

# *“Creating Community Connections for a Healthy Future Part III”*

City of Waukesha  
Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department  
Strategic Plan Update 2023-2027



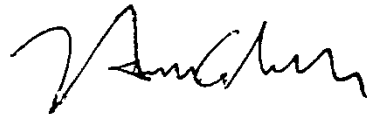
## Letter from the Director

On behalf of the City of Waukesha Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department and Board, I am pleased to present our updated 2023-2027 Strategic Plan – *“Creating Community Connections for a Healthy Future-Part III.”*

This plan was built upon the foundation of the previous plans and is a result of an inclusive process that involved both internal and external community stakeholders to help identify priority goals and develop specific action plans for the next five years and beyond. The completion of our statistically valid Community Needs Assessment “tool” in 2017 and implementation of the city wide NCS (National Community Survey) in 2022, played a pivotal role in the identification and development of Strategic Plan goals and objectives. Overall, the process of strategic planning will greatly aid our efforts toward achieving our vision while continuing to fulfill our mission.

Strategic planning is a “living process” that requires regular review and updates to keep initiatives focused and relevant. We are dedicated to accomplishing the identified goals and will continue to work closely with the community to ensure that our organization is moving in a positive direction and at a high level of service to our residents!

Respectfully submitted,



Ron Grall, Director  
City of Waukesha  
Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department

### ***WPRF Vision***

*“Gold Medal” services...Exceptional quality of life!*

### ***WPRF Mission***

To be responsive and committed in providing essential park, recreation and urban forestry services making our community a desirable place to live, work and play!

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# Acknowledgements

## SPECIAL THANKS TO:

All members of the WPRF Management Team who participated in the updating of the WPRF strategic plan.

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## COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS

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# Executive Summary

The Waukesha Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department (WPRF) has earned a reputation over the years for providing a wide range of diverse and high-quality services to the citizens of Waukesha and its visitors. Parks, boulevards, street trees, sports and recreation venues, park buildings, pools and programs have been developed, implemented, and well maintained by a skilled and customer-focused staff. Through careful and regular citywide feedback and measurement, the department has built an excellent reputation in the community. The citizens appreciate and use WPRF's many offerings. In 2018 the department accomplished a vital Strategic Plan goal segment through achieving CAPRA agency reaccreditation and in 2022 realized becoming a two-time **National Gold Medal** program winner.

The department also plays a key role in addressing strategic “community challenges” that required multi-jurisdictional and departmental communication, planning, and cooperation. Current examples include:

- Christmas Parade Tragedy and upcoming parade concerns  
*(Enhanced parade route safety measures and support for the community through Healing Hearts conversations and art therapy Stars of Hope Program)*
- COVID Related Concerns and Adaptations  
*(Provided safe access to parks and programs throughout pandemic)*
- Elimination of the Business Improvement District  
*(Assumed responsibility for various Downtown programs)*
- Park Safety & Security  
*(Expanded Community Service Officer and security camera programs)*
- City-wide Storm Water Management  
*(Further incorporated SWM features into parks & street medians)*
- Homelessness  
*(Participation on the City-Wide Task Force to help jointly address needs)*
- In City State/County Highway Medians  
*(Lead the initiative to address mowing/trimming maintenance concerns)*

WPRF has taken a multi-faceted approach to the challenges and opportunities presented to the agency. We have carefully assessed internal and external environments. We have challenged ourselves, through a strategic planning process, to look at challenges not as obstacles but as additional opportunities to further ensure relevance in the community. While we remain conscious of areas for improvement, we have chosen to create change in a positive and proactive way to best benefit the City of Waukesha. To this end, it is clear throughout the plan that our vision, goals, and approach centers on positive change.

In 2018, WPRF engaged Chamness Group Consulting to assist in the development of the 2018-2022 strategic plan. The plan considers and defines how to:

- Continue to make the department relevant and further grow
- Build upon the previous Departmental Strategic Plans
- Align with the City's overall strategic direction and goals

The fundamental focus of the plan was to not only allow for continued improvement and growth but set the stage to continue national (CAPRA) accreditation, thereby setting high standards for the department to achieve and maintain.

