



South Platte River

South Suburban
Parks & Recreation 2022

Master Plan

ADOPTED APRIL, 2023



*deKoevend Park and
High Line Canal*



MASTER PLAN

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cook Creek Pool



Bluffs 8K Trail Run
Bluffs Regional Park

PLAN OVERVIEW

Plan Purpose

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1959, South Suburban Park and Recreation District (SSPRD) is a unique community-driven organization providing indoor and outdoor recreation amenities to six communities and three counties in the southern Denver metropolitan area. The South Suburban boundary encompasses a 46 square mile area. The District includes the Town of Bow Mar, the Town of Columbine Valley, the City of Littleton, the City of Sheridan, the City of Centennial west of 1-25, the City of Lone Tree, and unincorporated portions of Douglas County, Jefferson County, and Arapahoe County. By 2026, more than 162,000 district residents and surrounding metro areas will count on South Suburban to enhance healthy living, community connections, wellness, play, and the quality of the place they live. The South Suburban Park and Recreation District provides parks and open space, recreation facilities, trails, wellness and recreation programs, and other facilities and services.

The 2022 Master Plan helps South Suburban plan for the future by meeting community needs and desires, managing resources, and meeting requirements for reaccreditation by the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA). CAPRA accreditation is a mark of excellence and demonstrates that the agency meets national best practices standards with a commitment to providing quality programs, services, and customer service. The South Suburban Park and Recreation District received its first CAPRA accreditation in 2019 and continues to update its Parks and Recreation Master Plan every five years to maintain accreditation. This plan offers comprehensive recommendations for improvements to parks, recreation facilities, and programs.



ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS

This comprehensive District-wide Master Plan builds off recent planning efforts, including the 2017 SSPRD Master Plan and the 2022 SSPRD Strategic Plan, and aligns with other planning efforts within the region:

- Arapahoe County Comprehensive Plan 2018
- Arapahoe County Open Spaces Master Plan 2021
- Arapahoe County Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan 2017
- CDOT Santa Fe Drive Action Plan 2022
- Centennial Trail and Recreation Plan 2017
- City of Lone Tree Comprehensive Plan 2019
- Columbine Valley Master Plan 2020
- Douglas County Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan (2012-2030)
- Envision Littleton Comprehensive Plan 2019
- High Line Conservancy Master Plan 2019
- Jeffco Trails Plan 2020
- Jefferson County 2020 Preservation Progress
- Jefferson County Open Space Conservation Greenprint 2020
- Littleton Nature Within Reach Year One Report 2022
- Littleton Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan 2016 (to be updated in 2023)
- Sheridan Comprehensive Plan 2015
- South Platte River Corridor Vision 2013

Mission

South Suburban Park and Recreation District is a citizen-founded organization with a mission to foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails, and open space, and by providing recreational services and programs.



Archery Camp

Plan Creation Overview

PLANNING PROCESS

The 2022 Master Plan is an update to the 2017 Master Plan and builds off the energy of new leadership, responds to the needs of South Suburban's diverse communities, and envisions how this award-winning system can find fresh ways to implement the South Suburban mission and serve the community. Approximately 2,926 people provided direct input in the plan creation process through a variety of methods. Figure 1 on the following page graphically represents the four components of the plan creation process.

CONTEXT OF UNDERSTANDING

The planning team conducted substantial research and analysis to understand the key factors impacting South Suburban's future. The process used to develop the 2022 Master Plan includes the following:

- Update the inventory database of the SSPRD parks and open space system, recreation facilities, and trails
- Update and analyze the park classifications
- Provide a demographic and population profile
- Understanding equity in the SSPRD parks system through mapping and level of service analysis
- Conduct community engagement, including in-person events and an online survey
- Examine the park types and recreation facilities and amounts per capita provided by comparable jurisdictions (benchmarking)
- Conduct a conditions assessment of the SSPRD parks system and facilities
- Identify best practices

[Chapter 2](#) provides an overview of these findings, and the Master Plan Appendices provide additional details.

SHARED VISION

To ensure community voices are a vital part of the South Suburban Park and Recreation District 2022 Master Plan, South Suburban staff and the planning team conducted multiple engagement processes and events, including:

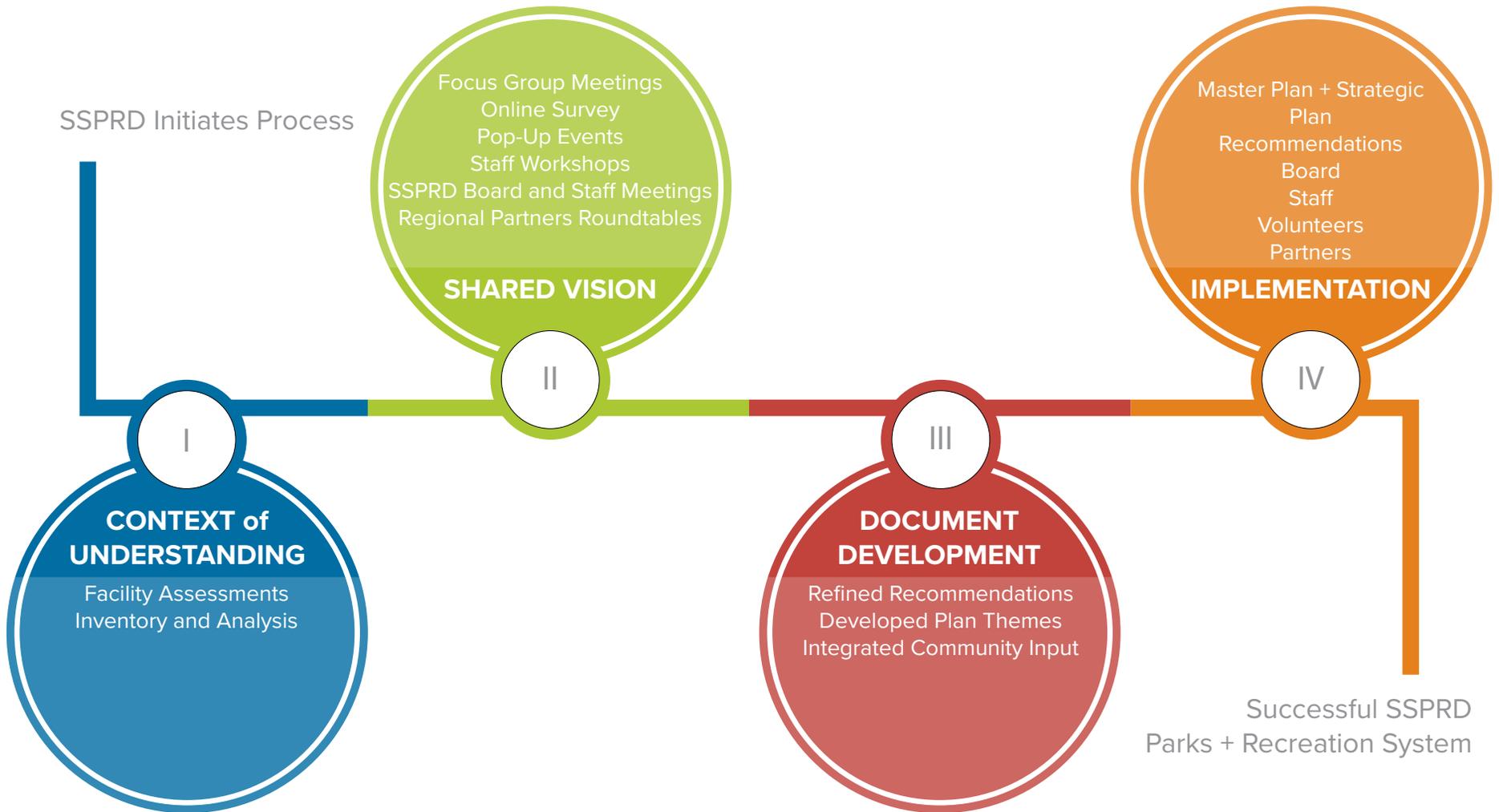
- Regional Roundtable meeting with municipal and county partners
- Focus group meetings with interested and affected agencies, organizations, programming partners, and user groups
- Online open community survey offered in both English and Spanish
- Pop-up activity engagement booths at various community events
- Digital outreach and advertising
- Webpage with updated project and schedule information

The plan's five Guiding Principles were distilled directly from community input in these outreach efforts. Community, municipal, and county partners provided input at key milestones in the planning process, and the SSPRD Board of Directors participated in planning meetings and briefings. Beyond this planning process, the SSPRD staff regularly meet and collaborate with municipal and county partners to ensure alignment of needs and investment of available resources.

DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

The planning team synthesized the analysis and community input into this plan based on the framework of the guiding principles and prioritization criteria described on page 9. The Master Plan is an overarching guiding document implemented through annual budgets and work plans, a Three Year Financial Plan, and a Five Year Capital Improvement Plan.

FIGURE 1: Master Plan Planning Process



How to Use This Document

HOW DO THE MASTER PLAN AND STRATEGIC PLAN RELATE?

The 2022 Master Plan helps establish the foundation of a community-driven vision for improvements to parks and recreation offerings. The 2022 Strategic Plan is a complementary document that provides the organization with direction to improve internal operations and services in support of the Master Plan Guiding Principles. The goals of these documents are to provide prioritized and clear recommendations to guide South Suburban Park and Recreation District's decision-making process over the next five years. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between these two plan documents.

ORGANIZED BY GUIDING PRINCIPLES (PLAN FRAMEWORK)

Figure 3 shows the Master Plan Framework, which is informed by South Suburban's Mission and Guiding Principles. Guiding Principles are broad objectives describing what South Suburban aspires to achieve, inspired by community input and recent staff planning efforts of the 2022 Strategic Plan. The plan framework charts a course toward ensuring South Suburban's long-term sustainability and ability to contribute to the community's physical, emotional, and social wellness.

The Master and Strategic Plans share the South Suburban Park and Recreation District Mission and five Guiding Principles. The 2022 Guiding Principles include:

1. Quality First
2. Connect Community
3. Enrich Wellness
4. Stewards of Nature and Sustainability
5. Fiscal Responsibility

The Guiding Principles organize the Master Plan's Opportunities for Improvement, which are plan recommendations outlined in [\(Chapter 3\)](#). Each Guiding Principle's content explores the following framework:

- Why This is Important
- Community Desires
- Opportunities for Improvement and Action Items

[Chapter 4](#) provides implementation considerations, including partnership opportunities and links to related plans. The Master Plan [Appendices](#) contains more detailed information on the planning process, inventory, assessments, and community outreach findings.

FIGURE 2: Strategic and Master Plan Components



Figure 3: Master Plan Framework



GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Quality First

We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. We strive to maintain and improve the quality of our offerings and customer service with innovations to remain industry leaders.



Connect Community

We create an inclusive culture that engages, welcomes, and connects all members of the community to feel a sense of belonging in our spaces and programs. We effectively communicate and provide diverse offerings which are accessible to all ages, abilities, and cultures.



Enrich Wellness

We prioritize wellness by offering indoor and outdoor recreation that strengthens bodies, engages minds, and refreshes a person's spirit. We facilitate wellness by providing recreation opportunities that represent the characteristics and needs of our diverse neighborhoods and communities.



Stewards of Nature and Sustainability

We conserve and enhance natural systems with green spaces, wildlife areas, and water recreation that promote interaction and respect for nature. We provide environmental education and volunteer opportunities to encourage community stewardship. Our spaces are designed and managed to be resilient environmental assets.



Fiscal Responsibility

We make investments with a long-range view of fiscal responsibility, balancing emerging needs while maintaining the quality of indoor facilities, outdoor spaces, and programs. We use funding responsibly and are transparent about priorities. We manage resources through extensive planning processes, investing in infrastructure, efficient operations, and strategic partnerships.

Opportunities for Improvement Summary

QUALITY FIRST

Q.1 Increase maintenance standards for current parks, trails, open space, golf courses, and facilities.

Q.2 Invest in replacing assets that can better meet the community's needs, will increase capacity and participation, can lower long-term maintenance and operation costs, are in poor condition, and/or have reached end-of-life usability.

Q.3 Increase visibility as leaders in the parks and recreation industry by maintaining and pursuing industry accreditations and certifications.

CONNECT COMMUNITY

C.1 Build community awareness of South Suburban by conducting research and creating opportunities to better understand community needs and desires for recreation programs, facilities, and spaces.

C.2 Reinforce parks and open spaces as destinations that are integrated into the community and designed with features that are accessible to all ages and abilities.

C.3 Invest in neighborhood parks as places that represent the community through placemaking and provide opportunities for gathering, recreation, and spending time in nature.

ENRICH WELLNESS

W.1 Fill the need created by increased recreation activity with new and/or updated facilities and amenities. Upgrade equipment and venues to support facilities and programs that can increase participation.

W.2 Assess field and facility schedules and rental strategies to allow for more flexibility, accommodate more uses and users, and extend seasonality.

W.3 Create accessible and diverse programs that provide opportunities for all ages, abilities, and incomes and strive to increase the cultural relevancy of programming for underserved communities.

STEWARDS OF NATURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

N.1 Improve opportunities for self-guided and programmed nature exploration and experiences.

N.2 Create opportunities for the community to learn about nature and urban wildlife.

N.3 Identify and invest in sustainability programs and equipment to improve resiliency of our spaces.

N.4 Provide programs and educational opportunities that connect people to places to encourage discovery, exploration, stewardship, play, admiration, and social opportunities.

N.5 Strengthen and enhance the trail network to create stronger connections and improved access between neighborhoods, parks, open spaces, trail corridors, and the larger community.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

F.1 Identify shared goals and continue to collaborate with municipal, county, and community partners on planning efforts and infrastructure projects to collaborate rather than duplicate efforts.

F.2 Find effective solutions to enhance parks and meet park and open space needs as the populations and boundaries of South Suburban communities grow.

F.3 Recommend municipalities and counties collaborate to create complementary fee-in-lieu/land dedication policies.

F.4 Continue and expand upon responsible use of resources and appropriate expenditures.

Recommendation Overview

RECOMMENDED OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Master Plan’s “Opportunities for Improvement” are overarching recommendations that reflect the community’s aspirations for potential Master Plan improvements. These recommendations have been prioritized based on assessments of needs and available resources over the next five years. Given South Suburban’s unique position in serving multiple municipal and county constituents, there is considerable care given to providing recommendations that offer direction but also remain flexible to meet the various needs of each community.

MASTER PLAN PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

The 2022 Master Plan process led to the development of prioritization criteria that South Suburban Park and Recreation District can use to evaluate future projects and improvements for implementation. Projects that meet the following criteria shall receive higher priority for funding and timing:

- Opportunities with the highest community interest or related to the community-driven guiding principles: Quality First, Connect Community, Enrich Wellness, Stewards of Nature and Sustainability, and Fiscal Responsibility
- Opportunities that provide recreational amenities to fill gaps in service or access or located in equity areas
- Opportunities with moderate to low impact on maintenance and operations expenses
- Opportunities that improve facilities that have reached end-of-life usability
- Opportunities that align with municipal and county partners’ planning efforts
- Opportunities with the highest impact to address capacity needs
- Opportunities that offer a high return on investment

RECOMMENDATION IMPLEMENTATION

For over 63 years, South Suburban has provided recreation facilities to the community. Over time, facilities age and need repair or replacement. Some facilities and properties are also leased or managed and not owned by South Suburban. With limited funds and construction costs increasing annually, South Suburban carefully chooses projects for upgrades and repair. Annual budgets, work plans, the Three Year Financial Plan, and the Five Year Capital Improvement Plan are updated annually to reflect changes in investment and improvement actions.



*Early programming,
tennis instruction*

BACKGROUND



*Abbott Park,
Centennial
Historic Photo*



DISTRICT HISTORY

To understand South Suburban's purpose, it is important to understand why the District was initially formed. South Suburban Park and Recreation District was created in 1959 by a citizen committee comprised of residents that imagined a park and recreation organization supported by citizens residing within the boundaries of their community. This parks and recreation organization was intended to plan and construct public parks and develop recreational programs for the enjoyment and benefit of residents within the growing community.

Recreational programming and events were developed primarily on school grounds until South Suburban began acquiring land through partnership or purchase. Softball, horsemanship, baseball, baton twirling, kite flying, soccer, tennis, square dancing, playground activities, and an "over 50 club" were some of the programs offered in these initial years. South Suburban also utilized the pools from local schools to provide classes for swim lessons as well as open swimming for the public.

PROVIDING RECREATION SINCE 1959

In its first decade, South Suburban Park and Recreation District partnered with the Denver Water Board to open a hiking trail along the High Line Canal, beginning the foundation of South Suburban's 100-mile plus trail network. 1959 marked the construction of the first facility, Harlow Pool, followed by the South Suburban Ice Arena that opened in 1969. Other early amenities include South Suburban Golf Course, Sheridan Recreation Center, Goodson Recreation Center, and Holly Pool and Tennis Courts.

From the historic High Line Canal Trail to more recent facilities like Lone Tree Recreation Center and Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center, South Suburban has fostered partnerships and collaborations to improve quality of life through parks, trails, open space, and recreational facilities and programs. Voters in 2017 approved two ballots enabling the extended funding for the maintenance and preservation of existing assets and for building new facilities and enhancements to existing amenities. These measures supported many improvements, including opening the regional South Suburban Sports Complex in 2021.



2017 PLAN ACHIEVEMENTS

2017 Plan Achievements

The 2017 Master Plan guided major initiatives and accomplishments that support South Suburban's mission of fostering healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails, and open space and by providing recreational services and programs. South Suburban is a community-driven organization that implements public outreach, extensive planning, and strategic partnerships to improve residents' quality of life. This is demonstrated through:

- **CAPRA ACCREDITATION**
- **VOTER-APPROVED TAX SUPPORT**
- **NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIPS**



Public Input Event

2017 Plan Achievements

FACILITY PROJECTS:

- **1 NEW SPORTS COMPLEX**
- **3 OUTDOOR POOL REPLACEMENTS**
- **2 FACILITY REPLACEMENTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION**
- **52 MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS TO EXISTING FACILITIES**



Ben Franklin Pool

2017 Plan Achievements

OUTDOOR RECREATION RENOVATION PROJECTS:

- **26 PARKS WITH PLAYGROUNDS**
- **4 BALLFIELDS**
- **7 BASKETBALL COURTS**
- **5 TENNIS COURTS**
- **2 SYNTHETIC TURF MULTIPURPOSE FIELDS**
- **1 DISC GOLF COURSE**
- **18 SHADE PAVILIONS**
- **41 TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS**
- **3 PARK RESTROOMS**
- **13 IRRIGATION SYSTEMS**



Mary Carter
Greenway Trail



Yoga in Belvedere Park

COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Unified in Recreation

Nationally, regionally and within South Suburban Park and Recreation District, individuals recognize that a community's parks and recreation system is a unifying amenity that improves the quality of life. Parks and recreation facilities have seen a significant increase in use in the past five years, with the COVID-19 pandemic making these close-to-home public resources considered all the more essential.

