



Oklahoma City Parks Master Plan: Executive Summary

In 2012, the City of Oklahoma City and the Oklahoma City Community Foundation hired a national consulting firm, Wallace Roberts Todd, to develop a long-term plan for the funding, maintenance and improvement of the community's public parks. This action followed nearly a year of discussions regarding the status of current public parks as well as funding and maintenance plans for future parks. For more than 20 years, the Oklahoma City Community Foundation has invested more than \$2.8 million in beautifying public lands in the Oklahoma City area.

The Oklahoma City Parks Master Plan was completed by Sept. 1, 2013 and will be received by the Oklahoma City Council on Jan. 21, 2014. The plan builds on other studies and supports ongoing efforts including the City of Oklahoma City's overall comprehensive plan, *planokc*.

The 129-page Parks Master Plan identifies six strategic directions of growth for the Oklahoma City parks system and suggests specific action steps to move the parks system forward. The six strategic directions are:

1. Maintain and improve physical assets of existing parks.
2. Develop facilities and programs in existing parks to meet community needs.
3. Improve access to existing parks.
4. Promote and increase awareness of the value of parks.
5. Develop new parks and facilities.
6. Establish agreements and standards for private parks and school parks.

In addition, the Parks Master Plan offers funding suggestions and recommendations for community and business partnerships to help support the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

The Parks Master Plan is organized in the following order:

- Laying a Foundation
- Setting Strategic Directions
- Park Classifications
- Level of Service Standards
- Analysis and Applied Standards
- Action Plan
- Funding Options and Strategies
- Maintenance Guidelines
- Partnerships

This Executive Summary was prepared by the Oklahoma City Community Foundation in an effort to provide an overview of the Parks Master Plan including key findings and recommendations.

Planning Process and Analysis

In 2012, a steering committee was formed and included representatives from Oklahoma City’s Parks and Recreation Department, Planning Department and the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. In addition, a group identified as key stakeholders (city council members, community leaders) was included in the process.

The Parks Master Plan builds on the findings of the following three studies:

- The 2005 Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan commissioned by the City of Oklahoma City that established the department’s mission: To promote the highest quality of life and to stimulate the economic viability of Oklahoma City by providing great parks, public areas and quality cultural leisure time opportunities for our citizens and visitors.
- The 2011 Oklahoma City Parks System Study commissioned by the Oklahoma City Community Foundation and conducted by the Oklahoma City University’s Meinders School of Business. The study assessed the park system in terms of funding, demographics and safety; assessed the park system within the context of the Trust for Public Land’s seven measures of an excellent system; and reviewed the operational cost impacts of new parks.
- Oklahoma City’s new comprehensive plan, **planokc**, is a long-range plan with the goal of ensuring a healthy environment, community and economy for the city’s residents. It includes nine elements including **playokc**.

Benchmarking

As part of the process of developing the Parks Master Plan, the consultant team compared the Oklahoma City parks system with the publicly-owned park systems of six other cities identified as peers. Of the cities, Oklahoma City is the largest in area but the second smallest in population:

Charlotte, N.C.	Fort Worth, Texas
Indianapolis, Ind.	Kansas City, Mo.
Louisville, Ky.	Memphis, Tenn.

Park Amenities

On a per capita basis, Oklahoma City outperforms or scores higher than the mean in several categories.

Oklahoma City scores *above*

<u>the mean on level of amenities</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Peer with next closest level of amenity</u>
Skate parks – 0.5 per 10,000 residents	0.2	Kansas City – 0.4
Recreation centers – 2.2 per 50,000 residents	1.6	Memphis – 2.4
Playgrounds – 1.9 per 10,000 residents	1.8	Kansas City – 2.4
Contracts with nonprofit organizations – 74	67	Fort Worth – 254

On a per capita basis, Oklahoma City scores *below* the mean per capita in the following areas:

Oklahoma City level of amenities

<u>per 10,000 residents</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Peer with highest level per 10,000 residents</u>
Ball fields – 0.6 per	1.3	Kansas City – 3.2
Basketball courts – 1.5	1.9	Memphis – 2.9
Tennis courts – 1.3	1.6	Louisville – 2.4
Dog parks – 0.3	0.4	Charlotte – 0.7
Park employees – 2.9	4.4	Kansas City – 6.1
Garden plots – 0.0	2.6	Louisville – 7.2
Number of park units – 2.7	3.0	Kansas City – 5.0
Permanent restrooms with unrestricted access – 8.3 per 100,000	16.4	Indianapolis – 40.2 per 100,000

Spending

The plan confirms that Oklahoma City spends less than its peers on parks.

<u>Oklahoma City spending</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Peer city with highest level</u>
Maintenance expenditures per resident – \$17.41	\$20.19	Kansas City – \$37.74
Maintenance per acre – \$462	\$897	Fort Worth – \$1,523
Operations per resident – \$34.32	\$42.53	Kansas City – \$73.31
Operations per acre – \$912	\$2,019	Fort Worth – \$3,882
Full-time employees per resident – 2.9	4.4	Kansas City – 6.1
Spending per full-time employee – \$117,000	\$98,571	Charlotte – \$158,000
Seasonal employees per resident – 7.1	3.6	Memphis – 8.0
Private funds raised – \$0.18 million	\$1.2m	Kansas City – \$2.32 million
Private donations given per resident – \$0.30	\$1.00	Kansas City – \$5.05

Community Survey

The consultant team conducted a community interest and opinion survey about parks, recreation and open space that was a key component to understanding current park system usage, determining priorities for future improvements and measuring support for ways to financially sustain the park system. More than 600 telephone and mail surveys were completed from a random sample of 2,400 households. The survey helped to identify park and recreation priorities; analyzed park access and connectivity; analyzed park needs in relation to existing and projected population; and reviewed current funding, operations and maintenance practices of the Parks and Recreation Department.

Overview of Survey Results

Park Access and Usage

- Fairly equal numbers of households use neighborhood parks (55 percent) and community parks (53 percent).
- More than three quarters of households have visited at least one Oklahoma City park in the past year.
- Nearly two-thirds of households consider city parks to be in good condition. Excellent ratings of 13 percent are lower than national benchmarks of 31 percent. Fair ratings were 21 percent which is higher than national benchmark of 12 percent.
- Households primarily drive (90 percent) and walk (38 percent) to parks.
- Approximately 85 percent of respondents feel quality parks, facilities and programs are important to the overall pursuit of a healthy and active lifestyle.
- A majority (52 percent) of respondents do not feel there are sufficient parks and green space areas within walking distance of home.
- Only about 11 percent of respondents participated in programs offered in the last year, much lower than national benchmarks. A majority of those who participate rate the quality as good.
- 45 percent of respondents find out about parks, programs and activities from friends and neighbors.
- More than a third (37 percent) of respondents do not use parks and recreation facilities because they do not know what is being offered. Nearly a third say parks are too far from home.

Funding the parks, trails and recreation facilities that are most important to the respondents:

- 58 percent support some increase in taxes.
- 62 percent support some increase in user fees.

The survey identified priority types of parks and recreation facilities, priority programs and priority actions for Oklahoma City to take to improve the parks system.

Top five priorities below represent the areas of greatest need that are not being met:

Priority Parks & Facilities	Priority Programs	Priority Access
1. Walking & Biking Trails (38%)	1. Adult Fitness/Wellness Programs (22%)	1. Upgrade Neighborhood Parks (28%)
2. Indoor Pool/Leisure Pool (21%)	2. Special Events/Festivals (17%)	2. Build New Walking/Biking Trails (22%)
3. Small Neighborhood Parks (21%)	3. Senior Programs (16%)	3. Upgrade Community Parks (21%)
4. Indoor Fitness/Exercise Equip. (19%)	4. Walking/Biking Groups (15%)	4. Develop Senior Wellness Centers (21%)
5. Large Community Parks (18%)	5. Family Programs (14%)	5. Purchase Land for Neighborhood Parks (19%)