The 2023-2027 strategic plan theme is driven by the over-arching goals established by the Parks, Recreation & Forestry Board:

#### **DEPARTMENTAL "OVER-ARCHING" GOALS** (Approved 12/19/22)

1. **Reaccreditation** – Maintain the highest standards and practices in the field.
2. **National Gold Medal Program** – Earn selection as top agency in class (for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time) when eligible.
3. **Park & Recreation Infrastructure** – Focus CIP energies on this direction.
4. **School Based Recreation** – Continue to expand related programs & services.
5. **Website & Social Media Presence** – Build upon and extend community outreach.
6. **Volunteerism** – Continue to grow related services and play a vital role in addressing community needs.
7. **"Embrace Green"** – Build upon sustainability practices and presence as an environmental leader.
8. **Repurposing Resources** – Evaluate current resources and repurpose as needed to best meet community needs.
9. **Community Partnerships** – Rethink "business as usual" and recognize and act on opportunities.
10. **Health & Wellness** – Facilitate equitable programs and services that promote positive community health outcomes.
11. **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)** – Utilize DEI principles and practices to help ensure "fairness" (social justice) in the provision of services.
12. **"Data Driven Agency"** – Base our strategic planning and decision making on sound research, analysis, and information.
13. **Customer Experience** – Provide exceptional customer services that are convenient to the public.



**14. Interdepartmental Collaboration** – Maximize collective resources through working closely and cooperatively with other City departments.

The 2023-2027 Strategic Plan update utilizes key findings from extensive community outreach (2017-18 Community Needs Assessment) and results of the 2022 National Community Survey. In addition, Board/Staff Strategic Planning Workshops were conducted to aid in the review/revision process of the current plan. Collectively, the indicated steps resulted in the following 2023-2027 Strategic Plan Goals:

1. Further improve operations and customer service.
2. Become a 3-time National Gold Medal Award Winner and maintain CAPRA National Accreditation status.
3. Provide appealing, safe, and secure parks and trails with efficient and updated facilities.
4. Promote environmental stewardship, protection, and education, encouraging outdoor experiences.
5. Further utilize partnerships, sponsorships, and community connections to offer exceptional services.
6. Provide comprehensive and inclusive recreational experiences and citywide celebrations.

**NOTE:**

The City of Waukesha Strategic Plan is scheduled to be updated in 2023. After the plan update is completed, it is recommended that the Parks, Recreation & Forestry Department Strategic Plan be revisited to evaluate and consider any necessary plan revisions to best align with the revised City of Waukesha plan.

## **RESEARCH/PLANNING METHODOLOGY**

To aid WPRF to gain a baseline understanding of community needs, attitudes, interests, and priorities, the following processes were implemented with the support of professional consulting services:

### **Project Coordination, Strategic Kick-Off, and Determination of Critical Success Factors**

- Strategic Kick Off meetings
- Critical Success Factors identified (SWOT Analysis)

### **Public and Stakeholder Engagement**

- Staff Focus Group Meetings
- Public Focus Group and Stakeholder Meetings
- Parks, Recreation & Forestry Board Meeting
- Open Public Forums

### **Statistically Valid Communitywide Survey (2017 & 2022)**

- Invitation Survey and Online Open Link Survey

### **Market Assessment**

- Demographics and Population Projections
- Trends Analysis
- Potential Program Analysis

### **Final Plan, Presentations, and Deliverables**

- Results of the Public Input Process
- Results of the Statistically Valid Survey
- Presentation of the final plans

