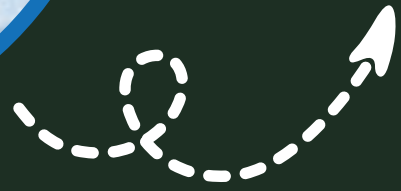
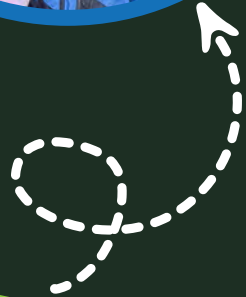


ELEVATE ELMHURST PARKS

mapping our future



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SECTION

1

Introduction



Connection to Vision 2020

In 2017, the Elmhurst Park District (District) adopted its comprehensive and strategic plan—Vision 2020: Focus on the Future (Vision 2020). Vision 2020 outlined why it is important for park districts to plan for the future, citing health and wellness, environment, social equity, and economic development as key factors. Most importantly, it served as a road map that would, “drive long-range planning, direct decision-making, and assist with allocating resources for the District by defining a clear vision for its future.” While it was intended to serve as a five-year planning tool, the Vision 2020 planning cycle was elongated due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2023, the District underwent a new comprehensive and strategic planning initiative, culminating in Elevate Elmhurst Parks: Mapping Our Future (Elevate Elmhurst Parks). Elevate Elmhurst Parks intends to serve as an update to Vision 2020 and guide the District through the next five years. The original focus outlined in Vision 2020 remains the same—the District continues to play a vital role in enhancing the community, and the plan “enables decision-makers to prioritize resources for growth and development in a fiscally responsible, environmentally sound, publicly supported, and politically prudent manner.”



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

—VISION 2020

The Planning Process

Project Leadership

While the District's Board of Park Commissioners (Board) served as the project sponsor, the District's Executive Director was responsible for project execution. Under their direction, a single staff member served as the project manager, and the Elevate Elmhurst Parks Staff Team (Staff Team) provided continuous perspective and insight from departmental and/or functional area leadership.

The Elevate Elmhurst Parks Steering Committee (Steering Committee) served in an advisory capacity through the duration of the planning process. The 11 external members represented their community-based entity's perspective; the Park Board President and three District staff also participated. The role of the Steering Committee members included:

- Stay connected throughout the project to understand progress
- Serve as ambassadors of Elevate Elmhurst Parks, spreading the word about engagement opportunities and encouraging community participation
- Provide feedback and representative insight to the project team
- Affirm that the planning process is transparent, engages a wide variety of community perspectives, and responsibly plans for the District's future

The consulting team coordinated the planning process, conducted the analysis, and served as subject matter experts in survey administration, architecture, landscape architecture, recreation service provision, and planning.

Community Engagement

The Elevate Elmhurst Parks planning process emphasized community engagement as the cornerstone to creating a plan that will serve residents' expressed interests and needs. A public awareness campaign encouraged residents to visit the project website to learn more about the planning initiative and to share their feedback through online engagement tools such as an ideas wall, an interactive map, and short surveys. A series of in-person awareness and feedback opportunities were held throughout the community. This first phase of community engagement fed into the creation of a community-wide, statistically valid survey.



1 INTRODUCTION

The statistically valid survey served as the second community engagement phase. Randomly selected households were invited to answer a series of questions regarding their park and recreation interests/needs and their impression of District services. The same survey was made publicly available after the random sample was collected. The results generated insight and information regarding how the District should prioritize and invest in future services.

A third phase of community engagement asked the community a series of questions designed to gather deeper insight into topics requiring further clarification based on engagement phases 1 and 2 data. Results yielded deeper insight into investment prioritization and enhanced understanding of specific park, facility, and recreation interests.

Analysis

Through a series of analyses, the consulting team examined what services the District provides, as well as how, where, and to whom it provides them. Both an internal and external exercise, the analysis portion of the planning process helped illustrate the District's current state. The internal analyses examined current employee culture, organizational structure, and fiscal status. The external analyses centered around level of service—or outputs—of staff efforts. These areas included the core components of parks, facilities, and recreation services in the forms of programs, memberships, rentals, and events. The external analysis also examined the community's current and predicted future demographic characteristics.