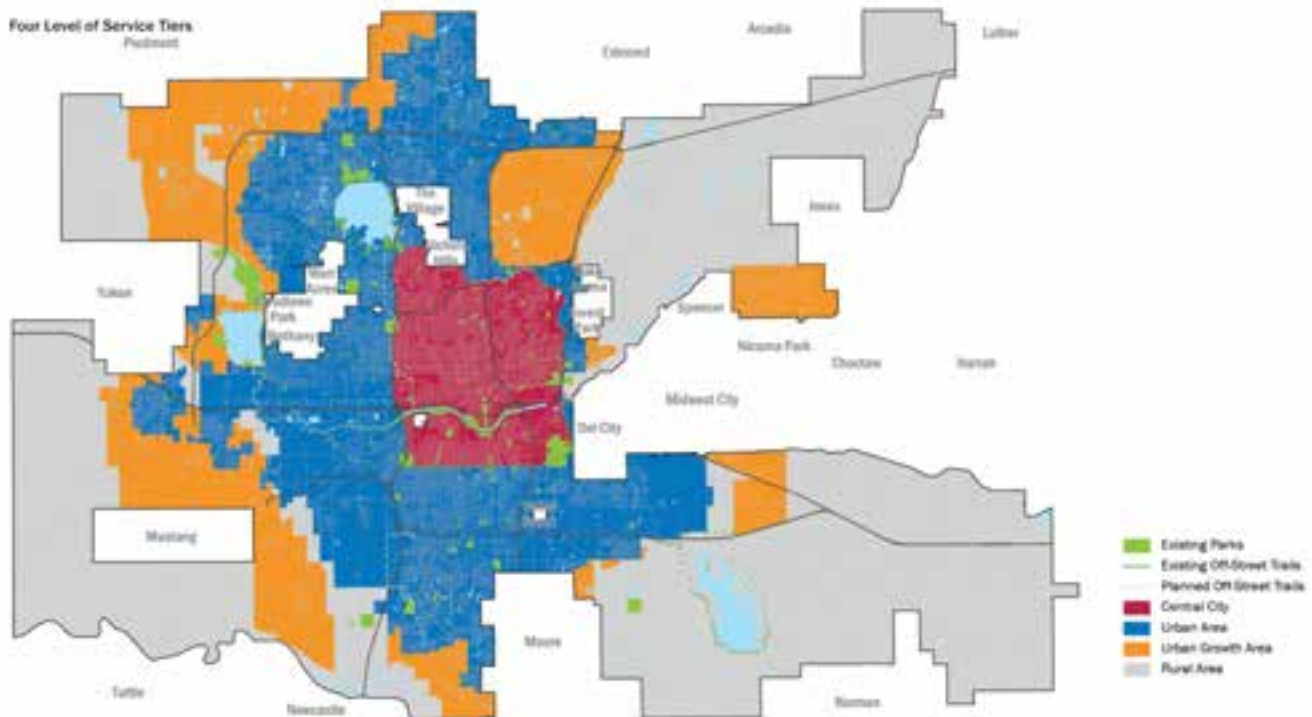
Park Classification

The consultant team utilized a park classification system first included in the 2005 Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan as a basis to categorize the classifications into three tiers for the purpose of defining levels of service. The Master Parks Plan includes a list of each of the parks and appropriate amenities. Below are the three tiers. (#) is the number of such parks in Oklahoma City.

- A **Local Park** serves the needs of close-by neighbors. Included in this classification would be neighborhood parks (84), community parks (24) and school parks.
- A **Regional Park** serves the needs of close-by neighborhoods and regional needs. Included in this classification are district parks (4) and metropolitan parks (11).
- **Other Parks** are integral to the park and recreation system but do not have a defined level of service. Included in this classification are greenspaces (13), greenways, nature parks (2) and special use parks (5).

