Green neighborhoods: a city in a park begins at home

To realize this vision of A City in a Park, the DPR Game Plan starts with the places “closest to the heart:” neighborhood streets and public spaces, schoolyards, and places to gather. The Game Plan proposes to make every city neighborhood greener and then extend outward to the broader fabric of recreation centers, playing fields, and community amenities. In a water wise, arid city, that “green” varies from the deep green of the “right tree in the right place” to the sage green of native plants.
BUIDLING BLOCKS FOR GREENER NEIGHBORHOODS

Denver 2010: A cool canopy of drought resistant street trees shades each neighborhood and cleanses the air. A network of public spaces that residents can walk to creates a vibrant urban landscape supporting a wide variety of activities, from bird watching to community gardening. Schoolyards, recreation center grounds, and other gathering places have been transformed through cooperative efforts.

New park-like spaces are created through redevelopment agreements with private developers. “Found” spaces, from vacant lots to rooftop gardens, become oases in the city. Restored natural open space offers new opportunities for residents to experience wildlife.

Beyond the neighborhood, recreation centers provide an array of services most desired by residents. New or refurbished centers offer the latest programming and equipment. Neighbors gather at transit stop plazas while waiting for a bus. Cooperative agreements with schools and colleges provide opportunities to use playing fields and other green space.

The features and elements described above — street trees, smaller park-like spaces, and natural open space — are the smallest-scale building blocks of A City in a Park. These small-scale improvements seek to leverage existing — often underused — land resources to provide a great deal of value for a comparatively small investment.

They also provide immediate opportunities for DPR to partner with other public agencies and private redevelopment entities to improve Denverites’ quality of life. And the “green” of these spaces is now an array of greens: from the sage green of high plains plants to the dark green of our urban tree canopy.

STREE TREE CANOPY COVER: “GREEN GRID” AND “GREEN LUNGS” Vision for Stree-Tree Canopy Cover

A City in a Park is a shaded city, where street trees play an important role in defining urban form, provide environmental and economic benefits, and enhance our quality of life. An appropriate sized canopy of drought resistant trees in an arid city like Denver is the mainstay of our green urban grid.
Values

Denver’s “green grid” of street trees connects the city and defines its character and form. Early Denver residents planted the first street trees in 1867. Adding shade and greenery to the prairie and urban environments, street trees have become one of the city’s most valued elements.

Today residents increasingly value this “urban forest,” especially as our climate becomes more extreme. Most residents attending Game Plan open houses said they would pay more taxes for more street trees. Especially during this time of drought, trees and shrubs are the landscape priority for water.

A healthy street-tree canopy also functions as the city’s “green lungs,” transforming climate. Significant environmental benefits include:

- Improved air quality by removing pollutants;
- Energy conservation from reduced demand for air-conditioning;
- Increased infiltration of stormwater into the ground, reducing the need for flood infrastructure and maintenance/operations expense; and
- Reduced amounts of volatile organic compounds that a hot, parked car releases into the air.

These potential benefits offer a compelling incentive for city agencies to invest in our urban forest. Of the various plant materials — turf, flowers, shrubs, and trees — long-lived trees help carry us through a drought.

Performance indicators

A 2001 American Forest report suggests that a tree canopy cover of 25 percent offers substantial environmental and economic benefits. Denver’s Forestry staff recommends a goal of 15-18 percent in residential areas and 10 percent in commercial areas and the Central Business District (CBD) as more sustainable for our arid climate.

Game Plan Street Tree Performance Goal

- Provide a tree-canopy cover of 15 percent to 18 percent in urban residential areas and 10 percent in the central business district by 2025.

How does the city measure up?

Counting residential, commercial, and industrial areas, Denver’s street tree canopy averaged 6 percent in 2001, as measured by an American Forests study of five cities along the South Platte River and Speer viaduct, circa 1900.
Front Range. Wide variations exist by geographic area and neighborhood. Along 7th Avenue Parkway, for example, large mature trees create about 40 percent cover. Elsewhere the urban forest has deteriorated. Residents are very aware of this uneven coverage; one-third of residents surveyed rated the City’s maintenance of the urban forest as only fair or poor.

A visual analysis of the city’s most recent aerial survey indicates that one third of Denver’s neighborhoods may have tree cover below the citywide average, as illustrated in the Tree Canopy cover map. Another one-third of neighborhoods meet the city average but is below the recommended 18 percent standard.

**Existing Tree-Canopy Cover**

![Denver's street trees]

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**Legend**
- < 5% Tree Canopy Cover
- 5-15% Tree Canopy Cover
- > 15% Tree Canopy Cover
Since this assessment is drawn from an aerial survey, it is difficult to judge just how many new trees are needed. Conservative estimates suggest at least 50,000 new trees are needed (when appropriate to plant) plus annual replacement of 2,000, dead or dying trees from the current inventory.