South Suburban's trails and open spaces are where community members exercise, bicycle to work, walk the dog, and connect with nature. South Suburban's sports fields and facilities are where children get introduced to team activities, leading to a foundation of life-long health and a gateway to intermediate and competitive sports. South Suburban's recreation centers, parks, and pools provide neighborhood and regional destinations for picnicking, splashing, playing, strengthening, relaxing, celebrating, and connecting.

South Suburban Park and Recreation District serves a network of diverse suburban communities within its borders. Day and night, South Suburban's amenities must meet the community's needs while balancing available resources and building key partnerships to help deliver parks and recreation services.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

South Suburban provides recreation to residents within historic Colorado municipalities of Sheridan and Littleton (both founded in 1890) and newer communities of Bow Mar (1958), Columbine Valley (1959), Lone Tree (1996), and Centennial (2001), plus unincorporated areas of three counties (Arapahoe, Douglas, and Jefferson counties). The population within South Suburban’s district boundaries for each municipality and county is displayed in Table 1. The cities with the greatest number of residents within the District’s boundaries are Centennial, Littleton, and Lone Tree (Map 1).

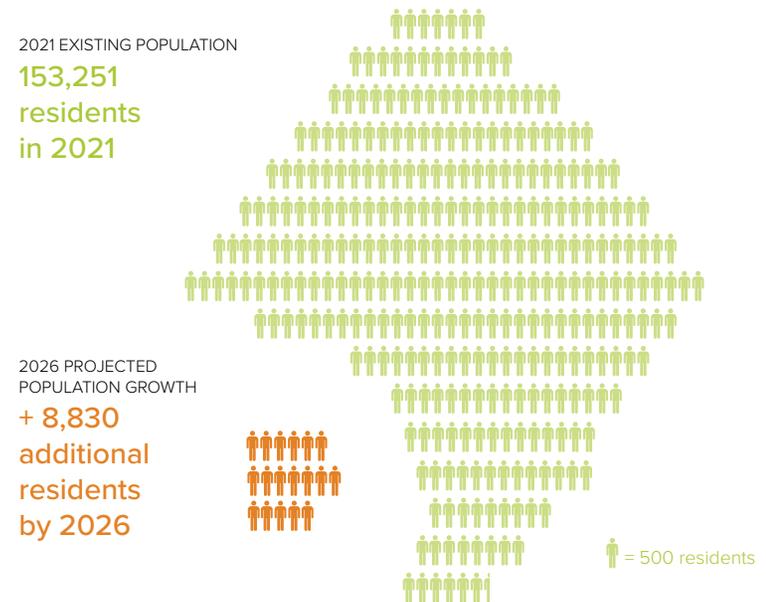
The population in South Suburban is projected to increase from 153,251 in 2021 to 162,081 by 2026, an annual growth rate of 1.13 percent¹. With future growth, it is important to anticipate increased use of parks, trails, and open spaces, including visitation from residents outside South Suburban’s boundaries.

TABLE 1: Population by Municipality

Location	SSPRD Residents 2020 Census	Total Municipal/ County Residents 2020 Census
Town of Bow Mar	587	853
City of Centennial	69,623	108,418
Town of Columbine Valley	1,502	1,502
City of Littleton	45,498	45,652
City of Lone Tree	14,180	14,253
City of Sheridan	6,105	6,105
Unincorporated Arapahoe County	2,937	97,047
Unincorporated Douglas County	10,207	205,800
Total Arapahoe County	123,959	655,070
Total Douglas County	24,935	357,978
Total Jefferson County	2,310	582,910

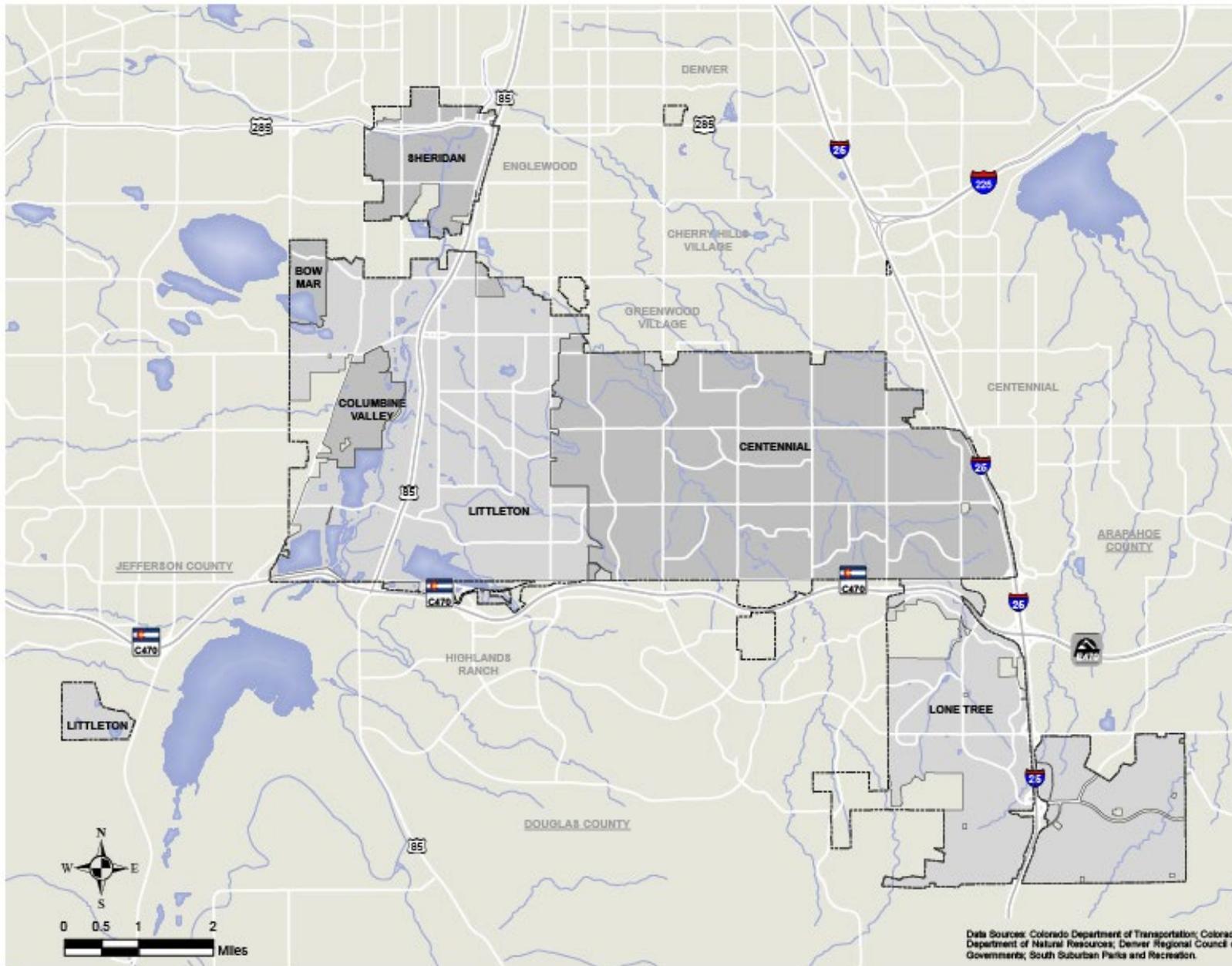
Source: 2020 US Census Data

FIGURE 3: Population Growth



Source: Esri Business Analyst 2020

MAP 1: South Suburban Parks and Recreation District Map



- Legend**
- District Boundary
 - Waterway
 - Lake or Reservoir
 - Municipalities

Data Sources: Colorado Department of Transportation; Colorado Department of Natural Resources; Denver Regional Council of Government; South Suburban Parks and Recreation.

Understanding Community Trends

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE DISTRIBUTION

The age distribution of residents within South Suburban provides insight into how programs and offerings must be tailored to meet the current and future needs of residents. Currently, the largest age group proportionately in South Suburban is those aged between 45 and 65, with the median age at 44 years as of 2021. This group consists of 40 percent of the population. While South Suburban has a smaller percentage of the youth population (28 percent under 24 years old) than the rest of the state, the 65 and older age group in South Suburban accounts for 20.4 percent of the population, significantly higher than the state's 15.3 percent. This age group is projected to increase to 23.3 percent by 2026 within South Suburban's boundary.¹ The State Demographer reports that the percentage of the population over 65 will see a 33% increase in Arapahoe County, a 55% increase in Douglas County, and a 36% increase in Jefferson County by 2030.²

Colorado ranks as one of the healthiest populations in the country, which has many implications for parks and recreation. As populations continue to increase in age, their needs and preferences will evolve. Considering the projected increase of older generations, South Suburban might plan to increase recreational activities and amenities that appeal to active older adults, including low-stress trails, pickleball, exercise classes, and birdwatching features.

FIGURE 4: Age Distribution

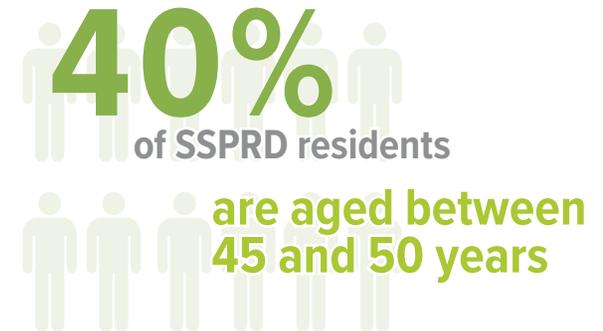
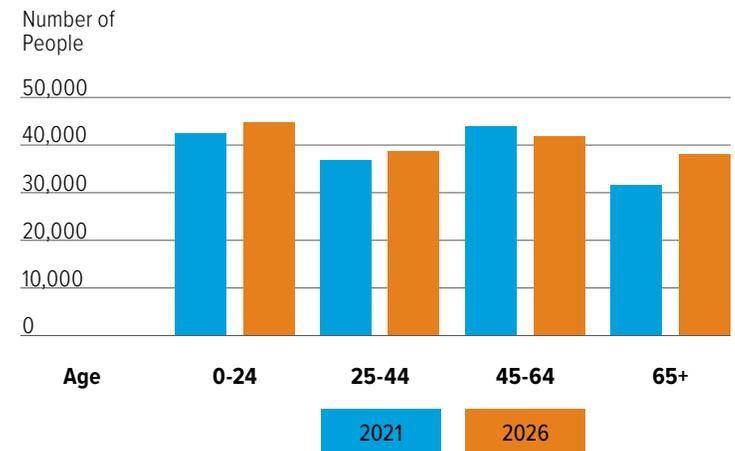


TABLE 2: Age Distribution 2021 - 2026



¹ Business Analyst 2020, Esri

² <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/>



Fitness Classes

Understanding Needs

DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES AND DIFFERENT NEEDS

EQUITY IN PARKS

Equity is the act of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial and fair and provide an opportunity for just outcomes¹, recognizing that each person has different circumstances and opportunities. Equity in parks is the philosophy that public parks and recreation are for everyone and ensures that all communities have access to the benefits of quality parks, recreational spaces, facilities, and programs.

Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Equality is when everyone receives an equal amount of investment. While that sounds fair, it assumes that all people start from the same place, which isn't true. Equity is about ensuring everyone receives the appropriate investment for where they are. South Suburban covers a socioeconomically and culturally diverse area and serves multiple communities, each with unique recreation needs and identity. Each community will require a tailored approach to investing in parks, trails, and recreation services.

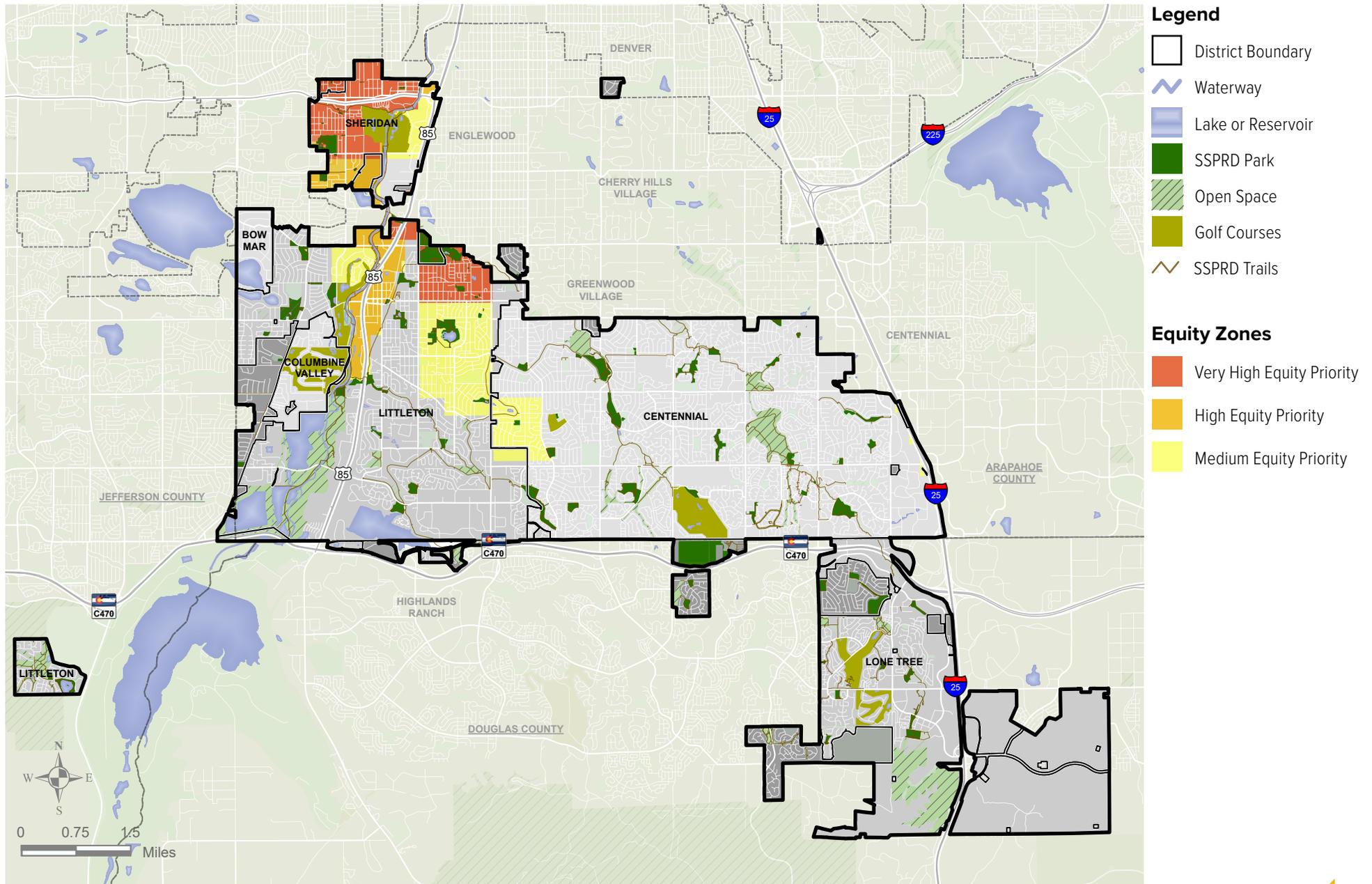
COMMUNITIES AND NEEDS

The Equity Zones Map (Map 2) on the following page highlights equity zones within South Suburban Park and Recreation District. These locations include neighborhoods with higher concentrations of vulnerable populations that also experience health conditions indicative of environmental inequities and provide the greatest opportunities for focused improvements and programs for enhancing equity within South Suburban.

The equity zones are determined by layering indicators of vulnerable populations, as shown in Table 3. This criteria includes the CDC's Healthy Places data on asthma prevalence, mental health distress, physical inactivity, and the CDC Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), containing 15 socio-economic factors mentioned in Table 3. The equity zones are categorized using a priority scale that shows very high, high, and medium equity priority areas. Equity zones with very high priority are in the northwest section of the South Suburban Park and Recreation District, especially within the northwestern portions of Sheridan and the northeastern parts of Littleton. High and medium equity zones also exist within these municipalities. The western portion of Centennial contains a medium equity zone.

TABLE 3: Equity Zone Criteria

CDC Social Vulnerability Index
Socio-Economic
Below poverty
Unemployed
Income
No high school diploma
Household composition and disability
Aged 65 or older
Aged 17 and younger
Older than age five with a disability
Single-parent households
Minority status and language
Minority
Speak English "less than well"
Housing type and transportation
Multi-unit structures
Mobile homes
Crowding
No vehicle
Group quarters
CDC Places: Health
Asthma
Physical Inactivity
Mental Health





*Nature Play
at Creekside
Experience*

INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT

Overview

South Suburban Park and Recreation District owns, manages, and maintains a wide variety of parks, open space, recreation and trail properties, facilities, and golf courses, including over 2,700 acres of parkland and open space. Map 4 indicates the locations of these offerings.

South Suburban maintains over 100 linear miles of regional and local trails within parks and open space properties. Thirteen regional trails are located within South Suburban. South Suburban partners with others in managing over 50 miles of regional trails. A few examples of regional trails include Big Dry Creek, Columbine, High Line Canal, Lee Gulch, Mary Carter Greenway, Little Dry Creek, and Willow Creek. South Suburban provides six regional trailheads to access the regional trails.

South Suburban offers a variety of outdoor recreation amenities, including six pickleball courts at the regional Cornerstone Park, miniature golf at Colorado Journey and Family Sports Center, and outdoor swimming at Holly Pool, Ben Franklin Pool, Harlow Pool, and Cook Creek Pool. Two skate parks, one BMX track, 50 tennis courts, 64 playgrounds, four golf courses, and seven nature play destinations, including Lee Gulch Overlook and Creekside Experience. Passive recreation opportunities exist on trails and are found in open space parks like South Platte Park and RidgeGate Open Space.