Level of Service Standards

The consultant team applied the level of service standards to the existing parks system and included the planned MAPS 3 downtown park. The Plan acknowledges that the Oklahoma City parks system has not grown uniformly as the city has grown and, as a result, different areas of the city have different levels of park service and access: Central City (area enclosed by the original Grand Boulevard loop), Urban Area (developed areas outside of the central city), Urban Growth Area (area designated for future growth) and Rural Area (area outside of the urban growth area). See map below that is on page 42 of the Plan.



The Plan also includes tables for each of the four areas that states the standards for local parks, regional parks and trails, the existing conditions of Oklahoma City parks/trails and action steps to help meet the standards.

Analysis and Applied Standards

This chapter allies the level of service standards to the existing system of local parks, regional parks, sidewalks and trails within Oklahoma City. Nearly half of the residents in the Central City are well served, but outside the Central City, not many are served. Overlaying these areas with 2010 and projected 2030 population showed that more than double the residents who are currently served based on the target levels of service could be served without building additional new parks.

Transit Access to Parks

Transit-accessible parks were defined as those adjacent to or within a quarter-mile/five-minute walk of existing bus routes. Areas with access to transit-accessible parks were defined as areas adjacent to or within a quarter mile/five-minute walk of existing bus routes. Using those definitions, 110 parks are accessible by transit. Twenty-five percent of the 2010 Oklahoma City population and 20 percent of the projected 2030 population are within areas that are transit-accessible to parks.

Frequency of bus transit service as well as days of no or minimal service was not accounted for in the analysis.

Demographics

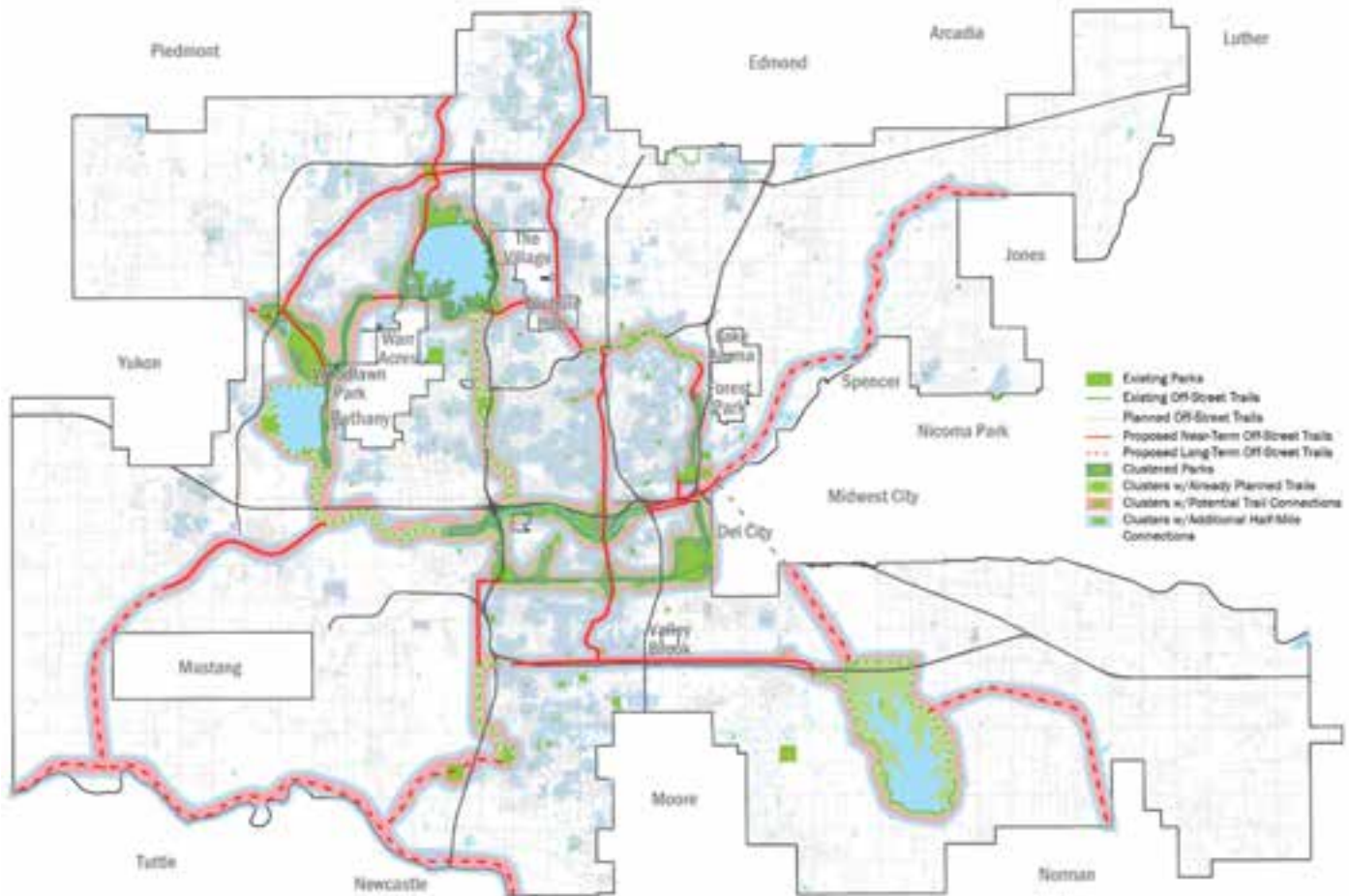
A demographic analysis was performed to identify areas of Oklahoma City with higher than average concentrations of particular age, ethnicity, income groups and wellness scores. While for most age and ethnicity cohorts, the population is relatively evenly distributed across Oklahoma City with some small pockets of concentration, four significant patterns were observed.

