



Agenda Report

City Council

Date: February 13, 2024

To: Brian Saeki, City Manager

From: Virginia Santana, Director of Parks, Recreation and Community Services
Erin Hamilton, Community Services Manager

Subject: Draft Parks Master Plan Discussion

RECOMMENDATION

Review and provide direction as appropriate for the Draft Parks Master Plan.

BACKGROUND

On September 13, 2022, City Council authorized a Professional Services Agreement with KTUA for a not-to-exceed fee of \$249,531 for the Parks Master Plan project. Using data from surveys, community outreach and analysis of existing facilities and programs, an initial draft Parks Master Plan was developed and reviewed by the Parks, Recreation and Community Services (PRCS) Commission on November 15, 2023. A special meeting was held on December 4, 2023, during which the Commission held an open forum to bring any other concerns to light in relation to the Parks Master Plan. KTUA took the Commission's recommendations and staff input to prepare a second draft plan. The PRCS Commission held a special meeting on January 11, 2024, to review the updates to the draft Parks Master Plan and recommended the plan to the City Council for review.

DISCUSSION

The City Council is asked to review the draft Parks Master Plan, including a stakeholder survey, nationwide benchmarking, and overall policy recommendations, and provide direction to staff. Together these will form a framework for staff to make recommendations to the PRCS Commission and City Council regarding current and future programs and facility improvements with the goal of maintaining accessible, attractive, safe, varied and responsive park programs and facilities for years to come.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the review of the draft plan.

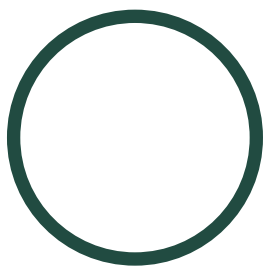
STRATEGIC PLANNING GOAL

Goal 3: Maintain & Enhance Quality of Life

Goal 4: Transparent & Open Government

ATTACHMENTS

A. Whittier Parks Master Plan 2024 - Executive Summary



Executive Summary





The City of Whittier (City) recognizes that parks, open spaces, trails, and recreational programming are essential components of healthy communities. The adequate provision, equitable distribution, and continued maintenance of these public resources are critical to the long-term quality of life in Whittier. With the City projected to grow by over 13,000 residents by the year 2045, creating new recreational opportunities and maintaining and updating existing parks and facilities will be critical to meeting the needs of all community members. The City developed the Whittier Parks Master Plan (Plan) to establish a clear and feasible path to guide the City in providing accessible, well-maintained, and diverse park facilities and programming for residents and visitors alike. The City will use this Plan as a playbook for the long-term management, investment, development, and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities over the next decade or more.

PLANNING PROCESS

This Plan was developed through a comprehensive 15-month planning process that included a citywide parks and recreation facility inventory and analysis; extensive engagement with community members, key stakeholders, and City staff; and development of both site-specific and all-encompassing recommendations for parks and recreation improvement and expansion.



PHASE 1

Park Inventory & Assessment

Assess existing City parks and recreation facilities, programs, and operations.



PHASE 2

Community Engagement

Engage community members and key stakeholders in the planning process through a variety of outreach activities and events.



PHASE 3

Recommendations

Develop policy recommendations and site-specific park recommendations to improve existing and develop new parks, facilities, and programs.



PHASE 4

Plan Adoption

Present the draft Plan to City staff and commissions for review and modification before presenting it to the City Council for adoption.



OVERVIEW OF THE DOCUMENT

The scope of the Plan encompasses a summary of existing planning efforts; an inventory of all parks and amenities; an assessment of the current standards; projections of future conditions; input from the community; and recommendations to the City. The Plan is organized into an executive summary, four chapters, and an appendix, all of which are described below.

Executive Summary: The executive summary provides an overview of the entire document, identifies key issues and themes within the City’s park system, and provides an overview of the recommendations.

1

Chapter 1: An introduction to the Plan and the planning context within the City. The Chapter includes an overview of the City’s Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department as well as policies and guidance from relevant reports. It also contains short summaries of the community engagement efforts and the existing park system analysis. This short, yet foundational, Chapter sets the stage for the rest of the Plan.

2

Chapter 2: Documents and analyzes existing conditions within the City. The Chapter begins with an overview of the park system in Whittier before diving into an in-depth analysis of the City’s parks and recreation system. The Chapter explains the differences between mini-parks, neighborhood parks, and community parks, and categorizes each Whittier park into its respective category. It lists the amenities of each park, shows the level of service of the entire park system based on national averages, and compares Whittier to several other Southern California cities. It provides a series of maps that show park distribution.

