

PLAY

BOOK

COLUMBUS

RECREATION & PARKS VISION PLAN
2026-2036

LETTER FROM THE MAYOR

Residents of Columbus:

It's no secret Columbus is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. With that growth comes the responsibility to ensure every resident in every neighborhood has access to safe, welcoming and high-quality public spaces. That's why we've introduced *Playbook Columbus*.

It's our vision for the future of recreation and parks in our city and was shaped by voices of thousands of residents from all parts of the city and of all ages. We listened, and your message was clear: parks, trails, and recreation centers are essential to community health and neighborhood vibrancy. *Playbook Columbus* is a roadmap for inclusive, thoughtful and lasting investments.

When young people have constructive and engaging opportunities after school and throughout the summer, they thrive and our city thrives with them. Recreation and parks are at the heart of this work. That's why we've invested millions of dollars to enrich youth programming, increase access to recreation centers and create safe, high-quality environments where young people can learn, play and grow. *Playbook Columbus* builds on this commitment by envisioning a future where every child has meaningful access to recreation, regardless of ZIP code, background or ability.

As Columbus continues to welcome newcomers and a broader diversity of cultures and experiences, our recreation and parks system must evolve. This plan promotes opportunities to celebrate cultural traditions and expand multilingual communication so every resident feels represented.

At the same time, we must modernize our civic infrastructure. *Playbook Columbus* outlines strategies to upgrade restrooms, lighting, athletic amenities and playgrounds. It also calls for building new community centers and parks, restoring natural areas and expanding our trail network.

We'll prioritize inclusive, accessible, high-quality public spaces as our city grows. We will support our young people with safe and positive pathways to success. And we will make sure to reflect the creativity, diversity and resilience of Columbus in every park, trail and facility.

Thank you to the residents, community partners, advisory groups and staff whose dedication and insight shaped this plan. Together, we are building a Columbus where every person can live healthy, active lives and take pride in the places that bring us together.

Sincerely,



Andrew J. Ginther
Mayor



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

On any given day in Columbus, you can see what recreation and parks really mean: a child in their first swim lesson, an older adult connecting with others in a fitness class, neighbors gathering for a game, a festival or a quiet walk along the river. These moments may seem small, but together, they shape how our city connects and cares for its people.

Playbook Columbus is our commitment to those moments.

This 10-year vision is not just about buildings, trails or programs. It's about building a strong, equitable system that serves every neighborhood and creates places where everyone belongs, no matter where you live in our City.

We didn't build this plan behind a desk. Over the past 18 months, we met residents in community centers, schools, festivals, pop-up events and neighborhoods across Columbus. We listened in multiple languages and heard from thousands of voices. What you told us was clear: you want safe and welcoming spaces; real opportunities for young people; stronger connections to nature and water; well-lit trails; clean and accessible facilities; and programs that reflect the diversity, creativity and culture of our City. Most of all, you want quality in every neighborhood.

We listened, and we built a plan to match that vision for the future.

By examining our system of 458 parks, 28 recreation centers, more than 230 miles of trails and thousands of programs, we identified where we must invest and how we must grow. *Playbook Columbus* sets bold, achievable goals to modernize parks, create new community hubs, expand aquatics and outdoor recreation, strengthen our trail network and protect our natural spaces. Equity, inclusive design and accessibility are central so every resident can experience meaningful, high-quality recreation.

This is how we build a system that lasts.

I'm inspired every day by our staff's commitment to our community, and by the pride residents bring to their neighborhoods. This plan reflects that shared purpose. It honors the trust you place in us and sets a clear direction forward—caring for what we have while preparing for the Columbus we are becoming.

At its heart, *Playbook Columbus* is a promise: to bring people together through nature, wellness and creativity, and to build a recreation and parks system that strengthens our community for generations to come.

Thank you for lending your voice to this work. Now, let's build what Columbus deserves together!

With gratitude,



Bernita A. Reese, M.S., CPRP
Director, Columbus Recreation
and Parks Department

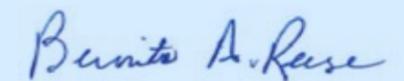


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And all of the dedicated staff of the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department.

Community Advisory Committee

Celia Anderson, Greater Columbus Sports Commission

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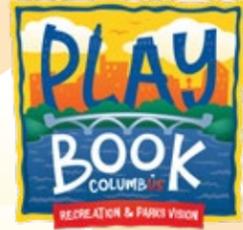
Clare Kavanagh, Design Workshop

Thank you to the multiple departments within the city, especially the Department of Neighborhoods for their important support and collaboration throughout the community engagement process.

And lastly, thanks to the thousands of community members whose interest, care and commitment is reflected throughout the pages of the Playbook Columbus Vision Plan.

PLAYBOOK SUMMARY

Playbook Columbus is a visionary and actionable roadmap for the future of Columbus' recreation programming and services, parks, facilities, trails, waterways and open spaces.



Department Mission

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

Plan Goals

A. Nurture an Active & Healthy Community

Expand programs and places that foster wellness and promote movement and fitness for full and healthy lives. Address health vulnerabilities and disparities by connecting people to resources. Increase the variety of youth and adult sports opportunities. Prioritize creation of social bonds to support mental and emotional wellbeing. Develop space for adaptive and therapeutic recreation programs.

B. Bring Nature into Focus

Improve ecological health and biodiversity as a legacy investment in people and land. Grow our urban forest and expand the functional benefits of natural environmental systems. Connect people to nature and its benefits through programming, education and access to high-quality natural areas. Encourage community stewardship with resources and partnerships for volunteerism. Take collaborative regional action to create a more resilient Central Ohio.

C. This Park Welcomes You

Make parks, trails, and recreation facilities welcoming and safe spaces for connecting. Uplift community champions embedded in our neighborhoods. Address physical and cultural barriers to use. Design for inclusion. Explore partnerships that promote community safety. Respectfully address conflicts in park use while promoting enjoyment for all.

D. Create What's Uniquely US About Columbus

Create opportunities for cultural experiences, joyful moments, and belonging through diverse community events and celebrations. Prioritize community-inspired design and support neighborhood initiatives. Develop places and programs that inspire discovery and wonder. Bring unique opportunities for adventure into every community. Celebrate what it means to be a "rec and parks kid" for a lifetime.

E. Connect the Journey to the Destination

Create a world-class network of greenway trails and waterways that support wellness, recreation, and mobility for a growing city. Grow recreation opportunities on the water. Prioritize and preserve habitat quality and connectivity. Make connecting to recreation and parks an easy and enjoyable experience.

F. Become Trailblazers in Operations

Lead the way for innovation and excellence in operations and managing growth. Operate with foresight to prepare for future generations while doubling down to maintain existing assets. Advance the use of technology to make systems more efficient, transparent, and sustainable.



Goals and Strategies

A Nurture an Active and Healthy Community

- A1 Add and improve parks and facilities where most needed.
- A2 Invest in distinctive, multipurpose and high-quality facilities.
- A3 Expand access to in-demand programs.
- A4 Plan and design parks that integrate with the transportation system.
- A5 Support health and wellness by promoting active lifestyles and aligning with citywide health goals.
- A6 Become a leader in providing universal access to recreation and parks.
- A7 Position Columbus as the "Nation's Capital for Women's Sports."

B Bring Nature into Focus

- B1 Design parks as functional landscapes.
- B2 Utilize proactive ecological approaches to managing growth through natural area acquisition, restoration, and maintenance.
- B3 Foster community stewardship and environmental education.
- B4 Expand nature-based play for all ages through park design and programming.
- B5 Preserve and grow the city's tree canopy.
- B6 Promote climate action through parks and facilities.

C This Park Welcomes You

- C1 Foster a culture of belonging across parks and facilities.
- C2 Remove cultural barriers to access.
- C3 Empower communities and elevate local voices.
- C4 Design for both comfort and safety.
- C5 Go above and beyond physical accessibility requirements.
- C6 Promote safe parks and facilities through programming and operations.

D Create What's Uniquely US About Columbus

- D1 Tell the Columbus story through parks and programs.
- D2 Draw on the unique talents of the Columbus community to expand programs and partnerships.
- D3 Infuse innovation and adventure.
- D4 Advance engagement and technology tools.
- D5 Bring recreation and parks closer to people through signature parks and programs.

E Connect the Journey to the Destination

- E1 Build a seamless network of trails and greenways.
- E2 Create signature waterway experiences and expand recreation on the water.
- E3 Improve access, information-sharing, and navigation.
- E4 Activate underutilized corridors as vibrant public assets.

F Become Trailblazers in Operations

- F1 Formalize a geographical service area approach to programming and facility management.
- F2 Classify and define standards for different types of facilities.
- F3 Expand the role of partnerships and volunteers.
- F4 Increase transparency and visibility.
- F5 Improve internal efficiency.
- F6 Implement consistent, transparent, and measurable maintenance standards.
- F7 Work towards financial sustainability.

Big Moves

Facilities & Programs: Transforming Our Growth

Prepare for growth and close the service gap through a tiered development approach that includes acquiring land, building new community facilities, and providing innovative and specialized programming at the regional level.

Aquatics: We're More than Getting Our Feet Wet

Expand Columbus' relationship with water through new aquatic facilities, safer access to rivers and reservoirs, and programs that deepen connections with the city's natural waterways.

Prioritize the Environment: It's in Our Nature

Transform the park system into a tool for resilience by acquiring ecologically sensitive land, completing stream restorations and adopting sustainability best practices in all parks.

Park Improvements: Every Park Counts

Expand the park system with an emphasis on quality and providing places that people love to come back to.

Greenways & Trails: Create Connections that Matter

Improve system connectivity through greenway and trail projects that allow people to reach natural experiences, recreational opportunities, parks, amenities and local attractions.



THE PLAYBOOK PROCESS

A playful, creative, and meaningful approach to public input was paired with technical analysis to ground the plan's recommendations in the public's values and the city's reality.

Public Input

Over an 18-month public input process, the planning team used a variety of engagement tools to ensure broad and inclusive community input. Outreach strategies included promotion on traditional and social media, stakeholder emails, printed materials, presentations, tabled events and displays at 110 community locations, and text messages sent to 50,000 residents. Participation opportunities were available in English, Spanish, and Somali.

50,000+
advertisements
sent to public



950
tabling participants



1,546
community center
poll participants



3,508
survey
responses



197
neighborhood meeting
participants



300
focus group
participants



Complete Needs Assessment

Technical Analysis

Quantitative assessment was used to supplement public input, including recreation trends data, demographic profiles of the city, benchmarking comparisons with peer cities, and spatial analysis using GIS. Technical analysis contextualizes the priorities identified through public input and links them with measurable outcomes, helping Columbus make strategic, data-driven investments in the years ahead.

PROPERTY CLASSIFICATIONS

Types of parks, facilities, and trails across Columbus

LEVEL OF SERVICE

Available amenities, programs, and services

PRIORITY AREAS

Neighborhoods most in need of park and program investments

PARK CONDITIONS

Staff and resident ratings of conditions and quality

BENCHMARKING

Columbus' system comparison to national and comparable city standards

ACCESS

Residents' ability to access the park system

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

Conservation, restoration, and preservation priorities

GROWTH

Impacts based on demographic projections

OPERATIONS REVIEW

Departmental efficiency, finances, and services

FUTURE INFLUENCES

Planning for the future requires an understanding of current trends and what the next ten years might look like in Columbus. Through research, data analysis, and conversations with the community, stakeholders, staff and elected officials, six trends were identified as key influences – both risks and opportunities – that Playbook Columbus must address.



ACCESS

As Columbus becomes more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly, the city's network of parks, trails, and facilities should become more connected to sidewalks, bikeways and transit routes.



AGING POPULATION

As the city's population ages, the department should expand its all-ages offerings and adapt to the unique recreation and wellness needs of older age groups.



CONCENTRATED DEVELOPMENT

In response to increased development and density, Columbus must acquire and preserve land for parks and trails and ensure its recreation spaces and programs are prepared for future growth.



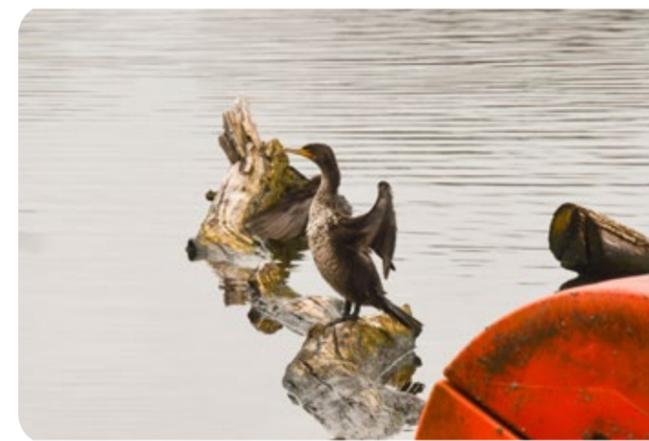
DIVERSITY AND NEW COMMUNITY MEMBERS

As Columbus grows and welcomes increased diversity, the recreation and parks system must innovate to serve the preferences and needs of those who are often underrepresented.



HEALTH OUTCOMES

Recreation and Parks can play a role in improving health outcomes by connecting residents to programs, services, open spaces, and resources and addressing higher-than-average inactivity rates.



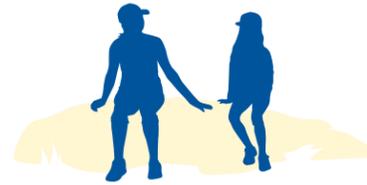
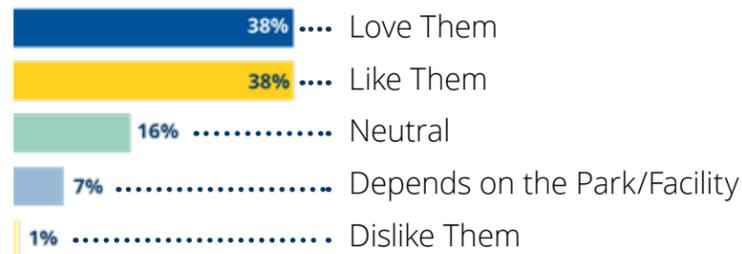
WEATHER AND CLIMATE

Parks and facilities should adopt best practices to mitigate the impacts of climate change and provide community resources for adaptation.

PUBLIC INPUT HIGHLIGHTS

Affinity for Parks

When asked how they feel about parks, greenway trails, and recreation facilities in Columbus, survey respondents reported:



Satisfaction with Current Offerings

Survey respondents were most satisfied with:

- Communication in their **preferred language**
- Available **parking**
- Walking or bike trail **accessibility**
- Park **hours**

Survey respondents were moderately satisfied with:

- The **types of programs and amenities**
- Park **signage**
- Available **information** about what types of facilities, programs, parks, and trails are offered
- Available **facilities**
- Cleanliness and **maintenance**
- The **welcoming** atmosphere
- Travel **distance**

Survey respondents were least satisfied with:

- Accessible spaces and amenities for **persons with disabilities**
- Availability of facilities and services during inclement weather and **all-weather activity offerings**
- Feelings of **safety** and **security**
- Available **restrooms**



Spaces in Need of Improvement

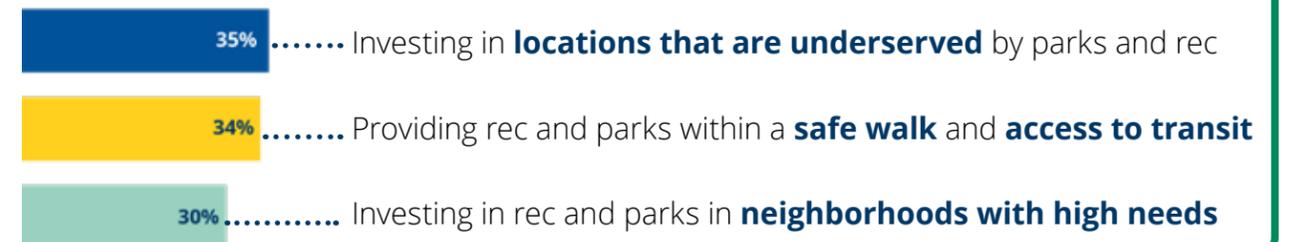
Survey respondents identified the following as priorities for improvement:

- Restroom facilities
- Site furnishings (benches, signs, tables, etc.)
- Picnic or shade structures
- Lighting
- Ways to access rivers, creeks, and reservoirs
- Playgrounds
- Indoor pools
- Trees and landscape features
- Outdoor sports courts
- Indoor and large group gathering spaces
- Natural areas, forests, and prairies
- Greenway trails
- Outdoor aquatics (pools, splash pads)
- Public art, historic elements, and cultural displays



Fair Access and Benefits

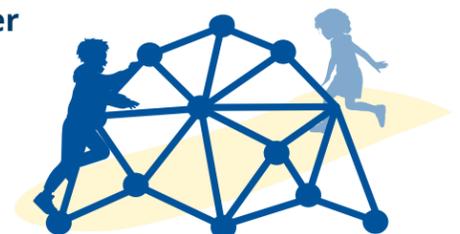
To ensure everyone has fair access and benefits, the community would prefer that CRPD focus on:



Youth Voices

In the future, youth would like to see more:

- Opportunities for **swimming** and interacting with **water**
- Indoor **court sports**
- Adventure and **obstacle courses**
- Modern **playgrounds**
- Events and **celebrations**
- Summer **camps**
- Skateboarding, biking, and scootering (**wheeled sports**)



KEY THEMES

Together, the findings from public input and technical analysis identify key themes from the planning process, highlighting where community voices align to reveal shared, urgent, and emerging recreation and parks needs. The focus areas below capture where public input, data analysis, and future influences intersect to illustrate the most pressing priorities for Columbus.




Sports with higher participation in Columbus than national levels include basketball, soccer, volleyball, and football.



"The quality of existing parks must be cared for in the next decade."
- Neighborhood Meeting Participant



70% of survey respondents visit City of Columbus trails at least monthly.



34% of Columbus participates in walking for exercise, the activity with the greatest number of participants.
Based on local recreation trends.



Indoor and outdoor swimming facilities, swim programs, and places to interact with water were top priorities among all forms of engagement.



"Ensure that all parks, recreational facilities, and trails are accessible to people of all abilities, including people with disabilities and seniors."
- Survey Respondent

NEEDS ASSESSMENT MATRIX

The Needs Assessment Matrix is a key tool in the Playbook Columbus planning process. By summarizing findings from community engagement and technical analysis, it highlights patterns across methods and demographics, helping tailor and prioritize recommendations based on the most widely shared and urgent parks and recreation needs.

	NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES									
	COMMUNITY/ STAKEHOLDER INPUT						TECHNICAL ANALYSIS			
	Survey	Community Center Polling	Pop-up Events	Advisory Committee	Focus Groups	Department Feedback	Recreation Trends Data	Benchmark Comparisons	Spatial Analysis	
Outdoor recreation + nature education	●	●	●		●	●	●	●		
Fitness classes	●		●				●	●		
Multicultural events	●				●					
Adult art / dance / painting classes / studio		●	●			●				
Nutrition / Produce markets / Free meals	●	●			●	●				
Community safety / violence prevention	●			●	●	●				
Swimming lessons/ classes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	
Youth sports	●					●	●			
Senior / 50+ programs & events	●		●		●			●		
Adult sports	●						●			
Water fitness						●				
Life skills classes		●			●		●			
Theatre performances							●			
Youth summer camp					●	●		●		
Youth art / dance / painting classes / studio		●	●			●		●		
Youth after school programs				●	●	●		●		
Martial arts or self-defense						●				
Rental venues for celebrations							●		●	
Youth Employment Program					●	●				
Adaptive and therapeutic programs					●	●	●	●		

● Identified common needs

	NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES								
	COMMUNITY/ STAKEHOLDER INPUT						TECHNICAL ANALYSIS		
	Survey	Community Center Polling	Pop-up Events	Advisory Committee	Focus Groups	Department Feedback	Recreation Trends Data	Benchmark Comparisons	Spatial Analysis
Restroom facilities	●				●			●	●
Site furnishings (benches, signs, tables, etc)	●				●				
Picnic or shade structures / small group gathering areas	●	●			●	●			●
Lighting	●				●	●			
Ways to access the river + creeks (ie: kayak, fishing piers)	●	●		●	●	●	●		●
Playgrounds / adventure / obstacle course	●	●	●					●	●
Special event venues (ie: plazas/ lawns, outdoor markets)		●	●		●				●
Indoor aquatics (ie: pools, aquatics classes, etc.)	●	●			●	●		●	●
Paved pathways at parks	●	●			●		●	●	
Outdoor sports courts (tennis, pickleball, basketball, etc)	●		●			●			
Outdoor aquatics / pools / splash pads	●	●	●				●	●	●
Indoor gathering spaces (ie: classrooms, arts, youth hubs, etc.)	●		●		●			●	
Public art / history / cultural displays	●			●	●	●		●	●
Nature education areas and facilities	●		●		●	●	●		●
Trees and landscape features/plantings	●				●	●			●
Natural areas / forests / prairies and meadows	●	●			●	●	●	●	●
Athletic fields (soccer, football, softball, baseball, etc.)			●						
Greenway trails	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bike skills park / BMX / Bike Pump tracks		●				●	●		●
Dog parks									●
Fitness Stations / Wellness		●	●		●		●	●	●
Therapeutic recreation facilities		●			●	●		●	
Indoor weight rooms						●	●		
Indoor gymnasiums / sports courts		●				●	●	●	
Skateboard / roller skating / scootering features						●			●
Indoor art classes / studios		●					●		

● Identified common needs

PLAN GOALS

Nurture an Active and Healthy Community

Expand programs and places that foster wellness and promote movement and fitness for full and healthy lives. Address health vulnerabilities and disparities by connecting people to resources. Increase the variety of youth and adult sports opportunities. Prioritize creation of social bonds to support mental and emotional wellbeing. Develop space for adaptive and therapeutic recreation programs.

Connect the Journey to the Destination

Create a world-class network of greenway trails and waterways that support wellness, recreation, and mobility for a growing city. Grow recreation opportunities on the water. Prioritize and preserve habitat quality and connectivity. Make connecting to recreation and parks an easy and enjoyable experience.

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Improve ecological health and biodiversity as a legacy investment in people and land. Grow our urban forest and expand the functional benefits of natural environmental systems. Connect people to nature and its benefits through programming, education and access to high-quality natural areas. Encourage community stewardship with resources and partnerships for volunteerism. Take collaborative regional action to create a more resilient Central Ohio.

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Lead the way for innovation and excellence in operations and managing growth. Operate with foresight to prepare for future generations while doubling down to maintain existing assets. Advance the use of technology to make systems more efficient, transparent, and sustainable.

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Make parks, trails, and recreation facilities welcoming and safe spaces for connecting. Uplift community champions embedded in our neighborhoods. Address physical and cultural barriers to use. Design for inclusion. Explore partnerships that promote community safety. Respectfully address conflicts in park use while promoting enjoyment for all.

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Create opportunities for cultural experiences, joyful moments, and belonging through diverse community events and celebrations. Prioritize community-inspired design and support neighborhood initiatives. Develop places and programs that inspire discovery and wonder. Bring unique opportunities for adventure into every community. Celebrate what it means to be a "rec and parks kid" for a lifetime.



BIG MOVES



Big Moves are the signature, high-visibility projects of Playbook Columbus that go beyond incremental improvements to transform how residents experience recreation and parks. They are bold, catalytic investments in the public realm that tie into multiple plan goals.

Facilities & Programs: Transforming Our Growth

Prepare for growth and close the service gap through a tiered development approach that includes **acquiring land**, building **new community facilities**, and providing **innovative and specialized programming** at the regional level.

Aquatics: We're More than Getting Our Feet Wet

Expand Columbus' relationship with water through **new aquatic facilities**, safer **access to rivers and reservoirs**, and **programs that deepen connections** with the city's natural waterways.

Prioritize the Environment: It's in Our Nature

Use the park system as a tool for **resilience, conservation**, and **preservation** by protecting **ecologically sensitive lands, restoring natural waterways** and habitats, and **embedding sustainability best practices** across the system.

Park Improvements: Every Park Counts

Prioritize **quality** across the park system, from regional destinations to neighborhood gems that **reflect community pride** and create lasting **connections between people and place**.

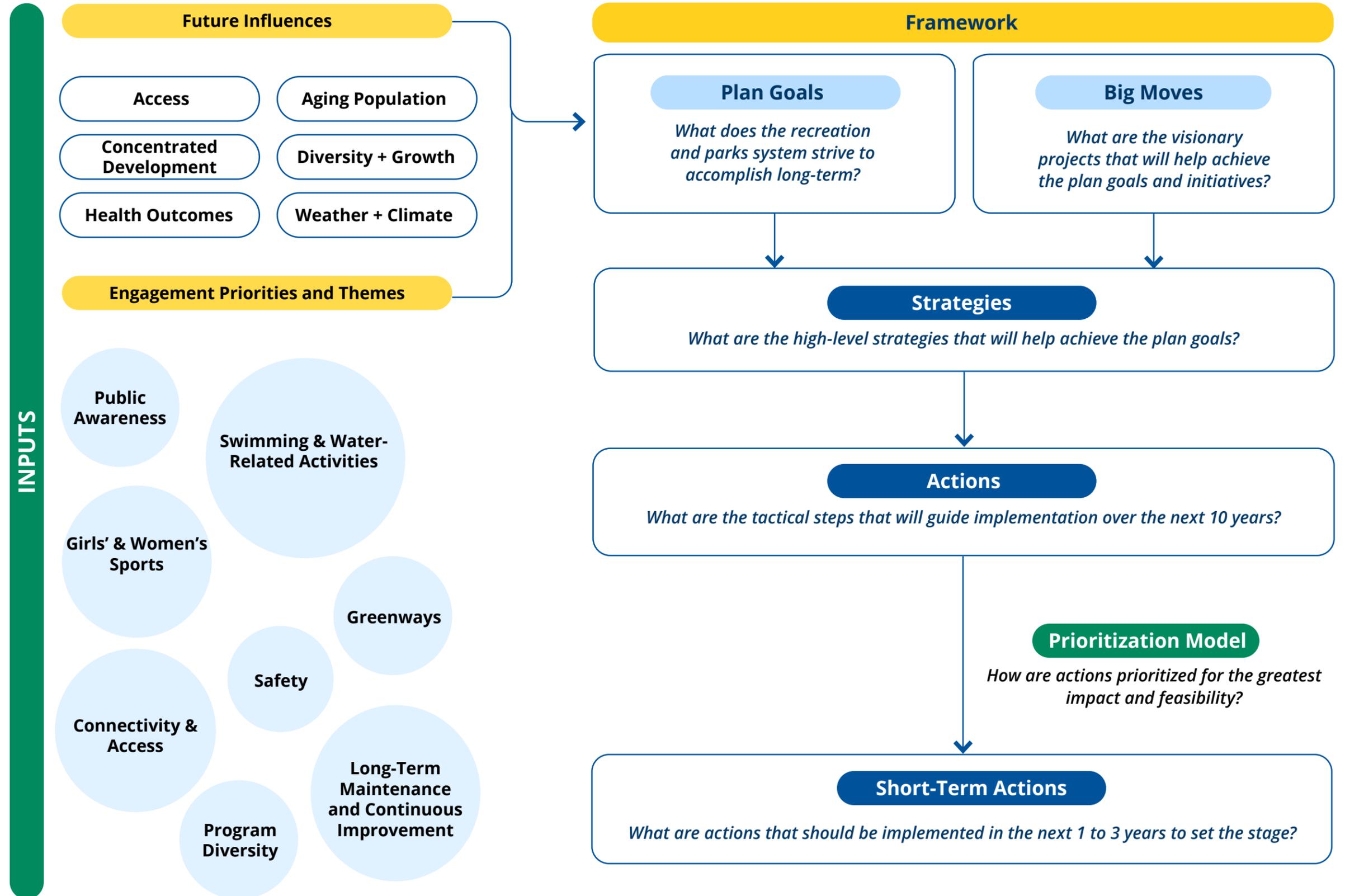
Greenways & Trails: Create Connections that Matter

Improve **system connectivity** through greenway and trail projects that allow people to reach **natural experiences**, recreational opportunities, parks, amenities and **local attractions**.

PLAN FRAMEWORK

By leveraging the existing system's strengths, opportunities identified through community engagement, and national best practices, Playbook Columbus envisions a future for the recreation and parks system that is ambitious and achievable.

The framework diagram demonstrates how anticipation of future influences, analysis of the current system, and community priorities were used to inform the creation of Plan Goals and Big Moves. Goals and Big Moves are vision elements that apply across the city. They are supported by Strategies and Actions, which are the most specific plan elements.



IDENTIFYING PRIORITIES

The prioritization model provides a community-driven methodology for citywide recreation and park investments.

To identify which Actions should happen first, Playbook Columbus defines a set of criteria based on the Needs Assessment and Plan Goals. By regularly revisiting this criteria, CRPD can update and re-evaluate which Actions are most important for implementation over the next ten years.

Park Condition and Use

Actions that improve the quality and condition of parks and facilities, direct investment toward neighborhoods with fewer parks and facilities in good condition, or address maintenance and operations to strengthen overall system performance received a higher score.

Access and Level of Service

Actions that add parks and facilities in neighborhoods with poor park access, improve connectivity or all-ability access, or promote regional connectivity received a higher score. Projects that expand access to high-demand or emerging amenities and programs were also prioritized.

Priority Areas

Playbook Columbus identifies Priority Areas, based on a composite of housing, transportation, environmental, demographic, ability, health, and socioeconomic indicators. The plan also designates Critical Environmental Areas using factors related to ecological risk, resilience, and assets. Actions that direct investment to Priority Areas or Critical Environmental Areas received a higher score.

Feasibility

Actions with dedicated funding, existing plans in place, or other “low-hanging fruit” that could be implemented in the short-term while remaining operationally sustainable in the long-term received a higher score.

Community

Actions that advance community or department priorities not otherwise captured in the prioritization model received a higher score. This includes projects informed by public or stakeholder feedback or aligned with local and regional planning efforts.

Priority Criteria

	 EXISTING PARK/FACILITY	 NEW PARK/FACILITY	 PROGRAM/PRACTICE
Condition + Use	<p><i>Is this existing park or facility in need of repairs?</i></p> <p><i>Is this existing park or facility heavily used?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a neighborhood with few parks or facilities in good condition?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this program or practice improve park and facility condition systemwide?</i></p>
Access + LoS	<p><i>Will this renovation to a park or facility improve park access?</i></p> <p><i>Does this existing park or facility offer high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a neighborhood with poor park access?</i></p> <p><i>Does this new park or facility offer high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this program or practice improve access to recreation citywide?</i></p> <p><i>Would this program or practice improve access to high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>
Priority Areas	<p><i>Is this existing park or facility in a Priority Area?</i></p> <p><i>Is this existing park or facility in an Environmental Priority Area?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a Priority Area?</i></p> <p><i>Is this new park or facility in an Environmental Priority Area?</i></p>	<p><i>Does this program or practice promote fair resource distribution?</i></p> <p><i>Does this program or practice promote goals related to climate and resilience?</i></p>
Feasibility	<p><i>Could this existing park or facility be renovated in the short-term?</i></p>	<p><i>Could this new park or facility be constructed in the short-term?</i></p>	<p><i>Could this program or practice easily be enacted in the short-term and sustained in the long-term?</i></p>
Community	<p><i>Would renovations to this existing park or facility address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this new park or facility address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>	<p><i>Does this program or practice address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

To lay the groundwork for successful implementation, Playbook Columbus identifies nearly 300 actions that should be taken by CRPD and partners over the next ten years. These selected strategies and actions will begin in the short-term, because they address the most pressing needs and challenges while leveraging existing resources and ongoing processes.

Add and improve parks and facilities where most needed.

A1 *Address gaps in the distribution of parks and centers, park amenities, and trails based on the current system, and think ahead to ensure areas slated for growth have adequate access to recreation and parks.*

A1.3 Prioritize improvements in parks and facilities with a low condition rating.

Revise or strengthen mechanisms for parkland dedication.

Invest in distinctive, multipurpose and high-quality facilities.

A2 *Parks and facilities should support the most popular activities in Columbus, but they can also offer opportunities for discovering something new. Creative recreation and parks spaces that offer memorable, unique experiences can establish a lifetime habit of physical activity, wellness, and play.*

A1.5 Adopt a “renew and reinvest” capital cycle for specialized facilities. Prioritize modernization of aging arts studios, theater, aquatic amenities, outdoor recreation facilities, and golf course infrastructure.

Support health and wellness by promoting active lifestyles and aligning with citywide health goals.

A5 *To encourage active lifestyles, CRPD should focus on upgrading walking, biking, fitness, and aquatic infrastructure and tailoring wellness programming to meet the needs of all Columbus residents, with a focus on addressing health disparities. Recreation and parks can contribute to the priorities established in the Columbus Public Health Strategic Plan by targeting investment in priority areas and continuing to offer services that help residents meet basic needs and improve their mental and physical health.*

A3.5 Grow wellness and positive-outlet programming for at-risk youth.

A3.6 Find funding for desirable incentives for participants in Youth Development and intervention programs.

Position Columbus as the “Nation’s Capital for Women’s Sports.”

A7 *Columbus has historically championed girls and women in sports. In 2025, Mayor Ginther declared an aspiration to solidify this tradition and establish Columbus as the “Nation’s Capital for Women’s Sports.” CRPD will be a leader in this effort by designing spaces and programs that not only provide opportunities for women and girls in active recreation, but that actively welcome them and allow them to thrive.*

A7.2 Define participation goals for girls’ and women’s sports and implement strategies to achieve growth.

Design parks as functional landscapes.

B1 *All parks – not just conservation areas – can be designed to reduce ambient heat, manage stormwater, and increase wildlife habitat, among other benefits. Planting native and adapted species, integrating green stormwater infrastructure, and increasing tree canopy will improve the park system’s ecological performance.*

B1.3 Identify and acquire land to serve as regional stormwater detention for capital projects.

Utilize proactive ecological approaches to managing growth through natural area acquisition, restoration and maintenance.

B2 *Urban development often results in fragmented native landscapes. As Columbus grows and densifies, the city has an opportunity to reimagine the typical relationship between development and conservation. A thoughtful approach to preservation and stewardship makes natural area conservation more impactful by considering how parks fit into regional ecologies.*

B2.5 Advocate for open space, tree preservation and planting in future updates to Columbus’ Growth Strategy, Zone In, LinkUS, and similar citywide policy or code revisions.

B1.6 Target mitigation of invasive species through monitoring, removal, controlled burns, and grazing to encourage native species growth.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

Expand nature-based play for all ages through park design and programming.

B4 *Hands-on experiences like outdoor classrooms, seasonal programming, river recreation and nature play can foster curiosity, learning and connection to the outdoors. These types of nature-based experiences are very popular in Columbus, but there are gaps in the current distribution of natural areas and environmental education and programming.*

B4.3 Identify potential locations that could host additional nature-based and outdoor programming to ensure that opportunities are distributed across the city and to highlight lesser-known natural areas of Columbus.

Preserve and grow the city's tree canopy.

B5 *The vision and goals of the Urban Forestry Master Plan will remain a priority for CRPD over the next ten years, with reforestation in park properties emerging as a focus area.*

B5.3 Implement planting plans to focus tree plantings in priority neighborhoods as defined in the Urban Forestry Master Plan and in the environmental priority areas from Playbook Columbus.

B5.2 Complete the transition from the current tree nursery location to the new nursery.

Promote climate action through parks and facilities.

B6 *As Columbus' climate changes, its parks and facilities will be essential infrastructure for climate resilience. These spaces have the potential to cool the city, absorb and clean stormwater, shelter urban wildlife, and can help with recovery and healing in the midst of climate emergencies.*

B5.11 Maintain and expand the public tree inventory to include all street trees, potential right-of-way planting sites, and park trees in maintained landscapes.

Foster a culture of belonging across parks and facilities.

C1 *For people to feel at home in parks and centers, they must be able to physically access and use facilities, and feel safe and welcome while doing so. Elements like multilingual signage, culturally relevant programming, and public art can celebrate the diversity of Columbus and cultivate spaces where everyone feels welcome.*

C1.1 Strengthen partnerships with cultural organizations to continue celebrating diverse traditions through events, festivals, and programming.

C2.1 Explore new/creative marketing tactics to engage more teens and young adults in programming for their age group.

Remove cultural barriers to access.

C2 *Throughout engagement, residents cited diverse reasons why they do not currently use the recreation and parks system. This includes concerns about safety and physical barriers, but it also includes personal factors like long work hours and a general lack of awareness. Through actions like expanding fee assistance, continuing to align program offerings with diverse interests, and flexible scheduling, Columbus can increase participation in recreation and parks.*

C2.4 Continue developing partnerships with organizations that can provide bilingual and culturally responsive outreach support.

Empower communities and elevate local voices.

C3 *A park or facility can be a point of pride for a neighborhood when it provides the right mix of amenities, programs, services, and events. By making it easy for residents to participate in planning, designing and programming parks and facilities, CRPD can foster community stewardship and create places that work for the people who use them.*

D4.1 Offer participatory budgeting opportunities during the community engagement process for capital projects to promote transparent decision-making.

D1.2 Grow the City's inventory of public art, murals, interpretive play installations, and storytelling pieces that reflect and represent Columbus' diversity of neighborhood stories and histories.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

Design for both comfort and safety.

C4 *Design elements like lighting, seating, clear sightlines, and furnishings communicate that a space is cared for and allow residents to feel comfortable using parks across all seasons and times of day.*

C4.2 Improve safety standards (including lighting, shade and sightlines) based on park classification and operating hours.

Go above and beyond physical accessibility.

C5 *Playbook Columbus calls for a complete accessibility audit of existing parks and facilities to identify priorities for access improvements. Where possible, parks and facilities should incorporate universal design principles.*

C5.1 Develop a range of Universal Design strategies for accessibility that can be applied across capital projects.

Promote safe parks and facilities through programming and operations.

C6 *Parks and facilities that are well-used are visibly safer and more welcoming. Encouraging full use of parks and facilities requires the right mix of programs offered at the right time, including nighttime and summer programming, and staff training in de-escalation and cultural competency.*

A5.2 Decrease violence through innovative programming, engagement, intervention, and relationship-building.

C6.3 Plan for the youth zone around the new Beatty Teen Center by identifying necessary safety measures, communicating with seniors living nearby, and coordinating with community groups.

Draw on the unique talents of the Columbus community to expand programs and partnerships.

D2 *Programs and events should be tailored to meet the needs, interests, and talents of community members. To cultivate experiences that are appropriate for each center, CRPD can recruit independent instructors to deliver non-traditional program offerings.*

D1.6 Define the department's public art policy in tandem with the Department of Development, Greater Columbus Arts Council and the Columbus Arts Commission.

D1.7 Partner with local museums and public art organizations to identify strategies for activating parks and facilities through art and other placemaking efforts.

Infuse innovation and adventure.

D3 *Creative, adventurous, and experimental experiences like adventure play, makerspaces, or pop-up mobile "labs", designed in partnership with local artists can make Columbus' parks and facilities hubs of discovery and wonder.*

D4.2 Expand creative approaches to community engagement used throughout park and trail master planning processes. Include strategies to promote participation by community members of all ages and abilities.

Advance engagement and technology tools.

D4 *Community engagement revealed limited awareness around the recreation and park offerings in Columbus. Digital tools can boost visitation and program participation by offering creative options for residents to explore the existing system.*

F4.2 Launch a public dashboard of Recreation and Parks capital projects.

D4.3 Launch new customer-facing app for registration and programs.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

Bring recreation and parks closer to people through signature parks and programs.

D5 *In a big city like Columbus, it is critical that unique and exciting recreation and park experiences can be easily accessed from the places people live. By embracing each park's unique set of opportunities and constraints, Columbus can create memorable spaces that authentically reflect its dynamic identity.*

D5.4 Document the gaps that CWOW seeks to fill when identifying locations. Measure and evaluate performance in relation to the identified gaps.

Build a seamless network of trails and greenways.

E1 *To ensure that walking, biking, and rolling experiences are interconnected, accessible, and safe for everyone, CRPD should prioritize closing trail gaps, including improving existing trail conditions and adding new trails. This will require close collaboration with partners like MORPC, COTA, and the Columbus Department of Public Service to realize the network proposed in the Bike Plus Plan.*

E1.4 Construct 25 miles of new greenway trails in collaboration with COTA, MORPC, neighboring municipalities, and other partners.

Create signature waterway experiences and expand recreation on the water.

E2 *Transform Columbus' rivers and waterways into vibrant recreational destinations by adding and improving docks, launches, and waterfront amenities. Partner with local organizations to support guided tours, water-based programming, water safety programs, and seasonal events that celebrate life on the water.*

E2.1 Expand partnerships to add river recreation options like kayak rentals, paddleboarding classes, and river tours.

E2.2 Identify locations and plan for new waterfront gathering spaces. Include an assessment of waterfront-specific maintenance and operations needs for each new site.

Improve access, information-sharing, and navigation.

E3 *Lack of information is a critical barrier to park access in Columbus. Community members were enthusiastic about initiatives that would make it easier to navigate the city's trails, waterways, parks, and facilities.*

E5.1 Identify locations for gateway trailheads at entry points to the greenway system. Design gateways that feature unique amenities that celebrate the surrounding neighborhood and trail system.

Activate underutilized corridors as vibrant public assets.

E4 *A corridor approach aligns Columbus' trails with its preserved natural and cultural landscapes, resulting in layered recreational, ecological, and cultural benefits. Creative reuse of vacant land, rail lines, and underused infrastructure can create opportunities for connectivity, recreation, and conservation.*

E4.1 Convert abandoned rail lines, easements, and vacant parcels into multi-use trails and greenways. Use demonstration projects to build momentum and secure funding long term.

Formalize a geographical service area approach to programming and facility management.

F1 *Adopt a regional operating framework by grouping centers into geographic clusters with coordination across sites. The current approach to zone management will reorient around geography, while each center maintains their individuality and autonomy. This strategy builds upon the current momentum towards a service area approach to promote differentiation in programs, improve center attendance, and balance resource allocation across the city.*

F1.2 Develop a detailed action plan for grouping centers into geographic zones.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES

Increase transparency and visibility.

F4 *Recreation and parks play a wide-reaching role in residents' lives. The diversity of its programs and services are an asset; however, this sometimes results in inefficient communication both internally and externally. CRPD should work to promote transparent progress reporting and data-driven decision-making.*

- F4.8 Continue to improve the information available on Recreation and Parks website regarding, parks, facilities, trails and capital projects.
- F4.6 Use departmental performance reports to regularly communicate achievements and needs to City Leadership and residents through storytelling and messaging.

Improve internal efficiency.

F5 *There are opportunities within the department to streamline processes, including those related to permitting, enforcement, and procurement. While these processes will have the largest impact on staff, the community will also experience their impact.*

- F4.10 Initiate CAPRA reaccreditation process.
- F5.5 As staff expansions become available, prioritize new positions in Community and Neighborhood Parks, where service gaps most affect residents.

Implement consistent, transparent, and measurable maintenance standards.

F6 *By aligning operations with resources, park usage, condition data, and more, maintenance will become more predictable and public accountability will improve.*

- F6.4 Use conditions audits to compare actual park and facility performance versus goals and reallocate resources accordingly.

Work towards financial sustainability.

F7 *To ensure operations can continue into the future, CRPD must work towards financial sustainability, improve cost recovery, and reduce reliance on the general fund. By developing mini business plans for each program area, the department can prepare for growth and avoid unexpected interruptions in program or service delivery.*

- F7.4 Update the unified cost recovery framework and fee policy through a cross-departmental committee.
- F7.6 Leverage grants, sponsorships, and naming rights to offset capital and maintenance costs for amenities and landscapes.

CHAPTER 1

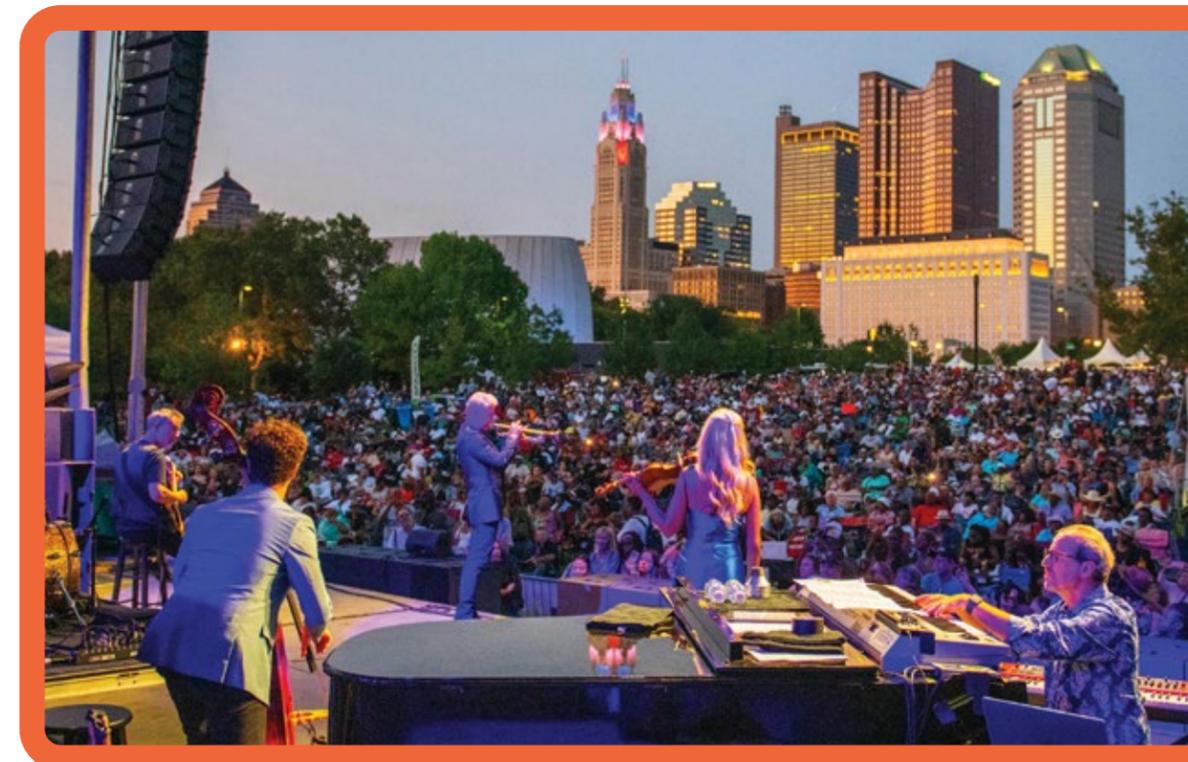
INTRODUCTION

- Parks and Facilities
- Programs and Services
- Rec and Parks by the Numbers
- History of Recreation and Parks
- Accomplishments Since 2014
- Recent Planning Efforts
- Future Influences

Playbook Columbus serves as a road map for the future of Columbus' recreation programs and services, parks, facilities, trails, waterways, and open spaces.

Columbus envisions itself as "America's Opportunity City," a place where individuals, families, and communities can enjoy a high quality of life. To support this vision, the city's recreation and parks system must be accessible, inviting, and easy to use for residents of all backgrounds and in every neighborhood.

As Columbus continues to grow and change, its recreation and parks system must evolve to meet residents' needs. Playbook Columbus is designed to guide this evolution and inform decision-making. Drawing on local and national trends, the plan offers recommendations grounded in current data, community input, and shared values of **joy, nature, legacy, community, and open.**



RECREATION AND PARKS SYSTEM | PARKS AND FACILITIES

Recreation and parks play an important role in daily life in Columbus, with the city offering nearly twice as many parks as some similarly sized cities.

CRPD provides a wide range of experiences across **458 parks**, from fishing and birdwatching at Hoover Reservoir to walking the cave trail at the McKnight Outdoor Education Center to participating in tournament sports at Berliner Sports Park.

Greenway and **blueway trails** offer scenic ways to traverse the city and stay active. **Pools** and **splash pads** provide places to play, keep cool, and learn about water safety.

In addition to outdoor spaces, CRPD manages programmed indoor spaces, including **28 recreation centers**, **5 athletic complexes**, **5 specialized facilities**, and **1 indoor aquatic center**. Indoor facilities also support community-led gatherings, offering **shelterhouses** and **pavilions** that are available for the public to rent.



LEARN MORE → [Recreation and Parks by the Numbers](#)

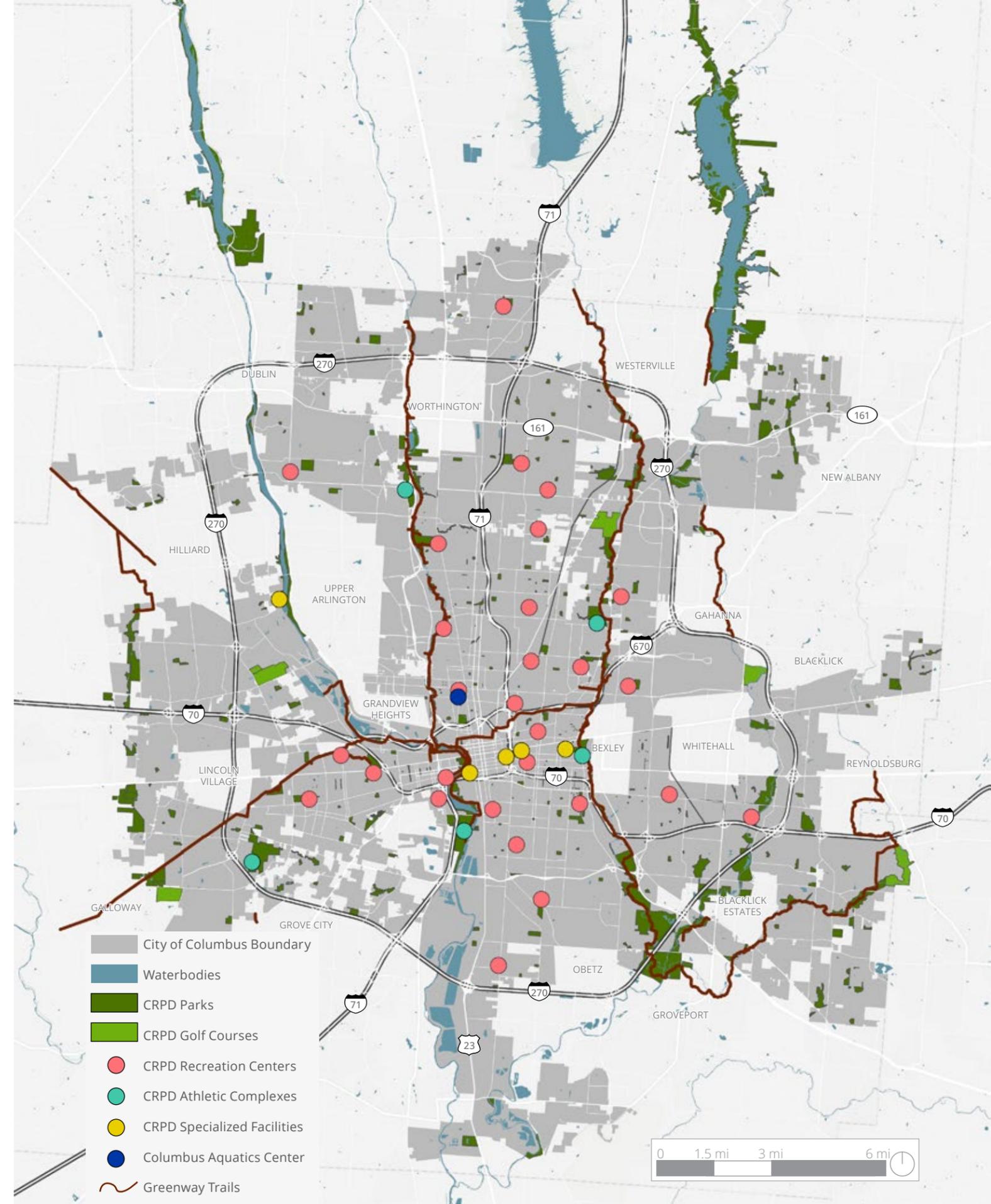


Figure 1: Recreation and Park System Map

Columbus offers year-round programs and services both indoors and outdoors. Its programs and services are planned, designed, and evaluated to reflect the distinct needs and interests of each neighborhood. While recreation centers share a core set of programs, each center works closely with neighborhood partners to provide services tailored to the surrounding community.

