

PARKS AND RECREATION  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN





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## Acknowledgements

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# **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

This plan's purpose is to chart 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. The vision here transforms parks and recreation from a series of distinct outdoor spaces scattered throughout the metro to a system that meets residents where they live and potentially supporting their everyday quality of life. The goals include strengthening the sense of community for all residents, while promoting public and personal health, education, fun,

learning, natural resources protection and economic vitality. To achieve this, Des Moines Parks and Recreation must become increasingly sophisticated in all aspects of its operations—from basic ongoing maintenance to fundraising for large-scale, game-changing initiatives.

This scope envisions a lengthy timeline (of up to 15–20 years) for execution of this plan while offering concrete, valuable and immediate actions to launch many of this plan's initiatives—be they large or small.



***In 2016, the City Council approved an amendment to the City's comprehensive plan, entitled "PlanDSM," which was drafted in accordance with the Iowa Smart Planning legislation set forth in Iowa State Code Chapter 18B.***

***PlanDSM specifically called for an update of the Parks and Recreation comprehensive plan to refine and achieve the vision goals for Parks and Recreation by PlanDSM.***



# PARK SYSTEM OVERVIEW

## OUR MISSION

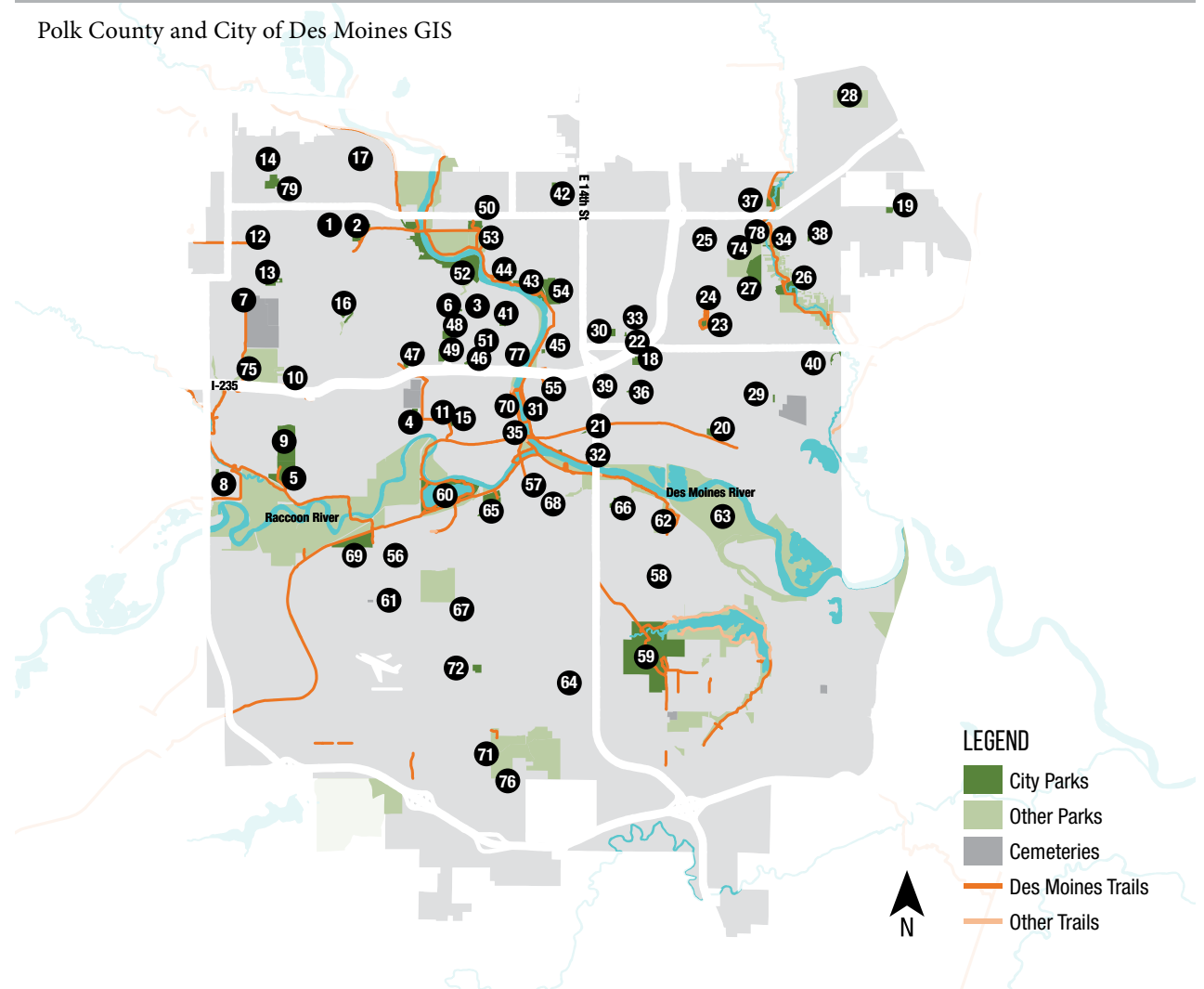
Helping Des Moines Live Well, Play Hard and Protect the Earth.

## 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



1 Ashby Park  
2 Beaverdale Park  
3 Brian Melton Field  
4 Chamberlain Park  
5 Ashworth Park  
6 Edna Griffin Park  
7 Franklin Field  
8 Frisbie Park  
9 Greenwood  
10 McCollum-Waveland Tennis Courts  
11 Pappajohn Sculpture Park  
12 Riley Park  
13 Tower Park  
14 Westchester Park  
15 Western Gateway Park  
16 Witmer Park  
17 Woodlawn Park  
18 Ashfield Park  
19 Brook Run Park  
20 Chesterfield Park  
21 Cohen Park  
22 Crowley Park  
23 Easton Basin Park  
24 Easttown Park  
25 Fairmont Park  
26 Fourmile Creek Park  
27 Grandview Park

28 Greater Des Moines Softball Park  
29 Laurel Hill Park  
30 Martin Luther King Jr. Park  
31 Muto Recreation Area  
32 Pete Crivaro Park  
33 Pocket Park 1  
34 Pocket Park 2  
35 Principal Riverwalk  
36 Redhead Park  
37 Sargent Park  
38 Sheridan Park  
39 Stewart Square Park  
40 Valley High Manor Park  
41 Bates Park  
42 Belle M. Turner Park  
43 Birdland Park  
44 Birdland Sports Park  
45 Burke Park  
46 Cheatom Park  
47 Drake Park  
48 Evelyn Davis Park  
49 Good Park  
50 McHenry Park  
51 Nash Park  
52 Prospect Park  
53 Riverview  
54 Union Park

55 Whitmer Park  
56 Brody School Park  
57 Columbus Park  
58 Evergreen Park  
59 Ewing Park  
60 Gray's Lake Park  
61 Harmon Park  
62 James W. Cownie Baseball Park  
63 James W. Cownie Soccer Park  
64 Jordan Park  
65 MacRae Park  
66 Pioneer Park  
67 Sayers Park  
68 Stone Park  
69 Carney Park  
70 Rotary Riverwalk Park  
71 Blank Park  
72 Nabas Park  
73 Cowles Commons  
74 Bright Grandview Golf  
75 Waveland Golf  
76 Blank Golf  
77 Riverwalk Dog Park  
78 Reno Dog Park  
79 Hoover / Meredith School Park

VISION



01

# VISION AND MISSION

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF DES MOINES PARKS AND RECREATION?

The parks and recreation system that is so well loved by those who use it is no accident—it is the result of thoughtful planning that articulates a shared vision of our parks, trails and natural resources. This vision was last captured in the City’s 1995 comprehensive plan known as *Parklands, A Celebration of Des Moines’ Community Spirit*. This 20-year-old document successfully guided the department and system through significant changes, contributing to Des Moines being recognized nationally as a special place to live, work, play and visit.

In 2017 the City embarked on a new vision for parks and recreation in the city. The new vision is called *LiveDSM* because so much of what Des Moines Parks and Recreation does is to help people live a better quality of life and make Des Moines a place where many people choose to live their lives.

Underpinning these efforts is a commitment to cultural and organizational change at Des Moines Parks and Recreation. Change is necessary to raise the organization’s operations to a high level and make it well-resourced, with the best management policies and procedures, so the world-class system it builds will stand the test of time

That system’s vision includes:

- Leadership in achieving equity goals for the community as defined in PlanDSM
- The parks and recreation system is everywhere and a fundamental part of everyone’s daily living
- Programming addresses goals of healthy living; active, reflective, social and educational
- Trails connect in all ways—especially among neighborhoods, parks and schools; everyone is within a ten-minute walk of a park or trail
- The park system’s care of natural areas, biodiversity and the environment demonstrate stewardship ideals; nature is always at hand
- World-class facilities help set Des Moines’ national identity and character
- Parks and trails use the latest technology for programs, promotion, security and system management
- The system attracts and keeps new businesses and young adults in the city
- Operational and maintenance needs are in sync with the system’s funding
- Neighborhood parks are the system’s backbone

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.

# GOALS TO REALIZE THE VISION OF LIVEDSM

In addition to the goals and policies identified in *PlanDSM*, *LiveDSM* is organized around five goals for the future that are the most essential and transformative elements of this Plan for Des Moines Parks and Recreation. While not specifically called out as one of the five goals highlighted below, the topic of health is woven into each of these ideas. People that have access to parks, trails and programming in our parks lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. This benefits individuals and the community as a whole. It reduces healthcare costs and improves mental wellbeing of users and those who call the City of Des Moines home.

## MAKING THE PLAN WORK

The vision of *LiveDSM* will be realized through the smart park and recreation plans, partnerships and policy directions as outlined in this *LiveDSM* Plan. The work ahead, though wide ranging, is unified by

the vision of transforming lives for the better and the intent to build and sustain a world-class parks and recreation system.

Implementing the plan will lead to a system shaped by attention to equity, health, nature and social connections. This focus will deliver equitable use of resources, high-quality parks and trails, neighborhood enrichment, better urban design and more engaging programs, while also activating waterways, improving natural areas and making places people want to visit. These are quality-of-living outcomes.

## EQUITY



### Goal 1—Deliver Equitable Facilities and Programs

Because parks and trails play a very special part in people's lives, Des Moines Parks and Recreation has a duty to strive for racial

equity in providing park and trail facilities and programming across the community. To accomplish this, conversations about race equity will need to be held and new behaviors and policies will need to be put into practice. Des Moines Parks and Recreation is committed to working with citizens and elected and appointed officials to eliminate inequities in the community and increase everyone's ability to succeed.

## ATTRACTION



### Goal 2—Support Year-Round Programming that Attracts People to Parks

Park programs and special events must deliver exceptional service and highly attractive programs year-round to current and yet-to-be-reached park users, while promoting personal and public health, equity, social connections, learning and play. Audiences





# GOALS TO REALIZE THE VISION OF LIVEDSM

of wide-ranging interests and backgrounds must be fully engaged to effectively deliver the public health and equity outcomes called for in this plan. Programming is every bit as essential as spaces, places and facilities.

## HEART



### **Goal 3—Make Parks and Trails the Heart of the Community**

Neither health nor equity outcomes can advance without a concerted effort to understand the needs and wants of the neighbors of parks and trails, the neighborhoods themselves and the neighborhood system gaps. This requires ongoing, meaningful engagement of residents. The department must know current conditions through sound inventories, stay ahead of trends and always ensure that parks, trails and connectors are safe. These neighborhood investments require acknowledging the character and identity of the individual neighborhoods, while being nimble enough to accommodate changing conditions and public interests.

## NATURE



### **Goal 4—Improve Natural Systems**

The dramatic changes in the Des Moines region

over the last 150 years are least noticeable in the natural areas of Des Moines' parks. They stand as refuges for biodiversity and healthy ecosystems. Des Moines Parks and Recreation will build on this natural legacy through a vigorous program of restoration, management and monitoring of progress. The variety of plant and animal life, the beauty of the forests, wetlands, prairies and the sense of peace these areas inspire will generate widespread support for budgets to manage these natural areas. The connection between land use and water quality will be made obvious by the example of well-managed parks and their contributing watersheds.

## INNOVATION



### **Goal 5—Launch New Approaches to Parks and Recreation**

Despite exceptional past success, the department can't achieve a world-class system without a highly professionalized and well-resourced approach for the future. The department intends to routinely employ best-management practices, thoughtfully use technology, make meaningful partnerships and retain an ever-enthusiastic and effective staff rich in resources. This requires building a system with access to real-time data, recognizing trends and innovations and achieving ongoing financial support. These approaches bring the

best of the industry to bear on all programs and projects. The partners will help expand capacity. Broader, deeper, increasingly meaningful and accountable partnerships are needed for a world-class system that is built to last and serves the needs of the public into the future.

## ASPIRATIONS

To effectively serve all citizens and users of the City's park and recreation system, the following aspirations have been established to paint a better picture of the vision for Des Moines Parks and Recreation.

### **Equitable**

Systems originally intended to serve the dominant cultural groups have not fully transitioned to systems ready to serve all residents equally well. Tackling inherent—and often unrecognized—bias will challenge the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system. Des Moines parks, however, are using this planning process to start ensuring the allocation of services within the City is equitable.

### **Effective**

This planning emerges from the voices of the community, including many stakeholders and partners. At the same time, making and implementing decisions should also be based on data and best practices.

### **Healthy**

“Healthy” means 1) the health of the system’s physical assets, internal resources and natural resources; 2) the financial health of the parks and trails operations; and 3) the physical and mental health of the people and cultural groups using the system. A healthy system supports all three areas. The resilience of the system—despite change over time—depends on a healthy environment, economy and society.

### **Vital**

Des Moines’ Park and Recreation system is a primary driver for quality of life in the City. Parks, trails and programs help residents live healthy, rewarding lives, and are an essential draw for new residents and businesses, and for business and employee retention. This plan—and the community—must recognize that fact.

### **Responsive**

As trends and needs change, the system must be able to adapt, while still maintaining the principles and goals that drive this plan’s vision and mission.



# THE PLANNING PROCESS

## PUBLIC QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The process has been driven by public engagement, reflections of decision makers and community leaders, staff input and the ongoing involvement of steering and technical committees—meeting jointly in a series of stakeholder reviews. Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department staff and the consulting team partnered consistently throughout the plan development. They worked to collect historical and current information while identifying trends, innovations and policies for the future. In-depth work included understanding details of operations and management. This work set the plan's foundation for moving forward through expansion of best management practices, improved partnerships, new ways of defining parks and new ways of doing business.

Engagement included: open houses, neighborhood meetings, park events, community discussions, outreach to seniors and students and focus groups with park users and decision-makers. Additionally, almost 1,200 people participated in an online questionnaire, indicating where they see needed improvements and where they seek more services or facilities. The data here reflects those survey results that reinforce feedback from the overall public engagement. The process reached more than 2,500 public contacts in total.

### DRIVING THEMES

#### IMPROVE

- NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS
- TRAIL CONNECTIONS
- HANDICAPPED ACCESS
- CUSTOMER SERVICE
- WATER QUALITY
- TRAIL SIGNS AND MAPS

#### MORE

- RESOURCES FOR PARKS
- WINTER ACTIVITIES
- PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES
- DISC GOLF
- MAINTENANCE
- SECURITY
- NATURAL LANDS
- RESTROOMS
- RIVER RECREATION
- FREE SPLASH PADS
- SHELTERS
- UNPAVED TRAILS
- URBAN GREEN SPACE
- LAND TO GROW FOOD
- HISTORICAL INFORMATION
- CLEAN WATER
- COMMUNICATION





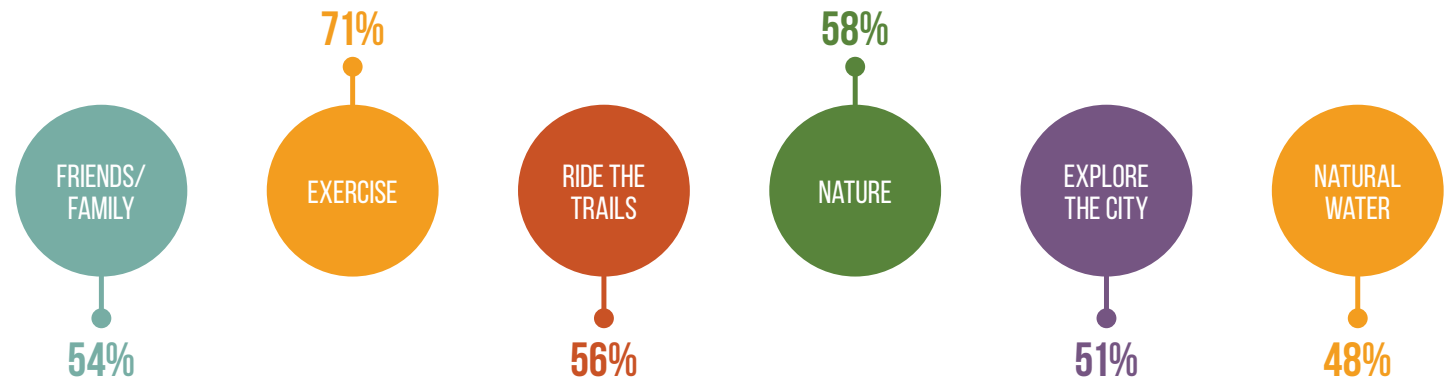
### GREATEST STRENGTH



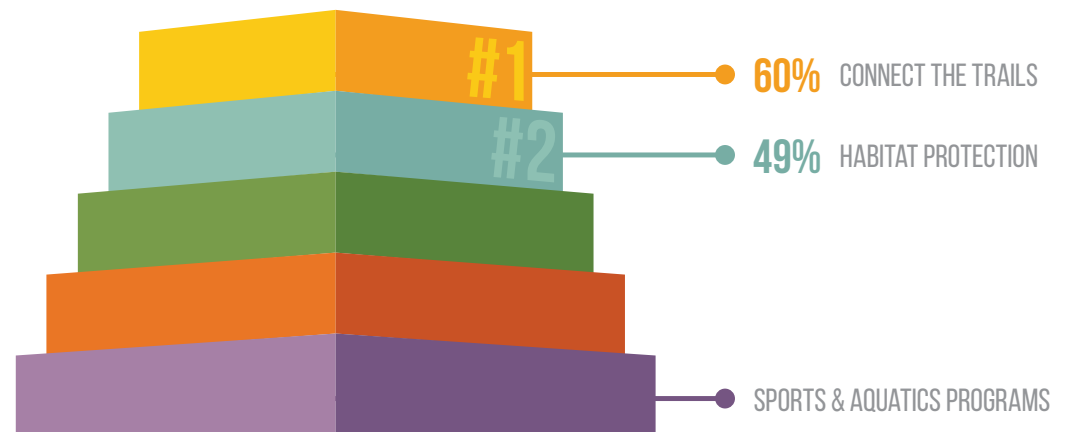
### GREATEST CHALLENGE



### WHY DO YOU USE DES MOINES PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES?



### HIGH VS. LOW PRIORITY



# PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES

## CONTEXT AND EXISTING CONDITIONS

At the time of the 1995 plan, many Des Moines residents realized that when it came to parks and recreation, there was a need for reinvestment, redirection and dreaming. That plan, therefore, spoke of reinvesting in the riverfront, restoring Gray's Lake to its glory days and building a significant trails system.

The transition of the department started in the early 1990's. The director at that time began to focus on community-to-regional facilities and creating partnerships within the City and region. Leadership since has continued in that vein with great success. Still, the challenge remains: shifting from regional-scale work to focus on the more intimate spaces—the neighborhood park, the things that take place outside a resident's

front door—not just downtown or at the regional scale. The downtown efforts are essential in building a city of renown, but at the same time, the Des Moines Parks and Recreation infrastructure also needs to connect in a neighbor-to-neighbor way.

With growing national recognition for this community, opportunities to enrich the lives of residents also grow. Benchmarking and understanding applicable level-of-service standards provide tools for identifying priority directions and defining success. Of particular value is crafting critical new metrics—in this plan, shaping what's required to achieve true equity through the Parks and Recreation system for Des Moines residents. This is not a historical measure, but one of the present and future.

Historically, Des Moines Parks and Recreation has been delivering meaningful results—often through big-picture initiatives (think Principal Riverwalk, Gray's Lake, John and Mary Pappajohn Sculpture Park, the trails network). But now it's time to maintain these features over time, ensure delivery of services at the neighborhood scale—in an equitable fashion—and make sure the system can stand the test of time. That requires a new emphasis on the inner workings of the agency and partnerships that sustain the effort. A history of bold, large-scale initiatives is about to modestly shift, not sacrificing big and bold, but building on it to embrace neighborhoods and ensure the fundamentals of Parks and Recreation management are in place for the long haul.



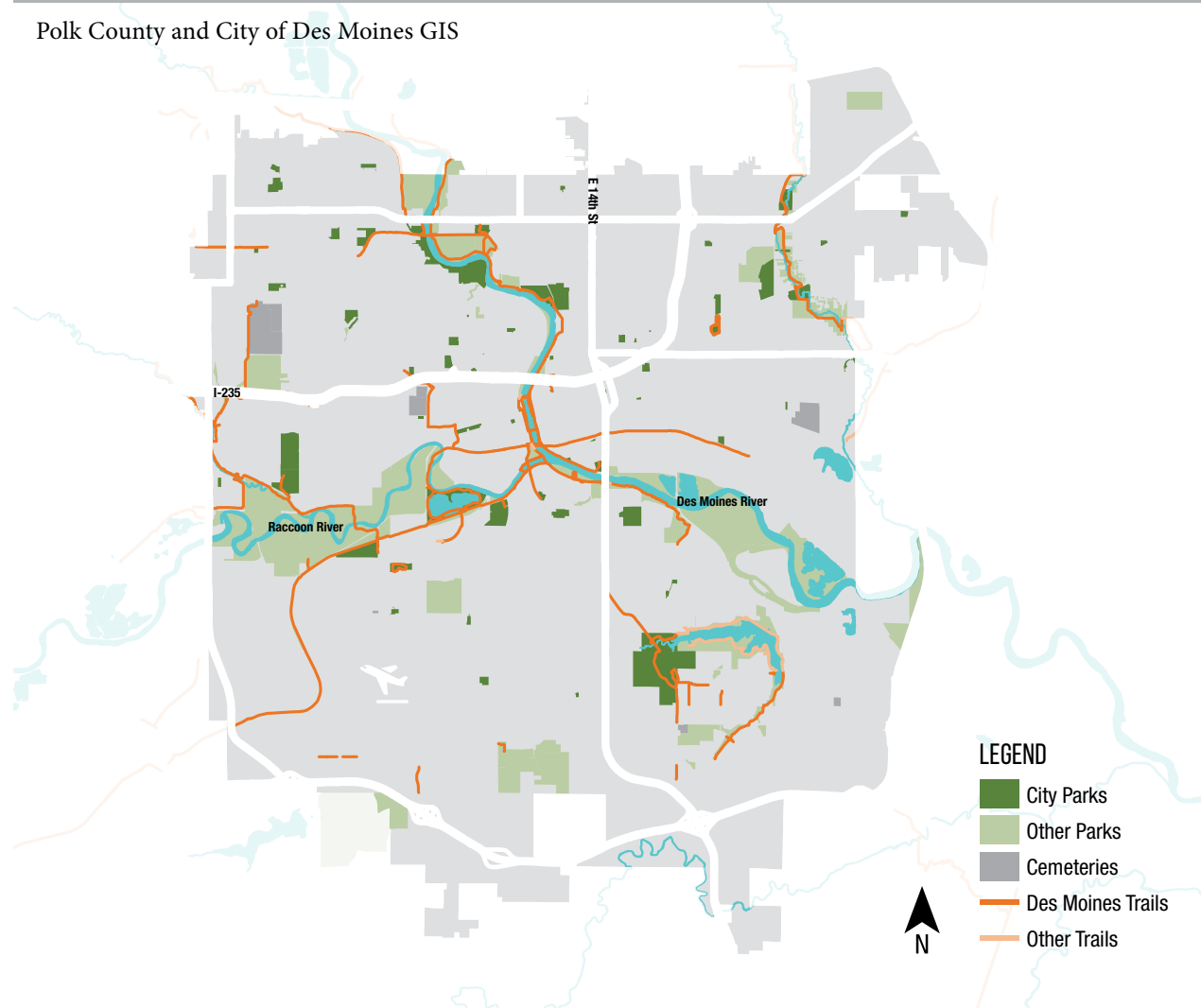


# PARKS, TRAILS AND PROGRAMS

## AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

### EXISTING PARKS AND TRAILS

Polk County and City of Des Moines GIS



### PARKS INVENTORY NEEDED

A detailed inventory of the system as a baseline for operations, maintenance and budgeting—as well as additional planning—is essential. An overview assessment of each of the parks in the system was conducted as part of this study and notes from those park reviews are included in the Appendix of this report. This is not, however, a substitute for a detailed inventory, but it is of value in informing this plan.

Overall, park conditions are in generally good shape, particularly considering the shortage of resources available. This is a tribute to the park staff's ability to work effectively with the resources available and to uncover private resources and partnerships to aid the system. That said, as systems age, information about age and condition can be connected to resources for stitch-in-time maintenance savings, improvements in accessibility and filling system gaps in service.

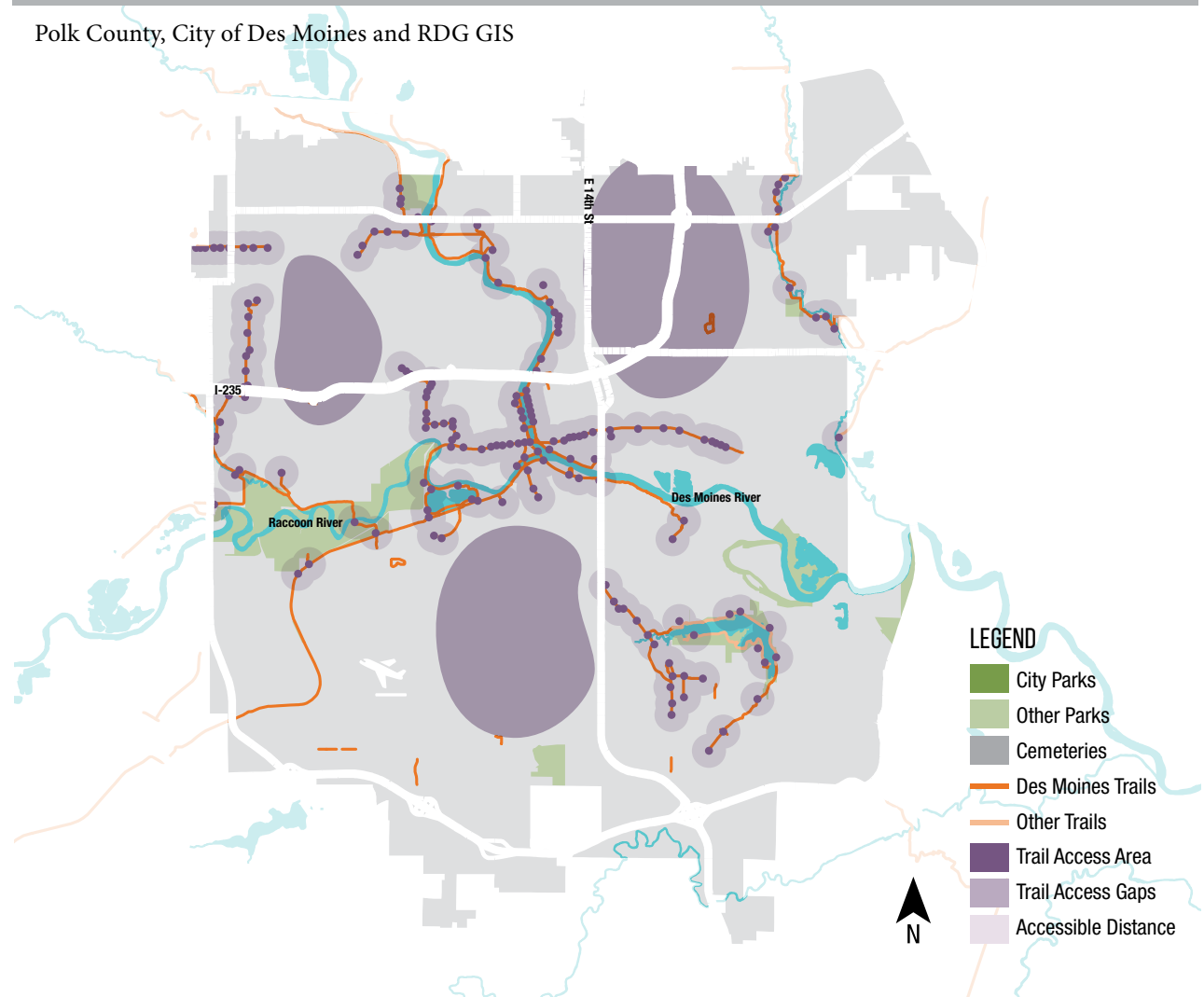


## TARGETED TRAILS GROWTH, ENHANCED ACCESS

A particular strength of the system overall is the trails network and its associated high-quality, helpful signage. Additional connections, however, will go a long way toward improving access not just to trails, but also to parks and programming sites—growing the system’s capacity to deliver public health and equity outcomes. Coordination with efforts to implement the City’s transportation master plan and complete streets policy for connectivity, along with some overall system expansion (particularly to the south and northeast), will prove valuable for the future.

### TRAIL ACCESS: FIVE-MINUTE WALK TO TRAIL ACCESS

Polk County, City of Des Moines and RDG GIS

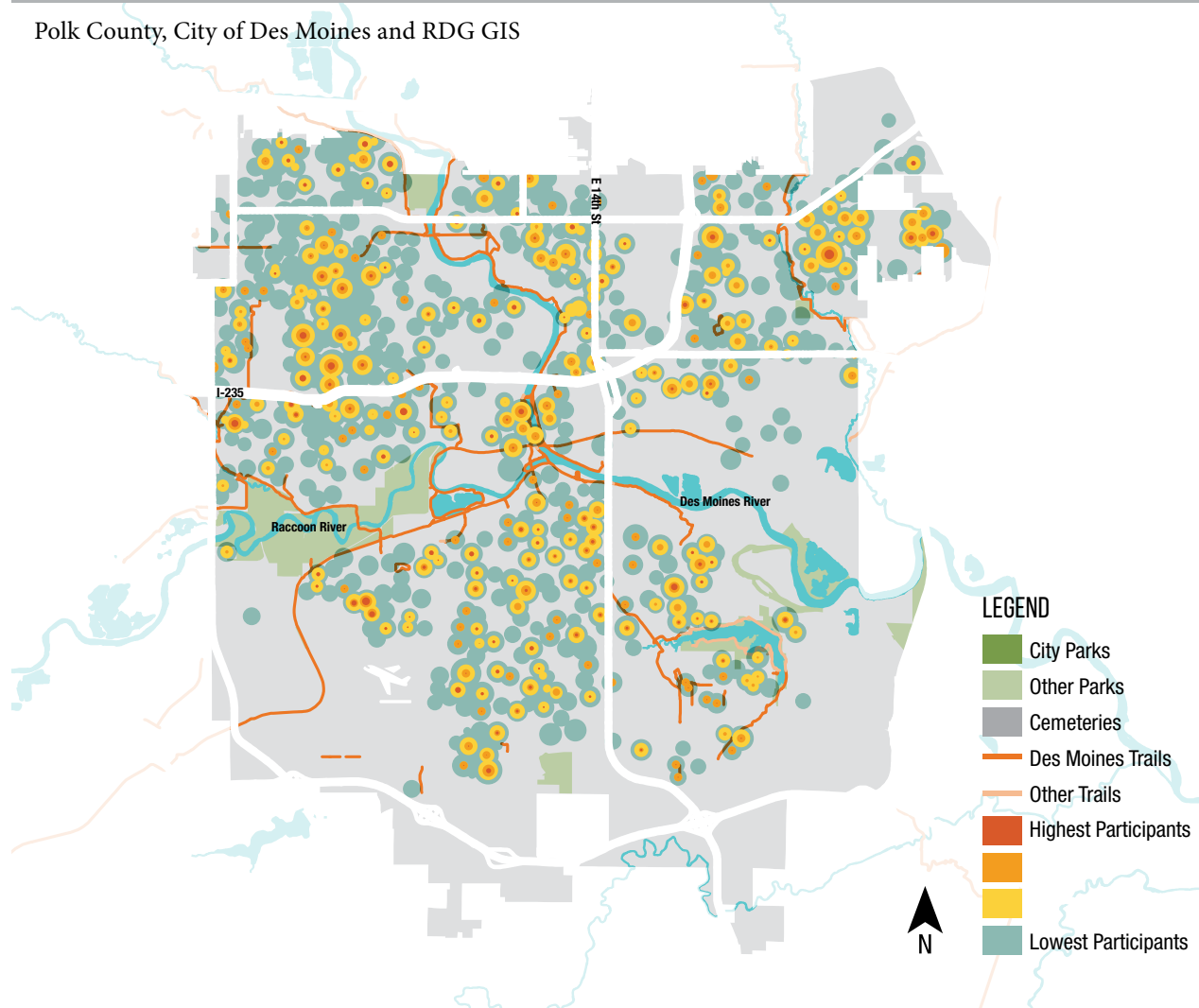


# PARKS, TRAILS AND PROGRAMS

## AN OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

### PARTICIPANT HEAT MAP

Polk County, City of Des Moines and RDG GIS



### PROGRAMS

Des Moines Parks and Recreation maintains strong program offerings and continues to build on those programs with new partnerships and technologies. At the same time, when considering who is participating in these programs, either outreach is lacking or the appeal of the programming leaves some audiences wanting more. The following map shows a “heat map” of resident participation in Des Moines Parks and Recreation department programming—and identifies gaps in the system.

When identifying gaps in resident participation, some overlap appears between priority zones for addressing inequities, health outcomes and lack of program participation. As dialogue continues and enriches around inequities and barriers, new approaches to programming may occur. (See Demographics and Social/Equity standards.)

# LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

As mentioned above, the Parks and Recreation Department leadership, management and partnerships re-energized nearly three-decades ago and that vibrancy continues to this day. However, to keep up with increasing demands on the system due to growth and trends/expectations, a new foundation for the department must be put in place. This will maximize use of best management practices, creating and enhancing new partnerships and approaches to leverage resources and partners for ever-greater benefits. This lay-the-foundation work begins with a detailed inventory and business-oriented approaches to revenue management and funding priorities. Details appear in Chapter VII: Innovation.

### IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES

The City of Des Moines was founded on the natural resources in and around the Des Moines River, the Raccoon River and their tributaries. Military scouts and early American settlers recognized the value of these rivers for military purposes, transportation and water power. The region's forests provided lumber for buildings; the surrounding prairies were easily converted into productive cropland. Since settlement, and especially in recent decades, Des Moines has thrived and grown, resulting in the loss and degradation of many of its natural resources. Today, Des Moines parks contain many of the City's best and most protected natural areas. These parks and natural areas are valuable to the community, delivering ecosystem services—spontaneous benefits people gain from nature's processes, such as water purification and flood reduction, soil building, wildlife and fish regeneration and air purification. Public interest in conservation is growing and more City resources are dedicated to protect, enhance and celebrate the City's natural areas.

Understanding the natural resources in an area is the first step in conservation—what is their condition, their function, their value? Just as important, what restoration work and ongoing management should the City carry out to create a healthy and resilient natural realm in the human-dominated landscape?

To answer these questions, Dr. Thomas Rosburg of Drake University completed a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) in 2014. He assessed and mapped the best natural areas in Des Moines parks and conservation lands (Rosberg 2014). This NRI and other data sources—as well as a deep knowledge of the Des Moines region's ecology and its needs for restoration and management—were the foundation for the assessment and recommendations for natural resources in this comprehensive plan.

# LIVEDSM

## ITS REGIONAL CONTEXT

This plan has been developed within a context of increasing interest in a regional approach to some aspects of park and recreation services in central Iowa—particularly paved trails, water trails and the greenways network as envisioned through a series of regional planning efforts. These plans have involved the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Greater Des Moines Partnership's Capital Crossroads, multiple jurisdictions and private partners including for- and non-profits. Challenges of water quality and water quantity in the region have brought new collaborations across the metro in the form of Water Management Authorities and new public-private partnerships. The region has also explored funding mechanisms including bonding and local option sales taxes to support parks and trails with mixed success—while also continuing to ramp up private engagement in recreation initiatives.

The regional interests are balanced at the local level with focused attention on community-scale neighborhood parks and programs.



### PLANDSM

This thoughtful, comprehensive plan looks at a new zoning code as its top priority, which ultimately dovetails with this plan's emphasis on thoughtful neighborhood park planning, development and upgrades. The data of this report—from demographics to economic growth—also aid this document in its overall development. The Parks and Recreation Department's emphasis on racial and social equity in this plan links *LiveDSM* directly to PlanDSM.



### GUIDEDSM

This 15-year strategic plan (2016–2031) requires the success of *LiveDSM* to reach

many of its visionary elements including: vibrant capital, great neighborhoods, thriving regional economy and leadership in sustainable communities. Of particular note is the GuideDSM's vision of "abundant opportunities for leisure." *LiveDSM* should strengthen that vision considerably. The five goals of GuideDSM for the City (financially sound, livable, sustainable, high-performing and upgraded infrastructure) are reflected here through the Parks and Recreation Department and the system it intends to build and maintain for the present and future.



### CAPITAL CROSSROADS

Capital Crossroads is the ongoing planning/volunteer work of the Greater Des Moines Partnership to continue to advance the region within a series of categories (or capitals) that include natural resources and governance. The Governance and Natural Resources committees have been working in areas of interest to parks and recreation in Des Moines and throughout the region. With the MPO, the Great Outdoors Foundation and other organizations, Capital Crossroads' Natural Resources committee has promoted greenways and water trails. Currently the Governance committee is spearheading



a regional education effort to address stormwater management. This initiative links directly to water quality/quantity work required for any future, successful riparian corridors/greenways or water trails networks.



## THE TOMORROW PLAN

The Tomorrow Plan engaged the eighteen governments of the Des Moines region in a three-year planning effort ending in 2014 to define the region's future. The Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) funded the work with federal housing and transportation planning funds. The goal was to align transportation improvements and development across the region, improve the environment—especially water quality and flood resilience—and encourage communities to work together to compete globally.

The Tomorrow Plan laid out actions and policies to achieve four big goals:

- Create a resilient regional economy
- Improve the region's environmental health and access to the outdoors

- Further the health and well-being of all residents in the region
- Increase regional cooperation and efficiency at all levels

The Tomorrow Plan identified five voluntary initiatives for governments to advance in the near term:

### *Nodes and Corridors*

The idea of development nodes and connecting corridors simply recognizes changing tastes in how people get around and what kinds of neighborhoods they want to live in—adding variety to choices in the Des Moines region. In its 2017 plan, the privately funded Capital Crossroads 2.0 Strategy points to this Tomorrow Plan initiative as a key strategy for the region.

### *Greenways*

Unify and completely connect all the parks, conservation lands, open space and trails of the region. Key steps to launch this initiative are to complete natural areas inventories to find the best areas; complete watershed plans to improve water quality; and celebrate land purchases, new parks and trail completions.

### *Resilient Neighborhoods*

Recognize the individual character of neighborhoods by supporting neighborhood

associations, planning for more lower-cost housing choices and providing model ordinances that strengthen neighborhoods.

### *Regional Cooperation*

Focus for now on improving flood resiliency and water quality. Look for and highlight stormwater best practices around the region through model ordinances and natural stormwater utilities.

### *Everyday Stewards*

To make these goals a reality, everybody has a stake and role to play. Look at the Tomorrow Plan ideas for how to make a difference.

BENCHMARKING

02

# INTRODUCTION

## INCLUSION CRITERIA

Benchmarking is a vital process that allows organizations to compare their assets, programs, policies and other criteria to those of peer organizations. Such comparisons are often used by agencies to evaluate themselves and, ultimately, better plan for growth and improvement. In this analysis, initial criteria were selected by the master planning team in conjunction with the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department. Additional points of interest were identified from data provided by the selected peer agencies and compiled for this report.

The City of Des Moines is growing, and the Parks and Recreation Department is taking steps to meet its new and changing needs. Anticipating the City's future growth, and with

the Department's goals in mind, the master planning team selected for comparison peer benchmarking cities which were identified based on geographic location in the Midwest region in addition to having reputable park and recreation systems. Aspirational cities were selected by the Department based on the Trust for Public Land park score rankings, familiarity of the cities to residents and sharing similar goals and characteristics of the Des Moines park and recreation system. The master planning team sought cities with similar or slightly larger populations for peer cities, and at least double in size for aspirational cities to reflect the 2% population growth over the next 15 years<sup>[1]</sup>.

Using these criteria, three peer agencies and three aspirational agencies were selected for

comparison and were contacted to complete a survey of approximately 45 questions.

The following three cities identified as "Peer Cities" were included in the final analysis:

- Omaha, Nebraska
- Madison, Wisconsin
- St. Paul, Minnesota

The following three cities identified as "Aspirational Cities" were included in the final analysis:

- Austin, Texas
- Denver, Colorado
- Minneapolis, Minnesota



MINNEAPOLIS, MN



MADISON, WI



It should be noted that the neighboring cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis were both selected because they score high through the NRPA and Trust for Public Lands system and leadership.

Compared to the benchmark cities, the Des Moines park and recreation system offers more park acreage per service area population than the other agencies, with the exception of Austin and Omaha. The percent of the population in Des Moines that is within a 10-minute walk to a park is also above average at 88% compared to the benchmark cities. Access to green-space is a priority for the city and, like many of the other benchmark agencies, the Mayor of Des Moines has pledged a commitment through The Trust for Public Land to create a park system in which all citizens are within a 10-minute walk to a park. In order for the city to meet this goal and maintain level of service, park acreage and trail mileage will need to continue to grow. Compared to the benchmark cities surveyed, the paved trail mileage in Des Moines is higher than average, at least doubling the mileage per service area population of the aspirational cities Austin and Minneapolis. Unpaved trail mileage, however, is lower than the benchmark average.

As for park and recreation facilities, the City of Des Moines offers an above-average number of aquatic recreation facilities including aquatic centers, wading pools, splash pools and spray grounds compared to the benchmark



DES MOINES, IA

# INTRODUCTION

## INCLUSION CRITERIA



cities. Swimming pools, however, are lower than the benchmark average due to the large number of swimming pools the aspirational cities offer. Disc golf and adventure sports are very popular in Des Moines which explains the higher-than-average number of disc golf courses and adventure sports facilities including climbing walls, skate parks and BMX tracks. Facilities that Des Moines could develop to meet or exceed benchmark averages include: outdoor sports facilities (e.g., softball fields, rectangular fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, volley ball courts), community garden plots, dog parks, playgrounds, picnic tables, fishing and water access (e.g., marinas, docks), ice skating rinks and community centers. Like the aspirational cities surveyed, Des Moines does not offer any multipurpose facilities. If the City would like to increase these types of facilities, one option may be to open schools after hours—similar to Denver’s lighted school house concept which makes every school a community center after hours.

Another area in which the City of Des Moines could improve is agency programming. Compared to the benchmark cities, Des Moines offers a lower number of programs and permits for agency-sponsored programs and events. Non-programming-based agencies such as Madison tend to issue a higher number of permits compared to agencies that offer more programs.

Improving the City of Des Moines’ park and recreation system does not happen without a cost. In order to increase the number of programs offered, facilities and parkland maintained, the City will need to find innovative ways to increase funding to support agency staff and operations. Currently, Des Moines has a lower-than-average operating budget per capita compared to the benchmark agencies surveyed. Peer and aspirational cities receive a higher tax income per capita than Des Moines. Compared to the benchmark cities, Des Moines is relatively short-staffed, serving nearly three times as many residents per full-time employee. While Des Moines has a relatively strong volunteer base, this is an area that could be improved since the number of volunteer hours do not quite meet the benchmark average. Increasing the volunteer base will help the City as it grows its financial base for staffing and operations.

Of the benchmark cities surveyed, two out of the three aspirational cities have received CAPRA accreditation and the NRPA Gold Medal award. It is recommended that the City of Des Moines provide a further assessment to determine standards that are not being met in order to address these in the future and potentially pursue national accreditation.

# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

According to the U.S. Census, the City of Des Moines is the fastest-growing city in the Midwest. As of 2016 the population was estimated to be 212,859. Projected growth suggests the population will increase to 269,957 by 2030. Given this swift growth, assessing the level of service (LOS) currently provided to residents and calculating the LOS in coming years is of utmost importance for Des Moines Parks and Recreation.

LOS is generally expressed as numeric metrics which analyze parkland, recreation facilities and recreation programs in relation to geography and population estimates. The LOS numbers are compared to standards from the industry as well as national averages and benchmark cities to provide a clearer picture of the way forward for the parks and recreation entity. There are a variety of other factors which are also important to consider when determining the LOS, such as industry trends and the specific needs of the community. This section explores trends in the parks and recreation industry, the unique characteristics of parks and recreation in the City of Des Moines and a needs assessment and analysis of parks and recreation resources in the City of Des Moines. Together, these factors help identify potential gaps in the system and inform recommendations to ensure a bright, healthy and sustainable future for Des Moines Parks and Recreation.

### PARKS AND RECREATION IN THE CITY OF DES MOINES

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. The Parks and Recreation Department 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 un-paved 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 volley ball 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.

The Parks and Recreation Department is an active partner with a variety of other entities to increase the number of facilities and programs provided to the community. These consistent partners include the following:

#### *Des Moines Public Schools*

The Des Moines Parks and Recreation department has participated with the public schools for more than four years to provide youth sports programming for the students and citizens of Des Moines. The partnership has worked to find facilities for programs and supply staff to offer opportunities in flag football, basketball, soccer and volleyball for students in grades 1–7. The goal of the collaboration is to provide quality athletic after-school experiences which emphasize fun, teamwork, sportsmanship and achievement.

#### *Des Moines Police Department*

The department has partnered with the Des Moines Police Department to provide a space for the police-run youth Boxing Club at the Columbus Community Center. Both partners recognize the issue of juvenile crime and are using the Boxing Club as one way to address it. The program seeks to develop physical and emotional maturity in youth through positive discipline, leadership and a supportive peer group. This type of initiative is valuable for youth development



# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

and developing stakeholders who have a connection to the parks and recreation system.

### *Polk County Conservation*

The department has also been a partner to Polk County Conservation. Polk County Conservation manages 21 park and wildlife areas which cover 14,000 acres and receive over 2.4 million visitors each year. Collaboration with Polk County Conservation has included the development of a Family Nature Club series, offered at multiple parks throughout the year.

### *Parks Area Foundation*

The Parks Area Foundation (PAF) is a local non-profit dedicated to helping residents understand the history of the City and appreciate its parks. In 2016 PAF hosted free concerts at Riverview Park to provide programming for the area. A recent decision by the Des Moines City Council will make PAF the primary concessionaire of Riverview Park, which will include the Prairie Meadows Riviera Stage and Variety Club Star Playground. The Parks and Recreation Department will be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the park. This partnership will bring new facilities and opportunities to this particular park in the City of Des Moines.

### NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS

The park and recreation needs of a community are expressed through a LOS analysis. Numeric LOS metrics are most commonly used when analyzing parkland and recreation facilities and express acreage or availability in per capita terms. LOS standards will change over time as the City of Des Moines grows and changes. In this master plan, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Level-of-Service Standards and the Trust for Public Lands Standards are used as guidelines to define a service area based on population and the resources that support parks, facilities and amenities. A projected population for 2030 is applied in this section to determine how LOS standards would change if no increases are made to the parkland inventory. Similarly, this section will explore the implications to park acreage if current LOS standards are maintained over time.

### PARK CLASSIFICATION

Park systems generally provide their communities with a wide array of diverse settings for many uses, and this is the case for the City of Des Moines. As a part of this needs assessment, a park classification system developed through industry best practices, community engagement and benchmark research has been created for the City of Des Moines in order to measure the development of

an equitable system of parks for its residents. Park classification systems are useful tools to analyze the existing resources of a park system and to identify needs in terms of facilities, programs and access. Park classifications are primarily based on a park's acreage and the nature of its location in the community. Parks of similar size or location often fill similar social, ecological and economic roles in a park system. Very small parks are limited in the recreation opportunities they can provide as well as their degree of resource protection. On the other hand, much larger parks can contain expanses of natural areas, or a sports complex with multiple recreation areas.

In this section, the City of Des Moines' park and recreation system will be broken down into park classifications and the LOS standard for each classification will be described. As part of its commitment to responsible management, the department adheres to a LOS that is responsive to the City's current needs, future growth and the high expectations of residents.

This classification system will be explained in greater depth in the remainder of this section and includes the following park types:

- Mini Parks
- Neighborhood Parks
- Community Parks
- Special-Use Parks/Areas

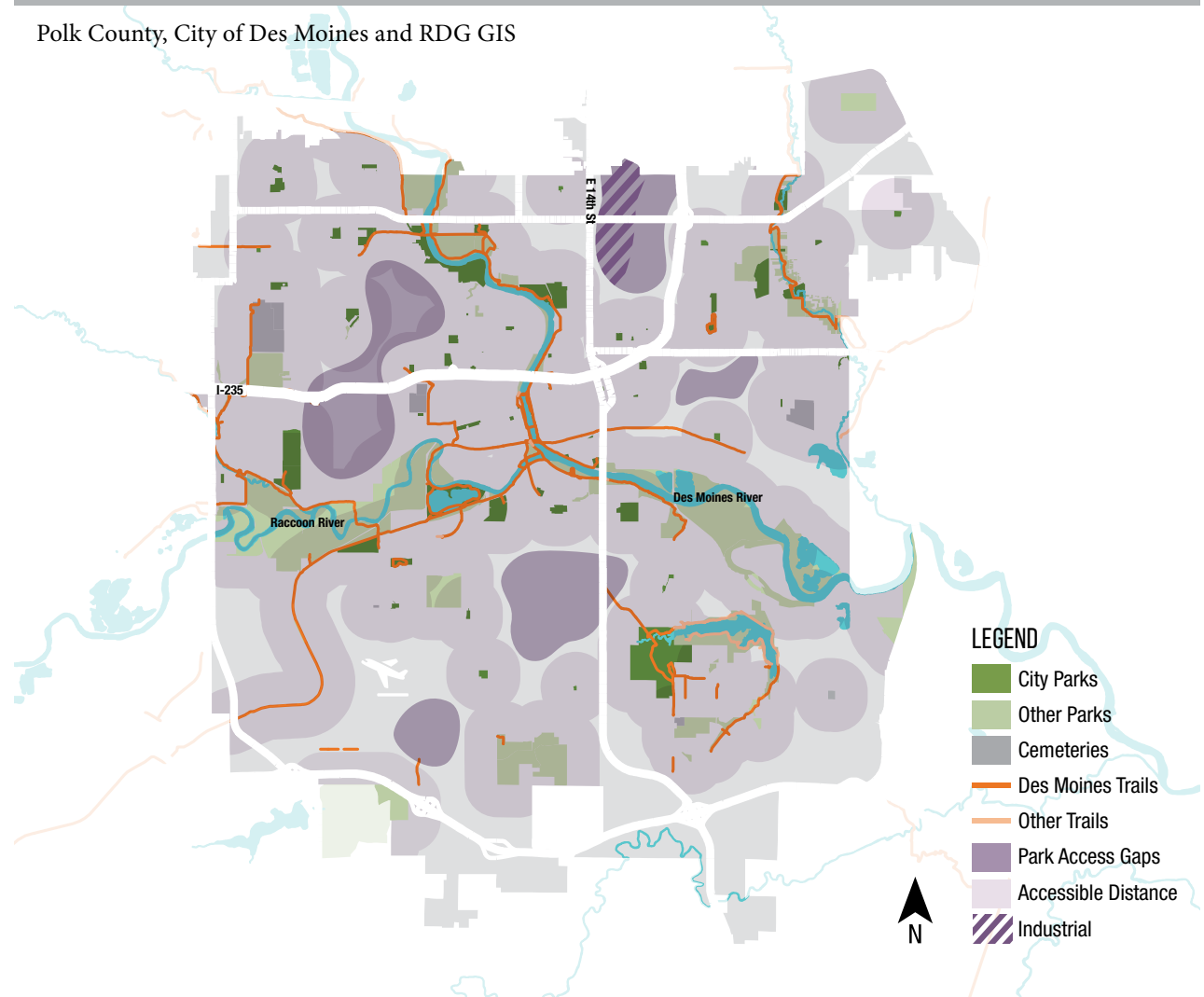


- Regional Parks
- Greenway (including trails)
- Open Space areas

The Park Access Map depicts the service area managed by the City of Des Moines and shows the City's developed parkland. Based on LOS mapping, Des Moines residents generally have good access to a variety of parkland, trails and open space but areas of need do surface.

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

Polk County, City of Des Moines and RDG GIS



# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

PARK CLASSIFICATION	
Type of Area	Current Acres
Mini/Urban Parks	0.32
Neighborhood Parks	409.50
Community Parks	699.52
Regional Parks	2,338.50
Special-Use Parks	4.86
Regional Areas (Greenway and Open Space) <sup>(1)</sup>	1,934.06
Special-Use Areas	1,565.25
Total Acres Managed by City of Des Moines	6,952.02
Portion of Trail Mileage Managed by Des Moines	81 miles

The breakdown of park classifications for the City of Des Moines is listed in the following table. Regional Parks make up the bulk of the system (67.73%) and cover more than 2,000 acres. Regional areas and special-use areas are the next largest classification and make up 27.82% and 22.52% respectively. Community Parks make up 10.06% of the system while Neighborhood Parks are 5.89% of the system. Special-Use Parks and Mini Parks are both smaller pieces of the system and cover 0.07% and 0.005% respectively.

