

2020  
**Vision**  
*Focus on the Future*

**COMPREHENSIVE &  
STRATEGIC PLAN**



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# INTRODUCTION



## WHY PLAN FOR PARKS & RECREATION?

The Elmhurst Park District plays a vital role in enhancing the community. From public health to economic development, parks and recreation services are an important component to improving quality-of-life and making communities more attractive places to live and work.



### HEALTH + WELLNESS

Parks help to **combat obesity and other chronic health conditions** by providing people opportunities to increase fitness and physical activity. Regular physical activity reduces risk of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes; improves muscle strength; promotes weight loss; and boosts cardiovascular, respiratory, and endocrine systems. Studies have shown that enhanced access to places for physical activity leads to an increase in frequency of physical activity for both adults and children. Active park users also require fewer physician visits and experience lower health care costs than those who used parks passively or not at all.

In addition to physical health, parks also **enhance quality of life and improve mental health** by providing access to and connections with nature. Studies show that exposure to nature offers a range of medical benefits including lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and stress. Exposure to nature may also alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Finally, parks and open space can **mitigate climate, air, and water health impacts** by reducing the urban heat island effect, removing pollutants from the atmosphere, and filtering water. As trees filter and clean the air, they decrease the risk of cancer and prevalence of asthma and other respiratory diseases. As the plants and greenspaces in parks filter and clean the water, they reduce the chance of water-borne diseases.



## ENVIRONMENT

One of the most obvious roles of parks and open spaces is to **protect and enhance the natural environment**. Cities can use parks to preserve ecological functions and protect and encourage biodiversity. Connecting parks, open spaces, riparian areas, wetlands, and other natural features strategically can help to protect the biological diversity and natural processes that are required to support a thriving wildlife habitat system.

Parks help **accommodate public infrastructure such as flood control, stormwater management, and transportation**. Studies have shown that parks and open spaces can provide numerous stormwater benefits, such as storing, carrying, and filtering runoff. Multi-use trails traversing interconnected park systems can provide alternative, less expensive modes of transportation, which relieves agencies of the additional, and typically greater, cost of roadway improvements.

## SOCIAL EQUITY

One benefit of public open space is the provision of a community space that **allows for the strengthening of social and familial bonds**. Parks allow children to engage in experiential, informal learning through both independent play and play with peers. This leads to the development of a foundation for effective formal education and social skills. Parks and open spaces are also gathering spaces where social ties can be formed. These social ties produce stronger, safer neighborhoods where people feel connected and supported.

Parks can also **provide a resource for closing the educational achievement gap in communities**. Not only are children motivated to learn when they can pursue discoveries outdoors, but using parks, open spaces, and natural environments for hands-on learning opportunities has been shown to improve the standardized achievement scores of socially-disadvantaged students.

Parks and open spaces can help **create neighborhoods with fewer violent and property crimes and improve community cohesion**. Open spaces provide the ability to spend time in nature, which reduces aggression and relieves mental fatigue. Lastly, planned public open spaces create a more welcoming environment, as opposed to vacant spaces, which can be frightening to people and lead to crime.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Parks provide a positive source of economic benefits. Vibrant park systems can **attract and retain retirees, talent, and homebuyers**. US retirees make up nearly 25% of the total population, and are moving to various locations across the county to enjoy retirement. These individuals desire communities that provide leisure and recreation amenities. Talent workers prefer places with a variety of outdoor recreational activities and homebuyers are likely to not only choose a home located closer to parks and open spaces, but they'll also pay nearly 10% more for it.

Numerous studies confirm that the **presence and proximity of parks and open space positively affect property values**. Parks can not only help to improve community health, sustainability, and equity, but done properly, can also function as a tool for neighborhood revitalization.

Finally, parks can help to **increase municipal revenues**. Increased property values go hand in hand with increased municipal revenues, as property taxes are major revenue streams for many communities. In addition to property tax benefits, parks and open spaces in shopping districts have been shown to stimulate more revenue and sales tax generation.

# OVERVIEW OF THE PLAN

The Elmhurst Park District Vision 2020: Comprehensive and Strategic Plan will drive long-range planning, direct decision-making, and assist with allocating resources for the District by defining a clear vision for its future.

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**This plan enables decision-makers to prioritize resources for growth and development in a fiscally-responsible, environmentally sound, publicly supported, and politically prudent manner.**

Comprehensive and strategic plans provide a foundation for building credibility and establishing consensus on important community issues. They also serve to inform and engage citizens about park and recreation needs. The most successful plans engage

the community and successfully transform their vision into a tangible implementation strategy.

Goals for this Comprehensive and Strategic Plan include:

- » Consider, integrate, and celebrate accomplishments and outcomes of past Elmhurst Park District planning efforts.
- » Engage the community in the planning process, building consensus for implementation, and fostering awareness of the District's presence within the community.
- » Assess the future vision of the organization and determine strategic priorities to achieve that vision.
- » Ensure the most effective use of District resources by focusing decision-making and spending on strategic priorities.

## DEVELOPING THE PLAN

The approach to the Elmhurst Park District Vision 2020: Comprehensive and Strategic Plan maximized community input, pairing it with both Park District staff's knowledge and experience and the planning team's resources and expertise. Organized into four phases, the planning process consisted of the following components: a needs assessment; visioning; identifying and evaluating community needs, priorities and opportunities; and creating a phased implementation and financial plan.

This document serves as the Park District's Comprehensive and Strategic Plan. For Strategic Planning initiatives, implementation follows a three-year timeline, with a focus on a one-year action plan. For Comprehensive Planning initiatives, implementation follows a ten-year timeline, with a focus on a five-year action plan.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of the Comprehensive and Strategic Plans is to guide capital improvements, planning and development, and program and service improvements in the near future. A Comprehensive Plan is more physical asset- and program and services-focused. The purpose of a Strategic Plan is to guide internal operations, communication, and administrative improvements in the near future. These two planning documents, while unique in their purpose and scope, are interrelated. For this reason, the Elmhurst Park District chose to complete the plans at the same time and combine them into one, overall guiding document.

## THE PROCESS

**ENGAGE:** In this first phase of planning, the planning team facilitated conversations with a wide variety of community stakeholders. These conversations fulfilled two critical planning functions: to provide the project team with an understanding of stakeholder needs and priorities and to communicate a consistent message to the community, thereby helping stakeholders understand their role in the process.

**ANALYZE:** During the analysis phase, the planning team developed a comprehensive needs analysis, working closely with the Park District staff and Board members. Following a kickoff meeting and study area tour, the planning team collected and assimilated Park District information, including an inventory of parks, open space, trails, recreation facilities, and program offerings.

