



Chapter Four  
**Policies**

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POLICIES**

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## **CHAPTER 4 PARK AND OPEN SPACE POLICES**

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### **OVERVIEW**

This chapter serves as the guiding tool for decision making about investment in parks and recreation facilities. The sources used to define these policies include Eden Prairie’s comprehensive plan policies, as well as existing park and open space system policy, adjusted to account for demographic changes and community preferences. The policies and objectives included in this chapter guide planning and development of the parks system. While there is a whole family of policies that guide decisions about specific aspects of the system, the focus of this chapter is on providing direction to build and maintain the policy framework that influences the system.

This chapter defines the City’s park and open space system policies in three distinct stages. First, the community’s goal statements are introduced. Starting in 1998, Eden Prairie officials initiated a broad based involved community participation effort targeted at understanding community-held values. Second, the chapter describes the program criteria, including system standards and operating policy for various facilities found in Eden Prairie. Finally, the chapter concludes with an assessment of the system’s existing attributes and recommendations about where and how new investments or City actions should be targeted.

### **EXISTING EDEN PRAIRIE PLANNING POLICIES**

#### **Comprehensive Plan Policies**

In 1998, under the leadership of the Mayor and the City Council, the City undertook a strategic planning process that involved the residential and business community, policy makers and professional staff. The results of this process involving community participation reported that the City is doing a quality job of providing services, and the City should enhance and improve current services as needed. Community members also identified five critical areas: transportation, public safety, economic growth, natural resources, and leisure services. Residents identified five general themes, which represent community values, to be considered guidelines for city decision-making:

1. *Do more with less* – increase productivity utilizing existing facilities and services, rather than major expansions.
2. *Optimize current services* – target efforts to ensure that needed services are provided efficiently and eliminate unnecessary programs and services.
3. *Support incrementalism over quantitative change* – meet emerging needs through program expansion or contraction instead of sweeping changes.
4. *Pursue proactive negotiation* – aggressively pursue community interests with other governmental agencies.

5. *Promote continuous communication* – disseminate information aggressively, strategically and economically.

During this process, the City developed the following vision: “Eden Prairie is a vibrant city characterized by the thoughtful integration of natural beauty with physical development. Respect for the past, planning for the future, and delivery of public services contributes to a strong sense of community where people live, work, shop, and play.” This vision statement notes the value of parks and open space in the City, and emphasizes the need to plan for these facilities and physical attributes.

A second step in the City’s comprehensive planning process involved translating community values into operating objectives. Based on the community input received by the City Council, City officials developed a number of strategic initiatives, several of which related directly to parks and opens spaces.

- A. *Develop and nurture strategic partnerships that are mutually beneficial to optimize opportunities and creatively use resources.*
  - Explore opportunities with adjacent communities and strategic partners to develop alternative public and leisure facilities.
  - Partner with the School District to cooperatively develop action plans to address common issues and problems.
  - Develop partnerships with other governmental agencies to ensure protection of the City’s natural and cultural resources.
- B. *Invest resources in people, programs, facilities, and infrastructure to support a vital community, protect the City’s natural resources and preserve the City’s heritage.*
  - Promote and support volunteerism throughout the community.
  - Update the Park and Open Space System Plan to ensure affordability and reflect changing public interests.
  - Develop programs to communicate and preserve the City’s cultural heritage.
- C. *Reflect the community's diversity in changing demographics in the City’s provision of services and program.*
- D. *Provide effective, timely and open communication channels for City residents and businesses to build awareness and promote programs and services.*

City officials showed leadership in representing community values, creating a vision statement for the City and defining strategic initiatives to fulfill these objectives. The essential elements identified in the comprehensive plan that have a lasting influence on the park system plan are summarized below:

- Partnerships to build or operate facilities, as well as programming partnerships, are key objectives for City leaders and officials.
- Change in demographics, facility operations and needs, as well as citizen demands, are expected, and leaders anticipate that staff will prepare studied, incremental proposals that ensure City services respond to community needs and interests.
- Communication and awareness of community needs and desires are core values for the City, and assist in providing excellent services to citizens by shaping policy decisions.

## **Park System Plan Policy Elements**

### ***Facilities***

Approximately half of the City's total parks and open space acreage is developed as park facilities. Many of these facilities were built in the 1980s, with the pace of new construction slowing in the mid 1990s. This pattern of investment represents a significant commitment of resources to maintain existing facilities. A portion of the policies described in this chapter relate to the overall goals that motivate decisions about new investments in and renovation of specific facilities.

### **Wetlands**

Policy decisions regarding the protection and management of wetland areas are outlined in Eden Prairie's Comprehensive Wetland Protection and Management Plan. This is a tool that assists in review of development proposals, and in conjunction with other water resource management devices, brings the City's policies on the management of the quality and quantity of wetland resources together in a coherent set of guidelines. The Comprehensive Wetland Protection and Management Plan provides an inventory of wetlands and an assessment of the wetland function.

### **Conservation Areas**

Protection of the City's natural resources has been a constant priority throughout the City's history. Conservation areas make up over 50 percent of the City's park and open space acreage, and they have an important profile in the City's park system. The City's objectives in managing each of the conservation area sites are described in specific Conservation Area Management Plans tailored to suit the needs of different conservation areas. These plans provide direction as to ongoing stewardship of these important community resources. Plans have been approved for the Prairie Bluff Conservation Area, the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area and the Birch Island Conservation Area. A management plan was approved for seven of the City's conservation areas in June 2000. Future management plans are anticipated for other sites, such as Nine Mile Creek Conservation Area.

### ***Recreation Programming***

Demand for recreation programs, influenced by demographic conditions and cultural trends in recreational activity patterns, has created expectations on the part of participants and generated expertise on the part of Parks and Recreation Department personnel. The policies that determine the nature of recreational programs and consequently the facilities needed to accommodate these programs are included in large part in this chapter. Future changes and influences on recreation programming demand are discussed in the Chapter 9, Future Recreational Trends.