Key takeaways from Chapter 2 include:

- » The City has 25 parks, which total 289 acres of park land.
- » The City provides 3.39 acres per 1,000 residents, which is higher than many other cities in the region, but short of the National Standard of 5 park acres per 1,000 residents.
- » The City would benefit from additional recreation amenities, especially more sports courts and fields, playgrounds, walking paths, and outdoor exercise areas.



3

Chapter 3: Recommendations for the City to improve and expand the parks and recreation system. The Chapter includes initiatives, objectives, and action items to improve the existing and future level of service of parks, recreational programs, and service delivery. The Chapter also identifies infill opportunity areas and proposes new amenities to be added to existing parks. The Chapter includes an analysis of future conditions based on planned and proposed parks and facilities.

Key takeaways from Chapter 3 include:

- » The projected future population will create an increased demand for more park acres and more park amenities. In preparation for this increased demand, the City will need to pursue recommendations to develop new parks and add new amenities to existing parks.
- » There are 13 existing parks with infill opportunity areas to add new amenities and diversify the City's park infrastructure. Some new amenities recommended at existing parks include court sports, field sports, walking loops, update playgrounds, and many more.
- » Vacant land in Whittier is minimal, which limits the City's ability to develop new parks. However, the Plan recommends a potential opportunity to develop a new linear park along Whittier Boulevard, as well as options to continue to leverage joint-use agreements with local schools to increase the availability of public park space.
- » Given limitations on the City's capacity to build new parks, the Plan includes several non-traditional strategies to expand parks and recreation access under land constraints.

4

Chapter 4: Summarizes the information gathered from the extensive community engagement efforts completed throughout the planning process. The Chapter includes public input collected from community surveys, three stakeholder focus group meetings, three pop-up events, and one community workshop. The Chapter identifies key trends and priorities of the community and stakeholders.

Key takeaways from Chapter 4 include:

- » There is a desire for more sports fields and courts throughout Whittier.
- » There is a desire for new amenities at existing parks, such as picnic areas, seating, walking paths, sports courts, community gardens, and aquatic facilities.
- » There is a desire to extend and enhance the Whittier Greenway Trail.
- » There is a desire for improved safety and security at parks through the use of fencing, lighting, and surveillance.
- » There is a need for regular maintenance, renovation, and upkeep of existing park amenities and facilities with an emphasis on play equipment, restrooms, and sidewalks.

A

Appendices: This plan has three appendices. Appendix A is the programming and staffing assessment that includes extensive analysis about existing programs and programming capacity. It also includes staffing analysis for parks and recreation.

B

Appendix B is the recreational trends analysis. It outlines trends in recreation on a national and local context. The purpose of this section is to inform the City of growing recreational needs as the City's demographics change and evolve to include new programming and amenities at parks in the future.