In addition to outdoor recreation, South Suburban has indoor facilities and sports centers. Indoor facilities include the South Suburban Sports Complex, Family Sports Center, and four recreation centers: Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center, Goodson Recreation Center, Lone Tree Recreation Center, and the Sheridan Recreation Center. South Suburban Sports Complex features three sheets of ice, two indoor fields, two gymnasiums, a restaurant/bar, party rooms, and a district administration office.

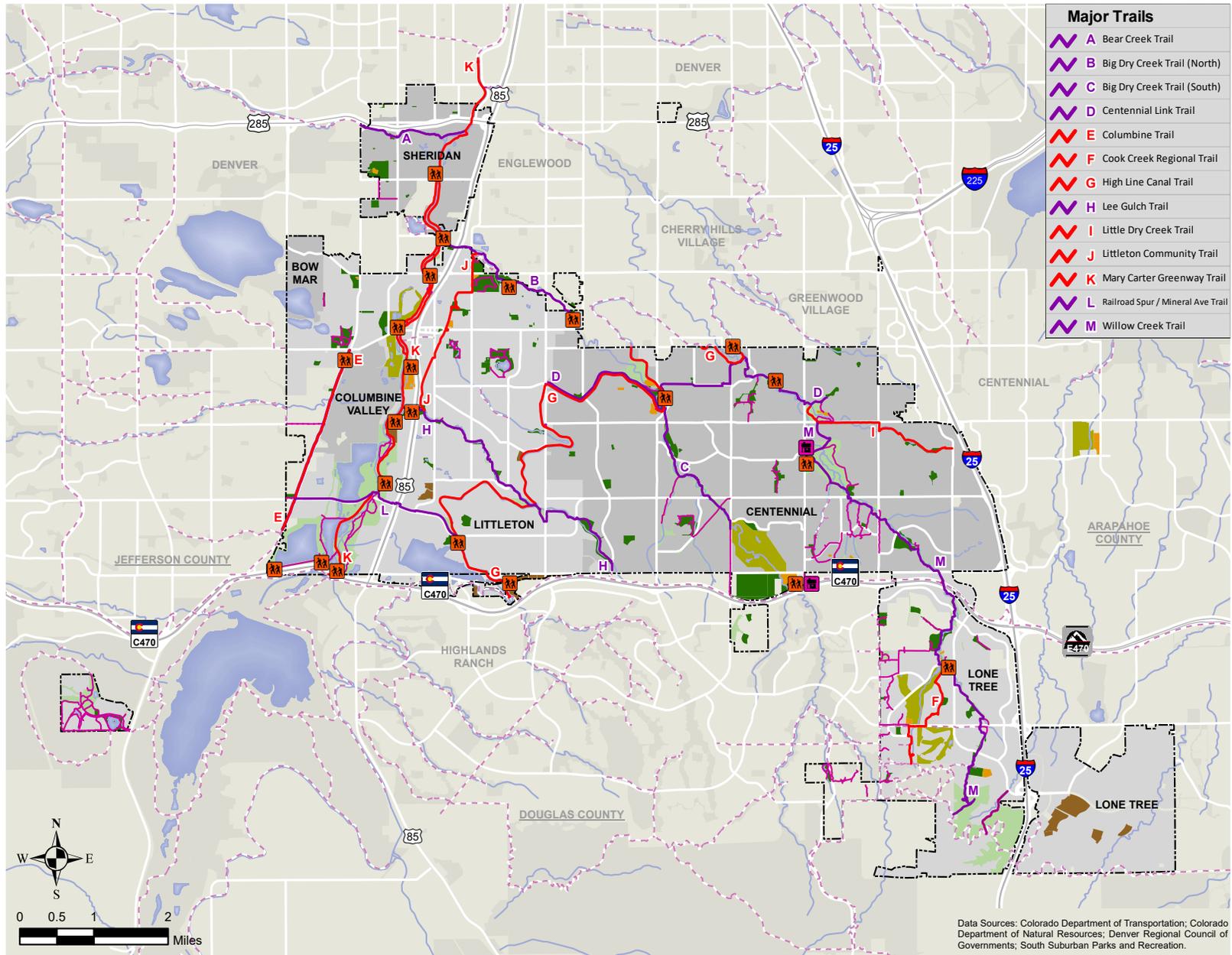


South Suburban Parks and Recreation System

Legend

-  District Boundary
-  Waterway
-  Lake or Reservoir
-  Facility
-  Golf Course
-  Open Space
-  Park
-  School
-  Undeveloped Park
-  Service Center
-  SSPRD Major Trails
-  SSPRD Local Trails
-  Other Area Trails
-  Trailheads with Parking

- ### Major Trails
-  A Bear Creek Trail
 -  B Big Dry Creek Trail (North)
 -  C Big Dry Creek Trail (South)
 -  D Centennial Link Trail
 -  E Columbine Trail
 -  F Cook Creek Regional Trail
 -  G High Line Canal Trail
 -  H Lee Gulch Trail
 -  I Little Dry Creek Trail
 -  J Littleton Community Trail
 -  K Mary Carter Greenway Trail
 -  L Railroad Spur / Mineral Ave Trail
 -  M Willow Creek Trail



Data Sources: Colorado Department of Transportation; Colorado Department of Natural Resources; Denver Regional Council of Governments; South Suburban Parks and Recreation.

Park Inventory and Assessment

PARK AND OPEN SPACE PROPERTIES

South Suburban owns and/or manages 123 park and open space properties that serve various purposes as grouped in nine classifications introduced in Tables 4 and 5. A complete parks and recreation amenities inventory is provided in [Appendix A Inventory and Level of Service](#).

PARK AND OPEN SPACE CLASSIFICATIONS

Park classifications are developed based on the characteristics of the park, such as size, amenities offered, access, and intended duration of use. A detailed description of each park classification is on the following pages (see Table 6). These descriptions help to express the expectations for how different types of parks and open space are anticipated to provide features, areas to service, and access.

TABLE 4: Park System Totals

Park Category	Acres	Number of Parks
Regional	141	3
Community	353	15
Neighborhood	295	41
Mini	6	11
School	44	13
Civic	15	6
Nature Park	47	7
Undeveloped	77	5
Total	979	101

Source: Design Workshop, SSPRD GIS data

Note: Park totals do not include recreation centers, sports facilities, golf courses, memorials, mini golf, maintenance, and administration sites.

TABLE 5: Open Space System Totals

Park Category	Acres	Number of Parks
Regional	1286	4
Community	446	18
Total	1732	22

Source: Design Workshop, SSPRD GIS data

Note: Open Space totals do not include recreation centers, sports facilities, golf courses, shared school properties, memorials, mini golf, maintenance, and administration sites.

Park Classification

TABLE 6: Park Classification and Standards

Size	Purpose and Function	Site Characteristics	Service Area	Access
Regional Park				
Largest	Provides recreational programs and amenities intended to serve the community as well as park users throughout the surrounding region. Typically, regional parks provide lighted synthetic athletic complexes, lighted sports courts, large or multiple playgrounds, multiple shade pavilions, restrooms, walking trails, etc. Regional parks may also support specialty facilities, bicycle and skateboard facilities, public art, outdoor event spaces, plazas, and other unique amenities.	Emphasis on providing a wide array of outdoor recreation opportunities for a variety of user groups. Portions of the site should be relatively flat to accommodate recreational programs. Areas with natural resource values of regional significance are to be protected. Special site features such as streams, lakes, reservoirs, rock outcrops, historic or archaeological sites, and other sensitive areas may be preserved or enhanced to add to the unique character of the park.	Entire district and the greater region.	Typically have direct access from an arterial street and access to regional trail systems. Parking should be primarily off-street but may be supported by on-street parking. Access to regional trail system and public transit is desirable.
Community Park				
Medium to Large	Serve as a focal point for community-wide activities that serve a broad purpose and balance active and passive recreation needs. Allow for group activities not feasible nor desirable at the neighborhood level due to noise, lights, traffic, etc. May include multiple programmed bluegrass or synthetic turf athletic fields and courts with or without lighting systems, a large playground with multiple structures, community event spaces, walking trails, shade pavilions, public art, and restrooms. Should maintain a balance between programmed sports facilities and other activity areas to appeal to the broader community. Specialty park amenities may also occur within community parks.	Portions of the site should have minimal variation in topography to accommodate active sports fields and open turf areas for passive recreation. Areas with natural resource values of significance are to be protected. Special site features such as streams, lakes, reservoirs, rock outcrops, historic or archaeological sites, and other sensitive areas may be preserved or enhanced to add to the unique character of the park.	Local community and park users throughout the district.	Easily accessible to the community, and adjacent to recreation centers, schools, community-oriented facilities when feasible. Off-street parking should be provided but may be supported by on-street parking. Direct access from an arterial street is ideal, though parks may be located along corridor streets. Access to regional trail system and public transit is desirable.
Neighborhood Park				
Medium	Provide both active and passive recreation opportunities and serve as a common area for neighbors of all ages to gather, socialize, and play. Typically includes multi-purpose athletic field, sport courts, playground, shade pavilion, looped trails, non-flushing restrooms, etc. In most cases, programmed sports should be limited to youth sports games and practices.	Landscape setting is a blend of cultivated park spaces for active use and natural areas. Features such as water bodies, interpretive signs, and areas of natural vegetation may also be included where appropriate.	Accessible to neighborhood population with safe walking and bicycle access. Should generally be located within 1/2 mile walking distance, as most people are comfortable walking these distances to reach parks.	Centrally located within neighborhoods, along collector streets, along trail or drainage corridors, or in neighborhood centers. Ideally, these parks are accessed by pathways, sidewalks, and trails. On-street parking is typically adequate.
Mini Park				
Small	Specialized parks designed to serve a limited area or neighborhood. Park amenities may include a small shade pavilion, picnic area, playground equipment, park benches, and open turf areas for informal play. If space allows, mini parks may include a sport court.	Mini parks could be either active or passive but address a specific neighborhood need.	Accessible to the immediate neighborhood and generally located within high density residential areas. Should be located less than 1/4 mile to provide the convenient walking and biking distance for all age groups.	Centrally located within neighborhoods, along collector streets, along trail or drainage corridors, or in urban centers. Connected via sidewalks and pathways to residences. On street parking is adequate.

TABLE 6: Park Classification and Standards

Size	Purpose and Function	Site Characteristics	Service Area	Access
Civic Park				
Varies	Specialized parks that are typically passive and support the surrounding area. Park amenities may include plazas, small, shaded seating areas, display gardens, green areas, public art, memorials, etc.	Typically located close to a municipal, entertainment, or population center and used for civic purposes.	Within a 1/2 mile to a municipal, entertainment or population center.	Generally accessible to primary roads and pathways. On-street parking is adequate.
School Park				
Varies	Shared sites with local schools for use by the public when not in use by schools. Provides opportunities for organized and informal sports, and playgrounds.	Typically, a combination of playground, athletic fields, and paved areas for court games.	Local draw with 1/2 mile walking distance.	Parking should be publicly available and adjacent to the facility and may be supported by on-street parking. Connected via sidewalks and pathways to residences.
Nature Park				
Small to Medium	Nature parks combine open space parks and built spaces for unstructured play and exploration. May include low impact and recreational features such as educational signage, nature art, and nature play elements. May also provide shaded seating, walking trails, native and xeric planting, etc.	Nature parks include access to natural areas such as rivers and streams, view corridors, rock outcrops, etc. They may also include historic, cultural, or archaeological sites.	Local or regional draw depending on location and extent of park development.	Parking may be on-street or off-street depending on the regional or local draw.
Open Space				
Varies	Open Space is generally a publicly accessible area dedicated to the preservation of significant natural resources and open space. These areas are generally maintained in their natural state and help preserve significant views, provide wildlife sanctuaries, and preserve lands. Low impact, nature-based recreation such as trails, interpretive signage, and viewing areas are possible in areas of low environmental sensitivity. Spaces should balance human impact and conservation of natural elements. May provide nature education opportunities.	Typically preserve or protect a natural resource, habitat, or other diverse ecosystems. May be unsuitable for development but provide other potential benefits.	Local as well as regional draw.	Varies. Access to the regional trail system is desirable. May include trailheads.
Trails, Corridors, and Trailheads				
Varies	Shared-use paths, trailheads or land used for trail corridors that connect elements of the community. Greenways adjacent to trails may provide space for park-like recreation and place-making such as small play features, public art, and interpretive signage. May exist or be developed in utility easements and corridors such as canals, former railways, etc. and may provide the potential for partnerships with groups such as utility companies, water district partnerships, etc.	Provide multi-modal recreational opportunities. Regional trails may be used by commuters, but trails are primarily designed for the recreational user. Greenways are typically maintained as open space.	Local to regional draw.	Varies. Regional trails area best served by trailheads with parking. Parking lots at parks adjacent to trails may provide trailhead amenities.

Level of Service

WHAT IS LEVEL OF SERVICE?

Level of service (LOS) is a standard measure that parks and recreation providers nationwide use to monitor the number of services provided to their communities. LOS is a tool used in conjunction with community outreach and can help determine quantity and quality gaps in the system and inform how services are distributed. The planning team assessed park acres per capita and park distances to homes to identify park provisions and accessibility gaps. Overall, South Suburban is doing well in offering competitive amounts and close-to-home access to recreation opportunities. Previous plans and community outreach revealed that improving quality and adding capacity to existing amenities is the top need for South Suburban’s five-year outlook.

ACRES PER POPULATION

South Suburban’s parks and open space properties total approximately 2,711 acres (Table 7). With a population of 153,251, South Suburban currently provides 6.39 acres per 1,000 residents of publicly accessible parks and 11.30 acres per 1,000 residents of open space for a total of 17.69 acres per 1000 people. With the District’s population projected to increase by about 8,800 people by 2026 to approximately 162,081 residents, roughly another 156 acres are needed to maintain current levels of provision per person.

Table 7 shows the South Suburban Level of Service per park type for the South Suburban District’s park system. The park totals do not include recreation centers, sports facilities, golf courses, mini golf, or maintenance and administration sites. Community parks, neighborhood parks, and open space would need the greatest increase in acreage to maintain the current level of service of park acres per population.

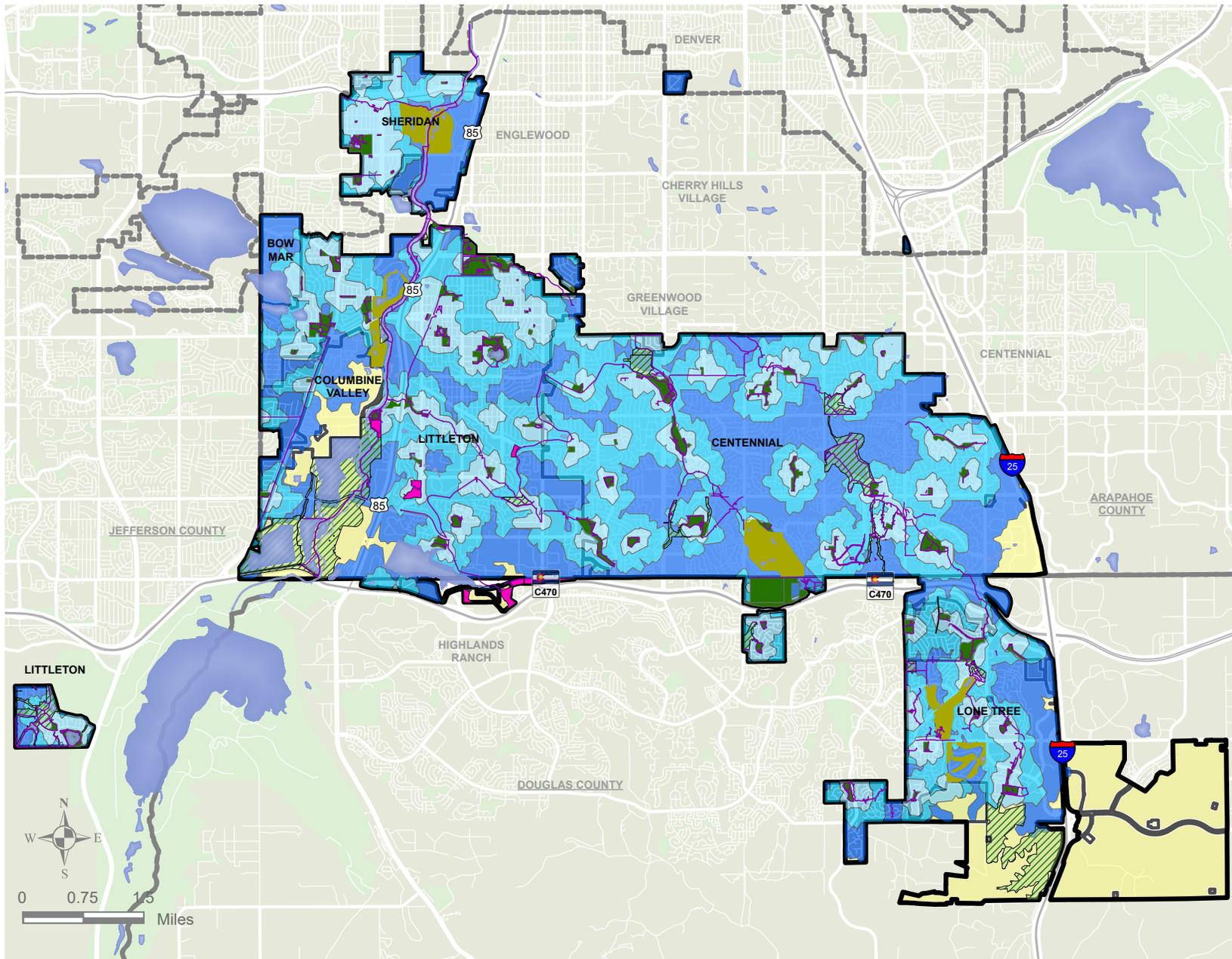
TABLE 7: Parks System Level of Service				
Park Category	Acres	Acres per 1000 people 2021 Service Level (Population 153,251)	Acres per 1000 people 2026 Service Level (Population 162,081)	Acres Needed to Meet Current Level of Service Standards in 2026
Regional	141	0.92	0.87	8
Community	353	2.30	2.18	20
Neighborhood	295	1.93	1.82	17
Mini	6	0.04	0.04	0.3
School	44	0.29	0.27	3
Civic	15	0.10	0.09	1
Nature Park	47	0.31	0.29	3
Undeveloped	77	0.50	0.48	4
Open Space	1732	11.30	10.68	100
Total	2711	17.69	16.72	156

Source: Design Workshop, SSPRD GIS data

PARK ACCESSIBILITY

To better understand park accessibility, South Suburban conducted a walkshed analysis to measure the distance between residential homes and park properties. Map 4, Park Service Areas, illustrates walkable pathways within a quarter-mile, half-mile, and one mile of all South Suburban parks.

