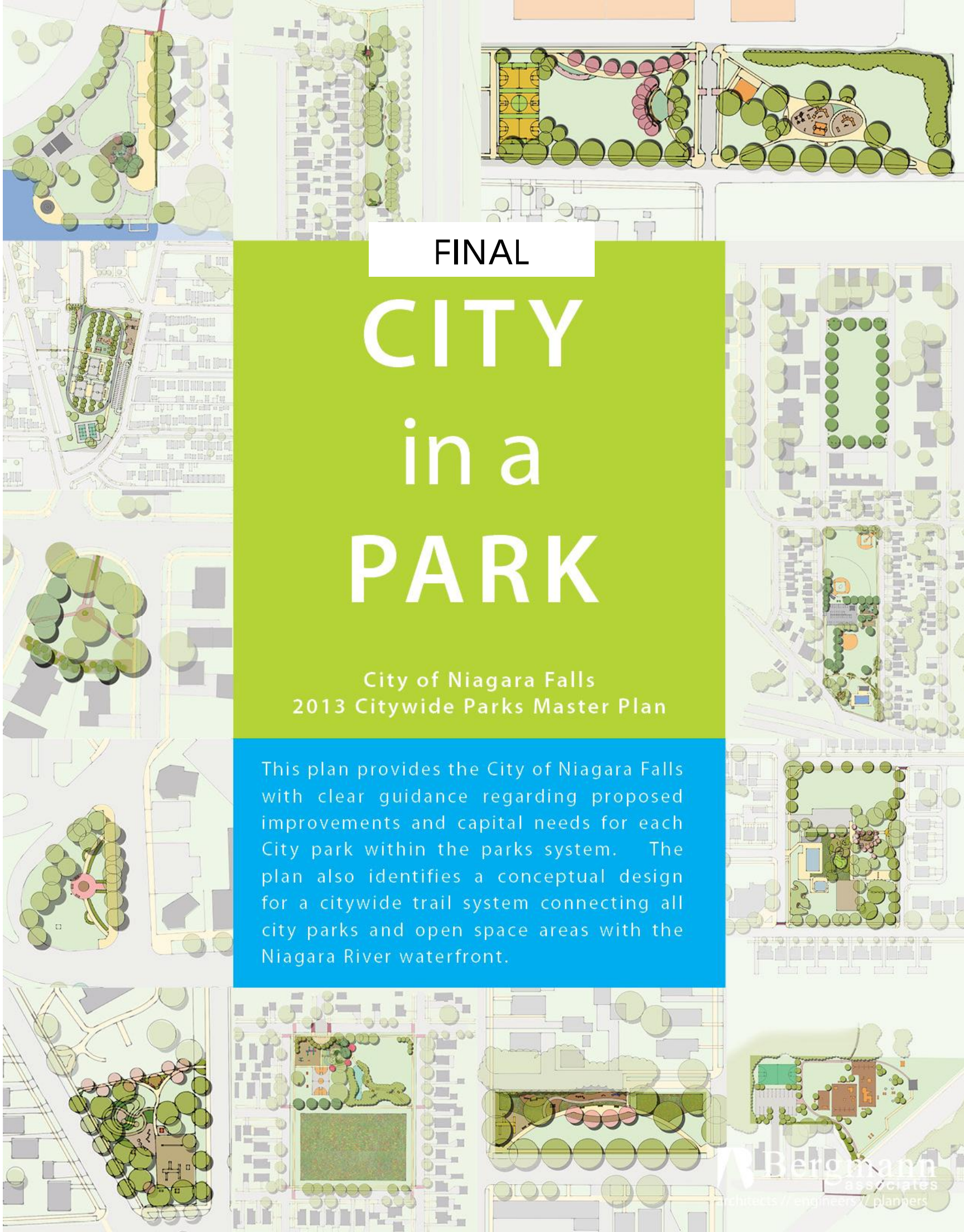


The background of the entire page is a collage of various park site plans. These plans show different park layouts, including playgrounds, sports fields, walking trails, and areas with trees and landscaping. The plans are rendered in a stylized, illustrative manner with various colors like green for grass, brown for paths, and blue for water or sky.

FINAL

# CITY in a PARK

City of Niagara Falls  
2013 Citywide Parks Master Plan

This plan provides the City of Niagara Falls with clear guidance regarding proposed improvements and capital needs for each City park within the parks system. The plan also identifies a conceptual design for a citywide trail system connecting all city parks and open space areas with the Niagara River waterfront.

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# Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

|            |                                                    |    |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| I          | PROJECT OVERVIEW .....                             | 1  |
|            | PROJECT BACKGROUND .....                           | 1  |
|            | PREVIOUS PLANNING STUDIES .....                    | 2  |
|            | THE CITY IN A PARK PLAN .....                      | 5  |
|            | A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PARKS .....        | 7  |
|            | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT .....                         | 10 |
| II         | THE PARK SYSTEM TODAY .....                        | 14 |
|            | OVERVIEW .....                                     | 14 |
|            | SUMMARY OF PARK SYSTEM .....                       | 15 |
|            | ON-GOING PARK IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS .....           | 15 |
|            | RECREATION SERVICE PROVIDERS .....                 | 16 |
| III        | HOW NIAGARA FALLS MEASURES UP .....                | 21 |
|            | DOES THE CITY HAVE ENOUGH PARKLAND? .....          | 21 |
|            | ARE CITY PARKS ACCESSIBLE? .....                   | 22 |
|            | WHO IS USING WHAT? .....                           | 22 |
|            | WHAT'S TRENDING IN RECREATION PARTICIPATION? ..... | 24 |
|            | IS THE CITY SPENDING ENOUGH ON PARKS? .....        | 27 |
|            | KEY FINDINGS .....                                 | 27 |
| IV         | CITY IN A PARK .....                               | 29 |
|            | PARK CLASSIFICATION .....                          | 29 |
|            | SYSTEM WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS .....                  | 32 |
|            | DESIGN GUIDELINES .....                            | 42 |
|            | INDIVIDUAL PARK MASTER PLANS .....                 | 51 |
| V          | IMPLEMENTING THE PARK MASTER PLAN .....            | 68 |
|            | FUNDING .....                                      | 73 |
| APPENDICES |                                                    |    |
| APPENDIX A | A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE PARK SYSTEM        |    |
| APPENDIX B | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARIES                     |    |
| APPENDIX C | PARK SUMMARY SHEETS                                |    |
| APPENDIX D | RECREATION STAKEHOLDER INPUT                       |    |
| APPENDIX E | ANALYSIS MAPS                                      |    |
| APPENDIX F | INDIVIDUAL PARK MASTER PLANS                       |    |
| APPENDIX G | OPINION OF PROBABLE COSTS                          |    |

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# I. project overview

(1)

Ask an adult who grew up in Niagara Falls a simple question: *What do you remember about your parks as a child?* Then watch...facial expression softens, and you will hear fond memories of walking to parks, playing ball at the fields, you may learn about playground coaches and hear boasting of the ice-skating downtown. The response to questions about the parks today will yield a difference response, one of concern for future generations, specifically regarding their access to quality open space and recreational opportunities and programs.

It is because of this shift in the perception of the parks and park programming that the City of Niagara Falls has undertaken the *City in a Park* plan. This plan reviews the park system today and imagines its future.

## Project Background

The City of Niagara Falls is located along the Niagara River at the Canadian border in western New York. The city encompasses approximately 16 square miles (10,240 acres), of which 560 acres are designated parklands. There are a total of 30 city owned or maintained parks within the city, ranging from small urban memorial parks to large regional destination parks. The park system includes a wide variety of recreational facilities and amenities in varying condition.

Though once a thriving city, the population in the City of Niagara Falls has declined by twenty thousand people over the past thirty years. During this time, the number of youth has declined while the number of adults has increased. These demographic shifts have



(2)

resulted in changes in park utilization as well as the city's ability to effectively manage the park system. This is consistent with a more global need for a sustainable approach to the planning, development and management of the park system.

The City of Niagara Falls has embraced a proactive approach to planning for the future, undertaking a full range of design and planning efforts from Comprehensive Plans to neighborhood specific plans. As implementation initiatives from these and other efforts begin to transpire, it became increasingly important to think about the park system as a local amenity and as a visitor asset, in a holistic manner.

Most importantly, redefining the park system as more than just playgrounds and athletic fields, it is the open spaces, both formal and informal, the naturalized areas of the city and the connective fabric that links the various amenities and resources together.

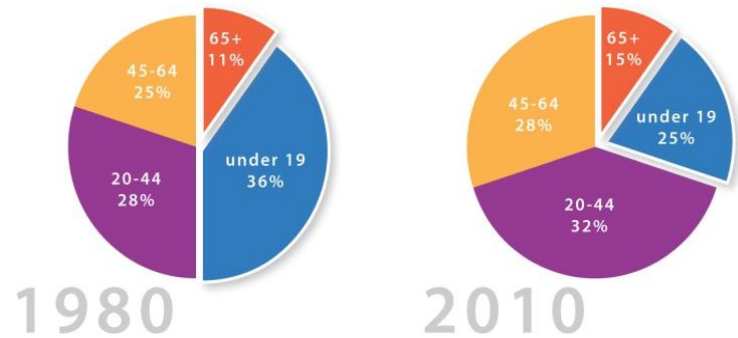
With the understanding that parks are largely the 'public realm', the city can explore greater opportunities for connectivity within the park system. Additionally, a comprehensive approach will ensure sustainable strategies are considered and incorporated to better meet the current and future recreational needs of the community.

## Previous Planning Studies

The *City in a Park* plan recognizes the planning efforts previously undertaken by the city. The 2009 Comprehensive Plan includes several principles associated with the city's parks and recreation facilities.

"The Big Moves" is one core strategy of the plan, which includes seven sub-strategies critical to the greater transformation of the city. One strategy, '*Reconnect the City to its Waterfront*' is related to the

## Population Change in Niagara



recommendations included in this plan. Along with focused investment in River waterfront through various action items, it states that the city should create green streetscape connections that link the riverfront amenities to the city, its neighborhoods and main streets.

The Comprehensive Plan includes nine policy areas, which establish a broad framework for revitalization of the city's urban environment. Policy Area 4, *Environmental and Open Space Resources*, includes specific recommendations for the city parks and open space. The action items included in this policy are focused to *preserve, conserve and recognize the environmental and natural resources of the city in a manner that contributes to the city's overall quality of life, enhances public health and fosters appropriate development*, which is, in part, the fundamental goal of the *City in a Park* plan.

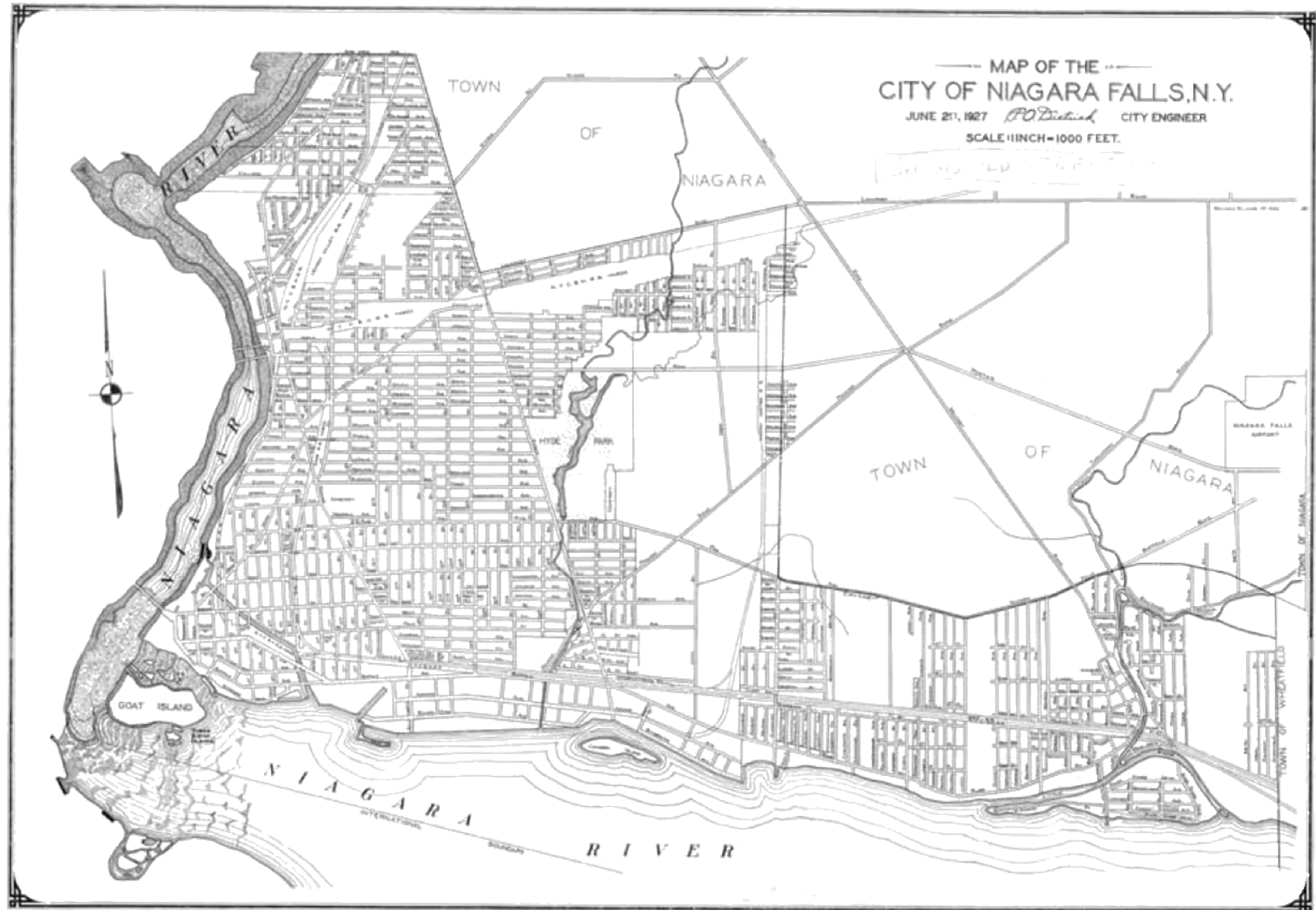


CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS PARKS

- |                              |                   |                       |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Lafayette                  | 11 Liberty        | 21 LaSalle Waterfront |
| 2 Tom Micklej Field          | 12 Jerauld        | 22 70th Street (KIES) |
| 3 Highland & Beech (Planned) | 13 Hyde           | 23 Stephenson         |
| 4 D'Amelio                   | 14 Orleans & 24th | 24 Hennepin           |
| 5 North & Lockport           | 15 Orleans & 25th | 25 91st Street Park   |
| 6 Gluck                      | 16 Porter         | 26 Jayne              |
| 7 Legends Basketball Court   | 17 MacKenna       | 27 Griffon            |
| 8 DiFranco                   | 18 Gill Creek     | 28 Black Creek        |
| 9 Statue of Liberty          | 19 Perry          | 29 Caravelle Drive    |
| 10 South Junior Playground   | 20 63rd Street    | 30 Wright Park        |



(4)



The Comprehensive Plan includes specific policies and action items related to the *City in a Park* plan, including:

- Providing recommendations for connections and public access, where appropriate, between development and natural areas, parks and recreation areas, and regional connections of these resources outside of the city.
- Protecting, maintaining and enhancing the city's open space resources, parks and natural environment.
- Implementing strategies for open space connections, as outlined in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Acknowledging the city's primary open space network and resources as valuable new public infrastructure.

The above policies were considered throughout the development of recommendations for the park system, individual park master plans and citywide trail system.

### The City in a Park Plan

The Niagara Falls Citywide Parks Master Plan provides a framework that identifies recreational needs, goals, programming and maintenance requirements for the city park system. The *City in a Park* plan also identifies recommendations for improvements to currently underdeveloped parklands. This plan also includes a conceptual design for a citywide trail system connecting the city parks and open space areas with the Niagara River waterfront. Finally, a prioritized list of projects is identified to facilitate implementation of this plan by the City of Niagara Falls.

### Goals of the Master Plan

The recommendations in this plan are focused on ensuring equal access to quality recreational facilities and programs that are within the fiscal and maintenance capacity of the City of Niagara Falls. The goals of the planning process include:

- Develop strategies for programming and development by prioritizing park needs.
- Identify a sustainable management and maintenance approach.
- Identify funding opportunities.
- Reflect resident and visitor needs.

(5)

## What is a Park Master Plan?

A framework to guide decision making for future management of park, recreation and open space facilities, which support community growth, environmental sustainability and future development while balancing financial capabilities and maintenance responsibilities.

(6)

## The Benefits of Parks

It is often difficult to measure fiscal success when thinking about parks and recreation programs, but they are important community assets that contribute tangibly to quality of life.

Parks and open spaces are an integral part of the city's landscape. The Citywide Parks Master Plan identifies a strategy for maximizing the park resources so Niagara Falls can recognize the many benefits associated with a world-class park system:

- **Improved Community Health:** Parks provide safe places to gather and recreate. Access to parks ensures people get necessary physical activity. The results of adequate exercise and activity have been shown to reduce obesity, reduce public health problems and associated health care costs, increase self esteem and reduce depression. The Citywide Parks Master Plan ensures that city residents have easy access to park facilities and the parks themselves offer a range of programs and recreational options.
- **Crime Prevention:** Providing adequate organized activities for youth is recognized as being directly related to a decrease in delinquent behavior.
- **Economic Revitalization & Investment:** The economic impacts of parks can be hard to specify but they indirectly play a critical role in the economic health of a community. Attractive and ample parks and recreation opportunities are often important considerations for residents when deciding where to purchase a home. Today, more and more businesses consider quality-of-life attributes when deciding where to locate a business. New recreational facilities and programs can also provide additional jobs for the local workforce.
- **Tourism Promotion:** Attractive parks and open spaces are not only important for residents, but can also be a defining factor in attracting visitors to a community. The City of Niagara Falls could build on its parks and open space assets to become recognized not only for the state park system, but also as a healthy and active destination offering a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities.
- **Art, Culture and Heritage:** Parks afford a unique opportunity for sharing the history and culture of Niagara Falls. They can be used for more than just recreation, and should be viewed as opportunities for education, interpretation, storytelling and public art.

