

Parks and Recreation Operational Audit and Business Plan Development

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

FINAL REPORT



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1. INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Operational Audit and Development of a Business Plan Report prepared for the City of Grand Rapids covers the Parks and Recreation Business Unit of the Public Services Department. It summarizes the analysis and findings of the project team and provides specific recommendation for consideration by the City. This initial chapter provides an overview of the project and an executive summary of key findings and recommendations contained within this report.

A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT AND REPORT

The Matrix Consulting Group (MCG) was retained by the City of Grand Rapids to perform an operational audit and develop a business plan for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit. This report provides the results of our efforts and analysis related to this engagement. Our analysis focused on a wide range of operational findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Specifically, the scope of work for this project is detailed in four chapters, which include:

- An executive summary as shown in this chapter.
- An overview of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit outlining key services provided, staffing allocations and basic budgetary information.
- A comparison of the City's operation against best management practices in park maintenance and recreational programming. This analysis identified existing strengths of the current operations and the identification of key opportunities for improvement if the City chooses to employ best practices activities.
- A proposed business plan that enables the City to understand required funding levels and service delivery approaches based upon varying service delivery targets and levels.

To develop this analysis the Matrix Consulting Group conducted a series of interviews with staff of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit and other stakeholders, toured parks and facilities throughout the City to gain an understanding of the existing infrastructure under management, compared operations to recognized best management practices and evaluated extensive background documentation including budgets, Green Grand Rapids Plan, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, recreation program guides, etc. in an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Division's operations.

B. PRIOR EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE CITY.

Over the last several years, the City of Grand Rapids has placed a significant amount of focus on the Parks & Recreation function. Some of the recent efforts undertaken by the City include the following:

- The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Parks and Recreation completed in March 2007; and
- A high-level management audit of the Parks and Recreation function performed by Pros Consulting that was completed in January 2011.

The Blue Ribbon Commission provided some general strategies that the City should follow related to the provision of Parks and Recreation services including:

- Youth-oriented programs and services should rank highly among the Parks and Recreation Department's priorities;
- Continue to explore the links between youth programs and the reduction of youth violence;
- Work to increase the level of Parks and Recreation funding;
- Reduce the Parks and Recreation Department's dependence on the General Operating Fund;
- Diversify the Parks and Recreation Department's revenues to enhance sustainability; and
- Continue to reduce City costs without reducing the recreational experience quality.

In line with these general strategies, the Blue Ribbon Commission outlined a number of general and specific recommendations for City staff to pursue to improve the sustainability of the Parks and Recreation operation. Based upon these recommendations, staff of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit developed a prioritized listing of the recommendations that could be addressed with existing resources.

The following table outlines some of the actions taken to move operations of this unit to a more sustainable position:

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Blue Ribbon Commission Recommendation	Action Taken
Create a Parks Foundation to publicize and enable private giving to the parks and recreation system.	Friends of Grand Rapids Parks organization was established in 2008. An executive director was hired in early 2009.
Develop policy for selling advertising opportunities and space.	A department policy was adopted in 2007. The elimination of the Sales and Marketing position has impacted the ability of the Business Unit to aggressively seek advertisers. Sponsor signs will be included in the Parks Alive program.
The City should encourage, simplify and create awareness of opportunities for citizens and businesses to donate to the parks and recreation system.	<p>The City implemented a check off box on City Income Tax forms for donations dedicated to the Parks Fund.</p> <p>Additionally, the City has had an Adopt-A-Park policy since 2005. This has been recently revised with adoption anticipated in the near future in conjunction with the Parks Alive.</p>
Increase collaboration with Schools, Kent County, and other entities to share facilities, resources, and program services.	<p>In October of 2008, an updated Joint Use of Facilities Agreement was approved by the School Board and the City Commission. The City/GRPS Liaison Committee continues to work on opportunities for further collaboration.</p> <p>In 2011 the City entered into a partnership with Boys & Girls Club Youth Commonwealth for operation of the Paul I. Phillips Recreations Center reducing operating and maintenance costs by almost \$200,000 annually.</p>
Remove or close outdated facilities that no longer meet codes, serve a useful purpose, or to reduce on-going maintenance costs.	The swimming pool at Garfield was removed. Several wading pools at Grand Rapids Public School sites and several Grand Rapids parks sites were removed. Additionally, other facilities such as restrooms (Briggs), recreation buildings (Harrison Elementary, Kent Hills Elementary) and tennis courts (Kent Hills Elementary) have been removed in accordance with this strategy.
Reevaluate fees for parks and recreation services with a goal of maximizing participation, as opposed to maximizing revenues.	Staff reviews fees annually. The FY2012 budget estimated a 57% cost recovery model for recreation including all departmental administration and City overhead costs. A non-resident fee was developed for swimming pools and recreation programs.
Utilize native landscaping, green buildings and energy saving measures to reduce maintenance costs.	Staff integrates these approaches on all park renovations where feasible. Examples of current approaches utilized include: native landscaping at Crescent and Joe Taylor Parks; and creation of rain gardens (which reduce watering requirements and total area to be mowed) at Plaster Creek, Riverside, Roosevelt, and Wilcox Parks.

These are just a few examples of efforts undertaken in direct response to the strategies developed by the Blue Ribbon Commission. Additionally, over the last several years, staff implemented pilot programs designed to increase usage of the City's pools including: marketing them as a location for parties, and implementation of season passes. While these efforts did not achieve intended results, they should be continued as one approach to improving pool usage levels. The ability to create a more sustainable Parks and Recreation effort will be through continued efforts, diligence and persistence by systematic implementation of the recommendations contained within this report and in making a series of incremental changes that combined result in major change for the organization.

C. NATIONAL TRENDS IN PROVIDING SERVICES.

The approach to providing parks and recreation services in Grand Rapids should take into consideration national trends that are impacting similar services provided by communities throughout the nation. A recent report issued by the National Parks and Recreation Association, outlines some key trends that are impacting the focus and provision of parks and recreation services. These are summarized in the following table and show the historical practice and the emerging future trend.

Past or Current Practice	Future Direction	Opportunity for Grand Rapids
Departments function as providers of programs, services, facilities and lands.	P&R Departments function as facilitators of public, nonprofit and private recreation opportunities in the community.	Grand Rapids assumes a more facilitator role rather than attempting to be the primary provider of all services.
Departments use public employees to provide operations, maintenance, and programming.	Departments use nonprofit partners, private vendors, and contractors for operation, maintenance and programming.	Grand Rapids utilizes many of these practices currently. Additional opportunities to expand this should be sought.
For cost-effective operations and maintenance, smaller parks are eliminated.	For child health and obesity issue the goal is to eliminate "Recreation Deserts" by creating smaller neighborhood parks.	Expansion of neighborhood parks through partnerships with other entities to maintain and operate.
Park site and mobile programming in neighborhood to ensure social equity goals.	Department revenue increase goals sought to offset tax subsidies even at cost of social equity.	Challenge for Grand Rapids to balance social equity goals with need to operate as a sustainable business unit.
Departments provide targeted programs and services for vulnerable populations, such as seniors and youth.	Reduced federal, state and local funding is reducing departments' ability to provide for vulnerable populations.	Increase role as facilitator to enable nonprofits and others to serve vulnerable populations.

Past or Current Practice	Future Direction	Opportunity for Grand Rapids
"What market will bear" guides revenue generation strategies for Department.	Revenue generation guided by market research and business practices.	Clearly establishing cost of recovery guidelines, setting fees based on cost of service provision costs, and annual trend analysis of programs will provide objective data for revenue generation.
Acquisition and installation of automated Recreation Management systems to improve registration services and monitoring.	Acquisition and installation of computer-aided maintenance management systems to improve asset management and cost effective maintenance.	Identified in recommendations as a strong need for the City of Grand Rapids.
Undeveloped open space left unmanaged and unimproved, environmental sustainability practices take low priority.	Residents want managed, useable, but no overdeveloped open space, environmental sustainability takes high priority.	Implementation of greater low-maintenance and environmental sustainable park improvements to provide environmental-friendly and lower-cost maintenance options.

The decisions made regarding the recommendations in this report should be taken with consideration of these trends and their impact and applicability to the City of Grand Rapids.

D. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is important to note when reviewing this report, that the major limitation on service delivery for the Public Services Department Parks and Recreation Business Unit is one of funding – not ability. City staff is performing, in many areas, above the levels that would be expected based upon current resource allocation. However, the lack of any significant capital investment into the park and recreation infrastructure is resulting in an asset base that is in a continually declining condition. This will make it increasingly more difficult for staff to maintain parks in usable condition with existing resources.

In reviewing the following recommendations, the following are key points to keep in mind regarding current operations and operating practices.

- Parks and Recreation services should be viewed as a core "Quality of Life" service provided by the City. While these services cannot be established as entirely self-sufficient, operational changes to enhance available data, improve operational practices and increase revenues can create more sustainable operations.
- Access to and the maintained condition of parks have an impact on neighborhoods, quality of life, and property values. This benefit, while not easily

quantifiable, contributes to the overall perception and economic vitality of the City of Grand Rapids.

- Operations have been impacted over the last several years through staff reductions. The Parks and Recreation Business Unit is currently operating under a very lean (minimal) staffing allocation. Managerial and supervisory staff is limited. The vast majority of staff allocated to maintenance functions are seasonal employees.
- Notwithstanding this staffing approach and limitation, the maintenance of parks is being maintained at a level above what would be expected based upon current staff allocations. Current staffing levels would indicate service, on average, at a “C-” level or less. However, staff is currently providing service at an overall “B- / C” level exceeding expected levels.
- Recreational programming is supported with one FTE position. All programming and services provided are generally through part-time and contracted services.
- The City provides a diverse and well-rounded assortment of recreational programming opportunities suited for its core constituency groups.
- The City is operating with constraints on the ability to expand and enhance recreational programs due to the lack of dedicated recreation space.
- Future sustainability and revenue growth for the Parks and Recreation Unit is going to be achieved through small incremental steps – ***large untapped revenues and cost reductions are generally not available unless services are significantly curtailed or eliminated (which is not recommended), or a dedicated funding source is secured.*** This is particularly true to Park Maintenance. Recreational services are targeted to be substantially self-sufficient under this plan.

The following section provides a summary of the key recommendations contained within the report.

E. TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

The following table summarizes the key recommendations contained within this report. The recommendations are grouped first by the major policy decisions that must be considered (generally discussed in Chapter 4) that will impact future operations of this Business Unit. Following those, the table contains recommendations designed to improve operations (from recommendations contained in Chapter 3 of the report) based upon the best management practices assessment that was undertaken.

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Recommendations	Priority	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Estimated Cost / (Savings)
Policy Decisions/Recommendations				
The City should pursue, short term, the acquisition or renovation of space suitable to provide three to four dedicated programming areas for recreational programming.	High	City Commission	2012-2013	\$160,000 cost. \$40,000 annually in new revenue.
<p>The City should modify its cost-recovery policy to provide new cost-recovery targets for the short and long term. The policy should be set for overall cost recovery, enabling staff to address the details on which programmatic areas exceed or fall below those targets.</p> <p>Recreational programs should be at 80% overall cost recovery in the short term with a stretch goal of 90%+ in three to five years.</p>	High	City Commission City Staff	2012	n/a
The City should undertake a comprehensive recreational program fee study to set class fees at a level sufficient to cover actual costs of providing the service. Fees for special programs or programs serving special populations, may be set, as a policy decision, at a subsidized level.	High	City Staff	2013	\$20,000 Potential increase of \$20,000
The City should maintain its use of a non-resident fee in addition to the program fee determined by the study. Non-resident fees should be applied to all recreation programs provided.	High	City Commission	Ongoing	n/a
The City should seek, through an RFP process, community groups or organizations that would desire to operate, lease or utilize the pools to supplement or provide their services.	High	City Staff	2012	n/a
Given that no direct City funds are allocated to Recreation Reaps Rewards, the City should seek to transfer responsibility for this program to another entity (i.e. – school district or non-profit agency) to enable limited staff resources to be focused on core Parks & Recreation services.	High	City Commission	Immediately	n/a

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Recommendations	Priority	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Estimated Cost / (Savings)
The City should adopt park maintenance standards, based upon those outlined in Appendix D, for all parks within the system. These standards should be utilized when allocating staff and determining maintenance levels and staffing approaches.	High	City Commission City Staff	2012-2013	n/a
The City should consider seeking public support for a dedicated revenue stream (i.e. dedicated parks and recreation millage) to support Parks & Recreation services. This provides the greatest opportunity to reduce the General Operating Fund subsidy and create a sustainable parks and recreation system.	High	City Commission City Staff	2013	Dependent on voter approval
The City should consider efforts to regionalize parks and recreation functions as long as the service has a dedicated funding source. If general funds are required, the City may not desire to participate as it loses control over service levels and service provision while still maintaining general fund obligations.	High	City Commission City Staff	Ongoing	
The City should consider transferring responsibility back to the Parks for all park event scheduling and reservations. All responsibility for shelter rental activities should be transferred immediately to the Parks and Recreation Business Unit and longer-term functions related to special events within City parks should be transferred. Estimated annual revenues accruing to the Parks & Recreation Business Unit are estimated at \$20,000 (though it should be noted these are not new revenues as they are already received by the City) for shelter rentals.	Medium	City Staff	2012	\$20,000 revenue allocated to P&R. Future revenues will increase with special events.
The City should work jointly with neighboring jurisdictions to jointly provide some programming / services to minimize cost and staff time.	Medium	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a
Operational Recommendations				
Specific service levels should be adopted for the City outlining park maintenance levels, types and levels of recreational programs that will offered, and other key goals and objectives for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit.	High	City Commission City Staff	2012	n/a

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Recommendations	Priority	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Estimated Cost / (Savings)
Condition ratings should be conducted annually for all assets on a master inventory listing. This information should be utilized for prioritizing capital needs and allocating capital funds.	High	City Staff	2013	n/a
The Department should ensure that a comprehensive inventory is maintained at all times.	High	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a
The City should continually administer a survey of prior recreation program users, and a citizen survey regarding park maintenance levels. This should be summarized annually and utilized for future planning for recreational and maintenance efforts.	High	City Staff	On-going	n/a
The Department should expand outreach efforts to inform the public of available recreational programs and services and increase community support for programming. Key efforts should include: (1) Reducing reliance on the recreation guide as principal approach to grow participation in programs (and increase revenues). (2) Seeking advertisers for the recreation guide to offset production and distribution costs. (3) Expanded marketing efforts and increased use of email to communicate with customers. (4) Expanding sponsor lists or external funding to support scholarship programs.	High	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a
The City should aggressively promote online registrations with a target goal of 40% penetration in the next two years.	High	City Staff	Immediate	n/a
An annual recreational program trend analysis should be conducted to determine: 1) Classes not meeting minimum enrollments and potential reasons; 2) Classes where demand exceeded capacity to determine if additional sessions should be offered; 3) New classes identified by the public as desirable; Opportunities to coordinate with other community resources to jointly provide services.	Medium	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a

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Recommendations	Priority	Responsible Entity	Timeframe	Estimated Cost / (Savings)
A long-range capital plan should be developed for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit that identifies capital needs over a five to ten year basis to maintain existing assets (land, buildings, and maintenance equipment). Standard life cycles should be adopted for each asset type to enable projections and determination of unmet capital needs. There is a need for annual capital funding for small and large park maintenance efforts. This should be developed in conjunction with the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to coordinate and integrate efforts.	Medium	City Staff	2013	n/a
A formal parks maintenance inspection program should be implemented with annual evaluations. These evaluations can be conducted either by maintenance staff or through volunteers from Friends of Grand Rapids Parks.	Medium	City Staff	2013 and ongoing	n/a
The City should adopt a preventive maintenance program for all major park systems, facilities, and equipment. This is critical for determination of both future staffing requirements and facility/equipment maintenance and replacement needs.	Medium	City Staff	2013	n/a
The department should continue efforts to track maintenance costs by park with modifications to the current system to make the data more useful.	Medium	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a
Annual work programs should be developed to guide maintenance staff activities.	Medium	City Staff	Ongoing	n/a
Longer term, a computerized maintenance management system should be implemented. However, given existing needs, this should not be given priority at the present time due to cost unless external funding can be achieved.	Low	City Staff	Ongoing	Unknown
Employee training should be focused on ensuring skill maintenance and skills necessary to achieve the Business Unit's annual goals and objectives.	Low	City Staff	2013	n/a

The following chapter provides a brief overview of the current organizational structure and parks maintained by the City. Chapter 3 then contains the details of our assessment of current operations against recognized best management practices in the parks maintenance and recreational areas.

The final chapter of the report outlines the key policy decisions and recommendations needed to provide a new path forward for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit and clearly outlines the need for a long-term sustainable funding alternative to the general fund if the City wishes to provide quality and responsive parks and recreation services to its residents.

