



Chapter Nine

Future Recreation Trends



**CHAPTER 9
FUTURE RECREATION TRENDS**

OVERVIEW	9-1
KEY INDICATORS	9-1
Demographics	9-1
Environment.....	9-2
Technology	9-3
Economics.....	9-3
Government.....	9-3
GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RECREATION PARTICIPATION TRENDS	9-4
Aging Population	9-4
Household Structure.....	9-4
Emphasis on Value and Choice in Recreation Activities	9-4
Youth Sports Participation.....	9-4
Rise in Number of Women Participating in Outdoor Recreation.....	9-5
Increased Urbanization	9-5
Health and Wellness	9-5
PARTICIPATION RATE INCREASES	9-6
IMPACTS ON PARKS AND RECREATION SERVICES	9-8
Facilities.....	9-8
Natural Resources	9-8
Programming.....	9-9
Operating Culture.....	9-9
Funding for Maintenance of Existing Facilities.....	9-9
Communications, Marketing and Information Gathering.....	9-10
Liability Issues.....	9-10
Operations and Maintenance.....	9-10
Access to Programs and Facilities	9-10
COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS	9-10
Future Needs or Demands: Perceptions of Eden Prairie in the Year 2020.....	9-10
Identification of Desired Services in 2010.....	9-11
Implications of Eden Prairie Providing Identified Services	9-12
Athletic Association Task Force Recommendations	9-12
SUMMARY OF IMMEDIATE, NEAR-TERM AND LONG-TERM PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES	9-13
CHAPTER SUMMARY	9-21

CHAPTER 9

FUTURE RECREATION TRENDS

OVERVIEW

The use of future recreation trends to anticipate programming or facility needs must be carefully weighed in relation to several factors. Present day trends and forecasts about future change need to be tempered by an understanding of the priorities and policies of parks and recreation service providers. This chapter focuses attention on key indicators that alert decision-makers to shifts in recreational participation and demand. Understanding these indicators allows the City to consider the impacts these trends will have on the diverse elements of the parks and open space system, from recreational programming to park facilities to natural resource and on operating culture, within government and City departments. The chapter concludes with a list of key questions facing Eden Prairie over the next 50 years of parks and recreation services provision.

KEY INDICATORS

The five indicator areas relevant to the task of evaluating future demands are demographics, environment, technology, economics, and government. They are discussed below in sequence.

Demographics

One of the prime indicators of future recreational demand and interest is the forecast for demographic change. The aging of the baby boom generation is one of the most significant trends affecting outdoor recreation. Born in the period 1946 to 1964, baby boomers reached their peak numbers in the birth years 1955 to 1959, totaling 21 million people born in this time frame. After 1964, birth rates fell abruptly and did not rise again until after 1980, when the baby boomers became parents themselves. Because of improved health and fitness, as well as lifestyle changes from their parents' generation, people are participating in recreation activities to older ages. People are also retiring at younger ages with relatively high disposable incomes. There is an increased demand for less active outdoor recreation pursuits and facilities (golf, walking, gardening, etc.). As the number of retirees increases, there will be more marginally fit recreation users, and more demand for mid-day recreation programs.

At the same time that the baby boom generation is aging, the recent Census data shows that rapid change in racial and ethnic diversity and population growth in immigrant communities is a mitigating factor for Eden Prairie. This population is family-based with children, but its recreational interests and needs are different than the traditional programs established in the City.

Certain population groups represent potential service needs or demands. Once the appropriate market groups are defined, additional information is required, which may include the level of participation by demographic market groups; trends in participation; competing services and the expected market share for that specific group.

Projections of recreational participation that are based on total population are subject to deviation consistent with changing demographics. Total population has a limited impact on recreation demand: because recreational activities and interest vary significantly over the life course, it is the profile, size and participation rates within actual user groups that determine future needs. Generally speaking, future behavior is influenced by past behavior. However, the 50-year-old of the future will not possess the same personal characteristics as the 50-year-old of today because of changes in the community and society in general, related to improved health and fitness, social perspectives on aging and earlier retirement age.

Typical questions of a specific market group's propensity to participate include:

- Who are the likely participants?
- How do these participants choose to allocate their financial and time resources?
- What are the requirements of participation in terms of advanced training acquired learning, skill, aptitudes, companions, access, etc.?
- How do the identified personal motivations and requirements fit the individual lifestyles?
- What resources are required for alternative choices?

At a community-wide scale, Eden Prairie has the positive attributes of an affluent population, a high level of education, and a planned commercial district. Additionally, the community has the enviable position of containing a significant natural resource base. At the same time, new arrivals and growth in the immigrant communities (Russian, Latino and Somalian), as well as a trend towards an aging population create new demands on the Parks and Recreation services, some of which are unmet and still in the process of being analyzed and understood.

