Erie Community Park
Credit: Town of Erie

Connecting YOU to FUN Playbook

2025 Erie Parks & Recreation PROST Strategic Plan

Appendix A: Needs Assessment Report

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Executive Summary

The Town of Erie is experiencing a transformative period of growth and opportunity. With a projected 60% increase in population by 2035, from approximately 40,000 to 64,000 residents, proactive planning is essential to maintain and enhance the community's quality of life. This executive summary highlights the most significant insights across key chapters of the PROST Community Needs Assessment for Erie.

Future Growth and Trends

- Erie's population is expected to grow by over 60%, significantly increasing demand for parks, open space, and recreation.
- The community is characterized by a high percentage of young families and a high median household income, indicating strong demand for quality youth programs, multi-generational facilities, and fitness offerings.
- Spending on recreation and wellness is robust, supporting investment in diverse recreational amenities.

Community Values and Top Priorities

- There is significant interest in more recreation centers, pools, and sports facilities.
- Many residents expressed the need to improve connectivity, especially with bike paths, trail links between neighborhoods, and access points across town.
- Residents strongly support a mix of maintaining existing amenities and building new ones.
- New program offerings, along with increasing the capacity of currently offered programs, is a top priority for many Erie residents.

Current and Future Levels of Service

- Erie currently provides 162.5 acres of park land, translating to a Level of Service (LOS) of 4.1 acres per 1,000 residents. With planned expansions, the future LOS will be 3.3 acres, which is acceptable but on the lower end of national benchmarks and relativity low when compared to similar agencies of Colorado.
- Erie currently owns 1,365 acres of open space, which equates to an LOS of 34 acres per 1,000 residents. Future LOS will be 21 acres, which is considered a similar or higher LOS when compared to other agencies in Colorado.
- There are currently 82.2 miles of trails located in Erie, of which 48.8 miles are maintained by the Town. There are also numerous future planned trails within Erie, all of which will provide excellent connectivity for current and future populations. There are however, some missing gaps in the trail system that need to be addressed.
- To achieve the goal of all residents living within a 1/2-mile walk of parks or open spaces, new parks and recreation amenities may be needed in:
    - Eastern Erie along I-25
    - Northern Erie near Highway 52 and Weld County Road 5
    - Western Erie near Union Pacific Railroad
    - Southwest Erie near Arapahoe Road
    - Other strategic residential areas within the Planning Boundary

Existing Erie Recreation Facilities, Programs, and Services

- Erie's Parks and Recreation Department offers a comprehensive range of programs and services and participation has grown significantly since 2021, demonstrating a strong and increasing demand for recreational services and facilities.
- The most popular programs and high-demand areas in the Parks & Recreation Department include aquatics, fitness, Camp Erie, youth sports, and older adult trips.
- Teen Programs, Therapeutic Recreation, and Cultural Arts are growing in popularity and have been prioritized for future development.
- Areas for expansion in the Parks & Recreation Department include aquatic space, gyms, fitness areas, multipurpose program rooms, athletic fields, office space, and storage space.

Operations and Funding

- Erie's Parks and Recreation Department is well-structured but will require staff growth to sustain service levels amid population increases.
- Maintenance operations follow best practices, but space constraints necessitate a standalone parks maintenance facility.
- The Erie Community Center is nearing capacity, highlighting the need for:
    - A second community center
    - An outdoor aquatic center
    - A performing arts facility
- Current funding sources include the General Fund, grants, user fees, and the Conservation Trust Fund.
- The 2022 cost recovery rate was 28.57%.
- Long-term financial sustainability will rely on updated cost recovery strategies, diversified revenue, and capital replacement funding.

Trends in Parks and Recreation

- Nationally, agencies are shifting toward regional recreation hubs and hybrid programming (in-person and virtual).
- Demand is rising for non-traditional recreation (e.g., pickleball, e-sports, cultural events) and flexible spaces.
- Trends support Erie's focus on:
    - Broad recreation programs and facilities that serve the entire community
    - Partnerships with schools and non-profits for expanded services
    - Sustainable park management practices and energy efficiency
- Agencies increasingly rely on alternative funding sources, cost recovery frameworks, and tiered fee structures to balance access and financial responsibility.

Erie is well-positioned to meet the challenges of growth through strategic investment in parks, facilities, and services. With thoughtful implementation, Erie can continue to be a vibrant, connected, and inclusive place to live, work, and play.

Erie Lake Open Space Signage
Credit: Town of Erie

1: Introduction

The Town of Erie Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails (PROST) 'Connecting YOU to Fun' Playbook serves as a strategic guide to enhance, expand, and sustain Erie's parks, recreation, open space, and trails system.

This Needs Assessment Report provides a comprehensive evaluation of existing PROST facilities and programs, identifies current and future needs, and highlights opportunities for growth. It serves as a data-driven foundation to guide decision-making and ensure that the final plan aligns with both community priorities and future trends.

Schofield Farm Property
Credit: Town of Erie

1.1. About this Report

The Needs Assessment Report (Report) includes two parts: a technical needs assessment and a community engagement summary. The purpose of the Report is to establish an understanding of the current PROST system and its capacity to meet the evolving needs of the community. The Report analyzes existing conditions, population growth projections, current recreation participation, and emerging recreation trends to help identify future needs, gaps, constraints, and opportunities for improvement.

Community outreach and engagement plays a critical role in shaping the PROST Playbook recommendations. Input gathered as part of the community engagement and outreach efforts ensures that the Playbook reflects community values and priorities. This input will inform the Playbook recommendations, ensuring a balanced and equitable approach to PROST development.

The Report is organized into several key sections, including:

- Socioeconomics and demographics of Erie
- Highlights from the PROST community engagement program
- Inventory of existing PROST facilities and programs
- Operations and funding sources
- National PROST trends

These components work together to inform the overall direction and initial recommendations of the PROST Playbook, as shown in Figure 2.

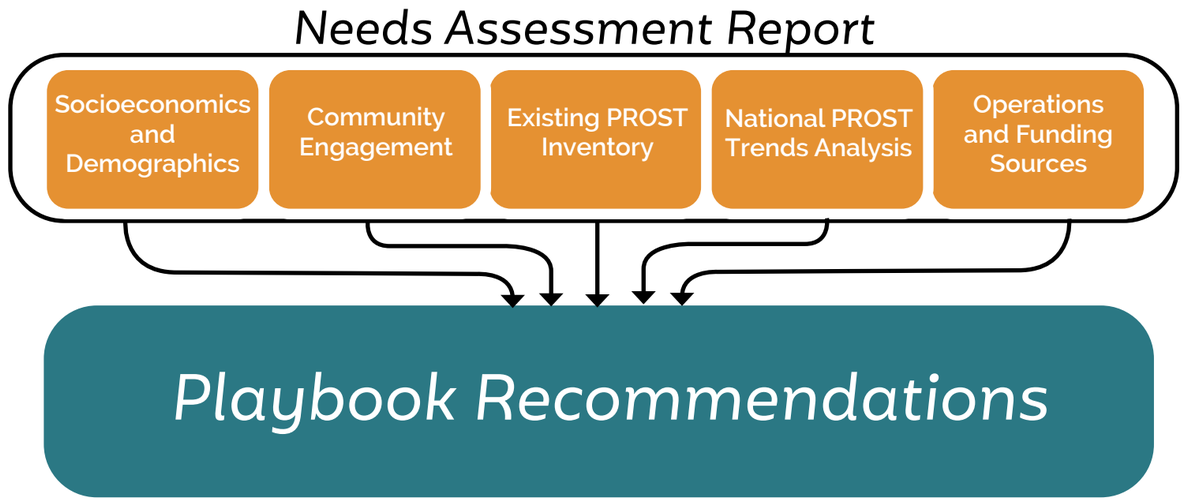


Figure 2. Recommendations Process

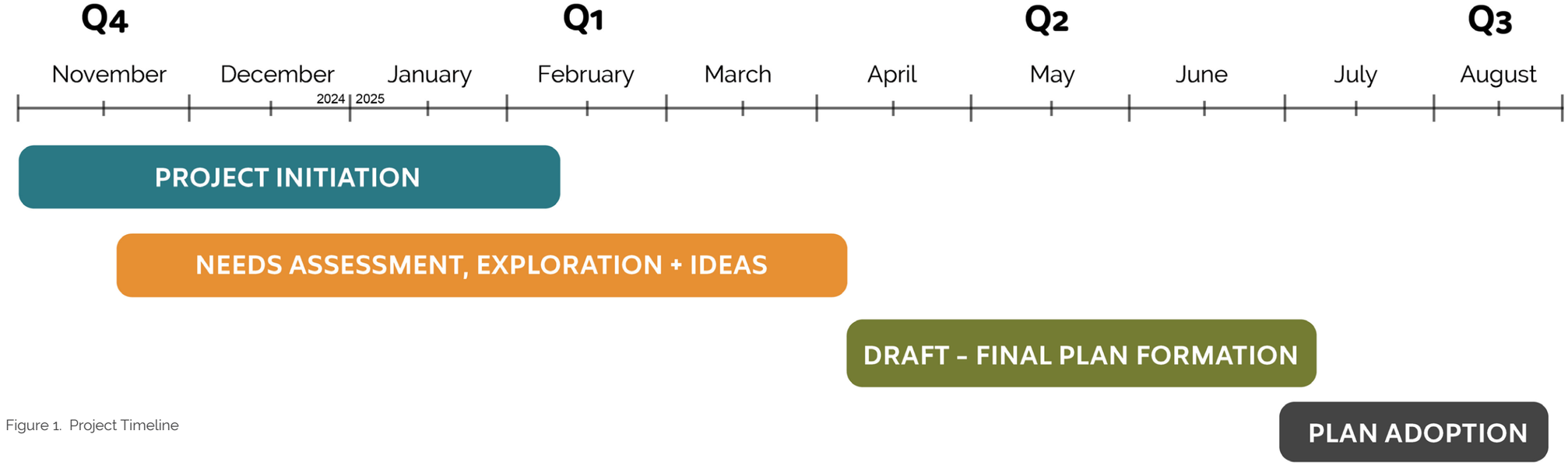


Figure 1. Project Timeline

2: **Future Population Growth & Demographics**

Understanding the evolving socioeconomics and diverse demographics of Erie helps pinpoint current and future demand for recreational facilities, parks, and programs.

This analysis draws on socioeconomic and demographic information provided by Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), who utilizes 2020 Census data and demographers for 2024-2029 projections. ESRI also provides data on housing, recreation, entertainment spending, and participation in activities.

Camp Erie Program
Credit: Town of Erie

2.1. Key Takeaways

For the 2029 and 2035 population estimates and characteristics, demographic information obtained from the Town of Erie was utilized to model off ESRI's data to develop the final figures.

The analysis of population growth and demographics reveals critical trends that will signify demand for Erie's parks, recreation, open space, and trails through 2035. Understanding these trends is essential to ensuring the Town's parks, recreational facilities, and programs remain responsive, equitable, and forward-thinking.

Population Growth

- Erie is expected to experience substantial population growth, increasing from approximately 40,000 residents in 2024 to around 64,000 by 2035—a 60% increase. This increase will put pressure on existing facilities and will require strategic expansion to meet growing demand.

Age Distribution

- Adults aged 25–44 represent the largest age cohort in Erie, followed by youth aged 5–17. There will be strong growth in the 55+ age groups in the coming years.
- The median age is projected to increase slightly from 38.8 in 2024 to 39.5 in 2029, suggesting a sustained presence of young families, working professionals, and school-age children.
- The youthful demographic of Erie will drive demand for family-oriented programs, teen-focused spaces, and flexible facilities that cater to both children and older adults.

Household Growth

- Nearly 45% of households have children, significantly higher than state and national averages, underscoring the importance of youth programming, inclusive family amenities, and safe, accessible outdoor spaces.

Household Income & Expenditures

- Median household income will increase from $163,377 in 2024 to a projected $184,911 by 2029—indicating that most of the community has financial means to support and engage with recreational services.
- 91.6% of Erie households earn over $50,000 annually, a strong predictor of participation in recreation programs and willingness to invest in leisure and fitness activities.
- Erie residents allocate approximately 4% of their household income—or around $7,168 annually—toward entertainment and recreation, reinforcing the opportunity for expanded offerings that align with their interests and expectations.

2.1.1. Implications for Parks, Recreation, Open Space, & Trails

Capacity Planning

Capacity planning helps communities allocate available and future resources to satisfy the needs of residents over time. Rapid population growth in Erie will necessitate the expansion of existing facilities and the development of new recreation facilities, parks, and trail systems to maintain quality of life and access.

Age-Specific Services

The prevalence of youth and middle-aged adults indicates a need for programming that serves children, teens, and adults, including multi-purpose recreation centers, sports facilities, and family-friendly open space. Older adults will also require additional programming and services.

Affluence-Driven Demand

Higher income levels and above-average recreation spending suggest residents will expect high-quality, diverse, and innovative recreation options.

Equity Considerations

While most residents are financially well-off, continued attention should be given to promoting inclusive access and affordability to ensure equity across all socioeconomic groups, including underserved and under-represented populations.

Sustainable Investment

The growing and demographically youthful population provides a strong foundation for long-term investments in trails, parks, and recreation that foster health, community connection, and environmental stewardship.

Resiliency

Incorporating resiliency and long-term flexibility into parks and recreation development is essential for creating spaces that can continue to be financially attainable and adapt to changing community needs.

2.2. Population Growth & Demographic Analysis

2.2.1. Population

Population in Erie is expected to increase from 2024 to 2035. Erie currently has a population of approximately 40,000 residents. The future population estimated for 2035 is approximately 64,000 residents. This growth implies a rising demand for community services, infrastructure, and recreational spaces.

2.2.2. Age

There is also a projected increase for the median age in Erie, expected to shift from 38.8 in 2024 to 39.5 in 2029. This increase in the median age is partially due to strong growth in the 55+ age groups. Both current and future projections anticipate that the largest age group in Erie is and will continue to be 25-44, with the second largest age group being ages 5-17. These statistics indicate that there will be a pressing need for additional youth, teen, and middle-aged recreational activities in the future. It is important to note that the lower the median age, the more recreational participation is expected.

Adult sports programs at Erie Community Center
Credit: Town of Erie

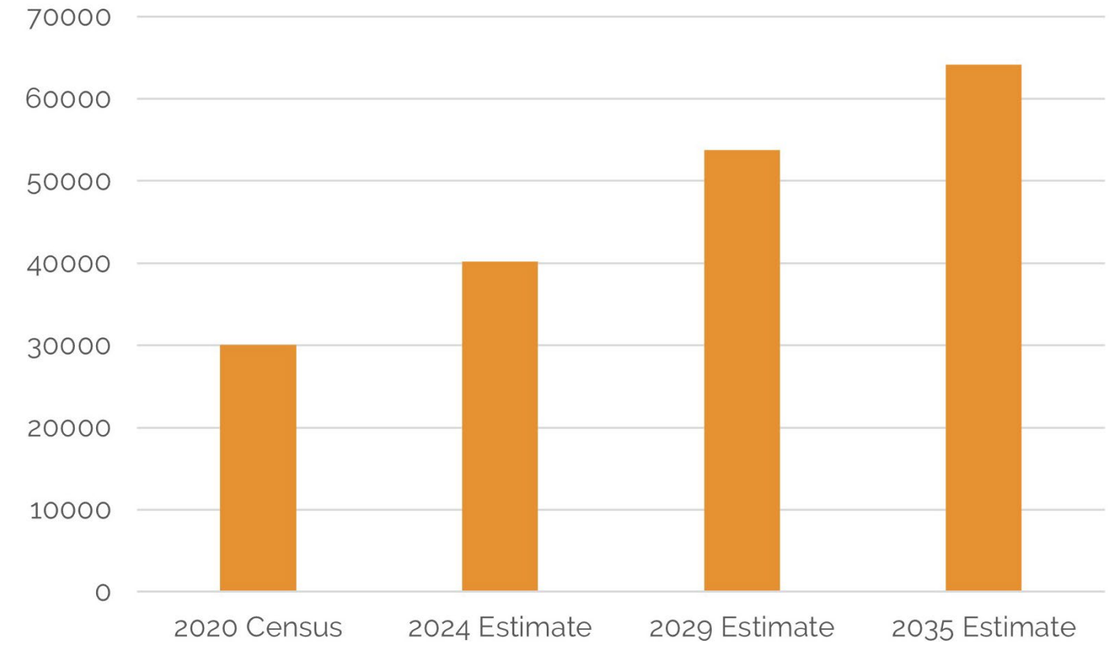


Figure 3. Estimated Population Increase in Erie

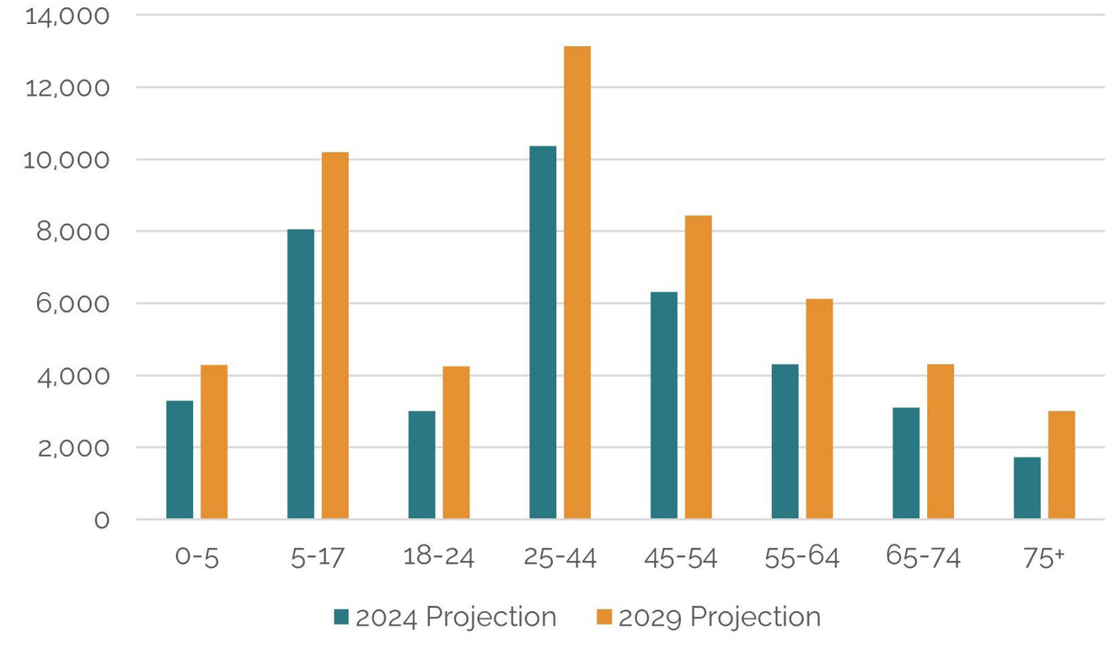


Figure 4. 2024 Primary Service Area Age Distribution (ESRI Estimates)

2.2.3. Household Growth

The average household size in Erie is expected to remain consistent, with the average being 2.93 people in 2024 compared to 2.98 in 2029.

Nearly 45% of Erie households have children, which is significantly more than both in the State of Colorado and nationally by nearly 15%. This further outlines the presence of families with children in Erie and the need to provide recreational programs for this demographic.

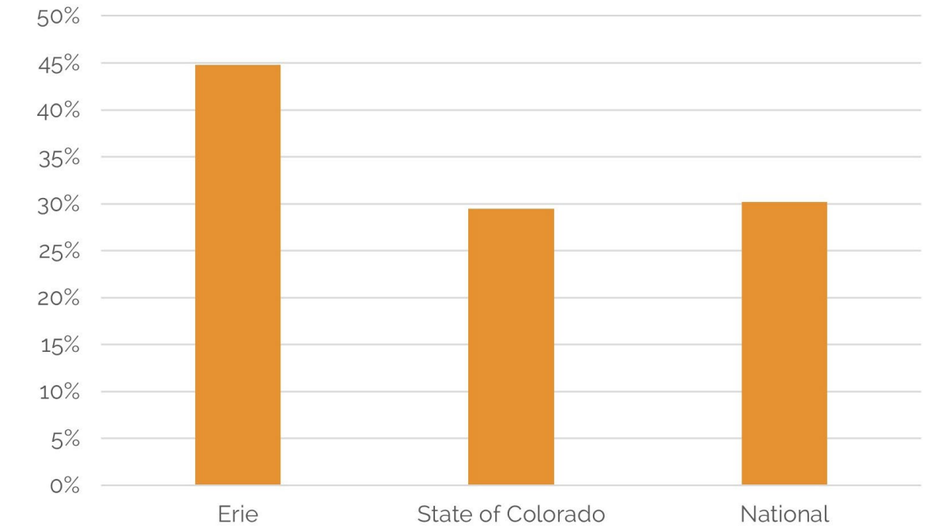


Figure 5. Households With Children

2.2.4. Household Income & Expenditures

In Erie, the median income in 2024 was $163,377 and is projected to increase to $184,911 by 2029.

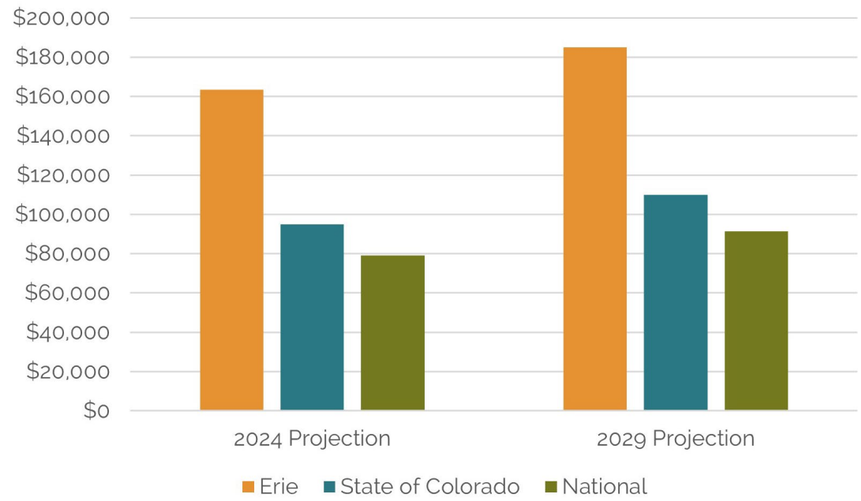


Figure 6. Median Household Income

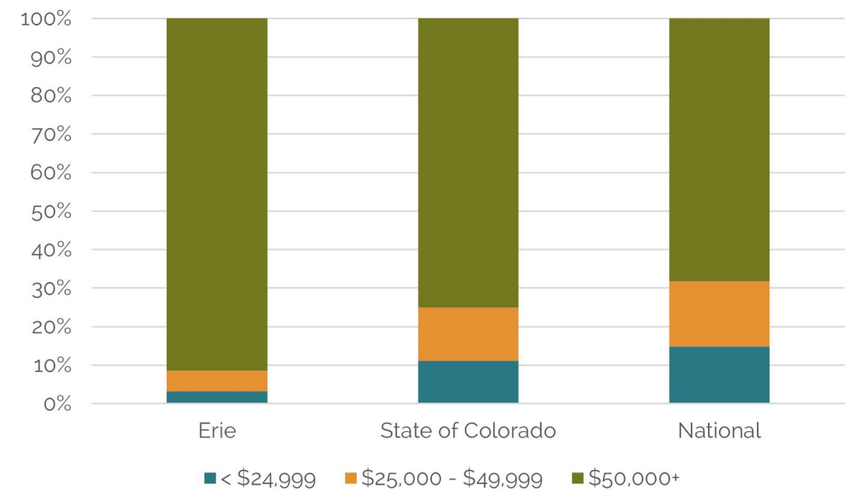


Figure 7. Median Household Income Distribution

The percentage of households with median income over $50,000 per year is 91.6% in Erie, compared to 68.3% on a national level. Furthermore, the percentage of households in Erie with median income less than $25,000 per year is 3.3% compared to a level of 14.9% nationally.

While there is no perfect indicator of use of recreation programs, facilities and services, the percentage of households with more than $50,000 median income is a key indicator. Typically, the level of recreational participation increases as the median income level goes up.

In addition to looking at the Median Income in Erie, it is important to examine Household Budget Expenditures. On average, Erie residents spend $7,167.91 annually on entertainment and recreation, which equates to about 4% of the average household income.

Additionally, it is important to consider the Spending Potential Index (SPI) for specific expenditures in Erie. SPI compares the average potential spending locally within an industry to the average potential spending nationally in that same industry. With a higher SPI in almost every category, Erie residents are much more likely to spend money on household expenditures and recreation than the state and national average.

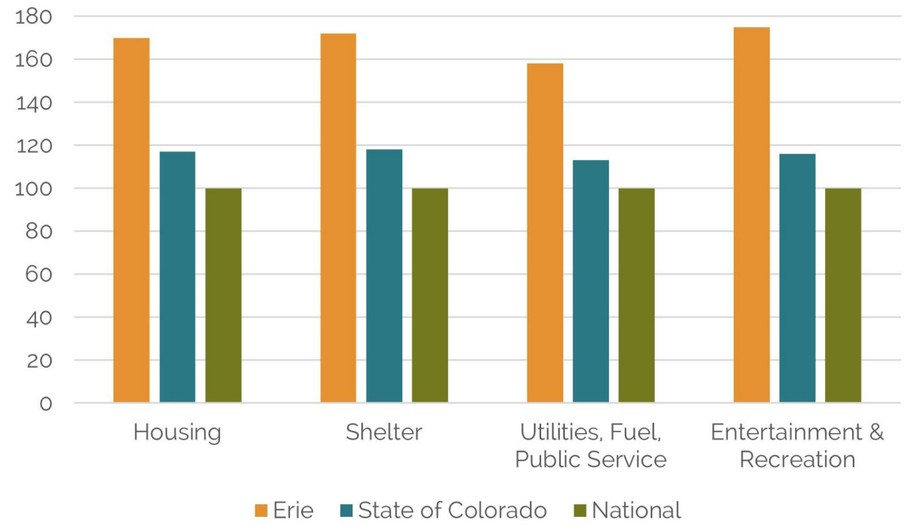


Figure 8. Household Budget Expenditures Spending Potential Index

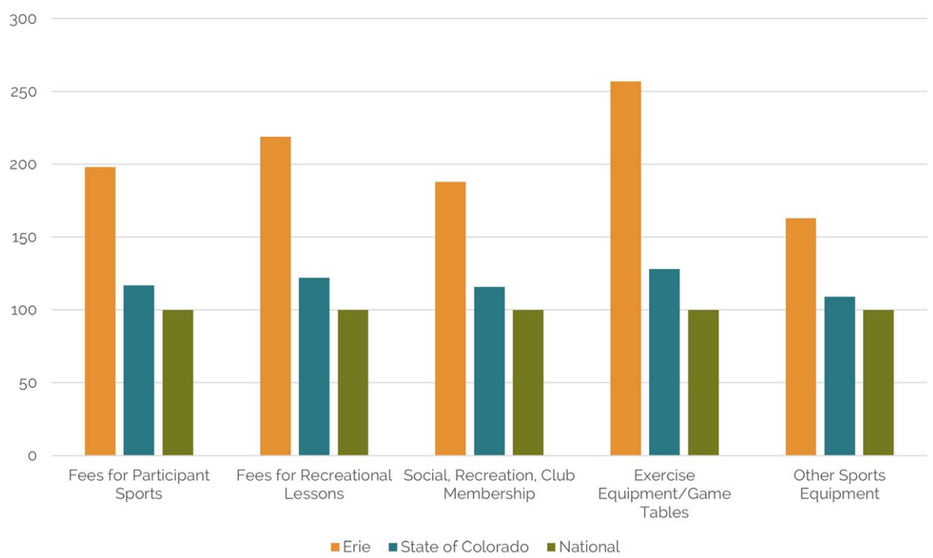


Figure 9. Recreation Spending Potential Index

Reviewing housing information; shelter, utilities, fuel and public services along with entertainment & recreation can provide a snapshot into the cost of living and spending patterns in Erie. The relationship between the median household income and the household budget expenditures is important. It illustrates that the spending patterns of Erie align with the resources available. Investing in parks, recreation, and sports programs in Erie is likely to increase spending by residents and visitors on local recreational activities. This revenue generation can, in turn, bolster the Town's ability to develop new facilities and support ongoing programs.

Ice rink at Coal Creek Park
Credit: Town of Erie

3: **Community Engagement Findings**

Community outreach and engagement is a driving force behind the Playbook, ensuring that it reflects the needs, aspirations, and priorities of Erie residents and stakeholders. Through an inclusive and transparent process, public input helps shape policies, funding priorities, and the long-term vision for parks, recreation, open space, and trails.

Arbor Day Event
Credit: DTJ Design

3.1. Key Takeaways

Through a comprehensive series of engagement events and activities, including stakeholder interviews, focus group meetings, a community questionnaire, community open house event, and other public engagement events, residents and stakeholders voiced their priorities, concerns, and aspirations for the future of the community's recreation, parks, and natural resources. The following is a summary of the most common and recurring themes that emerged across all engagement formats.

Expanded Recreation Facilities

There is strong demand for indoor and outdoor spaces that support activities in all seasons, including community gathering areas, aquatics, sports, and fitness spaces.

- High demand for a second multi-use recreation center with aquatics, fitness areas, sports courts, and flexible program space.
- Additional sports fields and gymnasiums to meet growing sports demand.

Aquatic Amenities

Several groups mentioned aquatics as a primary interest.

- A new outdoor pool is a top priority, especially for youth employment and recreation.
- Interest in expanded aquatics programming (swimming teams, lifeguard training, older adult aquatic fitness).

Enhanced Trail Connectivity

Residents emphasized the importance of an expanded and interconnected trail network for walking, biking, and recreation. Safe routes to parks and schools were a recurring concern.

- Fill in gaps in trail systems, improve safety and accessibility, and increase signage and wayfinding.
- Connect neighborhoods to schools, parks, commercial centers, and regional trail systems.

Preservation and Use of Open Space

Preserved open land and usable open space with trails ranked high among community desires. Many expressed strong interest in retaining Erie's unique environmental character, as well as protecting scenic views, wildlife habitat, and undeveloped land.

- Prioritize open space acquisition and habitat restoration.
- Balance development with conservation through long-term planning and updated land use policies.

Cultural and Creative Spaces

Discussions and mentions about a new performing arts center or other cultural resources were recurring.

- Strong interest in a Performing Arts Center for concerts, theater, and community gatherings.
- Support for an arts and history hub to highlight Erie's culture, heritage, and local artists.

Inclusive, Family-Friendly Parks and Recreational Opportunities

Facilities and programs that cater to children, teens, families, and older adults - especially those that promote health, wellness, and social connection - are high priorities.

- Development of accessible playgrounds, restrooms, and picnic areas.
- Expanding existing programming for teens, older adults, and people with disabilities.
- Expanding or introducing new recreation programs and services that include youth and adult sports, special events, camps, fitness and wellness, cultural arts, aquatics, teens, older adults, and therapeutic recreation.

Sustainability and Smart Growth

- Integrate green infrastructure, water-wise landscaping, and sustainable facility design.
- Ensure new developments have adequate recreational spaces and sustainable landscaping practices.

Maintenance and Facility Upkeep

Trash accumulation, deteriorating amenities, and concerns about safety and lighting were frequently cited.

- Improve cleanliness, repair timelines, and restroom access in existing parks.
- Clarify responsibilities between the Town and HOAs for shared parkland care.

Park and Amenity Access

The community called for more neighborhood-scale parks within walking distance, especially in underserved or newer areas of Erie. Universal access, inclusive design, and diverse amenities for all age groups were frequently mentioned.

- Develop additional neighborhood parks in growth areas, particularly in areas directly west of I-25, along Highway 52, and in southwest Erie.
- Improve accessibility in design, outreach, and programming to ensure inclusivity across age, ability, and income levels.

Key Challenges Identified

- Overcapacity at the Erie Community Center and limited indoor recreation space.
- Deferred maintenance and aging facilities do not meet modern needs.
- Unequal access to parks, recreation, open space, and trail networks in newer or underserved neighborhoods.
- Funding constraints and a need for new strategies to support capital and operational costs.
- Lack of teen-focused spaces and limited inclusive programming for all age groups and abilities.
- Unclear land management roles between the Town and HOAs, affecting shared park quality.

Implementation Priorities

- Explore funding and feasibility for a new recreation center to serve the growing population and reduce crowding at the Erie Community Center.
- Explore cultural arts opportunities, like a performing arts center, to support local events, arts programming, and celebrate Erie's unique cultural heritage.
- Pursue development of second community park, including a potential fieldhouse, across from Erie High School and Soaring Heights Elementary School.
- Develop a comprehensive trail plan to improve connectivity and safety.
- Expand access to aquatics and aquatic programs. Specific elements that were mentioned include an outdoor community pool, a competitive swimming pool, and expanded aquatic programs like swim teams, diving, water polo, lifeguard training, and fitness classes for youth and older adults.
- Upgrade park infrastructure with permanent restrooms, seating, lighting for sports fields and athletic facilities, general park and trail lighting for safety, and overall universal design.
- Preserve and restore open space with updated acquisition strategies and habitat protections.
- Ensure accessibility in all future projects, including ADA-compliant trails and inclusive playgrounds.
- Implement long-term maintenance plans for existing assets.
- Clarify land management roles between the Town and HOAs.
- Enhance community partnerships to support volunteer efforts, program delivery, and funding diversity.

This community input will directly inform the goals, strategies, and priorities outlined in the updated PROST Playbook Strategic Plan update, ensuring that it reflects the shared values and vision of Erie residents today and for generations to come.

3.2. Community Engagement Plan (CEP)

As part of the Playbook update, a Community Engagement Plan (CEP) was developed to identify a strategy to engage community stakeholders and gather diverse perspectives on needs and preferences for parks, recreation, open space, and trails facilities in Erie. The Erie Performing Arts Center Feasibility Study facilitated a separate planning process. The CEP included a variety of events and initiatives to maximize participation and ensure a well-rounded understanding of community needs.