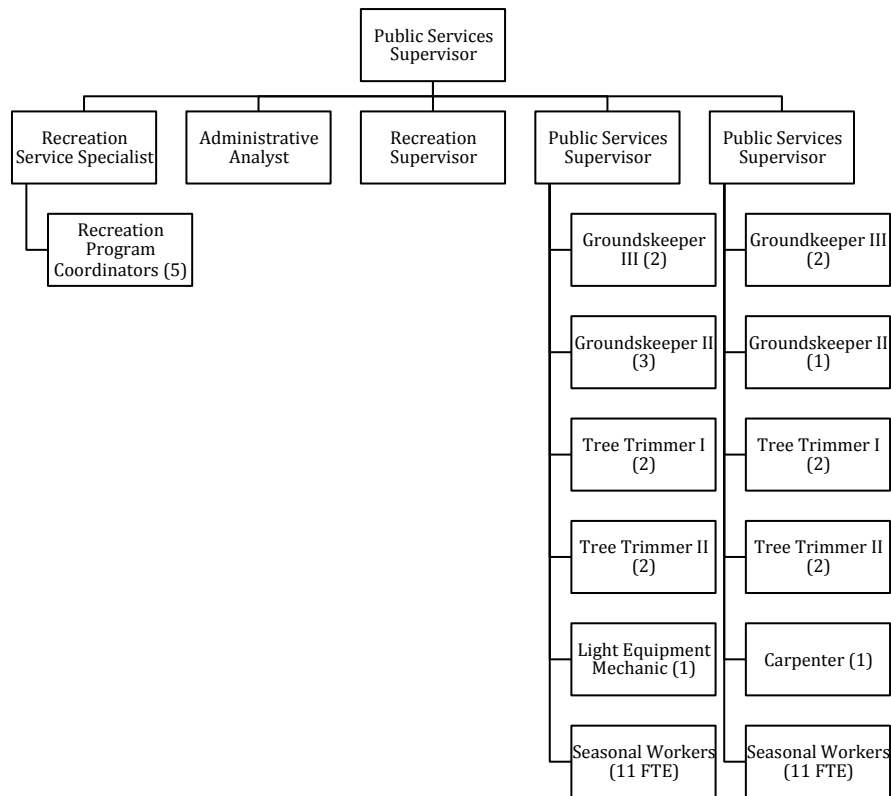
2. PROFILE OF PARKS AND RECREATION BUSINESS UNIT

The following provides an overview of the current allocation of resources and organizational structure for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit in the City of Grand Rapids. The Parks and Recreation Business Unit is one of the major functional areas of the Public Services Department.

A. INTRODUCTION

The Parks and Recreation Business Unit structure is shown in the following organizational chart. Note only those units under review in this study were included (i.e. – excluded functions include the Golf Course and Public Works functions of the Public Services Department).

Parks and Recreation Business Unit



NOTE: Of the positions shown, the Tree Trimmer Positions are not allocated to park maintenance functions.

In addition to these dedicated staff, the Parks Business Unit also shares access and receives services from a Customer Service Unit composed of six administrative positions that handle financial functions, customer contact, program registrations, complaints and service requests on behalf of the entire Public Services Department.

B. BUDGET INFORMATION

The following table provides an overview of the current budget outlining revenues and expenditures for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit.

	2011 Actual	2012 Year End Estimate	2013 Adopted	2014 Forecast	2015 Forecast
Revenues					
Taxes	0	0	0	0	0
Licenses and Permits	0	0	0	0	0
Intergovernmental Revenues	0	0	0	0	0
Charges for Service	530,547	507,375	572,000	544,075	569,340
Fines and Forfeitures	0	0	0	0	0
Interest and Rents	7,179	3,375	2,520	2,820	2,946
Other Revenue	366,145	273,550	52,850	20,350	20,350
Other Financing Sources	3,760,405	3,274,175	3,394,671	3,000,000	3,000,000
Total Revenues	\$4,664,275	\$4,058,475	\$4,022,041	\$3,567,245	\$3,592,636
Expenditures					
Personal Services	1,957,624	1,850,367	1,786,018	1,810,345	1,830,936
Supplies	291,444	401,950	400,975	388,593	388,593
Other Services and Charges	1,525,004	1,625,805	1,636,024	1,721,163	1,778,130
Capital Outlay	50,443	116,000	117,000	116,000	119,000
Debt Service	0	0	0	0	0
Appropriate Lapse	0	0	0	0	0
Transfers Out- Cost Allocation	442,409	283,180	216,251	222,739	229,421
Total Expenditures	\$4,266,924	\$4,277,302	\$4,156,268	\$4,258,840	\$4,346,080
Net Income (Loss)	397,351	(218,827)	(134,227)	(691,595)	(753,444)

	2011 Actual	2012 Year End Estimate	2013 Adopted	2014 Forecast	2015 Forecast
Subsidies Needed to Cover Expenditures					
Administrative	0	294,207	318,477	325,522	331,038
O&M	2,154,129	2,540,701	2,547,109	2,644,706	2,711,980
Recreation Programs	25,883	184,875	201,764	236,064	234,115
Pools	0	396,094	417,826	440,581	430,580
Wading Pool Maintenance	0	43,173	43,722	44,722	45,730
Total Subsidy	2,180,012	3,459,050	3,528,898	3,691,595	3,753,443
Authorized GOF Subsidy	2,180,012	3,274,175	3,394,671	3,000,000	3,000,000
Subsidy Shortfall (Excess)	0	\$184,875	\$134,227	\$691,595	\$753,443

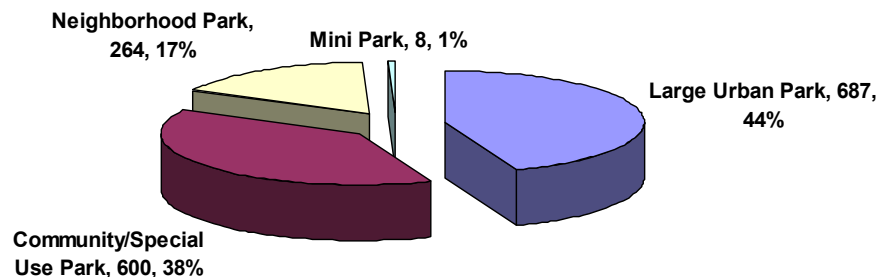
As shown, the annual General Operating Fund (GOF) subsidy for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit is projected to increase from \$2,180,012 in 2011 to almost \$3,400,000 in the adopted FY 2013 budget. While this is a significant reduction from the approximately \$4,500,000 subsidy provided in 2010, the forecasted authorized GOF subsidy amount for FY 2014-2017 is \$3,000,000. With this level of subsidy the shortfall of revenues to expenditures continues to grow with a projected shortfall reaching nearly \$900,000 in 2017.

C. PARK LISTING.

A detailed listing of parks within the City of Grand Rapids is provided in Appendix A. This is followed by a listing of the park acreage that is actually maintained by the Parks and Recreation Business Unit. The listings include the park type, park name, and measured acreage.

The following graph summarizes the park acreage by park type/category, reflecting approximately 1,560 park acres by type:

Distribution of Grand Rapids Parks by Type / Acreage



Of this park acreage, the City directly maintains approximately 833 acres. This represents only 54% of the parkland managed. The remainder is either maintained by other entities or is natural habitat. The next section of this report provides an in-depth assessment of the current operating practices and procedures of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit against industry best practices in providing recreational programming and park maintenance services.

The National Parks and Recreation Association annually issues a National Database Report that enables jurisdictions to compare their operations to those seen throughout the nation on a variety of demographic factors. While benchmarking

comparisons should be utilized cautiously when making policy decisions regarding service levels and operational practices, they do provide one “data point” that can be a useful comparison of a particular parks and recreation program against its peers.

The following table shows how the City of Grand Rapids’ Parks and Recreation Business Unit compares to parks and recreation departments of comparable demographics.

Comparative Factor	Grand Rapids	Comparable Jurisdictions
Median Number of FT Employees (for P&R Budget between \$1M and \$5M)	34.0	22.18
Median Number of FT Employees (community population between 100,000 and 250,000)	34.0	69.29
Median Number of FT Employees (acres of park maintained between 1,001 and 3,500)	34.0	62.81

As shown, except for the comparison based upon budget size, the City of Grand Rapids’ full time employee count is significantly below that seen in comparable jurisdictions based on community population or acres of park maintained.

3. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ASSESSMENT

This Chapter presents a summary of the diagnostic assessment conducted by the project team applying best management practices related to recreational programming and park maintenance to the current operations of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Business Unit. The following sections of this chapter outline the key operational strengths that are currently in place in the Parks and Recreation Business Unit and identify key opportunities and specific recommendations for improvement.

In order to make the assessment of operational strengths and improvement opportunities that if addressed could significantly impact service delivery, the Matrix Consulting Group (MCG) developed a set of measures or “best management practices” (BMP) against which to assess the organization. The best management practice measures utilized have been derived from the MCG's collective experience and research to include:

- Statements of “effective practices” based on the study team's experience in evaluating numerous operations in other jurisdictions. This includes identifying best-in-class operations for a variety of public sector operations.
- “Standards of the profession” from a variety of specialized professional organizations such as the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA), and others.
- Desirable planning, administrative, budgeting, and similar business practices as perpetuated by higher learning or widely recognized professional groups such as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Harvard School of Business, etc.

These best management practices are used to frame the strengths and opportunities for improvement in our parks and recreation services reviews.

A. THE PARKS AND RECREATION UNIT HAS SOME SIGNIFICANT STRENGTHS.

The completion of the best management practices diagnostic assessment has identified notable strengths within the department as it is currently structured and operating. It should be noted that existing staff is providing a level of service, in both in recreational programming and park maintenance, that exceeds what would be expected based upon allocated staffing and financial resources. Absent additional resources, significant improvements or enhancements to these service levels will be extremely difficult to achieve.

Examples of some representative positive aspects of the current operations include:

- The existence of a comprehensive Master Plan with park inventory and projections related to the future needs of the community with regard to park inventory and facility inventory.
- The Department has recently implemented a customer survey to solicit feedback regarding satisfaction with recreational programs and to identify future programming needs.
- The Parks & Recreation Business Unit is operating under a general cost-recovery guideline for recreational programming (to maximize self-sufficiency).
- The City distributes a quarterly "Recreation Guide" in print and through on-line efforts, to promote City recreation programs. On-line registration is available for recreational programs.
- Future community needs (park lands and facilities) have been prioritized within the Master Planning process.
- Significant interaction exists with community groups, athletic associations, and citizen advisory committees. The Friends of Grand Rapids Parks is an extremely active organization.
- Major assets, including facilities, parkland, and equipment, have been inventoried (while the level of detail may vary).
- Policies and procedures have been developed and compiled into manuals for critical areas including employee procedures, volunteers, and safety procedures.
- The City makes extensive use of joint use facilities with the School system enabling sharing of physical resources and facilities for recreational programming and shared maintenance of parkland around school facilities.
- The utilization of volunteers for assisting staff in providing programming is good. In some areas of programming, such as evening and weekend programming, volunteers provide a critical role in the provision of services.
- The City is making good use of the internet for promoting programs to its citizens and for enabling citizens to conduct online registration.

These strengths provide the Department with a good foundation for providing services to the community. Additionally, it provides a strong foundation for building upon to move the department to an even higher level of service.

B. OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT.

The diagnostic assessment also identified some potential opportunities for improvement in the Parks and Recreation operation. Key findings and observations include:

- The need to develop a longer-term plan for land acquisition and facility development that specifically targets locations in the community and provides detailed estimated costs for each project. This information will be necessary for coordination with capital project planning, scheduling and the development of funding strategies.
- While extensive interaction exists with community groups and advisory committees, a more formalized feedback solicitation effort would provide useful information for the department's use in developing priorities for programming efforts and physical asset acquisition and development.
- A more detailed analysis of cost recovery strategies, including the periodic review and re-adoption of the policy, would assist in the development of schedules and offerings that ensure programming is being undertaken in line with the policy.
- Current space limitations, for athletic offerings (fields and gymnasiums) and classroom programming, are impacting the ability of the department to increase program offerings. At the present time, few additional classroom programs can be added due to the lack of space (and the apparent inability to make greater use of classrooms). Additionally, some athletic programs have reached capacity and teams are being turned away during registration.
- Scheduling of joint use facilities, while done in advance and approved by each school's principal, continues to be a concern. Schedule changes are sometimes made following the advertisement and registration period for programs has concluded requiring City staff to expend time and effort in rescheduling these activities.
- Annual recreation program trend analysis should be conducted to evaluate the appropriateness of the class offerings. The focus should be on identifying those classes that (1) are not meeting minimum enrollments, (2) have demand exceeding capacity, (3) are not currently offered but are sought by the public, and (4) could be provided through alternative means (i.e. – jointly with neighboring communities, through contracted service with other local providers).
- The City should actively pursue continued expansion of on-line marketing and registration for recreational programming. The City should target 40% of enrollments occurring online within the next two years.

- Need to adopt performance standards for each park that is maintained to provide both a performance target for staff to measure and be held accountable for but also to enable appropriate staffing considerations during budgetary discussions. Staffing and park maintenance conditions are directly linked.
- Condition assessments of parks, facilities, and equipment should be conducted more formally and frequently in order to provide necessary information regarding necessary repairs and replacement and to determine annual staff work plans focused on maintaining and improving overall park infrastructure condition.
- The lack of a computerized maintenance management system limits the scheduling and tracking of work orders, preventive maintenance, and the compilation of cost data regarding work activities.
- Enhanced opportunities for jointly offering programs with neighboring communities and community groups (private and non-profit) should be developed as a way to address increasing service demands with resource limitations, at least in the short term.
- Additional funding resources should be developed through the development of private sponsorships and foundation support. A comprehensive fee study should be conducted to ensure fees are set in accordance with cost recovery goals and the local marketplace.
- A defined capital investment program for the parks and associated facilities must be developed to (1) document existing infrastructure needs; (2) determine necessary funding to maintain infrastructure at adopted service / performance / condition levels; and (3) ensure that further degradation of assets does not occur. This capital investment plan must be developed in conjunction with the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks to ensure a planned and concerted effort is undertaken and that limited funds are targeted to the areas of greatest need.
- The City should ensure some level of funding is allocated on an annual basis for “minor capital investment”. There are numerous small capital investment opportunities within the Parks that would improve park appearance, performance and maintenance levels. However, these “small” items are not corrected or maintained due to the lack of budgeted funds. Even an annual allocation of \$50,000 would provide the Department much greater flexibility in handling minor improvement opportunities within the parks in a timely manner.
- Annual work plans for maintenance of all parks should be developed that outline the (1) required maintenance, (2) frequency of specific maintenance activities, and (3) planned capital projects (minor and major) for the year. This annual maintenance plan should be developed to show required and allocated resources (financial and personnel) and the timing during the year when the activity will be occurring.

Specific recommendations are contained in the following chapter, which address the proposed changes for recreational services, park maintenance services, and staffing. These recommendations are designed to improve upon the existing structure, services provided, and controls in place to enable staff to provide an expanded level of service to the citizens of Grand Rapids.

It should be noted that agencies may not be able, or are unwilling to implement a best practice for a variety of reasons that include:

- Insufficient personnel or financial resources to adopt a best practice.
- Inadequate time available to proactively implement new practices due to a priority focus on managing critical day-to-day issues such as significant community growth or economic crises.
- Insufficient support from political, executive, or managerial personnel to adopt a best practice culture.
- Inadequate buy-in from line staff to implement a best practice.
- Disagreement that the best practice, although successfully implemented in other agencies, would not be successful (for various cultural, organizational, or local/regional issues) in the agency under Best Management Practices (BMP) review, and therefore is not a “best practice” from said agency’s perspective.

Although there are relevant reasons, as noted above, to not implement an identified best practice, the ultimate intent should be to strive for implementing as many practices as feasible. As previously noted, Appendix C details the specific best management practices in the parks and recreation industry that were utilized in our assessment of the City’s Parks and Recreation operation, and our assessment of whether or not the City was meeting the indicated standard. Where the practice has been identified as an opportunity for improvement, the project team has provided a specific recommendation for the City’s consideration.

The following chapter of this report outlines key policy issues that should be discussed, evaluated and decisions reached to provide staff with the necessary guidance and direction on key issues that will impact future operating practices.

4. KEY POLICY DECISIONS AND OPERATIONAL PRACTICES IMPACT SUSTAINABILITY

This chapter summarizes the key issues identified during our analysis, the prior best management practices assessment, and outlines alternatives for consideration to place the City's Parks and Recreation Business Unit on a more sustainable path for the future. This chapter is structured to provide a key overview of issues related first to the maintenance function, second to the recreation function and concludes with a discussion of the key policy issues that the City must address.

A. THE NECESSITY OF KEY POLICY DECISIONS — A CORNERSTONE.

There are several key policy decisions that must be addressed by elected officials and the top City Administration to provide guidance to the Department's managers in shaping future service delivery options and operations. *It is the execution of policy directives that will largely dictate the eventual costs of parks and recreation operations that the City of Grand Rapids provides.* These policy directives are vital to sustain an acceptable level of service within the community.

These key decisions include review and establishment of policies related to:

- Implementation of park maintenance levels of service, that differ based upon individual park, should be established for the City of Grand Rapids parks to guide daily operations and establish funding levels.
- Adoption of a cost recovery target and fees for recreational programming based upon cost of service delivery to achieve sustainability of this functional area.
- Recreation programming should be targeted at identified needs and service areas and based upon the financial sustainability of the overall program.
- The establishment of dedicated space for programming will impact service levels and fiscal self-sufficiency that can be achieved.
- A decision regarding pool utilization levels should be adopted to address currently closed pools.
- Divestment of responsibility for the Recreation Reaps Rewards program.
- Supporting regionalization efforts for service delivery and the establishment of a dedicated revenue source (i.e. – dedicated property tax) for parks and recreational services.
- Pursuing a dedicated revenue source (for example, property taxes) for parks and recreation.

