

INTRODUCTION

In its continuing effort to provide quality recreational opportunities, parks, trails and preservation of open space for its residents, the Columbia Parks and Recreation Department has created the *2013 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan*. This plan serves as a guide for the development of parks and recreational facilities over the next ten years.



Stephens Lake Park

Citizens have been enjoying the City of Columbia's parks and recreation system for over 60 years. Since its official formation in 1949, Columbia residents, council persons, commissioners, and staff have planned, developed, protected, and treasured their parks, recreation facilities, trails and natural areas. This history of dedicated service has allowed Columbia to be acclaimed for its high quality of living. The City of Columbia has become one of the most desirable places to live in the nation. Popular magazines such as *Money* and *Forbes* have ranked Columbia in their top 10 places to live or work. People and businesses appreciate the low cost of living, state-of-the-art health care, quality education; but mostly, people come and stay for the high quality of life. As stated in a December 2012 *Columbia Daily Tribune* article, Mr. Bernie Andrews, executive vice president of Regional Economic Development, said that the City's parks are a good aspect to highlight for out-of-town technological firms looking for a new location: "They want to see a nice community that has a lot of amenities for their families."

In February 2013, *Forbes* ranked Columbia as one of the *25 Best Places to Retire in 2013* stating:

"When it comes to non-financial factors, besides weather, we looked at such factors as availability of doctors, crime rates and encouragement for an active retirement—good biking and walking trails (as measured by Bicycling Magazine) and a high level of community volunteering."

Columbia has seen significant population growth. When the parks and recreation staff prepared the *2002 Facility Needs Update* of the *Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan*, the population of the City of Columbia was 88,291. The current population is reported at 116,843, representing a 32.3% increase in population. With this growth in population come challenges in providing recreational opportunities for all citizens and maintaining the high quality of life that Columbians have grown accustomed. In order to keep up, long-range planning tools such as this *2013 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan* are instrumental in seeing that residents' recreational needs are being met.

The following is brief overview of the main chapters in the *2013 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan*.

Strategic Plan - The Department's "Strategic Plan" represents a continuing effort to identify parks and recreational goals and objectives for the community that focus on recreational opportunities, maintenance strategies, planning and facility development,

trail networks, financial planning, and organizational capacity and communication. The Department's "Strategic Plan" is updated on an annual basis.

Accomplishments - As the Department evaluates projects for the next ten years, it is important to document the projects that have been accomplished since the 2002 P&R Master Plan was completed. The "Accomplishments" chapter highlights an impressive list of significant accomplishments that were completed since 2002.

Park and Facility Inventory - Prior to determining future needs an inventory and assessment of existing recreational opportunities is required. The "Park and Facility Inventory" chapter documents City-owned and managed facilities, as well as other government and private recreational opportunities.

Facility Standards - Questions regarding the appropriate number of parks, facilities, trails and even natural areas are often determined via market research acquired from significant public input. The research and analysis regarding appropriate standards is discussed in the "Facility Standards" chapter.

Public Input - The complexity of developing a comprehensive planning document requires a thoughtful, rational, and participative process. The public participation process is documented in the "Public Input" chapter.

Trends - Planning for the leisure needs of a community is influenced not only by analyzing past participation levels and observing what leisure activities citizens currently participate in, but also by anticipating their future needs. The "Trends" chapter discusses the potential impacts that national, regional and local trends may have on the community.

Financing - The success of the 2013 P&R Master Plan is ultimately measured by the Department's ability to implement the recommendations, thus providing high-quality parks and services that meet the needs of the citizens of Columbia. To a large extent this will be governed by the ability of the City of Columbia to effectively finance the proposed improvements. The "Financing" chapter identifies and defines the various financing methods that are available for capital projects and summarizes the funding sources that the Department has used for the past ten years.

Park Acquisition and Development and Trail Acquisition and Development - These two chapters analyze the current service areas of existing parks and trails. Areas with unmet needs are shown in priority order of acquisition and development. These two plans establish a framework for the sensible acquisition and development of future parks and trails.

Recommended Capital Improvements - The Department's Capital Improvement Plan, conducted as part of the annual City budget, is a five-year capital improvement program that addresses the capital needs of current and future years. It enables the scheduling of projects that represent citizen priorities and are within the fiscal capabilities of the City and is updated annually. The Capital Improvement Plan represents the action plan for

implementing specific items identified in the “Recommended Capital Improvements” chapter.

Beginning in 2006, Columbia began a visioning effort for its community. Over 1,000 citizens participated in the process. The final result was a report that turned the ideas generated by the public into vision statements, goals, strategies, and action plans. The final report - *Imagine Columbia's Future - Community Vision and Action Plan* was accepted by the Columbia City Council in 2008. The goals related to parks, recreation, trails and greenways are incorporated in this document in their related chapters.



