City of Carlsbad California

2023 - 2030

PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT MASTER PLAN UPDATE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Acknowledgements

City Of Carlsbad City Council

Keith Blackburn, Mayor

Priya Bhat-Patel, Mayor Pro Tem

Melanie Burkholder, Council Member

Carolyn Luna, Council Member

Teresa Acosta, Council Member

City Of Carlsbad Parks & Recreation Commission

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Amy Allemann, Vice Chairperson

Matthew Bartels, Commissioner

Joe Gisbert, Commissioner

Deborah Rasines, Commissioner

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Bruce Fitz-Patrick, Commissioner

Nelson Ross, Commissioner

Cecilia Schouwe, Commissioner

City of Carlsbad Executive Team

Scott Chadwick, City Manager

Geoff Patnoe, Assistant City Manager

Gary Barberio, Deputy City Manager, Community Services

Paz Gomez, Deputy City Manager, Public Works

Laura Rocha, Deputy City Manager, Administrative Services

Michael Calderwood, Fire Chief

Mickey Williams, Police Chief

David Graham, Chief Innovation Officer

Sheila Cobian, Legislative & Constituent Affairs Director

City Of Carlsbad Parks & Recreation Department Leadership Team

Kyle Lancaster, Parks & Recreation Director

Mick Calarco, Recreation Services Manager

Bonnie Elliott, Senior Management Analyst

Todd Reese, Parks Services Manager

Project Lead Consultants

Neelay Bhatt, Principal Consultant and CEO – Next Practice Partners

Jason Elissalde, Senior Project Manager – Next Practice Partners

Phil Parnin, Associate Principal – PROS Consulting

Project Sub-Consultants

Doug Grove, Principal - RHA Landscape Architects-Planners, Inc.

Jason Morado - ETC. Leisure Vision

Preface

The city's current Parks & Recreation Department Master Plan was adopted by the City Council in 2015, providing a road map for future investments in city parks and recreation based on the community's top priorities, demographic make-up, industry trends, market analysis and other factors.

The master plan resulted in several new and expanded parks and recreation offerings, including:

- A community center, ornamental gardens, and community garden at Pine Avenue Community Park
- The city's first outdoor pickleball courts and arena sports field at Poinsettia Community Park
- A dog park, along with an added restroom facility at Poinsettia Community Park
- An entryway with an outdoor fitness circuit and picnic areas at Calavera Hills Community Park
- A community garden at Calavera Hills Community Park
- An outlook with stage, picnic areas and a catering/restroom facility at Aviara Community Park
- Expanded multigenerational programs
- Expanded programs focusing on fitness and wellness, outdoor adventure, environmental education and culinary arts

Another key strategy in the 2015 plan was to conduct an updated needs assessment so the department could keep pace with changing needs, priorities and trends. That needs assessment is part of this 2023-2030 Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update.

Changes since 2015

Although healthy outdoor lifestyles and community connection are still important values for Carlsbad residents, several changes have occurred since the current master plan was completed:

- The city has made major investments in new and improved parks based on the needs identified in the 2015 master plan.
- The city is not projecting the same level of growth as it has seen in the past, meaning developer fees to fund new amenities will be less.
- The city is currently projecting a General Fund structural deficit as soon as fiscal year 2028. As a result, the city is looking for opportunities to reduce ongoing spending. New parks and recreation facilities require funding for ongoing maintenance and operations.
- The city's Growth Management Program is undergoing an update. The parks performance standard is expected to remain the same, at 3 acres per 1,000 residents. However, a study is yet to be completed that will determine the future development fees that would help fund park projects.

Moving forward

Due to the above factors, the 2023-2030 Parks & Recreation Master Plan Update focuses on maintaining the high-quality parks and recreation services currently enjoyed by the community and recommends ways to adapt them to reflect current community needs and priorities. The strategies listed for action in the master plan are based on several factors, including:

- Carlsbad Community Vision
- Carlsbad Strategic Plan (2023-2027)
- Carlsbad Capital Improvement Program
- Community and stakeholder input
- Parks & Recreation staff input
- Consulting team expertise and experience

Addressing the strategies that require significant capital and/or operating expense will be contingent upon the availability of funding during the term identified.