Visioning

The consulting team used information gathered through the community engagement and analysis phases to develop an environmental scan presentation. The environmental scan highlighted key data points and observations that helped inform the Board, Staff Team, and Steering Committee's visioning workshops. The groups reviewed the District's existing mission, vision, and values to assess their relevance and identify any need for change. The groups then worked to establish six strategic priorities with corresponding goal statements and objectives.

The Plan

The Elevate Elmhurst Parks Plan document builds on Vision 2020's momentum. The District's history, governance and organizational structure, and community partners summary are nicely articulated in Vision 2020's introduction. The Elevate Elmhurst Parks Plan starts where Vision 2020 left off—providing insight into the District's current environment—and then maps the intended strategies for the next five years.



SECTION

2

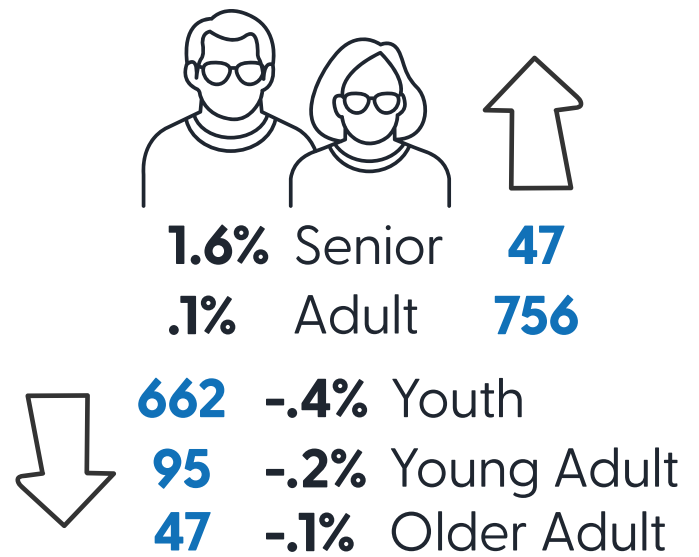
The Community

Demographics

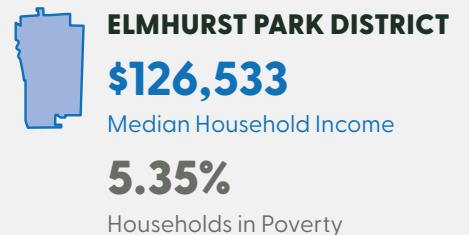
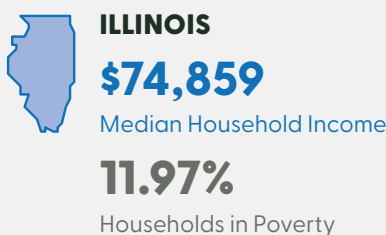
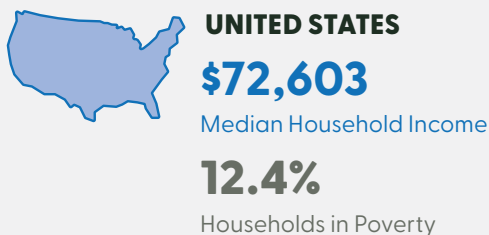
Demographic analysis suggests the District's population could decrease by approximately 316 residents by 2028 to an estimated 46,944. The median age of District residents was 41.8 years old in 2023. The age groups comprising the largest percentage of the population in the District were youth (0-19 years) at 26%, adult (35-54 years) at 25%, and older adults (55-74 years) at 24%. Over the next five years, the youth, young adult, and adult age groups are expected to decline slightly (-1.4%), while seniors are expected to grow 1.6% in the next five years.

Less than 6% of the District's population lives below the federal poverty line, and the median household income (\$126,533) is higher than both Illinois (\$74,859) and the United States (\$72,603). The poverty guideline depends on the average household size, which is 2.7 in the District (\$19,720 and \$24,860 for two or three household members).