Ninety-nine percent of households in South Suburban are within a one-mile walking distance of a park. Areas that do not fall within a one-mile walking distance are highlighted in yellow. Yellow areas represent locations within the one-mile park gap (see Map 4). Note that most southern and eastern Lone Tree is not within one mile of walking distance. These service gaps are primarily due to undeveloped areas. The community of Lone Tree is expected to expand over the following years, and new parks and open spaces are currently being planned to serve future residents.



Legend

-  District Boundary
-  Waterway
-  Lake or Reservoir
-  Golf Course
-  Open Space
-  Park
-  Undeveloped Park
-  SSPRD Trails
-  1 Mile Park Gap

***Park Accessibility**



*Park Accessibility Service Areas only measure access to parks and do not include access to open space or golf courses.

Park Assessments

PARK CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

The South Suburban Park and Recreation District conducted a conditions assessment to identify parks needing consideration for renovation in the next five years. The assessment included three regional parks, 15 community parks, 17 neighborhood parks, one mini park, and one school park. Table 8 shows the parks included in the assessment and an overall rating score ranging from poor to excellent.

TABLE 8: Park Assessments					
Park Name	Park Class	Park Condition	Park Name	Park Class	Park Condition
Cornerstone Park	Regional	Fair	Abbott Park	Neighborhood	Fair
David A. Lorenz Regional Park (County Line Rd, owned)	Regional	Excellent	Barnes Park	Neighborhood	Poor
David A. Lorenz Regional Park (Colorado Blvd, leased)	Regional	Poor	Carriage Club Park	Neighborhood	Good
deKoevend Park	Regional	Good	Clarkson Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Altair Park	Community	Fair	Columbine Manor	Neighborhood	Fair
Arapaho Park	Community	Good	Fairways at Lone Tree Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Bowles Grove Park	Community	Fair	Heritage Village Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Cherry Knolls Park	Community	Fair	Kline Homestead Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Gallup Park	Community	Poor	Little Dry Creek Park	Neighborhood	Poor
Harlow Park	Community	Good	Medema Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Ketring Park	Community	Good	Milliken Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Prairie Sky Park	Community	Excellent	Palos Verdes Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Progress Park	Community	Good	Powers Park	Neighborhood	Poor
Sheridan Community Park	Community	Poor	Puma Park	Neighborhood	Good
Sterne Park	Community	Good	Ridgeview Park	Neighborhood	Good
Sweetwater Park	Community	Poor	TrailMark Park	Neighborhood	Fair
Willow Creek Park	Community	Good	Walnut Hills Park	Neighborhood	Poor
Writers Vista Park	Community	Good	Nesbitt Park	Mini	Poor
Wynetka Ponds	Community	Good	Park at Lone Tree Elementary	School	Good

Source: SSPRD



Lone Tree Golf Club and Hotel

Facility Assessments

FACILITY CONDITIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS

As an additional measure to determine potential improvements and priorities, South Suburban staff completed facility assessments through self-evaluation and site visits. Facilities were graded based on the quality of exterior and interior characteristics, including building equipment and quality of finish. Table 9 gives an overall grade score rating for facilities selected for assessment, with an assessment score ranging from poor to excellent.

TABLE 9: Facility Assessments

2022 Facility Assessments	Assessment Score (as of 2022)
Ben Franklin Pool	EXCELLENT
Carson Nature Center	GOOD
Cook Creek Pool	GOOD
Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center	GOOD
Family Sports Center	FAIR
Family Sports Dome	UNDER CONSTRUCTION
Goodson Recreation Center	FAIR
Harlow Park Outdoor Pool	EXCELLENT
Holly Outdoor Pool	EXCELLENT
Holly Tennis Center (building)	GOOD
Littleton Golf and Tennis	UNDER CONSTRUCTION
Lone Tree Golf Club and Hotel	GOOD
Lone Tree Hub	GOOD
Lone Tree Recreation Center	GOOD
Tennis Center at Lone Tree Golf Club	GOOD
Sheridan Recreation Center	POOR
South Suburban Ice Arena	POOR/REPURPOSE
South Suburban Service Center	FAIR
South Suburban Sports Complex	EXCELLENT
Willow Spring Service Center	POOR

Source: SSPRD



Programs and Capacity

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

Capacity is the available space for participation in a program, sport, or activity. To understand capacity, the planning team reviewed program data, interviewed stakeholders in focus group interviews, and collected comments through surveys and public outreach events. Program participation is tracked annually by South Suburban Staff. The following is a summary of capacity findings by registration data for 2021 to 2022:

Sports Programs

- Winter youth basketball registration increased from 1,520 to 1,543 participants. There is a large waitlist of youth wanting to participate, but there is no additional capacity for practice or game space.
- Adult Soccer at the South Suburban Sports Complex increased from 12 to 17 teams.
- The total number of athletic sports camps offered decreased, while participation per camp increased from 58% to 62% capacity.
- The Family Sports Dome closed in May 2022 for new construction, limiting participation for the year. Programming will resume in fall 2023.
- Goodson Recreation Center's racquetball leagues were filled to capacity in 2022, and drop-in court time remains available.
- The Littleton Tennis Bubble was closed in December 2021 due to the air structure reaching the end of useful life. Limited tennis programming is provided in a temporary facility. Full programming will resume when construction is complete in fall 2023.
- Colorado Journey Miniature Golf admissions decreased from 62,316 to 59,227 participants. Weather closures played a large factor in lower admission rates.
- Pickleball registration increased from 630 to 864 adults.

Facilities

- Recreation center daily admissions are rebounding after record lows due to the pandemic and increased 15% from 2021 to 2022. The 2022 fall sale for punch passes generated \$9,478 more revenue than in 2021.
- Special Events such as the Pumpkin Plunge and the Trick or Treat Trail reached maximum capacity for the 2nd year in a row.

Gymnastics

- Gymnastics programming is affordable compared to others in the area. The programable space has reached capacity, and there are waitlists to participate.

Aquatics

- Swim lesson participation increased and has an average capacity of 80, relatively high for the area.

Programs and Capacity

South Platte Park

- By mid-August 2022, the Carson Nature Center received as many visitors as all of 2021 (6,000+) and doubled the total visitation of 2020 (3,000). Total visitation for 2022 is projected to approach 11,000 visitors, nearing the 2019 visitation.

Arts and Enrichment

- The number of enrollments per program has fluctuated over the last three years, but the overall average program capacity rose to 62% in 2022. Additionally, the number of programs offered has increased, and the number of canceled programs has decreased.
- Esports has been popular since its inception in March 2020. In November 2022, the fall showcase reached 102% cost recovery with 60 players, generating interest for future events.

Family Services

- Licensed day camp participants decreased by 2,444 from 2019 to 2020 but saw 1,470 of those participants return in 2021.
- Camps were over 80% of capacity in 2022, with staffing being the greatest limitation to program expansion. Thanksgiving and winter break camps and the parent night out program were full and had a waitlist.

Golf

- Golf participation is strong, with nearly every tee time, every day, at every course is full. In 2021 there were over 2,000 more rounds played than in 2020. Approximately 3,100 additional rounds were played in 2022.

Ice

- The Try Hockey for Free program had a 38% increase overall and specifically a 22% increase in female participants.
- The Adult Hockey program increased from 78 to 89 teams. The largest one year increase ever.
- The Learn to Play Hockey program increased from 3,676 to over 5,400 participants in 2022.
- The Learn to Skate programs increased from 1,893 to 2,781 participants in 2022.

Athletic Fields

- Field usage remains steady at 84% of desirable reservable field space (Monday through Saturday) booked in advance. Participation increased from 15,910 to 18,454 individual field users in 2022. Usage and participation are annually impacted by field closures for maintenance or renovation and available field location.

Programs and Capacity

SWOT ANALYSES

A Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis conducted through Internal Stakeholder Engagement revealed the following:

- **Strength & Opportunity:** The Learn to Swim program is undergoing changes to provide consistent programming at each facility with a set curriculum at each level.
- **Strength:** South Suburban is the state's largest USTA sanctioned tennis league provider by a large margin.
- **Weakness:** There is an ongoing need to strategically balance facility and field rentals, agreements, and internal programs to maximize use.
- **Opportunity:** Grant funding is being used to expand programming. Examples include a 2023 SCFD grant for arts and enrichment and nature programs.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** Additional multipurpose fields or conversion from bluegrass fields to synthetic turf is needed to meet community demands.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** Additional ballfields, including 300-foot outfields, in the southeast area of the district, are needed to meet demand.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** There is a need for additional pickleball courts to keep up with demand.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** The demand for the Youth Basketball program exceeds court capacity resulting in registration caps.
- **Opportunity:** There is a desire for new bicycle facilities and the existing BMX track to be relocated and rebuilt, including electricity and running water, to attract more races and events.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** The Esports lounge is space limited. One large arena/location would be ideal; however, multiple smaller arenas/locations would help improve team formation and meet demand.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** Academy of Dance classes is outgrowing our recreation center's capacity. The need for performance space has exceeded our capacity, and other facilities must be rented.
- **Weakness & Opportunity:** Pottery classes are consistently full and have waitlists due to limited studio space.
- **Opportunity:** Drop-in fitness participation across facilities is strong and consistent, but fitness program/class participation is lower than pre-pandemic.
- **Opportunity:** Expansion of the therapeutic recreation program is desired to allow for additional services and meet participant needs.
- **Opportunity:** The pandemic has created a resurgence in the golf industry, with a surge of new junior and female players.
- **Opportunity:** Outdoor recreation programs such as archery and equestrian are in demand and have waitlists.
- **Strength:** The addition of the South Platte Express (mobile program) improves access by providing close to home nature education and experiences.



Sheridan Celebrates
Engagement Event

COMMUNITY INPUT

Engagement Overview

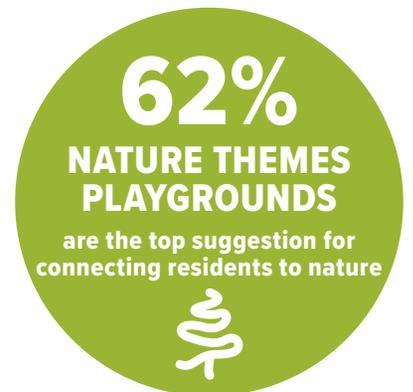
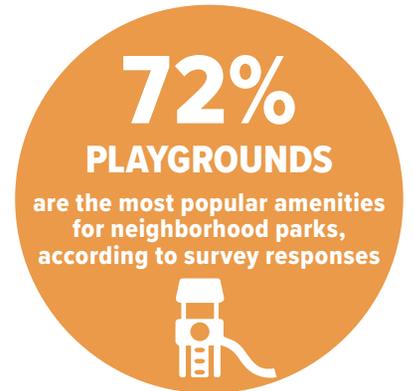
HOW THIS PLAN WAS CREATED

Extensive input from community members, regional partners, technical stakeholders, and South Suburban staff informed the development of the Master and Strategic Plan Update that helps guide improvements and planning of parks, trails, and recreation programs for the next five years. Investing in this engagement highlights South Suburban's commitment to aligning with community desires and identifying opportunities for improving the parks and recreation system.

The Master and Strategic Planning process kicked off in the Spring of 2022 with robust community engagement efforts focused on understanding community recreation needs and interests throughout South Suburban. Engagement opportunities and efforts included an online community survey, two focus group meetings, 13 summer pop-up events, a staff workshop, in-person and virtual regional partners roundtables, and sharing the final plan with the community for feedback.

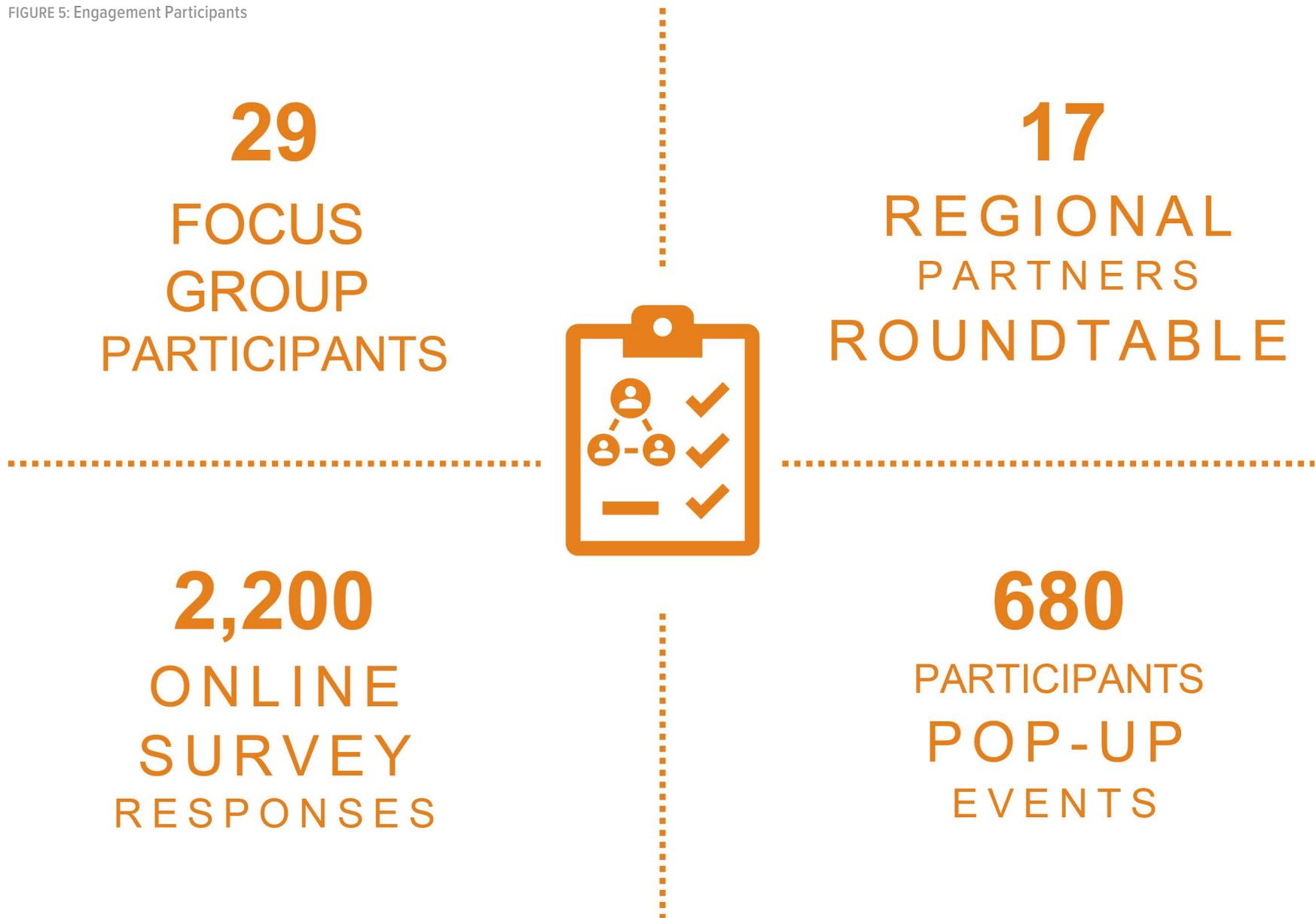
Thanks to targeted outreach, respondents provided representation from all communities and demographics. There were 2,200 enthusiastic responses to the community survey. Approximately 680 community members shared input on their preferred park, open space, and outdoor amenities at pop-up engagement stations held at 13 different events throughout the District.

[Appendix B Master Plan Engagement Summary](#) provides a full report on public engagement findings.



Community Participation

FIGURE 5: Engagement Participants





Public input at TrailMark

Survey Results

WHAT WE HEARD

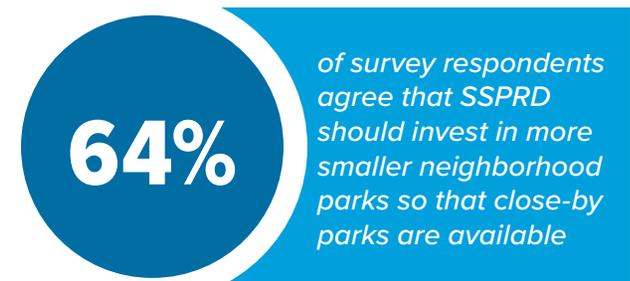
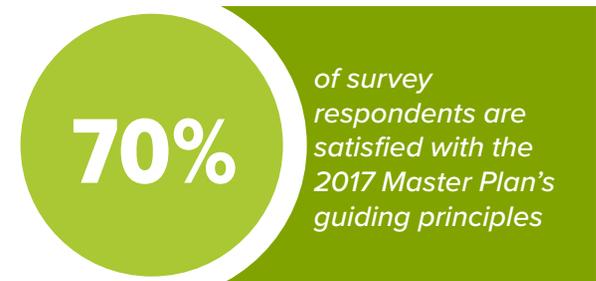
Community members provided feedback on the topics that are important to them regarding parks, trails, open space, golf courses, recreation programs, and facilities. Survey results shared by the community were influential in informing the 2022 Master Plan goals. The survey included 15 general questions to inform the Master Plan, 11 for TrailMark residents, and nine for demographic questions.

KEY SURVEY TAKEAWAYS

TOP PRIORITIES OVER THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS

When asked, “What do you think should be South Suburban’s top priority for parks, recreation, trails, facilities, programs, and open space over the next 5-10 years?” the following themes emerged from survey feedback (in no particular order):

- Accessibility for all ages (youth and seniors)
- Connections
- Facilities
- Inclusion
- Maintenance
- Preserving open space and wildlife
- Safety
- Social Gatherings
- Sustainability/conservation efforts
- Trails
- Water Play



Source: 2022 SSPRD Community Survey

COMMUNITY POP-UP EVENT RESULTS

At various pop-up engagement booths held throughout South Suburban, community members were asked to place stickers on images of experiences or features they would most like to see in parks, trails, or open spaces. A breakdown of the total community sticker count for different categories is listed below.