**Recommendations for Trees**

1. **Complete a comprehensive physical assessment and inventory of tree cover to identify areas that do not meet the performance goal and to guide investments in these areas.**

2. **Use the inventory to develop an action plan and budget for canopy replacement and restoration.** Begin with neighborhoods most in need that also are organized and actively support the effort.

3. **Monitor and report progress to residents using methods described in Chapter 8.**

4. **Update and reissue the city’s streetscape design manual.**

5. **Ensure that DPR, Planning (CPD), and Public Works (PW) provide common planning and enforcement standards and jointly adopt final guidelines.**

6. **Incorporate all planning into a citywide drought plan for all plant materials.**

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**A BIT OF BREATHING SPACE: ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC OPEN SPACE IN EVERY NEIGHBORHOOD**

**Vision**

A City in a Park provides a network of “breathing space:” safe, accessible, and flexible open spaces located within a half-mile of every home.

**Values**

As Denver becomes more urban, residents increasingly value green breathing space that they can walk to within their neighborhoods. These breathing spaces encompass a wide range of places with varied landscape character, from natural open space to neighborhood parks or rooftop gardens, to more urban squares and plazas.

What they hold in common is their ability to support gathering, recreation and relaxation for families, friends and neighbors.

These public open spaces also enhance property values and provide visual relief from surrounding development.

Expanding or enhancing these varied neighborhood spaces was rated as one of the
top two DPR priorities by over two thirds of city residents responding to the 2001 Game Plan Survey. They also described amenities that could be included in these spaces, such as:

- Community gardens,
- Public art,
- Interpretation of neighborhood history or cultural heritage,
- Playgrounds and Learning Landscapes for children,
- “Pickup” soccer, Frisbee, and other games,
- Natural open space with opportunities for wildlife, and
- Short-loop walking trails.

These also were the amenities for which residents were most willing to pay increased taxes.

It is important to note that access to these public neighborhood spaces is much more important to Denver residents than the acreage contained within them. Residents want these spaces to be walkable, ideally no more than a 10-minute walk from home, via sidewalks, paths, or other safe pedestrian ways that do not cross a busy arterial street or active rail line.

**Performance indicators**

Most U.S. cities establish acreage standards for small neighborhood parks; but only a few, such as Minneapolis and Seattle, also consider access as an important performance measure. The most typical goal is to provide a neighborhood park within one-half mile from every home.

In addition, community gardens, plazas, schoolyards, and other nontraditional public spaces typically are not counted as fulfilling the goal. But because these are the kinds of amenities Denverites value, the *Game Plan* incorporates these types of public spaces in the performance goal.

**Game Plan Public Open-Space Performance Goal**

- Provide at least one-half acre of public open space within one-half mile of every resident’s home that can be reached without crossing a major barrier.

The *Game Plan* takes this goal one step further by identifying basic amenities that should be incorporated in neighborhood scale open spaces. Some elements are more appropriate to a space that is mostly green, and others more appropriate to an urban, “hardscaped” facility. Nonetheless, they constitute basic “creature comforts.”
Game Plan Public Open Space Design Elements:

- Introduce a comprehensive basic program for breathing space in neighborhoods that includes: a loop walking trail; shade, seating, and a drinking fountain; an open play area; a picnic area; plantings; and a focal element, such as public art, a gazebo, or a plaza.

Given available space, breathing spaces also might include multi-use courts, community gardens, a playground, more extensive gardens and plantings, and natural open space. These "optional" elements reflect neighborhood needs and involve residents planning.

How does the city measure up?

Overall, Denver is doing a strong job of providing accessible breathing spaces, which is illustrated in the Walkable Parks map. In the benchmark year of 2000, some 90 percent of residents surveyed enjoyed safe, 6-block access to neighborhood parks. All neighborhoods have walkable access to schoolyards and other spaces that could be improved as community parks.

Areas posing challenges for safe access include Westwood/Mar Lee near Mississippi; portions of the I-25 corridor between University and Hampden; Windsor Gardens; portions of Park Hill/Congress Park; and the Northwest neighborhoods next to Federal Boulevard.

These are also areas with average population increases of 15 percent to 25 percent from 1980 to 2000. As Denver continues to grow, areas with access issues may include Downtown’s neighborhoods, West Colfax, Morrison Road, South Federal Boulevard, portions of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea, the Platte River spine, University Park, and Hampden.

Denver’s land area is mostly built out. Opportunities for expanding its public open spaces will require transformation of redevelopment sites; partnerships with educational institutions and campuses for shared use of their facilities; and leveraging of spaces such as carriage lots and rooftops that otherwise would be overlooked. Blueprint Denver’s Small Area Plans also will offer an opportunity to link new parks and public spaces to redevelopment.