### ***Operations and Maintenance***

Current standards for operations and maintenance are discussed according to the facility or the programming need. Other key factors that influence these needs are user demand and intensity of use, as well as available funding sources to support maintenance activity. The balance between building new or acquiring additional land for natural resource based recreational activities places demands on the operations and maintenance budgets. While capital funds to build new facilities are usually acquired through bond referendums, maintenance costs generally come from general revenue sources. This can lead to an imbalance in available resources if bond referendums are approved, but the City lacks sufficient resources to maintain the quality and breadth of programming expected by citizens.

### ***Funding and Financing Tools***

Bond referendums are a well-established method of funding acquisition and development of various elements of the park system. Park dedication fees, which the City is entitled to collect by state statute, are another important source of revenue for the parks and open space system. This chapter reviews existing funding and financing tools and recommends their use according to need and effectiveness.

### ***Coordination with Other Government Agencies***

#### **School District 272**

Continue to operate Joint Use Agreements with School District 272 that allows sharing of facilities and parkland for the overall benefit of Eden Prairie residents.

#### **Adjacent Communities**

Maintain ongoing communication with adjacent communities to ensure any coordinated effort to connect trails, linear parks and conservation areas where appropriate.

#### **Three Rivers Parks District**

Continue to work with the Suburban Hennepin Park District to encourage development of the regional park facilities within Eden Prairie and continued development of the regional trail system that serves not only Eden Prairie but also the seven-county Metropolitan Area and beyond.

### Metropolitan Airports Commission

The City shall work with the Metropolitan Airports Commission to develop a mutually beneficial agreement that allows expansion of the airport without increased noise impact on the community. The large amount of land that will be acquired to provide a buffer around the airport should be utilized to provide recreation opportunities for residents of this community as recreational uses are one of the few uses compatible with the needs of increased air traffic and low fly zones.

### US Fish and Wildlife Service

The Eden Prairie City Council approved the Minnesota Valley Refuge and Recreation Area Comprehensive Plan on December 20, 1983, with several minor recommended revisions.

Approximately 2,448 acres within Eden Prairie are planned for acquisition by the federal government for the National Wildlife area and an additional 161 acres of land within the wildlife refuge will be acquired by the City of Eden Prairie. This portion of the Refuge and Recreation Area can either be managed by the City of Eden Prairie or transferred to the Refuge and Recreation Area for its management.

The 161 acres to be acquired by the City are located on the eastern end of the refuge within Eden Prairie at a location where the Minnesota River Valley turns north and comes very close to Riverview Road, then easterly to the area just east of Purgatory Creek. The purpose of this 161-acre area is threefold: 1) to provide trail corridor access from Purgatory Creek nature area westerly to the trails within the refuge, 2) to preserve the floodplain in its natural condition and 3) to provide limited passive recreation such as hiking and biking trails, picnicking and small craft launch.

This property should be acquired concurrent with adjacent development, if at all possible, and should be acquired through the use of park dedication as land in lieu of park fees for the river frontage and through a negotiated purchase when other funding is available. A minimum property depth of approximately 150 feet is needed to adequately provide for riverfront preservation and to accommodate trail development. Acquisition of the remaining floodplain could be accommodated at a later date.

Development in the floodplain should remain consistent with the National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area Comprehensive Park Plan. City staff shall work with the multiple property owners, whose land abuts the river corridor, to work out property acquisition consistent with planned development activities.

The City shall continue the long-term support of the Minnesota Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area project and encourage the US Fish and Wildlife Service to consider expansion of boundaries in Eden Prairie to the top of the bluffs east of Highway 212.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Planning and Decision Making Process**

Over the years, the City has developed goals, policies and standards pertaining to Eden Prairie's park and open space facilities and operations. Other areas that are guided by established City policy include conservation area acquisition and management; the City's coordination with other governmental agencies on park maintenance or recreation facility development and finally, enhancement of the community's image and identity through investments in the public realm.

These goals, policies and standards help to provide a consistent thought process for making decisions about how the park and open space system is acquired, developed and operated. Taken as a comprehensive set of guidelines, the principles and policies described here will orient policy makers and citizens as they make decisions about future Parks and Open Space System investments.

### ***Facilities Identified as a Priority Need***

Due to the fact that community desires change and the resources available to meet a community's recreational needs may also be subject to variation, some facility or programming needs can emerge over a relatively rapid timeframe, and they need to be incorporated into Council actions and City department activities. In the case of the Park System Plan, there are a few of these priority needs for facilities, which have not yet been acted on by City Council. It is likely that these initiatives will be acted on over the next 5-8 years. Some of these facilities were identified in the Athletic Association Task Force recommendations, and others have emerged through separate citizen sponsored initiatives.

The results of the City Survey and the Community Forum indicated that Eden Prairie citizens want their community leaders and local government staff to:

- Ensure that the City is protecting its natural resources
- Complete the trail system
- Make sure the existing park system does not deteriorate
- Evaluate the feasibility of an 18-hole golf course
- Provide expansion or improvements to the Community Center, including an outdoor water park
- Provide facilities and programs for seniors as the community ages.

The findings of the Athletic Association Task Force indicated that the following facilities are needed to meet projected participation trends:

- One regulation-size (90 foot base) baseball field
- Four full-size regulation soccer fields
- Field improvements to the existing baseball and soccer facilities
- A citizen committee to evaluate swimming pool needs prior to committing tax dollars

## **PARK AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN POLICIES**

Goals as described in this section reflect an aspiration or end result that the City is striving for. Policies, on the other hand, indicate methods, actions, decisions or approaches needed to accomplish the specific goal. Taken together, they describe the City's values, as well as its priority activities that will achieve the desired end result.

### **Use of Facilities**

#### Goals

- The City shall provide the residents and businesses of Eden Prairie equal use of all facilities at no cost, and with a minimal cost when those facilities are reserved for their exclusive use.
- The City shall allow community non-profit, public services agencies or groups the use of park facilities for no charge or for minimal cost when those facilities are reserved for their exclusive use.
- The City shall make a detailed policy describing priority usage of City facilities available for public review.

