

DRAFT

— Park District of Highland Park —

GREENPRINT

BUILDING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING



DRAFT

JUNE 4, 2026

THE
LAKOTA
GROUP.

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THE LAKOTA GROUP.



LETTER FROM ED BRIAN ROMES



INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1



MISSION

To enrich community life through healthy leisure pursuits and an appreciation of the natural world.

VALUES

WELCOMING

We welcome everyone, fostering supportive relationships through positive interactions that appreciate the best in others and create a sense of belonging.

CARING

We care about our relationships with others, as well as sustaining and improving our material, financial and natural resources, through best practices that foster trust and ensure long term health, safety, and wellbeing.

EXTRAORDINARY

We aspire to provide extraordinary experiences by thinking creatively, creating personal interactions, and delivering unique services that positively impact lives.





THE HIGHLAND PARK COMMUNITY

Highland Park is a vibrant community of 30,459 residents across 12.22 square miles. It is known for its strong sense of community, diverse population, and a deep commitment to quality of life. The city's demographic composition reflects a mix of families, individuals, and older adults, creating a multigenerational community with a range of recreational needs and priorities.



30,459
RESIDENTS

Population and Households

The community includes 11,808 households, with an average household size reflecting a blend of family households (72.6%) and non-family households (27.4%). Of these, 31.7% of households include children under 18, while 42.7% of households include adults aged 65 and older, illustrating the District's dual focus on youth and senior programming.

Highland Park's population is highly educated and engaged, and the Park District serves as a vital connector, offering spaces and programs that bring residents of all ages together. This mix of younger families and an active aging population underscores the need for a recreation system that balances playgrounds, athletic facilities, and family programming with accessible parks, wellness initiatives, and passive recreational opportunities for active adults.

Diversity and Language

While English is the primary language for most households, linguistic diversity is present. Among residents aged 18 to 64, 5.4% speak Spanish at home, and 3.7% speak other Indo-European languages. Programs that incorporate cultural sensitivity and multilingual communication can help the Park District reach and engage these segments effectively.



**SPEAK SPANISH
AT HOME**

Economic Profile

The city exhibits economic stability, with 95.8% of households earning incomes above the poverty line and only 4.2% below. However, pockets of need remain, including residents receiving public assistance (1.2%) and those utilizing SNAP benefits (2.2%). Ensuring equitable access to recreation for all income levels is essential for maintaining inclusivity across the system.

Mobility and Work Patterns

Approximately 62% of employed residents drive alone to work, while a notable 25.2% work from home, a trend that influences park usage during daytime hours. This shift underscores the growing demand for accessible outdoor spaces, walking trails, and flexible programming that supports active lifestyles throughout the day.

Age and Life Stage

Children and youth (under 18) make up 25.7% of the population, while older adults (65+) account for 24%, and the remaining 50% are working-age adults. This age distribution underscores the importance of maintaining a balanced approach to parks and recreation—one that addresses active sports and youth programming alongside wellness, social engagement, and nature-based recreation for older residents.

Highwood Residents in District 112

The Park District of Highland Park (PDHP) not only serves Highland Park residents but also provides resident rates to Highwood families whose children attend the same North Shore School District 112 (NSSD 112) and the High School Dist 113 schools as Highland Park families. Highwood is located northeast of Highland Park, is a smaller, denser community with a distinct cultural identity,

Highwood differs from Highland Park in several ways. It features more compact neighborhoods, a greater proportion of renters, and a higher concentration of Hispanic and Latino residents compared to Highland Park. These demographic characteristics influence recreation needs, with Highwood families potentially seeking affordable programs, access to sports fields, and community gathering spaces that celebrate cultural traditions.

Students from Highwood attending NSSD 112 schools frequently participate in Park District activities, making PDHP an essential provider of out-of-school and seasonal programs for this population. The District's role extends beyond recreation, fostering inclusion, supporting cultural exchange, and strengthening regional identity by bridging two unique communities.



WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PARK AND RECREATION PLANNING?

Understanding Highland Park's demographics ensures that the New GreenPrint prioritizes multi-generational programming, accessible facilities, and diverse park amenities. The significant share of older adults highlights the need for wellness and passive recreation opportunities, while the presence of young families underscores demand for playgrounds, sports fields, and childcare-friendly programs. Economic diversity calls for affordable access and equitable distribution of resources, while language and cultural diversity emphasize the importance of inclusive engagement and program design.

Including Highwood in the GreenPrint planning process continues to guarantee programming, pricing strategies, and outreach methods are equitable and culturally responsive. Understanding Highwood's distinct community profile helps the District provide inclusive spaces, affordable programs, and transportation solutions where needed, ensuring that both Highland Park and Highwood residents benefit from shared park and recreation resources.



THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Highland Park’s recreation facilities, parks, and trails are **more than just places**—they are the **heart of the community**. They provide spaces for families to gather, children to play, athletes to compete, and residents to connect with nature. They contribute to physical and mental well-being, protect the environment, and enhance quality of life.

GreenPrint 2036 isn’t just about projects—it’s about people. It’s about ensuring that our parks and recreation system continues to serve everyone, now and for future generations.

Ten years ago, the Park District of Highland Park (PDHP) launched GreenPrint 2024, a comprehensive parks and recreation master plan that shaped the District’s vision for open spaces, facilities, and programs. Guided by community input and strategic analysis, GreenPrint 2024 set the course for significant improvements that residents enjoy today, from enhanced park amenities to expanded recreation opportunities.

Now, a decade later, the District has reassessed, refined, and reimaged what comes next. GreenPrint 2036 builds upon the success of the previous plan, incorporating new insights, priorities, and emerging needs. The New Plan reflects the community’s current priorities, responds to emerging trends, and ensures that Highland Park’s parks and recreation system continues to thrive for future generations.

Highland Park is not the same community it was when the last GreenPrint plan was developed. While the foundation from the original plan remains strong, the conditions shaping parks, recreation, and community life have evolved in meaningful ways. Updating the plan at this moment ensures the Park District remains aligned with current realities while positioning itself for the future. In addition, the Park District has developed focused plans over time, ranging from site-specific master plans to system-wide initiatives, that have guided important investments and decisions. The New Plan provides an opportunity to revisit those efforts, ensuring they remain relevant, aligned, and coordinated, with key elements either integrated into this Comprehensive Plan or identified to continue as standalone guiding documents.

A changing community.

Highland Park’s demographics are shifting, with changes in age distribution, household composition, and community expectations. An aging population is increasing demand for accessible spaces, passive recreation, and wellness-oriented programming, while families and younger residents continue to seek flexible, high-quality recreational experiences. These dynamics require a system that can serve multiple generations in different ways, often simultaneously.

Evolving expectations for parks and recreation.

Across the country, park districts are being asked to do more than provide traditional amenities. Parks today, more than ever, support mental and physical health, social connection, environmental education, and community resilience. Residents increasingly value experiences and flexibility, as well as spaces that feel welcoming and adaptable.

New trends shaping the system.

Recreation trends continue to shift toward unstructured play, multi-use spaces, nature-based experiences, and year-round programming. At the same time, technology, hybrid work patterns, and changing lifestyles are altering when and how people use parks.

Aging infrastructure and investment decisions.

Some of the Park District's facilities and assets are at a point where reinvestment, renovation, or replacement must be considered. With limited resources, the District must make strategic choices about where to invest, how to phase improvements, and how to balance maintenance with new opportunities.

Environmental and long-term resilience.

Stewardship of natural resources remains central to Highland Park's identity, but it now comes with new urgency. Climate variability, stormwater management, habitat preservation, and sustainable practices are increasingly important considerations that require updated strategies and coordinated action.

Positioning for what's next.

The New GreenPrint is not about starting over. It is about building upon a strong foundation while responding to a changing context. The Plan allows the Park District to align its mission and values with today's needs, anticipate future demands, and continue delivering high-quality parks and recreation experiences that serve the entire community.

The New GreenPrint is designed to be inclusive, forward-thinking, and actionable—grounded in both data and the voices of those who use and cherish the Park District's resources every day. The Plan seeks to address the following desired outcomes:

Actionable Plan

Creates a visionary roadmap for the next 10+ years, supported by actionable priority goals, projects and strategies that are specific, measurable, responsible and responsive to the current and future needs of the community, supporting the District's mission and grounded in organizational values of being welcoming, caring, and extraordinary.

10-Year Investment Roadmap

Prioritizes the District's long range capital investment plan and associated funding strategies that supports current repair, replacement, and development projects with a realistic implementation strategy.

Alignment with Future Community Needs

Conducts outreach with residents, including a statistically valid community-wide survey and robust community engagement. Engage with Community Key Stakeholders such as government partners, affiliates, sponsors, donors, and other local public or private organizations to assess and determine synergistic opportunities that benefit and serve community needs through strategic partnerships that promote efficiency, collaboration, and potential funding opportunities to better serve community needs.

Equitable and Inclusive Service Approach

Evaluates existing facilities, parks, natural areas, and recreational services to ensure the quantity and quality is aligned with identified level of service standards, providing equitable and inclusive services across the community while addressing innovative and forward thinking strategies that address underserved demographic segments and gaps in service, along with responsible cost recovery and financial planning.

Build Public Trust

Build public trust through a transparent Comprehensive Planning process that reinforces the Park District's impact on community well-being, while leading responsibly as stewards of community resources, in effort to enrich community life through healthy leisure pursuits.



COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Lakota Group organized the planning process into three phases:

- 1 ENGAGE
- 2 ANALYZE
- 3 PLAN & IMPLEMENT





1

ENGAGE

In the first phase, The Park District worked with Lakota Group and aQuity to gather input from stakeholders, and the community through survey's, meetings, pop-ups, and surveys to lay the foundation for action planning.



Community Interest Survey

The Community Interest Survey gathered statistically valid input from Highland Park residents to understand evolving needs, preferences, and satisfaction levels with parks, facilities, and programs. The 2025 survey provided direction on what the community values most, from desired park improvements and recreation offerings to priorities for sustainability and accessibility. Its results help the Park District align upcoming investments and initiatives with the community's highest priorities and expectations. Its value lies in how directly it informs decision-making. The findings are not meant to sit alongside the plan, but to shape it. As such, the results are fully embedded into the priorities, strategies, and metrics of the New GreenPrint, ensuring that future investments and actions reflect current community expectations.

403

Survey Respondents



In Person Engagement FOCUS GROUPS

The team connected with a wide range of stakeholders through focus group discussions.

- Civic Groups (4)
- Park Board Commissioners (5)
- Transportation Advisory (2)
- Government Partners (6)
- Park Foundation (9)
- New Residents (4)
- Pickleball Committee (5)
- Young Adults (1)
- Athletics / AYSO (5)
- Park District Employees (100+)
- Golf (5)
- Highwood Residents (8)
- Ice Focus Group (12)
- Athletics Focus Group (12)



Additional Engagement Opportunities

POP-UP EVENTS

- Centennial Ice Arena Pop-Up
- Egg Hunt Pop-Up
- Park Fitness Pop-Up
- Danny Cunniff Pop-Up

ONLINE THOUGHT SHARING

www.pdhpgreenprint.com

OPEN HOUSES

- Olson Park Open House (June 2025)
- Community Open House (February 2026)



2 ANALYZE

This phase focuses on reviewing existing plans, data, and community feedback to shape the direction of the Master Plan, with findings shared at a community meeting.



Previous Park District Planning Documents

The New GreenPrint builds directly on the success of previous planning efforts, including GreenPrint 2024 approved in 2015. The New GreenPrint carries forward core principles from the prior plans while updating priorities to reflect current conditions and future needs. As a comprehensive update, it replaces the original GreenPrint Master Plan and supported by prior planning efforts, establishing a renewed vision and implementation strategy for the next decade. Previous planning efforts include: GreenPrint 2024 (2015 Master Plan), Land Management Plan, Sports Field Master Plan (2019), ADA Transition Plan (2024–25), GreenPath Sustainability Plan (2025), Lakefront Master Plan Update (2020), Beach Management (2021), Park & Site Master Plans, Neighborhood Park Assessments.



Level of Service (LOS) Analysis

The Level of Service (LOS) analysis evaluates how well the Park District of Highland Park’s parks, facilities, and amenities are serving today’s community. It measures acreage, standards, and distribution so the GreenPrint Master Plan can align future investments with resident needs and expectations. LOS Types Used in this Report include:

- **Acreage:** *Do we have enough land to support recreation and conservation needs for our population?*
- **PDHP Standards:** *Are PDHP standards for capacity, access, quality, and experience met?*
- **Distribution:** *Are parks located and connected so residents can conveniently access them?*



historical participation data. Through interviews with staff, a recreation staff survey, and data analysis, the process gathered insights on current recreational use and future needs. The District’s registration software provided data regarding the 2024 program offerings and corresponding participation.

Having access to recreational opportunities helps people lead healthier lives and supports the overall well-being of the community. The District’s wide range of programs is a major draw for both residents and visitors. As such, the goal of the recreation programs assessment is to guide the future delivery of programs and services. This assessment uncovers insights regarding programming and includes the following items: A systematic program analysis, assessment, and evaluation process that will guide staff as they navigate current programming efforts and future needs. Identification of program categories, programming gaps, and future program considerations. Guidance in determining the most effective/efficient programs and the delivery of those programs.

