



City of
Eden Prairie

Park
and
Open Space
System Plan



Prepared by: SRF Consulting Group, Inc.

CITY OF EDEN PRAIRIE
PARK AND OPEN SPACE SYSTEM PLAN

Prepared for:

City of Eden Prairie
Department of Parks and Recreation

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Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This Park and Open Space System Plan was prepared by the City of Eden Prairie to develop a coordinated program for its future park and open space needs. The program is based on an assessment of residents' needs and desires, coupled with an inventory of existing facilities and projected facilities needs.

MISSION STATEMENT

Recreation and open space is a vital component of the City's environment, which serves several important functions. The City is committed to the value of park and open space, and seeks to fulfill these goals in the planning and development of the parks and open space system.

A. Provision of Recreational Resources

Opportunities for recreation and leisure time activities are integral to the overall quality of life. A growing emphasis on physical fitness and a desire for recreational diversity increases the responsibility of recreational providers.

B. Protection of Natural Resources

Natural resources possess more than just recreational and aesthetic value. They are essential to the enrichment of human life, health and welfare. Protection of these resources responds to community-held values about the importance of wetlands, forests, grasslands and other natural features in the natural ecology of the suburban environment.

C. Structuring of Urban Development

The nature and variety of parks and other recreational facilities heighten a community's identity and sense of pride. Development and maintenance of a quality park and open space system is a proven way to attract high-quality residential and commercial development, enhance property values and revitalize otherwise declining areas.

Recent strategic and comprehensive planning efforts conducted with the Mayor and City Council, in 2000, stated that the update of the Park and Open Space System Plan should respect goals of affordability and reflect changing interests in the community.

Update the Park and Open Space System Plan to ensure affordability and reflect changing public interests. – Strategic Initiatives, City of Eden Prairie (2000)

The Park and Open Space System Plan is an important component of the City's comprehensive planning. Recreational facilities and open space are key elements of the City's strategy of providing a livable, prosperous, attractive environment for its residents and citizens. The goals and strategy described here furthers the vision of parks and open space in the community.

CHAPTER 1 BASE DATA AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Community demographics comprised a major portion of the initial base data that was assembled. Using this data, a profile of Eden Prairie residents was compiled. The size of the population grew 40 percent between 1990 and 2000. The community has experienced tremendous growth in recent years, resulting in an even greater demand on its park and recreation facilities. Forecasts of future population growth anticipate continued change over the next 10 years to 2010, albeit at a slower rate of a cumulative 18 percent change from the 2000 population of 54,901.

Eden Prairie's population is made up largely of young to middle-aged adults, and children. Its population is younger in age composition than that of the overall Twin Cities metropolitan area and has shifted in age distribution since the 1990 census. There are fewer residents between the ages of 25 to 34, more children and teens, and a significant increase in the population older than 55 years of age.

Household growth continues, with the householders typically consisting of adults with younger children or smaller households (1-2 people) aged 55 and older, with no children at home.

Economic prosperity is expected to continue. The City's home prices are well above the metropolitan area average. The community's household income is approximately 33 percent above the metropolitan area's average. Job growth is expected to continue, and while it is not anticipated to match the rate of growth in the 1990s, it is still expected to be strong, ranging from 6 to 10 percent through 2010.

CHAPTER 2 INVENTORY OF EXISTING PARK AND OPEN SPACE FACILITIES

In order to categorize Eden Prairie's existing park and open space facilities, a detailed inventory of all resources was conducted. Existing parks were evaluated according to their use, size, function and facility development. Functional categories used include mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, community athletic fields, conservation areas, historic sites, and special use sites. Each of these classifications has unique characteristics and service areas. Accepted standards were used to assess recreation demand and level of service. The application of park standards was instrumental in establishing guidelines for park development, redevelopment and maintenance. The use of standards also provided the assurance that all neighborhoods within the City would have equal access and opportunities for use of the system.

The individual park inventory and assessment included a detailed description of each park and open space facility, its size, location, current classification and physical and development character. User groups and special issues pertaining to the park's development were identified.

A number of other public and private recreation providers such as the school district and private enterprise round out the total picture of current park and recreation resources available to Eden Prairie residents. In addition, regional facilities operated by Three Rivers Park District and the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area augment Eden Prairie's conservation areas.

This inventory was used to make specific recommendations for the improvement of each existing park and open space facility in the community.

CHAPTER 3 NEEDS AND DEMANDS ANALYSIS

Eden Prairie's rapid growth rate presents challenges in meeting the current and future needs of its residents. These needs were assessed over a two-year study period using the results of business and community forums, internal staff and City Council electronic brainstorming and a community wide survey.

