

# APPENDIX

*Urbana Park District Strategic Plan 2020*



 *You belong* here.



Urbana Park District

# **APPENDICES**

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Questionnaire Summary

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# APPENDIX A

## Urbana Park District User Questionnaire Summary

An analysis of the Urbana Park District User Questionnaire responses. In the summer of 2018, nearly 350 community members shared their thoughts via the questionnaire. These important responses, combined with other public input, informed the goals of the strategic plan.

# Strategic Planning Questionnaire

Urbana Park District



## Q1: Do you use Urbana Parks? (Please Select all that Apply)

Highest amount of users:

- Meadowbrook 74.12%
- Crystal Lake Park 71.47%

Lowest amount of users:

- Patterson Parklet .59%
- Judge Webber Park 1.18%

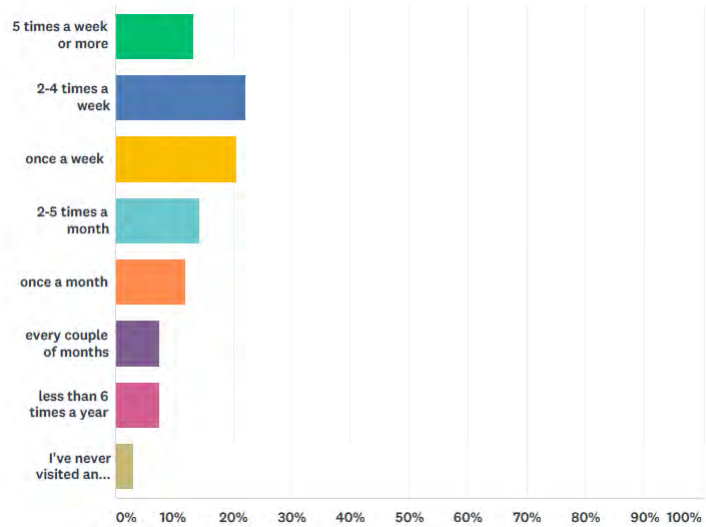
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
AMBUCS Park	22.06%	75
Blair Park	27.65%	94
Canaday Park	1.47%	5
Carle Park	42.94%	146
Chief Shemauger Park	2.65%	9
Crestview Park	8.24%	28
Crystal Lake Park/ Busey Woods	71.47%	243
Dog Park/ Perkins Rd. Park Site	9.41%	32
Judge Webber Park	1.18%	4
King Park	17.35%	59
Larson (Wheatfield) Park	11.76%	40
Leal Park	7.35%	25
Lohmann Park	5.29%	18
Meadowbrook Park	74.12%	252
Patterson Parklet	0.59%	2
Prairie Park	10.59%	36
South Ridge Park	10.59%	36
Sunnycrest Tot Lot	2.94%	10
Victory Park	19.12%	65
Weaver Park	4.41%	15
I do not use any Urbana Parks	4.71%	16
Total Respondents: 340		





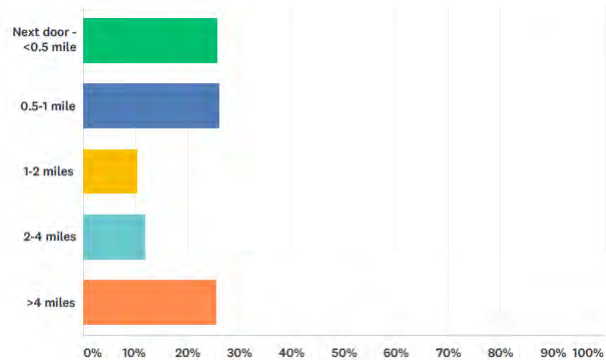
**Q2: Approximately how often do you visit an Urbana Park?**

- 2-4 Times a Week 22.16%
- Once a Week 20.41%
- I've never visited an Urbana Park 2.92%



**Q3: The closest Urbana Park to my home is \_\_\_\_\_?**

- 0.5-1 miles 26.13%
- Next door - .05 miles 25.83%
- Greater than 4 miles 25.53%



#### Q4: How satisfied are you with the following features of the park?

(1= very dissatisfied, 5= very satisfied, N/A= not applicable)

	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Paths/sidewalks	2.36% 8	2.36% 8	9.44% 32	29.79% 101	51.92% 176	4.13% 14	339	4.32
Parking lots/roads	3.26% 11	6.23% 21	15.73% 53	27.60% 93	40.36% 136	6.82% 23	337	4.03
Playgrounds	2.95% 10	2.06% 7	6.78% 23	29.50% 100	46.31% 157	12.39% 42	339	4.30
Fields/courts	2.37% 8	2.08% 7	11.87% 40	28.19% 95	31.16% 105	24.33% 82	337	4.11
Shelters/benches	2.40% 8	5.39% 18	14.37% 48	31.74% 106	37.72% 126	8.38% 28	334	4.06
Trees/turf/landscaping	2.38% 8	1.19% 4	5.95% 20	27.38% 92	58.33% 196	4.76% 16	336	4.45
Restrooms	6.57% 22	13.73% 46	23.58% 79	21.79% 73	25.07% 84	9.25% 31	335	3.50

#### Q5: When you are at an Urbana Park, are you\_\_\_\_\_?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Alone	27.54% 92
Accompanied by Children	62.28% 208
Accompanied by Pets	19.76% 66
Accompanied by Other Adults	64.67% 216
Total Respondents: 334	

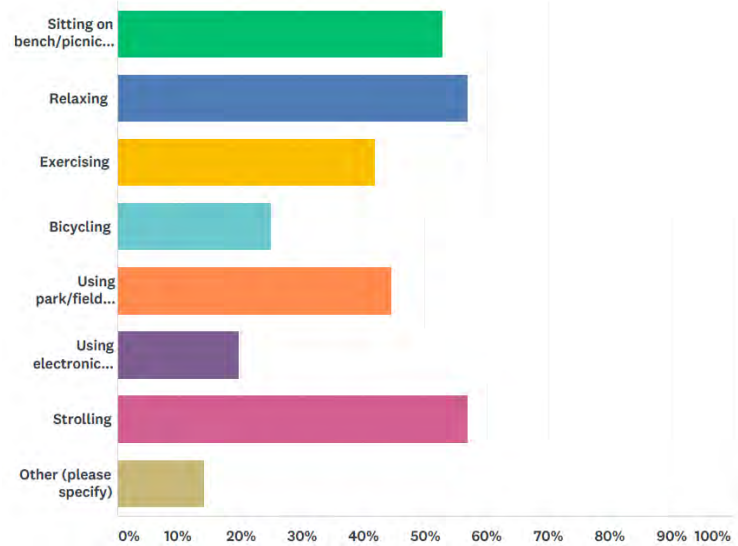
### Q6: When using the Urbana Parks are you \_\_\_\_\_?

Most Common Activity:

- Relaxing 56.89%
- Strolling 56.89%

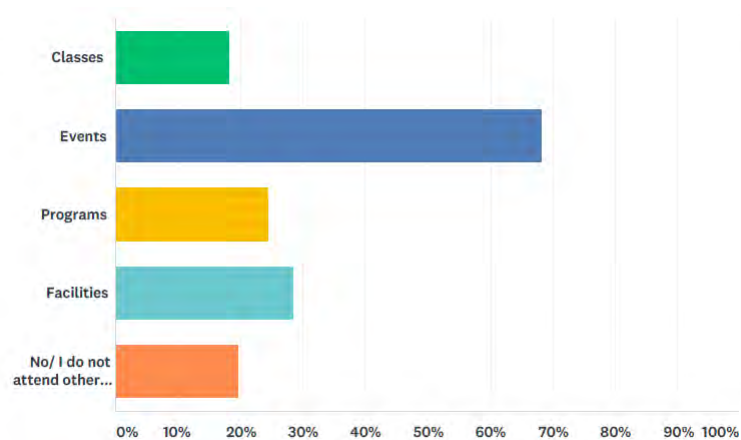
“Other” included:

- Playing
- Swimming
- Neighborhood Nights
- BBQ/Cooking



### Q7: Do you attend other UPD events, programs, classes, or facilities?

- Events 68.21%
- Facilities 28.40%
- Programs 24.38%
- Classes 18.21%
- No... 19.75%



### Q8: What barriers keep you from attending more (or any) park district events, programs, classes or facilities?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Financial reasons	12.08%	36
Lack of time	59.73%	178
Lack of interest in what the Urbana Park District offers	5.70%	17
Timing of classes/programs/events does not work with my schedule	24.50%	73
Lack of transportation	6.71%	20
Don't know what is offered/lack of activity information	18.46%	55
Shy	5.03%	15
Use programs from other organizations (YMCA, local gym, etc.)	12.08%	36
Other (please specify)	10.40%	31
Total Respondents: 298		



### Q9: What could the Urbana Park District do or offer to get you to utilize our programs, facilities, parks, and events?

classes<sub>use</sub> time<sub>great</sub> better<sub>love</sub> programs facilities  
 park activities events<sub>work</sub> kids<sub>make</sub> free<sub>dog</sub>  
 Advertise<sub>family</sub> Offer music

“More free community events in the parks! Neighborhood nights are cool!”

“The outside facilities are wonderful. It would be great if there were an indoor playground for children to use in winter.”

“More cleaner shelter areas and better restrooms”





**Q10: Crystal Lake is in an important rehabilitation phase; what would an improved Crystal lake look like to you?**

Nice New Playscape Accessible Brighter Colors Play Native Plants Activities  
 Facilities Walking Fishing Paths Kids Water Bathrooms  
 Lake Trails Park Enjoyed Geese Nicer Boat Basketball Court  
 Events Goose Poop Looks Disc Golf Course Place

“I love crystal lake and know it's hard to clean the water. The geese are a real turn off.”

“I'd like to see more bike/walking paths, lighting and safety features.”

“We love Crystal Lake - especially the new playscape. Maybe an expansion of that and the nature center facilities.”



**Q11: The park district wants to ensure we are providing you with opportunities to lead a healthy life. What facilities, programs, and amenities would inspire you to lead a healthier life?**

Water Fountains Classes Outside Healthy Food Crystal Lake Pool Doing  
 Basketball Courts Activities Workout Classes Running Healthier  
 Exercise Offered Programs Cooking Classes Parks  
 Community Walking Disc Golf Events Aquatic Center Bike  
 Better Lighting Fitness Classes Better Trails Swimming Meadowbrook is Great  
 Outdoor Yoga Classes

“Expanded options for outdoor exercise classes.”

“Perhaps some outdoor fitness equipment like pull-up bars, etc. would be nice.”

“Bike paths and hiking trails, vegetarian or other cooking programs, guided meditation sessions (after work hours or on weekends).”



**Q12: The first seven miles of the KRT have been constructed connecting St. Joseph with Urbana. What could UPD do to make the KRT more relevant and useful to you? Additionally, what trailhead amenities would make you most likely to explore the trail?**

Shade <sup>Far</sup> Champaign <sup>Points</sup> Downtown Urbana  
 Bag Kids Scavenger Hunt Path Transportation  
 Parking Maps Bike Surface Trail Markers  
 Water <sup>Never Heard</sup> Restrooms <sup>Bus Trips</sup>  
 Kickapoo <sup>Local</sup> Riding <sup>Unsure</sup> Going <sup>Look</sup>  
 Drinking Fountains

"I think there should be more ads so more of the community knows of the KRT. Bathrooms and emergency phones along the trail would be good."

"I haven't been there yet."

"It would be helpful if there were more bike routes from the center of town or other parts of town to the trailhead. I have not ridden the trail because I don't feel safe riding my bicycle from my house to the trailhead."



### Demographics:

Urbana Park District:

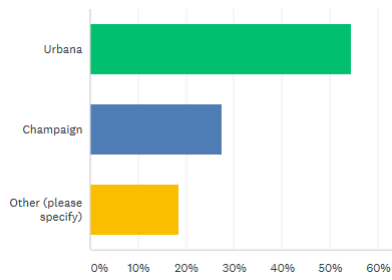
ANSWER CHOICES	PERCENTAGE	RESPONSES
White	65.58%	202
Black or African American	16.23%	50
Hispanic/Latino	3.57%	11
Asian	9.08%	28
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.32%	1
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.65%	2
Two or more races	4.55%	14
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>308</b>

U.S. Census Bureau:

Race and Hispanic Origin	PERCENTAGE	DIFFERENCE
White alone, percent (a)	59.6%	△ 5.98%
Black or African American alone, percent (a)	17.2%	△ 1.03%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	0.3%	△ 0.02%
Asian alone, percent (a)	18.8%	△ 9.72%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	0.1%	△ 0.55%
Two or More Races, percent	3.6%	△ 0.95%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	4.8%	△ 1.23%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	55.8%	△ 9.78%



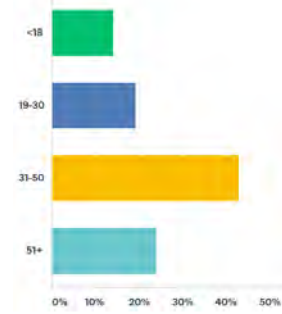
### Residency:



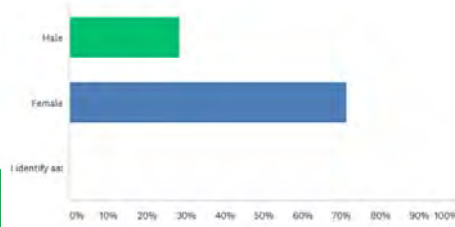
### Primary Language:

- English: 86.94%
- Chinese: 5.15%
- Spanish: 2.75%
- Arabic: 1.72%
- Russian: 1.03%
- Telugu: 1.03%
- Other: 1.38%

