

Executive Summary

A. Introduction

The City of Waukesha Parks, Recreation, and Forestry (WPRF) Department Community Needs Assessment is designed to provide an understanding of the community's needs, attitudes, interests, and priorities, and the results will aid the City in planning for policy making and management decision making. Areas of service strengths and areas needing improvement have been identified to advance the delivery of parks, recreation and forestry programs, and services.

The plan includes an evaluation of community demographics and trends, along with a comprehensive public input process encompassing public meetings, focus groups, and a statistically-valid survey. Analysis of all collected data provides an understanding of how well the WPRF is currently meeting the community's expectations and recommendations to improve and enhance the level of services and programs provided.

Demographics

Although the future of population growth of the City of Waukesha cannot be predicted with certainty, it is helpful to make assumptions about it for planning purposes.

- Waukesha's population is predicted to increase to 72,829.
- The median age of Waukesha residents 35.9 years, slightly lower than the median age for Wisconsin and the United States.
- The median household income for Waukesha residents is higher than the median statewide household income and national median household income.
- Waukesha's population is almost evenly split between male and female, similar to Wisconsin and the United States.
- Between 2010 and 2020, the most significant changes to the population are projected to be a slight increase of residents ages 60 to 69, as well as those 70 years and older.

Trends

Staying on top of current trends while providing programs, services, and facilities for parks, recreation, and forestry can be both challenging and rewarding. Understanding and responding to the changing recreation interests of the City of Waukesha is crucial to the continued success of the Department. The following highlights relevant local, regional, and national recreation trends relative to the City of Waukesha demographic and their identified desires and interests.

Roughly 31 percent of the population are Baby Boomers, 30 percent are Millennials, and 26 percent are Generation Z. Waukesha residents express interests including special events, trails, dog parks, and aquatics. Programming trends reflect partnerships with the health community and higher education, nature-based activities, and individual and group activities, including more purposeful use of outdoor areas. Improved funding for parks and recreation in general is being widely reported following the decline during the recession.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

It was important to reach out to as many groups and individuals as possible in order to gain the most diverse input possible. The community input process included participants from throughout the City of Waukesha, Park Board members, Chamber of Commerce members, WPRF staff, Waukesha Community Foundation, City Government, Advisory Board members, citizens, Carroll University staff, former mayors, the Waukesha Tennis Association, the UW Extension, the Salvation Army, St. Vincent DePaul, WPRF Friends and Foundation members, Civic Band members, several Alderman, Parents Place, HAWS, Soccer Association members, the Waukesha School Foundation, Waukesha Schools, School District Board members, the Police Department, and volunteers.

Focus Groups/Public Meetings

Citizens recognize that the City of Waukesha provides a wide variety of facilities, programs, and services to City residents related to parks, recreation, and forestry. Focus groups, public meetings, and stakeholder and staff interviews provided important input used as the basis for developing a statistically-valid survey.

Citizen Needs Assessment Survey

Results from a statistically-valid community survey are summarized and highlighted in the main report. All of this information provides a framework to understand Waukesha's park, recreation, and forestry needs and direction for future improvements and enhancements. The survey was conducted using three primary methods: 1) a mail-back survey, 2) an online, invitation-only web survey to further encourage response from those residents already within the defined invitation sample, and 3) an open-link online survey for members of the public who were not part of the invitation sample. A total of 3,000 surveys were mailed to a random sample of City of Waukesha residents in November 2016. After accounting for undeliverable addresses (76 total), 2,924 survey mailings were delivered, and 324 completed responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 10.9 percent. The margin of error for the 324 statistically valid responses is approximately +/- 5.4 percentage points calculated for questions at 50 percent response. Additionally, the open link survey received 104 completed responses.