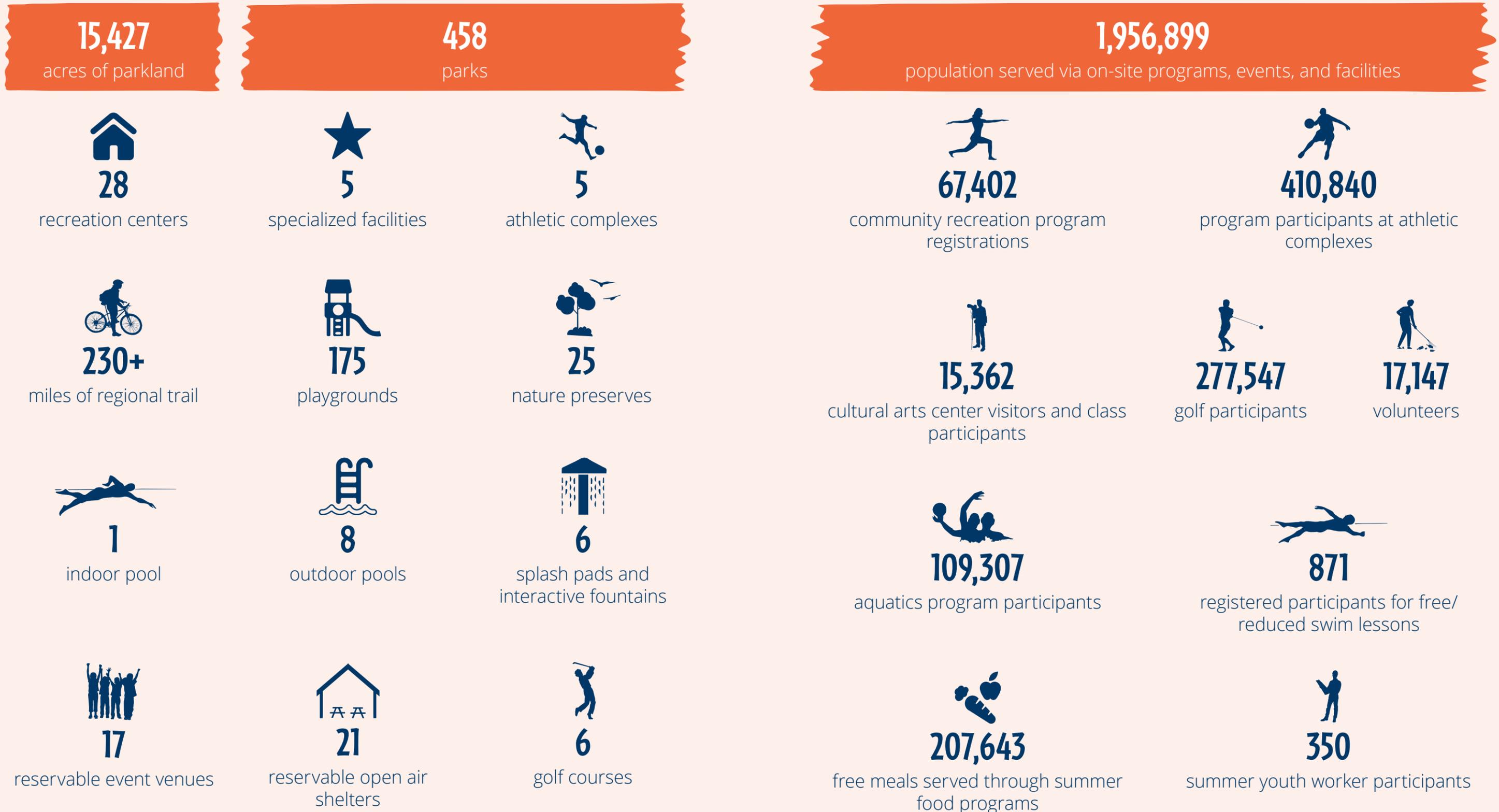
Popular offerings include adult and senior programs, arts, wellness, sports, aquatics, and therapeutic and outdoor recreation. Beyond these categories, CRPD functions as a broader support system for residents. The department hosts leadership programs, provides nutritious meals, and offers a wide range of youth services, including the award-winning Violence, Outreach, Intervention, Community Engagement (VOICE) program. These examples represent only a portion of CRPD's overall programming.

Programs and services are also delivered outside recreation centers and athletic complexes. As part of the Centers Without Walls (CWOW) approach, CRPD partners with two school districts for the use of their facilities. CWOW allows youth to access CRPD programs even in areas without a community center or where nearby facilities may be difficult to reach. Core services include after-school programming, summer camps, in-school outreach, and community pop-ups, offering experiences such as field trips, sports, arts and crafts, and other hands-on activities.



Figure 2: Program Overview

RECREATION AND PARKS SYSTEM | BY THE NUMBERS



Facility numbers are current as of March 2025. Program numbers reflect 2024 totals.

Throughout Columbus' history, recreation and parks have played a foundational role in quality of life by strengthening social connections, enhancing the city's character, and conserving natural resources. As Columbus enters a new period of growth, the role of parks continues to evolve.



Deer statues along the Scioto River



Franklin Park Conservatory

Image Source: Columbus Library



Young Ladies Playground Association

Image Source: Columbus Library

Indigenous Heritage

Central Ohio was home to many Indigenous communities for thousands of years before displacement by European settlers in the early nineteenth century. The influence of Indigenous culture remains visible in the landscape, including the Scioto River, whose name comes from the Wyandot word for "deer." Deer-shaped statues along the riverbanks acknowledge the region's original inhabitants, both the animals and the people who named the river.

Early Parks

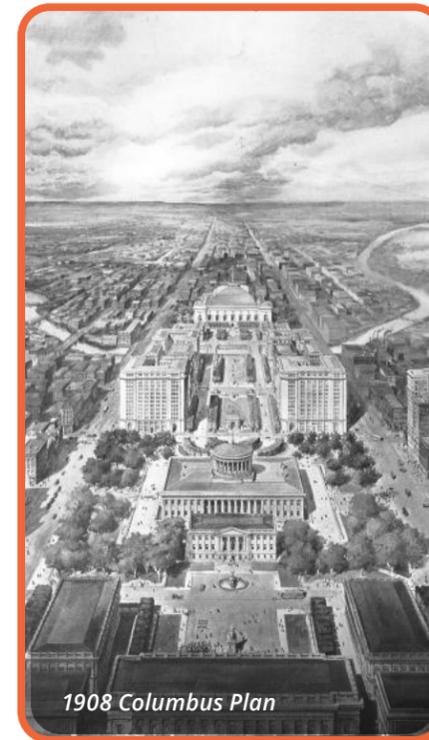
Columbus was incorporated as a city in 1834. Five years later, in 1839, the city established its first two parks, Franklinton Cemetery and Livingston Park. From these early beginnings, the park system grew into a small network of multipurpose spaces whose role extended well beyond recreation. Parks served as places for horticultural and zoological study and hosted large public gatherings, including the Ohio State Fair. During the Civil War, parks were even used as training grounds for the Union Army. Following the war, General

Sherman delivered his well-known "war is hell" speech in Franklin Park, and many of Columbus' historic and cultural resources today are connected to this period. The view of parks that emerged during this time, as adaptable and multifunctional spaces shaped by community needs, continues to inform how Columbus' park system is understood and used today.

Industrial Legacy

In 1870, Columbus reported a population of 31,274. By the turn of the twentieth century, that number had grown to 125,560. Within just thirty years, industrial growth had more than tripled the city's population. This period is still reflected across Columbus through historic markers and features embedded in the landscape.

Some formerly industrial areas, particularly along the downtown riverfront, have since been transformed into parks. Other sites remain vacant and may be remediated in the future, creating opportunities to honor the city's industrial heritage while restoring historic ecologies and expanding public space.



1908 Columbus Plan

Civic Reform

Like many industrial-era cities, Columbus experienced severe overcrowding and limited access to basic services, contributing to disease, social unrest, and poor living conditions. The 1908 Columbus Plan emerged in response to these challenges. Influenced by the City Beautiful movement, the plan called for a connected system of parks, streams, and green spaces linked by boulevards and parkways.

Women played a central role in turning the 1908 Plan into action, particularly through the development of neighborhood playgrounds and parks.

In 1910, the Young Ladies Playground Association and the Federation of Women's Clubs formed the Committee on Cooperation to urge the city to take responsibility for public playgrounds. Their efforts led to a City Council ordinance passed in July 1910 that established the Department of Recreation and laid the foundation for what is now the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department. This achievement came a full decade before women gained the right to vote.

During and after the Great Depression, the Works Progress Administration contributed to the park system by constructing several notable facilities, including the Holton Park shelter and the Schiller Caretaker's Cottage, both of which remain in use in CRPD parks today.

Migration, Segregation, Disruption

Many domestic migrants who came to Columbus during the industrial era were African Americans from the predominantly rural South, arriving as part of the Great Migration in search of job opportunities and relief from segregation. By 1930, however, 65 percent of African Americans in Columbus lived in just four

of the city's 19 census tracts, reflecting growing patterns of residential segregation.

The construction of interstate freeways in the 1950s further reinforced these patterns and disrupted established Black neighborhoods, including Mt. Vernon Avenue, once described by a former resident as the city's center of African American life. Today, parks and cultural spaces such as Mayme Moore Park and the King Arts Complex help honor and celebrate the history, resilience, and contributions of Columbus' African American community.

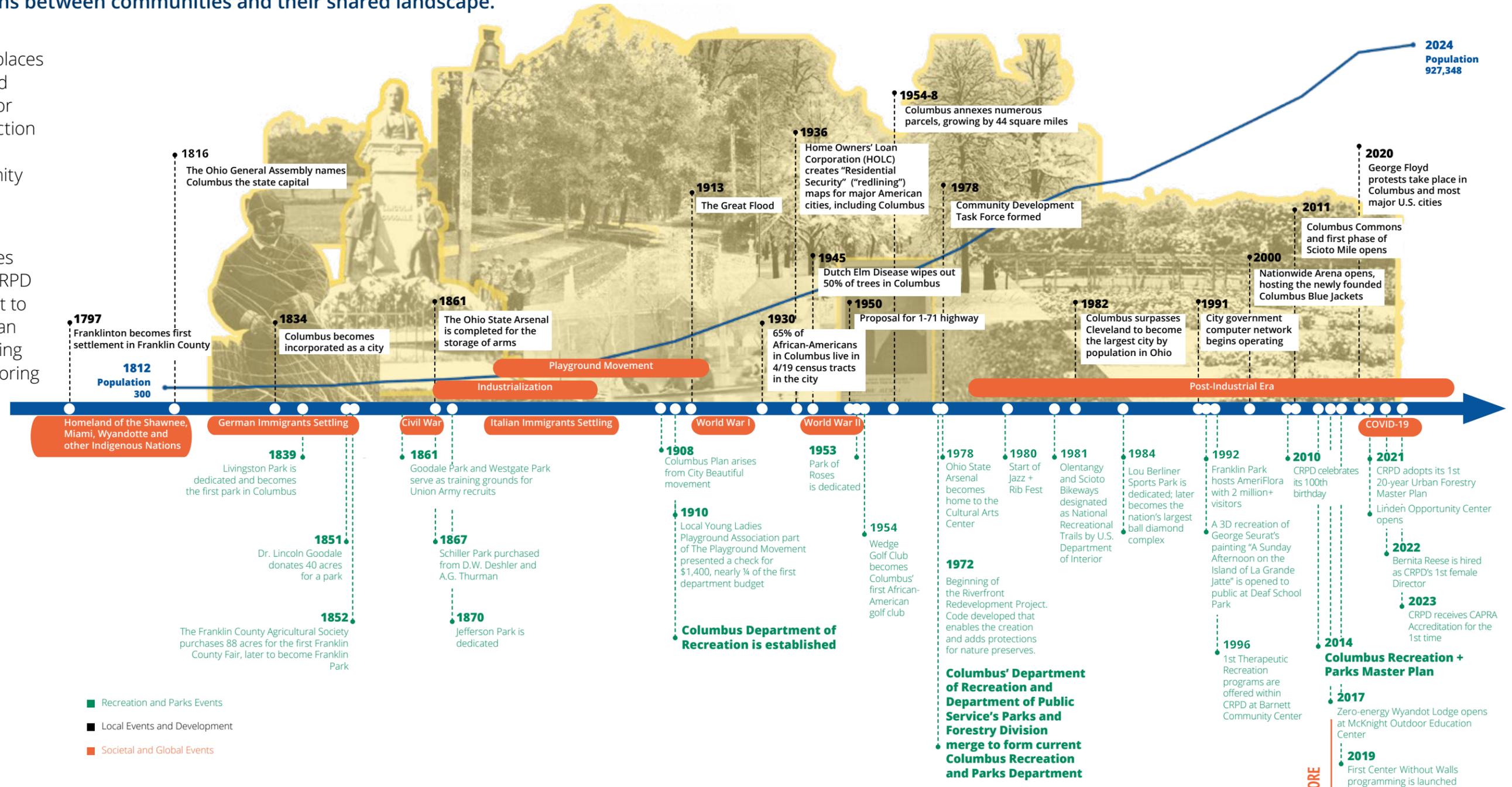
System Expansion

The year 1972 marked an important turning point for Columbus' park system, with the launch of the Riverfront Redevelopment Project and the establishment of the modern Recreation and Parks Department. By 1978, the department managed 120 parks totaling 10,548 acres of parkland. Over time, the system continued to grow, reaching the 15,427 acres and 458 parks managed by CRPD today.

The history of Columbus' park system reflects a long tradition of providing recreation and parks that adapt to changing community needs and preferences. It also points to opportunities to elevate historically marginalized voices and strengthen connections between communities and their shared landscape.

Today, CRPD is known for providing programs and places for maintaining health and fitness, expanding outdoor opportunities and connection with nature, and offering recreation for all community members regardless of financial status or ability.

Playbook Columbus arrives at a critical moment, as CRPD continues its commitment to inclusion while taking on an expanded role in preserving cultural heritage and restoring native landscapes.



All images are sourced from the Columbus Metropolitan Library Digital Collections

Figure 3: Historic Timeline

Columbus Recreation and Parks' 2014 Master Plan identified the previous set of ten-year priorities. Playbook Columbus documents a high-level sampling of the department's accomplishments since that plan's adoption.

System-Wide Updates

- **CAPRA Accreditation:** Received CAPRA accreditation. At this time, only 2% of all recreation and parks agencies are CAPRA accredited.
- **Columbus Recreation and Parks Foundation:** Established an independent foundation to expand partnerships.

Acquisitions

- **Total Acquisition:** 1,744 acres.
- Notable acquisitions include **West Case Road Parkland, Douglas School Property,** now home to the Fran Ryan Center, and **Linden Green Line,** a 7-mile former rail corridor stretching from Maloney Park to Cooper Sports Park.



Dorrian Green

Park (Re)Development

- **Dorrian Green:** Opened atop a city underground parking garage at the west entrance to COSI.
- **Dodge Skatepark:** Historic restoration of skatepark designed by Frank Hawk, father of the legendary skateboarder Tony Hawk. First public skatepark in a city where skateboarding was once outlawed in most public places.
- **Tuttle Skate Park**
- **Franklinton Median Parks**
- **Kilbourne Run Sports Park:** Upgrades to Kilbourne Run Sports Park will expand access to new soccer fields and first-class facilities. Construction began in 2024 and is expected to be completed in 2026.
- **Warner Woods Park**
- **Flatwood Park**
- **Livingston Park Playground**
- **Playground Improvements:** Replaced 90 playgrounds.

Facility Development

- **Fran Ryan Center:** Creative arts and wellness hub offering dynamic, hands-on programming for all ages. Honored with the Columbus Business First 2025 Building Columbus Award for Best Neighborhood Impact.
- **Linden Opportunity Center:** 55,000 square foot center opened in 20-acre renovated Linden Park.

- **Scioto Southland Community Center:** Major renovation and rebuild.
- **Glenwood Recreation Center:** Major renovation and rebuild.
- **Wyandot Lodge:** First commercial net-zero building in Ohio at the McKnight Outdoor Education Center.
- **HVAC upgrades:** Achieved a median 17% energy reduction at 22 facility locations.
- **Espy Adaptive Sports Complex:** Renovated facility offering recreational activities modified to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Youth Development

- **Innovation Award:** The Department received a first place NRPA Innovation Award for the VOICE program, which provides vital resources to victims of violent crime ages 18-40 to help prevent re-injury and jail time and assist with recovery.

Arts

- **Golden Hobby Gift Shop:** Relocated to Fran Ryan Center, doubling the number of their consignors and respective revenue.
- **Cultural Arts Center:** Selected #1 Cultural Institution by Columbus Underground readers in 2025. Undergoes interior renovation for even better classroom experience.

Aquatics

- **Windsor Pool:** Rebuild completed in 2023.
- **Glenwood Pool:** Rebuild completed in 2023.
- **Marion Franklin Pool:** Rebuild underway, complete in 2026.
- **20-Year Aquatics Capital Improvement Plan:** Provides the Department with insightful information to renovate and develop aquatics facilities.
- **Lincoln Park Pool Rebuild**
- **Driving Park Pool Rebuild**
- **Linden Sprayground**
- **USA Swim Club (Youth):** Chartered a competitive youth swim club that meets all the requirements set forth by USA Swimming, a rarity among municipal aquatics programs. The program ensures the highest qualifications for coaching, allows participants to compete in sanctioned swim events, and integrates with Para/Special Olympic-trained coaching for adaptive athletes, all made affordable through household-income based pricing.
- **Lifeguard Pay Raise:** Stabilized lifeguard core by raising pay to a competitive \$20/hour.

Community Recreation

- **Center Without Walls:** Launched a youth programming model using partner facilities in communities that lack traditional recreation centers.

The program has grown to serve youth at 11 locations.

- **Pandemic Response:** Virtual programs and services were offered to the public as the COVID-19 pandemic closed all city facilities. CRPD was one of few to navigate safe opening of summer camps to provide essential childcare during summer 2020. Community Centers were used as vaccine clinics for eliminating the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- **Nutrition:** In 2024, the department served over 207,000 free meals through the summer food program.
- **Teen Girls Empowerment Day:** Developed to focus on building confidence, self-awareness, and community connection.

Conservation

- **Nature Preserves:** 25% increase in nature preserves.
- **City Code Updates:** Code updated to create and protect nature preserves.
- **Conservation Section:** Established a Conservation Section to increase field work, education, outdoor experiences, and property management in Columbus' conservation spaces.

Events

- **Pop-up Concerts:** Held throughout the city.
- **Major League Soccer:** Hosted All Star Game and Celebration in Columbus in 2024.

- Established **Designated Outdoor Refreshment Areas (DORAs).**
- Celebrated **40th Jazz and Rib Fest**

Forestry

- **Tree Planting:** 32,842 public trees were planted between 2015 and 2024.
- **Urban Forestry Master Plan:** Columbus' first Urban Forestry Master Plan was adopted in 2021.
- **Updated Public Tree Code:** The City of Columbus adopted an updated public tree code, supported by the Urban Forestry Master Plan, to better protect Columbus trees. Major updates to the tree code include application to all projects impacting public trees, a companion technical manual, inch-for-inch replacement, and better enforcement practices.
- **Stockbridge Urban Forest:** 2,400 native trees were planted in this pilot reforestation in a Far South neighborhood park, formerly the site of a vacant elementary school building.

Golf

- **Increased Rounds:** Increased golf rounds from 177,170 in 2014 to 269,527 in 2024.

HISTORY | RECENT PLANNING EFFORTS

Playbook Columbus builds on previous and ongoing planning efforts to align with citywide priorities.

Columbus Recreation and Parks Master Plan (2014-2024)

Adopted in 2014, the Columbus Recreation and Parks Master Plan served as the predecessor to Playbook Columbus and guided recreation and park investments over the past decade. Key recommendations included expanding the trail network and adding neighborhood and community parks that support special events, festivals, nature programs, and outdoor education.

Columbus Recreation and Parks 5-Year Greenways Plan (2019-2024)

The Greenways Plan proposed twenty major new projects for CRPD to complete between 2019 and 2024.

Columbus Recreation and Parks Land Plan (2023-2028)

The Land Plan guides land acquisition and prioritization

based on current and projected population growth, areas of social vulnerability, CRPD land holdings, and the existing recreation inventory. It establishes priorities for the next five years and identifies sites that would most improve access and connectivity to parks and trails.

Columbus Urban Forestry Master Plan (2021)

This plan presents a community-informed vision to protect, expand, and manage the city's tree canopy more equitably across neighborhoods. Tree canopy coverage varies widely across Columbus, ranging from 9 percent to 41 percent, with a citywide average of 22 percent. The plan addresses gaps in coordination and long-term vision and includes a prioritized planting map based on equity, urban heat, and stormwater analysis.

Recreation and Leisure Trends Analysis (2023)

This analysis provides insight into demographic and recreation trends by Planning Area and helps identify community needs related to parks and recreation. Findings

show increased activity levels over the past five years, with growing interest in water-based and outdoor sports. Columbus reports strong participation in basketball, volleyball, football, soccer, softball, and tennis.

Recreation Plan (2023)

The Recreation Plan guides CRPD's programs and services and is led primarily by the Community Centers, Recreation Services, and Youth Development divisions.

Aquatics Capital Improvement Plan (2023)

This community-driven plan provides a road map for future programming and facility decisions related to the city's aquatic amenities.

Columbus Climate Action Plan (2021)

This plan outlines strategies to meet citywide climate goals, including the development of resilience hubs, expanded access to green space, water adaptation strategies, increased tree canopy, and improved pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure.

LinkUS Mobility Plan (ongoing)

LinkUS is a regional effort to expand Central Ohio Transit Authority service and transportation options. The plan proposes a 45 percent increase in transit service, along with new and improved bike lanes, sidewalks, trails, and crosswalks.

Columbus Bike Plus Plan (2024)

The Bike Plus Plan focuses on creating a safe, connected, and comfortable network for people to bike, scooter, skate, and roll throughout the city. Recommended improvements include protected bike lanes, trails, and safer crossings.

Themes from Past Plans



Connectivity

Create connectivity improvements within and around Columbus.



Community Centers

Add community centers where there are gaps in service, and provide safe access.



Growth

Provide opportunities for existing residents while planning for the needs of future residents.



Aquatic Facilities

Increase the number of aquatic facilities and expand aquatic programming.



Park Quality and Maintenance

Provide consistent park quality and maintenance standards across the city.



Branding, Signage, Wayfinding

Adopt consistent standards for signage and wayfinding and apply branding throughout parks.



Urban Tree Canopy

Grow the urban tree canopy throughout the city and achieve canopy coverage goals.



Climate Resilience

Use parks to address climate change and mitigate impacts.

FUTURE INFLUENCES

As a 10-year Vision Plan, Playbook Columbus is designed to guide the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department's programming, operations, and investments over the coming decade. Planning for the future requires a shared understanding of key trends and what the next ten years may bring for Columbus. Through research, data analysis, and conversations with community members, stakeholders, staff, and elected officials, six future influences were identified as important dynamics that present both challenges and opportunities for the plan to address.



Access

As development continues across Columbus, the Central Ohio Transit Authority is modernizing and expanding the transit system through the LinkUS Plan. Together with the city's zoning code update, these efforts are shaping a denser, more walkable, bikeable, and transit-friendly Columbus. This presents an opportunity to improve equitable access to parks by strengthening connections between sidewalks, bikeways, and transit routes and the city's network of parks, trails, and facilities.



Aging Population

Older adults (age 65+) make up 12 percent of the Columbus population, reflecting a 61 percent increase since 2010. This share is expected to continue growing over the next decade, with older adults projected to represent 14 percent of the population by 2029. Many older residents already participate in CRPD programs and services, and continued growth presents an opportunity to expand all-ages offerings and better respond to the recreation and wellness needs of older adults.



Concentrated Development

In 2021, the City of Columbus began the first comprehensive update to its zoning code in more than 70 years. This update allows for greater development density and encourages growth in urban areas, shifting how residents use parks and recreation spaces and increasing pressure on existing parks and facilities. As development continues, CRPD must move proactively to acquire and preserve high-quality natural areas, reserve land for future parks and trails, and right-size recreation spaces and programs to support long-term growth.



Diversity and New Community Members

Columbus is poised for continued growth over the next decade, with regional projections estimating a 16 percent population increase between 2024 and 2035, pushing the city past one million residents. Columbus is already more racially and culturally diverse than the state of Ohio, and this diversity is expected to continue increasing in the years ahead. Growth will be driven both by expanding communities of color and by the city's ongoing role as a welcoming place for New Americans. This growing and diversifying population presents an opportunity for the recreation and parks system to expand and adapt its offerings in ways that reflect the needs, interests, and cultures of the people it serves.



Health Outcomes

Columbus faces ongoing public health challenges, including air quality concerns, high infant mortality rates, and elevated rates of chronic conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and asthma. These challenges are systemic and closely tied to the built environment, environmental inequities, and historic patterns of disinvestment that have disproportionately affected communities along racial and ethnic lines. This context presents an opportunity to focus park investments in areas experiencing the greatest public health burdens. To maximize impact, parks should be part of a broader network of care. CRPD will continue to offer programs, services, and connections to resources that help residents meet basic needs and fully benefit from the health and social value of parks and recreation.



Weather and Climate

Over the past several decades, Columbus has experienced more frequent and intense storms, heat waves, and flooding. Parks and facilities play an important role in strengthening the city's resilience by reducing impacts and providing spaces that support community adaptation. Outdoor areas can be enhanced with trees and vegetation that help lower temperatures and manage stormwater, while indoor facilities can serve as cooling centers and be adapted to support communities as they prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

MISSION AND BRAND VALUES



The Columbus Recreation and Parks Department (CRPD) led the development of this plan and will continue to be actively involved by advancing progress toward its overarching goals, big moves, strategies, and actions over the next decade. Ongoing CRPD investment helps ensure the plan remains grounded in day-to-day operations while supporting a long-term commitment to implementation. CRPD's brand values form the foundation of Playbook Columbus and shape the plan's vision, goals, and actions. These values help ensure that recommendations respond directly to community needs while reflecting the department's commitment to creating vibrant, inclusive, and lasting parks and recreation experiences for all Columbus residents and visitors.

“We connect the people of our community through the power of nature, wellness, and creativity.”

Columbus Recreation and Parks Department (CRPD) Mission

CRPD is deeply committed to ensuring that every resident, regardless of age, ability, background, or neighborhood, can fully experience the benefits of parks, nature, recreation, and community wellness. This commitment is embedded throughout the department's brand values of **Joy, Community, Nature, Legacy,** and **Open** and guides how programs, facilities, and public spaces are planned and delivered.

This values-based approach ensures that Playbook Columbus remains focused on creating a recreation and parks system that is welcoming, resilient, and responsive to the needs of all residents. It reinforces the City's dedication to shaping environments where people can thrive, physically, socially, and emotionally.



BRAND VALUES

Joy

Our programs and activities are fun, celebrate culture and add to our quality of life.

Nature

As stewards of the land, we invest heavily in conserving our natural environment.

Legacy

Our assets are entrusted for generations to come, which is why we plan for tomorrow, not just today.

Community

We embed in our neighborhoods, know our participants and serve as a gathering place for all.

Open

We communicate in multiple languages, design for accessibility, program for inclusion and hire to represent the people we serve.

PLAN PROCESS SUMMARY

The Playbook Columbus Vision Plan was shaped through a community-driven process that centered resident voices and neighborhood advocates in setting priorities for the plan. Community needs were collected and analyzed throughout the process to ensure the plan represents the people it serves. Just as importantly, the process was designed to be transparent, building trust through openness, clarity, and ongoing communication. The result is a plan that reflects Columbus' values while remaining grounded in practical implementation, with strong support from City leadership and key partners.



A playful and creative approach helped build awareness and encourage participation by making engagement accessible and inviting. Technical analysis provided essential context, helping to inform and ground the plan's direction.

Public Input

The 18-month planning process used a variety of engagement tools, including a community-wide survey, polling sessions, pop-up activities at events across the city, input from the project's Advisory Committee made up of city staff and partners, key focus groups with collaborators and stewards, and feedback from CRPD staff.

Technical Analysis

A series of quantitative assessments were used to better understand Columbus' demographics and park inventory, helping identify gaps and opportunities to guide Playbook Columbus in maximizing resources and improving access to and the quality of services. This work draws on recreation trends at the national, state, and local levels, demographic profiles of the city, benchmarking comparisons with peer cities, recurring themes from previously completed cornerstone studies, and systems analysis using GIS, as described in Chapter 3.

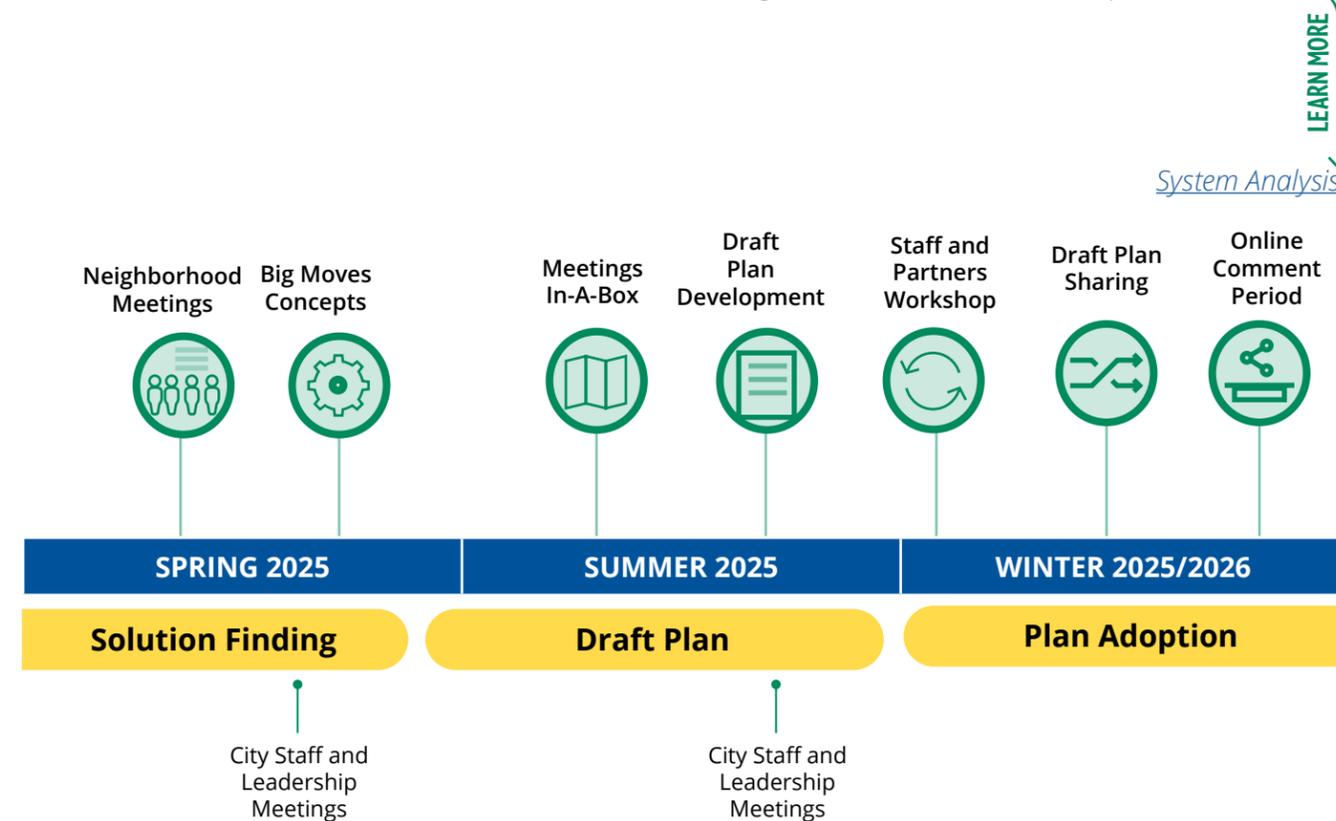
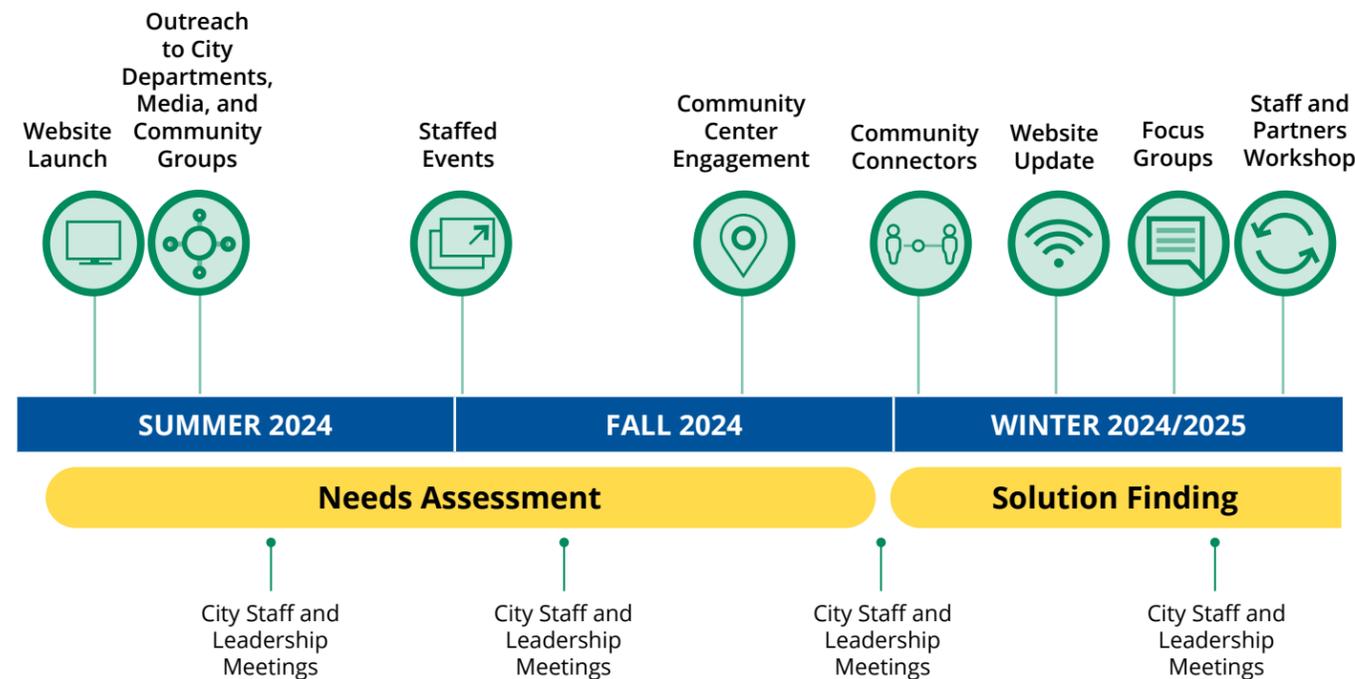


Figure 4: Planning Process Timeline

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The Needs Assessment Matrix is a key tool in the Playbook Columbus planning process that summarizes and synthesizes diverse input.

By comparing themes that emerged through public input and technical analysis, the matrix highlights where community voices align and where unique or emerging needs surfaced. It reveals patterns across methods and demographics, ensuring balanced representation and helping tailor and prioritize recommendations based on the most widely shared and urgent parks and recreation needs.

	NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES								
	COMMUNITY/ STAKEHOLDER INPUT						TECHNICAL ANALYSIS		
	Survey	Community Center Polling	Pop-up Events	Advisory Committee	Focus Groups	Department Feedback	Recreation Trends Data	Benchmark Comparisons	Spatial Analysis
	● <i>Identified common needs</i>								
Outdoor recreation + nature education	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	
Fitness classes	●		●				●	●	
Multicultural events	●				●				
Adult art / dance / painting classes / studio		●	●			●			
Nutrition / Produce markets / Free meals	●	●			●	●			
Community safety / violence prevention	●			●	●	●			
Swimming lessons/ classes	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Youth sports	●					●	●		
Senior / 50+ programs & events	●		●		●			●	
Adult sports	●					●			
Water fitness						●			
Life skills classes		●			●		●		
Theatre performances							●		
Youth summer camp					●	●		●	
Youth art / dance / painting classes / studio		●	●			●		●	
Youth after school programs				●	●	●		●	
Martial arts or self-defense						●			
Rental venues for celebrations							●		●
Youth Employment Program					●	●			
Adaptive and therapeutic programs					●	●	●	●	

Figure 5: Needs Assessment Matrix

	NEEDS ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES								
	COMMUNITY/ STAKEHOLDER INPUT						TECHNICAL ANALYSIS		
	Survey	Community Center Polling	Pop-up Events	Advisory Committee	Focus Groups	Department Feedback	Recreation Trends Data	Benchmark Comparisons	Spatial Analysis
	● <i>Identified common needs</i>								
Restroom facilities	●				●			●	●
Site furnishings (benches, signs, tables, etc)	●				●				
Picnic or shade structures / small group gathering areas	●	●			●	●			●
Lighting	●				●	●			
Ways to access the river + creeks (ie: kayak, fishing piers)	●	●		●	●	●	●		●
Playgrounds / adventure / obstacle course	●	●	●					●	●
Special event venues (ie: plazas/ lawns, outdoor markets)		●	●		●				●
Indoor aquatics (ie: pools, aquatics classes, etc.)	●	●			●	●		●	●
Paved pathways at parks	●	●			●		●	●	
Outdoor sports courts (tennis, pickleball, basketball, etc)	●		●			●			
Outdoor aquatics / pools / splash pads	●	●	●				●	●	●
Indoor gathering spaces (ie: classrooms, arts, youth hubs, etc.)	●		●		●			●	
Public art / history / cultural displays	●			●	●	●		●	●
Nature education areas and facilities	●		●		●	●	●		●
Trees and landscape features/plantings	●				●	●			●
Natural areas / forests / prairies and meadows	●	●			●	●	●	●	●
Athletic fields (soccer, football, softball, baseball, etc.)			●						
Greenway trails	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bike skills park / BMX / Bike Pump tracks		●				●	●		●
Dog parks									●
Fitness Stations / Wellness		●	●		●		●	●	●
Therapeutic recreation facilities		●			●	●		●	
Indoor weight rooms						●	●		
Indoor gymnasiums / sports courts		●				●	●	●	
Skateboard / roller skating / scootering features						●			●
Indoor art classes / studios		●					●		

PUBLIC INPUT | OVERVIEW

To ensure broad and inclusive community input, the planning process used a wide range of outreach tools. Pop-up tabling events were held at 22 locations across all nine City Council districts to build awareness, gather early input, and promote the community survey. Polling boards were placed at 28 community centers, giving both adults and youth the opportunity to weigh in on key recreation and park priorities. The community survey was available in English, Spanish, and Somali and was distributed through representative sampling, QR codes at events, and text messages sent to 50,000 residents. To further expand awareness, the project used a diverse promotion strategy that included media outreach, social media, printed materials, and displays at libraries, parks, and other community hubs. Focus groups offered deeper insight into specific community needs, highlighting priorities such as safety, cultural relevance, intergenerational spaces, access to nature, and coordination with community partners. The final community touchpoint included a series of neighborhood meetings, which played a key role in the later stages of the project by meeting residents where they are and gathering input on the plan's goals and big moves that shape the final recommendations. Together, these outreach efforts ensured the planning process was informed by a wide range of voices and lived experiences from across the city.



150
yard sign advertisements

50,000
survey text messages sent

110
locations with outreach materials

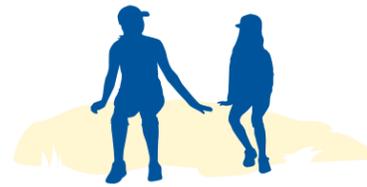
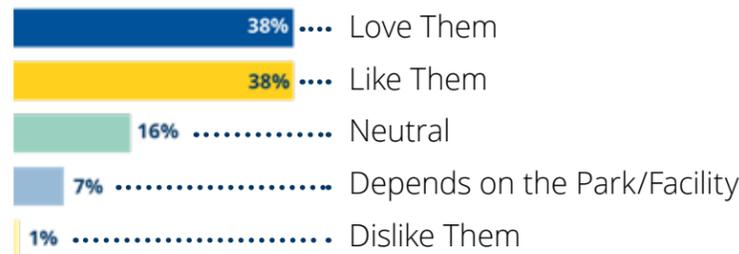
200+
emails sent to key stakeholders



Figure 6: Promotion and Outreach

Affinity for Parks

When asked how they feel about parks, greenway trails, and recreation facilities in Columbus, survey respondents reported:



Spaces in Need of Improvement

Survey respondents identified the following as priorities for improvement:

- Restroom facilities
- Site furnishings (benches, signs, tables, etc.)
- Picnic or shade structures
- Lighting
- Ways to access rivers, creeks, and reservoirs
- Playgrounds
- Indoor pools
- Trees and landscape features
- Outdoor sports courts
- Indoor and large group gathering spaces
- Natural areas, forests, and prairies
- Greenway trails
- Outdoor aquatics (pools, splash pads)
- Public art, historic elements, and cultural displays



Satisfaction with Current Offerings

Survey respondents were most satisfied with:

- Communication in their **preferred language**
- Available **parking**
- Walking or bike trail **accessibility**
- Park **hours**

Survey respondents were moderately satisfied with:

- The **types of programs and amenities**
- Park **signage**
- Available **information** about what types of facilities, programs, parks, and trails are offered
- Available **facilities**
- Cleanliness and **maintenance**
- The **welcoming** atmosphere
- Travel **distance**

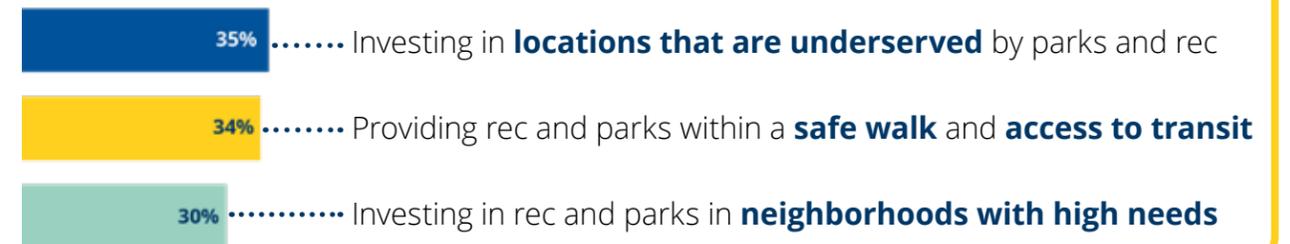
Survey respondents were least satisfied with:

- Accessible spaces and amenities for **persons with disabilities**
- Availability of facilities and services during inclement weather and **all-weather activity offerings**
- Feelings of **safety** and **security**
- Available **restrooms**



Fair Access and Benefits

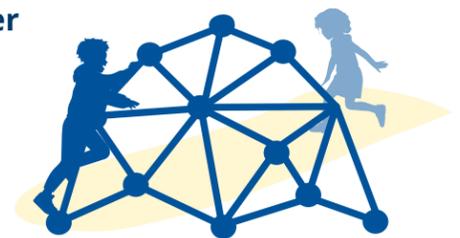
To ensure everyone has fair access and benefits, the community would prefer that CRPD focus on:



Youth Voices

In the future, youth would like to see more:

- Opportunities for **swimming** and interacting with **water**
- Indoor **court sports**
- Adventure and **obstacle courses**
- Modern **playgrounds**
- Events and **celebrations**
- Summer **camps**
- Skateboarding, biking, and scootering (**wheeled sports**)



Several themes were shared among all forms of input, reflecting the top priorities and needs identified by the community for recreation and parks in Columbus.

Maintenance and Upgrades

One of the strongest themes was the need for maintenance and upgrades to existing facilities, especially **restrooms, site furnishings, lighting, and playgrounds**. Many respondents cited concerns with **cleanliness, accessibility, and safety** as barriers to park use, underscoring the importance of regular maintenance and thoughtful design updates.



Program Diversity + Accessibility

Residents expressed a desire for **culturally inclusive offerings** and more options for **seniors, youth, and working adults**. Barriers such as **unclear information, limited transit, and inconvenient schedules** were noted, along with growing interest in **adult fitness, self-defense, and recreational leagues**. Support for **women's and girls' sports** emerged consistently, aligning with citywide goals to elevate Columbus as a leader in women's athletics.



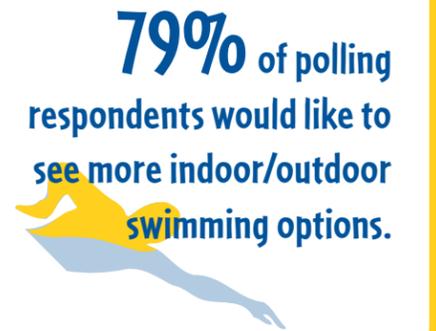
Connectivity + Accessibility

Connectivity and accessibility, especially via **improved trails, paths, and ADA-accessible infrastructure**, were identified as essential to enhancing access to recreation for all. 37% of survey respondents indicated they would like to see additional trails for hiking, biking, wheels, or walking. The community also called for more **safe, connected routes linking parks to neighborhoods**.



Aquatics

Swimming lessons and **access to indoor/outdoor pools** were among the most requested programs and amenities, highlighting strong community demand for **expanded water-related programming and facilities**. During community center polling, both youth and adults selected swimming, aquatic, and water-related options as their #1 or #2 priority for facilities, parks, programs, and active recreation.



Other Key Themes



As part of the technical analysis, Playbook Columbus conducted thorough demographic analysis during the initial stages of the project to understand population patterns, characteristics and changes that help inform future recreation and park needs.

Key Numbers

927,348

city resident population

1,007,914

daytime population

69.1/100

diversity index (race + ethnicity)

74,803

New American population

16%

expected population growth by 2035

Data sources: 2024 ESRI projections; American Community Survey 2023

Income

Columbus' median household income (\$65,011) trails below the state median and is significantly below the national median. Additionally, 18.1% of Columbus residents live below the poverty line, compared to 13.4% in the state of Ohio and 12.5% nationwide.

Household Characteristics

Many household indicators impact recreation and park access, including housing affordability and vehicle access. Columbus' Housing Affordability Index (HAI) score of 86 means that a median-income household does not have enough income to qualify for a mortgage on a median-priced home. It is also of note that 11% of households in Columbus do not have access to a vehicle.

Diversity

Columbus is becoming increasingly diverse, with a fast-growing population of New Americans that reached nearly 75,000 in 2023, representing a 30% increase since 2010. The city's Diversity Index of 69.1 is significantly higher than the state average and is expected to continue rising.

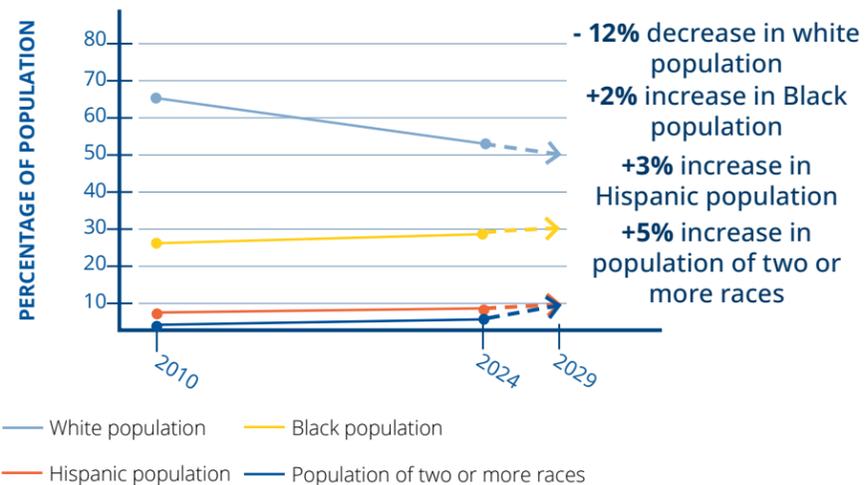


Figure 7: Population Growth Trends by Race and Ethnicity

Source: 2024 ESRI data, 2029 Esri forecasts, US Census Bureau 2010 decennial census data

Age

Columbus has a younger population than state and national averages, with a median age of 33.4 and a large share of children under age 18. Older adults (age 65 and up) make up the smallest percentage of Columbus' population, but the size of this cohort increased by 61% between 2010 and 2024 and is projected to continue growing across the metro area into the future.

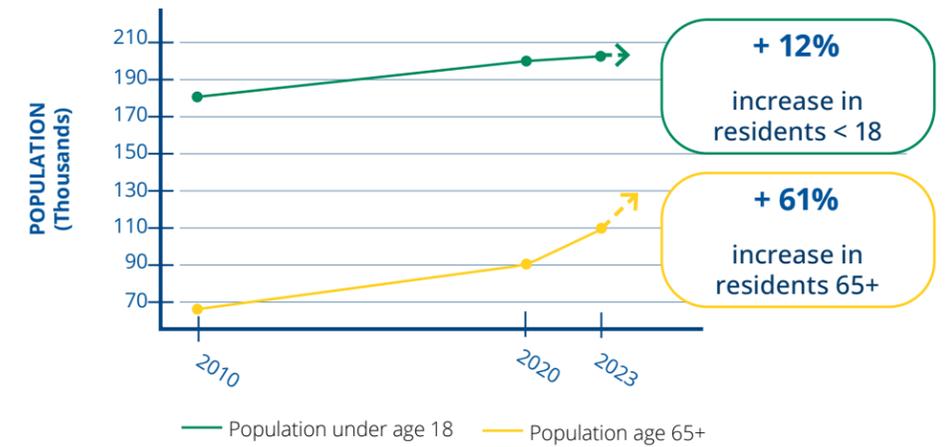


Figure 8: Population Growth Trends by Age

Source: 2024 ESRI projections, American Community Survey 2023, and MORPC Transportation Plan

Population Growth

As the second-largest city in the Midwest (behind Chicago), Columbus' population grew by 17% between 2010 and 2020. According to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, Franklin County is expected to absorb roughly half of the region's growth over the next decade. Columbus' population is projected to reach 1,073,624 residents living in 435,378 households by 2035.

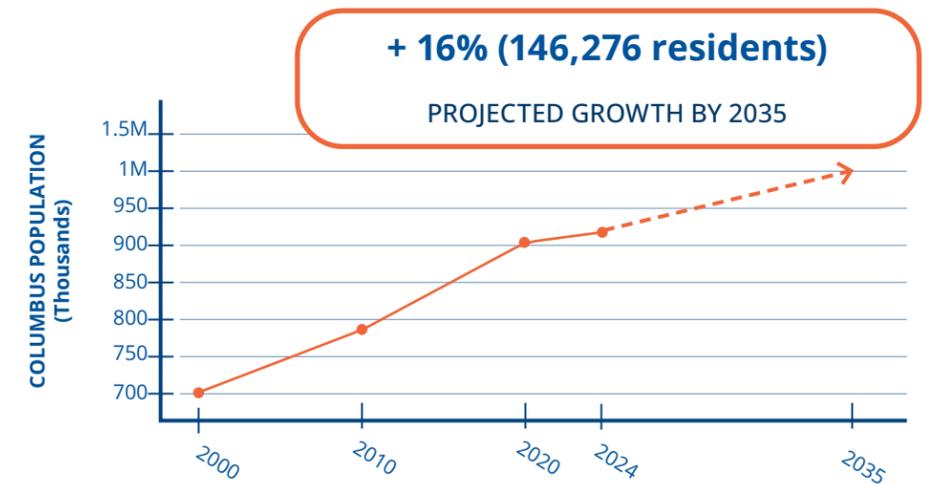


Figure 9: Population Growth Projections

Source: 2024 ESRI projections, American Community Survey 2023, and MORPC Transportation Plan

The demographic analysis revealed opportunities and challenges that informed the planning process and plan recommendations.



Accessibility

Disability inclusion is an important consideration for future parks and recreation planning in Columbus. CRPD must continue its ongoing efforts across all programs and facilities to reduce barriers and design spaces and services that are accessible and welcoming to residents of all abilities.

Safety

Like many large cities, Columbus faces safety challenges that influence how residents experience and use parks and public spaces. The city's total crime index is 156, well above the national average of 100. Safety is a key priority for City leadership, and recreation and parks has a crucial role to play in addressing this priority. Research shows that well-designed and well-maintained green spaces can help improve safety by strengthening social connections, reducing stress, and increasing everyday presence and visibility in neighborhoods.

It is important to note that in 2023, 40% of crime victims and suspects were age 21 or younger. CRPD provides critical intervention programming for youth, including job readiness, mentorship, and resource linkages, with proven connections to crime reduction.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[Programs and Services](#)

Health

Columbus faces ongoing public health challenges, including high infant mortality and low overall health rankings, both of which have implications for recreation and parks planning. In 2023, Franklin County's infant mortality rate was 7.4, notably higher than the national rate of 5.44. Non-Hispanic Black infants were disproportionately affected, accounting for 33% of births but 56% of infant deaths. City initiatives such as CelebrateOne work to address these disparities by focusing on social and environmental factors, many of which can be supported through parks and recreation. Access to green space, opportunities for physical activity, and support for maternal mental health all play a role in improving outcomes for families.

Broader health indicators further underscore the importance of fair access to parks and wellness programming. Ohio ranks 44th in the nation for overall health value, with high rates of smoking at 17%, physical inactivity at 25%, depression at 25%, and drug overdose deaths at 47.2 per 100,000 residents. For Playbook Columbus, these conditions point to the need for investments that promote community health, stress reduction, and active living, particularly in underserved areas. CRPD also has a crucial role to play in addressing social determinants of health, one of the priority health outcomes identified in the Franklin County Health Map 2025.



Broader recreation trends contextualize trends in Columbus and can help inform future planning.

Racquet sports are the fastest-growing activity type.

Inactivity rates are highest among seniors and low-income households.

Sports participation among older youth (ages 13-17) increased by 7% between 2022 and 2023.

National participation in outdoor recreation increased steadily from 51% in 2018 to 57% in 2023.

national trends

state trends

The recreation facilities with the highest demand statewide are trails.

By studying national recreation trends, statewide data from Ohio, and activity patterns specific to the City of Columbus, CRPD can align its planning decisions with how people are choosing to play, stay active, and engage with parks locally and beyond. This approach supports investments that reflect real trends and community needs, helping parks and programs remain relevant, responsive, and effective.

National Trends

Participation in recreational activities has increased nationally by 14% over the past decade, with 78.8% of the population now engaging in at least one activity each year. Fitness sports have the highest number of participants, followed by outdoor sports, individual sports, and team sports. Racquet sports, which is considered as a distinct category, continues to be the fastest-growing type of activity.

Participation in outdoor recreation steadily increased between 2018 and 2023. In 2023, 7.7 million Americans tried outdoor recreation for the first time, and most continued participating after their initial experience. The outdoor recreation participant base is also becoming more diverse, with growing participation among women, people of color, and older adults.