The Game Plan envisions every schoolyard renovated as both a Learning Landscape and a neighborhood park or green breathing...
space. The Highest and Moderate Priority Breathing Spaces map shows the potential for open space on elementary and middle school grounds. Urban school grounds typically provide two to eight acres of open space depending on the grades served. Managed under shared-use agreements, these sites could add a total of 400-500 additional acres of public open space citywide.

Building on the current Learning Landscape program, DPR and Denver Public Schools have identified the next 50 schools for renovation that could increase open space in neighborhoods as in “greatest need” of parkland. These are also areas of sustained population growth since 1980. These school lands alone could provide about 250 acres of

Walkable Parks

[Map of Walkable Parks]

LEGEND
- Areas with Walkable Access to Parks
- Existing Denver Parks and Natural Areas
- Parks in Other Municipalities
- Areas Unserved
additional public open space (see Appendices for a full list of schools).

Redevelopment at the neighborhood or site scale creates another opportunity for new parkland. Redevelopment in the areas of change identified in Blueprint Denver should be accompanied by a commitment from private developers to provide public space for all neighborhood residents, not just residents of new or redeveloped housing.

Through the city’s Pedestrian Master Plan process, DPR has begun working with Community Planning and Development and Public Works to remove barriers to parks and open space. Where arterial streets create safety hazards, the city is considering installing

High and Moderate Priority Breathing Spaces: Elementary and Middle Schools

![Diagram showing high and moderate priority breathing spaces for elementary and middle schools]
pedestrian-oriented features and traffic-calming efforts. Grade-separated crossings, such as underpasses and pedestrian bridges, should be considered for more significant barriers such as waterways, interstate highways, and active rail lines.

**Recommendations for Breathing Spaces**

1. **Bring neighborhoods that lack adequate breathing space up to par within 10 years.**
2. **Plan for projected growth as a concurrent priority.**
3. **Encourage partnerships with city agencies, DPS and private redevelopment entities to leverage city owned land and transform underused lands.**
4. **Remove or mitigate barriers to access (real or perceived) neighborhood facilities.** Support *Blueprint Denver* recommendations to make arterial streets safer and more pedestrian-friendly and to provide grade-separated crossings in appropriate areas.
5. **Encourage a variety of public spaces so residents have choices.** Community gardens, urban plazas, and other public spaces where people can gather are possible alternatives to formal parks.
6. **Ensure that community spaces are safe** through good design, more neighborhood “eyes on the park,” and ranger programs.

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**EQUITABLE AND GENEROUS STANDARDS FOR PARK ACREAGE**

**Vision**

A City in a Park enhances Denver’s reputation as a city with generous park resources by adding acreage to accommodate growth, while also distributing parks and open space more equitably throughout the city.

**Values**

Community surveys show that residents highly value and frequently use city parks. Seventy-eight percent of residents have visited a city park at least once in the past year, while 42 percent visited at least 10 times in the past year. Another 36 percent reported visiting between one and nine times. Fully 85 percent of residents surveyed think parks make a major or moderate contribution to the city’s quality of life. About 75 percent of residents are satisfied with the availability of these amenities throughout the city.

Denver’s park resources are also generous compared with communities of similar size. Protecting this level of amenity as the city grows is a key *Game Plan* challenge.

Though Denver’s park resources overall are above average, some areas of the city lack acreage relative to their population. In the
next two decades, other areas that now have adequate parkland may find they have too little space as growth takes place. The Game Plan addresses these distribution issues so that all residents have equitable access to public open space.

### Performance Indicators

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommends a standard of 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 people. This is close to the average provided by cities comparable to Denver in population and density, as shown in the City Comparison table.

#### City Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Area (Acres)</th>
<th>Population (2000 Census)</th>
<th>Total Public Open Space within City (Acres)</th>
<th>Public Open Space Acres per 1,000 Residents</th>
<th>Golf Courses</th>
<th>Golf Course Acreage (GCA)</th>
<th>Total Public Open Space within City (Acres) (w/o GCA)</th>
<th>Parks &amp; Open Space Acres per 1,000 Residents (w/o GCA)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>49,408</td>
<td>331,285</td>
<td>7,391</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1121</td>
<td>6,270</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland</td>
<td>49,280</td>
<td>478,403</td>
<td>2,887</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>713</td>
<td>2,174</td>
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<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
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<td>554,591</td>
<td>6125</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>942</td>
<td>5,180</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>88,768</td>
<td>951,270</td>
<td>5,890</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>35,156</td>
<td>382,618</td>
<td>5,694</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>4,594</td>
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<tr>
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<td>686</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,377</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that three quarters of Denver residents are satisfied with the current level of park acreage in the city, this seems to be a reasonable standard to maintain in the future.

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**Game Plan Proposed Park Acreage Performance Goal**

- Provide 8 to 10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, assuming 8 acres as a “lower bound” and 10 acres as most desirable.
How does the city measure up?

