

CHAPTER 8

PARKS AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Foreward

Parks and Recreation plays an important role in creating a high quality of life for City of Farmington (City) residents. It provides opportunities to learn and play, meditate and rejuvenate, create and imagine, and enjoy life. The 2030 Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2030 Master Plan) is the document that will provide the guidance upon which the City continues to make its decisions for parks, trails, recreational programs and facilities. As required by the Metropolitan Council, a regional planning agency serving the Twin Cities seven county metropolitan area whose responsibilities lie with providing essential services to the region, a city's park and open space plan is required to be updated every 10 years. In 1998, a 2020 Park and Recreation Master Plan was approved. This plan will reach the 10 year threshold, requiring it to be updated to be in compliance with the Metropolitan Council requirements. This required update will enhance and update City information and data allowing elected/appointed officials and staff to accurately assess the current and future direction for parks and recreation in the community. The new updated 2030 Master Plan will create a blueprint for making well-informed decisions that will move parks and recreation forward in the community for the next 20+ years.

Historical Perspective

The City began its parks and open space system (system) with the acquisition and development of Rambling River Park and Evergreen Knoll Park in the early 1970's. From these initial park developments and during the next 30+ years, additional acreage had been added to the system bringing the total in 2007 to 876 acres. The park and open space system will continue to grow in the coming years especially in the next several years due to the platting of a large new development that will occur in 2008.

Parks and Recreation was first organized through the creation of the Park and Recreation Advisory Commission (PRAC) in the 1970's. Hiring of the first Parks and Recreation Department (Department) staff member occurred in 1974. In subsequent years the City added staff in the areas of facilities, park maintenance and recreation programs. The Department currently consists of 12 full-time staff, two part-time staff and numerous seasonal staff making it the largest department (total number of staff) in the City.

Over the years, the City has been fiscally responsible in its development of the parks and recreation system. Acquisition of parkland has been accomplished through creation of a park dedication ordinance and thus has only used fee acquisition in a limited basis to secure public parkland. This park dedication process has also generated money that has been used to develop the park and trail system resulting in a zero debt parks and trail system. In 1974, the City did issue general obligation bonds from a voter approved referendum for the construction of the current ice arena. These bonds have long since been paid off. In previous years development of some park facilities were completed due to the efforts of volunteer organizations and individuals in the community.

Recreation programs began to be offered to residents in the 1990's when the first full-time staff member was hired and whose time was solely dedicated to planning and providing recreational

programs. When recreation programs were first provided, only a handful of programs were offered. Today the community enjoys a diverse mix of programs and classes year-round.

The City's recreational facilities include a senior center known as the Rambling River Center, the Schmitz Maki Ice Arena and an outdoor pool. The Rambling River Center was started by a group of older citizens who raised funds to purchase an existing building and created a senior center. When the senior center was not able to financially support itself in the 1980's it was taken over by the City. The outdoor pool and the Schmitz-Maki Arena were both built in the 1970's.

Demographic Profile

The City has seen a rapid pace in its growth over the past twenty years. US Census data showed that in 1990, the population of the City was 5,940. In 2000 the population of the City had increased to 12,365 people. Since the Census in 2000, the population of the City has continued to grow to the Metropolitan Council's certified population estimate of 18,589 residents as of April 1, 2007. This represents a 67% increase in the population from the 2000 Census and a 250% increase from the 1990 Census. Most of the growth is occurring in the northern part of Farmington, but with recent residential development on the east and central areas of the community, the growth has begun to spread and connect with older established neighborhoods.

The age group distribution of Farmington based on the 2000 Census indicates a heavy concentration of families and the overall median age is significantly lower than the national level. Although Farmington can be classified as a young community with the median age being more than 5 years lower than the national level, the age groups that will experience the most growth over the next five years is the 45-54, 55-64 and 65-74 age categories. Median household income is \$61,864 for the City of Farmington, which is about 50% higher than the national median household income of \$41,994. Age and household incomes are two significant factors that impact participation in Parks and Recreation services.

While the City has experienced rapid growth since the 2020 Master Plan, there are still many acres yet to be developed before the community is considered "built out". The final population will of course depend on the development of existing properties in the City as well as what properties outside of the City are annexed into the City. The Metropolitan Council is projecting that by 2020 the population of Farmington will reach 27,510 people. Based on the number of available residential lots and future allocation of MUSA by the Metropolitan Council the 2030 population is projected to be 32,000 people.

While the majority of homes being constructed in Farmington are single family homes, the City's distribution of housing types saw a change in the past ten years with more multi family and attached townhomes being built than in previous years. In many communities residents who live in multi family neighborhoods without sizeable yards of their own or with a small common park area often look for the public neighborhood or community park to meet their recreational needs.

