

## **Master Plan Summary**

The City of Prairie Village initiated the creation of this Parks and Recreation Master Plan in the summer of 2008 to guide the development and improvement of its parks, trails, and recreation programs over the next 10-15 years. It was understood by all participants from the very beginning of the process that Prairie Village residents view parks as a fundamental component of the quality of life in their city and that citizen interest in the outcome of this plan would be significant. The citizen's interest in parks was clearly illustrated early in the process with the tremendous response to a mailed survey. Nearly twice the original goal of responses was received and tabulated in the final summaries, a response far greater than that which could be expected in most any other community.

### **Process Overview**

The development of this plan has been overseen by a Parks Master Plan Committee, a special committee comprised of two City Council members and five other Prairie Village residents and formed specifically to guide this important planning task. As well, members of the City staff have been instrumental in providing information, insight, and assistance throughout process.

Aside from the review and guidance of the Committee and staff, the strategy to engage and capture the thoughts of the public revolved around three distinct strategies:

1. In September 2008, a 23-question survey instrument was mailed to 2,100 Prairie Village households, selected at random. The initial response rate needed to achieve a statistically-valid survey with a confidence level of 95% was 400 returned surveys. The final tally was 791 returned surveys, an outstanding response which has provided valuable insight into the preferences and hopes of the community in relation to parks and recreation. Section 3 of this report summarizes the findings of this survey.
2. The design team spent several days over several weeks in the parks, noting conditions, observing the way that visitors interacted with the park elements, and speaking to them about their thoughts related to park improvements. This was undertaken to gain an understanding of the likes and dislikes of those using the parks on a day-to-day basis. While the discoveries from this effort cannot be expressed in a statistically valid sense, the reinforcement of perceptions and fresh perspectives was invaluable in the formation of this Master Plan.
3. After initial concepts for parks, trails, and recreation were conceived, a Citizen Workshop was held to share the survey results and other findings, and to get feedback on the general collection of improvements tentatively proposed for each park. Again, the comments received were very helpful as refinements to the plans and priorities were developed.

### **Overview of Major Elements of the Master Plan**

During the course of the Master Plan development, several basic issues became the framework for the many specific recommendations that are included in the plan. A summary of the most prominent elements of the plan are outlined below. Additional discussion and detail regarding these elements can be found in the various sections of the full Master Plan report.

### **Children and Nature**

*“Passion does not arrive on videotape or on a CD; passion is personal. Passion is lifted from the earth itself by the muddy hands of the young; it travels along the grass-stained sleeves to the heart.....we must also save an endangered indicator species: the child in nature.” ~ Richard Louv*

There is a well-documented national trend that seeks to re-connect children to nature in the hands-on way of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors. This trend and the needs for its continued growth are best captured by the work of Richard Louv in “Last Child in the Woods.” The growing nature-disconnect of the last few decades has resulted in childhood obesity, attention disorders, and depression. More positively, it is known that close connections with nature are fundamental to increases in creativity and learning, and an appreciation of the nature world and how it works, as Louv’s book details.

There is great merit to efforts to connect children and nature, and this plan is devoted to working with the City of Prairie Village and its citizens to develop new ways to help rebuild that connection within its park system. At its core, the challenge is to create nature-based play that allows and encourages direct exposure to nature ...hands-on, dirt-under-the-fingernails kinds of experiences that use all of a child’s senses. This is how the children – and all of us – gain an appreciation for our place and the world around us...our nature.

These concepts for increasing the child-nature connection will go beyond education and observation, to actual experiences played out in un-structured, un-pressured ways. Nature play areas will seek to be attractive to children and families, encouraging them to explore - more on their own free time than in a programmed, controlled format. The solutions to this challenge, as proposed in the Master Plan, are play-based, as play is what attracts and holds the attention of children. A child’s job is to play...our job is to help - really to let - that play happen.

### **Trails System Overview**

A major piece of the overall Master Plan is the proposed community-wide trail system, which can be viewed in Section 6 of this report. The trail system is conceived first and foremost as a recreation and quality of life resource for the citizens of Prairie Village, with the goal of providing easily-accessed and safe corridors for walking, running, bicycling, and generally moving about the city. It is essentially intended to accommodate the following uses:

- Recreational cyclists and families with children
- Runners and walkers
- General citizen access to community sites, such as parks and recreation facilities, schools, civic sites, and commercial shopping areas

The trail plan includes locations of specific trail destinations that trail users would be expected to seek out. It is important to note that the proposed trail system connects directly to or within one block of 27 of the 32 anticipated destinations.

Thus, the proposed trail corridors are initially targeted for those areas that provide the safest pedestrian environments, comfortably allow for two-way trail traffic, and minimize interactions with vehicular traffic. The preferred corridors for the trails are, then, those that can accommodate minimum 8' wide trails, including:

- Existing parks and school sites
- Wide street right-of ways, where extra-wide sidewalks can be accommodated.
- Stream corridors, with particular focus on the few that are accessible for trail purposes.

