

# Executive Summary



December 2024

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## MAYOR & CITY COUNCIL

**Justin M. Bibb** - Mayor

**Joseph T. Jones** - Ward 1

**Kevin L. Bishop** - Ward 2

**Kerry McCormack** - Ward 3

**Deborah A. Gray** - Ward 4

**Richard A. Starr** - Ward 5

**Blaine A. Griffin** - Ward 6, *Council President*

**Stephanie D. Howse-Jones** - Ward 7

**Michael D. Polensek** - Ward 8

**Kevin Conwell** - Ward 9

**Anthony T. Hairston** - Ward 10

**Danny Kelly** - Ward 11

**Rebecca Maurer** - Ward 12

**Kris Harsh** - Ward 13

**Jasmin Santana** - Ward 14

**Jenny Spencer** - Ward 15

**Brian Kazy** - Ward 16

**Charles J. Slife** - Ward 17

## PARKS & RECREATION PLAN CORE TEAM

**Alexandria Nichols** - Director, Department of Parks & Recreation

**James DeRosa** - Director, Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Keshia Chambers** - Assistant Director, Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Jay Rauschenbach** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Michael Reder** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Mark Duluk** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Jim McKnight** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Brian Avery** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**Emily Petz** - Mayor's Office of Capital Projects

**John Laird** - Assistant Director, Department of Public Works

**Sam Gissentaner** - Commissioner, Division of Recreation

**Jessica Gift** - Assistant Commissioner, Division of Recreation

**Toi Porch** - Commissioner, Division of Parks Maintenance & Properties

**Adam Davenport** - City Planning Commission

## STEERING COMMITTEE

**Joyce Pan Huang** - Director, City Planning Commission

**Sarah O'Keeffe** - Director, Office of Sustainability & Climate Justice

**Sonya Pryor-Jones** - Chief, Youth & Family Success

**Patti Choby** - Cleveland Metropolitan School District

**Kelly Coffman** - Cleveland Metroparks

**Sean Terry** - Trust for Public Land

## KEY GROUPS

Cleveland Parks & Greenspace Coalition

Cleveland Metropolitan School District

Cleveland Metroparks

Trust for Public Land

Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress

Greater Cleveland Partnership

Downtown Cleveland, Inc.

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

Canalway Partners

LAND Studio

America SCORES

Cleveland Plays

Muny Football

Refugee Response

St. Ignatius Soccer

Old Brooklyn Baseball

B-Buzz Baseball

Case Western Reserve University Pickleball Club

Holden Parks Trust



Cleveland residents and valued partners,

Over the past year and a half, Clevelanders from all across the city have been clear that parks and recreation are essential public services that support health, wellbeing, and community.

Our invaluable system of public spaces spans the natural and the designed, the big and the small, the urban and the not-so-urban. These spaces bring beauty to Cleveland and give it an intentional sense of place. This Cleveland Parks and Recreation Plan — the city's first in more than 40 years — is a community-driven vision that will guide park and recreation investments for decades to come. The plan provides a road map for decision-making around parks and recreation policy, maintenance, physical improvements, programming, and funding.

With the creation of the new Department of Parks and Recreation to enhance day-to-day experiences and implement the Parks and Recreation Plan, we are continuing the important work of improving City services and making a commitment to be more equitable in the way we invest in our parks, recreation facilities, and programs.

Thank you to all those who contributed to this plan, and to those who remain committed to ensuring this vision for our parks, recreation facilities, and programs becomes a reality. We know that together with our partners within and outside of city government, we can provide the high-quality spaces and programs that residents expect. I could not be more optimistic for the future of parks and recreation in Cleveland and look forward to seeing the vision set forth in this plan come to life for the benefit of all Clevelanders for generations to come.

With gratitude,

Mayor Justin M. Bibb  
City of Cleveland



# OVERVIEW

The Cleveland Parks and Recreation Plan examines park and recreation needs in the context of the city's system of public spaces and articulates an ambitious yet attainable vision for parks and recreation in the future.

## A HOLISTIC SYSTEM OF PUBLIC SPACES

A bike ride along the Towpath Trail for some fresh air or for a commute to work. A walk in Rockefeller Park to decompress or to see the Cultural Gardens. A ballgame for the championship or between neighbors. A dip in the pool to cool off or to maintain agility. Pick-up games on the courts and fields. Flowers and holiday skating in Public Square. Volleyball on the lakefront or exploring history along the river. Public spaces are part of the daily lives of all Clevelanders.

The Parks and Recreation Plan focuses specifically on City-owned facilities. To implement this vision, the plan weaves together strategies, guidelines, and decision-making tools that the City can use as a road map to shape the parks and recreation system over the next 15 years. The Parks and Recreation Plan was informed by a collaborative process with Cleveland residents, park partners, elected officials, and other key groups.

Cleveland's parks and recreation facilities are a crucial component of the city's system of public spaces.  
Source: City of Cleveland.





# Parks & Recreation Vision:

Cleveland's **dynamic and equitable** network of parks and recreational facilities **enhances** quality of life and the natural environment, **preserves and stewards** the city's rich cultural identities, and **evolves** with the needs of current and future generations of Clevelanders.

# ANALYSIS & ENGAGEMENT

The development of the Cleveland Parks and Recreation Plan was a 19-month long process, beginning in the summer of 2023 and concluding in the fall of 2024. The planning process was framed around three main phases with significant engagement efforts to ensure the desires of the community and city staff were accurately reflected in the plan’s recommendations.

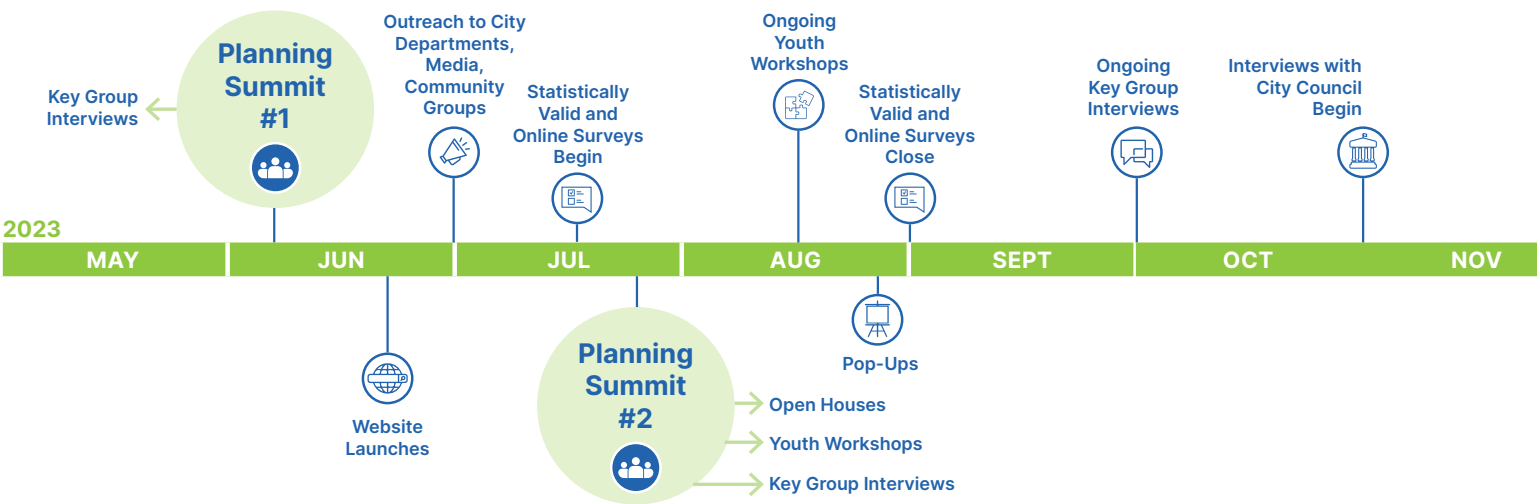
## PHASE I: COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The first phase encompassed understanding the current state of Cleveland’s parks and recreation system, its organization, program offerings, and residents’ needs. Multiple methods of engagement were leveraged, including a statistically valid survey.

## PHASE II: LONG-RANGE PLANNING

Building on the findings of the first phase as well as the City’s existing inventory and assessments, system-wide concepts, tools, recommendations and goals were developed and tested through public and staff review and comment. The public outreach of this component reported back to the community on the Community Needs Assessment, received feedback on the draft plan, vision, and goals, and continued to foster dialogue with residents about parks and recreation in Cleveland.

Figure 1. Community Engagement Timeline.  
Source: OLIN, 2024.



Top: Open house attendees were asked to put a dot on the park they visit most often.

Source: Sylven Lamar Edwards.

Bottom: Community members providing feedback at a pop-up engagement event at Kerruish Park.

Source: City of Cleveland.

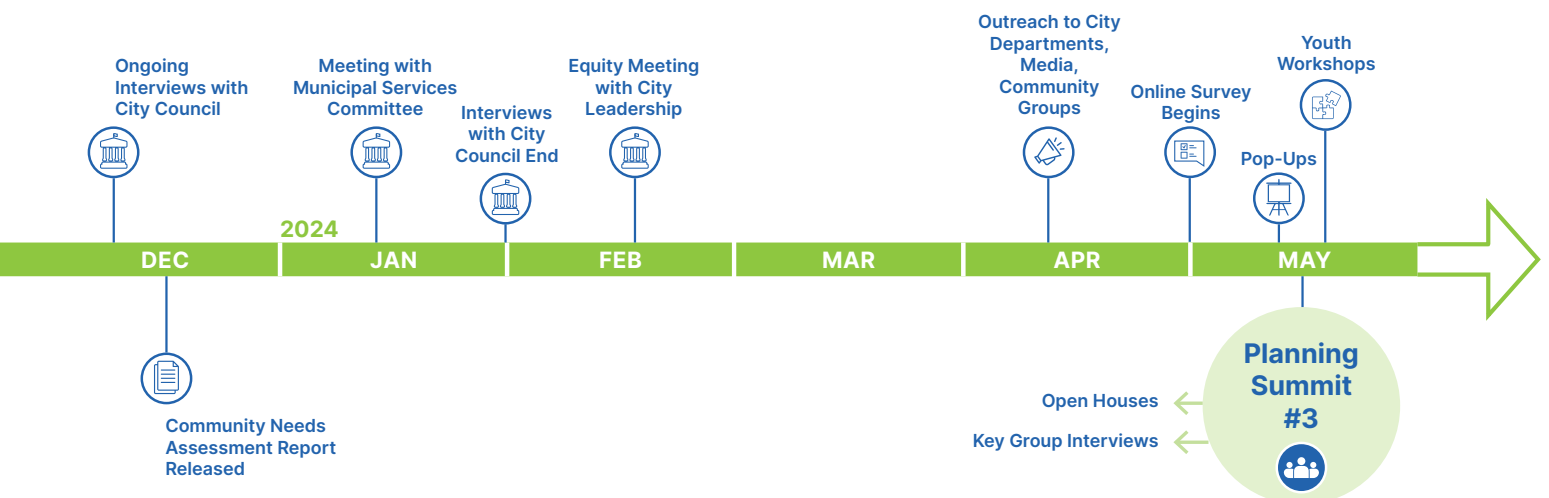
## PHASE III: STRATEGIC PLANNING

The third phase of the process was focused on setting the City up for short-term and long-term successes, developing funding and implement a strategy for the long-range plan and identify best practices and early action projects.

## ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

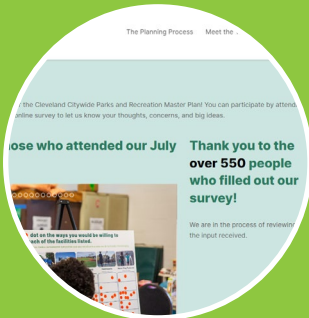
The process of developing this Parks and Recreation Plan included a number of opportunities for residents, advocates, and elected leaders to provide input. The goal of these touch points was to foster dialogue among the widest possible audience to cultivate a shared vision for the future of Cleveland's parks and recreation facilities.

During the 19-month long planning process, the project team engaged over 2,000 community members and key groups and organizations. The City's parks, facilities, and programs are all beloved, and the planning process was structured to ensure that all park users and communities were invited and had the chance to weigh in on the future of this important recreational system.

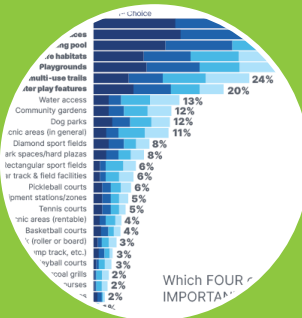


# 2,000+

## POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT



**765**  
Online Survey  
Responses



**528**  
Statistically Valid  
Survey Responses



**250+**  
Open House  
Attendees



**250+**  
Pop-Up  
Attendees



**158**  
Neighborhood  
Meeting Participants



**100+**  
Youth Workshop  
Participants



**45+**  
City & Community  
Group Interviews

# ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS





# AN EQUITABLE PARKS & RECREATION SYSTEM

Cleveland must continue to work towards a parks and recreation system that is equitable, providing just and fair inclusion for all people across race, age, culture, economic status, ability, and gender.

## DEFINING EQUITY

Equity in parks and recreation can be defined as when race is no longer a predictor of access to and quality of parks and recreation, health, well-being, and quality of life. An equitable parks and recreation system honors the unique qualities and needs of each user and neighborhood in design, programming, access to nature, registration, customer service and management.

To take an equitable approach is to constantly work to recognize and acknowledge past harms, work to ameliorate them, be adaptable, and center and reflect the community in the planning, design, and staffing/operations of parks and recreation facilities. It also means filling park and recreation gaps where there have not historically been investments and making sure that when improvements happen existing residents can enjoy those improvements.

Equity is also about the distribution of resources and decision-making. A more equitable parks and recreation system invests in historically underinvested communities and gives people opportunities to engage in shaping the facilities and programs in their neighborhoods.

## HOW THIS PLAN ADDRESSES EQUITY

### Level of Service Standards

The level of service access-based standards seek to ensure equitable access to fundamental recreational amenities within a short walk of each Clevelander's home.

### General Investment Strategies

Based on an analysis of proximity to park space, number of parks, and access to recreational amenities, the plan identifies parts of the City where additional amenities are needed, where current amenities should be maintained, and where there is an abundance of amenities—with the aim of more equitable investments.

### Park Prioritization Strategy

In an effort to move beyond the City's current condition-based strategy for prioritizing capital investments, this Plan proposes a strategy that centers equity and citywide priorities.

### Policy Framework

In support of all the goals of this plan, a number of specific methods aim to create more equitable City policy around parks and recreation.



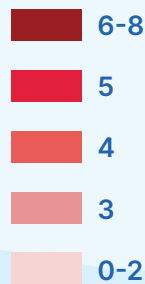
# A TOOL FOR MAPPING EQUITY IN CLEVELAND

## CLIMATE & ECONOMIC JUSTICE SCREENING TOOL (CEJST)

Developed by the Council on Environmental Quality in 2021, the CEJST measures the level of burden that communities across the country experience. The eight categories of burden the tool measures are:

- climate change
- energy
- health
- housing
- legacy pollution
- transportation
- water and wastewater
- workforce development

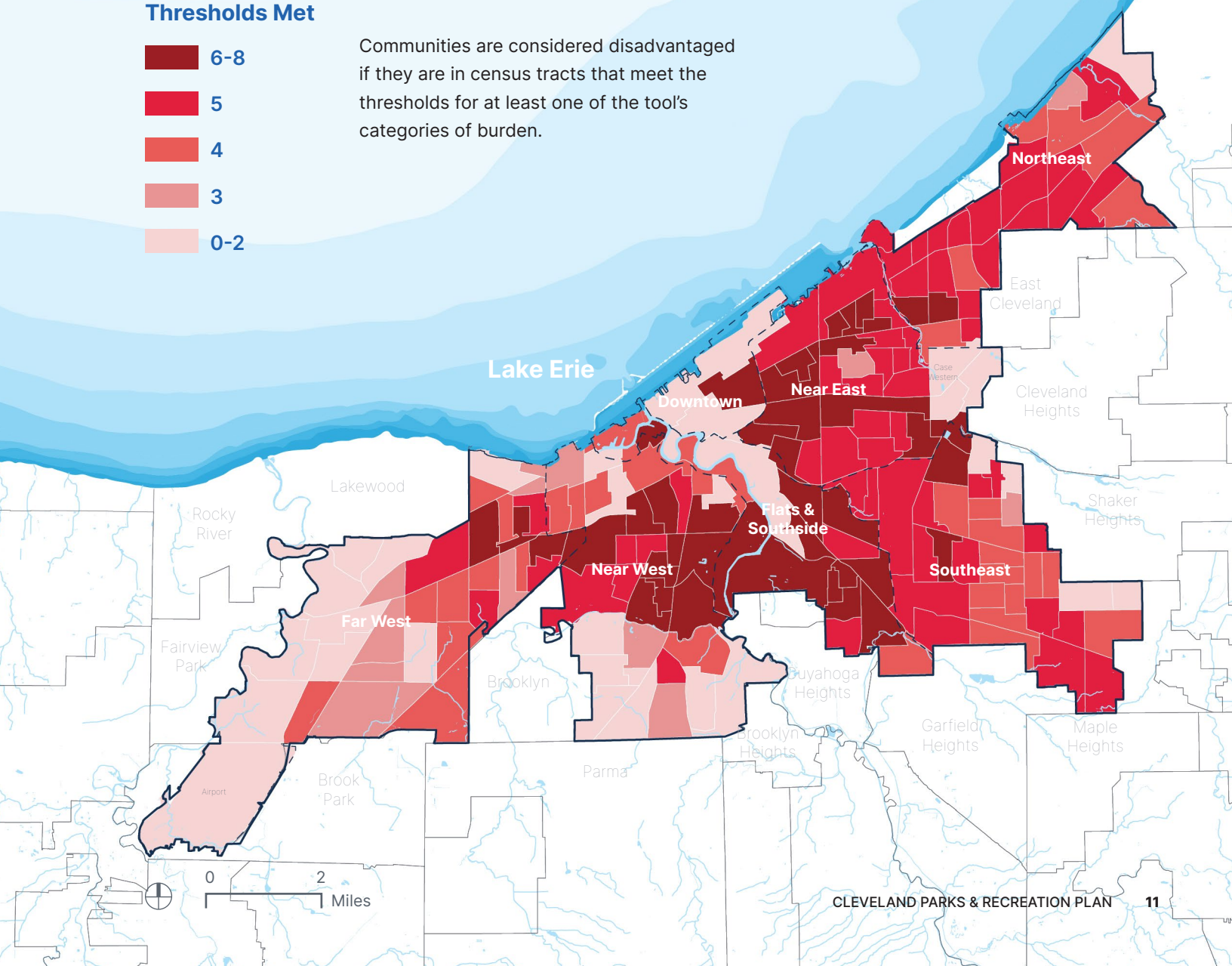
### Number of Burden Thresholds Met



Communities are considered disadvantaged if they are in census tracts that meet the thresholds for at least one of the tool's categories of burden.

Federal agencies use the tool to identify disadvantaged communities that will benefit from programs included in the Justice40 Initiative. The Justice40 Initiative seeks to deliver 40% of the overall benefits of investments in climate, clean energy, and related areas to disadvantaged communities.

Because the data is compiled nationwide, is comprehensive, is easily accessible, and is tied to a federal funding source, it is used throughout this plan as a way to identify geographic areas in the city with equity concerns. Areas burdened in at least six categories are prioritized in this plan for additional investments.



# DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines are a road map for designing new parks and recreation facility sites and refreshing existing ones—or evaluating whether sites need to be refreshed. They help ensure that parks and recreation facilities are functional and beautiful, and meet resident expectations.

The design guidelines are meant to ensure that park and recreation facility sites are well integrated into their surroundings and provide the best experiences for visitors. They address overall design, site context, access and connectivity, wayfinding, and various zones of use within the site. The guidelines are intended to inform:

- the development of framework and site plans;
- the periodic evaluation of parks and recreation facilities to determine if they're functioning as intended; and
- the design of refreshed or new parks.

“

Providing the community with **beautiful spaces throughout the city** to find respite can do wonders for mental health.

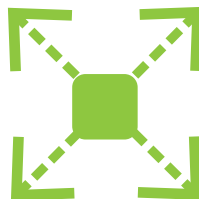
”

– Online survey participant from Near East Cleveland

The 36 design guidelines are organized into six categories:



Design



Context



Connectivity



Wayfinding



Infrastructure



Zones



# LEVEL OF SERVICE

Level of service standards help guide decisions about how many recreational amenities are needed and where.