**ENVISION:** During the third phase of the planning process, the planning team, staff, and Board of Commissioners created a shared long-term vision for the Park District based on the Engage and Analyze phase results. Alternative strategies for recreation programming; existing parks and open spaces; new parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces; and area trail corridors were tested, evaluated, and refined into a set of action items that the District will implement over the next 1 to 10 years (1-3: Strategic Initiatives, 1-10: Comprehensive Plan Initiatives).

**IMPLEMENT:** In the final phase of the planning process, the planning team, staff, and Board of Commissioners refined the strategies for the ten-year Vision. Recommendations for near- and mid-term capital and operational strategies were outlined in a Five-Year Strategy Action Plan. A one-year implementation plan was also developed to guide the first year of the plan. The Five-Year Action Plan should be revisited annually, to ensure the strategies correspond with the District's changing context. The overall comprehensive plan and needs assessment should be updated every five years, while the strategic plan should be updated every three years.

# 1

This section provides an introduction to the planning process and provides background on the Elmhurst Park District, including its history, governance, budget, and community relationships.

# 2

This section provides an overview of the Elmhurst Park District's existing context and key findings from analysis and community engagement.

# 3

This section provides the Elmhurst Park District's mission, vision, and values and outlines the strategic action plan and supporting implementation detail for the next 1, 3, 5, and 10 years.

# A

The appendices contain all supporting documentation, including the original State of the District report, community survey report, and other supporting documentation.



# ELMHURST PARK DISTRICT PROFILE

## HISTORY

The Elmhurst Park District was established on June 5, 1920, to meet the leisure and recreational needs of the community. Soon thereafter, negotiations were opened for the acquisition of the Wilder estate. The estate consisted of an undeveloped cow pasture to the north and the family home, gardens, and clay tennis courts to the south. Original development of the gardens had begun in 1868 by Seth and Elizabeth Wadhams, who built their home, known as White Birch, along with a greenhouse and gardens. They planted numerous trees representing a variety of species to create a true garden spot in Elmhurst.

The Park District acquired the Wilder property in 1921, making it the first public park in Elmhurst. The Park District added the conservatory to the

greenhouse in 1924, and the Wilder Park Conservatory then opened to the public.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Salt Creek, East End, and Butterfield Parks were established. East End Pool opened on June 26, 1937, with a “Grand Splash” of 750 youths who had lined up along the edge of the pool in readiness for its big moment. The pool was an immediate success for the District, with 1,200 people showing up on its second day.

The first recreation programs were offered in 1942 and included baton, handicrafts, archery, baseball, and ballet. Ben Allison Playground and Eldridge Park opened in the early 1950s. The Abbey was also established during this period as a place for teenagers to gather, but did not become part of the Park District until 1964. During the 1960s, seven new parks opened, including the York Commons Pool, dedicated in 1967.

Perhaps the most significant decade in the Park District’s history was the 1970s, when the District blossomed into a full-service agency. In 1971, voters approved a \$3.9 million bond referendum for land acquisition and development. The majority of EPD’s present land was purchased during this time, along with new park development. Five new special facilities also opened during this period, including: The Courts (1972), an indoor tennis, racquetball, and handball facility; Sugar Creek Golf Course (early 1970s), a 9-hole golf course owned and operated through a partnership between Elmhurst Park District and the Village of Villa Park; the first Elmhurst Community Center (1979); The Abbey Leisure Center (1975), a senior citizen leisure programming facility; and The Depot on York Road (1971). The Depot was renovated as a bicentennial project in 1975.



Perhaps the most significant decade in the Park District's history was the 1970s, when the District blossomed into a full-service agency.

provides additional multi-use space for the community.

In 2012, the District moved from its former Administrative Office in Wilder Park to an office building centrally located in Elmhurst (375 W. First Street) with a green roof and warehouse space. The move alleviated some of the parking demand at Wilder Park and the new building provides the additional space needed to address growth in District administrative, storage, office space and technology needs.

In 2013, the District renovated its historic Conservatory with the goal of preserving the structure and appearance while enhancing the user experience. The restoration, made possible in part by a \$1.84 million State of Illinois PARC grant administered through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, provides for improved green technologies and efficiencies with the installation of HVAC components, glazing system, and the use of modern materials, reducing energy loss and improving growing space. The two greenhouses were replaced with a single aluminum structure and a state-of-the-art propagating house. The restored Conservatory and new greenhouse are connected by an ADA-accessible vestibule, which provides access to the Wilder Park Formal Gardens.

*Source 1. 2016 Elmhurst Park District Budget*

## GOVERNANCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A community-elected, non-partisan Board of Commissioners consisting of seven members constitutes the governing board of the Elmhurst Park District. Commissioners are elected to six-year terms and serve without compensation. The Commissioners elect from among themselves a President and a Vice President to serve one-year terms. The Park Board of Commissioners appoint an Executive Director, a Treasurer, an Assistant Treasurer, an Attorney and a Secretary. The Executive Director serves as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for the Park District and carries out the policies of the Board. The District has six departments that

include Parks and Facilities, Recreation, Enterprise Services, Marketing and Communications, Information Technology, and Finance and Human Resources along with the Administrative function. The Park District employs 75 full-time, 450 part-time and 300 seasonal workers.

*Source 2. 2016 Elmhurst Park District Budget*

## COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The District's mission serves as the basis for all collaboration, and partnerships are formed to provide cost efficiencies and work for the betterment of the community as well as provide improved programming, recreation, athletic, and fitness services to residents. Some partnerships involve formal agreements while others are informal or simply collaborative efforts to work toward common goals. Many partnerships span decades and are updated frequently to ensure both parties and residents are receiving maximum benefit. As facility space and land are at a premium in Elmhurst, the collaboration between governmental units and organizations becomes more important.

Some long-standing partnerships include:

- » An agreement with District 205 to provide before-and after-school childcare in elementary schools
- » Sharing a maintenance facility with the City of Elmhurst, and providing land for a fire station
- » Working with DuPage County to maintain the Elmhurst portion of the Illinois Prairie Path
- » Agreement with Elmhurst College to provide an NCAA softball field at Salt Creek Park
- » Working with District 205 on shared use of tennis courts at Berens Park

A detailed list of District partnerships can be found in the Appendix C.

The 1980s and 1990s constituted a period of redevelopment and continued partnerships with other agencies. The Courts Plus expansion in 1990 provided an important collaboration with Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare to provide fitness, rehabilitation, and health programs for the community. In 1992, the District won the coveted National Gold Medal Award presented to outstanding park and recreation agencies.

