



Land Management Plan



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



PARK DISTRICT
of HIGHLAND PARK

Overview

The Land Management Plan is a demonstration of thoughtful collaboration between the various land managers at the Park District of Highland Park and is intended to serve as a foundation for future efforts to improve land management at the District. The recommendations aim to improve operational efficiency and the quality of Park District properties.

The land management planning effort was initiated as a result of The Green Print 2024 Plan which recommended the creation of a land management plan. The resulting plan covers nine major topics: Park Maintenance, Stormwater Management, Lakefront Maintenance, Natural Areas, Park Inventory, Real Estate, Park Amenities, Cultural Resources, and Connectivity. The planning committee met over the course of seven months to identify goals and objectives related to the land management topics.

The plan details existing conditions, opportunities and challenges that support the objectives to achieve the plan goals. The goals and objectives are intended to be accomplished over the next five years. The Park, Properties, and Planning Department is leading the implementation, evaluation, and tracking of the goals recommended in the plan. A detailed timeline is included in the plan's implementation section.

Land Management Plan Topics



1. Park Inventory // Page 4
2. Real Estate // Page 5
3. Park Maintenance // Page 6
4. Natural Areas // Page 7
5. Stormwater Management // Page 8
6. Lakefront Maintenance // Page 9
7. Park Amenities // Page 10
8. Cultural Assets // Page 11
9. Connectivity // Page 12

Park Inventory



Throughout the Park District's 700+ acres of park land, visitors will find a variety of amenities and park elements that contribute to the park experience such as courts, bathroom buildings, and play equipment. These amenities and park elements are managed and maintained by the Parks, Properties, and Planning Department.

Challenges / Opportunities

Currently a central inventory of park properties and elements is not available for all staff. Staff maintain separate lists which can result in dated or inconsistent information. The Park District has tools available to effectively share information across the District, these tools can be applied to develop a central list.

Goals / Objectives

Maintain one central inventory with reliable information that is accessible to all staff in the office and in the field

- ◆ Develop and maintain a dynamic up-to-date inventory that is accessible to all Park District staff.
- ◆ Develop a process to systematically update the inventory.
- ◆ Educate staff on how to access and use the inventory.



Real Estate



The Park District manages 44 parks throughout Highland Park that provide public open space for residents. Industry standards recommend that residents live within 1/2 mile of a park—94% of Highland Park residents meet this standard.

Of the Park District's park properties, 10 are fully or partially owned by other City entities. The Parks, Properties, and Planning Department is responsible for managing the property records including agreements, easements and deeds.

Challenges / Opportunities

The history of Park District properties is preserved through internal knowledge and recorded in property files. As staff changes, maintaining the various leases,

easements, and agreements tied to the Park District's properties becomes challenging due to the lack of a central tracking system. The Park District has the tools and access to the information to develop a detailed and central summary of existing property information to ensure that information is accurate, consistent, and transferable.



Goals / Objectives

Provide optimum level of open space service to the residents of Highland Park as determined by national standards

Maintain an up-to-date inventory of Park District real estate agreements

- ◆ Review and update the acquisition policy and identify areas of need.
- ◆ Review existing leases and develop an inventory.
- ◆ Renew or renegotiate existing property agreements as needed.

Park Maintenance



Park Maintenance staff, referred to as ‘parks staff’, is responsible for the maintenance of the Park District’s parks to ensure that the District’s properties are clean and safe for patrons and programs. Depending on the time of year, the parks staff ranges from 26-47 employees and includes electricians, ground keepers, carpenters, and mechanics. The men and women that make up the parks staff work behind the scenes to make park spaces ready for regular and special park programming while also keeping the public parks open and accessible for patrons to enjoy.

Challenges / Opportunities

Park District properties endure heavy wear and tear from regular use. Keeping up with routine maintenance can prove challenging when also trying to respond to service requests. The three major maintenance challenges facing the District are balancing time between park and facility maintenance, weeds, and creating time for improvements.



Goals / Objectives

Provide accessible, clean, and safe parks for all patrons

- ◆ Prioritize low-maintenance materials.
- ◆ Develop a system to quantify staff time to budget for future growth needs.

Natural Areas



The Natural Areas Program has been promoting ecologically based land management and restoration activities on behalf of the District since 1993. Twenty-nine natural areas have been identified in the Park District's 44 parks totaling approximately 250 acres. At least 10 distinct ecological communities can be found throughout the Park District's parks including: forest, woodlands, savanna, prairie, lakefront, and constructed communities.