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CHAPTER ONE – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 MASTER PLAN UPDATE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Parks & Recreation Department staff commenced this master plan update with these goals and objectives:

- Maximize community engagement to ensure diverse community and stakeholder input is heard and is utilized to shape the future of the city's parks, programs and facilities.
- Integrate Commission for the Accreditation of Parks & Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) best practices to ensure accreditation standards are met.
- Ensure diverse offerings, and equity of access, through the recreation program plan and levels of service analysis which is based on varied data sources including a statistically reliable survey, online tools, demographics, trends analysis and community engagement.
- Enhance financial sustainability through efforts to identify revenue opportunities and thus better ensure future operational and maintenance needs are addressed.
- Develop an action plan that establishes guidelines and strategies for the department's parks and recreation services, to support the Carlsbad community.

1.2 MASTER PLAN UPDATE PROCESS

The process of updating the master plan began with three questions to ensure that the community's and the department's goals and objectives would be recorded (Figure 1):

1. Where are we today?
2. Where are we going tomorrow?
3. How do we get there?

Note: This plan commenced in Dec. 2019, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in modifications to the update process, including additional virtual community engagement and an extended timeline for completion.

Figure 1: Process model

1.3 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Demographic data used for the analysis was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau and Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc., the largest research and development organization dedicated to Geographic Information Systems and that specializes in population projections and market trends. All data was acquired in September 2022 and reflects actual numbers as reported in both the 2010 and 2020 Census, as well as estimates for 2022 obtained by ESRI. Simple linear regression was utilized for 2027, 2032, and 2037 projections.[1]

The demographic data not only offers a snapshot of the present but provides invaluable insights into the future, ensuring that the Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update is proactive, and resonates with the changing community needs.

Full demographic and recreation trend information is included in chapter three.

Important demographic and recreation trend findings:

- The population has grown at a rate above the national average during the past 12 years, and projections show continued growth through 2032.
- The current age distribution has the highest representation in the age segment 35-54 with a median age of 40.4. This high representation of the 35-54 age segment will feed into the 55-74 age segment, which is projected to become the most represented age segment by 2032. This finding indicates the importance of focusing on adults 50+ programming to meet the needs of this active aging population.
- Since the 2010 Census, Carlsbad's racial and ethnic diversity has grown, with projections showing a continued increase over the next 15 years.

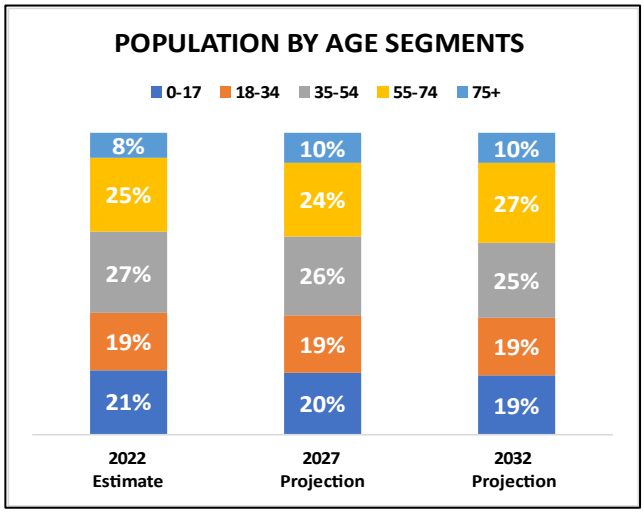


Figure 2: Population by age segments

- Household income and individual income are significantly higher than both the state and national averages. A higher household income confirms the importance of high-quality offerings and experiences to meet community expectations.
- 40 out of 46 activities tracked had a Market Potential Index (MPI) score of 100 or more. This high MPI indicates a strong participation rate among city residents in general sports and fitness activities. Such data highlights the need for future projects, including culinary programs, Monroe Street Pool upgrades, and additional pickleball courts.

[1] Simple linear regression is used to estimate the relationship between two quantitative variables.