On September 6, 2003, the Elmhurst Park District opened the Wagner Community Center. The redevelopment of Berens Park and the opening of The Hub in 2004 with batting cages, mini-golf, and a spray ground, occurred prior to the District's 85th anniversary. In 2003, the new Elmhurst Public Library opened in Wilder Park following a land exchange agreement between the District and the City of Elmhurst. In 2007, the District received the keys to Wilder Mansion (former Library), making its ownership official. The original 1860 home was remodeled without compromising the historic architectural features and now



## BUDGET SUMMARY

In formulating the annual budget, staff analyze a significant amount of data to project the next fiscal year's revenues and expenditures. Staff review historical and current revenue and expenditure trends, potential new projects and initiatives, current economic conditions, relevant changes in the law, and numerous other factors that impact the budget. The District's overall philosophy is to project revenues and expenses conservatively, and to use sound financial planning to achieve the Board's priorities, utilize existing reserves to maintain assets, take steps and allocate resources to address competition, attract and retain customers, and provide a balanced level of services and programs expected by the community.

In 2017, the District has the fiscal agility to use reserves to address capital project needs, maximize and grow revenue, ensure adequate staffing, and undertake key Strategic Plan initiatives for long-term success. To remain economically stable, the District's long-term Budget Plan and the 2017 budget continue the existing philosophy and policy of positioning the District financially so that it can carefully use available reserves for capital projects along with a long-term plan to build future reserves.

As illustrated in the 2017 Budget Summary by Fund chart in Appendix D, staff project that the total 2017 budget will have a deficit of \$1,359,337 due to using \$1,760,831 from reserves for capital projects and \$75,715 to pay debt that is possible due to the accumulation of excess reserves over the established cash and investment targets in accordance with Board policy. The deficit occurs because a portion of expenditures have no revenue offset since the revenues were received and recorded in previous years. This deficit is offset with a net operating surplus of \$441,922 mainly to replenish reserves in the General Fund (with a \$53,193 net surplus), the Recreation Fund (with a \$201,623 net surplus), and Enterprise Service Fund (with a \$141,862 net surplus).

A photograph of three children climbing a large, grey, textured rock wall. One child in a white shirt is at the top left, another in a blue shirt is on the right, and a third in a red shirt is in the middle. The scene is outdoors with green foliage in the background. A large, semi-transparent white diamond shape with a dark blue border is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing the text.

# WHERE WE ARE TODAY

## ANALYZE ENGAGE ENVISION

The Elmhurst Park District is one of 39 park districts within DuPage County in northeastern Illinois. The park district has a total population of 46,337 and this is expected to increase to 47,282 by 2021.



As the community grows, it will become older, more diverse, and more affluent. The number of families and households will grow, but the size of those households will remain stagnant. Youth population will also shrink into 2021.

Compared to other DuPage County park districts, the Elmhurst Park District is one of the largest and most affluent districts. Compared to those districts with similar populations, Elmhurst has one of the largest park and open space inventories (458 ac.), with only Naperville (2,419 ac.), Woodridge (620 ac.), and Carol Stream (460 ac.) owning / operating more open space. Finally, while one of the largest and most affluent districts in DuPage County, the tax rate is 25th out of the 39 districts in the County.

In its 458 acres of parks and open space, the Elmhurst Park District provides a vast array of recreational opportunities for residents, including 18 playgrounds, 28 baseball / softball fields, 25 tennis courts, 28 multi-purpose fields, 75 garden plots, and 5.9 miles of trails within its parks. The District also has access to two regional trails. Indoor facilities available include The Abbey Senior Center, Wagner Community Center, Courts Plus, The Hub, Wilder Mansion, and four preschool facilities – Butterfield, Eldridge, Wilder, and Crestview. In total, the District operates 202,255 square feet of indoor space. For this study, 147,115 square feet of indoor space was evaluated and studied, 93,600 square feet of which is dedicated to recreation programming.



## ANALYZE

The planning team evaluated three level of service (LOS) measures for the Elmhurst Park District - acreage, amenities, park distribution, and indoor square footage. The District has an overall acreage LOS of 9.9 acres per 1,000 population. This is just slightly less than the recommended benchmark of 11.8 acres per 1,000. Regarding amenity LOS, the park district is well-served when compared to benchmarks in almost all amenities. Development of new amenities such as picnic shelters, a dog park, a disc golf course, and baseball / softball fields could, however, improve its overall amenity LOS. Regarding park distribution (equitability), 64% of park district residents have access to a neighborhood or community park within 0.5-miles of their home. Compared to planning team benchmarks, this is below average, but when school-parks are included in this analysis the LOS increases to 80%.

Based on the 147,115 square feet evaluated, the District has an indoor recreation space level of service of 2.02 square feet per person, and while this meets the recommended Chicagoland benchmark, it is important to note that none of this space includes community fitness and wellness space. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the 93,600 square feet of indoor recreation space is dedicated to enterprise services at Courts Plus, 4.3% is dedicated to seniors, 6.5% is dedicated to preschool programming, and finally, a little over a quarter remains for general programming at Wagner.

## ENGAGE

During the strategic and comprehensive planning process, the planning team conducted a vast amount of community engagement. Overall, this process engaged nearly 3,000 individuals in the process, though this number does not account for those who may have participated in multiple venues. Public input included:

- » A project website;
- » Three days of stakeholder interviews and focus groups;
- » Three public open houses;
- » Two online community surveys; and,
- » One District-wide statistically-valid community survey.

Staff and Board also participated heavily in this process. Engagement included:

- » Seven full-time staff meetings;
- » One organizational culture survey;
- » Two Board workshops and individual interviews;
- » One full-time staff workshop;
- » Three part-time staff workshops and online survey;
- » Four staff work group workshops and online survey; and,
- » Two management team workshops and individual interviews.

Throughout this process, the planning team learned the community desires:

- » Additional indoor sports space, including a walking / running track, gymnasium, and fitness.
- » Enhanced existing indoor space especially The Abbey Senior Center (or a new senior center) and Wagner Community Center.
- » A dog park and outdoor nature center
- » Improved sports fields and affiliate relationships

Organizational improvements desired include improved communication, benefits, and training.

