



2016-20
Strategic Plan



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MISSION

To enrich community life through healthy leisure pursuits and an appreciation of the natural world.

VISION

To provide extraordinary experiences in parks and recreation, consistently exceeding the public's expectations, while:

- Inspiring environmental stewardship and education
- Using nimble decision-making and creative solutions
- Creating a harmonious workplace with passionate, forward-thinking staff that share true camaraderie
- Enriching the quality of life for our community

VALUES

Communication: We make earnest efforts to connect regularly and effectively with residents. In addition, within the District, we talk to those impacted by our decisions, we speak openly with one another in a trustworthy environment, and we provide direct feedback to others.

Accountability: We demonstrate responsibility to the District and the community in everything we do. We have congruency between our words and our actions.

Innovation: We create an environment that inspires new ideas, we view the District through a different set of lenses, and question why we do things the way we do. In addition, we desire to nimbly change our services in response to continuously changing customer requirements.

Integrity: We deliver on what we promise to do by adhering to the highest ethical standards. This results in trust and respect toward one another.

Teamwork: The District's greater good guides our actions. We respect others and work cooperatively and collaboratively, express our differences of opinion, and listen to one another.

Introduction

The Park District of Highland Park is committed to be an excellent, accountable, ethical, and sustainable organization based on a strong commitment to its mission, vision, and values. As part of that commitment, the District utilizes two planning mechanisms to stay on course and achieve these goals – a long-term master plan and a short-term strategic plan. The plans work together to provide the District with a roadmap to exceed our resident and customer expectations by delivering extraordinary experiences within our parks and facilities as well as through our programs and services.

GREENPRINT 2024

Adopted by the Board of Commissioners in December 2015, GreenPrint 2024 is the District's master plan which represents a new vision for the District and will guide our future facility and program development decisions over the next ten years. A framework for investment in the park system over the next decade, GreenPrint 2024 will ensure that resources are aligned with current and future resident needs, community values, and the District's changing demographics.



2016-20 STRATEGIC PLAN

At the end of 2016, the District will complete its 2012-16 Strategic Plan. As one of the top park districts in the state and an "Illinois Distinguished Agency" with a wide variety of outstanding programs, events, parks and facilities, it is important for the District to continue to be proactive meeting the community's ever-changing demands for programs and facilities.

In February 2016, staff began work on development of the 2016-20 Strategic Plan that:

- Establishes a near-term future direction
- Aligns the organization with a strategic direction
- Incorporates resident needs into future planning
- Drives innovation as part of the organizational culture
- Strengthens and identifies elements of organizational culture through values
- Develops preliminary approaches to infrastructure and capital project needs

Initiatives of the new plan are both a continuation of the 2012-16 Strategic Plan and meet the near-term objectives identified in the District's GreenPrint 2024 10-year master plan. The strategic plan also incorporates new initiatives identified through a series of focus groups with staff and community representatives.

Community & Staff Input

The Park District began the strategic planning process by engaging staff and the community in a series of focus groups to identify the District's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as they related to programs/services, parks/facilities, operations, and employee productivity. Five focus groups were conducted and the feedback was consolidated with additional feedback contained in the GreenPrint 2024 master plan.

MARKETING

- Current marketing strategies are effective and the new website is well-liked

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

- Interdepartmental support is positive, however communication between departments could be improved

TECHNOLOGY/REGISTRATION

- Due to outdated IT infrastructure and inadequate software solutions, registration can be difficult and inconvenient
- Registration deadlines are inconsistent across the board
- Implementation of new recreation management software needs to be smooth both internally and externally

STAFF RECRUITING

- More effective recruitment strategies are needed, specifically for seasonal staff.

EFFICIENCIES

- Staff could be more effective with additional planning time, work space, and support staff
- Time is often disproportionately spent on programs and services that get little use
- Residents feel there needs better synergy between city, PDHP, and school districts to make life in Highland Park better

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Capital Projects and GreenPrint 2024 will improve infrastructure and resources
- Facilities are well-maintained, clean, accessible, and safe
- GreenPrint 2024 is a strong plan for future growth, development and improved staff efficiency.
- There is a wide variety of facilities and parks to serve the vast needs of the community