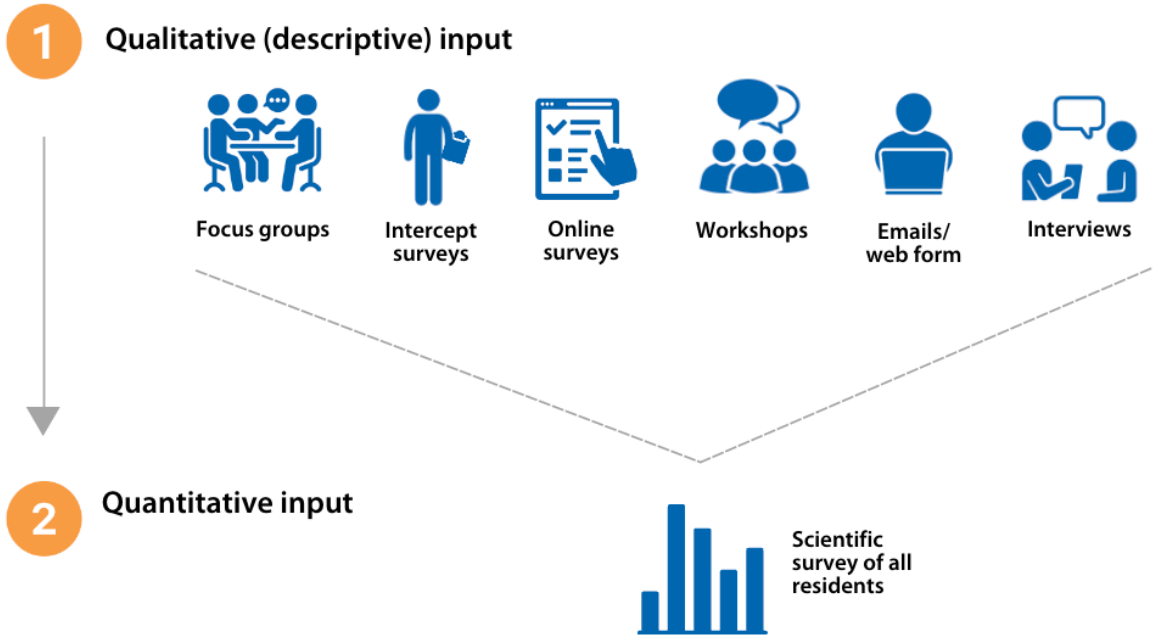
1.4 PUBLIC INPUT

The project team provided multiple ways for community members and other stakeholders to provide input to help ensure the final master plan reflects the community's most important needs, values and priorities. Input was gathered in two phases:

Qualitative and quantitative input

Phase one focused on qualitative input. Qualitative input is highly descriptive but is not necessarily representative of the entire population. The project team gathered qualitative input from City of Carlsbad elected and appointed officials, employees, residents, and various community and special interest groups.

This input helped inform the questions asked in the second phase, a statistically reliable survey. The survey sample included about 400 people chosen at random. Questions answered by all 400 respondents have a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 4.9 percentage points.



Effects of the pandemic

Outreach for the Parks & Recreation Master Plan update started in February 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was put on hold temporarily so the city could focus all available responses on its public health response

Once the city began to return to in-person services in 2021, city staff sought additional community input to learn whether the community's needs, values and priorities related to parks and recreation had changed.

Qualitative and quantitative feedback showed that the pandemic made some residents value parks and recreation more, but otherwise has not had a significant effect on needs, values and priorities. For example, most residents did not participate in the city's virtual parks and recreation programming and most said they do not have a need for such programming in the future.

Opinion of parks and recreation programs, facilities and services

Overall, residents gave the city high marks in terms of its parks and recreation offerings. Following are some of the key findings from the statiscally reliable survey:

- 85% of Carlsbad households had visited a city park, sports field or other recreational facility in the preview 12 months.
- About half go between one and four times a week.
- 91% rate the condition of parks, fields and facilities good or excellent
- Only about a third of residents participate in city recreational programs, but of those who do, 96% rate them as good or excellent.
- About three-quarters of residents said lack of features they want to use was the main reason they do not use parks, fields and facilities more. No other single reason was cited by more than 45% of respondents.
- More residents use city recreation services than other providers. Private clubs, other cities' programs, school programs and sports leagues were also in the top five, but used less than city programs.
- The main reasons people cited for not using city recreation programs more were not knowing what is offered, too busy or not being interested, and program times that are not convenient.
- Residents top needs for park facilities are community and neighborhood parks and family picnic areas. Of those who said they have a need for these facilities, only between 3% and 5% said their needs were not currently being met.
- When asked to choose the most important park facilities, community parks, neighborhood parks, off-leash dog parks, outdoor swimming pools and outdoor pickleball courts were the top five responses.
- Residents did not cite a significant need for recreational programs. Adult fitness was the only response cited as a need by a majority of residents, at 55%. Other responses in the top five included a need for senior adult and fitness programs (43%), adult sports programs (39%), aquatics programs (39%) and cultural arts programs (36%).
- Of those who cited a need for these five programs, between 20% and 25% said their need was not currently being met.
- When asked how to improve or renovate parks, the top responses were to add more shade, lighting and family picnic areas.
- About two thirds of residents said they are satisfied or very satisfied with the value they receive from city's Parks & Recreation Department, with only 7% saying they were dissatisfied.