Community Engagement Events and Initiatives included:

- **Community Questionnaire**
  Collected broad input on priorities and needs.
- **Stakeholder Interviews (4)**
  Gathered insights from key community leaders and organizations.
- **Focus Group Meetings (3)**
  Engaged specific community groups in detailed discussions.
- **Staff Focus Group (Parks and Recreation Culture Academy Event)**
  Provided internal perspectives from parks and recreation staff.
- **Public Engagement Events (2)**
  Offered direct opportunities for residents to share their input.
- **Community Open House**
  Allowed residents to review and discuss Playbook updates.
- **Social Media Outreach**
  Expanded engagement opportunities through digital platforms.
- **Other Meetings and Presentations**
  Various meetings and presentations were held as a part of the CEP process.

3.3. Community Engagement Events & Initiatives

3.3.1. Building on the 2024 Magellan Survey

The 2024 Town of Erie Parks and Recreation Community Survey (Magellan Survey) served as the foundation for the questions that were prepared for the PROST Playbook Community Questionnaire. The questionnaire built upon the Magellan survey findings and key takeaways to further narrow down preferences, identify specific needs, and address funding challenges, ensuring community priorities align with actionable planning.

3.3.1.1. 2024 Magellan Survey Key Takeaways

These key takeaways reflect a community engaged with its parks and recreation facilities, enthusiastic about new projects like the performing arts center and park, but cautious about funding and maintaining fiscal responsibility.

High Usage and Satisfaction with Existing Parks and Recreation Facilities

Engagement: Most respondents frequently visit parks, playgrounds, and open spaces, with over 50% reporting visits at least a few times a week.

Approval Ratings: Over 79% approve of how the Town of Erie manages parks, playgrounds, open spaces, trails, and the Erie Community Center, showing strong satisfaction with existing services.

Support for a New Performing Arts Center

Community Interest: 65% of respondents support building a new performing arts center, and 70% would likely attend events there.

Key Features: An auditorium, flexible exhibit spaces, and multi-use community rooms are seen as top priorities.

Desired Programming: Orchestra concerts, youth theater productions, and art classes are highly valued.

Prioritization of the 25-Acre Park

High Demand for Amenities: Restrooms, playgrounds, and lighted multi-use turf fields rank highest for inclusion in the park.

Programming: Youth sports, community events, and adult leagues are viewed as important uses of the space.

Sustainability and Accessibility: Respondents strongly favor eco-friendly designs and inclusive features for all ages and abilities.

Trail Connectivity as a Top Priority

Community Focus: Trail connectivity is frequently selected as a priority project, reflecting a desire for improved access and enhanced safety on trails.

Financial Caution

Mixed Support for Tax Increases:

- 50% support a modest tax increase for the 25-acre park.
- 44% support a tax increase for a performing arts center.
- 43% support a tax increase for a second recreation center.

Fiscal Transparency: While 55% believe the Parks and Recreation Department spends taxpayer money wisely, 31% remain uncertain, signaling room to build trust.

Broad Support for Inclusive and Diverse Programming

Respondents value intergenerational and inclusive programming, particularly youth-focused initiatives and adapted programming for individuals with disabilities.

Preservation of Open Space

Respondents emphasized the importance of maintaining open spaces and minimizing overdevelopment to preserve Erie's small-town charm and natural beauty.

Balanced Community Demographics

Recent Growth: A significant portion of respondents (38%) have lived in Erie for less than 5 years, indicating a growing and evolving population.

Active Participation: High response rates suggest strong community interest in shaping future developments.

3.3.2. Community Questionnaire

The Community Questionnaire was open for approximately 14 weeks, from February 21st through May 31st of 2025. It consisted of 31 questions and had 726 responses.

3.3.2.1. Community Questionnaire Summary

With ~**726 survey** responses collected; the sample size goes well beyond typical industry standards for community engagement. While statistical validity is not required, this level of participation offers a strong and credible reflection of community input across a broad cross-section of residents.

Demographics at a Glance

- Most respondents are aged **35–54**
- Majority have children under 18 (60%)
- Most have lived in Erie for **under 10 years**
- 53% report household incomes over $150K
- Respondents are majority white (84%)
- Neighborhoods with most responses: **Colliers Hill, Morgan Hill, Vista Ridge**

Key Takeaways

- Trail connectivity, safety, and access are top trail priorities.
- Universal access along with better lighting for parks and fields are important safety considerations for parks and outdoor facilities.
- Walking/biking trails, swimming/water play, active play, social gathering opportunities, fitness and wellness programs, and youth sports have the highest community interest.
- Residents strongly support a mix of maintaining existing amenities and building new ones.
- There is a willingness to fund improvements, particularly through a sales tax increase.
- The top ranked capital priority amongst participants is an outdoor community pool.

Barriers to Recreation Participation

- Top barrier: Programs fill up too quickly (45%)
- Time of day is an issue (27%)
- Desired program is not offered (16%)
- Very few reported feeling unsafe or unwelcome

Top Priorities

Most desired activities:

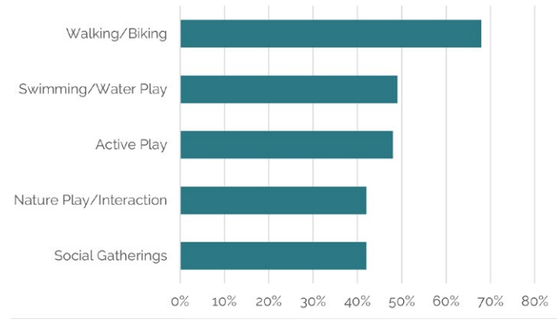


Figure 10. Community Questionnaire Most Desired Activities

Most desired recreation programs:

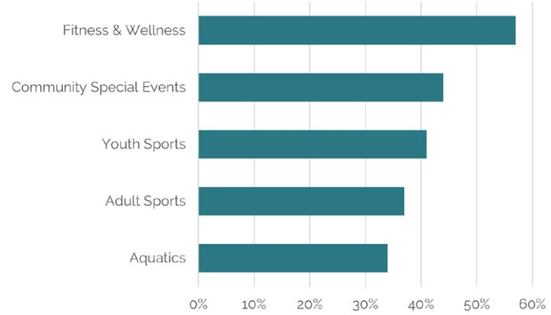


Figure 11. Community Questionnaire Most Desired Recreation Programs

Top trail improvements:

1. More trail connections to homes (Ranked #1 by 78%)
2. More unpaved trails
3. Safer trail crossings

Funding & Future Investments

- **Top ranked capital priorities:**

1. Outdoor Community Pool
2. Second Recreation Center
3. Second Community Park
4. Performing Arts Center (PAC)

Note: The response options for potential capital priorities included the following: Performing Arts Center, Outdoor community pool/aquatics facility, A second recreation center, A second community park, including a potential fieldhouse, across from Erie High School and Soaring Heights Elementary, or Other.

- **Top priorities for use of diversified trail and open space funds:**

1. Maintaining existing parks/trails/open space
2. Improving trail connectivity
3. Acquiring/preserving open space
4. Developing new parks

- 53% would vote YES for a sales tax increase to fund parks and facilities.
- Only 17% support a property tax increase.
- Only 14% would vote NO to either funding option.
- 60% want a balanced investment between maintaining existing and building new amenities.

Performing Arts Center (PAC) Results

Interest in a PAC:

- Performing Arts Center ranked 4th out of 4 future major investments.
- 29% ranked it as their top priority.

Participation in performing arts classes:

- 21% of households participate in performing arts classes.
    - Most popular: Dance (51%), Music (42%), Youth Theater (40%)
    - 72% participate weekly
    - 35% of users drive less than 10 minutes, many drive 10-30 minutes
    - Satisfaction is moderate (53% "somewhat satisfied", 24% "very satisfied")

Attendance at events:

- 53% attend cultural/performing arts events
- Most attend 2–5 events per year
- 89% of attendees drive over 20 minutes
- If built, residents would most likely attend:

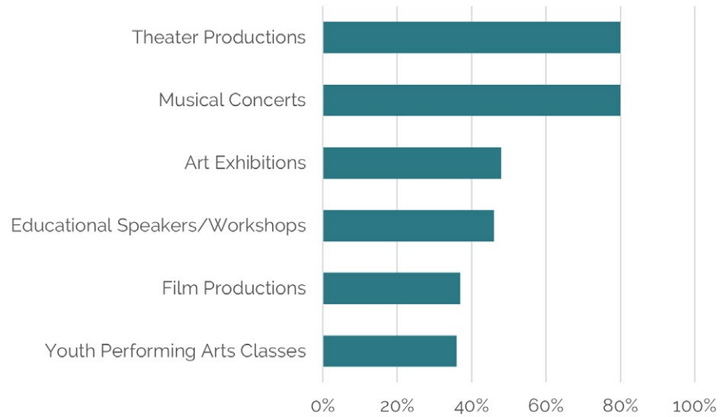


Figure 12. Community Questionnaire PAC Desired Events

Top Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Park Development

The most frequent topic, with many respondents emphasizing the need for new parks and completion of promised ones—especially Morgan Hill Park, which was mentioned explicitly in 58 responses.

Connectivity

Many residents expressed the need to improve connectivity, especially with bike paths, trail links between neighborhoods, and access points across town.

Trails and Open Space

Enthusiastic support for trails and open space continues, with mentions of both their current value and desired expansion.

Recreation Facilities

There's significant interest in more recreation centers, pools, and sports facilities (including gyms and indoor ice rinks).

Completion of Planned PROST Facilities

Participants underlined a desire for current planned facilities to be completed before prioritizing additional expansions.

Accessibility and Safety

A smaller but meaningful group mentioned the need for safe access, especially for older adults and cyclists.

Upgrades and Maintenance

Calls to update existing parks, revitalize existing amenities (such as the Lehigh Park Splash Pad), and increase amenities like shade, seating, and playgrounds.

3.3.3. Stakeholder Interviews & Focus Group Meetings

As part of the public engagement process, multiple stakeholder interviews and focus group meetings were conducted to capture the voices of key community groups of Erie. These discussions provided insights into the priorities, challenges, and opportunities that should shape the PROST Playbook over the next decade. This summary serves as an introduction to the detailed meeting memorandums that follow, outlining the specific concerns, priorities, and recommendations from each stakeholder interview and focus group. The feedback gathered from these meetings will be incorporated into the final PROST Playbook.

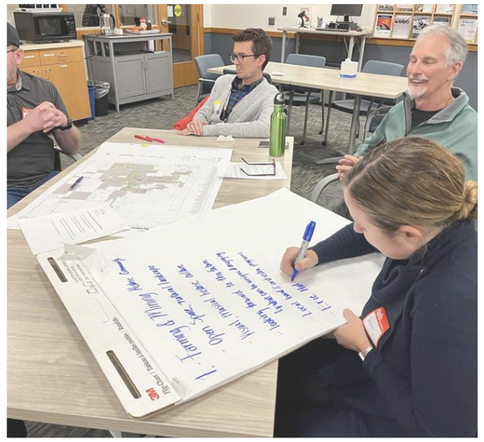
The purpose of these interviews was to gather input from diverse groups, including youth and education advocates, government and advisory boards, business and partner organizations, community representatives, accessibility advocates, outdoor recreation enthusiasts, recreation users, volunteers, and history and culture advocates. Each group provided valuable perspectives on what is important to them, what they hope to achieve through the Plan, and the key challenges Erie faces in meeting its PROST needs.

Stakeholder Meetings Conducted

1. Youth, Adult, and Education Advocates
2. Government and Advisory Boards
3. Partner and Business Organizations
4. Community Representation (HOA & Accessibility Advocates)

Focus Group Meetings Conducted

1. Recreation Center Users & Volunteers
2. History & Culture Advocates
3. Outdoor Enthusiasts & Advocates



Various Focus Group & Stakeholder Meetings
Credit: DTJ Design

3.3.3.1. Meeting Summaries

The following sections contain detailed summaries of each individual stakeholder meeting and focus group meeting, outlining specific concerns, priorities, and recommendations from each group.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW 1: Youth, Adult, & Education Advocates		
Date: February 2, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Michelle Regan (DTJ Design) • Taylor Atkins (DTJ Design)		• Judy Kilgore (Adult Program User) • Pranavi Mantha (High School Student) • Erie Youth For Change Members (Impromptu) Brody Baeh, Maris DeMers, Claire Nguyen, Neha Pesaramelli, Cristina Stroia, Sabina Stroia, Elise Koay, Tyler Li

Key Priorities

1. **Intergenerational Activities & Community Spaces**
   - Strong interest in fostering intergenerational connections through programs like a reading buddies initiative and older adult tech nights.
   - Need for more interactive community spaces, such as an outdoor amphitheater for concerts and performances.
2. **Recreational & Cultural Facilities**
   - Support for a new outdoor community swimming pool that serves as both a recreational and employment opportunity for local teens.
   - Interest in a Performing Arts Center and maker spaces for youth creativity and skill development.
   - Advocacy for an outdoor amphitheater as part of a broader cultural and recreational strategy.
3. **Trail System Improvements & Connectivity**
   - Demand for more soft-surface trails suitable for runners and cross-country training.
   - Improved trail connectivity to eliminate gaps and unsafe detours, especially for students biking to school.
   - Separate bike and pedestrian pathways to enhance safety and accessibility.
   - Implementation of signage for trail difficulty levels, similar to ski trail grading.
4. **Teen-Oriented Outdoor Spaces**
   - A need for designated spaces where teenagers can socialize, such as seating areas, hammock groves, and well-lit gathering spots.
   - Expansion of single-track trails for mountain biking and more diverse recreational offerings for teens.
   - Interest in park spaces specifically designed for teenage use, modeled after successful initiatives in other cities.
5. **Sustainability & Accessibility Considerations**
   - Calls for more wheelchair-accessible trails and paths to ensure inclusivity
   - Improved restroom facilities at trailheads and park locations.
   - Expansion of green spaces within existing neighborhoods to preserve open land.
   - Consideration of environmental sustainability in all future park and recreation developments.
6. **Mobility & Transportation Enhancements**
   - Exploration of electric scooter-sharing programs for increased mobility.
   - Improved pedestrian access and safety near the Erie airport.
   - Expansion of green spaces within existing neighborhoods to preserve open land.
   - Enhanced public transportation options for greater accessibility to parks and recreation centers.
7. **Preservation & Expansion of Open Spaces**
   - Preservation of agricultural and historic sites, such as Schofield Open Space.
   - Potential acquisition of land north of Erie Lake to maintain green spaces amid residential expansion.
   - Balancing open space for wildlife conservation with recreational use.
8. **Expanded Aquatic Facilities**
   - The absence of a public outdoor pool was a major concern.
   - Strong support for a new facility that could serve both recreational users and provide employment opportunities for teens as lifeguards.
9. **Cultural & Performing Arts Venues**
   - Interest in an outdoor amphitheater for community events and concerts.
   - Interest in a outdoor space to be used for overnight community events, such as camping night
   - Support for a performing arts center with creative and educational opportunities, or a community makerspace

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Lack of Teen-Centered Recreational Opportunities:** Teens currently lack designated public spaces and often travel to neighboring cities for activities.
- **Trail Connectivity Issues:** Incomplete trail systems force students and residents to take unsafe routes on roads.
- **Limited Public Aquatic Facilities:** The absence of a community pool results in residents traveling to other towns for swimming opportunities.
- **Balancing Open Space & Development:** Concerns about losing natural areas to high-density housing, with a desire for strategic land acquisition.
- **Safety & Maintenance of Recreational Spaces:** Need for improved upkeep of existing parks, pickleball courts, and sports fields.
- **Noise Considerations:** Concerns about noise pollution from pickleball courts and the potential for indoor facilities to mitigate disturbances.

Potential Action Items

- Explore funding and feasibility for an outdoor pool and amphitheater.
- Evaluate trail improvement opportunities, particularly for accessibility and connectivity.
- Assess land acquisition opportunities to preserve open space.
- Develop plans for teen-oriented recreational spaces.
- Investigate public transportation and mobility enhancement options.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW 2: Government + Advisory Boards		
Date: February 5, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7 p.m.	**Location:** Schofield Farm Open Space
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Luke Bolinger (Town of Erie) • Michelle Regan (DTJ Design)		• Justin Benore – Sustainability Advisory Board • Ken Martin – Open Space and Trails Advisory Board (OSTAB) • Leanne Vielehr– Tree Advisory Board (TAB) • Robert 'Bob' Braudes – Planning Commission

Key Priorities

1. Strategic Open Space Acquisition & Preservation

- Need clear criteria to prioritize land acquisitions based on ecological, recreational, and connectivity value.
- Concern about balancing open space acquisition with development pressures.
- Desire for a strategy that aligns with growth while maintaining preserved lands.
- Consideration of the Home Rule Charter and Boulder County's extensive open space holdings that may limit development.

2. Trail System Expansion & Connectivity

- Updating outdated trail maps to reflect current and future needs.
- Addressing gaps in the trail system to improve accessibility.
- Ensuring proper maintenance and usability of trails.
- Enhancing connectivity to Boulder and addressing Boulder-Erie Regional Trail (BERT) in the plan.

3. Recreation & Performing Arts Facilities

- Strong interest in developing a Performing Arts Center with community programming.
- Evaluation of a potential second recreation facility to accommodate future growth.
- Identifying areas where additional specific park facilities recreation fields, playgrounds, and pump tracks are needed in different parts or areas of Erie..

4. Alignment with Other Plans & Policies

- Integration of the PROST Plan with the Comprehensive Plan, Climate Action Plan, and Mobility Plan. Some of these Plans may not be complete.
- Ensuring consistency with land use and growth management strategies.
- Identifying a process for prioritizing open space acquisitions to balance conservation and development.

5. Sustainability & Environmental Considerations

- Need to balance sustainability with recreational development (e.g., irrigated fields, artificial turf impact on pollinators and heat radiation).
- Addressing water conservation strategies holistically rather than focusing only on reduction.
- Managing light pollution and adhering to dark sky policies for ball fields and public spaces.
- Exploring the use of recycled materials for trails while considering environmental impact.

6. Mobility & Transportation Enhancements

- Encouraging multimodal transportation options, including EV charging stations at open spaces to attract visitors.
- Working with the transportation team to assess e-bike classifications and golf cart regulations for safety.
- Evaluating signage effectiveness for trails and public spaces.

7. Implementation & Funding Strategies

- Need for a sustainable financial model to support long-term investments in parks and open space.
- Exploring innovative funding sources, including grants and partnerships.
- Addressing challenges of land acquisition timing and ensuring development follows acquisition promptly.
- Considering mechanisms for turf and sod disposal to avoid landfill accumulation.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Balancing Development & Conservation:** The need to maintain open spaces while accommodating growth.
- **Uncertainty in Land Acquisition Timing:** Land availability fluctuates, requiring flexible planning approaches.
- **Recreation Facility Constraints:** The existing Erie Community Center is nearing capacity and expanding to accommodate significant additional space presents both physical and economic challenges, as the current site has limited flexibility and any expansion would come with significant cost implications
- **Lack of Teen-Oriented Spaces:** Community members emphasized the need for recreational areas catering to teenagers.
- **Trail System Gaps:** There are missing links in the current trail system that hinder accessibility and connectivity.
- **Environmental Impact Considerations:** Water use, artificial turf impact, and dark sky compliance need to be integrated into planning.

Potential Action Items

- Review and update land acquisition strategies for open space preservation.
- Improve trail mapping and identify key areas for expansion.
- Develop sustainable funding strategies for long-term projects.
- Consider new transportation and mobility options, including EV infrastructure and e-bike policies.
- Evaluate sustainability measures, including water use, artificial turf impact, and light pollution compliance.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW 3: Partner and Business Organizations		
Date: February 24, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7 p.m.	**Location:** Schofield Farm Open Space
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Michelle Regan (DTJ Design) • Taylor Atkins (DTJ Design)		• Heidi Burgard – First National Bank • Pat Vero – Erie Chamber of Commerce • Ronda Grassi – Erie Economic Development Council

Key Priorities

1. Development of a Sports and Recreation Hub

- Strong support for Erie to position itself as a premier sports-centric town by leveraging existing facilities and expanding infrastructure.
- Interest in adding an Olympic-sized swimming pool, ice hockey rink, and additional tournament-quality sports fields.
- Strategic planning to attract regional and national sporting events to boost local economic development.

2. Enhancing Business and Recreation Integration

- Advocacy for stronger partnerships between businesses and the Parks and Recreation Department to enhance event programming.
- Improved coordination for events like the Erie Balloon Festival, ensuring dedicated space and infrastructure for long-term sustainability.
- Expansion of local business engagement through sponsorship and volunteer opportunities in community recreation programs.

3. Expanded Event and Cultural Programming

- Development of a dedicated outdoor event space to support concerts, festivals, and community gatherings.
- Construction of a permanent stage and event infrastructure at Coal Creek Park to reduce the burden of temporary rentals.
- Support for enhanced event logistics, such as improved parking and access for major community events.

4. Increased Trail Connectivity and Mobility Options

- Improved integration of trails into Erie's commercial and recreational spaces, making businesses more accessible by foot and bike.
- Support for expanded e-bike-friendly trails to enhance alternative transportation options.
- Consideration of trolley or shuttle systems to connect major recreational and commercial areas.

5. Balanced Growth and Sustainable Land Use

- Strategic planning for recreational spaces within new developments to ensure sufficient park access for all neighborhoods.
- Greater transparency in land use planning, particularly regarding public versus private recreation spaces.
- Implementation of sustainable landscaping practices to reduce excessive water consumption in park maintenance.

6. Improved Support for Large-Scale Events

- Identification of a permanent site for the Erie Balloon Festival and other large-scale community gatherings.
- Coordination with local hotels and businesses to better accommodate visitors attending Erie events and tournaments.
- Enhanced infrastructure to support large crowd management, including expanded parking and transit options.

7. Feasibility of a Performing Arts Center

- Growing interest in developing a multi-use performing arts center to host concerts, theater performances, and large community meetings.
- Evaluation of funding sources and potential private-public partnerships to support construction and operations.
- Integration of a conference space component to address the lack of large meeting venues within Erie.

8. Improved Park and Open Space Planning

- Prioritization of multi-use park spaces that can accommodate both passive and active recreation.
- Consideration of a more diverse mix of park amenities, including dog parks, playgrounds, and quiet green spaces.
- Ensuring adequate maintenance and funding for both new and existing park spaces.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Lack of Permanent Event Infrastructure:** Temporary event staging and logistics create high costs and inefficiencies for community events.
- **Unequal Distribution of Recreational Facilities:** Certain areas of Erie remain underserved and require new or expanded parks and recreation options.
- **High Costs for Park and Recreation Expansion:** Concerns over funding sources and long-term maintenance costs for large-scale recreational projects.
- **Limited Accessibility to Community and Event Spaces:** Lack of a centralized performance venue and large meeting space hinders community engagement.
- **Parking and Transportation Limitations for Events:** The need for better transit solutions to accommodate visitors attending local events and tournaments.

Potential Action Items

- Explore funding and partnership opportunities to expand Erie's sports and recreation facilities.
- Improve infrastructure for large community events, including permanent stage installation at Coal Creek Park.
- Expand trail connectivity and explore alternative mobility solutions like a shuttle system.
- Ensure new developments have adequate recreational spaces and sustainable landscaping practices.
- Identify a long-term site for the Erie Balloon Festival and ensure its continued success.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW 4: Community Representation		
Date: March 3, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7 p.m.	**Location:** Schofield Farm Open Space
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Will Glaeser (DTJ Design)		• Amber Widgery – Erie Commons Co-President • Carole Bakhos – TR Community Advocate • Jim Westgaard - Flatiron Meadows Metropolitan District President • Michael Pearson – Vista Point HOA President

Key Priorities

1. Accessibility Improvements in Parks & Trails

- Strong support for the development of fully accessible playgrounds, allowing children of all abilities to interact and play.
- Better maintenance and expansion of ADA-compliant trails, ensuring wheelchair access and mobility-friendly surfaces.
- Consideration of universal design principles in new park developments, rather than relying solely on ADA minimum standards.

2. Maintenance & Upkeep of Existing Infrastructure

- Addressing long-term maintenance concerns for aging parks and recreational facilities.
- Consistent upkeep of existing playgrounds, with replacement of broken or outdated equipment.
- Improve communication between HOAs and the Town to prevent mismanagement of shared spaces.

3. Enhanced Public Restroom Facilities

- Upgrading Park restrooms, from porta-potties to permanent structures where feasible.
- Inclusion of adult changing stations to accommodate individuals with disabilities.
- Ensuring regular sanitation and upkeep of existing facilities.

4. Recreational Facility Expansion & Availability

- Strong demand for additional community centers and indoor recreation spaces to accommodate growing Town needs.
- More flexible programming at the Erie Recreation Center, balancing structured activities with open-use time.
- Expansion of sports field availability, including more inclusive sports options for individuals with disabilities.

5. HOA & Town-Owned Land Management Agreements

- Greater clarity on maintenance responsibilities between HOAs and the Town for shared spaces.
- Improved communication on land ownership, funding obligations, and cost- sharing agreements for park and recreation facilities.
- Proactive planning to prevent long-term neglect of existing parks as new developments are prioritized

6. Trail Connectivity & Safety Enhancements

- Filling in gaps within the current trail system to provide safer, more direct connections between neighborhoods.
- More dedicated off-road biking and pedestrian paths to separate different user types and improve safety.
- Consideration of trail surfaces that accommodate wheelchairs, strollers, and other mobility devices.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Deferred Maintenance:** Existing parks and recreational spaces suffer from a lack of upkeep and investment, leading to safety concerns and accessibility barriers.
- **Funding & Budget Constraints:** Limited financial resources impact the ability to maintain older infrastructure while supporting new developments.
- **Lack of Accessible Recreational Spaces:** Few parks and playgrounds currently provide full accessibility for individuals with disabilities.
- **Confusion Over Park Management Responsibilities:** Unclear agreements between HOAs and the Town create challenges in maintaining shared spaces.
- **Trail Connectivity Gaps:** Many trail segments do not connect seamlessly, reducing their effectiveness for safe transportation and recreation.

Potential Action Items

- Evaluate opportunities for developing a fully inclusive, accessible playground.
- Improve maintenance and replacement schedules for existing recreational facilities.
- Clarify land management and maintenance agreements between HOAs and the Town.
- Assess feasibility of new restroom facilities and upgrades to existing park restrooms.
- Enhance trail connectivity with accessibility-friendly design and improved safety measures.
- Explore funding options to balance infrastructure maintenance with new development priorities.

FOCUS GROUP 1: Recreation Center Users & Volunteers		
Date: February 10, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7:45 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Jenise Jensen (Ballard King) • Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Ken Ballard (Ballard King) • Michelle Regan (DTJ Design) • Taylor Atkins (DTJ Design)		• Colin Temme (Coal Creek Little League) • Jim Martinez (Erie Youth Football League) • Kelly Thomson (Colorado Ignite) • Manoj Gangwar (Cricket) • Nate Lofton (Youth Sports Partner/Coach) • Raegan Hoeft (Dance Contractor) • Tyler Schilling (Youth Sports Coach)

Key Priorities

1. Lack of Adequate Facilities

- Lack of adequate field and gym space for youth sports programs, resulting in programs having to turn away participants.
- Overcrowding at the current recreation center, leading to conflicts between different programs.
- Need for more athletic facilities, including artificial turf fields, lighted fields, and an indoor sports complex.
- Existing fields and parks are in poor condition and not suitable for organized sports.

2. High Costs and Limited Support

- Lack of support and integration from the Town for volunteer-run youth sports programs.
- High fees for using Town facilities, with no discounts for volunteer-run or resident programs.
- Desire for the Town to take a more active role in developing new athletic facilities and supporting community sports programs.

3. Rapid Population Growth

- Erie's population is growing rapidly, with projections to double in the next 5–10 years, further straining existing resources.
- Increased demand for diverse recreational programs, including youth theater, volleyball, lacrosse, and older adult enrichment activities.

4. Expansion of Indoor & Outdoor Recreational Facilities

- Need for additional gym space to accommodate indoor sports.
- Request for more indoor turf fields for year-round sports training, especially for youth football and soccer.
- Development of a second community center with distinct amenities such as fitness studios, expanded locker rooms, and spaces designed for older adults.

5. Enhancement of Field & Park Spaces

- More full-sized, multi-sport fields to accommodate football, soccer, and lacrosse.
- Improved maintenance of fields, addressing issues like worn-out grass, ruts, and uneven playing surfaces.
- Adding several fields in one location to allow families to attend multiple games in the same area.
- Increased access to restrooms and weather-protected shelters at parks for camps and outdoor activities.

6. Aquatic Facilities & Water Recreation

- Strong support for the development of a dedicated community swimming pool.
- Expansion of aquatic programs to include swim teams, diving, water polo, and lifeguard training.
- Integration of aquatic fitness programs for both youth and older adults.

7. Accessibility & Inclusivity Enhancements

- Development of designated space for toddler and preschool-age sports programs.
- Expansion of fitness class space separate from high-noise gym environments.
- Improved park and trail accessibility for all ages and abilities, including paved paths and wheelchair-friendly routes.

8. Better Support for Volunteer & Youth Programs

- Requests for discounted or free facility use for volunteer-led youth sports programs.
- Improved collaboration between the Town and private youth sports organizations to enhance program coordination.
- Recognition of volunteers who contribute significant time and effort to community programs.

9. Sustainability & Smart Growth Strategies

- Review of park requirements for housing developments to ensure the inclusion of athletic facilities, not just small pocket parks.
- Consideration of alternative funding sources, including grants and partnerships, to support facility expansion.
- Sustainable infrastructure development that aligns with long-term community needs.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Severe Shortage of Recreational Space:** Existing gymnasiums and fields are overcrowded, limiting opportunities for youth sports and fitness programs.
- **High Cost of Field Rentals:** Lack of resident discounts forces Erie teams to pay the same rates as out-of-town organizations.
- **Lack of Lighting for Evening Use:** Many fields remain unusable after dark due to the absence of lighting infrastructure.
- **Limited Indoor Training Options:** No dedicated indoor turf space for winter training, impacting football, soccer, and lacrosse programs.
- **Inadequate Volunteer Support:** Limited resources for coaching education, program integration, and facility access.

Potential Action Items

- Explore funding and feasibility for a second community center and dedicated aquatic facility.
- Identify opportunities for field expansion and improved maintenance.
- Assess policy changes regarding park requirements for new housing developments.
- Develop strategies for better collaboration between the Town and youth sports organizations.
- Address lighting deficiencies to maximize field usability year-round.
- Improve accessibility and inclusivity in recreational programming and infrastructure.

FOCUS GROUP 2: History & Culture		
Date: February 12, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Michelle Regan (DTJ Design) • Taylor Atkins (DTJ Design)		• Aspen McArthur - Cultural Arts Programming & Events • Brenda Reeder - Cultural Arts Programming & Events • Cory Collard - Cultural Arts Programming & Events • Ed Guignon - Cultural Arts Programming & Events • Mimi Kruger - Cultural Arts Programming & Events • Rachel Folger - Erie Historical Society

Key Priorities

1. Preservation of Historic and Cultural Sites

- Strong support for celebrating and preserving Erie's small-town historical charm.
- Calls for incorporating the historic Blacksmith Shop at the Wise Homestead into preservation efforts.
- Additional support for maintaining and promoting Erie's historical museum and significant landmarks.

2. Enhancing Public Awareness of Local History

- Increased support and volunteers for historical events and activities.
- Expansion of rail bike programs to educate residents on Erie's mining history.
- Installation of historical markers and plaques at key sites to provide context and recognition.

3. Development of Cultural & Arts Spaces

- Interest in an Erie Arts Center to promote local artists and cultural exhibitions.
- Revitalization of former cultural spaces, such as the Pure Street House and Lorraine David Children's Library.
- Display of historical artifacts in public spaces with proper curation and presentation.

4. Improved Public Events & Programming

- Expansion of musical and art events in Old Town to highlight Erie's cultural heritage.
- Creation of an annual Town-wide art festival to engage the local artist community.
- More frequent outdoor concert series and potential for an indoor performance venue.

5. Infrastructure Improvements for Cultural Preservation

- Investment in proper maintenance and restoration of existing historic parks before new developments.
- Ensuring adequate shade and seating in public gathering areas to encourage longer visitor engagement.
- Town-funded cultural museum as a long-term goal to highlight Erie's history and evolution.

6. Community Education & Engagement

- Integration of Erie's history into Town welcome materials for both new and existing residents.
- Public outreach initiatives to educate residents on Erie's historical and cultural significance.
- Use of digital media and signage to increase awareness of Erie's unique historical identity.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Lack of Awareness & Support for Historical Initiatives:** Limited public knowledge and engagement with existing historical programs and sites.
- **Inconsistent Maintenance of Historic Sites:** Some historic areas are not well- maintained, leading to concerns about long-term preservation.
- **Insufficient Cultural & Artistic Spaces:** The Town lacks dedicated venues for cultural exhibitions, historical displays, and performing arts.
- **Limited Funding & Town Support:** Need for increased Town funding, staffing, and volunteer coordination for history and cultural projects.
- **Balancing Growth with Preservation:** Concern that rapid development may overshadow Erie's historical identity and cultural heritage.

Potential Action Items

- Identify opportunities for expanded cultural event programming.
- Identify opportunities for preserving and enhancing historic sites.
- Develop strategies for better integrating historical education into public spaces.
- Explore funding options for cultural preservation and infrastructure improvements.
- Increase public outreach efforts to engage the community in Erie's history and cultural legacy.

FOCUS GROUP 3: Outdoor Enthusiasts & Advocates		
Date: February 19, 2025	**Time:** 6 - 7:30 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
Facilitators		**Participants**
• Keith Walzak (DTJ Design) • Michelle Regan (DTJ Design) • Taylor Atkins (DTJ Design)		• Casey Lyons - Friends of Coal Creek • Christy Schaefer - Slides & Sunshine • Claudia Smelko - Tree Advisory Board (TAB) • Dave Ignatew - Singletrack volunteer, invited by David Neff • David Neff - Singletrack volunteer • Kyle Sylvester - Erie Resident and Brighton Parks employee • Rob Lindow – Agriculture Lease

Key Priorities

1. Enhancing Trail Connectivity and Wayfinding

- Increased wayfinding signage for ease of navigation and enhanced user experience.
- Development of a comprehensive master plan for trail connectivity within Erie and to neighboring communities such as Boulder, Lafayette, and Broomfield.
- Utilization of unused railroad rights-of-way for regional trail expansion.