Projected Age Change Over Time (2023-2028)



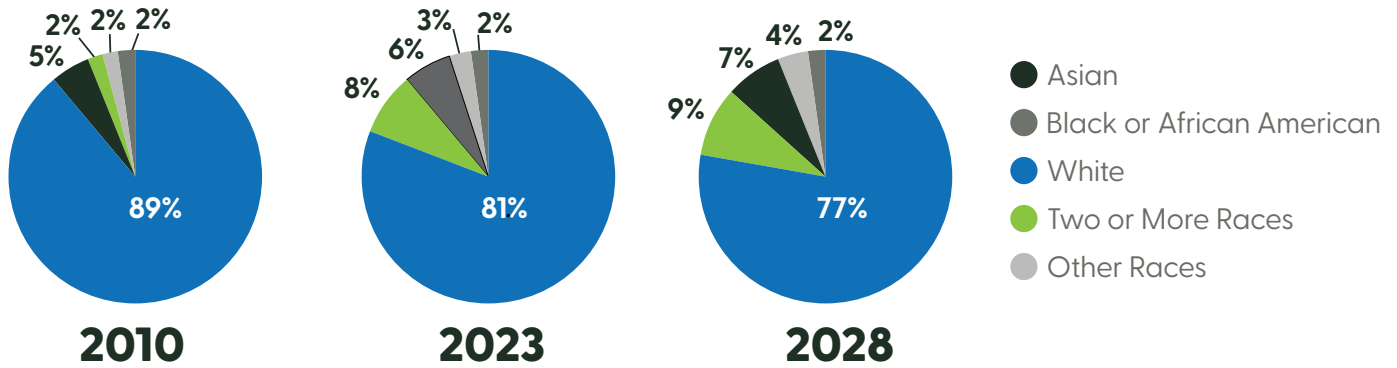
Household Characteristics (2023)



2 THE COMMUNITY

Racial Diversity (2023)

The District is becoming increasingly more diverse over time. From 2010 to 2023, the number of residents who are white decreased by 10%. Those who identify as two or more races increased by 6%, and those who identify as being of Hispanic origin (regardless of race) is expected to increase from 2% to 12% from 2010 to 2028.



Demographic data compiled using Esri's ArcGIS Business Analyst/Data for the Elmhurst Park District boundaries.

The Community's Voice

Engaging the community in the planning process gives residents a voice in the District's future. The engagement process sought residents' opinions and feedback regarding current services, including what they enjoyed the most, which areas needed strengthening, and where new ideas for the future could be integrated.

There were more than **4,831** participatory touch points in the planning process, which does not include the number of pop-up booth visitors, conversations at the three pop-up engagement booths, nor individual conversations between staff and community members.

8 interviews with Park Board members and the Executive Director

218 District staff culture survey participants

669 unique project website users in Phase 3

20 Staff Team members

16 open house participants from Phase 1

69 open house participants in Phase 3

11 Steering Committee community representatives

2,855 unique project website users in Phase 1

26 email responses

13 focus group participants

401 random sample survey respondents in Phase 2

42 comment cards (collected at community events, District facilities, and open houses)

17 stakeholder/key leader focus group participants

466 public survey respondents in Phase 2

Phase 1

The cornerstone of the Phase 1 community engagement strategy was to provide a variety of methods, days, times, and locations for the community to engage with the planning process. Whether in person at events, in small group meeting settings, or from the comfort

of their homes, community members were encouraged to share their feedback. In addition to these structured opportunities, residents could also provide feedback via email and comment cards available at District facilities, open houses, community events, and engagement pop-ups.



5 Community Focus Groups



Open House



Interactive Project Website



3 Engagement Booths



3 Discovery Sessions

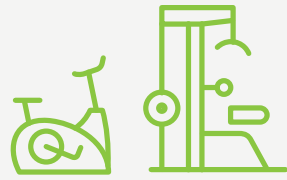


Stakeholder Focus Group

The thousands of data points collected in this engagement phase were synthesized into six key opportunities:



Add outdoor (permanent) restrooms



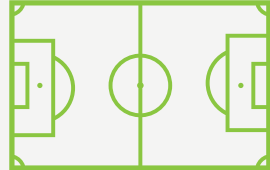
Upgrade outdated facilities



Add more child care spaces



Build a new recreation center for sports and to provide more winter recreation space



Increase and update sport fields



Replace playgrounds more frequently

Phase 2

Using insights from Phase 1 and aligning benchmarking questions from the previous community survey, the consulting team developed and mailed a six-page community needs assessment survey to randomly selected community households in summer 2023.

Needs and priorities were measured for indoor and outdoor amenities as well as parks and recreation programs.