### **Bike Lanes**

This master plan strongly encourages the future study and development of bike lanes throughout the community to better serve more serious cyclists and to promote an increase in daily commuters using bike lanes for regular travel to places of employment, while at the same time being available for the casual biker.

### **Community Center**

The resident's desire for a community center, encouragement to see the City find partners to assist in its development, and a basic willingness to consider funding assistance were all notable outcomes of the mailed survey. With this expressed desire known, discussions with various potential partners were held to gain a basic understanding of the viability of the concept. Out of these preliminary discussions has emerged a recommendation for the continuation of discussions and discovery, via the city's existing Community Center Committee, regarding the possibility of a community center and/or natatorium facility involving the school district and other public and/or private agencies. The master plan's recommendations strongly encourage city leaders to actively pursue the potential cost-sharing and operating partnerships that have recently surfaced. Pursuit of these opportunities should begin with dedicated meetings with each potential partner, likely followed by a feasibility study if these initial meetings provide, as anticipated, evidence of a notable shared interest in the project. If indeed a community center facility can be forged with strong partners and commitments, then many benefits to the community and partners – increased recreation programming opportunities, access to healthy lifestyles, social opportunities, and local school support - can be realized.

### **General Improvements to All Parks**

There are a few recommendations which are not feasible to show on the individual plans, but nonetheless are important to record as desirable improvements for the long-term. They are as follows:

1. Trail maps clearly show walking paths and distances within each park.
2. Tie all parks to Prairie Village's community identity through the incorporation of new, standardized park entry signs that evoke reference to the new city entry monument signs.
3. Implement an on-going tree replacement plan within the parks.
4. Provide additional lighting (solar-powered preferred), particularly along walking paths.

**Individual Park Plans**

The following bullet list provides an overview of the prominent improvements which have been proposed for each of the existing parks. More detailed lists and graphics of each park plan can be found in Section 7 of the report:

**BENNETT PARK**

- NEW INSET PARALLEL PARKING ON 77TH ST.
- NEW TRICYCLE PATH
- NEW 6' PERIMETER WALKING PATH

**BRENIZER PARK**

- NEW SMALL WATER FEATURE

**FRANKLIN PARK**

- ADD PARKING TO EXISTING LOT AND RECONFIGURE ALONG ROE
- NEW SHELTER, RESTROOMS, PATIO AREA, & GRILL
- WALKING PATHS WIDENED TO 8'
- NEW NATURE PLAY AREA TO ENHANCE PLAY EXPERIENCE
- NATURALIZE CREEK ALONG EAST EDGE
- BALL FIELD IMPROVEMENTS
- OTHER MINOR IMPROVEMENTS

**HARMON/SANTA FE PARKS**

- FINISH DEVELOPMENT OF AMPHITHEATER AREA
- RELOCATE AND EXPAND PLAY AREA AS A SANTA FE TRAIL-THEMED DESTINATION PLAYGROUND WITH PLAY VILLAGE, THEMED PLAY, NATURE PLAY, AND CRAFT SHACK
- ADD DRIVE AND PARKING AREAS AROUND WATER TOWER
- RENOVATE LARGE SHELTER, PATIO AREA, RESTROOMS, & GRILL
- ADD 8' WALKING PATHS AROUND PERIMETER AND THRU PARK
- NEW POOL IMPROVEMENTS—BATHHOUSE, RENOVATED 50-METER POOL WITH ENCLOSURE, AND OTHER FUTURE ADDITIONS
- ENHANCE SANTA FE TRAIL RUTS EXPERIENCE W/PRAIRIE PLANTS
- COMMUNITY CENTER EXPANSION OR NEW FACILITY
- TENNIS AREA—TOURNAMENT SHELTER, NEW PRACTICE COURTS
- NEW CLIMBING WALL NEAR SKATE PARK
- NINE-HOLE DISC GOLF COURSE
- OTHER MINOR IMPROVEMENTS

**McCRUM PARK**

- NEW PLAY AREA AND EQUIPMENT
- NEW SPRAY PAD AFTER WATER TOWER REMOVAL
- NEW TRICYCLE PATH

**Master Plan Summary**

- NEW 8' PERIMETER WALKING PATH
- NEW SMALL SHELTER
- NEW INSET PARALLEL PARKING ON 70TH ST.
- MID-BLOCK CROSSING ON ROE @ CREST OF HILL, W/ SIGNAL

MEADOWLAKE PARK

- WALKING PATHS WIDENED TO 8'
- NEW PLAY EQUIPMENT
- NEW NATURE PLAY AREA TO ENHANCE PLAY EXPERIENCE
- SPORTS FIELD IMPROVEMENTS AND EXPANSION—BASEBALL AND SOCCER

PORTER PARK

- WALKING PATHS WIDENED TO 8'
- NEW NATURE PLAY AREA TO ENHANCE PLAY EXPERIENCE
- SPORTS FIELD DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENTS—BASEBALL & SOCCER
- EXPANSION OF PLAY AREA SHELTER
- NEW INSET PARALLEL PARKING ON ROE FOR WEST SHELTER AND BALL FIELD PARKING

