

January 2022

City of Columbus, IN

PARKS & RECREATION STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

THANK YOU TO MEMBERS
OF THE COMMUNITY FOR
CONTRIBUTING INPUT
THROUGHOUT THE
DEVELOPMENT
OF THIS MASTER
PLAN

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The City of Columbus (“City”) Parks and Recreation Department (“Department”) selected PROS Consulting to assist in developing a Parks & Recreation Master Plan (“Plan”). The purpose of the Plan is to serve as a usable “blueprint” to the staff, Park Board and the City Council in preparing a needs assessment and action plan for the growing and extremely diverse population that calls Columbus home.

This document is intended to be a dynamic and forward thinking one to strengthen existing programs, facilities, and amenities to serve as a road map for the future.

The following goals were identified as a key outcome of this planning process:

- **Engage the community**, through innovative virtual and in-person public input means to build a shared vision for parks, facilities, programming, and special events and services;
- **Utilize a wide variety of data sources** and best practices to address unmet needs in the community;
- **Determine unique Level of Service Standards** to develop appropriate actions regarding parks, open space, trails, and recreation;
- **Shape organizational preparedness** through innovative and “next” practices to achieve the strategic objectives and recommended actions with achievable strategies; and,
- **Develop a dynamic and realistic strategic action plan** to ensure long-term success and sustainability for the Department’s parks and recreation services including a signature and transformational development at NexusPark.

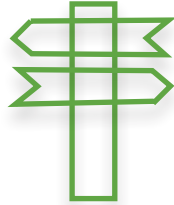


1.2 PROJECT PROCESS

The Plan followed a process of data collection, public input, on-the-ground study, assessment of existing conditions, market research, and open dialogue with local leadership and key stakeholders.



Where Are We
TODAY?



Where Are We Going
TOMORROW?



How Do We Get
There?

1.3 MISSION, VISION, VALUES, AND BIG MOVES

Based on an iterative visioning process with staff using community input, demographics and trends and an analysis of the Department's programs, maintenance and operations and levels of service, the following Core Values, Vision and Mission Statements and Big Moves were developed.

1.3.1 CORE VALUES

The following core values were developed through an iterative process during the Visioning Workshop with staff. These are the ones by which staff will operate. They have also helped shape the Vision and Mission for the Department.

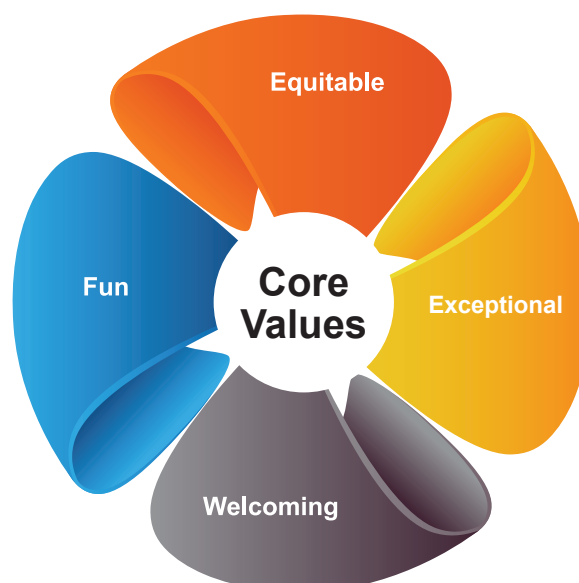


Figure 1: Columbus Core Values



1.3.2 VISION

The following is the vision statement that the Department aspires to fulfil.

“To build a community where everyone belongs”

1.3.3 MISSION

The following mission statement serves as the “why” for the staff to do what they do everyday

“To enrich lives”

#EnrichLives

1.3.4 BIG MOVES

Staff collaborated to identify the primary Department-wide outcomes they would aspire to achieve from this Plan. These Big Moves are the most significant outcomes desired and, when achieved, will serve as the legacy fulfilling the Plan’s vision. The following are the 5 Big Moves that were identified through this process:

1. Develop a marketing and branding approach built around telling the story of CPRD
2. Master Plan Donner Park and Pool to provide an updated aquatics facility
3. Pursue additional funding to reinvest in existing and new parks and facilities
4. Seek CAPRA Accreditation and National Gold Medal
5. Successful development of the NexusPark Campus

