Protection Plan/Environmental Assessment for various state and federal permits, and filed a Joint Permit Application to the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE).

Green Grand Rapids

Green Grand Rapids was developed in 2011 as an update to the City's 2002 Master Plan focusing on parks, greenspace and sustainability issues to enhance the City's livability. This study highlighted the need for natural resource protection, stormwater management practices, a complete streets approach, increased access and recreational opportunities along the riverfront, an enhanced park system, and greater local food access. The Department, together with

key partners such as the City's Urban Forestry Committee and Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, has worked extensively over the past years to advance the goals of this plan through updates to city ordinances, volunteer tree planting events, and training residents approachable strategies that increase climate resiliency. Looking ahead, the Parks Department will coordinate with upcoming community climate action and adaptation plans to ensure parks continue to play a central role in local climate resiliency, mitigation, and environmental justice initiatives.

Vital Streets

The Master Plan also aligns with the development of the City's 2016 Vital Streets Plan, an effort to make city streets safe and friendly to all modes of transit. This plan identified street types, particularly those designated as safe routes for non-automobile traffic, guiding future road improvements and ultimately enhancing connectivity throughout the city.

Over the last five years, Vital Streets has coordinated with the Department on curb cuts, crosswalk painting, and bike lanes adjacent to parks. The parks millage historically paid for curb cuts at the park property, and Vital Streets matched on the opposite street side.

Grand Action 2.0

In February of 2021, Grand Action 2.0, a not-for-profit economic development organization, revived a new vision for the eastern riverfront between Fulton and Wealthy streets, transforming the corridor into a mix of park, retail, and living space. The plan recommends the following elements to be considered in the development:

- » 10+ acres of new public open space connected to the Grand River
- » Alternatives for new pedestrian bridges to the west side of the Grand River
- » The Grand Rapids "Green Ribbon," an elevated and dedicated riverfront park connecting to the river trail system between Fulton and Wealthy Streets
- » Adventure park, kayak pit-stop, zip-line and seasonal attraction or cultural park
- » Community green space to accommodate multi-generational gatherings and activities
- » Ground floor retail and trend-forward mixed-use prioritized for minority-owned businesses
- » 12,000-seat amphitheater
- » Up to 1,500-1,750 mixed housing units, with a dedicated site at Wealthy and Market Avenue for affordable housing on the park and river

A River For All

A River for All (RFA) aims to return the Grand River to its rightful place as the iconic center of Grand Rapids. Guided by a team of regional, state and national partners, a connected and equitable river corridor plan was created that restored the historical relationship between the Grand River and the people of Grand Rapids. RFA guided the vision and direction of several interconnected plans.

The formal RFA report was adopted by the city in 2019. The document established general requirements for the design of the Grand River Corridor edge and helped decision makers and the development community transform the river corridor into an integrated, accessible, community asset. A unified design vocabulary was created to acknowledge and allow for the diverse character of each area of the corridor to be expressed. These tools defined processes for reviewing development proposals and measuring their consistency through formally approved design guidelines.

RFA projects along the river were categorized as "dry." These included the development of a continuous riverfront trail and plans to transform six "opportunity sites" along the river's edge to create a user-friendly, welcoming and accessible waterfront.

Protecting the ecology of the river and improving water quality is critically important as implementation begins of the "wet", or in-river, work. Two projects that support this are the planned relocation of native freshwater mussels during construction and the proposed installation of a specially-designed barrier to prevent the spread of harmful invasive sea lampreys.



The Master Plan will build off of current planning efforts, such as A River For All (above: trail connections to Opportunity Development Sites and downtown neighborhoods)

MASTER PLAN PROCESS AND KEY COMPONENTS

The 2022 Strategic Master Plan Update considers all aspects the 2017 document assessed including physical assets and community needs within Grand Rapids, and the Department's mission, vision, values, and culture. Many elements and goals of the 2017 document remain relevant when considering improvements of today's park system and community. The updated report maintains and expands upon these components where appropriate. Elements of the physical system and Department operations and culture were assessed and evaluated throughout the following three stages of the planning process:

PHASE 1: INVENTORY + ENGAGEMENT

The first phase reviewed the Park's overall vision, goals, and principles. The Department and project team developed an overall strategy for broad and focused public outreach and began data collection during this phase. The goal of this phase was to identify changes and growth that occurred within the system and community since 2017.

During this phase, the project team began the analysis of the system's existing conditions and established a strong understanding of the local context and foundation for future recommendations. Ongoing analysis included (1) updating of the system-wide inventory, (2) the establishment of level of service and community needs, and (3) the evaluation of system-wide resources and patterns.

The mission, vision, guiding principles, and values that were developed in 2017 were rooted in a collective process with Department staff through a series of workshops, and informed by community outreach themes. These departmental foundational components carry on in the 2022 Master Plan Update and are filtered through a lens that holistically addresses equity, accessibility and alignment with the City's vision and mission of building a welcoming, innovative, and collaborative city with a robust economy, safe and healthy community, and the opportunity for a high quality of life for all.

Simultaneously, the first round of public engagement began that aimed to identify active and passive patterns in how a wide range of Grand Rapidians use and relate to public green space through a series of one-on-one conversations.

PHASE 2: PLAN DEVELOPMENT

During this phase, a new design process for park improvements was imagined, tested, and evaluated through selected parks that served as case studies. The Department identified four Priority Parks to participate in a community-driven design process: Ball Perkins Park, Riverside Park, Roosevelt Park Lodge, and a potential new park along 32nd Street SE. A series of focus group meetings, online surveys, and input sessions were hosted to receive feedback on conceptual designs and programming for each park. Conceptual

site designs and programming baselines were established for the Department to reference as a record of initial community needs and concerns as projects are funded and move forward.

PHASE 3: REPORT FINALIZATION

In the final phase of the project, the project team refined the recommendations and developed implementation strategies to realize the Master Plan. Cost estimates for the priority parks were established to assist the Department with developing aspirational park improvement goals for the next five years. Report content was vetted and reviewed through the Parks Advisory Board and revisions were applied, as needed. The final draft was made available in December for a 30-day public comment period and was officially approved by the Parks Advisory Board on January 5, 2022. The official Master Plan report was approved by City Commission on January 25, 2022.



Pop-Up Input Session at the Neighborhood Summit, Richland Park

TIMELINE AND MILESTONES

The Master Plan sets the stage for an iterative design process for park specific improvements once funding is available. The plan is a blueprint for a unified vision defined by supporting goals, objectives and actions, with a prioritized phasing plan and associated costs. The plan bridges past and present, drawing from the stories Grand Rapids residents graciously shared over the years. Below is a summary of local organizations and community members who helped shape the 2022 5-Year Updated Parks Strategic Master Plan:



City-Wide Participation

Community Catalysts: one-on-one conversations with 75+ residents

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit

Priority Park: Ball Perkins Park

North East Citizens Action Alliance

West Michigan Mountain Biking Alliance

Grand Rapids Audubon Club

Ball Perkins Community Gardeners

Priority Park: 32nd Street Green Space

Steve Beukema, Millbrook Neighborhood Association

Samaritas

Margaret Kimosop McKenzie, African Community Fellowship Christian Reformed Church

Maple Villa Community Residents

Priority Park: Riverside Park

Creston Neighborhood Association

Priority Park: Roosevelt Lodge

Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association

Grand Rapids Public Schools

Southwest Business Association

Grandville Avenue Arts & Humanities



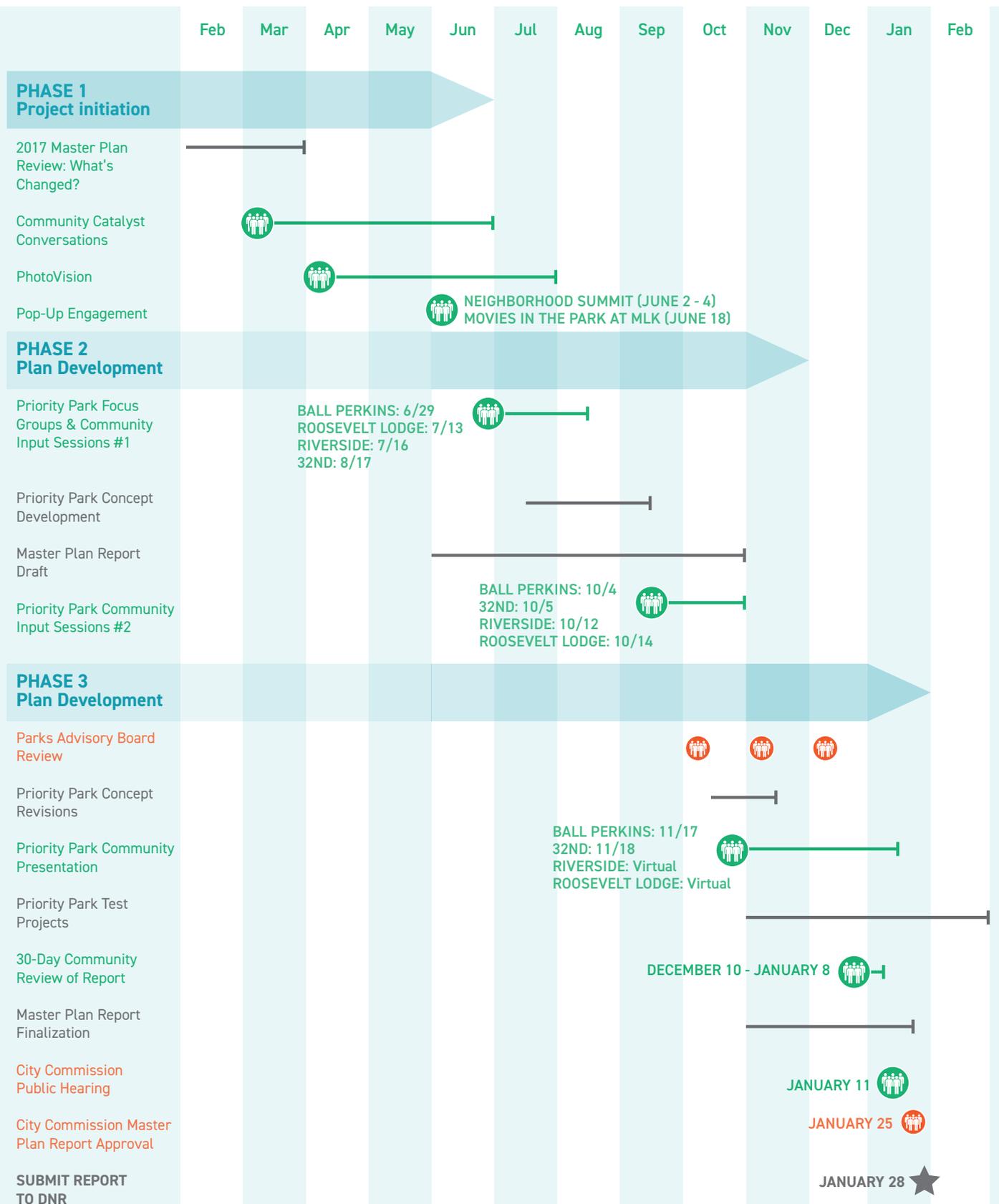
TIMELINE LEGEND

Consultant Team

Community Input

City Review/Approval

PROJECT TIMELINE AND MILESTONES: February 2021 - January 2022



COMMUNITY INPUT: BUILDING ON A SOLID FRAMEWORK

The 2022 Strategic Master Plan Update builds off the extensive community engagement completed during the 2017 Master Plan. An estimated 5,300 residents participated in 2017 outreach opportunities, including direct feedback from a Citizen's Committee represented by 24 local stakeholders.

The Parks Department recognized and valued the significant amount of time and thought community members contributed in 2017. While the shape of the city, and the world, have dramatically changed over five years, the way that people desire to connect and interact with public green space has not.

Since 2017, great strides have been made on increasing park assets and delivering new and improved opportunities that enrich park experiences for residents. This includes acquisition of two key riverfront properties downtown, major green infrastructure improvements at five parks and green spaces, and Spanish translations implemented on all rental forms, new park signage, and marketing materials.

Public awareness of park access, amenities, and events significantly increased since 2017. The Department increased marketing, communication, and partnerships while leveraging funding by filling new marketing and partnerships FTEs. Website visits on the Department's home page increased by 35% and social media engagements increased over 255%.

2017 OUTREACH THEMES

The following themes were derived from 2017 community feedback and remain applicable today:

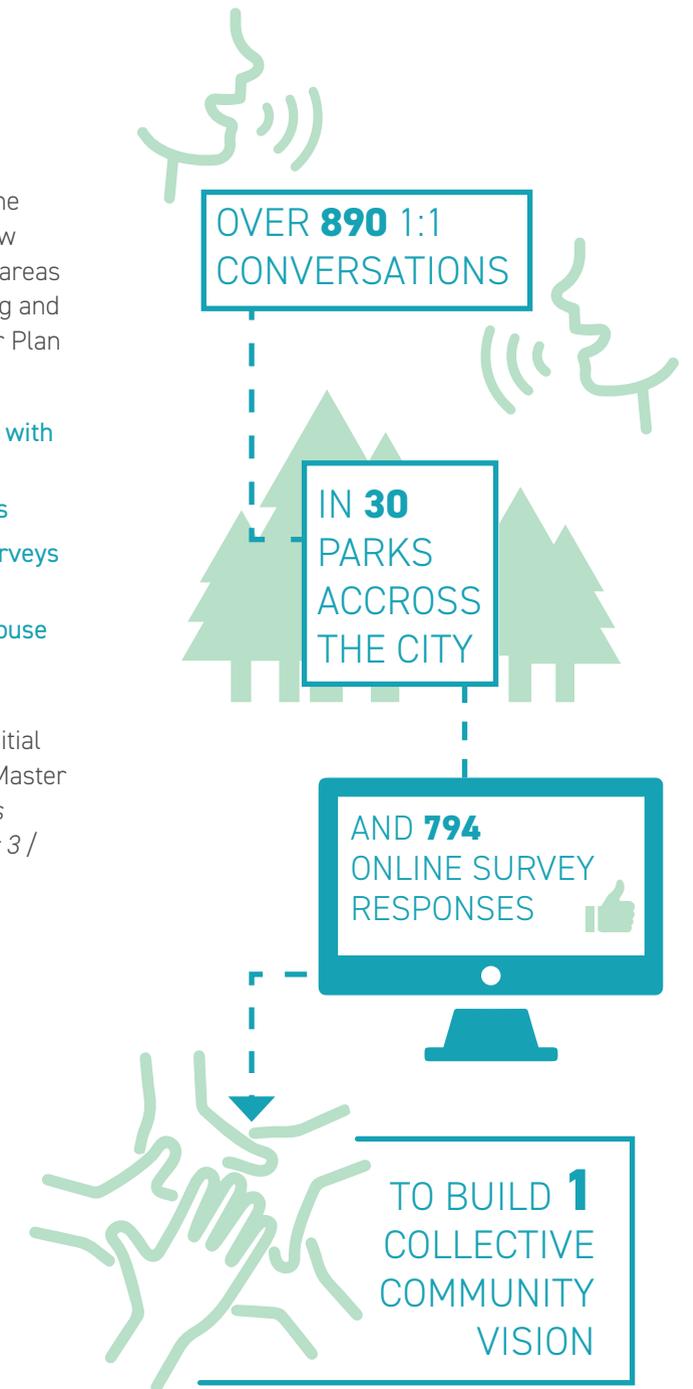
- » **Active adult and family programming:** the majority of recreation programming feedback focused on the need for more multi-generational activities, primarily for active adults.
- » **Special events and river activation:** a significant portion of the community requested more live music opportunities, family-oriented events and recreational activities along the river.
- » **System identity and awareness:** several community members suggested ideas to diversify the park system and enhance department communication, such as specific "theme" parks (exercise park, music park, etc.) and bilingual park maps.
- » **Fitness and outdoor recreation:** numerous comments indicated that access to a variety of fitness options for all ages and abilities is a clear priority for Grand Rapidians.
- » **Improved connectivity:** many emphasized the importance of having a well-connected park system and network of trails.
- » **Outdoor education:** community members at various events mentioned creating more opportunities to connect with nature and educational experiences.

2022 UPDATE: DIVING DEEPER

With the 2017 outreach themes in mind, the Department looked to further discover how inclusive practices can be infused into all areas of parks and recreation, including planning and programming. Engagement for the Master Plan update was multifaceted:

- » **Community Catalyst 1:1 conversations with residents**
- » **Pop-Up Input Sessions at public events**
- » **Virtual participation through online surveys and social media**
- » **Priority Park focus groups and open house input sessions**

The following pages summarize the the initial public engagement process used for the Master Plan update. *Community input summaries for Priority Parks can be found in Chapter 3 / Neighborhood Investments.*



COMMUNITY INPUT: WHAT GRAND RAPIDIANS SAY ABOUT PARKS AND RECREATION TODAY

Public engagement around parks and recreation during COVID times was challenging, yet rewarding. While engagement in general has shifted due to in-person meeting constraints, the use of our City's parks system has never been more robust. Never before has the City seen such a diversity of park-related activities and uses as these green space provided the calm, privacy, safe gathering and solitude users have been yearning for since the pandemic began. Whether it was groups hauling wooden planks to the parks for tap dance classes, pop-up symphonies, pumpkin carving or dragon boat races, the influx of use is remarkable and the department has been ready to provide the necessary support.

From an engagement perspective, digital and in-person means provided opportunities for folks to share their opinions and provide feedback on priorities for the next 5-year planning horizon. In addition to general input on parks and recreation, the project team conducted deep-dive planning sessions for four parks, and hosted staff-level engagement sessions for focused discussions on departmental operations and park facility maintenance. Using the 2017 Master Plan as a baseline, the design team used the following engagement strategies to understand how community needs have evolved over the past five years:

- » **PhotoVision:** Summer-long Instagram campaign with a kick-off during spring park clean ups. This activity was on-going and also included one-on-one intercept interviews with park users
- » **Movies In The Park:** An outreach booth to provide background and information about parks in general and promote awareness of the Master Plan Update
- » **Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit:** Three days of public input booths located in three parks in all three wards where the team shared statistics about parks and asked participants about what makes them feel a sense of belonging in a city park space
- » **Parks Staff Interviews:** Two discussion sessions that captured ideas and lessons learned from administrative team members and maintenance staff
- » **Public Agency Community Catalysts:** Six rounds of one-on-one conversations between four project team Community Catalysts and selected community members to unpack personal relationships with parks and open spaces
- » **Focused Community-Inspired Design:** Development with park-centric engagement including stakeholder meetings, digital survey, community open house, model building, and community design meetings (See Chapter 3: Neighborhood Investments for findings)
- » **Park Walks:** Conversations and walks with neighbors and the Parks Director were held at 19 neighborhood parks across the city, giving residents the opportunity to share ideas, concerns, and observations at a hyper-focused level in a familiar setting



Participants at the Neighborhood Summit (above) and the MLK Movies in the Park (below) shared stories of experiences they had when they felt a sense of belonging in a city park

PHOTOVISION CHALLENGE

The Photovision Challenge provided an on-line, do-it-yourself engagement tool for park users and others to take photos of their favorite aspects of parks as well as images of things for improvement. Park users were asked to upload images and tag #mygrparks. Participants could search images from others as well as provide comments on posts shared by the City Park's Department. To raise awareness about the Photovision Challenge, posts were made to various social media sites, the City of Grand Rapids website, and through the local press. Additionally, bi-lingual signage was placed at various parks inviting participation.

Findings

- » Park users enjoy the **flexibility of the spaces and appreciate having active park amenities as well as quiet spaces** for picnicking, relaxing, and hosting events or classes.
- » Park users appreciate that many parks have **facilities for all ages**, and desire that some of the features, such as the ping pong tables, be better located away from low walls, water and streets.
- » **Safe sidewalks, crosswalks and mid-block crossings were listed as the top challenge for park users to feel welcome at the park.** Too often high speeds and lack of crosswalks impeded access especially for youth desiring to visit parks.
- » **Continued creative programming** to share parks and park resources throughout the community, with the hopes that residents **familiarize themselves with many parks, not only parks within their neighborhood.**



NEIGHBORHOOD SUMMIT POP-UP INPUT BOOTH

The Department hosted a table at the 2021 Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit to promote public awareness of the Master Plan update and to capture community feedback in situ. The consultant team and Parks staff participated in three of the Summit's events, each located within a different ward of the city: Richmond Park on June 2, Riverside Park on June 3, and McKay Jaycees Park on June 4. The Summit reflected on the power of social justice events of 2020, sharing personal and community stories around the theme "Moving Beyond Diversity".

At the Summit table, the team presented participants with an analysis of park accessibility deficiencies within the park system today, and compared that with recent statistics that demonstrate how access to public green space is vital to the health, wealth, and welfare to city residents.

Channeling conversations held by the Community Catalysts prior to the Summit event, the consultant team asked participants to share a story of a time they felt a sense of belonging within a city park. This exercise helped the team understand the many layers of what helps residents from diverse backgrounds feel physically and emotionally safe and welcome while visiting a park.

Over 100 summit participants shared their experiences with the team. Programming and park activation were reoccurring themes. One resident said, "Swimming at the pool at Garfield Park when I was a kid. It was a huge draw for the black community". Others commented on safe and clean amenities and access to nature, as one

resident said they felt a connection, "Being along a body of water. Having access to spaces where I can hang my hammock and read a book, or work on my computer".

Findings

- » A majority of respondents stated that they felt **a sense of community when playing sports**, particularly team sports like soccer and basketball.
- » Respondents said they felt a sense of community when **playing with their kids on the playground, when walking their dogs, when having family cookouts in the parks, and when attending meetings hosted at parks** (specifically events unaffiliated with the Parks Department, such as church outings).
- » General feedback about parks focused on a desire to see the **park bathrooms and water fountains** opened up earlier and better cared for.
- » Several respondents commented on their **enjoyment of pools and splash pads** and wanting to see more of those across the city.



2021 Neighborhood Summit at Riverside Park

PUBLIC AGENCY

COMMUNITY CATALYSTS

Public Agency, a community outreach division of West Michigan Center for Arts and Technology (WMCAT), was hired to utilize Community Catalysts trained in human centered design methodologies to understand community needs and develop ideas for authentic and inclusive engagement.

The following design principles served as a foundation for Public Agency's process in the project:

- » **Designing with, not for**
- » **Anything about us, without us, is not for us**
- » **It's about you, and it's not about you**
- » **Hypotheticals are not predictors of future behaviors**

Engaging in a human-centered design process prioritizes the lived experiences and perspectives of those impacted by services, experiences, and products created. The process was meant to be iterative. One of the most satisfying parts of this qualitative approach was having unique insights emerge that change a course of action or challenges a previously held opinion. The beauty of these insights is that they can reveal unmet needs, reframe challenges, and ultimately expand our way of thinking about possible solutions.

Insights generated from over 100 conversations with community members resulted in the following (re)design opportunities for the Department to consider addressing:

- » **How might GR Parks continue to build community relationships?**
- » **How might GR Parks expand creative ownership to the community?**
- » **How could GR Parks use technology to improve community engagement?**

Key Insights

Increase Capacity Building for Future Projects:

Identify points of collaboration and shared leadership in the community; foster creative ownership by leveraging diverse talent within the community to lead future projects.

Build Intentional Partnerships: Consider community partnerships when outsourcing for projects and any other capacity-building opportunities. This could look like partnering with local vendors, doing intentional outreach when posting RFPs for projects, partnering with traditional neighborhood associations and also including other community groups. This results in ownership of creative spaces and places by us and for us.

Intentionality When Communicating with the Public:

Ensure that project activities and events are well-documented and well-communicated and create feedback loops regularly with the community by asking how can we communicate in new ways, what has been done, what has been heard, and how has the department responded? Key topics for communicating to the public include:

Activation: Consider what events and other experiences are taking place at the Parks? People want to go to a space that is activated, creating vibrancy through common interests.

Technology: Improve websites and modes of connection for learning about what is going on with Parks. Consider new Apps that can serve as links between metrics and goals that the system is working to achieve.

BASIC NEEDS

The research team noticed **Belonging, Recreation, Safety, and Connection** as recurring themes and explored underlying reasons for this pattern. They formed what the team eventually identified as "Basic Needs" for users of parks and public spaces. The following are excerpts from multiple rounds of community conversations that support our identified themes:



BELONGING

While there is no one magic formula to create the ultimate sense of belonging, the conversations identified cultural diversity and opportunities to share experiences with others as key features. The importance of representation and diversity of the people using parks and public spaces was evidenced as one resident shared, *"I enjoy seeing people that look like me and also people who don't look like me enjoying my culture."* Creating opportunities to convene, whether through small- or large-scale events that bring the community together, was also important. Another resident shared that, *"picnic tables represent family time, eating time, and friends time and getting together. And then we can continue playing."* These opportunities give people a common experience to connect to, and when such events take place in neighborhood parks, they might even encourage more active lifestyles.



SAFETY

Physical safety was a recurring issue and seemed to be influenced by how you are positioned in life. For example, women are more likely than men to be concerned about possible attacks while being alone in a space as shared by one resident, *"I feel safe as long as I can see other people on the trail."* Felt differently for the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community in how they experience safety (or a lack thereof) in public spaces, one person interviewed expressed that *"I have to be fearless, be completely radical in my approach to the outdoors. It's not safe - historically the woods have not been safe for black people."* Related, another person asked, *"We are loud. How can our movement be met without interruption or police interaction?"*



RECREATION

Participants had the opportunity to imagine and model their ideal park experience. It was clear that parks provide a place for residents to engage in recreational activities and that spaces should be able to meet a diversity of interests. An avid disc golfer wants a space where he *"can be funny and competitive at the same time."* A parent responded to one of the park experience ideas saying *"As a mom, the splash pad concept is life-changing."* One resident recalled how in her home country, she enjoyed seeing people selling fruit and ice cream. What the research team took from these multiple responses and perspectives is that at some point you can't design for everyone; but what can be done is to continue to explore new ways of engagement that provide elements of nature, art, exercise, serenity and even food.



CONNECTION

Similar to belonging, there were multiple perspectives on opportunities for connection. For example, one person expressed *"I go outside to kind of get away and connect back to myself."* Other residents talked about how specific activities such as "beautifying the community" and "helping neighbors" brought them closer to where they live. Accessibility is at the core of connection, referring to both physical barriers of a space, and to perceived cultural barriers that might keep residents from feeling welcomed in a public space. A resident shared his belief, *"good vibes' for a space are not so much dependent on the neighborhood but what other people are doing."*

COMMUNITY OUTREACH THEMES

Core needs: there are four core principles and desires of parks and recreation spaces including providing a sense of belonging, incorporating a form of recreation, are safe, and elicit opportunities for connection (to people or the environment).



GATHERING SPACES:

Parks are a neutral ground, and can be a place where people interact with others and should have park ambassadors to provide oversight



FITNESS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION:

Local instructors and participants desire streamlined information and processes for renting park space and scheduling activities, sort of a one-stop-shop that is intuitive.



SIMPLE IMPROVEMENTS:

Lighting, trash containers, benches and dog bag dispensers were mentioned as easy wins for many park spaces.



SYSTEM IDENTITY AND AWARENESS:

Diversify the park system and enhance department communication, such as specific "theme" parks (exercise park, music park, etc.) and bilingual park maps. Additionally, neighborhood-scale maps would provide information about more than the park where the sign is located to inform about other amenities a short walk or ride away.



EVENTS AND RIVER ACTIVATION:

More live music opportunities, family-oriented events and recreational activities along the river.



ADULT AND FAMILY PROGRAMMING:

Provide more multi-generational activities, primarily for active adults and teens.



IMPROVED CONNECTIVITY:

Promote a well-connected park system and network of trails. Provide safe access to the parks from adjacent city streets.



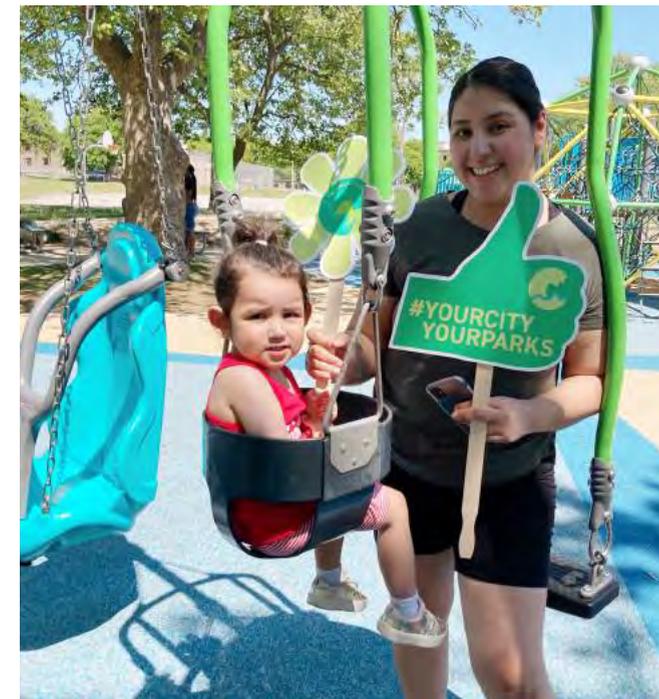
FOUR LEGGED FRIENDS:

Create more dog parks and off-leash hours at larger parks like Riverside, Mulick, Fuller, Highland, and Wilcox parks.



OUTDOOR EDUCATION:

Offer more opportunities to connect with nature and educational experiences.



PhotoVision interviews with ping pong players at Wilcox Park (top), a neighbor and her daughter at Ottawa Hills Park (lower left), and a dog-walker at MLK Park (lower right).

2/

GRAND RAPIDS PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM TODAY

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To understand Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system, we first looked at the City's wider ecological, environmental, social, cultural, and economic context. The analysis revealed a diverse and changing Grand Rapids, where the parks and recreation system can (and should) be at the center of questions about ecological health, social cohesion, livability, and economic development.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Grand Rapids' parks and open spaces lie within a rich variety of landscape conditions stemming from the City's underlying ecological framework and geological history. In the future, there is an opportunity to celebrate this diversity and landscape palette throughout the system.

Grand Rapids' pre-development context was comprised of a unique combination of glacial topography and hydrology dominated by the Grand River and its rapids. It was home to a rich array of plant communities and wildlife that created ecological diversity.

Over time, the City's growth and development has altered the landscape significantly. Today, this ecological diversity is mostly illegible. The City's park system – including the Grand River and its tributaries – has the potential to bring it back and give legibility to the multi-faceted ecological context. In many ways, this ecological framework is a strong "legacy" for the park system which has great promise for renewal in the future. Today, the City's ecological framework can be understood through four distinct ecological zones: the Grand River Valley, the Tributaries, the Bluffs, and the Upland Moraine.



The Rapids -1868

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Glacial Topography: the Grand River Valley, the Bluffs, and the Upland Valparaiso Moraine

The Grand River valley was formed during the last ice age by glacial meltwater traveling from the Huron Basin to Glacial Lake Chicago in the Lake Michigan Basin. The wide river valley was framed by the bluffs and rolling hills of the Valparaiso Moraine which formed during the Crown Point Phase of the Wisconsin glaciation. Where the glacier stopped, a mass of glacial till and sand (moraine) were deposited creating hills and defining the basin of Lake Michigan and part of the St. Lawrence Seaway Continental Divide bounding the Great Lakes Basin.

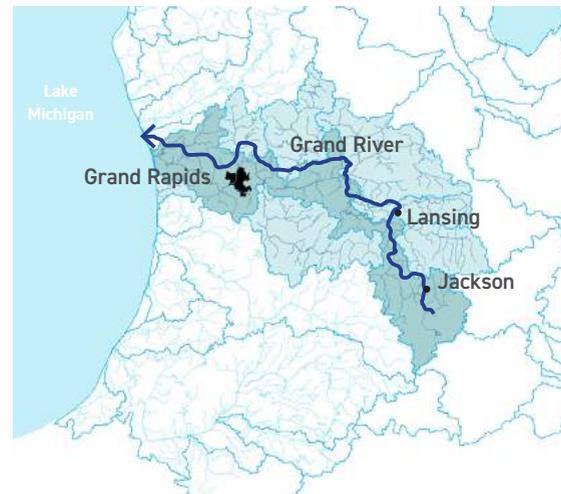
Grand River: Watershed and Hydrology

The 260-mile-long Grand River, Michigan's longest, runs through the center of Grand Rapids. Its many rapids gave the city its name and one of its key defining features. Within the Grand River's large watershed are many tributaries, including the Rogue, Flat, and Maple rivers, and within Grand Rapids' city limits, Plaster Creek.

The Grand River's history is one of ruin and recovery. It was used as a sewer by 19th century loggers and 20th century manufacturers, and is still adversely impacted by numerous dams, agricultural runoff, and urban stormwater. However, since the 1960s the Grand River has made a tremendous recovery due to the efforts of community leaders, government officials, and environmental activists. Grand Rapids has invested \$400 million on sewer upgrades over

the past two decades and has reduced sewage overflows into the river by 99 percent — from as much as 12 billion gallons annually in the 1960s to 11 million gallons in 2008, according to state data.[1] "The result is really obvious: The Grand River in Grand Rapids has become a world class fishery," said former mayor George Heartwell.[2]

The River Restoration Initiative, a public/private collaboration, is working to restore a section of the rapids that characterized the City's site before dams were built to harness the river's power and accommodate large boats.[3] Community efforts such as the annual Mayors' Grand River Cleanup and the Plaster Creek Stewards have also made significant progress in river restoration. Through these policies and initiatives the ecology of the river is recovering. Public awareness of the ecological value of the river had a large role in spurring the movement to restore it.



Grand Rapids falls within the Lower Grand River Watershed, a sub-watershed of the Grand Watershed that extends from Jackson to Lake Michigan

Wildlife

The Grand River watershed supports a varied array of wildlife. The Grand River is long and diverse, supporting trout and salmon for much of its length as well as attracting a great variety of bird species. The river's network of wetlands and marshes, lakes and bayous, gurgling streams, and powerful rivers support a wide range of wildlife: 95 native fish species, 215 bird species and 50 species of mammals, according to state data. [4]

Historic Vegetation

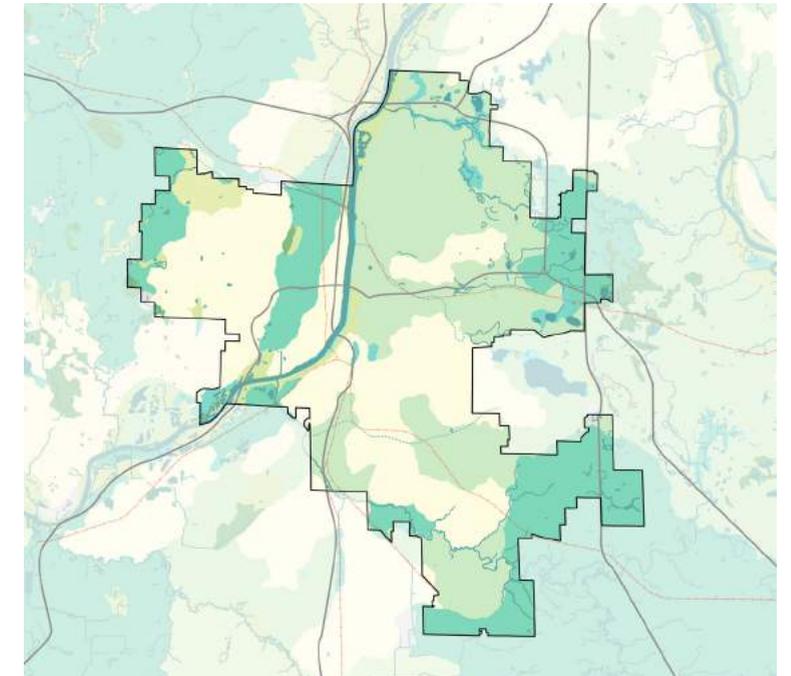
The glacial topography of the Grand Rapids region and hydrology of the Grand River produced a diverse mix of native forests, swamps and grasslands that characterized the landscape of Grand Rapids prior to its development.

Impact of Development

The urbanization of Grand Rapids' diverse landscape has significantly modified the aquatic habitats, soils, and plant communities that characterized its ecosystems and reduced their visibility and public awareness.

While restoring pre-development conditions is not feasible, by identifying the defining characteristics of the City's pre-existing landscape, we can create a framework that can raise awareness of the City's ecological diversity in the public eye and inform decisions on the City's park system and larger regional landscape.

[1] Pat Shellenbarger, Bridge Magazine, March 22, 2016.
 [2] Jeff Alexander, Muskegon Chronicle, July 11, 2010.
 [3] Ibid.
 [4] Jeff Alexander, Muskegon Chronicle, July 11, 2010.



Historic Vegetation

- city boundary
- beech-maple forest
- hardwood swamp
- oak-hickory forest
- savanna/grassland

5,572

square miles of drainage area in the Grand River watershed

13%

of Lake Michigan's drainage basin

95

native fish species inhabit the watershed

215

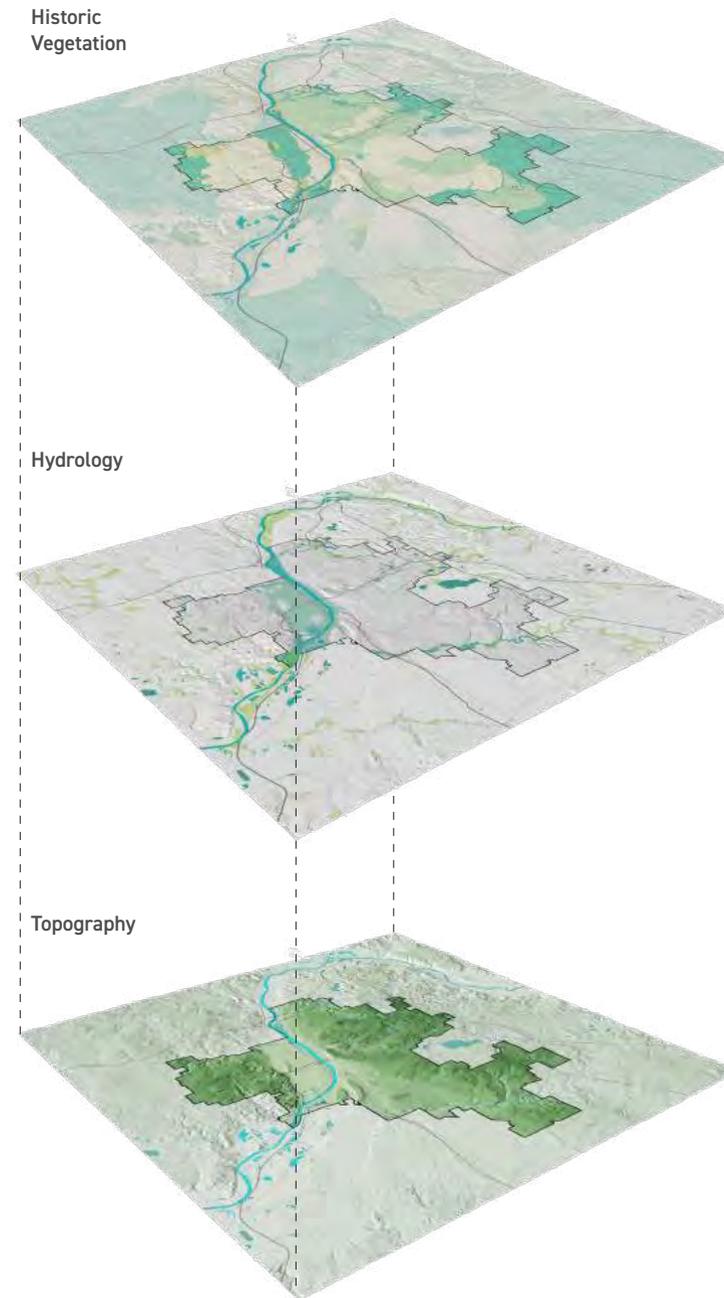
bird species inhabit the watershed

The large Grand River watershed contains great ecological diversity.

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: REFLECTING OUR NATURAL HISTORY IN OUR PARKS

The combination of Grand Rapids' local topography, hydrology, and historic vegetation communities creates a framework of four distinctive ecological zones that can be used as landscape typologies to inform and diversify the parks of Grand Rapids. With this framework, the parks system can reveal and celebrate the geologic events and habitats which are the natural heritage of Grand Rapids.

These four ecological zones reflect the major defining characteristics of the Grand Rapids landscape. An understanding of these zones reveals the diversity that once existed and that can inspire the future of the City's park system. The unique conditions of each zone will inform future improvements and changes of parks maintenance, planting, erosion and stormwater management, and landscape design. The Ecological Zones Framework can also serve as a narrative for environmental education to connect the communities of Grand Rapids with their parks and larger landscape context. This narrative can inspire a branding / marketing strategy for the Department and its parks.



