

Chapter 11.

Parks and Recreation



YOUR CITY. YOUR PLAN.



Chapter 11 Parks and Recreation

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Introduction

The City’s parks and recreation system and all components therein, have a considerable positive effect and influence on Harrisonburg resident’s quality of life, the health and well-being of the community and supports economic and environmental sustainability.

The City’s commitment to improved parks and excellence in recreation programming is demonstrated by its adoption of the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This Master Plan describes existing conditions of the parks and recreation system, provides results of a resident survey, sets standards for future park development and makes recommendations for needed improvements to the system. In addition, Master Plans for three parks have been completed and approved by City Council. These include the Smithland Road Park Master Plan completed in 2004, the Ralph Sampson Park Master Plan completed in 2008, and the Ramblewood Park Master Plan completed in 2012.

Background

A formal recreation program was first introduced in Harrisonburg at the end of World War II. In 1954, a full-time recreation director was hired and a Parks and Recreation Department was created. In 1967, the first comprehensive master plan for parks and recreation was created. The plan initialized a commitment by the City to provide a comprehensive approach to parks and open space planning. Since then, many employees have worked diligently to create a first-class parks and recreation system for the City of Harrisonburg.

Park facilities and recreational programming play an important role in the quality of life and economic sustainability of our community. A well-developed parks and recreation system can offer many benefits to residents and visitors by providing opportunities that improve people's health, reduce stress, encourage socialization, protect natural resources and air quality, improve aesthetics, and enhance property values, among others.

The administrative operations of the Department of Parks and Recreation is housed in the Cecil F. Gilkerson Community Activities Center on South Dogwood Drive. The department's current goals are to:

- Enhance the quality of life for the people of Harrisonburg by providing a broad and comprehensive program of leisure time activities.
- Contribute to the character of the City by developing and maintaining a system of parks, recreational facilities and open space areas.
- Become the benchmark in the delivery of recreation services that others aspire to attain.
- Seek agency accreditation through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies.

The Harrisonburg parks and recreation system has grown considerably in the amount of facilities and programming that the Department of Parks & Recreation oversees. The ability for the Department to change and grow has enabled it to keep pace with the growth of the City. The City's commitment to comprehensive park planning has had tangible results.

[Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission](#)

The needs of the general community are represented by a Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission that is composed of eight members including one member representing the School Board and one member representing City Council. The Commission's main objective is to communicate residents' needs and input into the long-range planning and improvement of the parks and recreation system.

[Parks and Recreation Program Needs](#)

A 2003 public survey and comparative analysis of level of use standards revealed several shortfalls and needs for improvements in the City's parks and recreation system.¹ Many of the needs expressed were in the area of athletic fields, walking trails, swimming pools, indoor hard courts and expanded programs for youth activities. A high demand was expressed for soccer and softball/baseball facilities. This was due to intensive use of existing facilities and the popularity of these sports with the general population as well as specific ethnic groups. In an analysis of available park acreage and distribution of parks by neighborhoods and voting precincts, it became evident that the population was relatively well served by

¹ The public survey and comparative analysis was completed with the 2003 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

larger community parks. However, the availability and distribution of neighborhood and mini parks was generally deficient. A detailed analysis can be found in the appendix of the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

The goal, objectives, and strategies listed below focus on the recommendations for the needs of the physical facilities as identified in the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Parks and Recreation Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal 12. To meet the needs of people by providing comprehensive recreation and self-development opportunities, both physical and mental, by developing and maintaining a safe, welcoming, well-distributed, and accessible parks and recreation system that also supports community well-being, economic sustainability, and environmental sustainability.

Objective 12.1 To continue to support Harrisonburg's parks and recreation system as a major community benefit.

Strategy 12.1.1 To implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Recreation and Parks Master Plan and associated park master plans.

Strategy 12.1.2 To update the Comprehensive Recreation and Parks Master Plan and associated park master plans as needed and determined by the Parks & Recreation Commission.

Objective 12.2 To enhance Harrisonburg parks and recreation facilities and programs to serve the diversity of interests and needs of our community.

Strategy 12.2.1 To implement community outreach and engagement strategies to guide decisions on provided facilities and programs best suited to the needs and interests of our diverse community.

Strategy 12.2.2 To partner with community organizations to develop strategies for expanding services to our diverse community.

Strategy 12.2.3 To continue cooperating with Harrisonburg City Public Schools in making school recreation facilities available to the public, as appropriate.

Objective 12.3 To develop an interconnected, accessible network of park and recreational facilities through development of a greenway (trails and natural corridor) system.

Strategy 12.3.1 To create a network of pocket parks and green spaces that connects the City's parks with trails and linear open spaces.

Strategy 12.3.2 To design greenways not only to provide recreational opportunities, but also to provide riparian habitat, protection from flooding, pollution filtering, and visible relief from urban development.

Strategy 12.3.3 To identify opportunities to develop a network of greenways and trail systems connecting parks and recreational facilities that could also support the needs and priorities identified in the City's Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan.

Objective 12.4 To enhance the appearance, safety, and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities.

Strategy 12.4.1 To create a set of design guidelines and standards for City parks and facilities addressing landscaping, architectural design, sustainability, accessibility, safety, and crime prevention.

Chapter Resources

Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Smithland Road Master Plan, and Ramblewood Master Plan, <https://www.harrisonburgva.gov/parks-plan>