Each of these policy decisions, and the supporting rationale, are outlined in more detail in the following sections.

B. BEST PRACTICES FOR PARK MAINTENANCE SHOULD BE IMPLEMENTED.

One key discussion in the policy arena surrounds the provision of park maintenance activities as discussed in the following sub-sections.

(1) There are a wide variety of activities involved in maintaining park/landscaped areas that impact the health, safety, ambiance, and ultimate community usefulness of the grounds.

Maintaining “park-like grounds” incorporate activities performed over a wide variety of possible areas that include, but are not limited to neighborhood, community parks, and regional parks; natural open space reserves; arboretums; pool maintenance; river walks; sports complexes; landscaped areas adjacent to public buildings; forested median strips; planter islands; etc.¹ The City of Grand Rapids has many of these areas. In effect, any public area with greenscaped or landscaped areas can fall under the responsibility of a parks maintenance operation.

As it relates to the Parks and Recreation Business Unit, the organization completes a wide variety of activities to maintain parkland infrastructure. The primary activities conducted by the Unit (and generally any park maintenance operation) have a demonstrable impact on the Grand Rapids community. The following photographs and attendant comments developed during our parkland tours are illustrative but in the project teams opinion representative of the City of Grand Rapids’ parkland network.

¹ Hereafter these areas will be collectively referred to as parklands for purpose of discussion.

Grand Rapids Parkland Review – Illustrative Observations



Example of damage already present on recently developed park. Demonstrates value of developing new park facilities and landscaping components with future maintenance requirements and durability in mind. Landscaping components in high use and public areas, such as parks, must be addressed with durability and low-maintenance impacts in mind.

Example of court surfaces with significant cracking and unevenness on playing service. Such deferred maintenance will limit functionality of overall park infrastructure and impose much greater cost in the future to rehabilitate. Further, these types of surfaces could be considered a safety hazard and potentially places the City at legal risk.



Another example of court surfaces with significant cracking and unevenness on playing service.



Another picture of basketball courts demonstrating inability to maintain existing infrastructure to a “reasonable standard.” Grass growing in cracks due to lack of resurfacing, crack sealing or on-going maintenance.

Representative examples of the type of new “play” equipment being utilized in renovated or new playgrounds being undertaken in conjunction with the ‘Friends of Grand Rapids Parks’ organization.

Example 1

(Joe Taylor Park)



Example 2





Representative examples of park infrastructure that demonstrates an acceptable level of park maintenance and upkeep.



(Campau Park)

Examples of facility maintenance issues that go unmet due to limited staffing.

Example 1: Picture shows damaged lighting fixture and exposed wiring on park structure.



Example 2: Picture shows paint requirements and roofing that is approaching or has exceeded its "useful life."

(Martin Luther King Community Park)





Another example of deferred maintenance, this picture shows cracking of and repairs needed to park sidewalks.



This example demonstrates another long-term deferral of building maintenance activities with gutter degradation to the point the gutter system is failing.

Example of park areas at the “highest” service levels performed by Grand Rapids P&R staff and partner agencies.

Example 1: Park maintenance augmented by Downtown Development Authority Fund revenues.
(Heartside Park)



Example 2: Park developed with Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund revenues. Fields are maintained by Little League.
(MacKay/Jaycee Family Park)



Examples of park grounds that are considered “sub-standard” maintenance activity.
(Martin Luther King Community Park)



Positive example of park and basketball court maintained in suitable and usable condition.



Sub-standard maintenance, such as unresolved graffiti, has potentially serious quality of life issues for nearby residents beyond just ambience. This can include the “broken windows theory”² related to law enforcement initiatives.

(Clemente Park)

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broken_windows_theory

The frequency in which preventive, corrective and rehabilitative maintenance activities are conducted, as well as the quality to which such tasks are performed, impacts the health, safety, ambiance, and ultimate community usefulness of community parklands. In summary, quality parklands are a community asset; whereas poorly maintained parklands are a community liability.

(2) There are extensive benefits to maintaining quality community parklands.

Significant research has demonstrated the benefits of quality parklands in an urban environment. Park assets are considered vital by many national organizations. Of importance, presently Grand Rapids has 7.88 acres per 1,000 population, lower than the 10-12 acres per the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). In effect, Grand Rapids is “under-parked.” Irrespective of this, benefits associated with parkland include some of the following:

- **An analysis completed in 2005 for the Illinois Association of Park Districts found positive impacts on real estate values depending on the proximity of homes to parks.** Neighborhood parks can provide up to a 20% increase in housing values for those homes facing the park. Benefits from a neighborhood park can extend to approximately 600 feet, with houses nearer to the park receiving the majority of the benefit. Community parks may provide benefits up to 33% of the residential real estate value. Homes within 1,000 feet of a large community park may receive a 9% increase in home value. Positive externalities of a community park may extend up to 2,000 feet. Homes in close proximity to greenbelts generate a premium of 11% in value over the average price. Similarly, a 1991 Denver survey revealed that the number of residents willing to pay more to live in a neighborhood near a park or greenway increased from 16% to 48% from 1980 to 1990.³
- **American Chief Executive Officers have identified quality of life for employees as the third most important factor in locating a business.** Only access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor are more important. Parks and open space are increasingly recognized as vital to the quality of life that fuels economic health.⁴
- **A Community’s urban forest provides several environmental and fiscal benefits.** According to a city of Boise, Idaho report these include electricity and natural gas savings, carbon dioxide reductions, pollutant reduction (e.g. Sulfur Dioxide) etc. It was estimated, by example, that the City’s Right-of-Way urban forest annually saved \$332,000 in electricity and natural gas costs and reduced carbon dioxide by 907 tons annually.⁵

³ Economic Research Associates, Real Estate Impact Review of Parks and Recreation, March 2005

⁴ The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space, Trust for Public Land, 1999.

⁵ Boise Idaho Municipal Forest Resource Analysis, June 2007, page 20-22.

- **Studies done specifically for Grand Rapids illustrate important urban forestry benefits.** Data collected from 201 field plots (out of total 250 plots) located throughout Grand Rapids were analyzed using the Urban Forest Effects (UFORE) model developed by the U.S. Forest Service, Northern Research Station. Key economic/health-related findings include: pollution removal, 283 tons/year (\$2.21 million/year); carbon storage - 280,000 tons (\$5.15 million); carbon sequestration - 9,230 tons/year (\$170 thousand/year); building energy savings - \$853 thousand / year; avoided carbon emissions: \$29.2 thousand / year; structural value of urban forest assets -\$926 million.⁶
- **City parks that are a liability can also have negative impacts.** For example, poorly maintained parks may decrease the value of surrounding properties. Therefore, any balanced assessment of the economic benefits of parks must address the net overall effect, by addressing both the positive and negative externalities.⁷

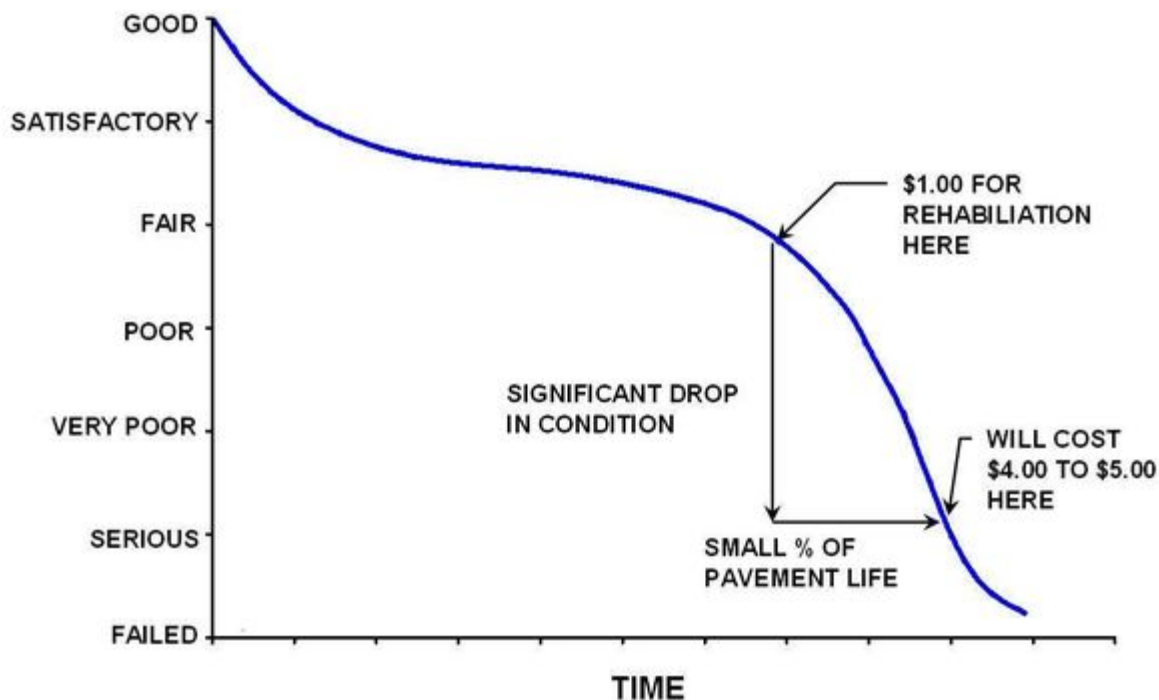
Based on the above research, there are clearly a number of socio-economic and environmental benefits to maintaining a quality urban parkland environment. In order to maintain these benefits, sufficient resources and effort must be dedicated to the variety of park maintenance activities necessary to maintaining urban parklands at a reasonable level of quality. This quality level is framed by critical policy decisions.

Additionally, the failure to allocate sufficient resources to maintain parklands in a suitable condition not only impacts citizens' perceptions and use of the parks, but impact future operating costs. The following chart shows for a representative asset (whether park land, playground equipment, or facility) the impact of capital investment over time on the condition of the asset. Often referred to as a "degradation curve" this chart demonstrates the financial benefit to early, timely, and consistent investment of maintenance dollars. While this chart specifically references pavement life, the same concept and principle is applicable to all assets that the City's Parks and Recreation Business Unit are responsible for maintaining.

As shown in the following graphic, a small investment of funds allocated to maintaining an asset while it is still in "fair" condition will be considerably cheaper than not addressing maintenance/rehabilitation of the asset until it is close to failure (or "end of useful life") where the costs will increase significantly.

⁶ I-tree EcoSystem Analysis, Grand Rapids, October 2011, page 2.

⁷ Karen Marie Edwards, Do Parks Make Cents, May 2007.



This chart illustrates the need for on-going continual investment in major infrastructure assets **while their condition is still good**, and prior to the need to conduct major renovation or rehabilitation. The only way that the City can comprehensively employ this principle is to conduct the condition assessments discussed elsewhere in this report, and to annually fund a capital improvement program based upon total asset value and defined performance levels.

(3) The variety of parkland benefits, costs, and community service expectations will help drive parkland maintenance levels of service.

As noted previously, there are a variety of factors involved in determining the appropriate levels of parkland maintenance. These include the level of maintenance to ensure quality parklands, the benefits derived from healthy, safe and attractive parklands, and the community's perceived expectations relative to park maintenance in the context of both a desirable amenity as well as a city service competing for scarce fiscal resources with other city services (e.g. public safety or economic development). These factors provide a backdrop for subsequent review of park maintenance service delivery performed by the Parks and Recreation Business Unit.

C. PARK MAINTENANCE LEVELS OF SERVICE SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED.

There are a variety of methodologies to evaluate park maintenance service levels, ranging from visual observations, as noted previously, as well as "park ratings" to comparisons with other agencies. These are discussed in detail in the following sub-sections.

(1) Policy-driven levels of park maintenance service impact staffing and ultimately costs.

Desired staffing levels can be benchmarked based on the type of park acreage noted and what service levels are applied to that park acreage. By example, fully developed parks that receive very high service levels will require the greatest staff resources. Conversely, parkland with no facilities can receive minimal services. The broad industry guidelines that MCG has evaluated relate the ratio of park maintenance workers to acres under maintenance for various service levels ranging from “A” to “D”. The table that follows provides the basic definition for each of these service levels.

Service Level	Service Level Definition and Required Maintenance Staffing
“A”	State-of-the-art maintenance applied to a high quality, diverse landscape. Turf is lush, free from weeds and cut to a precise level. Plants and trees in parks are pruned for safety, tree health and ornamental beauty. Hardscapes are regularly swept and litter is collected 5-7x per week. Requires one park maintenance worker per 4 to 6 developed park acres.
“B”	A reasonably high level of maintenance associated with well-developed park areas with higher visitation rates. Major difference with Service Level “A” is turf is not cut on frequent, regular intervals at precise level and plants and trees in parks are not pruned and trimmed at the same frequency. Litter control is periodic and hardscape maintenance is less frequent. Requires one park maintenance worker per 6 to 10 developed park acres
“C”	The lowest expected service level for fully developed parks or a moderate level of maintenance associated with park locations of large size, of average development, and/or visitation. Maintenance is accomplished, usually with longer service intervals, to keep the park safe and minimally serviceable to the community. This level requires one park maintenance worker per approximately 12 to 18 park acres.
“D”	A minimal service level to parklands or open space with no facilities with the intent to maintain safe grounds and a “natural” ambience. Generally inspection services and litter control are conducted, but on an infrequent basis. Usually such services are conducted as “fill-in” work by staff but otherwise one park maintenance worker can cover several hundred acres of undeveloped parkland or open space.

The above park maintenance service levels can help frame alternative levels of service that can be provided when maintaining a park system. These modes of service, as formally defined by the NRPA, are further discussed below.⁸

- **Mode A** is state-of-the-art maintenance applied to a high quality, diverse landscape usually associated with City-owned core facilities, destination parks with high levels of visitation, championship golf courses, and the like. Mode A locales have the following characteristics:

⁸ *Operational Guidelines for Grounds Management*, National Recreation and Park Association, 2001

- The turf is lush, dark green in appearance, of high quality and free from weeds, insects, fungus, or any foreign grasses.
 - The turf is cut to a precise level, and groomed weekly on a consistent schedule. Trimming along all lawn edges is performed concurrent with mow services.
 - Plants and trees are pruned, trimmed, and shaped to ornamental beauty and are free from insects or fungus.
 - Planter beds are well raked and cultivated weekly and are free of any weeds, grass, or any foreign matter. Significant color planting (flower beds) are noted throughout the park network.
 - Irrigation systems are constantly maintained and tested weekly. There are no brown spots in the lawn as a consequence of irrigation issues or under watering.
 - Litter and/or other debris is removed daily along with trash receptacles.
 - Reseeding and sodding are done rapidly whenever bare spots are present.
- **Mode B** is a high level of maintenance associated with well-developed park areas with reasonably high visitation. Mode B level of service is similar to Mode A level of service, with a major difference being the degree of plant and turf grooming. The turf has a lush green appearance and is relatively free from weeds and foreign grasses (less than 5%). Precise cutting and mowing (e.g. golf course-like) however, is generally not practiced. Plants and trees are trimmed, pruned, and shaped but not with the same level of frequency. Planter beds are generally free from major weeds, debris, or grasses, but flowerbeds are not as extensive throughout the park network.
 - **Mode C** is a modest level of maintenance associated with locations of moderate to low levels of development and moderate to low levels of visitation. Mode C facilities have the following characteristics.
 - Turf management such as mowing, reseeded and sodding, weed control, fertilization and irrigation are practiced to maintain generally healthy grass. However, turf maintenance services are applied less frequently than other maintenance modes (levels). Turf areas under this service level are generally not useful for a variety of high-traffic organized sports and leisure activities (e.g., soccer) unless turf degradation (browning, bare patches, etc.) is tolerable over the course of a season.

- Weeds and mixed grasses are tolerated in the turf and are considered minimally intrusive since turf conditioning and mowing is practiced on a scheduled basis.
 - Turf edging is performed monthly conducive to a generally neat appearance for a larger portion of the time.
 - Litter and/or other debris are removed weekly. Trash receptacle maintenance can be problematic in certain instances of high activity as refuse is not removed on a more frequent basis.
 - Plants and trees are trimmed and pruned annually to ensure proper growth, risk reduction (e.g. falling limbs), and to maintain a reasonably healthy appearance.
 - Planter bed areas are weeded and cultivated at four-month intervals so wild weeds or grasses may be present for shorter periods of time prior to scheduled maintenance. They are tolerated at this level as long as they are small in size and the area covered with weeds is minimal.
- **Mode D** level of service is for areas in which maintenance is reduced to a minimum. Such areas do not have developed turf or irrigation systems. These areas are maintained only to the extent necessary to control growth to reduce fire hazards, and keep native vegetation alive and healthy during the growing season and to eliminate unsafe facilities. However, these facilities will need variations in the level of service defined based upon the type of open space.