- Responses did not differ signficiantly among Carlsbad's four ZIP codes for most survey questions, with a few exceptions:
    - Residents in the northwest cite safety as the top reason they do not visit more often.
    - Residents in southeast don't visit more often because they use parks in other cities.
    - Residents in the northeast and southwest cite a lack of features they want to use.
    - Residents in northwest Carlsbad say they have the biggest need for a community park while residents in the southwest say they have the lowest need.
    - Residents in northern Carlsbad said they have a greater need for sports fields than residents in the south.
    - Residents in northwest and southeast Carlsbad cited a higher need for dog parks than other parts of the city.

How the input was used

The purpose of the statistically reliable survey was to ensure the project team gained an understanding of a representative group of Carlsbad residents in addition to those residents who choose to actively engage in city issues. Input from the qualitative phase helped the project team identify which questions should be included in the scientific survey.

Community input was an important factor but not the only factor used when developing parks and recreation priorities. Demographics, industry trends, existing and planned parks and programs, and other factors were also considered.

1.5 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

1.5.1 CORE PROGRAM AREAS

To fulfill the department's mission of strengthening community health and wellness, identifying core program areas based on current and future community needs is crucial, as is focusing on specific program areas that are important to the community.

The department is faced with the challenge of attempting to cater to all interests. The core program area philosophy assists staff, policy makers and the public with focusing on what programs are most crucial to the community.

A program area is considered core if it meets most of the following criteria:

- Provided for more than five years or is expected by the community based on community input results
- Accounts for 5% or more of the department's overall budget
- Is offered 3-4 seasons per year
- Broad demographic appeal
- Skill development tiers are available within the program area's offerings
- Full-time staff are responsible for the program area
- Facilities are specifically designed to support the program area

CORE PROGRAM AREAS DESCRIPTIONS, GOALS, & EXAMPLE PROGRAMS

Department staff and the consulting team identified the following core program areas for both general recreation and adults 50+ currently offered and shown in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 3: Core program areas - adults 50+

Figure 4: General recreation core program areas

1.6 PARK SITE ASSESSMENTS

The consulting team assessed the department's parks and made observations regarding park access, visual and aesthetic appeal, and maintenance standards.

Maintenance was good, considering how heavily the parks are used. Thirty-one of the parks were rated as excellent, nine were rated as good, and two were rated as fair. No park sites were rated poor.

STRENGTHS

- General parks maintenance
- Abundant amenities
- Clean and well-kept parks
- High levels of patron use indicating the quality and availability of needed amenities in the parks
- Overall consistent city branding and signs
- Synthetic turf athletic fields, allowing for increased use
- Variety of park experiences throughout system

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Some sites lack sufficient concrete, asphalt, or decomposed granite walkways to fully meet disabled access requirements (Pio Pico Park, Oak Park, El Fuerte Park, Harold E. Smerdu Community Garden, Buena Vista Elementary School Fields, Jefferson Elementary School Fields, and La Costa Heights Elementary School Fields)
- Several school field sites could benefit from additional trash and recycling cans, and seating

1.7 SERVICE AREA MAPS

Service area maps assist Parks & Recreation Department staff and city leadership in assessing where parks, facilities and amenities are offered, distribution of parks, facilities and amenities, and, based on population density, assess where there are gaps or overlaps for a specific facility or amenity.

The population source used for these recommendations is the 2022 estimated population, and the 2027 and 2032 projected populations, as reported by Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI). The estimated City of Carlsbad population for 2022 was 116,323.

The shaded areas in the maps indicate the service level (e.g., the population being served by that park type/amenity) as outlined in the facility/amenity levels of service matrix.

The central point inside the ring indicates the location of the facility or amenity while the ring extends out to the distance that amenity serves the population based on the number of amenities at that location, the levels of service recommendations established and the population density.

Dog parks service area map is featured in Figure 5, while the additional service area maps are included in section 5.2.