1.3.5 STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

In addition, the Consulting Team developed an Action Plan that will be updated and utilized by staff to implement and track progress on this Plan's recommendations. This was based on the key Strategic Areas identified during the Visioning Workshop. These were then organized based on Short-term (0 – 3 years), Mid-term (3-5 years), and On-going. Some key strategies by timelines are:

| Strategy | Who's Responsible | Timeline |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Add fitness amenities along People Trail | Parks & Trails | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Assess playgrounds to prioritize necessary enhancements/maintenance | Parks & Trails | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Assess restrooms to prioritize necessary enhancements/maintenance and add to CIP | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Create "Branding Committee" responsible for intentionally creating Department's brand and messaging | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Create Department Marketing Plan and update annually (CAPRA Requirement) | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Create in-depth staffing plan that addresses recruitment, onboarding, training, staffing levels, succession planning, and a salary analysis schedule | Maintenance, Operations, & Staffing | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Create standard operation procedures for all routine maintenance tasks (include in maintenance plan) | Maintenance, Operations, & Staffing | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Develop "Programming Committee" to brainstorm new program ideas, address opportunities, and create uniformed programming standards | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Develop a Trail Plan with an emphasis on connectivity, maintenance, safety, and wayfinding | Parks & Trails | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Develop an app that is one stop hub for info on programs/trail/parks/facilities and customer feedback | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Develop Recreation Program Plan (CAPRA Requirement), with emphasis on NexusPark outcomes | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Identify the return on investment from each marketing method used by the Department, investing more where the return is greater | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Short Term (0-3 Years) |

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Make the website fully ADA accessible and a multilingual website for the Department (i.e., could be project website www.ImagineYourColumbusParks.com) | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Partner with Human Rights Commission to assess programming and event needs for underserved populations | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| Work with the Foundation to enhance Chuck Wilt scholarship to include adults; or create an adult scholarship fund. | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Short Term (0-3 Years) |
| | | |
| Develop maintenance plan for existing parks and facilities that include standards and performance measures | Maintenance, Operations, & Staffing | Mid Term (4-5 Years) |
| Expand the "People Trail" to increase connectivity throughout entire City | Parks & Trails | Mid Term (4-5 Years) |
| Implement new work order system to help track/document needed work, improvements and key performance indicators using collected data for cost per acre, cost per capita, and fulltime equivalents | Maintenance, Operations, & Staffing | Mid Term (4-5 Years) |
| Master plan all existing parks that need improvement, while considering recreation programming needs to drive the design | Parks & Trails | Mid Term (4-5 Years) |
| Master Plan Donner Center to provide updated aquatic amenities | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Mid Term (4-5 Years) |
| | | |
| Annually review policies and procedures and update according to needs and changes in operation (CAPRA Requirement) | Maintenance, Operations, & Staffing | Ongoing |
| Brainstorm innovative ideas to activate outdoor spaces (i.e., high ropes and obstacle courses, outdoor adventure programming, etc.) | Parks & Trails | Ongoing |
| Conduct annual fee study to review and update fees as necessary | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Ongoing |
| Continue to identify and share social media analytics and assess new social media | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Ongoing |
| Utilize "Programming Committee" to assess and activate underutilized spaces | Funding, Marketing, & Branding | Ongoing |
| Utilize findings in statistically valid survey, including the top investment priorities, to expand on program offerings | Facilities, Programs, & Events | Ongoing |

1.4 KEY FINDINGS

Following the assessment of the Department's parks and recreation system, a variety of key findings were identified to support the implementation of the Master Plan. These key findings help to guide decision-making for the next five to ten years and are based on data sources identified or community input and consultant assessments.