### Age Range:



### Gender:

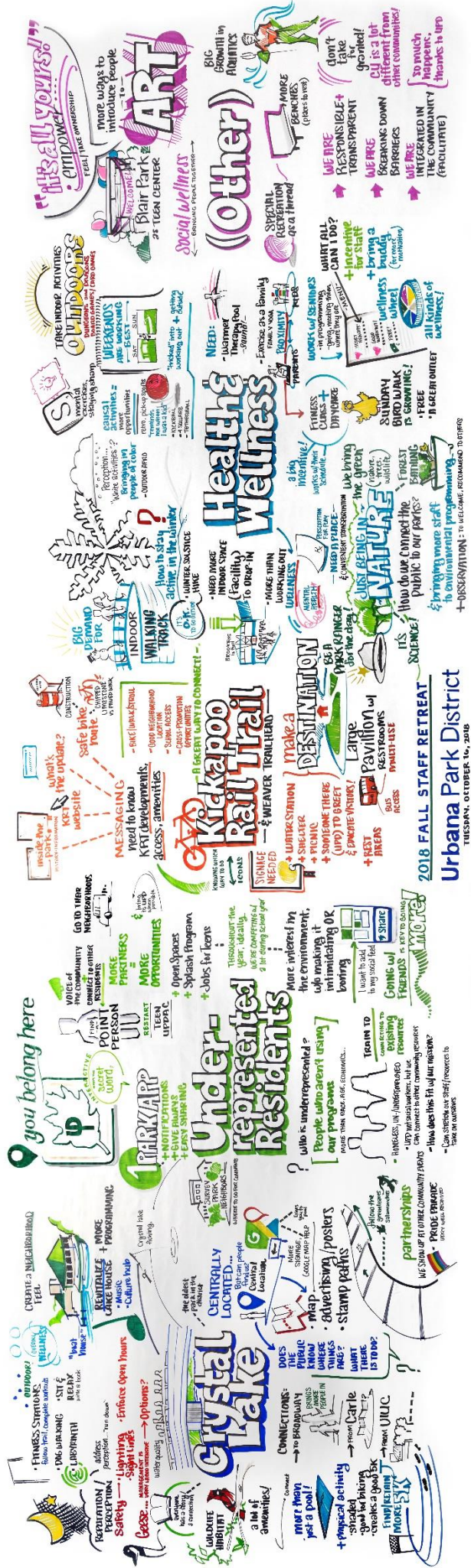


# APPENDIX B

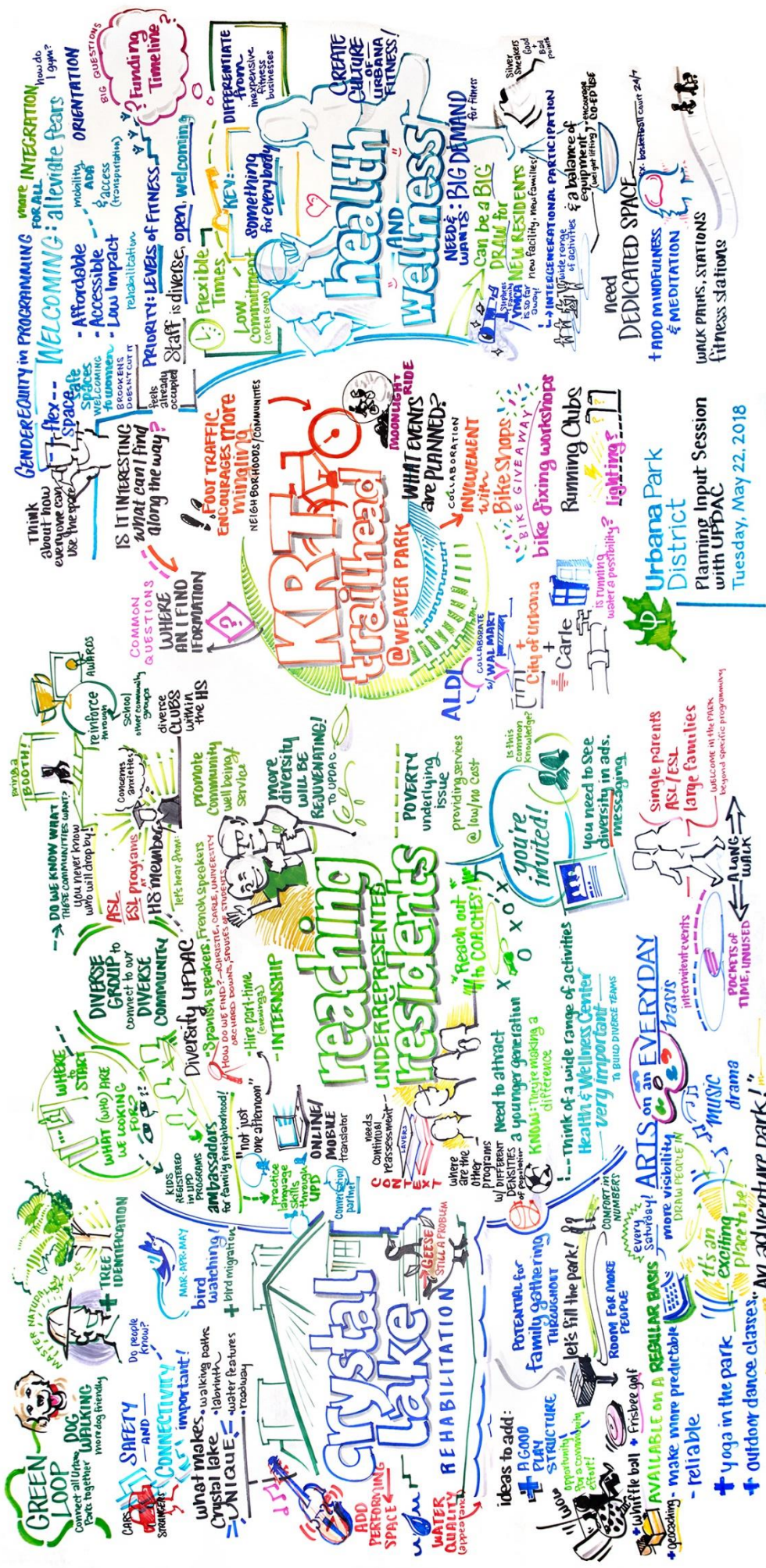
## Graphic Facilitation Illustrations

Artist and facilitator David Michael Moore gathered feedback and created giant-sized illustrations at two input sessions: Urbana Park District Advisory Committee (UPDAC) and Urbana Park District full-time staff. These 12-foot by 4-foot (staff) and 8-foot by 4-foot (UPDAC) posters gathered information on existing projects and plan initiatives and help to formulate the four plan pillars.









# APPENDIX C

## Detailed Strategic Plan Financials

While a streamlined version of the strategic plan financials is included within the plan document, this detailed version dives deeper into the sources of funding for strategic initiatives.

## **Detailed Strategic Plan Financials**

### **Introduction Paragraph**

The chart included in the strategic plan is a streamlined version of the strategic plan financials for those looking for brief information, or who may not be familiar with the park district's financials the same way UPD Board of Commissioners and Staff are. The next section of this document seeks to dive further into the financial component of the Strategic Plan by taking a brief look at:

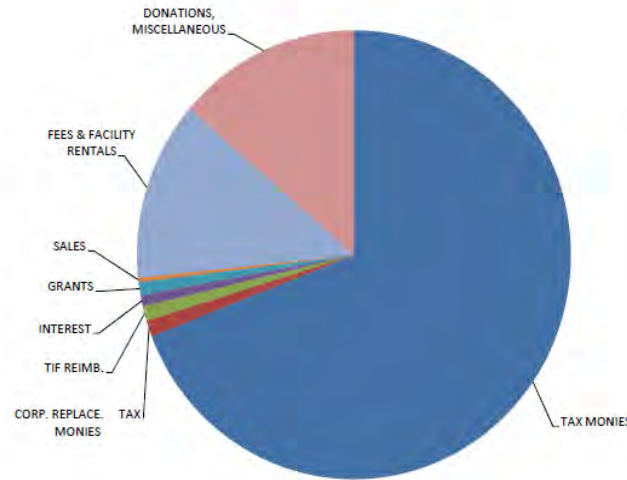
- (1) operating budget overview,
- (2) 5-year operating forecast,
- (3) 5-year capital budget,
- (4) matrix of Strategic Plan goals with added details,
- (5) other potential funding opportunities.



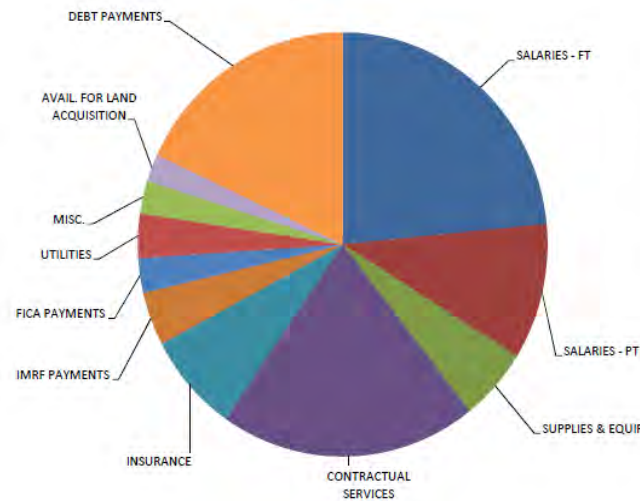
## 1. Operating Budget Information

An overview of operating revenues and expenditures for 2019-2020. The Operating Budget accounts for the annual operating funds of the district. It is used to account for administrative and park operating expenses and a variety of recreational activities and facilities.

OPERATING BUDGET (includes debt payments)  
2019-2020



REVENUES		
TAX MONIES	7,209,390	69.10%
CORP REPLACEMENT TAX MONIES	120,000	1.15%
TIF REIMBURSEMENT	110,000	1.05%
INTEREST	83,670	0.80%
GRANTS	98,420	0.94%
SALES	34,460	0.33%
FEES & FACILITY RENTALS	1,349,420	12.93%
DONATIONS, MISCELLANEOUS	1,427,490	13.68%
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>10,432,850</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



OPERATING EXPENDITURES		
SALARIES - FULL TIME	2,496,540	23.45%
SALARIES - PART TIME	1,105,930	10.39%
SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT	591,890	5.56%
CONTRACTUAL SERVICES	2,158,100	20.27%
INSURANCE	807,120	7.58%
IMRF PAYMENTS	435,000	4.09%
FICA PAYMENTS	279,500	2.63%
UTILITIES	361,890	3.40%
MISCELLANEOUS	266,220	2.50%
<b>TOTAL OPERATING EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>8,502,190</b>	<b>80.57%</b>
AVAILABLE FOR LAND ACQUISITION	222,800	2.09%
DEBT PAYMENTS	1,920,540	18.04%
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>10,645,530</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## 2. Five-Year Operating Forecast

The five-year operating forecast takes into account budget numbers from previous years, while allowing projection estimates for future years based on known information. The district is facing unprecedented budgetary constraints due to minimum wage law on top of property tax extension limitation law, and new, future budget scenarios continue to be assessed.

	FY20		FY21		FY22		FY23		FY24	
	Budgeted	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	
Property Taxes	7,209,390	2.50%	7,389,960	2.50%	7,575,052	2.50%	7,764,780	2.50%	7,959,261	
Corporate Replacement Tax Monies	120,000	0.45%	120,542	0.45%	121,087	0.45%	121,635	0.45%	122,185	
Urbana TIF Reimbursement	110,000	2.50%	112,755	2.50%	115,579	2.50%	118,474	2.50%	121,441	
Interest	83,670	25.00%	104,588	0.00%	104,588	0.00%	104,588	0.00%	104,588	
Grants	98,420	0.00%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	-	0.00%	-	
Sales	34,460	0.00%	34,460	0.00%	34,460	0.00%	34,460	0.00%	34,460	
Fees & Rentals	1,349,420	4.00%	1,403,397	2.50%	1,438,482	2.50%	1,474,444	2.50%	1,511,305	
Donations, Miscellaneous	1,427,490	0.00%	700,000	0.00%	700,000	0.00%	700,000	0.00%	700,000	
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>10,432,850</b>		<b>9,865,702</b>		<b>10,089,248</b>		<b>10,318,381</b>		<b>10,553,239</b>	
% Change from Previous Year	7.64%		-5.44%		2.27%		2.27%		2.28%	
	FY20		FY21		FY22		FY23		FY24	
	Budgeted	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	% incr(decr)	Projected	
Salaries - Full Time	2,496,540	2.92%	2,619,545	2.92%	2,696,146	2.92%	2,774,988	2.92%	2,856,135	
Salaries - Part Time	1,105,930	7.00%	1,183,345	7.00%	1,266,179	7.00%	1,354,812	7.00%	1,449,649	
Supplies and Equipment	591,890	4.52%	618,623	4.52%	646,563	4.52%	675,764	4.52%	706,285	
Contractual Services	2,158,100		1,200,000	2.00%	1,224,000	2.00%	1,248,480	2.00%	1,273,450	
Insurance (Liab. & Health)	841,620	3.53%	871,368	3.53%	902,168	3.53%	934,057	3.53%	967,072	
IMRF Payments	420,000	2.13%	428,934	2.13%	438,057	2.13%	447,375	2.13%	456,891	
FICA Payments	260,000	2.48%	266,436	2.48%	273,032	2.48%	279,791	2.48%	286,718	
Utilities	361,890	2.89%	372,364	2.89%	383,141	2.89%	394,230	2.89%	405,639	
Miscellaneous	266,220	1.00%	268,882	1.00%	271,571	1.00%	274,287	1.00%	277,030	
Capital Outlay	222,800		-		-		-		-	
Bond Principal and Interest	1,920,540		1,900,000		1,925,000		1,930,000		1,950,000	
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>10,645,530</b>		<b>9,729,497</b>		<b>10,025,858</b>		<b>10,313,784</b>		<b>10,628,869</b>	
% Change from Previous Year	13.15%		-8.60%		3.05%		2.87%		3.05%	
Excess (Deficit) Rev over Exp	(212,680)		136,205		63,390		4,597		(75,629)	

### 3. Five-Year Capital Budget Information

The Capital Improvements Budget accounts for purchases of property, equipment, and park improvements from proceeds of bond issues. Additionally there are grants, donations and transfers from other District funds received and spent in the Capital Improvement Budget. The five-year capital budget takes into account the master list of prioritized capital projects reviewed annually. It is then constructed based on this list, current needs, and various replacement schedules.