Recreation Service Assessment

The Park District of Highland Park (PDHP), in partnership with Berry, Dunn, McNeil & Parker, LLC (BerryDunn), conducted a recreation program assessment utilizing staff input and

The assessment provides insight into the District’s individual program areas as well as the program menu as a whole. This districtwide look will help the agency understand overall offerings and participation, trends therein, and therefore, opportunities to serve generations of residents and visitors for years to come.



Park Assessments

The park assessments and facility scorecards were developed as a systemwide evaluation tool to understand how well existing assets are performing today and where targeted improvements are needed. The assessments are grounded in a consistent set of criteria that measure not only what each site offers, but how it functions, how it is experienced, and how it serves the broader community.

Each park site was evaluated using four primary metrics: Capacity, Access, Quality, and Experience. Capacity measures the presence and diversity of core amenities and how well a site supports recreational use. Access evaluates how easily a site can be reached and navigated, including connections to sidewalks, bike infrastructure, parking, and transit. Quality focuses on the condition of amenities, maintenance levels, and the overall physical environment. Experience considers how a space contributes to community life, including comfort, usability, social interaction, and overall sense of place.

For parks, the assessment process built upon previous work completed by the Park District. Existing evaluations were reviewed, validated, and expanded to ensure a comprehensive and consistent systemwide analysis. Additional parks that had not been previously assessed, or where information was incomplete, were incorporated into the process to create a complete inventory and ensure that all park types were evaluated using the same criteria.

Facility Scorecards

For facilities, each scorecard was developed through an independent assessment of the building, site, and its ability to support current and future recreation needs. Scores reflect overall performance and help identify strengths, deficiencies, and opportunities for improvement.

The intent of the scoring system is not to rank facilities against one another, but to provide a consistent framework for identifying service gaps, prioritizing investments, guiding capital planning decisions, and tracking progress over time.

Sample Park Scorecard:

THE PRESERVE OF HIGHLAND PARK
1207 Park Avenue West
Regional Park | North Central District
108 ACRES

Overview
The Preserve is a one-of-a-kind natural area for passive recreation, welcoming visitors to sunbathe in the shade, stroll, and experience of nature and outdoor play. Park amenities include green lawns, nature-based play areas, specialized native gardens, restored woodlands, and walking and biking trails.

Standards Summary

STANDARD	MET?	KEY NOTES
CAPACITY	N/A	
ACCESS	Y	Park site facilitates multimodal accessibility.
QUALITY	Y	Facilities are well-maintained, though some updates are needed.
EXPERIENCE	Y	The park is a valuable community asset.

Recommendations to Fill Gaps & Constraints
Three actions address unmet Quality and Experience standards:

- Update outdoor amenities, including benches and the gazebo.
- Add drinking fountains with both filters.
- Add additional bike parking near the site perimeter.
- Enhance aquatic habitats through native plantings and in-water structures to support water quality and biodiversity.

Considerations to Exceed Standards
To improve visitor experience and meet long-term community needs, the following enhancements are suggested:

- Add bike repair stations and several bike racks to support multimodal access.
- Restore the Skokie River Woods corridor by removing invasive species, improving water quality, and enhancing access.
- Consider partnerships, sponsorships, adopt-a-park programs, and fee support models to support programming and resource.
- Explore solar infrastructure, stormwater enhancements, electric maintenance equipment, and controlled grazing for sustainable land management.

District Context
The Preserve of Highland Park opened in 2022 on the site of the former Highland Park Country Club. The Park District acquired the property from the City in 2010 and recognized a new opportunity to transform the large open space into a natural area for passive recreation.



3 PLAN & IMPLEMENT

During this final phase of the planning process, Lakota Group created the 10-year GreenPrint Comprehensive Plan based on the analysis and community engagement completed in the previous project phases. The Project Team established priority projects, strategic goals and strategies and an timeline for implementation. Chapter 2 provides an Executive Summary of the New GreenPrint Comprehensive Plan.









EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER 2



GUIDING THEMES

The New GreenPrint vision was shaped through a combination of systemwide analysis, technical assessment, and community engagement, ensuring that recommendations are grounded in both data and lived experience. Quantitative tools such as the Level of Service analysis, park and facility scorecards, and demographic review helped identify systemwide strengths, gaps, and investment priorities, while statistically valid surveys, stakeholder discussions, focus groups, and pop-up engagement provided insight into how residents experience parks and recreation in their daily lives. Together, these efforts revealed a consistent need to balance stewardship of existing assets with evolving expectations around comfort, flexibility, accessibility, wellness, and community connection.



At its core, this vision is guided by three overarching themes, Stewardship, Well-Being, and Efficiency. These themes provide a unifying framework for decision-making, ensuring that future investments and actions are thoughtful, community-centered, and sustainable over time. Together, they define how the Park District will care for its assets, support the health and experience of its residents, and operate in a responsible and effective manner. Three guiding themes emerged consistently through community engagement, stakeholder input, and system analysis.

Stewardship

Responsibly acquire, protect, and maintain parks and open spaces while implementing sustainable and resilient practices. Foster a vibrant community by creating inclusive gathering places, and champion parks and recreation through advocacy, impact, education, partnerships, and policy leadership to enrich community life.

Well-Being

Promote and support essential parks and recreation services that address the social, physical, intellectual, emotional, environmental, economic, and cultural needs of all individuals, regardless of life stage, ability, or income, while providing flexible options that remove barriers to participation.

Efficiency

Ensure fiscal responsibility by seeking opportunities for innovation and collaboration with local units of government, businesses, and other organizations that leverage funding, reduce redundancy, and streamline operations.

These themes are the lens through which the New GreenPrint evaluates priorities, shapes recommendations, and organizes future action.

To bring this vision to life, GreenPrint is structured as a comprehensive plan, integrating both physical investments and operational priorities into a single, coordinated framework.

Capital Investment Plan focuses on the Park District's physical system, guiding long-term investments in parks, facilities, and infrastructure. It outlines a strategic approach to maintaining existing assets, improving key spaces, and developing new opportunities where needed to meet current and future community needs.

Operational Strategic Plan provides an operational roadmap for the organization, aligning day-to-day work with long-term priorities. Grounded in the District's core values of being welcoming, caring, and extraordinary, it focuses on three key areas, customers, team members, and resources

Together, these two plans form a comprehensive and balanced roadmap. The Capital Plan addresses the outward-facing experience of parks and facilities, while the Strategic Plan strengthens the internal systems and operations that support them.

Aligned, they ensure that investments in physical spaces are supported by the people, programs, and processes needed to sustain them, creating a cohesive, forward-looking approach to delivering exceptional parks and recreation for the Highland Park community.



CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN



Capital Projects

Capital Projects are investments that support maintaining, improving, and developing current and future Park District assets such as land, buildings, vehicles, and equipment to meet assets. Park District Assets include land, buildings, vehicles, and equipment to meet the needs of the community. Capital Projects are categorized and prioritized by a Tier System:

- **Maintenance Projects (Tiers 1 – 3):** Level of investment focused on the essential repair and replacement of existing resources. Tier 1 is any investment where the primary purpose is to correct a safety hazard or is pursuant to a legal contract, ordinance, or law. Tier 2 is any investment in an existing asset that is in critical condition, whereas if not addressed may pose a safety hazard or lead to a larger expense and/or impact on existing services. Tier 3 is any investment for an existing asset that is recommended for replacement due to reaching its useful life.
- **Improvement Projects (Tiers 4):** Level of investment focused on improving existing resources / facilities to better serve the needs of the community. Tier 4 investments improve existing assets that proactively improve service quality.
- **Development Projects (Tier 5-6):** Level of investment focused on developing new resources that meet the current and future needs of the community. Tier 5 investments are new projects that fulfill a current unmet need. Tier 6 investments represent a need that currently does not have funding identified.
- **GreenPrint Priority Projects:** Level of investment focused on capital projects that are specifically prioritized and based on alignment with the Comprehensive Plan's Guiding Themes.

Capital Project Focus Areas

The New GreenPrint organizes future capital priorities into four primary project areas: Outdoor Sports, Indoor Sports, Recreation Facilities, and Park Amenities. This structure aligns with the needs and priorities identified through outreach and engagement and park system assessments. They help distinguish the types of investments the Park District plan to prioritize over the next decade and provide a clear pathway to communicate where resources should be directed.



OUTDOOR SPORTS

Outdoor sports projects include investments in field lighting, turf, drainage, stormwater management, amenities and new or improved multi-use fields, courts, and courses, as well as other site improvements that make outdoor sports more accessible, playable, safe, and sustainable, resilient, adaptable and inclusive to support high community demand.



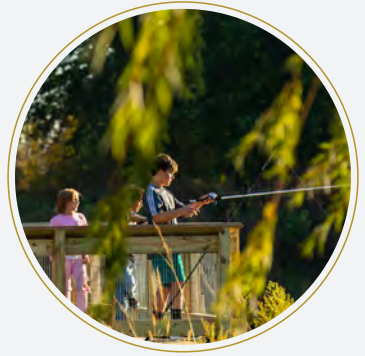
INDOOR SPORTS

Indoor sports address facilities used for practice, training and competition spaces. Project investments include in playing surfaces, amenities, and multi-use training areas that improve access, availability, and increased opportunities for athletes to practice and compete throughout the year.



RECREATION FACILITIES

Recreation facilities include spaces, equipment, and amenities that support a broad range of multi-generational activities beyond sports, including the arts, aquatics, natural areas, fitness, enrichment, and social programming.



PARK AMENITIES

Park amenities address investments in playgrounds, natural areas, beaches, trails, and pavilions that contribute to the overall quality, durability, and variety of recreation and leisure opportunities.

Capital Project Funding

A central component of the New GreenPrint is the distinction between funded and unfunded capital projects. This creates transparency around what is positioned to move forward in the near term and what will require additional effort, resources, or partnerships to become a reality.

- **Funded projects** align with existing funding sources that the Park District can leverage to advance priority projects in the near term.
- **Unfunded projects**, while still important, exceed the District's current funding capacity and require a more deliberate funding strategy to advance. Such projects may require feasibility studies, partnerships, grants, philanthropic support, debt financing, or phased implementation over time.

This distinction reinforces the need for a flexible and strategic approach to capital investment. While the District's overall funding provides a strong foundation to support ongoing capital maintenance, repair and replacement of existing infrastructure, future development projects require a more targeted and layered funding strategy. As project scale and complexity increase, the Park District must rely on a combination of funding tools to advance priorities in a responsible and achievable manner.

FUNDED

1-5 year Capital GreenPrint Projects (2026-2030)

Total 1-5 year GreenPrint
Capital Investment Funding:
\$4,100,000

Total 1-5 year Capital Plan
(maintenance + repair + replace):
\$27,378,249

FUNDED

1-5 year

Capital GreenPrint Projects
(2026-2030)

Funded Capital Development Projects | (2026-2030)

Outdoor Sports

COST	PROJECT	FY 2026				FY 2027				FY 2028				FY 2029				FY 2030				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
\$500,000	West Ridge Field Lighting																					
\$0 Staff Time	Concept Plan																					
\$0 Staff Time	Select Design/Engineer																					
\$15,000	Design and Preliminary Engineering																					
\$5,000	City Design and Review/Permitting																					
\$30,000	Final Documentation and Bidding																					
\$450,000	Construction																					
\$100,000	Sports Field Development Study (Olson / West Ridge)																					

Indoor Sports

COST	PROJECT	FY 2026				FY 2027				FY 2028				FY 2029				FY 2030				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
\$2,105,000	Sunset Valley Golf Simulator																					
\$0 Staff Time	Engagement																					
\$20,000	Concept Design																					
\$50,000	Schematic Design																					
\$5,000	City Design Review and Permitting																					
\$100,000	Construction Documents																					
\$5,000	Bidding																					
\$1,925,000	Construction																					
	Open to Use																					
\$300,000	Centennial Ice Aren - Off Ice Training																					
	Board Update																					
	Phase 1 - Flooring Specifications																					
	Phase 1 - Bidding																					
	Phase 1 - Construction																					
	Phase 1 Ready to Use																					
	Phase 2 - Training Amenities																					
	Phase 3 - HVAC Engineer Selection																					
	Phase 3 - HVAC Engineering																					
	Phase 3 - HVAC Bidding																					
	Phase 3 - HVAC Installation																					
	Open to Use																					

Recreation Facilities

COST	PROJECT	FY 2026				FY 2027				FY 2028				FY 2029				FY 2030				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
\$500,000	Ceramics Studio																					
\$0 Staff Time	Concept Design																					
\$10,000	Design and Engineering																					
\$5,000	City Design and Review/Permitting																					
\$20,000	Final Documentation and Bidding																					
\$465,000	Construction																					
	Open to Use																					
\$100,000	Waterpark Development Study & Planning																					

Park Amenities

COST	PROJECT	FY 2026				FY 2027				FY 2028				FY 2029				FY 2030				
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
\$50,000	Lakefront Access Development Study																					
\$750,000	Splash Pad Study & Development																					
\$5,000	Engagement																					
\$40,000	Design																					
\$5,000	Bidding																					
\$700,000	Construction																					
	Open to Use																					

\$4,405,000	Funded (1 to 5 Years)																					
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01

Outdoor Sports

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

WELL-BEING

Funded Budget:

\$500,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2026 - 2028

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

West Ridge Field Lighting Project

Funding for West Ridge Field Lighting is identified as a priority 5 -year capital investment project linked to the District's Guiding Theme of **Well-being** through outdoor sports facility enhancements. This investment complements recent site improvements at West Ridge Park by adding lights to the newly constructed athletic field that accommodates up to 90 ft. basepaths and multi-sport activities, and is adjacent to the recently constructed West Ridge Community Center. This project will significantly increase seasonal playability and programming opportunities. Expanding usable time responds to the growing demand for seasonal field usage and balanced programming of an existing park open space asset and is aligned with the Park District's Sports Field Master Plan.

