



OUR FUTURE  
STARTS WITH  
**YOU**



**ROCKFORD  
PARK DISTRICT**

# 2019-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

to achieve the vision, mission, and  
priority results, given by the Board of  
Commissioners on behalf of citizens.



# Rockford Park District 2019-2023 Strategic Plan

## VISION

To be the best urban parks and recreation system in North America, as measured by national standards and the citizens we serve

## MISSION

To “help people enjoy life” by providing an exceptional parks and recreation system.

## VALUE STATEMENT

The Rockford Park District improves the quality of life for citizens by providing a vibrant and relevant park system that increases property values, stimulates economic development, decreases juvenile crime, and improves our community’s health. A vibrant and relevant park system also protects the environment, employs hundreds of area teens, and brings our diverse community together in unity through the common love of play.

## BOARD PRIORITIES

### PRIORITY RESULT I

Park space and recreational facilities meet the recreational needs of this and succeeding generations

### PRIORITY RESULT II

Residents value and are involved in diverse, well-supported, and fun activities that promote a healthy lifestyle, and contribute to a vibrant and relevant park system

### PRIORITY RESULT III

Residents have exceptional parks and recreational facilities, services, and programs that reflect a high return on citizens’ tax investment

## **INTRODUCTION**

Park space and recreation are essential to the quality of life in the Rockford Park District, and contribute to the transformation of the region into a Top 25 Community. Parks, open spaces, and recreational amenities are used, valued, and enjoyed by residents and visitors. The Rockford Park District has a multi-faceted role in helping the community achieve its vision of becoming a Top 25 Community by contributing to community revitalization through participation in community advancement and alignment initiatives, contributing to retention and growth, and economic prosperity in the region. The Rockford Park District has a rich history spanning more than 109 years. Some of the challenges we currently face include making the best use of limited resources and preserving open spaces and recreation facilities while striving to serve our citizens' current needs and those of future generations.

This strategic plan, which is based on the 2019-2023 Master Plan recommendations and the feedback received from the community, is the Park District's strategy for how to accomplish our mission and best fulfill our vision given the current economic, demographic, and environmental challenges facing Rockford and the surrounding region. It also serves as a way to align the organization with goals, priorities, and resources to serve our community better.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS**

To achieve alignment with the needs and desires of our citizens for their recreational needs now and in the future, a Recreational Needs Survey was made available to the public over a period of three months, and several community engagement sessions were held to gather public input. Information gathered in this process, as well as the input of Board members and staff at all levels of the organization was included in the formation of the Five-Year Master Plan to ensure that the plan was comprehensive in nature, and a guide for the Park District over the next five years.

The District aligns itself and its resources to achieve its purpose, vision, mission, and priorities. This successfully drives the strategic plan, operational plans, and performance goals. The Board's Priorities are reviewed annually, and represent all citizens in determining the long-term outlook of the Park District.

The Strategic Plan provides direction to staff for their operational planning with a specific, systematic approach to achieve the Priorities with measurable goals that drive resource allocation. Each team member's contribution to support and achieve their Operational Plans is measured, and progress is tracked through performance evaluation. The work they complete is selected from a list of objectives developed to help the organization meet its strategic goals and the Board's Priorities.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR INTERPRETATIONS AND ACTION PLANS**

The Park District bases its operational strategy around achievement of the Board's Priority Results. These Priorities define the results or benefits that should come about for the owners or other impacted groups, and the level of priority given to the various services or people, or at what cost. The Board's Priorities establish the purpose of the organization. The Board reviews the Priorities annually, and updates them as needed.

The Executive Director provides staff with an interpretation of the Priorities that acts as the link between the Board's Priority Results and each departmental project plan. The Executive Director's interpretations and Action Items provided by the Executive Director clearly state what achievement of the Priority Results looks like. These are, for the most part, measurable results that provide direction to managers as they develop specific objectives for their departments.

Departmental projects are developed annually, and identify tactics and actions to achieve the stated objectives, which are reported in Monitoring Reports to the Board and in personal performance evaluations of staff members.

**Priority Result I: Park space and recreational facilities meet the recreational needs of this and succeeding generations.**

**PRI.A. Neighborhood Parks: Resources are allocated to support neighborhood parks, and to provide safe and secure playgrounds, programs, and amenities.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

Neighborhood parks meet the needs of the residents that live within walking distance. Residents have ownership in their neighborhood parks and take pride in them. Neighborhood parks have amenities that are safe, well maintained, and heavily utilized. All parks have standard amenities to provide the same level of service and experience for all families, but neighborhood parks can also have customized amenities that meet the specific needs of the residents that live near the park.

