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## **Section 5. Parks and Open Space**

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Section 8 will provide an overview of the City’s parks and open space system. The section will depict the location and the acreage of existing parks and open spaces found within the City boundary. It will also provide a description of the location of a proposed Dakota County Regional Park in Empire Township that is in close proximity to Farmington and how access might be provided through Farmington to this proposed regional park. In addition, the Dakota County Fairgrounds lies just south of the City and just outside the City boundary. While this property is not owned by the City, it does provide events that are available to City residents to easily access.

In order to better understand how the City is currently positioned with its park and open space system, a parks inventory was completed that identifies amenities contained within each of the City’s parks. The parks inventory will be used to assess if the City currently has any deficiencies with any national standards that have been developed by the NRPA. These standards are primarily based on having certain park amenities within a certain distance of residents.

Since the development of the 2020 Master Plan, the City has undertaken a process of developing a master plan for each of the City’s existing parks. This process utilized public input that shaped and defined what amenities should be included in the park and more precisely where each of the amenities should be located in the park. The master plans that have been completed thus far for each park are included in the 2030 Master Plan.

Through the completion of the master planning of each individual City park, the City has been able to identify a cost to make improvements to parks. Not only is there a cost estimate of what it will take to improve a park to meet the master plan that has been created but it also has provided the City with what the total cost will be to improve all parks to the level identified in each of the individual park master plans. Financial detail in this section will include:

- 1. A five year Capital Improvement Plan for parks and trails**
- 2. A table that will identify the following:**
  - *if a park master plan has been created and approved*
  - *the associated master plan improvements that funds have been spent on since 2003 and the total amount spent on the improvements that have been completed in each park*
  - *the improvements shown on the approved master plan that have not been completed and what the remaining costs are to complete those improvements*

This section will include an analysis and mapping of the location of future parks and open space so that as development occurs, a plan may be followed that provides for a park and open space system that meets national standards related to park size, location and are easily accessible either by vehicle, walking or biking.

## 5.1 Classifications

Parks and open space can be classified according to type and size. One classification system that has been created by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) defines parks according to the acreage contained within the park. Park and open space can also be classified by the features it possesses that make it distinct from other areas. Table 5.1 explains the classifications of parks and open space.

Classification of Park	Types of Use	Service Area Standard	Size	Site Distinctions
<b>Mini-Park</b>	Small park area that serves smaller population or a specific group	¼ mile or less	Less than one acre	Located close to the neighborhood and population that it serves
<b>Neighborhood Park</b>	Larger park than mini-park it provided an area that can be used for active and passive play	½ mile or less	More than one acre up to 40 acres	Easy access primarily through walking or biking to residents living in a neighborhood
<b>Community Park</b>	Larger park than a neighborhood park it contains both passive and active spaces that can be used for a diverse number of activities	Up to 2 miles	40 acres and up to 200 acres	Captures unique larger environmental features or terrain allows for intense development of recreational facilities
<b>Regional Park (owned and maintained by the Dakota County Park system)</b>	Large park area that is used primarily for passive, outdoor recreation and exploring the natural environment	1 hour or less drive time	200 acres or more	Natural resource based that include features such as: bodies of water, fauna, woodlands, river/stream and topography
<b>Linear Park/ Greenway</b>	Area that provide transportation linkage or connections through the following possible modes: hiking, biking, boating, snowmobiling and cross country skiing	No current radius identified	No specific number of acres but width of linear park should be sufficient to protect the environment for wildlife while providing maximum use	Captures areas that occur naturally along streams and rivers or are a result of constructed right of ways or utility easements that provide connections to parks, open space, schools and commercial areas
<b>Open Space</b>	Area that provides habitat for wildlife and passive space for viewing natural areas that includes features such as storm water ponds, wetlands, wooded areas and native/ natural vegetation	No current radius identified	No specific number of acres but adequate size is needed so that the area can sustain itself	Located within close proximity of the community that captures natural resources

