

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Acknowledgements

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At Large

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Ward 2

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Ward 3

Joe Gatto
Ward 4

City Manager

Scott Sanders

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Joel Potter

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Victoria Facto

Sammy F. Pugh

William Thompson

Bill Nassif

Mark Godwin

Andrea Woodard

Heather Anderson

Steering Committee

T.M. Franklin Cownie
Mayor

Ben Page
Parks and Recreation Director

Bill Good
Des Moines School District

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Park and Recreation Board Chair

Izaah Knox
Urban Dreams

Katie Wengert
Broadlawns Hospital

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Latino Resources, Inc.

Joe McGovern
*Iowa Natural Heritage
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Human Rights Director

Meg Schneider

*Des Moines Partnership
Representative*

Michael Simonson
Plan and Zoning Commission

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Bravo Greater Des Moines

Sarah Lohmeier
*Friends of Des Moines
Parks Board Member*

See Rodari
Asian Community Representative

Internal Technical Committee

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Ryan Moffatt
Economic Development

Michael Ludwig
Community Development

Amber Lynch
Community Development

Jessica Butler
Finance Department

Deb Maier
IT Department

Steve Naber
Engineering Department

Jeff Wiggins
Transportation Department

Larry Hulse

City Manager's Office (retired)

Paul Parizek
Police Department

Jonathon Gano
Public Works Department

Greg Heid
Public Library (retired)

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Manisha Paudel
*Civil and Human Rights
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Parks and Recreation Department Staff

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Parks and Recreation Director

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*Assistant Parks and
Recreation Director*

Jennifer Richmond
*Planning and Development
Administrator*

Ron Ward
Parks Manager

Matt Kalcevich
Recreation Manager



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What we are seeing is that cities around the country are using parks and open space as a way to increase the quality of life, to attract new businesses and residents as well as to retain the people who already live in the city.

—Catherine Nagel
Executive Director of the City Parks Alliance, Washington, D.C.
Des Moines Business Record, June 29, 2018

PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

OUR MISSION

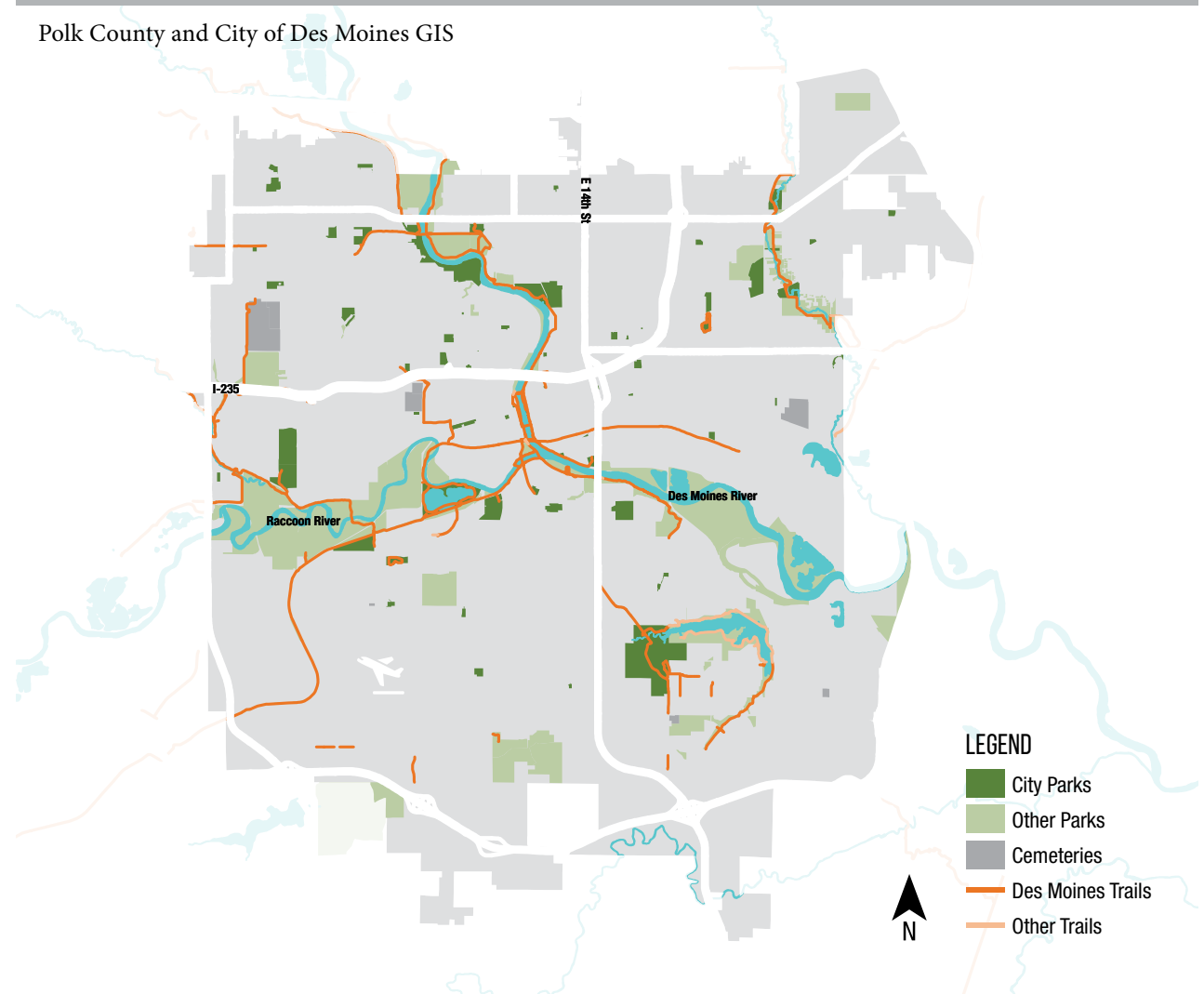
Helping Des Moines Live Well, Play Hard and Protect the Earth.

