



# YOUR CITY YOUR PARKS

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT  
2017 STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN



**This Plan was officially adopted by  
the City Commission on June 13, 2017.**



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**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**

Mayor Rosalyn Bliss  
Gregory Sundstrom, City Manager  
Eric DeLong, Deputy City Manager  
Scott Buhrer, Chief Financial Officer  
Jeff Dood, Deputy Chief Financial Officer  
Dave Shaffer, First Ward Commissioner  
Jon O’Connor, First Ward Commissioner  
Joseph Jones, Second Ward Commissioner  
Ruth Kelly, Second Ward Commissioner  
Senita Lenear, Third Ward Commissioner  
David Allen, Third Ward Commissioner  
Tom Almonte, Managing Director of Public Services  
Connie Bohatch, Managing Director of Community Services  
Suzanne Schulz, Managing Director of Design & Development  
Jay Steffen, Assistant Planning Director  
Kyle Barnhart, Planning Aide  
Lynn Heemstra, Our Community’s Children  
Shannon Harris, Our Community’s Children  
Stacy Stout, Assistant to the City Manager  
Steve Guitar, Communications Director

**GRAND RAPIDS PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT STAFF**

**PARKS ADVISORY BOARD**

Lee Mueller, Chair  
Rachel Skylis, Vice Chair  
Daniel Vainner  
Katrina Queenan  
Mel Atkins II  
Ryan Waalkes  
Tim Kelly  
Amanda St.Amour (past member)  
Dan Wells (past member)  
Maranda Ward (past member)  
Mark Augustyn (past member)  
Tracy Smith (past member)

**CITIZEN’S COMMITTEE**

Andy Guy  
Chris Reader  
Chris Wessely  
Cynthia Burkhour  
Elaine Isely  
Gail Heffner  
Hanna Jaworski  
Janet Korn  
Johanna Jelks  
John Helmholdt  
Jon Carfagno  
Jonathan Rinehart  
Julio Cano Villalobos  
Kelsey Perdue  
Kim VanDriel  
Lee Mueller  
Mike Guswiler  
Monica Steimle  
Rhondo Cooper  
Richard App  
Sam Cummings

Shawnte’ Williams  
Tracey Flower

**COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

Cook Library Center  
DGRI Alliance for Livability  
DGRI Alliance for Vibrancy  
Dyer-Ives Foundation  
Frey Foundation  
Grand Rapids Business Associations  
Grand Rapids Neighborhood Associations  
Grand Rapids Community Foundation  
Grand Rapids Planning Commission  
Grand Rapids Public Libraries  
Grand Rapids Public Schools  
Grand Rapids Stormwater Oversight Commission  
Grand Rapids Urban League  
LINC UP  
RDV Corporation  
Seeds of Promise  
Steelcase Foundation  
Wege Foundation

**COMMUNITY OUTREACH SUPPORT**

Aberdeen Elementary School  
African American Health Institute  
Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.  
Friends of Grand Rapids Parks  
Grand Rapids Art Museum  
Jenn Schaub, Avenue for the Arts  
Kyle Heys, GR Boulder Project  
Lisa Butler, Grand Rapids Urban League  
Master Plan focus group participants  
Melissa Harrington, Fulton St. Farmers Market  
Mulick Park Elementary School  
Progressive AE  
Saul Beccera, Jr., SOL Youth Program of Hispanic Center of Western Michigan  
Troy Williams, United in Christ Ministries  
Urban Core Collective  
Yiovanny Cornejo

**WITH GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM**

Dyer-Ives Foundation  
Kent County Health Department  
Wege Foundation  
Grand Rapids Public Schools



# FROM THE DIRECTOR

June 13, 2017

I am pleased to share the adopted and eagerly anticipated Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan. Citizens of Grand Rapids continue to emphasize the importance of parks and recreational opportunities as an essential public service. This importance was consistently heard across all demographics of Grand Rapids’ increasingly diverse community through over a year of distinct and meaningful engagement.

Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is entering an exciting stage of rebuilding, creating a strong internal culture, and fostering an external identity within the community. With several rounds of park repair and improvements completed with the 2013 parks millage, the community imagined future innovative improvements as part of this master plan.

The current momentum will allow the new community-driven vision and mission to guide park investments for decades to come. 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.

Grand Rapidians now have a comprehensive strategic plan to propel the community through and beyond the 2013 parks millage with innovative park improvements that are distinctly Grand Rapids by tailoring to specific park types, community needs, and local culture.

This extensive and forward-thinking planning process has created lasting and meaningful relationships with thousands of Grand Rapidians. Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation is committed to continued meaningful engagement with every park and recreation project moving forward in order to build on the momentum delivered by citizens through this important master plan.

Grand Rapids is facing a strong and bright future as improvements continue to be made to our valued park spaces across the city. The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan supports that future while contributing to Grand Rapids’ livability and 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



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 / LOOKING FORWARD</b>	<b>8</b>
Momentum and Collaboration	10
Master Plan Process and Key Components	16
Engagement	18
<b>2 / GRAND RAPIDS PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM TODAY</b>	<b>24</b>
Ecology and Environment	26
Local Culture and Character	36
Economic Engine	40
State of the Parks and Recreation System	44
Community Input: What Grand Rapidians Say About Parks and Recreation	64
<b>3 / SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE</b>	<b>70</b>
Strategic Direction	72
Master Plan Principles	76
Master Plan Goals	78
Connected Network	80
Healthy Community	100
Neighborhood Investments	116
Sustainable System	144
<b>4 / MAKING IT HAPPEN</b>	<b>168</b>
Current Capital Initiatives	174
Remaining Capital Initiatives	176
Aspirational Capital Initiatives	178
Operational Initiatives	184
Funding Strategies	188
<b>5 / APPENDIX – Available online at <a href="http://grcity.us/parks">grcity.us/parks</a></b>	
Park, Amenity, and Accessibility Inventory	
Annual and Proposed Budget	
Funding Strategies	
Recreation Program Assessment / Trends Analysis	
NRPA Park Metrics Peer City Comparison	

# 1/ LOOKING FORWARD

Momentum and Collaboration	10
Master Plan Process and Key Components	16
Engagement	18



# MOMENTUM AND COLLABORATION

The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department (“the Department”) is at a pivotal moment to establish a new direction for the city’s parks and recreation system, to energize the community, and to engage partner organizations in the process. Within the context of the recent parks millage, new departmental leadership, and strong synergies among parks and recreation goals and city priorities, the Strategic Master Plan (“Master Plan”) offers an aspirational vision for the future of Grand Rapids’ parks, open space, and recreation resources. The plan envisions ways to continuously enhance existing resources, while steadily building capacity and expanding opportunities and access throughout the community. Linking the system’s existing and future amenities and programs to community health, equity, connectivity, and long-term economic sustainability, the plan envisions elevating the role of the parks and recreation system in the daily lives of Grand Rapidsians in the years to come.

After decades of budget cuts and staff reductions caused by a weakening economy, the Department is now focused on the future growth and true potential of its great system. Since the previous master plan Green Grand Rapids was adopted in 2011, the Department has evolved significantly. This plan builds on the momentum provided by new leadership, departmental culture, transformative investments, and alignment with both the State of Michigan planning process and City of Grand Rapids’ priorities.

**“By working together, we can establish a collective goal, and we can create lasting, positive change.”**

Mayor Bliss, State of the City 2016

## ENERGIZED LEADERSHIP

The Strategic Master Plan is timely with a wave of new leadership at both the mayoral and department levels. There is strong advocacy for the role of parks and recreation in the advancement of the city across city departments. The importance of improved access to parks in all neighborhoods, as well as activation of the Grand River into a true community amenity were key topics in the Mayor’s 2016 State of the City Address. In addition to the support from the new administration, the Department has grown stronger through its own new leadership. During the period of financial setbacks, the creation of the nonprofit organization Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP) combined with the continued support of the Parks Advisory Board to help refocus and prioritize the Department as an important quality of live provider in Grand Rapids. With the resurgence and attention to the Department, City leadership renewed its commitment by hiring new management in 2015. This sense of transformational leadership across the city helps to raise awareness about the value of



Community members attend a summer event series, Movies in the Park, at Ah-Nab-Awen Park.



parks and recreation, and serves as the ideal setting in which to develop the Department’s next master plan. Today, the department has “fresh voices” and a revitalized perspective for looking at our park system.

A TIME FOR TRANSFORMATION

Prior to, during, and past the recent recession, the Department went through a period of constrained resources. Program and staffing cuts limited the Department’s ability to reinvest in its assets and to develop a clear vision for the system’s future beyond maintenance. Today, amid a stable economy, the Department is entering an exciting stage of rebuilding. This includes increasing staff, creating a strong internal culture, and fostering an external identity within the community as dedicated to a sustainable and inclusive universally accessible park system. Today’s period of growth serves as a crucial time for the Department to develop a new vision, goals, and priorities through a community supported master plan process.

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT

Today’s momentum in parks and recreation is not only experienced within city government. The residents of Grand Rapids are also deeply committed to the health and wellbeing of the city’s park system and have expressed this commitment through the recent approval of the park millage tax. By voting for an additional property tax to go directly to park improvements in 2013, citizens demonstrated

their understanding of the value of parks and their role as active and involved community members. With several rounds of park repair and improvements completed, the time is right to engage the community in the next round of aspirational and innovative improvements. Community members have played a critical role in helping the Department establish priorities for a strong direction forward and will continue to play an important role in ensuring these priorities are realized.

STATE PROCESS ALIGNMENT

In addition to coinciding with growth and the next stage of millage improvements, the 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) in order to become eligible for future grant funding. This process incorporated community feedback toward the development of all DNR plan components and was submitted to the State in October 2017.

CITYWIDE COORDINATION

The Master Plan comes at a time of great citywide momentum around the future of downtown, 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



Parks and open spaces are an important part of active lifestyles and the social lives of cities. Pictured above: splash pad at Cherry Park (L), swing dancing at Rosa Parks Circle (R).



planning efforts that have established a strong framework for the future of Grand Rapids’ public realm:

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 builds upon the previous efforts of the River Restoration Initiative, a collaborative effort working to bring the rapids back to the Grand River and provide white water recreation opportunities. This initiative has shed light on the river’s untapped potential as an amenity for both residents and tourists.

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 update.

2010 Parks and Recreation Master Plan

The Department developed this master plan to guide the City’s work on all future park and recreation projects for the following period of five years. The plan acknowledged the



Department’s struggle to maintain the existing level of service and to provide a sustainable high quality system of parks and recreation as a result of recent budget cuts, but focused on the importance of strategic partnerships for collaborative service delivery.

Vital Streets

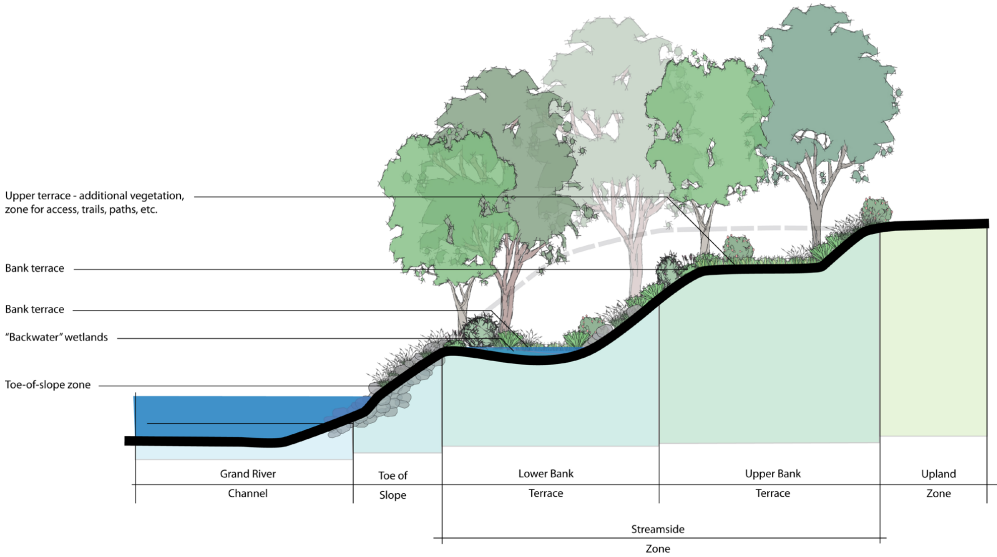
The Master Plan also aligns with the development of the City’s Vital Streets Plan, an effort to make city streets safe and friendly to all modes of transit. This plan identifies street types, particularly those designated as safe routes for non-automobile traffic, to guide future road improvements and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

Grand Rapids Destination Asset Study

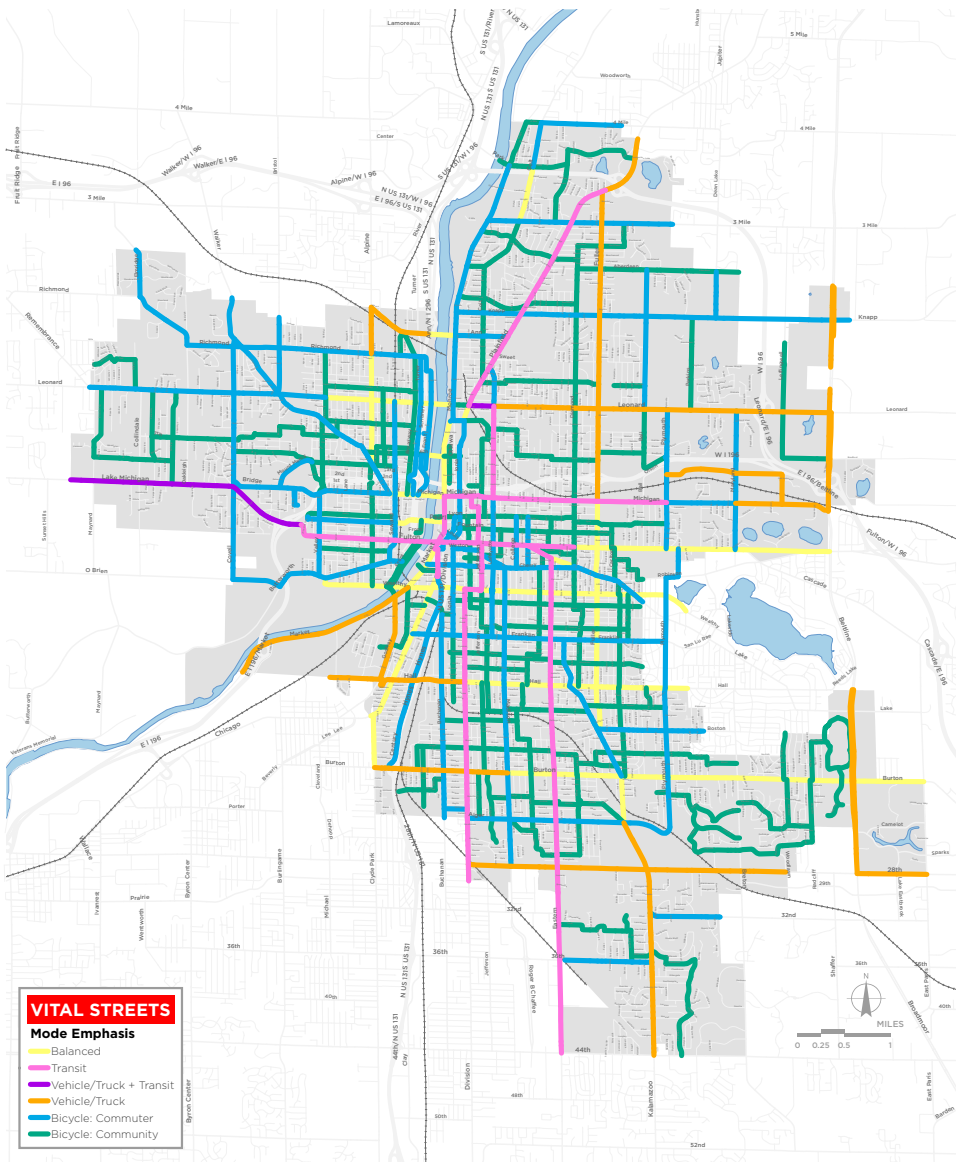
Grand Action, a local business-based non-profit organization, recently completed a destination asset study that identified several key future economic drivers of the city, primarily related to the visitor industry. Several of the opportunities identified in this study were direct recommendations from the Master Plan’s planning process, including the development of an active and accessible urban waterfront and the expansion of outdoor and adventure recreation. In order to best leverage

the river, the study proposed key river access points, such as the Coldbrook site, and a River Destination Center that would serve as a visitor space for water recreation equipment rentals and retail amenities. The study also notes the importance of extending the riverfront trail to the 201 Market Street site and ensuring strong connections between the redevelopment site and the surrounding neighborhood.

For the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, 2017 is a critical moment to capitalize upon the city’s recent growth and investments and seize the opportunity to set a strategic mission and guiding vision for the next decades to come. 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 other expenditures of public funds for parks and recreational activities.



The Master Plan will build off of current planning efforts, such as Green Grand Rapids (top) and the Vital Streets Plan (right).



# MASTER PLAN PROCESS AND KEY COMPONENTS

The 2017 Strategic Master Plan considers all aspects of the Department, both externally and internally. Equal importance is placed on assessing the system’s physical assets and community needs and on evaluating the Department’s mission, vision, values, and culture. Elements of the physical system and Department operations and culture were assessed and evaluated throughout the following five stages of the planning process.

## 1. PROJECT INITIATION

The first phase established the Plan’s overall vision, goals, and principles. The Department and team developed an overall strategy for public outreach and began data collection during this phase.

## 2. MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES ALIGNMENT

Department mission and culture are central to all parks and recreation master plans. For the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, this plan marked an ideal moment to develop a collective mission, vision and values understanding that could drive both internal work culture and external performance. This effort included a mission, vision, and values process for the Department through several workshops and exercises with staff members. Discussions and outcomes focused on the Department’s identity, existing system strengths and areas for improvement or innovation, process objectives, and implementation steps. Many of the concepts

that shaped our mission, vision, guiding principles, and values were informed from community outreach themes.

The goal of this task of the project was to operationalize a process whereby the Department has a shared identity and set of objectives, as well as an ongoing commitment to strategy execution.

## 3. PARKS INVENTORY AND RECREATIONAL ANALYSIS

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. This task also launched the beginning of the project’s public outreach with the first visioning open house held at two locations: First Friday on Division Avenue and the Fulton Street Farmer’s Market. This open house served to gather critical information to inform the mission process, as well as launch the overall master plan process with the public.

Ongoing analysis included the development of (1) a system-wide inventory, (2) the establishment of level of service and community needs, and (3) the evaluation of system-wide resources and patterns. All analysis findings were presented at the second public engagement session at Movies in the Park at Ah-Nab-Awen Park and are summarized in Ch 2 / Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation System Today.

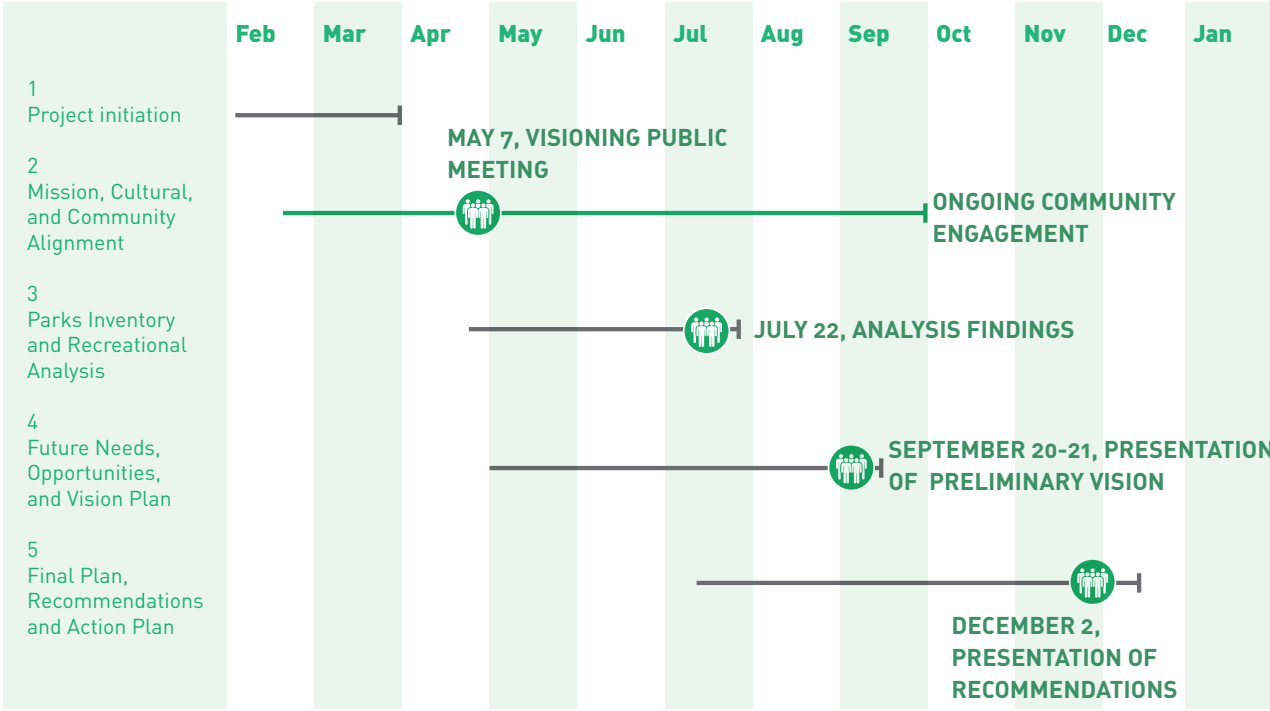
## 4. FUTURE NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND VISION

During this phase, a new future for the parks and recreation system was imagined, tested, and evaluated. The project team and the community explored future needs, goals and objectives, and project ideas at the third public open house. This open house was held at four locations throughout the City: Garfield Park, Mulick Park, Aberdeen Park and the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

## 5. FINAL PLAN, RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

In the final phase of the project, the project team refined the recommendations and developed implementation strategies to realize the Master Plan. The vision for implementation was shared with the public at the final open house in December 2016 at Rosa Parks Circle, and the final Master Plan was presented at a community luncheon in January 2017.

### Project Process





# ENGAGEMENT

The 2017 Strategic Master Plan was developed with the help of continuous input from community members. The plan was led by the Parks and Recreation Department, but included input from City leadership, other city departments, Grand Rapids Public Schools, neighborhood associations, organizations that provide similar services within the community, and local foundations. Friends of Grand Rapids Parks worked as part of the team to help gather community feedback throughout the process.

To gather input for the plan ideas and build a partnership base for future implementation, the Department led a diverse public engagement strategy throughout all five stages of the planning process. Throughout the summer season – a critical moment for the plan’s development – outreach was conducted at neighborhood meetings, farmer’s markets, local events and festivals, and community barbeques. The planning process intentionally reached out to all geographic corners of the Grand Rapids community and engaged a broad range of constituents through public meetings, community events, online feedback platforms, surveys, committees, and focus group meetings.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

An estimated 5,300 residents have participated in community outreach events (in addition to those reached through an online MyParks survey and a statistically valid survey). The Department and the project team conducted an extensive community outreach process that included large public open houses at key project milestones, “drop-ins” at existing events, meetings with neighborhood and business associations, and neighborhood park walks. The variety of formats deployed was intended to capture as great a diversity of voices as possible, particularly from those traditionally disengaged from the planning process. Special attention was paid to the equitable geographic distribution of community events. The number of community events by ward was:

- » Ward 1: 17
- » Ward 2: 17
- » Ward 3: 17
- » Downtown: 22


## PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

Four large public open houses were held at the major milestones in the planning process: project kickoff, analysis, future opportunities and visioning, and draft plan and recommendations. These events, summarized below, were designed to draw a broad cross section of the community in providing ongoing feedback to the content development of plan.

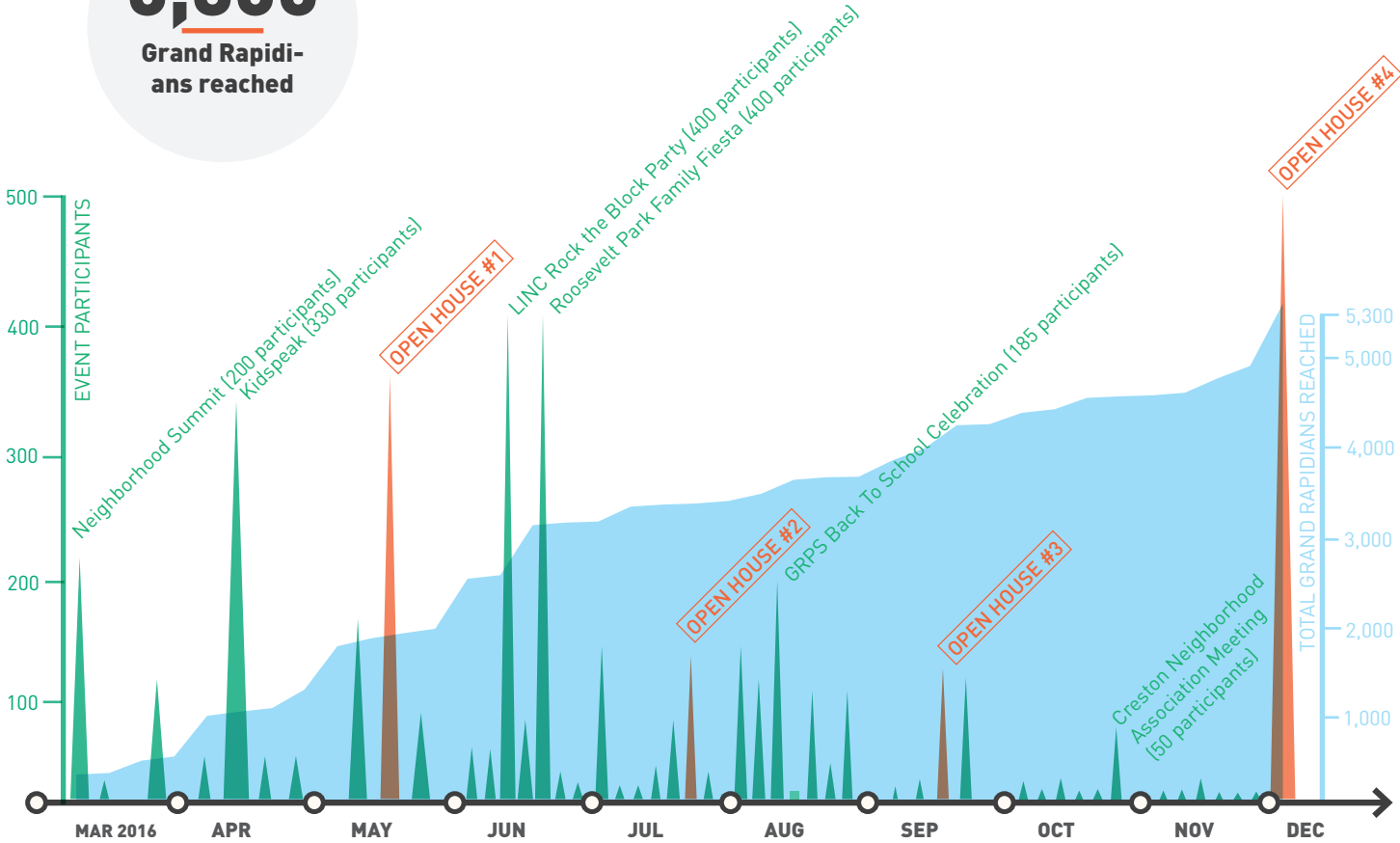
## Engagment by the Numbers

  
**1,000+**  
comments received

  
**400+**  
results from statis-  
tically valid survey

  
**650+**  
responses from  
MyParks

**5,300**  
Grand Rapidi-  
ans reached





### Open House 1, May 6-7

- » An evening event was held at First Friday Avenue of the Arts and a morning event was held at the summer grand opening of the Fulton Street Farmer's Market. Over 500 people participated in these events and 286 comment cards were received.
- » These events allowed the Department to spread awareness of the Department, the parks and recreation system, and the master plan process. They also allowed the project team to quickly become familiar with patterns of parks usage in the city through conversations with the community.

### Open House 2, July 22

- » An outdoor presentation/exhibit was set up at the Ah-Nab-Awen Park Movies in the Park event. 110 people participated in this event.
- » This event allowed the Department to share with the community results of the analysis phase. Information about the current state of the parks and recreation system was presented to the community in a clear, graphic manner.

### Open House 3, Sep 19-20

- » A series of 4 presentations were given at Garfield Park, Mulick Park, Aberdeen Park, and the Grand Rapids Art Museum. 117 people attended these events.
- » The Department presented elements of the future vision for the parks and recreation system and solicited input from the community in terms of additional priorities to address.

### Open House 4, Dec 2

- » An exhibit was set up at the Rosa Parks Circle Light Up Downtown Christmas celebration. Over 500 people attended this event.
- » This capstone public open house allowed the Department to present to the community a refined vision for the future of the parks and recreation system and present a list of specific implementation projects. These projects are outlined in Ch 4 / Realizing the Vision.

## COMMUNITY EVENTS

Between March and September, the Department attended 33 existing community events. These appearances supplemented the larger public open houses, and were effective for reaching specific subsets of Grand Rapids' population. A full list of events is included in the Appendix.

### Neighborhood and Business Associations

Each neighborhood association in the city was contacted to hear a presentation of the vision plan at the association's regular monthly meeting. In neighborhoods where no formal associations exists, community organizations were contacted. The plan was shared with 17 neighborhood and business associations.

### Neighborhood Park Walks

Each neighborhood association in the city was contacted to schedule a walk-through of a neighborhood park of their choosing with the Director of Parks and Recreation and the Executive Director of Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to share personal ideas or concerns in each neighborhood. 15 park walks occurred throughout the city.





