

## **Vision and Goals**

The following section captures the prominent thoughts and expectations that were consistently expressed throughout the master-planning process. These statements reflect a long-term direction for parks and recreation in Prairie Village and should be re-visited on a regular basis to assure that day-to-day and year-to-year decisions are working toward the fulfillment of the vision contained in the plans.

Following the Vision Statement and Goals is a section that explores how these statements relate to the community-wide goals expressed in the city's Village Vision plan.

### **Vision Statement**

This statement is the over-arching theme used to guide long-range decisions, especially if they are new issues or opportunities that are not specifically addressed by the park plan. For this master plan, looking to the foreseeable future, the following vision is noted:

Create an accessible, high-quality, and visually-appealing parks and recreation system that enhances access to nature and open space, provides a variety of patron-desired recreational uses, and fosters opportunities for community-building interaction.

The list of goals which follow will help lead Prairie Village toward the realization of the broad vision expressed above:

### **Goals**

- Neighborhood Parks – Begin a systematic improvement program to update and generally improve the existing neighborhood parks. Also, seek locations for new neighborhood parks in underserved 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 – Continue engaging in discussions with potential partners with the intent of making a concrete 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, sculpture garden, and a destination playground.
- Recreation Services – Increase recreation offerings primarily through existing agencies such as Johnson County Park and Recreation District, particularly for 50+ demographic. Also, provide additional city-sponsored recreation programs for adults, mothers with young children, and teenagers. Obtain space and facilities to allow these programs to grow.

### **Village Vision – Genesis of the Park Master Plan**

In May 2007 the Prairie Village City Council adopted the **Village Vision Strategic Investment Plan** as the City's Comprehensive Plan. It contained a number of recommendations regarding the development and improvement of public spaces, including parks and recreation facilities. This report section outlines the various goals and recommendations found within the Village Vision Plan and summarizes the response of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to those elements and how they support the direction taken with its adoption. (*Note: Text from the Village Vision document is in italics*)

### **Village Vision Goals (partial list)**

- **Community Character** – Implementation of this park plan and its inherent visual improvements of green space will help to create *“an attractive.....community with a unique village identity appealing to people of all ages”*.
- **Community Facilities, Activities, and Services** – The park plan includes ideas to improve park and recreation offerings for the youth, seniors, and in between, with the intent to *“provide diverse community recreation areas, cultural programs, and expanded parks and green space, including a new or renovated community center...”*. For the youngest residents, the plan outlines improved play environments, including the provision of nature-based play environments. For the seniors, the plan aims to increase recreation program offerings, better walking trails, and arts features. The middle-age adults will also benefit from improved walking trails, arts features, as well as concepts for increased social connections through team recreation offerings and programs. Teenage patrons will find recommendations to expand the active environment around the skate park. And, if an improved or new community center would be built in the future, all of these ages will benefit from the increase in recreation offerings and access that will be made available to them.
- **Land Resources** – The concepts for nature-based play environments and various park improvements such as new park entry signs *“encourage a high quality natural and man-made environment that preserves community character, creates identity and sense of place...”*.
- **Leadership & Governance** – Based upon a timely convergence of expressed needs and wishes from the park master plan public survey and other public entities, the park plan encourages the continuation of discussions and discovery regarding the possibility of a community center and natatorium facility involving the schools and other public and/or private agencies. This effort will be a prime opportunity to *“provide a City government that....works cooperatively with other communities to promote projects and programs that maintain a strong Prairie Village”*.
- **Learning** – Building upon the previous response to leadership and governance goals, the opportunity to partner with the schools to provide a high quality recreation environment in the form of a natatorium facility, coupled with an adjacent community center could be a highly-visible and well-used means to *“support the provision of high quality educational environments for residents at all stages of their lives, including strong public K-12 institutions”*.

- **Transportation** – Trail system elements of the park plan, including an interconnected system within parks and along street corridors, as well as connections beyond city borders to surrounding trail systems, seek to promote and “*encourage a variety of transportation choices including safe, interconnected, and well-maintained....sidewalks, biking trails....that supports the community’s needs*”.

Following are discussion points relative to specific chapters of the Village Vision plan, with the intent of highlighting the means employed by the parks master plan to help achieve the broader intentions of the Village Vision.