## ENVISION

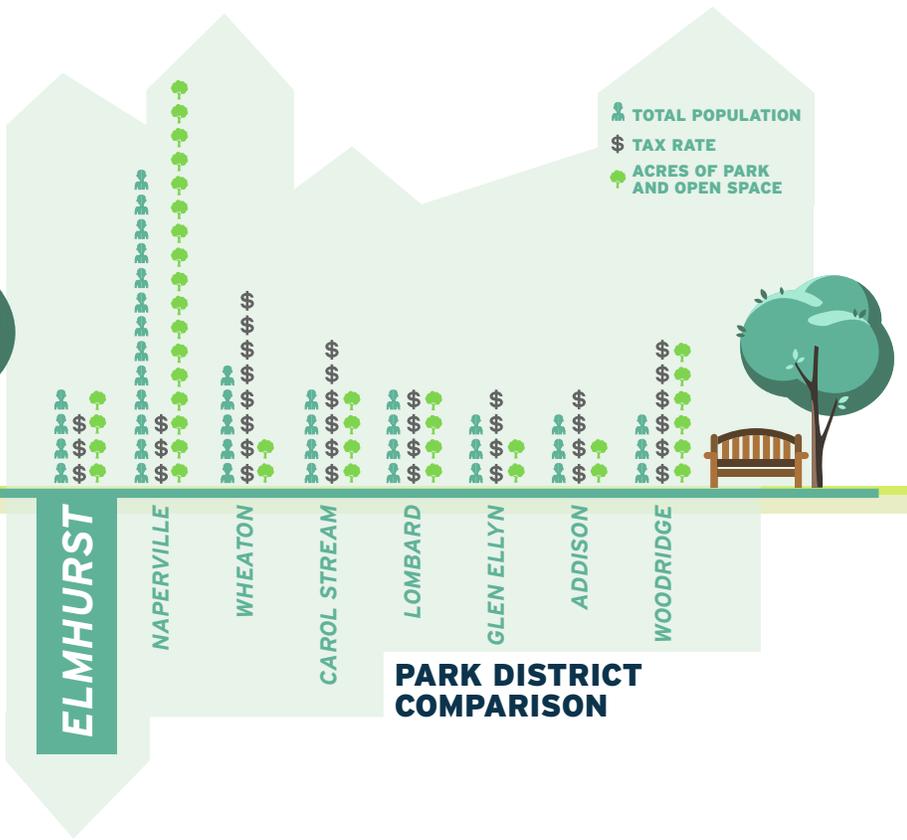
During the envision phase, the planning team and staff synthesized all findings from the Analyze and Engage phases to determine the specific needs and strategies for the future. The envision phase of the process also involved a review and revision of the District's mission and vision. The Board and staff also established the District's first-ever values.

The Board and staff organized and structured the tactics for the future around six themes – Parks, Facilities, Programs, Internal Operations, Communications, and Finance. Staff reviewed and refined these tactics into the final tactics found in the next section.

**ELMHURST PARK DISTRICT, LOCATED IN EASTERN DUPAGE COUNTY, COVERS 10.6 SQ.MI. WHILE A SEPARATE TAXING BODY THAN THE CITY, THEIR BOUNDARIES ARE NEARLY CONTIGUOUS.**

**WELCOME**

**ELMHURST PARK DISTRICT**



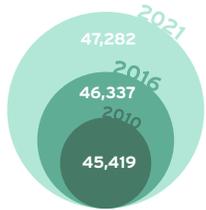
- FACILITIES**
- 135 Palmer Drive
  - Butterfield Park Recreation Building
  - Crestview Park Recreation Building
  - Eldridge Park Recreation Building
  - Smalley Bath House & Pool
  - Wilder Park Recreation Building
  - Wilder Park Former Admin Building - 225 Prospect
  - Sugar Creek Golf Maintenance Building & Clubhouse
  - Wilder Park Conservatory
  - The Hub
  - Administration Building
  - The Depot
  - East End Bath House & Pool
  - Park Maintenance Facility



**STAKEHOLDERS**

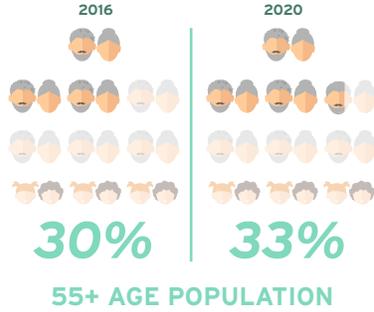
City of Elmhurst, Elmhurst Youth Commission, Elmhurst Senior Commission, Elmhurst Library, Village of Villa Park, DuPage County / IC Catholic Prep, School District 205, Elmhurst College / Elmhurst Chamber of Commerce, Edwards / Elmhurst Healthcare, Active Trans / Elmhurst Bike Club, Greenman Theatre, Elmhurst Symphony, Elmhurst Chorale Union, Elmhurst Centre of Performing Arts, Elmhurst Cool Cities Coalition, Crestview Garden Club, Elmhurst Garden Club, Lizzadro Museum, Ray Graham Association, People For Elmhurst Parks Foundation, Elmhurst AYSO, Elmhurst Eagles Football, Team Elmhurst, Elmhurst Baseball, Elmhurst Youth Baseball