2. Preservation and Enhancement of Open Spaces

- Acquire and protect additional open spaces, including the 30-acre Kenosha parcel.
- Increased habitat restoration efforts, particularly in wetland and riparian zones, to support pollinators and wildlife.
- Maintain and improve existing open spaces for long-term community benefit.

3. Improving Recreational Facilities

- Develop more outdoor sports fields to meet rising demand.
- Create inclusive playgrounds and recreational opportunities for all age groups and abilities.
- Development of additional single-track mountain biking trails to accommodate growing demand.
- Increased investment in outdoor swimming pools and aquatic facilities.

4. Schofield Property and Lake Area Improvements

- Relocate the parking lot to improve functionality and access, as well as promote pedestrian safety near the highway
- Expansion of passive recreation opportunities, such as designated picnic areas and non-motorized access to water bodies.
- Repurpose and preserve the historical barn and brick home.
- Enhance the area for recreational and community use.

5. Tree Canopy and Downtown Beautification

- Increase tree planting efforts to expand the mature tree canopy.
- Improve irrigation systems to support long-term tree health.
- Incorporate green infrastructure to enhance the downtown aesthetic.

6. Land Use Policy and Developer Requirements

- Strengthening land use codes to mandate dedicated park and open space development.
- Prevent developers from opting out of park contributions with fees.
- Ensure new developments align with recreational and environmental goals.

Key Challenges & Issues

- **Balancing Growth with Preservation:** Managing rapid development while maintaining natural and recreational spaces.
- **Funding for Land Acquisition & Maintenance:** Identifying sustainable financial sources for open space purchases and facility upkeep.
- **Ensuring Developer Compliance:** Preventing developers from opting out of park and open space development requirements.
- **High Demand for Recreational Facilities:** Increased participation in outdoor activities is placing strain on existing parks and trails.
- **Lack of Trail Connectivity:** Current gaps in the trail system make it difficult for users to access key recreation areas safely.

Potential Action Items

- Implement Land Use Code Updates to strengthen policies requiring developers to provide and enhance public open spaces.
- Work with Boulder County and other stakeholders on interconnected trail systems.
- Develop a comprehensive trail connectivity and wayfinding strategy.
- Identify opportunities for land acquisition to expand protected open spaces.
- Improve coordination with developers to ensure the inclusion of high-quality parks and recreation areas.
- Explore funding sources for recreational infrastructure, including grant opportunities.
- Address environmental concerns related to landfill sites and sustainability practices.
- Expand recreational facilities to meet growing demand, including additional sports fields and indoor community spaces.

3.3.4. Culture Academy Event (Staff Focus Group)

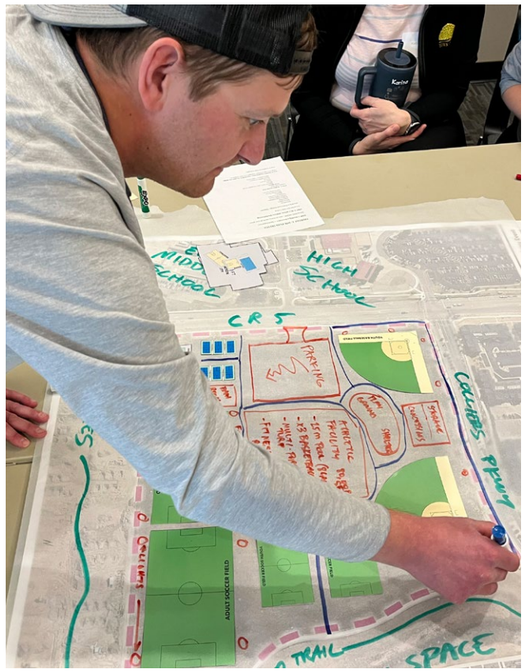
Date: March 12, 2025	**Time:** 12:20 - 3 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
DTJ Facilitators		**Town of Erie Facilitators**
• James Palmer • Keith Walzak • Riley Fountain • Taylor Atkins • Will Glaeser		• Jay Mauer • Jeff Rau • Kathy Kron • Levi Moser • Rachel Wysuph • Taylor Ingro

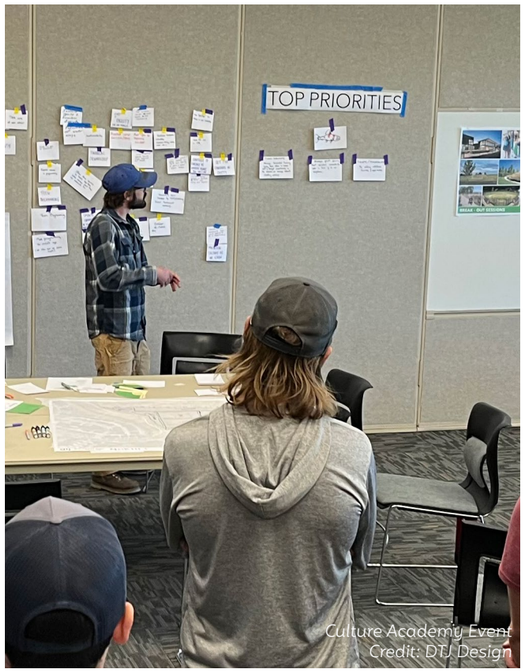
Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the workshop was to engage Town of Erie staff in updating the PROST Playbook. This group offers unique insight into the daily functionality of PROST programming and maintenance in Erie. Their ideas, priorities, and feedback will be evaluated along with other inputs received from the community to define a plan strategy.

Goals:

- Create an Open Forum Discussion
- Offer a Learning Opportunity
- Engage as a Team
- Broaden Communications





Culture Academy Event
Credit: DTJ Design

3.3.4.1. Task 1: Site Plan Sketch

In Task 1, each group was presented with the challenge of designing a 25-acre site in East Erie. The site is located at the corner of CR-5 and Colliers Pkwy, directly west of Erie High School and Soaring Heights PK-8. Each group was provided with a site base and "widgets" depicting common programming elements, including ballfields, sports courts, and building footprints, to help spark inspiration for potential site design ideas. Group members offered a variety of perspectives and expertise during the process, with each group ultimately coming to a consensus on a preliminary site design.

Design Ideas: Common Themes Across Groups

Below is a summary of common themes from the six groups.

Large Recreational & Sports Facilities

Each group supported creating new facilities to supplement the existing Erie Community Center, with proposed facilities ranging from 60,000 to 100,000 square feet.

Strong Connection to the High School & Schools

Many groups emphasized designing the site with high school and K-8 students in mind, including fitness spaces, sports training areas, and potential school partnerships.

Diverse Sports & Fitness Options

Many groups included multi-use fields (soccer, lacrosse, football, rugby), basketball courts, weight rooms, and indoor/outdoor pools.

Revenue Generation & Regional Draw

Some groups envisioned the facility as a regional attraction, bringing in revenue through rentals, events, and competitive sports programming.

Safe Accessibility & Connectivity

Concerns about traffic and safe access led to ideas like underpasses, bridges, and designated pathways.

Balance Between Passive & Active Spaces

Some groups included gardens, arboretums, art installations, and nature play areas alongside the sports infrastructure.

3.3.4.2. Task 2: Organizational Culture Discussion

In Task 2, group members discussed the organizational culture of the Erie Parks & Recreation Department (PRD). The discussion included describing the current culture of the PRD, listing the most important values of the PRD, and discussing opportunities for the PRD to contribute to growth and culture in the broader Erie community. Finally, each group identified 3-4 top priorities for both the PRD and the PROST Playbook to address within the next decade to best support an expanding Erie community.

Top Priorities: Common Themes Across Groups

Sustainable Growth & Financial Planning

Many groups emphasized the need to grow responsibly while ensuring financial sustainability.

Connectivity & Accessibility

Groups discussed maintaining strong connections between neighborhoods, recreational facilities, and surrounding communities.

Maintaining Excellence

There was a shared desire to keep Erie at the forefront of innovation and quality services.

Staffing & Infrastructure Needs

Several groups highlighted the importance of expanding staff and resources to support future growth.

Equity & Inclusion

Ensuring fair access to facilities and opportunities for all residents was a priority.

Task 2 Data Analysis

Responses to the Task 2 prompts were recorded and synthesized. Similar responses to each prompt were grouped to determine the prevalence of each answer.

Prompt 1: Describe the PRD organizational culture.
(Results shown in order of prevalence)

Top Descriptions	Recurrences
Innovative	29
Supportive	17
Hardworking	16
Fun	15
Family	12
Inclusive	12
Dedicated	11
Caring	11
Collaborative	11
Passionate	8
Positive	6
Professional	6

Prompt 2: List the values that are important for PRD.
(Results shown in order of prevalence)

Top Values	Recurrences
Teamwork	19
Inclusivity	15
Service	11
Integrity	11
Creativity	9
Accountability	8
Sustainability	8
Balance	7
Professionalism	7
Flexibility	5
Growth	5
Innovation	5
Accessibility	3

Prompt 3: List opportunities where PRD can grow and contribute to the Erie community.
(Results shown in order of prevalence)

Top Opportunities	Recurrences
Expand facilities and amenity space	21
Implement environmentally sustainable initiatives	15
Enhance and expand recreational programs	14
Increase PRD community events and educational opportunities	14
Become regional PRD leaders and set industry standards	12
Maintain standard of service as Erie population grows	11
Create and maintain new partnerships	9
Enhance connectivity and walkability	7
Increase PRD staff and professional development opportunities	5
Maximize use of current operational spaces	3

Key Takeaways

Some of the key takeaways discerned from the PRD Staff Focus Group Session were:

High-Quality Recreational & Sports Facilities

- A new multi-purpose recreation center is widely supported.
    - Facilities could include indoor and outdoor pools, fitness centers, weight rooms, multi-use sports fields/courts, and specialized training spaces.
- Ensure space for school partnerships, competitive sports, and regional events.

Maintain Existing Resources

- Take care of current amenities and maximizing their use before expanding.

Connectivity & Accessibility

- Prioritize safe, walkable connections between schools, parks, and neighborhoods.
- Consider underpasses, bridges, and trail extensions to improve access.
- Strengthen Erie's regional connections with neighboring communities.

Accessibility, Inclusion, & Community Engagement

- Ensure recreational facilities and programming are accessible to all residents.
- Focus on diverse programming and community-oriented spaces.
    - Include programming that is not currently available in Erie to appeal to a variety of interests.
- Incorporate gathering spaces such as art installations, gardens, and nature play areas.

Sustainable Growth & Strategic Planning

- Maintain PRD cultural identity and service standards while accounting for community growth.
- Ensure financial sustainability through dedicated funding, diversified revenue sources, and long-term financial plans.
    - Attract regional competitions and events to generate revenue.
    - Prioritize facility development based on community needs and financial feasibility.
- Ensure environmental sustainability through the implementation of a variety of focused initiatives (i.e. limiting water usage, enhancing biodiversity, etc.).
- Invest in proper maintenance facilities and staffing to support new developments.

3.3.5. Community Open House

Date: April 16, 2025	**Time:** 4 - 8 p.m.	**Location:** Erie Community Center
DTJ Facilitators		**Town of Erie Facilitators**
• Keith Walzak • Michelle Regan • Taylor Atkins		• Jay Mauer • Jeff Rau • Kathy Kron • Levi Moser • Luke Bolinger • Mike McGill • Matt Spinner • Rachel Wysuph • Shane Greenburg • Taylor Ingro

Attendance

An estimated 80-100 community members attended the event. Attendees consisted of a wide range of ages, including kids, teenagers, parents, and older adults. This diverse, multi-generational turnout ensured that various perspectives were heard regarding the future of PROST in Erie.

Purpose and Goals

- **Gather Broad Community Input**

  Provide an open forum for community members to share their thoughts on project goals, objectives, and vision at key project milestones.

- **Engagement & Connection**

  Encourage discussions about community values and future developments.

- **Interactive Participation**

  Offer various hands-on activities to make participation accessible and engaging.

3.3.5.1. Outreach and Engagement Stations

Designed to gather broad community input and foster meaningful connections, the event featured a series of interactive stations, each focused on a specific area of the PROST Playbook. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas, preferences, and priorities through hands-on activities and discussions. The stations were as follows:

Station 1: PROST Playbook Project Introduction (Informational)

Introduced the PROST Playbook project description, purpose, timeline, and current mission, vision, and values.

Station 2: Performing Arts Center (PAC) Feasibility Study Introduction (Engagement)

Introduced the PAC feasibility study project description, purpose, timeline, and next steps. Asked participants to indicate their current use of typical PAC programs, and which programs they would most likely participate in in the future.

Station 3: Walkable Map and Visioning (Engagement)

Asked participants to engage with a large-scale map of the existing Erie PROST system to gather data and feedback of the existing PROST system.

Station 4: Community Programming, Events, and Facilities (Engagement)

Asked participants to indicate which programs, events, and spaces they currently used, and which of these areas they would like to see more of in the future.

Station 5: Funding Resource Prioritization (Engagement)

Provided information on the current funding resource distribution within the parks and recreation department. Asked participants to indicate what types of programs and facilities they would like to prioritize funding in the future.

Station 6: Kids' Activity (Engagement)

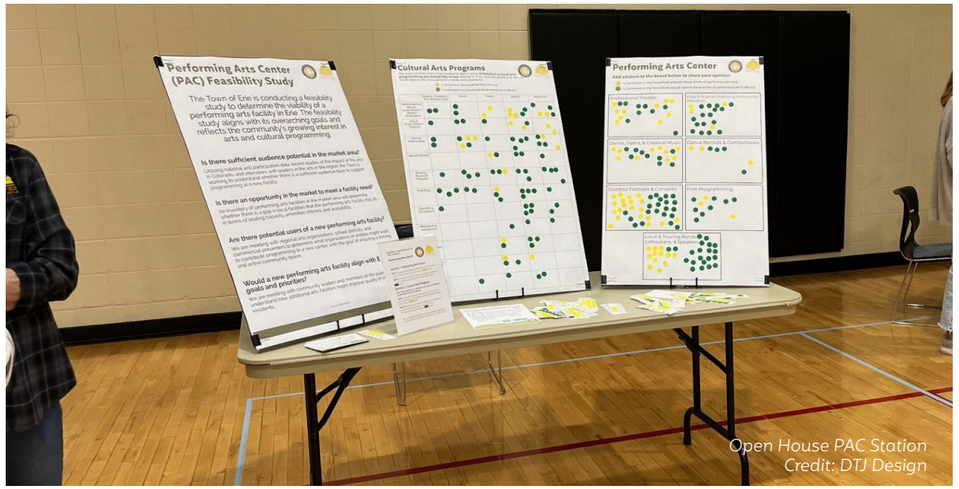
Provided coloring sheets and inspiration boards to allow kids to share their thoughts on what they would like to see in their parks in the future.

Station 7: Next Steps (Informational)

Thanked participants for attending and informed them how their feedback and input would be used for the project. Provided a space where people could take the questionnaire and provide additional feedback if needed.

3.3.5.2. Community Feedback

Performing Arts Center Feasibility Study Introduction



Open House PAC Station
Credit: DTJ Design

	Babies, Toddlers, Pre-School Kids		Youth		Teens		Adults		Adults 60+	
	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future	Current	Future
Instrumental Music Instruction/Band/Orchestra	0	5	1	3	4	1	5	3	2	4
Vocal Instruction/Chorus	0	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	2	1
Dance Instruction	0	2	4	2	1	1	0	4	2	5
Social Dance	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	7	1	2
Drama, Musical Theater	0	1	0	4	1	2	1	4	0	6
Painting	0	5	0	5	1	2	2	6	0	2
Ceramics/Sculpture	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	9	0	3
Metalwork/Woodwork	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	7	0	3
Jewelry, textiles, fiber arts	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	8	0	1
Photography, filmmaking	0	0	0	0	1	2	3	2	1	4
Digital media, game design	0	0	0	1	0	4	0	4	0	1

Table 1. Open House - Cultural Arts Programming Results

Category	Subcategory	Current Use	Future Use
Performing Arts Center	Professional Theater	18	18
	Plays & Musicals featuring Community Residents	7	24
	Dance, Opera, Classical Music	15	14
	Dance Recitals & Competitions	3	4
	Outdoor Festivals & Concerts	29	36
	Film Programming	7	11
	Local & Touring Bands, Comedians, & Speakers	17	30

Table 2. Open House - PAC Uses Results

From these results, we can discern the following:

Age Group	Most particpated-in activity currently	Most desired future activity
Babies, Toddlers, Pre-School Kids	N/A	Instrumental Music Instruction/Band/Orchestra, Painting
Youth	Dance Instruction	Painting
Teens	Instrumental Music Instruction/Band/Orchestra	Digital media, game design
Adults	Instrumental Music Instruction/Band/Orchestra	Ceramics/Sculpture
Adults 60+	Instrumental Music Instruction/Band/Orchestra, Vocal Instruction/Chorus, Dance Instruction	Drama, Musical Theater

Table 3. Open House - Cultural Arts Programming Summary

(Results below are shown in order of prevalence)

Category	Most Used Currently (Top 3)	Most Desired for Future Use (Top 3)
Performing Arts Center	Outdoor Festivals & Concerts	Outdoor Festivals & Concerts
	Professional Theater	Local & Touring Bands, Comedians, & Speakers
	Local & Touring Bands, Comedians, & Speakers	Plays & Musicals featuring Community Residents

Table 4. Open House - PAC Uses Summary

These results indicate that there is a community interest in expanding creative programs for all ages, particularly those focused on art and performance. Additionally, concerts, live performances, and both professional and local theater productions are among the most utilized and desired Performing Arts offerings in Erie.

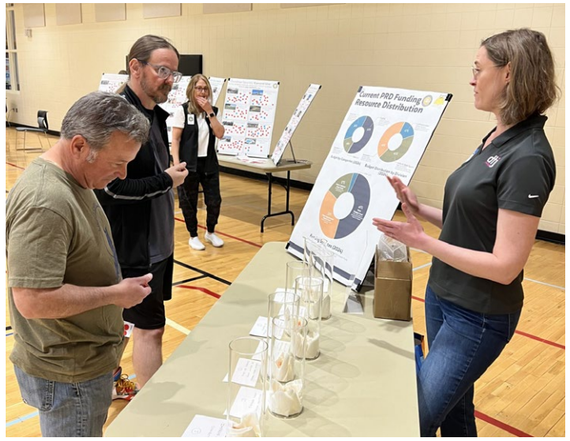
Walkable Map and Visioning

The walkable map activity helped showcase where current Erie residents felt the Town had adequate PROST facilities, as well as where they saw potential gaps. Engaging with these community members provided valuable, firsthand insight into the Town's existing facilities and programs. Some discussions included:

- Potential areas for additional sports courts and fields
- Desired places for enhanced trail connectivity to connect neighborhoods to community parks and amenities
- Potential locations for an additional recreation center for the Town
- Potential areas for open space conservation
- Concerns about the affordability of new facilities and making amenities accessible to all socioeconomic groups

Open House Walkable Map Station
Credit: DTJ Design

Funding Resource Prioritization



Open House Funding Priorities Station
Credit: DTJ Design

Options	Votes in Favor
Take care of what we have (deferred maintenance)	47
Add more recreation programs (sports, swim, arts, etc.)	44
Build a new recreation facility (recreation center or aquatics)	87
Build a new performing arts facility	30
Build new parks on vacant land owned by Erie	61
Acquire more open spaces	58
Improve trail connectivity	40

Table 5. Open House - Funding Priorities Results

Based on the results of the activity, there is a resounding desire for building a new recreational facility. Other top priorities for increased funding included building new parks on vacant land, acquiring more open spaces, and taking care of what already exists in Erie (deferred maintenance).

Community Programming, Events, and Facilities

Open House Programming & Events Station
Credit: DTJ Design

Category	Subcategory	Current Use	Future Use
Recreation Programs & Events	Aquatics	34	17
	Fitness & Wellness	43	25
	Sports	26	15
	Therapeutic Recreation	0	1
	Youth & Teen	11	11
	Adult / Adult 60+	19	17
	Special Events	37	29
	Cultural Arts	15	22
Indoor Spaces	Aquatics Area	26	40
	Fitness Area	42	39
	Sports Courts	21	45
	Adult 60+ Spaces	13	10
	Multi-Purpose Community Room	13	14
	Childcare	8	8
	Playground	11	16
	Teen/Youth Spaces	4	14
Outdoor Spaces	Community Parks	36	28
	Neighborhood Parks	33	32
	Passive Use Areas	28	24
	Sports Fields/Areas	19	26
	Venue Space	25	25
	Trails System	42	47
	Open Space	40	39
	Private Green Spaces	17	29

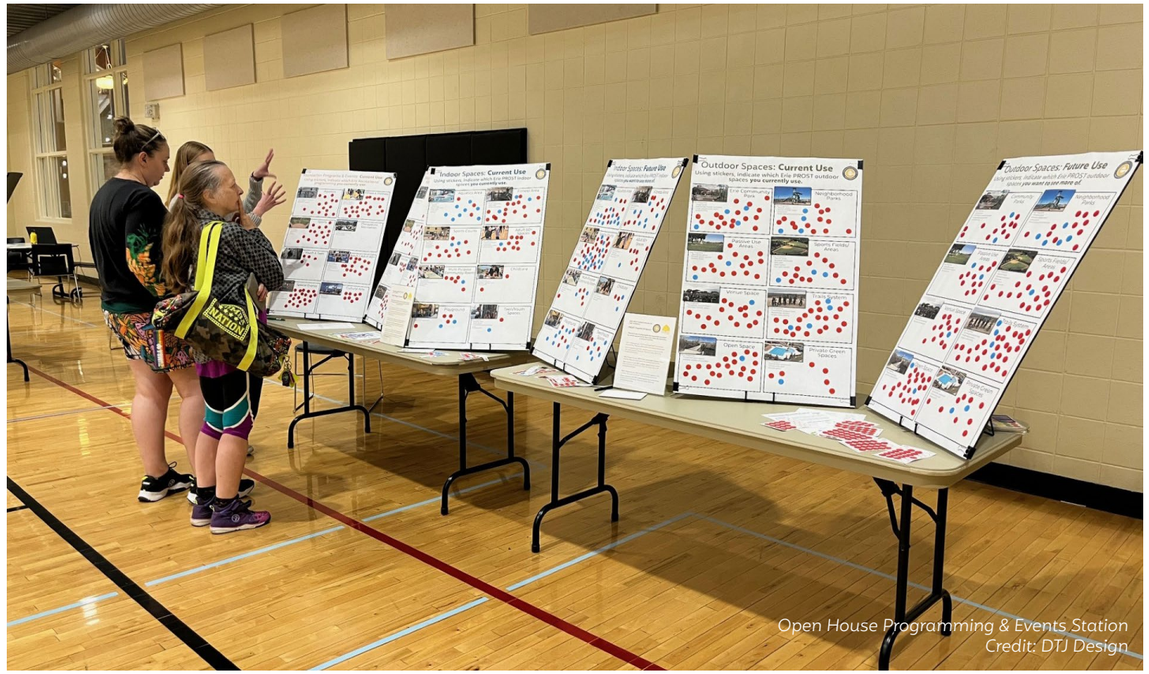
Table 6. Open House - Community Programs Results

From these results, we can discern the following:
(Results are shown in order of prevalence for each category)

Category	Most Used Currently (Top 3)	Most Desired for Future Use (Top 3)
Recreation Programs & Events	Fitness & Wellness	Special Events
	Special Events	Fitness & Wellness
	Aquatics	Cultural Arts
Indoor Spaces	Fitness Area	Sports Courts
	Aquatics Area	Aquatics Area
	Sports Courts	Fitness Area
Outdoor Spaces	Trails System	Trails System
	Open Space	Open Space
	Community Parks	Neighborhood Parks

Table 7. Open House - Community Programs Summary

These results indicate a clear preference for fitness-related activities, special events, and improved trail systems. Erie residents currently make the most use of fitness areas and trail systems, and they want to see these amenities expanded in the future. There is also significant interest in adding more sports courts, aquatics facilities, special events, and parks and open spaces to Erie's available programming.



Open House Programming & Events Station
Credit: DTJ Design

3.3.5.3. Key Takeaways

The Open House event served as a dynamic and inclusive platform to engage the community in shaping the future of PROST in Erie. From evaluating current facilities and programming to envisioning future developments, the event successfully encouraged thoughtful participation and set the stage for the next phase of community-driven planning.

The Open House allowed for:

- **Community Insight:** The event created space for residents of all ages to contribute feedback on current and future park and recreation priorities.
- **Project Introductions:** Clear overviews of the PROST Playbook and PAC feasibility study helped participants understand the vision, goals, and timelines.
- **Transparent Next Steps:** Attendees were informed of how their input would be used, creating continued community involvement in the planning process.

Community input gathered through the Open House activities revealed strong interest and clear priorities for the future of Erie's PROST Programming. These key takeaways will help inform future recommendations and design approaches for PROST in the Erie community.

Key Takeaways (Takeaways are not listed in order of prevalence):

High support for funding an additional Recreation Center
There is widespread community support for funding a new recreation center and related facilities (i.e. aquatics facility)

High support for funding more parks and acquiring additional open space areas
Residents prioritized building neighborhood parks on existing vacant lands currently owned by Erie and acquiring more open space areas.

Interest in Creative and Cultural Programming
If the community were to develop a new performing arts venue, there is strong interest in expanding arts and performance offerings for all ages.

Strong desire for enhanced trail systems
There is a clear interest in expanding Erie's trail system and improving access between neighborhoods and parks.

Prioritization for fitness areas and events
Fitness areas, aquatics facilities, sports courts, and special events are highly used. Residents support the expansion of these areas in the future.

Commitment to Open Space and Sustainability
Many participants underscored the importance of conserving natural areas and maintaining existing infrastructure.

Local Perspective
The walkable map helped residents identify areas with both strong coverage and service gaps in PROST facilities. Areas for new facilities, trails, and open space were identified.

3.3.6. Public Engagement Events

3.3.6.1. Arbor Day

The Arbor Day Event gave residents and visitors an opportunity to provide feedback on their preferences for future parks and recreation programming and facilities in Erie. Participants used a tabletop map to identify current uses they enjoyed, as well as potential programming gaps in the Town. Participants then selected their top priorities for future parks and recreation funding.

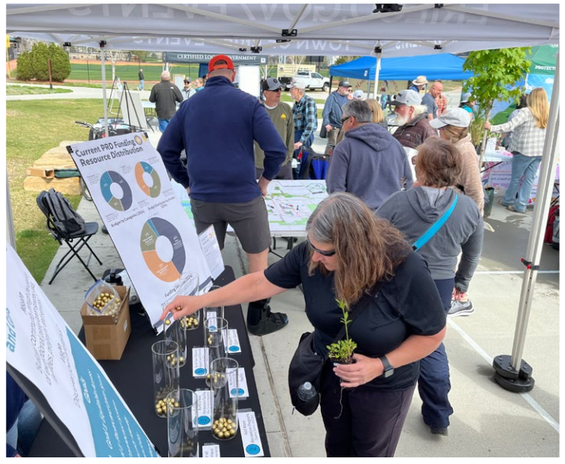
Feedback from this event indicated that Erie user groups favored funding for enhanced trail systems and connections, new parks on vacant land owned by the Town, and continuing to address deferred maintenance of Erie's existing programs and facilities.

Funding Category	Votes in Favor
Improve trail connectivity	120
Build new parks on open vacant land owned by Erie	113
Take care of what we have (deferred maintenance)	104
Add more recreation programs (sports, swim, arts)	103
Build a new recreation facility (recreation center/aquatics	96
Acquire more open space areas	93
Build a new performing arts facility	61

Table 8. Arbor Day - Funding Priorities Results

Tabletop map topics of interest:

- More playgrounds and dog parks
- Expansion of singletrack
- Expansion of Erie trails system
- Sculpture Park or Public Art opportunities (i.e. near Coal Creek Park)
- Outdoor aquatics facilities



3.3.6.2. Town Fair

The Town Fair Event provided a platform for the community to provide feedback on their preferences for future parks & recreation programming and facilities in Erie. Community members of all ages attended the event, diversifying the opinions and values that were received. Participants used the tabletop map to identify current uses they enjoyed, as well as potential programming gaps in the Town. Participants then selected their top priorities for future parks and recreation funding. The various engagement opportunities were well-received by the community and allowed for a wide range of input on the progression of the Playbook.

Funding Category	Votes in Favor
Acquire more open space areas	119
Improve trail connectivity	110
Build a new recreation facility (recreation center/aquatics)	107
Build new parks on open vacant land owned by Erie	91
Take care of what we have (deferred maintenance)	87
Build a new performing arts facility	55
Add more recreation programs (sports, swim, arts)	53

Table 9. Town Fair - Funding Priorities Results

Tabletop map topics of interest:

- Expansion of Erie trails system, primarily to Schools
- Expansion of disc golf
- Considerations for future residential development and growth
- More dog parks
- Opportunities for Community Gardens
- Building new Parks
- Outdoor aquatics facilities

3.3.7. Online Outreach & Communication Tools

Several online platforms were utilized to advertise the PROST Playbook project including a project website where participants can take the questionnaire and receive information, updates in the Town Quarterly Newsletter and existing social median channels.

3.3.8. Other Meetings & Presentations

Other meetings and presentations throughout the project included:

- Kick-Off Meeting with Staff
- Project communications Meetings with Staff (3)
- Open Space and Trails Advisory Board (OSTAB) Meetings (1)
- Town Council Meetings (2)
- Project Management Team Meetings with Staff (8)
- Work Session Meetings with Staff (4)

4: **Existing Parks, Open Space, and Trails Facilities**

This chapter provides a comprehensive inventory of existing parks, open space, and trails resources and facilities. It also includes an assessment that identifies gaps, constraints, and areas for improvement. By analyzing facility distribution, accessibility, and land use patterns, we gain valuable insights into how well the current system serves the community and where strategic investments may be needed.

Clayton Park playground
Credit: Town of Erie

4.1. Key Takeaways

This section provides an overview of the Town of Erie's current parks, open space, trails, and recreational facilities, along with projections to accommodate a growing population—from the current 40,000 to an anticipated 64,000 residents. The findings highlight strengths in the existing system, as well as areas that will require targeted enhancements to maintain high levels of service (LOS) and equitable access.

Parks and Level of Service

- **Current Town-Owned Park Land: 162.5 acres total***
- Current LOS: **4.1 acres** per 1,000 residents
- Planned Park Expansion: There are currently **49.9 acres** of Town-owned undeveloped parkland, with additional parkland dedications that are secured in development agreements in accordance with Town development code.
- Future LOS (at 64,000 residents): Taking into account future planned park expansions, the future LOS will be **3.3 acres** per 1,000 residents. This it is below the lower quartile per the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review.

*Please note that there are an additional 257.7 acres of privately owned parks and open space areas in the Town of Erie. These areas offer amenities for specific communities or developments, but are not Town-owned.

Potential Future Facility Needs

To meet the recreation expectations of Erie's future population, the following facilities* may be considered based on LOS benchmarks and national trends:

- Diamond fields
- Rectangular fields
- Basketball and volleyball courts, standalone
- Community gardens
- Indoor and/or outdoor multi-use courts (basketball, volleyball, tennis, pickleball, etc.)
- Indoor walking loops/running tracks
- Indoor competitive swimming pools
- Outdoor swimming pools
- Indoor and/or outdoor fitness zones and exercise stations

*Please note that this list is not exhaustive, and potential other facility options may be explored.

Trail Network and Missing Gaps

- Current Trail Mileage: **82.2 miles**, 48.8 of which are Town maintained
- There are numerous future planned trails within Erie, all of which will provide excellent connectivity for current and future populations.
- The future planned trail network has gaps, barriers, and missing connections that should be addressed.

Future Park Location Considerations

To support the goal of providing a park, open space, or recreational amenity within a ½ mile or 10-minute walk for all residents, future parks may need to be located in the following areas:

- Eastern Erie along I-25
- Northern Erie near Highway 52 and Weld County Road 5
- Western Erie near Wise Homestead Open Space
- Other strategic residential areas within the Planning Boundary

Open Space Areas and Level of Service

- **Current Town-Owned Open Space: 1,365 acres total**
- Erie has a similar amount of open space in terms of acres per population when compared to other agencies in Colorado.

Opportunities for Management Plan Enhancements

Parks and Recreation Maintenance and Operations (2021 Plan)

Improvements aligned with best practices in Colorado municipalities include:

- Upgrading to smart irrigation systems for water efficiency
- Introducing xeriscaping and native plantings to reduce water use and maintenance
- Installing waste-sorting and composting infrastructure
- Adopting Computerized Maintenance Management Systems (CMMS)
- Transitioning to electric-powered maintenance equipment
- Standardizing training and onboarding for seasonal staff
- Implementing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for park service levels
- Expanding community partnerships for volunteer involvement

Open Space Management (2019 Plan)

Enhancement opportunities include:

- Expanding native habitat restoration
- Implementing sustainable trail and erosion management
- Defining access zones and seasonal closures
- Adding educational signage on ecology and stewardship
- Creating riparian buffer zones for waterway protection
- Using digital monitoring and reporting tools
- Forming community stewardship programs
- Addressing climate resilience with adaptive landscaping and fire-wise planning

4.2. Existing PROST Facilities

Figure 13 shows the existing PROST facilities of Erie, including the various green spaces, trails, and the Erie Community Center within the Planning Boundary per the 2024 Comprehensive Plan. Residential and Non-Residential Land Use types are also shown for reference.

