



CITY OF SPARKS  
**comprehensive parks & recreation plan**

Final Plan  
November 2013





# Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the many citizens, staff, and community groups who provided extensive input for the development of the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. The project was a true community effort, anticipating that this plan will meet the needs and desires of all residents of Sparks.

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## Executive Summary

This Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan represents a year-long examination, coming at a critical time for Sparks, updating the successful 1997 Plan. In the mid-1990s, Sparks was rapidly growing to the north, and there were no standards in place to make sure the park system expanded to keep up with population growth. This issue was one of the focuses of the 1997 Plan, and that plan's recommendations set out a course which led to the development of Golden Eagle Regional Park, Sparks Marina, and Rock Park. These very popular sites are among the most visited by local residents, according to public involvement results. By 2012 the park system encompassed more than 1,000 acres and was serving more than 1 million people were served by City recreation programs and special events, even without including sports tournaments.

However, there have been significant changes in Sparks and throughout the region since 1997. Foremost, a recession resulted in a steeply reduced City budget. As a result, City expenditures for parks and recreation dropped more than 35% in three years. Parks maintenance was cut by \$1 million. This Plan update effort has focused on identifying a sustainable path to operate the parks and recreation system while making progress on the City's vision, and the Plan that follows provides guidance to move forward.

## Developing the Plan

Beginning in the summer of 2012, the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan process involved residents, key stakeholders, community leaders, recreation providers and City representatives and staff during a four-phased planning process. The planning process built on the conversations that began during the City’s *Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment*, in addition to direction provided by City Council through the *Strategic Plan*. The diagram below illustrates the process and timing.



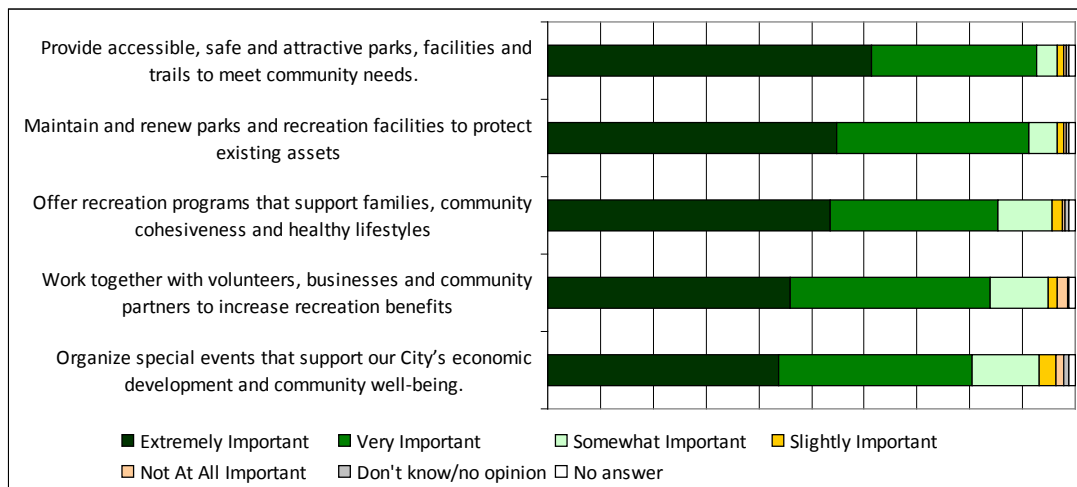
During each phase, a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), composed of City staff and community leaders, and the City’s Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) met to guide overall direction of the process and plan.

## COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

The Sparks Parks & Recreation Department regularly seeks feedback from the community to ensure its services are responsive. In 2009, the Department updated its *Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment* as a precursor to updating the *Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan*. As part of the Needs Assessment effort, the Department conducted a community recreation questionnaire in English and Spanish that attracted 572 responses through the paper and online instruments. The results of that questionnaire indicated that people consider park and recreation services to be very important to quality of life in Sparks. Further results showed high priority for providing youth with positive ways to fill their free time; supporting strong neighborhoods and families; providing opportunities to enjoy nature/the outdoors; and enhancing community image and sense of place.

During the update process, several methods were employed to gather further input from the public. In addition to a focused recreation and event providers focus group, an online questionnaire and public workshop allowed residents and park users to weigh in on the plan and their priorities.

- Online Trade-Offs Survey.** A total of 517 people responded to a 15-question online survey conducted in early spring 2013. Similar to the 2009 Needs Assessment, the vast majority of respondents (93%) indicated that park and recreation services are important to quality of life in Sparks. They also prioritized several park and recreation goals by ranking five goals in importance, as shown in the graph below.



*Importance Ratings for Park and Recreation Planning Goals, Questionnaire Results Summary*

- Trade-Offs Workshops.** Following up on the online survey, the Parks & Recreation Department held two workshops on May 29 and 30, 2013 at the Sparks Heritage Museum to provide an in-person and interactive opportunity to discuss priorities and trade-offs for park and recreation services. At these workshops, participants were asked to complete a tradeoffs exercise in small groups, where they were given a limited budget and asked to choose which of 23 different park and recreation services to fund. When asked what insights they had after completing the workshop exercise, participants noted that the following is needed:
  - A new service model for parks and recreation, with innovative ways to do business;

- More partnerships with other providers, including regional partnerships and collaborative efforts;
- A change in citizen expectations and/or awareness about the City's funding situation and what can be accomplished with limited funds; and
- Increased community and City support for parks and recreation.



## A Framework for the Future

With the input of the public and in light of the situational analysis (see Appendix F), the mission of the Parks & Recreation Department was critically evaluated to define how the Department could contribute to implementation of the City of Sparks Vision. The refined mission is:

Strengthening Sparks by protecting parks and natural resources and fostering recreation opportunities and special events that enhance our city’s image, economic vitality and quality of life.

Six key strategic directions define how the City will move forward with its parks and recreation services, and are the basis for the organization of the Plan’s recommendations (see Chapter 5 for detailed recommendations).

|  |
|--|
| <p><b>Funding and Resource Development.</b> Create diverse, stable and innovative funding strategies to provide the resources required to build, maintain and operate our system of parks, facilities, events and programs.</p>  |
| <p><b>Special Events and Economic Development.</b> Develop a special events program that includes a mix of national, regional, and local events, makes use of the capacity of each existing site in the City, and achieves financial targets or goals for direct revenue (user fees, concessions revenue, program and event fees) or indirect revenue (sales tax, hotel/motel tax, etc.)</p> |
| <p><b>Recreation Programming.</b> Offer recreation programs and services that respond to residents’ needs, strengthening families, enhancing community cohesiveness and encouraging healthy lifestyles.</p>  |
| <p><b>Maintenance and Improvements.</b> Maintain and renew parks, recreation facilities, and open space areas to protect existing investments, enhance user safety and accessibility, support recreation programs and events, maximize efficiency and protect revenue-generating resources for the long-term.</p>  |
| <p><b>Collaboration and Partnerships.</b> Continue to foster community partnerships, in-kind support, donations and volunteers.</p>  |
| <p><b>Parks and Open Space System.</b> Provide an accessible, safe and attractive park and recreation system that responds to changing demographics and meets community needs.</p>   |

## Realignment of Park and Recreation Services

While Sparks has achieved many successes with its park and recreation services, the City has shifted the way it provides all of its services and the community's needs and expectations have changed. The mission describes how Sparks will deploy its parks and recreation services to achieve the citywide vision. The strategic directions represent a shift from the way parks and recreation services have been approached in recent years, one that is supported by the public as demonstrated by the questionnaire results. To achieve this shift, Sparks will need to transition its approach, including modifying some of its practices.

There are many individual services, and each can be considered to be essential, important or value-added, based on the City's identified core services and community priorities as expressed during the planning process. This categorization provides a method for establishing financial targets for each service area, and can help guide the City's fee structures for parks, recreation and events, thus helping achieve the financial stability indicated in City of Sparks Core Goal A.

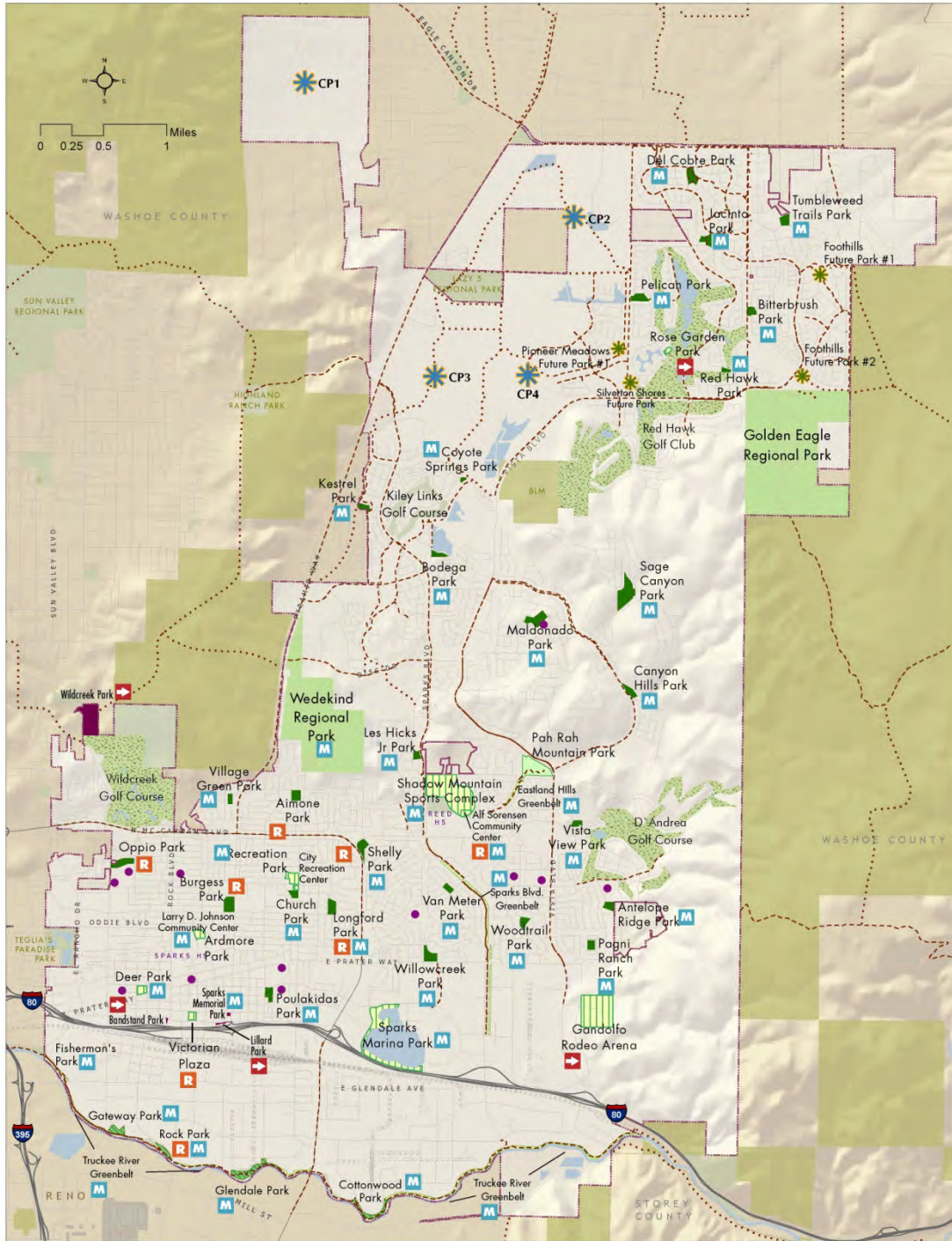
- **“Essential”** services are those parks and recreation services that the City of Sparks must provide or that are needed in order to capably govern Sparks. The failure to provide an essential service at an adequate level would result in a significant negative consequence for health and safety.
- **“Important”** services are those parks and recreation services that are important to enhancing the City's image, economic vitality and quality of life. Some of these services produce income or have revenue generation capabilities that offset some or all of the operating cost.
- **“Value added”** services are discretionary parks and recreation services that recover their costs or generate revenue, while still being consistent with the parks and recreation mission.

The Plan identifies individual services, and whether each should be consider essential, important or value added based on the City's strategic plan, parks and recreation norms and practices, and community feedback.

## Reinvesting in the System

The system map illustrates recommendations to reinvest in the system in the following ways:

- **Master Planning/Business Planning:** Prior to any new capital improvements, master plans or updated master plans should be prepared for large parks (most community parks) and specialty sites intended to serve as event venues. Business plans should be developed for all major facilities (recreation centers, sports complexes) and event venues, and should be used to guide master plans and capital improvements at these sites.
- **Design and Construction Documents:** Every major capital development or major maintenance reinvestment should include design development and construction documents.
- **New Development:** This category includes the permitting and construction of new parks, by the City or by developers in accordance with City standards.
- **Major Renovation:** This category includes redevelopment of portions of or the entirety of new parks to refresh their ability to meet community needs or achieve business plan targets.
- **Major Maintenance and Reinvestment:** All parks require major maintenance and reinvestment in assets on a cyclical basis (e.g., replacing playgrounds on a 10-year cycle, replacing artificial turf, reroofing structures). However, this does not mean simply replacing each facility in its location without considering whether it is still needed or used, or whether the feature is sited appropriately.
- **Transfer:** Some sites do not serve recreation uses, have features that are no longer useful or duplicative of other nearby sites, or include facilities that could best be operated by other entities. Transfer means shifting operational responsibility, removing a feature, or moving the site out of the inventory of parks and recreation facilities.



**City of Sparks**  
*It's Happening Here!*  
**Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan**

**Project Recommendations**

**M I G** 9.25.2013 | Data Sources: City of Sparks and Washoe County GIS NAD83 State Plane Nevada West

**City Parks**

- Regional Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Pocket Park
- Special Use Park
- Riverfront Park

**Other Public or Private Lands**

- Greenbelt
- Golf Course
- Other Park
- Federal Land
- City Limits
- County
- Water Feature

**Trails**

- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails

- Fwy/Hwy
- Arterial Road
- Local Road
- Railroad
- Schools with Joint Use Sports Fields

**Project Recommendations**

- Future Neighborhood Park
- Future Community Park
- Major Renovation
- Major Maintenance
- Transfer





# 1. Introduction

The City of Sparks Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan presents a new direction for park and recreation services at a critical time in the city's history. Until recently, the City of Sparks experienced rapid growth, with thousands of new residents and steady increases in employment and related tax revenue. However, the changing face of the city as a result of the economic recession has resulted in increasing demands on public services, adjustments to City staffing and departmental organization and a mounting list of needs for the park system, posing the questions:

- What services can the City sustain in the long-term?
- What tradeoffs will be needed to balance system needs?
- And how can the parks and recreation system continue to function as a major contributor to the quality of life in Sparks?

In July of 2012, the City launched the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan (Plan) update process. This Plan is the result of a critical assessment of the existing state of the parks and recreation system, which will lead to solutions that will keep needed services running efficiently. This Plan is integrated with the direction of the City's *Comprehensive Plan* and *Strategic Plan*, supporting the city wide vision and goals, and builds on the public outreach efforts conducted during the City's *Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment*. The planning process directly involved City decision makers and staff of different departments, area recreation providers and the public, resulting in a plan that:

- Forwards the city-wide vision, **linking existing goals and policies** with plan outcomes;
- Describes the most **effective solutions** to solve the critical issues facing the city’s parks and recreation system today; and
- Details **realistic strategies** needed to implement plan recommendations.

## Planning Process

Development of the Plan consisted of four phases. Involvement from City leaders and staff and area recreation providers was key to the process, resulting in a plan that accurately reflects the demands and challenges facing the city and its park and recreation resources. During each phase, the planning team met with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), composed of City staff and community leaders, and the City’s Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) to guide overall direction of the process and plan. An online questionnaire and public workshop allowed residents and park users to weigh in on the plan, along with reliance on findings from the City’s *Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment Report (2009)*.



Figure 1.1: The Planning Process

- **Phase 1: Where Are We Now?** Beginning in late summer 2012, Phase 1 established a baseline of information to support the Plan, including a thorough review of existing conditions facing the community and an assessment of the existing park system and recreation services. The *Baseline Service Assessment* and *State of Sparks Parks & Recreation* reports document the results of this assessment.