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

- Customer needs are being met with the variety of programs and convenient registration at facilities
- Become more flexible in accommodating resident's needs regarding resident requests
- At times, staff has difficulty meeting unrealistic resident demands
- Time and resource management would better serve the majority of our target market
- Better management of program scheduling, profitability, competition, trends and lifecycles as well as introduction of new curriculums or programs at strategic times
- Increase the availability of high use programs to avoid waitlists or sending users elsewhere
- Encourage community members to engage with each other at facilities, in programs, and at events
- Become an advocate for younger generations to develop stronger passions for the natural world
- Provide more opportunities for residents to participate in passive recreation - open spaces
- Some key demographic groups, specifically seniors, are not adequately served by existing program offerings
- Programs are highly valued and well-used by residents (particularly camp programs)



PARKS AND FACILITIES

- Recreation facilities, maintenance facilities, classroom facilities, and office facilities are aging and not up to the standard of peer communities
- The condition/quality of facilities do not align with community character or resident expectations
- Community priority facility concerns include: Sunset Valley Golf Course, lakefront, trails, athletic fields, golf practice facilities, concessions, and the Recreation Center of Highland Park
- Facilities do not take advantage of existing regional transportation access like public transit, which could better link the community to these assets
- Centralization of some facilities could be beneficial to operations and maintenance efficiency
- Existing wayfinding signage lacks cohesiveness and visibility
- Facility space limits the ability to expand popular program areas and activities
- Highland Park has many natural resources such as Lake Michigan and many open spaces
- Poor lighting exists in many ball fields and facilities
- Consideration should be given to taking over senior services

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Customer service is consistently delivered at a high standard through communication and delivery of programs based on customer needs and expectations
- Staff is often reactionary to the "squeaky wheel" -- spending time on small but loud groups
- Retain customer loyalty and satisfaction by encouraging use of multiple programs and facilities
- Customer expectations are always rising and we are limited in the resources we can allocate to programs



EMPLOYEE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

- Staffs feel there is not enough empowerment
- Improvement should be made to the staff appraisal process
- Overall, staff take pride in their work and deliver high quality results
- Continue to provide staff training and support growth and personal development
- Budget restrictions have limited educational opportunities and salary increases
- Continue to provide employee outlets that enable them to provide feedback on benefits and staff enrichment opportunities
- Create growth opportunities for advancement and implement an employee retention program and succession plan to promote longevity

Top 5 Strategic Priorities Identified in Community Focus Groups included:

- Facility maintenance, improvement and/or expansion (Recreation Center of Highland Park, Sunset Valley Golf Course, Centennial Ice Arena, Park Avenue)
- Build awareness of environment, ecology and conservation, open space
- Continue soliciting community feedback, transparency, communication
- Higher quality and excellence in programs and services
- Program variety (times, programs, ages)
- Value pricing/affordability
- Synergies with schools, city government, and other community groups

Top 5 Words that Describe the Park District Identified in Community Focus Groups

- Variety
- User-friendly
- Fun
- Community
- Excellence

Strategic Themes

Through staff and community feedback analysis, the Park District refined and categorized major focus areas based around four business perspectives -- Customer, Financial, Internal Business, Learning and Growth. These perspectives were further defined into four strategic themes that provide the framework and establish direction for the detailed strategic plan. The themes follow the four perspectives and include:

- Customer: Maximize the Customer Experience
- Financial: Sustained Financial Health
- Internal Business: Effective Operational Excellence
- Learning and Growth: Unified and Engaged Work Culture



Objectives

Two to four objectives support each of the four strategic themes. The objectives drill down on what the District must accomplish to support the four major themes. The following is a list of objectives and a specific definition of each.

THEME: MAXIMIZE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Objective #1 - Manage the Program Portfolio

With a focus on meeting the needs of the community through an appropriate, streamlined offering of high quality programs and services, the Park District will take a holistic approach to continuously evaluating the success of current programs and services while also assessing the competitive marketplace and addressing new industry trends.

Objective #2 - Build/Brand a Sense of Community

Develop new opportunities through partnerships, programs, services, and outreach that provide stronger connections to the community and build on the District's leadership role.

Objective #3 - Create Lasting Impressions

Building on the Park District's philosophy of providing the "WOW Factor", staff will continue to exceed customer expectations, differentiate services from our competitors, and create experiences that leave participants wanting to come back, time and time again.

Objective #4 - Build a Customer Relationship Management Program

In effort to attract and retain customers, the Park District will implement a holistic plan for building personal relationships with residents.



THEME: EFFECTIVE, OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective #5 - Improve Internal Communication

Adopt a standardized process for efficient internal and external communication.