Neighborhood parks can have active use and organized sports teams practicing and summer playground programs, or they can be passive use with open green space, natural areas, and walking paths. Neighborhood parks help define the neighborhood, and act as a common gathering place for families and youth. Investment in neighborhood parks will positively impact the *Youth* and *Infrastructure* critical facts.

**PRI.B. Infrastructure: Quality asset management is achieved for District infrastructure in parks, facilities, technology, and equipment.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

As determined by the master plan recommendations, investment will be made in the assets that are the highest priority to the citizens to help improve aging infrastructure, reduce deferred maintenance, and result in a higher quality asset. Investment in infrastructure will help reduce operating expense, increase revenue, and prolong the life of the asset. Investment in the District's infrastructure will positively impact the *Infrastructure* and *Technology* critical facts.



**PRI.C. Investment in Priority Areas:** Resources are allocated to provide funding for investment in specific areas of the District:

- I. Regional destination parks provide unique recreational experiences
- ii. Completion of amenities at strategic locations in the District to enhance experiences and meet community needs.
- iii. Trail systems enhance the connectivity of existing trails in the region, and create new trail systems that promote tourism and economic development, promote active and passive recreation, and outdoor activities.

**(i. Regional destination parks provide unique recreational experiences.)**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The Rockford Park District owns parks, facilities, and path/trail systems that attract citizens from all neighborhoods as well as visitors from outside the region. These destination parks, such as Sinnissippi Park, Lockwood Park, and South West Community Park, for example, are parks with many types of recreational offerings, with something for all residents to enjoy.

**(ii. Completion of amenities at strategic locations in the District to enhance experiences and meet community needs.)**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

Further investment in these areas will help complete these destination parks to fully maximize their potential, increase revenue, increase participation, and offer an experience for all families to enjoy.

**(iii. Trail systems enhance the connectivity of existing trails in the region, create new trail systems that promote tourism and economic development, promote active and passive recreation, and enhance outdoor activities.)**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

Along with these destination parks, trails, bike connectivity, path systems and silent sports are a growing trend locally as well as nationally throughout our industry. This recreational offering scored high in citizen feedback. Further investment in our paths, trails, silent sports, and connectivity will help meet the recreational needs of the citizens as well as spur economic development, retain our tax base, and connect other assets throughout the region. Investment in Priority Areas of the District will positively impact the *Youth, Value, and Financial* critical facts.

**PRI.D. Sale or Lease of District Assets: Obsolete, inefficient, duplicative, underutilized, or non-trending District parks, facilities, and amenities are repurposed and/or sold.**

- i. Surplus assets owned by the District and considered to be of low recreational value are sold or leased.
- ii. District assets are sold, privatized, repurposed, or consolidated to achieve District priorities.

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

Since 1909, the District has expanded its footprint to more than 180 facilities, parks, natural areas, paths, green space areas, etc., totaling more than 5,000 acres of public land. Much of the land acquired by the District was through acceptance of donations. Over time, recreational trends, community needs, and economic realities have changed, and some parcels of land and District assets no longer have a recreational use or no longer can be maintained at a level of quality citizens expect.

The District also owns land that is marketable for commercial private use that could produce much-needed revenue to support areas of the District that are a high priority and need for citizens. All District land and amenities will be analyzed to determine opportunities for sale, lease, or disposal to reduce the footprint of the District, to free up resources that can be reinvested in other areas, and to increase the quality of maintenance and capital of remaining assets. Selling or leasing of land and assets to reduce the footprint of the District will positively impact the *Financial* and *Workload* critical facts.

**Priority Result II: Residents value and are involved in diverse, well-supported, and fun activities that promote a healthy lifestyle, and contribute to a vibrant and relevant park system.**

**PRII.A. Community Partnerships: District assets and resources are leveraged through strategic partnerships and collaborations that enhance and strengthen achievement of the Board's Priorities.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The Rockford Park District has always held strong to a culture of collaboration. We do what we do best, help others do what they do best, and together we advocate. This has been and will continue to be the philosophy of the organization. We will look to take this partnership strategy to the highest of levels and will work with partners who have a vision and mission aligned to ours. We will develop partnerships that are mutually beneficial, and partnerships that put forth equal efforts and outcomes. Strategic partnerships will have a positive impact on our community:

- Strategic partnerships with organizations like the YMCA will provide residents with additional or higher quality recreational services.
- Strategic partnerships with municipalities like Loves Park, Winnebago County, etc., will result in government entities working together to leverage tax dollars and increase efficiencies.
- Strategic partnerships with organizations like Harlem School District or Rockford Public Library could result in children improving their reading skills, lowering youth crime, etc.