- **Phase 2: Where Do We Want to Be?** In Phase 2, the planning team designed and hosted workshops with city staff, area recreation providers and the public to identify community preferences and desires. This phase included the online trade-offs questionnaire which asked participants to make choices about the future of the park system. The combination of these efforts resulted in identifying the system-wide planning framework, by examining specific needs and priorities.
- **Phase 3: How Do We Get There?** Building on the outcomes of Phases 1 and 2, the planning team began developing recommendations and plan elements in support of the community’s vision. Outcomes of this phase included a capital and operations cost model and funding strategy to identify how the Master Plan and its recommendations will be funded.
- **Phase 4: Plan Adoption and Implementation** Phase 4 consisted of final review and refinement of the Draft Plan, presented before the public and City Council, resulting in the Final Plan.

## Plan Organization

Following this introduction (Chapter 1), this document is organized as follows.

- **Chapter 2: Planning Framework** Chapter 2 presents the Plan vision and goals, along with strategic directions responding to the key challenges and opportunities facing the city.
- **Chapter 3: Planning Context** Chapter 3 provides an overview of the present-day state of the parks and recreation system, focusing on the critical issues impacting city services.
- **Chapter 4: Park and Recreation Services** Chapter 4 describes the common themes that emerged from the online questionnaire and workshops, establishes parks and recreation service assessment criteria and outlines a shift in approach.
- **Chapter 5: Recommendations** Chapter 5 responds to the critical issues outlined in Chapter 3 and the refined service approach described in Chapter 4 by enumerating a comprehensive set of recommendations.

- **Chapter 6: Implementation Strategy** The final chapter provides the capital improvement plan, listing the range of costs needed to build on and improve system assets. This chapter includes criteria to rank and prioritize future projects and discusses what will be required for the city to carry the Plan forward.

There are six appendices that accompany these chapters. These include:

- **Park Inventory (Appendix A):** Lists all park sites in the system.
- **Program/Events Criteria (Appendix B):** Provides guidance on program and special event decision making.
- **Park Development Guidelines (Appendix C):** Outlines recommended parameters for park development.
- **Capital Projects List (Appendix D):** Lists recommended projects and their associated costs.
- **Potential Funding Sources (Appendix E):** Provides a reference for potential funding sources to operate and build the system.
- **Baseline Service Assessment (Appendix F):** Describes the existing context for parks and recreation services in Sparks, developed in the early stages of the planning process.



## 2. Planning Framework

The values, interests and community aspirations for the City of Sparks are the guiding forces behind the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. The planning framework describes these elements and identifies how city-wide policies relate to the department-specific interests and future priorities of parks and recreation services. Today, the planning framework must play an even greater role in guiding future direction of the department as the City aims to streamline its provision of services.

### Planning Framework Elements

- Vision
- Core Values
- Goals
- Mission
- Strategic Directions

During the planning process, the City and project stakeholders discussed the importance of parks and recreation services towards accomplishing multiple Strategic Plan objectives. Based on these discussions, the City identified a new mission for carrying out park related services and established strategic directions on which to base future operations. Along with guidance for the Strategic Plan, the Department's mission and strategic directions inform the priorities and recommendations identified in Chapters 4 and 5.

## Relation to the Strategic Plan

The City’s Strategic Plan forms the basis for policy direction and future decision making across all City departments and programs. At the same time, the Parks & Recreation Department requires a custom-tailored approach to determining its own service needs and priorities. Parks and recreation are essential services that appeal to city residents and visitors and also contribute to the City’s vision and goals for the future. For this reason, the planning framework for parks and recreation builds on the vision, core values and goals adopted in the City’s Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2012-2017.

### City of Sparks Vision

Be the city of choice for residents, businesses and visitors.

### VISION

The City’s vision is a clear message that states what the city strives to become. The vision sets the tone for all future planning and decision-making. The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan directly supports the City’s

vision by ensuring that parks and recreation services have the support needed to match the expectations of residents, businesses and visitors. The Plan recognizes the important role that parks and recreation services play in the lives of community residents and businesses, as well as visitors.

### City of Sparks Core Values

- Respect
- Diversity
- Quality
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Listening
- Responsibility
- Risk-taking
- Creativity
- Innovation

### CORE VALUES

The City of Sparks strongly believes in providing quality services to the community. The City’s high degree of standards is described through its core values which guide how it provides service to the community, and which are the qualities that staff should demonstrate in their daily actions.

The mission statement and strategic directions embody these attributes, ensuring that the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan is relevant and reflective of City aspirations.

## GOALS

The vision is supported by a collection of goals, articulating how City services should perform. There are five strategic goals, as well as two core goals which are central to all City actions (Figure 2.1 below). The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan and its recommendations relates to each of these goals, furthering the city-wide vision in a number of ways.



*Figure 2.1: City of Sparks Strategic Goals*

### *Relation to Goal 1: Creating safe places and programs*

- Quality park maintenance contributes to community perceptions of safety and results in places and experiences that are welcoming to residents and visitors.
- Inviting recreation facilities and a range of interesting programs contribute to youth development and can diminish unsafe or delinquent behavior.

- A focus on park design and programmed activity can help address problematic parks and promote safe public spaces throughout the city.

*Relation to Goal 2: Supporting the economy*

- Market-based pricing for event services can help determine an event’s potential return on investment and its economic development contribution.
- More hotel nights means more economic opportunity for Sparks.
- Preserving quality venues will continue to attract events.

“The park system is a 100 million dollar portfolio of community assets that must receive adequate stewardship to retain their value.”

*Relation to Goal 3: Sustaining the system*

- As tracked by the City, the park system represents approximately 100 million dollars in community assets that must receive adequate stewardship to retain their value.
- Prioritizing asset maintenance and replacement will extend the lifespan of recreation facilities.
- Linking fees for programming and events with the level or intensity of facility use can help cover the different scales of maintenance needs.

*Relation to Goal 4: Creating Strong Partnerships and Citizen Engagement*

- Parks and Recreation Commissioners can play a stronger role in catalyzing community engagement by promoting volunteerism and being ambassadors for parks and recreation.
- Volunteer coordination and management can help increase the role of area partners in supporting the park system.
- New and expanded partnerships with public and private organizations can offset park maintenance and operations resources.



### *Relation to Goal 5: Improving Quality of Life*

- Parks and recreation are marketable images of the City and contribute to the city’s sense of place and community.
- A connected trail system improves access to parks and other destinations and provides increased access to activities which support health and fitness.
- Maintaining current assets to a specific condition or level reflects community expectations for attractive parks, high-quality amenities and a livable community.

### *Relation to Core Goals*

The Plan relates to the core goals by ensuring financially sound services and a successful workforce.

## **Parks & Recreation Mission**

As part of this planning effort, the Parks & Recreation Department’s mission was critically evaluated. The refined mission for the City’s parks and recreation system represents a mission for the parks and recreation system, to which all of the City departments that support park and recreation services can contribute.

The mission statement summarizes the purpose and responsibilities of an organization, in this case answering the questions “What business are we in?” and “What is our reason for being?” with relation to parks and recreation. It embodies the community’s core values and contributes to achieving the City’s vision for the future.

### **PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT MISSION**

Strengthening Sparks by protecting parks and natural resources and fostering recreation opportunities and special events that enhance our city’s image, economic vitality and quality of life.

## **Strategic Directions**

Strategies and actions are the recommended methods and processes that City staff will use to carry out their mission and achieve the City’s vision. There are six overarching directions that should be considered for prioritizing park and recreation services. These

strategies form the basis for system-wide recommendations presented in subsequent chapters of the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan.

**Strategic Directions**

- Funding and Resource Development
- Special Events and Economic Development
- Recreation Programming
- Maintenance and Improvements
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Park and Open Space System

- **Funding and Resource Development:** Create diverse, stable and innovative funding strategies to provide the resources required to build, maintain and operate our system of parks, facilities, events and programs.
- **Special Events and Economic Development:** Organize and prioritize special events and recreation services that promote economic development and community well-being.
- **Recreation Programming:** Offer recreation programs and services that respond to residents’ needs—strengthening families, enhancing community

cohesiveness and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

- **Maintenance and Improvements:** Maintain and renew parks, recreation facilities and open space areas to protect existing investments, enhance user safety and accessibility, support recreation programs and events, maximize efficiency and protect revenue-generating resources for the long-term.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Coordinate the management, maintenance and marketing of parks and recreation among City departments, cultivating business and community partnerships, public involvement and volunteerism to support City goals and maximize the benefit provided to the community.
- **Park and Open Space System:** Provide an accessible, safe and attractive park and recreation system that responds to changing demographics and meets community needs.



### 3. Planning Context

In the mid-1990s, Sparks was rapidly growing to the north, and there were no standards in place to make sure the park system expanded to keep up with population growth. This issue was one of the focuses of the 1997 Plan, and that plan's recommendations set out a course which led to the development of Golden Eagle Regional Park, Sparks Marina, and Rock Park. These very popular sites are among the most visited by local residents, according to public involvement results. By 2013, the park system encompassed more than 1,000 acres and included six types of parks: regional parks, community parks, neighborhood parks, pocket parks, special use parks and greenbelts. Appendix A contains a detailed inventory of the system, as of 2013.

However, there have been significant changes in Sparks and throughout the region, as well as with the City's parks and recreation services. These changes accelerated approximately five years ago, creating challenges and opportunities for parks and recreation.

## Economic Slowdown and Budget Cuts

Between 2000 and 2010, the City’s population grew by 36 percent, adding approximately 23,900 people and increasing the demand for recreation services.<sup>1</sup> However, as early as 2008, an economic recession began a downturn that hit Sparks and the region particularly hard, stalling population and job growth in the last few years. City revenue steeply declined, affecting budgets across all City departments. As a result, City expenditures for parks and recreation dropped more than 35% in three years. Parks maintenance was cut by \$1 million. The City cut all other expenditures for parks and recreation services by \$1.4 million.

### REDUCED STAFFING

As a result of the reduced budget, more than 30% of City staff positions were eliminated over three years. The hiring of seasonal and temporary staff was discontinued in FY 08/09, and layoffs of full-time staff began in 2009. Under the Sparks Sustainable Services Initiative (SSSI), the Parks Maintenance Division was moved to Community Services. Also under SSSI, two Maintenance Crew Leaders, a Grants Administrator, Recreation Superintendent and Senior Administrative Analyst position in Parks & Recreation Department were eliminated. Other positions were reclassified, resulting in functional adjustments to remaining staff positions. One of three Recreation Specialist positions was left vacant.



The layoff of full-time staff triggered a provision in a union agreement which placed a moratorium on hiring new temporary staff. As a result, well-trained and highly paid Parks Maintenance Division staff took on the duties typically completed by lower-paid temporary staff, such as setting up and cleaning up for special events. In some cases, this work was completed as overtime (in addition to regular maintenance responsibilities), adding to maintenance costs, long-term staff stress and burn-out. Maintenance staff are spread thin, and they may be pulled from regularly scheduled duties to address complaints, special requests and emergencies. As a result, routine maintenance has suffered, and at times the facility maintenance needed to support

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<sup>1</sup> Source: U.S. Census data.

scheduled recreation programming and events is not being completed when needed. As a result, the Parks & Recreation Department staff also handle maintenance when needed, covering the cost through the recreation budget.

### DECLINING ASSETS

As the City has added to the parks system, it has not increased the parks maintenance budget. With a bigger system and no additional staff or funding, preventative and routine maintenance has decreased. In addition to more than 1,000 acres of park land, parks maintenance cares for more than 28 acres of planter beds, medians and sound walls in 36 different areas throughout Sparks. The City maintains some street medians itself and contracts with outside providers to maintain others. These contracts are funded through the park maintenance budget, not street maintenance.



In addition, the City lacks funding to replace facilities at the end of their life-cycle—which has meant some facilities such as playgrounds have been removed—or to keep up with the impacts of heavy use of its most popular parks, let alone to refresh aging parks and facilities. There is also no money to address unanticipated maintenance needs, such as turf damage from an unusually harsh winter. These funding shortfalls overburden staff, hasten the decline of the City’s parks and recreation assets, and increase need for capital improvements.

### Changing Demographics

Different population segments have different recreation needs and preferences, and the population make-up in Sparks today is different than it was fifteen years ago. While the median age is 35.5, more than 45% of the population is under 19 or over 60 years old. Older adults and seniors (ages 60+) comprise



nearly 17% of the City’s population, and nearly 29% are children and youth ages 19 and under. These percentages are higher in Sparks than in Nevada as a whole.

Sparks has a large percentage of families. The City has 33,502 total households, and 67.5% are family households. Thirty-three percent are families with children under age 18. This is one reason the City has focused on before and after school programs and camps to provide safe places for Sparks’ youth when school is not in session.

Sparks has also grown more diverse, like the rest of Nevada. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, more than 26% of the total population is Hispanic or Latino, and more than 25% of residents speak a language other than English at home. However, Sparks has not typically provided recreation programs or services in other languages. The Parks & Recreation Department has been trying to connect with this growing segment of the population. Budget cuts and consequent intense focus on cost recovery have made it difficult to try new programs and approaches.

Of particular note, the median household income in Sparks dropped nearly \$4,000 between 2008 and 2010. Generally speaking, residents have less disposable income to devote to recreation because of this drop.

## Collaboration and Volunteerism

The City is not the sole provider of parks and recreation services in Sparks. The School District, Washoe County, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and private providers also supply parks and facilities that help address the community’s demand for recreation opportunities. Non-profits such as the Boys & Girls Club provide needed services, benefiting Sparks residents. Washoe County operates a regional park in northern



Sparks, and the City of Reno provides a variety of recreation opportunities adjacent to Sparks, including two parks that are contiguous to the Sparks city limits. Though all agencies are struggling with reduced budgets, there is a history of collaboration in the region. The effort to update this Plan was a recent example, where area agencies and non-profits served on the Technical Advisory Group and provided strategic advice.

Individuals also collaborate to provide parks and recreation services in Sparks. In 2012, over 20,000 volunteer hours were logged (which is the equivalent of 9.7 FTEs). This

includes Community Service work crews (13,785 hours), community cleanups and recycling programs (2,456 hours), Adopt-A-Park (1,800 hours), youth and adult sports (1,634 hours), senior programs (469 hours), special populations (81 hours), and special events (10 hours). Participation in the City's Adopt-a-Park Program increased 15% in 2012, with the adoption of 25 parks.

## **Promoting Quality of Life**

Through its parks and recreation services, Sparks improves the quality of life for many residents. In 2012, more than 1 million people were served by City recreation programs and special events, even without including sports tournaments. Reservations and user fees from the Golden Eagle Regional Park were consistent with a 95% occupancy rating in 2012, with a 7% increase in revenues from 2011. Last year, 57 tournaments brought in 1,536 teams, totaling 137 tournament days.

## **Implications**

Sparks is currently in a state of adaptation and change, and the City's parks and recreation services must shift in response. The City has many assets, but given the significant challenges related to funding and sustaining parks, recreation programs and events, the approach to providing parks and recreation services must adapt and change as well.

## PLANNING CONTEXT





## 4. Park and Recreation Services

As noted in Chapter 2, Sparks City Council identified park and recreation services as core services during the citywide strategic planning process, calling out different components of the City's existing parks and recreation system based on the organizational structure at that time. Listed services included Parks Maintenance, Alf Sorensen, Special Events and Larry D. Johnson. In addition, Capital Projects also relates to parks and recreation, because parks and recreation projects are an important part of the City's capital improvement program.

A major purpose of this Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan update is to provide further detail on which park and recreation services and functions are the highest priorities for Sparks, given the staff and funding resources available. To do this, the planning process involved residents, key stakeholders, community leaders, recreation providers and City representatives and staff in identifying service priorities for the future. This chapter describes those service priorities, which were used to develop the strategies and recommendations in Chapter 5. These priorities allow the City to strengthen the role that parks, recreation and special events play in supporting its vision and goals for the future as articulated in its Strategic Plan.

## **Community Priorities**

The Sparks Parks & Recreation Department regularly seeks feedback from the community to ensure its services are responsive. In 2009, the Department updated its *Parks & Recreation Needs Assessment* as a precursor to updating the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. As part of the Needs Assessment effort, the Department conducted a community recreation questionnaire in English and Spanish that attracted 572 responses through the paper and online instruments. The results of that questionnaire indicated that people consider park and recreation services to be very important to quality of life in Sparks. Further results showed high priority for providing youth with positive ways to fill their free time; supporting strong neighborhoods and families; providing opportunities to enjoy nature/the outdoors; and enhancing community image and sense of place.