## **SWOT ANALYSIS (updated 1/7/23)**



Conducting a SWOT Analysis provides a snapshot of the organization by highlighting key strengths, areas of improvement, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two-time National Gold Medal Award winner for excellence in park &amp; recreation management.</li> <li>• Nationally accredited agency (less than 200 in nation).</li> <li>• Responsive to community needs.</li> <li>• The community by-in-large is very supportive of what we do and the services we provide.</li> <li>• Relationships with School District, Carroll University &amp; YMCA</li> <li>• The number of Community Partnerships &amp; interdepartmental collaboration.</li> <li>• Quantity of programs and special events (equitable &amp; inclusive).</li> <li>• Quality of parks and facilities – general level of maintenance.</li> <li>• Activity Guide – branding and strong marketing with sending it out into the community.</li> <li>• Before and After Cool School programming.</li> <li>• Family oriented programs and services</li> <li>• Generally, our programs and facilities are affordable (Financial Assistance Program cited).</li> <li>• Awesome customer service, always someone to talk to.</li> <li>• Staff expertise/experience and dedication.</li> <li>• Great and safe playgrounds.</li> <li>• New synthetic turf fields (Frame Baseball &amp; Mindiola Soccer).</li> <li>• Access to paved recreation trails</li> <li>• Urban forestry operations &amp; services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teen Programming – is there a need for it? How do we know there is a need for it? Do they want programmed activities, or do they just want a space/facility that is “theirs”?</li> <li>• Expand departmental marketing and promotion efforts.</li> <li>• Limited dog friendly parks – since COVID there has been an increase of dogs everywhere, and owner’s attitudes have changed. Do we expand more in appropriate places?</li> <li>• Not enough outdoor winter activities – it’s understood they are weather dependent. Look at outdoor winter season activities that are not reliant on snow/ice conditions.</li> <li>• Recognizing when programs/events are at the end of their lifecycle. Move on to the next thing.</li> <li>• The opportunity gap between historically excluded groups. Language barriers. Have Public Info Meeting notices in Spanish.</li> <li>• Speed barrier – not everyone has internet at home. Is there another way we can help provide opportunity for them to register? Equal access for programs that fill up quickly.</li> <li>• Website – the new design needs more work and better functionality.</li> <li>• Activity Guide distribution –limited postal service delivery to apartments, etc.</li> </ul>

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop sports complexes to a regional draw attraction level.</li> <li>• Awareness of trends and analysis for implementation.</li> <li>• Partnerships with other like agencies (private &amp; non-profit) to offer additional programming/services.</li> <li>• Outside funding sources, importance of looking at applicable grants.</li> <li>• Connecting with Middle Schools in particular. Expand cooperative programming with school district.</li> <li>• Mental health and addiction advocacy (instead of it being a threat).</li> <li>• Securing community liaisons with diverse populations that are underserved.</li> <li>• Expanding social media channels, in particular new opportunities with City Communications Team.</li> <li>• Expanded use and promotion of the E. B. Shurts Center.</li> <li>• Mini parks – additional greenspace in the city (spaces without playgrounds).</li> <li>• Undeveloped parks – facility development opportunities within existing parks.</li> <li>• Private business sector collaborations – opportunities existing with promoting and pursuing sponsors for adopt-a-park and other park/facility improvements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General level of funding (needs to be maintained and supported).</li> <li>• State and Federal “unfunded mandates”.</li> <li>• Aging facilities and infrastructure – however note that CIP programs are in place and systematically addressing. Support for the CIP program needs to be maintained.</li> <li>• Remaining competitive to best attract and fill regular full &amp; part-time positions.</li> <li>• Lack of seasonal workforce availability (significant recruitment challenges).</li> <li>• Fewer college students pursuing Parks &amp; Recreation as a career choice (Major).</li> <li>• Homeless challenges and impacts to parks/facilities – change to “Unhoused challenges”</li> <li>• Behavioral concerns in parks, pools, and trails (vandalism/graffiti).</li> <li>• Rising cost of items and supply chain issues.</li> <li>• Growing weather-related challenges – climate change impacts (more severe weather).</li> <li>• Competing services –Potentially a threat to our funding and even existence. It is up to us to change this type of threat into an opportunity.</li> <li>• Water resources. Water use and/or water threats. How is it being used?</li> </ul>

### FOCUS GROUPS/INTERVIEWS – Qualitative Summary

The information gathered in this process (conducted by Chamness Group in 2018), provided a baseline assessment or “report card” for the department to help determine the highest and best ways to grow, and became the foundation on which to build the strategic plan.