Other professional associations have used a similar approach in attempting to quantify necessary staff resources to service quality and acreage. For example, The Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers⁹ noted in Facilities Manager in September/October 2000:

“For many campus facilities management departments, staffing levels are an issue in whether the environment is managed with a short-term versus long-term mentality. Workers can provide different levels of maintenance quality depending on how much acreage is in each worker's area of responsibility. For a world-class result, such as a formal garden, one person can maintain about half an acre. It takes one person to maintain up to five acres of an ornamental, well-manicured landscape with a few flaws. That person can maintain up to ten acres of a well-maintained, park-like environment with, again, some flaws. When the space reaches 15 acres, one worker can only provide moderate maintenance for a park-like look that has significant flaws. At 20 acres, one person no longer can provide a

⁹ The Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers is an international association dedicated to maintaining, protecting, and promoting the quality of educational facilities. It serves and assists facilities officers and physical plant administrators in colleges, universities, and other educational institutions worldwide.

quality result; maintenance will be flawed and the landscape will continue to decline in quality.”

These staff to acreage and mode-of-service approaches can be used to frame projected staff resources needs for park maintenance and ultimately determine the efficiency and effectiveness of assigned personnel as well as the attendant costs for service delivery.

(2) The City of Grand Rapids does not presently staff and fund park maintenance at a reasonable level of service, thereby impacting the long-term sustainability of park infrastructure.

Ideally service levels and staffing should be based on more specific workload data relative to parks crews performing certain maintenance functions within a given period of time. Such information would typically come from a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) software program or a consolidation and analysis of information from formal Parks Rating Sheets (shown in Appendix E). Currently, there is no CMMS that has been implemented for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit as such software has not been implemented for the Unit and resource requirements to maintain this kind of database are presently unavailable given current staffing levels. In the absence of this data, the broad guidelines of service levels “A” to “D” can be used to estimate staffing requirements.

Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of City parks by type and acreage. Of the total 1,560 acres of parkland, the Parks and Recreation Business Unit maintains approximately 833 acres. At the request of MCG, City staff conducted a self-assessment to determine the current level of service being achieved at each of these parks. Appendix B provides a full list of parks maintained and the self-assessed Mode rating for each park. Based on this information, 91% of the 833 acres of parks are being maintained at a “C” level, with 8% at a “B” level and 1% at a “D” level. Based on our own field observations, MCG generally concurs with these ratings. They provide a useful and informative baseline for measuring park maintenance levels as they currently exist.

It should be noted that Crescent Park is maintained at an “A” level by the VanAndel Institute through an Adopt-a-Park program. This type of program is extremely beneficial, though is difficult to utilize for any significant number of parks. It does, however, provide a relief valve for communities without sufficient operating funds to maintain all parklands at the desired level.

Overall, the Matrix Consulting Group typically recommends service levels “B” and “C” with extenuating circumstances for service levels “A” and “D.” The following table demonstrates the calculated staffing requirements for each service level based on the self-assessed mode ratings for the 833 acres to be maintained.

FTEs Required to Maintain Park Grounds by Mode Rating			
Park Maintenance Service Levels	Acreage	Recommended Staffing Levels	Calculated FTE Staffing Requirements
Mode A	0.0	1 FTE / 4 to 6 acres	0.0
Mode B	66.2	1 FTE / 6 to 10 acres	6.6
Mode C	756.5	1 FTE / 12 to 18 acres	42.0
Mode D	10.0	1 FTE / 75 acres	0.1
TOTALS	833		48.8

As shown, the suggested staffing levels for park maintenance for the City of Grand Rapids park system at the self-assessed maintenance levels of “Very Good” to “Poor” dependent upon park location would be approximately 49 full-time equivalent positions; this excludes all non-maintained parkland, parks maintained by other entities, and other parklands maintained by the school district. This compares to a current staffing allocation of approximately 13 full-time staff and 22 FTE (seasonal staff) or the equivalent of a total of 35 full time employees. At this staffing level, the City would be expected to maintain, on average, its 833 acres of maintained parkland at around a “C-” level at best (representing almost 24 acres of parkland per maintenance worker).

Based upon the above guidelines, to maintain parkland at a “C” level, typically requires one maintenance worker per 18 acres. To maintain 833 acres at a “C” level should require 46 FTE positions. This is 31% more staff than currently deployed by Parks and Recreation Business Unit indicating that staff is performing well and above what would be expected. In fact, present staffing levels would equate to approximately 24 maintained park acres per staff member. As noted previously:

“At 20 acres, one person no longer can provide a quality result; maintenance will be flawed and the landscape will continue to decline in quality.”

It would take almost 84 positions allocated directly to park maintenance to maintain the entire parks system within the City of Grand Rapids (based upon acreage that is currently maintained) at an overall “B” level. This level of staffing and maintenance is not recommended for the City but is provided to demonstrate, in an order of magnitude, the correlation between staffing and attainable park maintenance levels.

With existing staffing levels, the City can realistically expect to maintain the large majority of parks at an overall “poor level of service” with obvious exceptions made based upon a park’s specific location where increased effort and time is allocated. Many of the site visits conducted by the Matrix project team reflect this level of park maintenance service, particularly related to deferred maintenance, and while there are some notable exceptions, any higher expectation of park maintenance service beyond

“less than average” appearance is impractical at current staffing and capital investment levels.

In the short term current service levels may be the acceptable maintenance level, especially given fiscal constraints and lack of formal public complaint about park maintenance. Nevertheless, to significantly improve park maintenance operations from the present state, the City of Grand Rapids will require a significant increase in staff allocations and/or capital investments in the future; failure to do so will have significant asset degradation results over the long term. Note such staffing increases have not been presently placed into any projected financial equation for maintaining sustainability, because there are no existing funding sources to address this issue. Increasing staffing levels to enable increased park maintenance levels will further strain the fiscal sustainability of the Parks and Recreation function.

(3) Park maintenance service in Grand Rapids illustrates well why policy must precede practice and funding.

Prior to addressing the important points of funding, it is critical to understand the importance of framing policy that drives service delivery. The prior park maintenance sub-sections demonstrate the impact maintenance decisions have on service levels and ultimate funding requirements. However, these decisions were not made in the formalized context of a policy for “this level (mode) of park maintenance will be performed for our community.”

Such policy direction is considered a best practice and most definitively should precede any major, high profile service delivery performed by a municipality. While parks maintenance serves to illustrate this point, there are other policy-related initiatives that deserve further scrutiny and discussion. These topics should be addressed during workshop type sessions with the City Commission, city executive management, and important stakeholders (e.g. Parks and Recreation Advisory Board; Friends of Grand Rapids Parks) to enable a full discussion and dialogue leading to a decision for alternative implementation strategies.

D. RECREATIONAL SERVICES SHOULD BE TARGETED.

The development and provision of a well-rounded recreational program within a community is seen as a significant “quality of life” effort for urban communities. In order to be done in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner, certain policies and priorities must be adopted by policy-makers to give guidance to staff.

While residents have many choices for accessing recreational programming, those provided by municipalities generally serve a unique “niche” within the recreational market and focus on either programs and/or segments of the market that are underserved. Other opportunities for the City of Grand Rapids to access recreational-type programming would include YMCAs, the Kroc Center (with which the City currently

collaborates), various service organizations, and for-profit entities such as health and fitness clubs.

A key component of developing a sustainable future for the City of Grand Rapids recreational programming is to address some of the following key issues facing the organization:

- What is the mission/vision for Grand Rapids recreation programs?
- What are our targeted programming areas?
- What role should we play in meeting unmet programming needs and/or serving underserved populations?
- What level of pool service should we provide to our public?
- What level of subsidization is appropriate for our agency's recreational programming?
- How do we define success?

These are all foundational and fundamental questions that require discussion at the policy level with adopted direction provided to staff to outline the parameters that they must work within. Absent a clear delineation of these parameters, it is likely that the City will continue to operate a program that some feel lacks focus – solely because there is not a unifying direction that has been given or provided to staff to meet.

(1) Existing recreation programs are well utilized but focused in a few select areas.

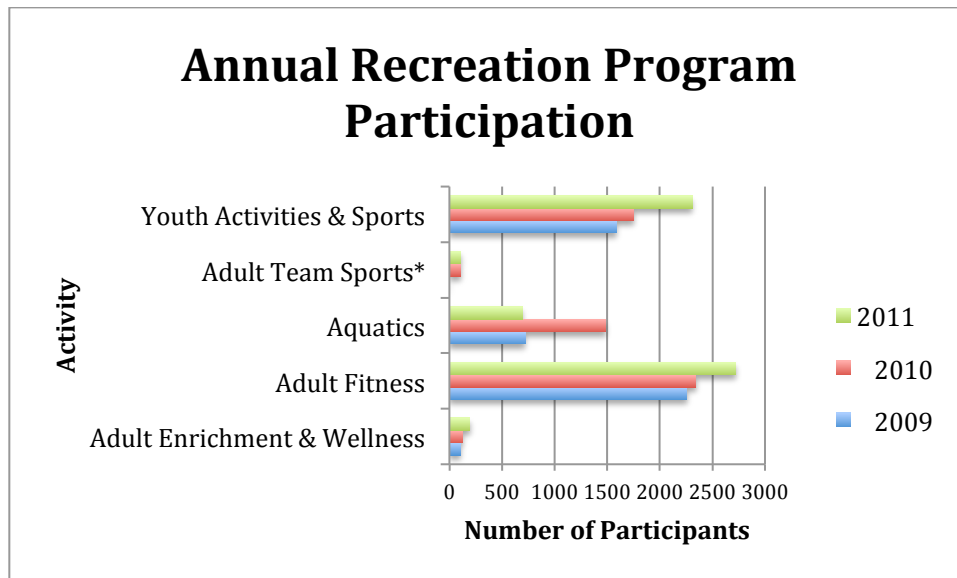
The City of Grand Rapids has a fairly well established recreational programming base of classes that are “tried and true.” There is both an identified need and a customer base to support these classes. Existing classes generally are focused five categories as identified in the table below that also provides historical about participation rates in each of these categories.

Class Categories	2009	2010	2011
Adult Enrichment & Wellness Programs	104	124	194
Adult Fitness	2,254	2,340	2,720
Aquatics	720	1,485	692
Adult Team Sports*	N/A	107	108
Youth Activities & Sports	1,588	1,753	2,308
Total Participants	4,666	5,809	6,022

* Adult Team Sports enrollment count is the number of teams, not individuals enrolled.

As the table shows, the recreation function has a strong customer base for these core programs and participation levels have been consistent over the three-year period. The mix of programs, more heavily focused on sports and fitness programming, is to be expected given the limited recreational space available to the City for their use in holding classes/activities.

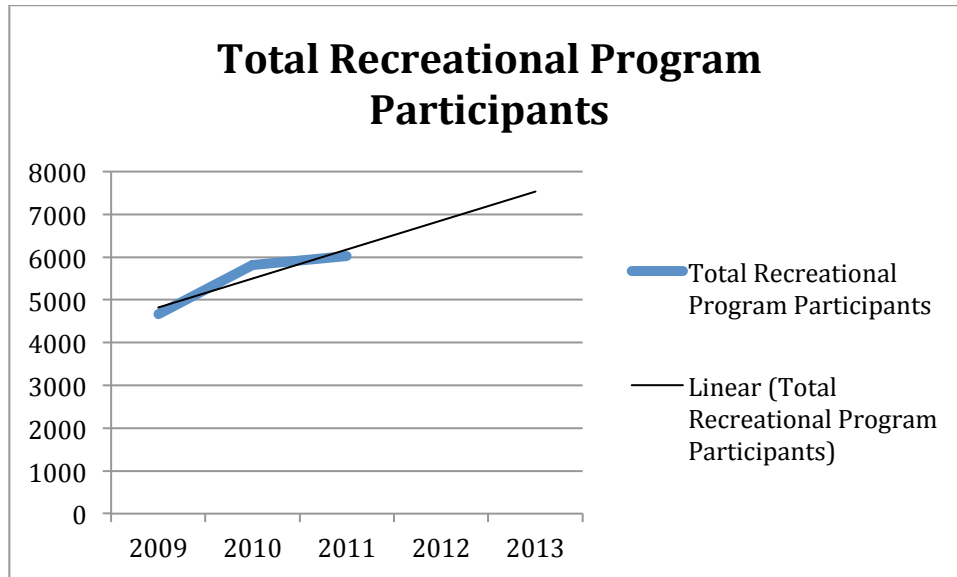
The following graph provides a visual of the participation levels by type of recreational programming.



* Adult Team Sports enrollment count is the number of teams, not individuals enrolled.

As this table shows, the focus is especially heavy on adult fitness and youth activities and sports. Two service areas that consistently remain among the most desired and requested classes nationally and ones that the City of Grand Rapids has historically provided and has a well-developed client base.

Based upon these historical participation levels, the project team conducted some analysis and projection of future program participation to determine “demand” for recreational programming on a total participant basis. This type of projection is important for the Business Unit to plan ahead for expected service demands and determine the number of programs to offer and the capacity of staff and facilities to handle the expected demand for service. The following graph projects future program participation levels based upon the three years of historical data available.



As shown, the projected participation for recreational programs, as currently provided by the City, at historical growth rates will result in participation levels reaching approximately 7,500 participants in 2013. It is extremely unlikely that participation levels can be increased above these projected levels without a significant change in either staffing allocations to the recreational function and/or changes in the facilities utilized to hold programming activities. The lack of a dedicated facility (or space within a facility) in which to hold recreational programs is the most significant limiting factor to future growth and expansion of the recreation program.

(2) The recreation program needs a clear and defined mission and focus for the future.

As noted earlier, absent a clearly defined mission and focus, the ability of staff assigned to the provision of recreational programs has the potential to be disconnected with the desires of the community and the City Commission. The Parks & Recreation Business Unit has recently implemented a customer survey to develop feedback and data from residents regarding key aspects of the recreational program and their satisfaction with the services provided. This information should be compiled and routinely analyzed to determine:

- What are the programs desired by the public?
- What is the level of satisfaction with existing services provided?
- What are the key factors that limit public participation in existing programs (cost, location, timing of course)?

The City should undertake a policy workshop based upon recommendations from staff (including an analysis of the results of the survey that has been conducted), to develop a clear mission and vision for the recreational function.

Based upon our review and analysis of the existing program, experience with other communities and trends in recreational programming nationally, the project team would recommend that the following points be considered as part of this discussion and as a starting point as ‘guiding principles’ for the recreational programming efforts of the City of Grand Rapids:

- Recreational Programs should target being self-sufficient financially in the long term with short-term goals of 80% cost recovery within three years, 85% within five years, and 90% within seven to eight years. Remaining funds would need to come from grants, other revenues or the general funds to maintain program levels as currently provided.
- While not all programs should be self-sufficient within the recreational function, the majority (over 80% should be either full-cost recovery or revenue generators). Some programs will be offered for the benefit of special populations that will not cover costs but are provided as a community service.
- Recreational programming should remain focused on the existing service areas (Adult Enrichment and Wellness Programs, Adult Fitness, Aquatics, Adult Team Sports, and Youth Activities & Sports).
- New areas should only be implemented if they are designed to be self-sufficient (bringing in enough course revenues to cover costs of providing the service) or there is a dedicated funding source to cover the costs of the program. These revenues could be special or dedicated fund for a specific program or general funds provided to meet the needs of a “special population” in the community.
- The City should not expand into those program areas that appear to be currently underserved by the City (such as Senior programs, therapeutic recreation, etc.). This is recommended based upon our review of existing programs and services in the community and surrounding communities. There appears to be sufficient access to these services at the present time from other providers that does not warrant a need for the City to expand into the provision of these services. Additionally, there is no evidence that there is a demand for these services, at the present time, from the public. The City would most likely be competing with existing services already provided by other entities. As long as the community need is being met, the City does not need to provide it directly. Finally, it is important to note that these services are often difficult to provide in a self-sufficient manner.
- The City should continuously survey prior participants in recreation programs, and the public at large, to determine demand for new or different programs. New programs should be piloted on a one or two-year basis to determine if anticipated demand results in actual participation levels sufficient to self-sustain the program. When new programs are added to a communities listing of programs, it takes

several programming cycles before publicity and awareness of these programs is achieved.

These activities will enable the City to develop a more focused recreational programming area that is operating under specific guidance and in accordance with adopted goals and objectives. This provides staff with the parameters necessary to make difficult business choices regarding services and programs provided. It is critical that the City realize and adopt a policy for staff with the understanding that it does not need to be the provider of all or even the primary recreational services in the community. The City should target it's market as providing a core base of desired recreational programs for the residents in high-demand areas, supplemented with courses targeted for special populations or programming areas. The City should avoid providing excessively duplicative services or programs that are already provided within the Community. There is no need for the City to be a major competitor with existing businesses providing comparable courses in the community but the division should focus on supplementing and meeting identified needs.

Recommendation: *The Recreation function should define a mission and vision, with input from elected officials, to guide their operations and provide direction for staff.*

Recommendation: *The City of Grand Rapids should focus its limited recreational funds on the provision of those programs that meet the identified demand of resident, meet needs of special populations that the City wishes to service and that are not duplicative of those already available in the marketplace.*

(3) The City must make some critical and difficult decisions regarding the provision of pool service in the community.

One of the more difficult and discussed issues related to recreational programming in the City of Grand Rapids in recent years has focused around the provision of pools to the community. At the present time, the City has six outdoor pools that are dispersed throughout the community. For the last several years, only three of these pools have been operated due to financial constraints.