NATURE EXPERIENCES

Sticker count out of 519 total stickers

1. Nature themed playgrounds (218)
2. Nature exploration/free play (107)
3. Nature education classes/guided hikes (86)
4. Bird watching amenities (60)
5. Stewardship and volunteer opportunities (48)

COMMUNITY GATHERINGS

Sticker count out of 394 total stickers

1. Community plazas for festivals and events (126)
2. Summer outdoor programs (86)
3. Family recreation classes (84)
4. Places for picnicking (58)
5. Pavilion for families and small group gatherings (40)

UNIQUE RECREATION

Sticker count out of 839 total stickers

1. Opportunities to play at the water's edge (313)
2. Food trucks at recreation games and events (178)
3. Bike park (130)
4. Interactive art in the park (124)
5. Bouldering (94)

Source: 2022 SSPRD Community Pop-Up Activity Boards



Sterne Park Engagement Event



Arapaho Park Public Engagement Event



Berry Park Public Engagement Event



*Outdoor basketball
is a featured
amenity at several
neighborhood parks*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Overview

ORGANIZATION OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Five guiding principles and their goal statements provide the structure for organizing this chapter:



QUALITY FIRST

- We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. We strive to maintain and improve the quality of our offerings and customer service with innovations to remain industry leaders.



CONNECT COMMUNITY

- We create an inclusive culture that engages, welcomes, and connects all members of the community to feel a sense of belonging in our spaces and programs. We effectively communicate and provide diverse offerings which are accessible to all ages, abilities, and cultures.



ENRICH WELLNESS

- We prioritize wellness by offering indoor and outdoor recreation that strengthens bodies, engages minds, and refreshes a person's spirit. We facilitate wellness by providing recreation opportunities that represent the characteristics and needs of our diverse neighborhoods and communities.



STEWARDS OF NATURE AND SUSTAINABILITY

- We conserve and enhance natural systems with green spaces, wildlife areas, and water recreation that promote interaction and respect for nature. We provide environmental education and volunteer opportunities to encourage community stewardship. Our spaces are designed and managed to be resilient environmental assets.



FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

- We make investments with a long-range view of fiscal responsibility, balancing emerging needs while maintaining the quality of indoor facilities, outdoor spaces, and programs. We use funding responsibly and are transparent about priorities. We manage resources through extensive planning processes, investing in infrastructure, efficient operations, and strategic partnerships.

Figure 8: Master Plan Framework



Opportunities for Improvements and Action Areas are potential steps to fulfill the guiding principles. A list of plan framework definitions is provided in "Table 9" to clarify the terms used in the document and their relationship to one another. Each guiding principle's content is explored using the following framework:

- Guiding Principle Goal Statement
- Why this is important
- Community desires
- Opportunities for improvement are potential approaches to fulfill the guiding principles and areas for action.

Table 9: Plan Framework Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
District Mission <i>(What we do)</i>	Mission statement guides SSPRD in its role and vision: <i>'To foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails, and open space and by providing recreational services and programs.'</i>
Guiding Principles <i>(What we Aspire to Achieve)</i>	Guiding principles are broad initiatives describing what SSPRD aspires to achieve and have evolved out of this plan's community engagement and recent foundational planning efforts of the 2014 Gold Medal Citizen Report and 2022 Strategic Plan. The Guiding Principles are <i>'Quality First, Enrich Wellness, Connect to Nature, and Lead Sustainability.'</i>
Opportunities for Improvement <i>(What type of Improvement)</i>	Opportunities for improvement are potential approaches to fulfill the guiding principles. They have been identified based on input from the community, SSPRD staff and partners, needs assessments, and consideration of SSPRD resources. Their general nature encourages creativity and flexibility in considering alternative actions for improvements.
Areas for Action <i>(Where and How)</i>	These are detailed actions that have been prioritized over a five-year planning horizon to pursue improvement opportunities.

Community desires
**IMPROVE AGING
AND WELL-LOVED
PARKS, TRAILS,
AND FACILITIES**
over new facilities.

2022 Community Survey

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Goal Statement: We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. We strive to maintain and improve the quality of our offerings and customer service with innovations to remain industry leaders.

The 2022 Strategic and Master Plans outline goals to ensure South Suburban continues to deliver high-quality recreation and community facilities. The Strategic Plan delves further into strategies for improving internal operations and customer service, while this Master Plan section outlines guidance for maintenance considerations, quality-assurance certifications, and improving South Suburban's facilities, parks, programs, services, and amenities.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

South Suburban parklands and facilities provide a sense of place and community connections as a unifying District spanning six municipalities and three unincorporated areas. If high standards of quality are not met, it diminishes the perception of quality of life. As a parks and recreation system over 60 years old, it is essential to plan for the improvement and replacement of aged facilities and amenities.

The community indicated through surveys and other engagement opportunities that they appreciate the new and improved facilities and recreation amenities resulting from the 2017 Master Plan. Over half of the survey respondents (57%) stated that recreation centers had gotten better since 2017. When asked about 2022 Master Plan priorities, the majority of respondents felt that focusing on improving aging and well-loved parks, trails, and facilities is a higher priority than providing new facilities. There are many opportunities to improve parks and trail corridors to increase accessibility and enjoyment, and many amenities, such as playgrounds and outdoor sports facilities that need renewal or replacement.



Cherry Knolls Park

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

The community survey feedback indicated the findings below:



Trails and Walkways
are the most requested priority for improvement



Neighborhood Parks
are the park type most stated as needing improvement



Goodson Recreation Center
is the facility most cited as needing improvements

2022 Community Survey



Maintenance at Cornerstone Park

TOP PRIORITY

Maintenance of park, facilities and recreation amenities



Community Survey Top Master Plan Priority

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

MASTER PLAN PRIORITIES

The majority of respondents felt that focusing on improving aging and well-loved parks, trails, and facilities is a higher priority than providing new facilities.

OUTDOOR PLACES IMPROVEMENT IS MOST DESIRED

When asked what places could use a lot or little improvements, top responses included:

1. Trails and Walkways: Respondents stated a need for a lot (59%) or a little (56%) improvement.
2. Neighborhood Parks: Respondents stated a need for a lot (56%) or a little (43%) improvement.
3. Natural Areas and Open Space: Respondents stated a need for a lot (50%) or a little (41%) improvement.
4. Playgrounds: Respondents stated a need for a lot (51%) or a little (38%) improvement.

FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS MOST DESIRED

When asked what facilities could use the most improvement, top responses included:

1. Goodson Recreation Center: 55% of respondents stated a need for a lot (17%) or a little (38%) improvement.
2. Littleton Golf & Tennis Club: 45% of respondents stated a need for a lot (26%) or a little (19%) improvement.

FACILITIES AND PLACES APPRECIATED AS MOST IMPROVED

When asked what facilities and places have gotten much better or better since 2017, the top responses included:

1. Recreation centers and facilities (57%)
2. Swimming pools (49%)
3. Athletic fields (48%)
4. Trails (45%)
5. Parks (44%)

2022 Community Survey



MAINTENANCE AND CARE

Taking care of existing parks and facilities ensures that investments made by the community continue to support quality places they can enjoy for years to come. Maintenance of parks, facilities, and recreation amenities was cited as a top Master Plan priority in the community survey. South Suburban has appropriated capital improvement project funds to upgrade maintenance facilities, tools, and vehicles to ensure that equipment is sufficient to keep spaces in top condition. South Suburban will also update its maintenance standards in the Park and Grounds Management Plan. The following actions focus on best practices and improved efficiencies for operations and maintenance standards.

Maintenance and Care

OPPORTUNITY 1

Q.1 Increase maintenance standards for current parks, trails, open spaces, golf courses, and facilities.

Action Items

- Update the Park and Grounds Management Plan to encompass the variety of landscape types within the system, expand preventative maintenance programs, and best management practices for resilience and sustainability.
- Consider the impact of operations and maintenance costs before constructing new facilities or amenities and prioritize those with lower impacts.
- Identify parklands and/or facilities that another entity could manage and maintain (e.g., HOAs and schools).
- Conduct a park maintenance facility study to strategically locate service facilities across the system to increase operational efficiency.
- Use historical maintenance data to evaluate operations and maintenance costs, operational efficiency, and potential for cost saving measures.
- Continue to expand the development of computerized preventative maintenance programs.

UPDATING FACILITIES, PARKS, AND ASSETS

Updating facilities and parks was another Master Plan priority identified in the community survey. Outdoor spaces and amenities such as trails and walkways, neighborhood parks, playgrounds, and open space were the most frequently cited as needing “a lot” or “a little” improvement, while many indoor facilities rose to the top of the list as needing “no improvement.” This community feedback suggests that the 2017 Master Plan’s focus on improving indoor facilities was successful and that a 2022 Master Plan focus on outdoor spaces and amenities would help to meet current community needs. South Suburban will outline general guidelines for the longevity of playgrounds, shade pavilions, courts, synthetic turf, and more in the Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Facilities Design Standards Plan to inform which facilities, parks, and amenities may be in need of updates. In depth facility assessments will be performed based on the age and need for improvements.

However, while outdoor spaces were cited as most in need of improvements overall, Goodson Recreation Center and Littleton Golf and Tennis Club were two indoor facilities that were most frequently cited as needing improvement. Master Plan goals will also focus on indoor facilities that are aging and in need of updates. South Suburban has budgeted capital improvement funds to address many community-identified improvements and needs. Plans are underway to conduct a feasibility study for the Goodson Recreation Center and reuse of the South Suburban Ice Arena. Construction is underway to replace the Littleton Golf and Tennis Club and Family Sports Dome facilities. Additionally, Capital Improvement Project improvements will be made to multiple parks and trails over the next five years, with projects selected by utilizing prioritization criteria included in this plan on page 9, guidelines for longevity outlined in the Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Facilities Design Standards, and community input.



Quality First

Updating Facilities, Parks, and Assets

OPPORTUNITY 2	Q.2 Invest in replacing assets that can better meet the community’s needs, will increase capacity and participation, can lower long-term maintenance and operation costs, are in poor condition, and/or have reached end-of-life usability.
Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Master Plan prioritization criteria on page 8 in conjunction with the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan and 3-Year Financial Plan to prioritize projects for replacement. • Reference the Recreation Programming Plan and best management practices for golf courses when identifying and prioritizing replacement needs. • Use the Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Facilities Design Standards to provide consistent quality and amenities throughout the system. • Identify long-term replacement needs, develop criteria and prioritization, and work with partners to identify funding opportunities to help realize new amenities. • Replace vehicles and equipment at their end of life with quality vehicles and equipment that will improve efficiency. • Identify and prioritize infrastructure replacements to minimize disruption of services and enhance operations efficiency.

INDUSTRY LEADERS

Putting “Quality First” as a core value means South Suburban prioritizes maintaining leadership in the parks and recreation industry. Accreditation from the National Recreation and Park Association Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA) was first awarded to SSPRD in 2019. CAPRA is the only national accreditation program for parks and recreation and is a means of demonstrating the highest level of service. Agencies must repeat the accreditation process every five years (due in 2024) to show compliance with best practices. South Suburban will continue to pursue industry certifications for both the organization and key staff members for accountability and recognition that operations are carried out using best practices and that services and amenities meet high quality standards.

Leaders in Parks and Recreation

OPPORTUNITY 3	Q.3 Increase visibility as leaders in the parks and recreation industry by maintaining and pursuing industry accreditations and certifications.
Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain national accreditation for quality assurance and quality improvement through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA), submitting updated documentation every five years. • Apply for the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration National Gold Medal Award. • Require and encourage appropriate certifications or licenses for key staff members to maintain a high level of service, demonstrate appropriate management, and meet regulatory requirements.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Goal Statement: We create an inclusive culture that engages, welcomes, and connects all members of the community to feel a sense of belonging in our spaces and programs. We effectively communicate and provide diverse offerings which are accessible to all ages, abilities, and cultures.

2022 Community Survey

This guiding principle gives focus to the importance South Suburban spaces play in connecting the community by providing places and programming for gathering and socializing and highlights the close-to-home trail connections and parks contribute to a meaningful quality of life.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Quality neighborhood parks are an integral part of the neighborhood and promote placemaking by reflecting the needs, values, and character of the community. The Project for Public Spaces defines placemaking as “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.”¹

South Suburban serves multiple communities, each with unique recreation needs and identity. Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but they mean different things. Equality is when everyone receives an equal amount of investment. While that sounds fair, it assumes that all people start from the same place, which isn't true. Equity is about ensuring everyone receives the appropriate investment for where they are. That means different geographic areas of South Suburban may have different needs and require tailored approaches to investing in parks, trails, and recreation services. Equity is the act of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial and fair and provide an opportunity for just outcomes.

South Suburban's neighborhood parks are an opportunity to engage in placemaking by responding to unique community needs and creating spaces for gathering and connection designed with community input. The act of park placemaking involves reaching out and listening to the community, engaging them to direct recreational opportunities, understanding cultural interests, and fostering a culture of stewardship. Finding new ways to communicate with underserved populations not currently being reached or providing information about South Suburban activities online are some strategies to strengthen community connections and communication.

Another component of placemaking is to ensure that neighborhood parks are accessible spaces where all members of the community feel welcome and find places that appeal to their interests and abilities. Creating places that are physically accessible to all abilities and are appealing to all ages removes barriers to participation. Understanding how people travel to parks and recreation offerings is also important to improving accessibility. Linking parks to the surrounding neighborhood with safe trail connections or public transit can help overcome barriers to access for youth, some seniors, and those without a personal vehicle.

Members of the South Suburban community recognize the importance of investing in neighborhood parks. When asked how parks could enhance access and inclusion, the top response in the community survey was to “Provide equitable neighborhood park investment, quality, and maintenance.” There is also an opportunity to examine how organized activities within neighborhood parks and trails can be supported by South Suburban programming.



*Sheridan Celebrates,
Sheridan City Hall*

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

The community survey feedback indicated the findings below:



Access and Inclusion in Parks
are the top-ranked ideas to connect communities



Playgrounds
are the most requested amenity in neighborhood parks



Shade Shelters and Pavilions
are the most requested amenities for outdoor features

2022 Community Survey



TOP PRIORITY

Inclusion and Diversity



Community Survey Top Master Plan Priority

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

INVESTING IN NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

The majority of participants agree or strongly agree with the statement: Invest in more but smaller neighborhood parks, rather than the statement: Invest in fewer but larger parks.

IDEAS TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND INCLUSION

When asked to rank ideas for improving access and inclusion, survey respondent's top-ranked choices were:

1. Provide equitable neighborhood park investment, quality, and maintenance
2. Focus on providing youth and senior programs and amenities
3. Make parks and facilities more accessible to all abilities
4. Make recreation and programs more cost accessible to lower incomes
5. Increase investment in parks and recreation offerings in historically under-resourced areas

POPULAR AMENITIES

When asked the most popular amenities for Neighborhood Parks, the top choices included:

1. Playgrounds (72%)
2. Community pavilions/activity space (53%)
3. Native and xeric gardens (44%)
4. Water play (32%)
5. Pickleball courts (30%)

OUTDOOR FEATURES AND AMENITIES

When asked what outdoor features and amenities participants would like to see more of, the top choices included:

1. Shade Shelters and Pavilions (32%)
2. Botanical and Display Gardens (32%)
3. Water Play (31%)
4. Exploration/Play in Natural Settings (28%)
5. Pickleball Courts (28%)



ACCESSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Strong communication with the community is a key factor in creating accessible recreation. South Suburban will continue to reach out to the community for input about their needs and desires for recreational amenities and programming. Strategies to enhance communication will be regularly evaluated in South Suburban’s Community Relations and Marketing Plan. Specific strategies may include new educational, marketing, and communication methods to better inform and connect with a broader range of the community. Outreach also includes adapting various community engagement activities and approaches that target different user groups and demographics. Providing diverse opportunities for community feedback will help to ensure that recreational offerings are relevant to community needs and appeal to a wide range of ages, abilities, and diverse community groups.

Accessibility and Community Connection

OPPORTUNITY 1	C.1 Build community awareness of South Suburban by conducting research and creating opportunities to better understand community needs and desires for recreation programs, facilities, and spaces.
Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the SSPRD 2022 Community Survey and Focus Group Summaries and the Recreation Programming Plan to continue to understand demand and capacity for amenities and facilities. • When completing site plans, engage the surrounding community and user groups to understand how to provide unique offerings that serve each community and provide recreation access to a variety of groups. • Conduct engagement and outreach to underserved communities to understand needs, gain diverse perspectives, and provide culturally relevant programming and recreation access. • Periodically review program offerings and amenities versus community desires and demographics to ensure programs and spaces encourage participation by people of all ages and abilities. • Work with partner agencies to collect requests and feedback from the community on South Suburban programs and offerings and coordinate marketing materials to maximize reach. • Expand community awareness of South Suburban’s facilities, programs, and offerings, and emphasize South Suburban’s role in contributing to the wellness of residents.

COMMUNITY GATHERING AND ACTIVATION

Parks provide a space for community connection and gathering. Adding park features and amenities - from benches for daily conversations to pavilions that accommodate family birthday parties to plazas that host community festivals and events - can greatly enhance and facilitate gathering opportunities. Social gatherings and community events in parks were both cited in the community survey as top priorities for the Master Plan to address, and community pavilions or activity spaces were among the top five amenities desired. While providing quality spaces to gather is important, events and programs also create additional opportunities for community members to connect. Increasing South Suburban and partner programming in parks will generate additional park activity, and supporting community-led events will encourage a sense of park ownership within the neighborhood.



OPPORTUNITY 2

C.2 Reinforce parks and open spaces as destinations that are integrated into the community and designed with features that are accessible to all ages and abilities.