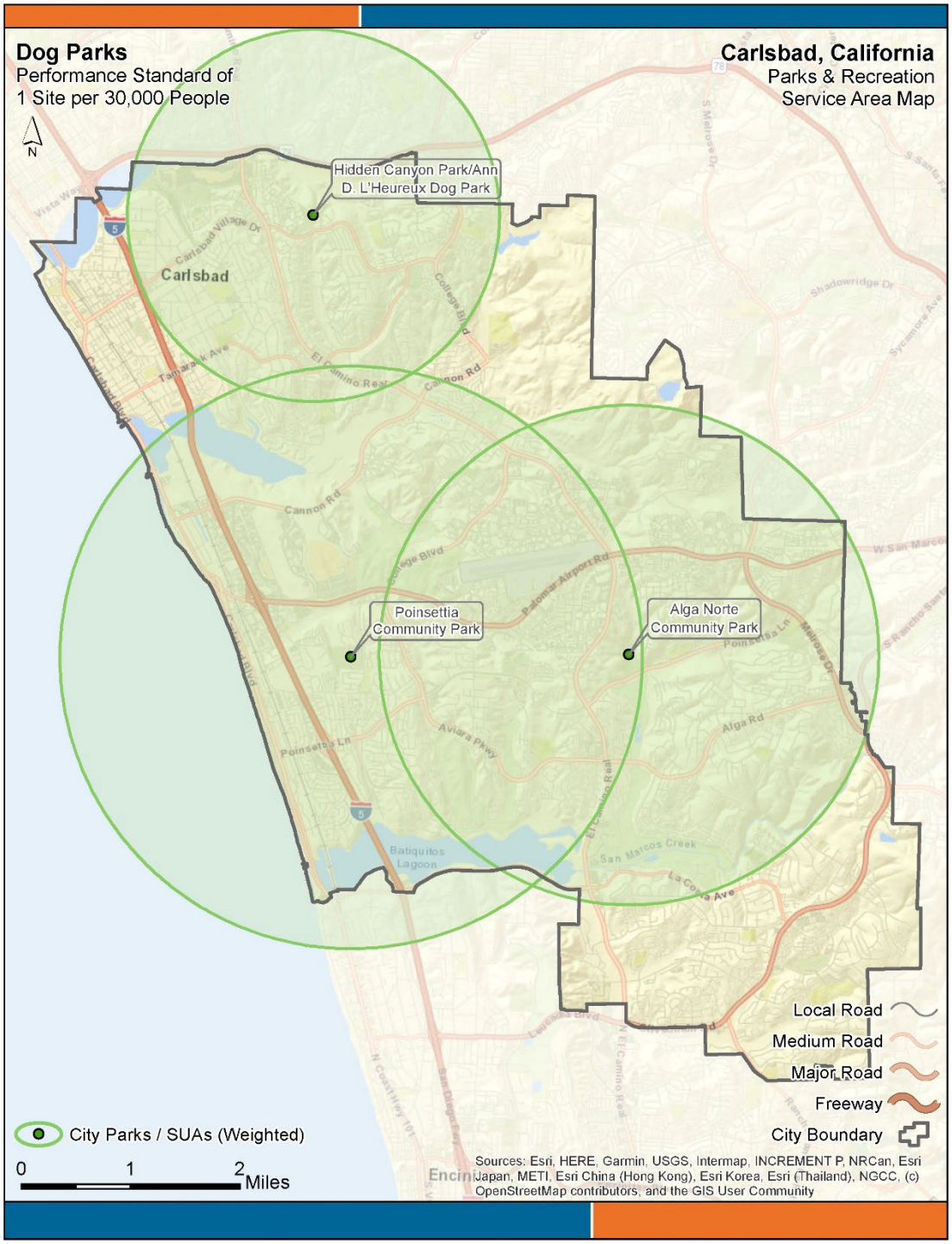


Figure 5: Dog parks service area map

1.8 MISSION, VISION, VALUES AND COMMUNITY INPUT AND STAFF VISIONING OUTCOMES

1.8.1 VISION

To strengthen community connectivity through inclusive world class offerings and exceptional customer service.

1.8.2 MISSION STATEMENT

To promote community health and wellness while building a culture that embraces change and continuous improvement.