#### Policies

1. Only Eden Prairie residents and businesses have the right to reserve the facilities for their exclusive use, for a fee that substantially covers the cost of extra maintenance for those facilities and helps reduce the operation costs of those facilities to local residents and businesses.
2. No individual or business will be allowed to use park facilities for personal gain, through lesson programs, clinics, tournaments, special events, etc., or charge a fee for access to the facilities reserved from the City of Eden Prairie.
3. Reservations for tournaments may only be made by Eden Prairie public service groups or City sponsored programs. All groups wishing to reserve for tournaments will be required to fill out a reservation request for tournaments and follow the rules approved by the City Council that are listed on that application form.

4. Residents and businesses of Eden Prairie may reserve picnic facilities within Eden Prairie parks beginning January 1 for reservations during the current year. Groups outside the City may not reserve any picnic facilities. All specific picnic reservations will comply with the rules approved by the City Council that are listed on the reservation form.

## **Acquisition of Land For Park and Open Space**

### Goals

- The City shall acquire a neighborhood park or provide a community park within a half-mile of all residential development.
- The City shall identify the most significant natural features within the community and attempt to preserve those features (i.e., creek valleys, lakeshore, bluffs, native prairie, old growth forests, wetlands, etc.) through acquisition or conservation easements, to the extent that is financially feasible.

### Policies

1. Recognize property owners' rights to develop their property according to state law and City code, using the City's Guide Plan and zoning regulations to indicate how the City desires the property to be developed in terms of land use.
2. Use all legal methods to encourage property owners to protect open space and employ all available methods to require protection of unique natural resources. These methods may include regulating the development density through density transfer mechanisms, scenic/conservation easements, park dedication fees, acquisition of tax forfeited land, philanthropy, bond referendums and grants from other entities or units of government.
3. Require developers to preserve or otherwise replace "significant trees" that are removed because of development by application of the Tree Preservation Ordinance. Significant trees are defined as at least 12 inches in diameter (deciduous trees) and at least eight inches in diameter (coniferous trees). The City's ordinance has been a model ordinance in the State of Minnesota for many other progressive communities and is discussed in more detail in the Implementation Policies section of this chapter.

## **Special Populations Services**

### Goal

- The City shall provide community-based social services that meet the needs of the general public and the special populations within the community. Special populations shall be defined as people with physical and mental disabilities, low incomes, racial and immigrant minorities, single parents and elderly people. These populations are at times dissuaded from making full use of the regional recreation and open space system because of some physical, mental, age, income, linguistic, cultural condition or perception about the system.

## Policies

1. Develop policies and maintain records as needed with the Senior Executive Board and Advisory Development Committee to ensure a safe and efficient facility for senior citizens. Provide a safe, pleasant facility that adequately serves seniors for meetings, special events, drop-in use and programs on a year-round basis, during the daytime and evening hours, seven days a week.
2. Provide programs and services that meet the needs of seniors and other special populations including recreation, information and referral services.
3. Provide recreation programs and facilities for mentally and physically disabled as the needs for those facilities and service dictate.
4. Provide transportation opportunities for the elderly to ensure access to the Senior Center and programs offered there, as well as limited shopping and medical visits.
5. Provide educational opportunities for all special populations through classes and speakers brought to various facilities, as well encouraging all individuals to participate in activities outside the Center.
6. Evaluate the younger age population in Eden Prairie and its future needs in relation to existing facilities and programs in order to project future growth requirements.
7. Continue to support the development of Edenwood Center at Birch Island Park through a cooperative program with Friendship Ventures.
8. Provide access for people with disabilities to all facilities at the community parks as soon as possible and to neighborhood parks within areas of the City that are not adequately served through community parks.
9. Ensure that the trail system is accessible to people with physical disabilities throughout the community.
10. Renovate existing playground structures, tennis courts, etc. according to a priority-based schedule to provide accessibility to people with disabilities.

## **Construction and Maintenance of Park Facilities**

### ***Park Shelters***

#### Goal

- The City shall ensure that park shelters are designed and constructed to allow for a variety of functions and with aesthetically pleasing and durable materials.

#### Policies

1. When constructing buildings, where sewer and water are not presently available, all plumbing should be stubbed in rooms constructed where they can be converted to restrooms when water and sewer are available.

2. Park shelters in neighborhood parks may be used as warming houses in the winter and as playground shelters in the summer months; therefore, all year-round park shelters should be designed with sufficient storage space, as well as large open areas to accommodate these uses.
3. Park shelters should be constructed to be as vandal proof as possible, using materials such as steel frames for doors and windows, as well steel doors, deadbolt locks, screens for windows or Lexan in place of glass.

### Goal

- The City shall ensure that all park shelters shall be maintained in a clean, functional condition at all times.

### Policies

1. All buildings should receive a complete and thorough cleaning, and general maintenance review at the end of each seasonal use.
2. A daily maintenance schedule should be provided for each building to ensure clean conditions for public use during seasons when the building is used on a daily basis. A daily checklist should be maintained by the Park Maintenance Supervisor.

### ***Ballfields***

#### Goals

- The City shall provide an opportunity for baseball/softball field and/or soccer/football field in all neighborhood parks that serves a half-mile radius.
- The City shall provide baseball, softball, soccer and football fields at designated community parks, neighborhood parks, and athletic fields in sufficient numbers to serve municipal and City athletic association programs for all age groups.
- The City shall provide sufficient number of athletic facilities to accommodate youth and adult participants who live or work in Eden Prairie.