KEY CATEGORIES OF FEEDBACK

- ✓ Reasons for participating
- ✓ Organizations used for recreation activities
- ✓ Condition of parks, trails, and facilities
- ✓ Information sources
- ✓ Value from property taxes
- ✓ Referendum perspectives

Participation Rates

REASONS WHY



Location of the Program Facility

62%



Times Programs are Offered

52%



Reasonable Fees

47%

REASONS WHY NOT



Classes/Programs Being Full

35%



Inconvenient Program Times

34%



Busy Schedules

27%

Most Often Used Providers

73%

Elmhurst Park District

50%

Neighboring communities or other park districts

40%

DuPage County Forest Preserve District*

*For respondents' indoor and outdoor recreation and sports activities.

Park, Trail, and Facility Condition Ratings

BEST RATED PARKS**

- Centennial Park (96%)
- Butterfield Park (90%)
- Wilder Park (90%)

LOWEST RATED PARKS**

- Van Voorst Park (45%)
- Jaycee Tot Lot (51%)
- Pioneer Park (55%)

BEST RATED FACILITIES**

- Wilder Park Conservatory (91%)
- Wilder Mansion (90%)
- Mary E. Kies Recreation Center (87%)

LOWEST RATED FACILITIES**

- Wagner Community Center (50%)
- The Hub (67%)
- Courts Plus (70%)

**Total percentage of excellent and good ratings

The program brochure was the most preferred and most effective information source. Most respondents (66%) rated their overall value from property taxes as either excellent (31%) or good (35%). Exploratory questions regarding a potential referendum indicated most respondents (62%) would be willing to pay less than \$50 in additional property taxes through a referendum to address high-priority items. The highest percentage of respondents (35%) said they would vote in favor of a referendum, 28% might vote in favor, 20% were not sure, and 17% said they would vote against.

The survey measured levels of unmet need and importance regarding 34 indoor and outdoor amenities and 36 program areas to determine priority investment ratings. Top facility investment priorities included an indoor running/walking track, fitness center, and indoor gymnasium/courts; permanent park restroom buildings; and walking and biking trails. Top program priorities included community events, fitness and wellness programs, and cooking classes.

Appendix E includes a summary of the publicly available survey results.

Phase 3

Phase 3's community engagement approach was designed to provide insight into areas that could use further clarification from the community. While it was understood that the community expressed interest in an indoor facility, a budget exercise available online and in person helped respondents prioritize which types of spaces within a facility were most important. Similarly, a question regarding park amenities and open space was posed in the context of a budget prioritization exercise. Then, specific questions regarding the top priority investment rating program areas were posed in relation to importance and interest. Phase 3 helped clarify and prioritize fitness and wellness, cooking program, and community event elements.

Phase 3 respondents expressed the highest interest in more and different varieties of fitness/group exercise classes as well as reduced Courts Plus membership fees. Respondents were most interested in music, exercise and active lifestyle activities, and food at community events. Evening, private/small group, and cost were the most important factors in selecting a cooking class, and healthy food and entrees were the class topics of most interest. Indoor gymnasium/courts and the acquisition of new park land and open space were of most interest to respondents.



SECTION

3

Key Findings

Accomplishments

The Vision 2020 plan identified 18 goals organized into six strategic themes. To achieve the goals, staff created a strategic work plan (SWP) that outlined specific tactics to be accomplished each year. Since 2017, staff have planned, tracked, and reported on tactic progress. The District accomplished nearly all the goals and tactics from Vision 2020, except for constructing new indoor recreation and sports spaces due to fiscal constraints.

TASKS ACCOMPLISHED INCLUDE

Park renovations at multiple parks, including Glos, Ben Allison, and Eldridge Parks

Added and developed new parks at Centennial and Pick Parks

Amenity upgrades, including Dog Park planning (construction in 2024) and baseball field renovations

Facility enhancements, including the Abbey sale and new Mary E. Kies Recreation Center

Ongoing programming, communications, finance, and organizational culture improvements

While the District intends to finish certain high priority, large-scale Vision 2020 multiyear projects in 2024, the Elevate Elmhurst Parks planning process aims to help ensure the District's comprehensive and strategic plan remains a relevant and effective long-range planning tool that responds to the community's changing needs.



Parks

Overall, the District has an excellent array of well-maintained parks with various programming opportunities. Many parks have new play equipment, while some older playgrounds need updates and/or replacements. When replacing these amenities, the District should consider diversifying play opportunities to create unique experiences at each park (ropes, climbers, combine courses, nature-based features) rather than traditional post-and-deck at every site.