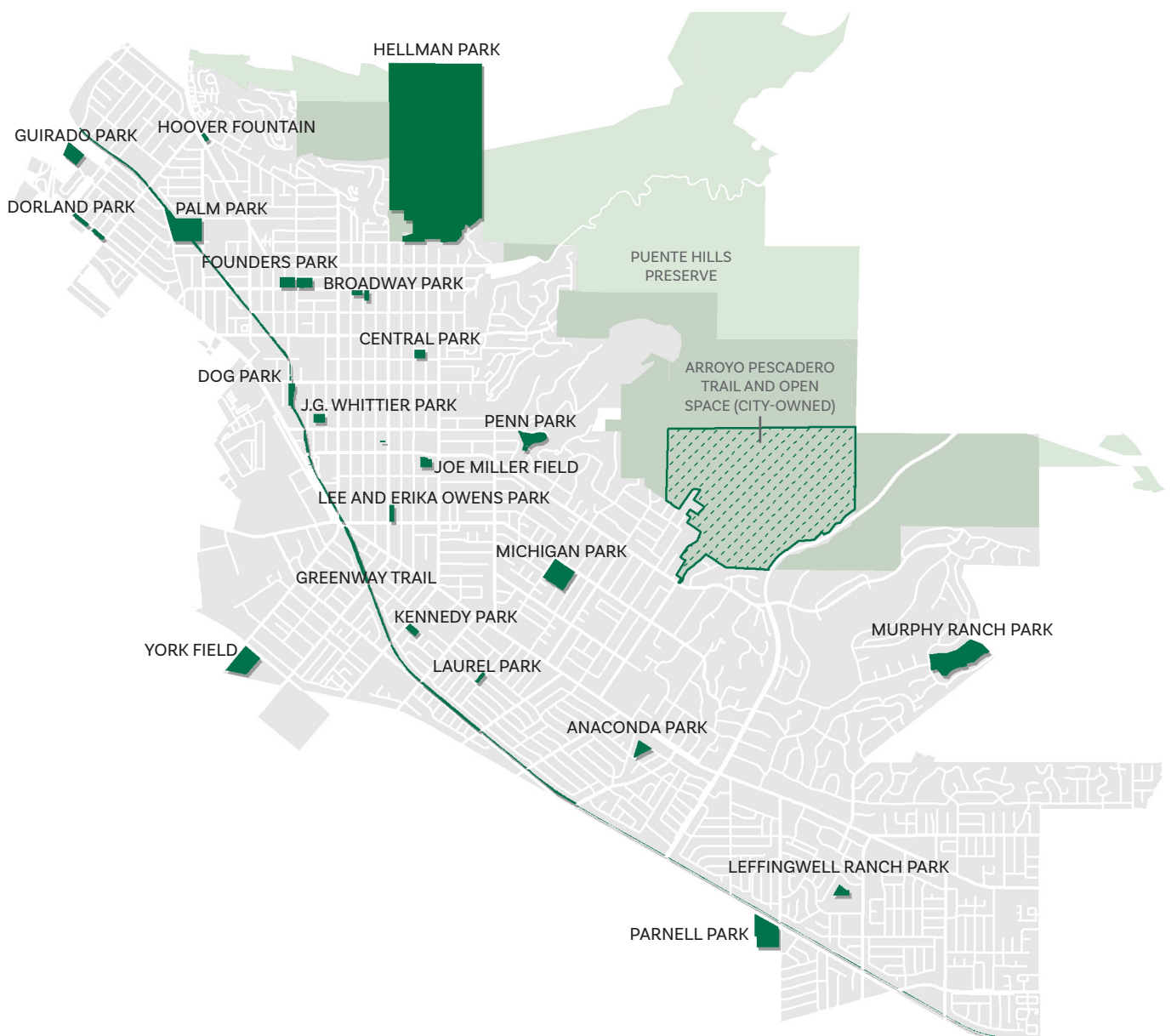
C

Appendix C contains the full results of both the community survey and Statistically-valid survey.

PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

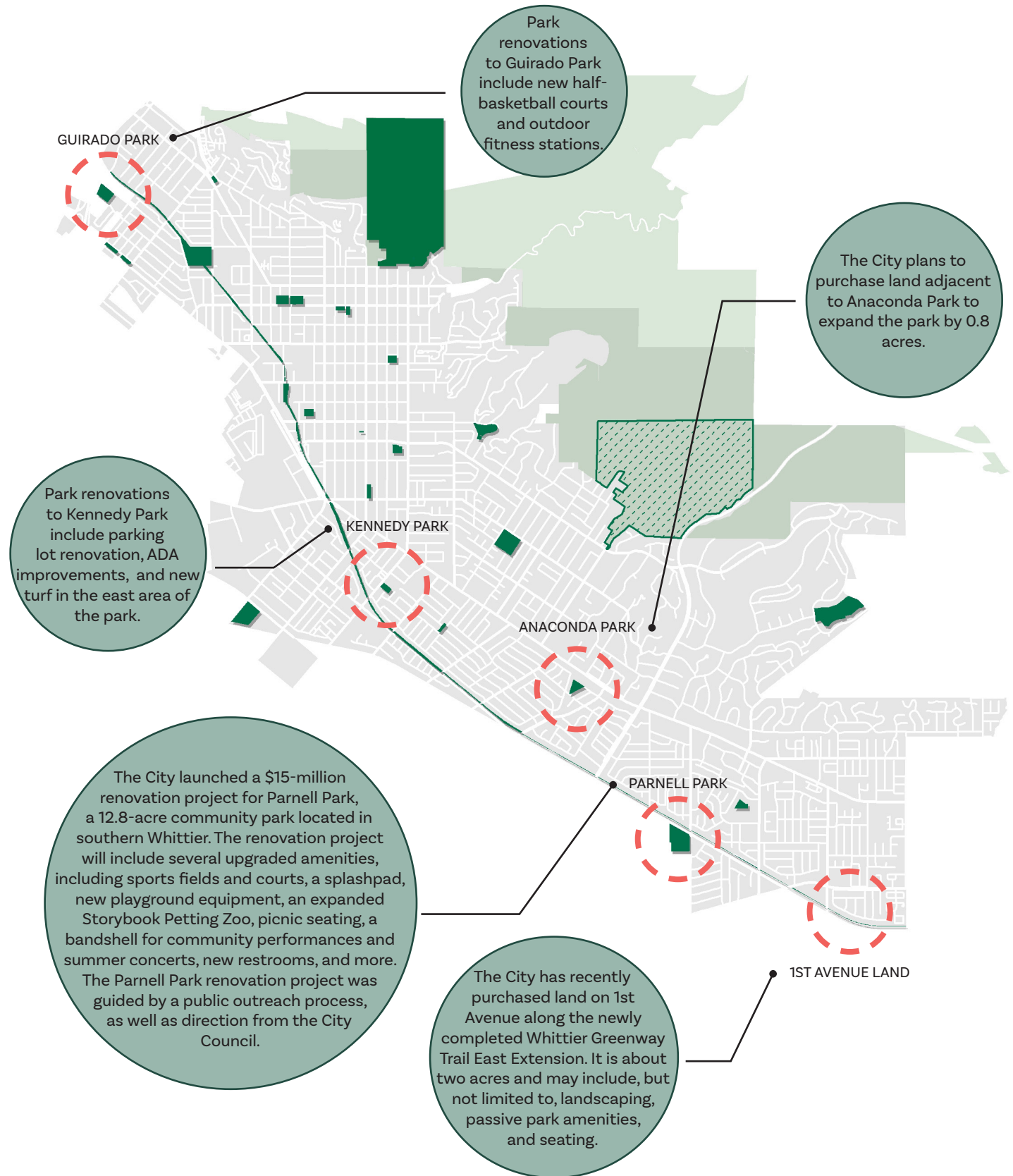
Existing Facilities

The City has five mini parks, eleven neighborhood parks, four community parks, one regional park, and four special use facilities for a total of 289 acres of park land. The City's 25 existing parks contain a variety of passive and active recreation amenities, including recreation and community centers, playgrounds and tot lots, sports courts and fields, splashpads and water play features, walking paths, picnic areas, a skate park, a dog park, and more. While many parks and recreation amenities currently exist in Whittier, the City sees opportunities to enhance and expand the parks and recreation system to increase park accessibility, equity, and satisfaction for the community. The City has established an ambitious goal to provide five acres of park land for every 1,000 residents. Currently, the City provides 3.39 park acres per 1,000 people, which presents both a challenge and an opportunity to better serve current and future community members. Recognizing the need for more parks is the first step towards action and can help the City pursue and secure grant funding for parks and recreation facilities.



Planned Projects

While Whittier is home to an already robust system of parks and recreation facilities, the City recognizes that gaps in park and recreation amenity access still exist and is committed to increasing park provision and quality throughout Whittier. The City is already taking strides to accomplish this through the revitalization of existing parks in Whittier.



Community Engagement

2

Community Surveys

4

Workshops and
Pop-up Events

1,148

Survey Responses

3

Stakeholder Focus
Group Meetings

Community Priorities

The major findings from community engagement include the desire for:

- » Upgraded play structures and surfaces at existing parks.
- » Additional sports fields and courts to meet the needs of local sports organizations.
- » Extension of the Whittier Greenway Trail and addition of new trail connection points.
- » Utilization of vacant park space for new park amenities, such as picnic areas, seating, walking paths, community gardens, and aquatic facilities.
- » Improved maintenance of existing park facilities, especially restrooms, sidewalks, playgrounds, and sports fields.
- » Improved park safety and security through fencing, lighting, and surveillance.
- » Improved marketing and promotion of recreation programs and special events.

Statistically Valid and Open Link Survey Key Findings

Key trends from the statistically valid and open link survey responses include:

- » Desire for increased safety and security
- » Desire for better maintenance of parks, facilities, and fields
- » Concerns about the unhoused population
- » General lack of awareness of parks, programs, and sports leagues
- » Interest in dog-friendly park locations
- » Need for more senior and youth programs

RECOMMENDATIONS

A series of recommendations were developed to guide the improvement of Whittier’s parks, recreation facilities, and programs. These recommendations were based on the cumulative findings of the inventory and analysis of existing facilities, evaluation of current and projected recreation trends, community and stakeholder input, and best practices and industry standards.