## STATISTICALLY VALID SURVEY

As part of the outreach process, a statistically valid survey was conducted to better understand user satisfaction and community needs, drawing responses from more than 400 households across the city throughout June and July. ETC Institute, a marketing research firm, administered the survey to a random sample of the Grand Rapids community via mail, phone, and the internet to garner statistically valid results. The statistically valid survey provides an accurate and equitable representation of community views across geographic areas and demographic groups, and served to complement the project’s other forms of ongoing community engagement. It provided critical direction around recreation and program needs, community priorities, and department communications. Key findings are summarized in Ch 2/ Grand Rapids Today.

## “MYPARKS” SURVEY

Concurrent with the statistically valid survey, the project team launched a “MyParks” survey designed to solicit qualitative feedback from the community about their use patterns and impressions of the parks and recreation system. The survey, consisting of both a mapping portion and a questionnaire, allowed Grand Rapids residents to answer questions about their favorite parks and activities as well as their priorities for the system’s future. 680 responses were recorded, highlights of which is summarized in Ch 2/ Grand Rapids Today.

## COMMITTEES AND FOCUS GROUPS

Input from local leaders and stakeholders was a key part of the public engagement process. The project team received guidance and feedback from the following groups:

### Citizen’s Committee

A Citizen’s Committee was created at the start of the master plan to give feedback throughout the process. The Citizen’s Committee, a group of 24 local stakeholders representing the city’s real estate, culture, and recreation sectors, met 8 times during the plan and gave strategic guidance to the Department and the project team with regard to the effectiveness of various outreach strategies.

### Implementation Committee

An Implementation Committee has been formed to provide specific implementation guidance after the plan’s completion. Composed of 14 members representing other city departments and local foundations, the committee provides their knowledge of other related city initiatives, both past and present, and feedback on project direction.

### Interviews

The project team also held several interviews and focus group discussions to understand needs from specific user group perspectives. These include athletics and outdoor recreation, accessibility and disability advocacy, youth, and diversity and inclusion.

## Meetings with Local Foundations

Over a two-day period in July, the project team met with local foundations to discuss the master plan process and vision. These conversations were crucial for the project team to understand the potential and limitations of these foundations in becoming programming and funding partners to the Department in the future.



Community Engagement occurred in neighborhoods throughout the City.

## CITIZEN’S COMMITTEE

- » Andy Guy, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.
- » Chris Reader, community activist
- » Chris Wessely, Grand Rapids Sport and Social Club
- » Cynthia Burkhour, Access Recreation Group and Disability Network of Kent County
- » Elaine Isely, West Michigan Environmental Action Council
- » Gail Heffner, Plaster Creek Stewards
- » Hanna Jaworski, MD, DeVos Children’s Hospital
- » Janet Korn, Experience Grand Rapids
- » Johannah Jelks, She Rides Her Own Way
- » John Helmholtz, Grand Rapids Public Schools
- » Jon Carfagno, Grand Rapids Art Museum
- » Jonathan Rinehart, Pine Creek Indian Reservation
- » Julio Cano Villalobos, Spectrum Health Healthier Communities
- » Kelsey Perdue, YMCA
- » Kim VanDriel, Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.
- » Lee Mueller, GR Parks Advisory Board
- » Mike Guswiler, West Michigan Sports Commission
- » Monica Steimle, 616 Development
- » Rhondo Cooper, Upward Bound
- » Richard App, Richard App Galleries
- » Sam Cummings, CWD Real Estate
- » Shawnte’ Williams, SAAK Solutions
- » Tracey Flower, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks

# GRAND RAPIDS PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM TODAY

Ecology and Environment	26
Local Culture and Character	36
Economic Engine	40
State of the Parks and Recreation System	44
Community Input: What Grand Rapidsians Say About Parks and Recreation	64



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 Valparaiso Moraine

The **Grand River valley** was formed during the last ice age by glacial meltwater travelling from the Huron Basin to Glacial Lake Chicago in the Lake Michigan Basin. The wide river valley is 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, glacial till and sand was deposited creating the hills of the moraine 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.



**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**

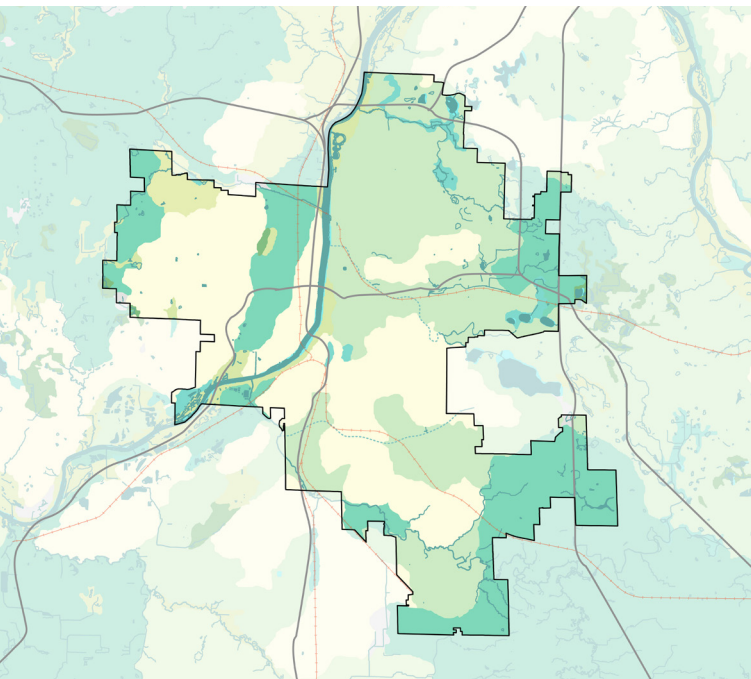
The glacial topography of the Grand Rapids region and hydrology of the Grand River produced a diverse mix of native forests, swamps and grasslands that characterized the landscape of Grand Rapids prior to its development.

**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.

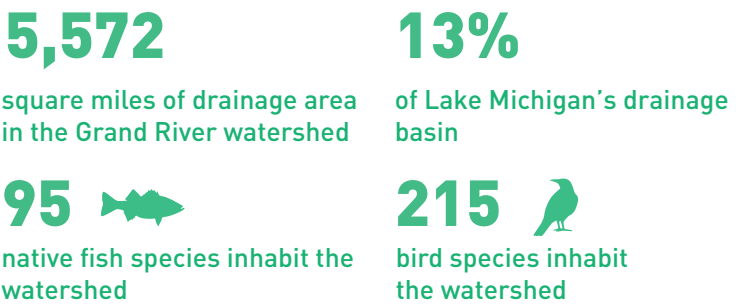
While restoring pre-development conditions is not possible, by identifying the defining characteristics of the city’s pre-existing landscape, we can create a framework that can raise awareness of the city’s ecological diversity in the public eye and inform decisions on the city’s park system and larger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



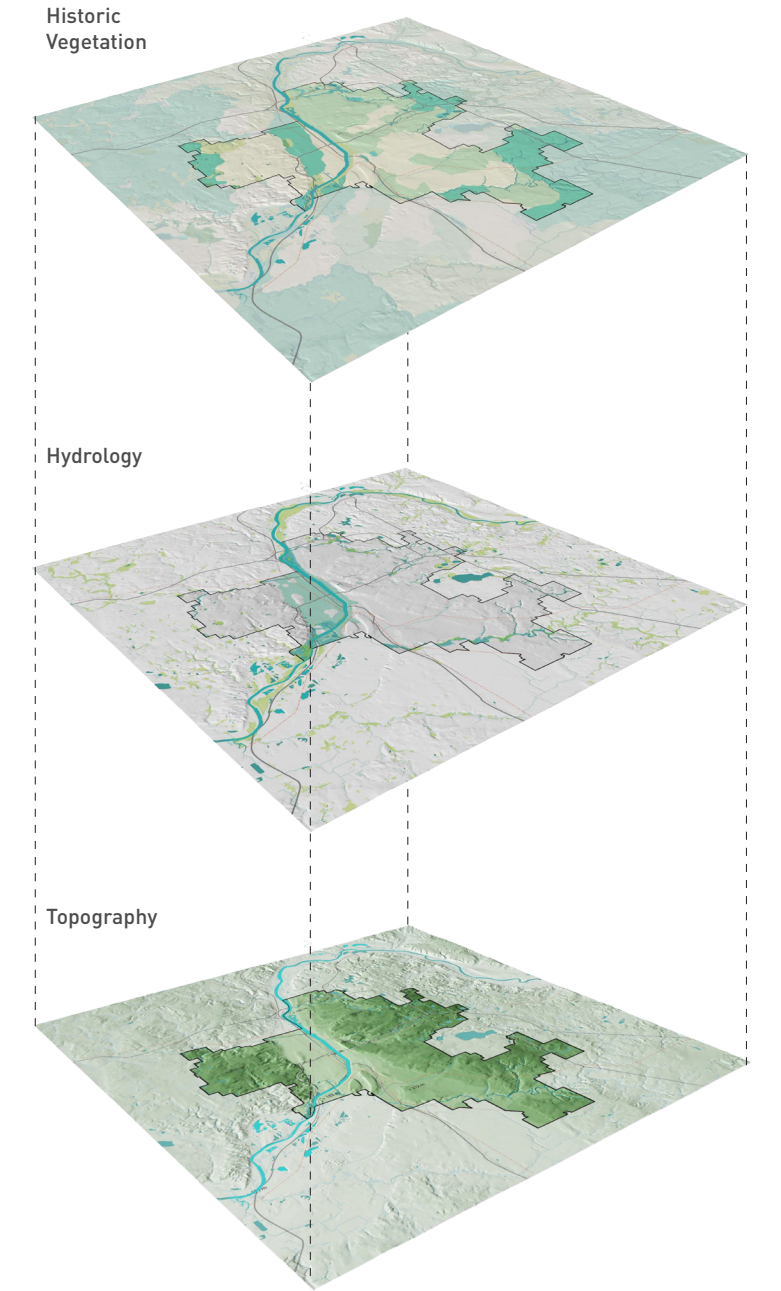
The large Grand River watershed contains great ecological diversity.



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

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.

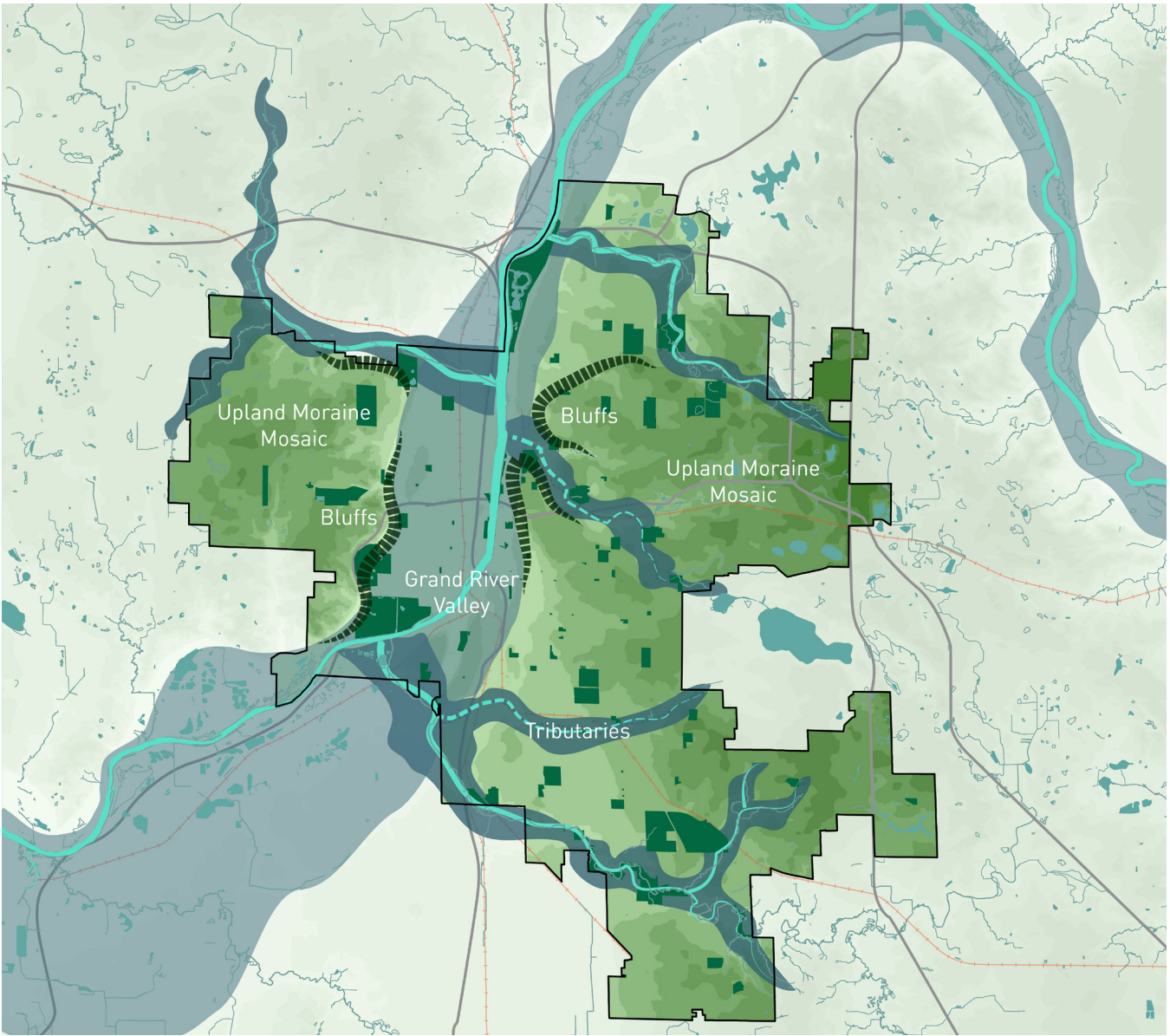
These four ecological zones reflect the major defining characteristics of the Grand Rapids landscape. An understanding of these zones reveals the diversity that once existed and that can inspire the future of the city’s park system. The unique conditions of each zone will inform future improvements and changes in 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
  - 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 flood plain 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 Rive, 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 raingardens and other infiltration areas.





Ah-Nab-Awen Park  
Grand River Valley Ecological Zone



Ken-O-Sha Park  
Tributaries Ecological Zone



Lookout Park  
Bluffs Ecological Zone



McKay Jaycee 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.

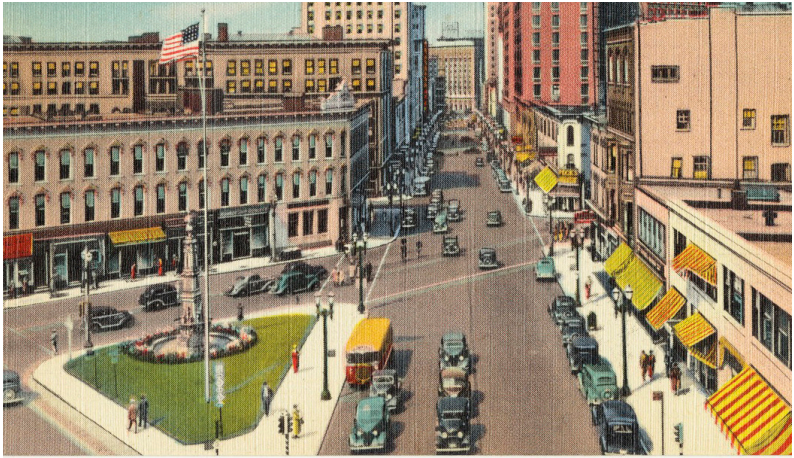
Officially incorporated as a city in 1850, Grand Rapids began to prosper as a result of its lumber mills and soon became recognized worldwide as a hub for furniture manufacturing. This industry continued to grow with the new rail infrastructure at the turn of the 20th century, enhancing regional connections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

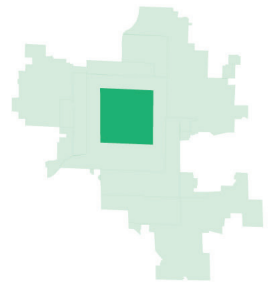
Despite years of urban disinvestment, the city began to stabilize and experience a cultural rebirth with an emphasis on the arts in the late 1960s. In 1969, the National Endowment for the Arts funded its very first public project in downtown Grand Rapids with the Alexander Calder sculpture, La Grande 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 must build off this prevailing urban identity and reflect the needs of the city’s evolving neighborhoods.

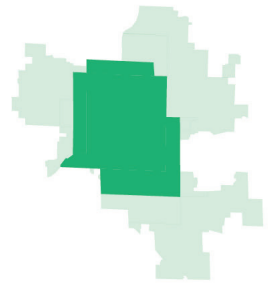


The city’s early Native American settlements and industrial heritage have shaped its riverfront and identity.

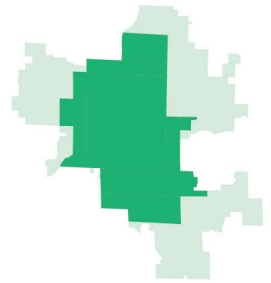
## CITY GROWTH OVER TIME



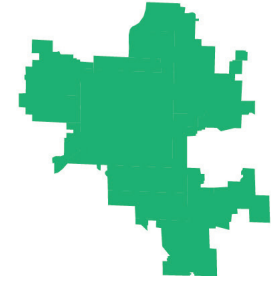
1850: Original Annexation



Before 1900



Post World War I



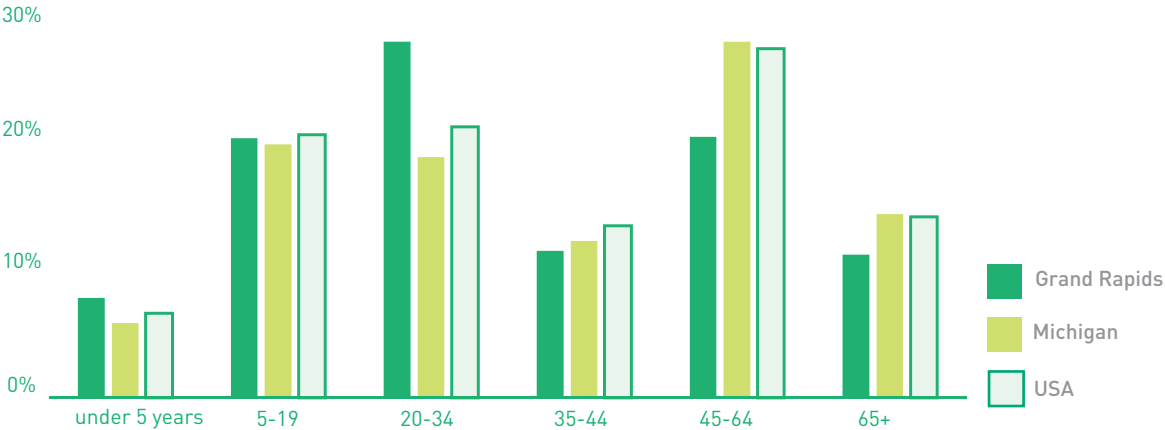
Post World War II

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. With an estimated population of 187,995 in 2010, Grand Rapids’ population has grown by approximately 5 percent over the last six years. The city’s current growth rate exceeds both the national rate of 4 percent and the state growth rate of only 0.5 percent. 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 the city’s current estimated population of 197,095 projected to increase by 5 percent to 207,536 by 2021.

Population Age Structure



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 10 percent between 2000 and 2010, the group entering the 45 to 64 year age cohort increased by approximately 32 percent. Grand Rapids is no different. Nationally 13.4 percent of the population is 65 and over; this compares to 13.6 percent 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 44,467 residents are 55 and older. In 2021 this number is projected to grow to 49,330, an 11% increase.

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 30.4 as compared to the national average of 37.6. There are currently 41,088 children below age 10 and this number is projected to increase by 5 percent over the next five years to 42,951 in 2021. 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, who include a targeted market of younger adults, which represents a large part of the City’s population growth.

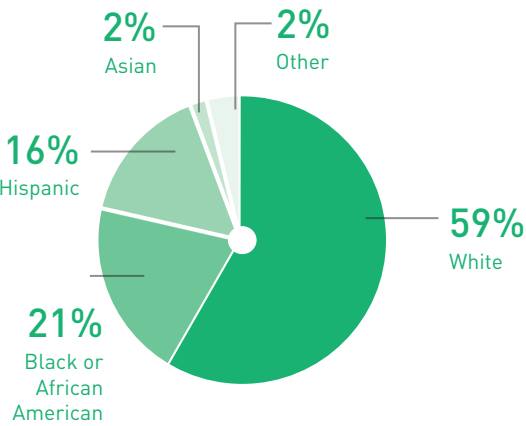
In addition to growing in size, the Grand Rapids population is also becoming more diverse. Currently 59 percent of the population is white; however, this number is projected to decrease with slight increases in Black, Asian,

and Hispanic residents. Particularly of note is the Hispanic population, which has more than tripled in the last 20 years. Moving forward, it is critical that the Department reflect the needs of this changing demographic in park and recreation offerings.

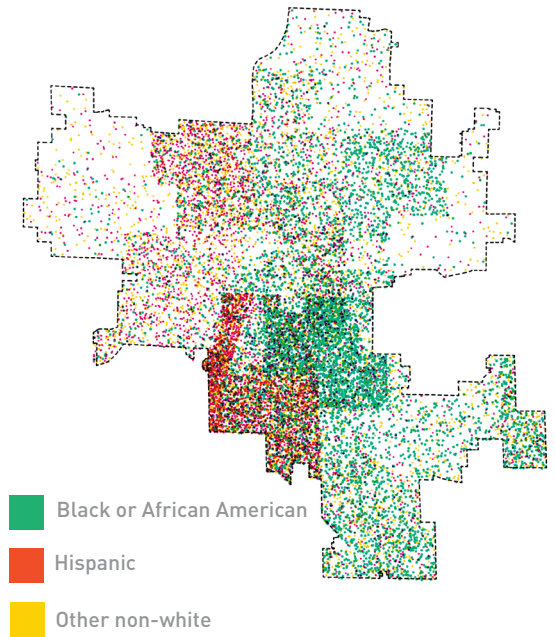
THRIVING LOCAL CULTURE

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.

Race and Ethnicity



Source: 2010 U.S. Census





# ECONOMIC ENGINE

## REGIONAL GROWTH

Over the past decade, the Grand Rapids region has experienced significant economic growth. This can be attributed to the region’s focus on diversifying business and education bases to produce competitive core industries such as advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and agribusiness, among other. Since 2007, employment in the Grand Rapids Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) has increased by 9 percent, compared to 4 percent nationwide. In order to continue this upward trend, the city must continue to invest in civic amenities that directly enhance resident quality of life.

## PARKS AND VALUE

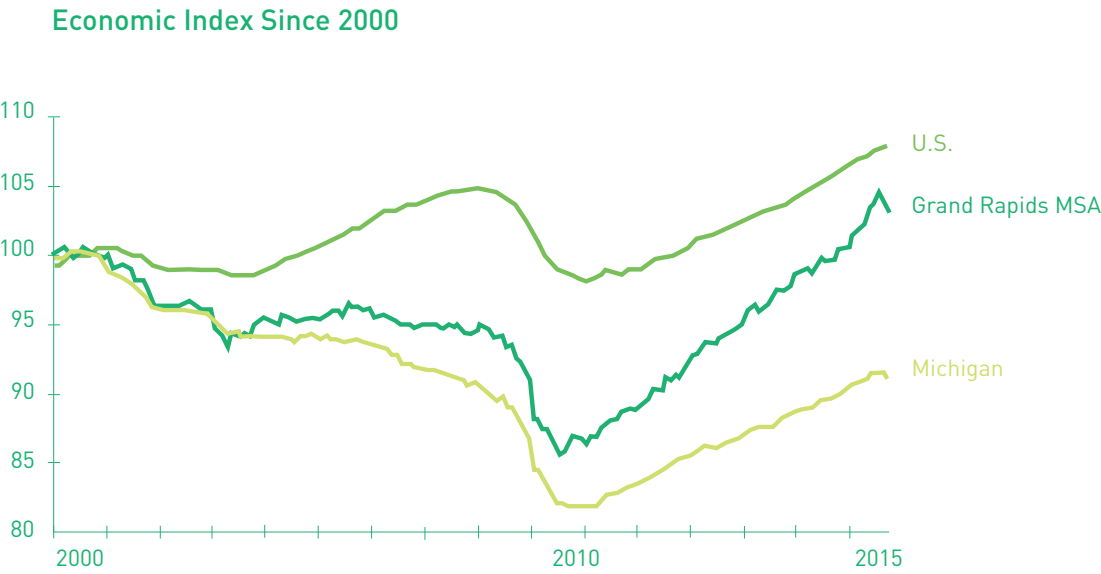
The value of the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation system can be understood and measured in terms of direct, indirect, and induced economic impacts of spending. But the value created by parks goes well beyond economic impact. Cities with strong, vibrant public park systems benefit from improved health, 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.

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 made for public parks and that park system investments offer sound return on investment of public monies. A 2016 study found that for every dollar invested into the Dallas Park System, the city saw seven dollars returned to the local economy in real estate, tourism, and environmental benefits, among others – despite the city’s park system being underfunded relative to peer cities nationwide.

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 can ensure that the city realizes 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 to 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 lower average temperatures that are rising due to heat







island effect. Trees remove pollutants from the air, serving as a form of filter, while open spaces absorb and clean stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces 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.



# 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.

Per requirements by the state Department of Natural Resources, this assessment also includes a description of the current organizational structure of the Department of Parks and Recreation.

In Grand Rapids, parks, open spaces and facilities come in many shapes and sizes, from urban plazas to neighborhood gathering spaces. Riverside Park provides waterfront access, walking paths and fields, while Rosa Parks Circle is an actively programmed downtown plaza serving daytime employees and hosting destination events. Each facility has a different role to play in the community. The master plan provides an understanding of the function of each space within the broader system, as well as its character and performance. It also looks at the system in aggregate to understand where there are surpluses and deficits of overall acreage and specific amenities compared to the city population.

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 included 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.



Veterans Memorial Park

## METHODOLOGY

How many parks, amenities and open spaces does Grand Rapids need from a community perspective? Today? For the next generation? These questions are the basis of an analysis process which analyzed Grand Rapids' parks and their uses 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 from several different sources:

- » Park and Amenity Inventory, updated through this process
- » 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, the Citizen's Committee, and community outreach has helped verify gaps and identify additional needs. Data gathered from the public meetings, statistically valid survey, and online survey has also informed these results.



PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM INVENTORY

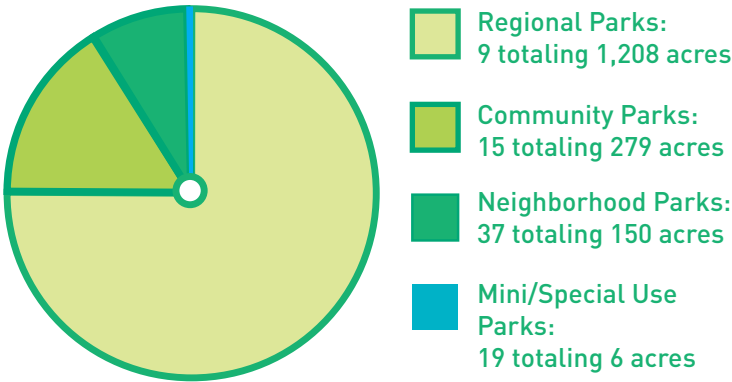
The updated park and recreation system inventory establishes a baseline understanding of the quantity, type, location, and quality of all park and recreation facilities in Grand Rapids. Starting with a list of facilities provided by the City, the project team visited each department facility and recorded its amenities and condition. The on-the-ground inventory was supplemented by an aerial survey and verified against the City’s GIS database. Overall, 85 parks and open spaces, as well as joint school yards sites, were inventoried through this process.

The Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department controls and manages approximately 2,030 acres of land which include developed parks, undeveloped land, natural areas, cemeteries, and a golf course. An additional 236 acres are joint school-park sites. Parks and recreational open space can be categorized based on their size and general function. 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 must accommodate a wide range of

programming and users. 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 1,208 acres. Thirty seven neighborhood parks comprise 150 acres, fifteen community parks add 279 acres, and 19 mini-parks add up to just over six 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 1,643 acres of developed, accessible park acreage.