Historic Vegetation

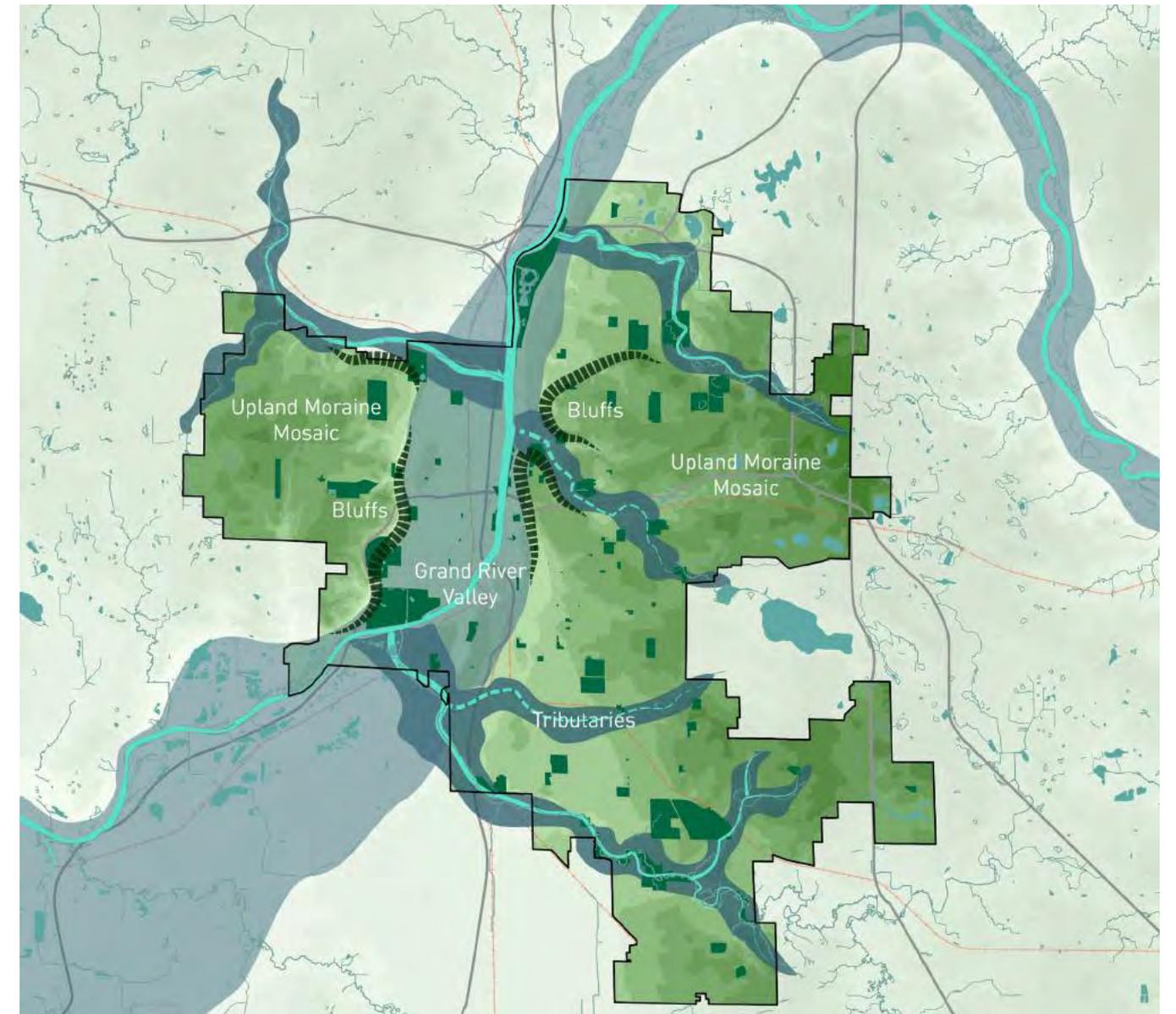
- City Boundary
- Water Bodies
- Beech-Maple Forest
- Hardwood Swamp
- Oak-Hickory Forest
- Savanna/Grassland

Hydrology

- City Boundary
- Water Bodies
- Wetlands
- 100-Year Floodplain
- 500-Year Floodplain
- State Highways

Topography

- City Boundary
- 177-190 m
- 190-200 m
- 200-211 m
- 211-221 m
- 221-230 m
- 230-238 m
- 238-248 m
- 248-274 m



Ecological Framework

- City Boundary
- Water Bodies / Waterways
- The Grand River Valley
- The Tributaries
- The Bluffs
- The Upland Moraine Mosaic

The Ecological Framework, a potential “legacy” for the park system, can inform future design, maintenance, and environmental education in the park system in a way that celebrates the underlying diversity in the City's landscape.

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: A FUTURE “LEGACY” FOR THE PARK SYSTEM



GRAND RIVER VALLEY

Characteristics

The wide, low-lying floodplain along the Grand River is an ancient channel created by glacial meltwater. It is mostly level terrain with access to the Grand River.

Origin

Ancient channel created by the meltwater of the Saginaw Glacial Lobe exiting the proglacial Lake Saginaw flowing into Glacial Lake Chicago.

General Soil Conditions

Well-drained sandy soils throughout, but wet in depressions and stream channel areas.

Historic Vegetation Cover

Beech-Sugar Maple forest, Mixed Hardwood Swamp, with occurrences of Mixed Oak Savanna and Wet Prairie.

Design Implications/Opportunities

Mostly level terrain with proximity and views to the Grand River.

- » Potential for flood resilience interventions for minimizing risk and restoring floodplain function.



BLUFFS

Characteristics

The Bluffs are dramatic topographic transition areas from the Grand River Valley to the rolling Upland Moraine landscape, providing viewpoints over the valley landscape.

Origin

Topographic transition from the Grand River Valley to the Valparaiso Moraine, both formed by glaciation.

General Soil Conditions

Typically well-drained to excessively drained soils with steep slopes.

Historic Vegetation Cover

Dry conditions support Black Oak Barrens, with some White Pine and White Oak.

Design Implications/Opportunities

- » Views into the Grand River Valley can be capitalized through restored open savanna landscape.
- » Slopes may be challenging in some locations and erosion may need to be managed.
- » Vegetation should be carefully selected as soils tend to be excessively drained.



TRIBUTARIES

Characteristics

The Tributaries are small rivers and streams that drain to the Grand River, provide ecological corridors that are ideal for trail connections, and offer unique landscape qualities, distinct from their surroundings.

Origin

Smaller rivers and streams carved by drainage of the larger watershed into the Grand River.

General Soil Conditions

Moderate to well-drained along ravine slopes, poorly drained in the valleys.

Historic Vegetation Cover

Shrub Swamp/Emergent Marsh in some locations, with inclusions of unique vegetation communities.

Design Implications/Opportunities

- » Potentially unique areas with distinctly different landscape qualities than the surrounding landscape.
- » Stream stabilization and habitat restoration is likely needed as most drainage areas may suffer from urban stream syndrome issues.
- » Tributary corridors may also be ideal for trail connections and wildlife corridors.



UPLAND MORaine

Characteristics

Grand Rapids' landscape is part of the Valparaiso Terminal Moraine, formed by glaciation around the Lake Michigan basin. The Moraine has generally well drained soils, providing good opportunities for stormwater management.

Origin

Part of the Valparaiso Terminal Moraine formed during the last glacial period.

General Soil Conditions

Variable from Sandy, Sandy Loam, to Loam; trending respectively from dry/well-drained, to more mesic conditions.

Historic Vegetation Cover

Mosaic of Mixed Oak Savanna, Oak-Hickory Forest, and Beech-Sugar Maple Forest.

Design Implications/Opportunities

- » Generally good soils and drainage.
- » Sandy areas may be more drought-prone than historically loamy soils.
- » Consider potential for upland stormwater management such as rain gardens and other infiltration areas.



 Riverside Park
Grand River Valley Ecological Zone



 Plaster Creek Trail
Tributaries Ecological Zone



 Lookout Park
Bluffs Ecological Zone



 MacKay-Jaycees Park
Upland Moraine Ecological Zone

LOCAL CULTURE AND CHARACTER

CITY DEVELOPMENT

Grand Rapids has grown and evolved in many ways since its early days as a Native American settlement. The Grand River Valley was first inhabited by indigenous people known as the Hopewells, who built earthen burial mounds along the Grand River more than 2,000 years ago. The people of the Three Fires (comprised of the Chippewa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi tribes) later settled in West Michigan with their largest village located in what is now downtown Grand Rapids.

Officially incorporated as a city in 1850, Grand Rapids began to prosper as a result of its lumber mills and soon became recognized worldwide as a hub for furniture manufacturing. This industry continued to grow with the new rail infrastructure at the turn of the 20th century, enhancing regional connections and garnering Grand Rapids the nickname "Furniture City."

Following this period of industrial growth, the city began to invest more in civic infrastructure and open space. The Parks and Boulevard Association formed in 1911 to manage the City's growing park system, which had previously consisted of numerous piecemeal land acquisitions. This initiative aligned with the nationwide City Beautiful movement that championed enhancing the quality of life in urban environments. Planning efforts at the time, such as the 1927 City Plan, also mirrored this effort to improve urban living conditions. The City Plan focused primarily on widening streets and developing a riverfront esplanade, which would later become Riverside Park.

In the years following World War II, the city experienced the rise of the automobile, which soon led to suburban growth and inner city decline. Federally-funded urban renewal demolished several city neighborhoods to allow for highway construction and altered the City's landscape dramatically.

Despite years of urban disinvestment, the city began to stabilize and experience a cultural rebirth with an emphasis on the arts in the late 1960s. In 1969, the National Endowment for the Arts funded its very first public project in downtown Grand Rapids with the Alexander Calder sculpture, *La Grande Vitesse*. The city also gained fame with the presidency of Grand Rapids native Gerald Ford in 1974. This period of cultural rebirth continued through the 1990s with new art and open space attractions, such as the Fredrick Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park, and significant waterfront park development.

Today, Grand Rapids is a city that prioritizes urban livability. As a result of ongoing public realm investments, efforts to attract new industries, and the promotion of the vibrant cultural scene, the city serves as a destination to live, work and visit. The park and recreation system has prioritized building off this prevailing urban identity and reflect the needs of the City's evolving neighborhoods.



The City's early Native American settlements and industrial heritage have shaped its riverfront and identity.

CITY GROWTH OVER TIME



1850: Original Annexation



Before 1900



Post World War I



Post World War II

CHANGING POPULATION

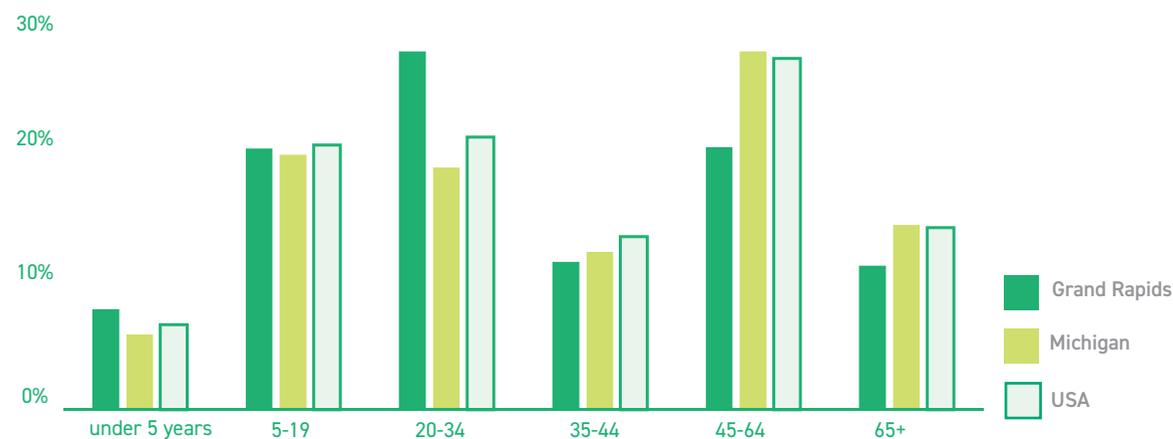
Grand Rapids' population is growing in size and diversity. With these ongoing shifts there is a unique opportunity to improve, preserve, and align the future community needs with the parks and recreation resources that support it.

Michigan's population is shifting westward and cities like Detroit and Flint have been losing residents in great numbers to western metropolitan areas like Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids' population has grown by approximately 6.9% over the last nine years, with the City's current growth rate exceeding both the national rate of 0.35% and the state growth rate of 0.3%. Likewise, Kent County and the region are growing faster than the state and national rates, demonstrating that Grand Rapids is part of a strong growth area. This trend is predicted to continue over the next several years with 2020 census data recording the City's estimated population of 198,917 projected to increase to 221,598 by 2030. In addition to planning for and

accommodating this projected growth, positioning the Department to serve the growing elderly and youth populations is a crucial part of the Master Plan. One of the most distinctive trends in the city, and at the national level, is the rapid aging of the population as result of the Baby Boomer generation. While the total U.S. population grew by approximately 6.3% between 2010 and 2019, the group entering the 45 to 64 year age cohort increased by approximately 32 percent. Grand Rapids is no different. Nationally 16% of the population is 65 and over; this compares to 12% in Grand Rapids. Most cities throughout the United States are experiencing significant gains in the number of residents 55 and over. This is similar in Grand Rapids as currently 23,968 residents whom are seniors.

The City's youth population is also on the rise. On average, Grand Rapids is a younger city than the rest of the country. The median age of Grand Rapids is 31.4 as compared to the national average of 38.6. There are an estimated 6.9%

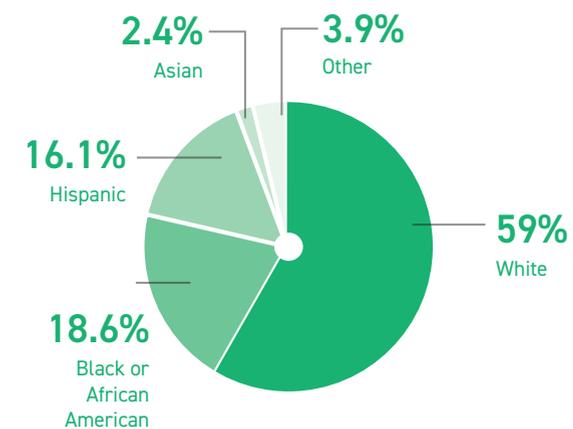
Population Age Structure



children below age 5 and 22.2% under the age of 18. This is important as the youth market is a primary age segment for the Department. There is an opportunity for the Department to grow outdoor recreation offerings, which target a market of younger adults, representing a large part of the City's population growth.

In addition to growing in size, the Grand Rapids population is also becoming more diverse. Currently 67.2% of the population is white; however, this number is projected to decrease with Hispanics, Asians, and people who identify as two or more races fueling Kent County's growth over the last decade. Particularly of note, the Hispanic population in Kent County grew by 30% in the last 10 years.

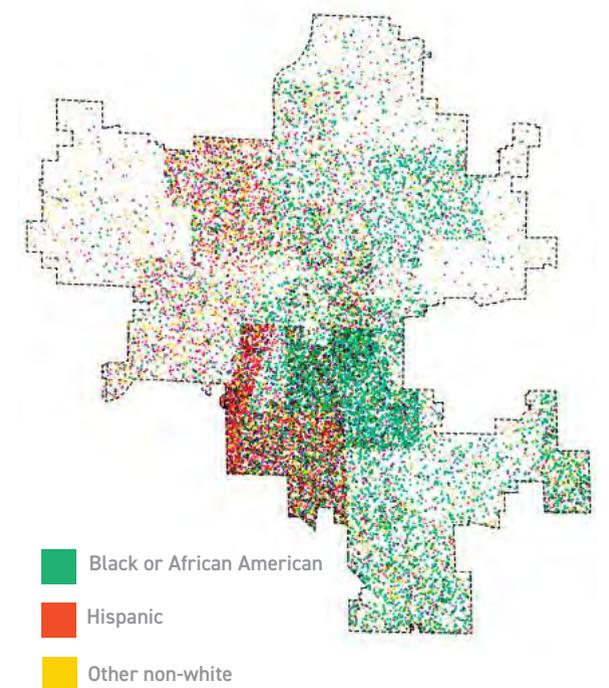
Race and Ethnicity



Source: 2020 U.S. Census

THRIVING LOCAL CULTURE

Grand Rapids is nationally recognized as a city with a strong cultural scene that attracts both residents and visitors. Citizens take great pride in their many cultural assets including the prominent art installations and competitions, multi-cultural groups and events, farm fresh food options, craft breweries, and numerous music events, among others. This strong local identity should be embodied in the City's parks and recreation system.



ECONOMIC ENGINE

A CENTER FOR GROWTH

Over the past decade, the Grand Rapids region has experienced significant economic growth. This can be attributed to strong employment growth in the City's core legacy industries of manufacturing and health care. With 24% job growth from 2010 to 2019, Grand Rapids' economy has grown at nearly double the rate of Michigan and the country. Additionally, Grand Rapids has a system of locally governed Corridor Improvement Authorities that plan for and fund improvements in commercial corridors and districts, encouraging economic growth and vibrancy in many of the City's commercial districts.

Although the Grand Rapids region is growing at a strong pace, economic benefits are often unequally distributed. While Grand Rapids' overall economy is growing, real wage growth for most employees has declined since 2010, echoing larger national trends. The growing disparities in income and employment show that more must be done to address fundamental barriers and gaps in access to opportunity.

Placemaking and quality of life improvements have the joint benefit of supporting businesses and residents. Residents are attracted to cities and neighborhoods with safe streets, parks, and cultural amenities. Businesses frequently locate in markets that are attractive to employees, to support workforce recruitment and retention. Retail businesses benefit from locating in safe and attractive destinations anchored by cultural institutions and public spaces. By supporting the efforts of its local development authorities, the City can help make Grand Rapids a destination for businesses, residents, and visitors.

PARKS AND VALUE

The value of the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation system can be understood and measured in terms of direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of spending. But the value created by parks goes well beyond economic impact. Cities with strong, vibrant public park systems benefit from improved health, closer connections to nature, and a greater sense of community. This can lead to lower healthcare costs, higher property values, and better quality of life that help attract and retain residents and businesses to the community.



29th 
Best-Performing City in the
United States

2.9%
Regional Unemployment
(April 2019)

38,300
Jobs Added (2010-2019)

24% 
Job Growth (2010-2019)

Taken from the 2020 Grand Rapids Economic Development and Mobility Strategic Plan

Studies conducted by the Trust for Public Land, the National Recreation and Park Association, and other researchers find Americans across all walks of life support investments in public parks and that park system investments offer sound return on investment of public monies. The result of park and recreation expenditures on Michigan's economy is immense. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) reported the shared impact of operations and capital spending by state and local park and recreation agencies in 2017 resulted in nearly \$2 billion in economic activity, and more than 14,000 jobs that paid salaries, wages and benefits totaling nearly \$47 million.

While city parks departments across the U.S. have continuously learned to do more with less, the Master Plan is an opportunity to think holistically about all of the benefits of the parks and recreation system. In Grand Rapids, the entire system may generate upwards of \$25 million annually in economic value and strategic investments utilizing the full benefits of the system. Parks, park systems, and open spaces build value as a function of their capacity to create benefits, which can be quantified in several ways.

» **REAL ESTATE VALUE** - Parks and trails have the ability to create both incremental and new real estate value. Great parks can raise neighboring property values by an estimated 15 percent or more, increasing city property tax revenue while also encouraging new private investment. Specifically, trail connections can encourage new development by providing a strong framework for private investments across a trail region.

- » **CITY BRAND** -Visible and active parks can build a City's identity and contribute to its branding. Successful parks represent local government and citizen commitment to public space and can give the city a sense of uniqueness and familiarity. These qualities help the city attract new residents and businesses and raise its stature as a tourist destination.
- » **LOCAL SPENDING** - Parks can generate economic value through direct investment in the system and revenue that comes into the Department then circulates through the local economy. Spending may include investments like capital improvements at parks as well as routine maintenance and upkeep, while revenue may be derived through lease payments from concessions and amusements, venue rentals, parking, and event permit fees.
- » **TOURISM** -Both parks and recreation facilities can serve as destinations for visitors. Tourism can create incremental value to a city through specific facility or park fees paid by out-of-region visitors and through indirect retail spending by those visitors.
- » **ENVIRONMENT** - As part of the greater ecological system, parks can play a significant role in promoting biodiversity and mitigating the negative impacts of climate, air, and water pollution. Parks serve as areas that can encourage biodiversity, a crucial element to the overall health, sustainability, and resilience of our ecosystems. With their vegetation and tree canopy, parks also help reduce the heat island effect¹ for nearby houses by as much as 17 degrees², which will become increasingly important as average temperatures are projected to rise. Trees in parks and along

1. Definition available at <https://www.epa.gov/heatislands>
2. 2018 published data by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/features/detailed-maps-urban-heat-island-effects-washington-dc-and-baltimore>



Roll Bounce GR Juneteenth event at Calder Plaza

city streets sequester carbon and remove pollutants from the air, serving as a form of filter, while open space provides permeable surfaces to absorb and filter stormwater before reaching nearby water bodies. These environmental benefits of parks all correlate to future cost savings for the city, such as reducing the cost of managing stormwater.

- » PUBLIC HEALTH - The numerous health benefits of recreation and park systems are apparent, as they provide opportunities for physical activity, contact with nature, and social interaction. Park and recreation systems provide environments that encourage fitness and work to reduce the rate of obesity, a national epidemic with several related health conditions. Certain park conditions such as good maintenance, accessibility, design and lighting, and proximity to other amenities and the community can lead to increased physical activity. Physical well-being is also directly tied to human contact with nature, which is

proven to lower stress, blood pressure, and cholesterol while strengthening the overall immune system. The psychological benefits of parks stem from both physical and mental exercise and the opportunities created for social interaction. Physical exercise has been proven to reduce anxiety and depression, while other open space activities, such as gardening, yoga, and tai chi positively engage both the mind and body. Parks, similar to other institutions such as schools and churches, also encourage social interaction and thus serve as places that foster human relationships. These relationships result in stronger, more cohesive communities.

- » PUBLIC SAFETY - With the proper design, parks can create safe places for youth outside of school hours, as well as improve an area's sense of safety. Converting an unused or vacant space into a park can dramatically improve an area's overall safety by conveying a sense of community investment and creating a space for social interaction. Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) offers guidance on using design best practices to foster safer cities and neighborhoods.

THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF PARKS AND RECREATION

COVID-19: A GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND ITS LOCAL IMPACT

On January 21, 2020, the first documented case of SARS-CoV-2 was confirmed in the United States. The World Health Organization issued a global health emergency on January 31, 2020. On March 10, 2020, the state of Michigan declared an emergency upon confirming the state's first two cases of coronavirus. Michigan schools were closed by executive order on March 12, 2020 and a state-wide stay-at-home order was issued by Governor Whitmer on March 23, 2020. Michiganders were allowed to visit grocery stores for food or medicine, medical treatment and minimal business operations. Essential workers in police, fire, hospital, grocery store and pharmacies were exempted. Remaining residents' only other exemptions to the stay-at-home order were walking a pet or walking for exercise. Public and private gatherings outside of family homes were banned.

The pandemic thus reminded residents of something that has been true all along: parks are essential to the health and wellbeing of people and communities. As neighborhood hubs, they augment safety, resilience, equity, environmental justice, and opportunity. Grand Rapids parks are part of a larger solution to community wellbeing, bringing a deeper resilience that not only helps us make it through COVID-19 but enables us to thrive after.

PARK USAGE DURING COVID

Parks have become a place to maintain a sense of normalcy, as residents continue to navigate new social norms during the pandemic. Local and state parks reported a tremendous increase in visitation, on average a 30% increase. Statewide, attendance at parks had been lagging, but since the state-wide stay-at-home order, it created a domino effect for people to want to venture outside and flood parks, recreational centers and golf courses. Countless municipalities reported difficulties in keeping up with park maintenance and trash removal.

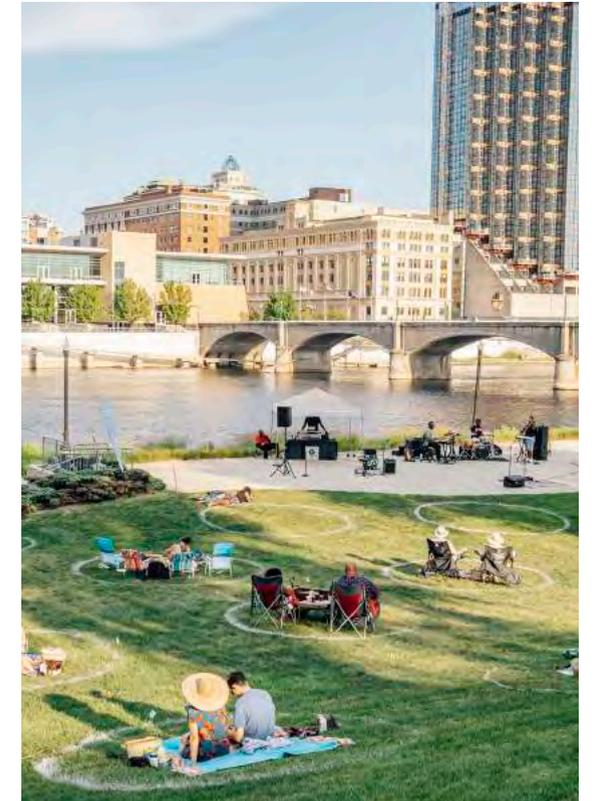
The consciousness about the importance of public space has risen. Epidemiologists say there are a couple of big differences between indoor and outdoor spaces: airflow and space. A recent study by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases found that corona viruses can survive in the air for up to three hours. But outdoors, where the airflow is good, the droplets are more likely to dissipate, making it harder for them to infect a new host. It's much easier to stick to the social distancing six-foot rule-of-thumb outdoors. By maintaining at least six feet from others at parks, beaches, and open spaces, the public is at low risk of contracting COVID-19.

Keeping the outdoors accessible to the public during the lock down also had major impacts on both mental and physical health. Spending time in nature has been proven to combat depression, calm anxiety, increase generosity and empathy, and decrease negative thoughts. In addition to its physical benefits, exercise like walking, running, hiking or biking improves mental health and may help to strengthen the immune system.

GR PARKS RESPONSE TO COVID AND PRECAUTIONS TAKEN

Following the Governor's executive orders, The Department shared in early April 2020 that individuals could engage in outdoor activities such as walking, hiking, running, cycling or any other recreational activity consistent with remaining at least six feet from people from outside a person's household and with other restrictions imposed by previous executive orders.

Despite a 27% loss in revenue from rentals and programs in 2020 from the previous year and an addition 7% decline in 2021, the City implemented a number of extra services benefiting the community. This included overtime for their limited maintenance staff, outsourcing for litter pickup, trash removal, wipe downs of high touch points and providing temporary COVID portable restrooms and hand washing stations in targeted downtown parks.



Socially distanced circles at the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks Green Gala, 2020



Warning notices affixed to playground equipment during the first several months of the COVID-19 pandemic

MOVING FORWARD

In late March 2020, The Department welcomed a return to recreation first online and then moving outdoors with free yoga, tai chi, cycling, zumba, pound fitness classes and more. Splash pads and other previously-closed amenities reopened at the beginning of June 2020. Softball leagues started up in July 2020. Outdoor recreation required complying with local and state health requirements.

Additional security for the vast uptick in park users, outsourcing for litter pickup, trash removal, wipe downs of high touch points and continued availability of COVID restrooms and hand washing stations in targeted parks were implemented as extra expenditures for fiscal year 2022.

A 2020 study by Boston University interviewed 130 mayors of large cities across 38 states to understand their perceptions and priorities about parks and open space now and in the future. Three out of four mayors surveyed said they expect residents to continue spending more time visiting parks and greenspaces than they did before the pandemic, and roughly two-thirds said they expect residents to spend more time biking or walking. More than half of the responding mayors said they would like to see more improvements to their parks and to programming events within those parks, although more than a third also said they expected funding for parks to take a big financial hit in the wake of the pandemic. 92% of mayors reported they had repurposed city streets for outdoor dining, temporarily or permanently.

In partnership with Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., the City pivoted to subsidize the creation of the outdoor "Refreshment Areas" in July 2020. With nearly 60 participating restaurants who applied to have these zones placed near their establishments, these areas were enjoyed far into the winter. These furnished, open-air zones utilized parking spaces and sometimes parking lots, in the case of the Welcome Center in Canal Park across from City Built Brewery, with concrete barriers, comfortable site furnishings and sometimes shade canopies. Patrons within the refreshment area were allowed to carry an open alcoholic beverage up to 16 ounces in a designated container. A number of restaurants supplied domes, tents and greenhouse enclosures, allowing patrons to enjoy the outdoors while minimizing contact with others as the weather turned cold. Over 40 restaurants continued this trend in winter 2021-22. Local reports indicated the expanded outdoor dining were 'here to stay.' These initiatives helped activate roadways largely abandoned by vehicles during the pandemic, though were minimized in the winter for snow plowing logistics.

The Department piloted free virtual fitness classes at the beginning of the pandemic. As demand grew, virtual classes have become a staple offering to residents, at a low price point. "We know how important these fitness opportunities are to our community," said John Judnich, recreation supervisor, in a press release. "We want to continue to provide ways for community members to stay active and connected during COVID-19." These classes were augmented by free in-person outdoor fitness classes in the parks when weather permitted. One participant shared "I have become a big fan of virtual exercise. It's safe and convenient. The instructors are wonderful."



The Welcome Center in the Canal Park Social Zone (above); Fitness @ Home virtual classes (bottom left); Outdoor SoulfulMOTION class at Garfield Park (bottom right)

STATE OF THE PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM

To ground the Master Plan recommendations in the existing conditions of the parks and recreation system and the needs of the Grand Rapids community, the Master Plan includes an update to the City's inventory, an assessment of demographics and access, a level of service analysis, including benchmarking comparisons, and a recreation and program assessment.

MISSION:

To provide our community with inspirational experiences through the responsible management and collaborative stewardship of the City's natural, educational, and cultural resources.

VISION:

Creating and supporting a healthy, vibrant community through active neighborhoods, inclusive programs and events, innovation and best practices, exceptional services and embracing diversity.

The diversity of Grand Rapids is reflected in the typology of high-quality parks, open space, and recreational facilities found within the City. From large-scale waterfront parks that draw visitors regionally, such as Riverside Park, to smaller neighborhood parks that serve as community hubs, such as Richmond Park, the residents of Grand Rapids have many options to choose from when looking for recreational or leisurely activities.

The Master Plan evaluates the character, performance, and accessibility of the diverse spaces within the park system, as well as a high-level review of the broader system in terms of the level of service and overall acreage. This analysis provides a comprehensive perspective of the opportunities and challenges within the park system and recreational experiences available to residents.

This plan was prepared in accordance with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) Guidelines for the Development of Community Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Plans. It is a tool for potential grant funding from the MDNR and other agencies and foundations.



John Ball Area Neighborhood Association at Lincoln Park

METHODOLOGY

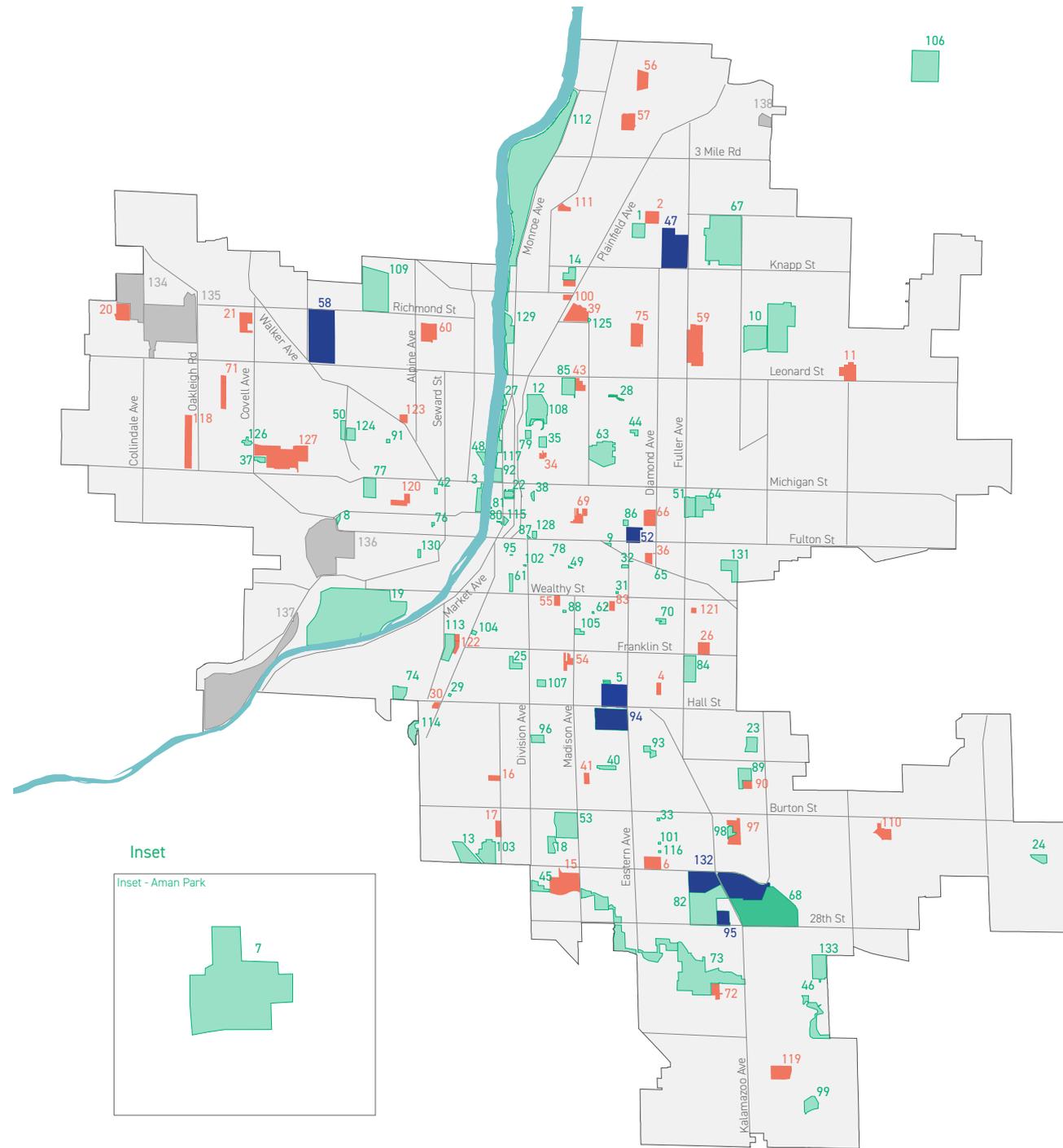
To determine present-day and future needs of Grand Rapids residents, the existing park system, facilities, and program offerings must be examined. This combined with current trends and community feedback will help the Department anticipate and plan for future user needs. The park system was evaluated in three ways:

- » Quantity (count of acreage and amenities): Is the amount of park space, recreation space, and amenities today appropriate for Grand Rapids?
- » Location & Distribution: Is park space distributed well across the city? Do all areas have equitable access to the parks and recreational amenities they need?
- » Quality: What are the defining features and characteristics of the system?

This analysis was based upon information gathered from several different sources:

- » Review of the 2017 Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan
- » Park and Amenity Inventory, updated through this process
- » Parks accessibility review
- » National Metrics and Benchmarks: The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) maintains a database of park system data in the US. Our team used information from this database to understand national trends and metrics in parks and recreation elements and to benchmark Grand Rapids with comparable cities.
- » Demographic trends: The team used data from the US Census and American Community Survey to understand population characteristics and trends.
- » Feedback: Information from stakeholders, City staff, and community outreach has helped verify gaps and identify additional needs. Data gathered from the public engagement activities has also informed these results.

PARK SYSTEM TODAY



- Park
- School park
- Golf course
- Cemetery

- 1 Aberdeen Park
- 2 Aberdeen Elementary School
- 3 Ah-Nab-Awen Park
- 4 Alexander Elementary School
- 5 Alexander Park
- 6 Alger Middle School
- 7 Aman Park
- 8 Baja Park
- 9 Baldwin Park
- 10 Ball-Perkins Park
- 11 Beckwith School Grounds
- 12 Belknap Park
- 13 Bike Park
- 14 Briggs Park
- 15 Brookside Elementary School
- 16 Buchanan Elementary School
- 17 Burton Elementary & Middle School
- 18 Burton Woods Park
- 19 Butterworth Site
- 20 CA Frost Environmental Science Academy Elementary school
- 21 CA Frost Environmental Science Academy Middle High School
- 22 Calder Plaza
- 23 Cambridge Park
- 24 Camelot Park
- 25 Campau Park
- 26 Campus Elementary
- 27 Canal Street Park
- 28 Carrier Creek site
- 29 Caulfield Park
- 30 Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School
- 31 Cherry Green
- 32 Cherry Park
- 33 Cheseboro Park
- 34 Coit Creative Arts Academy
- 35 Coit Park
- 36 Congress Elementary School
- 37 Covell Dog Park
- 38 Crescent Park
- 39 City Middle High School
- 40 Dickinson Buffer Park
- 41 Dickinson Cultural Center
- 42 Douglas Park
- 43 East Leonard Elementary School
- 44 Eastern Park
- 45 ED Property #1
- 46 ED Property #6
- 47 Fairplains Cemetery
- 48 Fish Ladder Park
- 49 Foster Park
- 50 Fourth St Woods
- 51 Fuller Park
- 52 Fulton Street Cemetery
- 53 Garfield Park
- 54 Gerald R. Ford Academic Center
- 55 Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center
- 56 Grand Rapids Montessori @ North Park
- 57 Grand Rapids Montessori @ Wellerwood
- 58 Greenwood Cemetery
- 59 GRPS University
- 60 Harrison Park Elementary School
- 61 Heartside Park
- 62 Heritage Hill Park
- 63 Highland Park
- 64 Hillcrest Park
- 65 Hosken Park
- 66 Houseman Field
- 67 Huff Park
- 68 Indian Trails Golf Course
- 69 Innovation Central High School
- 70 Joe Taylor Park
- 71 KEC Oakleigh Elementary School
- 72 Ken-O-Sha Elementary School
- 73 Ken-O-Sha Park
- 74 Kensington Park
- 75 Kent Hills Elementary School
- 76 Lexington Park
- 77 Lincoln Park
- 78 Lincoln Place Park
- 79 Lookout Park
- 80 Louis Campau Promenade
- 81 Lyon Square
- 82 Mackay-Jaycees Park
- 83 Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy
- 84 Martin Luther King Park
- 85 Mary Waters Park
- 86 Midtown Green Park
- 87 Monument Park
- 88 Mooney Park
- 89 Mulick Park
- 90 Mulick Park Elementary School
- 91 Nagold Park
- 92 North Monroe
- 93 Oakdale Park
- 94 Oakgrove Cemetery
- 95 Oakhill Cemetery
- 96 Otsego Drain Basin site
- 97 Ottawa Hills High School
- 98 Ottawa Hills Park
- 99 Oxford Place
- 100 Palmer Elementary School
- 101 Paris Park
- 102 Pekich Park
- 103 Plaster Creek Family Park
- 104 Plaza Roosevelt Green Space
- 105 Pleasant Park
- 106 Provin Trails
- 107 Raspberry Field
- 108 Reservoir Park
- 109 Richmond Park
- 110 Ridgemoor Park Montessori School
- 111 Riverside Middle School
- 112 Riverside Park
- 113 Roberto Clemente Park
- 114 Roosevelt Park
- 115 Rosa Park Circle
- 116 Seymour Park
- 117 Sixth Street Park
- 118 Shawmut Hills Elementary School Academy
- 119 Sherwood Park Global Studies Academy
- 120 Sibley Elementary School
- 121 Sigsbee School Grounds
- 122 Southwest Community Campus
- 123 Stocking Elementary School
- 124 Sullivan Field
- 125 Sweet Street Park
- 126 Tremont Greenspace
- 127 Union High School
- 128 Veterans Park
- 129 Water Department Storage Yard Site
- 130 Westtown Commons Park
- 131 Wilcox Park
- 132 Woodlawn Cemetery
- 133 32nd Street site

Other publicly-accessible sites not owned or operated by the City of Grand Rapids:

- 134 Blandford Nature Center
- 135 The Highlands (Land Conservancy of West Michigan)
- 136 John Ball Zoo
- 137 Kent Trails (Kent County)
- 138 Lambertson Lake Fen Nature Preserve (Land Conservancy of West Michigan)

PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM INVENTORY

The updated park and recreation system inventory establishes a baseline understanding of the quantity, type, location, and quality of all park and recreation facilities in Grand Rapids. Starting with a list of facilities provided by the City, the project team visited each department facility and recorded its amenities, accessibility, and condition. The on-the-ground inventory was supplemented by an aerial survey and verified against the City's GIS database. Overall, 87 parks and open spaces, as well as joint school yards sites, were inventoried through this process. Refer to the appendix for the park system inventory.

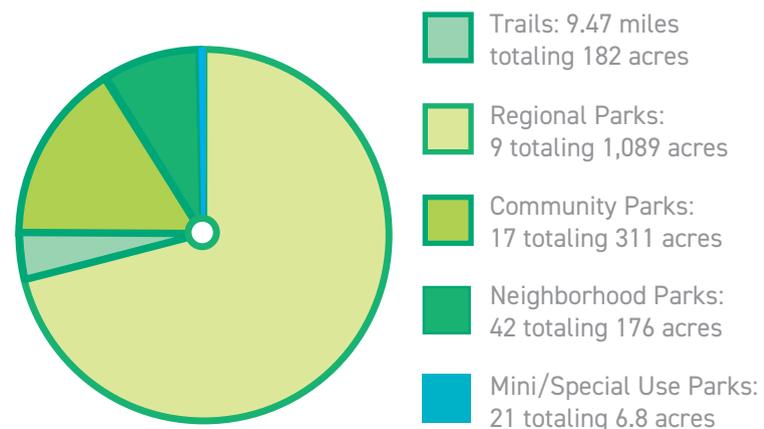
The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department controls and manages approximately 1,988 acres of land which include developed parks, undeveloped land, natural areas, cemeteries, trails, and a golf course. An additional 219 acres are joint school-park sites.

Typically, smaller open spaces address localized needs (like a small playground or riverfront access point), while larger parks and open space draw users from farther away for destination activities (like Riverside Park). The uses offered at a park vary by category. Neighborhood parks are considered the most critical for local, walkable park access and community health as these types of parks provide a range of playground amenities and recreational opportunities for residents. Community parks are larger in size and often feature a greater concentration of sports fields and other recreation amenities to meet demand for a broader area. Regional parks include the broadest range of amenities and accommodate a wide range of programming and users. They may include land set aside for preservation of natural resources or environmental significance, or for

historic or cultural use. These parks often play an important economic role, helping generate revenue which can help fund the rest of the system.

The majority of Grand Rapids' park acreage is held in nine large regional parks totaling 1,089 acres. Forty-two neighborhood parks comprise 176 acres, seventeen community parks add 311 acres, and 21 mini-parks add up to just almost seven acres of the system. Additionally, there are 294 acres of cemeteries and 96 acres of golf courses managed by the Department.

The large number of smaller parks in the system helps to improve access across the city, but smaller parks also add disproportionately to the maintenance burden, requiring more effort to maintain because of their small size and distribution across the city. **On the whole, the City's total acreage falls slightly short for the neighborhood park category, a type of park that is important for walkability, daily recreation, and access.**



Grand Rapids manages 1,987.7 acres of developed and undeveloped green space (diagram excluding cemeteries, schools, and golf courses)

Per NRPA guidelines, parks and recreational open space can be categorized based on their size and general function. These categories include associated service areas for each park type that indicate a minimum standard for geographic balance and availability of each park type in the park system.