**Table 8.7** *Park and Open Space Classifications*

## 5.2 Regional Parks and Trails

While the City’s park system is composed of primarily neighborhood and community parks, it is important to note that the City does have a need for access to regional parks. The current closest regional park to Farmington is Lebanon Hills Regional Park that is located in Eagan, Minnesota. However recently, the Metropolitan Council has approved creating a new regional park in Empire Township that will be owned and maintained by Dakota County. The park location will be approximately less than two miles from the City of Farmington’s municipal boundary. The future regional park will be accessible off of Dakota County Road 66. There are also two future regional trails that are planned to be constructed that will connect to the regional park. One of the regional trail will run parallel with South Creek and will extend from Lakeville through Farmington that will connect to the other regional trail planned to be constructed along the Vermillion River that will connect to the new regional park in Empire Township. Section 7 Trails and Greenways will address the regional trail system that has been identified by the Metropolitan Council to be created through the City of Farmington.

## 5.3 Existing Conditions

**Table 8.8** below shows in comparison the growth of park acreage by classification since the previous master plan was created and approved in 1998.

**Table 8.8:** *Park Acreage by Classification*

Classification of Park	1998 Acreage	2007 acreage	Acreage Difference
Mini Parks	0	3.3	+3.3
Neighborhood Parks	57	133.6	+76.2
Community Park	164	252.7	+88.64
Regional Park	0	0	0
Linear Park/Greenway	Not identified	246.52	NA
Open Space	Not identified	239.5	NA

**Table 8.13** Farmington’s Parks and Open Space Inventory that is found in the Appendix provides a review of the 41 park and open spaces areas that are contained within the City and the amenities found in each park. 23 of these areas are parks and 18 areas are considered open space or natural areas. Of the 23 park areas 19 have been developed with the remaining 4 park areas being planned to be developed within the next 2-5 years. Park and open space acreage currently totals 876 acres with 436 acres of the total acreage being either a mini-park, neighborhood park or community park that utilize well maintained spaces allowing the community to be active in them. The remaining 440 acres are open space that utilizes natural areas for passive recreation. While most of the open space acreage is accessible by the City’s trail system some acreage has been set aside as inaccessible in order to either protect its sensitive environment or due to its location as a storm water pond area. The City’s current policy is to have at least 20 acres of park acreage per 1,000 residents. Given the current park acreage of 436 acres and the current estimated population of 21,768 people, the City is currently providing just less than 21 acres per 1,000 people. The City does not have a current policy of open space and natural area acreage per 1,000 residents. It will be important to set some type of policy related to preserving open space and natural areas for the residents to experience and enjoy. It is being proposed that at least 20

acres of open space and natural area be set aside for every 1,000 residents. If this policy were to be implemented, this would mean that given the City’s current estimated population of 21,768 would mean that are just above 20 acres of open space and natural areas per 1,000 residents.

## 5.4 Needs Analysis

It is important to analyze the current inventory of recreational facilities that are owned by the City that were shown in Table 8.13 and compare them with the minimum number of recreational facilities that are recommended by the NRPA based on a community’s population. Table 8.9 below shows the comparison and identifies where the recreational deficiencies currently occur in the City.

**Table 8.9:** *City of Farmington’s Recreation Facility Inventory and NRPA Minimum Standards Based on Population*

Item	Baseball/ Softball Fields	Soccer Fields	Playgrounds	Football Fields	Tennis Courts	Outdoor Volleyball Courts	Basketball Courts	Hockey	Indoor Gym Courts
<b>City Facility</b>	11	0	16	0	2	7	12	3	0
<b>NRPA Facility Minimum Standards based on population</b>	1/1,250	1/3,333	1/park	1/20,000	1/2,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/3,000	1/10,000
<b>2007 Estimated population or parks</b>	20,768	20,768	21	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based on 2007 estimated population or number of parks</b>	17	6	21	1	10	4	4	7	2
<b>Currently (under) over NRPA minimum standard</b>	(6)	(6)	(5)	(1)	(8)	3	8	(4)	(2)
<b>2020 Estimated population or parks</b>	27,100	27,100	25	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based estimated population or number of parks</b>	22	8	21	1	14	5	5	9	2