#### Policies

1. In order to provide maximum use of all facilities, soccer and football fields may be overlapped, and baseball and softball fields may be overlapped; however, the softball/baseball fields will not be overlapped with the soccer/football fields in neighborhood parks if it can be avoided.
2. Whenever constructing a ballfield, all efforts will be made to construct ballfields to accepted current standards.
3. Lighted ballfields will be restricted to community parks and will adhere to park hours.
4. All competition softball/baseball fields will be planned for eventual installation of chain-link fence along base paths to protect players' benches and spectators along baselines. Softball/baseball fields in community parks will be provided with chain-link fence outfield and a warning track to ensure safe play, as well as a neat and orderly appearance.

5. All lighted fields will be irrigated prior to installation of lights.
6. The City shall attempt to provide parking at the following community facilities:
  - Softball fields – 60 cars per field (due to the practice of scheduling consecutive games)
  - Soccer/football fields/cross fields – 35 cars per field
  - Baseball fields – 30 cars per field
7. Designated athletic fields should have spectator seating and appropriate parking to accommodate day-to-day operations, as well as tournament play.

#### Goal

- The City shall provide attractive, safe, and playable conditions on its playing fields.

#### Policies

1. Prior to each season, fields should be inspected for any necessary repairs, including inspection of players' benches, backstops, goals, as well as the playing field.
2. All playing fields shall be mowed once a week during the season.
3. All softball/baseball fields shall be dragged on a daily basis during the season on those dates that are approved for games.
4. All ballfields shall be fertilized on an annual basis while irrigated fields shall be fertilized in the spring and fall.
5. All ballfields shall be aerated and over seeded as necessary.
6. All fields shall receive weekly inspection to check for any necessary repair, including holes or rough areas within the playing field, and any dangerous conditions in or around the playing field. A checklist will be maintained by the Park Maintenance staff.
7. All soccer goals shall be tied down except when field is closed for maintenance.

#### ***Skating Rinks***

#### Goal

- The City shall provide a safe and enjoyable skating facility in a two-mile radius of all residential neighborhoods.

#### Policies

1. Whenever a hockey rink is constructed, there will also be a lighted free skating rink, as well as a warming house provided.
2. All hockey rinks will be constructed on a north/south axis and to current standards, including lighting standards.

## Goals

- The City shall provide a safe and enjoyable skating facility from approximately mid-December to mid-February for both organized and public skating.
- The City shall provide a high quality hockey and free skating rink in selective neighborhood parks and community parks and to limit the development of skating rinks to a number that can be assured of high quality maintenance.

## Policies

1. Monitor usage of rinks and eliminate where use does not justify. If mini-rinks are not being used by at least 20 percent of the numbers using rinks with warming houses, the mini-rinks should be eliminated.
2. Sweep the rinks after one inch of snow has accumulated or immediately after a snowfall.
3. The Parks Division will go to a night shift for flooding until a satisfactory base is prepared in all rinks to maximize the rink season.
4. After February 15, the City will not flood rinks to build up ice if the ice base has been lost to due to warm weather.

## ***Picnic Areas***

### Goal

- The City shall develop attractive, functional picnic areas in all community parks and selected neighborhood parks.

### Policy

1. Picnic areas will be developed to take advantage of the unique views of natural features, as well as being developed in secluded wooded areas, along lakeshores and adjacent to active recreation facilities such as play structures and tennis courts when feasible.

### Goal

- The City shall maintain attractive, safe and enjoyable picnic areas in all community parks.

### Policies

1. Picnic areas will be mowed on a seven to ten day period throughout the summer.
2. All picnic areas will be inspected prior to the season and on a weekly basis throughout the season for any necessary repairs to any of the picnic facilities. A record of these inspections will kept by the Park Maintenance Supervisor and improvements made as necessary.
3. Picnic areas will be maintained on a daily basis when used on a daily basis. A daily checklist will be maintained by the Park Maintenance Supervisor.

## ***Playground Equipment***

### Goal

- The City shall develop safe and enjoyable playground facilities within neighborhood and community parks.

### Policies

1. Only manufactured equipment will be installed as play equipment on City facilities.
2. All surfaces under play structures shall be of wood chips, or other “soft surface” that conforms to current safety guidelines or ADA accessible standards where appropriate.
3. All equipment will be installed according to current safety guidelines.
4. Playground equipment will be placed in parks with a minimum of 50-foot setback from property line in order to minimize impact on adjacent land uses.
5. Playground equipment will not be installed in “foul ball zones” in the vicinity of baseball or softball fields.

### Goal

- The City shall maintain safe, attractive and functional playground equipment within neighborhood and community parks.

### Policy

1. All playground equipment shall be inspected on a monthly basis to ensure safety standards, as well as to review the conditions of equipment for necessary maintenance. A record of these maintenance checks will be kept by the Park Maintenance Supervisor and any necessary repairs will be made immediately.

## ***Bicycle Trails***

### Goals

- The City shall ensure that all bicycle trails will be constructed according to the design criteria for bikeway/hikeway trails contained in Chapter 5, Community Trails.
- The City shall ensure that maintenance to trails will be provided to ensure safe conditions, as well as preventing future high maintenance costs.

### Policies

1. Trails will be routinely inspected in order to schedule sweeping, snow removal, surface repair, erosion problems and vegetation control.
2. Sweeping of all trails will be done in early spring and when needed as determined by the Park Maintenance Supervisor, such as after heavy rains or sand build-up.

3. Snowplowing will be done on primary trail routes, as well as trails used by children required to walk to school, and the major trails within community parks. Additional eight-foot wide trails will be plowed as manpower and equipment is available.
4. Collective vegetation removal shall be required in order to remove low hanging branches and vegetative growth, which has encroached as to interfere with the safety of the bicyclists. Permission must be received from the property owner prior to trimming boulevard trees on private property.
5. Seal coating may be done with a coal or tar emulsion and will be scheduled one to three years after implementation of the trail. Seal coating will be reapplied every six to seven years thereafter.
6. All trails will be inspected on a weekly basis for unsafe conditions, such as broken glass, erosion problems, trail obstructions, sand on trails, etc. A weekly report on trail conditions will be kept by the Park Maintenance Supervisor and improvements made accordingly.