Classifying parks ensures the entire community is served by a wide range of park and recreational activities. Service areas for park types include:

- » Mini Parks: 1/4 mile or less
- » Neighborhood Parks: 1/4 - 1/2 miles
- » Community Parks: 1/2 to 3 miles
- » Regional Parks: Varies, within a 1-hour drive

MINI PARK



- » 21 Mini Parks
- » Under 1 acre, including Monument Park above
- » Address limited, unique, or isolated recreation needs
- » Can complement neighborhood parks in dense, urban areas
- » Many are clustered around Downtown and denser central neighborhoods

COMMUNITY PARK



- » 17 Community Parks
- » 10-50 acres, including Highland Park above
- » Meet broad community recreation needs
- » Preserve unique landscapes and open spaces
- » Contribute to a connected system
- » May contain specialized recreational facilities

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK



- » 42 Neighborhood Parks
- » 1-10 acres, including Westown Commons Park above
- » Focal point of a neighborhood with family activities
- » Walkable for residents
- » Can provide both informal active and passive recreation

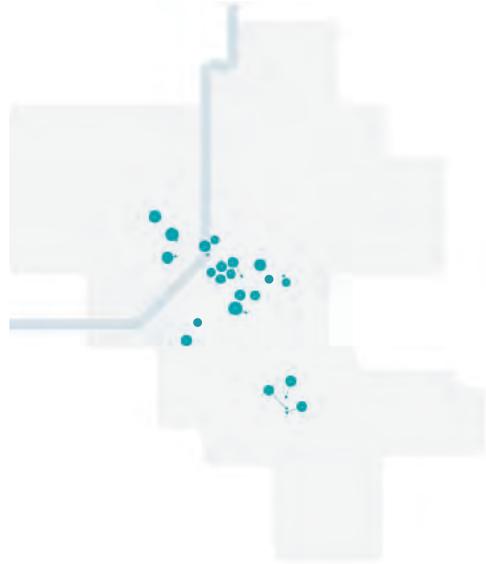
REGIONAL PARK



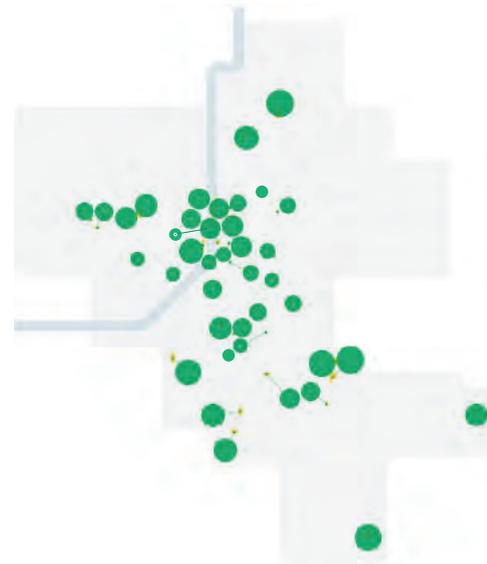
- » 9 Regional Parks
- » 50+ acres, including Ken-O-Sha Park above
- » Serve broad spectrum of regional recreation needs
- » Often require partnerships and substantial funding
- » Destination activities

PARK TYPE CLASSIFICATIONS IN GRAND RAPIDS

Mini Parks:
1/4 Mile or Less Service Area



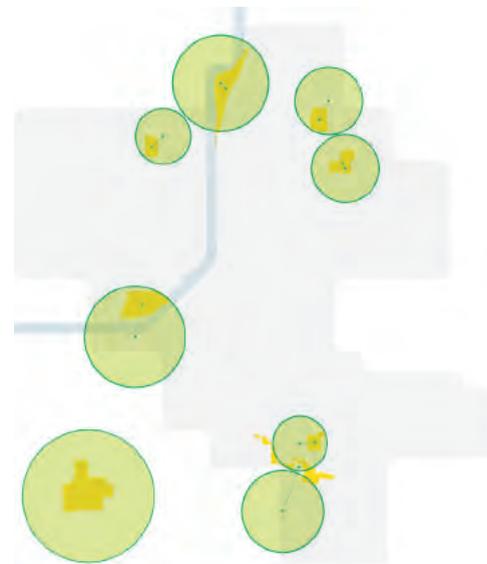
Neighborhood Parks:
1/4 to 1/2 Mile Service Area



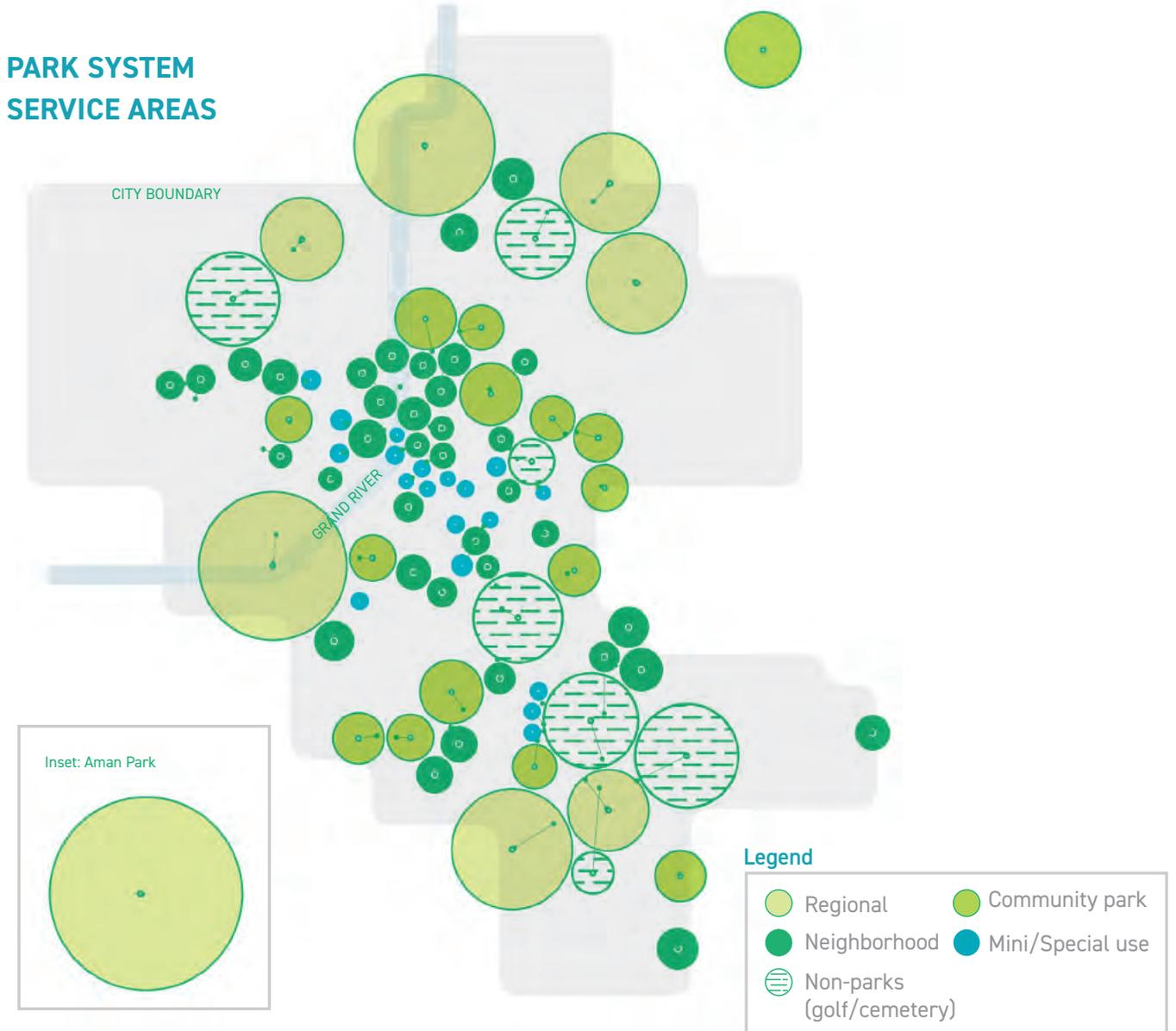
Community Parks:
1/2 to 3 Mile Service Area



Regional Parks:
Multiple Communities Served within an hour drive



PARK SYSTEM SERVICE AREAS



Analysis of the geographic distribution of park facilities throughout the City reveal that while overall park coverage is good, the City should consider addressing the following:

- » Mini parks and neighborhood parks are mostly clustered around the urban core and not equally distributed through out the three wards
- » The west end of Ward 1 does not have good coverage
- » The east and north ends of Ward 2 do not have good coverage
- » The south end of Ward 3 does not have good coverage
- » Ward 3, in general, has fewer parks

GRAND RAPIDS PARK WALKSHEDS

Although 80% of Grand Rapids residents live within walking range to a park, the Department continues to prioritize access to green space in under-served parts of the community and create park spaces that keep pace with current population growth and development. In April 2018, Grand Rapids was one of 12 U.S. cities to receive a planning and technical assistance grant to ensure all residents had access to a high-quality park close to home through the National Recreation and Park Association's 10-minute Walk campaign.

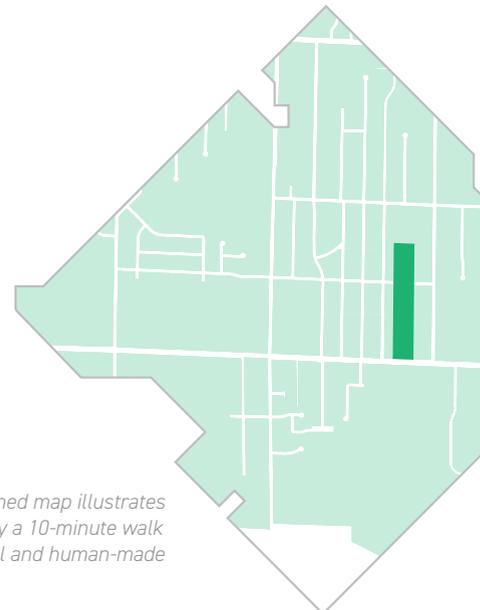
A "walkshed" is a tool to understand the barriers people face when walking to a park from their home. Analyzing the area around a specific park that's reachable on foot for the average person helps the Department understand how to make it more accessible.

On average, a person can be expected to walk about ten minutes to get to a destination like a park. That's typically about a half mile in a straight line. But realistically, people navigate routes based on sidewalk availability or a natural or man-made barrier that may be obstructing a direct path. The area covered by a ten-minute walk is often much tighter than the half-mile radius would suggest.

In the spring of 2019, the Urban Land Institute (ULI) reported that compared with the national average of 8.9 acres per 1,000 residents, the city of Grand Rapids currently has only 7.7 accessible acres per 1,000 residents, and in the Neighborhoods of Focus there are only 3.6 acres per 1,000 residents.

Based on conversations with residents and stakeholders, the ULI recommended several strategies to improve access to existing parks and prepare for future acquisitions:

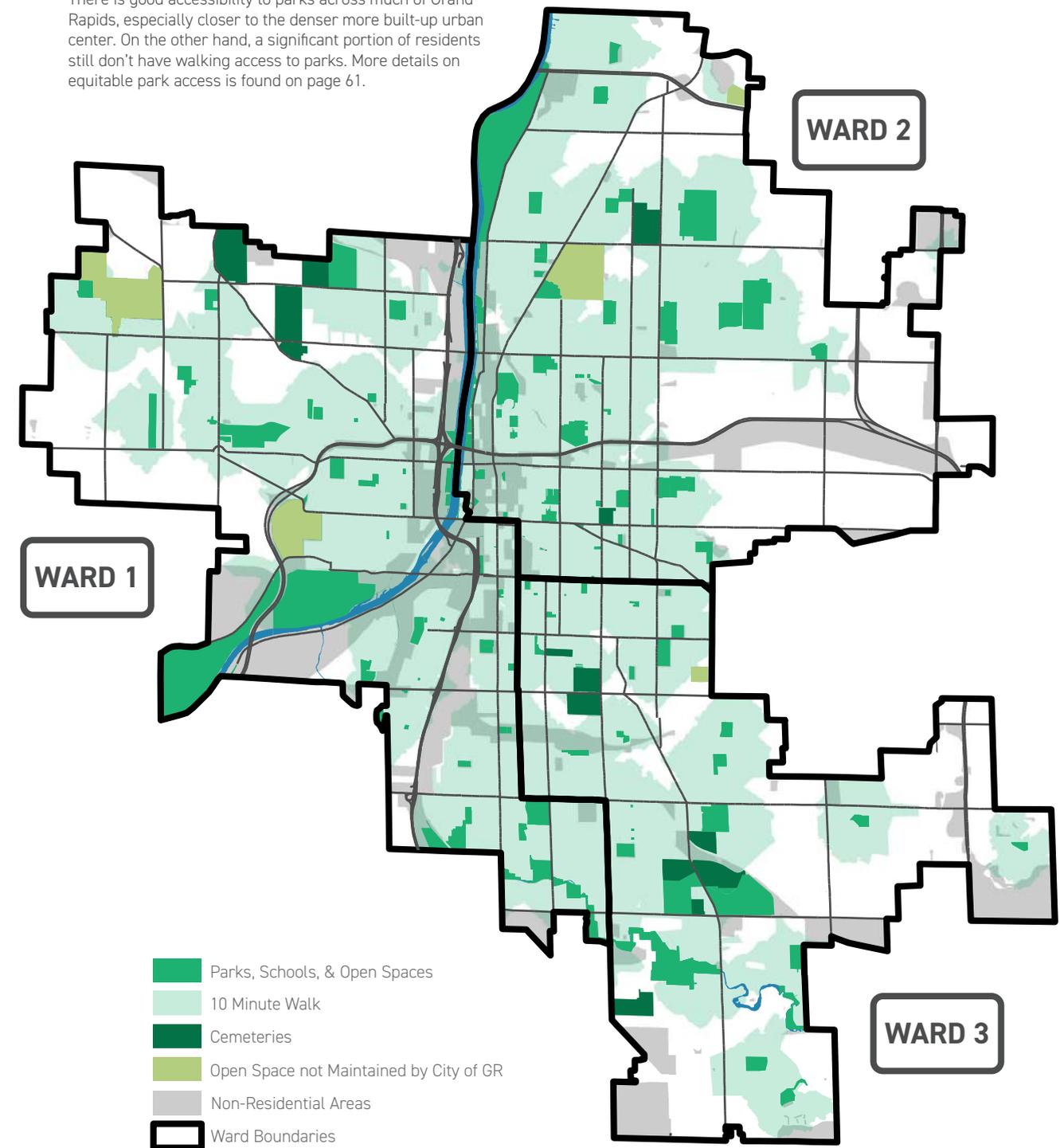
- » **Improved Connections to Parks and Between Parks:** Ensure adequate and safe connections to and from parks and adjacent communities. Expand mobility options and services in proximity to park spaces. Provide new signage and wayfinding. Provide safe and direct access between parks.
- » **Improved Access Within Parks:** Create a system of nodes and pathways. Provide lighting for comfort and safety.
- » **Accommodations and Amenities for a Wide Range of Populations:** Prioritize space for seniors, offer wheelchair-accessible site furnishings, implement gender-neutral restrooms.
- » **Coordination of New Parks with Existing City Plans:** Evaluate existing City plans and initiatives to ensure future parks are accessible by bus and bike route, and are in ecologically appropriate locations.



An enlarged walkshed map illustrates the area covered by a 10-minute walk based on ecological and human-made barriers.

Analysis of walking access across Grand Rapids

There is good accessibility to parks across much of Grand Rapids, especially closer to the denser more built-up urban center. On the other hand, a significant portion of residents still don't have walking access to parks. More details on equitable park access is found on page 61.



80% proportion of residents are within a 10-min walk to park

CONNECTING THE (GREEN) DOTS

Safe non-motorized access to park space is has improved across the city since 2017, including strong green space connections within the 3rd Ward. Trails, greenways and park systems provide important, carbon-free transportation options and link residents to popular destinations and to one another. As the Department acquires new parkland and invests improvements to existing park spaces, coordination with other city initiatives and departments, such as Vital Streets and City Traffic Engineering, is crucial to ensure access to all community members. Below is a list of advances the Department has made in improving connectivity within the parks system since 2017:

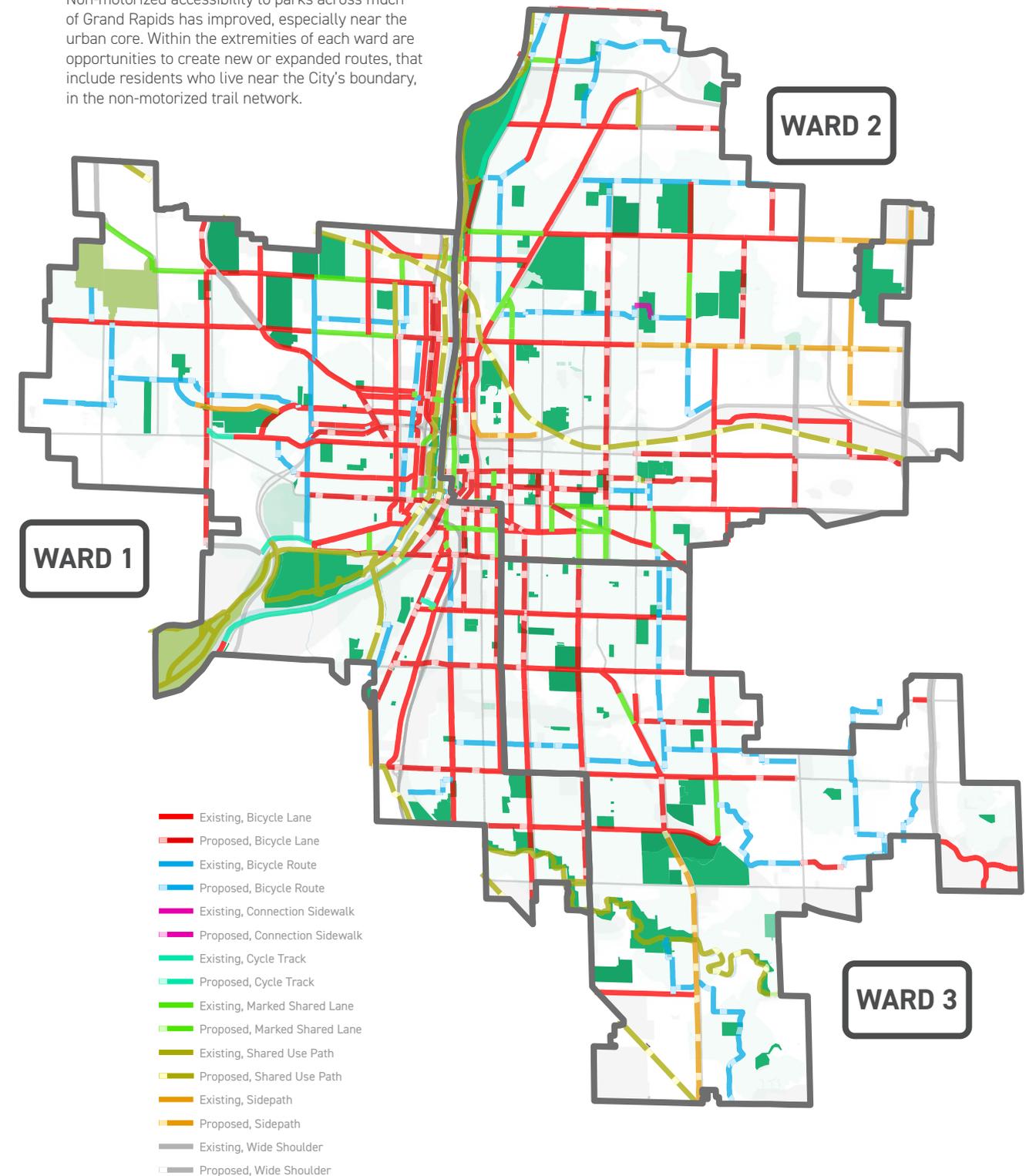
- » Acquired two key riverfront properties, **Monroe North and 1529 Monroe**
- » Created **River For All Trail Guidelines and Grand River Corridor Implementation Plan**
- » Collaboration with City of Wyoming for **Plaster Creek Trail extension** from Division to Buchanan (2021)
- » Design & fundraising for **Leonard-Ann Grand River Edges trail section**
- » **Internal trails and accessibility upgrades** including Ball Perkins, Roberto Clemente, Huff, Mackay Jaycee, Richmond, and Roosevelt Park
- » **Evaluation of access into the park space** including pedestrian and bicycle entrances, with coordination with City departments and streets projects to ensure curb cuts, crosswalk painting, and additional bike parking

Moving forward, the Department understands the increasing demand from Grand Rapids residents to have safe routes to park space that connect to regional trails beyond the city limits. The following is a list of future connectivity goals:

- » Trail connection from Kalamazoo to the Ken-O-Sha Park trail system and park
- » Plaster Creek Trail connections between Eastern Ave SE and Madison Ave SE, specifically the crossing at 28th St
- » Trail connection from Leonard to Knapp through Ball Perkins Park
- » Connection to Highland Park from the south, under I-196 and west from College Ave
- » Trail connections from downtown to the Oxford Trail and Butterworth
- » Strategize a potential connection between Plaster Creek Family Park and the north end of Bike Park
- » Grand River Edges Trail improvements in the downtown core
- » Pedestrian connection from the Belknap Neighborhood to Division Ave and the river front
- » Connection to the Walker and Fred Meijer Pioneer Trail
- » Connection to and expansion of the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail
- » Expansion of the Oxford Trail south
- » Collaborate Lyon St bike-way and intersection improvements at Fuller (Fuller Park/Hillcrest Park access)
- » Planning study/feasibility analysis of Plaster Creek Trail expansion east to city limits (Kalamazoo to Breton Ave)

2019 Existing Bicycle Facilities Network Plus Proposed Changes

Non-motorized accessibility to parks across much of Grand Rapids has improved, especially near the urban core. Within the extremities of each ward are opportunities to create new or expanded routes, that include residents who live near the City's boundary, in the non-motorized trail network.



LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS

Level of Service Standards are guidelines that define service areas based on population that support investment decisions related to parks, facilities, and amenities. Standards may change over time as demographics, program life-cycles, and needs of the community change.

Building on data from the park and recreation system inventory, Grand Rapids was compared to similar systems (cities in the range of 100,000 – 250,000 people) in the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)'s park metrics database. The NRPA database contains self-reported information from parks and recreation departments across the country. This comparison allows the project team to benchmark the level of service—in terms of park acreage and amenities per capita—between Grand Rapids and mid-sized peer cities nationally to evaluate the relative adequacy or inadequacy of the City's recreation system.

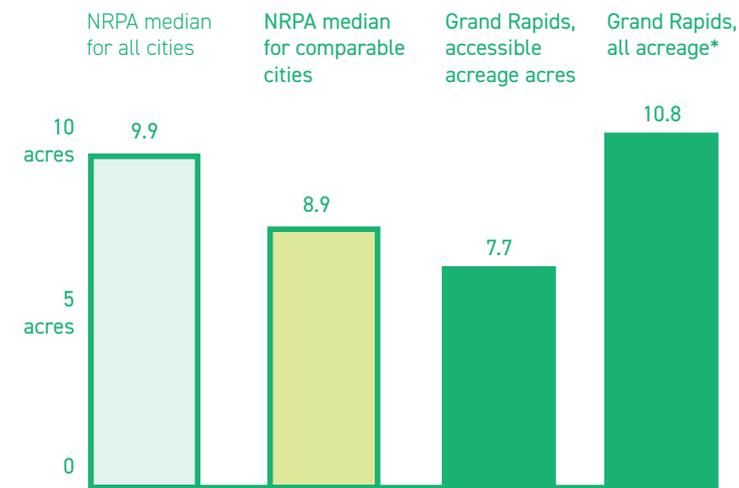
Park and Open Space Acreage

A basic measure of the level of service is the amount of park and open space acreage available per resident. In this Master Plan, the analysis begins by considering only "accessible", usable acreage, which excludes golf courses, cemeteries, undeveloped sites, and shared school-park sites (which are only partially accessible). **The analysis showed that "accessible" park acreage per capita in Grand Rapids is below comparable cities. The NRPA database demonstrated a median of 8.9 acres per 1,000 residents in similarly sized cities, while Grand Rapids measures only 7.7 acres of "accessible" parkland per 1,000 residents.** Given the City's growth trajectory, this gap will only increase in the coming years if accessible open space acreage is not increased. With a current population of 202,767, Grand Rapids would need an additional 293 acres of parkland to reach the

NRPA database median of 8.9 acres per 1,000 residents, and an additional 437 acres to reach the 9.9 median for all cities.

When all parkland acreages are considered, including undeveloped sites and school-park sites, Grand Rapids has 10.8 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, above the median of all cities in the NRPA database (9.9) and that of comparable cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 (8.9). This demonstrates an opportunity to expand park access within the Department's own holdings. However, considering the City's approximate 8% population growth over the last 10 years, the Department would need an additional 130 acres of open space to maintain their current ratio going forward.

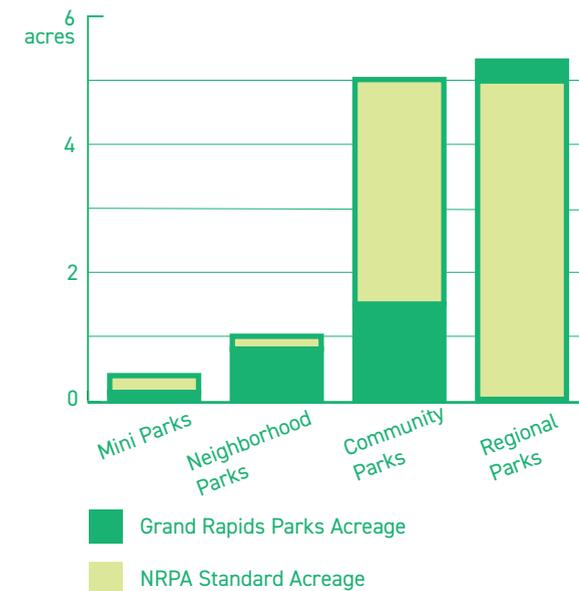
The Department currently has a Joint Use agreement that governs the sharing of 219 acres of school-park space. This agreement is rooted in a 1951 partnership between the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids Public Schools for the joint development and use of park-school facilities.



Park and Open Space in Acres per 1,000 Residents

*Includes undeveloped and school-park sites

In addition to overall acreage, NRPA guidelines recommend a certain number of park acres per units of population for different types of park classifications. NRPA standards state that per 1,000 residents, 0.25 acres of mini parks, 1 acre of neighborhood parks, and 5 acres for community and regional parks is needed to meet the needs of the community. Grand Rapids is below the standard for three park types. It should be noted that these standards are to be used as a guide and interpreted according to local needs, character, trends, and current Department capacity, and the demand may be greater or less than the national standard.



Park Types in Acres per 1,000 Residents

Per capita acreage analysis does not account for the quality of the park space available to residents. In Grand Rapids, maintenance of existing park space is a particular high concern, with upgrading existing parks and general maintenance and up keep being top community priorities in the engagement process. **This shows that in improving level of service, the Department must balance between adding new acreage and maintaining/upgrading existing ones.**

Park Amenities

Park amenities are the built elements within Grand Rapids' parks that support various forms of recreation (both active and passive). For many users these are crucial components that help them feel welcome and safe. It is critical that Grand Rapids' parks supply the right number and types of amenities to meet the needs of their users. As the demographics of Grand Rapids changes over time (race, age, population, etc.) park amenities need to be assessed for their relevance to the changing user groups.

To understand gaps and surpluses among amenities in Grand Rapids, Level of Service metrics from the NRPA benchmarking database were used. **The analysis showed that in Grand Rapids "basic" park amenities per capita, in categories with comparable NRPA benchmarks, are on par with comparable cities, without major gaps in service by number or by geography,** although there are minor deficits in the total number of playgrounds, baseball fields, and dog parks. Still, amenities that should serve a walkable population, such as playgrounds, are fairly equitably-distributed across the city.

While the NRPA benchmarking analysis is limited by the availability of amenity categories in the database, **focus groups during the engagement process, revealed community interest in more specialized amenities in specific priority parks.** These include a public boat house at Riverside Park, mountain biking trails at Ball Perkins Park, an improved community center at Roosevelt Park, and a new park that hosts an accessible nature trail system in the City's 3rd Ward.

The combination of the benchmark analysis and public input give clear direction for the city. **The city has done a good job of providing basic park amenities across the community. There is a desire for new, innovative and specialized amenities to add diversity to the system.** At the same time, the community has demonstrated need for more trails, access to natural areas, and gathering spaces. Focusing on walking and biking trails within the system would provide the greatest benefit for the largest number of residents within the City of Grand Rapids. Respondents indicated they were very supportive of upgrading and expanding walking and biking trails and nearly half (48%) of respondents indicated they would be willing to fund this improvement with tax dollars. The community has also voiced that indoor facilities for fitness and sports are high priorities for the future. (Additional detail on indoor facilities is discussed within the recreation assessment).

Wayfinding & Interpretive Signage

Directional and educational signage continue to be a top request from residents when considering improvements to the parks system. Within park boundaries, the Department has made advances in both directional signage and maps, as well as interpretive and/or interactive elements that tells a story of local culture, ecologies, or history.

In general, public awareness of all 72 city parks could be improved. Through public engagement, the project team found that many residents are unaware of the scope and diversity that the park system offers, and how to safely travel between green spaces. As the Department evolves to meet the needs of an increasingly tech-savvy population, intuitive virtual wayfinding solutions that improve connectivity & foster community-building should be explored.



Watershed Infographic at Ken-O-Sha Park (above);
Trail map at Ball Perkins Park (below)



Exeloo self-cleaning restroom planned for installation in Heartside Park in spring 2022 (left);
New restroom facilities and entry signage at Roberto Clemente Park (right)

Restrooms

Barriers to access in public facilities, such as restrooms, are an outdated social concept and often unnecessary. In a 2020 survey conducted by the Oakland Parks and Recreation Foundation, the barrier most people cited as keeping them from using a park was restroom conditions. Privacy and a sense of belonging is at the core of every conversation about inclusion: the desire to use facilities that are easier and safer regardless of ability, gender, age or family status. The Department aims to provide safe, clean restrooms in parks that make room for diverse community needs.

With a rising national movement for gender equality, local governments and park and recreation agencies will increase efforts to adopt inclusive policies and engage members of the LGBTQ+ community. Actions will range from making enrollment forms non-gender specific to modifying signage on existing restrooms and planning new bathroom facilities to be gender neutral. The efforts will pervade much of park and recreation management, including training for staff to become more LGBTQ+ inclusive and

engaging LGBTQ+ individuals and groups to provide advice and assistance, as agencies work to improve practices and policies.

The Department has begun updating and implementing new restrooms that address safety, maintenance, and inclusion that meet universal design standards. In Roberto Clemente Park, a new universally accessible restroom was built that considers environmental factors to address maintenance and performance issues often associated with traditional park restrooms, such as ventilation and lighting. In Heartside Park, the Department will be testing a new self-cleaning restroom in an effort to keep facilities cleaner for the public and to help cut down on maintenance costs. The non-binary, 3-stall bathroom cleans itself after every 30 uses and locks itself up at night.

WiFi in our Parks

In an effort to bridge the digital divide in Grand Rapids that widened during the global pandemic, the Department implemented a pilot program in the spring of 2021 that offered free public WiFi access in ten parks with funding from the CARES Act.

Parks were selected based on heavy event use, community need, and existing infrastructure in pavilions and community gyms that NIB devices could easily attach to. The hotspots have a range of about 900 feet and can support between 30 and 50 devices at a time, depending on usage. The ten parks that currently have free WiFi are:

- » Ah-Nab-Awen Park
- » Belknap Park
- » Briggs Park
- » Fish Ladder Park
- » Garfield Park
- » MacKay-Jaycees Park
- » Martin Luther King Park
- » Richmond Park
- » Roosevelt Park

Additionally, Rosa Parks Circle has free public WiFi through an independent wireless provider.



Ice Rink at Rosa Parks Circle with free public WiFi

RECREATION AND PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The recreation and program analysis offers a perspective on the Department's recreation programs, identifies strengths and weaknesses of existing program offerings, and highlight opportunities for future program direction.

- » **Demographic information:** the analysis examined current demographic data from 2020 Census demographics. This data helped to establish the magnitude and composition of population change in Grand Rapids and highlighted particular segments (youth, the elderly, and the Hispanic and African American populations) that the parks and recreation should position itself to better serve in the near future.
- » **Community input:** the analysis focused on information collected through one-on-one conversations and community engagement activities to understand current community participation in recreation programs and future community desires.
- » **Program inventory:** the project team examined the full program offerings between 2017 and spring of 2021, categorized them according to common classifications, and examined how these programs benchmark against national metrics and meet the needs of the Grand Rapids community.
- » **Financial and registration review:** COVID-19 played a major role in programming registrations number between 2020-2021. While many in-person classes were canceled, a wide offering of virtual classes became available to residents. It is recommended that the Department revisits a full program offering analysis once the pandemic is under control and participation trends level out.

Key Recreation Findings

There is significant room to grow recreation programs in Grand Rapids, both in terms of the rate of community participation and the range of programs offered. The Department will also need to address critical capacity gaps, such as the shortage of full-time recreation staff and a lack of dedicated indoor recreation space, to achieve its goals for growth.

- » Since 2017, the Department has made much progress in marketing its recreation offerings, with the addition of full-time marketing staff. Website visits and social media interactions have drastically increased, with public awareness of park activities and events more readily accessible.
- » Senior programs could expand: the Department's current recreation offerings by demographic group mirror those of similar agencies. Given the aging demographic trend, there will be greater demand for programs that serve the 50+ age segment.
- » The Department could expand core program categories: 72 percent of Grand Rapids' programs are in the adult fitness and aquatics categories. Since 2017, the Department now offers beginner kayaking and paddle boarding, guided kayak tours, mindfulness in nature, paddle board fitness fusion, qigong, and winter trail passes. Further discussion of recreation programming is included in Ch 3 / Shared Vision for the Future: Healthy Community.



Kayaking Adventures Class at Riverside Park



Senior knitting classes at Garfield Park gym



Checker tables at Roberto Clemente Park

- » Customer service should continue to be a focus in recreation programming to ensure repeat customers.
- » The Department should better serve the needs of minority communities by developing programs and services geared toward their needs. Some of these programs and services could include school and medical partnerships, increased group and family events, sports and exercise amenities, and enhanced multi-lingual marketing and programming information, among others. The Department should continue to provide opportunities for minority instructors to lead programming activities and classes. Further discussion of cultural awareness and different needs in relation to parks and recreation activities is included in Ch 3 / Shared Vision for the Future: Healthy Community.
- » Indoor facilities are a high investment priority: indoor fitness/wellness facilities, indoor track, and indoor aquatic facility are three of the highest investment priorities based on unmet community need. Based on a broad benchmark

- measure, a city the size of Grand Rapids should have approximately 400,000 SF of indoor space—an ambitious goal that the Department can try to meet in creative ways in the short term.
- » Expand winter recreation opportunities: the Department has made good progress in winter outdoor recreation activities, such as snow shoeing, cross country skiing, and fat tire biking trails at Indian Trails Golf Course, ice skating at Rosa Parks Circle, and sledding and other winter events through the Thrive Outside Gear Library. There is opportunity to expand these activities to additional locations to reach more residents.
- » Virtual classes will continue to be a staple offering: while virtual classes are not offered before the pandemic, the Department quickly shifted to offer free classes online when the State's stay-at-home orders went into place. Seeing the initial success in participation, fee-based virtual classes have become a standard with 1,421 virtual class registrations in 2020 and 1,843 registrations in 2021 to date.



Fitness activities such as pickleball are popular among active adult and senior populations (above, at Garfield Park gym)



Early spring canoeing with GRPS and Wilderness Inquiry (above left); Snowshoe and other low-cost winter rentals (above, at Indian Trails); Youth fat tire biking classes and fun outdoor activities free-of-charge (below, at Garfield Park)

DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

Staff Organization

The Department currently has 42 full-time staff members. Under the leadership of the Director, the Parks Superintendent oversees the maintenance and operations of parks, cemeteries, and urban forestry. The Recreation Supervisor oversees a mostly seasonal staff on the recreation and program side, and a new full-time recreation administrative aide was hired in early 2020.

The Department is rounded out by the Business Manager and a staff of financial assistants and administrative personnel; a Parks Project Manager; and an Administrative Analyst. The Department's golf courses are managed by a contract Golf Course Manager.

The Department hires a large number of temporary staff on a seasonal basis. These include 3 for cemeteries, 60 for parks maintenance, and 135 for recreation.

The Department operates with a level of resource constraint in terms of recreation and maintenance staff and indoor facilities. A key issue to address in the Master Plan is how the Department can expand its capacity, both through long-term strategic positioning and investments, and through short-term partnerships and outreach. The plan examines leveraging community stewardship and volunteer support, currently an area of weakness for the Department. The Parks Millage creates opportunity to expand capacity of maintenance & recreation—increasing maintenance staff (both full-time & seasonal) is an immediate priority.

Parks and Recreation Advisory Board

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was established under City Commission Policy No. 1100-07. The Board recommends policies, rules, and regulations for the public use of parks and recreation facilities and programs; assists in evaluation of programs and activities; and suggests changes to the Master Plan. The Board is composed of nine members; 6 resident seats and 3 organizational representation seats (can be non-residents). Members represent the interests of the Board of Education, the County, and other public bodies who provide services related to parks and recreation. Three members represent one of the following organizations: Grand Rapids Public Schools, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., and Friends of Grand Rapids Parks.

Enabling Legislation

Public Act 156 of 1917 entitled Local Government, Public Recreation System; Powers of Municipality is an act authorizing Cities, Villages, Counties, Townships, and School Districts to operate systems of public recreation and playgrounds. It states in Section 1 that any City, Village, County, or Township may:

1. Operate a system of public recreation and playgrounds;
2. Acquire, equip, and maintain land, buildings, or other recreational facilities;
3. Employ a superintendent of recreation and assistants; and,
4. Vote and expend funds for the operation of such a system.

PARKS MILLAGE 101: PARKS, POOLS, & PLAYGROUNDS

The millage rate in local government language refers to the property tax rate. Property tax in Michigan requires voter approval for tax increases or new taxes. In 2013, Grand Rapids voters approved a seven-year property tax to support parks, pools and playgrounds throughout the city. The seven-year tax addressed a backlog of much-needed park repairs, kept pools open, and funded new investments in parks. However, the 2013 millage covered only initial phases of upgrades in many City parks. Most parks received only an initial phase of investment and would require additional improvement to best meet community goals for these spaces. When the millage expired, total expenditures were more than \$20.5 million: **\$5.7 million in park improvements (26.2%), \$10.8 million in rehabilitation and repair (49.9%) and \$4 million for pool operations (18.4%).**

In 2020 voters approved a new permanent millage to help ensure adequate, ongoing funding for Grand Rapids parks, pools and playgrounds.

\$5.73/month

average homeowner cost as of 2021 for permanent Park Millage

The permanent millage provides stable funding to keep parks maintained and updated, and keep pools and splash pads open every summer with staff and supplies to keep them safe and clean. It allows for continual capital improvements and rehabilitation for neighborhood and community parks and helps leverage supplemental outside grants and funding. Additionally, it supports free recreational programming for children in Grand Rapids, giving them more opportunities to connect with community, nature, play, and friends

Anticipated *annual* parks expenditures from the millage include:

- » **\$3 million for continued capital improvements and rehabilitation of the City's 86 parks**
- » **Slightly more than \$1 million to keep pools operating and open at current levels supported by the 2013 millage**
- » **\$1 million for increased parks maintenance, allowing more parks to be maintained at a comprehensive stewardship level**
- » **\$200,000 to support increased recreational programming and scholarship opportunities for recreation classes**

The annual parks budget of \$11.7 million would include approximately \$5 million from the millage, along with additional general operating funds and resources leveraged through grants, fees and community partnerships.

EMBEDDING EQUITY IN THE PARKS SYSTEM

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In August 2021, representatives from the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians, along with other Anishinaabe tribes, gathered along the banks of the Grand River in Ah-Nab-Awen Park to mark the bicentennial signing of the 1821 Treaty of Chicago, in which leaders from the Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Chippewa tribes ceded present-day West Michigan land to the U.S. Government. Within the treaty, tribal leaders maintained their rights to hunting and fishing on the land, and defined reservations within its boundaries.

The treaty was a significant agreement that ultimately resulted in the settlement of Grand Rapids and the surrounding area. Commemorating this important, and for many, painful, piece of history is a reminder to the Grand Rapids community-at-large that the Anishinaabe people remain active participants in the city today. Their perspectives on social, economic, and racial issues must be represented and respected in all sectors of the City—including parks, open spaces, and waterways.

Tribal leaders have graciously shared important considerations with the Department and design consultants in large planning projects over the last several years. During the development of the 2017 River For All Design Guidelines, the City worked with Anishinaabe tribe members to understand the landscape and landscape features from a non-Euro-American experience through two story lines: the relationship of river to land, and the history of settlement and colonization of people. In 2018-2019, tribal leaders participated in focus group sessions, instructing the City on

important considerations for improvements to Ah-Nab-Awen Park and other green spaces along the Grand River.

The following list of considerations came out through these group conversations as important elements to include when implementing new improvements to parks, trails, and river edges within the park system:

- » **Include tribal representation at each phase of design implementation**
- » **Protect the sacredness and beauty of the entire river corridor while enhancing access to the river to sit and fish, also quiet space**
- » **Install more interpretation about the Anishinaabe, especially stories about the original burial grounds to explain the history, changes over time, and even why the fake mounds were installed and removed decades later**
- » **Consider the cardinal directions and have seating that faces those directions, also shade/awning to protect from rain**
- » **Label signs with the native language, Anishinaabemowen**
- » **Interpretation of the Indian trails and their influence on the layout of the city is an important/interesting story to share**
- » **Provide small to large scale event space and resources for pow-wow events**

“We are still here. We have always been here. We are part of this community.”

Elder with the Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians



The Grand River Bands of Ottawa Indians commemorated the bicentennial of the 1821 Treaty of Chicago at Ah-Nab-Awen Park

“Restoring the Grand River is just the beginning. With great partnerships and continued focus and diligence on equitable opportunity, we believe this project can provide our whole community with improved access to the great outdoors and the Grand River.”

Ciarra C. Adkins, JD, Equity Analyst at the City of Grand Rapids

In May of 2021, the City was awarded a \$75,000 Our Town grant through the National Endowment of the Arts to research, plan and integrate wayfinding, historical markers and art of original indigenous people into “River for All” trail and restoration improvements. Anishinaabe Circle and the Grand River Band of Ottawa Indians were community partners, coordinating with tribal members and elders in the Grand Rapids community. The grant helped fund the Anishinaabe Manidoo Bawating sculpture temporarily located at Ah-Nab-Awen Park during the World of Winter event. The sculpture honors important Native American symbols and unique traditions, and now has a permanent home along the Grand River at 6th Street Park.

The Department continues to look for ways to infuse the park system with opportunities for residents and visitors that deepen community appreciation and understanding of local Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and share their narrative through interpretive art and wayfinding in public space, aligning with the goals and objectives contained in the City’s strategic plan to celebrate the cultural diversity of the City’s residents.

Access to welcoming public green space remains the main priority to improvements within the Grand Rapids Park system. The Department understands that each neighborhood requires a unique approach in engaging with and improving parks throughout the City. The following is an analysis of service gaps in BIPOC neighborhoods and communities.



Manidoo Bawating sculpture at Ah-Nab-Awen Park

DEMOGRAPHIC AND EQUITY ANALYSIS

An increasingly diverse Grand Rapids population creates new demands on the parks and recreation system. To understand the needs, the demographic make-up of the city was analyzed in comparison to park locations and access. In particular, an important factor for equitable access is the distribution of parks in relationship to high need populations: minorities, lower-income households, the elderly, and households with children.