Environment

Interest in the environment is increasing. There is growing awareness and concern by the public for environmental quality, environmental issues, and the environmental movement. Growth and a shift in attitudes continue to evolve regarding the role regional and national environmental agencies play in local recreation and planning. People seek an active role for themselves in environmental protection and conservation, which manifests itself as a community-wide interest in environmental preservation and open space. Consequently, trends indicate that the participation rate for outdoor recreation continues to grow. This growth is seen as a greater demand for green corridors, with trails allowing users to travel along them. The growing preference is for a blend of a natural resource-based, minimally altered environment and trail use allowing full access for users.

At the same time, global warming is impacting outdoor recreation. Warm weather activities will last longer; cold weather activities will be shorter. Changes to the landscape resulting from less dependable climatological conditions will result in less dependable seasonal recreation. Water quality will impact use of lakes and beaches.

Concerns about water quality will sponsor a need to devise more creative plans and uses for storm water collection systems. Rising energy costs due to scarcities or macro-economic factors that cause price increases will drive a need for more local recreation and shorter vacations.

Technology

Electronic communication innovations have created interactive opportunities for recreation, through the Internet, World Wide Web, etc. Home access to the Internet is increasing. Consequently, competition for leisure time has set up a challenge to traditional recreational activities from new, electronic communications based sources, such as the Internet, computer simulated games and sports, and entertainment media. Spectator sports are on the rise and participative sports are on the decline, which can affect traditional investments in facilities and programming. Effectively, this has meant that new technology increases and diversifies recreational activities. From this increased opportunity comes a concurrent need for quality service in all recreational programming and facilities in order to maintain competitiveness with other non-traditional activities.

Economics

An increasing split is occurring between those that have access to recreation and those that do not. Household income is increasing while individual income in real growth terms is expected to decline. The fact that two-income households are a growing majority of the population results in two primary trends. For affluent households with more discretionary income, these resources are often used for leisure activities, including travel and entertainment. A more affluent population has access to more and broader recreation. However, there is a noticeable increase in the proportion of the urban population who are considered poor. This increasing division between affluent and poor has prompted an interest in developing separate strategies for the provision of leisure services for the affluent and the non-affluent. An evident pattern is competition for household recreation dollars and for people's recreation time; there is an emphasis on value and diversity of choices in spending money on recreational activities. For example, swimming facilities today must include water slides and inter-active water play facilities in order to be competitive with other facilities, to be appealing to most family households.

Government

Fiscal pressures on recreational facilities and program development will come with rising energy costs, greater scarcity and high cost of land, rising operating costs and revenue limits, and increasing anti-taxation sentiment. Recreation is becoming more of a consumer market, meaning that activities are subject to more competition between private, public and non-profit competition. A broad definition of what constitutes public access to city sponsored facilities and programs may challenge the financial feasibility of building new and maintaining existing facilities. Subsidized programs and minimal use fees could be difficult to maintain in light of these conditions.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RECREATION PARTICIPATION TRENDS

Aging Population

People are participating in recreation activities to older ages, and they are retiring at younger ages with relatively high disposable incomes. There is an increased demand for less active outdoor recreation pursuits and facilities (golf, walking, gardening, etc.). As the number of retirees increases, there will be more marginally fit recreation users, and more demand for mid-day recreation programs.

Household Structure

According to the 1997 Gallup Leisure Track Survey, many Americans consider time to be their scarcest resource due to the increase in dual-income households and demanding work schedules. Dual-income households and flexible work schedules create more flexible recreation and travel patterns.

Due to increased demands on limited spare time and the fact that households are generally busier with work and home life responsibilities, trends point to more discretionary activities, which do not require scheduling. For instance, over one-half of America's women now work outside the home, with the greatest growth in the labor force coming from women with children at home. This creates additional stress and limits available free time for all when all the adults in a household are working.

More families are postponing having their first child, which creates non-traditional/new leisure patterns. An increasing number of single parent families are visiting recreation sites. Additionally, more participants are single and in their 30s and 40s. For all of these groups, use of free time is perceived as an opportunity to spend time with their family and friends. Because of this trend, they want to participate in activities that allow for group participation. People are looking for diverse experiences and experiential trips in their leisure time rather than spending their time relaxing, with obvious implications for providers of outdoor recreational activities. The tendency is also to favor individual activities as contrasted to team or group activities. Non-contact activities are growing, as are areas of the arts. Increased specialization is also occurring. Traditional team sports have reached a plateau in their expansion and growth.