Including all public open space within city boundaries, Denver provides 11 acres for every 1,000 people, which exceeds the proposed performance goal. But because golf courses require a fee and cannot be used for other activities, Denver’s level of amenity was also calculated excluding golf course acreage. These calculations show that Denver provides 9.3 acres of parkland per 1,000 people, still slightly above comparable cities’ average of 8.9 acres per 1,000 residents.

For Denver to increase acreage provided to 10 acres/1,000 residents, excluding of golf courses, the city needs another 700 acres of public parkland and multi-purpose open space. Based on Blueprint Denver’s growth projections, 1,000 to 1,300 additional acres are needed to be added by 2025 to maintain the current level of service.

Projects planned for Lowry, Green Valley Ranch, Stapleton, and elsewhere, totaling 1,449 acres, meet a significant portion of this need, but do not address the issue of equity in the distribution of parkland throughout the city. Consequently, the city still needs another 700 acres.

The Park Acreage map illustrates city neighborhoods that fall below the established performance range for acreage. Areas at 50 percent or less include parts of the West Side (West Colfax, Villa Park, Westwood, Harvey Park, Harvey Park South); parts of Northwest Denver (Highland, West Highland, Sunnyside); Park Hill; East Colfax; the South Valley; and parts of Southeast Denver (University Hills, Virginia Village, Cory Merrill, and Southmoor Park).

Many of these areas — specifically the central and south West Side, Park Hill and Northeast Park Hill, East Colfax, portions of Southeast and Montbello — are also among the city’s highest-density neighborhoods, and there are limited facilities outside the city’s boundaries to accommodate the needs of these neighborhood residents.

Blueprint Denver’s Areas of Change map considers projected growth through 2025. While many of these areas now have adequate parkland compared to the recommended goal, future growth could change that. Downtown’s neighborhoods, for example, could require 40 new acres of parkland to keep up with projected growth. Neighborhoods already below standard, including Elyria-Swansea and West Colfax, could face new pressures from projected growth. These areas may not be served by new parkland at Stapleton and Lowry.
Opportunities to acquire new parkland are limited. The city should pursue creative strategies to add large parkland parcels, such as reclaiming abandoned industrial lands, ensuring that redevelopment in designated areas of change provides for public parkland, and forging partnerships with schools and colleges for shared use of green spaces.

For Denver to provide 10 acres/1,000 residents, exclusive of golf courses, the city needs to add 700 acres of public parkland and multi-purpose open space.

The city’s larger secondary-school campuses and universities represent a potential shared resource. Partnerships with DPS, private colleges and schools, and other institutions should be developed to seek shared-use agreements and identify long-lead acquisition and redevelopment opportunities. Campuses could be acquired if their owners vacate.

**Existing Park Acreage**

![Map showing existing park acreage with various shades indicating different acreage categories.](image)
The High and Moderate Priority Community Campuses shows opportunities to acquire new parkland by leveraging shared-use agreements with area secondary schools and other institutions. About 400 acres of parkland might be provided in the areas with the most biggest deficits in park acreage, and another 350 acres in areas with less severe deficits or projected deficits based on Blueprint Denver’s growth scenario. A total of 750 acres might be acquired through these partnerships.

As Denver redevelops, the city must provide incentives and directions to ensure park resources keep up with growth. For example, the city can create incentives for developers to “bundle” public space parcels together to create larger park like spaces.

**Blueprint Denver’s Areas of Change**
Recommendations for Equitable and Generous Park Land

1. Bring areas of the city that are significantly below the desired acreage goal up to par within 10 years.

2. Plan for growth while addressing the uneven distribution of parkland.

3. Work with CPD to ensure that redevelopment, especially within areas of change, provides neighborhood parkland at the recommended level of service.

4. Provide direction and incentives for developers to earmark sufficient open space to meet performance goals.

5. Strengthen partnerships with DPS, private colleges and schools, and other institutions to seek shared-use agreements and identify long-lead acquisition and redevelopment opportunities.

High and Moderate Priority Community Campuses: Secondary Schools and Universities
6. **Strengthen partnerships with nonprofits**, such as Groundwork Denver, Earthforce, and Denver Urban Gardens, working to increase types and availability of open space.

7. **Strengthen relationships with potential funding partners**, such as Great Outdoors Colorado and foundations.

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**NATURAL OPEN SPACE**

**Vision**

A City in a Park provides accessible natural open space at the neighborhood scale and beyond, creating opportunities for residents to observe wildlife from a safe distance, while sheltering urban wildlife and allowing movement along migration routes.

**Values**

Nearly 90 percent of respondents to the 2001 Game Plan Survey agreed that natural open space makes a major or moderate contribution to the city’s quality of life. Three-quarters say that acquiring new natural open space is a major or moderate priority. This was one of the three items residents valued most as part of expansion. Residents view natural open space “close to home” as particularly desirable. But residents add that DPR could do a much better job of providing natural areas. Only 46 percent rated DPR’s performance as excellent or good.