The District's investment will support further detail, study and implementation of state-of-the-art lighting fixtures and technology that meet appropriate community lighting standards.



02

Outdoor Sports

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$100,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2026 - 2027

See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5

Sports Field Development Study

This project is linked to the District's Guiding Themes of **Well-being and Efficiency** and focuses on evaluating future sports field improvements and expansion opportunities, with particular attention given to West Ridge Park and Olson Park. It further evaluates District objectives identified through previous planning efforts, including the Sports Field Master Plan. This priority project seeks to address overuse of existing fields, limited availability for practices and games, versatility of use, accessibility, quality, safety, and the overall experience for players and spectators. The study represents a long-term investment in expanding outdoor sports field capacity while strengthening connectivity and usability across the District. Considerations include property acquisition, development of existing property, site improvements such as field drainage, artificial turf, and universal design principles. Potential areas of development include a fully accessible, multi-sport artificial turf field at West Ridge Park and the acquisition and development of a contiguous 10-acre parcel at Olson Park.

03

TRACKMAN
INDOOR GOLF



Indoor Sports

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$2,105,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2026 - 2029

See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5

Sunset Valley Golf Simulators Project

The Sunset Valley Golf Simulator project is linked to the District's Guiding Theme of **Well-being and Efficiency**. It explores the expansion of the existing Clubhouse to accommodate several year round golf simulators. The simulators would not only add value to the current golfers at Sunset Valley during the peak season, but also support year round instruction, skill development, and recreational play for a wide range of users. This project also introduces continued revenue generation while expanding Sunset Valley's role as a year-round golf destination.



04

Indoor Sports

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$300,000

Currently funded in the 2026 Capital Plan

Implementation
Timeline:

2026 - 2027

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Off Ice Training Facility (Centennial Ice Arena)

This near-term initiative is linked to the District's Guiding themes of **Well-being, Efficiency, and Stewardship** and focuses on the adaptive reuse of the former gymnastics space at Centennial Ice Arena to create a dedicated off-ice training facility. The repurposed space would support conditioning, skills development, and supplemental training for ice users, helping athletes train more effectively year-round. By expanding functionality within the existing building, the project maximizes current assets while enhancing the overall ice program.

In effort to maximize impact and efficient use of this space, the District will create a flexible space that can accommodate a variety of training and recreational functions.

05



Recreation Facilities

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$500,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2026 - 2027

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Ceramics Studio Project

This project is linked to the District's Guiding Theme of **Well-being and Efficiency**. It involves assessing the feasibility of repurposing the Danny Cunniff Field House to accommodate a dedicated ceramics studio that supports classes, workshops, and community arts programming. The studio would expand creative and cultural offerings while providing specialized indoor space for hands-on arts education. The initiative strengthens the connection between recreation, learning, and community expression.



06

Recreation Facilities

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$100,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2029 - 2030

See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5

Water Park Development Study and Planning

Hidden Creek Aquapark Locker Room: This project is linked to the District's Guiding Themes of *Well-being and Stewardship*. It focuses on renovating or rebuilding the existing locker room facilities at Hidden Creek Aquapark to better support daily operations, programming, and visitor comfort. Improved locker rooms would enhance functionality for families, groups, and seasonal users with a universal design approach in addressing capacity, accessibility, and modern amenity expectations.

Hidden Creek Aquapark Amenities (Party Deck / Splash Pad): This project is linked to the District's Guiding Themes of *Well-being and Stewardship*. It explores enhancements to Hidden Creek Aquapark that expand its appeal and flexibility. New or renovated amenities would create opportunities for new gathering and celebration spaces, update water play opportunities, and include a universal design approach. Together, the improvements would broaden programming options, improve user experience, and strengthen the aquapark's role as a multi-generational recreational asset.

Guiding Theme:

WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY
STEWARDSHIP

Funded Budget:

\$50,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2029 - 2030

See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5

Lakefront Access Development Study

This project is linked to the District's Guiding Themes of **Well-being, Efficiency, and Stewardship**. It further evaluates objectives associated with the District's previous planning efforts in the Lakefront Master Plan and Park Avenue Site Master Plan. It considers improved access at lakefront properties such as connections between Central Park and Park Avenue Boating Facility, as well as connectivity to Rosewood Beach and Millard Beach. Projects respond to long-standing access challenges and reinforce stewardship of our lakefront properties as key community and visitor destinations.



08

Park Amenities

YEAR 1 - 5

Guiding Theme:

WELL-BEING

Funded Budget:

\$750,000

Implementation
Timeline:

2027 - 2030

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Splash Pad Study & Development

This project is linked to the District's Guiding Theme of **Well-being**. It further evaluates the objectives associated with the District's previous planning effort through the Sunset Woods Site Master Plan which suggested the installation of a splash pad. This amenity would add a family-oriented water play feature that complements existing park amenities. This study should evaluate other parks throughout the District and consider weather Sunset Woods Park is the best fit for this amenity versus development at a different park location. A splash pad would provide inclusive, low-barrier recreation for younger users and families, supporting seasonal use and expanding the park's role as a neighborhood gathering space.

FUNDED

5-10 year Capital GreenPrint Projects (2031-2036)

Total 5-10 year GreenPrint
Capital Investment Funding:
\$11,444,300

Total 5-10 year Capital Plan
(maintenance + repair+ replace):
\$24,000,000

FUNDED

5-10 year

Capital GreenPrint Projects
(2031-2036)

Funded Capital Development Projects | (2031-2036)

Outdoor Sports

COST	PROJECT	DEBT ISSUANCE	FY 2031				FY 2032				FY 2033				FY 2034				FY 2035				FY 2036			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
\$3,900,000	Sports Field Development Project																									
	Project start, scoping, planning, and programming, acquisition pursuit																									
	Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																									
	City review and approvals																									
	Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																									
	Material Procurement and Construction																									

Recreation Facilities

COST	PROJECT	DEBT ISSUANCE	FY 2031				FY 2032				FY 2033				FY 2034				FY 2035				FY 2036			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
\$3,000,000	Waterpark Development Project Implementation - Locker Rooms																									
	Staff																									
\$50,000	Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																									
\$50,000	Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																									
\$50,000	City review and approvals																									
\$50,000	Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																									
\$2,900,000	Construction																									

Park Amenities

COST	PROJECT	DEBT ISSUANCE	FY 2031				FY 2032				FY 2033				FY 2034				FY 2035				FY 2036			
			Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
	Administration/Operations Support Study & Project																									
\$544,300	Administrative Office Leasehold																									
\$4,000,000	Administrative Building Development																									
\$50,000	Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																									
\$100,000	Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																									
	City review and approvals																									
\$250,000	Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																									
\$3,600,000	Construction																									
\$11,444,300	Funded (5 to 10 Years)																									

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Outdoor Sports

YEAR 5 - 10

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$3,900,000Implementation
Timeline:**TBD**

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Sports Field Development Project

This project would be linked to outcomes of the Sports Field Planning Project in years 1-5. It is linked to the district's Guiding Themes of **Well-being, Efficiency and Stewardship** and reflects broader investment in outdoor sports facilities that support organized play, training, and flexible programming. The focus is on providing adaptable, multi-use spaces that can accommodate a variety of sports and age groups, helping relieve pressure on outdoor fields and improve year-round access to athletic opportunities.

A photograph of a modern locker room. The room features rows of wooden lockers with black combination locks. In the center, there are two long, light-colored padded benches. To the left, there is a white sink with a mirror above it and a small potted plant. The floor is covered in a patterned carpet. The lighting is warm and recessed into the ceiling.

10

Recreation Facilities

YEAR 5 - 10

Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$3,000,000

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Water Park Development Project Implementation

Hidden Creek Aquapark Locker Room: This project focuses on implementing new or upgraded locker room facilities at Hidden Creek Aquapark to better support daily operations, programming, and visitor comfort. Improved locker room facilities will enhance functionality for families, groups, and seasonal users while addressing capacity, accessibility, and modern amenity expectations.

This project will also factor in the Hidden Creek Development Study and Planning to determine the need and feasibility of adding or updating water park amenities.



YEAR 5 - 10

Guiding Theme:

WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY
STEWARDSHIP

Administration / Operations Support Study and Project

Although not an identified project development area, a long term facility to support administrative and support staff was identified as a need that must be addressed in the next 10 years. This study and project is linked to the District's Guiding Themes of **Well-being, Efficiency and Stewardship**, since the administrative team supports all essential functions of the Park District. This study evaluates two options; continue leasehold for administrative offices and; construction/renovation for new administrative offices.

Funded Budget:

\$544,300

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Administrative Office Leasehold

This option explores leasing approximately 12,000 square feet of office space to meet the District's administrative needs. A rental approach provides near-term flexibility, allowing the District to respond to space constraints without significant upfront capital investment. This option would support faster implementation and adaptability as staffing levels, programming, and operational needs evolve.

Funded Budget:

\$4,000,000

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Administrative Building Development Project

This initiative considers the development or acquisition of approximately 12,000 square feet of new office space designed to support long-term administrative and operational functions. A dedicated District-owned facility could improve efficiency, accommodate future growth, and align workspace design with organizational needs. This option represents a long-term investment in operational continuity and a higher ticket item compared to other options.

This option evaluates potential for shared efficiencies with other government bodies or partner agencies or within a multi-tenant facility. A shared approach could improve coordination, reduce costs, and create opportunities for collaboration while still meeting core administrative needs.



OPERATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

The Park District of Highland Park (PDHP) and Bright Threads Leadership Group, worked collaboratively with Park Board Commissioners and Staff to develop the Park District of Highland Park Strategic Plan 2030. The Plan is a component of the greater Comprehensive Plan, GreenPrint, which is a long-term, comprehensive roadmap that lays out a vision and framework for how the District should grow, develop, and operate. It is based on community needs and rooted in the Park District's Mission and Values.

The Strategic Plan aligns with the District's Mission and Values as well as the GreenPrint's Guiding Themes of Stewardship, Well-being and Efficiency. When applied to the District's core operational perspectives of Customer, Team Member and Resources, they create an operational framework that guides leaders and aligns teams with priority goals, strategies and action items that support the day-to-day work of all employees. The Plan evaluates current priorities, emerging needs, gaps in service and future opportunities.

Priority Goals

Priority Goals clarify what is most important for the District to achieve in the coming years to have the biggest impact on achieving on each operational perspective.



CUSTOMER - CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Develop and implement Innovative customer engagement processes to increase our reach and ensure consistent delivery of extraordinary experiences that foster community connections and enrichment of community life.



TEAM MEMBERS - VALUES DRIVEN WORKPLACE

Establish and champion values-driven workforce practices designed to attract and retain top industry talent; empower employees to perform at their highest level; and cultivate a culture of belonging, where all team members' contributions are acknowledged, recognized, and appreciated.



RESOURCES - STEWARDSHIP OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Create a comprehensive long-term resource plan for ensuring responsible stewardship, efficient operations, proactive maintenance, and funding for future development.

Strategies

Strategies provide further clarity on what must be done to support each Priority Goal. Each priority goal is supported by three strategies, with a Strategy Focus for each year of the entirety of the Strategic Plan.

2026 - 2027

SHORT TERM

- **Customer Focus - Improve Accessibility**
Enhance and standardize customer accessibility to recreation services, facilities, parks and communications
- **Team Member Focus - Operational Clarity**
Establish systems for district-wide alignment, operational efficiency, and clarity in achieving priority goals
- **Resource Focus - Resource Management**
Maintain planning documents and guidelines that ensure the long-term care and management of existing and future capital assets and natural resources.