The Natural Areas team manages and maintains the natural areas. Annual activities include: clearing of invasive trees, shrubs and plants, habitat monitoring, prescribed burns, seed collection, planning, funding pursuits, school group programs, and volunteer coordination as well as oversight of grant funded capital projects. To date, Natural Areas staff, with assistance from volunteers, has restored more than half of the natural areas acreage.

Challenges / Opportunities

The primary challenge facing the Natural Areas Program is increasing work load -- a direct result of the success of the program. As such, there are opportunities to expand natural areas, but with that requires additional capacity. As the Natural Areas Program grows, there is a need for a process to assess staff capacity.

Goals and Objectives

Maintain natural areas for continued optimal health of restored land

Promote efficiency of Park Maintenance and Natural Area staff by reducing duplicative maintenance efforts and increasing collaboration

- ◆ Conduct bi-annual review of restoration needs in priority parks, as well as integrate new natural areas (either recently acquired or converted) into the work schedules, to determine staffing requirements to meet performance and safety standards.
- ◆ Establish quarterly planning meetings between Parks and Natural Areas staff to set priorities and coordinate efforts.

Stormwater Management



Over the past decades, Illinois has experienced more frequent heavy rain events. As rain events have increased so have impervious surfaces throughout the community. The increase of precipitation and impervious surfaces results in stormwater runoff that pollutes local and regional waterways as well as contributes to flooding.

The Park District is committed to environmental stewardship and stormwater management to conserve the surrounding environment and reduce the flooding in parks.

The Skokie River bisects Highland Park from north to

south and is located adjacent to two of the Park District's community parks: Danny Cunniff Park and Larry Fink Park. These two parks are directly affected by flooding after heavy rains. Other Park District properties within a the flood plain boundary include



the Sunset Valley Golf Course, Sleepy Hollow Park, Buckthorn Park, Leonardi Park, Rory Deutsch Pay Lot, Skokie River Woods, Highland Park Country Club, and Hidden Creek Aqua

Park. While these parks are fully or partially within the flood plain, the increasing magnitude and rate of storm events has affected all park district properties.

Challenges / Opportunities

Stormwater impacts parks through increased flooding and non-point source pollutants affecting the natural areas. Flooding impacts programming, can cause repeated facility damage, and requires staff time for maintenance. Stormwater carrying non point sourced pollutants flow into Park District natural areas affecting the ecosystem.

The Park District has implemented best practice solutions to manage stormwater in some of the parks that can serve as a model for other implementation efforts.

Goals / Objectives

Implement stormwater best practices that benefit the environment and reduce maintenance costs and impact on play

Reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on Park District Managed natural areas

- ◆ Develop standards for pathways and parking lots to standardize Park District best practice.
- ◆ Identify additional no-mow areas.
- ◆ Identify Park District capital funds and outside funding sources for stormwater projects.
- ◆ Collaborate with athletic field master planning effort.

Lakefront Maintenance



Lake Michigan provides the Highland Park community with recreation, beauty and vital fresh water. The Park District's four lakefront properties require special maintenance and management pertaining to the water quality, sand replenishment, and shoreline repair. The Park District works with partner agencies in the management of Lake Michigan and is an active participant in regional shoreline management studies.

Challenges / Opportunities

The ever-changing and complex environment along the lakefront and the maintenance required is a challenge for the Park District, but local, state and federal partners serve as a resource. While the Park District has a Lakefront Master Plan, the emphasis is on capital development and recreational programming. The Park District lacks a lakefront maintenance strategy to guide management of lakefront properties. The available internal knowledge and expertise of local and regional partners is an opportunity to develop an effective maintenance strategy to address water quality, sand replenishment, and shoreline repair.



Goals / Objectives

Maintain lakefront parks for the enjoyment of patrons and to improve lakefront sustainability

- ◆ Develop a long-term plan for sustainable maintenance of lakefront parks.
- ◆ Identify areas of weakness along the District's shoreline properties and develop a plan to restore and protect the shoreline.

Park Amenities



The Park District provides amenities that contribute to a comfortable experience and encourage the use of the park elements. For the purposes of the Land Management Plan, Park Amenities are defined as elements of the built environment that offer convenience at the parks. This definition differentiates between destination elements such as playgrounds, courts, or sports fields and focuses on support elements such as drinking fountains, grills, and bike racks. Destination elements are covered in the annual capital planning process and for purposes of land management are not considered park amenities.