The chart that outlines the Five-Year Capital Budget is updated each year. The version current at the time of strategic plan finalization, September 2019, is included below, but is consistently revised as projects are completed and priorities are assessed.

Capital Budget Year	Revenues	Projected Expenses	Contingency
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2020	General Obligation Bonds	816,610	ADA transition projects - Blair	65,000	103,610
	ADA Funds	65,000	Cost of issue	11,000	
	Tributes and Donations	12,000	Tributes and Donations	12,000	
			Vehicles & Equipment	160,000	
			Operations Small Equipment	5,000	
			Recreation Small Equipment	5,000	
			EAB & Hazard Tree Management	10,000	
			Hardscapes & Fencing	150,000	
			Construction Crew Projects	20,000	
			Mechanical Replacement Schedule	10,000	
			Technology	20,000	
			Trail Projects - Blair	40,000	
			UIAC Capital Improvements	20,000	
			CLP Phased Rehab	150,000	
		Blair Park Playground	100,000		
	Subtotal 2020 Revenue	893,610	Subtotal 2020 Expenses	778,000	(Blair Park)

2021	General Obligation Bonds	821,080	ADA transition projects - Blair	65,000	122,780
	ADA Funds	65,000	Cost of issue	11,300	
	Tributes and Donations	12,000	Tributes and Donations	12,000	
			Vehicles & Equipment	225,000	
			Operations Small Equipment	5,000	
			Recreation Small Equipment	5,000	
			EAB & Hazard Tree Management	10,000	
			Hardscapes & Fencing	150,000	
			Construction Crew Projects	20,000	
			Mechanical Replacement Schedule	10,000	
			Technology	20,000	
			Trail Projects - Blair	40,000	
			CLP Phased Rehab	150,000	
			UIAC Capital Improvements	20,000	
		MBK Prairie Play Planning	20,000		
	Subtotal 2021 Revenue	898,080	Subtotal 2021 Expenses	763,300	(Blair)

2022	General Obligation Bonds	833,398	ADA transition projects - PrairiePlay	65,000	159,898
	ADA Funds	65,000	Cost of issue	11,500	
	Tributes and Donations	12,000	Tributes and Donations	12,000	
	PrairiePlay Donations	100,000	Vehicles & Equipment	TBD	
			Operations Small Equipment	5,000	
			Recreation Small Equipment	5,000	
			EAB & Hazard Tree Management	10,000	
			Hardscapes & Fencing - PrairiePlay	150,000	
			Construction Crew Projects	20,000	
			Mechanical Replacement Schedule	10,000	
			Technology	20,000	
			Trail Projects (PrairiePlay)	40,000	
			UIAC Capital Improvements	20,000	
			CLP Phased Rehab	150,000	
		PRC Roof - Metal	320,000		
	Subtotal 2022 Revenue	1,010,398	Subtotal 2022 Expenses	838,500	(PrairiePlay)

2023	General Obligation Bonds	845,898	ADA transition projects	65,000	325,698
	ADA Funds	65,000	Cost of issue	10,200	
	Tributes and Donations	12,000	Tributes and Donations	12,000	
			Vehicles & Equipment	250,000	
			Operations Small Equipment	5,000	
			Recreation Small Equipment	5,000	
			EAB & Hazard Tree Management	10,000	
			Hardscapes & Fencing	150,000	
			Construction Crew Projects	10,000	
			Technology	10,000	
			UIAC Capital Improvements	20,000	
			Trail Projects / Southridge	40,000	
			Mechanical Replacement	10,000	
	Subtotal 2023 Revenues	922,898	Subtotal 2018 Expenses	597,200	PrairiePlay

2024	General Obligation Bonds	820,000	ADA transition projects	65,000	359,800
	ADA Funds	65,000	Cost of issue	10,200	
	Tributes and Donations	12,000	Tributes and Donations	12,000	
			Vehicles & Equipment	190,000	
			Operations Small Equipment	5,000	
			Recreation Small Equipment	5,000	
			EAB & Hazard Tree Management	10,000	
			Hardscapes & Fencing	150,000	
			Construction Crew Projects	10,000	
			Technology	10,000	
			UIAC Capital Improvements	20,000	
			Trail Projects	40,000	
			Mechanical Replacement	10,000	
	Subtotal 2024 Revenues	897,000	Subtotal 2018 Expenses	537,200	(TBD)

#### 4. Matrix of Goals with Added Details

The below chart corresponds directly with the public version of the plan, while adding specific cost estimates. Again, you will find estimates of resources required, as estimated costs, and duration to complete each goal developed as part of the Strategic Plan. Beneath each strategic plan goal there are multiple objectives, not included in this chart, but found in Chapter 5 of the plan document. Resources required reflect the summation of all objectives under each broader goal.

##### Detailed Matrix of Goals:

Pillar	Goal	Total Estimated Cost	Potential Source of Funding	Time to Completion
You Belong Here	More effectively reach and communicate with community members for whom English is a second language.	\$25,000	Operating, partnerships	2 years
You Belong Here	Strive to create an environment in which all UPD staff appreciate and promote the importance of diversity and inclusion.	\$1,000	Operating	3 years
You Belong Here	Seek opportunities in which UPD can bring activities to neighborhoods and be responsive to interests of community groups.	\$10,000	Operating, partnerships, donations	2 years
You Belong Here	Advance efforts that make UPD parks and facilities more welcoming for everyone.	\$10,000	Operating, partnerships	2 years
Placemaking	Continue rehabilitating and revitalizing Crystal Lake and surrounding area, the district's oldest park and only public lake in Urbana.	Up to \$8,000,000	Bond reissuance, capital, grants, donations	5 years
Placemaking	Renovate and revitalize Blair Park with active, teen, and multigenerational opportunities.	\$800,000	Capital, OSLAD grant, donations, partnerships	2.5 years
Placemaking	Encourage a sense of place and uniqueness in Urbana parks, which creates vibrant spaces for park and facility users.	\$100,000	Operating, grants, donations	2-3 years



Health & Wellness	Improve and expand upon indoor health and wellness space (H&W space) for the community. The vision of this potential space incorporates a variety of opportunities in fitness, wellness and athletics to promote and improve the overall well-being of community members, while providing indoor, on your own time opportunities.	Up to \$10,000,000	Bond reissuance, grants, partnerships, capital, donations	3-5 years
Health & Wellness	Create opportunities for wellness experiences open to all generations.	\$10,000	Operating	1 year
Health & Wellness	Work to create health and physical wellness opportunities in colder months with less park usage.	\$10,000	Operating	1 year
Health & Wellness	Expand collaboration and partnerships with community health agencies.	\$10,000	Operating	1 year
Trails & Connectivity	Evaluate, identify and advance trail projects in UPD Trails Master Plan, which qualify for grant funding, in order to expand trails within Urbana parks.	\$100,000	Grants, partnerships	3 years
Trails & Connectivity	Connect more people to nature through Urbana parks and trails.	\$1,000	Operating	1 year
Trails & Connectivity	Promote a regional trail system through study of Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT) extension into downtown Urbana.	\$600,000	Grants, partnerships, capital	3 years
Trails & Connectivity	Focus on care and preservation of existing hardscapes and parking areas, as they are the front door to many parks.	\$1,000,000	Capital	5 years

### 5. Other Potential Funding Opportunities

- Bond reissuance (refunding)
- Grants
- Donations
- Partnerships
- Tax increment financing (TIF)

# APPENDIX D

## Strategic Plan Focus Group Report

This report highlights the six focus groups which were conducted in spring 2019 to gather in depth, detailed information from the community. This included determining use patterns, health and wellness needs, trail needs, and priorities for the future.



**Urbana** Park District



**2019 Strategic Plan  
Focus Groups Report**





# URBANA PARK DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN FOCUS GROUPS REPORT

PUBLIC INPUT | STRATEGIC PLAN | FOCUS GROUPS

Completed For  
**The Urbana Park District**

By

**Campfire Concepts**  
Champaign, IL

June 2019

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# Urbana Park District

 You *belong* here.



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# Executive Summary

## Purpose

In 2018, the Urbana Park District (UPD) formed a steering committee to establish a strategic plan for their future. The model for the local, public parks and recreation planning process makes use of various forms of input from residents and users throughout the plan's development to ensure their needs and desires are met. UPD utilized stakeholder interviews, community presentations, Urbana Park District Advisory Committee and UPD staff graphic facilitation sessions and a questionnaire to determine use patterns, preferences, satisfaction, priorities, and support. The results of these efforts were then used to inform the strategic plan, and also goals and objectives for a series of focus groups that were organized, moderated, and analyzed by Campfire Concepts, a park and recreation consulting firm. This mixed methods strategy combined the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in efforts to offset their weaknesses. The use of a questionnaire and focus groups allowed for numerical data representation and for the residents to provide a more subjective and open-ended representation of their opinions. In this case, the follow-up focus groups looked to provide a broader perspective, validate questionnaire response, produce more detailed information, and supply richer understanding about resident and user needs and interests.

The goals of the research study were to determine use patterns, better understand resident and user health and wellness needs, learn more about how those needs applied to the possibility of a health and wellness center, ascertain trail needs, and identify priorities for the future. The six focus groups yield the following results that fit within these categories:





## Use Patterns

- *“I really think Meadowbrook is the absolute perfect place.”* Meadowbrook Park was clearly the most used and loved UPD amenity.
- Focus group participants who self-identified as “households without children,” were less likely than “households with children,” to use UPD’s park, programs, facilities, and services that were closest to their residence and more likely to use community and regional level resources. Participants who self-identified as “households with children,” were more likely to have used their neighborhood UPD playgrounds, parks, programs, facilities, and services and more likely to have utilized more UPD resources throughout the year.
- Non-users understood the UPD’s services to be specifically for children and because their children had *“aged out,”* UPD’s services no longer applied to their household.

## Health & Wellness

The health and wellness goals of participants closely matched UPD’s dimensional model of health and wellness.

- Physical activity and nutrition were foundational components of health and wellness for focus group attendees. Going for a walk or walking was the most cited use of UPD’s parks and trails.
- Practices that facilitate emotional health and well-being such as stress reduction, meditation, mindfulness, contemplation,



and reflection were important to attendees. Participants were also actively seeking relief from life's challenges and stressors to find peace, calm, stress relief, digital disconnection, and to escape from the built / urban setting. Many attendees also recognized UPD's parks, facilities, and programs as facilitators of mental confidence and stability.

“

I really think  
Meadowbrook is the  
absolute perfect place.”

”

- Participants held a deep sense of identity from their relationship with “Urbana,” UPD, and their neighbors. The UPD was seen as an integral part of the participant’s sense of place in many ways and, most importantly, by creating spaces and programs that build community.

- *“For me, parks are a place to reconnect with nature and myself.”* In addition to the other previously mentioned dimensions of health and wellness, the environment and nature were seen as beneficial to the health and well-being of attendees. Wildlife was seen as an important component for some participants, but others were unsure of and felt less safe around wildlife found within the park district.

## Health & Wellness Facility

One priority for the focus groups was for participants to apply their health and wellness needs and desires to the possibility of a health and wellness facility or expansion of indoor space in Urbana. The following elements and amenities were important to the attendees:

- Affordability and access
- Indoor track
- Indoor playground
- Gymnasium(s)
- Drop-in child care
- Natural gathering spaces
- Windows, natural light, and visibility

Additionally, some participants were uncertain about UPD’s investment in a health and wellness facility. A number of attendees believed it was a better use of their resources to maintain and enhance the current parks and programs. Efforts to boost awareness of what is available and increased staff visibility / activity in park settings were also seen as important steps to build community and foster health and wellness.

Downtown Urbana, Weaver Park, and accessible locations (multi-modal and close to schools) were the top choices for locating a health and wellness facility in Urbana.

## Trail Priorities

Conversations surrounding connectivity resonated deeply with Urbana resident participants. This applied to trails as facilitators for all forms of transportation (car, bus, bike, walking, individuals with disabilities, etc.), as well as facilitating ways to connect to their neighbors and get out of the house. “Protected” pathways, trails, and bike lanes were also listed as priorities for participants.

Extending the Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT) west into Urbana is a key priority for residents and for the next UPD strategic plan. One line of questioning for the focus groups gauged participant’s interest on this extension, where it’s terminus and nodes of interests should be, and how it plays a role in the broader context of connectivity and active transportation. Participants prioritized downtown Urbana, Weaver Park, and the University of Illinois campus as the top three places for the KRT terminus and nodes. Connectivity was another term that resonated with participants who thoughtfully interjected ideas about how every mode of transportation, every neighborhood, and every individual should be connected to work, retail, recreation, and each other.