Every community has a unique set of service standards that fits its community profile. In the tables included in this section, the recommended LOS represents an adjusted level of service based on the unique characteristics of Des Moines, programming trends in the community and the goals of the City.

### Mini Parks

Mini Parks, or Urban Parks, are specialized areas that serve a concentrated or limited population. They are typically located in neighborhoods that are comprised of apartment complexes, townhouse developments or senior residences. The service area for Mini Parks is less than a quarter-mile radius and typically these parks are one acre or less. The City of Des Moines has only one Mini Park, Rotary Riverwalk Park, which is 0.32 acres and explains the low LOS.

1. Regional areas include 43% open space and 2% greenways

The City of Des Moines Park and Recreation department currently provides a total of 0.32 acres of urban parkland for a LOS of 0 acres per 1,000 residents. If no further acreage is added to the department, the projected growth in population will yield a LOS of 0 acres per 1,000 residents in the year 2030. To maintain the current LOS 0.09 acres would need to be added to the Department's lands. An additional 67.17 acres would be needed to meet NPRA's standard of 0.25 for LOS.

### Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood Parks primarily serve the surrounding neighborhood and are easily accessible by pedestrian walkways. They are intended to serve the recreational needs of people living or working within a half-mile radius of the park and typically range in size from 2 to 25 acres. They can be a combination of active recreational areas for family use, such as ball fields or playground apparatus, and passive recreation areas such as picnic shelters. Examples of the City's Neighborhood Parks include MacRae Park (50.94 acres), Carney Park (49.27 acres) and Pioneer Park (46.36 acres). Des Moines has a total of 43 Neighborhood Parks.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation currently provides a total of 409.50 acres of Neighborhood Park land for a LOS of 1.92 acres per 1,000 residents. If no further acreage is added to the department, the projected growth

MINI PARKS	
<b>Current Acreage</b>	0.32
<b>Current Level-of-Service</b> <i>(per thousand)</i> <sup>1</sup>	0.00
<b>2030 LOS</b> <sup>2</sup>	0.00
<b>Additional Acreage to Maintain Level-of-Service</b> <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	0.09
<b>Additional Acreage to Meet NPRA Standard</b> <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	67.17

NPRA STANDARD: 0.25–0.50 acres

1. Unless otherwise specified, LOS is presented as per 1,000 residents and based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-yr estimates.

2. Based on a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS	
<b>Current Acreage</b>	409.50
<b>Current Level-of-Service</b> <i>(per thousand)</i> <sup>1</sup>	1.92
<b>2030 Level-of-Service</b> <sup>2</sup>	1.52
<b>Additional Acreage to Maintain Level-of-Service</b> <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	109.85
<b>Additional Acreage to Meet NPRA Standard</b> <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	0

NPRA STANDARD: 1.00–2.00 acres

1. Unless otherwise specified, LOS is presented as per 1,000 residents and based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-year estimates.

2. Based on a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.

# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

### COMMUNITY PARKS

<b>Current Acreage</b>	699.52
<b>Current Level-of-Service</b> (per thousand) <sup>1</sup>	3.29
<b>2030 LOS</b> <sup>2</sup>	2.59
<b>Additional Acreage to Maintain Level-of-Service</b> (Required by 2030)	187.64
<b>Additional Acreage to Meet NRPA Standard</b> (Required by 2030)	650.27

NRPA STANDARD: 5.00–8.00 acres

1. Polk County Conservation Parks that directly serve urban residents and are in immediate proximity to City parks have been included for an accurate reflection of service to reside

2. Unless otherwise specified, LOS is presented as per 1,000 residents and based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-year estimates.

3. Based on a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.

### REGIONAL PARKS

<b>Current Acreage</b>	2,338.50
<b>Current Level-of-Service</b> (per thousand) <sup>1</sup>	10.99
<b>2030 Level-of-Service</b> <sup>2</sup>	8.66
<b>Additional Acreage to Maintain Level-of-Service</b> (Required by 2030)	627.29 <sup>3</sup>
<b>Additional Acreage to Meet NRPA Standard</b> (Required by 2030)	0

NRPA STANDARD: 5.00–10.00 acres

1. Unless otherwise specified, LOS is presented as per 1,000 residents and based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-year estimates.

2. Based on a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.

3. IMPORTANT TO NOTE—the current level of service reflects Water Works Park which is about to come on line as more of a full-service park, but has largely been used as an event and/or open space area throughout much of its history. It is currently an active space for cycling, horseback riding, fishing and birding. An underpass connection to Gray's Lake and an events lawn/amphitheater is planned for the near future.

in population will yield a LOS of 1.52 acres per 1,000 residents in the year 2030. To maintain the current LOS 109.85 acres would need to be added to the department's lands. Based on current acreage, no additional acres would be needed to meet NPRA's standard of 1.00 for LOS, as current Neighborhood Park acreage exceeds the projected standard by 139.54 acres.

### Community Parks

Community Parks are considered destination parks that generally require transportation to access. They are designed to serve groups of neighborhoods and, according to the National Recreation and Park Association, generally contain a minimum size of 30 acres with a service area radius of two miles. These parks typically feature lit outdoor recreation facilities that serve sports such as baseball, soccer, basketball and tennis, with on-site parking. Examples of the City's Community Parks are Prospect Park (140.18 acres) and Greenwood Park (80.76 acres). In total, these sites include 17 Community Parks.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation currently provides a total of 699.52 acres of Community Park land for an LOS of 3.29 acres per 1,000 residents. If no further acreage is added to the department, the projected growth in population will yield an LOS of 2.59 acres per 1,000 residents in the year 2030. To maintain the current LOS 187.64 acres would need to be added to the department's lands. An



additional 650.27 acres would be needed to meet NPRA's standard of 5.00–8.00 for LOS.

### ***Regional Parks***

Regional Parks, similar to large urban parks, are meant to serve a larger population than a Community Park and fill in when Community and Neighborhood Parks are not able to meet the community's needs. These parks may serve recreational needs or protect resources. The department has 10 Regional Parks and includes parks such as Gray's Lake Park, Ewing Park and Riverwalk parkland.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation currently provides a total of 2,238.50 acres of Regional parkland for an LOS of 10.99 acres per 1,000 residents. If no further acreage is added to the department, the projected growth in population will yield a LOS of 8.66 acres per 1,000 residents in the year 2030. To maintain the current LOS 627.29 acres would need to be added to the department's lands. No additional acreage is needed to meet NRPA's standard of 5.00 for LOS as it is expected to exceed the standard by 988.72 acres in 2030.

### ***Special-Use Parks***

Special-Use Parks include a variety of different parks that are generally focused on serving a specific purpose. Special-Use Parks generally fit into one of three categories: (1) historic, cultural or social parks, (2) recreation-based



# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

SPECIAL-USE PARKS	
Current Acreage	4.86
Current Level-of-Service <i>(per thousand)</i> <sup>1</sup>	0.02
2030 Level-of-Service <sup>2</sup>	0.02
Additional Acreage to Maintain Level-of-Service <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	1.30
Additional Acreage to Meet NRPA Standard <i>(Required by 2030)</i>	n/a

NRPA STANDARD: 5.00–10.00 acres

1. Unless otherwise specified, LOS is presented as per 1,000 residents and based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-year estimates.

2. Based on a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.

parks, or (3) outdoor recreation-based parks. The department currently has one Special-Use Park which explains the low LOS.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation currently provides a total of 4.86 acres of Special Use parkland for an LOS of 0.02 per 1,000 residents. If no further acreage is added to the department, the projected growth in population will yield a LOS of .02 acres per 1,000 residents in the year 2030. To maintain the current LOS 1.30 acres would need to be added to the department's lands.

### Open Space

Open space comes in many shapes and sizes. It typically does not have extensive active recreational programming with great flexible use. Two types of open space categories are typical with the City of Des Moines: spaces that provide more passive activities, and spaces that serve more of a conservation focus.

- Jim Muto Recreation Area
- Sycamore Area
- Four Mile Creek
- Gray's Lake Open Space
- Golf Creek Open Space
- SE Park/School Site
- Witmer Park Open Space
- Easter Lake Open Space



*A thriving and extensive parks  
and trail system helps  
attract and retain top talent.*

*We have to compete with other  
cities around the country.*

—Jay Byers

Greater Des Moines Partnership CEO,  
Capital Crossroads Tri-Chair

- Chautauqua Park Open Space
- Eagle Roost
- Des Moines River Open Space
- Riverwalk Park
- Cummins Woods
- River Hills
- Strasser Woods

#### **Natural Areas**

- Wildlife Habitat and Natural Areas
- Natural areas and low intensity recreational greenspace
- Land intentionally left undeveloped for nature and wildlife preservation

#### **Special-Use Areas**

Other Special Use Areas include seven cemeteries, three golf courses, a baseball park, sports complex, soccer park, softball park, tennis complex, botanical garden and sculpture park. Total acreage for these areas is 1,565.25.

#### **Undeveloped Parkland**

Land that is intended for future development into a park by the department. The department has 75 acres that it intends to develop. Land owned by the city that is not designated as a neighborhood park, community park, regional area, open space, etc., which the city intends to develop or designate as a space for public use.

# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

### RECREATION FACILITIES

The following recreation facility classifications are intended for use by Des Moines Parks and Recreation as guidelines to help establish a recreation facility inventory that represents and reflects the interests of the City of Des Moines community, accounts for relevant national trends, provides direction for future recreation facility management and fits within current and future funding levels. The table below provides a summary of the current LOS and identifies needs for each of these facilities. The current LOS was calculated primarily using the 2017 Trust for Public Land's recommended number of facilities based on city population and adjusted for the City of Des Moines' current and future population.<sup>{18}</sup> Where there were gaps in the Trust for Public Land's data, this information was supplemented by the 2017 American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) American Fitness Index.<sup>{19}</sup> National Recreation and Park Association Agency Performance Review Report<sup>{20}</sup> and benchmarking averages were used as an additional measure for the LOS when need

Des Moines Parks and Recreation operates a wide range of facilities including a BMX track, aquatic centers, disc golf courses and community garden plots, to name a few. Facilities benchmarking data was collected for the following categories: Aquatic Facilities,

Outdoor Recreation and Adventure Facilities, Indoor Recreation Facilities, Regional Gathering Spaces and Winter Recreation Facilities. The facilities selected for analysis support both general informal use by the public as well as specialized or scheduled use for athletic competitions, recreation programs and other events. Recreation facilities have highly specialized maintenance and management requirements and are subject to different standards than urban parkland. Benchmarking facilities in which a LOS could not be identified were not included in this plan. These facilities include aquatic centers, wading pools, spray/splash grounds, golf and disc golf courses and fishing/water access.

The facilities outlined in this report can be further categorized as active or passive recreation facilities. Active recreation facilities and "adventure facilities" include aquatic centers, skate parks, climbing walls and ice skating rinks and are typically more costly to build and operate over time. Community decisions about the provision of these facilities generally take into consideration the extent of the user base, lifecycle management costs and existence of similar facilities in or near the community.

Passive or community recreation facilities include playgrounds, shelters and some open rectangular fields for unstructured and

1. Data provided by Trust for Public Lands Park Score Metrics; TPL goals are for an entire community rather than a specific park agency
2. Trust for Public Lands recommends using the Median for calculating LOS
3. Data provided by ACSM American Fitness Index
4. Based on a population 100,000-250,000; number of residents per facility
5. Based on population over 250,000; number of residents per facility
6. The City offers two aquatic centers with swimming pools but does not offer any standalone outdoor pools
7. Per 100,000 residents
8. Outdoor basketball hoops per 10,000 residents
9. Per 10,000 residents
10. Ball diamonds per 10,000 residents
11. Per 20,000 residents
12. Per 10,000 residents
13. Per 100,000 residents



## CURRENT LEVEL-OF-SERVICE AND NEEDS

Recreation Facilities Type	Existing Quantity	TPL Range <sup>1</sup>	TPL Median <sup>2</sup>	ACSM/AFI Target Goal <sup>3</sup>	NRPA Standard <sup>4</sup>	NRPA Standard <sup>5</sup>	Benchmarking Median
AQUATIC FACILITIES							
Swimming Pools	0 <sup>6</sup>	-	-	3 <sup>7</sup>	-	-	22
OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES							
Basketball Courts <sup>8</sup>	60	0.7-10.2	2.6	3.1	8,104	12,190	89.5
Tennis Courts <sup>9</sup>	52			2			108
Baseball and Softball Fields <sup>10</sup>	16			1.9			100.5
Soccer Fields	15				17,407	49,789	34
Football Fields	2				55,000	87,937	16.5
INDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES							
Community Centers and Senior Adult Areas <sup>11</sup>	5			1			25.5
REGIONAL GATHERING PLACES							
Playgrounds <sup>12</sup>	55	0.7-7.4	2.4	2.4			153
Dog Parks <sup>13</sup>	3	0.0-7.2	0.9	1.1			10
Community Gardens	4				104,000	131,488	n/a
WINTER RECREATION FACILITIES							
Ice Skating	3				81,520	388,518	6.5

# LEVEL-OF-SERVICE

## STANDARDS

informal use. These facilities play a significant role in giving parks their character and, as a result of their broader use, a wider segment of the general public tends to access them. While passive/community recreation facilities are usually less expensive to develop and maintain, they also have notable lifecycle costs associated with their management.

Des Moines Park and Recreation meets LOS standards for providing a sufficient number of tennis courts, soccer fields, ice skating rinks, community gardens, playgrounds and dog parks. Community interest surveys, however, indicate a growing need for community garden plots, playgrounds and dog parks, which should be taken into account by the City to meet the demand of a growing population and widespread interest in these facilities. Facilities for which a need exists include swimming pools, outdoor basketball courts, baseball and softball fields, football fields and community and senior centers.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation offers a wide variety of recreation programs and services to Des Moines residents. In this needs assessment and trends analysis, the department's programs are analyzed for both specific and overarching issues in order to determine ways the department can enhance its services and most effectively use available resources. Programs and services were examined using national

data from the Sports & Fitness Industry Association's (SFIA) 2017 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report, benchmark data and information collected during the community engagement process.

The department understands its facilities and programs enhance the health, safety and livability of the City of Des Moines. The department offers over 1,000 programs and events annually. Across the benchmark communities reviewed for this master plan, the median number of programs a community provides is 3,768. The median number of permits offered is 1,100. The City of Des Moines, while serving a smaller population than the benchmarking communities surveyed, falls slightly below average, offering 2,721 programs and issuing 830 permits for programs and special events annually.

According to the SIFA's 2017 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report,<sup>{21}</sup> national participation rates in fitness sports, racquet sports, team sports, water sports and winter sports continue to see overall increases while participation in outdoor sports has remained fairly consistent and participation in individual sports has declined. Des Moines offers several opportunities for outdoor recreation including snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, nature clubs and hikes, stand-up paddle (SUP), fishing, community

1. LOS based on Trust for Public Land data and presented as per 1,000 residents based on a population of 212,859. This population estimate is based on 2016 ACS 5-year estimates.
2. 2030 LOS based on Trust for Public Land data and a population of 269,957. Population estimate derived by applying the 2016 annual census estimate growth rate of 0.02 percent.
3. NRPA standard based on population of 100,000–250,000.
4. NRPA standard based on population over 250,000.

FUTURE LEVEL-OF-SERVICE AND NEEDS										
Recreation Facilities Type	Existing Quantity	Current LOS <sup>1</sup>	LOS <sup>2</sup> (2030)	Current Need	Future Need (2030)	Current LOS NRPA <sup>3</sup>	LOS NRPA <sup>4</sup> (2030)	Current Need NRPA	Future Need (2030 NRPA)	Meets Standard/ Need Exists
AQUATIC FACILITIES										
Swimming pools	2	6	8.10	4.39	6.10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Need Exists
OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES										
Basketball Courts	60	65.99	83.69	5.99	23.69	26.27	22.15	-3.73	-7.85	Need Exists
Tennis Courts	52	42.57	53.99	-9.43	1.99	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Meets Standard
Baseball/Softball Fields	16	40.44	51.29	24.44	35.29	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Need Exists
Soccer Fields	15					12.23	5.42	-2.77	-9.58	Meets Standard
Football Fields	2					3.87	.3.07	1.87	1.07	Need Exists
INDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES										
Community Centers and Senior Adult Areas	5	10.64	13.50	5.64	8.50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Need Exists
REGIONAL GATHERING PLACES										
Playgrounds	55	51.09	64.79	-3.91	9.79	41.60	27.12	-13.40	-27.88	Meets Standard
Dog Parks	3	2.34	2.97	-0.66	-0.03	2.51	1.73	-0.49	-1.27	Meets Standard
Community Gardens	4					2.05	2.05	-1.95	-1.95	Meets Standard
WINTER RECREATION FACILITIES										
Ice Skating	3					2.61	0.69	-0.39	-2.31	Meets Standard

# **LEVEL-OF-SERVICE**

## **STANDARDS**



gardening, disc golf and yoga in the park. Data shows that adults in particular tend to gravitate toward outdoor recreation. Popular outdoor activities for adults include bicycling and fishing. Furthermore, specialized sports facilities such as the Ewing Park BMX track may create an opportunity to attract regional, state and national competition. In 2011, the Hy-Vee Triathlon to Gray's Lake—as well as other special events such as the weekly farmers market, world food festival, Drake Relays, and art festival—brought in \$50 million. Popular special events such as an off-road triathlon that utilizes Des Moines's multi-use trail system may attract visitors, bringing in funding from tourism and spread awareness of the extensive trail system throughout the City.



# RECREATION PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

## OUTDOOR SKILLS-BUILDING AND NATURE-BASED PROGRAMS

For those who are not regularly active, camping is the most aspirational sport for the second year in a row. Des Moines Parks and Recreation might consider adding educational programs focused on outdoor skills-building to learn more about camping and backpacking. Oregon Parks and Recreation, for example, offers a popular program called “Let’s go Camping!” that partners with state parks to offer camping excursions with gear included for participants to learn about camping basics, tent set-up, fire-building, and leaving no trace.

Parks and Recreation offers a variety of outdoor education programs such as Stand Up Paddle Boarding with a naturalist, Owl Prowl, Monarch Tagging, Prairie Seed Pick and the Wild Explorers program. A formal program of nature engagement, however, does not currently exist and could enhance current program offerings. DMPR should strive to include programs that promote stewardship of natural areas through education and build a volunteer support network for management of natural areas.

### *Social Equity and Youth Engagement*

It is a priority for the department to offer programs emphasizing equity and inclusion that promote equitable social outcomes.

National data reports lower-income housing continues to have the highest rate of inactivity, suggesting discounted access to sports and activities are needed to bridge the gap between being physically healthy and the cost of doing so. Currently Des Moines Parks and Recreation offers lower costs and a competitive recreation level for club sports. Other reported inhibiting factors to participation include lacking a partner, health and limited access to physical education at an early age. Those who had physical education in school show an increase and overall ability to remain active after age 18. While the City of Des Moines is not required to offer youth programming, this data suggests programs that promote leadership and physical activity among youth populations, as well as community/neighborhood events, may be a good way to ensure Parks and Recreation is offering programs that foster healthy communities. Popular youth programs include environmental education courses, leadership activities, STEM education and technology programming. National data reports that younger populations are more drawn to team sports and activities. As a best practice, all programs should provide learning objectives, formal evaluations and program objectives that link to health.

### *Senior Programs and Inclusive Recreation*

While the system’s excellent partnerships with schools and the City’s natural inclination to attract younger generations and families

continues to strengthen park offerings, promoting programs for “active seniors” is a key component of this plan. Popular senior programming can range from “silver sneakers” to gentle yoga to trips, tours and language courses.

For all programs offered, Parks and Recreation should consider opportunities for inclusive recreation. Maryland National Capital and the Illinois Special Recreation Association list several popular programs for inclusive recreation such as Special Olympics, Leisure Companion programs, adaptive recreation for swimming, cooking, hiking and dancing, and wheelchair basketball.

### *Water Recreation*

Aquatics and swimming for fitness remain the top two aerobic activities. Aquatics and water sports are highly valued in Des Moines and Parks and Recreation supports many facilities for aquatic recreation that include play at the City’s splash grounds, fishing at Gray’s Lake and kayaking along the City’s riverway. Expanding opportunities for kayaking, canoeing and fishing is supported by Des Moines residents. Other popular water recreation opportunities that may interest Des Moines residents include water workouts such as paddleboard yoga and special events such as family night paddle at Gray’s Lake. Development of the metro area’s water trails network, including potential dam mitigations downtown and at Gray’s

# RECREATION PROGRAMS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

Lake will further enhance water recreation meaningfully for residents if these projects prove viable.

## Other Programming Trends

Increased participation in racquet sports, largely from cardio tennis and squash, has been trending nationwide along with team sports, particularly niche sports such as gymnastics and rugby. In Des Moines, disc golf is very popular as an outdoor recreation activity. The Department offers an above-average number of disc golf courses compared to benchmarking but community engagement surveys demand this number increase to maintain LOS.

The following ranks top national trends in programming based on participation. While local data should be the driver, these figures may also guide the Department's recreation program plans. The activities and percentages listed are for the entire U.S. population over six years old.

## Top National Programming Trends

### • Aerobic Activities:

- Cardio High-Impact Intensity Training (6.4%), Swimming for fitness (4.5%), Aquatics (3.4%)
- Trending: Cross-training style workouts, Dance and other choreographed exercise to music

### • Top Conditioning Activities:

- Tai Chi (4.6%), Yoga (3.5%), Rowing machine (2.2%)
- Trending: Barre and Bodyweight Exercise and Bodyweight accessory-assisted training

### • Strength Activities:

- All declining

### • Top Individual Sports:

- Adventure racing (20.6%), Triathlon/Non-traditional, off road (16.7%), Boxing for competition (10.9%), Mixed Martial Arts for Competition (10.9%), Trail running (9.9%)

### • Top Racquet Sports:

- Cardio Tennis (10.5%), Squash (7.3%), Badminton (.6%)
- Trending: Pickleball

### • Top Team Sports:

- Rugby (13.3%), Roller Hockey (10%), Lacrosse (7%)

### • Top Outdoor Activities:

- Bicycling BMX (10%), Climbing (trad, ice, mountaineering) (8%), Shooting (trap/skeet) (6%), Backpacking Overnight – more than ¼ mile from vehicle/home (5.8%), Bicycling (mountain/non-paved surface) (4.5%)

### • Top Water Sports:

- Stand up paddling (23.8%), Kayaking (white water) (8.6%), Kayaking (sea/touring) (8.5%), Kayaking recreational (6.4%)

The 2017 NRPA Agency Performance Review reports the following key programming activities offered by at least 60% of agencies include:

- Team sports (86%)
- Fitness enhancement classes (80%)
- Health and wellness education (80%)
- Themed special events (72%)
- Social recreation events (70%)
- Safety training (69%)
- Aquatics (66%)
- Trips and tours (65%)
- Martial arts (62%)
- Performing arts (61%)
- Visual arts (61%)

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# DEMOGRAPHICS AND SOCIAL EQUITY STANDARDS

## DATA TO HELP IMPROVE THE PARKS



PlanDSM features detailed demographics for the City of Des Moines. This data is not repeated here, but instead, this plan captures layers of demographic and other data for analysis and interpretation to determine means for improving the Parks and Recreation Department facilities and offerings so they can continue to deliver and improve results for public health, equity and overall quality of life.

### HEALTH AND ACTIVE LIVING

Health is often at the forefront of the conversation in the parks and recreation industry. Parks and recreation departments are being pressed by their constituencies, health professionals and universities to do more regarding community health. Parks serve a critical purpose in the physical, psychological, social and economic health of communities. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce morbidity and mortality by decreasing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, colon cancer, depression/anxiety and weight.<sup>{1}</sup> <sup>{2}</sup> Research in the American Journal of Public Health determined that specific park features—paved trails, unpaved trails and wooded areas—significantly predicted the likelihood of people engaging in physical activity.<sup>{3}</sup> These specific features increase the chance that citizens will use the parks provided by the department and this activity leads to a healthier community.

The Iowa Health Rankings indicate that the health of Polk County has room for improvement. Polk County ranks 71st out of 99 counties for health outcomes related to Quality of Life.<sup>{4}</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have defined health-related quality of life as “an individual’s or group’s perceived physical and mental health over time.”<sup>{5}</sup> In terms of health behaviors, Polk County is comparable to the state overall. Out of Iowa’s 99 counties, Polk County is ranked 69th for overall health behaviors (e.g., diet, exercise and alcohol use) and 50th for social and economic factors (e.g., education, income and safety); however, it drops to 85th in environmental health factors which include air and water quality and housing and transit.<sup>{6}</sup> Polk County’s obesity rate of 29% is 2% lower than the state average of 31%; however, the percentage of the population with access to physical activity is much higher in Polk County than in the rest of the state.<sup>{7}</sup> At 92%, Polk County is one of four counties in Iowa to rank in the 90th percentile, while the state average is 76%.<sup>{8}</sup>

Parks and recreation opportunities are also valuable to the mental health of the communities they serve. Research on mental health is showing that social isolation is a growing epidemic leading to poorer mental, physical and emotional health and has targeted effects on the immune system, sleep patterns and stress hormone levels. Since the 1980s, the



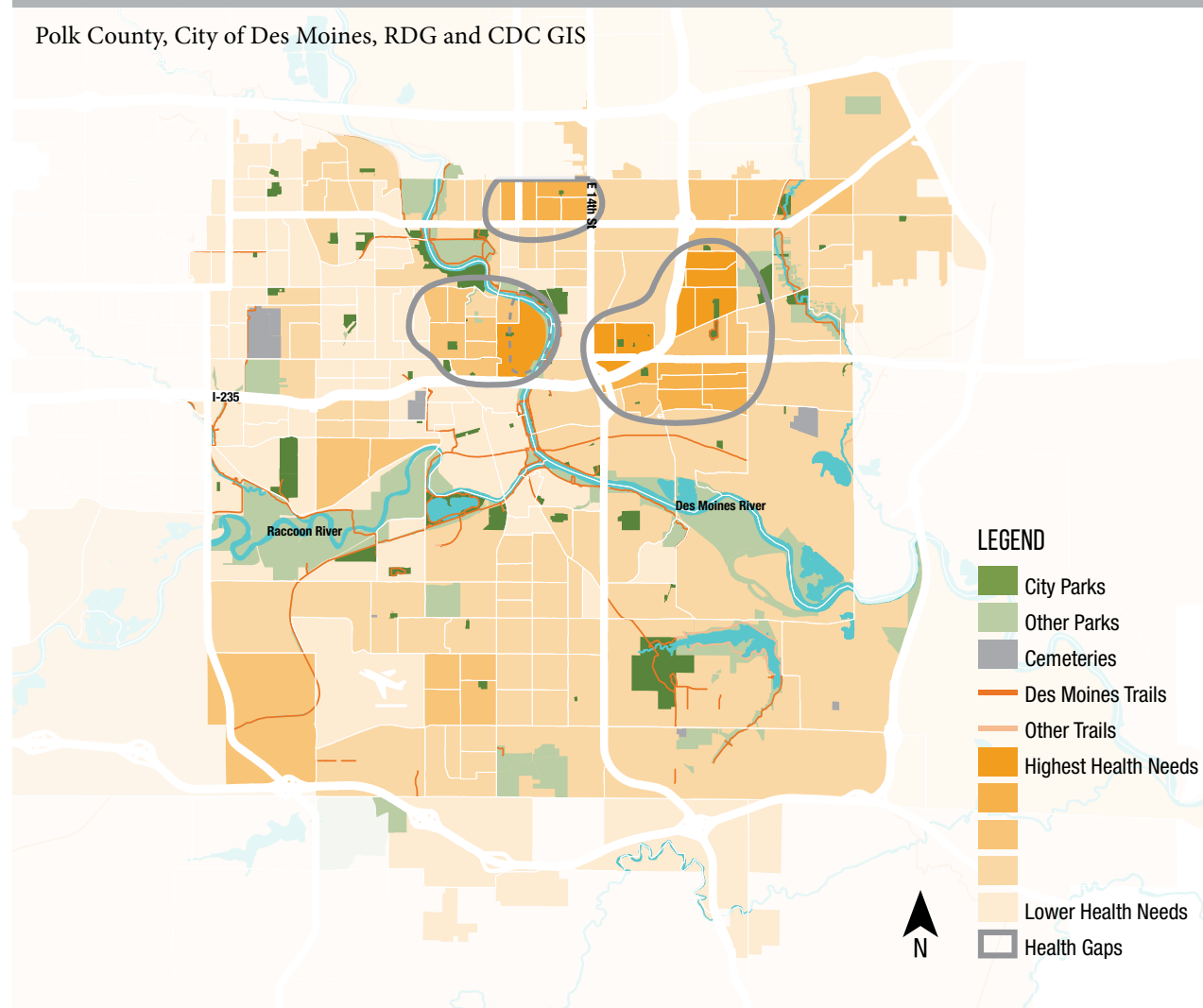
percentage of Americans who report they are lonely has doubled from 20% to 40%. One-third of the population older than 65 now lives alone, as does half of the population over age 85.<sup>{9}</sup> Public parkland and facilities that offer a variety of passive and active recreation opportunities and programs for people of all ages could help with this issue. Investing in public spaces that are inclusive, equitable and accessible helps build a community where people feel connected to one another rather than isolated.

This map reflects areas of potentially greatest health need based on distance to trail access points and three factors that can be connected to long-term health risks, according to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control): high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes.

Health has already been prioritized by Des Moines Parks and Recreation and improved health outcomes underpin the whole of this plan. By including health in the conversation, parks and recreation departments, health agencies and city planners are proactive in ensuring parks are protected, maintained, accessible and promoted, which can lead to an appropriate quality-of-life standard for the community.

#### HEALTH SHED MAP: HIGHER PROPENSITY FOR HEALTH PARKS

Polk County, City of Des Moines, RDG and CDC GIS



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*To be most effective, engaging citizens in their neighborhood, where they live, is essential.*

—Joshua Barr  
Human Rights Director

## EQUITY

There has been an increasing recognition of the importance of access to parks and recreation resources and a plethora of studies examining the availability of these amenities across the world. Research has found that access to these resources is surprisingly unequal, especially for minority and low-income populations.<sup>{10}</sup> One study found that Hispanic neighborhoods were 8.6 times more likely, African-American neighborhoods 3.3 times more likely, and low-income neighborhoods 4.5 times more likely than white and high-income neighborhoods to not have recreation facilities.<sup>{11}</sup> Moreover, a study found that neighborhoods consisting of African-Americans, low-income groups and renters had a significantly lower proportion of trees on their streets.<sup>{12}</sup> The importance of park access and recreation activities to youth development, crime reduction and health are well documented. Park and recreation opportunities can have an impact on physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional and social development.<sup>{13}</sup> Further, violent crime was found to be reduced in economically disadvantaged areas when there were more recreation centers.<sup>{14}</sup> Exposure to green space has also lessened health inequality for lower-income populations.<sup>{15}</sup> Given this information, there has been a move to address the inequalities in park and recreation resources to create more healthy, safe communities.

One obstacle to this has unexpectedly been private funding. Park philanthropy has been at an all-time high, and since park and recreation budgets are often limited, accepting private funds is an easy choice for decision-makers.<sup>{16}</sup> However, the difficulty with private funding is that it often goes toward one park. In many cases this is a place that is important to the funder, possibly an affluent area. Research has revealed that significant portions of park organizations' revenue come from donations, which means that more and more donors may be placed in a decision-maker role, deciding what gets funded.<sup>{17}</sup> This research suggests that funding mechanisms are another place for park and recreation entities to look when addressing inequalities in resources.

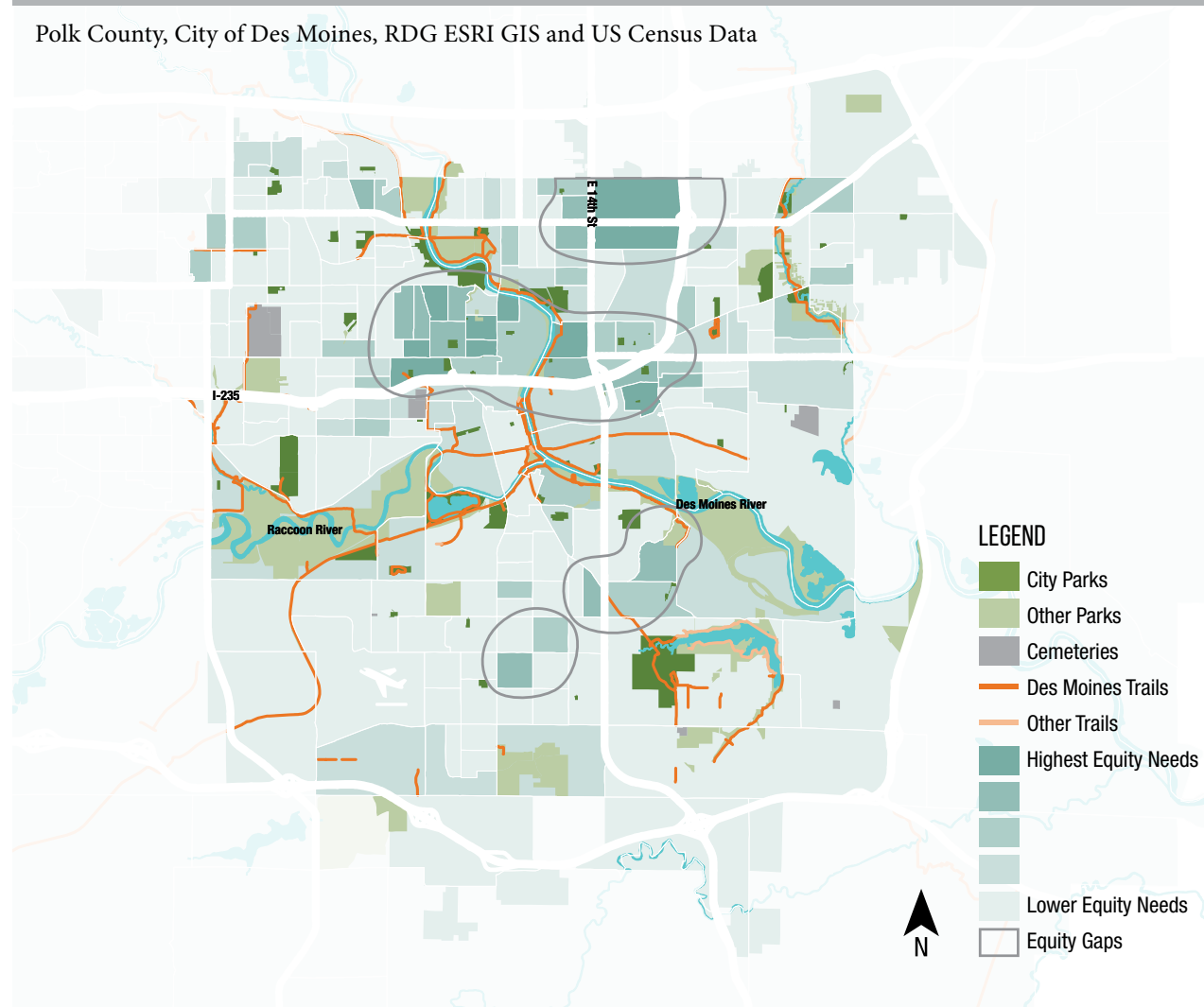
Des Moines Parks and Recreation has recognized the value of their system and has made equitable access a priority in their strategic plan. Their efforts are echoed by the community. In an open-ended question about a change in parks and recreation which could serve all residents in the future, many emphasized the need for equity in the park system. One resident stated, “keep in mind: kids in low-income areas and children of color and immigrant families too often have little access to neighborhood parks and good outdoor programming. They don't have the means to pay for recreation like Adventureland or travel to state parks (or feel welcome

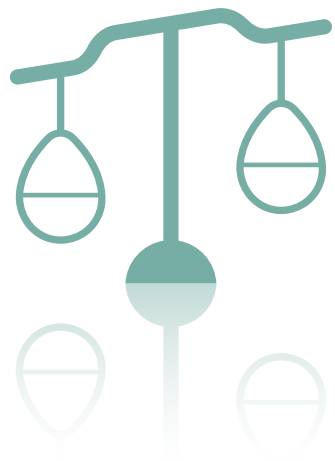
there) and we need to do more to bring them into contact with the natural world and the freedom and joy the outdoors can provide.” This comment highlights the feelings of the City of Des Moines regarding social equity as it pertains to parks and recreation and outlines an inclusive future for the city.

The Equity Lens Map looks at understanding the current makeup of the City with respect to poverty, race, crime, density, well-being and shifting populations over time. By weighting these factors, this map identifies priority areas for exploring barriers and inequities and the means to address them. This map is based on the City of Minneapolis’ park equity ranking system but here an additional piece is included to address shifts in the situation over time.

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

Polk County, City of Des Moines, RDG ESRI GIS and US Census Data





EQUITY



03





## 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.

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## 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
- 

*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

# INTRODUCTION

Because parks and trails play a very special part of people's lives, Des Moines Parks and Recreation has a duty to strive for racial and social equity in providing park and trail facilities and programming across the community. To accomplish this, conversations about racial equity will need to be held and new behaviors and policies will need to be put into practice. Des Moines Parks and Recreation is committed to working with the citizens and elected and appointed officials to eliminate inequities in the community and increase everyone's ability to succeed.

## STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Address Park(s) History*

Historically, institutions in this country served a largely able-bodied, white male audience. Improved understanding of Des Moines Park System's history/cultural origins and working to identify specific strategies to address those challenges-of-origin must continue. Recognizing the bias buried in a park's specific history is step one.

### *Baseline Measure/Level-of-Service Standards*

Establish a measurement system as a baseline to understanding current condition of system and identifying means for equitable improvements. Reference Minneapolis equity measurement tools. Identify service gaps

and secure additional and/or expanded park facilities, programs and natural-areas facilities to meet future growth needs.

### *Partner for Equity—Internally and Externally*

Tap city and community resources to better understand diverse cultural needs and connections. Continue school partnership as a key strategy for advancing equity of program and facilities; continue to employ models similar to the expansion of the recreational basketball program. At the same time, continue and enhance internal partnerships (e.g., with Des Moines Civil and Human Rights Commission, Des Moines Police Department) and pro-actively continue the parks-and-equity conversation, as started with this planning process and the Racial Equity Institute workshop that was held as part of this planning process as part of the LiveDSM planning process.

### *Incorporate the Discussion of Equity into Broader Discussions of Budget Resources*

Broaden the discussion on resource allocation to address who benefits for the resources and which groups continue to be burdened.

### *Communication and Public Awareness*

Consistently use inclusive messaging and proactively build the case that equity does not mean equal (also see ADA, below).

### *Finalize Implementation of ADA Transition Plan*

Continue to address ADA and other physical access issues as a priority for neighborhood parks and programs.

### *Improve Listening and Engagement Methodologies*

Ensure the most meaningful participation by all while using different community engagement strategies and tools.

### *Identify Means for Continual Update/Improvement*

Recognize shifting needs of transitioning neighborhoods and people.

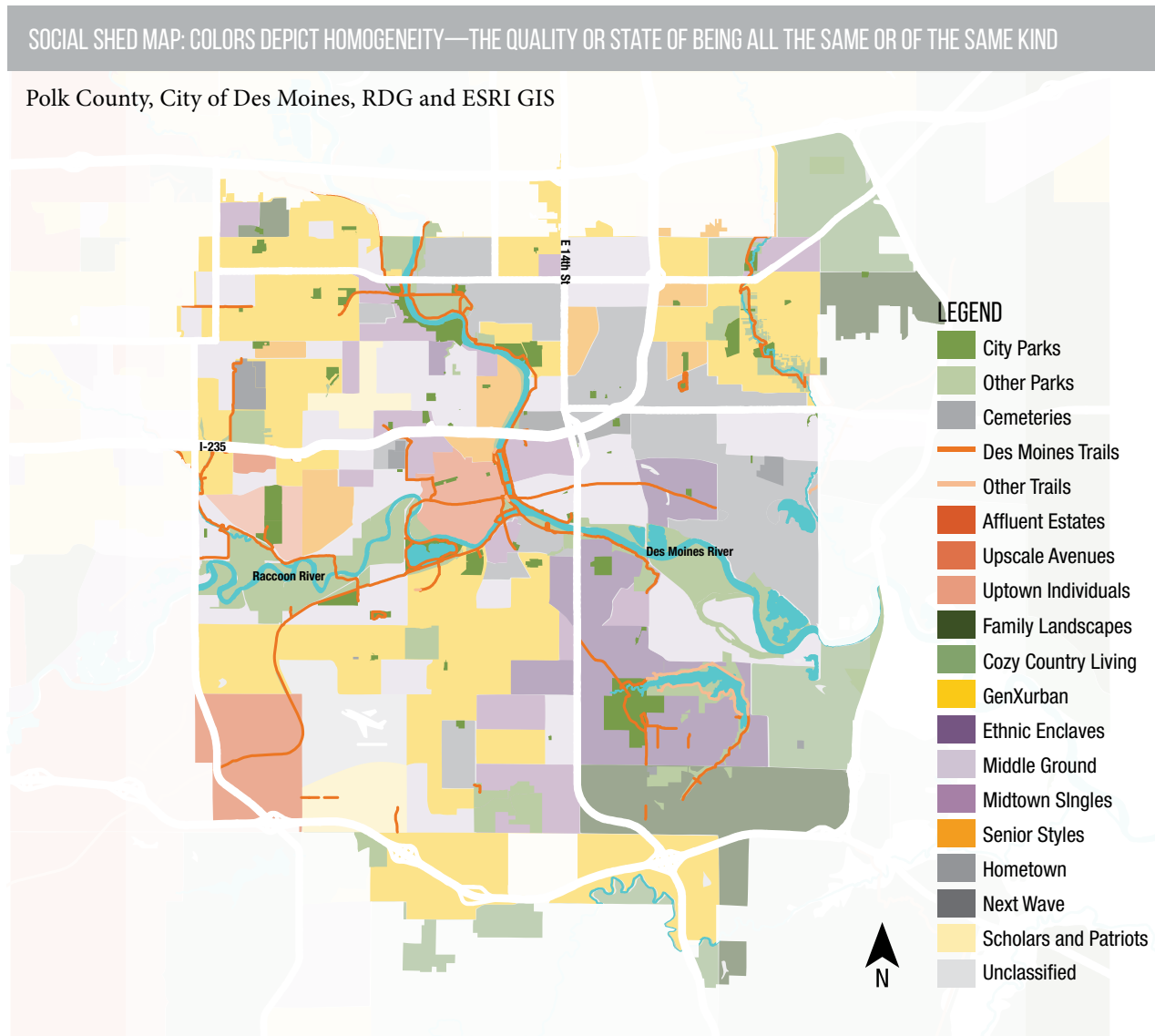
### *Adopt Policies to Aid in Promoting Equity*

See Equity Policy Recommendations.



This social shed map is intended as an additional resource for making connections with the public. It is merely another way of looking at public preferences, beyond the assumptions that are made based on demographics alone (census data). Think of it as a cohort of citizens in the same life stage. It is based on data supplied by Esri.

Esri is the software company that develops GIS software and then uses their product to better understand big data problems and questions. In this case, this map is based on multiple data sources—census data, purchasing habits and more—layered on top of each other. Each of the colors/labels on this map represents Esri's interpretation of these multiple data layers to identify the potential lifestyle preferences of a particular geographic area of the population. While the labels in the map key are reasonably intuitive, additional understanding of each segment is available through Esri.



# EQUITY POLICY GUIDE

Des Moines Parks and Recreation is committed to providing equitable programming, park and recreation opportunities for people of all races, genders and ability. To achieve this goal, the department will establish an internal “change” or leadership team to assess existing and future programming, parks and facilities from an equity perspective. Through internal training and hiring diverse employees, the leadership team will apply an equity lens to improve all functions of the department including programming, budgeting, service availability and facilities access, and will continue to engage diverse communities in the planning and decision-making processes. When applying an equity lens, the department should identify key barriers to access{1} that may be prevalent in the community. These include:

- Families may not have access to transportation or time to travel to recreation programs
- Language, culture and/or sense of belonging may inhibit participation
- Everyone may not have access to internet and media information about recreation programs and events
- Neighborhoods may not have recreation facilities or even safe outdoor places to play
- Gender barriers–bias in favor of boys in sports

- Cultural barriers–visible minorities feel uncomfortable and unwelcome
- Socio-economic barriers–the cost of recreation can be prohibitive
- Organizational barriers–a lack of supportive policies, facilities and financial resources
- Communications barriers–information about recreation resources and services doesn’t reach low-income families and families with language and other barriers

After initial assessment the Department will apply a data-driven approach with measurable results to achieve the desired outcome. This strategic initiative and commitment set by the Department will improve public health by better allocating the Department’s resources, address barriers and increase access to parks and recreation programs and services. The following policy implications may be adapted to advance this mission:

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to continuing the work of the Des Moines Legacy Foundation, Rotary Foundation, the Friendship Fitness Fun(d) Youth Scholarship Program and the Greater Des Moines Recreational Activities Scholarship Program, the following recommendations are offered:

- Partner with organizations of color, neighborhood leaders and

community organizers to lead initiatives, trainings and programs

- Commit to recruiting diverse leaders to support the department through boards, commissions or employment
- Ensure that swimming pools, spray grounds and outdoor recreation seasonal staff is reflective of the community
- Use the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) Racial Equity Toolkit{2} to assess existing and future policies, initiatives and programs through an equity lens. The toolkit:
  - Proactively seeks to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity
  - Identifies clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes
  - Engages the community in decision-making processes
  - Identifies who will benefit from or be burdened by a given decision, allowing strategies to advance racial equity and mitigate unintended negative consequences
  - Develops mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact
- Collect and analyze data to drive change and measure success toward equity



# EQUITY POLICY GUIDE

- Address gaps and access barriers to locations as priority capital projects
- All residents should live within a 10-minute walk to a park{3}
- Designate a “change” leadership team within the department for ongoing commitment and to ensure that data is being collected and analyzed appropriately
- Develop a framework that defines the department’s role in promoting and advancing equity
- Adopt an ordinance that uses a criteria-based system with a focus on racial and economic equity for capital investments in neighborhood parks
- Initiate equity-driven programming such as:
  - Clean and Safe Spaces Parks program as modeled in Los Angeles—a budgeted program that adds both maintenance and recreational services to more than 30 recreation centers in underserved communities{4}
  - Second-Grade Swim program—partnership with the schools to teach all second-graders to swim
  - Youth Ambassador program hires high school and college-aged youth from different ethnic groups to work within their community
  - Outdoor adventures youth programming

and environmental education programs for communities of color led by Youth Ambassadors

- Pop-up programming in underserved areas; a Parks On-the-GO Van brings arts and crafts and other activities to areas with limited green space
- Social functions and events for adults living with mental illness and/or development disabilities
- Yoga classes for adults who are blind or visually impaired
- Skill development classes with volunteer partner to participate in activities such as biking and disc golf
- Self-defense and fitness for adults with physical disabilities
- Develop policies that improve facilities to meet and exceed ADA requirements
- Add and improve signage that directs all users to parks and informs them of services

## POLICY EXAMPLES

### *Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) in Seattle, Washington*

Seattle’s park and recreation programs, policies and initiatives are embedded with racial outcomes, strategies and actions to provide measurable results for community health. As

part of this initiative, the park and recreation department established a Change Team to help determine which regions within the city are in need of resources. The program uses a stakeholder-driven process and partners with community organizations to achieve its goals. The plan ensures that the results are measurable, divisions are accountable and staff is intentional in implementing the work. The department conducts assessments as a strategic approach to provide important metrics for future initiatives. Assessment of projects helps the department improve capacity to achieve racial equity and track the effectiveness of using racial-equity tools.{5}

### *Racial Equity Plan in Portland, Oregon*

Portland Parks and Recreation’s Five-Year Racial Equity Plan focuses on workforce diversity and competency, adequate language access across organizations and racial equity in all levels of the organization. Four key focus areas are identified for the department:

- Leadership development
- Culturally responsible workforce
- Community engagement
- Accurate data systems

In addition, a data-driven equity framework assists the Department in operating with urgency and accountability. The Parks



Race and Ethnicity Project collects data on communities of color, immigrants and refugees to better understand who is currently using parks services.<sup>{6}</sup>

#### *Youth and Family Scholarship Program in Loveland, Colorado*

The Parks and Recreation Foundation is a Loveland non-profit that offers a Youth and Family Scholarship program. Candidates are referred by a school representative, social service agency, church or other community organization which has a working knowledge of the child (family). Funding is allocated on a quarterly basis to provide assistance to low-income families. In order to receive the reduced rates, families must meet gross income levels (125% of federal poverty level) and be designated as a low-income household. Eligible applicants must reside within city limits and provide verification of income. Eligible participants may receive the following:

- Paid admission to a recreation center
- Registration access to most parks and recreation activities and classes
- Option to purchase a six-month extended-use recreation pass at a 50% discount
- Lower daily admission

#### *Share the Fun Recreation Grants in Missoula, Montana*

Missoula has a policy that no one will be turned away from parks and recreation programs for the inability to pay registration fees. Share the Fun Recreation Grants are offered for families and seniors. These may include:

- Aquatics pass grant up to \$100
- Recreation program grant up to \$130
- Resident discount cards offering 20% discount on most recreation programs, pool passes, memberships and entrance fees

#### *Everyone Plays Scholarships in Danville, Virginia*

Provides assistance for kids to attend after-school programs and summer camps, and opportunities for adults to attend therapeutic recreation camps.

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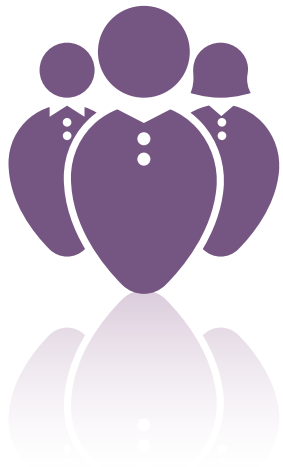
Our park system is 125 years this year, 2018.

It is truly a historic park system.

—Ben Page  
Des Moines Parks and Recreation Director



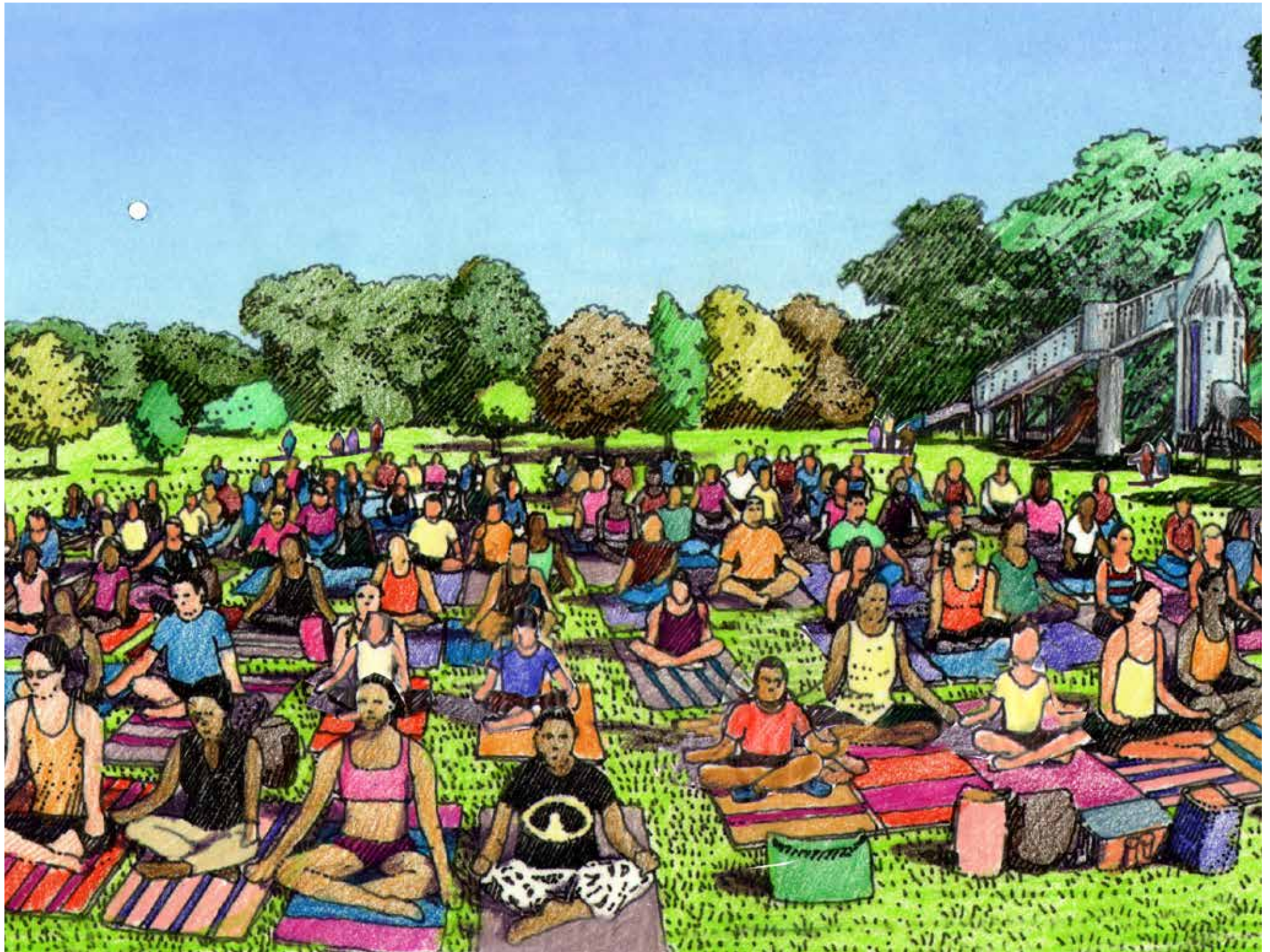




ATTRACTION



04





# 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

## *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 that is sent out at least once per year to all Des Moines households
- Create winter-season program options emphasizing outdoor play and engagement

# RECREATION PROGRAM

## GAP ANALYSIS

Recreation programs are an essential function of every park and recreation system. With as many as 2.3 million park visits a year, programming is a way to engage the community to build healthy relationships, increase physical activity and help people to lead healthy lives.<sup>{1}</sup> According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), programming spans many different activities and often touches on the organization's three pillars: Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity. From a sustainability standpoint, programming is a primary source of non-tax revenue for many park agencies, including Des Moines. Accounting for 20.3% (on average) of annual revenue, programming is the second-largest contributor to overall revenue for Des Moines Parks and Recreation after cemeteries.