Challenges and Opportunities

With the exception for park amenities around the District's major indoor facilities, park amenities and signage lack consistency in design, style, and placement. The lack of consistency creates a patchwork appearance and can complicate maintenance and repair. The Park District has made initial steps towards standardization. The existing standards serve as a model to continue to standardize park amenities. Park inspections offer an opportunity to build on an existing maintenance procedure to improve amenity maintenance and procurement.

Goal/Objectives:

Park amenities across the District have a consistent style and placement

- ◆ Develop and implement standards for park amenities detailing style and placement.
- ◆ Collaborate with communication department to implement signage design standards.
- ◆ Identify opportunities to standardize and consolidate amenity replacement and procurement.

Cultural Assets



The art pieces and historical landmarks located throughout the Park District are highly valued by the community and contribute to the aesthetic of the parks. Highland Park's appreciation for the arts is apparent by the art institutions within the community, for example, the City's Cultural Arts Commission and the Art Center — Highland Park.

There are 21 cultural resources located in Park District properties consisting of culturally or historically significant art work, landscapes or structures, for example the Jen's Jensen landscape at Rosewood Park, the Memorial Park Monument and Bandstand, and the sculptures at Moraine Park. The Park District, as an engaged public agency, seeks to support the inclusion of cultural arts throughout the parks. The Land Management Plan assesses these cultural assets from a management and maintenance perspective from acquisition of the cultural resources through years installed in the parks.

Challenges and Opportunities

The existing foundation of organizations and committees dedicated to cultural resources in Highland Park serves as an opportunity for partnership. However, the lack of standards and lack of funding for maintenance poses challenges for further growth of cultural resources in the parks.

Goals and Objectives

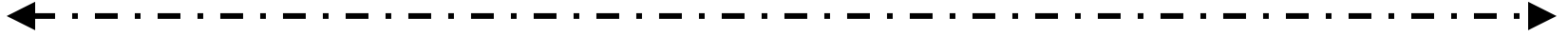
Evaluate cultural donations in accordance to Park District Master Planning

Promote and support cultural resources in the parks



- ◆ Partner with organizations to support cultural resources throughout Highland Park.
- ◆ Consider development of friends' groups to maintain and promote cultural resources in the parks.
- ◆ Develop evaluation standards.
- ◆ Identify key locations for future placement.

Connectivity



The Park District of Highland Park supports the City's Bike/Walk 2030 Plan which seeks to achieve a transportation network with safe access to regional destinations that serve all users, including cyclists, pedestrians, transit users, and motor vehicles.

Goals and Objectives

Support biking and walking in Highland Park

- ◆ Assess available bike amenities to encourage biking to the parks.
- ◆ Explore marketing opportunities to highlight bike and pedestrian access to parks.
- ◆ Work with the City on providing directional signage to existing pathways.



Implementation



Implementation of the land management plan will be led by the Park, Properties, and Planning Department which includes planning, parks, and natural area staff. The success of the implementation will be tracked by the Parks, Properties, and Planning Department.

Priorities

The goals are prioritized based on input from the Parks, Properties, and Planning Department staff.

Timeline

The recommended goals in the Land Management Plan are to be accomplished over the next five years. A detailed timeline is included in the plan.