Since its inception in 1995, the city’s Natural Areas program has pioneered sustainable methods for restoration and management of urban open space, especially along waterways, but also within parks. The program’s focus on restoration and sustainable landscape management can create natural open space, even in small spaces within the most urban neighborhoods.

For example, aboveground water channels that support wildlife habitat can be used to convey storm-water runoff in place of conventional underground pipes. Planting native trees, grasses, and wildflowers within parks also creates wildlife habitat.

**Performance Indicators**

Few other cities have specific goals for natural open space, although Minneapolis and Oakland/East Bay identify “significant natural open space” as an important amenity. Because opportunities for natural open space to some degree depend on the location of natural resources, performance goals that quantify acreage or sites are less meaningful than a statement of intent.
However, more traditional parkland can be naturalized by replacing turf with native and water conserving plants. The Game Plan proposes the following performance goals for natural open space:

**Game Plan Natural Areas Performance Goals**

- Provide significant natural area acreage in each quadrant of the city.
- Encourage more natural open space in the design of new parks and the retrofitting of established parks.
- Restore and protect existing natural open space.

**How does the city measure up?**

Close to half of Denver residents live within convenient walking distance to a natural open space area or greenway corridor. The city also provides large natural areas in each quadrant of the city, including Bluff Lake, parts of Bear Creek Park, and along the city’s major drainage ways and gulches. Numerous parks, including Hentzel Park, Bible Park, and Babi Yar Park, have added natural areas without altering the character or function of core spaces.

**Recommendations for Natural Areas**

1. **Amend the Natural Areas Strategic Plan to** describe lands that could be designated as extensions of critical habitat areas or wildlife corridors.

2. **Use the Natural Areas Strategic Plan to** guide future acquisitions or designations.

3. **Selectively transform portions of lands** covered in the Strategic Plan to bring neighborhoods with limited access up to par.

4. **Ensure that all new city parklands contain** natural areas.

5. **Work with golf courses to convert edges** and other nonplayable areas to more native, water-wise landscapes.

Note: See Chapter 5 (From Mountains to Plains) for complementary recommendations.
BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CITYWIDE RECREATION

Beyond the neighborhood, the park system extends citywide to offer playing fields, recreation centers, public pools and golf courses that serve many neighborhoods. These facilities offer opportunities for team sports and pick-up games, as well as programs and services that enhance health, well-being and quality of life.

PLAYING FIELDS

Vision
A City in a Park provides playing fields for youth and adults to engage in organized and spontaneous team sports and active recreational activities.

Values
Nearly half (49 percent) of city residents used playing fields in the past year, 20 percent classified as frequent users (10 or more times in the past year), according to the 2001 Game Plan Survey. Three out of four residents surveyed think places for active sports make a major or moderate contribution to the city’s quality of life.

Three out of four also are satisfied with the availability of playing fields. Some areas of the city, however, do not have adequate playing fields close to homes. Areas of change may have inadequate fields in the future.

Performance Indicators
NRPA recommends one baseball field for every 5,000 people and one soccer or multi-use field for every 5,000 people.

Game Plan Playing Field Performance Goals

- Provide one baseball or softball field for every 5,000 residents.
- Provide one soccer or multi-use field for every 5,000 residents.

How does the city measure up?
As shown in the Softball/Baseball Fields and Soccer/Football/Multiuse Fields maps, the city provides 118 baseball or softball fields that require permits for play — about 1.4 fields for every 5,000 people, exceeding the
NRPA guidelines. The city also provides a 135 permitted multi-use fields, meeting NRPA guidelines.

Differences exist across the city. Some sports enthusiasts have indicated they need more fields for their games. The Southwest neighborhoods exceed the goal for baseball/softball facilities, but achieve only 60 percent of the recommended goal for multi-purpose fields. Perhaps 10-11 additional multi-use or soccer fields are needed to meet the recommended level of service.

Soccer enthusiasts citywide argue that they need additional fields. The city maintains 90 permitted playing fields, and another 30 to 40 regulation fields may be needed for adult and youth leagues.

**Existing Softball/Baseball Fields**
To continue the current level of service as the city grows, about 20 more baseball and 34 additional soccer fields may be needed by 2025. Projects planned for Lowry, Green Valley Ranch, and Stapleton will provide enough fields, but will not address the issue of equitable distribution.

Opportunities to acquire new playing fields face the same challenges as those constraining acquisition of new parkland. Perhaps the best opportunity to expand playing field acreage is to forge partnerships with schools and college campuses for shared use of existing playing fields, and to work with regional partners to develop facilities that can serve a much larger market.