1.8.3 COMMUNITY INPUT AND STAFF VISIONING OUTCOMES

Based on community input and the staff visioning workshop, desired report outcomes were identified:

- Address aging infrastructure – refurbish or replace and maintain existing infrastructure
- Optimize staffing – ensure staffing levels and structure match future service levels
- Ensure greater financial sustainability – plan for future revenue generated from programs, services, and goods rendered
- Increase awareness of department's programs and services
- Expand programming – grow and diversify programming to meet the community's interests

1.9 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

Consistent with the 2015 master plan, this update provides systemwide recommendations for the department to implement over the short-term (0-3 years), long-term (4-7 years) and on an ongoing basis. The 2015 plan resulted in the department's successful accreditation through the Commission for the Accreditation of Parks and Recreation agencies, updates at Pine Avenue Community Park including a new building with indoor recreation space, catering support room and upgrades at Aviara Community Park and a dog park and dedicated pickleball courts at Poinsettia Community Park among other accomplishments.

The strategies are based on several factors, including the Carlsbad Community Vision, the Carlsbad Strategic Plan (2023-2028), the annual Carlsbad Capital Improvement Program, community and stakeholder input, Parks & Recreation Department staff input (throughout the process, including and through the visioning workshop), and the consulting team's expertise and experience.

Plan categories:

- Parks
- Maintenance and operations
- Programs, events, and facilities
- Funding and marketing

Category strategies are separated by an implementation timeline (Figures 6-9).

1.9.1 PARKS STRATEGIES

PARKS STRATEGIES
Short Term (0-3 Years)
Seek City Council direction on whether to pursue the construction of outdoor pickleball courts at an existing park to address the current demand
Educate park visitors about sustainable practices and encourage them to participate in environmental initiatives
Complete a Parks in Lieu Fee and Parks Impact Fee Study and present its findings to the City Council for review and direction
Evaluate the potential for revising protocols at the skate parks to allow other wheeled devices, which may enhance accessibility
Add additional trash and recycling cans, and seating at school field sites
Complete conceptual design and permitting for Leo Carrillo Ranch Historic Park Phase 3B Improvements
Complete construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Stagecoach Park Community Garden
Complete construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Veterans Memorial Park
Complete community engagement, conceptual design and permitting for Robertson Ranch Community Park
Complete conceptual design and permitting for Hosp Grove Park Improvements
Contribute to completing construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Monroe Street Pool Renovation/Replacement (in support of project's lead department: Fleet & Facilities)
Contribute to completing construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Beach Access Repairs and Upgrades (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)
Contribute to completing construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Carlsbad Boulevard and Tamarack Avenue Intersection Improvements (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)
Contribute to completing construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Terramar Coastal Area Improvements (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)
Contribute to completing conceptual design and permitting for ADA Beach Access Ramps (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)

Contribute to completing the conceptual design, permitting, construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Citywide Facilities Security Enhancements (in support of project's lead department: Information Technology)
Contribute to completing the conceptual design, permitting, construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Citywide Facilities WiFi Enhancements (in support of project's lead department: Information Technology)
Long Term (4-7 Years)
Enhance parks amenities, such as shade structures and seating, to improve visitor experience
Complete construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Leo Carrillo Ranch Historic Park Phase 3B Improvements
Complete construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Robertson Ranch Community Park
Complete construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for Hosp Grove Park Improvements
Seek City Council direction on whether to reprioritize the design and permitting of Village H South Dog Park
Contribute to completing conceptual design for South Carlsbad Coastline (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)
Contribute to completing construction plans, bidding and construction implementation for ADA Beach Access Ramps (in support of project's lead department: Transportation)
Commence community engagement for Zone 5 Park
Commence community engagement for Cannon Lake Park
Ongoing
Coordinate enforcement of parks and facility regulations to facilitate positive user experience
Incorporate environmentally friendly practices into park design and operations, such as drought-tolerant landscaping and energy-efficient lighting
Explore certifications or equivalencies, such as SITES or LEED, for new park designs or renovations
Ensure full ADA access at all parks, with a focus on most immediate needs
Encourage community participation in reporting maintenance or safety concerns
Review the potential for adding park amenities based on the levels of service recommendations
Add more trees within parks, where feasible