Recreation program trends in Des Moines show that use of aquatic facilities, participation in special events, interest in environmental education programs and volunteer participation hours have increased significantly since 2014. Des Moines Parks and Recreation would like to continue to expand recreation programs to meet the needs of its growing population. When staff were asked to describe a successful park and recreation system for the future of Des Moines, the top-three responses were: equitable access to greenspace; diverse and affordable services; and improved maintenance and expansion of recreation facilities.

In support of these needs—and according to benchmark data and LOS analyses; revenue and fees assessment; community engagement forums; and stakeholder interviews—it is recommended Des Moines Parks and Recreation take the following actions to address recreation program gaps:

### EXTEND RECREATIONAL PROGRAMMING TO UNDERSERVED AREAS

Underserved areas in the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system are classified as areas that are not within a 10-minute walk to a park, trail or recreation facility. These areas are mapped in the LOS analysis.

The following strategies are recommended to increase residents' access to Parks and Recreation Department facilities and programs:

- **Increase the number of small parks (less than 10 acres) throughout the City**  
In a comparison of five benchmark communities surveyed, Des Moines offers a relatively low number of small parks, which are classified as mini-parks, community parks or neighborhood parks. It is recommended that the department identify parcels of land in underserved areas that could be acquired for new park development. Read more about land acquisition policies in Chapter V: Heart.

- **Build on existing infrastructure**  
There are currently 75.66 acres of undeveloped parkland and 81 miles of multi-use trails. Mapping shows that 88% of residents are within a 10-minute walk to a park or trail. While residents are generally satisfied with the current trail system, resident input surveys from 2015 and 2016, and the 2017 racial equity workshop, indicate that trail development continues to be a need for the community.
- **Bring opportunities for play and recreation to small parks and areas that do not have a park within walking distance or a programmed recreational facility nearby**  
In 2017, the department initiated pop-up programming. It is recommended that the department expand pop-up programming activities and promote the program, focusing on underserved areas. Staff and volunteer training to implement this program is suggested.

### DEVELOP A WORLD-CLASS WATER RECREATION SYSTEM

Community engagement surveys and stakeholder interviews highlight the need to improve and expand opportunities for water recreation (see also “**Aquatic Services**,” pg. 150). But the metro is on the cusp of significant water recreation opportunities



through development of a world-class water trails network. The region's proposed 150-mile network also includes continuing plans to mitigate dams downtown and at Gray's Lake to allow for improved fishing, adventure water and flat-water recreation.

### CELEBRATE THE SEASONS WITH PARK PROGRAMMING

Des Moines Park and Recreation currently offers year-round programming and seasonal special events. As national trends continue to show increased participation in winter activity, it is recommended that Des Moines expand opportunities for winter programming to encourage residents to opt for the outdoors during the coldest months of the year. The City of Des Moines could offer year-round outdoor recreation programs. With average temperatures between 17 and 33 degrees Fahrenheit between December and February, and an average annual snowfall of 35 inches, there are many opportunities for the department to increase winter recreation activities.<sup>{2}</sup>

### ENHANCE NATURAL AREAS IN PARKS AND EXPAND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Des Moines has a robust environmental education program that offers nature-focused activities to all age groups and at many different

times throughout the year. A study of existing programs highlights opportunities to enhance environmental education by creating a holistic, systemwide approach, incorporating various strategies which integrate ecological themes into existing programs, designate nature/play discovery areas, identify opportunities for interpretation and incorporate new activities focused on natural recreation. It is recommended that the department formalize a program of nature engagement that trains and uses volunteer stewards to restore and manage natural areas, as well as help integrate environmental themes into existing programs. Learn more about the plan for environmental education in Chapter VI: Nature.

### DEVELOP INNOVATIVE PROGRAMMING AND ENSURE THAT FACILITIES HAVE THE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT PROGRAMMING DEVELOPMENTS

Benchmarking data identifies a need to develop recreation facilities for team sports including basketball, baseball and softball. 2017 data collected for the annual report shows that participation in baseball, adult basketball and youth soccer has increased. It is recommended the department ensure an adequate number of facilities is available for continued growth in these areas. It is also recommended the department stay current on emerging trends and local interest in

particular activities. Interviews with staff, for example, report a decline in participation in softball; national trends support this observation, finding a decline in participation in softball over the last five years.<sup>{3}</sup> It is recommended the department continue to monitor local participation in programs and find ways to engage the community to identify preferences in recreation programming.

Overall, team sport programs are a recommended area for the department to continue to offer, since team sports continue to show national interest year after year, especially among the youth population ages 6–17.<sup>{4}</sup> Additionally, 86% of all park agencies offer team sports activities.<sup>{5}</sup> By developing new facilities and improving existing facilities that support team sports, as well as providing innovative team programs identified through community engagement and emerging trends, Des Moines could become a hub for special events, programming and tourism. Providing opportunities for adult and youth programming, an area that has been declining since 2016, could increase revenue from athletic and sports tourism and concessions. Furthermore, understanding the types of recreation programs that inspire, motivate and educate residents to lead healthy lives is vital to the overall health of the community.

# RECREATION PROGRAM

## GAP ANALYSIS





## MAINTAIN EXISTING FACILITIES FOR RECREATION PROGRAMS

Interviews with department staff continue to highlight the need for the Parks and Recreation Department to maintain existing facilities. For example, the department has 27 playgrounds that date back to the early 1990s and are in need of an update. Maintaining existing facilities is essential for the sustainability of recreation programs, and a facility management plan is recommended for the department's future success. To ensure that maintenance issues are addressed in a timely manner, it is recommended that the department identify strategies to secure funding for park and facility maintenance. Using a Total Cost of Facility Ownership (TCFO) approach over time is highly recommended{6}. Another recommended strategy to improve park maintenance is to identify ways to foster a sense of ownership among community members. Ideas recommended by staff include Adopt-a-Street or -Park programs, volunteer-based special events such as park clean-ups, and increasing community garden plots, as this creates ownership of parkland and improves overall maintenance.

## EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY FOR PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Parks departments have an opportunity to bridge a technology gap within the park system. Emerging technologies—such as the

proliferation of cell phones, video-based geo-location games and the increasing use of drones—create opportunities for park departments to integrate technology with recreational programs for educational and health benefits.{7} Interviews with department staff support this national trend, emphasizing the importance of finding a balance between technology use and connection with nature. Department staff also mention that, internally, the department could benefit from an electronic work order system for field maintenance that includes the use of smart phone technology, taking pictures and sending work orders quickly and efficiently.

## EXPAND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering with Friends groups and private and non-profit organizations provides park and recreation departments with the opportunity to expand services and program offerings. It is recommended that Des Moines Parks and Recreation continue to build relationships with local organizations that can provide discounted or low-cost solutions for recreation programs; train volunteers to assist with programming, special events and maintenance; and expand parkland and recreation opportunities through equipment rentals. Expanding partnerships is also a way for the department to stay current with emerging trends in park programming. Trail running, for example, continues to see

an increase in national participation. In 2017, the department partnered with Fleet Feet Sports to introduce the Trail Run Series, which guided runners of all levels through the 18 miles of nature trails in Ewing, Greenwood and Grandview Parks. Innovative programming and staying current on emerging trends is critical to ensure that parks and recreation departments not only offer services that meet community needs but are able to maintain participation levels providing health benefits for the entire community.

## IDENTIFY SOCIALLY DYNAMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Generally speaking, park and recreation systems do not specifically inventory locations where neighbors can come together in a socially dynamic way. Instead, inventories address facilities and infrastructure; activities may be inventoried, but not necessarily the quality of experiences. What are the experiences that build community? The festival ground, the more robust shelters and quality nature settings—these should be a part of the much-needed future inventory. These “facilities,” once understood and incorporated in an asset/activation map, identify where the park's existing features lend themselves to building neighborhoods and bringing people together. See also Chapter V: Heart.

# RECREATION PROGRAM

## GAP ANALYSIS

Plan the whole park and cluster active areas within the park. This creates an more developed area much like a village within the park.

- Close proximity to pods such as a trail running past shelters or other places or destinations
- Provide interaction space around water, particularly splash pads or nature-based water areas
- Develop shared spaces such as terraces and plazas between shelters

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

The City of Des Moines is a first-hand witness to the impact of climate change. Even though all of the impact of climate change is unknown, the City has experienced flooding and we struggle with related water-quality issues as well. Our parks can become demonstration sites and showcases for improved stormwater management and habitat restoration, to help mitigate the impacts of climate change and show others how that can and should be done. So while the City of Des Moines continues to partner with watershed management authorities, and look upstream and develop policies, the department can work directly with stream restoration management, treating the water resources as the amenity they can and should be, while also monitoring water quality and partnering with groups that are

trying to improve water recreation as a way to build awareness about climate change, water quality and flooding. If we could shift the paradigm from viewing water as a waste product to an asset then we should set a goal to slow, store and clean water that passes through the parks and greenways.

Sustainability is defined in as many ways as there are people who define it. For the City of Des Moines, with this focus on planning the future of its parks and recreation areas, the definition of sustainability will guide future park development and management in order to optimize the functionality and aesthetics of the park system. For parks in Des Moines, sustainability means plans can be implemented, residents will approve of the changes to their parks, and parks staff and budgets will be equal to the growing work of operations and maintenance. In other words, operations and maintenance will be cost-effective. An effective way to explain sustainability is by showing the connections between things that people don't ordinarily connect. At the same time, going above and beyond the usual is also a City goal. This could mean:

- Achieving low-carbon and low-waste operations
- Providing flexible options for getting to and from parks

- Using sustainably sourced materials and food items
- Treating water as a precious resource
- Increasing plant diversity, wildlife and pollinator habitat
- Contributing to a vibrant community and economy
- Contributing to the health and happiness of City residents

Green infrastructure usually refers to stormwater runoff management systems that mimic nature's hydrological cycles. Several comprehensive studies (e.g., American River's "Banking on Green") clearly demonstrate that, in most projects, it is more cost-effective to construct naturalized stormwater systems than traditional gray infrastructure systems of gutters, sewers, pipes and detention basins.



# RECREATION AND PROGRAMMING PLAN

Des Moines Parks and Recreation offers over 1,000 programs and events annually. The department is committed to staying current with program demand as the population grows, while offering programs that touch on one or more of NRPA's Three Pillars: Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity.<sup>{1}</sup> One strategy is for the department to expand public-private partnerships to offer more programs, rentals and discounted options. Another strategy is to continue to engage residents to determine their programming needs and to stay updated on emerging trends.

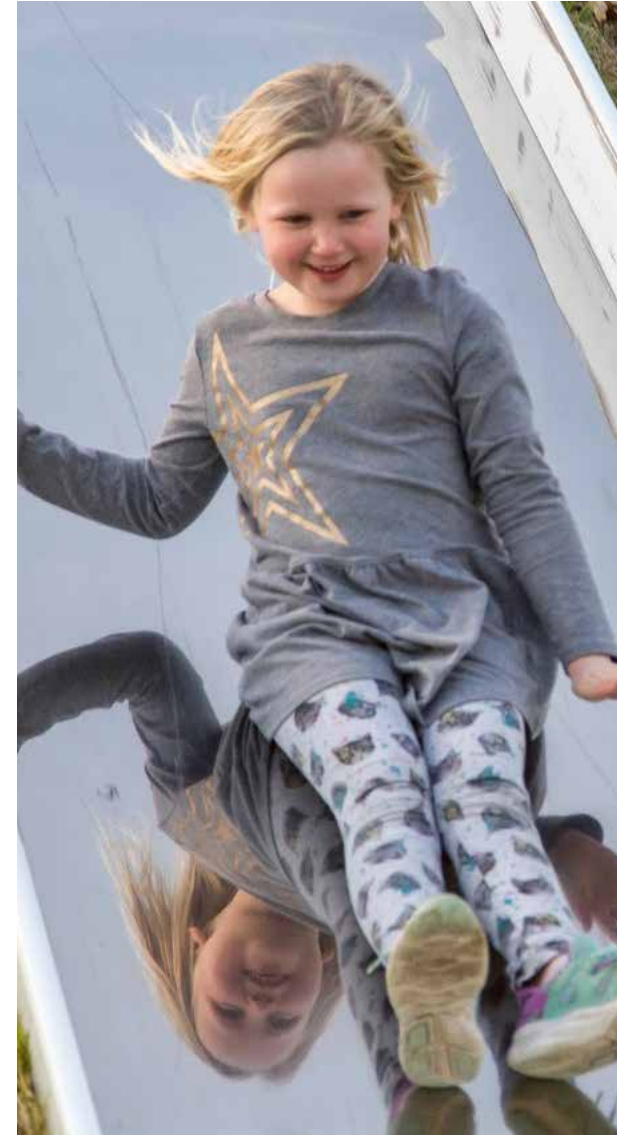
It is a priority for Park and Recreation to offer programs that are innovative, inclusive, appeal to multiple generations and highlight unique features of Des Moines parks, including cultural and historical heritage and natural areas. It is critical that the department plan and evaluate programs' public health outcomes, environmental stewardship, education functions, and commitment to social equity. Locations selected for hosting a new program or special event should prioritize high-needs locations and neighborhoods that are not within a ten-minute walk of a park, trail or programmed recreational facility.

Based on community engagement, stakeholder forums and surveys, and national trends data, the following recommended program areas are explained in detail in this plan:

- Pop-up programming
- Water Recreation
- Winter Recreation
- Environmental Education
- Technology in Parks
- Emerging Trends

## POP-UP PROGRAMMING

Pop-up programming is a quick and cost-effective way to bring parks and recreation programming to areas that do not have a park or recreation facility nearby. Cities across the nation are incorporating this spontaneous “everywhere” programming into their park systems to offer more opportunities for recreation and play. In many cities, public-private partnerships are on the rise. These partnerships operate without direct funding, using a pay-to-play model to cover operating and maintenance costs. While these hybrid models increase program offerings and park space, they do raise a question: How will parks agencies maintain equity? However, pop-up programming does have the ability to bridge social equity gaps, through free or low-cost programming and by targeting areas that



# RECREATION AND PROGRAMMING PLAN

are not within walking distance of a park or recreational facility. In 2018, Des Moines Parks and Recreation will offer pop-up programs at various locations throughout the City. Programs on the agenda consist of snowshoeing outings and environmental education programs such as bird watching at Gray's Lake. Prior to each event, the department will post a notice that will include the date, time, location and cost (if applicable) of the program. Notices will be posted on the department website and social media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram). Residents will also have the option to receive program news by texting **DSMPOPUP** to **84483**.

## Goals and Objectives

Bring mobile programming to areas that are not in close proximity to a park, trail or recreational facility. Priority areas to be identified based on:

- Social equity workshops
- GIS mapping—areas that are not within a 10-minute walk to a park or programmed recreation facility
- Provide free or low-cost programming at various locations throughout the City
- Activate underutilized space including park areas that some may perceive as unsafe
- Train staff and volunteers to serve as program mentors, respond to challenging situations and lead activities that meet program objectives

- Create an inclusive environment encouraging neighborhood involvement and engaging diverse and low-income communities

## Examples of Pop-Up Programs Supporting the Goals and Objectives

- Kids in Motion is a pop-up program that takes place at various locations throughout New York City. It is designed to get kids into playgrounds and introduce them to physical activity. Staff and volunteer members lead children's activities that include organized sports, games, fitness demos and guided walks.
- Sports training held at school basketball courts, parks, recreational facilities and other neighborhood areas with available open space and amenities. This program is designed for kids ages 8–14 to receive free training in a variety of sports including baseball, basketball, flag football, lacrosse, soccer, ultimate Frisbee and track. This program is designed for all ability levels.
- Fitness class pop-up programs that include free aerobics, yoga, Pilates and Zumba, taught by trained volunteer fitness instructors.
- Free swim instruction or supervised practice sessions held at various aquatic locations throughout the

city (specify age groups and consider offering for adults as well as kids).

- Pop-up programming vehicle that brings arts and culture programs to different locations. Programs may include art projects, dance, theatrical performances and music engagement programs.
- Pop-up art studio programming for all ages held at community centers and various meeting room locations.
- Gardening education programs at community gardens and other locations.
- Pop-up farmers market special event with health and nutrition programming.
- Touch-a-Truck program introduces kids to maintenance equipment. Partner with law enforcement and operations and maintenance staff to safely ride on and touch machinery, equipment and operation vehicles.
- Tree climbing in nearby parks. Partner with local arborists to provide safety gear, assistance and educational programming.
- Community day bonfires in a local park.
- Movie nights in parks and other available locations.
- Pop-up for pups activities available at dog parks throughout the city.

### Example: Pop-up Program in Minneapolis, Minnesota

Minneapolis provides a good example of how pop-up programming confronts issues of social equity by bringing mobile programming to high-crime areas in northern Minneapolis. During an eight-week period, City volunteers brought a truckload of games, sports equipment, music and art supplies to a new location every day except Sundays. The volunteers set up games and activities, free food and music in vacant lots or blocked-off streets. The Minneapolis Parks Department identified locations for the programs based on factors of low income, high crime rate and a distance of six or more blocks from a programmed recreation center. (This plan has developed similar data for Des Moines; see Chapter II: Benchmarking). The City held two half-day orientations for volunteers and staff where they received general programming training and Verbal Judo training on how to de-escalate problematic situations. The events were successful at bringing neighbors and families together, creating a safe, non-violent space for recreation and connecting youth with caring adults.{2}

FEE	FREE PROGRAM
Demographics	Youth do not sign in. Staff perform a visual assessment of diversity. Most of the neighborhoods focused on have been in North Minneapolis where the population is primarily African-American and Somali. Materials were printed in English, Spanish and Somali.
Budget	\$25,000 and runs 30 hours a week for eight weeks.
Funding	Predominantly funded through the City of Minneapolis.
Evaluation	General reports from parks staff have shown that violence has decreased. The department has an evaluation tool but finds it difficult to motivate kids to use it for drop-in programming. Staff take informal notes on weather and other factors that may impact attendance.
Marketing	The most successful strategy for the Pop-Up Park has been door-to-door dissemination of information in the neighborhoods where programming will occur. Facebook has also been used to promote the program to youth, but has not been found to be very effective.{3}

# RECREATION AND PROGRAMMING PLAN

## POP-UP PROGRAM BEST PRACTICES

### *Example: City of Falls Church, Virginia Pop-up Program Schedule, 2017*

DATE/TIME	PROGRAM	PARK	DESCRIPTION
<b>Sunday, April 23</b> 12:00–2:00 P.M.	Cardboard Creations	Issac Crossman Park	You and your family bring the imagination, we'll bring the boxes, tape, and paint. Join us by the play equipment, and bring any other supplies you'd like.
<b>Sunday, May 21</b> 11:00 A.M.	Magic Show	Cavalier Trail Park	Louis the Magician will provide a free 45-minute show, which includes comedy, characters, and audience participation. The show is appropriate for all ages. Meet at the basketball court.
<b>Saturday, June 3</b> 10:15 A.M.	Nature Walk & Craft	Howard E Herman Stream Valley Park	Join us for a guided walk through Howard E. Herman Stream Valley Park. The walk will start at the Broad Street Entrance of the Park.
<b>Saturday, July 22</b> 9:00–11:00 A.M.	Breakfast at Berman	Berman Park	We've partnered with the Mary Riley Styles Library for this month's program to provide board games, outdoor activities (like cornhole), Storytime (at 10:00 A.M.), and light breakfast foods.

- Identify the mission and objectives for each program as well as an evaluation method or tool to measure the success of the program in meeting set objectives.
- Be strategic about pop-up programming locations. Consider the following guidelines adopted from How to Build a Better Block:<sup>{4}</sup>
- Safety—ensure that the location is safe, both real and perceived (i.e., safe to cross the street, linger or stand on the sidewalk, free from environmental hazards, etc.)
- Shared access—choose locations that are easily accessible to neighborhoods and consider transportation. The location should have available parking and should be accessible by walking and biking. Incorporate way-finding signs to the location and ensure that there are amenities available that allow people to linger, such as tables, seating, etc.
- Stay power—consider activities that are engaging for all ages and have food options and restrooms available or nearby
- Inclusive—make sure the location is accessible and offers recreation activities that everyone can be part of. Consider hiring bilingual staff and/or printing materials in Spanish or another language prevalent in the area to encourage minority communities to participate.



- Create a recognizable brand for effective community engagement. Have a flag with the brand on it available at each pop-up program location.
- Build relationships with community stakeholders and partner organizations.
- Combine pop-up programming with special-event programming.
- Work with volunteer groups such as Americorps to offer pop-up programming. In Minneapolis, for example, Americorps volunteers have started a pop-up library.
- Provide training for volunteers and staff on program activities, objectives and mission. Consider providing training on how to de-escalate difficult situations orally if offering

a pop-up program in high-crime areas.

- Program leaders should be easily identifiable during the event (wearing a matching uniform) and should be trained to ensure safety at all times.
- Volunteers should be required to complete a security clearance process and have training in first aid.
- Assign pop-up program managers to each event or activity offered.
- Consider taking requests for proposals (RFPs) for pop-up programs. Make RFPs available to community groups, neighborhood associations and partner organizations. Ensure that proposed programs meet the

Parks and Recreation Department's mission, objectives and timeline.

- In areas with park facility shortages, consider regularly scheduled/predictable “pop-up” programming (i.e., it's more “temporary” and less “pop-up”) to help the in-a-box park fill a void until a more permanent option is available.

1. National Recreation and Park Association. Agency Performance Review. 2018.
2. U.S. Climate Data. Climate Des Moines - Iowa. Accessed May 25, 2018. <https://www.usclimatedata.com/climate/des-moines/iowa/united-states/usia0231>
3. Sports & Fitness Industry Association. Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Report. Silver Spring: Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 2018.
4. Ibid.
5. National Recreation and Park Association. Agency Performance Review. 2018.
6. Total Cost of Facility Ownership. National Parks Service. Accessed May 31, 2018. [https://www.nps.gov/transportation/cost\\_of\\_ownership.html](https://www.nps.gov/transportation/cost_of_ownership.html).
7. National Recreation and Park Association. Agency Performance Review. 2018.



# WATER RECREATION FACILITIES

## PROGRAMMING

Americans engage in a variety of water recreation activities including water aerobics, swimming, fishing, boating, kayaking, canoeing, stand-up paddling and triathlons, to name a few. Participation in swimming for fitness, swimming on a team and aquatic exercise have shown moderate increases of approximately 2%, 4%, and 5%, respectively, in the United States over the past three years, whereas off-road triathlons have had a 10% increase over three years.<sup>{5}</sup> Fly fishing has also seen about a 5% increase, while freshwater fishing has increased by less than 1%.<sup>{6}</sup> As for water sports, participation in kayaking and stand-up paddling are both on the rise with 6.0% and 6.5% increases over the past three years, but interest in other sports such as canoeing and motorized boat activities have been declining.<sup>{7}</sup> Swimming for fitness was reported as among the top three aspirational sports for non-participants ages 13 to 17, 25 to 34, and 35 to 44.<sup>{8}</sup> Fishing was also reported as among the top three aspirational sports for non-participants ages 6 to 12, 13 to 17, 45 to 54, and 65 and above.<sup>{9}</sup> Moreover, the National Survey on Recreation found that as of 2009, 43% of the United States population ages 16 and older participated in swimming in outdoor pools, 41% swam in natural waters, 36% participated in boating, 34% participated in fishing, 23% participated in motorized boating, 12% participated in canoeing and kayaking, and 8% engaged in waterskiing.<sup>{10}</sup>

It is anticipated these water-based activities will follow national trends in Des Moines.

To meet the needs and interests of residents and visitors, park and recreation agencies generally provide a variety of water recreation facilities. The 2018 NRPA Agency Performance Review reports 69% of park and recreation agencies offer aquatics programming.<sup>{11}</sup> The City of Des Moines offers many water-related facilities including two swimming pools, three aquatic centers, nine wading pools and twelve splash pools and spraygrounds. In addition, properties managed by the City of Des Moines also have boat ramps, fountains, ponds, lakes, beaches and opportunities for fishing. Compared to parks and recreation agencies in St. Paul, MN, Denver, CO, Austin, TX, and Madison, WI, Des Moines' water recreation facilities are similar. However, Des Moines has significantly fewer pool facilities than Austin and Denver and less access to fishing than Austin or Madison.

An online questionnaire made available in December of 2017 revealed some clear desires from the community pertaining to water recreation. High on the list was the quality of the water. Many community members were interested in using the rivers, ponds and lakes for recreation but felt that the water was not clean enough. In a staff interview it was noted that the water is checked monthly, but that

signage may be necessary to make visitors aware. Another priority of community members was the development of trails and parks along the rivers. There was also a desire for recreation opportunities on the rivers (e.g., water trails), whether kayaking or stand-up paddling and adequate access to do so. In addition to natural water areas, many community members wanted to see more pools and aquatic centers. There were several people who noted the need for an indoor pool facility. Respondents also felt that access to pools through reasonable pricing and expanded hours during the busy season were important. Interviews with staff members from the department revealed some additional ideas. Staff members have suggested that a water park complete with water slides and a lazy river would be a valuable asset for Des Moines citizens. A few others noted the success of Gray's Lake and the need to replicate it. The development of a walking pool, which might be attractive to older populations, was suggested. Meanwhile, development of the 150-mile water trails network for the metro, with an emphasis on dam mitigation in downtown Des Moines and near Fleur Drive (by Gray's Lake), continues to gain traction.









In light of participation trends, activities in similar cities and data from the community and staff members, a series of recommendations have been developed to improve Des Moines Parks and Recreation's water recreation opportunities.

- Build on existing water recreation facilities (these suggestions should be reviewed in a recommended aquatics feasibility study; see next chapter)
  - Renovate pool facilities
  - Develop new pool facilities
- Create additional opportunities with existing resources
  - River recreation opportunities
  - Fishing opportunities
  - Dining opportunities alongside water resources
  - Water recreation programming opportunities
- Create new world-class water facilities; options include:
  - Developing a water park
  - Developing a nature-based water recreation center (akin to the current proposal for downtown dam mitigation and associated recreation)

The relationship between the new Olympic-sized pool at the downtown YMCA and the

City should also be subject to consideration in any future decision-making about indoor water recreation in particular.

### BUILD ON EXISTING WATER RECREATION FACILITIES

The trend toward increasing participation in swimming—and even the aspiration of many non-participants to participate—suggests that being able to provide swimming pools is an important function of park and recreation departments in the future. The City of Des Moines already provides pool facilities (two pools and three aquatic centers); however, it was clear from the survey of community members that these facilities are valued and that both renovations and new developments would be looked upon favorably.

Several areas were identified for this type of project. Community members noted that Ashworth Pool could use renovations of the locker room. In addition, it was suggested that the area in the vicinity of Teachout Aquatic Center could be a revitalization area and the center itself could use a comprehensive renovation. There were a number of people who advocated for returning a pool with restrooms to Good Park, and near the Riverwoods area would be a good idea.

A variety of community members also felt that an indoor pool would be an asset to the system. Seattle Parks and Recreation has developed eight indoor pool facilities which are widely



popular among their community members. The table below lists all their pool facilities along with the amenities they provide. All of the pools listed, except Colman and Mounger Pools, are indoor facilities. All facilities feature stair entry and lifts or rope swings (300- to 400-pound max weight). These facilities are used recreational swimming, family swim nights and special event nights, by community members of all ages. Rainier Beach Pool, which was renovated more recently, has features for both children and adults and includes space for birthday parties. This type of facility would likely be well received in the City of Des Moines given that approximately one quarter of the population is under 18 and about 89% of the population is under the age of 65.<sup>{12}</sup>

Another way to expand on the existing idea of pool facilities is to provide a walking pool. This was suggested by a staff member and could be a way to stay current with the increasing participation in aquatic exercise. Bell Recreation Center in Sun City, Arizona, provides a walking pool (pictured) which is popular and appreciated by residents and guests who visit.

SEATTLE POOL FACILITIES AND AMENITIES					
	Lap Pool Temp.	Warm Water Pool Temp.	Spa Temp.	Sauna Temp.	Amenities
<b>Ballard Pool</b>	85°		99		1 meter diving board, slide, rope swing
<b>Colman Pool</b> <i>(Summer)</i>	83°				1-meter diving board, tube slide, 50-meter heated saltwater pool
<b>Evans Pool</b> <i>(Green Lake)</i>	85°			160°	1-meter diving board
<b>Medgar Evers Pool</b> <i>(Garfield)</i>	85°			160°	1-meter diving board, rope swing
<b>Helene Madison Pool</b>	85°				1-meter and 3-meter diving boards
<b>Meadowbrook Pool</b>	85°			160°	1-meter and 3-meter diving boards, rope swing
<b>Mounger Pool</b> <i>(Summer)</i>	85°	93°			50' slide, outdoor
<b>Queen Anne Pool</b>	85°			160°	1-meter and 3-meter diving boards, rope swing
<b>Rainier Beach Pool</b>	85°	93°	102°	160°	1-meter diving board, giant slide, lazy river, water spray
<b>Southwest Pool</b>	85°		102°	160°	1-meter and 3-meter diving boards

## Loeb Boathouse Restaurant



PHOTO SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

The Loeb Boathouse Restaurant is located in Central Park in New York City. Operating since 1954 the Loeb Boathouse has been incredibly successful. It has a restaurant, an outdoor bar, a café offering to-go items and facilities for private events. This type of facility could be used as a model for the development of a restaurant at Gray's Lake.

### CREATE ADDITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES BY USING EXISTING RESOURCES

The City of Des Moines has a variety of resources which could be used to further develop water recreation in the area and meet the needs of residents and tourists. Fishing was identified as an aspirational sport among younger and older populations alike. Fly fishing in particular has also shown increases in participation over the last three years. For these reasons, providing further infrastructure such as docks or platforms with accompanying signage to encourage fishing in places where it is allowed could be an easy way to create additional fishing opportunities.

Community members also mentioned a desire to have more opportunities for recreation on the river. Some of the activities they were interested in participating in were kayaking and stand-up paddling. This could be achieved through partnering with concessionaires to provide kayaking and stand-up paddling and through identifying areas on the river which could support this type of recreation and would not interfere with other river activities. The downtown water trails proposals currently under consideration have potential to fill this bill if they become a reality (see right).

### CREATE NEW WATER FACILITIES

#### Indoors

There is also an opportunity to create new indoor water facilities, which will be an asset for the community and bring in tourism. It is noted that many citizens choose to go out of town for water parks; creating one within the City would keep tourism/recreation dollars in place. An indoor facility is suggested for study here, avoiding competition with the popular Adventureland Park in nearby Altoona and allowing for additional winter recreation options.

A great example of a highly successful water park is Schlitterbahn in New Braunfels, Texas. This park map shows that it covers 70 acres and boasts 51 attractions including waterslides, rides, pools, wave pools, wave rivers and water coasters. The park is split into two sections, the original waterpark and the expanded water park. It's located on the Comal River and the original section makes use of water from the river. Due to its location on a river, this park could be a good model for the City of Des Moines in the development of an indoor water park.

#### In Nature

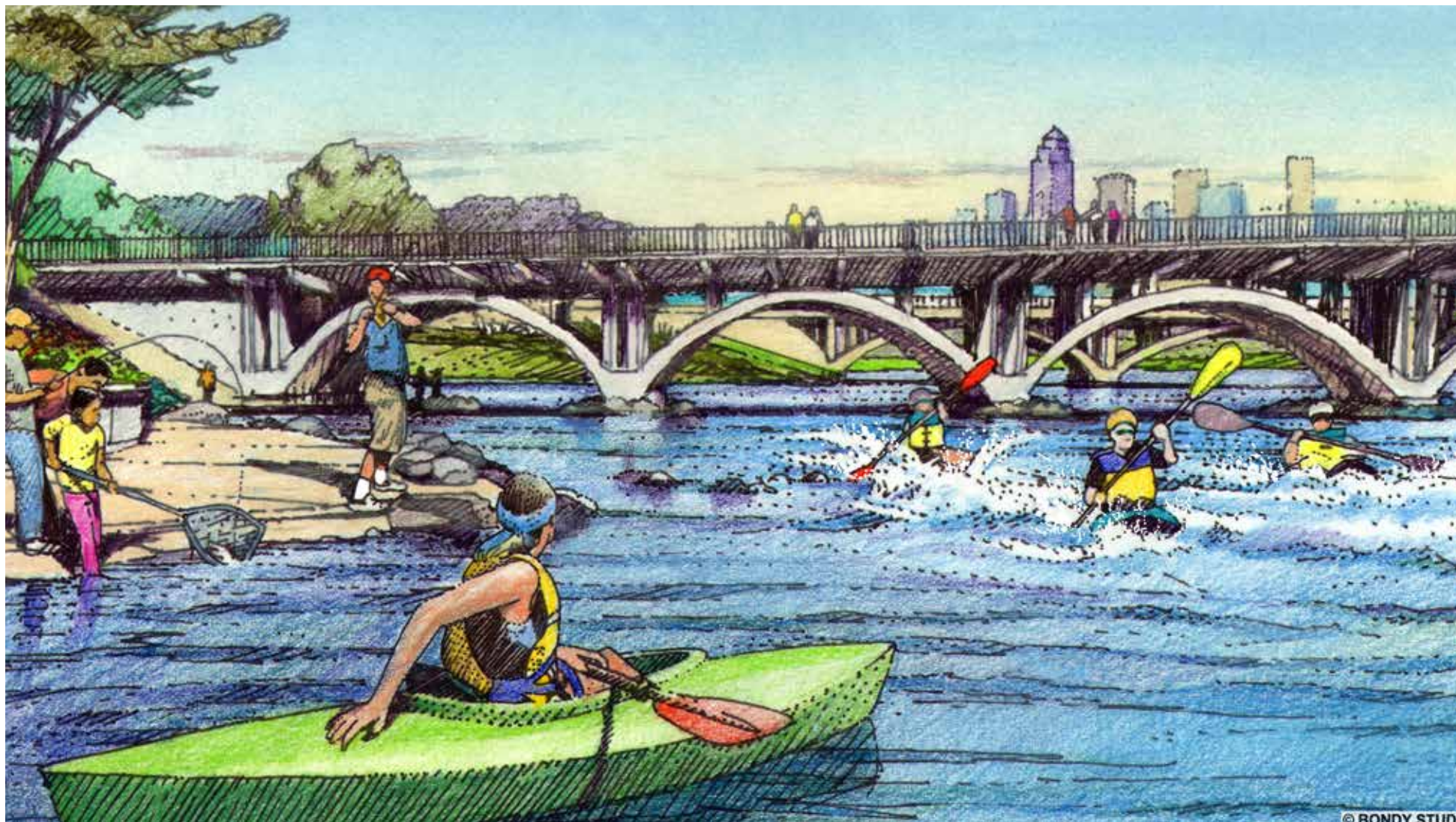
Another idea to consider is the development of a water recreation center. This aligns with the interest of some community members





DOWNTOWN WATER TRAIL PLAN : FLEUR DRIVE ILLUSTRATION





© RONDY STUDIO

DOWNTOWN WATER TRAIL PLAN: FLEUR DRIVE ILLUSTRATION



in having a whitewater course for kayaking or courses for stand-up paddling. The U.S. National Whitewater Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, is an example of the type of facility that could be a good fit for Des Moines. The Center provides courses for whitewater kayaking, stand-up paddling and rafting. It also provides flatwater kayaking and stand-up paddling. In addition, it has a variety of land activities such as trails, zip lines, ropes courses and jumps. Festivals, film nights and yoga are also provided. This type of facility has the ability to bring tourism to the area and become a truly unique recreation opportunity for the residents of Des Moines. Currently, the Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Greater Des Moines Partnership, Polk County Conservation and the Great Outdoors Foundation have been working with the City of Des Moines and numerous other agencies and partners to study a similar facility for downtown Des Moines as part of the metro's 150-mile water trails project. This project includes dam mitigation and recreation enhancements at Center Street, Scott Avenue and Fleur Dam locations.

#### **Greater Des Moines Water Trails and Greenways Master Plan**

In the fall of 2017 through the summer of 2018 the Water Trails Engineering Study was developed. This study was the first phase of implementation of the Greater Des

Moines Water Trails and Greenways Master Plan, a regional roadmap for developing a network of recreational corridors along 150 miles of rivers and creeks in central Iowa.

Water trails help re-connect Iowans to their waterways' history, heritage, geology, fisheries, and wildlife. Water trails provide adequate access and can include amenities like riverside camping, wild spaces, picnic areas, and restrooms, and watercraft rentals provided by local, state, and federal partners. Coordinated signage and mapping systems guide users toward the types of experiences they seek, ranging from a highly social first-time river experience lasting a few hours to multi-day adventures. Water trails help boost local economies and give central Iowans outdoor experiences just out their back doors

“

*This is the most  
transformational  
quality-of-life  
project of our  
generation  
in Des Moines.*

*We need to  
come together  
and get it done.*

—Jay Byers  
Greater Des Moines  
Partnership CEO, Capital  
Crossroads Tri-Chair

# WINTER RECREATION

## PROGRAMMING

Des Moines Parks and Recreation offers several opportunities for residents to opt outside during the winter months. Current winter recreation activities consist of snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and ice skating. Community engagement surveys and interviews with staff members indicate that the City could benefit from park programming that celebrates the seasons, especially during the winter months, to keep residents active. Some suggestions include adding ski trails, maintaining existing trails for winter activity, improving park signage and increasing promotion of winter recreation and programming in parks. Across the nation, participation in winter recreation activities is on the rise. National trends indicate that participation in winter activities—including all types of skiing (downhill, cross-country and freestyle), sledding/tubing and snowshoeing—has increased by at least 5% in the last year. A steady increase in participation over the last five years indicates growing interest in outdoor winter recreation, which park agencies should not overlook.

Ice fishing is another popular activity in Minneapolis. In Des Moines, fishing is available at Gray's Lake, Birdland Park and will soon be available at Easter Lake (a Polk County Conservation facility within City limits). Residents in Des Moines would like to see improvements made to water quality and increased fishing access in the City.

Ice fishing is an activity for all ages and may be of interest to many residents.

The following policy adapted from Minneapolis could serve as a guide.

- Permits are not required for a portable fish house.
- Fish houses must be occupied when they are on the lake and removed at the end of the day. It is prohibited for fish houses to remain on the lake overnight.
- Gas powered augers are legal to use; holes are limited to 10 inches in diameter.
- No one is allowed on city lakes between midnight and daylight of the following morning.
- The use of motorized vehicles (cars, trucks, ATVs, snowmobiles, etc.) is strictly prohibited on City Lakes.

### WINTER RECREATION PROGRAM GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- Increase participation in existing winter recreation opportunities through promotion and spreading awareness in ways that motivate residents to opt for going outside
- Keep residents active year-round by expanding winter recreation activities, programs and special events
- Provide proper equipment, appropriate

signage and winter advisory updates to keep residents safe while participating

### RECOMMENDED INITIATIVES THAT SUPPORT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

- Identify additional parkland and open space that could be used for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing
- Identify and designate areas in parks for sledding and tubing; provide appropriate signage with etiquette for user safety
- Develop a volunteer ambassador program to lead cross-country ski and snowshoe outings, offer snowboarding lessons, and assist with trail grooming and maintenance of outdoor winter recreation areas
- Open frozen lakes and ponds to the public for ice fishing, ice skating, hockey, broom ball and pond hockey
- Monitor the weather and ice conditions, maintain proper signage and post regular updates on the website for each location to help keep residents safe
- Offer outdoor winter recreation programs such as naturalist-led snowshoeing and natural history programs for all ages
- Maintain existing paved and unpaved trails (e.g., Ewing flow trail) for winter cycling and walking
- Improve promotion of existing winter

## *Example: Winter Activities in Minneapolis, Minnesota*



PHOTO SOURCE: THE LOPPET FOUNDATION, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Minneapolis, MN has an outstanding winter recreation program and sets an example for other agencies. The Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Department partners with The Loppet Foundation to offer more than 20 miles of trail for cross-country skiing and skijoring, seven lakes for ice fishing, ice arenas at 24 parks, snowshoeing, off road cycling, sledding, tubing, and snowboarding. Programs include snowshoe hikes led by guided naturalists, snowboard lessons, hockey, and broomball. The Department trains Volunteer Ski Ambassadors to help maintain ski trails, check ski passes, and patrol the area. Information about how to participate in winter activities is readily available on the Parks and Recreation Department website.

### ***Ski with your pup!***

Skijoring, as pictured, is dog-assisted cross-country skiing that uses a harness and a rope to pull the skier. This has become a popular winter activity in Minneapolis, Minnesota.



# WINTER RECREATION

## PROGRAMMING



YOUNG PEOPLE ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS IN WINTER.  
FOR ADDITIONAL WINTER PROGRAMMING IDEAS, SEE PREVIOUS PAGE.



recreation activities on website; the City currently offers free snowshoe rentals and winter excursions but the information is hard to find

- Promote existing partnership activities, such as winter workshops offered at the Greater Des Moines Botanical Gardens
- Expand partnerships with non-profits, friends groups and private businesses to offer winter recreation programming, equipment, training instruction and trail maintenance
- Offer training on skijoring at one of the dog parks; provide ropes and harnesses to let pet owners try it out
- Consider the feasibility of operating snow manufacturing devices at designated hills for tubing during certain weather patterns that are dry but cold

#### RECOMMENDED SPECIAL EVENTS THAT CELEBRATE THE SEASONS:

- Halloween Treasure Hunt at Greenwood Park to include live music, public art, food trucks, free Halloween Flick and a treasure hunt around the park
- Halloween Costume Party and Competition at dog park
- Seasonal hikes focused on outdoor education such as tree leaf

identification, invasive species, winter wildlife and spring wildflowers

- Winter Holiday Nights to include a bonfire with hot dogs and opportunities to try snowshoeing and cross-country skiing; offer the same event at dog park with skijoring training and practice session
- Summer gardening and farmers market special events focused on health and nutrition, such as a tomato tasting contest where vendors submit their best heirloom varieties for the public to taste and vote on

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*To be the  
most effective,  
engaging  
citizens  
in their  
neighborhood,  
where  
they live, is  
essential.*

—Joshua Barr  
Human Rights Director

# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## PROGRAMMING

Des Moines is well along in delivering environmental education programming to its parks as part of its overall programming. About two dozen nature-focused activities target children, youth, adults, families and mixed-age groups. Activities are well dispersed throughout the year, with something offered in most months. Offerings are less well dispersed across all the parks. In general, environmental education programs are best suited to parks with natural areas or at least some naturalized green space. Many, if not most, of Des Moines' parks fall somewhere between a large natural area and completely developed parkland, but most do present numerous opportunities for environmental education.

In this section, we draw from diverse nationwide examples for ways to integrate and diversify a systemwide environmental education experience. (We include commonly used terms such as outdoor education, nature play and nature discovery within the term "environmental education.") A fundamental challenge is how to weave all the programming together so that environmental education works holistically at a park system level, rather than playing out as scattered and isolated initiatives and actions.

The environmental education challenges are to:

- Create a holistic systemwide park environmental education program.
- Continue or even expand educational efforts despite stagnant or shrinking budgets.
- Build stakeholder involvement in neighborhood parks.
- Involve new volunteers in programming.
- Use a wider variety of park venues.
- Integrate environmental education with ongoing ecological enhancement and restoration.
- Build additional funding sources (grants, partners such as museums, foundations, corporations).

With a collection of diverse City parks considered to be a starting point, the places themselves become engines for unifying outdoor education themes, fostering experiences of nature in the parks and building a sustainable group of park stakeholders for the future.

Partner with other agencies or entities including:

- Polk County Conservation
- Blank Park Zoo
- Iowa Outdoor Learning Association

- The Des Moines School District
- Other naturalist and outdoor environmental educators in the region

Identify the different ecosystems that are within the entire park system and provide STEAM stations:

- Wetland
- Woodland
- Grassland
- Prairie areas

Urban park environmental education programs across the nation use various strategies to create holistic, systemwide programs. These include:

- Ecological themes
- Nature-learning opportunities, nature play and discovery spaces
- Interpretation
- Trails
- Service and problem-solving
- Nature recreational activities







# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## PROGRAMMING

### ECOLOGICAL THEMES

Thematic programming based on the ecosystems of the park system can unify an environmental education program by focusing on the habitats themselves or on individual species or groups of species in habitats. Already such efforts are underway with the department's Urban Prairie Project, which creates small pockets of native prairie in parks, schools and public spaces—serving as educational resources and places for recreation. Existing programming on this theme can be rotated among similar ecosystems in more parks to introduce people to those parks and build loyalty. If data are collected by citizens—monarch counts, frog and toad calling results—these could be tied to ecosystems and displayed online in maps of the park system and its ecosystems. This kind of outreach can unify a wide range of educational moments across time and space. Combined with guided events involving ecological exploration, such data also build awareness of the park ecosystems. Ecological themes also fit well with the pop-up park concept.

Some examples of integrating ecological themes with environmental education are:

- Bird surveys of the same ecosystem (e.g., prairie, savanna, woodland) in different parks

- Snowshoe hike led by someone who can interpret mammal tracks for participants
- Volunteers controlling invasive plants in one ecosystem at several parks (e.g., honeysuckle in oak woodlands)
- Pollinator habitat and use assessment by citizen scientists moving from park to park
- A BioBlitz—documenting all species found in a park in one 24-hour period
- Monarch tagging tied to Urban Prairie Project
- Monitoring of park aquatic resources (e.g., plants, macroinvertebrates, water quality) by citizen scientists

### NATURE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES, NATURE PLAY AND DISCOVERY SPACES

For environmental education programs to work, the park system needs its champions—and individual parks need neighborhood stakeholders. But many urban people are not comfortable in natural areas—some see them as unfamiliar and unsafe spaces. Giving urban dwellers chances to band birds, watch eagle nesting behavior or gaze at stars introduces them to natural areas in parks in a controlled way that feels safe. But what about natural parks that are underused by neighbors? Or parks that lack interesting and accessible natural areas?

A technique increasingly used by urban park systems nationwide is to deliberately create areas for “nature play and learning” or, more broadly, “nature discovery.” This movement was accelerated by the partnership of the Natural Learning Initiative at North Carolina State University and the National Wildlife Foundation. The definition of a nature play and learning area is straightforward:

***A designated, managed location in an existing or modified outdoor environment where children of all ages and abilities play and learn by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements, materials, organisms and habitats, through sensory, fine-motor and gross-motor experiences (Moore 2014).***

The goal of nature play areas is to create, in miniature, an ecologically designed landscape with multiple opportunities to encounter nature in unexpected ways throughout the space. They can be designed and even constructed through an interactive process involving the park's neighborhood. The process includes a community survey and visioning and design workshops where stakeholders, especially families with children, make their wishes known. Schools, childcare centers, conservation non-profits, camping organizations and government agencies can get involved to advance the design or help with funding. Potential partners can latch onto



something concrete which they can report to their constituency. Nature play areas can be large or small and are well suited to areas where mowed turf is intended to be naturalized.

Nature play/discovery areas typically have:

- Designated entry points and trails to create a sense of safety
- Native vegetation arrayed to create a sense of mystery and immersion in a locally appropriate ecosystem
- Large natural objects (stumps, logs, and stepping stones) encourage movement and play
- Expendable and moveable natural-play objects (pine cones, seed pods, stones, etc.)
- Practical features (shade and places to sit)
- Designs to involve people of varied sensory and mobility capabilities
- Interests for all ages, not just a “redo” of manufactured playground equipment

***Nature discovery as a self-directed activity in an inviting park system expands the concept of environmental education beyond programming and one location. Studies have shown that neighbors using such spaces feel a greater sense of place in their neighborhood and become more involved with the park where they play (Russ et al. 2015).***

## INTERPRETATION

Signage, brochures, self-guiding booklets, websites and mobile apps can be used systemwide to establish an integrated environmental education experience. Expert- or volunteer-led presentations and tours are interactive and personal for participants. A “passport” system could be created (like that of National Parks or Minnesota Parks and Trails) to assist park visitors in their quest to experience all parks in Des Moines; in this case, each park would have a particular interpretive emphasis that establishes the identity of that park in the mind of visitors.

Many Des Moines parks already have interpretive signage. Expanding this systemwide in a cohesive, well considered “branding” approach could make it more effective. Interpretation would focus on each park’s natural and cultural histories, the important natural resources there, issues that are being addressed, ecological restoration activities and results, stormwater runoff issues and anything that sets that park apart from other parks.

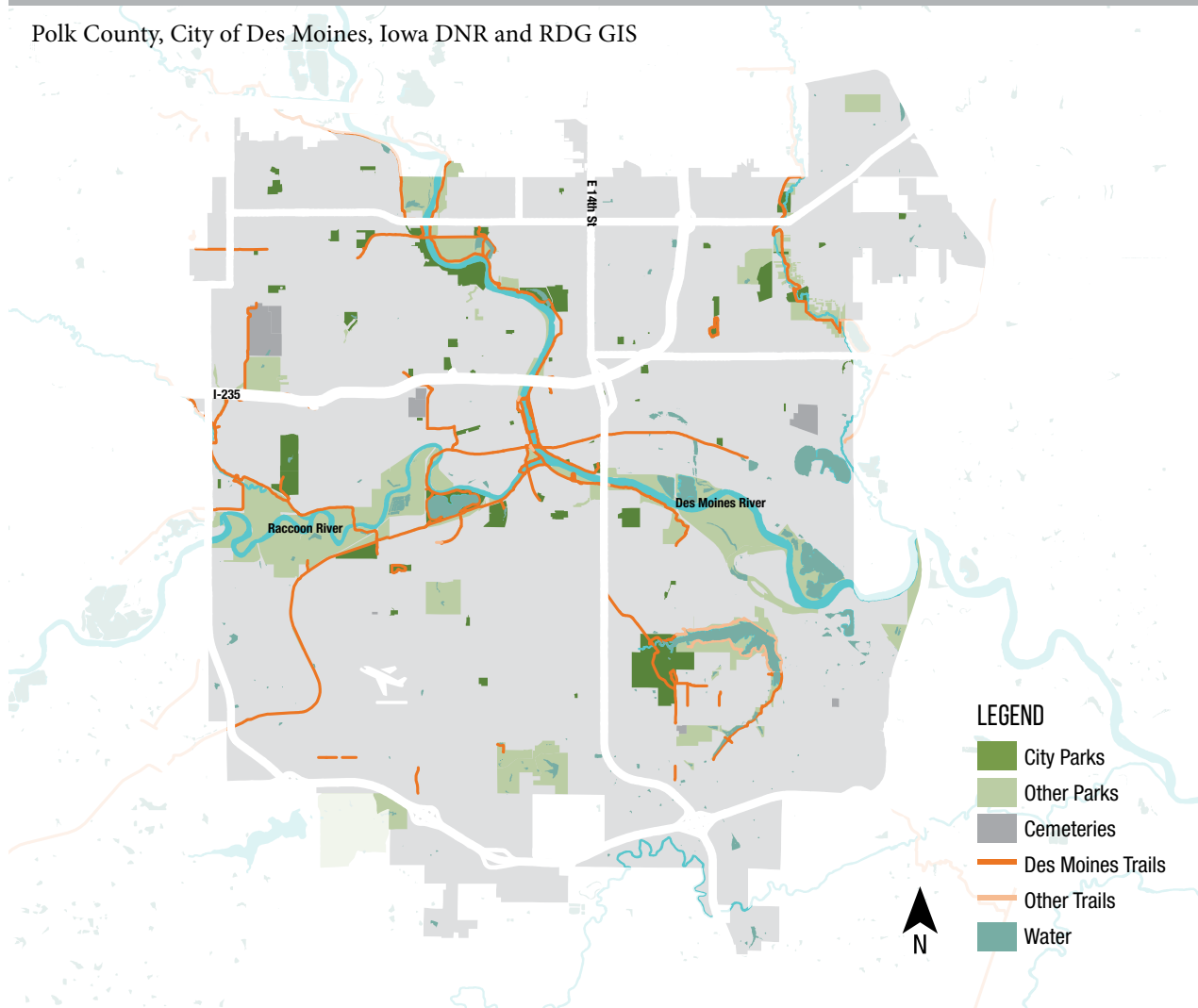


# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## PROGRAMMING

### WATER ACCESS: WHERE WATER AND PARKS CROSS

Polk County, City of Des Moines, Iowa DNR and RDG GIS



### TRAILS

Trails not only connect parks with neighborhoods, but also are places for environmental education to happen. Trails may, for instance, lead to a nature play and learning space at a park entry point. A nature trail with interpretive stations can also be employed to introduce people to a park system's ecosystems. There is an emerging trend to create trails with stations for nature play, following the exercise trail model. These can be designed as nature play trails, expanded on nature play and learning spaces.