National inactivity rates vary by age and income. Adults age 65 and older experience the highest rates of inactivity at 28 percent, while youth ages 13 to 17 are the least inactive. Households earning less than \$25,000 have an inactivity rate of 38.2 percent, compared to 13.1 percent among households earning more than \$100,000.

Statewide Trends

Statewide demand for new recreation facilities is highest for trails of all types, followed by wildlife viewing and birding areas. A growing senior population, along with rising activity levels among older adults, is expected to continue shaping recreation trends statewide.

For youth, financial barriers remain a challenge. In Central Ohio, 20% of youth reported that costs prevent them from participating in organized sports more often. These barriers affect Black youth more than white youth and impact elementary-age children more than middle and high school students.

Local Trends

At the local level, the most common recreation activities for adults include walking for exercise, hiking, weightlifting, swimming, running, biking, yoga, fishing, aerobics, and golf. Participation in volleyball, soccer, football, and basketball is higher than the national average, while pickleball and golf participation is lower.

Locally, adult participation in fitness activities such as running and jogging is slightly above the national average, while pilates, swimming, and walking for exercise fall slightly below the national average. Outdoor activity participation is similar to national levels, though hiking, walking, and fishing occur at somewhat lower rates.

Walking for exercise is expected to see the greatest growth between 2025 and 2028, along with increases in equipment-based exercise, aerobics, weightlifting, and yoga. Among outdoor activities, hiking, running, biking, swimming, and camping are projected to grow the most.

A 2020 survey found that 81% of Columbus youth feel they have a safe place in their neighborhood to play with friends. However, perceptions of safety vary, with female youth reporting lower levels of comfort than males.

Source: The Aspen Institute State of Play Central Ohio, 2024 Ohio Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, ESRI Business Analyst, 2024 Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 2024 Outdoor Industry Association Participation Trends Report

Physical inactivity prevalence in Ohio is 26.9%, higher than the national average of 25.3%.

state trends

local trends

Basketball, soccer, volleyball, and football have notably higher participation in Columbus compared to national levels.

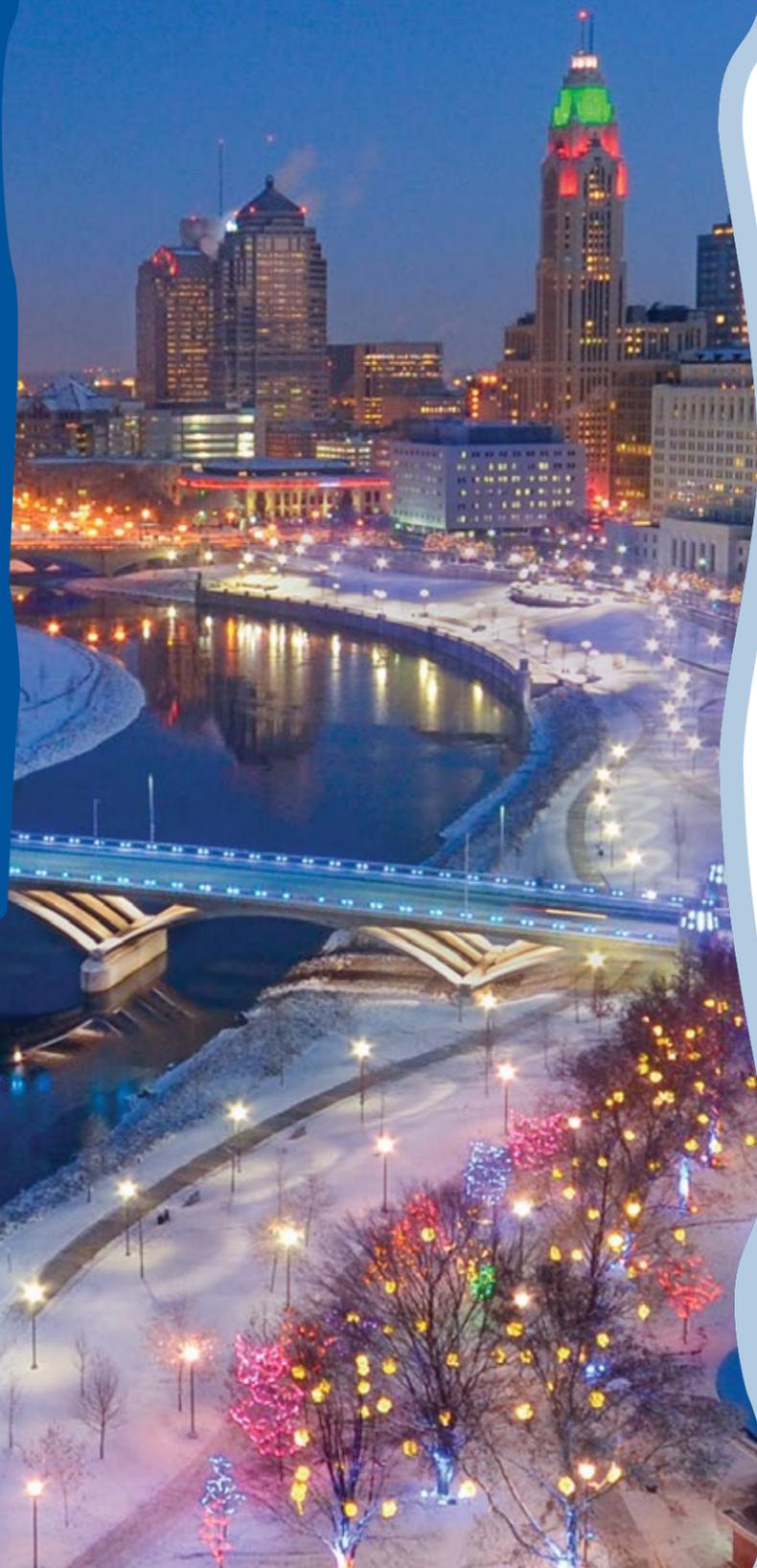
34% of residents engage in walking for exercise, making it the most popular form of exercise in Columbus.

Other popular forms of exercise include hiking, aerobics/equipment, weightlifting, swimming, running, biking, yoga, fishing, and golf.

CHAPTER 3

SYSTEM ANALYSIS

- Park Classifications
- Conditions Assessment
- Access
- Programs and Services
- Level of Service
- Benchmarking
- Priority Areas
- Environmental Analysis
- Operations
- Preparing for Growth



An exceptional recreation and park system is part of what makes Columbus unique. As the city grows and changes, Playbook Columbus looks closely at the current system to understand community needs and set a plan for the next ten years.

Recreation and parks in Columbus aren't just about having fun—they are essential to community wellbeing. Parks, programs, and services play a critical role in improving mental and physical health, enriching the lives of youth, protecting the environment, and strengthening both the economy and overall quality of life.

Sustaining an exceptional recreation and park system requires periodic evaluation of the system's offerings and quality to ensure investment is well-placed. This chapter shares key findings from a system-wide analysis that critically examines how the city's recreation and parks are performing to identify where strengths exist and where gaps or inequities need to be addressed. The assessment considers the condition of parks and facilities, locations and use, participation in programs and services, comparison to other

cities' offerings and alignment with broader environmental goals. It also anticipates needs for the next decade to identify how the system can adapt to ongoing growth and demographic shifts. Together, these insights form the foundation for the Playbook's Big Moves, Goals, and Strategies.



SYSTEM ANALYSIS

Grounding stakeholder and community engagement in technical analysis creates a plan that is both visionary and pragmatic. That balance is what makes Columbus' recreation and parks system special: it explores innovative approaches that respond directly to the community's needs, preferences, and daily experiences. System analysis links community priorities with current conditions, allowing CRPD to measure key outcomes and make strategic investments in programs, services, and facilities.

CRPD uses six Land Plan Areas for system analysis:

- **In-Town Land Plan Area**
- **Central Land Plan Area**
- **Northeast Land Plan Area**
- **Northwest Land Plan Area**
- **Southeast Land Plan Area**
- **Southwest Land Plan Area**

Land Plan Areas						
	Square Mileage	2023 Population	Parks	Park Acres	Recreation Centers	Pools
In-Town	24.13	157,798	104	1,891	9	6
Central	34.9	120,562	77	1,337	8	1
Northeast	27.3	144,050	54	3,046	2	0
Northwest	29.4	142,956	45	2,293	2	0
Southeast	62.2	188,809	101	1,097	4	1
Southwest	46.5	172,900	77	2,427	3	1

Figure 10: Land Plan Areas Overview Table

Unless otherwise specified, System Analysis findings are based on Columbus' inventory of parks, facilities, and amenities current as of March 2025.

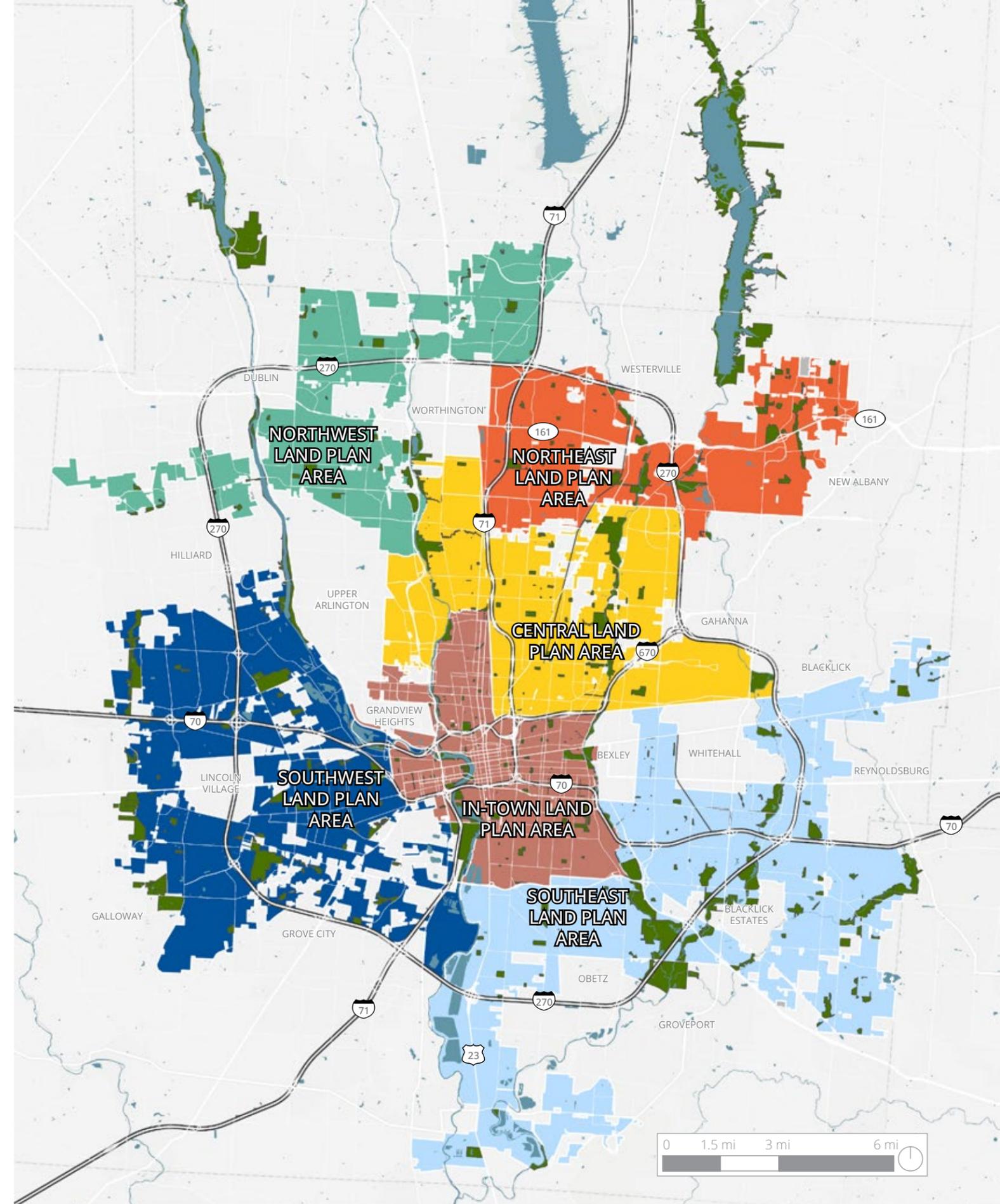


Figure 11: Land Plan Areas Map

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Park Classifications establish a common language around the types of amenities and experiences that are offered by various park types. They provide a framework for managing and designing parks to maintain a balanced system and respond to local needs. CRPD currently recognizes thirteen categories of land holdings, nine of which are considered park types (Figure 12).

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Classification	Description	Number	Acres	
Regional Park	Developed parks that have a metropolitan draw and serve multiple communities for both active and passive uses. They serve as a destination for recreation tourism, enhance the identity of the region, and provide enough interest for a half- to full-day experience. They also often host large-scale organized events, like sporting events and festivals.	27	2,719	
Community Park	Developed parks with both active and passive uses that serve two or more neighborhoods. Community parks have the capacity for programmed and/or facilitated recreation.	52	1,358	
Neighborhood Park	Developed parks with an emphasis on both active and passive uses that are typically self-directed (not programmed or facilitated by CRPD). These parks usually serve residents of the immediately surrounding neighborhood or within a half-mile radius.	114	862	
Neighborhood Open Space	Developed parks that serve as open space for residents' passive recreation. They do not include a playground or other active recreation facilities, but they are maintained by CRPD. These parks are intended to serve residents within a 10-minute walk (half-mile radius).	78	126	
Conservation Area	Parkland acquired by CRPD to protect and preserve natural areas such as forests, wetlands, and riparian corridors. The primary purpose of these areas is the conservation of natural resources.	119	1,887	
Nature Preserve	Parkland that has been officially designated through the process established in the City of Columbus Nature Preserve Code 919.27	25	2,937	
Reservoir	Parkland and water associated with in-stream drinking water reservoirs. Co-managed by Columbus Water & Power.	3	3,499	
Golf Course	Property used as a standalone golf course where golf is the primary recreation opportunity.	6	915	
Parkland Reserve	Properties acquired by CRPD to preserve green space with the intent of developing it as future parkland in an unspecified time frame.	34	943	
Total		458	15,247	

Figure 12: Park Classifications Table

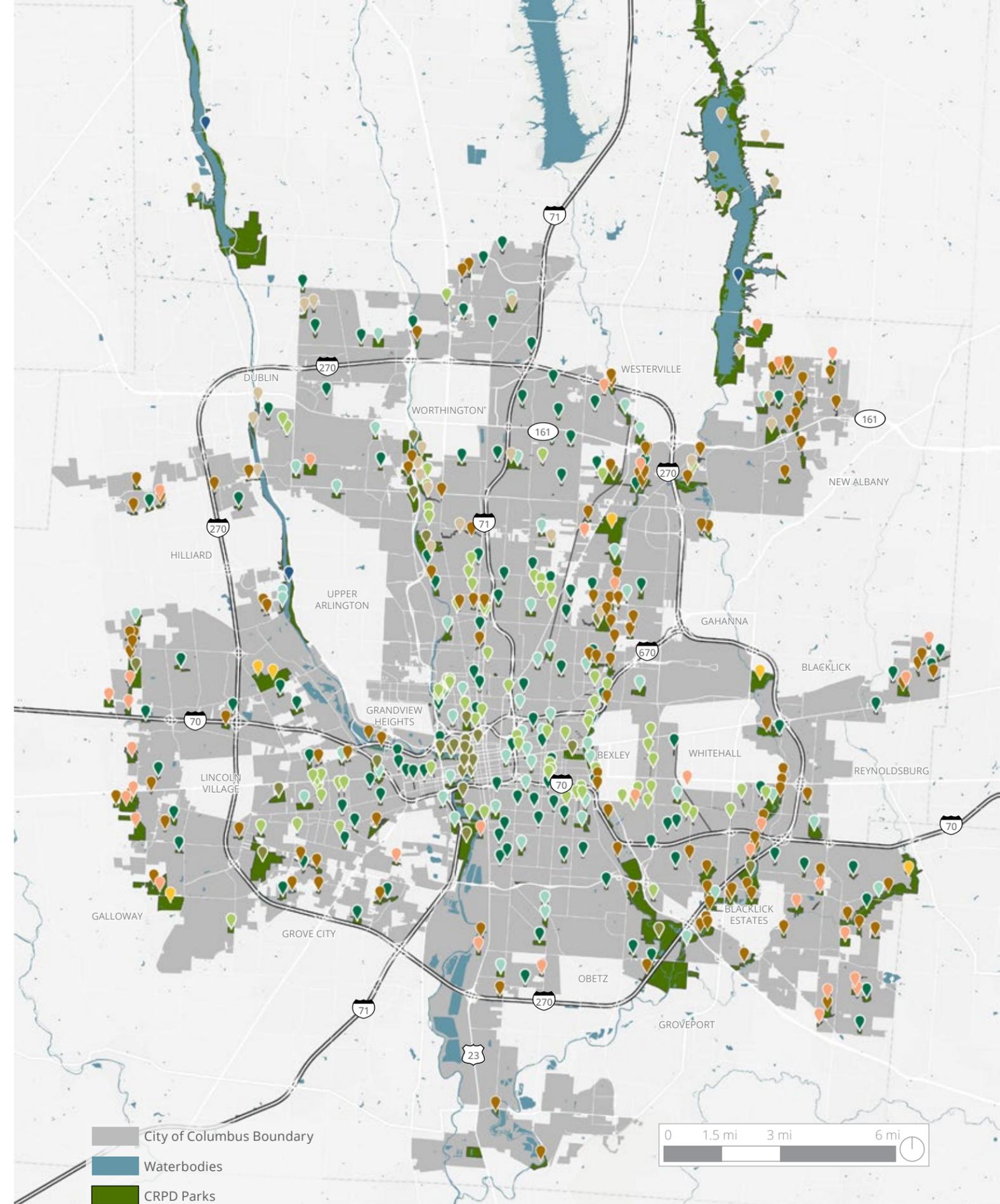


Figure 13: Park Classifications Map

CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

The quality of parks directly impacts the value and experience they provide to users. In fact, 62% of survey respondents listed “renovating and upgrading existing parks, recreation facilities, and natural areas” as their short-term priority for the department. By analyzing maintenance needs, infrastructure quality, and overall park health, CRPD can better contextualize the classifications, identify gaps, and prioritize improvements to ensure all residents have access to well-maintained, safe, and enjoyable spaces.

CRPD Park and Facility Operations staff provided condition ratings for all 270 developed parks (Regional, Community, Neighborhood, and Neighborhood Open Space), and the department completed professional engineering audits of each recreation center. Citywide, parks received an average condition rating of “Good,” while recreation centers earned an average score of “Great,” reflecting generally strong infrastructure across the system. Park condition ratings were based on a composite score of grounds, amenities, hard surfaces, and playground conditions, with some ratings updated to reflect community input. Recreation center condition ratings were measured using Facility Condition Index (FCI), which is a ratio that compares the cost of needed repairs and maintenance to the current replacement value of the facility. The higher the percentage, the greater the need for repair, renovation or replacement.

Staff may rate parks differently than how residents perceive the quality of parks in their neighborhood. During the Neighborhood Meetings, participants were asked to share their opinion on park quality. This feedback was considered alongside the staff’s. For some parks, this led to a change in condition rating.



Figure 14: Example Criteria for Condition Ratings

CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT | FINDINGS BY LAND PLAN AREA

The city's six Land Plan Areas were used to identify where well-maintained parks and recreation centers are concentrated and where additional attention may be needed. The maps help identify neighborhoods where parks and recreation centers are in need of significant repairs or renovations. This analysis is helpful for long-term planning, too: even parks and recreation centers that are currently rated "Good," particularly those that are heavily used, are likely to decline in quality over the next ten years.

- The **Northwest Land Plan Area** does not contain any parks in "Great" condition and will likely have significant maintenance needs over the next ten years.
- 95% of parks in the **Central Land Plan Area** are in "Good" or "Fair" condition. The area will likely have significant maintenance needs over the next ten years.
- Residents in the **Southwest Land Plan Area** are most likely to live next to a park that is not in good condition, with 27% of the area's parks rated "Fair" or "Poor".
- Residents in the **Northeast, In-Town and Southeast Land Plan Areas** are most likely to live near a park in "Great" condition.

CONDITION RATING DEFINITIONS

Rating	Rating Definition	FCI Range	% of centers	% of parks	Acres	Icon
Great	Well-maintained, fields and courts are playable, grounds are even, all amenities are working well, surfaces are highly functional with no wear.	< 15	59%	16%	553	Green pin
Good	Some maintenance needed, fields and courts are playable with minor wear, amenities function as needed with mild wear, some cracks in surfaces larger than the typical wheelchair or stroller wheel.	15-30	31%	70%	3,534	Blue pin
Fair	Visible signs of ground repair needed, fields and courts are playable but deteriorating, amenities are aged, many cracks in surfaces larger than the typical wheelchair or stroller wheel.	30-60	5%	13%	930	Yellow pin
Poor	Major damage beyond parks staff capacity, fields and courts are not playable, amenities are not functional, out of service or missing, full restoration of surfaces is needed.	> 60	5%	1%	3	Red pin

Figure 15: Condition Rating Definitions

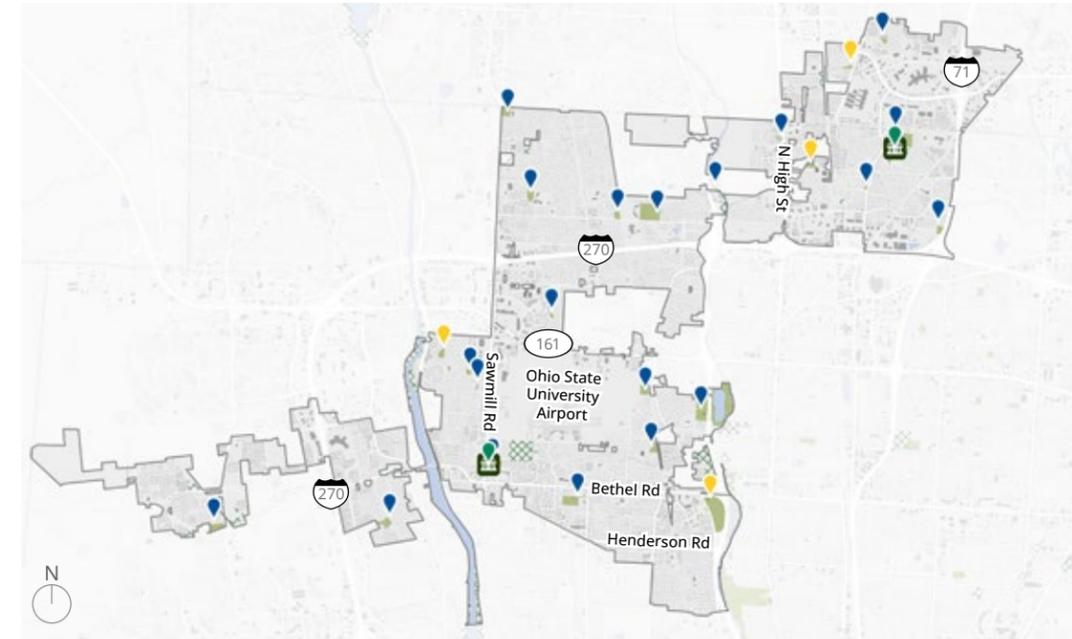


Figure 16: Northwest Land Plan Area Conditions

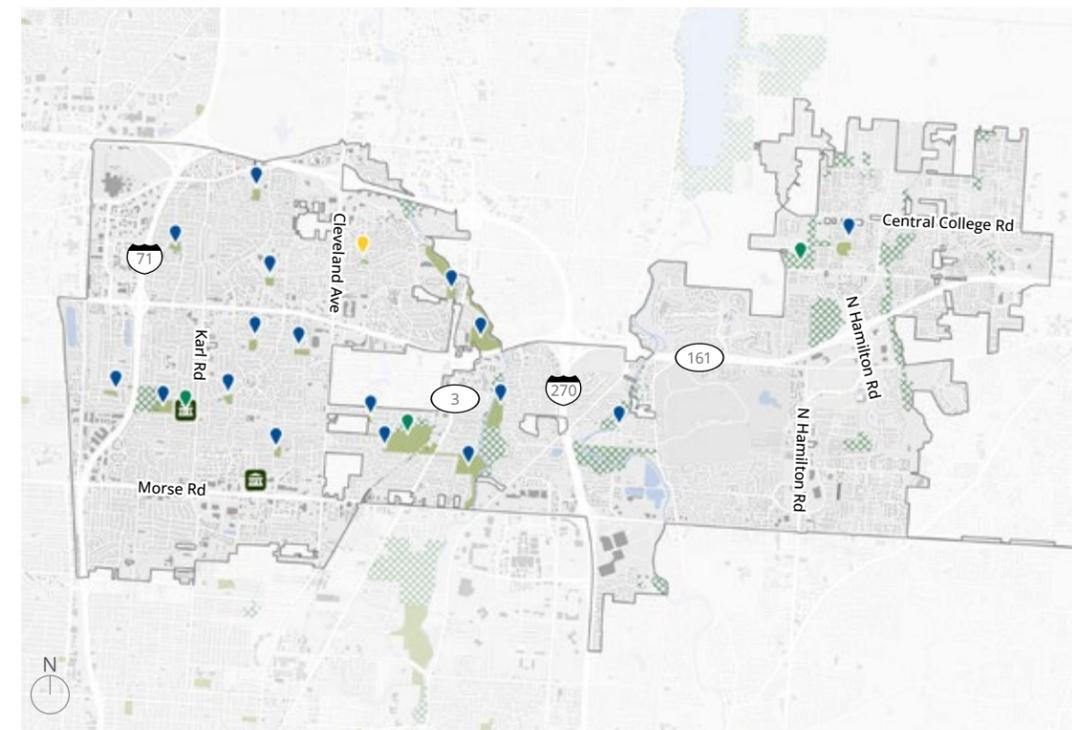
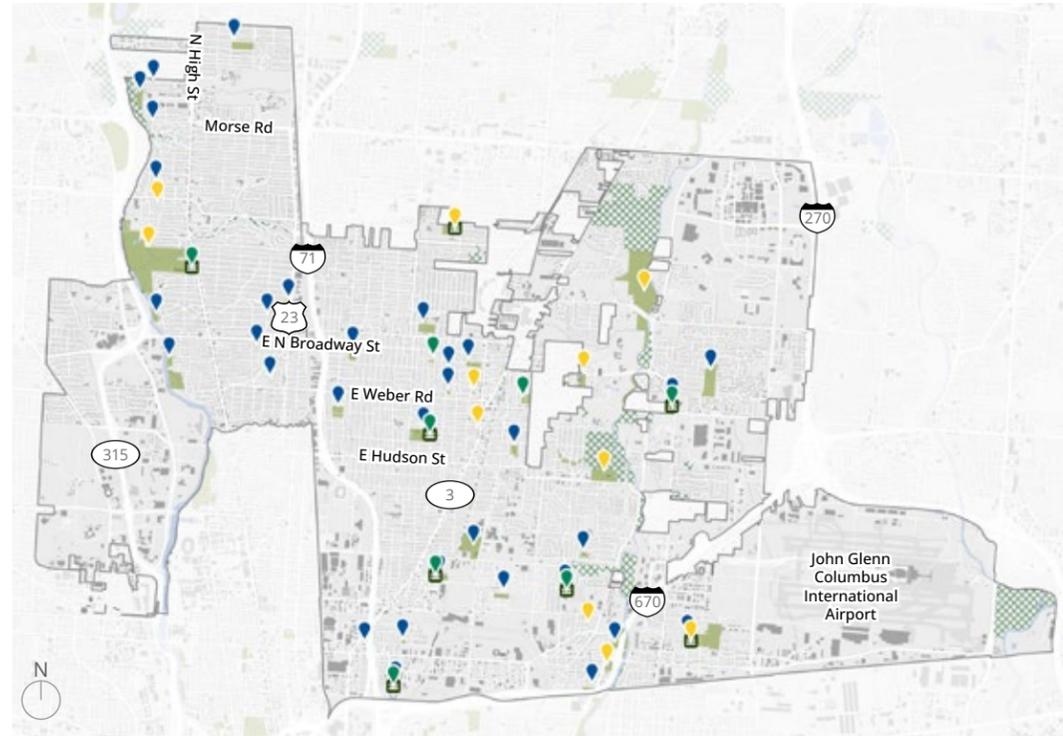


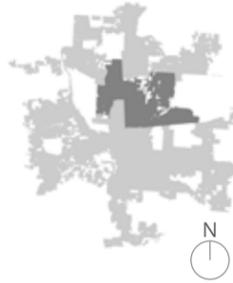
Figure 17: Northeast Land Plan Area Conditions

Land Plan Area Boundary
 Waterbodies
 CRPD Parks Evaluated
 Other CRPD Parks
 Recreation Centers

CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT | FINDINGS BY LAND PLAN AREA



CENTRAL LAND PLAN AREA



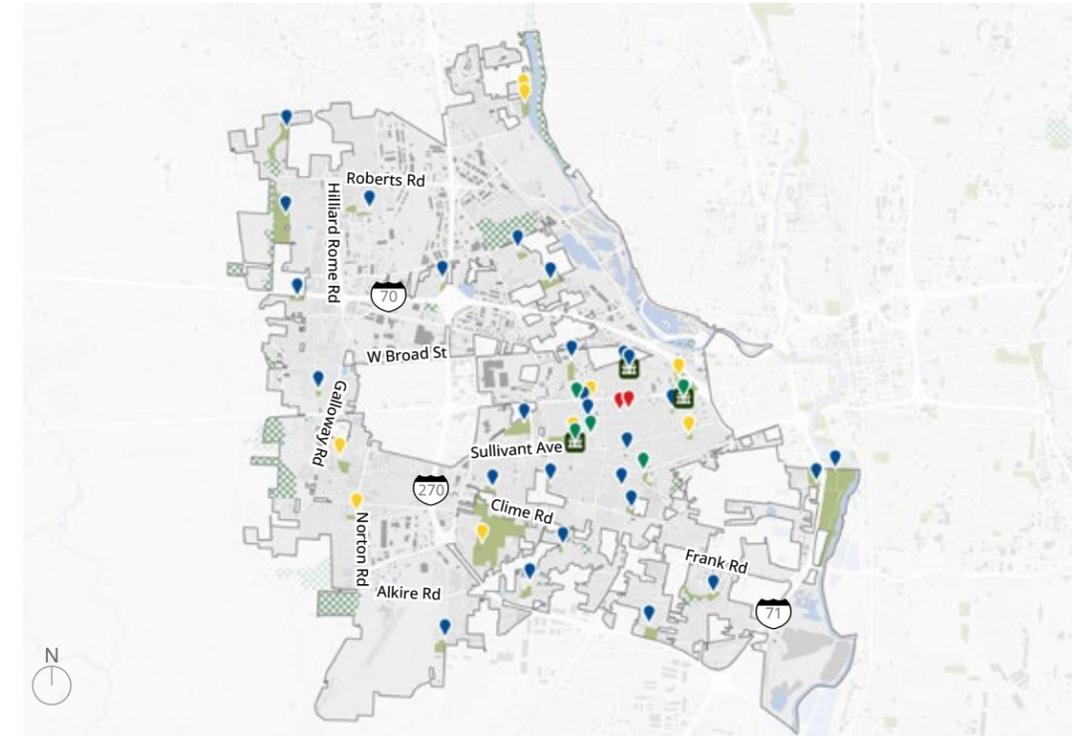
CENTER CONDITION

- 75% Great
- 25% Fair

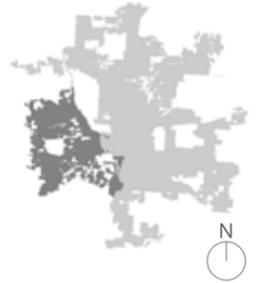
PARK CONDITION

- 5% Great
- 75% Good
- 20% Fair

Figure 18: Central Land Plan Area Conditions



SOUTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA



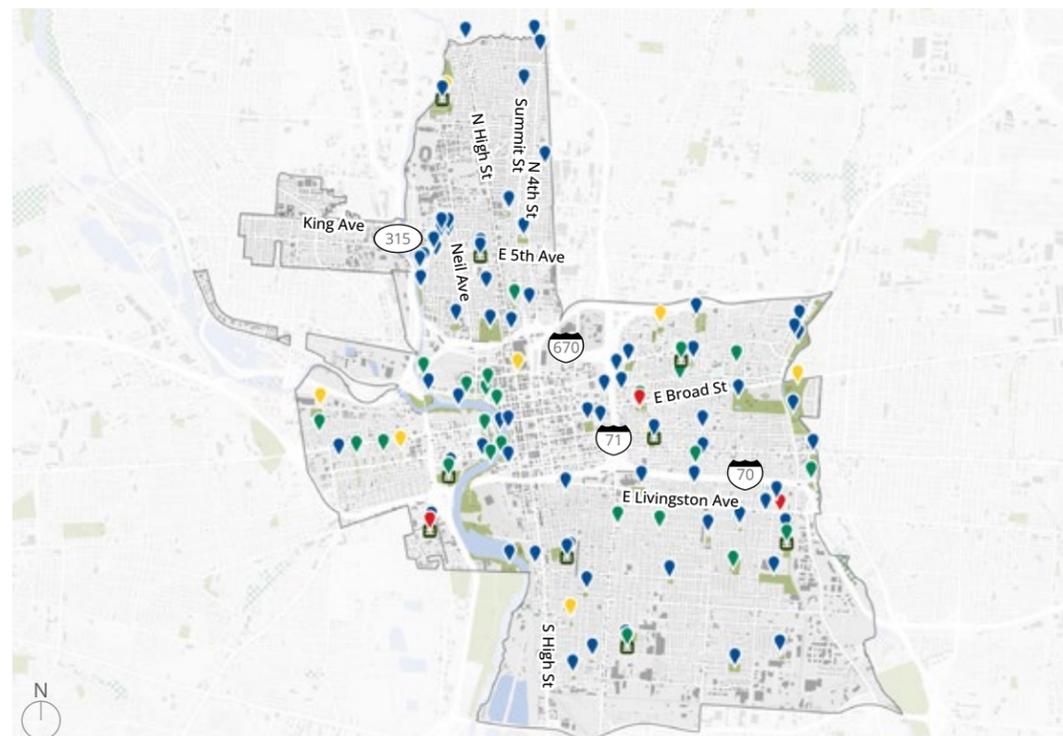
CENTER CONDITION

- 67% Great
- 33% Fair

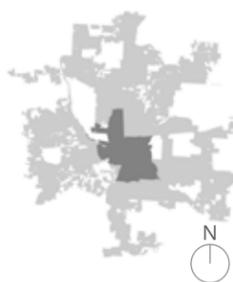
PARK CONDITION

- 10% Great
- 63% Good
- 22% Fair
- 5% Fair

Figure 20: Southwest Land Plan Area Conditions



IN-TOWN LAND PLAN AREA



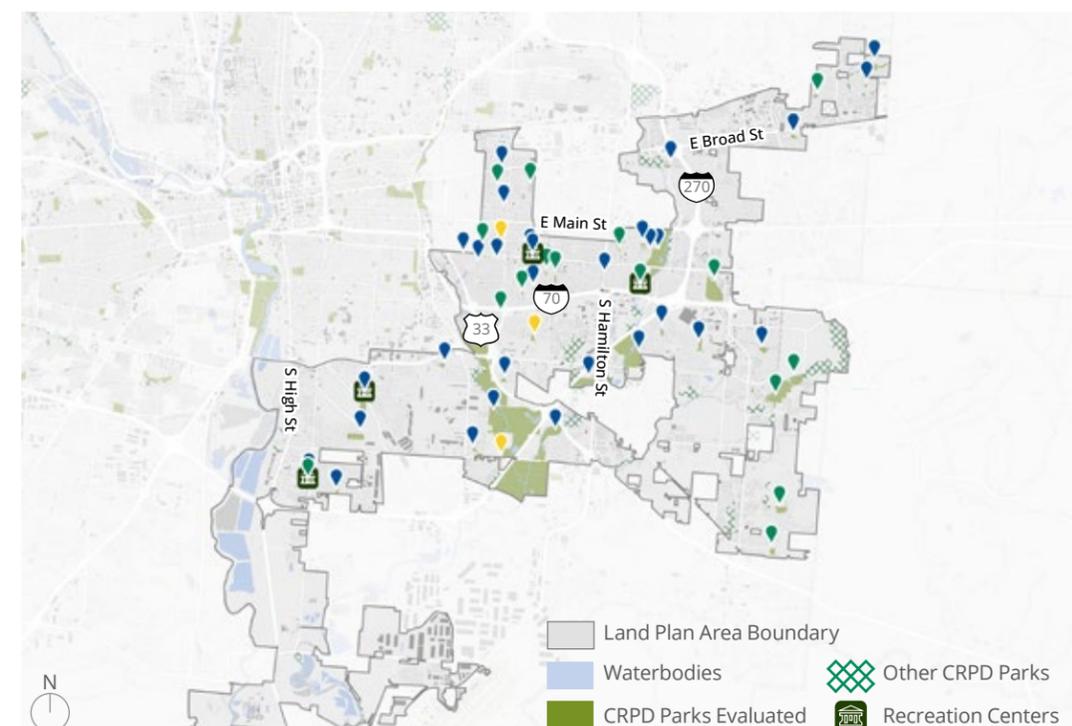
CENTER CONDITION

- 33% Great
- 50% Good
- 17% Poor

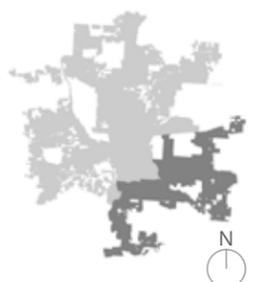
PARK CONDITION

- 22% Great
- 68% Good
- 9% Fair
- 1% Poor

Figure 19: In-Town Land Plan Area Conditions



SOUTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA



CENTER CONDITION

- 50% Great
- 50% Fair

PARK CONDITION

- 30% Great
- 64% Good
- 6% Fair

Figure 21: Southeast Land Plan Area Conditions

ACCESS TO PARKS

For a quality park system to meet people's needs, it must offer locations within reach by walking, biking, transit, or a short drive. While Columbus is fortunate to have 458 parks and 28 community centers, it is important that they are distributed to provide safe and convenient access across the city. When planning where new parks, trails, and facilities will be located, CRPD must also align with citywide trends like future growth areas and transportation improvements.

Many cities use a 10-minute walk (generally considered to be half a mile) as their standard for park access. According to a 2025 Trust for Public Lands report, 76% of people across the 100 most populous cities live within a 10-minute walk of a park. Figure 22 looks at walksheds based on CRPD parks and trails, illustrating how proximity to parks varies by location and highlighting where gaps in access exist. The analysis considered factors like sidewalk availability and busy road crossings to identify gap areas. Residential areas without park access are shown in red on the map in Figure 22. The areas within the city boundary shown in dark grey represent non-residential areas without park access, like quarries, the airport, and Ohio State University.

Residential areas without park access are located in each of the six Land Plan Areas, with the largest gaps at the edges of the city. Addressing gaps in park access is about more than proximity: it is about creating welcoming, safe, and usable routes for all ages and abilities. This includes addressing barriers like a lack of shade, limited lighting, or steep grades that can discourage walking or biking. It also means ensuring that transit stops are well-connected to parks and that trail systems link seamlessly to neighborhoods, schools, and community hubs.

LEARN MORE

[Access to Partner Parks](#)

68.2%
of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a CRPD park or trail

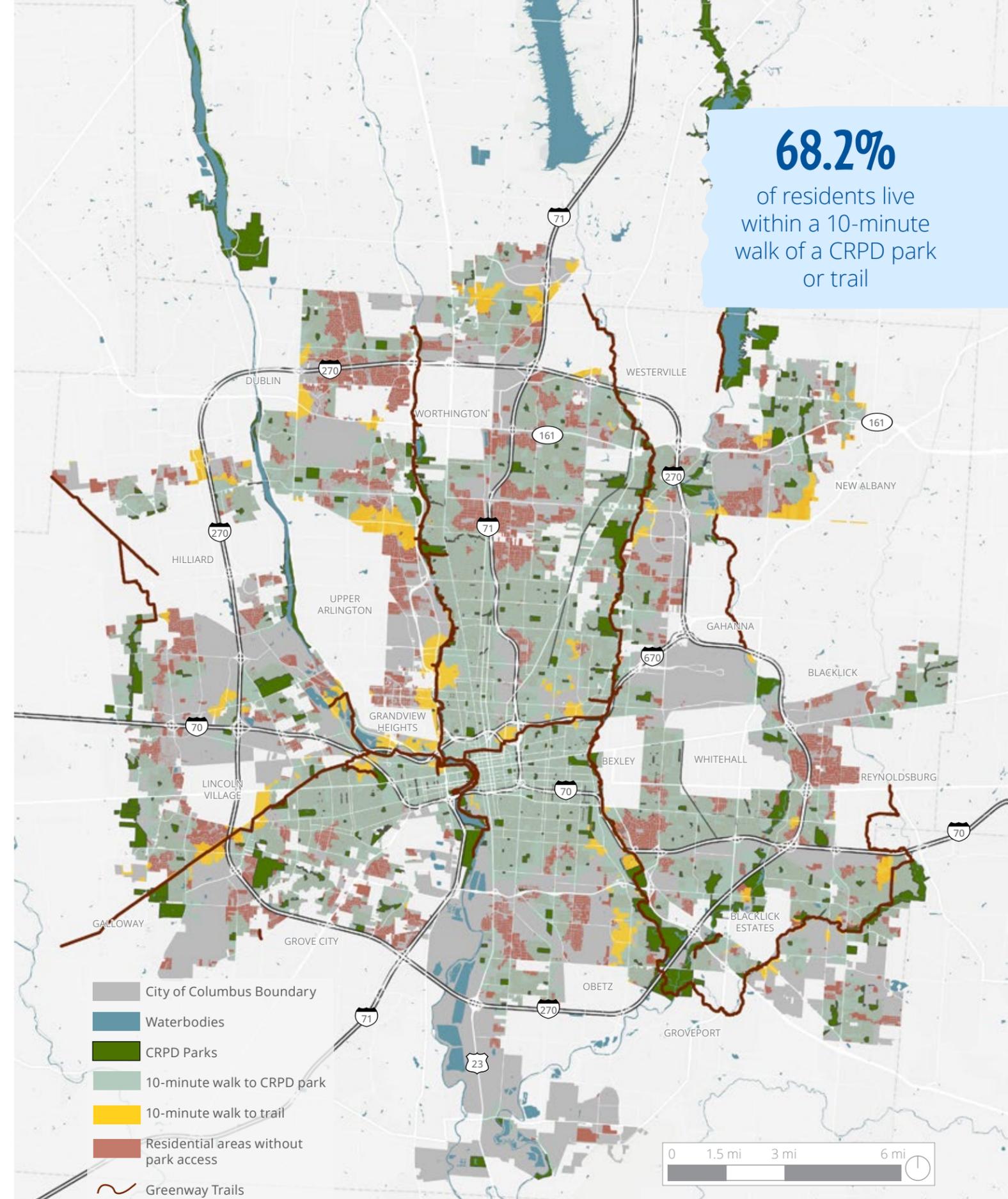


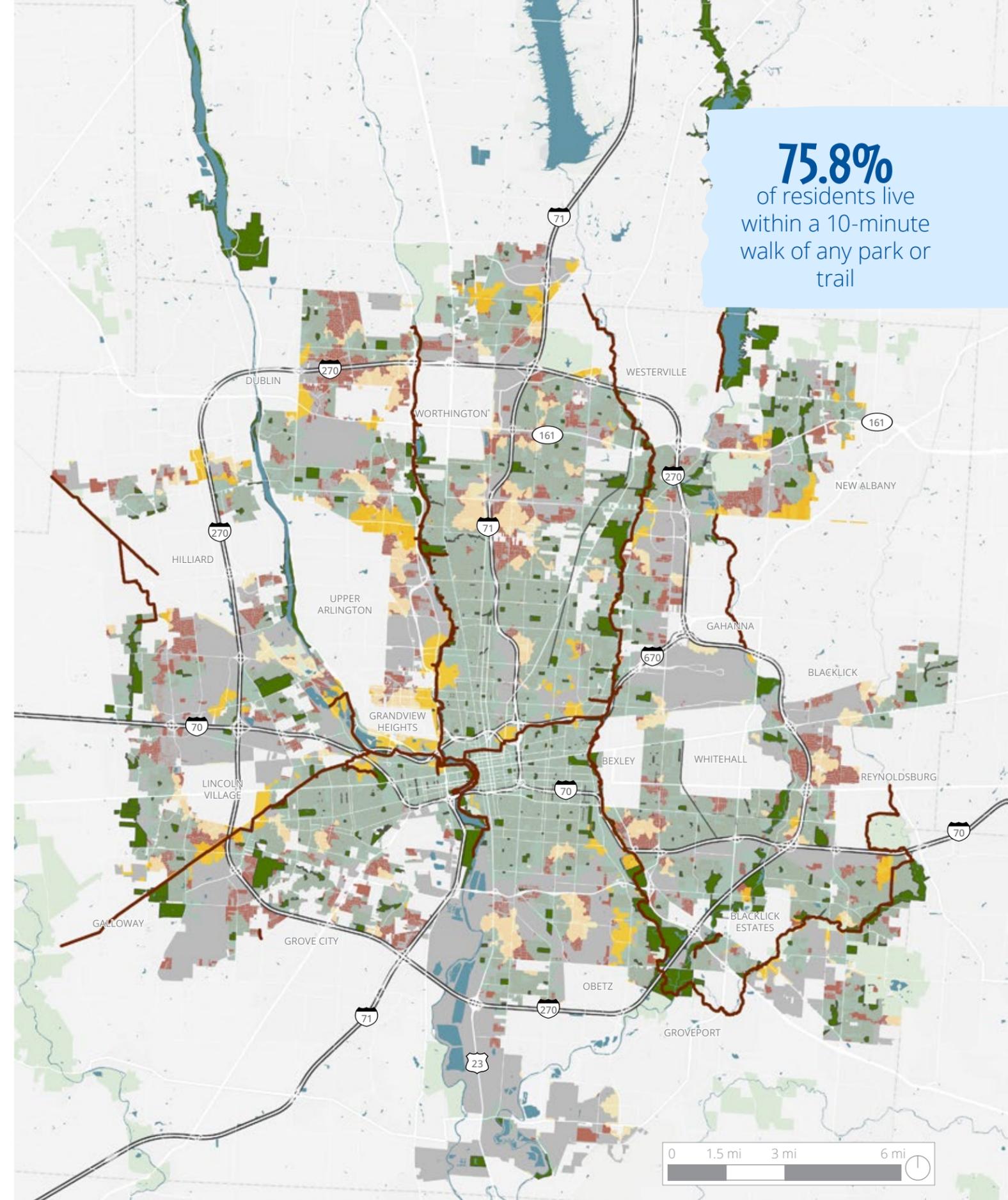
Figure 22: 10-Minute Walk to CRPD Park or Trail

ACCESS TO PARKS | PARTNER PARKS

CRPD's system of parks and trails are supplemented by partner agencies including Metro Parks and Columbus City Schools. When partners are considered, Columbus approaches the median population served (76%) within a 10-minute walk for cities of its size. Figure 23 illustrates how partner agencies contribute to address park access gaps across the city. When partner agencies are included in the analysis, the remaining park access gaps skew further towards the edges of the city.



- City of Columbus Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Metro Parks
- 10-minute walk to CRPD park
- 10-minute walk to trail
- 10-minute walk to partner park or school
- Residential areas without park access
- Greenway Trails



75.8%
of residents live
within a 10-minute
walk of any park or
trail

Figure 23: 10-Minute Walk to Any Park or Trail

ACCESS TO CENTERS

Recreation centers are essential spaces for community life in Columbus. The city's 28 recreation centers offer vital services, recreation, and opportunities for civic engagement. Serving as neighborhood anchors, they host programs that span generations, from youth sports and after-school activities to senior wellness classes, cultural events, and job readiness workshops. The location and quality of recreation centers also impacts program participation.

Similar to parks, access to recreation centers can be measured in terms of proximity to residence and ease of access by walking, transit, or car. Most residents live within a 10-minute drive from a recreation center, a threshold that generally reflects how far people are willing to travel to reach these facilities based on feedback from the survey. However, there are access gaps in the Northeast, Far West/Westland, and South/Southeast areas, where population expansion has outpaced facility development and public transit coverage. These findings highlight the need for strategic investment in new facilities, partnerships with other recreation providers at the edges of the city, and improved connections to ensure residents citywide can conveniently reach community centers.

88%
of residents live within a 10-minute drive of a recreation center

100%
of centers are within 1/4 mile from a transit stop

Northeast, Southwest, Southeast
land plan areas that have the largest gaps in access

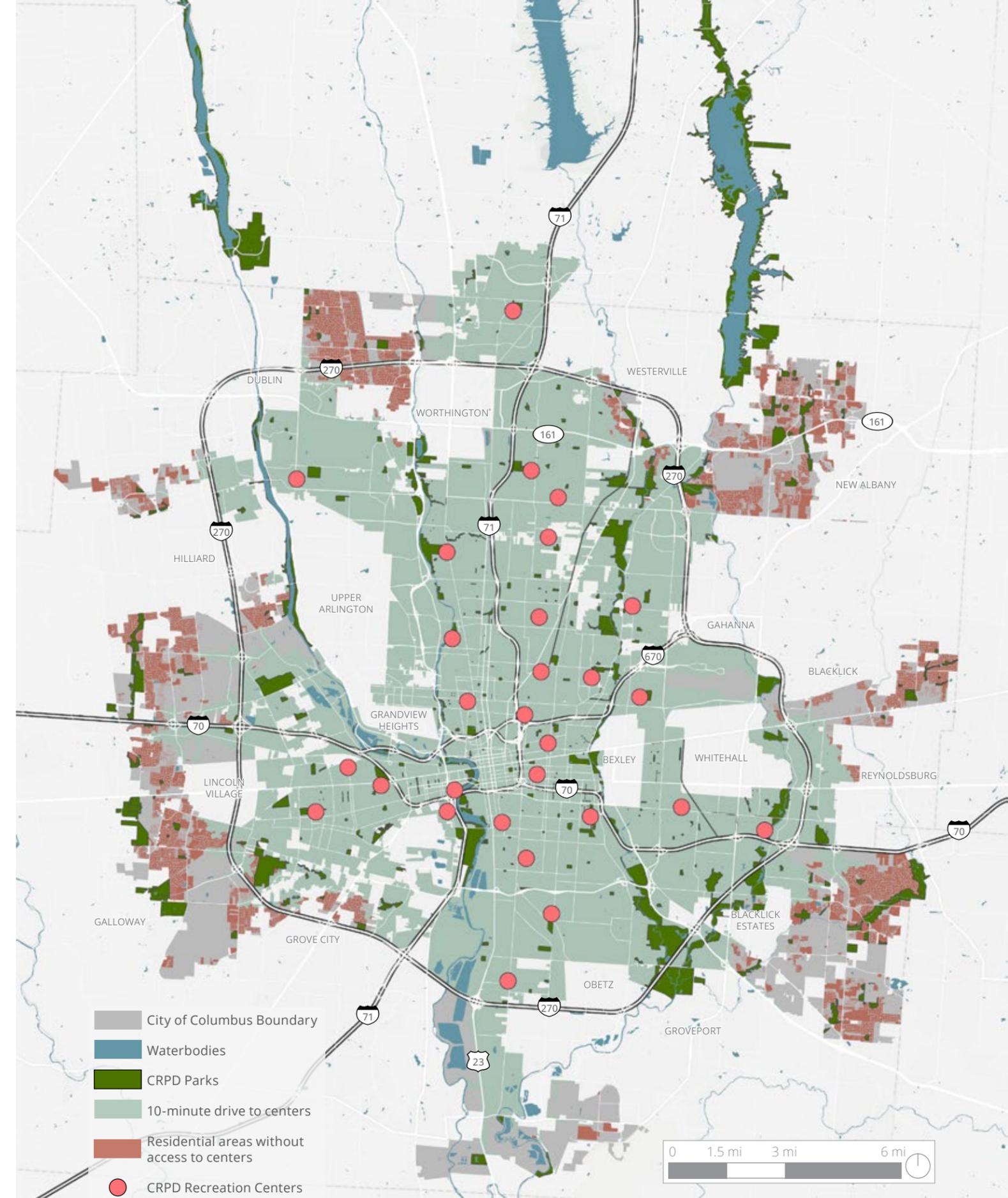


Figure 24: Drive Access to Recreation Centers

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

CRPD operates one of the most comprehensive and community-centered recreation systems in the nation. In 2024, the department served nearly 2 million people via on-site programs, events, and facilities.

Columbus offers a large and diverse inventory of programs and services in parks, facilities, and off-site locations. Programs are organized into several core categories: Youth and Teen Development, Adult and Senior Recreation, Aquatics, Arts and Culture, Fitness and Wellness, Therapeutic Recreation, Outdoor and Nature Education, and Special Events.

Program Gaps

The broad program portfolio reflects the city's diverse, multigenerational population. However, demand exceeds capacity in several areas, including youth programs, fitness and wellness activities, and senior services. Arts and nature education programming are especially limited compared to community interest. There is also increasing demand for therapeutic programs and cultural programs and events, particularly among the city's growing Hispanic, African American, and New American populations.

Programmed Indoor Facilities

In addition to 28 recreation centers, Columbus maintains five athletic complexes and five specialized facilities. Centers Without Walls (CWOW) operates across eleven non-CRPD sites to complement the programmed indoor spaces. Seven of the city's eight outdoor pools, the Columbus Aquatic Center, and four splash pads are co-located with recreation centers.