Objective #6 - Create Effective Strategies for Employee recruitment

Develop a clearly defined recruiting strategy that communicates the Park District brand message, targets applicants, utilizes popular recruiting resources, and effectively markets the advantages of working for the Park District.

Objective #7 - Implement a User Friendly Registration Process

With the implementation of new recreation management software, focus efforts on consistently implementing customer friendly systems and processes.

Objective #8 - Create Efficiencies Through Innovative Technology

Utilize innovative electronic systems & technologies for employment processes, document and work order management.

Objective #9 - Create a Green Culture

Continue to manage and maintain infrastructure in a sustainable manner that is consistent with the vision of inspiring environmental stewardship and education.

Objective #10 - Continue Cutting-Edge Integrated Marketing Systems

Test, implement, and utilize new marketing strategies to effectively support the growth and expansion of programs,

Objectives (continued)

services, and the brand.

THEME: UNIFIED AND ENGAGED WORK CULTURE

Objective #11 - Create an Employee Growth and Development Plan

Expand employee training programs to include high level training opportunities that align with "position specific" core competencies and mission critical objectives to enhance employee knowledge-base, skills, and abilities.

Objective #12 - Be the "Employer of Choice"

Continue to build a culture that empowers and engages staff, provides competitive compensation and benefits, develops leaders, and inspires trust to create a stronger sense of internal satisfaction and pride.

Objective #13 - Integrate Core Values Into the Work Culture

Develop a clearly defined strategy of integrating core values into the work culture to increase employee engagement, to improve Return on Investment, and to reduce turnover by "walking the talk".

THEME: SUSTAINED FINANCIAL HEALTH

Objective #14 - Implement Key Performance Measures

Identify and implement standardized performance-based tools that assist staff in measuring and managing strategic and operational initiatives to meet District goals.

Objective #15 - Implement Creative Strategies for Alternative Sources of Revenue

Identify revenue opportunities that: lessen reliance on property tax revenue; offset operational expenditures; and ensure future facility and program growth -- without large increases in registration fees.

Objective #16 - Identify Efficiencies to Reduce Expenses

Implement operational efficiencies in staffing, infrastructure, purchasing, and energy use to sustain a healthy financial position for facility and program cost centers.



Initiatives

Each objective will be accomplished through completion of individual initiatives. Initiatives were assigned a timeframe for completion:

- Oct 2016 - Dec 2017 – **SHORT-TERM**
- Jan 2018 - Jan 2019 – **MID-TERM**
- Jan 2019 - Jan 2020 – **LONG-TERM**
- Ongoing goals repeated during the entire time period – **ON GOING**

THEME: MAXIMIZE THE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Objective #1 - Manage the Park District Program Portfolio

1. Evaluate program/service pricing to assess pricing effectiveness and identify pricing opportunities **MID-TERM**
2. Create a global strategy for scheduling programs/services **MID-TERM**
3. Develop a program/service categorizing system based on the impact to the entire community **SHORT-TERM**
4. Evaluate program lifecycles to determine areas of growth and saturation **SHORT-TERM**
5. Create standards that define program success **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #2 - Build/Brand a Sense of Community

1. Develop ongoing opportunities to connect with other community organizations **ONGOING**
2. Build partnerships with local organizations and units of government **ONGOING**
3. Focus on connecting the community through programs/services **ONGOING**

Objective #3 - Create Lasting Impressions

1. Exceed customer expectations through detailed planning of the customer experience **ONGOING**
2. Implement a customer service philosophy of "Make their Day" **ONGOING**
3. Design spaces and infrastructure based on the customer experience **ONGOING**

Objective #4 - Build a Customer Relationship Management Program

1. Implement a customer service philosophy of "Make it Personal" **SHORT-TERM**
2. Identify stages of the customer lifecycle and develop standards **MID-TERM**
3. Create loyalty and satisfaction by increasing engagement and connections with the community (i.e.: committees, feedback, focus groups etc.) **SHORT-TERM**

THEME: EFFECTIVE OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Objective #5 - Improve Internal Communication

1. Create standards and processes for improved efficiency and consistency through effective internal communication and information management **SHORT-TERM**
2. Create opportunities to cross-train interdepartmental responsibilities and create an internal philosophy of "check your wake" in effort to increase awareness of how decisions can affect other departments **SHORT-TERM**
3. Create standards for effective meetings **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #6 - Create Effective Strategies for Employee Recruitment

