

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The public participation program was a critical element of the master planning process. The goal: to involve as many Columbus residents as possible. Input from the public participation program was cross-checked with recreation and park industry standards to form the foundation for plan recommendations.

The public participation program encompassed four levels of input:

- Level 1: **Stakeholders group** (input was focused, specific, and targeted);
- Level 2: **Focus groups**;
- Level 3: **Public input meetings**; and
- Level 4: A statistically valid **household survey** and a **customer satisfaction survey**, which canvassed the entire city (input provided the broadest possible coverage).

The public participation process involved the following six steps:

- Step 1: Establishing an **Advisory Group** representing Planning Areas in Columbus;
- Step 2: Hosting two rounds of **public input meetings**;
- Step 3: Conducting interviews with **focus groups**;
- Step 4: Conducting interviews with **stakeholders**;
- Step 5: Collecting data from a survey of Columbus **households**; and
- Step 6: Collecting data from a **customer satisfaction** survey.

Each level of input builds on the others. The findings provide insight into the public's perception of the existing system and needs, which lead to recommendations (outlined in Chapter 5). Responses at all levels reveal that the **community is willing to support quality recreation** through user fees and a dedicated funding source.

This master plan also incorporates public input gathered by the City of Columbus Planning Division, which prepared a number of **Area Plans** to address growth and other development issues unique to particular areas. These Area Plans also addressed recreation and parks issues and provided recommendations for parks and open space. See Section 1 of the **Appendix** for a summary of parks recommendations in Area Plans.

Information in this chapter is a **summary of data gathered** from Advisory Group meetings, public input meetings, interviews, and surveys. (For supporting data, see the **Needs Assessment Appendix** in a separate document).

ADVISORY GROUP

A citywide **Advisory Group**—established at the beginning of the planning process—served as a conduit for information to Columbus residents. All 31 Advisory Group members were invited to participate in the planning process and provide guidance on plan preparation. This group represented the **13 Area Commissions** (liaisons between neighborhood groups, property owners, residents, developers, and city officials) and **major civic associations** in Columbus and Franklin County.

The Advisory Group, which met monthly with CRPD staff to remain up-to-date on the planning process, also gathered for a **half-day workshop** to discuss planning issues and make recommendations for consideration.

Needs Related to the PDO

A high-priority item for the Advisory Group was **modification of the Parkland Dedication Ordinance** (PDO). According to the Advisory Group, the following are important points related to the PDO:

- The group wants to see **land donations deeded** when City Council hears the rezoning case; this is similar to street right-of-way requirements. The giving of land should be a "requirement," not a "donation." This will allow open space to be protected.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- CRPD needs to set aside **funds to perform current appraisals** as required in the PDO. Funds collected as required by the PDO could be placed into a separate trust account, which would allow the CRPD to use the interest earned to perform the appraisals. Another option: CRPD could establish a yearly blanket account for appraisals.
- Changes to the PDO language should include specific wording to correct and better define **zoning categories that allow residential uses**. PDO language should also be reworded to close the loophole of allowing residential zoning to be approved under Council variances without PDO calculations for parkland.
- **Accounting** should be conducted annually and a **performance report** should be prepared on the PDO. This performance report should be made public, or at a minimum, each Area Commission or civic association affected should be notified about the physical and financial resources currently available in their area for parks. (The timing of this information release should not coincide with budget reviews.)
- Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND) zoning should follow departmental policies and be exercised fairly. Too many **small “parks” will drain maintenance resources** and negatively affect the entire system while providing no real recreational benefit.
- The PDO is intended to provide neighborhood parkland and open space in growing areas. However, the city uses the **ordinance as the only means** to work with developers to protect environmentally sensitive areas.
- **Detention ponds** should be limited to 25 percent of the entire area donated to the city. This should be a written requirement of the Stormwater Management Section of the Division of Sewerage and Drainage.

Advisory Group Workshop

The half-day workshop with the Advisory Group was conducted on March 28, 2001.

The purpose was to present background information on the CRPD and citywide demographics. The workshop included presentations on the public input meetings, and on results from stakeholder and focus group meetings and the household survey. The Advisory Group participated in a brief focus group exercise that generated immediate results for discussion among meeting attendees.

A predetermined methodology was used to collect and analyze data for the public participation program. It was noted, for example, that the central portion of the metro area is very densely developed and its demographics differ from the outlying areas of the city. Thus, it was decided to base data gathering and analysis on several geographic sectors representing the **different development densities and demographic makeups in the greater Columbus area**. As a result, the 30 Planning Areas were consolidated into five geographically oriented **Planning Sectors** for data-gathering and analysis purposes. These **five Planning Sectors** include:

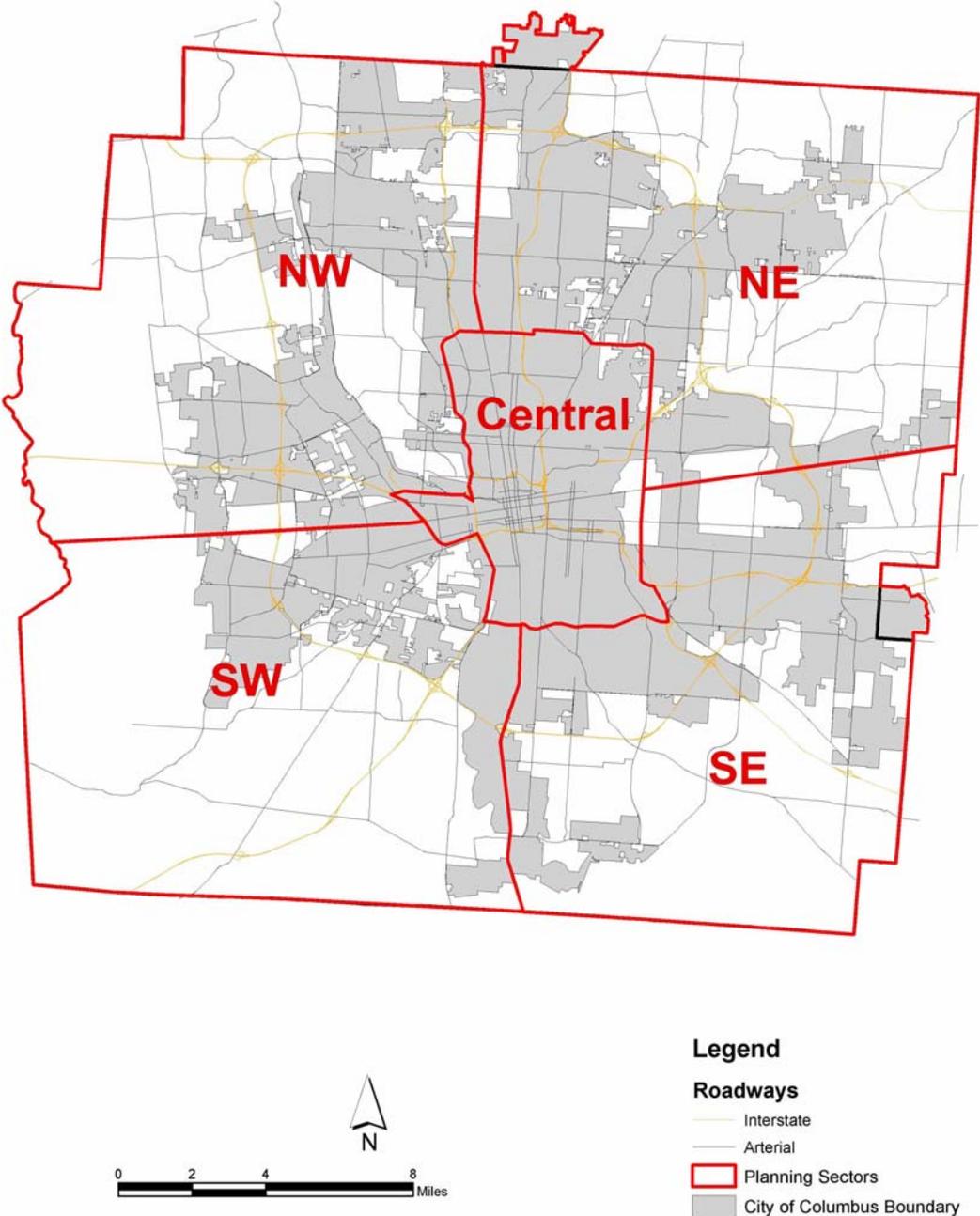
- Northwest Planning Sector;
- Northeast Planning Sector;
- Southwest Planning Sector;
- Southeast Planning Sector; and
- Central Planning Sector.

See **Figure 4-1** for a map outlining Planning Sector boundaries.

To mirror the realities of the city's development factors and demographics, and the breakdowns used to analyze household survey data, the Advisory Group was divided into five groups, based on Planning Sectors, to **discuss ideas and recommendations**. An **overview** of each Planning Sector, along with ideas and recommendations, follow.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Figure 4-1
5 Planning Sectors in Columbus



CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Northwest Planning Sector

Overview

Demographics:

- 2000 population: 260,289
- Projected 2010 population: 288,817

CRPD Neighborhood Parks:

- Size: 170 acres total
- Smallest park: 2 acres (Brookside Woods Park)
- Largest park: 27 acres (Kenney Park)

CRPD Community Parks:

- Size: 343 acres total
- Smallest park: 13 acres (Carriage Park)
- Largest park: 136 acres (Whetstone Park)

CRPD Recreation Centers:

- Carriage Place Recreation Center
- Holton Recreation Center
- Whetstone Recreation Center

Northwest Planning Sector	Inside I-270	Outside I-270
Area	57 square miles	80 square miles
Number of CRPD Neighborhood Parks	12	4
Total Acres: CRPD Neighborhood Parks	142 acres	74 acres
Number of CRPD Community Parks	3	1
Total Acres: CRPD Community Parks	268 acres	74 acres
Number of CRPD Recreation Centers	3	0
Number of Neighborhood Parks (Other Service Providers)	14	25
Number of Community Parks (Other Service Providers)	8	6

Regional Parks:

- Griggs Reservoir

Ideas and Recommendations for the Northwest Planning Sector

- The area is not meeting the **PDO** (5.5 acres/1,000 persons).
- Only three **recreation centers** exist here.

- Areas that need **recreation center services** should be identified.
- Areas for **neighborhood parks** should be identified.
- The use and comfort of rentable space in the **shelter house** should be expanded (Antrim Park).
- Only one **athletic complex** exists (McDonald Sports Complex in Anheuser-Busch Sports Park).
- There are no **swimming pools**.
- The **trail** along the Scioto River, and feeder paths connecting this trail to the neighborhoods, should be developed.
- **Neighborhood schools** that would partner with CRPD should be identified.
- An **education program** for Hayden Park should be developed. Hayden Park has one endangered species and one rare species and includes a 35-foot waterfall.
- **Green space/trees** in the corridor between the Scioto River and High Street are lacking.
- Areas of **natural resources** should be identified as priority areas for future parks.
- To create more green space, **park planning** is needed.
- **Lighting** in parks and along trails for safety and security should be discussed.
- **Sidewalks** and **signage** are needed in parks.
- **Fences** should be used as a security measure.
- Parks and facilities should be designed for ease of **observation** by park staff.
- **Public relations** is badly needed.
- The CRPD should find ways to share costs and initiate cooperative efforts between **school districts** and the CRPD.
- In growing areas, **land acquisition** for parkland should be aggressive.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Northeast Planning Sector

Overview

Demographics:

- 2000 population: 248,885
- Projected 2010 population: 275,319

CRPD Neighborhood Parks:

- Size: 208 acres total
- Smallest park: 1 acre (Sancus Park)
- Largest park: 43 acres (Parkridge Park)

CRPD Community Parks:

- Size: 211 acres total
- Smallest park: 29 acres (Krumm Park)
- Largest park: 97 acres (Innis Park)

CRPD Recreation Centers:

- Fedderson Recreation Center
- Krumm Recreation Center
- Woodward Recreation Center

Northeast Planning Sector	Inside I-270	Outside I-270
Area	43 square miles	83 square miles
Number of CRPD Neighborhood Parks	14	4
Total Acres: CRPD Neighborhood Parks	156 acres	52 acres
Number of CRPD Community Parks	4	0
Total Acres: CRPD Community Parks	211 acres	0 acres
Number of CRPD Recreation Centers	3	0
Number of Neighborhood Parks (Other Service Providers)	7	29
Number of Community Parks (Other Service Providers)	3	16

Regional Parks:

- Hoover Reservoir

Ideas and Recommendations for the Northeast Planning Sector

- **Park planning** should be used in the revitalization of the Northland area.
- The **interaction** between city and suburban communities (Westerville, Gahanna, and Worthington) needs to improve.
- The three waterway corridors should be used to develop **trails** and **open space**.
- **Open space** should be preserved in recognized recreation areas: Hoover Reservoir and Big Walnut Creek.
- A continuous **trail** and an **open-space system** should be developed in the Alum Creek corridor; the parks should be connected.
- A **trail** and an **open-space system** should be developed in Blacklick Creek; the parks should be connected.
- There are no recreational services provided on **Big Walnut corridor** north of Broad Street.
- “Buy **parkland** now!”

■ Southwest Planning Sector

Overview

Demographics:

- 2000 population: 155,326
- Projected 2010 population: 180,531

CRPD Neighborhood Parks:

- Size: 123 acres total
- Smallest park: 1 acre (Wrexham Addition)
- Largest park: 23 acres (Stoneridge Park)

CRPD Community Parks:

- Size: 62 acres total
- Smallest park: 16 acres (Glenwood Park)
- Largest park: 46 acres (Westgate Park)

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

CRPD Recreation Centers:

- Glenwood Recreation Center
- Sullivant Gardens Recreation Center
- Westgate Park and Recreation Center

Southwest Planning Sector	Inside I-270	Outside I-270
Area	23 square miles	104 square miles
Number of CRPD Neighborhood Parks	11	3
Total Acres: CRPD Neighborhood Parks	96 acres	27 acres
Number of CRPD Community Parks	2	0
Total Acres: CRPD Community Parks	62 acres	0 acres
Number of CRPD Recreation Centers	3	0
Number of Neighborhood Parks (Other Service Providers)	0	5
Number of Community Parks (Other Service Providers)	0	3

Ideas and Recommendations for the Southwest Planning Sector

- Daily **facilities maintenance** should be increased.
- There is a need to meet the goal of a **neighborhood park** within one-half mile of every resident.
- There should not be acreage without **maintenance coverage**.
- **Maintenance standards** should be developed.
- There are not enough **active recreation programs** for adults and youths.
- Currently the area has approximately 45 additional acres of undeveloped land. It is important to **work with other entities** such as Columbus Public Schools, YMCAs, suburban communities, and other schools for providing **open space** (e.g., playgrounds) and programming (e.g., gymnasiums).
- The city and the Columbus Board of Education need an umbrella agreement to help **eliminate red tape** every time a joint project is proposed.
- The area lacks programs for **youth baseball and soccer**. Wilson Road

parkland should be developed as an athletic facility for youths.

- Another **recreation center** is needed; currently, the farthest southwest is Westgate. What kind of center should it be? Traditional? Or one that attempts to meet future needs (e.g., a regional center)? Should a center be built or should space be leased? (The population is growing now, but the population will age and possibly move on, so is building a better option?) This project could be similar to the Gillie Center—a highly successful conversion of an existing commercial building into a recreation center—which was a revolutionary project for the CRPD.
- The Internet should be used to improve administrative operations; **online registrations** for CRPD programs should be accepted. (Registration plans should be reviewed continuously so improvements can be made routinely to ensure a smooth process.)
- There is an **insufficient number of staff** for programs.
- CRPD should have more **self-sustaining programs** to pay for staff such as contractors. Taxes should be increased; another permanent revenue source such as a tax levy would pay for additional staff and programming. CRPD may need to set a threshold (i.e., at what point can the city do no more?).
- Connecting parks and neighborhoods through a **trail system** should be considered as this area continues to grow and before additional land is developed or purchased.
- CRPD needs to determine if there are **aquatic needs** in this area, and how it might deliver aquatic services throughout the city.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Southeast Planning Sector

Overview

Demographics:

- 2000 population: 191,232
- Projected 2010 population: 221,484

CRPD Neighborhood Parks:

- Size: 208 acres total
- Smallest park: 2 acres (Canini Park)
- Largest park: 45 acres (Portman Park)

CRPD Community Parks:

- Size: 195 acres total
- Smallest park: 1 acre (Liv-Moor Park)
- Largest park: 143 acres (Big Walnut Park)

CRPD Recreation Centers:

- Barnett Recreation Center
- Far East Recreation Center
- Indian Mound Recreation Center
- Marion-Franklin Community Center

Southeast Planning Sector	Inside I-270	Outside I-270
Area	32 square miles	86 square miles
Number of CRPD Neighborhood Parks	10	6
Total Acres: CRPD Neighborhood Parks	68 acres	140 acres
Number of CRPD Community Parks	5	0
Total Acres: CRPD Community Parks	195 acres	0 acres
Number of CRPD Recreation Centers	4	0
Number of Neighborhood Parks (Other Service Providers)	3	5
Number of Community Parks (Other Service Providers)	1	4

Regional Parks:

- Three Creeks

Ideas and Recommendations for the Southeast Planning Sector

- **Public safety** in parks should be increased.
- In response to problem behavior in Big Walnut Park, a **police substation** (similar to that in Big Run Park) should be built.

- The partnership agreement with Metro Parks should include **ranger patrol** for Three Creeks Park.
- More partnerships with **schools** are needed.
- CRPD should coordinate with all seven **school districts** in the southeast area.
- CRPD should initiate **summer programs**—especially where no recreation centers exist.
- There should be **environmental education** during the school year.
- New **school buildings** should be planned with a partnership in mind.
- **Paths** should be planned between existing schools and parks.
- **Access** to recreation centers and parks should be improved.
- The development of **walking/bike/trail** paths should continue.
- CRPD should capitalize on its existing partnership with **COTA**.
- The minimum level of **standards for each facility** should include sidewalks, curbs, streetlights, and ADA ramps.
- The possibility of sharing right-of-way with **S.R. 33 for pedestrian access** should be explored.
- **Waterways** should be developed to serve as connectors between parks.
- **Active and passive** recreation opportunities should be increased.
- **Richardson Road Park** should be developed.
- **Additional recreation centers** should be built in the far southeast area.
- CRPD should investigate the use of **Rickenbacker Air Base** facilities.
- A partnership should be developed with the **Ohio Air National Guard**.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Central Planning Sector

Overview

Demographics:

- 2000 population: 202,442
- Projected 2010 population: 204,333

CRPD Neighborhood Parks:

- Size: 156 acres total
- Smallest parks: 0.2 acre (Douglas Playground) and 0.2 acre (Frank Fetch Park)
- Largest park: 32 acres (Nelson Park)

CRPD Community Parks:

- Size: 482 acres total
- Smallest park: 1 acre (Milo-Grogan Park)
- Largest park: 102 acres (Mock Road Park)

CRPD Recreation Centers:

- Barack Recreation Center
- Beatty Recreation Center
- Blackburn Recreation Center
- Brentnell Recreation Center
- Brittany Hills Recreation Center
- Dodge Recreation Center
- Douglas Recreation Center
- Driving Park and Recreation Center
- Milo-Grogan Recreation Center
- North East Recreation Center
- Sawyer Recreation Center
- Schiller Recreation Center
- Thompson Recreation Center
- Tuttle Recreation Center

Central Planning Sector	Inside I-270	Outside I-270
Area	40 square miles	0 square miles
Number of CRPD Neighborhood Parks	39	0
Total Acres: CRPD Neighborhood Parks	156 acres	0 acres
Number of CRPD Community Parks	18	0
Total Acres: CRPD Community Parks	482 acres	0 acres
Number of CRPD Recreation Centers	14	0
Number of Neighborhood Parks (Other Service Providers)	1	0
Number of Community Parks (Other Service Providers)	1	0

Ideas and Recommendations for the Central Planning Sector

- All recreation centers should have access to **sidewalks** and **public transportation**. Solution: Recreation centers without sidewalks should be identified. Solving this problem should be a priority.
- There is a **lack of green space** in this sector. Metro Parks should be asked to take a more active role in **land acquisition**. There should be more **partnerships** for greenway and trail development in central Ohio. **Brownfield sites** downtown should be considered for rehabilitation. There should be green space either instead of, or in conjunction with, commercial development. The use of **Clean Ohio Fund** money should be promoted. People should be made aware of **economic impacts** tied to residential development.
- A plan should be developed for the rehabilitation of **older facilities** in the Central Planning Sector. A dedicated **funding source** is needed to respond cyclically. An **endowment** should be started.
- A **consistent standard** should be developed for programs, facilities, and fees.
- **More staff** members are needed for programs.
- Additional parkland being acquired via the PDO is not receiving **maintenance funding** as promised by City Council.
- **Green space** should be increased around recreation centers; Blackburn should be used as a model.
- **Partnerships** with businesses, especially those downtown, should be formed to develop more green space. Rivers should be used more; e.g., walkways and paths are needed along rivers. More fishing, boating, and regattas should be added.
- The **river** should be used as an educational component.
- **Business support** should be developed for maintaining recreation centers and other properties (e.g., Topiary Park). Enlightened corporate leadership is needed.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- There is a **lack of playing fields** in the Central Planning Sector. Vacant lots can be developed. More community involvement is needed.
- **Smaller park parcels** might best be maintained by neighborhoods.
- There should be a study to determine what current properties can be **expanded**.
- Current partnerships should be **marketed** to build greater corporate involvement. Note: Two recent local newspaper articles about parks did not mention CRPD. Thus, the department's **image** needs to be improved.
- Current staff responsibilities should be reevaluated to refocus, if possible, on building partnerships with **corporations, non-profits, and civic groups**.

Advisory Group Responses to the Short Survey

During the half-day workshop, the Advisory Group also participated in a **short survey** that included several questions from the household survey. The purpose of the questions was to identify preferences for developing new facilities and services. The Advisory Group used the following list to **select the most important parks or facilities for development**:

- A. Multipurpose youth sports complex (soccer, baseball, etc.)
- B. Outdoor pools with special recreation features (e.g., water slides, walk-in entry to water, spray fountains, etc.)
- C. Indoor ice-skating rink
- D. Multipurpose trails (for biking, skating, jogging, and walking)
- E. Small parks in neighborhoods for general park use
- F. Large indoor community centers with special features (e.g., walking tracks, indoor pools, gymnasiums, an aerobics area, etc.)
- G. Extreme sports park (BMX bicycle course, inline skating)

- H. Teen center
- I. Acquire land for open space
- J. Environmental education center (for nature or interpretive programs)
- K. Develop a large community park with passive facilities such as trails, picnic areas, shelter houses, etc.

Highest ranked—When ranking all these facilities by priority, the group ranked **multipurpose trails** and **acquiring land for open space** the highest, followed by **small parks in neighborhoods** and **large indoor community centers** and **large community parks** (equal).

Lowest ranked—An indoor ice-skating rink and an extreme sports park were ranked lowest.

The **three most important** parks and facilities chosen by the group were the following:

1. Acquiring land for open space (by a large margin);
2. Multipurpose trails; and
3. Large indoor community centers.

The **least important parks and facilities** included indoor ice skating, outdoor pools, extreme sports, and an environmental education center.

Compared to the city as a whole, the Advisory Group placed **more emphasis on acquiring land**. Otherwise, results were generally consistent with the household survey results and general preference patterns throughout the Midwest.

More specific discussions with the Advisory Group showed an overwhelming preference for **large indoor facilities** over small facilities or no facilities. While the Advisory Group's No. 1 preference for CRPD emphasis over the next 10 years is **land acquisition**—at 47 percent—a significant number of responses cited **improvements**—at 35 percent—and the remainder favored **development**.

When asked whether the CRPD should emphasize **large multi-use parks** or **small neighborhood parks**, the overwhelming preference was to give them equal favor, a response consistent with other responses gathered throughout the public participation program. However, this differed from the

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

household survey, which revealed only slightly more interest in an equal balance (47 percent) than in small neighborhood parks (35 percent).

More than 60 percent of Advisory Group members would **register for classes and activities on the Internet**—a response slightly higher than the city as a whole, according to the household survey.

PUBLIC INPUT MEETINGS

Two rounds of public input meetings were conducted. Each round consisted of two meetings per night—at different locations—over a three-day period.

Public Input Meetings, Round One

The first round of meetings was conducted in September 2000 at the following locations:

- **Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2000**, at the Marion-Franklin Recreation Center and Thompson Recreation Center;
- **Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2000**, at the Northeast Recreation Center and Barnett Recreation Center; and
- **Thursday, Sept. 21, 2000**, at the Westgate Park Shelter House and Carriage Place Recreation Center.

Participants at these public input meetings worked together in **small groups** to discuss ideas and identify opportunities and constraints to the CRPD system. Discussions focused on five topics: **facilities, programs, policies, financing, and general topics.**

Hundreds of comments have been consolidated into the following **key issues**:

■ Facilities

- Facilities in the newly acquired areas of Columbus are **inadequate.**
- Many facilities in urban areas need **renovations** and upgrades.
- There is a demand for more **recreation centers** and **pools.**

- **Operating hours** are not long enough.
- Upgrades to **communications capabilities** are needed.
- Facilities lack **air conditioning.**
- **Swimming pools** are a huge drain to the department for the two months they are open.
- Access to **senior centers** and **recreation centers** should be improved.
- There are not enough **fields** for baseball, soccer, and softball.
- The downtown area could use **signature** or **destination parks.**
- More **trails** and **walks** are needed.
- More **neighborhood parks** and dog runs/parks are needed.

■ Programs

- Programming needs to be **expanded** in areas such as art, education, environmental/nature, older adults, soccer, teens, and youths.
- More programming is needed in the **summer** and when people are **available** to participate.
- **Youth programs** should be scheduled to meet parents' schedules.
- Programs should be identified and focused where **demand** exists.

■ Policies

- Staffing levels have not kept pace with the amount of land being acquired; thus, staff are overworked.
- There must be more focus on **providing open space** and **acquiring land.**
- There needs to be better communication with the public about **park planning and design.**
- Parcels of land are acquired with no **master plans** or **long-term maintenance plans** in place.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- **Marketing** is a weakness. Public awareness of programs and services is very low.
- Adequate **information** is unavailable in the recreation centers.
- The city needs to inform the public about who is performing **beautification efforts** and **maintenance** after special events.
- The CRPD needs to **distinguish** itself from other park and recreation providers.
- Partnering and developing **new partnerships** are essential for the CRPD's future.

■ Financing

- The CRPD needs better **funding**.
- The CRPD should think of **creative ways** to get additional funding.
- There is **broad support** for any additional funding methods.
- A **permanent revenue source** is needed.
- The public wants value and quality in the recreation and parks system.

■ General

- **Staff levels** are inadequate.
- A **central location** for all staff is needed to improve workflow and efficiencies.
- The CRPD should be **computerized**—from scheduling to registrations—with Web sites that inform the public.
- Service expansion is threatened by a lack of **money and staff**.
- The city does not have a **leash law** for pets; only voice commands are used.
- A **lack of lighting** and the presence of **homeless people** contribute to the perception that parks are unsafe.
- **Safety issues** such as fencing, signage, and brush clearing are not being addressed adequately.
- The central area needs more **tree cover**.

- **Mowing** is neglected.

Public Input Meetings, Round Two

The second round of meetings was conducted in May 2000 to present the results of collected public comment, which would be used in shaping the *Columbus Recreation and Parks Master Plan*. The meetings were held at the following locations:

- **Tuesday, May 22, 2001**, at the Krumm Recreation Center and Raymond Memorial Golf Course;
- **Wednesday, May 23, 2001**, at the Gillie Recreation Center and Martin Janis Senior Center; and
- **Thursday, May 24, 2001**, at the Big Walnut Shelter House and Indian Mound Recreation Center.

The second round of public input meetings was not well attended. No dissenting or contrary comments were made.

FOCUS GROUPS

There were **10 focus group meetings** conducted over three days—January 10-12, 2001—with sessions scheduled in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

Although the CRPD staff identified and encouraged more than 300 individuals to participate, only about **75 people attended** the focus groups, which were arranged generally to accommodate work and school schedules.

The purpose of the focus groups was to understand the current issues facing the CRPD and the effect of these issues on the community. Many lively discussions stopped some focus group leaders from asking all the questions. A summary of key issues follows.

Key Issues

- Many consider **CRPD staff** as one of the system's key strengths. Many believe the CRPD staff is doing a wonderful job with existing resources.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- **Park maintenance** is questionable. Some of the smaller parks are perceived to be more **neglected**. Grass mowing is one visible area that gets noticed quickly when it is not performed.
- Many facilities need **renovation and upgrades**, especially in the urban areas. Many thought the process of upgrading parks is based on socioeconomic factors.
- The number of **fields** for baseball, softball, and soccer are inadequate.
- Facilities are needed in the **outlying areas** of Columbus where much of the population is growing.
- **Safety** is a concern for many people. The lack of **lighting** may contribute to the perception that a park is unsafe. **Homeless people** are in the parks.
- Programming needs to be expanded or enhanced in certain areas (e.g., **environmental programming, soccer and baseball, and programs for adults and children**). Columbus' population increases will only increase demands for programs and services.
- **Funding** is a major issue. There are perceptions that budget cuts happen first for CRPD before any other city department. People recognize that the parks have been mandated to do more with less.
- **Planning** does not seem well structured. The public perceives they are left out of the process. Many parcels of land are acquired with no master plans or long-term maintenance plans in place (e.g., especially for parklands in housing developments).
- Many felt that park plans were not being completed. Specifically identified were the **riverfront park** and the **bike paths**.
- A review of the PDO is warranted. People felt that it is **unacceptable to acquire more parks if these parks cannot be maintained**. Maintenance staffing levels have not kept pace with land acquired in association with housing developments; thus, it is impossible for staff to keep up. The process should be focused on acquiring quality land—not land in quantity.
- The CRPD should capitalize on **partnering opportunities** wherever possible. Partners mentioned included schools, corporations, and other non-profit organizations—such as United Way, Red Cross, and Catholic Social Services—so more programs could be offered and more facilities made available. CRPD's partnership with Metro Parks on Three Creeks Park is well recognized; similar partnerships should be planned.
- **Marketing** needs improvement. Public awareness of programs and services is perceived as low. In addition, there is an image confusion with Metro Parks that could be viewed positively for either party.
- The CRPD should actively pursue the use of **volunteers**. Many felt volunteers are an untapped resource for programming in areas throughout the city.
- More advisory groups, “friends of parks” groups, and other **advocacy groups** would help the CRPD meet community demands.
- The CRPD is involved in a multitude of programs and services; an evaluation should be conducted to determine which **core services** the CRPD should provide. If resources will remain limited, then some services and programs may need to be eliminated.

STAKEHOLDERS

Beginning in January 2001, the consulting team conducted **one-on-one interviews with community leaders** chosen by the CRPD. The following people were interviewed:

- Matt Habash, City of Columbus Council President;
- Gene Harper, Recreation and Parks Department Commissioner;
- Wayne Roberts, Executive Director, Recreation and Parks Department;
- Jerry Saunders, Recreation and Parks Department Commission President;
- Lynn Greer, Recreation and Parks Department Commissioner;
- Ellen Tripp, Recreation and Parks Department Commissioner;
- Kathy Espy, Recreation and Parks Department Commissioner;

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- Mayor Michael B. Coleman, City of Columbus;
- Chad Jester, Nationwide Insurance;
- Larry James, attorney;
- Steve Wittman, downtown businessman;
- Ken Danter, Danter Company;
- John Wolfe, CEO, *Columbus Dispatch*; and
- Cathy Mayne-Lyttle, Worthington Industries.

Each one-hour interview took place at the stakeholder's office. Interviewees were asked a variety of questions; discussions focused on main issues for the master plan, and opinions shared provided much insight.

The following is a summary of the stakeholders' opinions and perceptions:

Community

Columbus residents value the parks, open space, recreational opportunities, and facilities being provided. The programs, parks, and facilities provide a quality of life for Columbus that the Council and Mayor need to understand, support, and appreciate.

The CRPD's approach to improving the quality of life should be considered a **positive influence** in the community, and especially with the youth. The recreation and parks system is viewed as a **connector** within the community by unifying neighborhoods and people through activities, facilities, special events, programs, passive uses, and volunteer opportunities. The system brings all people together.

Partnerships

Partnerships are very important to the future success of the CRPD. It is essential that the CRPD aggressively pursue partnerships for **operations** and **programming**.

Companies and businesses in Columbus need to be **educated** on how they can become involved with the CRPD. In addition, partnerships should include other city agencies, social services, and neighboring communities and organizations. **Many cited the partnership between Columbus and Metro Parks on Three Creeks as a model for what can be accomplished.** Existing partnerships should be reviewed to ensure an **equitable** partnership exists. The documentation of these partnership

agreements should outline what each partner is bringing to the arrangement.

Partnerships should include increasing "friends" groups, volunteer opportunities, neighborhood projects, and areas for **collaboration**. CRPD alliances with schools can go a long way toward **space and resource sharing**.

Planning and Development

Many stakeholders perceive that **park plans** are either not being completed or are being completed slowly, and that changes or improvements are not tracked easily nor are they recognized. **Updates** need to be issued and publicized to keep residents informed of progress.

There should be more emphasis on the **downtown area** because that belongs to everyone. People benefit from "taking a break" from the cityscape; the 90,000 people who work downtown would access parks. However, the inner city has few accessible parks. Columbus needs more **destination-type parks**, which attract people from the region and could be used as tourist draws.

The CRPD should be involved in any city discussions about **growth** because of the department's important role in developing neighborhoods.

Programming

Stakeholders consider the innovation and variety of programs currently offered as very good. Most stakeholders interviewed wanted to see more programming for **families** and **youths**. After-school programming, especially to help at-risk youth, is needed. The CRPD should not serve as babysitters but instead provide structured programs for recreational activities. Some also mentioned that soccer, year-round swimming, and programming for young adults (16 to 21), adults (Baby Boomers), and seniors should be expanded.

The CRPD must keep up with trends in **sports for youths and teens**. It is important that youths and teens remain involved in CRPD programming to provide for and strengthen their positive growth.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Facilities

There is a lack of facilities in the outer loop and newly acquired areas of Columbus.

Current facilities need **renovation and upgrades**; in some cases, facilities should be razed. Desired most are **new facilities** that meet the needs of the neighborhood they serve. Designs of the older facilities should be updated and programmed to serve more people in the community.

Pools were mentioned often as a facility type that “falls short” in Columbus. Old-style pools are ineffective for today’s standard of aquatic design. Many felt that indoor aquatic opportunities are lacking, and that the number of outdoor pools is disproportionate to the population.

A **central CRPD location/facility** is needed to improve efficiencies and resource sharing.

Marketing

Many believe that **overall awareness** of the CRPD and its services and programs is inadequate. Public relations, advertising, and promotion is insufficient; residents do not know about everything that the department provides.

Because the CRPD is in the “people business,” it must do **aggressive promotion and advertising** of its offerings and take credit for its accomplishments. People both inside and outside the government must understand what the CRPD contributes to the quality of life in Columbus.

Parks and Open Space

Stakeholders support **continuing to acquire land for green space**. Making land connections and completing the MORPC regional bikeway plan are highly desired. The **waterways** also must be protected from over development and overuse.

Many interviewees believe the city wants to **set aside** parkland now before it is purchased and turned into housing developments. Some neighborhoods have very little parkland. The partnership with schools in the inner city needs to be developed because of **schools’ land holdings and the potential to have dual use for schools and parks**.

Stakeholders perceive that the following geographic areas are **underserved**: inner city, west side, outside the belt, far north end, northwest, new areas of the city, southwest, far east, far west, west side, and south side. In short, **all areas in Columbus need more parkland**.

Maintenance

Maintenance is very important to the image and safety of the recreation and parks facilities in Columbus. Maintenance is one of the department’s core services. Thus, it is important that the department’s assets are kept in good condition. Stakeholders generally perceive that there are **too many assets and not enough maintenance workers**. The pace of land acquisitions, the deterioration of buildings and amenities, and the increase in programming needs and park use exceed the capabilities of current maintenance staffing levels. The ratio of maintenance staff per acre of land needs to become equitable and manageable for the CRPD.

Funding

The statement mentioned most often in terms of funding was the need for a **permanent revenue source** for the CRPD. The levy recently passed by Metro Parks was considered as either a funding method CRPD should pursue, or a funding source to be shared.

In general, revenues from user fees should be a component of the operations budget. **User fees** should be instituted in appropriate areas, with an option of sliding scales for those who may not be able to afford market-rate fees.

Marketing and high-quality facilities and programs are strongly related to the CRPD’s ability to charge market-driven user fees that can support operations and create a positive revenue stream for the department.

The **economic impact from amateur events** such as the National Softball Tournament held in Berliner Park greatly benefits the city and the department. Similar events should be pursued more in the future.

Tax abatements for companies developing in Columbus should include a **trust fund that supports the parks**. This type of arrangement

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

needs to come from City Hall. Compliance with tax abatements should be monitored; when there is non-compliance, repercussions could be a trade-off to meet park needs. The Council and Mayor must understand just how tight the CRPD budget is.

Safety

Safety should be addressed in the master plan. Illegal activities are occurring in the parks. If people feel unsafe in the parks, they will continue to stay away from these areas.

Regular patrolling of parks by rangers and police would help reduce or eliminate some of these problems. Preventive measures are warranted such as increasing security lighting, reducing brush, clearing areas that block line-of-sight, providing signage and fencing, and increasing positive activities.

Additional Comments and Ideas

Small areas around downtown could be transformed into some unique and fabulous spaces. Brick pavers could be installed, benches could be provided, and trees could be planted for shade, giving people respite from the concrete landscape. Spaces provided should require little maintenance.

Other spaces downtown are prime for redevelopment into parks. A proactive approach could turn these areas into **urban parks**.

A company picnic area is needed; currently there is no place for corporate picnics that allows alcoholic beverages such as beer and that can accommodate large crowds. Columbus needs a space that can hold up to 5,000 people, is priced at market rate, and has all the facilities and amenities to attract businesses from the central Ohio region.

The idea of the CRPD being governed by a **commission** instead of the City Mayor is appealing. A commission would be more representative of the community.

The CRPD should ensure a **diverse workforce**.

The CRPD should pursue a program with **college-level horticulture students**. Because students with loans must perform community services, the CRPD could develop a program

that taps the expertise of college students. CRPD staff members could work with students to design and enhance park landscaping and serve as mentors to teach students a new life skill, while emphasizing the importance of students continuing with their education.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION RESEARCH

Two distinct but interconnected surveys were conducted to gather citizen and customer feedback required for developing the master plan.

Household Survey (Methodology)

A household survey, conducted in spring 2001, was designed to obtain statistically valid results for the City of Columbus and Franklin County as a whole, and for the five Planning Sectors within the county.

This survey was mailed to a **random sampling of households in the community** to gather feedback from **users and non-users** of the parks and recreation system. Extensive phone follow-up was conducted for households that received the surveys; households were encouraged to complete and mail the survey, or to participate in a phone version of the mailed survey.

The goal of obtaining **2,000 completed surveys** (approximately 350 to 400 surveys per Planning Sector) was met. Survey questions addressed a full-range of strategic issues important for evaluating the use of and satisfaction with current parks, facilities, and programs, and for planning the future system.

Customer Satisfaction Survey (Methodology)

A customer satisfaction survey, conducted in summer 2001, was designed to help determine key strategic issues related to customer satisfaction for **current users** of a wide variety of fee-based programs and activities offered by the CRPD.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The City of Columbus provided names, addresses, and labels for the mailing after reviewing various lists of participants in recreational programs and activities.

Survey questions addressed key issues affecting **use of and customer satisfaction with current programs and activities**. Additionally, the survey addressed potential support for various **fee-based activities** and other potential actions for improving customer service and program quality.

The research team mailed the surveys; each mailing included a postage-paid return envelope addressed to the team. A total of **264 completed surveys** were returned.

HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

This section of the chapter summarizes the **results** from the household survey.

Household Survey Findings (Overview)

■ Finding 1: Residents' Use of and Satisfaction with CRPD Programs

Residents were asked a series of questions to better understand their current **use of and satisfaction with CRPD programming**, and to identify future programming priorities.

Overall, **22 percent** said that at least one member of their household had participated in CRPD programs during the past year. Participation was consistent across all five Planning Sectors, with at least **18 percent** of households in each sector participating in scheduled programs.

Most—**87 percent**—of overall respondents who had participated in CRPD programs during the past year rated the overall quality of the programs as **excellent** (36 percent) or **good** (52 percent). An excellent or good rating was received from a minimum of **80 percent** of respondents in each **Planning Sector**.

■ Finding 2: Most Effective Sources for Marketing CRPD Programs

Nearly half—**49 percent**—of overall respondents who participated in CRPD programs learned about the programs from **friends/co-workers**. Respondents in each Planning Sector rated friends/co-workers as their No. 1 source for learning about CRPD programs. Since current users are highly satisfied with CRPD programs, spreading the word about CRPD programs through **friends/co-workers seems to be an effective means of marketing**.

The **second** most frequently cited source for learning about CRPD programs was “**visited or called a parks/recreation office**,” at 25 percent.

Other **sources** included newspaper (21 percent); fliers/brochures (21 percent); and the Columbus Recreation and Parks Catalog (12 percent).

■ Finding 3: Satisfaction with Program Availability

Residents used a five-point scale to rate their satisfaction with the **availability of 23 CRPD programs**; “5” meant “very satisfied,” and “1” meant “very dissatisfied.” Programs rated the **highest include downtown and community festivals, concerts, and outdoor education programs**. (Note: The percentages have been adjusted to exclude “don’t know” responses.)

■ Finding 4: Visits to and Satisfaction with City of Columbus Parks

Of overall respondents, **74 percent** indicated they had **visited a City of Columbus park** during the past year. Importantly, within the five Planning Sectors, at least **70 percent** had visited a city park during the past year. The Central Planning Sector reported the highest visitation rate, at 82 percent.

Of overall respondents, **86 percent** of those who had visited a park rated the park’s **physical condition** as either **excellent** (31 percent) or **good** (55 percent). Only 2 percent rated the conditions as poor. At least **80 percent** of households in each Planning Sector who had visited a city park rated the park’s condition as excellent or good.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Finding 5: Most Important Programs to Respondents

The **most important programs** to households in Columbus are:

- Downtown and community festivals (47 percent);
- Concerts (34 percent);
- Outdoor education programs and recreational swimming (both 16 percent); and
- Adult arts/music and theater (14 percent).

Downtown festivals were the most important program to respondents in all five Planning Sectors and to respondents both inside and outside the I-270 beltway.

■ Finding 6: Satisfaction with the Availability of Parks and Recreation Facilities

Residents used a five-point scale to rate their satisfaction with the **availability of 23 CRPD parks and facilities**; “5” meant “very satisfied,” and “1” meant “very dissatisfied.” Parks and facilities rated the **highest include walking/biking trails, neighborhood parks, and horticultural parks and gardens**. (Note: The percentages have been adjusted to exclude “don’t know” responses.)

■ Finding 7: Visits to Parks and Recreation Facilities

Respondents were asked to review the **23 types** of parks and recreation facilities listed and indicate those that their household had **visited over the past two years**.

The most visited park or recreation facility was **neighborhood parks**, visited by **64 percent** of overall respondents. Importantly, within the five Planning Sectors, at least **50 percent** had visited neighborhood parks. This demonstrates excellent overall community coverage. The Central Planning Sector reported the highest visitation rate for neighborhood parks, at 67 percent.

Other parks and recreation facilities visited by at least **40 percent** of households included:

- Walking and biking trails (61 percent);
- Picnic facilities/shelters (57 percent);
- Downtown riverfront parks (47 percent); and

- Large multi-use parks for active/passive recreation (40 percent).

■ Finding 8: Most Important Passive Parks and Recreation Facilities

The **most important passive parks and recreation facilities** to households in Columbus are:

- Walking/biking trails (44 percent);
- Neighborhood parks (41 percent);
- Picnic facilities/shelters (29 percent); and
- Downtown riverfront parks (27 percent).

■ Finding 9: Most Important Active Parks and Recreation Facilities

The **most important active parks and recreation facilities** to households in Columbus are:

- Large multi-use parks for active/passive recreation (14 percent);
- Golf courses (12 percent);
- Community recreation centers (11 percent);
- Softball fields (10 percent); and
- Outdoor swimming facilities (9 percent).

■ Finding 10: What Affects Respondents’ Use of Parks and Recreation Facilities

Following are the top four reasons respondents gave for **not using city parks and recreation facilities more often**:

- **Too busy or not interested** (37 percent);
- Do not know **what is being offered** (36 percent);
- **Location** of city facilities not close to residence (18 percent); and
- **Do not know location** of parks and facilities (18 percent).

Importantly, only **3 percent** of respondents indicated that they do not use parks and recreation facilities more often because either fees are too expensive, or the city does not have quality programs, or the staff provides poor customer service.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Finding 11: Use of Recreation Programs Offered by Organizations Other Than CRPD

Of overall respondents, **53 percent** use recreation programs or facilities offered by organizations other than the CRPD. Respondents said these organizations include:

- Metro Parks (39 percent);
- Private clubs (37 percent);
- State of Ohio parks (36 percent);
- Churches (25 percent); and
- Other cities (23 percent).

■ Finding 12: Opinions on Availability of Trails, Parks, and Open Space

Respondents were divided on whether there were **enough trails, parks, and open space within walking distance** of their residence. Of overall respondents, 41 percent said “yes,” 49 percent said “no,” and 10 percent said “don’t know.”

■ Finding 13: Most Important Improvements to Parks Closest to a Respondent’s Home

Respondents were asked to indicate the **improvements they would most like to see made to the park closest to their home.**

Of the 13 choices provided, **33 percent** of respondents chose **drinking fountains**. Other responses included:

- Additional **restrooms** (28 percent);
- Improved **lighting** (22 percent);
- Walking **trails** (19 percent); and
- Picnic **shelters** (15 percent).

■ Finding 14: Developing Small Neighborhood Parks vs. Large Multi-Use Parks

Of overall respondents, **47 percent** favored the city placing **equal emphasis** on developing small neighborhood parks and large multi-use parks. At least **43 percent** of respondents from all five Planning Sectors and from areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway agreed.

Of overall respondents, **39 percent** felt that the city should emphasize developing **small neighborhood parks**. Only 9 percent felt that the city should emphasize developing large multi-use parks. Importantly, only 6 percent of respondents said that the city did not need to develop either type of park.

■ Finding 15: Importance of Developing New Parks and Recreation Facilities

Respondents were asked to review the **12 different types** of parks and recreation facilities listed and indicate the importance of developing each type of facility.

Of overall respondents, **50 percent or more** indicated that it was either **very important** or **somewhat important** to develop 10 of the 12 parks and recreation facilities. More than **70 percent** indicated that it was very important to develop **multipurpose trails** (73 percent) and **small parks in neighborhoods** for general park use (71 percent).

■ Finding 16: Most Important New Parks and Recreation Facilities

Columbus respondents said the most important new parks and recreation facilities are:

- **Multipurpose trails** (46 percent);
- **Small parks** in neighborhoods for general park use (40 percent);
- **Large indoor community centers** with special features (27 percent); and
- A **teen center** (27 percent).

However, while a **multipurpose youth sports complex** is tied for fifth (with large community park/passive facilities) as the most important new parks and recreation facility to develop, it received the third most first-choice votes of any potential new facility.

■ Finding 17: Preferences for Developing Indoor Recreation Facilities

A full **72 percent** of respondents supported developing **indoor recreation facilities**; an additional **19 percent** of respondents weren’t sure which type of indoor facility they wanted to develop. Only 9 percent said they did not want to build any new indoor facilities.

Of overall respondents, **42 percent** supported **renovating and building more small neighborhood-oriented facilities** with a limited number of recreation spaces; this was the first choice reported by all five Planning Sectors and by areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Of overall respondents, **30 percent** wanted to build **fewer large facilities** with multiple recreation spaces that serve residents from many parts of the community. (In the Northwest Planning Sector, the percentage of respondents who favored this approach [35 percent] was almost equal to the percentage of respondents who favored smaller neighborhood-oriented facilities [37 percent].)

■ Finding 18: Emphasis over the Next 10 Years

More than half—**56 percent**—of overall respondents believe that the CRPD should emphasize **making improvements/improving maintenance to existing recreation and parks facilities** over the next 10 years. Respondents in the Southwest Planning Sector (60 percent) supported this option the most. Of overall respondents, **24 percent** believe that **acquiring land to create new parks and open-space areas** should be the primary emphasis. Respondents in the Northwest Planning Sector (29 percent) supported this option the most. Respondents outside the I-270 beltway (27 percent) supported this option slightly more than respondents inside the I-270 beltway (24 percent).

Of overall respondents, **14 percent** believe that **developing new recreation and parks facilities** should be the primary emphasis. Respondents in the Northwest Planning Sector (18 percent) supported this option most.

■ Finding 19: Using the Internet to Register for Classes and Activities

More than half—**56 percent**—of respondents said they would be **very likely** (36 percent) or **somewhat likely** (20 percent) to register for recreation classes and activities through the Internet. In the Central Planning Sector, 42 percent of respondents said they would be very likely to register for classes this way; this was the highest percentage among the five Planning Sectors.

At the same time, **35 percent** of respondents said they **would not likely use** the Internet to register for recreation classes and activities—a very similar percentage to those choosing **very likely**. These findings indicate that while there is a large market of potential users who would register via the Internet, there is still a significant market of potential users who want the ability to register through a more traditional approach.

■ Finding 20: Support for Establishing a Dedicated Funding Source for Parks and Recreation Facilities and Programs

Of overall respondents, **72 percent** are **very supportive** (40 percent) or **somewhat supportive** (32 percent) of establishing a **dedicated funding source** that could only be used to pay for operations and maintenance of CRPD programs, parks, and facilities.

At least **69 percent** of respondents from all five Planning Sectors and from areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway said they **supported establishing** a dedicated funding source.

Importantly, only **8 percent** of households or less in the five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway **opposed** establishing a dedicated funding source.

■ Finding 21: Hypothetical Allocation of \$100 to Various Recreation and Parks Facilities

Respondents were given seven options for allocating **\$100 in new revenues** for various recreation and parks facilities. The results:

- **\$39** (improvements/maintenance of existing parks, playgrounds, and recreation facilities);
- **\$17** (acquisition/development of walking and biking trails, linear parks, and greenways);
- **\$14** (acquisition/development of new parkland and open-space areas);
- **\$12** (construction of new community recreation facilities);
- **\$8** (construction of new game fields for youths and adults);
- **\$8** (development of special facilities such as skateboard parks); and
- **\$2** (various other facilities).

■ Finding 22: Support for a Tax Increase to Produce a Higher Level of Maintenance for Parks, Trails, and Recreation Facilities

Of overall respondents, **78 percent** indicated they would be willing to pay more taxes to have a higher level of maintenance for parks, trails, and recreation facilities. At least **70 percent** of respondents in the five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway supported paying more taxes to have a higher level of maintenance.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

■ Finding 23: Priority Importance of Funding Improvements to CRPD Facilities over the Next 10 Years vs. Funding Improvements to Other City Priorities such as Public Safety, Streets, and Refuse

Of overall respondents, more than **80 percent** indicated that funding improvements to CRPD facilities over the next 10 years was either **very important** (43 percent) or **somewhat important** (45 percent) compared to other city priorities.

At least **80 percent** of respondents in the five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway said that funding such improvements was important.

Household Survey Findings (Demographics)

■ Most Important Programs

Of the seven programs rated most important to the community, downtown festivals were clearly the most important. Nearly half—47 percent—of overall respondents rated downtown festivals most important, compared to **concerts**, the next most important, at just over one-third (34 percent).

While downtown festivals and concerts were consistently the top two in all Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway, these two programs were considered even more important in the Central Planning Sector than in the other sectors.

The **third** most important program overall is **outdoor education/nature programs**, at 16 percent. However, the Central Planning Sector ranks **adult arts programs** as third (22 percent), which reflects the higher proportion of adults in this population. In the Southeast Planning Sector, recreational swimming was slightly more important (16 percent) than outdoor education/nature programs (15 percent)

In each **Planning Sector**, several programs were ranked similarly by residents as **most important** (from 9 percent to 14 percent). These programs include:

- Recreational swimming;
- Adult arts;
- Adult fitness;

- Adult sports leagues;
- Boating and canoeing; and
- Youth sports programs.

Respondents in the **Central Planning Sector** ranked adult arts programs, recreational swimming, and adult fitness higher than overall averages. Respondents in the **Southwest and Northeast** Planning Sectors placed slightly more emphasis on **adult programs** than respondents in the Southeast and Northwest.

Respondents from inside the I-270 beltway gave similar priorities to adult fitness, adult arts and recreational swimming. Youth sports replaced boating/canoeing in the second tier of priorities inside the beltway.

■ Most Important Existing Parks and Facilities

Throughout the city, three times as many respondents considered **passive parks and facilities** as the **most important existing facilities** compared to active facilities.

All but the Southwest and Southeast Planning Sectors ranked **walking and biking trails first**.

These two sectors ranked walking and biking trails second, slightly behind neighborhood parks.

Neighborhood parks were considered **second most important**.

Picnic facilities and **downtown riverfront parks** were next. The Northeast Planning Sector, however, ranked playgrounds for children as next most important.

These responses emphasize the importance of **passive open-space areas** to a broad cross-section of the community.

The **most important active facilities** are large multipurpose parks, golf courses, community recreation centers, and softball fields. The order of the rankings varied only slightly from sector to sector, and the percentages for each remained very close (10 percent to 15 percent).

Golf is important in all areas except the Central Planning Sector. Outside the I-270 beltway, golf is significantly more important than other facilities (18 percent for golf compared to between 10 percent and 12 percent for other facilities). As important as arts programming is, generally less than 10 percent of respondents

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

identified cultural arts facilities as most important, except in the Northwest and Central Planning Sectors.

■ Most Important New Parks and Facilities

Multipurpose trails and **neighborhood parks** were the most important new facilities citywide, with little variation from sector to sector. The third most important facility, **large indoor community centers**, was among the most important in all areas, but the Southwest and Central Planning Sectors ranked these higher.

The broad appeal of these facilities may be related to their **multi-generational nature**. **Teen centers** were also ranked highly in all areas but were most important in the Southeast Planning Sector.

The pattern of preference is similar inside and outside the I-270 beltway. However, inside the beltway, **multipurpose trails** are relatively more important, and a **multipurpose youth sports complex** is more important than a large community park.

■ Variations by Planning Sector

The **Central Planning Sector** tends to emphasize festivals, concerts, and the arts, and shows more preference for downtown facilities.

The other sectors emphasize facilities that appeal to **youths** (in the Southwest and Southeast Planning Sectors) and **adults** (in the Northwest and Northeast Planning Sectors). Inside the I-270 beltway, facilities associated with open areas, walking and bike trails, and sports complexes are relatively more important.

However, in general, the preferences and needs from **sector to sector are quite similar**. This finding should allow CRPD to move forward with a relatively balanced distribution of services and facilities.

Household Survey Conclusions

- Columbus has a **high rate of use** of its park system, and users of both the parks and recreation programs rate these services as **high quality**. The survey found that **74 percent** of households use **parks**, and of these, **86 percent** rate the physical **condition** of the parks as **excellent or good**. Of recreation program participants,

88 percent rate the **programs** as **good or excellent**.

- Households perceive that the CRPD has done a good job providing **equitable services** throughout the Columbus area. Based on the cross-tabular analysis conducted, in different age, gender, and racial groups, there were **similar percentages** of households visiting parks and recreation facilities and participating in recreation programs in each Planning Sector and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway.
- The Columbus community strongly supports **improving the current recreation and parks system**, and wants to look to the future **with new land acquisitions and recreation and parks facilities**. When asked to rank four action options, every area of the community ranked “making improvements/improved maintenance to the existing recreation and parks facilities” first; “acquiring land to create new parks and open space” second; and “developing new recreation and parks facilities” third. Perhaps most importantly, every area of the community ranked “doing none of these” last.
- Although Columbus is a large, diverse community, often there are **common priorities** for developing recreation programming, parks, and facilities. Simultaneously, there are important **differences** that the master plan must recognize. The end of this chapter summarizes priorities for recreation programming, system improvements, and new recreation and parks facilities.
- There should be a strong emphasis on developing and improving small **neighborhood parks** within walking distances of homes. Moreover, this priority must be balanced with the development of **large multi-use community parks**. Every area of the community supported this approach with a caveat that neighborhood parks should receive a majority of the dollars. Respondents ranked improving neighborhood parks along with walking and biking trails as the two most important parks and recreation facilities.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- The community strongly supports **creating a dedicated funding source** that could only be used to pay for operations and maintenance costs for CRPD programs, parks, and facilities. In all five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway, at least 69 percent of the households are either very supportive or somewhat supportive of establishing a dedicated source for funding. In every age group, gender, and race, at least 70 percent of households are either very or somewhat supportive of such a funding source (except for those age 55 and older, where 65 percent are very or somewhat supportive).
- The community is willing to **support an improved recreation and parks system through higher taxes**. Of households overall, 78 percent are willing to pay higher taxes to support a higher level of maintenance for parks, trails, and recreation facilities. In all five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway, at least 72 percent of households are willing to pay some increase in taxes to support a higher level of maintenance. In every age group, gender, and race, at least 70 percent of households are willing to pay some increase in taxes (except for those age 55 and older, where the percentage is 61).
- The community sees **funding improvements to parks and recreation facilities as a priority over the next 10 years**. When asked to compare the importance of funding improvements to parks and recreation facilities to other city priorities, such as public safety, streets, and refuse, **88 percent** of respondents rated the improvements as very or somewhat important. Only 6 percent said this was not important. In all five Planning Sectors and in areas inside and outside the I-270 beltway, at least 80 percent of households rated the improvements as very or somewhat important. In every age group, gender, and race, at least 79 percent rated the improvements as very or somewhat important.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

This section of the chapter summarizes the **results** from the customer satisfaction survey. Assessing customers' level of satisfaction with existing programs, parks, facilities, and service delivery provides **valuable insight into customers' needs**. This survey also measures how well the CRPD is meeting current needs and suggests **measurable standards for improvement**. Based on identified needs, these results help compare the current emphasis on particular programs, parks, and facilities with what the future emphasis should be.

Customer Satisfaction Survey Findings (Overview)

■ Finding 1: Customer Satisfaction with the Quality of CRPD Programs

Customers were asked to review a list of **12 programs** and indicate whether they felt very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with each program.

For 10 of the 12 programs, at least 60 percent of respondents said they were either **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with the program. The exceptions were the **adult basketball program**, with 43 percent of respondents stating they were satisfied or very satisfied, and **boat dock rental**, with 21 percent stating they were satisfied or very satisfied.

Recreation center classes received the highest satisfaction rating, with 86 percent of respondents stating they were either satisfied or very satisfied. Close behind were cultural arts center classes, at 81 percent; Columbus Swim Center, at 80 percent; city golf courses, at 78 percent; shelter house rental, at 75 percent; and summer day camp program, at 74 percent.

■ Finding 2: Customer Participation in CRPD Programs

Customers were asked which CRPD programs they had participated in during the past two years.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

City golf courses had the highest participation rate, at 33 percent of respondents. Other programs with high participation rates included the Columbus Swim Center, at 31 percent; recreation center classes, at 27 percent; cultural arts center classes, at 18 percent; youth sports program, at 17 percent; adult softball program, at 17 percent; and summer day camp program, at 16 percent.

■ Finding 3: CRPD Program That Customers Participated in the Most

Customers were asked which single CRPD program they had participated in most frequently during the past two years. Of all respondents, **21 percent** said they had participated in the **Columbus Swim Center** more often than any other program. Other programs respondents had participated in most frequently included city golf courses, at 17 percent; adult softball programs, at 15 percent; and cultural arts center classes, at 13 percent.

■ Finding 4: Satisfaction with the Service Elements of the CRPD Program Participated in the Most

Customers were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with **nine service elements** of the city program they said they used most frequently during the past two years. For all nine service elements, at least **65 percent** of respondents indicated they were either **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with it. **Length of the class or activity** received the highest satisfaction rating, with 89 percent of respondents indicating they were either satisfied or very satisfied. Other service elements that respondents were the most satisfied with included location where activity was offered, at 86 percent; times and dates the activity was offered, at 85 percent; quality of staff, at 79 percent; fees charged based on value received, at 78 percent; and equipment available for activity, at 76 percent.

■ Finding 5: Most Important Service Elements of City Programs

Customers were asked to choose which two of the nine service elements were most important to them and their household.

Quality of staff instructors was one of the top two most important service elements, reported by **55 percent** of respondents. Other service elements ranked as one of the top two most important included condition of facility, at 38 percent; fees charged based on value received, at 29 percent; and times and dates activity was offered, at 29 percent.

■ Finding 6: Reasons Customers Have Stopped Participating in City Programs

Customers were asked if they **had stopped participating** in CRPD programs over the past three years, and if they had, their reasons why. Respondents were asked to choose the statements that best represented why they had stopped using the program. Of all respondents, **22 percent** said they had stopped using city programs within the past three years. Of these respondents, more than half—54 percent—indicated they were **satisfied** with the program; 45 percent indicated they were satisfied with the program and **no longer needed it**; and 9 percent indicated they were satisfied with the program but **found a provider they liked better** for the same program.

■ Finding 7: Reasons Respondents Were Not Satisfied with City Programs

Customers who had stopped using city programs within the past three years were asked to review a list of **nine statements** and indicate which ones represented why they had stopped using city programs. Of all respondents, **30 percent** said the program was **poor quality**. Other reasons respondents said they had stopped using city programs included fees too expensive, at 27 percent; poor customer service, at 24 percent; poor customer service by staff, at 19 percent; location of program not close to home, at 19 percent; and hours of program were not convenient, at 19 percent.

■ Finding 8: How Respondents Learned of City Programs

Customers were asked to review a list of eight options and indicate **all the marketing methods** they used to learn about city programs.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The method respondents used most frequently was **friends and co-workers**, at 63 percent. Other marketing methods used frequently to learn about city programs included visiting or calling a recreation and parks office, at 40 percent; reading the Columbus Recreation and Parks Catalog, at 28 percent; and reviewing fliers/brochures, at 24 percent.

■ Finding 9: Most Preferred Ways to Learn of City Programs

From the eight marketing methods suggested, customers were asked to **choose their top two preferred ways** to learn of city programs.

The **Columbus Recreation and Parks Catalog** was the most preferred way to learn of city programs, at 36 percent. Other marketing methods that appeared most frequently included fliers/brochures, at 34 percent, and through friends and co-workers, at 27 percent.

■ Finding 10: Support for Potential Fee Policies

A critical factor in evaluating needs is the **willingness of the community to pay for the programs and facilities** it wants to have. **A majority of the customers would support modest fee increases to maintain current levels of service.** Significant numbers would pay **higher fees** for improved quality. A majority of respondents support establishing a **dedicated funding source** for facilities and programs.

These figures indicate that recreation is important enough to the community, and that the community is willing to increase expenditures to **ensure current levels of service and increase the quality of service.**

Customers were asked to review a list of **potential fee policies** and state which policy they would support most. More than half—**54 percent**—of respondents said they would support a **modest increase in fees** to maintain current program quality; 13 percent said they would support a **higher increase in fees** for a much **higher quality program**; and just 11 percent indicated they would not support any increase in fees either to

maintain current program quality or to obtain a higher quality program—even if it meant eliminating some programs. The remaining 22 percent of respondents indicated “don’t know.”

■ Finding 11: Support for a Modest Increase in Fees to Maintain Current Program Quality

Customers who supported a **moderate increase in fees** to maintain current program quality were asked to indicate the highest percentage increase in fees they would support.

Nearly **70 percent of respondents** indicated they would support a **small increase** in fees of either 1 percent to 5 percent (29 percent) or 6 percent to 10 percent (40 percent); **20 percent of respondents** indicated they would support a **moderate increase** of either 11 percent to 15 percent (6 percent) or 20 percent to 25 percent (14 percent). Only 5 percent would support a large increase of either 30 percent to 50 percent (4 percent) or 75 percent to 100 percent (1 percent).

Only 6 percent indicated they would support no increase at all.

■ Finding 12: Support for a Higher Increase in Fees for a Higher Quality Program

Customers who supported a higher increase in fees for a **much higher quality program** were asked to indicate the highest percentage increase in fees they would support.

Nearly **35 percent of respondents** indicated they would support a **moderate increase** in fees of either 11 percent to 15 percent (11 percent) or 20 percent to 25 percent (24 percent); **29 percent of respondents** indicated they would support a **small increase** of either 1 percent to 5 percent (12 percent), or 6 percent to 10 percent (17 percent).

There were **26 percent** who said they would support a **large increase** of either **30**

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

percent to 50 percent (20 percent), or 75 percent to 100 percent (6 percent).

Only 10 percent indicated they would support no increase at all.

■ Finding 13: Support for Potential Fee Policies—Current Program Quality vs. Higher Quality Program

Overall, those who favor a much higher quality program stated they would be willing to pay a **higher increase in fees** than those who favor maintaining the current program quality.

Almost 70 percent of those who support **maintaining the current program quality** said they would pay a **small increase in fees** of 1 percent to 10 percent; 29 percent of those who support a much higher quality program would pay a small increase.

However, **35 percent** of those who support a **much higher quality program** would support a **moderate increase in fees** of 11 percent to 25 percent; 24 percent of those who support maintaining the current program quality would support a moderate increase in fees.

In addition, **26 percent** of those who support a **much higher quality program** would support a **large increase in fees** of 30 percent to 100 percent; only 5 percent of those who support maintaining the current program quality would support a large increase in fees.

■ Finding 14: Support for Establishing a Dedicated Funding Source to be Used Only for City Programs

Customers were asked if they would be very supportive, somewhat supportive, not sure, or not supportive of the city establishing a **dedicated funding source** that could be used only to pay for operating and maintaining city programs and facilities.

Of all respondents, **64 percent** were either **very supportive** (39 percent) or **somewhat supportive** (25 percent) of the city establishing such a funding source. Only 4 percent of respondents said they were not

supportive, and 32 percent said they were not sure.

SUMMARY OF THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

The citizens of Columbus are accustomed to having recreational opportunities available through the CRPD. Public input and participation received during the planning process suggests that citizen interest and demand for quality leisure services will only increase in the future. The good news: **Members of the community consider recreational services so important that they are willing to pay modest increases in fees and to support establishing a dedicated funding source.**

Columbus citizens have expressed their opinions that the city should ensure quality leisure services by being pragmatic. The city should **balance the purchase of new land with upgrading and maintaining existing recreation centers and parks** to a specified standard of maintenance.

According to Columbus residents, new land purchases should focus on opportunities to expand the **greenway system**, primarily for multi-use trails. Acreage and location of **neighborhood parks** should be a high priority when decisions about land purchases are made.

In addition, the citizens expect local government to be the **main provider** of recreational services at a **price that will accommodate** as many people as possible. Providing recreational opportunities that meet the **needs of people who are economically and socially disadvantaged** is a major concern within the community.

CHAPTER 4: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

ABOUT THE NEXT CHAPTER

Chapter 4: Needs Assessment determined what programs, parks, and facilities are lacking based on the results of the public participation process, which produced great ideas for the future of the CRPD and the quality of life for city residents. The demographic makeup of the community directly influences residents' attitudes and preferences. Results revealed needs tied to adult, teen, and youth recreation in areas of the community with established populations and in areas where these populations are growing. **Chapter 5: Recommendations** outlines the new or enhanced programs, parks, and facilities that should be implemented.