The range and quality of amenities vary across the system, creating inconsistencies in accessibility, functionality, and technology. CRPD does not currently have a formal approach to classifying different types of recreation centers, which limits transparency and consistency in decision-making.

Access to Programs

Playbook Columbus identifies Priority Areas to inform future planning, ensuring that program expansion, facility reinvestment, and operating

[Recreation and Parks by the Numbers](#)
[LEARN MORE](#)

decisions are informed by data. Each program area also has unique operational data points to consider in their decision-making that go beyond the citywide Priority Area analysis. Fair access is a critical outcome of CRPD's approach to program and service delivery.

Hours of Operation

Recreation centers have consistent operating hours across the system, which are not always well-adapted to the specific needs of individual centers. Defining hours of operation for different types of recreation centers and different parts of the city will allow CRPD to continue providing fair access to centers and make better use of resources.

[LEARN MORE](#)
[Priority Areas](#)

Program Participation

The top program categories in 2024 were:

- **Arts & Cultural Programs**
- **Youth Sports**
- **Camps**

Participant data related to race, income, and language have not been consistently tracked. However, available data suggests that participation patterns and program preferences vary significantly by demographics, culture, and geography.

- **Age:** Youth (ages 0-17) primarily use recreation centers and CWOW sites. Participation for children under five, which primarily includes parent-child play, early learning, and preschool prep, is limited, but increasing. Adults (age 18-54) report strong participation at recreation centers, including in fitness, sports, arts, cultural and enrichment programming. Older adults (age 55+) are frequent users of specialized facilities, and report moderate but steady participation in wellness, arts, and social engagement programs.
- **Adaptive and Therapeutic Audiences:** Participants in adaptive and therapeutic programming most frequently visit the Epsy Adaptive Sports Complex and select other recreation centers that offer adaptive recreation, inclusive fitness, and special events.
- **Culture and Language:** Multilingual families, particularly those speaking Spanish, Somali, and Nepali, increasingly rely on CWOW and nearby centers for access to programs. The department's expansion of bilingual communication, staff representation, and outreach programs has increased participation in several centers, but demand continues to exceed available capacity.

Strategic partnerships are one of CRPD's most effective tools for reaching communities.

Summer camps were the program with the strongest participation growth between 2023 and 2024.

CWOW experienced more participation growth between 2023 and 2024 than any one recreation center.

There are currently fewer programs offered in the Southwest and Southeast Land Plan Areas.

Senior and therapeutic recreation programs are well-established, but will require continued investment to keep pace with geographic and demographic changes.

ACCESS TO EXPERIENCES

While access determines whether residents can reach parks and facilities, the type of experiences available at those locations shapes how well the system meets community needs. Some experiences are well-distributed across the city, but others are concentrated in certain neighborhoods.

Service Area Analysis

This amenity-level approach highlights the distribution of amenities within Columbus to identify areas that are not well-served by specific types of experiences.

Level of Service Analysis

To evaluate how amenities and facilities compare to Columbus' population size, a **level of service (LOS)** analysis was conducted using **National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA)** metrics, which measure the ratio of amenities per resident and compare Columbus to other jurisdictions with populations over 500,000. This amenity-level approach highlights both the location distribution within Columbus and comparison to the typical number of amenities within similar-sized cities.

The following pages present LOS findings for selected amenities and facilities based on priorities from community engagement. Not all amenities have LOS standards.

Why is this important?

NRPA performance metrics provide a nationally recognized benchmark for evaluating the adequacy and distribution of parks and recreation amenities. By comparing Columbus' facilities and programs to the median of other cities, Columbus can evaluate relative performance. These comparisons are not intended as standards for agencies to obtain, as circumstances and needs vary widely for each place. The city's projected growth also impacts how the current LOS informs future amenity needs.

[LEARN MORE](#)

[Planning for Growth](#)



HOW TO READ NRPA METRIC COMPARISONS

- ▲ Columbus provides more amenities per population compared to the NRPA median
- ▼ Columbus provides fewer amenities per population compared to the NRPA median

Places to Play

Playgrounds

Playgrounds should be a “drop-in” park experience for children and families, conveniently located close to home. For this reason, playgrounds have just a quarter-mile service area, roughly corresponding to a 5-minute walk. Columbus has more playgrounds than the national median; however, there are gaps across the city where residents would benefit from playgrounds closer to home (Figure 25).

Columbus has invested in state-of-the-art universally accessible playgrounds, with a goal of providing regional access. Universally accessible playgrounds encourage users of all ages and abilities to play through design features like inclusive communication resources, sensory areas, and wheelchair-accessible equipment. However, there are currently no Universally Accessible Playgrounds in the Northeast or Southwest Land Plan Areas (Figure 26).

175 playgrounds =
1 playground per 5,299 residents

▲ 1 playground per 14,717 residents
(NRPA Median)

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.

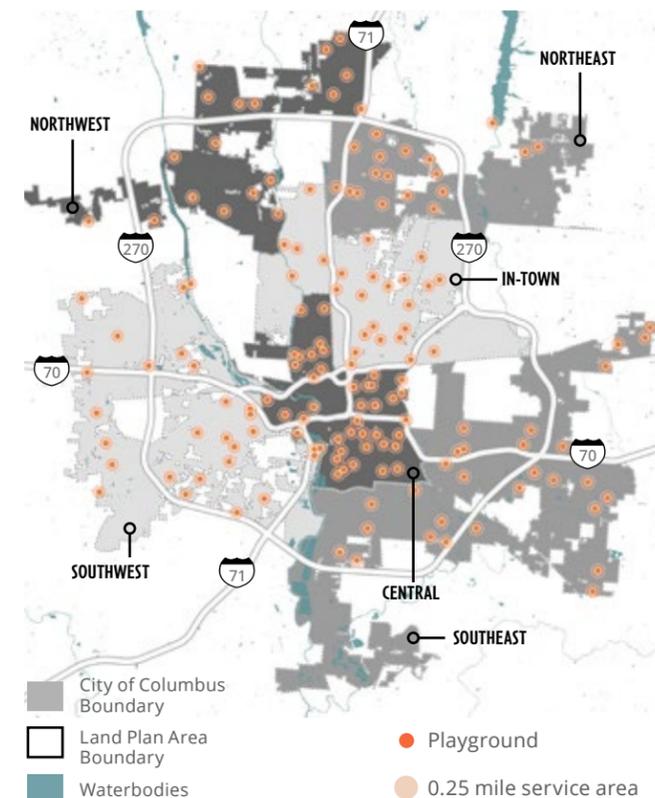


Figure 25: Playgrounds Service Area

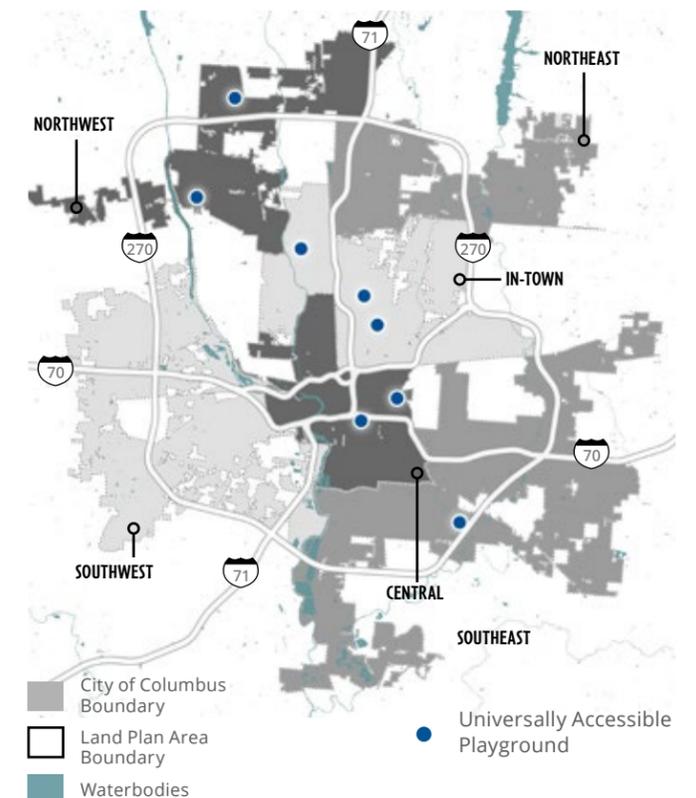


Figure 26: Universally Accessible Playgrounds Service Area

Athletic Fields

Columbus offers a range of outdoor fields for active recreation that support team sports, individual fitness, and community leagues. This includes football fields, soccer fields, baseball/softball fields, and multiuse fields. Athletic fields are concentrated in the In-Town and Central Land Plan Areas, with the largest gaps in the Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast Land Plan Areas (Figure 27).

NRPA medians are especially meaningful when considered alongside local recreation trends. Since Columbus has higher participation rates in soccer and football than the national average, fields that support those activities should be fairly distributed across the city. Columbus' multi-use fields also support popular sports like lacrosse, field hockey, rugby, and more.

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.

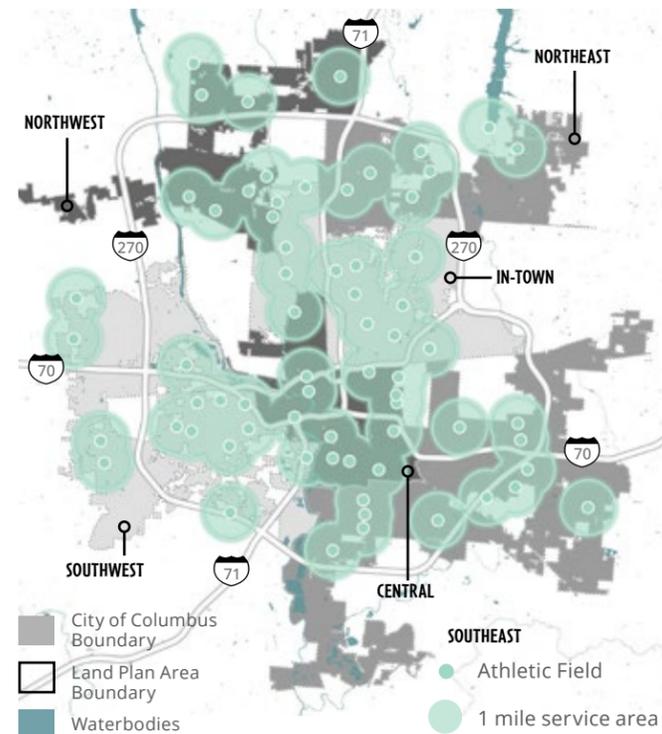


Figure 27: Athletic Fields Service Area

14 football fields =
1 football field per **66,239** residents

▲ 1 football field per 73,556 residents (NRPA Median)

94 baseball/softball fields =
1 baseball/softball field per **9,865** residents

▲ 1 baseball/softball field per 14,729 residents (NRPA Median)

Sports Courts

Outdoor sports courts also offer drop-in and organized opportunities for physical activity for all ages. Sports courts include tennis courts, pickleball courts, basketball courts, futsal courts, and hockey rinks. These facilities are concentrated in the Central and In-Town Land Plan Areas, with large gaps in the Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast Land Plan Areas.

Columbus currently provides more basketball courts than the NRPA median. Basketball is also more popular in Columbus than it is nationally, with 8% of residents participating. Tennis courts and pickleball courts are provided at a slightly higher rate compared to the NRPA median. While these were not identified as high-priority needs throughout the community engagement process, it is still important to monitor trends and use levels to ensure that residents have access to all types of sports facilities.

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.

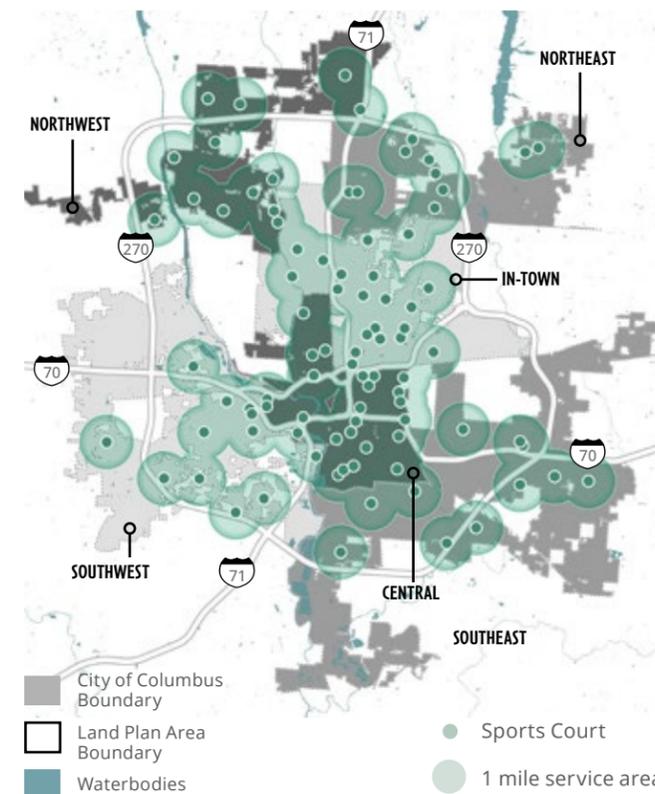


Figure 28: Sports Courts Service Area

109 outdoor basketball courts =
1 outdoor basketball court per **8,508** residents

▲ 1 outdoor basketball court per 22,351 residents (NRPA Median)

98 tennis courts =
1 tennis court per **9,463** residents

▲ 1 tennis court per 15,185 residents (NRPA Median)

14 dedicated pickleball courts* =
1 pickleball court per **66,239** residents

▲ 1 pickleball court per 68,894 residents (NRPA Median)

* 4 additional dedicated pickleballs courts are under development.

Water-Based Experiences

Throughout the community engagement process, residents expressed a strong interest in engaging with water via swim lessons, pools, splash pads, and access points to natural waterways and reservoirs.

Pools and Splash Pads

For Columbus to improve health outcomes for all, it must expand access to aquatics. Pools are an established priority in Columbus, following the Aquatics Capital Improvement Plan published in 2023. The need for more indoor and outdoor pools distributed across the city was reinforced throughout community engagement and through mapping existing facilities with a 2-mile service area. Splash pads complement the city's pool inventory by offering safe, seasonal water play. While they do not support aquatic programming, they can help improve residents' comfort level around water and provide places to cool down.

8 outdoor pools =
1 outdoor pool per **115,919** residents

▲ 1 outdoor pool per 156,427 residents (NRPA Median)

6 splash pads =
1 splash pad per **154,558** residents

▲ 1 splash pad per 199,437 residents (NRPA Median)

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.

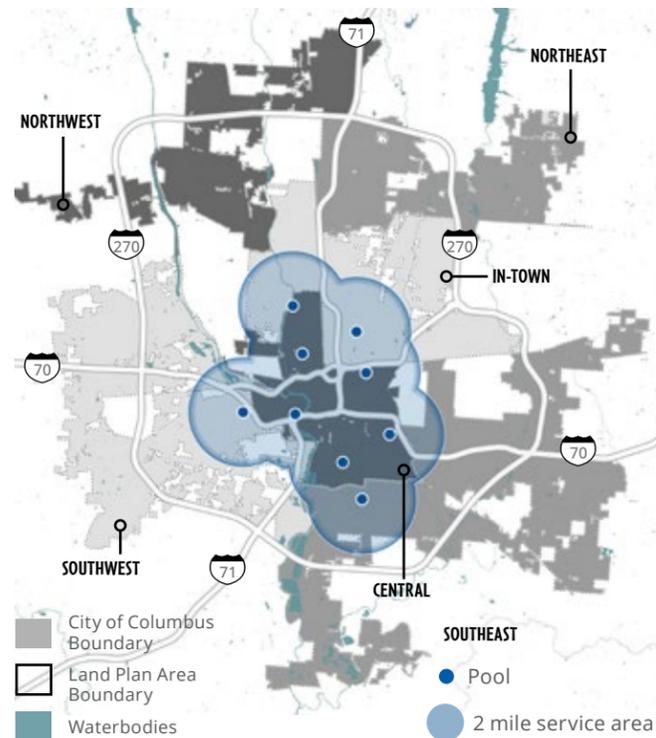


Figure 29: Pools Service Area

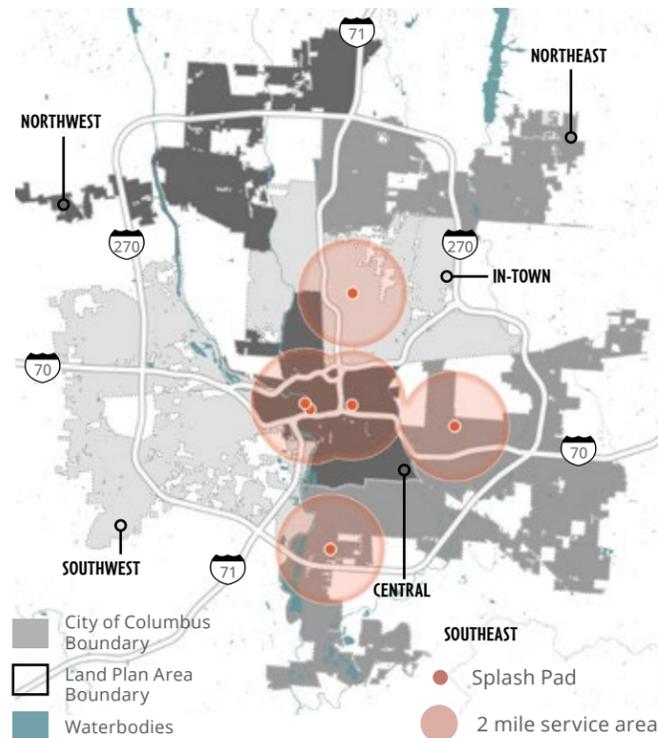


Figure 30: Splash Pads Service Area



Waterways and Reservoirs

Water is one of the most prominent natural features in Columbus. The city is intersected by five major waterways: Big Walnut Creek, Alum Creek, Olentangy River, Scioto River, and Big Darby Creek, each of which offer unique opportunities for recreation. This includes blueway access points where residents and visitors can legally access the water for paddle sports. Columbus' park system also includes three reservoirs with recreation opportunities that include fishing and boating.

The number of blueways and reservoirs in the city is unlikely to change and therefore is not tied to a traditional level of service. However, programming and transportation strategies can help expand access to these resources.

- City of Columbus Boundary
- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- Blueway Access Point
- Reservoir
- Paddleable Waterway

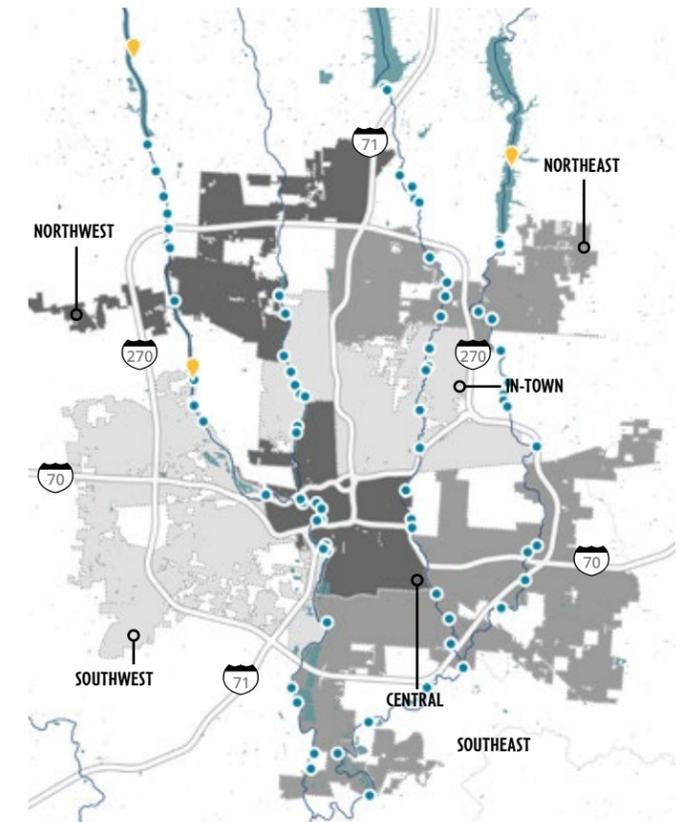


Figure 31: Waterways and Reservoirs

Places to Walk

Walking paths offer everyday opportunities for physical activity that complement more structured recreation. Walking is the most popular form of exercise in Columbus, with 34% of residents participating, so it is essential to provide infrastructure in support of this activity.

Walking Loops

Paved loops within parks are particularly important amenities that can serve as accessible and approachable spaces for residents who do not feel comfortable walking in areas without sidewalks or around busy streets. Empowering people to walk can help establish a habit of physical activity.

Walking loops are well-distributed across the city, with the largest gaps in the Northeast, Southwest, and Southeast Land Plan Areas.

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.

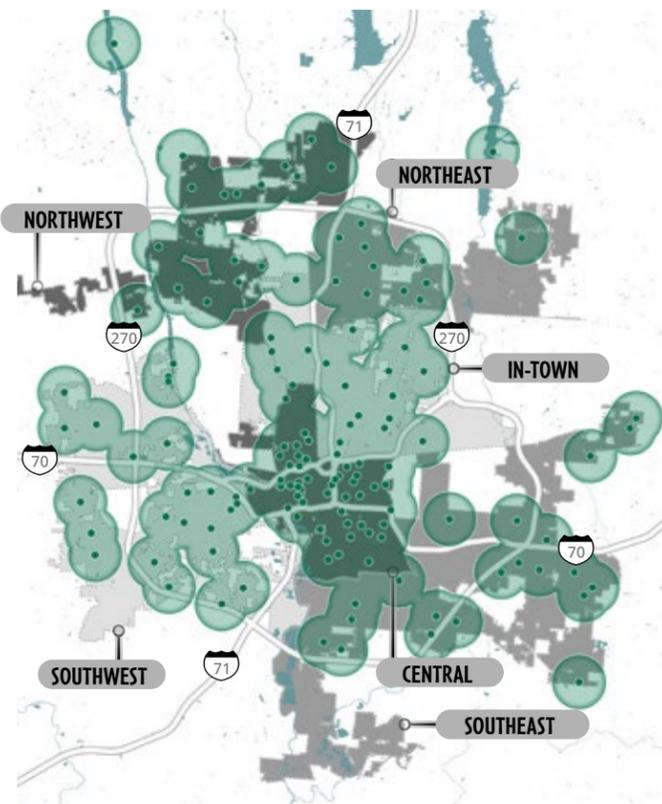
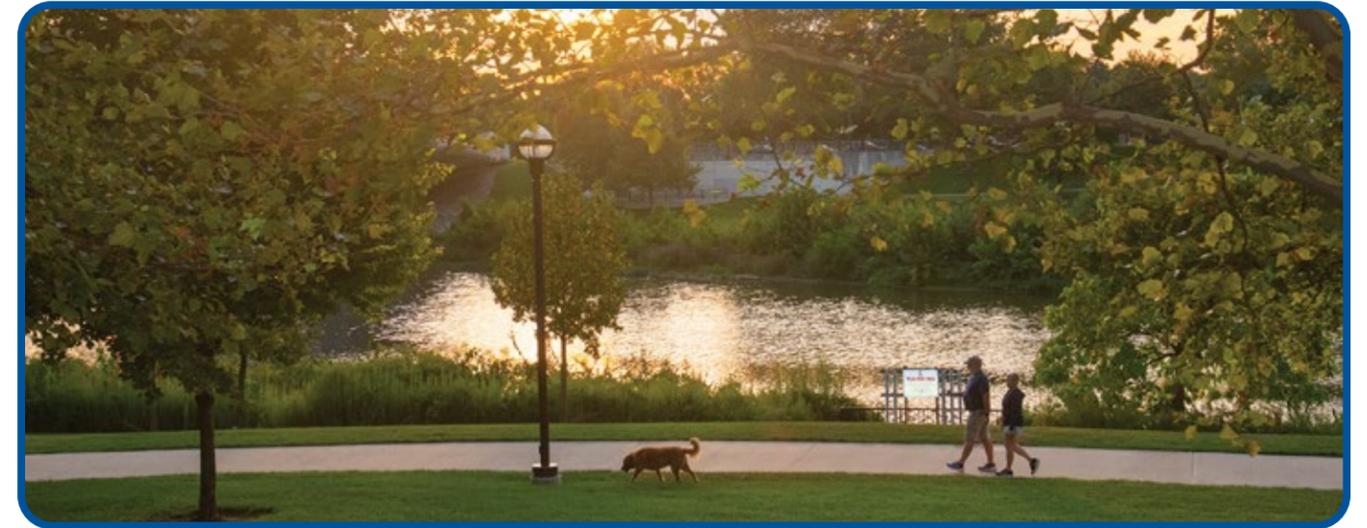
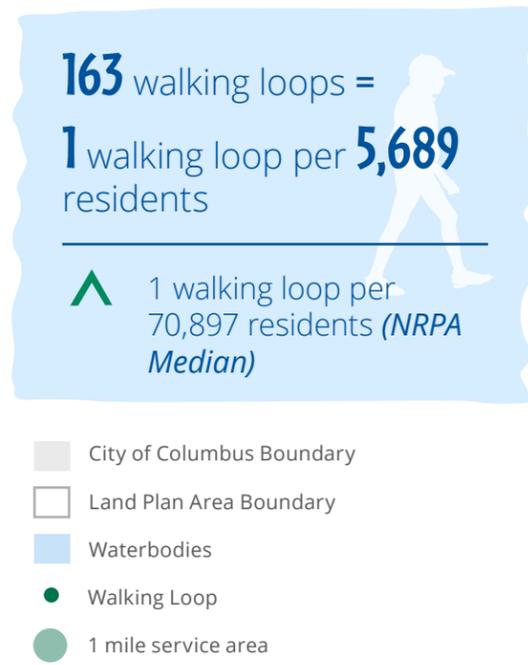


Figure 32: Walking Loops Service Area



Greenway Trails

Greenways are multi-use trails that provide opportunities for transportation, exercise, and connection to cultural, environmental, and recreational resources. They are more than places to walk or bike. They are expansive — residents who live close to a greenway access point can experience not just the greenway itself, but the network of park experiences it connects to. By providing safe infrastructure for walking and biking, greenways serve an essential transportation purpose in addition to their recreation and environmental impacts.

Growth in the greenway system must address current gaps in access. It must also consider the system's overall connectivity and the number of experiences it connects to from each neighborhood.

Some gap areas may be served by other park providers, which were not included in this analysis.



Figure 33: Greenway Service Area



Figure 34: Nature-Based Experiences

Some gap areas may be served by other providers, notably Metro Parks, which were not included in this analysis. NRPA medians are not available for this category.

Nature-Based Experiences

In addition to greenways, Nature-Based Experiences include conservation areas, nature preserves, pollinator gardens, wetlands, and parks with non-mowed acreage. These spaces inspire meaningful interactions with nature — without having to leave the city. Throughout community engagement, residents expressed strong interest in expanding natural areas set aside for conservation and passive recreational use.

The largest gaps in Nature-Based Experiences are in the In-Town and Central Land Plan Areas, but there are gaps distributed across all Land Plan Areas.

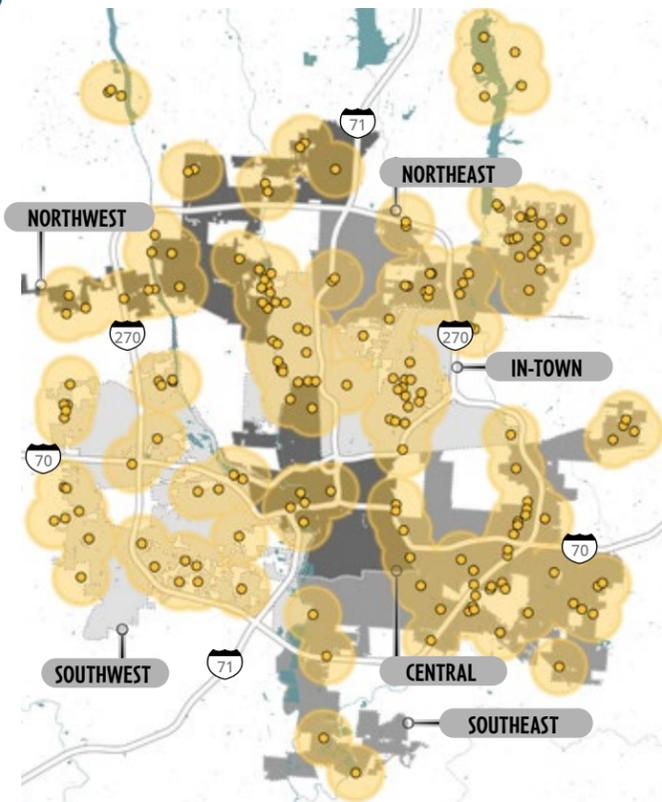


Figure 35: Nature-Based Experiences Service Area

- City of Columbus Boundary
- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- Nature-Based Experience
- 1 mile service area

Places to Play

Columbus offers more playgrounds than the national median, but there are many service area gaps. While the city has invested in multiple Universally Accessible Playgrounds, this amenity is currently lacking in the Northeast and Southwest Land Plan Areas.



Water-Based Experiences

Access to water, especially pools, is concentrated in the In-Town and Central Land Plan Areas and should be better distributed across the city.



Nature-Based Experiences

The largest gaps in access to nature-based experiences are in the In-Town and Central Land Plan Areas, but there are gaps distributed across the city.



Gaps in Access

Amenity gaps are most common in the Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest Land Plan Areas.

BENCHMARKING

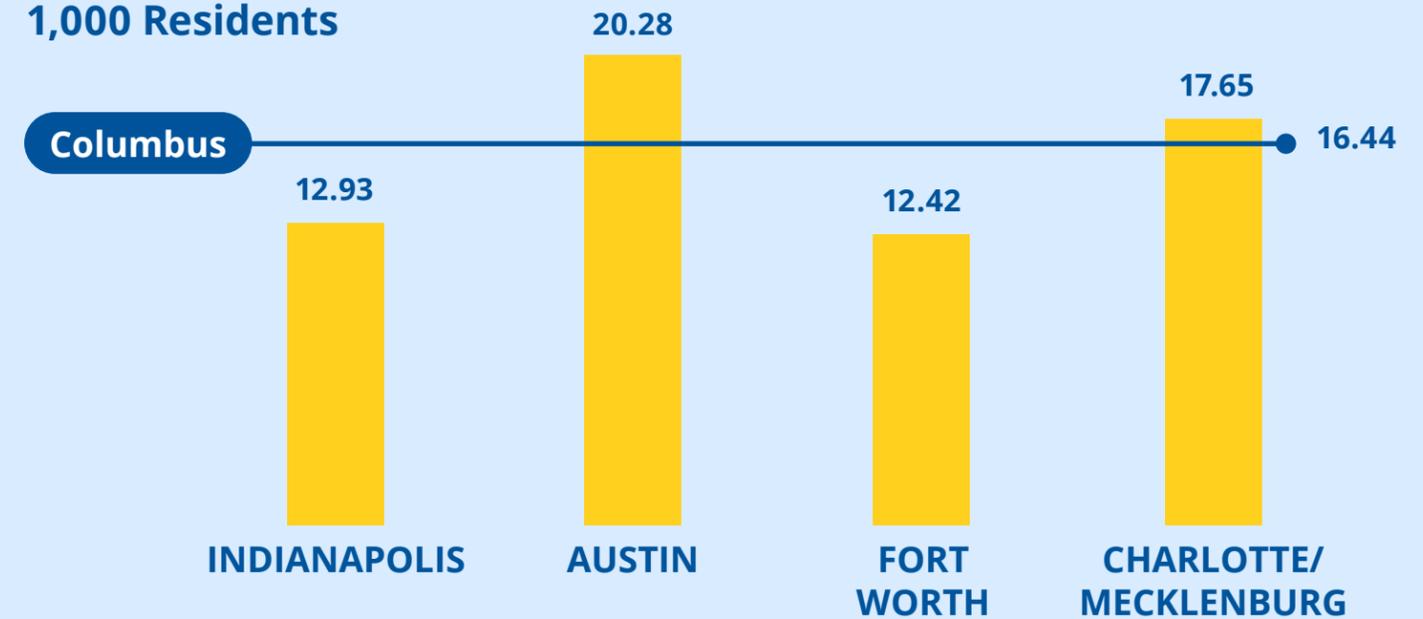
Comparing Columbus with similar communities builds on the level of service analysis to provide context for how the recreation and parks system compares to peer cities. Four park systems (Indianapolis, IN; Austin, TX; Fort Worth, TX; and Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, NC) were reviewed for funding, operations, and organizational structures. Peer cities were selected based on population size and growth, local economy, and community character.

The peer city benchmarks provide a useful lens for understanding how Columbus can elevate its own parks and recreation system through Playbook Columbus. Across all four comparison cities, several common themes emerge: an emphasis on comprehensive, long-range planning, a clear organizational structure and a commitment to equity and community-driven priorities.

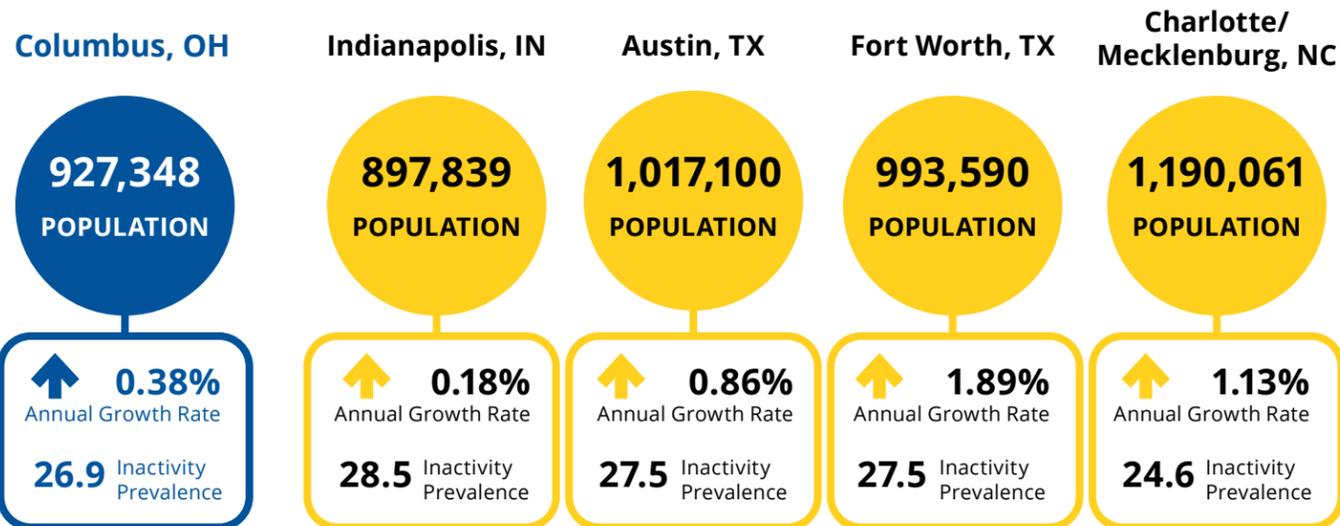
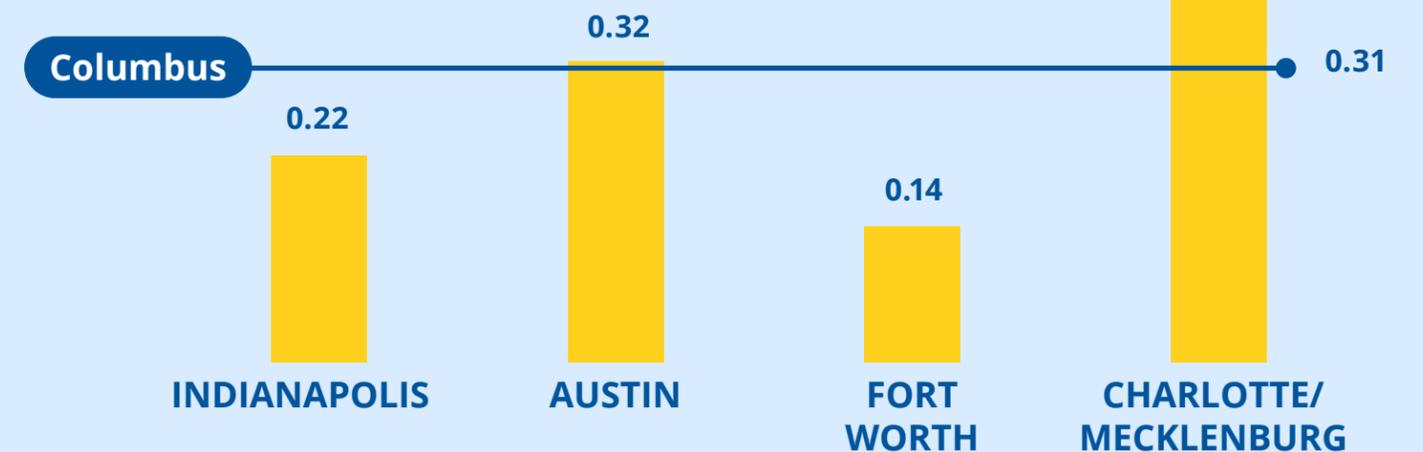
	COLUMBUS	NRPA MEDIAN
Total number of parks	458	266
Parks per 10,000 residents	4.94	2.71
Park acres per 1,000 residents	16.44	15.29
Indoor facilities per 10,000 residents	0.31	0.27
Trail miles per 10,000 residents	2.48	2.96

Columbus currently surpasses these similar communities based on the number of parks, but falls short compared to some individual cities based on park acreage and the number of indoor facilities. Studying peer cities can help the recreation and parks system evolve to keep pace with emerging trends and establish level of service goals that are aligned with national practices and community values.

Park Acres per 1,000 Residents



Indoor Facilities per 10,000 Residents



- Similar community character and density
- Cities with universities and urban rivers

- Similar local economy and outlook
- CAPRA-accredited park agencies

Sources: Esri Business Analyst 2023-2024 Annual Growth Rate, 2024 American Community Survey Population Estimates, local recreation and park data

Figure 36: Benchmark Cities Demographic Comparison

Figure 37: Benchmark Cities Parks and Facilities Analysis

PRIORITY AREAS

CRPD is committed to ensuring fair access to resources, opportunities, and services for all individuals and communities, particularly those who have been historically underserved or marginalized. This requires addressing disparities in access to parks, recreational programs, facilities, and opportunities, and ensuring that all people feel welcome.

What are Priority Areas?

Priority Areas are a key tool for ensuring that parks and recreation resources are directed to communities with the greatest need. Priority Areas use spatial analysis to identify neighborhoods where residents face complex barriers to parks, facilities, and programs. Park investments and maintenance are often unevenly distributed across cities, causing disparities in access and quality. This analysis pinpoints vulnerable populations and areas that have historically been underinvested. Priority Areas represent high-priority areas for park investment, identified through a custom index to provide a localized, data-driven approach tailored specifically to park need in Columbus.

How are Priority Areas identified?

Priority Areas are created using geographic information systems (GIS) to conduct a weighted overlay of the factors that are most important for recreation and parks planning in Columbus. In Figure 38, indicators are broken down by the custom index. For example, Housing and Transportation Indicators show whether households have the resources or transit options to access recreation, while Socioeconomic Indicators such as income, education, and employment reveal potential financial or social barriers. These factors, in totality, highlight medium- and high-priority areas to provide the City with a finer lens to prioritize improvements.

[LEARN MORE](#)

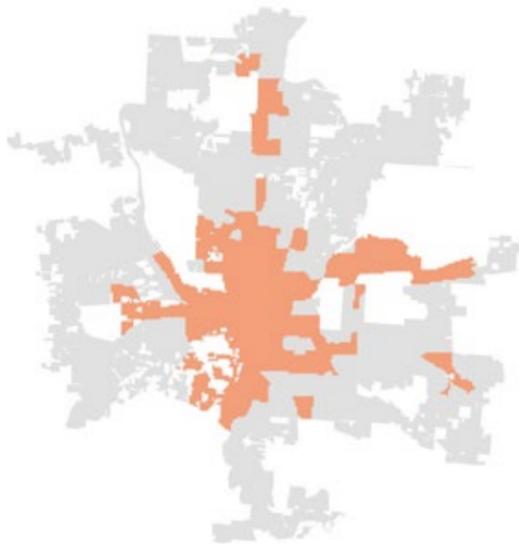
[Composite Priority Areas](#)

Housing & Transportation



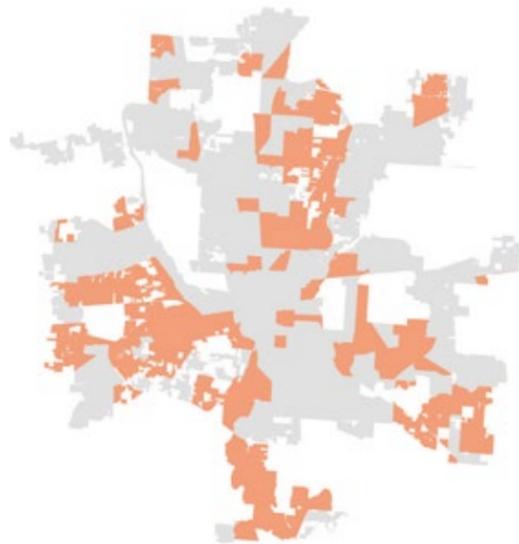
- Housing Cost
- Vehicle Access
- Crowding
- Energy Use
- Housing Vacancy

Environmental



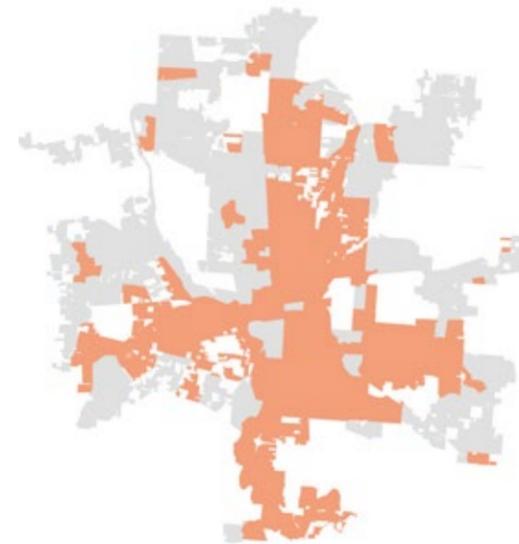
- Urban Heat Island
- Brownfields + Heavy Industrial
- Tree Canopy Coverage
- Flood Risk
- Highways + Landfills
- Air Pollutant Exposure
- Noise Levels

Household Demographics



- Single-Parent Households
- English Language Proficiency
- Disconnected Youth
- Racial and Ethnic Composition
- Ages 65+
- Ages 17 or Younger
- Internet Access

Socioeconomic



- Poverty
- Unemployment
- High School Diploma
- Crime
- SNAP Recipients

Ability & Health



- Health Insurance
- Disability and Physical Inactivity
- Mental Distress and Depression
- Diabetes, Heart Disease + Asthma
- COPD
- Infant Mortality

Figure 38: Priority Areas by Indicator

PRIORITY AREAS

The composite of all the Priority Area indicators is shown in Figure 39. The brightest orange shows the Highest Priority Areas, where it is most important to direct additional or differing focus in recreation and park investments.

The highest-priority areas for park investment form an upside-down “T” through the center of Columbus. This corridor stretches from the Far North neighborhood through Linden and into Downtown, West into Franklinton and the Hilltop, and East into Mid-east Columbus, highlighting a continuous band of need that runs along the city’s urban core and inner fringe communities. This is an area of considerable population density, housing more than one-third of the total city population.

The Priority Areas model provides a framework for regular updates, knowing that community conditions will likely change over time. The indicators used to identify Priority Areas were carefully selected to reflect the unique dynamics impacting Columbus, so the inputs for updating the analysis can remain relatively consistent even as the output neighborhoods change. CRPD should update its list of Priority Areas within a regular timeframe to ensure investment remains fair and balanced across the city.



[LEARN MORE](#)

Priority Areas with Park Needs

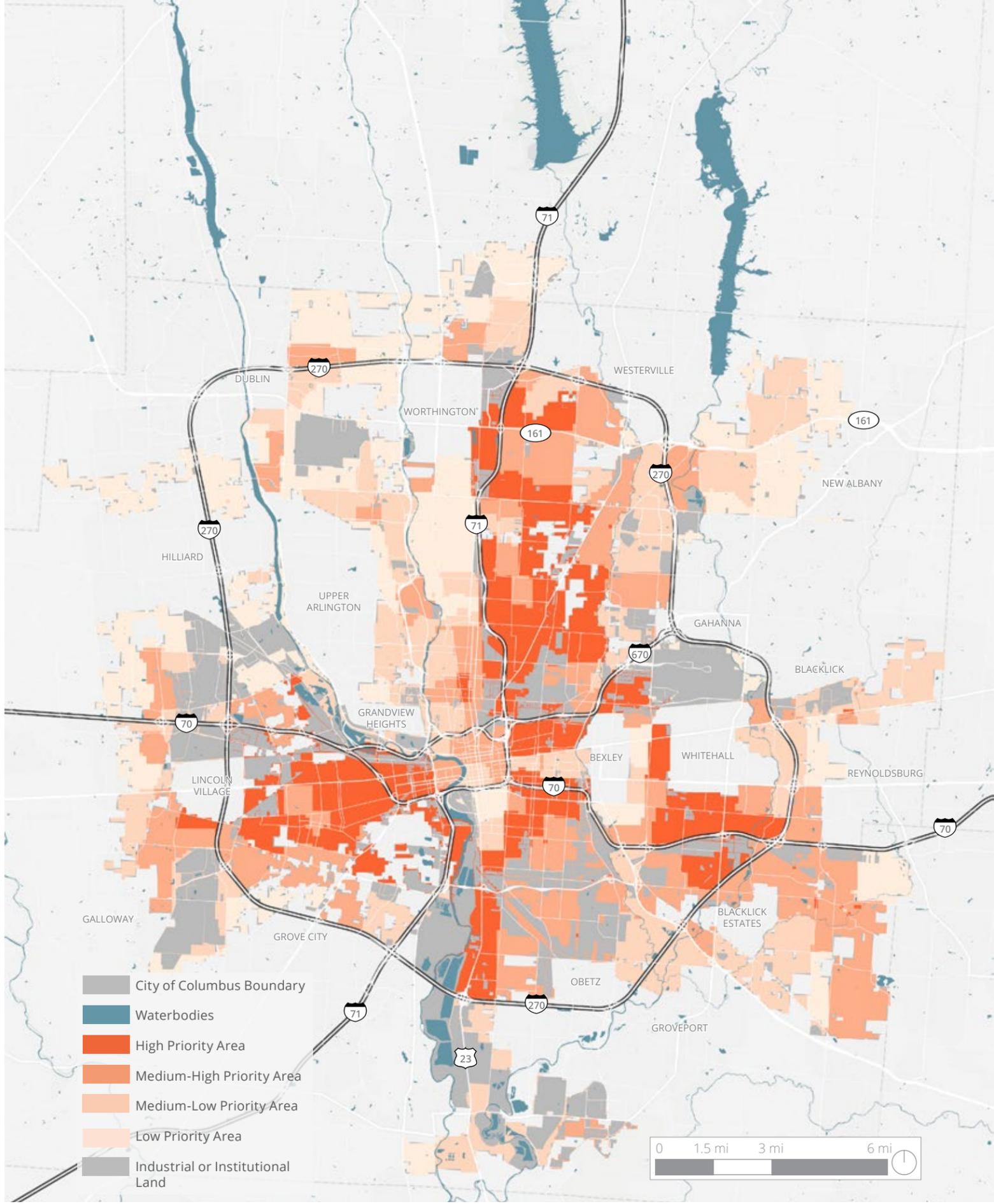


Figure 39: Priority Areas

PRIORITY AREAS | UNDERSERVED BY PARKS

Priority Areas that are underserved by recreation and parks are the areas most in need of investment. Figure 40 identifies where residential areas that are not within a 10-minute walk of a CRPD park or trail overlap with areas that are considered Medium-High or High Priority based on neighborhood indicators. The areas in dark grey show parts of the city that have access to parks, trails, and recreation centers, and considered Medium-Low or Low Priority based on neighborhood indicators.

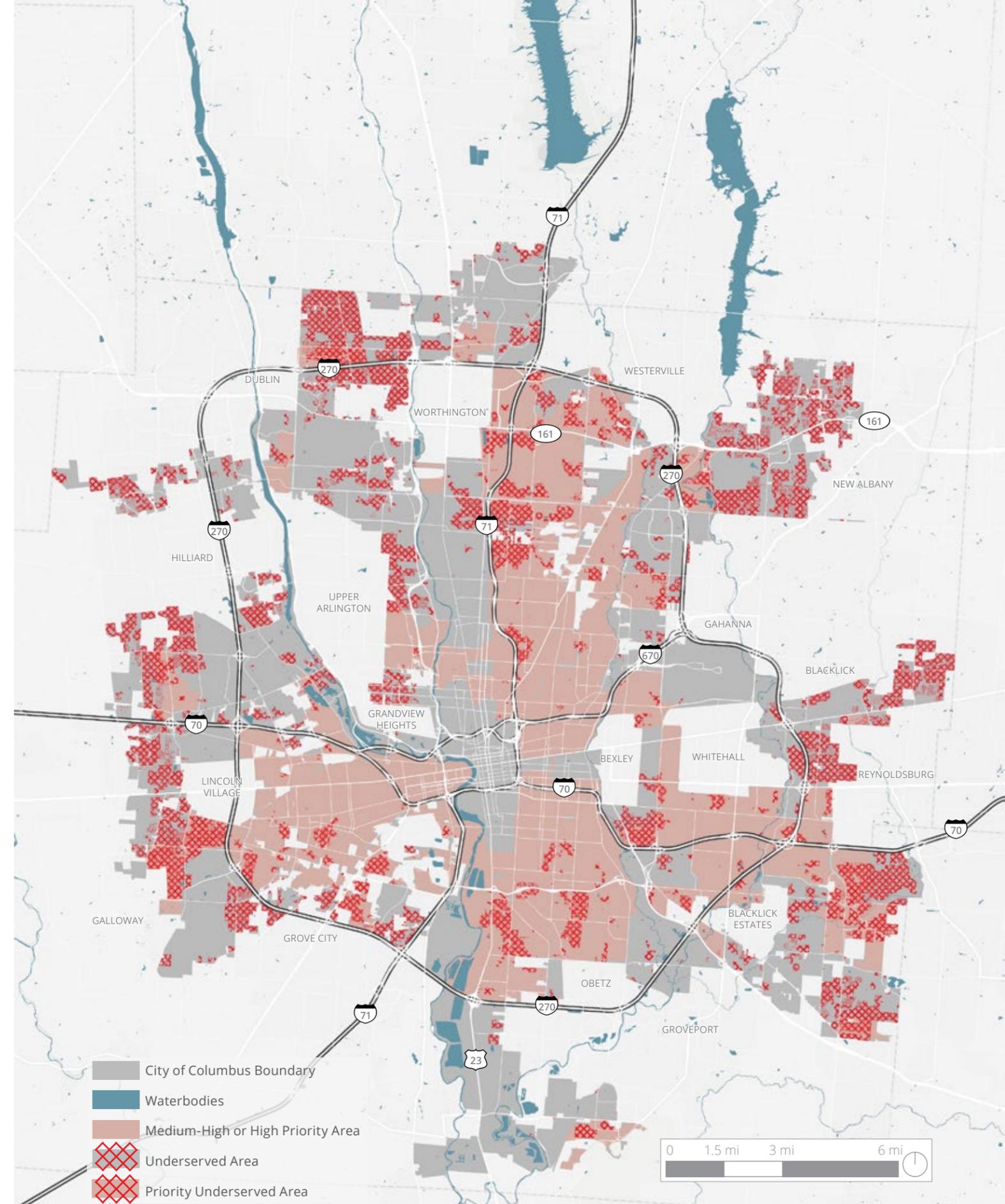


Figure 40: Priority Areas Underserved by Parks



Lanceleaf Tickseed

These bright yellow flowers, native to Ohio, attract important pollinators like butterflies and bees.



Sideoats Grama

This native grass is a drought-tolerant alternative to turf that provides food and nesting materials for birds and other wildlife.

Parks are sometimes described as an escape from urban life — instead of an essential feature for a healthy city. As Columbus grows, protecting its natural resources will be critical to ensure all forms of life can thrive.

Native Ecology

Columbus’ natural areas are a contemporary expression of the city’s historic ecology; remnants of a land once characterized by forests, swamps, and prairies. But as forests were cleared to make way for agriculture and industry, the regional landscape became increasingly fragmented. The park system is an opportunity for the city to celebrate and restore pre-development ecosystems.

A park system that allows plants and wildlife to thrive also benefits its human users. Parks that are designed and maintained using an ecological approach can make the city cooler, greener, healthier,

and more resilient. Increasing biodiversity allows native species to thrive and offers opportunities for city-dwellers to have frequent, meaningful encounters with nature.

55% of Columbus’ park acreage are natural areas. This includes pollinator gardens, wetlands, and no-mow meadows that cultivate biodiversity and provide critical habitat. As the park system evolves, its natural areas will contribute to a reimagined regional landscape that makes the region more livable — for all forms of life.

Urban Forestry

A healthy urban tree canopy delivers significant environmental benefits: trees reduce pollution, alleviate heat, reduce flooding, buffer noise, improve human health, and provide essential wildlife habitat. The pre-development landscape in Columbus was dominated by forest, but today, the citywide canopy cover is only around 22%.