To the participants, the KRT was not seen as being easily accessible in its current state. Participants mentioned seeing people using the KRT and they really like the concept, but barriers exist to using the trail. An extension of the trail into the community may mitigate some of the perceived constraints.

## Desired Trail Amenities

There was consensus among the focus groups about the need for the following trail and pathway amenities:

- Paved and natural trails were valued in their proper setting. For example, long unpaved trails were valued at natural areas such as Busey Woods and paved looping trails were prioritized at neighborhood parks.
- Lighting
- Shade
- Trash receptacles
- Benches
- Restrooms (including access in winter)
- Mile markers and signage to identify route mileage
- Wayfinding
- Rules and regulations for bikers and dog walkers.
- Native landscaping
- Bike maintenance stations
- Safety for people and animals



## Additional Observations

- *“Accessibility is connectivity is welcoming.”* Access, connectivity, and a welcoming atmosphere were seen as interrelated values. Accessibility was broadly defined to include transportation, affordability, 24-hour services (for hours of operation and programs), and diversity of programs.
- There is excitement and interest in the restoration of Crystal Lake Park and participants came to the focus groups to learn more.
- African American participants shared similar opinions with the broader group, but also noticeably diverged from the overall themes in unique ways, such as perceived neighborhood and park safety and interactions with wildlife. Continued investment in outreach activities (i.e. interviews, focus groups, discussions with partners) to better understand these concerns for this population are an important consideration for the future.
- Play for adults (playground features, games, programs, etc.) emerged as potentially important aspects of health and wellness for participants.
- Winter is the most difficult season to find quality options to maintain individual health and wellness, and participants would like to see UPD do more to program during these months.
- UPD’s marketing efforts through the program guide, Facebook events, and partnerships with online blogs and newspapers were seen as effective. The redesign of the website, development of an app, and electronic reader boards were also of interest to the focus groups.
- Participants prioritized public input as part of the UPD strategic plan and appreciated the opportunity to share their opinions.
- Attendees held a positive opinion of the UPD board, staff, and park district as a whole.



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# Introduction

Community park and recreation services in the United States resulted from several social movements occurring in the latter half of the 19th century. All were somewhat related to industrialism and urbanism, the emergence of a system of mass production as well as mass consumption. For example, in 1832 a cholera epidemic within U.S. cities was in large part caused by overcrowding in urban areas leading to unsanitary living conditions. To remedy this, leaders realized urban areas lacked open space, so they purchased open space and developed parklands for residents to escape from the city and for recreational purposes.

Over time, the purpose of community parks evolved into an opportunity to address social ills within poor working-class areas. Responding to the lack of safe places for children to play, recreation areas and facilities started to make an appearance along with an establishment of a national association of park and recreation professionals. This development helped the field become recognized as vital in enhancing the quality of life and prevention of acts of social deviance. Building on these ideas, construction of recreation facilities and areas increasingly became a government function, with substantial support from tax funds. Programs became more diverse, which resulted in leadership by full-time professional leaders. As a result, community park systems became increasingly prevalent in the United States during the 19th century.

Significant changes in size and scope happened during the 20th century. Largely in response to the tax revolt of the 1970s and 1980s, public park and recreation agencies faced increasing pressures of limited budgets and fiscal conservatism. Faced with these challenges and in order to keep pace with the changing needs of the publics they served, many agencies sought alternative financing sources to supplement property taxes. These financial challenges brought about an increased focus on efficiency and economy with many agencies seeking opportunities for agency and community collaboration, partnerships and other resource-sharing practices. Throughout these changes, public park and recreation agencies have maintained a commitment to diverse programming opportunities for a variety of ages in areas such as sports, visual and performing arts, hobbies, health and fitness, natural resource education, social activities and aquatics; instill a sense of community pride and ownership among residents; operate with financial efficiency; and serve as a community resource for recreational opportunities and special events, attracting local residents and tourists alike.

## Purpose of the Plan

Today, the Urbana Park District (UPD) continues the lineage introduced centuries ago by working to improve the mental, physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing of all citizens in their community. Additionally, UPD adds to the overall economic and environmental health of the community through natural area stewardship and the provision of high quality parks and trails, recreation programs, recreation facilities, and events that create jobs, support local business

through operations and capital spending, and increase the value of local properties and homes. These beneficial outcomes are achieved through visioning, planning, and the operationalization of UPD's mission. Therefore, research conducted by UPD and consulting parties must be completed in light of the guiding mission statements and strategic initiatives to match historic outcomes with future priorities.

## Mission of the Urbana Park District

- Improve the quality of life of its citizens through a responsive, efficient, and creative park and recreation system;
- Pursue excellence in a variety of programs, parks and special facilities that contribute to the attractiveness of neighborhoods, conservation of the environment and overall health of the community.

## You Belong Here

Additionally, in recent years, UPD has fostered a welcoming and inclusive culture with a strategic priority and campaign entitled, "You Belong Here." Staff have reorganized job titles and priorities around outreach and have made new inroads into the community as a result. Long-time and new established partnerships were also an integral part of the public input process and will remain a priority for inclusion in the future.

## Resident Input

Planning for public parks and recreation is only effective with broad input from residents and users. In order to meet this goal, the UPD strategic plan steering committee developed a mixed methods strategy to engage residents. These efforts included stakeholder interviews, community presentations, Urbana Park District Advisory Council and staff graphic facilitation activities. Additionally, in the summer of 2018, UPD staff created and distributed a questionnaire and asked residents to answer specific questions at UPD events and facilities. The results were then used to inform the strategic plan and the goals and objectives of the focus groups. This mixed methods strategy combined the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis in efforts to off-set their weaknesses. The use of a questionnaire and focus groups allowed for numerical data representation and for the residents to provide a more subjective, open-ended voice to the planning discussion. In this case, the follow-up focus groups sought to provide a broader perspective, validate questionnaire response, produce more detailed information, and supply richer understanding about resident needs and interests.

## Study Procedures

### Methods for Requesting Participation

In 2018, the Urbana Park District staff created and distributed a questionnaire through



various channels. Questionnaire respondents were asked to share their contact information if they would be willing to participate in future focus groups. Ninety-nine individuals provided their name and email address. Three contacts were made via email to each of these individuals to request participation in the 2019 focus groups. Email correspondence included a link to a SignUp Genius page. The page highlighted six options for participation and each option included a button to sign-up for a focus group. Weekday, weekend, midday, and evening sessions were available to provide a variety of options. Focus groups were limited to ten individuals and participation was on a first-come, first-serve basis. Additionally, simultaneous contacts were made to a variety of UPD partners and connections to request help in promoting the focus groups (figure 1) by phone and email.

Organization	Organization
Carle Therapy	Parkland College
Champaign County Bikes	Prairie Cycle Club
Champaign County Community Coalition	Ridgewalkers
Champaign-Urbana Friends & Allies of Immigrants and Refugees	SE Urbana Neighborhood Association
Christie Clinic Marathon	Silverwood
CU Able	University of Illinois Extension
CU Chefs Association	Urbana Free Library Outreach Department
CU Public Health	Urbana Neighborhood Connections Center
Cunningham Children's Home	Urbana Police Department
Dream Girls Academy	Urbana Pops Orchestra
Exchange Club of Urbana	Urbana School District Congolese Family Liaison
Historic East Urbana Neighborhood Association	Urbana School District EBD Special Education Department
Hope Center	Urbana School District Latino Family Liaison
Krannert Center for Performing Arts	Volunteer Illini Projects
Lierman Neighborhood Action Committee	Youth Assessment Center
Move MS	40 North / 88 West
Neutral Cycle	89 additional affiliate community cooperation connections
New American Welcoming Center	

*Figure 1. UPD Community Partners*

After two weeks of outreach, 31 registrations had been secured for various focus groups. At this point, stage two of the invitation process began with broader public promotion through UPD's website and social media (4/11/19). Additionally, Campfire Concepts reached out to 27 local connections, houses of worship, and the EBD Special Education Department at the Urbana School District to tap into more local networks. UPD made one final social media push on 4/22/19 and saturation was achieved at 60 registered participants.

Participants who were unable to attend the meeting they registered for were given the opportunity to respond to the focus group questions by attending another focus group, in-person interview, phone call, or email. Two individuals chose to respond to the focus group questions by email to this inquiry.

## Participant Profile

Public park and recreation agencies attempt to design their programs and services to appeal to the diverse needs of their community. In light of these efforts, attempts to reach all segments of the population is important for proper planning of the Urbana Park District's park and recreation services and programs. Lack of careful assessment of the District's demographics can lead to the disproportionate placement of park facilities and recreation programs, ultimately leading to social problems in the community.

Therefore, focus groups were designed to be as inclusive as possible of all residents when requesting participation. Information such as resident ages, gender, race and ethnicity were gathered when participants registered with SignUp Genius to determine if any segments of the population were not reached.

In total, 47 individuals attended the 6 focus groups and 2 individuals who registered but were unable to attend offered their opinions through email. Figure 2 highlights self-reported participant demographics through the SignUp Genius registration platform.

Race / Ethnicity	
Caucasian / White	14
African American / Black	9
Chinese American	4
Hispanic	2
Arabic / Middle Eastern	2
Multi-Ethnic	1
Italian American	1
Chose not to respond	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

Do you reside in Urbana?	
Yes	38
No	8
Chose not to respond	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

Gender	
Male	16
Female	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>

Age	
Number of Participants Who Shared Their Age	41
No response	8
Mean Age of Participants	42
Median Age of Participants	39
Mode Age of Participants	38
Age Range	22-74

Figure 2. Participant Demographics



# Focus Group Questions & Protocol

The UPD leadership team and strategic plan steering committee met with Campfire Concepts four times over the course of six months to prepare for the focus groups. Previously collected board, staff, and public input had established priorities for the focus groups. UPD Staff and Campfire Concepts worked together to identify areas where more information was needed and where possible gaps existed. A series of questions and prompts were derived from these discussions. The questions, prompts, and consent form are included in Appendix A.



# Focus Groups Assessment

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**“So I consider parks almost like  
this amazing public backyard.”**



Focus group goals, objectives, questions, and prompts were collaboratively formulated in a series of meetings that involved the UPD leadership team and Campfire Concepts staff. The six focus groups were recorded, transcribed, reviewed, and analyzed by the moderator and an independent researcher. The following section highlights themes and responses for each objective as well as direct quotes from participants in the focus groups. Names and identifiers were removed to protect confidentiality.

## Activities at the Start of the Focus Groups

Attendees of the first three focus groups were asked to identify on a map the UPD park, trail, or facility closest to their residence and the UPD park, trail, or facility they most frequently used upon entrance into the meeting room(s). It was apparent this task and map was possibly priming the participants to think about their health and wellness needs solely in terms of parks. In future focus groups, the maps were inserted into the meetings after the health and wellness questions for the final three focus groups. A total of five focus groups participated in the map exercise due to the moderator forgetting to ask one group to participate. The exercise was effective in facilitating conversation related to use and needs.

Additionally, each participant was asked to share their name and to tell the group about their use or non-use patterns of the UPD. This line of questioning helped to enhance understanding of use patterns.

## Use Patterns

*“So I consider parks almost like this amazing public backyard.”*

A strong majority of the focus group attendees, both local and non-resident, self-identified as frequent UPD park, program, facility, and event users. Most participants were monthly, if not weekly users. Overall, Meadowbrook Park was the most used by participants. There was a general desire to replicate the qualities of marquee park amenities across the district. There was also excitement about the potential of Crystal Lake Park.

*“I really think Meadowbrook is the absolute perfect place.”*

*“I used to live in Orchard Downs Apartments which is within walking distance of Meadowbrook Park. So even though it took me quite some time to discover that park, I was really surprised and really pleased.”*

*“I mostly go to Meadowbrook for running almost every day.”*

*“... now I mostly use Meadowbrook for walking.”*

*“We are interested in getting a garden plot at Meadowbrook. I think that’s a nice program that’s offered there.”*

*“We live in a rural area, and unfortunately our little country road, it has a lot of traffic. So, we don’t feel safe riding bikes with our kids, or you know, even sometimes just walking. It’s a little uneasy, you have to be very careful of cars driving 50 plus miles per hour by you. So, it’s nice to go someplace like Meadowbrook.”*

*“I really enjoy the Nature Center, Meadowbrook Park. We love Meadowbrook Park.”*

*“We love the parks here. I guess Meadowbrook is maybe one of our favorites.”*

Initially, it appeared that participants were less likely to use neighborhood parks in close proximity to their homes and more likely to use community or regional parks. However, after analyzing the data from the focus group transcriptions this appears to be more likely for individuals who would identify as households “without children.” Participants with children (especially young children) were more likely to use their neighborhood park, and more likely to use *all* of the neighborhood parks in search of a variety of playgrounds and athletic programs for their children.