Action Items

- Provide a diversity of park features and amenities that appeal to all ages.
- Design flexible spaces and install amenities to allow parks and trailheads to serve as community gathering spaces, and encourage fitness and wellness activities, and nature exploration.
- Strategically invest in providing park amenities that promote social interactions and gatherings.
- Increase program offerings in parks to encourage a wide variety of group activities and promote the use of parks for community events.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS AND PLACEMAKING

Neighborhood Parks are the smaller, close-to-home places that serve neighborhoods and fulfill different purposes than the community and regional destination parks that draw people from greater distances. Neighborhood parks greatly enhance the quality of life by providing experiences connecting with nature, access to convenient outdoor recreation and play, and opportunities for neighbors to socialize. The survey responses indicated that investing in neighborhood parks is important to the community. The majority of participants strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: “Invest in more, but smaller neighborhood parks, so that close-by parks are available for more people and local playgrounds and green space are of satisfactory condition.” At pop-up engagement events, community members consistently voiced their appreciation of having an outdoor space that is an integral part of the neighborhood. Neighborhood parks were cited as critical investments in wellbeing, especially for elderly adults and youth who may not be able to drive to reach other regional outdoor spaces.

As essential spaces, it is important that neighborhood parks serve all members of the community. This can be done by ensuring these parks are connected to the neighborhood with safe walkways, physically accessible to all ages and abilities, and offer a variety of recreation opportunities that appeal to multiple generations and cultures. Providing accessible paths and seating that allow those with mobility challenges to enjoy natural areas is one specific example of ensuring a park serves all. Additional examples include providing inclusive playground features accessible to all abilities, providing recreation opportunities that appeal to elder adults, such as birdwatching or pickleball, and providing play options that appeal to teens and tweens, such as skateboarding features. Adding community-requested features to neighborhood parks is a placemaking opportunity, as it allows for unique amenities to each park and directly reflects community desires. Such features may include artwork that reflects the character of the neighborhood or smaller versions of recreational amenities that would typically be found in a regional park but are scaled appropriately to the context and needs of the neighborhood.

OPPORTUNITY 3

C.3 Invest in neighborhood parks as places that represent the community through placemaking and provide opportunities for gathering, recreation, and spending time in nature.

Action Items

- Provide more trail loops within neighborhood parks and local open spaces to encourage close-to-home walking opportunities, especially as South Suburban’s population ages.
- Provide access to nature by creating areas of natural planting, pollinator gardens, and small walking paths.
- Enhance access to waterways when possible to provide opportunities to enjoy riparian habitat and water play.
- Provide access to playgrounds for people of all ages and abilities and provide a balance of accessible play and challenging play events to stimulate the mind and body.



2022 Community Survey

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Goal Statement: We prioritize wellness by offering indoor and outdoor recreation that strengthens bodies, engages minds, and refreshes a person’s spirit. We facilitate wellness by providing recreation opportunities that represent the characteristics and needs of our diverse neighborhoods and communities.

Community public health and wellness can be enhanced by increasing the number of people who utilize SSPRD programs and facilities and by increasing opportunities for current users to extend their recreation activities. This guiding principle gives thought to expanding recreation opportunities through improvements that accommodate events and sports tournaments, scheduling and offering programs to be more inclusive of a wider range of the community, support for partnerships and clubs, and recognizing wellness trends.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

A driving goal encompassed in the Guiding Principle “Enrich Wellness” is to promote active lifestyles which increase personal and community health and overall wellbeing. South Suburban is a major provider of recreation opportunities - facilitating club sports, fitness classes, and individual recreation and exercise. As participation and demand for recreation have increased over the last few years, so has the need for additional recreational space and availability. South Suburban partners are pleased with current partnerships and want to increase participation and see programs grow. Similarly, community survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of South Suburban’s program offerings and facilities. Still, some stated that lack of availability and program choice are major reasons that prevent them from participating in South Suburban programs or facilities.

Finding creative ways to enhance recreation choice and availability will continue to augment access to active recreation and promote South Suburban’s goal of “Enriching Wellness.” Suggestions from the community include exploring creative scheduling and reservation possibilities, finding ways to accommodate more tournament play, and exploring new programming ideas. Other ideas to increase program participation and inclusion are to bridge gaps in programming and support financial opportunities for those in need. Detailed recommendations for improvements to programming are outlined in South Suburban’s Recreation Programming Plan.



Writers Vista Park

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

The community survey feedback indicated the findings below:



Program Availability
is the top reason for non-participation in facilities or programs



Desired Programs not Offered
is the second top reason for non-participation in facilities or programs



Goodson Recreation Center
is the most frequently used recreation center

2022 Community Survey



Nia at Buck Recreation Center

TOP PRIORITY

Recreational space and
availability



Community Survey Top Master Plan Priority

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

ACCESS AND PROGRAMMING

31% of participants stated that nothing prevents them from participating in South Suburban recreation facilities, programs, parks, trails, or natural areas, and they use them often.

USING RECREATION FACILITIES, PROGRAMS, PARKS, TRAILS, OR NATURAL AREAS

When asked what reasons prevent participants from using South Suburban recreation facilities, programs, parks, trails, or natural areas, the top responses included:

1. Facilities are not available because they are booked or full (24%)
2. Desired programs are not offered (21%)
3. Other facilities have more or better equipment or amenities (14%)

POPULAR RECREATION CENTERS

When asked what recreation centers are the most frequently used, the top choices included:

1. Goodson Recreation Center (50%)
2. South Suburban Sports Complex (36%)
3. Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center (35%)
4. Lone Tree Recreation Center (33%)

2022 Community Survey



SUPPORT INCREASE IN USERS

Participation in sports in all sectors has rapidly grown over the last few years. The desire for youth and adult leagues is rising, and sports courts are consistently booked, resulting in waiting lists of would-be participants. South Suburban’s programming partners would like to respond to this demand by growing programs and accommodating all who want to participate. In addition, the population continues to grow, and newly developed communities will have recreation needs to fill. South Suburban will explore ways to encourage and accommodate the increase in recreational users to support growth-related needs. When possible, this may include the addition or enhancement of facilities, fields, and amenities. The 2017 Master Plan’s efforts improved South Suburban’s ice facilities and successfully accommodated the growth of related programs. The 2022 Master Plan recommends similar studies and projects to address emerging capacity needs for multi-use fields, sports courts, and recreation amenities.

Encourage Increase in Users

OPPORTUNITY 1	W.1 Fill the need created by increased recreation activity with new and/or updated facilities and amenities. Upgrade equipment and venues to support facilities and programs that can increase participation.
Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Recreation Programming Plan to identify amenities needed to increase participation in existing programs or implement new programming. • Where feasible, provide additional indoor & outdoor multi-functional sports courts to accommodate the increase in demand and be a regional amenity. • Perform a feasibility study to repurpose the South Suburban Ice Arena and improve the functionality of the Goodson Recreation Center. • Consider the need for an additional recreation center and activity spaces to serve the future residents of Lone Tree east of I-25. • Evaluate programs and offerings at The Hudson Gardens and Event Center and identify opportunities to consolidate, enhance or expand South Suburban’s overall program offerings. • Evaluate programming on fields and courts before replacing or resurfacing to determine the capacity to implement new programs.

FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE SCHEDULING

South Suburban’s recreational programming partners recognize the success of existing programs and would like to continue to build and strengthen these partnerships. There is a strong community desire to participate in recreational programming, with high demand from youth and adults. South Suburban’s programming partners suggested ideas to maximize facility use, including shared facility or field reservations and solutions for extending the length of day use (i.e., lighting) and seasonal use of outdoor spaces. They also voiced a desire to explore ideas that would enable tournaments and events at South Suburban fields and facilities to promote awareness, bolster participation, and further solidify South Suburban as a leader of recreational programming in the region. Other partner ideas centered on finding ways to enhance the flexibility of scheduling or prioritizing hours to allow families or youth more opportunities to use facilities and participate in programs.

Flexible and
Creative Scheduling

OPPORTUNITY 2

W.2 Assess field and facility schedules and rental strategies to allow for more flexibility, accommodate more uses and users, and extend seasonality.

Action Items

- Prioritize field and facility scheduling times for South Suburban’s internal programs.
- Prioritize tee times at golf courses for residents, leagues, clubs, and members.
- Accommodate youth schedules by prioritizing facility and field space for programming during after school hours.
- Identify potential opportunities to accommodate the growth of programs within existing facilities.
- Where appropriate, replace bluegrass athletic fields with synthetic turf and install sports lighting to extend use.
- Provide space for large community events and tournament play in future regional and community park developments.
- Strategically assign outdoor field space to align complimentary programming and ensure field maximization occurs.

RECREATION TRENDS, ADAPTABLE AND UNIQUE RECREATION

Regional partners and staff are interested in exploring new programming ideas that would provide additional recreation options and seek to remove barriers for many who do not currently participate in South Suburban offerings. Providing universal playgrounds that create inclusive play opportunities for all abilities is one way to reduce barriers to participation. The Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Facilities Design Standards Plan will identify standards for universal play. South Suburban will conduct a study to determine the need and potential locations for universal playgrounds.

Another idea to reduce barriers to participation is to create more flexibility in scheduling by offering family classes that allow kids and parents to share programmed time together. Additional ideas to increase participation include expanding program offerings to include activities that appeal to a broad range of ages, expanding offerings for those experiencing a disability, creating bridge programs between beginner and advanced offerings, and finding ways to reduce the cost of programming for those experiencing financial hardship. Exploring new trends in recreation, such as outdoor art classes or alternatives to traditional sports-based programming, are additional ideas to increase the breadth of offerings and appeal to more user groups.

Inclusive, Adaptable and
Unique Recreation

OPPORTUNITY 3

W.3 Create accessible and diverse programs that provide opportunities for all ages, abilities, and incomes, and strive to increase the cultural relevancy of programming for underserved communities.

Action Items

- Promote continual multigenerational wellness through programming and amenities that appeal to all ages and abilities.
- Conduct a study to identify the need and potential locations for universal playgrounds and increased accessibility to accommodate play for all abilities.
- Continue to provide and grow all-abilities programming such as the Special Olympics and therapeutic recreation programs.
- Promote scholarship or reduced cost programming opportunities to include youth and families with lower incomes and people experiencing disabilities.
- Promote diversity in program participation by marketing to underserved communities and strive to increase the cultural relevancy of programming.
- Provide opportunities for adaptable and unique recreation that provides alternatives to traditional sport-based programs.
- Create pathway programs that better assist youth in bridging the gap between beginner and advanced programs.



Stewards of Nature and Sustainability



2022 Community Survey

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Goal Statement: We conserve and enhance natural systems with green spaces, wildlife areas, and water recreation that promote interaction and respect for nature. We provide environmental education and volunteer opportunities to encourage community stewardship. Our spaces are designed and managed to be resilient environmental assets.

This guiding principle focuses on the natural environment of South Suburban's outdoor spaces, including trail corridors, conserved open space, water resources, natural areas in parks, and environmental measures to address sustainability. It also has a human dimension, encouraging stewardship that is often fostered through opportunities to build a personal relationship with nature throughout a lifetime.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

There is a growing concern that humans are becoming less connected to nature as people spend more time indoors. According to the US EPA, Americans, on average, spend 90% of their time indoors,¹ even though spending time in nature has many physical and mental health benefits. Research by the USDA Forest Service has shown that spending time outdoors can increase life expectancy, increase focus and attention, and lower the risk of depression.² Studies have also shown that spending just 20 minutes outside a day can reduce stress and improve mental health.³

The Guiding Principle “Stewards of Nature and Sustainability” addresses the need for continued stewardship and ecological management of conserved open spaces, as well as the importance of providing diverse outdoor experiences. Survey feedback indicates that the community values opportunities to experience nature and spend time outdoors in the scenic spaces SSPRD provides. Enhanced natural areas, experiences in nature, and amenities that allowed people to comfortably access nature were frequently chosen by community survey respondents as the top elements they would like to see more of in South Suburban spaces. Top choices for new outdoor features and amenities included botanical and display gardens (32%), shade shelters and pavilions (32%), opportunities for water play (31%), and exploration/play in natural settings (28%).

Increasingly parks and recreation organizations are finding value in utilizing their properties and facilities as resilient environmental assets. The NRPA notes that parks are key to community resiliency and that adding green infrastructure can provide benefits, including improved water quality, lower urban temperatures, and increased wildlife habitat. Agencies surveyed by the NRPA emphasized that sustainability activities not only create environmental benefits but also provide public education and cost savings. Implementing green infrastructure is a way to share sustainable practices with members of the community while also conserving critical resources such as water and energy.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 1989. Report to Congress on indoor air quality: Volume 2. EPA/400/1-89/001C. Washington, DC.

² [The wellness benefits of the great outdoors | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

³ [Time Spent Outside Reduces Stress | Park Pulse | National Recreation and Park Association \(nrpa.org\)](#)



*Aerial of South
Platte Park*

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

The community survey feedback indicated the findings below:



Trails and Walkways and Neighborhood parks are outdoor facilities or programs used the most



Environmental sustainability is frequently cited when thinking about nature



Nature themed playgrounds are the most desired way to connect to nature

2022 Community Survey



Water play at deKoevend Park



Community Survey Top Master Plan Priority

“Include more sustainability, helping reduce water usage, by using back to native plants to help control the water consumption. Have green space and nature take a forefront in the parks.”

Community Survey Quote

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

EXPERIENCES IN NATURE

Enhanced natural areas and experiences in nature were frequently chosen in survey responses as preferred elements people would like to see more of.

OUTDOOR FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

When asked what the most frequently used outdoor facilities or programs are, participants cited the following choices:

1. Trails and walkways (85%)
2. Neighborhood parks (80%)
3. Natural areas and open spaces (76%)
4. Playgrounds (58%)

POPULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

When asked what the most popular ways participants use South Suburban parks, open spaces, and trails, the top choices were:

1. Walking/hiking/jogging on trails (82%)
2. Bicycling on trails (45%)
3. Dog walking (38%)
4. Outdoor play/playgrounds (34%)
5. Spend time with family and friends (29%)

CREATING NATURE EXPERIENCES

When asked how to connect residents to experiences in nature, the responses included:

1. Nature themed playgrounds (62%)
2. Nature exploration/free play (54%)
3. Natural material playgrounds (46%)
4. Educational displays and/or gardens with interpretive signage (38%)
5. Nature education classes/Guided Hikes (35%)
6. Stewardship and volunteer opportunities that teach about nature(23%)
7. Birdwatching amenities (21%)



CREATING NATURE EXPERIENCES

Natural spaces can be found in trail corridors, corners of parks, or large regional open spaces. Adding park-like amenities (such as benches, attractive pollinator gardens, educational signage, and public art) to these spaces helps close gaps in park access and enables people to enjoy spending time in nature more. The community strongly desires increased opportunities to interact with streams and natural features. This could entail providing steps and ramps to the water's edge where splashing and wading are possible or enhancing trails along creek corridors. A variety of strategies to make outdoor space more comfortable and interesting to engage with nature were suggested, such as providing shade, ADA accessible pathways, native plantings, and designs that benefits birds and wildlife.

Educational signage and nature programming provide opportunities for the community to learn about local ecology and wildlife, cultivating stewards of natural areas. Promoting play in nature is another form of nature education. Nature themed playgrounds and play features encourage kids to learn about nature through creative play. Community survey respondents indicated that nature themed playgrounds (62%) and places for nature exploration or free play (54%) were the top ways to connect residents to experiences in nature.

Creating Nature Experiences

OPPORTUNITY 1

N.1 Improve opportunities for self-guided and programmed nature exploration and experiences.

Action Items

- Add nature parks to the existing classification system allowing for park like amenities in areas previously classified as open space that encourage nature play and exploration.
- Create natural spaces with accessible pathways, benches, and shade to allow those of all ages who may have mobility challenges to enjoy nature.
- Find creative ways to offer nature experiences close-to-home by adding recreation features to trail corridors, nature parks, and local open spaces.
- Increase access to water and waterways to allow for enjoyment of the creeks and water-based recreation.
- Create localized opportunities for exploration and free play in natural settings by providing nature education displays, nature play features, and nature themed playgrounds where appropriate.
- Create opportunities for outdoor recreation in natural settings that appeal to all ages.

NATURE AND WILDLIFE EDUCATION AND CONSERVATION

People are increasingly recreating outdoors. Increased human activity in green spaces can increase support for and threaten local habitats. Balancing the need to conserve habitat and promote recreational access to nature will be an important consideration when planning outdoor spaces. The community survey identified the preservation of open space and wildlife as a top priority for the master plan to address. South Suburban will work with partners and the community to identify and conserve quality habitat and protect environmentally sensitive areas from impactful use. Other solutions include providing education to build awareness for local ecology and wildlife needs and reduce recreational behaviors that have a negative impact on habitat. South Suburban will continue to invest in programs, such as the Nature Van, which engage youth and foster an appreciation of nature at an early age.



Stewards of Nature and Sustainability

Nature and Wildlife Education

OPPORTUNITY 2

N.2 Create opportunities for the community to learn about nature and urban wildlife.

Action Items

- Continue to provide programming opportunities that connect people with nature and the outdoors.
- Increase cultural relevancy of nature and recreational programming through partnerships with community organizations that serve underserved and diverse communities.
- Continue to offer mobile programs to bring nature-based outreach to the community.
- Raise awareness about human/wildlife conflicts and strategies through educational pop-up events along trails, in open spaces and within parks.
- Work with communities to identify and balance use of open spaces and trail corridors while protecting wildlife habitat.
- Partner with other entities to acquire and conserve additional open space where possible.

SUSTAINABILITY AND RESILIENCY

Community Survey participants identified sustainability and conservation as top priorities for the master plan to address. Sustainability can encompass different ideas for different communities. At its root, sustainability is defined as using resources in a responsible manner to preserve opportunities for the next generation. For South Suburban’s stakeholders, improving energy and water efficiencies are core aspirations. The monetary savings over time and the conservation of valuable resources help South Suburban fulfill its mission as stewards of the environment.

Well cared for green spaces are investments that provide community benefits. Examples of benefits include lower urban temperatures in tree-shaded areas and reduced urban flooding due to green infrastructure and permeable open space. South Suburban will continue to explore and implement best practices for the care and management of natural spaces, encouraging nature to thrive and monitoring outdoor spaces in the face of a changing climate.

Sustainability and Resiliency

OPPORTUNITY 3

N.3 Identify and invest in sustainability programs and equipment to improve resiliency of our spaces.