## **Security and Safety**

### Goals

- The City shall provide for the efficient maintenance and operation of clean, orderly, controlled, safe and attractive parklands and recreational facilities.
- The City shall provide effective management and staffing for all its facilities to ensure delivery of a quality recreational experience to park users.

### Policies

1. Park maintenance and operations shall safeguard the physical condition of parks and open spaces from deterioration from weather, vandalism or other natural or human causes.
2. Different levels of maintenance should be provided depending on the intensity of use and purpose of the site.
3. A safe and sanitary environment shall be established and maintained for physical facilities within the system to enhance the use and enjoyment of the facilities by users.
4. Policing of system facilities will be handled by parks staff or park rangers as appropriate, to protect facilities and lands from abuse, vandalism or other activities with negative repercussions on the quality of the park facility.

## **Stewardship of Parks and Open Space Elements – Conservation Areas**

The City of Eden Prairie will eventually own over 2,800 acres of permanent open space, in the form of parks and open space land, over 12 percent of the City's total acreage. The majority of that land is either along one of the three major creek valleys within the City or along the Minnesota River Bluffs. These creek valleys provide significant definition to the City and are considered valuable resources worthy of conservation.

### Goals

- The City shall ultimately acquire all of the designated floodplain parcels within the three major creek valleys to ensure long-term preservation of the valleys' natural resources.
- The City shall encourage the preservation of permanent open space on the wooded slopes of the creek valleys through scenic easements or public ownership.

### Policies

1. Several additional segments of the Purgatory Creek Valley should be acquired as adjacent land is developed, principally through dedication of floodplains or scenic/conservation easements.
2. Portions of the Edenvale Conservation Area and the Lower Purgatory Creek Conservation Area should be acquired. Those sites are critical for the preservation of the entire ecosystem in that part of the community, as well as connecting trail corridors along this linear greenway through the City.
3. The Riley Creek Valley should be preserved by dedication or public acquisition, to preserve the integrity of the linear greenway concept and fulfill goals of its conservation status. Variances for setbacks and other site features along the Riley Creek Valley that would allow development closer to the creek than what is permitted by ordinance should not be granted by the City.

### Goal

- The City shall work with the various Watershed Districts to develop joint plans for these areas as many of the management practices may impact the water quality within these conservation areas.

### Policies

1. Conservation Area Management Plans will be used to guide City efforts at maintaining the ecological vitality and aesthetic appeal of these conservation areas. They should not only provide site plans assuming development for limited public use such as pedestrian trails. They will outline maintenance practices that should occur in order to ensure protection of these valuable natural resources. Management plans should further establish goals for renovating existing degraded areas, such as old growth forests, native prairie areas, etc.
2. Future management plans (eg along the Nine Mile Creek Valley) may be appropriate as open space and recreational needs evolve over time.

### ***Minnesota River Bluff and Valley (Alluvial Lands)***

One of the unique physical characteristics contributing to Eden Prairie's landscape is the Minnesota River valley bluff. The need to preserve Eden Prairie's bluff areas is justified by the bluffs' contribution to community heritage. The bluffs' topography, vegetation and aesthetics are currently jeopardized by encroaching development. Without preservation, their character may be permanently altered such that future generations cannot enjoy them.

Native American burial sites are present throughout Eden Prairie's bluffs. More than 100 earth mounds have been recorded within Eden Prairie City limits; most are conical or ovoid in shape and occur in clusters along the Minnesota River bluffs. They represent some of Eden Prairie's most significant cultural resources.

#### Goals

- The City should complete a survey of known burial sites to determine current conditions of mounds and require archaeological survey of any bluff development.
- The City should ensure that bluff line preservation through land acquisition or conservation easements that the City acquires from developers.

#### Policies

1. The Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA Line) should not be extended south of the top of the bluff in order to limit development on the bluff to one unit per ten acres.
2. Density transfer from the bluff face to the top of the bluff should be encouraged to allow property owners to maintain their current development potential. Development on the face of the bluff should be discouraged by all means available through current law and ordinance.

#### Goal

- The City shall acquire approximately 160 acres of floodplain within the Minnesota River Valley for the Minnesota Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area for conservation and passive recreation, such as bike/hike trails, picnicking and perhaps a canoe launch.

#### Policy

1. Steep bluffs along the Minnesota River Valley may also be preserved through scenic easement or public acquisition.

## **Stewardship of Parks and Open Space Elements – Wetlands and Water Resources**

Wetlands are recognized as a valuable asset to the community, for their aesthetic qualities and for the water quality improvement benefit they provide. More detail on wetland policy is provided in the Comprehensive Wetland Protection and Management Plan (November 1999).

### Goal

- The City shall protect high quality wetlands, enabling long-term protection, restoration and management.

### Policies

1. Development review guidelines will be linked to these goals of protecting wetlands.
2. Educating the public and development community about the City's policy will be undertaken to accomplish this goal.

## **Aesthetics, Community Image and Identity**

A positive image and identity are difficult concepts for a community to grasp, let alone attain. However, these subjective topics are important tools to assist in economic development, community growth and community pride.

The term “community identity” refers to how a community is viewed in comparison to other communities it abuts or is compared. This concept is especially important for communities traversed by a major roadway such as I-494 or TH5. Along such corridors, municipal boundaries become blurred for roadway users and individual communities lose their sense of identity. Eden Prairie's challenge may be to become a more distinct community in contrast to other municipalities such as Minnetonka, Chanhassen, Bloomington and Edina.

The term “community image” need not be associated with community identity. Community image is the impression that individuals gain from community exposure whether it is the landscape setting, printed literature or other visual material. A positive image is normally associated with visual quality or community quality of life.

While these terms appear subjective and conceptual, they are important components to marketing a community and competing with other suburbs for economic development. For example, Eden Prairie's quality environment may not be apparent to some individuals who relate to the long-time commercial corridors adjacent TH 212 and TH 5. Commuters who pass through the City on a daily basis may not relate to attractive neighborhood qualities or community open space.