The City of Cleveland has a robust, distributed public space system that seeks to provide residents with convenient access to amenities and services. However, different parts of the city have different levels of access to recreational amenities.

No uniform level of service standards exists for parks or recreational amenities across the country. There are generally two types of standards that communities use to analyze service: population-based standards and access standards. This plan defines both population-based and access standards by amenity.

Used in combination, the population-based and access standards provide a snapshot



of the level of service provided by current recreation amenities and a road map for addressing the number and location of amenities in the future. The level of service standards can be used to help prioritize which actions will increase equitable access to recreational amenities for the most residents.

Level of service standards can and should change over time as industry trends change and demographic trends of the community change. The City will update its inventory of recreation amenities annually and will reexamine the recommended level of service standards approximately every five years as the needs assessment is updated.

## Access-Based Standards

How close should residents be to a type of park amenity?

### 10-minute walk

-  Playgrounds
-  Basketball Hoops

### 20-minute walk

-  Pools & Splashpads
-  Rectangular Fields
-  Diamond Fields
-  Recreation Centers
-  Community Gardens
-  Pickleball Courts
-  Dog Parks

## Population-Based Standards

How many of each park amenity does Cleveland have per resident?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  Playgrounds        |  Community         |
|  Basketball Hoops   |  Gardens           |
|  Pools              |  Pickleball Courts |
|  Splashpads         |  Dog Parks         |
|  Rectangular Fields |  Tennis Courts     |
|  Diamond Fields     |  Volleyball Courts |
|  |  Walking Loops     |

# CLASSIFICATIONS

The new park and recreation facility classification system in this plan clarifies how existing parks and recreation facilities function and provides guidelines about future park and recreation facility typologies that may be necessary to build in the future to meet the needs of current and future residents.

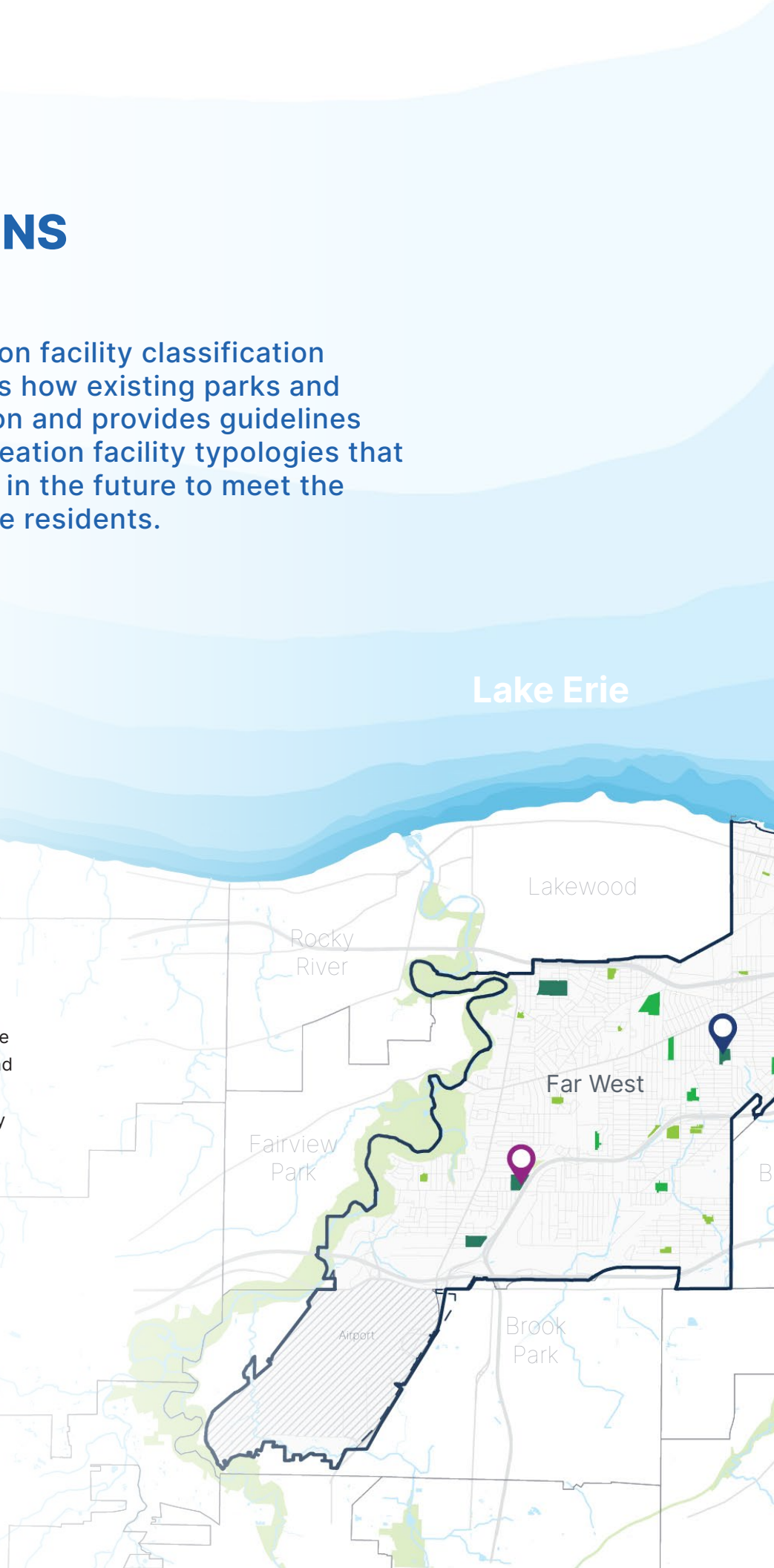
For each park and recreation facility classification, the plan includes a general description of the classifications:

- typical size range;
- typical length of visit;
- access provisions;
- list of appropriate amenities, and
- applicable design guidelines  
(Descriptions of the design guidelines can be found in the previous section).

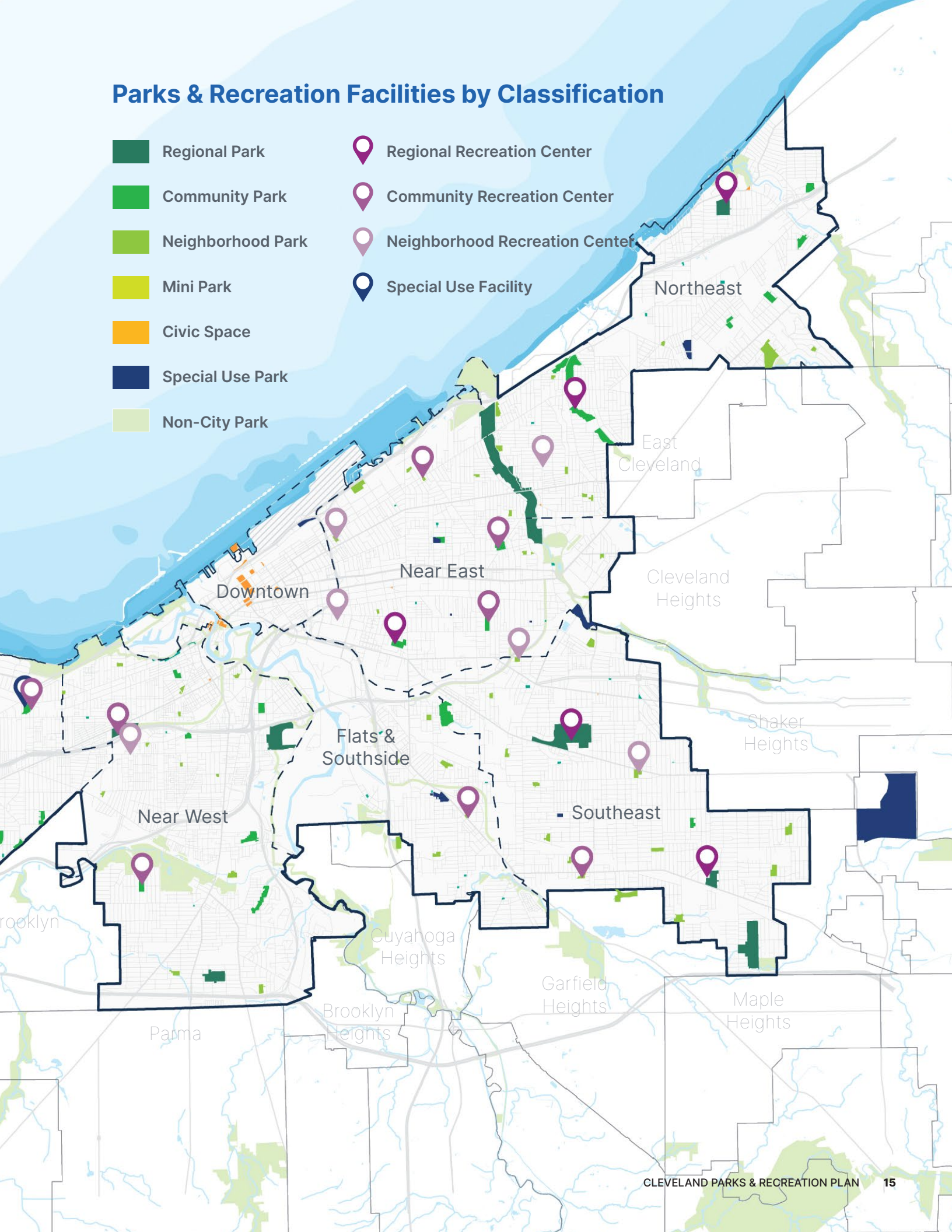
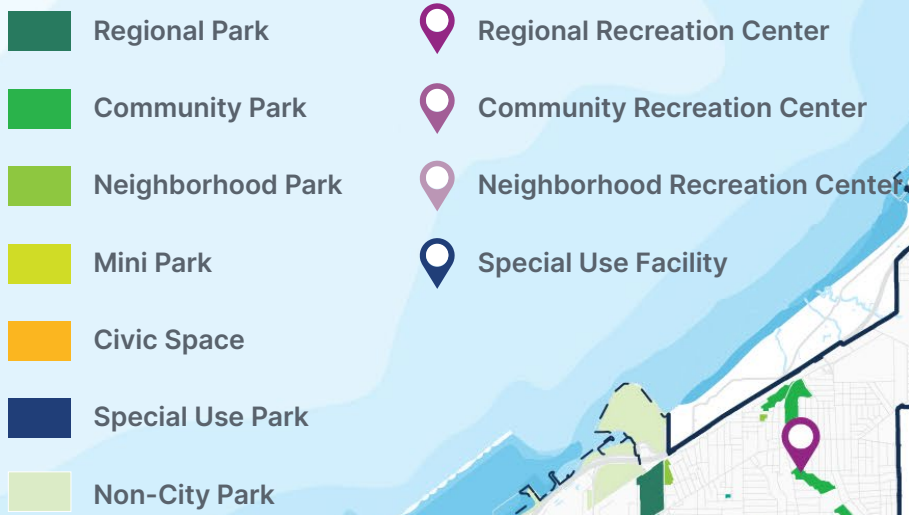
The list of amenities is not meant to be prescriptive or exhaustive. The appropriate amenities for any individual park or recreation facility should be determined through a planning process that involves the community it is meant to serve. All parks and recreation facilities should be designed to serve multiple age segments and a diversity of users.