Park And Open Space Areas

As of this 2030 Master Plan update, the City owned park and open space land totaling 876 acres. The breakdown of this acreage includes 436 acres of park land and 440 acres of open space. In addition, the Farmington Independent School District #192 (School District) owns land that is used for athletic fields and open space. The School District also provides, in its school buildings, indoor recreational spaces. However for the purposes of creating an updated 2030 Master Plan for the City, the School District's facilities, while mentioned, will not be used to determine the City's needs because even though the School District facilities are available to the public, the City has no control over their scheduled use and said facilities are to be used first and foremost by school related programs and activities. Furthermore, the School District's boundaries extend beyond the City's boundaries and so only the area inside the City's boundaries will be addressed in the 2030 Master Plan.

With the Metropolitan Council's estimated population of 18,589 in 2007, the City's parks and open space acreage of 876 acres provides a ratio of 47.35 acres of park and open space per 1,000 residents. However a further analysis finds that of the 876 acres, only 436 acres is active park acreage. The remaining 440 acres consists of open space areas. This means the ratio for active park acreage is 23.57 acres of park land for every 1,000 residents, well within the minimum commonly accepted standard identified by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) of at least 10 acres of active park acreage per 1,000 residents. The City's 2020 Park and Recreation Chapter Master Plan adopted a policy establishing that at least 20 acres of active park acreage per 1,000 residents should be provided in Farmington. The current ratio of 23.57 acres per 1,000 residents meets the policy adopted in the 2020 Master Plan. While a past acceptable practice has been to follow park acreage standards established by the NRPA, it is not the only method. Recently parks and recreation professionals and professional planners have begun incorporating community demand/benefits into the formula when determining park acreage standards for communities. The thinking is that minimum park acreage requirements for communities should not solely be based on minimum number of acres needed per 1,000 residents, but rather park acreage should be determined according to what each community needs based on the demand being made by park users. The City may want to further explore this notion of having the park and open space acreage standards based on demand rather than a standard based solely on the population.

The City lacks adequate athletic facilities based on the minimum standards developed by the NRPA. Of most concern is the shortage of outdoor athletic facilities that the City provides. There is a low inventory in the number of existing ballfields that are provided for youth baseball and adult softball. There is intense pressure currently in the community for green space for soccer. With youth lacrosse beginning to be organized in the community, the pressure for additional green space will only be intensified. The City currently has two outdoor hockey rinks, which is below the minimum standard developed by the NRPA. The City should focus on correcting this shortage by constructing additional outdoor athletic facilities for both youth and adult sports in order to meet the increased growth in participation that has occurred in the community.

Recreation Programs

The Department’s recreational programming has been staffed by professionals who are imaginative, resourceful and comprehensive in the planning and facilitating of programs. The innovative and imaginative programs that have been provided to the community has resulted in several recreational programs being recognized in the past five years with an Awards of Excellence, which is a state-wide award provided by the Minnesota Recreation and Park Association.

Recreational programs have been offered in such areas as youth and adult sports, pre-school activities, arts and crafts, fitness, team sports, individual sports, senior citizen programs and trips. Department staff plan and facilitate some of its own special events that are sprinkled throughout the year. There is also involvement though partnerships with other local organizations to provide seasonal special events and celebrations.

Park And Recreation Administration

The Department provides the administrative oversight for the recreational services, recreational facilities, parks and trails that are offered to the community. The City Council approves the operating and capital improvement budgets that provide the annual funding for the Department. In 2007 operational costs for all Divisions within the Department was budgeted at \$1.7 million. Capital improvement costs including park improvements, equipment and vehicles for the Department was budgeted at \$700,000. The following shows how the budget is distributed to the various divisions within the Department:

Table 8.1: Department’s 2007 Budget by Division

Division	Amount of Department’s Budget
Building Maintenance	6.5%
Park Maintenance	22%
Park and Trail Capital Improvements	24.5%
Recreational Programs	19.5%
Recreational Facilities (outdoor pool, senior center & ice arena)	27.5%

A five year capital improvement budget is vital in determining future parks and trail projects and the funds needed to complete the projects. The capital improvement projects in parks and trails have been funded over the years through two funding sources. The first funding source has been through funds received from residential, commercial and industrial development. These funds were received as cash in lieu of land through the park dedication process. The second source of funding has been through the City’s municipal liquor store profit transfers.

Since the 2020 Master Plan was approved in 1998, the City has focused on developing new parks and redeveloping existing parks to make them accessible, attractive and safe. In order to ensure that all parks received a review and a master plan, the Department developed a planning and improvement schedule. As a result of this master planning process for each City park, a capital improvement budget identifying improvements for its parks and trails was create. By the year 2012, all new and existing parks will have received a review resulting in a master plan developed. Then based on the approved master plan for each park, improvements will be completed provided that funding is available. Table 8.2 below provides the most recent five year capital improvement plan from 2008-2012. It identifies which park the improvements are to be made, the type of park and/or trail improvement to be made, the year in which the improvements are to be made and the estimated cost of the improvements.