The community engagement efforts for the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan were designed to build on the conversations begun during the Needs Assessment, in combination with the direction provided by City Council through the Strategic Plan. A key part of this planning effort is to define a sustainable path to operate the parks and recreation system while making progress on the City's vision. For this reason, the Department sought further input from the community on specific service priorities through an online survey and an interactive workshop regarding the tradeoffs needed to be able to provide quality parks, recreation and event services with the resources available.

### **ONLINE TRADE-OFFS SURVEY**

A total of 517 people responded to a 15-question online survey about community recreation priorities during the period from February 22, 2013 to April 15, 2013. Similar to the 2009 Needs Assessment, the vast majority of respondents (93%) indicated that park and recreation services are important to quality of life in Sparks. They also prioritized several park and recreation goals by ranking five goals in importance, as shown in Figure 4.1 on the next page. Despite funding challenges, 92% of respondents noted that it was important or very important to continue to provide safe and attractive parks and recreation facilities, and 91% noted that it was important or very important to continue to maintain existing assets.

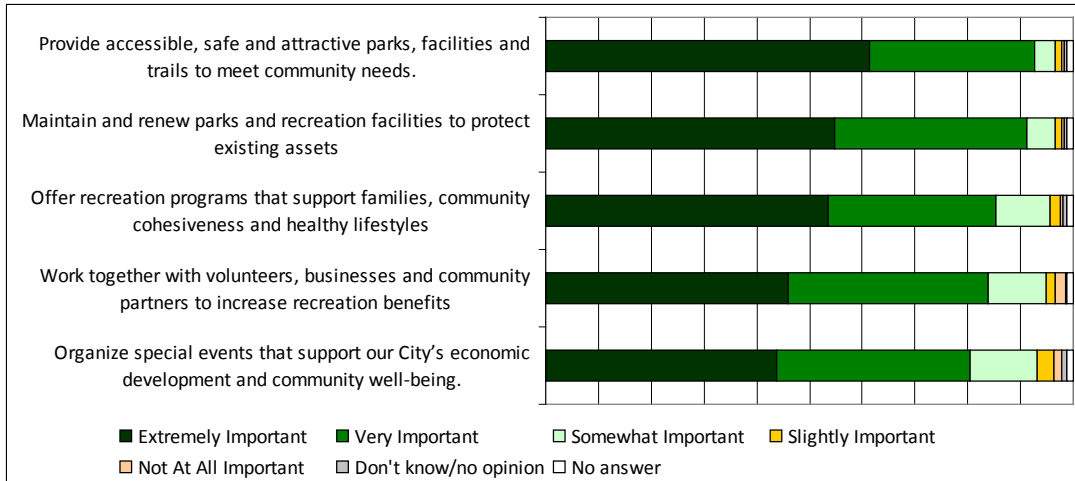


Figure 4.1: Importance Ratings for Park and Recreation Planning Goals, Questionnaire Results Summary

While the survey revealed that nearly half of respondents (46%) were not aware of the significant funding cuts in recent years for parks and recreation, it also illustrated that residents favor the reallocation of funding to support priority projects and services. Several of these priorities, based on feedback from the survey, are noted below.

- Reinvestment and renewal is a higher priority than system expansion.** When asked to rate the priority of 15 different potential system improvements, respondents ranked the following as their top two: replacing worn or unsafe playgrounds and repairing broken amenities. Improving existing community and neighborhood parks also ranked in the top five responses (4 and 5 respectively).
- Residents support the use of City funds to provide services with perceived higher community benefits.** When asked about the level of City investment that should be provided for different recreation services, respondents indicated that the City should provide funds to support youth and teen before/after school programming, services for at-risk families and youth, and senior programs. On the other hand, little or no public dollars should be used to support services such as adult sports and special events provided by private producers at Sparks’ facilities. For most traditional services, people favored a mix of user fees and City funds, with the City lightly subsidizing the provision of services such as youth sports, general recreation programs, and special events. The prioritization of youth and families was consistent with the 2009 Needs Assessment questionnaire results.

- Sites with higher recreation value should receive more maintenance funding.** Survey respondents noted that more frequent and better maintenance is needed at the City’s most popular developed parks, especially Golden Eagle Regional Park, Sparks Marina, Rock Park and Victorian Square. To improve the maintenance and caretaking of its high-use sites, respondents agreed that street medians and small downtown parks should have less priority for maintenance funding.
- Standard maintenance practices may need to change to reflect the budget available to take care of park assets.** When asked about support for potential changes to maintenance practices to address the budget shortfall, there was little interest in closing lower priority parks or reducing trash removal/restroom cleaning (Figure 4.2). However, respondents indicated that the City should avoid developing new parks and facilities until funding is available to take care of them.<sup>1</sup> There also was support for involving sports leagues in field preparation, increasing program and event fees to help fund maintenance, and reducing mowing frequencies and landscape maintenance, especially at lower priority sites.

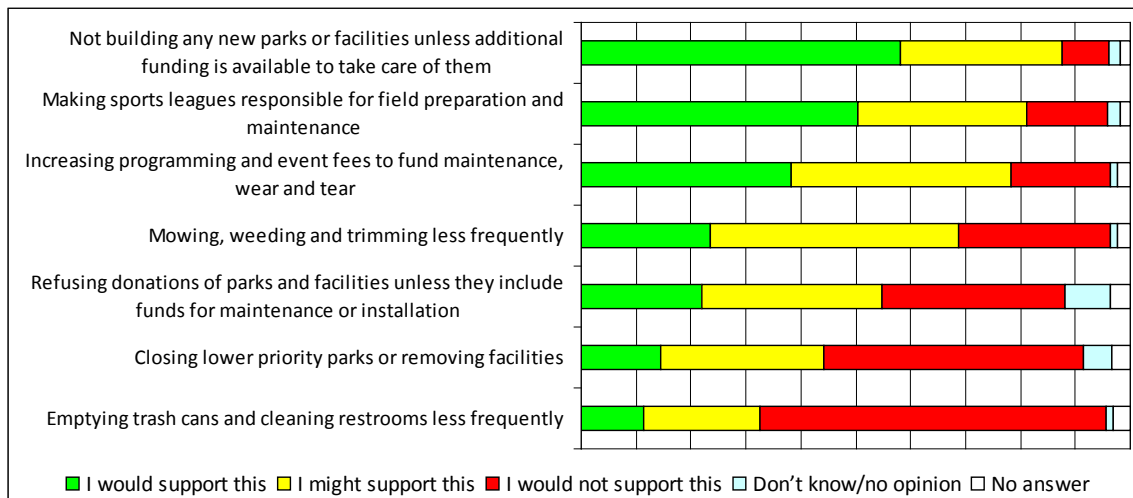


Figure 4.2: Options to Address the Maintenance Budget Shortfall, Questionnaire Results Summary<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This means the City will need to increase the park maintenance budget when several approved parks in new residential developments are opened, or coordinate with the developer to defer this park development.

<sup>2</sup> There were 307 total responses to this question.



Commission, Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation, Sparks Tribune, Reno Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority, and John Ascuaga's Nugget Casino Resort.

At these workshops, participants were asked to complete a tradeoffs exercise, where they were given a limited budget and asked to choose which of 23 different park and recreation services to fund. Small groups discussed their funding choices to see if they could agree on their funding priorities. Most agreed they would like to see the City focus resources on the following:

- Maintenance and stewardship of developed parks and recreation facilities;
- Special events and tournaments, which have significant economic impacts and provide recreation opportunities;
- Sports and aquatics, which support youth development and community health and wellness; and
- Needed services and programs for targeted groups, including at-risk teens and families, seniors, and youth before/after school.

When asked what insights they had after completing the workshop exercise, participants noted that the following is needed:

- A new service model for parks and recreation, with innovative ways to do business;
- More partnerships with other providers, including regional partnerships and collaborative efforts;
- A change in citizen expectations and/or awareness about the City's funding situation and what can be accomplished with limited funds; and
- Increased community and City support for parks and recreation.

### **COMMUNITY DIRECTION ON SERVICE PRIORITIES**

Community feedback shows a strong recognition that changes are needed to preserve the parks and services that residents value most. The public clearly believes that parks and recreation should be supported by a combination of General Fund dollars and earned revenues from fees and charges, and that certain services and target populations merit a greater City investment than others.

## Realignment of Park and Recreation Services

While Sparks has achieved many successes with its park and recreation services, the City has shifted the way it provides all of its services and the community's needs and expectations have changed. The mission presented in Chapter 2 describes how Sparks will deploy its parks and recreation services to achieve the citywide vision. The strategic directions described in Chapter 2 represent a shift from the way parks and recreation services have been approached in recent years. To achieve this shift, Sparks will need to transition its approach, including modifying some of its practices.

### **Parks & Recreation Department Mission:**

Strengthening Sparks by protecting parks and open space and fostering special events and recreation experiences that enhance our City's image, economic vitality and quality of life.

### **SERVICE AREAS**

Sparks park and recreation services can be divided into five primary service areas, as noted below. With the exception of Administration, each of these is considered a core service for the City of Sparks in their Strategic Plan.

- **Recreation Programs:** Activates parks and facilities with activities and classes too enhance the quality of life of residents.<sup>3</sup>
- **Special Events:** Supports the local, regional and national scale events that bring to life the Sparks brand, "It's Happening Here!"
- **Parks Maintenance:** Provides stewardship of the City's park and recreation assets.
- **Capital Projects (Parks Capital Projects):** Provides oversight and management of the construction of and major improvements to the park system.<sup>4</sup>
- **Parks and Recreation Administration:** Manages and makes strategic decisions for the four service areas noted above.

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<sup>3</sup> Recreation Programs as used here is inclusive of the core services Larry D Johnson and Alf Sorensen, as identified by Sparks City Council in the City's Strategic Plan, as well as recreation programs at other sites.

<sup>4</sup> As the City has applied capital funding to cover the cost of minor repairs (which is considered maintenance in many other communities), it is important to distinguish that capital projects is defined here to include new development, facility replacement, and major park or facility renovations—not minor improvements and enhancements.

The five service areas are independent of the City of Sparks organizational structure. For example, the Parks & Recreation Department is only one of several Sparks departments and divisions charged with providing park and recreation services. Today, the Parks & Recreation Department has primary responsibility for Parks and Recreation Administration, Special Events and Recreation Programs. The Community Services Department has primary responsibility for Parks Maintenance and Parks Capital Projects, as well as administrative duties associated with these services. Other departments also support the provision of park and recreation services, including Finance, Public Safety and the Public Information Office.

The City's organizational structure may shift in the future, as it was shifted in the past, as the City of Sparks continues to evolve how it provides all of its municipal services. Regardless of the City's organizational structure, each of these five interrelated service areas is critical to achieving the parks and recreation mission.

## **CATEGORIZATION OF SERVICES**

Within each of these five service areas are many individual services. Some are provided because they reflect the City's core services and goals. Others are provided because they seem to be a good fit with available infrastructure and resources. Each individual service can be considered to be essential, important or value-added, based on the City's identified core services and community priorities as expressed during the planning process. This categorization provides a method for establishing financial targets for each service area, and can help guide the City's fee structures for parks, recreation and events, thus helping achieve the financial stability indicated in City of Sparks Core Goal A.

### *"Essential" Services*

Essential services are those parks and recreation services that the City of Sparks must provide, are legally required, or are needed in order to capably govern Sparks. The failure to provide an essential service at an adequate level would result in a significant negative consequence for health and safety. These services typically are expected to be performed with little to no cost recovery from earned revenues. Essential services include the following:

- The City is required by law or is contractually obligated to provide the service;
- The service is essential to protecting and supporting the public's health and safety;
- The service protects and sustains existing City assets and infrastructure through their regular lifecycle to support safe use; and/or



- The City needs to provide this service to be able to provide other essential services (e.g., some administrative services).

### *“Important” Services*

Important services are those parks and recreation services that are important to enhancing the City’s image, economic vitality and quality of life. Important services typically are expected to have a balance of public funding and earned revenues to support the costs of providing those services. Some of these services produce income or have revenue generation capabilities which can offset some or all of the operating cost. Criteria for identifying important services are as follows:

- The service expands, enhances or supports an essential service;
- The service helps Sparks achieve the two core goals and five strategic goals that are central to its Strategic Plan; and/or
- The service is broadly supported and used by the community, and is considered by the public to be an appropriate, important and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon the manner by which the service is paid for or funded.

### *“Value-added” Services*

Value added services are discretionary parks and recreation services that recover their costs or generate revenue, while still being consistent with the parks and recreation mission. Value-added services should be fully supported by earned revenues and may generate additional revenue to help fund the overall parks and recreation program. These include:

- The service enhances the City’s image, economic vitality and quality of life;
- The service is supported by the community and provides an appropriate public benefit; and/or
- The service generates income or attracts funding, which could include sponsorships and grants as well as user fees.

Table 4.1 lists key park and recreation services or functions, organized by the service areas, and identifies whether each service should be considered essential, important, or value-added based on the City’s strategic plan, parks and recreation norms and practices, and community feedback. In some cases, the service/function may include programs in more than one category. Each service/function can be further broken down into individual programs, which can also be evaluated as essential, important or value-added.

*Table 4-1: Categorizing Services as Essential, Important or Value-Added*

| Service Area  | Essential, Important or Value Added |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| Recreation Programs   |                                     |
| Recreation staff administration and supervision (staff scheduling, management, evaluations)                     | Important                           |
| Recreation partner coordination (e.g., School District, Washoe County, Reno, non-profits, sports organizations) | Important                           |
| Facility programming and operation (swimming pool, recreation centers, sports complexes)                        | Important                           |
| Recreation program registration   | Important                           |
| Parks and recreation facility scheduling, reservations and rentals  | Important, Value-added              |
| Recreation program marketing and communications   | Important                           |
| Recreation program development and scheduling   | Important, Value-added              |
| Direct program provision and management   | Important, Value-added              |
| Recreation program contract management (e.g., contract teachers)  | Important, Value-added              |
| Special Events  |                                     |
| Event staff administration and supervision (staff/volunteer scheduling and management, staff evaluations)       | Important                           |
| Event/tournament recruitment  | Important, Value-added              |
| Event/tournament operations coordination  | Important, Value-added              |
| Event/tournament promotion, publicity and marketing   | Important, Value-added              |
| Event venue reservations/permitting/site plan review  | Important, Value-added              |
| Coordination of tournament reservations with Recreation Programs Service Area                                   | Important, Value-added              |
| Coordination with tourism and economic development organizations  | Important, Value-added              |

Table 4-1: Categorizing Services as Essential, Important or Value-Added (continued)

| Service Area   | Essential, Important or Value Added |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Parks Maintenance  |                                     |
| Maintenance staff administration and supervision (staff scheduling, management, evaluations). Includes Sheriff work crews    | Essential                           |
| Physical system data tracking, management and reporting (inventory, asset status, maintenance frequencies, repair log, etc.) | Important                           |
| Maintenance management plan development and implementation   | Important                           |
| Management of contracted services  | Essential                           |
| Turf maintenance (mowing, fertilizing, overseeding, etc.)  | Essential                           |
| Routine landscape maintenance (leaf pickup, weeding, trimming)   | Essential                           |
| Horticulture care (planting/care of flower baskets, beds, gardens)   | Important                           |
| Arboriculture (tree pruning and tree care)   | Essential                           |
| Irrigation system maintenance and management   | Essential                           |
| Natural area/open space management   | Essential                           |
| Trail maintenance  | Important                           |
| Sports field preparation   | Important                           |
| Facility (indoor and outdoor) set-up and clean-up (for programs and rentals/reservations)                                    | Important, Value-added              |
| Playground safety inspection   | Essential                           |
| Janitorial services (restroom and building cleaning)   | Essential                           |
| Nursery operation and management   | Important                           |
| Parks fleet and equipment management and repair  | Essential                           |

Table 4-1: Categorizing Services as Essential, Important or Value-Added (continued)

| Service Area   | Essential, Important or Value Added |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Parks Capital Projects   |                                     |
| Preparation and management of the Capital Improvement Plan   | Essential                           |
| Lifecycle/capital replacement scheduling   | Essential                           |
| Professional services procurement and management for park and facility development and renovation                          | Important                           |
| Oversight of site master planning, design development and construction documents for parks and event/recreation facilities | Important                           |
| Construction bidding/contract management for park and facility development and renovation                                  | Important                           |
| Construction management/observation for park and facility development and renovation                                       | Important                           |
| Land acquisition   | Important                           |
| Review and acceptance of developer-provided parks  | Important                           |
| Parks and Recreation Administration  |                                     |
| General budgeting and financial management   | Essential                           |
| Human resources – management and evaluations of senior staff   | Essential                           |
| Service data tracking, management and reporting (participation, customer satisfaction, department annual reports, etc.)    | Important                           |
| Strategic planning, policy research and development  | Important                           |
| Customer service   | Essential, Important                |
| Internal and external communications   | Essential, Important                |
| Coordination with other City departments   | Essential                           |
| Coordination with Parks and Recreation Commission and City Council   | Essential                           |
| Partnership management   | Important                           |
| Volunteer recruitment, training and management   | Essential, Important                |
| Grant writing  | Important                           |
| Community engagement/public involvement  | Essential                           |

## RECREATION PROGRAMS

The service area of recreation programs has been categorized as “important” and “value-added,” with the intent that there will be a mix of different program types with different financial performance expectations depending on the intended purpose/outcome of the program. This is a shift from the current practice, where each individual program is expected to recover all its direct costs. The Parks & Recreation Department should shift to a more holistic view of its recreation program, considering the financial performance of the entire set of programs based on cost recovery targets set by program area (e.g., learn to swim, aquatic exercise).