OVERVIEW

The City of Des Moines oversees more than 4,000 acres of parkland, open space and trails, and offers a variety of events and programs for Des Moines residents of all backgrounds, ages and abilities. Des Moines Parks and Recreation is responsible for managing, operating and maintaining complex assets within the park and recreation system. The assets managed by the department include 75 parks, 81 miles of paved and unpaved trails, seven cemeteries, two community recreation centers, three golf courses, four disc golf courses, 25 aquatic facilities, one ice skating rink, 265 community garden plots, 58 playgrounds, three dog parks, one skate park, one BMX track, 56 sheltered areas, 552 picnic tables and a variety of sports facilities that include basketball courts, soccer and football fields, baseball and softball fields and tennis and volleyball courts. The department employs 59 full-time staff, 333 part-time staff and over 4,400 volunteers to maintain its resources and offers 137 recreational programs per year.

EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS

Polk County and City of Des Moines GIS



THE PLANNING PROCESS

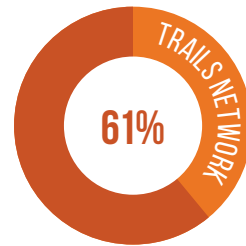
PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

This plan charts a course for the City's future aimed at reaching a new understanding of what parks and recreation means to the City and its residents. Public engagement, reflections of decision makers and community leaders, staff input and the ongoing involvement of steering and technical committees drive this plan.

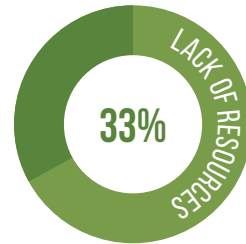
As part of this extensive engagement, the public played the "What's in Your Park" game, attended public events providing input and went on-line to answer questions. The results of that questionnaire help summarize the public's interests in the future Parks and Recreation system.