1.4.1 Demographics & Trends

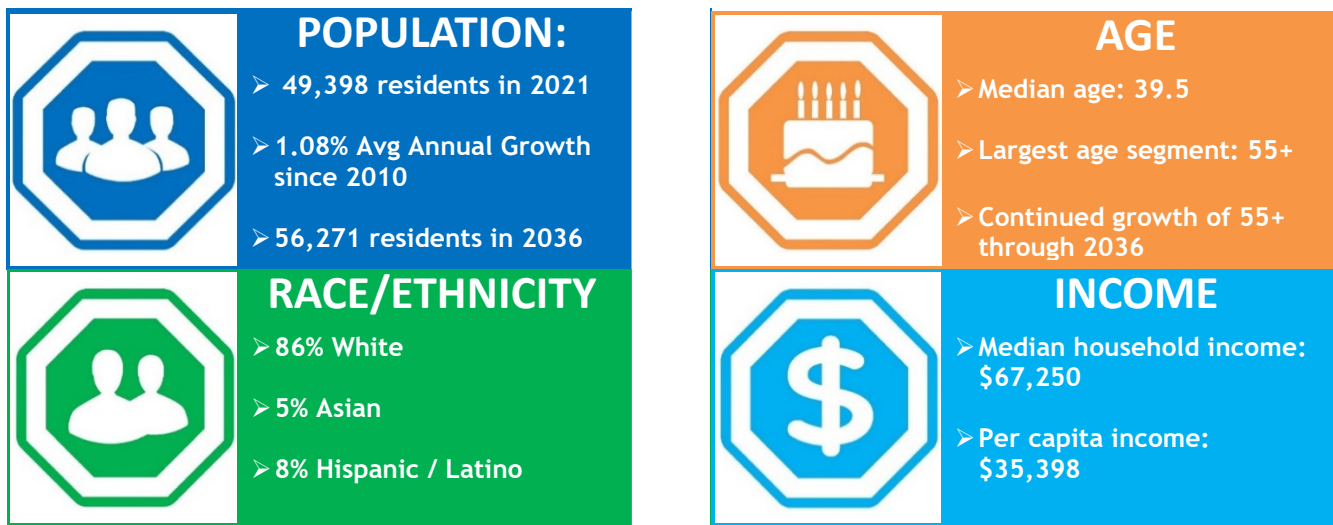


Figure 2: Demographics Infographic

Summary

- Age:** The population is beginning to skew toward the older age segments. 30% of residents are now over the age of 55-years old (up from 26% in 2010) and that number is expected to grow steadily over the next 15 years.
- Race:** The City's current population is majority White Alone (85%) and the largest minority is Asian (5%). The 2021 estimate also shows below national average representation of all minority groups, with Black alone (3.4%), Some Other Race (3.4%), and American Indian (.3%) populations being substantially lower than the national average.
- Ethnicity:** The City's percentage of Hispanic/Latino Population (8%) is much lower than the national average (18.6%). This population is expected to increase by 2036 to 10% of the population.
- Household income (\$67,250) is higher than both the state (\$57,268) and national averages (\$64,730). The City's per capita income (\$35,598) is also higher than both the state and national averages (\$30,129 & \$35,106).
- Local recreation trends show average, to slightly below average participation across most categories assessed with the most popular activities being those that take place outdoors.

