



The background of the page is a light cream color with a pattern of numerous thin, wavy, orange lines that create a sense of movement and texture. The lines are arranged in a somewhat chaotic but rhythmic pattern, with some lines being straight and others curved, and some being more densely packed than others.

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PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY

KEY CONCEPTS

- 1. Broad, Multi-Method Engagement Drove The Plan** - Tactics included meetings, site tours, listening sessions, interviews, statistically valid surveys, open houses, pop-up events, and a project website, ensuring a wide range of community voices were heard.
- 2. Strong Community Satisfaction, With Clear Gaps** - 75% of residents are satisfied with parks overall (above the 62% national average), but barriers like distance and lack of awareness (“don’t know what’s offered”) signal a need for better outreach and distribution of parks.
- 3. Top Resident Priorities Are Clear** - Neighborhood parks, paved connectivity trails, restrooms, and unpaved hiking trails topped facility priorities; Special Events, nature programs, and adult fitness/wellness led program priorities.
- 4. Consistent Themes Emerged Across All Groups** - Stakeholders, staff, leaseholders, and the public all echoed desires for improved trail connectivity, ADA upgrades, more activation of open spaces, equitable park distribution, and a plan that is actionable, not just aspirational.
- 5. Nature And Outdoor Identity Are Rapid City’s Greatest Asset** - Across open houses, surveys, and advisory sessions, residents consistently expressed a preference for natural areas, native vegetation, and expanded trail systems over traditional manicured or sports-focused amenities.

PEOPLE

Parks and recreation spaces are vital to the health, wellbeing and vibrancy of communities. They serve as places for relaxation, physical activity, social interaction, and connection with nature. Because these spaces are so integral to daily life, it is essential that the public has a voice in how they are planned, designed, and maintained. Public engagement in park and recreation planning ensures that these spaces reflect the needs, values, and aspirations of the communities they serve. For the first-ever Rapid City Parks and Recreation Master Plan process, it had to start with people.

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PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Project Management Team was a small group that served as the drivers for the planning process. Department leaders were appointed to meet regularly, communicate directly with the consultant team and handled logistics for events and communication with the public. The team was made up of the following individuals:

- Melissa Petersen, *Project Manager*
- Scott Anderson
- Jeff Biegler
- Matt Brandhagen
- Doug Lowe
- Darin Sabers



PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Advisory Committee was a larger group made up of key stakeholders, crucial to the process and the ultimate success and implementation of the plan. The committee included City staff from outside departments, elected officials, representatives of the tourism and business industries, representatives from recreation associations, advocates for various community groups, park enthusiasts and active community members. They met 4 times throughout the planning process and helped think through community dynamics, prioritization and implementation strategies. The following individuals volunteered their time and talents to the Committee:

- Kelly Brennan
- Eric East
- Bill Evans
- Randy Fisher
- Ally Formanek
- Kyle Hansen
- Roger Heacock
- Tamie Hopp
- Dave Holland
- Debra Jensen
- Marlo Kapsa
- Doc Savage
- Jim Sullivan
- Domico Rodriguez

PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board initiates, reviews, and makes recommendations for ordinances, policies, and rules governing the use of the City's public parks, swimming pools, and other facilities including the golf courses. Board members also assist in making recommendations of appointments to the following subcommittees of the Board, Urban Forestry Board, Urban Wildlife, and the Beautification Committee. The consultant team hosted board members to give feedback to early park concepts and provided updates for staff to present throughout the project. Park Board members who were serving during the master plan process are listed below:

- Anthony Marshall
- Karen Gundersen Olson
- Chris Zian
- Krista Lynn Kirst
- Alan Dietrich
- Roger Heacock
- Shon Hanczyc
- Stacey Huether
- Theresa Ferdinand



LISTENING SESSIONS

Sometimes you have to hear it directly from the source. Department Staff, Advisory Committee Members and active lease holders had abundant knowledge and valuable experience to share with the consultant team. At the end of the day, a plan has to work for the individuals who will be responsible for championing and implementing it. Some of the sessions were conducted one-on-one, some were small group interviews, some were in person and others were conducted via Zoom. These subject matter experts provided invaluable information about day-to-day operations and suggestions for the future. Below is the list of individuals and groups that participated in listening sessions:

- Advisory Committee Members (previously listed)
- City Staff (Parks, Cemetery, Recreation, Ice, Golf, Aquatics)
 - Lindsey Myers
 - Amy Graves
 - Jerrell Lewellen
- Lease Holder Listening Sessions
 - Black Hills Junior League
 - Black Hills Sports
 - Canyon Lake Little League
 - Harney Little League
 - Post 320 Baseball
 - Rapid City Church Softball
 - Rapid City High School Baseball
 - Rapid City Girls Junior Olympics - ASA Girls Softball
 - Dinosaur Park Concessions
 - Rushmore Lions Club
 - The Journey Museum and Learning Center
 - Rapid City Youth Boxing
 - Black Hills Rapids Soccer
 - Rapid City Junior Football
 - Black Hills Farmers Market
 - Brennan Ave. Community Gardens
 - Black Hills Bike Hub
 - Rapid City BMX

PROCESS



Parks are all about people. Equity-centered community engagement is crucial for a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. Innovative engagement means getting creative with our stakeholders and providing a variety of ways for the community to contribute to the development of the plan. With the beautiful scenery of the Black Hills, the consultant team worked to leverage the nature available throughout the process. The following tactics were deployed to get out into the community, meet with people and help build a coalition of support for the plan.

- Meetings
- Site tours
- Listening sessions
- Interviews
- Statistically valid survey
- Project website
- Media
- Pop-up events
- Open houses

NUMBERS

- 519 completed surveys were collected. The overall results for the sample of 519 completed surveys have a precision of at least +/-4.3% at the 95% level of confidence.
- 13 individuals served on the Project Advisory Committee
- 18 Leaseholders participated in listening sessions
- 12 Interviews were conducted with Advisory Committee members
- 50+ people attended the first round of open houses
- 75+ people attended the second round of open houses
- 585 visitors on the project website
- 15+ staff members attended a mission and vision workshop

519
Surveys
Collected

250+
Open House
Attendees

13
Advisory
Committee
Members

5
Leaseholder
Listening
Sessions

12
Advisory
Committee
Interviews



KEY PROJECT THEMES ESTABLISHED WITH THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Access to Open Spaces

People love Rapid City because they love nature. Access to open spaces is about equity and quality life opportunities for all.

World-Class Destinations Bring Great Opportunity

Many of us have sojourned to the Black Hills with a hearty sense of adventure... we also stopped for gas, found lodging, bought souvenirs and a cup of coffee and a meal. Think of the possibilities!

Funding

We don't get into the world of parks to make money, but we do need money in order to make and maintain great parks. The budget is always tight and diversifying and maximizing revenue generation supports sustainable services for the community.

The Plan Should be Strategic

This is the first official system-wide master plan that the City of Rapid City has undertaken. A good plan maximizes the resources available, finds efficiencies and is actionable, holistic and pragmatic.

Maximized Resources through Partnerships

We're better together. Even unlikely allies can become great partners when similar goals are realized. Parks are a great way to bring folks together.

Operational and Maintenance Planning

Building beautiful parks and facilities is great but maintaining them is crucial for programming. Beyond mowing, a maintenance and operation plan can find efficiencies, outline life cycle analyses of equipment and support annual budgeting.

Quality-of-Life Focus

Parks departments improve quality of life by providing physical and mental health benefits, fostering social connections, and creating environmental and economic advantages for the community.

Activation of Open Spaces

Activation begets activation is a concept that describes a self-reinforcing cycle: when public spaces are intentionally programmed with events and activities, they attract more people, which in turn draws even more people and encourages spontaneous use.

Inclusive and Accessible Parks

It was a priority of the Advisory Committee to continue working towards making all parks and facilities (and future parks and facilities) more accessible for more folks. Inclusive and accessible parks are designed to accommodate people of all ages and abilities, including those with physical, sensory and cognitive disabilities.

Parks as a Tool for Economic Impact

The Parks of Rapid City have increasing potential to drive tourism, increase property values and support local businesses through visitor spending. Through marketing and partnerships, this can be expanded and improved upon.

Expanded Trail System

People use trails, love trails and want more trails due to the variety of benefits they provide. Improved health and wellness through recreation and exercise, transportation alternatives and economic and social opportunities have room to expand and connect throughout Rapid City.

Year-Round Activities

We don't have the luxury of hibernation (we're not bears). Multi-season, year-round programming supports a variety of interests and activities and keeps people active and engaged with the Parks Department.