According to consulting team analysis, sports fields are generally in good condition. Many fields feature new or updated equipment like backstops. Multipurpose rectangular fields could benefit from an analysis of the supply and demand of fields and an evaluation of their specific placement/alignment and turf/grading conditions within each park. Diamond fields would benefit from shade, seating, and better connectivity to the overall park.

KEY PARKS TAKEAWAYS

Acquisition opportunities should prioritize mini- and neighborhood park-size sites.

Planning Areas 6, 8, and 10 are park-acquisition priority areas.*

Priority amenities are restrooms, rectangular fields, pickleball courts, playgrounds, and trails. While the District exceeds benchmarks for many of these amenities in terms of quantity, community input indicates need for further study.

Opportunities exist to activate key underdeveloped park sites at Crescent, Kiwanis, Sleepy Hollow, and Maple Trail Woods.

*Planning Areas map provided in Appendix A

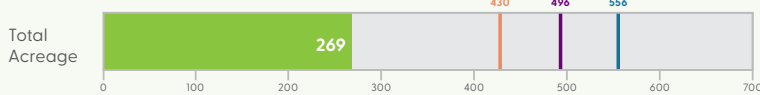
Park Level of Service Dashboard

QUANTITY-ACREAGE

Considering the District's acreages alone appears to render the community deficient in park space, however, when all open space providers and their assets are included (i.e. School District, Forest Preserve), the District has a **surplus** of between 178 and 254 acres. Future park acquisitions should prioritize small-scale, **neighborhood and mini park sites**.

SURPLUS/DEFICIT (ACRES)

Active Park Acreage LOS (Mini, Neighborhood, Community)



-288 Local
-161 State
-227 National

When the LOS quantity analysis only considered the "active" park sites, or the Mini, Neighborhood, and Community Parks, the District is **deficient** in all three categories (local, state, and national).

Parks and Open Space Acreage LOS (All Parks)



-237 Local
-79 State
-162 National

When considering all park assets - Mini, Neighborhood, Community, linear, Special Use, and Natural Areas - the District is **deficient in total acreage** at the local, state, and national levels.

Community Park Acreage LOS (Park District, Schools, and Forest Preserve)



178 Local
337 State
254 National

When considering all community openspace assets across the Park District, and Forest Preserve District, the District has a **surplus** across all three benchmark categories.

Level of service data is available in Appendix A.

3 KEY FINDINGS

The approach to linear parks could be improved to enhance neighborhood connections and support trail users through the inclusion of restrooms, seating, fitness, bike repair, and parking.

Most park recommendations are related to aging infrastructure, accessibility, neighborhood connectivity, and shade.

The District maintains 30 parks—including three trails/linear parks and a golf course—across **458.02*** total acres.

*see Appendix A

Facilities

The District’s 13 recreation and community centers are well maintained despite their age. Community center functions take place in repurposed buildings and spaces that impede functionality. While one facility (Wilder Park Conservatory) is in excellent condition, nine facilities (69%) are rated in either fair or poor condition. The preschool facilities, while serviceable, have space-quality and accessibility challenges.

Similarly, three of the District’s six administrative, maintenance, and support facilities are in fair condition; one is in poor condition (Sugar Creek Maintenance). The District has outgrown its park/facility maintenance facility, and additional maintenance space is needed in other parts of the community.

KEY FACILITIES ANALYSIS TAKEAWAYS

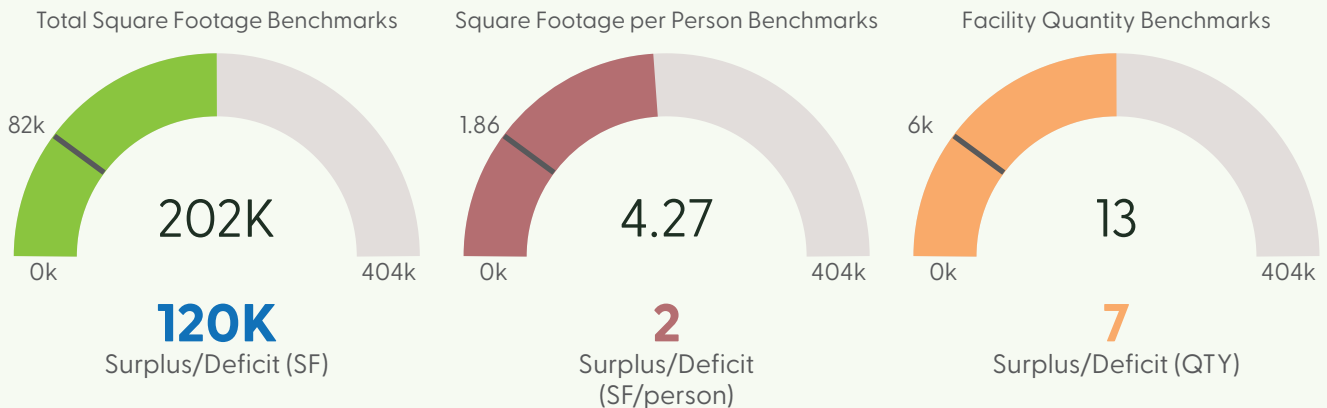
Since 2017, the District addressed a key community need: a new senior center that is centrally located and easily accessible.

