

I. Executive Summary

Purpose of this Plan

The City of Meridian, Idaho, provides a comprehensive Parks and Recreation system that greatly contributes to the quality of life in Meridian and the surrounding areas. In order to plan into the future of this valuable Parks and Recreation system, the City's Parks and Recreation Department began a planning process to develop this Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Development of this plan took place from December 2014 to December 2015, and included a public input process, services inventory and analysis, needs assessment, operational and maintenance analysis, and financial analysis. The Master Plan provides the framework to respond to the evolving needs of this growing community.

Planning Process Summary

This project has been guided by a Meridian Parks and Recreation project team made up of City staff, with input from the Parks and Recreation Commission and the City Council. This team provided input to the GreenPlay consulting team throughout the planning process. This collaborative effort created a plan that fully utilizes the consultant's expertise and incorporates the local knowledge and institutional history that only community members can provide. The project consisted of the following tasks:

Community Engagement:

- Review of previous planning efforts, City historical information.
- Extensive community involvement effort including focus groups, meetings with key stakeholders, and a community-wide public meeting.
- Statistically-valid community interest and opinion survey
- Online community engagement website – MindMixer/mySidewalk.

Facility Inventory:

- Inventory of parks and facilities using existing mapping, staff interviews, and on-site visits to verify amenities and assess the condition of the facilities and surrounding areas.

GRASP® Level of Service Analysis:

- Interviews with staff to provide information about City facilities and services, along with insight regarding the current practices and experiences of the City in serving its residents and visitors.
- Identification of alternative providers of recreation services to provide insight regarding the market opportunities in the area for potential new facilities and services.
- Analysis addressing recreation, parks, and related services.

Assessment and Analysis:

- Review and assessment of relevant plans.
- Measurement of the current delivery of service for City facilities using the GRASP® Level of Service Analysis and allowing for a target level of service to be determined that is both feasible and aligned with the desires of citizens as expressed through the citizen survey. This analysis is also represented graphically in GRASP® Perspectives.

- Exploration of finance and funding mechanisms to support development and sustainability within the system.

Needs Assessment:

- Consideration of the profile of the community and demographics, including population growth.
- Research of trends related to Meridian and American lifestyles to help guide the efforts of Parks and Recreation over the next several years.

Operational and Marketing Analysis:

- Analyze parks and recreation programming and service delivery.
- Conduct an organizational Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis.
- Develop a broad assessment of the overall parks and recreation operations.

Recommendations: Goals, Objectives, and Action Plan:

- Identification and categorization of recommendations into themes with goals, objectives, and an action plan for implementation.
- Development of an action plan for capital improvements including cost, funding source potentials, and timeframe to support the implementation of the plan.

Other Plan Elements:

- Review of current staffing and development of recommendation for future growth potential.
- Review of the current Park Classification System and development of recommendations for a component based system of classification.
- Develop an Urban Forestry Management strategy.
- Review current Pathways Plan and develop updated recommendations.
- Conduct public engagement meeting to develop draft concept plans for:
 - South Meridian Regional Park (77 acres)
 - Borup/Bottles Properties (47 acres)
 - Margaret Aldape Park (60 acres +/-)

Key Issues Summary

During the initial stages of the project, the following Key Issues were identified for focus:

Organizational:

- Improve marketing and communication of activities and facilities.
- Increased staffing for programming and future facilities operations.
- Increased maintenance staffing to keep up with quality of service and demand.
- Increase opportunities to utilize technology to improve customer service and efficiencies.
- Increase social media use and navigation apps for parks and pathways.
- Increase partnerships.

Programs and Service Delivery:

- Increase year round recreational activities.
- Expand special event offerings.
- Expand outdoor and adventure recreation opportunities.
- Need programs at convenient times for community.
- Expand programming for seniors, active adults, special needs, tweens and teens.

Facilities and Amenities:

- Maintain existing quantity and quality of level of service.
- Maintain and improve existing facilities.
- Find opportunities to acquire new land for parks.
- Expand pathways and connectivity.
- Adopt and continue to maintain a component based inventory and level of service standard in existing GIS.
- Add indoor recreation space.
- Improve signage agency-wide.
- Maintain existing facilities and amenities.
- Develop new amenities at new and existing parks based on level of service analysis.
- Add additional athletic fields and lights.
- Evaluate parking and event/program/activity scheduling.
- Develop an ADA Transition Plan.
- Upgrade convenience and customer service items to existing facilities.
- Consider programming needs when adding new components to existing parks or when developing new ones.
- Gather and maintain data on HOA and alternative provider owned recreational property.
- Develop and maintain life cycle replacement and asset management plans.
- Create park identity in existing and new parks.