1.4.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

1000+

PARTICIPANTS

419

STATISTICALLY-VALID
SURVEY RESPONDENTS

468

Page Views



ABOUT COLUMBUS PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

ADA CROWDSOURCING WEBSITE
WWW.IMAGINEYOURCOLUMBUSPARKS.COM

508

ONLINE SURVEY
RESPONDENTS

1

PUBLIC INPUT
MEETING

9

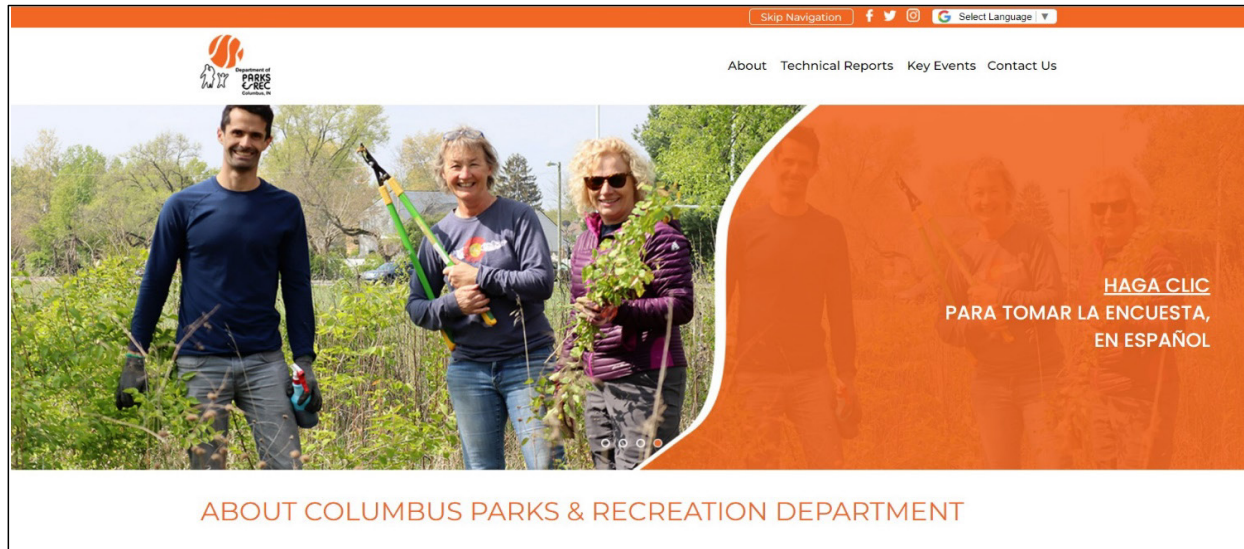
STAKEHOLDER
MEETINGS

11

KEY LEADER
MEETINGS

Figure 3: Public Input Infographic

The ADA-accessible, multilingual and responsive design website www.ImagineYourColumbusParks.com was used throughout the entire planning process.



1.4.3 STATISTICALLY VALID SURVEY

ETC Institute conducted this statistically valid survey via mail, phone and online for Columbus respondents. The goal was to obtain 325 completed surveys and was exceeded with a total of 419 completed surveys. The overall results for the sample of 419 households have a precision of at least +/- 4.7% at the 95% level of confidence.

The Priority Investment Rating (PIR) was developed to provide an objective tool for prioritizing investments. The PIR equally weighs (1) the importance that residents place on facility/program and (2) how many residents have unmet needs for the facility/program. [Details regarding the methodology for this analysis are provided in **Section 3.2** of this report.]

Priorities for Facility/Amenity Investments: Based the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), the following six facilities/amenities were rated as high and top medium priorities for investment:

- Indoor walking/jogging track (PIR=172.5)
- Restrooms (PIR=137.6)
- Multi-use unpaved trails (PIR=129.9)
- Indoor aquatic center (PIR=125.6)
- Multi-use unpaved trails (PIR=92.6)
- Indoor Recreation Facility (PIR=88.8)