Emphasis on Value and Choice in Recreation Activities

Many participants are seeking out the best combination of price, service, and convenience in recreation and leisure services, seeking value and quality. Working parents create an increased demand for recreational opportunities, such as after school and summer programs. There is a greater focus on recreational activities that are healthy, safe, and provide a sense of community.

Youth Sports Participation

As the role of schools in recreation and provision of facilities changes, greater expectation means a more pronounced need for city-school partnerships. Year-round sports specialization is on the rise, which has clear repercussions for facility use and scheduling. Young athletes participate over a longer season, spend more time training and enter into organized competitions at a younger age than their peers did 10 years ago.

Specific to Eden Prairie, City staff conducted a survey of program participation for youth and adult athletic associations in 1995 and 2001. Responses received indicate that very few associations anticipate much decrease in participation, and almost all representatives suggested that participation rates would be maintained at their current levels and in fact grow slightly in numbers over time. Some sports, such as football and particularly soccer, expected large-scale participation increases over the next 10 to 20 years.

Projections prepared by representatives of these athletic associations optimistically assumed continued growth in participation rates for all sports. In fact, the data collected from these representatives exceeded the total school enrollment population in consecutive years, starting in 2001 and continuing through 2020. This forecast contradicted the trend of declining school age population noted in 2000 Census age distribution data. The Athletic Association Task Force, which met in April 2002 to address concerns about facilities needs and participation trends, discussed these projections as a group and agreed that the participation estimates should be reduced on a case-by-case basis in order to arrive at a more conservative set of numbers that more accurately reflected the school age population.

The Task Force work did reveal a growth trend for participation increases in specific sports, understanding that the ability of some associations to use existing facilities effectively is constrained by recreational activities that compete for the same facilities, such as soccer, football and lacrosse.

Rise in Number of Women Participating in Outdoor Recreation

More women are recreating in activities traditionally dominated by men. Leisure opportunities for women are becoming more diverse, and often times less tied to family. Adventure activities, including camping, hiking, scuba diving, whitewater rafting, biking, and rock climbing, have seen significant increases in the level of participation by women. The rise in participation appears to be partially attributed to a shift in attitude and societal norms, as well as expanded product lines that better cater to women participants.

Increased Urbanization

Urban residents are more likely to participate in activities utilizing specialized facilities, such as city parks and recreational facilities, whereas rural residents are more likely to participate in activities associated with wilderness areas. As the urbanization of our society grows, the need for specialized facilities will increase.

Health and Wellness

Outdoor recreation is a component of physical fitness, a major focus of preventative care. Outdoor recreation leads to a better quality of life physically, mentally, and socially. A snapshot of the outdoor recreation industry today reveals increasing sales, new activities, and growth in participation at both ends of the spectrum: activities that are closer to home and require little gear, such as walking, and those that usually require a great time commitment, a more adventurous attitude, and more highly technical gear, such as climbing, kayaking, and backpacking. The exact role public lands, recreational facilities, and outdoor activities will have in the future of health and wellness care is uncertain. However, the view that recreation can be a means of maintaining wellness will be a constant feature of programming and investment in parks' facilities over time.

PARTICIPATION RATE INCREASES

The tables below illustrate two different but complimentary trends in recreational participation. Table 9.1 describes participation rates by sport at a national scale, giving a sense of the most popular activities throughout the population. This data shows that recreational swimming, bicycling and walking are the most common activities among people older than 6 years of age. Table 9.2 shows the top 10 “growth” sports of the late 1990s, as measured by participation rate increases. This table tells us that specialized sports and high-tech, gear-intensive recreation have been the defining qualities of sports that saw the most growth in new participants from 1993-1998.

Other observations that emerge from these two sources show that there will be continued high demand for fishing opportunities. Recreation that allows socializing opportunities will be sought after by participants. A decline in demand for some hunting activities and some recreational activities, including tennis and softball is anticipated, due to aging of the population and the preferences of younger recreational participants. New trends in recreation today include dog parks, skateboard parks, BMX trails and facilities. These trends are not expected to maintain a long-term demand.

Table 9.1
National Participation Rates for Popular Recreational Activities

Sport	Participants (in millions)
Recreational Swimming	94.4
Recreational Walking	80.9
Recreational Bicycling	54.6
Bowling	50.6
Freshwater Fishing	45.8
Tent Camping	42.6
Basketball	42.4
Free Weights	41.3
Billiards	39.7
Day Hiking	38.6
Treadmill Exercise	37.1
Fitness Walking	36.4
Stretching Exercise	35.1
Running/Jogging	35.0
In-line Skating	32.0

Source: Twin Cities Sports, May 1999

Table 9.2
Growth in Recreational Activities by Percentage Increase in Participation