A community forum of 100 randomly selected citizens produced comments that were helpful in verifying perceived trends, system adequacies and inadequacies, and community support for future improvements. Frequently mentioned comments included: a desire for a community walkway/bikeway system, alleviation of overcrowded parks and athletic fields, additional natural resource and preservation areas and nature trails, and a possible future public golf course.

Additional residential input was received through a mailed survey of the entire community. The survey identified evenly divided support for active outdoor recreation facilities. Preservation and access to natural areas, particularly for trail-type users, was strongly endorsed.

By evaluating standards for the provision of park space compared to community demographics and recent development patterns, this process confirmed the need for one additional neighborhood park to serve residents in the south central part of the community. The City currently has 1,058 acres of active use parkland, and it anticipates acquiring another 135 acres. Eden Prairie has over 1,400 acres of conservation land and will acquire additional open space mainly along creek valleys and bluffs. The City will eventually own over 2,843 acres of land designated as park or open space land. Eden Prairie School District owns approximately 100 acres of land with outdoor recreation facilities such as ball fields that are used as City parks much of the year.

Three Rivers Park District has 488 acres of parkland located in Eden Prairie. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the DNR will own over 1,700 acres of land as part of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area, and the Metropolitan Airports Commission will own over 800 acres of open space to buffer land around Flying Cloud Airport. In addition to City park and open space land, these other lands, controlled by other governmental agencies will total over 6,100 acres of permanent open space within this community. This is triple the national goal of 10 percent open land within a community.

Another issue that was identified by a Task Force comprised of members from various athletic associations convened by the City Council in March and April 2002 was the heavy user demand on youth athletic fields and facilities. The need for additional fields and facilities results from current heavy participation and projected future use. Extraordinary growth in participation was noted for soccer and football. Unknown sports, such as the relatively recent popularity of lacrosse, make some changes in demand even more difficult to predict. Youth athletic participation has increased the burdens facing existing athletic fields, and will continue to do so, given predicted future participation rates. Parcel acquisition and facility development must continue to keep pace with user needs and demands if current youth and adult athletic participation continues. Adult athletic participation appears to be in decline; therefore, the continued growth demand for youth facilities may be alleviated somewhat by transferring the use of adult facilities to youth programs.

CHAPTER 4 PARK AND OPEN SPACE POLICIES

The majority of policies included in this chapter are intended to address the challenges faced by decision-makers and to guide the planning and development of the Park and Open Space System. While the policies included here are not a complete set of the standards or operating procedures that govern the City's parks-related activities, they detail the framework for decisions about building and maintaining the value of the system. These are the most critical guidelines for shaping policy decisions related to parks and open spaces in the City of Eden Prairie.

The chapter also identifies priority needs for continued development of the Park and Open Space System. Some of the identified needs have been acted on by the City Council, and others are yet to be decided, relative to funding or additional planning needs.

The established guidelines included here address the construction and maintenance of park facilities, services to special populations, use of facilities, fees, charges, and park dedication. Additionally, policies or position statements were written for the preservation of Eden Prairie's trees, bluff features and creek valley resources.

Policies address the City's commitment to incorporate Eden Prairie's Park and Open Space System into the Metropolitan Park and Open Space System. This requires an effort to ensure the City's trail system connects to adjacent community trails, as well as regional trails and state trails. It is also important to treat the regional parks and the National Wildlife Refuge and Recreation Area as vital parts of the total open space system that serves this community.

CHAPTER 5 COMMUNITY TRAILS

The development of a trail system within the City stemmed from a hikeway/bikeway study done by the City in 1976. The recommendations formulated during this study continue to serve as a trails policy for the City today. Trails are a valuable asset to the City, as they deliver important recreational and transportation service to the broader community.

Because of the different standards that apply to different types of trails, they have been classified into four categories. These categories are: transportation trails, recreation trails, nature trails and cross-country ski trails. Snowmobile trails and equestrian trails have been eliminated from the park system because of the incompatibility of those uses with other trail users.

Eden Prairie's existing walking trails encompass approximately 80 miles of sidewalks. Hikeways/bikeways currently amount to about 90 miles, with another 15 to 20 miles being planned. Proposed nature walkways will eventually total approximately 18 to 20 miles.

Goals and policies were developed in regard to functional considerations, aspects of user welfare, safety and security and programming/financial considerations. These goals and policies effectively coordinate trail system planning with comprehensive planning efforts, such as subdivision review, capital improvements planning and citizen participation activities. Suggested design standards for trail construction were formulated to guide future trail construction and ensure user safety and comfort. These design standards follow accepted standards used by national design associations, Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota Department of Transportation.

Funding sources for transportation trails are found principally in general operating funds or specially targeted referenda initiatives. By City Council decision in 1984, cash-in-lieu-of-parkland fees have not been a resource for trail development; however, recreation trails, cross-country ski trails and nature trails have typically been funded by either cash-in-lieu-of-parkland fees or community referendums.

CHAPTER 6 WATER RESOURCES

Water resources are important elements within the City of Eden Prairie and the City's park system. The City places importance on the preservation and protection of these resources, as they provide ecological, aesthetic, and educational benefits to the City.

The City maintains an inventory of the City's water resources. In 2000, 495 wetlands, 17 lakes and 105 non-jurisdictional stormwater ponds were identified. The total wetland and stormwater pond acreage was approximately 4,500 acres in 2000. Fifteen of the City's 17 lakes have City trail systems, parks and/or Conservation Areas adjacent to them for the enjoyment of these water resources by the community.

The City has developed a number of educational tools as well as ordinances aimed at protection and management of the City's water resources.

CHAPTER 7 SPECIAL USE FACILITIES, SUPPORT FACILITIES, HISTORIC SITES AND GOLF COURSE NEEDS

Any area providing specialized or single purpose recreational activities is classified as a special use facility. Generally, special use facilities require less land acreage, and they can often be found in a park classified for neighborhood or community use. They may include, nature centers, boat landings, marinas, community centers, and other special use sites. In Eden Prairie's case, attention was focused on existing and proposed community gardens, ornamental gardens, nature interpretive areas, fishing piers, boat ramp sites, picnic facilities, day camp, amphitheater, marina and a number of other potential special use recreation facilities for the City.

Eden Prairie's plan for historic preservation should respond to aspects of assessment, preservation, development of support facilities, interpretation and promotion, and management policies. An inventory was done of the City's historic sites, and recommendations were made for their future use and promotion.

Golf course feasibility was assessed in response to indications that there may be desire and support for such a facility in the City. Development of a golf course depends on national trends, community interest, trade area demographics, competing facilities, required land acquisition, and related development costs. Many of the traditional golf course feasibility indicators suggest that the opportunity may exist for a municipal golf course in Eden Prairie; however, the cost of land and the rapidly diminishing amount of undeveloped land indicates that the only viable option would be on the former BFI landfill site. Options for use of that site may be limited for several years.

CHAPTER 8 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PLANNING (CIP)

The capital improvements program is a tool for fiscal management that should be reviewed to remain sensitive to local needs, resources and changing circumstances. Establishment of priorities for improvement is a step-by-step process that considers factors, such as areas of population growth, overused facilities, intergovernmental cooperation, adjacent land-use compatibility, satisfying community need, operating costs, and a number of other evaluation criteria. Funding mechanisms also were explored to assist decision-makers in pursuing all available resources for the financing of park improvements. There are a number of funding tools available to the City as implementation devices. The City's own financing resources typically include general funds dollars, bonds (usually initiated as the result of a community referendum process), and tax increment financing (TIF). Sources of matching funds outside of the City's traditional resources include loans and grants from federal and state sources, transportation funds at the state and county level, school district facility investments, and private donations.

The City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) is a six-year document, which produces a mid-term vision of future and ongoing spending on public projects. It is a tool that establishes priorities for project completion. These priorities are arrived at through citizen participation in meetings of the Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Commission and City Council meetings. A CIP's ability to reflect the spending priorities of the community relies on citizen participation to be accurate and closely reflect the interests of the majority of citizens.

CHAPTER 9 FUTURE RECREATION TRENDS

Key indicators revealing future conditions for recreational activities are found in reviewing today's observable trends, demographics, environmental conditions, technology, economics, and government. As trends reveal changes in the interest and modes or methods by which participants engage in recreational activity, planners must prepare to meet needs and deliver services with tools and techniques that are virtually unknown today.

The visioning workshop undertaken for this chapter of the Park and Open Space System Plan identified immediate, short-term and long-term challenges related to identified trends. The conclusions drawn here reflect the fact that changes in demographics, environmental conditions, technology, economics, and government may cause the parks and open space system to respond in radically different ways, depending on the degree of change that actually occurs.

Some of the clearest indicators of future issues that could face the park and recreation system are the community's definition of recreational needs; the possibility that environmental conditions (water scarcity, plant species change due to global warming) could deteriorate rapidly and change recreational patterns significantly, and that applied technology may derive solutions to problems of maintenance and use of materials unknown to parks and recreation staff today. Other more socio-cultural and economic trends suggest that the economics of supporting park and open space facilities will become a source of debate and dispute at the local level of government, and that the role of local government in providing parks and recreation services to all citizens at little to no cost will be challenged from within the community.

The best method of responding to future issues is to track present day trends and ensure that communication and strategic planning within the City and the Parks and Recreation Department are maintained as important functions. This aspect of stewardship of the park and open space system must continue to be addressed on a regular basis as an element of the City's comprehensive planning efforts.