Existing Soccer/Football/Multiuse Fields
Other opportunities may exist in redevelopment along the Platte River in the southwest area of the city — to create larger playing field complexes.

**Playing Field Recommendations**

1. **Forge partnerships with schools and college campuses for shared use of playing fields.**
2. **Work with regional partners to develop facilities that can serve a much larger market.** Sufficient land for larger playing-field complexes might exist in large redevelopment parcels, such as along the Platte River in Southwest Denver.
3. **Forge partnerships with leagues and other nonprofits to leverage resources for fields and programs.**
4. **Use artificial turf where appropriate for water conservation.**
5. **Improve drainage and conditions of current fields.** Provide field down time.
6. **Analyze current field use to create a realistic standard based on demand and resources.**

**PUBLIC RECREATION PROGRAMS**

**Vision**

Public Recreation programs visibly contribute to the physical, mental and social health of Denverites. Programs and scheduling are in tune with everyone’s needs, but especially with youth and seniors. Recreation centers are the social hub for neighborhoods, hosting an array of activities and anticipating social leisure needs.

Expanded recreation outside the center walls — the after-school programs, special needs, or partnerships with other providers (such as the James P. Beckwourth Mt. Club or YMCA) extends the reach of public recreation to new and emerging audiences. New programs that provide recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities throughout our parks and trails broaden the very scope of our recreation programs.

**Values**

The Game Plan focused primarily on facility issues, rather than programming or fees for recreation. DPR continues to use and adapt a 1995 Recreation Management Plan for administrative and program goals. The Game Plan primarily offers capital and policy recommendations. Even so, the Game Plan process (public comments, informal recreation...
center user surveys, and interviews with recreation center directors) produced strong recommendations for DPR’s recreation services.

The 2001 Game Plan Survey measured overall perceptions regarding recreation programming and facilities. An informal survey was conducted of recreation users. Although both surveys showed overall satisfaction with Denver’s programs, many people also voiced room for improvement. In the 2001 Game Plan Survey, 49 percent of Denverites said that DPR does a “good” job of providing indoor recreation and fitness services, while 22 percent gave the city an “excellent” rating.

In general forums, most Denver residents supported the special programs, such as cultural festivals and races that are held in parks (if the park is not totally used for these events, shutting out more casual use). They also consistently requested that more cultural, educational, and interpretive recreational programs be offered in the parks, making the parks “come alive.”

Recreation center staff, as well as the public, called for some administrative changes to strengthen communication and marketing, customer service, consistency across the system, and programs more responsive to the community.

**Recommendations for Public Recreation Programming**

1. **Provide clear, consistent policies, fees and programs throughout the recreation centers.**

2. **Strengthen marketing of programs** through diverse materials, media, and community outreach.

3. **Reach Denver’s non-English speaking residents** through bilingual materials, cultural programs, and more bilingual staff.

4. **Reach more people and create efficiencies** through innovative partnerships with other recreation providers, such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Denver Public Schools, and the James P. Beckwourth Mt. Club.

5. **Assess community needs through feedback such as community forums and surveys** (see Chapter 8 for community engagement).

6. **Improve customer service through regular staff training, accountability and incentives.**

7. **Increase DPR’s ability to provide more programs “outside the walls”** by strengthening existing programs, such as community recreation, outdoor recreation, special needs and service-based learning. Expanding recreation programs to park-based educational, cultural and social programs.
RECREATION FACILITIES

Vision
A City in a Park provides accessible and affordable basic recreation services — within high-quality facilities that are cost-effective to operate. Programs and facilities are available regardless of ability to pay, although those who can afford to pay, do.

Recreation Center Service Areas

Values
The city’s recreation centers and associated infrastructure have served residents for almost 40 years. Among the system’s strengths are users who are very satisfied with programs and facilities; substantial agreement on serving a broad client base, especially youth and seniors; and experienced staff who know their communities.
To meet 21st-century challenges, however, DPR needs to address numerous facility constraints, including: aging and small facilities that are not cost-efficient to operate; facilities whose configurations make it difficult for staff to deliver desired programs; and an uneven distribution of facilities that leaves some areas without services.

Performance Indicators

In Denver and nationwide, surveys of recreation center users and the general public suggest that public recreation programs should provide five basic services and associated physical facilities:

- A gymnasium (86 percent of surveyed residents rank as very important or important),
- A dedicated weight room and cardiovascular fitness area (81 percent),
- Dedicated aerobic dance space (79 percent),
- An indoor lap pool (76 percent), and
- Flexible multi-purpose space adaptable to a variety of activities.

According to national guidelines, communities of more than 25,000 should also provide 2.4 square feet of facility space per person, the amount needed to deliver basic services while being cost-efficient to operate and maintain. Safe pedestrian and transit access also are important, especially for meeting the needs of youth and seniors.