The analysis showed that the availability of parks, recreation and open space to residents varies throughout the city. To understand and illustrate this finding geographically, data about each park from the parks and recreation inventory was combined with demographic information about the locations of high-need populations in the city.

Today, there is a relative concentration of high-need populations in the areas south of downtown which also corresponds to an area of the city that is not well served by parks. While Grand Rapids does not have sharply delineated areas of concentrated need overall, there is a relatively high concentration of minority populations as well as households with children in neighborhoods such as Roosevelt Park, Garfield Park, Baxter, and the Madison Area. The West Grand area, west of the Grand River, exhibits some of the same characteristics, but to a lesser extent.

Geographically, the areas where residents have limited accessibility to parks include both less densely populated suburban areas of the city and a few central neighborhoods that also have a concentration of high need populations. These “high need” areas include parts of Roosevelt Park

and many neighborhoods in the 3rd ward. These are areas of concern that the Master Plan seeks to address through its recommendations.

Analysis also measured driving access to regional parks as previous studies have indicated that most individuals travel to regional parks by car. The analysis revealed that almost the entire city is located within a 15-minute drive of a regional park and therefore driving access is not a major concern for the Department.



Students participate in a planning session for a nature-based play area at Ken-O-Sha Park in the City’s 3rd ward

INVESTMENT IN NEIGHBORHOODS OF FOCUS

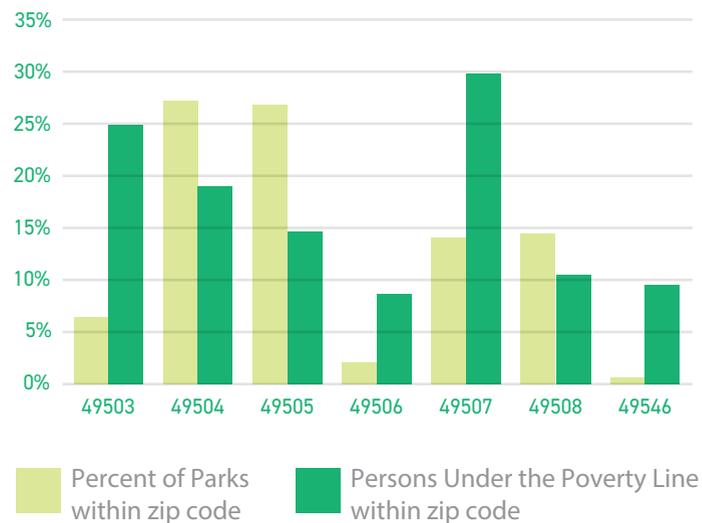
The identified neighborhoods of focus consist of 17 Census Tracts with higher poverty, higher unemployment and lower rates of educational attainment than elsewhere in the City. Originally determined in 2016 by research funded by the Kellogg Foundation, the geographic boundary stretches across the west and southeast portions of the city, roughly John Ball Park on the City's west side to Eastown and neighborhoods south of Wealthy Street.

The Neighborhoods of Focus make up about 31 percent of the City's population. The breakdown in those areas is 29.4 percent black and 33.4 percent Hispanic -- both significantly higher than their makeup of the City's overall population. Neighborhoods of Focus are divided between the 1st and 3rd wards of Grand Rapids—a large portion of the city historically neglected from economic growth and development.

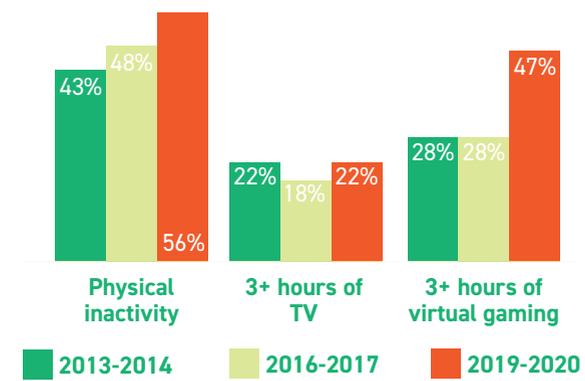
Health, wealth, and welfare vary dramatically by race and zip code. Parks matter as we work beyond, and towards, equity.

Parks benefit our health, wellness, and welfare in many ways:

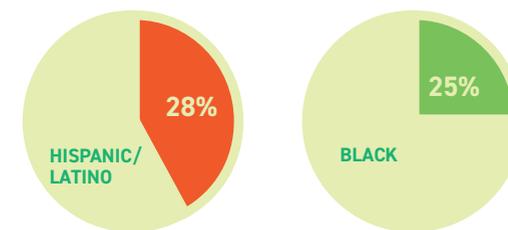
- » Property values increase when located within a safe 5-minute walk
- » Programmed parks are linked to crime reduction
- » People who live near parks are more likely to exercise
- » Parks and green space reduce the heat island effect by 10 degrees
- » Access to safe parks and green space improves mental health
- » Shade trees in parks and green spaces improve air quality



Among middle and high school-age youth, fewer are meeting physical activity recommendations for adolescents and more are spending over 3 hours a day on the computer or playing video games. While this trend has exacerbated recently with a large population of youth attending school virtually and athletic events canceling during the global pandemic, the rise of physically inactivity among youth is cause for concern.



Physical Inactivity & Daily Screen Time Among Youth



In Kent County, minority populations report large percentages of daily inactivity.

2019 Poverty Data Collected from <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/86000US49503-49503/>

2019 Park Data Collected from <https://data.grandrapidsmi.gov/dataset/Parks-Acreage-by-Neighborhood/pp8p-7ixt>

Access to quality parks and green space matters now more than ever. The Department is making strides to address inequities in the Neighborhoods of Focus. Since the 2017 Master Plan, the Department has:

- » Expanded free summer camp at MLK, Garfield, Joe Taylor, and Roosevelt parks to serve 200+ neighborhood youth
- » Added outdoor exercise equipment stations to parks including Mackay Jaycee and Roosevelt
- » Collaborated with GRPS on the Green Schoolyards Initiative bringing outdoor play, classrooms, and native plantings to Plaster Creek Family Park/Burton, Buchanan Elementary, Brookside Elementary, & Sigsbee schools
- » Partnered on the development and implementation of the Thrive Outside program, headquartered in Roosevelt Park Lodge, which provides free outdoor gear rentals, year-round events, and trainings to get youth outside
- » Implemented the Clean Air and Public Places Ordinance declaring all Grand Rapids parks and playgrounds to be smoking/vaping-free zones

Moving forward, the Department should continue to build partnerships centered in equitable outreach and programming, prioritize micro-local business enterprise contracts, and improve recruitment and retention efforts to increase diversity of staff.

Parks can be the intersection of meaningful social, economic, and physical wellness.

3/

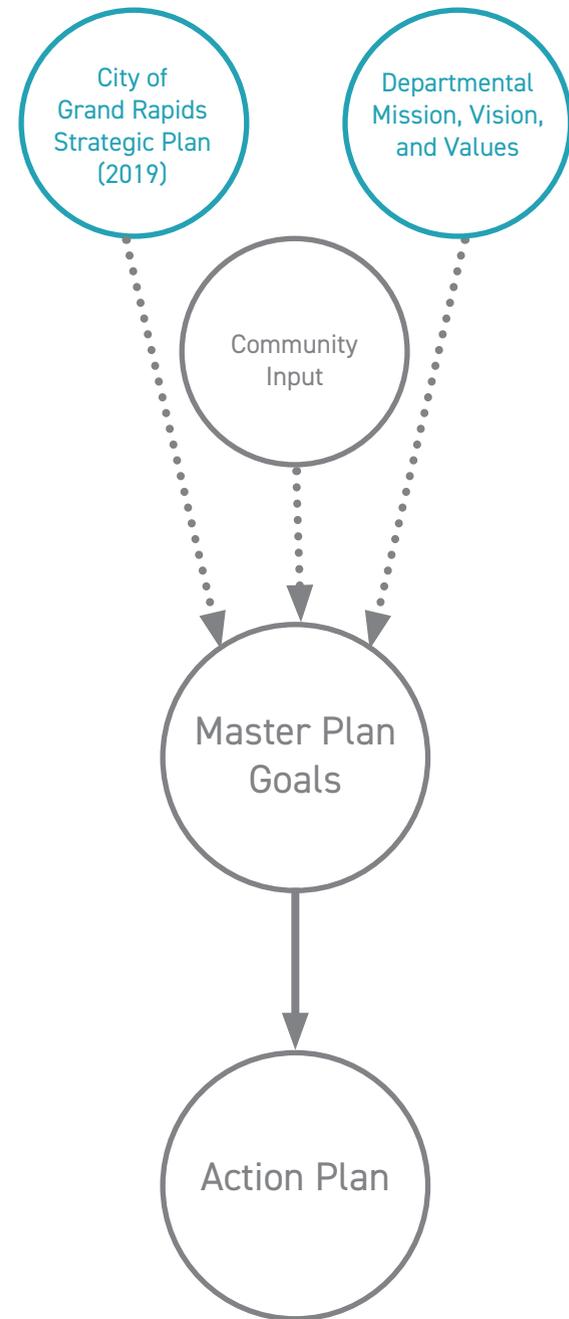
SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Strategic Direction 80

Master Plan Goals 84

- Connected Network
- Healthy Community
- Neighborhood Investments
- Sustainable System

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: MISSION, VISION, & VALUES



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Both the long-term goals of the Grand Rapids Parks & Recreation Department as well as the daily operations are driven by a clear mission and vision, which guide both internal departmental strategy and Master Plan recommendations. The development of the Department’s mission, vision, guiding principles, and values, was an important element of the 2017 Parks Master Plan that established a new direction and momentum for the department.

The City of Grand Rapids 2019 Strategic Plan also charts a path for how the work of the Department integrates with the larger mission and vision of the City organization. Six strategic priorities – governmental excellence, economic prosperity and affordability, engaged and connected community, health and environment, mobility, and safe community – inform strategies and actions for the park and recreation system. The City of Grand Rapids Strategic Plan also sets the framework for ensuring the City’s value of equity is embedded within all City operations, processes, and policies.

The overall strategic direction of the City of Grand Rapids, the Parks Department, and the Parks Master Plan is also closely informed by broad community outreach efforts and consistent dialogue with residents.

MISSION

A mission statement describes the overall purpose of the Department. It creates boundaries for the Department’s operations: what we do, who we do it for, and how and why we do it. It also answers the question, “what is our business?”

DEPARTMENT MISSION

To provide our community with inspirational experiences through the responsible management and collaborative stewardship of the City’s natural, educational, and cultural resources.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS MISSION

To elevate quality of life through excellent City services.

VISION

A vision statement is aspirational, forward-looking and describes an ideal future.

DEPARTMENT VISION

Creating and supporting a healthy, vibrant community through:

- » Active neighborhoods
- » Inclusive programs and events
- » Innovation and best practices
- » Exceptional services
- » Embracing diversity

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS VISION

Grand Rapids will be nationally recognized as an equitable, welcoming, innovative and collaborative city with a robust economy, safe and healthy community, and the opportunity for a high quality of life for all.

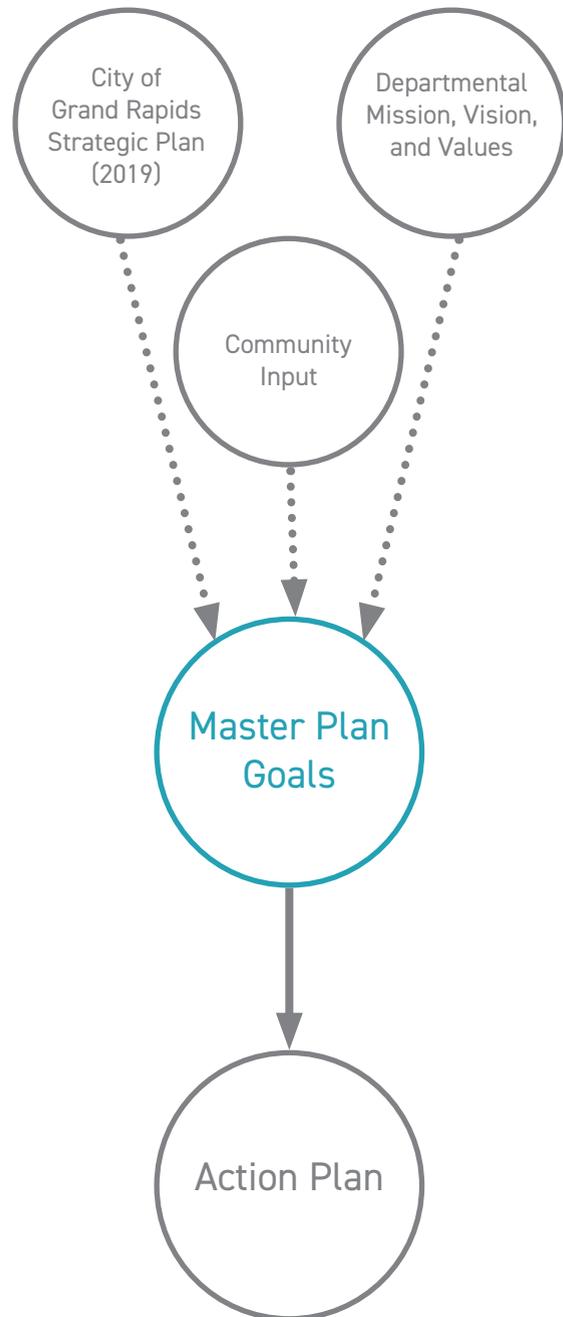
VALUES

Values are internally focused and represent the way the employees of the organization work together. They help to describe the organizational culture and what we stand for.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS VALUES

- » Accountability
- » Collaboration
- » Customer Service
- » Equity
- » Innovation
- » Sustainability

MASTER PLAN GOALS



As a vehicle for realizing the mission, vision, and values outlined previously, the Master Plan sets out four goals for the future of the Grand Rapids park and recreation system.

GOALS

CONNECTED NETWORK:

Create a connected network of parks, natural areas, and waterways that is accessible to all of the Grand Rapids community.

HEALTHY COMMUNITY:

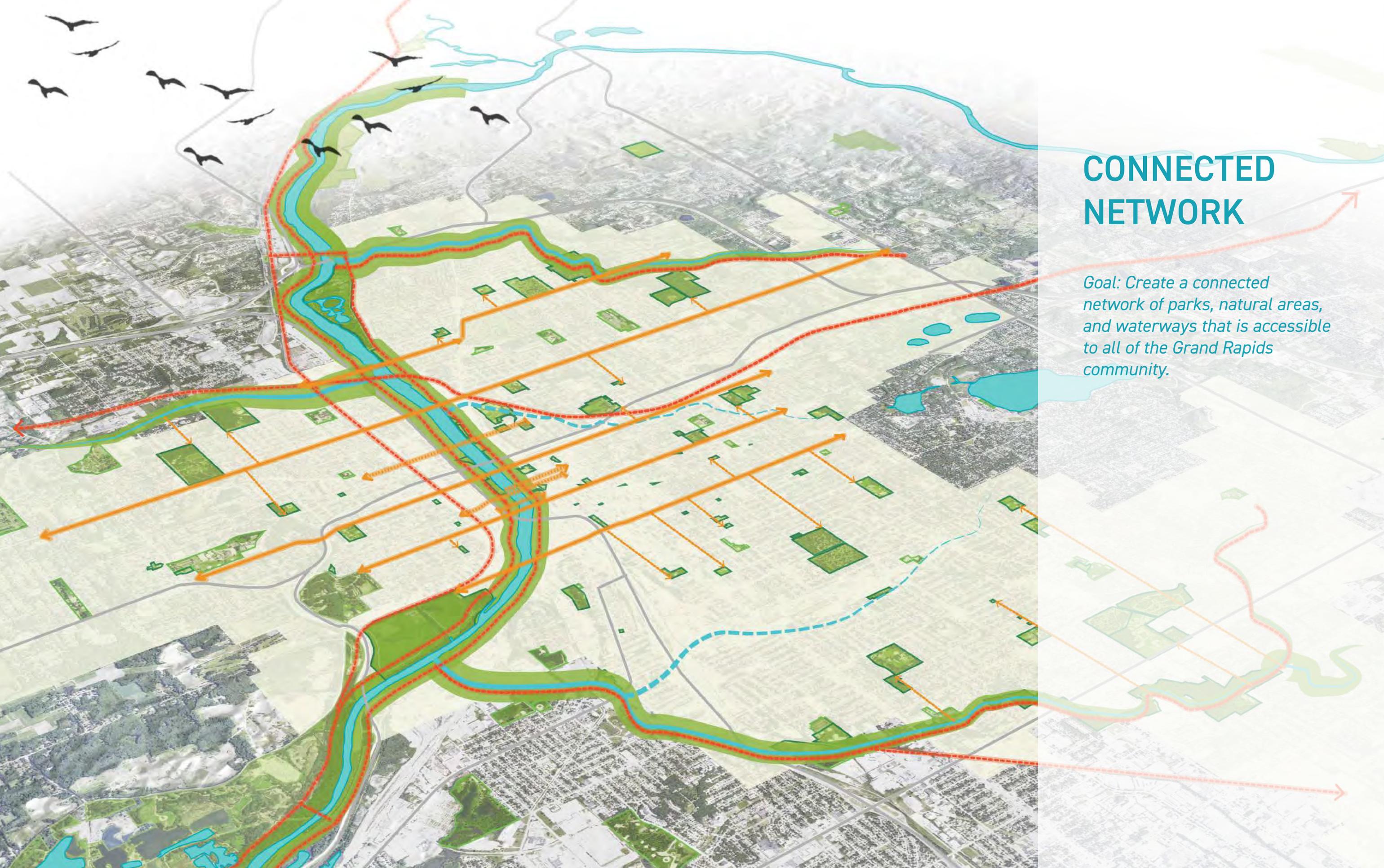
Create programs and projects that ensure the park and recreation system supports the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all Grand Rapidians.

NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT:

Enhance the diversity and experience of the park system by drawing on community feedback, local ecology, and national trends.

SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM:

Build on innovative solutions to strengthen financial sustainability, environmental resiliency, and community impact.



CONNECTED NETWORK

Goal: Create a connected network of parks, natural areas, and waterways that is accessible to all of the Grand Rapids community.

Imagine the Grand River as the heart of a regional water-based trail network of parks, amenities, and public gathering places.

Great momentum is underway to transform the Grand River into the heart of a regional water-based trail network of parks, amenities, and public gathering places. While the Grand River might seem untapped today, there is tremendous potential for it to be a resource for recreation, parks, and greater system connectivity. Community partners and plans such as River For All, Grand Rapids WhiteWater, and the Grand River Partnership are actively collaborating to implement the community vision for a downtown that embraces its namesake.

Realizing the full potential of the river as a public amenity will require thoughtfully programmed adjacent parkland and urban plazas, linear trail systems, water access sites, and active recreation uses. The economic impacts of a restored river have already been calculated as part of the River Restoration Initiative; the Anderson Economic Group estimated that expanded recreational use of the river and riverfront would stimulate a net economic impact of between \$15.9 million to \$19.1 million per year. By coordinating efforts of this Parks Master Plan with ongoing city and partner initiatives, the impact of the Plan will have a much wider reach and fulfill its potential as a truly integrated City Parks System.

Looking beyond the Grand River, Grand Rapids'

parks and recreation system can ensure the full benefits of the river restoration reach every community member by strengthening connections to the river corridor through new links along the tributaries, trails, streets, and bridges. Precedents from other cities suggest further economic and health opportunities with trail development. For example, in Dallas, trails had a 50:1 return on investment. Another study done in Lincoln, Nebraska revealed that every \$1 invested in trails for physical activity led to nearly \$2.94 in direct medical benefit. By connecting the restored river with the surrounding neighborhoods through tributary corridors, trails, improved streetscapes, and micro-accessibility improvements to neighborhood parks, the economic impact of the river could be expanded to benefit the whole city.

Strategies for a Connected Network



REGIONAL SYSTEM

Connect city parks to state and regional networks to create a broader system of open space, trails, and wildlife habitat.



GRAND RIVER WATERFRONT

As a unified system, Grand Rapids' riverfront parks will be a recognizable icon and economic driver for the Department and the City.



TRIBUTARIES & TRAILS

Consider the river, tributaries, and related open space for an integrated approach to ecological enhancement and watershed management.



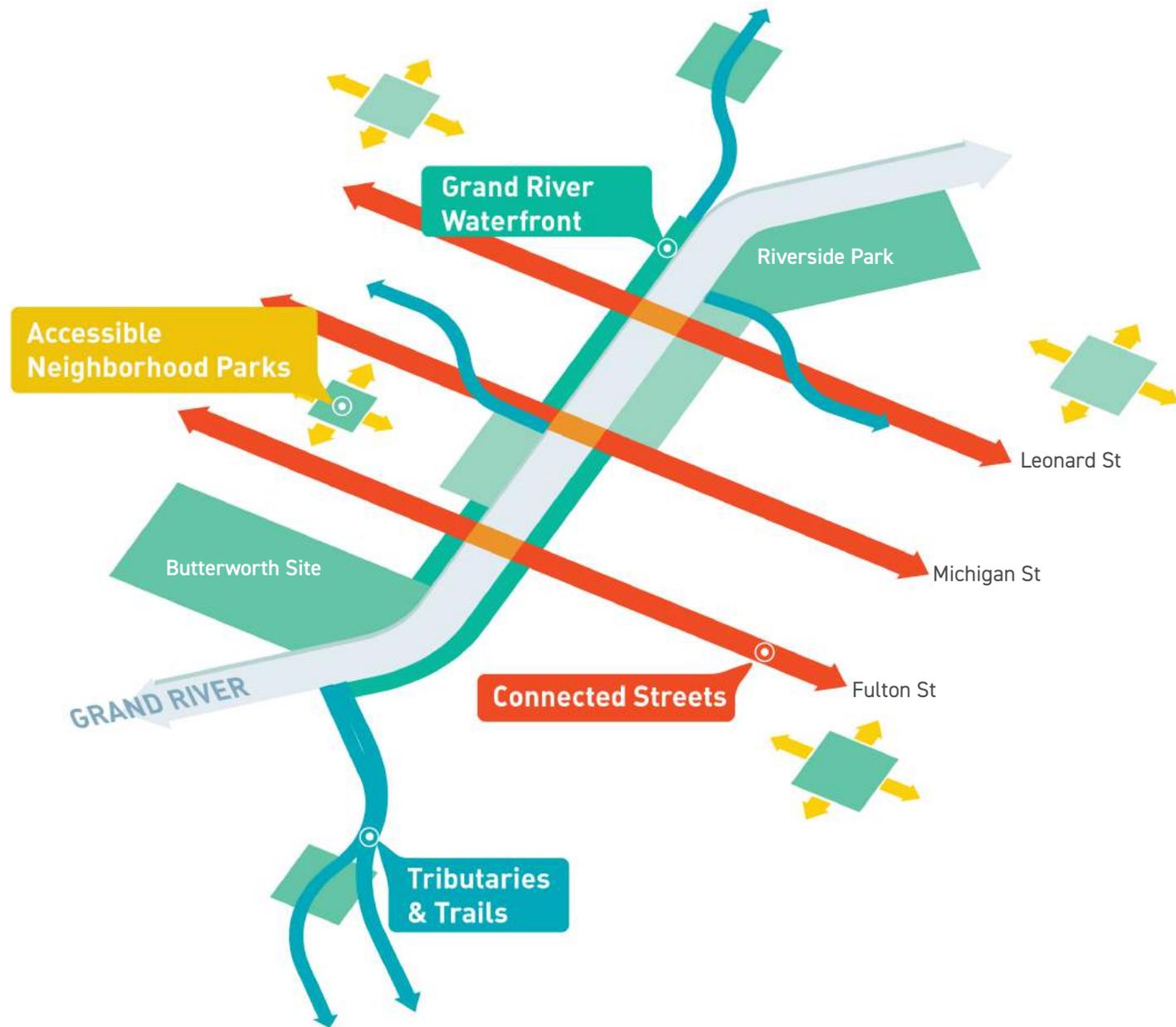
CONNECTED STREETS

Streets are ecological infrastructure too. They treat stormwater, bridge different ecological zones, and connect disparate parks across Grand Rapids.



ACCESSIBLE NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

Small scale improvements and safe streets can improve accessibility to parks, even without adding acreage.



What do we mean by “connected” and “accessible”?

WALKABLE

Everyone has opportunities to safely and easily walk to park facilities from his or her home.

UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE

Parks and programs cater to the needs of - and are accessible to - Grand Rapidsians of all ages, abilities, demographics and cultures.

ECOLOGICAL

Grand Rapids’ waterways and natural resources are healthy and resilient, including large corridors that support wildlife habitat.



Strategy 1

Regional System

The Grand River connects the city to its regional context, embedding it into the glacial landscape of Michigan and its network of parks and trails. City park improvements and trails can tap into the existing resources of Millennium Park and other county and state parks along the river.

Non-motorized trails are a great way to stay active, unwind, and for many, a main source of transportation for getting to school and work without relying on a car. According to an NRPA study, three in four adults say access to public biking or walking trails near their home is important.

Through partners such as the West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition, the Department could tap into trail systems that extend beyond the City's boundaries. Trail projects such as the Grand Rapids to Kalamazoo Interurban would be a massive draw for cyclists to visit and explore local parks, restaurants, and businesses.

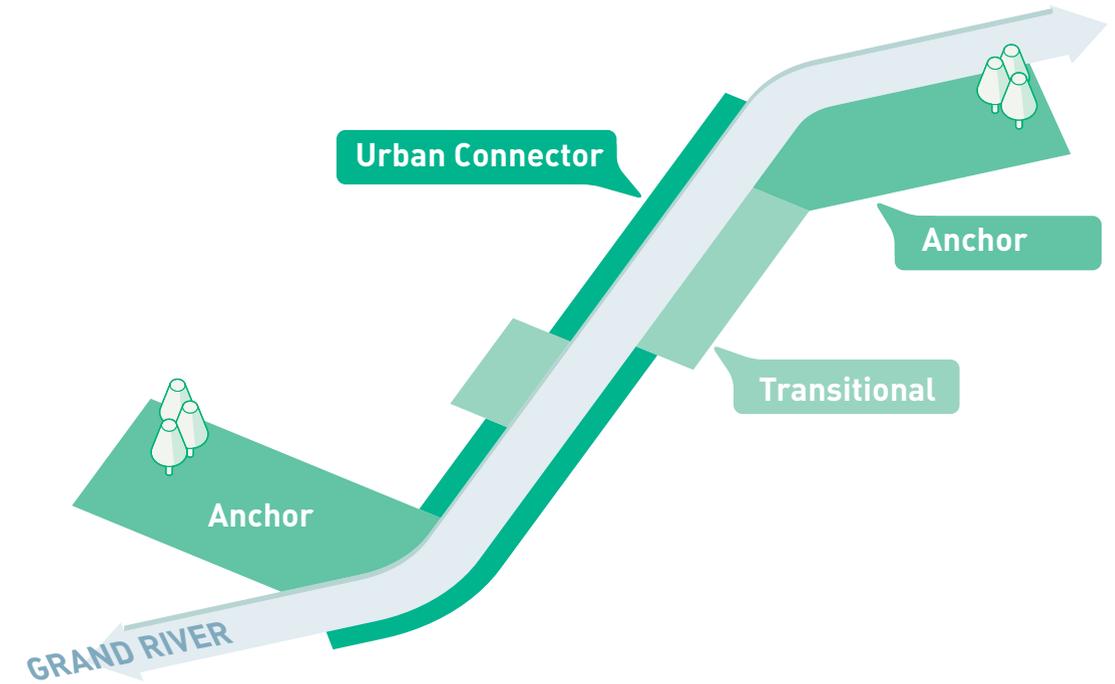


Strategy 2

Grand River Waterfront

The Grand River Waterfront encompasses a range of different conditions within the city of Grand Rapids: Urban Connector, Transitional, and Anchor sites. The potential for riverfront recreation and new park amenities varies according to each condition.

- » In Downtown Grand Rapids, the Urban Connector spaces are characterized by hard-edged flood walls, small dimensions, discontinuous links to the river, and a downtown context.
- » The Transitional spaces refers to semi-natural riverside conditions with lower flood walls or landscaped berms. These are typically block-deep parks or undeveloped sites along the river, and are adjacent to commercial or industrial areas of medium density.
- » The Anchor parks and spaces refers to large areas, such as Riverside Park, has natural edges and large areas of publicly accessible land. These sites are found in lower density neighborhoods and can be large "anchors" for riverfront access at the north and south ends of the city.



The Grand River connects three typical conditions, each offering unique opportunities for improvement.



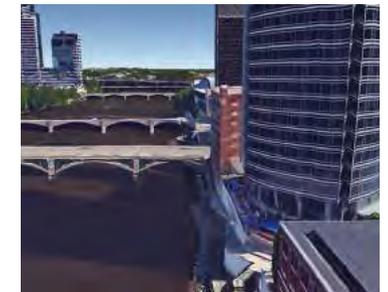
Anchor

Large anchor sites combine water access and outdoor recreation with ecological restoration.



Transitional

Important riverfront links, these parks provide water access and combine active with natural and passive uses.



Urban Connector

These sites are closely linked to development and events.

The potential of the Grand River corridor for citywide parks and recreation services cannot be underestimated. As other city departments and private or nonprofit initiatives continue a parallel process of restoring the rapids and transforming the “wet side” of the river, the Parks Department and Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. developed riverfront design guidelines in a community-driven planning process called A River For All:

» **Riverfront Design Guidelines:**

The Grand River Corridor River Trail Design Guidelines establishes general requirements for the design of the Grand River edge at and above the normal high water level (approximately 2-year frequency event at 16,000 cfs) to create a cohesive and accessible river trail system that serves the entire Grand Rapids community. The Design Guidelines were developed through an iterative process of research, discussion, and coordination with the design team, City, and advisory and focus groups. The following describes the overall intent for the Design Guidelines:

1. Provide a long-range planning document to help guide decision makers and developers in transforming the Grand River from an underutilized and disconnected river trail system into an integrated, accessible, community asset.
2. Capitalize upon the proposed ‘rapids’ restoration efforts to expand recreation options along the Grand River Corridor.
3. Provide guidance to create a connected network of diverse upland, riparian, and riverine habitat areas as well as guidance for corridor-wide stormwater management and flood resiliency along the river’s edge.

4. Recommend opportunities to celebrate the historical and cultural significance of the existing landscapes along the river’s edge by recognizing their intrinsic value and making improvements to bring their stories to life.

5. Establish a unified design vocabulary that acknowledges and allows for the diverse character of areas along the corridor to be expressed.

6. Provide implementable design guidelines that direct future improvements along the river’s edge.

7. Define protocols and processes for reviewing development proposals and measuring their consistency with the Design Guidelines. These should leverage existing planning documents and policies and build upon these resources.

» **Opportunity Sites:**

The 2016 GR Forward plan identified fifteen ‘Opportunity Sites’ for improvements and new programming along the river’s edge. Following the completion of the GR Forward planning process, and in collaboration with Grand Rapids White Water and the ongoing Grand River restoration efforts, the City of Grand Rapids selected six of these sites for further design study. These sites were selected based on their location within the Grand River restoration construction area and anticipated role in future in-river and trails circulation.

The plans were driven by community and stakeholder feedback, coordination with the Grand River restoration engineering team and the City of Grand Rapids, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc. and Grand Rapids Public Museum staff. The Schematic Designs for Six Opportunity Sites, was completed alongside,



North Monroe Opportunity Site: Community members helped visualize a large, flexible green space in the heart of downtown that directly connects people to the Grand River

and to be used in conjunction with, the parallel Grand River Corridor Design Guidelines and Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) efforts.

The schematic designs represent steps towards the first implementation of the larger corridor-wide design vision that is detailed in the Design Guidelines and incorporated into the City’s financial planning and budgeting through the Strategic Asset Management Planning process.

» **Asset Management Plan:**

The Strategic Asset Management Plan for the Grand River Corridor is intended to serve as a long-range planning document to guide how the City and its partners can most effectively maintain and replace the assets specified in

the Design Guidelines over time in the Grand River Corridor. To achieve this goal, the plan includes:

- Recommended maintenance standards for the river corridor
- An overview of the forecasted maintenance for river corridor elements
- Outlines of the life cycle of different park assets and landscapes (to be used for future planning and budgeting efforts)
- Strategies for managing the river corridor to ensure its long-term success.

The Asset Management Plan is intended to be a living document that is meant to be updated regularly. It examines the various elements recommended in the Design Guidelines and lays out a road map for how these assets should be managed once they are realized. See Appendix for the full *River For All* Plan.



Strategy 3

Tributaries & Trails

The tributaries of the Grand River-Lamberton Creek in the Northeast, Indian Mill Creek in the Northwest, Plaster Creek in the South, and the buried Silver Creek and Coldbrook Creek in the center - are part of Grand Rapids' natural resources. However, their presence is not significantly felt in the city, with the exception of portions of Plaster Creek which run through Ken-O-Sha Park. Tributaries appear in several parks, but portions of them remain accessible as they pass through private lots.

Grand Rapids' tributaries present significant potential for enhanced ecological corridors. In the future, best practices for ecological restoration and management of tributary landscapes within the parks and on other land uses adjacent to tributaries should inform park maintenance regimes. The tributaries also present great opportunities to enhance the recreational trail network, one of the top community priorities echoed throughout the planning process.

Some tributary parcels are already owned by the City and the Department can work with other city divisions to reserve space for trails along these key sites. Potential easements through private parcels along tributaries are another way to begin to build a more community-based system of trails that connect the river system with the neighborhood parks of Grand Rapids. Further study is required to better understand the feasibility of securing easements in the areas of discontinuity, and to identify redundancies with other kinds of trail opportunities. Acquisition of some riverfront (and other trail) parcels will

require negotiation with current land owners, including private commercial/industrial real estate firms, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Transportation, US Naval Center, and others. These discussions may entail legal resources and/or transaction costs to the Department. Design and management guidelines can be put into place to inform the portions of the tributaries not owned by the Parks Department to ensure continuity and ecological health. To complete the Riverfront trail system, the Department may explore partnerships with the philanthropic community to support trail lands acquisition.



EXAMPLES: Connected Network



Nine Mile Run, Pittsburgh



Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City



Accessible Water-based Recreation, Michigan



Indianapolis Cultural Trail



Outdoor Adventure Play, Houston



Toronto Ravines

Leonard-To-Ann: The Missing Link

In 2020, the Department began conceptual design for the “missing link” in the Grand River Edge Trail between Leonard Street and Ann Street. This trail gap separates the downtown area from Riverside Park, making it difficult for trail users coming into town from trails like the White Pine to easily access the City. Planning and fundraising efforts are currently taking place and if all goes as planned, construction of this vital link will happen in 2023. Closing this gap will connect the City of Grand Rapids to hundreds of miles of uninterrupted trails to the north and west, and create pedestrian underpasses at the bridges on those streets and the Grand Rapids Eastern Railroad line between them. West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition is working with the City to handle the private fundraising needed to match state and federal dollars.

- 1 Future park development area
- 2 Railroad underpass
- 3 Continuous multi-use trail for walking, hiking, biking, rollerblading
- 4 Viewing platform
- 5 Riverside trail signage & lighting
- 6 Riverbank restoration planting



A new River Edge Trail connection closes the gap between city and regional non-motorized trails



Strategy 4

Connected Streets

In order to serve the greatest number of community members, parks depend on safe street connections. A network of key streets has been identified for potential streetscape improvements to better connect the City's parks and provide safer and more comfortable pedestrian and bike-friendly access. Burton Street, Franklin Street, Fulton Street, Knapp Street, Leonard Street and 3 Mile Road all provide east-west connections to parks while Diamond Avenue in the east and Covell Avenue in the west provide connections north-south. Given the importance of walkable park access, the Department can collaborate with other streetscape projects in the city to ensure that these important people-to-park connections are enhanced. The City's Vital Streets Plan demonstrates a key area of overlap between goals of the Planning Department and the Department of Parks and Recreation. The priority streetscape improvements have been coordinated to align with the Vital Streets Plan recommendations for transportation corridors and best-suited bike routes.

Additional design recommendations for Connected Streets include stormwater management and strategic planting to enhance ecological corridors, multi-modal mobility, and signage and wayfinding improvements to enhance physical and perceptual accessibility to the City's parks. Stormwater management and coordinated planting are areas to continue working in collaboration with Environmental Services.

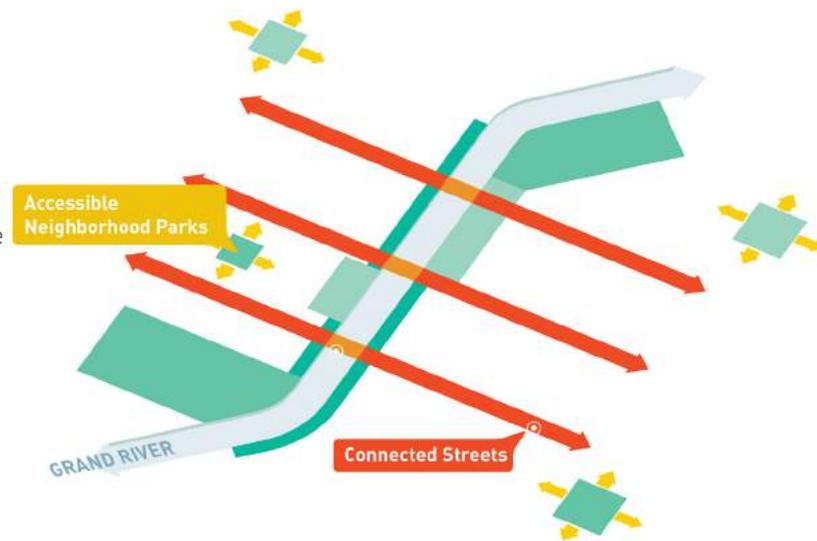


Strategy 5

Accessible Neighborhood Parks

Within many neighborhood parks, small-scale design improvements will go a long way to supporting access and legibility. New entry signage, clarified park entrances, improved parking and paths, lighting, and landscaping will further improve accessibility and strengthen the sense of an integrated neighborhood and park system. Additionally, a 3-tiered Accessibility Audit was developed to investigate access to green space based on proximity (see Chapter 3/Section C). As deferred maintenance improvements are made, simple updates can significantly improve the physical accessibility of parks as well as raise their presence in the public perception of the community.

Several existing neighborhood plans, such as the Grandville Avenue Area Specific Plan, also identify key, small-scale strategies to improve park accessibility within the community.



Accessible Neighborhood Parks



Trail and Path Entrances

Entrances should clearly exclude cars while welcoming others.



Micromobility

New forms of self-propelled and motorized transportation, especially micromobility devices are revolutionizing how people get to parks and travel within them.

CONNECTED NETWORK

GOAL: CREATE A CONNECTED NETWORK OF PARKS, NATURAL AREAS, AND WATERWAYS THAT'S ACCESSIBLE TO ALL OF THE GRAND RAPIDS COMMUNITY

Strategies

Regional System

Objective 1 – Create connections to existing regional natural resources along the Grand River, such as Millennium Park and other county and state parks, to strengthen the Grand River as a larger park system.

Objective 2 – Prioritize Opportunity Sites identified in A River For All that support uses that are integrated into the Grand River Greenway.

Objective 3 - Work with neighboring municipalities and community partners to expand and strengthen connections to regional multi-use trails:

- » Fred Meijer White Pine Trail
- » Musketawa Trail
- » Paul Henry Thornapple Trail

Grand River Waterfront

Objective 1 – Increase riverfront access and recreation for the Grand Rapids community through the following opportunities:

1. Redevelop the Coldbrook site or other potential riverfront sites into a community and recreation hub that includes a new indoor facility, public outdoor event space, and direct water access.
2. Improve existing riverfront parks through additional opportunities for water access, water-based recreation, and ecological restoration and naturalization.

3. Provide free public wifi access and charging stations in riverfront parks.
4. Partner with local businesses on concession sales and rental opportunities for water-based recreation equipment, in and along park social zones.
5. Coordinate with Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW) and regional partners on river access points, signage, and public communication around the designated Grand River Water Trail.

Objective 2 – Continue and expand partnerships with local entities engaged and interested in riverfront transformation, including city departments, DGRI, the River Restoration Initiative, Grand Action, Kent County, local businesses, and others to coordinate programming efforts, site development, open space improvements, and potential funding opportunities.

Tributaries and Trails

Objective 1 – Study the property ownership of currently inaccessible privately-owned areas along Lambertson Creek, Indian Mill Creek, and Plaster Creek, and identify the most feasible areas for potential acquisitions or easements in order to build a community-based system of trails that connects the river system with neighborhood parks.

Objective 2 - Along tributaries within existing parks, create environmental signage educating the community about the site ecology, riparian habitat, and stewardship of these environments.