Legend

Existing Waterways & Railroads
- Streams & Ditches
- Railroads
- Water Bodies

Boundaries
- Town Boundary
- Planning Boundary

Land Use
- Residential Land Uses
- Non-Residential Land Uses

- Erie Community Center
- School Sites

Green Space
- Town Owned Parks
- Town Owned Open Space
- Private Green Space
- Other Open Space
- Golf Course
- Town Owned Undeveloped Park Sites
- Housing + Preserved Open Space

- Existing Trails
- Other Existing Trails

- Underpass

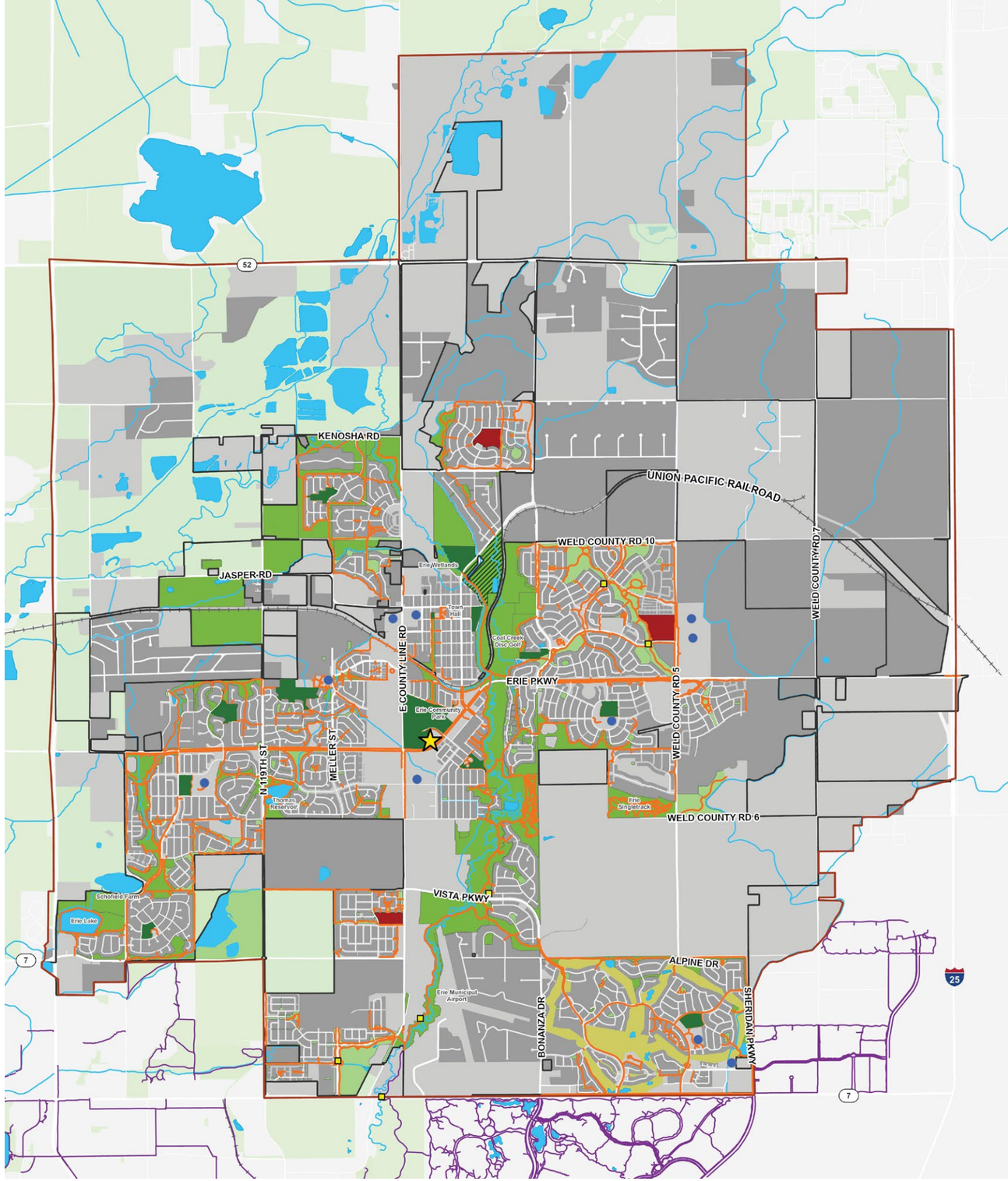


Figure 13. Existing Facilities Map

Scale: 1" - 4,500'
0' 4,500' 9,000'
north

4.2.1. Parks & Levels of Service (LOS)

The Town of Erie currently owns **162.5 acres** of developed parks and is planning for the future development of an additional **49.9 acres** of future planned parks. Erie owned parks are categorized as either Community Parks or Neighborhood Parks.

The current provided Parks LOS based on 40,000 residents is 4.1 acres per 1,000 residents. With the additional future planned parks acreage, the future Parks LOS based on 64,000 residents would be 3.3 acres per 1,000 residents. This is a slightly low LOS, as it is below the lower quartile of 4.7 acres per 1,000 residents per the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review. When compared to other agencies in Colorado, the Town of Erie has a relativity low current LOS as shown in Table 10 below.

Figure 14 shows the current and future planned park locations for the Town of Erie.

Legend

Existing Waterways & Railroads

- Streams & Ditches
- Railroads
- Water Bodies

Boundaries

- Town Boundary
- Planning Boundary

Land Use

- Residential Land Uses
- Non-Residential Land Uses

- Erie Community Center
- School Sites

Green Space

- Town Owned Parks
- Town Owned Undeveloped Park Sites

Agency Owned Park Lands Comparison Chart				
Agency Name	**Estimated Agency Owned Parks Lands (Acres)**	**Population Estimate**	**Level of Service**	**Data Resource Reference**
City and County of Broomfield	778	84,000	9.3 / 1,000 Residents	*2024 Open Space, Parks, Recreation, and Trails (OSPRT) Plan*
City of Thornton *	900	132,000	6.8 / 1,000 Residents	*2017 Parks and Open Space Master Plan*
City of Lafayette	236	31,000	7.6 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Lafayette Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Map*
City of Louisville	355	21,000	16.9 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Louisville Parks Division*
City of Commerce City **	840	68,000	12.4 / 1,000 Residents	*Commerce City "Living In" Resource*
City of Longmont	194	101,000	1.9 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Longmont Parks and Natural Services Division*

** Includes Joint Use Facilities and future planned parks*

*** Includes both Parks and Open Space Areas.*

Table 10. Agency Owned Park Lands Comparison Chart

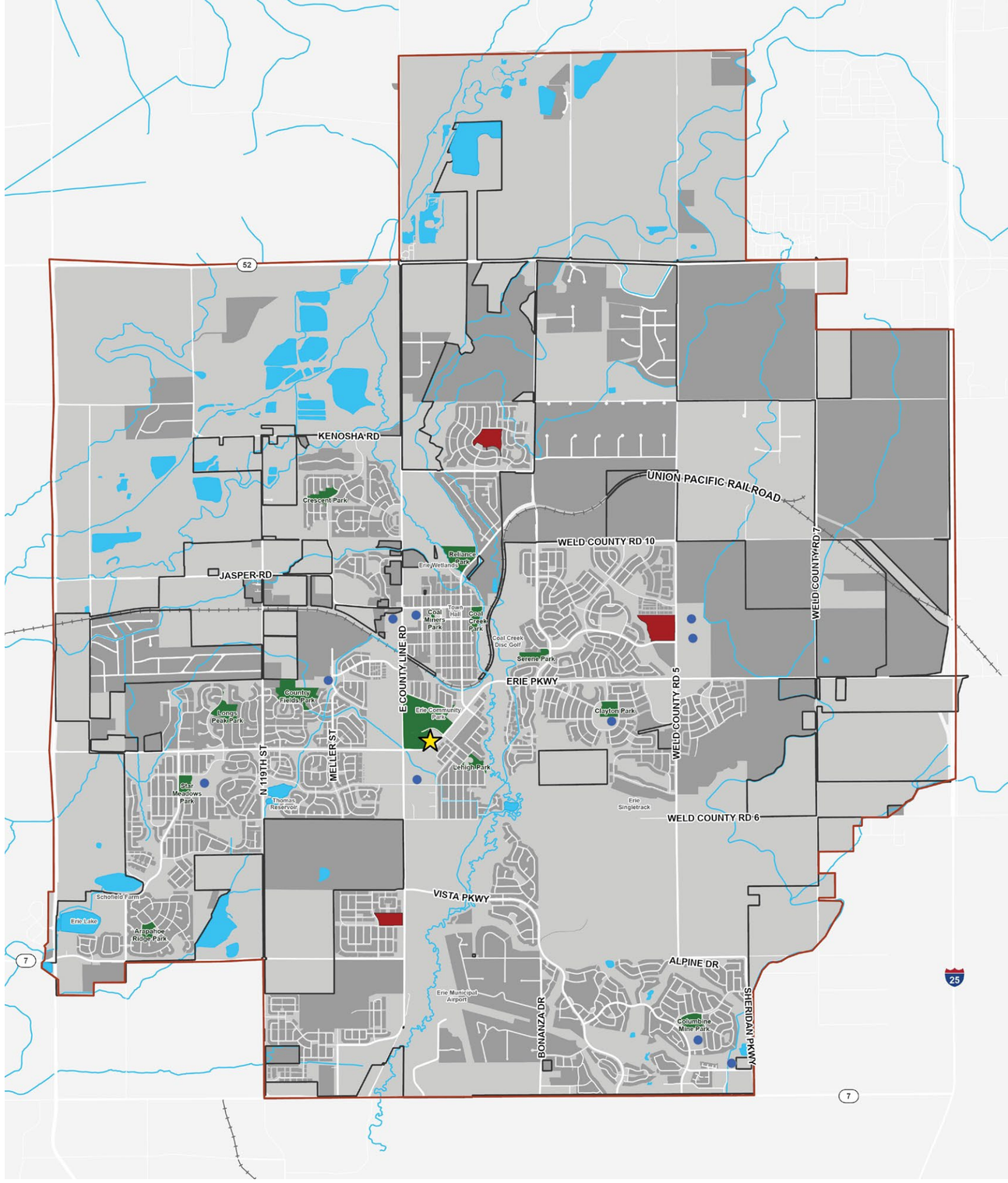


Figure 14. Existing Parks Map

Scale: 1" = 4,500'

0' 4,500' 9,000'

north

4.2.1.1. Community Parks (Erie Owned)

Industry standards define parks that are 15+ acres as community parks. Erie currently owns one developed Community Park. The Erie Community Park is 49.3 acres in size which includes the Erie Community Center. This community park serves as a large-scale recreational hub, offering amenities such as sports fields, playgrounds, picnic areas, and event spaces. Erie is planning for a second 24.6-acre community park.

Current Community Parks

- Erie Community Park
- Community Park Site (Planned)

Erie Community Park
Credit: Design Concepts

4.2.1.2. Neighborhood Parks (Erie Owned)

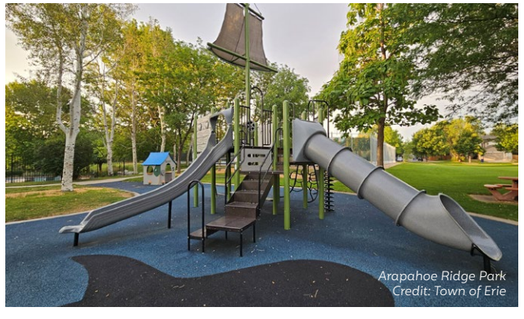
Industry standards define parks that are less than 5 acres as small neighborhood parks, and 5-10 acres as large neighborhood parks. Neighborhood parks provide local recreational opportunities with walking paths, playgrounds, and open green spaces for nearby residents.

Erie currently owns 12 neighborhood parks that provide a total of 113.4 acres of park land.

Park	Acreage
Arapahoe Ridge Park	5.5
Clayton Park	8.7
Coal Creek Park	6.4
Coal Miner Park	0.8
Columbine Mine Park	9.2
Country Fields Park	22.2
Crescent Park	8.0
Lehigh Park	6.1
Longs Peak Park	12.4
Reliance Park	19.3
Serene Park	6.6
Star Meadows Park	8.2

Table 11. Current Neighborhood Parks

Serene Park
Credit: Town of Erie



Arapahoe Ridge Park
Credit: Town of Erie

4.2.1.3. School District Sites

School sites offer shared recreational resources, including sports fields and playgrounds, fostering collaboration between the Town and local school districts.

The Town of Erie has an existing joint use agreement (JUA) with the St. Vrain Valley School District and access to seven school sites.

Current School Sites

- Black Rock Elementary
- Erie Elementary
- Erie Middle
- Erie Highschool
- Highlands Elementary
- Red Hawk Elementary
- Soaring Heights PK-8
- Vista Ridge Academy (not part of JUA)

4.2.1.4. Private Open Lands, Parks, & Pocket Parks

Private open land, parks, and pocket parks comprise of land area that is on private land and is maintained by other entities, other than the Town of Erie. Open lands may be open areas within a subdivision. Pocket parks are small green spaces that enhance residential areas, while private parks offer amenities for specific communities or developments .

There are currently **257.7 acres** of privately owned park land and open space areas in Erie. While the Playbook acknowledges these parks and green spaces as adding value to the communities in which they serve, their acreage is excluded from the LOS analysis of the Playbook.

Colliers Hill Community Clubhouse and Pool
Credit: Redfin

4.2.2. Open Space and Levels of Service (LOS)

Erie owns a total of **1,365 acres** of open space. This equates to a LOS of 34 acres per 1,000 residents. While there is not an NRPA Agency Performance review to compare to, this LOS is relatively similar or high when compared to other nearby agencies in Colorado, as shown in Table 12. Even with a future population of 64,000 the LOS would be 21 acres per 1,000 residents, which is still considered relativity high when compared to the median LOS in Table 12 below.

The main open space system is located primarily along the Coal Creek corridor. Additional large open space areas are located on the west side of Erie, adjacent to open spaces owned or maintained by other agencies such as Boulder County and the Town of Frederick.

Agency Owned Open Space or Open Lands Comparison Chart

Agency Name	Estimated Agency Owned Open Space or Open Lands (Acres)	Population Estimate	Level of Service	Data Resource Reference
City and County of Broomfield	3,733	84,000	44.4 / 1,000 Residents	*2024 Open Space, Parks, Recreation, and Trails (OSPRT) Plan*
City of Thornton *	1,722	132,000	13.0 / 1,000 Residents	*2017 Parks and Open Space Master Plan*
City of Lafayette	506	31,000	16.3 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Lafayette Parks, Recreation & Open Space Division*
City of Louisville	2,000	21,000	95.2 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Louisville Open Space Division*
City of Commerce City **	840	68,000	12.4 / 1,000 Residents	*Commerce City "Living In" Resource*
City of Longmont	2,500	101,000	24.8 / 1,000 Residents	*City of Longmont Open Space History*

** Includes Thorncreek Golf Course.*

*** Includes both Parks and Open Space Areas.*

Table 12. Agency Owned Open Space Comparison Chart

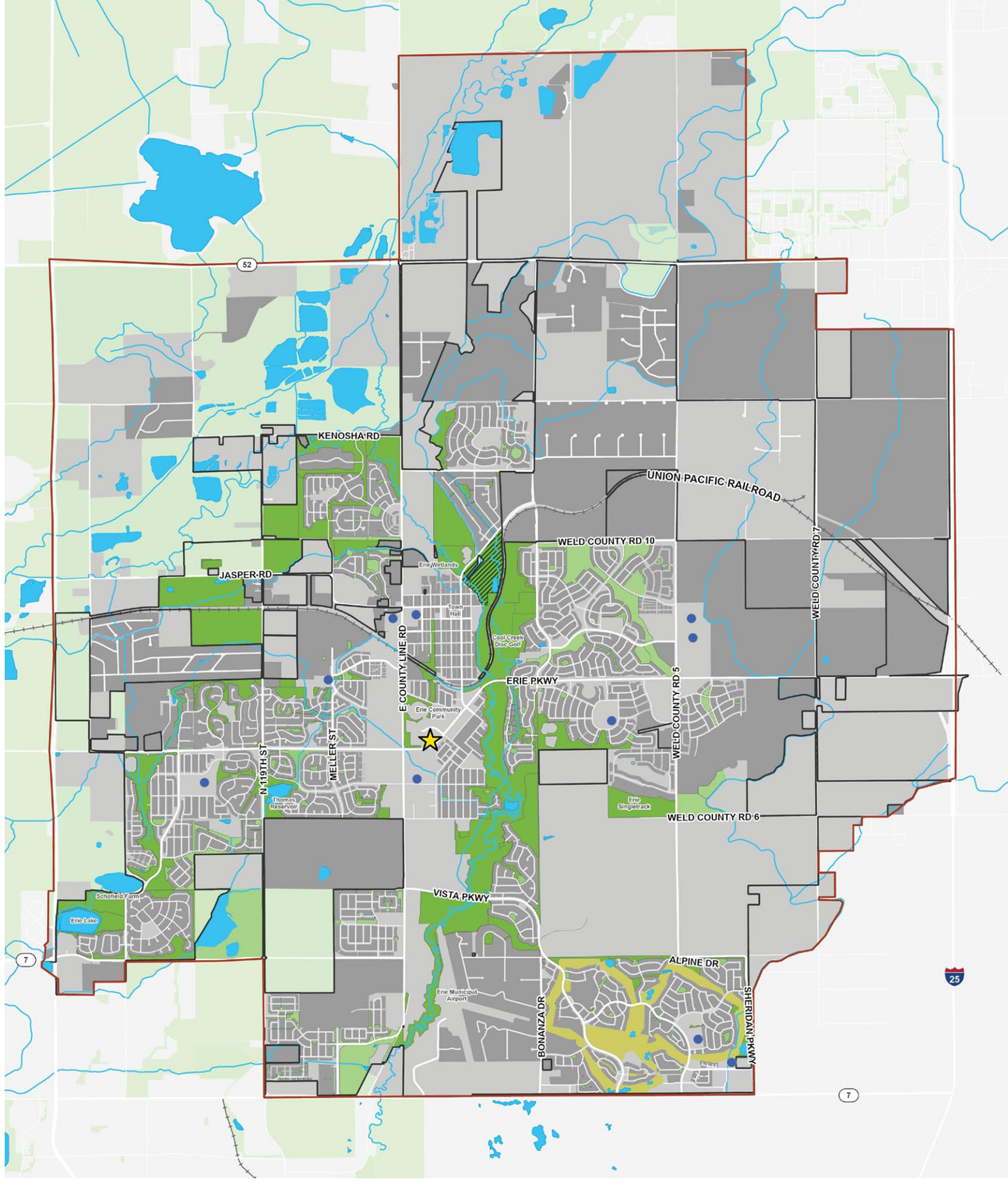


Figure 15. Existing Open Space Map

4.2.3. Trails

Erie currently has 82.2 miles of trails as shown in Table 13 below. 48.8 miles of these trails are maintained by the Town. There are also numerous future planned trails within Erie, all of which will provide excellent connectivity for current and future populations. There are however, some missing gaps in the trail system that need to be addressed.

Figure 16 shows the existing and future planned trails of Erie. Several gaps and barriers exist, including the following:

- Weld County Road 10
- Gaps located near School Sites
- Future trails located on lands that are not owned by the Town of Erie

Trail Type	Total Length (in Miles)	Percentage of Total Trails
Spine	26.9	33%
Local	48.1	59%
Primitive	3.7	4%
Singletrack	3.5	4%
TOTAL Trails	**82.2**	**100%**

Table 13. Erie Trail Types

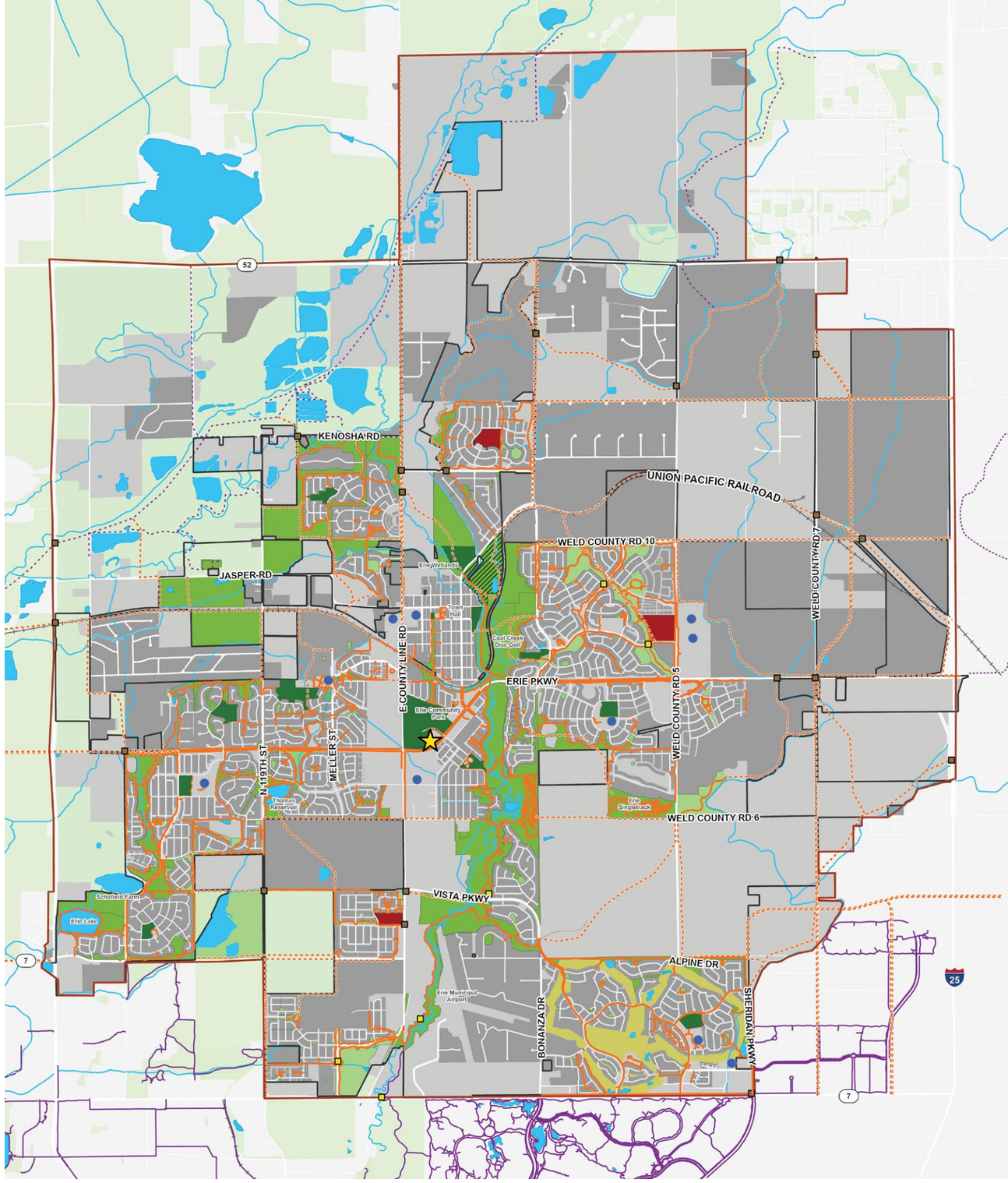


Figure 16. Existing and Future Trails Map

4.3. Future Land Use & Walkability

4.3.1. Future Land Use

A significant amount of Erie's population growth will occur in the eastern portions of Town, along the I-25 corridor. In addition, infill development will likely occur within the Town limits over the next 10 years. It will be important to strategically plan for future parks and recreation needs in these general locations to meet the needs of current and future residents of Erie.

4.3.2. Walkability

A goal of the Playbook is to ensure that every Erie resident may experience barrier free access to an Erie-owned park, amenitized open space, or recreational facility within a 1/2 mile or a 10-minute walk of their home. Based on the 1/2 mile walkability analysis, future parks and recreation resources may be needed on the east side of Erie, along the I-25 corridor north and south of the intersection of Weld County Road 10, as well as in northern Erie, near State Highway 52 and Weld County Road 5. They may also be needed near various residential areas within the Planning Boundary.

Figure 17 shows a 1/2 mile radius from the existing Erie-owned parks.

Legend

Existing Waterways & Railroads
- Streams & Ditches
- Railroads
- Water Bodies

Boundaries
- Town Boundary
- Planning Boundary

Land Use
- Residential Land Uses
- Non-Residential Land Uses

- Erie Community Center
- School Sites

Green Space
- Town Owned Parks
- Town Owned Open Space
- Private Green Space
- Other Open Space
- Golf Course
- Town Owned Undeveloped Park Sites
- Housing + Preserved Open Space

- Existing Trails
- Future Trails
- Other Existing Trails
- Other Planned Future Trails
- Underpass
- Proposed Underpass

- 1/2 mile distance to an Erie Owned Park

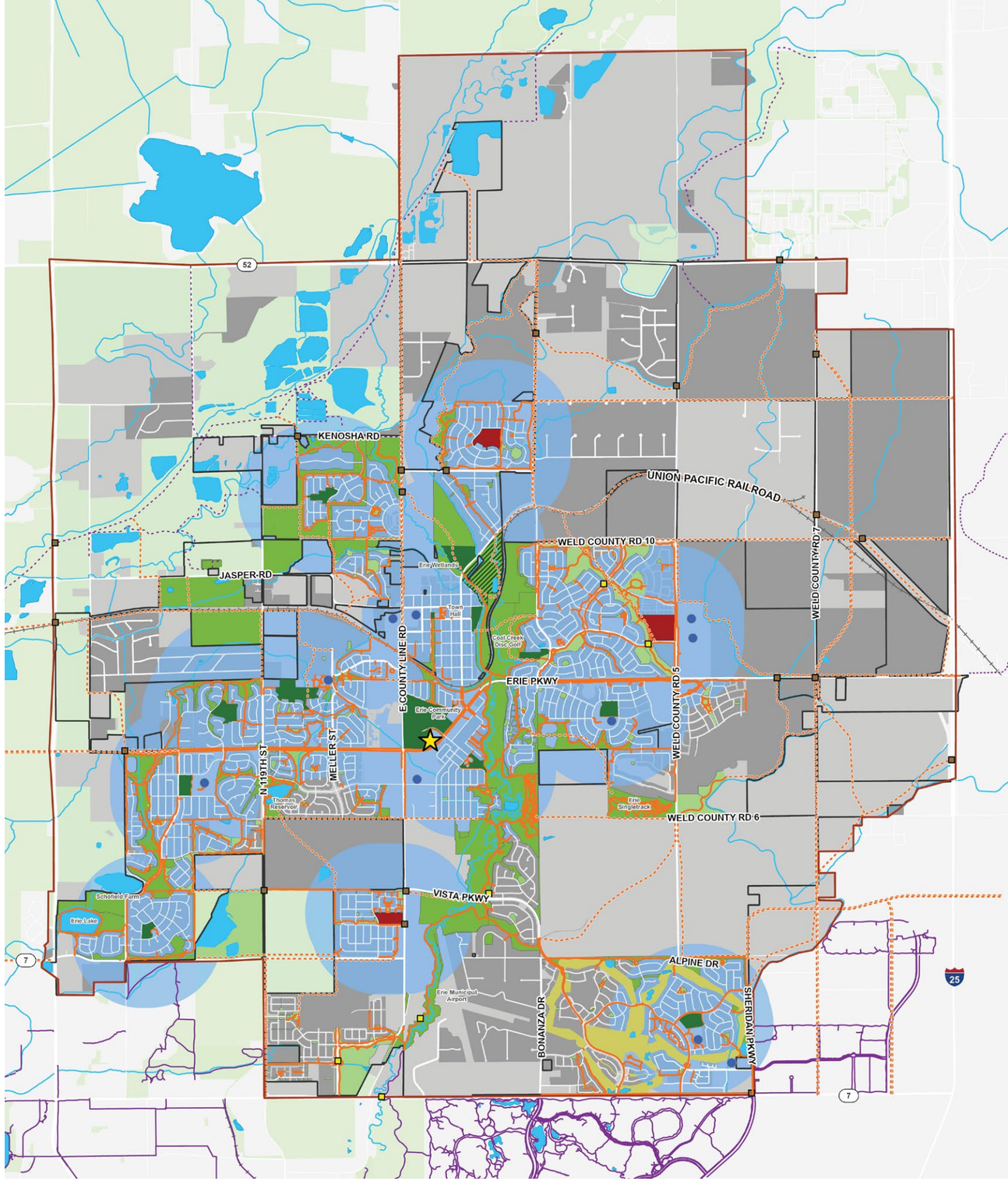


Figure 17. Walkability Map

4.4. Trail Access

Figure 18 shows a 1/2 mile radius from the existing trails of Erie. Most residents of Erie live within a walkable distance to an existing trail, but some current and future residents in the north eastern area of the Planning Boundary do not meet this requirement. The future planned trails of Erie may help to alleviate this need.

Legend

Existing Waterways & Railroads

- Streams & Ditches
- Railroads
- Water Bodies

Boundaries

- Town Boundary
- Planning Boundary

Land Use

- Residential Land Uses
- Non-Residential Land Uses

- Erie Community Center
- School Sites

Green Space

- Town Owned Parks
- Town Owned Open Space
- Private Green Space
- Other Open Space
- Golf Course
- Town Owned Undeveloped Park Sites
- Housing + Preserved Open Space

- Existing Trails
- Future Trails
- Other Existing Trails
- Other Planned Future Trails
- Underpass
- Proposed Underpass

- 1/2 mile distance from Existing Erie Trails

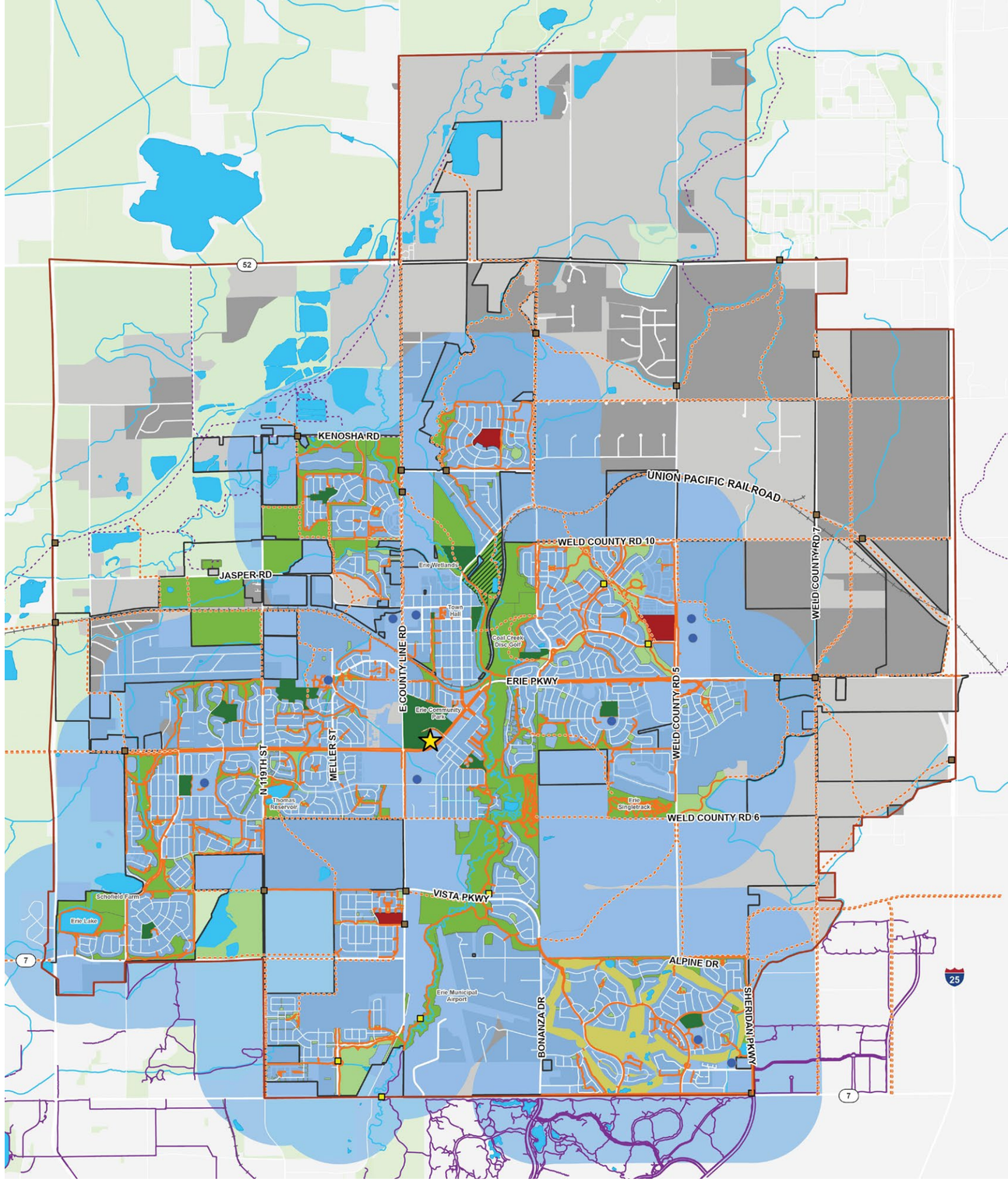


Figure 18. Trail Access Map

4.5. Potential Gap Areas

Based on the locations of the existing PROST areas, future planned parks, future planned trails, future land use, walkability, and trail access, several potential gap areas have been identified where future parks or recreation facilities may be located.

These areas include:

- Eastern Erie along I-25
- Northern Erie near Highway 52 and Weld County Road 5
- Western Erie near Wise Homestead Open Space
- Other strategic residential areas within the Planning Boundary

Figure 19 identifies several gap areas in the Town.