<b>2020 (under) over NRPA minimum standards</b>	<b>(11)</b>	<b>(8)</b>	<b>(9)</b>	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(12)</b>	2	7	<b>(6)</b>	<b>(2)</b>
<b>2030 Estimated population or parks</b>	32,000	32,000	30	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based on estimated population or number of parks</b>	26	10	30	1	16	6	6	11	3
<b>2030 (under) over NRPA minimum standards</b>	<b>(15)</b>	<b>(10)</b>	<b>(14)</b>	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(14)</b>	1	6	<b>(8)</b>	<b>(3)</b>

Based on the above analysis that uses NRPA minimum standards developed for recreational facilities, the City of Farmington currently does not meet the minimum standards in 7 of the 9 recreational facility categories. In the years 2020 and 2030, it shows that the City will become even more deficient with meeting the minimum recreational facility standards unless it continues to add more facilities as the park and open space system grows.

The Farmington School District also owns and maintains recreational facilities. It is important to note that when school district facilities are combined with Table 5.4 the number of facilities in each category is brought to a level where minimum standards are being met. However it should be noted that because the City does not own these facilities, it has no control over the maintenance or scheduling of these facilities. The issue then is that school district facilities are not always available for public use and are concentrated at a few school sites. School district facilities also serve a larger service area that covers the entire school district boundaries, which are outside the City’s boundaries. Table 5.5 is being used to merely illustrate that the school district does provide recreational facilities that adds to the overall inventory of recreational facilities available to the community.

**Table 8.10:** *City of Farmington and Farmington School District’s Combined Recreation Facility Inventory and NRPA Minimum Standards Based on Population*

Item	Baseball/ Softball Fields	Soccer Fields	Playgrounds	Football Fields	Tennis Courts	Outdoor Volleyball Courts	Basketball Courts	Hockey	Indoor Gym Courts
<b>City Facilities</b>	11	0	16	0	2	7	12	3	0
<b>School District Facilities</b>	19	8	3	1	20	0	16	0	24
<b>NRPA Facility Minimum Standards</b>	1/1,250	1/3,333	1/park	1/20,000	1/2,000	1/5,000	1/5,000	1/3,000	1/10,000

<b>based on population</b>									
<b>2007 Estimated population or parks</b>	20,768	20,768	21	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768	20,768
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based on 2007 estimated population or number of parks</b>	17	6	21	1	10	4	4	7	2
<b>Current (under) over NRPA minimum standard</b>	13	2	(2)	0	12	3	24	(4)	22
<b>2020 Estimated population or parks</b>	27,100	27,100	25	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100	27,100
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based estimated population or number of parks</b>	22	8	21	1	14	5	5	9	2
<b>2020 (under) over NRPA minimum standards</b>	8	0	(6)	0	8	2	23	(6)	22
<b>2030 Estimated population or parks</b>	32,000	32,000	30	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000	32,000
<b>NRPA Minimum standard based on estimated population or number of parks</b>	26	10	30	1	16	6	6	11	3
<b>2030 (under) over NRPA minimum standards</b>	4	(2)	(11)	0	6	1	22	(8)	21

In looking at the balance of recreational facilities provided by the City and School District, it is difficult to make a fair comparison because facilities at the School District are indoor and outdoor. What can be determined about the analysis is that the City lacks an adequate number of indoor recreational facilities and lacks adequate outdoor recreational facilities in certain areas.

The City does not have an adequate number of outdoor recreational facilities such as soccer fields, hockey rinks and ball fields to meet the minimum NRPA standards. This is important to note as the current need for these types of recreational facilities have been made known to the City through community surveys that have been completed over the past several years and from youth sports organizations.