2028

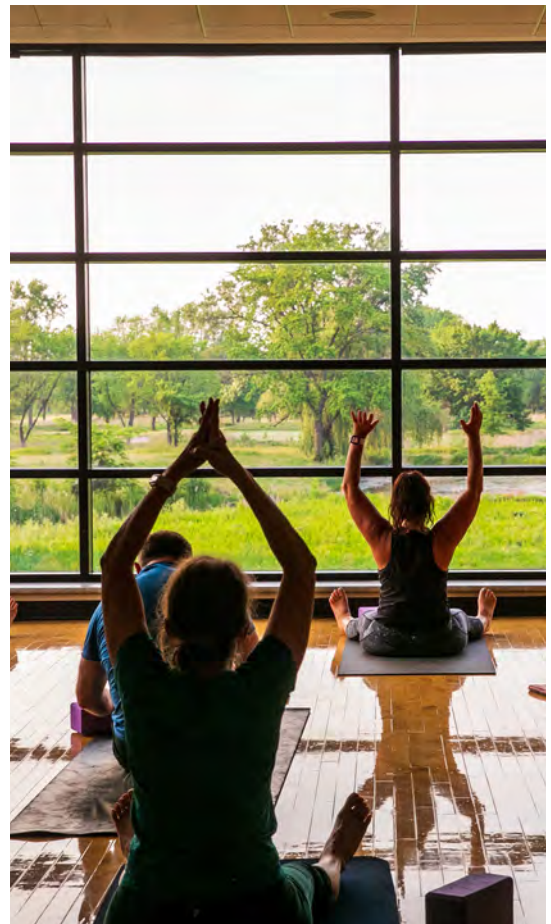
MID TERM

- **Customer Focus - Assess Needs**
Create consistent modes for evaluating community needs, assessing gaps in services, and prioritizing future improvements to our services, facilities and parks
- **Team Member Focus - Attract, Empower and Retain Talent**
Build a structured talent lifecycle framework
- **Resource Focus - Capital Funding**
Develop a funding plan to advance unfunded or underfunded capital projects

2029

LONG TERM

- **Customer Focus - Create Loyalty**
Elevate the customer experience and communicate community impact in effort to build loyalty and advocacy
- **Team Member Focus - Culture of Belonging**
Create employee practices that cultivate a culture of belonging, where team members' contributions are acknowledged, recognized, and appreciated
- **Resource Focus - Financial Sustainability**
Prioritize and align capital investments with a long-term funding model







ENGAGE

CHAPTER 3

The Park District of Highland Park used a layered engagement approach to capture both lived experiences and statistically valid feedback.

- **Statistically Valid Community Survey:** A survey of more than 400 households (n=403) was conducted in spring 2025, ensuring representation across age, geography, and demographics. The same instrument was also offered as an open online survey, extending reach to additional residents who wished to share their input.
- **In-Person Engagement:** Stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and pop-up workshops gathered detailed stories and perspectives. These discussions shaped a number of key themes that highlight opportunities, concerns, and ideas across the community.
- **Cross-Tabulation of Results:** Findings from the statistically valid survey were compared with what was heard in person. This allowed the planning team to see where results align and where they diverge, grounding the GreenPrint recommendations in both quantitative data and lived experiences.



COMMUNITY SURVEY KEY TAKEAWAYS

As part of the planning process, the Park District of Highland Park and aQuity conducted a statistically valid community survey to better understand the needs, preferences, and priorities of residents. A total of 403 households within the Park District boundaries participated in the survey, which was administered between May 20 and June 25, 2025. Invitations were distributed by both email and USPS to a random sample of households served by the District. Respondents were able to complete the survey online, by phone, or by returning a printed questionnaire.



Residents Continue to Hold the PDHP In High Regard, Mostly for its Parks/Outdoor Assets, Programs, and Overall Management

On a 0-10 scale, 86% give the District positive esteem ratings (scores of 6+), including 36% who hold it in the highest regard (scores of 9+). Only 8% give negative scores.

- Its average rating of 7.7 is virtually identical to its 2019 mark (7.6). However, residents are now more familiar with the PDHP, with only 6% who remain unfamiliar overall (down from 12% six years ago).
- Its average score is generally in line with benchmark comparisons from nearby agencies (with a few exceptions).

When asked what they like most about the PDHP (in an open-ended format), many give multiple responses/positive comments, most often its parks, playgrounds and trails (mentioned by 45%), especially their care and upkeep, the number and variety, and overall appreciation of having open space nearby.

- Nearly as many (41%) cite various admin/management responses, most often how well the District manages and maintains its properties in general, the friendly staff service. (While 6% appreciate the reasonable fees, twice as many (13%) said PDHP fees/costs are their top dislike.)
- Another 40% cite the programs among the District's top strengths, usually the range of offerings available (25%). About a quarter as many cite the quality of these programs as well (6%).
- PDHP facilities are cited by 25% overall (usually the Rec Center specifically).

Virtually all (88%) feel that their household's interests/lifestyle/background is reflected by the District and all that it offers, with 83%+ of all subgroups agreeing.

Given that 6.8% of one's property taxes goes to the PDHP, 67% think this is at least a good value given all that the District provides, with 32% saying it represents an excellent value.

- Only 15% rate it a poor value, and the remaining 18% rate it an average value.
- The average value rating (6.8) is about the same as in 2019 (6.9 when the District represented a 6% share of taxes) but continues to lag slightly below scores from nearby districts. (Again, PDHP fees are cited as a top dislike by 13%).



Usage and Satisfaction with District Parks and Facilities Likewise Remains Very Strong

As in 2019, virtually all (93%) still report that someone in their household used or visited a PDHP park or facility in the past year. This includes a majority who report going to Sunset Woods Park (73%), the Rec Center (63%), and Rosewood Swimming Beach (58%).

- Other popular destinations (cited by at least 30%) include the Preserve of Highland Park, Danny Cunniff Park, one of the other District beaches, Heller Nature Center, and/or Hidden Creek Aqua Park.
- While many of the most visited PDHP assets tend to be used by nearby residents, several draw from all parts of Highland Park, especially Danny Cunniff Park and most of the District's facilities (Rec Center, Heller Nature Center, Hidden Creek, Centennial Ice Arena, the Boating Center/Yacht Club, and Sunset Valley Golf Course).

Satisfaction with these parks and facilities is very strong, outperforming the overall esteem rating for the District. Each attribute receives an average rating of 8.2 or higher (on a 0-10 scale), with the highest scores going to:

- Safety (8.6 on average; no change over time)
- Cleanliness/upkeep/maintenance (8.5, significantly higher than 8.0 in 2019)
- Accessibility (8.4, up slightly from 8.1).





Needs Assessment Analysis Shows that Most of the Indoor Amenities Garner Only Some Demand and Represent “Gaps”

From a list of seven possible indoor facilities/amenities, those that garner the highest level of demand or interest are:

- Space for fine arts programs (35%, especially among younger and newer residents, those with children, SE region)
- An indoor warm water therapy pool (32%, especially from lower-income households).

Fewer (15% to 22% each) express a need or interest in the next “tier” of possible facilities:

- Rental rooms for private events (22%, usually younger and higher income residents with children)
- Gym space (16%) and/or an indoor sports training facility (15%) – both of which receive high interest from NW residents
- An indoor ice rink (with 15% citing a need, interest or current usage).

Most are seen as less critical “gaps” (given low demand levels), with under half of those interested in each facility feel it is readily available currently. This is especially true for the top two options – a fine arts studio, and a warm water therapy pool (bigger unmet needs).

- The gaps are smaller for those interested in facilities that the PDHP already offers – indoor ice rink, gymnasiums, rental rooms – which may reflect concerns about the availability or condition of these facilities.

None of these represent overwhelming priorities for the PDHP to address or deliver, with fine arts space receiving only 16% of the “#1 priority” rankings (followed closely by a warm water therapy pool at 13%).

- In fact, the most frequent response was “none of these are priorities/needed” (41%, especially among the oldest residents and households without children).



Outdoor Facilities Are More Likely to Meet Demand, Though Some Opportunities Remain

A majority (54%) express a need or interest for an outdoor aquatic park/pool, and for the most part that need is already being met. Nearly a third also express a need or interest in:

- Miniature golf (32%) – mostly met currently
- Water splash pad at a community park (31%) – a top gap or opportunity
- Outdoor fitness stations or court (28%) – likewise a gap.

All other outdoor amenities tested garnered less need or interest, and some (paddle/platform tennis, baseball/softball diamonds) are seen as readily available currently.



Most Residents Report Household Member Participation or Attendance at PDHP Programs/Events in Past Year

Overall, 70% recently took part in a District event or program, with very high overall satisfaction (7.6 average on a 0-10 scale).

- The highest ratings tend to come from older residents (ages 70+) participating in these activities. However, older adults in general and households without children tend to be the least likely to report program participation.

From a needs assessment standpoint, community events generate the greatest demand and are the top priority. While these needs are mostly being met, residents are especially interested in more music events and festivals/family events (e.g., block parties).

Otherwise, adult programs for the 18-54 and 55+ age groups rank next highest in interest, priority, and unmet needs. Aside from pickleball (important to both age groups):

- Younger adults (18-54) seek more team/competitive sports (scheduling is key for working adults).
- Those 55 and older tend to seek more arts and crafts as well as fitness/wellness activities.

Residents Support Most of the Unfunded Capital Projects Tested

Support is strongest (88%, and 76%+ among all subgroups) for completing the stairway from Central Park to Park Avenue Beach. Nearly half (44%) voice “strong” support.

Three other projects receive majority support (at least 2:1 over opponents) and rank close together in terms of priority (after the Central Park/Park Avenue Beach staircase):

- Improvements to Hidden Creek locker rooms, water features, etc. (77% support, mostly from younger/newer adults, upper income households, and those in the NE region)
- Adding inclusive and accessible artificial turf fields at West Ridge Park for youth of all abilities, including those with assistive devices (73%, likewise strongest support from younger adults, higher income residents, and the NE region)
- Adding a splash pad at Sunset park (70%, with a high level of “strong” support at 35%).

Slightly less support (62% to 67%) is given to:

- Improvements at Olson Park including natural and inclusive artificial turf sports fields and other amenities such as bathrooms, improved paths, and shelters (67% mostly from the NE region, but only 19% “strong” support)
- Indoor artificial multi-sport game fields (62%, with as many “strong” opponents as “strong” supporters at 14% each).

Respondents are most divided on whether to replace the gymnastics space at Centennial Ice Arena with a ¼ sheet studio training ice rink (53% support, 47% opposed). In fact, when given an alternative option:

- They instead tend to favor using that space for indoor sports classes and training (39%) over a studio ice skating training rink (15%), more than 2:1. Recent Centennial users are even more likely to feel this way (54% vs. 20%, respectively).
- Overall, 46% have no strong opinion/preference (mostly non-users of this facility).

While resident opinions about the PDHP remain very positive, several improvement opportunities remain



PERCEPTION / IMAGE

- Similar to many park districts, the biggest reason for non-usage or limited usage of the PDHP's parks, facilities and programs is the perception that it is primarily focused on youth and young families. Specifically, adults without children (both the youngest residents and especially empty nesters) feel there is little offered for them.
- Some of this perception may be due to lack of information, or less compelling reasons to seek options for the Park District.
- Know that while most residents get information about programs, facilities etc. on the PDHP website (66%), a majority (53%) also go to City sources such as its website, the Highlander newsletter, etc.
 - Note that non-program participants and households without children are nearly twice as likely to prefer City (non-PDHP) sources for District info, compared to program participants.
 - Frequent and consistent promotion and updates via these City sources (especially the Highlander) should be maintained, with steady emphasis on adult offerings.
- Keep in mind that visitors/users most appreciate how safe they feel at PDHP locations, and how well they are maintained. It is worth reinforcing this messaging when trying to engage and attract non-users.



PROGRAMMING

- As mentioned, adult programs/activities are the biggest unmet needs (both sports and non-sports) for ages 18-54 and 55+.
- A frequent comment is that many of the existing program options for adults are during work hours.
 - Program scheduling ranked as the 2nd biggest dislike overall (after costs/fees).
 - These residents would like to see more evening and weekend activities – not just for adults, but also for some younger youth programs (which require the parent to drop off/pick up or attend).
- Pickleball remains the top suggestion across the board, but younger adults seek other team or competitive activities as well, while those ages 55+ most want arts/crafts options and wellness or fitness options (yoga, stretching, tai chi, group classes).





OUTDOOR AMENITIES / NEEDS

- Knowing that residents are especially happy with the parks and outdoor facilities in general, and those deemed most important (Hidden Creek, miniature golf) are seen as readily available (along with paddle/platform tennis and ball fields).
- That said, a number of outdoor improvements generate strong support, especially:
 - The Central Park to Park Avenue Beach stairway
 - A splash pad at Sunset Park (echoing support for water features at a neighborhood park, with Sunset being heavily used)
 - Inclusive and accessible fields at West Ridge Park allowing all abilities to participate in sports activities.



INDOOR AMENITIES / NEEDS

- The indoor facilities tested generated a lower sense of priority, due to lower levels of demand for each.
- That said, a few opportunities are worth considering/pursuing:
 - Locker room and water feature improvements at Hidden Creek (strong support at a popular, valued facility)
 - Additional space for fine arts programming and studios – which appeals mostly to younger adults but also nearly one in four of those without children and who have not participated in programs recently
 - An indoor warm water therapy pool.
- For the former gymnastics space at Centennial, residents are more likely to favor an indoor sports training facility (broader demand for multiple sports/activities) than an additional ice rink for private skating lessons and training, or hockey clinics.
 - Regardless, either decision from the District and Park Board will need to be carefully reasoned and explained to the most interested parties (e.g., ice/hockey groups and broader sports communities).





IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT KEY TAKEAWAYS

Accessibility

The current registration system is seen as favoring those with flexible schedules, digital literacy, and financial resources, creating unintentional barriers for many families. Highwood residents, who are part of the school community but live outside the Park District's tax base, face cost-related access barriers and limited program availability. Stakeholders emphasized the continued need for equity to continue being intentionally embedded across all stages of program design, from pricing structures and registration formats to geographic distribution of services. Residents want accessibility to extend beyond ADA standards to include sensory, cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions that address the full range of user needs. Parks and trails are sometimes disconnected or feel difficult to access, especially for older adults, children, and residents with disabilities. Improved communication was also framed as essential to equity, ensuring that everyone, not just long-time residents, benefit from available programs and amenities.