Finance:

- Increase event and activity sponsorships.
- Review Developer Impact fee ordinance.
- Consider dedicated funding source for parks and recreation.
- Pursue grant and philanthropic opportunities.
- Consider Cost Recovery and Pricing Philosophy including scholarships.

Key Level of Service (LOS) Analysis Findings:

Several general findings were revealed by the City of Meridian GRASP® Analysis. These may be summarized as follows:

For neighborhood access to parks and recreation, Meridian offers:

- A wide variety of well distributed recreational opportunities.
- High quality and well maintained parks.
- Good access with over 75 percent of land area above threshold when considering all providers.
- Definite distinction between “Community Parks” and “Neighborhood Parks.”
- An overall high level of service if accessed by an automobile.
- High scoring “Regional Parks” or “Community Parks.”
- A high number of components and average score per site when compared to some other communities.
- Some large “pockets” of high level of service.
- Great restroom standards.

For walkable level of service:

- Demographic analysis shows good distribution of parks where people live with 98 percent of 0-19 age group having walkable access to some recreation service.
- While “Neighborhood Parks” often score high enough to meet the “threshold,” a lack of pathway access often keeps an area below the threshold mark.
- Some parks, especially “Neighborhood Parks,” lack unique or identifiable character.
- Alternative providers are an important supplement to Meridian’s “Neighborhood” level of service.
- There is heavy reliance on alternative providers (including schools) for walkable neighborhood level of service in many areas, and the quality of alternative provider’s parks vary greatly across the system.
- Demographic analysis shows good distribution of parks where young people live with over 75 percent of 0-19 age group having walkable access to some recreation service.
- There is a need to identify and collect inventory data on the remaining alternative provider parks/facilities.
- Access to a quality, connected pathway system is limited and greatly impacts overall walkable level of service in Meridian.

For pathways and pathway access:

- There a variety of pathways are available across the City, but they are not meeting the needs and demands of the community.
- Many of the pathways within Meridian are not connected to the larger overall pathway system.
- A significant portion of these pathways may have limited or restricted access based on locations within subdivisions.
- Pathway access is notably absent from some Meridian residential neighborhoods.

Based on projected population growth over the next 5-7 years, Meridian and its partners need:

- Additional park land and components added to the system to maintain current level of service.
- To improve or upgrade existing components to maintain current level of service.

Recommendations

After analyzing the Findings that resulted from this process, including the Key Issues Matrix, a summary of all research, the qualitative and quantitative data, the GRASP[®] LOS analyses, and input assembled for this study, a variety of recommendations have emerged to provide guidance in consideration of how to improve parks, recreation, and pathway opportunities in the City of Meridian. This section describes ways to enhance the level of service and the quality of life with improvement through organizational efficiencies, financial opportunities, improved programming and service delivery, and maintenance and improvements to facilities and amenities.

Goal 1: Continue to Improve Organizational Efficiencies

Objective 1.1 – Maintain existing level of service goal

The City of Meridian currently has a Level of Service that is three acres of developed park land per 1,000 persons with a goal of increasing to a Level of Service Standard of four acres/1,000 persons by 2040. Additionally, the City should develop a Level of Service Standard that considers components within parks and a radius of .5 miles per component for walkability.

Objective 1.2 – Enhance and improve internal and external communication regarding department activities and services

The Parks and Recreation Department should continue to implement the Marketing Plan (Communication Plan) that will guide the Department's efforts in communicating and promoting their activities, services, and facilities. This will continue to create great awareness and should include all the recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, and facility upgrades. Additionally, the Marketing Plan should be reviewed annually and updated as needed and include marketing strategies that incorporate the efforts of partner departments and projects.

The marketing and communication of Parks and Recreation Department activities should be enhanced with a focused effort on adopting open lines of communication and meetings with partners and potential partners within the community. This enhanced focus will help to create advocacy in the community and provide a forum to better celebrate the successes of the Department.

Objective 1.3 – Provide improved signage agency-wide to make it easier for patrons to find and use parks, facilities, and pathways

The Parks and Recreation Department should evaluate directional and wayfinding signage to facilities on roadway, pathways, and within parks. Additionally, the Department should develop signage standards for parks and update existing park signs as parks are renovated to meet the new standard. Improved wayfinding signage will contribute to a greater connectivity of parks, facilities, and pathways.

Objective 1.4 – Maintain existing quality standards for facilities and amenities

There was an overwhelming public response to make sure that Parks and Recreation maintains and improves existing facilities. The Department should continue to improve and upgrade existing facilities and amenities as well as address low scoring components through the CIP Plan and the Life Cycle Maintenance Program.