0 2  
Miles



## Parks & Recreation Facilities by Classification





# EQUITY-BASED PARK PRIORITIZATION STRATEGY

In an effort to move beyond the City’s current condition-based strategy for prioritizing capital investments, this Plan proposes a strategy that centers plan priorities, equity, and citywide priorities. This strategy is meant to ensure that investments have a greater impact.

The park prioritization strategy uses nine criteria to ensure that capital investments are targeted first in the parks and communities where they are needed the most. The criteria should be reviewed periodically to adapt to changing neighborhood demographics, investments, and city priorities.

## PARK AND RECREATION PLAN PRIORITIES

The following four criteria are identified within this plan.

### Site Investment Strategy

Following the city’s site evaluations, each park receives a score based on design,

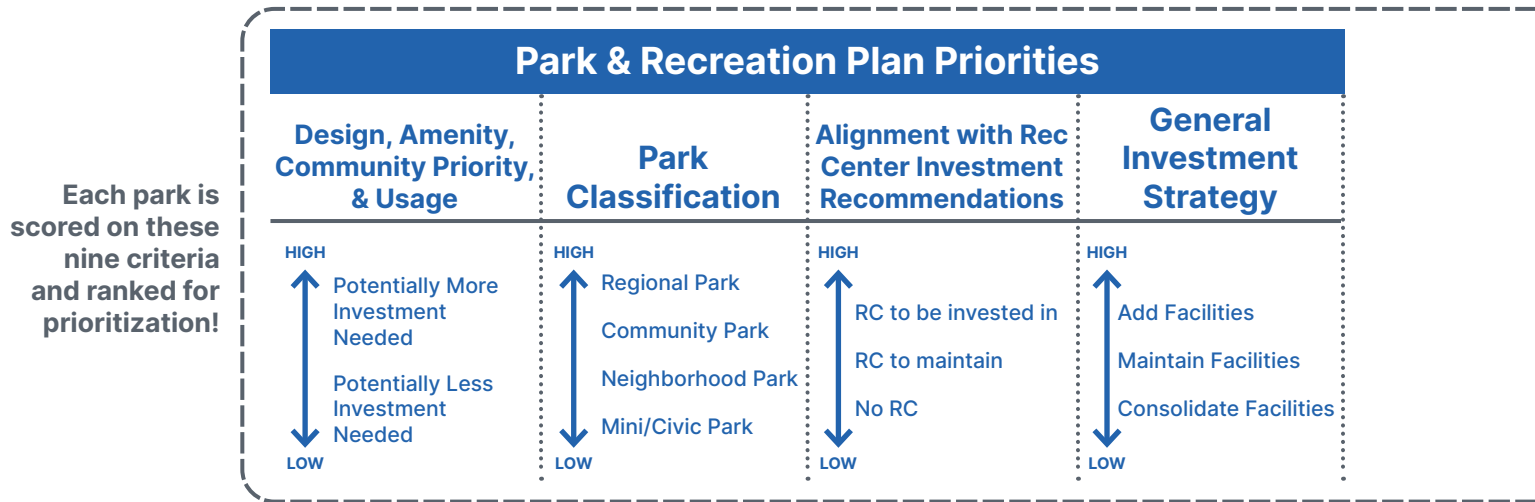
amenity conditions, community priorities and usage. Parks potentially needing more investment are scored higher than those that potentially need less. Previously, this was the only criteria used for prioritization.

### Park Classification

Regional parks are crucial destinations in Cleveland’s park system, offering many amenities, programs, and access to green space. Because of this, regional parks receive a higher score than mini parks.

### Alignment with Recreation Center Investment Recommendations

If a park has a recreation center identified for investment, it receives a higher score.





## General Investment Strategy

This plan identifies three areas in the general investment strategy. Parks in the 'areas to potentially add facilities' receive a higher score.

## EQUITY

The following criteria center racial and economic equity.

### Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)

Areas burdened in at least six of the eight categories are prioritized in this plan for investments.

### Expenditures Since 2013

Measuring previous investments in existing park assets is an important way to identify parks that have historically received lower levels of investment. These parks are much more likely to be due for significant reinvestment.

## ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER CITY PRIORITIES

These criteria may vary by administration, but are helpful to advance projects and priorities across Cleveland.

### Crime

Parks in areas with high crime are prioritized for additional investments.

### 15-Minute City

A priority of the City Planning Commission, areas with a high index rating receive a higher score than areas with a lower index rating.