Building an inclusive assessment process was important to the department. Understanding the concerns and needs of both outside constituents and knowing where staff and board members see potential for the organization to grow was imperative to create a holistic and comprehensive strategic plan for the next five years. Efforts were made to ensure all stakeholders had a voice in the assessment process. Interviews and focus groups were inclusive and conducted with the following groups:

- Management and supervisors
- Union employees
- Seasonal employees and volunteers
- Board members
- Community leaders
- City political leaders
- Area business representatives
- Community members at large

The following are the key themes/highlights: gathered from both internal and external dialogues:

## Findings

The strengths of WPRF were obvious. Not only were they heard consistently, but they were supported with many examples and personal experiences. The following is a summary of the best services provided by WPRF:

### Programming

The programming that WPRF offers the community is diverse, high-quality, and well-priced. It is especially rich in opportunities for children and seniors to participate. New programs are often introduced to keep up with growing trends and interests. The community especially values the Activity Guide, which is the primary communication tool informing all about the wide variety of programs available.

**Sports:** The sports programs offered to children and adults are regarded highly. The children's programs are affordable and educational for entry-level sports, allowing parents to introduce their children to a variety of athletics. The sports programs are available to all age levels and are particularly popular at the adult level.

**Recreation:** Recreation opportunities offered by the department target many areas of interest and were developed to address the needs of everyone in the community. These programs span from cooking classes, to dance classes, to art classes and much more. Several respondents specifically recognized the importance of WPRF's summer programs in providing structured activities for kids and young people that keep them constructively active and safe, and promote a healthy lifestyle.



*"They make the citizens top priority and do all they can to ensure that customer service satisfaction is the highest and best it can be."*

***Programs for older adults and disadvantaged:*** These programs were considered the best of all activity programming. Because of the offerings WPRF provides, both groups are able to enjoy day trips and activities that they otherwise would not be able to access or are not offered elsewhere.

#### **Amenities**

High-quality recreation amenities such as the pools, athletic fields and recreation trails were noted as things community members greatly enjoyed and frequently took advantage of.

***Pools:*** Waukesha pools are one of the most loved aspects of the parks during the summer. Families have access to season passes to the pool and swimming lessons, both of which are taken advantage of by many.

***Sports Fields:*** The fields and facilities that WPRF offer to local teams are second to none. These are often fully booked for the spring, summer and fall seasons. Several tournaments are held on WPRF fields because of how well-kept they are; they are suitable for the athletes as well as the crowds that come to watch them.

***Play areas:*** WPRF provides over 25 community and neighborhood parks. Open grass space and playgrounds promote healthy living and social interaction for kids in the City of Waukesha. It is something constructive to do with their time and, like the summer programs, gives them something positive to do.

#### **Events**

The City of Waukesha's residents find great value in community-wide special events as they represent a key piece of who the community is. WPRF is the orchestrates of multiple events such as the much-loved JanBoree and the 4th of July Parade and fireworks. The dedicated effort and hard work of WPRF is both recognized and appreciated by the community.

#### **Customer Service**

It is clear that WPRF employees are dedicated to serving their community. They respond to feedback and make changes to their programs based on frequent consumer inputs; the office staff is always available and interested in assisting those who need help. They make the citizens top priority and do all they can to ensure that customer service is the highest and best it can be.

#### **Urban Forest**

The urban forest is a unique and interesting component to the City of Waukesha. WPRF has developed a strong forestry program to support this community asset. The program is well-respected and well run, keeping the streets/boulevards maintained and aesthetically pleasing.



### **Partnerships**

Community partnerships are a strong point of the department. Partnerships mentioned as assets include those with the Volunteer Center, the business community, the school district, the state and county, Carroll University, local nonprofits, and churches. The implication in most cases is that the partnerships allow for greater service offerings and collaboration, resulting in extended community reach.

### ***Improvement Areas and Opportunities***

Although generally positive and proud of the department, stakeholders mentioned opportunity areas for improvement and change.