The program types and target populations prioritized by the public should be considered “important” and warrant more City investment (and have a lower cost recovery target). This includes services and programs for targeted groups, including at-risk youth, teens, families, special needs groups, and seniors. Additional “important” program areas are youth sports and aquatics, which people prioritize for health and wellness benefits as well as safety.

All other programs should be considered “value-added,” thus having a higher cost recovery expectation. Not all value-added programs will recover all costs, and some value-added programs may be designed to generate revenue to help fund important services.

To give Sparks a truer picture of the costs associated with recreation programs, more costs besides direct costs should be factored in, and data-driven decision-making should become a standard practice using information already available from the City’s computerized registration program.

These shifts may mean Sparks needs to provide recreation programs in new ways or locations, and even consider phasing out some traditional program areas.

To make these shifts, see Chapter 5 recommendations in the following strategic directions:

- Funding and Resource Development
- Recreation Programming
- Collaboration and Partnerships
- Park and Open Space System



## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

The service area of special events has been a focus in recent years for the City of Sparks, and events are a part of the City’s brand and identity. Special events have also been identified as a mechanism for economic development. The services within special events are categorized as “important” and “value-added,” similar to recreation programs. This means that Sparks should continue to hone its approach to special events and better define desired outcomes in terms of economic development, including continuing to develop measures to identify which events create the

biggest local economic impact. The focus should be on bringing in those events that result in overnight stays, including sports tournaments.

Over the past ten years, Sparks has focused much of its park system capital development on new facilities and parks that are suitable for events, including Sparks Marina Park, Golden Eagle Regional Park and Rock Park. Based on public input, Sparks needs to shift its focus to maintaining and sustaining the assets it has and avoid building more special events venues in its park system. Therefore, Sparks needs to be more business-like in its approach to special events, including its approach to venue use and pricing. Sparks has significant assets in its event venues, but its current approach to venues is resulting in depleted assets without a source of funding for capital reinvestment. Keeping top-notch venues in quality condition is an important part of maintaining a market position for Sparks. More attention to and reinvestment at the City’s top-tier venues is needed, and the public has indicated that the revenue for this should come from the events that are creating the wear and tear. In addition, a recruitment approach is needed to attract events that make use of other City venues and locations (e.g., Wedekind Regional Park, the non-field areas of Golden Eagle Regional Park).

To make these shifts, see Chapter 5 recommendations in the following strategic directions:

- Funding and Resource Development;
- Special Events and Economic Development;
- Maintenance and Improvements;
- Collaboration and Partnerships; and
- Park and Open Space System.

## PARKS AND RECREATION ADMINISTRATION

With multiple departments helping to provide parks and recreation services in Sparks, parks and recreation administration is particularly important. Sparks is still in transition from its past organizational approach, where all parks and recreation services were centralized in a single department. Today, the role of the Parks & Recreation Director is even more critical than in the past because cross-departmental



coordination and collaboration is necessary for achieving the parks and recreation mission and citywide vision. For this reason, parks and recreation administration services and functions are categorized as “essential” or “important.” Some of the costs of parks and recreation administration should be allocated to other areas of parks and recreation service such as recreation programs or special events, regardless of whether Sparks recovers these costs, in order to provide a truer picture of the cost of providing service. For example, many customer service functions are a result of program registration, facility reservations, and event rentals.

Parks and recreation administration needs to shift to a more data-driven approach that looks at the entire parks and recreation program more holistically and over a longer term. There is also a need to set financial performance standards for areas under its budget purview, within the overall City budget.

To make these shifts, see Chapter 5 recommendations in the following strategic directions:

- Funding and Resource Development;
- Special Events and Economic Development;
- Recreation Programming;
- Maintenance and Improvements;
- Collaboration and Partnerships; and
- Park and Open Space System.

## **PARKS MAINTENANCE AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The other two service areas (Parks Maintenance and Capital Projects) should support and be tied to Recreation Programs and Special Events, and share or coordinate with Parks and Recreation Administration.

See Chapter 5 recommendations in the following strategic directions:

- Funding and Resource Development;
- Maintenance and Improvements;
- Collaboration and Partnerships; and
- Park and Open Space System.







## 5. Recommendations

Chapter 4 presented an approach to realigning parks and recreation services in Sparks in accordance with the City’s vision and the community’s goals for parks and recreation. This chapter includes specific recommendations to accomplish the realignment, organized by strategic direction. Individual recommendations are numbered for easy reference. Chapter 5 is closely linked with Chapter 6, which focuses on implementation.

# 1. Funding and Resource Development

## 1-1. Implement a more robust cost and revenue tracking system.

Establish a cost and revenue tracking system that accurately reflects the costs of all parks and recreation-related services offered by the City and the revenues generated by each service area. This system should be designed to be compatible with the City’s budget structure, procedures and accounts and should incorporate cost data from different departments to provide a complete picture of the community’s investment in each major area of parks and recreation services. City leaders need good information to make informed decisions toward getting the greatest return on investment for these services.

**Strategic Direction:**  
 Create diverse, stable and innovative funding strategies to provide the resources required to build, maintain and operate our system of parks, facilities, events and programs.

- a) Track all costs and revenues for each major facility or program area. At minimum, break out costs by:
  - Golden Eagle Regional Park
  - Sparks Marina Park
  - Victorian Square (including Victorian Plaza and Victorian Amphitheater)
  - Alf Sorensen Community Center
  - Recreation Center
  - Larry D. Johnson Community Center
  - Sparks Senior Center
  - Operations & Maintenance for Developed Parks (includes Community Parks, Neighborhood Parks, Pocket Parks, Riverfront Parks and any Special Use Parks not called out separately)
  - Operations & Maintenance for Natural Areas (includes Wedekind Regional Park, Greenbelts, and undeveloped park land)
  - Operations & Maintenance for Beautification Areas (includes street medians maintained by Sparks and by contracted companies)

- b) For operations and maintenance of developed parks, the total park acreage of each site should be considered (not a lesser “developed acreage” figure).
- c) Track any staff time or capital resources invested towards the Senior Center.
- d) Set financial performance targets for each area, with an overall target for the parks and recreation program. This will be discussed further in the recommendation on fee philosophy and structure.

**1-2. Identify a fee policy and pricing structure to guide the implementation of recreation programs, events and services.**

Sparks has been operating its recreation programs on an assumption that every recreation program should recover its direct costs through fees and charges to support a Parks & Recreation Department-wide cost recovery rate of 85%. However, the City has not ever adopted a fee philosophy to guide its pricing and practices. Operating every program on a break-even basis is not the norm in recreation services, nor is setting such a high cost recovery rate where recreation plays a key role in providing community services that are considered integral to quality of life. Given the current economic climate, Sparks should maintain its revenue generation level (approximately \$2.6 million annually as reported in September 2012), but establish pricing and fees based on a new fee philosophy in response to desired community outcomes. This will mean charging less for some programs or even making them free, and charging more (turning a profit) for others. It will also mean revisiting Council priorities for services that do not typically recover much of their costs, such as recreation programs for at-risk youth and families, special needs populations, and seniors.

**1-3. Identify a new pricing approach for special events.**

The current approach is to develop an estimate for all City staff time and costs for each event, a cumbersome process for staff and one that does not allow event producers the certainty they desire. Pricing structures should vary by event scale (national, regional, local). Event tenure (legacy, emerging and new) may also be a consideration. Specific decisions should address whether to account for costs not currently considered, including event recruitment costs and facility reinvestment to cover wear and tear on facilities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Develop a pricing structure that provides more certainty for event producers, while providing the needed protection for the public good. For example, a set fee (varying by event scale) with a damage deposit would achieve this.
- b) Define cost recovery targets for national, regional, and local events. This includes identifying event types or scales that should generate revenue or recover all direct and indirect costs.
- c) Use improved data to identify the full cost of events, including administration, marketing, facility use/replacement, maintenance, event services (set up, clean up, staffing), resources and utilities.
- d) Base the cost recovery strategy on an understanding of the full costs, including the long-term costs associated with asset depreciation.
- e) Identify targeted audiences, scales, tenures or activities that may receive subsidized services or be eligible for greater City and TourMark support.

### **1-4. Foster foundation/conservancy support for parks and recreation in Sparks.**

Park foundations, conservancies and friends groups support parks and park systems in many communities. These organizations can serve different roles, and may be ad hoc or established as a non-profit 501(c)3. In some cases, they are designed to support a specific site or type of park. In other cases, they support an entire park system. These organizations can fundraise for special projects and, if a 501(c)3, can collect charitable donations from individuals and corporations (and donors can receive tax benefits). They also may have access to types of funding that governmental entities do not. The Truckee Meadows Park Foundation is an example of one such resource.

- a) Encourage the establishment of park foundations, conservancies and friend groups, and formalize how Sparks will interact with these groups.
- b) Develop and approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Truckee Meadows Park Foundation, and use this MOU as a model for future partnerships.

### **1-5. Retool policies and pricing for reservable and rental facilities.**

The Parks & Recreation Department has already undertaken changes to its reservable facilities and facility rental policies, as part of its efforts to streamline services.

Sparks offers reservations for a fee at the Recreation Gym, both Community Centers, and six parks. The Recreation Gym and Community Center rooms and facilities (including the pool and gym at Alf Sorensen) are rented by the hour. Parks are reservable for a set fee, which is not established hourly.

Requiring reservations for large group gatherings provides a level of control for City staff, including requiring security personnel, cleaning deposits, or insurance. From the resident perspective, many people like the assurance that they will have the space of their choice if they plan ahead. Changes made within the past year include requiring security services as a condition of rental and reducing the number of picnic shelters in the reservation program.

However, policies and pricing for reservable and rental facilities should be further retooled to streamline processes and provide the assurances that both the public and staff desire, without impacting the overall park system. Consider the following:

- a) Simplify the fee structure. The current structure requires staff to calculate fees individually based on very customized information for each renter. A simplified structure would reduce the staff time needed for each reservation and would be more easily understood by the public.
- b) Set fees based on blocks of time (e.g., 4 hours) or time slots (10-2, 2-6, etc.), rather than by the hour as is the current practice, to simplify fee calculations and reservation booking.
- c) Clarify what an individual resident pays. The current structure addresses Class I “for profit” and Class II “non profit” in a business structure, which does not seem applicable to the general population.
- d) Continue the practice of charging higher fees for non-residents.

- e) Distinguish between shelter or room reservations for group gatherings versus more extensive park or facility reservations for special events, as is done for Sparks Marina Park. Establish different fee structures, and consider separate vendor fees if applicable.
- f) Evaluate the effectiveness of the policy change to require security services as a condition of rentals at the Recreation Gym. If effective, consider expanding this requirement to large group gatherings at other locations if specific criteria apply (e.g, more than 200 attendees, alcohol served).
- g) Clarify reservation details on the City website to alleviate confusion. For example:
  - For park rentals, clarify the amount of time covered by the reservation fee as well as what facilities can be reserved. The reservation appears to cover the picnic area, as well as a variety of other park amenities.
  - Explain what the application process or permitting system is. If an application is needed, make it available online to expedite the reservation system and decrease the staff time involved.
  - Spell out responsibilities for renters. Though the park rentals webpage indicates that “groups are responsible for their own setup and cleanup,” further detail about what renters need to do is currently not available until they arrive at the office. The rules and procedures could be offered in a downloadable format.
- h) Periodically evaluate the picnic shelter reservations and make adjustments when warranted based on use and financial performance.

**1-6. Expand revenue generating sources.**

There are other means of earning income beyond program and event fees and charges. Sparks should consider all methods possible to expand its revenue sources, taking into consideration what the market will bear and the community will approve. Examples used by other park and recreation agencies include concession stand/food and beverage services, lease or concessionaire agreements (such as the one for the restaurant at Golden Eagle Regional Park), campgrounds, gate fees, alcohol and sound system permits, special event parking fees and cellular tower leases. Some park agencies gain revenue through

vendor fees for park services such as food trucks, equipment sales or rental, and pro shops.

Major parks and sports complexes often provide opportunities to maximize revenue generation in a variety of ways. For example, the City of Medford, Oregon, operates U.S. Cellular Community Park (USCCP), a sports complex similar to Golden Eagle Regional Park. U.S Cellular purchased naming-rights to the site in 2008 as a part of a six-year, \$650,000 agreement. The City has an exclusive agreement with Subway as the sole authorized operator of USCCP concession stands, and it has agreements with lodging partners who advertise on the park's webpage and in the annual Tournament Guide. The City has a well-established program and pricing structure for promotional opportunities for additional businesses and organizations, including package deals for banners and signage, hyperlinks and website advertisements, and promotional advertisements in other materials. For tournaments and events, it requires (where applicable) Equipment/Souvenir Sales and Vending Permits, which stipulate that the City retains 15% of the gross revenue of any vending operations. It also requires that the City is reimbursed 15% of any gate fee revenue for events held at the site. It promotes the use of the park for sports and other special events such as concerts.

To expand revenues, the City of Sparks should consider the following:

- a) Test new concepts with pilot projects or programs to determine their viability. If the new options are both financially viable and acceptable to the public, the City can make these changes permanent.

### **1-7. Develop a Business Plan for each major facility.**

Conduct an economic feasibility study, business plan and operating pro forma when considering the development of major new facilities. Avoid constructing or phasing in facilities that cannot meet targeted financial performance goals. For existing major facilities, develop a business plan before making major additional capital improvements or when stronger operational guidance is needed.

### **1-8. Update donation policies that govern the acceptance of land and donated amenities (benches, scoreboards, trees).**

All donations should conform to adopted City standards to ensure that all sites and improvements meet high standards for quality and match public need and available resources. Three general types of donations should be addressed: park land, park features or amenities (e.g., a scoreboard), and memorial trees/benches. Donation policies should link to the strategic goals of the City and this Plan. When conflicts and/or questions arise, proposals should meet the intent of the donation policies.

Prior to acceptance, identify the long-term benefits and costs associated with a donation. These may include restrictions made by the donor, eligibility requirements and short- or long-term operations and maintenance costs. Above all, the City should ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs, and that the City can afford the costs (staffing, funding or other required resources), or consider requesting funds/services/resources to cover these costs as part of the donation.

The City should develop and adopt specific policies that codify the conditions for public acceptance of land and facilities to include:

- a) Land (improved or unimproved): The site should be consistent with the policy guidance of this plan and meet design guidelines for the type of park it is intended to be. For each proposed donation, a fiscal impact analysis should be prepared to identify capital costs related to staff time and resources, infrastructure needs (water, sewer, street improvements, park upgrades to achieve a public park development standard and parking) and long-term operating costs (looking at a 10 or 20 year horizon). If an endowment or improvement funds are being provided by the donor, these funds should be factored into the fiscal impact statement. Land should only be accepted if the City is willing to take on the costs associated with the donation.
- b) Unencumbered Land: All donated land should be free from encumbrances (deed restrictions, restrictive easements, public liens) and have official certification stating that the land is clean from environmental contamination. All donated lands should be required to undergo an environmental assessment that results in a clean environmental record.