The City has invested millions of dollars in the acquisition and development of the community's park system. Most of the parks are located on some of the highest value land in the community, i.e. lakeshore property, oak savannahs, wooded hills, etc. Eden Prairie's parks have a reputation as one of the best systems in the state. The image of all these parks is one of respect for the natural environment.

The following goals and objectives are opportunities for Eden Prairie to strengthen its visual identity and enhance its already positive image. These efforts can and should be incorporated into the City's development of park and open space facilities.

#### Goal

- Maintain the respect for the natural beauty of each park setting through strong controls for facility development.

#### Policies

1. Continue to discourage the permanent installation of advertising signs or billboards on buildings, ballfield fences or rinks.
2. Require the same standards for building materials, screening parking etc. on park property as required of the developers.

#### Goal

- The City shall improve community image, visual appeal within state highway corridor right-of-ways and views from principal roadways.

#### Policies

1. Work collectively with the Mn/DOT maintenance district and private property owners to establish a strong maintenance program for right-of-way landscaping and ground cover.
2. Right-of-way fences' appearance should be maintained or replaced as necessary.
3. Landscape quality should be enhanced by increased maintenance and plant material replacement when appropriate. The use of prairie grass along highway corridors should be promoted, where appropriate, as a means of right-of-way stabilization.
4. Right-of-way ground cover appearance should include regular mowing, weed control and reseeding or sodding as necessary.
5. Develop specific design themes for areas along major traffic thoroughfares into a "Corridor Design Framework Manual." This manual could serve as a guide for consistent lighting, signage, fencing, landscaping and other site features to be incorporated into the development process or when corridor improvements are made.
6. Scenic views from highway corridors should be furthered by discouraging the use of advertising billboards along the corridors.
7. A parkway system with large green medians should be created in the community (for example, along Dell Road in southwest Eden Prairie). The parkways would provide space for landscaping, benches, special lighting, trails and trash receptacles.

### Goal

- The City shall create a distinct community identity, which contrasts with other abutting communities along principal highway corridors.

### Policies

1. Accentuate community gateways by constructing urban design gateway elements or landscaping. Specific roadway gateways should include the TH 5, TH 169 and TH 101 corridors. Gateway elements could include monuments or architectural objects, which integrate the community logo or an image of the City's quality. Urban design monuments or intersection landscaping should occur at major roadway intersections within the community.
2. Special districts or neighborhoods within the community could have intersection lighting and signal hardware painted a dark tone or of an equipment design that has a distinctive appearance. The identity of specific neighborhoods could be emphasized through establishment of neighborhood themes, and expressed through creative uses of landscaping, lighting and other visual elements.
3. Unify and emphasize principal highway corridors by additional hearty landscaping at right-of-way edges and intersection medians. Annual flower massings could be considered to accent these areas.

### Goal

- The City shall structure regulations to treat right-of-way/private property edges commensurate with abutting land-use type.

### Policies

1. Select right-of-way edge landscaping appropriate with abutting land uses. Single-family and multi-family residential development should be buffered by both coniferous and deciduous plant material massing. Institutional, commercial, retail and office uses should be enhanced and complemented by attractive landscape plantings. Industrial land use should be screened by plantings, berming or by erecting fenced devices.
2. Right-of-way fence use or design should be tailored to specific land use. Residential areas should retain the fence with increased fence maintenance or an alternative fence design, such as dark-tone vinyl clad. Other land uses such as retail commercial could remove the fence at their option. Interstate corridors should be exempt from fence removal.
3. Right-of-way edge maintenance should be increased through joint public/private efforts.

### Goal

- The City shall encourage landowners to improve visual quality of private parcels abutting major corridors.

## Policies

1. Site standards for private parcels should be strictly enforced.
2. The private parcel owner should be encouraged to utilize high quality landscaping.
3. The City of Eden Prairie should strictly enforce site maintenance of prominent parcels abutting highway corridors.
4. Design performance standards should be reinforced to direct landscaping, signing, parking lot screening and similar features, which contribute to site aesthetics.

While these goals and objectives may appear general, they establish a spirit to which highway corridors, community gateways and principal intersections should adhere. Tasteful, but hearty, landscaping and fixed urban design gateways located outside of highway safety zones should be planned for whenever highway corridors are developed or reconstructed within Eden Prairie.

## **PARK AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM IMPLEMENTATION POLICIES**

### **Financing**

#### Goals

- The City shall provide financing for the acquisition and development of the Park and Open Space System through a variety of revenue sources including the general fund, park dedication fees, grants, bond referendums and donations.
- The City shall provide financing for the transportation trail system through the general fund for constructing transportation trails along existing streets and roadways and from developers on new streets and roadways required to serve their development.

#### Policies

1. Staff will review and secure all available county, state and federal grants for assistance in the acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities, as well as the City trail system.
2. Staff will provide a Six-Year Capital Improvement Program that defines priorities and cost estimates for acquisition and development of parks, recreation facilities and trails to assist in the planning and budgeting for these projects. This CIP will be updated and reviewed on an annual basis by the Parks and Recreation Citizen Advisory Commission and the City Council.
3. Staff will provide the Commission and the Council with regular reports regarding the financial status of the park development fund and its relation to scheduled acquisition and development projects.

4. The City will finance neighborhood parks from the residential cash park fees generated from their neighborhood area, general fund and from bond referendums.
5. Community parks will be financed mainly through funded cash park fees from office, commercial and industrial development and from bond referendums.
6. Acquisition and development of historical sites will be funded from grants, donations, bond referendums and the general fund.