While exceeding benchmarks for square footage and the number of facilities, the District’s building spaces do not align with community program needs.

Indoor sports and recreation space remains a high priority for the community.

Facilities Level of Service Dashboard

QUANTITY



Level of service data is available in Appendix A.

Programs, Memberships, and Services

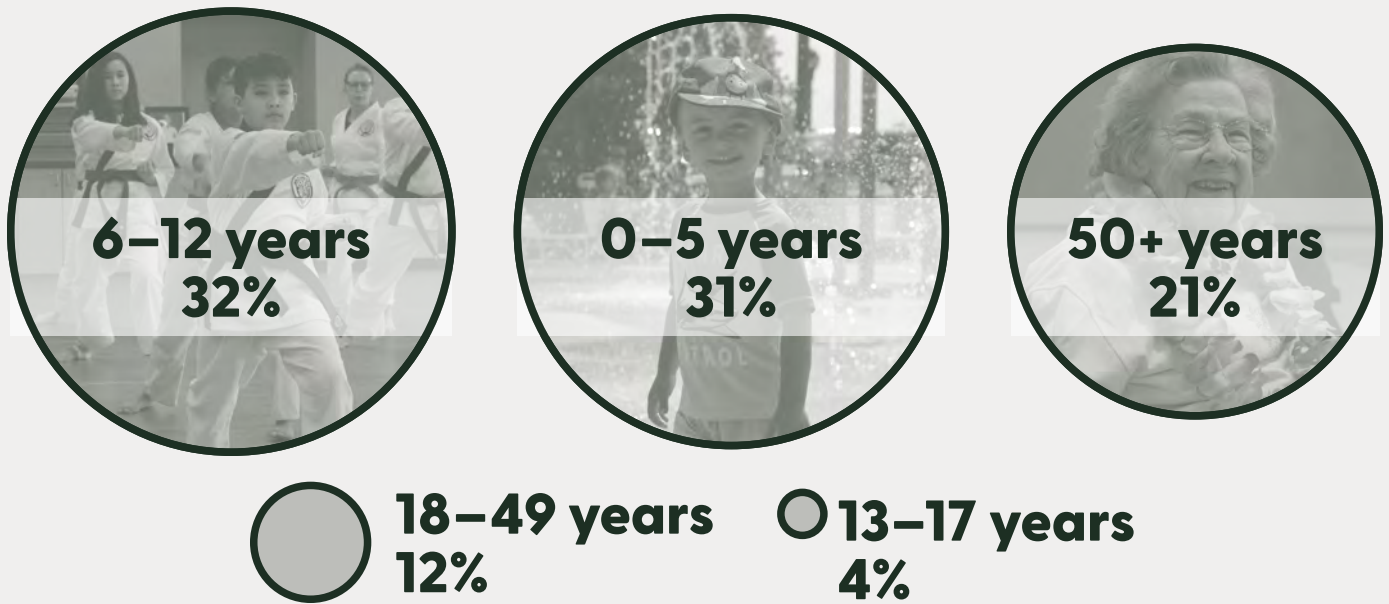
The District offers programs across 15 categories, fitness center memberships, outdoor pool memberships, rental services, and indoor/outdoor drop-in and passive leisure experiences. Gymnastics, fitness, and racquet sports comprised a majority of programming requiring registration (54%) in 2022, while racquet sports, aquatics, and early childhood programming experienced the highest enrollment in that time frame. A majority (67%) of participants in enrollment-based programs were youth ages 0–17 years.