In 2021, the Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) established a plan for restoring

the urban forest, with a goal of 40% citywide canopy cover by 2050. The objectives of the UFMP address canopy level, not individual trees. A newly planted tree will take decades to reach its full canopy potential. This makes tree planting, protection, and maintenance critical in the short-term to achieve the visionary outcomes of the plan. Because 70% of Columbus’ tree canopy is currently on private property, CRPD must engage in private canopy management, in

part by advocating for policy updates.

The parks and greenways that CRPD owns and maintains are crucial places for planting trees to contribute to a healthy urban forest. It is important to prioritize tree planting in neighborhoods with the highest need based on their current canopy coverage and to plant the right species of trees, based on a combination of factors like system diversity, projected habitat loss due to climate change, and ecosystem services.



ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS



Beaver

Columbus' low-lying landscape historically made a great home for beavers. The beaver population declined significantly in the 19th century, but the species has gradually returned, and can now be found in several of the city's reservoirs.



Great Blue Heron

These birds are native to Ohio and are often seen along Columbus' rivers, streams, and wetlands.

Water

Water is one of the most important natural resources in Columbus, but the quality, availability, and management of water is an ongoing challenge. Portions of the Olentangy and Scioto Rivers are considered impaired under Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act. Parks can play a key role in improving the health of these rivers and the plants, wildlife, and people who depend on their aquatic ecosystems.

In addition to protecting water quality, the park system can preserve land for groundwater recharge. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency recently completed the Central Ohio Regional Water Study, which evaluated the region's current and future

water needs. The study found that potential recharge sites are limited, which means it is crucial to protect areas that could supply groundwater in the future. Notably, areas around the confluence of Big Darby Creek and the Scioto River were identified as conservation priorities.

As extreme rain events become more common, parks can play a critical role in capturing and holding stormwater. Different types of parks have varying abilities to store stormwater: while developed parkland can be effective, natural lands with richer vegetative cover will have a larger impact than mowed areas. Preserving and restoring wetlands is especially important, as they deliver ecosystem benefits while providing detention volume.

Climate & Resiliency

Columbus is experiencing the impacts of climate change now: the city is warming faster than the national average and experiencing more frequent and intense rainfall events, deteriorated air quality, and increased flood risk. Nature-based solutions in parks will be essential to mitigate these impacts. Recreation will play a part, too, through social and wellness programming, disaster recovery and resilience infrastructure, and nature education to inspire the next generation of community stewards.

Figure 41 maps imperviousness, tree canopy cover, flood risk, and soil drainage to identify areas at a higher risk for climate impacts that should be prioritized for resiliency improvements.

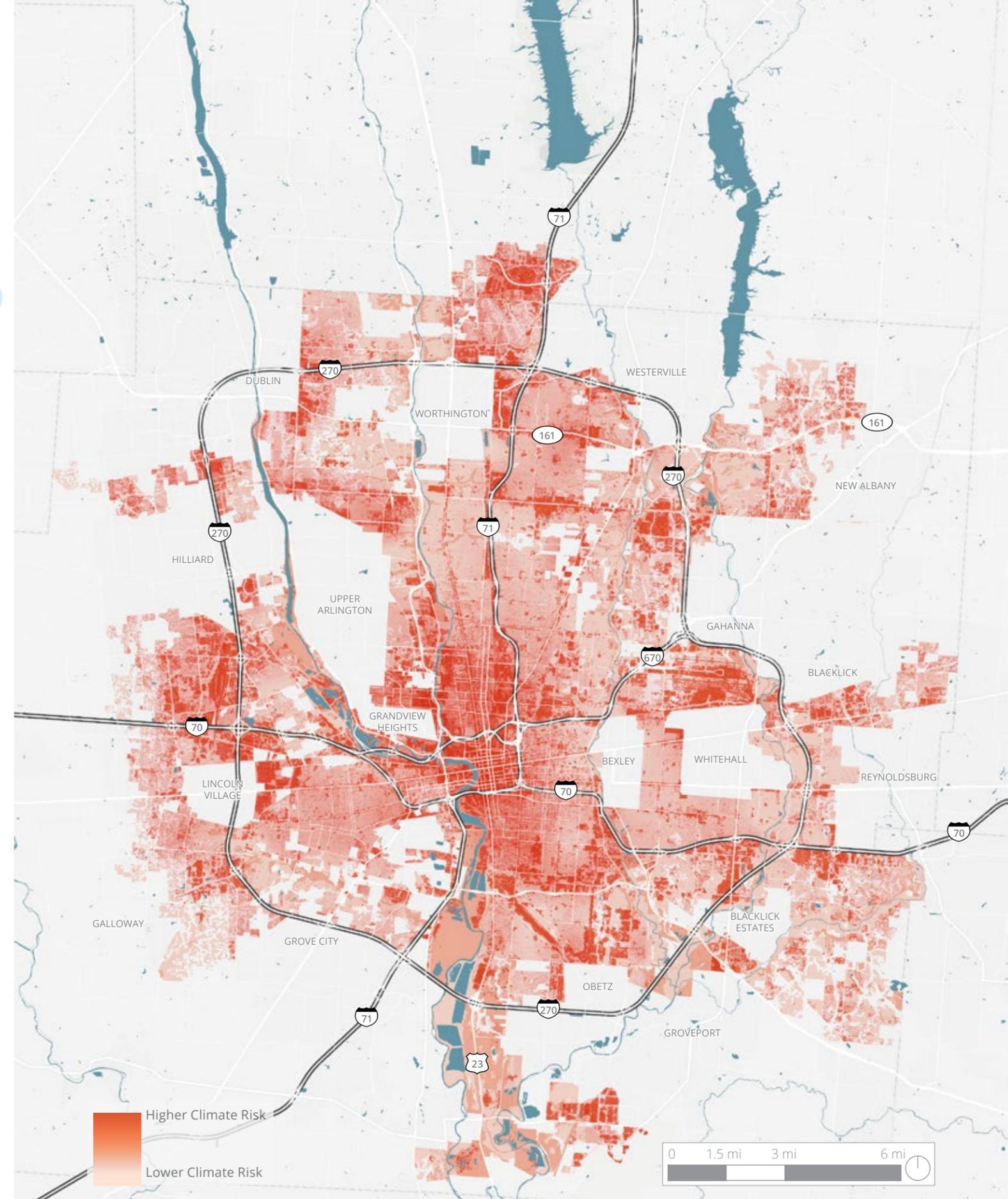


Figure 41: Climate Risk

In addition to providing programs and services, CRPD staff develop, operate and maintain parks and facilities, including golf courses and natural areas.. The department's Forestry section is also responsible for all public trees located along streets, within parks, and on all City-owned properties.

Program Staffing

Staffing at recreation centers is organized by functional responsibility rather than by individual facility. Each center typically includes a mix of full-time recreation professionals, part-time support staff, seasonal employees, and seasonal program staff assigned to therapeutic recreation, cultural arts, athletics, and youth employment programs.

Parks Maintenance

Parks Maintenance staff are responsible for a diverse range of parks, from large regional parks and natural areas to small neighborhood parks, medians, and trails. This mix requires both equipment-intensive maintenance and high-frequency custodial and

even landscaping services. Large-acreage parks depend on mowing and ecological care, while smaller scattered parcels demand constant visibility and responsiveness.

To manage Columbus' significant park acreage, the city is divided into zones for daily maintenance operations. These zones do not align one-to-one with the Land Plan Areas.

Building Maintenance

The Building Maintenance section is responsible for the safety, function, and cleanliness of over 130 facilities totaling approximately 1.5 million square feet. Staff are responsible for small building improvements and both preventative and corrective maintenance.

Forestry

Forestry staff perform planting, pruning, removals, stump grinding, inspection and emergency response. They also manage contracted forestry services, permits, forestry related plans review, and public communication about park and street trees. Staff are also on call 24 hours a day to respond to tree-related emergencies that

pose risks to public safety or property.

The Forestry section also operates a 45-acre tree nursery, supplying the City's planting program with diverse species not typically available from local commercial nurseries. Nursery staff inspect, care for, and cultivate stock used for City planting projects. Trees are planted through both in-house crews and professional contracts, ensuring year-round capacity to meet Urban Forestry Master Plan (UFMP) targets.

Golf

Columbus operates several high-profile golf courses that require diverse maintenance and management strategies tailored to each course's specific needs, including course design, player capacity, and seasonal considerations. The Golf section operates with a blend of full-time staff and and seasonal workers.

Conservation

The Conservation section oversees a range of operational activities, from outdoor recreation programming to in-field natural resource management and operations. Conservation

staff are responsible for maintaining all green infrastructure located on park property. With support from volunteers, they develop, install, and maintain pollinator gardens, host tree-planting events in parks, develop and monitor wetlands, and conduct invasive species removal projects.

Maintenance Needs

The diverse range of facilities that CRPD operates requires a diversified maintenance approach.

- **Parks:** Parks Maintenance defines five maintenance tiers, each with its own standard of care that provides management guidance. Parks are categorized into each tier based on their classification and specific amenity types.
- **Buildings:** Facilities vary widely in age and maintenance needs, but Building Maintenance does not currently define standards of care for its full range of assets. Standards for Building Maintenance should tie each action to the right asset type so actions are measurable and quality is consistent.

- **Forestry:** The Urban Forestry Master Plan calls for proactive maintenance; however, Forestry is approximately four years behind on reactive work orders generated by 311 requests.
- **Golf:** Golf courses have diverse maintenance needs and require investment in high-quality maintenance equipment and improved maintenance outcomes through a targeted increase in staffing.

- **Conservation:** The Conservation team oversees management plans for CRPD's 25 nature preserves and specialty park sites, including the Stockbridge urban forest, wetlands, and trail development projects. Conservation staff will also lead ecological management of CRPD's ponds.



PLANNING FOR GROWTH

Over the next ten years, Columbus must **catch up** to park and facility needs by addressing current gaps in service, and **keep up** with future needs based on growth projections. The System Analysis inputs guide decision-making for what types of parks are needed and where (Figure 43).

Figure 44 identifies future park and facility needs for CRPD to continue providing the current level of service. For some facilities, like pools, this does not include the need for added facilities to keep up with existing demand.

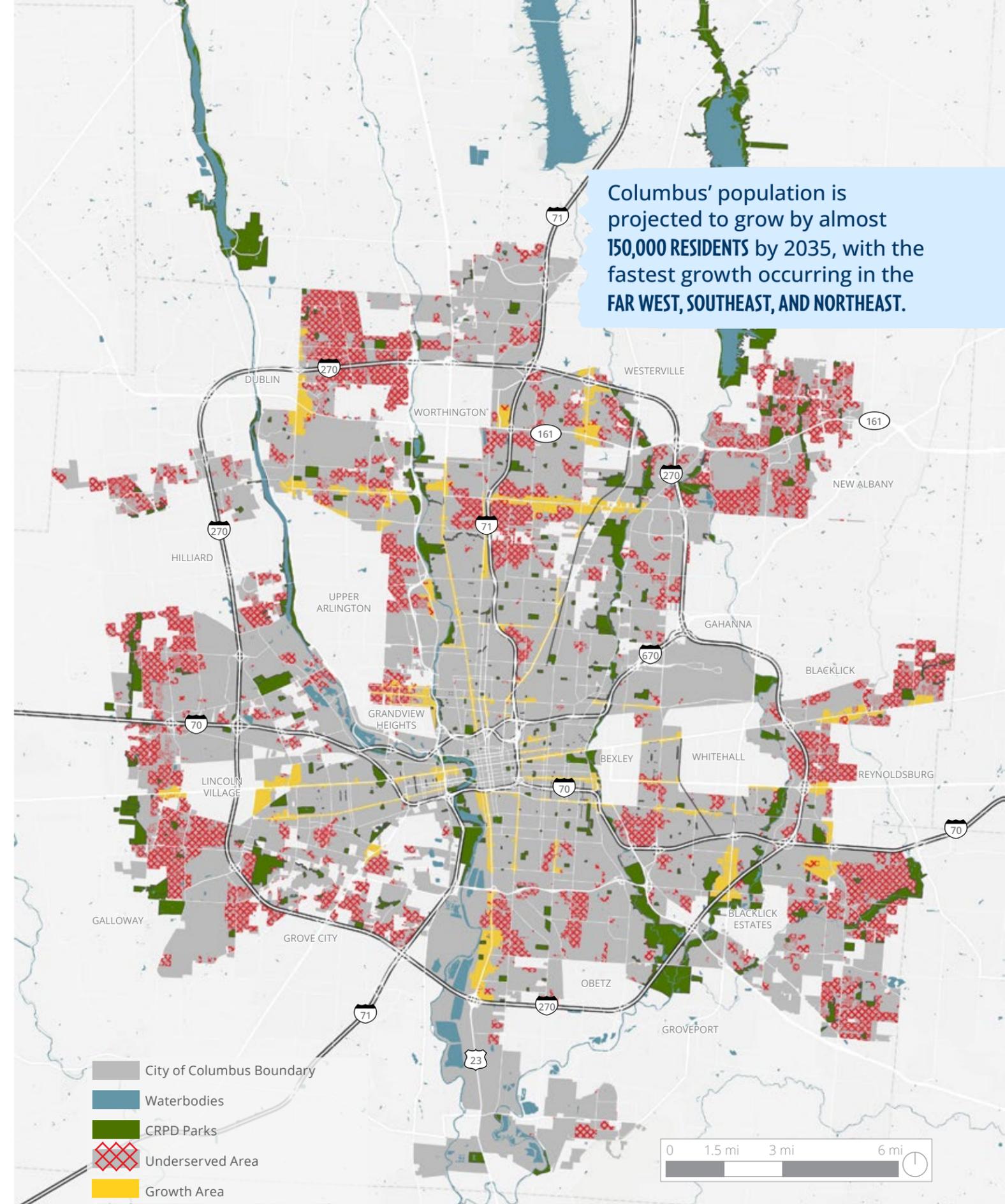
SYSTEM ANALYSIS INPUTS

- **Park Classifications:** What types of parks and facilities are currently offered and where?
- **Park Conditions:** What parks and facilities will need maintenance and repair over the next ten years?
- **Access:** Where do residents not have access to parks, facilities, or amenities?
- **Level of Service and Benchmarking:** How do the number of amenities compare to the population levels? How do the number of parks, facilities, and amenities compare to similar cities' systems?
- **Priority Areas:** Where will investment in recreation and parks have the greatest impact?
- **Growth:** Where will additional parks and facilities be needed as the population increases?

Figure 43: System Analysis Inputs for Planning for Growth

	2024 Level of Service (per 1,000 residents for population of 927,348)	Needed to Maintain Current Ratio by 2035 (per 1,000 residents for a population of 1,073,624)
Regional Trails 230 miles	0.25	+ 36 miles
Recreation Centers 28 centers	0.03	+ 4.4 recreation centers
Parks 458 properties	0.49	+ 72 park properties
Regional Parks 2,719 acres	1.41	+ 206 acres
Community Parks 1,306 acres	2.93	+ 429 acres
Neighborhood Parks 862 acres	0.93	+ 136 acres
Pools 8 pools	0.09	+ 1.3 pools

Figure 44: Projected Park and Facility Needs Based on Level of Service



Columbus' population is projected to grow by almost **150,000 RESIDENTS** by 2035, with the fastest growth occurring in the **FAR WEST, SOUTHEAST, AND NORTHEAST.**

Figure 45: Projected Growth Areas and Underserved Areas

Future programming should focus on quality, access, and alignment rather than simple expansion. The department can improve consistency and reach through staff specialization, targeted partnerships, and data-driven adjustments to program mix.

Center Classifications

CRPD does not currently use a formalized tiered classification system for its recreation centers. Moving toward a framework that defines standards related to scale, function, and reach for different types of recreation centers will help standardize staffing, program expectations, and cost recovery targets. The classification framework should serve as a decision-making tool to guide capital reinvestment, staffing ratios, and pricing structures while maintaining flexibility to reflect neighborhood context.

Geographic Service Area

Formalizing a geographic service area approach will allow CRPD to better balance reach and quality across the

system. This model will allow for resource efficiency and minimize duplication, allowing staff to focus on innovation and partnerships. Building on the existing strengths of each center will allow for improved coordination so different centers complement one another. As program demand grows, this framework can be used to improve access by positioning each service area as a single, easy-to-navigate network.

Program Types

Data from program registration, community engagement, recreation trends, and future influences should be used to plan for program offerings going forward. Strengthening arts, nature, and therapeutic programs responds directly to the top unmet needs identified through community engagement and peer benchmarking.

Additionally, as the city diversifies, it will be increasingly important to ensure resources for bilingual staffing and cultural representation are distributed across the city. Aligning program offerings with the city's shifting population will

ensure that every resident, regardless of location, culture, or age, can find a welcoming and relevant place to engage in recreation. Aligning with population trends will require more consistent demographic data recording for program participants.

Program Locations

CRPD must leverage citywide changes in access to ensure program options are accessible via transit or a safe walk or bike. Providing a fair distribution of therapeutic and senior programs is especially important because participants are likely to face complex travel barriers.

Partnerships

Continuing to strengthen and build partnerships will allow CRPD to adapt to population growth and change, extend community reach, and optimize resources. Partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and cultural organizations enhance program depth and facility utilization across all classifications.

Increased park, facility, and program needs correspond with increased operations and maintenance needs.

Staffing

Staffing is the most critical determinant of consistent service delivery. Staffing models must be right-sized to the department and the population it serves.

CRPD is currently facing vacancies and staffing shortages in many sections. A reliance on part-time staff and a lack of supervisory staff increase turnover and retraining needs and contribute to operational inefficiencies. As park and facility use increases with population growth, the burden on staff will increase.

Parks Maintenance

Several park maintenance zones face severe staff shortages that should be addressed before system growth occurs. Staff capacity can be improved through proactive hiring and equipment procurement. Filling vacancies, especially in supervisory positions, will be critical to maintain appropriate service levels.

Building Maintenance

Labor to facility ratios are strong, but FTEs are not always aligned to the range of demands associated with Columbus' diverse facility types. Building Maintenance also faces challenges avoiding duplication with field maintenance, which should be resolved by clearly delineating roles and responsibilities in future maintenance manuals.

Forestry

Forestry aspires to achieve a proactive 10-year pruning cycle, which would require roughly 14,000 mature trees to be pruned annually. This is more than double the current capacity, and will necessitate additional staff and equipment resources. Tree planting, protection, and maintenance standards are also reflected at a policy level through the Public Tree Code, the Tree Technical Manual, and other strategies to implement the Urban Forestry Master Plan.

The current combination of high tree-to-staff ratios, limited pruning capacity, persistent backlogs, and expanding emergency workload indicates that Columbus Urban Forestry is under-resourced relative to its operational responsibilities

and long-term canopy goals. Increasing field staffing by 6–8 FTEs over the next several years is both justified and necessary to shift the division from a reactive posture to a sustainable, proactive urban forestry program.

Golf

As the city grows, the Golf section is interested in expanding community participation in golf. This will require additional staff to improve course conditions and ensure customer service and administrative tasks are met. There are also opportunities in the division to modernize operations, adhering to best practices in course management, staffing, pricing, and proactive maintenance.

Conservation

CRPD's Conservation section was established recently to address growing and highly important needs for the department. Staff capacity does not currently meet demands. As the need for in-field resource management continues to grow so will the need for cooperative-work with the Parks team. Adding part time staff to support the team will be needed in order to meet the required standards.

CHAPTER 4

PLAN FRAMEWORK

- Framework
- Goals
- Big Moves and Strategies

Playbook Columbus establishes a roadmap for how the recreation and parks system will evolve to meet the needs of Columbus' people today and for the decade to come.

The Goals, Big Moves, Strategies, and Actions are the core of the plan. They reflect the community's aspirations, CRPD's values, and the realities of a growing city.

The ideas within this chapter are informed and supported by both community desires and the realities of existing conditions. The plan framework expresses ambitions for the next ten years, providing flexibility for actions to adapt to opportunities. Playbook Columbus charts a path forward that balances stewardship with innovation, caring for what exists while preparing for change.



FRAMEWORK

By leveraging the existing system's strengths, opportunities identified through community engagement, and national best practices, Playbook Columbus envisions a future for the recreation and parks system that is ambitious and achievable.

The framework diagram (Figure 45) demonstrates how anticipation of future influences, analysis of the current system, and community priorities were used to inform the creation of Plan Goals and Big Moves. Goals and Big Moves are general elements that apply across the city. They are supported by Strategies and Actions, which are the most specific plan elements. As a whole, this framework informs the department's direction.

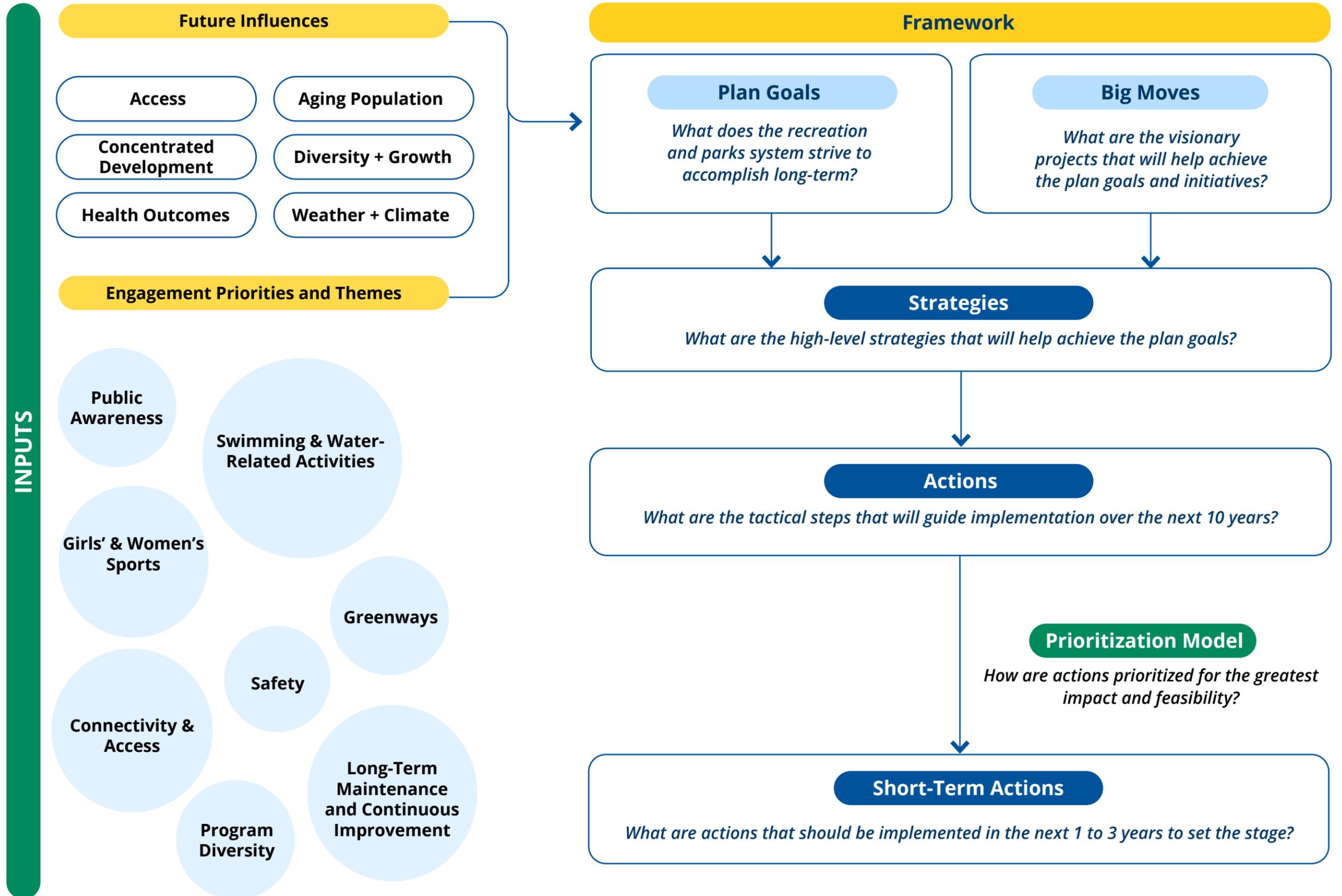


Figure 45: Playbook Columbus Framework Diagram

BIG MOVES



Big Moves are the signature, high-visibility projects of Playbook Columbus that go beyond incremental improvements to transform how residents experience recreation and parks. They are bold, catalytic investments in the public realm that tie into multiple plan goals.

Facilities & Programs: Transforming Our Growth

Prepare for growth and close the service gap through a tiered development approach that includes **acquiring land**, building **new community facilities**, and providing **innovative and specialized programming** at the regional level.

Aquatics: We're More than Getting Our Feet Wet

Expand Columbus' relationship with water through **new aquatic facilities**, safer **access to rivers and reservoirs**, and **programs that deepen connections** with the city's natural waterways.

Prioritize the Environment: It's in Our Nature

Use the park system as a tool for **resilience, conservation**, and **preservation** by protecting **ecologically sensitive lands**, **restoring natural waterways** and habitats, and **embedding sustainability best practices** across the system.

Park Improvements: Every Park Counts

Prioritize **quality** across the park system, from regional destinations to neighborhood gems that **reflect community pride** and create lasting **connections between people and place**.

Greenways & Trails: Create Connections that Matter

Improve **system connectivity** through greenway and trail projects that allow people to reach **natural experiences**, recreational opportunities, parks, amenities and **local attractions**.

Figure 46: Big Moves

A. NURTURE AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Health, fitness, and wellness are important outcomes that can be addressed by recreation and parks. By providing fair access to parks, programs, and services, CRPD can lay the groundwork for a thriving community.

Expand programs and places that foster wellness and promote movement and fitness for full and healthy lives. Address health vulnerabilities and disparities by connecting people to resources. Increase the variety of youth and adult sports opportunities. Prioritize creation of social bonds to support mental and emotional wellbeing. Develop space for adaptive and therapeutic recreation programs.



A1 Add and improve parks and facilities where most needed.

Address gaps in the distribution of parks and centers, park amenities, and trails based on the current system, and plan ahead to ensure areas slated for growth have adequate access to recreation and parks.

A2 Invest in distinctive, multipurpose, and high-quality parks and facilities.

Parks and facilities should support the most popular activities in Columbus, but they can also offer opportunities for discovering something new. Creative recreation and parks spaces that offer memorable, unique experiences can establish a lifetime habit of physical activity, wellness, and play.

LEARN MORE

[Underserved Priority Areas Map](#)

KEY FINDING

Pools, greenway trails, and nature-based experiences are high-priority park and facility investments.

A3 Expand access to high-demand programs.

CRPD must continually adapt its programs and services to meet the community's evolving needs. Public input and system analysis reveal program types where service is outpaced by demand, and other emerging interests to monitor and plan for. Popular programs to consider expanding include swim lessons, summer camps, arts and crafts, outdoor recreation, youth sports, and more.

A4 Plan and design parks that integrate with the transportation system.

Locating parks along transit lines, bike lanes, and trails can make recreation part of residents' everyday lives. Proximity to the mobility network should be considered when identifying locations for new parks and facilities. Existing parks and facilities can be retrofitted to improve wayfinding and signage. In some cases, park or facility entrances should be added or moved to promote seamless integration with the active transportation network.

LEARN MORE

[Program and Service Analysis](#)

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

What are some of the priorities for expanded programming?

- Use **data** collected at centers and throughout the Playbook process to identify what programs are needed and where they should be added.
- Expand **Therapeutic Recreation** programs, including sports, wellness, fitness, after-school programs, arts, and aquatics.
- Continue to grow **wellness** and **positive-outlet programming** for at-risk youth.
- Bring the community together through **multigenerational programs**.



NURTURE AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY

A5 Support health and wellness by promoting active lifestyles and aligning with citywide health goals.

To encourage active lifestyles, CRPD should focus on upgrading walking, biking, fitness, and aquatic infrastructure and tailoring wellness programming to meet the needs of all Columbus residents, with a focus on addressing health disparities. Recreation and parks can contribute to the priorities established in the Columbus Public Health Strategic Plan by targeting investment in priority areas and continuing to offer services that help residents meet basic needs and improve their mental and physical health.

LEARN MORE

[Ability & Health Indicator Map](#)

A6 Become a leader in providing universal access to recreation and parks.

Throughout the public engagement process, the community expressed relatively low levels of satisfaction with the number of accessible spaces and/or amenities for people with disabilities. To ensure all residents can access and enjoy recreation and parks, CRPD must expand adaptive, therapeutic and inclusive programming, incorporate accessibility into new projects, and track progress through accessibility-focused metrics.

KEY FINDING

Universally Accessible Playgrounds are needed in the **Northeast** and **Southwest** Land Plan Areas.

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

How can recreation and parks promote community health and wellbeing?

- Develop an evaluation framework to measure outcomes of health and wellness programs.
- Strengthen partnerships and processes to connect residents to social services.
- Ensure active recreation infrastructure is well-maintained and ADA accessible.
- Promote public awareness of active recreation opportunities.
- Improve feelings of safety and welcome at parks and facilities.

A7 Advance Columbus' aspiration of becoming the "Nation's Capital for Women's Sports."

Columbus has historically championed girls and women in sports. In 2025, Mayor Ginther declared an aspiration to solidify this tradition and establish Columbus as the "Nation's Capital for Women's Sports." CRPD will be a leader in this effort by designing spaces and programs that not only provide opportunities for women and girls in active recreation, but that actively welcome them and allow them to thrive.

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

How can CRPD get more girls in the game?

- Expand opportunities for girls and women to participate in sports. This means adding options for women's sports leagues, offering sports programming at different times of day, and facilitating equipment exchanges and rentals.
- Stigma and safety concerns often inhibit girls and women from participating in sports. Identify the specific barriers that exist in Columbus and actively work to promote feelings of safety and welcome.
- Partner with local teams to provide high-quality, competitive sports programs for girls (youth) that connect them with athletic role models.
- Continue to celebrate the incredible history of female athletes in Columbus. Elevating the stories of women and girls in sports can empower the next generation to "be what they see."



WE'RE MORE THAN GETTING OUR FEET WET

When looking at a map of Columbus, the importance of water is immediately evident. With rivers and creeks stretching north to south and three sizeable reservoirs, there are numerous opportunities for connecting with natural waterways within the city.



Figure 47: Aquatics Illustration

BIG MOVE | AQUATICS

To promote meaningful engagement with water, CRPD must prioritize programs that prepare residents to feel comfortable and safe around water. This requires investing in aquatic facilities to expand programming and close service gaps, and providing equipment and training for people to safely explore rivers, creeks, and reservoirs.

Promote Water Safety

Facility investments must be paired with programs that prepare people to feel comfortable and safe around water. This includes expanded learn-to-swim programming, added safety equipment and signage along natural waterways, and a process for tracking outcomes associated with aquatic investments, like the percentage of residents who know how to swim.

Connect Communities to Water

Public spaces along natural waterways should inspire curiosity and invite residents to interact with rivers and streams. Waterfront gathering spaces, activated water access points, and expanded river recreation options can strengthen the community's relationship with water.

Offer Creative Programming

Innovative aquatic programming can go above and beyond foundational skills. This includes expanding access to competitive swim programs, while also providing opportunities to interact with water for individuals who do not know how to swim. Water play contributes to broader water safety strategies, as features like splash pads can improve residents' comfort levels around water.

UPCOMING CAPITAL PROJECTS

Northeast Indoor Aquatics Center

New state-of-the-art facility that will serve a variety of aquatic programming and recreation needs year-round, including lifesaving, leisure, and competitive activities.

Outdoor Pool Rebuilds

- Tuttle Pool
- Marion Franklin Pool

Splash Pads

- West Case Park
- Barnett Park (replacement)

Access to Natural Waterways

- Hoover Mudflats Boardwalk
- Walnut Street Boat Ramp
- Courtesy Docks
- Griggs Reservoir Accessible Kayak Launch
- O'Shaughnessy Reservoir Accessible Kayak Launch

- City of Columbus Boundary
- Waterbodies
- Rivers and Creeks
- Aquatic Desert Zones
- Splash Pads
- Outdoor Pools
- Water Access Point
- Columbus Aquatics Center
- Potential Aquatic Location

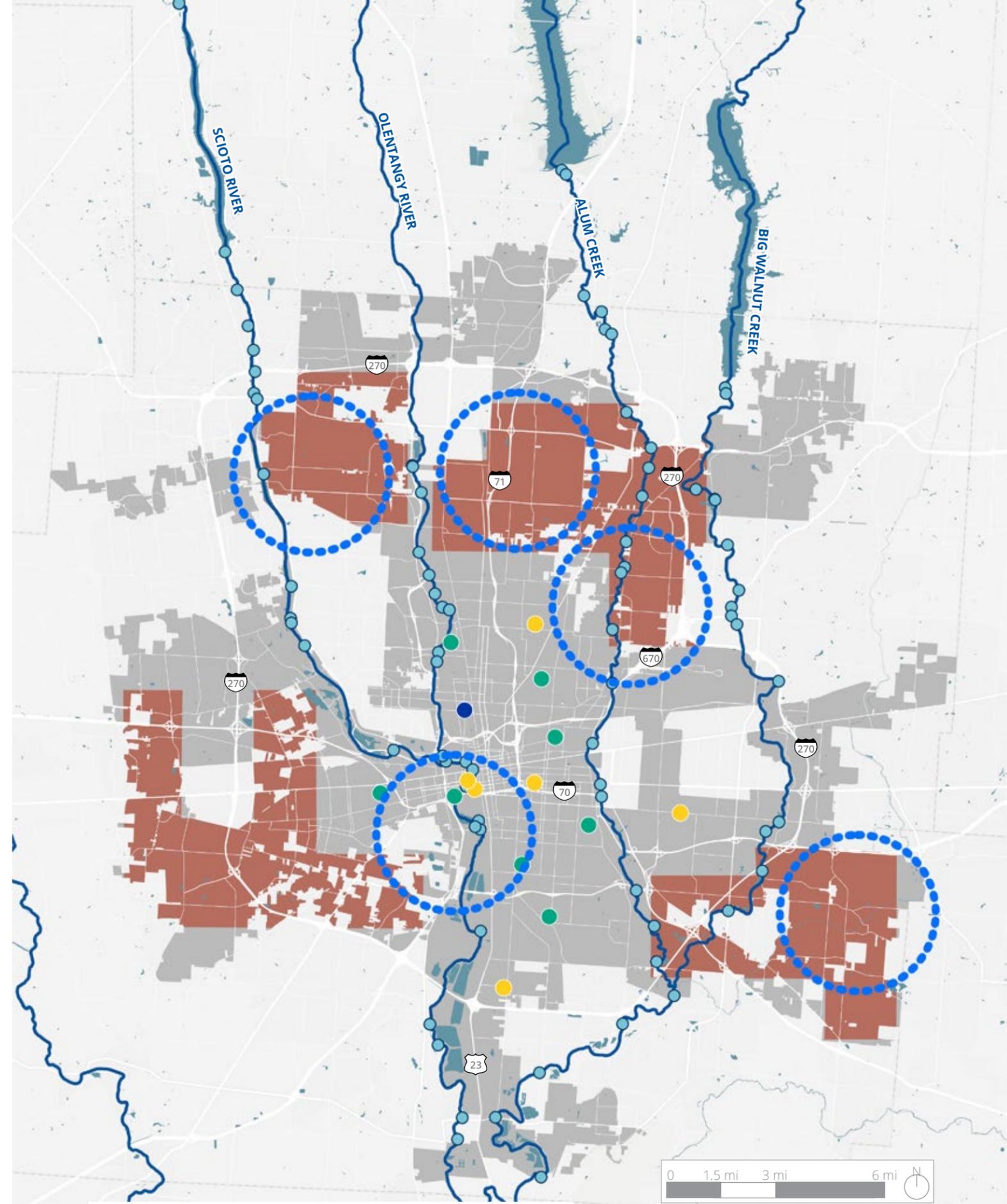


Figure 48: Aquatics Program and Water Access Locations Map

B. BRING NATURE INTO FOCUS

The City of Columbus was once characterized by forests, swamps, and prairies. Preserving what remains of those landscapes is one of the park system's most important functions.

Improve ecological health and biodiversity as a legacy investment in people and land. Grow our urban forest and expand the functional benefits of natural environmental systems. Connect people to nature and its benefits through programming, education and access to high-quality natural areas. Encourage community stewardship with resources and partnerships for volunteerism. Take collaborative regional action to create a more resilient Central Ohio.



B1 Design parks as functional landscapes.

All parks – not just conservation areas – can be designed to reduce ambient heat, manage stormwater, and increase wildlife habitat, among other benefits. Planting native and adapted species, integrating green stormwater infrastructure, and increasing tree canopy will improve the park system's ecological performance.

B2 Utilize proactive ecological approaches to managing growth through natural area acquisition, restoration, and maintenance.

Urban development often results in fragmented native landscapes. As Columbus grows and densifies, the city has an opportunity to reimagine the typical relationship between development and conservation. A thoughtful approach to preservation and stewardship makes natural area conservation more impactful by considering how parks fit into regional ecologies.

B3 Foster community stewardship and environmental education.

By providing fair access to nature and environmental education across the city, CRPD can cultivate generational stewardship.

B4 Expand nature-based play for all ages through park design and programming.

Hands-on experiences like outdoor classrooms, seasonal programming, river recreation and nature play can foster curiosity, learning and connection to the outdoors. These types of nature-based experiences are very popular in Columbus, but there are gaps in the current distribution of natural areas and environmental education and programming.

LEARN MORE

[Nature-Based Experiences Map](#)

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

How can parks work to improve urban ecological health?

- Update park design guidelines to require a certain percentage of **native plant species** in all park properties, based on lessons learned from designing and maintaining the existing inventory of pollinator habitats.
- Publish an approved species list that prioritizes native and adapted species that attract pollinators. Share these guidelines publicly so they can be used as a **best practice resource** throughout the region.
- Develop **ecological performance-based design standards** for parks and facilities, building upon existing City standards to ensure parks are built with **green stormwater infrastructure** and **low-impact development** principles.
- Build on the Urban Forestry Master Plan to identify strategies for increasing **tree canopy** within parks.
- Balance ecological strategies with the realities of **maintenance** and **operating costs**.



GOALS & STRATEGIES | BRING NATURE INTO FOCUS

B5 Preserve and grow the city's tree canopy.

The vision and goals of the Urban Forestry Master Plan will remain a priority for CRPD over the next ten years, with reforestation in park properties emerging as a focus area.

B6 Promote climate action through parks and facilities.

As Columbus' climate changes, its parks and facilities will be essential infrastructure for climate resilience. These spaces have the potential to cool the city, absorb and clean stormwater, shelter urban wildlife, and can help with recovery and healing in the midst of climate emergencies. Defining design criteria for Resilience Hubs (see Figure 49) is one action CRPD can take to ensure its facilities promote citywide environmental goals.

LEARN MORE

[Transforming Our Growth from the Ground Up](#)

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT



How can parks advance the goals of the Urban Forestry Master Plan?

- Identify sites for large-scale urban reforestation efforts to work towards a citywide tree canopy cover of 40%.
- Expand partnerships focusing on preserving tree canopy and expanding new tree plantings on private property.
- Prioritize tree planting in parks where the surrounding neighborhood has relatively low tree canopy coverage to achieve fair canopy across all neighborhoods by 2030.

DEFINITION

What is a Resilience Hub?

The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) defines Resilience Hubs as “**community-serving facilities** augmented to support residents, coordinate communication, **distribute resources**, and **reduce carbon pollution** while enhancing quality of life...providing opportunities for communities to become more self-determining, socially connected, and successful before, during, and after disruptions.”

Columbus' community centers already serve many of the key functions associated with Resilience Hubs – they act as hubs that **bring people together, promote physical activity, offer health and wellness programming, and connect residents with social services.**

To add to this criteria, CRPD should **define city-specific design criteria, including guidelines for climate-adaptive design, energy efficiency, and sustainable materials.**



Figure 49: Resilience Hub Features

IT'S IN OUR NATURE

Cities are composed of natural and built landscapes that are interconnected and overlapping. Nature can be enhanced and adapted as green infrastructure to combat major challenges like flooding, extreme heat, and pollution. From small interventions like creating a pollinator garden or planting a tree, to bigger efforts of restoring streams, prairies, meadows, and wetlands, CRPD can work with the natural environment to make the city more livable for future generations.



Figure 50: Prioritize the Environment Illustration

BIG MOVE | ENVIRONMENT

Adopt an Ecological Approach

To develop a strategic approach for prioritizing the natural environment, CRPD can define and map “placetypes” based on a composite of factors like existing landcover, habitat value, and soil type. An ecological approach consists of establishing a framework to identify and move forward with critical acquisitions that aggregate fragments of land in proximity to existing parks and natural areas, as illustrated in Figure 52. A deeper understanding of ecological context will allow for increased resiliency and sustainability in park design and opportunities for nature education and awareness across the city.

Develop Place-Based Strategies

Placetypes can be paired with corresponding strategies for acquisition, design, and maintenance that respond to their unique context. In addition to ecological criteria, conservation strategies might consider the amount of land available, surrounding uses, and the overall program mix of the park. Figure 51 illustrates how nature-based strategies can be incorporated into different park types. This ranges from small, urban settings like neighborhood parks or open spaces, to developed parks that also serve community recreation purposes, to larger areas that are solely devoted to conservation.

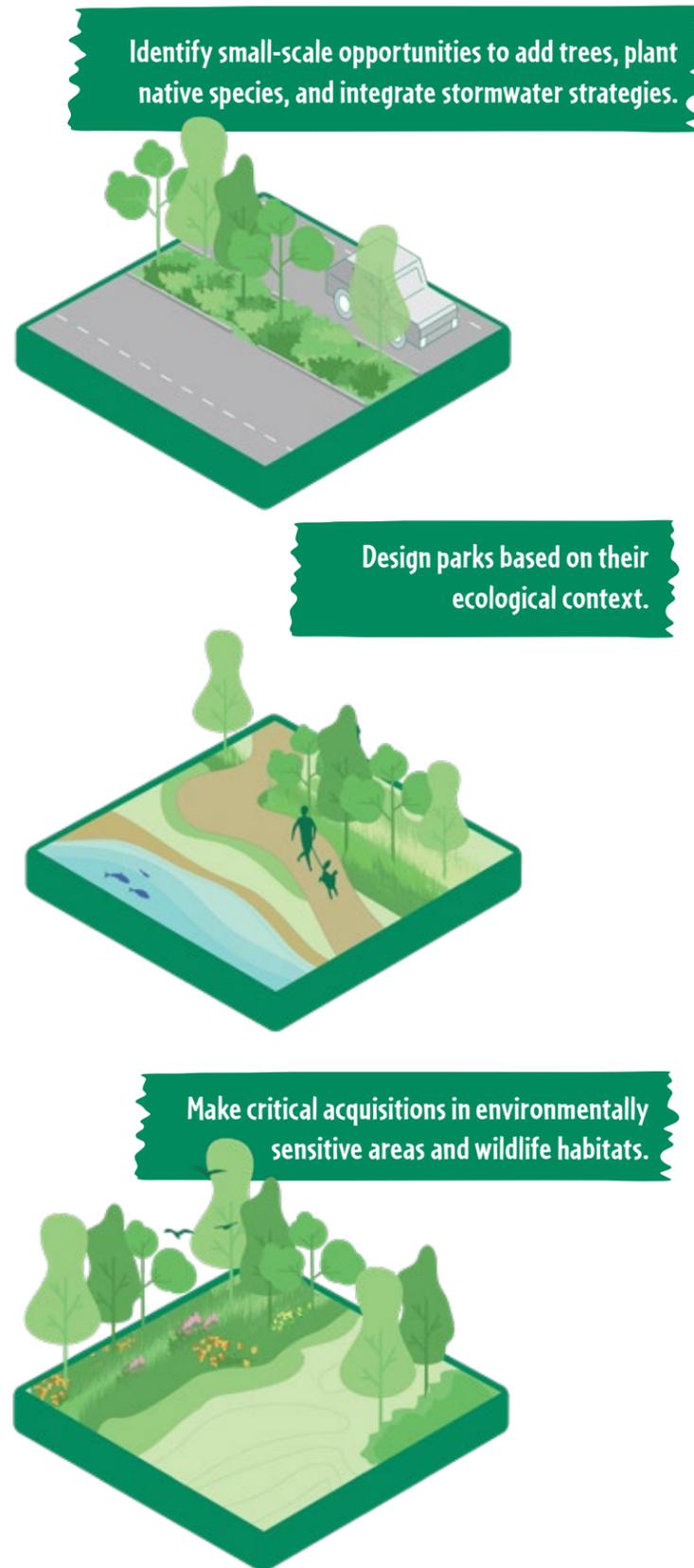


Figure 51: Prioritizing the Environment Interventions

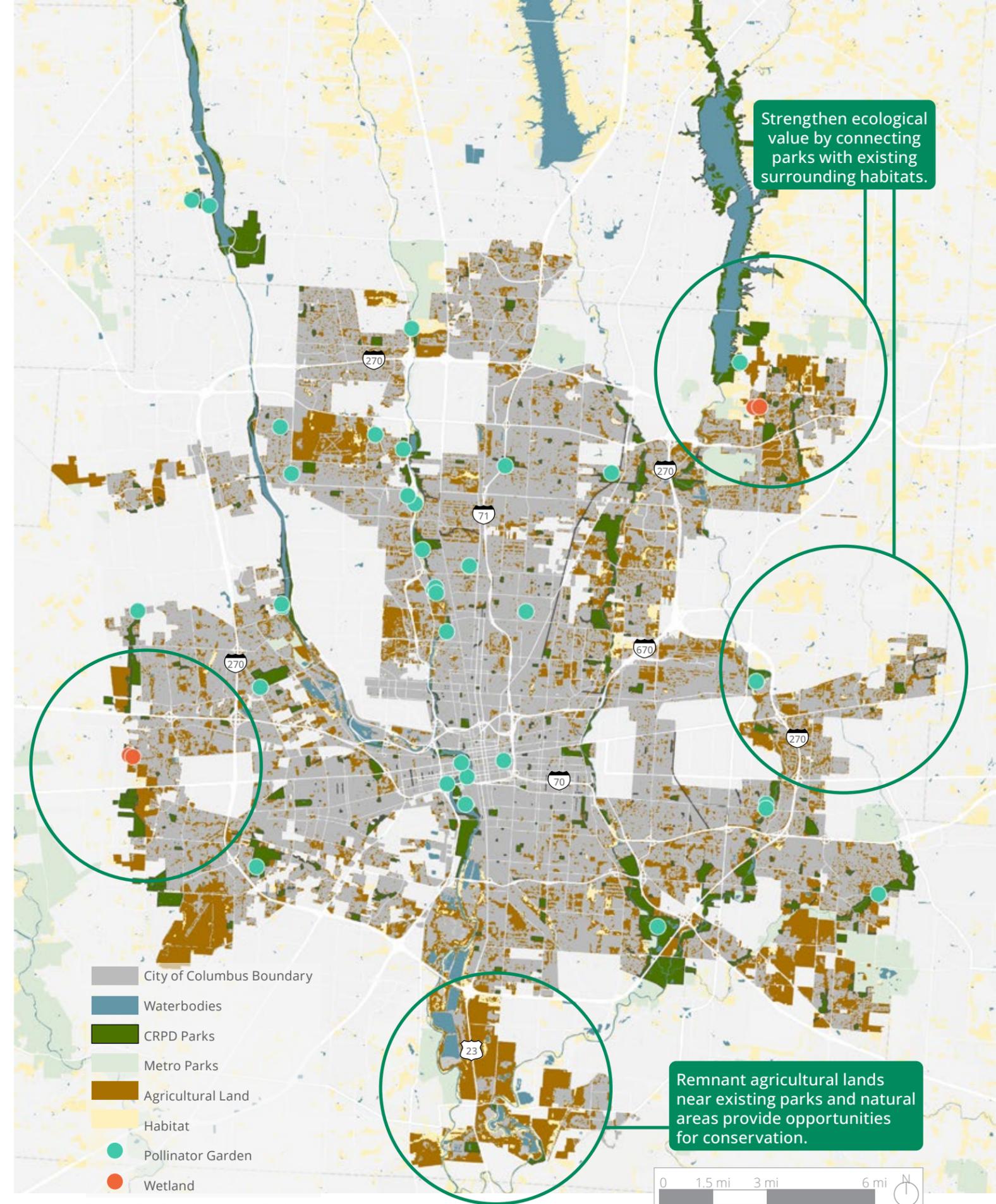


Figure 52: Prioritizing the Environment Map

C. THIS PARK WELCOMES YOU

Great parks and facilities are the anchors of their communities. They are places where people come together to socialize, celebrate, and connect. As Columbus grows and diversifies, the recreation and parks system can adapt to welcome residents of diverse backgrounds and interests and provide neighborhood institutions that are well-used and well-loved by all.

Make parks, trails, and recreation facilities welcoming and safe spaces for connecting. Uplift community champions embedded in our neighborhoods. Address physical and cultural barriers to use. Design for inclusion. Explore partnerships that promote community safety. Respectfully address conflicts in park use while promoting enjoyment for all.



C1 Foster a culture of belonging across parks and recreation facilities.

For people to feel at home in parks and centers, they must be able to physically access and use facilities, and feel safe and welcome while doing so. Elements like multilingual signage, culturally relevant programming, and public art can celebrate the diversity of Columbus and cultivate spaces where everyone feels welcome.

C2 Remove cultural barriers to access.

Throughout engagement, residents cited diverse reasons why they do not currently use the recreation and parks system. This includes concerns about safety and physical barriers, but it also includes personal factors like long work hours and a general lack of awareness. Through actions like expanding fee assistance, continuing to align program offerings with diverse interests, and flexible scheduling, Columbus can work to ensure that all residents see themselves represented in recreation and parks.

C3 Empower communities and elevate local voices.

A park or facility can be a point of pride for a neighborhood when it provides the right mix of amenities, programs, services, and events. By making it easy for residents to participate in planning, designing and programming parks and facilities, CRPD can foster community stewardship and create places that work for the people who use them.

C4 Design for both comfort and safety.

Park design can impact feelings of welcome and real and perceived safety. Design elements like lighting, seating, clear sightlines, and furnishings communicate that a space is cared for and allow residents to feel comfortable using parks across all seasons and times of day.

LEARN MORE

[What design elements make a park feel comfortable and safe?](#)

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

What does it mean to foster a culture of belonging?

- Strong partnerships with cultural organizations allow recreation and parks to provide **culturally relevant events, festivals, and programming**.
- **Multilingual signage, wayfinding, and outreach** improves access to information and communicates that recreation and parks are welcome to all.
- **Public art and interpretive installations** can be curated to reflect Columbus' diversity and celebrate its history.



C5 Go above and beyond physical accessibility.

Playbook Columbus calls for a complete accessibility audit of existing parks and facilities to identify priorities for access improvements. Where possible, parks and facilities should incorporate universal design principles.

DEFINITION

What is **Universal Design**?

Universal design accommodates and welcomes visitors of diverse ages, abilities, backgrounds and experiences. It goes beyond ADA standards to create parks and facilities that are more inclusive for people of all abilities.



ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

How can parks and facilities incorporate universal design principles?

- Accommodate users of **different heights**, including those using wheelchairs.
- Ensure adequate **clearance** for mobility devices.
- Provide **choices** in methods of use.
- Accommodate **left- and right-handed** methods of access.
- Present essential information using different **modes of communication**, like pictures, auditory recordings, and tactile features.
- Use different **colors** to indicate intensity of experience on specific pieces of play equipment.
- Locate the most used elements in a visible place, with more **challenging elements** less centralized.

C6 Promote safe parks and facilities through programming and operations.

Parks and facilities that are well-used are visibly safer and more welcoming. A 2018 study by City Parks Alliance found that programming is the most effective way to increase park use. Encouraging full use of parks and facilities requires the right mix of programs offered at the right time, including nighttime and summer programming. To ensure respectful coexistence between park users, staff must be trained in de-escalation and cultural competency. A strengthened and expanded volunteer steward program and a standard approach to conflict resolution can also help improve rule enforcement in parks and facilities.

ACTIONS HIGHLIGHT

What design elements make parks feel comfortable and safe?

- Features that communicate a place is **cared-for**, including landscaping, public art, and signage.
- Open **sight lines** and **visibility**.
- Diverse amenities that keep the park **activated throughout different seasons and times of day**.
- Clearly **marked and ADA-accessible entries**.
- Active, **vibrant park edges**.



D. CREATE WHAT'S UNIQUELY US ABOUT COLUMBUS

In Columbus, residents of all ages share memories of being a “rec and parks kid” — an expression of pride in having grown up in the city’s parks and facilities. As the city grows and diversifies, it can offer this experience to a new generation by providing spaces where people come together to strengthen community, celebrate culture, and make memories that last a lifetime.

Create opportunities for cultural experiences, joyful moments, and belonging through diverse community events and celebrations. Prioritize community-inspired design and support neighborhood initiatives. Develop places and programs that inspire discovery and wonder. Bring unique opportunities for adventure into every community. Celebrate what it means to be a “rec and parks kid” for a lifetime.



D1 Tell the Columbus story through parks.

Parks are important places for protecting and interpreting the City’s history. CRPD can add to the existing inventory of historic and cultural resources in the city by strategically preserving, acquiring, and commissioning resources to ensure residents have access to a range of interpretive elements that are appropriately distributed across the city and that represent diverse stories that may not otherwise be told.

D2 Draw on the unique talents of the Columbus community to expand programs and partnerships.

Parks and facilities can support local creativity and business by hosting opportunities for artists, makers, and small businesses to test and grow their offerings. By partnering with organizations like Experience Columbus, Greater Columbus Sports Commission, and other cultural groups, CRPD can promote the city as a regional destination for creative experiences based in parks and facilities. Similarly, programs and events should be tailored to meet the needs, interests, and talents of community members. To cultivate experiences that are appropriate for each center, CRPD can recruit independent instructors to deliver non-traditional program offerings.