## 5.5 Park Improvements

The City prides itself in utilizing a public input process to gather input and feedback on the development of park master plans since 2003. As a result, 14 out of the current 21 City parks have approved master plans created that provide a long range (15 years or more) vision for these parks. The public input process for the 13 neighborhood parks that have been master planned consisted of inviting residents within 350 feet of the park. While the attendance at the public meetings ranged from very few people to many people depending on the type of improvements identified and whether or not neighbors were concerned about the improvements, the important thing to remember that the approved master plans for neighborhood parks reflect improvements that were identified during the public input process.

The public input process for community parks consisted of inviting local youth and adult sports organizations to participate in the planning of the parks. The City currently has master plans for two future community parks. Land for one of the community parks will contain a youth athletic complex and will be given to the City as part of the 965 acre development called Fairhill Development. The other community park that has been master planned is located on land just to the south of the Mystic Meadows First Addition development and park land will be given to the City when this land is developed in the future.

Creation of the individual park master plans has provided the source of information for the timeline to complete the improvements as identified in the five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The strategy has been to first create a master plan for a park and then in the following year make improvements to the park. The City has taken the approach to try and complete all improvements identified in the master plans for new parks provided that there is sufficient funding in the Park Improvement Fund (PIF). **Table 8.2** below shows the City’s five year CIP.

**Table 8.2: Five Year Parks and Trail Improvement Budget**

Name of Park and Projects	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Vermillion Grove Park:</b> boardwalk construction	\$55,000				
<b>Farmington Preserve Park:</b> playground, shelter, basketball court, turf seeding, prairie restoration, signage, trails and site amenities	\$100,000				
<b>North Creek Park:</b> playground, shelter with warming house, turf seeding, fishing dock, trails, site amenities, hockey and pleasure skating rinks and park signage	\$125,000				
<b>Meadowview Park:</b> boardwalk construction		\$20,000			

<b>Hill Dee Park:</b> <i>playground</i>	<b>\$45,000</b>				
<b>Lake Julia Park:</b> <i>playground, shelter, trails basketball court and master plan development</i>		<b>\$100,000</b>			
<b>Pine Knoll Park:</b> <i>playground, shelter, basketball court, trails and master plan development</i>		<b>\$85,000</b>			
<b>Middle Creek Park:</b> <i>boardwalk construction</i>		<b>\$35,000</b>			
<b>Troy Hill Park:</b> <i>playground, gazebo and master plan development</i>					<b>\$50,000</b>
<b>Prairieview Park:</b> <i>basketball court, shelter, trails and master plan development</i>				<b>\$50,000</b>	
<b>Fairhills Park:</b> <i>shelter, playground equipment, basketball court and master plan development</i>				<b>\$50,000</b>	
<b>Town Square Park:</b> <i>gazebo, landscaping, playground, site amenities, sculptures and master plan development</i>			<b>\$250,000</b>		
<b>Rambling River Park:</b> <i>master plan development, playground, shelter, trails, amphitheatre, prairie restoration, sculptures</i>				<b>\$1,000,000</b>	
<b>Mystic Meadows Development Community Park:</b> <i>four field adult softball complex, shelters, maintenance building, playground, parking lot, concession and restroom building</i>				<b>\$2,600,000</b>	
<b>Fairhill Development Community Park:</b> <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>		<b>\$3,300,000</b>			
<b>Middle Creek Park:</b> <i>playground, shelters, trails, parking lot, site amenities and ballfield</i>		<b>\$475,000</b>			
<b>Lake Julia Waterway:</b> <i>pedestrian bridge</i>		<b>\$100,000</b>			

While the five year CIP identifies the schedule for completing improvements in certain parks in the coming years, the sources of where the funding will come from to fund the improvements in the coming year has not. This issue will need to be addressed as part of the 2030 Master Plan so that the PIF does not run out of funds in the future so that improvements can continue to be made to existing and new parks.