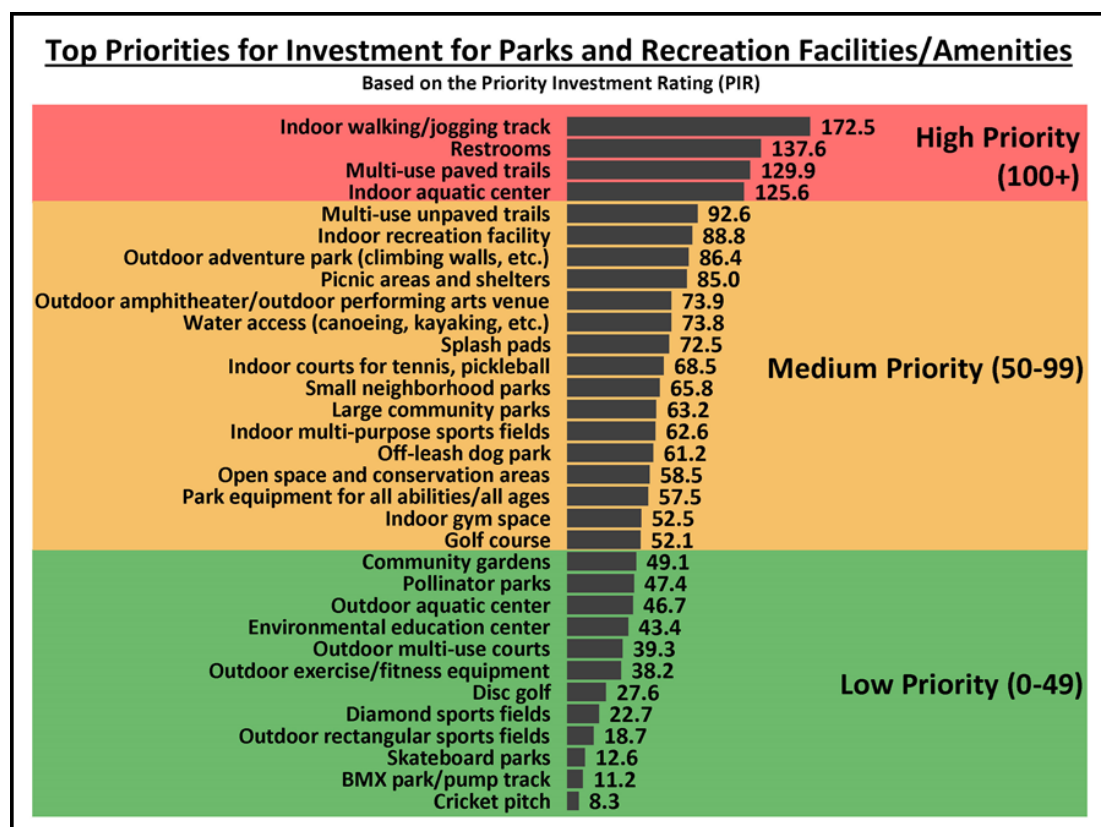


Figure 4: Top Facility/Amenity Priorities for Investment

Priorities for Program Investments. Based on the priority investment rating (PIR) the following five programs were rated as high and top medium priorities for investment:

- Adult fitness and wellness programs (PIR=175.2)
- Farmer's market (PIR=146.8)
- Community special events (PIR=124.9)
- Senior fitness and wellness programs (99.8)
- Cultural enrichment programs/events (83.4)