Open link respondents were considerably more likely to report that they have used and are slightly more satisfied with WPRF facilities and customer services. They have also participated in WPRF programs and attended WPRF events more frequently than invitation sample respondents. As with the participants in the focus groups and public meetings, the survey respondents indicated a high level of satisfaction relative to the majority of parks, recreation and forestry programs, and services provided by the City. Priorities for future improvements and enhancements were identified by survey respondents and closely mirrored those of the earlier public input opportunities. Survey respondents also showed a desire to maintain what is currently available in Waukesha and build upon the strengths of the WPRF.

B. Summary of Key Findings

Generally, findings from the public input process consistently identified an appreciation of existing facilities, programs, and services being offered by WPRF. All facilities and programs were indicated to be meeting the community's needs. Satisfaction with WPRF facilities and programs is generally quite high. For all the listed current facilities and programs, respondents provided an average rating of three or higher on the five-point scale, indicating that each of these amenities is adequately meeting the needs of Waukesha residents. Invitation respondents generally indicated that trails and pathways were the most important facility priority and that community events were the most important program priority. Both amenities were rated as being currently satisfactory; however, these should continue to be monitored in the future, as they are important to a large proportion of responding households. Top general priority is quality and maintenance of facilities and amenities. Throughout the survey results, both quantitative and qualitative, the maintenance of existing parks and facilities emerged as one of the most important areas of focus for the City of Waukesha. The prioritization of maintaining and improving existing amenities was also reinforced through the open-ended comments.

Invitation respondents indicated that affordability in pricing and user fees is crucial not only as an area of improvement for the long term, but also an issue that, if addressed, would likely increase their usage of WPRF offerings. In addition, invitation respondents were not supportive of additional funding. Funding mechanisms like increased user fees, sales and property taxes, and a bond referendum were not rated favorably by respondents.

Respondents in the open link sample, predominantly WPRF users, prioritized indoor recreation facilities. Open link respondents were considerably more likely to indicate that they have used WPRF offerings in the past year when compared to invitation respondents, likely because of the open link survey email campaign to the WPRF contact list. In addition, open link respondents placed high priority and high importance on indoor facilities such as recreation centers and aquatics facilities, whereas invitation respondents were more likely to prioritize outdoor amenities like trails and pathways.

C. Summary of Overall Analysis

Community leaders are increasingly recognizing that parks, recreation, and forestry facilities, programs, and services are essential to creating and maintaining communities where people want to live, work, play, socialize, recreate, learn, and visit. These amenities should be investments in the long-term vitality and economic sustainability of any active and desirable community. The WPRF is committed to providing comprehensive, high quality facilities, programs, and services to the community of Waukesha. The WPRF recognizes these factors and seeks to make program, service, and facility improvements and enhancements for the community.

Areas of Focus and Action Steps

Areas of Focus with Action Steps are outlined in the main document to help create a process to move forward. Over the next five to ten years, many influences will impact the success of the development of future facilities, programs, and services. Funding availability, staff buy-in, and political and community support will play significant roles in future planning efforts.

The action plan identifies specific objectives for the following areas of focus:

- **Area of Focus 1:** *Ensure continuation of the high-quality maintenance of facilities, parks, trails, open spaces, medians, and forested areas residents of Waukesha have come to expect.*
- **Area of Focus 2:** *Ensure affordability of services and programs related to facilities, parks, trails, and open spaces.*
- **Area of Focus 3:** *Explore improving/adding trail and pathway connectivity, shelters with restrooms, open space/natural area preservation, and playgrounds.*
- **Area of Focus 4:** *Explore the addition of indoor facilities such as recreation centers and aquatic centers.*
- **Area of Focus 5:** *Explore additional land acquisition for new parks.*
- **Area of Focus 6:** *Explore whether the resources supporting the Rotary Building at Frame Park, baseball/softball fields, soccer fields, or the E.B. Shurts Environmental Center outweigh the benefits.*
- **Area of Focus 7:** *Monitor the participation and usage of the tennis courts, outdoor ice rinks, basketball courts, and pickleball courts to determine if these facilities warrant future continuation or improvements.*