#### **Chapter 4: Neighborhoods**

In the section titled “Parks and Natural Resources” there are several issues outlined that are addressed, at least in part, through this parks master plan. A brief discussion follows:

- “*The City is underserved in terms of parks and other public spaces that typically help to define neighborhoods*”. While this is a true statement in terms of typical reference standards, it is instructive to note that the public survey conducted during the parks master planning process indicated a general level of satisfaction with both the quantity - and access to - park land within the city. That said, it was also noted through input opportunities with the public that a few sections of the city are indeed under-served with regard to park space. The park plan, in general, makes these two recommendations:
  - Attempt to secure park land for a few segments in the city that lack reasonable access to such places, most notably in the west and northwest neighborhoods.
  - As opportunities arise, attempt to secure additional park land that is adjacent to existing parks, especially the smaller parks of McCrum, Bennett, and Prairie. Also, realigning Cambridge Street will allow the combining of the two halves of Weltner Park.

From bullet list of recommendations:

- “*Prioritize open space acquisition*” – As noted above, the parks plan calls for the addition of park land where feasible. However, understanding the real challenges of this, as well as recent news that the Meadowbrook Country Club property is moving toward a redevelopment strategy, major additions are not likely. Regardless, the plan calls for the city to be prepared to purchase lands when the opportunities arise, by the development of a Park Land Acquisition Fund, allowing the city to act quickly.
- “*Enhance the parks and recreation system*” – The entire package of improvements detailed in the parks plan is aimed at enhancing all parks in the City, as well as making reasonable efforts to increase targeted recreation offerings.
- “*Engage in waterway restoration*” – Because of the land use strategies employed when the majority of Prairie Village was built, including channel narrowing and straightening, the chances to make significant changes to the stream corridors are very limited. However, those stretches of creeks and streams which can be naturalized and softened should be strongly considered for such restoration efforts.

- *“Promote volunteer beautification efforts”* – The incorporation of new park signs at each park and expansion of the existing sculpture garden are two specific opportunities within the plan that serve to promote this goal. A “Friends of the Parks”-type organization may be able to assist with maintenance and/or fund raising.

### **Chapter 5: Civic and Park Enhancement**

This chapter explores several issues related to civic and park space, including the following recommendations, which are variously addressed by the park master plan.

- *“Increase value by creating civic space”* – The Village Vision states that property values can be positively impacted by the creation and enhancement of civic space in a particular neighborhood or section of the city. This argument is well-founded by studies of this issue from many places around the country. To that end, implementation of the park master plan encourages enhancement of public spaces throughout the community, and also seeks to increase the value of the investment by encouraging development of a trail system, which will extend the sense of connection to the parks and make them more a part of what defines Prairie Village.
- *“Improve less desirable places”* – This recommendation was partially directed at raising the value of existing parks that do not factor high on the list of quality places in the city. Much of this “value”, or lack thereof, can be attributed to the small size of the parks, but also in some cases to aging play equipment. The parks plan specifically addresses these concerns, highlighting the potential for improvements in features and scale.
- *“Consider building a community center facility”* – While the idea of a community center has been alluded to above, it should be emphasized that the park plan, working from the expressed desire in the public survey for such a facility, strongly encourages the city leaders to actively pursue the potential cost-sharing and operating partnership(s) that have recently surfaced. If indeed a community center facility can be forged from strong partnerships and commitments, then many aspects of the community – from recreation programming, health lifestyles, social opportunities, and the local school viability - can all be bolstered.
- *“Enhance resident’s access to recreational opportunities”* – During discussions with Johnson County Park and Recreation District, they indicated a strong interest in increasing their recreation programming presence in Prairie Village, particularly for the 50+ demographic. To help this happen, additional space will be needed, and the park plan’s recommendation is to make a focused study of community center partnerships and possibilities.
- *“Provide gathering places in commercial areas”* – While not specifically addressed within the parks master plan due to the many other factors that impact the development of commercial areas, the park plan states that capturing special spaces for civic functions and community gatherings are complementary to the goals of park development.