*“Then we also had two kids along the way. And so, it’s really changed my experience of parks. So, before it used to be a lot of walking, and then now we’re looking for playgrounds.”*

*“the outdoor beauty is awesome, and we love doing that, but I can tell you which parks have the cool playgrounds. Cause my daughter knows exactly where they are.”*

*[Because we have children in our family] “Yeah, so I have been to a lot, probably most of the parks in Urbana.” “I’ve been to pretty much every park here.”*

*“And I have a granddaughter, that’s why I’m in the parks most of the time. And we go to all of them, they’re all unique.”*

*“My daughter loves discovering new playgrounds.”*

Individuals without children discussed the desire to use their neighborhood park, but felt judged as an adult spending leisure time in proximity to a playground that is in use. This was especially apparent when the park was perceived to have less amenities for adults:



*“As someone who is not an undergrad at U of I and also is not raising a family, I fall into the group of people in this town that are like the in between. And so, there is a lot of things for families. There is a lot of things for older individuals. There are tons of things for college students and younger, and I’m sort of in the age group where if you go to the park you might come off a little creepy because there are kids around. There is nothing for you to do. You have to borrow kids, and then it’s okay I can go to the park. My best friend is about to have a baby, and it’s like this is great. I have a reason to go to the park now. And it won’t be creepy. But the areas where there is hiking and things, you know, you don’t feel creepy there. But like it’s probably the reason I don’t go to my neighborhood park..... But then if I’m going to pay catch with someone, it’s a great spot, but other than that it’s not somewhere I can really feel comfortable hanging out. So, as we talk about things like an ice-skating rink or a skate park... about cafes near the parks, or just more circle paths in the parks, things you can do where you don’t feel as weird in my age group being there. Those things sound exciting, like I’d go out more. I’d go to the parks more if I felt like there was a space for me.”*

Attendees also talked about being lifelong participants of UPD programs and events. Participants found value in attending UPD programs as a child and, because of that experience, many of them became staff or volunteers in UPD programs and athletics as they grew older to provide the same great opportunity for other children. Some have even enjoyed seeing their grandchildren use the parks and programs they remember loving as a child.

*“The Park District, we’ve been involved with it pretty much my entire life. Growing up, I used to do the summer musicals which was always really fun. And then right out of high school, I got a job with the Park District doing the afterschool programs at the different elementary schools..... Now my grandchildren are attending camps.”*

*“I played little league at Blair Park, and then I coached my sons....”*

*“I attended a lot of camps with the Urbana Park District, mainly sports camp. My first job was with the Urbana Park District doing afterschool programs at the middle school, and then eventually other programs in other places.”*

*“And yeah, I do everything with the park district. And I’ve went to camps as a kid, as well, like the sports camp. And then my daughters have done stuff with Urbana Park District, the Soccer League.”*

The individuals that identified as non-users cited a common reason for not taking advantage of UPD’s services. These non-users held the perception that park districts are exclusively for households with young children, *“For me my son has aged out of recreation activities.”*



## Health & Wellness

### Participant Definition of Health and Wellness:

One major objective of the study was to investigate and confirm the health and wellness needs of UPD residents and users. Additionally, UPD had been exploring the possibilities of a health and wellness facility or expanded indoor space. Initially, participants were asked to define health and wellness as a way to help them think about how UPD meets their needs and how UPD could possibly meet their needs into the future through the development of a new facility. UPD staff had completed their own research on health and wellness and had assigned eight dimensions to describe how their programs and services fit health and wellness needs. Not only do the participant responses fit within UPD's dimensional model, but their responses also more richly describe their unique understanding of what those dimensions mean to them.

### Physical Dimension: Walk or Walking Most Frequently Used Terms:

At the outset of the focus groups, participants were asked to share their name and to tell the group about their use or non-use patterns of the UPD. A majority of participant's self-identified as "users" of the Urbana Park District parks, programs, facilities and events.

Participants offered unsolicited references to health and wellness outcomes when describing their use patterns, but were less

likely to specifically reference physical activity or nutrition. Both were implied as priorities throughout the sessions.

*"I think to go along with the stress reduction comment is that nutrition and physical activity are the foundation of those things but there's a lot more, emotional health, mental health, stress reduction."*

Additionally, it was apparent that physical activity was a basic health and wellness goal for the participants through their description of use. For example, the terms "walk" and "walking" were a few of the most frequently used words throughout the focus groups. Also, when discussing their use patterns, participants would reference the physical dimension of wellness directly as an activity or sport, such as:

*"Victory Park is the one that I've used a lot. Mainly because I was doing some running as well, like couch to 5K, couch to 10K. And I was looking for non-paved surfaces to run on. So I would run around that park a few times just in the grass as I could."*

### Emotional Dimension:

The dimension that appeared to resonate most deeply with participants related to the emotional dimension. Comments related to actively seeking relief from life's challenges and stressors such as: seeking peace, finding calm, searching for stress relief, desiring digital disconnection, and to escape from the built / urban setting were met with verbal and physical affirmations from fellow focus group attendees. Many participants also recognized

UPD's parks, facilities, and programming practices to facilitate emotional confidence, positivity, and stability through meditation, mindfulness, contemplation, and reflection.

## Stress Management: Meditation, Mindfulness, Contemplation, Reflection

*"Wellness is stress management because we feel this need to constantly be connected. We're connected all the time. We have our phones, we're connected. We have our work and our family and Facebook and all this social media. It's like a constant barrage of stuff that you feel like you never get a minute."*

*"I walk to decompress."*

*"...but all of our experiences [with UPD] have been calming and peaceful."*

*"I also like anywhere where there is water [Crystal Lake], bodies of water are very peaceful to me."*

*"I think there is something really life-affirming about being on water [Crystal Lake]."*

*"Even just sitting and contemplating...."*

*"...and walk there, and just be reflective and contemplative there [Referring to Crystal Lake Park]."*

*"It's [Meadowbrook Park] a great place for contemplation, and it's pretty accessible to us from our house."*

*"And then it's beautiful out there [Meadowbrook Park], the contemplation."*

*"We've been completely alone!"  
-Participant enthusiastically referring to visit to South Ridge Park.*

**I love that I feel like I'm not in the city anymore.**

*"It's a nice escape from work and everyday life [UPD Programs]."*

*"You can actually kayak on the lake [Crystal Lake] at different times and not really know that you're in the city. You do really feel like you're in nature."*

*"You can't get more nature in a city than that [Busey Woods]. It is leaving the urban experience behind and becoming really one with nature, and it's wonderful."*

## Social Dimension:

***"It's a good way to get to know your neighbors."***

Participants held a deep sense of identity from their relationship with "Urbana" and their neighbors. UPD fosters their resident's sense of place in many ways, and one way is through creating spaces and programs that build community. Participants appreciated UPD's efforts, and some said they would like to see even more efforts to help bring people together. A number of focus groups also highlighted isolation as a concerning mental health challenge within the community. UPD

parks, programs, and events were seen as proactive ways to find something to do to leave the isolation of the home, to help overcome loss, and to restore social vitality.

*“We’re seeing people that we know. We went to a Park District soccer game. My kids are playing, but we went to watch my daughter’s best friend on Saturday, and we knew every kid on the team. That’s just so fun.”*

*“To me a big part about wellness is community...”*

*“[to live a] ...balanced life, balanced and fully dimensional life. So a combination of food, exercise, sociability.”*

*“I totally agree that a sense of community is part of what I consider essential to my health and wellness.”*

*“And the kids get to know each other, and they know the counselors. And they love that connection...”*

*“Well I think the idea of being social on some level... So that we don’t have isolation, but you know, like programming that’s directly putting people in dialogue with each other.”*

*“I thought of our grandma. My grandpa passed about a year and a half ago and of course she took that really hard. And kind of went into herself and needed to be out and about and around people. I think any time we’ve been able to get her to go out to the parks with us or to these events with us, you can kind of see that life come back to her.”*

*“just being able to be out and about with other people.”*

*“For me, it also has to do with being around people. I have to have a community in order to be well.”*

“

For me, parks are a place to reconnect with nature and myself.

”





*“...forming relationships that make you actually want to get outside and help your neighbors and do things with your friends and family.”*

*One participant said to another participant, “I thought you looked familiar. I’m pretty sure we probably ran into each other somewhere, at one of the events or facilities.”*

### **Environmental Dimension:**

*“For me, parks are a place to reconnect with nature and myself.”*

The body of research continues to grow surrounding the connections between nature and well-being (USDA Forest Service, 2019). Access to nature has been shown to positively affect the other dimensions of health and wellness as well. Individuals who live within close proximity of parks and trails that are perceived as safe note increases in home values, physical activity, and social capital. They also experience reductions in stress, illness, and even live longer lives.

Many participants appreciated the outdoor opportunities that UPD provides. These outdoor opportunities were a key factor in the way people approached health and wellness. Specifically, people thought of their time in UPD parks as good for their physical and mental well-being. Some participants wanted UPD to do more to develop contemplative or reflective spaces within parks. This could include programs like yoga or meditation classes in the parks, but also to have a centering space where people could go to relax and be in nature. Other people pushed for more outdoor activities during the winter time. Ice





skating was mentioned several times as a potential option UPD could/should explore.

“Nature” and “the environment” are also highly valued in other communities Campfire Concepts has studied in Illinois. However, when compared to Urbana’s focus group results it appears UPD’s residents perceive they have more access to local nature than their counterparts. This is an important observation in light of their definition of health and wellness as it relates to the environmental dimension:

*“I find Busey Woods is kind of unique in the area. It’s very nature-y if that makes any sense. My favorite recreational activity is hiking. And I find that to have by far the best hiking in the area. So that’s what draws me to Busey Woods.”*

*“[health and wellness means] ...just immersing myself in nature.”*

*“I love anything that touches my sight, and smell, and sense, and the wind on my skin. And anything that can draw me back into nature, but bring me closer to myself,”*

*“every kind of green space is nurturing for us.”*

*“I love walking through all that different terrain. All those trees and deer.”*

*“We’d get up and we spent our whole lives being outside.”*

*“How many times have I driven out of my way just to eat my lunch in my car in the park just so I can be near some trees?”*

*“.....but in Europe and mostly Asia, that’s a big thing that you can get prescribed to be out in nature.”*

*“It’s very nice and quiet. This time of year you see tons of deer, a lot of does and a lot of fawns. I mean yesterday I had to see at least 35, you know, walking around thinking, he’s not a hunter.”*

*“just being out in nature is a big part of wellness for my family..... With my kids, I want to encourage them to be outside as much as possible.”*





## Health & Wellness Facility Needs

After each focus group had shared what health and wellness meant to them, participants were then asked to imagine a facility that would help them achieve their goals, needs and desires. Participant's opinions varied on the idea of a new recreation center facility in Urbana. Initially, the moderator speculated that the use of a map at the outset of the focus group was inadvertently focusing the conversations on parks. Additionally, one focus group was entirely comprised of participants who were non-residents of Urbana. These items are noted to explain some of the variances in the first three focus groups. Many pointed out the need for physical activity space, especially during the winter. Others did not want to duplicate spaces that were perceived to have sacrificed quality, community, and beauty at the expense of affordability (e.g. Charter Fitness, free walking at Lincoln Square mall). Participants felt that UPD could make their facility to be open 24 hours so that people who work different shifts could take advantage of its services at ideal times of the day.



The YMCA in Champaign was frequently used as a comparison facility. The YMCA was seen as big, nice, expensive, and not at all accessible to Urbana residents. Many people noted they would not go there because it is too far away; further, they noted it was not accessible for people without a car. The YMCA staff were seen as a plus, but the location was problematic in that it further divided the haves and have-nots in U-C. Participants saw UPD's mission as being one that welcomes all people, bringing them together for the betterment of the community. Attendees felt that any facility should be built with this notion in mind.

If a facility were to be built there seemed to be a few crucial priorities – it has to be centrally located, have an open/welcoming design with lots of light and windows, it has to be affordable with amenities/programs that are free to the public, it should include a variety of multipurpose spaces, some kind of childcare option would be highly beneficial, and it should have elements to draw in teens.

One participant posited the overarching goal for a UPD Health and Wellness Center to be to *“help people stay focused on their goals,”* which applies to all aspects of health and wellness.

### Variety is Key:

Most people appreciated all that UPD has to offer and noted examples of programs and parks that meet their needs. However, they are also looking for more. Some specific activities were discussed, but many times participants were just open to new things UPD wants to try. The variety is key though – in

terms of timing and scheduling, age, cultural group, etc. Participants wanted a diverse variety of offerings from UPD.

*“I think a variety. It sounds like there is a lot of variety, both in classes and informal things, places you can walk, things to do when the weather is too cold or too wet, sometimes, to be outside. But also, activities for a variety of ages and things that you can do together, despite maybe how old you are or how young you are. I really appreciate those. And that leads to the whole mental health issue, just being able to be out and about with other people.”*

### 3 Specific Amenities for a Health and Wellness Facility that were Common to all Focus Groups:

- Indoor track:

*“Indoor track! And since they fenced off the high school when they redid it, you can’t go to a track surface unless you pay.”*

- Indoor playground:

*“I remember taking daycare kids about 10 years ago to First Christian Church over in Champaign because they have the indoor track and the little playground. Parents walk, there’s room to sit.”*

*“An indoor playground would be well-utilized in Urbana.”*

- Gymnasium(s):

*“Yeah, and so for me that’s where I would put it, if I were to do infrastructure: a brand-new beautiful gym.”*



**Campfire Concepts**

*“And alternatively things that are fun that don’t feel like working out, but are just focused on getting people moving in general. So indoor basketball court, volleyball net.”*

- Drop-in child care:

*“But the kids things are not being offered that late, so now I need a babysitter. So I’m still not going. I don’t want to find a babysitter for a 30-minute activity. It’s little much.”*

*“...if there was a whole building dedicated to health and wellness, and then you go there – well, that’s like your time. But if you have two kids, you know, providing for them [child care] in a place you can really trust, you know, I think is part of mental wellness. So I think that’d be really key thing.”*

- Natural gathering spaces:

*“[The health and wellness center needs a] great community feel. You would walk in, you would talk to people, you would know people.”*

- Windows, natural light, and visibility:

*“There’s a lot of glass and windows and things like that, natural sunlight, as well as being able to see what’s going on. And it’s like, “Okay. Here’s what I can do here.”*

*“So indoor recreational spaces for the winter that have good light, high ceilings, things like that. Cause I know the YMCA offers that, but it’s really far, one, and a lot of these places just tend to get so expensive. So we’re resorting to the mall, which is depressing. But it’d be nice to have an alternative to that in the winter.”*

- Programming was also important. Group fitness (yoga, Zumba, etc.) and cooking classes ranked high on the list of priorities. Participants noted the recently revamped kitchen space at Phillips, and looked forward to more programming in that facility. Several participants with children were especially excited about opportunities to take a cooking class with their children.

### **Affordability and Access:**

Each focus group had concerns about access and equity in relationship to the fees for entry to a potential facility. These ideas manifested in different ways. A few discussions touched on a graduated fee structure based on income. Other participants talked about the need for spaces inside and outside of the building that were free and beneficial for all.

*“And then having it be subsidized where based on income you could get memberships that have a tier so if you don’t make a lot of money or you’re not wealthy you’re not kept out.”*

*“Because Leonhard Rec Center for our family is much cheaper than any other sort of indoor exercise facility option. And so that, you know, feels good that it’s more affordable and you’re supporting park district.”*

*“But I was also saying those on fixed incomes that would be the population that I would be concerned about is accessing resources when you’re on a fixed income. And I will say one strategy that I liked at the University of Illinois as a staff member when I was there is that they had pro-rated amounts.”*

*“The biggest barrier is the cost. A lot of families can’t afford to pay for six or seven kids. You know, two or three, four kids, to participate in different programs.”*

*“And it’s just something that – you wouldn’t have to charge students to come in after school.”*

The focus group participants recognized the variety of scheduling conflicts that are experienced by differences in age, family status, and career. When discussing health and wellness facility needs, unlimited daily access was an important goal as well. And, as discussed in several places in this report, participants noted the importance of a space for teens, especially during the later evening hours.

*“You can go and take a six-week class and you’re done. Or you can go in on a Saturday or at 3:00 am or whenever and just do it. I think that’s the one amazing thing about the park district that makes us different.”*

*“the exercise classes that are more convenient for working people. So either first thing in the morning, like early in the morning so that you can work out, shower, and still get to work.”*

*“I was just thinking back to when I was 13, 14. Like something we always really wanted was a space that was open late,”*

*“I’m concerned with the teenagers at night. Can they have a drop-in place where they can go that’s also a multiple use facility.”*

*“Yeah. Well, for me, I work overnight so in the mornings, you know, would be better. Mornings or afternoon, before my daughter gets out of school. I’ve wanted to do some yoga or something. They usually don’t offer that till like the evening times, which I understand because a lot of people work 9:00 to 5:00 or 8:00 to 5:00.”*

*“I had the same issue where it was really hard to – I work second shift, so finding anything that fit into my schedule didn’t happen unless it was an ungodly hour in the morning. Would it be possible to have something held open 24 hours for the people who, you know, may have to be at work overnight so they want to go as soon as they get off of work, and then sleep, and then get ready for work or vice versa,”*

Attendees also debated the meaning of a health and wellness center. One group, entirely comprised of non-resident users defined a health and wellness “facility” as well-kept, safe parks with a variety of supervised programs.

*“Yeah, making the parks, parks. I mean that’s about as simple as you can say it. Make it safe. Make it available. Make it somewhere that anybody wants to be.”*

*“More people, less stuff like it’s not that they need bigger and better and newer. They just need to get people there.”*

*“[Parks] You know, those are the real community centers. It was parks that were the true melting pot of a community.”*

**It was parks that were the true melting pot of a community.**



## Health & Wellness Facility Location

Next, the focus group participants were asked about their opinions on the ideal location for a health and wellness center in Urbana. The most common responses were: Downtown, Weaver Park, and locations with ease of access for school aged children and all modes of transportation (i.e., bus, walking, biking, individuals with disabilities). Additionally, focus group participants found value in repurposing existing buildings and land, as well as a new building that would be strategically located.

*“In terms of location, somewhere that people can walk/bike/drive to easily. I think the downtown area really needs more visibility. If it’s in the downtown area, it could be integrated with office space, meeting rooms, or a coffee shop. We enjoy living close to the Urbana city center so that we don’t have to drive everywhere for everything.”*

*“Downtown someplace. Maybe in central Urbana so everybody can access it.”*

*“Just facing the beauty of Weaver Park and it’d be next to two schools in a neighborhood with a ton of kids. You do get your park district taxes from property value. It would raise the property value of that sub-division. I’m just saying.”*

*“Not on the edge. Like the Y, because of the space, they put it so far away. So it’s by design to definitely separate the haves and the have-nots, and I think that that is another overarching conversation. When we talk about what Park Districts are supposed to do, they are supposed to, I think, bring communities together and not separate and divide.”*





## Trails & Pathway Interests Needs

“Definitely something that a lot of people have touched on is the idea of accessibility or conductivity, so the ability to get from park to park, from neighborhood to neighborhood, business district to business district, and interchange between these easily, and not requiring a car, and having it be safe to do all these things. I think a lot of people would like that.”

Extending the Kickapoo Rail Trail (KRT) west into Urbana is a key priority for residents and for the next UPD strategic plan. One line of questioning for the focus groups gauged participant’s interest on this extension, where it’s terminus and nodes of interests should be, and how it plays a role in the broader context of connectivity and active transportation. Participants prioritized the Urbana downtown, Weaver Park, and the University of Illinois campus as the top three places for the KRT terminus and nodes. Connectivity was another term that resonated with participants who thoughtfully interjected ideas about how every mode of transportation, every neighborhood, and every individual should be connected to work, retail, recreation, and each other.

*“Yeah, how do we get it [the KRT] to downtown cause that’s really the goal!”*

*“And I don’t know how practical it is but the trail they opened from Urbana to St. Joe [the KRT]. Having something like that through Urbana.”*

*“I was just going to say another interesting thing that I feel coming from this conversation is the connect-ability to campus. And I think really Urbana makes, the park district kind of make zero use of that potential. And so there is all kinds of opportunities I think not only for getting people to campus, but getting campus people to Urbana, and to downtown, and to the parks with appreciating that connectivity a little bit more.*

*“And so I would be really interested in creating what I would call a green loop of connectivity between all the parks that’s safe, low stress, easy,”*

*“So the idea of being able to connect between the Meadowbrook trail here and have a kind of a map or a guide or something that would get you over to Weaver, and then get you over to Crystal Lake. So that you could experience the different kinds of things that might be happening at each location on any weekend. That wouldn’t necessarily always be organized by the park district, but organized by other people using the parks. If there is a way through that makes sense, like a loop. That would be amazing.”*



*“...and I would just add that working with the City of Urbana and the park district to get a better connectivity between Weaver Park, Kickapoo, Kickapoo downtown Urbana would be helpful. There is a patch once you’re off Main Street that’s pretty darn scary if you’re biking.”*

*“in terms of immediate priorities to make Crystal Lake safer to get to for more people to utilize. And to sort of activate Weaver Park more, and then you know, longer term connecting them all into downtown.”*

*Participant 1: “so the ability to get from park to park, from neighborhood to neighborhood, business district to business district, and interchange between these easily, and not requiring a car, and having it be safe to do all these things. I think a lot of people would like that.”*

*Participant 2: “That would be beautiful.”*

*Moderator: “Would that be off-street, ideally, or would it –“*

*Participant 2: “I would think off-street would be preferred. Almost all the bikers I know don’t get along with cars well, and almost all the people who don’t ride bikes don’t get along with bikers well. So it seems like it would behoove everyone to try and separate those two media.”*

To the participants, the KRT was not seen as being easily accessible in its current state. Participants mentioned seeing people using the KRT and they really like the concept, but barriers exist to using the trail. An extension of the trail into the community may mitigate some of the following perceived constraints.

*“No, I would love to use it [The KRT]. Again, I’ve got kids, and we love to ride bikes. But where we live is not conducive to it,”*

*“Right, I have to ride my bike to Walmart? That doesn’t seem very nature-y, you know what I mean?”*



*“But how am I going to get four or five bicycles out there to actually use it? I mean I’d have to pull a trailer with bikes on it to use it.”*

*“I legitimately don’t know how to get to the beginning of that bike trail, and like I’ve always wanted to go. But I have no idea where it is.”*

## Trail Accessibility, Types and Amenities:

For a number of years, trails and pathways have consistently been considered to be one of the top recreation priorities. What is unclear, however, is what type of trails and pathway amenities are desired the most by residents? Therefore, the second set of trails and pathways focus group questions related to participant's specific opinions on-trail length, surface, style, and desired amenities.

### Accessibility to Crystal Lake Park:

Participant's expressed interest and excitement about the revitalization of Crystal Lake Park. However, access for all modes of transportation across the University Avenue arterial was a concern for most focus groups.

*"But I never go to Crystal Lake, and that's mostly because of University Avenue. I find it a huge barrier for crossing. I find it to be ugly. I don't want to run a mile up it, so I avoid that park."*

*"I would also echo the accessibility to that whole Crystal Lake complex."*

*"I like Crystal Lake Park a lot, and I'm very close to it. But I can't bike to it because I hate biking to it. So, I end up driving there if I'm going to walk there, which is silly cause it's so close to me."*

*"I echo the not pedestrian friendly aspect of sort of University Avenue and getting across there, which ends up making me go further south to Meadowbrook Park when I'm much closer to Crystal Lake Park."*

*"There is great public transportation here compared to there, but it's still not, for large parts of the community it's still not as accessible as it could be. Because you need a car or you feel safer if you have a car if you're trying to get up to Crystal Lake than trying to walk or bike."*

*"I wouldn't trust my kid to cross University Avenue –"*

“  
We want protected bike  
lanes and walkways.  
”

## Trail Types:

*“We want protected bike lanes and walkways.”*

“I would think off-street would be preferred. Almost all the bikers I know don’t get along with cars well, and almost all the people who don’t ride bikes don’t get along with bikers well. So it seems like it would behoove everyone to try and separate those two media.”

*“[Our street] ...it has a lot of traffic. So we don’t feel safe riding bikes with our kids.”*

*“And with kids, you want to be able to do it [bike] with kids safely. And right now it does not feel safe.”*

*“We like to walk to parks and just not have to worry about getting run over by a car, you know?”*

*“The park experience should be safe, interesting, low stress. It shouldn’t be will I die getting breakfast this morning?”*

*“So again, any place there are apartment complexes, where there is a higher density population, there should be more of an opportunity to get on a nice sidewalk and walk around and do things.”*

*Participant 1: “Cause it’s not enjoyable biking next to cars going really fast, it’s just not.”*

*Participant 2: “And it’s stressful for drivers passing too!”*

Additionally, focus group participants found value in all types of trail surface, length and style:

- Paved was valued in community and neighborhood parks, while unpaved hiking trails was preferred in natural areas.

- Long distance trails were important in larger natural areas, for linear bike paths, and active forms of transportation. Looping trails circling neighborhood parks felt welcoming to the participants and also as an idea for the adults to have something to do while their children played.

## Trail Amenities:

There was consensus among the focus groups about the need for the following trail and pathway amenities:

- Lighting
- Shade
- Trash receptacles
- Benches
- Restrooms (including access in winter)
- Mile markers and signage to identify route mileage
- Wayfinding and interpretive signs
- Rules and regulations for biking and dog etiquette.
- Native landscaping
- Bike maintenance station
- Safety for people and animals



## Related Themes

Attendees were asked to summarize their priorities for UPD's future based on what they heard during the discussion. The themes below are summaries of the participant's overarching goals and the most common topics of conversation that resonated with attendees in all focus groups. Specific objectives related to the research questions were highlighted previously throughout the document.

### “Accessibility is Connectivity is Welcoming:”

For the focus group participants, accessibility and connectivity began with active transportation and universal infrastructure, but were also used as terms to apply to every area of life. This included low cost and no cost programs and services, variety of offerings, hours of operation, universal access (i.e. baby changing stations in men's restrooms), and diversity in music, art, culture, and nature.

There was significant confusion about how to reach UPD's amenities and programs by MTD bus routes. One attendee did not have a car and could not figure out how to get to outlying parks and facilities by bus. Another attendee used a bus route to visit Meadowbrook Park, but believed that route stopped on the weekends, the most important time for them to go there. Others mentioned the possibility of a wrapped bus or colored route that would stand out as the bus that stops at UPD locations.

*“That's a great idea if you think about it, to get people to know more of the parks.”*

*Do a dedicated bus where they're going to stop at all the different parks, and they're going to do an activity. Almost like a progressive dinner, but a progressive park day. A passport thing.”*

### The Renovation of Crystal Lake Park:

*“Crystal Lake Park is my priority.... If you got that as nice as Meadowbrook I think that would really bless the north side of town.”*

Attendees were filled with excitement about Crystal Lake Park. They looked at Crystal Lake as a park that is full of potential, including many who fondly remember Crystal Lake Park from decades ago. Many participants specifically came to the focus groups to learn more about the progress with the Crystal Lake Park renovation.

*“I looked at the Crystal Lake plans, and it looks really awesome.”*

*“The reason why I bought the house was because I wanted to use the lake.”*

*“We love Crystal Lake and the aquatic center.”*

*“This is a beautiful piece of my neighborhood. I meet my neighbors here.”*

For many, when they first arrived in Urbana, it was hard to imagine the grand prairie that used to exist in Illinois, it was challenging to find scenic beauty, and it was difficult to connect with others. Coming to a new town

meant loneliness that reflected the emptiness of the surrounding landscape. It came as a beautiful surprise to find unknown beauty in a local park like Meadowbrook or a place for their child on an athletic team. Besides just the prairie, participants also appreciated UPD for the sculptures, deer, jazz and other music in the parks, pools with slides, soccer, and dance. UPD parks and programs became a place that helped the participants in their search to find new identity, new community, a new sense of place, and movement from restlessness to rest, from overstimulation to reflection, and from isolation to growth.

### Weaver Park / Scottswood Neighborhood, Children, Graduate Students, and Older Adults

Focus group participants perceived that the surrounding neighborhoods of Weaver Park

(Scottswood in particular) exhibited the most barriers to individual health and wellness. Each focus group mentioned this park as a possible focal point for future development to serve the surrounding neighborhoods, and a number of focus groups would like Weaver Park to be the location for a new health and wellness center.

Additionally, attendees were also most concerned about school-aged children and older adults as segments of the population who need the most attention and

guidance to be healthy and well. Graduate student and young professional focus group participants often described themselves as a forgotten or in-between group who had limited time, resources, and access to the opportunities that would help them achieve their health and wellness goals.

*“And being black in Urbana is just a kind of a different experience.”*

African American attendees are highlighted specifically in this section to warrant future confirmation and consideration of the noticeably divergent themes shared by this demographic within the focus groups. A majority of the African American participants were women. Their values, beliefs, and priorities for UPD fit within the needs and desires expressed by the other attendees. However, their perceptions and experiences were also

“  
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”

different than the rest of the attendees. The Campfire Concepts research team will not choose to draw conclusions from these limited interactions, but rather let their own

words portray the potential differences related to safety, equity, wildlife, and access. UPD's growing outreach efforts will continue to seek to better understand how to overcome barriers and constraints.

*"And I like Meadowbrook. I have never felt unsafe when I'm walking the path. I'm still alert, but I feel like I can have my ear buds up a little louder if I want to and not really be freaked out all the time."*

*"[It's important for me] ...to feel safe in my community, and that I can access the parks and not feel intimidated or afraid."*

*"I think socioeconomic status is a big strain and the safety issues. How safe is it to go outside your house after dark or even in the daylight to access parks and places?"*

*"[Referring to parks] Are they maintained equally?"*

*"The animals. I have definitely tried, but I was like, no, thank you. You didn't know coming around the corner what was going to happen. I was usually alone, so I didn't feel safe with wildlife."*

*"I like Meadowbrook more mid-day and evening versus early morning. There's a little too much wildlife out there."*

*"Participant A: I mean the deer, they are bold at times because –*

*Participant B: Yeah.*

*Participant A: They sound terrifying."*

*"And so safety and access are an issue, when I see children in my neighborhood passing through, I think safety, their immediate physical safety in the park is a concern. They're often on their own, and so then I feel concerned about wait, how old, like how little are you? Are you supposed to be crossing the street by yourself?"*

*"Participant 1: "There is one section [Meadowbrook Park], right, that looks unsafe. Like in the back.*

*Participant 2: Yeah, the bunny sculpture –*

*Participant 3: By the rabbit.*

*Participant 1: Yeah.*

*Participant 3: It's really dark back there. Even in the day, it's weird.*

*Participant 2: Yeah, it's still kind of a sketchy spot.*

*"Participant A: That's the one downside – even Meadowbrook Park, the bathroom out there is just kind of... scary.*

*Participant B: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's really dark in there, to start. It's just really dark.*

*Participant C: Yeah, it's very dark in there. The lighting is always kind of flickering. You know, and I know people can't be out there cleaning up after everybody who throws a tissue on the ground, but there are some things maintenance wise – the water fountain is never working or stuff like that. One stall only being available at Blair Park forever. And again, being somebody who doesn't have a car, if*





*I'm going to go and use a park, now I definitely need to use the bathroom before I leave.*

*Participant D: Again, with the one at Meadowbrook Park, the door slams shut really hard.*

*Participant A: It slams, then the lights shake. And you're like, Yeah. It's kind of scary."*

African American participants were also concerned by the anti-homelessness measures enacted by MTD with their benches that prevented people from laying down on them. Given UPD's stated mission and goals for belongingness in the community, participants did not want to see the park district follow a similar path.

### **Play for Adults / Being Active with Children or while Children Play:**

When discussing a health and wellness center, the City Museum in St. Louis was frequently referenced as a model to review. Play, playgrounds, and adult playground features ("more [adult-sized] swings, taller slides") brightened faces and conversations around the table. Playfulness was seen as a component of individual health and wellness across the lifespan.

*"I don't know if anyone is familiar with the City Museum in St. Louis. They have this giant playground, but adults can go. And you can play with your kids, or with your nieces, or whatever. And it's just like together, which is another like form of community."*

*"the last time I walked in Crystal Lake Park I saw someone in scrubs, I assume she was a nurse. And she was on the swings, an adult, and I was like good for you. If you're decompressing or if you're just on your lunch break or whatever you're doing, you're taking care of yourself. And I was like, Oh can you leave? Cause now I want to be on the swings. And so having adult size swings, having the swings that are wheelchair accessible, having the merry-go-rounds....."*

*"what are we going to do with people over 45 in terms of play? You know? There is creative play in all of us. I'm really enjoying this part of the conversation."*

Participants also requested features and programs to engage adults with children. They expressed the desire to have programs that included parents and children as well as activities for the adults while their children play (i.e. walking paths around playgrounds, outdoor board games).

*"But there are all these playgrounds for kids, and then I see a lot of adults kind of sitting around. And there is not as much activity to do..... not forgetting that it's not just kids that need to run around and having more of a space for everybody to stay active."*



*“I don’t want to sit on my phone on a bench while they play.”*

*“I want to do the activities my kids do at summer camp. Can I go to camp with them?”*

*“Family yoga would be an enriching activity for us.”*

### Winter Activity is Limited:

Each focus group discussed the winter season in Urbana. It felt challenging for them to find things to do in order to be healthy. *“I think for health and wellness during the winter it feels difficult in Urbana-Champaign because my wife and I just feel like there is nowhere really to go to move around.”* It was understood that one constraint to recreation in the winter was the local weather. It felt too cold to go out to attend programs, but there wasn’t anything to draw them out of the house either, like an outdoor ice-skating rink. For those that used the winter months to train for the local April marathon events, it was challenging to find an “interesting” running route with available bathrooms. The attendees expressed the desire for additional options to get outside and to be active to combat seasonal impacts on their health and wellness. As previously noted, participants mentioned some activities they would like to see (e.g. ice skating), but they were open to other options the park district could provide.

Overall, UPD programs and events were seen as a good reason “to get out of the house,” no matter the season. The events, programs, and volunteer work were seen as vital ways for to get active and connect socially, especially for older adults.

### Uniquely Urbana:

There is a strong sense of place in Urbana and focus group participants expressed the desire to protect their unique culture. Parks and recreation are part of the fabric they want protected!

*“but I also want to highlight the fact that Urbana is special. There are some unique qualities, being born and raised here, I’m very grateful that I was born and raised here, so I would want whatever the park district does to reflect and honor the roots of Urbana and the crunchy granola-ish-ness of Urbana.”*

*“that’s where the community pride comes in, and that’s where I feel like we as a community are building these spaces together through consensus.”*

*“You Belong Here initiative I think is very welcoming, quite frankly, for Urbana Park District. I think it’s a really good idea. And so I think if you can kind of attach yourself to that and have a physical location, you know, where people belong that’s uniquely Urbana, suited to Urbana’s needs – maybe it is 24 hours a day? That might be a really interesting model.”*

Despite this strong sense of place and cultural identity, racial/ethnic minority participants were more apt to point out the inequity in maintenance or park infrastructure in their communities. This was more apparent for participants who had moved away to neighboring communities and had memory of enjoying UPD parks as children. How the park system has evolved looks different

to them over distance and time. Thus, participants felt UPD's strategic priorities to better serve diverse and multicultural populations should include representation of historic cultural needs, such as improvements in neighborhood park athletic fields and supervised, but unstructured sport opportunities.

***“We’ve got a lot of really nice parks and amenities and things already. It’s just letting people know that they’re there.”***

Participants identified the most effective marketing channels as the program guide, Facebook Events, Chambana Moms, Smile Politely, and word of mouth. They also expressed interest in upgrading the website and the development of an app to help them learn about programs as well as the best

“  
... I feel like we as a community are building these spaces together ...  
”

way to travel to specific parks. Many people pushed for UPD to send home more flyers through the schools about upcoming events, specifically highlighting scholarships. Some countered that this approach was less than ideal because many such flyers do not make it home. Additional alternatives were also suggested such as more electronic billboards in front of UPD facilities, like at Phillips, to help promote upcoming programs and events or an outlook/google calendar that integrates summer camp sign up deadlines, events, and other points of interest with their personal digital calendars.

Overall the sentiment seems to be: UPD has nice parks and programs, we want to know more about them!

*“Well I mean apps are great ways welcome people to Urbana. Here is the park district. Here is a map of where are you, what’s the closest park, what are the amenities? Are there fees? How do you get there?”*

*“A lot of the parks here I found by getting really desperate with two little kids, and*



**Urbana Park District**



*not knowing what to do. So lists like Chabanamoms were really helpful.”*

*“I kind of stopped using the park district website. So you should all try it and see, maybe they’ve changed it. But man, it was not intuitive about how to find a program.”*

*“Yeah, and I have heard parents who when that booklet comes, that summer booklet comes, that they just sit there and they look at it. And to them it’s just like a complete lifeline to be able to look in there.”*

*“I will say one social media thing that constantly gets me going places I would never even know about is Facebook events.”*

### Public Input is Valued:

At the end of the focus groups, focus group members were asked to take what they heard throughout the session and select a priority for UPD. The importance of public input was not discussed in the focus group, but it was identified as a top priority for a number of participants, especially those who were concerned about marginalized populations.

*“I think it’s already done [top priority achieved], just involving the community, giving the opportunity for any community member to come in here and say anything. Let’s redo these groups or get out to certain community members and ask these questions all over again and show them what we already have [learned].”*



## Positive Perception of UPD:

Participants were not asked questions related to their satisfaction with UPD, its staff, or its offerings. At the end of the focus group they were given the opportunity to share any additional thoughts, at which point each focus group chose to share positive remarks about the park district. *“I love the park district, I love the staff,”* was a common phrase heard at every session.

“  
I would like to thank the  
park district. I think they  
do a really good job.”

*“I would like to thank the park district. I think they do a really, really good job.”*

*“I get a lot for my tax dollar, a whole lot for my tax dollar.”*

*“The Park District listens as far as I can tell and I’m real happy about that.”*

## Other Observations & Ideas

### Greater than 10 years of Residency Equals Greater Knowledge of UPD:

At the beginning of the focus group, attendees were asked to share their UPD use patterns. Without hesitation, every participant also shared the number of years they had lived in Urbana or at their current residence. The moderator observed a noticeable increase in knowledge of UPD parks, programs, and service for those who had lived in Urbana (or the area) more than 10 years when compared with those who had not lived in the area that long. Those who lived in Urbana less than ten years would frequently stop conversation to say, “I’ve never heard of that, where is it?” or “I didn’t know they offered that program, I’m going to check it out.” In turn, positive experiences and interactions with staff, programs, and amenities fostered free publicity and promotion from those who had lived in town for a long period of time.

### Music and Art in Parks:

The Jazz walk, Neighborhood Nights, and other events were greatly appreciated. People liked the variety and seemed open to more such events. One crucial aspect in these events was that they were free and people could show up when they liked. Many people – especially those with young kids – mentioned the importance of flexibility with showing up or not, and not having to pay.



Additionally, several people mentioned how much they valued the musical instruments at AMBUCS Park. Kids and parents alike enjoyed this amenity.

### Variety of Desires:

Based upon Campfire Concept's previous focus group experience with other park district's in Illinois, it was not unexpected for attendees to have a broad variety of requests, competing ideals, and ideas that may not be immediately realized: "We want a Hessel Park in Urbana," or "Do the same thing to Weaver Park [as Crystal Lake Park]," or we'd like solitude and community. Requests for warmer water temperatures at the Indoor Aquatic Center were in direct competition with the school district's needs (UPD's facility partner). This perceived unmet need appeared to fuel desires for a warm water therapy pool, hot tub, and expanded indoor swimming/water activities.

### What Goes Around Comes Around:

The parks, facilities and trails were seen as assets for the community and attendees frequently discussed ways to enhance these amenities, how to increase user benefits, and how to get more people to take advantage of these resources. These discussions led to conversations related to trending recreation programs and amenities that have been available in the past. The participants showed interest in supervised play/sport at the parks (e.g. playground monitors), sports sampling programs at the facilities, and outdoor fitness equipment/stations on trails. Some of the participant's supported focused investments

in "people-ware" over infrastructure. This included selecting staff from "visible" and trusted members of each neighborhood to work in the supervised settings of their immediate parks and facilities. Engaging in such hiring would not only provide the neighborhood with a trusted contact at UPD, it would also enhance employment opportunities for groups of people who have traditionally been underrepresented at UPD.

*"I think programming in the park would really help. We have kids at King, at Victory, and all in the southeast Urbana parks who aren't in a kind of a family who can sign them up for Tuesday and drive them to a program. But who would really benefit from programming, so if they knew that every Tuesday morning somebody was going to come with tennis rackets, and balls, and jump ropes. And you know, maybe paint up, tic-tac-toe, I mean hopscotch on the sidewalk, and help them learn to play games. And including teenagers, I think that would be a big help."*

### Wi-Fi in Parks:

Parks or areas of parks that are clearly marked as locations to find Wi-Fi (both online as well as at the physical site) was of interest to individuals who could "work from home" or graduate students who were looking for an outdoor location to work. Others thought free Wi-Fi might be another draw to get teens in parks. Participants were sensitive to the debate about using technology to get teens into UPD parks; but many pointed out that teens would use their technology anyway so it might not be a bad tool for UPD to draw in more young people.

## Residents of Both Urbana and Champaign Over Time:

It was interesting to note that a number of the focus group attendees had lived in both Urbana and Champaign over the course of their lives. This broadens the impact and imprint of the UPD when considering it could be possible for a current Champaign resident to relocate to Urbana or vice versa.

*“11th year now. Mostly in Urbana, a couple years in Champaign, and currently in Urbana I lived in Champaign for two of those years, but other than that I’ve been in Urbana the whole time.”*

*“I’m originally from Urbana. Then I’ve lived in various places but came back and lived in Champaign for a very long time, until last year.”*

## When Living Arrangements Limit Space and Access, UPD’s Services are Even More Vital:

Attendees reflected on the small apartments and hotel rooms that they called home when they first arrived in Urbana. All of these participants mentioned how important it was for them and their families to have UPD’s programs, parks, and events to have affordable recreation programs, sport teams, free events, and open space. Therefore, parks and recreation were seen as lifelines for new residents. Awareness, affordability, and access were especially critical for individuals with limited resources.

*“Yeah, so I have been to a lot, probably most of the parks in Urbana. I like parks. Especially since most of the time my wife and I have lived in an apartment. So we don’t really have a lawn or green space or that sort of thing. So that I would say is one of the major reasons we use parks.”*

## Reflexology Path:

A reflexology path is a walkway full of materials consisting of different shapes and sizes to stimulate and connect individuals to their senses and different energy zones when walking barefoot over the path.

*“I would love for somewhere for there to be a reflexology path to do some extra grounding work. Where people could just step on the stone and kind of reorient their body and their energy too.”*



## Outdoor Exercise Equipment and Kinetic Art:

Outdoor fitness equipment, especially along trails and to provide activity for adults who are supervising children at a playground were seen as valuable enhancements and were mentioned in every focus group.

One participant shared a creative idea to combine the other attendees' ideas about outdoor fitness equipment with UPD's historic use of sculpture in parks.

*"I think they [outdoor fitness equipment] should be kinetic art that people interact with to exercise. Because actually I don't know the research related to how frequently those are used, people who are in the parks departments would know. When they get installed do they really get used? But I think if they were some combination of kinetic art that's also exercise that would be amazing."*

## Indoor Spaces are Thoughtfully Designed:

Three of the focus groups were held at the newly remodeled "kitchen" at the Phillips Recreation Center. The remodel was well received. Additionally, praise was given to the teaching kitchen remodel at the other focus groups held at the planning and operations building. Many participants found UPD's indoor spaces to be thoughtfully designed. One attendee self-identified as a person with autism and they mentioned how the space felt calming and welcoming to them and

that they had the ability to share and process without visual distractions. Participants also appreciated how indoor spaces were designed as multi-use to diversify programs and expand services.

## Food and Coffee in or near the Parks:

Food and coffee were seen as a way to enhance and extend one's visit to a park or facility and as natural community builders. Participants loved the opportunity to purchase food at UPD events, but also wondered if there were possibilities for more on-demand locations throughout the district.

## Splash Pad:

Splash pads were mentioned a number of times as an amenity for UPD to consider in the future. Hessel and Douglass Parks were suggested as examples of water features they would prefer.

*"Yeah, a splash pad would be great, and things that are sensory."*

*"I don't think you can get any better bang for your buck than splash pads. I mean I would put some way to get wet, and then find shade at every park."*

*"you know, the parks that are putting in the little water play areas. Those are nice."*

## Non-traditional Family Events:

One group discussed the desire to have summer camps for families to enjoy together. Another group desired for UPD to help

### CITATIONS:

"Urban Nature For Human Health & Well-Being." *USDA Forest Service*, 5 May 2019, [www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/fs\\_media/fs\\_document/urbannatureforhumanhealthandwellbeing\\_508\\_01\\_30\\_18.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/sites/default/files/fs_media/fs_document/urbannatureforhumanhealthandwellbeing_508_01_30_18.pdf).



connect or to provide a safe space for blended or dysfunctional families through recreational programming.

“And also, how about dysfunctional family events? A lot of people may see themselves in tough situation. Isn't there any expertise in that level? My cousin told me there was one summer during his parent's divorce that the public pool saved them; that they didn't need a parent. Or what about events that allow for kids to be in the same space as parents who don't get along?”

### **Outdoor, On-demand Programs in the Park and/or Fitness and Wellness Center:**

One participant was inspired by their family's recent visit to Millennium Park in Chicago. They admired and enjoyed the Crown Fountains, which combined sculpture, digital art, and water. It made them think about utilizing an outside wall of the health and wellness center or a wall in a local park to show digital projections of group fitness classes such as yoga. This could be an interesting possibility to offer a number of free programs and classes (art, education, exercise, movies, etc.) at different times of the day or in an on-demand capacity.

### **On-location Mental Health Care Professionals:**

A number of the focus groups came to the conclusion that partnerships would be important for the development of a health and wellness facility, especially partnerships with health care providers. When considering the overall health of an individual, attendees came to the conclusion that mental health care professionals should be included in the new development.





# Appendix A: Consent Form & Questions

4

Consent forms were created to ensure the research team made every effort to protect the anonymity of participants and for the participants to agree or disagree with allowing the discussions to be recorded for future analysis. One participant did not sign the consent form and the information they shared was subsequently redacted from the focus group transcription and analysis.

## Consent Form

### *Purpose of participation*

You are a local resident of the Urbana Park District or have access to the Urbana Park District's amenities, offerings, and services. Your opinion matters to the Park District. The Urbana Park District board of commissioners and staff would like to know how they can best meet your needs.

Participation in this focus group is of your own free-will and volition. Your participation will not positively or negatively affect your relationships and standing with the Urbana Park District. You are free to leave a focus group or decline to answer any questions at any time. The research firm reserves the right to ask anyone to leave a focus group if it is within the best interests of the study.

Six total focus groups will be organized and roughly sixty participants will be asked similar questions.

### *Purpose of this study.*

The purpose of the focus groups is to explore the needs, motivations, and constraints of the Urbana Park District residents and users. The results will inform a strategic plan that will set a course of action for the Park District.

### *Study methods and procedures.*

Participants will be asked to join one of six focus groups. The dates, times, and locations of the focus groups will be predetermined by the Urbana Park District. The focus groups will be audio-recorded and will last between one and two hours. Audio-recording is mandatory.

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. However, a risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to see this information).

This study is designed to learn more about the needs of the Urbana Park District residents and users. The study results will be reported to the Urbana Park District, who may use the information to serve you and/or other residents or users in the future.

*Study confidentiality*

Staff who may see your information will maintain confidentiality to the extent of laws. Personal identifiers will not be published or presented. Information related to specific Urbana Park District elected officials, staff, or volunteers will not be publicly shared.

*Study incentives*

\$20 gift card to Meijer.

*Study agreement*

I have read and agree to the Urbana Park District strategic plan focus group consent form. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and have my responses audio-recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

## UPD Focus Group Protocol & Questions

### I. Housekeeping

- i. Thank everyone for coming. Distribute confidentiality agreement. Share incentives, offer beverages, and snacks.
- ii. Introduce Jarrod Scheunemann and Campfire Concepts.
- iii. Explain the purpose of the focus groups. Stress that everyone’s opinions are important, and we want to hear each person’s thoughts about each topic.
- iv. Participant introductions:

*Will each of you take about 2 minutes to introduce yourself to the group? Please tell us how you use the Urbana Park District parks, programs, events, and activities.*

*Follow up: If not, why? What would encourage you to participate?*



## II. Questions

*\*\*\* From now on, please feel free to jump in and share your opinion at any time \*\*\**

1. What does health and wellness mean to you? (Probe on UPD pillars if connections are possible)
  - a. According to your definition, are your needs currently being met?
    - i. If not, what keeps you from being healthier?
    - ii. Are there other populations (SES, age, individuals with disabilities, etc.) in the community who experience constraints to being healthy?
2. How does the Urbana Park District currently serve your health and wellness needs?
  - a. What are ways the Urbana Park District can better serve your health and wellness needs?
  - b. You referenced xyz people group who face xyz health and wellness constraints. How can the Urbana Park District play a role in alleviating these constraints?
3. Imagine there was a health and wellness center that served the needs of you and your household:
  - a. What programs, activities, and components (ie. indoor walking track, gyms, group fitness, multi-generation, kitchen, cardio, weights) would you prioritize?
  - b. Where would a health and wellness facility ideally be located? How can UPD make this center safe and accessible for all?
  - c. If you could envision a health and wellness center where you and your household felt welcome, what “welcoming” aspects would be the most important?
    - i. Urbana is unique and special in many ways. What characteristics of a health and wellness facility would fit within the character and identity of your community?
4. When surveyed about park and recreation needs, local and national responses prioritize trails.
  - a. What are the trail needs and desires of you and your household?



- i. Use: Biking? Skating? Hiking? Walking? Running? Wild-life observation? Destination? Accessibility?
- ii. Type: Looping? Connected? Regional system? Protected? On-street?
- iii. Surface: dirt, gravel, paved?
- iv. Amenities: Rest rooms?
- v. Safety: Are local trails safe? What makes you feel safe on a trail or within a park?

5. Based on what we have discussed today, what is one thing you believe UPD should prioritize spending on?

6. Other thoughts you would like to share about the Urbana Park District or your park and recreation needs?

Thank you very much for sharing your time and opinions! We estimate the study will be completed by the end of June of 2019. We'd like to share the results with you by email. Please confirm with the moderator that you would like to review the results.







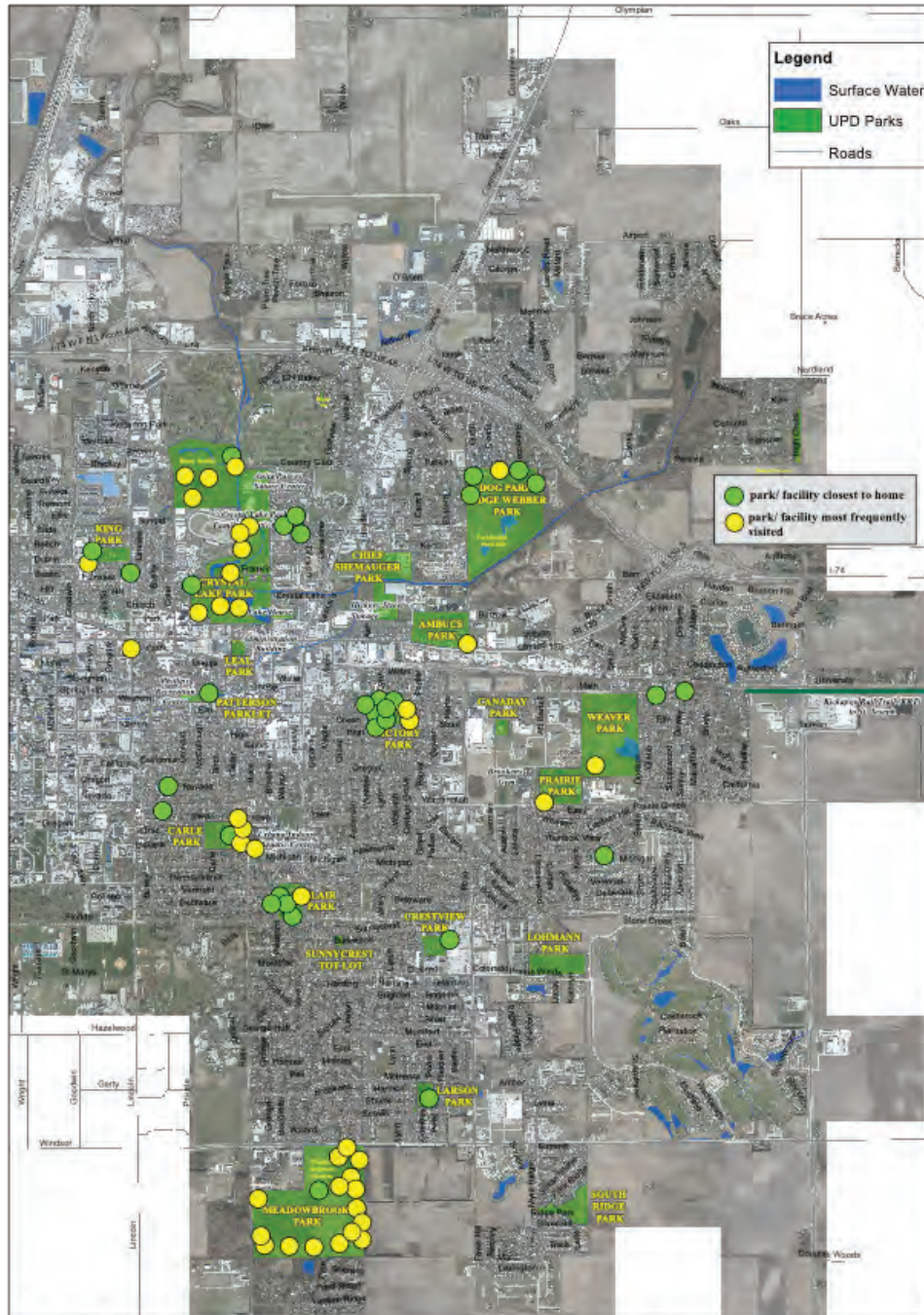
# Appendix B: Map of Participant Use Patterns

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Focus group participants were asked to identify the location of the UPD park or facility that is closest to their home (green dots) and they were also asked to identify the UPD park or facility that they most frequently use (yellow dots). The moderator forgot to request the participation of one focus group, therefore, the results represent 5 out of 6 focus groups or 38 individual responses.



### Parks and Facilities for Strategic Plan Focus Groups



Date: 4/23/19  
Source: CCRPC, UPD, CCC  
Author: KAD



**Urbana Park District**  
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