

Appendix A:

Full Review of “Omaha Master Plan - Park Element”

In order to ensure a unified planning process for the suburban park system, this plan must be in concert with the current City of Omaha Master Plan. The 1995 Park Element of the Omaha Master Plan was reviewed for consistency in planning principles with those of this Suburban Park Master Plan Update 2015. In general, the vision, goals and objectives of the ‘Parks Element’ are compatible with the planning principles of this plan. However, a detailed narrative updating, clarifying or augmenting certain sections of the Park Element for consistency with this plan is provided below.

Introduction Section

Currently, Omaha’s park system (within the city limits) contains 229 park units comprising 9,552 acres of land serving a population of 421,570. This results in an exceptional figure of 44 acres of parkland per 1,000 population.

Vision & Goals from the Concept Element Section

Concurrence with the central vision: “Omaha must be a community committed to promoting and maintaining a high quality of life for all its people”.

Concurrence with the Goals:

- » Develop and maintain a positive city image
- » Promote and maintain a high quality of urban design
- » Protect our natural systems and environmental quality

Current Conditions, Trends & Issues Section

PARKS & RECREATION SYSTEM

Update- the city is very well served in terms of overall parkland per 1,000 people. Omaha’s figure of 40 acres of parkland / 1000 population is well above the National Recreation & Park Association’s (NRPA’s) national ‘high’ standard of 18.8.

CONNECTORS & TRAILS

Concurrence- “Developing linkages between parks extends the potential of the system to provide for the community’s recreational needs”. The Suburban Park Master Plan expands the understanding that the purpose of trails is to support transportation as well as recreation needs. This concept is also aligns with the original park system ethic of H.W.S. Cleveland who prepared Omaha’s first park system master plan in 1889. Currently the City of Omaha has approximately 120 miles of paved shared-use trails for public enjoyment.

PARK MAINTENANCE & REHABILITATION

Concurrence: that it is important for the future suburban park system to “stretch limited maintenance funds, and seek efficiencies in City’s maintenance programs... designing new facilities to meet standards which ensure lower long-term maintenance costs” must be considered. This plan recommends that specific attention should be paid towards reducing the amount of mowing required in new parks as this is the number one maintenance expense. Limited mowing to allow areas to “naturalize” not only reduces costs but can enhance the park’s aesthetic and provides environmental/habitat benefits.

Concurrence: that “on-going rehabilitation programs” are necessary to ensure that parks and facilities are in a safe and usable condition”. Additionally, parks that are in “safe and usable condition” have an expanded level of service to the population for which they provide. Simply stated, people will walk up to ½ mile to parks which are in excellent to very good condition. Conversely, will walk less than a ¼ mile, or not use at all, a park which is in poor condition. Such parks become merely an expense and safety liability with no public benefit. The nicer the park, the more people they serve lowering the per user expense of that park.

Quality of Life and Environment Section

PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM

Concurrence- this Suburban Park Master Plan endorses, and finds essential, the following statements cited in the Concept Element of the City of Omaha Master Plan:

- » “Omaha should have high quality public spaces, landscaping, parks ...and boulevards...”
- » “Emphasis will be placed on the modification of development proposals to accommodate and protect natural features rather than modification of natural features to accommodate development”.
- » “Conservation of natural resources and concern for long term effects of actions on natural systems must be a primary consideration in City decisions”.
- » “Effective measures must be taken to ensure that lakes, rivers, wildlife habitat, wooded hills, ravines and waterways, natural springs, loess bluffs, prairies, rock out crops and steep slopes are prevented from destruction”.
- » “The City will make every effort to protect and improve the overall quality of our environment”.
- » “The proportion of land used as parks should not be reduced as the city grows”.

- » “Additional tree cover, wildlife habitat and open space corridors should be established throughout the Omaha area”.

CIVIC IMAGE

Concurrence- “Omaha’s urban parkway systems also contributes to the city’s positive image by incorporating scenic landscapes, natural features, and historic and cultural sites into the overall circulation systems”.

Update- on April 23, 2013, the Historic Omaha Parks & Boulevard System was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service.

COMMUNITY LIVABILITY

Concurrence- “Parks often become a focal point for neighborhood activities, and contain natural and cultural features which provide a strong sense of neighborhood identity”. This Suburban Park Master Plan employs the principle of linking parks with greenways following the stated notions that “Park linkages between neighborhoods can help to create a sense of community” and, that “Development of linear connectors such as boulevards and parkways, trails and paths for bicycling and walking, or ‘other greenways’ fit this concept well”.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Concurrence- “As new developments and public parks and open space systems are created, they should be designed in a manner which provides for the movement of wildlife from one natural area to another”. This Suburban Park System Master Plan employs the principle of linking parks with greenways thereby allowing for habitat movement and improved natural systems. The Natural Environment section of this plan discusses this concept in greater detail.

