

PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM PLAN

Saint Paul is planning to transform the parks and recreation system to be:

- *more relevant*
- *more connected*
- *more sustainable*

The **2008 Vision Plan** set the direction for Parks and Recreation in Saint Paul.

The **System Plan** addresses the built components of the park and recreation system. This infrastructure (buildings, fields, courts, trails) requires the most money to construct, staff, operate, maintain, and upgrade.

The **System Plan** is necessary to assure that Saint Paul parks and recreation system is economically sustainable – that expenditures match revenues.

The goal of the **System Plan** is to transform the Saint Paul Parks and Recreation System into a 21st Century Parks and Recreation System. 

The **System Plan** weighs community needs and wants with financial realities, to ensure the system remains economically viable and responsible with tax dollars.



Characteristics of a 21st Century Park and Recreation System:

- » The system is activity-oriented, not facility-oriented
- » The system responds quickly to the community and its needs
- » The system provides equitable service to all sectors of the community
- » The system is sustainable – economically and environmentally
- » The system capitalizes on strong partnerships
- » The system is organized around linear elements (trails and greenways) rather than around smaller neighborhood sites
- » The system recasts City recreation centers as “community centers” that are about more than recreation and are open and accessible

SYSTEM PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

Community Center Buildings:

- ✓ Transform recreation centers into community places that **appeal to all ages and abilities**. Accomplish this by reducing the number of buildings and reinvesting in remaining center buildings – staffing, programming and capital improvements expanding beyond the current primarily youth recreation role. This is a re-casting of the rec center as a community center, with broader appeal and wider draw. In some cases this will require reinvestment in the building.
- ✓ **Have fewer, but better buildings**. Emphasize quality over quantity. The Plan recommends an eventual system of 19 community centers, which would be staffed full-time and provide a wide variety of programming and activities for all ages and interests, and three school-city partner recreation centers, which would be staffed part time and would function much like recreation centers do today.
- ✓ **Reduce the number of low quality buildings**. Obtain viable long-term partners for some high to average quality buildings. Over time, remove low quality buildings where a viable partner cannot be obtained to take over all building operations, improvements, and costs.
- ✓ **Strengthen facility, staffing and programming relationships** with the School District, the community, partners and libraries. Support Learning Campuses and other initiatives.

City Parks and Recreation Community Centers:

These centers will expand to be more community oriented places, responding to neighborhood as well as City-wide needs.

Battle Creek, Dayton's Bluff, Edgecumbe, El Rio Vista, Hancock, Hazel Park, Hillcrest, Langford, Linwood, Martin Luther King, Merriam Park (master plan process recommended), North Dale, Oxford/Jimmy Lee, Phalen, Palace (expand), Payne Maryland (new multi-use rec ctr/partner building), Rice, Scheffer (new building recommended), and West Minnehaha.

School/Partner/City Recreation Sites:

The City will provide out-of-school time programming and staffing for gym use and events.

Groveland, NW Como, and a new partner recreation center in the northeast portion of the City (Hayden Heights building replacement).

Partner Buildings:

Existing partner relationships would be improved and expanded, in order to facilitate removal of all city parks and recreation staffing from these buildings. Eventually, partners would take on full operation, maintenance, and upkeep of high and moderate quality buildings, while low quality buildings would be removed when current partners depart or when significant upgrades become necessary.