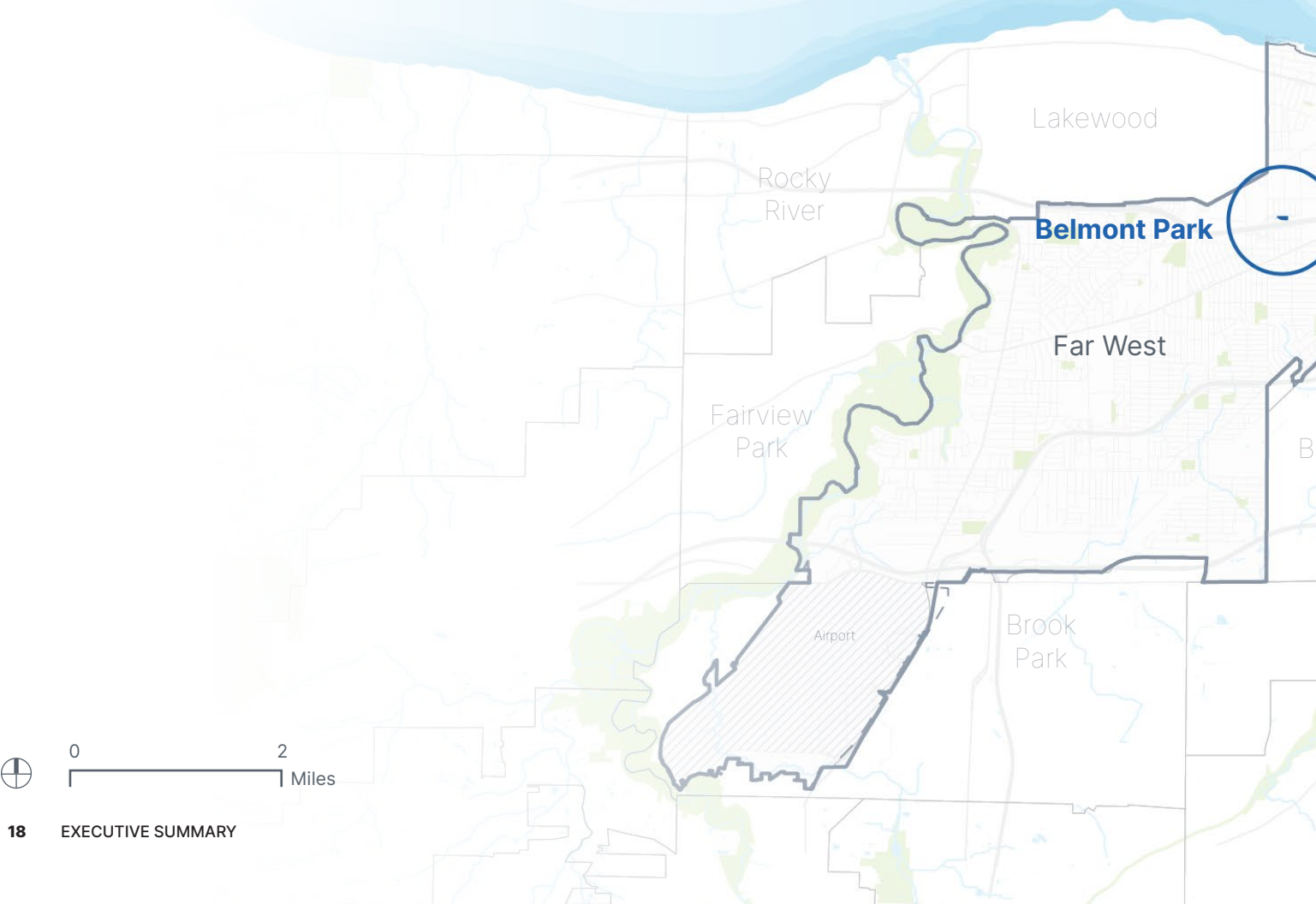
### Southeast Side Promise

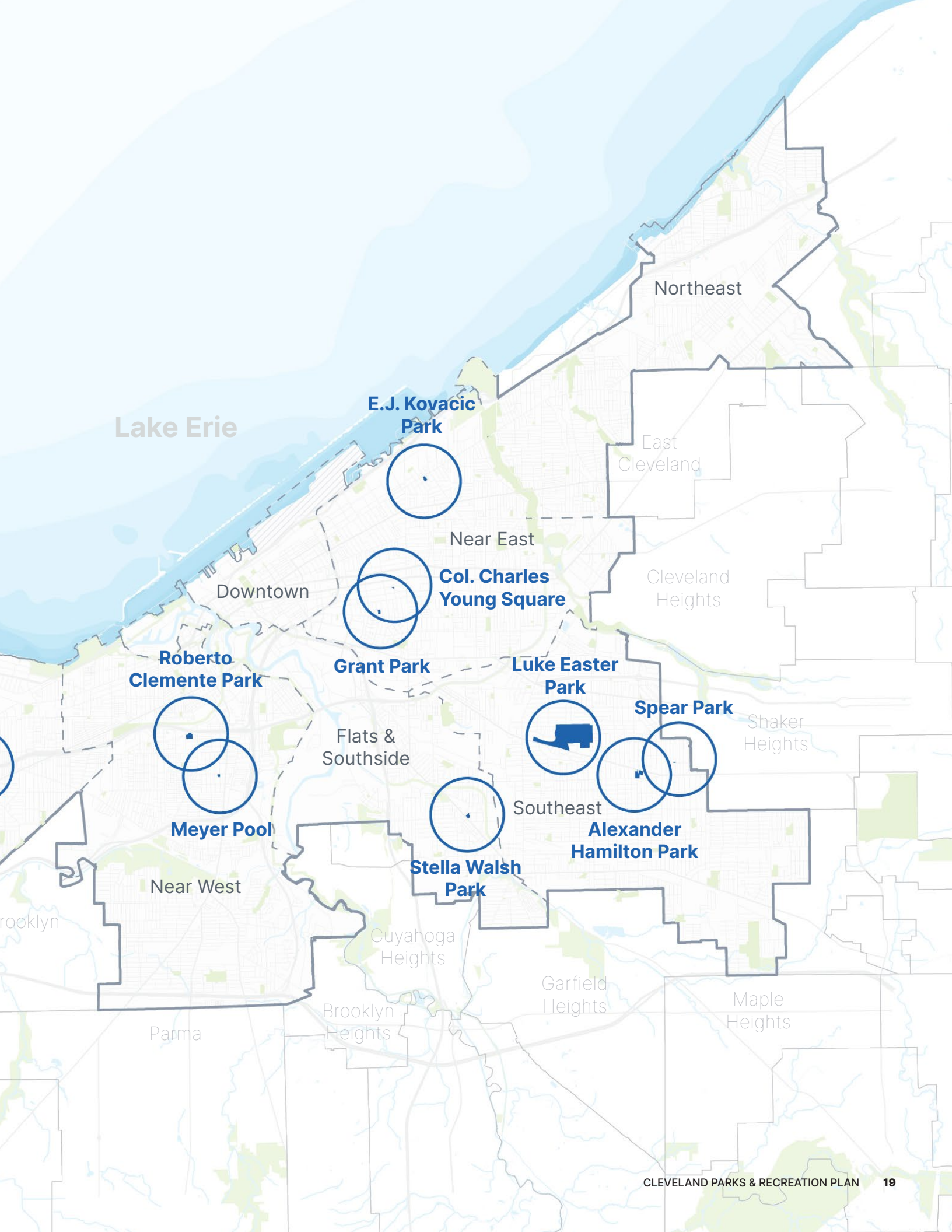
A priority of Mayor Justin M. Bibb to address the issue of concentrated disinvestment in the neighborhoods of Cleveland's southeast side. Parks in this area are prioritized for investments.

Equity		Alignment with Other City Priorities		
CEJST	Expenditures Since 2013	Crime	15-Minute City	Southeast Side Promise
<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>Burdened in 6+ cat.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Burdened in &lt;6 cat.</p> <p>LOW</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>No investment</p> <p>Some investment</p> <p>Lots of investment</p> <p>↓</p> <p>LOW</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>High Crime</p> <p>↓</p> <p>Low Crime</p> <p>LOW</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>↓</p> <p>No</p> <p>LOW</p>	<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>↓</p> <p>No</p> <p>LOW</p>

# Park Prioritization Strategy

		Classification	Planning Region	
1	Alexander Hamilton Park	Neighborhood Park	Southeast	Top 10
2	Stella Walsh Park	Neighborhood Park	Flats & Southside	
3	Spear Park	Mini Park	Southeast	
4	Grant Park	Neighborhood Park	Near East	
4	Meyer Pool	Neighborhood Park	Near West	
6	Luke Easter Park	Regional Park	Southeast	
7	Belmont Park	Neighborhood Park	Far West	
7	Col. Charles Young Square	Civic Space	Near East	
7	E.J. Kovacic Park	Neighborhood Park	Near East	
7	Roberto Clemente Park	Community Park	Near West	





Lake Erie

Northeast

**E.J. Kovacic  
Park**

East  
Cleveland

Near East

**Col. Charles  
Young Square**

Cleveland  
Heights

Downtown

**Roberto  
Clemente Park**

**Grant Park**

**Luke Easter  
Park**

**Spear Park**

Shaker  
Heights

Flats &  
Southside

Southeast

**Meyer Pool**

**Alexander  
Hamilton Park**

Near West

**Stella Walsh  
Park**

Brooklyn

Cuyahoga  
Heights

Garfield  
Heights

Maple  
Heights

Parma

Brooklyn  
Heights



# RECREATION FACILITY PRIORITIZATION STRATEGY

With 22 recreation centers & special facilities, Cleveland needs an approach for prioritizing investments in these critical resource hubs. These recommendations are designed to be implemented over a 20-year period through an intentional phased plan.

The phased approach is designed in 5-year increments to transition the city's recreation centers and special facilities into modern, quality recreation facilities to serve the residents of Cleveland.

These overall recommendations and the phasing plan can only be accomplished with adequate funding for planning, capital investments, and ongoing operation, maintenance, and programming. If adequate funds are not available to cover all these costs, not just the capital costs, the City should look at further reducing the number of centers and special facilities it invests in and operates to ensure quality facilities and quality programs are provided. If reductions in centers and special facilities is necessitated, the City of Cleveland should prioritize investments in and operation of facilities to ensure:

- recreation centers and special facilities are provided in neighborhoods with the greatest needs
- recreation centers are geographically distributed across the City, and;
- the City does not duplicate facilities and services in close proximity to other similar providers (i.e., YMCA, YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs).

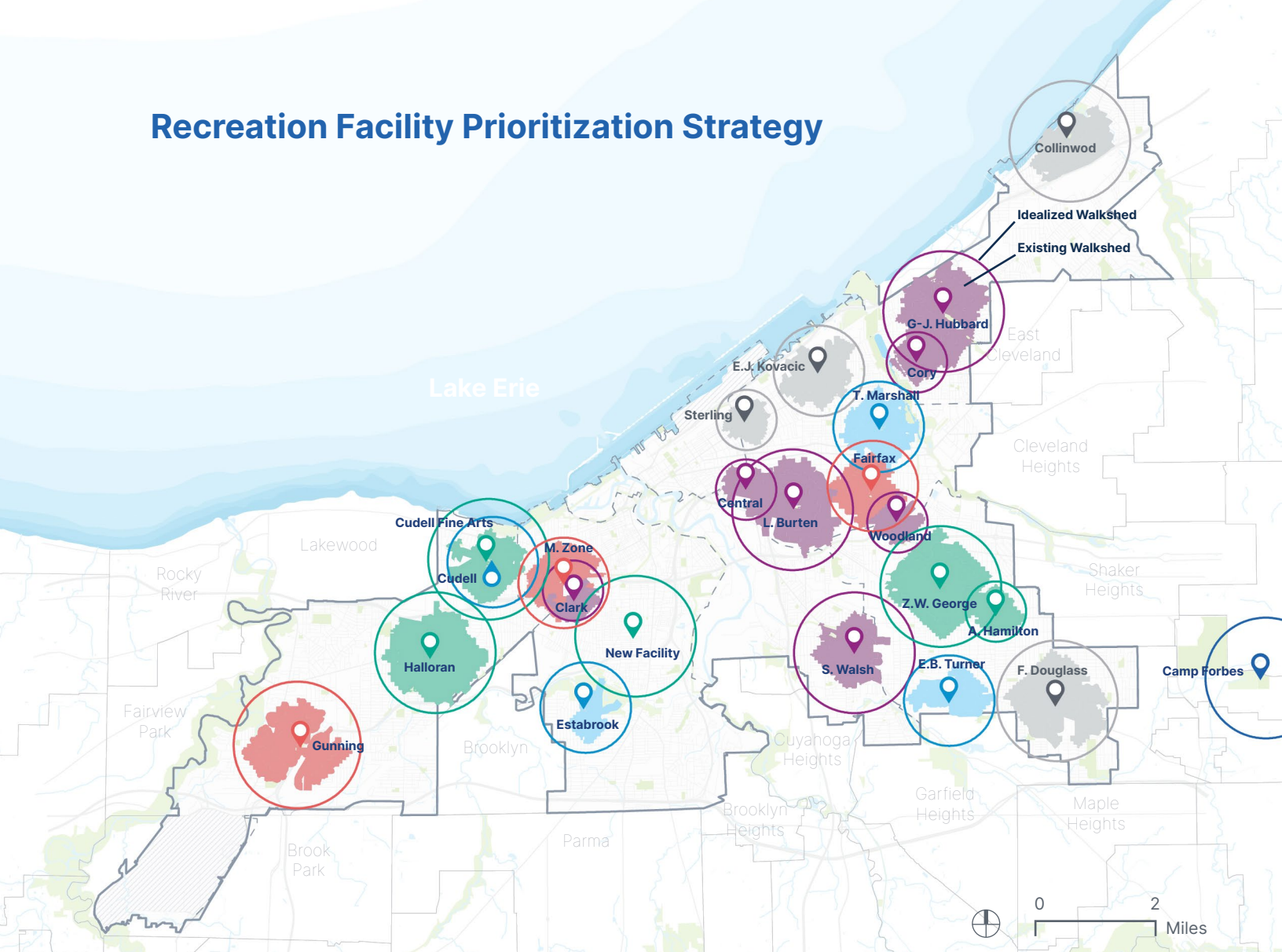
Additionally, implementing this plan requires that at the time of planning for the capital investments of each facility the city provide a pro forma that details the ongoing operation, maintenance, and programming costs along with the capital costs to educate decision makers and budget for the annual costs needed to operate, maintain, and program each facility, along with the capital investment costs.

Zelma Watson George  
Recreation Center.  
Source: OLIN, 2024.