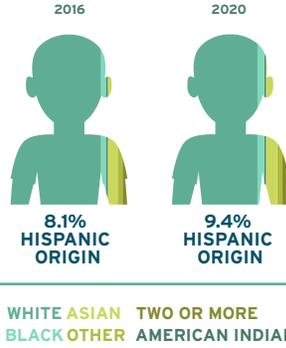


# THE POPULATION IS...

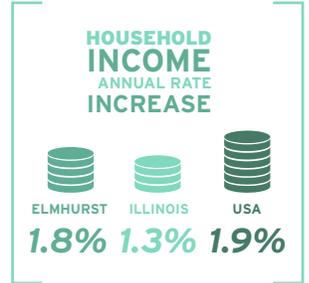
## AGING IN PLACE



## GROWING MORE DIVERSE



## BECOMING INCREASINGLY AFFLUENT



CURRENT POPULATION

**46,337**

WHO IS THE  
ELMHURST  
PARK  
DISTRICT

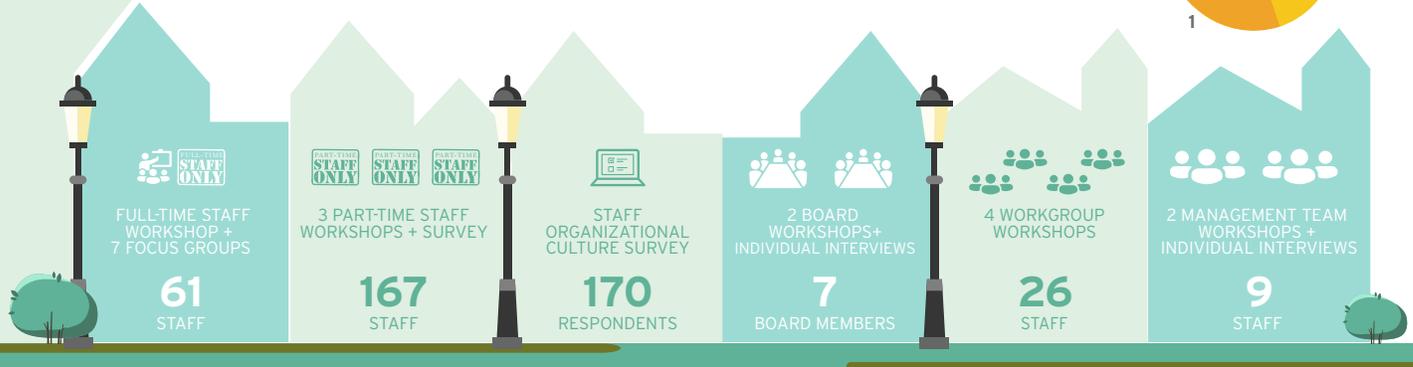
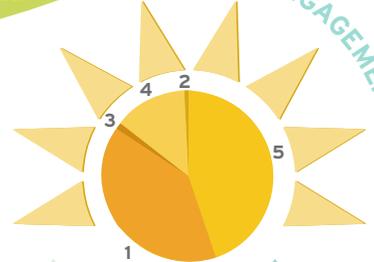


55+ AGE POPULATION



## ENGAGEMENT

1. COMMUNITY
2. BOARD
3. STAKEHOLDERS
4. STAFF
5. WEBSITE

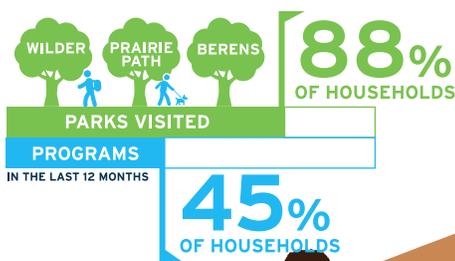


STAFF

# KEY FINDINGS

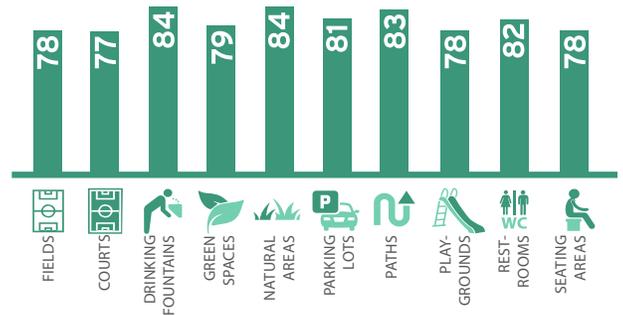
## ELMHURST PARK DISTRICT IS THE LARGEST OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PROVIDER IN THE COMMUNITY.

Among the four open space providers within the community, the Park District provides nearly 458 acres (47%) of parks and open space. Open space and recreation is important to the community, shown by their high park use in the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E). During the past 12 months, 88% of households visited at least one Elmhurst Park District park. The three most visited parks were Wilder Park, Illinois Prairie Path, and Berens Park. In addition to park open space, 45% of households participated in recreation programs in the past 12 months, exceeding the national average of 34%. Overall, 72% of households use the District for their indoor and outdoor recreation needs and activities.



## PARKS ARE IN FAIR CONDITION, AND THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.

Although more than half of the parks (54%) were rated as a B (80-89) in the park assessments (Appendix C), the park system itself is in fair condition with an overall score of 79, or a C+. Only 5 of the 10 park features within the parks received a B- (Good) rating or higher, and no single feature received an A rating. On the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E), 97% of households rated the condition of the parks as either Excellent (38%) or Good (59%). These higher ratings are most likely attributed to the specific parks they visited most often, which were the larger community parks that were also rated high in the park assessment. Community input revealed that high priority parks for improvement included: York Commons, Crestview Park, and Conrad Fischer Park. It is obvious that the Elmhurst community values their park system and park conditions, which is why 85% of households support upgrading existing parks and park amenities. Over half (52%) of households are also willing to fund these upgrades with tax dollars according to the survey. Additionally, a high priority for the community is outdoor sports fields specifically, which 72% of households support upgrading. However, only 31% of households support making these sports fields upgrades using tax dollars.

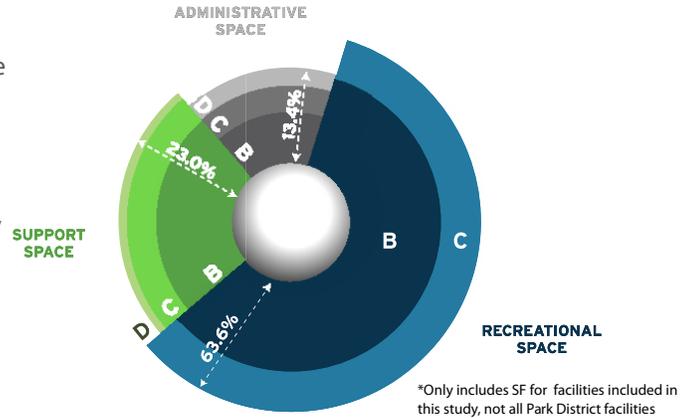


## THE COMMUNITY WOULD BENEFIT FROM THE NEW AMENITIES, INCLUDING A DOG PARK AND OUTDOOR NATURE CENTER.

The top outdoor recreation priorities, according to the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E), are walking and biking trails, off-leash dog parks, and an outdoor nature center. Additionally, the lack of a dog park puts the community in a deficiency compared to state and national benchmarks. According to community input, the preferred site for the dog park is Eldridge Park, but they also may support placing the dog park at Salt Creek Park, a partnership with another agency, or acquiring land for the amenity. Community input revealed that the preferred amenities for an outdoor nature center are: hiking trails, nature-based / themed play, open air shelter, water feature, gardens, fishing overlook, ropes course, and bike course. A dog park and outdoor nature center are also a high priority for the Board, staff, and stakeholders. In addition, implementing new amenities including picnic shelters, pavilions, trails and playgrounds, would help decrease the deficiencies for benchmarks and may be implemented as part of the aforementioned community priorities. It is especially important to meet these benchmarks because Elmhurst residents are more likely than typical Americans to participate in walking, jogging, hiking, and bicycling according to trends research.

# INDOOR FACILITIES ARE IN FAIR TO GOOD CONDITION, AND THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT – BOTH PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS AND SPACE UTILIZATION.