## ***1. Funding Issues***

There are many issues associated with completing all of the improvements identified in each of the individual park master plans. The biggest current issue is quite frankly having an insufficient fund balance in the Park Improvement Fund to fund all of the improvements that have been identified in the park master plans. There are currently only three parks that have had all improvements completely constructed as identified in their master plan. Several more parks have a significant amount of improvements that have been completed with only a few items that have been deferred. Parks that have athletic fields shown as part of their master plan have not had any improvements constructed. These parks with athletic field complexes account for a significant portion of what has been deferred to date by the City for park improvements. The Appendix contains **Table 8.12** Deferred Park Improvements that identifies improvements in parks that have been deferred due to a shortage in funding. The City has relied in the past on the park dedication process to receive cash-in-lieu of land in order to fund improvements in new and existing park. However, this funding source is unreliable to be the sole funding source for making improvements to parks. The City also established a policy that allows for the transfer of 50% of the municipal liquor store profits into the PIF. However these profits have fluctuated over the years and there has not been enough profits transferred to keep pace with the cost of constructing park improvements.

## ***2. Funding Solutions***

The City will need to develop a strategy on how a dedicated long term funding source will continue to occur. By having a dedicated long term funding source, it will provide continuous money for improvements so that facilities and amenities can be replaced and/or added in park and open space areas so that there continues to be good diversity that will provide a variety of experiences to park and open space users. There are several possible dedicated funding solutions for the City to consider. While no one solution is necessarily the best, the possible solutions to consider are as follows:

- General obligation bond referendum
- Chapter 429 funding as part of a larger City improvement project
- Increase in amount of liquor store profit transfer
- Annual General Fund transfer
- Financial partnerships

## **5.6 Future Park Locations**

The City has created an Existing and Proposed Parks, Open Space and Trails Map that identifies the location of future parks, open space and trails. The map has identified locations for future neighborhood and community parks based on an NRPA standard that no resident in a City shall be further than a half mile away from a City park. While the total acreage of each future park has not been established, it is anticipated that when the land where the future park is located is going through the platting process, the park acreage will be determined at that time that will meet the half mile standard.

## 5.7 Parks Amenities Inventory

**Table 8.10** previously referenced in Section 5.4 identifies that the City has fewer facilities than what is recommended by NRPA minimum standards. While the City currently lacks certain facilities compared to recommended NRPA minimum standards, the City does have a diverse park and open space system in regards to the types of facilities and amenities offered to park and open space users. Twenty-six (26) different types of amenities are identified throughout the park and open space system. It is important that the City continue to look for new trends in the area of park development including adding new amenities and facilities in park and open space areas that currently do not exist. As mentioned previously Table 8.13 Farmington Parks and Open Space Inventory found in the Appendix shows the various facilities and amenities that are found in City parks and open space areas.

## 5.8 Maintenance

The City has maintained its parks and open space areas well. As the City's park and open space system grows, the City will need to budget additional money to cover the increased maintenance and operational costs. This will include providing funding for additional personnel to complete the increased maintenance and operational work in parks and open space areas. While there is no established policy identifying a minimum or maximum staffing level for park maintenance and operations, City staff have recently begun to identify the estimated number of additional hours needed to maintain new parks and open space areas as they are developed. As these hours begin to accumulate, it seems appropriate that when certain thresholds are met such as additional hours that are equivalent to full time staff hours (2,080 hours), additional staff, whether seasonal, part time regular or full-time regular staff should be hired in order to adequately meet the increased demand on staff time needed to maintain the additional parks and open space areas.

The City's annual budget contains funds for the purchase of maintenance equipment and vehicles. The City has an established guideline for the replacement of park maintenance equipment and vehicles and when equipment or vehicles are identified to be replaced or added to the existing inventory. Annual funding should be provided in the Capital Outlay budget to acquire the equipment and vehicles identified in a specific year to be replaced or added to the existing inventory.