In summary, the primary purpose of the 2013 P&R Master Plan is to:

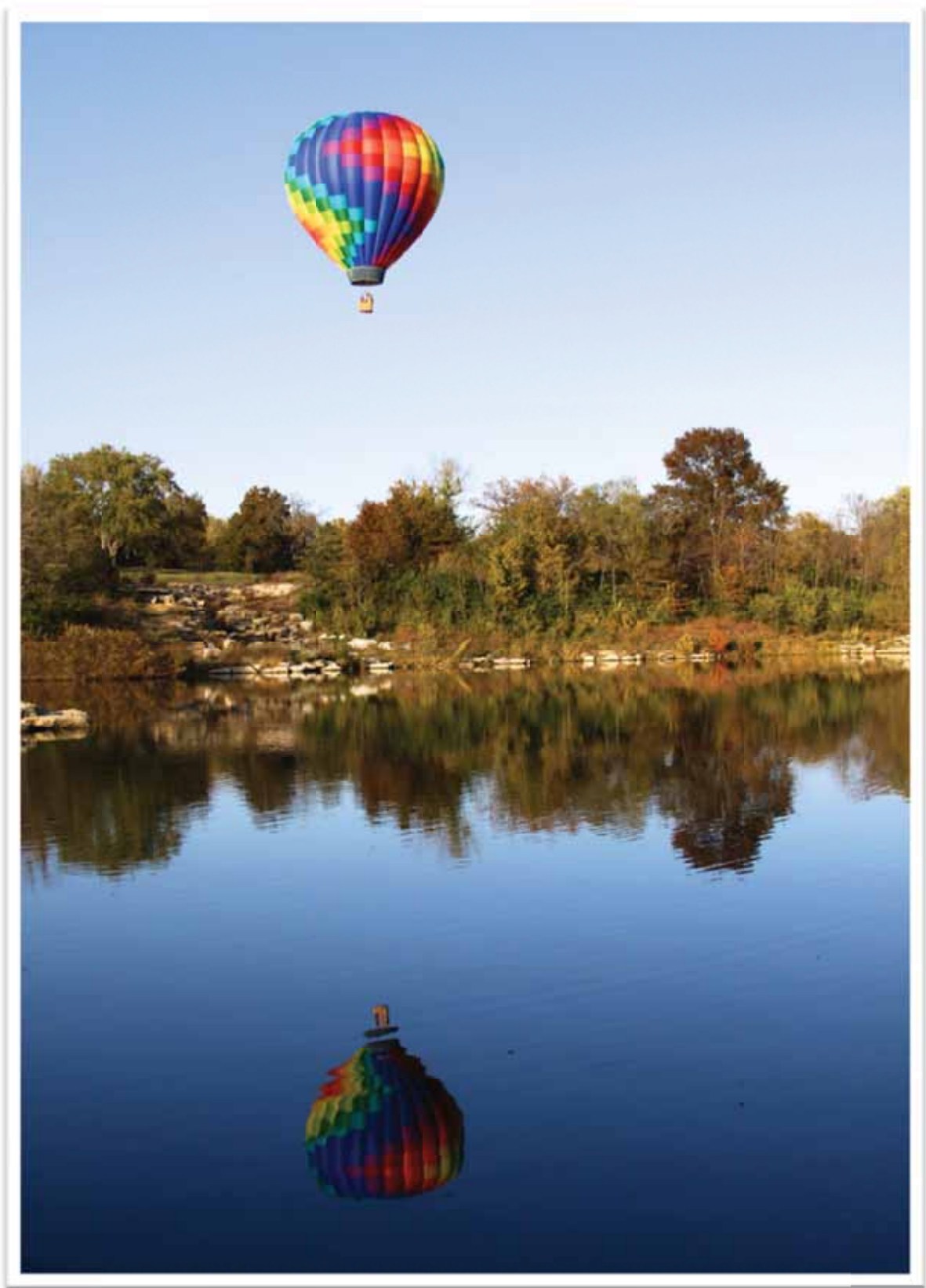
- guide both long-range and short-range park planning
- provide equitable parks, trails and recreational facilities for all citizens
- identify areas underserved by parks and trails
- prioritize park, trail and recreational facility acquisition and development
- schedule capital improvement projects based on priority and available funding
- guide acquisition of parks and trails in new development areas in order to meet growth needs
- guide opportunity acquisitions and land donations
- achieve level of service standards and community vision goals

This plan does not address issues such as fees and charges, staffing levels, and an analysis of recreation programs and services. Those are better served by independent third party vendors who specialize in these types of analyses.

The 2013 P&R Master Plan is intended to be a working document that will evolve over time, challenging community leaders to continue working to provide a high quality of life and a sense of community for their citizens. Having this plan in place is not only beneficial for staff, commissioners and council members, but it also provides the entire community a clear and defined sense of the direction for Columbia's Parks and Recreation Department, as it works to achieve its mission.

Mission Statement

"The Department of Parks & Recreation is committed to improving our community's health, stability, beauty, and quality of life by providing outstanding parks, trails, recreational facilities, and leisure opportunities for all Columbia citizens."



Stephens Lake Park - Photo by Kelly Smith