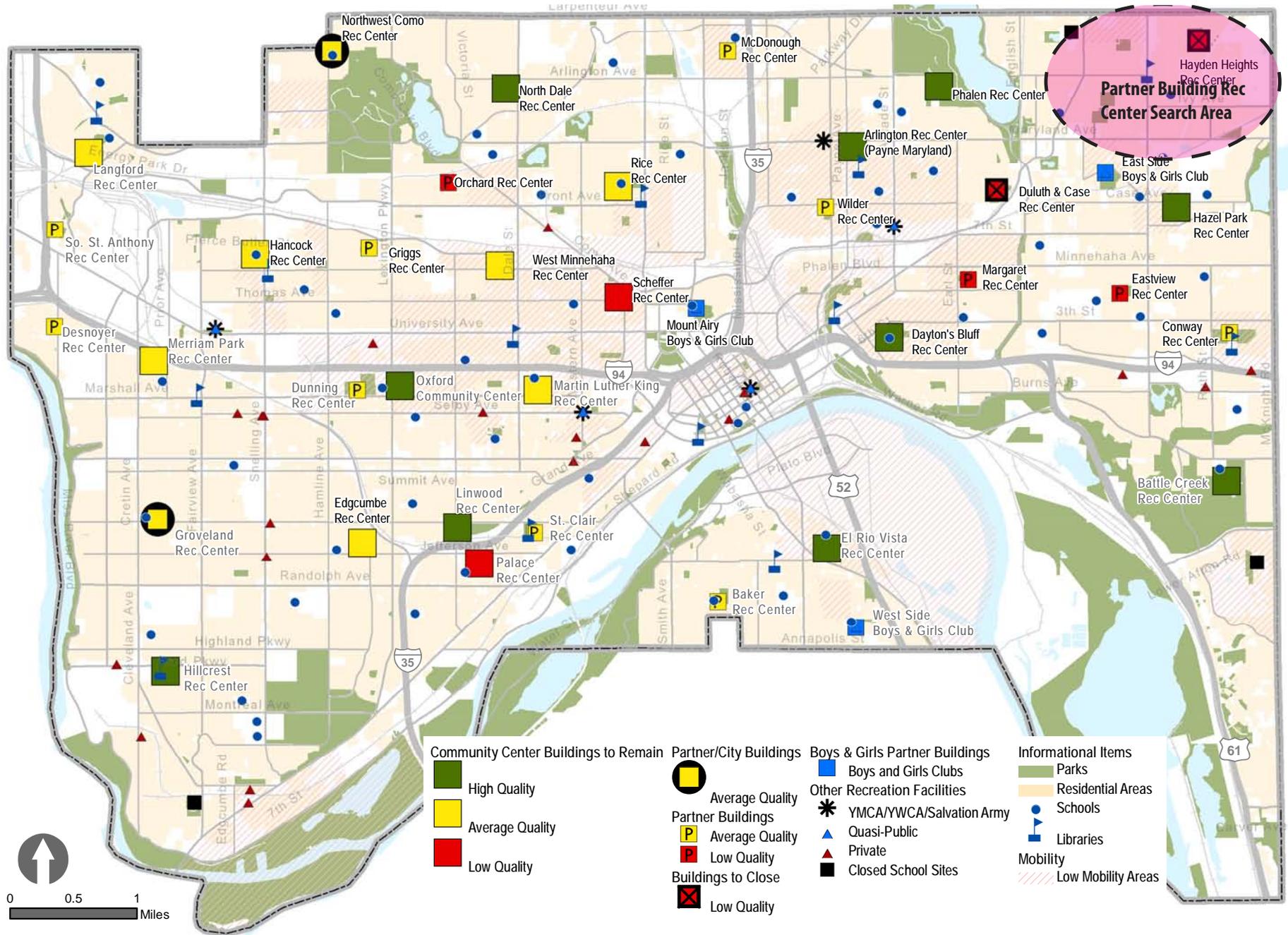
High/Average quality: Conway, Wilder, McDonough, Griggs, Dunning, St. Clair/ West 7th, Desnoyer, South St. Anthony, Baker

Low quality: Eastview, Margaret, Orchard

Building Removal:

Duluth and Case (renovation to a community athletic and neighborhood park recommended with a new bathroom, picnic, meeting room and storage building)
Hayden Heights (add out of school time City recreation services in an existing school or library building)

COMMUNITY CENTER RECOMMENDATIONS:



SYSTEM PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

Trails and the Grand Rounds:

- ✓ Trails are one of the most sought after park amenities. The Plan should maintain or create signature trail loops at five locations: Como, Phalen, Hidden Falls/Crosby Farm/ Mississippi River Blvd., Battle Creek, and Downtown (the latter two loops are only partially complete). These loops should be off-road, high quality, nature-focused trail loops.
- ✓ The signature loops would be linked together by the Grand Rounds. To accomplish this, we recommend the implementation of off-road multi-use trails on Johnson Parkway and Wheelock Parkway, and a re-thinking of the Grand Rounds route through the northwestern corner of the city.

Access to Natural Areas and Open Space:

- ✓ Access to nature is very important to Saint Paul residents. The same locations with signature trail loops would also be considered signature natural areas, with good access to water, topography, and nature interpretation and programming.
- ✓ Neighborhood parks with an existing nature focus would continue as such, and several other parks will be considered for augmentation or restoration of natural areas. The parks and lands where new or enhanced nature access will be considered are:

Pigs Eye, Cherokee, Hillcrest Knoll (stormwater basin), Sackett, Johnson Parkway, Indian Mounds, Willow Reserve, Marydale, Wheelock Parkway Triangles, Wheelock Parkway hairpin area, Ryan, Horton, Newell, Hampden, Merriam, Linwood, Conway, Duluth and Case, Ford Site, Victoria and the regional parks.