D3 Infuse innovation and adventure.

Creative, adventurous, and experimental experiences like adventure play, makerspaces, or pop-up mobile “labs”, designed in partnership with local artists, can make Columbus’ parks and facilities hubs of discovery and wonder.

D4 Advance engagement and technology tools.

Community engagement revealed limited awareness around the recreation and park offerings in Columbus. Digital tools can boost visitation and program participation by offering creative options for residents to explore the existing system. This could include a “passport” app that rewards residents for attending events, visiting parks, and joining programs, immersive media like augmented reality trails, interactive art installations, or digital story walks, and using real-time engagement tools like QR codes and digital kiosks to promote events and gather feedback from the community at key locations.

D5 Bring recreation and parks closer to people through signature parks and programs.

Great parks are a source of pride for a city — both its large destination parks and its smaller hidden gems. In a big city like Columbus, it is critical that unique and exciting recreation and park experiences can be easily accessed from the places people live. The system analysis offers a starting point for locating new amenities and reinvesting in existing amenities to promote a sense of community pride. A community-led design approach can be adopted to co-create Signature Parks and programs across the city. By embracing each neighborhood’s unique set of opportunities and constraints, Columbus can create memorable spaces that authentically reflect its dynamic identity.

LEARN MORE

[Every Park Counts](#)

EVERY PARK COUNTS

Columbus is a leader in level of service, providing an above-average number of parks to its resident population. However, with park age and use has come deterioration, need for replacement, and higher community expectations for the purposes of parks. Improvements to the park system should consider how every space contributes to the overall recreation and park system and the unique experiences that a park can provide.

Great parks can reflect community pride and create lasting connections between people and places. Rather than a cookie-cutter approach in which all parks look the same and offer the same activities, park quality can be enhanced through design and programming that is adapted to the local context.



Figure 53: Park Improvements Illustration

BIG MOVE | PARK IMPROVEMENTS

Celebrate What We Have

Every reinvestment in an existing park is an opportunity to amplify what makes that park and neighborhood special. Figure 54 illustrates examples of opportunities for design changes in existing parks, demonstrating a range of investment levels that can contribute to high-quality parks with a strong sense of place.

Develop Signature Parks

Signature parks have unique elements that help define the way people think about Columbus. It may highlight natural features, offer unique amenities or hold something iconic of cultural or regional significance. In many cases, establishing signature parks will involve partnerships, and the design process will require significant community involvement. In Figure 55, existing signature parks are centralized in the city, while future potential signature parks can become community assets at the edges of the city.

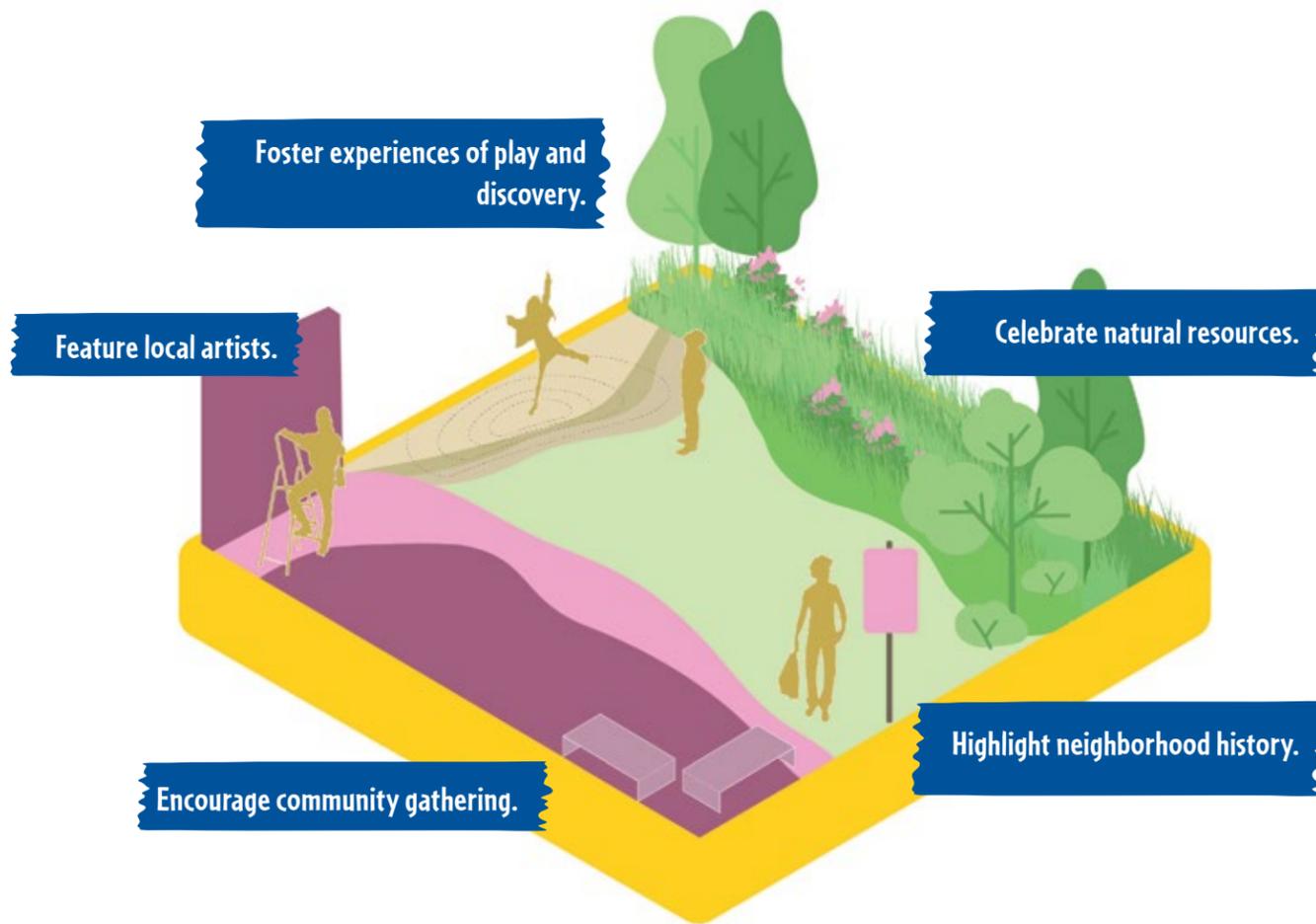


Figure 54: Signature Park Features

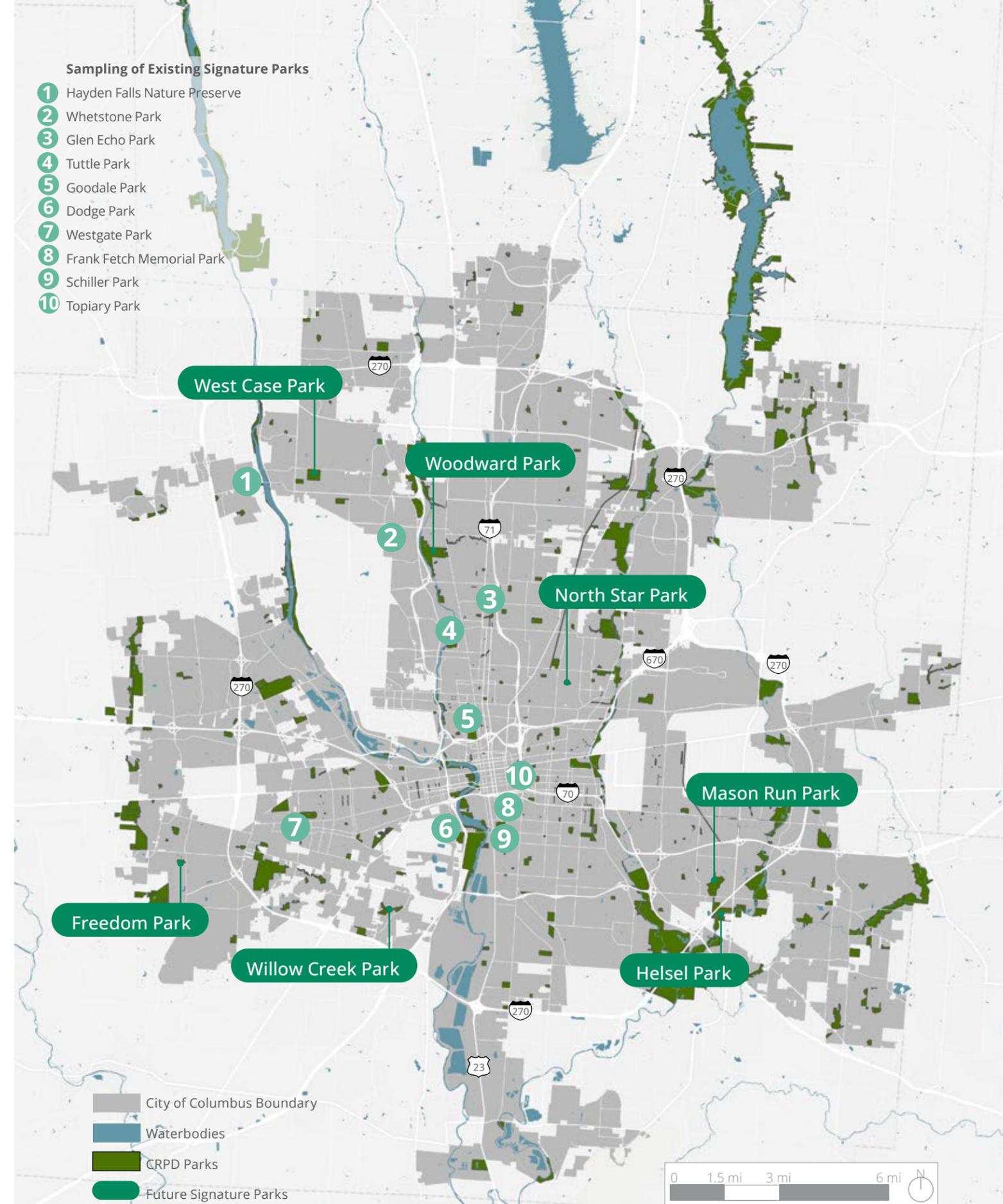
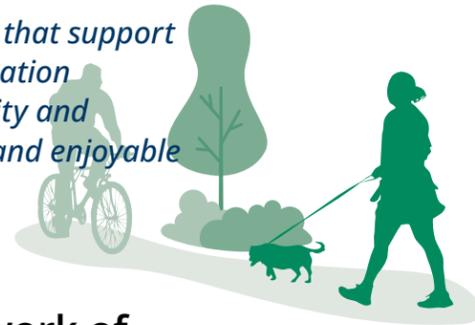


Figure 55: Signature Parks Map

E. CONNECT THE JOURNEY TO THE DESTINATION

Greenways and blueways connect neighborhoods, preserve habitat quality and connectivity, and make it easier and more enjoyable to access recreation and parks. A world-class trail network can serve as a gateway to everything the city has to offer, while providing valuable recreational opportunities.

Create a world-class network of greenway trails and waterways that support wellness, recreation, and mobility for a growing city. Grow recreation opportunities on the water. Prioritize and preserve habitat quality and connectivity. Make connecting to recreation and parks an easy and enjoyable experience.



E1 Close trail gaps to build a seamless network of trails and greenways.

Gaps in the trail system include areas where trail portions are disconnected and areas that cause the user stress or discomfort. To ensure that walking, biking, and rolling experiences are interconnected, accessible, and safe for everyone, CRPD should prioritize closing trail gaps, including improving existing trail conditions and adding new trails. This will require close collaboration with partners like MORPC, COTA, and the Columbus Department of Public Service to realize the network proposed in the Bike Plus Plan.

E2 Expand recreation on the water.

Columbus' rivers and waterways can be transformed into vibrant recreational destinations by adding and improving docks, launches, and waterfront amenities. Partnerships with local organizations can support guided tours, water-based programming, water safety programs, and seasonal events that celebrate life on the water.

LEARN MORE

[We're More than Getting Our Feet Wet](#)

E3 Improve access through information technology and navigation.

Lack of information is a critical barrier to park access in Columbus. Community members were enthusiastic about initiatives that would make it easier to navigate the city's trails, waterways, parks, and facilities. Features like upgraded trailheads, wayfinding and multilingual signage, digital mapping tools and kiosks, and integrated mobility hubs could make it easier to traverse the system. A CRPD signage branding effort would help make the system more consistent and recognizable, while programs and events can increase awareness of what the system has to offer and improve its navigability.

E4 Activate underutilized corridors as vibrant public assets.

A corridor approach aligns Columbus' trails with its preserved natural and cultural landscapes, resulting in layered recreational, ecological, and cultural benefits. Creative reuse of vacant land, rail lines, and underused infrastructure can create opportunities for connectivity, recreation, and conservation.

E5 Create signature trail and waterway experiences through distinct gateways.

By linking neighborhoods, trails connect residents to key destinations and one another. The trail system can celebrate Columbus' diversity through gateways that highlight neighborhood identity, encourage exploration along trails and waterways, and activate parks and facilities. Themed neighborhood segments and programming along paths can provide unique hubs for discovery and play that go beyond everyday park visits.

LEARN MORE

[Create Connections that Matter](#)

CREATE CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

Greenways and trails are essential components of the recreation and parks system. By providing a safe, natural experience for walking, rolling, or biking, they serve as an entrance point to all the city has to offer. In Columbus, this extends across the region, as CRPD collaborates with the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks and neighboring municipalities to plan and design the trail network.

By considering the trail system holistically as a cohesive network of access and experience, Columbus can improve connections between neighborhoods, parks, and local attractions. Prioritizing tree canopy and pollinator planting contribute habitat corridors for wildlife and can foster a healthier urban ecosystem. Creative placemaking strategies contribute to a trail system that is whimsical inviting and exciting, urging residents to learn, play and explore as they traverse the city.

Develop trailheads in key locations with distinct design and wayfinding elements that reflect the surrounding neighborhood.



Increase access to parks through safe and desirable pathways with diverse amenities including lighting, seating, and trash receptacles.

Transform trails to active corridors with opportunities for rest, play, and exercise.

Figure 56: Greenways & Trails Illustration

BIG MOVE | GREENWAYS & TRAILS

ACTIVE GREENWAY PROJECTS

These projects are underway or slated to begin in the short-term.

- 1 **Big Walnut Trail:** This 28 mile north-south regional trail will provide access to parks, community centers, school, civic centers, and scenic natural areas.
- 2 **Alum Creek Trail:** The Hudson/Mock Greenway will expand access to the Alum Creek Trail through a key east-west connection in North Central Columbus.
- 3 **Olentangy Trail:** The Olentangy Highbanks Extension will connect residents in the Northwest Land Plan Area and neighboring suburbs to the Olentangy Trail and Highbanks Metro Park.
- 4 **Scioto Trail:** A signature greenway, Scioto Trail spans from downtown to Fifth Avenue. New connections are underway to Franklinton, Hilliard, Dublin, Grandview Heights, and the far south side of the city.
- 5 **Linden Green Line:** The Linden Green Line will transform a 7-mile corridor of abandoned railway into a vibrant 58-acre linear park and trail, accessible to over 131,000 people who live within minutes of walking and cycling distance.
- 6 **East Side Rail Trail:** The 3-mile East Side Rail Trail will run through 4 neighborhoods with potential connections to 6 parks and 14 acres of natural areas across Columbus and Whitehall.

VISION GREENWAY PROJECTS

These projects are visionary and are unlikely to be implemented in the short-term.

- 7 **Big Run Greenway:** The Big Run Greenway will connect two major trails, Camp Chase and Scioto, to strengthen east-west connections on the south west side of Columbus and increase access to parks like Big Run Park along the way.
- 8 **Heritage Rail Trail:** This future trail will transform existing rail line to strengthen connections to Northwest Columbus and neighboring suburbs.
- 9 **Hellbranch Trail:** This 12 mile trail in the Big Darby area will connect neighborhoods on the city's southwest side.

VISION TRAIL GATEWAYS

These parks are possible pilot locations for gateways: enhanced trailheads that introduce people to Columbus, highlight neighborhood character, and provide a sense of place.

- A Tuttle Park
- B Maloney Park
- C Hayden Park
- D Napoleon Park
- E Big Walnut Park
- F Helsel Park
- G Willow Creek Park
- H Giller Parkland

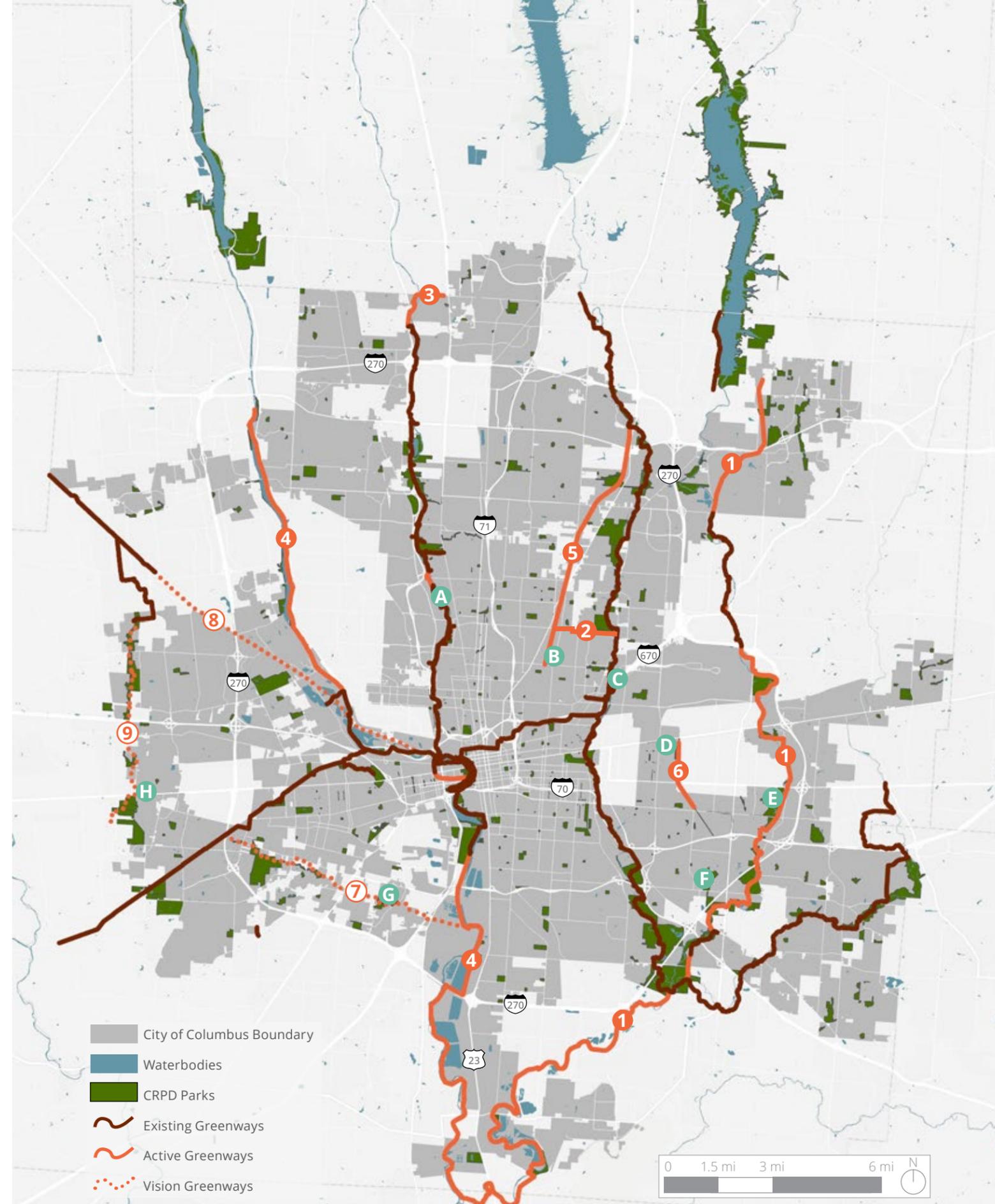


Figure 57: Greenway & Trails System Map

F. BECOME TRAILBLAZERS IN OPERATIONS

Columbus' unique service delivery and commitment to quality requires a tailored approach to maintenance and operations. Internal operations should be aligned with department values and public priorities to promote efficiency, transparency, and sustainability. By streamlining operations, CRPD can maintain its focus on connecting the community to parks, programs, and services.

Columbus Recreation and Parks will lead the way for innovation and excellence in operations and managing growth. Operate with foresight to prepare for future generations. Advance the use of technology to make systems more efficient, transparent, and sustainable.



F1 Formalize a geographical service area approach to programming and facility management.

Adopt a regional operating framework by grouping centers into geographic clusters with coordination across sites. The current approach to zone management will reorient around geography, while each center maintains their individuality and autonomy. This strategy builds upon the current momentum towards a service area approach to promote differentiation in programs, improve center attendance, and balance resource allocation across the city.

F2 Classify and define standards for different types of centers.

Define classifications and standards for community centers to establish consistent public expectations that are appropriate for each type of center. Standards will ensure each center meets baseline criteria for their classification, but the specific programs offered at each center will remain flexible. This approach will result in uniform quality while allowing each center to align with the needs and preferences of the communities they serve.

F3 Expand the role of partnerships and volunteers.

Volunteers and community partners have the capacity to stretch beyond City staff capacity, expand program reach, and reduce operational strain on staff. The programs and supporting policy related to partnerships and volunteers should be formalized to explicitly encourage non-staff participation.

F4 Increase transparency and visibility.

Recreation and parks play a wide-reaching role in residents' lives. The diversity of its programs and services are an asset; however, this requires clear communication between divisions and with the public. To promote transparent progress reporting and data-driven decision-making, each section should track diverse outcomes and identify specific key performance indicators (KPIs). By measuring results, the city can clearly communicate achievements and needs to the public and foster greater community pride, awareness, and support.

F5 Improve internal efficiency.

There are opportunities within the department to streamline processes, including those related to permitting, enforcement, and procurement. While these processes will have the largest impact on staff, the community will experience their impact in the quality of parks and programs.

F6 Implement consistent, transparent, and measurable maintenance standards.

By aligning operations with resources, park usage, condition data, and more, maintenance will become more predictable and public accountability will improve.

F7 Work towards financial sustainability.

To ensure operations can continue into the future, CRPD must work towards financial sustainability, improve cost recovery, and reduce reliance on the general fund. By developing mini business plans for each program area, the department can prepare for growth and avoid unexpected interruptions in program or service delivery.

TRANSFORMING OUR GROWTH FROM THE GROUND UP

Columbus' facilities and programs set the city apart. Its centers are true community assets that go beyond traditional recreation offerings to deliver critical services and innovative programming. Over the next ten years, CRPD must continue to invest in its centers as vital pieces of social infrastructure. Facilities and centers should proactively plan for growth by closing existing service gaps and streamlining operations so the city can continue delivering innovative, high-quality programming that is available to all residents.



Figure 58: Facilities & Programs Illustration

BIG MOVE | FACILITIES & PROGRAMS

Close the Service Gap

New facilities are needed in the service gap areas identified in Figure 59. As the city grows, classifying centers and establishing a geographic service area approach can help clarify expectations and distribute resources appropriately across centers. This will require a thoughtful, neighborhood-informed approach to define core services at each center and develop strategies for filling gaps in facilities and programs. In addition to restructuring existing resources, the city must prioritize facility development in growth areas while land is still available and affordable.

Offer Innovative and Specialized Programming

As existing facilities are repurposed, rebuilt, or renovated, they can be enhanced to expand access to new and specialized programs like performing arts, teen recreation and development, senior, aquatics, therapeutic recreation, nature education and culture. By leveraging strategic partnerships, enhanced community hubs provide innovative programming that reflects the unique character of each community or neighborhood and provide synergies with nearby parks.



- City of Columbus Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- CRPD Recreation Centers
- CRPD Athletic Complexes
- CRPD Specialized Facilities
- Residential areas without access to recreation centers
- Investment Search Areas

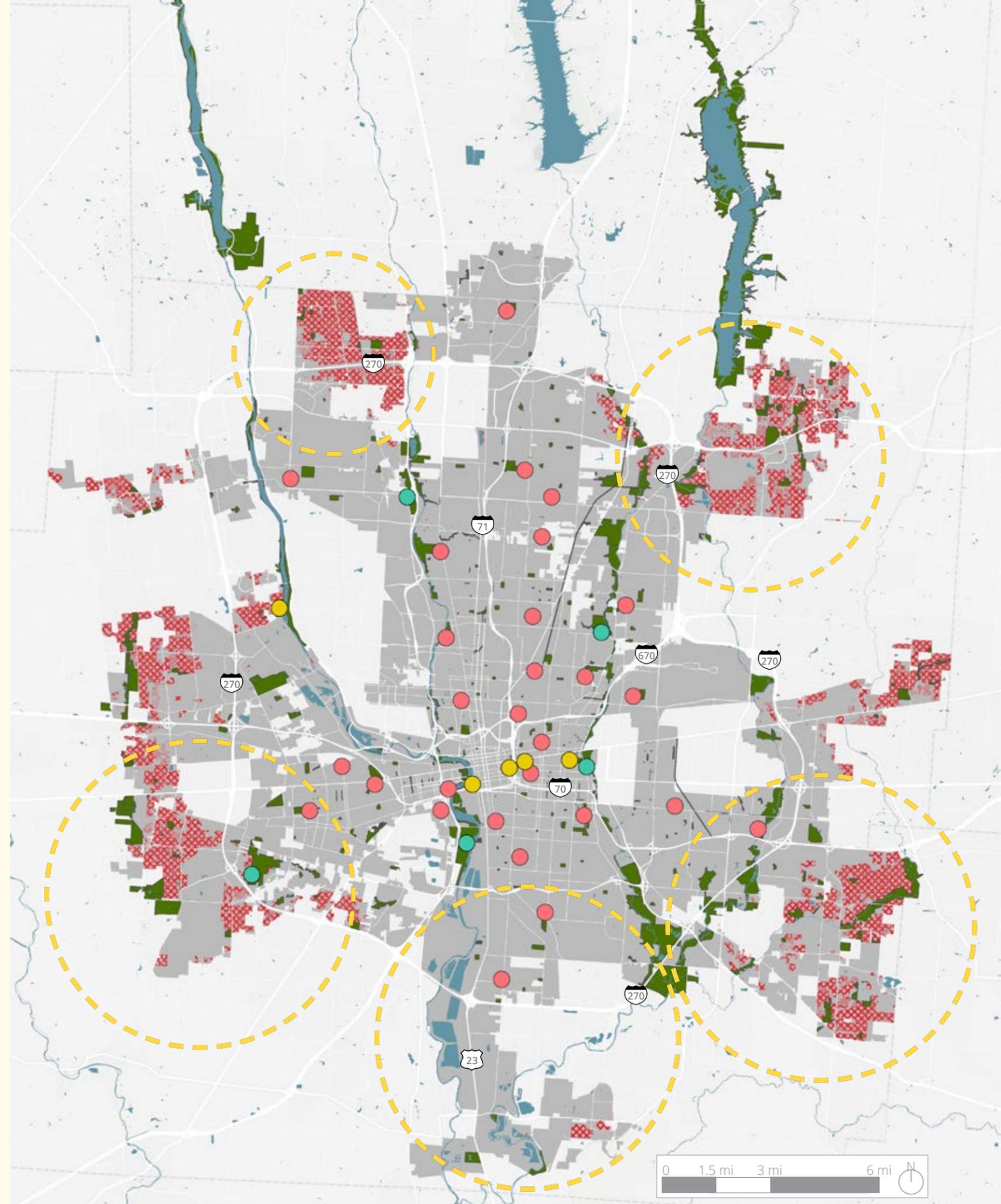


Figure 59: Facilities & Programs Big Move Map

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION

- How We Get There
- Identifying Priorities
- Level of Service
- The Change You Will See
- Actions



Playbook Columbus is a Vision Plan, but for its vision to have impact, it must be grounded in the realities of implementation.

The plan includes 280 Actions that build on the Goals, Big Moves, and Strategies. Actions will have tangible impacts on residents' experiences through new and improved facilities and parks, program offerings, maintenance, and operations practices.

The Vision Plan is a living framework that can evolve to meet changing community needs. While it is flexible enough to guide implementation over the next ten years, it will also directly inform the department's internal strategic planning. This process ensures the vision of Playbook Columbus remains central to decision-making.



HOW WE GET THERE

Playbook Columbus identifies specific Actions for CRPD and partners to take in order to achieve the Plan Goals. Successful implementation will require coordination, accountability, and alignment with the broader policy and funding environment.

Types of Actions

- **Programming:** Recommended changes to program and service delivery, including new, expanded, and restructured programs and services.
- **Best Management Practices:** Actions related to operations, maintenance, and planning, including high-level approaches to how programs and capital projects are planned and prioritized.
- **Capital Project:** New or renovated parks, facilities, trails, and amenities, including land acquisition.

Strategic Planning

While the Playbook Actions provide more specificity than the goals and strategies, they must be flexible so they can adapt to changing conditions over the next decade. Flexibility also allows each section within the department to adapt the Actions to its unique context and revisit them annually to update approaches and commit resources and investments.

As the external planning process concludes, CRPD will begin its internal strategic planning process. As part of the strategic planning process, each section will create a work plan that will be updated annually. Creating the work plan is an opportunity for each section to adapt the Playbook Actions and add detail so the high-level recommendations are tailored to the diverse needs across the department.

Identifying Champions

Actions must be clearly connected to a staff person, section or sections who will guide implementation. These staff members will be responsible for monitoring progress, coordinating with partners, and working within

the department to advocate for resource needs.

Tracking Progress

Increasing transparency and visibility is a strategy proposed by Playbook Columbus. Defining and measuring outcomes related to the plan's actions is an important step CRPD will take to advance this strategy.

During the annual strategic planning process, each section will define measurable outcomes associated with each action. Because these plans are updated more frequently than the Vision Plan, they provide a mechanism for tracking progress towards the Playbook goals.

CRPD will also commit to a schedule and identify communication methods for sharing periodic updates on the Playbook implementation process with community members, key partners, and other City departments.

Tracking progress toward implementation is part of a broader strategy to improve data-driven decision-making within the department. CRPD will formalize a context-to-outcomes approach that links community engagement

findings, operational data, and facility classification results to measurable strategic directions.

By aligning verified participation data, GIS mapping, and access metrics, CRPD will evaluate how each facility and program contributes to broader community objectives such as youth engagement, public health improvement, and neighborhood vitality.

The framework supports a continuous feedback loop where participation outcomes, staff input, and engagement results directly inform system operations, program adjustments, and capital priorities.

Making Use of Data

CRPD tracks a significant amount of data. However, data is often siloed within different sections of the department or within individual centers. The department must identify and address sources of red tape that limit data-driven decision-making. Additionally, each section will define key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the strategic planning process and ensure they have the data tools

needed to track and share those outcomes.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Strategic partnerships remain one of CRPD's most effective tools for extending community reach and optimizing resources. Partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and cultural organizations enhance program depth and facility utilization across all classifications.

Adopting a Partnership Policy Framework will formalize agreement tiers, evaluation criteria, and reporting protocols to ensure access, accountability, and mutual benefit. This standardized approach will strengthen coordination within the department while encouraging new collaborations that address neighborhood-specific needs.

Supporting Policy

Playbook Columbus helps advance the City of Columbus' Strategic Priorities. Throughout the planning process, CRPD coordinated with the Mayor's Office and City Council to ensure the Playbook Goals, Big Moves, and Strategies were in service of citywide priorities.

This alignment will help the department collaborate with other departments in the city in pursuit of a shared vision.

The local, state, and national policy context will evolve over the next ten years. To implement Playbook Columbus, CRPD must be prepared to adapt Actions in light of new opportunities or changes in funding.

It will also be necessary to advocate for policy changes. Topics that impact recreation and parks include policy to protect natural areas and ensure that recreation amenities keep pace with population growth, grow the tree canopy, promote green stormwater infrastructure and low impact development, and provide safe routes to parks through improvements to the transportation network.

The Actions in Playbook Columbus will have corresponding maintenance and operational costs. Achieving the vision for recreation and parks will require adequate staffing, equipment, technology, and best management practices.

Staffing Needs

Columbus' short-term staffing needs for maintenance and operations include:

- Increase Forestry staffing by 6-8 FTEs.
- Develop Building Maintenance staffing by aligning FTE targets to real demand across all facilities.
- Increase supervisor-to-staff ratio in Parks Maintenance.
- Fill nine vacancies in Parks Maintenance.
- Address critical staffing shortages in Parks Maintenance and work towards a long-term goal of adding 60 FTEs.

Staffing

Implementing Playbook Columbus will require the right number of staff with the appropriate levels of training and supervisory support. Staffing models must be right-sized to meet Columbus' current and future needs.

The department's staffing needs vary by section. Priorities include hiring to fill vacancies, hiring supervisory staff, aligning full-time equivalents (FTEs) to real demand, optimizing organizational efficiency, and improving retention and training.

Equipment and Technology

Outdated equipment raises maintenance risk and reliability concerns. As the department updates its maintenance approach, it must consider how equipment use will be impacted as a result, and update the long-range schedule for renewal and replacement accordingly.

Standards of Care

Standards define how work is performed and documented. They are the foundation

for quality, safety, and customer service. Systemwide standards exist, but will be streamlined across sections, offering a flexible framework for different maintenance needs while defining a shared language to improve internal communications and efficiency. This will include clearly defined standards for preventative maintenance and corrective maintenance.

Updating standards of care will also allow CRPD to add measurable outcomes related to compliance and performance that are linked to different facility types and levels of maintenance. The updated standards of care can then be linked to relevant Manuals and Handbooks that serve as references for staff.

CRPD's resource needs will increase over the next ten years as the city grows and the Playbook recommendations are implemented. The department must ensure they fully understand their current costs to anticipate the implications of future growth.

Building Maintenance

CRPD will develop a repeatable cost and staffing model that can be applied before opening new facilities. This model can also be used to link maintenance costs with future capital projects and track data as needed to project budgetary needs. Improved financial tracking will allow the department to more accurately project budgetary needs, including staffing and equipment needs.

Parks Maintenance

The number of Parks Maintenance staff does not meet Columbus' current needs, and the impacts of being short-staffed will increase as the system grows. The department must plan for increased staffing by developing sustainable funding strategies including

revenue generation, cost-saving measures, or phased implementation to mitigate the sharp rise in expenses.

Forestry

Expanding staffing and replacing outdated equipment will be critical to meeting both short- and long-term goals related to increasing the city's tree canopy. A proactive 10-year pruning cycle would require roughly 14,000 mature trees to be pruned annually, more than double the current capacity, and would necessitate additional pruning staff and equipment resources with a significant financial impact.

Centers

CRPD is transitioning toward a data-supported model that integrates participation data with revenue and expense records to establish an accurate picture of cost recovery and operational performance. While cost recovery ratios and policy have been in place for some time, these are currently being reviewed and updated. CRPD maintains sound fiscal management through transparent pricing, resident-focused affordability measures, and the forthcoming Cost Recovery Framework that aligns financial goals and priorities.



To implement changes in centers, CRPD will adopt classification standards and formalize a geographic service area approach. This will allow for more efficient and impactful program and service delivery across the city.



Center Classifications

Moving toward a framework that defines standards related to scale, function, and reach for different types of recreation centers will help standardize staffing, program expectations, and cost recovery targets.

Geographic Service Area Approach

Formalizing a geographic service area approach will allow CRPD to better balance reach and quality across the system, improving access by positioning each service area as a single, easy-to-navigate network.

Program Mix

Columbus provides a comprehensive array of programs organized into several core categories: Aquatics, Arts, Camps, Community Recreation, Outdoor Recreation, Senior Programming, Special Events, Sports, Therapeutic Recreation, and Youth Development. Program reach and balance vary across the system depending on facility size, staff expertise, and available space.

CRPD will work internally to develop a Citywide Program Framework that links offerings to different facility types and establishes minimum and enhanced service standards for each facility type.

Center classifications will clarify program expectations between different facility types to improve consistency and reach through staff specialization, targeted partnerships, events, and data-driven adjustments to program mix. Classifications will not be rigid or prescriptive; programming at each center will continue to align with local demand and staff strengths.

Hours of Operation

Columbus' current approach to operating hours is not well-adapted to the unique profile of individual centers, which vary by program offerings and community needs.

Formalizing operating-hour standards through a classification-based framework will allow the department to meet community expectations and improve resource alignment. Clear definitions of minimum and maximum daily hours by facility type will enhance scheduling efficiency and public transparency.

Staffing at Centers

Staffing levels are generally consistent with national benchmarks for a system of Columbus' size, but workloads differ significantly across facilities. High-volume centers with extended hours require larger front-line teams, while smaller neighborhood centers rely heavily on part-time or seasonal coverage.

Columbus' recreation workforce demonstrates strong dedication and adaptability, often balancing instructional, operational, and customer service responsibilities within a single role. However, there is a need to formalize staffing expectations and reduce the system's reliance on individual expertise. Some programs depend heavily on one skilled employee, causing gaps in service when turnover occurs.

The center classifications can be linked to staffing standards for different facility types, aligning the number and type of positions with program areas, participation levels, and hours of operation. This will ensure balanced service delivery and predictable resource needs.



IDENTIFYING PRIORITY ACTIONS

The prioritization model provides a community-driven methodology for citywide recreation and park investments.



To identify which Actions should happen first, Playbook Columbus defines a set of criteria based on the Needs Assessment and Plan Goals. By regularly revisiting this criteria, CRPD can update and re-evaluate which Actions are most important for implementation over the next ten years.

Park Condition and Use

Actions that improve the quality and condition of parks and facilities, direct investment toward neighborhoods with fewer parks and facilities in good condition, or address maintenance and operations to strengthen overall system performance received a higher score.

Access and Level of Service (LoS)

Actions that add parks and facilities in neighborhoods with poor park access, improve connectivity or all-ability access, or promote regional connectivity received a higher score. Projects that expand access to high-demand or emerging amenities and programs were also prioritized.

Priority Areas

Playbook Columbus identifies Priority Areas based on a composite of housing, transportation, environmental, demographic, ability, health, and socioeconomic indicators. The plan also designates Critical Environmental Areas using factors related to ecological risk, resilience, and assets. Actions that direct investment to Priority Areas or Critical Environmental Areas received a higher score.

Feasibility

Actions with dedicated funding, existing plans in place, or other “low-hanging fruit” that could be implemented in the short-term while remaining operationally sustainable in the long-term received a higher score.

Community

Actions that advance community or department priorities not otherwise captured in the prioritization model received a higher score. This includes projects informed by public or stakeholder feedback or aligned with local and regional planning efforts. It also includes actions with urgent timing.

Priority Criteria

	 EXISTING PARK/FACILITY	 NEW PARK/FACILITY	 PROGRAM/PRACTICE
Condition + Use	<p><i>Is this existing park or facility in need of repairs?</i></p> <p><i>Is this existing park or facility heavily used?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a neighborhood with few parks or facilities in good condition?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this program or practice improve park and facility condition systemwide?</i></p>
Access + LoS	<p><i>Will this renovation to a park or facility improve park access?</i></p> <p><i>Does this existing park or facility offer high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a neighborhood with poor park access?</i></p> <p><i>Does this new park or facility offer high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this program or practice improve access to recreation citywide?</i></p> <p><i>Would this program or practice improve access to high-priority amenities or experiences?</i></p>
Priority Areas	<p><i>Is this existing park or facility in a Priority Area?</i></p> <p><i>Is this existing park or facility in an Environmental Priority Area?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this new park or facility in a Priority Area?</i></p> <p><i>Is this new park or facility in an Environmental Priority Area?</i></p>	<p><i>Does this program or practice promote fair resource distribution?</i></p> <p><i>Does this program or practice promote goals related to climate and resilience?</i></p>
Feasibility	<p><i>Could this existing park or facility be renovated in the short-term?</i></p>	<p><i>Could this new park or facility be constructed in the short-term?</i></p>	<p><i>Could this program or practice easily be enacted in the short-term and sustained in the long-term?</i></p>
Community	<p><i>Would renovations to this existing park or facility address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>	<p><i>Would this new park or facility address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>	<p><i>Does this program or practice address priorities from public and stakeholder input?</i></p>

NEEDS BY LAND PLAN AREA

Playbook Columbus identifies overlapping needs and other level of service considerations for each Land Plan Area. This step contextualizes the Actions and allows CRPD to focus resources in the areas of the city where they are most needed.

To identify high-level priorities for each Land Plan Area, the following factors were layered to identify recreation and park needs that are widespread or overlapping.

Condition Improvements

Recreation centers and parks that received a condition rating of poor or fair will be prioritized for quality improvements, aligning with widespread community concerns about improving existing facilities before constructing new. Quality improvements are especially important in areas where multiple centers and parks are in fair or poor condition.

Walk and Drive Access

Residential areas that do not have access to CRPD parks or trails within a 10-minute walk and residential areas that do not have access to recreation centers within a 10-minute

drive will be prioritized for new facilities. Some areas currently do not have access to centers or parks. These areas are especially critical for investment.

Priority Areas

Residents in Priority Areas face complex barriers to accessing recreation and parks. While many Priority Areas are not considered underserved based on walk and drive times, these neighborhoods require additional investment to ensure the benefits of recreation and parks are fairly distributed across the city.

Growth Areas

Columbus' continued growth will be shaped in part by the regional LinkUS Transportation Initiative and citywide comprehensive zoning code updates. These plans, along with other qualitative data sources, indicate where population might be added in the city over the next ten years. CRPD must anticipate increasing recreation and park use in growth areas and plan to adapt to growing demand and evolving needs.

Areas with Overlapping Need

Layering facility conditions, walk and drive access, priority areas, and growth areas allows for a more nuanced understanding of recreation and park needs across the city. This high level analysis prepares CRPD to address overlapping needs, including:

- Priority Areas with multiple recreation centers and parks in need of condition improvements.
- Priority Areas that are underserved based on walk and drive access.
- Growth Areas with multiple recreation centers and parks in need of condition improvements, where use of these facilities is expected to increase.
- Growth Areas that are underserved based on walk and drive access, where demand for centers and parks is expected to increase.

Other Considerations

The following factors add detail to the Top Needs. They offer a starting point for understanding what specific amenities might be added and where.

Access to Experiences

Service Area mapping, community input, recreation trends, and benchmark analysis were used to develop preliminary recommendations about what amenities are needed to fairly distribute recreation and park experiences across the city.

Environmental Priority Areas

Playbook Columbus includes Goals, Big Moves, Strategies, and Actions related to conservation and the natural environment. CRPD's approach to stewardship involves a different set of criteria than level of service analysis. Overlapping environmental hazards and opportunities provides a starting point for identifying areas where conservation needs might be prioritized above recreation needs.

AMENITY NEEDS

Columbus should focus on adding these facilities to provide fair access to experiences:

- Universally Accessible Playgrounds
- Pools and Splash Pads
- Greenway Trails
- Nature-Based Experiences
- Public Art and Cultural Displays
- Therapeutic Recreation Facilities
- Gathering and Event Spaces
- Fitness Spaces

MEASURING PROGRESS

Linking current level of service metrics to future outcomes improves accountability during implementation. Over the next ten years, Columbus will:

- Complete condition improvements on all 37 parks and 4 recreation centers that are currently in poor or fair condition.
- Increase the percentage of the population within a 10-minute walk to CRPD parks or trails from 68.2% to 80%.
- Increase the percentage of the population within a 10-minute drive to a recreation center from 88% to 95%.
- Add 2,620 acres of parkland to maintain the current acres-to-population ratio of 16.44 acres per 1,000 residents.
- Achieve no net tree canopy loss.
- Construct 25 new miles of greenway trails.

NORTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS

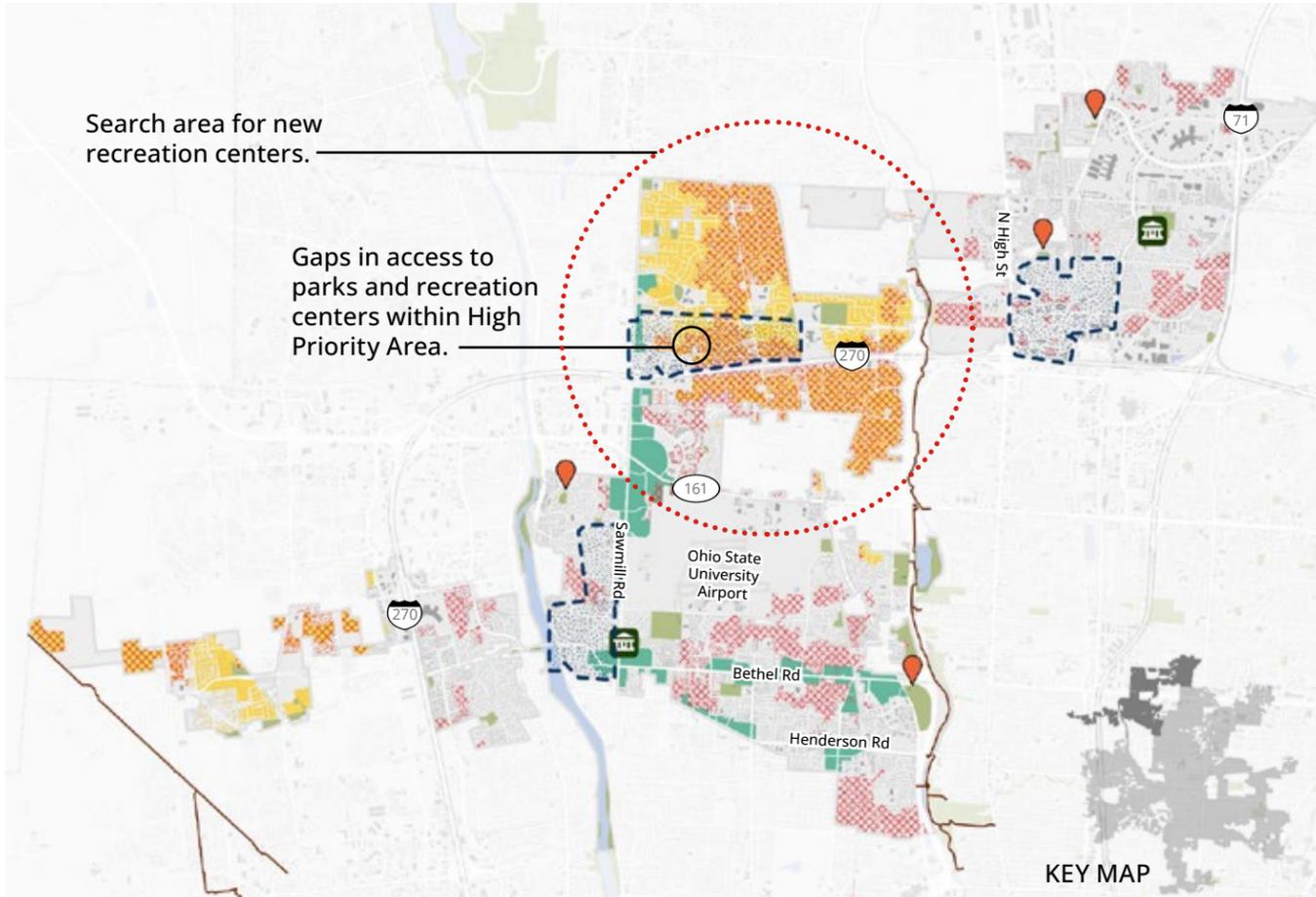


Figure 60: Northwest Land Plan Area | Areas with Overlapping Needs

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Park or Center in Need of Improvements
- Growth Area
- Priority Areas
- Residential areas without access to CRPD parks
- Residential areas without access to recreation centers

Recreation and park needs in the Northwest Land Plan Area:

- Address gaps in access to parks and recreation centers.
- Identify opportunities to add recreation centers within the search area identified in the Facilities & Programs Big Move.
- Prioritize capital projects that address gaps in access within High Priority Areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas.
- Improve four parks with low condition scores.

NORTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

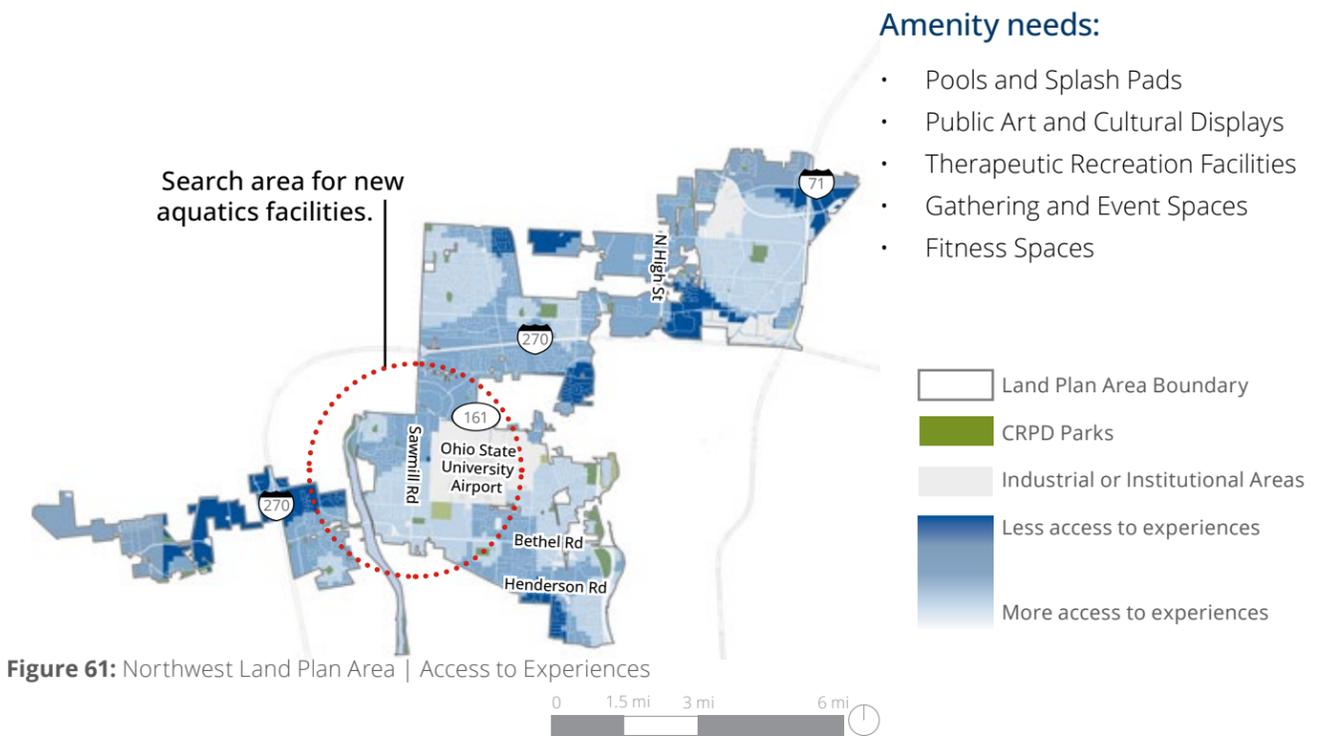


Figure 61: Northwest Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences

Amenity needs:

- Pools and Splash Pads
- Public Art and Cultural Displays
- Therapeutic Recreation Facilities
- Gathering and Event Spaces
- Fitness Spaces

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- CRPD Parks
- Industrial or Institutional Areas
- Less access to experiences
- More access to experiences

Environmental considerations:

- Add tree canopy cover.
- Explore opportunities to improve habitat connectivity along rivers and streams.
- Identify conservation opportunities near industrial land uses.