### **Programming**

WPRF offers many programs duplicated by other area organizations such as the YMCA, local daycare centers, schools, and area businesses. It would be ideal to see some overlapping programs (e.g., daycare, some exercise programs, etc.) discontinued. This will allow WPRF to tweak program offerings to ensure the best is being offered and prioritize the program offerings within budget constraints. Further, although the department does a great job meeting the needs of all of the citizens they serve, many thought more programming could be targeted for teens.

### **Buildings and Facilities**

Buildings and facilities are another area with great growth potential. Some facilities that are heavily used, like the Schuetze Recreation Center, could use repairs and updates, as well as renovations, to make them more conducive to the programming that is offered for the community. In addition, there is a need for new park and recreational facilities in the community (i.e., Mindiola Park).



### **Organizational Structure**

As the department has grown and will continue to grow, individuals' roles and responsibilities have changed and expanded. WPRF needs to repurpose roles and organizational structure to ensure people and their talents are being used in the highest and best ways.

### **Alternative Revenue**

It will be important for WPRF to continue to expand their alternative revenue sources. Fundraising is currently done on a program-to-program basis, but it could be done in a more efficient and effective way. By combining the fundraising effort into a campaign for the aggregate whole, WPRF could offer a better package to potential sponsors (providing brand visibility throughout the entire year instead of a single event).

*“Expanding partnerships is a great opportunity for WPRF to extend its reach into the community and continue to improve and expand their programs and offerings.”*

### **Public/Private Partnerships**

As all organizations try to do more with less, collaboration becomes increasingly important. Expanding partnerships is a great opportunity for WPRF to extend its reach into the community and continue to improve and expand their services.

### **Communication**

The department is doing many interesting and great things to improve the quality of life in the community, yet most of these efforts are not communicated to the community. The department needs to raise awareness of all the good they are doing and explain why it is important to the residents. Opportunities to expand and diversify communication can come from leveraging the readership of the Activity Guide, utilizing contacts at local publications, and improving WPRF's web presence.

*"The department has an opportunity to drive "green" initiatives"*

Internal communication also falls within the scope of opportunities for departmental growth. Further collaboration between staff members can go a long way for creating organizational efficiencies, especially with marketing and fundraising duties.

### **Sustainability**

Because WPRF is the city department closest to the natural resources of the area, it is especially important that the department be environmentally conscious and takes an active role in leading the city in sustainable practices. The department has an opportunity to drive "green" initiatives and develop a comprehensive recycling program, ultimately becoming the environmental leader for the City of Waukesha.

### ***The Future of WPRF***

Overall, the community and staff are pleased with the services the WPRF offers. Comments were positive but not without opportunities for improvement and growth. What was most compelling were the conversations we had with staff. Even in dialogues where individuals were frustrated or concerned, the sense of pride was overwhelming. Staff wants to be engaged in doing great things. They want to be, and are part of, a winning team.

## **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY – Quantitative Summary**

In addition to the qualitative research implemented, in 2017 WPRF conducted (facilitated by GreenPlay, LLC) a community-wide, statistically valid Customer Satisfaction Survey. Surveys were mailed to a random sample of 4,000 households with a strong return rate of approximately 15% (over 600 respondents).



*Note: Response % denoted within parenthesis.*

## Findings

### Areas of Importance (Somewhat to Very Important)

- Walking Trails (89.2)
- July Fourth Festivities (Fireworks & Parade) (87.5)
- Special Events & Festivals (82.5)
- Frame Park Formal Gardens (81.2)
- Concerts in Cutler Park (78.3)
- Bike Trails (77.9)
- Playground Equipment (75.5)
- Neighborhood Community Centers (74.1)
- Park Shelter Rentals (74.1)
- Fitness Centers (71.4)
- Park Land Acquisition (71.0)
- Trails for Winter Recreation (e.g., Cross Country Skiing) (71.0)
- Park Shelters for Year-Round Use (70.1)
- Exercise Equipment (69.9)
- Indoor Aquatic Facility (68.6)
- Reconstruction of Buchner Pool (68.3)
- Senior Center and Programs (67.9)
- Environmental Education (66.4)
- Building Rentals (64.6)
- Swim Lesson Instruction (62.8)
- Holiday Break Programming (61.8)
- Playground Program (61.5)
- Water Play Areas (e.g., Spray grounds) (60.6)
- Outdoor Ice Rinks (59.3)
- Tennis Courts (58.7)
- Youth Baseball/Softball Programs (58.2)
- Dog Parks (56.4)
- Outdoor Basketball Courts (55.4)
- Baseball Facilities in General (51.5)