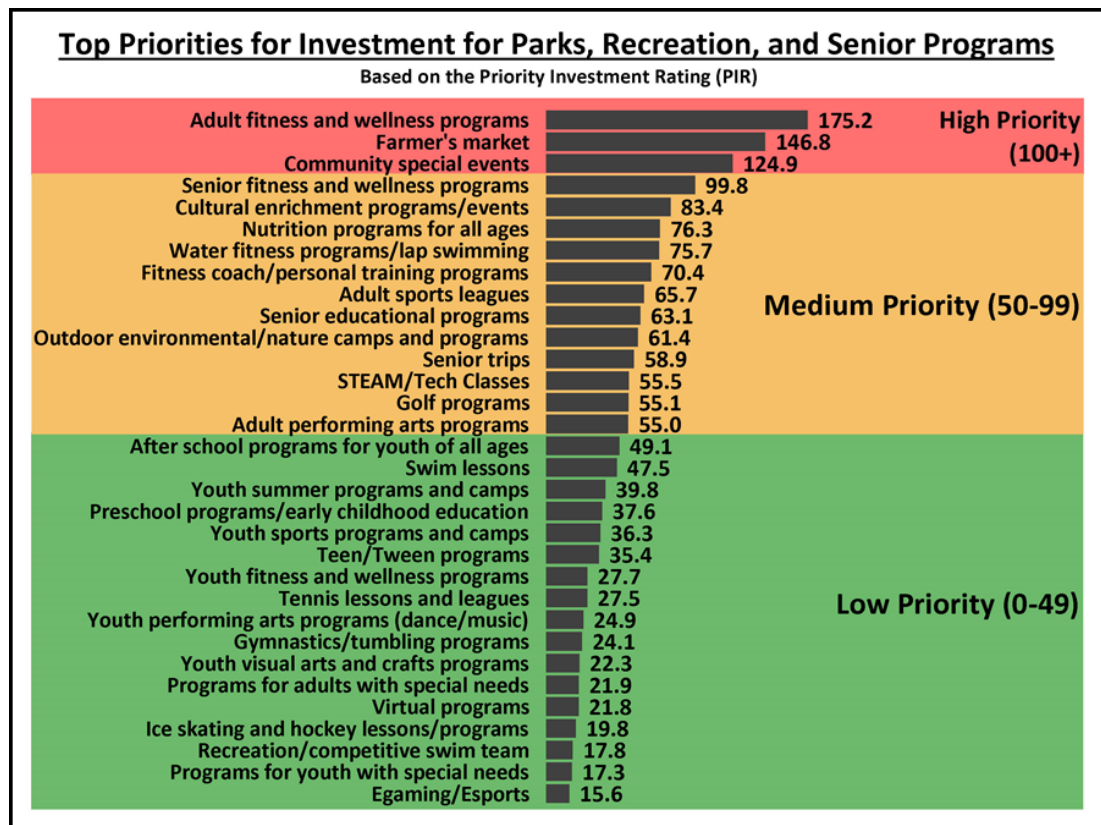


Figure 5: Top Recreation Program Priorities for Investment





DIVISION STAFF

1.4.4 PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

In consultation with the Recreation Division staff, the consulting team identified the following Core Program Areas currently being offered:



Figure 6: Existing Core Program Areas

KEY FINDINGS

After reviewing all the data provided by the Department and information generated through the public engagement process, several key findings, or emphasis areas, are presented:

- **NexusPark:** The addition of NexusPark and its additional facilities will provide the Department an opportunity to address many, if not all the community's programming needs. Using the program assessment results, including the top priority investments, will help ensure that parks, facilities, amenities, and programming is aligned with the communities' identified needs.
- **Core Program Areas:** The Department will need to continue evaluating Core Program Areas as priorities shift and the community demographics evolve and they must be aligned with the community's needs from the statistically valid survey results. The Department staff should evaluate Core Program Areas and the individual programs on an annual basis to ensure offerings reflect community needs.
- **Age Segments:** Consider the long-term development of programs for Active Adults that may include social services, community engagement, mental, and/or physical health goals. The Department should develop content that targets specific age segments within the Core Program Areas that are primarily all ages programs.
- **Program Lifecycle Analysis:** The Department should complete this analysis on an annual basis and ensure that the percentage distribution closely aligns with the desired performance. Furthermore, the Department could include annual performance measures for each core program area to track participation growth, customer retention, and percentage of new

programs as an incentive for innovation and alignment with community trends.

- **Program Development and Marketing Plan:** Each new program and existing program should have a solid program development and marketing plan. The Department needs to ensure target markets and age segments are reached through appropriate media. Social Media should be utilized at a higher level to share the Department's story and help the community understand the importance of the work you do.
- **Volunteer and Partnership:** Volunteers are important to continue to assist with meeting the needs of the community. The Department should know the cost of providing this service and compare it to the outcomes being achieved. This will help demonstrate leveraging resources and ensure that the outcomes match the effort.



1.4.5 EQUITY MAPS

Service area maps and standards assist management staff and key leadership in assessing where services are offered, how equitable the service distribution and delivery is across Columbus's service area and how effective the service is as it compares to the demographic densities. In addition, looking at guidelines with reference to population enables the Department to assess gaps or overlaps in its services, where amenities/facilities are needed, or where an area is over saturated.

Based on this, the Department leadership can make appropriate capital improvement decisions to meet systemwide needs while assessing the ramifications of the decision on a specific area.

The source for the population used for standard development is the estimated 2021 population and as reported by Environmental Systems

Research Institute, Inc. (ESRI). The shaded areas in the Equity Maps indicate the service level (i.e., the population being served by that park type/amenity) as outlined in the previous section. The circles' size varies dependent upon the quantity of a given amenity (or acre type) located at one site and the surrounding population density. The bigger the circle, the more people a given amenity or park acre serves and vice versa. Additionally, some circles are shaded a different color which represents the "owner" of that particular amenity or acre type.

There is a legend in the bottom left-hand corner of each map depicting the various owners included in the equity mapping process. The areas of overlapping circles represent adequate service, or duplicated service, and the areas with no shading represents the areas not served by a given amenity or park acre type.