Legend

Existing Waterways & Railroads
- Streams & Ditches
- Railroads
- Water Bodies

Boundaries
- Town Boundary
- Planning Boundary

Land Use
- Residential Land Uses
- Non-Residential Land Uses

- Erie Community Center
- School Sites

Green Space
- Town Owned Parks
- Town Owned Open Space
- Private Green Space
- Other Open Space
- Golf Course
- Town Owned Undeveloped Parks
- Housing + Preserved Open Space

- Existing Trails
- Future Trails
- Other Existing Trails
- Other Planned Future Trails
- Underpass
- Proposed Underpass
- Access Gaps

- 1/2 mile radius to an Erie Owned Park
- 1/2 mile radius to Existing Trails

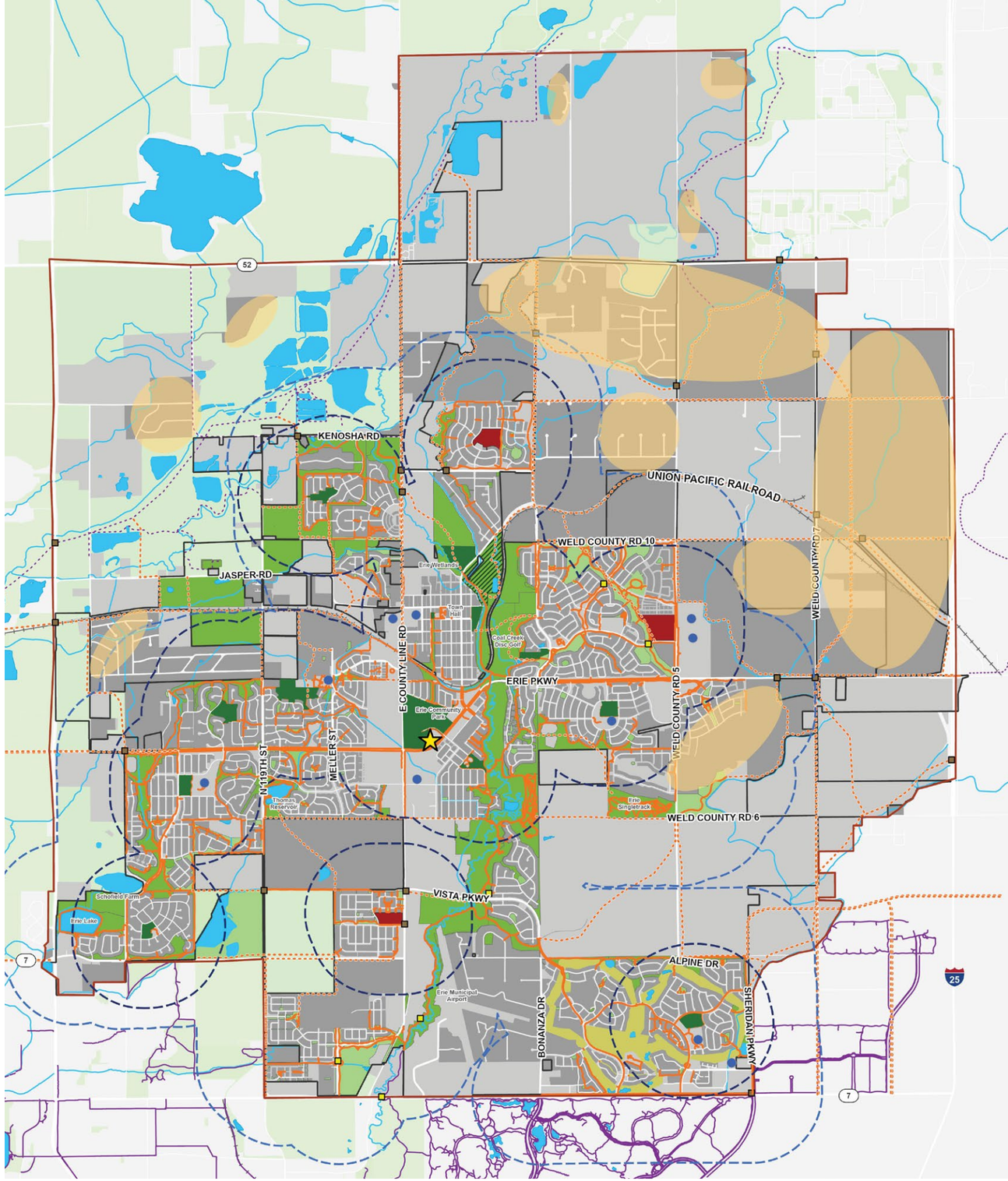


Figure 19. Potential Gap Areas Map

4.5.1. Recreation Facilities & Level of Service

Erie will provide a high LOS for the 2035 population for most facility types when compared to the benchmark comparisons of the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review. More detailed information about these metrics can be found in 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review.

2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review

For a future population of 64,000, the following facilities may be considered as additions to meet the benchmarks set forth in the NRPA Agency Performance Review. Other factors such as population demographics, future trends, and information gathered during the community engagement process should also be taken into consideration.

Potential Future Facilities to be Considered* based on NRPA benchmarks:

- Recreation Center
- Diamond fields
- Rectangular fields
- Basketball and volleyball courts, standalone
- Community gardens
- Indoor multi-use courts (basketball, volleyball, tennis, pickleball, etc.)
- Outdoor multi-use courts (basketball, volleyball, tennis, pickleball, etc.)
- Indoor walking loops/running tracks
- Indoor competitive swimming pools
- Outdoor swimming pools
- Outdoor fitness zones/exercise stations

*Please note that these considerations are for general reference and information only. It is not expected that Erie would institute all of these or limit future facility expansion to these only, but rather keep these in mind when considering NRPA benchmarks.

Erie Community Park Aerial
Credit: Bergreen Photography

Park and Recreation Facilities Level of Service (LOS) Analysis

Facilities Type	Current LOS Standards (Residents per Facility)							
	Current No. of Erie Owned	Current Erie LOS based on 2023 Population of 40,000 Residents	NRPA Target LOS for 40,000 Residents	Current No. of Facilities Meet or Exceed NRPA Standards	No. of Facilities Required to Meet NRPA Target LOS	Future NRPA Target LOS for 2035 Population of 64,000 Residents	No. of Facilities Required to Meet NRPA LOS Standard for 2035 Population	Potential Additional Future Facilities Needed to Meet NRPA LOS
Outdoor Park and Recreation Facilities								
Cricket Field	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Pump Track	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Singletrack Course	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Boat Ramps	**0**	*N / A*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Outdoor tables with seating	**153**	*1 / 261*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Pet waste stations	**53**	*1 / 755*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Playgrounds or play structures	**17**	*1 / 2,353*	*1 / 3,320*	Yes	12.0	*1 / 3,643*	18	**1**
Diamond Fields	**8**	*1 / 5,000*	*1 / 3,408*	No	11.7	*1 / 4,560*	14	**6**
Basketball courts, standalone	**5**	*1 / 8,000*	*1 / 8,000*	Yes	5.0	*1 / 8,447*	8	**3**
Rectangular fields	**14**	*1 / 2,857*	*1 / 4,002*	Yes	10.0	*1 / 4,659*	14	**0**
Tennis courts	**3**	*1 / 13,333*	*1 / 6,284*	No	6.4	*1 / 5,818*	11	**8**
Dog parks	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 26,534*	No	1.5	*1 / 55,250*	1	**None**
Community gardens	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 27,230*	No	1.5	*1 / 56,367*	1	**1**
Outdoor Swimming pools	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 26,900*	No	1.5	*1 / 48,064*	1	**1**
Skateboard parks	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 35,000*	No	1.1	*1 / 61,384*	1	**None**
Multiuse courts – basketball, volleyball, etc.	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 17,209*	No	2.3	*1 / 25,512*	3	**3**
Pickleball (Standalone)	**4**	*1 / 10,000*	*1 / 7,333*	No	5.5	*1 / 8,592*	7	**3**
Multiuse courts – tennis, pickleball	**2**	*1 / 20,000*	*1 / 12,984*	No	3.1	*1 / 13,339*	5	**3**
18-hole golf courses	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 34,058*	No	1.2	*1 / 62,756*	1	**1**
Driving range stations	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 23,211*	No	1.7	*1 / 7,774*	8	**8**
Synthetic rectangular fields	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 23,958*	No	1.7	*1 / 33,799*	2	**2**
Volleyball courts, standalone	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 16,487*	No	2.4	*1 / 29,214*	2	**1**

Table 14. Park and Recreation Facilities LOS Analysis

Splash pads, spray grounds or spray showers	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 29,804*	No	1.3	*1 / 51,000*	1	**None**
Fitness zones/Exercise stations	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 21,468*	No	1.9	*1 / 32,500*	2	**1**
Disc golf courses	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 32,519*	No	1.2	*1 / 56,150*	1	**None**
Ice rinks*	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 21,428*	No	1.9	*1 / 28,500*	2	**1**
Walking loops/Running tracks	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 21,217*	No	1.9	*1 / 19,700*	3	**2**
Nine-hole golf courses	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 36,127*	No	1	*1 / 64,937*	1	**1**
Overlay fields (inspection fields)	**11**	*1 / 3,636*	*1 / 10,054*	Yes	4	*1 / 25,500*	3	**None**
Racquetball/Handball/ Squash courts	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 23,974*	No	2	*1 / 40,796*	2	**2**
Waterparks	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 34,275*	No	1	*1 / 64,304*	1	**1**
Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities								
Bouldering/Climbing wall	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*N / A*	N/A	N/A	*N / A*	N/A	**None**
Competitive swimming pools	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 36,979*	No	1.1	*1 / 64,000*	1	**1**
Pools for leisure (noncompetitive)	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 32,258*	No	1.2	*1 / 63,418*	1	**None**
Pickleball	**3**	*1 / 13,333*	*1 / 12,237*	No	3.3	*1 / 14,818*	4	**1**
Multiuse courts – basketball, volleyball, etc.	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 14,667*	No	2.7	*1 / 24,000*	3	**2**
Basketball courts, standalone	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 17,569*	No	2.3	*1 / 25,598*	3	**2**
Multiuse courts – tennis, pickleball	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 9,000*	No	4.4	*1 / 15,015*	4	**4**
Therapeutic pools	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 30,037*	No	1.3	*1 / 63,610*	1	**None**
Walking loops/Running tracks	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 33,431*	No	1.2	*1 / 63,671*	1	**None**
Racquetball/Handball/ Squash courts	**2**	*1 / 20,000*	*1 / 15,655*	No	2.6	*1 / 40,708*	2	**None**
Tennis courts	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 8,761*	No	4.6	*1 / 10,428*	6	**6**
Types of Indoor Park and Recreation Facilities and Amenities								
Recreation centers (including gyms)	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 27,517*	No	1.5	*1 / 31,805*	2	**1**
Community centers	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 29,445*	No	1.4	*1 / 50,284*	1	**None**
Senior centers	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 34,058*	No	1.2	*1 / 64,937*	1	**None**
Performance amphitheaters	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 34,275*	No	1.2	*1 / 60,594*	1	**1**
Nature centers	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 34,960*	No	1.1	*1 / 64,672*	1	**1**
Aquatics centers	**1**	*1 / 40,000*	*1 / 32,000*	No	1.3	*1 / 60,770*	1	**None**
Permanent and semi- permanent restrooms	**14**	*1 / 2,857*	*1 / 4,976*	Yes	8.0	*1 / 5,521*	12	**None**
Stadiums	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 35,370*	No	1.1	*1 / 62,575*	1	**1**
Teen centers	**0**	*N / A*	*1 / 32,798*	No	1.2	*1 / 59,694*	1	**None**

*Erie Ice Rink is seasonal

4.6. Current Management Plans

The content of this section is intended to be an analysis of existing plans. Some of these plans were established several years ago. As a result, some of the recommendations may already be in progress or completed at the time of this assessment.

4.6.1. Parks and Recreation Maintenance & Operations Management Plan (2021)

The purpose of this Plan is to guide the ongoing maintenance, management, and enhancement of parks, recreational facilities, and landscaped areas throughout the community. It is meant to be used by the Parks and Recreation Department staff, Town leadership, seasonal employees, and contractors.

The Plan contains maintenance standards, staffing structure, service levels, equipment and fleet, seasonal responsibilities, and long-term planning.

4.6.1.1. Opportunities for Enhancement

The following areas present key opportunities to enhance efficiency, sustainability, and policy within the current Parks and Recreation Maintenance and Operations Management Plan, particularly when benchmarked against practices from other Colorado municipalities:

Irrigation Systems

Current State: Irrigation systems are partially centrally controlled, with many relying on timers and manual adjustments.

Opportunity: Upgrade to smart irrigation controllers that adjust watering schedules based on real-time weather and soil moisture data.

Impact: Significant water savings, reduced maintenance time, and improved landscape health—practiced successfully in Boulder and Fort Collins.

Sustainable Landscaping

Current State: Turf and traditional non-native plantings dominate parks and landscaped areas.

Opportunity: Transition to xeriscaping and native plantings to reduce water demand and promote regional biodiversity.

Impact: Reduced mowing and watering needs, enhanced aesthetics, and improved ecological resilience—mirroring efforts in Aurora and Denver.

Waste Reduction

Current State: Limited recycling; no composting or waste-diversion infrastructure in parks.

Opportunity: Install waste-sorting bins and pilot composting at larger parks or events.

Impact: Less landfill waste and greater public environmental awareness, consistent with Boulder and Golden's zero-waste goals.

Technology and Maintenance Management

Current State: Maintenance scheduling and tracking are handled manually with basic tools.

Opportunity: Adopt a Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) for proactive and data-driven maintenance.

Impact: Increased efficiency, reduced downtime, and transparent tracking of maintenance tasks—used in Loveland and Greeley.

Modernization of Fleet and Equipment

Current State: Most maintenance tools and vehicles are gas-powered.

Opportunity: Phase in electric mowers, blowers, and utility carts where feasible.

Impact: Reduced noise and emissions, easier compliance with sustainability goals—successfully piloted in Fort Collins.

Staffing and Training

Current State: Seasonal staff receive general orientation; no formal training program detailed.

Opportunity: Implement a standardized onboarding and training program that includes safety, maintenance standards, and sustainability practices.

Impact: More consistent service quality and increased employee retention—similar to structured seasonal programs in Denver.

Performance Metrics

Current State: General service levels are described, but there are no published metrics or tracking systems.

Opportunity: Define and monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for park cleanliness, response time, and public satisfaction.

Impact: Better accountability, resource justification, and alignment with community goals—as seen in Fort Collins.

4.6.2. Town of Erie Open Space Management Plan (2019)

The purpose of this Plan is to ensure that open spaces are preserved and managed for ecological value, public use, and visual quality while limiting disturbance. It is meant to be used by Homeowners' Associations (HOAs), environmental consultants, planning staff, and open space stewards.

The Plan contains land categories, restoration protocols, maintenance plans, prohibited activities, and long-term oversight responsibilities.

4.6.2.1. Opportunities for Enhancement

Analysis of the Open Space Management Plan also reveals several opportunities for enhancement, especially in alignment with open space strategies employed by other Colorado communities:

Habitat Restoration

Current State: Focus on invasive species removal; native restoration is not emphasized.

Opportunity: Enhance native habitat restoration efforts with seed mixes and ongoing planting of local species.

Impact: Improved biodiversity, erosion control, and ecological health—common in Boulder's open space restoration work.

Trail and Erosion Management

Current State: Trail maintenance is general; erosion management lacks detail.

Opportunity: Implement sustainable trail design and erosion control best practices.

Impact: Reduced maintenance needs, safer trails, and preserved habitat—practiced by Jefferson County Open Space.

Public Access Planning

Current State: Passive use is allowed, but there is no clear access strategy or zoning.

Opportunity: Define seasonal closures, access zones, and designated trails.

Impact: Better protection of sensitive habitats and user experience—used effectively in Boulder.

Waterway Protection

Current State: Creeks and wetlands are not clearly managed with buffer zones.

Opportunity: Establish riparian buffers with native vegetation and no-mow policies.

Impact: Improves water quality, wildlife habitat, and erosion control—demonstrated in Fort Collins.

Monitoring and Reporting

Current State: Annual inspections required, but the method is not specified.

Opportunity: Use digital tools and photo documentation for consistent year-to-year reporting.

Impact: Easier tracking, better oversight, and clearer communication—implemented in Longmont.

Community Stewardship

Current State: Oversight falls solely on HOAs; limited public involvement.

Opportunity: Launch "Adopt-an-Open-Space" or trail stewardship programs with community groups.

Impact: More hands-on support and community pride—seen in Lafayette and Golden.

Erie Highlands Open Space
Credit: Town of Erie

4.6.3. Referenced Plans and Documents by Municipality

Aurora

- Aurora Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan (2019)
- Aurora Xeriscape Rebate and Guidelines
- Water Management Plan (Aurora Water)

Boulder

- Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2022)
- Open Space and Mountain Parks (OSMP) Master Plan (2019)
- Urban Forest Strategic Plan
- Climate Mobilization Action Plan (2021)

Colorado Springs

- Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Master Plan (2020)
- Interpretive Signage and Education Program Guide
- TOPS (Trails, Open Space and Parks) Program Strategic Plan

Denver

- Game Plan for a Healthy City – Denver Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan (2019)
- Denver Sustainable Landscape Guidelines
- Denver Waste Diversion and Recycling Strategy (2020)
- Climate Action Plan (2020)

Durango

- Parks, Open Space, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan (2021)
- Durango Climate & Sustainability Action Plan (2021)
- Wildfire Adaptation Best Practices for the WUI

Fort Collins

- Parks and Recreation Policy Plan (2021)
- Natural Areas Master Plan (2023)
- Water Efficiency Plan (2015, Update in progress)
- Climate Action Plan (CAP) Framework (2015)

Golden

- Parks, Recreation & Open Space Master Plan (2016)
- Golden Sustainability Strategic Plan
- Golden Clear Creek Management Plan

Greeley

- Parks, Trails and Open Lands Master Plan (2022)
- Fleet Electrification and Efficiency Strategy
- CMMS implementation documented via city budget reports

Jefferson County

- Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan (2019)
- Sustainable Trail Design Guidelines
- Habitat Conservation Framework

Lafayette

- Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails Master Plan (2021)
- Adopt-a-Trail and Stewardship Volunteer Programs
- Wildlife and Prairie Management Guidelines

Longmont

- Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan (2020)
- Natural Resources Management Plan (2019) (Covers photo-monitoring, adaptive management, and GIS use)

Loveland

- Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2020)
- Open Lands & Trails Strategic Plan (2022) (Includes community partnerships and stewardship models.)

Schofield Farm Property
Credit: Town of Erie

5: **Existing Recreation Programs and Resources**

This chapter offers a detailed overview of Erie's current recreation programs and facilities. It highlights key recreational trends, including the most popular activities and facilities amongst residents. These trends reveal areas of increasing community interest so this demand can be met in the future.

Erie Community Center
Credit: Town of Erie

5.1. Key Takeaways

Erie's Parks & Recreation Department offers a range of programs and services that currently serve all age groups and interests in the community. The Town is recognized for high-quality programs in aquatics, fitness, youth and adult sports, camps, and special events. Participation has grown significantly since 2021, demonstrating a strong and increasing demand for recreational services and facilities.

Most Popular Programs and High-Demand Areas

- Aquatics, Fitness, Camp Erie, Youth Sports, and Adult Trips consistently experience extensive waitlists, signaling strong community interest and the need for expansion.
- Teen Programs, Therapeutic Recreation, and Cultural Arts are growing in popularity and have been prioritized for future development.
- Special Events remain a signature offering, with 18 annual events and expanded permitting of private/community-led events.

Areas for Expansion

- The Erie Community Center (ECC) is the primary indoor recreation hub but operates near capacity. Lack of indoor and outdoor aquatic space, gyms, fitness areas, and multipurpose program rooms is a key constraint limiting program growth.
- There is a strong need for additional indoor space, including group fitness areas, drop-in fitness areas, gyms, aquatic spaces, cultural arts facilities, and administrative spaces.
- Athletic field demand exceeds current supply, particularly during peak seasons.
- There is no performing arts center, outdoor aquatic center, or indoor ice rink, which limits offerings in cultural arts and other recreation activities.
- Limited school district facility access due to shared use restricts scheduling flexibility. Additional facility partnerships should be explored.
- Lack of available time at existing Town recreation facilities to support drop-in (self-directed) use or rentals.
- There is an opportunity to establish more formal partnerships with nonprofits, private providers, and neighboring municipalities.
- There is a need for more office space and storage for the Department.

Program & Facility Planning for Future Growth

To meet future recreational needs tied to population increase, the following considerations are essential:

- Planning for a second community center, outdoor aquatic center, additional athletic fields, and a performing arts facility is a key future need.
    - Expand indoor recreation facilities, potentially through a second community center, to accommodate growing interest in aquatics, fitness, youth programs, therapeutic, and cultural programs.
    - Increase the number of athletic courts and fields (both diamond and rectangular) to support youth and adult sports leagues, with strategic partnerships for shared development and use.
    - Build specialized facilities, such as a performing arts center and outdoor aquatic center, to diversify programming and meet rising demand in cultural and family recreation.
- Provide increased opportunities for rentals of recreation spaces.
- Continue to offer programs that are delivered by Town staff and supported by contracted providers under structured rental or revenue-sharing agreements.
- Boost program staffing levels as programs and facilities grow.
- Enhance partnerships with schools, private providers, and non-profits to expand capacity and avoid duplication of services.
- Sustain and increase operations budgets to match the expected breadth and volume of programming.
- The Recreation Programming Plan (2021-2023) is in place and regularly guides program design and evaluation. This Plan should be updated as needed to meet future demands and needs.
- Determine the role of other providers and partnering with other organizations.
- Priorities for programming based on community input include:
    - Youth and Adult Sports
    - Special events
    - Camps
    - Fitness/Wellness/ Therapeutic
    - Cultural Arts
    - Aquatics
    - Teens/Adult 60+

5.2. Recreation Facilities Analysis

5.2.1. Current Erie Recreation Facilities

The Town manages a variety of recreation facilities and parks that help to support the assortment of programs and services that are available to the residents of Erie. The primary staff managed facilities include:

Erie Community Park (ECP)

At 49.3 acres, the ECP includes the Erie Community Center, the Ballpark at Erie, concessions, shelters, and multi-use fields for sports, programs, and events. The Ballpark includes four ballfields used for youth and adult sports programming. In 2021, the Department constructed the Final Phase of Erie Community Park which includes a pump track, two basketball courts, a sledding hill, walking paths, and more.

Erie Community Center (ECC)

At nearly 64,000 ft., the ECC includes a swimming pool, fitness floor and studio, gymnasium, climbing wall, two racquetball courts, indoor playground, childcare room, older adult lounge, and three large community rooms with a stage.

Coal Creek Park

The park includes a multi-use field that is utilized for concerts, a vendor plaza, concessions, seasonal ice rink, and splashpad.

The Town has a few areas designated as Special Use Open Space, including:

- Erie Singletrack Trails at Sunset Open Space
- Coal Creek Disc Golf Course
- The Boneyard Dog Park at Reliance Park

The Schofield Farm Open Space will be developed for events and recreation activities in the future.

The Town does not have an outdoor public aquatic center, nor a performing arts center.

Indoor recreation is almost solely dependent on the Erie Community Center for the delivery of services. However, the center is often at capacity making future growth in programming very difficult.

For information regarding national trends for Parks and Recreation facility offerings, refer to Pg. 141 - Table 25.

The Town has an existing joint use agreement (JUA) with the St. Vrain School District for use of facilities. There are limited opportunities for use with school demands. School facilities include:

- Black Rock Elementary
- Erie Elementary
- Erie Middle
- Erie High School
- Highlands Elementary
- Red Hawk Elementary
- Soaring Heights PK-8
- Vista Ridge Academy (not part of JUA)

The primary amenities being utilized at schools include:

- Gymnasiums
- Cafeterias/Commons
- Classrooms
- Fields

The Town currently has 9 diamond fields and 14 rectangular fields to serve the community.

There is a need for additional facilities to support programs. These include:

- Group exercise rooms
- Fitness areas including weight areas, cardio equipment and functional training
- Pools for lessons, aqua exercise, lap swimming, and recreational swimming.
- Performing arts/cultural arts space
- Community space and classrooms
- Gyms
- Athletic fields
- Outdoor aquatic center
- Pickleball courts (indoor and outdoor)
- Administrative spaces (i.e., offices, storage facilities)

Additional Findings

- The Town's recreation facilities are well maintained and there have been on-going improvements to most of them.
- Field use policies and fees are covered in Erie's 2023 Athletic Field Rental Manual. Facility and athletic field rentals are an important service, but there is a higher demand for these rentals than can be met.
- The Town does not build or maintain pocket parks but will build and maintain neighborhood parks and community parks.

5.2.1.1. Recreation Facilities and Community Center Visits over Time

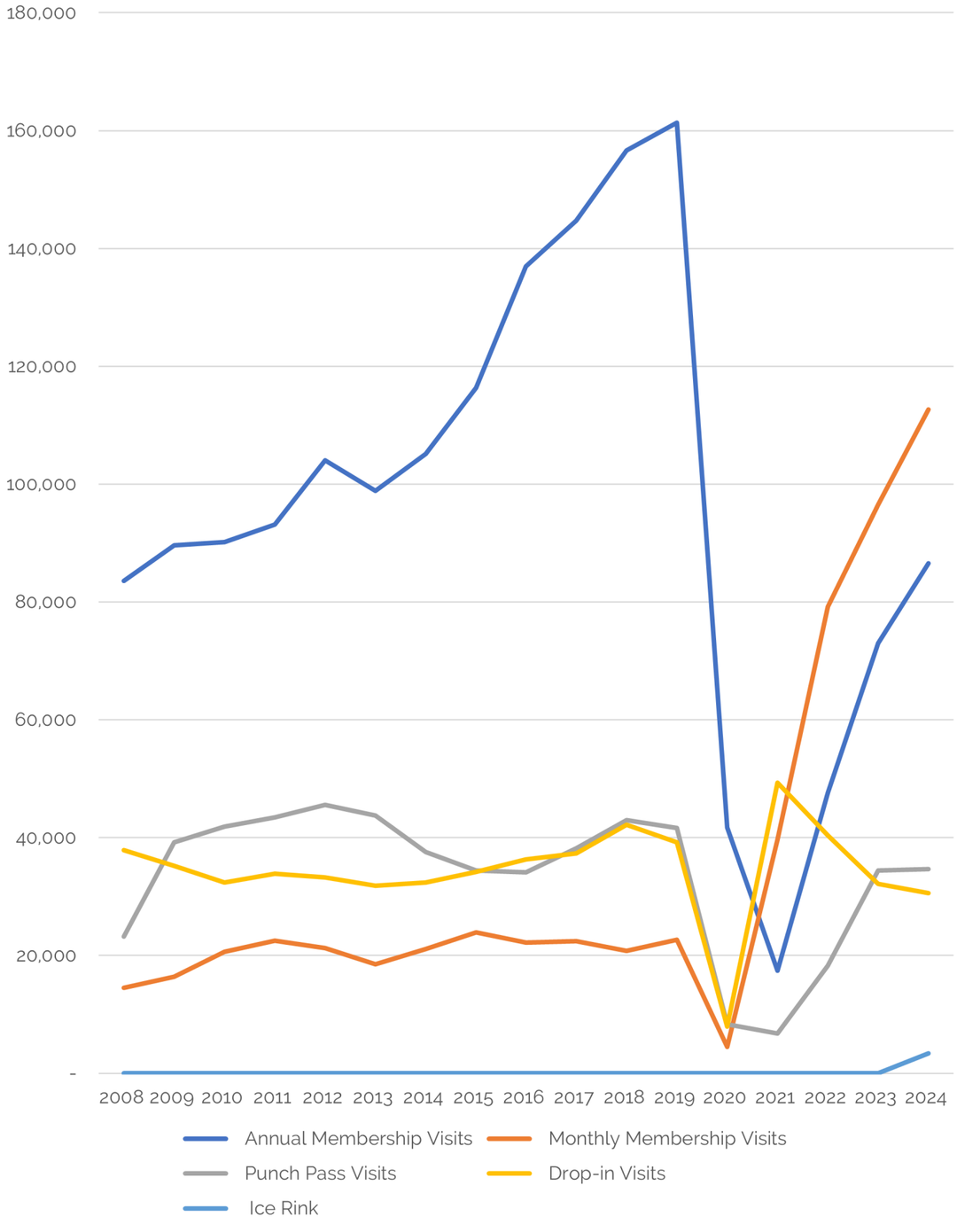


Figure 20. Erie Recreation Facilities and Community Center Visits (2008 - 2024)

5.2.2. Other Facilities & Service Providers

Recreation programs and services are provided by other organizations. Some of the key service providers include:

Public	
Neighboring Communities (Boulder, Broomfield, Longmont, Lafayette, etc.)	
Facilities	Recreation centers
	Aquatic centers
	Athletic fields
	Specialty facilities (ice rinks, etc.)
Programs & Services	Fitness
	Sports
	Older adults
	Youth/teens
	Aquatics
	Therapeutics
	Cultural arts
	Outdoor recreation/education
	Special events
	Specialty programs
Private	
Facilities	Health clubs and wellness facilities
	Dance studios
	Martial arts studios
	Swim schools
	Gymnastics centers
	HOA's (pools, clubhouses)
Programs & Services	Fitness/wellness
	Sports
	Dance
	Martial arts
	Aquatics
	Gymnastics
Non-Profits	
YMCA	Fitness
	Sports
	Older adults
	Youth/teens
	Aquatics
	Therapeutics
	Cultural arts
	Outdoor recreation/education
	Specialty programs

Table 15. External Facilities and Services

For specific information on other facilities and service providers, refer to the Recreation Programming Plan (2021).

5.3. Recreation Programs and Services Analysis

The Recreation Division offers a wide range of recreation programs and services* to the community. Most programming is the responsibility of division staff that is augmented by contract providers or other organizations in the community.

- The Department has a comprehensive **Recreation Programming Plan** in place that guides the programming process and direction. This document contains:
    - Resources required for the plan
    - Recreation programming goals and objectives
    - Plan goals, strategies and actions
    - Plan review

In addition to the programming plan, staff also utilize a program planning worksheet for any newly proposed recreation programs, rentals, events, and services. There is also a program evaluation form used to evaluate programs annually.

5.3.1. Recreation Program Inventory

Current recreation programs are available in the following areas:

Program Area	Key Programs
Adult	general interest, hikes/day trips, extended travel, events
Adult 60+	lunch, partnership programs
Aquatics	swim lessons, private swim lessons, water aerobics, specialty aquatic programs
Cultural Arts	live music performances, art lectures, cultural experiences
Fitness & Wellness	drop-in programs, specialty programs, personal training
Sports	youth leagues, adult leagues, camps, lessons
Self-Directed	basketball, pickleball, swim, kidstation
Special Events	Community events, registration-based events, external event permitting
Therapeutic Recreation	adaptive programs, outings, Special Olympics, inclusion services
Youth & Teen	climbing, preschool/enrichment, Camp Erie, youth and teen general interest, volunteer opportunities, Erie Youth for Change Teen Council
Other	parties, room rentals

Table 16. Erie Recreation Program Inventory

5.3.2. Programming of Degree of Emphasis

The following are general classifications of programs by degree of current emphasis.

High Program Area	Medium Program Area	Limited Program Area
Youth Sports	Cultural Arts	Outdoor Recreation
Fitness & Wellness	Teens	Extended Travel
Camp	Therapeutic	
Aquatics	Adult Sports	
Special Events	General Interest	
Adult 60+		
Self-Directed		

Table 17. Erie Programming Degree of Emphasis

*For information regarding national trends for Parks and Recreation programs and services offerings, refer to Pg. 145 - Table 27

Erie Parks and Recreation is known for the following recreation programs:

- Adult Trips
- Aquatics
- Camps
- Fitness
- Special Events
- Youth and Adult Sports

There are extensive waiting lists for many program areas including:

- Adult Trips
- Aquatics
- Camp Erie
- Fitness
- Youth Basketball

Demands for programming include:

- Youth and Adult Sports
- Aquatics
- Camps
- Cultural Arts
- Fitness
- Special Events
- Teen Programming
- Therapeutic

Unique programs include:

- Customized birthday parties
- Integration of therapeutics into all program areas
- Intergenerational programs and trips

Key recreation program partners include:

- Adults/Older Adults: Art, Resources, Travel groups
- Camps: Private schools
- Cultural Arts: Arts non-profits
- Special Events: Chamber, Private event companies
- Sports: Sports Camps, Tournaments, Trainings
- Youth: Cheer, Dance, Karate, Enrichment, STEM

Additional Findings

- The division sets up contracts with outside organizations to provide progams and services not offered internally. There are contracts with the partner and contract providers with either a rental of space or revenue sharing (70% contractor/30% Town or 80% contractor/20% Town).
- Aquatics and fitness programs are part of the Recreation Facility Operations Division based on their direct connection to specific spaces in the Community Center.
- Recreation focuses its youth sports on the recreational level and does not offer competitive programs. This is the responsibility of community sports organizations.
- Special events include not only 18 annual events organized by staff but also the permitting of numerous other events run by others.
- The Town needs to develop a policy regarding how the facility needs of competitive youth sports/travel teams will be met and what level of relationship it will have with these organizations.

The following information is collected from Erie participation tracking and compiled to show trends in recreational activities from 2008 - 2024. The impact of COVID-19 is readily apparent, but the strong rebound and overall growth is clearly evident.

5.3.2.1. Total Recreation Admissions, Program Participants, Event Participants, and Rentals

This graphic shows the total of facility admissions, program registrations, event participants and rentals since 2008.