When the variety of ways to recreate with the District are considered, the District recorded 7,919 program enrollments, 525 golf program enrollments, approximately 22,000 community

event attendees, and more than 283,716 additional service touch points in 2022, including memberships, punch passes, rentals, and more. While participation is high throughout District services, demand is especially high in gymnastics, racquet sports, and sports—as evidenced by the 3,442 waitlisted participants for these activities in 2022.

The services in highest demand are hindered by space constraints, most notably in gymnastics, racquet sports, and Rec Station. Service development and/or expansion opportunities are strongest in community events, fitness, and cooking. Community feedback and key service analysis components should be used to continue data-driven decision-making. Indoor space adjustments and/or expansion can help meet the community’s expressed program and service demands.

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT BY AGE



Number of enrollments by age		
0-5 YEARS	2,373	13-17 YEARS320
6-12 YEARS	2,435	50+ YEARS1,644
		18-49 YEARS 911

KEY PROGRAM TAKEAWAYS

Wide variety of programming for all ages.

Preschool is highly regarded despite dated facilities.

High demand for programming—long wait lists in core program areas.

Program availability is limited by indoor recreation space.

Community has a high sense of respect for programs and programming staff.

Programming staff are very aware of program success and program life cycle.

Registration is challenging but a new system is coming (December 2023).

A consistent system is needed to evaluate programs.

Potential for waitlist process evaluation.

Organization

There is a relatively flat senior leadership reporting structure, with 10 positions reporting to the Executive Director. While staffing levels have returned to 2017 (pre-pandemic) figures, there are opportunities for restructuring and/or adding positions in events, rentals, and marketing. There is also an opportunity to formalize succession planning for division managers and supervisors. The addition of an HR software system has helped centralize employee communications and enhance the overall employee experience.

As illustrated in Appendix C, the culture survey revealed a strong work environment, where most respondents (92%) felt they had a safe work environment, and 93% affirmed they know what is expected of them at work. Of the seven question categories, District culture received the highest levels of satisfaction scores, followed by teamwork, collaboration, and customer service. The survey results revealed that the District can strengthen interdepartmental communication and improve transparency for career advancement.

The consulting team administered a district-wide employee culture survey as a part of the analysis process. The 218 responses equated to a 31% participation rate and represented all employment status groups, lengths of employment, and departments.

To provide insight into the data that could use further clarification from employees, full-time staff were asked to provide additional feedback and the District’s leadership team is already using and acting on the data as exhibited in Appendix C.



Key Observations

- The District’s largest barrier to accomplishing Vision 2020 goals—and subsequently meeting community needs—is funding. As one focus group participant expressed, the District’s residents have “champagne taste on a beer budget.” The District’s last significant tax increase was the referendum effort in 1972 (over 51 years ago) and for the past 30+ years, tax cap legislation has continued to limit annual growth to the lessor of 5% or the Consumer Price Index, making substantial facility upgrades or increasing indoor recreation space to meet growing demand out of reach. The District cannot complete these priorities with the current level of property taxes levied.
- Community members envy neighboring community’s assets (i.e., parks, facilities), which intensifies their interest and desire to have what their neighbors have. More and enhanced indoor recreation space and higher quality parks and fields were top expressed needs.
- Balancing the needs and interests of current and changing demographic groups will be a continued focus into the future. The age of community members is predicted to shift, and racial and cultural recreation interests will continue to diversify. The District will need to continue to evolve its service menu to stay aligned with community interests.
- Full programs were the most significant barrier to program participation. Without more space to hold programs, the District will continue struggling to meet demand.
- A dog park remains a high interest to the community; those aware of the newly planned amenity are looking forward to its opening in 2024.
- The District should continue to monitor its role in fitness and wellness service provision and adapt to the community’s changing fitness and wellness needs. The high importance ratings and unmet need ratings suggest that while the District provides fitness and wellness services, the current service provision format might need to change.
- The District leadership team continues to make a concerted effort to intentionally engage its employees and respond to employee feedback. A high culture survey response rate—coupled with positive survey results—indicate ongoing efforts are well received and should be continued.

The District succinctly summarized the results of the Vision 2020 community engagement process by stating:

- You would like new places to play
- You want more community programming
- You want even better upkeep of parks and fields

The same summary can be used for the 2023 results—residents want more and better indoor space, outdoor space, and services. Overall, residents are satisfied but have asked the District to continuously improve. The following section depicts the District’s strategy to address community needs.



