

2015-2020 Parks and Open Space Master Plan

Executive Summary

“The development of a Master Plan by a park agency is essential to meeting the challenges of today’s demand for the public’s expectations for park and recreation facilities. With limited financial resources, disappearing suitable land for parks, changing trends in recreation and growth in population, park agencies must carefully plan for their future by accommodating the needs of constituents.”

Purpose of the Waukegan Park District Parks & Open Space Master Plan

This plan was developed to guide and shape the future of the Waukegan Park District parks and facilities. This plan will serve as a guide for the Commissioners and the staff to conceive and define the future direction for the infrastructure of the Park District. This plan is a general master plan that is primarily concerned with the Park District’s management, protection, use and development of parks. The plan has been developed to be both responsive to the people and consistent with the Mission, Vision and Value Statements of the Park District.

Review of Accomplishments from the Preceding Plan

Creation of the 2015-2020 Parks and Open Space Master Plan would not be complete without a review of initiatives that were taken after the 2008-2013 plan was completed. Key accomplishments include:

- ❖ Three properties were acquired: Beach and Cornell property (7.1 acres), Bowen (1 acre addition) and King Park (.1 acre addition).
- ❖ The \$20 million Phase I Waukegan Sports Park was completed in 2010 on the former Orchard Hills Golf Course site.
- ❖ The District partnered with the Waukegan Harbor Citizens’ Advisory Group who was the recipient of a \$1.4 million dollar GLRI Grant, portions of which have been used to restore and expand natural areas at Bowen Park.
- ❖ The District was the recipient of a Technical Assistance Grant to be used to mitigate the impact of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).
- ❖ The employee driven “Green Team” was organized in 2012 to provide leadership and direction for environmental leadership and promote district and community sustainability practices. The committee has held annual Community Recycling events and secured funding for energy efficient LED lighting at Smith Park.
- ❖ In October 2013, the Waukegan Park District was awarded the 2013 Gold Medal for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management in Class III (Population of 50,001 to 100,000) by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration (AAPRA), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association.
- ❖ In cooperation with Libertyville Township, Phase II of the River Road Bike Trail was completed in 2014. This trail connects three subdivisions to Independence Grove Forest Preserve and the Des Plaines River Trail.
- ❖ An indoor pool addition at the Field House is being pursued to be funded in part with a \$2.5 million PARC Grant.

Community Input Methodology and Results

The development of this Master Plan has been formed by the opinions and input gathered in several ways from the public, staff and board members. Community members are the customers of the parks and facilities and their input, along with Board and Staff, is valuable to the plan. A 23 member Master Plan Committee was created to both guide and inform the master plan process and provide input on the plan itself. Representatives included citizen representatives from the six planning communities, governmental liaisons and Park District Staff. Community input to this plan was gathered through Public Community Input Meetings, a Public Community Input Online Survey and through Board and Staff Input Meetings. In distilling all of the input, five themes and their related recommendations were common: **More Parks, Improved Parks, More Facilities, Improved Operations, and Improved Facilities.**

Parks and Open Space Inventory and Standards

The Waukegan Park District is the primary provider of park, recreation and open space in Waukegan. The District owns 40 developed parks, 8 undeveloped sites encompassing 727.94 acres of land which results in the District owning approximately 4.35% of the land within its boundaries. These lands are managed to the highest environmental and conservation standards.

The land the District owns and has developed as parks, have been classified *by function*. By this method 116.36 acres are classified as “Neighborhood Park Land” and 108.7 acres as “Community Park Land”, for a total of 225.06 acres. In our primary assessment, only these acres are used towards meeting the NRPA Recommended Level of Service Standards.

Ten (10) acres per one thousand (1000) residents standard is the recommendation from National Recreation and Park Association’s (NRPA)

Only the land within each park that provides a park or recreation function count toward the standard. The resulting higher deficiencies may appear significant but when all Park District land and land from other public and private landowners that provide park and open space functions, such as Lake County Forest Preserve, Waukegan School District 60, and Illinois Beach State Park is factored in, the deficiencies are eliminated.