### WATERWAYS

Additionally, from direct experience with nature play design and its impacts on park users, members of the consulting team see nature play near water, particularly moving water, as an additional attractor for participation. This map shows the potential within the existing park system to capture nature play opportunities that have that moving-water appeal at least periodically during the year:

### SERVICE AND PROBLEM-SOLVING

Litter pick-up, invasive plant-pulling and other service activities can be environmental education moments. Ecological information wrapped in a fun service event fits quite well at pop-up parks. The challenge of service-



based environmental education is keeping it fresh and engaging, and ensuring it has an impact that goes beyond the event itself. Litter collection, for example, can be part of a recycling story and might cause participants to think of their own recycling habits.

### NATURE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Creative initiatives already take place in Des Moines Parks. These includes stand-up paddle boarding, nature observation and hands-on fishing tutorials. When environmental education is linked to other park programs, deeper learning happens. Other nature recreation activities include boating, hiking and biking.

Additional opportunities for environmental education are embedded in the “Engage and inform the public” section, later in this plan.



# TECHNOLOGY

## ENHANCING PARK AND RECREATION PROGRAMS



PHOTO SOURCE: RICHARD BRIAN/  
LAS VEGAS REVIEW @VEGASPHOTOGRAPH



PHOTO SOURCE: RICHARD BRIAN/  
LAS VEGAS REVIEW @VEGASPHOTOGRAPH

City, state and national park agencies are developing innovative ways to integrate technology into parks and recreation programs. There are many advantages to embracing technology in parks, including educational opportunities, increased social interaction, park usage data tracking, and networking and park promotion through social media. Some examples of integrated technology include the development of “smart parks” and “smart playgrounds” which offer solar-powered charging stations, Wi-Fi network expansion and interactive apps for recreation. {13} Burroughs Park in Houston, Texas, is one of the thousands of **Smart Playgrounds** popping up across the nation. Smart Playgrounds connect active play with digital play through free, downloadable apps that interact with augmented-reality markers installed in playground equipment. Similar to the Pokémon Go phenomenon, these smart playground apps, available through Biba Technology, offer several games designed to help people develop a relationship with the outdoors through the park system.{14} These games are also a way for children to connect with adults through active recreation, which helps bridge generational gaps often associated with technology.

Another example is the **WebRanger** program offered by the National Park Service, which allows youth the opportunity to become a Junior Ranger from home.{15} An interactive web-based program designed to train youth to become stewards of their park,

this may be an opportunity for Des Moines Parks and Recreation to instill a sense of pride and ownership of the City’s parks in the younger generation by educating them about the natural environment, cultural heritage and many health benefits of parks.

**OnCell** is an additional mobile app used by city and national parks. This is a location-aware app that is used to create tour guides for park visitors that can be accessed directly on mobile devices. The tours are GPS-based and create a custom experience to guide visitors through parks.{16} This technology could be used to develop tours of special features, landmarks, natural wonders or cultural and historical heritage of Des Moines’ parks.

Whether the department is developing a new park, playground or trail, leading an environmental outdoor education program, or promoting a special event, the role of technology and how it can be used to benefit active living, build social connections and enhance the park system should be considered.



## EMERGING TRENDS

Trends in recreation as applicable to Des Moines is outlined in further detail in the LOS report. The following additional emerging trends in recreation either support previous findings or carve out a new category for the department's recreation program plan.

### OUTDOOR ACTIVITY

In 2018, the top aspirational activity for all age segments is outdoor recreation. Every year, participation in outdoor recreation continues to grow with increasing interest in camping, biking, birdwatching, hiking and kayaking.{17}

While outdoor activity and adventure sports are appealing to all ages, the Wildlife Explorers Program is a good example of a compelling outdoor environmental education program for kids 9–10 years old. Reports from program pilots show that participants in the Wildlife Explorers Program demonstrated an overall increase in knowledge about nature, wildlife and protecting the environment among other benefits such as spending more time outdoors. The program implements six chapters of a Wildlife Explorers workbook and requires implementation of a community action project to benefit park sites, such as planting of native flowers and trees, mulching, creating habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, picking up trash and watering trees.{18}



# EMERGING TRENDS

## ADVENTURE SPORTS

Participation in adventure sports—including BMX, climbing and non-traditional off-road triathlons—continues to grow in 2018. {19} New additions to programming in Des Moines may include a pop-up climbing wall or triathlon that utilizes Des Moines' lakes, BMX track, parkland and trail system.

## TEAM SPORTS

More and more people want to participate in recreation programs and activities with a partner, whether it be outdoor activities or fitness classes. Participation in team sports continues to grow and, at 86%, it is the largest category of programming offered by park and recreation agencies in the U.S. {20} Youth are the most active participants in team sports at 57.1%. {21} Team sports that have seen increased participation over the last five years include baseball, field hockey, flag football, lacrosse, rugby and indoor soccer. The department should ensure that adequate facilities are available to support team sports programs. The department may also consider adding a special event that combines trends in outdoor recreation and adventure sports with a team component such as a long-distance relay race or orienteering event that uses the City's parks and trails system.

## INCLUSIVE PROGRAMMING

Inclusive programming is a proactive approach to planning recreation programs that go beyond non-discrimination policies by actively planning for people with disabilities to participate. Park agencies now have inclusive policies to provide opportunities at day camps. Trained staff members are present to assist individuals with disabilities and other accommodations are made that include adaptive equipment, a behavior support plan, architectural accessibility and increased supervision (inclusion support advocate). {22}

## EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS THAT MEASURE HEALTH

Park and recreation sites serve as more than just a place for recreation activity, but also as locations to participate in evidence-based programs that measurably improve health. It is recommended that the department design programs that include identifiable, measurable health outcomes, and conduct ongoing assessments to report on health changes of participants (self-reported or college service-learning project-based). Examples of these types of programs range from arthritis intervention programs such as Fit and Strong!, Walk With Ease low-impact weekly walking programs, and Active Living Every Day, designed to help sedentary adults

become more active. NRPA reports that 155 agencies representing 45 states have committed to implementing arthritis evidence-based physical activity programs. {23}

Partner with other agencies or organizations including:

- Courage League Sports that offer year-round programming for children and adults with special needs
- Miracle Foundation
- Miracle League Ball Field







# LIVEWELL AMBASSADORS PROGRAM

Health is a significant motivator that attracts people to each other and people to parks. The department would work internally within the City to be a resource for other agencies that promote similar health and wellness programs. The department could also go out of house to promote health and wellness with liveWELL Ambassadors using the parks as a platform.

The University of Iowa launched an employee health and wellness program in 1999, which developed into the liveWELL program in 2006. The new program was branded as a comprehensive health-management strategy with the mission “to create and sustain a healthy campus culture.”{24} liveWELL includes many benefits for employees such as free health and well-being services (online, in person and over the phone), a personal health assessment, a health coach and several financial incentives.

As part of liveWELL, University of Iowa faculty and staff volunteer as Wellness Ambassadors to bridge the gap between the wellness program and different departments throughout campus. Ambassadors receive first-hand information on wellness programs, learn how to be a healthy role model, expand their knowledge of health and wellness and play a role in improving morale among employees. The liveWELL program notes that Ambassadors should have enthusiasm for the role, the ability to bring the program to life, access to email, good use

of judgment regarding communication and a willingness to generate and share ideas.

Des Moines Parks and Recreation has an opportunity to use the liveWELL program as a model for both internal and external use. Internally, the Department could select an employee, or a committee of employees, to act as a liaison with the City of Des Moines Human Resources Department to implement aspects of the already-established Employee Wellness Program.{25}

An example of this is the City of Columbus, Ohio’s, active Wellness Ambassador Program for city employees. City Ambassadors meet quarterly and organize the following programs:{26}

- **Group Fitness Classes**  
Yoga, cardio kickboxing, boot camp, meditation and dance classes are offered at no cost to employees throughout the year.
- **Gym Discounts**  
Free employee memberships to community centers are provided.
- **Quit Tobacco Program**  
Participants enrolled in the program receive free patches or gum, access to 24/7 support, a tailored quit plan and mobile games to help with cravings.
- **Great River Organics-CSA Program**  
Participants have access to local, seasonal

food directly from a farmer. Three different share options are available and produce is delivered directly to work locations throughout the city.

- **Real Appeal**  
An online education program about health and lifestyle, the program focuses on small, manageable changes and is customized to meet personal needs and goals. Weekly online group coaching sessions are included and led by a Transformation Coach who provides guidance and support throughout the year. A handy mobile app helps participants track their goals.
- **Walk/Run Club**  
All ability-level participants are welcomed to train for an upcoming race or provided support as they walk and run for fun. Waivers are required.

Externally, the liveWELL model could be adapted to parks and recreation facilities and programming to incorporate aspects of health and wellness throughout the Parks and Recreation system. The National Recreation and Park Association has published a Best Practices Guide highlighting examples of how park systems can recruit and train youth volunteers to serve as health ambassadors within the community. {27} Des Moines Parks and Recreation may consider implementing similar programs:

- Youth Ambassadors Commit to Health**  
 Houston, Texas  
 A teen-led initiative that prepares youth to lead healthier lives. Program activities take place throughout the city at community centers. Teens work with other teens and children to maintain Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (HEPA) standards, lead fitness classes, provide physical activity and nutrition education at afterschool programs and work with local conservation groups to lead environmental education activities.
- Positive Play Project**  
 Mesa, Arizona  
 Youth Ambassadors advocate for, raise awareness of and support a healthy culture shift through the **Positive Play Project**, a program that “fosters an inclusive and fun atmosphere for youth sports with an emphasis on positive coaching, injury prevention, hydration, concussion awareness and nutrition.” Youth Ambassadors attend community sporting events to educate parents, families, coaches and peers about healthy eating and physical activity.

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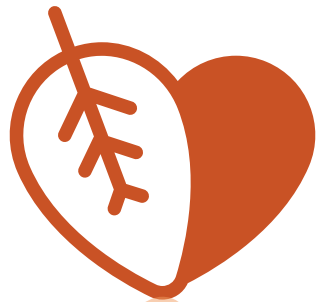
“  
My favorite  
spots in  
Des Moines  
are any of the  
beautiful  
parks within  
walking  
distance from  
my home.

—Public Engagement  
Respondent









HEART



HEART

05







# 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

## *Big Ideas to Get Started*

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

# INTRODUCTION



Multiple destination parks and trails lead to exceptional experiences and create lasting memories for residents and visitors. LiveDSM intends to build on this success by ensuring every park in the system is based on meaningful planning and design principles.

This is critical at the neighborhood park level in particular – whether that’s a mini-park in a once-vacant lot, or a neighborhood feature of a larger park. For parks and trails to truly serve as the heart of the community, to realize the vision of a valuable park experience out your front door, each park requires:

- Neighbor involvement
- Full understanding of natural resources
- Careful design of built facilities
- Planning for the role of technology
- Awareness of the larger context – neighborhood, district, ward, system
- Attention to equity, health and programming
- Sustainable funding for the park or trail
- Recognition and consideration of short and long term maintenance needs

Just to name a few. In short, each park or trail segment in the system needs to be part of the larger whole while receiving its own thoughtful development process. This holds true for new parks or revisiting older parks

in the system. Typically across the country, neighborhood parks receive minimal thought related to their vision and mission. Instead, they sit on a list of capital improvement projects or maintenance schedules, receiving (at best) repair and replacement of what was once there. Often, that park was originally developed in a vacuum with minimal public input and little recognition of its surroundings or role in the system. With this section of the plan, the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department intends to help lead the nation in changing that – to now make sure each system building block is as well-polished as the big, regional features and tourist attractions.

## THE CHALLENGE

In many respects, the City of Des Moines Parks and Recreation system compares favorably to the benchmark communities described in Chapter One. But the system falls dramatically short on one key measure: personnel. To show leadership in making sure parks are the heart of the community, the Department will need access to more personnel. Des Moines will not successfully compete with an Austin, Denver or Minneapolis, without serious attention given to the Department’s resource challenges, particularly in the area of staff or human resources. Thoughtful planning takes people.



# HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

This chapter's purpose is simple: to develop a comprehensive way of planning for the future of parks and trails, including neighborhood parks.

## STAFF

If you are Des Moines Parks and Recreation staff, this chapter will provide to you a template for successful park planning. That template considers:

- Technology, including mapping parks using GIS methods
- Public engagement and communications planning
- Finance strategies
- Facility needs/infrastructure improvements
- Natural resources needs, protections and opportunities
- Programming needs and
- Maintenance requirements
- The methods described here encourage:
- Team work – both within Parks and Recreation and outside the agency
- Understanding the desired outcomes for the whole system – as well as for any particular park
- Using a process that is easy to understand, inclusive, and delivers outcomes that meet people's needs.

## COMMUNITY LEADERS

Community leaders and decision makers recognize the tremendous success of planning for the destination features – whether the Principal River Walk, Pappajohn Sculpture Park, or Gray's Lake. LiveDSM asks to continue development of community and regional facilities but also for that same focus and energy to apply to the parks out our front door – the neighborhood parks.

To make this happen, leadership can help in the development of:

- Resources, particularly human resources, to apply a valuable planning process to all parks and trails
- Young staff with up-to-date skill sets – their involvement is critical for success
- Policies and practices that endorse the planning “template” outlined here
- Public awareness around the value of this approach
- Messaging and decision-making that helps all recognize the need to address maintenance resources up-front, to encourage the development of a sustainable system.

## PUBLIC

The process outlined here does not work unless neighbors – and the public at large – take ownership of the planning process and fully participate. Identifying the true potential of Des Moines' neighborhood parks – particularly when focusing on equity, nature, innovation and park attractions – requires wide-ranging stakeholders to make connections. If only the “usual suspects” engage in park system development, the results likely won't deliver what the neighbors and larger community need. The public can and should use this chapter to understand the planning process well enough to become full participants in – if not leaders of – park system development.

# ACTIVATION, CONNECTION AND POP-UPS

For parks to serve as the heart of the community, facilities must be in place across the metro that can deliver on that promise. This chapter looks at five objectives to support this effort.

## 1. **Park Planning Fundamentals**

Developing both equity and interest in the park system. Essential facilities and unique opportunities will help any park provide meaningful gathering spaces for its neighbors and visitors.

## 2. **Understanding our Park Assets**

Developing a clear and thoughtful approach to planning and investing in current and future parks. Use GIS technology to inventory, analyze,

plan and manage the built and natural resources in our park system.

## 3. **Park-by-Park Planning**

An example of merging natural and built environments with neighborhood/district connectivity. The park-by-park planning recommended here, using Ashby Park as an example, would employ this method coupled with meaningful public/stakeholder engagement.

## 4. **Access and Connection**

Connect parks to the surrounding neighborhood and community. Consider the bigger-picture look at parklands and existing trails. When coupled with the equity and health lenses (see Context and Existing

Conditions), priorities for neighborhood park planning, trail connections and specific lands acquisition emerge.

## 5. **Pop-up Park to Land Acquisition**

propose opportunities where none currently exist to deliver on the promise of parks as the heart of the community. The goal: place a park at every resident's front door. This is where creative partnerships, innovation, pop-ups and activation come into play. The goal: place a park at every resident's front door. This is where creative partnerships, innovation, pop-ups and activation come into play.



# PARK PLANNING FUNDAMENTALS

## GUIDELINES

Neighborhood parks provide the backbone for the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system. Des Moines currently offers 43 neighborhood parks to residents, with an average size of 9.5 acres. To meet future LOS standards, Des Moines would want to provide an additional 110 acres (or roughly 10–11 additional average-sized neighborhood parks). It is important to note that some community parks have areas within them that serve as neighborhood parks. Some community school grounds also serve as neighborhood parks to the surrounding neighborhood. As additional parkland is needed to meet an ever-growing demand, this chapter can guide that development. See “Access and Connectivity” for identified parkland gaps in the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system.

### PARK FACILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The following text describes built, natural and adjacency features to consider when developing neighborhood parks. Pictured is a map of a potential neighborhood park “ideal.”

This plan recommends that all future planning and design address specific park and surrounding community needs while strategically serving a larger mission both through the development of facility infrastructure and landscape restoration. Each park, and specifically each neighborhood park, should have basic core facilities while offering unique amenities that make for a

comprehensive system working together, creating a park system experience that serves the public well (see adjacent chart).

Understanding what types of facilities are preferred in neighborhood parks is key. This helps plan for basic needs while understanding the special requirements for each facility. Start with assessing the natural environment and preserving two acres of open space.

Through public engagement (see next page) identify unique programming opportunities that work within the park but are unique to the surrounding neighborhood.

If the park has a unique relationship to community influences or natural amenities, plan facilities that have more community pull.





# PARK PLANNING FUNDAMENTALS

## GUIDELINES

### *Building Blocks of a Neighborhood Park—Three Levels of Programming*

Neighborhood parks are considered the basic unit of the Des Moines Parks system, providing a recreational and social focus for residential areas.

#### **Standard Program:**

- 5 to 25 acres
- 2 acres of open space
- Playground
- Shelter
- Pathway (trail) Access
- Frontage Access (at least one side, preferably two sides)
- Accessibility
- Landscape
- Signage
- Additional Program with Neighborhood Pull
- Parking for a Minimum of 10 to 20 Stalls
- Restrooms
- Half-court Basketball

- Full-court Basketball
- Backstop/Ball Fields for Informal Play
- Lighting
- Additional Shelters and Shade Structures
- STEAM Station

#### **Unique Program with Community Pull**

- Tennis
- Volleyball
- Football
- Pickleball
- Splash Pad / Wading Pool
- Gardens
- Fitness / Adventure Course
- Art

- Day Lodge
- Day Camp Programing
- Expanded Picnic Opportunities
- Fully Accessible Play
- Amphitheater
- Winter Activity
  - Sledding Hill
  - Ice Skating
  - Ice Hockey
  - Snowshoe
- Environmental Activity
  - Boating
  - Fishing
  - Bird Watching
  - Nature Trails
  - Other

# UNDERSTANDING OUR ASSETS

Several years ago, Des Moines Parks and Recreation began to use a mapping tool called Geographic Information System (GIS) to inventory, analyze and, to a degree, manage park assets for both the built and natural environment. Over the years, the department has had to reassign staff and take on more responsibility to do unique projects and expand their role within the community. This has led to a reduction in the use of GIS as a primary tool for project management and delivery. Recently, the department has refocused on using this impactful tool.

## ASSET INVENTORY, ANALYSIS AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

### Objective

Develop a comprehensive data collection, analysis and management system which can effectively and clearly portray the functionality and condition of assets within the City of Des Moines Park System

### Benefit

Investing the time and resources in the effective collection and management of data will be critical for the department moving forward. Collecting and managing data for both the built and natural environment will better inform decision-making in the areas of restoration, development and maintenance.

## DESIGNING THE SYSTEM

Developing a systems-based approach using data collection through inventory and analysis will connect project planning to project implementation and significantly help the department to meet future opportunities. The department is the steward of over 4,000 acres of land, 81 miles of trail and over 8,000 assets ranging from benches to buildings. A fully robust GIS management tool will help the department be more effective in the planning, design, implementation and management of City assets and more responsive to community leaders, the public and park users.

## GIS Technology

GIS technology is designed to collect, integrate and analyze diverse data, and generate information-rich, computer-based maps of a given project area.

Taking in data like population, topography, services, structures, permitting, roads and point-to-point travel times, GIS creates clear and accurate visualizations that empower planners, engineers and project owners to make informed decisions based on high-quality, meaningful data.

GIS maps can be updated in real time with data collected in the field using mobile computing devices.

# UNDERSTANDING OUR ASSETS

## GEOGRAPHIC FILTERS



**PARK PROPERTIES**

*What opportunities does the park offer?*



**NEIGHBORHOODS**

*What are the needs of the adjacent neighborhoods?*



**WARDS**

*How are surrounding communities served and what unique opportunities does this park provide?*



**EQUITY**

*What unmet facilities are not offered in the equity zones?*

## PARKLAND CATEGORIES



**PARKS**



**CEMETERIES**



**GOLF COURSES**



**TRAILS**



**RECREATIONAL  
OPEN SPACES**



**NATURAL  
OPEN SPACES**

## ASSET CLASSES



**GROUND PLAY**



**WATER PLAY**



**ATHLETICS**



**BURIAL  
STRUCTURES**



**STRUCTURES**



**AMENITIES**



**TRANSPORTATION**



**SIGNAGE**



**ENVIRONMENTAL**



## ASSET TYPES

### GROUND PLAY:

- Playground Package
- Freestanding Feature
- Swing Set
- Nature Playground
- Play Surfacing
- Special Feature
- Other

### WATER PLAY:

- Sprayground
- Splash Pool
- Wading Pool
- Fountain
- Water Slide
- Other

### ATHLETIC:

- Full-Court Basketball
- Half-Court Basketball
- Soccer Field
- Ball Diamond
- Tennis Court
- Pickleball Court
- Takraw Court
- Bocce Court
- Volleyball Court
- Horseshoe Pit
- Other

### BURIAL STRUCTURES:

- Mausoleum
- Mini-Mausoleum
- Columbarium

- Memorial Monument
- Ash Spreading Area
- Other

### STRUCTURES:

- Enclosed Shelter
- Open Air Shelter
- Full Restroom
- Kybo Restroom
- Storage Building
- Maintenance Building
- Pump House
- Community Center
- Pool
- Clubhouse
- Other

### AMENITIES:

- Drinking Fountain
- Picnic Table
- Bench
- Grill
- Trash Receptable
- Recycling Receptable
- Bike Rack
- Lighting
- Fence or Railing
- Bike Fix It Station
- Other

### TRANSPORTATION:

- Hard-Surfaced Path
- Hard-Surfaced Trail
- Soft-Surfaced Trail
- Bridge
- Parking
- Road
- Other

### SIGNAGE:

- Site Location
- Wayfinding
- Interpretive
- Regulatory
- 911
- Other

### ENVIRONMENTAL:

- Free Play Lawn

## PRE-PLANNING: DESIGNING THE SYSTEM

A citywide analysis should be developed, understanding that four graphic filters are required to make more informed decisions for future improvements. The graphic to the left illustrates the decision-making filters that are required for park development.

## The Issue

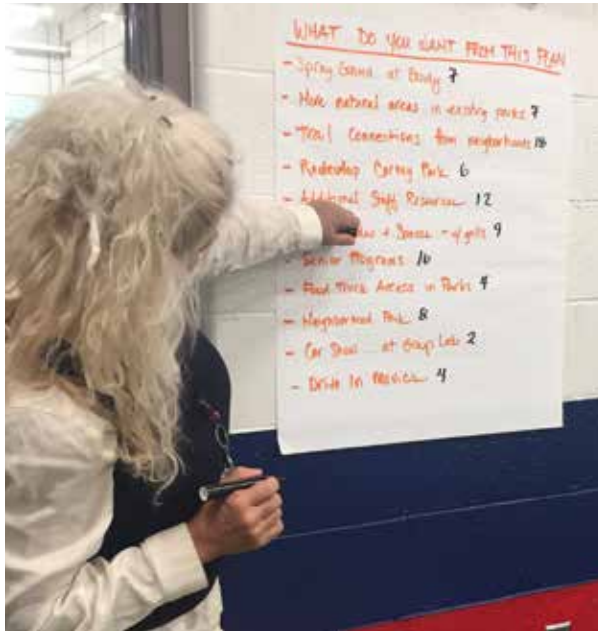
The City of Des Moines' parks and recreation system includes:

- 75 Parks
- 81 miles of Trail
- Over 4,000 acres of Parkland

Due to the size and complexity of the parks system, it is difficult for even those with advanced institutional knowledge to understand and/or identify issues across the system.

The objective is to inventory, store, manipulate, analyze, manage and present built and natural resource data. It will also serve as a tool to identify current age, value, condition and estimated replacement year and cost for project management use. By developing a comprehensive inventory of park systems (built and natural), staff will more effectively use interactive searches to inform future investments.

# PARK-BY-PARK PLANNING



## PRE-PLANNING: PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

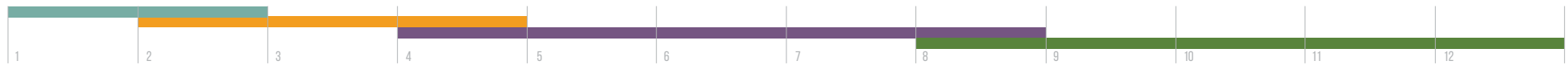
Developing a comprehensive approach to public engagement is as important as the plan itself. Community “buy-in” is critical for the development of all public lands and especially for neighborhood parks. Developing public engagement strategy and a communication plan is a time-sensitive and critical component to developing a successful project. The adjacent graphic is an example of how the project team in the early pre-planning phase can better understand different types of public engagement at different phases of the project.

The following are key phases of public engagement:

- **Awareness.**  
At the beginning of the project, developing project awareness and branding is important for overall project familiarity and critical information gathering.
- **Input.**  
Once the project is well on its way, input is critical to help guide the project and bring greater clarity to the “need list,” the “want list” and the “got to have it” list of park facilities. Gathering early input will help develop better concepts and design considerations.
- **Concepts.**  
Presenting concepts to the public helps the planning team and the community understand that the public is being heard and the surrounding stakeholders have greater buy-in.
- **Owners.**  
Once the stakeholders and general public have seen that they were included in the project and helped favorably impact the development of program and concepts, ownership begins to take root.

## PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

**SCHEDULE:** EXAMPLE OF A 12-MONTH PROCESS.



### AWARENESS

### INPUT

### CONCEPTS

### OWNERSHIP

**PROJECT BASE:** PROVEN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES TO PROVIDE PARTICIPATION THROUGHOUT PROCESS.

- ☐ **LARGE GROUP KICK-OFF PRESENTATION**  
Short presentation. Stations for each topic of plan.
- ☐ **PROJECT WEBSITE**
- ☐ **SURVEY** *for Steering Committee or Community*   
Identify issues and gather perspectives.

- ☐ **REPRESENTATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE**  
Strong involvement by meeting regularly.
- ☐ **STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS**  
Organize by: Parks and Recreation, Major Employers, Education, Professionals, Retailers, Housing, Arts, Nonprofits, Special Districts

- ☐ **DESIGN STUDIO**  
Consultant Team on location for three days. Open hours to meet with public.

- ☐ **COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE**  
Short presentation. Stations for each topic of plan.
- ☐ **FEEDBACK**  
Short presentation. Stations for each topic of plan.
- ☐ **JOINT WORK SESSION**  
Short presentation. Stations for each topic of plan

**ELECTED OPTIONS:** TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES THAT INCREASE INTEREST, ENGAGEMENT, AND OWNERSHIP OF THE PLANNING PROCESS. *USING ALL FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT IS NOT ADVISABLE.*

- ☐ **PROJECT SYMPOSIUM** *for Public*  
Consultants speak on projects within city.
- ☐ **KICK-OFF CELEBRATION**  
Presentations. Expo-like event with participating vendors (including profit and not-for-profit groups).
- ☐ **COMMUNITY EVENTS**
- ☐ **LECTURES**
- ☐ **NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL/ARTICLES**
- ☐ **HANDOUTS AND COLLATERAL**
- ☐ **SOCIAL MEDIA AND E-BLASTS**
- ☐ **1-QUESTION INSTANT POLLING E-BLASTS**
- ☐ **VIDEOGRAPHY**

- ☐ **LARGE MIXED GROUP FACILITATION**  
Discussion with invited experts/representatives organized around subject areas. *Day-long or 3 hours.*
- ☐ **COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES** *for Public*  
Small group discussion. Hundreds could attend; challenge to manage. *Day-long or 2 hours.*
- ☐ **"MY CITY" CLASSROOM PROGRAM**  
Training assists students to identify projects and priorities for community improvement.
- ☐ **STAKEHOLDER GROUPS** *by Geography*
- ☐ **SELF-FACILITATION TOOLBOX**
- ☐ **HALF-DAY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**
- ☐ **STATISTICALLY VALID SURVEY**   
Third-party administers.
- ☐ **VISUAL LISTENING SURVEY**   
Series of images; users votes on preference.
- ☐ **ONLINE MAPPING TOOL**   
Allows challenges/opportunities to be pinpointed.
- ☐ **POP-UP EVENTS**

- ☐ **NEIGHBORHOOD DESIGN STUDIOS**
- ☐ **SPECIAL DISTRICT PLANNING** *for Public*
- ☐ **PREFERENCE MAPPING**
- ☐ **INTERACTIVE SCENARIO MAPPING**
- ☐ **ONLINE FORUMS**

- ☐ **LARGE MIXED GROUP FACILITATION**
- ☐ **NEIGHBORHOOD OPEN HOUSE**
- ☐ **COMMUNITY CELEBRATION**
- ☐ **IMPLEMENTATION SUMMIT**
- ☐ **APPROVAL PROCESS**

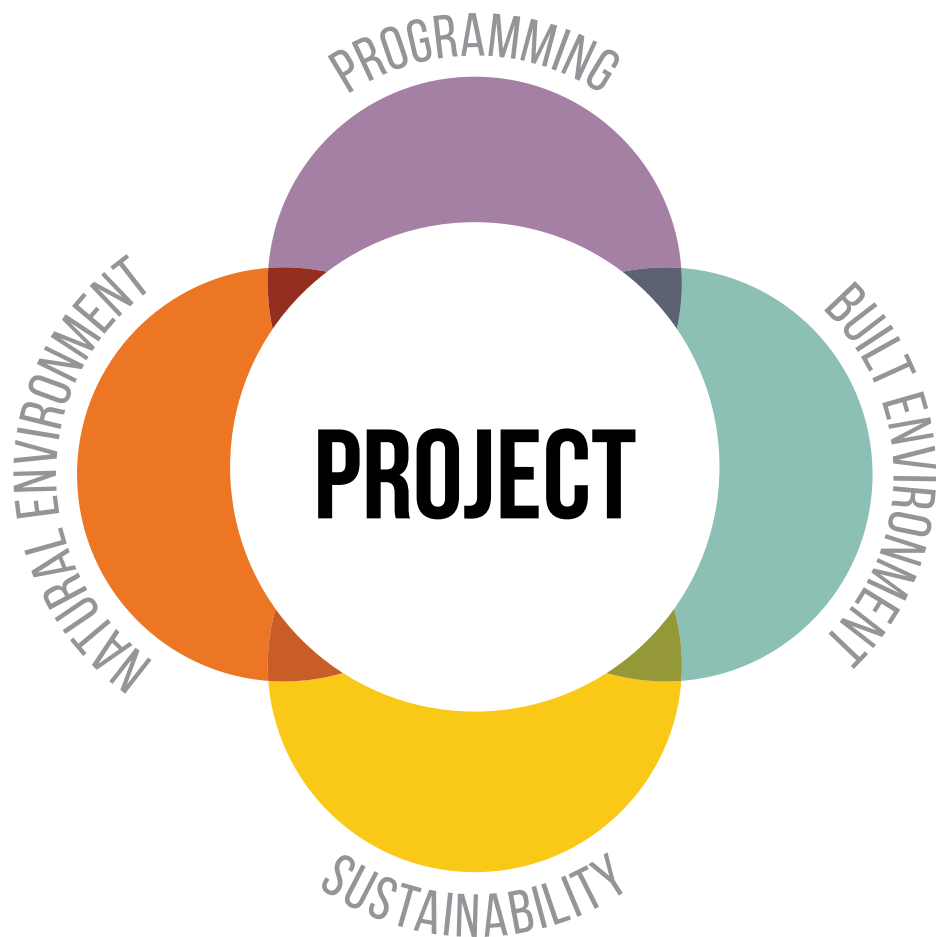


# MASTER PLANNING

## BEGINNING THE PROCESS

### PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

*Programming, Environments & Sustainability*



### PRE-PLANNING: DEVELOPING A PARK BRIEF AND A PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS OUTLINE

A critical time for any project is the initial stages. Developing clear objectives, lines of communication and a realistic schedule and budget are all critical to the success of a planning and design project. The recommended adjacent documents will be helpful in communicating project intent to City staff, community leaders and stakeholders. This plan recommends that a park brief and a planning and design outline be established at the beginning of every project.

# PARK BRIEF



# PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS OUTLINE



## PARK BRIEF

A document that provides an outline of the project intent/description (scope), project team (in-house or consultant), public engagement strategies, city context, neighborhood context, park context, schedule, project budget, project, goals, the Big Idea, and defining success.

## PLANNING AND DESIGN PROCESS OUTLINE

This is a supporting document that provides greater detail for the project.







# ASHBY PARK: MASTER PLAN

## A TEMPLATE FOR PLANNING



### PARK CONTEXT

Park Location: 3200 38th Street

Park Size: 11.6 Acres

Acquired in 1925

Park Classification: Neighborhood Park

### PROJECT PURPOSE

Develop a master plan for Ashby Park that accommodates a donation by a community member for the purpose of a woodland restoration project and nature trail development.

- **Existing Condition**  
The current forested condition of Ashby Park has exacerbated erosion issues while also holding back the native community that the site's soil condition desires.
- **Proposed Managed Condition**  
Oak/Hickory Woodland Managed Climax Community
- **Proposed Nature Trail**
  - 2/3 Mile Trail System
  - 3 Overlook Locations
  - 2 Stream Crossings and Signage

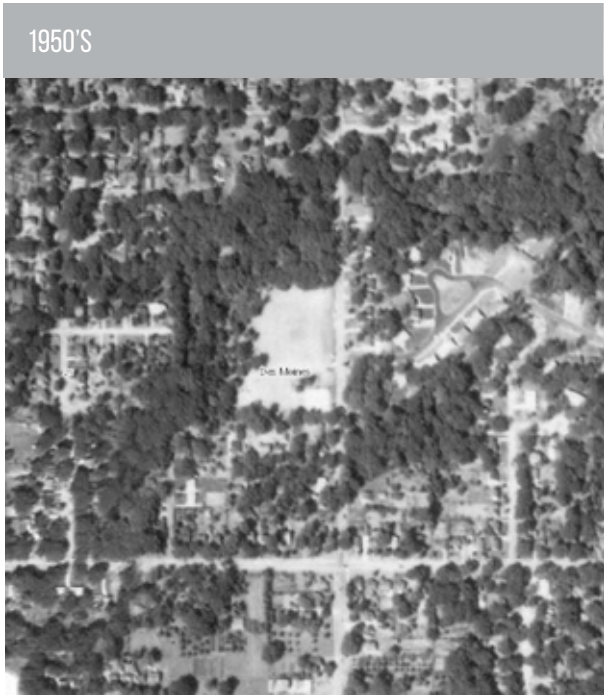
# ASHBY PARK: MASTER PLAN

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

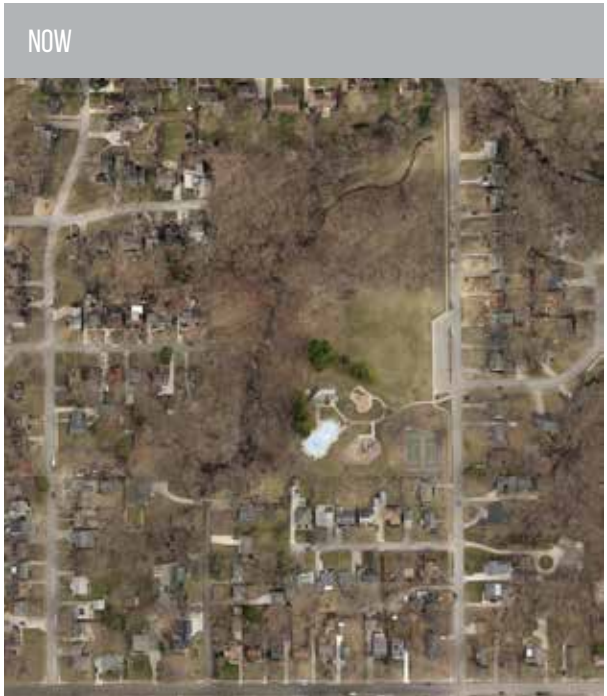


### DISCOVERY: INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF PARK FACILITIES

The process of planning will start with the inventory of park facilities in the designated park, using GIS as a tool to collect and analyze park infrastructure. This plan calls for an update to this system of inventory by assessing all park assets (see chart XXX on page XXX). This information will be valuable in evaluating the needs of the individual park. It will also be valuable for assessing facilities



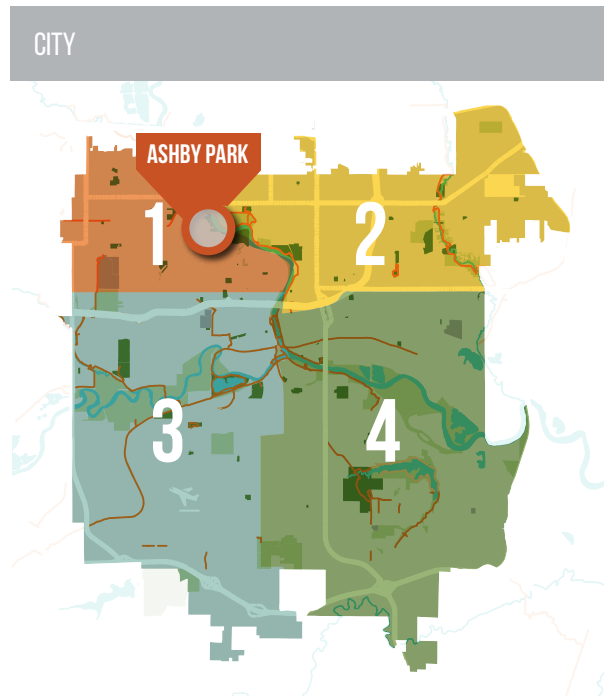
in the neighborhood and across the City. This will provide a systemwide approach to understanding the current condition of assets, the probable year to replace them and the probable cost. Once an understanding of comprehensive asset condition, value and replacement schedule is assessed, a systemwide and neighborhood-wide approach to planning can provide a more strategic and meaningful process of developing new facilities and maintaining existing ones.



### Historic Aerial Context

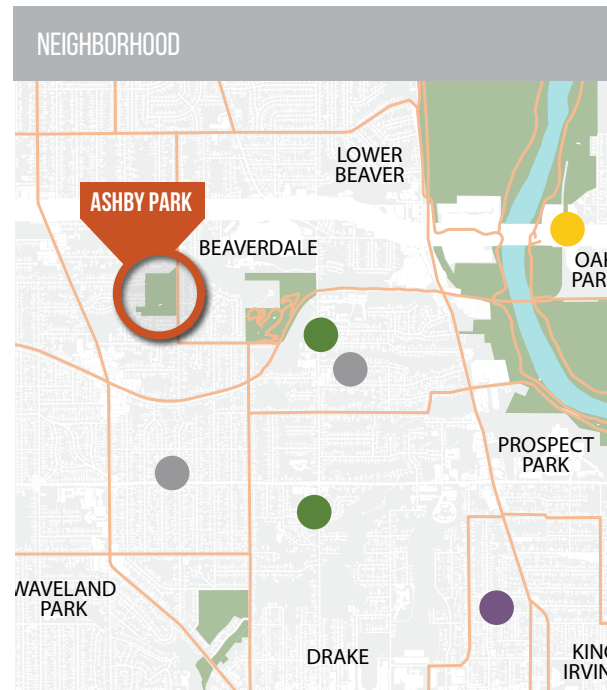
These can be used to assess the change in the surrounding built and natural environment. The aerials reveal significant changes in vegetative cover and surrounding development over time.

## DOCUMENT REGIONAL CONTEXT



### City Context

The City diagram illustrates the park location, the ward it is in and any other City-wide considerations.



### Neighborhood Context

The neighborhood diagram illustrates the cultural and environmental considerations that may relate or influence any analysis or recommended planning options.



PARKS



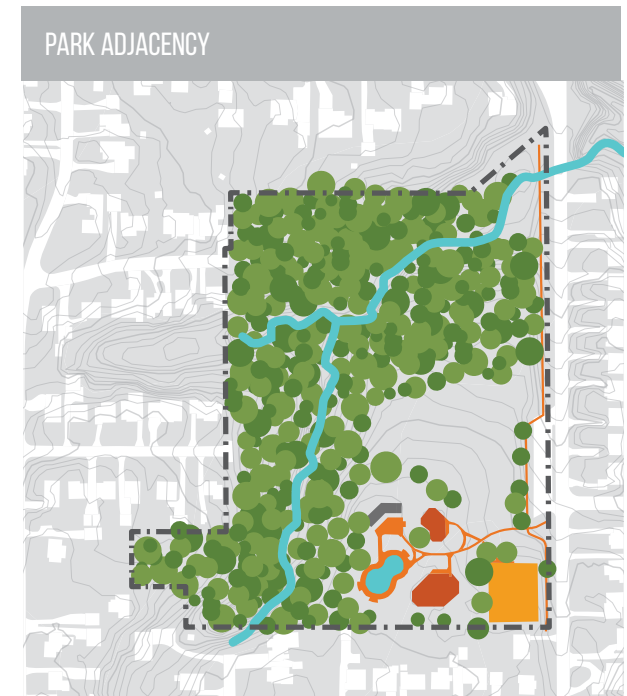
CEMETERIES



OPEN SPACES



GOLF COURSES



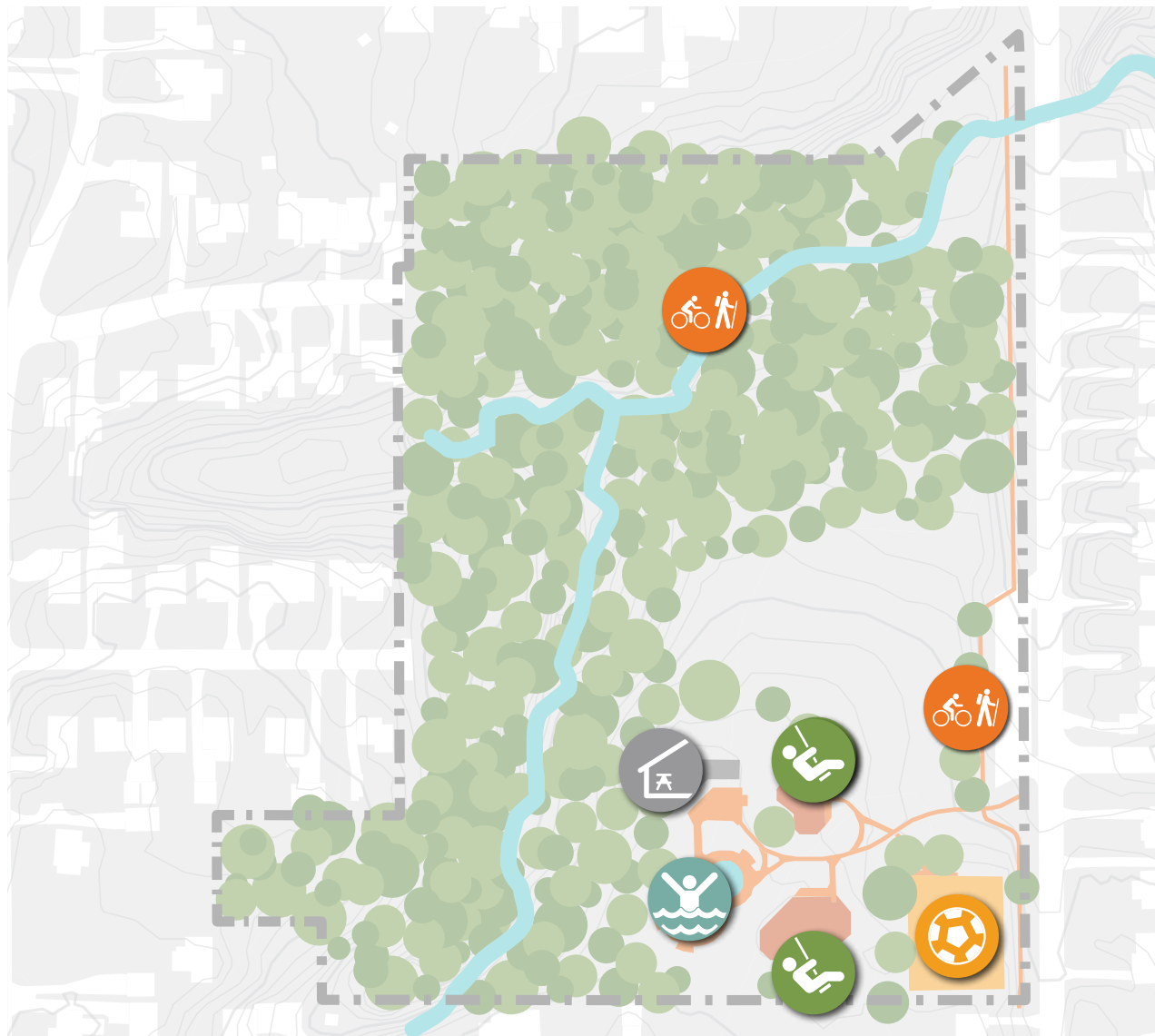
### Park Adjacency Context

This diagram identifies the issues directly adjacent to the park in relation to the built and natural environment. These items include circulation systems, land use, adjacent property considerations (including proximity and view sheds), vegetative systems, drainage



# BUILT ENVIRONMENT

## DOCUMENT THE CONTEXT



### ASSET INVENTORY SYSTEM

With an understanding of the location of the park (as it pertains to the City, the surrounding neighborhood and land directly adjacent), it is time to inventory the park itself starting with the built environment. Utilizing the GIS technology, the inventory of assets within the park will be comprehensive. The symbols below will be link through GIS providing a comprehensive approach to asset management.



ATHLETICS



WATER PLAY



GROUND PLAY



STRUCTURES



AMENITIES



TRAILS

The chart to the left illustrates a comprehensive inventory of park facilities in the designated park, using GIS to create an asset inventory system. This tool illustrates a comprehensive park inventory and assessment while also providing comparative analysis against all other parks within the Des Moines Park System.

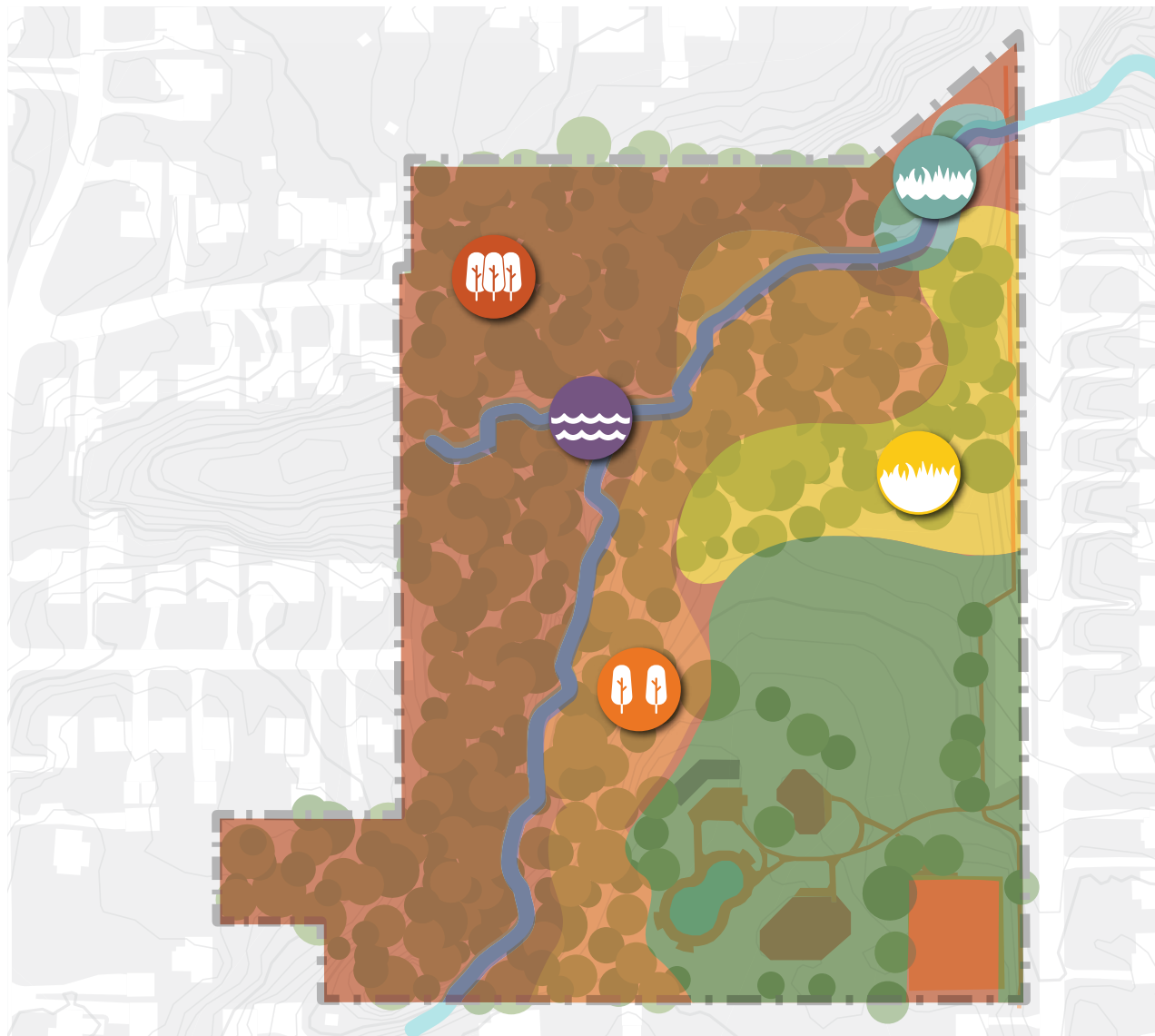
Included in this inventory are the following:

- Park name
- Object number
- Asset category
- Asset type
- Park category
- Asset name
- Maintenance description
- Condition physical
- Condition visual
- Condition accessible
- Asset cost (current)
- Asset replacement year
- Asset replacement cost

INVENTORY				
Item	Asset Type	Visual Condition	Year Built	ADA Facility
Playground Equip.	Recreation	Good	2000s	NC
Wading Pool/Splash Pad	Destination	Good	2004	YES
Tennis Courts	Sports Facility	Fair	1970s	YES
Open Shelter	Structure	Good	1930s	YES
Off-Street Parking	Infrastructure	Fair	1970s	YES
Bridge	Structure	Fair/Poor	1950s	NO
Sidewalks	Infrastructure	Fair		YES
West Sidewalks/Stairs	Infrastructure	Poor		YES
Benches	Infrastructure	Good	Varies	YES
Grills		Good	2014	
Signage	Wayfinding	Fair	2008	YES

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

## DOCUMENT THE CONTEXT



### ASSET INVENTORY SYSTEM

This inventory identifies the land cover types that currently exist in this park. These include oak savanna, woodland, grassland, prairie, wetland and running water. A full inventory will also illustrate the quantity and location of these land cover types. Using GIS technology, the inventory of land cover types within the park will be comprehensive. The symbols below will be interactively linked to GIS data, providing a comprehensive approach as a land cover management tool.