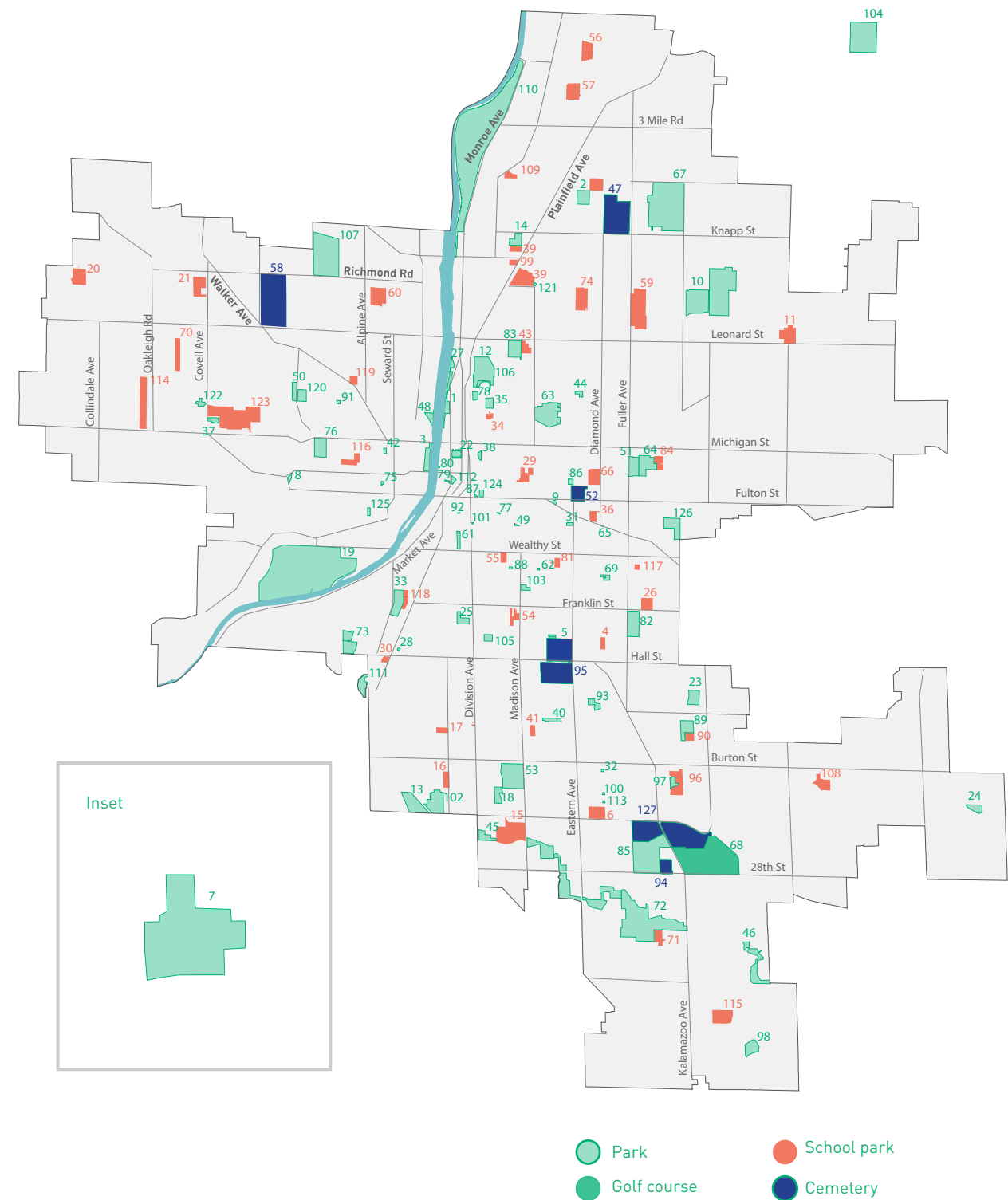
Huff Park



Garfield Park



PARK SYSTEM TODAY



- 1 6th Street Bridge Park

2 Aberdeen Park & 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

21 CA Frost Environmental Science Academy High/Middle

22 Calder Plaza

23 Cambridge Park

24 Camelot Park

25 Campau Park

26 Campus Elementary

27 Canal Street Park

28 Caulfield Park

29 Innovation Central High School

30 Cesar E. Chavez Elementary School

31 Cherry Park

32 Cheseboro Park

33 Clemente Park

34 Coit Creative Arts Academy

35 Coit Park

36 Congress Elementary School

37 Covell Dog Park

38 Crescent Park

39 City High/Middle 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 Joe Taylor Park

70 KEC Oakleigh Elementary School

71 Ken-O-Sha Elementary School

72 Ken-O-Sha Park

73 Kensington Park

74 Kent Hills Elementary School

75 Lexington Park

76 Lincoln Park

77 Lincoln Place Park

78 Look Out Park

79 Louis Campau Promenade

80 Lyon Square

81 Martin Luther King Jr. Leadership Academy

82 Martin Luther King Park

83 Mary Waters Park

84 Mayfield Middle School

85 Mackay-Jaycee Park

86 Mid Town Green Park

87 Monument Park

88 Mooney Park

89 Mulick Park

90 Mulick Park Elementary School
- 91 Nagold Park

92 Oak Park

93 Oakdale Park

94 Oakgrove Cemetery

95 Oakhill Cemetery

96 Ottawa Hills High School

97 Ottawa Hills Park

98 Oxford Place

99 Palmer Elementary

100 Paris Park

101 Pekich Park

102 Plaster Creek Family Park

103 Pleasant Park

104 Provin Trails

105 Raspberry Field

106 Reservoir Park

107 Richmond Park

108 Ridgemoor Park Montessori

109 Riverside Middle School

110 Riverside Park

111 Roosevelt Park

112 Rosa Park Circle

113 Seymour Park

114 Shawmut Hills

115 Sherwood Park Global Studies Academy

116 Sibley Elementary School

117 Sigsbee School Grounds

118 Southwest Community Campus

119 Stocking Elementary School

120 Sullivan Field

121 Sweet Street Park

122 Tremont Greenspace

123 Union High School

124 Veterans Park

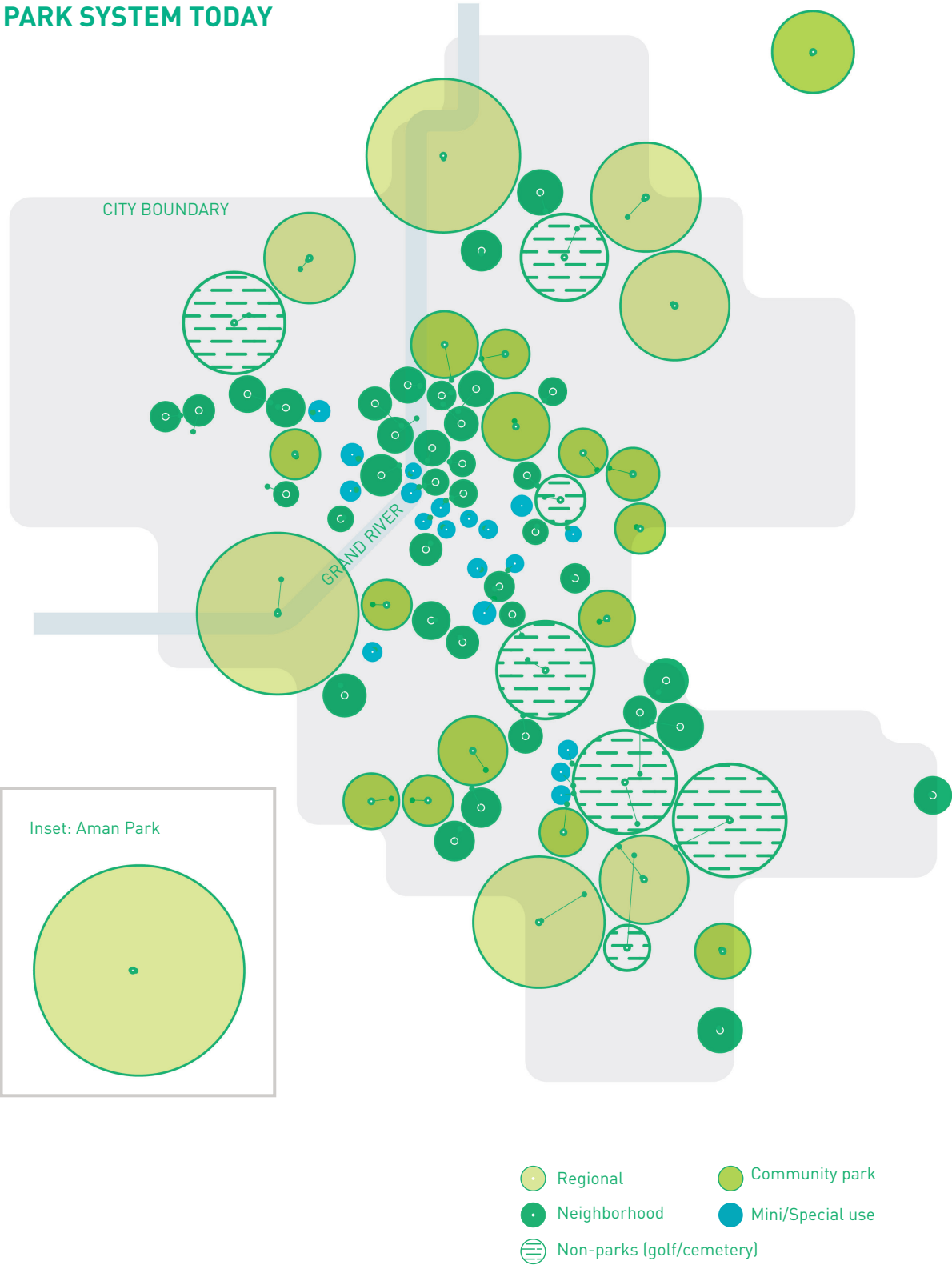
125 Westtown Commons Park

126 Wilcox Park

127 Woodlawn Cemetery

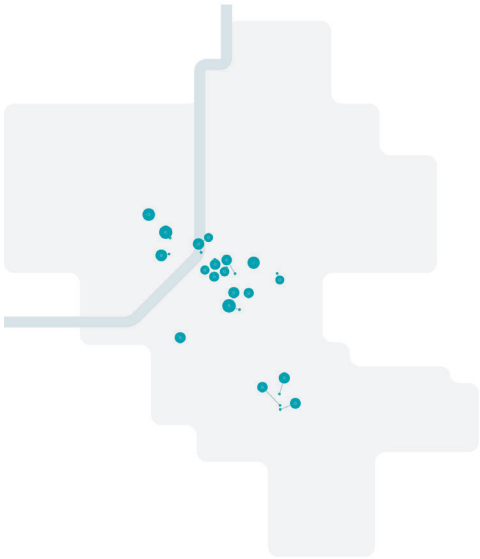


PARK SYSTEM TODAY

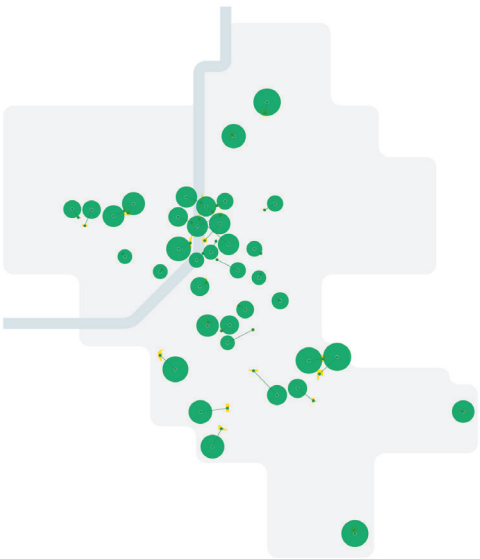


PARK TYPE CLASSIFICATIONS IN GRAND RAPIDS

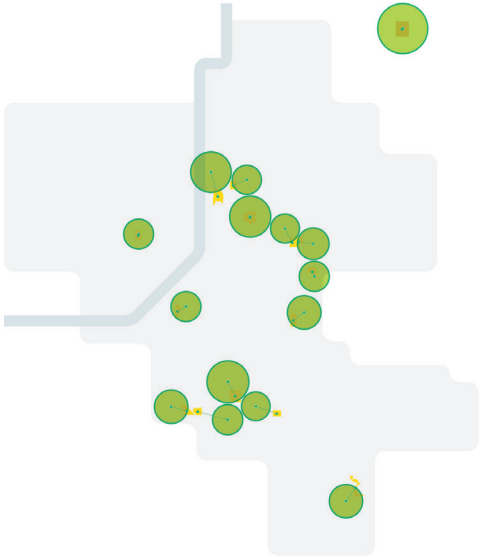
Mini Parks



Neighborhood Parks



Community Parks



Regional Parks



MINI PARK



- » 19 Mini Parks
- » Under 1 acre, including Monument Square 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



- » 15 Community Parks
- » 10-50 acres, including Highland Park above
- » Meet broad community recreation needs
- » Preserve unique landscapes
- » Contribute to a connected system

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK



- » 37 Neighborhood Parks
- » 1-10 acres, including Westtown Commons above
- » Focal point of a neighborhood with family activities
- » Walkable for residents
- » Could use greater diversification of program and appearance

REGIONAL PARK



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

LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS

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.

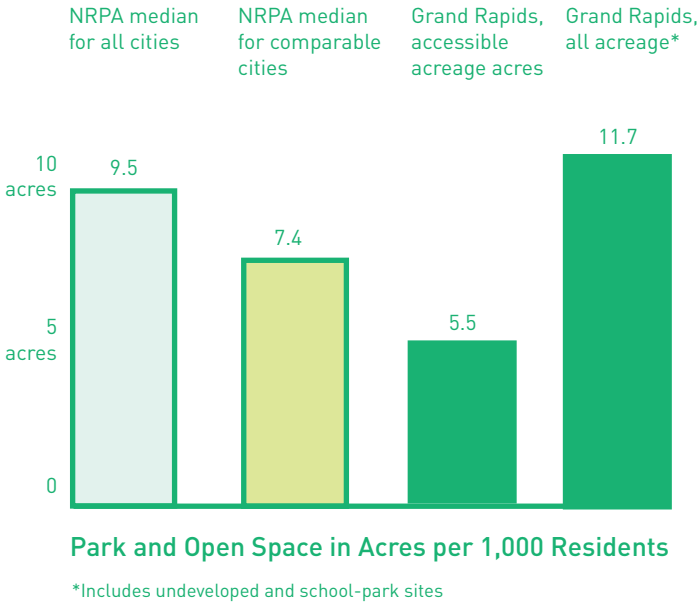
Park and Open Space Acreage

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 (such as Butterworth Site), sites outside city limits, 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 7.4 acres per 1,000 residents in similarly sized cities, while Grand Rapids measures only 5.5 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 projected population of 207,536 by 2021, Grand Rapids would need an additional 485 acres of parkland to reach the NRPA database median of 7.4 acres per 1,000 residents.

**When all parkland acreages are considered, including undeveloped sites and school-park sites, Grand Rapids has 11.7 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, above the median of all cities in the NRPA database (9.5) and that of comparable cities with a population between 100,000 and 250,000 (7.4).** This demonstrates an opportunity to expand park access within the Department’s own holdings. However, considering the projected population for 2021, the Department would still need an additional 145 acres of open space to maintain their current ratio.

The Department currently has a Joint Use agreement that governs the sharing of 236 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.





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 concern, with “upgrading existing parks” being a top community priority in the engagement process. In the statistically valid survey, 86% of respondents were supportive of upgrading existing park spaces, and 51% indicated it was the action they would be most willing to support with their tax dollars. **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 the primary reason they visit parks and recreation facilities. 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, **the statistically valid survey that was conducted as part of this Master Plan, as well as focus groups during the engagement process, revealed community interest in more specialized amenities.** These include community gardens, a skate park, climbing walls and boulder parks, and inclusive and adventure-themed playgrounds.

The statistically valid survey found that the Grand Rapids community described the highest need and the highest level of importance for the same three types of amenities/facilities: walking and biking trails (69% reported need), natural areas and wildlife habitats (56%), and picnic areas and shelters (53%).

The survey recommends a list of priorities for facility investments based on a methodology that equally weights the importance that residents place on facilities and how many residents report unmet needs for the facility. The following eight facilities were rated as high priorities for investment:

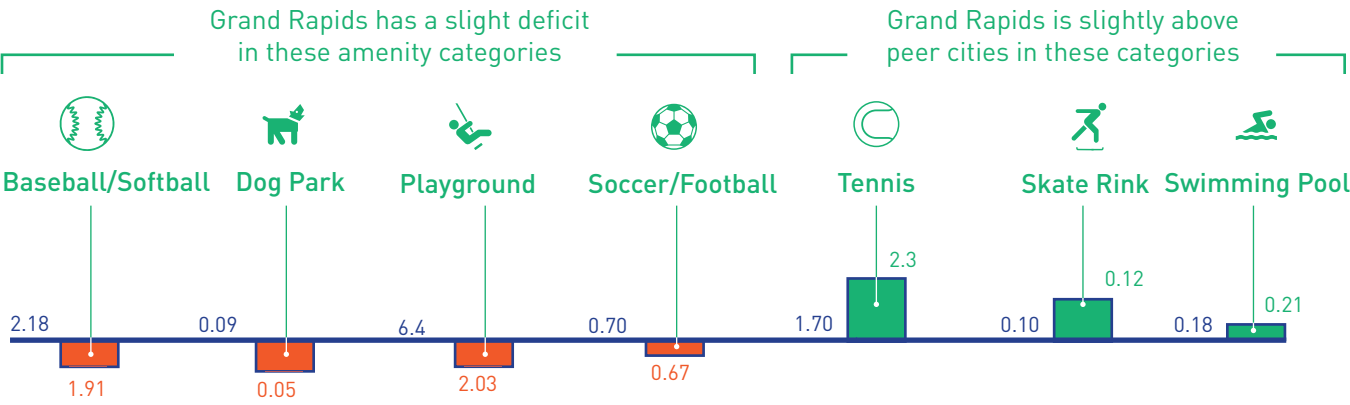
**Top Investment Priorities for Park Amenities**

- Walking and biking trails
- Natural areas and wildlife habitats
- Indoor fitness and exercise facilities
- Indoor running and walking track
- Indoor swimming pool and aquatic center
- Picnic areas and shelters
- Small neighborhood parks
- Nature center

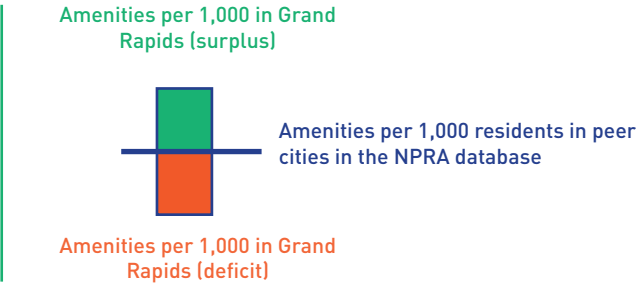
The combination of the benchmark analysis and the statistically valid survey give clear direction for the city. **The city has done a good job of providing basic park amenities across the community. There is a desire for new, innovative and specialized amenities to add diversity to the system.** At the 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).

For the comprehensive park and amenity inventory and accessibility assessment, please refer to the Appendix.

Amenities per 1,000 Residents, Grand Rapids vs. Peer Cities in the NRPA Database\*



\*This comparison was generated with amenity data submitted by the Department and other peer cities to the NRPA Database. Some amenity categories (for which the Department may have submitted data) are not reflected here if there was not sufficient data from peer cities for comparison.



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. Using software, an “isochrone” (or walkshed) was drawn from each park delineating the area within a 5- and 10-minute walk of the park. When combined, these isochrones revealed the areas not within a reasonable walking distance to a park.

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.

“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

There are also key gaps in walking access to parks. When detailed walking accessibility is calculated, 33 percent of Grand Rapids’ residents do not have access to any parks within a 10-minute walk. This compares with 33 percent of city residents who have walking access to only one park and the remaining third who have access to at least two parks. For Grand Rapids, park access and walkability is a central goal which has been highlighted by the Mayor and the Department.

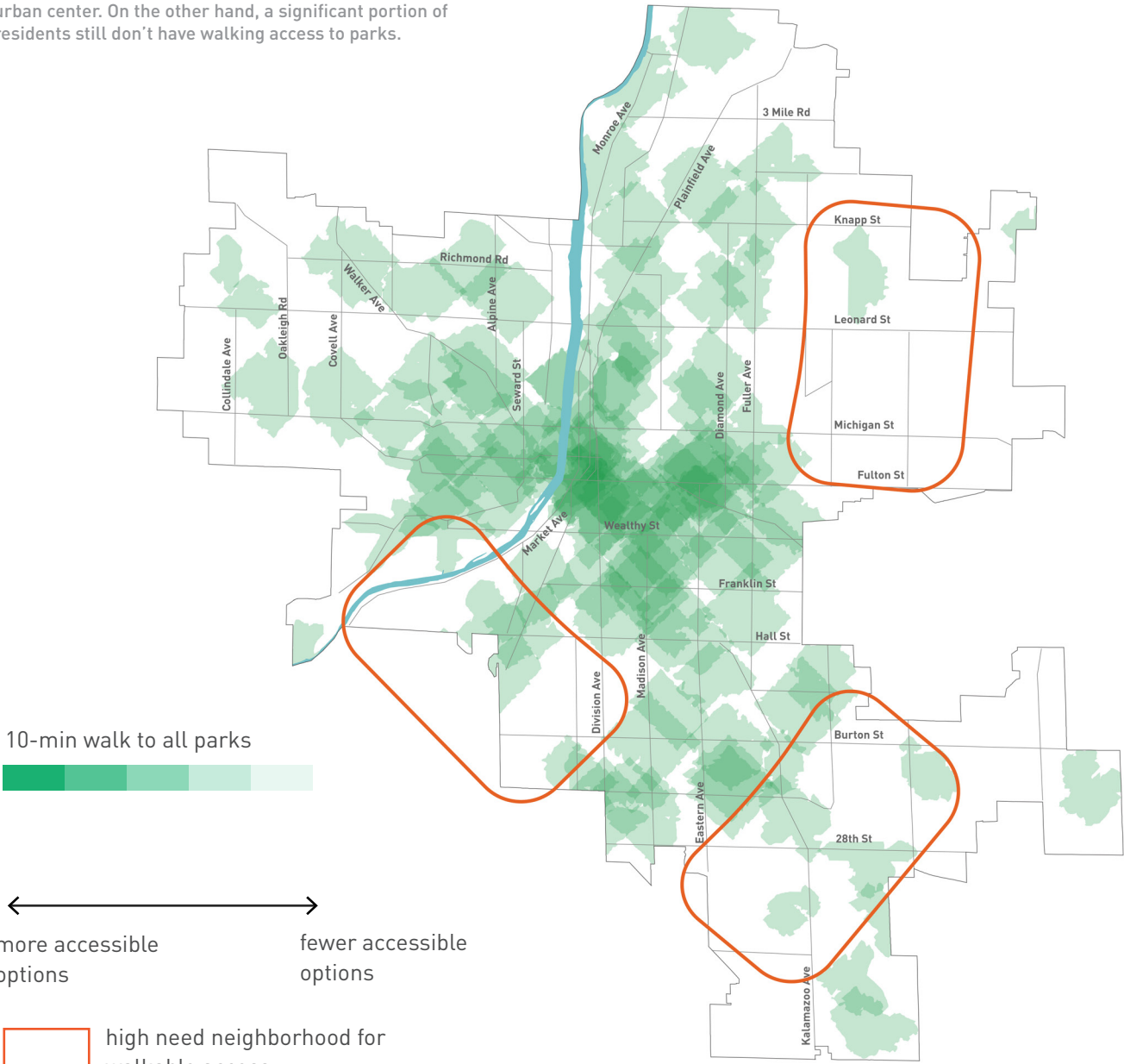
Geographically, the areas where residents have limited accessibility to parks include both less densely populated suburban areas of the city and a few central neighborhoods that also have a concentration of high need populations. These “high need” areas include parts of Roosevelt Park and western portion of Garfield Park, as well certain areas of West Grand. These are areas of concern that the Master Plan seeks to address through its recommendations.

The access 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.



Analysis of walking access across Grand Rapids

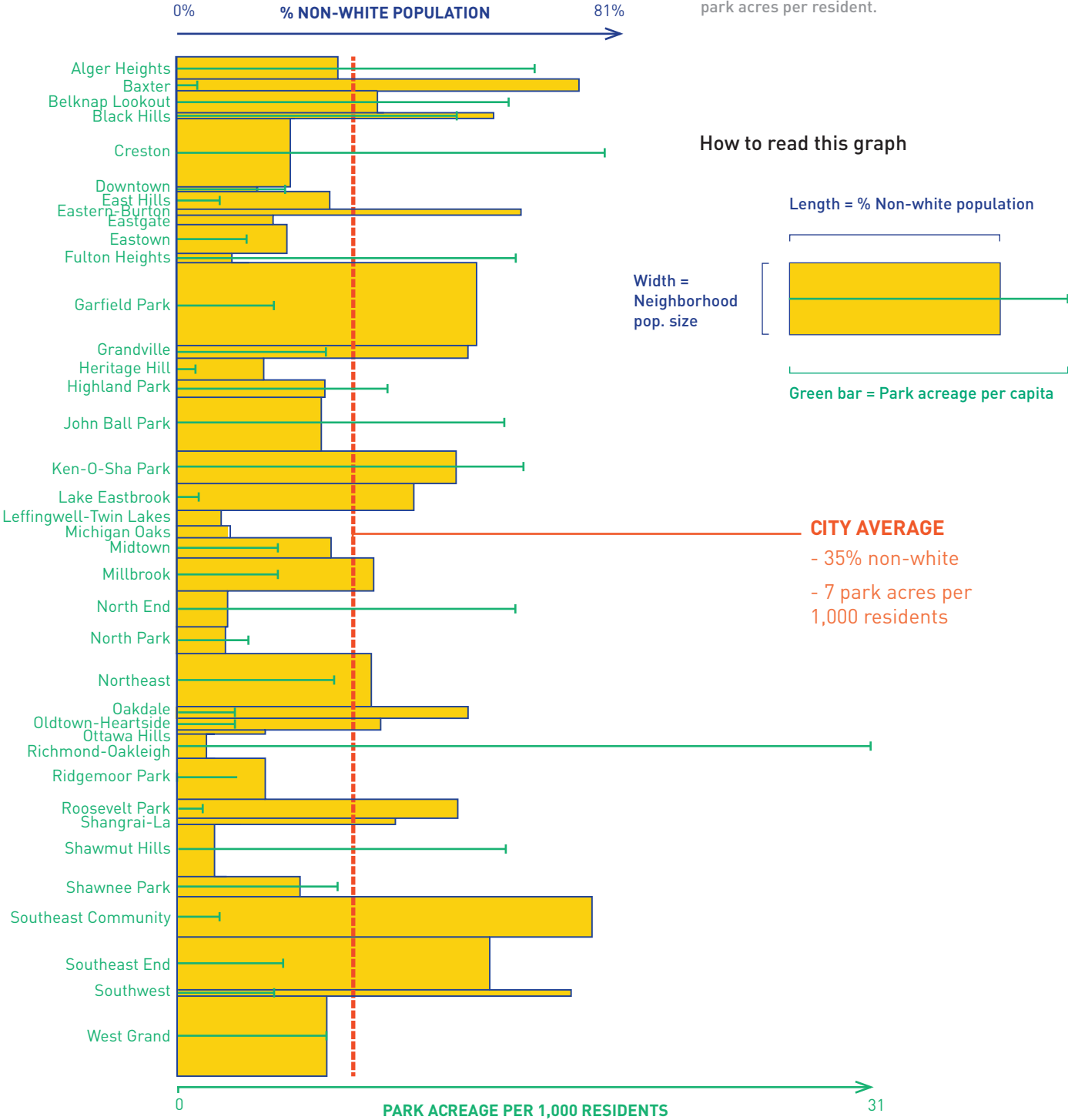
There is good accessibility to parks across much of Grand Rapids, especially closer to the denser more built-up urban center. On the other hand, a significant portion of residents still don't have walking access to parks.



**33%** proportion of residents with no access to parks within a 10-min walk

Park Acreage by Neighborhood

Identifying underserved neighborhoods in terms of park acreage is an important part of the process. Neighborhoods such as Garfield Park and Grandville have a high percentage of minority populations and have below the city average of park acres per resident.



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. The recreation and program analysis synthesizes information from a diverse array of sources, a full discussion of which (including backup data) is included in the Appendix and a summary of which is provided below.

- » **Demographic information:** the analysis examined current demographic data from the 2010 Census and projected demographics for 2016 and 2021 obtained from ESRI. 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 and community survey:** the analysis focused on information from both the MyParks online survey and the statistically valid ETC Institute Survey to understand current community participation in recreation programs and future community desires.

- » **Program inventory:** the project team catalogued and examined the full program offerings during a full year between 2015 and 2016, categorized them according to common classifications, and examined how these programs benchmark against national metrics and meet the needs of the Grand Rapids community. Specifically, the age segment analysis looked at how program offerings meet the needs of different age groups and core program analysis looked at how comprehensive the program areas are.
- » **Financial and registration review:** based on data gathered by the City over the past six years, the project team analyzed trends in the financial and registration results and offered some preliminary prescriptions for tackling the declining trend in registration.

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 currently offers approximately 400 programs compared with a national median of 843 for communities with a population between 150,000 and 200,000 (according to NRPA data). 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.

- » Program participation rate needs to grow: only about 18 percent of Grand Rapids households participated in recreation programs in the last year, compared to an

average of 35 percent in ETC Institute’s national database of comparable cities. The reasons for this are myriad; however, “lack of awareness” was cited by 36 percent of respondents, a high percentage that the Department can address with better marketing.

- » The Department could better market its recreation offerings: low participation is partly attributable to a lack of strong marketing. Currently, only 25 percent of survey respondents receive information from the Department’s program guide as a part of We Are GR. This compares to a national average of 53 percent. The Department currently has no dedicated

marketing staff, whereas similarly-sized departments typically have two to three.

- » Senior programs could expand: the Department’s current recreation offerings by demographic group mirror those of similar agencies: 45 percent of programs are targeted to the 0-12 age segment, 7 percent to the 13-18 segment, 43 percent to the 18-49 segment, and 4 percent for those 50 years or older. Given the aging demographic trend, there will be greater demand for programs that serve the 50+ age segment; this is corroborated by the MyParks survey results and the statistically valid community survey.



Fitness activities such as pickleball are popular among active adult and senior populations



- » The Department could expand core program categories: 72 percent of Grand Rapids’ programs are in the adult fitness and aquatics categories. Typically, agencies have a wider distribution of programs, particularly related to youth programming. The project team compared Grand Rapids’ core program areas with information collected from agencies across the country as a way to understand future possibilities for diversifying the Department recreation program portfolio. In particular, programs in outdoor recreation (such as kayaking and canoeing), outdoor environmental education, and programs for special needs populations are key areas to consider. Further discussion of special needs programming is included in Ch 3 / Shared Vision for the Future: Healthy Community.
- » Customer satisfaction should improve from “good” to “excellent”: 28 percent of survey respondents rated Grand Rapids’ recreation programs as excellent, while 55 percent rated them as good. Since customers who rate services as “excellent” are much more likely to return as repeat customers, the Department should establish 50 percent “excellent” as a performance goal.
- » The Department should better serve the needs of minority communities: given the over 20% African American population

and the growing Hispanic population, the Department should develop programs and services geared toward their needs. Some of these programs and services could include school and medical partnerships to reinforce health benefits of exercise, increased group and family events, certain amenities (futsal and basketball, for example), and enhanced marketing information in Spanish, among others. 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: the survey revealed indoor fitness/wellness facilities, indoor track, and indoor aquatic facility as 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.

## DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

### Staff Organization

After staff reductions during the recession, the Department currently has 35 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 coordinator was hired at the end of 2016.

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. A Special Events manager also reports to the Director.

The Department hires a large number of temporary staff on a seasonal basis. These include, as of 2016, 7 for urban forestry, 6 for cemeteries, 117 for parks maintenance, and 135 for recreation.