PROCESS

STATISTICALLY VALID SURVEY

In May and June of 2025, ETC Institute conducted a parks and recreation needs assessment survey. The primary goal of the survey was to determine parks and recreation priorities for the community. The insights from the survey will help the City in taking a resident-driven approach to recreation planning to enhance the community and improve the quality of life for residents. A seven-page survey, accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope was mailed to a randomly selected sample of households in Rapid City, South Dakota. The cover letter outlined the survey's purpose and encouraged recipients to complete and return it by mail or participate online. To further participation, ETC institute conducted follow-up outreach to sampled households and promoted the survey through targeted social media advertisements.

The goal was to obtain completed surveys from at least 400 Rapid City residents. This goal was surpassed, with a total of 519 residents completing the survey. The overall results for the sample of 519 residents have a precision of at least +/-4.29% at the 95% level of confidence.

Operational And Maintenance Planning Facility and Amenity Priorities

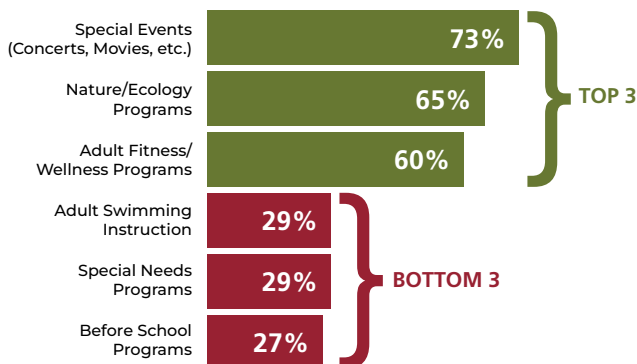
Based on the Priority Investment Ratings, the following amenities were determined to be **top priorities for residents:**

- Neighborhood parks
- Paved connectivity trails for bikes and pedestrians
- Restrooms
- Unpaved hiking trails
- Natural areas and greenways
- Large community parks
- Indoor fitness and wellness spaces

Barriers to Facility and Program Usage

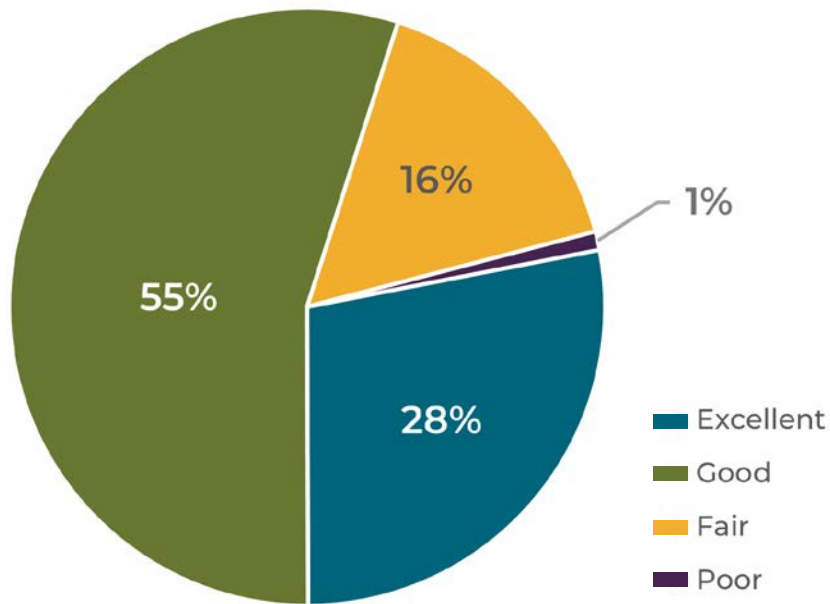
- Respondents who had not visited any parks or facilities were asked to select the reasons why they do not visit
 - 23% selected that the parks or facilities are "too far to walk or bike."
- 63% of respondents who have not participated in a program or attended an event indicated they "don't know what is offered."

Respondents were asked about their preferences for programming. The following were the top and bottom of the list, with "special events" being the greatest programming need.



Q17. If You had a budget of \$100 for services provided by the Rapid City parks and recreation, how would you allocate the funds among these categories? (by respondents' mean answer)





Q3a. How would you rate the overall quality of the recreation programs or events offered by Rapid City Parks and Recreation that you and the members of your household have participated in?

Park System Usage Comparison

- 75% of respondents were either “very satisfied” (21%) or “satisfied” (54%) with the overall value their household receives from parks, facilities, programs and services.
 - *Nationally, only 62% of respondents provide either “very satisfied” or “satisfied” responses (so Rapid City is well above average).*
- 96% of respondents indicated they have visited a City park in the past year
 - *Nationally, only 81% of respondents visit parks and facilities in their community.*
- 41% of respondents indicated they have participated in a program or attended an event offered by the City in the past year.
 - *Nationally, only 36% of respondents participate in program or attend events in their communities.*
- Rapid City Parks and Recreation is by far the most used organization for recreation and/or sports activities in the area (74%).