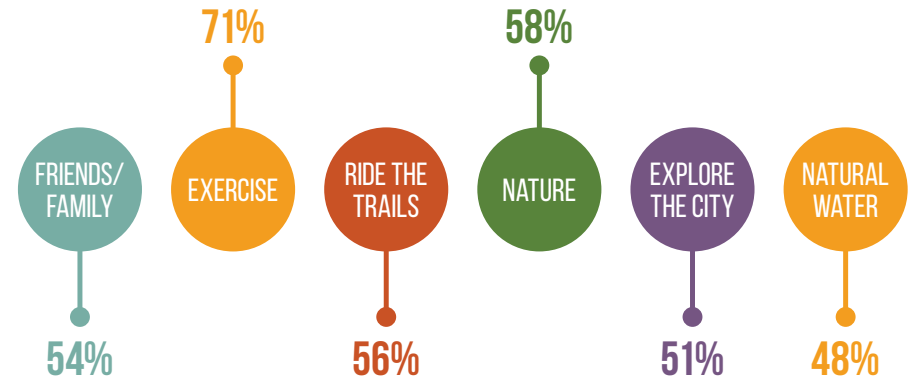
GREATEST STRENGTH



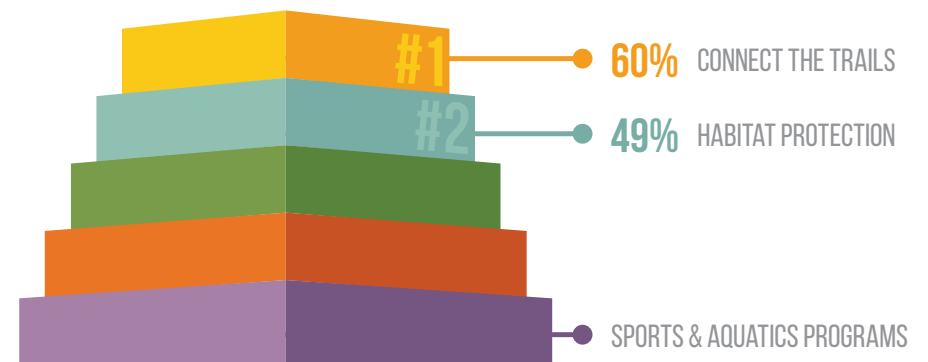
GREATEST CHALLENGE



WHY DO YOU USE DES MOINES PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES?



HIGH VS. LOW PRIORITY



The City of Des Moines Parks, Trails and Open Spaces are invaluable assets that play an important role in the economic prosperity and personal health of the residents of Des Moines. As the population continues to grow and diversify, it is important for the city of Des Moines to provide spaces and facilities that fit the ever-changing needs and desires of the community.

HEALTH SHED MAP: HIGHER PROPENSITY FOR HEALTH PARKS

HEALTH HAS ALREADY BEEN PRIORITIZED

Identifying areas of greatest health need based on long-term health risks will help future priorities investments and underpins the whole of this plan.

OPPORTUNITY GAPS: AREAS BEYOND A 10-MINUTE WALK TO A PARK

THE TRAILS NETWORK CAN EFFECT PUBLIC HEALTH

Additional connections will improve access to trails, parks and programming sites and help grow the system's capacity to deliver public health and equity outcomes.

EQUITY LENS MAP: AREAS WITH GREATER EQUITY NEED (POVERTY, RACE POPULATION DENSITY AND CRIME)

EQUITABLE ACCESS IS A PRIORITY

Des Moines Parks and Recreation has recognized the value of their system.

SOCIAL SHED MAP: COLORS DEPICT HOMOGENEITY—THE QUALITY OR STATE OF BEING ALL THE SAME OR OF THE SAME KIND

BUILDING COMMUNITY IS A GREAT STRENGTH

Understanding Des Moines social shed is another way of looking at public preferences, beyond the assumptions that are made based on demographics alone (census data).

VISION AND MISSION

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF DES MOINES PARKS AND RECREATION?

VISION

Since 1995, at the time of the last parks and recreation comprehensive plan, the Parks and Recreation Department has been working from a big-picture view proposing powerful initiatives—the revival of Gray’s Lake Park, Principal Riverwalk and an extensive trails system, just to name a few. LiveDSM maintains that vein of highlighting game-changing projects, but the vision experiences a shift. No simple slogan captures this new vision. The following aspirations paint a more detailed picture—a system that is equitable, effective, healthy, vital and responsive. The parks and recreation system is, essentially, “everywhere” and a fundamental part of daily living for all residents and visitors.

Parks: Everywhere, every day. According to the public, the system’s success in delivering meaningful quality of life will be clear when:

- Parks and Recreation leads in achieving equity goals for the community
- Programming addresses goals of healthy living: active, reflective, social and educational
- Trails connect in all ways – everyone is within a ten-minute walk (half-mile) of a park or trail
- The park system excels in stewardship with nature always at hand
- World-class facilities help set the City’s national identity and character
- Parks and trails use the latest technology
- The system attracts and keeps new businesses and young adults here
- Operational and maintenance needs sync with the system’s funding
- Neighborhood parks serve as the system’s backbone

MISSION

Despite this ambitious vision, the mission of the Parks and Recreation Department remains unchanged: helping Des Moines to live well, play hard and protect the earth. The update of the mission through this plan comes in the level of support for carrying out this work. The Department has done exceptional work with limited resources. Parks and Recreation has identified strategies—working with non-profits, public-private partnerships and vendor contracts to increase impact for the dollar. The proof’s in the pudding. Des Moines’ system is strong but the plan’s analysis of peer communities shows the Department functions with fewer resources per capita than those communities. This downward public funding trend cannot maintain the system this plan envisions and the public wants. All resources must grow. Here’s how.