Figure 6: Parks strategies

1.9.2 PARKS MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS STRATEGIES

MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS STRATEGIES
Short Term = 0-3 Years
Continue to invest in upgrading aging infrastructure with the department's annual operating budget and – as needed – with the capital improvement program budget
Explore partnerships with community organizations or individual volunteers to periodically provide additional maintenance support
Long Term = 4-7 Years
Invest in equipment and technology as needs are identified that will improve maintenance efficiency and effectiveness.
Fully adopt and utilize the Better Impact database to enhance volunteer management
Ongoing
Evaluate and pursue either increasing contractual services or hiring additional staff to perform routine maintenance as the inventory of sites grows
Ensure staffing levels align with programming or facility hours
Expand staff onboarding procedures and compile an onboarding manual focused on the department's culture and philosophy
Train and cross train staff to enhance professional growth and operational coverage
Partner with the Human Resources Department to enhance staff retention and succession planning
Coordinate with the Human Resources Department in recruiting and managing department volunteers to maximize the support
Prioritize staff time and resources to address critical maintenance needs and concerns
Explore grant opportunities to supplement funds for upgrades to aging infrastructure and equipment
Enhance pathway and parking lot lighting, and reduce energy consumption, by converting aging incandescent systems with modern LED systems
Request specific monitoring by the Police Department's Park Rangers and patrol Officers to address unpermitted activities and promote positive experiences of patrons

Figure 7: Maintenance and operations strategies

1.9.3 PROGRAMS, EVENTS AND FACILTIES STRATEGIES

PROGRAMS, EVENTS AND FACILITIES STRATEGIES
Short Term = 0-3 Years
Assess current programs and facilities to identify barriers to accessibility and develop plans to address identified barriers (in support of project's lead department: Risk Management)
Create a staff committee to review and prioritize requests for new programs and events, considering factors such as community interest, feasibility, and cost-effectiveness
Explore expansion of scholarship programs and other financial assistance options, such as sliding scale fees, to help reduce barriers to program participation
Consult the Human Resources Department on the development of recognition programs to acknowledge staff members who provide exceptional customer service
Evaluate offering programs at the northern, city-controlled beach
Expand program offerings outdoors, including fitness, etc.
Annually evaluate program lifecycles to ensure balance between different stages
Offer multicultural programs that reflect the community's increasing diversity
Expand staff training on effective communication strategies, program development and customer service
Partner with local organizations that represent marginalized communities to receive input on program development
Provide accommodations, such as sign language interpretation, to make programs and facilities more inclusive
Long Term = 4-7 Years
Complete implementation of relevant Age Friendly Action Plan recommendations
Expand indoor recreation offerings for the growing active adult population
Enhance aquatic offerings at Monroe Street Pool once renovation/expansion project is complete
Ongoing
Continue to monitor program trends to ensure ongoing alignment with community needs

Encourage feedback and open communication between the department and the community
Partner with healthcare organizations to provide health screenings and education to the community to the active adult population
Utilize technology, including Augmented Reality, and Virtual Reality to enhance the program experience
Work with community organizations and local businesses to develop partnerships that can help provide or promote new programs and event offerings

Figure 8: Programs, events and facilities strategies

1.9.4 FUNDING AND MARKETING STRATEGIES

FUNDING AND MARKETING STRATEGIES
Short Term = 0-3 Years
Consider revenue generation that includes corporate partnerships, sponsorships, foundations and/or naming rights opportunities
Identify potential grant opportunities and develop grant proposals to secure funding
Implement fee study findings to ensure fees are competitive to those fees of surrounding cities for like offerings
Develop a CAPRA compliant department marketing plan to promote the various offerings
Long Term = 4-7 Years
Pursue development of a professional photography policy and fee at historic parks
Ongoing
Partner with community organizations and businesses to provide additional funding for scholarships and discounted programs
Annually review and adjust program, event and facility fees to ensure they are competitive to the market
Annually review athletic field use fees competitive to the market

Figure 9: Funding and marketing strategies

1.10 CONCLUSION

The City of Carlsbad and the Parks & Recreation Department has done an admirable job serving the community – even more so through the pandemic. The department has shown a successful track record of implementing the 2015 master plan recommendations as seen by the numerous projects citywide including, Pine Avenue Community Park, Poinsettia Community Park, Aviara Community Park and Calavera Hills Community Park, while also successfully pursuing national accreditation through the Commission for the Accreditation of Parks and Recreation Agencies.

This update shows the continued growth and increased diversification of the Carlsbad community, in addition to showcasing the high level of parks, programs and recreation spaces provided by the city. The plan underscores the department's emphasis on additional parks development projects while maintaining what parks and facilities currently exist, equitably expanding programs for an active and diverse adult population, and staff training and development.

A focus on innovation and new ideas, maintaining what facilities and amenities exist, providing a high level of care and responsiveness to community needs will ensure the high-quality experience that Carlsbad Parks and Recreation Department patrons are accustomed to will not only continue, but will grow and thrive in the years to come.