1. **African American Population:** About 15 percent of the Oklahoma City population is African American and is highly concentrated in the northeast quadrant of the city, in a corridor stretching from College Park to Carverdale Street, around Northeast 63rd Street and North Sooner Road and around Northeast 50th Street and North Anderson Road.
 - The North Highland Street to Carverdale Street area is well served by the park system.
 - The areas around Northeast 63rd Street and North Sooner Road are not well served.
 - The Northeast 50th Street and North Anderson Road area is a low-density rural community with two parks in the vicinity.
2. **Hispanic Population:** About 17 percent of the Oklahoma City population is Hispanic and is highly concentrated in the southern part of the city, within the loop formed by Northwest 10th Street, I-35, I-240 and MacArthur Boulevard.
 - Most of the Hispanic population is well served by the parks system.
3. **Median Income:** The median household income in Oklahoma City is about \$45,000 (source: 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates). Household incomes are significantly higher outside the inner city than within the inner city, with the exception of the Heritage Hills area.
 - Most lower income households within the inner core of the city are well served by the parks system.
 - The higher income households on the edges of the city are not as well served.
4. **Wellness Scores:** The consultant team used the Oklahoma City-County Health Department's Wellness Score to measure scores against access to parks. The Wellness Score is an aggregate measure of the determinants of community health such as socioeconomic, educational, environmental, cultural and infrastructure factors as well as the overall health of the community.
 - Wellness scores are significantly higher outside of the inner city than within the inner city.
 - Most areas with a low wellness score are well served by the parks system.
 - Areas with high wellness scores are not as well served by the parks system.

Connectivity

The consultant team also measured the connectivity of the public parks and trails in Oklahoma City. They identified four major clusters of connected parks and trails. See map below that is on page 59 of the Plan.

Proposed and Potential Trails Can Unite Existing Trails and Parks into One Connected System



Action Plan

The Action Plan includes recommendations for how the City and community partners can implement each of the six strategic directions. For each direction, there is a set of actions that can move the parks system in that stated direction, a rationale for each action and specific action steps. The Action Plan also assigns a responsible party for implementation and monitoring/evaluation, lists potential partners including private, public and nonprofit entities that could assist in the implementation, provides performance measures that can be used to gauge success and indicates a suggested timeframe for implementation.

