

I - INTRODUCTION

The Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a document which guides future decisions for parks and recreation services in the Town of Highland. The 2009 Plan also serves as a comprehensive document which brings leisure services efforts together to meet the needs. The document contains inventory of recreation facilities and programming and identifies areas where new or expanded services may be needed or desired. It also summarizes results of the several discussions and meetings with town officials, recreational stakeholders, and two public meetings. The Plan further contains anticipated, goals, policies, and specific future capital expenditures needed to address the needs. An action plan and a set of priorities further describe the anticipated activities which the Department plans to carry out for the next five years.

1. Background

During the period that spans over a century parks have evolved from green spaces with formal design to spaces which support a variety of the recreational, social and community needs. Parks developed in the early part of the last century were designed as large open grasslands with occasional majestic gardens. They often offered minimal cultural experiences on holidays and an opportunity for the less affluent to enjoy outdoor environments.

The industrial revolution and massive urban expansion, gave rise to development of neighborhood parks more close to home. These parks aimed to provide recreational opportunities for the working families in the newly developing neighborhoods. The primary feature of the neighborhood park was the introduction of the community buildings for gathering, swimming pools and other amenities. Today, last century's neighborhood parks have evolved into more active facilities with athletic fields that include baseball, soccer fields and tennis courts, along with organized recreation programs.

The use of public park facilities and open spaces has changed over the last two decades. Broader concepts of gathering places in urban areas have ushered in new ideas of a park and what a park represents. Open spaces have become more prominent in the description of parks. Open spaces that include mini-parks, urban plazas and social and life enrichment offer many opportunities for gathering and leisure activities that traditionally took place in the neighborhood park. In today's lifestyle and urban design, even suburban communities, would require open space, as density in many suburban communities has increased substantially. Today, people seek out the parks that have facilities for their daily social well being, physical health, and room for family cookouts, and sports fields.

Park departments today combine elements of the traditional plans with new social and communal requirements by creating oases of small fountains, ponds, flower gardens and picnic groves to meet the needs. They have added more sports areas with some buildings, large swimming pool or water slides for their neighborhoods. Room for daily activities with support staff are routinely provided in many park facilities. Adding lights to parks have expanded daily use well into the evening hours.

Winter programming for sledding, toboggan and ice-skating have also become a routine part of leisure services offered by the many parks and recreation agencies.

The modern family relies heavily on two incomes with working parents who need all-day, all-summer park programs with supervision for their children. More children's sports teams are run by the parks departments or volunteer sports groups. These teams require space for practice and games. Teens want basketball hoops and places where they can skateboard without getting in trouble with business owners. The parks departments also are often asked to provide spaces for day care, while maintaining services for the elderly.

Quality of life has become a major consideration for relocation and real estate decisions by families. This condition is more evident among suburban communities where people are less rooted to the hometown and more interested in amenities offered by the community. Working adults have also learned that daily exercise is essential for good health now and into their later years. They look to the parks to help them get that daily workout and provide them with opportunities to meet their lifestyle needs. For this group the parks will need to provide facilities and programs that are often beyond the weekend hours. Their needs often require parks department to stay open later in the evening and start earlier in the morning.

On the other hand, older populations are more active and staying fit long into their later years. They need facilities for year round activities which support healthy and active living lifestyle. Similarly, the disabled and special needs population, who were more homebound in the past have greater mobility now due to modern technology. Parks departments today are required to provide them with a full range of facilities and programs for a quality experience and meaningful lifestyle.

The changing society and the market conditions are also imposing challenges for the parks departments. These challenges are forcing the departments to become more responsive, entrepreneurial while becoming more sustainable as funds are often not adequate to meet a variety of needs that are demanded. The societal changes require parks department to adapt and respond accordingly to meet the needs of an evolving community.

2. Plan Objective and Process

The Town of Highland's Parks and Recreation Master Plan is the official document that guides provision and allocation of resources for the parks and recreational services. It will also direct the department's acquisition and development of facilities as well as establishment of leisure services. It considers not only the immediate needs and concerns of the community, but also the projected needs of the community for the next five years and beyond.

The plan development process was very much open and participatory. It included community meetings to get input from the citizens, meeting with recreational providers and sports organizers, discussions with the users of the facilities, and input from the town officials. These efforts have resulted in:

- a. Identify the needs of the community
- b. Provide a vision for parks and recreational services
- c. Establish strategic direction for delivery of recreation and park services.
- d. Establish a timeline for provision of services for the next five years.

The role of the consultant was to guide, advise, review, and prepare different elements of the plan including the final Plan. The Town of Highland's Parks and Recreation Superintendent served as a project advisor in close coordination with the Consulting Team. The primary tasks performed in the development of this plan included:

- Demographic Analysis - (Completed by the Consultant Team)
- Key leadership and Park Board one on one interview and discussion
- Focus Group discussion with the organized athletic groups
- Residents Questionnaire and comments
- Facilitation of two public meetings;
- Analysis of community/stakeholder Needs
- Recreation Program Analysis
- Development of Draft Plan
- And Completion of the final Master Plan.

PLANNING AREA

The planning area for the master plan is the corporate boundaries of the Town of Highland. The Parks Department is governed by a Board of Park and Recreation according to an ordinance approved by the Board as the corporate ordinance sets the jurisdictional authority of the Board as the corporate boundary of the town. Adjacent communities' plans were however reviewed and considered in development of this master plan. Exhibit 1 shows the town boundaries and adjacent communities.

Exhibit 1- Town Map