“A study of metropolitan areas across the US provides evidence that crime rates drop when adequate parks and recreation activities are available.”

*Trust for Public Land*

## The Planning Process

The *City in a Park* plan takes a system-wide approach to analysis of the park system providing a comprehensive understanding of citywide needs and opportunities.

The planning process began with an inventory of existing park conditions and development of a community profile. Individual park boundary maps were provided by the city, as was information regarding park maintenance, management, budget and operations. The project team collected community information inclusive of demographic and population trends, recreation programming opportunities and recreation trends.

This information was used to identify the opportunities and deficiencies within the park system. Once identified, analysis of parks and recreation standards and trends guided the development of system-wide goals. These goals were then used to make the recommendation included in the individual park master plans and citywide trail system.

## A Historical Perspective of the Park System

As part of the *City in a Park* plan, a historical perspective of the park system was prepared, see Appendix A. The report provides the background and framework that was instrumental in the initial creation of the City of Niagara Falls park system. An in-depth look at the historical developments of each park (where known) was conducted which identifies features that remain from its original construction. The parks were also evaluated for their conformity to the Olmstead Brothers' recommendations and guidelines for implementation of a comprehensive park system. For the *City in a Park* plan, the historic information was used to help guide the master planning process for each park to be sure the park system was relevant for today's needs while keeping the historic integrity of the system intact.

Every city has a story and for Niagara Falls, it becomes most interesting in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was a collection of small villages along the Niagara River. It was at

(7)

## Parks Database

Following the completion of the field inventory, all existing conditions information was compiled into a GIS database. This provides the City immediate access to information on park facilities and amenities.

Over time, the database will be used to monitor park needs, prioritize necessary upgrades and improvements, track work orders and improve forecasting and budgeting capabilities.

The screenshot displays the 'Parks Facility Management' software interface. On the left, a 'Select a Park' dropdown menu lists various parks including Hyde Park, Griffon Park, Hampden Park, Highland and Beech, Jayne Park, Jerauld Park, Lafayette Park, LaSalle Park, LaSalle Waterfront Park, Legends Basketball Court, Liberty Park, Mackenna Park, North and Lockport, Orleans and 24th, Orleans and 25th, Perry Park, and Wetland. Below this is a 'Building List' section with a scrollable list of facilities such as Boat Rental Building, Comfort Station (Ball Fields), Comfort Station (Splash Pad), Concession Building (Ball Fields), Gazebos/Duck Island, Golf Club House, Ice Pavilion, Park Lodge, Pavilion (Gazebos), Pavilion (Centennial), Pavilion (Oasis), and Pavilion (Rose Garden). The main area shows 'Assets' with a table listing descriptions, notes, and counts. The 'Asset Details' section on the right provides information for 'Hyde Park', including 'Needs Work?' (No), 'Material' (asphalt), 'Condition' (4), 'Install Date' (Select a date), 'Manufacturer' (Enter Manufacturer), 'Replacement Cost', 'Maintenance Cost', 'Area' (23751 SF), and 'Is Listed?' (Yes).

| Description                                                       | Note | Count |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------|
| 4 courts, poor drainage/standing water at center near parking lot |      | 4     |
| 6 courts                                                          |      | 5     |
| 4 courts, no nets                                                 |      | 2     |

(8)

this time, in 1880, when the City of Niagara Falls population grew with the construction of the Hydraulic Canal and its associated hydropower production facilities. Cheap energy attracted many industries to the area, which in turn brought workers needing not only jobs, but also places to live.

Officially established as the City of Niagara Falls in 1892, the population of approximately 12,000 residents expanded throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to over 75,000 in 1930. Boasting to be the “Power City of the World” and the electro-chemical center of the nation during that period, the city built roads, public utilities and schools to serve the needs of the growing neighborhoods. What began as small clusters of dense development near the suspension bridge and in the villages of Bellevue (to the north) and LaSalle (to the east), spread outwards to fill in the city limits by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

While the city kept up with the physical infrastructure needed to accommodate industrialization and rapidly expanding neighborhoods, it struggled to come to terms with the role that parks and open space

“Every city is more attractive for such small pleasure grounds, even if there is nothing to see on them but grass and a few trees.”

*Olmsted Brothers*

would play in the daily life of its residents. Other prosperous cities of the period, namely its neighbor Buffalo to the south, but also Boston, Rochester, Chicago and Louisville, were already implementing grand plans for

comprehensive park and boulevard systems designed decades earlier by Fredrick Law Olmsted, the most visionary and sought-after park planner and landscape architect of the time.

Olmsted first became involved with the City of Niagara Falls in the late 1860s. Concerned with the river’s waning flow, public inaccessibility and the unsightly conditions due to industrialization, he and a small group of political and civic leaders founded the “Free Niagara” movement, which sought to restore the natural landscape of the falls and make it freely accessible to visitors. As a result of this effort, the Niagara Parks Commission was formed in 1883.

Establishment of the Reservation followed in 1885 and construction of the Reservation (the first state park in the country) continued for the next 50 years, largely in keeping with the master plan developed by Olmsted and Vaux.

## Origins of Niagara Parks & Recreation

It is within this broader context at the turn of the 20th century that the City of Niagara Falls started coming to grips with the need for a city park system. By 1900, the city’s population had grown to approximately 20,000, yet the city had no true municipal parks to call its own. Expanding rapidly as an industrial center and tourist destination, the city formally considered the development of a citywide park system similar to that found in nearby Buffalo and other prosperous cities of the time.

Having optimistically looked into the cost in 1906, however, the city was disappointed to find that a comprehensive park plan prepared by the Olmsted Brothers--who took over the landscape architecture and park planning practice of their father--was “beyond the city’s purse” at the time. The president of the

city's Park Commission, obviously committed to the idea, presented his own rough draft "of boulevards and small parks along the lines of the Buffalo park system." This idea, however, which was largely based upon "acquiring land along the outskirts of the developed areas and connecting them with a system of park and highways," was met with resistance, as other commissioners were more in favor of acquiring property for small parks within a close walking distance of existing centers of the population.

Whether due to disagreement, lack of political will, or scarcity of funds is unclear, but the city did not immediately act on either approach. Likely due to this inaction, Paul Schoellkopf, who was president of the very powerful and profitable Niagara Falls Power Company, took it upon himself to donate the land for what are generally recognized as the city's first two public parks in 1913. This included three acres for Schoellkopf Park, located along Portage Road between Pine and Walnut Streets and one and a half acres for Gluck Park, located along South Avenue between 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Streets.

Schoellkopf, who evidently had great interest in public recreation and city beautification, served on the Niagara Parks Commission 1913-1914 and later became Chairman of the city's Parks Commission. Whether due to his influence or that of others, limited support for a comprehensive park system study did finally materialize. In 1916 the Olmsted Brothers were hired by the city to prepare a study that described "a comprehensive system of parks for Niagara Falls." The Olmsted Brothers must have understood, however, that the political climate of the period would not allow full or immediate implementation of their recommendations, so their study was mostly crafted to provide

guidelines for gradual acquisition and development.

The Olmsted Brothers did leave the city with recommendations for the development of a park hierarchy. They made recommendations for the classification and development of six types of open space. The classification system includes 1) Ornamental Squares 2) Playground Parks 3) Local Parks 4) Large Parks 5) Reservations and 6) Parkways. These classifications can still be applied to the city's current park system, though the park system development does not appear to have been tied closely to these classifications.

Unfortunately, none of the Olmsted Brothers' recommendations were implemented and in 1959, the Robert Moses Parkway was constructed along with other development that was prohibitive to many of their recommendations.

Although various improvements were made at individual parks within the park system since the early 1900's, a system-wide approach to the park system was not undertaken again until the late 1900's. In 1981 the city adopted the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Action Program, which provided system-wide as well as individual park recommendations for the development and management of the city's park facilities and recreational programs.

The current park system is reflective of some of the recommendations, however many of the recommendations were never implemented. Additionally, many of the opportunities and constraints noted in the plan from 1981 remain today.

## Community Engagement

(10)

An important component of the Citywide Master Plan for the Niagara Falls Parks System was ensuring that the community was engaged throughout the planning process. Community participation brings local knowledge and meaningful dialogue to the decision-making process. Several community outreach efforts were initiated, including a series of Project Advisory Committee Meetings, Public Meetings, Stakeholder Interviews, Student Outreach and a Community Survey. The purpose of these outreach efforts was to familiarize the public with the project, initiate targeted community dialogue to better understand the existing park system, its use and potential opportunities and to gather input for specific geographic areas related to park deficiencies, needs and opportunities.

A brief overview of community engagement that contributed to the development of the *City in a Park Plan* can be found on the following pages.



### Project Advisory Committee Meetings

The project officially kicked off on February 29, 2012 with an initial meeting between the consultant team and the Project Advisory

Committee. The purpose of the initial meeting was to review and confirm the scope of the project, deliverables, project schedule, community engagement, lines of communication and roles and responsibilities.

Subsequent meetings were conducted in tandem with project milestones to review progress and gather feedback before presenting the materials to the public. These meetings were intended to offer guidance to the project team as they prepared analysis and recommendations. A summary of all meetings can be found in Appendix B.

### Stakeholder Interviews

To gain more specific and detailed information about the individual parks, the park system as a whole and the availability and type of programming opportunities, the study team reached out to various stakeholders via phone calls, email and individual meetings.

Several private recreation program and facility providers were contacted at the onset of the project to gain a better understanding of the citywide recreational opportunities. Organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Niagara Falls Housing Authority, Cayuga Youth Athletic Association and Salvation Army were interviewed. Information obtained through this outreach provided context for the variety of programs and facilities available to city residents. Each of these programs require a fee or membership to participate. The summary of programs and facilities offered by these organizations can be found in Appendix B.

Meetings with the Niagara Falls Department of Public Works were held to gain a greater understanding of the current facility management and maintenance program. This

information was used to inform recommendations for park management and recreation programming.

The project team also met with the Niagara Falls Board of Education. This meeting provided the study team with an understanding of the current facility utilization and plans for future upgrades and development. The information gained through this outreach was used to analyze the program needs and deficiencies in the public park and recreation system.

## Public Meetings

### *Kick Off Meeting*

**April 3, 2012**

The first public meeting was held at the Niagara Falls Public Library. The purpose of the meeting was to provide members of the public a general overview of the project, goals and objectives and a review of the project schedule including an understanding of subsequent public involvement opportunities. Following the presentation, an interactive visioning exercise was conducted with participants to help the project team gain a better understanding of the community's overall vision for the city's park system. As part of this exercise, three questions were asked of the attendees:

- What do you see as the current **needs** associated with the City Park System?
- What are the **opportunities** associated with the City Park System?
- What do you see as the current **constraints** associated with the City Park System?

Responses covered topics such as the desire for aesthetic enhancements; the need to engage schools and students; and, the costs of ongoing park maintenance and staffing.

### *Second Round of Public Meetings/Workshops*

**January 29, 30 and February 12, 2013**

For these workshops, the city was divided into three planning neighborhoods - west, central and east. A separate planning workshop was held for each neighborhood.

During the park planning workshop, attendees had the opportunity to learn about the project goals and the project team's findings from the initial site inventory and analysis. Most importantly, residents were asked to provide ideas as they relate to the needs and opportunities of the city parks and open space network.

(11)



### *Third Round of Public Meeting/Workshops*

**June 17 & 18, 2013**

During these workshops residents were given the opportunity to work with the project team to provide feedback as it related to the individual draft park master plans. The information gathered at these meeting was used to develop a prioritized list of park improvements and to set the framework for the implementation plan.

A full summary of all public meetings can be found in Appendix B.

## (12) Community Survey

A community survey was developed to offer an alternative means for providing feedback. This survey questioned residents about current facility utilization, recreation participation, recreation programming and facility deficiencies and park maintenance concerns. Over 300 surveys were completed with the summary of the survey findings included in Appendix B.



## Student Outreach

A student outreach session was conducted at Niagara Falls High School on March 4, 2013 to gather feedback from local youth regarding the city park and recreation facilities. The project team gave a brief presentation to sixteen senior government classes over the course of a school day, reaching approximately 400 students. Following the presentation, the project team facilitated discussion to gather feedback from the students regarding the park system, including existing issues/constraints and improvements they would like to see in the future.

The meeting summary can be found in Appendix B.

## Project Website & Social Media

(13)

In addition to the meetings previously discussed, community members were also engaged through two online resources – the project website ([nfcityinapark.com](http://nfcityinapark.com)) and project-specific Facebook page ([facebook.com/CityInAPark](https://facebook.com/CityInAPark)). The utilization of these resources recognizes that the way people are consuming information is changing and that the internet is often the first place people now go when seeking information.

The website provided an online presence for the project that allowed residents to view project-related materials, keep informed of upcoming public involvement opportunities and provide comments to the project team. The project Facebook page served as an alternate method for engaging city residents by allowing for open discussion of potential park issues and opportunities.

Both the project website and Facebook page were updated throughout the course of the project and were successful communication tools as an added communication tool for the city and residents.

(14)

## II. the park system today

### Overview

The majority of those who participated in this project admitted they were unaware of how extensive the city park system is today. There was much surprise among community members as they learned of the sheer quantity of parks within Niagara Falls. As their parks system was revealed it became clear why the plan has been named *City in a Park*.

Within the City of Niagara Falls' 10,240 acres, there are approximately 850 acres of park and recreation facilities. The majority, 560 acres, is owned and/or maintained by the City of Niagara Falls. The remaining 290 acres are owned and maintained by the State or Board of Education.

For the purposes of this study, the plan focuses on recommendations and strategies associated with the 560 acres of city maintained facilities. The school and state facilities contribute to the citywide park system and were evaluated to ensure that the city is providing complementary programming and facility amenities.

A basic understanding of how the park facilities and recreation programs operate and are managed assists in understanding the recommendations included in the plan. Currently facility planning, management and programming is the responsibility of multiple city departments.

**The Department of Community Development** includes the City Planning Office and the Office of Environmental Services (part of Division of Planning and



Legend Park

Orleans and 24<sup>th</sup> Park

Black Creek Park



Gluck Park

Development). This Department assists with land acquisition activities, identification of recreational facility needs in target areas, community engagement, grant writing and administration.

***The Department of Public Works and Neighborhood Services*** is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the park system, including facility maintenance, planning, budgeting and implementation of services.

Park facility maintenance and development is dependent on the close coordination between the various departments. The assessment of the current organizational structure and management approach is addressed later in the plan.

## Summary of Park System

The extensive city park system includes 30 parks offering a variety of recreation facilities, open space and nature trails.

The majority of the parks in the city system are considered neighborhood or playground parks, sized between 1 and 15 acres. The remaining parks are comprised of small pocket parks under an acre with three large parks each over 20 acres.

The park system is largely neighborhood-based parks, most with recreation amenities, dispersed throughout the Niagara Falls residential neighborhoods. There are three notable waterfront parks, Jayne, LaSalle Waterfront and Griffon, each offering a different experience along the Niagara Waterfront. The most known and prized park by the city and residents is Hyde Park.

As the largest park in the city, Hyde Park functions as a destination park offering a plethora of recreational opportunities and extensive programming.

The Park Facility Matrix graphic (page 17) offers an illustrative overview of the park system and amenities. Park summary sheets (available in Appendix C) were developed to provide a snapshot of the existing conditions in each park. These summaries do not include improvement projects that are underway.

Though not evaluated as traditional park facilities, two established multi-use trails are present in the city. The Niagara River Greenway and Robert Moses Parkway Trail provide connectivity along the Niagara River waterfront. Understanding the current condition and future plans for these facilities will influence the recommendations for increased connectivity throughout the park system.

Though the city park system is impressive in scale and available amenities, it is important to understand that these facilities are complemented by three State Parks. Niagara Falls, DeVeaux Woods and Whirlpool State Park are along the Niagara River, each offering a unique opportunity to engage with the river and falls. These facilities were taken into account in the recommendations for the improved citywide trail connectivity study as part of the *City in a Park* plan. It has consistently been the goal of the City of Niagara Falls to connect people from the city core into the waterfront. Although the programs of the state parks was not considered as part of the *City in a Park* plan, connecting them to the city system was important.

## On-Going Park Improvement Projects

At the time of this study the City of Niagara Falls was responsible for securing a significant amount of grant funding for park improvements. Active park improvement

projects that were incorporated into individual park master plans include:

## (16) Jayne Park Restoration Project

In 2008 an Environmental Protection Fund matching grant was received for park improvements to be completed by December 2013. The improvements included in this project are under development and will be revised after the recommendations of this study are published.

### Blueway Trail

In 2008, an Environmental Protection Fund matching grant was received and matched with Niagara Greenway funds for the development of a blueway trail on the upper Niagara River.

The project includes the development of the LaSalle Blueway Trail and conservation corridor, the survey and restoration of significant trees along the shoreline and installation of a canoe launch. The expected completion date is December 2013.

### Griffon Park

Niagara River Greenway funding will be used to make improvements in Griffon Park. The improvements include the installation of a canoe launch, new parking facilities, lighting and improved boat docks.