Indoor and Outdoor Sports Facilities

Skaters and families routinely travel to other towns to access practice and training time, resulting in a loss of both local talent and community spending. Poor outdoor sports field conditions, especially flooding and mud at Olson Park, lead to regular cancellations and unsafe play environments. Parents and coaches worry that inadequate facilities are pushing families to seek out other towns with better infrastructure and year-round training options. The removal of indoor training areas has left families without needed practice space. Participants called for year-round, multi-sport training spaces to support both emerging sports and legacy programs like baseball and soccer. Residents expressed excitement about the new Club Pickle & Padel facility, advocating for community-oriented programming and equitable use policies.



Flexibility and Variety

The time between 3:00 and 5:00 PM remains one of the hardest to cover for working families, creating a need for flexible, enriching after-school options. Parents expressed interest in short-format, drop-off, and sensory-friendly programs, especially for households with children of different ages or needs. Many families face logistical challenges coordinating pickups and drop-offs for programs located at different sites or with overlapping schedules. With school transportation changes reducing bus availability, more families are depending on Park District-provided transit, which is seen as helpful but inconsistent. The lack of before- and after-care programs impacts working parents, leaving a gap in support during critical hours of the day. Families with toddlers and young children asked for expanded programming outside of 9-to-5 hours, including weekend, evening, and late afternoon options. Many participants expressed interest in flexible formats like short sessions, trial packs, and seasonal drop-ins to reduce commitment barriers and encourage new participation.

Adult Recreation

Residents across age groups want programs that align with their actual schedules, life stages, and interests. Adults requested more enrichment-oriented offerings such as DIY workshops, cultural classes, guided walks, and social events like wine or bourbon tastings. Natural destinations like Rosewood Beach, Heller, and The Preserve were frequently mentioned as ideal settings for casual, seasonal events like bonfires, concerts, and group hikes. Residents emphasized that programs should foster joy, connection, and belonging, not just provide structured activities, with a focus on flexibility, inclusivity, and community-building. Current adult programming is limited for working parents, caregivers, and residents with nontraditional schedules. Residents strongly support adding afternoon and evening classes for cycling, yoga, strength training, and other fitness programs. Aquatics users want expanded lap swim hours, more evening family swim time, and accessible adult swim lessons that better align with daily routines. There is growing demand for wellness-based programming, including guided recovery, mobility and stretching classes, meditation, and nutrition education.



Community-wide Collaboration

Civic leaders expressed continued coordination between the Park District's GreenPrint process and the City's Comprehensive Plan. Opportunities for joint planning to improve efficiencies and shared visions for public spaces and community wellness. Suggestions included cross-agency planning summits, unified dashboards, and collaborative grant applications to support shared goals. Many residents are unaware of the Parks Foundation of Highland Park and its purpose, or role in supporting Park District initiatives. Opportunities exist to grow visibility, partnerships, and year-round fundraising, suggesting that there is untapped potential for the Foundation to support GreenPrint priorities through targeted campaigns, legacy giving, and donor recognition programs. Participants pointed to successful models in peer communities where foundations play a more visible and strategic role in funding park improvements and community programming. Residents across demographics expressed a desire for opportunities to volunteer and contribute to the care of parks and programs. New residents saw volunteering as a way to build relationships and integrate into the community; parents wanted ways for children to help too. Participants enjoy structured, family-friendly, and accessible pathways to get involved in park cleanups, events, and stewardship efforts.

Sustainability and Stewardship

Residents expressed strong emotional ties to Highland Park's natural areas and want to see those spaces protected and maintained with care. Concerns around shoreline erosion, seasonal flooding, and maintained trails signaled a need for more visible management. Families suggested hands-on ways to engage the public in sustainability efforts, including intergenerational trail clean-ups and conservation events. There is an appetite for educational programming that promotes understanding of ravines, native plantings, and broader environmental stewardship.



STAFF ANALYSIS KEY TAKEAWAYS

District staff participated in several focus groups and an evaluation using a SWOC framework (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges). Summarized results are as follows:

Strengths

- **Strong Staff Culture and Leadership** - Nearly every department highlighted the dedication, expertise, and adaptability of their staff as a core strength. For example, Park Fitness, Athletics, and Aquatics all referenced “extraordinary staff culture,” “operational leadership,” and “qualified staff” as drivers of program quality and community trust. This is reinforced by high staff retention in key areas (e.g., Early Childhood, Youth Enrichment, and Camp), which supports consistent service delivery and positive relationships with patrons.
- **Quality Facilities and Programming** - Departments such as Aquatics, Athletics, and Centennial Ice Arena emphasized the high quality of their facilities (e.g., “clean and welcoming beach,” “high quality sheet of ice,” “modernized fitness floor”) and the breadth of programming offered. This is echoed in the Recreation and Golf Learning Center, where the variety and innovation in programs (STREAM, mini golf, Toptracer technology) are seen as differentiators that attract and retain participants.
- **Community Engagement and Relationships** - Multiple departments (e.g., Heller Nature Center, Marketing, Parks and Natural Areas) noted strong community ties, positive feedback from residents, and successful partnerships as strengths. Examples include “loyalty and retention of core participants,” “community buy-in of ordinances,” and “deepened community ties” through events and outreach.



Weaknesses

- **Space and Facility Constraints** - A recurring theme is the lack of adequate space—both for programs and staff. Athletics, Rentals, and Centennial Ice Arena all mention “lack of field space,” “not enough rental space,” and “limited space for cheer team/skating school.” This limits the ability to expand offerings, accommodate demand, and provide optimal experiences.
- **Staffing Shortages and Retention Challenges** - Departments such as Park Fitness, Rentals, and Centennial Ice Arena cite “staffing shortages,” and “retaining high quality staff,” as ongoing issues. These challenges are compounded by seasonal fluctuations, pay equity concerns, and the need for specialized skills, which can impact morale and service quality.
- **Aging Infrastructure and Deferred Maintenance** - Facilities, Parks and Natural Areas, and IT all reference “aging infrastructure,” “deferred maintenance,” and “deteriorating buildings/trails” as weaknesses. This creates operational inefficiencies, and increased costs, making it harder to keep up with community expectations and regulatory requirements.
- **Unclear or Inconsistent Processes and Communication** - Several departments (e.g., HR and Risk, Registration, Planning) point to a need for improved procedures and documentation, clarifying roles and responsibilities and clear communication to promote efficiency and staff satisfaction. This can synergize efforts, create new opportunities, and improve both internal and external satisfaction.

Opportunities

- **Expanding Partnerships and Collaborations** - Many departments see value in building new partnerships—to with schools, local businesses, and other agencies—to expand programming, share resources, and reach new audiences. For example, Athletics aims to “establish relationships with local schools,” while Heller Nature Center and Recreation seek to “build connections with senior centers and libraries” and “engage with new audiences such as scout troops and sports teams.”
- **Launching New Programs and Services** - Innovation in programming is a common opportunity. Departments are exploring new formats (e.g., “mini-sessions,” “Try-It weeks”), expanding into underrepresented areas (e.g., “female athletics,” “inclusive and sensory-friendly design”), and leveraging feedback to pilot offerings that meet evolving community needs.
- **Leveraging Technology and Digital Engagement** - IT, Marketing, and Registration highlight the potential of technology upgrades—such as moving to SharePoint, implementing AI chatbots, and enhancing digital marketing—to improve efficiency, engagement, and service delivery. These initiatives can help modernize operations and provide better data for decision-making.

- **Facility Enhancements and Modernization** - Departments such as Park Fitness, Golf Learning Center, and Facilities are planning or advocating for facility upgrades (e.g., “warm water pool addition,” “mini golf redesign,” “capital equipment replacement plan”) to meet current and future needs, improve accessibility, and enhance the member experience.

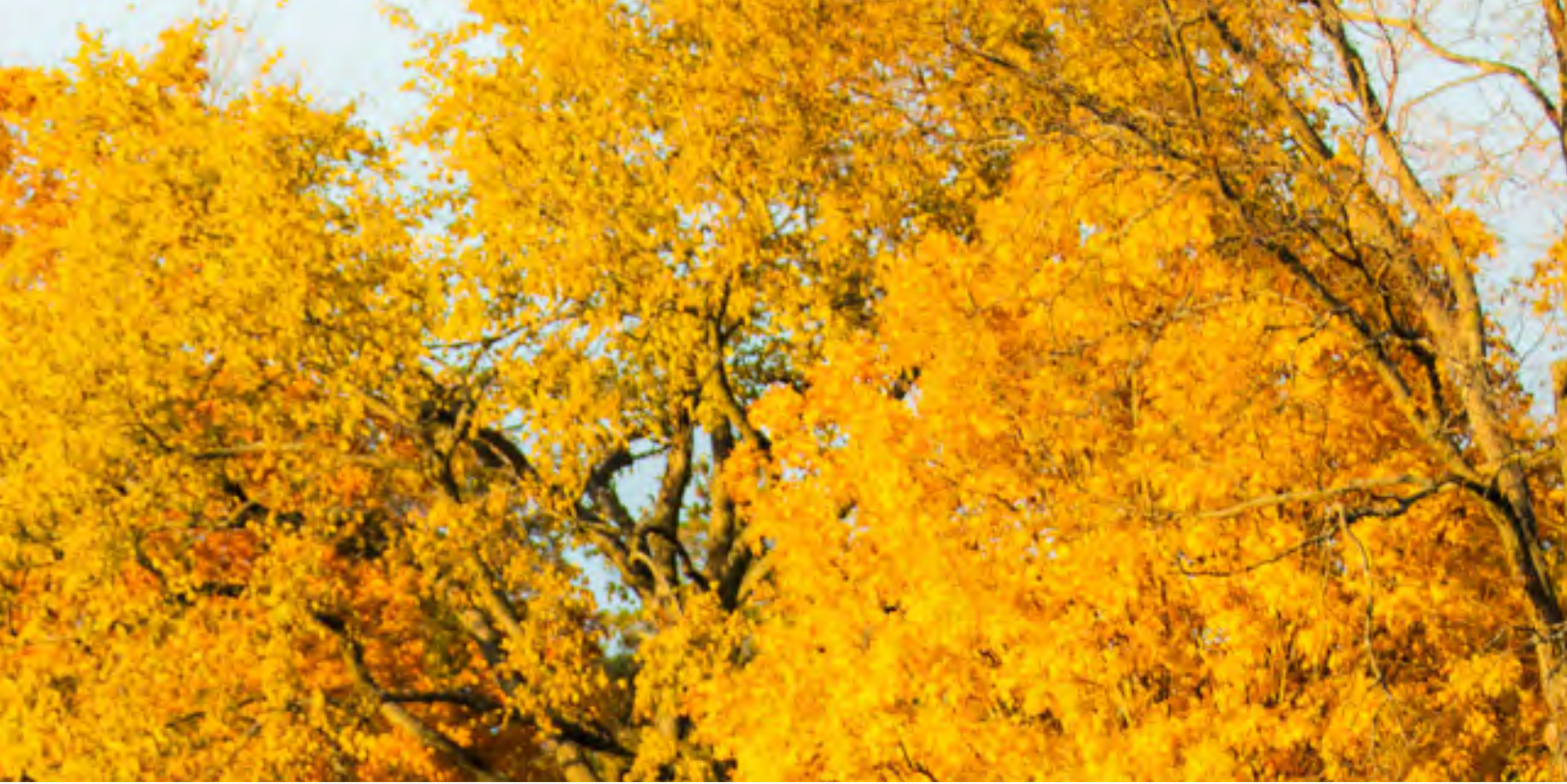
Challenges

- **Funding Limitations and Rising Costs** - Budget constraints are a universal challenge. Departments cite “funding limitations,” “rising costs,” and “inflation” as barriers to maintaining and improving facilities, staffing, and programming. This is particularly acute for capital projects and long-term maintenance.
- **Climate Impacts and Environmental Sustainability** - Parks and Natural Areas, Facilities, and Planning all reference “climate impacts,” “floodplain/floodway challenges,” and “environmental sustainability” as significant concerns. These issues affect maintenance, capital planning, and the ability to deliver reliable services.
- **Increasing Operational Complexity** - As the District grows and diversifies, operational complexity increases. Departments note “growing and evolving community expectations,” “operational limits without burnout,” and “competing and changing priorities” as ongoing challenges. Balancing innovation with day-to-day demands requires careful planning and resource allocation.
- **Community Expectations and Change Management** - Departments such as Marketing, Planning, and Recreation highlight the challenge of meeting “high community expectations,” managing change, and maintaining transparency and accountability. This includes adapting to demographic shifts, responding to feedback, and maintaining trust through effective communication and engagement.