The existing facility conditions and offerings were assessed and 10 of the 11 facilities (except for Courts Plus which received a B) received a grade of C+ or lower (see Appendix C). Facilities that were built or underwent major renovations after 2005 were not included in the assessment. While most of the facilities on the survey were rated in poor to fair condition, improving indoor space was listed as the 3rd funding priority in the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E), and input from the community revealed that high priorities for desired improvements were at Courts Plus, Wagner, and Wilder Recreation Building.



## THE COMMUNITY WOULD BENEFIT FROM ADDITIONAL NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS.

While a leading community open space provider, the District does have deficiencies in both acreage and distribution according to the level of service (LOS) analysis (Appendix B). In terms of acreage, the District has a 9.9 acre per 1,000 LOS, which is lower than the recommended 11.8 acres per 1,000. Regarding distribution, 64% of residents are served by neighborhood parks within 0.5-miles, which increases to 80% when school-parks are included in the analysis. Because the District is built out, the potential for additional neighborhood park development is low, but further analysis reveals opportunities for new park developments in planning areas 11, 6 and 8 (see map in Appendix B). In the future, the community would appear to support acquisition to expand the park system, with 31% of the community willing to fund acquisition of new parks and open spaces with tax dollars, and 62% very or somewhat supportive of acquisition in the scientific Community Survey.

## IMPROVING AND EXPANDING THE WAGNER COMMUNITY CENTER IS A HIGH COMMUNITY PRIORITY.

The Wagner Community Center provides 32,000 square feet of the District’s available recreation space. This includes gymnastics, preschool, general programming, dance, teen programming, and music. Wagner received a grade of C, and 30% of scientific Community Survey respondents rated Wagner in Poor to Fair condition. Community input revealed that residents would like to expand Wagner with a gymnasium and multi-purpose rooms, but prefer a larger multi-use sports center to be elsewhere. Fifty-percent of households support developing a new indoor gymnasium facility. This strategy would also support the community preferred preschool / small recreation buildings strategy of consolidating pre-k programming into three facilities (north, central, and south). Wagner would serve as the north facility.

## A NEW OR IMPROVED SENIOR CENTER IS A HIGH COMMUNITY PRIORITY.

The Abbey received a grade of C+ and 48% of households also rated The Abbey in Fair condition on the Community Survey (Appendix E). There is an opportunity for a new senior center with the acquisition and development of the 135 Palmer Drive building (not currently programmed), and 58% of households are very or somewhat supportive of developing a new senior center while 23% are willing to fund the development with tax dollars. Community input revealed that there is a preference to renovate the downtown 135 Palmer Drive facility and relocate senior programming there.



## THE COMMUNITY DESIRES AN INDOOR SPORTS AND RECREATION FACILITY.

The District currently provides preschool, fitness, gymnastics, and general programming / recreational space, but does not offer a community walking track, gymnasium, or indoor class fitness space for community use. In the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E), the top community priorities were indoor fitness, walking/running track, gymnasium, indoor aquatics, and lap lanes for exercise swimming. Currently, 29% of the community does not participate because the program or facility they desire is not offered. Development of the desired indoor space would provide an opportunity to engage a larger segment of the community. Most households support using additional funds for the development of new indoor facilities, and 50% support developing a new indoor gymnasium facility, specifically. The indoor facility needs are also high priorities for the Board, staff, and stakeholders. To accomplish this, community input revealed that the preferred strategy to take regarding a new indoor sports facility would be to construct a new facility at a park site within Elmhurst, but not Berens Park, or acquire land for the indoor facility.

## THE COMMUNITY DESIRES NEW OR EXPANDED PROGRAM OFFERINGS, SPECIFICALLY WITHIN THE ADULT FITNESS AND WELLNESS, COMMUNITY EVENTS, AND ADULT CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAM AREAS.

In the scientific Community Survey (Appendix E), indoor fitness facilities / amenities and adult fitness and wellness programs were the top two priorities for each household composition / segment analyzed (households with children under 10, households with children 10-19, households with no children ages 20-64, and households with no children ages 65+). Community events and adult continuing education programs were also rated as a high priority for investment, and 29% reported that "Program or facility not offered" was a top reason preventing their household from using parks, recreation, and sports facilities more often. Providing programs for adults could include programs such as community concerts and computer classes, which are classified in the District's program assessment in the "Growth" lifecycle stage and have the ability to continue maturing. Other desired programs are provided below.

## OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO IMPROVE PART-TIME STAFF COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT.

In the organizational culture survey results (Appendix E), part-time / seasonal employees disagree or strongly disagree with many statements that indicate they have limited awareness of District-wide happenings or control over happenings. Only 8% of full-time employees disagree or strongly disagree that they "Know the Organization's Vision" compared to 28% of seasonal employees. Only 15.6% of full-time employees disagree or strongly disagree that the "Organization asks what I think" compared to 20% part-time and 29% of seasonal employees. These are opportunities for improvements. Other areas of improvement include communication about the how the organization is doing overall and financially, particularly with part-time and seasonal employees. Based on these results, the planning team facilitated part-time staff workshops and an online survey to dig a little deeper into the key survey results. During the staff workshops and online surveys, staff also noted that they desire additional training opportunities and benefits.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS ARE WORKFORCE FOCUS AND PROCESS MANAGEMENT WHILE STRATEGIC PLANNING AND CULTURAL RESULTS NEED IMPROVEMENT.

In the staff organizational culture survey (Appendix E), the organizational ratings are above average in comparison to agencies nationwide - 90% or more employees agreed that "My Organization is a Good Place to Work." Overall, while internally staff understand who their customers are and regularly ask what they need and make quick decisions, customer feedback was an important opportunity for improvement, as only 58% of staff ask if their customers are satisfied or dissatisfied with their work. Across all Departments, except All Other Areas (Administration, Finance, HR, IT Marketing and Communications), awareness about Organization's Financial Performance is low. Staff were also concerned about the speed to which the agency responds to changing needs and progress.





Board and staff members reviewed the District's existing mission and vision. They also established values for the District to adhere to going forward. These values will serve as the guiding force for the creation of the mission and vision statements as well as how the District continues to operate.

# MISSION

***We enrich lives while having fun***

# VISION

***To be a national leader in providing memorable parks and recreation experiences to our community***

# VALUES

***Fun:*** We inject fun and passion into what we do every day

***Integrity:*** We always do the right thing

***Customer Service Excellence:*** We exceed customer expectations and present the "wow" moment

***Community-focused:*** We engage and collaborate with the community we serve



# OUR VISION FOR TOMORROW



## STRATEGIC THEMES

The comprehensive and strategic plan goals and tactics were developed and structured around the six themes identified on the following page. These themes address the Park District's six major areas of improvement.