The construction of a playground was funded by KaBoom, Snapple and Dr Pepper Foundation. The playground was installed by community volunteers in 2012.

### LaSalle Waterfront Park

Funding from the Environmental Protection Fund and the Niagara River Greenway will be utilized to install the second phase of the newly constructed LaSalle Waterfront Park. The improvements include landscaping,

pedestrian lighting, fencing, shoreline plantings and picnicking amenities.

### Legends Park

In July 2013, City Council approved moving forward with improvements to Legends Park. Improvements include a new asphalt track, drinking fountains and benches.

### Caravelle Drive Park

In July 2013, City Council approved moving forward with improvements to Caravelle Drive Park. Improvements include a new playground, picnic tables, drinking fountain and basketball court improvements.

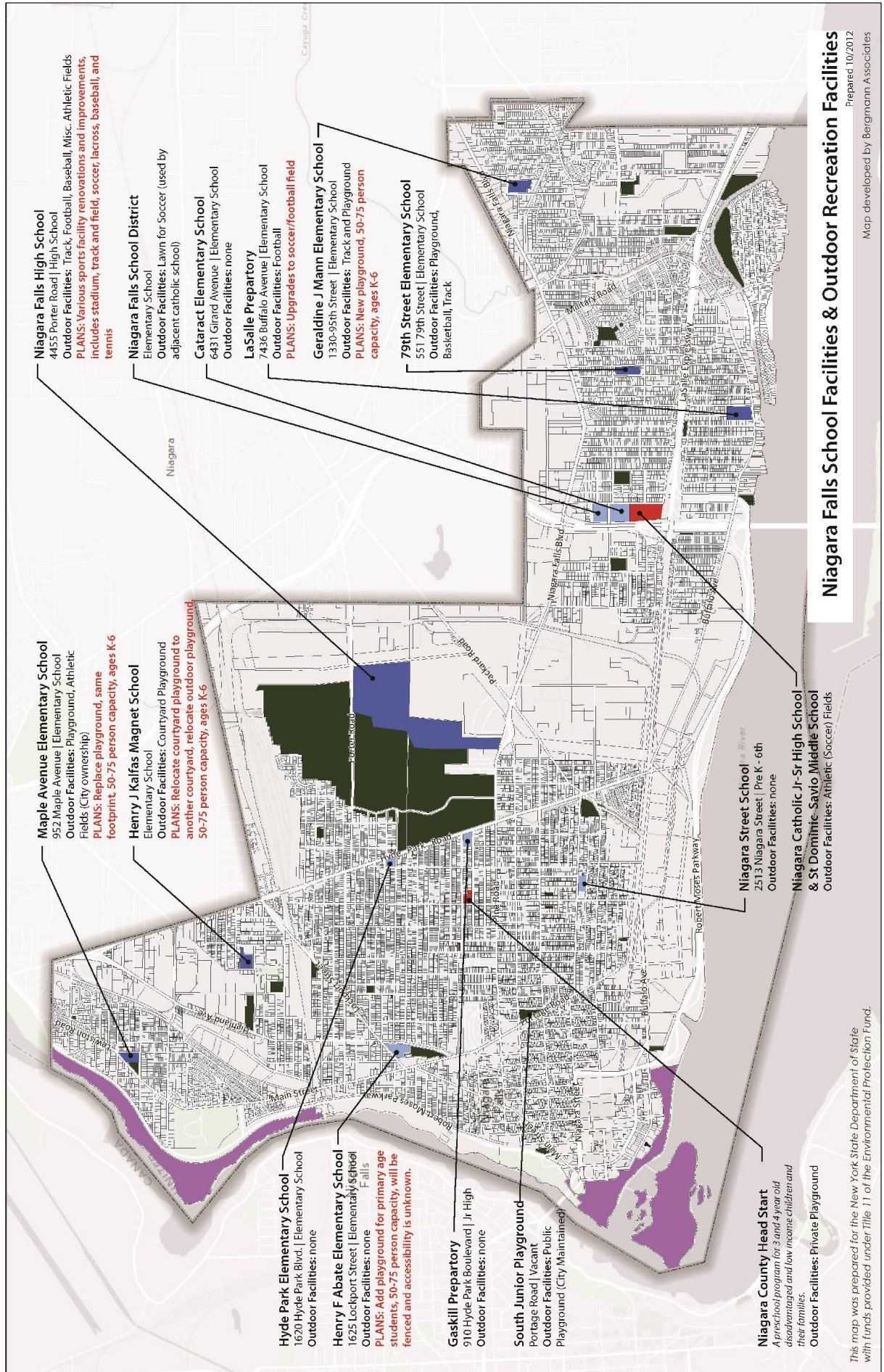
## Recreation Service Providers

Parks provide opportunities for active recreation, which is increasingly important as trends indicate that Americans are leading less active lifestyles and our national health is in decline. This makes it the ideal time for the City of Niagara Falls to invest in its recreational resources in an effort to entice and encourage greater use. Having a sound understanding of the recreational resources in Niagara Falls will ensure all residents and visitors have adequate access to parks, trails and other out-the-door recreational amenities.

(17)

| Park Facility Matrix |                              |        |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------|-------------|-----------|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------|--------------|---------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|------------|------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|
|                      |                              |        | PASSIVE |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         | ACTIVE       |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
|                      |                              |        |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         | Courts       |                  |                    | Fields              |              |                | Other                    |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| Park ID              | PARK NAME                    | ACRES  | Gazebo  | Pavillion | Picnic Area | Bandshell | Nature Trail | Educational / Interpretive | Monument / Memorial | Scenic Views | Fishing | Boat Trailer Launch | Small Watercraft Launch | Tennis Court | Basketball Court | Large Hard Surface | Baseball / Softball | Soccer Field | Football Field | Designated Multi-Purpose | Playground | Large Turf Area | Running Track | Outdoor Swimming | Skate Park | Golf | Indoor Ice Hockey | Outdoor Ice Skating | Comfort Station | Porta Potties | Storage Shed |
| 1                    | LaFayette                    | 0.35   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 2                    | Tom Micklein Field           | 2.1    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    | X                   |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 3                    | Highland and Beech (Planned) | 6.4    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 4                    | D'Amelio Park                | 3.1    |         |           |             | X         |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         | X            | X                |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               | X                |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 5                    | North and Lockport           | 1.96   |         | X         | X           |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  | X                  |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               | X            |
| 6                    | Gluck Park                   | 1.33   |         |           |             | X         |              |                            | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 | X             | X            |
| 7                    | Legends Basketball Court     | 5.4    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         | X            | X                | X                  |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               | X             |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 8                    | DiFranco Park                | 1.85   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 9                    | Statue of Liberty Park       | 0.55   |         |           |             |           |              |                            | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 10                   | South Junior Playground      | 4.31   |         |           | X           |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 | X             | X            |
| 11                   | Liberty Park                 | 0.75   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 | X             | X            |
| 12                   | Jerauld Park                 | 1.55   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                | X                  |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 13                   | Hyde Park                    | 715.48 | X       | X         | X           |           | X            | X                          | X                   | X            | X       | X                   | X                       | X            | X                | X                  | X                   | X            | X              | X                        | X          | X               | X             | X                | X          | X    | X                 | X                   | X               |               | X            |
| 14                   | Orleans and 24th             | 0.76   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 15                   | Orleans and 25th             | 0.78   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  | X                  |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 16                   | Porter Park                  | 1.73   |         |           | X           |           |              |                            | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 17                   | Mackenna Park                | 0.85   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  | X                  |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 18                   | Gill Creek                   | 2.34   | X       |           | X           |           | X            |                            | X                   | X            | X       |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     | X               | X             |              |
| 19                   | Perry Park                   | 4.58   |         |           |             |           |              |                            | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 20                   | 63rd Street Park             | 0.65   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 21                   | LaSalle Waterfront Park      | 2      | X       |           | X           |           |              |                            |                     | X            | X       |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     | X               |               | X            |
| 22                   | 70th Street (Kies) Park      | 4.59   |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    | X                   |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 23                   | Stephenson Park              | 1.4    |         |           | X           |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                | X                  |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 24                   | Hennipen Park                | 6.8    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 25                   | LaSalle Park                 | 5.8    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    | X                   |              |                |                          |            | X               |               | X                |            |      |                   |                     | X               | X             | X            |
| 26                   | Jayne Park                   | 20.7   |         |           |             |           |              |                            | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    | X                   |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 | X             | X            |
| 27                   | Griffon Park                 | 20     |         |           |             |           | X            |                            |                     | X            | X       | X                   | X                       |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          |            | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 | X             |              |
| 28                   | Black Creek Park             | 1      |         | X         |             | X         |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              |                  |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          |                 |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 29                   | Caravelle Drive Park         | 0.5    |         |           |             |           |              |                            |                     |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |
| 30                   | Wright Park                  | 0.5    |         |           |             |           |              | X                          | X                   |              |         |                     |                         |              | X                |                    |                     |              |                |                          | X          | X               |               |                  |            |      |                   |                     |                 |               |              |

(18)



The City of Niagara Falls is fortunate to have many local organizations that offer recreational programs and facilities to the community. For the purposes of this study only public recreation programs and facilities offered by both the City of Niagara Falls and the City School District were considered to guide the development of recommendations.

### City of Niagara Falls

The City of Niagara Falls Department of Public Works, Parks Administration offers a variety of public recreation programs citywide. The current summer programs include:

**Lunch Program:** A summer lunch and recreation program offered daily on weekdays at Gill Creek, Gluck, Hyde, Liberty, Nor-Lock, South Junior, Stephenson and La Salle Park.

**Pool and Spray Parks:** Open daily to the public for open swim and recreation at D'Amelio Park and Hyde Park.

**Mini-Baseball Clinics:** Hour-long sessions hosted at Legends Basketball Courts, Gill Creek, Gluck, LaSalle and Stephenson Park.

**Special Programs:** Basketball and golf tournaments are hosted in addition to the regular summer programs.

Winter programs are only scheduled at the indoor facilities located at the Ice Pavillion at Hyde Park, the John Duke Senior Center at Hyde Park and the Senior Citizen Recreation Site at Black Creek Park.

The program utilization was not available at the time of this study.

### City School District

The Board of Education owns and maintains several indoor and outdoor recreation facilities throughout the City of Niagara Falls

that are available for public use. For a complete list of outdoor facilities, see Niagara Falls School Facilities & Outdoor Recreation Facilities map, page 18.

(19)

The school district reported the following trends in recreation programming and facility utilization:

- Participation is high in baseball, soccer, football and hockey.
- Participation is increasing in lacrosse.
- Participation is decreasing in volleyball.
- Participation in skateboarding is strong, although there are no dedicated facilities for skaters.

In addition to trends, the school district reported improvement and development plans for the school facilities. In September 2012, a proposition was passed to borrow \$67 million to renovate and enlarge public school buildings and recreation facilities. Because the planning of the school district improvements is concurrent with the *City in a Park* plan, final details of the improvements are not available. However, the School Board reported that the proposed improvements would include athletic field updates and playground renovations as summarized below:

**Henry F Abate Elementary:** Construct a new early childhood playground (ages 5 and under) with a 50-75 person capacity. A fence may be included in the improvements which will limit public access to this facility.

**Maple Avenue Elementary School:** Replace existing school-aged playground in the same location for children ages 5-12 with a 50-75 person capacity.

**Henry J Kalfas Magnet School:** Relocate existing courtyard playground to another courtyard (maintain limited public access). Relocate existing outdoor school-aged

(20)

playground to a new location with a 50-75 person capacity. The outdoor playground is expected to be publicly accessible.

**Niagara Falls High School:** Various athletic facility renovations and improvements, including the replacement of several existing traditional turf fields with artificial turf.

**LaSalle Preparatory:** Upgrades to the existing soccer and football field.

**Geraldine J Mann Elementary School:** Replace existing school-aged playground in the same location for children ages 5-12 with a 50-75 person capacity.

These improvements may be revised as the Board of Education moves forward in planning, development and bidding the projects. It is anticipated that the projects will be completed by 2014.

The reported trends in program participation and improvements will be utilized to develop recommendations for the citywide park system.

## Private Recreation

Private organizations which offer recreation facilities and programs in Niagara Falls include:

- Boys and Girls Club
- YMCA
- Niagara Falls Housing Authority
- Cayuga Youth Athletic Association
- Salvation Army

The summaries in Appendix D identify specific programs and facilities provided by each organization.

# III. how niagara falls measures up (21)

In order to create a world-class park system that meets the needs of residents and visitors, it is important to benchmark where the city is today and set goals for the future. Although important for providing a general understanding of the park system, standards cannot be the only information utilized to evaluate the parks. As any park user knows, the acreage of parks is not as important to a city as making sure the needs of the community are met with *quality* facilities.

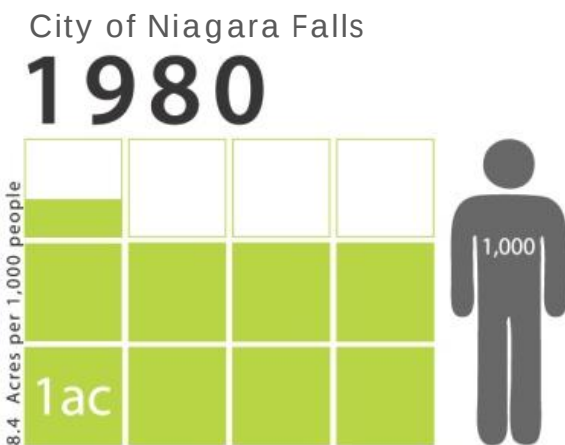
Advancement in technology and cultural shifts influence recreation trends and park facility standards. Because recreation is ever-evolving, the analysis and development of recommendations should be flexible to account for future trends and advances.

## Does the city have enough parkland?

Various organizations have offered standards for evaluating the quantity of parkland available to a community with minimum acceptable standards. Early in the planning process the simple question was asked, *Does Niagara Falls have enough parkland?*

## ParkScore

Developed by the Trust for Public Lands, ParkScore is a rating system developed to measure how well cities are meeting the community need for parks. The assessment is based on three main factors, 1) park acreage, 2) service and investment and 3) access. The current findings compare the fifty largest cities in the United States,



however the methodology can be applied to any city.

(22)

When applied to Niagara Falls it was found that the City of Niagara Falls (including the State and School facilities) is competitive in all areas and excels in providing park access to residents. When compared to regionally similar cities, Niagara Falls remains competitive in all areas with some room for improvement in park spending.

### National Parks and Recreation Association

Eight acres of parkland per one thousand residents is the current recommendation set forth by the National Parks and Recreation Association. With a current population of just under 50,000, Niagara Falls provides approximately 11 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The result? The city is providing an additional 164 acres of parkland to

### ¼ MILE and ½ MILE:

Accepted as the average distance an able-bodied person is willing to walk to an amenity or service. With the ever-increasing demands and limited leisure time available these days, the 5 minute (quarter mile) walk to a service has become increasingly valuable.

residents than the national recommended standard. When you also include State parks and school facilities open to the public, the surplus grows to 500 acres.

The recommendation for appropriate quantities of athletic facilities is also based on population. When analyzed, it was found that the city is providing very close to the recommended quantity of various recreational facilities with the exception of a surplus of basketball courts and baseball diamonds, and a deficiency in tennis courts, volleyball courts and soccer fields according to national standards. This information was used when engaging various stakeholders and community members to better understand the local needs as they relate to the identified deficiencies or surpluses.

### Are city parks accessible?

Park accessibility plays a major role in park utilization. Though Niagara Falls has an overabundance of parkland, it provides no direct benefit to residents if it is not accessible. Through a series of analyses, park and recreation accessibility was studied and evaluated. A half mile and quarter mile radius was drawn around each park to identify residents within a 10 minute (half mile) or five minute (quarter mile) walk from each park.

The map found on page 38 illustrates that all residential properties within Niagara Falls are within a half mile radius to a park facility. In fact, the majority of residents are within a quarter mile radius to a park facility, as shown in the green highlighted areas.

With the noted adequacy of parkland and accessibility of the park facilities, programming the parks becomes a critical factor in the success of the parks system.

### Who is using what?

The population in the City of Niagara Falls has declined over the past thirty years.

During this time, the youth population has also declined, while the senior population has increased. These statistics provide insight on how to best program the park facilities to meet the unique needs of the changing population.

While total population can help determine the demand for the amount of park and recreational facilities in a given community, the demand for particular types of activities can vary significantly across age groups.

The quantity and geographic distribution of various age groups in the City of Niagara Falls helps to forecast the current and future demand for recreation facilities. For the purposes of this analysis, the city's population was divided into the following age groups:

- Youth, 18 years and under;
- Adult, 19-64 years;
- Older Adults, 65 years and over

Because of the varied needs among the three age groups, each park was categorized as a

passive or active recreational facility, with some functioning as both.

The recreational amenities available throughout the park system were assessed as they relate to the areas of demographic concentrations. The analysis revealed areas of deficiency where there is an assumed increased need for either passive or active recreational opportunities. These deficiencies were used to develop recommendations for maintaining, removing, or adding recreational facilities to the individual parks. The complete series of recreational opportunity analysis maps can be found in Appendix E.

(23)

## Passive Recreation:

Activities that require low physical exertion typically occur in less formally developed areas. Examples may include picnic pavilions, scenic viewing areas, fishing, nature trails and educational or interpretive areas.

## Active Recreation:

Activities that typically require a modest or high level of physical exertion and typically more formal development of a site. Some examples include sport courts, athletic fields, swimming pools, skating rinks and running tracks.



(24)

## What's trending in recreation participation

Understanding that many factors influence the level of participation in recreation programs, the plan explores the recreation trends at a national, statewide and local level. This information was reviewed and considered during the development of program recommendations to best serve the community needs.