# Recreation Facility Prioritization Strategy



## Phase I (Years 1-5)

- 1 Complete renovations of Clark & Central
- 2 Invest in Lonnie Burten
- 3 Invest in Stella Walsh as a regional recreation center
- 4 Invest in Glenville-James Hubbard  
End lease at Cory
- 5 Consider repurposing Woodland for other City uses or closing
- 6 Develop a strategic plan for Camp Forbes

## Phase II (Years 6-10)

- 1 Add new regional recreation center in Clark-Fulton
- 2 Invest in Zelma Watson George
- 3 Consider repurposing Alexander Hamilton as a special facility or closing
- 4 Invest in Cudell Fine Arts
- 5 Implement Phase I of Camp Forbes Strategic Plan
- 6 Conduct a study on the future use of the Halloran Ice Rink

## Phase III (Years 11-15)

- 1 Invest in Earle B Turner
- 2 Invest in Thurgood Marshall
- 3 Invest in Cudell
- 4 Invest in Estabrook
- 5 Implement Phase II of Camp Forbes Strategic Plan

## Phase IV (Years 16-20)

- 1 Invest in Fairfax
- 2 Invest in Gunning
- 3 Invest in Michael Zone
- 4 Implement Phase III of Camp Forbes Strategic Plan

**Phases I-IV:** Make rehab investments across rec centers and special facilities to improve the functionality, safety, and lifespan of existing assets making sure accessibility and flexibility of spaces are addressed in this work.

# FUNDING

In order to continue to build and maintain parks and recreation facilities, fiscally sustainable and realistic funding sources are essential. A diversified approach is necessary. This plan includes realistic and diverse funding options for the City to consider moving forward.

## RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Based on the current conditions of parks, recreation facilities, and services as well as the national benchmarking numbers, Cleveland should reallocate and gradually ramp up funding for parks and recreation.

Figure 3. Recommended Department Budget.

	FY25	FY26	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30	FY31	FY32
<b>OPERATING BUDGET</b>	<b>\$26.0M</b>	<b>\$28.5M</b>	<b>\$3.01M</b>	<b>\$33.5M</b>	<b>\$36.0M</b>	<b>\$38.5M</b>	<b>\$41.0M</b>	<b>\$43.5M</b>
Parks (46%)	\$12.0M	\$13.1M	\$14.3M	\$15.4M	\$16.6M	\$17.7M	\$18.9M	\$20.0M
Recreation (41%)	\$10.7M	\$11.7M	\$12.7M	\$13.7M	\$14.8M	\$15.8M	\$16.8M	\$17.8M
Other (13%)	\$3.4M	\$3.7M	\$4.0M	\$4.4M	\$4.7M	\$5.0M	\$5.3M	\$5.7M
Personnel (55%)	\$14.3M	\$15.7M	\$17.7M	\$18.4M	\$19.8M	\$21.2M	\$22.6M	\$23.9M
Operating Expenses (38%)	\$9.9M	\$10.8M	\$11.8M	\$12.7M	\$13.7M	\$14.6M	\$15.6M	\$16.5M
Capital Expenses not in CIP (5%)	\$1.3M	\$1.4M	\$1.6M	\$1.7M	\$1.8M	\$1.9M	\$2.1M	\$2.2M
Other (2%)	\$0.5M	\$0.6M	\$0.6M	\$0.7M	\$0.7M	\$0.8M	\$0.8M	\$0.9M
<b>CAPITAL BUDGET</b>	<b>\$7.0M</b>	<b>\$7.5M</b>	<b>\$8.0M</b>	<b>\$8.5M</b>	<b>\$9.0M</b>	<b>\$9.5M</b>	<b>\$10.0M</b>	<b>\$10.5M</b>
<b>TOTAL SPENDING</b>	<b>\$33M</b>	<b>\$36M</b>	<b>\$39M</b>	<b>\$42M</b>	<b>\$45M</b>	<b>\$48M</b>	<b>\$51M</b>	<b>\$54M</b>
REVENUE GENERATION	—	\$0.9M	\$1.4M	\$1.5M	\$1.8M	\$2.0M	\$2.3M	\$2.6M
VOLUNTEER HOURS	—	\$0.3M	\$0.6M	\$1.0M	\$1.4M	\$1.9M	\$2.5M	\$3.0M

## FUNDING & REVENUE STRATEGIES

Parks and Recreation departments across the country have learned to optimize revenue generation, where appropriate, to support the typically limited general fund dollars allocated to parks and recreation services. They have developed new sources of revenue to help support capital and operational needs.

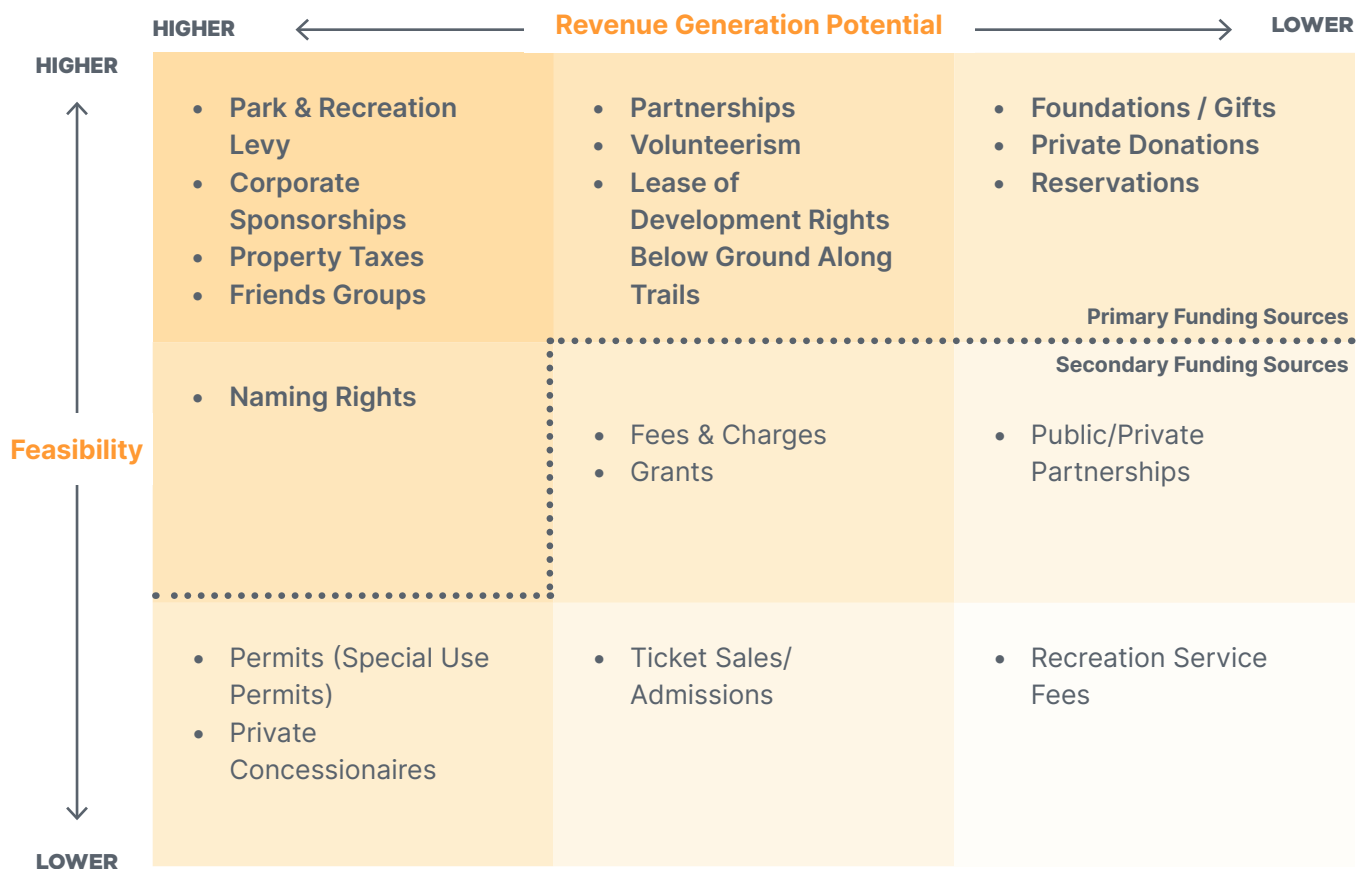
The City of Cleveland should consider the following funding sources—some of which are currently employed by the City and some of which would be new opportunities—to support implementation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This menu of options should serve as a resource to fit a variety of projects, operational needs, or partner-specific initiatives.

Each of the funding sources is rated on a scale of revenue generation potential and a scale of feasibility. The funding sources with higher feasibility and higher revenue generation potential are categorized as primary funding sources, while others are categorized as secondary funding sources. While the City should pursue all available options, the primary funding sources are a first place to start over the next five years.

Given the financial condition of the City, many of the primary funding sources are private sector resources. As the City rebuilds and is in a stronger financial situation (both as a City entity and as individual Clevelanders) other funding strategies, secondary funding sources, can be expanded or added to the toolbox for parks and recreation.

Figure 4. Park & recreation levy, corporate sponsorships, property taxes, and friends groups are the funding sources that are most feasible and have the highest revenue generation potential for Cleveland.

Source: OLIN, 2024.



# POLICY FRAMEWORK

The path forward for parks and recreation in Cleveland is captured within the following goals, actions, and methods.

## RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP



### Maintenance & Updates

Ensure parks and recreation facilities are operated and maintained effectively and to defined standards.

### Funding

Enhance the fiscal sustainability of Cleveland's parks and recreation facilities.

### Community & Partnerships

Build and strengthen partnerships to leverage resources for mutual benefit.

## ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES



### Connectivity & Accessibility

Ensure equitable access to quality parks & recreation facilities.

### System Awareness & Communications

Improve users ability to quickly find park and recreation facilities and programs.

### Safety

Continue to enhance safety and security in all parks and recreation facilities through multiple models of community safety and harm reduction.

## ENGAGING EXPERIENCES



### Recreation Programming

Provide equitable access to quality recreational experiences.

### Staffing & Hours

Ensure that staff capabilities match park and recreation needs.

## ENHANCED SPACES



### Parks

Elevate the design of park facilities.

### Recreation Facilities

Better leverage recreation facility resources to enhance the delivery of recreation programming.

### Nature & Green Spaces

Protect and enhance natural, historic, and cultural resources in parks and at recreation facilities.



# 1/ MAINTENANCE & UPDATES

**Goal:** Ensure parks and recreation facilities are operated and maintained effectively and to defined standards.

Clevelanders are concerned that parks and recreation facilities are not being adequately maintained and updated. Half of survey respondents identified this as the top reason for not visiting parks and recreation centers more often, and 38% noted “poor or uncomfortable atmosphere” as a major barrier. People noted issues around trash collection and mowing, upkeep of existing equipment and facilities, and investments to older and dated facilities.

## ACTIONS

**1.1.** Define clear maintenance standards that will be consistently met.

**1.2.** Make procurement and contracting processes clearer and more transparent.

**1.3.** Strengthen sustainability policies and practices.

City staff working with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to plant trees.  
Source: City of Cleveland.

Apply maintenance standards **across the park system** consistently ensuring standards are equity-driven, transparent, and accessible by community members, and includes a feedback-loop.

**Equity-focused method 1.1.2.**



## 2/ FUNDING

**Goal:** Enhance the fiscal sustainability of Cleveland’s parks and recreation facilities.

While operational budgets have been stretched to maintain existing parks, recreation facilities, and other city infrastructure, additional capital and operational funding is needed to ensure all parks and recreation facilities continue to provide the level of experience that residents seek.

### ACTIONS

**2.1.** Secure funding to support development, maintenance, and programming of parks and recreation facilities and ensure those public funds are efficiently and effectively spent.

**2.2.** Account for both up-front and ongoing costs and benefits in maintenance and capital budgeting.

**2.3.** Identify and pursue public-private, nonprofit, and philanthropic partnerships to support capital improvements and programs.

**2.4.** Identify revenue-generating opportunities from parks, recreation facilities, and programs that can be reinvested back into these assets.

**2.5.** Track and report revenues and direct and indirect costs with the Parks and Recreation Department’s services.

---

# 66%

of respondents are **supportive** of an increase in taxes or levies to fund parks & recreation facilities.



## 3/ COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIPS

**Goal:** Build and strengthen partnerships to leverage resources for mutual benefit.

Clevelanders benefit from having access to amenities provided by the City and other entities, including Cleveland Metroparks and the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. In an era of limited resources, partnerships can help deliver more efficient and effective services. By strengthening existing partnerships and identifying new partners, the City can leverage its resources to make limited funding stretch further. In addition, community and other organizations have expressed interest in developing collaborative partnerships with the City. There is energy to establish “Friends of” groups and to leverage community volunteerism, but navigating the City’s organizational structure and processes is currently difficult.

### ACTIONS

**3.1.** Establish partnerships between the new Parks and Recreation Department and other City departments.

**3.2.** Formalize and strengthen partnerships with other major providers of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and community services in Cleveland and the greater Cleveland area.

**3.3.** Create and regularly revise partnership policies and agreements to ensure fair and equitable relationships.

**3.4.** Cultivate long-term relationships with community members, leaders, and community and cultural organizations to help enhance parks and recreation facilities and programs.



“

Encourage & create clear process for **“friends of”** and volunteer park maintenance.

”

– Online survey participant from Near East Cleveland

## 4/ CONNECTIVITY & ACCESSIBILITY

**Goal:** Ensure equitable access to quality parks & recreation facilities.

Clevelanders aspire to have a well-connected park and recreation system with biking and walking trails that make traveling to facilities safe. Paved, multiuse trails were most frequently cited as the most important outdoor facilities, selected by 41% of respondents.

### ACTIONS

**4.1.** Utilize this plan's level of service standards as a planning tool to manage public space assets equitably and efficiently and provide a high quality of service.

**4.2.** Make efficient use of land resources and facilities through system-wide planning and investments.

**4.3.** Create safe routes to parks and recreation facilities.

**4.4.** Embed accessibility and universal access as a fundamental aspect of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services.

### Paved, multi-use trails

are the most important outdoor facility for residents.

Create **universal accessibility guidelines for parks and recreation improvements** to determine changes necessary for improved accessibility to amenities by all.

**Equity-focused method 4.4.3.**





## 5/ SYSTEM AWARENESS & COMMUNICATIONS

**Goal:** Improve users ability to quickly find park and recreation facilities and programs.

Many Clevelanders are unaware of the full range of services, programs, and amenities offered by the City. In the survey, 40% of respondents identified not knowing where to go for programs or what is offered as a major barrier to visiting parks and recreation centers more often. People noted a desire to be able to search and register for programs online.

### ACTIONS

**5.1.** Promote City parks and recreation facilities as part of a unified regional system.

**5.2.** Create a legible brand identity for City parks and recreation facilities.

**5.3.** Develop a communications and marketing plan that increases awareness of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and other department services.

**5.4.** Provide a single source to learn about programs and services, register for programs and make facility reservations.

**5.5.** Gather input from residents on a recurring basis in the planning of parks, facilities, and programs.

“

Updated website & registration platform. It would be nice to go the website and **easily find out what classes are being offered each day/ weekly, location and how to sign up.**

”

– Online survey participant from Near West Cleveland



## 6/ SAFETY

**Goal:** Continue to enhance safety and security in all parks and recreation facilities through multiple models of community safety and harm reduction.

Residents want to feel safe in parks and at recreation facilities, and they want to feel safe getting to those facilities. Over a third (37%) of survey respondents said they did not visit parks and recreation centers more often due to a lack of visible patrolling presence. Other residents cited a general lack of lighting and other preventative security as barriers to usage.

### ACTIONS

**6.1.** Support a visible community presence in parks and recreation facilities.

**6.2.** Work with law enforcement and social service agencies on a coordinated approach to preventive and reactive safety and security in parks and at recreation facilities.

**6.3.** Incorporate 'Crime Prevention through Environmental Design' (CPTED) principles into design standards.

**37%**  
of respondents  
said they did  
not visit parks  
and recreation  
centers more  
often **due to a  
lack of visible  
patrolling  
presence.**



Connectivity is about creating safe and accessible ways to get to parks and recreation facilities.

Source: City of Cleveland.







## 7/ RECREATION PROGRAMMING

**Goal:** Provide equitable access to quality recreational experiences.

Clevelanders love and appreciate the City's free programming. The 57% who participated in recreation programs in the previous year rated program quality as excellent or good. There is a desire for more diverse, multigenerational, community-focused programming in parks and recreation facilities. Close to a third of survey respondents said they do not participate because their desired facility/program is not offered.

### ACTIONS

**7.1.** Expand year-round usability of existing recreation facilities.

**7.2.** Ensure indoor and outdoor facilities and programs continue to respond to changing user needs.

**7.3.** Promote public health and wellness through public space programming.

**7.4.** Consider the separate and combined needs of children, youth, families, adults, seniors, and individuals with disabilities.



Over 90% of respondents agree that park and rec facilities improve physical health.

Source: City of Cleveland.

# 32%

of respondents have participated in a rec program in the past year.



## 8/ STAFFING & HOURS

**Goal:** Ensure that staff capabilities match park and recreation needs.

Residents are encouraged to use parks and recreation facilities when they are open at convenient times and when there are staff available to support their experience. Currently, people feel uncertain about the hours that neighborhood resource and recreation centers and indoor and outdoor pools are open. Nearly half of survey respondents said they do not participate in programs because of the times the programs are offered, and close to a third of respondents said they do not visit parks and recreation centers more often because facility operating hours are not convenient.

### ACTIONS

**8.1.** Increase full and part-time staff and contractor capacity and capabilities.

**8.2.** Provide regular training to ensure that existing staff develop the skills to perform their duties.

---

#### Create a local high school/college internship program

to augment staffing resources, experiment with new management practices, and develop a pipeline into the city's environmental stewardship division.

#### Equity-focused method 8.1.5.

---

“

It's been hard to use public pools this year because of hours and understaffing that creates uncommunicated closings.

”

– Online survey participant from Near West Cleveland



## 9/ PARKS

**Goal:** Elevate the design of park facilities.

Basic amenities like restrooms, seating, shade/shelter, lighting, water fountains, and directional/informational signage in parks are critical to an enjoyable parks and recreation experience. In addition, residents expressed interest in moving towards universally accessible playgrounds, natural playgrounds, elements that reflect the unique identity of the community, and multi-use facilities were all frequently mentioned.

### ACTIONS

**9.1.** Develop a unified design language for parks and recreation facilities that is flexible enough to reflect individual community identities.

**9.2.** Consider the design of adjacent parks, recreation facilities, and other public facilities holistically.

**9.3.** Strive for design excellence in the development and refresh of parks and recreation facilities.

**9.4.** Incorporate public art, including landscape-based art and functional art, into parks and recreation facilities.



The community surrounding Roberto Clement Park made sure that their neighborhood was reflected in the park.  
Source: OLIN, 2023.



“

Taking the beauty of the parks [the City] creates into consideration. What people see on the outside affects what is going on inside their minds.

”

– Online survey participant from Near East Cleveland



## 10/ RECREATION FACILITIES

**Goal:** Better leverage recreation facility resources to enhance the delivery of recreation programming.

Neighborhood resource & recreation centers provide not just recreational opportunities but social, cultural, and other support services. Appropriate resources will allow for these facilities to meet the needs of current and future residents and expand their services. In the survey, less than a quarter of respondents said that recreation centers are in excellent or good condition indicating the need for enhanced recreation spaces throughout Cleveland.

### ACTIONS

**10.1.** Optimize the use of recreation centers to best meet recreation needs and provide access to City services.

**10.2.** Utilize this plan's level of service standards as a planning tool to manage recreation assets efficiently and reduce duplication of services without reducing the overall quality of service.

**10.3.** Create a welcoming, safe, and seamless experience between recreation facilities and adjacent parks.

“

Create  
**community  
wellness** hubs.

”

– Online survey  
participant from Near  
West Cleveland

### Expand recreation programs to target underserved residents

based on the Recreation Program Plan and current parks and recreation needs assessment, such as providing more fitness programming at recreation centers or expanding athletic leagues for adults.

### Equity-focused method 10.1.6.



# 11/ NATURE & GREEN SPACES

**Goal:** Protect and enhance natural, historic, and cultural resources in parks and at recreation facilities.

Clevelanders want parks that feel more natural and incorporate sustainable elements that move beyond grass. This includes increased tree canopy, wildlife habitats, ecological diversity through native plantings, opportunities to interact with nature, and unprogrammed green space. In the survey, unprogrammed green spaces (36%) and natural areas and wildlife habitats (29%) were both in the top four most important outdoor facilities to respondents.

## ACTIONS

**11.1.** Integrate natural resources and natural resource interpretation into the design of parks and recreation facilities.

**11.2.** Promote the planting, preservation, and maintenance of canopy trees and native vegetation.

**11.3.** Expand the capacity to care for natural resources.

**11.4.** Capitalize on historic and cultural resources, themes, neighborhood history, and stories in parks and recreation facilities. [e.g., Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area]

“

Investigate alternate/no-mow solutions to replace grass, and phase in **more natural landscaping** to reduce maintenance needs.

”

– Online survey participant from Near West Cleveland



Lush and diverse plantings at Otter Park.  
Source: OLIN, 2023.

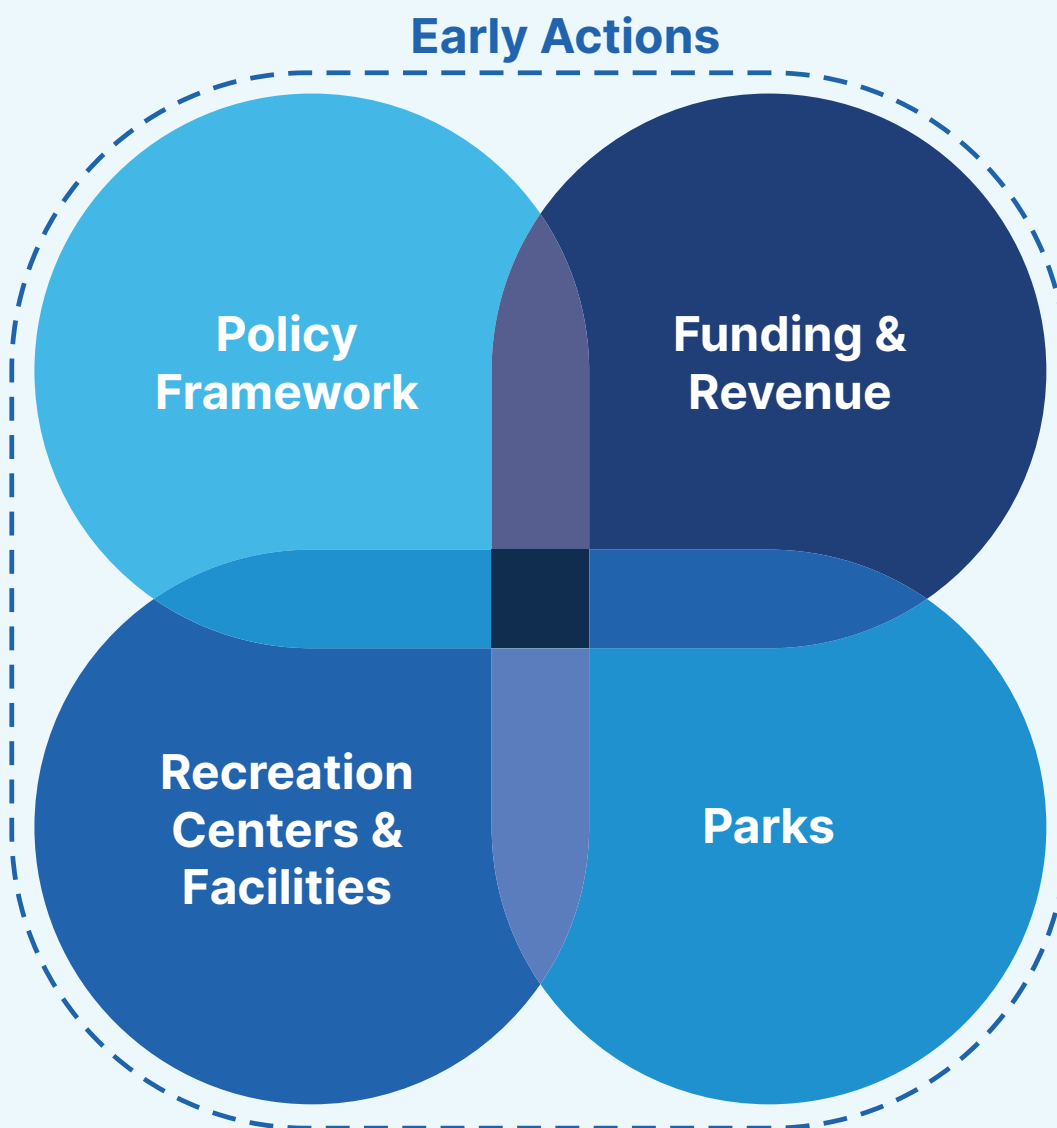






# EARLY ACTIONS

The following build on the strategies and actions identified in the plan and serve as first steps the Department and the City can take to begin a successful and inclusive implementation process.



There are four categories of early actions.



# POLICY FRAMEWORK

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

### Responsible Stewardship

- 2.1. Secure funding to support development, maintenance, and programming of parks and recreation facilities and ensure those public funds are efficiently and effectively spent.
- 3.4. Cultivate long-term relationships with community members, leaders, and community and cultural organizations to help enhance parks and recreation facilities and programs.



### Accessible Facilities

- 4.4. Embed accessibility and universal access as a fundamental aspect of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services.
- 5.3. Develop a communications and marketing plan that increases awareness of parks, recreation facilities, programs, and other department services.
- 6.1. Support a visible community presence in parks and recreation facilities.



### Enhanced Spaces

- 9.3. Strive for design excellence in the development and refresh of parks and recreation facilities.
- 10.2. Utilize this plan's level of service standards as a planning tool to manage recreation assets efficiently and reduce duplication of services without reducing the overall quality of service.
- 11.1. Integrate natural resources and natural resource interpretation into the design of parks and recreation facilities.



# FUNDING & REVENUE

## EARLY ACTIONS

### Parks & Recreation Levy

Nov 2024



Plan Completed

1

#### Stand up the Parks & Recreation Department



**Year 1** Reconcile staff and budget that will move to the new department

#### Demonstrate Department Effectiveness



**Years 1-3** Improve level of service and meet customer service expectations

2

3

#### Plan & Publicly Campaign for a Levy



**Year 3-4** Make the case for a levy based on improved performance

Nov 2028



Ballot Measure Put to Voters

### Primary Funding Sources

1

Pursue high revenue generation potential + high feasibility sources like corporate sponsorships, property taxes, friends groups, and naming rights.

2

Leverage partnerships & volunteerism.

3

Explore foundations/gifts, private donations, and reservations.

4

Test the leasing of development rights below ground along trails.

# RECREATION CENTERS & FACILITIES

## EARLY ACTIONS

### Phase 1 (Years 1-5)



**1** Complete renovations of Clark & Central



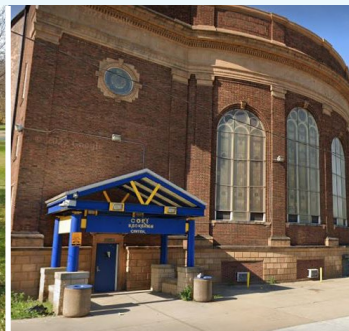
**2** Invest in Lonnie Burten



**3** Invest in Stella Walsh as a regional recreation center



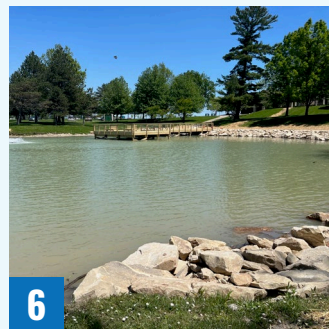
**4** Invest in Glenville-James Hubbard



**5** End lease at Cory



**6** Consider repurposing Woodland for other City uses or closing



**7** Develop a strategic plan for Camp Forbes

Make rehab investments across recreation centers and special facilities to improve the functionality, safety, and lifespan of existing assets making sure accessibility and flexibility of spaces are addressed in this work.

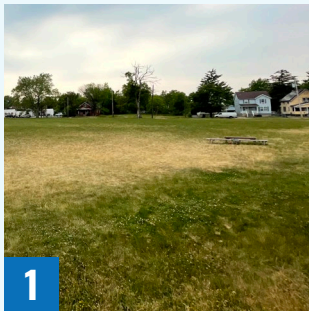




# PARKS

## EARLY ACTIONS

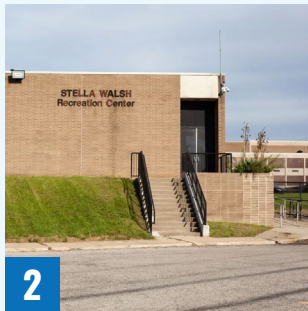
### Park Prioritization - Top 10



1

#### Alexander Hamilton Park

Neighborhood Park | Southeast Cleveland



2

#### Stella Walsh Park

Neighborhood Park | Flats & Southside Cleveland



3

#### Spear Park

Mini Park | Southeast Cleveland



4

#### Grant Park

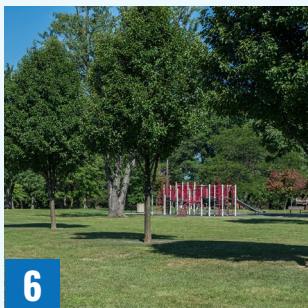
Neighborhood Park | Near East Cleveland



4

#### Meyer Pool

Neighborhood Park | Near West Cleveland



6

#### Luke Easter Park

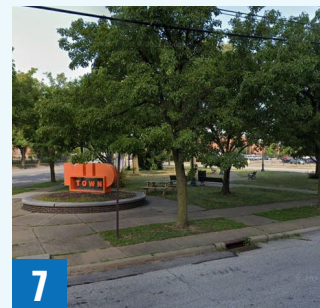
Regional Park | Southeast Cleveland



7

#### Belmont Park

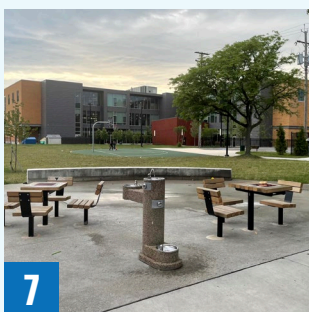
Neighborhood Park | Far West Cleveland



7

#### Colonel Charles Young Square

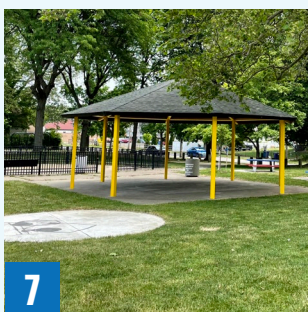
Civic Space | Near East Cleveland



7

#### E.J. Kovacic Park

Neighborhood Park | Near East Cleveland



7

#### Roberto Clemente Park

Community Park | Near West Cleveland

See the capital life cycle (page 226) to determine what site investment strategy is appropriate for each park.

Engage the community and partners!

#### Next Steps

See the 'Equity-Based Park Prioritization Strategy' on page 228 for more information on the ranking process.

Community mural at Roberto Clemente Park.  
Source: OLIN, 2023.