- c) Memorials: The City should expand on its donation catalogue to direct potential supporters, including those seeking to honor or memorialize a friend or loved one. The catalogue should contain an array of potential options, such as benches and trees, and include a cost methodology for other proposed amenities. Costs should account for City staff time, shipping and/or handling, installation and long-term maintenance. The memorial program should account for adequate staff time for administration. Scottsdale, Arizona provides a simple and effective memorial tree and bench program, highlighted on their website:  
<http://www.scottsdaleaz.gov/parks/memorial>
- d) Donation Catalogue: Sparks should develop an updated donation catalog that includes policies about how City and installation costs and maintenance will be factored into the cost of donated items, such as playgrounds, scoreboards, field lighting, spraygrounds and other features. Donor catalogues can be customized for specific parks (e.g., Sparks Marina Park or Victorian Square), allowing donors to fund individual features of a park of their choice and receive recognition.

### **1-9. Develop procedures for community-built projects in parks.**

Volunteers, non-profits and friends-of groups are moving beyond traditional roles of park adoption or clean-up, to also fund, build and/or maintain amenities and facilities. This trend is increasing, in light of the budget reductions that many cities are facing. Examples of successful community-built facilities include the Bootleg Canyon Trail System in Boulder City, Nevada, the disc golf course and skate park in Bijou Community Park in South Lake Tahoe, California, and Paradise Park Community Garden in Reno, Nevada.

The Sparks Parks & Recreation Department should be prepared to take advantage of community-driven projects by adopting a system to prioritize, fund and manage any proposed community-built projects. At the same time, the City should actively promote the need for volunteers and new ideas to help offset City costs, and encourage the development of a park system that has the widespread support of its users. Steps the Department can take to help guide community-built projects include:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Allocate a small budget to fund minor staff support and review time, equipment and material needs for volunteers, and other miscellaneous costs associated with community built projects.
- b) Create project evaluation criteria that can be used by department staff to weight the relative merits of projects proposed by the public. The criteria should address the following questions:
  - Does the project fulfill an identified need?
  - What are the expected outcomes?
  - Is the project proposer supported by an organized sponsor?
  - Is the location suitable for the project?
  - Will the project displace or hinder other users, partnerships or neighbors?
  - What will the project cost and who will fund it?
  - Who will manage the project?
  - Who will maintain the project and what are the responsibilities of the City?
- c) Provide an online application that allows proposers to submit an idea for a park improvement or new recreational facility. Incorporate the project evaluation criteria on the form to allow proposers to explain how their idea meets the criteria.
- d) Work with local non-profits, such as the Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful, and other public agencies, such as Washoe County and the City of Reno, to help market and/or target volunteer opportunities and needs.
- e) Consider supporting a community-built pilot project to serve as a test for future projects and to build excitement around city parks. As an example, the City could donate land and soil to start a small community garden, similar to the community garden recently developed at Reed High School.

**1-10. Continue to seek sponsorships from the business community, employers and others for parks and recreation programs and projects.**

Sparks' efforts to secure sponsorship of sites and programs should be continued. Successfully cultivated sponsorships for parks and facilities include St. Mary's sponsorship of Alf Sorensen Community Center, the Shadow Mountain Sports Complex, and the Victorian Square sound system. Pricing needs to be set appropriately for the recognition value and ongoing commitment by the City, and sponsorship agreements should be structured to provide recognition for a specific duration of time (e.g., 5 or 10 years).

**1-11. Continue to seek grants.**

The Department has been successful at securing grants, despite the current lack of a staff person specifically assigned to perform this function. Sparks should continue its efforts to seek grants to support community priorities in recreation programming and capital development. It should be noted, however, that most grants require a substantial match by the City, and often provide grant funding in the form of reimbursement. Steps the Department can take to secure more grant funding include:

- a) Include grant writing in the job duties of an identified a person within the Parks & Recreation Department. This may require eliminating another responsibility from this employee's duties so they can re-designate the necessary amount of time.
- b) Reach out to park conservancies and other non-profits to seek the expertise of their volunteers or paid staff as grant writers and administrators. For example, the City of Portland, Oregon routinely works in collaboration with local parks advocacy groups to help secure grant funding for park improvements and maintenance ([www.parklandia.org](http://www.parklandia.org)). Volunteer groups can also help by donating their time to instruct recreation programming.
- c) Identify alternative sources of grant funding to support recreation programming. For example, new healthy living-based grants are an emerging resource to secure program funding while adding variety to program offerings.

## 2. Special Events and Economic Development

### 2-1. Develop the special events program to build Sparks' brand: "It's Happening Here!"

As a means to support and earn its brand, the City of Sparks should look strategically at supporting a mix of special events that attract visitors and enhance the local community.

- a) Sparks should provide, support and/or recruit special events to achieve one or more of the following objectives: 1) to promote tourism (regional economic impacts), 2) to enhance the City's economy, and/or 3) to stimulate civic pride.
- b) The City should consider a mix of events that target national, regional, and/or local audiences. It is helpful to identify a primary marketing audience for most events, although they may ultimately attract a mixed crowd. For example, a sports tournament can be designed to attract teams throughout the region or state, but will likely include some local teams as well. Similarly, Sparks' Hometowne Christmas event is planned primarily for the local community, but might also attract some residents from Reno or Washoe County.
- c) Identify the ways that events of different scales contribute to the three objectives listed above. For example, table 5-1 identifies some key existing events, identifies their scale, and highlights how these events help to achieve one of the objectives.

#### Strategic Direction:

Develop a special events program that includes a mix of national, regional and local events; makes use of the capacity of each existing site in the City; and achieves financial targets or goals for direct revenue (user fees, concessions revenue, program and event fees) or indirect revenue (sales tax, hotel/motel tax, etc.)

*Table 5-1: Examples of Events Contributing to Special Event Objectives*

| <b>Objective: Promote Tourism (Regional Economic Impacts)</b> |                   |   |
|---|-------------------|---|
| Hot August Nights   | National          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracts visitors to Sparks, Reno and other locations within the region</li> <li>• Fills hotel rooms; supports local businesses</li> </ul>   |
| Street Vibrations   | National          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracts visitors to Sparks, Reno and other locations within the region</li> <li>• Fills hotel rooms; supports local businesses</li> <li>• Attracts a demographic with discretionary income</li> <li>• Provides a high profile event to help promote Sparks and the region as a tourism destination</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Objective: Enhance the City's Economy</b>                  |                   |   |
| Triple Crown Softball Tournaments                             | Regional/National | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generates multiple event days, bringing Sparks over its target of 200 event days per year</li> <li>• Has a significant local economic impact (which has been calculated)</li> <li>• Generates business for specific local hotels as part of a "Stay to Play" program</li> <li>• Has a low impact on local residents (no extra City services required, no road closures)</li> </ul> |
| Rib Cook-off  | National          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracts locals and visitors as the City's largest event (more than 500,000 come to downtown)</li> <li>• Provides extra revenue for downtown businesses</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Objective: Stimulate Civic Pride</b>                       |                   |   |
| Christmas Parade  | Local             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves hundreds of volunteers</li> <li>• Is supported by residents, non-profits and businesses</li> <li>• Encourages donations to community groups like E. Mount, Food Bank, Toys for Tots</li> </ul>  |
| Farmers Market  | Local             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is noted as first farmers market in the area</li> <li>• Draws people to downtown</li> <li>• Has transitioned to management by an outside producer to reduce costs to the City</li> </ul>   |
| Walk/Run Events   | Local/Regional    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raises money for local organizations (the Humane Society, Boys and Girls Clubs, Rotary, American Cancer Society and more)</li> <li>• Involves hundreds of volunteers</li> </ul>  |

## **2-2. Support legacy events, cultivate emerging events and recruit new events.**

To cultivate a dynamic events scene, the City needs to support special events of different tenures—the length of time an event has been offered in Sparks. New events are those events that are less than three years old. Emerging events are those between four and nine years old. Legacy events are those that have been going on for 10 years or more. New events have different needs than emerging or legacy events, and Sparks should tailor its level of support to address event needs based on tenure. The goal is to apply resources strategically to retain legacy events, encourage emerging events to stay in Sparks, and attract new events—planning for the possibility new events may someday become legacy events.

- a) Support legacy events with infrastructure by providing a venue and in-kind assistance.
- b) Cultivate emerging events with funding and avenues for sponsorship to ensure their continued growth and maturation.
- c) Recruit new events that meet one or more of the three objectives (as defined in recommendation 2-1), work with available venues, and do not negatively impact infrastructure.

## **2-3. Evaluate each event to make more informed decisions about where to focus local resources to achieve the greatest benefits.**

An Event Evaluation Scorecard (presented in Appendix B) can be used to rate events so staff can determine which events to support, and what level of involvement or support to provide. Use the following criteria to evaluate each existing and proposed event.

- a) Categorize each event according to its scale and targeted audience as national, regional or local.
- b) Identify whether the event is legacy, emerging or new.
- c) Evaluate the event's ability to support the City's brand by defining the number of event days it achieves.
- d) Identify how the event will achieve one or more of the three objectives (as defined in recommendation 2-1).

- e) For events intended to promote tourism or enhance the City’s economy, identify specific performance measures or goals (e.g., number of visitors, hotel nights, known economic impacts in Sparks and region, etc.). After the event, evaluate event performance against the measures.
- f) For events intended to stimulate civic pride, identify specific performance measures or goals (number of visitors, sponsorships, involved volunteers or community groups), and other community benefits (contributes to community stewardships, health and wellness, etc.). After the event, evaluate its performance against these measures.

**2-4. Develop and implement a recruitment plan to achieve the right mix of events, make the best use of venues, and achieve event objectives.**

A recruitment plan is needed to recruit new events and retain and solidify relationships with emerging events. The plan should help identify a strong mix of national, regional and local events, as well as venues to support those events.

- a) Focus recruitment efforts on filling gaps in event days and capacity in event locations (non-summer time periods, unscheduled venues) as well as achieving one or more of the three objectives (as defined in recommendation 2-1).
- b) Set a target to begin recruitment at least 20 months in advance to allow for proper site visits, sponsorship development and event planning. As part of this process, reevaluate the amount of resources devoted to FAM (familiarization) tours to reprioritize more time at conferences and one-on-one site times to recruit events that are a good fit to our city and venues.
- c) Evaluate different sites and venues to explore opportunities to spread out events to new locations, better utilize existing venues, and reduce impacts that are currently concentrated at a few key sites.
- d) Consider pre-qualifying event producers based on the Event Evaluation Scorecard, to ensure that staff time is spent with producers of events that meet Sparks’ objectives and are financially viable (even without TourMark funding).

## **2-5. Further define performance targets for the special events program.**

Further refinement is needed on performance targets for the special events program. The current performance measures include a target to achieve a specific number of event days (targeted at 200 as of 2013), and to recover the costs of staff time related to events from event producers. Sparks should reconsider the 200 event days target, which focuses on quantity rather than the outcomes desired (economic development). Outcome-based targets (economic development measures such as hotel nights or economic impact of visitors) may be more useful and meaningful. More definition on the desired outcomes would allow staff to tailor the recruitment plan to achieve the desired outcomes, including financial targets.

Sparks' current financial target of recovering costs associated with events is consistent with what many other cities do. However, the current practices should be refined. The current pricing structure for events is unwieldy for both staff and producers. Producers are given an estimated cost, then staff time is tallied up and producers are billed after the fact for actual cost. This is time-consuming for staff and is also disliked by producers who are looking for more predictability. In addition, this pricing structure does not account for the wear and tear on capital facilities inflicted by large events. As an example, Portland, Oregon has a detailed fee structure based on event type and also assesses a turf renovation fee on all events that rent portions of Waterfront Park, using a worksheet included as Appendix B in the User's Guide for Major Parks.

In Sparks, the following is needed:

- a) Shift from a quantity target to an outcome-focused target for events, and refine the cost recovery target to provide greater clarity. Define expectations about indirect revenue (sales tax, hotel/motel tax, etc.) as a means of economic development. In addition, more clarity is needed on the overall 100% cost recovery target, including what costs are included and whether there are circumstances when the cost recovery target would be higher or lower. Clarity around special events cost recovery expectations can be provided in Sparks' overall fee philosophy (see Recommendation 1-2).
- b) Identify and track direct costs associated with each event, using results to develop a fee structure based on past data. This should be updated



periodically, and at least annually for a few years to calibrate the fee structure.

- c) Identify the indirect costs to the City associated with event marketing, recruitment, administration and production (e.g., the cost of the Special Events Supervisor position, the budget for advertising/recruitment, etc.).
- d) Identify the capital costs of maintaining special events venues in top tier condition, including costs related to major maintenance resulting from events (e.g, repairs to structures, revegetation, reseeding turf). At minimum, this should be done for Victorian Square and the GERP fields. Other sites should be included if wear and tear issues are occurring. Even if Sparks opts not to charge fees for the use of these public assets, the City should account for these costs for a clearer understanding of the return on investment for different types of events.
- e) Use the cost information on direct costs, indirect costs, and capital costs to develop a pricing structure for events that will achieve the overall financial targets and be consistent with Sparks' fee philosophy (see Recommendation 1-2). This structure should incorporate factors such as the duration of the event, the number of people attending, the scale (national, regional, local), event tenure (legacy, emerging, new), and whether it is commercial or non-commercial in nature.
- f) Define the fee structure and event policies in a clear and easy-to-use guide for event producers. Consider creating a special guide for Victorian Square and possibly Sparks Marina. See the event guides on Portland Parks & Recreation's rentals/events/permits webpage for examples (<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/38280>).

**2-6. For events that stimulate civic pride, produce fewer events and recruit, partner on or serve as an advisor/coordinator on more events.**

The Parks & Recreation Department should focus its efforts on recruiting and encouraging events that stimulate civic pride, whether regional or local scale and continue transitioning out of the producer role, as it successfully did with the Farmer’s Market. The Department should limit its efforts to partner, coordinate or provide in-kind support to local scale events that serve targeted populations and underserved areas of the community.

- a) Define targeted population groups where the Parks & Recreation Department would consider providing more in-kind support. Based on public feedback during this plan update, low income families, West Sparks, and youth merit special attention.
- b) In the fee structure for events, provide very low or no fees for use of parks for local events that stimulate civic pride and meet specific criteria (such as no entry fee, no sale of merchandise, targeted to youth and families) to encourage community organizations to hold events.
- d) For events in areas with target populations, help grow capacity of organizations and volunteers to provide local scale events by providing a venue free of charge and a limited amount of staff in-kind support in the form of guidance and expertise (e.g., marketing support, administrative guidance and coordination.). This assistance should be limited to a one or two time commitment, with Sparks reducing its role to venue provider once there is a transition from new to emerging event.

**2-7. Develop an annual marketing and promotion plan for events.**

Sparks should promote itself as a tourist destination. This includes promoting events held on/in Sparks venues (regardless of who produces them), as well as those events that promote tourism and encourage economic impact in Sparks. Further marketing of events should be driven by the annual marketing and promotion plan, which will be focused on helping events succeed using the resources the City has available. Some key strategies are:

- a) List all events occurring on/in Sparks venues and those that are designed to achieve the events objectives on the City website.
- b) Utilize and expand online and social media promotion to increase local attendance at events (email blasts, Facebook, Twitter, photosharing).
- c) Increase the appeal of local ads to encourage local residents to attend events, especially new events.
- d) Utilize more dollars in “Out of Market” media to encourage more tourism.
- e) Evaluate media buys and align them with best practices for successful events, not just to communicate the Sparks brand.
- f) Promote Sparks as a tourist destination, noting other recreation and event opportunities (either in the City or nearby) to attract visitors and to encourage visitors to use/reserve other City recreation facilities (e.g., pool, picnic shelters, restaurant at Golden Eagle Regional Park). See Recommendation 3-12 regarding improved web presence for the park system.

## **2-8. Prioritize TourMark funding to align with event objectives.**

TourMark funding is the Tourism and Marketing Fund, which collects room tax revenues given to the City by the Reno-Sparks Convention and Visitors Authority (RSCVA).

- a) Give TourMark funding priority to:
  - Events of a mix of tenures (new, emerging and legacy events), focusing strongly on attracting and retaining new and emerging events.
  - Events meeting different objectives (promoting tourism, enhancing the City’s economy, and stimulating civic pride), achieving primary recreation benefits and/or serving targeted groups.
  - Those events with “Stay to play” programs to increase overnight stays in Sparks hotel rooms (thus generating more room tax).
  - Events that fall outside the “summer events season.”