### National & State Trends

The National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) administers an annual survey to collect recreation participation at a national level. The survey is conducted online to 55,000 households across the United States. Participants ages seven and older are surveyed on their frequency of participation in recreation activities. This survey uses a weighted matrix to accurately represent the age and gender distribution of the U.S. population. This survey included both indoor and outdoor recreation. For the purposes of this study, only the outdoor

recreation activities were included.

The data collected by the NSGA survey is also used to provide a state-by-state index of participation. This index is calculated by applying a formula that relates state participation proportions to state population proportions. This projects the likelihood of state residents to participation in each sport.

The recreation trends identified in the New York State 2005 General Public Recreation Survey parallel the findings of the NSGA survey, which indicate that **walking, swimming and bicycle riding are among the top activities with high levels of participation.**

Additionally, the NSGA survey indicates that, statewide, **New Yorkers are nearly twice as likely to participate in baseball and kayaking than the national population.**

Although the NSGA survey indicates a national decline in participation in golf, it is one of the few activities that participation increases with age.

## Key Findings in National Recreation Trends

Top ten recreational activities (highest surveyed participation) include:

Exercise Walking, Swimming, Biking, Hiking, Running/Jogging, Basketball, Golf, Soccer, Tennis and Baseball.

- Exercise walking is the most popular sport.

- The fastest growing outdoor recreational activity is kayaking.

There was a 40% percent increase in participation in exercise walking, hiking, running/jogging, tennis and kayaking.

- Responses indicate a possible decline in participation in swimming, fishing, golf, baseball, volleyball, skateboarding and in-line skating.

The NYS 2005 General Recreation Survey projects a **slight increase in golf participation** as the baby boomers continue to age.

The national and state standards and trends are valuable for identifying opportunities for the park system. However, determining the adequacy of the existing recreational facilities is heavily dependent on the preferences of the local community.

### Local Trends

Anecdotal evidence was provided by the community through public meetings and a community survey to help generate what trends in recreation are occurring locally in the City of Niagara Falls.

Leisure time is far more valuable today than ever before, and community members don't always have the luxury of being able to attend project meetings. In response to this, an online survey was offered to the residents of Niagara Falls to provide feedback about their park and recreation preferences. This survey was used alongside the information gathered at community meetings, to better understand the community preferences in Niagara Falls.

The online survey was conducted to obtain an understanding of current facility and recreation program utilization. The survey also gathered information from participants on park use, programming, and their perception of park maintenance. The findings from the survey results were consistent with the feedback received from the field and public meetings.

The community feedback and survey findings identified the following opportunities and concerns:

Understanding community preferences is more than a comparison to national standards. (25)

Does the amount of people on this trail look comfortable, crowded, safe or unsafe...



The High Line, NYC

...if the plantings along this trail are perceived as pleasing or unkempt?

(26)

### Opportunities:

- Improve recreational opportunities and maintenance throughout the park system.
- Better integrate community, youth, schools and senior programming in the park system.
- Improve connectivity between parks and residential areas.
- Integrate healthy living initiatives, cultural heritage and green infrastructure.

### Concerns:

- Park security and safety.
- Maintenance costs and funding.
- Community engagement - support and involvement in planning process and development of recommendations.

The community feedback confirmed the understanding of park facility use as related to the condition of the park. Parks that are in disrepair are underutilized, whereas the parks that are in moderate to good condition are well utilized. Additionally, the current recreational participation in Niagara Falls is aligned with National Standards and support a focus on connectivity through a citywide trail and a stronger focus on water recreation. These community preferences will be used as the framework for the prioritization of the park system recommendations.

The findings from the student outreach were consistent with feedback from other outreach initiatives. Feedback from the student sessions indicate that youth are generally interested in better maintenance of the parks facilities and specifically interested in more progressive recreational opportunities such as skateboard parks and trending park programming such as dog parks.



Dog Park



Skate Park



Natural Play

## Is the City Spending Enough on Parks?

To better understand the cost of maintaining a park system, the current budget for parks and recreation was analyzed as it compares to the budgets allocated by similarly sized cities.

Park and recreation budgets for cities of comparable size to Niagara Falls range from \$1.2 to \$17 million, with a median budget of \$5 million annually. The 2013 park spending budget for the City of Niagara Falls was allocated at approximately \$2.8 million. This equates to approximately \$56 / per person based on 2012 population. This figure falls below the national average of \$82 / per person as documented by the Trust for Public Land.

Personnel allocation for park facility maintenance is, on average, for a similarly sized city, one full time equivalent employee for every 18.5 acres of park. Niagara Falls is currently allocating one full time equivalent employee for 22 acres of parkland.

## Key Findings

**Existing park acreage** in the city is adequate and accessible by all residents; no new parks should be added to the city at this time.

**Park amenities programming** does not fully respond to current demographic concentrations and does not fully address current recreation trends. In response to adjacent demographic needs, park amenities should be added and upgraded at several parks.

**Connections and linkages** are lacking between existing parks and facilities. Implementation of a citywide trail which

## Key Findings from Household Survey

(27)

### WHO WAS SURVEYED?

**300+** Total Households **80%** Long-term homeowners (10+ years ownership)

### HOW OFTEN DO PEOPLE USE THE PARKS?

**50%/50%**  
Frequent 2-3x /month Occasional 12x / year or less

**Lack of Time & Awareness** is the main reason for low participation

### MOST FREQUENTLY VISITED

Hyde • LaSalle Waterfront  
Tom Miklejn • Jayne

### RECREATION PARTICIPATION

**HIGH** 30% or more Walking Biking Picnicking Playgrounds Baseball

**LOW** less than 30% Swimming Boating Fishing Ice hockey Soccer Basketball Golf Tennis Ice Skating

### MAINTENANCE

POOR FAIR GOOD

**ISSUES** Equipment and facilities that are in state of disrepair, the presence of trash and litter, grass and natural areas are not properly maintained, and sidewalks and trails are in disrepair.

### DESIRED IMPROVEMENTS

Activities for Children | Playgrounds  
Music and Art Programs | Safety  
Walking Facilities

includes on-road and off-road facilities will help knit the park system together.

(28)

**Recreation activity programming** is insufficient and should be developed to respond to community interests and health needs. Creative recreational programming will strengthened the community connection to the parks. Continual evaluation of programs will ensure community needs are being met.

There is a lack of a consistent “**brand**” to the park system (signage, themes, interpretation). Developing a park brand will strengthen the park identity and promote public awareness of the opportunities within the park system.

The development of the recommendations relies most heavily on the **understanding of community preferences**. National Park standards are adequate for broad recommendations, but when it comes to park locations and amenities, the unique neighborhood needs and the culture of the community should be assessed to develop appropriate recommendations.

**The existing parks and recreation budget** does not meet the current needs for on-going maintenance, security and park upgrades.

**Current maintenance personnel** allocated to the park system is not adequate to maintain the existing park system.

## IV. city in a park

A healthy functioning parks system plays a vital role in the pride, health and ultimate success of the community. The *City in a Park* plan lays the framework to guide decision-making for the future management of park, recreation and open space facilities in the City of Niagara Falls. This plan is intended to support community growth, environmental sustainability and future development while balancing fiscal capabilities and maintenance responsibilities.

The *City in a Park* plan lays the framework for a long-term vision for the city park system. As an international gateway, the City of Niagara Falls should capitalize on its open space assets as has been successfully done in Boston (Emerald Necklace), Chicago (Millennium Park) and New York City (The High Line).

The *City in a Park* plan recommendations are broken into the following components:

- Park Classification
- System-Wide Recommendations
- Design Guidelines
- Individual Park Master Plans

### Park Classification

Park classification systems serve as a guide for park planning and investment. Maintaining diversity in the park system through a range of park types strengthens the system and should ultimately result in greater utilization.



(30)

## Olmsted Brothers' Recommendations for Park Classification

Although it began late and took more than 50 years to develop, many of the Olmsted Brothers' recommendations were carried out to varying degrees. Their key recommendation, to create a park classification system, is still relevant today - one hundred years later. The Olmsted Brothers' recommendations for the Niagara Falls park system called for a hierarchy of six types of open space, as described in the box below.

### Recommended Park Classification

Although the Olmsted Brothers' recommendations were not fully implemented, the classifications developed by the Olmsted Brothers are still relevant and provide a framework for the city park system today.

Park Classification systems are a general framework that guide open space planning and programming by grouping parks according to certain common characteristics. The system helps to identify the appropriate location and equitable distribution of varying types of parks within the city-wide system.

In Niagara Falls, the city park system is augmented by state parks, private recreation and open space facilities, and school district facilities.

The recommended park system for Niagara Falls builds on the existing neighborhood-based park system, while also recognizing the need to provide a variety of parks and programming elements to serve the city's diverse population. The *City in a Park* Plan focuses on expanding the number of playground and local parks to serve residents within a 10-minute walking distance, while

also improving and enhancing large parks for use by residents and visitors.

The following are the recommended park classifications in the City of Niagara Falls park system including a list of parks that fall within each classification.

### Ornamental Squares

These include squares, triangles and strips of land that serve certain uses or simply to give pleasure to the eye.

#### **Parks included in this category:**

LayFayette, Gluck and Statue of Liberty

### Playground Parks & Nature Parks

Small parks assigned primarily to play, but generally having some portions beautified by landscape gardening.

**Parks included in this category:** Tom Miklejn, North and Lockport, South Junior Playground, Liberty, Orleans & 24<sup>th</sup>, Orleans & 25<sup>th</sup>, Caravelle Drive, Jerauld, Mackenna and Hennepin.

### Local Parks

Informal landscape garden and often crowded with features, but may be simple groves of trees and grass or open fields with a few if any trees.

**Parks included in this category:** Highland and Beech, D'Amelio, Legends Basketball, DiFranco, Porter, Gill Creek, Perry, 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, LaSalle Waterfront, 70<sup>th</sup> (KIES), Stephenson, 91<sup>st</sup> Street and Black Creek

### Large Parks

A large park, outside of town, which include one or more natural landscape features.

**Parks included in this category:** Hyde, Jayne and Griffon

## Reservations

Sufficiently far out of town and sufficiently large, to permit the landscape to be preserved in a comparatively wild condition.

(31)

**The New York State park system** facilities fulfill this recommended classification.

## Parkways And Linkages

Provide agreeable approaches to parks and connections from one park to another. The City of Niagara Falls developed without implementing many of the recommended parkways as defined by Olmsted.

This classification includes any parkways or linear parks, trails or designated non-motorized routes within the city, specifically as it relates to tying together the components of the park system to create a cohesive open space environment. Proposed linkages are noted on the City-Wide Trail Connectivity Study map as shown on page 37.

(32)

## System Wide Recommendations

The *City in a Park* Plan identifies four focus areas as the foundation of implementing the plan at a system-wide level:

- Maintenance & Park Improvements
- Connections & Linkages
- City-Wide Trail Connectivity Study
- Park Identity
- Programming

Recommendations have been developed based on the findings from the assessment of the park system, community response and steering committee feedback. The recommendations are designed to be flexible to take advantage of available funding and allow for creative implementation.

### Maintenance & Park Improvements

Fundamentally, parks should be clean, safe and usable by residents. Maintaining and improving the recreational amenities in the parks will greatly benefit the community and enhance the health and quality of life of the residents of Niagara Falls.

- **Repair Equipment and Playground Surfacing:** The parks are only as good as the condition of the equipment in them. Continued deferred maintenance, as has occurred over the past several years, will ultimately result in a defunct park system. Additionally, vandalism has taken a toll on park amenities, contributing to increased maintenance requests. Equipment that does not meet current safety code should be immediately replaced or removed and equipment located in priority parks should be scheduled for repairs. For all

equipment in lower priority parks, repairs or removal should be prioritized as funding streams become available. To help deter vandalism, a park security plan should be developed. This plan should identify community partners to assist with park surveillance and identify locations for security cameras. Reducing vandalism in the park system will reduce vandal-related maintenance costs and relieve funding for park improvements.

### Meadow vs. Lawn

Meadows cost approximately \$670 per acre per year to maintain

Lawns cost approximately \$3,500 per acre per year to maintain

- **Reduce Lawn and Naturalize Select Landscapes:** Lawn removal is an approach to reduce maintenance costs associated with mowing lawns and to install landscapes that contribute to the environmental health and stability of the city. Several parks master plans include recommendations to replace vast areas of underutilized lawn with native landscape plantings. This shift in landscape management will increase biodiversity, reduce maintenance demands and provide an educational opportunity for park users. As referenced earlier in this plan, contemporary definitions of a 'park' are evolving and have expanded to include amenities such as green infrastructure, native meadows, and reforestation areas.

- **Add Recreation and Service Amenities:**

Contemporary recreation opportunities that are lacking in the park system and should be added as funding becomes available. The community expressed interest in a variety of recreational amenities that would bring diversity to the park system, such as skate parks, dog parks, natural play environments, and areas for group exercise. In addition to the lack of contemporary amenities, basic services such as drinking water, lighting and restroom facilities are currently lacking in many parks. It is recommended that these amenities be implemented in priority parks in the short term. Adding universally accessible drinking fountains at all parks offering athletic amenities is a simple way of making a large impact on user comfort in the parks. The addition of these amenities and services will support the development of more extensive recreation programs and community use.

- **Ensure Consistent Maintenance:** The maintenance approach should focus on providing safe access to quality recreation to all residents in all parks. A seasonal maintenance manual for the park system as a whole and for each individual park should be developed. This manual can be used as a framework for scheduling routine maintenance throughout the park system and allow for adequate personnel allocation.

- **Utilize GIS Database on a regular basis:** The GIS database developed in conjunction with the park master plan should be used as a living document to track, manage and schedule park maintenance and improvements. The database will assist the city in the planning

and budgeting for park maintenance and improvements. In order to maximize this resource, the database must be used by park staff as intended, on a regular basis. (33)

The database includes a comprehensive inventory of all park assets which can be easily updated as park facilities and equipment are changed. The city has the ability to add replacement costs to assist in planning for annual and long-term budget needs. The database also includes a management tool for documenting calls and equipment issues associated with the park system. This allows park staff to monitor and track when issues are resolved.



Volunteerism is happening in Niagara Falls – The above image is an event flyer from CleanMob, a flash mob-styled cleanup event initiated by members of the Niagara Beautification Commission.

(34)

## Connections & Linkages

With an increasing demand for alternative transportation, the city can capitalize on the extensive park system within Niagara Falls by implementing a comprehensive on and off road trail system that connects and facilitates movement between open space amenities.

The existing trail network is limited to a single continuous trail along the waterfront with few defined connections between the waterfront and internal neighborhoods.

- **Implement City-wide Trail System:** A citywide trail system (as depicted on Proposed Trail System Map) is intended to provide connections throughout the city, between parks, services, the waterfront and to regional trail networks. The *City in a Park* plan identifies the concept plan for this alternative transportation network. In the short-term, the City should pursue low-cost implementation projects, such as implementing shared-road routes on low volume roadways through pavement markings and bike route identification

signage.

- **Implement Proposed Trails:** The LaSalle Recreation Way Trail and the future pedestrian-oriented development of the Robert Moses Parkway are critical links in the alternative transportation networks identified in the city-wide trail system. The implementation of these trails will contribute to greater connectivity within Niagara Falls.
- **Maintain Existing Trail and Sidewalk Facilities:** Respond to the needs of the community by committing to routine maintenance of existing trails and sidewalks.
- **Study the Feasibility of Developing a Rail with Trails Project:** Implementation of rail with trail facilities is a nation-wide approach to enhancing the local transportation network. The abundance of rail corridors within the city offers an opportunity to celebrate the industrial past by fulfilling the growing need for alternative transportation routes. It is

## LINKING THE PARK SYSTEM:

CONNECTIVITY IS MORE THAN JUST IMPROVING ACCESS – IT IS ABOUT BRIDGING A COMMUNITY.

The Olmsted recommendations from 1917 included suggestions for a parkway that would connect residents to the waterfront from Hyde Park. This was never implemented and subsequent planning efforts have continued to echo this recommendation.

The popularity of cycling, as a mode of transportation, is expected to continue to rise – alongside increasing gas prices. The time has come to develop the city-wide trail system that will improve connectivity between not only the parks, but also between neighborhoods, services and the waterfront. The goal of the conceptual city-wide trail system is to identify potential opportunities for improving connectivity between the parks and expanding alternate transportation routes.

The city-wide trail system map illustrates the conceptual city-wide trail design. The concept is based on identifying hubs, or places of origin, within the city and identifying routes of connectivity between them. The routes illustrated include potential shared-road facilities as well as off-road facilities along railroad and utility corridors.

recommended that a feasibility study be completed to identify potential rail with trail locations. Ample time for planning should be allocated to this because traditionally rail with trail projects take a long time due to the required negotiations and coordination with railroad companies.

(35)

- **Prepare a Comprehensive Bike Master Plan:** The City should pursue funding and develop a bike master plan to study the feasibility of implementation of the proposed trail connections, particularly where on-road facilities would be required.

**RAIL-WITH-TRAIL:** ANY SHARED-USE PATH THAT IS LOCATED ON OR DIRECTLY ADJACENT TO AN ACTIVE RAILROAD OR LIGHT-RAIL CORRIDOR.

### Case Study | Schuylkill River Trail (Norristown, PA)

Built in 1993, this rail-with-trail is approximately four miles long and part of the 22 mile Schuylkill River Trail which connects Philadelphia and Valley Forge. Approximately two miles of the trail are located on Norfolk Southern Railroad Company property, while the other two miles are adjacent to an active local transportation authority right-of-way. The tracks adjacent to the trail carry approximately twenty freight and commuter rail trains daily at speeds between twenty to forty miles per hour. The presence of trail users appears to have deterred incidences of trespassing and vandalism along the rail corridor.