Action Items

- Continue investing in equipment, resources, and practices to improve irrigation system efficiency.
- Evaluate transitioning bluegrass sports fields to synthetic turf to conserve water and lower maintenance needs.
- Expand the use of xeriscape or low-water landscapes and gardens and non-potable sources to responsibly use water while meeting the needs of our user groups and community.
- Identify appropriate areas to be restored or managed as grasslands with minimal mowing practices.
- Support wetland restoration efforts identified in existing site or management plans at South Platte Park and The Hudson Gardens and Event Center.
- Investigate using electric vehicles and alternative fuels for the operation and maintenance fleet to reduce energy use.
- Work with South Suburban’s Sustainability Committee to identify and promote sustainability improvements.



STEWARDSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM

South Suburban offers stewardship and volunteer opportunities that generate awareness and appreciation for the outdoors and foster a community of stewards dedicated to caring for parks, open space, and trails. South Suburban will continue to invest in nature-based programming, provide volunteer opportunities, and form partnerships with organizations that support these endeavors.

Creating Nature Experiences

OPPORTUNITY 4

N.4 Provide programs and educational opportunities that connect people to places to encourage discovery, exploration, stewardship, play, admiration, and social opportunities.

Action Items

- Provide public education and volunteer opportunities at gardens and natural areas.
- Work with volunteer organizations to assist with open space and trail maintenance and improvements.
- Collaborate with schools to encourage using South Suburban’s open spaces and trails as learning landscape educational opportunities.
- Support educational opportunities that raise public awareness of the needs, considerations, and care required for natural areas and open spaces.
- Partner with organizations that promote stewardship and enhance natural areas.

TRAILS AND WALKWAYS

Trails and walkways are heavily utilized, popular amenities in South Suburban. The community shared that trails and walkways were the most frequently used outdoor amenities, with 85% of survey respondents stating that trails were the outdoor facility they most frequently used and 82% stating that walking, hiking, or jogging on trails was the most common way they used South Suburban outdoor facilities. Most residents in South Suburban can access a trail within one-half mile of their home.

Trails strengthen connections between neighborhoods and parks, helping to fill gaps in park access by making park spaces easier to reach. Connecting local pathways to regional trails was cited as the #1 way to improve trails in South Suburban by both community survey respondents and regional partners. Trails also offer greater connection to the larger community. Regional trails are part of a comprehensive network that links to local trails and the Denver Metro area. While regional trails are geared for recreational, off-street use, they also provide critical connections for active transportation and commuters.

County and municipal partners recognize the importance of a cohesive regional trail network and the potential to increase recreational and active transportation opportunities. These partners have a strong desire to collaborate on trail planning and projects. Some ideas that emerged during the Regional Partners Roundtable include trail data sharing, planning sessions, collaborating on cohesive branding and signage, and integrating recreational, active transportation, and public transit planning efforts.

Improving access to trails was another important roundtable discussion. Improving accessibility through enhanced amenities can promote safety by increasing awareness of the trail system and reducing barriers to use and connectivity. Specific strategies to improve accessibility include installing lighting at key underpasses, enhancing roadway crossings, creating low-traffic connections between homes and trails, and collaborating on cohesive trail maps and signage. Other discussed strategies include studying areas with steep trail grades to better accommodate all ages and abilities and reducing conflicts between different trail user groups who are traveling at different speeds.

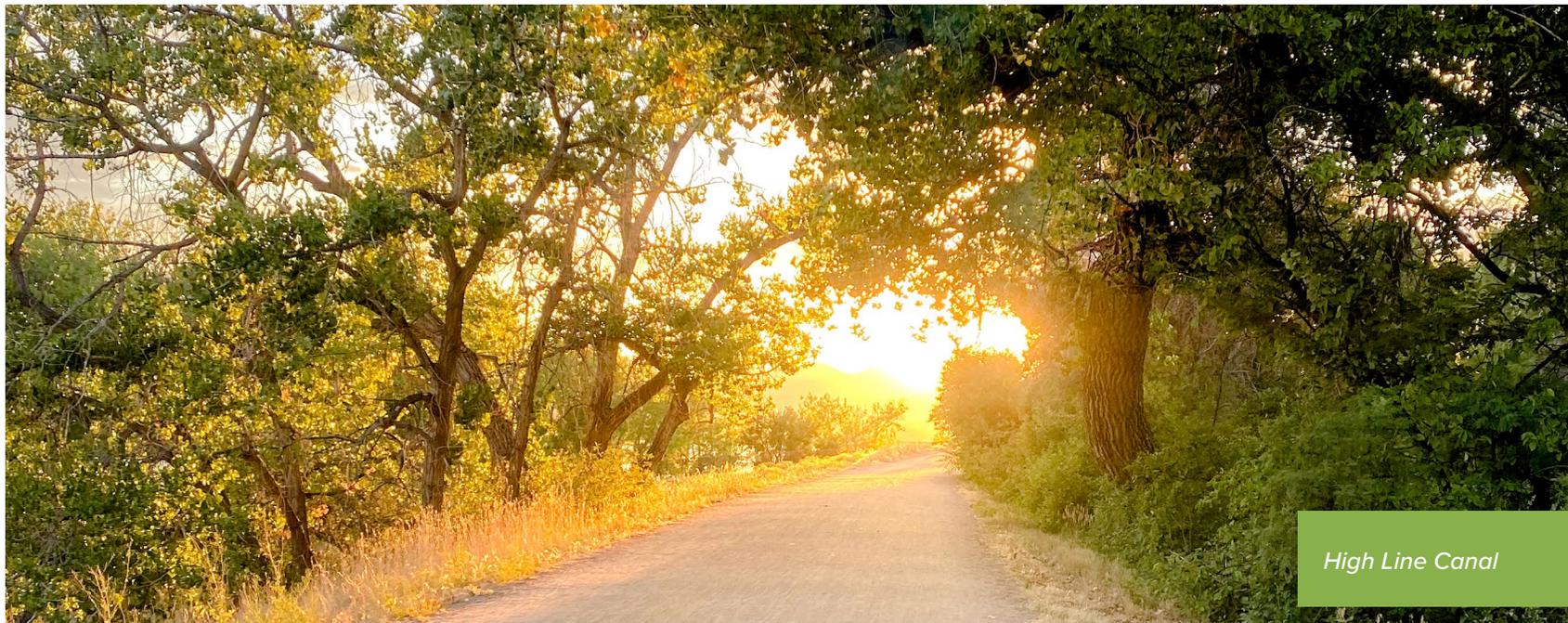


OPPORTUNITY 5

N.5 Strengthen and enhance the trail network to create stronger connections and improved access between neighborhoods, parks, open spaces, trail corridors, and the larger community.

Action Items

- Identify possible barriers to accessing parks, open spaces, trails, and recreation centers.
- Prioritize new or improved trail connections that close the ½ mile park access gaps, provide school access, and connect to community hubs and transit centers.
- Support local and regional partners in identifying and improving road crossings and connections to the on-street bike network.
- Increase awareness of the trail system through maps, online interactive applications, and unified signage and wayfinding.
- Invest in trail amenities that increase human comfort and allow people of all ages and all abilities to utilize the trail system.
- Enhance design standards for the Mary Carter Greenway and Bear Creek Regional Trail to keep pace with recreational uses and commuter demands.
- Work with local and regional partners to create policies to address conflicts between slower paced recreational trail users and faster paced trail users such as road and electric bikes, etc.



High Line Canal

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Goal Statement: We make investments with a long-range view of fiscal responsibility, balancing emerging needs while maintaining the quality of indoor facilities, outdoor spaces, and programs. We use funding responsibly and are transparent about priorities. We manage resources through extensive planning processes, investing in infrastructure, efficient operations, and strategic partnerships.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Throughout the Master Plan process, the community has strongly supported improving quality District-wide. Implementing goals and improvements will require thoughtful financial planning to balance needed investments with revenue and operating costs. As a public benefit that operates partially on taxpayer dollars, South Suburban strives to efficiently utilize funding for community purposes and invest in offerings that residents value most. Careful decisions are made regarding how and when to grow, when to upgrade amenities, and implement efficient operations and maintenance practices that save on resources.

South Suburban partnerships are formed strategically to share resources and create partnerships that mutually benefit each group and the community. As the population increases and new developments are built, South Suburban seeks to work with the community and developers to provide recreation opportunities that meet the needs of a growing community. Governmental jurisdictions require developer contributions to parks, open space, trails, and recreation to ensure new development pays for itself and the impacts of additional populations. However, an evaluation of the municipal codes for the cities and counties within South Suburban finds that the requirements vary greatly and need to be revised to ensure South Suburban can maintain quality service. These findings highlight the importance of encouraging local governments to revise requirements and continually update to reflect current costs and needs.

During the planning process, South Suburban engaged with a variety of municipal, county, and community partners. All groups shared enthusiasm for existing partnerships and a desire to strengthen and grow collaborative efforts and programs. When partners expressed what they felt were the most successful outcomes of the 2017 Master Plan, they highlighted the benefits of shared facilities and land management. Additional feedback on partnership success achieved over the last five years is listed on page 81.



Active Adult Expo

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

South Suburban's partners indicated that the greatest partnership or regional successes from the 2017 Master Plan included:



Shared Facilities
and Land
Management



Collaborations
on built
projects



Activities and
Programs
Provision

Regional Partners Roundtable



TOP PRIORITY

Collaboration and Partnerships



Top Master Plan Priority

WHAT DOES THE COMMUNITY DESIRE?

PARTNERSHIP CONSIDERATIONS

Regional Partners Roundtable agreed that Shared Facilities and Land Management are some of the greatest partnership or regional successes that came out of the 2017 Master Plan.

GREATEST SUCCESS FROM 2017 MASTER PLAN

When asked to rank some of the greatest partnership or regional successes from the 2017 Master Plan, the respondent's choices were:

- 46% Shared Facilities and Land Management
- 23% Collaborations on built projects
- 15% Activities and Programs Provision
- Other - Repaired and Replaced Bridges

Source: Regional Partners Round Table



REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

South Suburban has formed many active partnerships throughout the years with a variety of municipal, county, and community partners. These partners play a large role in allowing South Suburban to offer a wide range of programming and serve many diverse communities. Partnerships range from partner-led program offerings held at South Suburban owned and managed spaces to collaborative funding, planning, and project efforts with municipal and county partners. During the planning process for the 2022 Master Plan, regional partners expressed a desire for continued collaboration and ongoing planning sessions to identify shared goals. Potential partnership opportunities that support Master Plan goals are listed on pages 90-91.

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships

OPPORTUNITY 1

F.1 Identify shared goals and continue to collaborate with municipal, county, and community partners on planning efforts and infrastructure projects to collaborate rather than duplicate efforts.

Action Items

- Conduct regional partner planning workshops and reference partner plans on a reoccurring basis to identify alignment in future planning efforts, upcoming projects, and shared goals.
- Coordinate and support parks, open space, and trail improvements with the planning efforts of local municipalities and counties to meet community and regional goals.
- Support youth fitness and wellness programs through collaboration with school districts and recognized organized youth sports groups.

GROWTH

South Suburban will need strategies to meet the recreation needs of a growing community as the population increases and new developments emerge. Tactics to accommodate growth may involve developing new facilities and parks, partnering with others to provide expanded programming, and maximizing the use of existing facilities, parks, and open spaces. Augmenting partner and community facilities such as schools and libraries will also help to meet the growing demand for additional recreation space.

Planned Growth

OPPORTUNITY 2

F.2 Find effective solutions to enhance parks and meet park and open space needs as the populations and boundaries of South Suburban communities grow.

Action Items

- Work with cities and counties to provide appropriate park and trail facilities as the population grows to maintain South Suburban's Level of Service, especially for programmable athletic fields and sport court spaces.
- Co-locate new assets with new or existing facilities, including schools, libraries, and areas of concentrated employment, to share construction and maintenance costs, provide efficient delivery of services, and create multi-purpose destinations.
- Identify opportunities to improve neighborhood access to public parks and open spaces via trail connections from new developments.

DEVELOPER CONTRIBUTIONS

Municipalities and counties throughout South Suburban Parks and Recreation District require new developments to provide parks and open space that will serve the development's new residents. These requirements are outlined in jurisdictional code. However, requirements vary for each municipality and county and range from loosely defined open space, to dedicating parkland, and fees for additional park space and amenities. The lowest end of requirements may result in unusable and low-quality dedication that does not provide quality nature conservation, sufficient recreational amenities, adequate parkland to support the community, or fees that are sufficient for the cost of purchasing land and developing a park. Without appropriate contributions by development, South Suburban is challenged to provide consistent levels of service and ensure that each community's recreation needs are met.

The array of differing code requirements from eight jurisdictions also makes it difficult for South Suburban to anticipate what lands might become part of their inventory to improve and maintain or fees they might collect. Working with municipal and county partners to find alignment in developer requirements, land dedication code, and fee-in-lieu policies would help South Suburban better manage and plan for recreation investments as communities continue to develop and grow.

Complimentary Land Dedication Policies

OPPORTUNITY 3	F.3 Recommend municipalities and counties collaborate to create complementary fee-in-lieu/land dedication policies.
Action Items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend fee-in-lieu practices are adopted into code across all jurisdictions to ensure adequate park investment and development that meets community needs and aligns with South Suburban's Master Plan goals. • Hold a fee-in-lieu workshop with jurisdictional partners to potentially align guiding principles with land use code. • Through land dedication or fee-in-lieu policies, promote new housing and mixed-use developments as opportunities to connect regional trails and strengthen local trail connections to neighborhood parks.



Fiscal Responsibility

FUNDS

South Suburban Parks and Recreation District has traditionally operated in a fiscally conservative manner. South Suburban staff look for ways to decrease expenditures and improve revenue and efficiencies on an ongoing basis. For close to 60 years, South Suburban has provided parks and recreation opportunities to benefit the communities it serves. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted revenue in 2020 as all indoor facilities were closed. The District was able to adjust and reduce expenditures to help offset the loss in revenue. Due to that conservation and the overall age of many South Suburban assets, several facilities, parks, and trails have deferred maintenance needs. This Master Plan informs the prioritization of investments, as it is not affordable or feasible to address all deferred maintenance and capital improvement projects simultaneously (see Master Plan Prioritization Criteria page 9). In prioritizing amenities for upgrades, the South Suburban board and staff consider many factors, including facility condition, capacity, community desires, and long-term impact on capital investment. Aligning budgets with desired investments will be key to achieving Master Plan goals. Fiscal priorities will be outlined through annual work plans, the 3-Year Financial Plan, and the 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan.

Appropriate Use of Funds

OPPORTUNITY 4

F.4 Continue and expand upon responsible use of resources and appropriate expenditures.

Action Items

- Continue to develop and use the 3-Year Financial Plan and 5-Year Capital Improvement Plan in conjunction with the annual budget to ensure appropriate funds are available for operations, maintenance, and replacement or development of amenities.
- Recognize the impacts of supply chain disruption, cost escalation, and labor shortages when evaluating and prioritizing the replacement or development of amenities.
- Use the adopted Fees and Charges Policy to provide the community with equitable opportunities for our diverse services while meeting cost recovery goals.
- Remain financially solvent through appropriate expenditures, pursuing funding partners, annual auditing, and adhering to the 3-Year Financial Plan.



War Memorial Rose Garden Volunteer Annual Maintenance



Youth Programming
Partnership, Sports
Complex

IMPLEMENTATION



BMX Race,
Lorenz Regional Park

IMPLEMENTATION OVERVIEW

The 2022 Master Plan outlines a long-term vision to help South Suburban grow and become more sustainable. Recommended opportunities for improvement will evolve over the next five years as South Suburban aims to improve quality, connect communities, enrich wellness, steward nature through sustainable practices, and remain fiscally responsible. This implementation chapter is supported by the 2022 Strategic Plan, which offers internally focused actions to help South Suburban identify and overcome challenges to implementing plan recommendations. This Master Plan implementation chapter provides an overview of the following:

- » Funding Opportunities and Challenges
- » Partnership Opportunities
- » Goals for Level of Service
- » Maintenance and Management Considerations
- » Next Steps and Supporting Plans

Funding Opportunities and Challenges

FISCAL MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

South Suburban is funded through a variety of revenue streams, including tax levies, program fees, and grants. These funds are used to support operating costs, deferred maintenance, and capital improvement projects. Expenditures for operating costs and improvements are outlined in South Suburban's Annual Budget, Three-Year Financial Plan, and Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan. These plans are necessary strategic tools to align the District's finances with the adopted 2022 Master and Strategic Plans. They identify funding opportunities and challenges to achieving the Master Plan's goals. Listed below are some key funding opportunities and challenges.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

- » Increased tax collection due to a continued rise in the assessed value of residential and commercial properties in the Denver Metro area.
- » Pursuing grant and partnership opportunities.
- » Investments in revenue-generating amenities such as the South Suburban Sports Complex (opened in 2020) and managing the District owned Hudson Gardens and Event Center (starting in 2023).
- » Continued collaboration with municipal and county partners on projects that align with the 2022 Master Plan and partner planning efforts.
- » Opportunity to increase requirements for new development contributions for creating or improving parks, trails, recreation offerings, and open space to better match the expense of providing for increasing populations.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

- » Nationwide inflation in 2022 increased construction, maintenance, utilities, and operating costs.
- » As South Suburban grows, new funds will be needed to support the salaries of additional staff members.
- » New or increased revenue streams will be critical to keeping up with increased operating expenses and deferred maintenance and improvements to the District's aging facilities.
- » Operating costs are projected to continue to increase at a faster rate than operating revenue.
- » Resident increase of expectations for high quality and diverse offerings and services.
- » Aging infrastructure replacement needs and deferred maintenance.
- » Increase use and resulting wear and tear as more people use the South Suburban facilities, trails, parks, and open spaces.

South Suburban will continue to focus on maximizing funding opportunities, identifying new revenue streams, and growing existing revenue. Also important is pursuing efficiencies that can lead to decreases in expenditures.



Neighborhood Access to Trailways

Partnership Opportunities

NETWORK OF PARTNERSHIPS

South Suburban has a strong network of partners who have participated in this planning process through focus groups and plan reviews. Individual interest groups and municipalities can be partners for upgrades or new facilities that support the community's desires, Master Plan guiding principles, or specific sports (e.g., ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer). The District works closely with municipal and county partners to prioritize projects and share related project costs. The Master Plan anticipates partner and grant-contributed funds to help complete important projects that will meet Master Plan goals. Below is a list of partnerships and partner plans highlighting existing relationships or offer potential future opportunities.