OAK SAVANNAH



WOODLAND



GRASSLAND



TURF



WATER



WETLAND





# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

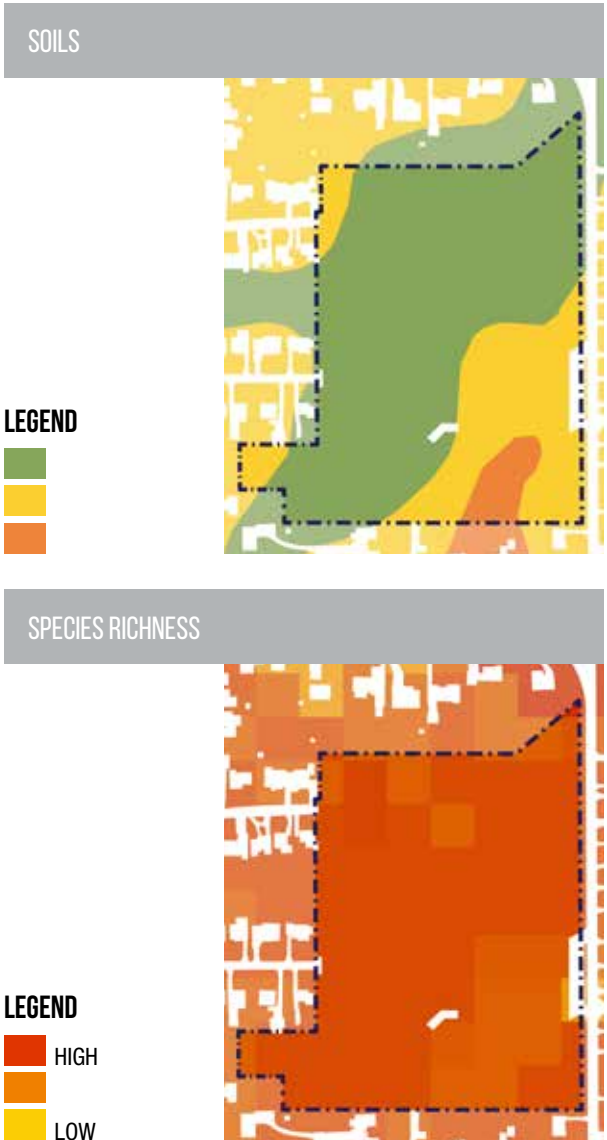
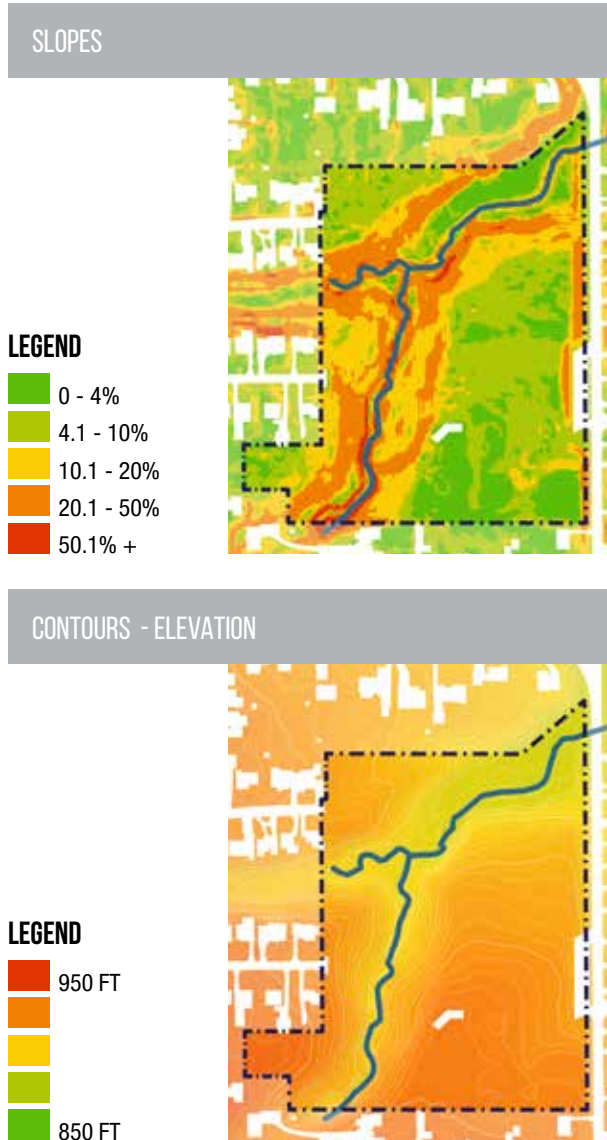
## DOCUMENT THE CONTEXT

### LANDSCAPE INVENTORY SYSTEM

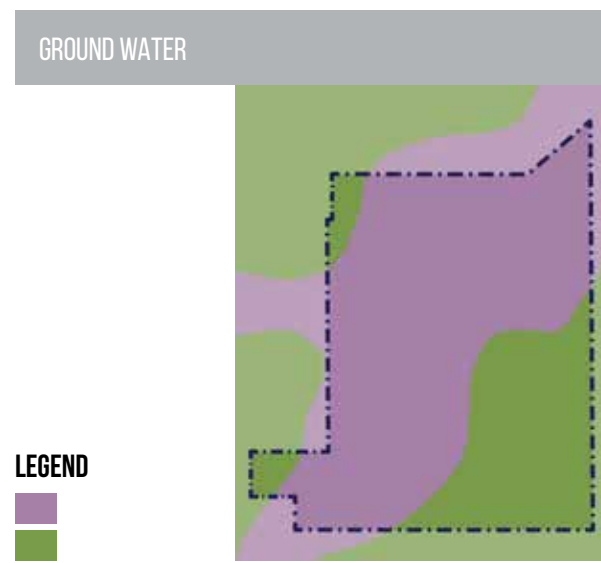
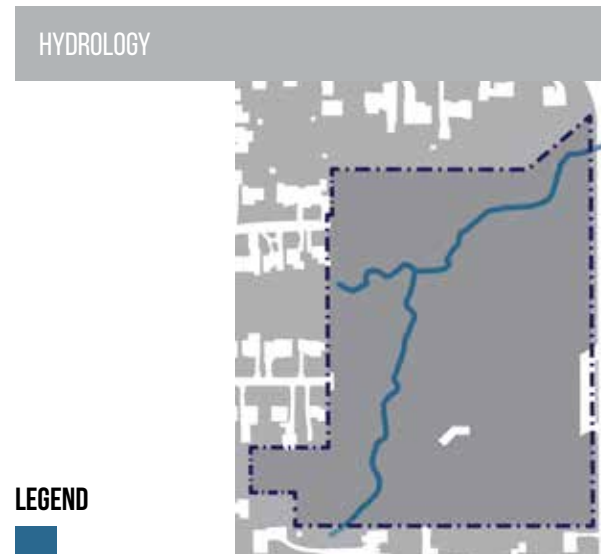
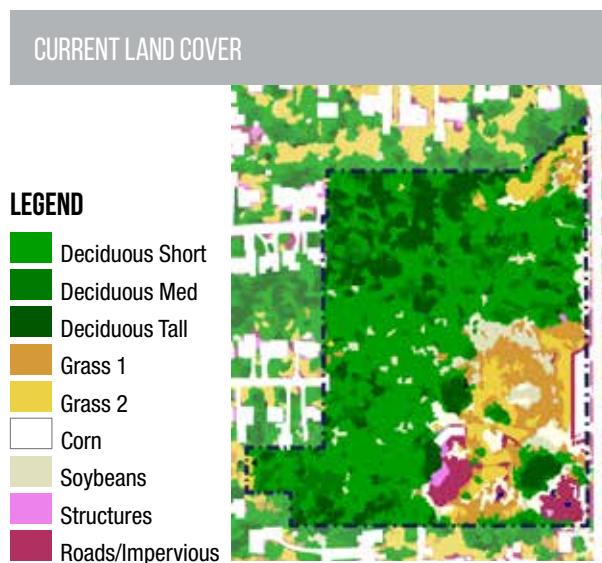
Part of the master planning process will be the analysis of environmental systems. Included in this landscape analysis are the following:

- Slopes
- Soils
- Contours
- Species richness
- Current land cover
- Historical land cover (vegetation)
- Hydrology
- Ground water

The analysis diagrams are illustrated on the following page. This analysis will inform the location of trails, facilities and restoration of natural systems.



“

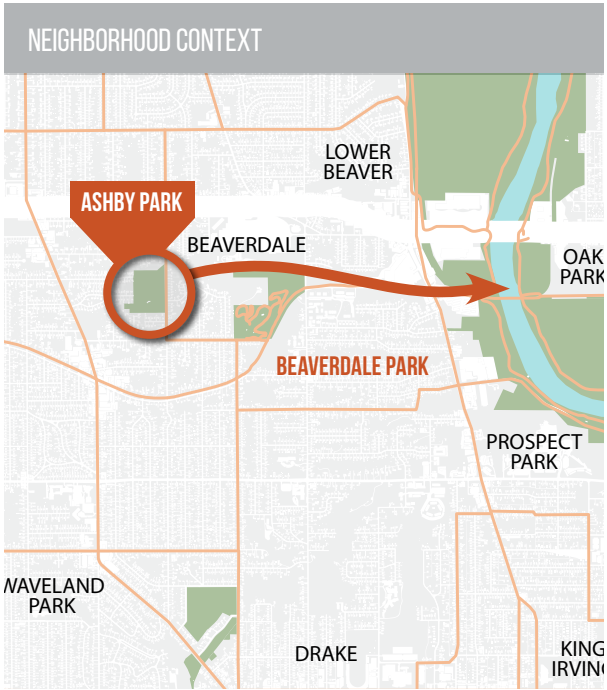
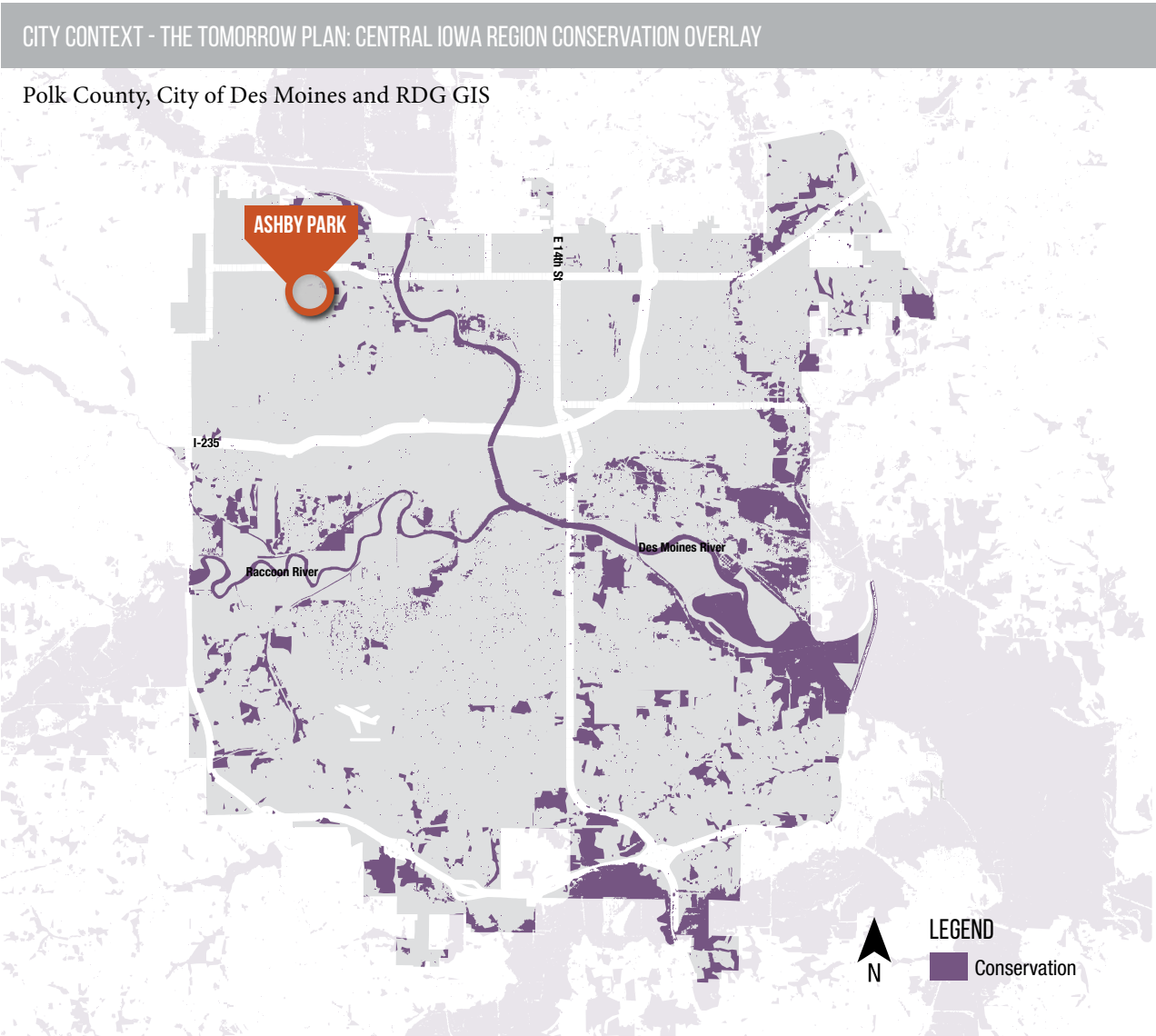


*In merging nature and culture the most successful cities combine such universal needs as maintaining or restoring contact with the cycles of nature, with specific, local characteristics.*

—Sally A. Kitt Chappell

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

## DOCUMENT THE CONTEXT



### NEIGHBORHOOD—HABITAT CONNECTIVITY

Ashby Park is at the headwaters of Ashby Creek. Beaverdale Park is 0.25 miles directly east and the Des Moines River is 1.16 miles directly east.



## ECOLOGICAL LAND COVER

Showing existing habitats and plant species, with wildlife implications; it is the foundation for future ecological restoration and management.

## NATURAL LAND COVER

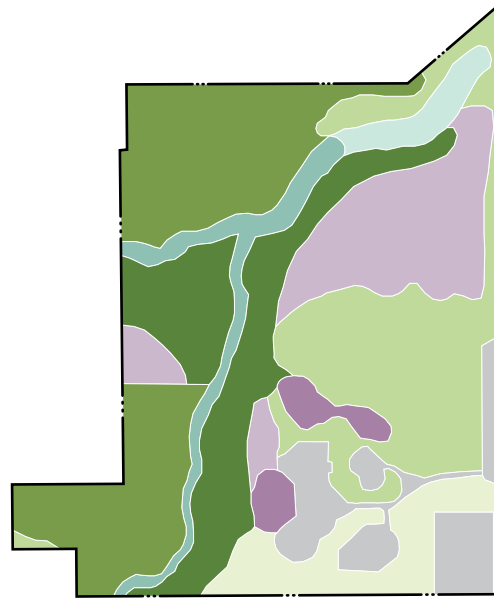
A natural resource management plan describes the vision and the tasks to improve ecological resilience of natural lands and waters in a park.

Natural features and processes dominate in the Core Habitat. People are visitors, treading lightly and temporarily. Built infrastructure is rare and hardly noticed. Wild exploration and serenity are possible.

Natural features and processes dominate in Transition/Low Use. People come and go frequently. Built infrastructure is noticeable for low levels of use. Being in nature, learning through recreation, and socializing are possible.

Cultural features and processes dominate in High Use areas. Built infrastructure is obvious and necessary. Natural features and processes make the space more liveable and meet the high standards of environmental stewardship, such as ecological stormwater management. All imaginable park and recreation activities are possible.

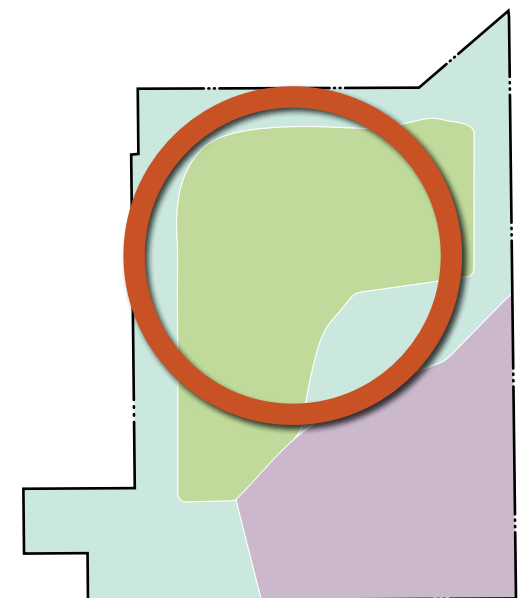
### ECOLOGICAL LAND COVER



#### LEGEND

- Natural Wetland Forest
- Cultural Restoration Potential Woodland Conifers
- Cultural Restoration Potential Woodland
- Semi-Natural Wetlands Herbaceous
- Cultural Restoration Potential Parkland
- Natural Woodlands Established
- Natural Woodland Early
- Cultural Impervious Surface
- Cultural Herbaceous

### NATURAL LAND COVER



#### LEGEND

- Core Habitat Zone
- Core Habitat
- Transition / Low Use
- High Use

# NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

## DOCUMENT THE CONTEXT

EXAMPLE OF CORE HABITAT ZONE



This ideal park embraces the park's existing ecology—to leverage experiences for park users and improve habitat, water quality and overall ecosystem health. At the same time, the built environment responds to recreational/program needs, the neighborhood context and respect for nature.

### NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN/BRIEF AND NATURAL AREA

This is explained in detail in the Nature Section and its Appendix. A shorthand way of thinking about this is that we apply these ecological ideas to parks. They are easier to apply at parks larger than 10 acres, but even small neighborhood parks can benefit from this thinking. The Active Area should be molded to accommodate the Natural Area, since natural lands are a rare, irreplaceable commodity in Des Moines parks.

#### *Reserve Circular Natural Areas*

The bigger and rounder a natural area, the less the damaging effects of surrounding land use and activity. Bigger, rounder areas support larger wildlife populations. Infrastructure and intense activity are not suitable inside natural areas.

#### *Connect Natural Areas*

The more connected a natural area is to other natural areas—over land or by water—

the healthier the wildlife populations using them will be. This is especially true for organisms that can't fly or swim. Less inbreeding and fewer local extinctions happen in well-connected natural area networks.

### Minimize Edge Effect

A constant rain of invasive plants, incursions by hunting house pets, hotter and drier air, noise and visual disturbance all enter natural areas from the edges. Planting native species to create buffers, working with topography, minimizing trails and infrastructure, making natural areas rounder—all help reduce edge effects and protect the native plants and animals living there.

### Create High Quality

Ecosystems need lots of plants and animals to withstand the buffets of time. If one species struggles to cope with hotter summers and warmer winters, another species in the mix can step in to replace it. This makes natural areas that have a variety of native plants more resilient in the long run, changing as conditions change without major disruptions. Wildlife responds to that, becoming more diverse in the process. This is quality habitat.

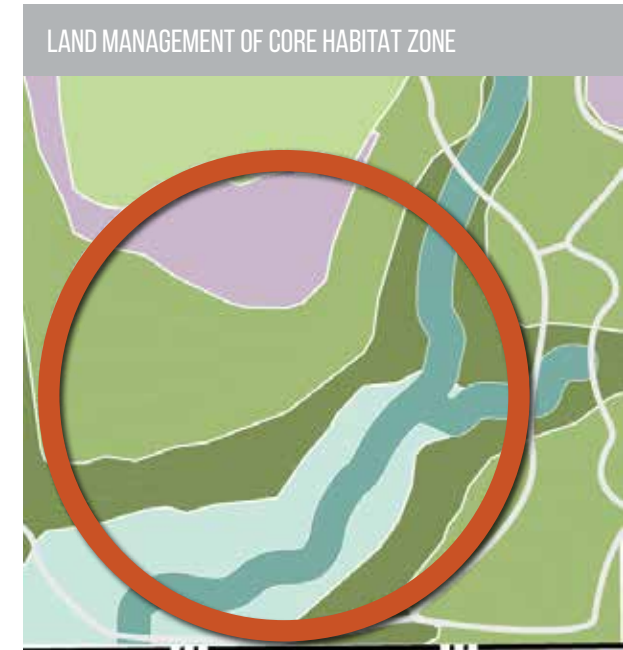
## MOVEMENT SCHEME

The plan creates a pedestrian campus, avoiding conflicts with traffic, working to create a park interior that seamlessly and safely connects

with the surrounding neighborhood circulation system. Within each one of these parks, an internal park hub should welcome visitors with a kiosk for information, interpretation, what programs are happening and how the built and natural environments interact.

## PARK MASTER PLAN AND ACTIVE AREA

A park master plan works toward visual appeal and leveraging natural assets. It essentially finds the engaging balance between the built and natural environments and their surrounding neighborhoods and districts. Public involvement is always an essential element of park planning. The example of Ashby Park demonstrates how to think about neighborhood park planning and balance the outcomes a good park master plan strives for: nature stewardship, education, recreation, a place for the community to go and activities that connect neighbors to each other where they live.



### LEGEND

- Natural Wetland Forest
- Cultural Restoration Potential Woodland Conifers
- Cultural Restoration Potential Woodland
- Semi-Natural Wetlands Herbacious
- Cultural Restoration Potential Parkland
- Natural Woodlands Established
- Natural Woodland Early
- Cultural Impervious Surface
- Cultural Herbacious

# ASHBY PARK: MASTER PLAN

## BUILT AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT



### BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Ashby Park has benefited from continued investment in both recreational amenities and the historic shelter. The addition of the splash pad in 2004 and the restoration of the shelter and restrooms in 2009 are significant neighborhood attractions. The playground and open lawn also attract neighborhood youth.

### NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Ashby Park is currently undergoing a stream restoration, woodland clearing and removal of invasive species.

In recent public meetings, several residents identified both nature access and natural play as a recreational opportunity that could benefit the park and its users.



## NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION OPTION



## NATURAL RESOURCE CORE HABITAT OPTION



## NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION

The Natural Resource Restoration Option, shown to the far left, illustrates the development of trails throughout the more natural areas creating the opportunity to explore nature in a more managed way. The illustration depicts the type of trails that could be developed in this type of restoration plan.

## NATURAL RESOURCE CORE HABITAT

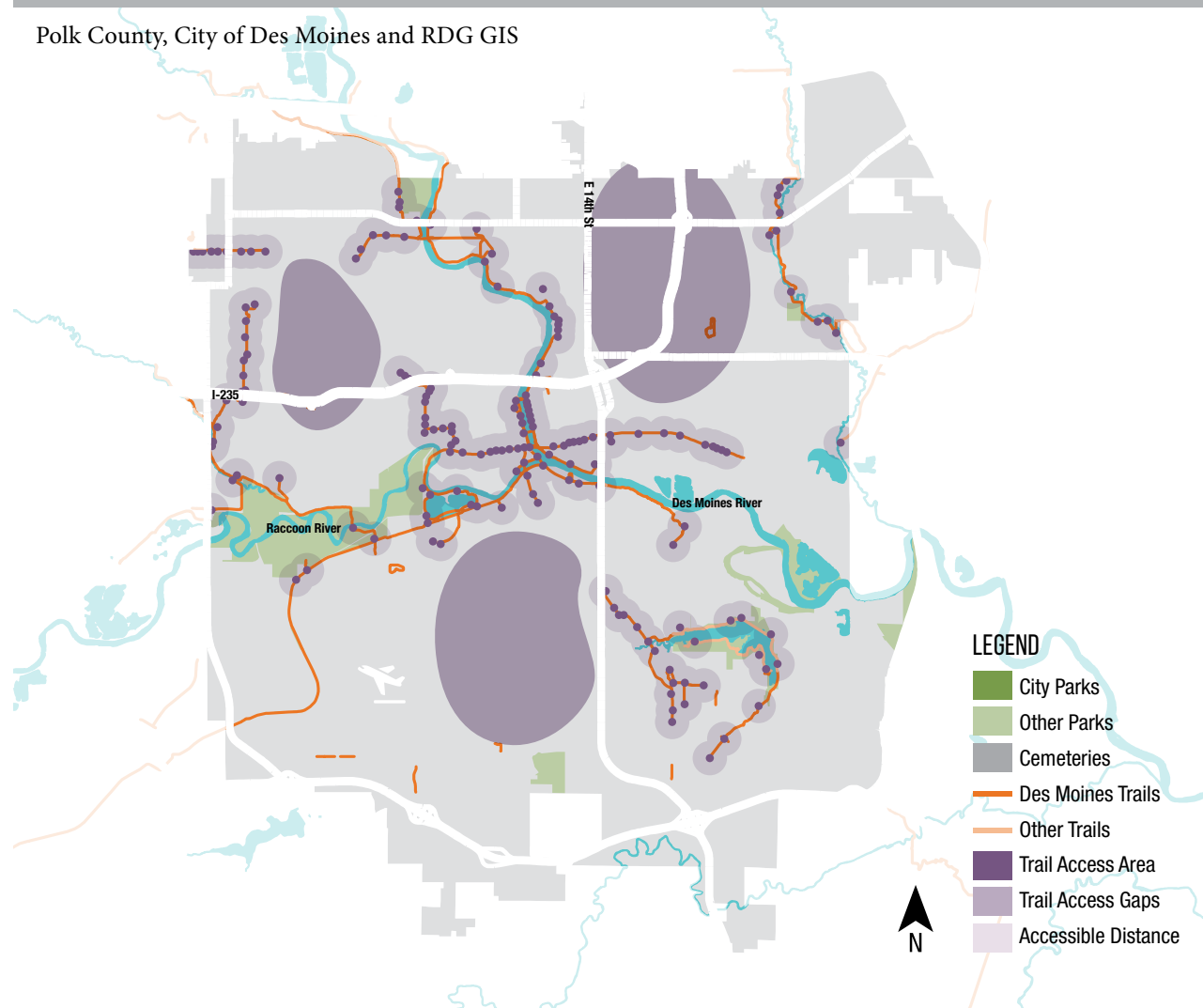
The Natural Resource Core Habitat Option, shown to the left, provides for a landcover restoration area. This area would have very limited development and is earmarked for habitat restoration. Park users can still explore these areas but without the development of trails. More of a “choose your own adventure” form of exploration. The illustration depicts the type of opportunities that could exist in a more aggressive habitat restoration area.

# ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

## SETTING PRIORITIES, SERVING THE NEED

### TRAIL ACCESS

Polk County, City of Des Moines and RDG GIS



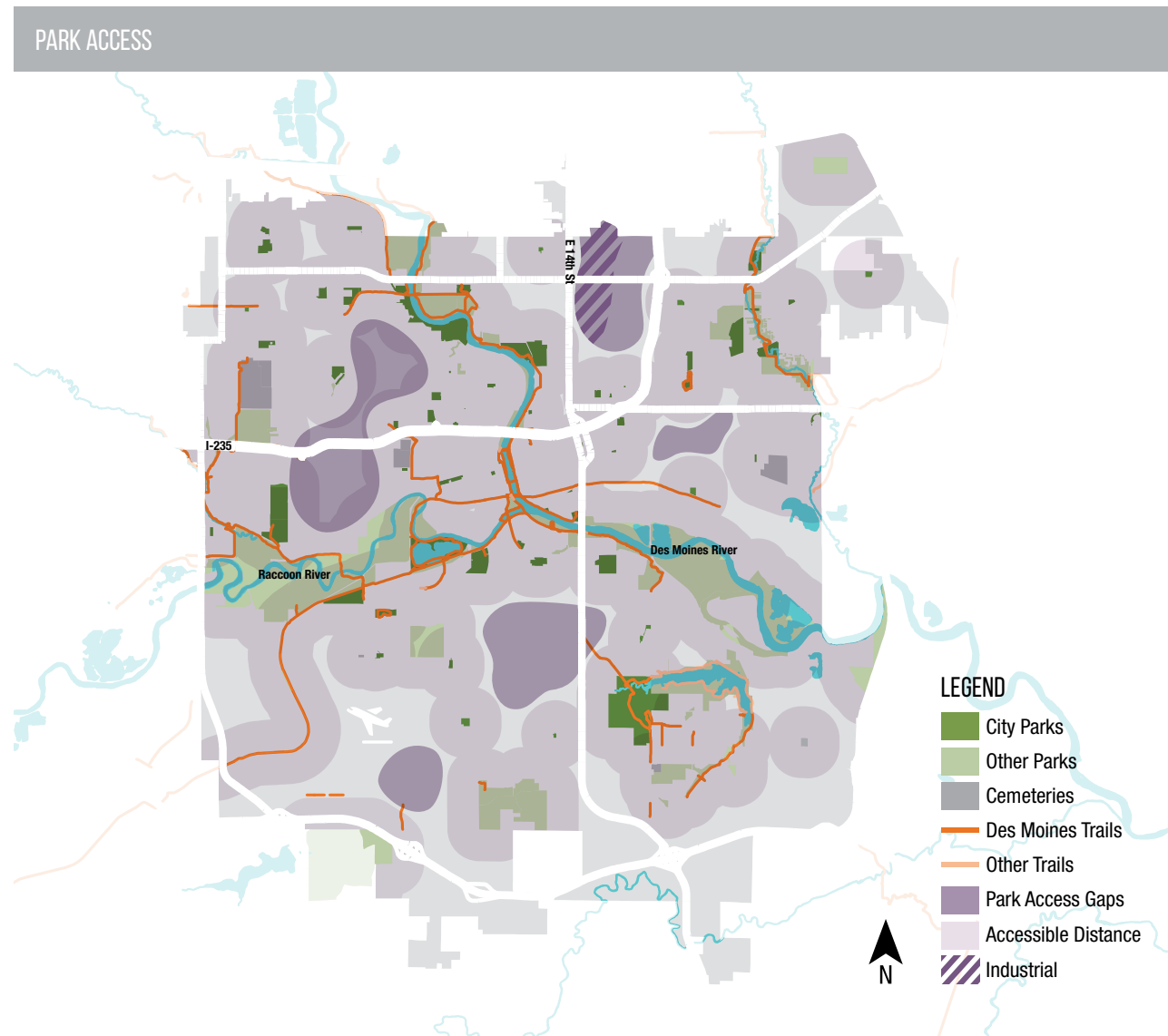
This section of the report addresses the big-picture needs of trail connectivity and system parkland gaps while including a Land Acquisition Policy Guide to further help address present and future parkland needs.

### TRAIL EXPANSION AND CONNECTIONS

The trail needs map demonstrates where trails expansion would be of value and also highlights current connection points. Gaps in the system are highlighted. Where these gaps overlap with higher equity and/or health needs provides a priority consideration for improved connectivity. This plan recommends an updated trail and complete streets study for the City with a particular focus on park-to-park, park-to-trail and park-to-neighborhood connections.

## PARKLAND

Similar to trail needs, the map below highlights potential land acquisition locations, if such resources become available. As with trail connectivity, overlaying barriers to equity and/or health lens map helps identify priority locations for consideration.



# POP-UP PARK TO LAND ACQUISITION

## MAKING A PARK WHERE THERE IS NONE

When parks are not available to deliver the day-to-day results of active living, social gathering and reflection this plan endorses, what's the solution to deliver those meaningful experiences to the resident's front door? How does the City activate neighborhoods when a permanent location for public art, special events, playgrounds, sports and gathering spaces might not be available? (See Chapter IV's discussion on pop-up park programming.)

Neighborhood parks could secure notable social gatherings—through pop-up facilities, events planning and execution. New partnerships and access to associated new facilities are also part of the story. These images tell the story of the fun, diverse activities taking place that may be temporary in nature. Through new approaches and partnerships, spaces can be activated that are not necessarily publicly owned. Facilities and programs could also be provided within smaller footprints than might typically be considered ideal. While initially “pop-up” or temporary facilities, they can also lead/connect residents to more permanent facilities or serve as the vision for a future permanent park, trail, greenway or other facility.

At the larger scale, this plan in the Existing Conditions section and the next section (Access and Connectivity) reviews opportunities for expanded trail access points and land acquisition. Still this plan suggests that, even more relevant here, is looking at each park and its surrounding neighborhood and district as a microcosm – and planning should also occur at that scale.

In some cases, pop-up parks will have limited development other than open space and signage. In other cases, the park will have a number of temporary facilities located within the space. The red arrow to the right depicts this range of offerings from flexible open space to festival facilities.







## *Example Opportunity: Edmunds Elementary*

A quick assessment shows Edmunds Elementary generally provides all elements of a standard program without the playground—which is across the street at the Oakridge Neighborhood, making it a particularly good candidate for pop-up/temporary experiences—that could evolve into a more permanent park facility down the line. Also, it can accommodate various scales of activation—from a smaller, more intimate pop-ups to special events.

### **Standard Program:**

- 5 to 25 acres
- 2 acres of open space
- Playground
- Shelter
- Pathway (trail) access
- Frontage access (at least one side, preferably two sides)
- Accessibility
- Landscape
- Signage

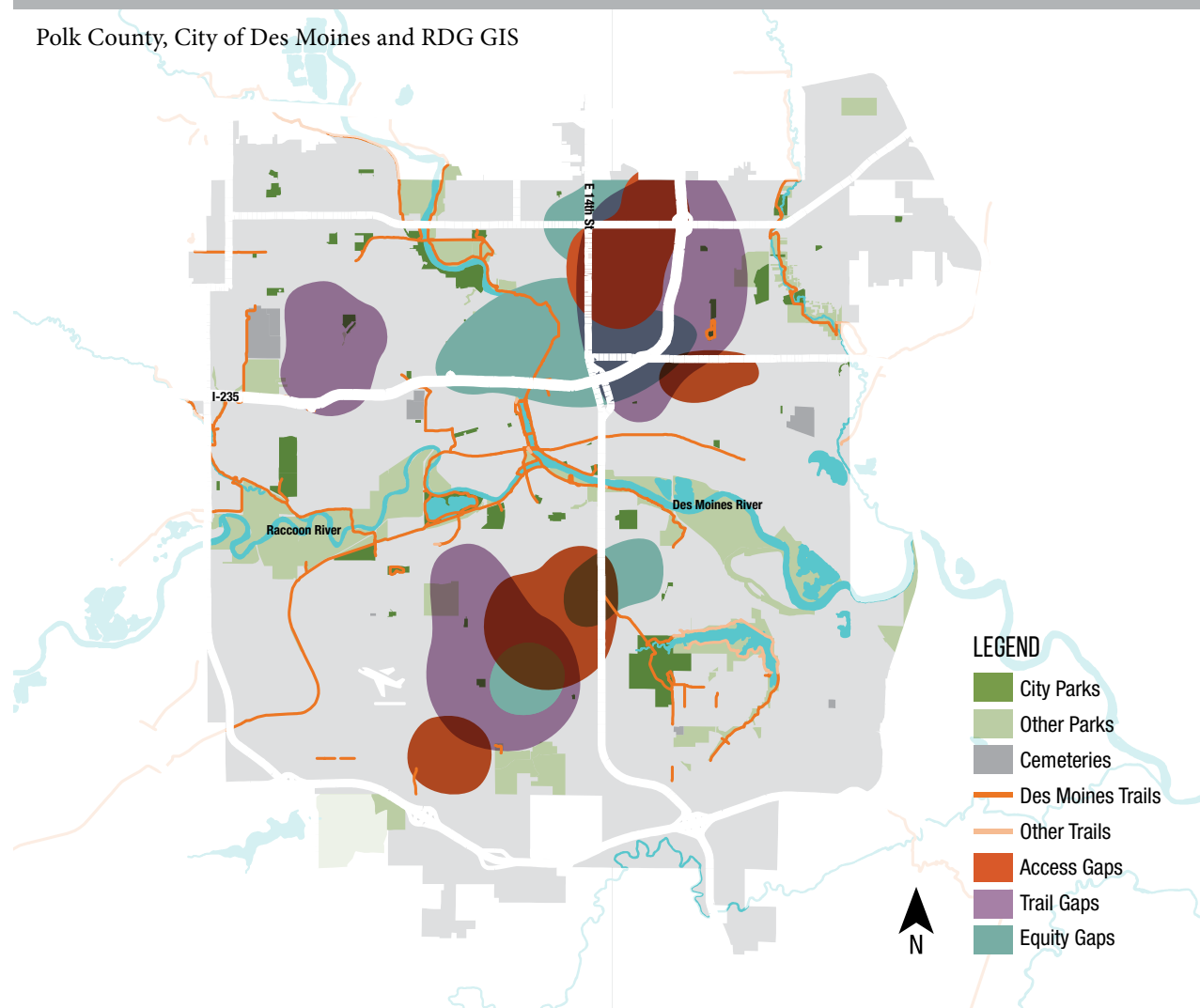
While Edmunds meets the basic standards, the beauty of the pop-up approach is its flexibility. When we can't meet those standards, pop-ups allow for parking lots, corporate courtyards, or perhaps a rooftop to serve as a temporary, exciting opportunity for the community to gather and connect.

# POP-UP PARK TO LAND ACQUISITION

## MAKING A PARK WHERE THERE IS NONE

HIGH PRIORITY GAPS ADDRESS WHERE SYSTEM DEFICIENCIES OCCUR

Polk County, City of Des Moines and RDG GIS



### LAND ACQUISITION POLICY GUIDE

As the population of Des Moines continues to grow at an annual rate of 2%, Des Moines Parks and Recreation needs to consider how it will continue to meet adopted LOS standards. One way is to acquire property for park and open space development and preservation of natural areas. Maintaining a sufficient amount of greenspace is vital to the health of a community. Economically speaking, studies continue to show that parks increase property values—a testament to the value residents place on parks. Parks also serve an important role in preservation—protecting natural habitats, streams, woodlands and trees for ecological functions as well as for the enjoyment of residents. Access to greenspace has many physical and mental health benefits and contributes to the high quality of life in Des Moines.

As part of this plan, Des Moines Parks and Recreation is committed to developing comprehensive policies that align the needs of the City with the development of new parkland. Policies developed need to address high-needs areas, funding sources, promotion of inter-jurisdictional cooperation and community support.

### Existing Conditions

Des Moines currently has 75.6 acres of undeveloped parkland. In order to meet LOS standards for the growing population, approximately 2,301 acres of parkland (regional, community, neighborhood and mini parks) will need to be acquired by 2030 to meet current NRPA LOS standards.

In order to meet this goal, it is recommended that the City begin to identify parkland for acquisition based on community needs identified in the master plan. Priorities for land acquisition in Des Moines include proximity to the trail system; neighborhoods identified as high-needs areas with few to no parks; and areas that protect important natural resources, special features and/or cultural and historical heritage. Additionally, this report encourages consideration of the areas with potentially greater needs to achieve an equitable system.

The community engagement process identified a need or desire to acquire land for the following developments:

- Downtown Playground
- Natural Areas (e.g., Gray's Lake)
- Trail Connectivity
- Aquatics Facility
- Dog Parks
- ATV park

- Camping
- Open-Space Areas for Recreation Activities (e.g., disc golf)
- Areas for Winter Recreation (e.g., sledding hills, cross-country skiing, snowshoe courses, and ice fishing)

### Recommended Policy Guide for Land Acquisition

The following policy recommendations were adapted from the San Francisco Park and Recreation Department 2011 Acquisition Policy report.

[http://sfrecpark.org/wp-content/uploads/Acquisition\\_Policy\\_2011.pdf](http://sfrecpark.org/wp-content/uploads/Acquisition_Policy_2011.pdf)

- Acquire public land in high-needs areas and locations in need of increased access to the park and recreation system
- Places of high population density
- Places with a high percentage of children and/or seniors
- Areas categorized as low-income
- Areas identified as having a low public health score
- Areas identified as having limited access to greenspace (not within a ten-minute walk to a park, trail or recreation facility)



# POP-UP PARK TO LAND ACQUISITION

## MAKING A PARK WHERE THERE IS NONE

- Acquire properties that have identified funding for their purchase, development and maintenance
- Acquire properties in areas that are experiencing a significant increase in population
- Acquire properties identified as having great potential for recreational use. Consider the following categories for recreational use:
  - Active recreation
  - Passive recreation
  - Natural resource protection
  - Special features (e.g., water features or views)
  - Acquire properties that have valuable attributes. Examples may include:
    - Community support
    - Identified partners
    - Presence of historic and cultural resources
    - Existing trees and vegetation
    - Site topography
    - Site accessibility

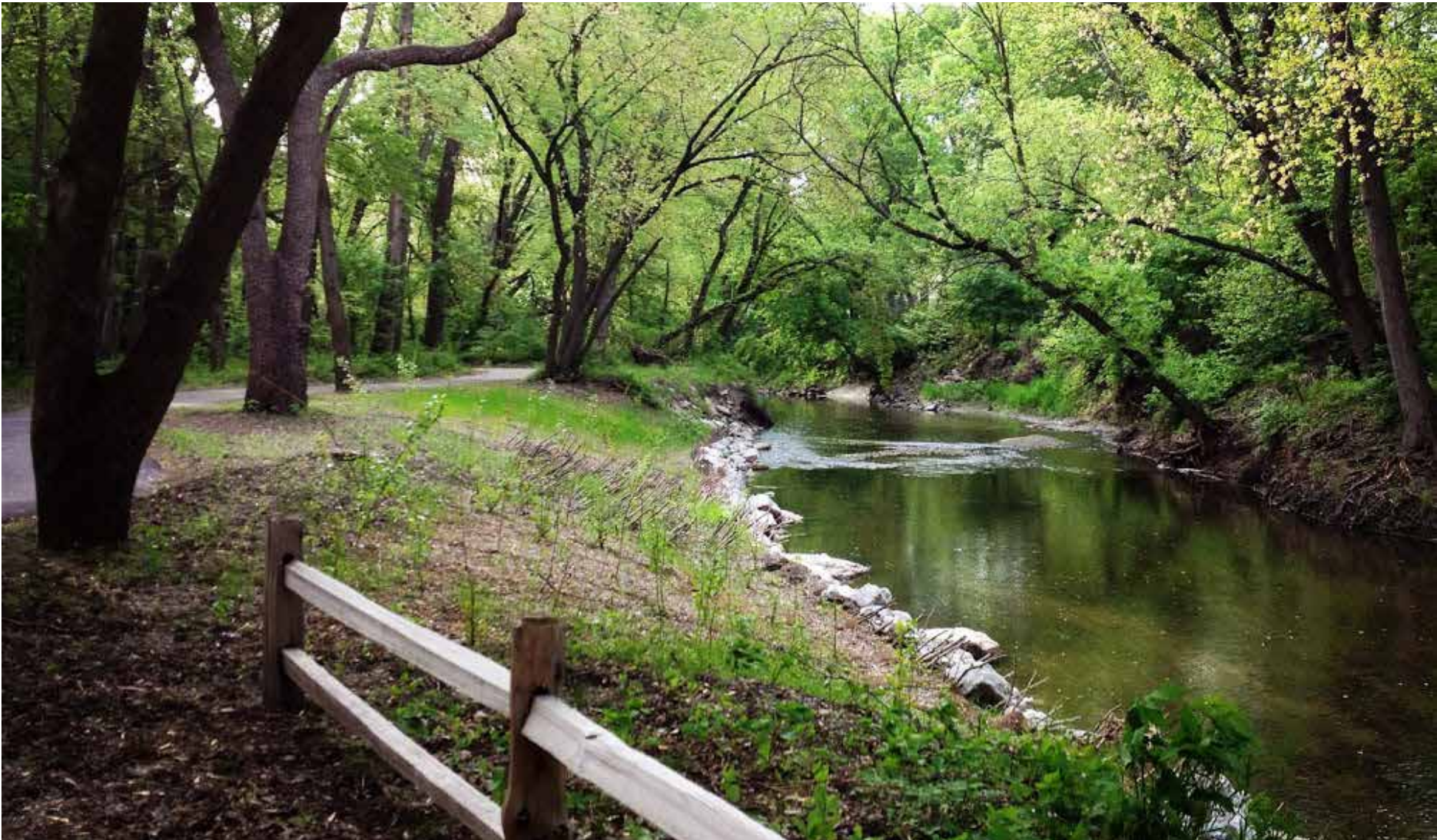
- Trails and connectivity
- Proximity to public transit
- Location adjacent to existing property
- Acquire property through donations for open space use and park development, where appropriate to city needs

Questions to answer when considering property for acquisition:

- Is this a high-needs area?
- Is this site deficient of parks, open space and nearby greenspace?
- Is the site located to adjacent Parks and Recreation Department property?
- What funding sources are available for acquisition, capital improvements and maintenance?
- Are there any opportunities for revenue generation at this site?
- Is the property suitable for passive and/or active recreation?
- Are there any significant natural resources that require protection on the property?
- Are there any special or unique features?

- What is existing social connectivity to this site (i.e., is it accessible from a public street or property, how far is it from the trails system)?
- What is existing ecological connectivity to this site (i.e., does it fit within the green space network)?
- Are there any historic or cultural resources located on property?
- Who are the potential community partners for this property?
- Is the property located near a notable and significant source of pollution?
- Are there any known hazards on and/or around the property?













NATURE



The dramatic changes in the Des Moines region over the last 150 years are least noticeable in the natural areas of Des Moines' parks. They stand as refuges for biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, able to withstand the buffets of change over time. Des Moines Parks and Recreation will build on this natural legacy through a vigorous program of restoration, management and monitoring of progress. The variety of plant and animal life, the beauty of the forests, wetlands and prairies and the sense of peace that visitors and neighbors feel in natural areas

will generate widespread support for strong budgets to manage the natural resources of the parks. The connection between land use and water quality will be made obvious through the example of well-managed parks and their contributing watersheds. Succinctly:

*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.*







# 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

## *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

# KEY PROJECTS AND IDEAS

The City of Des Moines made a wise investment in the City park-wide Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) project (Rosberg 2014). This project established a robust, systemwide and park-specific inventory and assessment of baseline conditions. In turn, this will help identify and prioritize the actions to advance the City's natural resources goals across its parklands. Key concepts and ideas to advance Des Moines' natural systems follow.

## BRING ECOLOGICAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE TO PARKLAND

The following ideas will advance conservation and sustainable management of natural areas in Des Moines parks. Rosberg (2014)

stated that restoration and management priorities should be based on:

- **Size of the Area**  
Bigger areas have greater resilience and smaller areas demand more attention.
- **Goals of Master Plans**  
Identification of natural areas should be embedded in master plans.
- **Availability of Areas and Timing of the Restoration Work**  
Start with available areas, but plan for future, harder-to-secure areas that improve the health and resilience of the ecosystems.

- **Potential for Success Based on Ecological Condition**  
Start with high-quality areas and quickly elevate ecological health and resilience.
- **Uniqueness or Rarity in the City or State**  
Ecosystems and species that are uncommon and likely to disappear without intervention should be addressed soon.
- **Visibility for Residents, Bicyclists, Pedestrians and Trail Users**  
people will notice improvements if they are visible.

As the City moves ahead with its work, systemwide prioritization should be completed to guide restoration and management activities.





## USE A SYSTEM-WIDE NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN

The 2014 NRI by Dr. Rosberg is a foundation for systemwide planning of natural areas in parkland. Three important recommendations to go beyond this inventory follow.

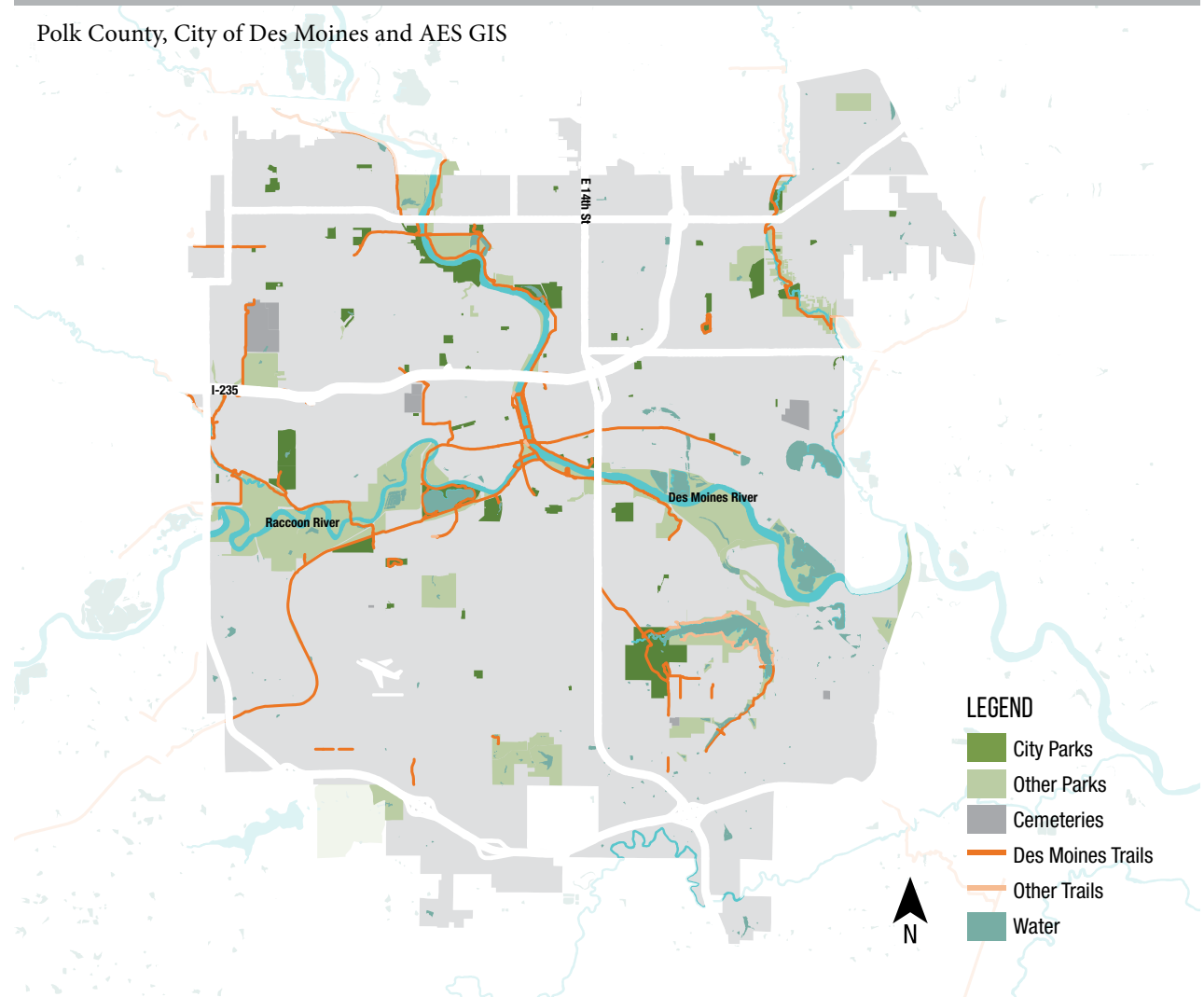
### Identify Natural Areas and Conservation Targets

Natural areas are any place in the park system where natural and naturalized conditions exist or are desired. Conservation targets are specific natural features existing in natural areas that are intended to be restored and managed.

A systemwide classification is needed to designate parks or portions of parks where the best use is to protect, restore and manage natural resources (“natural areas”). Places with high natural resource values and conservation needs are top candidates for such a designation. A label such as “preserve” or “reserve” would be applied to such areas where human activity and infrastructure would be minimal. Transitional areas, suited to more human activity and infrastructure, are placed around such areas to cushion them from high-activity areas and highly developed portions of parks. Transition areas shelter natural areas from “edge effects,” explained in Part 1 of this plan. Such a classification will guide the City’s planned best use of parkland before siting infrastructure and non-natural improvements.

### CENTRAL IOWA REGION CONSERVATION OVERLAY—ALL NATURAL AND PROTECTED LANDS

Polk County, City of Des Moines and AES GIS



## KEY PROJECTS AND IDEAS



It would also define the scope of natural area restoration and management systemwide.

Another important step is to decide on the conservation targets. Fine-tuning priorities for restoration and management (i.e., what should happen, where and in what order) depends on several factors, such as location, ecosystem type, rarity and threats. Ecosystems worthy of immediate attention in the park system are described here.

### **Oak Savanna and Woodland**

From the 2014 NRI: “The Des Moines Park system is in a unique and significant position in that it can make an important contribution to the restoration of oak savanna and oak woodland through renovation of these degraded remnants. Oak savanna and woodland restoration is possible in several parks, including Mac Rae, Pioneer, Prospect, Grandview, Ewing, Greenwood, Ashworth and Waveland Golf Course.” Protecting, restoring and maintaining remnant oak savannas and woodlands across the park system would create large, high-quality habitats rare in Iowa and important regionally for many Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

### **Prairie Restoration (or “Reconstruction”)**

Prior to European settlement, prairie occupied over one-third of the City’s park system; today, only 1.2% of parkland is prairie. The practice

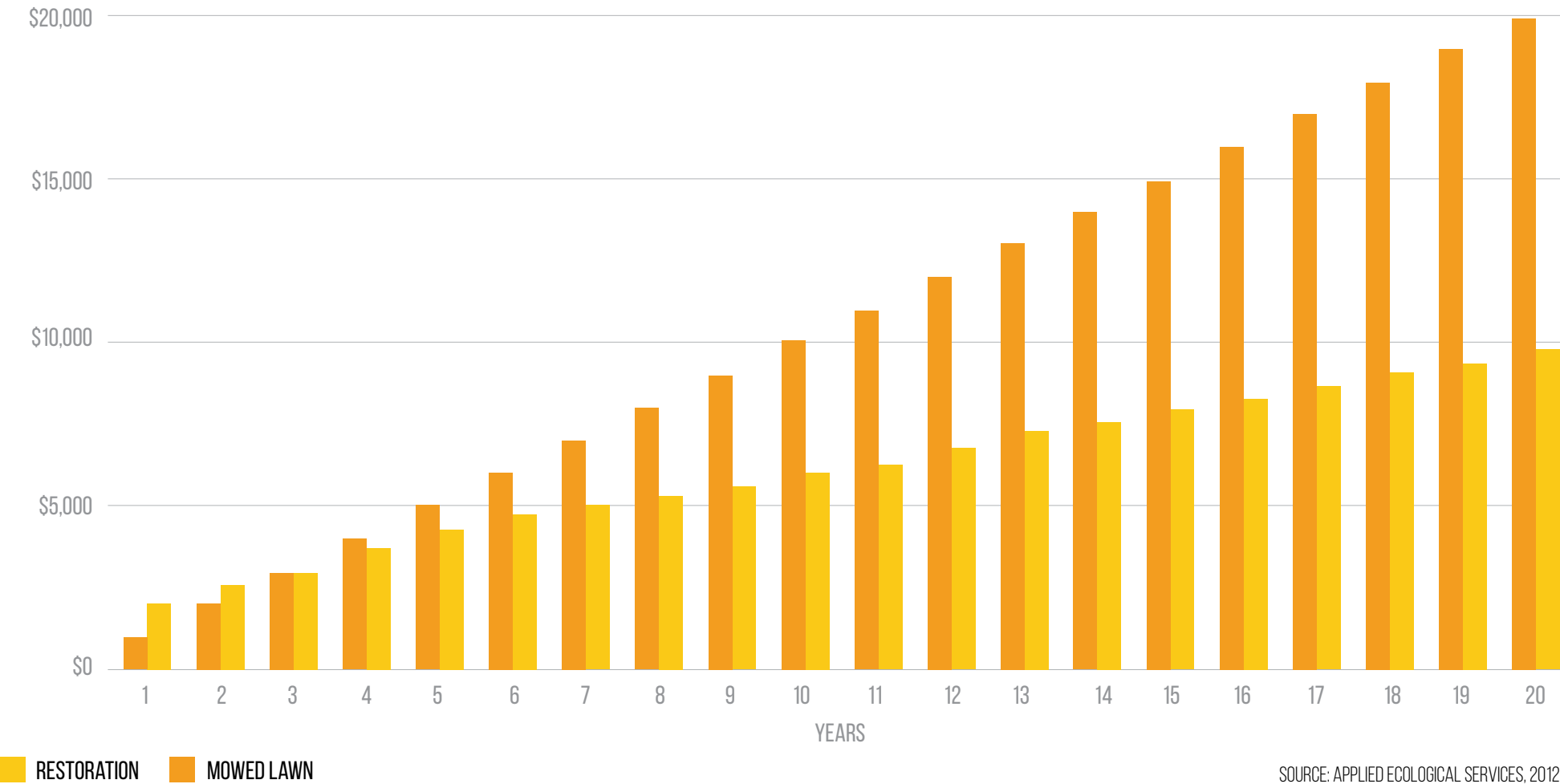
of restoring native prairie is well understood and relatively inexpensive compared with most other ecological restoration and management efforts. It is also cheaper to maintain than mowed turf, which requires frequent mowing, fertilization and weed control. (After only 2–5 years, depending on the cost of the initial prairie planting, the cumulative cost of prairie becomes less than the cumulative cost for maintaining turf.) The recently identified regional threat to pollinators can best be addressed by expanding, buffering and connecting prairie remnants to other prairies, to reconstructed prairies and to restored oak savannas.