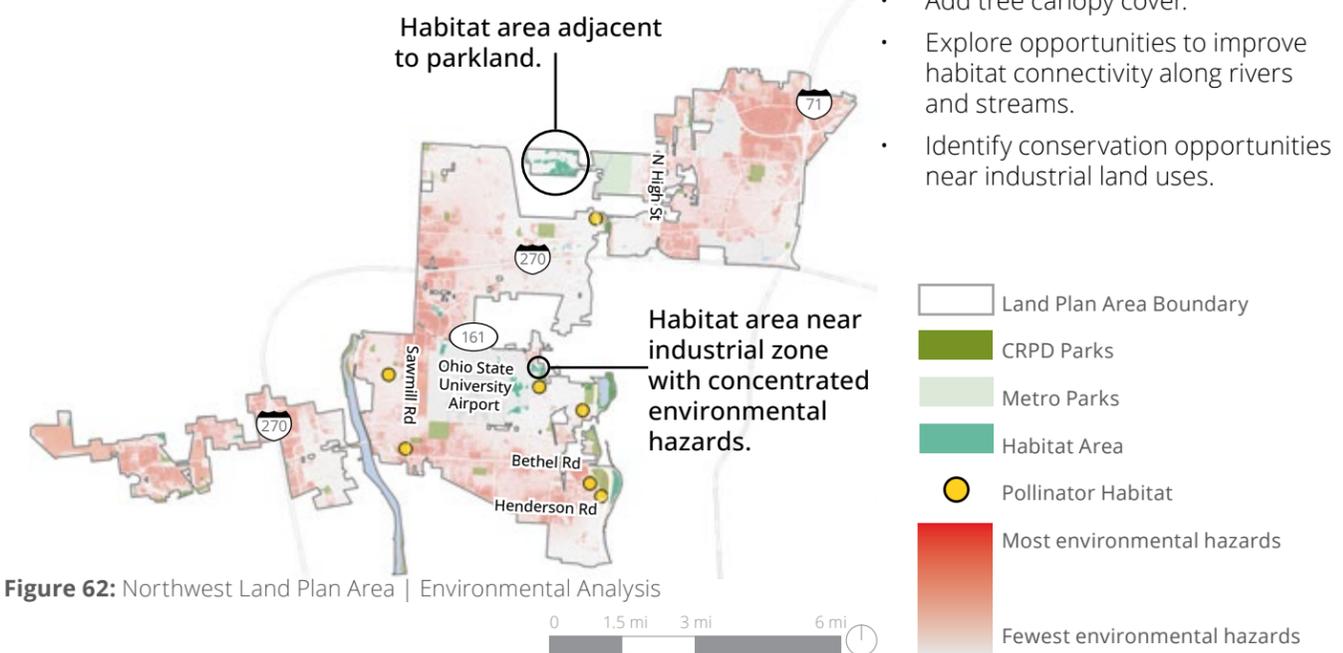


Figure 62: Northwest Land Plan Area | Environmental Analysis

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- CRPD Parks
- Metro Parks
- Habitat Area
- Pollinator Habitat
- Most environmental hazards
- Fewest environmental hazards

NORTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS

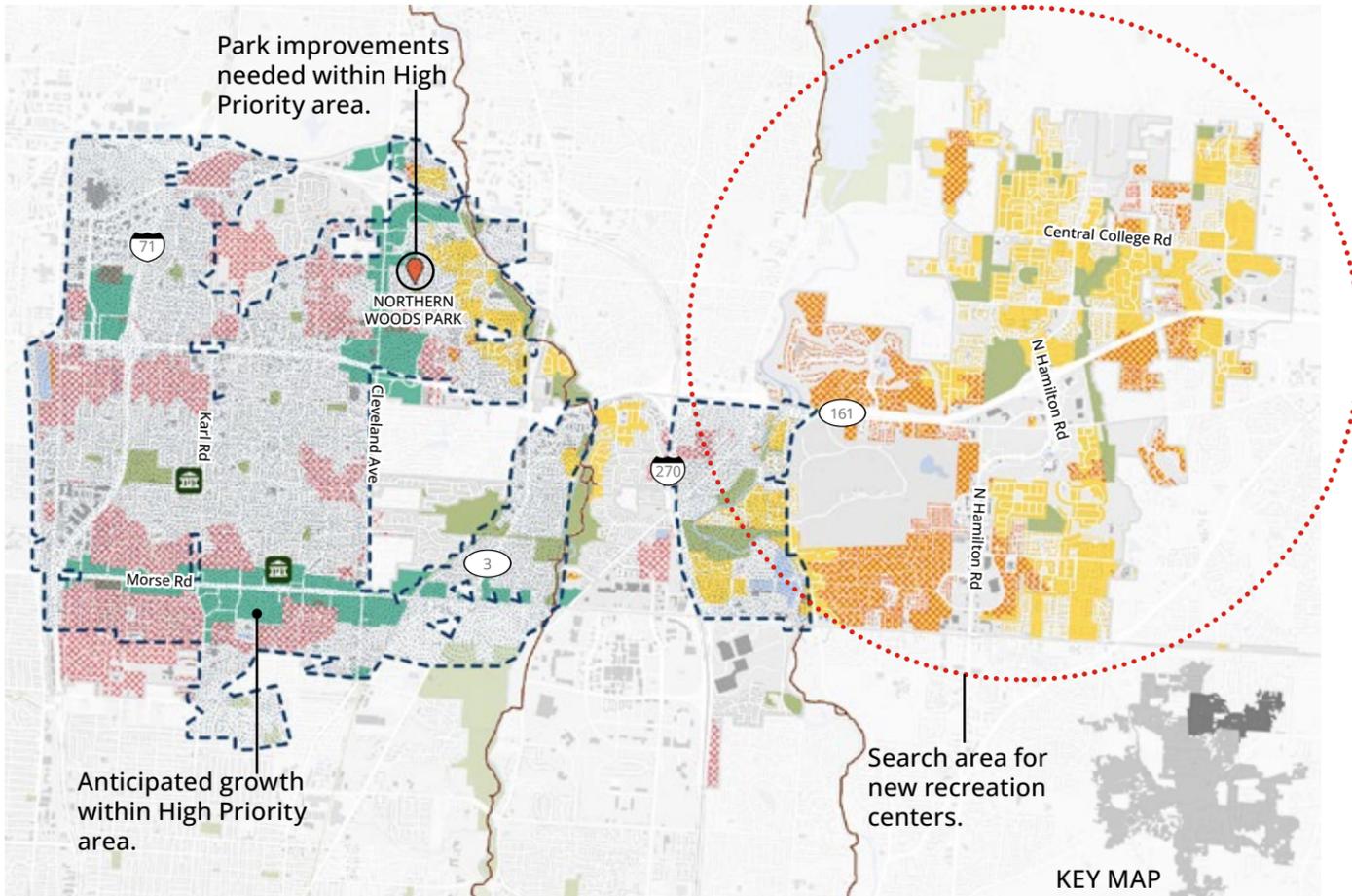


Figure 63: Northeast Land Plan Area | Area with Overlapping Needs

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Park or Center in Need of Improvements
- Growth Area
- Priority Areas
- Residential areas without access to CRPD parks
- Residential areas without access to recreation centers

Recreation and park needs in the Northeast Land Plan Area:

- Address gaps in access to parks and recreation centers.
- Prioritize addressing gaps in access within High Priority Areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas.
- Address low condition rating at Northern Woods Park.

NORTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

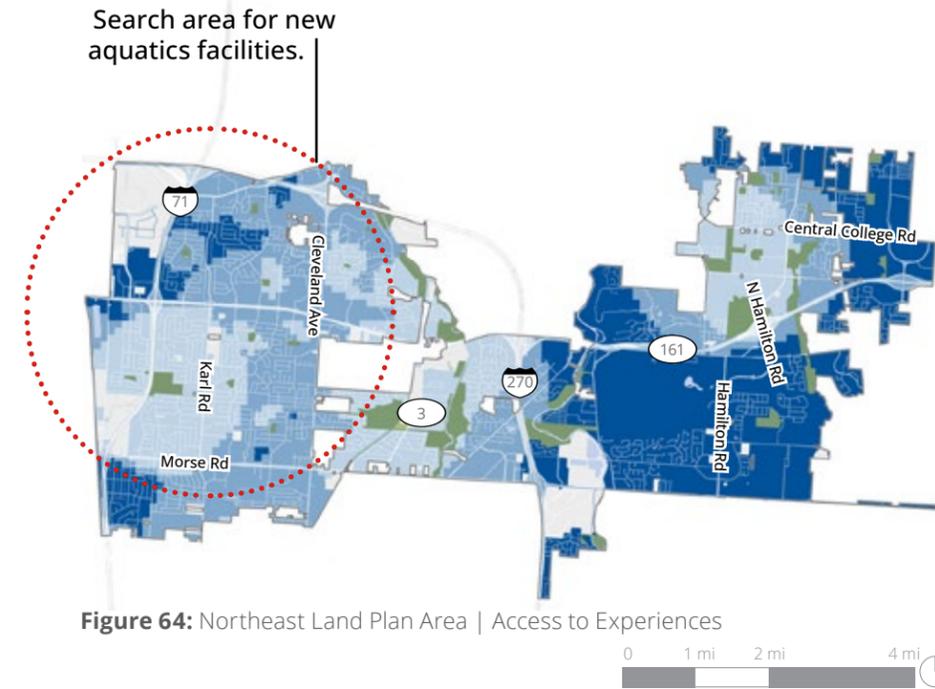


Figure 64: Northeast Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences

Amenity needs:

- Universally Accessible Playgrounds
- Pools and Splash Pads
- Public Art and Cultural Displays
- Therapeutic Recreation Facilities
- Gathering and Event Spaces
- Fitness Spaces

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- CRPD Parks
- Industrial or Institutional Areas
- Less access to experiences
- More access to experiences

Opportunity to improve ecological connectivity and protect existing habitat area.

Concentrated environmental hazards along major roads.



Figure 65: Northeast Land Plan Area | Environmental Priorities

Environmental considerations:

- Add tree canopy cover along Morse Road and other high-volume roadways.
- Explore opportunities to protect existing habitat areas.

- Land Plan Area Boundary
- CRPD Parks
- Habitat Area
- Pollinator Habitat
- Wetland
- Most environmental hazards
- Fewest environmental hazards

CENTRAL LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS

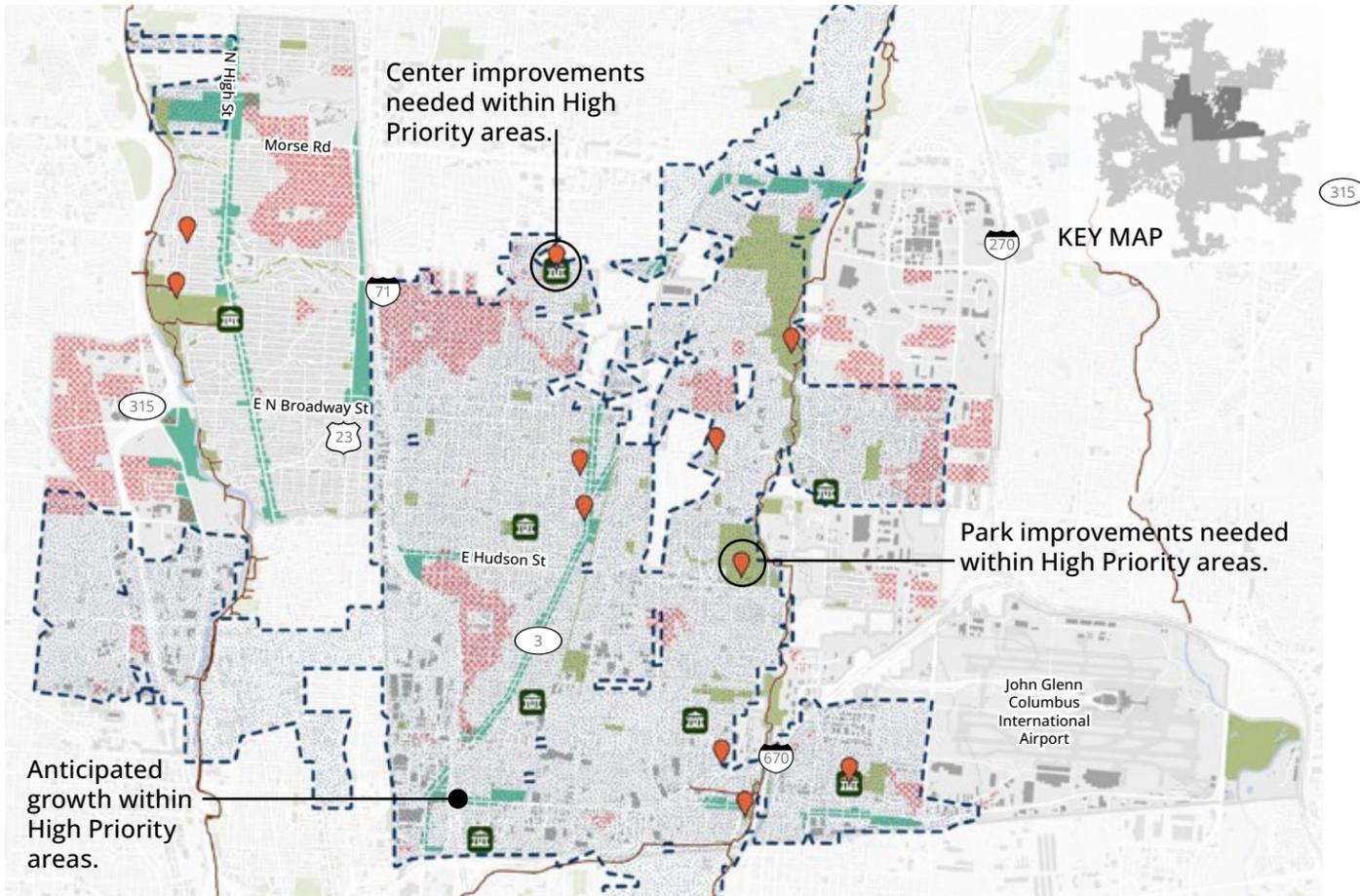
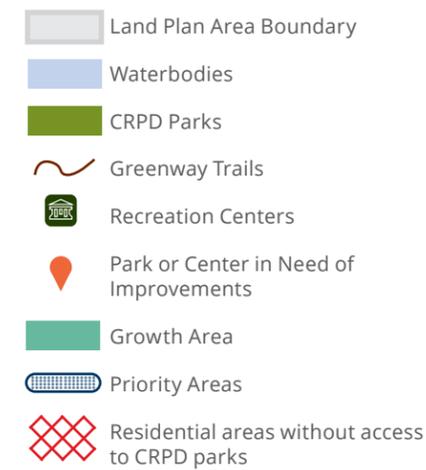


Figure 66: Central Land Plan Area | Areas with Overlapping Needs



Recreation and park needs in the Central Land Plan Area:

- Improve parks and centers with low condition scores. Prioritize improvements in the eight parks and centers that fall within High Priority Areas.
- Identify opportunities for developing Signature Parks in High Priority Areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas. Anticipate what additional recreation and park needs might emerge for growth areas within High Priority Areas.

CENTRAL LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

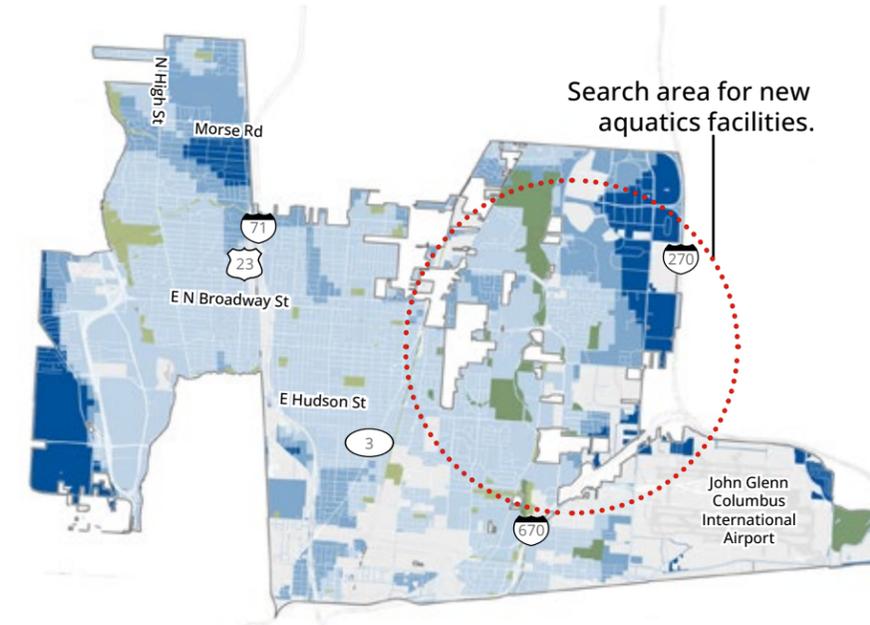


Figure 67: Central Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences

Amenity needs:

- Pools and Splash Pads
- Nature-Based Experiences
- Playgrounds

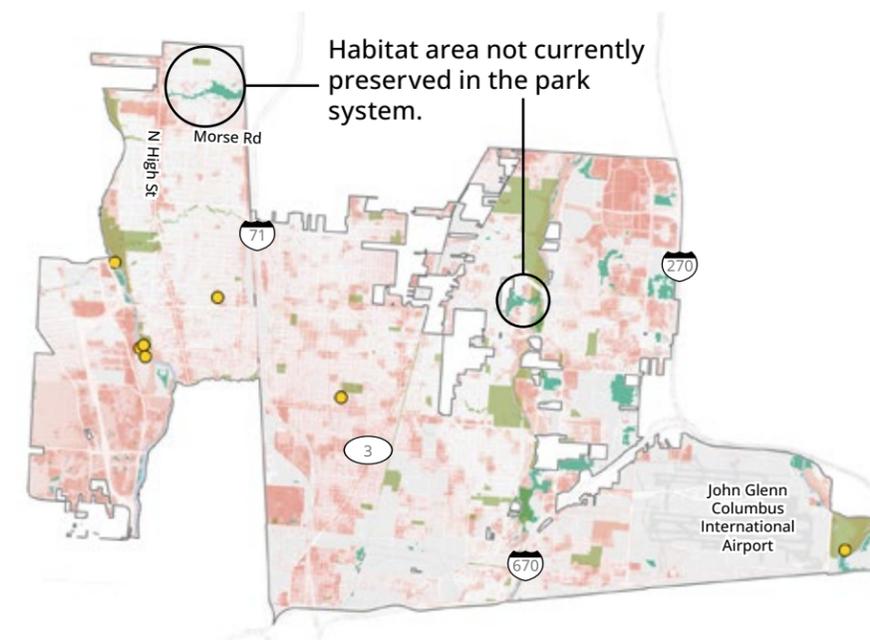
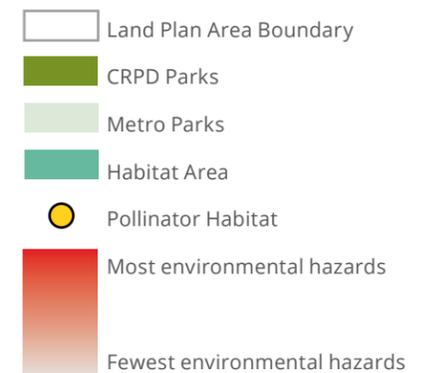


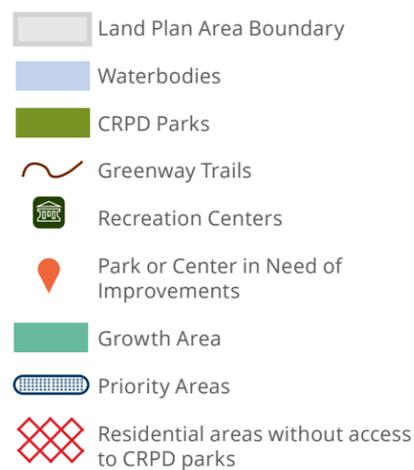
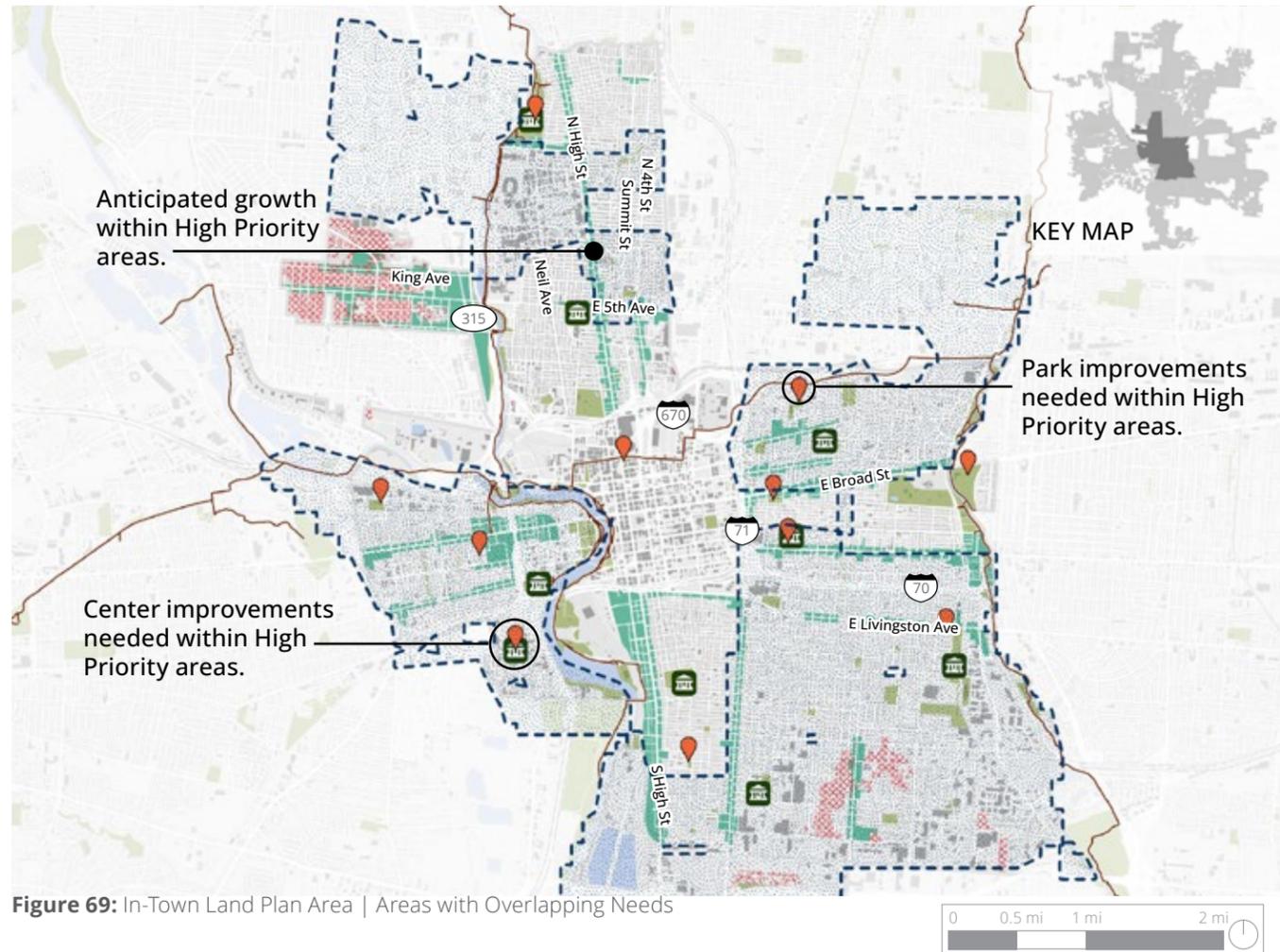
Figure 68: Central Land Plan Area | Environmental Priorities

Environmental considerations:

- Identify opportunities to preserve existing habitat area adjacent to parks.
- Improve habitat connectivity between pollinator areas and parks and along natural ecological corridors.



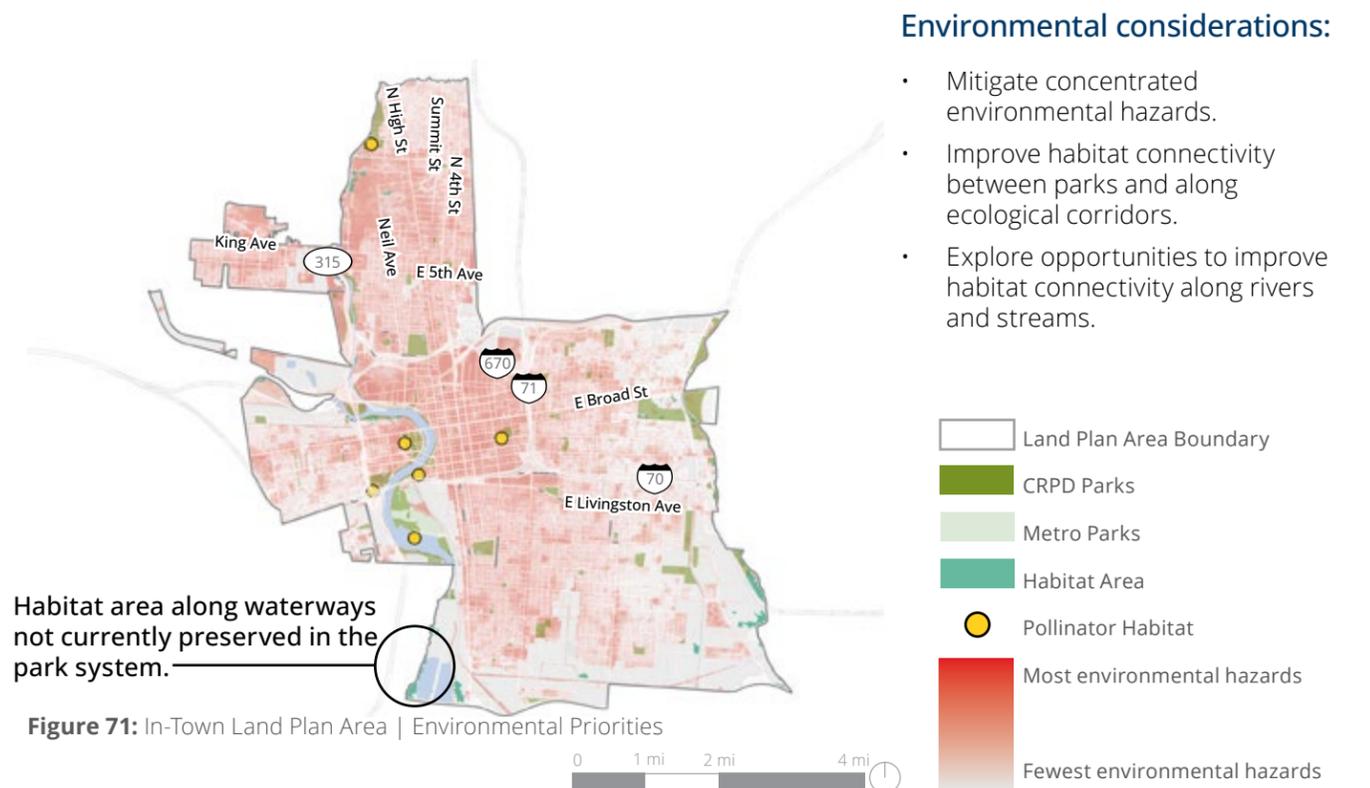
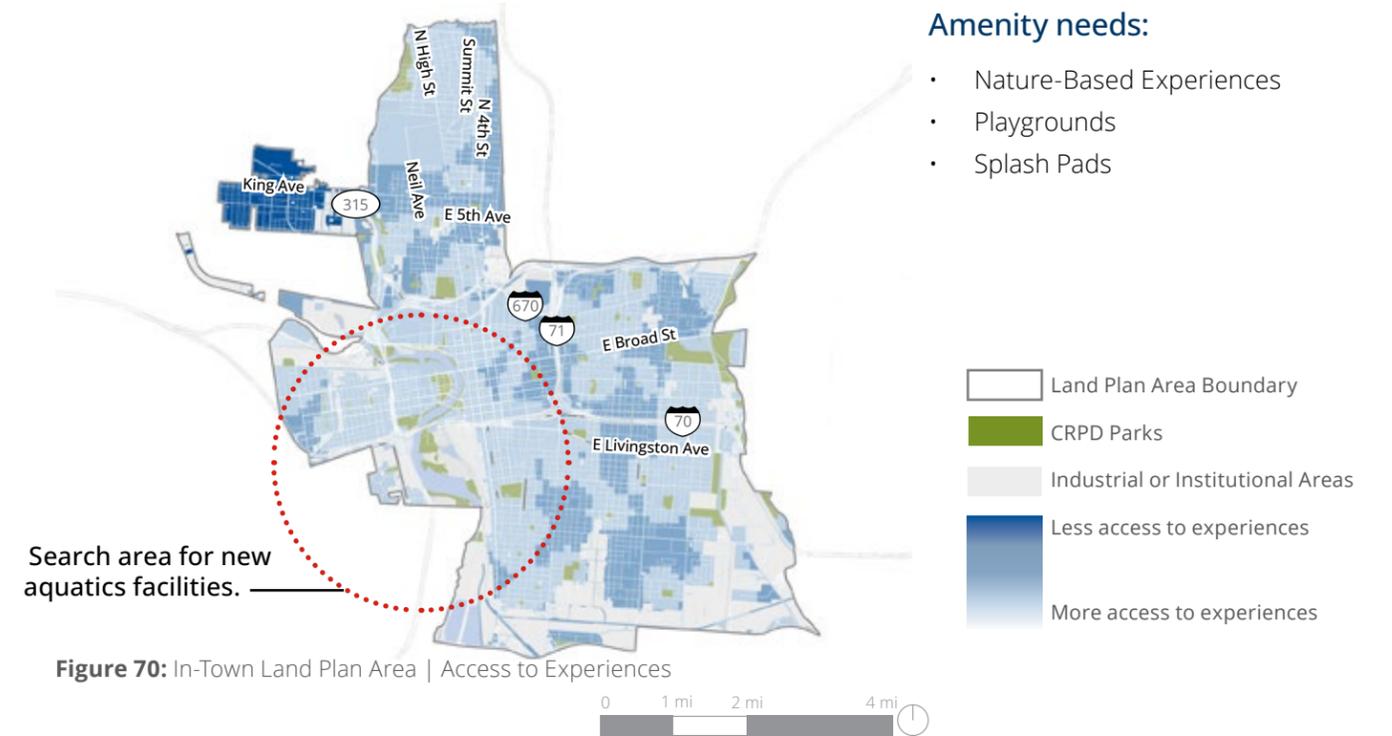
IN-TOWN LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS



Recreation and park needs in the In-Town Land Plan Area:

- Improve parks and centers with low condition scores. Prioritize improvements in the parks and centers that fall within High Priority Areas.
- Identify opportunities for developing Signature Parks in High Priority Areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas. Anticipate what additional recreation and park needs might emerge for growth areas within High Priority Areas.

IN-TOWN LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS



SOUTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS

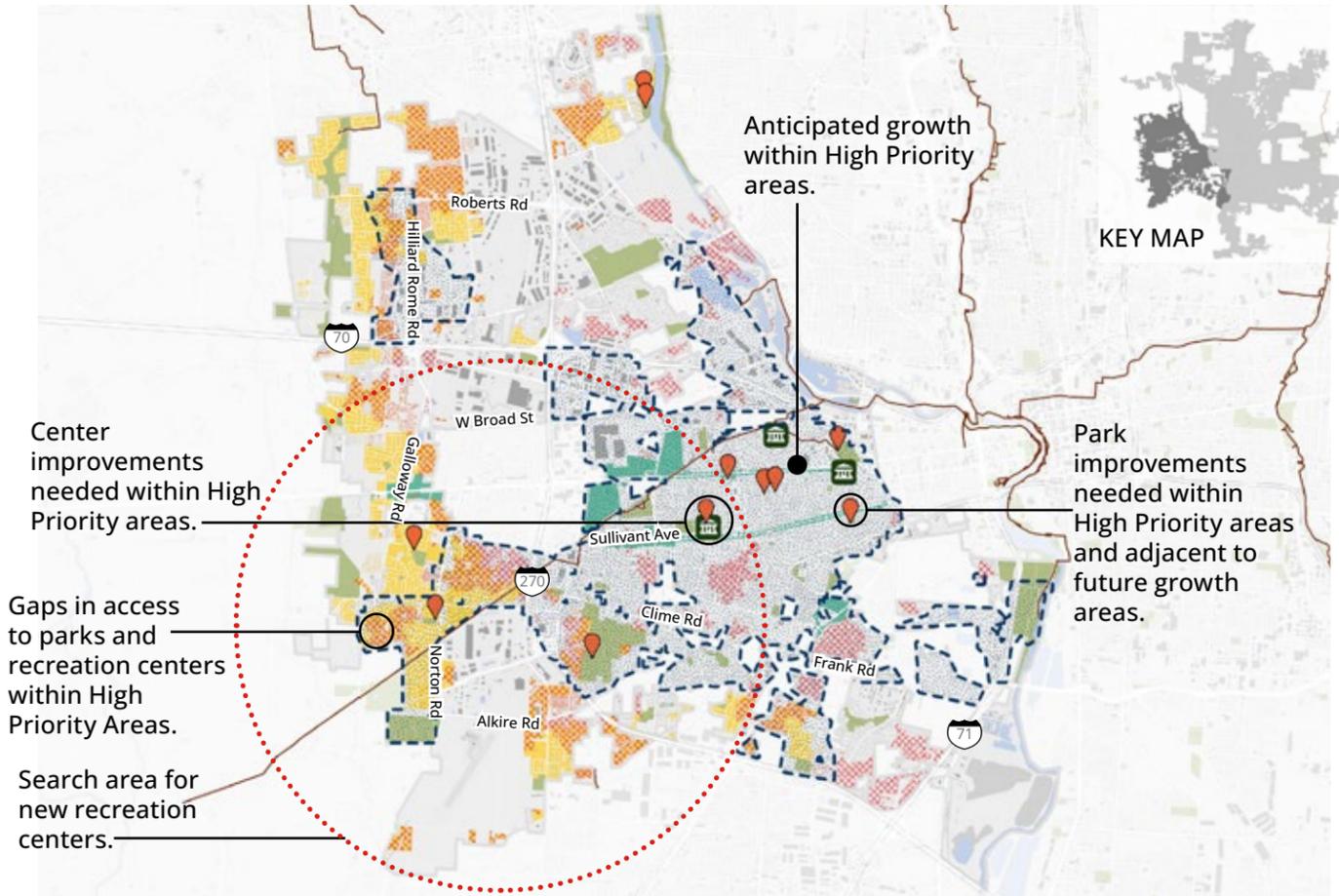
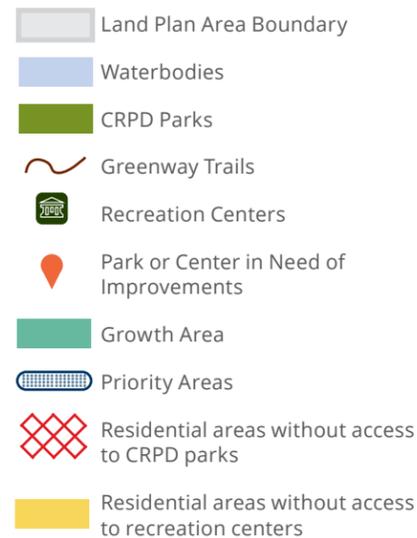


Figure 72: Southwest Land Plan Area | Areas with Overlapping Needs



Recreation and park needs in the Southwest Land Plan Area:

- Address gaps in access to parks and recreation centers.
- Prioritize capital projects that address existing gaps in access within High Priority Areas and near projected growth areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas. Anticipate what additional recreation and park needs might emerge for growth areas within High Priority Areas.
- Improve parks and centers with low condition scores. Prioritize improvements in the parks and centers that fall within High Priority Areas and near projected growth areas.

SOUTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

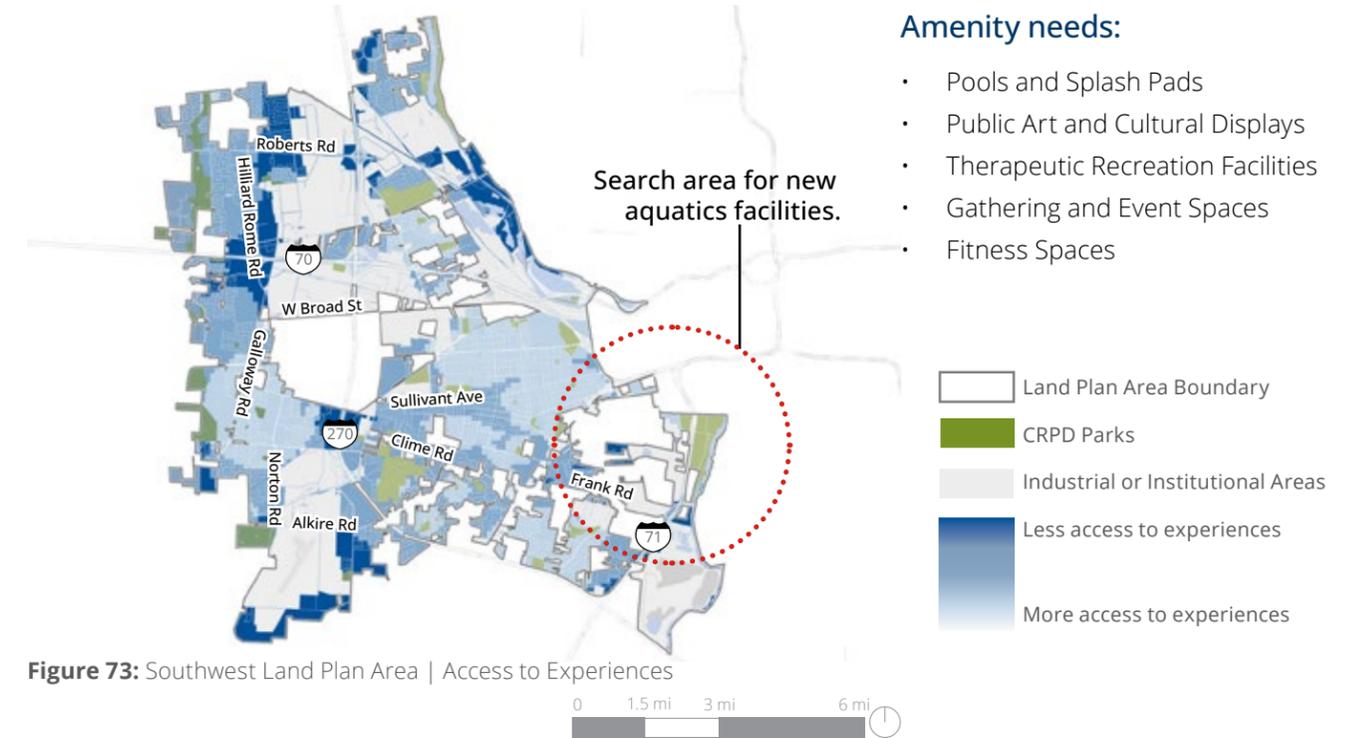


Figure 73: Southwest Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences

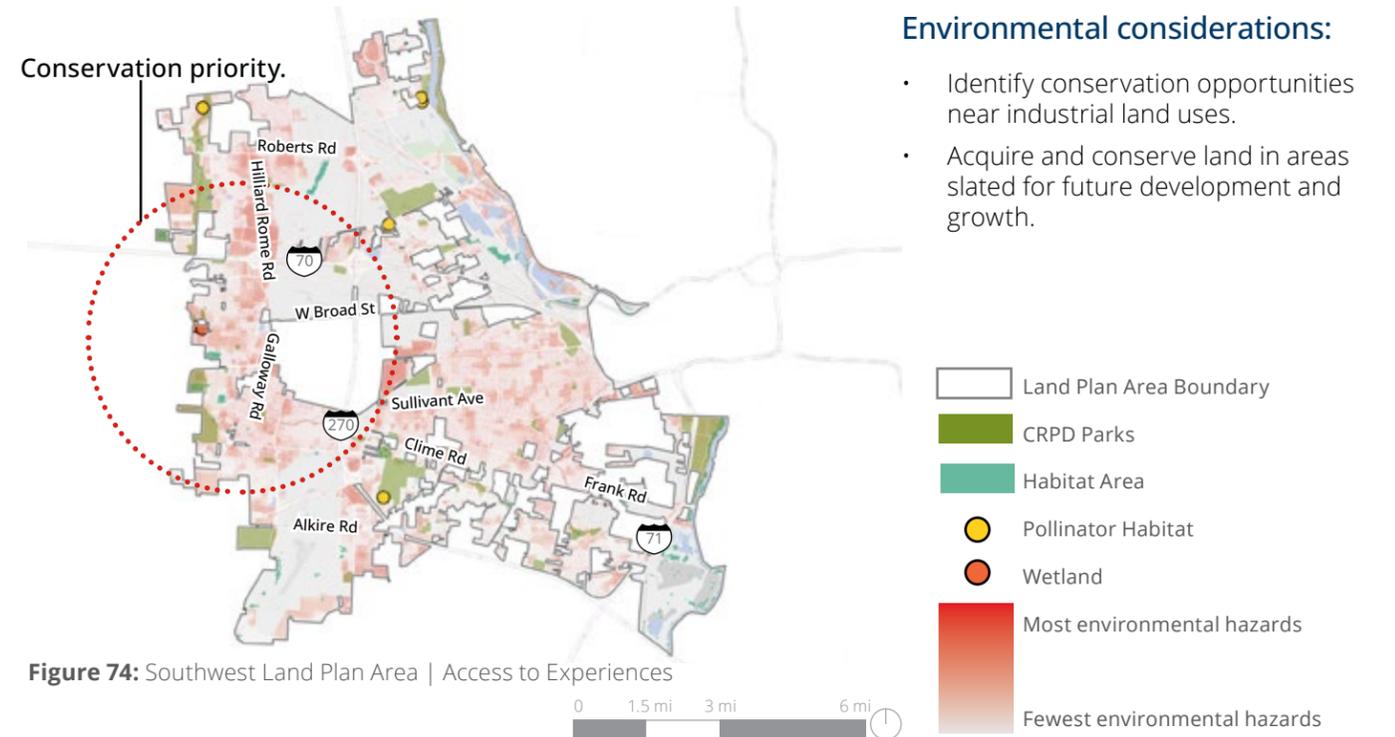


Figure 74: Southwest Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences



SOUTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA | OVERLAPPING NEEDS

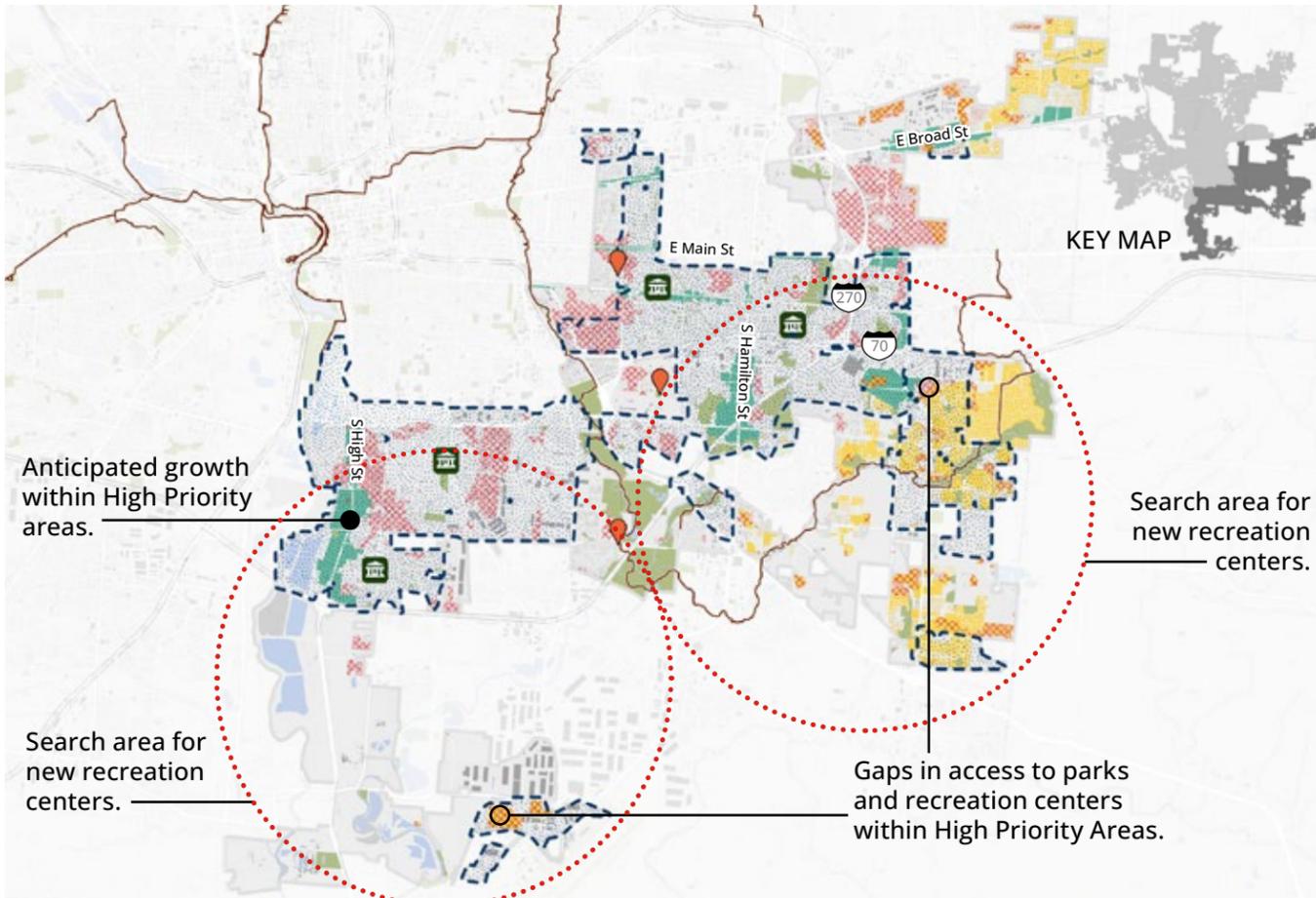
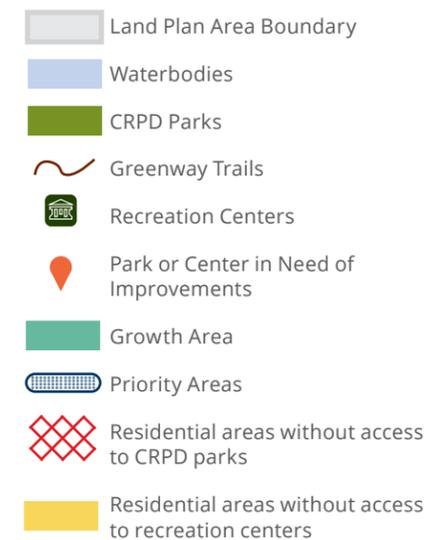


Figure 75: Southeast Land Plan Area | Areas with Overlapping Needs



Recreation and park needs in the Southeast Land Plan Area:

- Address gaps in access to parks and recreation centers.
- Prioritize capital projects that address existing gaps in access within High Priority Areas and near projected growth areas.
- Plan for future recreation and park needs within projected growth areas. Anticipate what additional recreation and park needs might emerge for growth areas within High Priority Areas.
- Improve parks and centers with low condition scores. Prioritize improvements in the parks and centers that fall within High Priority Areas and near projected growth areas.

SOUTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA | OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

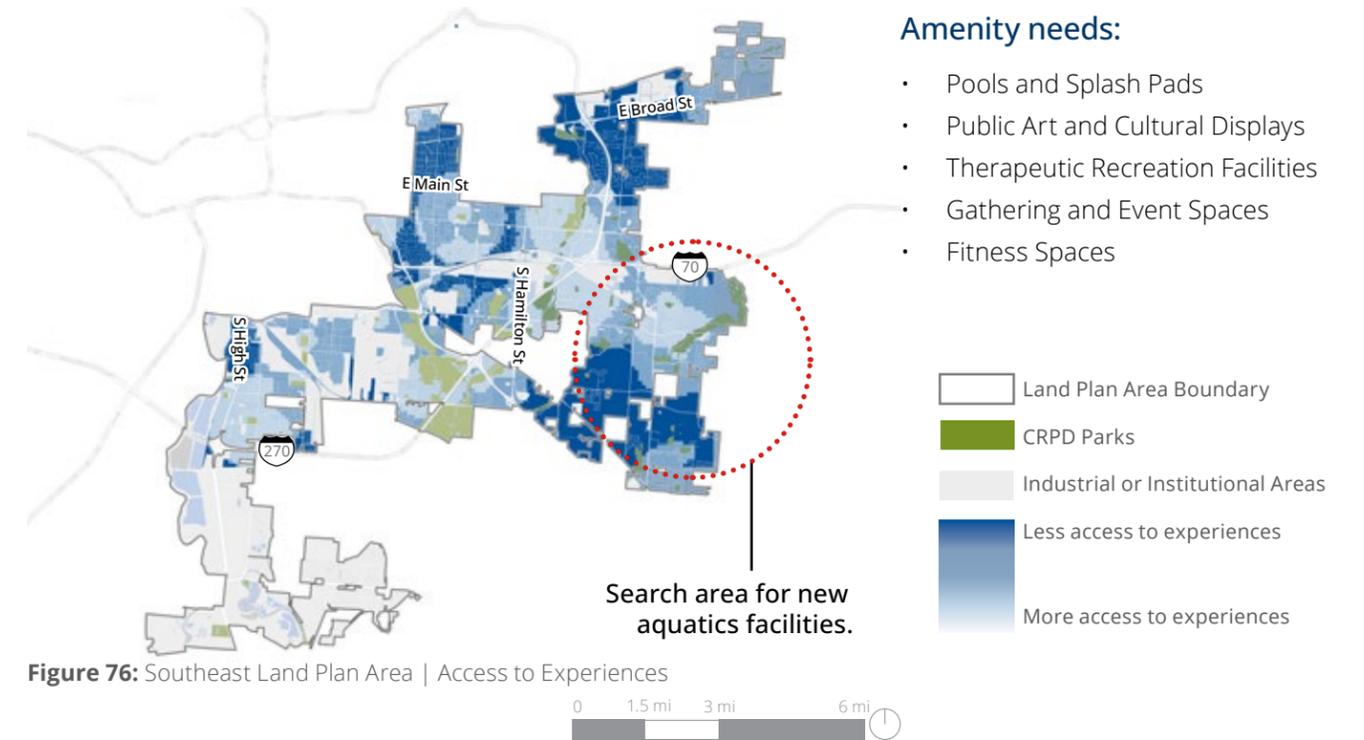


Figure 76: Southeast Land Plan Area | Access to Experiences

Amenity needs:

- Pools and Splash Pads
- Public Art and Cultural Displays
- Therapeutic Recreation Facilities
- Gathering and Event Spaces
- Fitness Spaces

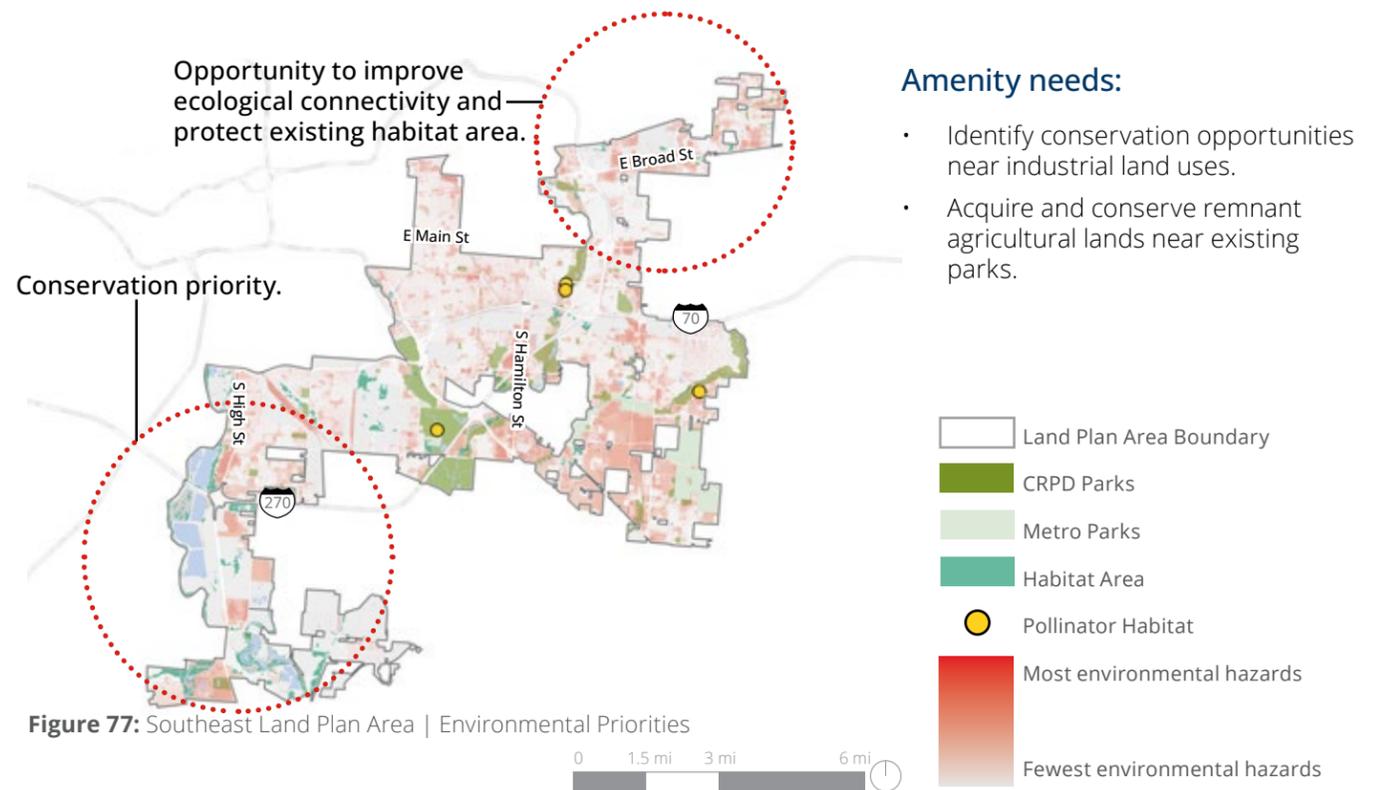
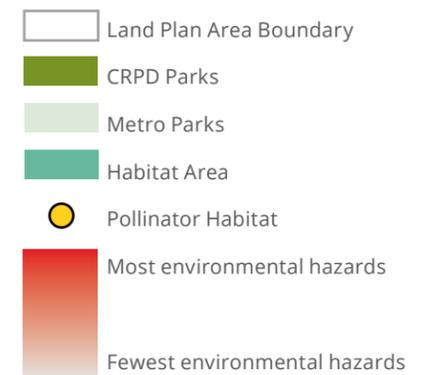


Figure 77: Southeast Land Plan Area | Environmental Priorities

Amenity needs:

- Identify conservation opportunities near industrial land uses.
- Acquire and conserve remnant agricultural lands near existing parks.



THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | NORTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA

These capital projects will be implemented in the next three years.