Cost/Funding

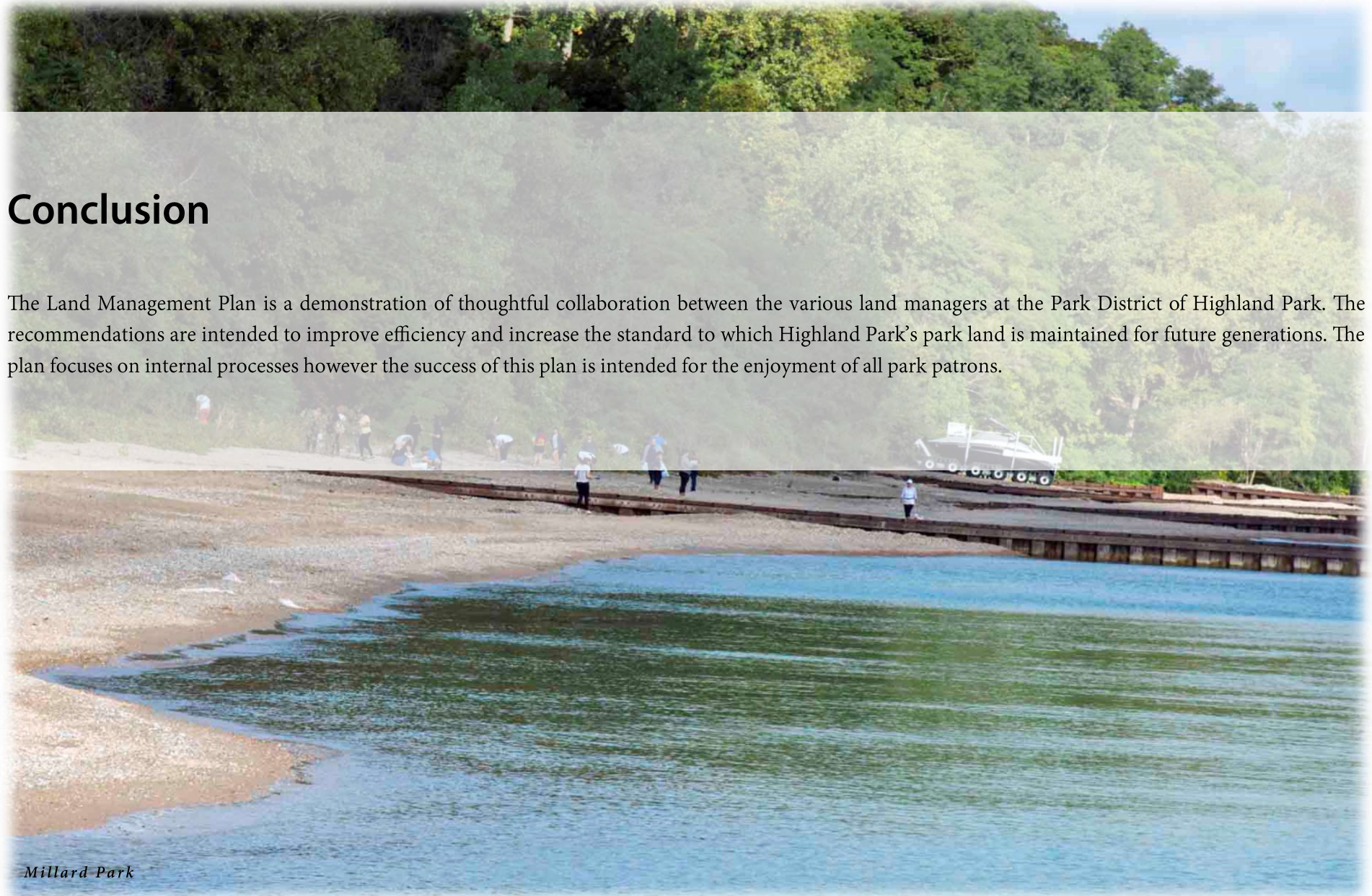
The primary cost to accomplish the recommendations of the Land Management Plan is in staff time. Dollars may be spent for consultants, for example to evaluate Lakefront infrastructure or software to improve process.

Evaluation

Each recommendation will be assessed for completion of success on a quarterly basis.

Prioritization Chart: Goals in order of Priority

1. Provide accessible, clean, and safe parks for all patrons.
2. Implement stormwater best practices that benefit the environment and reduce maintenance costs and impact on play.
3. Maintain lakefront parks for the enjoyment of patrons and to improve lakefront sustainability.
4. Maintain natural areas for continued optimal health of restored land.
5. Promote efficiency of Park Maintenance and Natural Area staff by reducing duplicative maintenance efforts and increasing collaboration.
6. Maintain one central inventory with reliable information that is accessible to all staff in the office and in the field.
7. Provide optimum level of open space service to the residents of Highland Park as determined by national standards.
8. Park amenities across the District have a consistent style and placement.
9. Reduce the impact of stormwater runoff on Park District managed natural areas.
10. Support biking and walking in Highland Park.
11. Maintain an up-to-date inventory of Park District real estate agreements.
12. Promote and support cultural resources in the parks.
13. Evaluate cultural donations in accordance to Park District Master Planning.



Conclusion

The Land Management Plan is a demonstration of thoughtful collaboration between the various land managers at the Park District of Highland Park. The recommendations are intended to improve efficiency and increase the standard to which Highland Park's park land is maintained for future generations. The plan focuses on internal processes however the success of this plan is intended for the enjoyment of all park patrons.

Millard Park