1. Create employee recruitment marketing strategy **SHORT-TERM**
2. Identify specific responsibilities for a recruitment coordinator and implement position **SHORT-TERM**
3. Build relationships with educational institutions (colleges, high schools) and implement programs that train and develop young professionals from (high school through college) **SHORT-TERM**
4. Evaluate effectiveness of Applitrack and consider application software alternatives **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #7 - Implement a User Friendly Registration Process

1. Create standard operating procedures to ensure consistent and effective implementation of RecTrac software **SHORT-TERM**
2. Stay abreast of cutting-edge use of RecTrac and registration technologies **ONGOING**
3. Become experts in our registration process and educate the community **SHORT-TERM**

Initiatives (continued)

Objective #8 - Create District-Wide Efficiencies Through Innovative Technology

1. Build an electronic document management system, including an intranet and shared drive **LONG-TERM**
2. Create a work order/help desk solution **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #9 - Create a Green Culture

1. Educate staff on the importance of sustainability and energy efficiency **SHORT-TERM**
2. Identify potential grants **ONGOING**
3. Conduct a "green infrastructure" audit at parks and facilities including inventory and assessment to identify areas for potential cost savings **SHORT-TERM**
4. Identify ways to reduce, reuse, and recycle **ONGOING**

Objective #10 - Continue Cutting Edge Integrated Marketing Systems.

1. Capitalize on content marketing opportunities as a way to "tell our story" and highlight our experts **SHORT-TERM**
2. Seek and utilize brand ambassadors **SHORT-TERM**
3. Brand and promote the Parks Foundation **SHORT-TERM**
4. Create a media kit to post on our website so various media outlets can easily collect consistent background regarding the Park District and our executives **SHORT-TERM**
5. Develop a community-wide biking and walking trail marketing program **MID-TERM**
6. Conduct market testing with social and digital media advertising **ONGOING**



THEME: UNIFIED AND ENGAGED WORK CULTURE

Objective #11 - Create a Plan for Employee Growth and Development Plan

1. Identify "core competencies" required for each position **MID-TERM**
2. Adopt a systematic approach to identifying education and training opportunities that align with "core competencies" **ONGOING**
3. Create an "education team" and a process to manage effective trainings that are aligned with specific positions **MID-TERM**

Objective #12 - Be the "Employer of Choice"

1. Build a Culture of Trust **ONGOING**
2. Develop strategies that provide staff an opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute **MID-TERM**

Objective #13 - Integrate Core Values Into the Work Culture

1. Improve the appraisal process including the incorporation of values and "core competencies" **MID-TERM**
2. Brand core values into our culture **MID-TERM**
3. Complete a 360 assessment that includes core values **SHORT-TERM**

THEME: SUSTAINED FINANCIAL HEALTH

Objective #14 - Implement Key Performance Measures

1. Educate staff, identify, and prioritize key performance measures **SHORT-TERM**
2. Create a consistent, convenient, and practical standard of measurement and reporting format **SHORT-TERM**
3. Create annual team targets that align with key performance measures **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #15 - Implement Creative Strategies for Alternative Sources of Revenue

1. Create a Parks Foundation **SHORT-TERM**
2. Expand the sponsorship program **ONGOING**
3. Generate additional funds for SMILE Fund **ONGOING**
4. Develop creative opportunities that generate net revenue **SHORT-TERM**

Objective #16 - Identify Efficiencies to Reduce Expenses

1. Identify cost effective purchasing strategies **ONGOING**
2. Implement green initiatives and energy efficiencies **SHORT-TERM**
3. Identify operation efficiencies **SHORT-TERM**

Implementation

Dedicated staff time will be required to complete the Strategic Plan. All full-time staff will be assigned to working committees to streamline efforts and ensure effective teamwork, communication, and accountability.

The plan will be broken into fiscal years. Prior to the beginning of each fiscal year, strategic plan initiatives scheduled for the upcoming year will be evaluated and timelines may be amended to accommodate anticipated operational workloads. This will ensure staff can set realistic schedules that can be completed without sacrificing on-going operations.

Initiatives will be supported by specific action items developed on an annual basis by the working committees. An annual assignment of action items will ensure that the plan is flexible and can evolve to meet potential District or community changes that may occur during the 4 years.

It is the working committee's responsibility to provide progress updates in monthly and quarterly reports. A comprehensive 2016-20 Strategic Plan progress report will be provided to the Park District of Highland Park Board of Commissioners once a year. The progress report will be posted on the Park District website for public viewing.





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