**Helpful Tip:** Begin planning early, the process for approving the trail was long and difficult. The project included easement agreements with the railroad and the railroad company had final approval of the trail design.



## City-Wide Trail Connectivity Study

(36)

The city-wide connectivity study was created to present a long term vision for the development of the City of Niagara Falls city-wide bicycle and pedestrian network. The goal of this network is to improve access and safety for city residents to the city park system and to the waterfront.

The map, opposite, illustrates the existing, planned and potential trails that would help to link the entire City of Niagara Falls through a system of designated routes for non-motorized transportation.

The City-Wide Trail Connectivity Study identifies where these existing trails could be supplemented with new multi-use trails (off-road), improved sidewalks and on-road bicycle facilities. These new facilities would originate at and connect to various city, private and state park and open space amenities. The City-Wide Trail would ideally be supplemented by a pedestrian wayfinding program that reinforces the linkages between park resources, neighborhoods, destinations and the waterfront.

Existing and previously studied/planned trails, indicated with black lines on the map, include the Robert Moses Parkway Multi-Use Trail and the planned LaSalle Recreation Way Trail. The Robert Moses Trail offers an off-road linkage from the Grand Island bridge, along the waterfront and north to the Town of Lewiston. The proposed LaSalle Recreation Way Trail would extend and run parallel to the LaSalle Expressway, linking various neighborhoods to the Robert Moses Trail and waterfront.

The existing NYS Bicycle Route 5 (shown in blue), traverses east and west through the City of Niagara Falls. This is a signed, on-road

bike route along heavily traveled roadways, providing access across the entire City.

Proposed future connections and linkages are described further below:

- Connections depicted with an orange dashed line represent trail connections being achieved through improved sidewalk and on-road bicycle facilities. On-road facilities such as sharrows (shared lane arrows) and dedicated bike lanes.
- Connections depicted with a pink dashed line represent a multi-use 'rails with trails' located along the existing railroad corridor. The trailhead would begin at North and Lockport park and provide an alternative and direct off-road route to the waterfront, ending at the newly restored Customs House.
- The green dashed line represents a potential multi-use trail located along an existing utility right of way, which would connect the Geraldine J Mann Elementary School to NYS Bike Route 5, ultimately creating a complete link from the proposed LaSalle Way Recreation Trail and Robert Moses Trail.

Olmstead Brothers' plan for parks and boulevards emphasized the connection between Hyde Park and the Niagara Reservation via Pine Avenue. Special treatment could be given to this linkage as it connects two of the city's most important open spaces.

With the implementation of new multi-modal trail systems along with an overall wayfinding signage system, the City of Niagara Falls can safely link city residents to the entire park system and to the waterfront.

POTENTIAL TRAILS

**CITY-WIDE TRAIL: CONNECTIVITY STUDY**

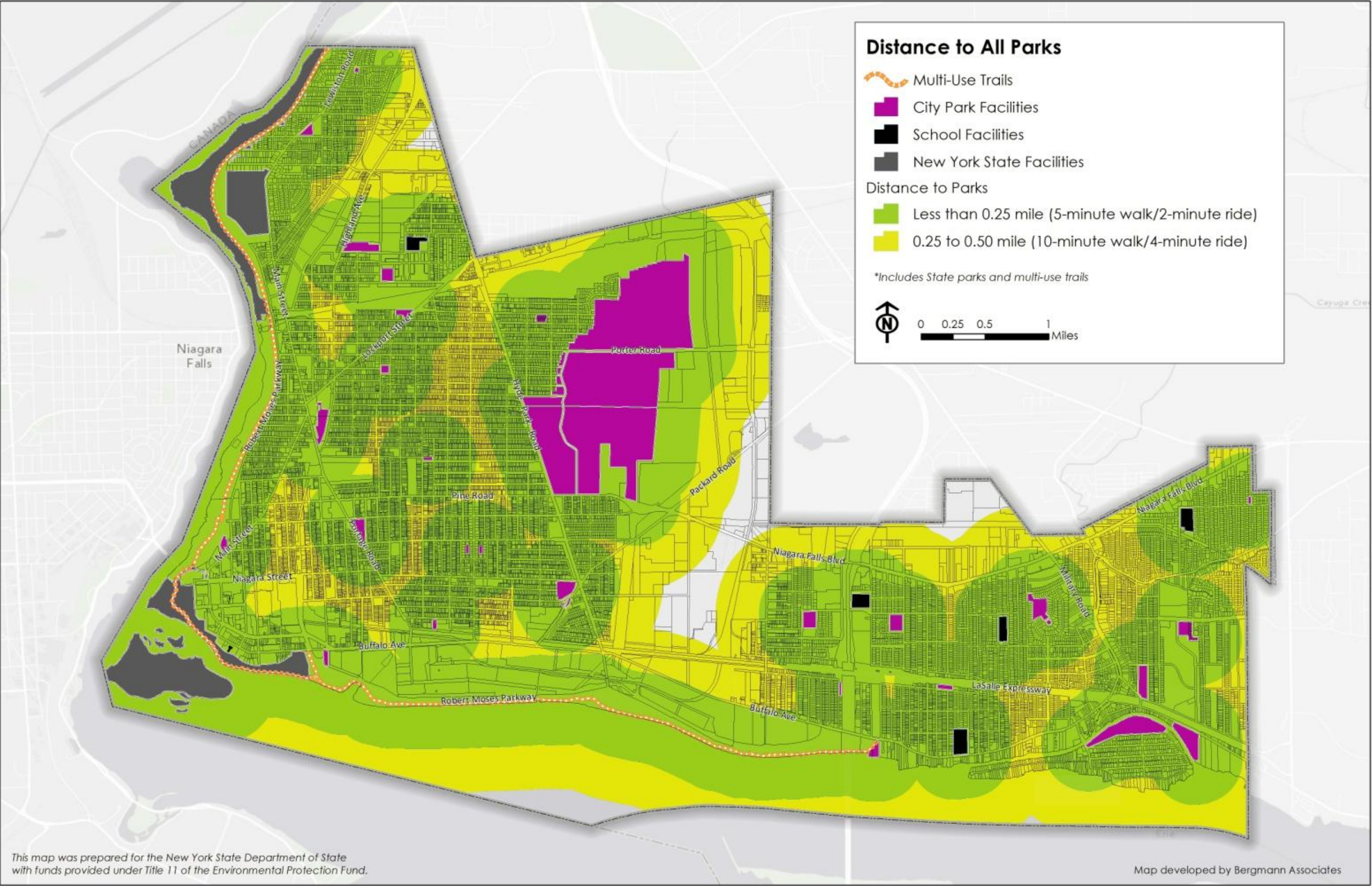
- EXISTING MULTI USE TRAIL
- PLANNED LASALLE RECREATION TRAIL
- EXISTING CONNECTOR
- SIGNED NYS BICYCLE ROUTE 5
- POTENTIAL TRAIL LOCATION
- POTENTIAL TRAIL LOCATION ALONG EXISTING RAILROAD CORRIDOR / 'RAILS WITH TRAILS'
- POTENTIAL TRAIL LOCATION ALONG EXISTING UTILITY ROW

August 2013

This map was prepared for the New York State Department of State with funds provided under Title 11 of the Environmental Protection Fund.

Map developed by Bergmann Associates

(38)



## Park Identity

Park identity should clearly communicate that a park is publicly owned, accessible, safe land that is cared for and available for use.

Defining and marking the identity of the park system is fundamental to encourage user satisfaction and to maximize public investment in the facilities.

- **Embrace the *City in a Park* brand & Spread the Word:** Develop a common aesthetic and logo – “a park brand” - which should be incorporated into signage, promotional materials and other park collateral. In public settings refer to the *City in a Park* concept to increase local association and familiarity with brand identity. Invest in modest marketing efforts and promoting the park system through social media.
- **Incorporate Consistent Aesthetic & Improve Safety and Security:** Implementation of design standards and consistent maintenance practices between

parks will strengthen the park system identity and increase the perception of safety in the parks. Vandalism can be discouraged through the development and posting of park rules, which will also empower park visitors to self police the parks. Additionally, strategic collaboration with the police department would increase park security and reduce park vandalism.

- **Develop a Park Signage Program:** A series of park identification signs (see Design Guidelines for additional information) should be developed and implemented throughout the park system to unify the park system and strengthen the brand. The sign program should include the development of educational and interpretive signs for installation in select parks consistent with the individual park master plans. It is recommended that the large parks (parks over 50 acres) should incorporate directional signage within the park. Additionally, a

(39)

## National Heritage Area Management Plan Interpretive Signage Thematic Content

**Natural Phenomenon:** Niagara Falls and the Niagara River Gorge are natural phenomena overwhelming in physical magnitude and deeply embedded in the popular consciousness;

**Tourism and Recreation:** Niagara Falls has been a leading international tourist attraction for 200 years, influencing the development of tourism and nature conservation in North America;

**Power and Industry:** Around 1895, Niagara Falls became the foremost source of hydroelectric power in North America, stimulating the development of innovative heavy industries in Niagara Falls and Buffalo;

**Borderland/ Border Crossing:** The Niagara River area, a boundary between the United States and Canada, has played an important role in Indian culture, the French and English colonial struggle to control North America, the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Underground Railroad and it reflects national differences and similarities between the two countries today.

(40)

wayfinding program should be developed, at the city-wide scale, to direct people between open space amenities to increase use of the overall system.

- **Harness Educational Opportunities:** Incorporate interpretive or educational signage where appropriate to share thematic content. Educational signage may discuss the natural elements of a particular park and approach to natural resource protection, highlighting topics such as wildflowers, natural habitat, biodiversity and wetlands. Interpretive signage should discuss the history of the City of Niagara Falls and/or the park system. Interpretive signage should build on the thematic concepts developed as part of the National Heritage Area Management Plan. Locally relevant significant themes that may also be considered for the sign program include the role of the Olmsted Brothers in city/parks planning; the Schoellkopf family in early parks establishment; and Fred Aigner, former Parks Superintendent. Refer to historic study in Appendix A for further historic educational opportunities.

## Programming

In decades past, there was exceptional park programming in the city. Today, however, one of the most notable gaps that differentiates the City of Niagara Falls from other communities is the lack of a formal, organized community recreation program. Recreation programming is limited to school wrap programs and summer lunch programs. There are no specific programs available and offered to seniors, adults, group activities for teens and children or specialty programs for toddlers. Formal recreational programs

should be reintroduced, in partnership with schools and other providers, to support creative, active and healthy community growth.

- **Identify an Appropriate Recreation Program.** A full-fledged recreation program must be well-thought out, respond to local needs and trends, and be economically feasible. Before allocating funding to implement a sizable recreational programming initiative, the city should dedicate a small amount of funding to further study the types of recreation and community education programs that have the greatest chance for success. The study should consider potential partners and funding avenues that could be explored to assist in implementing a comprehensive and robust recreational program for residents.
- **Invest in Recreation Programming:** Programming is a costly part of park management; program development should respond to community needs. Programming should not be limited to outdoor recreation, but should also include indoor recreation, arts and cultural programs, culinary, as well as entertainment. A full program often includes educational offerings, recreation leagues over four seasons for various age groups, summer camps and lessons. The cost of programs may be covered by the city, through grant funding or, in many instances, a small fee may be associated with participation. Programs should continually be evaluated and modified to respond to recreation trends and community interests.
- **Sponsor Special Events for the Community.** The recreation program should also identify and include special

community events, such as a Movie in Hyde Park, or other festivals and community engagement activities that bring people into the park system and get them excited about the resources and amenities available within the city. These types of events often also draw people from outside the community, resulting in additional economic development benefits.

- **Strengthen Partnerships:** The city is encouraged to continue to partner with the school district, existing recreation service providers and local non-for-profit organizations. These partnerships will lessen the financial and personnel burden typically associated with program management.

## Design Guidelines

(42)

The Park Master Plan Design Guidelines are not intended to be overly prescriptive; they are intended to set the framework for the decision making process during detailed design associated with park improvements.

The character of each park should be preserved, whether it is historic, ecological, athletic, or simply open green space. The flexibility built into these design guidelines will allow context sensitive design solutions for each unique park within the overall system.

The guidelines identify the considerations associated with park elements, allowing decision-makers to not only respond to the individual site, but also to allow the guidelines to evolve alongside advancements in technology and changing development strategies.

Park design guidelines have been established for the following:

- **Landscape Design & Plant Selection**
- **Hardscape**
- **Site Amenities**
- **Signage**
- **Trails & Connections**

“One may lack words to express the impact of beauty but no one who has felt it remains untouched. It is renewal, enlargement, intensification. The parks preserve it permanently in the inheritance of the American citizens.”

— *Bernard DeVoto, Historian and Author*

## RECOMMENDED TREE SPECIES

### Large Deciduous Trees

Acer x Freemanii – Freeman Maple  
 Acer rubrum – Red Maple  
 Acer saccharum – Sugar Maple  
 Betula nigra – River Birch  
 Catalpa speciosa – Northern Catalpa  
 Gleditsia triacanthos var. inermis – Thornless  
 Common Honeylocust  
 Gymnocladus dioica – Kentucky Coffeetree  
 Liriodendron tulipifera – Tuliptree  
 Nyssa sylvatica – Black Tupelo  
 Quercus palustris – Pin Oak  
 Quercus rubra – Red Oak  
 Tilia americana – Basswood  
 Ulmus americana – American Elm

### Ornamental Trees

Amelanchier spp. – Serviceberry  
 Cercis canadensis – Redbud  
 Crataegus crus-galli var. inermis – Hawthorn  
 Hamamelis virginiana – Common Witchhazel  
 Malus spp. – Crabapple

### Evergreen Trees

Picea abies – Norway Spruce  
 Picea glauca – White Spruce  
 Pinus nigra – Austrian Pine  
 Pinus strobus – Eastern White Pine

## TYPICAL WILDFLOWER SEED MIX

Big bluestem, Virginia Wildrye, Sideoats  
 Grama, Indiangrass, Patridge Pea,  
 Blackeyed Susan, Ohio Spiderwort, Tall  
 White Beardtongue, Marsh (Dense)  
 Blazing Star (Spiked Gayfeather), Hairy  
 Beardtongue, Zigzag Aster, New  
 England Aster, Wild Senna, Oxeye  
 Sunflower, Autumn Bentgrass, Blue False  
 Indigo, Maryland Senna, Early  
 Goldenrod, Wild Bergamot, Orange  
 Coneflower, Butterfly Milkweed

## Landscape Design & Plant Selection

If a landscape tells the story, what is being told in the parks today? Better yet, what story do we want to start telling?

(43)

The landscape of the park system today is bleak and largely overrun with lawn. With the exception of a few parks, there is little biodiversity and no focus on ecological restoration. When implementing the park improvements the following should be taken into consideration:

- All plant material should be native, adaptive, non-invasive.
- In support of sustainable maintenance practices, no irrigation should be installed and all plant material should be drought tolerant.
- All fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, if used, should be chosen to effectively treat the existing conditions present without posing risks to human health and the environment.
- Tree plantings should be selected from an approved tree list (see sidebar). This list should be evaluated annually for appropriateness and availability.
- In an effort to reduce maintenance costs, increase biodiversity, and add seasonal interest to the parks, wildflower meadows should be established or natural succession should be allowed to take place. The site conditions where wildflower meadows are proposed should be evaluated to ensure the correct wildflower seed mix is used. The most appropriate mix is dependent on soil conditions and environmental factors (sun versus shade). The wildflower mix identified in the sidebar is a standard mix suitable many sites. An alternative to the wildflower

(44)

## Hardscape

Choosing a surface type is an important step in park planning and design. The surface material used should be determined by considering the desired users of the facility, the context of the park, performance, cost and sustainability. Consideration should be given to the following aspects of the materials:

- Appropriateness for the public realm and potential exposure to vandalism
- Life cycle costs balanced against initial investment.
- Environmental, social and economic impacts of the material.
- Aesthetic value and site sensitivity.
- The recommended materials for the various hardscapes planned in the Niagara Falls park system are noted below.

**Trail Surface:** Stone Dust, Asphalt (pervious or impervious), Resin Bound Aggregate and Mulch

**Plazas:** Concrete (standard, colored, or stained), Stone Pavers, Brick Pavers

**Circulation Paths:** Concrete, Stone Pavers, or Brick Pavers

As the construction industry adapts to more sustainable development strategies, new materials should be evaluated for their appropriateness.



decorative crosswalks



plaza



brick pavers

## Site Amenities

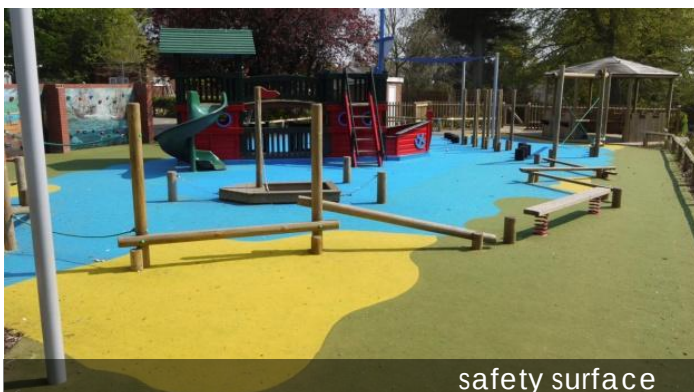
Choosing appropriate site amenities is important in park planning and design. The context, programmed activities and historic significance of the park should be taken into account when selecting site amenities. Design guidelines have been established for the following site amenities:

### PLAYGROUNDS

All children should have access to safe, clean and comfortable environments to play. Playground equipment must meet current Consumer Product Safety Commissions *Public Playground Safety Handbook*. The playground layout and design must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act *Standards for Accessible Design*.