The National Parks and Park Association, in a publication titled "*Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines*" have proposed standard guidelines for pool service that recommend:

- One (1) pool per 20,000 population; or
- Pools should accommodate 3% to 5% of total population at a time.

Based upon these guidelines, the City of Grand Rapids with a 2010 population of just over 188,000 should have pool capacity for 5,640 to 9,400 residents at a time or 9 pools. However, these "general guidelines" do not take into account several critical factors including:

- The presence of other pool resources in the community;
- The ability of the public entity to fund, maintain and operate the pools;
- The demand of the residents for pool services.

While meeting “ideal” benchmark comparisons and guidelines is often desired, these guidelines and benchmarks should not be utilized as the definitive determination of the services to be provided within the community nor a **requirement** that must be met by a community.

As noted, there are currently other pool services within the City of Grand Rapids that is meeting, at least in part, the City resident’s needs. These include pools at the YMCA/YWCAs, the Kroc Center, and independently operated pools within the community or area.

The City of Grand Rapids has kept some detailed information regarding pool usage over the last several years that is extremely beneficial in evaluating this issue and provides important information for decision makers to utilize. The following table summarizes pool usage – by pool – for each of the last three years:

Pool Name	Youth Attendance			Adult Attendance			Total Attendance		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
Briggs	8,467	11,151	4,700	3,323	2,852	2,176	11,790	14,003	6,876
MLK, Jr.	3,255	5,757	2,628	819	1,078	940	4,074	6,835	3,568
Richmond	13,901	21,301	9,154	5,494	5,785	4,722	19,395	27,086	13,876
Campau	1,680	0		287	0		1,967	0	
Highland	3,013	0		1,078	0		4,091	0	
Lincoln	3,146	0		772	0		3,918	0	
TOTAL	33,462	38,209	16,482	11,773	9,715	7,838	45,235	47,924	24,320

For a variety of reasons, the pool usage last year was significantly below that of the prior two years. Interestingly, the usage (though only one year of data was reviewed) shows that the pools that were closed, did not impact overall attendance figures. While access may have been less convenient, it appears that the communities’ needs were still served with the remaining three pools.

Over the last several years, the City has undertaken several efforts to make the pools more self-sufficient and financially self-sustaining. These efforts included imposition of a higher non-resident fee, annual permit for pool usage, and the increased marketing and programming of pools for parties, special events and similar activities. While these have not had any significant impact of operating revenues, they should be noted as important actions to continue to shore up a service that will most likely always require some level of significant subsidization. The City has determined that the use of a “season permit” for pool usage was not well received by the public (even though it was a potentially cheaper alternative) and that most users paid on a per use basis.

As mentioned previously, the City imposed non-resident pool fees for the 2011 season. The table below summarizes this information by pool.

	Non-Resident Youth Attendance	Non-Resident Adults Attendance
Briggs Pool	21	12
MLK, Jr. Pool	0	0
Richmond Pool	640	193
TOTAL	661	205

Clearly, this data shows that the use of pools by non-residents is not a major factor – positive or negative – to the operation of the pools. Therefore, it is not a factor that needs to be considered when evaluating options for the future of pool service. While non-residents should, as a matter of fairness, be charged more to utilize the City pools, this will not be a major revenue generator for the City but should be continued.

As a reference point, the following table summarizes the revenues and expenditures associated with pool operations for the 2010 and 2011 season.

2011 Pool Season Revenues and Expenses		
	2010 Actual	2011 Actual
REVENUES		
Admission Fees	\$39,961	\$49,451
Family Passes		\$1,666
Swim Lessons		\$18,700
Aquatic Programs		\$1,355
Lifeguard Training	\$5,444	\$3,745
Facility Rentals	\$550	\$375
Childrens & Parks Fund - Income Tax	\$15,086	\$13,171
Other		\$7,311
Donations	\$297,233	\$146,531
Total Revenue	\$358,274	\$242,305
EXPENDITURES		
Personnel	\$335,945	\$295,148
Supplies	\$50,281	\$61,237
Contractual / Utilities	\$96,615	\$86,703
Shared Services/Citywide Overhead	\$56,023	\$62,627
Total Expenditures	\$538,864	\$505,715
Required Subsidy from GOF	\$180,590	\$263,410

*Note: Revenue to cover costs for swim lessons and passes were covered by donors in 2010.

The revenues generated from admission fees only represent approximately 20% of the total revenues associated with the pools. Total revenues are only covering approximately 48% of operating costs even with substantial donations. This data represents that Grand Rapids pools cannot be operated on admission fees and donations alone – they require some subsidization if the City wishes to provide this service at the current level. The City has experimented with differing admission rates and found that the general public is not willing (or able) to pay an increased fee for pool usage. Prior experience showed that as the fee was increased, usage decreased.

From a review of all available data, including access to other pools in the community, historical utilization levels, attendance figures, the City appears to be at a point where it should establish the operation of three pools as the “standard” for the Community. While greater ease of access to the public would be achieved with more pools in operation, there does not appear to be any method for making this a fiscally responsible action. The need for pool service can be met with the operation of the three pools.

This leaves the City with the tough determination of what to do with the three closed pools that are relatively new but due to closure have not been maintained in several years and have an unknown current condition. It is unlikely they can be opened for operation, if even they could be self-sustaining, without significant capital investment. Additionally, based upon a review of usage and demand, it does not appear they are needed at this point in time to meet the existing service demand. The City has a substantial investment in these pools and it is recognized that the potential exists for this to be a politically sensitive topic. However, doing nothing and maintaining the status quo (closed pools) is not a reasonable approach for the long term.

Given the nature of pools as fixed infrastructure, the options available to the City are limited. They could remove the pools and reutilize the space for other programming or recreational activities or attempt to lease them out to other entities to operate. The longer these resources are not utilized, the greater the cost will be to bring them back into operation. For this reason, the City should focus on efforts to find alternative users of these pools who would lease them from the City for operation. This should be done in a manner that is designed to basically cover the cost of operations and minor maintenance and not as a revenue generator for the City. The market for these assets is extremely limited and there is likely to be few entities that would have the capacity, let alone the interest, in operating the pools.

Notwithstanding these points, the City should utilize a Request for Proposal approach to seek community users and proposals for the alternative use of the closed pools. This RFP approach should enable proposers to consider any alternative use of the facilities and terms that would make reuse possible. The City’s main concern is ensuring long-term protection of the assets (if the decision is made not to close them permanently and remove them) and covering on-going city costs for owning the assets (such as liability, maintenance costs, etc.). There is very limited likelihood that there

would be a proposal provided that would enable the City to recoup the initial capital investment made in constructing the pools.

However, the City should be open to consideration of proposals that are “outside the box” such as enclosure of the pool to enable year-round usage and adding alternative uses to the facility that are not available with outdoor pools. While these proposals will raise additional issues such as private use of public space and liability issues that need to be addressed, the City must explore any reasonable opportunity that external entities may be able to devise for these resources.

The City’s ability to operate the pools as a self-sufficient programming area is not realistic given utilization levels and current pool size and configuration. A subsidy of some type will be required to provide this service – however, this is not uncommon in urban communities. The bigger question is the source of the funds for the “subsidy” required to provide this service. As discussed in more detail in the park maintenance section of the report, the City must seek a dedicated revenue stream (such as a millage allocation) to further reduce or eliminate the subsidy required from the general fund.

Recommendation: *The City of Grand Rapids should target operation of three pools as the “normal” level of service for pool service.*

Recommendation: *The City should issue a broadly worded request for proposals soliciting proposals for alternative operation and usage of the closed pools.*

E. SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POLICY-RELATED DECISION-MAKING REQUIREMENTS.

The following table summarizes each of the key policy decisions, provides comments to place the issue in context, outlines the rationale for the recommendation and/or alternatives and finally provides a recommendation for consideration by the City of Grand Rapids.

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
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Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>The City is restricted in its ability to provide some recreational programming courses due to a lack of dedicated space.</p>	<p>The following key points are noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The primary use of school facilities, through joint use agreements, while a best practice and minimizing costs to the City, significantly decreases the ability of the City to offer a variety of courses at times and locations convenient for the public. • School facilities are primarily available nights and weekends, and the City may be bumped from use in favor of school related activities. • School classrooms are not always the best resource/facility for hosting many recreational programs. Plus all equipment, supplies, etc. related to the course must be transported. • The Department has had some preliminary cost estimates developed to renovate space at and / or adjacent to the current parks and recreation facility (2nd floor of facility and the adjoining building) to dedicate to recreational programming. Two alternatives for the second floor provided cost estimates ranging from \$160,000 to \$600,000 depending on the level of renovation undertaken. Plans for the adjoining building might also provide space and opportunities for hosting a physical fitness center that could also be available for City employees. • If the City were able to acquire, lease, or renovate space for around \$160,000 this should be pursued. Amortized over 5 years, this would equate to an investment of \$40,000 per year that could be supported by a modest increase in recreational programming equivalent. An additional 38 participants per week (estimated class fee of \$20) would be required to pay cost of facility acquisition so total increase in participants would need to approximate 50 to also cover course costs. 	<p>The City should pursue, short term, the acquisition or renovation of space suitable to provide three to four dedicated programming areas for recreational programming.</p>

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Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>The cost recovery goal for recreational programming should be updated to provide a new target for staff.</p>	<p>The following points are noted regarding this issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City should target overall cost recovery from recreational programming at 80% across all programs. Some programs, such as youth, special needs programming, etc. will not meet this target and others such as adult and sports programs should exceed. The overall target short term should be 80%. • Longer term, the city should seek to increase cost recovery in 5% increments every two to three years targeted a maximum cost recovery of 90% (95% may be achievable in the best case scenario longer term when dedicated recreation space is available). • Few public organizations are able to achieve 100% cost recovery for recreation programming. 	<p>The City should modify its cost recovery policy to provide new cost recovery targets for the short and long term. The policy should be set for overall cost recovery, enabling staff to address the details on which programmatic areas exceed or fall below those targets.</p>
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>To facilitate the achievement of greater cost recovery for recreational programs the City should undertake a fee study, and maintain a non-resident fee.</p>	<p>The following points more fully describe this issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City should either undertake internally, or contract with a financial services firm, to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of recreational fees to determine if fees are set in accordance with market rates, at a level sufficient to cover all costs of providing the service, and to identify opportunities to increase revenue. • Studies of this nature can be conducted for approximately \$15,000 and generally identify revenue opportunities much greater than the cost of the study. If the City has the capacity to conduct this evaluation in-house, the cost of the study could be avoided. • The City should maintain its imposition of a non-resident fee as currently practiced (\$10/class). Industry practice is that fees charged for non-residents to register for a class is greater than those required of residents since residents are supporting operations through other taxes. 	<p>The City should undertake a comprehensive recreational program fee study to set class fees at a level sufficient to cover actual costs of providing the service. Fees for special programs or programs serving special populations, may be set, as a policy decision, at a subsidized level.</p> <p>The City should continue with the non-resident fee and ensure that it is applied to all courses (exclusive of team sports where it is less practical to do so).</p>

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Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>A decision regarding future pool operations should be determined to enable decisions to be made regarding existing infrastructure inventory.</p>	<p>The following points are noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently the City owns 6 pools, with only three being in operation over the last several years. Approximately a decade ago, the City invested around \$1.3 million in construction for pools. Since that time, operational costs have prohibited utilization of all pools and three have not been utilized for several years. • Pools are an infrastructure that if not utilized, can become expensive to maintain and reopen as systems are designed to be utilized annually. Each year the pools remain shuttered, the cost for reopening the pools will increase. • Recent and historic operating data demonstrate that the City is unable to generate usage levels (or impose entrance fees) at a level high enough to sustain operations. Annually operating costs are around \$600,000. Annual subsidies have been required to maintain services. Currently \$250,000 for two years has been dedicated from the Transformation fund. • The design, size and location of these pools (distributed throughout community in various parks/outdoor pools/three of smaller size) limits alternatives for reuse or alternative use. While feasible, there does not appear any real available alternative to "enclosing" a pool to create a year-round facility/operation. • The City has explored options with other groups in the past to utilize pools with no success. Operating costs for other agencies appeared to exceed those of the Recreation staff. • The City should determine acceptable levels of pool resources within the community. The project team would recommend setting this level at 3. • The City should seek to find alternative use for the existing pools or eliminate them from the infrastructure inventory. • Pools are typically viewed as a quality of life offering in communities and not a revenue generator. 	<p>The City should seek, through an RFP process, community groups or organizations that would desire to operate, lease or utilize the pools to supplement or provide their services.</p> <p>The City should not necessarily pursue this option as a revenue generator but to ensure use of an idle infrastructure and prevent further deterioration of the asset from non-use.</p> <p>In the much longer term, should any investment be allocated to pools, the City should seek to develop larger and fewer pools rather than smaller and more. Large facilities are easier and less costly to operate; though may present some access issues for participants. Pools that are designed as full service (pools, water parks, etc.) are the most likely to maximize revenues against operating costs.</p>

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Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>The City should seek to transfer responsibility of the Recreation Reaps Rewards Program from City control to the Schools or a non-profit organization</p>	<p>It is important to note the following regarding the after-school program:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the present time, this program is primarily cost neutral to the City. The City is not contributing any hard dollars to this effort but must cover central services costs related to the program. • Time spent by Parks & Recreation managers, including the Public Services Manager, overseeing this program and its operations divert attention and time away from core services provided by the City. • These programs are frequently overseen or operated by non-profits or school districts themselves, and funded from grants. City involvement is not required or necessary for the continuation of this program. 	<p>Given that no direct City funds are allocated to this effort, the City should seek to transfer responsibility for this program to another entity (i.e. – school district or non-profit agency) to enable limited staff resources to be focused on core Parks & Recreation services.</p>
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>A policy regarding park maintenance levels should be established, at an individual park level, outlining the desired level of maintenance.</p>	<p>The following data are noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absent establishment of park maintenance levels on an individual park basis, Managers have little guidance on differentiating service levels. • At the present time, the City of Grand Rapids is maintaining parks with far less resources than that which should be dedicated for “average park appearance” (Mode C). • Adopted park maintenance levels provide a firm foundation for determination of required staffing levels for park maintenance activities and will provide future guidance in determining expenditure of funds. For example, if reductions in staffing are contemplated, staff can provide direction on the impact that will have on overall park maintenance levels. Conversely, elected officials will know the increase in park maintenance that can be attained for each additional staff member added to the workforce. 	<p>The City should adopt park maintenance standards, based upon those outlined previously, for all parks within the system.</p> <p>These standards should be utilized when allocating staff and determining maintenance levels and staffing approaches.</p>

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN
Report on the Operational Audit and Business Plan

Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>Park event planning and reservations are not conducted by Parks and Recreational Business Unit staff.</p>	<p>The following points should be noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently, these services are provided by the Police Department; though they have been provided by the Parks and Recreation Business Unit in the past. • The current approach has operational difficulties in that coordination is not at a level sufficient to ensure that Parks staff are fully aware of events occurring within the Parks. • Parks and Recreation staff are responsible for all costs associated with set-up, clean up and maintenance associated with the events, however no revenues are received to support these duties. 	<p>The City should consider transferring responsibility back to the Parks for all park event scheduling and reservations. Event scheduling related to non-park events should remain with the Police Department. Estimated annual revenues accruing to the Parks and Recreation Business Unit are estimated at \$20,000 (though it should be noted these are not new revenues as they are already received by the City). Inclusion of one seasonal position to perform these duties is practical.</p>
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>There is currently no dedicated park revenue funding source for parks and recreation services.</p>	<p>The following points regarding this issue should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks maintenance functions are not revenue generators. The provision of these services should be supported by a dedicated revenue stream (either general funds – as currently provided – or through another dedicated revenue source such as dedicated millage rate). • Dedicated revenue streams are utilized in many surrounding communities including Kentwood, East Grand Rapids, and Wyoming. 	<p>The City should consider seeking public support for a dedicated revenue stream to support Parks and Recreation services.</p> <p>This provides the greatest change of reducing current general fund dollars allocated to these programs.</p>

Key Issues	Comments/Discussion	Recommendation for Action
<p><u>Key Issue:</u></p> <p>The City should pursue opportunities, as they arise, to regionalize services.</p>	<p>The project team understands that Kent County has undertaken a review of the potential alternatives and feasibility of regionalizing parks and recreation services. The City of Grand Rapids should continue to actively participate in this process, and if alternatives arise that are feasible, should consider participating in those that regionalize, and support with county-wide resources the funding of these services.</p>	<p>The City should pursue alternatives that create a regional parks and/or recreation program as this approach is generally more self-sufficient and has dedicated revenues to support operations.</p> <p>This support should only be given to alternatives that rely on dedicated funding. If general funds remain required, the benefit to the City is less as there is no offset to the general fund and there would be a loss of control over both service levels and service provision.</p>

The consideration of each of these policy issues will provide the ability for the elected officials and the City Administration to provide a more defined set of operating parameters for the Parks & Recreation Business Unit operations. Additionally, it will provide greater flexibility and direction to City staff in ensuring that it is providing services in concert with adopted policies.

F. FUNDING ALTERNATIVES.

Augmenting the information in the prior table, the following information serves to denote particular areas where funding and service options can be further explored.

(1) Grand Rapids has done very well developing partnerships related to parks and recreation.