Objective 1.5 – Increase social media use and navigation apps for parks and pathways

Mobile marketing is a trend of the future. Young adults engage in mobile data applications at much higher rates than adults in age brackets 30 and older. Usage rates of mobile applications demonstrate that chronologically across four major age cohorts, Millennials tend to get information more frequently using mobile devices, such as smart phones. Parks and Recreation should explore additional social media uses and navigation apps for parks and pathways. The City of Meridian has current best practices for social media that should be followed, reviewed annually, and updated as is needed.

Objective 1.6 – Increase appropriate partnerships within the community

The City of Meridian Parks and Recreation Department currently partners with a number of agencies to provide programs and activities to the community. The Department should continue to explore additional opportunities, as well as build on their existing partnerships. Where not already in place, the Department should ensure that all existing and future partnerships are accurately portrayed in a signed partnership agreement (Sample Partnership Policy can be found in **Appendix G**).

The City of Meridian Strategic Plan that was adopted in 2015 sets a goal of continuing to explore partnerships with alternative providers to increase level of service. Additionally, the Department should identify desired sports facilities or complexes and establish partnerships that foster their development.

Objective 1.7 – Increase the utilization of technology to improve customer service and efficiencies

The Department should continue to explore additional opportunities to expand the use of technology Department wide. Some immediate area to increase technology within the Department would be provide online shelter reservations and provide a mobile application of the Department’s website.

Objective 1.8 – Staff appropriately to meet demand and maintain established quality of service

As recommendations in the Master Plan for programs, services, new facilities, pathways, parks, and facility upgrades are implemented, it is important to maintain staffing levels to maintain current performance standards. This will require the new positions both in parks and recreation.

Objective 1.9 – Maintain and keep current the Department Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and Policies

The Parks and Recreation Department is governed by City Code and internal standards of operations and policies. The Department should review the City Code Chapter for Parks and Recreation annually and recommend updates as needed. Additionally, staff should review Department SOPs and policies annually and update as needed.

Objective 1.10 – Expand the volunteer program

The Department currently has a Park Ambassador Program that could be reviewed, improved, and expanded to meet their growing needs. Additionally, they should continue to make use of other volunteer opportunities for park projects and events.

Goal 2: Increase Financial Opportunities

Objective 2.1 – Increase special event and activities sponsorships

The Department should continue to explore additional sponsorship opportunities and build on existing sponsorships. All existing and future sponsorships should be evaluated to ensure that they are accurately portrayed in a signed sponsorship agreement (Sample Sponsorship Policy can be found in **Appendix E**).

Objective 2.2 – Evaluate Developer Impact Fee Ordinance

The current Developer Impact Fee is based on a LOS of 3.04 acres of developed park land per 1,000 people. As the Department moves toward their goal of 4 acres of developed park land per 1,000 people, they need to review the ordinance every 3 years to keep current with the LOS. Additionally, the Department should review their Developer Impact Fee revenue annually to align with CIP requests and existing LOS.

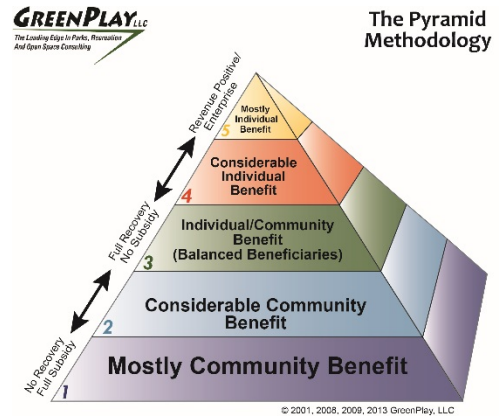
Objective 2.3 – Pursue grant and philanthropic opportunities

The Department currently takes advantage of grant opportunities available for programming, services, and facility improvements. The Parks and Recreation Department should continue to pursue any and all grant opportunities at the federal, state, regional, and local levels. To accomplish this, the Department may consider contracting with a dedicated grant writer to research, submit, and track such grants.

Objective 2.4 – Implement a cost recovery and pricing policy

The Department currently has a practice of cost recovery but it varies based on the different service areas. The Parks and Recreation Department should implement a Cost Recovery Policy, such as the Pyramid Pricing Methodology (**Appendix F**) to determine a consistent method of pricing Parks and Recreation activities throughout the Department. As part of the policy, the Department should continue to support the current Care Enough to Share Scholarship Program.

In addition to establishing a Cost Recovery and Pricing Policy, the Department should explore the feasibility of a dedicated revenue for parks and recreation through special revenue funds, sports, tourism, or other available sources.