- ✓ Access to nature may include replacement of turf with native prairie or savanna plantings, naturalized stormwater management areas, augmented native woodland, or restored ponds and wetlands.



PARK AND TRAIL SYSTEM OVERVIEW:



SYSTEM PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

Parks

Community Parks

- » Focus on high quality fields, specialty facilities, and user amenities at community parks throughout the city.

Neighborhood Parks

- » Most neighborhood parks are in good condition and are located close to St. Paul residents. 95% of residents live within a half-mile of parks, trails or open space.
- » Service area gaps within the Central Corridor and around the West Seventh Street and Snelling Avenue intersection need to be addressed. Victoria Park will also provide neighborhood scale recreation.
- » Strengthening and enhancing trail connections along Wheelock and Johnson Parkways is important in providing better access to the existing parks for the small number of residents who are outside of the half mile service areas.
- » Implement planned investment and improvements at Prosperity, Front, Sylvan, and Burns Avenue parks.

Central Corridor

- » A new neighborhood park should be established south of University Avenue between Hamline and Victoria to address the half mile neighborhood park service area gap.
- » Streetscape enhancements should be implemented to provide stronger pedestrian connections to all of the facilities south of Interstate 94.
- » Additional plazas and open spaces should be a focus of redevelopment efforts, especially in areas with new concentrations of residential development. These should be privately owned and managed with public access provided.
- » Parks and Recreation should take an active role in encouraging the YMCA to rebuild its facility along University Avenue

Downtown

- » Enhance and maintain streetscapes along trail corridors which connect downtown to the State Capital Grounds to the north, Harriet & Raspberry Islands to the south, and Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary and Swede Hollow Park to the east.
- » Seize opportunities to add additional urban parks in the downtown area, especially around areas of residential growth. Where site size permits, consider adding facilities such as a basketball court or additional playgrounds.

Restrooms

- » Expand access to restrooms by adding outside access to restrooms in park buildings and adding portable toilets and screens.