### **Wetlands and Other Water Bodies**

While not occupying a substantial portion of Des Moines parkland (only 5.8% today), there are opportunities to improve the quality of wetlands, and also to restore previously drained wetlands on parkland. Improving and managing wetland habitats will benefit the large numbers of plants and animals that depend on wetlands.

CUMULATIVE COST COMPARISON

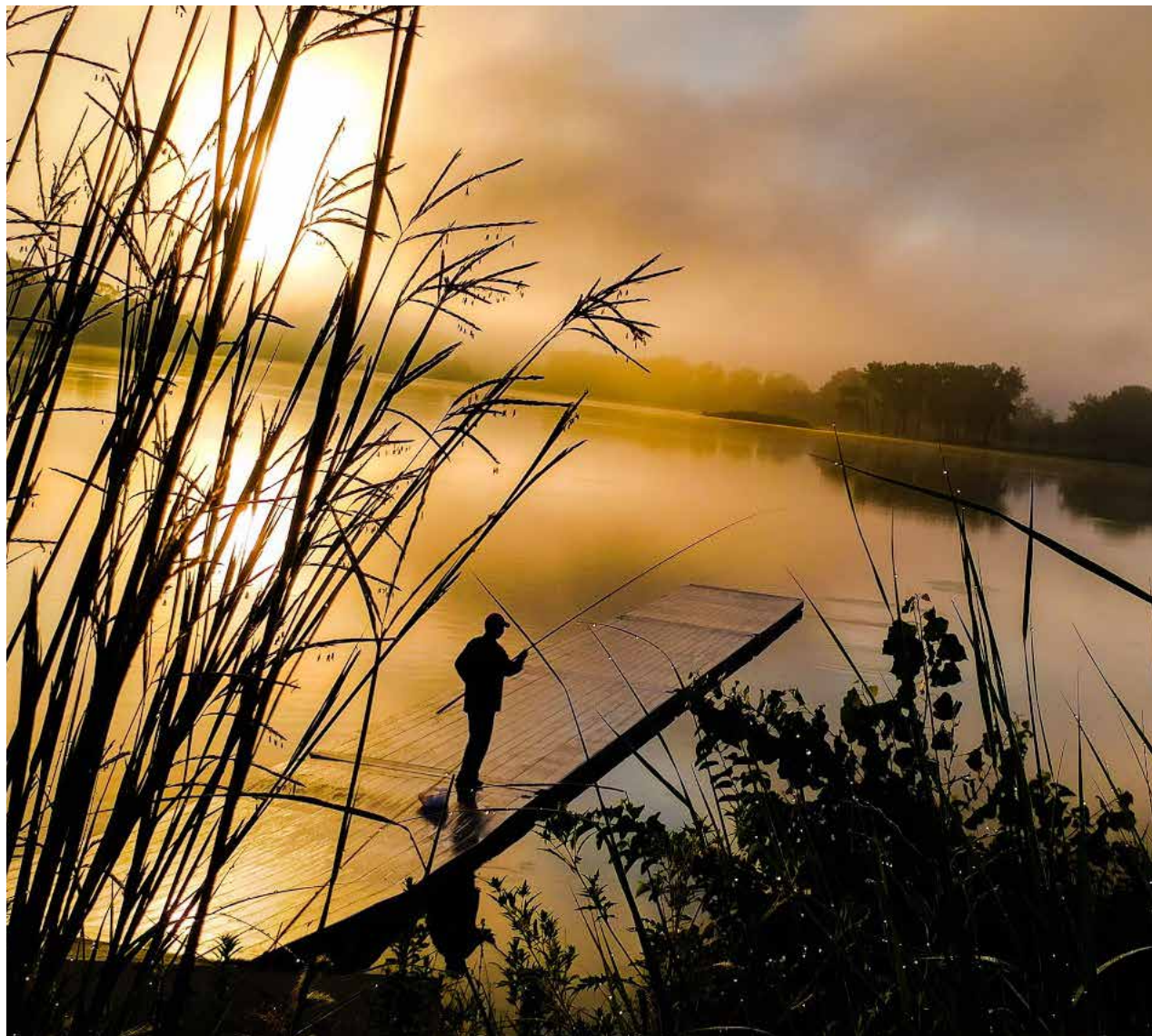
between planting & maintaining prairie vs. maintainig existing mowed lawn (using average-cost seed mix)



SOURCE: APPLIED ECOLOGICAL SERVICES, 2012



## KEY PROJECTS AND IDEAS



### Other Things Worth Keeping

Other things worth paying attention to and moving to the front of the priority list are:

- High-quality, large woodlands
- Natural area buffers and connections (e.g., grasslands adjacent to prairie and savanna)
- Endangered, threatened, special-concern or SGCN species
- Suites of important species, such as pollinators
- Charismatic or easy-to-spot wildlife

### Connect Natural Areas

The problem of inbreeding in isolated populations, as explained in Part 1, can be reduced by connecting the natural areas where species live. This reverses the fragmentation process of the last 150 years. Connecting like habitat to like habitat benefits many SGCNs in the City. The concepts of core habitats, edge effects and connectivity can be brought into park master plans as a way to conserve the City's full spectrum of biodiversity. Existing greenways can be enhanced by improving the quality of habitat and widening them, as appropriate, for species that the park system wants to promote. On the downside, securing and upgrading the quality of greenways requires years, often decades, of planning, acquisition, restoration and management.

# NATURAL RESOURCES

## NATURAL RESOURCES AND URBAN PARKS

Urban parkland conjures up images of artistically designed celebration, gathering and play structures, ballfields, ponds and mowed lawns, scattered trees and formal shrubs and flower beds. Roads, parking lots and paved trails are arrayed within. At locations where managers have an interest in preservation and restoration, such as Des Moines, urban parks include native ecosystems such as woodlands, prairies and wetlands. Whatever the features, a primary focus is on use and enjoyment of natural resources by people. Along with the many and varied human uses, natural resources of vegetation, water and scenic views also contribute an unnoticed benefit—ecosystem services.

### WHAT ARE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES AND WHY DO THEY MATTER?

Lands and waters in an urban park system—through interacting ecological functions—support a diversity of plants and animals that spin off ecosystem services. At a basic level, these are defined as “the benefits human populations derive, directly or indirectly, from ecosystem functions” (Costanza et al. 1997). Ecosystem services (and goods) are usually associated with land covers that yield certain physical and biological outcomes. For example, wetlands retain water, improve water quality and provide wildlife habitat. Prairies soak up and retain water, build and hold soil and

sequester (absorb) carbon. Goods are direct products produced by an ecosystem, used directly by humans (e.g., lumber, fish, crops, wild foods), or can have assigned market values (e.g., sequestered carbon, huntable wildlife).

Costanza estimated the value of the world’s ecosystem services at \$125 trillion, or twice the planetary Gross Domestic Product (GDP). If humans had to replace those ecosystem services with human systems, planetary GDP would have to double. Various approaches put a dollar value on ecosystem services for specific ecosystems—in particular, landscapes. There is growing attention on the value of these services to society, with a recent focus on urban landscapes.

### ECOSYSTEM SERVICES IN URBAN PARKS

Urban parks with a diversity of natural land cover provide a diversity of ecosystem goods and services (Alvey 2006; Boland and Hunhammar 1999, Postel and Thompson 2005, and others). These services include air purification, microclimate regulation, noise reduction, wildlife habitat and biodiversity, carbon sequestration and stormwater and water quality management. Parks also provide cultural ecosystem services—attractive settings, recreation, relaxation and opportunities for pastimes such as photography and bird-watching. More parks are planting harvestable

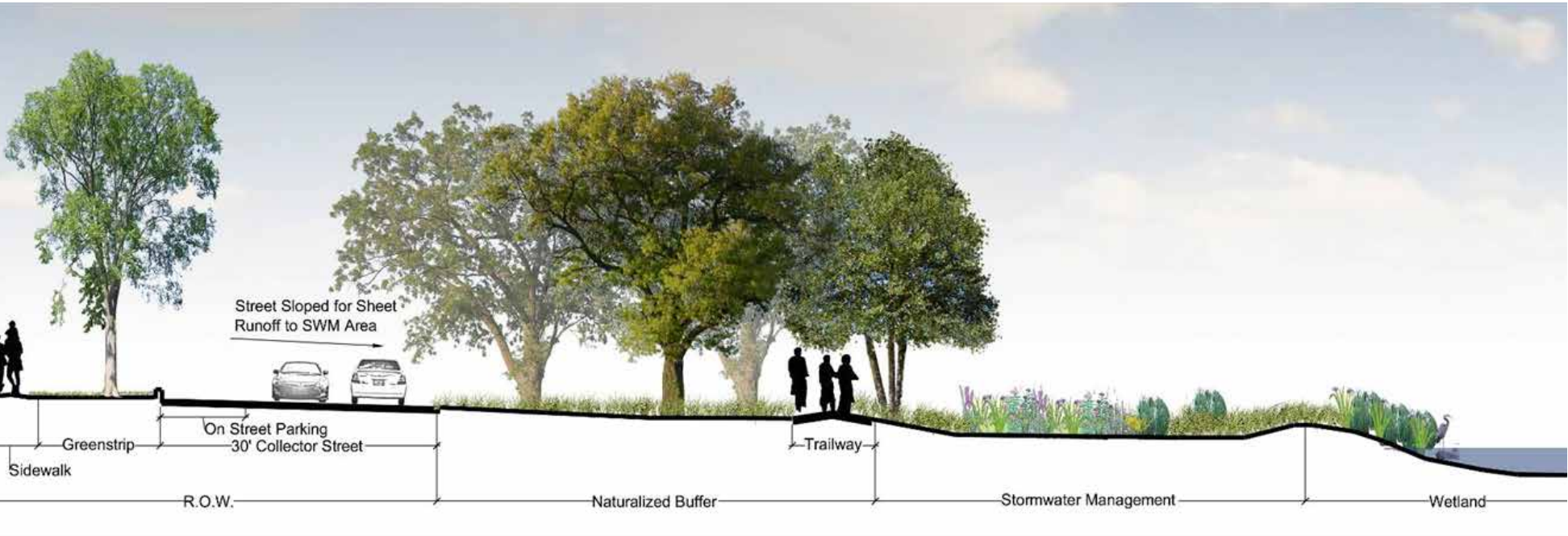
edible fruit, nuts and greens—“wild food”—as a cultural ecosystem service (McLain et al. 2012).

At about two-thirds of Des Moines parks, over half the land, is covered by natural and semi-natural vegetation. (Natural vegetation covers much less land at the remaining parks.) These areas, with their vegetation and species diversity, provide the most ecosystem services in the park system. Forests and woodlands—roughly 40% of the natural and semi-natural land cover of Des Moines parks—have a complex structure of ground, shrub, sapling and canopy layers, and rich species diversity. They provide the greatest number and intensity of ecosystem services (air quality, microclimate moderation, water regulation and purity, biodiversity and habitat, etc.).

Even modified vegetation like mowed lawns or degraded natural habitats deliver more ecological services than do buildings, pavement and other hard surfaces. In general, a park’s local ecosystem has a substantial effect on the quality of life in surrounding neighborhoods, as well as a cumulative effect on the larger urban landscape. This combined local and landscape effect on ecosystem services is one of the great assets of the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system.



# KEY PROJECTS AND IDEAS



PRECIPITATION



RAIN GARDEN



BIO-SWALE



CLEANSING MEADOW BUFFER



NATURALIZED DETENTION BASIN



TREATMENT WETLAND



## HOW TO MAKE CITY PARKLAND SUSTAINABLE

The concept of “sustainability”—usually discussed in environmental, economic and cultural terms—refers to a system’s ability to continue in a healthy way well into the future. This includes ecosystem restoration/enhancement and reduced long-term (“perpetual”) management costs. Converting maintained turf to prairie, for example, recoups conversion costs in 2–5 years (depending on the type of restoration) compared to ongoing maintenance costs for the lawn. Natural and semi-natural vegetation needs management, but it is not nearly as intensive and expensive as for lawns and gardens, or for built environments. Thus, a simple approach to fostering more sustainable parkland is to reduce the amount of lawn, reserving it for places where it is most desirable and useful. Wholesale lawn conversion is not needed everywhere. Lawn extent can be reduced through carefully designed plantings of pollinator strips of native vegetation, for example, or by making connections between and providing transitions around natural areas. Restoration and enhancement of ecosystems typically increase most ecosystem services and improve the sustainability of parks in ecological and financial terms, as well as the quality of life in neighborhoods.

A larger question of sustainability, however,

is how Des Moines parkland contributes to sustainability of the entire city. The 22 parks, comprising 3,568 acres, constitute about 1.3% of the City of Des Moines. While a small fraction of the City’s land base, parks provide more ecosystem services per acre than does the majority of the City.

In the Des Moines urban landscape, the topics of greatest concern for sustainability are  
1) water quality improvement and  
2) habitat maintenance and improvement.

## WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Of all ecosystem services provided by parkland, stormwater management is perhaps the most crucial for Des Moines (and, indeed, Iowa as a whole). Since water quality is a particular focus of state and federal grant funding, approaching ecological enhancement and restoration from the perspective of water quality improvement is a good funding strategy.

These interrelated ecological functions can be achieved with good stormwater management.

- Increased infiltration and groundwater recharge
- Increased transpiration of precipitation by plants
- Reduction in runoff volume and velocity
- Decreased erosion and sedimentation

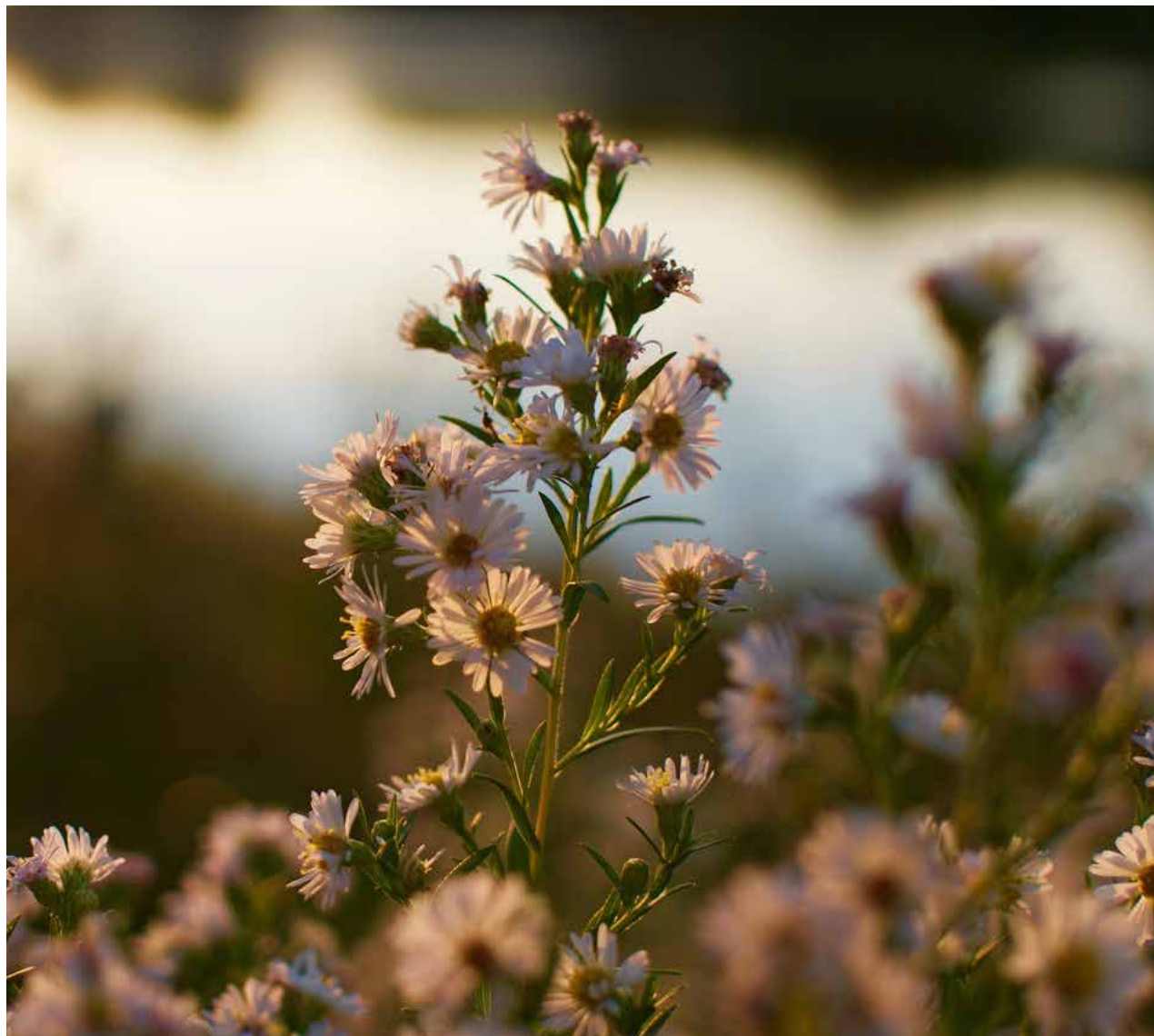
- Improved water purification—nutrients and sediment are filtered and settle out
- Reduction in floodwaters

These ecological functions can be enhanced during park master-planning by taking the actions below:

- Decrease extent of unnecessary impervious (hard or paved) surfaces
- Strategically use green infrastructure (e.g., bioswales, detention/infiltration basins, stormwater treatment trains) in combination with or in preference to hardscape and gray infrastructure
- Install native vegetation buffer strips beside water bodies for filtration while providing fishing access for anglers
- Increase the acreage of restored forest, woodland, prairie and other native vegetation
- Improve ecological functioning of native vegetation by controlling invasive plants and planting native species
- In areas with damaged soil, practice soil quality restoration (SQR) by aerating soil and thin-spreading compost

A specific example of green infrastructure is the Stormwater Treatment Train (STT). This stormwater management system can be designed at small and large scales.

## KEY PROJECTS AND IDEAS



It uses restored and enhanced swales, grasslands, wetlands and ponds in a natural sequence to secure much of the rainwater through infiltration and evapotranspiration (evaporation through plants), while filtering the remaining runoff. The result is lower runoff rates and volumes, reduced erosion, improved water quality, recharged groundwater, reduced flooding and improved aquatic habitat in receiving waters. An STT would make a good candidate for securing grant funding for restoration.

### HABITAT MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

One of the most visible results of ecological restoration is the perpetuation of natural habitat and improvement of degraded habitat. In an urban setting, unmanaged natural ecosystems suffer from multiple factors—overuse, invasive species and the effects of neighboring land uses. Hands-off management is simply not an option. On a positive note, even small efforts at habitat management pay off in big ways, with benefits such as greater attractiveness, more plant and animal life, rare species and pollinator support and opportunities for environmental education.

Ecological restoration and management often aim to reduce invasive plants and increase native plant diversity. Such activity often benefits water quality and invites participation

by volunteers, and includes the activities below:

- Cutting unwanted woody species
- Pulling herbaceous invasive species
- Selective herbicide treatment as needed for unwanted woody and herbaceous plants
- Site preparation, seeding and planting of native species
- Periodic prescribed burns
- Soil quality restoration
- Retention of woody debris on woodland floor and in patches for pollinator habitat
- Strategic conversion of mowed turf to native vegetation
- Control of white-tailed deer population in parks

Habitat improvements can extend to installing nesting structures for bluebirds, chickadees, eastern phoebe, kestrel, wood ducks, hooded mergansers and others. Bat roosting structures and woody debris on the ground for native ground-nesting bees are more simple ways to improve wildlife habitat and can be used for environmental education.

**Ecosystem Services (adapted from Millennium Ecosystem Assessment 2005)**

**Supporting (Natural Processes that Help People)**

- Primary production

- Nutrient cycling
- Carbon storage
- Soil formation
- Erosion control (e.g., vegetation)
- Air purification
- Water purification
- Decomposition of waste
- Detoxification (e.g., soil)
- Groundwater recharge
- Pest and disease control
- Pollination of crops and natural vegetation
- Seed dispersal
- Local shading and cooling
- Blockage of harmful ultraviolet radiation

**Provisioning (Direct Use by People)**

- Clean air
- Fresh water
- Fertile/productive soil
- Food production
- Fiber production
- Fuel production
- Game and fish production
- Biodiversity (and genetic resources)

**Regulating (Maintain Normal Conditions)**

- Climate stabilization
- Water flow regulation
- Flood regulation
- Disease and pest regulation
- Hazard amelioration

**Cultural**

- Spiritual
- Aesthetic
- Educational
- Recreational
- Economic (e.g., ecotourism)



# NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT

## TOOLS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT



### **1. Describe healthy, resilient ecosystems in parks and their benefit to Des Moines.**

This first step summarizes in words and pictures what the result of restoration and management will be. It also makes the benefits of healthy, resilient ecosystems real for residents by showing how this affects them. In effect, this is a vision for the outcomes of good stewardship in parks. Informing decision-makers and their constituents about this will lead people to recognize and more easily value natural areas and ecosystems. Outreach campaigns, environmental education (discussed above), and volunteerism (discussed below) are ways to get the message out.

### **2. Explain to city leaders and the public what a sustainable program is for managing natural resources in parks.**

Define and then convey the vision of an effective, systemwide program for natural resources management in City parks. This is paired with the first item above.

### **3. Complete a systemwide natural resources management plan.**

The 2014 NRI gives solid, scientific, baseline data to make recommendations for natural resources management, but better strategic guidance and detail is needed to understand the scope and cost of a systemwide restoration and management program.

Developing well-thought-out and supported priorities and a 20-year implementation plan would greatly advance the City's strategic management of natural resources.

#### **4. Develop park-specific Natural Resources Management Plans (NRMPs).**

Like most endeavors, natural resources restoration and management is most successful when operating from a good plan. A task-oriented NRMP:

- Considers existing ecological conditions
- Identifies stresses to ecosystems and species and opportunities to address them
- Defines goals for the site
- Recommends and prioritizes restoration and management tasks
- Provides an estimate of costs to carry out 5, 10 or 20 years of restoration and management

An NRMP should be written for a park in Des Moines that is highly valued for its natural resources. This can serve as a template for subsequent park NRMPs.

#### **5. Implement pilot projects.**

A pilot or demonstration project can tell the story of natural resources restoration and management better than a picture or talk. Pilot projects show citizens, agencies

and businesses the techniques of ecological restoration and management and ways to improve those techniques. Pilot projects should be placed where the community can watch the restoration process and the changes in plant communities, pollinators and other wildlife. Interpretive signage always makes a pilot project more understandable. The east shore restoration at Gray's Lake, for instance, demonstrates how to bring shoreline restoration to a recreational park.

<https://www.dmgov.org/Departments/Parks/Pages/GraysLakeRestoration.aspx#moreinfo>

#### **6. Monitor, measure and adjust.**

A successful restoration program has a good monitoring program behind it. Monitoring gives feedback on whether restoration and management are improving plant communities and species populations as intended. If not, then the goals or techniques of restoration and management at a park should be changed. This is called adaptive management—a cycle of implementation, monitoring, evaluation and adjustment.

Monitoring is tied to the goals for improving natural resources in parks. Each park will have a NRMP with goals for that park. The plan will identify the indicators that tell whether goals for natural resources are being achieved. For instance, measuring the percent of invasive

plant cover in a park will reveal whether management is reducing invasive plant cover—a goal for the entire park system. One can choose indicators for biodiversity, wildlife, erosion, water quality or anything related to a goal.

Monitoring should be simple, easy to carry out and inexpensive. The power of monitoring comes from a long record—it is better to measure just one or two things for twenty years, than to measure twenty things but be unable to continue because of cost. Each year's measurement of an indicator is compared to the baseline condition of that indicator—taken before restoration and management started. The 2014 NRI is an excellent baseline to measure and report future trends in the indicators. More information about natural resources monitoring can be found in the Appendix.

Citizen scientists or volunteers can do some monitoring, especially with training. Sometimes only experts, such as botanists or entomologists, can do the work. A monitoring program is part of an NRMP, but because many parks have the same issues—invasive plants, low native plant diversity—monitoring work should be aggregated at a program level for efficiency.

# NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT

## TOOLS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT

### 7. Develop efficient systems and operations to improve ecological health and resilience.

Many parks, each with natural areas in various states of health, pose a challenge to natural resources restoration and management. Tracking information and progress toward goals requires internal systems and operations that are efficient and effective. Several commercial software packages exist to help with such management, but common GIS, spreadsheets, data forms and other techniques (including smart phone and field tablet applications) can also be effective.

### 8. Engage and inform the public through volunteerism.

Volunteerism has many benefits.

- Participants learn about natural resources, raising awareness and appreciation of the natural world
- Participants gain a basic understanding of the goals and benefits of restoring and managing natural resources
- Data can be gathered for baseline and trend monitoring, involving citizen scientists, university professors, teachers and students
- Cost-savings accrue due to volunteer labor, which can be used as in-kind match for grants

- Friendships and networks develop, advancing natural resource protection, restoration and management

Volunteer efforts vary. Physical work includes planting trees and removing invasive species. Des Moines has a volunteer program and understands the requirements and training needed to carry it out safely and effectively. Volunteers in research was mentioned, but the BioBlitz warrants comment. A BioBlitz is a 24-hour period when volunteers, supported by experts, document all living species in a park. Data are gathered, it has the feel of a scientific venture and people discover things they never imagined were in their parks. They are not a substitute for systematic monitoring of vegetation, water and wildlife resources, but they add information to the pool of data. See Appendix for additional information.

### AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they say... and hence, meeting the aesthetic expectations of a diverse community can be challenging. Some natural areas appear messy and unkept to some, while others see the “wildness” as beautiful. Common complaints about natural areas are that plants are too tall, there is too much variety, or it simply doesn’t look like it used to. Early communication with the public about restoration and management program goals and projects can prevent

misunderstanding and reduce conflict. Natural-areas management practices can be used to meet traditional expectations of how parks should look include:

#### Employ “Signs of Care”

Researchers have found that simply mowing a strip between native vegetation and a trail or parking lot will lower opposition to natural areas. Unless a park specifies a wild trail, trail edges next to or through natural areas should be periodically mowed and always kept free of brush. Mowing prevents tall vegetation from flopping onto the trail.

#### Limit the Height of Some Plantings

In small restorations surrounded by turf or near trails and buildings, use shorter grasses and wildflowers, such as little bluestem and side-oats grama, and remove tall vegetation from seed mixes (e.g., big bluestem, Indian grass, tall sunflowers).

#### Limit the Diversity of Some Plantings

While the health and resilience of ecosystems depends on having large numbers of species, some people do not like diverse plantings at some locations. The plantings appear too complicated, uneven and wild. Fewer species planted near buildings and high-use areas can reduce opposition to natural areas with some individuals.



### **Mass Plantings**

Rather than allowing nature to take its course following a diverse seed planting, many people prefer to see masses of the same species. This creates areas that are more like gardens but use native species. Areas of similar bloom colors, plant heights and leaf colors and textures can be arranged to provide pollinators with native species, while presenting the look of a garden. Management of mass plantings, however, is more time consuming and expensive than managing less formal plantings.

### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The goals, projects and ideas described above suggest that the following policies be established.

#### ***Commit to Refining and Improving Des Moines Parks and Recreation's Outreach Program and Environmental Education***

Define the scope of education and outreach efforts, as discussed above

- Clarify and redirect existing outreach efforts to align with the scope
- Define the systemwide interpretive signage work, as discussed above
- Refine and redirect natural resources volunteer opportunities to match the natural resource priorities, volunteer capabilities and staff capacity to manage



# **NATURAL RESOURCE RESTORATION AND MANAGEMENT**

## **TOOLS NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT**



- Define the level of collaboration with citizens and academics for monitoring and assign a staff lead to define and implement the program consistent with monitoring needs

#### **Resolve to Develop a Systemwide Natural Resources Management Plan**

Much work is already completed that lays the foundation for a systemwide plan.

- Refine the priorities for existing ecosystems and species, with an eye toward restoration and management
- Examine City-wide conservation opportunities on and off City parkland
- Establish and memorialize the City's natural resources restoration and management priorities

A city's highest-quality, largest or most threatened natural areas should receive top priority for protection and management. Lastly, considering anticipated capital and general fund budgets, donations and grant sources, create a 20-year implementation plan for restoration and management of parkland.

#### **Resolve to Complete Park-specific Natural Resources Management Plans and Implement them as Funding is Available**

The order in which NRMPs are completed would be informed by the priorities set forth in the systemwide plan.

#### **Identify Opportunities and Advance Green Infrastructure Across City Departments**

Whenever the City plans a stormwater or street project, that is an opportunity for green infrastructure. Green infrastructure uses the power of ecosystem services to deliver better stormwater management at a lower cost. As discussed above, pilot projects can position the City as a leader in green infrastructure and give developers examples of stormwater best practices. The Parks and Recreation Department's stormwater and stream management project in the Waveland Golf Course and Glendale Cemetery showed how to do this kind of project.

<https://www.dmgov.org/Departments/Parks/PDF/Waveland-Glendale%20MP%20Report%20-%202014-10-28.pdf>

<https://www.cleanwateriowa.org/water-quality-initiative-for-waveland-park-neighborhood>

By pooling resources, more can be accomplished by private developers, the City, regulatory agencies and grant-making organizations.

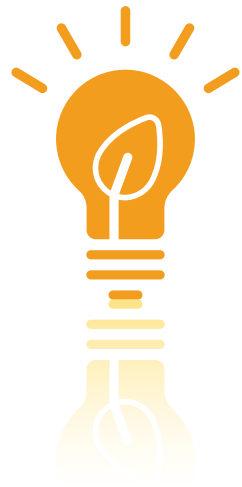
#### **Develop Systems and Operations to Manage City Natural Resources**

As discussed already, knowing whether the City is achieving its goals for natural resources depends on systematic and regular monitoring. It also requires well-organized internal operations for carrying out the restoration and management work. This includes looking for cost efficiencies, like creating bigger management units for controlled burns or bundling honeysuckle removal and treatment for several parks into one outsourced contract. Simply knowing what work is needed across all parks, and scheduling that work over five, ten and twenty years, will go a long way to getting organized for success.









INNOVATION



07









## 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.

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## 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
- 

*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



# REVENUE AND FEES ASSESSMENT

## OBJECTIVE OF ASSESSMENT

As part of the LiveDSM engagement, the project team undertook an assessment of the revenue and fees generated by Des Moines Parks and Recreation. Revenue and fees are part of “earned income” for the department. Earned income is revenue received for a service or in exchange for goods. Also captured in this section is an overview of resources received under “contributed income.” The project team defines contributed income as cash or in-kind resources that were given (not loaned) to the organization in the form of a gift or grant.

The following analysis provides insight to historical earned and contributed income funding trends and opportunities for growth in earned income funding. Additionally, based on the findings of the assessment, the project team identified gaps in program management and provides best practices for consideration.

### REVENUE OVERVIEW

The City of Des Moines provided ten years of annual budget data; however, in 2014, the City switched reporting systems. This change in reporting format and content made cross-walking and comparing of previous budgets infeasible. Therefore, the team only used data from 2014 through 2017 as reported under the new system. Additionally, in order to undertake a comparison from the 2010 Cost Recovery Study, only the 20

departments included in that study were included in this analysis. Understanding revenue trends requires clarity on what budget line items represent and include. The following are definitions for the categories of revenue and what each line item includes.

#### Goods and Service Fees

These include rentals and royalties, cemetery charges, program fees (park, recreation and cultural charges) and other charges for sales and services. These activities are defined as earned income.

#### Permits

These include licenses and permits to operate recreational events. The team considers these activities earned income.

#### Concession Fees

These include fees from third parties using municipal money or property to generate revenue. The team considers these activities earned income.

#### Contributed Income

This include contributions and donations. The team considers these activities contributed income.

#### Interest Income

This includes interest earned from money

placed in non-expendable trusts. The City of Des Moines is required by law to put a percentage of sales from cemetery lot sales into this trust. The team considers the former earned income. The other portion comes from money donated to the city for a specific purpose. The team considers the latter portion contributed income.

#### Other

This includes reimbursement of city expenditures, contractual payments, payments from other local governments, other miscellaneous charges and other undefined charges. These charges are a combination of earned and contributed income.

# REVENUE AND PROGRAM TRENDS

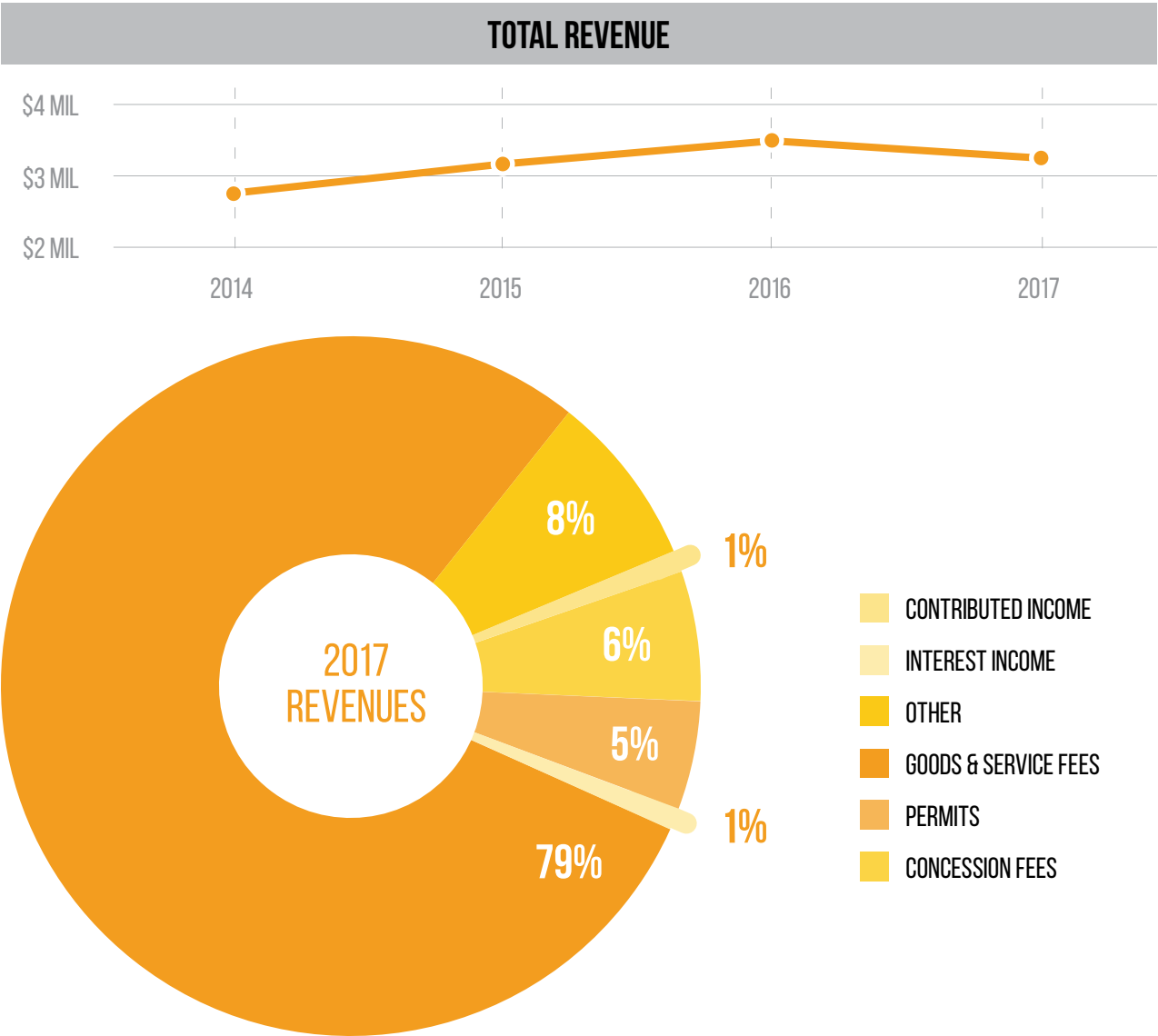
## OVERVIEW

The team identified 20 revenue departments that matched those that were evaluated for the 2010 Cost Recovery Study. For each department the project team created a revenue breakout using the revenue reports provided by the City for the years 2014 through 2017. The team then combined the 20 revenue departments into a consolidated revenue summary. The team, through various interviews with Parks and Recreation Department staff, attained usage information for certain departmental areas for the period 2014 to 2017. This information is useful in identifying trends in specific programs. Using revenue breakouts and usage data, the team was able to identify growth trends in revenue line items, both departmentally and in a consolidated form. The same is true for growth trends in program usage. The Appendix contains the detailed breakout and summary of each department.



# REVENUE AND PROGRAM TRENDS

## OVERVIEW



### OVERALL REVENUE

Historically, cemetery charges have been the largest contributor to revenue in the group, contributing 35.6% of revenue annually on average. Programing (listed as park, recreation and cultural charges) has been the second-largest contributor, contributing 20.3% annually on average. The following chart illustrates the breakdown of revenue for 2017 by revenue category.

Overall, total revenue growth has increased at a compound annual growth rate (“CAGR”) of four percent between 2014 and 2017. The following table and chart are a consolidation of all 20 departments that the team analyzed.



# TRENDS

## RECREATION PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

As previously mentioned, the Appendix contains a detailed breakdown of departmental revenues and program trends. The following are macro trends identified through our analysis:

### REVENUE

- Cemetery charges increased at a CAGR of 3 percent.
- Park, recreation and cultural charges (e.g., program fees) are growing significantly at a CAGR of 21 percent.
- Rents and royalties demonstrated a positive CAGR trend of 10 percent.
- Concession fees have increased consistently at a CAGR of 3 percent.
- The largest decline in revenues occurred in reimbursement of City expenditures, which declined at a CAGR of 21 percent.
- Total revenue from Athletics and Sports Tourism has declined from 2016, likely because of a decline in youth and adult sports participation.
- Revenue for Park Improvement Planning has declined at a CAGR of 18 percent since 2014.

### ATTENDANCE

- Aquatic facility usage has grown at a CAGR of 15 percent since 2014.
- Special Events participation has grown at a CAGR of 54 percent since 2014.
- Total attendance at the Four Mile Community Center has decreased at a CAGR of 2 percent, while it has grown 4 percent at Pioneer Columbus Community Center.
- Volunteer participation, hours committed and economic value have increased 14 percent, 28 percent and 30 percent, respectively.
- Environmental Education participation has increased at a CAGR of 33 percent since 2014.



# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

## BACKGROUND

There are various forms of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) available to park system managers as they evaluate development and/or operating structures for hospitality and/or recreational real estate or services.

The most common forms of PPPs follow:

### THIRD-PARTY MANAGEMENT AGREEMENTS

Third-party management agreements are vehicles for management or development of a facility/service. Third-party management agreements are contractual obligations between an owner and a service provider that spell out a specific scope of work/responsibility, which includes a form of compensation through a fee, typically calculated as a percent of gross receipts and/or gross operating profit (GOP), or net operating income (NOI). In some circumstances, there can be a base fee, calculated as a percent of gross receipts and incentives through additional fees (also paid as a percent), calculated on thresholds over and above budgeted GOP or NOI. Third-party management agreements are typically the riskiest structure for an owner, as most or all of the current and future capital risk is the responsibility of the owner (working capital, routine and preventative maintenance and capital investment requirements). Benefits to the owner accrue in the form of cash flow from operations.

Third-party management agreements typically have a term of 20 to 30 years.

### CONCESSION CONTRACTS

Concession contracts are formal obligations between an owner and operator, whereby the operator has a contractual obligation to manage a business/facility and pays the owner a franchise fee as a form of return for the opportunity and privileges of generating cash flow—the basis of the operator’s return. This structure shifts the capital risk more to the operator as it is responsible for the funding of working capital, repair and maintenance costs associated with the property, as well as any future capital improvements. It also allows an operator to leverage the concessioner’s capital with provisions for self-amortization during the term of the contract, or a remaining compensable interest in the real property improvements that the owner addresses at contract expiration or as the basis of an upfront capital investment upon contract roll-over to a successor. Typically, a provision of the contract will include reserve requirements for the replacement of long-lived assets (typically with a life cycle in excess of seven years) and furniture, fixtures and short-lived equipment (typically with a life cycle less than seven years). Property title remains with the owner, but the contract contains specific stipulations about asset(s) condition at the

end of a term. Concession contract terms typically range between 10 and 20 years.

### LEASES

Leases constitute an agreement between a land/property owner and a developer/operator, whereby the owner receives a base rent (fixed monthly payment) and/or a percentage rent as calculated as a percent of revenue for the privileges a developer/operator secures to develop a revenue-generating entity or to earn income from operations of an existing facility. In the situation where a lessor is leasing the operation and income-generating ability to a lessee, it is not atypical for the lease to be structured on a “triple-net” basis whereby the lessee agrees to pay all real estate taxes, building insurance and maintenance costs, in addition to any normal fees that are expected under the agreement such as rent, utilities, etc. Lease terms vary significantly based on the negotiation of the parties and the capital investment requirements, ensuring there is enough time to amortize the investment and generate a suitable return on invested capital.

The City of Des Moines uses the term “concession” to also refer to operations that they run themselves. For purposes of this report, the project team considers these as program revenue and has not included them in this analysis.



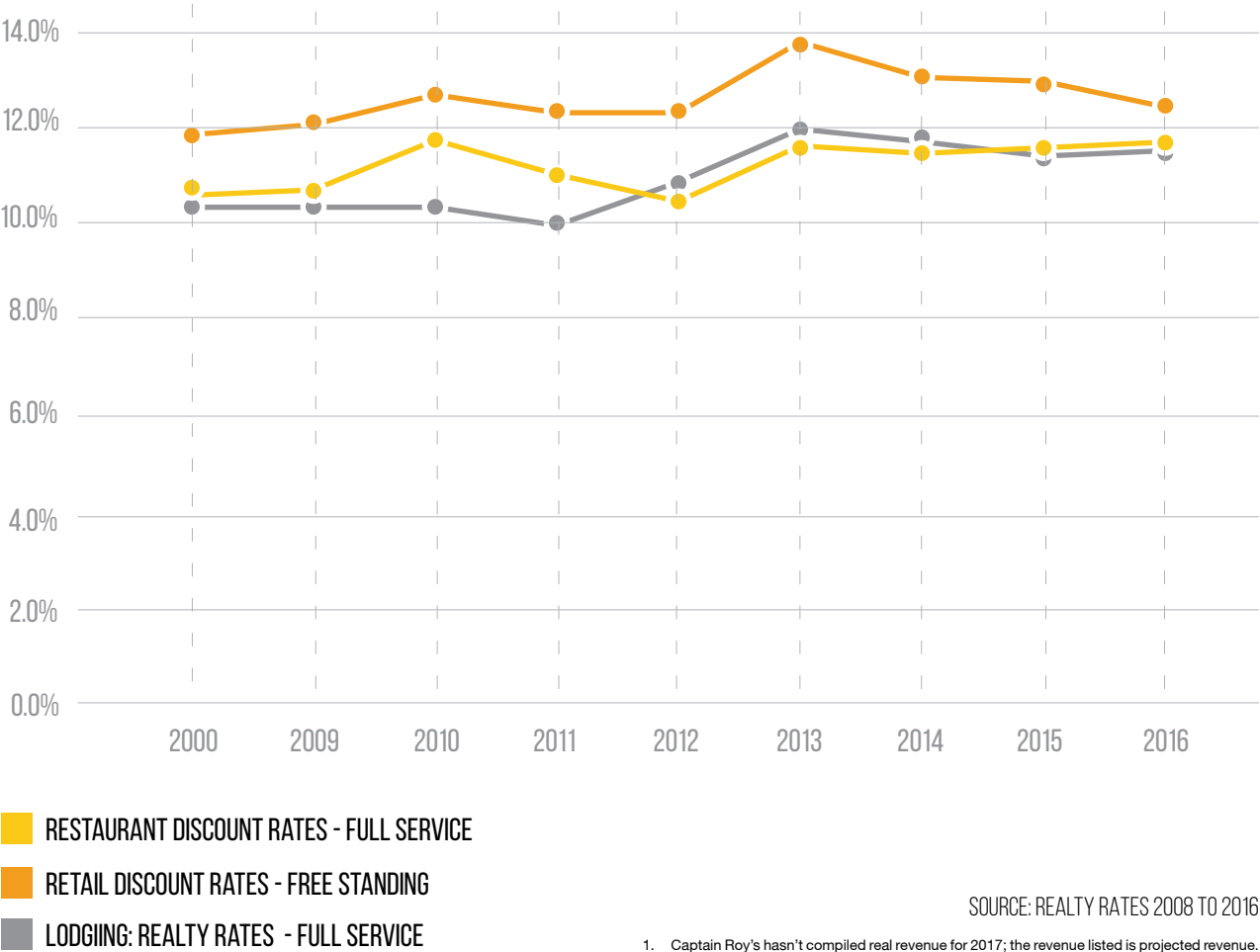


# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

## BACKGROUND

### COMPARATIVE INDUSTRY INVESTMENTS RETURNS BY ASSET CLASS

Internal Rate of Return



SOURCE: REALTY RATES 2008 TO 2016

1. Captain Roy's hasn't compiled real revenue for 2017; the revenue listed is projected revenue.

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW: DES MOINES

The following provides an overview on the number of public-private partnerships that exist within Des Moines Parks and Recreation.

*Note: the City of Des Moines did not provide to the project team any information regarding the basis of the concession fee revenue (e.g., gross revenue against which the concession fees' percentage is levied).*

Concession fee revenues for food and beverage from the Amphitheatre have decreased since 2014 at a CAGR of 3%, driven primarily by a decline in concession fee revenues from alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. Since reaching a high in 2015 of just over \$35,000, revenues have declined 43% in total.

Hub Spot has seen tremendous growth since 2015. Concession fee revenue has grown at a CAGR of 93% to the 2017 high of \$42,156.56. Concession fees from food sales have declined at a CAGR of 13% per year; however, alcohol has grown at a CAGR of 41%. Concession fees from event food and alcohol revenues and rentals have taken off as well, all of which have increased more than 250% annually over the period. Captain Roy's projects that revenues will increase at 1% annually.

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Revenue Generating PPPs	Service	Fee Description	2017 Fee Revenue
Simon Estes Amphitheatre	Food and Beverage	25% of gross revenues from alcohol and non-alcoholic beverage sales	\$19,678.94
		50% of food vendor or catering and non-alcoholic beverage vendor fees	\$500.00
Hub Spot	Food and Beverage	8% revenue excluding catering for third parties, up to \$500k annually, 10% up to \$1 million, 11.5% after that	\$4,350.75
		8% revenue excluding catering for third parties, up to \$500k annually, 10% up to \$1 million, 11.5% after that	\$6,379.20
		10% of all gross revenues for food and beverage catering to third parties	\$11,745.79
		10% of all gross revenues for food and beverage catering to third parties	\$4,531.30
	Rentals	50% of the use fees for rentals	\$15,149.52
Captain Roy's <sup>(1)</sup>	Food and Beverage	1% of revenue excluding catering for third parties, with biannual percent increases of 1%	\$7,067.00
	Rentals	25% of rentals of the concession area	\$0
	Fuel	\$0.25 per gallon of boat fuel sold at the fuel station	\$1,100.00
TOTAL FEE REVENUE			\$70,502.50
Other PPPs	Service	Expense Description	2017 Fee Revenue
Iowa Cubs	Field Maintenance	Maximum of \$270,714 (soccer), \$59,558 (baseball), and \$200,329 (sports fields). Additionally, the City will pay \$40,000 annual equipment allowance	\$524,351.33
Bike World Iowa	Bike Rentals	50% of gross revenues from bicycle sales	\$825.00
TOTAL EXPENSE			\$525,176.33

# PRICING AND FEE POLICY

## BEST PRACTICES

### BACKGROUND

The team conducted interviews with park staff to ascertain the basis for pricing of recreation programs and setting of Public-Private Partnership (“PPP”) fees. Interviews identified that the City of Des Moines does not have a formal pricing policy. Additionally, interviews regarding the method of setting PPP fees identified there is no policy or methodology used to set these fees. As part of the *LiveDSM* analysis, the team has identified the need to improve the business practices to support a “culture of innovative leadership.” In support of this effort, the team includes insight to best practices to consider for pricing and fee policy.

### BEST PRACTICES FOR PRICING POLICY AND ESTABLISHING PROGRAM AND SERVICE FEES

In 1986, Dr. John Crompton and Dr. Charles Lamb wrote the book, *Marketing Government and Social Services*. Over the course of the last thirty years, public recreational professionals have widely accepted concepts outlined in this book regarding equity and pricing policy of public services in the development of their pricing policy and development of program and service fees.

Crompton and Lamb discuss the allocation decisions for which public agencies have responsibility when they are delivering visitor services to the public. They identify that “two

related sets of decisions are involved in the delivery of services and hence development of pricing. They revolve around the issues of allocation and distribution. Allocation decisions address the question, ‘who gets what?’ or in normative terms, ‘who ought to get what’<sup>{1}</sup>. Distribution relates to how public agencies deliver the services within the community and typically involves decisions regarding providing new services.

The authors state that “the term allocation implies that different amounts of a service are assigned to a select group on the basis of a principle or standard. The generally accepted standard for allocating public services is equity”<sup>{2}</sup>. They further identify that “Equity address the question of, ‘is the allocation of services in this jurisdiction fair?’”<sup>{3}</sup>. The authors identify that, since achieving equity involves value judgement, there needs to be an entity that makes this judgement. They state that the public representatives are therefore the arbiters of this issue. Specifically, they identify that these value judgements occur through:

1. **Community priorities and values that citizens have articulated; who**
2. **Influence elected representatives; who**
3. **Convert various demands into formal policies; that**
4. **Agency personnel endeavor to carry out.**<sup>{4}</sup>

This position recognizes that value judgments are part of the process in determining allocation of public resources for visitor services. As such, a fee/pricing policy equity framework needs to take into consideration the values of the community as well as the perspectives of the public agency personnel. Survey research, similar to that completed by Leisure Vision in 2015, is a valuable component to consider regarding public priorities. In applying an equity concept to visitor services, it is essential that one differentiates between public and private type of visitor services. They each sit on opposite sides of the spectrum and much of the debate on pricing public services revolves around whether a visitor service provided has characteristics of a public or private service. When setting pricing for visitor services, understanding who is benefiting and who is paying for the service is paramount. The agency must factor these ideas into the fee/pricing policy. The following exhibit (originally presented in the book) effectively illustrates this concept.

5. **Type of program or service continuum**<sup>{5}</sup>  
Crompton and Lamb identify that “equity means that a price should be fair.” Therefore, a fee/pricing policy must address where the visitor service sits on the continuum of services and answer the question of who benefits and who pays. In order to



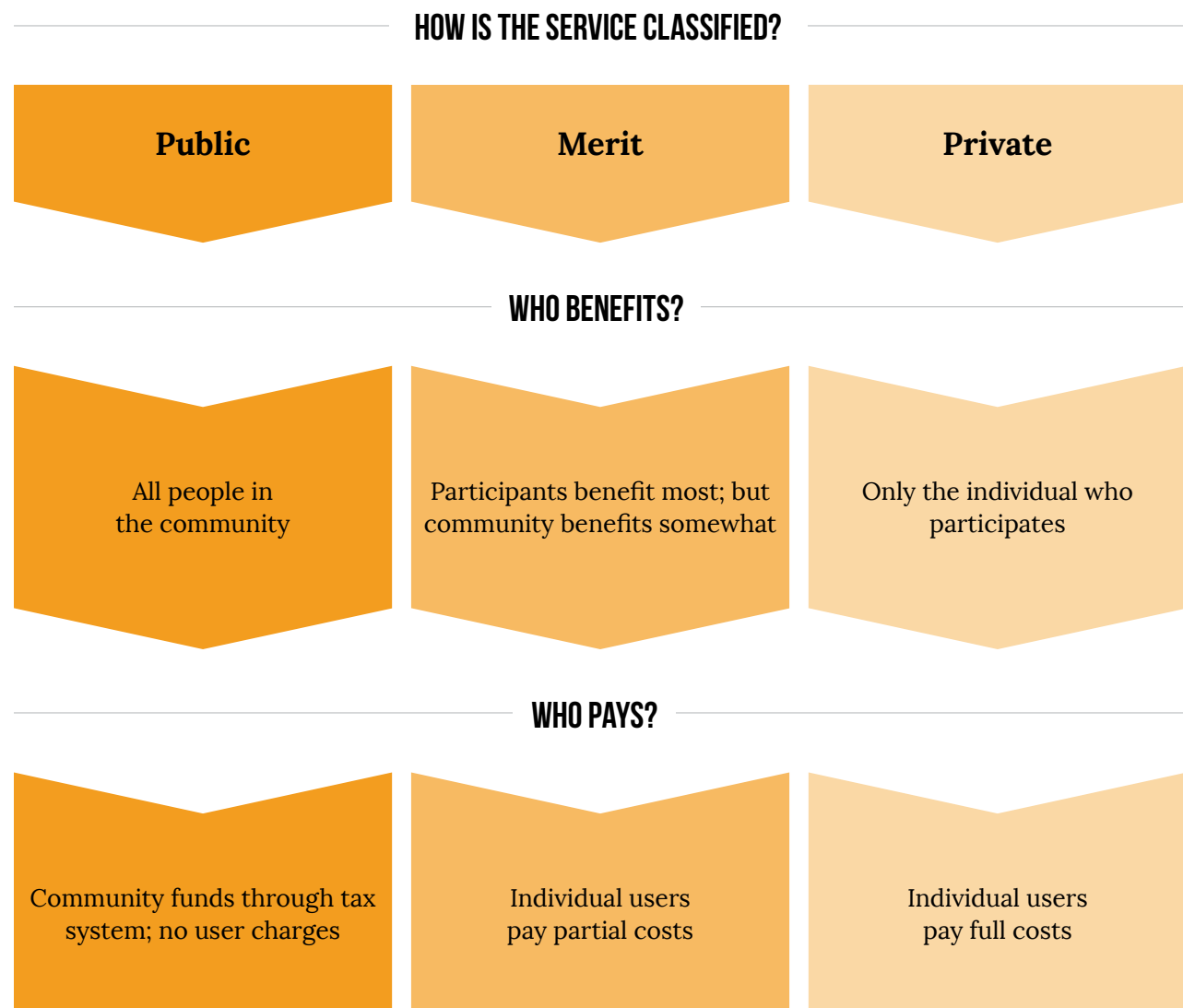
allocate public funds and determine prices for services that do not receive significant public funding, it is necessary to determine what level of public subsidy should exist for various services with user fees. Fee/pricing strategy evolves from this process.