PRAIRIE PARK

- ADD TODDLER SWINGS FOR PLAY AREA
- OTHER MINOR IMPROVEMENTS

SCHLIFFKE PARK

- REMOVE PARKING AND ADD 10' TRAIL, BENCHES
- NEW SCENIC OVERLOOK OF BRUSH CREEK

WELTNER PARK

- RE-ALIGN CAMBRIDGE ST. AND COMBINE TWO HALVES OF PARK
- NEW 8' PERIMETER TRAIL
- RELOCATE SHELTER AND NEW PLAY AREA

WINDSOR PARK

- WALKING PATHS WIDENED TO 8', AND NEW EXTENSIONS AROUND TENNIS COURTS AND N.W. TOWARD VILLAGE SHOPS
- NEW NATURE PLAY AREA TO ENHANCE PLAY EXPERIENCE
- NEW SHELTER AND MORE SHADE @ PLAY AREA
- OTHER MINOR IMPROVEMENTS

### **Recreation Programming**

There are a variety of components to the proposed recreation programming within the master plan. In general, these components are as follows:

- Existing Aquatics and Tennis Programs – Continue involvement in the current, well-attended programs for swimming, diving, and tennis. The long-term viability and growth of these programs, especially aquatics programs, will require decisions to be made regarding the nature of investment in facilities.
- Implement new adult programs and social sports leagues and tournaments, making use of the parks and providing close-to-home recreation options.
- Actively pursue options, and space, for increased programming for the 50+ demographic, especially in partnership with Johnson County Parks and Recreation District.
- Increase opportunities for teens through new programs associated with the skate park, summer camp programs, and community service.
- Use the proposed destination play features in Harmon Park, including a new “craft shack,” as the basis for new family and children programs for nature study and art.

### **New Park Land**

Regardless of future opportunities or intentions to increase park land in the city, it will be important to establish a Park Land Fund with which to pursue a land purchase when the opportunity arises. The under-served areas of the city do indeed warrant serious discussion for new parks and finding opportunities to expand the smaller existing parks is also an important consideration. As with other elements of the community, be it housing or commercial development, the land-locked nature of Prairie Village provides limited growth opportunities for parks. Thus, the most effective response is to focus on making the most of what is already here, and seeking to add to the park land inventory as opportunities arise in the future.

### **Park Master Plan Committee Priorities**

Following presentation of the initial parks and recreation concepts at the Citizen Workshop, Opinions of Probable Cost figures were developed for each component of the plan. The Park Master Plan Committee then met to review and discuss the long list of proposed improvements and associated costs and to then prioritize the improvements for implementation.

In general, the highest priority items coming out of this exercise were the following:

- Continue Exploration of Community Center Options.
- Implement proposed improvements to Weltner Park and McCrum Park.
- Increase lighting in all parks.
- Develop the Trail System, and
- Implement proposed improvements to Franklin Park, Harmon & Santa Fe Parks, and Porter Park.

**Parks and Recreation Department or Staff**

The need for a recreation staff member will go hand-in-hand with the decision to implement the proposed recreation programming ideas outlined above. The recommendation of this report is to pursue the hiring of a fee-supported, part-time staff member to give focused effort toward initiating at least some of the recreation programs mentioned. The collective tasks of planning, marketing, administering, and monitoring new recreation programs will be required of this position. These programs will likely not succeed without at least this level of support.

**Goals of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan**

Based on the prominent elements or issues as outlined above, broad goals for this master plan have been crafted, which seek to capture the overall intent of the specific recommendations for each park and recreation element:

- Enhance Neighborhood Parks – Begin a systematic improvement program to update and generally improve the existing neighborhood parks. Also, seek locations for new neighborhood parks in under-served areas of the community.
- Nature Play – Be a leader at the municipal level in providing opportunities for children to experience play in “natural environments,” which can supplement the more traditional play environments currently found in the parks.
- Trail System – Develop a community-wide trail system that makes the most of opportunities within all park lands, along major street corridors, and with connections to neighboring systems.
- Community Center – Engage in detailed discussions and a feasibility study with potential partners with the intention of making a decision in the near future on the viability of this potential community amenity.
- Community Park Features – Develop prominent features that service the entire community such as an amphitheater, enhanced sculpture garden, and a destination playground.
- Recreation Services – Increase recreation offerings, primarily through existing agencies such as Johnson County Park and Recreation District, with emphasis on the 50+ demographic. Also, provide additional city-sponsored recreation programs for adults, families with children, and teenagers. Obtain space and facilities to allow these programs to grow.

**In Summary**

There are many worthy concepts included in this master plan, and achieving their implementation will indeed take a steady, phased approach. Yet, the quality of life expected by the residents of Prairie Village will be the force behind taking those first steps and continuing on as conditions and opportunities allow. One of Village Vision’s overall themes could be characterized as the pursuit of redevelopment aimed at retaining and attracting families with children and those in their prime earning years. Similarly, this park plan should be viewed as an opportunity to provide the types of park lands that these demographic groups value so highly when they are choosing a community within which to live. While part of this decision making is dependent on housing size and style, the availability of high-quality, accessible parks can help to overcome some of the inherent challenges that confront the City.