

Envision Evanston 2045

Parks and Open Spaces Section

Ellie Shevick, Parks and Recreation Board Chair

Challenges

Time and Data

- Tomorrow we will have our 3rd meeting with Envision Evanston on our agenda. Any feedback in the presentation is still in process.
 - Our first board meeting with Envision Evanston on the agenda was shortly after the draft was published. The zoning map on the draft had removed or changed several parks in the city. Board asked for a corrected map and a more robust section to comment on.
 - Our second board meeting staff provided a longer chapter but it was missing crucial focus and “how’s”. Staff suggested uploading a google doc of our chapter so members could edit. That was provided to us two weeks ago.
 - Our third meeting discussing EE45 will hopefully have a draft that has included board comments and suggestions for review.

Challenges

The Parks and Recreation Department has a Master Strategic Plan in Draft Form

- The EE45 draft plan was first sent to us with very minimal information on parks and open spaces because it is relying heavily on the strategic plan.
- This strategic plan was approved by council in September 2022 with a 12-14 month timeline.
- Our board received the draft on July 9, 2024. The board has questions about the draft strategic plan and requested to speak with the consultants. We are still waiting for confirmation from staff and council if that is a possibility.
- Members of our board have requested Envision Evanston 2045 not be published until the parks strategic plan is completed.

Policies and Actions

Policies

1. Assess existing parks and recreation programming and investment levels in all neighborhoods

- PO 1.1 Evaluate program lifespans, park usage, and attendance in accordance with the City's Parks Master Plan
- PO 1.2 Recognize and evaluate national trends in recreation and leisure studies and be on the forefront of supplying these opportunities to address current and future programming needs.
- PO 1.3 Determine a threshold for the programming a park can support to prevent over programming an area that would decrease the positive impacts of the space.

Policies

2. Align and expand existing park programming to provide inclusive programs for people of all ages and abilities including

- PO 2.1 Develop outdoor education programs in partnership with schools and conservation organizations that encourage youth engagement in forest stewardship, wildlife monitoring, and environmental restoration efforts.
- PO 2.2 Support local community groups and organizations in their activities related to improving habitat in green spaces.
- PO 2.3 Invest in right sizing the staffing needs to meet the expectations of the community.
- PO 2.4 Recalibrate the system by prioritizing access and reducing barriers for residents of all abilities with the highest unserved need.
- PO 2.5 Develop criteria to ensure programming meets Evanston's equity, inclusion and accessibility goals.

○ There is discussion whether recreation needs and concerns apply to Parks and Open Space portion of Envision Evanston 2045

Policies

3. Increase city investment to maintain, operate and improve equitable park and recreational facilities.

- PO 3.1 Develop a staffing and training plan to maintain existing facilities.
 - PO 3.2 Assess the condition of park facilities and identify equity, inclusivity, and proper amenities needed to align with the demographics of the geographic areas served.
 - PO 3.3 Develop a multi-year capital improvement and funding plan that includes a park replacement matrix with components related to equity to support the delivery of inclusive programs for people of all ages and abilities.
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- The City Council, with the advice of the P and R Board and Department, shall commit to the renovation and improvements of all city playgrounds so that by 2035, there is no playground feature/equipment more than 12 years old and thereafter that the City is committed to replacing all city playground features/equipment when such reaches its useful life or 15 years old, whichever is less.
 - The portion of the city budget (not including CIP funds) dedicated to the care, maintenance, restoration, renovation, improvement, etc., of parks and open space should annually (starting with the 2026 budget) be no less than 5% of the City's overall budget, but never decreased below its 2026 budget amount, regardless of the annual city budget, at least until this Comprehensive Plan is re-assessed in 2045

Policies

4. Sustain and/or expand strategies to expand water access through City leadership and partnerships

- PO 4.1 Connect community through a mix of programs and amenities.
- PO 4.2 Investment in offerings that meet community desires for swimming and waterfront views.
- PO 4.3 Increased investment in North Shore Channel
- PO 4.4 Complete the design and build the canoe launch facility in conjunction with the Evanston Environmental Association.

Policies

5. Evaluate and establish a plan to create an accessible public restroom system

- PO 5.1 Develop a list of existing and potential placement of public bathrooms.
 - PO 5.2 Identifies park and public space where the current infrastructure could be accentuated by the placement of a bathroom for programming offerings.
- We'd like to see the city plan or at least look to see if it made sense to add sewer access in nearby parks whenever they open roads for water replacement.

Policies

6. Increase strategies focused on stewardship, education, and investments in urban habitats and natural landscapes throughout the city

- PO 6.1 Enhance existing naturalized landscapes in a coordinated effort to improve the connectivity, quality and resilience of the network.
- PO 6.2 Utilize technology to increase ecological knowledge.
- PO 6.3 Manage volunteerism and partnerships to restore naturalized landscapes in alignment with the city's goals.

Policies

7. Maintain and execute the 2025 Parks and Green Space Strategic plan as the governing blueprint for Parks and Recreation

- PO 7.1 Prioritize recommendations and improvements.
- PO 7.2 Implement items after strategizing with internal departments.
- PO 7.3 Update and adjust the strategic plan over the expected fifteen-year lifespan.
- PO 7.4 Fund a new strategic plan once the existing plan has outlived its relevant lifespan of ten to fifteen years.

Board Suggestions

Restructuring Parks and Recreation

That all Parks and Recreation programs, functions and other works shall, by January 1, 2028, be consolidated under a single Parks and Department, with all such activities currently being handled by Public Works or Greenways transferred for operations, management and control to the Parks and Recreation Department.

That sufficient professional parks and recreation staff and employees be hired or transferred from other City departments to enable the Parks and Recreation Department to function much like a Park District but within the City; subject to all expenditures and major projects being finally authorized by the City Council.

Board Suggestions

Increasing park land

- Evanston has about half of the national average for park land per capita. As we plan for population growth we need to keep in mind that we are already fall below.
 - We need to develop a plan to actively acquire park land until we meet the national average.
 - Require new developments to include park or open space.
 - Collaborate with school districts 65 and 202 to provide shared space and facilities.