**6. Policy decisions should address a fee/pricing strategy that heeds cost recovery.**

Cost recovery is estimated by dividing the revenue for a program by its expenditures. Currently, Des Moines Parks and Recreation has no pricing policy and does not use cost recovery as a basis for setting prices.

### APPLICATION OF FEE SETTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRICING POLICY

In 2008, the City of Des Moines underwent a study to define what it costs the City to provide various fee-related services across some departments and to determine whether there were any opportunities to implement new fees. However, the Parks and Recreation Department did not use this study as a basis for setting fees. The study found that 98% of the department's costs come from programs that involve user fees. Of those costs, the study identified that user fees recover only 30% of the department's operating budget; the City's general fund subsidizes the other 70%. The study produced a cost-recovery matrix that outlined revenue for Parks and Recreation Department



# PRICING AND FEE POLICY

## BEST PRACTICES

operations that had some type of user fee. It recorded revenues—direct and indirect allocated overhead costs—and ultimately revealed cost recovery for each operation.

To ascertain whether the cost recovery ratio had changed since 2008, the consulting team undertook a high-level cost recovery analysis for the Parks and Recreation Department using FY2017/2018 data. The following table represents the team's effort to replicate the matrix created in 2008, with improvements that have occurred in cost recovery highlighted in green, and declines highlighted in red.

As the Parks and Recreation Department contemplates a pricing policy to represent an equity framework, a best practice is to

incorporate insight from their community regarding the priorities for public funding (e.g., taxes) versus private funding (e.g., “user fees”). The City of Des Moines is fortunate that it has available a relatively recent research study that can provide insight into this issue. The 2015 Leisure Vision/ETC Institute Survey, conducted for the Parks and Recreation Department, does provide insight as to resident priorities for the type of facility and programs that are most important to households, as well as those most willing to be supported by public (e.g., tax) resources.



### *Cost recovery improvements*

#### *Cost recovery declines*

1. The Parks and Recreation Department has made improvements in some cost recovery areas; however, it is still at approximately 30% of its costs with revenues from user fee operations.
2. Allocated Overhead could not be identified in the same method that was used for the 2008 study; allocated overhead as a percent of total full cost was taken for 2008 and applied to the 2017 model.
3. This analysis excludes the following departments that were not evaluated as part of the 2010 Cost Recovery Analysis: A&G, Construction and Structural Repair, Heavy Equipment Support, Greenhouse, Trails, Municipal Buildings, Sports Turf Maintenance, Golf Contracted Operations, Special Revenues and other Funds, Permanent Cemetery, Glendale Cemetery Restoration, Bikeways, Swartzell- City and Public Project, Civil War Headstone Restoration, Mausoleum Repairs, Tournaments, Davis Park.
- 4.

## CITY OF DES MOINES - PARKS AND RECREATION

Service Name	2017 Revenue	Direct Labor Cost	Capital Outlays	Other Direct Cost	Total Direct Cost	Subsidy	Allocated Overhead	Total Full Cost	2017 Total Full Cost	2017 Total Direct Cost	2018 Total Direct Cost	2018 Full Cost
Cemetery	\$1,263,472	\$1,099,652	\$6,810	\$503,570	\$1,610,032	\$537,962	\$191,402	\$1,801,434	78%	70%	72%	64%
Pools	\$418,470	\$611,945	\$4,256	\$226,915	\$843,116	\$741,505	\$316,859	\$1,159,975	50%	36%	42%	31%
Grays Lake	\$107,325	\$409,878	\$1,4187	\$254,170	\$678,325	\$691,830	\$120,920	\$799,155	16%	13%	6%	5%
Athletics & Sports Tourism	\$455,460	\$283,342	\$2460	\$185,441	\$471,243	\$462,427	\$446,644	\$917,887	97%	50%	79%	41%
Summer Playground Program	\$101,825	\$119,913	-	\$27,040	\$138,953	\$115,038	\$77,910	\$216,863	73%	47%	89%	57%
Special Events	\$59,000	\$124,514	-	\$31,600	\$156,114	\$128,189	\$31,075	\$18,7189	38%	32%	10%	9%
Brenton Ice Skating Plaza	\$4,765	-	-	\$56,000	\$56,000	\$52,825	\$1,050	\$57,050	9%	8%	0%	0%
Four Mile Community Center	\$33,348	\$119,211	-	\$78,756	\$197,967	\$220,456	\$55,837	\$253,804	17%	13%	11%	9%
Pioneer Columbus Community Center	\$51,993	\$117,415	\$8,511	\$92,851	\$218,777	\$228,490	\$61,706	\$280,483	24%	19%	-	-
Model City Complex	\$5,112	-	-	-	-	\$5,112	-	-	0%	0%	-	-
Chesterfield Community Center	-	-	-	\$15,906	\$15,906	\$20,392	\$4,486	\$20,392	0%	0%	15%	15%
Soccer Complex Operations	-	-	-	\$382,298	\$382,298	\$390,100	\$7,802	\$390,100	0%	0%	0%	0%
James W. Cownie Baseball Park	\$65,000	-	-	\$67,495	\$67,495	\$3,872	\$1,377	\$68,872	96%	94%	69%	68%
Marina Operations	\$33,898	-	-	\$3,889	\$3,889	\$27,837	\$2,172	\$6,061	872%	559%	222%	142%
Zoo	-	-	-	\$290,000	\$290,000	\$337,170	\$47,170	\$337,170	0%	0%	100%	86%
Downtown Maintenance	\$137,368	-	-	\$567,069	\$438,044	\$8,343	\$575	\$412	24%	24%	0%	0%
Horticulture Maintenance	\$157,168	\$1,930,084	\$45,205	\$126,0971	\$3,236,260	\$3,183,315	\$104,223	\$3,340,483	5%	5%	4%	4%
Park Improvement Planning	\$401,000	\$503,073	\$3,747	\$6,450	\$513,270	\$131,991	\$19,721	\$532,991	78%	75%	101%	97%
Volunteer Programs	\$22,691	\$277,159	\$568	\$41,465	\$319,192	\$303,015	\$6,514	\$325,706	7%	7%	-	-
Environmental Education	\$5,285	\$132,271	-	\$18,625	\$150,896	\$148,691	\$3,080	\$153,976	4%	4%	-	-
TOTAL USER FEES	\$323,180	\$5,720,457	-	\$411,0511	\$9,916,712	\$8,101,825	\$1,508,293	\$11,425,005	-	-	-	-
% OF FULL COST	29%	50%	-	36%	87%	71%	13%	100%	-	-	-	-

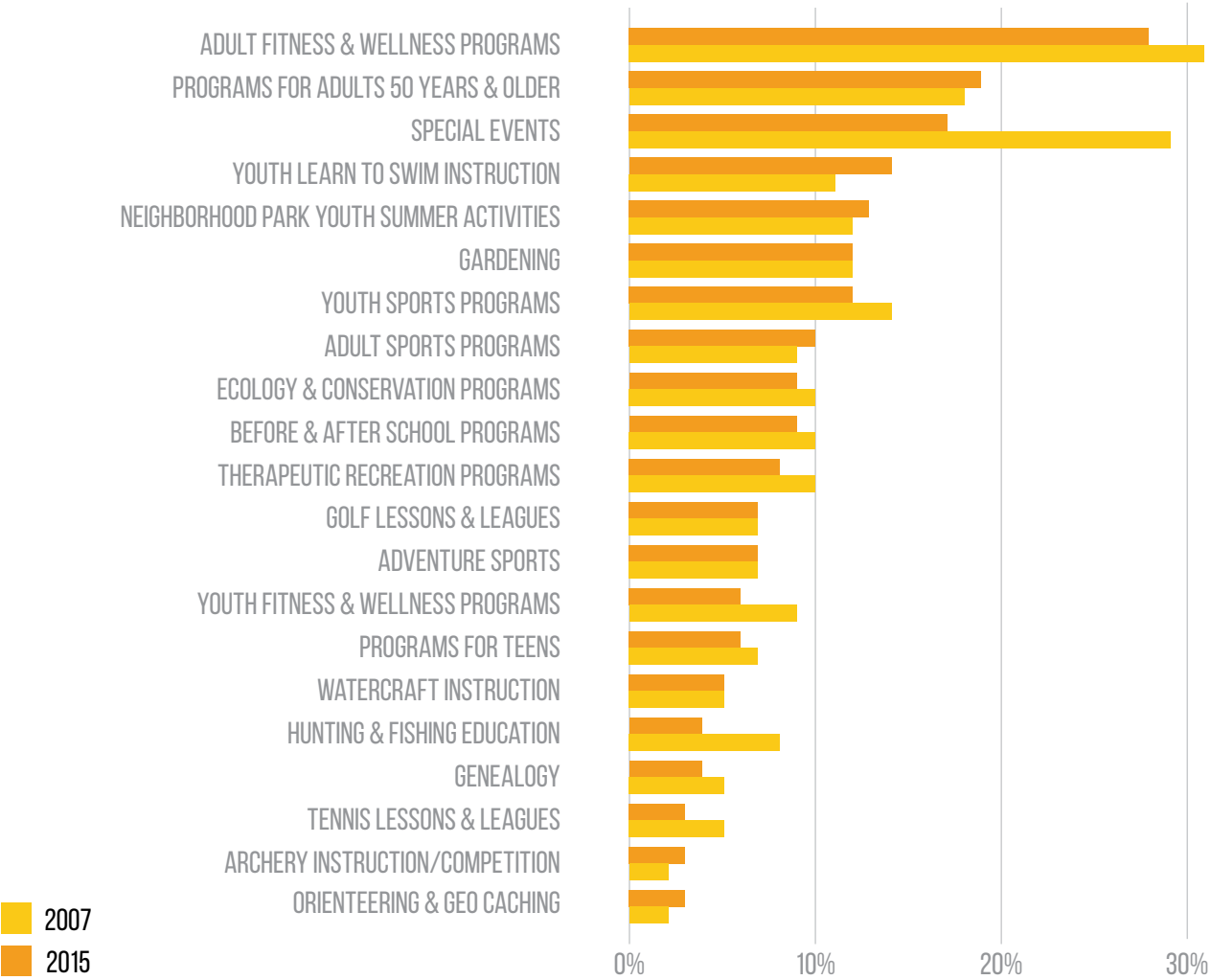


# PRICING AND FEE POLICY

## BEST PRACTICES

### RECREATION PROGRAMS MOST IMPORTANT TO HOUSEHOLDS

by percentage of respondents who select it as one of their top four choices



This survey illustrates public priorities both prior to and following the 2008 recession. Trails, aquatic, cemeteries and nature observation areas are the most important facility elements, and wellness, senior activities, swimming safety and special events are the most important programs and services as of 2015. When Leisure Vision/ETC Institute queried the public regarding their priorities for using tax dollars, trail systems and natural habitats ranked high, along with fixing existing facilities. Funding for athletic fields was the lowest facility priority. There were no questions asked regarding funding programs and services. The following graphs outline the findings of a survey that determined what park and recreation facilities and programs are most important to Des Moines households in 2015 compared to 2007:

# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

## BEST PRACTICES

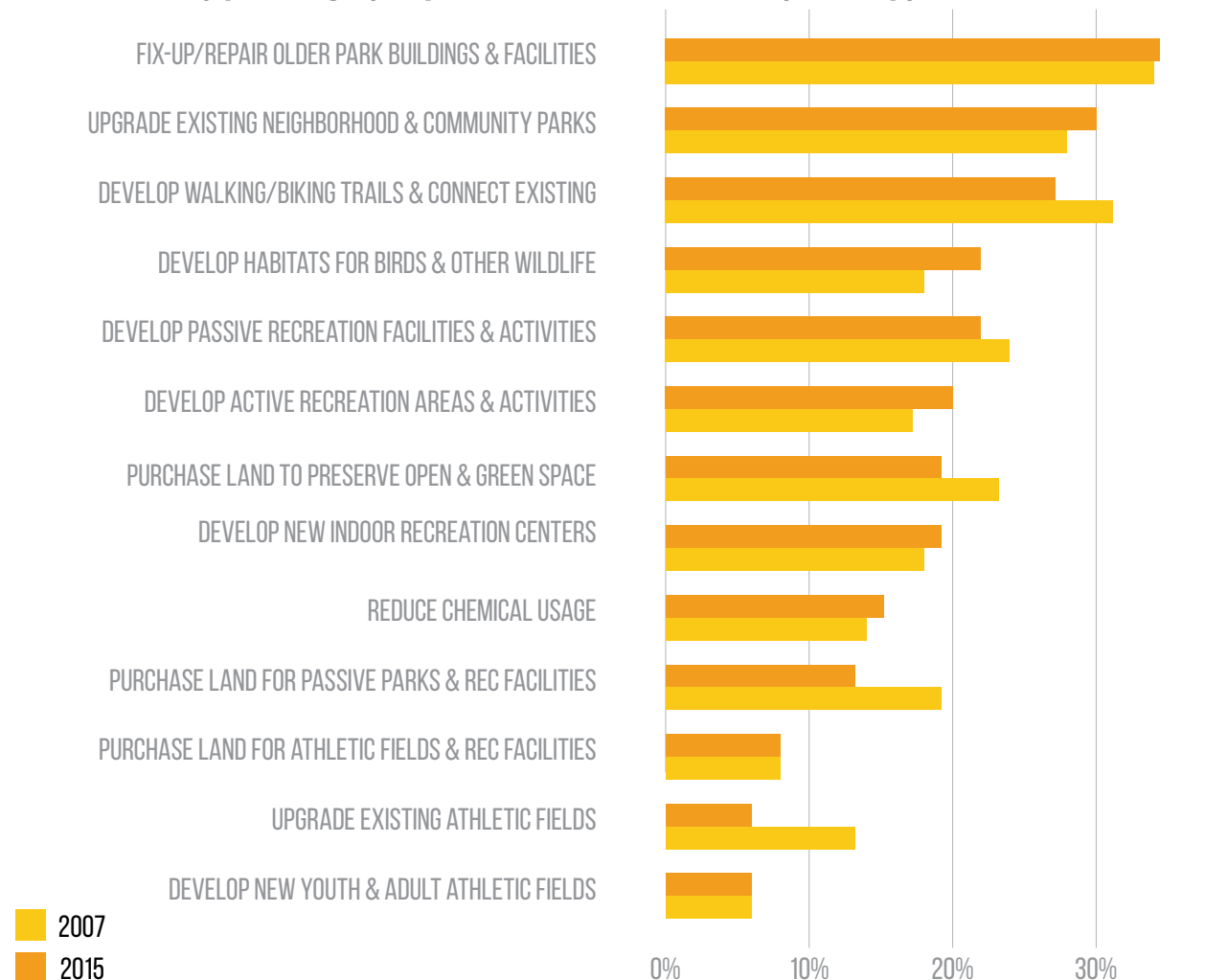
Interviews with Des Moines Parks and Recreation staff, as well as Contracting, Risk Management and Legal, identified that the City does not have PPP policies outside of those that exist as part of the City's contracting processes. To provide the City of Des Moines insight as to the critical components of a well-managed PPP program, and to support a "Culture of Innovative Leadership," the following is an overview of best practices to consider for a successful PPP program.

### FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGEMENT

Public entities employ PPPs to leverage a third party's ability to secure and deploy resources and specialized expertise. The business' lifecycle and capital requirements should dictate the operating and contract structure for the partnership. A successful PPP program is illustrated below.

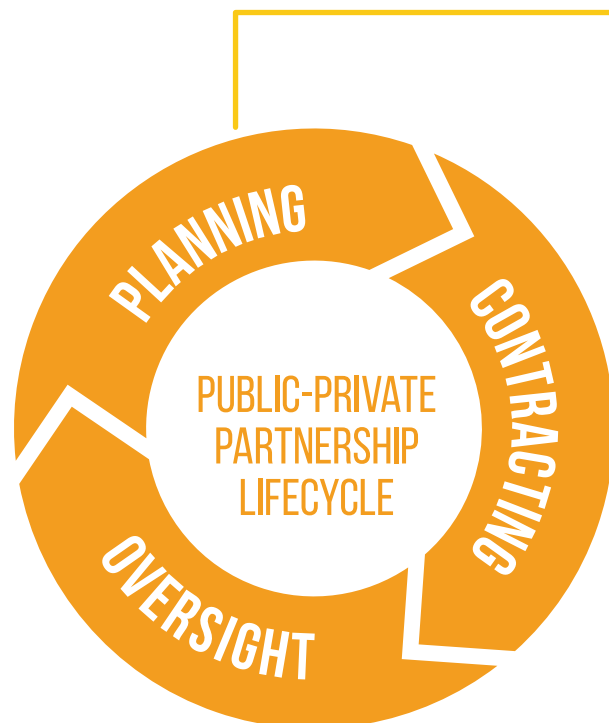
### ACTIONS HOUSEHOLDS ARE MOST WILLING TO FUND WITH CITY TAX DOLLARS

*by percentage of respondents who select it as one of their top four choices*



# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

## BEST PRACTICES



### PLANNING

#### *Business Opportunity Scoping*

- Market Analysis
- Existing Operations Analysis
- Future Operations Analysis
- Facility Analysis

### CONTRACTING

#### *RFP Development & Award*

- Financial & Investment Analysis
- Operational & Maintenance Plan Development
- RFP Analysis Matrices
- Transition Guidance

### CONTRACT OVERSIGHT

#### *Compliance & Monitoring*

- Operating Budget Development/Review
- Cost Containment Monitoring
- Capital and Maintenance Planning and Executing
- Revenue Generation Monitoring
- Service/Facilities Evaluation

### PLANNING ELEMENTS

Planning for PPPs ensures that the relationship aligns with a park unit's natural, cultural and historic resources and addresses market needs. This process typically begins with assessing the market supportability of a business concept or idea. A market analysis assesses the competitive supply and demand for like services to ensure that adequate demand at a competitive price point exists to support the business. If market analysis proves market supportability of the business concept, the next step is to conduct a financial analysis that measures financial feasibility.

If a PPP is going to leverage existing facilities or require new facilities, understanding the condition of facilities and infrastructure is essential. A best practice is to conduct a detailed inventory including age and condition of facilities and infrastructure. The inventory can also provide a plan for addressing the costs to fix and/or improve the facility over its lifecycle. Infrastructure assessments include an identification of where the infrastructure is located and the capacity/condition of the infrastructure (e.g., number of parking spaces, capacity of septic, capacity of transformer, condition of roads, etc.).

Capital planning to maintain the existing/new facilities and supporting infrastructure is critical. Costs to expand and/or maintain



the facilities and infrastructure must be determined. Facility planning must include investments needed for deferred maintenance, investments to improve the assets and costs to maintain the asset over its life. Understanding these costs is essential since asset stewardship must be the priority in all PPP deal structures and contracts.

## CONTRACTING

A PPP best practice is to have agreement types that are available for use that vary based upon the scale of the business opportunity, use of public facilities and investment level. This includes special-use permits that involve commercial use of parks—contracts that include use and non-use of park facilities; contracts that involve improvements to facilities or new construction; and potentially leases to provide for excess land parcels that could be used for visitor services.

Deal structuring for a PPP operation that grosses over \$250K should contemplate financial and investment analysis. Financial analyses build upon a market assessment by applying market- and industry-supported operating expenses against prospective revenues. However, it is important to note that positive financial viability does not necessarily mean that the business opportunity has “investment feasibility.” Financial viability is only an initial, yet important, first step to

testing investment feasibility. In all PPPs, there need to be three returns: a “return to asset,” a “return to the operator” and a “return to the agency.” The estimating of two of these returns results in the final return to the public agency in the form of a fee and a reserve to be reinvested in the asset base. Currently, the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department is not developing PPPs through this methodology.

**The first return** needs to be to the asset in the form of a maintenance reserve, personal property reserve and/or capital fund. The “asset” includes the real property or personal property used for the PPP’s operation. Poorly maintained facilities, grounds and/or personal property results in dissatisfied visitors and, in the end, unsustainable PPP. Stewardship of assets involves addressing deferred maintenance and ensuring an adequate maintenance reserve and/or maintenance fund.

**The second return** is in the form of a market-acceptable return to the operator on their invested capital. Estimating this return involves calculating the unlevered (e.g., not including debt) after-tax return on the invested capital (e.g., startup costs and all other appropriate investments) as required of the business enterprise. For smaller operations, the return can include owner salaries, benefits and bonuses.

## The third return

goes to the public agency in the form of a concession, lease fee or cash flow from operations. This may seem counterintuitive. Why does the public agency receive the last return component? It is because if the first two returns are not in place and adequate, there are overall risks to sustained high-quality visitor service at the concession operation and, ultimately, the concession fee as well. By assessing the agency’s fees last, we minimize the risk to the overall business enterprise and create a balanced public-private partnership.

Offering a PPP to the market through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process needs to be done in an informative way to demonstrate that the prospective client has done their due diligence and is delivering a business opportunity to market that is feasible and equitable to the parties. An RFP or Prospectus for services is typically set up in a logical progressive fashion.

A typical table of contents may resemble:

- Cover
- Table of Content
- Business Opportunity Summary
- Proposal Instructions
- Proposal Package
- Draft Contract/Lease
- Appendices (as necessary)

# PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

## BEST PRACTICES

The Cover should evoke a representative sample of images of the business opportunities—images that stimulate a level of interest and excitement in the possibilities of the requirements contained within the body of the RFP.

The Business Opportunity is the section of the RFP that conveys the extent of the business opportunity available, substantiated with market research and analysis findings that deliver credibility of the work done to justify the attractiveness of the opportunity. This is the principal sales document of the RFP/ Prospectus. The agency needs to demonstrate the strength and attractiveness of the business opportunity through data, graphs, charts and tables and associated narratives, maps, and photos of facilities, views, etc. to prospective bidders. Bidders need to know the business opportunity is worth pursuing.

The proposal instructions and package specifically outline what the agency expects of the prospective bidder and the criteria by which the agency will evaluate their bid. Specific standard schedules, templates and conveyance letter are most beneficial in a consistent and efficient review of bids.

The draft contract should be consistent in its contents, as best as the agency can achieve. Exhibits to the standard contract in the areas of operational, maintenance,

risk management, etc. are the typical areas where the agency should include contract, service or operational specificity. This format replicates consistency in approach regardless of what the business opportunity is. It also mitigates the possibility of omissions when the task of putting together RFPs/solicitations is given to multiple agencies or individuals.

Contract appendices include land assignment maps, facility specifications, utility capacities, flood plan maps, etc. that the agency can customize based on the unique nature of the business opportunity, extent of facilities and breadth of land assignment.

### CONTRACT OVERSIGHT

The contract oversight function requires active engagement in monitoring, evaluating and influencing PPP management in operations to ensure that the owner (City) and operator objectives remain aligned for the mutual benefit of the parties, their guests and the integrity of the real and personal property.

Effective contract oversight starts with setting up a disciplined and scheduled communication protocol. Active and frequent engagement ensures alignment by all parties in their actions and best manages the prospects of surprises. The contract should specify the details of scheduling regular monthly or

quarterly meetings to discuss performance, address opportunities and concerns and to hold the parties accountable for their actions.

The contract should specify the details, schedule and expectations for establishing a reporting protocol at contract onset. Reporting requirements could include guest satisfaction data, financial, real property maintenance and/or custodial schedules and statements, and other data exchanged and discussed in the context of whether it is meeting party objectives, return expectations and housekeeping and maintenance.

The contract oversight function should be a collaborative effort of the stakeholders, driving decisions for the mutual benefit of the parties. It should be constructive, accountable, measurable and attainable. It should not be a “gotcha” process, where the owner is continually challenging and setting the operator up for failure, as failure of the operator will ultimately lead to failure of the owner in terms of meeting the overall mission and objectives of the business opportunity.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The City of Des Moines does not have policies in place to support the setting of program and services or PPP fees. This should be a priority for consideration under the category

of a need to improve the business practices of Des Moines Parks and Recreation to support a “culture of innovative leadership.”

### FEE-BASED PROGRAMS

Des Moines Parks and Recreation needs a pricing policy that is based on principles of justice and fairness, and involves the use of cost recovery. The agency can accomplish this through the completion of an in-depth cost-recovery analysis. This is a best practice that most municipal park and recreation systems use as the basis for establishing their fees and charges for recreation programs and services. The project team provides details on the scope of services that this type of analysis would require in the Appendix.

### EXECUTING AN EFFECTIVE PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

Des Moines Parks and Recreation needs to establish policies and procedures for its PPP program that are based on industry best practices. It can begin by assembling an accurate overview of its PPP program through the development of a contract abstract for each of its PPP structures. The project team expected that this baseline information would be available, but it was not. Also, using the PPP best practices outlined above, the City should begin to document the parts of the planning,

contracting for and management of PPPs that it currently has in place resulting in an “as-is” analysis. This will provide the foundation for developing future policies and procedures.

Key elements for underwriting a PPP include understanding one’s existing inventory of assets, their condition and future capital investment requirements. Before new opportunities for PPPs can be investigated, it is essential that the department understands its current inventory of owned assets and their requirements to stay competitive and live

out their useful lives. A schedule and process for completing condition assessments on built inventory would be a positive first step in properly maintaining these assets, and is critical to supporting assets that support both the revenue as well as the PPP program.

PPP fees must be set using financial and investment analyses, methods, processes and tools—none of which appear to exist or are used in the process for underwriting successful PPPs. So, beyond policies, tools and procedures are needed to ensure





# STRATEGIES

that there is consistency in the manner in which the department sets fees for future business opportunities to be advertised as a PPP. Proper and thorough underwriting is what gives credibility to a business opportunity offered to market, ensuring equitability of returns to all stakeholders.

## REVENUE AND FEE-BASED PROGRAMS

Des Moines Parks and Recreation needs to recognize there is an opportunity to grow earned income but the policies, procedures and staff positions are not in place to achieve this goal.

A first step is to establish a Revenue Management/Business Development position focused on the management and future growth of revenue and fee-based activities. This position would manage existing earned-income streams while developing the business plans and policies necessary to guide future growth of earned income. This position would also be responsible for coordinating with the Friends of Des Moines Parks foundation for the growth of contributed income. The best location for management of contributed income is within the nonprofit, due to the competencies required as well as the ability of the nonprofit to be nimble and to accept funds on behalf of

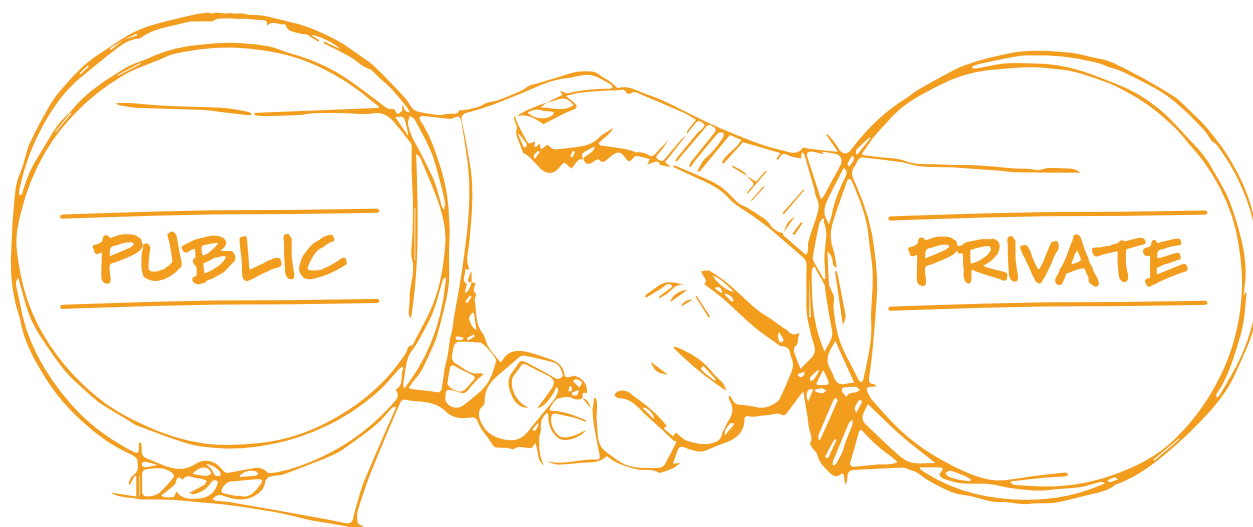
the City. It is critical that the nonprofit works strategically with the department, and the proposed position should be the nonprofit's day-to-day liaison. The proposed position would be responsible for developing a business plan for the program area as well as the policy and procedures to drive the growth of the plan.

In conclusion, Des Moines Parks and Recreation needs to embrace the fundamentals of managing an enterprise that is in part generated by resources received outside of its tax base. This means recognizing the importance of earned and contributed income streams and ensuring that the policies, procedures, tools and skill sets are in place to focus on this program area. The "big idea" is the "fundamentals," and an investment in this area will have a meaningful impact on the ability to grow and enhance revenue and fees for the Parks and Recreation Department.

A separate Appendix item details trend information by asset class.

## PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

In order to cultivate a "culture of innovative leadership," it is recommended that Des Moines Parks and Recreation staff receive up-to-date training in fundraising and partnerships. Additionally, it is recommended that the department establish policies for sustainable funding that include a formal



pricing structure and policy for setting PPP fees as well as a policy for selecting PPPs and other partners with whom to collaborate.

The following policy example is adapted from the Austin, TX Parks and Recreation Department's Public Private Partnership Policy Overview and is intended to serve as a guide.

<http://www.austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=147511>

It is recommended that Des Moines Parks and Recreation establish a partnership policy for working with PPPs, selecting partners that:

- Demonstrate similar values, vision, mission, goals, strategic priorities and image as the Parks and Recreation Department, and result in mutual public and department benefit
- Bring significant new revenue, resources, ideas, innovations, specialized expertise, technologies and/or partners to advance or enhance park or recreation facility or amenity development through the investment of private resources
- Commit to share resources, responsibilities and rewards, while minimizing risk
- Ensure no legal, regulatory or legislative prohibition to involving the private partner in the provision of the service or the project
- Are motivated to implement services that result in a significant and

measurable public benefit, in relation to the potential public costs

- Allow park and recreation services to be established, continued or enhanced, while maintaining or reducing public tax support
- Are committed to upholding the department's policy on equity and making decisions to ensure equity based on geographic locations and economic conditions

### WORKING WITH FRIENDS GROUPS

In support of these suggested qualifications, the NRPA recommends the following strategies for agencies working with friends groups.<sup>{6}</sup> To ensure that the friends group's mission matches that of the park agency, NRPA suggests:

- Holding regular meetings with the friends group
- Creating friends groups where none exist
- Making a list of needs (or wants) and sharing this with the friends group

Working with friends groups such as Friends of Des Moines Parks is an effective way to build relationships with the community and fund programs and services like the "learn to swim" programs. Friends groups help residents connect to the park and recreation system in a more profound way. They also do an excellent job at organizing special events

and volunteer outreach initiatives. Training volunteers to be stewards of their parks and building a volunteer network helps park agencies reduce maintenance costs and creates a sense of park ownership in the community.

The law office of Lehmann Strobel wrote an article, Fundraising through Friends Groups, which emphasizes the importance of partnering with friends groups that have sufficient autonomy to manage their own affairs and exercise the obligations of an independent nonprofit organization. The article reaffirms the importance of aligning with the agency's mission and further suggests that the friends group has sufficient involvement in the agency to be able to exercise stewardship over donor funds. The key to a successful partnership is a high level of trust and willingness to collaborate.<sup>{7}</sup>

1. Crompton and Lamb, Marketing Government and Social Services. New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1986, p.149.  
 2. Ibid, p.155  
 3. Ibid, p. 155  
 4. Ibid, p. 164  
 5. Crompton and Lamb, Marketing Government and Social Services. New York: J. Wiley & Sons, 1986, p.324.  
 6. O'Connor, Jimmy. Friends Groups: People with Passion for Parks. NRPA Parks & Recreation Magazine. February 1, 2016. <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2016/february/friends-groups-people-with-passion-for-parks/>.  
 7. Fundraising Through Friends Groups. Lehmann Strobel PC. <http://www.lehmannstrobel.com/articles/fundraising-through-friends-groups/>.

## FRIENDS OF DES MOINES PARKS



Friends of Des Moines Parks has an opportunity to expand its available resources and take on a more strategic role in the development of the parks and recreation system now and into the future. As potentially the closest, ongoing private-sector partner for the City's parks, this Friends group can grow its leadership in many aspects of the "Innovation" chapter, should the members choose to do so.

In particular, the group is called on here to look at a primary role in the management and growth of revenue and fee-based activities for Des Moines Parks and Recreation. The flexibility of a private non-profit arm to pursue and secure contributed income can be an exceptional asset to a public agency. This plan supports the Friends development of their fundraising plan and encourages collaboration to determine priorities for fundraising that can result in a part- or full-time staff for expanding the fundraising potential for the organization.

Close-to-home models of similar non-profits include the Great Outdoors Foundation (working with Polk County Conservation) and the Water Works Park Foundation Board, partnering with Des Moines Water Works and others to pursue game-changing projects.



# MARKETING AND OUTREACH

Marketing and outreach serves an important role in informing the community of programs and services that benefit their health and quality of life. With over 1000 programs and many special events offered annually, the department would benefit from a marketing and communication plan to ensure residents are getting the information they need to fully use the departments services.

## SITUATION ANALYSIS

### Staff Responsibility

Des Moines Park and Recreation employs a Marketing Supervisor who is responsible for handling billboard, media and small program sponsorships. The Director of the Parks and Recreation Department manages larger outreach initiatives and a close partnership has been formed with Friends of Des Moines Parks to provide outreach for planned giving. When asked about promotional efforts it was unclear who is responsible for promotions, as no single staff member has this responsibility. With the development of new facilities, programs and special events it is recommended that promotional efforts and outreach responsibilities be outlined in a marketing plan. This approach is a deliberate and thoughtful method to increase use of Des Moines Parks and Recreation assets and programs.

### Communication Channels

The following channels of communication are used by department staff and Friends of Des Moines Parks to inform residents of available programs, special events, volunteer opportunities, maintenance updates and important information regarding operating hours, closings and safety hazards:

- Website
- Text alerts

Social engagement platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube). Since 2016, the following social engagement platforms have shown an increase in use:

- **Facebook**  
This is the most popular platform among park users. The department's Facebook page has 10,899 likes, an increase of 2,546 likes since 2016.
- **Twitter**  
3,326 followers, an increase of 611 followers since 2016.
- **Instagram**  
2,280 followers, an increase of 586 followers since 2016.

### Outreach Initiatives Identified

- **Annual Report**  
A publicly available Annual Report does an excellent job of highlighting

the department's social outreach, programs, services and milestones in an easily digestible, marketable way.

- **Monthly Newsletter**

### Branding

- **Logo**  
The parks and recreation department uses the following logo to indicate ownership and initiatives:



- **Additional Branding**  
Following are a couple examples of additional branding, utilized consistently to help residents identify services:





# MARKETING AND OUTREACH



## Wayfinding Signage

In 2007, the department launched a wayfinding signage plan and is currently in Phase 5 of implementing the plan. New primary signs were added to the following parks and facilities in 2017: Brook Run, Burke, Cheatom, Frisbie, Jordan, Riley, Stewart Square, Vlassis Greenway, the Dan and Mary Kelly Family Sprayground and Jay Spence Shelter House signage.

## RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES FOR DES MOINES

The following strategies outline important considerations for the Department's existing marketing efforts as well as for the future development of a Marketing and Outreach Plan.

- It is recommended that the Marketing Team continue to use consistent branding and color schemes on all outreach and promotional distributions. Doing so is especially important for pop-up programming due to the variability in location. It is suggested that the Department purchase a pop-up program flag with the brand on it to fly at all program events as well as side-branding for pop-up program vehicles.
- Adopting an agency image program-policy is important consisting of printed materials standards, style guide documents, approved logos and use, signage, social media, displays-

bulletin boards, telephone etiquette, email signature and staff appearance.

- Internally, the Department should clearly establish roles and responsibilities for marketing staff that may include the following communication channels: website updates, social media outreach, text alerts, promotion, etc.
- Follow the AIDA approach for promotion{1}:
  - Increase awareness (A)
  - Attract interest (I)
  - Create desire (D)
  - Initiate action (A)
- Organize a Marketing Team and hold regular meetings to initiate creative marketing ideas, stay current on marketing trends, and evaluate current initiatives.
- Complete development of way-finding signage and continue to make signage a priority in new park developments (include maps, destinations, restrooms and food).
- Update website with new program offerings and special events. Categorize programs and events that include, for example, Winter Recreation, Water Activities, Nature Programs, Art, etc.
- Implement wildlife and environmental education signage in natural areas.
- Develop appropriate signage for

water recreation user safety that may include water quality reports, fishing regulations, and ice conditions for ice-skating and fishing.

- Implement signs that promote physical activity as studies show that parks with this type of signage have a higher rate of park use than parks without those messages.<sup>{2}</sup>
- Avoid signs that prohibit activity as this type of signage is found to decrease overall park use rather than just the targeted activity that is unwanted.<sup>{3}</sup>
- Develop a programming brochure and guide for each season that includes a calendar schedule of activities, location, and cost information.
- Develop a 1-2 page flier summary of “What You Get for \$128 a Year” section of the 2017 Annual Report to post on website and social engagement platforms.
- Identify communication channels for each target market and user segment. Some examples may include newspaper or flyers at community recreation centers for senior citizens, mobile apps for millennials, email to neighborhood associations or announcement at local meeting or event.
- Define target markets and segments for outreach initiatives, which may include underserved portions of the community, neighborhood associations, friends

groups, private partners, parents of youth, senior citizens, etc. The following bases of segmentation are described below<sup>{4}</sup>:

- *Demographics*  
Income, age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, and family life cycle
- *Geography*  
Geoclusters (people who live close to each other more likely to be similar); proximity (people who live close to a service are more likely to use it)
- *Psychographics*  
Personality, motivation, lifestyle variables (activities, interests and opinions), and social class variables
- *Behavioral Characteristics*  
Frequency of participation, Loyalty to a program, volunteer group, or special event
- *Benefits*  
What the participants are looking to gain from the program
- Ensure that the Marketing Team is committed to social equity when distributing promotional materials. For example, low-income populations are less likely to have smart phones or internet. Consider alternative communication channels for these populations.
- Develop marketing materials, signage

and promotions in Spanish or other common language commonly spoken.

- Clearly state and implement content guidelines for promotion that consistently reinforce the brand, story and goals of the marketing efforts.
- Implement evaluation methods for marketing efforts to determine whether targeted users are being reached through the designated channels.

1. Hurd, Amy R., Robert J. Barcelona, and John T. Meldrum. Leisure Services Management. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008.  
 2. Harnik, Peter. You Have My Word on It: Signage in City Parks. Parks & Recreation, March 2018.  
 3. Ibid.  
 4. Hurd, Amy R., Robert J. Barcelona, and John T. Meldrum. Leisure Services Management. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2008.







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***Making The***

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PLANWORK

08



# HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The first chapter, Vision and Context, paints the picture of the driving forces behind the plan and the Des Moines Parks and Recreation system's role within a larger regional context.

The second chapter, Benchmarking/Level-of-Service, should be used as a reference to understand how Des Moines Parks and Recreation compares to its peers, and what aspirational cities are doing that Des Moines might like to emulate. Perhaps most notable there is the work Minneapolis (and a few other cities) have started in order to develop an understanding of equitable outcomes in their communities. This chapter then goes on to develop baselines for measuring success and targeting priority work ahead.

The Goal Chapters (III–VII) each appear with a vision, priorities and a check list to get the work started, strategies to move the goal forward and an individualized vision statement that can serve, essentially, as a “means test” for future action. Is what we're planning going to help us reach this element of the vision?

In Making the Goals Real, the plan discusses the priority of the Innovation goal but, to some extent, each goal can launch some level of implementation even while the Innovation work is getting underway. Each goal appears with an early plan for action.

## MAKING THE GOALS REAL

The detailed strategic plan in the Appendix of this report should be assigned to someone who will be held responsible for prompting, monitoring and supporting the overall progress of this plan—a “plan leader,” if you will. The plan implementation team should also have one person assigned for each of the goals: equity, attraction, heart, nature and innovation—a “goal leader.”

In addition to the high-level work appearing in the body and summary of this plan, the Strategic Plan in the Appendix of this report also aligns with those goals and can be used to help direct action/work plans. It should be the responsibility of each goal leader to make an annual action plan in partnership with appropriate agency staff to work toward the goal for that year, and then ensure milestones for that year are met.

Similarly, the plan leader should meet at least monthly with the goal leaders to assess progress, and the planning team can help overcome obstacles in the action plans that may surface as this work progresses.

Particular attention should be paid to the baseline work outlined in the Innovation goal so that other goals do not end up struggling to achieve success due to a lagging inventory or other foundational work. But no one needs to

“

*If there are  
things that need  
to be done,  
we can do  
them today.*

– Mayor  
Frank Cownie





wait to do something of substance. Every one of these goals has been supplied with a “Let’s Get Started” checklist that should make work planning for the first year of this plan relatively easy to accomplish—getting this plan off to a good start and helping lay the foundation for action plans in years two, three and beyond.

Finally, due to the many policy pieces included in this report, a team member with particular skill in developing and passing policy should be part of the planning team, working with each of the goal leaders to help ensure their goal’s policy requirements become a reality.

### NEW PLANS TO CREATE

It often feels counter-intuitive for one plan to recommend other plans, but a Comprehensive Master Plan must take a 15,000-foot view and acknowledge where additional work lies ahead. In that vein, this plan suggests the following:

#### *Community Outreach and Equity*

- **Marketing Plan**  
See “Marketing and Outreach” in the Innovation chapter for more details
- **Equity Plan**  
Dialogue for detailed, comprehensive Equity Plan means for conducting workshops and connecting with the public to identify and address equity issues, to develop in partnership with Des Moines

Human and Civil Rights Commission and other agencies working on this topic; engagement of an expert might be valuable

#### *Master Planning*

- **Individual Park Master Plans**
- **Sub-Area Park Plans**
- **Aquatics Study**  
Addressing the need/feasibility of future pools and aquatic centers
- **Trail Plan**  
Complete streets update to enhance park, trails access, and connectivity

#### *Ecosystem Health and Resilience Planning*

- Systemwide Natural Resources Management Plan (NRMP)
- Individual Park NRMPs

#### *Financial Planning*

- **Cost Recovery Plan and Pricing Policy**
- **Contributed Income/Philanthropic Plan**  
Completed in conjunction with Friends of Des Moines Parks
- **Facility Condition Assessment Plans**  
for Capital Allocation Decisions (Inventory)

## MEASURING SUCCESS

### *Sustainable Funding Strategies*

- **Baseline Cost-Recovery Percentage**
- **Changes in Cost-Recovery Percentage**
- **Public-Private Partnerships**
  - Percentage and Type
  - Changes in Number and Type
- **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 (June survey) in the natural areas of parks
- Acres of invasive plants in natural areas

### *Health and Equity*

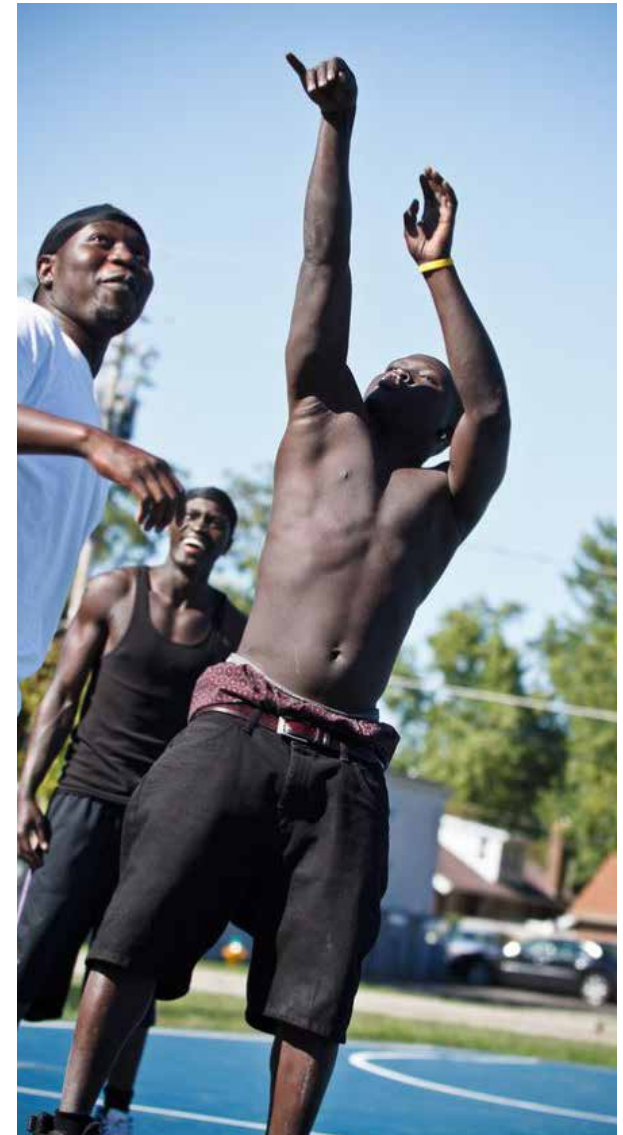
- **Shrinking of Equity-needs Zones**  
Identified on baseline Equity Map in Benchmarking chapter
- **Set Baseline “Sense of Well-Being”**
- **Shrinking “Red Zones” in Health Map**  
Identified on baseline Health Map in Benchmarking chapter

### *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

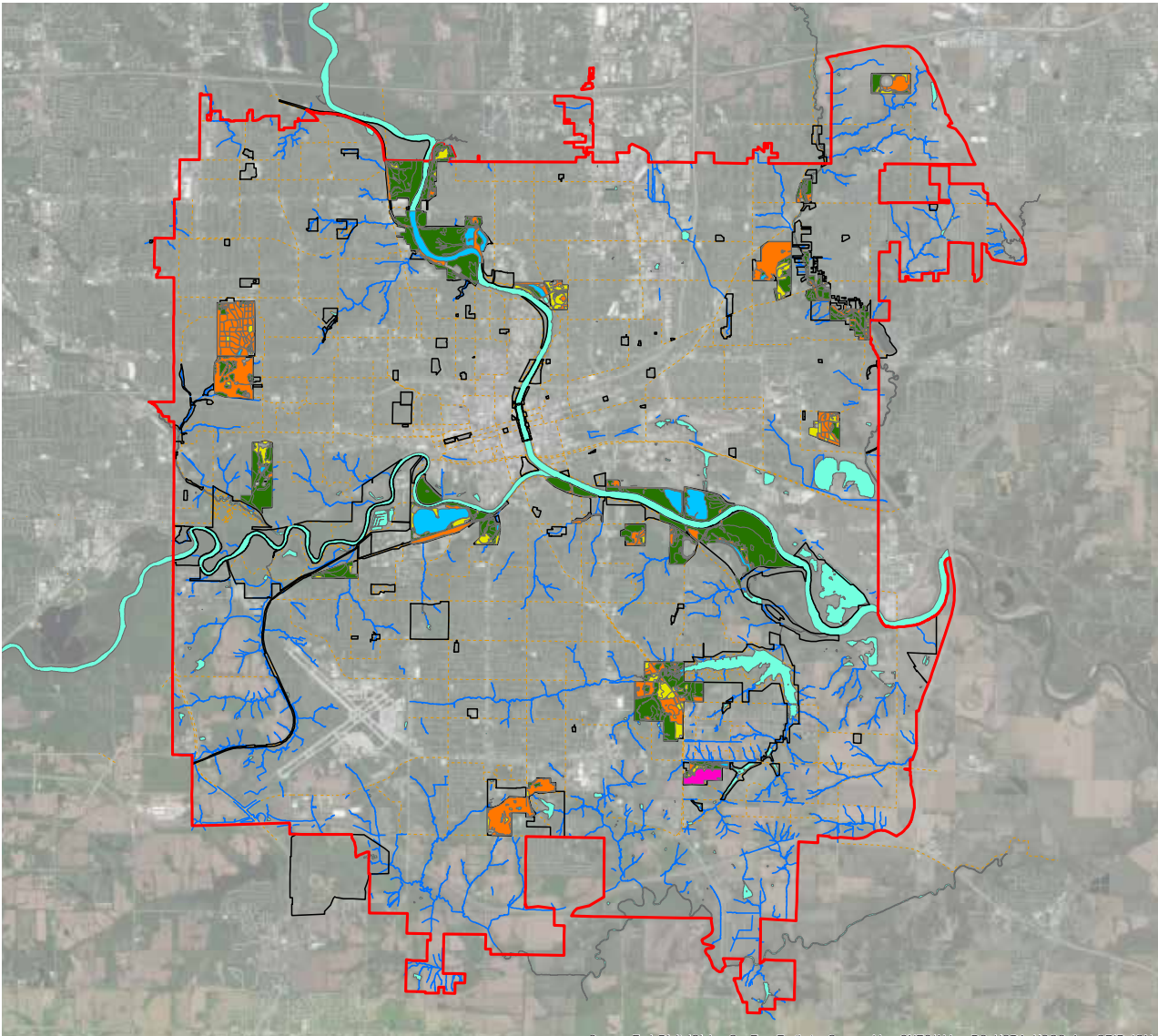


APPENDIX

09



# IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES



## Des Moines Parks and Recreation

### Existing Land Cover

- Existing Land Cover**
- Agricultural
  - Cultural
  - Cultural with Restoration Potential
  - Natural/Semi-Natural
  - Open Water
  - No Data
  - Des Moines Boundary
  - Des Moines Park Boundary
  - River, Lake, Pond
  - Creek
  - Trails

Data Sources:  
- City of Des Moines, Parks and Recreation Department  
- Natural Resources Inventory  
- Iowa DNR  
- Iowa State ImageServer

AES Project Number: 17-0407  
Date: 1/19/18  
File Name: AES natural areas\_2018-01-19



Applied Ecological Services, Inc.  
21938 Mushtown Road  
Prior Lake, MN 55372  
952-447-1919  
[www.appliedeco.com](http://www.appliedeco.com)



## ECOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES AND LAND COVER

Land cover is a basic measure of how parks are used. Cultural land cover is pavement, buildings, playing fields and mowed turf, occupying about a third of Des Moines' park acreage. Natural and semi-natural land cover includes forests, savannas, prairies, wetlands and water. Together these are called "natural areas." Natural areas make up nearly 2,000 acres of Des Moines parkland.

The majority of natural areas in Des Moines parks consists of young forest and woodland, old fields and open water. Seven parks have 81% of the park system's natural areas: Prospect & Prospect, Cownie Soccer, South Des Moines River, Ewing, Gray's Lake, North Des Moines River, Greenwood-Ashworth and Four Mile. Each park has at least 100 acres of natural areas. While natural areas are found at other parks, they are much smaller—all but one having fewer than 40 acres. Golf courses and cemeteries make up a large percentage of the system's acreage but have few natural areas. A few parks have the potential to expand natural areas by converting areas of mowed turf with trees to native plantings. Places best suited for turf-to-native conversions are Ewing, Grandview Park and Golf Course and Union and Birdland.

## DIVERSITY AND RARITIES

The diversity of native plants and animals indicates the health of an ecosystem. Likewise, the more species of plants and animals in an ecosystem, the more resilient that ecosystem is to environmental change. Diversity enables ecosystems to withstand and recover more quickly from severe storms, drought, flooding and invasive species colonization. Not surprisingly, then, a pillar of conservation is to protect biological diversity. The uncommon or endangered plants and animals in the landscape already have low populations, putting them at the highest risk of disappearing from natural areas in the region.

### Vegetation

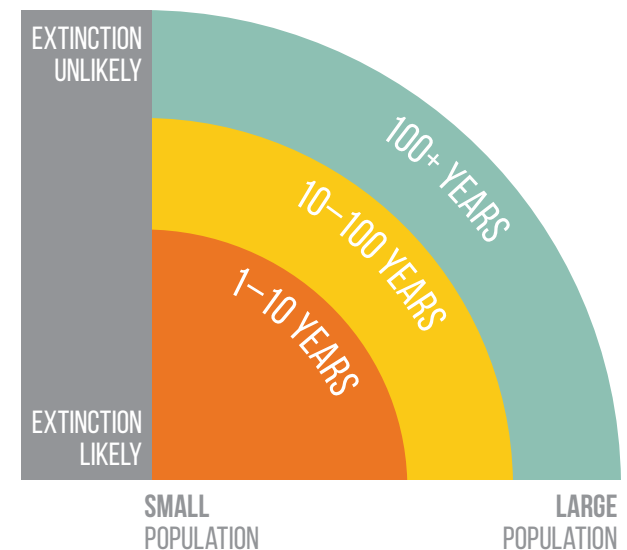
The 2014 NRI identified 651 plant species, 459 of which were native to central Iowa. This is 30% of the state's entire native flora! Species that indicate high-quality plant communities—"conservative" species—comprised 17% of the native species. Places with many conservative species are the highest-quality natural areas in the system.