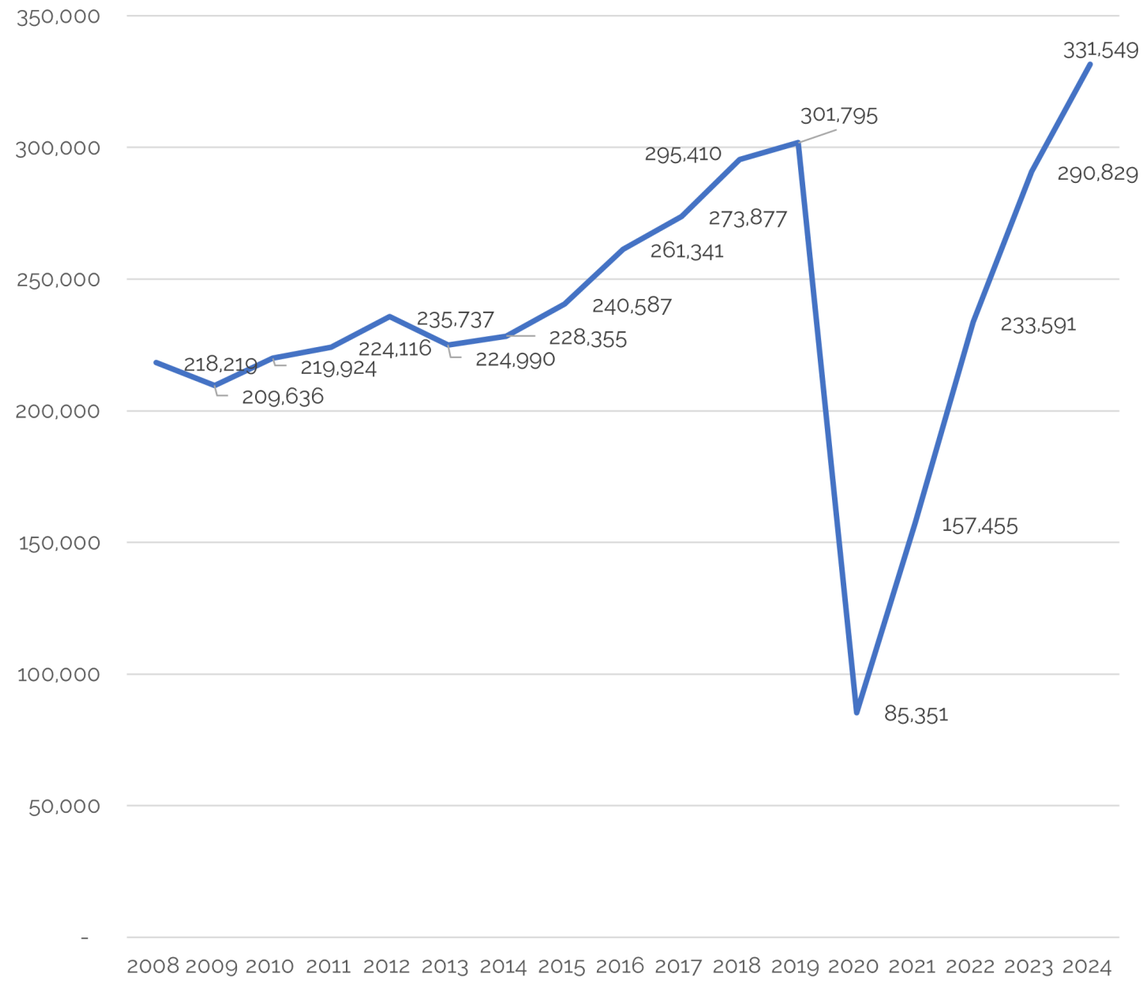


Figure 21. Total Recreation Admissions, Program Participants, Event Participants, and Rentals (2008 - 2024)

5.3.2.2. Recreation Admissions, Programs, and Events

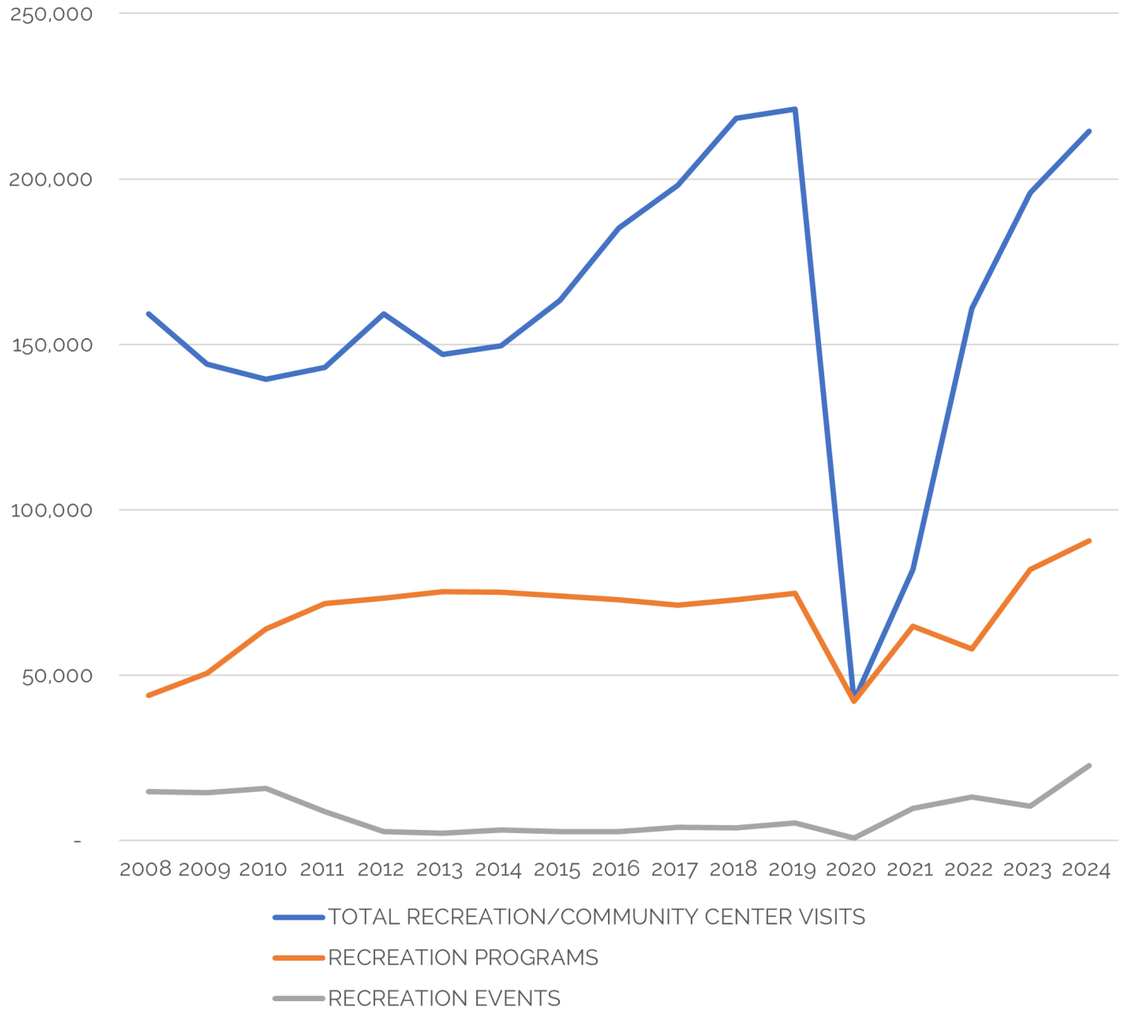


Figure 22. Recreation Admissions, Programs, and Events (2008 - 2024)

5.3.3. Recreation Division Participation

- Recreation participation numbers were impacted by COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021 but rebounded and continued to grow in 2023 and 2024.
- There is strong program tracking system in place.
- There are contracts in place for programs that are provided by others that utilize Town facilities.
- Rentals are an important recreation service that is provided by Parks & Recreation. This includes indoor facilities, athletic fields, and park shelters.

5.3.3.1. Reference Points for Participation Data

- To avoid duplicate counts, Aquatics and Fitness visits for drop-in classes are subtracted from overall Recreation Center visits.
- Starting in 2024, Ice Rink participation shifted from being tracked under Special Events to Recreation Center visits.
- Special Events include registration-based programs like Rad Rover, while Community Events reflect open, non-registration events such as Boo! on Briggs.
- Therapeutic Recreation programming was introduced in Fall 2024.

For information regarding national trends for Parks and Recreation participation, refer to Pg. 146-147 - Tables 28, 29, and 30.

Recreation Division Participation	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	TOTAL
Rec/Community Ctr. Visits							
Annual Membership Visits	161,346	41,739	17,426	47,617	72,995	86,532	1,646,757
Monthly Membership Visits	22,659	4,483	39,664	79,167	96,509	112,651	579,216
Punch Pass Visits	41,647	8,351	6,733	18,275	34,445	34,666	568,444
Drop-in Visits	39,183	7,949	49,303	40,417	32,170	30,606	586,345
Visit Adjustments	(43,686)	(20,215)	(31,214)	(24,697)	(40,401)	(53,379)	(661,489)
Ice Rink	-	-	-	-	-	3,374	3,374
Total Rec/Com Ctr. Visits	**221,149**	**42,307**	**81,912**	**160,779**	**195,718**	**214,450**	**2,722,647**
Recreation Activities							
Active Adults	12,964	12,463	16,909	13,878	16,191	16,845	175,193
Aquatics	8,538	4,276	8,849	12,188	11,007	11,680	150,734
Cultural Arts	-	-	-	-	-	2,755	2,755
Fitness & Wellness	44,230	20,563	24,794	17,699	35,951	46,156	655,454
Youth & Families	1,783	836	1,912	3,005	5,938	5,593	55,025
Special Events	906	488	5,179	2,972	4,347	1,278	28,064
Sports	6,279	3,458	7,082	8,221	8,483	8,907	91,574
Youth/Therapeutic Programs	-	-	-	-	-	72	72
Total Recreation Activities	**74,700**	**42,084**	**64,725**	**57,963**	**81,917**	**93,286**	**1,158,871**
Community Events							
Parks Events	382	-	5	250	700	750	5,424
Police Dept Events	500	750	365	547	50	1,000	3,412
Recreation Events	5,400	804	9,777	13,115	10,479	22,634	137,393
Total Community Events	**6,282**	**1,554**	**10,147**	**13,912**	**11,229**	**24,384**	**146,229**
Rentals (By Permit)							
Facility Rentals	321	80	620	1,062	1,188	1,719	9,597
Field Rentals	75	32	67	351	1,084	1,727	3,938
Park Shelter Rentals	150	44	354	321	443	488	3,071
Total Rentals	**546**	**156**	**1,041**	**1,734**	**2,715**	**3,934**	**16,606**
TOTAL RECREATION PARTICIPATION	**302,677**	**86,101**	**157,825**	**234,388**	**291,579**	**336,054**	**4,044,353**

Table 18. Erie Recreation Participation (2021-2024)

5.3.3.2. Recreation Program Participants over Time

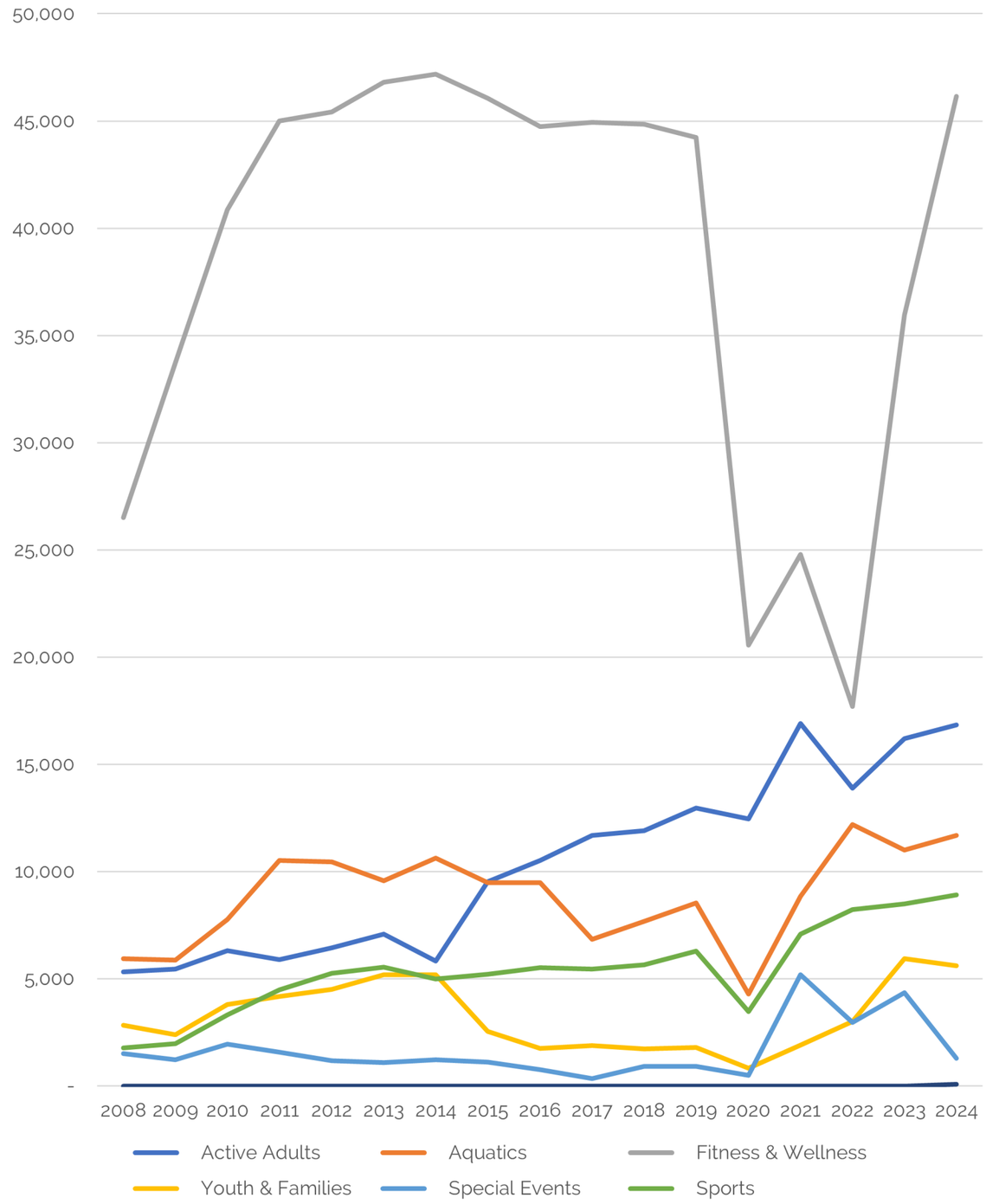


Figure 23. Recreation Program Participants (2008 - 2024)

5.3.3.3. Location of Erie Recreation Program Participants

The Amilia software program utilized by the Parks & Recreation Department provides great information about recreation facility utilization and recreation programming registrations. Amilia's analytics are still in beta access. The following map from the Amilia software analytics module indicates the location of the participants in Erie recreation programs for the last 12 months (May 2024 through April 2025). The vast majority of participants are within the immediate Erie area.

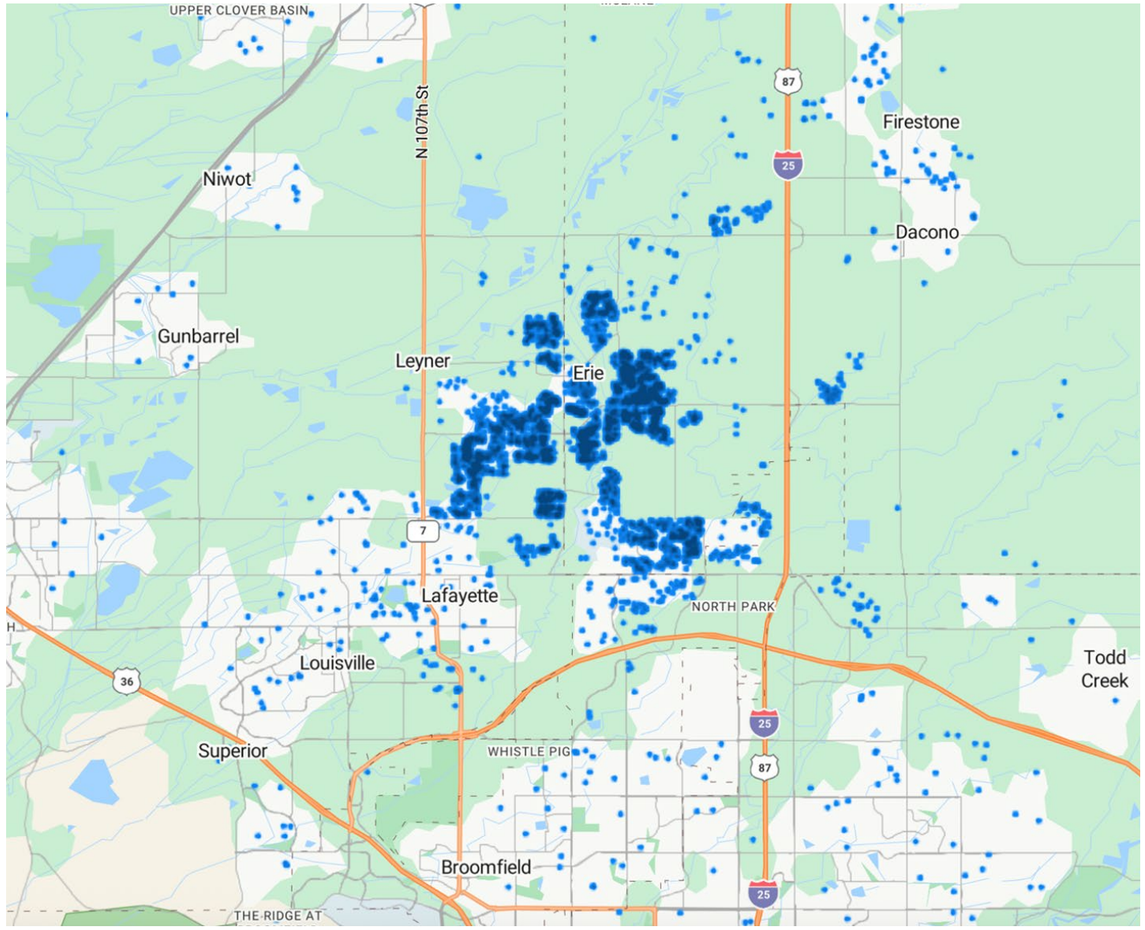


Figure 24. Location of Erie Recreation Program Participants (2024 - 2025)

6: **Operations & Funding**

Erie's parks, trails and open space are well managed and maintained by a knowledgeable staff. Maintenance staff are also responsible for various other Town properties, with some responsibilities allocated to the Public Works Department. As Erie grows, clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities will be needed to maintain operational efficiency.

Erie Community Park Pump Track
Credit: Town of Erie

6.1. Key Takeaways

Currently, the Erie Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) organizational structure for operations and maintenance is well suited for future growth and development. For instance, budgets and success metrics accurately reflect the performance of the department, allowing the department to consistently deliver a high level of service.

As Erie continues to grow, the PRD must evolve to meet increasing community demands while maintaining high levels of service, fiscal responsibility, and operational efficiency. The following summary highlights the current status and future considerations related to operations, funding, staffing, and service delivery.

Organizational Strength and Growth Readiness

- Erie PRD is structured across four core divisions: Business Services, Development & Neighborhood Services, Parks and Open Space, and Recreation.
- The PRD's organizational structure and performance tracking systems are well-positioned for future growth, supported by accurate budgeting and clear operational responsibilities.
- Staff growth is needed to meet rising service demands in planning, project administration, recreation programming, parks and facilities maintenance, facility operations, and volunteer coordination.
- Succession planning and continuity strategies for major disruptions (e.g., natural disasters or pandemics) are future needs.

Operations and Maintenance

- Erie's parks, trails, and open spaces are well managed by knowledgeable staff using a detailed Maintenance Management Plan with tiered service levels.
- Staff also maintain other Town assets such as medians, public lands, and vacant properties. These maintenance items often overlap with Public Works responsibilities, which indicates a need for more role clarity.
- The Parks and Open Space Division currently shares a maintenance facility with Public Works, which has outgrown its capacity. Plans may require a standalone Parks and Open Space Division facility.
- Continued investment in equipment, tracking systems, lifecycle cost analysis, and deferred maintenance planning is critical.

Current Funding Sources and Financial Planning

- The primary source of operational funding is the Town's General Fund (46%), supplemented by the Parks Improvement Impact Fund which is reserved for capital projects that enhance the system, and the Trails & Natural Areas Fund which can be used for capital, operations, or land acquisition.
- Other sources include user fees, sponsorships, grants, and the Conservation Trust Fund, and the Tree Impact Fund.
- The 2022 cost recovery rate was 28.57%, with higher-than-average operational expenditures and revenue per capita.
- The department has a cost recovery philosophy with a tiered fee and a scholarship program to ensure access and affordability.
- Budget growth across capital, personnel, and operations categories reflects Erie's investment in expanding services—but identifying new funding sources for capital replacement and operational expansion will be vital.

Future Considerations

- **Facility Expansion:** Meeting the community's growing indoor recreation needs will require significant capital investment and potentially new public-private partnerships.
- **Staffing and Planning**: Continued staff growth, long-term planning capacity, and interdepartmental coordination will help sustain high service levels.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Long-term cost recovery strategies, updated funding policies, and diversified revenue streams will be critical to sustain operations.
- **Operational Excellence:** Clearer delineation of responsibilities, robust data tracking, updated policies, and enhanced volunteer management will support efficient operations.
- **Recreation Programming Growth:** Rising demand for recreational programming will necessitate additional facilities and staff.

6.2. Operations Analysis

6.2.1. Organizational Structure

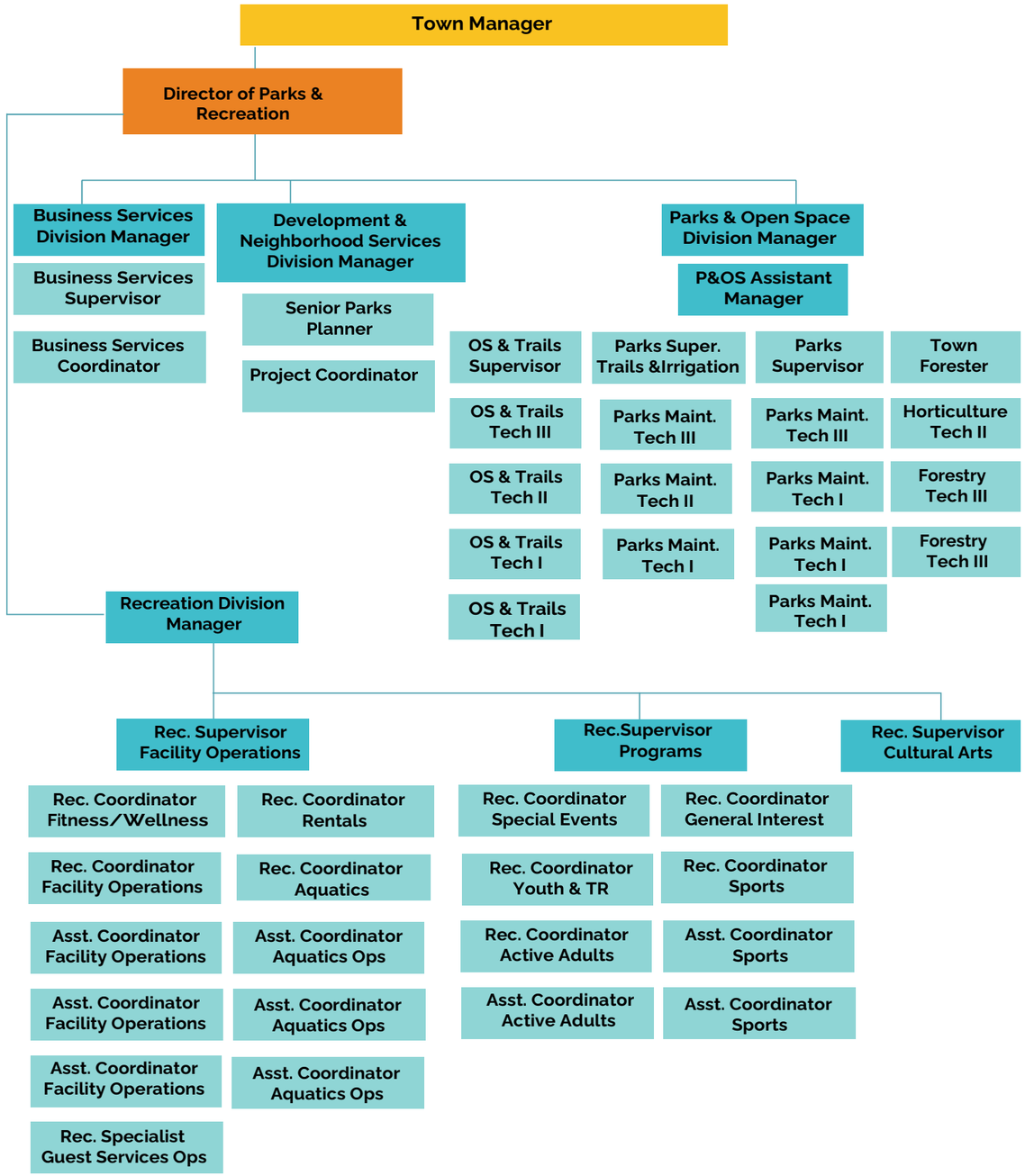
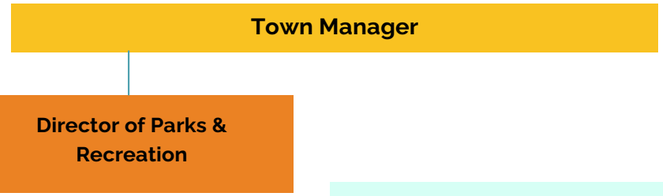


Figure 25. Erie Parks & Recreation Organizational Chart: Full Time (2025)

There is an organizational structure in place that is well suited for current department operations, which is illustrated in Figures 25 and 26. The Erie PRD has long range planning efforts in place for staff reorganization that is tied to the tiering and priorities of services to be delivered in the future. These planning efforts also identify the need for future new positions based on new parks, facilities, and services that are likely to be added as part of the overall strategic plan.



Parks Part-Time

Parks Maint. Tech – Parks Maintenance
Parks Maint. Tech – Athletics/Wknd Ops
Parks Maint. Tech – Open Space & Trails
Parks Maint. Tech – Foresty & Hort.
Parks Maint. Tech Lead – Parks Maint.
Parks Maint. Tech Lead – Athletics/Wknd Ops
Parks Maint. Tech Lead – Open Space & Trials
Parks Maint. Tech Lead – Forestry & Hort.
Parks Maint. Tech Lead – Mow Crew

Recreation Part-Time

Building Attendant – Facilities
Camp Counselor I
Camp Counselor II
Camp Director
Facility Operations Attendant
Lifeguard
Manager of Duty - Aquatics
Manager on Duty – Active Adults
Manager on Duty - Guest Service
Manager on Duty - Special Events
Manager on Duty - Sports
Manager on Duty - Rentals
Nutritionist I/II/III
Party Attendant - Rentals
Program Instructor I - Aquatics
Program Instructor I - General Interest
Program Instructor I – Group Fitness
Program Instructor I – Personal Trainer
Program Instructor I – Youth & TR
Program Instructor II - Aquatics
Program Instructor II - Group Fitness
Program Instructor II - Personal Trainer
Program Instructor III – Group Fitness
Program Instructor III – Personal Trainer
Program Instructor IV – Group Fitness
Program Instructor IV – Personal Trainer
Recreation Assistant
Recreation Assistant - Active Adults
Recreation Assistant - Fitness
Recreation Assistant – Rentals
Recreation Assistant - Special Events
Recreation Assistant - Sports
Recreation Assistant – Youth & TR
Recreation Attendant I - General Interest
Recreation Attendant II - Guest Service
Recreation Attendant II – General Interest
Sports Official/Scorekeeper I
Sports Official/Scorekeeper II
Van Driver
Van Driver II

The organizational structure should be reviewed at least every two years to ensure that it is still serving the community and the department in the most efficient manner.

Figure 26. Erie Parks & Recreation Organizational Chart: Part Time (2025)

The Department's organizational structure includes four main divisions:

Division	Responsibilities
Business Services	Contract administration
	Budget oversight and compilation
	Purchasing guidelines
	Invoicing and billing
Development & Neighborhood Services	Development • Parks and trails development • Development applications • Long range planning • Project management
	Neighborhood Services • Collaborating with HOA's • Erie Neighborhood Improvement Program (ENIP) • Organizing Neighborhoods of Erie (ONE) liaison
Parks and Open Space	Parks maintenance
	Athletic field maintenance
	Open space and trails maintenance
	Other Town properties maintenance • Medians • Vacant properties
	Forestry and horticulture
	Amenity/asset maintenance and inventory
	Capital improvement projects
	Special event support
Recreation: Facility Operations	Community Center operations
	Coal Creek Park ice rink/splashpad
	Concessions at Erie Community Park and Coal Creek Park
	Aquatics operations and programs
	Fitness programs
	Birthday parties and room rentals
	Park shelter rentals
	Disc golf rentals, single track rentals
Recreation: Recreation Programs	Special events & Community event coordination
	Sponsorships and vending
	Active adults
	General Interest programming
	School age state licensed camps
	Preschool & youth
	Therapeutics
	Teens
	Youth and adult sports
	Athletic field rentals
Recreation: Cultural Arts	Cultural arts
	Public Art program

Table 19. Erie Parks & Recreation Division Responsibilities

The Department would benefit from having a staff succession plan in place.

6.2.1.1. Continuity of Service

Consideration should be given to developing a service plan to address a resilient operations program that may anticipate staff changes, natural disasters (wildfire, flooding), and other considerations (economic down turns, pandemics, and other major incidents).

6.2.1.2. Core Services Model

The Department has a Core Services model that is updated and reviewed periodically. It identifies three levels of service within the four divisions of the Parks and Recreation Department and the services that are in each category. This information is then connected to the current and future staffing levels that are required to support the core services model.

6.2.2. Operations

Operations cover management practices, budgets, policies and procedures and funding.

- Facility maintenance of the ECC is split between the Town's Facilities Division and the Recreation Facility Operations Team. The Facilities Division is responsible for the shell of the building including, but not limited to, the solar system, roof, HVAC, plumbing, and floor replacement. The Facilities Division also oversees the contractual agreement for custodial services.
- The Recreation Facility Operations Team is responsible for maintenance of items inside the building such as fitness equipment, furniture, appliances, and light custodial work.
- Aquatic mechanical system are a shared responsibility of the Recreation Facility Operations Team and the Facilities Division.
- The management of the recreation software program (Amilia) is the responsibility of the Recreation Division. This program provides valuable analytical information on recreation programs, facility use, and pass/membership management.
- The Department has an annual operating calendar that lists the major tasks that are to be completed monthly.
- Safety and security are important priorities and need to continue to be an area of focus.
- The Town does not currently utilize a park ranger program.
- The Department has a **Marketing and Community Relations Plan** (2021). This covers:
  - Marketing and communication roles and responsibilities
  - Community and public relations
  - Parks and recreation brand
  - Segmentation and market strategies
  - Assessing marketing methods and effectiveness
  - Plan evaluation

A variety of marketing strategies are utilized including:

- A program brochure is printed and available online three seasons a year
- Activity flyers are developed for certain programs
- The Town's website and the Parks & Recreation web pages
- Program/facility promotion is available on the Community Center's video monitors
- Social media platforms

6.2.2.1. NRPA Agency Performance Review

The Department completed an NRPA Agency Performance Review Report in 2025 that provided some key benchmarking information on a national basis.

NRPA Agency Performance Review (2025)

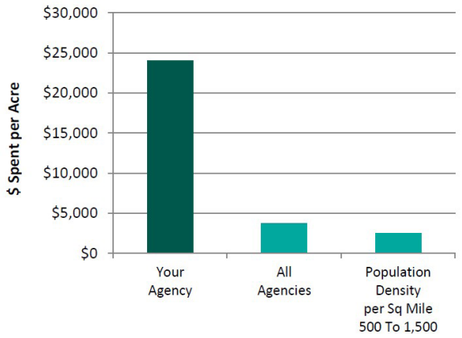


Figure 27. Operating Expenditures per Acre of Parkland

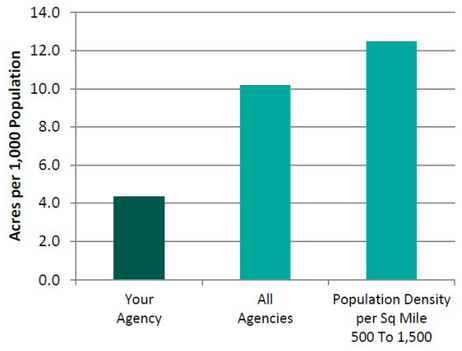


Figure 28. Acres of Parkland per 1,000 Population

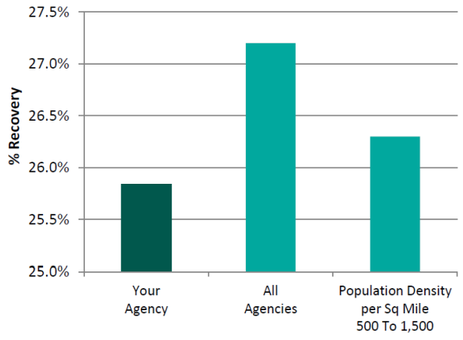


Figure 29. Revenue as a Percent of Operating Expenditures (Cost Recovery)

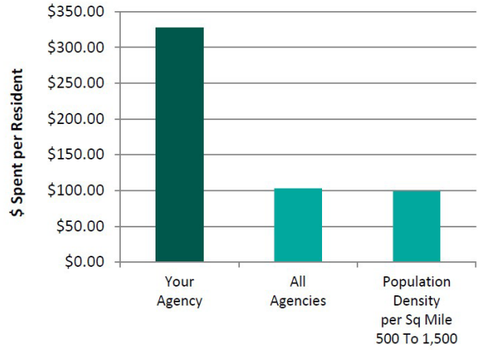


Figure 30. Operating Expenditures per Capita

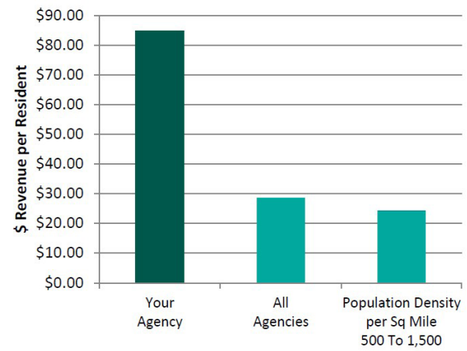


Figure 31. Revenue per Capita

The results* for Erie Parks and Recreation when compared to other agencies per the NRPA 2024 Agency Performance Review indicate the following:

- Expends more for operations
- Has fewer acres per thousand of population
- Generates more revenue per capita
- Has a lower level of cost recovery

* It is important to note that an NRPA Agency Performance Review is a high-level comparison with other agencies and the methodology for reporting data can be different for each agency.