When selecting playground equipment or natural play elements, the following should be considered:

- Include a diverse range of equipment or elements to meet the developmental needs of children of all ages and abilities.
- Evaluate the safety surfacing materials and consider long-term maintenance, not just initial investment.
- Reflect context and support park aesthetics with selected play equipment.
- Adhere to principles of sustainability by using products made from recycled materials.



safety surface

- Provide shade by planting trees or installing a structure.
- Include seating areas around playgrounds.

(45)

### LIGHTING

Because of the high concern for vandalism, lighting should be used in most cases to provide increased security in the parks. The placement and design of the lighting system should follow best practices in sustainable design.

The following guidelines should be followed:

- Light fixtures should be attractive, durable and vandal resistant.
- The style of fixture should be timeless and complement the park amenities.
- Site lighting should have cut-off control and minimize light spillage onto adjacent residential properties.
- The feasibility of utilizing LED technology, solar power or other technological advances as they become available should be evaluated.



ornamental light poles

(46)

### SITE FURNISHINGS (SEATING, TRASH RECEPTACLES, DRINKING FOUNTAINS, ETC)

Because each of the parks has its own unique character, several lines of site furnishings can be considered. The site furnishings within the park should be of the same product line and contribute to a seamless aesthetic throughout each individual park.

Site furnishings should meet the following criteria:

- Style should be timeless and complement the park aesthetic.
- Materials should be durable and vandal resistant.
- Finish should be natural brown or black to blend in with the natural landscape.
- Drinking fountains should include source of drinking water for pets and consideration should be given to fountains that have a source for refilling water bottles.
- Informal seating elements, such as boulders should be considered in less formal parks and trails.



ornamental bench



trash can



informal seating elements



drinking fountain



bollard

## Signage

Identification and wayfinding signage is key to linking and branding all of the individual parks together to identify them as one cohesive park system.

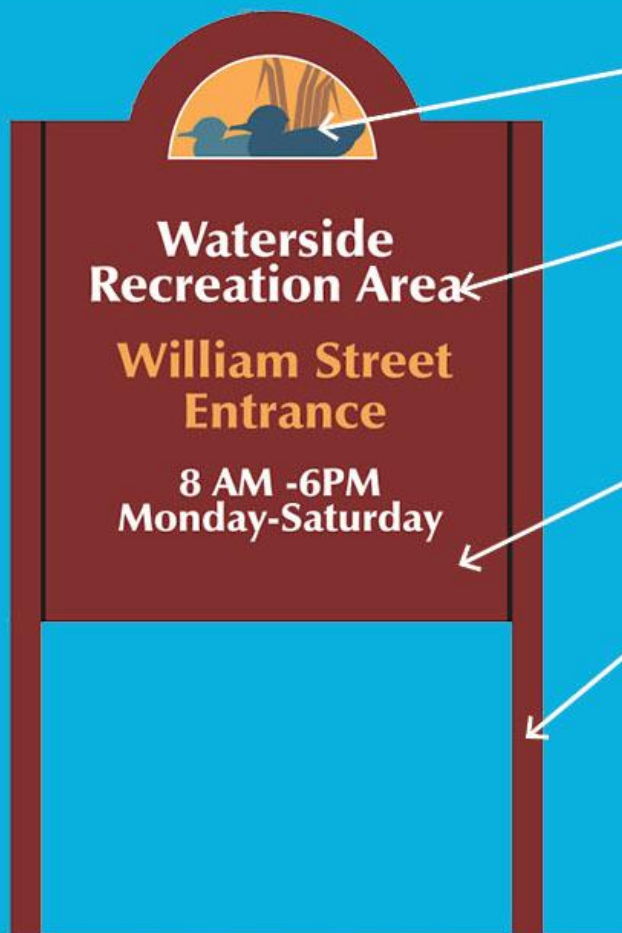
### IDENTIFICATION

Park identification signage will improve park recognition and strengthen the park brand by providing a consistent aesthetic to park welcome and gateway signs.

- The signage system should build off the already established Niagara River Greenway Signage Program. The sign system should be modified slightly to read as part of the overall system but also to be distinctly *Niagara Falls, City in a Park*. This will tie the park systems together and create an easily understood and recognizable sign program.

- Parks that do not currently have any identification signage should be targeted first for the installation of new signs. This should be followed by parks with signs that are outdated or in disrepair and lastly by parks that have adequate signage.

(47)



Logo to be branded for the City of Niagara Falls Park System, *City In a Park*

Text font and size to remain consistent with the Niagara River Greenway Wayfinding & Signage Standards. Font Color to be branded for *City in a Park*

Sign colors to be modified and branded for *City in a Park*

Sign materials to remain consistent with Niagara River Greenway Wayfinding & Signage Standards

## WAYFINDING

(48)

Two tiers of wayfinding signage should be incorporated into the City sign system. Wayfinding signage should be incorporated into large, regional parks (i.e. Hyde Park) to direct visitors to amenities within the park.

Most importantly, a comprehensive wayfinding system should be incorporated city-wide that directs people to parks from various locations throughout Niagara Falls. These signs should give people a sense of distance to amenities and may include maps and other wayfinding context elements.

The signs should follow the standards outlined below:

- Prepare a City-Wide Pedestrian Wayfinding Plan to identify the design, locations and content for a city-wide wayfinding signage system that is centered around the *City in a Park* brand.
- For large, regional parks incorporating internal wayfinding signage, a sign master plan should be developed before any signage is installed.
- Materials, colors and branding should be consistent with park identification signs.



Example wayfinding that identifies distance and time to destinations

## EDUCATIONAL & INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

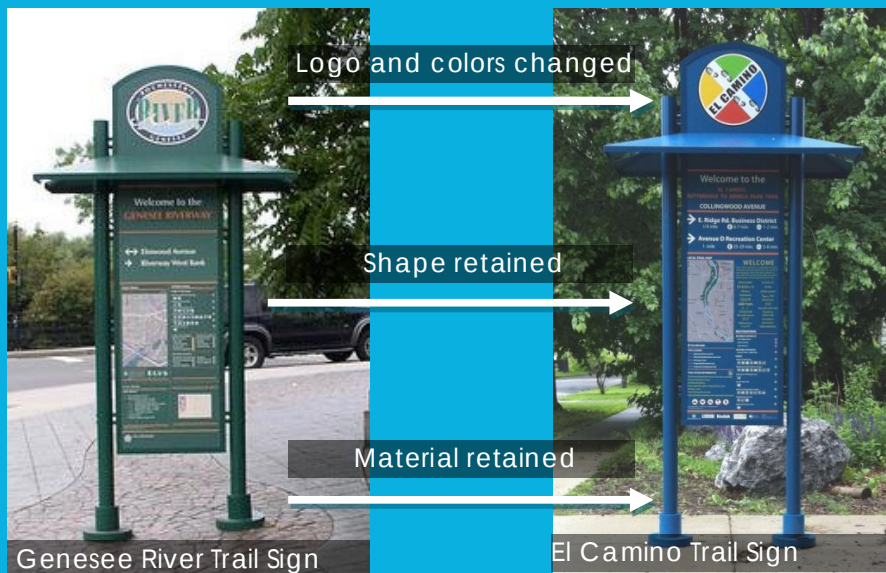
A number of parks within the City system have exceptional opportunities for educational and interpretive signage programs. Parks have been identified as part of the Individual Park Master Plans, based largely on findings and recommendations stemming from the Historic resource report completed for the park system.

The following recommendations apply to the implementation of a system-wide education and interpretive signage program:

- This signage program should be understated and blend in with the surrounding landscape and context.
- The thematic content should be consistent with the themes identified in the National Heritage Area Management Plan and be expanded to include ecology and sustainability.
- The signs should be focused on education, creating a sense of place and encouraging discovery in the parks system.
- Signage can be implemented through traditional post and panel signs, but consideration should be given to nontraditional signage as well. Non-traditional interpretive elements may include engravings or inlaid panels in pavement, plaques mounted on structures or monuments, vinyl stickers or banners on signposts, or mobile applications.
- The educational and interpretive signs should have:
  - Educational message that is clear to the public.

- Materials durable and suited for the exterior environment.
- Sign layouts consistent with Identification and Wayfinding signage that builds upon the Niagara River Greenway Wayfinding Standards & Signage Manual, available online at [http://www2.erie.gov/environment/index.php?q=NRG\\_Signage](http://www2.erie.gov/environment/index.php?q=NRG_Signage).

(49)



The Genesee Riverway trail signage is used throughout Rochester to identify the citywide trail system. The El Camino is a new extension of the system, connecting inner city neighborhoods to the riverfront trail. The existing sign design as modified and branded to create a unique identity for the El Camino extension. However, to ensure continuity of the overall system, the sign design retained the general form, layout and materials.

(50)

## Trails

Linking the individual parks together to achieve one cohesive unified park system can be achieved by expanding upon the existing network of trails in the City of Niagara Falls. The following guiding principles should be considered when designing new connecting trails.

### TRAIL DIMENSIONS AND SURFACE

It is anticipated that a variety of trail types and surfaces will be implemented to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists on both on-road and off-road trails:

- For shared-use trails, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) recommends 10 feet plus 2 foot clear buffers on each side as the minimum desired width for a two-directional shared-use trail accommodating both bicyclists and pedestrians.
- According to AASHTO, there are no bicycle-specific designs or dimensions for roadways and legally, cyclists can operate on all roadways unless prohibited by statute or regulations. The types of roadway bicycle facilities include:
  - Shared Travel Lanes
  - Marked Shared Travel Lanes or Sharrows
  - Designated Bike Lanes
- Choosing a surface type is an important step in the planning and design of a trail . The surface material used should be determined by considering the desired users of the facility, the context of the trail, and the available resources (budget and maintenance staff). Most multi-use

trails use either an asphalt surface or a natural surface such as stone dust.

### ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility for people with disabilities, including wheelchair users, should be provided whenever possible throughout the length of a proposed trail.

- Trailhead parking lots, trail connections and trail slopes should meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Trail surfaces should be firm, stable and slip resistant in order to accommodate as much of the public as possible.



Stone Dust Trail

## Individual Park Master Plans

The individual *City in a Park* Plan master plans are a two-tiered strategies which prioritizes the parks and also prioritizes the recommended improvements within each park.

To best provide the city with a practical and manageable implementation plan, the individual parks were prioritized based on the following criteria:

- 1) Current or planned projects;
- 2) Maintenance requirements;
- 3) Current park visitation;
- 4) Current park condition; and,
- 5) Understanding of existing neighborhood needs.

Each of the 30 parks were evaluated against these criteria and assigned to one of the four categories below:

**Short-Term Maintenance Reduction Parks (0-4years):** Parks in this category provide opportunities to reduce long-term maintenance and operational costs. The parks in this category are typically underutilized and may contain amenities that are in disrepair. Additionally, these parks provide duplicative recreational opportunities to the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

**Short-Term Investment Parks (0-4 years):** Parks in this category provide opportunities that would result in improved recreational opportunities. The parks in this category may contain amenities that are in disrepair and are highly utilized. Additionally, funding sources have already been identified or currently exist to assist in the implementation of many of the recommended improvements.

(51)

### Short-Term Maintenance Reduction Parks

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Liberty  
Jerauld  
Porter  
MacKenna  
70th Street  
Hennepin

### Short-Term Investment Parks

---

Tom Miklejn Field  
Highland & Beech  
Hyde  
Orleans & 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup>  
Gill Creek  
Jayne  
Griffon  
Caravelle Drive

(52)

## Mid-Term Improvement Parks

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D'Amelio  
Legends Basketball  
Court  
Statue of Liberty  
91<sup>st</sup> Street  
Black Creek

## Long-Term Investment Parks

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Lafayette  
North and Lockport  
Gluck  
DiFranco  
South Jr Playground  
Perry  
63rd Street  
LaSalle Waterfront  
Stephenson  
Wright

### **Mid-Term Improvements Parks (5-8 yrs):**

Parks in this category can offer improved recreational opportunities and reduced maintenance. However, these parks are less utilized and current park conditions may be acceptable in the short term.

### **Long-Term Improvement Parks (8 yrs+):**

Parks in this category include recommendations that would result in improved or new recreational opportunities. Parks in this category are either new or in relatively good condition and not in need of immediate improvements. It is recommended that, although these parks are not in need of immediate attention, they continue to be maintained adequately and should be considered if a funding opportunity arises.

### **General Approach**

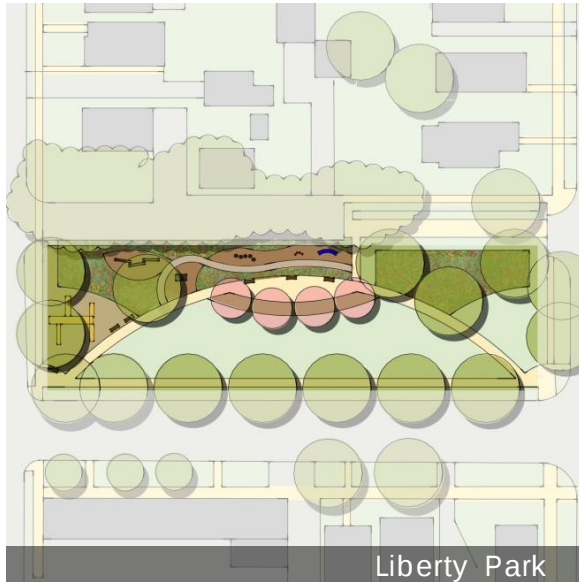
Each of the 30 park master plans are illustrated on the following pages (separated by category and in alphabetical order). A full park improvement description and implementation strategy can be found in Appendix F.

## Park Improvements (by category)

(53)

### SHORT-TERM MAINTENANCE REDUCTION PARKS (0-4 YEARS):

**Liberty Park** is currently in a state of disrepair and should be redesigned to provide more value to the surrounding residential properties. Improvements to the park will enhance the park as a neighborhood asset, which provides passive and active recreational opportunities. Recommendations for the park include replacement of the existing chain link fence with an ornamental fence. The existing playground, which is in poor condition, should be replaced and a natural play environment should be included alongside the traditional play equipment. New pathways with lighting and seating areas are recommended to increase park accessibility and make the park more inviting. In an effort to reduce maintenance costs, portions of the lawn should be replaced with native meadow and wildflower plantings. Interpretive signage will provide educational opportunities focused on the value of native plantings and habitats.



**Jerauld Park** is in poor condition with existing park amenities in a state of disrepair. It is recommended that the existing play structures be replaced with a natural play environment and the basketball court be replaced. To reduce maintenance associated with lawn mowing, it is recommended that much of the lawn be replaced with native meadow plantings. Remaining lawn will provide informal recreational opportunities. The meadow plantings can be installed in a pattern to interpret the former parcel lot lines which will also provide walking paths between the meadows. Fencing and signage along meadows will create a clean edge and provide educational information about sustainability, habitat restoration and native plants. The



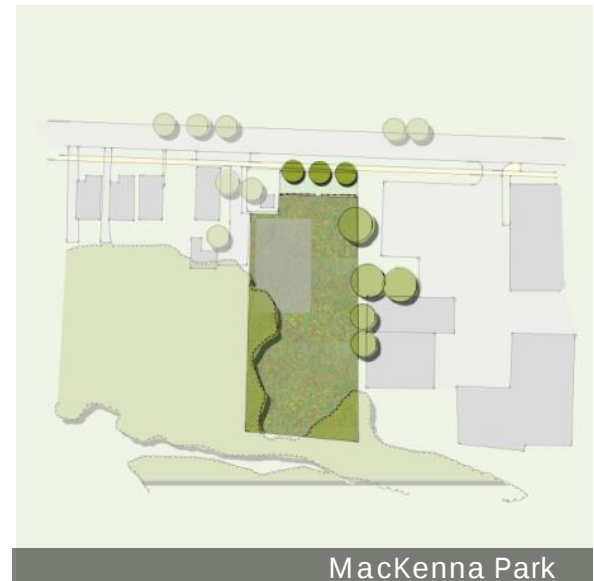
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addition of shade trees and picnic tables will enhance the park as a neighborhood amenity.

Until adjacent redevelopment occurs, it is recommended that **Porter Park** be land banked. The existing cannon monument should be preserved and a small park sign should be considered along Buffalo Avenue. The historic chimney at the south end of the site should be relocated to a more historically appropriate location. A native meadow can be installed to increase biodiversity and reduce maintenance costs. It is recommended that the rich history of the park be incorporated in the future development.

Due to the low utilization of the park, other parks within close proximity and the need to reduce maintenance costs, it is recommended that **MacKenna Park** be land banked until the demand for a park in this neighborhood increases. It is recommended the majority of the park should be naturalized with wildflowers. This will provide an opportunity for educational signage focused on sustainability, ecology and native habitats.