Game Plan Recreation Program and Facilities Performance Goals

- City recreation centers should provide the foundation services at the following levels:
  - aerobic dance: one per center
  - cardio/weight room: one per center
  - indoor pool: one for every 15,000 residents
  - gymnasium: one for every 12,000 residents
  - multi-purpose “drop in” space

- Recreation centers should average 2.4 square feet per person, although this standard cannot be met in every city center given site and facility constraints. Between 10 and 25 percent of recreation center space should be flexible multi-purpose or support space.

- At least 75 percent of Denver residents should have safe pedestrian or transit access to a recreation center.
How does the city measure up?

Denver maintains 29 recreation centers with a total of 472,132 square feet of facility space. The average center size is 16,280 square feet. Fifty-two percent of centers offer less than 15,000 square feet. Most centers were built in the 1960s and 1970s to serve their immediate neighborhoods and have continued to respond to neighborhood needs and preferences.

This community base is a great strength of the system. At the same time, some facilities, especially smaller recreation centers, have aged without major expansions or upgrades, and have not kept up with changes in recreation and leisure trends. Many centers

Areas of Recreation Facility Need
are too small or poorly configured to deliver a full range of services. Equipment is “well-loved” or worn out. Some neighborhoods are not served at all. In others, safe access is an issue.

DPR studied major arterial streets and transit routes to identify barriers and opportunities for access to recreation centers. These routes define 24 recreation service areas where residents have suitable access. Using these measures, about three out of four of residents have safe walkable routes or transit access to a center, which meets the desired goal.

Major areas lacking public recreation center coverage or walkable access, such as southeast Denver, southwest Denver and east-central Denver, are illustrated in the Recreation Center Service Areas map. (In the Southeast, the YMCA and Jewish Community Center operate other full-service recreation facilities that could address some of these needs.)

The city does not meet the desired square-footage standard. If all neighborhoods are counted, including those with no public center, the city provides .7 square feet per person, compared to the desired standard of 2.4 square feet. Excluding unserved areas, the city provides 1.7 square feet per person, or 70 percent of the goal. Areas most challenged include Sun Valley, Highland/West Highland, Marston, University Hills, Virginia Village, and East Colfax.

The Areas of Recreation Facility Need map considers overall facilities and resources, combining goals for square footage and basic amenities. City neighborhoods are divided into four groups that:

- meet or exceed goals;
- provide adequate square footage but need modifications to provide desired services;
- lack adequate square footage and desired services; or
- have no recreation resources.

Within this framework, areas that fall short include Southwest and Southeast Denver and East-central Denver. These areas either have no facility, or their facility lacks both square footage and dedicated space for the four core activities.

Growth will add still more pressure. Within Downtown’s major neighborhoods, five recreation centers offer significant access and meet the goal of 2.4 square feet per person. With a projected population increase of 40,000, however, Downtown’s neighborhoods could support two more centers. Other areas where growth may tax
the system are Southeast, University Hills, and South Broadway.

**Recommendations for Recreation Centers**

1. **Create a long-range plan for specific sites** that addresses inequities and expanding services to meet minimum standards. Analyze current centers, sites, and neighborhoods on the basis of equity criteria — access, basic standards, demand, existing conditions, site availability, alternative providers, access and possible partnerships.

2. **Ensure this plan also addresses projected growth**, especially in areas now unserved or underserved.

3. **Create priorities for capital investments to address equity issues and meet the needs of youth and seniors.**

4. **To help set priorities, develop a facilities-resource allocation model** based on demand for programs and supply of facilities.

5. **Focus major capital expansions on high-demand neighborhoods** that are unserved.

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**COMMUNITY SCALE RECREATION AMENITIES**

**Vision**

A City in a Park has special recreation facilities and amenities logically located across the city to serve growing sport needs, from in-line hockey and dogs playing off-leash to indoor soccer. It also has DPR working closely with private providers and other municipalities to ensure that emerging sports have a home when the demand warrants it.

**Values**

Denver’s parks and recreation facilities are a land bank, with DPR continually looking for appropriate places and funding to accommodate new community level activities. That’s difficult in a park system that is primarily built and in a city that has a highly competitive demand for capital funds.

DPR needs to continue building specialized community level amenities when financially possible. These larger, community amenities, too, often lend themselves to a public/private partnership or inter-jurisdictional partnership.

Throughout the Game Plan public process and over the past few years, a number of substantially sized user advocacy groups and emerging youth leagues have requested that
DPR respond to the needs of in-line skaters and hockey players, dogs exercising off-leash, and disc golf. In the 2001 Game Plan Survey, when asked what they thought of dog off-leash areas, 77 percent supported fenced areas, and 67% supported specific times and areas. Also, 67% supported strict enforcement of leash laws.