Objective 3 - Continue to expand and provide new safe trail routes between park spaces:

- » Trail connection from Kalamazoo to the Ken-O-Sha Park trail system and park
- » Plaster Creek Trail connections between Eastern Ave SE and Madison Ave SE, specifically the crossing at 28th St
- » Trail connection from Leonard to Knapp through Ball Perkins Park
- » Connection to Highland Park from the south, under I-196 and west from College Ave
- » Trail connections from downtown to the Oxford Trail and Butterworth
- » Strategize a potential connection between Plaster Creek Family Park and the north end of Bike Park
- » Grand River Edges Trail improvements in the downtown core
- » Pedestrian connection from the Belknap Neighborhood to Division Ave and the river front
- » Expansion of the Oxford Trail south
- » Collaborate Lyon St bike-way and intersection improvements at Fuller (Fuller Park/Hillcrest Park access)
- » Planning study/feasibility analysis of Plaster Creek Trail expansion east to city limits (Kalamazoo to Breton Ave)

Connected Streets

Objective 1 – Collaborate and coordinate with other existing city streetscape projects, such as the Vital Streets and Bicycle Action Plan, to promote walkable, bikeable neighborhoods, specifically along:

- » 3 Mile Road
- » Knapp Street
- » Leonard Street
- » Fulton Street

- » Burton Street (east-west connections)
- » Covell Avenue
- » Diamond Avenue (north-south connections)

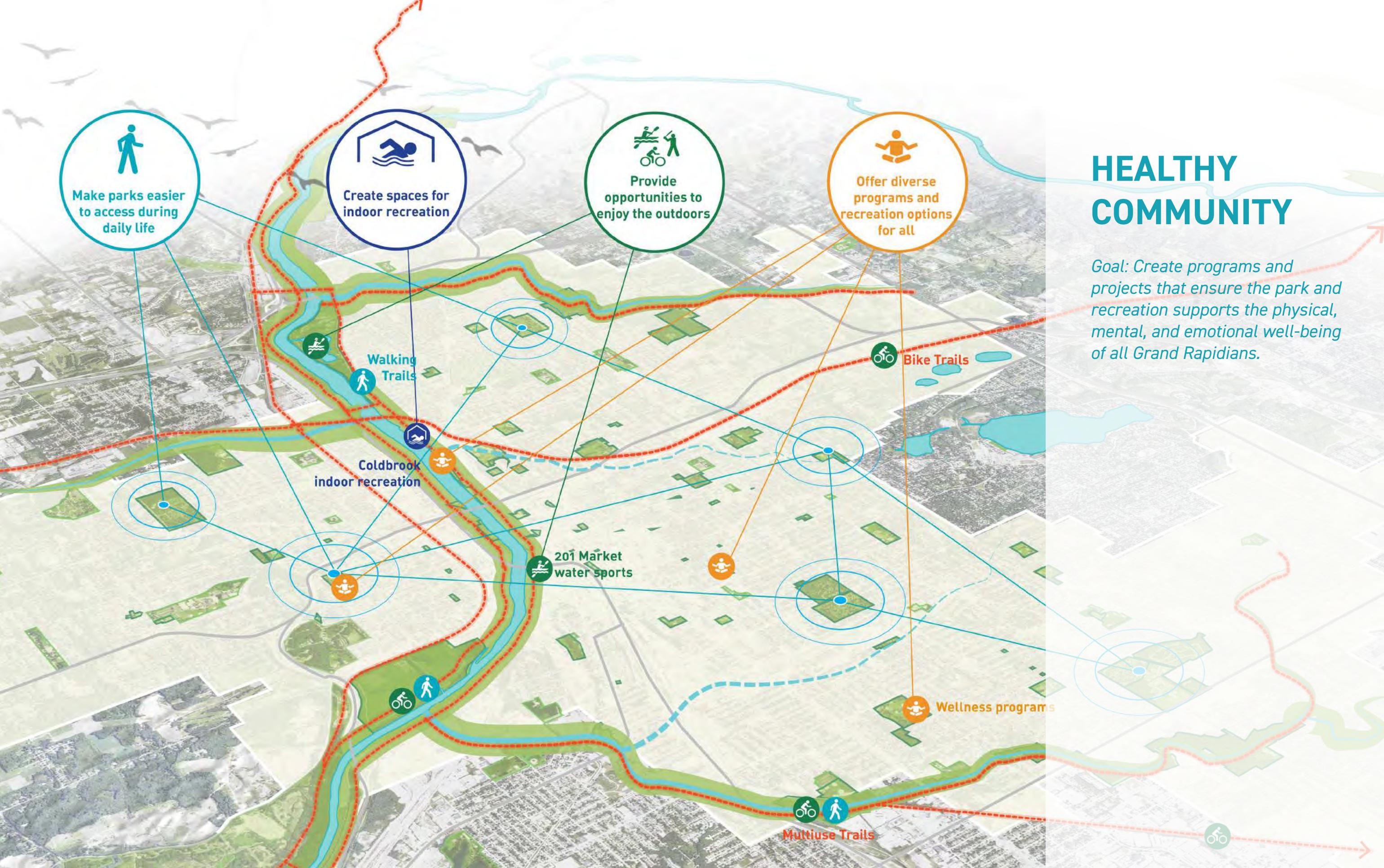
Objective 2 – Work with other city departments to incorporate the following elements into future street improvements that support walkability to parks and environmental management:

- » Street trees
- » Stormwater management
- » Strategic planting by ecological zone
- » Multi-modal mobility
- » Park signage and wayfinding

Accessible Neighborhood Parks

Objective 1 – Incorporate small-scale design improvements to enhance park and neighborhood connections, such as new entry signage or landscapes that improve visibility, parking and path signage, lighting, and landscaping, as part of overall maintenance improvements.

Objective 2 – Create universal accessibility guidelines for park improvements to determine changes necessary for improved accessibility to amenities by all. Build on the updated inventory of accessibility needs to inform standards and integrate inclusive universally accessible improvements to future deferred maintenance or parks millage projects.



Make parks easier to access during daily life

Create spaces for indoor recreation

Provide opportunities to enjoy the outdoors

Offer diverse programs and recreation options for all

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Goal: Create programs and projects that ensure the park and recreation supports the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all Grand Rapidsians.

Walking Trails

Coldbrook indoor recreation

201 Market water sports

Bike Trails

Wellness programs

Multiuse Trails

Research shows that time outdoors, no matter how you spend it, is a key part of a healthy life.

Health and wellness is one of the many things that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront of public mind, and parks continue to play a central role in the health and wellbeing of people and communities. Park and recreation agencies are also an important part of the solution to challenging issues such as obesity, physical inactivity, and lifelong wellness. The National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) acknowledges the industry's commitment to developing healthy communities through one of its three pillars: Health and Wellness. This pillar focuses on the value of parks and recreation systems in improving health outcomes and our physical environment and on the range of services that they provide for people of all different ages, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

A 2021 study completed by the NRPA revealed that 70% of U.S. adults want their local governments to invest in community infrastructure such as parks, community centers, recreation facilities, and nature centers. This belief holds true in Grand Rapids as well, where 70% of voters supported the 2019 parks millage for evergreen investments in parks and

recreation facilities. These investments allow for increased access to green space and nature, help bring vital services and programs to the community, and improve the physical and mental health of all residents.

Grand Rapids' leadership has acknowledged the important role of nature in child development – both physically and emotionally. The Mayor is committed to having every child live within walking distance of a park and has prioritized partnering with Grand Rapids Public Schools to enhance environmental education throughout the city. Today, partnerships with Grand Rapids Public Schools, Our Community's Children, environmental education providers and national organizations like the Children & Nature Network and the Outdoor Foundation are coalescing around several new initiatives to meaningfully connect children to nature. With this strong support, the City's park and recreation system will continue to advance its mission to participate

Strategies for a Healthy Community



INCREASING ACCESS

Make parks easier to access during daily life to encourage active lifestyles for all ages and abilities.



RECREATION OFFERINGS FOR ALL AGES AND ABILITIES

Offer diverse programs and recreation opportunities to provide fitness opportunities for all kinds of residents.



OUTDOOR FITNESS OPPORTUNITIES

Provide a range of opportunities to have fun, be active, and enjoy the outdoors.



INDOOR COMMUNITY & RECREATION FACILITIES

Provide a range of indoor space for multi-purpose and multi-generational community and recreation programming.

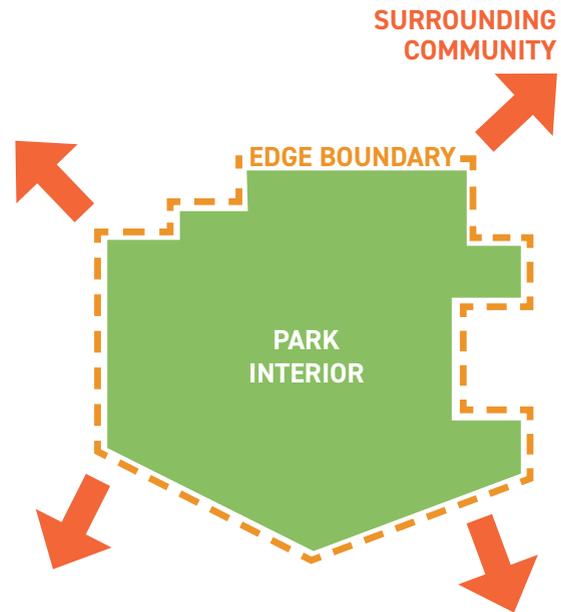


Strategy 1

Increasing Access

Access to park and recreation services is one of the key elements to building a healthy community. If readily accessible, parks and recreation opportunities have the power to change how people live and to encourage healthy lifestyles. Grand Rapids' parks are distributed across its three wards; however, access to these parks is not always equal across the neighborhoods. In order to increase the number of residents with easy access to parks and recreation opportunities, the Department will focus on the following:

- » High need neighborhoods - As part of the equity analysis, several areas of the city that are not within reasonable walking distance to a park were identified. These areas should be targeted for future parkland acquisition.
- » Riverfront links and trail gaps - In its current state, the City's riverfront serves as a main attraction for both residents and visitors; however, the Department should continue to develop a continuous path on both the east and west sides of the river. Key pedestrian and bicycle connections to the surrounding neighborhoods are also top priority for improving overall park access.
- » Easements and partnerships - Both trail extensions and parkland acquisition will require strategic easements and strong community partnerships. Easements across private property will allow for development of new trails or extensions, and partnerships can improve access by increasing provision of services or facility space in under-served areas.



Access Inside & Out

Making parks easy to access in daily life requires addressing physical and social barriers to access in the park interior, park edges, and surrounding park community at large.

See Neighborhood Investment Case Studies (p. 135) for examples of how to address.



Strategy 2

Recreation Offerings for All Ages and Abilities

More Americans are looking for activities that provide a fun, physical, emotional, and mental experience. While many Americans enjoy watching team sports like football and basketball, the Olympics, and national championship events, they are not necessarily interested in participating in those types of events for their fitness needs. Fitness classes, like HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training), Pilates, and Cardio Dance, are outgrowing traditional team sports, and proving that one does not need a lot of equipment to be fit. These classes are often more accessible to the larger population than team sports and will only continue to grow in popularity.

This national trend is also reflected within Grand Rapids; community feedback indicated that there is high demand for adult and youth fitness and wellness classes. The Department should focus on growing adult fitness/wellness, youth sports and education programs, and senior programs.

Active Adults: As the population ages, the Department should continue to grow programs for older adults. Since 2017, programs offered for adults aged 50+ have increased to activities including knitting club, card games, and pickle ball. Additionally, older adults are looking to spend time outdoors in social settings such as picnics and barbecues in parks. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is all the more important for the Department to find creative ways to connect with older residents for their health and wellbeing.

Trends in lifestyle programming for active adults include six dimensions of human wellness that influence optimal health, well-being, and quality of life. These program areas include: 1) Physical, 2) Social, 3) Intellectual/Creative, 4) Emotional, 5) Vocational, and 6) Environmental. When applying the six dimensions of wellness to developing a seasonal program menu, consider four major categories:

- » trips
- » lifelong learning
- » social events
- » sports and wellness



Tai Chi class at Wilcox Park

Thriving Outside: The Gear Library & Green Schoolyards

The Thrive Outside Initiative is focused on reversing the declining trend of outdoor engagement by working at the grassroots level, empowering communities to make outdoor recreation an accessible lifestyle for all. In April 2019, the Outdoor Industry Association awarded the City a multi-year, capacity-building grant to build and strengthen the relationship children and families have to the natural world through repeated and reinforced positive experiences in the outdoors.

THRIVE OUTSIDE GEAR LIBRARY

A Gear Library works just like a book library, with the goal of eliminating common barriers that keep people from spending time in nature—access to gear and supplies. The Department opened the City's first Gear Library in the summer of 2021 on the first floor of Roosevelt Park Lodge, offering free lending of outdoor equipment such as camping, apparel, sledding and snowshoe gear, among other items. Each member has a process for their gear, including reserving, checking in and out, and sanitizing after each use.

Examples of program support the library offers are:

- » Invite a gear library staff member to join your group for a hike, walk in a park, or tour of a local nature center
- » Staff training in outdoor skills. I.e dressing for all weather conditions, camping, hiking, and more
- » Group quantities of yard games, sporting equipment, apparel, etc



GREEN SCHOOLYARDS

In 2016, the City of Grand Rapids joined the Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) initiative, a national partnership between the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network. Since then, the City has received technical assistance and grant support to execute several nature connection strategies, including a green schoolyards initiative that creates school-based green spaces in the Neighborhoods of Focus.

The partnership between the Parks Department and GRPS provides open access to green spaces on school grounds. Through Millage dollars and private grant funding, the combination of merged priorities and maximized resources has led to a great impact with six new outdoor classrooms and nature play spaces.

The new outdoor classroom gives students, teachers, and families the opportunity to broaden their educational experience through exploration of our natural world. Moving forward, the City and GRPS will look to expand the initiative to additional sites and will support ongoing activation of outdoor classrooms through the Grand Rapids Environmental Education Network (GREEN).



“Grand Rapids has moved into a position of national leadership in connecting children to nature more equitably. The Grand Rapids success story is about partnerships.”

Jaime Zaplatosch, Director of Green Schoolyards for Healthy Communities for the Children & Nature Network



Ottawa Hills Park Playground, Grand Rapids' first universally accessible playground, opened in 2018



Braille Trail, Watertown, Massachusetts

Inclusive Programming: The Department currently does not have programs dedicated to serving individuals who have disability characteristics, but this is an important area to develop. While current staff capacity does not allow for the development of specialized Therapeutic Recreation services, inclusion services should happen in all programs provided by the department to support participation in typical recreation programming by individuals with disabilities.

A community-wide and/or regional approach to offering Therapeutic Recreation has worked for several agencies throughout the nation. Common specialized program areas offered by other recreation agencies around the country include social clubs, special events, and partnerships with Special Olympics and Paralympics. The Department should explore partnerships with Mary Free Bed, Kentwood Parks and Recreation, the YMCA, and others to address this need at the regional level.

Multi-Cultural Audiences: Programming should also offer activities for participants of diverse backgrounds and cultures. In addition to celebrating the City's increasingly diverse population, the Department must also constantly evaluate the existing offerings to meet cultural needs and ensure cultural inclusivity. Whether addressed through intentional park design, strategic programming or general marketing, cultural awareness should be at the forefront of the Department. Community feedback also indicated this need for enhanced cultural awareness and improved bilingual communication.

In particular, the Department should ensure that the specific needs of the City's African American population and its growing Hispanic population are addressed and that all resources are fully accessible. A recent study by the UCLA Anderson School of Management concluded that leisure activity within the Hispanic culture is primarily driven by a strong commitment to family and friends. An increase in special group events or family fitness activities targeted toward this audience could result in higher participation rates.

Strategic program location, targeted advertisements, and community partnerships can be used to increase overall awareness of the Department's offerings within these communities. A more concerted effort to provide information and materials in Spanish is needed, as well as a potential Hispanic community engagement staff person. The number of community feedback comments written in Spanish further emphasized this need for enhanced communication efforts.



Outdoor spinning class offered along the Grand River Edge Trail



Bike Park BMX trail in Grand Rapids' Burton Heights community



"Fitness Court" coming to Ottawa Hills Park, summer 2022



Strategy 3

Outdoor Fitness Opportunities

COVID-19 brought a communal shift in perspective in how and where people exercise. When gyms and fitness centers closed during the pandemic, for many residents, exercising outdoors became a necessity for physical and mental health, and a way to connect with your active community, be it 6-feet apart.

The Department's response to outdoor fitness options during the pandemic had an overwhelmingly positive response. Continued research into new classes and partnerships should be done to provide residents with a diverse selection of activities that feel safe and social in unique outdoor settings.

Municipalities nationwide are creating more outdoor fitness opportunities to encourage residents to become active. These opportunities come in many shapes and forms, including trails for walking, running, or biking, outdoor gyms, water-based recreation, climbing, mountain biking, and natural areas for play, in response to the growing trends. Community members suggested a wide range of outdoor fitness activities such as zip lines, rope courses, and dog-friendly workout classes, among others.

Indian Trails Golf Course has seen remarkable growth over the last several years thanks to new investments, high-quality customer service, and innovative programming such as winter recreation trails. There are ample opportunities to continue to engage community members in this specialty outdoor recreation facility in new and innovative ways to make it a regional destination. Specific recommendations for capital improvements and programing opportunities at this facility will be explored in a master planning process for Indian Trails Golf Course led by the Department in 2022.

The Department should also address demand for water-based recreation along the Grand River. The Department will work to align program offerings with this community need. Expanded programs will also offer important opportunities to increase non-tax revenue generation. Partnerships with existing service providers in the community offer other opportunities to expand awareness and access to fitness programs. These non-conventional health and fitness opportunities succeed in attracting users of all ages and abilities.



Strategy 4

Indoor Community and Recreation Facilities

In addition to maintaining accessible parkland and offering a wide variety of programs, cities must provide sufficient indoor facility space in convenient locations in order to increase participation in fitness and recreation. In its current state, the Department does not have ample multi-purpose indoor space for programming and must rely on other organizations to supply these programs. Currently, the Department relies on dispersed, small recreation facilities with limited space to provide the services the community desires. These include spaces at 201 Market Street, small neighborhood facilities (such as at Garfield Park), and joint facilities shared with the public schools. While these spaces help to meet some needs today, the Department's program offerings are restricted, upgrades are needed, and it is less efficient to program spaces across the city.

The 2016 community survey results indicate a high level of need for indoor fitness and exercise facilities. This need was prioritized after trails, natural and wildlife areas, and picnic areas. Indoor space would also be used to develop program space for seniors and teens, program deficit areas for the City. Community feedback also indicates a need for more family-oriented programs, such as art, yoga, pottery classes, and family and teen movie nights that would ideally be located in a communal, indoor space for multi-generational activity.

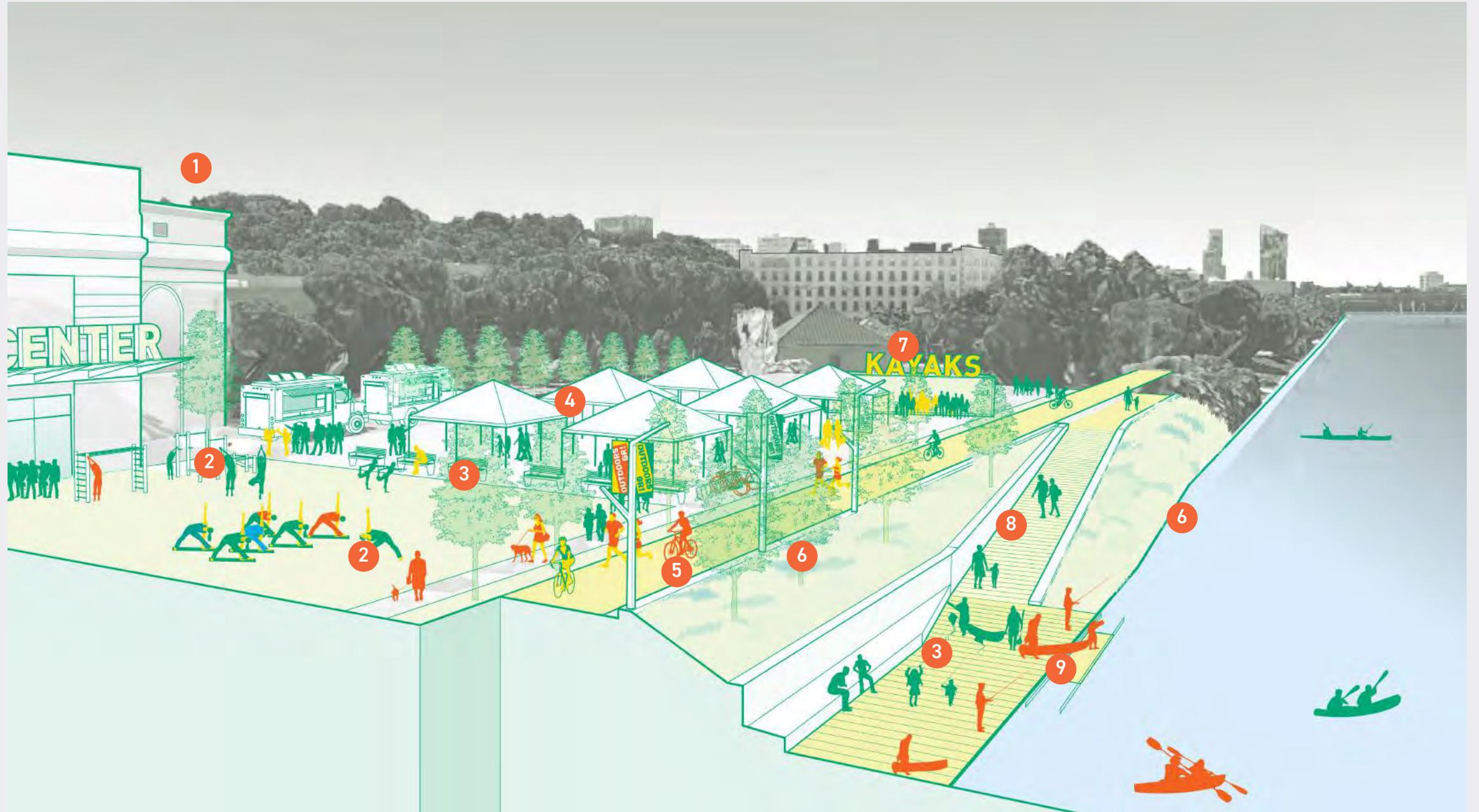
Although no national standards exist for indoor recreation space, similarly-sized Michigan communities to Grand Rapids are building new facilities in the range of 50,000 square feet to 100,000 square feet. Space for new facilities is most likely to occur through acquisition of existing sites or buildings and spaces in Grand Rapids, or as part of redeveloped sites in Grand Rapids. Locations should take into consideration multi-modal access, central locations for access to all residents of Grand Rapids, and ability to accommodate growth of programs and accommodation of unmet needs with teens and seniors.



*Coldbrook Decommissioned Water Pumping Station
Opportunity Site, A River For All*

Waterfront Community and Recreation Center: Coldbrook (or other riverfront site)

- 1 Potential indoor fitness facility
- 2 Space for outdoor fitness (with exercise equipment)
- 3 Seating for passive enjoyment
- 4 Space for events (music, art, markets etc.)
- 5 Continuous riverfront trail
- 6 Flood resilient landscape (can be an educational opportunity too)
- 7 Recreation equipment rentals
- 8 Easy access down to the river
- 9 Launch for kayaks and paddles (and a chance to touch the water), including EZ Launch for universal access



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

GOAL: CREATE PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS THAT ENSURE THE PARK AND RECREATION SUPPORTS THE PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF ALL GRAND RAPIDIANS.

Strategies

Increasing Access

Objective 1 – Identify parkland for future acquisition in high-need areas such as the southeast and northwest neighborhoods. Opportunities may be direct acquisitions or through partnership agreements.

Objective 2 – Grow new partnerships with local institutions, organizations, and commercial businesses to increase provision of recreation services and facility space.

Objective 3 – Evaluate feasibility of potential easements or acquisitions along both sides of the river where there are missing trail links, including the following target areas:

- » Butterworth site to Fulton Street (west side)
- » 6th Street to Ann Street (west side)
- » Wealthy Street to Fulton Street (east side)
- » Oxford Trail to Wealthy Street (east side)

Objective 4 – Evaluate design and cost feasibility of a rail trail within the right-of-way of the active Grand Rapids Eastern (GRE) Railroad.

Objective 4 – Continue partnership with GRPS and community partners to increase number of green schoolyards and opportunities for outdoor learning and play at school sites across the system, focusing on schools in park-deficient neighborhoods.

Recreation Offerings for All Ages and Abilities

Objective 1 – Expand recreation opportunities in Neighborhoods of Focus.

Objective 2 – Target an increase in the number of recreation programs for older adults, including both active adults (ages 55-59) and seniors (ages 70+). Potential opportunities include trips, lifelong learning, social events, and sports and wellness.

Objective 3 – Expand inclusive and adaptive recreation programming through partnerships with Kentwood Parks and Recreation, Mary Free Bed, and YMCA.

Objective 4 – Strategically advertise and locate programs to attract a multi-cultural audience, primarily the City's African American and Hispanic populations. Expand marketing and programming in additional languages.

Objective 5 – Expand Thrive Outside Gear Library and outdoor recreation programming in Neighborhoods of Focus to increase the number of children and families connected to nature.

Outdoor Fitness Opportunities

Objective 1 – Incorporate outdoor fitness opportunities into park infrastructure improvements:

- » Skate park
- » Bike park
- » Boulder park
- » Community boathouse
- » Multi-modal trails
- » Outdoor gyms
- » Water recreation
- » Climbing walls
- » Mountain biking trails
- » Nature play areas
- » Golfing features

Objective 2 – Build on recent success of outdoor fitness programming by expanding new classes and partnerships.

Objective 3 – Expand opportunities for water recreation along the Grand River through access points, programming, and education.

Objective 4 – Expand winter recreation opportunities across the system including snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, hiking, and fat-tire biking.

Indoor Community and Recreation Facilities

Objective 1 – Make improvements and address deferred maintenance in existing, small indoor facilities, such as the neighborhood centers at Roosevelt, MLK, and Garfield parks.

Objective 2 – Continue to partner with other organizations' indoor space to maintain recreation programming and explore new space sharing options with partners, including Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS), Grand Rapids Community College (GRCC), the YMCA, and churches and urban ministries.

Objective 3 – Investigate options to temporarily lease vacant retail or other spaces for additional program and community space, with long-term options for acquisition of any appropriate spaces that fit the needs of the department.

Objective 4 – Create more flexible spaces for outdoor programming, particularly at larger regional- and community-scale parks such as Riverside and Garfield parks.



NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS

Goal: Enhance the diversity and experience of the park and recreation system by drawing on community feedback, local ecology, and national trends.

Neighborhood Investments provides strategies to meet community needs, including more accessible park space, new amenities and programs, and integration of trends. These ideas can be incorporated into deferred maintenance projects, facility upgrades, and new park sites.

While Grand Rapids is generally at par with peer cities in terms of “basic” park amenities, additional investments in new amenities in parks across the City’s neighborhoods will address unmet needs in the community and serve to strengthen and differentiate key parks in the system. Similarly, while great progress has been made to address deferred maintenance in the system with recent millage funding, additional upgrading is needed.

The 2014-2020 millage has allowed the Department to address critical deferred maintenance while creating additional park amenities, improving accessibility and ADA compliance, and enhancing ecological functions. Moving forward, the Department needs to continue its effort to improve the state of maintenance in the system beyond those parks with critical deficiencies while simultaneously broadening amenities and making strategic acquisitions.

Strategies for Neighborhood Investments



DEFERRED MAINTENANCE

Continue to address deferred maintenance in existing parks and facilities through phased improvements.



NEW INVESTMENTS & AMENITIES

Broaden and grow the amenities and programs hosted by the Department to meet community need and to add innovation to the system.



ACQUISITIONS

Make strategic acquisitions to improve access, connectivity, and plan for future generations.



Strategy 1

Deferred Maintenance

Deferred maintenance refers to the total cost of all backlogged maintenance projects that were not completed on schedule and therefore have been postponed (typically due to funding shortfalls, reduced staffing levels, etc.) resulting in larger needs that need to be addressed through capital projects.

Addressing deferred maintenance issues was a significant focus of the 2013 parks millage. The Department used the asset management database to determine high priority (critical deficiency) projects that address failure of equipment, advanced deterioration and amenities that fail to meet a legislated requirement. Projects over the last seven years have started to address these high priority concerns and have improved park access, replaced failing mechanical/electrical equipment and repaired structural concerns at indoor facilities. New amenities and materials were carefully selected to reduce ongoing maintenance costs and several basic amenities were standardized across the system for easier maintenance and replacement.

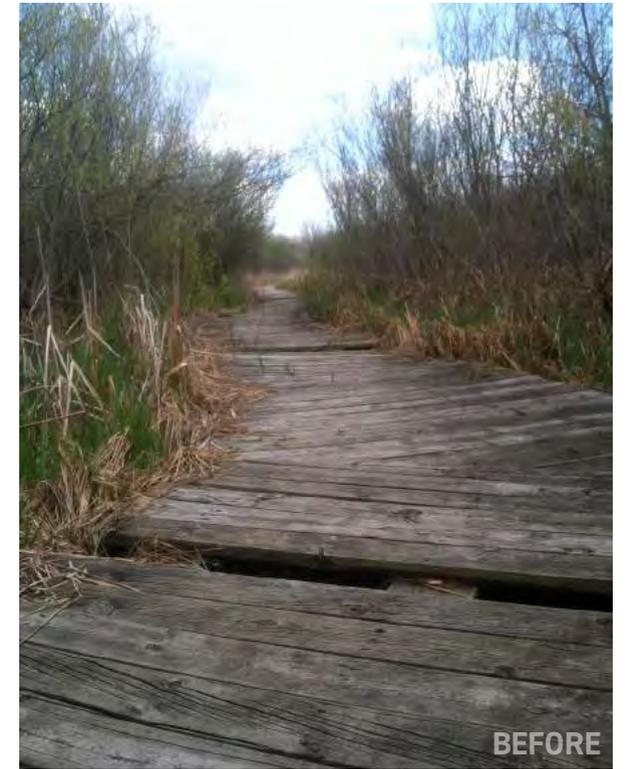
While great progress has been made in addressing the most critical maintenance gaps, the funding available at the time was only able to address approximately 25-33% of the needs in each park. Moving forward with the dedicated capital funding of the 2019 parks millage, the Department will continue to focus on updating aging park assets that are beyond their service life. Upgrades to basic park amenities is essential as park usage continues to rise to new levels.

Project examples include:

- » Addressing failed parking lots and interior park roadways
- » Accessibility upgrades to pathways, restrooms and playgrounds
- » Structural, electrical, and mechanical upgrades to indoor facilities
- » Fixing broken benches and picnic tables, old playground pieces, and cracking sports courts



Standardized waste receptacles, lighting, and benches for park system, implemented at Briggs Park, 2020



HUFF PARK BEFORE & AFTER

Materials for the replaced accessible boardwalk at Huff Park will last for 50+ years, decreasing the need for ongoing maintenance costs.





Strategy 2

New Investments and Amenities

Community outreach revealed a desire for new innovations and programs. A 2021 study completed by the NRPA revealed that 70% of adults say investing in community infrastructure by local government is extremely or very important. This includes amenities found within park systems such as green spaces, community centers, recreation facilities, and senior centers. As the City addresses maintenance in existing parks, it should seek to grow and broaden its park and recreation offerings. Trends and community feedback provide a strong basis for creative solutions that address unmet needs and help the Department remain relevant to the community. In particular, in light of needs highlighted by community engagement and surveys, these categories of amenities should be prioritized:

Trails and paths: Additional walking trails and paths for park users of different fitness levels are a high priority for the community. These can be walking loops in regional- and community-scaled parks, or trails located along the tributary zone that form part of a larger city-wide network. Parks in these categories include Ball Perkins, 32nd Street, Garfield, Ken-O-Sha, Butterworth, and new riverfront parks.

Specialty recreation amenities: Conversations with community groups have revealed interest in specialty amenities such as skate parks, boulder and climbing walls, inclusive play equipment, community gardens, and dog parks. These either do not currently exist in the park system or exist in limited quantities. Monroe North has been identified as a potential location for a destination

skate park. Dog parks are proposed in long-term plans for Riverside and Highland parks, however additional off-leash areas are needed in southeast Grand Rapids.

Access to nature: Natural areas have the benefit of simultaneously improving the ecological functions of parks, enhancing their identity, reducing maintenance, and providing opportunities for environmental education. Natural areas are especially appropriate in parks that exemplify the conditions of their ecological zone, for example, Huff, Lookout, and Riverside Parks. Exposure to nature can also be incorporated into parks through partnerships for pollinator or vegetable gardens and edible landscaping.

Picnic areas: Additional picnic shelters, structures, and gathering spaces should be considered in a number of popular destination parks, including Riverside Park, Garfield Park, and MLK Park, as well as parks in neighborhoods where there is demand for community and family gathering spaces (e.g. Roosevelt). These facilities also have revenue potential as rental facilities for small group events.

Four-seasons park spaces: Grand Rapids residents want to stay active in local parks year-round, and the Department should provide supporting amenities such as groomed trails for winter activities and enclosed shelters and restroom buildings that are accessible year-round. Existing four-season parks within the system include Richmond, Mulick, and Plaster Creek Family Park.

RECENT AND UPCOMING INVESTMENTS:



Ottawa Hills Playground, first universally accessible playground in Grand Rapids, completed fall 2018



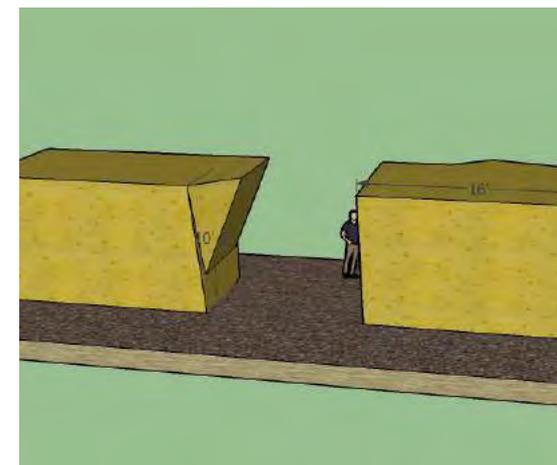
Nature amplifier above Plaster Creek at Ken-O-Sha Park, completed summer 2021



Bike Park, a new all ages mountain bike trail, in the Burton Heights neighborhood, completed 2018



Picnic pavilion at Roberto Clemente Park, completed summer 2021



Boulder climb at Highland Park, projected completion spring 2022



Fitness Court at Ottawa Hills Park, projected completion summer 2022



Strategy 3

Acquisition of New Land

Acquisition of new park land in historically deficient areas is a priority of the Department to ensure every resident lives within a 10-minute walk of a quality park. The Department should carefully balance the acquisition of additional park land with its ability to maintain and upgrade existing assets. By coordinating with other city departments and community partners, the Department can strategically focus any acquisition of additional park land on one of the three strategic goals:

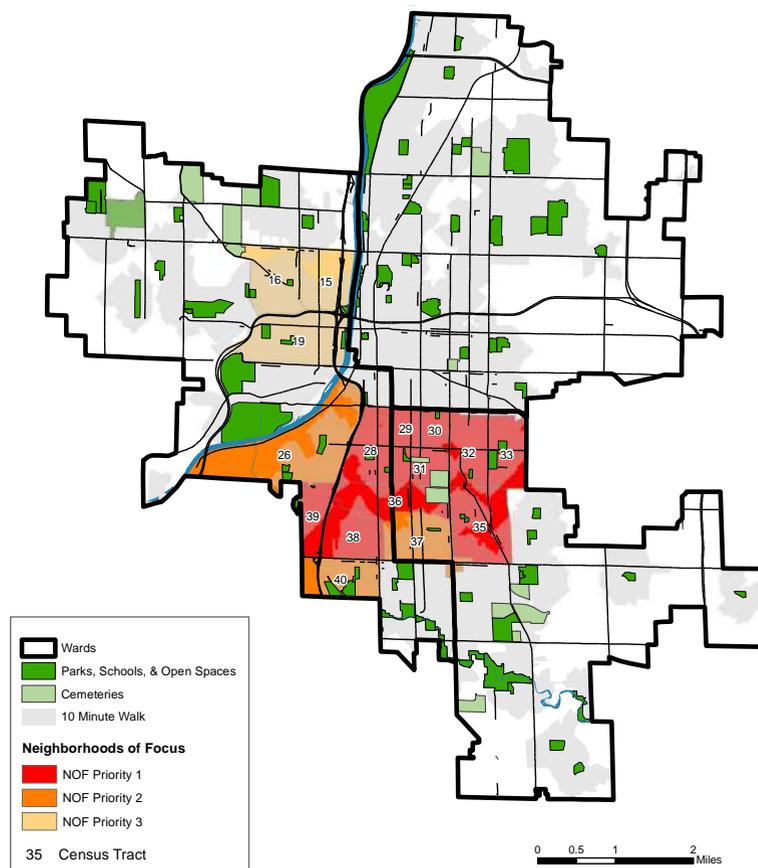
Increase 10-minute walk access to parks citywide: The Department should continue to invest in green space acreage in all city wards to shorten the distance from home to park. Simultaneously, the Department should evaluate physical and ecological accessibility barriers within and surrounding parks to help improve walkability for all.

Increase green space in Neighborhoods of Focus: The Department has identified several properties in park deficient areas of the city that could be transformed into new community green space. This includes property in Roosevelt Park, South Division, and Boston Square.

Expand connections between parks and the regional trail system: The Department will need to work with community partners to fundraise and seek grants for trail acquisition and development, and coordinate on easement access to build a community-based system of trails that connects the river system to neighborhood parks.

“We will work to ensure that there is a park within walking distance of every child who lives in our city.”

Mayor Bliss, State of the City 2016



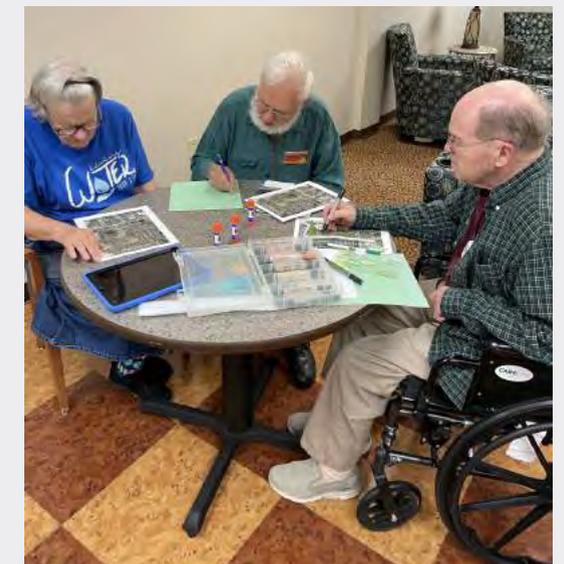
TRANSFORMATIVE DESIGN

Transformative design is transactional— it facilitates a process of give-and-take between community members, designers, technical experts, and client stakeholders. While traditional planning processes focus on physical improvements, transformative design has the ability to address individual, social, and physical inequities within a given neighborhood. Through this process, critical information and opinions are exchanged, building collective understanding, empathy, and respect between participants. A shared language is found and everyone gains knowledge beyond their limited experience.

Participatory design is grounded in the everyday places and lives of people. For community engagement to be a truly democratic process, it cannot be a standardized public process that is formulaic, closed, or superficial. Parks are not “one-size-fits-all;” each park type serves a different need within the system. These neighborhood improvements draw on the ecological diversity of Grand Rapids’ landscape and provide a menu of improvements that can be customized to each park project. The ideas reinforce sustainable practices and build them into the future improvements of each park. This includes recommendations for appropriate stormwater management for each park’s location and soil composition, responsive programming to engage nature, and floodplain management in parks along Grand Rapids’ water systems.

Park programs, amenities, public art, and other community facilities can also add variety and value to the Grand Rapids system. These are helpful elements to consider when building sense of place and community identity with residents. Through conversation and trust-based relationship building, the Department can understand and appreciate what makes each park unique and special within a given community.

The Neighborhood Investments strategy offers techniques for design and programming improvements of Grand Rapids’ parks and facilities. It classifies parks and open spaces by their ecological zones, park type/function, accessibility, and the adjacent area’s community need. Based on the analysis, recreation trends, and community feedback, improvements and strategies are recommended—unique to each park space.

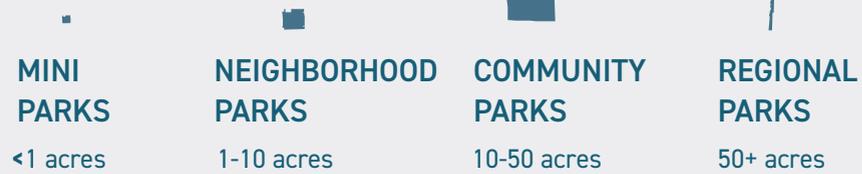


A Samaritas resident focus group assists in planning a new park space along 32nd Street SE through map making and model building exercises

TECHNIQUES FOR COLLECTIVE CREATIVITY

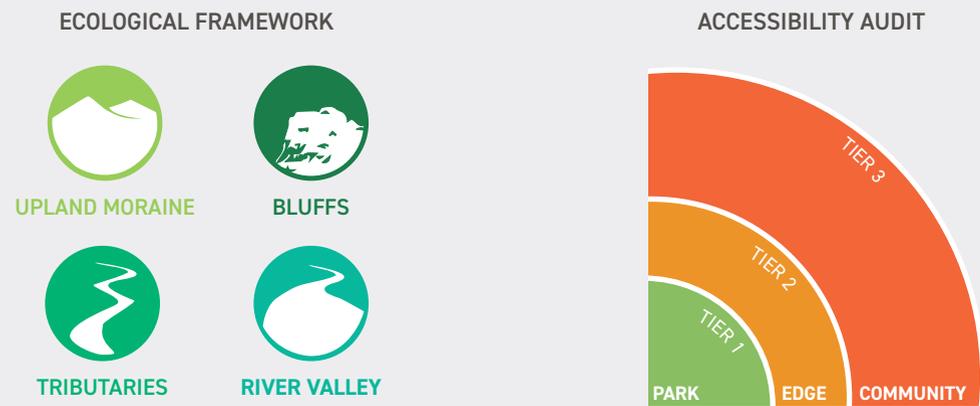
Determine Your Park Type

Grand Rapids has parks of many shapes and sizes from large naturalized regional parks, to amenity-rich community and neighborhood parks, to mini parks.



Assess the Local Context

Recognize the ecological zone in which the parks sits and identify site-specific topographic, hydrological conditions, and native vegetation communities. Analyze accessibility on a tiered scale that identifies human-made and ecological barriers to park users.



Consider the Basic Needs of the Community

Community needs vary depending on economical, cultural, and social settings, and are unique to each neighborhood in which they reside.



Test Projects

Test projects, or pilot prototyping, have the power to generate public interest and activate neglected spaces quickly and inexpensively. This helps ignite public imagination, while making a case for more permanent, costlier investments. Pilot projects can also inspire community partners to initiate similar projects and create a greater sense of ownership of public spaces. Public art, signage, programming, and other simple interventions can make a big difference in activating places and generating identity through public use.



Winter festival at Martin Luther King Park

Alongside the project team, each priority park community flushed out a design intervention to quickly build in their park space, allowing them to see their ideas in action at human-scale. After six months, the projects should be evaluated with a series of questions:

- » What worked and what did not work?
- » What findings (positive and negative) arose from implementation?
- » What unexpected opportunities appeared before, during and after the process?
- » How did this benefit park users?



Basketball mural art at Heartside Park



Live music at Sullivan Field

NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS: PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDIES AN ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

When the evergreen millage was passed in 2019, the Department understood that a concerted, intentional effort was needed to balance demands and create a community vision for long-term development for several city parks. Four priority park case studies within each ward of the city, with varying qualities, demands, and infrastructure were selected to undergo a master planning process. Each park has unique community and environmental needs in which the Department looks to innovatively address in a culturally- and ecologically-sensitive manner.

A master plan for a specific park is a high-level view, conceptual design package that records current community needs and concerns. It should be viewed as a living document, evolving and responding to the changing community and surrounding context. A park master plan may be realized over several years, as funding becomes available. At each phase of implementation, the Department will work together with community members in a detailed, site-specific design process to reevaluate the master plan and create spaces that are truly reflective of the neighborhood.

Roosevelt Park Lodge

Improvements to the Lodge has been a high community priority for many years. The Department completed a facility condition index and determined the building is structurally sound enough to sustain improvements within its existing footprint. Recognizing the potential for the Lodge to be an unprecedented community recreational hub within a Neighborhood of Focus, the Department sought to modernize and diversity programming in and around the immediate building surrounding.

Riverside Park

Due to budget constraints, Riverside Park has not undergone a recent master planning process. Large asset management needs paired with high community daily demands and special event use make Riverside a priority for improvements now more than ever. As a regional park along the Grand River, improved circulation, integration with river corridor plans, and the balance of active recreation with environmental protection will help Riverside Park reach its full potential.