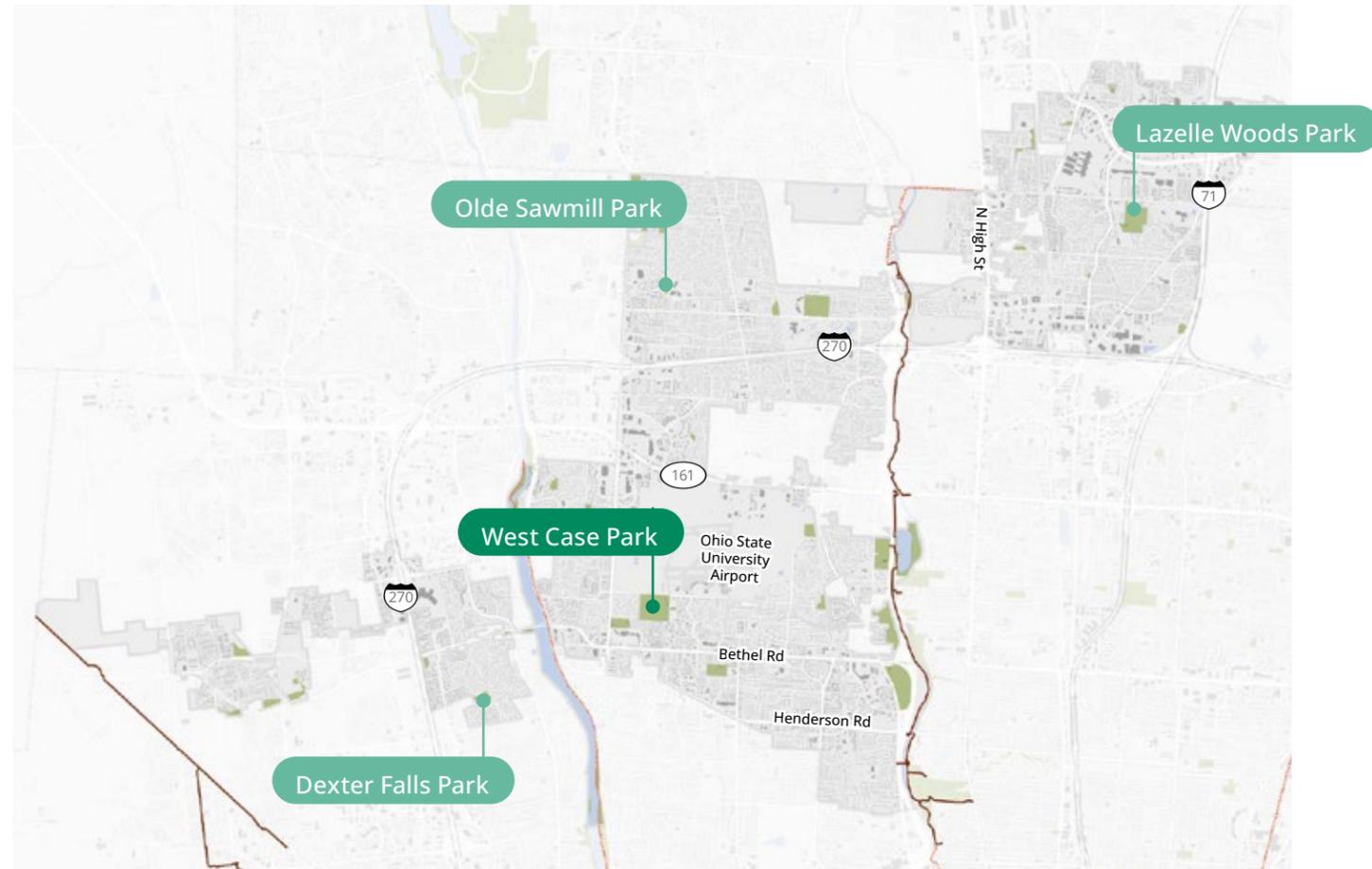
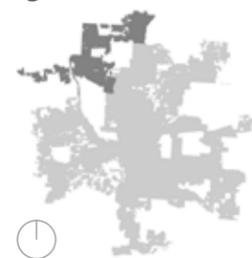


Figure 78: Northwest Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **Lazelle Park:** Universally Accessible Playground development
- **Dexter Falls Park:** Playground replacement and fitness station addition
- **Olde Sawmill Park:** Playground replacement and fitness station addition
- **West Case Park:** New 58-acre park development

THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | NORTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA

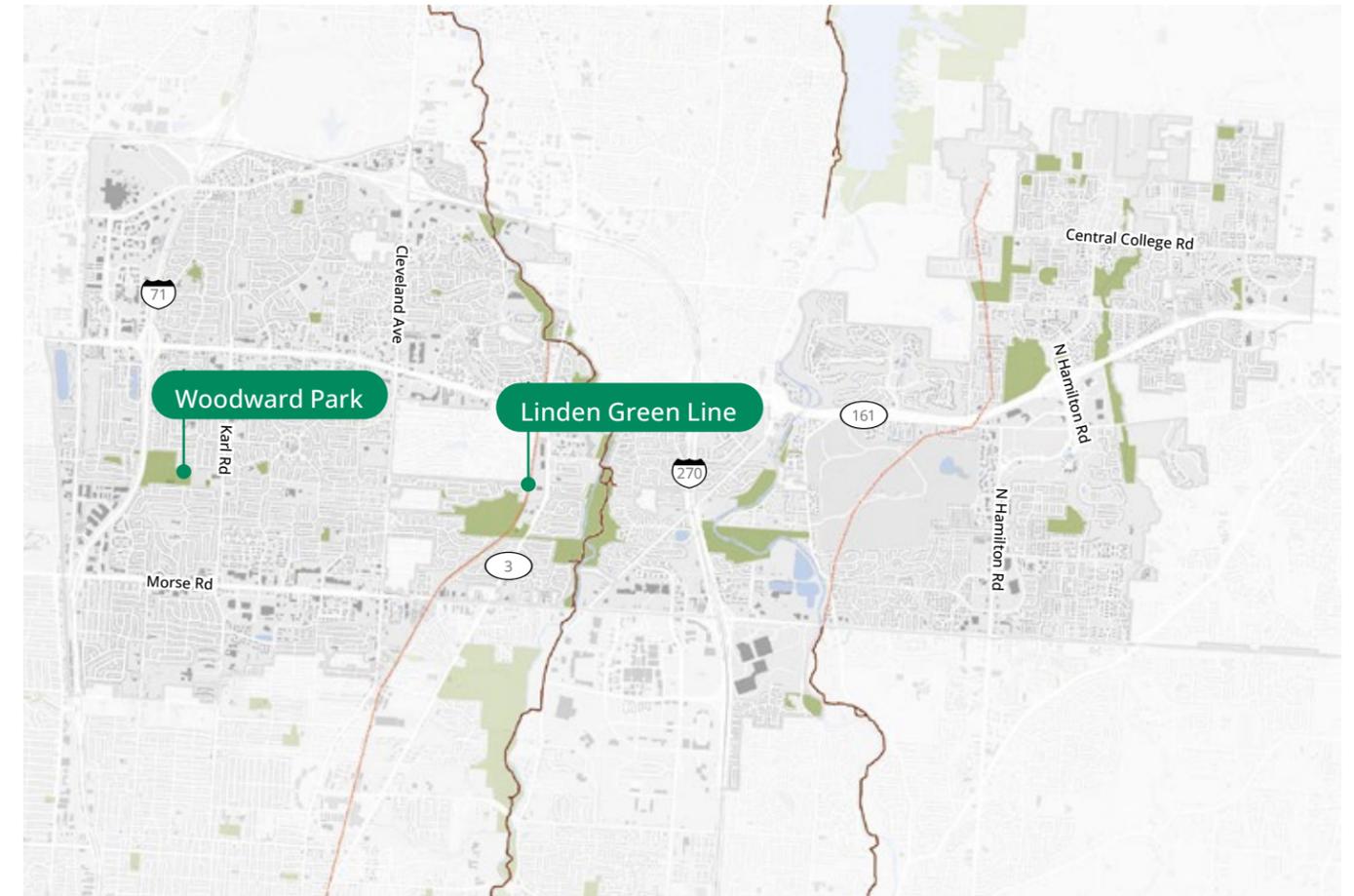
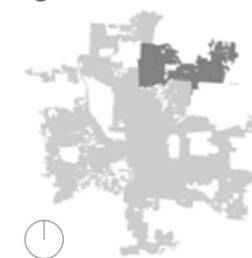


Figure 79: Northeast Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **Woodward Park:** New splash pad
- **Linden Green Line:** New greenway trail

THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | CENTRAL LAND PLAN AREA

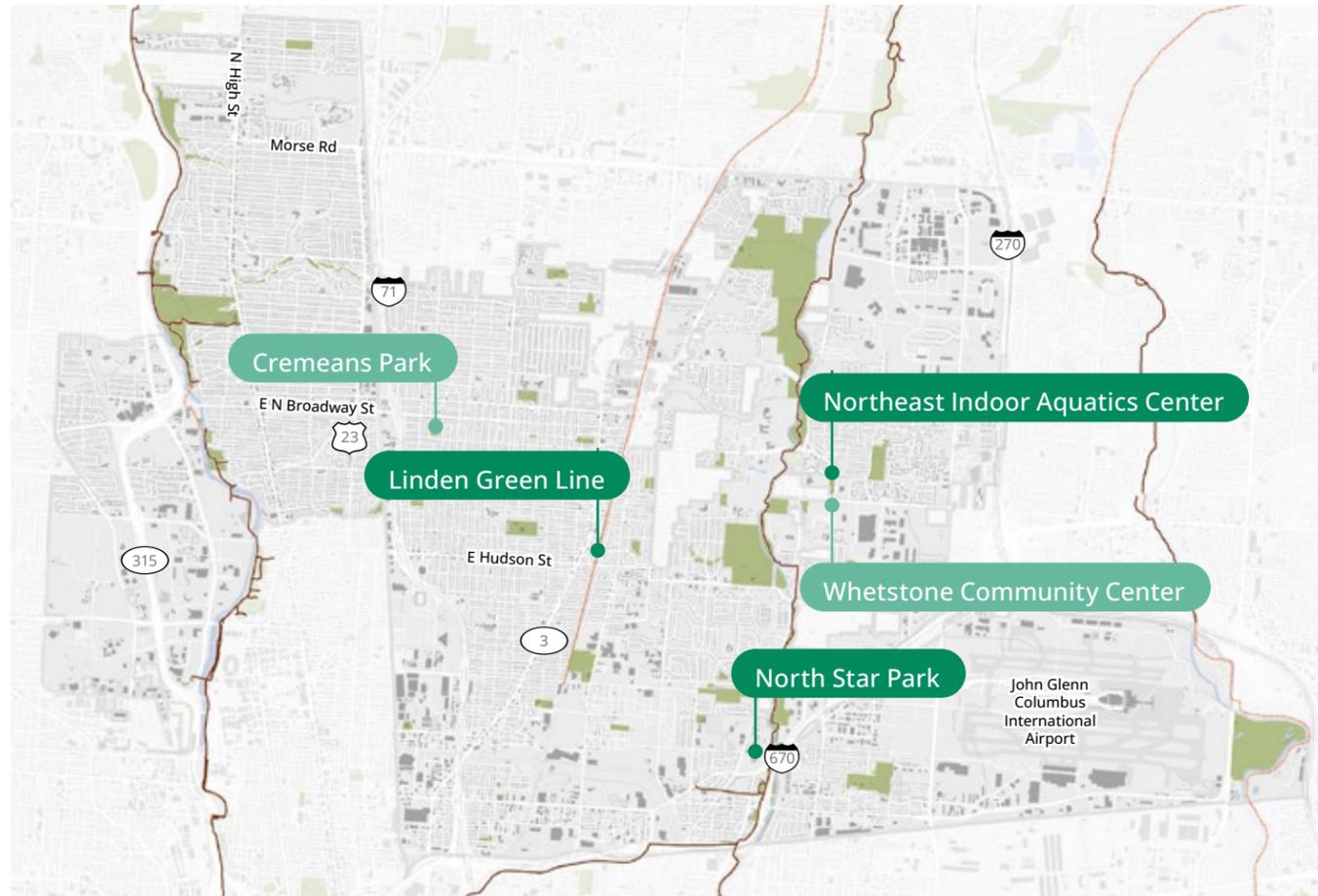
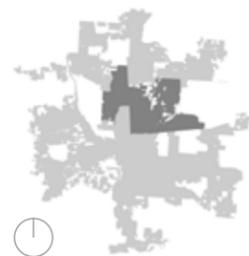


Figure 80: Central Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **Northeast Indoor Aquatics Center:** New indoor aquatics center
- **Linden Green Line:** New 7-mile greenway trail
- **North Star Park:** New park and cultural installations along the Alum Creek Trail
- **Whetstone Community Center:** Recreation center improvements
- **Cremeans Park:** Park renovation and rebuild

THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | IN-TOWN LAND PLAN AREA

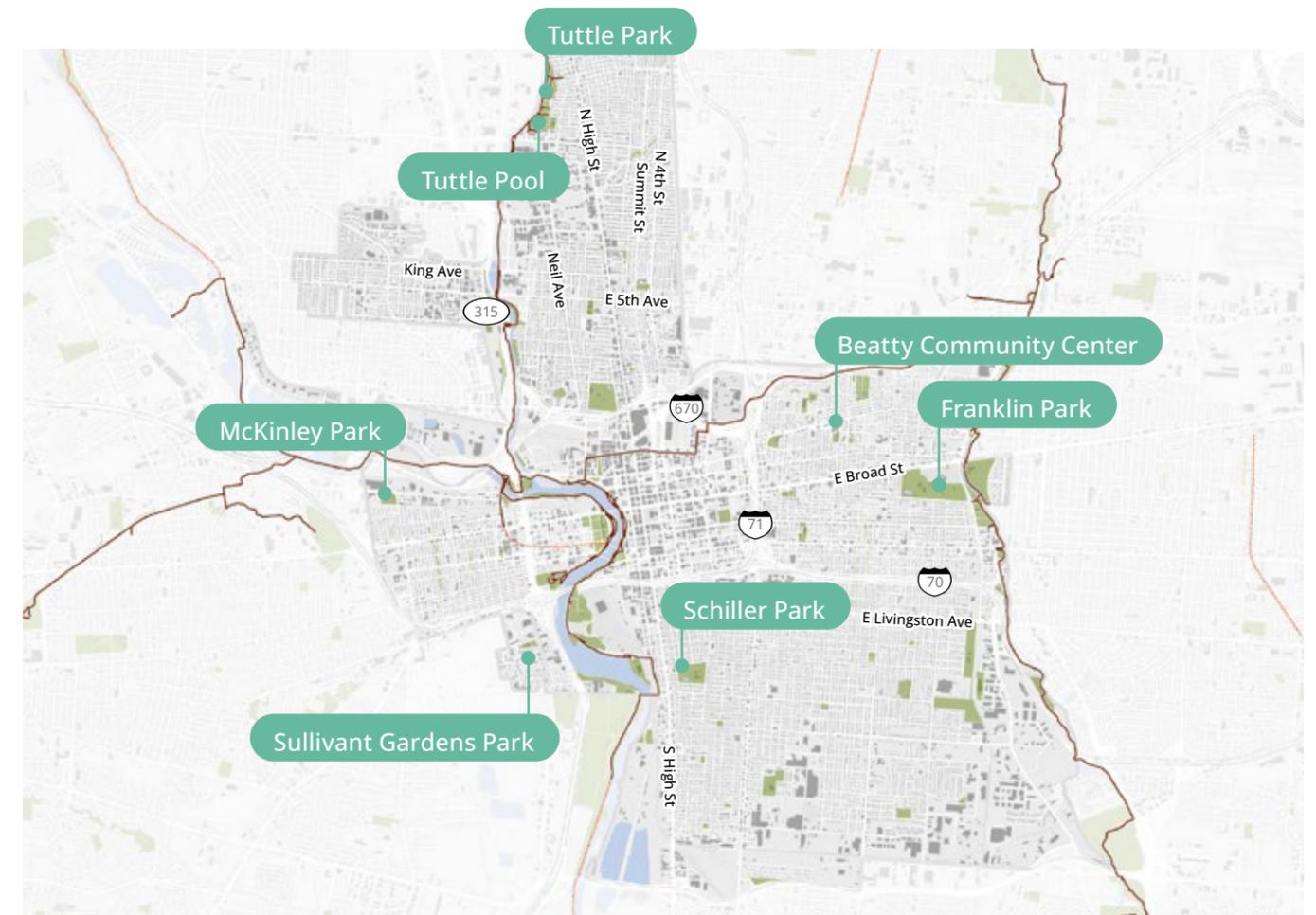
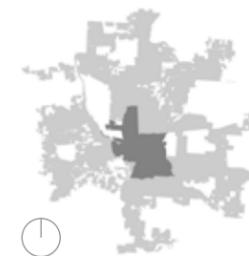


Figure 81: In-Town Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **Franklin Park:** Conservatory renovation and rebuild
- **Tuttle Pool:** Pool rebuild
- **Tuttle Park:** Playground renovation and rebuild
- **McKinley Park:** Park renovation and rebuild
- **Schiller Park:** Pond and playground renovation and rebuild
- **Sullivant Gardens Park:** Park renovation and rebuild
- **Beatty Community Center:** Recreation center renovation and rebuild

THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | SOUTHWEST LAND PLAN AREA

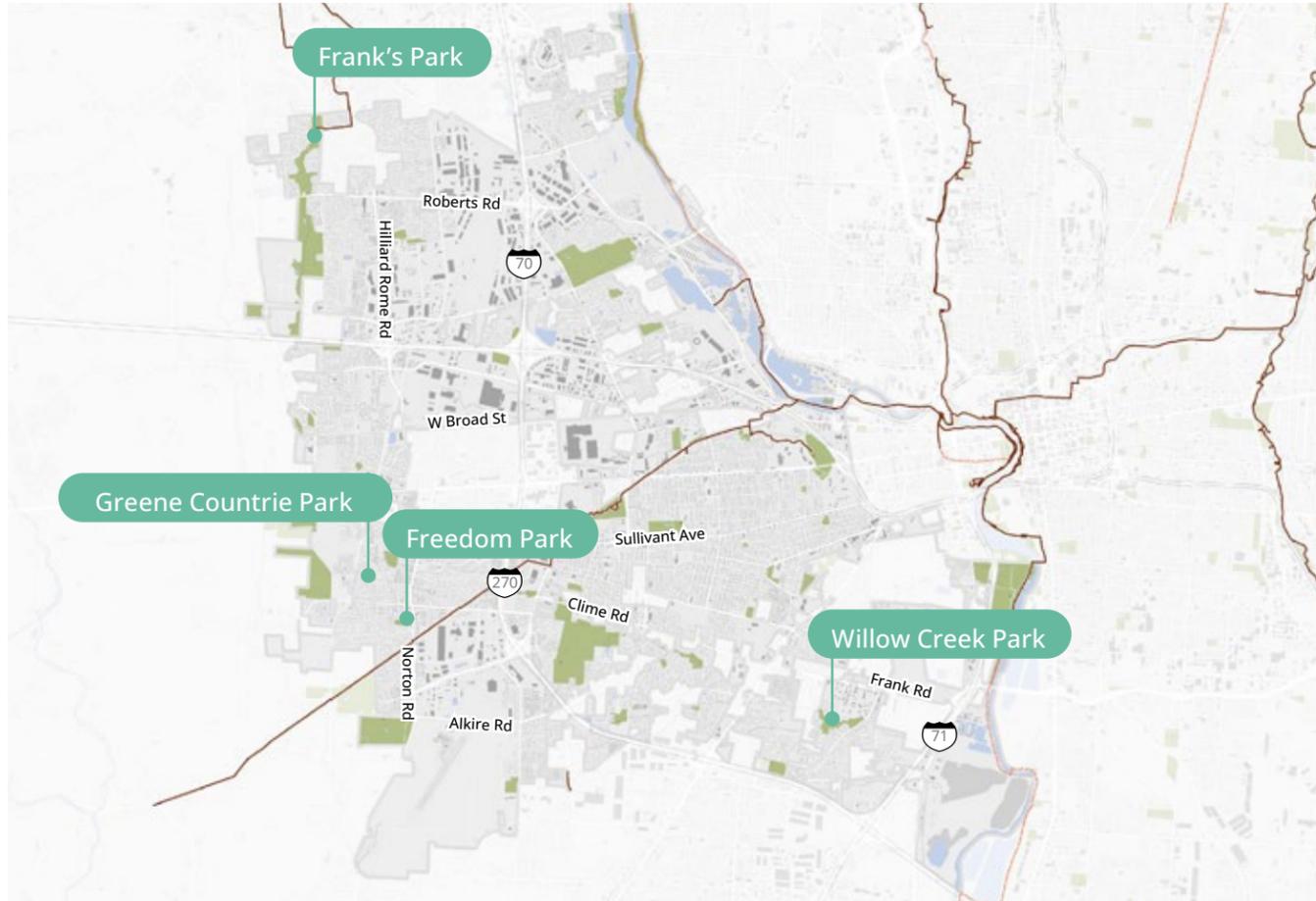
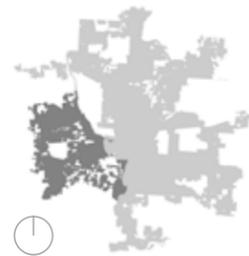


Figure 82: Southwest Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



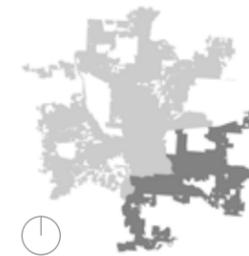
- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **Willow Creek Park:** Park redevelopment
- **Freedom Park:** Park redevelopment
- **Greene Countrie Park:** Shelter rebuild
- **Frank's Park:** Playground replacement and shelter addition

THE CHANGE YOU WILL SEE | SOUTHEAST LAND PLAN AREA



Figure 83: Southeast Land Plan Area Short-Term Capital Projects



- Land Plan Area Boundary
- Waterbodies
- CRPD Parks
- Existing Greenway Trails
- Proposed Greenway Trails
- Recreation Centers
- Renovation/Rebuild
- New Park or Facility

- **East Side Rail Trail:** New greenway trail
- **Mason Run Park:** New park
- **Helsel Park:** Park redevelopment
- **Independence Village Park:** Park renovation
- **Easthaven Park:** Park renovation

ACTIONS

A. Nurture an Active and Healthy Community

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME				
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING	
A1 Add and improve parks and facilities where most needed.						
A1.1	Use Level of Service analysis to identify where recreation and park amenities should be added.	A F		●	●	
A1.2	Prioritize improvements in highly-used parks and facilities.	A C D				●
A1.3	Prioritize improvements in parks and facilities with a low condition rating.	A C D				●
A1.4	Correlate maintenance data with park usage and Priority Area mapping to guide reinvestment decisions.	A F				●
A1.5	Adopt a "renew and reinvest" capital cycle for specialized facilities. Prioritize modernization of aging arts studios, theater, aquatic amenities, outdoor recreation facilities, and golf course infrastructure.	A C D F	●			●
A1.6	Identify opportunities to repurpose underutilized or redundant recreation and park amenities.	A		●		
A1.7	Upgrade or expand parking and improve circulation at well-utilized sports parks and community parks.	A D E				●
A1.8	Complete park and facility condition audits every three years.	A C F	●			●
A2 Invest in distinctive, multipurpose, and high-quality facilities.						
A2.1	Develop Site Master Plans for all new parks or facilities and major renovations of existing parks or facilities to ensure neighborhood needs are considered on a project-by-project basis.	A C D				●

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME				
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING	
A2.2	Complete plan for and implement programming at the new Beatty Teen Center. Incorporate opportunities for placemaking, wayfinding, and programming to reinforce inclusivity, neutrality, and safety.	A C D	●		●	
A2.3	Address art facility capacity limits through partnerships and satellite art spaces in recreation centers and specialized facilities with underused spaces to host workshops, expand reach, and reduce overcrowding.	A C D	●			●
A2.4	Identify a potential art center within each geographic zone with specific programs and targeted support from arts staff. Identify associated resource needs for each art center.	A D F	●			
A2.5	Modernize golf amenities to diversify participation and extend the season.	A			●	
A3 Expand access to high-demand programs.						
A3.1	Critically assess program participation and trends on a biannual (2x/year) basis to understand the demographics and preferences of program participants. Identify strategies for reallocating funding based on the assessment of unmet program needs.	A F	●			●
A3.2	As funding permits, expand existing popular nature-based and outdoor adventure programs and camps to meet demand.	A B	●	●		
A3.3	Expand outreach programs for golf, targeting an additional 2,000 youth participants through discounted or free programs.	A F	●			
A3.4	Facilitate equipment exchanges and continue offering rentals to reduce the cost burden of participating in sports. Strengthen and formalize partnerships with organizations like Level the Playing Field to support equipment exchanges and rentals with a focus on hard-to-find equipment like girls' and women's sports equipment and gear for outdoor recreation.	A C	●			
A3.5	Grow wellness and positive-outlet programming for at-risk youth.	A C	●			●
A3.6	Find funding for desirable incentives for participants in Youth Development and intervention programs.	A D	●			●

ACTIONS | NURTURE AN ACTIVE & HEALTHY COMMUNITY

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
A3.7 Continue to explore and pilot partnerships with area hospitals for intervention programs.	A D	●			●
A3.8 Increase school and community group golf participation by 10% annually through targeted programs and promotions.	A F				●
A3.9 Expand multigenerational and cross-generational programs that bring youth, adults, and seniors together.	A C D	●			

A4 Plan and design parks that integrate with the active transportation system to encourage mobility.

A4.1 Promote ease of access by locating high-demand programs in parks and facilities that are accessible via bus, bike lanes, or trails. Annually assess the distribution of high-demand programs across the city to align with developing bus and bike infrastructure.	A E	●			●
A4.2 Complete an access audit and site report for all facilities and parks to measure connectivity based on pedestrian, bike, and bus infrastructure.	A E		●		
A4.3 Identify high-priority areas for adding micromobility hubs and define parameters for adding hubs near CRPD properties.	A E			●	
A4.4 Use the walkshed analysis to identify areas where park access is limited by gaps in the pedestrian network. Work with DPS to prioritize sidewalk improvements and trails in these areas.	A E			●	●

A5 Support health and wellness by promoting active lifestyles and aligning with citywide health goals.

A5.1 Work with food and nutrition partners to develop a strategic approach for growing local capacity and building resilience to changes to external programs.	A C		●	●	●
A5.2 Decrease violence through innovative programming, engagement, intervention, and relationship-building.	A C	●			●

GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

A6 Become a leader in providing universal access to recreation and parks.

A6.1 Create a guide to ADA-accessible parks and facilities that is available online.	A C	●			●
A6.2 As funding permits, expand the non-sports program offerings of Therapeutic Recreation, including wellness, fitness, after-school programs, arts, and aquatics.	A C	●			
A6.3 Conduct the next phase of the ADA accessibility audit of existing parks and facilities and identify priorities for access improvements.	A C		●		
A6.4 Implement ADA accessibility improvements at parks and facilities based on current audit.	A C		●		
A6.5 Provide regional access to Universally Accessible Playgrounds. Address the current gaps in service areas.	A C			●	

A7 Advance Columbus' aspiration of becoming the "Nation's Capital for Women's Sports."

A7.1 Identify local partners to support outreach with girls and women in Columbus and address gendered barriers to participation in recreation.	A C	●			
A7.2 Define participation goals for girls' and women's sports and implement strategies to achieve growth.	A C	●			
A7.3 Partner with local women's sports teams to plan workshops, clinics, camps, and other opportunities for young girls to build skills and connect with athletic role models. Identify partners to support a diverse range of sports programming.	A C	●	●		
A7.4 Work with the Greater Columbus Sports Commission to evaluate sports programming options for women and girls, including coed options. Convene periodically to evaluate and grow program offerings.	A C	●			●

ACTIONS | BRING NATURE INTO FOCUS

B. Bring Nature into Focus

B1 Design parks as functional landscapes.

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
B1.1 Develop ecological performance-based design standards for parks and facilities. Build upon existing City standards (i.e., the Green Infrastructure Design Guidelines) to identify opportunities for integrating green stormwater infrastructure and low-impact development principles in capital projects.	B F	●			●
B1.2 Update park design guidelines to exclude invasive plant species and require a certain percentage of native plant species to be planted in park development projects with landscaping plans. Share internal approved species lists publicly so they can be used as a best practice resource.	B	●			●
B1.3 Identify and acquire land to serve as regional stormwater detention for capital projects.	B	●			●
B1.4 Establish design and maintenance standards for CRPD's street island and neighborhood open space inventory to improve design and plant variety.	B F		●		
B1.5 Develop natural resource management plans for all conservation parkland and natural areas to guide conservation, habitat restoration, and sustainable maintenance practices.	B F	●			●
B1.6 Target mitigation of invasive species through monitoring, removal, controlled burns, and grazing to encourage native species growth.	B F				●

B2 Utilize proactive ecological approaches to managing growth through natural area acquisition, restoration, and maintenance.

B2.1 Revise or strengthen mechanisms for parkland dedication.	A B D E	●	●		
B2.2 Collaborate with developers to ensure CRPD priorities are incorporated into future development projects.	B	●			●

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
B2.3 Work with partners including MORPC, the Nature Conservancy, Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District, and Metro Parks to map and conserve habitat corridors and flyways.	B	●			●
B2.4 Identify acquisition targets for nature preserves and conservation lands, with varying criteria depending on an area's current density and projected growth.	A B	●			●
B2.5 Advocate for open space, tree preservation and planting in future updates to Columbus' Growth Strategy, Zone In, LinkUS, and similar citywide policy or code revisions.	B				●

B3 Foster community stewardship and environmental education.

B3.1 Provide ongoing support for park stewardship groups through technical assistance, training, equipment, and other resources. Designate a point of contact for community stewards and volunteers.	B F	●			●
B3.2 Expand and formalize opportunities for youth employment and volunteerism, building on teen conservation camp and CIT/LIT programs to engage more young people in environmental stewardship, landscape management, outdoor education, data collection, and public engagement.	A B C		●		

B4 Expand nature-based play for all ages through park design and programming.

B4.1 Add nature trails, nature play, observation decks, quiet and reflection areas in community parks throughout the city.	B	●	●	●	
B4.2 Re-evaluate fee structure for nature-based programs. Identify opportunities to expand free and low-cost options.	A B	●			
B4.3 As funding becomes available to expand programming, identify potential locations that could host additional nature-based and outdoor programming to ensure that opportunities are distributed across the city and to highlight lesser-known natural areas of Columbus.	A B	●			

ACTIONS | BRING NATURE INTO FOCUS

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
B4.4 Expand outdoor recreation programming year-round at centers and parks across the city.	A B		●		●
B4.5 Develop new nature-based and outdoor adventure programming.	A B	●			●

B5 Preserve and grow the city's tree canopy.

B5.1 Implement a strategic approach for increasing tree canopy coverage within CRPD properties and rights-of-way, building on the work of the Urban Forestry Master Plan.	B	●			
B5.2 Complete the transition from the current tree nursery location to the new nursery.	B F	●	●		
B5.3 Implement equitable planting plans to focus tree plantings in priority neighborhoods as defined in the Urban Forestry Master Plan and in the environmental priority areas from Playbook Columbus.	B				●
B5.4 Strengthen public and private tree protection policies, advancing private tree protections in zoning codes.	B				●
B5.5 Identify the appropriate staffing and resource needs to establish a proactive 7-10 year pruning cycle for 140,000 street trees, focusing on mature trees.	B F				●
B5.6 Continue to maintain tree inventory data publicly accessible through an interactive web map.	B F				●
B5.7 Continue to seek and secure grant funding for tree care, protection and planting.	B F				●
B5.8 Advocate for tree canopy coverage to be considered as a stormwater mitigation strategy in a future update to the Columbus Stormwater Manual.	B F	●	●		●
B5.9 Adapt guidelines to further incorporate climate-adaptive design, energy efficiency and sustainable materials into CRPD sites that serve the community.	B	●			

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
B5.10 Maintain and expand the public tree inventory to include all street trees, potential right-of-way planting sites, and park trees in maintained landscapes	B F				●
B5.11 Prioritize tree canopy in high-use areas adjacent to the mobility network to provide shade for people who are waiting for a bus or using sidewalks, bike paths, or trails.	B C E		●		●

B6 Promote climate action through parks and facilities.

B6.1 Adapt guidelines to further incorporate climate-adaptive design, energy efficiency and sustainable materials into CRPD sites that serve the community.	B	●			
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ACTIONS | THIS PARK WELCOMES YOU

C. This Park Welcomes You

GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

C1 Foster a culture of belonging across parks and recreation facilities.

C1.1	Strengthen partnerships with cultural organizations to continue celebrating diverse traditions through events, festivals, and programming.	C	●			●
C1.2	Identify opportunities to incorporate inclusive design elements that support diverse cultural gathering traditions (e.g., group cooking, music, and extended-family use).	C D	●			●
C1.3	Continue to provide training, small grants, and resources to community groups to host events and activities in parks.	C				●
C1.4	Identify locations for larger, multi-use pavilions that accommodate over 100 guests. Ensure these pavilions are sited near complementary amenities such as restrooms, playgrounds, trails, parking, and utilities.	C D	●			
C1.5	Identify key locations where multiple shelters throughout the park would better support demand for simultaneous small gatherings.	C D	●			
C1.6	Develop a formal pathway that connects Centers Without Walls participants to the broader Columbus Recreation and Parks programs.	C D		●		
C1.7	Re-evaluate program best-fit locations at least every three years based on changes in Priority Areas as part of the Recreation Plan Update.	C D F		●		●
C1.8	When financially feasible, expand CRPD-produced events (e.g., signature tournaments, family festivals, awareness fundraisers) to strengthen the city's identity and generate predictable annual revenue.	C D F	●			●

C2 Remove cultural barriers to access.

C2.1	Explore new/creative marketing tactics to engage more teens and young adults in programming for their age group.	C D F	●			●
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GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

C2.2	Ensure online materials are easily translatable.	C	●			●
C2.3	Maintain a practice of translating department communication informed by ongoing analysis of community need.	C	●			●
C2.4	Continue developing partnerships with organizations that can provide bilingual and culturally responsive outreach support.	C D				●

C3 Empower community stewardship and elevate local voices.

C3.1	Strengthen and expand volunteer steward program drawn from neighborhood leaders.	C F	●			●
C3.2	Offer recognition (certificates, event passes, social media highlights) for recurring volunteers and partner businesses.	C F	●			●
C3.3	Streamline the process for volunteer coaches to make it easier for neighborhood residents to get involved in sports.	C F	●			

C4 Design for both comfort and safety.

C4.1	Conduct a system-wide analysis of existing restrooms to identify locations where portable or permanent restrooms should be added. Explore feasibility, maintenance and safety considerations of adding restrooms to strategic locations.	C	●			
C4.2	Improve safety standards (including lighting, shade and sightlines) based on park classification and operating hours.	C	●			
C4.3	Identify parks and facilities in need of additional parking, shade, seating and concessions.	C D	●			
C4.4	Improve safety by implementing new safety standards in identified parks.	C		●	●	

C5 Go above and beyond physical accessibility.

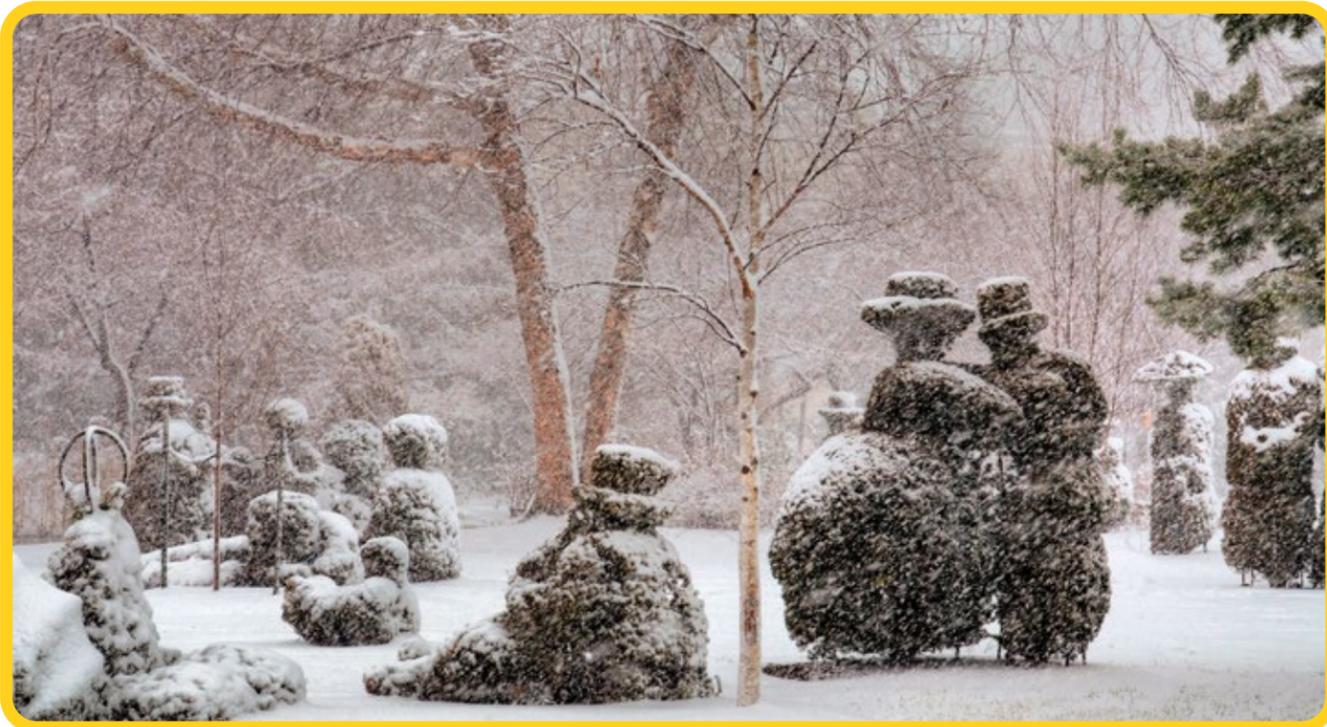
C5.1	Develop a range of Universal Design strategies for accessibility that can be applied across capital projects.	C	●			
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ACTIONS | THIS PARK WELCOMES YOU

GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

C6 Promote safe parks and facilities through programming and operations.

C6.1 Establish clear communication protocols for notifying nearby residents and businesses of upcoming events to minimize disruption and build goodwill.	C D		●		
C6.2 Prioritize annual refresher and safety training, including certifications for equipment operation and pesticide/herbicide use.	C F	●			●
C6.3 Plan for the youth zone around the new Beatty Teen Center by identifying necessary safety measures, communicating with seniors living nearby, and coordinating with community groups.	C D	●			
C6.4 Increase collaboration with Columbus Division of Police (CPD) to ensure a welcome environment.	C	●			
C6.5 Explore feasibility of increased on-site presence through a park ranger program or similar functions.	C		●		



D. Create What's Uniquely US About Columbus

GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

D1 Tell the Columbus story through parks.

D1.1 Celebrate the contributions of women in Columbus through interpretive installations, naming, and public art in parks and facilities.	C D	●			●
D1.2 Grow the City's inventory of public art, murals, interpretive play installations, and storytelling pieces that reflect and represent Columbus' diversity of neighborhood stories and histories.	C D	●			●
D1.3 Collaborate with the Columbus Metropolitan Library to develop digital archives or story maps where residents contribute photos, oral histories, and memories tied to park spaces.	C D		●	●	●
D1.4 Continue to update the inventory of public art and historic and cultural resources, including information about the quality of existing resources.	C D	●			●
D1.5 Develop a list of significant historic and cultural elements that should be memorialized through art or interpretive components in the park system.	C D		●		●
D1.6 Define the department's public art policy in tandem with the Department of Development, Greater Columbus Arts Council and the Columbus Arts Commission.	C D	●			
D1.7 Partner with local museums and public art organizations to identify strategies for activating parks and facilities through art and other placemaking efforts.	C D	●			●
D1.8 Explore opportunities to work with local artists to build functional public art pieces in parks that double as shelters, shade, seating, or similar. Establish a process for integrating art into capital projects with a range of strategies based on project size and budget.	C D	●			●

D2 Draw on the unique talents of the Columbus community to expand programs and partnerships.

D2.1 Promote, celebrate and expand the ways CRPD programs create Columbus' unique identity.	D	●			●
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ACTIONS | CREATE WHAT'S UNIQUELY US ABOUT COLUMBUS

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
D2.2 Explore opportunities to connect youth with age-appropriate job readiness program options. Include speaker sessions to introduce younger age groups to different career options, shadowing opportunities and site visits for middle grades.	D	●			
D2.3 Showcase local talent in parks and facilities through diverse methods, including art installations, maker exhibits, and live performances.	C D	●			●
D2.4 Develop a robust marketing plan to recruit and streamline onboarding for independent instructors to expand program offerings such as sports, yoga, fitness and cardio-boxing, hobby, creative writing and arts workshops or technology workshops at recreation facilities.	A D F	●			
D2.5 Create career pathway opportunities by connecting interns and job readiness participants to part-time or seasonal employment, mentorships, and professional certifications.	D		●		
D2.6 Expand youth mentorship and leadership opportunities from middle through high school by linking existing programs such as City Leaders and Job Readiness with a future teen advisory committee to create a seamless pathway for civic engagement and career development.	D		●		
D2.7 Establish a formal internship and practicum program with regional higher education institutions to provide students with hands-on experience.	D F		●		
D2.8 Pilot and test innovative program offerings.	D F	●			●
D2.9 Expand Youth Summit "for youth by youth" model for teen programming.	D	●			●

D3 Infuse innovation and adventure.

D3.1 Create opportunities for pop-up installations such as temporary park features, art and landscape installations to introduce short-term activations while testing long-term solutions.	C D	●			●
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GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

D4 Advance engagement and technology tools.

D4.1 Offer participatory budgeting opportunities during the community engagement process for capital projects to promote transparent decision-making.	C D				●
D4.2 Expand creative approaches to community engagement used throughout park and trail master planning processes. Include strategies to promote participation by community members of all ages and abilities.	C D	●			
D4.3 Launch new customer-facing app for registration and programs.	D	●			
D4.4 Use technology to measure pedestrian, bike, and micromobility usage at new key trail nodes or notable park and facilities improvement locations.	D E F		●		
D4.5 Use technology to measure park and facility usage to drive strategies.	D		●		

D5 Bring recreation and parks closer to people through signature parks and programs.

D5.1 Initiate conversations and explore partnerships between CWOW and libraries, faith-based institutions or nonprofit organizations to identify opportunities for collaboration or complementary programming in facility-gap zones.	C D		●		
D5.2 Designate 3–5 event-ready parks with enhanced infrastructure including expanded restrooms, power access, lighting, and parking.	D F			●	

ACTIONS | CONNECT THE JOURNEY TO THE DESTINATION

E. Connect the Journey to the Destination

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME				
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING	
E1 Close trail gaps to build a seamless network of trails and greenways.						
E1.1	Identify street crossings within a half mile of all parks and facilities where safety improvements are needed. Collaborate with partners to implement improvements.	C E	●	●	●	
E1.2	Coordinate with the Department of Public Service and Columbus Water and Power to improve lighting, wayfinding, shade, street trees, and pavement conditions along sidewalks that connect neighborhoods to parks and facilities.	C E			●	●
E1.3	Identify locations for future east-west trail connections.	A E		●		
E1.4	Construct 25 miles of new greenway trails in collaboration with COTA, MORPC, neighboring municipalities, and other partners.	A E			●	●
E2 Expand recreation on the water.						
E2.1	Expand partnerships to add river recreation options like kayak rentals, paddleboarding classes, and river tours.	A D E	●			
E2.2	Identify locations and plan for new waterfront gathering spaces. Include an assessment of waterfront-specific maintenance and operations needs for each new site.	A C D E F	●			●
E2.3	Offer public water-safety trainings for river and reservoir recreation participants.	A E		●		
E3 Improve access through information technology and navigation.						
E3.1	Explore partnership opportunities with COTA to offer bus passes and corresponding education around accessing public transit.	E F	●			●

GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING

E4 Activate underutilized corridors as vibrant public assets.

E4.1 Convert abandoned rail lines, easements, and vacant parcels into multi-use trails and greenways. Use demonstration projects to build momentum and secure funding long term.

GOALS	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
A E			●	●

E5 Create signature trail and waterway experiences through distinct gateways.

E5.1 Identify locations for gateway trailheads at entry points to the greenway system. Design gateways that feature unique amenities that celebrate the surrounding neighborhood and trail system.

GOALS	SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
C D E			●	



ACTIONS | BECOME TRAILBLAZERS IN OPERATIONS

F. Become Trailblazers in Operations

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME				
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING	
F1 Formalize a geographical service area approach to programming and facility management.						
F1.1	Formalize a geographical service area approach by grouping centers into geographic zones.	F	●			
F1.2	Develop a detailed action plan for grouping centers into geographic zones.	F	●			
F1.3	Assign unique niches (e.g. youth skill building, arts, senior fitness, sports) within geographic zones that take into account current staff skillsets.	F	●			
F1.4	Implement key performance indicators (KPIs) by geographic zone related to participation growth, cost recovery, population reach, satisfaction, and facility operational times.	F	●			
F2 Classify and define standards for different types of centers.						
F2.1	Classify and define standards for each type of center so residents know what to expect at each level and site.	F	●			
F2.2	Provide tools for staff to communicate standards for each type of center so residents know what to expect at each level and site.	F	●			
F3 Expand the role of partnerships and volunteers.						
F3.1	Strengthen partnership models with universities, hotels, and large employers to co-host or co-develop event spaces and field complexes.	A F		●		
F3.2	Establish partnership structures and value metrics so external collaborators understand expectations, benefits, and recognition protocols.	F	●			
F3.3	Expand volunteer program, with an emphasis on training and supporting staff capacity.	F	●			

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME				
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING	
F3.4	Formalize agreements with schools, nonprofits, and health partners to extend programs beyond City staff capacity.	F		●		●
F3.5	Establish a joint programming council that includes external partners and meets quarterly to align city, school, and nonprofit offerings.	D F		●		
F3.6	Revisit a structured event volunteer program to support logistics, hospitality, and operations.	F		●		
F3.7	Coordinate with the Recreation and Parks Foundation to clarify roles, fundraising priorities, capital campaigns, and reporting structures to reduce duplication and strengthen accountability.	F	●			
F4 Increase transparency and visibility.						
F4.1	Develop a newsletter for intervention services to keep parents, hospital staff, and other partners up-to-date on our work and share success stories	A C F	●			●
F4.2	Launch a public dashboard of Recreation and Parks capital projects.	D F	●	●		
F4.3	Use social media and earned media strategically to highlight staff expertise, success stories, and community partnerships rather than only event promotion. Explore possibilities for decentralizing communications in certain instances so sections can elevate their own stories.	D F	●			●
F4.4	Develop storytelling campaigns that highlight how programs teach life skills, environmental appreciation/stewardship, and ignite community connections.	D F	●			●
F4.5	Implement a comprehensive Communications and Marketing Plan that clearly defines goals for awareness, engagement, and retention, along with measurable performance indicators for each audience segment. Identify opportunities to align the Communications and Marketing Plan with the Playbook Columbus Vision Plan.	F	●			●

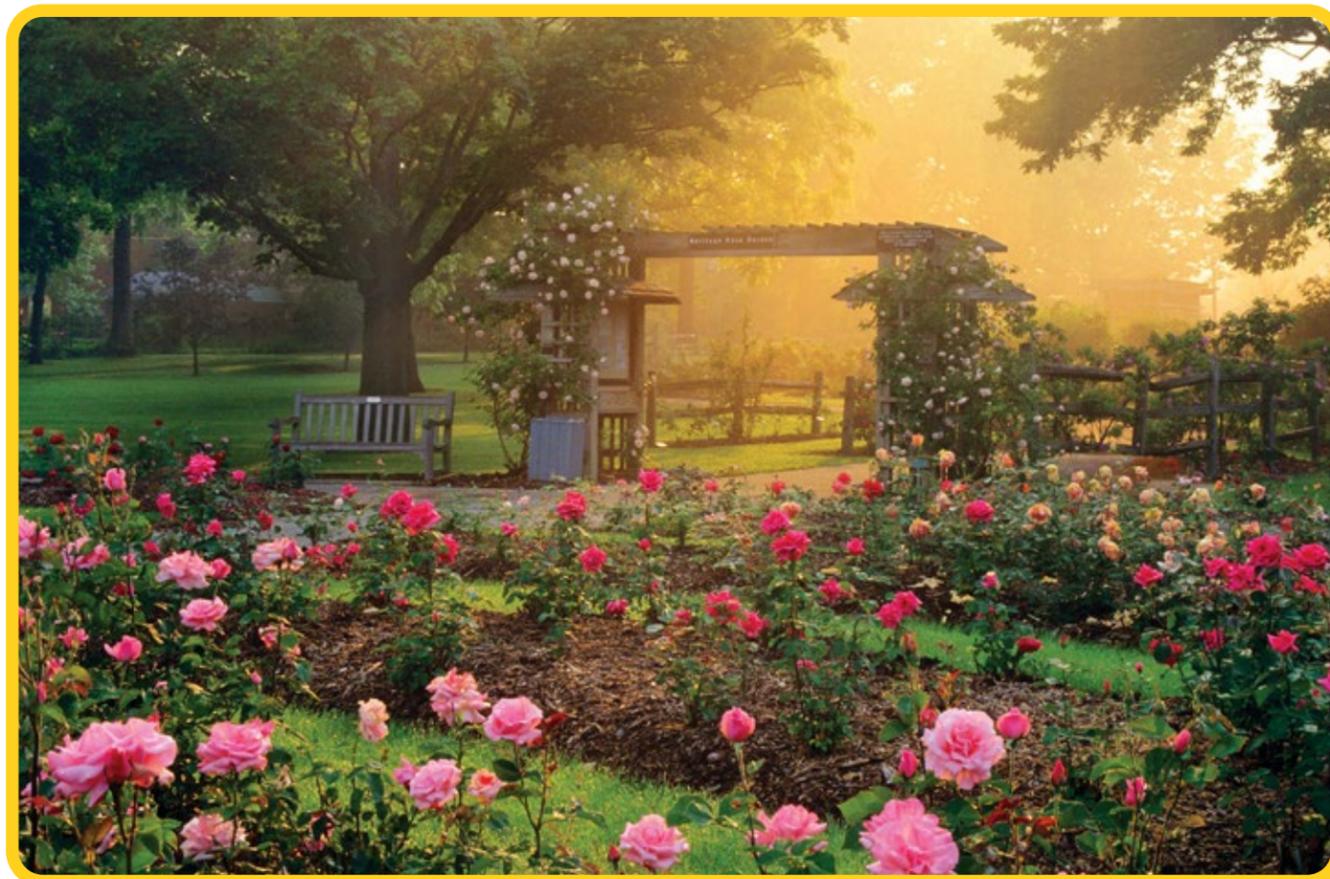
ACTIONS | BECOME TRAILBLAZERS IN OPERATIONS

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
F4.6 Use departmental performance reports to regularly communicate achievements and needs to City Leadership and residents through storytelling and messaging.	F	●			●
F4.7 Publish a shared “Impact Dashboard” to tell the story of participation, diversity, and outcomes across programs (by the numbers). Include non-financial success indicators such as volunteer engagement, emotional impact, violence intervention & workforce development, life-skill development, or water safety proficiency.	D F		●		
F4.8 Continue to improve the information available on Recreation and Parks website regarding, parks, facilities, trails and capital projects.	F				●
F4.9 Earn the National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Parks and Recreation.	A B C D E F		●	●	
F4.10 Initiate CAPRA reaccreditation process.	A B C D E F	●			
F4.11 Implement regular surveys to achieve a 90% satisfaction rate regarding golf course conditions.	D F				●
F5 Improve internal efficiency.					
F5.1 Develop joint program calendars across centers and mobile units.	F	●			
F5.2 Strengthen a structured onboarding and training program to better inform and prepare new employees and promote long-term employment.	F	●			

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
F5.3 Demonstrate the value of new equipment types versus legacy units annually through performance metrics.	F				●
F5.4 Document the gaps that CWOW seeks to fill when identifying locations. Measure and evaluate performance in relation to the identified gaps.	C D F	●			●
F5.5 As staff expansions become available, prioritize new positions in Community and Neighborhood Parks, where service gaps most affect residents.	F				●
F5.6 Adopt a tiered event classification system to align appropriate permit fees, staffing expectations, and cost recovery targets with each event scale.	F		●		
F6 Implement consistent, transparent, and measurable maintenance standards.					
F6.1 Establish a maintenance plan for the department's public art inventory.	D F	●			
F6.2 Define unique maintenance standards for each internal division. Unify the Tier language so while criteria varies, there is a shared understanding of Tier I-IV maintenance needs.	F	●			●
F6.3 Benchmark and report performance compliance metrics directly to work orders for measurable accountability.	F	●			●
F6.4 Use conditions audits to compare actual park and facility performance versus goals and reallocate resources accordingly.	C F	●			●
F7 Work towards financial sustainability.					
F7.1 Incorporate annual reviews of cost-per-acre and cost-per-task to optimize budgets and demonstrate efficiency gains.	F				●
F7.2 Benchmark fees against peer cities and local service providers.	F	●			●

ACTIONS | BECOME TRAILBLAZERS IN OPERATIONS

	GOALS	TIMEFRAME			
		SHORT	MID	LONG	ONGOING
F7.3	Establish and equip staff to utilize business plans for each program area. Include cost recovery targets, lifecycle needs, and participation trends to guide annual budget requests and determine reinvestment priorities.	●			
F7.4	Update the unified cost recovery framework and fee policy through a cross-departmental committee.	●			
F7.5	Reinvest revenues to upgrade facility amenities and equipment.	●			●
F7.6	Leverage grants, sponsorships, and naming rights to offset capital and maintenance costs for amenities and landscapes.				●



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 THE CITY OF
COLUMBUS
RECREATION AND PARKS