One potential source of additional resources for parks and recreation is investments or pro-bono services developed as a result of public/private partnerships and the like. Grand Rapids has done very well with respect to developing such partnerships, to include the following illustrative list of coordinating partners.

Illustrative Listing of Grand Rapids Parks and Recreation Partners

Friends of Grand Rapids Parks – Facilitation; Maintenance; Championing
VanAndel Institute – Adopt-a-park (Maintenance)
Downtown Development Authority – Augmented Park Maintenance
Grand Rapids Public Schools – Facility Use
Grand Rapids Community College – Facility Use
Grand Rapids Art Museum – Programming
West Michigan Fencing Academy – Programming

Grand Rapids Public Libraries – Programming
Kent County Health Department – Programming
Endurance Fitness – Facility Use
Salvation Army Kroc Center – Facility Use and Programming
The First Tee – Programming
Area Churches – Facility Use
West Michigan Whitecaps – Programming
St. Cecilia’s Music Center – Programming
Women’s Expo – Marketing
Grand Rapids Rowing Association – Programming
YMCA – Programming

Because the City has done an admirable job in developing partnerships within the community, there is likely not a significant opportunity for hugely expanding this initiative. There are, however, two potential approaches worth future consideration as demonstrated by these “working models” in other jurisdictions.

- The New York City Department of Parks & Recreation stretches its skimpy budget (it gets around \$230 million out of a \$63 billion NYC budget) by linking up with a network of privately-funded, park-specific **conservancies**. Meanwhile, the fundraising prowess of city park conservancies is reflected in the city’s cherished high-profile public places. These conservancies are responsible for raising funds and keeping the jewels of NYC’s park system in shape. For example, Central Park’s well-connected conservancy raises some 85 percent of Central Park’s annual \$27 million operating budget. However, as President of NYC Park Advocates Geoffrey Croft points out, the result is that “New York has created a two-tier park system. One for the rich, the other for the poor.”¹⁰
- A city-wide private parks **foundation**, Seattle Parks Foundation, for example, works on many fronts: advocacy, fundraising, project oversight, park system planning, and programming. Under this scenario, local residents in wealthier areas could continue to connect with active, accountable park-specific conservancies, and poorer neighborhoods could get help from a city-wide foundation to form their own volunteer groups or conservancies and finance upkeep of long-neglected community parks. A mutually-beneficial relationship between the parks departments and a city-wide park foundation could help the city’s neglected parks win a bigger voice in discussions on city-wide park maintenance. The other less-palatable option for some: financing the upkeep of neglected parks with corporate advertising and sponsorships and local business operations within parks.¹¹

‘Friends of Grand Rapids Parks’ acts in many respects like the aforementioned foundation model. At issue is what types of services these organizations will provide.

¹⁰ <http://dirt.asla.org/2010/09/07/the-gathering-storm-over-park-maintenance/>. The definition of a conservancy is an organization or area designated to conserve and protect natural resources

¹¹ Ibid.

What is often clear, and as stated by the Executive Director of “Friends,” such organizations don’t wish to replace existing services but augment present services available. There is no practical way to develop a projected cost off-set for these alternative service approaches, yet they are initiatives worthy of further exploration. The 2012 benchmarking data available from the National Parks & Recreation Association indicates that for comparable sized communities, the median number of volunteers in communities in the population range of 100,000 to 250,000 equals 775 who provide, on average, ten (10) hours of service annually. This demonstrates the potential increase in support that could be achieved with a higher-performing volunteer program.

(2) Dedicated park maintenance funding should be considered a vital strategy for the City on a move forward basis.

The clearest strategy for parks and recreation sustainability is to gain the buy-in of the community on the benefits associated with parklands. “Buy-in” is used both figuratively and literally—a dedicated funding source for parks maintenance and related services should be deeply explored to determine the community’s willingness to directly fund park maintenance-related operations. As noted previously, dedicated revenue streams for park maintenance are utilized in many of Grand Rapids’ surrounding communities including Kentwood, East Grand Rapids, and Wyoming. These millage rates vary, but by example include 0.1% for Kentwood. In the larger context, Grand Rapids has one of the lowest overall millage rates in Michigan for populations exceeding 20,000. Consideration of a “1 mill rate” (\$1 per \$1,000 assessed property valuation) therefore appears both possible and practical, and could raise approximately \$4 million annually for the parks and recreation system. Such funding could essentially transform operations and address nearly all critical needs identified.

(3) Alternative service level options are to return asset maintenance “back to the community.”

Throughout the nation there are various maintenance requirements associated with “city assets” that have resided with, or have been returned to, the property owner. By example, this includes both assets such as street trees and sidewalks in the “right-of-way.”

One example is the City of Placentia, California which notes the following operational criteria related to street trees.

The City has adopted ordinances and policies which regulate the installation, maintenance, and removal of street trees throughout the City. Ordinance No. 132, adopted in 1954, specifies a process for requiring permits for tree maintenance, planting, and removal. That Ordinance has been carried over into Chapter 14.12 of the Placentia Municipal Code and clearly requires the abutting property owner to obtain a permit to plant, maintain, or remove a tree in the street (defined as the area between the curb and sidewalk). Moreover, since its adoption in 1954, the Ordinance

*has stated that a tree to be removed after issuance of a permit may be planted, maintained (trimmed) or removed by City forces but only after the cost thereof has been paid to the City. In other words, tree maintenance is the responsibility of the adjacent property owner. While the City may have, in past years, provided tree trimming at no direct cost to the property owner, the City did so without obligation to continue doing so.*¹²

Other examples of tree ownership of communities with similar profile to Grand Rapids include the City of Spokane, Washington. At issue is making the policy decision to require property-owners to maintain street trees at a standard level of service and enforcing such maintenance. While establishment of programs of this type could be onerous, the potential benefits to the urban forest resulting from consistent maintenance and ultimate cost savings to the City could be extremely significant. As such, modifications to the tree ordinance to include such practices should be considered at a policy and practicality level. As a side note, this approach can also include sidewalk maintenance services.

G. NET IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGES TO FINANCIAL STATUS.

Taking into consideration all the recommended changes listed in this report, the following table summarizes the net impact on the operating budget if they were implemented. We have utilized as a base budget, the prior proposed budgets for the Parks and Recreation function outlined in the budget document and shown in a separate section the recommendation, net impact, and overall impact on the Business Units budget.

As will be evident, the long-term sustainability of the operation is dependent upon increasing revenues and ultimately finding a **dedicated** funding source other than the general fund of the City of Grand Rapids. (Note that figures appearing in the proceeding tables are presented as depicted on the *Parks & Recreation Statement of Operations* in the City of Grand Rapids FY 2013-2017 Preliminary Fiscal Plan.)

The recommended revenue enhancements included are those that are easily achievable with both existing staff and resources as recommended elsewhere in the report. Erring on the side of caution, these figures do not include other recommendations that, while they should be pursued, are beyond the direct ability of staff to ensure success – such as grant funding. As noted previously, the ability to achieve fiscal sustainable is most easily achieved for recreation programming but virtually impossible for park maintenance activities without adding a large dedicated revenue stream such as property taxes.

¹² <http://www.placentia.org/index.aspx?nid=475>

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	2011 Actual	2012 Year End Estimate	2013 Adopted	2014 Forecast	2015 Forecast
Revenues					
Taxes	0	0	0	0	0
Licenses and Permits	0	0	0	0	0
Intergovern. Revenues	0	0	0	0	0
Charges for Service	530,547	507,375	572,000	544,075	569,340
Fines and Forfeitures	0	0	0	0	0
Interest and Rents	7,179	3,375	2,520	2,820	2,946
Other Revenue	366,145	273,550	52,850	20,350	20,350
Other Financing Sources	3,760,405	3,274,175	3,394,671	3,000,000	3,000,000
TOTAL REVENUE	\$4,664,275	\$4,058,475	\$4,022,041	\$3,567,245	\$3,592,636
Recommended Revenue Enhancements					
Programming Revenue from Dedicated Space			20,000	40,000	40,000
User Fee Changes			5,000	25,000	25,000
Park Reservation Fees			20,000	20,000	20,000
Advertisers (to support program guide)			15,000	20,000	20,000
TOTAL NEW REVENUES			\$60,000	\$105,000	\$105,000
TOTAL REVENUES WITH ADDITIONS	\$4,664,275	\$4,058,475	\$4,082,041	\$3,672,245	\$3,697,636

As shown, the total revenues are estimated to increase by \$60,000 in the first year of implementation (shown as 2013) and \$105,000 in the second year (shown as 2014). Historical and projected expenditures are shown in the following table. While not included within the “revenue projections” the Parks and Recreation business unit should pursue other revenue enhancement opportunities and cost reduction measures such as park sponsorships (either through funding support or actual maintenance of the park from private businesses), aggressively pursuing grant support for park development and renovation, and recreational program sponsorships.

	2011 Actual	2012 Year End Estimate	2013 Adopted	2014 Forecast	2015 Forecast
Expenditures					
Personal Services	1,957,624	1,850,367	1,786,018	1,810,345	1,830,936
Supplies	291,444	401,950	400,975	388,593	388,593
Other Services / Charges	1,525,004	1,625,805	1,636,024	1,721,163	1,778,130
Capital Outlay	50,443	116,000	117,000	116,000	119,000
Debt Service	0	0	0	0	0
Appropriate Lapse	0	0	0	0	0
Transfers Out- Cost Alloc.	442,409	283,180	216,251	222,739	229,421
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$4,266,924	\$4,277,302	\$4,156,268	\$4,258,840	\$4,346,080

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Recommended Expenditures					
Dedicated Recreational Programming Space			160,000	0	0
User Fee Study			20,000	0	0
TOTAL RECOMMENDED EXPENDITURES			\$180,000	0	0
TOTAL EXPENDITURES WITH ADDITIONS	\$4,266,924	\$4,277,302	\$4,336,268	\$4,258,840	\$4,346,080
NET INCOME (LOSS)	\$397,351	(\$218,827)	(\$254,227)	(\$586,595)	(\$648,444)

As shown, through changes in user fees and other revenue enhancements, the Business Unit can increase revenues by approximately \$100,000 annually within several years. This will require some upfront investment in order to enable this to occur including capital funding of \$160,000 to renovate or acquire dedicated programming space and \$20,000 for a revenue study. Both of these amounts could be paid back from the future increased revenues. These increases are based upon “easily implemented” changes and actions. This does not include other potential increases that are not directly within the control of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit’s control – such as grant funding and sponsorship funds.

As show, in 2014, the Business Unit has the potential to generate a net income almost \$100,000. How to allocate any remaining income following repayments is a policy decision. It could be utilized to decrease the current general fund expenditures or be invested into capital improvements.

As stretch goals of the unit, the City should adopt an aggressive approach to seeking additional external funding – initially focusing on grant opportunities and sponsorship (either directly of recreational programs or park maintenance support) that would enable further reduction in annual cost outlays to provide services. Given the highly uncertain nature of these opportunities, they have not been included in the financial model to prevent presenting an overly optimistic projection of cost reductions. Despite this non-inclusion, the importance of pursuing these opportunities should not be overlooked.

It should be noted that these future recommendations envision no increase in the general fund operating subsidy above the estimated annual amount of \$3,000,000, which is a significant reduction from prior years. The proposed operating loss in FY 2014 based upon these projections is reduced from \$691,595 to \$586,595, which still requires significant GOF investment.

As was discussed in an earlier section of this chapter, the imposition of a millage assessment **dedicated** to Parks and Recreation is estimated to generate a total of \$4,000,000 annually to support services. This amount is sufficient to completely eliminate the general fund subsidy **and** provide needed funds for a modest investment in capital infrastructure (dedicated recreation space, park improvements, equipment upgrades, etc.). While the raising of taxes at any point is difficult, the benefit of having a

dedicated revenue source is the public can make an informed decision on the value of a particular service and whether they wish to financial support it with tax revenue. In this case, the City can make a strong case that the dedicated millage will provide not only an enhance park maintenance operation, but the ability to expand recreational programming (as determined appropriate) and ensure continued operation of pools.

Given the sizeable unmet capital needs related to park infrastructure, the project team would recommend that any operating net income be dedicated to capital programs to benefit the parks. The long-term solution for further reducing general fund contributions to the Parks and Recreation Business Unit would be better served through the implementation of a dedicated funding stream (i.e. – millage amount) that enables the City to provide the quality of life services desired by the public.

Finally, these projections do not include any future grant funding that may be achieved or pursued by the City. It is evident that the City of Grand Rapids must consider a long-term stable funding alternative, other than general funds, if it wishes to maintain and enhance its parks and recreational programs for residents. While staff is able to effectively utilize the resources allocated to it (and will be able to improve efficiency and effectiveness after implementing changes outlined in this report), the status quo funding levels will provide for nothing more than basic maintenance of existing parks and continued degradation of the City's park infrastructure.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Listing of Parks within the City of Grand Rapids

PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	SIZE (ACRES)
Large Urban Park	Ball Perkins Park	80.11
Large Urban Park	Butterworth Park	129.25
Large Urban Park	Creston High	6.29
Large Urban Park	Huff Park	87.45
Large Urban Park	MacKay/Jaycee Family Park	69.8
Large Urban Park	Ottawa Hills High	21.2
Large Urban Park	Richmond Park	57.05
Large Urban Park	Riverside Park	180.95
Large Urban Park	Union High/Westwood Middle	54.73
Community and Special Use Parks	Aberdeen Park	9.19
Community and Special Use Parks	Ah-Nab-Awen Park	6.78
Community and Special Use Parks	Alger Middle School	7.39
Community and Special Use Parks	Baldwin Park	0.17
Community and Special Use Parks	Belknap Park	24.56
Community and Special Use Parks	Bike Park	16.63
Community and Special Use Parks	Blandford Nature Center	11.07
Community and Special Use Parks	Briggs Park	10.73
Community and Special Use Parks	Burton Elementary & Middle	1.41
Community and Special Use Parks	Burton Woods	5.97
Community and Special Use Parks	Calder Plaza	4.43
Community and Special Use Parks	Campau Park	7.27
Community and Special Use Parks	Canal Street Park Central/Fountain U-Prep	4.41
Community and Special Use Parks	Central/Fountain U-Prep	3.9
Community and Special Use Parks	City High/Middle School	27.34
Community and Special Use Parks	Fish Ladder Park	3.4
Community and Special Use Parks	Fourth Street Woods	4.74
Community and Special Use Parks	Fulton Street Market	2.43
Community and Special Use Parks	Garfield Park	29.34
Community and Special Use Parks	Harrison Park Elem Math/Science Heartside Park	8.03
Community and Special Use Parks	Heartside Park	2.99
Community and Special Use Parks	Highland Park	27.92
Community and Special Use Parks	Hillcrest Park	14.43
Community and Special Use Parks	Hosken Park	0.003
Community and Special Use Parks	Houseman Park	9.62
Community and Special Use Parks	Indian Trails Golf Course	83.74

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PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	SIZE (ACRES)
Community and Special Use Parks	Ken-O-Sha Park/ Plaster Cr. Trail	141.12
Community and Special Use Parks	Lincoln Park	12.45
Community and Special Use Parks	Louis Campau Promenade	0.6
Community and Special Use Parks	Lyon Square	0.27
Community and Special Use Parks	Martin Luther King Park	16.94
Community and Special Use Parks	Monument Park	0.2
Community and Special Use Parks	Mulick Park	9.95
Community and Special Use Parks	Paul I. Phillips Recreation Center	0.32
Community and Special Use Parks	Plaster Creek Family Park	34.58
Community and Special Use Parks	Raspberry Field	2.97
Community and Special Use Parks	Reservoir Park	7.35
Community and Special Use Parks	Riverside Middle	15.71
Community and Special Use Parks	Riverwalk Trails	0.6
Community and Special Use Parks	Roosevelt Park	8.25
Community and Special Use Parks	Rosa Parks Circle	0.59
Community and Special Use Parks	Shawnee Park Elementary	8.26
Community and Special Use Parks	Sixth Street Bridge Park	4.26
Community and Special Use Parks	Southwest Community Campus	0.93
Community and Special Use Parks	Sullivan Field	5.5
Community and Special Use Parks	Veteran's Memorial Park	1.61
Neighborhood Parks	Aberdeen Elementary	7.58
Neighborhood Parks	Alexander Elementary	2.11
Neighborhood Parks	Beckwith Elementary	8.77
Neighborhood Parks	Brookside Elementary	9.7
Neighborhood Parks	Buchanan Elementary	2.02
Neighborhood Parks	CA Frost Elementary	9.82
Neighborhood Parks	Cambridge Park	7.77
Neighborhood Parks	Camelot Park	5.04
Neighborhood Parks	Campau Park Elementary	2.25
Neighborhood Parks	Cesar E. Chavez Elementary	1.16
Neighborhood Parks	Cherry Park	1.05
Neighborhood Parks	Clemente Park	11.91
Neighborhood Parks	Coit Elementary	1.32
Neighborhood Parks	Coit Park	4.16
Neighborhood Parks	Congress elementary	3.32
Neighborhood Parks	Covell elementary	9.37
Neighborhood Parks	Dickinson Elementary	0.84
Neighborhood Parks	Dickinson Park	4
Neighborhood Parks	Douglas Park	0.79