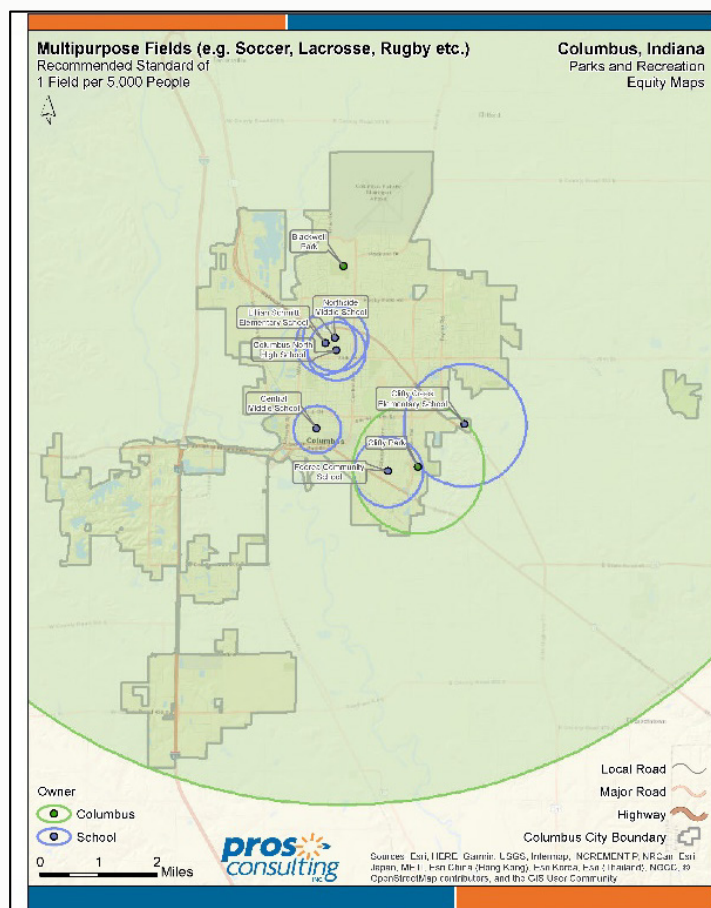


Figure 7: LOS Equity Map (Multipurpose Fields)

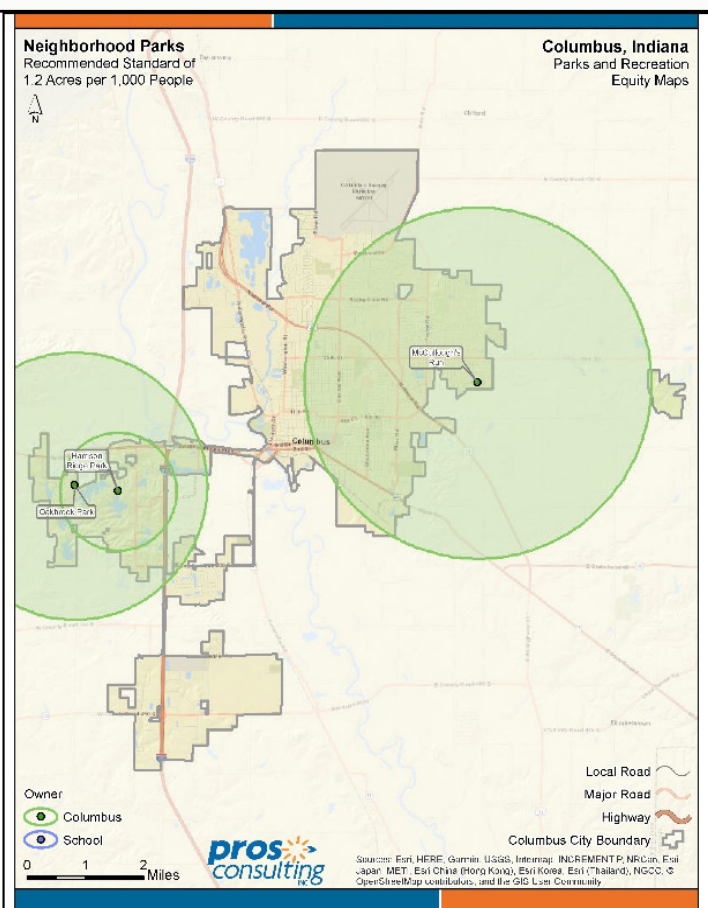


Figure 8: LOS Equity Map (Neighborhood Parks)

1.4.6 NEXUSPARK OPERATIONAL IMPACTS

NexusPark is a new community destination that intends to turn a mostly vacated mall into a special community asset. This repurpose is truly a win-win-win project. The community is coming together with civic organizations, Columbus Regional Health and the City. Repurposing this property keeps it from becoming an attractive nuisance and a dilapidated eyesore to the residents while creating a gathering space for resident programs and regional draw with positive economic impacts.