### **Chapter 11: Goals and Actions**

The Park Master Plan's relationship to the stated goals of the Village Vision document have been outlined above. Chapter 11 of the Village Vision document also details specific actions related to these goals. A few of the more prominent parks-related actions are addressed below:

- **Community Character: CC2. Community Activities: a.** *Consider creating a Parks and Recreation department to coordinate recreation, community activities, and cultural events.* At this time, unless there is a desire within the city administrative structure to reorganize the existing city staff, there does not appear to be a strong need to create a formal Parks and Recreation Department. However, there are elements of the park plan that could modify this statement to suggest that a new part-time or full-time recreation staff position is needed. First, the park plan encourages the development of, at a minimum, experimental leagues geared toward adults such as Chicago Ball, Kickball, and other recreational, social-centered sports that have had success in other community markets. Second, the plan notes a need to develop additional recreation programs for the teens. As well, should a community center facility become a reality, there will be new opportunities, unique to Prairie Village, which will arise simply due to available space. These elements of the park plan would most certainly benefit from regular administration efforts of employed staff. Additional discussion on this recommendation is offered in other sections of the report.
- **Community Character: CC2. Community Activities: a.** *Expand community arts programming.* The park plan has three specific elements that address this action item: Development of a “formal” amphitheater in Harmon Park, creation of a sculpture garden, and possibly incorporating art pieces at each new park entry sign location.
- **Community Facilities and Services: CFS1. Community Center: a.** *Conduct an assessment of community needs and preferences and feasibility study for a new or expanded community center, or reciprocal relationships with other facilities.* The park master plan conducted a statistically valid, mailed survey in the early stages of the process. This effort effectively accomplishes the first portion of this action item. Initial contacts have also been made regarding reciprocal relationships with other facilities and public agencies. The positive outcome of these efforts strongly suggests that a detailed feasibility study should be conducted in the near term.
- **Community Facilities and Services: CFS2. Parks and Green Space: a.** *Preserve and protect natural areas.* The limited quantities of natural areas within the City place a premium on preserving that which is available. Additionally, the park plan focuses much attention on creating opportunities for children to experience “natural” environments in close proximity to the existing play areas.
- **Community Facilities and Services: CFS2. Parks and Green Space: b.** *Enhance parks for active and passive recreation through capital improvements such as landscaping, tree and flower planting, shelters, picnic facilities, athletic fields, etc.* Numerous recommendations for this action item are found within the parks master plan.

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- Land Resources: LR2. Open Space: a. *Encourage active involvement in open space planning and improvements by the Parks and Recreation Committee.* This action item is being largely fulfilled by the creation of this parks master plan.
- Land Resources: LR2. Open Space: Items b and d. These action items make mention of potential public space, plazas, and open space associated with redevelopment of the Corinth Square and Meadowbrook Country Club. It is generally felt at this time that other factors are such that anticipating the potential for these developments is very difficult and thus not purposeful at this time. Nonetheless, the community should keep in mind these opportunities as the city begins its redevelopment efforts per the Village Vision goals.
- Leadership and Governance: LG2. Intergovernmental Cooperation: a. *Build on intermunicipal cooperative activities, agreements, and planning initiatives.* During the course of this master plan, it became known that there was interest in a natatorium facility to serve the Shawnee Mission School District. The master plan consultants and City staff followed up on this information, leading to an understanding that a partnership was possible which would place this facility within Prairie Village for the benefit of both the school district and the City. Coupling this with the previously noted citizen interest in a community center, the park plan states that pursuing this potential partnership is worthwhile and consistent with the expressed desire of the community in the Village Vision and the parks master plan.
- Learning: LRN1. Managing Assets a. *Promote continued support of schools within the community.* Similar to the Leadership and Governance item noted above, the potential natatorium facility and/or community center is an opportunity for the City to support the goals of bettering schools in the community, and in doing so, capture direct and indirect benefits for the citizens of Prairie Village. Specifically, the natatorium would benefit the swimming teams of the entire school district and classroom/meeting space in a community center may allow for readily-accessible after-school classes and activities for teens.
- Transportation: TR1. Bike & pedestrian friendly: b. *Provide interconnected bike routes, lanes, and paths to facilitate safe bicycle travel throughout the Village.* The proposed trail system plan is targeted at accomplishing this action item.

### **Implementation: Programmatic Initiatives**

This section of the Village Vision plan organized the previously discussed actions into distinct, related packages of improvements. While beneficial in regards to implementation strategies for the city's comprehensive plan, the items discussed within have been addressed in the discussion above and, thus, are not revisited here.

### **Some final thoughts related to Village Vision...**

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. This plan follows that mind-set.

Similarly, one of Village Vision's overall themes could be characterized as pursuing 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 provision of high-quality, accessible parks can help to overcome some of the inherent disadvantages that confront the City.