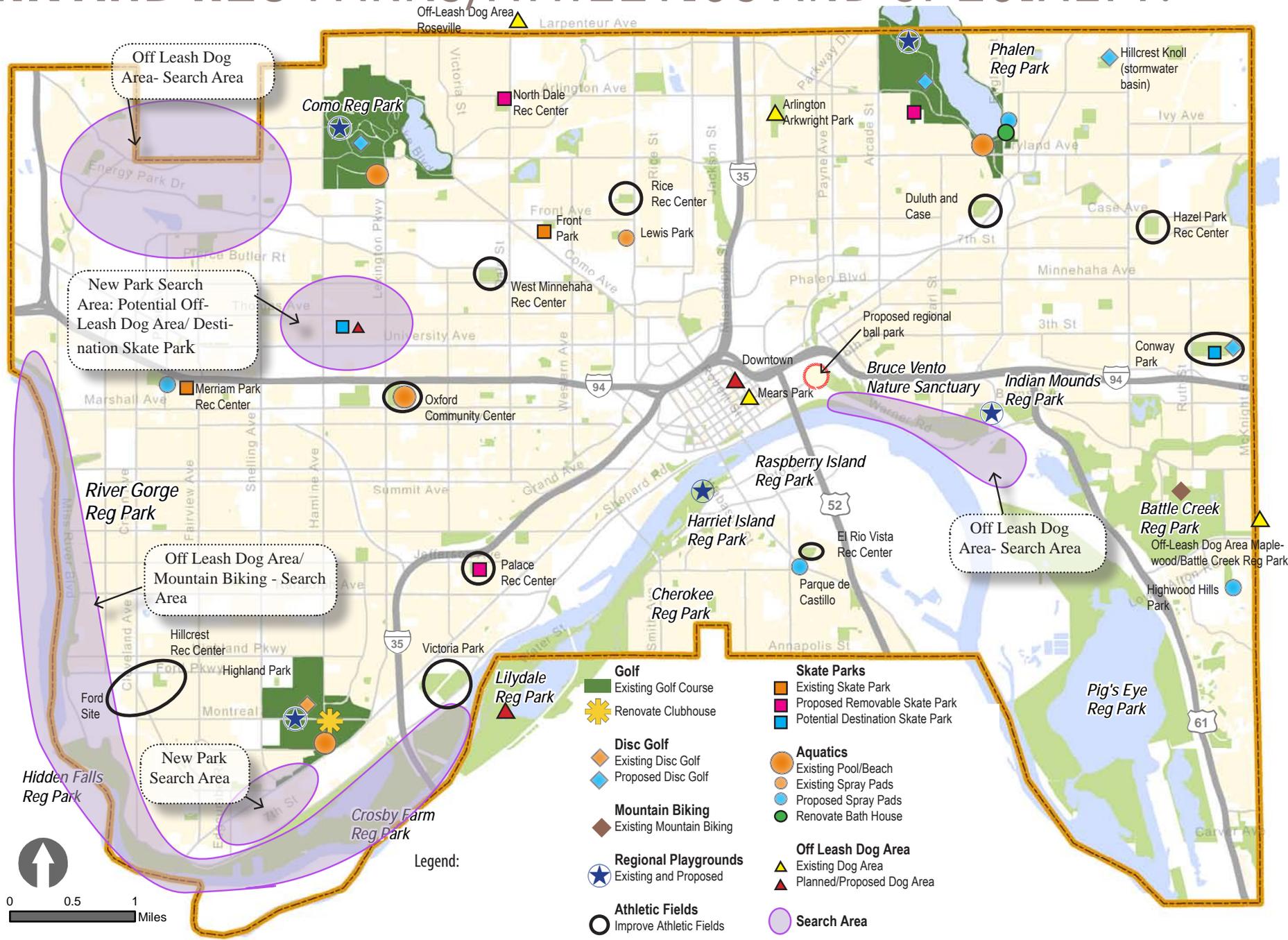
Outdoor Athletic Facilities

- » Reduce the number of overlapping fields to improve quality.
- » Create more high quality irrigated turf fields and artificial turf fields.
- » Renovate Duluth and Case as an athletic and neighborhood park.
- » Improve the quality of fields at West Minnehaha, Rice, Palace, Hazel Park, Oxford, Conway and El Rio Vista.
- » Add new high quality multi-use turf fields at Victoria Park (pending).
- » Renovate the Hillcrest fields or replace some of them on the Ford site.
- » Eliminate some low quality and low use tennis courts.

Specialty Recreation Facilities

- » Evaluate need/benefit for three public golf courses. There should be a minimum of two public golf courses in Saint Paul. Expand Highland clubhouse capacity (+200 seats) to allow for tournament, event and rental uses. Over the long term, if Phalen is to remain as a golf course, renovation of the food service and club house is needed.
- » Renovate the beach and bathhouse at Phalen. Add spray pads to provide more access to free aquatic amenities evenly across the City - Phalen, Highwood Hills, El Rio Vista and Merriam Park.
- » More off leash dog areas are needed. Off leash dog areas are recommended for Lilydale, the northeast part of the City, Downtown, Central Corridor and along the Mississippi River.
- » Add removable skate parks at refrigerated ice locations - Palace, Phalen, and North Dale. Look for a location for a larger, destination skate park. Potential locations - Central Corridor, Conway or Hillcrest if some fields are relocated to the Ford Site.
- » Look for a location for a second signature pleasure ice skating rink (potential locations Phalen Park or Ford Site overlooking the Mississippi River).
- » Restore groomed cross-country ski loop in Crosby-Hidden Falls Regional Parks.
- » As playground replacement is needed, add regional destination playground experiences at Como Picnic Grounds, Phalen Picnic Grounds, Harriet Island and Indian Mounds Regional Park.

PARK AND REC PARKS, ATHLETICS AND SPECIALTY:



SYSTEM PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS:

Financial and Operational Benefits:

- + The financial benefits of the Plan recommendations stem largely from recreation center building changes/reductions and changes to athletic fields and courts. Fewer buildings allows for a redistribution of staff resources to the remaining centers to expand hours of operation, expand programming and activities, and enhance visitor experience.
- + Fewer buildings also reduce annual capital maintenance and operating expenses and capital replacement costs. The recommended future community/recreation center building system will result in approximately \$20 million in savings over the next 20 years (2009 dollars) which can be directed toward increased staffing, programs, and services.

Non-financial Benefits:

- + Road map for system revitalization (creating a 21st Century Park and Recreation System)
- + Transition of recreation centers to community center adds appeal to all residents, ages and abilities
- + System-wide asset management plan and actions
- + Connects the City with trails and parkways
- + Enhances access to nature
- + Defensible rationale for decision-making
- + Efficient resource allocation (budgeting and staffing)
- + Fosters strong partnerships
- + Long-term economic sustainability



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