Table 8.2: Five Year Parks and Trail Improvement Budget

Name of Park and Projects	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Vermillion Grove Park: <i>boardwalk construction</i>	\$55,000				
Farmington Preserve Park: <i>playground, shelter, basketball court, turf seeding, prairie restoration, signage, trails and site amenities</i>	\$100,000				
North Creek Park: <i>playground, shelter with warming house, turf seeding, fishing dock, trails, site amenities, hockey and pleasure skating rinks and park signage</i>	\$125,000				
Meadowview Park: <i>boardwalk construction</i>		\$20,000			
Hill Dee Park: <i>playground</i>	\$45,000				
Lake Julia Park: <i>playground, shelter, trails basketball court and master plan development</i>		\$100,000			
Pine Knoll Park: <i>playground, shelter, basketball court, trails and master plan development</i>		\$85,000			
Middle Creek Park: <i>boardwalk construction</i>		\$35,000			
Troy Hill Park: <i>playground, gazebo and master plan development</i>					\$50,000
Prairieview Park: <i>basketball court, shelter, trails and master plan development</i>				\$50,000	
Fairhills Park: <i>shelter, playground equipment, basketball court and master plan development</i>				\$50,000	
Town Square Park: <i>gazebo, landscaping, playground, site amenities, sculptures and master plan development</i>			\$250,000		

Rambling River Park: <i>master plan development, playground, shelter, trails, amphitheatre, prairie restoration, sculptures</i>				\$1,000,000	
Mystic Meadows Development Community Park: <i>four field adult softball complex, shelters, maintenance building, playground, parking lot, concession and restroom building</i>				\$2,600,000	
Fairhill Development Community Park: <i>five field youth baseball complex, soccer fields, lacrosse fields, shelters, concessions/restroom building, outdoor hockey and pleasure rink, playground, parking lot, turf seeding and site amenities</i>		\$3,300,000			
Middle Creek Park: <i>playground, shelters, trails, parking lot, site amenities and ballfield</i>		\$475,000			
Lake Julia Waterway: <i>pedestrian bridge</i>		\$100,000			

2030 Master Plan Public Input

Public input on the 2030 Master Plan occurred many different ways. Some of the input occurred through earlier studies where the public was invited to participate on task forces and committees. Public meetings were held as part of the committee and task force work that resulted in further input. Several scientific surveys have also been completed in the past few years that provided insight into what the community desires. The recommended actions being offered in the 2030 Master Plan were created as a result of various committees and task forces work and public input meetings.

Additionally two public visioning sessions occurred in early 2007 that provided the community with an opportunity to speak on updating not only the City’s Park and Recreation Master Plan but also the entire Comprehensive Plan. While there were some differing opinions, the basis for the information and recommendations being offered in the 2030 Master Plan resulted from the input provided by the community. Items scoring highest on the visioning sessions included:

- Increase the amount of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities
- Creation of additional larger community parks
- Trails are important
- Develop a wide variety of parks
- Develop a wide variety of recreational programs

Guidance For Implementing the 2030 Park And Recreation Master Plan

The City has seen growth in its parks and recreation system since the 2020 Park and Recreation Master Plan was approved. However, the growth of the park and recreation system has not kept

pace with the City's double digit population growth since the 2020 Park and Recreation Master Plan was approved in 1998. The City of Farmington has completed several studies, surveys and

plans related to parks, recreation, facilities and trails since 2004. Studies that have been completed include the Recreational Facility Needs Study, Community Center Feasibility Study, a Community Center Facility Site Plan Study and a Community Attitude and Interest Citizen Survey. A Trail Master Plan was also completed that identified an existing network of interconnected trails in the community that should be connected to future trails.

A summary of the highest priorities for parks and recreation based on the information collected from the public studies, community surveys and during visioning sessions are identified below. It will be important for the City to continue on an annual basis to review these priorities and modify these priorities as needed.

- 1. Develop a park and open space system that includes active and athletic spaces.**
- 2. Develop a park and open space system that includes natural areas and environmentally sensitive areas for passive and un-programmed spaces.**
- 3. Expand the city's trail and sidewalk system, including adding trails that are safe and provide connections between schools, parks, neighborhoods, commercial areas, open space/natural areas, other communities and regional parks.**
- 4. Develop a long-term financial plan for the development of parks, open space and trails.**
- 5. Re-develop Rambling River Park.**
- 6. Develop maintenance standards for parks.**
- 7. Develop maintenance standards for recreational facilities.**
- 8. Increase marketing of parks and recreation (recreational programs, parks, open space, trails and recreational facilities) to the community.**
- 9. Complete the development of master plans for remaining city parks.**
- 10. Construct new indoor recreational facilities when it may not be financially feasible or structurally possible to make improvements to existing recreational facilities such as the Schmitz-Maki Arena, Outdoor Pool and the Rambling River Center.**
- 11. Work with adjacent cities, townships and Dakota County to develop an interconnected regional trail system providing connections to regional parks.**
- 12. Acquire land in a manner that maximizes the size of parks when possible.**

- 13. Explore opportunities to expand youth, teen, adaptive, adult and senior programs including possible partnerships with other organizations or governmental agencies.**