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PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	SIZE (ACRES)
Neighborhood Parks	East Leonard Elementary	5.73
Neighborhood Parks	Eastern Elementary	3.09
Neighborhood Parks	Franklin Campus for Art/Lit	0.74
Neighborhood Parks	Fuller Park	11.41
Neighborhood Parks	Gerald R. Ford Middle	8.5
Neighborhood Parks	Jefferson Elementary	1.82
Neighborhood Parks	Ken-O-Sha Park Elementary	6.38
Neighborhood Parks	Kensington Elementary / Adelante High School	2.07
Neighborhood Parks	Kensington Park	10.12
Neighborhood Parks	Kent Hills Elementary	13.1
Neighborhood Parks	Martin Luther King Leadership Academy	1.65
Neighborhood Parks	Mary Waters park	9.94
Neighborhood Parks	Mid-Town Green	1.48
Neighborhood Parks	Mulick Park Elementary	4.01
Neighborhood Parks	North Park Elementary	9.42
Neighborhood Parks	Oakdale elementary	3.71
Neighborhood Parks	Oxford Park (undeveloped)	9.48
Neighborhood Parks	Palmer Elementary	2.6
Neighborhood Parks	Pleasant Park	2.3
Neighborhood Parks	Shawmut Hills Elementary	13.11
Neighborhood Parks	Sherwood Parks Elementary	11.84
Neighborhood Parks	Sibley Elementary	4.67
Neighborhood Parks	SE Academic Center at Sigsbee Park Elementary	2.31
Neighborhood Parks	Stocking Elementary	2.43
Neighborhood Parks	Teacher Training Cener at Hillcrest Elementary	2.87
Neighborhood Parks	Wellerwood ISD Early Childhood Center	10.97
Neighborhood Parks	West Leonard elementary	1.86
Neighborhood Parks	Westown Commons	1.07
Neighborhood Parks	Wilcox Park	12.67
Mini Parks	Alexander Park	0.57
Mini Parks	Caulfield Playground	0.33
Mini Parks	Cheseboro Park	0.34
Mini Parks	Crescent Park	1.06
Mini Parks	Foster Park	0.24
Mini Parks	Heritage Hill Park	0.18
Mini Parks	Joe Taylor Park	1.65
Mini Parks	Look Out Park	1.98
Mini Parks	Mooney Park	0.35
Mini Parks	Pekich Park	0.1

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PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	SIZE (ACRES)
Mini Parks	Nagold Park	0.64
Mini Parks	Paris Park	0.29
Mini Parks	Seymour Park	0.27
Mini Parks	Sweet Street Park	0.48
TOTAL PARK ACREAGE		1,560

APPENDIX B - Listing of Parks Noting Acreage Maintained by City Staff and the Current Level of Maintenance Achieved

PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	Maintained Acreage	Current Level of Maintenance Achieved
Community and Special Use Parks	Ah-Nab-Awen Park	6.7	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Belknap Park	25	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Canal Street Park Central/Fountain U-Prep	4	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	City/County Plaza	4	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Fish Ladder Park	3.4	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Harrison Park	8	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Heartside Park	2.99	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Lyon Square	0	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Monument Park	0.2	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Rosa Parks Circle	0.5	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Sixth Street Bridge Park	4.26	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Sullivan Field	5.5	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Veteran's Memorial Park	1.6	Level B
Community and Special Use Parks	Aberdeen Park	18	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Alexander Park	11	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Baldwin Park	0.17	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Briggs Park	11	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Campau Park	7	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Garfield Park	29	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Highland Park	27	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Hillcrest Park	15	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Lincoln Park	12	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Martin Luther King Park	17	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Mulick Park	10	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Plaster Creek Family Park	27	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Roosevelt Park	8	Level C
Community and Special Use Parks	Huff Park	80	Level C
Large Urban Park	MacKay/Jaycee Family Park	70	Level C
Large Urban Park	Ottawa Hills High	1	Level C
Large Urban Park	Richmond Park	60	Level C
Large Urban Park	Riverside Park	250	Level C
Large Urban Park	Caulfield Playground	0.33	Level C
Large Urban Park	Cheseboro Park	0.4	Level C
Mini Parks	Foster Park	0.25	Level C

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PARK TYPE	PARK NAME	Maintained Acreage	Current Level of Maintenance Achieved
Mini Parks	Heritage Hill Park	0.18	Level C
Mini Parks	Joe Taylor Park	3	Level C
Mini Parks	Look Out Park	2	Level C
Mini Parks	Mooney Park	0.35	Level C
Mini Parks	Nagold Park	0.7	Level C
Mini Parks	Paris Park	0.29	Level C
Mini Parks	Seymour Park	0.27	Level C
Mini Parks	Sweet Street Park	0.235	Level C
Mini Parks	Cambridge Park	8	Level C
Mini Parks	Camelot Park	5	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Cherry Park	1	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Clemente Park	11	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Coit Park	4	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Dickinson Park	4	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Douglas Park	0.79	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Fuller Park	11	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Kensington Park	10	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Mary Waters park	10	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Mid-Town Green	1.5	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Oxford Park (undeveloped)	3	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Westown Commons	1	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Wilcox Park	12	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Mulick Park Elementary	10	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Sheldon Field	3	Level C
Neighborhood Parks	Ball Perkins Park	10	Level D
TOTAL ACREAGE		832.6	

APPENDIX C - Detailed Best Management Practices Assessment

Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
PARKS & RECREATION - ADMINISTRATION			
A strategic plan is in place that outlines the future direction of the Department including an assessment of the type and general location of future expansion for parklands, facilities, and programming.	The City has a Parks & Recreation Master plan that includes significant discussion regarding the role of parks and recreation in the City including numerous park concept plans to guide future development.		The City should develop a long-range plan for park improvements, in conjunction with the Friends of Grand Rapids Park that will enable multi-year planning for capital investments to occur.
The strategic plan contains comprehensive, well-defined goals and objectives to guide resource allocation.		While selected goals and objectives are defined for specific parks and service areas, no overriding goals and objectives are outlined or have been adopted to guide future operations of the Parks and Recreation functions.	Specific service levels should be adopted for the City outlining park maintenance levels, types and levels of recreational programs that will offered, and other key goals and objectives for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit.
The long-rang plan provides clear and specific guidance for the capital program development process.		Current plans do not provide a comprehensive approach to future capital program development. The level of funding for capital improvements has been minimal over the last several years.	As previously noted, a long-range capital plan should be developed that provides guidance on specific improvements targeted in future years.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Customer service approaches, citizen outreach and feedback on services performed are utilized.	The Department has only recently implemented a customer service survey to evaluate operations.	The Department should continually conduct community outreach to assess customer satisfaction, identify new programming opportunities, and evaluate park maintenance levels.	The City should continually administer a survey of prior recreation program users, and a citizen survey regarding park maintenance levels. This should be summarized annually and utilized for future planning for recreational and maintenance efforts.
A specific cost recovery plan for programs is in place and is reviewed at least every two years. The project team's benchmark average for communities offering a wide range of services (excluding child care) at a high level of service is 40%.	The Department operates under general cost-recovery guidelines for recreation programming that generally conform to the following guidelines: 100% cost recovery for adult programs and lower recovery for youth programs.	<p>The Department should expand the current cost recovery policy with information regarding general guidelines for program continuation (based upon participation and/or cost recovery achieved) and programs that will be offered without regard to the cost recovery (those meeting identified community or special population needs).</p> <p>Currently, the Department is achieving approximately 58% cost recovery.</p> <p>This plan should be reviewed at least every other year to determine if changes are warranted. The policy should outline the cost-recovery targets for various types of programming (such as Athletics, Social Events, Art & Crafts, etc.). Annual performance to these targets should be monitored and reviewed as part of the semi-annual program offering development.</p>	<p>The City should develop a new cost recovery target for recreational programs targeting an overall cost-recovery of at least 80% in the short term with a stretch goal of 90%+ cost recovery in three to five years.</p> <p>Cost recovery should be supported by conducting a comprehensive fee analysis to determine if existing fees meet the cost of providing services.</p> <p>Further efforts at grant acquisition as a significant component of future financing of the parks and recreation function will require the dedication of a staff position (or a portion of a position) to this function. Existing staffing will not support allocation of an existing position to this effort.</p>

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Departmental training needs have been evaluated and identified; a training strategy has been developed to ensure staff receives appropriate training and professional development for their position.		As part of the annual performance evaluation process, specific training plans for each employee should be developed to identify the training needs to be addressed in the coming year.	Training should be focused on ensuring skill maintenance and skills necessary to achieve the Business Units annual goals and objectives.
The Department has a complete and up-to-date inventory of all major assets.	The Department has an inventory of major assets including all park, buildings, park facilities (pavilions, playgrounds, etc.), and equipment.	The inventory should be maintained up to date, with future projections developed based upon the useful life of each asset. This is especially critical for maintenance equipment which should be maintained / replaced on a recurring basis based upon type of equipment.	A long-range capital plan should be developed for the Parks and Recreation Business Unit that identifies capital needs over a five to ten year basis to maintain existing assets (land, buildings, and maintenance equipment). Standard life cycles should be adopted for each asset type to enable projections and determination of unmet capital needs.
The Department regularly collects information on the condition of assets.		Condition ratings are done on an ad-hoc basis. Comprehensive evaluations are not conducted – though in some areas, such as playgrounds, annual inspections are attempted.	Condition ratings should be conducted annually for all assets on a master inventory listing. This information should be utilized for prioritizing capital needs and allocating capital funds.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
The Department a long-range facility plan developed that identifies facility / space needs necessary to support recreational and other programming.		The Department does not have a facility plan developed. It is known that the City is “facility-poor” especially as it related to facilities under its control for use in recreational programming. Various architectural plans have been developed that would provide opportunities for the City to renovate space existing at their current facility at various levels with price ranges from \$150,000 to \$600,000. The Department is excessively dependent upon the use of school facilities to provide recreational programming limiting the number and timing of course offerings.	A long-range goal of the City needs to be acquisition of dedicated space that can be utilized for recreational programming if this function is going to be able to not only expand course offerings, but provide multiple course sessions, and acceptable timing of courses (i.e. – time of day when demand is present). The use of transformation funds should be considered to support the renovation of the existing space available at the Parks and Recreation facility to provide this space. The payback on these expenditures may exceed the 5-year target for transformation funding.
Dedicated facilities for the delivery of senior programs and services in the City have been developed.		The City of Grand Rapids does not provide dedicated senior programming.	As long as this need is met through other community programming/services, the City of Grand Rapids should not endeavor to provide these unless demand is identified through the customer survey being conducted.
Knowledge of the senior community characteristics is researched and used in service planning.		These activities are not undertaken since senior programs are not a core component of the recreation offerings provided by the department.	

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Coordinates programs and services with other private not-for-profit agencies.		The Department should work with other community groups to ensure that suitable senior programs are being offered to residents in the community.	
Coordinates programs and services with neighboring communities.		No coordination is currently taking place.	The City should work jointly with neighboring jurisdictions to jointly provide some programming/services to minimize cost and staff time.
GENERAL RECREATION PROGRAMS			
Use of trend analysis to identify changing needs and demands for services.		Detailed analysis of program participation and needs is not conducted as part of the annual programming effort. Given the high utilization of some programs, an annual evaluation of program utilization would assist in determining programs needing additional capacity and those programs that have low registration rates that might be candidates for replacement with new or expanded programming efforts.	An annual recreational program trend analysis should be conducted to determine: 1) Classes not meeting minimum enrollments and potential reasons; 2) Classes where demand exceeded capacity to determine if additional sessions should be offered; 3) New classes identified by the public as desirable; 4) Opportunities to coordinate with other community resources to jointly provide services.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Aggressive promotional techniques are utilized for programs and services.	Programs are advertised primarily through the "Recreation Guide" programming booklet and the City's internet system. Some targeted advertisement through schools has been undertaken in the past.	Underutilized programming courses may also be targeted for additional marketing efforts. The City should expand the use of the internet, and other public access sources for promoting classes. The City should seek advertisers for its recreation guide to offset the costs of production and distribution. Estimated target of \$15,000 annually.	The Department should expand outreach efforts to inform the public of available recreational programs and services. Reliance on the recreation guide may not enable future ability to grow participation in programs (and increase revenues).
Detailed marketing plan for recreation services has been developed and regularly updated.		The City does not currently have a marketing plan in place. This is critical if the recreational programs are to become more self-sufficient. The development of a basic marketing plan to identify additional opportunities for communicating with target audiences may enhance the utilization of department programs especially for those that have low enrollments. Efforts could include, pamphlets distributed through schools (assuming suitable arrangements can be made with the Schools), utilization of the public access advertisement (radio and TV), and through targeted mailings / emails to previous registrants.	The City should implement additional efforts to expand marketing efforts to include those noted in the preceding column. Particular focus should be on email communications with prior participants.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Registration should be made as easy as possible so as to encourage participation.	The City has recently implemented an on-line registration process for its recreation programs, in addition to mail in and walk in services. On-line registration includes the ability to make payments via credit card.	Efforts should be made to direct more individuals to on-line registration to reduce the workloads handled by registration staff and expand the ability to utilize the internet as a primary marketing effort. However, the City must recognize that there is a significant component of the client base that may not have access to the internet.	The City should aggressively promote online registrations with a target goal of 40% penetration in the next two years.
Recreational opportunities offered by non-municipal providers should also be identified and marketed through the recreation departments.	The City of Grand Rapids makes effective use of jointly supporting and advertising community programs and has an agreement in place with local recreations centers to jointly advertise and provide selected programs.		
Eliciting sponsorship for special events and for ongoing programming.		The department should develop a policy for soliciting sponsorships for special events and programming to offset operational costs. Targeted programs could include those provided free (or at a reduced registration fee). Programs that are often suitable for this include wellness programs (sponsored by health related companies), community celebrations / social events, and youth sports activities. Other opportunities to increase external funding could include local retailers who provide a percentage of sales to parks development.	The City should continue and enhance efforts to solicit sponsorships for special events and programming. This responsibility should be allocated to the duties of a staff member.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Established foundations to assist in support of specific services or facilities (e.g. "Friends of the...")	The City has a very active friends of the park organization that undertakes significant park improvement activities.	The City and the Friends organization should jointly develop the future capital program so that efforts are closely coordinated.	The City and the Friends organization should jointly develop the future capital program so that efforts are closely coordinated.
Joint use agreements with the school district.	The City of Grand Rapids has utilized joint use agreements extensively with the Grand Rapids Public Schools for an extended period of time. In fact, the majority of programming space utilized by the City is made available by the schools.	There are significant issues that are arising through the use of joint use agreements, namely limitations on the availability of space and the time space is available. Given that the Department is highly dependent on this space to support recreational programs, efforts should be made to enhance access to some school space (when needed by the Department) and to identify alternative space that can be utilized for recreational programming.	Additional recreational programming space must be identified for use by the Department (either through joint use agreements with the schools, identification of other space in the community, or through dedicated space controlled by the Department) if recreational programming offerings are to be expanded and increased self-sufficiency achieved.
The City has dedicated space allocated to recreational programming.		The City of Grand Rapids has virtually no dedicated space for recreational programming. While limited utilization of rooms at the current Parks & Recreation facility has been utilized for this purpose, it places classes among offices and other work activities – a less than desirable outcome. The City has a definite need for dedicated space.	As previously noted, the City should continue efforts to renovate space either in or adjacent to its current facility to provide dedicated space for recreational programs.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Citizen committees in place to provide constant feedback and oversight.	The City has an active Friends organization (non-profit appointed by Council) and Park and Recreation Advisory Board (citizens) that provide the citizen input into operations and oversight.		
The Department has an inventory of resources from the community, which would facilitate recreation program offerings.	The City makes use of school and some other community resources for the provision of recreation programming (such as Rock Climbing facility).	An inventory listing of other resources should be developed to provide alternative locations for recreation programming. In the near term, this may assist in relieving space needs that are occurring due to the lack of public facilities. Space needs are currently most critical for programs needing classroom space.	
Background investigations are performed on all staff with client contact. This includes those who are hired under contracts.	Background investigations are conducted on all staff, including contracted service providers, who are involved in providing services for the Public Services Department Parks and Recreation Business Unit.		
The Recreation Program has implemented a scholarship program for qualified residents.	The Department has an active scholarship program for qualified residents	Funding for this effort is limited to approximately \$25,000 annually.	The City should seek sponsors or external funding sources that would enable it to expand its scholarship program.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
The Department aggressively pursues alternative funding and fees to cover costs.	The Department has explored different fees and funding strategies.	Efforts are primarily limited due to insufficient staffing levels to allocate to this function. Key funding sources that should be focused on in the short term include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Naming rights for facilities, structures, and parks; - Advertisements; - Grant opportunities. 	The Department should seek assistance from other grant writers within the City organization to assist short term. Longer term a dedicated position would be appropriate to handle these functions and other financial planning efforts of the Department.
PARKS MAINTENANCE			
Staff periodically inspects the condition of the parks and related facilities.		While staff periodically conducts park inspections while performing maintenance services, no formal inspection program documenting such outputs is performed by staff.	A formal parks maintenance inspection program should be implemented with annual evaluations. These evaluations can be conducted either by maintenance staff or through volunteers from the Friends organization. An example inspection report is provided as an attachment to this report for consideration.
Quality standards have been developed for park-related maintenance.	Quality standards are currently influenced based on the number of complaints received and there content. At the present time the City is providing a level of service that exceeds what would be expected with current staffing levels.	There are no formal and documented quality standards in place consistent with the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), and the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers guidelines.	The City should adopt maintenance standards for each park, based upon desired level of service and available staffing to achieve the standards.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation															
Park assets are being maintained in good condition, and the quality of the maintenance is formally evaluated quarterly and at minimum bi-annually.	Based on the MCG’s tour of numerous sites, park assets are maintained at different quality levels. Newer assets, as well as those within the Downtown Development Authority Fund are typically maintained at a higher level of service.	Formal inspections are not performed quarterly or bi-annually to determine park asset maintenance requirements or park asset capital requirements.	Formal inspection program should be implemented to ensure park maintenance is maintained at adopted service levels.															
Levels of service have been developed that define the frequency in which various maintenance tasks are to be performed.	<div><div>A short list of asset rehabilitation services (CIP) performed was developed and is noted below:</div><table><tr><th>Yr.</th><th>Project</th><th>Amt.</th></tr><tr><td>FY 12</td><td>New stainless steel gutters at Richmond Park Pool</td><td>\$100,000</td></tr><tr><td>FY 11</td><td>None</td><td>\$0</td></tr><tr><td>FY 10</td><td>Pool basin repairs at Campau Pool</td><td>\$50,000</td></tr><tr><td>FY 10</td><td>Garfield sewer line connection</td><td>\$25,000</td></tr></table></div>	Yr.	Project	Amt.	FY 12	New stainless steel gutters at Richmond Park Pool	\$100,000	FY 11	None	\$0	FY 10	Pool basin repairs at Campau Pool	\$50,000	FY 10	Garfield sewer line connection	\$25,000	Levels/frequency of service has not been formally defined.	Specific preventive maintenance service levels should be adopted. Recommended standards are provided as an appendix attached to this report.
Yr.	Project	Amt.																
FY 12	New stainless steel gutters at Richmond Park Pool	\$100,000																
FY 11	None	\$0																
FY 10	Pool basin repairs at Campau Pool	\$50,000																
FY 10	Garfield sewer line connection	\$25,000																