The Department operates with a level of resource constraint in terms of marketing, 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.

### 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 who must be City 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.

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

Concurrently with the data-driven analysis of Grand Rapids’ parks and recreation system, the project team undertook a “bottom-up” process of soliciting community impressions and feedback about the system through ongoing outreach events, an online “MyParks” survey and a statistically valid survey conducted by ETC Institute. The latter was important for contextualizing many of the findings through the data analysis, and lent fresh insights into the issues facing the system.

Throughout all phases, the community offered feedback through several large, public open houses at key project milestones, “drop-ins” at existing events, meetings with neighborhood and business associations, and neighborhood park walks across all three wards. At these events, community members were able to share their priorities and recommendations for the Department, most of which focused on future park and recreation programming and system accessibility.

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH THEMES

The following themes were derived from community feedback over the course of the planning process:

- » Active adult and family programming: the majority of recreation programming feedback focused on the need for more multigenerational 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.



Feedback from community members and current recreation participants indicated a need for more active adult programming.



The second public open house was held in conjunction with Movies at the Park and attracted a large audience at Ah-Nab-Awen Park.



PUBLIC RESPONSE

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **RIVERSIDE PARK**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**• Multicultural activity**  
**• Live Performance**  
**• Bike rental**  
**• Boat rental**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name/Nombre:  
Email:  
Neighborhood/Barrio:

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system? / ¿Qué puede imaginar para el sistema de parques y recreación de Grand Rapids?  
*Queremos caminar al rededor del parque.*

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **Garfield Park**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**Community Rec Centers in large Parks. Neighborhood Kitchens helping food entrepreneurs. Disc Golf tournaments. Fountains, ponds, & pools. Rope & rock climbing.**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Diverse nature trails**

Name/Nombre:  
Email:  
Neighborhood/Barrio:

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system? / ¿Qué puede imaginar para el sistema de parques y recreación de Grand Rapids?  
**More activities + programs for seniors (speakers, community events, + recreation)**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **EAST HUFF**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**Access to Parks For Everyone in Every Neighborhood.**  
**More Programs.**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **(Mine is "Tulank" square)**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**Healthy & Division S.E. corner lot/block made into "mini" central park. Include some benches; a water fountain, stone chess/checker tables, flower beds & fruit trees. & BEING PPL TOGETHER, ALLOW THEM TO HAVE a APPRECIATE BEAUTY in the HEART of our city!**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **Acta Township**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**• Nature trails**  
**• Bird Houses**  
**• Dog Parks**  
**• Park w/ Art Sculptures**  
**• Lights (string clear) on trees along streets.**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Name:  
Email:  
Neighborhood: **EAST TOWN**

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?  
**• Multi playground  
• Make nodes around paths to help people enjoy more  
• Benches for people  
• Community stairs - places for people to exercise**

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

MYPARKS SURVEY

The MyParks survey was an online map- and question-based survey that solicited Grand Rapids’ residents for their impressions of the parks and recreation system. The survey was open to all and was advertised by the Department through social media, sharing with key community contacts, and other means of advertising. Hard copies of the survey were available in English and Spanish through neighborhood association offices. In the end, over 630 question-based surveys were completed, representing all sections of the city. It is important to weigh the feedback against proportional participation, since some neighborhoods were underrepresented in relation to their share of the city’s population.

Findings

- » **Overall satisfaction with the state of the park system is adequate, though could be improved:** overall, survey respondents were adequately satisfied with the state of upkeep in the park system (average score of 5.4 out of 10, with 10 being most satisfied). A significant minority, however, are dissatisfied.
- » **Favorite parks are also frequently those most in need of an upgrade:** the top three favorite parks according to the survey, Riverside, Huff, and Garfield, also happen to be the top three most in need of help, according to survey comments. Huff Park received many comments about the state of repair of its boardwalks; however, these are being replaced through a millage-funded project in summer of 2017. Other parks of

note include Heartside Park, which received many comments in relation to its perception of safety issues.

- » **“Lack of information” is a key barrier to access:** when asked for the biggest reason for not accessing parks and recreation offerings, respondents noted the lack of information about what is available in the system.
- » **Improved park maintenance is a key “bread and butter” issue:** when asked for their highest priorities in the next 3-5 years, better maintenance is by far the number 1 cited response. Better amenities and facilities, opportunities for biking and walking, as well as better marketing emerged as other important priorities.

STATISTICALLY VALID COMMUNITY SURVEY

The statistically valid survey conducted by ETC Institute recorded over 400 responses, and is a geographically and demographically representative study of how Grand Rapids’ residents access the parks and recreation system now and their priorities for the future investments. A full report of the survey results can be found in the Appendix. The survey addresses several important areas:

- » Parks usage: which facilities are people using? What are barriers to access for these facilities?
- » Amenities: which amenities do people have a need for?
- » Recreation: what recreation programs are people participating in? How can these programs be improved?

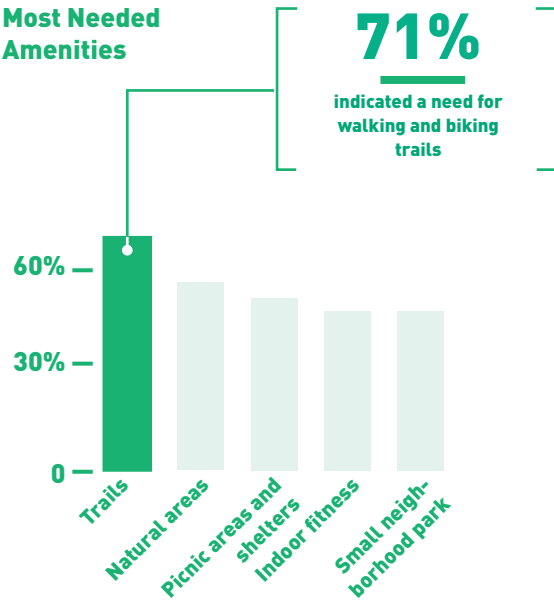


Key Findings

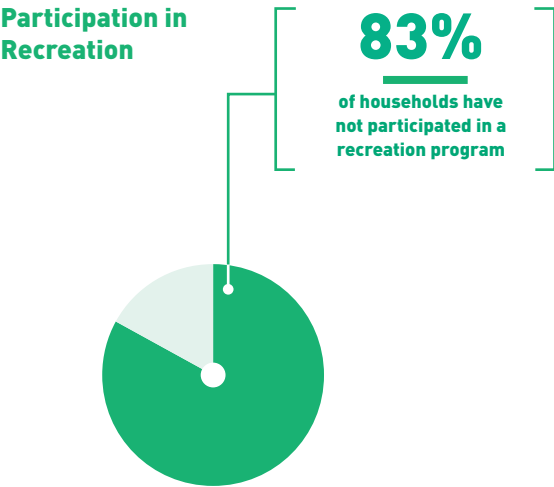
- » **Central, well-programmed parks tend to draw the most users:** the top three most frequently visited parks in the city are Rosa Parks Circle (62 percent), Ah-Nab-Awen Park (55 percent), and Riverside Park (53 percent). Of these, the first two frequently host programs and events, which accounts for the number of visitors drawn despite their relatively small size.
- » **The community desires a wide spectrum of park amenities, chief among them walking trails and biking trails:** 71 percent of the respondents mentioned walking and biking trails as a desired amenities. Natural areas and habitats, picnic areas, indoor fitness facilities, and small neighborhood parks round out the top five.

- » **Recreation program participation is low, due in large part to a lack of awareness:** 83 percent of households did not participate in recreation programs offered by the Department in the past year and 36 percent of households cited “lack of information” as the reason for non-participation.
- » **Desired programs include adult fitness and wellness, nature, and special events:** there is significantly unmet demand in these program categories. Over 30 percent of respondent households indicated that their need for adult fitness and wellness and special events are “not met”. For nature programs, over 60 percent indicated unmet demand.

Most Needed Amenities



Participation in Recreation



Community members prioritized park and recreation improvements with a voting exercise at the first public open house.



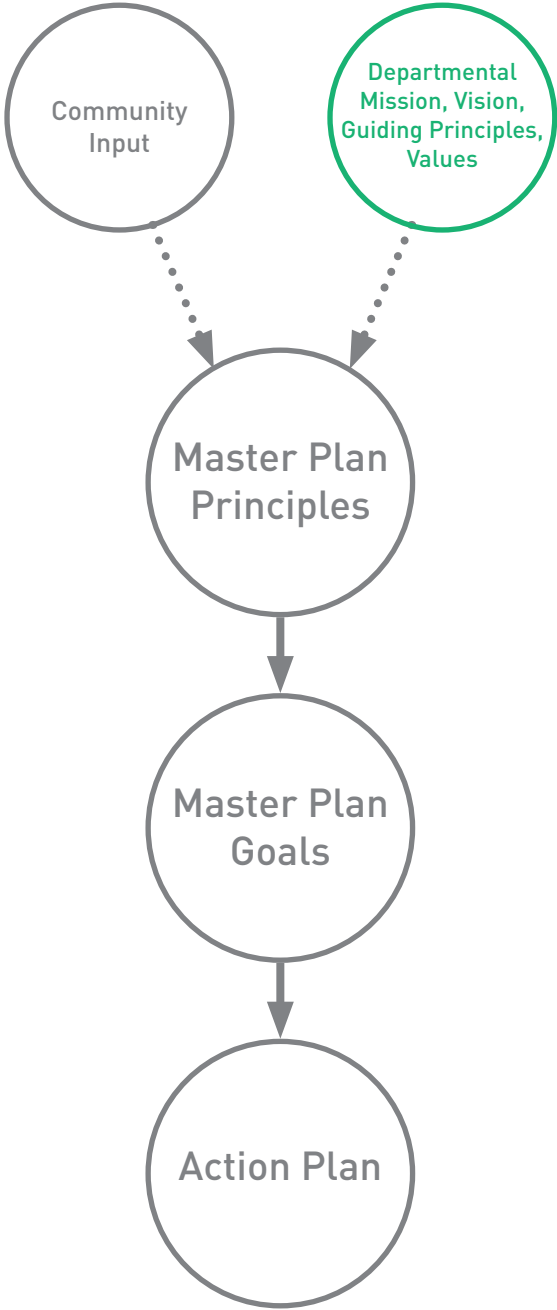
Community members at Garfield Park discussed access to their local parks at one of the public open houses.



# SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Strategic Direction	72
Master Plan Principles	76
Master Plan Goals	78

# STRATEGIC DIRECTION: MISSION, VISION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES, VALUES



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The Grand Rapids Strategic Master Plan is 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 (MVGV) was an important element of the Master Plan. Looking ahead, the Department is committed to becoming a strategy-focused organization so the Master Plan’s recommendations are aligned with the Department’s newly created mission and vision statements. The overall strategic direction and plan recommendations are also closely informed by the broad community outreach collected during this process.

This section of the Master Plan details the process involved in the creation of the Department’s mission, vision, guiding principles, and values statements, definitions used, and the outcomes of the process. It is important to note that the Department exhibited great care in ensuring the crafting of the statements and values were influenced by community input as part of the Master Plan process.

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

The development of MVGV ran parallel to the Master Plan process, and included two staff workshops and two subsequent staff meetings. In order to unfold the story of building their MVGV, staff discussions included a review of the public engagement results to identify key words associated with the Department. For example, residents were asked to list the key benefits of the Department, which included the following:

- » Having a healthy, active City of Grand Rapids
- » Creating places to hang out with my friends and community
- » Protecting the environment
- » Making Grand Rapids more beautiful
- » Creating economic value and generating revenue

Staff members also reviewed the Needs Assessment Survey to glean any results that could influence the mission, vision, and guiding principles. Outcomes of this work resulted in the development of the following mission and vision statements, guiding principles, and values.

## MISSION AND VISION

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.

A vision statement is aspirational, forward-looking and describes an ideal future. It reflects the essence of an organization’s mission and values and answers the question, “what impact do we have on society?”

### Department Vision

Creating and supporting a healthy, vibrant community through:

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



### Departmental Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are externally focused. They represent principles or precepts that guide an organization throughout its life in all circumstances, irrespective of changes in its goals, strategies, type of work, or leadership.

---

### Departmental Guiding Principles

Connectivity: creating a connected system of safe and accessible parks, programs, and facilities for all.

Collaboration: working externally and internally in a spirit of partnership and teamwork.

Sustainability: creating an enduring system of park and recreation services.

Exceptional Service: providing our best efforts in creating memorable experiences and service.

Equitable: providing residents with the opportunity to improve their quality of life and well-being through a balanced distribution of outstanding parks and recreation services.

---

### Departmental Values

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

---

### Departmental Values

Accountability: We take ownership of our decisions and actions.

Integrity: We will be honest and forthright in our interactions and do what we say we will do.

Diversity: We will recognize and support individual differences.

Communication: We will work toward a common understanding through openness and sharing of information.

Team-Oriented: We work effectively together in shared contributions toward the achievement of mission and vision, utilizing individual strengths to the benefit of the greater good of the organization.

---

# MASTER PLAN PRINCIPLES



# PRINCIPLES

## Access and Equity

Our parks will be accessible, and serve residents city-wide equitably, regardless of location, age, ability, or socio-economics.

## Ecological Diversity

Our parks will reflect the rich ecological diversity of our city, incorporating strategies for green infrastructure, environmental education and natural resource health.

## Identity

Our parks will be high-quality, visible, and recognizable assets to the city. Several signature parks serve as representative icons of the system and Grand Rapids character.

## Economic Sustainability

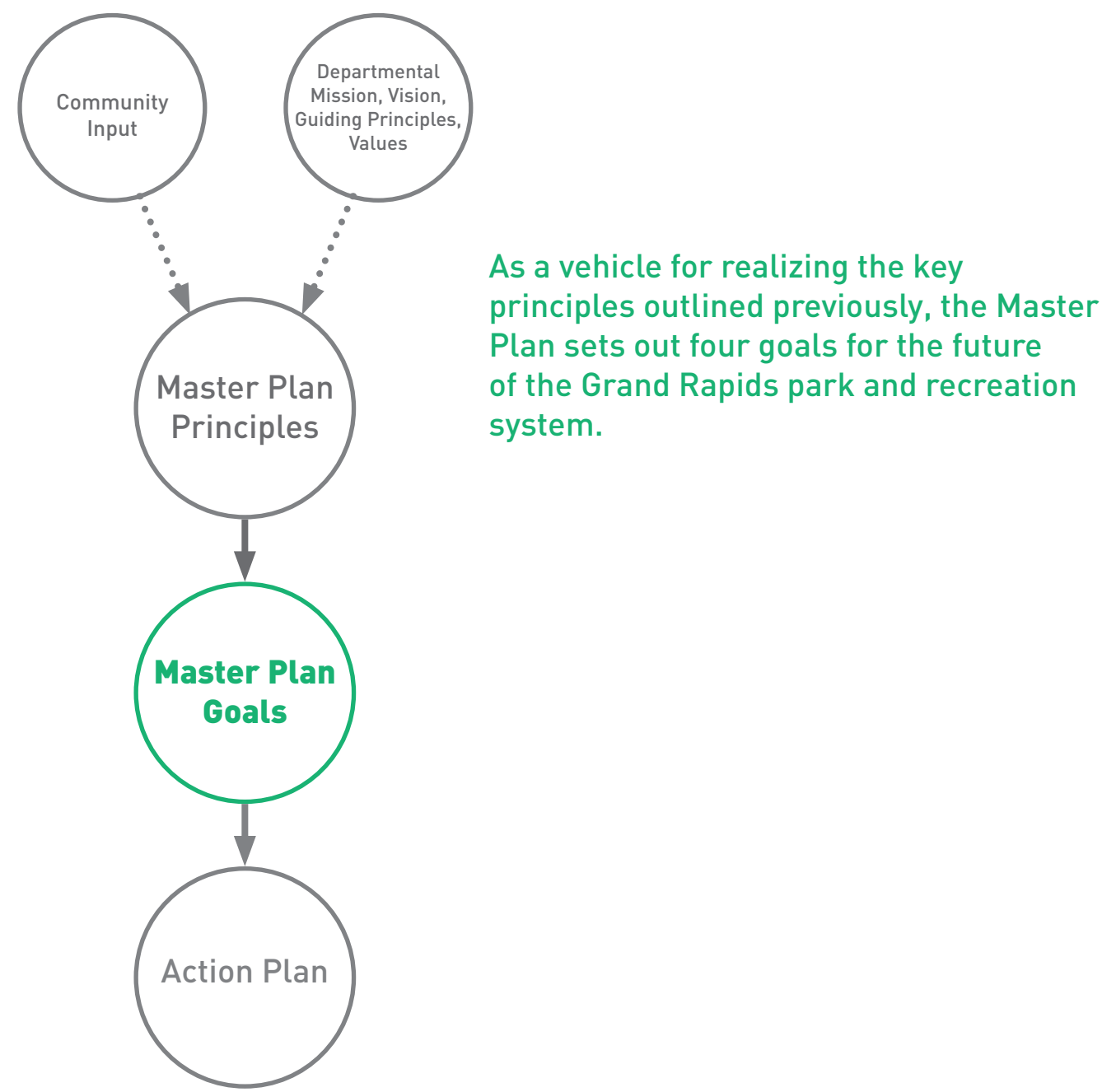
Our parks will be central to the city's economic success, supporting development, neighborhood integrity and including mechanisms for revenue and operational sustainability.

## Healthy Community

Our parks will be a vital component of community wellness and support active lifestyles, mental and emotional well-being.



# Master Plan Goals



## 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 supports the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all Grand Rapidians.

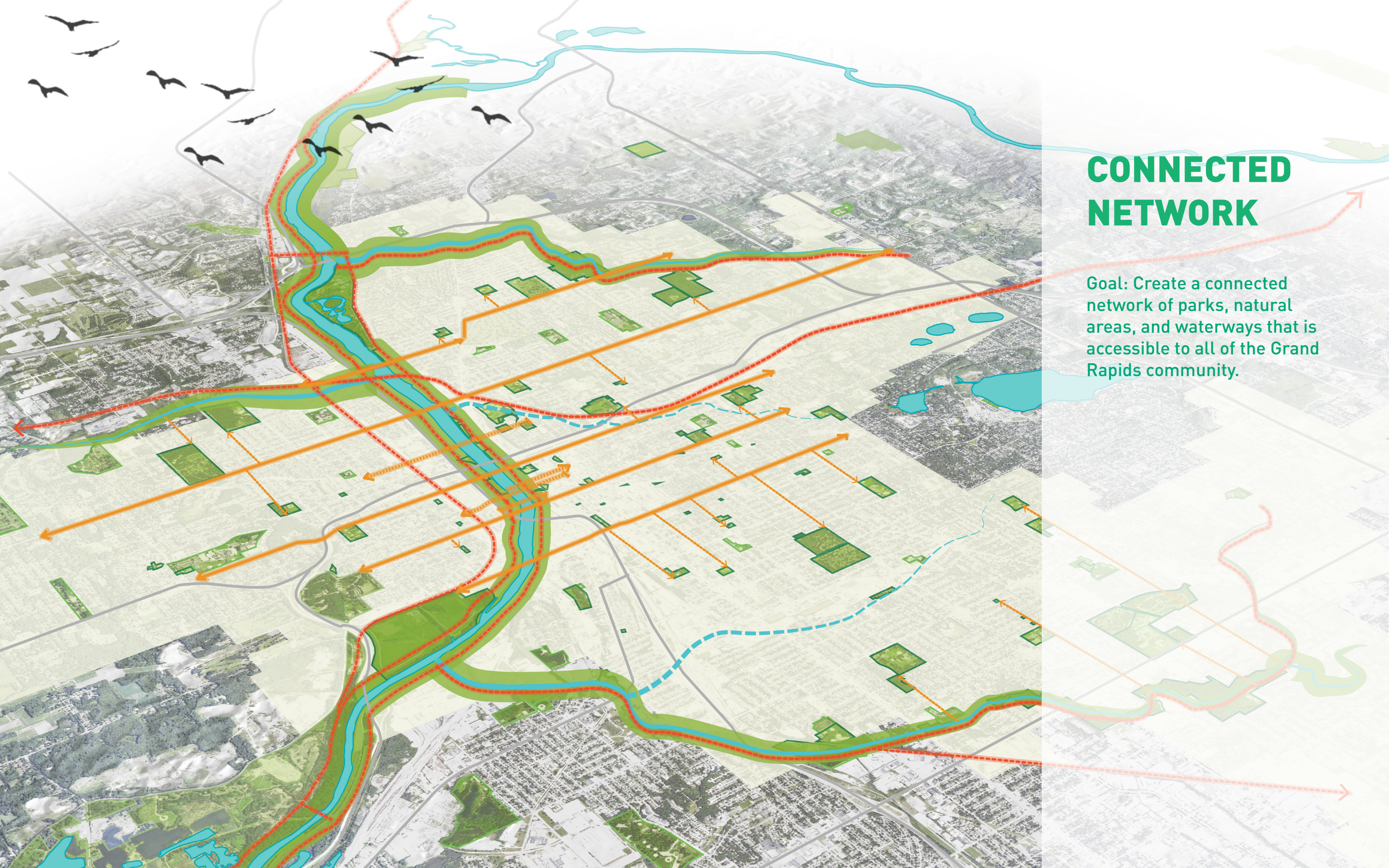
### NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT:

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

### SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM:

Seek innovative solutions to become more financially self-sustainable and diversify funding sources.





## 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.

The Grand River is a tremendous untapped resource for recreation, parks, and greater system connectivity. Not only does it trace through the center of the city and downtown, it is linked to a network of tributaries that can draw the benefits of the city's water system deep into neighborhoods on the east and west sides. In order for the Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system to realize the full benefits of the river, it needs to reach every community member through new riverfront open spaces and links along the tributaries, streets, and bridges.

There is already momentum today around a river renaissance with the River Restoration Initiative and the GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan's vision for a downtown that embraces its river. In order to realize the full potential of the river as a public amenity, it needs to also be thoughtfully programmed with adjacent parkland, urban plazas, linear trail systems, water access sites, and active recreation uses. By coordinating efforts of this Parks Master Plan with ongoing city initiatives such as the River Restoration Initiative, GR Forward Downtown and River Action Plan, and Vital Streets, the impact of the Plan could have a much wider reach and fulfill its potential as a truly integrated City Parks System.

With the river improvements, there's a major opportunity for one or more new or renovated signature parks along the river that could be a new "Central Park" of Grand Rapids, anchored by water access, a new community recreation and wellness facility, and active programming. If the river improvements were anchored by a major downtown park, it would likely be the highest single value generator in the parks system. 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. In addition to economic potential, these new riverfront facilities should be sited to add new park space or trail connections to underserved areas of the city, such as southeast of Downtown.

Looking beyond the Grand River, precedents from other cities suggest further economic and health opportunities. 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.



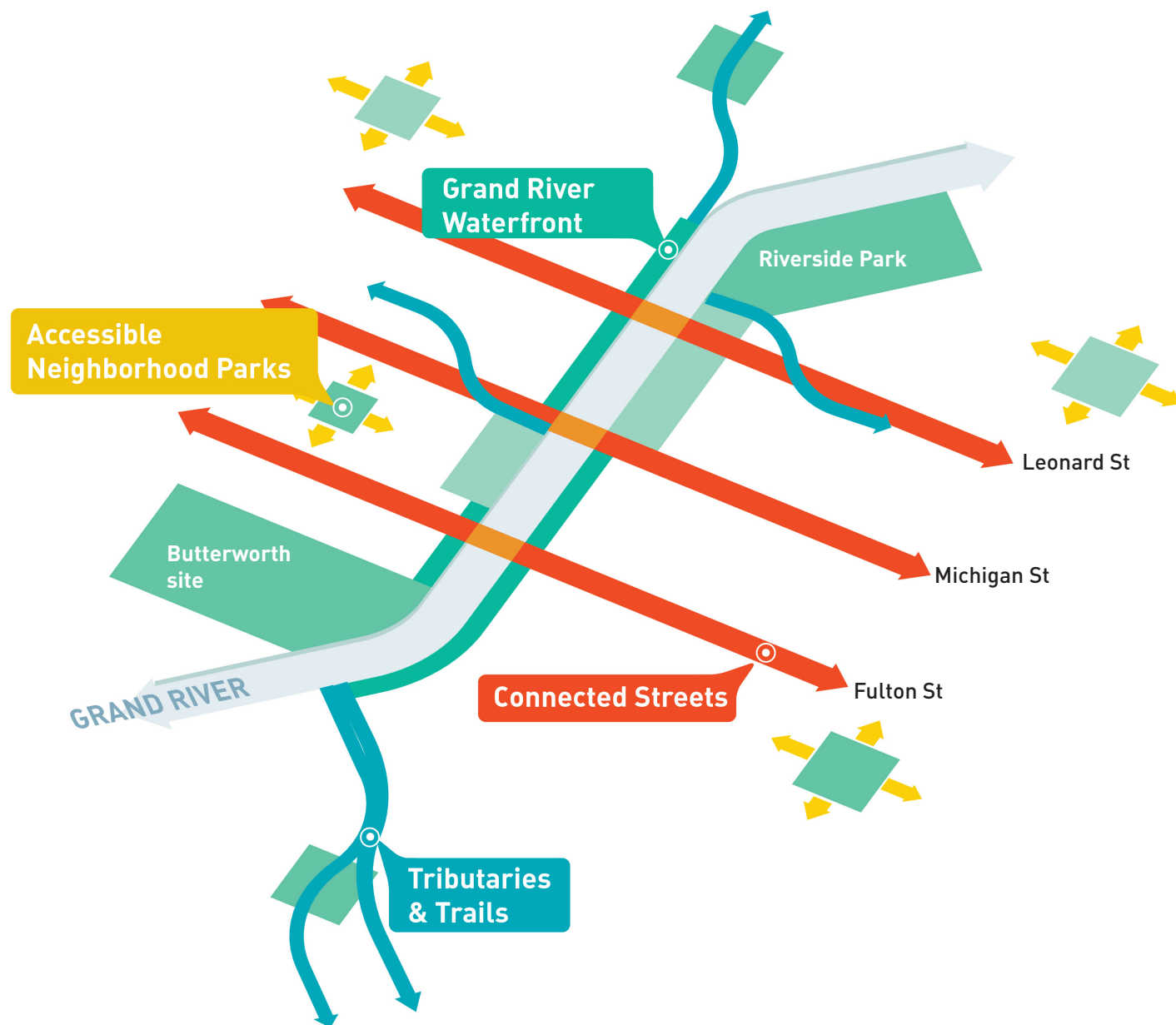
### CONNECTED STREETS

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 Rapidians 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.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Neighborhood: Heartside

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?

*~ Connecting parks through Trails for biking / hiking  
~ More open areas, and wooded areas*

One of the major community feedback themes was the need for a well connected park system and strong trail network.

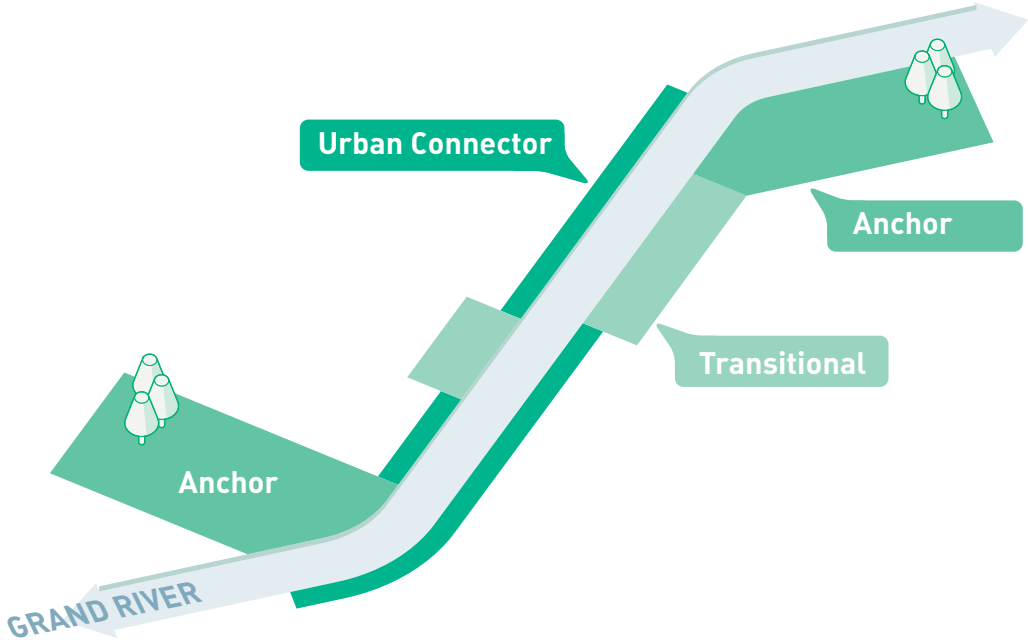


Strategy 2

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 and the Butterworth site, which have 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.



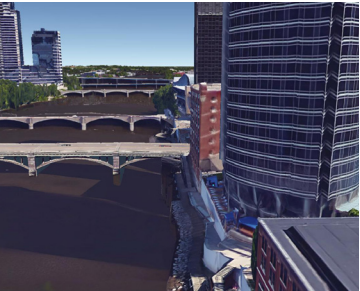
Anchor

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 Master Plan envisions several opportunities to begin to build greater riverfront access and recreation for the community:

- » **Develop Riverfront Design Guidelines:** Different river conditions and adjacencies require site-specific responses; yet, there is also a need to establish guidelines that tie the river’s experience together as a whole. The city can take the next step of creating a riverfront master plan or design guidelines document that outlines recommendations for the urban, transitional, and anchor sites based on their characteristics and potentials.



New trails, water access, and nature play at a future park at Butterworth site create an waterfront anchor in the southwest neighborhoods and connections to existing regional natural resources along the Grand River.

- » **Improve existing riverfront parks:** As part of an overall vision of a connected system of riverfront parks, existing park spaces along the Grand River should be improved to provide additional opportunities for water access, water-based recreation (kayaking, canoeing, fishing), and ecological restoration and naturalization along the river’s edge.
- » **Envision a New Park for the Southwest Neighborhood:** Butterworth site, a capped former landfill, is undeveloped today, but has the potential to be a large anchor for the south end of the city. Through this process, it has been re-imagined as a nature-based park experience with trails, environmental education and the potential to host both neighborhood park amenities, water access, and public events. As this park which is located in an industrial area is developed, attention should be paid to improving safe, walkable access.
- » **Create a Riverfront Community and Recreation Hub:** As the river improvements occur, there will be a need to provide more access points, equipment rentals, and additional space that connects the community to this new asset. The master plan envisions a new community facility and public outdoor event space along the river that embraces the water, provides much-needed indoor recreation space, and offers outdoor events and a rental venue for the community. Redevelopment of the Coldbrook site or of the 201 Market site both provide prime opportunities for this new facility; other sites in the city may be considered as well. More detail is provided in the Healthy Community section.

Name/Nombre:  
Email:  
Neighborhood/Barrio: SECA

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids’ parks and recreation system? /  
¿Qué puede imaginar para el sistema de parques y recreación de Grand Rapids?

River access park  
in Roosevelt  
Park or Black  
Hills

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

The opportunities described above strongly reflect the community’s interest in activating the riverfront. Throughout the planning process, community members highlighted the need for more river access, as well as more recreational activities along the river.



# A New Nature-based Park at Butterworth Site



Butterworth today, undeveloped.

- 1 Site art / sculpture
- 2 Solar power generation
- 3 Continuous multi-use trail for walking, hiking, biking, rollerblading
- 4 Adventure playscape
- 5 Riverside trail signage
- 6 Environmental education programs
- 7 Accessible path to the water
- 8 Launch for kayaks and paddle boards, water access
- 9 Ecological info boards
- 10 Riverbank restoration planting
- 11 Water activities (canoe, kayak, paddleboards)



A new river corridor anchor at Butterworth





### 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 of Grand Rapids and Parks and Recreation can work with other city departments 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 of 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.

The map on the following page identifies key proposed river/tributary trail connections that will build off of the existing trail network and connections proposed by the City Bike Facility Plan.



## EXAMPLES: Connected Network



Nine Mile Run, Pittsburgh



Brooklyn Bridge Park, New York City



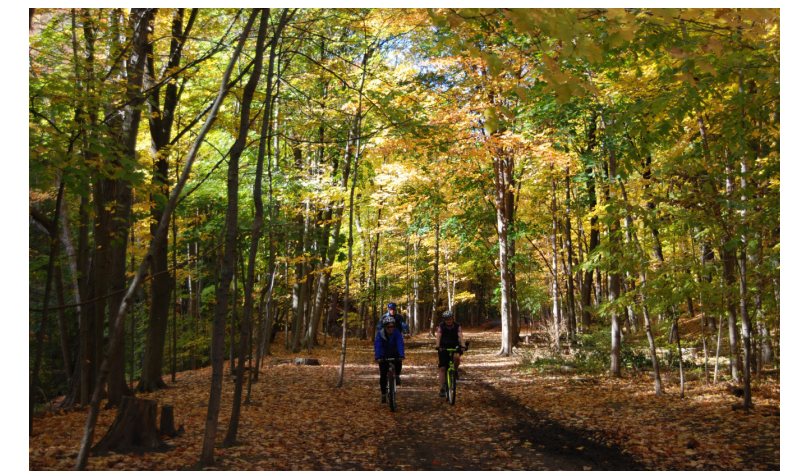
Accessible Water-based Recreation, Michigan



Indianapolis Cultural Trail



Outdoor Adventure Play, Houston



Toronto Ravines



# Existing & Proposed Trail System

## OPPORTUNITIES

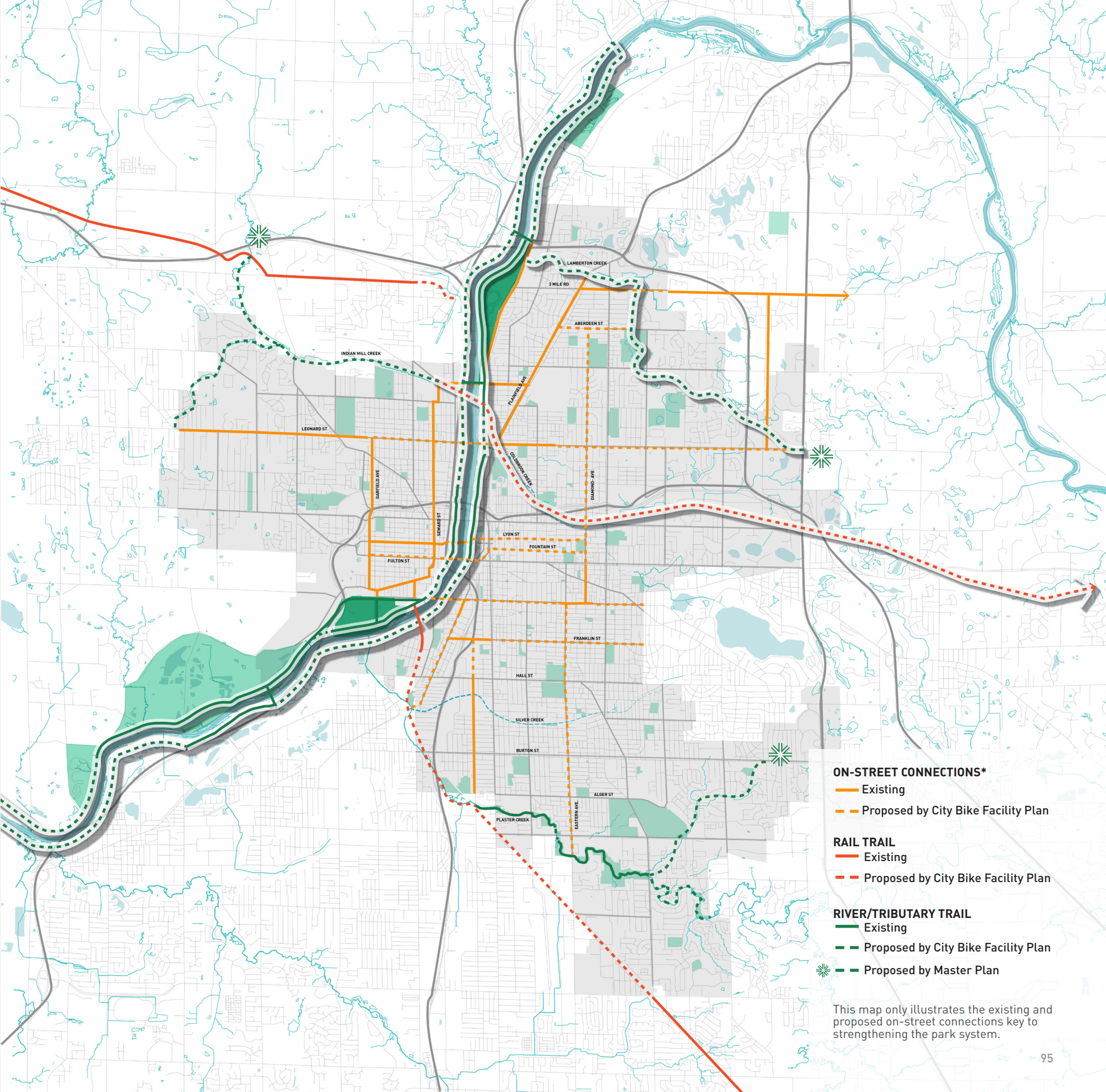
1 Fulton St. NE



2 Lamberton Creek



3 Highland Park







#### 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 recent 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.

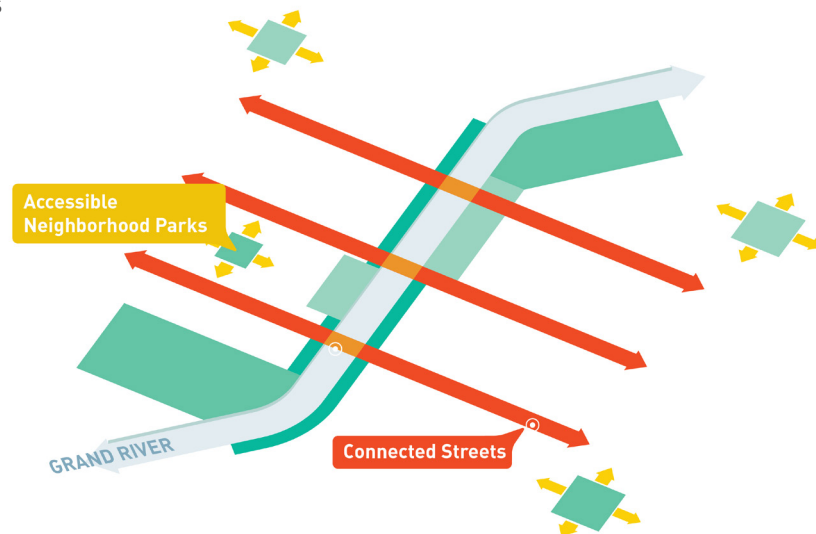


#### Strategy 5

##### 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, the 2016 inventory created an update to the ADA compliance regulations throughout the system. 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 recently approved Grandville Avenue Area Specific Plan, also identify key, small-scale strategies to improve park accessibility within the community.

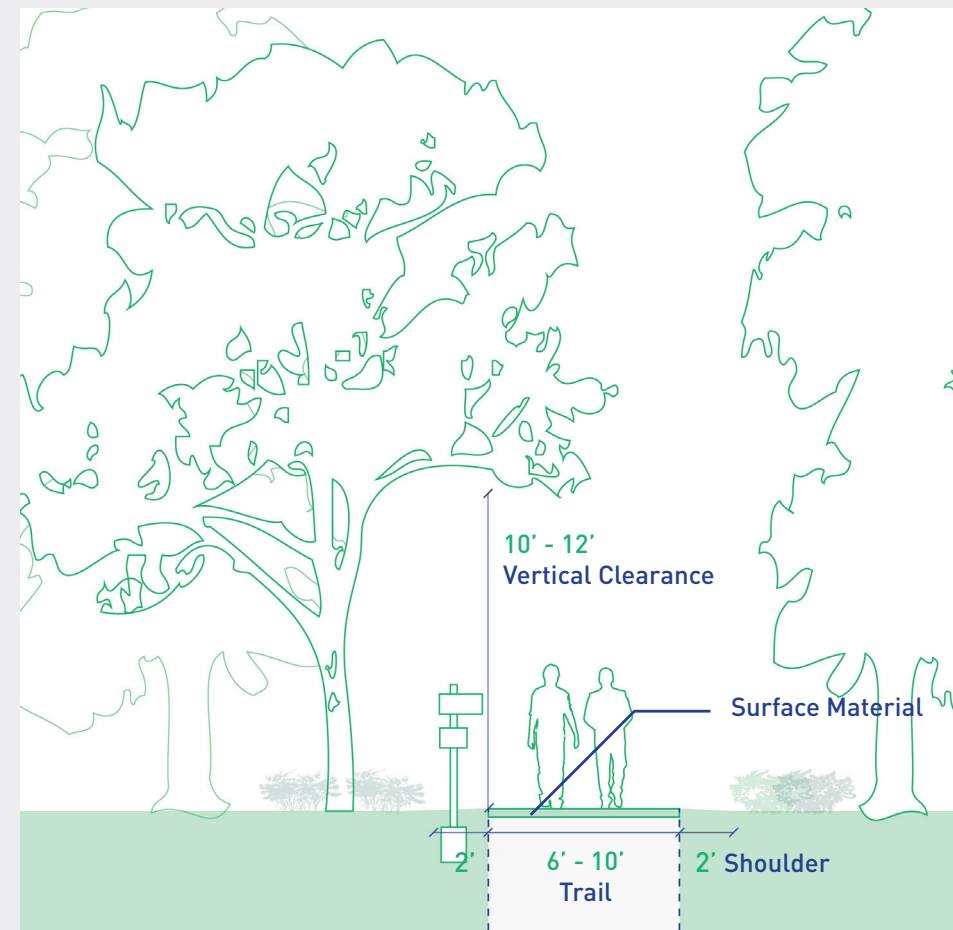


## Accessible Neighborhood Parks



### Trail and Path Entrances

Entrances should clearly exclude cars while welcoming others.



### Trail Standards

Standards for trail design should be established, according to American Trail standards and for universal accessibility and safety.



# CONNECTED NETWORK

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

### Objectives

#### 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.
- » Connect Kent Trails between Millenium Park and river trail at Butterworth site.
  - » Create water access sites and support uses that are integrated into a designated Michigan Water Trail.

#### Grand River Waterfront

- Objective 1** – Increase riverfront access and recreation for the Grand Rapids community through the following opportunities:
- » Design a new nature-based park for the southwest neighborhood at the undeveloped 214-acre Butterworth site that incorporates trails, environmental education, neighborhood park amenities, water access, and public events space
  - » Redevelop the Coldbrook site, the 201 Market 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.
  - » Improve existing riverfront parks through

additional opportunities for water access, water-based recreation, and ecological restoration and naturalization.

- 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.

- Objective 3** - Develop riverfront design guidelines or a riverfront master plan that outlines recommendations for the urban, transitional, and anchor site conditions.

#### Tributaries and Trails

- Objective 1** – Develop park maintenance routines that reflect best practices for ecological restoration and management of tributary landscapes within the parks and on other adjacent land uses.
- Objective 2** – Study the property ownership of currently inaccessible privately-owned areas along Lamberton 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 3** – Develop design and management guidance and informational brochures for non-city-owned areas along the tributaries to ensure continuity and ecological health integrity.

- Objective 4** - Along tributaries within existing parks, create environmental signage educating the community about the site ecology, riparian habitat, and stewardship of these environments.

#### Connected Streets

- Objective 1** – Collaborate and coordinate with other existing city streetscape projects, such as the Vital Streets Plan, to promote walkable neighborhoods, specifically along:
- » 3 Mile Road
  - » Knapp Street
  - » Leonard Street
  - » Fulton Street
  - » Franklin Street
  - » Burton Street (east-west connections)
  - » Covell Avenue
  - » Diamond Avenue (north-south connections)

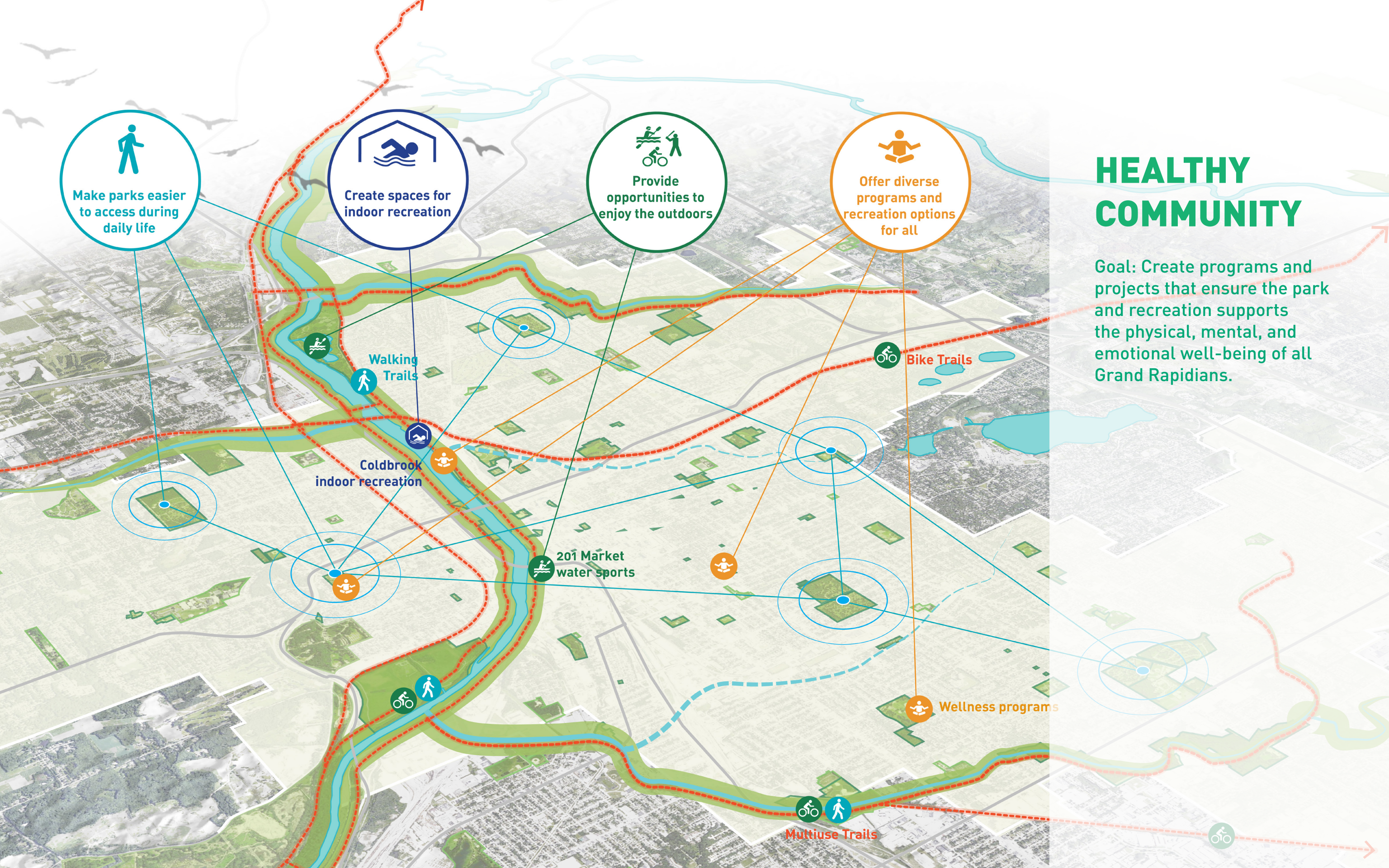
- Objective 2** – Work with other city departments to incorporate the following elements into future street improvements that support walkability to parks and environmental management:

- » 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

Bike Trails

Coldbrook indoor recreation

201 Market water sports

Wellness programs

Multiuse Trails



In Grand Rapids, health and wellness are embodied in the Department’s strategic mission and core values.

Across the nation, communities are struggling with a health and wellness epidemic. Park and recreation agencies are 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.

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, a “Connecting Children with Nature” grant and the existing partnership with Grand Rapids Public Schools form a foundation for greater programmatic and educational partnerships. With this strong support, the city’s park and recreation system will continue to advance its mission to participate in the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of all Grand Rapidsians.

## Strategies for a Healthy Community



### INCREASING ACCESS

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



### 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 recreation opportunities.



### RECREATION OFFERINGS FOR ALL AGES AND ABILITIES

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



### 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 the city's 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, there are several missing trail links on both east and west sides that could be developed to create a continuous path. 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.



### 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; survey responses and other forms of community feedback indicated that there is high demand for adult and youth fitness and wellness classes. Based on the ETC Institute's Priority Investment rating, the Department should focus on growing adult fitness/wellness, nature/environmental education programs, adult continuing education programs, and senior programs.

**Active Adults:** As the population ages, the Department should continue to grow programs for older adults. Currently, programs are offered for adults aged 50+ on a limited basis. The survey indicated that the third and fourth most important program areas to invest in include general adult education programs and senior programs.

Most agencies are evolving toward offering programs for two separate age groups, as the recreation needs of a 50 year old are very different than the needs of an 80 year old. Furthermore, 50 year olds do not consider themselves as seniors. Many agencies offer active adult programs for individuals age 55+ through age 69, while targeting senior programs to individuals aged 70 or more.

Many times when departments begin to offer programs for active adults, they experience disappointment with few registrations. It takes time to build a brand and image for active adult programs. To increase participation of active adults, the Department should create a task force, or launch group, to help determine program ideas and connect to the community. In addition, marketing specifically to this age group may result in increased interest.

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



Inclusive play at Harper's Playground, Portland



Outdoor fitness classes, Tampa

Name/Nombre: _____ Email: _____ Neighborhood/Barrio: _____	
What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system? / ¿Qué puede imaginar para el sistema de parques y recreación de Grand Rapids?  More activities + programs for seniors (speakers, community events, + recreation)	To: <b>Karie M. Enriquez</b> Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept 201 Market Ave SW Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Community feedback indicated a need for more senior and active adult recreation opportunities



RECREATION PROGRAMS TO GROW

AREA	COMMUNITY IDEAS
Adult and youth fitness	Programs in the “introductory” and “growth” stages include: Indoor cycling Hapkido Yoga Youth dance Gymnastics / tumbling
Outdoor recreation	Kayaking Canoeing Climbing Biking
Environmental and outdoor education	Natural science programs Community gardening program Team building course Summer camps Programs related to sustainable practices
Winter programs	Ice skating Sledding Cross country skiing Fat tire biking Snowshoeing Winter outdoor festivals
Special events	Food oriented events, such as Taste of Grand Rapids Road races, biathlons, triathlons Arts festivals Ethnic festivals Winter festivals Holiday based events Green/environmental events Fitness related events
Other	Senior programs Adult continuing education Early childhood Before/after school Teen programs Day camps

**Therapeutic Recreation and 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. Therapeutic Recreation services can be provided in several ways: providing programs designed exclusively for people with disability characteristics or inclusion support services to support participation in typical recreation programming by individuals with disabilities. Both levels of service are important in meeting the various interests of individuals with disabilities in Grand Rapids.

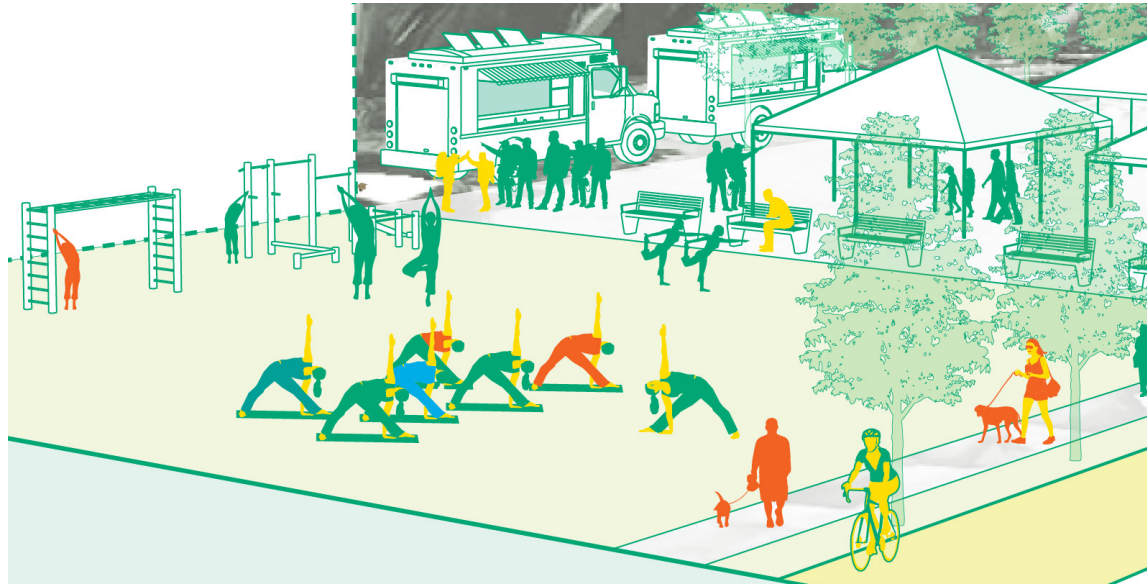
Inclusion should happen in all programs provided by the department for all ages and interests. To effectively provide both types of services, a specially trained staff person in the area of Therapeutic Recreation is necessary. The creation of programs requires a specific skill set. That same skill set is also essential in training and supervising staff that are providing inclusion support services. A city the size of Grand Rapids should provide appropriately educated and trained full time programmatic staff for these services. If additional seasonal or part time staffing is needed, partnerships should be considered. 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.

**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 and targeted advertisements can be used to increase overall awareness of the Department’s offerings within this community. 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 recreation and gathering space at a proposed riverfront facility



Quiet enjoyment at Brooklyn Bridge Park



Pittsburgh's actively programmed North Shore



### Strategy 3

#### Outdoor Fitness Opportunities

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 ziplines, rope courses, and dog-friendly workout classes, among others.

**Water-based Recreation:** The Department should also address demand for outdoor recreation, particularly 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 was listed as the fourth most important amenity, after trails, natural and wildlife areas, and picnic areas. Additionally the Priority Investment Rating from the survey shows high priority for indoor fitness and exercise facilities and an indoor running/walking track. Indoor space could be used to develop program space for seniors, which is a programming deficit for the City. Community feedback also indicated a need for more family-oriented programs, such as art, yoga, and pottery classes, that would ideally be located in a communal, indoor space for multigenerational activity.



Although no national standards exist for indoor recreation space, 2.0-2.5 square foot per capita is a useful guideline for Grand Rapids based on a comparison of agencies within cold weather regions. With this metric, Grand Rapids would need approximately 400,000 square feet of indoor space. However, a facility or facilities of this scale is impractical in the short term. Continued use of other organizations' space will need to play an important role in recreation programming. Improving existing indoor spaces, such as the distributed, small neighborhood facilities, is

also recommended to fulfill the indoor space requirement. In addition, many park systems throughout the United States are using their parks as programming space, which is a strategy for Grand Rapids when weather allows.

**Future Citywide Indoor Facility:** Ultimately, in order to fulfill the need, the Department should consider developing two indoor facilities of each approximately 100,000 square feet. Developing indoor facilities is a long term goal for the Department as the space will take years to develop. One center could be built

on the Coldbrook site given that a location near downtown would be an optimal way of attracting not only residents, but visitors to the City as well. Pending the success of the first recreation facility, a second center could be included as part of the future 201 Market Street redevelopment. Both of these sites would benefit from flexible outdoor/indoor event space and be able to address the high level of need for events such as community concerts and open mic nights, among others.

The development of indoor space requires an extensive amount of groundwork and comprehensive planning. The process involves connecting with the community to determine the specific need, asking residents what amenities they would like to see, cost recovery goals, partnership opportunities, and financial projections of expense and revenue as well as capital investment. Cost recovery for the building will depend on selected program spaces. Typically, community recreation centers include amenities such as an indoor track, group exercise space, fitness center, multi-purpose classrooms, and a gymnasium. Many centers also include indoor aquatics, but the inclusion of an indoor pool significantly increases the required operating subsidy and may be covered by other providers in the community.

Once feasibility and a more detailed strategy is developed, the Department – in partnership with philanthropic and civic partners – may then undertake a major capital fundraising campaign for the design and construction, ideally in conjunction with design and site planning for the riverfront park space at its doorstep. To reduce cash-flow burdens on the Department, the facility may be developed through a public-private partnership with a private development entity and/or the Downtown Development Authority, as has been done successfully with other civic projects in the city.

In the short- and medium-term, the Department may creatively address community need for indoor space and programs by strengthening partnerships with entities such as GRPS, YMCA, and GRCC (in the form of indoor space sharing or even co-development of spaces).



Recreation and Library Facility Partnership, Phoenix

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.

### Objectives

#### 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** – Evaluate feasibility of potential easements 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)
  - » Coldbrook Street (northern end of Canal Street Park) to Ann Street (east side)
- Objective 3** – Evaluate design and cost feasibility of a rail trail within the right-of-way of the active Grand Rapids Eastern (GRE) Railroad.
- Objective 4** – Grow new partnerships with local institutions, organizations, and commercial businesses to increase provision of recreation services and facility space.

#### Recreation Offerings for All Ages and Abilities

- Objective 1** – Develop Therapeutic Recreation programs and Inclusion Support Services
- Objective 2** – Hire a specially trained staff person or consider alternative partnerships to provide required support for specialized recreation offerings, such as inclusive/therapeutic recreation.
- Objective 3** – 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 4** – Create a citizen’s coalition to generate program ideas and increase overall active adult participation.
- Objective 5** – Create an inclusive universally accessible playground in one of the city’s most highly utilized community or regional parks while strategizing on a more robust approach to delivering inclusive play opportunities across the city.
- Objective 6** – Strategically advertise and locate programs to attract a multi-cultural audience, primarily the city’s African American and Hispanic populations. One potential opportunity includes hiring a Hispanic community engagement staff person.

#### 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
- Objective 2** – Coordinate with community partners and seek opportunities to collaborate on various programming recommendations.

#### 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 rent vacant retail or other spaces for additional program or community space.
- Objective 4** – Create more flexible spaces for outdoor programming, particularly at larger regional- and community-scale parks such as Riverside and Garfield parks.
- Objective 5** – Undertake a study to examine the feasibility and detailed program needs for a centralized indoor facility. The study will confirm or refine the recommendations to develop two indoor facilities (approximately 100,000 square feet each) with amenities such as an indoor track, group exercise space, fitness center, multi-purpose classrooms, and gymnasium. Potential sites include both the Coldbrook site and the 201 Market Street site.





# 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. Beyond 2020, 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

The current parks millage, approved in 2014, provides approximately \$4,000,000 per year in dedicated property millage for improvements to city parks, pools, and playgrounds. The seven-year millage for 0.98 mills expires in June 2020. The millage funding allowed for important improvements to neighborhood amenities across the city, implemented in ongoing park improvement projects as well as extending swimming pool operations. These improvements have been developed as part of an extensive stakeholder engagement process and are informed by the Asset Management inventory conducted in 2014.

In 2014, the City conducted an Asset Management inventory on all park spaces. The Department uses the asset management database to determine high priority (critical deficiency) projects that address failure of equipment/amenities, advanced deterioration, and amenities that fail to meet a legislated requirement. The millage projects 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.

The ongoing park millage improvements are an ideal opportunity to begin implementing many of the master plan’s recommendations for neighborhood-based improvements. The latest round of 2017 millage improvements, at Aberdeen Park, Alexander Park, Ball Perkins Park, and Huff Park, already begin to incorporate many of them, including:

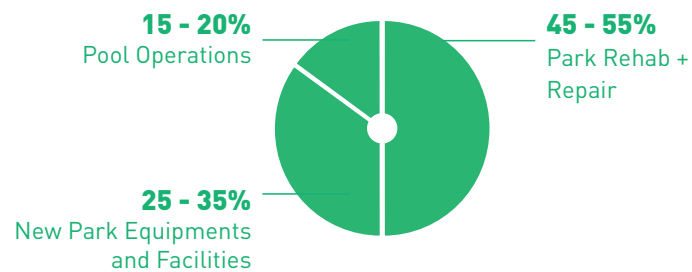
Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Neighborhood: West Grand

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids’ parks and recreation system?

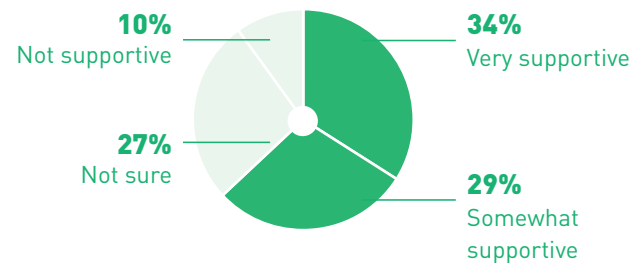
*My wish:  
Playgrounds  
to be cleaned up &  
checked for safety.*

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Many communities members expressed a desire for the Department to address deferred maintenance in the park system. Overall, better maintenance for the existing parks is one of the highest community priorities during the community engagement process.



Breakdown of the allocation of the 2014-2020 millage



Level of support for a renewal of the 2014-2020 parks millage, based on results from the statistically valid survey.



Recent millage projects included elements like rain gardens with educational signage (Roosevelt Park) and new shelters (Westtown Common)

- » Natural areas with reduced mowing
- » Improved gateway signage
- » Improved pedestrian accessibility
- » Accessible walking paths
- » Signage for trail wayfinding and tree identification

While the recent maintenance projects have made progress, additional work remains. Top priority sites for maintenance include those identified in the Department’s Asset Management System; with conditions rated as “fair” to “poor” in the master plan inventory; with limited ADA compliance; and considered by the community to be top priorities. Examples of these parks include:

- » Nagold Park
- » Eastern Park
- » Lexington Park
- » Belknap Park
- » Huff Park\*
- » Clemente Park\*

Of these, several parks, including Huff\* and Clemente\*, are already slated to receive millage upgrades. It should be noted that the current slate of millage projects focus on addressing the most critical maintenance gaps. Future improvement projects may revisit these parks to bring their condition from “good” to “excellent”.



## Strategy 2

### New Investments and Amenities

Community outreach revealed a desire for new innovations and programs. 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:

#### 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. Lookout and Heartside Parks have been identified as potential locations for skate parks and boulder/climbing walls and the future Coldbrook and 201 Market sites are good candidate sites that will greatly benefit from the draw of these “destination” type amenities.

**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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Neighborhood: Ada Township

What can you imagine for Grand Rapids' parks and recreation system?

• Nature trails  
• Bird Houses  
• Dog Parks  
• Park w/ Art Sculptures  
• Lights (string clear) on trees along streets.

To: **Karie M. Enriquez**  
Grand Rapids Parks & Rec Dept  
201 Market Ave SW  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503

During the engagement process, the community expressed desire for a range of new and innovative park amenities.

community-scaled parks, or trails located along the tributary zone that form part of a larger city-wide network. Parks in these categories include Huff, Belknap, Garfield, MLK, Ken-O-Sha, Richmond Parks, and as yet undeveloped Butterworth Site.

**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.

**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 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.

## EXAMPLE: Expanding Ecology, Program, and Identity



Floodable terraced landscape in Washington D.C.



Berks County, PA Department of Parks and Recreation low-mow practices



Creative shade structure in Los Angeles, CA



Union Street urban orchard in London, England



Department of Parks and Recreation cross-country ski classes in Madison, WI



An outdoor classroom in Carlow, Ireland





### Strategy 3

#### Acquisition of New Land

The Department should carefully balance the acquisition of additional park land with its ability to maintain and upgrade existing assets. While Grand Rapids is slightly below the national median of comparable cities in terms of accessible park acreage per capita, increases in park acreage will also create additional maintenance needs that the Department is not necessarily positioned to meet. By coordinating with the Planning Department, Community Development Department, and local economic development agencies, the Department can strategically focus any acquisition of additional park land on one of the three strategic goals:

**Increase the proportion of the population within a 10-minute walk of a park in under-served and high-need areas:** These areas include parts of Roosevelt Park, the western side of Garfield Park, Ridgemoor, Grandville, and Northeast. The Department has recently made acquisitions at Raspberry Field and Ottawa Hills, addressing deficiencies in park access in those areas.

**Anticipate growth:** Several areas with relatively poor access to parks are slated for significant future growth according to the GR Forward plan. These include the areas south of downtown (particularly south of US-131) and the Near West Side, although the former will benefit from future parks investment in the 201 Market Site.

**Connect the system:** The Department will need to engage in strategic land acquisition with an eye towards a future connected system of river trails and parks. While the precise scope of land acquisition needs to be determined in more detailed, area-specific feasibility studies (and is to a certain extent opportunistic), the Department should prioritize acquiring small neighborhood-scaled parks (1 acre to 5 acres). Parks of this size received a high community investment priority rating in the statistically valid survey.

## PILOT PLACEMAKING

Pilot interventions 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, play equipment, programming, and simple amenities such as food trucks can make a big difference in activating places and generating identity through public use. In light of the anticipated development of future capital projects along the River at the Coldbrook Site, the Monroe North Site, 201 Market, and the Butterworth Site, these pilot interventions are especially appropriate sites to test ideas in the short-term.

#### Potential opportunities include:

- » Test out low-cost outdoor adventure play area at the Clemente, Huff, or Ken-O-Sha Park, with potential private partners.
- » Create a pilot park space at Coldbrook and Monroe North sites with seating, food trucks and other amenities.
- » Introduce a rotating public art program at Riverside Park, Ah-Nab-Awen Park, and the Coldbrook site.
- » Install interpretive signage along trails at Huff Park or Ball Perkins Park.
- » Test neighborhood-based agricultural and natural education programs at MLK Park or Nagold Park.
- » Create a signage campaign to direct people to parks from their neighborhoods, or to create a walking loop between parks.
- » Implement a campaign to tell the story of the ecological zones in GR parks, including educational signage.
- » Plant a small patch of native plant communities of the ecological zone near the entrance signage of each park to strengthen their identities and help people understand the different ecological zones.





# A Toolkit for Grand Rapid’s Parks

The Neighborhood Investments strategy creates a “toolkit” of design and programming improvements for Grand Rapids’ parks and facilities. It classifies parks and open spaces by their ecological zones, park type/function, and the adjacent area’s community need. Based on the analysis, recreation trends, and community feedback, improvements and strategies are recommended.

## Role of Community Input

Community input is an important aspect of the Neighborhood Investments vision strategy. Currently, stakeholder input is already a key process in the parks millage improvement projects. The “toolkit” of design and programming improvements recommended herein should be seen as a conversation starter around which stakeholders can form a creative consensus based on their unique needs. Grand Rapids has many park assets, but they often lack identity and a strong “sense of place.” 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. In Dallas, the park system creates \$119M of “park premium” due to the enhanced value of existing real estate as a consequence of the existence of an adjacent park. Fifty percent of this value comes from neighborhood parks. Programmed parks create much higher value than un-programmed parks.

## HOW TO USE THE TOOLKIT

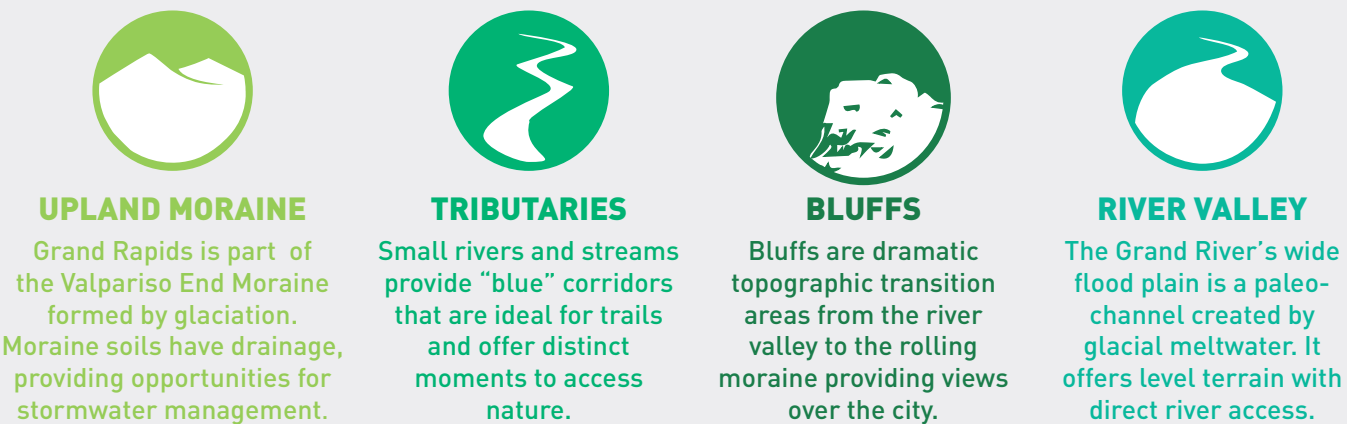
### 1. Determine your Park Type

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



### 2. Identify your park’s Ecological Zone

Grand Rapids is home to four Ecological Zones which result from varied topographic, hydrological conditions, and native vegetation communities.



### 3. Consider potential Improvement Strategies

Based on the park type and ecological zone, consider potential improvement opportunities, including these three categories.





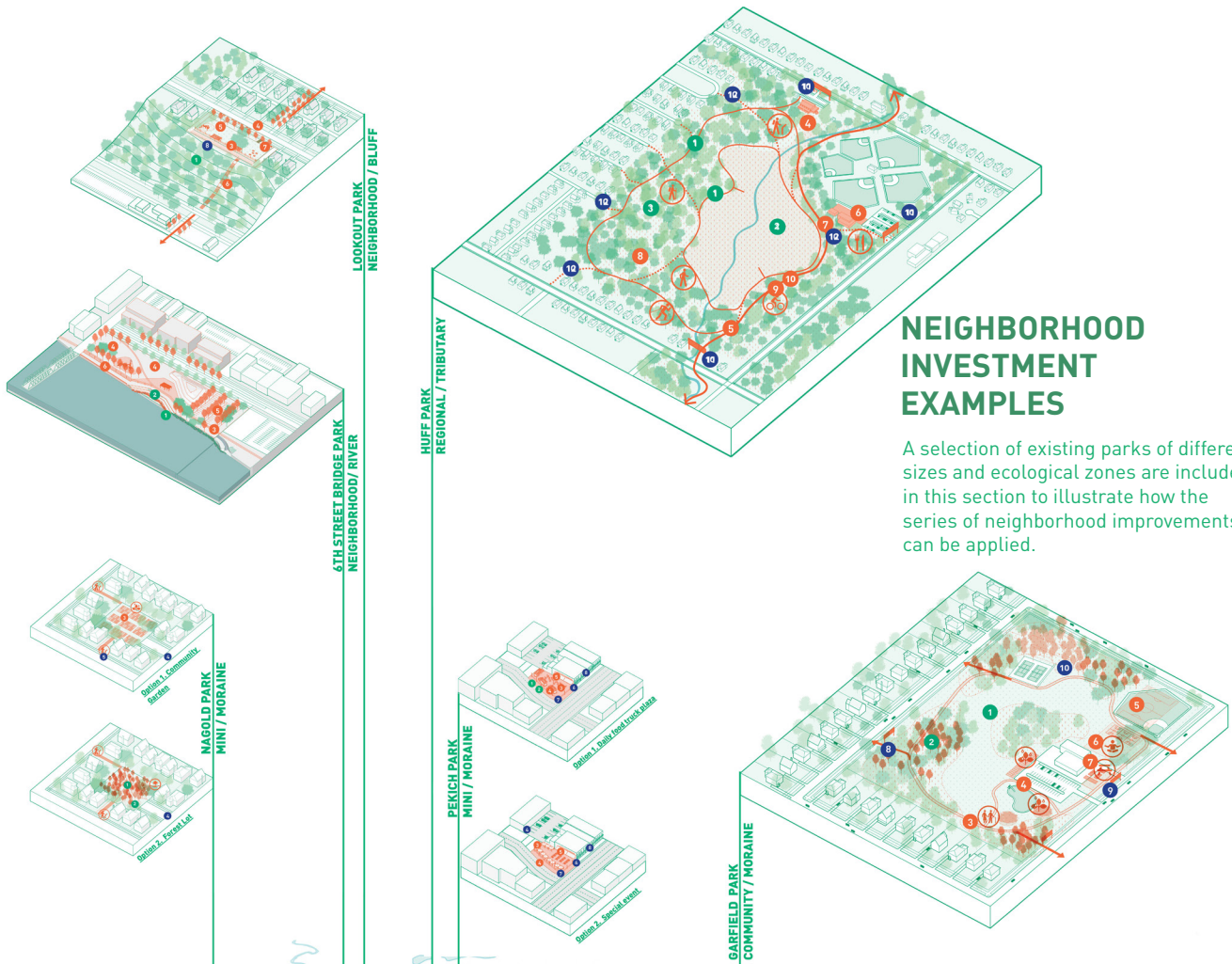
Applying the Toolkit

A selection of existing parks of different sizes and ecological zones illustrate how the Neighborhood Investments will be applied to transform Grand Rapids’ parks into vibrant community amenities with strong ecological and programmatic identities. Huff Park is representative of Regional and Tributary Parks. Garfield Park represents Community and Moraine Parks. Lookout Park represents the Bluff condition and Sixth Street Bridge Park represents the River Valley condition, both

at a Neighborhood Park Scale. Pekich Park and Nagold Park are both Mini Parks within the Moraine condition. Each one of these selected example parks is illustrated with existing conditions and challenges, community recommendations, applicable neighborhood improvements, and relevant precedent examples that help envision how they could be improved and diversified.

Selected Example Parks

Example	Park Type	Ecology
Huff Park	Regional	Tributary
Garfield Park	Community	Upland Moraine
Lookout Park	Neighborhood	Bluffs
6th Street Bridge Park	Neighborhood	River Valley
Pekich Park	Mini	Upland Moraine
Nagold Park	Mini	River Valley



NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENT EXAMPLES

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





EXAMPLE:  
REGIONAL PARK + TRIBUTARY  
Huff Park

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » Boardwalk and trails cross through wetland habitat and are difficult to maintain; however, have been recently upgraded by the Department.
- » There is an ecologically sensitive tributary habitat area.
- » Active recreation areas could benefit from more services, amenities, or concessions.
- » There is potential to improve arrival experience and signage.
- » Better connections to neighborhood are needed.

WHAT WE HEARD

- “True park corridors running through the city and connecting to rural areas”
- “Walking paths, nonpaved trails walkable in the winter, and a nature playscape!”
- “Label the trees!”
- “A bike trail that connects the entire city!”

POSSIBLE INVESTMENTS

ECOLOGY

Preserve intact continuous sensitive habitat areas, and provide access through multiple loop trails along the perimeter

- 1 Fast and slow perimeter trails around wetland and woods
- 2 Preserve large habitat zones, restore streams and wetlands
- 3 Tree identification signage

PROGRAM & RECREATION

Amplify the difference between natural areas and active recreation, provide variety of experiences

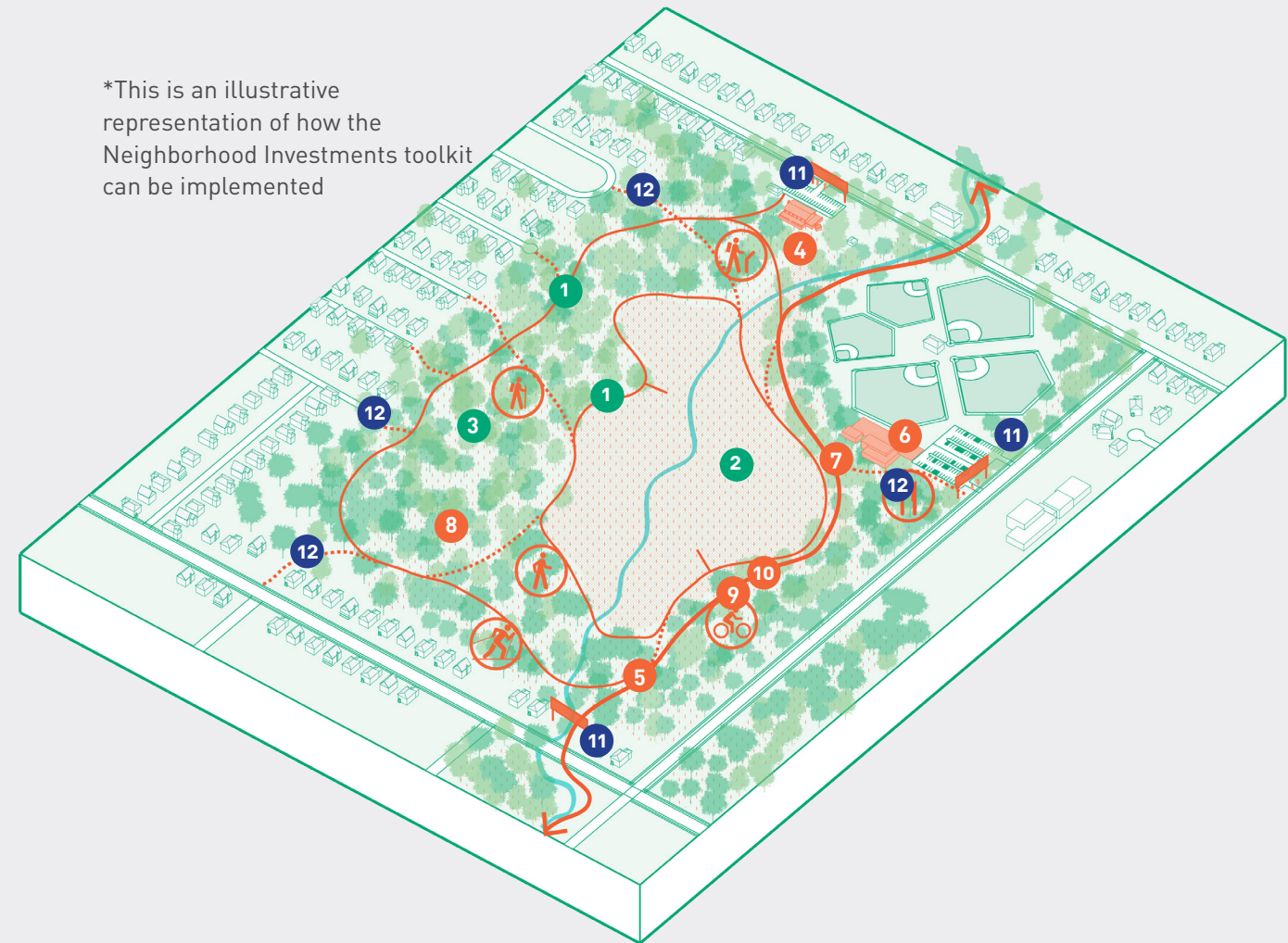
- 4 Nature hub with events pavilion and programs
- 5 Tributary trail connection
- 6 Recreation hub with concessions and services
- 7 Rental bikes
- 8 Wilderness Park - geocaching
- 9 Winter events - cross country skiing
- 10 Trail races

IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE

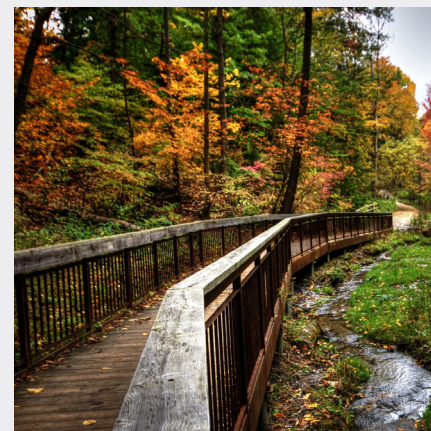
Strengthen the park’s identity and public perception of through signage, wayfinding, arrival experience and better connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods. When possible, create distinct zones for recreation and nature center.

- 11 Gateway signage and arrival experience to signify regional park
- 12 Improve connectivity to neighborhood

\*This is an illustrative representation of how the Neighborhood Investments toolkit can be implemented



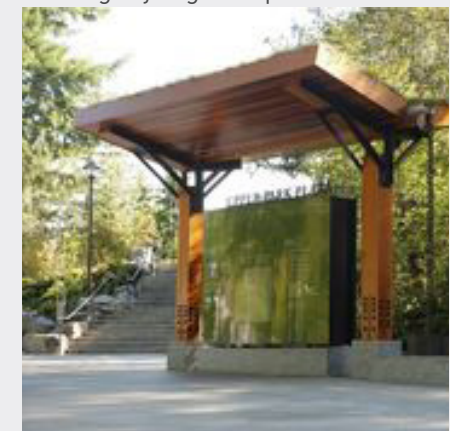
1 Wetland trails



7 Rental bikes



11 Gateway signage to signify regional park





EXAMPLE:

COMMUNITY PARK + UPLAND MORaine

# Garfield Park

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

- » Today, there is little differentiation of park edges and large areas of unprogrammed mowed lawn.
- » Existing, small parking lots impact views and internal park connectivity.
- » There is potential for better physical access to neighborhoods.
- » Circulation system needs more clarity to the adjacent neighborhood.
- » The recreation facility is a key feature, but has limited inside/outside connections and there are scattered single-use fields.

**WHAT WE HEARD**

“Walking paths!”

“Group workout classes with dogs!”

“More community gardens maintained by local youth”

POSSIBLE INVESTMENTS

**ECOLOGY**

Community parks are large enough to showcase diverse ecological conditions. Focus on creating varied character and functions, while reducing maintenance. Upland Moraine parks, with well-drained soil, are good candidates for stormwater management and infiltration features.

- 1 Reduce mowed lawn, add meadows as character zones
- 2 Tree succession program

**PROGRAM & RECREATION**

Community parks serve a broad audience and can provide something for everyone, from active to passive space and activities for different ages and abilities. They are also a great place to focus on meeting unmet demand for adult fitness, environmental education.

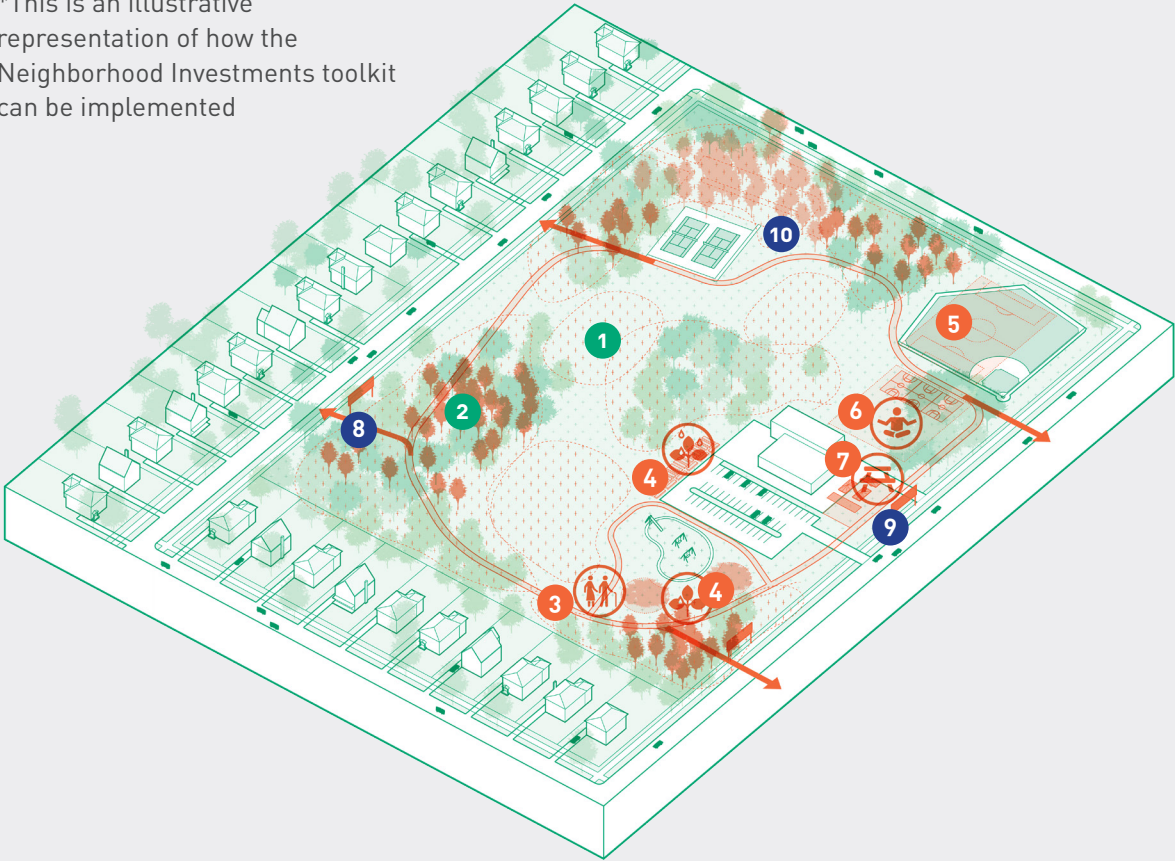
- 3 Universally accessible trail loops for walking, running, and fitness
- 4 Environmental education: bioswales, community gardens etc.
- 5 Multi-purpose fields meet a range of recreation demand
- 6 Meet demand for adult fitness; where indoor spaces are limited, consider outdoor programming
- 7 Picnic and rental areas

**IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE**

Community parks aspire to be true hubs. They need maximum visibility and connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods.

- 8 More neighborhood connections
- 9 Signage, wayfinding, and gateways
- 10 Consolidate small parking areas and introduce stormwater management

\*This is an illustrative representation of how the Neighborhood Investments toolkit can be implemented



1 Low-mow areas



6 Outdoor programming



10 Stormwater management





EXAMPLE:  
NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + BLUFFS  
Lookout Park

EXISTING CONDITIONS

- » Lookout Park has poor street presence and lack of edge definition.
- » Large areas of mowed lawn require high maintenance.
- » There are views over the city and river, but there is inadequate seating to enjoy them and dense vegetation obstructs views.

WHAT WE HEARD

- “Walking paths”
- “Nonpaved trails walkable in the winter”
- “Picnic amenities and more seating in general”
- “Possible boulder climbing components on bluff!”

POSSIBLE INVESTMENTS

ECOLOGY

Parks on bluffs need to address slope stabilization and management of invasive species in order to open up views and access.

- 1 Stabilize slope by restoring meadow grassland species and thinning out invasive understory species to open up views and access
- 2 Reduce mowed lawn

PROGRAM & RECREATION

Neighborhood parks offer iconic views, and need to provided amenities of choices of seating, shade, and light to create comfortable spaces for both quiet daily experiences, and special events.

- 3 Lookout plaza with seating, lighting, and pavilion for shade and events
- 4 Parking at the street or edge of park
- 5 Feature playground taking advantage of view
- 6 Stair or switchback path access down slope to connect to nearby riverside parks
- 7 Open lawn for passive recreation, picnics, and flexible playfields

IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE

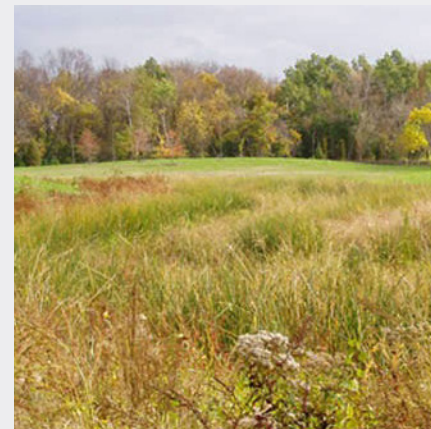
The view is the most important identity generator of bluff parks, and it can be strengthened through iconic shade structures, pavilions, well designed seating and lighting and also regular events like musical performances, if the site allows.

- 8 Open up and frame views over the city and Grand River

\*This is an illustrative representation of how the Neighborhood Investments toolkit can be implemented



1 Stabilize slope and restore native species



3 Lookout plaza



8 Frame Grand River views





EXAMPLE:

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK + RIVER VALLEY

# Sixth Street Bridge Park

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

- » Large, fragmented open green space is underutilized today.
- » Generous parking lots limit areas for active and passive recreation.
- » Continuous hard water's edge lacks water access and provides poor aquatic habitat.
- » A water access for fishing and boat launch make this a popular site.

**WHAT WE HEARD**

"Entertainment activities around the river, e.g. Waterski show."

"Exercise equipment for seniors/adults"

"More recreational activities for families...Like fishing, art classes, yoga, and pottery"

"Boathouse for rowing, canoe, kayak and stand-up paddle at riverside park"

**POSSIBLE INVESTMENTS**

**ECOLOGY**

Neighborhood-scale parks along the river offer opportunities for diversifying water's edge conditions to improve aquatic habitat, and provide floodable landscapes to accept stormwater.

- 1 Diversify river's edge conditions to promote aquatic habitat and promote water access
- 2 Introduce floodable terraced landscape to bring water in

**PROGRAM & RECREATION**

River parks offer opportunities for water access and water sports, creative play with water features, promenades for strolling and sitting along the water, and iconic venues for events such as music or movies in the park.

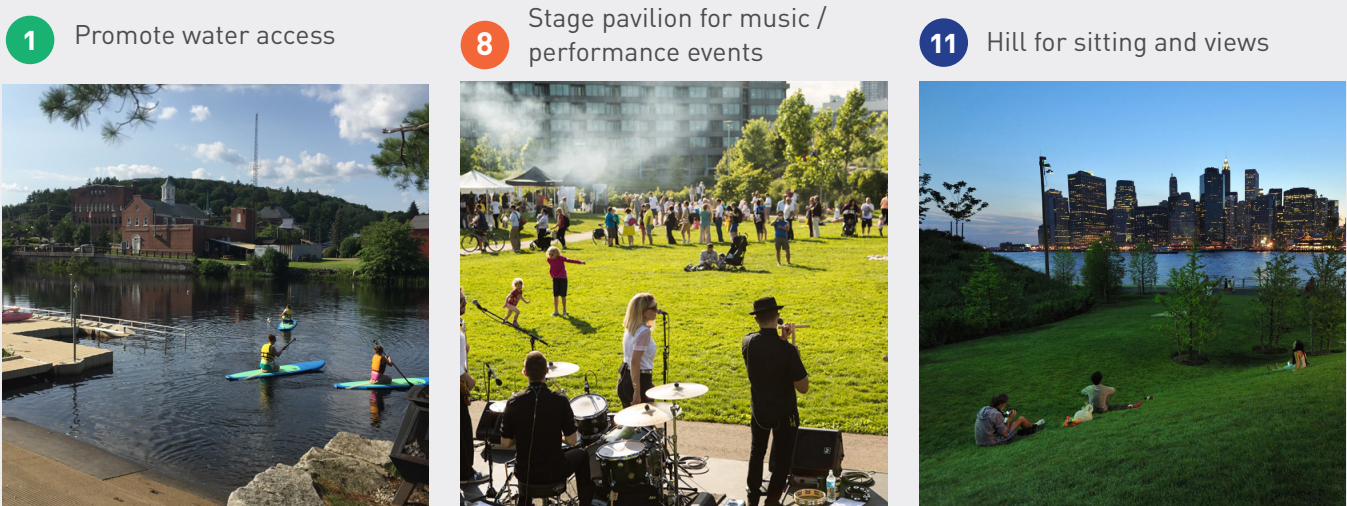
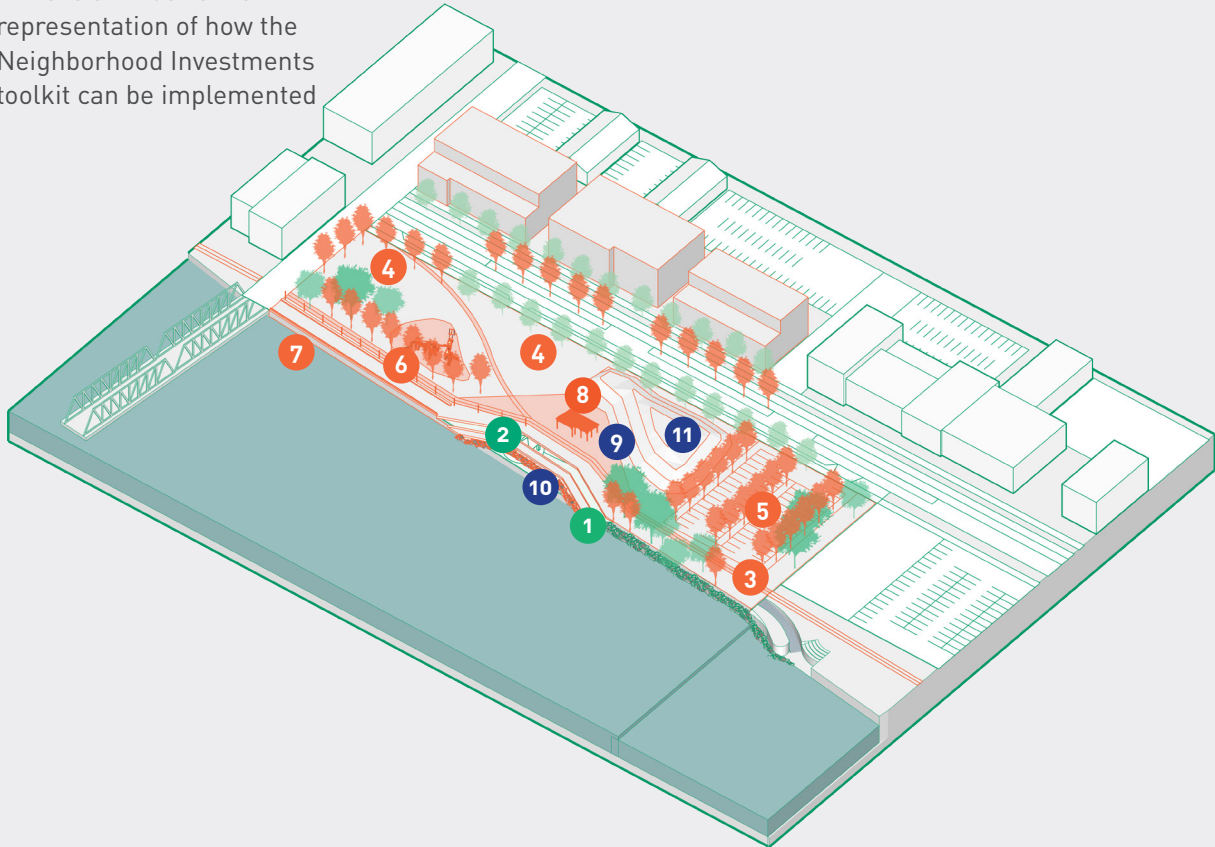
- 3 Continuous riverside multi-use trail
- 4 Open lawn areas for play, passive recreation, and events
- 5 Consolidated landscaped parking lot at one end to make room for more parkland width
- 6 Public promenade with seating and lighting
- 7 Programmed barges with restaurants, pool deck etc.
- 8 Stage pavilion for music / performance events

**IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE**

Neighborhood river parks are iconic as a result of their location and views along the river and proximity to downtown. Their identities could be strengthened and diversified by introducing public art, topography, and associated regular events and performances.

- 9 Water views
- 10 Universally accessible river access
- 11 Hill for sitting and views

\*This is an illustrative representation of how the Neighborhood Investments toolkit can be implemented





EXAMPLE:  
MINI PARK + UPLAND MORaine  
Pekich Park

**EXISTING CONDITIONS**

- » The formal design limits applicable programs.
- » Stepped levels and changes in grade reduce accessibility.
- » More street trees and shade are needed to encourage gathering.

**WHAT WE HEARD**

“Cookouts!”

“Open mic night for young musicians!”

“Bilingual maps!”

“Better access to knowing about events/parks”

POSSIBLE INVESTMENTS

**ECOLOGY**

- Plant street trees to define edge, provide shade over seating and improve microclimate.
- 1 Plant trees along the edge for continuous street canopy, shade, and microclimate
  - 2 Use structural soil or silva cells to improve growing conditions for trees

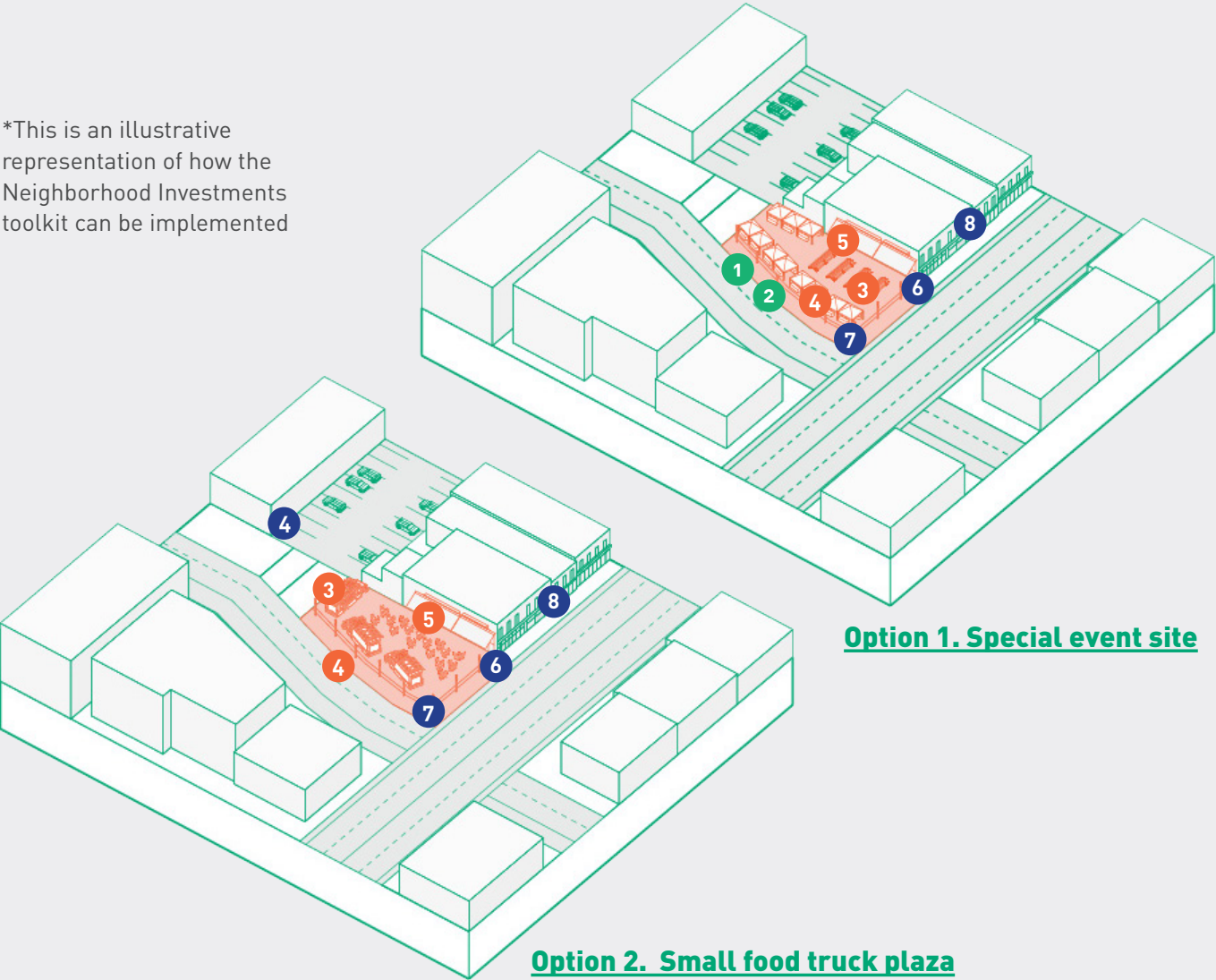
**PROGRAM & RECREATION**

- Introduce flexible pop-up programming like food trucks, farmer’s markets, art & craft fairs, cookouts etc. to activate the space year-round.
- 3 Introduce flexible pop-up programming:
    - » Food Trucks
    - » Farmer’s Markets
    - » Craft Markets
  - 4 Provide shade, seating and lighting to improve comfort and safety
  - 5 Introduce compatible adjacent programs such as cafes and shops to activate space with outdoor patios

**IDENTITY & SENSE OF PLACE**

- Partnerships with community groups and local businesses could be leveraged to manage downtown mini parks. Strengthen identity through public art, signage, and special event programming.
- 6 Improve signage to create strong identity and visibility for parks department
  - 7 Introduce public art and murals to strengthen identity of the park
  - 8 Encourage partnerships with local business associations, institutions and community groups for management and programming

\*This is an illustrative representation of how the Neighborhood Investments toolkit can be implemented



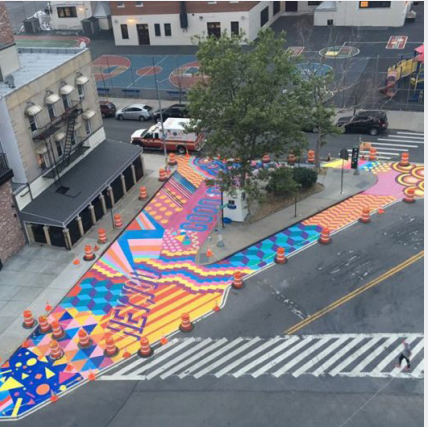
1 Plant trees



3 Pop-up programming



7 Public art





# Environmental Education Signage Campaign

The Grand Rapids Park System could become much more clearly legible and educational to the public through an Environmental Education Signage campaign. A family of signage elements would use colors and icons to characterize each of the parks by the Ecological Zone they belong to and provide information on the historical landscape of that zone. This would help the public to get a clear sense of the character of the park type and to imagine the landscape that preceded development.


The educational signage system could communicate the underlying geology,


hydrology, and ecology of Grand Rapids landscape to the public, making them more interested in its preservation through the Parks System. The signage would also help more clearly communicate the diversity of Grand Rapids parks and create the sense of an integrated park system.




The signage campaign could be done provisionally at first as a pilot project and then implemented everywhere more permanently if successful. It could also include associated directional signage on local streets to facilitate access to the parks and expand their perceived presence in the community.

Lookout Park  
Bluffs Ecological Zone





**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

**GRAND RIVER VALLEY**  
**Characteristics**  
The wide, low-lying flood plain 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  
**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  
**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

GR PARKS SYSTEM

Park Entrance Signage  
(L) Back, (R) Front



BLUFFE PARK

Lookout Park

**1950**

**2016**

**LOOKOUT PARK HISTORY**

**LOOKOUT PARK - PRESENT AND FUTURE**

HOURS: 6AM-12AM

PROGRAMMING:

Music Afternoons (Third Thursday of every month at Sunset)

Picnic Sundays - First Sunday of every month 11-5pm

Environmental Storytime - Last Saturday of every month 10am

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:

Grand Rapids Bluffs are perhaps the most distinctive element of the landscape. They offer dominating views over the river valley and downtown while providing scenic areas for strolling or picnics. They are characterized by Black Oak Barrens plant communities and include White Pine and Black Oak.

Historical + Environmental Signage



Plant Community Info Signage

BLUFF



Lookout Park

0.5 mi 

Neighborhood Directional Signage



# NEIGHBORHOOD INVESTMENTS

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

### Objectives

#### 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, enhanced views, and special activity use, into regular park improvements. Seek grants to support art initiatives and nurture potential mission-driven collaborations with local art organizations.

**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, outdoor adventure opportunities, 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.







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.



Despite the much-needed additional funding from the property tax millage (much of which is restricted to capital improvements), the Department still faces significant resource constraints. While they are achieving “a lot with a little,” a more sustainable strategy is needed for the future.

In 2016, per capita expenditure on parks was approximately \$32, significantly below the median level of \$83 per capita in comparable cities in the NRPA database. Likewise, full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing per 10,000 residents was 4.88, compared with the NRPA median benchmark of 7.90. Critical gaps exist in recreation, marketing, and maintenance staff.

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.

Parks spending per capita		Earned revenue per capita	
			
Grand Rapids	\$32	Grand Rapids	\$2.07
Peer cities	\$83	Peer cities	\$17.00

## 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 improve the sustainability of the Department while maintenance regimes 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 implement educational and recreational programs.





## Strategy 1

### Revenue Generation

#### Increasing Program Participation

Program revenue in the Department has shown a declining trend over the past five years and there are several initiatives the Department can undertake to reverse this decline and increase program revenue:

- » Build the number of professional recreation staff positions. The Department is currently in the process of adding one full-time position. Additional positions will be needed to grow therapeutic recreation and active adult/senior programs.
- » Increase marketing and communications efforts to raise awareness of its program offerings by hiring dedicated staff or interns, re-creating a dedicated program guide, and increasing its web and social media presence.
- » 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. The recently added recreation program position is a starting point for these potential program expansions.

An ongoing constraint for increased program participation is the lack of program space. While the construction of an indoor facility (at the Coldbrook site, 201 Market Street, or another site) should remain a priority, in the near-term the Department can increase



Increased program offerings, Oxford, Ohio



Music and special events, Toronto



Sports events

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 and Garfield Parks, 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, MLK, and Garfield Parks.

#### Special Events

Special events bring another potential source of revenue in the form of increased concession sales, rental income, and income from corporate sponsorship and naming rights. The success of Movies in the Park at Ah-Nab-Awen Park and the annual tree lighting ceremony at Rosa Parks Circle demonstrate the potential benefits of hosting special events at central, highly-visible parks. The Department should pursue additional opportunities, such as races and other sports events, music events, and seasonal festivals, tying in as much as possible with existing popular events such as ArtPrize.

Staff capacity and dedicated event spaces are two areas 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 at the center of a signature facility at either the Coldbrook Site or 201 Market. Recently, the Office of Special Events rejoined the Parks and Recreation Department, opening the door to growth and greater mission alignment.

#### 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 at the Coldbrook Site and 201 Market. 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 maintains significant acreage without adequate resources for maintenance. Yet, compared to similarly-sized agencies in the NRPA database, the Department performs its maintenance with only about 30% of the operating expenses per capita and about 50% of the operating expenses per acre of parkland. As a result, lack of maintenance has often been described as a priority concern during the community engagement process.

Closing the maintenance resources gap and increasing capacity is clearly the most important priority. Given finite resources and growing park acreage, the Department must also find creative ways to address needs by increasing efficiency, seeking partnerships, and using low-maintenance landscape strategies.

Increase Staff Capacity

Grand Rapids is already undertaking a variety of strategies to streamline maintenance processes and improve efficiency, and the master plan outlines additional ideas. However, improving the maintenance of the park system will still require the addition of more maintenance staff. Of the 35 full-time Department 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, a technology staffing and solutions firm. According to NRPA data from 2014, in parks departments comparable to Grand Rapids, each FTE staff is responsible for maintaining 18.3 acres of park land; this staff allocation corresponds to an NRPA level of service standard “C”, corresponding with “acceptable”. The 2011 Matrix Parks Business Plan reached similar conclusions: it recommends 49 FTE staff to maintain Grand Rapids’ developed park land mostly at the “C”, or baseline, level.

Both comparisons point to a need for the Department to grow the size of its maintenance workforce, particularly in light of widespread community feedback for better maintenance across the system, as revealed through this Master Plan, and the Department’s future expansion plans. A recommended distribution of maintenance levels of service, based on where the Department is currently and other typical agencies, would require 78 FTE maintenance staff (potentially split between roughly 1/3 full-time and 2/3 part-time to reflect current ratios), a detailed breakdown of which is below.

% of parkland maintained at level:	2011 Matrix assessment	Recommended	FTE staff required
A	0%	10%	14
B	7.9%	60%	50
C	90.8%	30%	14
D	1.2%	X	0
Recommended staffing level (FTE):			78

Current vs. Recommended Maintenance Levels of Service, and Required Staffing

A maintenance staff of 78 FTE will allow the Department to significantly improve its maintenance standards and keep the majority of the system’s parkland acreage at a “B” level of service.

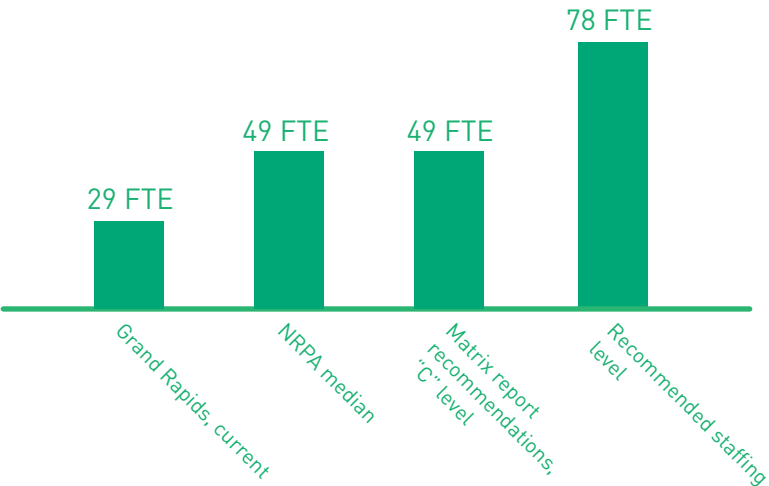
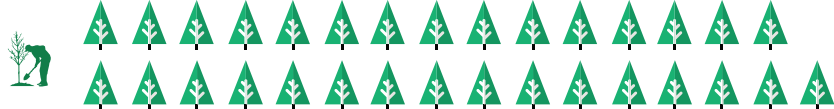
1 maintenance staff (FTE) in comparable cities is responsible for 18.3 acres of parkland

1 maintenance staff (FTE) in Grand Rapids is responsible for 31 acres of parkland.

Maintenance Staffing Responsibilities, Comparable Cities



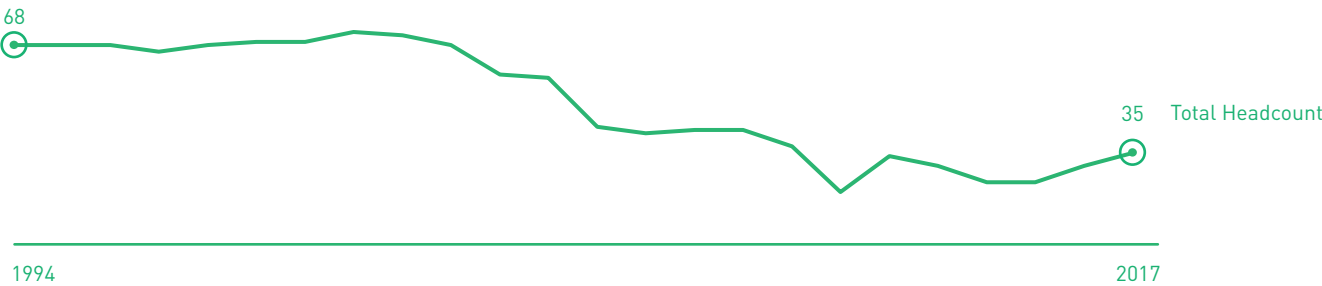
Maintenance Staffing Responsibilities, Grand Rapids



Staff Level Comparisons for Maintenance (excluding cemeteries, golf courses, and forestry) - Grand Rapids vs. national standards vs. recommended target



Department Headcount, 1994 - 2017  
\*Full-time staff only

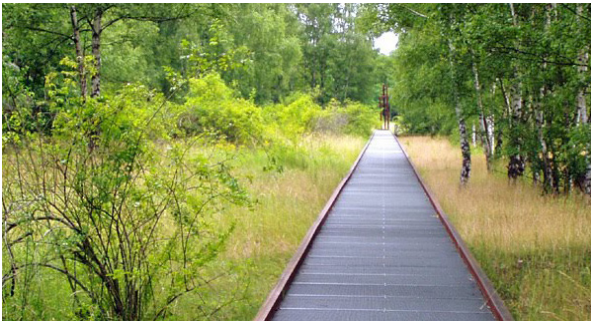


To reach this target, the Department can begin by growing its workforce incrementally, including seasonal/contractual employees to accommodate staffing flexibility during the offseason, and allow for seasonal weekend crew for special events. Additionally, some staff resources can also be augmented with 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.

In combination with staff growth, the Department can continue to develop creative ways to augment and extend the capabilities of existing maintenance resources. Currently, the Department is working toward this goal, but staff resources are limited. Maintenance standards should be established to improve operational efficiency. A Parks Maintenance Manual can clarify standards, work schedules, and athletic field condition assessment and renovation recommendations. A work order system for both preventive and demand maintenance can be instituted 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. A first step will be to



Native meadow



Balance of natural areas and human access



Business Improvement District - Shared Maintenance

develop and implement task lists for monthly, weekly, and daily tasks, as specified in a Parks Maintenance Manual.

Staff Training

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 in order to inform the whole workforce. The Department is currently working to address staff training incrementally, but additional resources would expedite this process. 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 in new maintenance strategies for low- or no-mow lawns, as well as meadow, wetland, and forestry restoration should be implemented for all staff in order 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 should be put in place and data collected regularly to measure 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

Systemwide, the overall maintenance burden could be reduced by shifting appropriate areas to more naturalized zones and prioritizing well-used and amenitized parks that serve the whole city. Within large parks, many transitional areas can be scheduled for less intense mowing. Maintenance burdens can also be decreased through more 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. In addition, implementing design standards for park components and amenities such as benches, lighting, and trash bins, will make maintenance efficient for the staff.



When first implementing a sustainable maintenance strategy, Grand Rapids should plan to conduct training and education about these new landscapes. New skillsets may be needed in restoration ecology techniques, overall awareness of new landscape types, and education among staff and community about their appearance, maintenance, and benefits.

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).



Low-mow area at MLK Park in Buffalo, NY

## EXAMPLE: Landscape Management Practices (Minneapolis)

Many communities have successfully integrated renaturalized landscapes into their sustainable maintenance policy structure. Revered nationally for its beautiful parks and recreation system, Minneapolis, Minnesota is a successful example of a system that has managed care and promoted conversion of underutilized turf into low-maintenance natural zones.

Minneapolis has a three-tiered approach to maintenance of its parks, allowing continued high-intensity maintenance of active sports areas and less intense upkeep of more passive zones. Initiated in 1996, grass or turf in Minneapolis parks’ is maintained through the Parks and Recreation Board’s (MPRB) Maintenance Section’s mowing program. The mowing program divides turf areas into three management standards: athletic field maintenance, general parkland maintenance, and natural area maintenance.

### Athletic Fields

Active athletic fields are maintained on a daily to weekly basis, depending on usage. Grass height will be maintained at a height of 2.5 to 3 inches for designated athletic fields. Types of uses that are maintained on this frequent basis include baseball, softball, football, soccer, and cricket fields, among other actively used spaces.

### General Park Turf Maintenance

General park zones are maintained on a less frequent basis than athletic turf. Grass height can exceed 5” at times but will be cut back to 3” on a regular basis as time and weather allows. This standard is being applied to most of the park system, including neighborhood parks, boulevards and parkways, and active use areas within regional parks.

### Reduced Mowing in Natural Areas

Minneapolis’ park natural areas include parklands that are maintained on an infrequent basis. These areas are located primarily within the regional parks and include some lands within neighborhood parks. A natural area is defined as a site that is converted to prairie grasses. Stormwater ponds and shoreline buffers are managed through a variety of management strategies in collaboration with the Environmental Operations Section of the MPRB.

Goals for these reduced mow areas are to:

- » Maintain park user safety and sight line visibility,
- » Reduce the spread of invasive and problem plant species, and
- » Reduce mowing frequency in erosion prone areas.



**Build Marketing Capacity**

The first task for building marketing support is to create a system-wide marketing plan that outlines strategic approaches to promotions, creating awareness, brand and image, social media approaches, data and analytics, and support for programs. The plan will address marketing functions such as public relations, community engagement, corporate branding and image, corporate sponsorships, liaison to the city manager’s office, and marketing support for agency programs and services through local partnerships.

Unlike many agencies of its size, the Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Department does not have any full-time staff members dedicated to marketing functions. In order to grow participation in programs and services, labor resources should be dedicated to marketing. A similar sized department to Grand Rapids typically has two to three full-time dedicated marketing staff. The Department could initially hire an intern to provide marketing support. The City will receive some level of return on investment for a marketing position, as this will result in increased revenues.

**Program Guide:** Currently, the primary method of Departmental marketing includes a listing of programs in the *We Are GR* quarterly publication. According to the ETC Institute database of over 700 agencies, approximately 53 percent of households find out about their parks and recreation department’s services through a program guide that is typically mailed to households either three or four times a year, demonstrating that program guides are the most important marketing tool for agencies. In comparison, Grand Rapids’ parks and recreation offers are generally listed in the middle of the *We Are GR* publication, which promotes all City services and as a result, only 25 percent of households find out about the Department’s services through the *We Are GR* publication.

Nationally, best practices show that program guides are not only informational tools, but an important way of fostering engagement and outreach. Creating a dedicated program guide will incur additional cost to the Department to the tune of over \$50,000 a year. Nevertheless, 75 percent of households are either very supportive or supportive of a separate program guide for the Department’s programs.

**Translation:** Departments across the nation are also increasingly producing program information in Spanish as well as in English. This is relevant to Grand Rapids given that the percentage of residents of Hispanic origin is anticipated to increase from approximately 29,000 in 2016 to almost 37,000 in 2017.

**Web and Social Media:** Agency websites increasingly are a source of information for parks and recreation services. Approximately 18 percent of residents find out about Grand Rapids programs and services through the City website. This will be an increasingly important promotional tool for the Department. As of now, the content and visual appeal of the site is limited; however, the City has begun the process of re-designing the website. Social media will also become increasingly more important for the Department, as well as customers’ ability to register for courses through their smart phones and tablets. Most agencies use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram extensively to promote their services. Grand Rapids uses social media, but on a more limited basis than other comparable departments. This is a function of not having staff positions dedicated to marketing and social media.





### Strategy 3

#### Extending Capacity through Partnerships

With less than half the number of full-time staff compared to comparable organizations, the Department faces significant constraints, particularly in recreation and marketing. While growing its capacity is one of the long-term objectives of this Master Plan, in the short term, the Department can explore creative partnerships with other organizations to expand capacity for education, outreach, and programming; explore creative space-sharing; and reduce its maintenance and operational responsibilities. Key opportunities include:

##### Grand Rapids Public Schools

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. Additional areas of collaboration include outdoor environmental education programs, creation of outdoor "learning labs" and community gardens in parks, and the joint development of indoor facilities. For example, the city's Connecting Children and Nature grant has allowed the exploration of "green" playgrounds at Burton and Buchanan Elementary schools. Through outdoor educational programming, educators expand on this partnership by bringing

students of all ages outdoors to play and learn outdoors to better understand the natural environment and enhance science and math curricula while also improving overall health and performance.

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 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.

With upcoming bond initiatives by GRPS, the Parks Department can potentially pursue the joint development of indoor exercise and recreation spaces shared between the schools and the neighborhood as an intermediate step towards building a full-fledged indoor recreation facility. If shared space is pursued, the partners should ensure clarity around the goals, access, and long-term use of the space.



Blandford Nature Center



School System



Community Volunteers

##### Downtown Development Authority (DDA)

DDA can provide key support in civic investments, including a future indoor facility and the development of new riverfront parks.

##### Art and Cultural Partners

A city's parks can serve as the democratic space for experiencing and elevating its arts and cultural offerings. Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. (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. 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 underserved communities. With the support of a foundation partner, the Department can build on the city's design legacy as well as DGRI's programming and 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.

##### Educational Programming Partners

Given the demand and trends toward outdoor nature education, the Department can explore potential educational programming



partnerships with the Blandford Nature Center, GRPS, West Michigan Environmental Action Council, and area colleges.

Adult Fitness Operators

The proliferation of boutique fitness and unique exercise experiences is a trend that has brought exercise to the outdoors in every city. While there are many indoor gyms in Grand Rapids, the Department’s parks – particularly those located Downtown – are key locations for expanded outdoor seasonal programming. Outdoor programming helps fitness studios reach new clientele and provide diverse offerings. The Department can reach out to local operators, such as yoga studios, “bootcamp” 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).

Private Sector and Corporate Sponsorship

The Department of Parks and Recreation is seeking innovative opportunities to partner and expand capacity. While it is still an emerging area, potential partnerships with benefits corporations or social impact investors may be another opportunity to align the Department with like-minded organizations and businesses. Community health initiatives, corporate-sponsored events and programs, and maintenance are potential areas to explore in the future as this area grows.

In the near term, the Department should establish sponsorship targets to support general event programming in highest-visitation parks (e.g., Ah-Nab-Awen Park), to be sought from corporate (and other) philanthropic donors. 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. In the intermediate term, the Department can develop a sponsorship development strategy that aligns with its branding and marketing campaign. Key sponsored assets may include season-long sponsorships for certain parks, wifi sponsorship, or naming rights (generally reserved for major capital acquisitions or upgrades).

Volunteer Partnerships

The Department can leverage the enthusiasm of community-based organizations toward ongoing improvement of parks and programming. While currently the Department does not have the internal capacity to support a volunteer program, they should work to build staff support and a network of organized volunteers to support the system going forward. Nationally, parks departments (in the

middle quartile of population) have a median of 350 volunteers annually (with the top 25% of this group having 1,669 volunteers). These volunteers account for a median of 10,564 person-hours of labor. Based on an hourly rate of \$23.76 as estimated by independent sources, volunteer labor can potentially contribute hundreds of thousands of dollars towards the Department’s bottom line.

	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
Upper 25%	1,669	55,205
Median	350	10,564
Lower 25%	51	2,359

Volunteer Utilization across Parks Departments, NPRA (2014)

These volunteer partnerships will ultimately require additional capacity within the Department. Best practice agencies generally have a staff position for a volunteer

coordinator or staff person in charge of volunteer recruitment, maintaining a database of volunteers, hiring and managing the background check process, volunteer recognition, developing job descriptions, and measuring results. In the case of Grand Rapids, these responsibilities, as well as managing relationships with neighborhood associations, can be consolidated into one marketing and outreach position.

Lastly, given that agencies are finding that it is increasingly difficult to enlist the commitment of ongoing volunteers, the Department should explore creating more one-off volunteer opportunities for one-time events. This will allow volunteers to get to know the Department and to begin developing a relationship which can be nurtured to grow over time.



A neighborhood event hosted by Monroe North Business Association.



Community associations can be essential partners in the development and maintenance of neighborhood-based amenities, such as community gardens and rain gardens.



**Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (FGRP):** As a long-standing community organization with an interest in the parks and recreation system (and a partner in this master plan), the FGRP has established a strong volunteer base. As the FGRP embarks on their own strategic planning initiative in 2017, the Department should work with them to seek alignment among goals and to clarify responsibilities around volunteers going forward. With the Department’s intent to grow its internal capacity, volunteer coordination for City of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation efforts should be centralized within the Department. Effectively mobilizing this volunteer workforce will require the Department to take on a volunteer coordination responsibility, and create a staff position for volunteer recruitment, hiring, management, and coordination, and measuring results. The Department may also require a staff position, which can potentially be combined with the volunteer coordinator position, to engage neighborhood associations with the appropriate level of capacity in maintaining neighborhood parks. The FGRP can continue to play an active and complementary role with volunteers in terms of recruitment, information dissemination, and community engagement.

The FGRP serves as a critical advocacy organization that successfully advocated citywide for passage of the 2014-2020 parks millage measure. FGRP can continue to be a leading citizen-led voice that organizes and advocates on behalf of the overall health and prosperity of Grand Rapids parks and in the next few years, as it evolves its mission

with the implementation of a new Strategic Plan, it may take on new roles. 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. In Grand Rapids, while each of these roles would support the Department in the longer term, it will need to prioritize fundraising as a priority, even as FGRP may be evolving this capacity in parallel.

**Community Groups:** Other opportunities for volunteer collaboration include partnering with strong neighborhood associations to program and maintain parks across the city. The plan recommends neighborhood improvements which include devoting some mini-parks to more specialized purposes such as community gardening. Community gardens are an ideal activity for neighborhood associations to steward given their local nature, individual benefits, and high maintenance requirements. While the Department may supply the land, it will be important to establish neighborhood groups or partners who can manage their users and maintain them over time.

The Department may also explore volunteer partnerships with other organizations from the private and non-profit sectors to elevate the prominence of the parks as places for services projects. For example, corporations based in West Michigan may seek to hold outdoor team-

building exercises through low-skill volunteer activities (e.g., trash pickup). In addition, the Department may reach out to the Boy Scouts of America to explore the potential for Eagle Scout service projects in Grand Rapids Parks.

**Master Gardener Volunteer Program:** The Department can also partner with the Master Gardener Volunteer Program at the Michigan State University Extension’s Gardening & Environmental Education program. Through MSUE, Master Gardeners undergo 40 hours of training and, to maintain their active status, commit to 5 hours of continued education and 15 hours of volunteer service annually. MSUE connects Master Gardeners with volunteer opportunities throughout West Michigan. Planting projects undertaken by trained volunteers under close supervision of Department supervisors offer volunteers the opportunity to build their local hands-on experience. MSU provides intake, training, and vetting of volunteers and requires that the project provide educational value to volunteers under supervision of project leaders.

**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 (supported by ArtPrize, among others).



SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

GOAL: SEEK INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO BECOME MORE FINANCIALLY SELF-SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES

Objectives

Revenue Generation

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

- » Build the number of professional recreation staff positions for both therapeutic recreation and active adult/senior programs.
- » Improve marketing efforts through a new dedicated staff or intern position, a dedicated department program guide, and increased web and social media presence.
- » 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.

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

**Objective 3** – Incorporate a waterfront events and rental space into the redevelopment of the Coldbrook site or 201 Market Street in the long term.

**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.

**Objective 5** – Consider developing a maintenance endowment fund exclusively for park maintenance.

Enhance Operations and Maintenance

**Objective 1** – Increase maintenance staff incrementally, including seasonal/contractual employees to accommodate staffing flexibility during the offseason, and allow for seasonal weekend crew for special events.

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

**Objective 3** – Develop a Parks Maintenance Manual that identifies standards, work scheduling, and athletic field condition assessment and renovation recommendations to maximize staffing resources and efficiency.

**Objective 4** – Strengthen staff training in the following ways:

- » Expand programs to respond to community desires, such as adult and youth fitness, senior programs, and outdoor and nature-based education.
- » Prioritize skills of supervisory level staff.
- » Establish onboarding and ongoing training for all staff.
- » Create training system based on skills and competencies needed for job classifications.

- » Update job descriptions and organizational structure.
- » 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.
- » Establish key performance indicators and 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.
- » 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.

**Objective 6** – Expand marketing capacity through the following strategies:

- » Develop a marketing plan to build brand awareness and address issues such as public relations, community engagement, branding, and corporate sponsorships.
- » Develop a dedicated program guide of all Department offerings in both English and Spanish to be distributed citywide.
- » Increase Department web and social media presence through new marketing staff or intern position.

Extending Capacity through Partnerships

**Objective 1** – Explore potential programming partnerships for outdoor nature education with the Blandford Nature Center, GRPS, WMEAC, and area colleges.

**Objective 2** – 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 3** – Continue strong collaboration with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks as they begin their strategic planning initiative, particularly around a shared and mobilized volunteer base.



# SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

## GOAL: SEEK INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO BECOME MORE FINANCIALLY SELF-SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFY FUNDING SOURCES

### Extending Capacity through Partnerships (Cont.)

**Objective 4** – Partner with neighborhood associations to program and maintain parks.

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

**Objective 6** - Partner with the Master Gardener Volunteer Program at the Michigan State University Extension’s Gardening & Environmental Education program on volunteer planting projects.

**Objective 7** - Collaborate with local art and cultural organizations on programming initiatives in city parks.

**Objective 8** - Partner with local fitness operators, such as yoga studios and training gyms, for outdoor programming in parks.

**Objective 9** - Explore funding and grant partnerships with local private foundations to advance trail connectivity, community health, safety, and social equity goals.

**Objective 10** - Establish sponsorship targets to support general event programming in highest-visitation parks and seek funding from corporate and other philanthropic donors.

**Objective 11** – Consider hiring a volunteer coordinator to develop and manage volunteer recruitment, a volunteer database, recognition process, job descriptions, and measurement of results, or leverage existing partnerships to assist with volunteer coordination (e.g. FGRP).

**Objective 12** – Create more volunteer opportunities for one-time events.



# MAKING IT HAPPEN

Current Capital Initiatives	174
Remaining Capital Initiatives	176
Aspirational Capital Initiatives	178
Operational Initiatives	184
Funding Strategies	188



# MAKING IT HAPPEN



Groundbreaking at Dickinson Park as part of the 2014-2020 millage park improvements. The Department will now build off of the momentum and support of the Grand Rapids community and estimate a potential need for the 2020-2027 millage renewal.

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 important initiatives that are grouped in four categories.

“Current Capital Initiatives” identifies current capital improvement projects to repair, rehabilitate, and improve all parks in the system through the current tax millage. “Remaining Capital Initiatives” describes the remaining work needed across the system to upgrade existing parks to a good state of repair beyond what the current millage is able to deliver. “Aspirational Capital Initiatives” discusses projects and initiatives that will help achieve the vision laid out in the four Master Plan Goals: Connected Network, Healthy Community, Neighborhood Investments, and

Sustainable System. In addition to projects and approximate costs, this section provides action steps to take through ‘Making It Happen’ projects. Finally, “Operational Initiatives” details actions the Department can take to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of its recreation programs, outreach efforts, operations, and maintenance. This final section acknowledges that these action items cannot be undertaken without the adequate backing of financial and staff resources and that partnerships are key. Various partners in Grand Rapids that may provide the Department with funding, volunteer, or programming support are identified, as well as various sources of funding that the Department can pursue in support of the Master Plan.



### PHASING OF CAPITAL PROJECTS

Sustaining and expanding the park system is one of the most cost effective investments that any community can make. National research on the benefits of parks – economic, social, and environmental – indicates that **a single dollar spent in the park system can result in a return of \$7 to \$20 in benefits to the city overall.** These overall benefits can increase multiple-fold when looking specifically at the benefits from trails, miniparks, and neighborhood parks; real estate benefits in particular increase multiple-fold with signature downtown parks. Such “downtown gems” are generally highly designed, well-activated, and easily accessible parks, such as Rosa Parks Circle, located in the central business district. Such parks can spur new or increased real estate activity in the surrounding area, sometimes termed Park-Oriented Development, where properties located in closest proximity to the park see greater annual property value appreciation, known as a “park premium,” than other properties located several blocks away. The effect of park premiums is not limited to downtown parks, however, and national research confirms that neighborhood and community parks confer a similar benefit on real estate values.

Relative value created by assets in the park system can vary based on the type of asset rather than the scale of the use. In Grand Rapids, for example, the nine Regional parks comprise more than 1,300 acres, while together, 52 Community and Neighborhood parks add up to just a third of that total acreage. Applying a conceptual benefit creation methodology employed in the 2016 study of the Dallas Park System, the total value created by the regional parks is only

approximately \$7 million, while value created by Community and Neighborhood parks together exceeds \$8 million. A similar calculation for Rosa Parks Circle reveals that it, on its own, may generate a nearly equivalent value on its own – at less than an acre in size. While these calculations are conceptual and not intended to be definitive for the Grand Rapids context, it is clear that **strategic investment can result in significant benefit creation for the entire city.**

Despite the clear positive relationship between investment and benefits, park systems require significant and regular infusions from City budgets – particularly due to a nationwide trend in disinvestment in parks systems over the past generation, particularly in Grand Rapids in the last decade. Yet the 2014-2020 millage, new Department leadership, and this Master Plan together herald a new era for investment in Grand Rapids parks.



The Master Plan has identified several capital projects for each of the four goals. In total, these investments represent around \$100 million in potential initiatives and in recognition of the Department’s limited resources, a phased investment strategy suggests the following three phases for funding:

**First: Connect for equitable access.** These immediate-action capital investments are high priorities for enabling a Connected Network of Parks, Natural Areas, and Waterways. Because 2014-2020 millage expenditures have already been committed to specific capital projects, the new projects prioritized in the Master Plan should be discussed with the philanthropic community. Foundations have already expressed interest in expanding connectivity and social equity in the city’s neighborhoods and the Department can begin by identifying opportunities for mission alignment through the initiatives described in this section. Over the next three years, the Department should identify and calendar key acquisitions that will seed future investments (i.e., park developments on acquired sites) using the Vision and Goals as a framework to guide site selection and planning. By 2020, capital projects slated for millage-related expenditures should be identified in these sites. Announcement of these key acquisitions will, when coupled with evidence of 2014-2020 millage improvements, generate public excitement for new investment in park equity and connectivity in further support of a 2020-2027 millage renewal measure.

**Second: Restore for quality.** Using the Neighborhood Investments framework, the Department will continue to meet community needs for quality park space. Great progress has been made to address

deferred maintenance in the system with recent millage funding, however additional repairs and improvements are needed. Beyond 2020, 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. These activities will be supported by the annual operating budget and partnerships as further described in this chapter.

**Third: Collaborate for new opportunities.** On an ongoing basis, the Department should work with advocates and potential partners who can help advance key Downtown projects to support the advancement of the Grand Riverfront project, including a new indoor facility in the park and the introduction of new waterfront access points to the river. This project, which spans multiple jurisdictions and will require coordination across federal, state, and other funding sources and approval bodies, will require that the Department remain an active and collaborative participant that can undertake responsibilities for advancing the project opportunistically. To advance riverfront initiatives, the Department can seek to partner with GR Whitewater to jointly develop principles for the development of new riverfront parkland and the protection of water resources, to coordinate and amplify fundraising efforts, and to collaborate on grant applications. By joining forces, the philanthropic community will more clearly understand implementation pathways for the overall project. Also critical are discussions with potential public and private partners for financing, development, operation, and maintenance of the Coldbrook site facility, which will provide important new community gathering space within the footprint of the riverfront park as well as potential to complete riverfront trail connections.



# CURRENT CAPITAL INITIATIVES

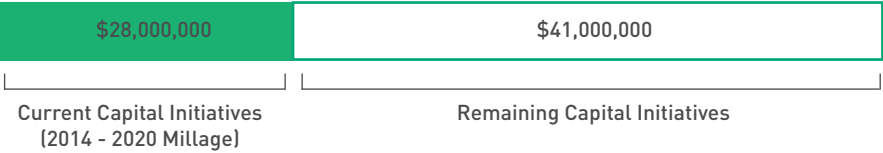
The current parks millage, approved in 2013, provides approximately \$4,000,000 per year in dedicated property millage for capital improvements to city parks, pools, and playgrounds. The anticipated projects listed below are subject to change, however every park in the system will be touched with millage funding. The seven-year millage for .98 mills expires in June 2020.

NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED INVESTMENTS		
WHEN	PROJECTS	ANTICIPATED FUNDING
2014 - 2016	<u>Projects Completed</u>	
	Camelot, Campau, Cherry, Dickinson, Douglas, Fuller, Garfield, Highland, Lincoln, MLK, Mary Waters, Mulick, Richmond, Roosevelt, Westown Commons, Wilcox	-
2017	<u>Park Improvement Projects</u>	\$2,871,411
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Aberdeen Park</li><li>Alexander Park</li><li>Ball-Perkins Park</li><li>Huff Park</li></ul>	
	<u>Pool Operations</u>	\$733,296
	TOTAL	\$3,604,707
2018	<u>Park Improvement Projects</u>	\$2,911,655
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Bike Park</li><li>Cambridge Park</li><li>Cheseboro Park</li><li>Coit Park</li><li>MLK Park</li><li>Mooney Park</li><li>Ottawa Hills Park</li><li>Plaster Creek Family Park</li></ul>	
	<u>Pool Operations</u>	\$770,709
	TOTAL	\$3,138,245

WHEN	PROJECTS	ANTICIPATED FUNDING
2019	<u>Park Improvement Projects</u>	\$3,138,245
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ah-Nab-Awen Park</li><li>Belknap Park &amp; Reservoir Park</li><li>Briggs Park</li><li>Clemente Park</li><li>Lexington Park</li><li>Mackay-Jaycee Park</li><li>Oxford Place</li><li>Look-Out Park</li></ul>	
	<u>Pool Operations</u>	\$776,362
	TOTAL	\$3,914,607
2020	<u>Park Improvement Projects</u>	\$3,162,644
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Alger Park</li><li>Aman Park</li><li>Burton Woods Park</li><li>Butterworth</li><li>Eastern Park</li><li>4th St. Woods</li><li>Ken-O-Sha Park</li><li>Kensington Park</li><li>Richmond Park</li><li>Riverside Park</li><li>Sullivan Field</li></ul>	
	<u>Pool Operations</u>	\$781,437
	TOTAL	\$3,944,081
2021	<u>Park Improvement Projects</u>	\$2,980,008
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Canal St. Park</li><li>Caulfield Park</li><li>Covell Dog Park</li><li>Fish Ladder Park</li><li>Heartside Park</li><li>Hillcrest Park</li><li>Midtown Green</li><li>Nagold Park</li><li>Provin Trails</li><li>Riverwalk Trails</li><li>6th St. Bridge Park</li><li>Sweet St. Park</li></ul>	
	<u>Pool Operations</u>	\$813,068
	TOTAL	\$3,793,076

# REMAINING CAPITAL INITIATIVES

Remaining work is needed across the system to upgrade existing parks to a good state of repair beyond what the 2014-2020 millage is able to deliver. Costs show the outstanding capital improvements by park type and are based on budget figures of recent millage projects. Potential funding sources and partnerships include the Department operating budget and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund



## NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED INVESTMENTS

PARK TYPE	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. COST	WHEN
Regional Parks	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Aman Park</li><li>Ball Perkins Park</li><li>Butterworth Site</li><li>Huff Park</li><li>Ken-O-Sha Park</li><li>Mackay Jaycee Park</li><li>Richmond Park</li><li>Riverside Park</li></ul></div>	\$8,900,000	As grants become available, or with future funding
Community parks	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Belknap Park</li><li>Bike Park</li><li>Clemente Park</li><li>Fuller Park</li><li>Garfield Woods</li><li>Highland Plaza</li><li>Hillcrest Park</li><li>Lincoln Park</li><li>Martin Luther King Park</li><li>Mary Waters Park</li><li>Oxford Place Park</li><li>Plaster Creek Family Park</li><li>Provin Trails Park</li><li>Wilcox Park</li></ul></div>	\$11,000,000	As grants become available, or with future funding

PARK TYPE	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. COST	WHEN
Neighborhood parks	<div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Aberdeen Park</li><li>Ah-Nab-Awen Park</li><li>Alexander Park</li><li>Briggs Park</li><li>Burton Woods</li><li>Calder Plaza</li><li>Cambridge Park</li><li>Camelot Park</li><li>Campau Park</li><li>Canal Park</li><li>Cherry Park</li><li>Coit Park</li><li>Covell Dog Park</li><li>Crescent Park</li><li>Dickinson Park</li><li>Eastern Park</li><li>Fish Ladder Park</li><li>Fourth St. Woods</li><li>Fulton St. Market</li><li>Heartside Park</li></ul></div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Joe Taylor Park</li><li>Kensington Park</li><li>Look Out Park</li><li>Mid Town Green Park</li><li>Mulick Park</li><li>Ottawa Hills Park</li><li>Pleasant Park</li><li>Raspberry Field</li><li>Reservoir Park</li><li>Roosevelt park</li><li>Rosa Parks Circle</li><li>Sixth St. Bridge Park</li><li>Sullivan Field</li><li>Veteran's Memorial Park</li><li>Westtown Commons Park</li></ul></div></div>	\$18,500,000	As grants become available, or with future funding
Mini Parks	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Baldwin Park</li><li>Caulfield Park</li><li>Cheseboro Park</li><li>Douglas Park</li><li>Foster Park</li><li>Heritage Hill Park</li><li>Hosken Park</li><li>Lexington Park</li><li>Lincoln Place Park</li><li>Louis Campau Promenade</li><li>Lyon Square</li><li>Monument Park</li><li>Mooney Park</li><li>Nagold Park</li><li>Oakes St. Park</li><li>Paris Park</li><li>Pekich Park</li><li>Seymour Park</li><li>Sundial Park</li></ul></div>	\$2,600,000	As grants become available, or with future funding
TOTAL:		\$41,00,000	



# ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL INITIATIVES

## NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED INVESTMENTS

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. COST	FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS	WHEN
New Amenities	<p>Potential New Amenities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outdoor adventure play (4 locations across the city) .....</li><li>• Stairs for active/passive recreation (Lookout, Clemente, riverfront) .....</li><li>• Universally inclusive playground .....</li><li>• Mountain bike trails (Bike Park, Ball-Perkins, Richmond, Provin .....</li><li>• Outdoor classroom (Aberdeen, Ken-O-Sha, Mulick, Plaster Creek) .....</li><li>• Expanded trails and walking paths .....</li><li>• Outdoor gym/adult exercise equipment .....</li><li>• Boulder/climbing wall .....</li><li>• Destination skate park (1 location) .....</li><li>• Boardwalks/wetland trails .....</li><li>• EZ Universal kayak launches.....</li><li>• Boathouse .....</li><li>• Outdoor wedding venue.....</li><li>• Ampitheater or stage .....</li><li>• Entrance signage .....</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>\$50,000 - \$150,000</li><li>\$40,000 - \$100,000</li><li>\$200,000 - \$600,000</li><li>\$200,000 - \$600,000</li><li>\$10,000 - \$20,000</li><li>\$50,000 - \$250,000</li><li>\$150,000 - \$400,000</li><li>\$100,000 - \$300,000</li><li>\$500,000 - \$1.5 million</li><li>\$50,000 - \$500,000</li><li>\$30,000 each</li><li>\$1.5 - 5 million</li><li>\$1 - \$2.5 million</li><li>\$30,000 - \$500,000</li><li>\$10,000 - \$40,000</li></ul> <p>TOTAL: \$3,720,000 - 12,550,000</p>	<p>Key Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Department operating budget</li><li>• Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund</li></ul>	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Create pilot placemaking projects to build excitement and engagement around larger future capital projects</li></ul>			
Neighborhood-based Land Acquisition	<p>Target park land acquisition in high-need/under-served areas, anticipating future growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Target neighborhoods: Garfield Park, Southeast Community, Roosevelt Park</li></ul>	<p>~\$20,000,000 - \$50,000,000</p>	<p>Key Funding Sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foundations and corporate philanthropy</li><li>• Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund</li></ul> <p>Partnerships: Coordination with Planning Dept, Community Development Dept, and economic development entities</p>	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop land acquisition implementation work plan targeting high-need areas and the riverfront corridor</li><li>• Develop a list of opportunity sites and investigate partnership approaches</li></ul>			



CONNECTED NETWORK

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. COST	FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS	WHEN
Riverfront Trail Connection	<b>Land acquisition and construction to complete a continuous trail along the east bank of the river (approx. 4 miles from Riverside to Butterworth)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Assume a 20' easement</li></ul>	\$5,000,000 - \$7,000,000 for land acquisition	<u>Key Funding Sources:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Foundations and corporate philanthropy</li><li>Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund</li></ul> <u>Partnerships:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders</li></ul>	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Connect Kent Trails between Millennium Park and river trail at Butterworth Site</li><li>Complete missing connections on Riverwalk Trail from Leonard St. to Ann St., connecting downtown to Riverside Park</li></ul>			
Other trails/tributary improvements	<b>Improvements to Grand River tributaries (Lamberton Creek, Indian Mill Creek, Plaster Creek)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Ecological restoration of tributary edges</li><li>Environmental signage</li><li>Improve and complete missing connections in existing tributary trails</li></ul>	\$10,000 - \$25,000 \$5,000 - \$10,000 \$200,000 - \$300,000  TOTAL = \$215,000 - \$335,000	<u>Key Funding Sources:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Foundations and corporate philanthropy</li><li>Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund</li></ul> <u>Partnerships:</u> Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Complete missing connections in Plaster Creek Trail</li><li>Begin feasibility studies to investigate land acquisition or easments for additional tributary trails</li></ul>			
Riverfront park space	<b>Improvements to the network of riverfront park spaces to improve access to water and enhance river-based recreation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Sites include: Riverside, Ah-Nab-Awen, Fish Ladder, Canal St., and 6th St. Bridge parks</li><li>Continuous waterfront pedestrian and bicycle connection</li><li>Community boathouse (Riverside)</li><li>Concessions and rentals</li><li>Improved water's edge, including floodable, naturalized landscapes</li></ul>	Approximate total per park space: \$5,000,000 - \$8,000,000	<u>Key Funding Sources:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Department operating budget</li><li>Foundations and corporate philanthropy</li></ul> <u>Partnerships:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Public-private partnerships with Riverfront park leaders</li></ul>	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Launch pilot program for kayak and stand up paddle board classes</li></ul>			
Riverfront park space - new development	<b>Developments of existing City-owned land as part of a system of riverfront parks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Butterworth site: trails, naturalized areas, water access, kayak and canoe launch</li><li>Coldbrook site and/or Monroe North site: flexible outdoor event and program space, seating, kayak and canoe launch, concessions</li></ul>			
» MAKING IT HAPPEN:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Activate Monroe North site with a pilot placemaking project</li></ul>			



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	APPROX. COST	FUNDING SOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS	WHEN
Indoor facility improvement  » MAKING IT HAPPEN:	Invest in upgrades at existing indoor facilities at Roosevelt, Garfield, and MLK parks in the short term  • Begin assessment of current indoor facilities • Review feasibility of additional shared indoor facilities with partners such as GRPS	\$600,000 - \$1million each	Key Funding Sources: • Private sources (development finance) via public-private partnerships • Foundations and corporate philanthropy (capital fundraising campaign)	With future dedicated funding, or as grants become available
Coldbrook facility improvement  » MAKING IT HAPPEN:	Renovate Coldbrook facility to create a waterfront community and recreation center  • Begin hosting recreation classes at the Coldbrook facility	~\$40,000,000	Partnerships: • Public-private partnerships with private development entity	
New indoor facility development  » MAKING IT HAPPEN	Approx. 100,000 SF facility, connected to developed open space  • Begin feasibility study for a new indoor facility			



The Department will continue to Invest in existing indoor facilities, such as the facility at Garfield Park.



Examples of an indoor facility for recreation and fitness.

# OPERATIONAL INITIATIVES

## RECREATION

INITIATIVE	MAKING IT HAPPEN	APPROX. COST ANNUALLY
Access & Equity	Review of current offerings and locations of recreation opportunities.	<i>Costs of new recreation programs and initiatives is included in salaries of new hires</i>
	Expand program delivery to targeted neighborhoods or audiences.	
Customer satisfaction measurement	Improve performance measurement by:	
	1) creating a system wide customer satisfaction measurement system for programs and services.	
	2) review the age segment distribution on an annual basis.	
Targeted program growth	3) continue monitoring the lifecycle of programs on an annual basis and discontinue declining programs.	
	Grow programs that were listed as high priority in the ETC Institute’s program priority rating: adult fitness/wellness, nature/environmental education programs, adult continuing education programs, winter recreation programs, and senior programs.	
Program dashboard	Develop a recreation program dashboard of key performance indicators.	
Recreation staff hires	Hire additional staff dedicated to recreation programming to support program growth.	\$75,000
	Begin with a part-time active adult/senior coordinator and a part-time therapeutic recreation specialist.	

## MARKETING

INITIATIVE	MAKING IT HAPPEN	APPROX. COST ANNUALLY
Expand Reach	Develop stronger social media presence to promote Department events and program offerings.	<i>Costs of marketing initiatives is included in salaries of new hire</i>
Rental marketing	Improve the marketing of existing rental opportunities, and develop and market additional ones.	
Program guide	Create a separate Parks and Recreation program guide.	\$30,000 - \$60,000
Marketing staff hire and plan	Create a dedicated position for Department marketing and outreach.	\$75,000
	Develop a long-term marketing plan.	



The Department will focus on growing high priority recreational programs such as nature/environmental education and adult wellness.





OPERATIONS + MAINTENANCE

INITIATIVE    MAKING IT HAPPEN

Pool Operations	Continue operating Briggs, MLK, and Richmond pools every year for 12 weeks, 7 days as week (\$800,000 annually)
Future low-maintenance landscape standards	Implement naturalized and low-maintenance landscapes as part of ongoing neighborhood-based park investments  Review and revise maintenance level of standards to reflect low-mow/low-maintenance landscape strategies
Work order system/maintenance manual	Begin implementing a work order system and a Park Maintenance Manual to streamline maintenance operations
Shared maintenance agreements	Establish shared maintenance agreements with key community-based groups. Begin by finalizing updates to the Joint-Use Agreement between the Parks Department and Grand Rapids Public Schools
Maintenance staff increase	Grow maintenance workforce to meet Level Of Service standards and growing population demands
Environmental Stewardship	Continue partnerships with West Michigan Conservation Network, the Land Conservancy, WMEAC and FGRP to conserve and enhance natural areas  Hire a Natural Resource Coordinator to support the development and maintenance of natural areas

OTHER

FGRP planning collaboration	Continue to develop shared goals and align efforts with Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to sustain a vibrant park system
-----------------------------	--



# FUNDING STRATEGIES

## SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION
Concession opportunities	Advance concession opportunities throughout the system. Food concessions such as food trucks have become mainstays for many urban park systems. Other trending concessions include kayaking, paddle boarding, canoeing, ziplines and alpine slides, wedding venues, and general rental facilities.
Corporate sponsorships	Develop work on corporate sponsorships and naming rights opportunities.
Foundation partnerships	Continue efforts in developing relationships with the multiple foundations located in the Grand Rapids region.
DNR grants	Continue to advance grant applications on an annual basis through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.
Federal funding options	Continue to pursue projects that would qualify for New Markets Tax Credit and/or Community Development Block Grants.
Impact Investments	Partner with local private investors to make environmental or social impacts through programs funded by bonds, using “Pay-for-Performance” contracts to achieve specific performance targets.
New development cash in lieu policy	Work with the appropriate state government legislators to develop a cash in lieu policy for new developments (in the long term).