Goal 3: Continue to Improve Programs and Service Delivery

Objective 3.1 – Increase year round recreational programming and activities

The Department should continue to look for opportunities to expand indoor recreational programs and activities. The community would like to see additional programs for tweens, teens, special needs, and seniors. As new programs are developed, continue to monitor recreational trends to stay current with programming and demand. As popularity in program offerings and activities increases, continue to look for opportunities to expand programs around working hours and commuting citizens schedules.

The City’s Strategic Plan has also set a goal to attract, promote, and maintain a “signature” event for the City, and to set targets, identify gaps, and deploy programs, activities, and events that provide family-centered recreational opportunities.

Goal 4: Maintain and Improve Facilities and Amenities

Objective 4.1 – Maintain and improve existing facilities

The Department should continue to implement existing plans, the CIP, Life Cycle Replacement Programs, and the Master Plan. These plans should be reviewed annually and updated as needed.

Objective 4.2 – Expand pathways and connectivity

The Department should continue to implement the existing Pathways Master Plan and update as needed based on annual reviews. As new and existing pathways are designed and renovated, the Department should consider adding fitness stations and family fun stations in appropriate locations along the pathways.

Objective 4.3 – Add indoor recreation space

Based on feedback from focus group participants and the survey results, there is a need for additional indoor recreation space. The Department should continue to explore opportunities to add additional indoor recreation space either through partnerships, purchase of an existing facility, or construction of a Community Center or Fieldhouse. Another option would be to explore opportunities to add Community Centers to newly planned elementary schools.

Objective 4.4 – Develop new amenities at existing parks based on level of service analysis

Demand for usage of Meridian parks and athletic facilities continue to grow, and the Department should look for opportunities to add new amenities to enhance the experience for users. As Meridian continues to grow, the Department should look for opportunities to add parks and pathways in those new growth areas. Also, based on the GRASP analysis, the Department should look for opportunities to add new components at existing parks where the level of service is below threshold.

Objective 4.5 – Acquire new land for parks

Based on population growth and a LOS goal of reaching 4 acres of developed park land per 1,000 population, the Department needs to continue to find and purchase additional land for future park development. When considering new parks, priority should be given to areas where LOS is below threshold.

Objective 4.6 – Improve parking at parks

Parking was an issue that was identified at most of the focus groups. The Department should continue to monitor parking during peak usage times and explore the need to improve and potentially add more parking at appropriate parks and amenities. Another consideration would be to explore alternative transportation options to reduce parking demand.

Objective 4.7 – Continue to improve ADA accessibility at all facilities

According to the ADA.gov website, "Access to civic life by people with disabilities is a fundamental goal of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). To ensure that this goal is met, Title II of the ADA requires State and local governments to make their programs and services accessible to persons with disabilities... One important way to ensure that Title II's requirements are being met in cities of all sizes is through self-evaluation, which is required by the ADA regulations. Self-evaluation enables local governments to pinpoint the facilities, programs, and services that must be modified or relocated to ensure that local governments are complying with the ADA."

Parks and Recreation currently does not have an ADA Accessibility Transition Plan which identified needed changes during a self-evaluation process. The Department needs to conduct a self-evaluation and develop a comprehensive transition plan. Once the ADA Transition Plan is developed and adopted, it should be updated at least every 5 years.

Objective 4.8 – Upgrade comfort, convenience, and cultural amenities to existing facilities

As the Department is making upgrades to and improving existing facilities, it should explore opportunities to add shade, storage, security lighting, synthetic turf, and other amenities appropriately at existing facilities. Working with the Parks and Recreation Commission, the Department should seek opportunities to create individual identities for each Neighborhood Park. Where appropriate, look for opportunities to add public art to new and existing facilities.

Objective 4.9 – Add destination park amenities

As citizen interest grows, and demand for new and different amenities at parks are identified, the Department should explore opportunities to add destination playgrounds and natural play areas at existing parks. The newly adopted Strategic Plan also has a goal to foster development of Discovery Parks that uniquely blend arts, entertainment, and culture.

Objective 4.10 – Address current and future needs for athletic fields

As demand warrants, explore opportunities to add rectangle and diamond fields as usage increases. To help increase field time, add sports field lighting to new facilities and improvements to lighting at existing facilities where appropriate. Additionally, the Department should consider upgrading to or adding synthetic turf fields as use and demand increases.

Objective 4.11 – Consider programming needs when adding new components to existing parks or when developing new parks

Continue to evaluate the programming needs of the community when developing new parks or when adding new components to existing parks.

Objective 4.12 – Monitor use, demands, and trends of recreation components

Through the use of dashboards and other reporting and tracking tools, continue to monitor and evaluate the use, demands, and trends in recreation amenities.