Program and Event Priorities

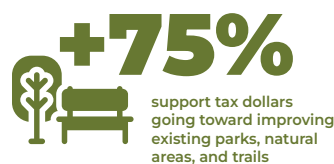
based on the Priority Investment Ratings, the following programs were determined to be **top priorities for residents:**

- Special Events
- Nature programs and environmental education
- Adult fitness and wellness programs
- Water-based recreation programs

Service-Level Improvement Areas

Three areas were determined to be **high priorities for improvement:**

- Security and Safety in Parks
- Availability of Information
- Security and Safety on Trails



TAKEAWAYS



What The Consultant Team Learned From Listening Sessions With Advisory Committee Members

- Funding is the biggest concern
 - Rapid City has the potential to be a sports hub
 - Committee members would like to see some sort of tax that supports parks and recreation BUT locals don't like additional taxes
 - It's hard for the Department to work with such a limited budget
 - The Department does a good job with what they have
 - Improve trail connectivity through the community-goal to be able to get everywhere by bike or walking
 - There is a lot of opportunity for growth
 - It's not just about building, but maintaining
 - There are some historical and cultural sites to be aware of
 - It's all about relationships
 - Everyone loves the Black Hills
 - Parks aren't evenly distributed throughout town. Make sure different areas have access to parks and recreation.
- A plan will help to see a vision rather than just react to situations
 - Think about opportunities for activities and programming all four seasons
 - Parks should be the centerpiece of the community
 - Desired ADA improvements
 - Departments should coordinate to maximize efforts and dollars
 - People love the Parks and Recreation staff and think they do a great job
 - People want parks to be clean, usable, family friendly and safe
 - People come to Rapid City because there are other cool things to do

“We have a great city that is so wonderfully outdoors.”



What The Consultant Team Learned From Listening Sessions With Staff

- Both lease agreements and reservation processes have room for improvement
- Food trucks (vendor permits) are growing, and staff is trying to make the program better
- Staff likes working at the City
- There is a desire to try some new programming
- The parks are very special, and people want them to be safe
- The plan needs to be tangible and implementable- “something we can do!”
- Desire to update playgrounds and provide more activities
- The City needs a new website
- Staff would like to see some case studies to show successful examples of plan recommendations
- The new Ranger program has been initially successful with room to grow
- Outside contracts support the work of the Department staff significantly
- Update restrooms and pavilions
- There is no camping in Rapid City

What The Consultant Team Learned From Listening Sessions With Leaseholders

- Lease agreements and requests vary dramatically between groups
 - *More consistency is desired*
 - *Clubs may consider consolidation to better pool resources*
- Leaseholders are grateful for the help and support the Parks Department provides
 - *They are proactive and responsive and provide help with mowing and litter removal*
 - *Maintenance in the park can be cumbersome*
 - » *Irrigation systems are old and need a lot of attention*
 - » *Some clubs pay a full or part-time person to take care of maintenance*



What The Consultant Team Learned From Community Open Houses

- The people of Rapid City love getting outside and enjoying nature and parks.
- Respondents preferred to see natural and native vegetation over manicured turf.
- Natural area recreation was more desired than active sports fields.
- Walking, biking and improved connectivity is strongly desired.
- All kinds of playgrounds are enjoyed (from nature play to more traditional playgrounds).
- Paved trails are desired over soft rails, but respondents appear to use both.
- The swimming pools are highly used and highly valued along with splash.
- Both large, open dog parks and amenity-rich dog parks are desired.
- Respondents would like to see more money put into the Parks and Recreation Department.
- People would like to see more water activation and paddle sport opportunities.
- Respondents are passionate about protecting the greenway along Rapid Creek.
- Community gardens are desired in additional locations.
- Respondents suggested improved shade, picnic tables and expanding the tree canopy.
- Pickle ball enthusiasts are loud and proud and want more courts.

What The Consultant Team Learned From The Project Website Interactions

- *“It would be so nice to have a park out in Rapid Valley.”*
- *“I would like to see the development of the pump track and feature park which was talked about a few years ago.”*
- *“A safe route between Lakota Homes and Vickie Powers Park. About kids live here and there is not a direct way for them to access the park.”*