SWOC SUMMARY

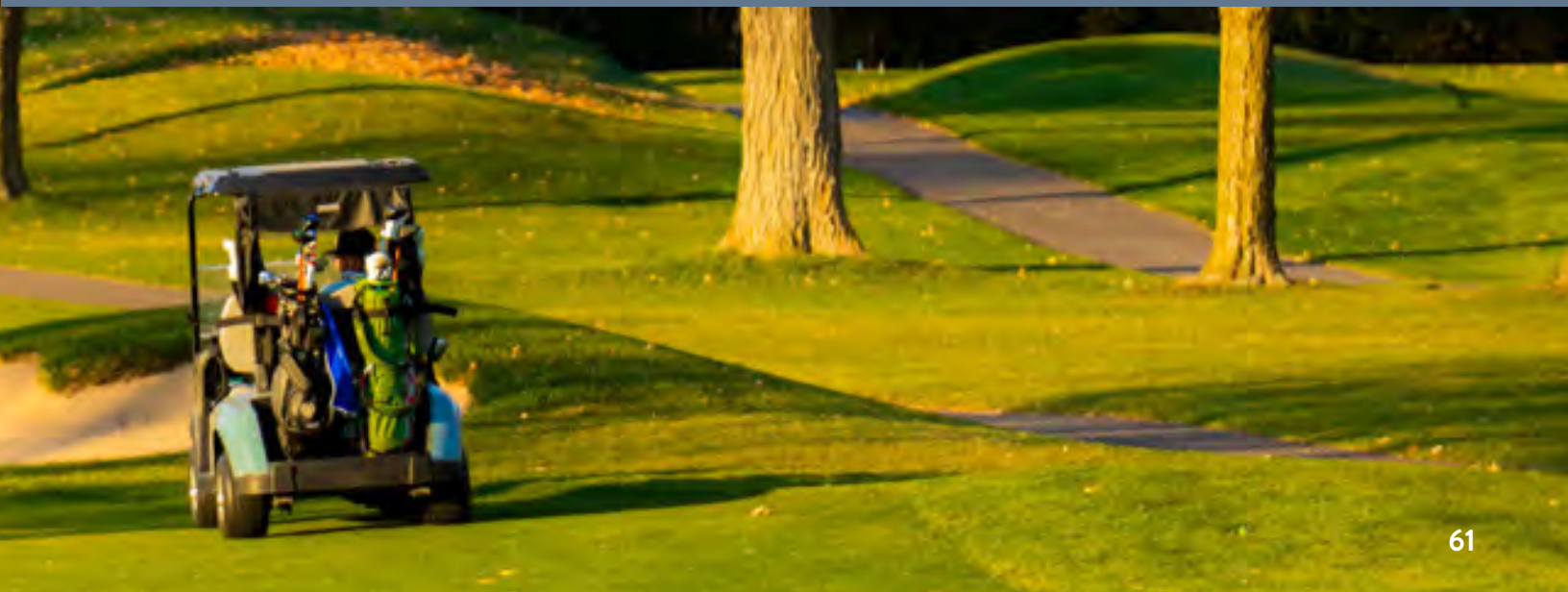
The SWOC analysis across all departments reveals a District that is proud of its staff, programming, and community relationships, but is also grappling with space, staffing, and infrastructure challenges. There is a strong appetite for innovation and partnership, but these ambitions are tempered by financial, environmental, and operational realities. Addressing these interconnected themes will require coordinated efforts, strategic investment, and ongoing dialogue with both staff and the community.





ANALYZE

CHAPTER 4



PREVIOUS PLANNING DOCUMENTS KEY TAKEAWAYS



GreenPrint 2024

GreenPrint 2024 established a comprehensive vision for how Highland Park's parks, facilities, and programs should evolve over a decade. It prioritized reinvestment in aging infrastructure, better park access and equity across neighborhoods, environmental stewardship, and modernization of key community facilities. The plan served as a roadmap for phasing capital projects, such as Sunset Woods improvements, the Recreation Center renovation, and ice arena upgrades, ensuring that the District's investments reflected community priorities and long-term sustainability. The majority of the initiatives proposed in the GreenPrint 2024 Master Plan were implemented over the last decade. At the same time, the plan was developed in a different context and does not fully address emerging priorities. Evolving expectations around inclusion, flexibility, and changing recreation trends, along with a greater emphasis on system performance, connectivity, and operational alignment, highlight the need for an updated framework.

Land Management Plan

The Land Management Plan provides a framework for the long-term stewardship, maintenance, and ecological management of Park District lands and natural resources. The plan focuses on balancing active recreation needs with environmental sustainability by guiding practices related to stormwater management, natural area management, standardization of park amenities, and connectivity. It also reinforces the importance of aligning maintenance operations with the Park District's broader goals for efficiency, resource management, and user experience. As environmental conditions, maintenance practices, and community expectations continue to evolve, the principles of the Land Management Plan remain highly relevant. Moving forward, its recommendations should continue to inform day-to-day operations and long-term capital decisions. The plan should remain a living operational document that can adapt over time .



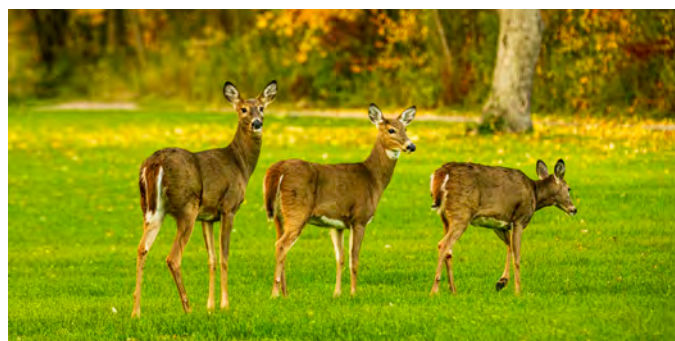


Sports Field Master Plan (2019)

The Sports Field Master Plan provides a system-wide assessment of sport fields and recommended improvements to meet sport programming demand, reduce maintenance challenges, and improve field quality. The plan identifies the primary objectives to focus on turf conditions, players/spectator amenities, and flexibility. The plan's outcome was a scenario approach to be a tool for the Park District to respond to needs based on demand, funding, and available land in an effort to improve reliability and quality of the athletic experience across the District. The plan evaluated every athletic field site in the District, highlighting Larry Fink Park, Danny Cunniff Park, Sunset Woods Park and West Ridge Park as priority locations for upgrades due to their existing infrastructure (i.e. parking capacity, lights) and high capacity for programming. The plan recommends operational and low scale capital improvements to improve three main focus areas within the existing athletic infrastructure. The plan considers other scenarios to meet its the three focus objectives such as introducing synthetic turf and acquiring property. The Sports Field Master Plan has informed impactful improvements to athletic fields such as the Fox Field at Larry Fink Park which addressed drainage with a synthetic turf field, player and spectator amenities, as well as improving the flexibility to serve multiple age groups at the field. Though, while the three primary objectives identified in the plan remain relevant, through the GreenPrint planning process, new athletic needs surfaced including: The need for expanded indoor recreation capacity. The plan also did not fully account for broader system considerations such as equity, distribution, and long-term capital prioritization. Moving forward, the core recommendations of the Sports Field Master Plan are carried forward and integrated into the New GreenPrint, rather than maintained as a standalone plan. This includes advancing a strategy for indoor recreation at multiple scales, improving drainage at District fields, and continuing to optimize field layouts for flexible, multi-sport use. These priorities will be evaluated alongside Level of Service findings, community demand, and funding considerations to ensure they are implemented in a coordinated and equitable manner across the system.

ADA Transition Plan (2024–25)

The ADA Transition Plan provides a comprehensive assessment of accessibility across the park system, identifying barriers and establishing a prioritized framework for improvements. As a compliance-driven document, it outlines the actions required to ensure the Park District meets accessibility standards and continues to improve equitable access to parks and facilities. A district-wide audit was completed in 2024 and Public meetings in 2024 helped highlight high-priority sites such as Sunset Woods, Danny Cunniff, and the Recreation Center of Highland Park, where upgrades to routes, restrooms, and play areas are most needed. The plan outlines a phased schedule with cost estimates for corrective actions and integrates universal design principles into future capital projects, ensuring that accessibility improvements become a standard feature of every renovation and new development across the District. Because accessibility is a fundamental requirement, the recommendations of the ADA Transition Plan should inform standalong ADA priority projects as well as contribute to all capital projects and system improvements. The plan will continue to be updated to serve as a technical reference, while its priorities are implemented through the Capital Plan and ongoing reinvestment efforts.



GreenPath Sustainability Plan (2025)

The GreenPath Sustainability Plan defines measurable goals to reduce the District's environmental footprint, improve energy and water efficiency, minimize waste, and foster a culture of sustainability in daily operations. It positions Highland Park as a regional leader in sustainable park management, guiding future design, purchasing, and maintenance practices toward long-term ecological health. GreenPath is intended to evolve over time and should remain a standalone document. Its principles are to be reflected in capital planning and operational decisions, ensuring sustainability is consistently considered as part of long-term investment and system management.



Lakefront Master Plan Update (2020)

The Lakefront Master Plan Update reaffirmed the lakefront as Highland Park's signature natural and recreational asset. It proposed site-specific upgrades, including improved trails, signage, erosion control, and restored access points, across Rosewood, Moraine, Millard, and Park Avenue. The plan's overarching goal was to preserve natural character while improving safety, resilience, and public enjoyment, positioning the lakefront as both an ecological corridor and a community gathering destination. Given the dynamic nature of the lakefront, including ongoing shoreline change and climate-related pressures, the plan remains highly relevant but requires continued adaptation. Moving forward, it should be maintained as a focused sub-area plan, with its recommendations carried forward into the Capital Plan and revisited periodically to respond to evolving conditions. Strengthening connections between the lakefront and the broader park system will also be an important next step.

Beach Management (2021)

The Beach Management Plan provides recommendations for protecting and managing the Park District of Highland Park's beaches, bluffs, ravines, and other lakefront properties. The Beach Management Plan complements the Lakefront Master Plan in that it focuses on actionable recommendations for the protection, management, and enhancement of the beaches to respond to the dynamic environment. The recommendations provided in the plan are based on an evaluation of the existing conditions found at the beaches, uses associated with the beach, and a review of lake and habitat conditions. Following the Lakefront Master Plan Update, the Park District implemented a series of shoreline management and sand nourishment projects to address erosion and fluctuating lake levels. These efforts, particularly at Rosewood Beach, stabilized bluffs, replenished sand, and protected both natural habitats and recreational amenities. The initiatives reflected a proactive approach to climate resilience and long-term lakefront stewardship, ensuring that Highland Park's beaches remain safe, accessible, and environmentally sustainable for future generations.



The Preserve of Highland Park Site Master Plan (2018–2022)

The planning and development of The Preserve of Highland Park transformed a former golf course into a 100-acre community park focused on ecological restoration, education, and recreation. Through a multi-year master planning and public engagement process, the project introduced walking trails, ponds, bird habitats, interpretive signage, and nature-based play areas. The park's 2022 grand opening marked a milestone in adaptive reuse and sustainability, turning a previously single-purpose landscape into one of the District's most celebrated natural and educational destinations. This effort has been highly successful, and its long-term impact will depend on continued programming, activation, and stronger integration with the broader park system. The Plan continues to guide improvements and growth at The Preserve.



Sunset Woods Park Master Plan (2021–2022)

The Sunset Woods Master Plan recognizes Sunset Woods as Highland Park's premier community park that balances active play for all ages with natural respite. It proposed reconfigured circulation, upgraded playgrounds, enhanced gathering areas, and stronger visual and physical connections to surrounding streets. The result was a clear design direction and phased improvement plan that aligns with the community's desire for a modern, inclusive, and accessible park experience. The Plan continues to guide improvements and growth at Sunset Woods Park.



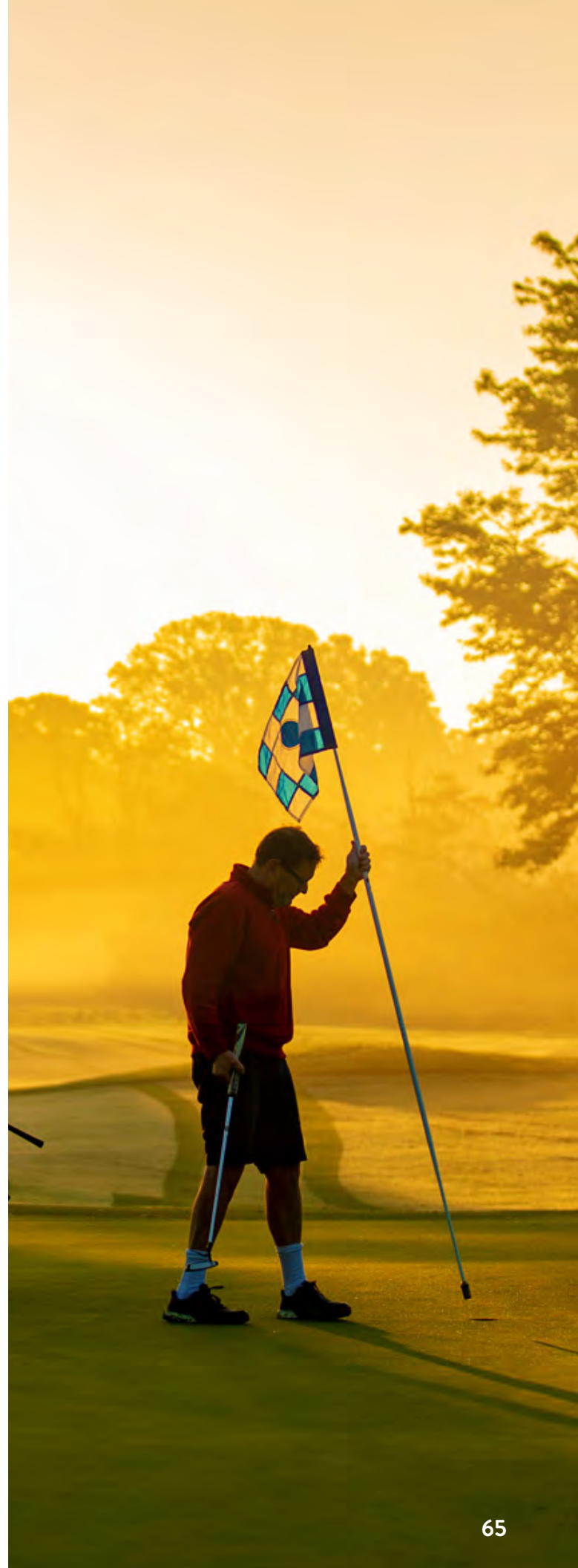
West Ridge Park Site Master Plan (2022–23)

The West Ridge planning process focused on modernizing facilities and optimizing the site to better support recreation, programming, and community use. Its end result was a set of conceptual recommendations for updating the park’s amenities, improving circulation, and aligning future redevelopment with the District’s broader master plan and community needs. Rather than remaining a standalone effort, West Ridge is positioned as a priority opportunity site within the New GreenPrint. Future planning and investment should build on the original concepts, refined through updated data and system-wide insights.