The destination will include a fieldhouse with basketball, soccer, football, volleyball and potential other outdoor sports inside on turf grass and hardcourts. Creating synergy through partnerships will create a destination with multiple services. Included in the facility are spaces for partners to have a presence, large meetings/trainings, programmable spaces, and conference room spaces. The Department will have office space and fitness facility. This unique space presents some unique challenges to the Department. The full review can be found in the Appendix. The following are operational observations from the review of the project and Department implications:

- **Brand Identity:** Creating a strong brand identity is essential to carve out NexusPark's portion of the market. This is especially true with similar projects planned in Auburn Indiana, Lebanon Indiana, Paducah Kentucky, and Frankfort Kentucky. All are within the three-hour regional draw of a destination facility.
- **Staffing:** Operationally, the expectations of this project are high due to the amount of community

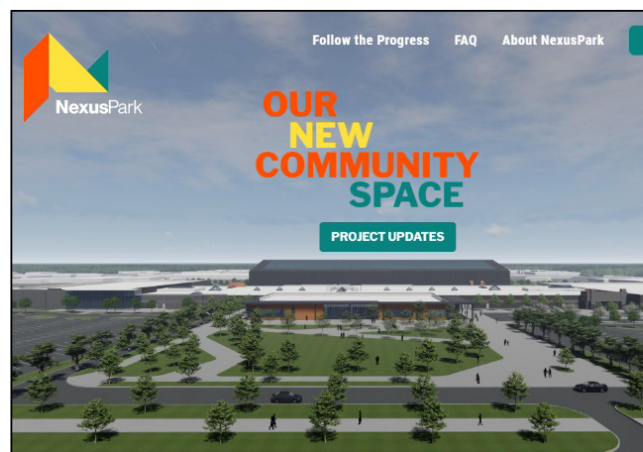


Figure 9: New Community Space Website: www.NexusPark.org

involvement. The Department will need to bring key staffing positions online with the Department at least one year in advance to develop preparedness within the Department for opening day.

- **Flexible Design:** The fieldhouse can hold many more hardcourts than turf fields. This can increase the players, teams and visitors participating in events. Subsequently, this also impacts the economic impact and direct spending locally from increased visitors. The key to success with these indoor event facilities is flexibility. Being able to change the flooring (to include min. 8 hardcourts) will increase the reach of the destination. This also increases the level of effort and overhead costs, so striking the appropriate balance is important.
- **Funding:** With increased costs impacting leisure activities across the country, additional funding may be necessary for developing the facility. Developing a capital campaign with a professional firm can help to reach the funds needed for development.
- **ProForma:** Accounting for inflation in the proforma will be necessary for the first four years to achieve the desired financial outcomes. Developing a cost of service to ensure appropriate pricing and financial sustainability is recommended.

1.5 CONCLUSION



The City of Columbus has always showcased a vision that outperformed its relatively small size, from the presence of international companies like Cummins to its world-renowned architectural offerings and not to forget, an exceptionally 'sweet' presence with a 120+ year old landmark restaurant and ice cream parlor Zaharakos. As its population continues to grow and be more diverse in nature, it is critical that its parks and recreation offerings also adapt to the global audience and the changing nature of life / work in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic.

To that end, this Strategic Master Plan is the roadmap to help the Department position itself as an exceptional service provider. The community's needs have outpaced the current staff offerings and resources and with the addition of NexusPark this gap can further

widen. Thus, it is critical that as the city looks to invest in updating what it has (e.g., Donner Park and Pool) and building new offerings (e.g., NexusPark) that it continues to have a proportionate increase in staffing and resources as well.

With an emphasis on storytelling and setting ambitious goals such as CAPRA Accreditation and NRPA National Gold Medal Award, the staff has taken on the challenge and are committed to doing their best to continue to enrich lives every single day in the city.

Lastly, investments in culture building and guest experience creation will be critical to ensure that Columbus remains a place that is equitable and welcoming to all and that parks and recreation will help build a community where everyone belongs.



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