RELATED PARTNER PLANS

This Master Plan supports and aligns with regional planning efforts including:

- » **2021 Arapahoe County Open Spaces Master Plan**
 - Support education and programming under the plan's Program Offerings and Gaps Assessment section.
 - Collaborate on shared goals for South Platte Park and Carson Nature Center.
 - Collaborate to close gaps in the outdoor recreation network, promote sustainable programming, improve regional trail connectivity, and increase biodiversity and habitat.
- » **2017 Arapahoe County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan**
 - Support Arapahoe County's Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan vision to encourage alternative modes of transportation through increased trail use.
- Support improvements along regional trails such as the Mary Carter Greenway, the Cornerstone Park trail connector, and the South Platte River Trail.
- » **2017 City of Centennial Trails and Recreation Plan**
 - Support the resulting vision and future steps of the Centennial Trails and Recreation Plan. Support Centennial's ongoing interest in connectivity in the community.
- » **2020 Columbine Valley Master Plan**
 - Support partnerships with Columbine Valley expressed in the plan.
 - Support projects such as potential improvements to the Mary Carter Greenway Trail and the Columbine Trail.
- » **2030 Douglas County Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan**
 - Support Douglas County's desire to better connect inter-regional trails, including segments within the Plum Creek, Cherry Creek, and Greenland Ranch corridors.
 - Support the desire to improve east to west trail connectors such as the High Line Canal corridor, the C-470, and the E-470 corridor.
- » **2016 Foothills Park and Recreation District IGA**
- » **2019 Highline Canal Master Plan**
 - Support further steps of the High Line Canal Master Plan.
 - Support the plan's focus on public health, improved access, safety, and quality of experience.
 - Support potential projects identified in the plan that fall within South Suburban's boundaries.
- » **2020 Jefferson County Open Space Conservation Greenprint**
- » **2020 Jefferson County Preservation Progress Plan**
 - Collaborate with partners to provide access to a trail or green space within a 10-minute walk.
- » **2020 Jefferson County Trails Plan**
 - Collaborate with partners to strengthen trail connections across the region.
- » **2023 Littleton Park, Recreation, and Trails Master Plan (Future Plan)**
- » **2019 Envision Littleton Comprehensive Plan**
- » **2019 City of Lone Tree Comprehensive Plan**
 - Support developing communities east of I-25 with facilities, parks, trails, and open spaces.
- » **2015 City of Lone Tree Walk and Wheel Report**
- » **2021 Santa Fe Drive Action Plan – PEL CDOT**
 - Support efforts to enhance pedestrian and bike safety and access, transportation and connectivity issues, and environmental concerns in the Santa Fe Drive corridor.
- » **2015 Sheridan Comprehensive Plan**
 - Work collaboratively with the City of Sheridan and the Sheridan School District to identify opportunities for increasing access to existing resources like playgrounds and recreation facilities.
 - Support efforts to increase trail connectivity throughout Sheridan in locations such as connectivity between the Quincy trail to Centennial Park.
 - Work with the City of Sheridan and the Regional Transportation District (RTD) to provide access to recreational opportunities in new growth and redevelopment areas.
- » **2013 South Platte River Corridor Vision (updated plan currently under development)**
 - Support implementation of the South Platte Corridor River Vision's recommendations for trail improvements along the South Platte River.

Partnership Opportunities

DISTRICT PLANNING PARTNERS

This Master Plan supports partners and planning efforts within the District including:

- Continue to work together with Mile High Flood District and Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority to improve waterways throughout the District.
- Continue to collaborate on mutually beneficial projects with school districts (Littleton, Cherry Creek, Sheridan, Douglas County).
- Continue to implement the engineering and infrastructure, education, and awareness recommendations for the Mary Carter Greenway Trail.
- Continue to reinforce the South Platte River Corridor as a recreational and open space destination for the entire region by supporting the 2013 South Platte River Corridor Vision and South Platte Working Group.
- Support The Hudson Gardens and Event Center Master Plan recommendations (e.g., nature themed improvements and programs).
- Continue joint-use agreements with elementary school sites within SSPRD to provide spaces for programming and play.
- Work with existing partners like Littleton, Lone Tree, Sheridan, Bow Mar, Columbine Valley, Centennial, Arapahoe County, Douglas County, and Jefferson County to conserve and provide public access to open space within the District (such as corporate campus, transitional industrial areas, and riparian corridors/ canal connections).
- Continue to support programs such as Sheridan Inspires (GOCO nature initiative).

PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS

This Master Plan supports public and private partnerships that would:

- Engage local employers and areas of concentrated employment to understand how SSPRD can support worksite wellness initiatives.
- Work with volunteers, environmental organizations, and staff to conduct stewardship activities and annually measure:
 - Number of people participating in nature programs
 - Amount of publicly accessible natural areas
 - Increase the amount of quality wildlife habitat

SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERS

This Master Plan supports opportunities to connect with a variety of partners and organizations to explore potential sustainability practices including:

- Denver Water
- Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Solar Power Providers
- Charge Ahead Colorado-Clean Air Fleets
- Colorado Proud
- U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)
- Sustainable Sites Initiative™ (SITES®)
- NRPA's Great Urban Parks Campaign
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife
- High Line Canal Conservancy

FUNDING AND VOLUNTEER PARTNERS

SSPRD is supported by funding and volunteer partners including:

- Recreation participant user fees
- Community taxpayers
- Arapahoe, Douglas, and Jefferson Counties (e.g., specific ownership tax portion of vehicle registration, Douglas County grant support of STAR)
- Arapahoe County Open Spaces Grants
- Great Outdoors Colorado Grants (GOCO)
- Douglas County Parks and Trails, Open Space, and Historic Resource Fund
- Local grants, Intergovernmental agreements, and local government matches (e.g., City of Littleton, City of Centennial, City of Lone Tree, City of Sheridan Matching Grants)
- Conservation Trust Fund
- Volunteers efforts (e.g., SSPRD Youth Commission, South Platte Park Volunteers)
- Joint fundraising efforts
- Sports leagues and recreation groups
- Trust for Public Lands
- South Metro Land Conservancy

Goals for Level of Service

GOALS FOR 2026 LEVEL OF SERVICE

Level of Service (LOS) standards for parks and recreation measure how well places serve their current population and anticipate population growth needs. While LOS metrics cannot be used as absolute standards, they can be helpful in determining if there is a deficiency in parkland or facilities by assessing equitable distribution across geographies and populated areas. [See Appendix A: Inventory and Level of Service](#) for a detailed breakdown of South Suburban's LOS for parks, open space, trails, and recreation centers.

One way to assess if there is adequate recreation space to meet the needs of the community is to compare recreation space acreage with the number of residents. This LOS offers a guideline to determine land requirements for various park and recreation areas and facilities. Understanding the acreage of parkland as it relates to the current and future projected population helps anticipate the needs of new residents. The primary purpose of measuring LOS acreage per population is to monitor a community's supply of developable, publicly accessible parkland. As the population grows, South Suburban will strive to maintain level of service as measured by provision per population.

Another common measurement is evaluating the percentage of residents with a park, recreation facility, and/or regional trail within a half mile of their home. Ensuring that parks are within walking distance is an important LOS measurement as it makes parks accessible to all people, including those who have mobility challenges, youth, or people without access to a vehicle.

PLANNING FOR LOS

South Suburban has limited control over some aspects of planning for adequate LOS. South Suburban relies on partnerships to help meet LOS standards and provides for the recreation needs of the community. Partnerships to provide services are formed through lease agreements and shared funding of parks and recreation facilities. For example, South Suburban leases certain parks from local school districts to provide recreational amenities and programs in areas where obtaining other parklands may be limited. South Suburban school parks managed but not owned by the District are part of the parks system and included in the LOS analysis but might not contribute to the LOS in the future if leases are discontinued. The fields at David A. Lorenz are an example of a temporary lease that will end, resulting in the loss of five multi-purpose fields. South Suburban is actively pursuing acquisitions of athletic field space to fill the gap once the lease ends.

Private development dedication of parks, trails, and/or open space also contributes to LOS performance. Municipalities and counties throughout South Suburban require jurisdictional codes for new development to provide open space that will serve the development's new residents. The current municipal and county codes do not adequately prescribe requirements for developers that match the current level of parks and recreation service within the District. Without appropriate contributions by development, South Suburban is challenged to provide consistent levels of service and ensure that each community's recreation needs are being met.

Revising development codes would create improved accountability for developers contributing to maintaining the level of service as new private development adds to the demands placed on South Suburban parks, trails, programs, and facilities. LOS metrics is an important tool for informing community standards for developer contributions to parks through dedications or fee-in-lieu. These metrics can be used as a guide to uphold provision in alignment with expectations for the region and that a balanced array of recreational opportunities and amenities are provided. See page 81 for Master Plan Opportunities for Improvement related to developer contributions.

LOS Park and Open Space Acreage

2022:
Acres of developed parks and open space per 1,000 population= 17.69*

2026 Goal:
Maintain LOS by adding 156 acres

LOS Walkability

2022:
Percentage of households within walking distance of a park, regional trail, or recreation facility = 99%

2026 Goal:
Maintain percent of households within walking distance by developing parks and pathways which connect to new communities.

*During the 2022 Master Plan process, South Suburban's park inventory was updated to include new park categories, resulting in differences in Level of Service measurements between the 2017 and 2022 master plans. See Appendix A: Inventory and Level of Service for details.

Goals for Level of Service

LEVEL OF SERVICE CALCULATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Table 11 provides a breakdown of the Level of Service by acres of park type for the South Suburban park system. South Suburban will need to add 56 acres of developed park space and 100 acres of open space to their system by 2026 to keep up with the projected population growth of 8,830 by 2026 and maintain South Suburban's current level of service.

South Suburban is projected to meet these goals, as 109 acres of newly developed parks and 213 acres of open space are planned to be added to the system. Proposed parks, trails, and facilities that will help to meet future LOS goals are listed below.

In addition, it is recommended that jurisdictional codes be amended to require new development contribute at the rate of the park and open space types listed in Table 11.

Parks

- SSPRD has five undeveloped parks with approximately 77 acres. In the future, these parks may contribute to the LOS of different park categories as park amenities are developed. Undeveloped parks include the Mission Viejo Open Space, Ohlson Acres, Superchi Property, Grandpa's Acres, and Jackass Hill Park.

Future Parks

- Lone Tree Regional Park (RidgeGate Southwest Village) 80 acres
- Lone Tree (RidgeGate Southwest Village) 29 acres of planned Neighborhood Parks (3 parks)
- Lone Tree (RidgeGate Southwest Village) 213 acres of planned Open Space

TABLE 11

Parks System Acres Per Population

Park Category	Acres	Acres per 1000 people 2021 Service Level (Population 153,251)	Acres per 1000 people 2026 Service Level (Population 162,081)	Acres Needed to Meet Current Level of Service Standards in 2026
Regional	141	0.92	0.87	8
Neighborhood	295	1.93	1.82	17
Community	353	2.30	2.18	20
Mini	6	0.04	0.04	0.3
School	44	0.29	0.27	3
Civic	15	0.10	0.09	1
Nature Park	47	0.31	0.29	3
Undeveloped	77	0.50	0.48	4
Open Space	1732	11.30	10.68	100
Total	2711	17.69	16.72	156

Source: Design Workshop, SSPRD GIS data, US Census population data, ESRI population projections

- Superchi Property 12 acres of planned Nature Park
- Jackass Hill Park 19 acres of potential future Nature Park
- Mission Viejo Open Space 19 acres of potential future Community Park 16 acres of potential future Open Space

Future Trails

Proposed trails that will help to meet LOS and fill gaps in access include:

- Future public trail (overlapping metro-district owned) connecting the future residents of the Santa Fe Park and River Park subdivisions to South Platte Park and the Mary Carter Greenway.
- The Happy Canyon Regional Trail and Badger Gulch Trail will be developed to serve residents of Lone Tree.

Future Recreation Centers and Sports Complexes

New recreation centers and improvements to existing recreation centers and sports complexes will help to ensure LOS for indoor recreation is maintained. The construction of new facilities are not currently planned within next five years. Studies expected to be complete within the next five years to identify indoor recreation improvements may include:

- South Suburban Ice Arena/Goodson Recreation Center Utilization Study.
- Recreation Center Feasibility Study (Lone Tree east of I-25).

Maintenance and Management Considerations

MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

South Suburban Park and Recreation District features a variety of parks, trails, natural areas, and community facilities. To be effective, maintenance standards must reflect the desired aesthetics and usage of the different places and facilities, e.g., an athletic park will have different standards than a naturalized area. Standards provide guidance for achieving quality maintenance and should be adjusted as needed. South Suburban's standards are found in the Parks and Grounds Management Plan and the Parks, Trails, Open Spaces, and Outdoor Facilities Design Standards document.

The goal of parks and facility maintenance is to provide the highest quality of maintenance to ensure that amenities are clean, attractive, and usable for visitors at all times and during all seasons. To achieve the highest levels of service for maintenance, several principles guide maintenance work: classifying maintenance standards, having an effective management and maintenance process, and ensuring that those performing maintenance and repair have the needed skills and equipment for the tasks.

The standards of care for maintenance of any public space directly affect the annual maintenance budget and influence perceptions of safety and use. For example, a maintenance plan in which all tasks are carried out at or above recommended best maintenance practices may create a pristine landscape but may ultimately prove to be unsustainable due to cost. Alternatively, a maintenance plan in which tasks and repairs are carried out at minimal levels may reduce annual budgets but will likely result in high capital costs required for replacement or repairs that could have been prevented with regular care.

Maintenance needs are also influenced by intensity of use – areas of higher use typically require greater maintenance. However, use is also affected by the level of maintenance: a well-maintained site will attract visitors, whereas a poorly maintained site discourages visitors. Given this relationship between use and the standards of care, it is important to develop a maintenance plan that balances fiscal considerations with maintenance needs to provide a sustainable, high-quality visitor experience.

Identified as a priority to both the community and South Suburban staff, maintaining and improving existing facilities, parks, and trails will be a major focus over the next five years. Replacing outdated maintenance equipment with more efficient tools can save on both cost and resources. New, efficient equipment can also empower staff to be more effective at completing their work by cutting down on maintenance time and enabling best practices of care.

Some of the upcoming improvements over the next five years include:

- Replacement of rolling stock equipment, mowers, and vehicles that are used to maintain parks and golf courses
- Funds to repair damaged concrete and trails
- Replacing aging monument signs
- Technology and system upgrades, such as software and computer replacements
- Replacing ice resurfacers
- Replacing select recreation facility equipment



Puma Park

Next Steps and Supporting Plans

NEXT STEPS

South Suburban will continue to experience growth and this community-led plan lays out opportunities for improvement to the parks and recreation system. The five Guiding Principles of the 2022 Master Plan (see page 7) have been crafted with the support of the community, Board, staff, and municipal and county partners. It will be important for South Suburban staff to continue communicating the plan progress and celebration of achievements over the next five years of improvements.

The 2022 Master Plan is an overarching guiding document that is part of a larger planning effort. The Master Plan is supported by the 2022 Strategic Plan and is implemented through annual budgets and work plans, a Three-Year Financial Plan, and Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan. The recommendations in these efforts will begin to be implemented in 2023 and will be updated periodically as needed.

SUPPORTING PLANS

The recommendations of the Master Plan are not all immediately achievable – it will take planning and effort by South Suburban and the community to see them successfully implemented. Many of the recommendations in this Master Plan will be implemented through guidance in supporting plans which provide additional details for SSPRD staff on specific subject matters and outlines ways to realize Master Plan goals. These plans also provide direction for South Suburban to maintain CAPRA accreditation, a national standard awarded from the NRPA which certifies that park and recreation agencies meet best practices and maintain high standards.

The following plans are supporting appendices to this 2022 Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update. Please note, supporting plans may be updated on a different cycle than the Master Plan.

ADA TRANSITION PLAN: A phased plan for identifying and removing barriers at existing recreation facilities, parks, and amenities per requirements of the US Department of Justice Title II regulation.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND MARKETING PLAN: An understanding of customer needs, wants, concerns, and behaviors. The plan addresses the appropriate mix of communications tools to promote programs, facilities, events, and services to various segments of the community.

EMERGENCY, SECURITY, AND CRISIS PLAN: A comprehensive general security plan including hazardous and flammable material storage, unified signage system, evacuation procedures, critical incident response, AED training, active shooter plans and crisis communications for areas, buildings, and facilities under our jurisdiction.

FACILITY PREVENTATIVE MAINTENANCE PLAN: The maintenance and replacement of District assets for optimum use and safety. The plan gives the ability to reach or extend an assets full life cycle and achieve expected return on investment.

FIVE-YEAR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN: Analyze the future capital and deferred maintenance needs based on the District's Master Plan and strategic goals for the future.

FLEET MANAGEMENT PLAN: An inventory of all vehicles, rolling stock, and other major equipment and inspection and replacement schedules.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN: Inventory of historical and cultural resources and strategies for how they will be managed.

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS: Protection procedures, such as for erosion control, conduct of nature studies, wildlife and habitat preservation, and protection of water supply reservoirs for environmentally unique or sensitive areas such as valuable wetlands, riverbanks, and woodlands.

PARKS AND GROUNDS MANAGEMENT PLAN: Provides management standards for various types of parks, trails, open spaces, and facility grounds found throughout the District.

PARKS, TRAILS, OPEN SPACES, AND OUTDOOR FACILITIES DESIGN STANDARDS: Plan outlining design standards for parks, trails, and amenities, including accessible park features, trail typologies, and universal playground equipment.

RECREATION PROGRAMMING PLAN: Programming model, services management matrix, orientation to those serviced, development and selection type, and scope of programs and outreach initiatives for all leisure and recreation programs and services.

RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN: The plan analyzes the programs/services offered and facilities/areas managed for personal injury and financial loss potential and identifies approaches to manage such injury, loss, business and operational impact.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN: Projects and initiatives that demonstrate the agency's commitment to energy and resource conservation. The plan includes product purchasing, reduction and handling of waste, wise use and protection of land, air, water, and wildlife, and sustainable design/construction of buildings and facilities.

THREE-YEAR FINANCIAL PLAN: To help make informed budgetary and operational decisions by anticipating future revenue and expenditures, as well as highlighting anticipated fiscal risks and opportunities.



**SOUTH
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PARKS & RECREATION