Eight upland species are endangered, threatened or of special concern in Iowa. In addition, three species not found in the 2014 NRI are found in the region and are considered threatened by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

- Mead's Milkweed (*Asclepias meadii*)
- Prairie Bush-Clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*)
- Western Prairie Fringed Orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*)

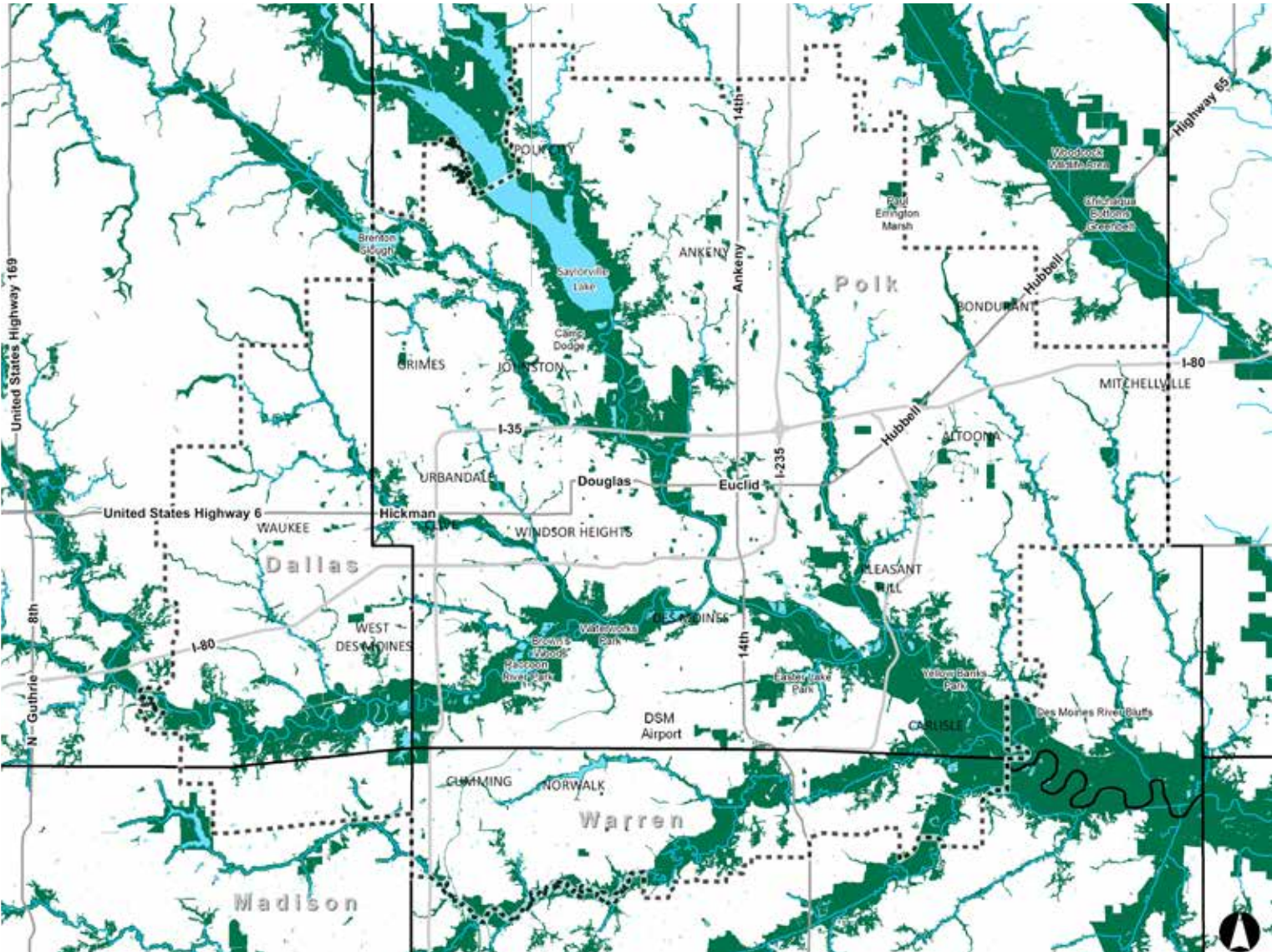
### Wildlife

Wildlife surveys were not conducted in the 2014 NRI, and few have ever been conducted in the City's park system. Bird surveys were completed by the Iowa Ornithological Union (2017) at several City parks and natural areas; results can be found at <http://www.iowabirds.org/birds/DataSets.aspx>.





# IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES



## THE TOMORROW PLAN

CENTRAL IOWA REGION  
Conservation Overlay  
All Natural & Protected Lands

- MPO Project Area
- County Boundary
- Streams (2nd Order and Above)
- Lakes and Ponds
- Conservation Overlay

Source:  
State Wildlife Action Plan 2010  
NLCD 2006  
NWI  
City of Des Moines  
IA DNR  
USFWS

0 1 2 4 6 Miles



Casual observations over the years suggest that Des Moines parks support a moderate diversity of animal species, most of which are common or uncommon (but not rare). The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service indicates that it may be possible to find three federally listed species in the City, if surveys were conducted at the right time and in the right place.

- Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*)  
–federally endangered
- Northern Long-Eared Bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*)–federally threatened
- Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum*)  
–federally endangered

## ISSUES AFFECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

The loss and degradation of Des Moines' natural resources have many causes, listed briefly below and discussed at greater length in the Appendix.

### Loss of Natural Areas

Conversion of natural areas to cultural or developed landscapes removes habitat for native vegetation and wildlife.

### Loss of “Core” Habitat

Many wildlife species—often SGCNs—require large blocks of diverse, high-quality native habitat. Large habitat blocks

are not common in Des Moines and are mostly along rivers and streams.

### Edge Effects

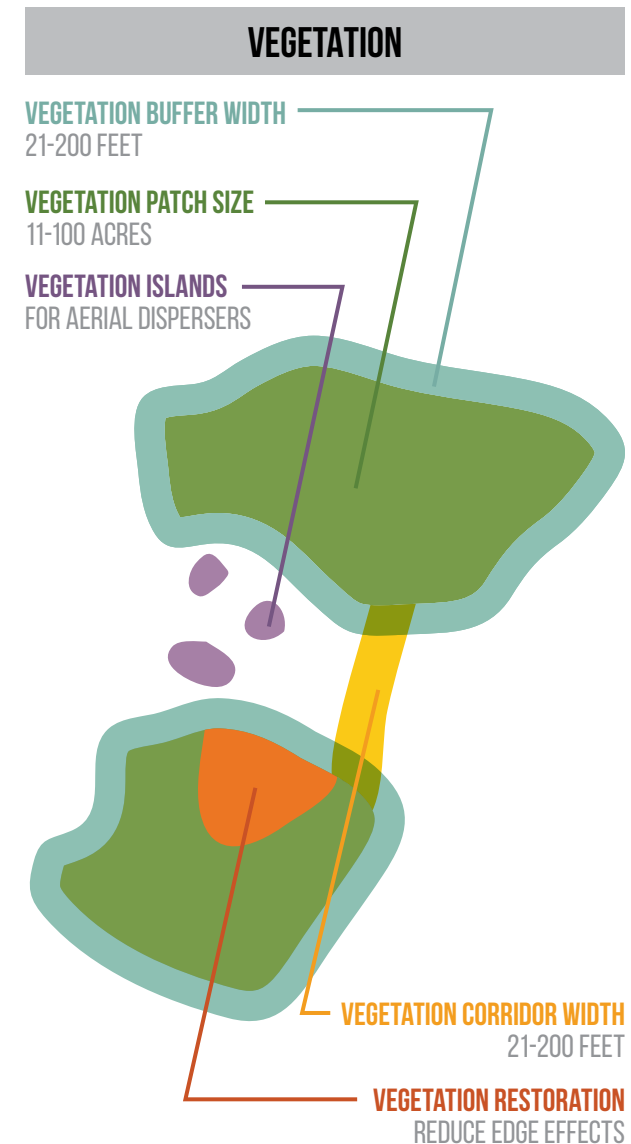
Edge effects are the influences from surrounding or nearby land uses that damage natural areas. Noise and urban activity, water and air pollution, invasive species and microclimate warming can penetrate the edges of natural areas, degrading their quality and value as habitat.

### Loss of Connections

Plants and animals need to move around to maintain good genetic diversity in their populations. Loss of genetic diversity leads to inbreeding and eventual disappearance from an area. Urban areas and large agricultural regions place many obstacles in the paths of plants and animals moving among small, disconnected natural areas.

### Invasive Plants

At this moment in the evolution of the natural landscape of Des Moines, invasive plants pose the greatest threat. Such species often establish and thrive in disturbed areas but will colonize in even better-quality habitat if conditions are right. They usually reduce the abundance of native plants and affect animal populations by reducing the amount of food and overall quality of their habitat.





# IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT NATURAL RESOURCES

By changing the makeup of plant and animal communities, they can make areas less resilient in the face of future disturbance and environmental change. Controlling invasive plants is often the focus for most ecological restoration and management efforts.

## *Invasive Animals*

Invasive animals are most common in rivers and lakes. Asian carp and Zebra mussel damage the ecosystems they colonize in many ways and are hard to control, let alone eradicate. The Emerald ash borer (EAB) was found in 2015 in West Des Moines and Urbandale but it has not been reported in Des Moines itself. Given its history elsewhere, its eventual appearance seems certain to have a devastating effect on the many mature ash trees of the region. Gypsy moth has arrived in the City and harms native oaks and other species by repeated defoliation. Wood from areas with these pests must be handled in a way that does not spread the eggs or larvae of these species.

## *Plant Pathogens*

Oak wilt has been in Des Moines for many years. Species in the red oak group are especially vulnerable and warrant special management to stop the spread of this disease. Bur oak blight was recently noticed by the Iowa DNR around the state. Given the importance of bur oak in parks and open

spaces, understanding and preventing the spread of the blight should be a top priority.

## *Damage to Streams, Rivers and Lakes*

The streams, rivers and lakes of Des Moines support hundreds of species of plants and animals that need water for part or most of their life cycle. Some are SGCNs species. The poor-quality water, however, of some Des Moines water bodies is unsuitable for these life forms, in particular freshwater mussels, aquatic life forms called “macroinvertebrates” (think big bugs) and small unique fish species, like darters and shiners. Many water bodies in the City are often turbid with suspended sediment or green from algae growth. At some locations, City park managers have reduced the stressful inputs of sediment, nutrients and excess runoff by installing stormwater best practices and stabilizing the beds and banks of water bodies.

## *Future Changes from a Changing Climate*

People are seeing the early effects of climate change in Iowa. A recent study of climate change impacts revealed the following changes that may affect Des Moines’ natural areas in the future (Iowa Climate Change Impacts Committee 2011).

- Generally increasing rainfall amounts and severe storms, with increases runoff
- Generally increasing temperature and humidity in different seasons

- A variety of adverse effects on agricultural production
- A variety of adverse effects on native plants and wildlife

Management of natural resources, including water bodies, will need to consider the changing climate in order to reduce any negative effects on parks, infrastructure and quality of experience.



# COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

## PEER AND ASPIRATIONAL

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PEER CITIES				
	Service Area Population <sup>1</sup>	Land Area <sup>2</sup> in Square Miles	Population per Square Mile	Median Income <sup>3</sup>
Des Moines	212,859	81	2,632	\$48,088
St. Paul	297,160	52	5,717	\$50,820
Madison	243,122	77	3,166	\$54,896
Denver	663,303	153	4,335	\$56,258
Austin	907,779	298	3,047	\$60,939
Minneapolis	404,670	54	7,498	\$52,611
Omaha	443,072	127	3,486	\$50,827
BENCHMARKS				
Average	493,184	127	4,542	\$54,392
Median	423,871	102	3,911	\$53,754

The selected peer cities represent cities primarily in the Midwest region while the aspirational cities selected span across the U.S. The largest city, Austin, Texas, had a 2016 population estimate of 907,779, while the smallest community selected, Madison, Wisconsin, had 243,122 residents in 2016 and most closely compares to the Des Moines, Iowa, 2016 population estimate of 212,859. The average population of the benchmark cities was 453,138, higher than Des Moines's population, and thus a good picture of what Des Moines might plan for as it continues to grow.

*Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

*Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

1. Figures for population accessed from 2016 American Community Survey 5-yr Estimates
2. Figures for land area accessed from 2010 Census Quick Facts
3. Figures for income accessed from 2016 American Community Survey 5-yr Estimates







# AGENCY CHARACTERISTICS AND STAFFING

BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS OF PEER AGENCIES				
	Total Number of Parks	Total Acres Managed by Agency	Total Park Acres (per 1,000 Population)	Acres of Natural Areas
Des Moines	75	4,000	18.79	1,977 <sup>1</sup>
St. Paul	179 <sup>2</sup>	4,123	13.87	2,500 <sup>2</sup>
Madison	282	4,547	18.70	1,750
Denver	292	6,238	9.40	1,460
Austin	306	18,726	20.62	2,551
Minneapolis <sup>3</sup>	179	5,064	12.51	534
Omaha <sup>3</sup>	248	10,648	24.03	2,035
BENCHMARKS				
Benchmark Average	248	8,224	16.53	1,805
Benchmark Median	265	5,651	16.29	1,893

Directly comparing information such as total acres managed by an agency does not provide a full picture of how much parkland is available to residents, as it does not take into account the service area population (i.e., how many residents share use of that parkland). Computing total park acres per 1,000 population, therefore, provides a more useful figure when comparing agencies. While the City of Des Moines manages fewer acres than the benchmark average, it manages a much higher proportion per 1,000 population, surpassing the benchmark median. Only two peer agencies reported higher figures.

Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies

Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies

1. Covers 58% of all park areas  
2. Actively manages 500 acres annually due to limited resources  
3. Accessed from Trust for Public Land Park Score data

TRAILS						
	Paved Mileage	Paved Mileage (Per 1,000 Population)	Unpaved Mileage	Unpaved Mileage (Per 1,000 Population)	10-Minute Walk to Park Commitment <sup>1</sup>	Population with Walkable Access <sup>2</sup>
Des Moines	63	0.30	18	0.08	Yes	88%
St. Paul	113	0.38	25	0.08	Yes	86%
Madison	86	0.35	100	0.41	No	90%
Denver	255	0.38	33	0.05	Yes	86%
Austin	98	0.11	138	0.15	Yes	48%
Minneapolis	51	0.13	20	0.05	Yes	96%
Omaha	120	0.27	-	-	No	78%
BENCHMARKS						
Average	120	0.27	63	0.15	-	82%
Median	105	0.31	33	0.08	-	88%

Trails provide excellent opportunities for physical activity, recreation, social interactions and connectivity. While Des Moines maintains fewer trail miles than the benchmark average, it maintains relatively the same proportion per 1,000 population of both paved and unpaved trail miles as the other cities surveyed. The benchmark average for both paved and unpaved trails is higher than the median, mostly due to the exceptionally large paved trail systems in Denver and unpaved trail systems in Austin and Madison.

Four out of the six benchmarking cities have mayors who have pledged a commitment through the Trust for Public Lands for everyone to be within a 10-minute walk to a park, as has the mayor of Des Moines. All aspirational cities are committed to this goal. Maintaining walkable access is a priority for Des Moines. At 88%, Des Moines is above average of the benchmarking cities as having a population that is within a half-mile of a park. Other cities with an above-average percentage of walkable access include Minneapolis, followed by Madison.

*Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

*Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

1. Accessed from Trust for Public Land 10 Minute Walk Commitment  
<https://www.tpl.org/10minutewalk>

2. Accessed from Trust for Public Land Park Score Data

# AGENCY CHARACTERISTICS AND STAFFING

STAFFING LEVELS OF PEER AGENCIES							
	Full-Time Employees	Population (Per Full-Time Employees)	Part-Time Employees (Full-Time Equivalents)	Part-Time Employees	Volunteer Hours	Volunteer Hours (Per Capita)	Volunteer Hours (Defined as Income)
Des Moines	59	3,608	55	333	36,879 <sup>3</sup>	0.17	\$868,869 <sup>4</sup>
St. Paul	562	529	400 (1)	220	100,000	0.34	\$787,000 <sup>5</sup>
Madison	179	1,358	71	n/a	56,000	0.23	\$467,000 <sup>6</sup>
Denver	542	1,224	456	n/a	46,430	0.07	\$431,799 <sup>7</sup>
Austin	651	1,394	41 <sup>2</sup>	n/a	54,978	0.06	\$1,380,498 <sup>(8)</sup>
Minneapolis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Omaha	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BENCHMARKS							
Average	483	1,126	242	n/a	58,857	0.17	\$766,549
Median	552	1,291	236	n/a	54,978	0.17	\$627,000

In organizations of all shapes and sizes, variability exists in human resources. Peer agencies track staffing levels differently and did not provide a consistent benchmark. However, even from the incomplete data, we can infer that Des Moines meets the benchmark average of volunteers per capita. St. Paul and Madison’s volunteer base exceeds the standard and is much higher than the aspirational cities surveyed. There is inconsistency in the way agencies report volunteer hours. Not all agencies report volunteer income based on state minimum wage.

Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies  
Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies

1. Employs 400 seasonal staff. In addition, 1.5 Payroll FTEs manage payroll for City’s youth employment program housed in parks employing 425 in summer 150 in winter  
2. Part-time is considered 1,040 hours per calendar year  
3. Derived from the 2016 Annual Report  
4. Calculated on wage of \$23.56, reported as 2000 hours is equivalent to \$10,000  
5. Reported based on state minimum wage of \$7.87/hour  
6. Reported based on state minimum wage of \$8.30/hour  
7. Reported based on state minimum wage of \$9.30/hour  
8. Reported based on wage of \$25.11/hour



“

*City parks  
serve, day in  
and day out,  
as the primary  
green spaces  
for the  
majority of  
Americans.*

—Bruce Babbitt  
Former Secretary  
of the Interior

## ACCREDITED AGENCIES

	Des Moines	St. Paul	Madison	Denver	Austin	Minneapolis	Omaha
<b>CAPRA Accreditation</b>	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>NRPA Gold Medals</b>	No	2005	1970	No	1968, 2004	1989	No

Four out of the six cities have earned at least one of these recognitions, and half of them currently have both designations.

The Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) represents the highest level of performance in the parks and recreation industry and is based on agencies' adherence to 151 rigorous standards. To achieve initial accreditation, agencies must meet all 37 Fundamental Standards and at least 108 of the 114 Non-Fundamental Standards. At the time of this writing, there are only 116 CAPRA-accredited park and recreation agencies in the United States. Half of the benchmark cities analyzed have received CAPRA accreditation.

Each year, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) presents its Gold Medal award to outstanding agencies, with different agency classes based on population. According to NRPA's description of the selection process, recipients are chosen for demonstrating “excellence in long-range planning, resource management, and innovative approaches to delivering superb park and recreation services with fiscally sound business practices.”

Des Moines, with a population of 212,859 (American Community Survey 5-year Estimate, 2016), falls into Class II (populations of 150,001–400,000). The City of Des Moines has never received a gold medal award, while two of the peer cities and two of the aspirational cities analyzed have received the award.

# AGENCY BUDGETS

REVIEW OF PEER AGENCIES' BUDGETS							
	Operational Total	Operational Cost (Per Capita)	% of Total Operational Budget to Nat. Resource Management	% from Fees and Charges	% from Taxes	Tax Cost Per Capita	% from Private Donations and All Other Sources
Des Moines	\$12,912,738	\$60.66	1.0%	27.0%	70%	\$42.46	
St. Paul	\$60,604,242	\$203.94	0.9% <sup>1</sup>	43.0%	57.0%	\$116.25	0.6%
Madison	\$28,000,000	\$115.17	72.0%	54.0%	44.0%	\$50.67	2.0%
Denver	\$72,750,172	\$109.68	9.0%	0.0% <sup>3</sup>	100.0% <sup>4</sup>	\$109.68	0.0%
Austin	\$97,813,664	\$107.75	1.9% <sup>2</sup>	14.5%	85.3%	\$91.91	0.2%
Minneapolis	\$98,011,172	\$242.20	-	-	-	-	-
Omaha	\$34,783,264	\$78.50	-	-	-	-	-
BENCHMARKS							
Average	\$57,839,322	\$131.13	20.9%	27.7%	57.4%	\$73.79	0.7%
Median	\$60,604,242	\$109.68	5.4%	27.0%	57.0%	\$91.91	0.4%

The following definitions were provided to peer agencies on the survey:

- **Total Operating Budget**  
from ALL sources
- **Budget Dedicated to Natural Resource Management**  
(% of Total Operating Budget)  
Labor and materials used to manage natural resources, estimated as a percent of total operating revenue
- **Percent of Budget from Fees and Charges**  
All fees and charges; programs, rentals, contract fees
- **Percent of Budget from Taxes**  
Commonly property and/or local option income tax
- **Percent of Budget from Private Donations and All Other Sources**  
Define private donations or other (e.g., food and beverage, operations or capital, unrestricted, etc.)

Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies  
Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies

1. Includes less than 2% of general fund money plus additional environmental grants.  
2. For nature preserves and trails.  
3. Park generates about \$6M, but it all goes into the City's general fund.  
4. Parks are funded from the City's general fund, which is funded from multiple sources.

One of the major benefits of surveying cities both within and outside the Midwest is seeing the variation in approaches to parks and recreation budgeting. In our analysis, we standardized budget-related data to the greatest extent possible, but it is important to note that every municipality operates differently. Under operating budget per capita, Des Moines is below the benchmark median and average. In terms of the percent of budget from fees and charges, Des Moines is right in the middle of the benchmark agencies at 27.0%. In the calculated tax cost per capita, Des Moines has a value of \$42.46, well below the average of benchmark agencies.



# AGENCY FACILITIES

AQUATICS AND WATER SPORTS FACILITIES				
	Swimming Pools	Aquatic Centers	Wading Pools	Splash Pools and Spraygrounds
Des Moines	2	3	9	12
St. Paul	3	3	0	3
Madison	1	0	1	3
Denver	29	0	14	6
Austin	34	0	3	11
Minneapolis	-	-	-	-
Omaha	22	-	-	9
BENCHMARKS				
Average	17.8	0.8	4.5	6.4
Median	22.0	0.0	2.0	6.0

Facilities of interest include aquatics facilities, outdoor sports facilities, other outdoor facilities, regional gathering facilities, indoor recreation facilities and winter recreation facilities. Differences between benchmark agencies exist for a variety of reasons, including geography, weather, local or cultural preferences and funding.

All agencies surveyed manage at least one type of aquatics facility, with several agencies managing three different types of facilities. Pools and splash pads provide opportunities for either seasonal or year-round recreation and can appeal to all age groups and abilities. Des Moines’ commitment to aquatic recreation is strong, as evidenced by matching or exceeding benchmark agencies in number of aquatics centers and splash pools or spraygrounds.

Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies  
Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies



OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES									
	Baseball Fields	Softball Fields	Football Fields	Soccer Fields	Golf Courses (# of holes)	Disc Golf Courses (# of holes)	Outdoor Basketball Courts	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts
Des Moines	3	8	2	15	54	63	30	52	2
St. Paul	32	115	18	45 <sup>2</sup>	45	9 <sup>3</sup>	38	78	2
Madison	2	22	3	84	72	36	120	92	20
Denver	21	113	15	19	126	39	103	145	11
Austin	35	35	78 <sup>1</sup>	23	99	90	76	124	47
Minneapolis	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Omaha	-	-	-	-	-	45	-	26	-
BENCHMARKS									
Average	22.5	71.3	28.5	42.8	85.5	43.8	84.3	93.0	16.4
Median	26.5	74.0	16.5	34.0	85.5	39.0	89.5	85.0	11.0

Des Moines ranks above average for disc golf courses, with 63 holes, well above the average of 43.8. One trend identified in this section is the use of multipurpose fields for rectangular fields, such as football or soccer fields. Both St. Paul and Austin report high numbers of rectangular fields, but many of them are multipurpose.

*Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

*Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

1. Not sole football use; mixed use.
2. Most fields are multipurpose.
3. Expanding to 18 in 2018.

# AGENCY FACILITIES

REGIONAL GATHERING FACILITIES							
	Community Gardens (Plots)	Picnic Tables	Shelters	Playgrounds	Residents (Per Playground)	Dog Parks	Residents (Per Dog Park)
Des Moines	265 <sup>1</sup>	552	56 <sup>4</sup>	55	3,870	3	70,953
St. Paul	70	196 <sup>3</sup>	16 <sup>5</sup>	77 <sup>8</sup>	3,859	4	74,290
Madison	739	1,300	73 <sup>6</sup>	173	1,405	10	24,312
Denver	8 <sup>2</sup>	1,351	87	158	4,198	11	60,300
Austin	609	981	31 <sup>7</sup>	147	6,175	12	75,648
Minneapolis	-	-	-	112	3,613	7	57,810
Omaha	-	-	-	193	2,296	-	-
BENCHMARKS							
Average	472.7	957.0	51.8	143.3	3,161	8.8	51,493
Median.	609.0	1,140.5	52.0	152.5	2,654	10.0	40,467

Des Moines is below average, offering a much lower number of garden plots compared to the benchmark standard. Based on community interest and a growing population, this is a program area Des Moines could expand in the future to meet residents' needs. Des Moines supplies a lower-than-average number of picnic tables. Des Moines is just above average compared to the benchmark cities providing shelter for park visitors. Based on population, Des Moines is below average in terms of providing residents with playgrounds and dog parks. Interest in these facilities continues to grow, according to community engagement surveys. In order to maintain level of service, Des Moines will have to create more dog parks and playgrounds for the growing population.

*Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

*Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

1. Four gardens
2. Number of gardens on park land; program administered by outside entity
3. Picnic tables at shelters only; additional picnic tables are scattered around play areas, rec centers and regional parks
4. Nine enclosed, 47 open air
5. Nine open, two closed-kitchen but open-sided, three closed-sided, two gazebos, not including one bandshell
6. Twenty-two large (6 enclosed, 16 open); 51 small open shelters
7. All are open-air, but covered
8. Tot lots

OTHER OUTDOOR FACILITIES AND WINTER RECREATION FACILITIES				
	Fishing Access (marina/docks)	Adventure Facilities (BMX, skate park, climbing, etc.)	Water Access	Ice Skating
Des Moines	8 <sup>1</sup>	10 <sup>4</sup>	3 <sup>9</sup>	3
St. Paul	3 <sup>2</sup>	5 <sup>5</sup>	4 <sup>10</sup>	29
Madison	23	2 <sup>6</sup>	17	12
Denver	1	7 <sup>7</sup>	Unknown <sup>11</sup>	1
Austin	27 <sup>3</sup>	10 <sup>8</sup>	10	0
Minneapolis	-	6	12	-
Omaha	-	-	-	-
BENCHMARKS				
Average	13.50	6.00	10.75	10.50
Median	13	6.5	10	6.5

Des Moines surpasses the benchmark average, reporting a higher number of adventure facilities including the BMX track at Ewing Park and a skate park and climbing rock at McHenry Park. These three activities tend to be the most popular and supported adventure facilities across all the cities surveyed. It should be noted, however, that the benchmark for Des Moines may be higher in this area because cross-country ski access was included. It is unclear (and possibly unlikely) whether the other agencies considered cross-country ski access in this category.

Des Moines provides a lower-than-average number of water and fishing access as well as ice skating facilities compared to the other cities. Since water recreation is important to residents, Des Moines may want to consider increasing access points for these activities.

*Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

*Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies*

- 665-ft. dock; 2000-ft. marina -Birdland Park (3 docks); Birdland Marina; Gray's Lake Park (4 docks).
- 1 beach, probably 150 ft. of dock with Harriet Island and fishing docks at Como and Phalen, shoreline at Hidden Falls.
- 26 docks, 1 marina.
- 1 skate park; 1 climbing rock (McHenry Park); 1 BMX track/Bicycle Flow Track (Ewing Park); 7 parks allow cross-country skiing.
- 2 skate parks, 1 zip line at Como Pool, 1 climbing wall at HPAC, 1 portable climbing wall; also not counted but 2 Tuj Lub courts and building 4 Kato courts.
- 1 skate park with a full complement of bowls, street skate; 1 cyclocross facility.
- 2 bike parks; 5 skate parks.
- 3 BMX/skate parks; 7 climbing walls.
- Boat ramps at Birdland Park, Prospect Park and Grays Lake Park.
- 117 miles of Mississippi River; Como and Phalen Lake, some smaller streams and ponds. Phalen Beach and a boat launch at Phalen Lake, many points along the river including a large dock at Harriet Island and boat launches at Crosby and Hidden Falls, fishing docks at Como and Phalen.
- Many parks along waterways; have not had designated access points inventoried.

# AGENCY FACILITIES

CHARACTERISTICS OF INDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES			
	Community Centers	Designated Senior Adult Areas	Multipurpose Facilities
Des Moines	2 <sup>1</sup>	3 <sup>3</sup>	0
St. Paul	35 <sup>2</sup>	0	35
Madison	0	0	14
Denver	27	1	0
Austin	23	3	0
Minneapolis	-	-	-
Omaha	-	-	-
BENCHMARKS			
Average	21.25	1.00	9.00
Median	25	0.5	0.5

St. Paul offers the highest number of community centers and multipurpose facilities but no senior adult designated areas. Like the aspirational cities surveyed, Des Moines does not offer multipurpose facilities but does offer an above-average number of senior adult designated areas for its residents. Des Moines offers a lower number of community centers compared to the benchmark average.

The benchmarking agencies did not provide square footage for each type of facility defined, which would provide a more accurate analysis. Madison operates using the lighted school house concept which makes every school a community center after school hours.

1. Provides 36,298 sq. ft. of community centers
2. Provides 524,434 sq. ft. of community centers
3. Provides 10,403 sq. ft. of senior adult designated areas
4. Provides 15,500 sq. ft. of multipurpose facilities





# AGENCY PROGRAMS

SNAPSHOT OF PEER AGENCIES' PROGRAMMING		
	Agency-Sponsored Programs and Events	# of Permits Issued for Agency-Sponsored Programs and Events
Des Moines	2,721	830
St. Paul	3,600 <sup>1</sup>	1,500 <sup>4</sup>
Madison	360 <sup>2</sup>	2,100 <sup>5</sup>
Denver	5,800	375
Austin	3,936 <sup>3</sup>	700 <sup>6</sup>
Minneapolis	-	-
Omaha	-	-
BENCHMARKS		
Benchmark Average	3,424	1,169
Benchmark Median	3,768	1,100

The programmatic capacities of each agency vary according to factors such as budget, culture and climate. The median number of programs and events offered is 3,768. Denver offers the highest number of programs at 5,800. Des Moines falls just short of the median, offering an estimated 2,721 programs annually. Madison reported that it is a non-programming-based agency which explains the low number of programs relatively. Although Madison offers a low number of programs it does issue a high number of permits, exceeding the benchmark average by 1,000. Des Moines issues a lower-than-average number of permits.

Highest value of peer and aspirational agencies

Lowest value of peer and aspirational agencies

- 1. Includes youth and adult athletics. Youth: environmental education, camps, martial arts, technology and recording arts, free after-school programming, swim and ski lessons; Adult: fitness, dance; Seniors: trips and tours, card groups, fitness, pickle ball
- 2. Non-programming-based agency; 95% of recreational programming produced is family-/community-focused by group; 35% is nature recreation-focused, 45% is focused on community celebrations; 20% is athletic lessons or learning event
- 3. Includes drop-in programs, events-focused programs, life skills and enrichment and skills-focused programs
- 4. Includes large special events (over 25,000); 10–12 medium-size special events (5000–25,000); 10–15 small-size special events (under 500); ballfield permits; recreation center gym; meeting rooms for youth and adult activities; picnic shelter permits
- 5. Includes festivals, picnics and gatherings, athletics, environmental/nature-based recreation, and kids camps; group defined as children, adults, senior and community
- 6. Estimate; information is not centrally located; the department issues permits for sound, commercial use of parkland (e.g., exercise groups, boat rentals)



The following definitions were provided to benchmarking agencies on the survey, providing qualitative data on the programs and special events offered:

On average, how many programs/events does your agency sponsor or program? Please define your user groups and breakdown by GROUP or TYPE. Please list as it appears in your agency Recreation Plan or Strategy.

#### *Group Examples*

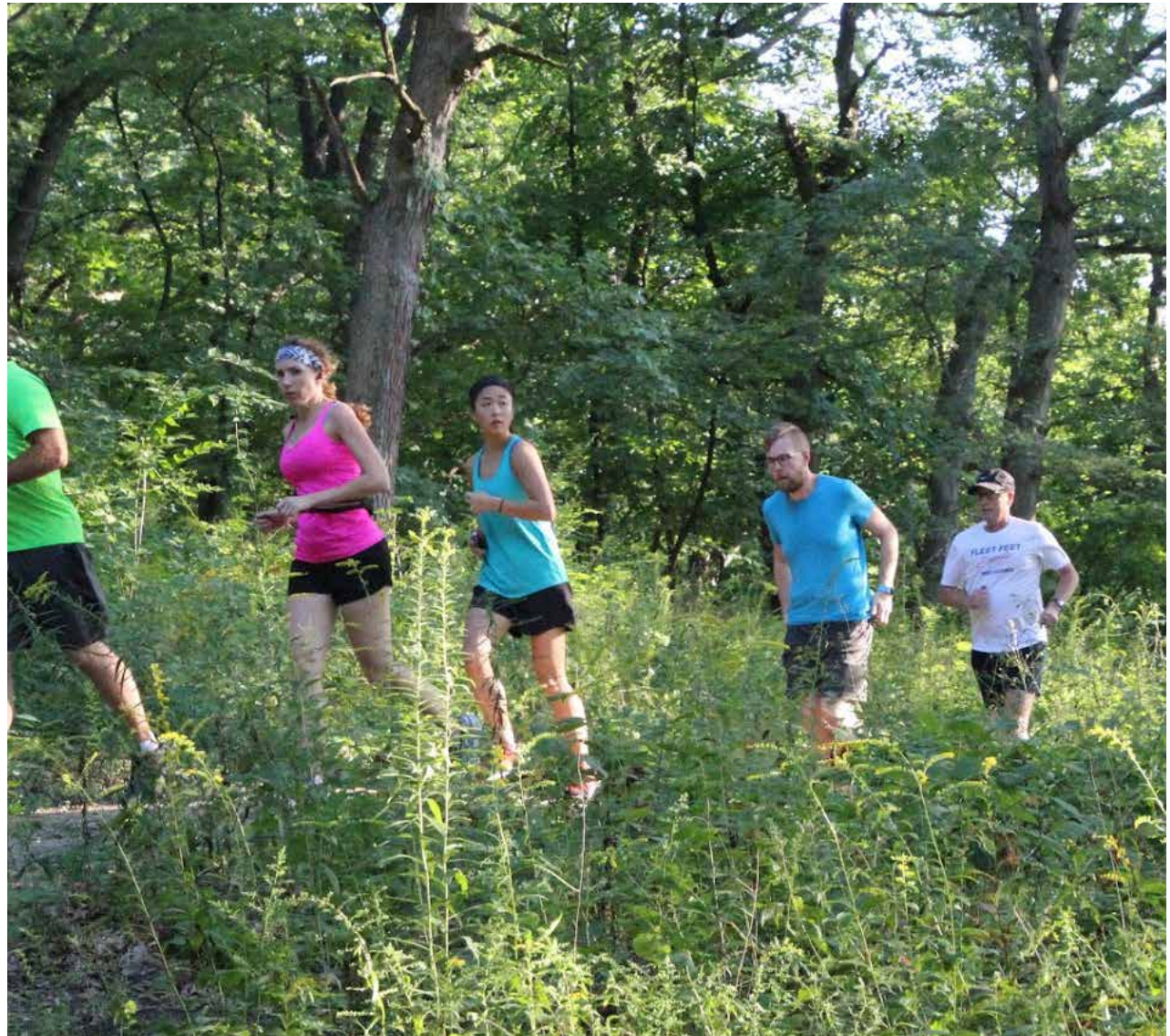
- Children
- Adults
- Seniors

#### *Type Examples*

- Athletics
- Kids Camps
- Environmental Education

On average, how many programs/events does your agency issue permits for in the park system each year?

*Figures for population and income were taken from the 2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates. Land area figures were taken from the 2010 Census Quick Facts.*



# CEMETERIES

## ROLE AND POLICIES

Des Moines Parks and Recreation manages 310 acres of public cemeteries. The City's seven cemeteries are nestled in the central, east, west and southern locations surrounded by neighborhoods and adjacent to parkland. Currently, the City's cemetery policy does not encourage public use of these areas aside from traditional visitation of the burial grounds. Signs posted at entrances inform the public of the City's policies regarding visitation and generally prohibit picnicking, loitering or dog walking. Taking a closer look at the cemeteries' environs, it is clear that encouraging public use of these locations could have a positive effect on the health of the community by creating more opportunities for passive and restorative recreation and increasing residents' access to green space.

Cities across the nation and world are embracing cemeteries for public use by incorporating natural areas, walking trails and arboretums into existing design and designating space for passive recreation as well as special events programming. Trends show that as populations continue to grow and cities become denser, green space and open space areas are becoming more desirable. As the fastest-growing city in the Midwest, the City of Des Moines is no exception, and the Parks and Recreation Department is seeking new ways to make green space more available and accessible to the public.

Public use of cemeteries is not a new concept. Mount Auburn cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, designed by the Massachusetts Horticulture Society in 1831, is considered the nation's first modern cemetery and public park. The grounds incorporated a Victorian-style garden into the design, known as the "garden of graves," which quickly became popular for strolling and picnicking.<sup>{1}</sup> Today more cities across the U.S. are finding ways to encourage the public to use the available green space and better appreciate the restorative qualities of cemeteries. It is even said that public use could mean the difference between degradation (maintenance costs) and becoming a thriving part of a community.<sup>{2}</sup> Some cemeteries leading the way include:

### **Green Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, NY**

Offers yoga classes and movies in the historic chapel. The cemetery is now seeking an arboretum status to attract more visitors including bird watchers.

### **Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta, GA**

Offers special events such as the "Tunes from the Tombs" music festival which draws 4,000 people annually, a 5K run and Halloween tours. The city partners with the Historic Oakland Foundation to fund and manage special events. The foundation fundraises through sponsorship and optional annual membership fees and events packages.

### **Forest Hills Cemetery, Boston, MA**

Offers dog walk tours.

### **Columbia Cemetery, Boulder, CO**

Open to the public for walking and jogging. Dogs are allowed on-leash.

### **Evergreen Cemetery, Portland, MA**

Developed hiking paths in adjacent woodland area. Includes paved and gravel trails through the cemetery as well as an extensive network of wooded biking and hiking trails behind the cemetery.<sup>{3}</sup>

### **Highland Cemetery, Fort Mitchell, KY**

Includes natural surroundings, no-mow and nesting areas, an abundance of spring wildflowers and nature programs. The nature trail system, mapped out in 1990, provides a popular destination for public use and has won an Environmental Excellence Award from the state of Kentucky. Volunteer base helps maintain and develop trails. Signage throughout explains local history and natural surroundings.<sup>{4}</sup>

### **Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles, CA**

Has a 1.4-mile soft-surfaced jogging track around the cemetery, providing improvements to the built environment in an area with little open space or parkland. The path hosts thousands of runners and walkers each month and is a model for change in the built environment that



“

promotes healthy habits. Other cemeteries in Los Angeles are following suit.{5}

The most common activities in cemeteries include running, picnicking, bicycling, jazz concerts, bird watching, dog walking, bench sitting, trails, grave rubbing, tours, art classes, ghost hunting, event space, Halloween programs, theatrical performances, and scavenger hunts.{6} It is important to note that parks departments that intend to encourage public use of cemeteries should strive for a balance of appropriate programming with privacy and respect for those visiting the graves.{7}

*There's always a taboo about a cemetery... the trails put that to rest. People can come in and enjoy the landscape. The hiking trails have provided a sense of community to a business that is wrought with a lot of heartache. Trails bring a little life to the place.*

–Tom Honebrink  
Highland Cemetery General Manager

# CEMETERIES

## BEST PRACTICES

### ENCOURAGING APPROPRIATE PUBLIC USE

- Events, tours and programs should support and advance the mission of the cemetery and should not be detrimental to the cemetery’s historical resources.{8}
- A greater level of sensitivity should be applied when selecting programs. Appropriate programs may include historical interpretation programs and tours, horticultural programs and tours, programs for school groups, theatrical programs, arts programs and appropriate music.{9}
- Policies should highlight cemeteries as an attraction for the community and include signage that, to encourage use, says what is allowed as opposed to what isn’t.{10}
- Keep the focus on natural areas, restoration projects, tree planting, preservation and sustainable groundskeeping.{11}
- Consider issuing permits for dog walking or open up space for dog walking on a leash.
- Open up cemeteries for school visits and tours.{12}
- Incorporate the use of technology to enhance historical aspects of cemeteries—guided apps, a website and/or a “digital ranger” program to locate and visit historical graves.
- Seek partnerships to build community awareness of the importance of cemeteries

and need for preservation. Partners can conduct a tour, publicize efforts in local newspapers, establish a website with photographs of headstones in need of attention, partner with local schools, appeal to local church groups and garden clubs and garner support from historical and genealogical societies.{13}

- Establish safety guidelines for workers and material artifacts and continue to train volunteer stewards using these guidelines.{14}
- Address security, vandalism and theft issues.{15}
- Pay attention to family rights issues.{16}
- Implement policies that balance public use with private use.{17} Identify changes in the built environment that support active living. Develop a policy on trails around the edge of and through cemeteries that states which activities are appropriate. Generally, active recreation activities occur on trails outside or surrounding cemeteries, while more passive activities (e.g., resting on a bench, observing wildlife and meditation walks on meandering paths) are encouraged inside cemeteries.
- Develop a policy on picnic areas for family gatherings related to memorial-type events

### Des Moines Cemeteries

**St. Ambrose Cemetery**  
15 acres (Central)

**Oak Grove Cemetery**  
2 acres (Southwest near airport)

**Laurel Hill Cemetery**  
77 acres (East)

**Glendale Cemetery**  
176 acres (West)

**Elm Grove Cemetery**  
10 acres (Southeast, part of SE Park/School site)

**Woodland Cemetery**  
29 acres (Central, adjacent to St. Ambrose)

**Sims Cemetery**  
1 acre (East)

**Total: 310 acres**

# CEMETERIES

## POTENTIAL FOR RECREATIONAL USE

### GLENDALE CEMETERY

- Pond area attracts many varieties of birds, fish and water plants and could be open to public use as an area for passive recreation
- The infant section may serve as an interesting historical site

### LAUREL HILL CEMETERY

- Scenic view overlooking downtown area may be a good location for picnicking; would require department to revise cemetery policies
- Impressive Avenue of Flags for Memorial Day; department may consider this site as a location for a pop-up program or jazz concert on Memorial Day
- Adjacent woodland area could serve as an arboretum or a place for meditation and walking trails for recreational use

### WOODLAND CEMETERY

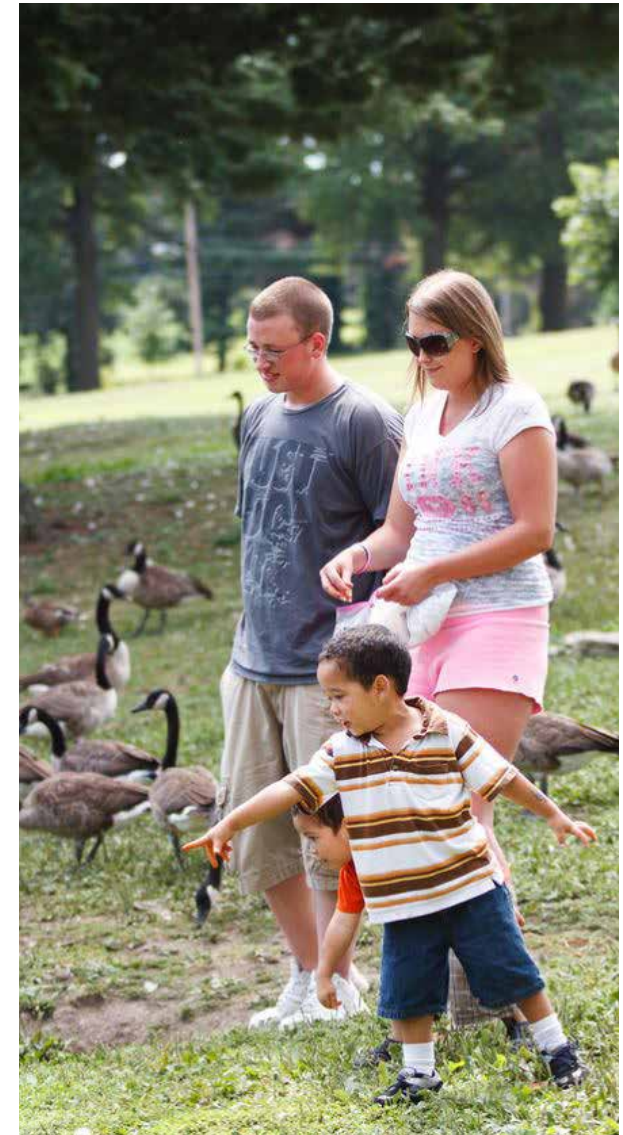
- Des Moines' oldest cemetery, beautiful and historically rich

### OAK GROVE CEMETERY

- Location near airport may serve surrounding neighborhoods with limited access to greenspace
- Could help the City achieve goal of 10-minute walk to park
- Opportunity as a pop-up programming location

### ELM GROVE CEMETERY

- Adjacent to S.E. Park/School undeveloped site
- Opportunity to incorporate school tours and programs
- Serve as a restorative and passive recreation site to nearby residents



## Example Policy: Columbia Cemetery in Boulder, Colorado

The city of Boulder, Colorado, provides a cemetery policy that encourages public use of these spaces. Although the policy outlined does not specifically state that jogging, walking or picnicking is permissible, it is implied using signage that mirrors park regulations, stating that the cemetery is open from dawn to dusk and dog walking is permitted as long as pets are leashed and picked up after. Listing these policies first presents a more welcoming invitation to the public rather than signage that lists prohibited activities. Attention to visitor safety and providing alternative solutions to gravestone rubbing creates a supportive atmosphere for visitors, while prohibiting “projectiles” reinforces passive recreational use and is mindful of those using the cemetery for traditional purposes.

### **Cemetery Visitor Rules and Regulations**

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*Columbia Cemetery is a place of memory and quiet reflection. It also functions as a sculpture garden, a primary source for genealogical research and a rich resource for local history. Most importantly, Columbia Cemetery is still active as a burial ground. Please treat this historic cemetery, its residents and its visitors with respect.*

- *The Cemetery is open from dawn until dusk (BRC 8-7-3.)*
- *Pets must be leashed, and all excrement must be picked up and properly disposed of (BRC 6-1-16, 6-1-18.)*
- *For visitor safety and resource protection, it is unlawful to lean against, push, pull, shove, kick, climb on or strike any grave marker (BRC 8-7-9.)*
- *Projectiles (balls, boomerangs, frisbees, paint balls, model airplanes) are prohibited (BRC 8-7-5.)*
- *Gravestone rubbing can damage grave markers and is prohibited (BRC 8-7-8.) Instead, use a mirror to direct sunlight onto the face of the marker to read the information on the stone. Preserve the epitaphs and artwork by taking a photograph.*
- *You are responsible for knowing and obeying all City of Boulder Revised Code Cemetery regulations. Violations are punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000, 90 days in jail, and/or full restitution for damage.*



# CEMETERIES

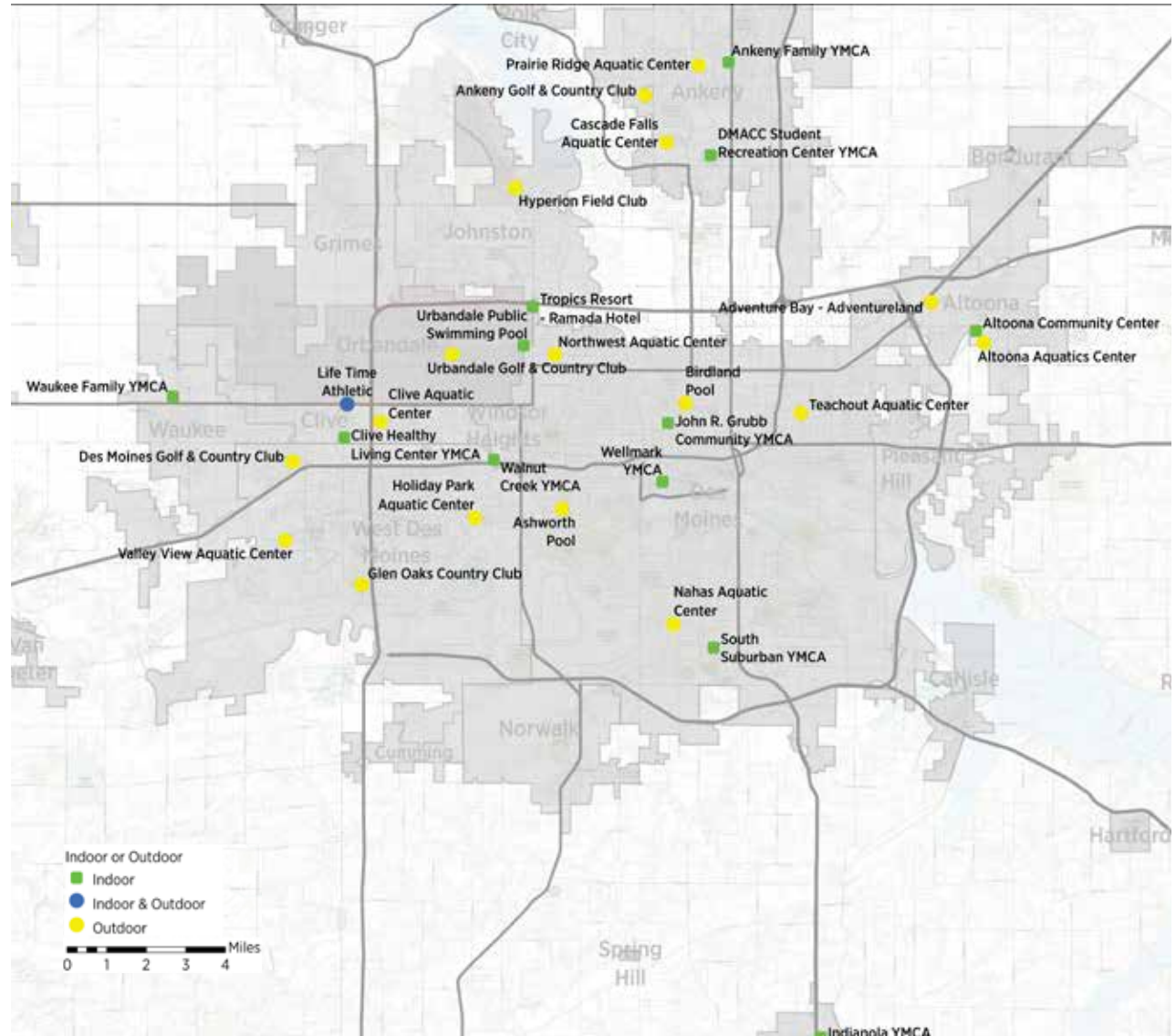
## POLICY, AND REGULATIONS

- Revise policy on Public Conduct in Cemeteries, which currently discourages public visitation and use of the cemetery by strictly prohibiting “picnicking or loitering on any of the graves or monuments in the cemetery or on any of the buildings”
- See Boulder signage and include hours of operation, dog leashing and waste removal requirements, grave marker treatment
- Create and provide signage to designate locations for passive recreation, resting or picnicking, including wildlife and natural areas, habitat observation areas if available
- Permit jogging (only on designated paths to avoid disturbing people visiting their loved ones)
- Discourage the use of flying objects or “projectiles” such as Frisbees, boomerangs, etc., and reinforce a respectful and peaceful atmosphere when using the cemetery for recreational purposes
- Provide contact information on website or in cemetery for those interested in organizing a tour, special event or program



# AQUATIC SERVICES

Aquatic facility usage has grown at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15% since 2014. Departmental staff report that Des Moines offers pools and aquatic centers, some with significant maintenance needs. This plan recommends a detailed look at the City's available aquatic services—both public and private—to best address resident needs and the capacity for the City to meet those needs. In part, the issue is balancing the interests of lower-maintenance, popular facilities such as splashpads and spraygrounds, with the higher capital and operations costs of aquatic parks and swimming pools. Access to affordable safety instruction and job supports like swimming lessons and lifeguard certification may prove a much-needed service for the City to continue to offer, given the public's increasing expectations for high-quality aquatic facilities. However, more traditional facilities have grown costly to build, maintain and operate. Additionally, finding lifeguards available to work the length of the swim season continues to challenge managers. In short, this topic has complexities that are both technical and social and will require its own specific study to complement the work of this plan. An indoor water park should also be considered as part of this aquatics study. Also, see the previous chapter, Attraction, where water recreation is discussed more broadly—including nature-based water recreation.







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