Park Avenue Beach and Boating Facility Master Plan Report

The Park Avenue Beach and Boating Facility Master Plan explores opportunities to improve public access, circulation, safety, and recreational functionality along one of Highland Park’s unique lakefront destinations. The plan focuses on strengthening the relationship between the boating facility, beach access, bluff conditions, and surrounding public spaces while maintaining the site’s informal and community-oriented character. Recommendations include improved circulation, enhanced storage and support facilities, accessibility upgrades, shoreline resiliency measures, and strategies to better support both recreational boating and passive lakefront use. While portions of the plan have informed ongoing improvements and operational decisions, many of its broader goals remain relevant due to the evolving conditions of the lakefront and continued demand for improved public access and waterfront recreation.



PARK LEVEL OF SERVICE ANALYSIS AND FACILITY SCORECARDS KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Level of Service (LOS) analysis evaluates how well the Park District of Highland Park's parks, facilities, and amenities are serving today's community. It measures acreage, standards, and distribution so the GreenPrint Master Plan can align future investments with resident needs and expectations.

LOS Types Used in this Report



ACREAGE

Do we have enough land to support recreation and conservation needs for our population?



PDHP STANDARDS

Is capacity, access, quality, and experience met?



DISTRIBUTION

Are parks located and connected so residents can conveniently access them?



ACREAGE LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) ANALYSIS



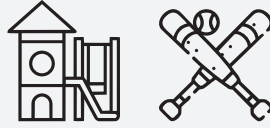
30,459

Population
ACS 2019-2023



750

Total PDHP Parkland
(all categories)



283

Active Parkland
(Neighborhood &
Community Parks)



290

Special Use Parks



112

Regional Parks

Acreeage Benchmarks & Findings

Using the updated Level of Service measure of 10.8 acres per 1,000 residents for active parkland (Neighborhood + Community), the recommended targets and PDHP's performance are:



RECOMMENDED ACTIVE TOTAL (N + C):

~329 ACRES



RECOMMENDED NEIGHBORHOOD:

~82 ACRES



RECOMMENDED COMMUNITY:

~247 ACRES

PDHP exceeds each benchmark

ACTIVE RECREATION TOTAL = 283 ACRES MEANS 46 ACRES BELOW THE 10.8/1,000 TARGET OF 329 ACRES

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS = 98 ACRES MEANS 16 ACRES ABOVE THE 2.7/1,000 TARGET OF 82 ACRES

COMMUNITY PARKS = 185 ACRES MEANS 62 ACRES BELOW THE 8.1/1,000 TARGET OF 247 ACRES

Per-capita supply

NEIGHBORHOOD + COMMUNITY:

~9.29 ACRES PER 1,000

ALL PARKLAND:

~24.62 ACRES PER 1,000

Interpretation: At a benchmark of 10.8 acres per 1,000 residents, Highland Park far surpasses NRPA standards for all park land. This reinforces that the District's challenge is not about the amount of land, but rather optimizing distribution, improving amenities, and creating equitable access experiences across all neighborhoods.



PDHP STANDARDS LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) ANALYSIS



11

**Neighborhood
Districts Assessed**



29

Parks Assessed



600+

Individuals Heard



2,000+

**Feedback Points
Collected**

In 1996 the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) began to encourage agencies to develop their own standards instead of relying on a national standard. The standards used for this assessment were shared with the Park Board in 2021, in advance of the assessments completed in 2022–2023. These standards were developed by staff using resources informed by NRPA Park Metrics, the American Planning Association guide to determining Parks and Recreation Level of Service, and trends in park design.

The assessments evaluate each park at a site-specific level of service, while the report also evaluates the broader level of service at the neighborhood scale.

In this inaugural assessment, staff assessed 11 neighborhood districts and 29 parks, with a focus on neighborhood parks. The parks and neighborhood districts were evaluated based on the standards summarized in the table below.

Standards alone cannot tell the entire story. During the summer of 2023, the Park District launched the Your Parks - Your

Perspectives campaign to collect feedback from park visitors. In total, the District heard from over 600 individuals and collected over 2,000 feedback points.

For the parks that do not meet all of the standards, the assessment pages offer suggestions for improvements to meet or exceed standards. Recommendations range from minor operational adjustments to large-scale capital improvements.

Results of the Standards Level of Service (LOS) analysis can be found in the Key Takeaways section of the Distribution LOS analysis and in the individual park assessments that follow. The Park District expects to update the standards and assessment every five years.

Individual Park Standards

Each park is evaluated based on four standards: Capacity, Access, Quality and Experience. The criterion for each standard varies by park type. Listed below are the standard descriptions and the criteria to be met for each park type.

STANDARD	MET?	KEY NOTES
CAPACITY	Measures diversity of park elements and play value within a park.	Measures diversity of park elements within a neighborhood.
ACCESS	Measures access to the park by travel type.	Measures accessibility to PDHP parks.
QUALITY	Measures the scale and type of landscaping at a park in addition to general maintenance.	NA
EXPERIENCE	Measures a park's contribution to the community based on economic, environmental, and social criteria.	NA



1. Capacity Standard

The Capacity standard measures the diversity of park elements and play value represented within a park. This standard evaluates parks based on the number of core recreation amenities present. Core amenities, supported by GreenPrint and the 2019 Attitude and Interest Survey, include: baseball, basketball, multi-use field, playground, racquet sports (tennis/pickleball), and walking path.

CAPACITY STANDARD - (BY PARK TYPE)

- **Community Park:** should have all six core amenities present
- **Neighborhood Park:** should have at least two of the six core amenities present
- **Special Use Park:** N/A
- **Passive Natural Area:** N/A
- **Undeveloped Park:** core amenities are not required

2. Access Standard

The Access standard measures access to the park by travel type. Travel considerations vary by park type and include biking, walking, driving, and public transit. Evaluation is determined by residents' ability to travel to a park and by the travel amenities present in a park.

ACCESS STANDARD - (BY PARK TYPE)

- **Community Park:** should be accessible by pedestrian, bicycle, personal vehicle, and public transit. To support access, travel amenities available should include parking, City sidewalk connections, curb cuts (if applicable), bike parking, and pedestrian connections to nearby public transit (within 1/4 mile).
- **Neighborhood Park:** should be accessible by pedestrian and bicycle. At least one entrance should have travel amenities including: curb cuts (if applicable), bike parking, and City sidewalk connections. The best practice is for all entries to have these amenities present.
- **Special Use Park:** should be accessible by pedestrian, bicycle, personal vehicle, and public transit. To support access, travel amenities available should include parking, City sidewalk connections, curb cuts (if applicable), bike parking, and pedestrian connections to nearby public transit (within 1/4 mile).
- **Passive Natural Area:** should be accessible by pedestrian and bicycle. At least one entrance should have travel amenities including: curb cuts (if applicable), bike parking, and City sidewalk connections. The best practice is for all entries to have these amenities present. If within 1/4 mile of public transit, pedestrian connections should be provided.
- **Undeveloped Park:** N/A

3. Quality Standard

The Quality standard measures the scale and type of landscaping at a park in addition to general maintenance. General park maintenance criteria are supported by park maintenance modes. The condition of accessory amenities and accessory structures is also considered as part of this standard. Accessory amenities include: benches, bike racks, drinking fountains, perimeter fencing, picnic benches, player seating, restrooms, and trash/recycling receptacles. Accessory structures include: fishing decks, gazebos, shade structures, and small shelters. This standard also considers pathway conditions and signage standards.

GENERAL MAINTENANCE CRITERIA - (BY PARK TYPE)

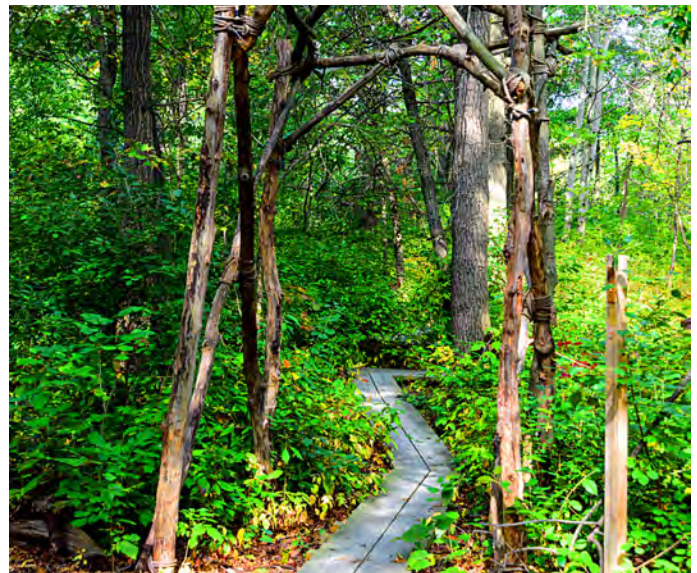
- **Community Park:** maintained at a higher level than any other property. Visitors can expect to see ornamental shrubs and perennial plantings throughout the landscape. These beds are weeded, and grass is mown regularly. Restrooms are present and maintained at least once daily. Trash is picked up at a higher frequency than other park properties (minimum of once daily, 5-7 days per week).
- **Neighborhood Park:** landscape is intended to be lower maintenance than a Community Park. Patrons will primarily see grass and trees; ornamental shrubs and plantings are not recommended for these sites. Restrooms, if present, are maintained daily and trash is picked up at least twice per week.
- **Special Use Park:** these sites have cultural or historic elements and unique landscapes with their own standards of maintenance.
- **Passive Natural Area:** (also includes natural areas within Community or Neighborhood Parks) maintenance is based on enhancing the quality of native plantings. Low frequency mowing schedule is based on species, low growing grasses may not be mowed, and high grasses may receive periodic mowing to aid public use or reduce fire damage. Weed control is limited to the legal requirements for noxious weeds, weeds will be removed on an area-specific basis.
- **Undeveloped Park:** landscaping varies depending on the site and existing landscaping. If landscaped with grass, these properties are on a low frequency mowing schedule (once every 10 working days). Regular maintenance is limited.
- **All Park Types:** General maintenance criteria should be met, accessory amenities and accessory structures (if present) should be in good condition, park paths (if present) should be in good condition, and park signage should meet PDHP standard (if applicable).

4. Experience Standard

The Experience standard measures a park's contribution to the community based on economic, environmental, and social criteria. The Experience standard measures a park against David Barth's High Performance Public Spaces Criteria (HPPS) (see Appendix C for full list).

EXPERIENCE STANDARD - (BY PARK TYPE)

- **Community Park:** strives to meet 80% of the HPPS criteria
- **Neighborhood Park:** strives to meet 25% of the HPPS criteria.
- **Special Use Park:** strives to meet 40% of the HPPS criteria.
- **Passive Natural Area:** strives to meet 25% of the HPPS criteria.
- **Undeveloped Park:** N/A





DISTRIBUTION LEVEL OF SERVICE (LOS) ANALYSIS

PDHP measures distribution LOS through Community Parks (broad access across the city) and Neighborhood Parks (close-to-home access within walking distance). This analysis uses Neighborhood Districts, planning areas defined by major roads, rail lines, and natural features, to identify gaps and prioritize improvements.

Parks Areas Strengths

Across the system, parks demonstrate a strong foundation in providing core recreational amenities and a well-distributed network of spaces that support everyday use. Community and neighborhood parks consistently feature playgrounds, courts, open fields, and walking paths, allowing them to function as reliable destinations for both active and passive recreation. In many cases, these parks are already meeting baseline expectations in terms of capacity, meaning the system is not lacking in assets or land, but rather in how those assets perform over time.