PARK AND RECREATION SYSTEM SECTION

Concurrence- this Suburban Park Master Plan endorses, and finds essential, the following statements cited in the Concept Element of the City of Omaha Master Plan:

- » “To the extent possible, the city’s parks will be connected by an extensive open space network which will utilize existing boulevards, creeks, and other multi-purpose open space corridors to link proposed and existing parks”.
- » “Omaha will continue to provide a wide range of recreational facilities and opportunities that promote reasonably equal service levels and accessibility to city (and future) residents in all areas of the city. Parks will range in size from neighborhood to large regional parks”.

- » “The city shall ensure that future suburban development will include recreational facilities and provide a level of service comparable to Omaha’s”.
- » “As the city grows, it will continue to create and expand an interconnected park system linked by recreational trails that utilizes the city’s creek and boulevard networks.... “The city will also strive to enhance and preserve wildlife diversity along these trails...”.
- » “The city will set-aside a certain amount of appropriate parkland for the creation of wildlife habitat”.

OVERALL SYSTEM

Concurrence: this Suburban Park Master Plan concurs with the three basic key facets of the city-wide park system as follows:

1. To offer a variety of active, passive and seasonal activities.
2. To provide an equitable level of service for all residents of the city and its jurisdiction.
3. To be responsive to the changing needs of the community’s residents.

Clarification: to ensure these “changing needs” are met in the future, this Suburban Park System Master Plan sets aside a 20% open space factor in new parks to allow for future facilities to be constructed and/or to be used for “un-programmed” play allowing for a multiplicity of uses.

Addition: according to the Parks Element, the following are basic facilities and open space areas which should be provided throughout the city based on service standards. Those items should be added per the recommendation of this Suburban Park Master Plan. The list is as follows:

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| 1. Ballfields | 7. Soccer fields |
| 2. Basketball courts | 8. Swimming pools |
| 3. Multi-use open space areas
(football, frisbee, kite flying , etc.) | 9. Tennis / Pickleball courts |
| 4. Playgrounds | 10. Frisbee golf courses |
| 5. Community centers | 11. Cricket fields |
| 6. Recreational trails (walking,
jogging, bicycling, equestrian,
loop trails, etc.) | 12. Lacrosse fields |
| | 13. Nature interpretation / hiking
trails |

Park System Location Section

LOCATION OF BASIC FACILITIES

Concurrence- with the statement of the Park Element that “service standards for facilities should be used to guide the location and size of new parks and facilities and to assess the adequacy of existing facilities”.

Clarification & Update- new suburban parks built since 2001 were inventoried using a web-based mobile application called Site Capture for Parks. The program allowed the inventory to be conducted in the field real time using cloud-based technology. The inventory collected information about two things, the overall condition of the park itself and the overall condition of the amenities within each park. These scores provide a check for level of service by combining research by Project for Public Spaces as well as professional experience of the consultant.

The park scores and amenity scores were added together and mapped to create an overall park score and level of service boundary as described in the level of service section of the main narrative (see page 8).

PARK SITE PLANNING

Concurrence- “Park layout and design should accommodate the people who will use the park and at the same time protect and enhance the park’s natural environment. Flexibility for future changes, additions and/or facilities expansion to meet changes in recreation needs should be provided in park design”.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Concurrence- “Park sites and recreation facilities should be designed and constructed for durability and cost-effective maintenance, serviceability and safety to users, and in a manner which enhances the city’s overall appearance.

Park Maintenance and Rehabilitation Section

MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

Concurrence- “Uniform maintenance levels and standards for parks and facilities must be established. Where the intended function and intensity of users allows, variation to the maintenance standards should be allowed”.

MAINTENANCE AND REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Concurrence- “Ensure equitable usability of the park and recreation system through a comprehensive program of preventative maintenance and rehabilitation. Priorities for maintenance and repair must be set to ensure that parks and facilities are maintained in an equitable manner”.

MAINTENANCE FUNDING

Concurrence- “Park maintenance should receive adequate financial support to ensure a clean, safe and quality park system. Additional maintenance costs resulting from acquisitions or development of new parks and/or facilities should be adequately funded to ensure continued maintenance levels of existing facilities”.

MAINTENANCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY IN PARKS

Concurrence: “Ensure that the protection and improvement of the natural and human environment is supported by park maintenance operations and that the quality of parks is maintained through environmentally sound practices”.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Concurrence: “Promote citizen interest and involvement in the care and maintenance of the city’s recreational parks and facilities”.

MAINTENANCE CONSIDERATION IN DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Concurrence: “Park and recreation facilities should be designed and constructed to lower long-term maintenance and life-cycle costs, even if initial costs are higher”.

EFFICIENCY AND CONSERVATION

Concurrence: “Improve quality and cost-effectiveness in park and recreation service by promoting long-term efficiency and conservation of energy and resources”.

COST OF PRIVATE BENEFITS

Concurrence: “Maintenance costs of land or improvements that primarily benefit private individuals or organizations should be paid by those who benefit. If a higher level of maintenance is desired or is necessary due to the park or facility design, those who benefit should pay for the higher cost”.