- b) Make City of Sparks recommendations on use of TourMark funding to the TourMark Committee using the Special Events Scorecard in Appendix B and the priorities listed above.
- c) Present the recommendations in a matrix format to help TourMark committee align with the objectives listed in this document.
- d) Consider shifting TourMark funding to the fall of the prior year to align with RSCVA fund allocations.

**2-9. Consider in-kind support for special cases.**

As part of the pricing structure and within the context of the special event financial targets, the City may consider offering in-kind support for some events. This allows the City flexibility if a one-time unique opportunity arises, or a special event is needed to attract a national event that would help market the city as a destination venue.

- a) Consider waiving rental fees on space or all or a portion of City service costs for unique and special cases.
- b) Require TourMark-funded events and those receiving City in-kind support to report data, including:
  - Hotel room block reports
  - Number in attendance
  - Volunteers utilized
  - Marketing information on how much media was used and how many were reached with event information, in-market and out-of-market

**2-10. Coordinate a team of special events support staff.**

Staffing reductions over the last several years has forced the City to rely on trained maintenance staff to provide event services, such as set up and clean up. A team of event support staff would be more cost effective in supporting event services.

- a) Use part time, temporary or seasonal staff to handle event set up, clean up and associated services. Avoid using higher-paid or specialized maintenance staff for these services.

- b) Administer and manage event support staff through the Parks & Recreation Department.
- c) Expand the use of volunteers and community groups where appropriate (such as collecting parking fees) to maximize efficiencies for community events and create opportunities to support local organizations.
- d) Enhance and expand the volunteer database to recruit volunteers for events; develop a schedule of event volunteer opportunities.

### **3. Recreation Programming**

#### **3-1. Manage recreation services to achieve the financial target for the entire recreation program.**

As noted earlier in the section on funding, the cost recovery target for recreation services should be set for the entire recreation program and major program categories, not for each individual program offered. This means that Sparks will offer a portfolio of programs, some low cost or perhaps even free that are balanced with other programs that fully recover costs or generate revenue above their cost.

#### **Strategic Direction:**

Offer recreation programs and services that respond to residents' needs, strengthening families, enhancing community cohesiveness and encouraging healthy lifestyles.

#### **3-2. Focus on the outcomes most valued by Sparks residents when making recreation programming decisions.**

Sparks residents prioritized youth development, supporting at-risk populations (e.g., low income children and families, seniors, people with special needs), and enhancing community and neighborhood safety through recreation programming.

#### **3-3. Use data to make programming decisions**

Use cost and revenue data, user feedback data and participation rates to inform programming decisions. The scorecard for program evaluation included in Appendix B is a tool for evaluating individual programs. The RecTrac system provides a wealth of data, and has the capability of producing more than 600 standard reports. Sparks staff should identify key reports that meet their needs using this readily available data and integrate reporting into the program decision-making process.

**3-4. Develop mobile/flexible service delivery models that are less tied to City-owned buildings.**

Sparks has many parks, but few sites that it actively programs. To achieve greater community benefit from recreation programs, Sparks should focus on programming outdoors in parks and indoors in other spaces (e.g., in schools or empty storefronts) and including options such as mobile playground programs and fitness boot camps. Though these options require added funding, they can help expand the distribution and access of programming. As an example, the Town of Apple Valley, California, secured a county public health grant to promote health and active living. The funding allowed the Town to send staff, a customized mobile recreation van, and portable recreation equipment to schools, parks and events to offer healthy living programs and recreation activities throughout the community.

**3-5. Continue revenue streams from market-based programs.**

Sparks has been focusing on programs that recover costs, and should continue to develop and offer market-based programs that can generate revenue. Programs such as before and after school programs, preschool, fitness classes (e.g., Zumba) and adult sports should be structured to generate cost recovery and potentially generate additional revenue. Active use of the scholarship program will provide opportunities for low income individuals and families to participate, while still generating revenue from those who can afford to pay.

**3-6. Phase out program areas well-served by other entities, and avoid initiating programs in these areas.**

Some program areas are well-served by other providers, whether public, private or non-profit. For example, many private providers offer fitness equipment in health club settings. There are also fitness rooms at some workplaces and housing developments. Given the wealth of opportunities, Sparks could phase out its fitness rooms, unless there is a business plan/revenue generating function the fitness rooms are achieving.

**3-7. Focus health and wellness programming on sports, group fitness and aquatics.**

Sparks has a niche in sports, is known for its aquatics programming and has a park system that would support a variety of group fitness programs, classes and activities (boot camps, group exercise classes, walking groups). To this end, the City is already developing a park permit to allow local businesses to conduct private business in public parks.

**3-8. Continue to partner with the Washoe County School District to support programs.**

In addition, update the joint use agreement, if feasible, to expand opportunities for facility use.

**3-9. Recruit recreation user groups (bike groups, hiking groups, sports organizations) to develop recreation events and programs.**

Sparks can partner with these organizations, providing space for them to host programs. They bring expertise, equipment and knowledge, which they are often willing to share with the community if the City can facilitate the program logistics, scheduling and publicity.

**3-10 Further refine and develop culturally and demographically targeted programming options**

Sparks has evolved over the past fifteen years. The City has developed its Leisure Without Limits programming targeted at people with special needs and is known regionally for its efforts in this area. Programming should be developed to serve other population groups identified as high priority by City Council and Sparks residents, including Latino/Hispanic residents, at-risk families, and youth. While the senior population is growing, they will continue to be served by Washoe County's senior-only programs. To broaden senior opportunities, the Parks & Recreation Department can structure multi-generational programs and events, including recreation and fitness programs, to accommodate older adults and seniors.



**3-11. Continue to identify potential administrative cost savings to reduce recreation administrative costs.**

Reevaluate policies such as offering walk-in registration (residents indicate they would support reducing hours if it saved money) and practices such as printing an Activity Guide to determine if the benefit is worth the cost to the overall recreation program.

**3-12. Increase the web presence and user-friendliness of the park system information on the Sparks website.**

Self-directed recreation within the park system is an important aspect of recreation in Sparks. Increased smart phone use by both residents and visitors means that people expect to find information about the parks and facilities easily online and to be able to use online mapping services or GPS to navigate to their locations. Though Sparks has a city map and information about each park's facilities on its website, the user experience and usefulness of this information can be greatly improved.

- a) Make sure that all parks are searchable using online mapping services (Google, Bing). Physical addresses should be provided for each site.
- b) Replace the map on the Sparks website with a Google maps widget or other interactive online map.
- c) Update the Sparks, Nevada Wikipedia entry to include parks, recreation and events. Key parks (GERP, Sparks Marina, Rock Park, Victorian Square) that visitors may want to find should be listed. Key events and programs should also be listed.

## 4. Maintenance and Improvements

### 4-1. Develop a detailed list of assets at each park site and evaluate asset condition annually.

This initiative is important for the long-term management of the Sparks park system. Solid inventories already exist, and facility life-cycles are known, but conditions should be further detailed and reported for each site. Each year, during the winter season, staff should rate the condition of each asset based on a simple scale of 1-3 or 1-4. This should be tracked over time. With this information, Sparks can plan its operational workload more effectively, reduce costly crisis response when an asset unexpectedly fails, and budget for repairs and upgrades. The asset inventory can also be used with the maintenance management plan to assign maintenance frequencies.

#### Strategic Direction:

Maintain and renew parks, recreation facilities, and open space areas to protect existing investments, enhance user safety and accessibility, support recreation programs and events, maximize efficiency and protect revenue-generating resources for the long-term.

### 4-2. Create and fund an asset preservation program for parks and recreation.

An asset management program will help the City achieve the lowest lifecycle cost of its parks and recreation facilities. An asset preservation program involves designation of a budget line item to fund annual preventive maintenance and reinvestment in already developed sites to maintain their functionality and prolong their life. Sparks, like most cities, has not been funding asset preservation adequately.

Asset preservation funding levels are typically based on a percentage of the total replacement value of the assets. For example, the City of Seattle’s asset preservation program recommends a target of 1% of the replacement value for buildings and 0.5% of the replacement value for “non-buildings” (all other assets, including parks). Some communities jumpstart asset preservation with a tax measure or by establishing a surcharge on user fees and charges (e.g., 5% of

total cost or \$1 per transaction). It is more important to commit to any level of asset preservation funding than to wait to define the optimum level.

- a) As part of this effort, begin developing asset replacement schedules, starting with the biggest ticket items (e.g., reinvestments to Victorian Square) and as part of the process for any park capital improvement. In addition, develop and keep current a prioritized list of deferred maintenance projects.
- b) At Golden Eagle Regional Park—where revenues from all rentals, advertising, sponsorships, and concessions must be reinvested at the site—clarify what portion should support current operations/maintenance and small projects versus what should be set aside to afford the future cost of field replacement. If all of these funds are used to support or increase maintenance staff, there will be insufficient funds available to replace the synthetic turf at the end of its lifecycle.
- c) Minimize event impacts to parks and facilities, and maintain and sustain event areas and infrastructure for long-term use.
- d) Expand the sites considered for event use. This may include targeting different types of events that could make use of existing sites (e.g., a trail run at Wedekind Regional Park or a walking event at GERP) or providing strategic investments to make sites more usable for events (e.g., seeking additional parking to expand the use potential of Whitewater Park).
- e) Locate new or replacement facilities strategically to allow more parks to host events. Avoid placing too many event-supporting amenities and facilities at sites such as the Sparks Marina to spread out impacts, avoid site overuse, and keep the park available for use by the general public. In addition, schedule events to allow time for field rest and/or landscape regeneration.
- f) Include the cost of asset repair and replacement in event fees to offset wear and tear and fund regular refreshment/replacement at the site.

#### **4-3. Continue to base capital improvement decisions on the long-term operational costs.**

During project planning and design, the City should continue to consider lifetime projects costs – capital costs plus operating and maintenance costs –

when making decisions. Decisions made during the project design phase have significant impacts on the cost and level of effort required to maintain parks. Since capital project funding is more readily available than operations funding, project design decisions should factor in impacts on subsequent operations and maintenance. The focus should be on building high quality projects the first time so there is a longer lifecycle, less repair and less maintenance needed. For example, spending additional money on soil preparation up front can greatly reduce the lifetime maintenance cost of a turf area.

#### **4-4. Establish tiered maintenance classifications, with funding level targets for each classification.**

A tiered maintenance classification system will help Sparks focus its limited financial resources (Table 5-2). Recommended classifications are:

- a) Revenue generating parks/facilities. This classification includes those sites that attract special events or generate significant revenue for the City, such as Sparks Marina Park, Victorian Square, GERP, and Rock Park. This tier should receive the highest level of care to ensure the continued marketability and appeal of the sites.
- b) High visitation/highly programmed parks. High visitation and highly programmed sites are those that provide the greatest community benefit, by serving more community members or providing important community services. This tier includes Deer Park, Recreation Park/Recreation Center, Alf Sorensen Community Center, the riverfront parks and similar sites.
- c) Standard parks. The remaining developed parks should be assigned to this tier, and should receive a basic level of maintenance.
- d) Natural areas. Parks within this maintenance tier include Wedekind Regional Park and the greenbelts. Maintenance activities should be focused on noxious weed abatement, fire prevention and similar activities.
- e) Beautification areas. The maintenance level for beautification levels should be determined based on the level of investment City Council would like to make to continue these visual amenities. Further prioritization or tiering of beautification areas may be needed to focus efforts in certain corridors.

**4-5. Develop a comprehensive list of maintenance, management and operational tasks and clarify responsibilities for each.**

Convene a cross-departmental working group to identify all tasks associated with operation, maintenance and improvement of the park and recreation system. This includes tasks such as field preparation and event support services, some of which are currently grouped with maintenance tasks. Clarify and/or assign responsibilities for each task so that all those involved in the operation and stewardship of the parks and recreation system have a common understanding.

**4-6. Adopt and implement updated park design guidelines and policies.**

New Park Development Guidelines are presented in Appendix C. In addition to addressing size, location and site configuration, the updated guidelines address design programming, park amenities, site access and street frontages. Sparks should reference these park guidelines and the park standards proposed in this Plan when developing and finalizing developer handbooks and master plans for new park development and renovation. In addition, overall design policies are needed, including:

- a) Develop master plans for all community, regional and special use parks prior to making any improvements. Master plans should define the design program, take into consideration the business plan for the site, and spell out phasing that is consistent with business plan targets.
- b) Reevaluate construction standards to ensure that materials, equipment and site furnishings are consistent and meet the high standards expected by the City and the public.
- c) Design for flexibility and multiple uses.
- d) Design for maintenance efficiencies. For example, use turf strategically only where it serves a recreation purpose and design pathways and curbing to reduce maintenance issues, such as informally created walking and biking paths where people cut across turf or landscaped areas.

**4-7. Adopt and implement a consistent policy for street beautification projects.**

The 1997 Plan identified beautification areas as an issue due to inconsistency around what was accepted by the City and what was not, and recommended that a policy be adopted to establish a consistent approach city-wide. Specific recommendations were provided, and are reiterated in this 2013 update because the same inconsistencies still exist with the street beautification program.

- a) Determine the level of design, quality of development and amount of maintenance based on the location and visibility of each beautification area.
- b) Select sites larger than 10,000 square feet. Only consider smaller sites when unique conditions exist and when the increased per unit maintenance cost can be justified.
- c) Design beautification areas to reflect ease of maintenance. The planting of annuals and other high maintenance plant materials (including turf) should be discouraged. The use of drought tolerant plant materials should be encouraged.
- d) Encourage adoption of beautification areas by neighborhood groups and community organizations.
- e) Encourage the use of materials that are not plants, such as river rock, pavers, and sculpture.
- f) Consider vandalism when designing beautification areas, and incorporate vandalism-resistant materials.
- g) As previously noted, assign street beautification maintenance its own budget.

#### 4-8. Make improvements to existing parks in the system as recommended in this Plan.

Table 5-2 identifies recommendations for each existing site, which are also discussed in Chapter 6. The Capital Projects table includes the following types of projects to carry out at existing parks:

- a) **Master Planning/Business Planning:** Prior to any new capital improvements, master plans or updated master plans should be prepared for large parks (most community parks) and specialty sites intended to serve as event venues. Business plans should be developed for all major facilities (recreation centers, sports complexes) and event venues, and should be used to guide master plans and capital improvements at these sites.
- b) **Design and Construction Documents:** Every major capital development or major maintenance reinvestment should include design development and construction documents.
- c) **New Development:** This category includes the permitting and construction of new parks, by the City or by developers in accordance with City standards.
- d) **Major Renovation:** This category includes redevelopment of portions of or the entirety of new parks to refresh their ability to meet community needs or achieve business plan targets.
- e) **Major Maintenance and Reinvestment:** All parks require major maintenance and reinvestment in assets on a cyclical basis (e.g., replacing playgrounds on a 10-year cycle, replacing artificial turf, reroofing structures). However, this does not mean simply replacing each facility in its location without considering whether it is still needed or used, or whether the feature is sited appropriately.
- f) **Transfer:** Some sites do not serve recreation uses, have features that are no longer useful or duplicative of other nearby sites, or include facilities that could best be operated by other entities. Transfer means shifting operational responsibility, removing a feature, or moving the site out of the inventory of

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parcs and recreation facilities. It may mean simplifying elements and landscaping at the site so it can be maintained as a lower priority beautification area. These areas are not inventoried as park land. Notes are provided about the reason for the divestment or transfer recommendation.