Sport	Percentage Increase in Participants
In-line Skating	118.0%
Roller Hockey	106.2%
Snowboarding	102.0%
Mountain Biking (off road)	87.2%
Backpack/Wilderness Camping	58.9%
Snorkeling	49.7%
Mountain Biking (on road)	45.6%
Exercising with Equipment	32.2%
Soccer	27.8%
Martial Arts	26.7%

Source: National Sporting Good Association, 1993-1998

From the knowledge gained in understanding demographic trends, participation rates, participant interests and physical capacity, staff at Eden Prairie’s Parks and Recreations Services division has identified the following trends:

Table 9.3
Recreation Trends Envisioned for Eden Prairie

Increasing Trends	Decreasing Trends	Stable Elements
Adult Care	Downhill Skiing	Aerobics
Aquatics	Horseshoes	Baseball
Badminton	Scuba	Basketball
Camping	Softball	Biking
Cross-country Skiing	Racquetball	Bowling
Disc Golf	Table Tennis	Broomball
Extreme Sports	Tennis	Clubs & Group Activities
Fishing		Fine Arts & Cultural Programs
Gardening		Football
Inclusionary Activities		Four Person Football
Kayaking		Golf
Lacrosse		Hockey
Outdoor Programs		Hunting
Personal Fitness		Ice Skating
Recreation Toys (personal watercraft, snowmobiles, scooters, etc.)		Large Group Picnics
Skateboarding		Leisure Classes
Snowboarding		Open Gym
Snowshoeing		Rock Climbing & Indoor Climbing
Soccer		In-line Skating
Walking		

Source: Eden Prairie Recreation Division Staff (April 4, 2002 Recreation Division Staff Meeting)

These observations will direct policy for decision making about facilities investment in the near and long term future.

IMPACTS ON PARK AND RECREATION SERVICES

Facilities

In order to understand future facility needs, it is instructive to learn which activities are most popular among today's participants. The increasing trends and appeal of outdoor recreation activities will demand continued investment in these facilities. At the same time, trends in youth sports require significant time dedicated to training and practice in a crunch period, as one sport (e.g., basketball) competes with another (volleyball) for available facilities in a limited, preferred time frame. Individual recreation that is not programmed or scheduled will place demands on use of facilities, particularly the recreation facilities, such as ice rinks or swimming pools.

Natural Resources

Participation trends indicate that recreational walking, in-line skating and mountain biking are among the most popular and growing interest activities nationally. These activities emphasize an interest in using trails and less developed natural resource areas for outdoor recreation, and they contribute to the outdoor recreation experience of populations who do not typically get outdoors for play or recreation. A key element in bringing recreation to all Americans is providing open spaces and recreation infrastructure locally and at the state and federal levels. Adding to the existing natural resource facilities base is expected to be a continued priority for future recreational planning. A good resource to accomplish this goal is the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It is a congressionally-mandated program with a two-fold mission: federal acquisition of park and recreation lands; and matching grants for recreation planning, acquisition, and development at the state and local level.

Maintaining the quality and characteristics of these natural resource areas, while more and more users access them, will require careful attention to environmental conditions, such as water quality, as well as traffic on supporting infrastructure in the form of traffic on access roads. Personal watercraft, snowmobiles, mountain bikes, all-terrain vehicles, and in-line skates will continue to be popular and will challenge resource management agencies to deal with their impact on natural resources. Water surface management will become increasingly widespread on lakes and rivers.

Peak traffic in some parks and recreation areas contribute to traffic congestion on local roadways, which detracts from the recreational experience. Ongoing concerns about the impact of crowding and user conflicts on the quality of visitor experiences in outdoor settings poses a challenge to public agencies, which will lead to demands for more restrictive management to deal with crowding, congestion, and conflicts in many recreation areas. Defining carrying capacity and regulating visitor use will characterize most of the struggle recreation agencies will encounter in the next years.

Programming

While the racial and ethnic makeup of our country is rapidly changing, the intense growth in most outdoor pursuits tends to be among those who are white and male. To truly involve all members of the community in outdoor recreation and to address the problem of limited and fragmented leisure time, we must create more recreation facilities where the demand is greatest, near the urban center. This will require more research and testing of market groups, such as immigrant communities, whose recreational preferences are not well-known to planners. The challenge of defining program needs and appropriate responses will raise the issues of program fees and access. It is also possible that the nature and venues for recreational programs will change as the City brings activities to targeted populations at their home locations, such as immigrant communities or senior housing within newly-built residential neighborhoods.

Operating Culture

Funding for Maintenance of Existing Facilities

Community-based recreation provided or sponsored by the local government should consider the public policy implications. Recreation participation or access may be defined as the sum of time, money and health. The parks and recreation services area must work with policymakers in determining the mix between meeting needs and providing recreation services to those with limited access, and desired community recreation. The ability to act as a recreation provider must be considered within the public policy base of scarce resources.