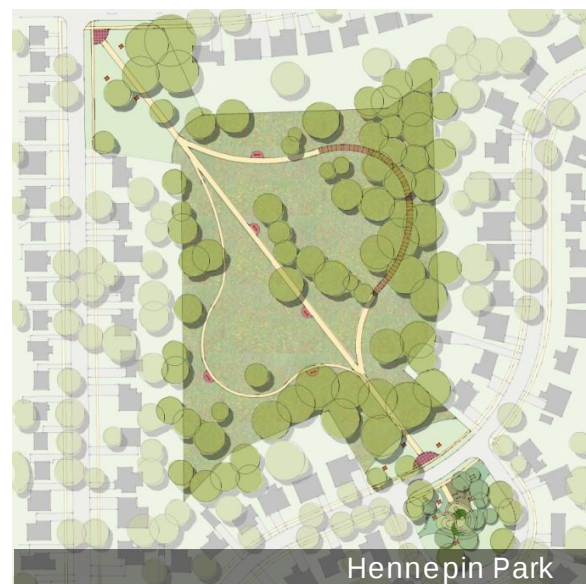
**70th Street (KIES) Park** is a large open space located within a residential neighborhood. A community initiated proposal for park improvements was reviewed and refined in the development of recommendations for the park. The existing basketball court is in disrepair and should be replaced, however the existing baseball diamond is well-utilized and should be maintained. Recommendations to enhance the recreational opportunities and community programming needs in this neighborhood include park identification signage, a central plaza with a shade structure or pavilion, circulation path system through the park.



picnic tables and seating, a traditional and natural play environment and a pedestrian It is also recommended that the adjacent crosswalks are striped to enhanced safety for children and pedestrians. In an effort to reduce maintenance costs, a segment of the park will be reforested and replaced with meadow plantings, reducing the amount of turf to be maintained and increasing biodiversity in the park.

**Hennepin Park** is underutilized due to poor drainage conditions and low visibility. Proposed improvements include the addition of park identification signage and improved park circulation. It is recommended that the wetland-like character of the site be enhanced with the installation of native wetland plantings. This planting installation will provide a more diverse ecosystem and reduce maintenance costs associated with mowing turf. With the addition of several trails, two at grade and one raised boardwalk, accessibility throughout the park will not be compromised by the wet soil condition. Installation of interpretive signage will enhance the ecological focus of the park providing educational opportunities for park visitors. Other improvements include the addition of picnic tables and a natural playground on the parcel south of Laughlin Drive.

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### SHORT-TERM INVESTMENT PARKS (0-4 YEARS):

Proposed improvements at **Tom Miklejn Field** will enhance the park's identification and improve pedestrian safety. Improvements include the installation of a six foot tall ornamental fence with landscape along Lewiston Road to prevent stray balls from entering the pedestrian and vehicular environment. The introduction of striped crosswalks on Lewiston Road and Maple Avenue will provide safe crossings for school-aged children and pedestrians. Other improvements include the addition of a path with fitness stations that connects two existing sidewalks and the installation of a new drinking fountain.

Proposed improvements at **Highland and Beech** will transform a former industrial brownfield site into a neighborhood park. The proposed park improvements include a picnic pavilion, open lawn and amphitheater for community events. Passive recreational opportunities will be available with the addition of new pedestrian paths, seating, game tables and interpretive signage. Active recreational opportunities are proposed with the installation of open lawn for informal athletics, a baseball diamond, playgrounds and a multi-use gaming area (MUGA). The improvements in this park should include water service and park lighting which will support greater event programming and increase park security. The improvements recommended in this master plan reflect and build upon the community needs expressed in the 2011 community design plan.



**Hyde Park** is centrally located and offers a wide variety of experiences and recreational amenities. The main recommendations for the park are to maintain the existing facilities, focus on improving the water quality of Hyde Lake, to promote expanded use and add additional amenities that will enhance the park as a destination for the city and region.



Hyde Park: Full Park

Hyde Lake is included in the Environmental Protection Agency, 2012 Section 303 (d) List of Impaired Waters Requiring a TMDL/Other Strategy. The pollutant documented is phosphorus and is suspected to be caused by stormwater runoff. The first step to mitigating the Lake's poor water quality is with the development of a water monitoring strategy. It is recommended that the city partner with a local water resource organization, such as the Buffalo Niagara River Keeper, for water monitoring. Because stormwater runoff is the cause of the water quality issues, recommended improvement strategies include:

(57)

## MUGA: Multi-Use Gaming Area

A new style of ball court and athletic field that is gaining popularity. MUGAs expand the space allocated to a single sport field or court by combining them in one. They offer a cost effective solution to a wide spectrum of sporting needs.

The fenced in court is surfaced with a material that accommodates field and court athletics. Clever line marking and goal positioning allows the court to be used for a variety of sports in one area, such as basketball, football, soccer, tennis and volleyball.



(58)

- 1) Implement green infrastructure to filter stormwater before it enters the lake,
  - 2) Install shoreline plantings to stabilize the banks of the lake and reduce erosion and
  - 3) Installing a fountain to oxygenate the water.
- Improvements in the water quality in Hyde Lake should also contribute to improved conditions at Gill Creek.

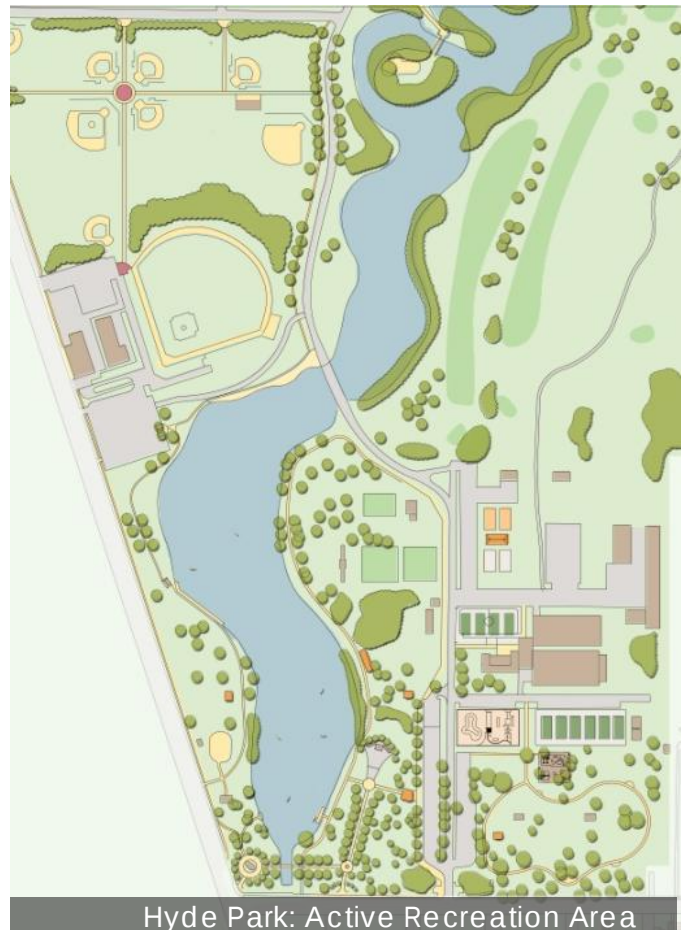
Various improvements are recommended to expand the recreation offerings in the park, including the addition of volleyball courts, restoration of tennis courts and installing a new skate park. Several recommendations focus on the restoration of historic elements, such as the beach and bridle path around the lake. The bridle path could be reinterpreted as a trail, to aid in greater circulation, while the beach would provide access to water, which has been identified as a city priority (see enlarged park plan for location).

General park service improvements include the replacement of two picnic pavilions on the east side of the lake and the installation of a new picnic pavilion on the west side of the lake.

There is enormous opportunity for a public private partnership for two areas in the park, at the lake and Sal Maglie Stadium. With regard to the lake, a partnership to provide boat rentals and concessions at Hyde Park Lake would bring back water recreation to the park and provide a destination feature in the park.

As the High School implements their athletic facility improvements, they will no longer maintain Sal Maglie Stadium and will transfer the maintenance responsibilities back to the city. This increase in maintenance will set the city's maintenance responsibilities even

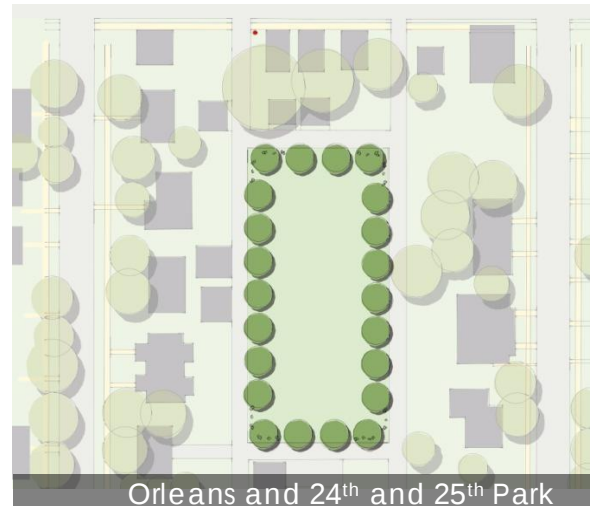
further beyond capacity. A partnership opportunity should be considered to continue the recreational use of the stadium. If this partnership cannot be identified, adaptive reuse strategies should be considered. The city should evaluate and consider adaptive reuse opportunities for Sal Maglie Stadium through a subsequent planning and feasibility process.



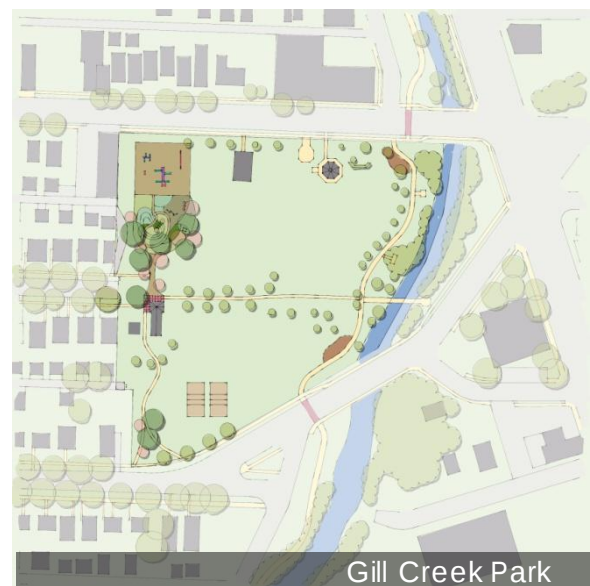
Proposed improvements at **Orleans and 24th and 25th Parks** will address the park's identification as a community green space for the surrounding neighborhood. Improvements include installation of a park identification sign on Ferry Avenue, establishment of turf area for informal recreation, installations of shade trees around the perimeter and boulders to restrict vehicular access.

**Gill Creek Park** is a well utilized community park that would benefit from several modest improvements. Proposed improvements will build upon existing park initiatives, including the addition of a new playground and improved fishing access. The existing comfort station is in need of renovations to bring it up to contemporary park standards which will better service current and potential park programming. Gill Creek is currently included on the DEC's 2012 Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waters Requiring a TMDL/Other Strategy, therefore recommendations for the addition of a new kayak launch should be considered after water quality is sufficiently improved. A final improvement, though outside of the park boundary, is to add a trail to the north and south of the park to improve trail connectivity within the city. A northbound trail would provide a valuable connection to Hyde Park along the creek and contribute to the citywide trail system.

Proposed improvements at **Jayne Park** include managing invasive species, selectively clearing views to the water and adding a pedestrian circulation path with fitness circuit through the park. Improvements to existing park amenities include resurfacing of the basketball court, replacement of the existing playground and restoration of the comfort station. In an effort to reduce maintenance costs and increase biodiversity, it is recommended that the former baseball fields



(59)



are naturalized with a wildflower meadow, including educational signage.

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The recommendations at **Griffon Park** will build upon improvement projects underway which include tree plantings, resurfacing the parking lot, installation of new lighting and construction of a small kayak launch. Proposed improvements will enhance the park user experience through the improvement of park identification, reconfiguring the park path system to improve circulation and construction of a new comfort station (with drinking fountains). In the future, it is recommended that pedestrian crossings be added to connect to the future LaSalle Recreation Way Trail.

Because **Caravelle Drive Park** is a neighborhood park which provides the only walkable recreational opportunities in a dense residential neighborhood, it is recommended that improvements include the replacement of both the existing basketball court and play equipment. Additionally, the park should have an identification sign and park rules sign installed. This signage will inform visitors of the hours of operation and rules of play with respect to the adjacent residential properties. Other improvements recommended for this park include seating adjacent to both the basketball court and playground and a drinking fountain.



Griffon Park

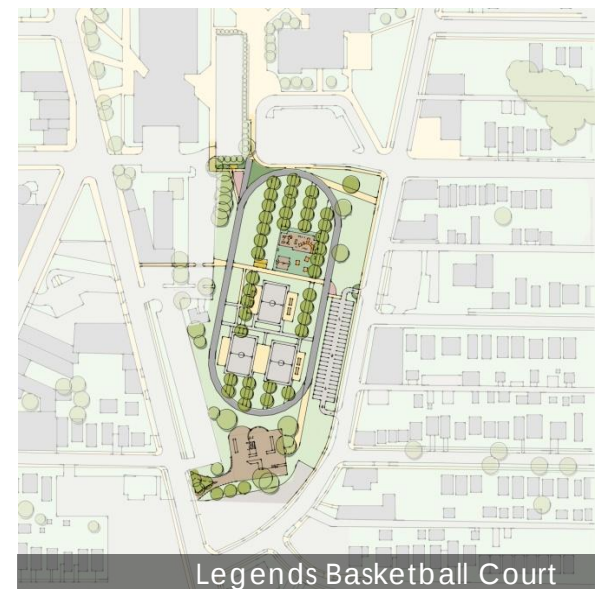


Caravelle Drive Park

## MID-TERM IMPROVEMENTS PARKS (5-8 YRS):

Proposed improvements at **D'Amelio Park** will address safety concerns, improve amenities in disrepair and provided new amenities in the park. Park improvements include the addition of park identification, replacement of the existing traditional playground, the addition of a natural play environment, new picnicking areas and shade trees. Pedestrian connections will be improved between D'Amelio Park and the community center on Calumet Avenue and the newly re-opened community center on Centre Avenue.

**Legends Basketball Court** is envisioned as an athletic campus because of its recreational amenities and adjacency to the public library, an elementary school and the YMCA. The existing facilities, including the basketball courts, newly paved track and drinking fountain should be maintained. Proposed park improvements include a formalized parking lot, the addition of a comfort station, a new playground and a new skate park. These improvements will be enhanced with internal park circulation providing connectivity, shade tree plantings, improved pedestrian circulation between the park and adjacent facilities and directional signage within the park. Due to the rich history of the site, it is recommended that interpretive signage and landscaping be installed to share the former rail history with park users.



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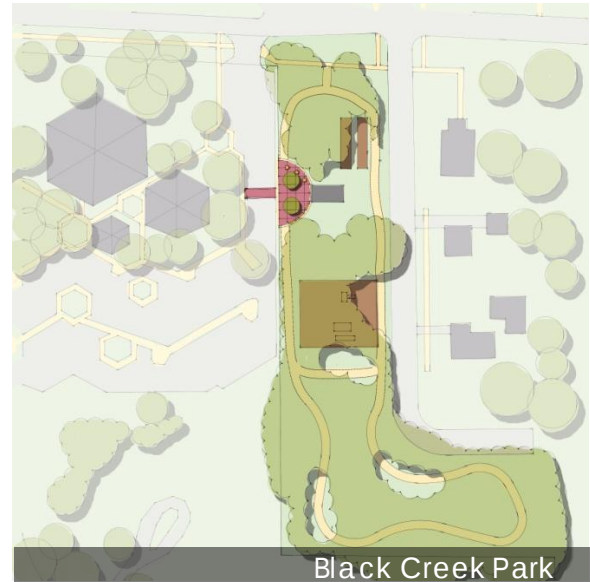
Improvements proposed for **Statue of Liberty Park** will enhance its function as an ornamental pocket park and gateway. Recommendations include the addition of park identification signage, circulation paths and new seating to allow visitors to interact with the existing monuments. New interpretive signage (physical and digital) can explore the history of the city as an international gateway.

The improvements recommended for **91st Street Park** will enhance the park user experience. The baseball fields and swimming pool are the primary amenities at the park. It is recommended that the baseball fields and pool should be maintained. Additional recommendations include restoration of the existing concession stand, installation of a drinking fountain, restrooms, a new playground, as well as increased shade with the planting of shade trees throughout the park. The existing parking lot should be restriped to clearly identify vehicular circulation, pedestrian routes and parking spaces, which will help to alleviate congestion during baseball games. Because there is rich history associated with this park, it is recommended that historic elements of the park be reintroduced, as the park is developed. Historic improvements to the park include the reintroduction of the historic path system, new plantings and interpretive signage.



The amenities in **Black Creek Park** should be enhanced to respond to the needs of the adjacent Senior Center. Recommendations for the park include maintaining the existing park pavilion and walking loop and enhancing the park with new features catering to the parks targeted user group. Enhancements include the addition of a small plaza, game tables and fitness stations. Additional park improvements include repairing the existing playground and nature trail. The park currently has identification signage located along Colvin Boulevard; it is recommended that this sign be maintained until sign replacement is required.

(63)



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## LONG-TERM IMPROVEMENT PARKS (8 YRS+):

Proposed improvements at **Lafayette Park** seek to enhance a community green space for the surrounding neighborhood. Improvements include the addition of monumental style park identification sign, which will strengthen the character of the park as an ornamental square. The reintroduction of historic park features, such as circulation paths and a central focal element will also enhance the ornamental character of the park. A planted buffer on the south side of the park will provide privacy to the neighboring properties and help to differentiate the park as public space.

The existing playgrounds and picnic shelter at **North and Lockport Park** are utilized and should be maintained. Recommendations for the park include the addition of park identification signage, improved pedestrian circulation within the park and improved park access for increased safety. The addition of drinking fountains and lighting at the picnic shelters would greatly benefit park users. A new path along the north side of the park could provide access to a future 'Rails with Trails' project. Additionally, through acquisition of property along North Avenue, additional access (physical and visual) will be provided. This improvement could allow for the addition of a parking lot and athletic field as well as improved park safety.