Planning Communities

In this planning process, the “*neighborhood* within a community” is the concept upon which this Master Plan is based. This plan establishes six planning communities: **Northwest, North Central, Central, South Central, Downtown/Lakefront, and Southwest**. Each community has been further divided into neighborhood planning areas. A “Community” Park differs considerably from a “Neighborhood” Park as defined in the classification standards discussed in Chapter 2. Ideally the District would provide at least one Neighborhood Park for each *neighborhood* and one Community Park for each community.

All of these communities were determined using population demographics for each community and in certain cases, individual *neighborhoods* to gain a better understanding of the true need for additional park space. This information was cross-referenced with several layers of data including, level of service from each park, income, housing values, and population statistics. The boundary of each community and neighborhood is defined by major traffic arteries, railroads, natural features and restrictive land uses. The ability of a resident to walk or bike to a park facility is an important aspect of defining the *neighborhood*, and subsequently the *community*.

PRORAGIS Benchmarking

PRORAGIS, short for Park and Recreation Operating Ratio and Geographic Information System, is NRPA’s online management tool, designed for public park and recreation agencies. The PRORAGIS database tool has become the most comprehensive and largest collection of detailed data on municipal, county and state park systems in the U.S. PRORAGIS contains reliable, detailed data on a wide range of park agency metrics, allowing agencies to compare their operations and offerings to other agencies of similar size and population.

When the District is compared to similar agencies across the U.S. in the same population density category through PRORAGIS many metrics can be measured but two key findings emerge: 1) The District spends less money per acre (\$13,424) to maintain their parks than the national median (\$15,625) and 2) the District has more parkland per 1,000 residents at 7.8 acres than the national median of 6.4 acres. This “real time” benchmarking tool will continue to be used by the District to assess our provision of park and recreation services to our community.

Recommended Park Improvements

This plan establishes **District-Wide Park Improvement Recommendations** as well as **Recommended Park Improvements** for each park site for the next five years and beyond. A strategic and continual effort must be made to incorporate these recommendations into the District's Capital Improvement Program (CIP). It is important to note that these recommendations are based on current needs and expected resources. As these needs and resources change, priorities and recommendations will change as well.

District-Wide Park Improvements

1. Maintain asphalt parking lots and pathways per Pavement Maintenance Plan (PMP).
2. Maintain basketball, tennis and other sport courts per Sport Court Maintenance Plan (SCMP).
3. Implement Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Management Plan including Treekeeper Inventory.
4. Implement Green Initiatives championed by the Green Team addressing waste reduction and recycling, energy efficiency, natural areas management and green purchasing.
5. Correct Non-Compliant Playground Hazards per 2013 Playground Safety Audit Report through modification or playground replacements. (See Projected Capital Improvement Projects Appendix)
6. Accomplish Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance recommendations as feasible per the 2012 ADA Access Audit and Transition Plan.
7. Maintain and/or replace District vehicles and equipment per Vehicle and Equipment Replacement Schedule (VERS).

Implementing the Plan

As an extension of this plan, a separate Parks and Open Space Master Plan **Implementation and Tracking Plan** will be developed. This plan will extract all the recommendations from this plan and develop projected timelines and tasks to accomplish the recommendations. These tasks will then be tracked towards completion. As resources and priorities shift within the District, timelines and expectations will be adjusted appropriately to make this a living document that makes the District both accountable and flexible in implementing the Master Plan.

Implementation Guidelines

This plan should have direct connection and accountability to the District's Strategic Plan, Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and Long Range Capital Development Plan. As part of the Strategic Plan review process, this plan should be reviewed, progress tracked and updates made as necessary. All employees and Board members should receive a hard or electronic copy of this plan and appropriate review should be conducted annually with them. A summary of the Implementation and Tracking Plan should be made available to staff and posted in appropriate locations including the Website.

Appendices

The appendices contain reference materials associated with development of the plan.

1. WPD Strategic Plan
2. WPD Community Engagement Project
3. WPD Master Plan Online Survey - Full Report
4. Waukegan Lakefront – Downtown Master Plan
5. Lake County Forest Preserve District
6. Lake County Department of Transportation (LCDOT) 2040 Transportation Plan
7. Watershed Plan Summaries
8. WPD Projected Capital Improvement Projects
9. WPD Land Dedication Policy
10. NRPA 2014 National Database Report (Powered by PRORAGIS)
11. CorLands Needs Analysis 2002