The dynamics of outdoor recreational activity provide a good illustration of these tensions. Outdoor recreation is a growing area of the economy. This growth pattern prompts local government to invest more in the activities that are providing economic benefits to the community. That suggests more funding for trails, recreation management, and recreation facility maintenance but could divert funding from traditional facilities.

This conflict in funding/investment priorities may result in less active management and monitoring at recreation areas. If such a trend emerges, public agencies will rely on cost recovery, and establish and raise user fees to cover costs. Dwindling acreages of private land available for recreation will put greater demands on public lands. A blurring of public and private functions in the provision of leisure services and facilities may emerge as financial resources are strained and collaborative partnerships are formed.

An illustration of changes in established operating culture is seen in the introduction of recreation fee programs at the U.S. National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 1996. While some recreationists may object to paying for services that are currently free, they are likely to see a return on their investment. The challenge is to ensure that the fees are fair and reasonable, and that the combination of fees at the local, state, and federal levels do not become deterrents to recreation.

Communications, Marketing and Information Gathering

As participation rates in traditional activities fluctuate, having good communications systems set up to bring information about desires and interests into the planning and decision making process will become central to the relevance and appeal of parks and recreation services. These channels can also serve to broadcast important facts about how operations, fees, program constraints and new recreational opportunities will benefit the community. The most important vehicles are communications media, new technologies, and personnel serving as ambassadors for parks and recreation services.

Liability Issues

Growth in participation levels of such adventurous activities as rock climbing has increased liability exposure. This will continue to be a factor of concern for local municipalities and constrain their enthusiasm and interest in providing venues for extreme sports or other activities where the potential risk for litigation appears high.

Operations and Maintenance

New technology may allow increased efficiency in maintenance activities. Innovative changes in construction and renovation of new and existing facilities (such as the replacement of natural sod fields with artificial turf for high-use facilities) may save additional maintenance expenses, such as irrigation costs and labor hours. However, a diverse inventory of facilities and intensive use of existing resources increase the level of maintenance time and effort needed to maintain quality amenities.

Access to Programs and Facilities

Enjoying any outdoor pursuit is dependent on access to the resource. Public access and fair fee structures all have an impact on the public's ability to enjoy outdoor recreation. The tension between managing facilities to preserve high quality standards, providing open and equal access and securing enough funding to cover capital and operating expenses further complicates the approach to ensuring fair access to public facilities.

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS

Future Needs or Demands: Perceptions of Eden Prairie in the Year 2020

The following list represents some of the themes and trends that were identified by citizen participants in the Community Survey conducted in 2000. These trends identify the perceptions that participants had about how Eden Prairie might change in the next 20 years.

- An expectation of increase traffic and congestion.
- Potential loss of open space and green areas.
- Expectation of increased businesses and community build out.
- Average age of the City's residents will be older.
- A much more ethnically diverse population.

- A more defined and developed downtown.
- A distinction between neighborhoods on a socio-economic basis.
- A sense that we may look back more and value the City's history.
- A maturing park system, which has the potential for overuse.

The aging of Eden Prairie's population and facilities and the overall social diversity is expected to increase. This will put a strain on the development of services and programs. Overall, though, Eden Prairie has some unique things that may influence or guide its future, as described by survey participants:

- Having little land to develop is not a bad thing. What you see is what you get. There is some concern that we may not protect what we have.
- Affluence is not a bad thing. That means a highly educated base and a solid tax base, as well. Citizens will press for ongoing development of new services and programs.
- The perception is that Eden Prairie seems to be well run. The City's recreation services and programs are well used and highly regarded.

This unique set of factors has the potential to become a significant attribute to attract and retain people who are committed to the quality attributes of Eden Prairie and are willing to pay for them. At the same time, if the City does not provide these, affluent and well educated residents and the older/wiser population will look for other options.

Identification of Desired Services in 2010

The following responses describe priorities or desired services that the City should focus on up to 2010. Each of these scored at least 7.0 of a maximum potential 10.0 by at least one of the four groups participating in the Community Forum:

- Focus on a coordinated transportation system that will allow easy access to the various services and venues offered by the City.
- A program of continuing education for seniors.
- Increased and improved hiking, walking, and biking trails.
- Programs that actively engage seniors into the community.
- Overall maintenance and upgrading of our park facilities.
- Increase affordable physical fitness facilities.
- More activities and support for teens.
- Upgrade the current Community Center.
- Development of more defined downtown.
- Focus on preserving and maintaining open spaces.
- Increase in bike lanes and their safety.

- Cleanup our current lakes and make them swimmable.
- More dining out alternatives (upscale – avoid fast food).
- Expand library and its services.
- City organized services to support the elderly and disabled.
- More City friendly walking.