A defining strength of the system is its natural character. Many parks include expansive open lawns, mature tree canopy, and passive landscape areas that create a strong sense of place and identity. These spaces are widely valued by the community for walking, informal play, and quiet recreation. Park sites such as The Preserve, Foley's Pond, and Highmoor illustrate how natural areas are preserved and actively used and appreciated for their ecological and experiential value.

Many of these spaces already have the physical capacity to support gathering and social use. Large open areas, flexible layouts, and scenic environments provide the foundation for community interaction, even if they are not yet fully designed or programmed to function that way. This reinforces that the system's strength lies in its underlying structure and potential.



PARKS AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

While the system is strong at its core, the scorecards consistently identify gaps in quality, comfort, and overall user experience, which limit how parks are used and how long people stay. Across many parks, amenities such as benches, pathways, fencing, and signage are either aging, limited in quantity, or not aligned with current expectations.

EXAMPLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR PARKS

Team observations have identified amenity gaps across parks and open spaces.

BENCHES, FENCING, SIGNAGE — AGING, BROKEN, OR NEEDING UPDATES

- *Brown Park*
- *Carroll F. Snyder Park*
- *Danny Cunniff Park*
- *Foley's Pond*

MISSING, UNCLEAR, OR DETERIORATING PATHS AND CIRCULATION SYSTEMS

- *Devonshire Park*
- *Kennedy Park*
- *Central Park*
- *Highmoor Park*

NOT ENOUGH BENCHES, SEATING, GATHERING ELEMENTS, ETC.

- *Fontana-Pasquesi Park*
- *Kennedy Park*

One of the most consistent systemwide deficiencies is the absence of intentional design for gathering and social use. While many parks include open lawns and flexible areas, they often lack the supporting elements, such as shade structures, defined gathering zones, and orientation, that would allow those spaces to function as true community destinations. As a result, parks that have the capacity to host social interaction often remain underutilized beyond basic or pass-through use.

Shade and seating are among the most frequently identified gaps. Even in parks that are otherwise well-used, the absence of these basic comfort elements limits accessibility for older adults, families, and individuals who may benefit from places to rest, observe, or spend extended time.

Access-related challenges also persist in specific locations. While many parks are technically reachable, gaps in sidewalk connectivity, bike infrastructure, and entry visibility make them less intuitive and less inviting to access. In passive or natural areas in particular, entrances can be unclear or disconnected from surrounding neighborhoods, limiting their usability as part of the broader system.



Facilities Scorecards

Facility Strengths

Across the system, facilities provide a diverse network of indoor recreation spaces that support year-round activity, structured programming, and community use. These facilities serve as essential anchors within the park system, allowing the Park District to deliver programs and services, and extend recreation opportunities across seasons.

Many facilities, especially newly built or renovated ones, perform well in terms of core functionality and program delivery, supporting a wide range of uses including athletics, fitness, enrichment programs, and community activities. Spaces such as Centennial Ice Arena along with other multi-use recreation facilities demonstrate the District's ability to provide specialized environments that respond to both recreational and competitive needs.

A key strength of the system is its ability to support multi-generational use, with facilities serving youth, teens, adults, and older residents through a variety of programs and services. In many cases, these spaces are well-utilized and reflect strong alignment with community demand, particularly in areas such as athletics, fitness, and structured programming.

Similar to the park system, facilities also have underlying capacity and adaptability. Many buildings and spaces have the footprint and structural foundation to support expanded or evolving uses over time.



FACILITY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The scorecards highlight consistent challenges related to aging infrastructure, limited flexibility, and evolving expectations for indoor recreation. Many facilities were designed for a specific set of uses and, over time, have become constrained in their ability to adapt to new program demands or changing user preferences.

A recurring issue across the system is the lack of flexible, multi-use spaces across the majority of facilities that can accommodate a variety of activities throughout the day and across seasons. As recreation trends continue to shift toward more adaptable, year-round, and cross-programming opportunities, existing facilities may lack the layout or infrastructure to fully support this evolution.

User experience is also impacted by outdated amenities and support spaces in a number of facilities including the Deer Creek Raquet Club and Hidden Creek Aqua Park. Elements such as locker rooms, restrooms, circulation areas, and gathering spaces do not consistently meet current expectations for comfort, accessibility, and quality. While facilities may function well from a program standpoint, the overall experience of being in these spaces can feel dated or limited.

There is also a notable gap in social and informal gathering spaces within facilities. Older facilities often prioritize program space over user experience, resulting in limited areas for people to wait, connect, or spend time outside of structured activities. This reduces opportunities for facilities to function as true community hubs.

At a broader system level, challenges related to capacity and specialization are also evident. In certain program areas, demand exceeds available space, while in others, facilities are not optimized to support the types of activities the community is increasingly seeking. This is particularly relevant for emerging needs such as indoor sports, flexible recreation areas, and year-round athletic facilities.



RECREATION ASSESSMENT KEY TAKEAWAYS

BerryDunn found the District to be a high-functioning, high-producing agency. Any changes to the recreation services menu, administration, and/or the facilities that support the programs and services will only continue to enhance an already strong agency. The following key findings summarize the opportunities to strengthen the District's performance.



PROGRAMMING

Continue to increase adult programming. Work with the City's Senior Center to determine how PDHP can support and collaborate the demand for increased older adult services. Capitalize on the new gymnastics space. Increase repeat registrants in all groups outside youth. Recapture and grow the teen market. Use caution when considering increased community festivals/events, as significant resources, both fiscal and human, would be required.



ADMINISTRATION

Enhance the registration software's database management to support future reporting enhancements. Consider formalizing the program evaluation process. Enhance marketing initiatives to cross-promote programs through additional promotional items and digital brochures. Conduct a districtwide life cycle analysis. Increase staffing support to retain current performance levels. Work to reduce cancellation rates to the 12% – 15% window. Enhance the internal waitlist tracking process to understand true demand. Consider a follow-up (non-random) survey to better understand which sports are of most interest.



RECREATION FACILITIES

Consider alternative locations for existing programs and storage not accommodated at the new West Ridge Center. Consider increasing registration-based programs at locations beyond core indoor facilities. Create a business plan for Heller Nature Center. Consider marketing DCRC to residents in the District's northwest quadrant.







PLAN & IMPLEMENT

CHAPTER 5

CAPITAL INVESTMENT PLAN

Capital Projects Funding

The Capital Projects Fund is used to account for all capital projects. Funding sources for the Capital Projects Fund include the following:

- **Operational Fund Transfers:** Park District operations are funded by a combination of property taxes, user fees, and other miscellaneous revenue sources. Surplus revenue from Park District operations may be transferred to the Capital Fund in accordance with policy. The amount of surplus revenue is not guaranteed year-to-year and is only transferred at the end of each fiscal year.
- **Debt Financing:** Per Illinois statute, when operating funds do not provide adequate revenue to support capital projects, the Park District may issue debt to finance these projects. Several financing options are available, such as General Obligation Bonds and Debt Certificates. The amount of outstanding debt is limited by statute and the Park District's ability to finance repayment.
- **The Parks Foundation of Highland Park:** The Parks Foundation is a separate nonprofit 501(c)(3) entity that generates private philanthropic donations and grants, which can be used to support capital projects. These funds help reduce reliance on property taxes, debt financing, and operational transfers.
- **Grants:** The Park District may apply for grant funding from federal, state, private, and other sources that support public park and recreation improvements. Grants vary from year to year, are awarded based on multiple factors, and often require matching funds from the Park District.
- **Partnerships:** The Park District may partner with public agencies, nonprofit organizations, or private entities to share costs or resources for capital improvements. These partnerships can help advance projects that align with shared community goals while reducing reliance on traditional funding sources.





UNFUNDED

1-10 year Plan (2026-2036)

Total 1-10 year Unfunded
GreenPrint Capital Investment:
\$NA

UNFUNDED

1-10 year

(2026-2036)

Unfunded Projects | (2026-2036)

COST	PROJECT	FY 2026				FY 2027				DEBT ISSUANCE	FY 2028				FY 2029				FY 2030						
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4			
\$300,000	Hidden Creek Aqua Park Amenities (Party Deck/Splash Pad)																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Material Procurement and Construction																								
N/A	Park Avenue Beach & Boating Facility Enhancements																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Construction																								
N/A	Lot 3 Improvements - Cover My Tee																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Construction																								
N/A	Trail Connection																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Construction																								
N/A	Sports Training Facilities / Deer Creek Raquetball Conversion																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Construction																								
N/A	Second Sheet of Ice @ Centennial Center																								
	1. Project start, scoping, planning, and programming																								
	2. Design development, budget, permits, and entitlements																								
	3. Construction documents, bidding, and negotiation																								
	4. Construction																								
N/A	Unfunded (10 Years)																								



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$300,000

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Hidden Creek Aquapark Amenities (Party Deck / Splash Pad)

This initiative explores enhancements to Hidden Creek Aquapark that expand its use, appeal and flexibility through the addition of a party deck and a splash pad. These amenities would create new gathering and celebration spaces, support birthday parties and group rentals, and provide age-inclusive water play opportunities. Together, the improvements would broaden programming options, improve user experience, and strengthen the aquapark's role as a multi-generational recreational asset.

02



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$NA

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Park Avenue Beach and Boating Facility Enhancements

This project focuses on exterior building and site improvements, and deck repairs at the North Shore Yacht Club to maintain the condition, safety, and usability of the existing facility. The project supports continued access to waterfront recreation while protecting a key asset that serves boating, programming, and community use.

03



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$NA

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Lot 3 Improvements – Cover My Tee

This project envisions a three-season covered driving range experience at the existing Lot 3 facility, similar in concept to Toptracer-style venues. The improvements would extend the driving range season, enhance the practice experience through technology and shelter, and increase overall use of the site. The initiative builds existing assets while modernizing the facility to meet evolving user expectations.

04



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY
STEWARDSHIP**

Funded Budget:

\$NA

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Trail Connections

This initiative focuses on creating and/or enhancing trail connections to improve connectivity between parks, facilities, and surrounding neighborhoods. Improved trail links would support walking, biking, and inclusive access while strengthening the overall park and open space network. The project emphasizes safer, more intuitive movement and better integration of recreational assets.

05



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$NA

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Sports Training Facility (Deer Creek Racquetball Conversion)

This project seeks to repurpose the former racquetball courts at the Deer Creek facility into modern indoor sports training space. The high-ceiling interior offers flexibility for a range of training, conditioning, and skill-based programming. This repurposes underutilized space while responding to changing recreation trends and needs.

06



Guiding Theme:

**WELL-BEING
EFFICIENCY**

Funded Budget:

\$NA

Implementation
Timeline:

TBD

*See Implementation Timeline
exhibit in Section 5*

Second Sheet of Ice

This initiative explores expanding ice capacity to better meet community demand for practices, games, and programming while maintaining flexibility in how that capacity is delivered and managed. In its evaluation of adding an additional sheet of ice at Centennial Ice Arena, the District may consider opportunities to partner with an experienced third-party operator that could assist with planning, building, and management of a new ice facility either on the Centennial campus or at an alternative location.

A partnership-based approach could allow the District to increase access to ice time, improve scheduling flexibility, and support the growth of youth, adult, and instructional programs while mitigating operational and capital risks. By exploring multiple delivery models and potential locations, this initiative positions the District to respond strategically to long-term demand and evolving recreation needs.

OPERATIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

Prioritize (Ongoing)

Committees for each District perspective, plus an Implementation Committee, will ensure Implementation is focused on Priority Goals, Focused Strategies, and alignment between departments. Responsibilities:

- Finalize action items to be prioritized in the Annual Work Plan (Q1)
- Provide clarity on priorities for Action Items in the upcoming budget cycle (Q2)
- Assess progress on Focused Strategies and Action Items in the current year. (Q3)
- Evaluate and report on key performance indicators from the previous year and their impact on achieving Priority Goals (Q4)
- Ensure tracking, measuring and communicating progress to staff, board and community (Ongoing)

Align (Q2/Q3)

Department Teams are responsible for developing annual Action Items to be placed in the Annual Work Plan. Responsibilities include:

- Conduct Annual SWOC analysis as part of the budget process, specifically focused on impact towards Strategies and progress on Priority Goals. SWOC focuses on what has been going well over the past year, and what should be focused on in the upcoming year (Q2)
- Prepare Action Items as part of the budget process. Align with Strategies and have the biggest impact on Priority Goals. Include lead employees, and deadline(s) for implementation and completion. Each year will have a Strategy Focus, but all Strategies considered (Q3)



Implement (Ongoing)

Department Teams and lead employees implement the Annual Work Plan

Track (Ongoing)

Department Teams assign lead employees to track progress on Action Items in Smartsheets

Measure (Ongoing)

Department Teams assign lead employees to update Key Performance Indicators

Report (Ongoing)

- *Ongoing – Department Teams provide ongoing progress updates at département team meetings*
- *Quarterly – Committees provide progress reporting shared via email or intranet*
- *Annually – Committees provide District Progress Assessments (Q3) and Impact Reporting (Q1) to the Park Board, Staff and Community*







APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
PARKS & FACILITIES SCORECARDS

APPENDIX B
RECREATION ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX C
STATISTICALLY-VALID COMMUNITY SURVEY

APPENDIX D
STRATEGIC PLAN DOCUMENT

APPENDIX E
IN-PERSON ENGAGEMENT SUMMARIES