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
The levels of service provided has been formally adopted and classified as level “A,” level “B,” level “C,” or “level D” (or similar classification system) to ensure a linkage between policy-level decision-making (community expectation) and actual service delivery.		There is no service level classification rating system in place to ensure service level expectations have been formally adopted by policy-making boards (e.g. Council) and translated into resource requirements to ensure such service levels are maintained.	The City should adopt a classification rating for each park with the rating dictating the level of maintenance efforts conducted. The Matrix Consulting Group recommends that the City adopt an four-tiered system assigning maintenance levels of “A”, “B”, “C” or “D” to each park. Park recommendations and potential maintenance levels are shown in a later section of this report. Service levels should be directly tied to the available staffing to achieve – or that can be achieved with support from the Friends organization.
Sufficient resources have been provided to maintain at least a “B” level of maintenance such as weekly mowing, bi-weekly edging, weekly inspection of playground equipment, daily restroom cleaning, aeration 2 to 3 times annually, fertilization once annually, etc.	<p>The City currently recognizes and tacitly supports a lower overall level of park maintenance services.</p> <p>There are, however, some specific locations that exhibit “B” service levels.</p>	Based on observations and data assessments, the Department is not capable of performing maintenance overall at a “B” level of service and cannot maintain over the long term a “C” level of service based on existing resources.	Adopted maintenance standards by the Council should be sought to enable staff to allocate resources appropriately and for elected officials to understand staffing requirements for each park level.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
A preventive maintenance program is in place for major assets and equipment (such as irrigation systems, playground equipment, facilities, fences, etc.). Preventive maintenance should focus on addressing issues before they impact either the operation or functionality of the asset and prior to developing into safety concerns.		No comprehensive preventive maintenance program is currently in place that identifies maintenance tasks, frequencies, and staff requirements. No computer system is used for use in developing detailed preventive maintenance programs or inventorying systems, facilities, and assets needing maintenance. Insufficient staff are available to focus on proactive preventive maintenance activities—response oriented corrective maintenance predominates.	The City should adopt a preventive maintenance program for all major park systems, and equipment. This is critical to determine both future staffing and equipment replacement needs.
The Department keeps a comprehensive list of park-related inventory such as the square feet of turf, linear feet of edging, square feet of sidewalks, number of picnic areas, etc.	An inventory is maintained of various park accouterments on the website at the following location: http://www.grcity.us/public-services/Parks-Recreation-Forestry/Pages/Grand-Rapids-Park-Finder.aspx This data was made available through the cooperation of the “Friends of Grand Rapids Parks”	A comprehensive and up-to-date single-source of park-related inventory information, by asset count (e.g. number of tennis courts) is not available.	The Department should ensure that a comprehensive inventory is maintained at all times.
The Department maintains and uses information on the full unit costs of maintenance activities.	FAMIS (mainframe system replaced in November) is used to track financials related to Parks operations and maintenance. Presently park maintenance costs are tracked, but the quality of the data is unreliable.	CitiWorks Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) is used on the Public Works side but not Parks side.	The department should continue efforts to track maintenance costs by park with modifications to the current system to make the data more useful. Improvements in this data will enable the City to track historical costs, by park or recreation program to provide service.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
An annual maintenance calendar has been developed that identifies when seasonal tasks will be performed (e.g., turf will be fertilized in March and September, color planting in Spring, etc.).		No annual maintenance calendar has been developed.	An annual maintenance calendar should be prepared for all seasonal tasks.
Parks has identified the maintenance tasks and staff hours required to maintain service areas using specific inventory information, desired levels of service, and an annual maintenance calendar. As a result, Parks is able to deploy staffing levels to meet targeted service levels.		There is no comprehensive program to identify service level requirements by location through the use of CMMS data and annual Work Plan programs.	Annual work programs should be developed to guide maintenance staff activities.
A computerized maintenance management system is in place to handle and schedule preventive, routine, and emergency maintenance service requests.		There is no dedicated computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) that has been implemented for Parks. Resource requirements to maintain such a database are presently unavailable given current staffing levels.	Longer term this should be implemented. However, given existing needs, this should not be given priority at the present time due to cost unless external funding can be achieved (i.e. – transformation fund).
Alternative service delivery methods are periodically assessed to determine if there are cost-effective service delivery options.	The Department has performed various service delivery studies to include the 2010 ProsConsulting Audit of Parks and Recreation services performed in January 2011.	There has been no formal review of the benefits and disadvantages of contracted services (e.g. mowing service).	The Department should undertake an RFP process to determine if allocating some mowing services through contracted services would be more cost-effective than the current approach utilizing seasonal employees.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
A cost-effective balance between full-time versus part-time and volunteer staff is utilized.	The Department has progressively used full-time and part-time staff as well as has developed numerous partnerships (e.g. "Friends of Grand Rapids Parks", "Little League") to appreciably impact service delivery. Medians landscape maintenance is contracted as well as Ash tree removal.		Grand Rapids should continue the best practice of utilizing seasonal employees to maintain parkland.
An integrated pest management program is utilized that includes a range of treatment strategies.		The Department has no published IPM Chemical Pesticide Management Guidelines nor, given present budgets, consistently uses pest management strategies.	Longer term a pest management program should be developed.
The Department makes effective use of pre-and post-emergent chemicals for pest control. This should be part of an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program.		Given present budgets, consistent use of pest management chemicals is not performed.	Longer-term a pest management program should be developed.
The irrigation system is centrally controlled with a personal computer linked to controllers.	Automated irrigation systems are in place.	The irrigation system is not centrally controlled nor based upon temperature, water usage, etc.	In the long term, a CIP should be developed for a computer-based and centralized irrigation control system.
Safety reviews of facilities, parks, playground equipment and other resources are conducted at an appropriate frequency level (such as: playground equipment – daily to weekly; facilities and parks – monthly, etc.)	Inspections are conducted routinely.	Further efforts are warranted to increase the frequency of such inspection to a regular program, documentation of results and certifying additional playground inspectors.	Playground inspections should be conducted at the minimum frequency noted and observations formally documented with records maintained consistent with the City's records retention practices.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
Continuous training programs are provided to keep step with state-of-the-art advances and continuously improve workers' knowledge and skills in safety, park care and maintenance practices.		Parks has an insufficient budget to offer continuous training on a regular basis.	Augmentation of training budgets should be considered upon long-term economic recovery.
There is a funded and long-range capital improvement program relative to park operations.	As noted in a previous table, modest capital improvements have been accomplished.	There is no comprehensive capital improvement program for parks in place. Present approaches to CIP and funding are creating significant deferred maintenance issues.	As previously noted, a comprehensive capital improvement program based upon identified maintenance or replacement needs should be developed.
The City has developed a long-term Master Plan relative to Parks. The Department included an assessment of the type and general location of future expansion for parklands, facilities, and programming.	There is a comprehensive 5-year Parks and Recreation Master Plan published in 2010 of over 100 pages.		The master plan should be updated every five years to maintain eligibility for state funding.
The Master Plan provides clear and specific guidance for the capital program development process.	The Master Plan has a separate and detailed Action Plan chapter describing capital asset investment strategies and issues.		Continue in the future best practices surrounding Master Plan development.
A cleaning unit provides services seven days a week to ensure community expectations are met. This includes restroom cleaning and removal of trash from receptacles.	Cleaning and trash removal is regularly performed.	A seven-day per week is not undertaken. This is partially due to closures during the Winter season.	Current trash removal frequency is satisfactory and should continue unless and until maintenance service levels increase.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
The organization has an effective reservation program in place to reserve picnic areas, shelters, etc.	Special event reservations are performed at the Police Department.	This locale for reservations is unusual. Coupled with the PD receives funds for such planning, such a practice is very uncommon. Anticipated annual revenues from this change would approximate \$20,000.	This function should be returned to the control of the Parks and Recreation Business Unit for all park reservations.
A strong and well organized citizen advisory group has been established to aid in setting policy, provide checks and balances, and advocate for the parks network.	There is an established Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.	The P&R Advisory Board does not have significant authority, nor does it interface regularly with community organizations such as "Friends of Grand Rapids Parks."	
URBAN FORESTRY			
A tree inventory exists of all trees including location, size species, and condition.		Interview suggests that there is no comprehensive tree inventory for the City.	Longer-term a comprehensive tree inventory should be developed.
A user-friendly CMMS is utilized that is easily accessible by urban forest management staff to record maintenance activities, manage the maintenance program, track complaints and evaluate the value and costs of each urban forest management and maintenance activity.	CitiWorks is used to track urban forestry complaints.	There is no dedicated computerized maintenance management system (CMMS) that has been used outside of complaint tracking.	Addressed in prior sections.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
A strong and well organized citizen advisory group has been established to aid in setting policy, provide checks and balances, and advocate for the urban forest.	There is a well-organized Urban Forestry Committee in the City.		The Urban Forestry Committee should continue with reasonable policy influence regarding the urban forest.
A strong public information program has been established to inform and educate residents about the benefits and value of the urban forest, the cost to adequately maintain it, and the adverse results of withholding proper care.	There is a variety of urban forestry information available at the following website: http://www.grand-rapids.mi.us/public-services/Parks-Recreation-Forestry/Pages/Forestry.aspx This includes a report on the economic value of the urban forest. s		Further opportunities to facilitate education with respect to the urban forest should be taken, although existing resources dedicated to the program make this impractical in the short term.
A tree ordinance has been adopted that covers planting and removal of trees within public rights-of-way, maintenance or removal of private trees which pose a hazard, tree planting requirements such as those requiring tree planting in parking lots, and providing protection for trees requiring that a permit be obtained before trees can be removed, encroached upon, or in some cases, pruned.	Grand Rapids has a Tree Ordinance (Chapter 42) as well as Zoning Ordinances (Chapter 61) discussing the urban forest.		The tree ordinance should be revisited every 4-7 years as urban forestry needs and circumstances change.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
A formal, written tree plan and reforestation plan has been adopted outlining the species to be planted, planting guidelines, diversification of species, and general maintenance and removal.	An Urban Forestry Plan was developed in March, 2009.		The urban forestry plan should be updated every five to seven years.
Formal protocols have been established for tree planting, pruning, and removal programs.		Formal maintenance standard practices consistent with Approved American National Standard (ANSI) such as A300 and Z133 documentation are currently not in place.	The department should adopt formal policies and procedures on tree maintenance.
The City has applied for, and received, a Tree City USA designation.	In 2011, Grand Rapids was recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA community a 13th time for its commitment to urban forestry.		The City should continue to pursue Tree City USA designations on an annual basis.
Responsibility for tree maintenance has been centralized for economies of scale.	Tree Maintenance has been centralized in the Department.	Local power companies have authority to trim trees without inspection /reporting requirements to ensure they meet City standards.	Require, through ordinance if necessary, independent certified arborist inspection reporting for any party maintaining the Grand Rapids urban forest.
City trees located within the urban / community forest receive an annual inspection to evaluate their condition and identify potential hazards.		A City-wide annual inspection of all street trees is not accomplished.	Given current staffing and service levels this is not easily achievable.

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Performance Target	Strengths	Potential Improvements	Recommendation
All trees that are removed are replaced.		Given the Emerald Ash Borer infestation, this best practice is currently not practical.	Replace as many urban forest trees that are removed as practical, generally avoiding species that can be harmed by local infestations.
Tree planting is provided proactively, not just for removals, within established neighborhood planting areas where tree stocking is inadequate based on existing canopy coverage.	Proactive tree planting is performed via a variety of programs and as discussed in the 2009 Urban Forestry Plan.		Pursue proactive tree planting, as practical and economically viable.
Trees are trimmed on a proactive, block-by-block basis.		Tree trimming is performed largely based upon service complaint.	A proactive component to tree trimming, even if small, should be developed to ensure proactive approaches to tree maintenance.
Tree complaints are inspected within one workday and specific problem resolution accomplished based upon a risk assessment.	The Forester performs the large majority of tree complaint inspections.	There is insufficient data to identify turnaround time; however there is insufficient staff to meet this best practice.	Develop turn-around time metrics for tree trimming complaints and appropriate performance objectives for this activity.
The Department uses a two-person crew for tree maintenance: one staff in the aerial tower and one staff on the ground chipping brush.	Two-person tree trim crews are utilized.		Continue best practice tree trimming crew sizes.

APPENDIX D - SAMPLE PARK RATING SHEET

Park Name:

Park Type:

Condition / Criteria	No/Minor Problem(s)			Multiple/Major Problem(s)		Comments
Score (High to Low)	5	4	3	2	1	
Signs were visible (i.e., well placed and not obscured by overgrown plants or weeds) and in good condition.						
The parking lot was in good condition. There were no potholes, litter, and the striping was clearly visible.						
Tables were well maintained. Surfaces were painted or sanded. There was no graffiti on tables.						
Trash receptacles were available and clean.						
Grills were well maintained and clean, including free of ashes and coals.						
Baseball / Softball fields were well maintained. Backstop was in good condition, stable with no holes. In field and out fields were well maintained, mowed, and level.						
Basketball Court was in good condition. Court was striped. Nets and backboards were in good condition.						
Tennis Court was in good condition. Court was striped. Nets in good condition.						
Trees & shrubs were pruned. Beds maintained.						
Turf was mowed and trimmings removed. There were no bare spots. Edging was complete and irrigation was satisfactory (lack of brown spots or puddles).						
The playground equipment was in good condition. Equipment was not defaced or in need of repainting or refinishing.						
Equipment was generally safe. Equipment was not broken, corroded, loose or missing parts.						
The surface under the equipment was soft and level.						
Cleanliness: Walkways were free of litter and debris. Grass and shrubs were trimmed and not growing on walkways.						
Condition: Walkways were paved, smooth, and even.						
Condition: Restroom facilities were clean, stocked with toilet paper, and absent graffiti.						
Important Observations						

APPENDIX E - Primary Park Maintenance Activities

Work Activity	Activity Description
Organic weed control	Organic herbicides are utilized to control weeds in turf.
Planted area fertilization	Planted areas are fertilized to provide adequate nutrients and optimum growth.
Tree and shrub pruning	From ANSI A300: Reasons for pruning include, but are not limited to, reducing risk, maintaining or improving tree health and structure, improving aesthetics, or satisfying a specific need.
Tree Planting and Tree Removal	Performed for the health and safety of the urban forest to include removal of diseased, severely damaged, or unsafe trees as well as rehabilitation and ambiance planting of the urban forest.
Sports courts cleaning	Courts are cleaned to remove all litter, including broken glass or other such debris.
Picnic table and barbecue cleaning	Picnic tables are to be washed down as needed to provide clean, sanitary surfaces. This may result in weekly cleaning in high-use areas. Barbecues are to be cleaned as needed to remove ashes and baked on food residue. A wire brush will work for cleaning grills. Park benches are to be kept clean and sanitary. This may require washing off debris and spilled material.
Maintenance of Site Amenities	Benches, drinking fountains, concrete, asphalt, restroom fixtures, signs, parking lots, etc. received a variety of preventive and corrective maintenance activities based upon work orders and preventive maintenance schedules.
Ponds and Waterways	Erosion control, water quality control and testing, riparian maintenance, waterway access, dock maintenance, etc. are all representative activities performed in ponds and waterways.
Pathways	Hard surfaces, painting, striping.