

Public Input

Conclusion

The eleven-month public input process allowed the Department to have free-flowing communication between park planners and park constituents and gain a comprehensive understanding of the community's recreation facility needs. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics used in the conclusion comments are from the citywide survey conducted by Leisure Vision/ETC Institute. Below is a summarization of the top parks and facility needs as identified through this process:

1. **Walking and Biking Trails:** There is strong support for walking and biking trails in terms of citizen use, satisfaction with existing trails, and financial support for acquisition and development. Walking and biking trails ranked as the number one facility need (76%). Walking and biking trails also ranked first as the most important recreation facility (37%), and 70% of respondents indicated a recent visit. Nature trails also scored in the top five as an important facility (17%), as well as facilities most visited (41%). The Department should continue to pursue acquisition and development of trails in order to provide community-wide support for citizens desiring to utilize trails for recreation, exercise, and non-motorized transportation.
2. **Neighborhood Parks and Community Parks:** Neighborhood parks, community parks, playground equipment/play areas, and park shelters/picnic areas were the second, third, fourth, and sixth (respectively) most important facilities to survey respondents. The majority of survey respondents expressed a need for parks shelters/picnic areas (70%), neighborhood parks (68%), community parks (66%), and playground equipment/play areas (51%). Although many Columbia residents have access to the parks in their area, 29% of the respondents in both the citywide and park user surveys did not feel there were sufficient parks and green space within walking distance of their residence. Seventy-five percent (75%) expressed support for acquiring land for developing neighborhood parks. As a result of these findings, the Department should continue to pursue acquisition and development of parks and their supporting amenities.
3. **City-Wide Special Events and Festivals:** The number one recreation program most important to households (29%) and that households participate in most often (25%) was special events/festivals. Survey respondents ranked special events/festivals as the top recreation program need (46%). The main venues for outdoor special events and festivals are community and special purpose parks. Based on the survey results and considering the economic benefits festivals bring to the community, the Department should make every effort to continue to develop, maintain and enhance facilities to accommodate special events that are managed by the Department and other organizations.
4. **Use and Maintenance of Parks:** The survey revealed that the vast majority (87%) of Columbia citizens use the parks, significantly more than the national benchmarking average of 72%. The majority of respondents (77%) felt City officials should place a high or very high priority on maintaining the existing parks, trails and recreation

facilities. Ninety-two percent (92%) expressed support for fixing up and repairing existing park facilities, which also ranked number one (47%) of the actions respondents would be most willing to fund with Parks and Recreation tax dollars.

Ninety-five percent (95%) rated the physical condition of the parks they've visited as either excellent (41%) or good (54%). This is higher than the national benchmarking average of 85% of households who rated the physical condition of parks as either excellent or good. It is evident by the high priority respondents placed on maintaining the parks that Columbia residents desire to maintain their high satisfaction level. Thus, renovation and major repair of existing park facilities should continue to be a high priority for the Department and scheduled in the Capital Improvement Program.

5. **Improvements to Existing Parks/Facilities:** Discussions with focus groups and park users led to many requests for improvements to existing facilities (such as the addition of lights, bleachers, parking spaces, playgrounds, restrooms, water fountains, etc.) to accommodate their needs and make their recreation experience more enjoyable. Eighty-three percent (83%) of survey respondents expressed support for upgrading/improving pools/sports fields/golf courses. Upgrading/improving facilities also ranked second (29%) as the action respondents were most willing to fund with their Parks and Recreation tax dollars. The Department should continue to make improvements to existing facilities to maximize their use and taxpayer investment.

6. **Athletic Facilities:** Survey respondents (15%) indicated that youth and teen sports programs were the second most important in terms of participation and third in overall importance (12%). Organized athletic clubs and organizations expressed a variety of needs for additional fields, court and related support facilities such as parking, concession stands, batting cages, storage rooms and lights. Some of the facilities were requested to facilitate hosting local, regional, and state tournaments that would not only serve the players, but would have a positive economic impact on the community. Listed below is a summary of the estimated facility needs based on current and anticipated participation numbers:
 - a. Baseball/Softball 4 – 6 fields (225 ft. – 360 ft.)
 - b. Soccer 10 – 12 fields (all regulation)
 - c. Football/Lacrosse 3 – 4 fields
 - d. Basketball 4 – 6 indoor courts

7. **Ice Skating Facility:** Strong support for an ice arena was indicated via the public input process as well as comments from organized citizen groups. Local ice skating enthusiasts regularly travel to Jefferson City and as far as St. Louis for both practice and competition. Thirty-one percent (31%) of survey respondents expressed a need for an ice skating facility, which represents an estimated 12,659 households. Development goals include an outdoor single-sheet facility to meet short-term needs with long-term goals including an indoor, year-round facility. A year-round facility would initially include a single-sheet facility (option to expand to two), locker rooms and viewing area with the focus on all aspects of ice sports and ice skating (e.g. figure skating, learn to skate programs and broomball leagues).

8. **Aquatic Facility:** Participation in aquatic programs ranked third overall (22%), with youth learn to swim classes also ranking third as the most important recreation program (16%). As cost recovery goals become a critical issue, there is a need for a premier, family-friendly aquatic center with multiple interactive play structures (e.g. water slides, vortex, lazy river, diving board, etc.). Development goals should include a facility designed to meet the needs of residents, as well as an attraction to visitors from surrounding areas.
9. **Recreation Centers and Fitness/Wellness Programs:** Adult fitness and wellness programs ranked second in recreational program needs (42%) and received the same ranking for most important recreation program (26%). Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the survey respondents had visited the ARC in the past year. It is noteworthy that “location of City facilities not close to my home” ranked as the third reason (12%) that prevented households from using Parks and Recreation facilities. The Department should continue to monitor the community-wide availability of low-cost and satellite fitness centers, as well as pursue the national trend of providing outdoor fitness equipment.
10. **Extreme Sports Facilities:** Non-traditional activities such as skateboarding, BMX and mountain biking continue to be more mainstream for Columbia youth. Numerous comments during the public input process alluded to the need for multiple, community-wide facilities (with varying skill levels) to meet this growing demand. Overcrowding and repeated misuse by BMX trick-bicycles at the existing skate park indicates a pressing need for additional facilities.
11. **Nature/Interpretive Center:** The 2002 Facility Needs Update noted that at that time, the Department of Natural Resources was working with local organizations to develop a facility at Rock Bridge State Park. Unfortunately, those efforts have stalled and are not being pursued at this time. The Department recommends that a facility similar to the Runge Nature Area in Jefferson City is appropriate in size and scope for the Columbia area.



Tony Hawk Visits Columbia Skate Park
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