Table 5-2: Recommended Projects and Maintenance Levels in Existing Parks

| PARK CLASSIFICATION            | PARK ACRES |                  | CAPITAL PROJECT TYPE              |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          | MAINTENANCE CLASSIFICATION |
|--------------------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
|                                | Developed  | Total Park Acres | Master Planning/Business Planning | Design and Construction Documents | New Development | Major Renovation | Major Maintenance and Reinvestment | Transfer |                            |
| <b>Regional Park (RP)</b>      |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Golden Eagle Regional Park     | 100.0      | 447.8            |                                   |                                   |                 | •                |                                    |          | Revenue-Generating         |
| Wedekind Regional Park         | 250.0      | 270.4            |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Natural Area               |
| <b>Community Parks (CP)</b>    |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Pah Rah Mountain Park          | 13.1       | 16.5             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| <b>Neighborhood Parks (NP)</b> |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Aimone Park                    | 3.5        | 3.6              |                                   | •                                 |                 | •                | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Antelope Ridge Park            | 2.9        | 3.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Bitterbrush Park               | 2.0        | 2.6              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Bodega Park                    | 1.6        | 2.4              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Burgess Park                   | 5.7        | 6.1              |                                   | •                                 |                 | •                |                                    |          | Standard                   |
| Canyon Hills Park              | 1.3        | 3.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Church Park                    | 2.3        | 2.3              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Coyote Springs Park            | 0.6        | 0.6              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Del Cobre Park                 | 4.4        | 5.1              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Jacinto Park                   | 2.7        | 3.4              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Kestrel Park                   | 2.7        | 2.7              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Les Hicks Jr Park              | 1.7        | 1.8              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Longford Park                  | 4.0        | 4.3              |                                   | •                                 |                 | •                | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Maldonado Park                 | 17.7       | 25.5             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Oppio Park                     | 5.2        | 5.2              |                                   | •                                 |                 | •                |                                    |          | Standard                   |
| Pagni Ranch Park               | 5.0        | 5.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Pelican Park                   | 4.0        | 4.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Poulakidas Park                | 3.1        | 3.5              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Red Hawk Park                  | 1.0        | 1.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Sage Canyon Park               | 2.7        | 12.9             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Shelly Park                    | 3.2        | 4.1              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Tumbleweed Trails Park         | 2.6        | 3.3              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Van Meter Park                 | 2.0        | 2.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Village Green Park             | 1.6        | 1.6              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Vista View Park                | 2.0        | 2.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Willowcreek Park               | 4.7        | 5.3              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Woodtrail Park                 | 2.3        | 2.6              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |

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Table 5-2: Recommended Projects and Maintenance Levels in Existing Parks (continued)

| PARK CLASSIFICATION                            | PARK ACRES |                  | CAPITAL PROJECT TYPE              |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          | MAINTENANCE CLASSIFICATION |
|--|------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|
|  | Developed  | Total Park Acres | Master Planning/Business Planning | Design and Construction Documents | New Development | Major Renovation | Major Maintenance and Reinvestment | Transfer |                            |
| <b>Pocket Parks (PP)</b>                       |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Bandstand Park                                 | 0.3        | 0.3              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    | •        | Beautification Area        |
| Lillard Park                                   | 0.4        | 0.6              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    | •        | Beautification Area        |
| Sparks Memorial Park                           | 0.5        | 0.5              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Wildcreek Park                                 | 0.5        | 20.8             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    | •        | Decommission               |
| <b>Special Use Parks (SU)</b>                  |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Alf Sorensen Community Center                  | 2.2        | 2.2              | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Revenue-Generating         |
| Ardmore Park/Larry D. Johnson Community Center | 3.3        | 3.7              | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Deer Park                                      | 3.0        | 3.3              | •                                 | •                                 |                 |                  | •                                  |          | High Visitation            |
| Gandolfo Rodeo Arena                           | 15.0       | 40.6             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    | •        | N/A                        |
| Recreation Park/Recreation Center              | 4.9        | 5.4              | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  | •        | High Visitation            |
| Rose Garden Park                               | 1.4        | 1.4              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    | •        | Beautification Area        |
| Sparks Senior Center                           | 1.0        | 1.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  | •        | Standard                   |
| Shadow Mountain Sports Complex                 | 24.4       | 49.5             | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | High Visitation            |
| Sparks Marina Park                             | 32.2       | 109.0            | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Revenue-Generating         |
| Victorian Square (including amphitheater)      | -          | 30.0             | •                                 | •                                 |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Revenue-Generating         |
| <b>Riverfront Parks (RFP)</b>                  |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Cottonwood Park                                | 3.0        | 6.0              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Gateway Park                                   | 0.6        | 4.1              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Glendale Park                                  | 1.9        | 10.3             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Standard                   |
| Rock Park                                      | 2.4        | 4.5              | •                                 |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  | •        | High Visitation            |
| <b>Greenbelts (GB)</b>                         |            |                  |                                   |                                   |                 |                  |                                    |          |                            |
| Eastland Hills Greenbelt                       | 3.3        | 3.3              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Natural Area               |
| Sparks Boulevard Greenbelt                     | 14.2       | 14.2             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Natural Area               |
| Truckee River Greenbelt                        | 37.4       | 37.4             |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Natural Area               |
| Fisherman's Park                               | 5.4        | 5.4              |                                   |                                   |                 |                  | •                                  |          | Natural Area               |

<sup>1</sup>The total park acreage includes the entire park parcel that is owned by the City of Sparks. (Source: Sparks GIS and Parks & Recreation Department)

## 5. Collaboration and Partnerships

### 5-1. Strengthen communication and collaboration among City departments to support parks and recreation.

#### Strategic Direction:

Continue to foster community partnerships, in-kind support, donations and volunteers.

Sparks has shifted the way parks and recreation services are provided and supported, and ongoing shifts are likely as part of the continuing effort to provide City services in the most efficient manner. This means that several departments engage with parks and recreation services, in addition to the Parks & Recreation Department. This Plan is intended to provide strategic focus to help all departments prioritize efforts related to parks and recreation.

Specific strategies to strengthen collaboration include:

- a) Coordinate efforts to market special events and build the City's brand between Public Information/Management Services and the Parks & Recreation Department.
- b) To implement the Parks and Open Space System recommendation related to customer service, establish communication protocols for maintenance requests to ensure that program staff can anticipate when a maintenance issue will be resolved (and can plan around this timeline). Because maintenance will be the responsibility of different departments, this will also help ensure that needed maintenance is addressed as a priority.
- c) Define when investment in a park constitutes a capital improvement (e.g., infrastructure development, replacement, or improvements with a minimum cost of \$10,000) to distinguish these from maintenance projects. This will clarify responsibility and ensure that park capital improvements follow established City procedures. Clarify the role of the Parks Development & Operations Manager in this process.
- d) Coordinate programming and event support staff, tasks and funding to support the efforts of Parks & Recreation Department.

**5-2. Strengthen volunteer opportunities and partnerships with local residents and non-profit community groups to enhance the City's parks, events, and programs.**

Sparks has many residents and organizations who are interested in helping the community. Volunteers already contribute to many events and programs, and this plan recommends a number of ways to expand volunteer and non-profit engagement with parks and recreation. A more robust volunteer recruitment and management structure is needed to achieve these recommendations.

- a) Continue to emphasize community involvement by engaging individuals, groups, agencies and businesses in the planning, design, maintenance, operation and programming of parks and facilities.
- b) Create a part-time position for a volunteer coordinator or assign staff responsibilities to expand volunteer recruitment efforts.
- c) Develop a volunteer database (contact information for residents, businesses and groups who have supported events, programs and maintenance) to help recruit volunteers for future opportunities. Expand on the volunteer database already initiated for special events.
- d) Expand the role of Parks and Recreation Commissioners to become a catalyst for community engagement, promote volunteerism and serve as ambassadors for parks and recreation.
- e) Hold an annual volunteer party that showcases new or unique volunteer effort, especially volunteer-built or maintained park improvements, to celebrate the work of volunteers and support future and on-going involvement.

**5-3. Foster links to partners and other service providers so that programs beyond the purview of the City's priority services are seen as part of the community service network.**

There are many entities involved with parks and recreation in Sparks and in the larger Reno/Sparks region. People regularly cross boundaries to access parks and recreation services. Though Sparks should not try to fill the role as a

regional clearinghouse/coordinator, the Parks & Recreation Department should foster awareness of other providers who are meeting needs in Sparks.

- a) Encourage non-profits and community recreation providers to use the 211 resource referral line to share information and communicate recreation opportunities and services to residents.
- b) Expand contact information or the resource/referral list of other providers noted in the Parks & Recreation Activity Guide.
- c) Enhance collaboration and/or support best practices by working with regional partners to convene a partners' forum once a year. Consider meeting early fall/winter to cycle into the budget season.

## 6. Parks and Open Space System

### 6-1. Revise the park land standards adopted in 1997, and incorporate these into the Comprehensive Plan update.

**Strategic Direction:**  
 Provide an accessible, safe and attractive park and recreation system that responds to changing demographics and meets community needs.

This plan proposes new park standards to move parks and recreation services toward a system more focused on park function (local-serving and specialty parks) rather than on classification.

- a) Adopt the revised park land standards presented in this Plan (Table 5.3).
- b) Calculate the level of service standard based on the total park acreage, not on the “developed park acreage.”
- c) South of Los Altos Parkway, strive to provide neighborhood parks within ½ mile walking distance of residents. See the 2009 Needs Assessment for the network methodology of measuring distance to parks.
- d) North of Los Altos Parkway, strive to provide new community parks within 1 mile of residents. Note: Proposed new neighborhood parks that have already been platted will be developed according to the guidelines under which they were approved.

Table 5-3: Revised Park Land Standards

| Park Function | Park Classifications  | Recommended Standard     |
|---------------|---|--------------------------|
| Local-Serving | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Parks</li> <li>• Neighborhood Parks</li> </ul>                           | 2.0 acres/1,000          |
| Specialty     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional Parks</li> <li>• Special Use Parks</li> <li>• Riverfront Parks</li> </ul> | 12.0 acres/1,000         |
|               |   | 14.0 acres/1,000 overall |

**6-2. Revise the approach for providing future parks, aiming for fewer parks that are larger, support more recreation, and are more efficient to maintain.**

When the 1997 Plan was adopted, Sparks had been growing rapidly. The City needed to focus on providing new parks to keep up with the anticipated population growth in expansion areas in north and east Sparks. As a result, the 1997 Plan proposed a neighborhood-based park system, with parks distributed to provide recreation opportunities within a ½-mile travel distance in developing residential areas.

Since 1997 economic conditions and recreation preferences have shifted dramatically nationally, regionally and locally. Sparks residents now place a higher priority on larger parks with more recreation opportunities, including active recreation experiences that contribute to health and fitness. In addition, the parks maintenance budget has become severely constrained. Larger parks are more efficient to maintain on a cost-per-acre basis than smaller pocket parks and neighborhood parks.

For these reasons, Sparks should revise its approach to providing new parks in developing residential areas. The strategy should be to secure larger parks (e.g., the scale of Pah Rah Park, the only community park in Sparks today), but fewer sites. In addition, the recreation opportunities provided by Washoe County's Lazy 5 Regional Park should be taken into consideration, given the role that site plays in serving north Sparks.

- a) Continue to work with developers to establish new parks in developing residential areas, but focus on larger community-scale parks of 10 to 20 acres in size. Reflect this approach and reference the new Park Development Guidelines (Appendix C) in any newly adopted developer handbooks.
- b) Pursue a mix of neighborhood and community parks in developing areas, as noted in Table 5.4. Where larger consolidated community parks are recommended, strive to provide parks of 10-20 acres. Where the acreage for developer-provided parks has already been adopted, the consolidated parks should have the combined acreage that would have been provided through separate neighborhood parks (provided that developer handbooks can be amended to reflect these community priorities; see 6-2 c below).

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- c) Investigate options to finalize or amend the relevant developer handbooks to reflect the revised Park Development Guidelines (Appendix C) and the shift to fewer, larger parks. Discuss with each developer and any affected residents the community priorities that are driving these changes, since handbook amendments are contingent on a revised agreement between the City and developer with consideration (as per NRS 278A.380-420) of the interests of any residents of the planned development. In development areas with existing residents, this may involve holding a community meeting or other forms of outreach to illustrate and discuss how park consolidation “runs in favor” of the residents of the planned unit residential development.
- d) Avoid acquiring new pocket parks, because of their limited recreation value and high maintenance costs. If developers opt to provide small parks within their subdivisions, they should not receive park credit for these.
- e) Enhance access to new parks by developing them along bike, trail and transit routes, with access by arterial or collector streets.
- f) Avoid accepting neighborhood parks from Homeowner’s Associations that do not meet park design standards and guidelines or contribute to the recreation goals outlined in this plan.
- g) Update the City code and Comprehensive Plan to reflect the new guidelines for travel distances (service ratio) and park size.



Table 5-4: Recommendations for Larger Future Parks

| Parks as Originally Planned    | Preferred Approach to Park Provision <sup>1</sup>   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Eagle Canyon Future Park #1    | Target one community park (CP1) central to this geographic area. Revise handbooks.  |
| Eagle Canyon Future Park #2    |   |
| Eagle Canyon Future Park #3    |   |
| Pioneer Meadows Future Park #1 | No change   |
| Silverton Shores Future Park   | No change   |
| Foothills Future Park #1       | No change   |
| Foothills Future Park #2       | No change   |
| Kiley Future Park #1           | Target one community park (CP3) in the southern part of this area, away from Lazy 5 Park                                    |
| Kiley Future Park #2           |   |
| Pioneer Meadows Future Park #2 | Target one community park (CP4) central to this area. Initiate neighbor engagement process. If successful, revise handbook. |
| Pioneer Meadows Future Park #3 |   |
| Stonebrook Future Park #1      | Target one community park (CP2). Revise handbook.   |
| Stonebrook Future Park #2      |   |

<sup>1</sup>The Community Park number (e.g., CP1) corresponds to the map on page 79.

### 6-3. Revise the level of service approach for recreation facilities.

The 1997 Plan included level of service standards for recreation facilities. In 2009, a Needs Assessment Analysis compared these standards to existing service levels, recognizing that the existing standards could not be carried forward. Generally speaking, the 1997 facility standards do not take into account participation trends, emerging sports and activities, and the quality, condition and location of facilities. Standards also do not take into account the City's need for a business approach for providing recreation facilities and services, or the community's willingness to pay for facility development and operation. Consequently, this plan proposes a revision to the City's service approach for recreation facilities.

- a) Eliminate level of service standards for recreation facilities from the Comprehensive Plan. Instead, create a goal to address facility provision through design and development that emphasizes variety, quality and recreation value.
- b) Use the following guidelines for sports fields, to provide direction on identifying the right mix when planning new parks and making park improvements (Table 5.5). Take into account facilities available from other providers, including jointly developed sports fields with the Washoe County School District and WCSD fields maintained by the City of Sparks. (These joint-use fields are noted in Appendix A, Table A-2.)

*Table 5-5: Sport Field Guidelines*

| Facility Type           | Guideline              | Existing Level of Service <sup>1</sup> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Baseball fields         | 1 field/ 10,500 people | 1 field/8,335 people                   |
| Softball fields         | 1 field/ 7,500 people  | 1 field/7,640 people                   |
| Youth ball fields       | 1 field/ 11,000 people | 1 field /11,461 people                 |
| Soccer/multi-use fields | 1 field/4,600 people   | 1 field /18,337 people                 |

<sup>1</sup> Existing level of service based on 2009 Needs Assessment

- c) Consider all options to provide soccer/multi-use sport fields within the McCarran Loop for easy access and to respond to changing demographics in this section of town. Implementing the sport field guidelines should take into account joint use facilities with the WCSD, but also address needs within older parks.
- d) Eliminate numerical standards or guidelines for outdoor tennis courts, volleyball courts and basketball courts. These features are a potential design program element suitable for many park classifications and are addressed in design guidelines (Appendix C).
- e) Eliminate numerical standards for gymnasiums and aquatic facilities. Provision of these facilities should be determined based on a business plan, since they are costly to build and to operate.

**6-4. Prioritize trail development, which serves a greater number of people per dollar invested, meets the need for safe places for walking and bicycling, and can enhance access to parks and recreation facilities.**

Trail-related activities (e.g., walking, biking, running and dog walking) are among the most popular recreation activities regionally and nationally, because of the frequency people participate and the variety of participants that engage in trail-related activities. For this reason, Sparks should strive to prioritize trail development both inside parks and between parks and other key destinations.

- a) Provide trail loops in existing parks where feasible.
- b) Connect future parks in residential areas to schools, business nodes and other important community facilities via trails.
- c) Collaborate with regional partners on development and management of the regional trail system.
- d) Prioritize missing links in trail system connectivity, and advocate for street crossings, sidewalks and other improvements that create better pedestrian access to neighborhood parks.

**6-5. Secure open space where trail connections are needed or where a unique feature or highly valued visual or natural resource is located.**

Given limited funding for parks and recreation, open space and beautification areas are not high community priorities among residents—for maintenance or for acquisition. Sparks should only take ownership of open space where trail connections are needed or where there is a unique natural resource that cannot be protected by another entity.