The Five Goals

It’s time to bring well-resourced, best management practices to inform parks decisions—much as businesses would operate in the private sector. The plan recommends a commitment to cultural and organizational improvement. These changes are needed to achieve a world-class system that can stand the test of time—enriching/expanding partnerships while attaining new levels of effectiveness in operations and growing resources to keep pace with progress.

MEASURING SUCCESS

SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGIES

- Baseline cost-recovery percentage
- Changes in cost-recovery percentage
- Percentage and type of public-private partnerships
- Changes in number and type of public-private partnerships
- Percentage of budget from contributed income—leveraging Friends of Des Moines Parks

ECOSYSTEM HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

- Acres of land being managed for ecosystem health and resilience
- Stream reaches not eroding to a serious degree
- Average number of native plant species in the natural areas of parks
- Number of parks with at least two species of frogs and toads
- Average number of breeding birds in the natural areas of parks (June survey)
- Acres of invasive plants in natural areas

HEALTH AND EQUITY

- Shrinking of equity-needs zones identified on baseline Equity Map in Benchmarking chapter
- Set baseline “sense of well-being”
- Shrinking “red zones” in health map identified on baseline Health Map in Benchmarking chapter

COMPARATIVE STANDARDS/ STANDARDS OF SERVICE

- Meeting or exceeding measures based on aspirational cities
- Achieving NRPA Gold Medal Award

ACHIEVING GOALS

(Largely output-based measures)

- Accomplishing action steps/work tasks in pursuit of the plan’s Five Goals
- Examples include: development of inventory, policy adoption, land acquisition





EQUITY



Big Ideas to Get Started

- Continue dialogue on equity in parks and recreation through partnerships
- Develop and adopt a series of policies regarding equity and its impact to parks and recreation
- Establish “Parks for New Des Moines Program” to work with city leaders and partners to design relevant programs accessible to people of color, immigrants, refugees and persons of all abilities
- Adopt budgets to fill equity gaps

GOAL

Deliver Equitable Facilities and Programs

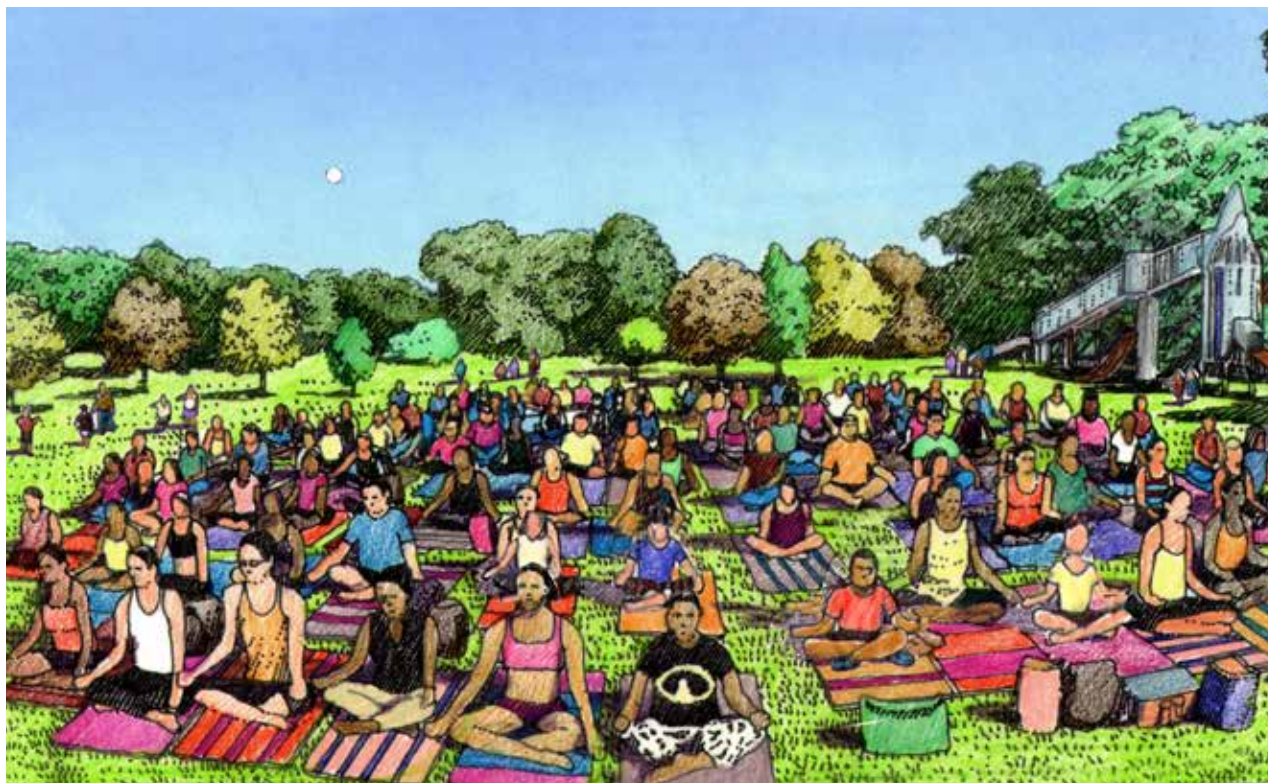
“Parks” is redefined and brought to you in ways that are meaningful, accessible and healthy to you, your friends, family and neighbors—Des Moines’ parks, trails and public spaces are everywhere.