Citizens of Eden Prairie value its parks and opens spaces, trail systems, and quality of life. They also recognize that the City must do more for a growing set of seniors and offer programs and facilities of interest to its youth.

Implications of Eden Prairie Providing Identified Services

Other services were identified as desirable: on-line registration and information services, water parks, golf course, playhouses, etc. The participants were asked to respond with a statement about the possible implications if Eden Prairie is successful in providing identified services. This could influence the future of the parks and recreation system significantly:

- New young families would be attracted because of the City’s commitment to quality of life and attractive physical attributes.
- The open spaces, parks and trails become a centerpiece of the lifestyle and a statement of how important they are to the City’s community and lifestyle.
- The price tag might be high in terms of taxes and cost, but it might also be well worth it in terms of preserving the lifestyle.
- The likelihood of families staying long-term in Eden Prairie increases.
- The image of the City would be raised to a higher level.
- It becomes very attractive for selective business development.
- The community would be a more active, healthy place to live.
- What you do for seniors in supporting their lifestyle and development, you will get back in terms of their support and vitality in the community.

Athletic Association Task Force Recommendations

An Athletic Association Task Force was formed by the City Council in March 2002. The Task Force was charged with determining youth and adult athletic facility needs for the next 20 years and recommending to the City Council how this plan should be accomplished and funded. Membership on the Task Force consisted of members from associations, community education and a member representing citizens at large.

Two meetings of the Task Force were held in April 2002. The work of the Task Force focused on reviewing past, present and future data related to demographics and population growth. Members also reviewed participation rates for youth and adult sports over the last 10 years, and discussed influential variables that affected changes in participation over time. Their last meeting concluded with a discussion about projected needs and demands for recreation across all activity categories. Their recommendations about specific facility needs and strategies to meet future demands are summarized below:

- One regulation size (90-foot base) baseball field to accommodate the increasing number of players over the age of 14.
- Four full-size regulation soccer fields (in addition to the two that are under construction at Crestwood Park in 2002). These fields are needed to serve the new lacrosse program, the continued growth of soccer and the strong football program.
- Field improvements to the existing baseball and soccer facilities were also called for, including consideration of installing artificial turf to handle the high amount of play.
- A citizens committee to evaluate swimming pool needs prior to committing tax dollars was identified as another key strategy in meeting future demands.

The need for additional facilities for youth programs, a third indoor skating rink and an outdoor pool was recognized by the Task Force. In light of the competing demands and the complexity of demands centered around each of these facilities, the Task Force recommended that the Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Commission, as well as the City Council, postpone any decisions on funding a major athletic or program facility until the completion of a pool feasibility study, perhaps in preparation for a referendum in Spring 2003.

SUMMARY OF IMMEDIATE, NEAR-TERM AND LONG-TERM PRIORITIES AND CHALLENGES

See Table 9.4, Parks and Open Space System: Future Priorities and Challenges, on the following page.

**Table 9.4
Parks and Open Space System: Future Priorities and Challenges**

	Immediate-Term (5-10 years)	Near-Term (10+ years)	Long-Term (50+ years)
Park Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Differences in cultural norms re: use of facilities. Need for signage, information about park use posted in other languages (Russian, Spanish, Somali) ▪ Enforcement of policies and regulations regarding use of park facilities. ▪ Difficulty in meeting current day demand for adaptive facilities. ▪ Youth association demands for young players, less tolerance of using facilities for practice, etc at non “prime-time” hours. Skewed use patterns consisting of very busy weekdays, virtually deserted facilities on weekends, related to tournament schedules. Competing demands from different sports for same facilities (ice rinks, some fields, water facilities). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Greater demand for adaptive recreation facilities (ADA compatible design, unisex washroom facilities) as population ages. ▪ Demand for trails to increase, provision of maintenance (smooth clear trails) all year-round to accommodate winter recreation, as well. ▪ Multi use trails, for less active population to use wheels to get around. ▪ Functional trails for transportation purposes, to compensate for large-scale roadways unfriendly to pedestrians or cyclists. ▪ Water facilities for aquatic activities will retain appeal and serve a number of interests (kids, adults and therapeutic purposes). ▪ Continued discussion about the role of public sector in building facilities for extreme sports (rock climbing, skate parks) due to role of private market, liability, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fitness, therapeutic facilities will become a standard feature. A focus on health and wellness is expected. ▪ No indication that population will become more active in recreational activity: multiplying options related to entertainment and increasingly scarce free time would not encourage participation in recreational activity. ▪ Residents/citizens will seek out more recreational opportunities that take place in a natural resource setting for aesthetic, as well as health and welfare benefits. ▪ Some facilities will retain steady demand over time, as these activities do not lose their appeal as participants age. Examples: tennis, golf and swimming.

