

## Three-Year Strategic Plan Executive Summary (2026–2028)

### Building Momentum for Playbook Columbus

Columbus is one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation. As our city grows, so must our commitment to ensuring every resident — in every neighborhood — has access to safe, welcoming, high-quality parks, programs, and public spaces. The Playbook Columbus Vision Plan (2026–2036) establishes a bold 10-year roadmap for recreation and parks. This three-year strategic plan (2026–2028) represents the first phase of implementation. It focuses on high-impact investments, measurable outcomes, and equitable growth — advancing our mission:

To connect the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness and creativity.

Over the next three years, Columbus Recreation and Parks (CRPD) will prioritize:

- Expanding equitable access to parks, trails, and programs
- Improving the quality and safety of existing facilities
- Strengthening youth development and wellness outcomes
- Advancing environmental sustainability and resilience
- Modernizing operations for transparency and long-term sustainability

### Strategic Focus Areas (2026–2028)

#### 1. Expanding Access to Active & Healthy Living

Recreation and parks are essential public health infrastructure. Over the next three years, CRPD will close service gaps and increase access to movement, aquatics, sports, and wellness programming — particularly in Priority Areas identified in Playbook Columbus. By prioritizing quality and equity, we will ensure that every child — regardless of ZIP code — has access to meaningful recreational experiences.

Key Initiatives:

- Improve and modernize aging parks and recreation centers
- Expand aquatics access, swim lessons, and water safety programs
- Increase youth development and violence-prevention programming
- Advance Columbus' leadership in girls' and women's sports
- Grow adaptive and therapeutic recreation opportunities

Three-Year Outcomes:

- Increased youth and teen participation in structured programming
- Measurable growth in girls' and women's sports participation
- Expanded access to aquatics and learn-to-swim programs
- Modernized facilities serving high-need neighborhoods

#### 2. Strengthening Nature, Sustainability & Climate Resilience

Parks are not only spaces for play—they are critical environmental assets. Playbook Columbus calls for positioning the park system as a tool for resilience, conservation, and climate action. Over the next three years, CRPD will accelerate environmental initiatives that protect ecosystems while improving human health. These actions will strengthen biodiversity, improve air and water quality, and ensure future generations inherit a resilient park system.

Key Initiatives:

- Targeted tree planting in Priority Areas
- Expansion of the public tree inventory to include park trees

- Invasive species mitigation and ecological restoration
- Acquisition of land for conservation and stormwater management
- Expansion of nature-based play and environmental education

Three-Year Outcomes:

- Increased tree canopy in high-need neighborhoods
- Additional acres restored or preserved
- Growth in environmental education participation
- Reduced reliance on mechanical maintenance through sustainable land management

### **3. Creating Welcoming, Safe & Inclusive Spaces**

Community input made one priority clear: parks must be safe, accessible, and welcoming for everyone. Over the next three years, CRPD will focus on physical improvements and cultural initiatives that remove barriers to participation. Every resident should feel a sense of belonging in Columbus' parks and recreation spaces.

Key Initiatives:

- Lighting, seating, and visibility improvements in high-use parks
- Systemwide accessibility audit and Universal Design standards
- Multilingual outreach and culturally responsive programming
- Continued expansion of multicultural festivals and events
- Public art and storytelling that reflects neighborhood identity

Three-Year Outcomes:

- Improved park conditions and safety ratings
- Increased accessibility compliance across facilities
- Growth in participation among underrepresented groups
- Higher resident satisfaction scores

### **4. Building Connections Through Trails & Waterways**

- As Columbus grows, connectivity is essential. Greenways and waterways are not only recreational amenities — they are mobility corridors that link neighborhoods, natural areas, and community hubs. A seamless trail and greenway network will improve wellness, access, and environmental stewardship across the city.

Key Initiatives:

- Construct 25 miles of new greenway trails
- Close high-priority trail gaps
- Add new river access points and waterfront gathering spaces
- Activate underutilized rail corridors as multi-use trails
- Expand water-based programming and partnerships

Three-Year Outcomes:

- Increased trail mileage and neighborhood connectivity
- Expanded river recreation opportunities
- More residents within safe walking or biking distance of parks and trails

### **5. Investing in Signature Experiences & Community Identity**

Columbus' parks and recreation system reflects the creativity and cultural vibrancy of our city. Over the next three years, CRPD will continue investing in signature festivals, neighborhood events, and innovative programming that celebrate what makes Columbus unique. These efforts strengthen social bonds, support local economic activity, and elevate Columbus' identity as a city where culture and community thrive.

Key Initiatives:

- Expand large-scale community events and neighborhood festivals
- Increase paid opportunities for local artists and performers
- Grow public art installations and interpretive storytelling
- Launch enhanced digital tools for program registration and awareness

**Three-Year Outcomes:**

- Increased attendance at signature festivals and neighborhood-based events
- Expanded economic opportunity through paid engagements for local artists, musicians, and vendors
- Greater community pride and cultural visibility through new public art, storytelling installations, and diverse programming

## 6. Trailblazing in Operations & Accountability

Sustainable growth requires operational excellence. CRPD will modernize systems, improve transparency, and strengthen financial sustainability to ensure long-term success. Operational improvements will allow CRPD to deliver higher-quality services while responsibly managing public resources.

Key Initiatives:

- Implement geographic service area model for centers
- Establish measurable maintenance standards
- Launch public capital project dashboard
- Update cost recovery and fee policies
- Advance CAPRA reaccreditation

Three-Year Outcomes:

- Improved park condition scores
- Greater public transparency
- Increased operational efficiency
- Stronger long-term financial sustainability

## The Change Residents Will See

By 2028, Columbus residents will see:

- Improved parks with better lighting, restrooms, and amenities
- Expanded access to aquatics and nature-based programming
- New trail connections linking neighborhoods
- Increased tree canopy and environmental restoration
- Vibrant community events celebrating local culture
- Easier access to information through digital tools
- A recreation and parks system that reflects the diversity, creativity, and resilience of Columbus

## Conclusion

The next three years represent a pivotal implementation phase of Playbook Columbus. By focusing on quality, equity, sustainability, and operational excellence, CRPD will strengthen its role as essential civic infrastructure. Through intentional investment and measurable outcomes, we will continue fulfilling our mission: **Connecting the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness and creativity — today and for generations to come.**