Other requests include indoor soccer facilities, an ice rink, equestrian trails, a bicycle track, dirt bike areas, and model airplane fields. Evolving recreation trends make it impossible to predict the future. Perhaps most important is a DPR process and policy that welcomes and responds to new needs.

Performance Measurements

Quantitative performance measurements make little sense for a “one of a kind place” or reuse of existing facilities for a new sport. What can be more easily measured are DPR’s policies and efforts: to keep a data base of current uses in facilities, to have a flexible and open approach to partnerships and possible accommodation of sports in multi-use areas, and to keep abreast of recreation and community assessment.

DPR identified two, less capital intensive, uses as meeting these criteria. Dog off-leash and disc golf areas warrant immediate study and pilot testing.

Game Plan Community Scale
Recreation Amenity Performance Goals

- Produce yearly recreation trend report for the department.
- Conduct regular community needs assessments.

How does the city measure up?

Denver is the one of the few cities in the country that does not accommodate dog owners exercising their pets off-leash or disc golf players. Private providers offer facilities for indoor ice rinks, indoor inline skating, and other indoor sports such as tennis. No publicly funded indoor facilities exist. DPR currently is working on Phase II of its Skate Park, next to Commons Park, already the largest skate park in the country.

People may no longer trot their horses in Cheesman Park. But the Urban Farm, located on Sand Creek in east Denver, provides equestrian and farm activities and Sand Creek Trail will accommodate equestrians.
Community-Scale Recreation Amenities Recommendations

1. Create a set of criteria and guidelines for deciding appropriate uses and changes in existing urban and mountain parks.

2. Create specific criteria and a city-wide management plan for new uses, such as dog off-leash areas and pilot test these areas.

3. Pilot test one disc golf area in a currently underused, existing park.

4. Study the use patterns in potentially underused facilities such as tennis courts and horseshoe pits for their reuse or removal.

5. Work closely with both Stapleton and Lowry redevelopment agencies for potential locations for special facilities.

6. Analyze existing parks for potential sites for new facilities, such as small skate park.

7. Pursue potential public/private partnerships for special large-scale facilities.

DENVER MUNICIPAL GOLF COURSES

Vision

More urban kids learn to play golf at Denver’s close-to-home, high quality municipal courses. The courses themselves are models of “green infrastructure” — storing and cleaning water on-site in wetlands, reducing the need for pesticides and fertilizers, and conserving water an oasis in the city.

Values

Denver has seven municipal golf courses spread over 942 acres, providing over 400,000 rounds of golf in 2001. Fees at the end of 2002 averaged $22 a round, the lowest in the metropolitan area. (Other municipalities have slightly higher fees. Private golf course fees can vary from $35 to $120 for a game.) One course is in Evergreen and an eighth course is planned for Stapleton.

As an enterprise fund, the municipal golf courses are a departure from the rest of the park system, with all operating and capital needs to be covered by revenues generated. The demand for moderately priced, public golf facilities has grown steadily since the first course, Overland Park Golf Club was organized in 1892.
The courses also function as a park land bank, visual open space, and wildlife refuge. Like the concessionaires and nonprofit partners who manage other city-owned resources (such as historic mountain park structures), golf course managers must run solid businesses that ensure that the physical resource is well cared for, provide a public service, and generate a profit.

If the physical resource begins in excellent shape, Denver’s municipal golf courses can be more financially sustainable. As the major water, fertilizer, and pesticide consumer in the park system, Denver’s municipal golf courses have room to conserve and improve natural resources, especially water.

As public sentiment, management, and design of Denver’s parks shift towards “sage green” and water conserving measures, Denver’s golf courses (both municipal and private) will need to adapt, too. As an enterprise fund dependent upon satisfied golfers and revenues, responding to drought and conserving natural resources will require a complex, city-wide plan.

**Golf Recommendations**

1. **Ensure the continued quality and repair of** the city’s golf courses through appropriate and adequate city capital contributions and well-monitored concessionaire contracts (see Chapter 9 also for concessionaire recommendations).

2. **Strengthen Denver Golf’s service based** learning and golf programs through partnerships with the Recreation Division, DPS and other organizations.

3. **Implement a comprehensive natural resource program for all of Denver’s municipal golf courses, specifically to:**
   - Integrate municipal golf courses into the metropolitan drought plan that addresses economic and business implications, marketing and public response, as well as natural resource conservation.
   - Help educate the public and golfers about landscape alternatives, drought realities, and natural resource conservation.
   - Implement, over time, course renovations and management techniques that increase water conservation, on-site wetlands and retention of stormwater, and decrease fertilizer use.
   - Ensure that the new golf course at Stapleton is a “bioregional model,” using best management practices for golf course design and water conservation and incorporating the native high plains landscape.

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When Willis Case Golf Course was built in 1902, the course had sand greens, cut weeds, and no turf. Even the weeds were so sparse that golfers could move a ball two club lengths without penalty to reach the nearest spot of green.