Ball Perkins Park

A large, under-developed site with need for greater public access, Ball Perkins Park was selected for master planning to balance the demand for active recreation and environmental preservation.

32nd Street Green Space

The City's 3rd ward is a historically park-deficient community compared to the other 2 city wards. The Department intentionally selected this undeveloped plot of land to be studied as a potential community nature park, adding 17-acres of much needed public open space to the neighborhood.



NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT CASE STUDIES

A selection of existing and proposed parks of different sizes and ecological zones are included in this section to illustrate how the series of neighborhood improvements can be applied.

| EXAMPLE | WARD | PARK TYPE | ECOLOGY |
|----------------------|------|--------------|----------------|
| Roosevelt Park Lodge | 1st | Neighborhood | Bluff |
| Riverside Park | 2nd | Regional | River Valley |
| Ball Perkins Park | 2nd | Community | Upland Moraine |
| 32nd Street SE | 3rd | Community | Tributaries |

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + BLUFF

Roosevelt Park Lodge

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT



BUILDING AREA: 11,056 SQUARE FEET

TIER 1 (Lodge Interior)

1. Outdoor visibility poor due to damaged/deteriorating windows
2. Existing seating- folding/movable chairs only
3. Inactive lift from the parking pavement to basketball court is located at the west side of the building
4. Basketball court not sound proofed
5. Poor building ventilation

Other notes:

- » Main entrance to Lodge is split-level, with no barrier-free access to either level.
- » Bathrooms located on both levels (locker rooms on ground floor)
- » No windows to exterior at lower level

TIER 2 (Lodge Exterior)

1. Path to splash pad, restrooms, picnic shelter, playground
2. Path to upper parking area
3. Barrier-free access point to patio
4. Movable picnic table seating
5. Concrete patio (poor condition), ~ 4,500 sf
6. Parking along east and north side of building
7. Stairs to patio
8. Path to park entry road
9. Vegetation visually blocking building



TIER 3 (Lodge Community)

1. Main park entry off Chicago Dr (no crosswalks)
2. Plaster Creek
3. Industrial edge
4. 25' bluff
5. Water tower (no public access)
6. Public stairs to neighborhood
7. Park road access to Lodge
8. Access to park off Grandville Ave via Van Raalte Dr (no crosswalks)
9. Existing parking, ~ 17,000 sf

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » The Lodge is currently programmed for youth basketball on the upper level, and the Gear Library on the lower level
- » A facility condition index was completed in 2018, deeming the building sound to withstand upgrades
- » Both levels of the split level building and the sunken patio are not barrier-free accessible
- » The upper level includes a full-length basketball court, bathrooms, maintenance closet, and restrooms. The lower level includes a large open space, storage room, office, and locker rooms
- » Poor street visibility and lack of lighting often creates a feeling of lack of safety within the park space. Illegal activity in the parking lot is not uncommon.

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + BLUFF

Roosevelt Park Lodge



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The first step in understanding the community's potential support of the Lodge was to talk with a small group of stakeholder neighborhood leaders to determine 1) if there neighborhood interest in investing in it as a community amenity, 2) could the existing footprint be modified to meet current community needs, and 3) should an alternative location or new building be considered. Stakeholders agreed that the Lodge in its current location has the potential to be a transformative addition to the health and wellness of the neighborhood.

In a series of three input sessions and an online survey, residents showed their excitement for Lodge renovations and programming through dot polling, mapping, and conversation. Spanish translators were present at each session, often gaining in depth feedback when there otherwise would have been a language barrier.

In regard to the physical condition of the Lodge, neighbors want a more welcoming feel, with a heightened sense of arrival. Wayfinding and accessibility are less than adequate. Currently, there is little to no natural ventilation in the building causing a uncomfortable experience. While there are some windows, most are broken or discolored with low visibility. Everyone felt the locker rooms in the lower level were unnecessary. With no existing acoustical separation between the lower level and the upper level, the lower level is almost unusable socially due to the high noise levels from above.

Roosevelt Park residents would like to see the Lodge reemerge as a safe, multifaceted community asset that celebrates the diversity and talents of their neighbors. Most conversations involved a concern for safety and a hope for a flexible space to host a range of uses and events.

A balance of recreational/sport activities with event space flexible for various scales, accessible for lease or rent was desired. Basketball led the way in recreational/sport activities. Residents also discussed futsal, indoor soccer, and dance. A rental space for family-focused events such as Quinceaneras, birthday parties, and baby showers, and weddings was a high community priority. Multi-generational activities such as bingo, small concerts, neighborhood parties, and youth and senior classes, was also important. Several people felt it would be worth considering a small library, vending, access to technology and wi-fi, art space, as well as a kitchen for users to utilize during events.

WHAT WE HEARD

"Event space for birthdays, art center, mixed-use space, movable furniture, basketball, bathroom, kitchen outlets"

"Ventilation, sound proofing, visibility"

"Senior center/youth center, classes"

"Kitchen to use for weddings or quinceaneras"

BASIC NEEDS THEMES

CONNECTION Gathering Spaces / Local Art / Programming & Activation



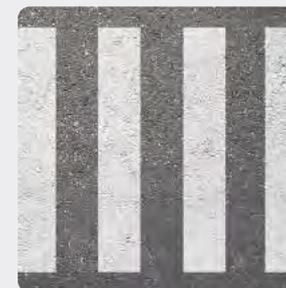
- "Opportunities to experience things together"
- "Live entertainment to bring life and groove into the neighborhood"
- "This is what we all want, there just isn't enough community spaces"
- "Exchanging/trading and growing of harvest. Harvest festival"
- "Local artists, inviting events"
- "Nurture the creativity of our community"

BELONGING Neighborhood & Community / Family-Focused / Local Culture, Talent & Cuisine



- "More for people to do that is constructive and inclusive"
- "Coming together as a neighborhood 'family', belonging with the community"
- "Kids belong in all spaces!"
- "Representation of neighborhood culture"
- "Open free access to the space (indoor and outdoor)"
- "Food brings us together"

SAFETY Lighting & Visibility / Safe & Clean Access To & Within the Park



- "City work with us so we can know each other and have a relationship. If I know you and my neighbors there is safety"
- "We need more lighting, too dark"
- "Lights for more security at night"
- "Increase visibility"
- "Safe/better access to the park from Tulip/Coate"
- "Safe and clean sidewalks"

RECREATION Family-Friendly Activities & Events / Walking / Music



- "Safe parks to enjoy with my family and friends"
- "Basketball courts for the youth"
- "Going for walks with my family"
- "Breakdancing sounds fun!"
- "Live music is a great way to enjoy the weekend"
- "Kids nature exploration events/activities"

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + BLUFF

Roosevelt Park Lodge



VENUE FOR FIESTAS AND PERFORMANCE



MULTI-FUNCTIONING COURT SPACE



ARTS AND CULTURE



SMALL FAMILY AND FRIEND GATHERINGS

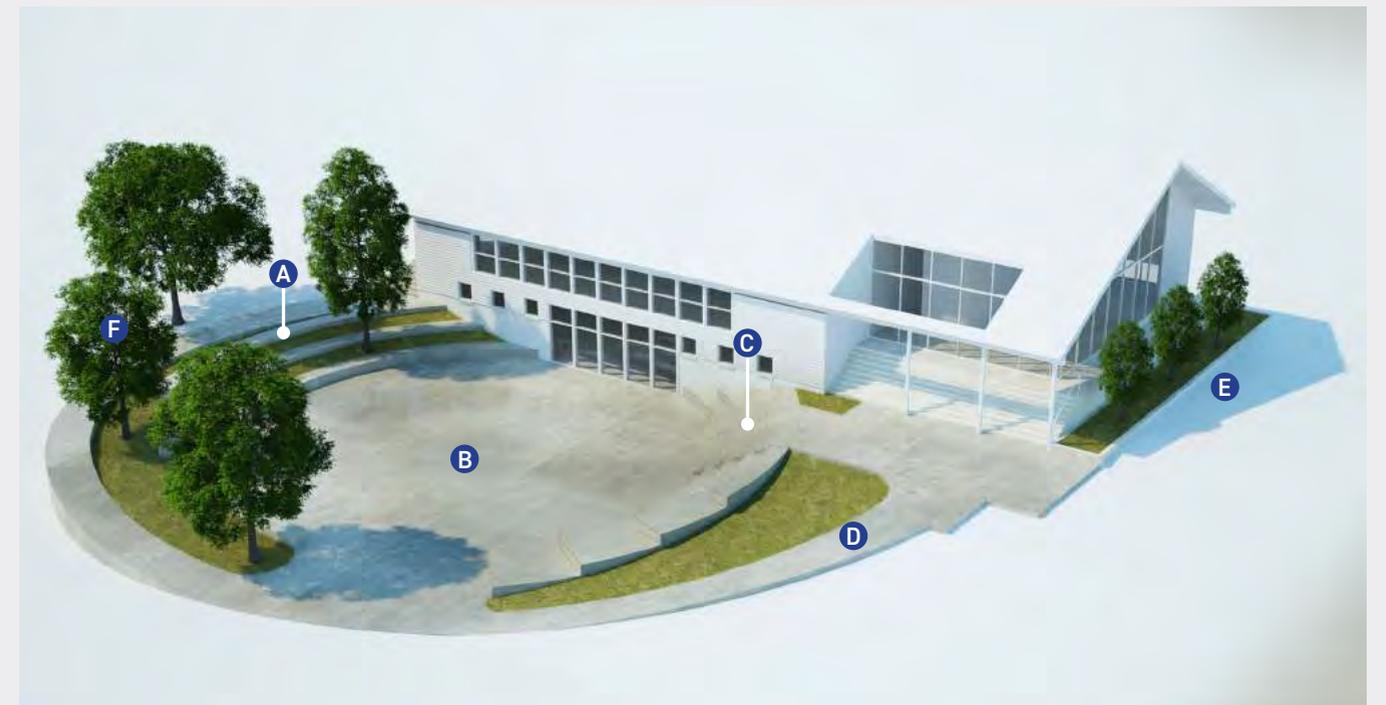
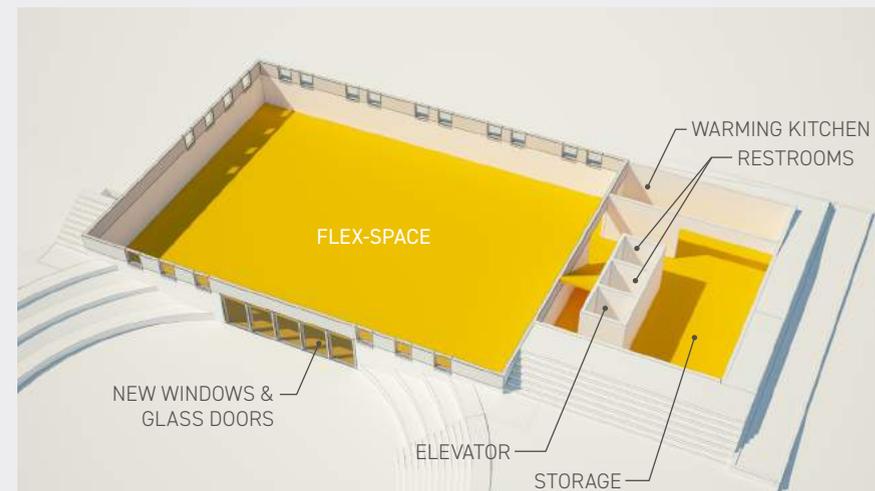
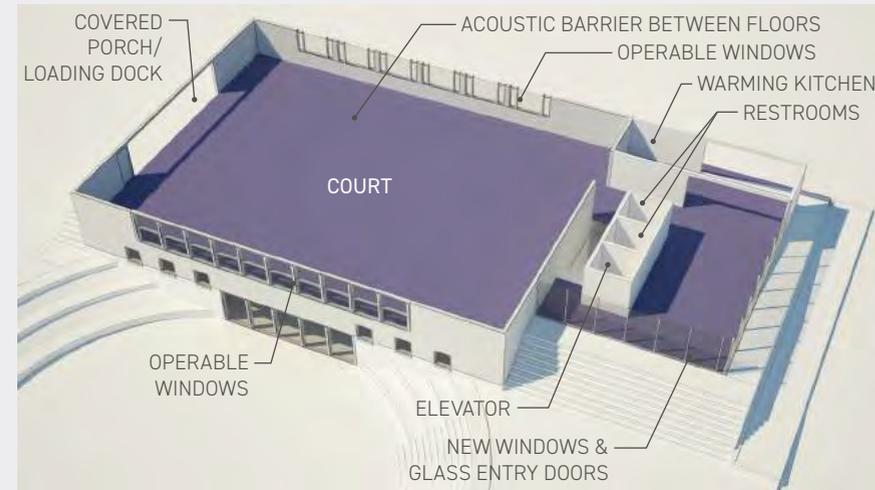


OUTDOOR AMPHITHEATER AND PATIO

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on community feedback, a design for the revitalized Lodge was created that addressed safety and accessibility issues, improved visibility and ventilation, offered flexible space for community events and activities at multiple scales, and is adaptable to evolve with community needs and cultural character as it is customized and detailed in further planning processes. At the heart of the design, the Lodge is centered around the sense of community, belonging, and inclusivity.

UPPER LEVEL



LODGE BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS

- A** NEW BUILDING FACADE
- B** NEW SHATTER PROOF WINDOWS
- C** IMPROVED LOWER LEVEL VISIBILITY
- D** BARRIER-FREE ACCESS FROM PARKING
- E** FRONT PORCH

- F** VIBRANT LOCAL ART
- G** EXPANDED ROOF
- H** IMPROVED NATURAL LIGHT

LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

- A** AMPHITHEATER SEATING
- B** FLEXIBLE PATIO SPACE
- C** AMPHITHEATER STAIRS
- D** BARRIER-FREE RAMP TO PATIO
- E** BARRIER-FREE PARKING
- F** SHADE TREES

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + BLUFF

Roosevelt Park Lodge

COST ESTIMATES

Rehabilitation cost estimates for the lodge have been grouped in building improvements and site work:

Lodge Renovation & Expansion: \$3,000,000

- » Renovated interior (both levels)
- » Basketball court sound barrier
- » East expansion & entry sequence
- » New windows
- » New exterior facade

Site Work: \$750,000

- » Plaza with amphitheater seating
- » Barrier-free pathways
- » Trees & landscaping
- » Renovated parking lot

TOTAL LODGE IMPROVEMENT COST: \$3,750,000



UPDATED FACADE



FLEXIBLE PLAZA SPACE

TEST PROJECT

Initial stakeholder meetings for the park master plan, and past engagement sessions for recent park improvements, identified the lodge as a desired community venue for indoor basketball, community events, birthdays, and celebrations. The neighborhood often speaks of a lack of family-friendly space to host events, other than nearby school gymnasiums.

The project team asked participants to select a test project that could temporarily enhance the exterior of the building, and imagine programming uses for the building interior. Top priorities were a stair mural to add color and link the front door and lower lodge plaza, an outdoor sculpture in the park, and outdoor work spaces with shade and reclining seats for comfort with views of the lawn area. The majority of participants reinforced that an event and programmed "drop-in" space for art and classes was desired. Finally, one participant mentioned winter uses at the park for skating and sledding and using the lodge as a warming house.

Given the seasonality and timing of the test project, and in close collaboration with area stakeholders including the Southwest Business Association, Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association, and Grandville Area Arts and Humanities, park activation was selected as a test project. To activate the park, a community Christmas Tree Lighting was held, and extensive seasonal lighting was placed throughout the park with a focus on a lit path from Grandville Avenue to the lodge, which for some, was an unknown park feature.

A local community leader was hired by the project team to help coordinate the event, which included hot chocolate, music, crafts and a fire pit with the Gear Library. The project will help raise awareness about the park and lodge, and return the space to one for community events and cultural celebrations.



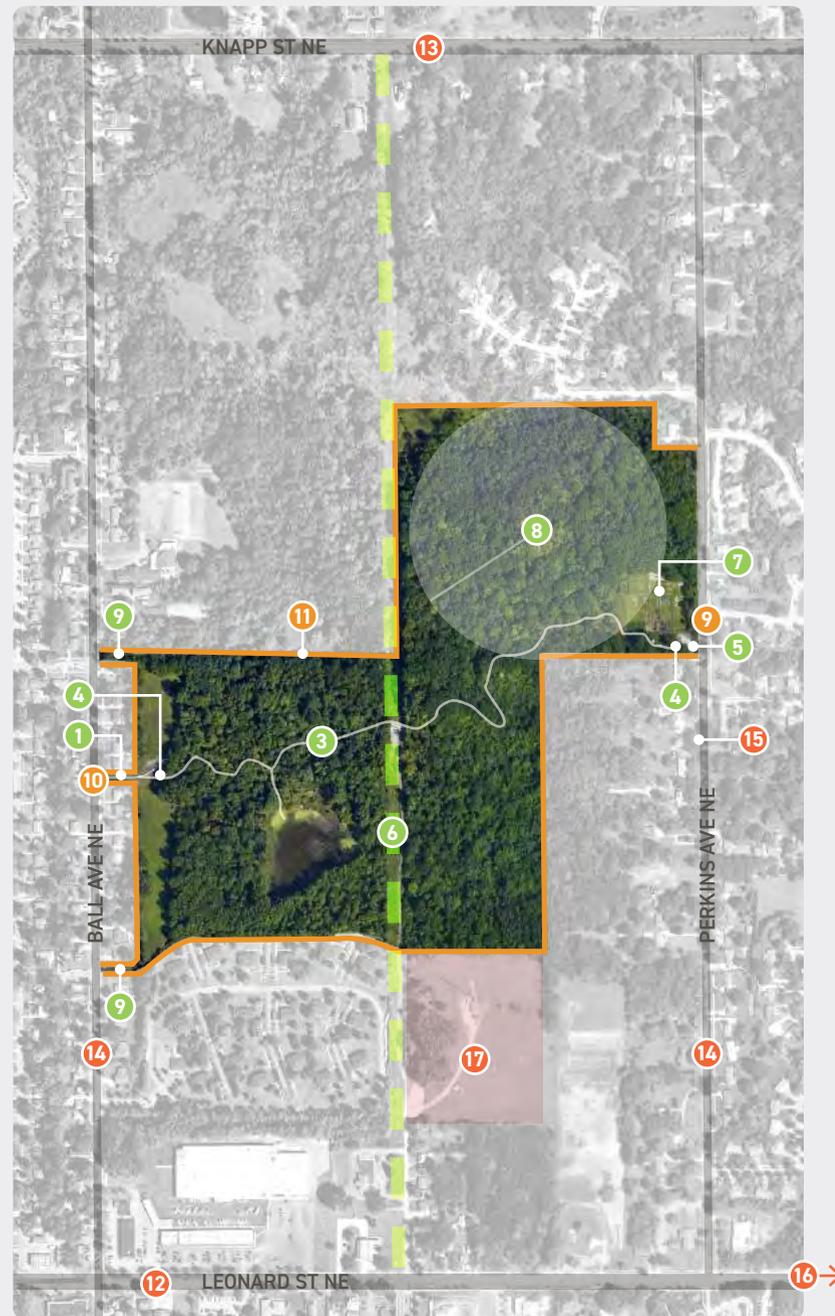
PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY PARK + UPLAND MORaine

Ball Perkins Park

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » The majority of the park is natural and not accessible. A single 0.65 mile crushed stone path connects the east and west sides of the park.
- » The park landscape is defined by wetlands land and steep ravines.
- » An expanded trail system could activate more areas of the park and diversify park user types.
- » There is potential to improve arrival experience and signage.
- » Better connections to neighborhood are needed.
- » The majority of the park is bounded by residential or private property.

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT



TIER 1 (Park Interior)

1. Accessible paved sidewalk into park
2. City right-of-way (no path)
3. Accessible crushed stone trail
4. Trailhead with park map
5. Crushed stone parking area (no barrier free spaces)
6. Consumer's Energy right-of-way
7. Mowed paths in community garden
8. Steep terrain
9. City right-of-way (no sidewalk)

TIER 2 (Park Edge)

10. Park access point (no crosswalks, parking along arterials)
11. Private property edge (orange line)

TIER 3 (Park Community)

12. Rapid Bus routes 14 & 15 (Leonard St NE)
13. Designated bike lane (painted lanes)
14. Designated bike route (no separate lane)
15. No sidewalk on west side of Perkins Ave NE
16. I-96 1.2 miles to Perkins park entrance
17. Radio tower (lot not accessible)



PARK AREA: 80.11 Acres



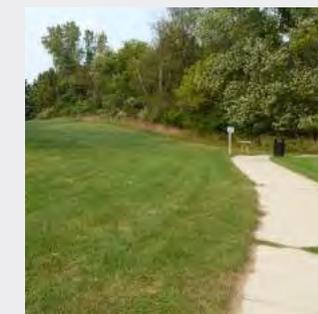
UPLAND HARDWOODS

- Protect, but incorporate selective thinning for stand health and to increase biodiversity



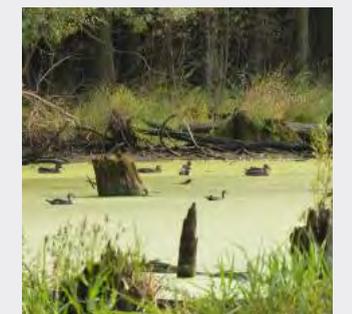
SCRUB SHRUB

- Remove invasive species
- Thin/open to promote species diversity and better sight lines



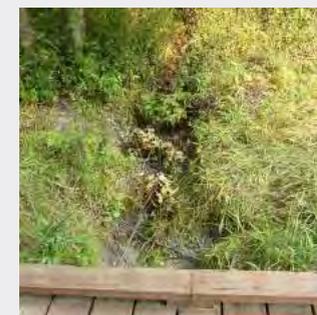
SUCCESSIONAL FIELD

- Convert/restore into native upland prairie



WETLAND

- Enhance water quality through erosion control and ecological-forward maintenance practices



DRAINAGE WAY

- Restore edge utilizing green infrastructure practices

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Ball Perkins is a largely undeveloped green space with an east-to-west nature trail and community garden along Perkins Ave. The park is home to a diverse range of flora and fauna including deer, turtles, and migrating bird species, such as great egrets. The steep terrain divides the park into two unique sub-watersheds of the Lower Grand River Watershed. The south end of the park's low wetland area drains directly to the Grand River, and the ravine to the north directs water to the Lambertson Creek sub-watershed. The ~40' grade change within the ravine provides a scenic viewshed to the lower half of the park. In some areas along the ravine, banks have eroded and should be restored. The wetland and surrounding landscape seasonally floods to the southwest corner of the park.

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + UPLAND MORaine

Ball Perkins Park



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The North East Citizens Action Association (NECAA) is an active community, deeply invested in the health and wellness of their fellow neighbors and green spaces. The project team initiated the Ball Perkins master planning process with a small group round table discussion with members of the neighborhood association. This conversation informed questions and ideas for the project team to discuss with the community at large at two public input sessions.

The first session, held at the annual NECAA meeting, introduced the planning process to residents and participants weighed in on needs and concerns surrounding improvements to the park through conversation and mapping exercises. Mountain biking trails, in particular, were thoroughly discussed, with varying participant support. Many folks were excited about a new trail amenity close to home, while others voiced concern for wildlife displacement. Additionally, participants selected and commented on imagery that resonated with them in terms of Basic Needs at Ball Perkins Park (see themes on following page).

At the second input session, the project team presented a conceptual design for residents to respond to, with a companion virtual survey for those who were not able to attend to weigh in on. A full engagement summary can be found in the appendix.



WHAT WE HEARD

"Exercise—love the idea of mountain bike trails so close to the neighborhood!"

"Police need to monitor traffic on Perkins. Too many speeders"

"A place to enjoy nature and quiet walk or sitting. Keep it natural and a home for wildlife"

"Education signage about the flora and fauna found there."

BASIC NEEDS THEMES

CONNECTION Nature / Dog-Friendly / Safe Pedestrian Access / Community Gathering



"A haven for dog walkers"

"Education signage about the flora and fauna found there. A classroom area with benches and stumps"

"When we walk the trail, we feel connected to nature, to a slower heart rate, and a letting go of the everyday world"

"Bring people together so all benefit"

"Natural spaces, clean water"

BELONGING Neighborhood & Community / Gardening & Gathering / Welcoming / Peace



"A place to be at peace!"

"I feel such a connection to the community when I work in the community garden. I moved to GR 3 years ago and made friends immediately at the garden"

"A great place to see all kinds of activity—walkers, runners, birdwatchers, grandkids and grandparents, all ages! Love it!"

"Love the sounds of spring peepers and chorus frogs in early spring nights"

SAFETY Vehicular & Pedestrian Safety / Parking / Ecological Health / Signage & Lighting



"Bicycles need a safe way to travel between Knapp and Leonard"

"Don't expand access to pond in order for the wildlife to feel safe/ stay there and use it"

"Loop trails—with signage to know they are official"

"Police need to monitor traffic on Perkins. Too many speeders"

"Defined parking—it always feels like I'm trespassing or parking illegally"

RECREATION Active & Passive Activities / Pedestrian Trails / Ecological Education



"Exercise—love the idea of mountain bike trails so close to the neighborhood!"

"Wetland walking trail and trail to the ravine"

"Places for activity for families"

"An ideal space for 'escaping to nature' to pursue quiet and reconnect with wildlife, water and woods. And it's blissfully quiet"

"Wider trails for walkers and bikers who aren't looking for mountain bike trails"

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY PARK + UPLAND MORaine

Ball Perkins Park



RAVINE RESTORATION



WOODLAND MANAGEMENT & PRAIRIE RESTORATION



PICNIC SHELTER



MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

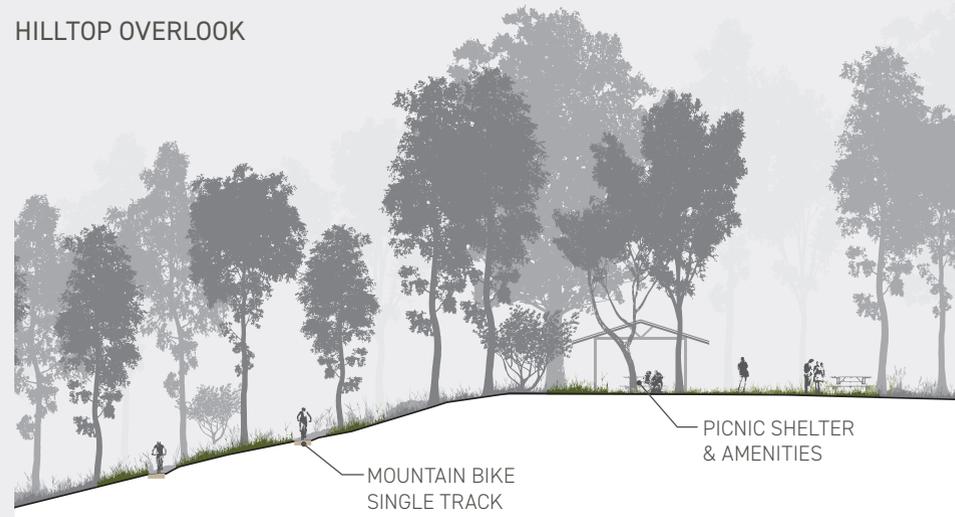


WILDLIFE VIEWING

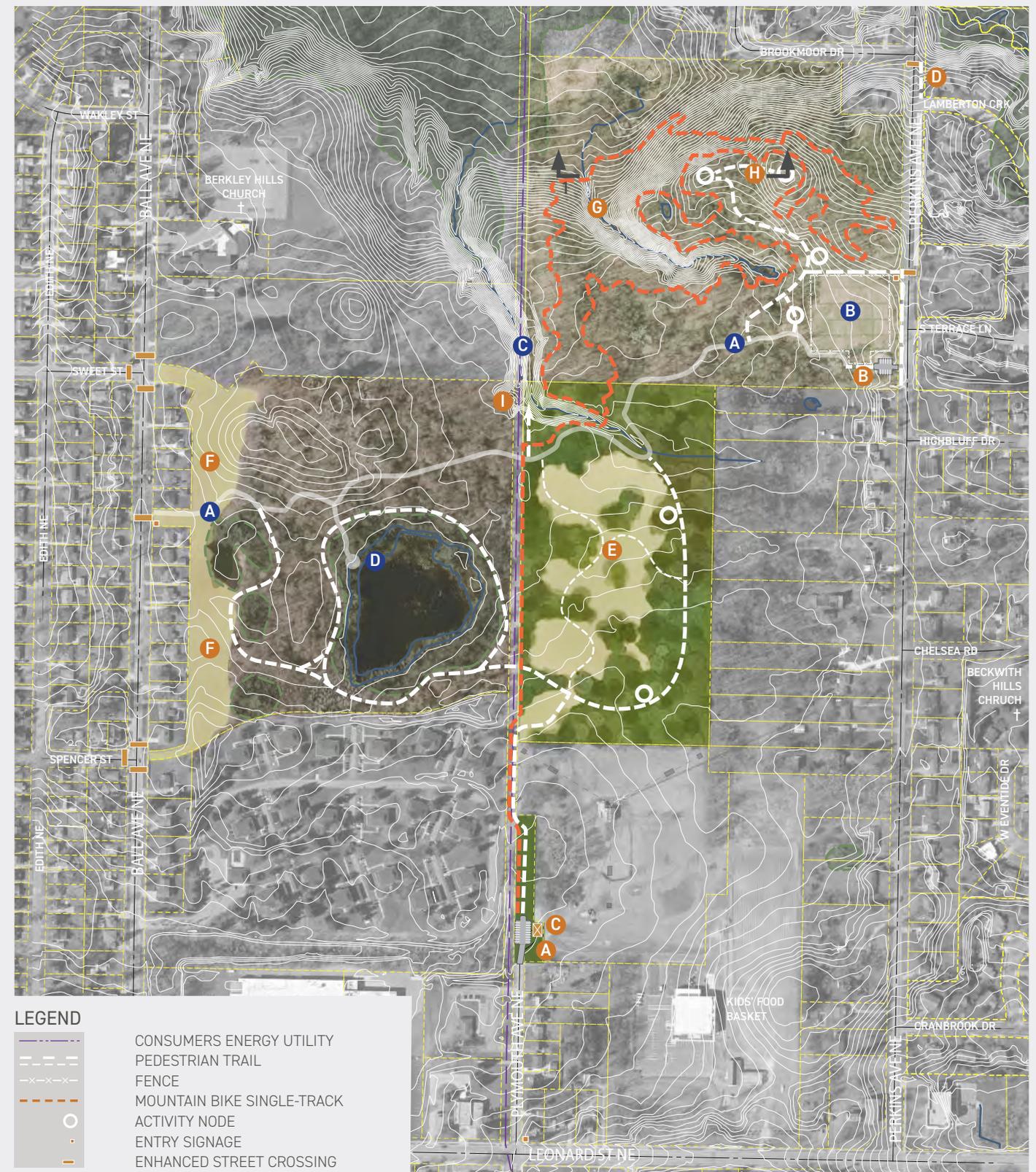
DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on community feedback, the project team developed a preferred master plan concept that merged active and passive recreational opportunities in an environmentally sensitive design strategy. With 75% of residents in the 49505 zip code supporting the mountain biking trail, the trail design balances bike and foot paths in a intentional route that reduces interaction between users groups. Additionally, native plantings and ravine restoration supports the existing wildlife with healthier habitat.

HILLTOP OVERLOOK



RAVINE RESTORATION



| LEGEND | |
|--------|----------------------------|
| | CONSUMERS ENERGY UTILITY |
| | PEDESTRIAN TRAIL |
| | FENCE |
| | MOUNTAIN BIKE SINGLE-TRACK |
| | ACTIVITY NODE |
| | ENTRY SIGNAGE |
| | ENHANCED STREET CROSSING |

EXISTING

- A** NATURE GRAVEL TRAIL
- B** COMMUNITY GARDEN
- C** CONSUMERS ENERGY CORRIDOR
- D** POND OVERLOOK

PROPOSED

- A** LEONARD ST ACCESS & PARKING - 20 SPACES
- B** PERKINS ST ACCESS & PARKING - 12 SPACES
- C** EVENT SHELTER
- D** EXTEND SIDEWALK CONNECTIONS
- E** PRAIRIE OPENING / PRAIRIE RESTORATION
- F** UPLAND PRAIRIE RESTORATION
- G** RAVINE RESTORATION
- H** HILLTOP OVERLOOK, WITH SHELTER
- I** FUTURE TRAIL TO KNAPP ST NE

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: COMMUNITY PARK + UPLAND MORaine

Ball Perkins Park

COST ESTIMATES

New improvements to Ball Perkins Park have been grouped into implementation projects. Each project could be built as a stand alone project or combined with other site improvements for a larger package as funding becomes available:

- » Nature Trail: \$350,000
- » Mt. Bike Trail: \$123,000
- » Native Prairie Restoration: \$287,000
- » South Parking/Trail Head: \$261,000
- » Perkins Garden Parking: \$150,000
- » Perkins Garden Fence: \$33,000
- » Perkins and Ball Access Improvements: \$174,000

TOTAL PARK IMPROVEMENT COST: \$1,378,000



NATURE TRAILS



NATIVE PRAIRIE RESTORATION

TEST PROJECT

After an initial stakeholder discussion, the topic of wayfinding landed as a priority for Ball Perkins Park. Wayfinding and signage can serve multiple purposes. As a test project, the team offered six types of signage for participants to select. Below are the images and voting results. The top selection included signs that are playful, and less informational in their content. Participants also designed their own signs to help inform the project team.

Twelve unique signs were created for the wayfinding test projects. Half of the signs provide nature-related quotations by historical figures, along with nature imagery and reflection questions. Companion signs provide educational information about nature, including habitat, tree, leaf, fungi, cloud and bird identification. Several sets of the signs are printed in Spanish. Each sign is printed to metal and mounted within a steel frame. Signs can be moved and relocated within the park or to other parks, including 32nd Street Park.



PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: REGIONAL PARK + RIVER VALLEY

Riverside Park

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » The majority of the park falls within the Grand River floodplain. Seasonally, many areas of the park are inaccessible due to flooding, including parking areas and path ways.
- » Pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the park is not well defined or organized, and is often confusing for visitors.
- » There is no existing sidewalk or path on the east edge (along Monroe) of the park.
- » River edge pedestrian access is minimal and often unstable

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT



TIER 1 (Park Interior)

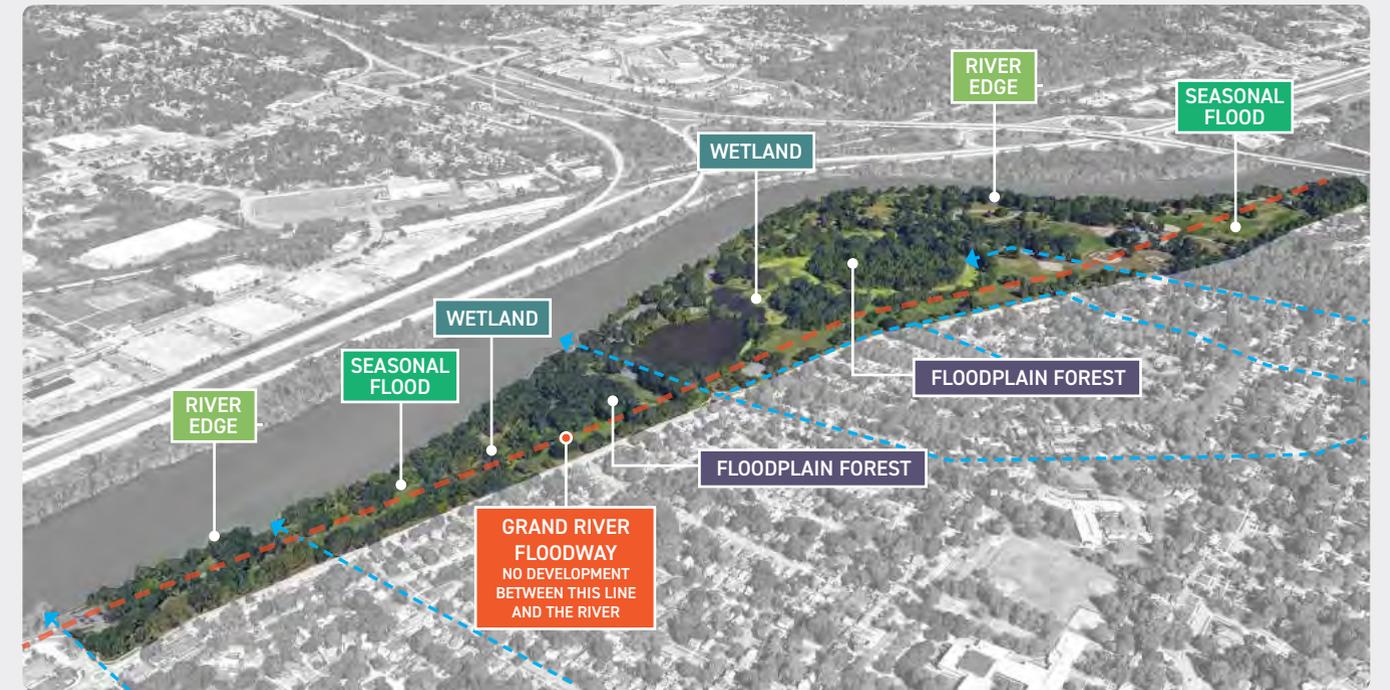
1. North entry: parking, boat launch, crosswalk at Monore
2. Shared non-motorized path
3. Ball field entrance, crosswalk at Monore
4. Band shelter, restrooms, parking
5. Parking at picnic shelter & playground
6. Picnic shelter, restrooms, playground
7. Parking, boat launch
8. Parking, event lawn
9. Guild St. entry: crosswalk at Monore
10. South entry: parking, boat launch, crosswalk at Monore

TIER 2 (Park Edge)

1. To White Pine Trail
2. Monroe Ave N: separated bike path, no bus line
3. To Grand River Edge Trail
4. Crosswalk at 3-Mile

TIER 3 (Park Community)

1. I-96 (no off ramp)
2. Grand River
3. US-131 (off ramp at Ann St.)



PARK AREA: 181.74 Acres



FLOODPLAIN FOREST

- Mature floodplain tree canopy
- Promote continued tree planting and removal of invasive species
- Selectively clear for visual connection to lagoon and river



SEASONAL FLOOD

- Seasonally wet areas
- Promote broader hydrological and plant diversity through green infrastructure



RIVER EDGE

- Provide native filter planting strips to capture nutrient and sediment loads before entering the river



WETLAND

- Standing/open water areas with poor water quality (algae blooms)
- Selective dredging to remove sedimentation and promote water depth and movement



STORMWATER OUTLETS

- Directly discharges into river and lagoon
- Prioritize daylighting existing pipes through the park

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The largest park in the city, Riverside Park is defined by water. With 1.8 miles of riverfront promenade, the park is home to a diverse population of waterfowl and migratory birds. The park is prone to seasonal flooding, with the majority of its footprint within the 100-year flood zone. Existing wetlands are of poor quality due to stagnant water and stormwater discharge from the surrounding neighborhood. Within a drainage district of over 1,900 surface acres, over 24 million gallons of water is piped through Riverside Park, either emptying in the lagoon or the Grand River. There is potential to transition much of the Parks managed lawn areas into naturalized native plantings to restore habitat and improve water quality through the use of constructed wetlands, rain gardens, and bioswales.

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: REGIONAL PARK + RIVER VALLEY Riverside Park



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

As the City's largest park, Riverside Park presents opportunities to meet community needs for active spaces, trails, river access and connection to nature. During a stakeholder focus group meeting, participants felt that many aspects of the park, including its varied amenities, should remain and that careful attention to wildlife habitat diversity should be considered.

The first session, held at a Food Truck Friday event in the park, introduced the planning process to residents and participants weighed in on needs and concerns surrounding improvements to the park through conversation and mapping exercises. River and lagoon interaction, dog parks, and restorative native plantings were common discussion topics with participants. Additionally, participants selected and commented on imagery that resonated with them in terms of Basic Needs at Ball Perkins Park (see themes on following page).

At the second input session, the project team presented a conceptual design for residents to respond to, with a companion virtual survey for those who were not able to attend to weigh in on. A full engagement summary can be found in the appendix.