### OVERVIEW

The strategic action plan is a living, dynamic document focused on these six themes. For each theme, in a collaborative workshop setting with staff and through an iterative process, goals and tactics were developed and then refined to integrate the Comprehensive and Strategic Plans' findings and requirements.

These are all integrated into a vision / action matrix outlining timelines, staff responsibilities, relevant themes and performance metrics and overall prioritization based on cumulative staff feedback.



### PARKS

Meet community needs for parks, open space, and outdoor amenities.

### FACILITIES

Meet community needs for new and existing indoor recreation space.

### PROGRAMMING

Innovative programming to meet community needs.



### INTERNAL OPERATIONS

Employee growth and development.

### COMMUNICATION

Exceptional and consistent guest experience.

### FINANCE

Sustainable revenue strategies and funding options.

# THEMES, GOALS, AND PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

	Themes + Goals	Performance Metric(s)
<b>PA</b> <b>PARKS</b> Meet community need for parks, open space, and outdoor amenities.	<b>Parks:</b> Meet community needs for parks, open space, and outdoor amenities. PA1: Maintain and update existing parks, open spaces, and amenities. PA2: Address open space and amenity deficiencies and equitability. PA3: Provide new recreational opportunities to respond to community needs.	
<b>FA</b> <b>FACILITIES</b> Meet community need for new and existing indoor recreation space.	<b>Facilities:</b> Meet community needs for new and existing indoor recreation space. FA1: Maintain and update existing facilities. FA2: Invest in new indoor facilities / spaces to respond to community needs. FA3: Optimize use of our existing facilities.	
<b>PR</b> <b>PROGRAMMING</b> Innovative programming to meet community needs.	<b>Programming:</b> Innovative programming to meet community needs. PR1: Remain aware of and responsive to trends. PR2: Regularly engage the community to understand their needs. PR3: Provide sustainable, high quality and inclusive program offerings.	
<b>CO</b> <b>COMMUNICATIONS</b> Exceptional and consistent guest experience.	<b>Communication:</b> Exceptional and consistent guest experience. CO1: Foster a "customer-first" environment. CO2: Address customer service staffing needs.	
<b>FI</b> <b>FINANCE</b> Sustainable revenue strategies and funding options.	<b>Finance:</b> Sustainable revenue strategies and funding options. FI1: Review and improve cost recovery. FI2: Seek alternate sources of revenue. FI3: Consider pursuing General or Recreation Fund referendum.	
<b>IO</b> <b>INTERNAL OPERATIONS</b> Employee growth and development.	<b>Internal Operations:</b> Employee growth and development. IO1: Continue to invest in training, continuing education and personal development programs. IO2: Improve internal communication. IO3: Improve employee benefits. IO4: Become a more data-driven organization. IO5: Increase focus on Districtwide succession planning.	



2020 Vision  
 Focus on the Future  
**WHAT ACTIONS SHOULD THE PARK DISTRICT TAKE TO ADDRESS THE...  
 SMALL RECREATION BUILDINGS**



**YOUR TURN...** Place your dot in the corresponding box below to indicate which action you think the park district should take to address the issues and opportunities for the small recreation buildings.



# ACTION STRATEGY MATRIX: YEAR 1

Theme	Goals	Tactics	EPD Values	Cost	Duration
PA	PA1	1.1a Update Conrad Fischer Park.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence	\$\$\$	
PA	PA1	1.1a Replace Berens Park Two Synthetic Turf Fields	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence	\$\$\$\$	
PA	PA1, PA2	3.1: Build dog park.	Fun, Community Focused	\$\$\$	
FA	FA2, PR1, PR2	2.1: Determine future of Palmer Drive site / building.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence, Integrity	\$	
FA	FA2, PR1, PR3	2.2a: Determine approach to indoor sports facility.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence	\$	
FA	FA3, PR1, PR3	3.1: Finalize future of small recreation and 225 Prospect buildings based on evaluation of preschool business model.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence	\$	
PR	PR1, PR2, PR3	3.1: Offer programs identified as high priorities in Community Survey.	Fun, Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence	\$	
CO	CO1	1.1: Establish district-wide customer service model.	Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused, Fun	\$	
CO	CO1, IO1, IO2	2.2: Optimize staffing structure to provide exceptional customer service.	Customer Service Excellence, Integrity	\$	
FI	FI1	1.2: Analyze cost recovery data to ensure future financial sustainability.	Integrity, Community Focused	\$	
FI	FI1	1.1: Implement cost recovery goals.	Integrity, Community Focused	\$	
FI	FI3	3.1: Determine approach to referendum (e.g. hire firm).	Integrity, Community Focused	TBD	
IO	IO1	1.1: Establish District-wide training plan for all levels of staff.	Fun, Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused, Integrity	\$	
IO	IO3	3.1: Implement 2017 Compensation Study.	Integrity	\$\$\$	
IO	IO3	3.2: Expand benefits offered to part-time staff.	Integrity	\$	
IO	IO4, IO5	4.1: Implement dashboard software.	Integrity, Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused	\$\$	

**TABLE LEGEND / KEY**

**COST**

\$	\$0-\$25,000
\$\$	\$25,001-\$99,999
\$\$\$	\$100,000-\$499,999
\$\$\$\$	> \$500,000

**TIMEFRAME / DURATION**

	≤ 6 months (0)
	6 months - 1 year (25)
	1-3 years (50)
	3-5 years (75)
	≥ 5 years (100)

**PROGRESS**

	Started (10)
	Ongoing (50)
	Completed (100)
	Delayed / Stopped (0)