**Table 9.4
Parks and Open Space System: Future Priorities and Challenges (continued)**

	Immediate-Term (5-10 years)	Near-Term (10+ years)	Long-Term (50+ years)
Recreational Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Better understanding of recreational needs of all residents, particularly minority populations that have been growing rapidly in the last 5-10 years. Requires market group research, communications abilities. ▪ Potential changes to program offerings in response to needs and interests. ▪ Fees and access impacts if changes are made to fee structures for City recreational programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Activities that focus on individual participation, with the company of 2-3 others, will satisfy interest in social interaction. Examples: disc golf, skate parks, personal watercraft. ▪ Continued improvements and refinement of programs designed to respond to interests of new communities (immigrant groups, adaptive recreation participants). ▪ New programs expected to match the shift in facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some programs may be brought to users' location, e.g., seniors' housing complex/development, to better meet needs. ▪ Partnerships may be formed to more efficiently deliver services; the City may take on sponsors or other role than traditional host for some activities. ▪ Non-active recreation is expected to gain in importance, for universal appeal (e.g., Arts Center). ▪ Activity that addresses health and welfare concerns (physical and mental) are expected to be more popular than demands for active recreation programs. ▪ Programming for certain activities is expected to retain steady demand over time, as these activities do not lose their appeal as participants age. Examples: tennis, golf and swimming.

**Table 9.4
Parks and Open Space System: Future Priorities and Challenges (continued)**

	Immediate-Term (5-10 years)	Near-Term (10+ years)	Long-Term (50+ years)
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Users are unaware of regulations and policies governing natural resources (e.g., fishing limits at Staring Lake and Round Lake). ▪ Enforcement and communication with education of the public. This may require additional resource in other languages, etc. ▪ Greater community interest in best practices for urban forestry, sustainable landscaping, native plant habitat preservation, and less surface water runoff. ▪ Continue to add natural resource areas to the parks system whenever possible. Define ‘carrying capacity’ of natural resource areas and regulate visitor use as needed. ▪ Preserve the quality of natural resource areas, even as ‘hard use’ increases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased appreciation for natural resources but expectation that these areas are easily accessed and enjoyed by a diverse group of people. ▪ Interpretative signage and education becomes increasingly important to emphasize quality of experience. ▪ Technology may assist in developing new materials to compensate for increased cost and scarcity of traditional materials (e.g., use of artificial turf to avoid costs of water/ irrigation as water scarcity increases). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Global climate change: prairie ecosystem is bound to get drier and warmer. ▪ Water usage will increase scarcities, as well. ▪ Maintenance equipment likely to change due to innovative technology: reduced labor power needed, use robotics to perform labor-intensive tasks such as mowing or plowing. ▪ Increased aesthetic and economic appreciation of natural resource areas as development continues. ▪ Role of recreation activity and setting as solace, a “getaway” opportunity.

**Table 9.4
Parks and Open Space System: Future Priorities and Challenges (continued)**

	Immediate-Term (5-10 years)	Near-Term (10+ years)	Long-Term (50+ years)
Other (Operating Culture, Financial Climate, Program Delivery)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased tensions or conflicts in funding priorities: facilities which bring economic benefits and attractiveness for new residents (e.g., trails, natural resource areas) may not mesh with community sentiment, suggest redirection of funds away from traditional investments in programs or facilities. ▪ Longevity of newly built facilities will be of concern: can they be converted or reused to respond to changing community needs? ▪ Expectations of quality in programs, facilities, etc., related to lack of support for increased taxes or user fees. This is difficult to reconcile. ▪ Maintenance obligations in the face of ‘hard use’ pattern among participants requires significant investment of resources to maintain quality. ▪ Question of accessibility for public recreation programs - treat all equally; provide service for no fee for those who require assistance, charge all participants a user fee? Conflicting opinions about role of publicly provided recreation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expectations about quality service delivery and facilities will continue to be a presence, reflect community’s general affluence and perception of ‘standards’ for public facilities. ▪ Administrative changes, such as e-mail registration for recreational programs, other modes to access facilities and programs beyond traditional phone, mail, in-person actions. ▪ Technological tools to reduce labor required for maintenance and operations will become more commonly used (e.g., robotic mowers). ▪ Collaboration and partnerships with other agencies or other cities will prompt question of whether City parks and recreation services should specialize by focusing on strengths, or generalize to deliver a broad package of goods/ services to a larger proportion of the population. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marketing: education and awareness will be ongoing requirements within the department, as they are often the key to successful fund-raising (bond referendums). ▪ Change in organization structure may be needed to respond to shifting program or facility needs- skills and abilities among personnel may adapt to fill new roles. ▪ Limited financing tools available to local government may be further constrained depending on ability of local governments to invest resources in development and maintenance of park system.