- a) Acquire open space to protect unique resources, such as the river corridor.
- b) Acquire linear corridors (land or easements) to fill in gaps in the trail connectivity and connect to the regional trail system.
- c) Avoid acquiring or accepting other open space, medians, street rights of way or beautification areas in the city

**6-6. Transition underperforming sites to alternative management structures to improve operational and fiscal efficiency.**

During the development of this Plan, Sparks was in the process of finalizing an agreement to transfer operation of Gandolfo Rodeo Arena to the rodeo association. This arrangement can serve as a model for other sites, which may be better operated by entities such as non-profits, other governmental agencies or local organizations. However, the City will want to continue its investment or partnership in facilities that are successfully addressing key community needs.

- a) Continue the arrangement with the County to operate the Sparks Senior Center.
- b) Seek an alternative arrangement for the Larry D. Johnson Community Center building (LDJ). Currently, Sparks residents get very limited recreation value from this facility, and it is costly to keep open. Consider options that will allow the Boys and Girls Club of Truckee Meadows to continue to operate its club there. For example, consider moving the Parks & Recreation Department offices from their current location to the first floor of the Larry D. Johnson Community Center. LDJ is newer, more energy efficient and more centrally located in the city. Once the Richards Way office is empty, this building should be demolished, due its deteriorating condition.

**6-7. Update customer service policies and procedures**

Customer service policies and procedures should be updated to include all parks and recreation services (recreation programs, events and maintenance of parks and facilities).

- a) Institute procedures and methods for collecting user feedback (evaluation forms for recreation classes, email address for providing feedback).
- b) Because responsibility for parks and recreation services is split amongst departments, identify specific procedures to communicate maintenance-related feedback to other departments, including standards for response time.

**6-8. Prioritize facility improvements and park enhancements that support plan objectives.**

When developing the parks capital improvement plan, use the prioritization criteria as described in Chapter 6.



## 6. Implementation Strategy

The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan should be used to guide the evolution of the park system, charting the course for future park and recreation investments and operations. The tools in this chapter should be used in decision-making during the long-term timeline for plan implementation. The recommended projects presented in this Plan, summarized in Appendix D, represent an ongoing list that requires periodic updates and revisions to take into account changing community needs and funding availability, especially as economic circumstances begin to improve in the future. These capital projects will ultimately be considered for the City's five-year Capital Improvement Program.

This chapter describes a process to develop the annual work programs that will be used to implement the recommendations of this Plan. Actions for inclusion in the 2014 work plan are summarized to provide initial direction. In addition, Appendix E: Potential Funding Sources provides additional detail on funding sources for capital improvements and operations.

### Capital Projects

The recommendations for parks and facilities in Sparks include projects that will be carried out over a long period of time, based in part on future community growth and development. Figure 6.1 depicts the proposed park system, including recommendations for new and existing parks. These recommendations are summarized in a Capital

Projects List, presented in Appendix D. In that appendix, Table D-1 notes all capital projects by park type, associated capital costs, and anticipated costs associated with grounds maintenance.

Following the map, Tables 6.1 and 6.2 summarize the recommended capital project costs and annual maintenance cost first for local parks and then for specialty parks. Though the total costs might seem out of the reach of the City's resources today, the projects will occur at over a period of many years. The City's past success at putting together deals for completing major projects, such as the Golden Eagle Regional Park and Sparks Marina Park, exemplifies the potential to build the future system.

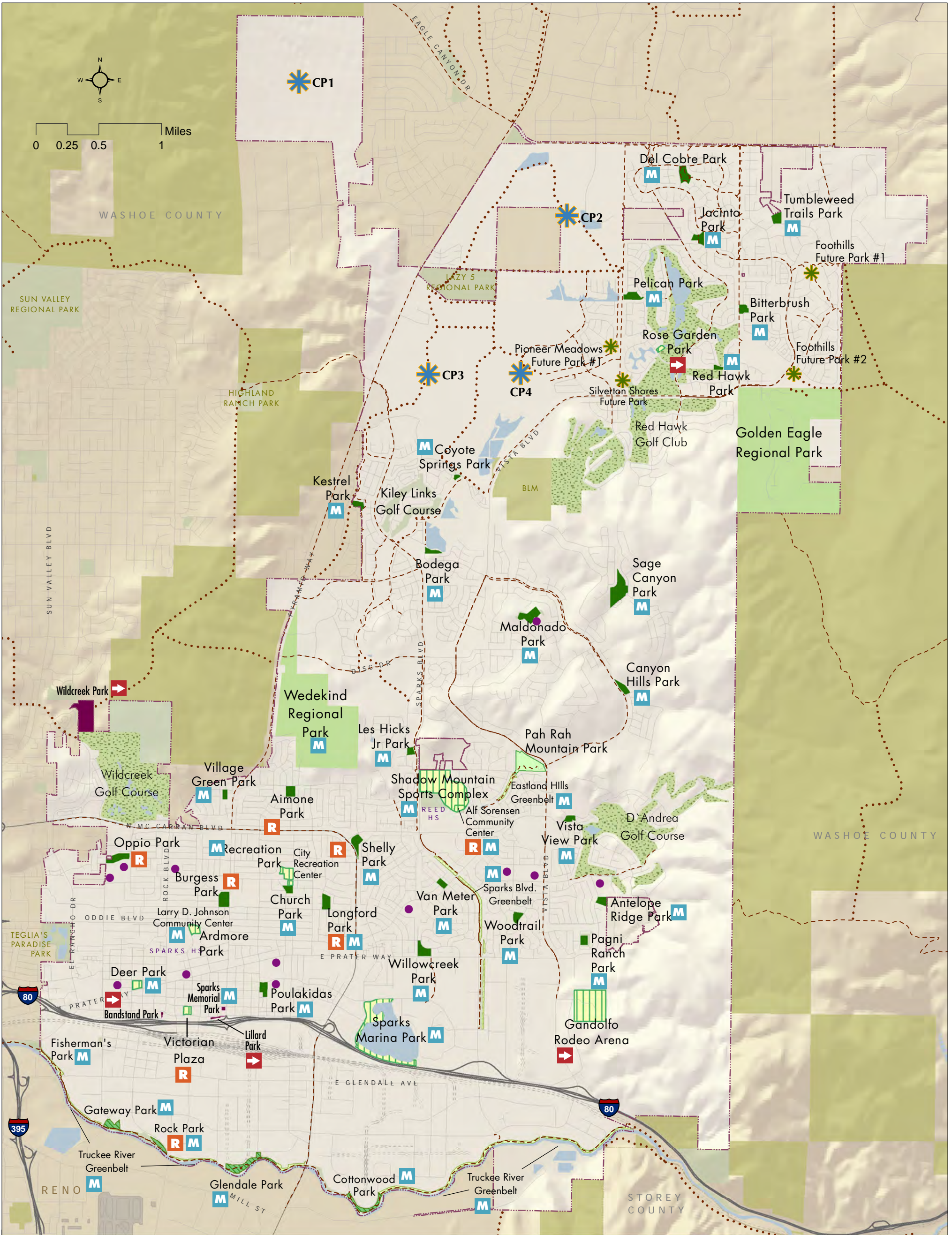
### **COST MODEL**

Appendix D presents planning level costs for capital projects and maintenance, which have been calculated using spreadsheet formulas to estimate the total costs by site and across the system. The inputs to this model are shown in Tables D-2 and D-3. The cost model relies on a series of assumptions about the cost of building, maintaining and renewing the City's parks and facilities. The design of this model is intentionally flexible, to allow for refinement of the cost assumptions and project elements as the plan is implemented. These costs reflect general estimates for the purposes of budgeting and considering which projects should move forward into the city-wide CIP. As master plans and construction documents are developed with more detailed cost estimates, the project costs should be updated with this information.

### **LOCAL PARK PROJECTS**

Community members place a high priority on reinvesting in local parks, including neighborhood parks, community parks, and trails. The City's existing neighborhood parks all need attention. With a new neighborhood park costing almost \$1 million to develop, Sparks' neighborhood parks represent valuable assets. Reinvestment will preserve these sites and contribute to quality of life in neighborhoods throughout the city. Over the course of the life of the plan, Pah Rah Park will also need reinvestment. As Sparks grow, new neighborhood and community parks will be needed to serve residents in these new developments.

Table 6.1 summarizes development costs for the new parks needed to serve the city in the future. These do not include land acquisition costs, because it is presumed these sites will be secured through land dedications. These costs are based on the development of four new community parks and four new neighborhood parks, as shown on the map.



**Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan**

**Project Recommendations**



9.25.2013 | Data Sources: City of Sparks and Washoe County GIS NAD83 State Plane Nevada West

**City Parks**

- Regional Park
- Community Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Pocket Park
- Special Use Park
- Riverfront Park

**Other Public or Private Lands**

- Greenbelt
- Golf Course
- Other Park
- Federal Land
- City Limits
- County
- Water Feature

**Existing Trails**

- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails
- Fwy/Hwy
- Arterial Road
- Local Road
- Railroad
- Schools with Joint Use Sports Fields

**Project Recommendations**

- Future Neighborhood Park
- Future Community Park
- Major Renovation
- Major Maintenance
- Transfer





*Table 6-1: Local Parks Capital Projects Summary*

| Park Classification              | Capital Projects Costs | Annual Maintenance Allocation |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Reinvestments in Existing System |                        |                               |
| Community Parks                  | \$3,273,000            | \$82,500                      |
| Neighborhood Parks               | \$7,579,000            | \$419,000                     |
| Pocket Parks                     | \$38,000               | \$2,400                       |
| Greenbelts                       | \$1,593,000            | \$64,800                      |
| New Development                  |                        |                               |
| Community Parks                  | \$29,200,000           | \$360,000                     |
| Neighborhood Parks               | \$3,852,000            | \$40,000                      |
| Greenbelts                       | \$990,000              | \$4,500                       |

## SPECIALTY PARK PROJECTS

The City also recognizes the value of its specialty parks, including regional parks, special use parks, and riverfront parks. Some of these sites constitute the major event venues in Sparks, while others are more focused on local residents. Costs for both capital projects and operations vary widely at these sites, due to the specialized nature of each park.

Over the life of this Plan, each site will require some level of reinvestment even though no new specialty parks are proposed. For example, Golden Eagle Regional Park has a very high capital project cost to address artificial turf replacement, as well as the development of additional multi-purpose fields, trails and recreation facilities to serve the community.

*Table 6-2: Specialty Parks Capital Projects Summary*

| Park Classification | Capital Projects Costs | Annual Maintenance Allocation <sup>1</sup> |
|---------------------|------------------------|--|
| Regional            | \$14,250,000           | \$810,000                                  |
| Special Use         | \$14,606,000           | \$567,400                                  |
| Riverfront          | \$738,000              | \$44,700                                   |

<sup>1</sup> Includes grounds maintenance only. Does not include costs associated with special events, which will be recouped through special events fees.

## **PARKS AND RECREATION CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

### **PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA**

The City already has a process in place to update its Capital Improvement Plan. The criteria in this section are intended to help prioritize parks and recreation capital improvements within that process. They can be used by staff from various departments and the Parks and Recreation Commission to determine which improvements to address first, when funding is available.

The six criteria described below are derived from the Plan recommendations and based on feedback received from the public about their priorities.

- **Reduce operating costs.** Improvements that reduce operating costs, especially those that will result in a payback within five to 10 years, should receive a high priority for available resources. Sparks should also target outside funding for projects that reduce water and electricity use.
- **Reinvest in community assets.** Neighborhood parks in Sparks have a replacement value of almost \$27 million, and the replacement value of the total assets in the system is more than \$100 million. Reinvesting in these assets is prudent stewardship of public resources. In addition to being a high priority for the public, reinvestment also contributes to quality of life and stabilizes property values.
- **Address gaps in service.** Projects that will bring existing parks up to the Development Guidelines or will increase Sparks' ability to serve target population groups will address gaps in service. New parks in northern Sparks should be prioritized only as new development occurs.
- **Reinvest in event facilities and infrastructure.** Sparks can only continue to attract events, including sports tournaments, if its event facilities and infrastructure remain attractive to the market.
- **Increase revenue-generating capacity.** Projects that will allow Sparks to generate more revenue should be prioritized, especially those that have a pay-off of five years or less.
- **Leverage partner resources.** Projects that take advantage of resources or funding provided by other entities should have a high priority, especially if the project also meets other criteria.

## Implementing the Plan

This is a long range plan, and the recommendations will take ten to fifteen years to realize. Some recommendations will take several steps or multiple years to implement. Implementation will occur by consistent, small steps towards the vision and goals. Taking measured and manageable steps towards the desired future will help the Parks and Recreation Department transition from years of crisis response caused by several financial difficulties towards greater financial and operational stability.

Each year, the Parks and Recreation Department should develop an annual Action Plan with the participation of the Parks and Recreation Commission. The timing of the annual Action Plan should be set so that it can feed into the City's established budget process. At present, "new need" requests are due in March each year as part of the budget process. A target of approving the Action Plan at the January meeting of the PRC each year would give the Department the lead time needed to meet the "new need" request timeline.

The Action Plan must consider capacity (the number of ongoing projects, staffing levels and anticipated financial resources). There are a limited number of staff, and their time and professional expertise is as valuable a resource as operational and capital funding dollars. The Action Plan should consider staff capacity as a factor of equal importance to operational costs in making decisions about which programs and initiatives to pursue.

The Action Plan should include:

- A summary of the accomplishments of the past year;
- The previous year's actions that carry over into the current year; and
- New actions that should be initiated to implement the Plan.

For each action, responsibility should be assigned to a specific staff person, department, partner, or other entity. The responsible party will be tasked with implementing the action. If there are operational costs or new staffing associated with an action, a cost should be identified in the Action Plan. This can then be used in the City's budget process. If a specific staff person is assigned responsibility for an action, the Action Plan should include a time budget that factors in their total capacity and other ongoing responsibilities. Timing should also be indicated, by quarter, to show sequencing of activities.

Over the course of this Plan's lifecycle, some new ideas or capital projects could also surface which have not been specifically identified in the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan. These should be documented for future consideration during the annual Action Plan process.

## **Recommended Actions for Work Plan #1**

The following actions are recommended for inclusion in the 2014 work plan. Table 6.3 provides a format for the work plan, for use by staff and the PRC.

- a. Develop and implement updated cost tracking. See Recommendation 1-1.
- b. Adopt a fee philosophy. See Recommendation 1-2.
- c. By the end of 2014, initiate the development of updated fee structures for recreation programs and special events using the newly adopted fee philosophy. See Recommendations 1.2 and 1.3.
- e. Develop and implement a recruitment plan for special events. See Recommendation 2-2.
- f. Begin the process of moving the departmental office to the Larry D. Johnson Center.
- g. Allocate adequate funding to maintain existing parks at recommended level. See Appendix D, Table D-2.
- h. Begin the process to update development handbooks to reflect new standards, where feasible. See Recommendation 6.2.

Table 6.3: Annual Work Plan Format

| #        | Action  | Year? | Requires "new need" request? | Responsibility | Staff Hours Allocated | Cost (note if one time or recurring) | Timing |
|----------|---|-------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|
| 1-1      | Develop and implement updated cost tracking.  | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q1     |
| 1-2      | Adopt a fee philosophy.   | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q1-Q2  |
| 1-2, 1-3 | Initiate the development of updated fee structures for recreation programs.                 | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q4     |
| 2-2      | Develop and implement a recruitment plan for special events.                                | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q1     |
| 4-8      | Begin planning the move of the departmental office to the Larry D. Johnson Center.          | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q2     |
| 4-4, 4-5 | Advocate for adequate funding to maintain existing parks at recommended level               | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q1     |
| 6-2      | Begin the process to update development handbooks to reflect new standards, where feasible. | N     | ?                            | TBD            | TBD                   | TBD                                  | Q3     |

Notes:

- “#” identifies the recommendation number in the Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan.
- The Action column succinctly describes the planned action. The initially recommended list of actions for 2014 is included as a starting point. Note that for 2014, staff and PRC may prioritize other actions due to factors such as staff capacity.
- Because this is an updated plan, the first Work Plan assumes that no actions are continued from Previous Year to allow for more consistent tracking.
- “Requires new need request” indicates whether a request is needed in the budget process. A “?” denotes that this has not yet been determined.
- “TBD” abbreviates “to be determined”. These cells should be filled in during the preparation of the Work Plan.
- “Timing” denotes when implementation should begin, based on staff and financial capacity considers. Use Q1, Q2, Q3 or Q4 to denote the quarter during which implementation should commence.

## IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY