


7 Park & Facility Evaluation

PARK & FACILITY EVALUATION

The on-site evaluation of all APD parks and facilities took place over a two month period in the summer of 2009. This evaluation provides the basis for formulating recommendations for improvements to each park and facility. As such, the documentation of conditions and amenities is a very important step in the comprehensive planning process.

INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT

Prior to initiation of the on-site evaluation, the background information of each property was researched through the APD web-site, property maps and aerial photographs, and other APD documentation. Maps and aerials of each park were printed and an inventory sheet prepared that was unique to each individual site. The inventory sheets listed facility name, address and acreage. A character section was used to record first impressions and the curb appeal of each park; questioning if this looks like somewhere I want to visit. Signage was evaluated for the condition, visibility and location of the park sign and whether any off-site wayfinding signage is

	Cherokee Park 25 South Michigan 4.96 acres
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General / Curb Appeal	
Signage	
Park Sign	
Internal Wayfinding	
Off-Site Wayfinding	
Neighborhood Access	
Relationship	
Pedestrian Access	
Bicycle Access	
Safety	
Lighting	
Vehicular Access	
Entry/Exit	
Drop-off	
Parking	
Pavement	
Curbing	
Lighting	
# Spaces	

seen in the neighborhood areas nearby (if appropriate to the park type). Landscaping and furnishings were evaluated, along with the specific recreation amenities found on each individual park site. Checklist items for each amenity, landscape element and furnishing were listed under each heading. For example, the Tennis Court evaluation looks at play surface condition and material, fencing condition and material, background and equipment condition (posts, nets, etc.).

An average of an hour and a half of time was spent on each park property preparing a general inventory of amenities, assessing their condition and noting potential improvements for each site. Existing conditions of site furnishings, recreation amenities, court surfaces and equipment, athletic fields, fencing, lawns, etc. were documented.

The evaluation also included measuring some athletic fields to determine their use potential. Photographs were taken of each site, including general park views, specific amenity views and detail photos of furnishings and problem areas. Maintenance of parks and facilities was also considered in the evaluation as maintenance can often be the cause of issues that require improvements. Maintenance recommendations are included as a part of the comprehensive plan where appropriate.

DISTRICT-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

During the on-site inventory and analysis of APD properties, a number of common opportunities for improving the properties were found that could be applied to parks and facilities throughout the District. There were also specific parks and facilities that should undergo a master planning process to make major modifications to the facilities and amenities on those properties. Preliminary Master Plans are included for those properties. The District-wide recommendations for park improvements are presented below.

STANDARDIZATION OF SITE FURNISHINGS & AMENITIES

While each APD property can have its own character or theme, there are many reasons for developing a standardized palette of certain furnishings and amenities. Standardization can provide a common look throughout the APD system that presents an image that can be identified as a part of the Addison Park District. Also, buying multiple units of a single item can often provide long-term cost savings to the District.

The District has already been initiating this branding process to a degree, with most park signs, new furnishings and playground bases showing this standardization. There are some existing APD parks and facilities, however, which have multiple types of furnishings or materials; sometimes in close proximity to one another. This mixing of styles and materials can create a chaotic feeling and a definitive lack of aesthetic.



The following elements should be standardized for use on properties throughout the District, and should all work together (style, materials and installation) to present a distinct image for the District that says quality.

- Benches
- Picnic Tables
- Trash Receptacles
- Bicycle Racks
- Playground Edging
- Parking Lot Lighting
- Pedestrian Lighting
- Drinking Fountains

It is certainly appropriate for individual parks to project their own image and character rather than looking like every other park. But it is still important that the character of individual parks have some type of consistency. Within any given park, the design philosophy of using like materials and styles of elements to create an image for that park is important.

QUALITY MATERIALS

Providing quality is a philosophy that should be presenting any park agency. The Addison Park District provides quality programming and has many quality parks and facilities. When selecting equipment, furnishings and amenities for the parks, it is important to consider aspects of the quality of those products and how they will meet the needs of the District. Are the materials and surfaces prone to vandalism? What is the life cycle of the product? Does the product require special maintenance in order to reach its maximum life cycle? Will the product hold up in this climate? Is the product safe? Does the product 'look' like it is of high quality? These are just some of the questions that need to be asked and researched when making decisions about buying products for the parks, and for determining their overall quality.

While APD strives to be environmentally conscious, utilizing recycled materials for site furnishings is still a quality question. While there may be some high quality recycled site furnishings available to meet the environmental philosophy of the District in this regard, many plastic benches and picnic tables currently being used in parks throughout the country do not exhibit a quality aesthetic, and they have a history of significant bowing within relatively short periods of time; thus requiring earlier than normal replacement. APD should research the availability of quality recycled site furnishings, but should not use any products that are not up to the quality standards the APD should be instituting.



APD utilizes 55 gallon drums/barrels as trash cans at most of its parks and facilities. These barrels often detract from an otherwise very aesthetically pleasing setting, and promote an image that does not spell quality. APD should consider, over time, undergoing a systematic replacement of all barrels using a standardized receptacle throughout the system.

Playground surfaces present an important component of quality in the parks. Poured/sprayed surfaces present the highest quality image, while recycled rubberized or modified mulch products can also present a quality image. At the same time that the quality of the playground surfaces is being considered, ADA accessibility should also factor into the decision of which surfaces to use. The use of recycled

shredded rubber surfaces or mulches creates an interesting conflict in meeting ADA and CPSP standards. While these mulches do meet ADA criteria, their accessibility rating is significantly higher when the material has been compacted. At the same time, this compaction reduces the ability to cushion falls. Only the poured/sprayed surfaces and the tiled surfaces fully meet both ADA and CPSP criteria. Cost considerations, of course, will be a primary consideration in determining what surface to use. The District should always strive to use the best surfaces available given the budget for the project.



Fencing is an element found in many parks for many different purposes. And it is an element that can significantly affect the character and quality of a park. APD has a variety of fencing types and materials in use within its parks, including split rail and chain link in different colors and forms. Those locations where wood fencing or decorative metal fencing is used project a character and quality that exceeds other parks. Galvanized chain link is a long-traditional standard for use on ball field backstops and fencing. Vinyl-coated chain link provides aesthetic and some safety attributes that make it preferable for use, with black and brown coated fencing the least obtrusive aesthetically, while also providing a backdrop that allows better visibility of baseballs, softballs and tennis balls. Replacement of existing galvanized fencing with vinyl-coated should be carried out as replacements come due.

Quality can also extend to plant materials. Quality trees and shrubs not only produce a better aesthetic, but may also be healthier and have greater longevity. And the appropriate use of plant materials provides character to a park and can make improvements to the environment. Some nurseries will sell trees that may be designated as 'park grade'. This often means that the trees do not have central leaders or have been over-pruned during their cultivation. Care should be given in utilizing these trees as future structural problems could manifest over time. With park and recreation agencies taking on a greater role as stewards of our natural resources, APD should use plantings to enhance the environmental quality of the parks as well as enhancing the aesthetics of the parks.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Safety in APD parks and facilities should always be a high priority, and the safety of its patrons is something that is evident in the everyday operations of the District. Safety concerns can be quite diverse and need addressing from a variety of perspectives. The few items that have been identified for improvement are diverse as well.



Although the parks open and close with the phases of the sun, site lighting is still an important safety component in parks. While many of the parks do have pole lights or floods, The Addison Police Department has recommended that additional site lighting be added and maintained in parks where appropriate and needed. The type and location of lighting is also an important safety consideration. Flood lighting in particular should not be angled outward as the glare caused by such lighting can, in itself, create unsafe conditions. APD should review its site lighting annually and make sure that lighting is placed where it is needed.

Site utilities often have access panels, manholes or other maintenance devices that were installed flush with the ground elevation but that have, over time, either rose above or sunk into the ground. Others have had covers installed that are hazards because they are raised or have a slotted grate that is dangerous to bicycles. These create trip hazards in lawns and paved areas that can be unsafe and be a liability. Ongoing maintenance should be completed to raise ground levels or add risers where they are needed, and to replace any grates that are of unsafe design.



Another safety recommendation presented by the Addison Police Department is the reduction of shrubs and evergreen trees that provide places where people can hide. While all parks and all shrub masses are not an issue, the District should consider this recommendation and, over time, eliminate this type hazard. Lower growing shrub masses, grasses and other low prairie type plantings could be substituted, with any new shrub planting designed to this recommendation.



The Chicago-style backstop was designed to keep foul balls from leaving the playing area; making spectators and parked cars less prone to the effects of an errant baseball. This type backstop is very effective in this regard. They are also aesthetically elegant when compared to the more traditional styles of backstop. But many agencies that put these into their facilities years ago are going back to the traditional styles due to the possibility of injury to the batter, catcher and umpire directly beneath the arched support. Foul balls hit straight up onto this support have been known to bounce straight down with a high velocity that is difficult to avoid. For that reason, APD should replace any Chicago backstops with the traditional style backstops and fencing as replacement becomes needed.

Other safety concerns at ball fields exist that require attention to protect both the participants and the spectators. Many ball fields have fences in front of the dugouts and bleachers that are too low, making foul balls a hazard to players and spectators. Since many of the ball field backstops and fencing are in need of replacement, this is the perfect time to also address this safety issue. At parks where multiple ball fields are clustered, like Community Park and Centennial Park, foul balls can cross to the spectator and dugout areas of the adjacent fields. While higher fencing will help with line drive type fouls, pop-ups can still be a problem. Some park agencies have installed an overhead mesh that covers those areas between the fields. This mesh also provides some level of shade and sun protection.



PARK & FACILITY ENHANCEMENTS

The following recommendations are based on opportunities for improvements on a District-wide basis. It is recommended that these improvements be implemented over a three to ten year period to bring all Addison Park District properties to the same standards in a relatively short period of time. It is important to first take the time to develop quality standardization of furnishings and materials before embarking on these improvements. Any recent upgrades to amenities may need to be revisited in 5-7 years to meet the new quality standards. While many of these are listed in the recommendations for individual parks, they should be considered system-wide.

Park Amenities

- Replace all picnic tables with metal mesh table or other as selected for branding
- Add bicycle racks at all parks and facilities, with paved surfaces and access on both sides if using ribbon-style design
- Trash receptacle replacements
- Add picnic pavilions/gazebos in appropriate locations
- Add paved aprons in front of all benches

Landscape improvements at all parks

- Shade trees in/around playgrounds
- Landscape areas within playgrounds
- Shade trees near spectator seating areas
- Low level landscape areas for seasonal interest/aesthetics
- Low-level signage landscaping that can include annual plantings, but depends more on materials that will offer ongoing color and interest

ADA accessibility improvements

- Add paved base pads and access walks to all athletic field bleachers, with addition space for wheelchair access
- Add ADA picnic tables at all locations where there are/will be picnic tables
- Initiate improvements outlined in the June 30, 2009 report prepared by Recreation Accessibility Consultants, LLC to bring the District into compliance with ADA

Signage & Wayfinding

- Work with the Village and IDOT to add directional street signage for more parks/facilities that cater to overall community interests
- Consider redesign of park signage that will further brand the District when other site amenities and furnishings are replaced

Athletic Fields/Courts

- Re-cut baseball/softball infields
- Add irrigation at heavily-used fields
- Replace fencing/backstops with black vinyl coated materials
- Initiate systematic improvements to all turfgrass areas
- Add concrete pads under all team bench areas
- Add concrete pads under all spectator seating areas
 - ADA walkways to seating areas

NEW FACILITIES / REDEVELOPMENT SITE MASTER PLANS

New amenities/facilities have been identified for possible addition to the Addison Park District. Several parks are identified as needing more than simple playground replacement or walkway resurfacing. Some of these parks have new Preliminary Master Plan designs that balance the needs for open space with programmed activity areas. Some possible pairings of park sites and new amenities are listed below.

- Army Trail Nature Center - Nature Center building
- Byron Park - Soccer
- Centennial - Fitness Trail/Fitness Pod
- Cherokee - Basketball & Soccer
- Community - Soccer, Basketball, Volleyball, and Expanded Spraypad
- Foxdale Park - Disc Golf
- Green Oaks Park - Soccer
- Highview Park - Basketball, Volleyball, Soccer & Performing Arts
- Kenroy Park - Soccer
- May Street Park- Redevelopment or Divestment of Property
- Mill Meadows Park - Basketball
- Nike Park - Skate Facility
- Old Mill Park - Basketball, Volleyball & Soccer
- Sunset Park - Soccer
- Tamara Heights Park - Soccer & Disc Golf
- Westview Park - Soccer
- Westwood Park - Soccer
- Wilderness Park - Basketball

New or redeveloped facilities that focus on greater senior and teen activities and programs are also recommended. A teen activity hub should include indoor and outdoor amenities such as an urban skate plaza, a multi-use/basketball court, a music center, a computer center and a performance/multi-use space. A senior activity center should include such amenities as a computer center, a music center, indoor and outdoor walking areas, exercise/multi-purpose space and a library/game club.