### ***Fees and Charges***

#### Goals

- The City shall levy fees and charges for special use facilities, such as the Eden Prairie Community Center. Fees and charges will be based on similar facilities in other communities, as well as the goal of meeting the operating costs of the facility.
- The City shall collect fees for recreation programs based on the policy approved by the City Council in 1995:
  - A. *Basic Services:* Basic services are those that every taxpayer is entitled to receive – playground programs, drop-in recreation, such as free skating and swimming beaches, as well as services for seniors and the disabled. These programs and services guarantee all residents access to basic recreation program facilities. Subsidy within the basic services would range from 40 percent to 120 percent. The programs subsidized at 120 percent would be free programs, with 100 percent direct costs, plus 20 percent indirect costs charged to the program.
  - B. *Enhanced Services:* Enhanced services include special events or activities to which the community is invited without a fee. These events promote the City, our history, and quality of life, and do have potential for outside sponsorship or partners. Examples of these programs are community-wide festivals, such as 4th of July and Oktoberfest or the smaller events, such as the Staring Lake Amphitheatre programs, Winter Wonderland program, Sunbonnet Day, etc. Maximum subsidy levels for these types of programs should be 75 percent, with the goal to obtain sponsorship of the entire cost of the programs.
  - C. *Fee Assisted Services:* These services include programs that are slightly subsidized (up to 20 percent), such as preschool playground and some senior programs, as well as programs with mandated fee levels. These programs provide fees that offset the direct costs of supervisors, instructors, and expendable equipment, but might not cover the entire indirect costs of the program. The goal for these programs is to cover the entire costs of the program.
  - D. *Fee Supported Services:* These services are provided at no cost to the taxpayers and in many cases show a profit. These programs include the majority of all adult and youth athletic and lesson programs, and outnumber all other programs combined.

Note that all of the subsidy maximum levels include 20 percent above the direct costs for indirect costs charged to the program.

### Policies

1. All programs that are based on meeting operating expenses will have a minimum registration number designed to meet operating expenses. If this number of registrations is not met, the program will be canceled.
2. The staff will present a report to the Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Commission and the City Council on an annual basis to reflect how various programs met with subsidy goals, and to determine if subsidy goals should be revised, programs continued or fees increased or decreased.

### ***Park Dedication Fees***

Park dedication fees are established based on the law that allows cities to charge developers a park fee based on the amount of additional cost for acquisition and development of park and recreation facilities that will be required to serve proposed development. Expenditure of these fees is determined based on the needs of the park system as defined in the Park and Open Space Plan and prioritized in the Capital Improvement Plan. The Six-Year CIP is reviewed by the City Council on an annual basis with each project requiring review and approval on an individual basis.

The City's policy on park dedication is based on providing new residential neighborhoods with equivalent recreational amenities planned/provided for the entire community. The nature and distribution of these land amenities are based on comparisons to national standards and other metropolitan communities, as well as an in-depth review of the City of Eden Prairie's needs based on the infrastructure of this community.

### Threshold Criteria for Allocating Park Fees

The City established the park dedication fee to assist in meeting its objective of providing a neighborhood park within a half-mile radius of all residential homes. A neighborhood park should accommodate the games, activities and play space required of neighborhood children and adults recognizing that these needs may be accommodated by community athletic association programs and leagues. The City standard for each neighborhood park includes a regulation soccer field, a softball field, a tennis court, basketball court and a play structure. Other community facilities such as a warming house/park shelter, a skating rink and lighted hockey rink should be located within a two-mile radius. These standards may change as needs for various facilities increase or decrease.

### Formula to Calculate Park Fees

The general formula for establishing a residential fee is based on the City ordinance requirements on residential units (density) per acre and the average market value of the land prior to improvements. The cash park fees are determined by a formula based on 10 percent of the fair market value of the unimproved land that has access to water and sewer for development. The cash park fees are based on the number of units that would normally be developed as low density residential or two and one half units per acre. As an example, \$2,400 per unit would be equivalent to land valued at \$60,000 per acre ( $2,400 \times 2.5 = \$6,000$  per acre  $\times 10 = \$60,000$ ).

### Cash in Lieu of Land Dedication

The City, in most cases, requires cash in lieu of land from developers in order to acquire neighborhood park sites several years ahead of development. The City uses the cash to acquire the land that is most suitable for the park development prior to development within that area. The remaining park fees are used to develop the park. The City will require land in lieu of fees when the land in the proposed development is proposed as parkland according to the Park and Open Space Plan.

The cash park fee is not required from the developer until building permits are issued. This alleviates a significant burden on the developer; however, it adds a delay of receiving the fees to the City when parkland should be acquired prior to development.

The City generally has not accepted creek valley in lieu of park fees, as creek valley lands do not substitute for the active play areas required to provide recreation opportunities to neighborhood residents. The method for acquiring and preserving these creek valleys is to require dedication of the floodplain for preservation and control purposes, and to require the steep wooded slopes of these creek valleys to be either covered by a scenic or conservation easement that will guarantee preservation of these areas, or encourage the developer to gift these steep wooded slopes to the City as park of the plat. If they are dedicated or gifted to the City, but not as a condition of park dedication, the City should grant the developer a density transfer from this acreage; however, the City should not grant density transfer for floodplain acreage that does not have development potential.

### Role of Non- Residential Development

The City of Eden Prairie has an unusually high ratio of businesses to residents compared to typical suburban communities. The high number of commercial, office and industrial sites does add to a wide tax base, but it also requires a unique burden to the park system. The people that work at these offices or industrial complexes often wish to participate on company teams, such as softball, volleyball and basketball. Companies also require facilities for company picnics and other social functions that require large community park spaces. For this reason, the City requires commercial, industrial and office development to pay a park fee based on approximately 5 percent of the parcel's value. The word "approximate" is used because of the wide range of value of property between industrial, commercial and office use. The City has established a fee based on comparison of other suburban community fees for commercial, office and industrial use. The formula estimates the cost of the facilities used by commercial, office and industrial users and their percentage of use compared to residential use of these community park facilities.