Key Findings

- Oklahoma City's park system has not grown uniformly as the city has grown. As a result, different areas of the city have different levels of park service.
- Good access to parks does not necessarily mean people are using parks for health benefits.
- About 76 percent of survey respondents rated the quality of parks in Oklahoma City as excellent or good. The national average is 85 percent.
- Oklahoma City is below the mean compared to peer cities on per capita spending for maintenance, operations, full-time employees and spending per full-time employees.

Recommendations

- An awareness campaign about how parks can be used to improve individuals' health may be necessary combined with improved fitness and wellness facilities and programs.
- Providing connections to existing programs and facilities that already have those experiences may be an alternative to creating new programs and facilities.
- Establish four levels of service tiers with standards that reflect the location of existing parks and the budgetary constraints of developing new parks to increase service.
- Implement the plan's Action Plan to guide decision-making and allocate resources to achieve the six strategic directions:
 - Strategic Direction One: Maintain and improve physical assets of existing parks.
 - Develop and implement a comprehensive asset management and maintenance system with sufficient funding to improve the quality of user experiences in the Oklahoma City parks.
 - Determine additional areas in the system where mowing can be substantially reduced or eliminated to reduce costs and create a more balanced system of natural and maintained areas.
 - Develop and implement design standards to improve the attractiveness of and enhance user experiences in community-serving parks.
 - Implement a tree planting and replacement program in the Oklahoma City parks.
 - Identify and dispose of unproductive parks to allow resources to be invested in more productive parks that better serve community needs.
 - Evaluate the current park maintenance districts for opportunities to increase efficiency and reduce costs.
 - Strategic Direction Two: Develop facilities and programs in existing parks to meet community needs.
 - Implement a program to improve existing park assets to align with community recreational facility needs.
 - Develop a plan for recreational programs and services to be offered in Oklahoma City parks to meet community needs.
 - Implement a model of larger, multi-generational centers located in regional (district or metropolitan) parks to replace the current outdated model of smaller recreation centers in community parks.
 - Enhance the value of the Oklahoma City parks as places for the community to come together at scales ranging from neighborhood gatherings to large-scale festivals and special events.
 - Increase the attractiveness of Oklahoma City parks for young adult professionals as an economic and community-building strategy.
 - Strategic Direction Three: Improve access to existing parks.
 - Implement a program to better connect neighborhoods to existing parks via the sidewalk network.
 - Connect parks to the citywide trails system.
 - Enhance Oklahoma City design standards to promote connectivity.
 - Strategic Direction Four: Promote and increase awareness of the value of parks.
 - Increase the marketing and business development capabilities of the Oklahoma City Parks and Recreation Department.
 - Initiate a broader, community-wide campaign to increase awareness of the value parks bring to Oklahoma City's quality of life and economy.

- Strategic Direction Five: Develop new parks and facilities.
 - Complete the citywide trails system.
 - Develop a signature downtown (Core to Shore) park system to leverage economic development and quality of life.
 - Develop new local (neighborhood or community) parks where necessary to serve existing residents and regional (district or metropolitan) parks where necessary to serve residents of developing parts of the city (urban or urban growth area).
 - Develop partnerships to develop and manage new facilities.
- Strategic Direction Six: Establish agreements and standards for private parks and school parks.
 - Develop a coordinated school/park system strategy providing for appropriate use and sharing of facilities for recreational purposes.
 - Meet the local recreational needs of new residents in developing areas through private parks
- Consider additional funding options to support the capital, operational and maintenance needs of the Parks and Recreation Department.
- The Action Plan should be incorporated into annual work plans and budgeting systems and monitored on a continuous, as-needed basis.

To review or download the 129-page Parks Master Plan, please visit occf.org/ParksPlan.