Source: City of Eden Prairie Parks and Recreation Department, 2002

The table above lists some of the priorities and challenges identified in a working session convened to address the question of what the future may bring. Some of the summary findings from this discussion do as much to generate new questions as they do to provide answers.

Some of the key questions that surfaced in this discussion are:

- Are the existing activity patterns for the use of high demand facilities too overloaded? Is it important to moderate traffic user flow between the relatively quiet daytime hours and the busy evening hours?
- Should the costs of running facilities or programs be borne by City revenues or be supported by user fees? If user fees are charged, how to ensure access for all is still in place, and that access is equal to all members of the community. If trend moves towards levying user fees and setting up a “pay as you go” strategy, what is the impact on those who do not have means? Will this not increase the gulf between “haves” and “have-nots” in the community? Is it government’s role to provide services to all, not just the wealthy members of society?
- Should programming be delivered on site to new and growing participant communities? (e.g., retiree/seniors housing complexes). This is an opportunity for growth. Is it the direction that is agreed upon as the right path to take? What should the City’s role be in running events? Should the traditional role of host, bearing the brunt of costs, be continued, or are there other partnerships or sponsorships that could be fruitful and change the City’s obligations.
- What is the role the public sector should play in responding to extreme sports? Is there room for this type of role in public recreation programming, or will the interests/demand be met in the private sector?
- What is the future for kids raised in an intensely organized activity-oriented recreational environment? Today’s 12 year olds will be 22 years old by 2010. What will their preferences be for recreational activity when they will make their own choices about where to invest their time and fees paid to be active in recreational experiences?
- Does the City’s operating culture need to maintain a generalist stance of providing the broadest possible range of services to all users? Or, can it shift to focus on strengths and specialties, working in partnership with private and public organizations to compensate for weaknesses?
- Is it likely that people will be more physically active in 20-year time frame? This seems unlikely given the amount of time spent at work and the wide variety of passive recreational choices available today with a purely entertainment orientation.

Consequently, the recommendations that will assist the City as it takes up these questions are:

1. Remain flexible to respond to change: facility design and management, programming management, use/demand changes, maintenance costs, organization and institutional goals – all bring a noteworthy contribution to the process of making decisions.

2. Making scarce resources stretch is another key tenet of the findings of the group. Clearly, the natural resources, as well as the financial resources, are highly valued, because they are rare and essential to the unique character of the parks system.
3. Finally, it is important that parks and recreational planning respond to other social institutions and demographic trends that are already noticeable and influential in the world today. The School District activity and the significant demographic changes that have occurred in Eden Prairie over the last 10 years build the case for connections between the civic institutions, such as schools, and activist groups.

This page has
been intentionally
left blank

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Population growth may continue but at a slower rate than the last decade. As a community's population grows, that population tends to age in place, and the aging trend is slightly offset by immigrant communities with young families arriving in the community. This aging means fewer kids and older adults usually with higher economic resources granting access well beyond the community recreation base. Generally, older individuals participate less in traditional community recreation programs. At the same time, the immigrant communities living in the City will continue to grow, and their profile is generally represented by younger families with multiple children in the household. Immigrants will be the primary group providing demographic balance to the aging non-immigrant population.
- Technological change may significantly impact not just participant interest in traditional recreational activities, but how parks and recreation services are delivered. These technological changes must be embraced to the best of an agency's ability, from the potential use of mechanized maintenance robots to electronic recreational program registration to alternative use of water resources and application of non-traditional materials in new facilities (such as artificial turf for playing fields). The ability to incorporate technology as it develops and proves itself useful will aid users and caretakers in delivering high quality, efficiently managed facilities, programs and natural resources for community use.
- Building constituencies for programs and facilities will be another important strategy for future parks and recreation services. This emphasizes information gathering and surveying to anticipate needs and interests. It also demands creativity and innovation in forming partnerships and seeking out sponsors to deliver programs to a wide variety of community members.
- In terms of maintaining public access to recreational programming and facilities, it will be important to plan for increasing diversity in demand for programs and patterns of use. Those traditionally seen as non-participants should be targeted in order to solicit their interest and involvement in programming and planning.
- Initiatives to establish communications and educational functions within the Parks and Recreation Services will be needed to continuously gather user feedback about successes in programming and facilities use. This effort is an important investment in the long-term relevance of parks and recreation activities in the City of Eden Prairie. As attitudes and preferences change, methods that provide instant information as to participation rates will assist in designing programs, directing maintenance activities and anticipating future capital costs.