6.2.3. Policies & Procedures

There are extensive operations and management policies and procedures in place for the PRD.

Key policies include:

- Mission and Vision
- Recreation Program Plan
- Security Guidelines and Emergency Action Plan
- Athletic Field Rental Guidelines
- ADA Transition Plan
- Park Naming Policy
- Parks and Recreation Staff Expectations
- Risk Management Plan and Procedures
- Parks and Recreation Vehicle & Equipment Management Plan
- Maintenance and Operations Management Plan
- Marketing and Community Relations Plan
- Sponsorship Guidelines
- Parks and Recreation Land Disposal Policy
- Volunteer Management Guidelines
- DEI plan
- Code of Conduct for recreation participants
- Erie Public Art and Placemaking Plan

In addition, the Town itself has policies and procedures that cover human resources (employee manual), purchasing, and other management functions.

The Department should update the naming rights policy to cover trails and open space.

6.2.4. Parks, Trails, & Open Space Maintenance

Erie's parks, trails, and open space are well managed and maintained by a knowledgeable staff that has a wide range of responsibilities.

The Parks and Open Space Division maintains **13 parks, over 40 miles of trails, and over 1,300 acres of parks, open space, and agricultural land** in the community. The division is also responsible for maintaining other open Town properties, medians, and right of ways.

The Division is responsible for maintaining designated parks, open spaces, select facility grounds, trails, and related assets located on Town-owned, Town-maintained properties.

- Athletic field maintenance is a focus of the Division and there are dedicated staff for this purpose.
- The Forestry/Horticulture work group is responsible for managing trees on Town-owned and Town-maintained properties. The Town Forester's authorities are codified in Chapter 7 of the Erie Municipal Code.
- The Division places a strong emphasis on species diversity.
- The Division has a **Comprehensive Maintenance Management Plan** in place that covers the following:
    - Parks maintenance standards for all the different amenities that are being maintained. There are seven levels of maintenance for the parks themselves.
    - Quality of work
    - Maintenance modes and frequencies
    - Preventative maintenance and inspections
    - Snow removal
- The Division would benefit by having a more robust maintenance management software program in place to track lifecycle cost analysis on amenities, equipment, and facilities. Business Services is currently working on replacement costs for much of this.
- The Division manages an Agricultural Lease Program that provides a level of revenue to the Department. The goal of the Division is to continue to grow and improve this program and allocate funding for site improvements.
- The Division measures all aspects of its operation and has strong performance metrics in place as a result.
- The Division has a **Vehicle & Equipment Management Plan** that includes the following:
    - Fleet maintenance duties and measures
    - Parks and Recreation's role in fleet maintenance and replacement
    - Fleet justification and replacement criteria and plan
- The Division has several specific maintenance plans including:
    - Emerald Ash Bore Response Plan
    - Tree Inventory Management Plan
    - Open Space Management Plan
    - Weed Management Strategy
- The Division contracts for several services including:
    - Cemetery services
    - Prairie dog management
    - Graffiti removal
    - Mosquito control
    - Painting
    - Open space mowing
    - Open space mowing
    - Fertilizer application
    - Tree care services
    - Median maintenance
    - Weed management
    - Goat grazing
- The Division currently shares a maintenance facility and staff offices with Public Works. The demands for both departments exceed the space that is available. The Division may need to consider developing their own maintenance facility at a different location and allowing Public Works to take over the existing space.
- Parks design standards are in place and need to continue to be updated.
- Code enforcement and enforcement of park rules continue to be a challenge and may require dedicated staff. This could be a park ranger program.
- Developing a wildfire mitigation and management plan is a goal of the division along with a wildlife management plan.
- There is a need to develop different classifications for open space and trails based on the level of use.

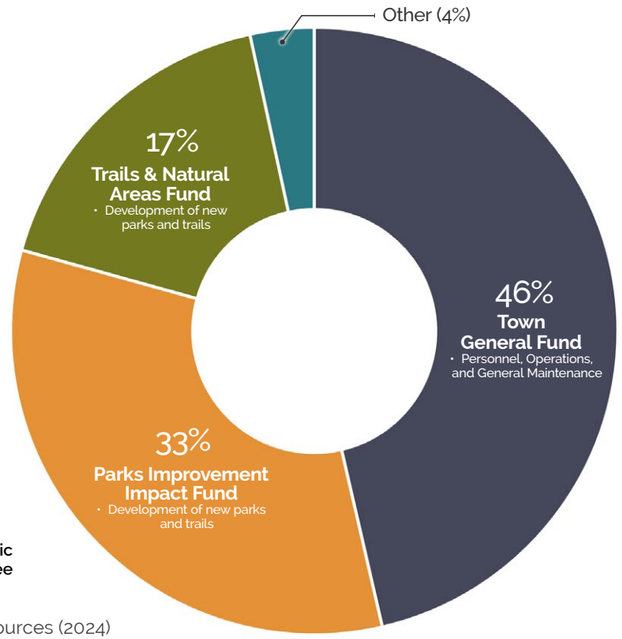
Future park maintenance priorities include:

- Increasing trail connectivity
- Reducing natural turf areas and utilizing some artificial turf for athletic fields
- Reduce water usage and use of fertilizer
- Utilizing more technology for tracking operations and maintenance
- Updating levels of service with the addition of new amenities
- Implementing autonomous machines (mowers and field painters) to the equipment inventory to increase staff efficiency

6.3. Funding & Budgets

6.3.1. Funding

The Town utilizes several funding sources for parks and recreation. Figure 32 represents the PRD funding distribution from the 2024 Adopted Budget.



Other: Fleet & Equipment Acquisition Fund, Public Facilities Impact Fund, Conservation Trust Fund, Tree Impact Fund

Figure 32. Erie Parks and Recreation Funding Sources (2024)

Parks, open space and infrastructure maintenance are primarily funded by the Town's general fund as is most parks and recreation staffing and general operations. The Community Art Program, the HOA Pocket Park Program, and the Erie Neighborhood Improvement Plan are also general fund expenditures.

The percentage level of funding from the Town's general fund is as follows:

- 2022 - 73% of budget funding
- 2023 – 75% of budget funding
- 2024 – 46% of budget funding

The 2024 budget contained a much higher level of capital expenditure that was funded through the Parks Improvement Impact Fund and Trails & Natural Areas Fund.

Determining possible additional funding sources for capital replacement and operations will be important to pay for additional future financial requirements.

The other primary sources of funding come from the Parks Improvement Impact Fund and Trails & Natural Areas Fund. This allows for the continued development of new parks and trails but cannot fund all projects (new community center, community parks, etc.).

The Town has a Tree Impact Fund for forestry related expenses, and the Conservation Trust Fund helps to fund appropriate capital projects. User fees from programs and services are utilized to fund a portion of programming and operations.

6.3.2. Budgets

Current operational budgets are satisfactory for existing operations and maintenance.

6.3.2.1. Expenditures

Expenditures by Budget Category	2022 Actuals	2023 Actuals	2024 Actuals
Capital	$6,944,012	$4,982,676	$634,286
Debt	$25,237	$54,112	$54,631
Operations	$3,449,160	$3,188,372	$3,594,033
Personnel	$5,979,851	$7,204,762	$8,219,584
TOTAL Parks & Recreation Expenditure	**$16,398,261**	**$15,429,922**	**$12,502,534**

Note: For the purposes of this study, budget data from 2025 is not included

Table 20. PRD Expenditures by Budget Category Actuals (2022 - 2024)

The Parks & Recreation Budget has seen increases in the personnel and operations portions of the budget but declines in capital from 2022 through 2024.

6.3.2.2. Revenues

Revenues by Budget Category	2022 Actuals	2023 Actuals	2024 Actuals
Admissions (Facility Access)	$1,058,462	$1,123,850	$1,327,851
Activity Fees & Charges	$1,109,502	$1,469,441	$1,651,432
Rentals	$230,397	$217,439	$301,045
Resales	$42,845	$60,854	$68,305
Sponsorships & Advertising	$41,567	$66,165	$43,806
TOTAL Parks & Recreation Revenue	**$2,482,773**	**$2,937,749**	**$3,392,439**

Note: For the purposes of this study, budget data from 2025 is not included

Table 21. PRD Revenues by Budget Category Actuals (2022 - 2024)

Revenues from admissions and activity fees & charges have shown significant growth in the last three years while other areas have seen more modest growth or a small decline.

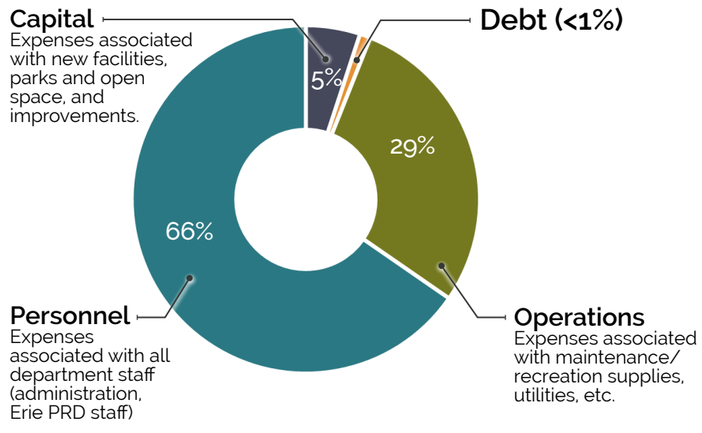


Figure 33. Expenditures by Budget Category (2024)

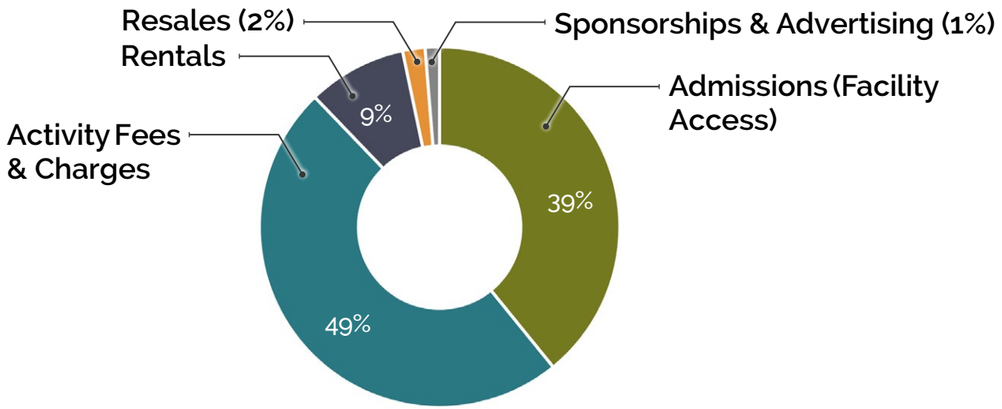


Figure 34. Revenues by Budget Category (2024)

The Department budgets in three accounts:

- Administration
- Parks & Open Space
- Recreation

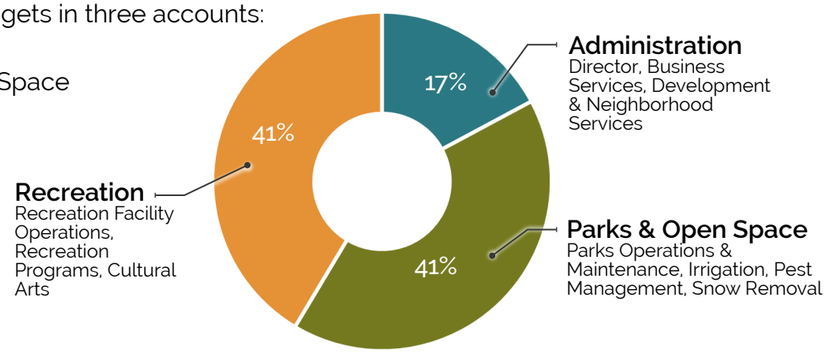


Figure 35. Budget Distribution by Division (2024)

6.3.2.3. Cost of Service Analysis

In 2022, a Cost-of-Service Analysis Report addressed specific aspects of the operating budget and calculated cost recovery percentages. This included Expenses by Division, Expenses by Category, and Department Revenue.

Division	Dollars	% of Budget
Administration	$1,131,588	13.02%
Parks & Open Space	$2,997,734	34.49%
Recreation	$4,561,196	52.48%
TOTAL	**$8,690,518**	**100%**

Table 22. Expenses by Division (2022)

Category	Dollars	% of Budget
Personnel	$5,932,366	68.26%
Administration	$645,653	7.43%
Operations & Maintenance	$1,416,168	16.30%
Utilities	$696,330	8.01%
TOTAL	**$8,690,518**	**100%**

Table 23. Expenses by Category (2022)

Source	Dollars
Admissions (Facility Access)	$1,058,462
Activity Fees & Charges	$1,109,502
Rentals	$230,397
Resales	$42,845
Sponsorships & Advertising	$41,567
TOTAL	**$2,482,773**

Table 24. Department Revenue (2022)

The overall cost recovery for 2022 was 28.57%.

The report broke down expenses and revenues as well as the cost recovery rate. This is an excellent budget tool that should continue to be used.

- There are existing CIP budgets in place and a deferred maintenance plan.
- Having an adequate level of funding for capital replacement is important to keeping parks, trails and facilities in top condition.
- The Town does not currently assess administrative overhead costs to the Department's budgets.
- There are no maintenance chargeback costs levied by the Facilities Department.

6.3.2.4. Cost Recovery Continuum

There is a comprehensive fee policy in place for the Department. This is based in part on the following cost recovery philosophy that was developed by 110% Inc.

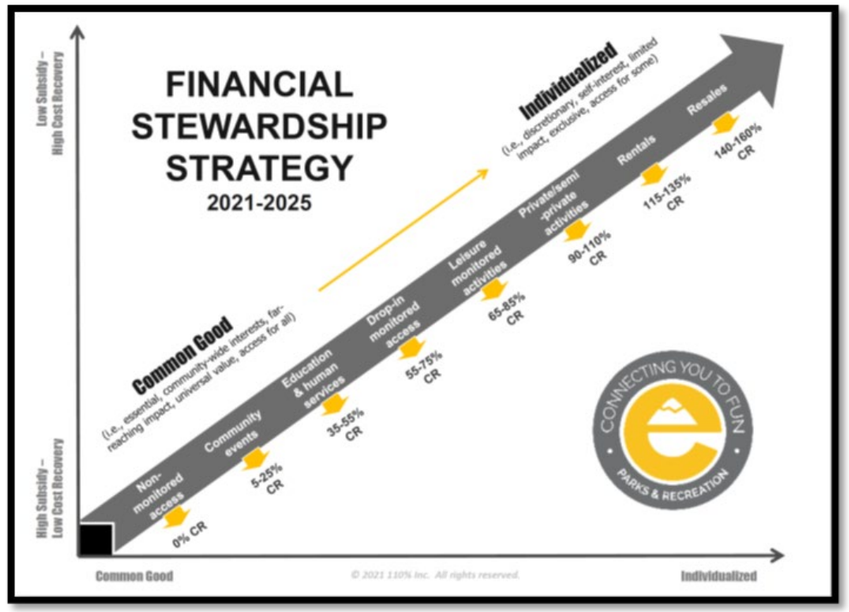


Figure 36. Cost Recovery Continuum

A scholarship program is in place to allow access to facilities and programs when there is a need for financial assistance.

6.4. Park Land Dedication (PLD) and Open Space Dedication (OSD) Requirements

Currently, the Town of Erie has codified Park Land Dedication (PLD) and Open Space Dedication (OSD) requirements. This obligates residential developers to dedicate a portion of their property, or pay an equivalent fee, to the Town for the dedication of the land.

6.4.1. Future Park Land Dedication

The current PLD standard requires providing 8.5 acres of park land per 1,000 residents divided into:

- Pocket Parks: 0.5 acres / 1,000 residents (HOA-owned and maintained)
- Neighborhood Parks: 3 acres / 1,000 residents
- Community Parks: 5 acres / 1,000 residents

Developers either dedicate land or pay a Neighborhood Park Land fee in lieu of dedication.

This equates to providing approximately an additional 204 acres of park land (or fee-in-lieu equivalent) to be dedicated to the Town for an additional anticipated 24,000 residents.

With the future planned town owned park land and future PLD park land, the total is approximately 416.4 acres of park land. This equates to 6.5 acres of park land per 1,000 residents.

Future Park Land LOS Analysis

Park Land Type	Acres	LOS Provided for 64,000 Residents
Future Planned Town Owned Park Land*	212.4	3.3 / 1,000 Residents
Future PLD Park Land**	204.0	3.2 / 1,000 Residents
Pocket Parks	12	
Neighborhood Parks	72	
Community Parks	120	
Total Future Park Land	**416.4**	**6.5 / 1000 Residents**

*Acreage includes both current and future planned parks.
** Acreage is based on the required 8.5 acres / 1,000 residents for an additional 24,000 residents.

Impacts

- The future park land LOS is acceptable, as it is above the lower quartile of 4.7acres per 1,000 residents per the 2025 NRPA Agency Performance Review. It is however below the national benchmark of 9.2 acres per 1,000 residents.
- The current PLD requirements provide a solid LOS baseline for total parks. Future development patterns and land availability will determine whether community park needs are fully met.
- The town will need to assess the financial impacts of an additional 204 acres of park land, including the cost of acquisition, maintenance, and operations.
- The 120 acres of future community parks may be difficult to achieve without sufficient large tracts of dedicated land or robust fees-in-lieu. The Town may struggle to secure the 30+ acre sites needed for larger community amenities.
- Pocket parks, while useful for non-programmed recreation, may lead to equity and maintenance concerns if HOA quality varies widely.

Serene Park
Credit: Town of Erie

6.4.2. Future Open Space Dedication

The current Open Space Dedication standard requires providing 17 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.

- Developers must dedicate land or pay a Fee-in-Lieu, directed into the Trails and Natural Areas Fund.
- Open space dedications must generally be at least 10 contiguous acres and connected to other parks/open spaces where possible. More criteria are outlined in the Unified Development Code.

This equates to providing approximately an additional 408 acres of open space (or fee-in-lieu equivalent) to be dedicated to the Town for an additional anticipated 24,000 residents.

With the current Town owned open space and future OSTD open space, the total is approximately 1,773 acres of open space. This equates to 27.7 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.

Future Park Land LOS Analysis		
Open Space Type	**Acres**	**LOS Provided for 64,000 Residents**
Current Town Owned Open Space	1,365	21.3 / 1,000 Residents
Future OSTD Open Space*	408	6.4 / 1,000 Residents
Total Future Open Space	**1,773**	**27.7 / 1000 Residents**

*Acreage is based on the required 17 acres / 1,000 residents for an additional 24,000 residents.

Impacts

- Achieving 408 acres of dedicated open space is possible if the Town continues to emphasize strategic acquisitions and developer contributions.
- However, fee-in-lieu rates must keep pace with rising land values to secure priority parcels and trail corridors. Ensure fees-in-lieu are sufficient to purchase land and build trails at current market rates.
- Dedication patterns will need to be monitored to ensure connectivity.
- Focus on acquiring and preserving contiguous open space systems that align with Erie's trail and habitat goals.

Erie Highlands Open Space
Credit: Town of Erie

7: **National Trends in Parks & Recreation**

This chapter provides a synopsis of current national trends that are shaping the future of agencies responsible for parks, recreation, open space, and trails. Over the past several decades, parks and recreation agencies throughout the United States have been required to evaluate and modify their approach to providing parks and recreation services. As a result, parks and recreation agencies have evolved to meet the rising demand for accessible, inclusive, and high-quality parks, recreational facilities, and services. Many agencies have adopted measurable service standards, integrated universal design principles, and tracked real time usage, major updates to operations, and budget performance to improve community impact.

Erie youth soccer team
Credit: DTJ Design

7.1. Overview

Understanding national trends helps local communities to make informed decisions while recognizing that the key drivers are uniquely representative of the local conditions. Four key trends that most parks and recreation agencies are addressing include:

Increasing Demand
Respond to ever increasing facility, program, and service demands from the public.

Inclusiveness & Equity
Provide access to parks, facilities, programs and services to increasingly diverse populations.

Cost Effectiveness
Achieve high standards for cost effectiveness in planning and development, and operations of services and facilities.

Measurable Outcomes
Quantify results and benefits of investments, programs, and facilities that are provided. Establishing well defined and objective Levels of Service (LOS) is key to demonstrating how funding is applied and what the return on investments may be.

7.1.1. Essential Services and Community Resilience

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Parks and Recreation services proved to be essential, as shown by the record number of people who relied on parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities across the country. Sources such as the Journal of Park and Recreation Administration (JRPA) and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) reported that outdoor recreation spaces contributed largely to increased physical and mental health during the pandemic. This highlights the critical role Parks and Recreation plays in public health, well-being, and community resilience. Therefore, Parks and Recreation agencies should be recognized as a core, essential public department and future planning and funding decisions should reflect this.

For more information, please refer to the Journal of Park and Recreation Administration (JRPA) and National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA).

As a result of these factors the following general best practices have been adopted by many parks and recreation agencies.

- Establish a clear mission and vision statement regarding roles and responsibilities in providing services to their constituents. The vision statement is backed up by several pointed goals.
- Utilize the vision and goals to produce a professional and updated strategic plan to guide future development and operations of parks, recreation facilities, and programs.
- Define ongoing, long-range planning efforts to position the agency for success in the future.
- Recognize that an agency cannot effectively be all things to all people in the delivery of parks and recreation services and facilities. As a result, specific focus areas are determined and certain functions are left to others.
- Perform careful analysis to determine which services should be provided in-house and which should be contracted to other vendors or providers.
- Create a system for record keeping that allows for trends and directional analysis. This also results in the development of specific performance measures. For this to be effective there must be full computerization of all management records. This includes program registration, point of sale, rentals, facility scheduling, timecard management, maintenance, etc.
- Develop well-written and comprehensive policies and procedures that cover all aspects of an agency's management and operation. These are updated on a regular basis.
- Evaluate, track, and measure virtually every aspect of the agency's operation on a regular basis.

Ballfields at Erie Community Park
Credit: Town of Erie

7.2. Key Takeaways

The following trends are identified by Ballard King & Associates, supplemented by data pulled from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). These national trends may help inform the Erie Parks and Recreation PROST strategies.

Sources: NRPA Best Practices, Ballard King & Associates

Organization and Management

- Streamlined organizational structures with clearly defined roles are becoming standard, helping agencies operate more efficiently and responsively.
- Agencies are shifting to function-based or geographically aligned staffing models . Function-based models organize staff based on their job function or expertise, and geographically aligned models organize based on the physical location of staff. There is an increased reliance on a combination of full-time, part-time, contract, and volunteer labor.
- Strong leadership, performance evaluation systems, and staff training are essential to delivering high-quality services.

Programs and Services

- Many agencies are taking on more of an oversight and coordination role, enabling community-wide recreation programming through partnerships rather than being the sole service provider. Agencies are required to define programming responsibilities to determine what services are best provided in-house in lieu of external partnerships and third-party contractors.
- Fitness and wellness remain the top drivers of participation across all ages, while traditional team sports show decline. Demand is growing for non-traditional offerings like pickleball, e-sports, cultural arts, and socially oriented programming.
- Virtual and hybrid programming remains relevant post-pandemic, along with short-duration and weekend offerings.
- Programs serving families, youth, older adults, and ethnically diverse populations are expanding. Programming is increasingly focused on fitness, wellness, outdoor activities, and community-based events.
- Frequent updates to programming plans with age-specific and culturally relevant offerings ensure strategic development and community alignment.

Parks and Facilities Development

- Agencies are adopting indoor facility standards and placing greater emphasis on regional and community-wide facilities.
- Parks are classified into maintenance levels to prioritize resources based on visibility, use, and development.
- New developments routinely include feasibility studies of all the aspects mentioned in this chapter, which incorporate public input and identify operational and capital funding sources.
- There is an increasing focus on open space preservation, trail expansion, and acquiring natural areas that support health, wellness, and environmental sustainability.

Operations and Maintenance

- Comprehensive management plans are becoming common and include maintenance standards, staffing needs, and performance tracking.
- Contracted maintenance services are common, supported by robust supervision and cost-benefit analysis.
- Lifecycle cost tracking, asset inventories, and energy management plans contribute to long-term sustainability.

Funding Programs and Fees

- Agencies are increasingly pursuing cost recovery programs with higher recovery targets for programs and facilities.
- Financial sustainability plans and cost center accounting help track direct and indirect expenses and guide rate setting.
- Fee policies include tiered structures based on community benefit and market demand, ensuring both access and financial viability. There is a stronger emphasis on fee for service.
- Scholarship programs and differential pricing ensure inclusiveness while balancing revenue generation.

Capital Funding

- Capital improvement planning, maintenance tracking, and lifecycle budgeting are becoming foundational practices.
- Funding for capital projects comes from a combination of sources, including general tax revenues, dedicated taxing sources, partnerships, grants, and occasionally, naming rights.
- Agencies are advised to use feasibility studies and community engagement to support large-scale capital investments.

Marketing and Promotions

- Recreation is a discretionary activity, and strong marketing is essential to ensure visibility and engagement.
- Agencies are adopting branding strategies, leveraging social media, and investing in interactive websites, seasonal guides, and online registration systems.
- Annual marketing plans backed by dedicated funding and regular evaluation improve effectiveness.
- Agencies are expanding efforts to understand how users learn about programs and tailoring outreach to diverse demographic groups.

Partnerships

- Effective partnerships are foundational to service expansion and facility development.
- Partnerships with other public agencies, private organizations, healthcare providers and nonprofits are increasingly leveraged.
- Formal agreements with defined roles and expectations ensure long-term sustainable collaboration.
- Agencies act as coordinators and advocates for community-wide recreation efforts, facilitating equitable service provision.

Recreational Facility Development Trends

- Public agencies are moving away from small, neighborhood-scale buildings in favor of comprehensive regional, multi-purpose recreation facilities including recreation centers, aquatic centers, and performing arts centers.
- There is increasing demand for facilities that integrate diverse uses: fitness, aquatics, arts, sports, and community gathering spaces.
- Splash pads are rapidly replacing smaller neighborhood pools due to lower operating costs and broader appeal.

Performance Measures

- Agencies are focusing on measurable outcomes, with strong tracking systems for registration, cost recovery, and program effectiveness.
- A clear fee-for-service model is common, with support for accessibility through scholarship and inclusion programs.
- Lifecycle analysis helps phase out underperforming offerings while scaling popular new ones.

Cultural Engagement and Arts Participation*

- There is a steady decline in formal arts attendance, but open-air and informal venues remain popular.
- Arts participation is shifting toward digital consumption and casual creation (e.g., photography, crafts, digital art).
- Public parks play a significant role in facilitating access to cultural and performing arts experiences

*For more information, refer to the Erie Performing Arts Feasibility Study (Webb Mgmt., 2025)

Cultural arts installation at the Erie Community Library
Credit: David Besnette

7.3. Trends Analysis

7.3.1. Introduction

7.3.1.1. Approach to Providing Parks & Recreation Services

The delivery of parks and recreation facilities, programs and services faces unique challenges in many communities. Key topics include:

Proximity

Providing equitable access for all areas of a community can be challenging. Many communities have all facilities and programs available on a neighborhood level. While some services are provided at the neighborhood level (e.g., parks, playgrounds, etc.), other facilities are designed to serve a larger service area (ex: community centers, athletic fields tournament complexes, festival grounds, etc.).

Demographics

Understanding the demographic make-up of the overall community as well as the nuisances of smaller sub-areas and neighborhoods is more important than ever. Recognizing that different user groups have different recreation interests and expectations has an impact on the types of facilities that are developed and the programs and services that are provided. There are also substantial differences by age with a greater focus on the growing active older adult market. Many communities serve a diverse population, including culture groups, visitors who are looking for something unique or special, and full-time residents who may have more conventional needs. Additionally, the need to serve the special-needs segments of the community (underserved populations, members who are experiencing disabilities or homelessness), in an effective manner is often addressed through partnerships with special interest groups and organizations.

Roles of Public Agencies

In the last decade, there has been the realization that parks and recreation agencies cannot be the sole provider of services and be all things to all people. Many public agencies have taken on the role of a coordinator of parks and recreation resources and a clearinghouse for community wide information. However, public agencies still work to ensure social equity in the provision of parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. For this concept to work, the agency must make a clear determination of the areas of focus that will be priorities for the future. This is based on the role that other agencies and providers can realistically provide.

Resource Allocation

Increasingly, public agencies have been faced with the pressure to do more with less. This requires careful allocation of existing resources to continue to provide parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. In addition to reducing costs, there is also a much stronger emphasis on revenue production to increase the level of cost recovery. With the need for improved allocation of resources comes the requirement to be able to measure results.

7.3.2. Recreational Facilities

Developing and managing a variety of recreational facilities is the focus of many public agencies. The types of facilities that are now provided by parks and recreation departments have become more diverse, and expensive to acquire, develop and maintain. As a result, establishing a strategic plan is critical to determining facility development roles, timelines, and priorities.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) 2024 Agency Performance Review document has specific information on recreation facilities that are provided by park and recreation agencies nationally.

Amenities	Percentage of Agencies	Median Number of Residents per Facility (100,000-250,000 pop)
Recreation Centers	62%	57,750
Community Centers	59%	55,135
Outdoor Swimming Pools	49%	65,697
Indoor Aquatic Centers	30%	110,629
Senior Centers	40%	125,817
Amphitheaters	40%	116,135
Nature Centers	34%	139,248
Stadiums	19%	154,198
Indoor Ice Rinks	12%	108,508
Teen Centers	12%	124,264
Arenas	9%	118,500

Table 25. Facilities Provided by Parks & Recreation Agencies Nationally

Responsibilities	Percentage of Agencies
Provide Recreation Programs and Services	93%
Operate and Maintain Indoor Facilities	93%
Conduct Community Wide Special Events	83%
Operate, Maintain, Contract Outdoor Swim Facilities	67%
Operate, Maintain, Contract Racquet Sports Center	77%
Administer/Manage Outdoor Sports Complex	57%
Manage Outdoor Amphitheaters	36%
Operate, Maintain Contract Indoor Swim Facilities	31%
Maintain, Manage, Lease Indoor Performing Arts Ctr.	19%
Manage Indoor Sports Complexes	20%
Arenas	9%

Table 26. Responsibilities of Parks & Recreation Agencies Nationally

7.3.2.1. Recreation Facility Trends

There are several apparent trends that have emerged in the development and maintenance of recreational facilities nationally:

- There has been a much stronger emphasis on preserves and open space acquisition and trails development in the past 10 years than most other types of facilities.
- There is increased development of capital replacement budgets for key facility amenities with an established funding source.
- Outsourcing operations and management to other organizations is being explored in many communities. This is particularly true for specialty facilities.
- There is increased emphasis on generating revenues to offset the cost of operations.
- Communities are moving away from smaller community buildings and neighborhood pools to more comprehensive facilities that serve a larger population base.
- Many communities are now developing an indoor facility Level of Service (LOS) standard that is between 1 sq. ft. to 2 sq. ft. per person.
- Many communities are performing comprehensive tracking of operations, utilization, and budget metrics to justify facilities.
- For new facilities it is common for the following to occur:
    - The completion of a feasibility study to determine need, site, amenities, capital and operations costs.
    - Identification of specific funding sources, such as general obligation bonds, for capital and operations.
    - Integration of the public into the planning and development process.

7.3.3. Recreation Programs

Some of the keys to providing recreation programs and services include:

Programming

Essential to developing a comprehensive recreation program is strong administrative oversight of the process. It starts with the development of an overall philosophy that defines programming responsibilities of the organization. The approach should emphasize areas of focus by age group and program area and prioritize future program development options.

The programming philosophy determines what programs and services will be offered directly by the recreation staff, and which will be contracted to other individuals or organizations. Increasingly, recreation departments are turning to contracted services or the outright rental of facilities to other providers to broaden programming and limit the role of in-house employees.

Program Plan

Based on the program intent, recreation agencies must develop a well-conceived plan for the delivery of recreation services. This plan takes into consideration the future direction of recreation services in the agency along with the role of other organizations and recreation providers in the area. There are clearly identified areas of programmatic responsibility to ensure that there is no overlap in resource allocation. As a result, recreation agencies establish a five-year program plan that identifies the priorities for program development, the responsible staff member and the required resources.

The plan also establishes programs that have not only an appeal for different age groups (youth, teen, adult, and older adult) but also to the family unit and the different ethnic groups in the community. Establishing events and programs that will serve any seasonal population and might attract visitors to a community are often critical as well.

Facilities

Most of the outdoor related recreation programming takes place in public parks with school facilities providing the other main venue. For indoor programs, school buildings are still the primary location for most activities with public recreation centers and other provider's facilities being the additional sites. With the demand for recreation programs and services continuing to expand at phenomenal rates, a new innovative approach has been implemented to find appropriate sites to accommodate multiple activities. This has resulted in partnering with private facilities (fitness centers, dance studios, outdoor aquatic clubs, etc.), non-profits (YMCA's, Boys & Girls Clubs, cultural arts centers, etc.), and even private schools for certain activities. With the demand for youth sports fields continuing to grow, it is not unusual for youth sports organizations to build and operate their own fields on their own property or on leased undeveloped public land.

Fee Setting

To accomplish a high level of recreation services, recreation agencies have been much more aggressive in their fee setting with the goal of covering more operational expenses for most programs. However, with a more entrepreneurial approach to assessing fees for activities comes the need to develop a broad-based scholarship program that allows for those individuals that cannot afford to pay the opportunity to participate in recreation activities. Such programs usually have a limited budget and do require the user to pay at least something for service.