WHAT WE HEARD

"More community classes and events at the park. Music festivals of all kinds"

"More parking/better circulation, specifically for events. Point person and online info needed for events"

"Consider the nature and the environment first, and then how we as humans can interact within it and enjoy it second"

"I would like to see the water quality of the lagoons addressed"



BASIC NEEDS THEMES

CONNECTION Wildlife Preservation / Family-Friendly / Nature Trails



"Opportunities for children to connect with nature and be immersed in nature"

"Preserve natural areas with minimal or natural development. Tree loss and green space affects animal and plant ecology and sustainability"

"Connect with nature in an accessible way"

"Trails that take advantage of the unique environment"

"Families together"

BELONGING Events & Music / Connecting to Nature / Dog-Friendly



"Music festivals of all kinds"

"More community classes/events at the park. It would be nice if residents were notified via next door app, mailings, or emails"

"Teaching and learning opportunity garden"

"More native gardens"

"Community dog park"

SAFETY Pedestrian & Bicycle Circulation / Ecological Health & Safety



"Lighted pathway at night on White Pine from Knapp to 3-Mile"

"More parking/better circulation, specifically for events. Point person and online info needed for events"

"Bicyclists don't know how to use the traffic circles... rather than use the bike lane next to the sidewalk they will go into the traffic circle"

"Dredge the lagoon to improve water quality"

"More nature is always the right way to go"

RECREATION Dog-Friendly / Multi-Age Play / Improved Trails



"Dog park at a certain section, maybe at south end at Knapp and Monroe"

"Hammock groves, specifically 4x4 posts. Hard to find trees. Ping pong tables"

"Playground for 2-10 year olds"

"Mile markers on trail for walkers. More places to sit along the trail"

"Bike on trails, prefer asphalt. Like to stop at brewery, ice cream"

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY:
REGIONAL PARK + RIVER VALLEY
Riverside Park



EXISTING

- A** RESTROOM & MAINTENANCE BUILDING
- B** BOAT LAUNCH
- C** SOCCER FIELD
- D** LITTLE LEAGUE COMPLEX
- E** RESTROOM & SHELTER
- F** DISC GOLF
- G** LAGOON
- H** PARKING
- I** LARGE GROUP SHELTER
- J** PUMP STATION
- K** PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE

PROPOSED

- A** RENOVATED RESTROOM & NEW MAINTENANCE BUILDING
- B** IMPROVED BOAT LAUNCH AND RECONFIGURED PARKING
- C** FENCED OFF-LEASH AREA - 5 ACRES, ADJACENT PARKING
- D** NON-MOTORIZED BOAT LAUNCH, BARRIER FREE
- E** RENOVATED RESTROOMS & SHELTER
- F** IMPROVED LARGE EVENT AREA
- G** NEW NATURE-BASED PLAY AREA
- H** STORMWATER DAYLIGHTING
- I** ISLAND NATURE PRESERVE - NO BOAT ACCESS
- J** NEW RESTROOM & SHELTER (2022 IMPROVEMENTS)
- K** BOATING CENTER RENTAL & LARGE EVENT SHELTER
 - NON-MOTORIZED
 - FLOATING DOCKS
 - TERRACED OVERLOOK
 - 7,000 SF, +/-, 300 CAPACITY (4,500 SF)
 - RESTROOMS & CONCESSIONS
- L** PARKING IMPROVEMENTS
- M** RIVER AMPHITHEATER
- N** ADDITIONAL CROSSWALKS
- O** GENERAL NOTE:
 - REMOVE INVASIVE & SCRUB SHRUB AROUND LAGOON EDGES.
 - PHASE IN WETLAND EDGE/WET MEADOW FILTER STRIP WITHIN 2FT OF SUMMER LOW WATER
- P** GENERAL NOTE:
 - SELECTIVELY CLEAR OVERGROWN TREES & BRUSH ALONG TRAIL TO ALLOW GREATER VISIBILITY TO WATER
- Q** SEPARATE, FENCED SMALL DOG AREA

- IMPROVED SHARED-USE TRAIL, 12' WIDE
- - - NEW SHARED-USE TRAIL, 8' WIDE
- STORMWATER DAYLIGHTING
- DISC GOLF
- 100-YEAR FLOODPLAIN LINE
- FLOODWAY LINE

- RIVER ACCESS SEATING AREA
- WET MEADOW & WETLAND/OPEN WATER
- UPLAND PRAIRIE RESTORATION
- EVENT AREA DELINEATION

CONTOUR INTERVAL = 2FT

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: REGIONAL PARK + RIVER VALLEY

Riverside Park



UPLAND PRAIRIE



WET MEADOW



STORMWATER DAYLIGHTING



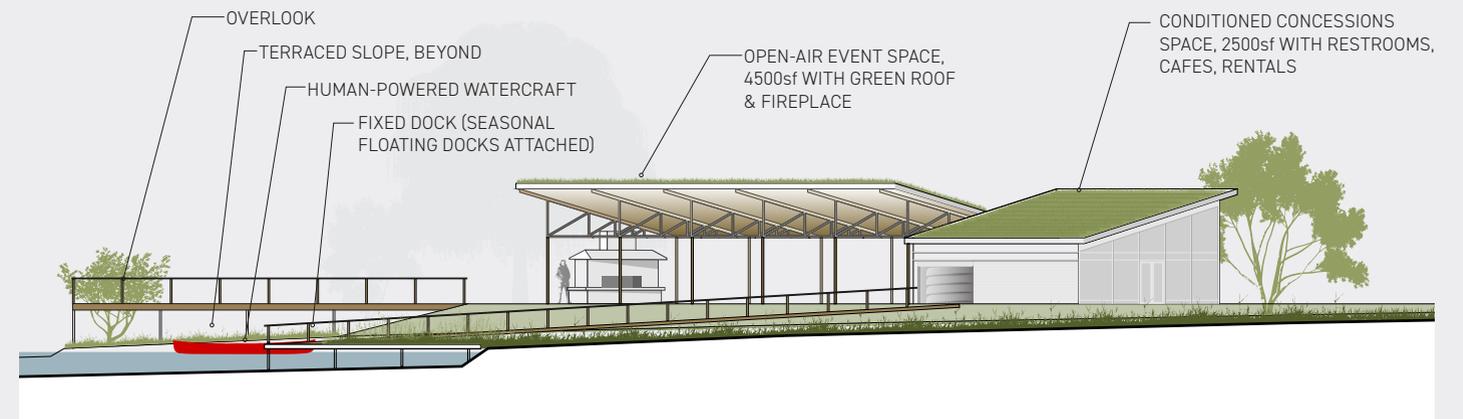
LAGOON RESTORATION

DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

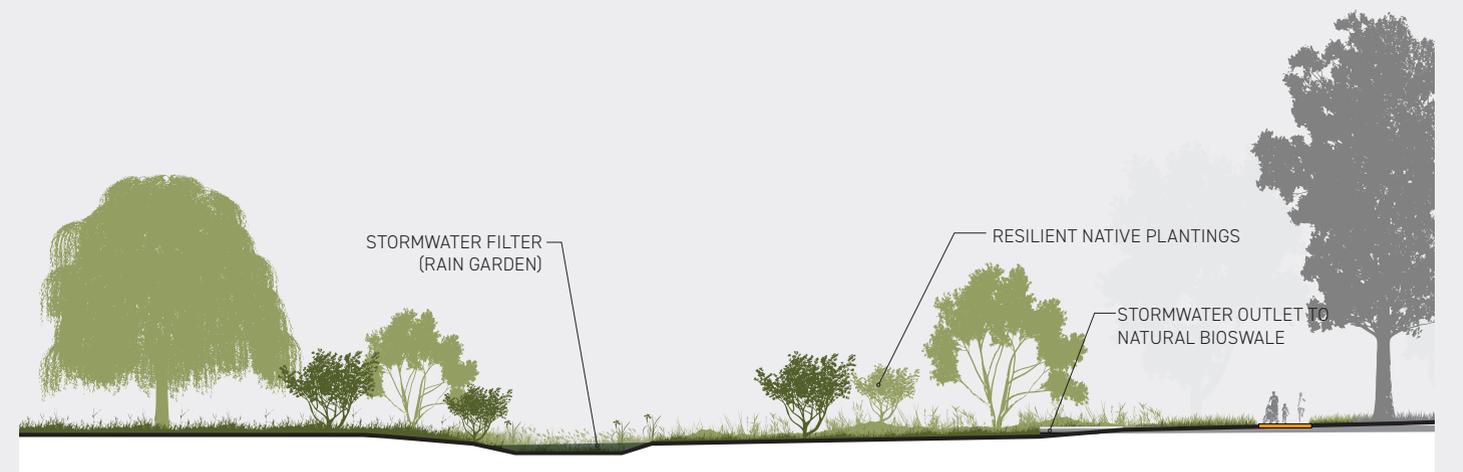
Community members overwhelmingly supported a transition of park character from maintained expanses of lawn to native floodplain planting ecologies that support wildlife while treating and reducing stormwater from the surrounding neighborhood. The design provides unique experiences to Grand Rapids residents and regional guests through improved water access, pet-friendly and off-leash areas, intentional and safe pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and inclusive, multi-generational activities, all while remaining conscious of environmentally sensitive ecologies. Multi-user trail improvements, wayfinding and interpretive signage, and accessible park amenities will reinstate Riverside as a destination within regional trail systems.



BOATING CENTER & ARRIVAL ENLARGEMENT



SECTION THROUGH BOATING CENTER



SECTION THROUGH STORMWATER DAYLIGHTING

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: REGIONAL PARK + RIVER VALLEY

Riverside Park

COST ESTIMATES

New improvements to Riverside Park have been grouped into implementation projects. Each project could be built as a stand alone project or combined with other site improvements for a larger package as funding becomes available:

- » Dog Park: \$1,400,000
- » Waterfront Center: \$3,600,000
- » Existing Trail Improvements (12' wide): \$500,000 (with lighting add \$400,000)
- » New Trails (8' wide): \$600,000 (with lighting add \$500,000)
- » Stormwater Daylighting +Green Infrastructure (North of Guild): \$3,500,000
- » Stormwater Daylighting +Green Infrastructure (South of Guild): \$3,800,000
- » River Access Points Along Trail: \$300,000
- » Lagoon Restoration: \$2,900,000
- » Restoration of Ex Roads and Parking: \$1,800,000
- » North Boat Launch Renovation w/ New Restroom: \$1,400,000
- » Large Event Area w/ New Multi-Purpose Pavilion/Restroom: \$1,600,000
- » General Park Native Seeding: \$220,000
- » Playgrounds (2): \$1,500,000
- » Disc Golf Improvements: \$45,000
- » South Launch Improvements: \$550,000
- » Intersection Access Improvements: \$100,000



BOAT HOUSE



NATURE PLAY

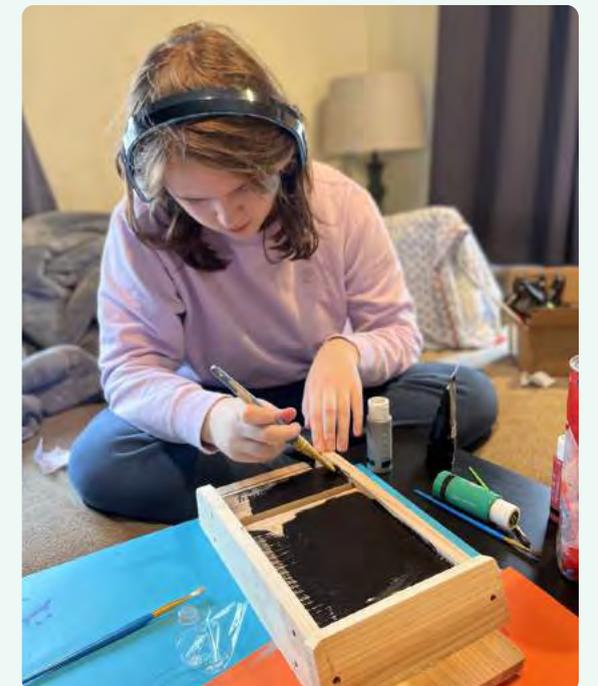
TOTAL PARK IMPROVEMENT COST: \$24,715,000

TEST PROJECT

As the City's largest park, Riverside Park presents opportunities to meet community needs for active spaces, trails, river access and connection to nature. During stakeholder meetings, participants felt that habitats for wildlife and ensuring safe spaces for the various (and increasing) diversity of species was a priority.

From the initial input, the consultant team asked participants at the community open house to select test projects that supported or created new habitats, created new events or activated the varied resources, and increased signage. The priorities for the test project included pollinator gardens, which add habitat and also color within the park.

As a way to create habitat and bring color and interest to the park, residents were asked to sign up to paint a habitat house. Types of houses included: bird, bat and pollinator. Once complete, residents hung their bird houses within the park. For the bat boxes and pollinator houses, the team will work with department staff to hang in appropriate locations. The team will provide the artists with a report showing the work of their colleagues as a way to share in the artistic expression and feel a greater sense of belonging at the park and within the neighborhood.



PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + TRIBUTARY 32ND Street SE

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » The existing green space is undeveloped and not accessible.
- » A 75' wide grassland corridor links the remaining property to 32nd St. All other property edges are private residential or industrial.
- » There are no traffic calming measures or traffic lights along 32nd St. between Kalamazoo and Burton, often leading to reckless driving patterns.
- » There are no crosswalks across 32nd St.
- » There is no parking on the site or street parking along 32nd St.

ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT



TIER 1 (Park Interior)

1. Park access point
2. Consumer's Energy right-of-way (no path)
3. Stormwater bioswale (to Plaster Creek)

TIER 2 (Park Edge)

4. City of Kentwood boundary (red line)
5. Private property edge (orange line)
6. Residential edge
7. Industrial edge

TIER 3 (Park Community)

8. 32nd Street: no existing bus route, crosswalks, or bike lanes between Kalamazoo and Burton
9. 0.7 miles to Kalamazoo Ave
10. 0.3 miles to Breton Rd



GREEN SPACE AREA: 80.11 Acres



UPLAND HARDWOODS

- Protect, but incorporate selective thinning for stand health and to increase biodiversity



SCRUB SHRUB

- Remove invasive species
- Thin/open to promote species diversity and better sight lines



SUCCESSIONAL FIELD

- Convert/restore into native upland prairie



WETLAND

- Enhance water quality through erosion control and ecological-forward maintenance practices



DRAINAGE WAY

- Restore edge utilizing green infrastructure practices

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The property at 2149 32nd Street SE is an green space owned by the City of Grand Rapids. The undeveloped site has evidence of former agricultural use with buried drainage tiles, a small, aged apple orchard, and a pine planting wind barrier. The site is divided by a surface drainage way—predominately low and wet at the south end and dry upland grasses to the north end. The drainage way carries stormwater runoff from the neighboring industrial park to the east, through the property, before making its way to Plaster Creek. As there are no programmed areas or formal entry points or trails, wildlife in this area is predominately undisturbed, home to many wildlife species including deer, foxes, and wild turkeys. With no existing site maintenance, invasive plant species have established and should be removed in the near future.

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + TRIBUTARY 32ND Street SE



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The green space along 32nd St. SE rides the border of the Grand Rapids/Kentwood city line. Outside of any formal neighborhood association boundary, the project team understood the importance of gathering a diverse range of perspectives from neighbors who are often disconnected from city projects. A focus group of residents was formed of nearby neighbors, church leaders, and community organizers to understand the needs and concerns of a potential park space at this location.

A series of public input sessions were held in the Samaritas parking lot, across the street from the city green space. The first session was met with both skepticism and excitement, with many participants concerned about personal safety, privacy, ecological health, and heavy traffic.

Feedback from the first session relayed that neighbors were passionate about keeping the site in as natural of state as possible. The project team shared two concepts with participants, both with a focus on wildlife protection, habitat, enhancement, and low-impact programming such as walking nature trails and viewing platforms. While some neighbors remained opposed to opening the space as a public park, most were pleased that their concerns from the first session had been addressed.

Additionally, the project team hosted a small group discussion with residents at Samaritas Senior and Assisted Living Facility. Residents participated in mapping and model building exercises and expressed their desire for a safe route across 32nd St. to a natural park space that offered inclusive, barrier-free activities they could experience with friends and family.



WHAT WE HEARD

"Minimal development. Unpaved trails and clear delineation of wetlands"

"We need a kids exploration area closer to this neighborhood. Already nature trails at Ken-O-Sha"

"No problem with a nice nature park"

"Is this pushing the deer out of their habitat?"

BASIC NEEDS THEMES

CONNECTION Wildlife Preservation / Family-Friendly / Nature Trails



"Opportunities for children to connect with nature and be immersed in nature"

"Preserve natural areas with minimal or natural development. Tree loss and green space affects animal and plant ecology and sustainability"

"Connect with nature in an accessible way"

"Trails that take advantage of the unique environment"

"Families together"

BELONGING Welcoming Spaces / Accessible & Inclusive / Nature & Peace



"Quiet place for reflection"

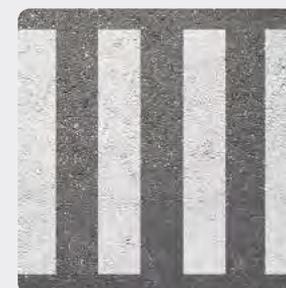
"Small pavilions scattered around for small groups, friends connecting"

"Wheelchair accessibility is my number one priority"

"Our children of color need to feel welcome in green spaces and be connected to nature's serenity"

"Meditation garden with a few benches"

SAFETY Vehicular & Pedestrian Safety / Illegal Activity / Ecological Health



"Need safe access for traffic. This is a dangerous street"

"Huge need for crosswalk on 32nd"

"Regular police oversight, including after park closure and night time"

"Protecting green space in an urban area"

"Help protect the watershed. Use native plants to help with run off of surrounding areas"

RECREATION Barrier-Free Nature Trails / Ecological Education / Play



"Access to water/serenity"

"Label the trees, plants, etc. for environmental education"

"Families hiking, exploring"

"Walking trails for all ages/abilities. A quiet environment for appreciating nature. A few benches for sitting. A labyrinth for"

"We need a playground in this neighborhood. There are very few—we just moved here in November and have struggled to find parks with playgrounds and sports activities"

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + TRIBUTARY

32ND Street SE



ACCESSIBLE AND PAVED NATURE TRAILS



NATURE-BASED PLAY



ELEVATED BOARDWALK

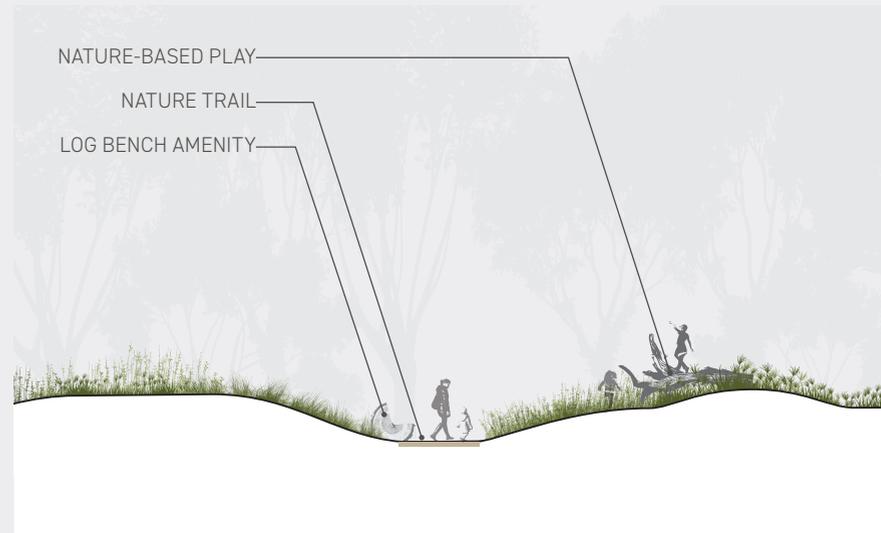


SEATING AREA

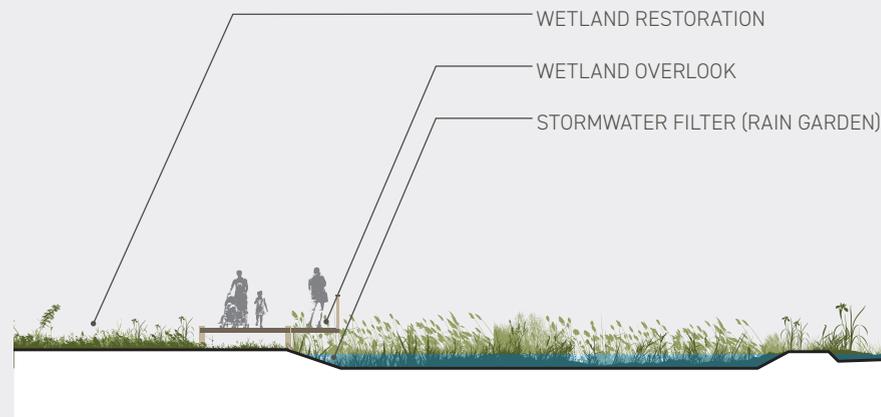
DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

A preferred concept design was developed based off feedback residents provided on the initial concepts. Embracing the property's natural state, the design provides neighbors with a way to discover, play, and exercise in an ecologically sensitive, low-impact way. Through native prairie and wetland restoration, habitat will be improved that will help diversify species within the park and manage and filter stormwater before reaching Plaster Creek.

SECTION 1 - TERRAIN PARK



SECTION 2 - ELEVATED BOARDWALK



EXISTING

- A** OVERHEAD ELECTRIC
- B** RESIDENTIAL AREA
- C** INDUSTRIAL AREA

PROPOSED

- A** TERRAIN PARK & NATURE TRAIL
- B** UPLAND PRAIRIE RESTORATION
- C** ELEVATED BOARDWALK
- D** WETLAND RESTORATION & STORMWATER FILTER (RAIN GARDEN)
- E** WETLAND PAVILION
- F** PAVED ACCESSIBLE TRAIL
- G** NATURE-PLAY AREA
- H** OPEN LAWN AREA
- I** PICNIC SHELTER
- J** LANDSCAPE BUFFER
- K** ENTRY DRIVE & PARKING, 10 SPACES, 1 ADA
- L** ENHANCED CROSSWALK
- M** SEATING AREA
- N** WILDLIFE OBSERVATION BLIND
- O** GATE
- P** PEDESTRIAN-SCALE LIGHTING



CONTOUR INTERVAL = 2FT

PRIORITY PARK CASE STUDY: NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + TRIBUTARY 32ND Street SE

COST ESTIMATES

The 80-acre site is divided into three project areas with associated costs:

South Redevelopment Area: \$975,000

- » Parking lot & lighting
- » Paved loop trail
- » Path lighting
- » Picnic shelter
- » Nature-based play area
- » Open lawn area
- » Small seating area
- » Landscape buffers
- » Native prairie restoration



PICNIC PAVILION

Middle Redevelopment Area (Wetland): \$341,000

- » Paved loop trail
- » Path lighting
- » Picnic shelter
- » Nature-based play area
- » Open lawn area
- » Small seating area
- » Landscape buffers
- » Native prairie restoration



WILDLIFE OBSERVATORY

North Redevelopment Area: \$272,000

- » Nature trail
- » Native prairie restoration
- » Terrain earthwork
- » Landscape buffer
- » Wildlife viewing blind
- » Small seating area

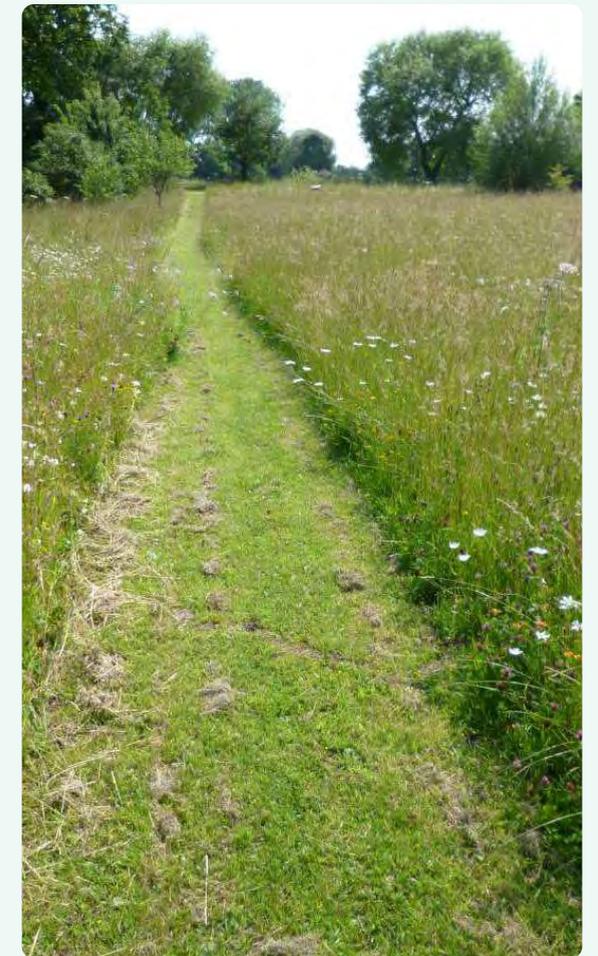
TOTAL PARK IMPROVEMENT COST: \$1,588,000

TEST PROJECT

To test out an improvement to the potential park space, and given that the space is relatively hidden and unknown, except for immediate neighbors who use the informal trails, the idea of wayfinding was presented as a test project. Some participants were reluctant to select any signs, as they desire no changes to the site. Others welcomed the idea of sharing nature's beauty with others, and having places for children and dogs to run. Signs that identify the space, while also offering passive enjoyment were generally supported by those wishing for this land to remain undeveloped.

Of note, during the initial stakeholder meeting, participants shared a desire for bringing cultural awareness to the park, celebrating the diversity of the neighborhood. Signs to educate about world view and cultures were not prioritized during the voting process at the open house. Instead, interpretive signs were selected, with mindful signs a close second. Mindful signs would include quotations or passages to encourage quiet reflection and contemplation in the potential park space.

Other opportunities to activate the greenspace through test projects include mowing informal trails and providing interpretive and mindfulness signs within the park to demonstrate potential trail alignment and reinforce the passive use of the space.



NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS

GOAL: ENHANCE THE DIVERSITY AND EXPERIENCE OF THE PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM BY DRAWING ON COMMUNITY FEEDBACK, LOCAL ECOLOGY, AND NATIONAL TRENDS.

Strategies

Deferred Maintenance

Objective 1 – Continue to address critical deferred maintenance across the system, working with the community to make improvements that move the overall quality of the system toward a consistently “good” level.

Objective 2 – Develop a strategy to make additional upgrades in the future that move the overall quality of the system beyond “good” and closer to “excellent.”

Objective 3 – Develop playground standards and a schedule of updates to support the goal of providing accessible and inclusive play opportunities citywide.

Objective 4 – Reflect community input and cultural values in future park designs and program activities, ensuring alignment of park spaces with specific neighborhood and cultural uses.

New Investments and Amenities

Objective 1 – Increase outdoor recreation opportunities, such as walking trails and water recreation activities, to promote community health and reflect stated desires from survey responses.

Objective 2 – Incorporate national trends into existing and new park spaces, such as outdoor gyms, multi-generational space, inclusive playgrounds, and adventure play space.

Objective 3 – Add more opportunities for winter programming, such as cross country skiing/snowshoeing trails, to create active park spaces year-round.

Objective 4 – Increase revenue opportunities at parks through concessions and equipment rentals, particularly in new river destination spaces, such as cafés and bike and water equipment rentals.

Objective 5 – Layer environmental education into parks with interventions such as informational signage, outdoor classrooms, and nature play areas, particularly around parks with existing natural habitat areas.

Objective 6 – Incorporate each park’s ecological conditions into design and maintenance through water management, plant species, soil management, and erosion control.

Objective 7 – Seek collaboration opportunities with GRPS for environmental education features or programs in parks adjacent to school yards.

Objective 8 – Design to enable sustainable management practices such as designated meadow zones, tree planting programs, rain gardens, and tree health and succession programs.

Objective 9 – Partner with community organizations to activate park space with special events and temporary uses such as road/trail races, cultural events, farmers markets, and community meals.

Objective 10 – Incorporate unique design elements, such as public art, cultural features, and special activity use, into regular park improvements. Seek grants to support local collaboration for art, multi-language features, and neighborhood-scale museums related to public spaces.

- » MLK Park
- » Sullivan Field
- » Roosevelt Park

Objective 11 – Enhance the user experience through prominent gateway signage, a diversity of amenities/uses, and consistent and legible wayfinding.

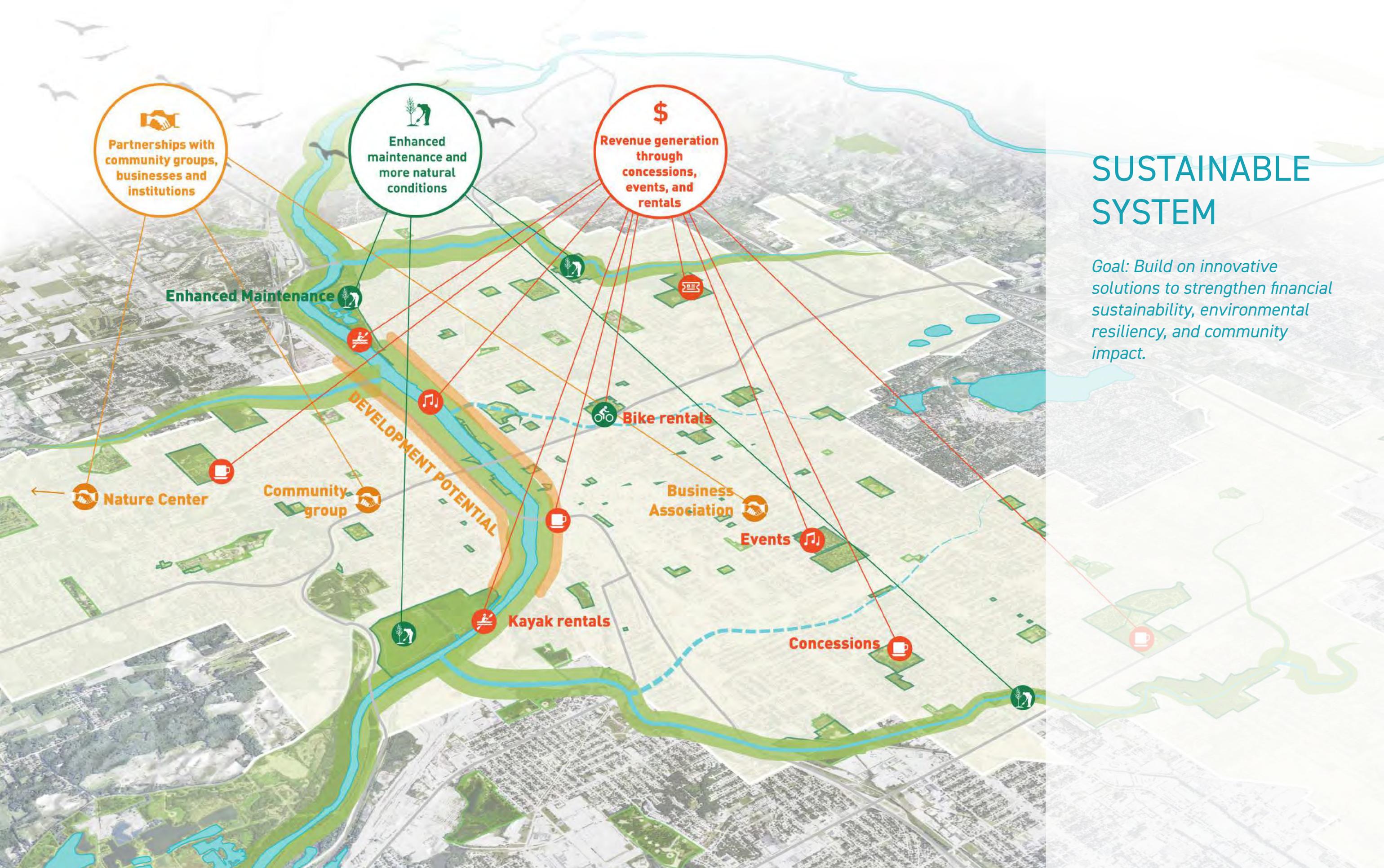
Objective 12 – Collaborate with like-minded private and non-profit partners for initiatives that promote destination activities in Grand Rapids such as the riverfront revitalization, pickleball at Belknap Park, creative uses at Indian Trails Golf Course, and sports tourism studies.

Acquisitions

Objective 1 – Acquire neighborhood-scale parks that will increase the proportion of the population within a 10-minute walk of a park in under-served and high-need areas, including parts of Roosevelt Park, the western side of Garfield Park, Ridgemoor, Grandville, and the Northeast.

Objective 2 – Align a long-term acquisition strategy around significant growth areas, including south of downtown and the Near West Side.

Objective 3 – Collaborate with other departments and private owners on strategic acquisitions and easements to improve connectivity, particularly along the riverfront and trail system.



Partnerships with community groups, businesses and institutions

Enhanced maintenance and more natural conditions

\$ Revenue generation through concessions, events, and rentals

Enhanced Maintenance

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

Nature Center

Community group

Bike rentals

Business Association

Events

Kayak rentals

Concessions

SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

Goal: Build on innovative solutions to strengthen financial sustainability, environmental resiliency, and community impact.

In order to enhance today's operations and meet future demand for parks and recreation in Grand Rapids, the Department must become more financially self-sustainable.

Revenue generation is an important part of the Department's growth and sustainability. By another important metric, "earned revenue" per capita is \$2.07 in Grand Rapids, versus a median of \$17.00 in comparable organizations. This is an indication of the Department's significant reliance on the General Fund (i.e. tax) to fund its operations. However, increasing revenue will require creative solutions, particularly given the limited indoor space to increase programming and the many similar service providers in the region.

Still, there are a variety of strategies to pursue to work toward financial self-sustainability in the long run. By investing in events and amenities that help generate revenue, the Department can decrease tax-reliance; by adopting enhanced maintenance standards, the Department can reduce the cost of maintaining its facilities while enhancing their ecological functions; and by building creative partnerships with other organizations, the Department can extend its offerings to the public without major resource outlays. These strategies not only put more resources at the Department's disposal, but also help to meet the public's demand for a greater range of offerings.

With "earned income" revenue per capita that is 88 percent below comparable sized organizations, the Department has significant opportunities to grow its earned revenue through strategic investments in its revenue generation capacity, and in doing so, satisfy the community's demand for a greater variety of programs and experiences from the parks and recreation system.

The sustainability and resiliency of the natural systems within the parks is also paramount to the long-term health and success of the Department and Grand Rapids community at large. Expanding natural areas like restored meadows and wetlands increases biodiversity and habitat while reducing the staff burden of mowing large areas, and green stormwater infrastructure and healthy urban tree canopies are key aspects of mitigating the effects of climate change. Grand Rapids can continue to be a leader in municipal sustainability practices by applying an ecological framework to park development and operations.

Strategies for a Sustainable System



REVENUE GENERATION

GR parks can generate revenue and be less tax-reliant through greater program offerings and facilities that increase overall enrollment and through public amenities and events that help generate revenue for their operations and maintenance.



ENHANCED OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE

Key operational changes can increase the grade level of parks while maintenance practices can shift toward less intensive practices to reduce costs and allow the ecology of the parks to diversify.



EXTENDING CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Strategic partnerships with nature centers, schools, local community organizations, and business associations can be leveraged to a wide variety of projects and programs to accomplish collective goals.



Strategy 1

REVENUE GENERATION

Increasing Program Participation

Over the past five years, the Department has made large strides in offering a diverse range of programs. Public response have been extremely positive with the help of the Department's improved presence on social media. There are several initiatives the Department can undertake to continue to increase program revenue:

- » Continue to provide virtual and socially distanced activities to help residents feel comfortable participating in social gatherings during the pandemic or flu season.
- » Focus on increasing customer satisfaction to build a base of repeat program customers.
- » Expand and align program offerings with community desires revealed through this process, chief among them adult and youth fitness, senior programs, and outdoor and nature-based education.
- » Continue to build year-round activation activities to engage residents in all four seasons.



Increased program offerings, such as outdoor fitness



Sledding at Mulick Park



Sports events

An ongoing constraint for increased program participation is the lack of program space. While the construction of an indoor facility should remain a priority, in the near-term the Department can increase the amount of program space at its disposal through several tactics:

- » Create flexible, programmable outdoor spaces, particularly at larger regional- and community-scale parks such as Riverside, as part of the Neighborhood Investment standards.
- » Expand space sharing options with partners, including the Grand Rapids Public Schools and churches and urban ministries.
- » Investigate options to rent vacant retail spaces.
- » Invest in modest upgrades to smaller, existing indoor facilities at Roosevelt, Lincoln, and Garfield Parks.

Special Events

Dedicated event spaces is one area of improvements the Department should pursue. In the short term, large, signature parks (such as Riverside Park) and centrally-located parks (such as Rosa Parks Circle and Ah-Nab-Awen Park) offer the best locations. In the long run, a dedicated waterfront event space should be at the center of a signature facility. The Office of Special Events and the Parks and Recreation Department should continue to coordinate to provide new and unique events for residents.

Concession and Rentals

Very little income is currently derived from concession sales or the rental of equipment and facilities. By building up offerings in rentals and concessions, the Department can not only create an important new revenue stream, but also offer a greatly improved visitor experience. As river recreation opportunities grow, key rental opportunities include rentals of kayaks and other water-based recreation equipment, bicycle rentals, and rentals of picnic spaces. These opportunities should focus on existing regional- and community-scale parks (e.g. Riverside Park and Garfield Park), as well as future waterfront facilities. These riverfront sites would also be desirable rental venue sites for private functions, increasing the potential for revenue generation.



Strategy 2

ENHANCED OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Like many urban areas, Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system has historically maintained significant acreage without adequate resources. Lack of maintenance was described as a priority concern during the community engagement process for the 2017 Parks Master Plan. **Closing the maintenance resource gap and increasing capacity was a key recommendation from the 2017 plan.**

The approved 2019 Parks Evergreen Millage included an additional .25 mills to add much needed capacity. The increase yields an additional \$1,000,000 annually towards park maintenance. Given finite resources and growing park acreage, the Department is also working to find creative ways to address needs by increasing efficiency, seeking partnerships, and using low-maintenance landscape strategies.

Department Operating Plan

The department recently completed an extensive process to develop the FY22-FY24 Parks and Recreation Strategic Operating Plan. The plan was built to achieve desired outcomes outlined in the 2017 Parks Master Plan and the 2019 City of Grand Rapids Strategic plan. (Appendix XX) The primary objectives and strategies for operations and maintenance include increasing the grade level of park maintenance system and enhancing the resiliency of the system through renaturalization, maintenance standards and sustainability initiatives.

Park Grade Levels

The park grade level scoring system was first introduced as a concept in the 2011 Parks Business Plan created by Matrix, a technology, staffing and solutions firm. Based on NRPA data, it was determined that a robust park system should consist of 10% ranked as "A", 60% as "B", and 30% as "C". The department completed a comprehensive review of the system and identified very serious gaps.

Significant progress was achieved between 2011 and 2018 with the seven-year parks millage which was passed in 2013. This millage directed a significant investment in capital asset management and was supported by aggressive strategies to improve operational efficiencies. Even with this significant investment, there remained a gap that couldn't be addressed with the available resources. Investments were being made in upgrading the overall system, but the department was unable to maintain each space to levels expected by the community. Core levels of service standards were developed to define what an "A", "B", or "C" park should look like. These were instituted in 2018.

| Level of Service | 2011 | 2018 | FY22 Goal | FY27 Goal |
|---|-------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| A - Showpiece Facility | 0% | 5.2% | 9.1% | 15.0% |
| B - Comprehensive Stewardship | 14.1% | 15.4% | 64.9% | 65.0% |
| C - Managed Care | 64.1% | 82.1% | 26.0% | 20.0% |
| D - Reactive Management/Crisis Response | 21.8% | 2.6% | 0% | 0% |

Increase Staff Capacity

To measure and understand the operating capacity gap, an extensive review was done of the total labor hours being invested in the system on an annual basis. Improving the grade levels of each park, and the system in its entirety, could only be addressed with an increase in hours spent on the ground. The 2019 millage investment has provided funding to almost double the annual budgeted labor hours from an average of 51,000 hours in FY19-21 to 94,000 hours in FY2022.

The Park maintenance organizational structure was reviewed and updated to ensure alignment with industry best practices and align with the newly funded labor hours available. The new staffing structure included 2 new full-time Groundskeepers and 20 additional seasonal employees. The department, however, has been significantly challenged to build this new structure

given the current national hiring crisis. This process included the development of new park maintenance to reduce the number of spaces each group is responsible for. The department should assess and consider converting a portion of the budgeted and unfilled seasonal labor hours into full-time groundskeeper or building maintenance positions.

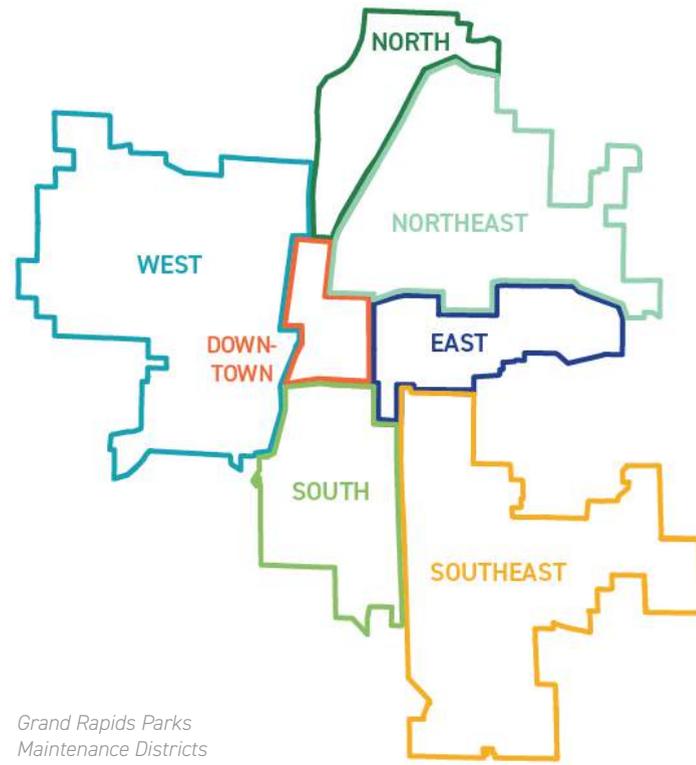
Of the 35 full-time Parks and Recreation staff, 8 are involved in maintenance and operations, with 9 additional forestry staff and 3 full-time staff for cemeteries and the golf course. They are joined by 21 additional full time equivalent (FTE) seasonal staff dedicated to maintenance of park land (excluding cemeteries and the golf course). In all, there are 29 FTE maintenance staff, and together they maintain approximately 900 acres of actively maintained park land, or roughly 31 acres per FTE maintenance employee. These staff numbers represent only a modest improvement

from historical low points, and place Grand Rapids below both national metrics and standards established by the City's 2011 Parks Business Plan created by Matrix.

Additional strategies could be explored including augmenting the labor gap with the use of local college interns majoring in turf management curricula or through the hiring of park rangers. For example, the Department could explore an internship program with Grand Rapids Community College's Landscape and Lawn Management students.

Other Operating Efficiencies

In combination with staff growth, the Department can continue to develop creative ways to augment and extend the capabilities of existing maintenance resources. Maintenance standards have been developed and formally documented in Standard Operating Procedures for each park in the system. A task tracking process has been established using the Cityworks work order system. This system is also being used for preventive and demand maintenance to help prioritize tasks. With plans and schedules in place, employees will be able to become more proactive, purposeful, and efficient in day-to-day work assignments. The next step is developing metrics and benchmarks to achieve incremental continuous improvement. Completing regular park inspections with a standardized scoring system will be critical to quantify progress and continually assess gaps and opportunities.



Grand Rapids Parks Maintenance Districts



No-mow field at Highland Park

Training and Development

Just as important as growing the size of the staff is to nurture the skills and development of existing and future employees. The first step is to develop skills of supervisory level staff to inform the whole workforce. The Department is currently working to address staff training incrementally. Another priority should be to develop an onboarding and ongoing training for all staff and establish a training system based on skills and competencies needed for job classifications. Job descriptions and organizational structure should be updated and require specific positions to have appropriate certifications, including pesticide application, playground, and risk management.

Training or continuing-ed courses in new maintenance strategies for low- or no-mow lawns, as well as meadow, wetland, and forestry restoration should be implemented for all staff to shift standard practices toward ecological restoration and renaturalization. Key processes such as athletic field maintenance, mowing, playground inspection, etc. should be documented and institutionalized. This will result in the transfer of knowledge to new employees and will also assist in the continued improvement of processes. Key performance indicators are already in place to collect data regularly and chart progress. Renaturalization programs should be coupled with a communications strategy to explain the methods and their benefits to the community.

Reduce the Maintenance Burden

Since 2017, the Department has developed a Parks Maintenance Manual that identifies standards, work scheduling, and athletic field condition assessment to maximize staffing resources and efficiency. System-wide, the overall maintenance burden is declining by shifting turf in appropriate areas to more naturalized zones and prioritizing well-used and amenitized parks that serve the whole city. The Department has successfully piloted natural turf maintenance program to reduce mowing, pesticide, and herbicide use in six parks. Maintenance burdens can continue to be decreased through additional naturalized planting strategies - restored meadow, wetland, and forested areas within parks that would improve ecological diversity and create more self-sustaining park landscapes. This also supports the ecological and identity goals of the Neighborhood Investments strategy.