Approximately 65 to 70 percent of picnic reservations and adult softball field use come from the commercial, office and industrial area. These facilities make up approximately 75 percent of the developed community park space. Cash park fees generated from commercial, office and industrial pay for approximately 50 percent of the development of Eden Prairie's community parks and community park acquisition. The other 50 percent cost is accommodated through residential cash park fees and from bond issues paid for by the entire community (including the commercial, office and industrial companies).

### ***Bond Referendums and Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)***

Capital improvement programs generally focus on investments that establish or improve physical property, have a threshold level of expenditure, are planned to have a multi-year life and are tangible. Usually these costs include land and development activities but exclude lower cost equipment and vehicles, nursery stock, emergency repairs and concession products.

Capital investments are usually grouped into five key categories: a) land acquisition and dedication; b) site and facility development; c) special recreation facility development; d) natural resource investments and e) replacement/ renovation of existing facilities.

### **Legal Tools/Regulatory Requirements**

#### ***Tree Preservation Ordinance***

The ordinance was developed as an objective method to evaluate a development's impact on trees and forested areas, preserve significant trees within a proposed new development area, and suggest methods for mitigation when trees are removed. As part of the City's intent and desire to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment and beauty of Eden Prairie, the ordinance is used to encourage a resourceful and prudent approach to development of wooded areas.

Between 1986 and 1990, the City utilized a Tree Preservation Policy, the precursor to the 1990 Tree Preservation Ordinance, adopted by City Council. The policy emerged in response to City Council's desire to have a comprehensive and objective method to evaluate a development's impact on trees. The goal was to have a quantifiable standard to assure consistency of review. Since 1986, all woodland developments have been reviewed according to these tools.

While it is understood that the development of a wooded site requires some tree removal, the policy provides an incentive for creative land use and good site design, which preserves trees while allowing development in wooded areas with some mitigation. Partial reforestation is one method for mitigating tree loss. Other mitigating measures used to avoid tree removal may include such things as parkland dedication, density transfers, variances, larger lots, alternative site plans, and alternative land uses. Tree replacement should be used as a partial mitigation to tree loss only after all other tools for tree preservation have been explored.

It is the intent and desire of the City to protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment and beauty of Eden Prairie by encouraging a resourceful and prudent approach to urban development of wooded areas.

#### ***Scenic/Conservation Easements***

The City has made extensive use of conservation easements since the late 1970s. This allows private property owners to retain ownership of wooded slopes, wetlands and other areas the City would like to preserve but requires the owner to maintain certain vegetation and natural features on the designated lands. These easements should only be used when the majority of the property owners clearly see the advantage of maintaining the easements, for example creek valleys and natural lakeshores or wetlands.

### ***Density Transfers***

For more than 20 years, the City has allowed the use of density transfer to protect open space, which allows high density development to be clustered on a portion of a site in order to protect valuable areas, such as wooded lands, as intact environments. For example, if a property owner owns 10 acres of land zoned low-density residential (which allows 2.5 units per acre or 25 units on 10 acres) and if half of the property is wooded, the City Council might encourage that property owner to put the 25 units on the 5 non-wooded acres in a multi-family residential development and preserve the 5 wooded acres. The property owner still gets the 25 units that he is entitled to, and the woods are preserved.

### ***Philanthropy and Grants***

City staff always encourages developers to consider gifting marginally developable land to the City in order to ensure that land is protected forever and to provide a benefit to the developer in terms of capital gains taxes. The City has received several hundred acres of land in donations over the past 20 years.

The City of Eden Prairie has been one of the most successful communities in the State of Minnesota in the acquisition of grant money used for the purpose of preserving parkland. Grants were used for the majority of the acquisition of the above named parks. Other parks acquired or developed with the use of grant money are: Preserve Park, Edenvale Park and the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area.

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## **CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter summarizes policy for planning and development of the parks system. It focuses on the values and approaches favored by the City in pursuit of the long-term goal of improvement and expansion of the Parks and Open Space System.

### **Facilities**

#### ***Built Facilities***

Approximately half of the City's total parks and open space acreage is developed as park facilities. Many of these facilities were built in the 1980s, with the pace of new construction slowing in the mid 1990s. This pattern of investment represents a significant commitment of resources to maintain existing facilities. New investments and renovations of existing facilities are discussed in this chapter. Another category of facility investments, not acted on by City Council at the present time, are described in this chapter as Priority Needs, and include a third sheet of ice, a pool/ water park facility, additional athletic fields and others. Decisions about these facilities are pending, but are expected in the next 5-8 year period.

#### ***Wetlands***

The City's policies on the management of the quality and quantity of wetland resources are governed by the Comprehensive Wetland Protection and Management Plan and other regulatory devices. This plan is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, Water Resources.

#### ***Conservation Areas***

The City's objectives in managing each of the conservation area sites are described in specific Conservation Area Management Plans tailored to suit the needs of different conservation areas. Plans have been approved for the Prairie Bluff Conservation Area, the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area and the Birch Island Woods Conservation Area. A management plan was approved for seven of the City's conservation areas in June 2000. Future management plans are anticipated for other sites, such as Nine Mile Creek Conservation Area.

### **Recreation Programming**

The policies that determine the nature of recreational programs and consequently the facilities needed to accommodate these programs are included in large part in this chapter. This includes program delivery, fee policies and other aspects of recreational programming.

### **Operations and Maintenance**

Current standards for operations and maintenance are discussed according to the facility or the programming need. Other key factors that influence these needs are user demand and intensity of use, as well as available funding sources to support maintenance activity. While capital funds to build new facilities are usually acquired through bond referendums, maintenance costs generally come from general revenue sources. This can lead to an imbalance in available resources if bond referendums are approved, but the City lacks sufficient resources to maintain the quality and breadth of programming expected by citizens.

## **Funding and Financing Tools**

Bond referendums are a well-established method of funding acquisition and development of various elements of the park system. Park dedication fees, which the City is entitled to collect by state statute, are another important source of revenue for the parks and open space system. This chapter reviews existing funding and financing tools and recommends their use according to needs and effectiveness.