APPROACH

- Continually expand the definition of a park to align with how people in Des Moines need and use parks and public spaces
- Establish a baseline and begin to measure progress
- Fill the gaps in places and programs
- Continue to make progress with a racial equity lens



ATTRACTION



Big Ideas to Get Started

- Start a pop-up park initiative to deliver programs where the system has gaps
- Expand outdoor skills-building programming with learning objectives and evaluation
- Discuss with other city departments focusing on Live Well Ambassadors concept
- Begin a dialogue about unmet recreation needs
- Start a community activities guide, sent out at least once per year to all Des Moines households
- Create winter-season program options emphasizing outdoor play

GOAL

Support Year-Round Programming that Attracts People to Parks

Exceptional programming and services deliver all-season opportunities for current and future park system users.

APPROACH

- Develop “pop-up parks,” special events and programs for year-round (available everywhere) use
- Use best practices—include learning objectives, evaluation
- Establish a series of guidelines and policies that standardizes fees and evaluation tools for programming
- Establish a Recreation Committee to understand the recreation needs of the community



HEART



Big Ideas to Get Started

- Identify system gaps—missing parks or trail connections
- Prioritize areas where equity needs are highest
- Launch signage study and implement using city's existing park and trail plans as a starting point
- Achieve a world-class water recreation feature that supports advocacy for water quality

GOAL

Make Parks and Trails the Heart of the Community

Neighbors love their nearby parks/trails and see them as ever-active hubs of connection, learning, reflection and play. All embrace facilities of community pride and inspiration.

APPROACH

- Ensure locals are within a ten-minute walk to a park or trail
- Expand/add neighborhood parks with updated play, gathering spaces and services (water, shade, etc.)
- Sign the way to parks, comparable to trails signs
- Consistently provide a sense of safety and security (programming, lighting, patrol)
- Plan for four-season park facilities
- Activate our network of water



NATURE



Big Ideas to Get Started

- Describe healthy, resilient natural systems in parks and their benefit to Des Moines
- Engage and explain to city leaders and the public what a sustainable program is for managing natural resources in parks
- Complete a systemwide plan for natural resources
- Develop a Natural Resources Management Plan for one park

GOAL

Improve Natural Systems

A deep commitment to ecological stewardship translates to healthy ecosystems; high-quality land, water and wildlife; and tremendous resilience for natural areas and biodiversity in the park system—despite change over time.

APPROACH

- General and special funds are well planned and always meet the ecological stewardship needs
- A system plan guides natural resource management priorities and methods on land and water; monitoring and reporting; and how volunteers and other resources are used
- People understand and engage with nature in parks without harming wildlife or sensitive natural features



INNOVATION



Big Ideas to Get Started

- Evaluate existing processes and decision criteria for driving partnerships, programs and projects to identify gaps in Best Management Practices (BMP)
- Maintain a culture of creativity and innovation
- Establish data-driven analytical processes, methods and tools to drive decisions
- Benchmark success through parks/trails inventory

GOAL

Launch New Approaches to Parks and Recreation

Des Moines Parks and Recreation creates a highly professional foundation for its work—serving as a launch point for new ways of thinking about parks, partnerships and meeting public needs.

APPROACH

- Expand successful partnerships
- Leverage best practices from other park systems (city, county, state and federal)
- Empower decision-making through a process of underwriting, contracting and contract oversight to drive partnerships, services, facilities and guest satisfaction