The Department can also leverage partnerships, such as adjacent businesses or neighborhood groups, to alleviate the maintenance burden for its many mini-parks, as well as school grounds, cemeteries, and golf courses. Another strategy to reduce the maintenance burden is to emphasize appropriate behavior by park users, implementing informational signage with a positive tone, coordinating volunteer clean-up schedules, and educating the public about the costs (i.e. quantify labor dollars spent doing litter pick-up).

Park Ambassadors

Park ambassadors, or stewards, are paid city field employees whose mission is to ensure parks and public spaces are safe and welcoming for all to enjoy. They can be stationed at a single park, or have a small circuit of parks they travel between. Ambassadors are typically uniformed in a bright color and often outfitted with a bicycle. While on patrol, Ambassadors go out of their way to actively acknowledge park users with a friendly greeting or identify visitors in order to provide directions, information, city information or recommendations. They watch for unwanted behaviors or criminal activity and report to police via established communication methods. They have been trained in deescalation methods and can articulate accurate description of persons, vehicles and other similar identifiers.

Staff presence in the Grand Rapids parks system was a reoccurring demand during community engagement. One life-long neighbor at Martin Luther King Park recalled a time when the park had a full-time attendant. A familiar, friendly face helped neighbors feel comfortable knowing that someone was present as a caretaker to help activate and clean the park space. A need for this type of park service today was brought up often when talking with residents throughout the city. Residents would like a point person to address safety, beautification, and event coordination needs

In 2019 and 2020, the Department piloted an ambassador program at Martin Luther King and Garfield Park in response to an uptick in gun violence. Each park had four ambassadors working seven days a week between mid-July and the end of September to answer questions, clarify park rules, offer needed assistance, and provide light maintenance and a presence in the park.

Moving forward the Department should establish a full-time ambassador program to serve as a liaison between neighbors, City and Parks staff, the Grand Rapids Police Department, homeless caseworkers, and adjacent businesses to share information and make professional contacts on behalf of the Department.



Members of the King Park Neighborhood Association help beautify MLK Park and shared ideas for Park Ambassadors

EXAMPLE: Park Stewards (Bend, Oregon)

The Bend Parks and Recreation Park Stewards serve as ambassadors of the district and through their presence, interactions and outreach build positive relations with park patrons forming an informal neighbor-watch program. Stewards will serve as a resource to park visitors regarding district and community programs, rules and regulations, activities and events. They will work cooperatively with contracted patrol services, Bend Police Department, and Deschutes County Sheriff to support law enforcement.

The team of park stewards addresses issues such as unleashed dogs, pet waste, river safety, alcohol and drug use, smoking, vandalism and other matters in the parks. The stewards work in parks and trails seven days a week with support from Bend Patrol Services, a private security resource that offers both day and night safety services. Two full-time and two seasonal steward cover 84 parks and 75 miles of trails.

Program Objectives

- » Build positive relationships with park patrons and connectivity with the park district by providing public information and other outreach opportunities.
- » Encourage appropriate and law abiding behaviors in parks through positive interactions with the community.
- » Foster a sense of safety
- » Reduce illegal activity in parks.
- » Assist in managing rented (reserved) park uses.

Park Events Specialist

The Park Events Specialist steward provides administrative and on-site support for community events that take place on district property. Supports Public Events Coordinator in communications with current event accounts/ contracts and collecting and reviewing paperwork: reservation contract, logistics plans, insurance, parking permits and payments: park fee, impact fee, damage deposit and post event billing.

Role of the Park Steward

Park stewards serve as park hosts, tour guides and educators, natural resource interpreters, first aid assistants, law enforcement liaisons, and park services partners. They anticipate park maintenance needs such as watching for hazards, surveying trails, trees, and play structures, note graffiti and other vandalism, and offer directional assistance to those who need it. Most importantly, they are present to show enthusiasm for the parks and share enjoyment of trails and natural resources. They are guided to use empath-driven enforcement and be thoughtful of the variety of experiences, personalities, and cultural backgrounds of park users.



Bend Parks and Recreation Park Steward



Strategy 3

EXTENDING CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

The Department should continue to build creative partnerships with other organizations to expand capacity for programming and outreach; explore creative space-sharing; and reduce its maintenance and operational responsibilities. Key opportunities include:

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP)

As a long-standing community organization supporting the parks and recreation system, the FGRP has established a strong community of invested residents and volunteers. Initiatives such as the revived Adopt- A-Park program connect citizens with opportunities to beautify and activate their neighborhood parks. The Department and FGRP should build on the success of 26 parks adopted and nearly 1,500 volunteer hours in 2021 to strengthen community connections to public spaces and decrease maintenance burden.

The Department should explore creating more one-off volunteer opportunities for one-time events in partnership with FGRP. This will allow volunteers to get to know the Department and to begin developing a relationship which can be nurtured to grow over time. Additionally, there lies great opportunity to increase the use of volunteers in Department youth recreation and family programs in leagues, clinics, camps, and events.

The FGRP serves as a critical advocacy organization that supported the successful passage of the permanent parks millage measure

in 2019. FGRP can continue to be a leading convener and organizer of resident priorities for the overall health and prosperity of Grand Rapids parks. In many cities, similar citywide non-profit park advocacy organizations serve to provide the following resources in partnership with the municipal parks department: advocating for citywide park policy by underwriting or developing research initiatives; expanding stewardship by incubating new “friends of” groups for parks citywide; and fundraising by centralizing fundraising requests.

Grand Rapids Public Schools

Since 2017, the Department has collaborated with Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) on outdoor environmental education programs through the “Green Schoolyards” initiative, creating outdoor “learning labs” and nature play experiences in parks. For more information see Chapter 3 / Healthy Community.

There is an opportunity to expand the extent of the Department’s collaboration with GRPS beyond the Joint Use Agreement that governs the sharing of 244 acres of school-park space. In addition to park space, the Department currently uses public school swimming pools, gymnasiums, and recreation spaces across the City. The Department would benefit from an expanded use of these spaces to accommodate other fitness programs.

This partnership can strengthen the bond between the Department and GRPS, particularly those in closest proximity to parks, and it can also leverage GRPS’ partnerships with civically engaged local businesses through a model that is already successful in the city. GRPS can also



Celebration of a completed green schoolyard with GRPS



Volunteer tree planting with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks



Downtown art and cultural programming

establish academic-year parental release forms which allow teachers to extend their classrooms into City parks as frequently as possible without the burden of requiring special approvals from parents. After-school park use can also be expanded for athletics and recreational sports as well as art classes and other programs. Higher education can also benefit from the opportunity to offer outdoor education and the Department can also explore a partnership with Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids Community College, and other local colleges.

Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc and Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

The Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc (DGRI) can continue to provide key support in civic investments including the development of new riverfront parks, pedestrian and bicycle enhancements in the downtown district, public art and cultural programming, and a future indoor facility.

River Restoration and Development Partners

Close coordination should continue with Grand Rapids WhiteWater, the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, City departments, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc., and other community partners on the restoration of the Grand River and development and activation of riverfront parks and trails.

Art and Cultural Partners

A City’s parks can serve as the democratic space for experiencing and elevating its arts and cultural offerings. DGRI has long supported public arts and cultural programming throughout public parks in

the Downtown area and the Department can seek to build on this successful partnership with new initiatives in neighborhood parks. For example, in Seattle, the City's Office of Arts & Culture partners with Seattle Parks and Recreation to administer its Arts in Parks Program which provides small grants to support direct project costs to execute free cultural events in parks. Grants are made to individuals, neighborhood arts councils, and community groups, with an emphasis on serving under-served communities. With the support of a foundation partner, the Department can build on the City's design legacy as well as initiatives such as ArtPrize, which have brought regional and national recognition for Grand Rapids and the urban realm as a center for art and cultural understanding.

Adult Fitness Operators

COVID-19 brought forward the need for expanded outdoor seasonal programming and exercising. Outdoor programming helps fitness studios reach new clientele and provide diverse offerings. The Department should continue to reach out to local operators, such as yoga studios, "boot-camp" style training gyms, and others, to expand reach, providing park, recreation, or aquatic space in exchange for a small fee along with simple requirements (such as release forms signed by participants). For more information see Chapter 3 / Healthy Community.

Private Sector and Corporate Sponsorship

The Department of Parks and Recreation is seeking innovative opportunities to partner and expand capacity. Partnerships with local corporations or social impact investors is another opportunity to align the Department with like-minded organizations and businesses. A new sponsorship policy for Parks & Recreation and Mobile GR was approved by City Commission

in 2021 to allow for more formal business partnerships with for-profit sectors in the form of event, program, project, and site sponsorships. The Department should further leverage partnerships in the private-sector to sustain and expand parks, facilities, and programs.

Sponsors – particularly locally-based businesses – can seek out and benefit from experiential marketing opportunities, such as movie nights, where events organically attract key marketing demographics. The Department will need to consider a balance between income potential and quality of park experience, which can be impacted by the presence of marketing signage, barriers, or certain types of activations. Key sponsored assets may include season-long sponsorships for certain high visitation parks, wifi sponsorship, or naming rights (generally reserved for major capital acquisitions or upgrades). Community health initiatives, corporate-sponsored events, and community programs are areas for the Department to grow strategic partnerships.

Private Foundation and Grant Partners

The Department can also explore funding partnerships to advance trail connectivity, community health, safety, and social equity. Foundations such as the Wege Foundation and Frey Foundation have expressed interest in enhancing social cohesion in neighborhoods. The Grand Rapids Community Foundation and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund can assist specifically with land acquisition for new parks (including trails).

The Department can seek grant funding to support specific programming goals such as environmental education (supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Wege Foundation, among others) or public arts and cultural programming.

Climate and Sustainability Partnerships

A new challenge confronting the Grand Rapids parks system is climate change, which has the potential to dramatically alter the natural, educational, and cultural resources that the Department is responsible for stewarding. The Department should work with the City's Office of Sustainability and local environmental organizations in the climate-justice movement to establish climate adaptation and mitigation strategies specific to parks. Examples include cooling urban heat islands with parks and green spaces to reduce heat stress for residents and reduce summer energy usage and continuing to utilize green infrastructure in preparation for increases in precipitation and extreme weather events.

Incorporating projected climate changes into Parks & Recreation planning helps to promote the health of residents, encourage ecosystem resilience, preserve cultural heritage, and protect facilities and infrastructure as we look to provide the best service to our community.



A neighborhood event hosted by Monroe North Business Association.



Adopt-A-Park volunteer steward at Garfield Park



The Ken-O-Sha Park Naturescape received funding through the NRPA Great Urban Parks Campaign grant

SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

GOAL: BUILD ON INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY, ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCY, AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Strategies

Revenue Generation

Objective 1 – Increase overall program participation in the following ways:

- » Prioritize customer satisfaction in service delivery to ensure repeat program customers.
- » Expand programs to respond to community desires, such as adult and youth fitness, senior programs, and outdoor and nature-based education.
- » Continue to provide virtual and socially distanced activities to help residents feel comfortable participating in social gatherings during the pandemic or flu season.

Objective 2 – Develop or host new events such as races and other sporting events, concerts, and seasonal festivals in coordination.

Objective 3 – Incorporate waterfront events and rental space into the redevelopment of the indoor recreational facility.

Objective 4 – As water access grows, respond with concession sales and rental opportunities for kayaks and other water-based recreation equipment, bicycles, and picnic spaces.

Enhance Operations and Maintenance

Objective 1 – Increase maintenance staff incrementally, including seasonal/contractual employees to accommodate staffing flexibility during the offseason, and increase grade level of park maintenance.

Objective 2 – Consider a local college internship program to augment staffing resources and experiment with new practices.

Objective 3 – Strengthen staff training in the following ways:

- » Prioritize skills of supervisory level staff.
- » Establish onboarding and ongoing training for all staff.
- » Train staff in new maintenance strategies for low- or no-mow lawns, as well as meadow, wetland and forestry restoration.
- » Document and institutionalize key processes such as athletic field maintenance, mowing, and playground inspection.
- » Use key performance indicators to collect data on a regular basis to measure and chart progress.

Objective 5 – Reduce the maintenance burden through the following strategies:

- » Prioritize well-used and amenitized parks and identify areas for more naturalized areas.
- » Build soil health and reduce herbicide use by expanding organic turf maintenance program.
- » Leverage partnerships with businesses or neighborhood groups adjacent to mini parks, schools grounds, and golf courses.
- » Install informational signage and coordinate volunteer clean-up schedules to emphasize appropriate public behavior.
- » Develop landscape maintenance standards with a hierarchy of regular, low-mow and no-mow zones.
- » Implement naturalized planting strategies for restored meadow, wetland, and forested areas within parks.

Extending Capacity through Partnerships

Objective 1 – Continue strong collaboration with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, particularly around a shared and mobilized volunteer base and Adopt-a-Park program.

Objective 2 – Create more volunteer opportunities for one-time events and recreation programs.

Objective 3 – Strengthen existing GRPS partnership and collaborate on outdoor environmental education programs, community gardens, and the potential joint development of indoor exercise and recreation facilities.

Objective 4 – Explore potential programming partnerships for outdoor nature education with the Blandford Nature Center, GRPS, WMEAC, and area colleges.

Objective 5 – Partner with the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) on the future development of an indoor facility and new riverfront parks.

Objective 6 – Collaborate with local art and cultural organizations on programming initiatives in city parks.

Objective 7 – Partner with local fitness operators, such as yoga studios and training gyms, for outdoor programming in parks.

Objective 8 – Explore funding and grant partnerships with local private foundations to advance trail connectivity, community health, safety, and social equity goals.

Objective 9 – Collaborate with City's Office of Sustainability and local partners to establish and implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies for park spaces.

4/

MAKING IT HAPPEN

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MAKING IT HAPPEN

While the Master Plan sets out an ambitious vision for the future of Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system, realizing this vision will require a carefully considered implementation plan with clear, actionable steps. This chapter describes the framework and implementation plan for future capital projects that will build on the progress made from 2013 millage and deliver on the community goals set out in the Master Plan.

The 'Capital Framework' section details the Department's new method for prioritizing

capital projects that restore and enhance park assets through an equity lens. The framework is applied into specific park projects in the 'Remaining Capital Initiatives' section. 'Aspirational Capital Initiatives' discusses long-term projects and initiatives that will expand the park system and help achieve the vision laid out in the four Master Plan Goals: Connected Network, Healthy Community, Neighborhood Investments, and Sustainable System.



Ribbon cutting at Roberto Clemente Park as part of the 2013-2020 park millage improvements. The Department will build off of the momentum of recent capital improvements for equitable investments across the park system with the 2019 park millage.

CAPITAL FRAMEWORK

Previous Investment Framework

The 2013 Parks millage provided a solid foundation for necessary investments across the park system with \$28 million over 7 years. Roughly \$1 million each year was dedicated to keeping three outdoor pools open and operational, with the remaining \$3 million per year dedicated to capital and deferred maintenance needs. Capital projects with the 2013 millage focused on repairs to outdated and failing park amenities, improving accessibility and ADA compliance, broadening recreational amenities, and enhancing ecological functions.

Capital projects accomplished from 2014-2021 were prioritized mainly by asset management needs. Several parks per year received improvements, starting with the large community parks such as Garfield, Lincoln and Wilcox that had the greatest need in terms of service water features and major amenities beyond their lifecycle. This investment approach led with equality, promising that every park in the city would receive improvements over the seven-year millage. Capital improvements were prioritized based on the millage investment guidelines of 45%-55% rehab and repair work and 25%-35% park improvements (the remaining 15%-20% went to pool operations).

This initial approach was successful in many ways – the largest deferred maintenance issues were addressed, every park in the system was improved, and public support was established, resulting in a successful park millage renewal in 2019.

However, there were also challenges.

Grand Rapids' parks, both in number and in acreage, are not distributed evenly among wards. Neither are the types of amenities. With so much need across the system, it was difficult to justify why one project was prioritized over another. In

short, if the starting point is an inequitable system, a capital framework that distributes funding based only on existing amenities will perpetuate inequitable outcomes.

Asset management remains a high priority for the Department, but it cannot be the only factor determining investments moving forward.

Embedding Equity in a New Investment Framework

While every park and every project is important, clear guidelines are necessary to direct large amounts of public infrastructure funding to areas where they will create the most benefit. The Department is living out the City's core values by focusing on racial and economic equity in project prioritization.

After the passing of the evergreen parks millage in 2019, the Department developed a new framework for capital investments that seeks to balance park asset needs alongside community needs using a multi-criterion scoring system.

Methodology from the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board was used as a starting point and adapted with metrics to fit Grand Rapids' context. By quantifying capital needs and community demographics from a combination of data sources and categories, capital investments are targeted in a more equitable way.

The Department is living out the City's core values by focusing on racial and economic equity in project prioritization.

EQUITY-CENTERED CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN

Capital Plan Priority Scoring - How It Works

Each park is given an objective numerical score based on the combination of its park characteristics and community characteristics. Community characteristics scores are calculated at the neighborhood scale, and each park within a census tract will receive the same score. The community scores for large parks, such as Riverside, are calculated using the average of census tracts adjacent to the park. The park characteristic score is unique for each park based on the assets and

physical needs of the individual park. For example, Belknap Park and Canal Park will receive the same community characteristic score because they lie in the same neighborhood or census tract, but they will receive different park characteristic scores based on the unique features that are physically located within each park.

Parks that rank high according to the criteria are prioritized for investment of millage capital dollars.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

| CRITERIA | DESCRIPTION | SCORING |
|--|---|--|
| Racially/Ethnicity Concentrated Areas of Poverty | 40%+ Non-white population AND 30%+ Population with income below poverty line | 5 - Racially/ethnically concentrated area of poverty 3 - Concentrated area of poverty OR <40% NW 0 - Neither |
| Population Density | GR average: 4,400 people per square mile Scoring: upper/middle/lower thirds | 3 - 8,000+ 2 - 4,400 to 7,999 1 - 0 to 4,399 |
| Youth Population | % of Census Tract population under 18 years old Scoring: upper/middle/lower thirds | 3 - 24%+ 1 - 19.20% to 23.99% 0 - < 19.19% |
| Senior Population | % of Census Tract population age 65 and above Scoring: upper/middle/lower thirds | 2 - 12%+ 1 - 6.70% to 11.99% 0 - <6.69% |
| Neighborhood Safety | Crimes against person per 1,000 residents (2013-2017) Scoring: upper/middle/lower thirds | 2 - 183+ 1 - 93-182 0 - < 92 |
| Park Access | % of Census Tract population with 10-min walk to a park Scoring: upper/middle/lower thirds | 2 - < 64% 1 - 64% to 96% 0 - 96%+ |

MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS, COMMUNITY SCORE: 17



PARK CHARACTERISTICS

| CRITERIA | SCORING |
|--|--|
| Park Asset Lifespan | 3 - Expired before 2010 1 - Expired between 2010 and 2020 0 - Still within lifespan in 2020 |
| Park Asset Condition of Highly Used Items • Gym/Lodge* • Pools* • Ice rink* • Restroom* • Parking lot* • Playground* • Splash pad* • Sport courts* • Lighting • Irrigation • Walking trails & sidewalks • Turf *Weighted items over \$100,000 | 5 - Safety concern/potential removal from service due to deficiencies 4 - Functions as a result of numerous ongoing repairs 3 - Functional but could benefit from rehab or replacement 2 - Functional & reliable 1 - New or like new |
| ADA/Accessibility Needs | 3 - Multiple safety concerns or barriers into or throughout the park for mobility devices, limited eyesight, etc. 2 - Limited safety concerns or barriers 1 - ADA features that could benefit from universal design upgrades |
| Green Infrastructure & Environmental Needs | ½ - Reduces flooding ½ - Enhances water quality ½ - Enhances habitat, plant life, wildlife |

MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS, PARK SCORE: 12.5

MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS, TOTAL SCORE: 29.5

REMAINING CAPITAL INITIATIVES

Despite the great progress made with funding from the 2013 parks millage, the Department was able to accomplish roughly one-third of the needed work across the system. The remaining capital initiatives detailed here will focus on building on momentum of the 2013-2020 millage park improvements by **restoring** -- improving the state of maintenance of existing parks and recreation facilities -- as well as **enhancing** parks to address community desires for unique amenities, evolving recreation needs, and strengthening the ecological function and identity of parks.

While the projects listed below have been assigned preliminary budgets and scopes based on asset management items, they also include additional budget reserved for resident priorities to be determined through focused community engagement efforts for each site.

Public and private partnerships will continue to be a key strategy to leverage funding available through the 2019 parks millage and deliver on projects across the system.

| FY23 | Community Score | Park Score | Total Score | Budget - 2019 Parks Millage |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Roosevelt Lodge | 13 | 10 | 23.0 | \$200,000 |
| Plaza Roosevelt (Acquisition) | 11 | 11 | 22.0 | \$100,000 |
| Grand River Edges Trail (Leonard to Ann) | 6 | 12 | 18.0 | \$150,000 |
| Martin Luther King | 7 | 9 | 16.0 | \$500,000 |
| Sullivan Field | 8 | 7 | 15.0 | \$300,000 |
| Richmond | 4 | 9.5 | 13.5 | \$300,000 |
| 32nd St. Site | 6 | 7 | 13.0 | \$50,000 |
| Camelot | 8 | 5 | 13.0 | \$200,000 |
| Heartside | 6 | 6 | 12.0 | \$200,000 |
| Highland | 6 | 6 | 12.0 | \$300,000 |
| Ottawa Hills | 6 | 5 | 11.0 | \$100,000 |
| Ball Perkins | 6 | 4 | 10.0 | \$200,000 |
| Canal | 3 | 6 | 9.0 | \$200,000 |
| Sixth St | 3 | 5 | 8.0 | \$137,500 |
| <i>Anticipated contingency for as-needed projects, not included in overall total</i> | | | | \$250,000 |
| TOTAL | | | | \$2,937,500 |

| FY24 | Community Score | Park Score | Total Score | Budget - 2019 Parks Millage |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Plaza Roosevelt (Development) | 11 | 11 | 22.0 | \$200,000 |
| Grand River Edges Trail (Leonard to Ann) | 6 | 12 | 18.0 | \$250,000 |
| Martin Luther King | 7 | 9 | 16.0 | \$700,000 |
| Sullivan Field | 8 | 7 | 15.0 | \$800,000 |
| Richmond | 4 | 9.5 | 13.5 | \$500,000 |
| 32nd St. Site | 6 | 7 | 13.0 | \$100,000 |
| Camelot | 8 | 5 | 13.0 | \$300,000 |
| Ottawa Hills | 6 | 5 | 11.0 | \$150,000 |
| <i>Anticipated contingency for as-needed projects, not included in overall total</i> | | | | \$250,000 |
| TOTAL | | | | \$3,000,000 |

| FY25 | Community Score | Park Score | Total Score | Budget - 2019 Parks Millage |
|--|-----------------|------------|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Otsego Drain Basin (Development) | 14 | 11 | 25.0 | \$500,000 |
| Roosevelt | 13 | 10 | 23.0 | \$600,000 |
| Ah-Nab-Awen | 10 | 7.5 | 17.5 | \$300,000 |
| Lincoln | 10 | 6 | 16.0 | \$600,000 |
| Riverside | 4.67 | 9.5 | 14.2 | \$450,000 |
| Dickinson | 10 | 4 | 14.0 | \$50,000 |
| 32nd St. Site | 6 | 7 | 13.0 | \$100,000 |
| Bike Park | 9 | 5 | 14.0 | \$200,000 |
| Ball Perkins | 6 | 4 | 10.0 | \$100,000 |
| <i>Anticipated contingency for as-needed projects, not included in overall total</i> | | | | \$250,000 |
| TOTAL | | | | \$2,900,000 |

| FY26 | <i>Community Score</i> | <i>Park Score</i> | <i>Total Score</i> | <i>Budget - 2019 Parks Millage</i> |
|--|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Roosevelt | 13 | 10 | 23.0 | \$400,000 |
| Ah-Nab-Awen | 10 | 7.5 | 17.5 | \$1,300,000 |
| Alexander | 13 | 2.5 | 15.5 | \$300,000 |
| Riverside | 4.67 | 9.5 | 14.2 | \$500,000 |
| Westtown Commons | 10 | 4 | 14.0 | \$400,000 |
| Wilcox | 6 | 7 | 13.0 | \$100,000 |
| <i>Anticipated contingency for as-needed projects, not included in overall total</i> | | | | <i>\$250,000</i> |
| TOTAL | | | | \$3,000,000 |

| FY27 | <i>Community Score</i> | <i>Park Score</i> | <i>Total Score</i> | <i>Budget - 2019 Parks Millage</i> |
|--|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Ah-Nab-Awen | 10 | 7.5 | 17.5 | \$500,000 |
| Garfield | 7 | 7 | 14.0 | \$500,000 |
| Bike Park | 9 | 5 | 14.0 | \$400,000 |
| Campau | 11 | 3 | 14.0 | \$200,000 |
| Mackay-Jaycee | 6 | 8 | 14.0 | \$800,000 |
| Douglas | 10 | 3.5 | 13.5 | \$200,000 |
| Aberdeen | 6 | 7 | 13.0 | \$400,000 |
| Fuller | 5 | 8 | 13.0 | \$400,000 |
| Wilcox | 3 | 8 | 11.0 | \$400,000 |
| <i>Anticipated contingency for as-needed projects, not included in overall total</i> | | | | <i>\$250,000</i> |
| TOTAL | | | | \$3,800,000 |

THESE PARK IMPROVEMENTS
Made possible by the Parks Millage

A dedicated Parks Millage was approved by Grand Rapids voters on November 5, 2019. This new, evergreen millage allows continued investment in City parks following the end of the 7-year millage passed in 2013. The millage will provide approximately \$5 million each year for repair, maintenance, and new improvements to parks, pools, and playgrounds.

THANK YOU GRI!

Parks and Recreation
CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS

Your City, Your Parks
Learn more about the Parks Millage projects and get involved at grandrapidsmi.gov/parks



ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL INITIATIVES

Ambitious, long-term projects for the Department to create additional facilities and meet future community needs. Use park millage funding as match for grant and philanthropic requests.

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED INVESTMENTS

| INITIATIVE | DESCRIPTION | APPROX. COST | FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS | WHEN |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| New Amenities | <p>Potential New Amenities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Outdoor adventure play b. Stairs for active/passive recreation (Lookout, Roberto Clemente, riverfront) c. Universally inclusive playground (Richmond, Riverside) d. Mountain bike trails (Bike Park, Ball-Perkins, Richmond) e. Outdoor classroom f. Expanded trails and walking paths g. Outdoor gym/adult exercise equipment h. Permanent boulder/climbing wall i. Destination skate park (1 location) j. Boardwalks/wetland trails (32nd St Site, Riverside, Ball Perkins) k. EZ Universal kayak launches l. Boathouse (Riverside) m. Outdoor wedding venue n. Amphitheater or stage o. Entrance signage p. Synthetic turf athletic fields (Roberto Clemente, Sullivan, Belknap, Mackay) q. Off-leash dog parks (2) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. \$500,000 - \$800,000 ea b. \$100,000 - \$1,500,000 ea c. \$500,000 - \$1,000,000 ea d. \$10-15 per linear foot (lf) e. \$10,000 - \$30,000 ea f. \$100/lf paved (12' wide), \$20/lf nature (6' wide) g. \$200,000 - \$300,000 ea h. \$40,000 - \$100,000 ea i. \$1,300,000 - \$2,000,000 j. \$400-\$1,000/lf k. \$20,000-\$5,000 ea l. \$3,000,000 - \$4,000,000 ea m. \$50,000 - \$250,000 ea n. \$50,000 - \$500,000 o. \$5,000 - \$10,000 ea p. \$900,000 - \$1,500,000 ea q. \$500,000 - \$1,500,000 | <p>Key Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks Millage • Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund | With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available |
| Neighborhood-based Land Acquisition | <p>Target park land acquisition in high-need and under-served areas, anticipating future growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target neighborhoods: Garfield Park, Southeast Community, Roosevelt Park, near Westside | \$2,000,000 - \$5,000,000 (5-10 acres) | <p>Key Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundations and corporate philanthropy • Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund <p>Partnerships:</p> <p>Coordination with Planning Dept, Community Development Dept, and economic development entities</p> | With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available |



CONNECTED NETWORK

| INITIATIVE | DESCRIPTION | APPROX. COST | FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS | WHEN |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p>Riverfront Trail Connection</p> <p>» MAKING IT HAPPEN:</p> | <p>Land acquisition and construction to complete a continuous trail along the east bank of the river (approx. 4 miles from Riverside to Butterworth)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assume a 20' easement Complete missing connections on Grand River Edges Trail from Leonard St. to Ann St., connecting downtown to Riverside Park Complete connection of Grand River Edges Trail from Fulton St. to Oxford Trail and Butterworth site | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$15,000,000 - \$20,000,000 | <p><u>Key Funding Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundations and corporate philanthropy Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund <p><u>Partnerships:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders | <p>With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available</p> |
| <p>Other trails/tributary improvements</p> <p>» MAKING IT HAPPEN:</p> | <p>Improvements to Grand River tributaries (Lamberton Creek, Indian Mill Creek, Plaster Creek)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ecological restoration of tributary edges Environmental signage Improve and complete missing connections in existing tributary trails Complete missing connections in Plaster Creek Trail from Kalamazoo Ave. to Ken-O-Sha Park, Eastern Ave. to 28th St., and Division Ave. to Buchanan Ave. (currently in design). Begin feasibility studies to investigate land acquisition or easements for additional tributary trails | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$50-\$100/sf \$500 - \$2,500 ea \$80-\$100/lf | <p><u>Key Funding Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foundations and corporate philanthropy Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund <p><u>Partnerships:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders | <p>With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available</p> |
| <p>Riverfront park space</p> | <p>Improvements to the network of riverfront park spaces to improve access to water and enhance river-based recreation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sites include: Riverside, Ah-Nab-Awen, Fish Ladder, Canal St., and 6th St. Bridge parks, Monroe North, Butterworth, and Wealth St access site Continuous waterfront pedestrian and bicycle connection Improved water's edge, including floodable, naturalized landscapes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$3,700,000 - \$17,700,000 ea \$100 - \$1,000 lf \$50-\$100/sf | <p><u>Key Funding Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks millage Foundations and corporate philanthropy <p><u>Partnerships:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders | <p>With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available</p> |
| <p>Riverfront park space - new development</p> | <p>Developments of existing City-owned land as part of a system of riverfront parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Butterworth site: trails, naturalized areas, water access, kayak and canoe launch Coldbrook site and/or Monroe North site: flexible outdoor event and program space, seating, kayak and canoe launch, concessions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$800,000 - \$1,500,000 \$3,000,000 - \$5,700,000 | <p><u>Key Funding Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks millage Foundations and corporate philanthropy <p><u>Partnerships:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders | <p>With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available</p> |

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

| INITIATIVE | DESCRIPTION | APPROX. COST | FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS | WHEN |
|---------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---|--|
| Indoor facility improvement | Invest in upgrades at existing large indoor facilities (MLK, Garfield, Roosevelt) as well as smaller neighborhood-based facilities (Cherry, Lincoln, Garfield Park lodge, Wilcox). | \$500,000 - \$8,000,000 ea | <p><u>Key Funding Sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private sources (development finance) via public-private partnerships Foundations and corporate philanthropy (capital fundraising campaign) | With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available |
| » MAKING IT HAPPEN: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin facility condition index assessments for neighborhood-based facilities | | | |
| Coldbrook facility improvement | Renovate Coldbrook facility to create a waterfront community and recreation center | | <p><u>Partnerships:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public-private partnerships with private development entity | |
| New indoor facility development | Approx. 100,000 SF facility, connected to developed open space | | | |



The Department will continue to Invest in existing indoor facilities, such as the lodge at Martin Luther King.



Trails and water recreation are high priorities for residents.



OPERATIONAL INITIATIVES

The Department's Strategic Operating Plan for FY22-24, a subset of the 2019 City strategic plan, lays out detailed operational and programming initiatives that will achieve the mission, vision, and goals of the Department.

HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Objective 1: Increase the number of youth connected to nature through expanded recreational, educational, leadership and employment opportunities

Strategies:

1. Increase youth engagement in outdoor activities through Thrive Outside and other departmental outdoor recreation program offerings
2. Expand winter recreation opportunities across the system including snow shoeing, crosscountry skiing, sledding, hiking, and fat-tire biking
3. Strengthen existing GRPS partnership and collaborate on outdoor environmental education programs like Canoemobile, green schoolyard projects, GREEN curriculum and field experiences for all GRPS students in local and regional natural spaces
4. Partner with First Tee of West MI to grow youth engagement at Indian Trails Golf Course
5. Research, develop and implement new program curriculum for summer camps
6. Expand youth employment opportunities in the parks and recreation system (GRow100, lifeguards, Thrive Outside, Park Ambassadors, etc.)

Objective 2: Provide high quality inclusive programming that is accessible to all

Strategies:

1. Enhance the quality of life for residents over 55 through innovative, multigenerational programs
2. Expand inclusive and adaptive recreation programming through partnerships with Kentwood Parks and Recreation, Mary Free Bed and the YMCA
3. Co-develop partnership programs to provide water safety for youth and expand swim lessons
4. Expand established learn-to-paddle programs for youth, families, and organizations in canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up-paddle boarding



Objective 3: Elevate equity in community wellness programming

Strategies:

1. Introduce free or reduced cost recreation program access for all residents 18 and under in partnership with GRPS and private corporate sponsors
2. Expand free summer camp programming in the third ward and Neighborhoods of Focus
3. Research barriers to participation and program to expand reach
4. Expand recreation programs in Neighborhoods of Focus
5. Expand the number of residents participating in the recreation scholarship program
6. Expand cultural reach through recreation program offerings in Spanish and other languages

Objective 4. Evaluate policy options to reduce community health disparities

Strategies:

1. Support Grand Rapids Urban Agriculture Committee special projects and policy recommendations to grow and enhance our local food system, including opportunities in parks
2. Implement millage capital equity investment plan to ensure equity-based investment in park facilities
3. Continue collaboration with community partners, including Kent County Health Connect HEAL Task Force, to promote Health In All Policies

Objective 5. Leverage partnerships and neighborhood leadership to gather and lift resident voice

Strategies:

1. Expand impact through partnership opportunities with local non-profit and philanthropic organizations, as well as private corporate sponsors
2. Continue collaboration with community organizations to drive participation in events, programs, and projects
3. Reflect community input and cultural values in future park designs and program activities ensuring alignment with specific neighborhood and cultural uses and needs

Objective 6: Enhance safety of park spaces through activation, engagement and amenities

Strategies:

1. Expand Park Ambassador Program
 2. Collaborate with City and community partners to activate target parks with events and programming
 3. Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in all park design
 4. Ensure all City employees assigned an emergency operations center role or cross functional field work during major emergencies are trained to the appropriate level
 5. Install amenities for enhanced park safety such as lighting, controlled access, and improved visibility and monitoring
-

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT & FINANCE**Objective 1: Sustain a financial plan that supports our strategic direction and drives innovative, revenue generating strategies**

Strategies:

1. Adherence to budget, projections and forecasting models
 2. Implement sponsorship program and policies
 3. Continue successful leveraging of grant funding
 4. Increase program participation
 5. Drive new volunteer support for recreation programs
 6. Review and update department's cost recovery guidelines
 7. Increase revenue opportunities at parks through concessions, and facility rentals
 8. Expand partnerships to increase the number of sponsored outdoor fitness classes
-



Objective 2: Increase resident and stakeholder awareness of the park system and programming through meaningful engagement

Strategies:

1. Survey event and program participants to improve program quality and customer experience
 2. Expand park branding, grow programming and communicate millage success through social media
 3. Hire marketing and communication intern to expand capacity
 4. Raise awareness around the river restoration project and communicate the work of partner organizations
 5. Expand media channels to reach special user groups
 6. Create and implement departmental advocacy plan to inform the general public and key stakeholders of community impact
 7. Continue to leverage technologies to enhance communications with the public, with an emphasis on center equity and being culturally relevant
-

Objective 3: Leverage data to drive continuous improvement, generate revenue and expand community reach

Strategies:

1. Extract targeted groups from the Civic Rec database for program-based marketing
 2. Continuation of the Public Service Group Key Performance Indicator program
 3. Disaggregate data to sharpen recreation programming in underserved neighborhoods
 4. Conduct data informed analysis in all operations using lean tools
 5. Track and report park capital investment by ward and park, including Neighborhoods of Focus as a tracking mechanism
 6. Collaborate with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) on national benchmarking initiatives
-

Objective 4: Create exceptional customer experience in all interactions

Strategies:

1. Regularly update scripts with 311
 2. Expand customer service training to all front line staff
 3. Develop and implement a robust administrative Standard Operating Procedures program and database that incorporates an annual review with updates
-

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Objective 1: Increase grade level of park maintenance

Strategies:

1. Regular review of the park maintenance organizational structure to ensure alignment with industry best practices while utilizing available 2019 parks millage funding
2. Implement use of Cityworks for task tracking
3. Institute regular park inspections with a standardized scoring system
4. Increase the annual number of staff maintenance hours spent in the park system, matching available 2019 parks millage funding and operating fund support
5. Coordinate with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to expand Adopt-A-Park program
6. Expand the Green Stewards program

Objective 2: Enhance the resiliency of the park system through renaturalization, maintenance standards and sustainability initiatives

Strategies:

1. Incorporate the ecological framework planting strategies into millage project planning and the park maintenance guidelines
2. Build community engagement and communication plans for greater awareness and understanding of new sustainable management practices
3. Reduce pesticide and herbicide use by expanding organic turf maintenance program
4. Develop landscape maintenance standards with a hierarchy of regular, low-mow and nomow zones
5. Continue to advance balanced use of active park spaces and build in periods of rest to reduce negative impacts of overuse
6. Reduce wood waste from city forestry operations through reuse in future playground construction and sale of logs
7. Continue to incorporate low energy and sustainable amenities into park design standards (such as LED lighting, drinking fountains with bottle filler, seating with recycled materials, etc.)
8. Partner with the Environmental Services Department and community organizations to implement green infrastructure into more public right-of-ways and park spaces (stormwater daylighting, bioswales, rain gardens, tree plantings, and native plantings)
9. Evaluate opportunities with all capital projects to layer in education and sense of place through environmental and interpretive signage and outdoor learning spaces
10. Participate in community engagement and planning processes for City Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (FY23-24)

Objective 3: Increase the city's tree canopy and reduce invasive species throughout the system

Strategies:

1. Hire GIS intern to assess carbon sequestration of public trees
2. Revise forestry sustainability plan to better align with available resources
3. Partner with Kent Conservation District to expand invasive species removal
4. Preserve tree canopy from exotic and invasive species through treatments to support better natural regeneration
5. Expand collaboration with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks for pruning, watering and planting
6. Complete GIS quantification of all vacant street tree spaces in the public right-of-way
7. Remove trees identified by our priority two removals as well as any trees that have degraded and become priority one



Objective 1: Expand parks and active open spaces to reduce disparities in park deficient neighborhoods

Strategies:

1. Acquire land in the third ward and Neighborhoods of Focus as part of the larger park acquisition strategy
2. Track additional potential park property acquisitions and score with equity prioritization model in all wards of the city

Objective 2: Close gaps in the City's segments of regional multi-use trail system

Strategies:

1. Work with community partners to fundraise and seek grants for trail acquisition and development
2. Explore partnerships for acquisition or easement to build community-based system of trails that connects the river system with neighborhood parks

Objective 3: Increase the the accessibility, diversity, and experience of park spaces and facilities to ensure an inclusive and sustainable park system

Strategies:

1. Create design guidelines for incorporating universally accessible playground features and designs into all playground improvements
2. Install new park entry signage, wayfinding, and rules signage to be more welcoming and user-friendly
3. Review park accessibility needs as part of all millage projects including curb cuts, width of spaces, sidewalks, parking lots, restrooms, and recreational amenities
4. Coordinate with Traffic Safety and Mobile GR for pedestrian safety, bicycle infrastructure, park entrances, and other accessibility upgrades
5. Construct new, all gender restroom facilities throughout the park system
6. Implement capital project prioritization framework with focus on equity and asset management
7. Complete cemetery capital improvements as identified in the 2021 asset management plan
8. Add amenities that support four-season use of parks

Objective 4: Ensure Grand Rapids riverfront parks are a recognizable icon and economic driver for the department and the city

Strategies:

1. Advance new waterfront public hub for recreation and environmental education at Coldbrook water building and/or Riverside Park
2. Continue collaboration with the river restoration team and DGRI to align park and trail development with in-river projects
3. Continue collaboration with public and non-profit partners to increase awareness and activation of riverfront park spaces
4. Expand pilot recreational facilities and programs in key opportunity site locations that allow real-time understanding and use of recommended amenities from master plans and strategic plans for parks and river access points

Objective 5: Residents and community partners are actively engaged in the planning and implementation of park improvement projects

Strategies:

1. Grow partnerships and inclusive engagement strategies to increase meaningful engagement touchpoints with every project and increase ownership of public spaces
2. Continue collaboration with community partners to leverage millage funding
3. Pilot and implement community-build for neighborhood playground projects with support of community partners
4. Collaborate with the Office of Equity & Engagement to develop equity-centered protocols, standards, training, staff skills for community engagement
5. Track attendance of community engagement activities to learn patterns and test targeted approaches
6. Improve engagement participant data tracking, including demographics
7. Encourage development and incorporation of public art into parks millage projects



LEADERSHIP & EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Objective 1: Strengthen internal workforce professional development

Strategies:

1. Leverage the Learning Management System to provide additional professional development opportunities
 2. Create individual performance goals anchored to strategic planning and operational priorities
 3. Train all Parks and Recreation staff in equity policies and practices
 4. Increase park maintenance certification opportunities
-

Objective 2: Examine organizational structure and staffing strategies to ensure an adequate pipeline of quality employees

Strategies:

1. Develop formal internship programs to increase capacity and build future department leadership
 2. Develop a workforce that embodies the values of the City and is reflective of the community we serve
 3. Collaborate with Grand Rapids Public Schools and community partners to educate youth on career opportunities in Parks and Recreation
 4. Identify critical leadership and operational positions and develop a comprehensive succession plan
 5. Examine vacancies to determine optimum staffing levels
-

Objective 3: Increase the the accessibility, diversity, and experience of park spaces and facilities to ensure an inclusive and sustainable park system

Strategies:

1. Improve internal communication to enhance staff awareness and engagement through Park Post and other strategies
 2. Encourage and expand use of the ACE employee recognition program
 3. Develop an employee satisfaction survey that captures workplace culture and areas for improvement
 4. Collaborate with the Wellness Coordinator to provide low-cost or free physical wellness activities for employees
-