SECTION

4

Strategy

Mission, Vision, and Values

Reflecting on why an agency exists, where it is headed, and how it operates is a quintessential strategy development exercise. In the District’s case, this reflection was completed by conducting a review of the existing mission and vision statements and the District’s values. After careful review and discussion, the Board, District staff, and Steering Committee concluded the mission and vision statements should remain unchanged and an additional value—belonging—should be added.

MISSION STATEMENT

We enrich lives while having fun!

VISION STATEMENT

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

VALUES

✦ Integrity

✦ Fun

✦ Customer Service
Excellence

✦ Community Focused

✦ Belonging









PRIORITIES, GOAL STATEMENTS, AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic priorities are broad areas upon which a District should focus its resources and energy to achieve the vision. They are the most important things the organization needs to focus on. It is best to keep this list small so they are achievable and do not overwhelm the organization.

Goal statements are action-based phrases that help define the desired outcome for the priority. Objectives are the precise actions or measurable steps an agency will take to move closer to its goals.



Through the visioning process, the District identified six strategic priorities:

 Invigorated Parks	 Engaged Community
 Vibrant Facilities	 Stronger Finances
 Dynamic Offerings	 Thriving Culture



DYNAMIC OFFERINGS

GOAL
Expand program and service experiences

OBJECTIVES

- Integrate data-driven program/service analysis to guide program planning and execution
- Offer innovative programs and services that include a diverse array of audiences



ENGAGED COMMUNITY

GOAL
Increase opportunities for communication and collaboration

OBJECTIVES

- Expand transparency through communication and feedback initiatives
- Implement strategies to foster a culture of belonging for community members
- Strengthen and grow partnerships



INVIGORATED PARKS

GOAL

Enhance park amenities and open spaces

OBJECTIVES

- Invest in new park amenities
- Modernize current park amenities
- Expand open space
- Support park operations



THRIVING CULTURE

GOAL

Foster a culture where every employee feels valued

OBJECTIVES

- Enhance employee development opportunities
- Improve employee communication between departments and staff levels
- Continue fostering a culture of belonging
- Enhance employee benefits, compensation, and recognition to remain competitive with the market and ensure equity



STRONGER FINANCES

GOAL

Grow fiscal capacity

OBJECTIVES

- Prepare for future fiscal impacts and opportunities
- Secure alternate revenue to address community priorities
- Increase financial communications regarding outlook and capacity
- Implement operational improvements to increase effectiveness and maximize financial resources



VIBRANT FACILITIES

GOAL

Expand and upgrade facilities

OBJECTIVES

- Add new indoor programming facilities/spaces
- Modernize current facilities/spaces for maintenance and programming
- Ensure staff workspaces meet evolving needs

These priorities, goal statements, and objectives inform detailed tactics that guide staff members' everyday work. While the tactics are laid out in an action plan format for the next five years, they are also designed to be re-evaluated annually for relevance, feasibility, and resource availability. Staff will use the action plan to develop their annual Strategic Work Plan (SWP), which outlines specific tactics with corresponding timelines and

responsibilities for the year. The SWP is reviewed prior to each year's budget process to help guide decision-making, work planning, and resource allocation. As staff successfully complete the tactics, they will be able to report to the Board and community that the District is achieving its goals and objectives. Historically, staff have completed progress updates at mid-year and at year-end.

SECTION

5

List of Appendices



To read the analysis reports, community engagement findings, and project data, visit:

www.epd.org/ElevateEmhurstParks

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Level of Service Analysis
Inventory Matrices

APPENDIX B. PROGRAM AND MEMBERSHIP ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX C. ORGANIZATIONAL REVIEW

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APPENDIX D. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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APPENDIX E. COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY RESULTS

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Demographics Review
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Verbatim Community Feedback

- Comment card submissions
- Email submissions
- Ideas wall comments
- Interactive map comments
- Non-user survey responses
- Phase 3 survey open-ended responses

*Due to file size, Appendix content will be provided upon request by calling the Administrative Office Manager at 630-993-8900 or submitting a contact form at www.epd.org/contact.



ELEVATE ELMHURST PARKS

mapping our future

Comprehensive and
Strategic Plan *update*