Use of Other Service Providers

There has been a movement away from the principle of public recreation departments having to be the actual provider of all recreation programs and services, to a model where public agencies serve as general coordinators and enablers of overall community recreation needs and resources. This has resulted in many programs now being conducted by volunteer youth sports organizations, adult sports associations, non-profit groups such as the YMCA and other social service organizations, as well as the private sector. The result is a reduction of the financial obligations of the public sector, placing programming in the hands of organizations with specific expertise (and often the facilities as well), and allowing the private sector to have a more active role in public recreation. There has also been an increase in the number of public agencies collaborating to bring a higher level of recreation service on more of a regional basis, especially for more specialized services (special needs, outdoor education, etc.).

Staffing

To continue to grow the number of recreation programs and services that are offered to a community, adequate staffing is necessary to not only conduct the program itself but also to supervise and administer the activities. With staffing costs being the single greatest expense item for parks and recreation departments, many agencies have attempted to minimize the number of full-time staff by contracting certain programs or partnering with other providers for services. The need to reduce full-time staff became even more acute with the poor financial condition of most agencies during the Great Recession and the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, even with this approach there still needs to be adequate full-time staff to oversee and coordinate such efforts. Part time staff is still the backbone of most recreation departments and make up most program leaders and instructors. Many departments have converted program instructors to contract employees with a split of gross revenues (usually 70% to the instructor and 30% to the city) or developed a truer contract for services that either rents facilities and/or takes a percentage of the gross from another organization. The use of volunteers can help to augment paid staff but should not be seen as a substitute for them.

Funding

The basic requirement for the provision of recreation programs and services is a funding commitment associated with the development of facilities to support programs and staff to manage and provide the programming. This usually requires a tax dollar commitment but also other sources of funding including program fees, grants, and partnering with other agencies can also help with additional funding. In many departments, limited funding has been the biggest challenge, making it difficult to maintain existing programs and introduce new services.

7.3.3.1. Recreation Program & Service Trends

Table 21 below illustrates current national recreation trends organized by major program areas. This list serves as general guidance. Each community is unique, and specific analysis is needed to understand the bearing on individual trends and other operational factors in Erie.

Area	Specific Programs
Sports	Youth Lacrosse
	Adult Soccer
	Adult Cricket
	Youth & Adult Rugby
	Pickleball
	Youth Camps and Clinics
	Individual Sports (Fencing)
	Adventure/Non-Traditional (BMX, Mountain Biking, Disc Golf, Ultimate)
	E-sports Competitions and Tournaments
	Youth Sports Specific Training
Fitness/Wellness	Functional Training Classes
	Personal/Small Group Training
	Yoga
	Nutrition/Cooking
	Healthy Lifestyle Education
	Mindfulness Programs
Cultural Arts	Music Production for Youth
	Digital Media
Youth	Before and After School Programs at Recreation Centers, Specialty Summer Camps
Education	Camps, STEAM
Outdoor	Eco-Tourism
	Environmental Education
Seniors	Fitness/Wellness
	Sports (pickleball)
	Baby Boomer Focused Activities
Aquatics	Therapy
	Triathlon Training
General Interest	Personal Finance
	Cooking
Special Events	Community Wide Events
	Health and Wellness
Social Services	Feeding Programs, Job Training, Educational Support, Childcare
Other	Virtual Programming

Table 27. General Program and Services Trends by Area

The National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) annual survey (2023) indicates the ranking of the top 10 sports activities nationally as well as the level of participation. Note that the top ten activities are predominately fitness-related activities and outdoor recreation pursuits.

Sport	National Rank*	National Participation (in Millions)
Exercise Walking	1	110.2
Exercise w/ Equipment	2	52.9
Hiking	3	51.8
Swimming	4	44.9
Running/Jogging	5	43.1
Bicycle Riding	6	42.4
Camping (overnight)	7	40.4
Weightlifting	8	36.8
Yoga	9	30.7
Fishing (fresh)	10	29.9

Table 28. Sports Participation Ranking (2023)

The NSGA also lists several sports activities and the percentage of growth or decline that each has experienced nationally over the last ten years (2014-2023).

Sport	2014 Participation (in Millions)	2023 Participation (in Millions)	Percent Change
Pickleball	1.7	9.9	482%
Boxing	3.4	5.3	56%
Surfing	2.2	3.2	46%
Skateboarding	5.4	7.2	33%
Kayaking	9.0	11.8	31%
Table Tennis/Ping Pong	9.9	12.9	30%
Mountain Biking (off road)	5.4	7.0	30%
Hiking	41.1	51.8	26%
Wrestling	2.9	3.6	24%
Ice/Figure Skating	7.3	9.0	23%

Table 29. Top Ten Sports Activity Participation Increases (2014-2023)

Trends for key areas of program growth have occurred in fitness related activities over the last decade. Many of the declines in participation are related to traditional team sports such as baseball, football, basketball, and softball.

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) 2024 Sports, Fitness and Leisure Activities Top-Line Participation Report indicated the rate of participation by major sports activity categories over the last 5 years.

Activity Category	2018 Percentage	2023 Percentage
1. Fitness Sports	66.0%	67.8%
2. Outdoor Sports	50.5%	57.3%
3. Individual Sports	45.3%	42.1%
4. Team Sports	22.8%	25.7%
5. Water Sports	13.7%	15.7%
6. Racquet Sports	13.2%	18.0%
7. Winter Sports	8.2%	9.8%

Table 30. Percentage of Participation Comparisons

Fitness related sports continued to be the most popular activity category, but racquet sports have shown the greatest percentage increase over the last five years due in large part to pickleball. Team sports, water sports, and outdoor sports have all seen an increase as well. Individual sports and winter sports have seen a decrease in participation. Erie's high-demand areas are also generally in fitness, outdoor sports, team sports, and aquatics (water sports) as identified in Chapter 5.

Participation in outdoor recreation grew 4.1% in 2023 to 175.8 million, amounting to 57.3% of the U.S. population. 22.2 million more Americans aged six and older are participating in outdoor recreation in 2023 than were participating in 2019 (Outdoor Foundation).

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) 2024 Agency Performance Review document has specific information on programming that is offered by park and recreation agencies nationally.

Program	Percentage of Agencies
Themed Special Events	89%
Social Recreation Events	88%
Team Sports	86%
Fitness Enhancement Classes	82%
Health & Wellness Education	80%
Individual Sports	76%
Safety Training	73%
Racquet Sports	70%
Aquatics	68%
Performing Arts	62%
Visual Arts	63%
Natural and Cultural History Activities	66%
Cultural Crafts	63%
Trips and Tours	62%
Martial Arts	56%
Running/Cycling Races	53%
Golf	49%
eSports/eGaming	26%

Table 31. Programming Offered by Parks and Recreation Agencies Nationally

The Recreation Management Magazine State of the Industry Report examines trends in parks and recreation. Their report indicated the following as it relates to common recreation programs and services additions in 2024.

Program	Percentage of Agencies
1. Environmental Education Programs	26.4%
2. Educational Programs	24.1%
3. Holiday Events and Other Special Events	23.8%
4. Fitness Programs	22.5%
5. Mind-Body Balance Programs	22.2%
6. Adult Sports Teams	22.2%
7. Teen Programming	22.2%
8. Programs for Active Older Adults	22.2%
9. Group Exercise Programs	20.6%
10. Special Needs Programs	19.6%

Table 32. Most Planned Program Additions in 2024

7.3.3.2. Performing Arts Center *

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) provides insight into how Americans are spending their time with art and art-like activities. The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) is the nation's largest, most representative survey of adult patterns of arts participation in the United States.

- Following a minimal increase in almost all arts attendance that occurred from 2012-2017, participation rates decreased from 2017-2022.
- Changes in the U.S. demographic composition appear to have contributed to attendance in performing arts attendance. Still, various subgroups of Americans have decreased attendance rates for individual art forms. COVID-19 played its role in the decrease in participation as well.
- The most popular site to attend in-person arts events was an open-air facility (parks, pavilions, amphitheaters) at 17.1%. The next venue is restaurants, bars, nightclubs and coffee shops (10.3%) with the remainder equal between schools, churches, community centers, and libraries.
- Those who attended learned about the event most frequently through social media (17.0%) then through friends (14.7%) with traditional media next (11.3%).
- Art Museums/Galleries and Parks/Historical Buildings attendance has increased from 2012 to 2017 but decreased in 2022.
- Craft/Visual Arts Festivals have seen a decline between 2012-2022.

*For more information, please refer to the Erie Performing Arts Feasibility Study (Webb Management 2025)

7.3.3.3. Other Programming Trends

- Recreation departments now often serve as a coordinating agency and a clearinghouse for multiple recreation organizations and providers to bring a comprehensive scope of recreation programs to a community. This has also increased the number of partnerships that are in place to deliver a broader base of programs in a more cost-effective manner.
- Programming continues to emphasize the needs of young people and older adults but has also focused more on adults and the family unit.
- There has been a concerted effort to integrate conventional recreation programming with community based social service programs and education. Most of the social service programs are offered by other community-based agencies and education is often coordinated with school districts.
- Program characteristics (performance measures) are tracked including:
    - Program registration comparisons by year for each season
    - Rates of fill (especially for fee-based programming)
    - Participation numbers and comparisons to past years/seasons
    - Rate of program cancellations (for fee-based programming)
    - Financial performance including cost per participant
    - Evaluations from participants

Camp Erie Program
Credit: Town of Erie

7.3.4. Maintenance & Operations

Over the last decade there have been significant changes in how maintenance and operations of parks and recreation facilities are addressed. Some of the more significant trends include:

- The responsibility for maintenance and custodial services now varies considerably by agency. Many municipalities have moved parks maintenance functions to a separate facilities maintenance department or a division within public works. Specialized facility maintenance (athletic fields, aquatic centers, etc.) still often remain the responsibility of parks and recreation departments or even the recreation division. On the other side, functions such as right of way maintenance are now being moved from public works to parks operations.
- The development of a comprehensive management plan for parks, open space, trails and recreation facilities is now considered essential. This document must not only deal with an overall plan for the parks and recreation agency but also specific plans for each park or facility. This plan should include:
    - Classification of outdoor parks, preserves, and open space into 6 levels of maintenance standards (see below).
    - A listing of specific maintenance tasks that need to be performed, their frequency and the quality level that is expected.
    - A determination of manpower, equipment and operating supplies that are required to complete the tasks.
    - Tracking of maintenance tasks and overall performance.
    - The establishment of a preventative maintenance plan.
- The maintenance division develops specific levels of service for each facility that is under their responsibility utilizing the NRPA's maintenance standards that divide outdoor park maintenance into 6 different levels. These include:

Level 1
High visibility areas that require the highest level of maintenance.

Level 2
The normal standard and what an individual expects to see on a regular basis.

Level 3 & 4
These two levels are just below the norm and include reductions in frequency of maintenance with a focus on safety. These levels are often utilized when there are budget and manpower reductions.

Level 5
This level is one step above allowing the land to return to its original state.

Level 6
This level allows the land to return to its original natural state or open space that is already in its natural condition.

- Levels of maintenance of a park can include varying levels within different areas of the same park. Highly developed areas often have a higher level assigned while less developed have a lower level.

  For indoor facilities, there is usually a similar 3 level classification for building maintenance functions. Each existing indoor facility would then be classified in the same manner as parks.
- More parks maintenance functions are now being contracted out to 3rd party providers. As a result, agencies are developing specific guidelines to determine which maintenance functions or activities could possibly be considered for contract service.

  When developing contracts that detail specific tasks, outlining the frequency and expected quality of service is essential. Contracts must have specific performance standards to ensure that recreation facilities are adequately cleaned. Contract maintenance also must be supervised, managed, and evaluated on a regular basis.
- A maintenance cost assignment system is developed that tracks costs by major parks or recreation facilities so that the true costs of maintaining these facilities are known. This system is also valuable in estimating future costs for any new or renovated parks or facilities. Cost assignments are also done by task (mowing, sweeping, fertilization, etc.) to develop costs per function or for determining a cost per acre or mile.
- Agencies are creating lifecycle cost estimates for major capital assets associated with parks and recreation facilities and equipment. An asset inventory is required to establish an objective assessment for all major equipment as well.
- Maintenance supervisors and administrative staff are becoming more actively involved in the design review process for all newly planned facilities. The review process often focuses on materials and surfaces/finishes being specified, maintenance equipment required to maintain the amenity, access for maintenance equipment, and brand of materials for continuity.
- Many parks and recreation agencies develop an energy management plan for buildings and structures that attempts to control energy costs, promote energy conservation, and utilize alternative forms of energy.

7.3.4.1. Organizational & Management Planning

To become more efficient and effective in the delivery of parks and recreation services, there is greater emphasis on organizational structure and management programming.

Some trends include:

- Organizational structures have become more streamlined with direct lines of responsibility established. There is greater emphasis on having strong leadership at the administrative level that is supported by an overall team concept. As a result, most organizations tend to have fewer mid-management positions.

  There is a mix of full-time and part-time staff that reflects the levels of service that have been established, any seasonal operations, and the budget requirements of the department.
- Several cities have preserves, open space, and greenway divisions, some of which are separate departments within the organization.
- Facilities and recreation programming that can generate strong revenues are often placed outside the normal organizational structure as enterprise funds.

- To minimize the impact of reduced budgets, establishing a strong volunteer program is often in place. To effectively make use of volunteers there must be a staff person who is responsible for managing and recruiting volunteers. If the program becomes large enough, then a full-time volunteer coordinator position is often necessary.
- Most organizational structures tend to be functionally based, but in larger communities there can also be a geographic structure as well.

7.3.4.2. Staff Resources

Agencies continue to develop staffing plans to clearly define the roles and responsibilities for all staff. A staffing plan:

- Determines required positions and the need for full-time and part-time status employees. Within the last several years there has been difficulty attracting and keeping qualified part-time staff. This has been particularly true for specialty positions such as lifeguards. As a result, there has been a greater focus on full-time staff.
- Establishes a formal communications protocol. Staff meetings for all segments of the organization are held on a regular basis and the minutes and actions are documented.
- Provides job descriptions for all full-time and part-time staff that accurately describe the job requirements and skills that are necessary for the position.
- Responds to the growing role of contract positions, especially for program instructors and specialized services.
- Considers union requirements that often impact staffing plans, schedules, and management practices.
- Empowers staff to make important management and supervisory decisions and holds them accountable for the performance of their areas. Supervisory staff have budget responsibilities as well.
- Establishes levels of service based on the number of FTEs per thousand people, acreage maintained, and facilities operated.
- Cross trains staff to handle most operational or supervisory responsibilities for a variety of program areas and facilities.
- Is backed up by a comprehensive staff manual that is updated regularly to guide staffing standards and regulations. Background checks are completed on all new recruits, including volunteers, especially those that have direct contact with young people.

7.3.4.3. Performance Evaluation

- Full-time staff have an annual performance review completed that clearly indicates areas of excellence, areas of compliance and where improvements should be made. Detailed and specific annual work plans are developed for each full-time and major part-time staff members and these are monitored by their direct supervisor on a regular basis. The work plans cover issues such as budget development, financial transactions, programming, marketing, community outreach and staff interaction and communication. It is important to have measurable benchmarks and outputs for each plan. Staff are then held accountable to meet these goals.
- There is a strong staff training and education program in place to provide opportunities for staff growth and improvement. The staff training program focuses on financial transactions, customer service, program development, budgeting, revenue growth, and maintenance functions, and facility operations. A specific training program for new hires, including part-time and seasonal staff, is also in place.

Lifeguard staff training at the Erie Community Center
Credit: Town of Erie

7.3.5. Funding Sources & Fees

With greater emphasis on capital needs, operational costs, and revenue opportunities, parks and recreation agencies are focusing on new ways to fund operations to maximize revenues.

Trends in these areas include:

- Over the last 10-15 years there has been a greater emphasis on increasing the overall level of cost recovery for recreation programs and services from well below 50% to as much as 100% of direct and indirect costs for these services. Cost recovery calculations are focused on costs and revenues associated with providing recreation services and not all department costs are included.
- The development of a financial sustainability plan outlines how program and facility costs will be tracked and controlled as well as revenues enhanced and tracked to clearly delineate the overall rate of cost recovery. Ideally this is a five-year plan with individual cost recovery targets set for each year .
- Agencies continue to move toward a cost-center accounting system where major budget sections are set up with sub-categories based on specific facilities or program areas. This provides greater transparency for the entire budget process, allows for an accurate picture of both costs and revenues for individual areas, and requires supervisory employees to be directly responsible for their own budgets.
- Operational and management contracts with outside vendors are ideally reviewed at least every three years and rebid on a regular basis.

Erie Community Center Staff
Credit: Town of Erie

7.3.5.1. Operations Funding Sources

Agencies utilize a variety of funding sources to support parks and recreation facilities, programs, and services. These include:

User Fees and Charges

Collecting fees for services continues to be one of the primary sources of revenue for parks and recreation agencies. In fact, there is a great deal of pressure in most agencies to increase the level of funding from this source.

General Fund

Most agencies continue to rely on a yearly budget allocation from the general fund of a city for most parks and facility maintenance functions as well as some programs and services. This can be 75% to 100% of a departments operating budget. However, for many agencies the level of funding from this source has been reduced in the past 5 years.

Dedicated Taxing Source

This type of funding is difficult to obtain but some communities have been successful in establishing a dedicated funding source for parks and recreation services. This has come in the form of a specified mill levy, a particular sales tax amount, the use of bed/restaurant taxes, and other specific tax sources.

Sponsorships

There has been a real strong effort nationally to establish comprehensive sponsorship programs for recreation facilities, programs and services. This has been particularly beneficial for special events and for older adult activities. This has required the development of a detailed sponsorship program to be effective.

Partnerships

Partnering with other organizations, foundations, and businesses to share costs or enhance revenues has been effective.

Foundations

Many agencies have established a 501(c)3 foundation for parks and recreation to provide a tax-free way to collect a variety of fundraising dollars as well as qualify for a broader range of grants.

Grants

There are a number of grants that are available for programs and services that serve the disadvantaged, youth, teens and older adults. There are also facility grants including ones for energy efficiency, emergency shelters and other functions. Grants can come from other governmental agencies (county, state or federal), lottery proceeds, and private sources.

Endowment Fund

This form of operational funding is relatively rare as it requires a large fund balance to establish an annual operational endowment level of any magnitude.

7.3.5.2. Fees

As parks and recreation agencies are becoming much more aggressive in revenue generation, the need to develop an overall fee policy is critical. The first step in developing a clear user fee policy is to adopt a general philosophy for setting fees. For this to occur, the following must take place:

- Establish a standardized approach to setting fees.
- Determine the overall goal of cost recovery for programs, services, and facilities.
- Ensure general access to recreation programs and services is not denied simply based on the ability to pay.
- Require that exclusive use of any public parks, facilities or services by individuals or organizations results in compensation for the costs associated with such use.
- Require that users pay for programs and services when there is an instructor, official or other personnel associated directly with the provision of the service.
- Require that at least a portion of other direct and indirect expenses associated with the delivery of a program or service to the user be recovered through fees.

From this, agencies are developing a comprehensive fees and charges policy that is updated annually. This usually includes:

Programs and Services

Programs and Services are categorized into four levels of offerings that are divided by the level of instruction, expertise, or importance to the community's well-being. Priority for funding and facility usage should be based on the category in which they fall, with fees being set accordingly. The four categories include:

Community Events: Special community wide events, activities or festivals that are one-time events. There are generally little to no fees for these activities. Some revenues may be collected from sponsorships and sales of goods and services.

Basic or Core Programs: Programs that are essential to recreation and community needs (such as teen activities, older adult programs, youth sports activities, special populations, etc.). These program's direct costs are usually subsidized.

Enhanced: Programs that are beyond basic and are focused on an audience that can pay. Programs in this area could include adult fitness and sports, or general programs. These programs are generally recovering 100% of direct costs and some in-direct costs.

Specialized: These are activities that are very specialized in nature. These often include activities such as private swim lessons, fitness assessments, trip programs, facility rentals and the like. Fees are set based on what the market will bear but at minimum would require 100% of direct costs and most indirect costs to be covered.

Outdoor Facilities

Outdoor facilities are usually sorted into three categories for fee assessment.

Drop-in Outdoor Facilities: Drop-in use of basic park amenities should remain free. Examples would be open park areas, playgrounds, trails, picnic areas, outdoor courts, skate parks, etc.

Specialized Outdoor Facilities: Facilities such as swimming pools, lighted/organized sports fields, and similar facilities should have market rates established for use. There should be a rate differential for youth, adult, and older adult users.

Rental of Facilities: Rentals of specialized facilities should require a fee for use that could be based on categories of non-commercial and commercial. Fees for non-commercial should be based at a minimum on recovering all direct costs of renting the facility, and commercial should be significantly higher. All field or facility maintenance fees required for rental plus any other amenities not normally associated with the facility will be charged to the renter.

Indoor Facilities

Indoor facilities also are sorted in three categories for fee assessment.

Drop-in Indoor Facilities: Drop-in use of basic indoor facilities such as youth game rooms, open lounge areas, community gathering spaces and similar areas usually do not require a fee for use.

Specialized Indoor Facilities: Facilities such as fitness areas, gyms, pools, racquetball courts, ice rinks, etc. should require a fee for use. Specific cost recovery goals need to be established for each specialized facility to determine the basic fee structure that needs to be developed. There should be a rate differential for youth, adult, older adult, and disabled users.

Rental of Facilities: Rentals of specialized facilities should require a fee for use that could be based on categories of non-commercial and commercial. Fees for non-commercial should be based at a minimum on recovering all direct costs of renting the facility, and commercial should be significantly higher. All field or facility maintenance fees required for rental plus any other amenities not normally associated with the facility will be charged to the renter.

7.3.5.3. Capital Funding

A major challenge for parks and recreation agencies is determining a method for funding the capital development costs for new or renovated facilities. For most agencies, a combination of several different funding sources is generally utilized for new capital projects.

Government Funding

In most cases, a governmental agency is the primary funding source for new parks and recreation facilities. Some options to acquire the necessary tax dollars for a project include:

General Tax Dollars

Utilization of any existing non-allocated tax dollars for a project. This usually results in slower development of new facilities by allocating existing tax funding when possible.

Capital Improvement Fund

Establishing a dedicated funding source for capital projects from either a percentage of existing tax revenues or through a tax increase established for that purpose.

Bond Measure

A voter passed tax initiative to fund specific capital projects.

Certificates of Participation

A form of lease-purchase, COPs are issued for debt periods like normal bonds, but the amenity itself serves as the collateral. This funding mechanism does not require voter approval.

Impact Fees

Paid by developers for new parks and facilities to reduce the cost to the public agency. This can be in lieu of land dedication or in addition to.

State or Federal Special Tax Revenue

At times there can be limited funding opportunities for special projects.

Partnerships

The ability to include equity partners in projects is critical to developing new parks and recreation facilities. Partnerships can be with other public agencies, the non-profit sector and even with for-profit providers.

Fundraising

One source of capital funding can come from a comprehensive fundraising campaign. Contributions from local businesses, private individuals, and social service organizations can be targeted. To maximize this form of funding, a private fundraising consultant may be necessary.

Grants

There are some grants available for parks and recreation projects. It is more difficult to fund active recreation facilities than parks and open space from these sources, but efforts are still made to acquire funding from these sources. Key areas that should be targeted for grants are serving youth, teens, older adults, and families as well as environmental projects.

Naming Rights and Sponsorships

Although not nearly as lucrative as for large stadiums and other similar facilities, the sale of naming rights and long-term sponsorships could be a source of some capital funding as well. It is often necessary to hire a specialist in selling naming rights and sponsorships if this revenue source is to be maximized to its fullest potential. No lifetime naming rights should be sold, and only 20 years maximum rights should be possible. Determining the level of financial contribution necessary to gain a naming right is crucial.

7.3.6. Marketing & Promotions

Recreation is a discretionary use of people's time and money. As a result, it is critical that there is a strong marketing effort to promote the facilities, programs and services that are offered by a park and recreation agency. This includes the following trends:

- A comprehensive marketing plan for recreation facilities, programs and services is developed for the agency. This document is usually a simple, easy to implement, document that serves as a guideline for specific marketing efforts. There is often a more visionary 5-year plan as well as a very specific yearly plan that outlines areas of focus, specific marketing tools and tasks, as well as the responsible staff member for implementation, financial resources that are required and a thorough evaluation process.
- There must be a strong recognition of the different demographic markets that must be served. The youth, older adult, and family populations in the area should be specifically addressed as should any different ethnic groups.
- There is usually an effort to "brand" an agency, its facilities, and its programs through all publications, promotional materials, flyers, signs, web site, and other items. All marketing materials often have the same format, look, logo, etc.
- Most agencies have an interactive web site that is updated seasonally. In addition, separate web sites for specific facilities and even large program areas (summer camps) are often utilized as well, with links to and from the agency's main site. Some agencies are now using a web-based survey instrument for program and facility evaluations by users as an option/or in addition to paper-based forms.
- Agencies heavily promote the use of online program registration as well as facility rentals. This requires a fully computerized registration software package with point of sale and the ability to make payments over time.
- There is strong use of Facebook, X, and other social media sources to promote the agency's facilities, programs and services. This is backed up with a formal social media policy.
- The way users find out about parks and recreation facilities, programs and services, is tracked on a regular basis and guides future marketing resource allocation and areas of focus.
- A formal sponsorship plan is in place for facilities as well as events and programs.
- For marketing efforts to be effective, it is critical that the agency provide an annual funding level. The amount is usually tied to implementing the annual marketing plan.
- Agencies often survey the community and existing parks and recreation users every other year to determine overall levels of satisfaction as well as future needs and expectations for facilities and services.
- The annual marketing efforts have a formal evaluation mechanism to determine the overall effectiveness of the plan.
- Agencies establish a strong customer service training program for all its employees (full-time and part-time). Areas of focus often include, dealing with difficult people, diversity, how to handle discipline and behavioral issues, and effectively implementing emergency procedures.

7.3.7. Partnerships

Partnerships with a variety of entities are a major way to provide parks and recreation services and specialized programs, as well as new or renovated facilities. The roles and expectations of partnership organizations and providers should be clearly articulated by the agency to promote the effective use of overall community resources. These partnerships often include:

- Health care providers
- School districts
- Other governmental agencies
- YMCA's/Boys & Girls Clubs/Jewish Community Centers
- Community organizations
- Private health clubs
- Sports organizations
- Business and corporate community
- Equity partnerships for facilities and programs
- Coordination efforts with other government agencies

7.3.7.1. Programmatic Partnerships

There has been a movement away from the principle of public recreation departments having to be the actual provider of all recreation programs and services. This has resulted in a great deal of programming now being conducted by volunteer youth sports organizations, adult sports associations, non-profit groups such as the YMCA and other social service organizations, as well as the private sector. This has reduced the financial obligations of the public sector, placed programming in the hands of organizations with specific expertise (and often the facilities as well), and allowed the private sector to have a more active role in public recreation. However, parks and recreation agencies often still need to be providers of many of the facilities (especially outdoor parks) for other organizations to use.

Other organizations that could provide programs and services can include:

Youth Sports Organizations

Can be responsible for providing team sports for youth. However, the agency will still need to provide most if not all the facilities for these activities.

School Districts

Coordinating with school districts to provide youth after school programs and services, education classes for youth (and even adults), as well as youth sports (location for practices), can be beneficial. The school's facilities should be a location for at least some recreation programming in most communities.

Other Government Organizations

There needs to be strong efforts to partner with other governmental agencies in an area to develop programs and services. This is most likely to occur with a county and neighboring communities. Program areas that could be provided by other organizations through a partnership include special needs, special events, outdoor recreation, and cultural arts events.

Non-Profit Providers

Coordinating with a variety of non-profit providers to deliver recreation services is often pursued. Organizations such as the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA, cultural arts groups, etc. should be encouraged to continue to develop facilities and provide programs in a community. These types of organizations are often well positioned to provide a variety of programs in different areas.

Health Care Organizations

It is not unusual to have a health care organization offering fitness and wellness related services to parks and recreation agencies.

Private Providers

Since there often several private recreation, sports and fitness providers located in a community (health clubs, dance, martial studios, arts studios, etc.), these entities could be counted on to provide more specialized activities that are not easy for the public sector to conduct.

Residential Communities, Condos and HOA's

There are often several residential communities, condos, and HOA's in a community. Some of these have social and recreation facilities that serve their residents and provide a level of programs. Their role in providing recreation services needs to be recognized.

Faith Based Organizations

With a significant number of churches and other faith-based institutions in most communities, they often provide some recreation services for their congregation and community. These organizations should be seen as possible providers of some basic community-based recreation services and facilities as well.

7.3.7.2. Facility Partnerships

A significant number of new public recreation facilities now involve some form of partnership with other community organizations and recreation service providers. Partnerships are generally on three levels.

Primary or Equity Project Partners

These would be the main partners in a project who have the most interest, the ability to fund, and a willingness to be a part of the development and operation of a facility.

Secondary Project Partners

These organizations could have a direct interest in the facility but not to the same level as a primary partner. Capital funding for the project is unlikely but there could be some assistance with program and service delivery.

Support Partners

These organizations support the development of a new facility but would see limited to no direct involvement in the development or operation of the facility.

Specific facility partnerships could include:

Health Care Providers

A health care provider could offer capital funding for a portion of a facility or lease space in a building. In addition, they can also possibly provide programs and services for the center. Partnerships between public entities and medical providers can be very beneficial for both parties.

Non-Profits

YMCA's, Boys & Girls Clubs, and Jewish Community Centers could be a possible operator of a facility and can also be part of a fundraising campaign for a project.

Private Health Clubs

A partnership would most likely be in the form of a city or other agency leasing land at a very low rate and the club building a private fitness center. This is often not a realistic option for most communities.

School District

A school district's role in a project could be considerable and include, offer of a site, a capital contribution for construction, or funding for operations (beyond possible fees for use).

Retail Operations

It may be possible to integrate some retail services into a facility. This could come in a small drink/food service operation and/or a small area to sell sports, recreation, and fitness goods. The facility can either lease space in the amenity for these purposes and/or take a percentage of any goods that are sold. This could include food truck operations and other vendors.

Sports Organizations

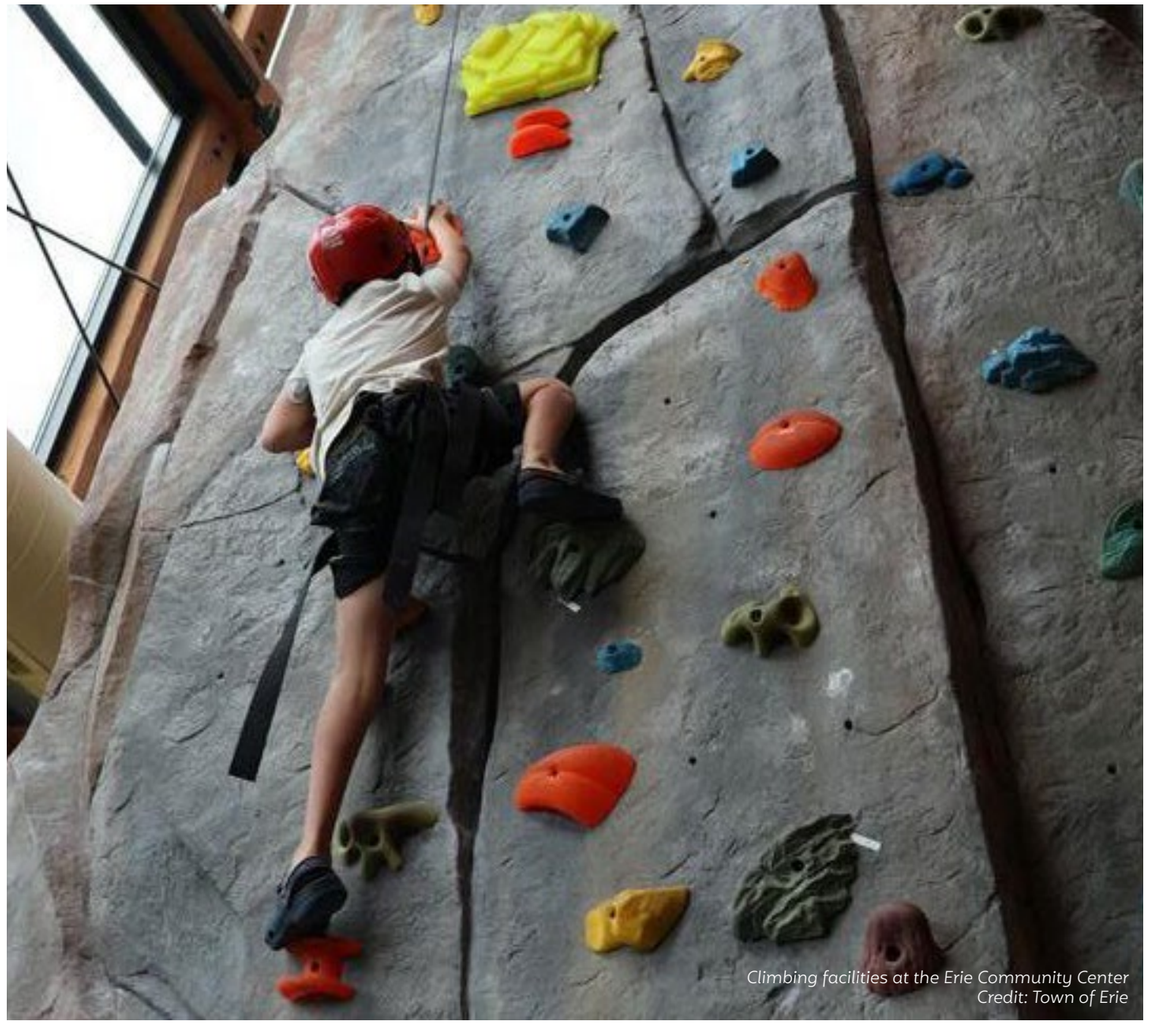
Local sports organizations could be primary users of a new facility if the amenities that they need are available and support their activities. It should be expected that these groups would be strong supporters of a new facility and would possibly pay for their use.

Community Organizations

Developing working relationships with community organizations and service clubs could provide much needed support for a project as well as generate possible users of a facility.

Business and Corporate Community

It is important to approach the corporate community with a variety of sponsorship opportunities to enhance the revenue prospects of a facility.



Climbing facilities at the Erie Community Center
Credit: Town of Erie

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