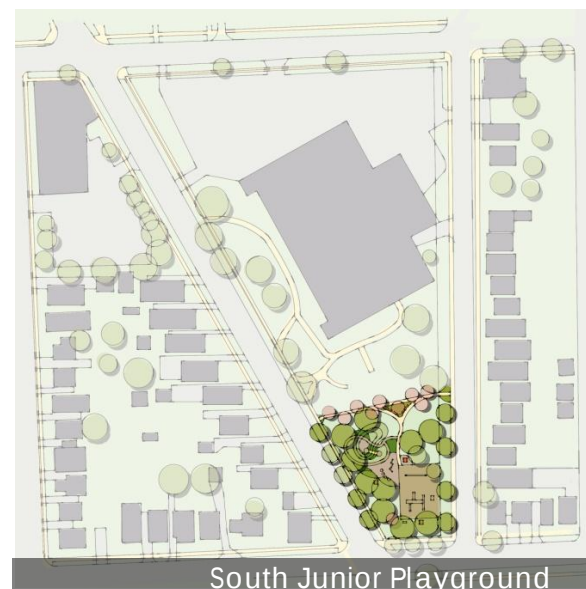
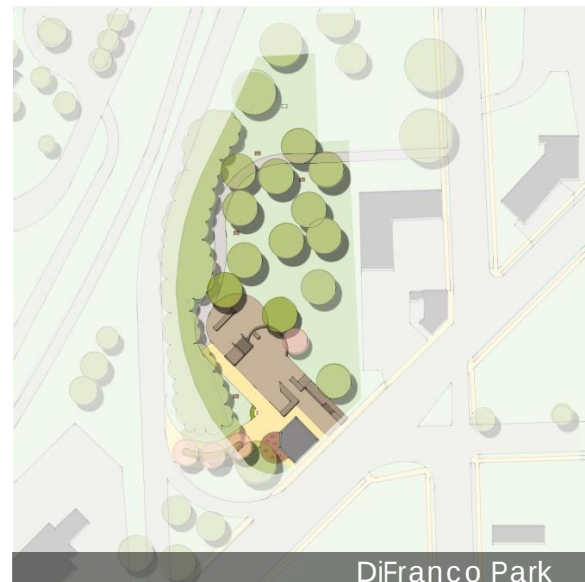
To maintain the historic integrity of **Gluck Park**, recommended improvements focus on the rehabilitation and preservation of the park features. Proposed improvements include the restoration of historic plantings along the path system, replacement of a missing entry column and introduction of a focal feature in the center of the park. The existing bandstand is not an original feature of the park and is in poor condition. This feature is utilized by

adjacent resident and community groups and it is recommended that a historically appropriate structure be installed as a replacement. Additionally, the existing playground and basketball court are not original to the historic design of the park but are also regularly utilized. These features should be maintained in order to serve the needs of the local community.

Due to the potential future development of the Robert Moses Parkway as a pedestrian oriented trailway, it is recommended that **DiFranco Park** be land banked in the short term. When the larger Robert Moses Parkway planning study is completed, it is recommended that coordination occur between NYS Parks and the city to determine the best development for the parkland. It is recommended that the following improvements be considered at that time: park identification signage, a recreational focused welcome center, connection to the future Robert Moses multi-uses trail, a skatepark and additional tree plantings. These improvements have the potential to make DiFranco Park a gateway to Niagara Falls and to create a major trailhead for the Robert Moses multi-use trail.

The existing playground at the **South Junior Playground** is in good condition and is well utilized. It is recommended that a park identification sign be added to improve the park presence. Seating should be added adjacent to the playground for adults who are supervising children. If redevelopment of the vacant former school building occurs, this park could become an asset to that development and benefit from new pedestrian paths to connect the park to the adjacent public sidewalks. Other improvements include adding a natural play environment to provide alternative play options for youth and interpretive signage along Portage Road (a future heritage trail).

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As a large fairly underutilized open space in the city, **Perry Park** will benefit from additional plantings and reforestation of much of the site. The existing athletic court and playground equipment are in poor condition and should be removed. However, because the park is in a residential neighborhood, it is recommended that an athletic field and play environment be added to the park when redeveloped. Other recommended improvements to enhance the park include the addition of park identification signage, picnic tables, a pedestrian circulation path system and striped pedestrian crossings at adjacent intersections to create a safer crossing environment for children and pedestrians.

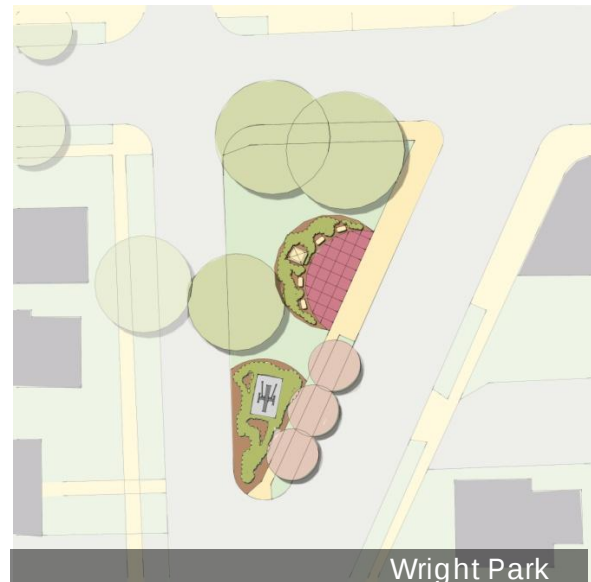
**63rd Street Park** is a neighborhood park, which offers unprogrammed open space for residents. Improvements to the park should remain minimal to allow for informal athletics to occur in the open turf area. In an effort to retain the current character of the park, recommendations are limited to the installations of park identification signage and an informal loop trail around the park. The signage will enhance the park identification, while the loop trail will increase accessibility and recreational opportunities in the park. A future improvement to the park could include the acquisition of the NYS DOT owned parcel to the north creating a formalized trailhead and connection to the existing sidewalk network and future citywide trail network.

The **LaSalle Waterfront Park** was constructed in 2012 and does not require any immediate improvements. Future improvements that should be considered include enhancing an expanded natural play environment and improved crosswalks connecting to the future LaSalle Recreation Way Trail.



**Stephenson Park** is a well-utilized park with a variety of recreational amenities in good condition. The only immediate improvements recommended for this park focus on the need to improve access and safety with the addition of curb ramps, sidewalks and a striped crosswalk. Access to the future LaSalle Recreation Way Trail should be provided once the trail is developed.

**Wright Park** is a small triangular shaped parcel with several military monuments and memorials. It is recommended that the monuments be reoriented to and arranged around a new small plaza area with a few seating elements. The formalization of this park will give it greater presence and provide a more meaningful memorial of the individuals and groups being honored.



(68)



## V. implementing the park master plan

The *City in a Park* plan identifies visionary elements for the future of the Niagara Falls park system. This chapter outlines the key strategies and recommendations necessary to see the vision of the city park system become a reality.

- Partnerships & Collaboration
- Organizational Structure
- Budget & Operations
- Funding

### Partnerships & Collaboration

Successful development of the park system will be dependent on the coordination and cooperation of several community partners. Partnerships should be harnessed for park maintenance, recreation programming and facility use.

The city should focus on strengthening relationships with partners to leverage efforts in providing services within the park system.

- **Coordinate with School District.** Coordination with the City School District can aid in the identification of recreation programming gaps and underutilization of facilities.
- **Have regular outreach and coordination meetings with other recreation providers.** Increased communication with community partners such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club,

various baseball leagues and the senior center can result in savings in personnel costs and program management. Additionally, these partnerships can allow the city to identify maintenance expectations for league and program for these partners, potentially reducing the city's maintenance burdens.

- **Address water quality issues.** Addressing water quality issues throughout the park system is critical to providing water recreation. Community partners such as the Buffalo Niagara River Keeper can assist the city in developing a water monitoring plan to improve the water quality to acceptable standards.

- **Streamline and improve internal coordination.** In addition to the coordination with community partners, greater emphasis should be put on internal coordination with regard to the park system. Currently there are various offices working on the planning, funding, and implementation of improvements within the park system. (see organization structure for additional information).

(69)

## CONSIDERING A NEW PARK MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

### Case Study | Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy | Buffalo NY

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy is the first nonprofit organization, funded by grants, donations and membership fees in the nation to manage and operate an entire historic urban park system. The Conservancy is a membership-based, community organization whose mission is to promote, preserve, restore, enhance, and maintain the Fredrick Law Olmsted designed parks and parkways in the Greater Buffalo area for current and future generations.

In 2004, the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy entered a groundbreaking partnership with the City of Buffalo, Erie County and the community that made the Conservancy the official stewards of the Buffalo Olmsted Park System, overseeing its management, operations and maintenance. Maintenance includes turf care, litter pickup, and trash removal, graffiti clean-up, tree, shrub and flower plantings and pruning. This maintenance is managed year round by the Olmsted staff with the help of thousands of dedicated volunteers.

#### Revolutionary Results

In a plan modeled after Central Park Conservancy's highly successful Zone Management System, the Conservancy has broken the entire Olmsted Park System into a series of 10-15 acre zones. A seasonal zone gardener is assigned to every zone. Each zone gardener is responsible for everything within the assigned area, from trash pick up to bench repair; from working with volunteers to plantings. This revolutionary urban parks management plan brings accountability, pride, and ownership to the parks. Public feedback and participation is key to its success.

(70)

## Organizational Structure

Today, park management and operations fall under the Department of Public Works. The Department of Public Works is responsible for a range of public services, in addition to parks and recreation, including:

- Streets and Sidewalks
- Traffic Engineering
- Central Trades
- Parking
- Parks
- Neighborhood Services
- Golf Course (Hyde Park)

Maintenance, funding, operations and programming occur separate from one another within the existing organizational framework. While the needs of the park system may be secondary in comparison to the needs associated with roadways, sidewalks, and traffic engineering, they are imperative to the quality of life and economic development opportunities within the community.

Recommendations specific to the Organization Structure of the City of Niagara Falls as it relates to park and recreation implementation include:

- **Create a Department of Parks and Recreation with its own director that can advocate for the appropriate needs for the park system.** This would result in a clear differentiation of responsibilities with the DPW and would still allow for the sharing of facilities, staff and equipment as deemed appropriate.
- This division will allow dedicated oversight for the park facilities and recreation programming. The dedicated Departments will require coordination as improvements are planned to ensure sustainable planning and development is occurring within each department. The synergy of collaboration between the two departments has the potential to significantly improve, not just the park system, but also the public realm in Niagara Falls.
- **Identify stream of dedicated funding.** Funding for the Parks and Recreation Department will be a primary concern early in the formation of this new department. The city should plan to budget for a Director and appropriate staff levels, in addition to funding for park maintenance, recreational programming and park improvements.
  - **Hire a grant writer.** The Parks Department should be expanded to include a grant writer, either within the department or shared with other city departments, such as Public Works and Community Development. Grant writing is critical to the long-term success of a department dedicated to parks and recreation. There are an abundance of grant programs and opportunities available for both park improvements and programming.
  - **Study the feasibility of creating a Parks Board or Authority that is distinct from other City Departments and City Hall.** The City should consider whether the parks and recreation department may be more efficient as a stand-alone entity that is supported by some City funding but benefits from a certain level of autonomy. This has been an effective approach in other cities, including the Olmsted Conservancy in Buffalo, NY. Additional study of benefits, constraints and transition to such an entity would be required.

## Budget & Operations

Well-maintained park facilities contribute to a greater sense of community, quality of life, and serve as a tourism attraction, providing attractive locations to gather and visit. When parks are not well maintained, they have adverse impacts on perception of a place. People associate vandalism and unkempt facilities with a lack of safety and crime and will choose not to visit certain locations. During the inventory phase of the master planning process, it was noted that the current park system is not equitably maintained. Some parks are in good condition, while others are in poor condition. Consistent and on-going regular maintenance does not occur because the needs of the park system exceed the capacity of the Department of Public Works.

A full-time equivalent (FTE) employee indicates any combination of employment that equates to one person working full-time for a full year period.

For example, a FTE may mean:

An employee working full-time, all year; or two employees each working half-time for a full year; or four employees each working full time for a quarter of the year.

- **Hire additional staff to support the current and future needs of the parks and recreation department.** Today, the city budget accounts for approximately 25 full-time equivalent park employees, which accounts for seasonal employees, staff shared with other departments and part-time employees. In order for the city

to adequately maintain, monitor and improve their park system to a level consistent with other municipalities, an additional five (5) full-time equivalent employees should be retained.

Additional personnel should be hired to cover the largest gaps in current staffing – regular and on-going maintenance, repairs and replacement of equipment and seasonal recreational programming.

- **Implement Schedules for Routine Maintenance:** Routine maintenance schedules should be developed for each of the parks in order to ensure their consistent upkeep and all facilities are kept in adequate condition.
- **Plan for Future Needs:** Utilize the parks database to budget and schedule maintenance efforts efficiently. Prioritize needs and set realistic and practical expectations for maintenance and improvements in both the short and long term.
- **Pursue Innovative Funding:** Budgets are tight for everyone these days, but most people find a way to pay for and invest in the things that are important to them. Through partnerships, private donation, or dedication programs a variety of improvements can be realized. Another alternative is to assess the community's willingness to pay more than \$50 per year for their parks - then bring it to vote. For specific funding opportunities, refer to the implementation section.
- **Solicit Volunteers:** The current labor union contracts in Niagara Falls limit the opportunity for volunteerism as well as community-initiated projects. The city is encouraged to open dialogue with

(72)

residents and develop an agreement with the labor unions to promote civic engagement to assist with park maintenance and improvement projects. Including the community in events, such as fall clean up, spring planting or annual park weeding can foster a sense of pride and ownership. Personal investment in the park system can result in increased “community watch” efforts and fewer instances of park vandalism.

- **Reduce regular, routine maintenance costs.** One of the easiest ways to reduce the gap between budget need and available funding is to reduce costs associated with park maintenance, including the replacement of expansive underutilized lawns with ecologically focused landscapes such as wildflower meadows. The use of wildflower meadows will be a new approach to landscape management in the city, and therefore it is recommended that wildflower meadows be coupled with educational signage. The educational signage should indicate the benefits to the environment and to the park users that wildflower meadows bring. This strategy is recommended in several parks where the shift in landscape management will increase biodiversity and contribute to natural habitat restoration, while reducing maintenance demands and costs, and providing an educational opportunity for park users.



## Funding

The funding strategy for the park system must address both the day-to-day operations and future park improvements; funding both parts are critical to the long-term success of the park system.

The focus of funding should be on developing sustainable park management and maintenance practices that will allow for the continued development and improvements of the park system. Funding will need to come from a combination of resources, including but not limited to city budget allocation, grants, private donations, special events and sponsorships.

## Operation Costs

Funding considerations associated with operation costs include:

- **Increase the budget.** The city should increase allocations for park facility maintenance and recreation programming; the city should use \$4.0M as an annual budget goal to maintain existing park system.
- **Bring it to vote.** Develop a plan and determine a budget that would allow the park system to add greater value and provide more services to the community. Hold a referendum and ask the residents to help support parks and recreation.

(73)

## POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES FOR PARK PROJECTS

1. Transportation Enhancements Program
2. Safe Routes to School Program
3. Local Waterfront Revitalization Program
4. Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) Municipal Grant program
5. Recreational Trails (RTP) program
6. Brownfield Opportunity Area Funding
7. Parks Program, Environmental Protection Fund
8. Green Innovation Grant Program
9. Cleaner Greener Communities Funding
10. Niagara River Greenway
11. NYSDEC Urban and Community Forestry Program
12. Great Lakes Habitat Restoration Funding
13. Community Development Block Grant Funds
14. Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquariums Funding
15. Building Healthy Communities (Home Depot)

(74)

- **Consider a Nonprofit.** Whether for an individual park or multiple parks, consider forming a non-profit organization that can oversee maintenance and/or programming. A ‘Parks Foundation’ could work with the city to raise funds, form partnerships, advocate and develop park improvement plans. This should be considered in context with Organizational Structure recommendations.
- **Host Special Events.** Special events can generate revenue through parking, activities, vendor fees and leases.
- **Solicit advertising dollars.** Considering providing advertising and sponsorships for an annual fee. Advertising could be discreetly placed on golf carts or in brochures and the fees could be used to offset maintenance and enhancement projects. Or, as another example, if the city implemented a new outdoor skate rink in Hyde Park, the naming rights could be sold to offset costs associated with running the rink.

If each resident in the City paid \$313 in 2013, the entire City in Park Master Plan could be implemented...

### Implementing the Park Master Plans

Park improvements and enhancements are a substantial cost that many parks department cannot fund within existing capital budgets. The City of Niagara Falls is no different.

The city should continue to aggressively pursue private donations, fundraising campaigns and grants to pay for the park improvements outlined in this plan.

How much money does the city need? A cost estimate was prepared for the improvements associates with each park, which range from \$25,500 for maintenance reduction projects in MacKenna Park to \$3.6 million for a range of projects in Hyde Park.

The total estimated cost to implement the Parks Master Plan in 2013 dollars is \$15,541,387.00. This cost estimate is only for noted park improvements identified in the individual park master plans. Other implementation activities are not included in this estimate (i.e., additional studies, on-going maintenance, etc.) The cost, by phase, is broken down as follows:

|                              |                |
|------------------------------|----------------|
| Short-Term Maintenance.....  | \$2,250,745.00 |
| Short-Term Improvements..... | \$7,748,502.00 |
| Mid-Term Improvements.....   | \$2,937,360.00 |
| Long-Term Improvements.....  | \$2,604,780.00 |

An aggressive grant funding strategy will be required to support short-term implementations. When implemented, these initial improvements will reduce overall maintenance costs and allow for increased budget available for implementation of the mid-term park improvements.

The line item cost estimates for each park can be found in Appendix G.

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