### Personal Opinions (Agree to Strongly Agree)

- Well maintained parks add to the quality of life in the community (93.9)
- Having trees adds to the overall economic value of the community (92.1)
- WPRF provides an essential service to the City (85.9)
- WPRF should provide activities for the whole family (80.2)



**Levels of Satisfaction** (Satisfied to Very Satisfied)

- Location of City Parks (90.1)
- Maintenance of Parks, Facilities & Grounds (84.9)
- Maintenance of Street & Park Trees (82.6)
- Variety of Programs (62.6) – 28.9 Not Sure
- Cost of Programs (60.4) – 30.1 Not Sure



## NATIONAL COMMUNITY SURVEY – Quantitative Summary

In 2022, The National Research Center was hired to conduct a city wide NCS (National Community Survey). These survey results are then comparable to national averages. The survey was available in English and Spanish. On January 13, 2022, this valid survey was distributed to 2,700 households randomly selected. Persons completing the survey were asked to be the “person whose birthday has most recently passed”. 3% of the surveys were returned due to being undeliverable. 417 surveys were completed resulting in a 16% response rate. This resulted in a 95% confidence rate for the accuracy of the results (+/- 5% significance rate).

### Findings

A sampling of questions asked by the National Community Research Survey included:

#### *Facets of Livability*

**Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Waukesha as a whole.**  
(% excellent or good)

- Overall quality of natural environment 76% Similar vs. benchmark
- Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities 88% Similar vs. benchmark
- Overall health and wellness opportunities 80% Similar vs. benchmark

**Rate how important, if at all, you think it is for the Waukesha community to focus on each of the following in the coming two years.** (% essential or very important):

- Overall quality of natural environment 82% Similar to national benchmark
- Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities 78% Similar to national benchmark
- Overall health and wellness opportunities 76% Similar to national benchmark

#### *Facets of Mobility*

**Please also rate each of the following in the Waukesha community.** (% excellent or good)

- Ease of walking 77% Similar vs. benchmark
- Ease of travel by bicycle 63% Similar

**Please indicate whether or not you have done each of the following in the last 12 months.**  
(% yes)

- Walked or biked instead of driving 46% Lower vs. benchmark



### *Natural Environment*

**Please rate each of the following characteristics as they relate to Waukesha as a whole.**  
(% excellent or good)

- Overall quality of natural environment 76% Similar

**Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Waukesha.**  
(% excellent or good)

- Preservation of natural areas 71% Similar
- Recycling 69% Similar
- Waukesha open space 68% Similar

### *Parks and Recreation*

**Please rate each of the characteristics as they relate to Waukesha as a whole.**  
(% excellent or good)

- Overall quality of parks and recreation opportunities 88% Similar

**Please also rate each of the following in the Waukesha community.**  
(% excellent or good)

- Recreational opportunities 80% Similar
- Fitness opportunities 78% Similar
- Availability of paths and walking trails 78% Similar

**Please rate the quality of each of the following services in Waukesha.**  
(% excellent or good)

- City Parks 87% Similar
- Recreation programs or classes 85% Similar
- Recreation centers or facilities 81% Similar

When the survey result compared the ratings of the importance of services to their ratings of the quality of these services, Parks and Recreation ranked as one of the highest in both quality and importance.

## GOAL & ACTION PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Utilizing the findings of the strategic planning process, goals and action plans were developed in alignment with the current City of Waukesha Strategic Plan and national accreditation standards (CAPRA). These action items define staff leads, timeframes for completion and measurements for success. **Strategic Plan Goal Action Plans begin on the following page.**