The recommendations are organized into seven overarching initiatives:



1 Parks and Facilities Initiative

Improvement of existing and development of new parks and facilities infrastructure.



2 Programs and Services Initiative

Enhancement and expansion of recreational programs and services.



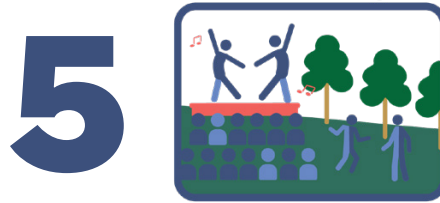
3 Equity and Access Initiative

Prioritization of an equitable and accessible parks and recreation system.



4 Connectivity Initiative

Increased connectivity of parks, recreation facilities, trails, and open spaces.



5 Placemaking Initiative

Celebration of community diversity, culture, and history at parks and recreation sites.



6 Sustainability and Stewardship Initiative

Elevation of environmental sustainability and stewardship at parks and recreation sites.



7 Administration Initiative

Incorporation of innovative strategies for an efficient and modern park and recreation system.

Under each initiative are a series of objectives and actions for the City to consider. The initiatives, objectives, and actions represent ideas that have evolved from the beginning of the planning process and have been influenced by public input, data analysis, and other factors. The recommendations were designed to be both bold and realistic and are intended to serve as a leading vision and actionable framework to guide City staff over the next decade or more. The recommendations can be found in more detail in Chapter 3.

The following section describes overarching short, mid, and long-term goals the City can explore to improve the parks and recreation system. They are based on the feedback collected from the community as well as the initiatives discussed earlier in this Chapter.

Short-Term Goals

Short-term project goals are those that can typically be implemented within a one to two-year time frame.

- » Improve park safety and security by adding items such as lighting, new fencing, or security cameras.
- » Replace play equipment that has been identified in poor condition.
- » Identify all sports fields maintenance needs and implement low to mid-cost renovations such as fencing, small seating areas, or small areas of surface replacements (sod or decomposed granite).
- » Identify and add low-cost passive park amenities such as picnic tables, bench seating, community gardens, or small walking paths.
- » Improve marketing and communications of programs and events.
- » Install small park amenities along the Whittier Greenway Trail that can enhance the recreation experience.
- » Continue conversations with local school districts to identify opportunities and challenges related to the schools identified as candidates for Joint Use Agreements.
- » Offer additional programming for active older adults, particularly the subset of younger seniors, using part time staff or contractors.
- » Add recreation staffing to address in-demand programming that is at or over 100 percent capacity.

Mid-Term Goals

Mid-term project goals are those that can typically be implemented within a two to five-year time frame.

- » Identify sites to add or replace existing splashpads/spraygrounds.
- » Identify all sports fields maintenance needs and implement mid to high-cost renovations such as lighting, large seating areas (bleachers) or large areas of sod/artificial turf enhancements.
- » Perform a detailed facility and asset conditions assessment to determine deferred maintenance to bring facilities into good condition or to determine large capital investment needs.
- » Conduct a feasibility study to identify private sites that can be purchased and converted to park land.

Long-Term Goals

Long-term project goals are those that can typically be implemented within a five to ten-year time frame.

- » Purchase private land to construct in-demand parks amenities such as sports fields and sports courts.
- » Construct a new multi-purpose recreation center that offers spaces such as a large gymnasium for indoor basketball/volleyball/pickleball, community rooms, rentable banquet spaces, exercise equipment rooms, and passive outdoor spaces.
- » Construct a teen center that offers spaces such as game rooms, lounges, a small gymnasium for indoor basketball/volleyball, and multi-purpose rooms.
- » Consider renovation the Palm Park Pool to include shallow-end pool space for programming.
- » Design and install basketball, volleyball, tennis, and pickleball courts.
- » Identify and purchase larger areas of land to help address large diamond field and rectangular fields deficit.

PLEASE NOTE:

Due to the file size of the Parks Master Plan it will be available for the general public to view in its entirety at the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department counter in City Hall, 13230 Penn Street, Whittier, CA 90602

**The full text of the Draft Parks Master Plan is
available for public viewing at the Parks,
Recreation, and Community Services Department
Counter inside Whittier City Hall:**

**13230 Penn Street
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