Timeframe			Department / Staffing		Implementation	Progress
Anticipated Start	Anticipated Completion	Reporting	Lead	Staff Groups		
January 2018	November 2018	Semiannually	Director of Parks & Facilities	Parks & Facilities	Conduct community outreach, design and engineer, bid, and construct by December 2018.	
January 2018	November 2018	Semiannually	Director of Parks & Facilities	Parks & Facilities	Remove and replace carpet on two synthetic turf fields.	
July 2017	December 2018	Semiannually	Executive Director, Director of Parks & Facilities	Admin, Parks & Facilities	Conduct site feasibility study and community outreach in 2017 and 2018 and master plan, design and engineer, bid, and construct by 2019.	
July 2017	April 2018	Semiannually	Executive Director	Admin, Parks & Facilities, Recreation	Based on data from completed assessment, determine best use of facility.	
September 2017	June 2018	Semiannually	Executive Director, Board of Park Commissioners	Management Team	Based on prior planning reports and community feedback, determine next steps for addressing indoor sports facility needs.	
September 2017	June 2018	Semiannually	Executive Director, Director of Recreation	Admin, Facilities, Recreation, Finance, Marketing & Communications	Based on data collected and public input, determine next steps for optimizing the use of these buildings.	
January 2018	December 2020	Seasonally	Directors of Recreation, Enterprise Services, Parks and Facilities	Recreation, Enterprise, Facilities	Offer at least one new program from the high priorities seasonally.	
January 2018	June 2018	Semiannually	Director of Marketing and Communications	Customer Service Team	Institute Customer Service Model, including staff recognition program and customer feedback approach.	
September 2018	March 2019	Annual	Director of Marketing and Communications, HR Division Manager	Customer Service Team	Implement new staffing structure by Spring 2019.	
September 2017	September 2018	Annually	Director of Finance & Human Resources	Recreation, Enterprise, Facilities	Establish cost recovery analysis and reporting provided District-wide.	
January 2018	December 2020	Annually	Director of Finance & Human Resources	Recreation, Enterprise, Facilities	Meet cost recovery goals with annual review and update of cost recovery model, as necessary.	
September 2017	June 2018	Ongoing	Executive Director, Board of Park Commissioners	Management Team	Determine referendum strategy by June 2018.	
June 2018	December 2018	Semiannually	Division Manager HR	Strategy & Planning Coordinator, Task Force	Develop District-wide training plan based on Vision 2020 feedback.	
September 2017	January 2018	Annually	Executive Director	Finance & HR	Implement Compensation Study recommendations.	
September 2017	March 2018	Semiannually	Division Manager HR	Admin, HR	Consider and implement part-time benefit changes based on Vision 2020 Plan and part-time staff focus group feedback.	
July 2018	June 2019	Annually	Strategy & Planning Coordinator	Management Team	Chose and utilize dashboard software based on an assessment of data to be tracked and the best fit software options.	

# ACTION STRATEGY MATRIX: YEAR 2-5

YEAR 2-5					
Theme	Goals	Tactics	EPD Values	Cost	Duration
PA	PA1	1.1b Update Crestview Park athletic courts and seating areas.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PA	PA1	1.1c Improve athletic fields, including backstops and nets, at Van Voorst, York Commons, and Washington Park.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PA	PA1	1.2: Develop athletic field study.	Integrity, Community Focused		
PA	PA1	1.3: Develop park design guidelines.	Integrity, Customer Service, Community Focused		
PA	PA2	2.1: Explore open space partnerships to increase community offerings.	Customer Service, Community Focused		
PA	PA2, PA1	2.2: Establish a District-wide level of service policy.	Integrity, Customer Service, Community Focused		
PA	PA2	2.3: Explore locations for new amenities to meet level of service benchmarks and fulfill amenity deficiencies.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PA	PA3, PA2	3.2: Study the feasibility of an outdoor nature center.	Integrity, Customer Service, Community Focused		
FA	FA1, PR2	1.1: Update facility master plans.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence, Integrity		
FA / PA	FA1, PA 1	1.2: Update capital improvement plan for parks and facilities and improve / replace parks and facilities with low scores to improve overall system.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
FA	FA2, PR1, PR2	1.1a: Update Wagner Community Center Master Plan.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence, Integrity		
FA	FA2, PR1, PR3	2.2: Expand community indoor recreation space.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
FA	FA2, PR1, PR2, PR3	2.3: Undertake a needs assessment and create a financial and facility plan for new senior center facility.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence, Integrity		
FA	FA2, PR1, PR2, PR3	2.4: Explore facility partnerships to increase and meet facility space needs (ex: performing arts facility, indoor sports facility, etc.).	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence, Integrity		
FA	FA3, PR1, PR 3	3.1: Conduct indoor space utilization study and determine future use of all facilities.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PR	PR1	1.2: Remain current with and invest in industry and innovative trends.	Integrity, Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PR	PR1	1.3: Establish target for new program offerings, and provide incentives for staff.	Fun, Community Focused		
PR	PR2	2.1: Implement rewards program to incentivize participation.	Fun, Community Focused		
PR	PR2	2.2: Gather ongoing feedback from participants and community on program wants/needs.	Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PR	PR2	2.3: Update the Community Needs Assessment every five years.	Integrity, Community Focused, Customer Service Excellence		
PR	PR3	3.2: Address the recommendations in the program assessment.	Integrity, Community Focused		
PR	PR3	3.3: Explore programming partnerships (identify program partnership in detail).	Community Focused		
CO	CO2, IO2	2.1: Refine customer service staff hiring policies and practices.	Customer Service Excellence		
CO	CO1, CO2	2.3: Unite customer service and registration staff into one department.	Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused		



# ACTION STRATEGY MATRIX: YEAR 2-5, CONTINUED

## YEAR 2-5

Theme	Goals	Tactics	EPD Values	Cost	Duration
FI	FI1	1.3: Review and annually update cost recovery model goals based on actuals.	Integrity, Community Focused		
FI	FI2	2.2: Explore and pursue grants.	Integrity, Community Focused		
FI	FI2	2.3: Explore and pursue partnerships.	Integrity, Community Focused		
FI	FI2	2.4: Develop sponsorship plan to evaluate true sponsorship value and viable sponsors.	Integrity, Community Focused		
FI	FI3	3.2: Hire referendum firm to assist district.	Integrity, Community Focused		
IO	IO1	1.2: Define growth expectations for each job description.	Integrity, Customer Service Excellence		
IO	IO1	1.3: Establish personal development plans and coaching program for employees.	Fun, Integrity		
IO	IO2	2.1: Utilize apps for employee communications.	Customer Service Excellence, Fun		
IO	IO2	2.2: Annually conduct the Malcolm Baldrige Survey to gain employee feedback and continue assessing organizational culture and strategies to address it.	Integrity		
IO	IO2	2.3: Institute non-structured opportunities for organic communication (e.g. Hallway Buddies).	Fun, Community Focused		
IO	IO4, IO2	4.2: Track performance metrics to enhance efficiencies, productivity, and customer loyalty.	Integrity, Customer Service Excellence		
IO	IO4	4.3: Conduct annual benchmarking study comparing EPD metrics to best practice NRPA field report metrics.	Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused		
IO	IO5	5.1: Establish cross-training and job shadow program.	Fun, Integrity, Customer Service Excellence		
IO	IO5	5.2: Create policy and training curriculum for future leaders.	Fun, Customer Service Excellence, Community Focused, Integrity		