We will work to partner with those who want to go together for the good of the overall community: *If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.*

A reinvestment in strategic community partnerships will positively impact *Youth, Partnership, Financial, and Workload* critical facts.

**PRII.B. Our Next Generation: Services and programs supporting youth, teens, and families are a priority of the District.**

- i. Recreational activities are provided for health, well-being, fun, and entertainment.
- ii. Programs provide leadership development.
- iii. Job opportunities for teens are provided and promoted throughout the community.
- iv. Activities promote a healthy lifestyle, utilize recreational facilities and natural assets, and promote the District's role in environmental sustainability through preservation, conservation, beautification, and reforestation.

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The two reasons the community started the Rockford Park District in 1909 were to have a place where families could gather to recreate, relax, and maintain the family unit, and also to keep area youth off of the streets and out of trouble.

The principles that Levin Faust, Robert Tinker, Fred C. Carpenter, and HW Williams built the foundation of our organization on are the same principles and needs that exist today. Priority will be given to an investment in our next generation, our youth and teens, in a variety of ways to set the course for the future. Investments will include additional resources to recreational programs to teach our next generation lifelong skills.

Lifelong skills include not only sports and recreational learning, but also teamwork, responsibility, respect, etc. Programs will link youth and teens with mentors, coaches, instructors, and program leaders who will mentor and teach them, setting the stage for future success.

Programs will exist that provide leadership skills that youth will take with them in school, in their homes, and eventually apply as the future leaders of our community and park district.

One major role that the Rockford Park District provides is being a first-time employer of thousands of local teens. We will invest in this role to make first-time job experiences positive, which will not only have a positive impact on the youth, but will also have a positive impact on the customers receiving great service. An investment in our next generation will pay off in multiple ways in the present and future.

Children and teens who are actively involved in positive recreational programs, volunteering, or working for the Rockford Park District have a greater chance of success. The Rockford Park District lowers juvenile crime by investing in programs and opportunities for youth and teens, and we continue to add to the foundation that was created in 1909 to set the Park District and community up for continued success. The District will also intentionally strategize and offer events, programs, and services in which entire families can participate at the same time. Families that play together, stay together. A reinvestment in our next generation will positively impact the *Youth* critical fact.

**PRII.C. Culturally Inclusive Programs: District services and programs are accessible to all, and meet the recreational needs of our diverse community.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

Our community is diverse, with families of all different backgrounds, ethnicities, needs, challenges, and opportunities. Our organization exists to provide recreational services to all. An investment in culturally inclusive programs means building relationships with all cultures within our community, identifying existing recreational needs, the potential barriers that are preventing participation, and how to effectively deliver outstanding services to all.

Culturally inclusive Park District services are delivered from an organization that is culturally inclusive internally. We will work to diversify our workforce so that we reflect the community we serve. We help to achieve unity when we bring all citizens together for the common love of play. Further investment in culturally inclusive programming will positively impact the *Youth* and *Value* critical facts.

**PRII.D. Residents value a vibrant park system: The community is engaged and participates in their Park District as advocates, volunteers, on advisory committees, and through donations and sponsorships.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

It's more than just recreation. The Rockford Park District improves the quality of life for citizens by providing a vibrant and relevant park system that increases property values, stimulates economic development, decreases juvenile crime, and improves the community's health. The Rockford Park District



also protects the environment, employs thousands of area teens for the first time, and brings the community together to enjoy life.

This value statement is something that the community understands and supports. Residents love their park district not only because of their individual involvement, but because they also understand the critical role parks and recreation play in our region.

Greater advocacy, partnerships, volunteers, advisory committees, donations, and sponsorships are all examples of how our community values its park district. Investment into the full engagement of our community will positively impact the *Value* critical fact.

**Priority Result III: Residents have exceptional parks and recreational facilities, services and programs that reflect a high return on citizen's tax investment.**

**PRIII.A. Priority is given to areas of greatest public benefit:** Resources are prioritized in areas that provide a broad array of recreational activities giving the greatest benefit to the community as a whole, through facilities, programs, and activities that enhance quality of life, and promote unity, health, and well-being.

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The community's tax dollars are allocated in areas that result in the greatest overall public/community benefit. Through community engagement, citizens consistently requested their tax dollars go to areas like neighborhood parks, paths, open space, community events, youth programs, and other areas that have a greater impact on the entire community. Facilities and services that benefit individuals should exist with a reasonable tax subsidy. This feedback and direction from our citizens supports the parameters established by the District's cost recovery parameters. Park and facility acquisition and development meet established criteria, and investment in priorities that provide the greatest public benefit will positively impact the *Value* critical fact.

**PRIII.B. Reasonable tax subsidies are achieved: A reasonable level of tax subsidy is achieved for all areas of operation in programs and at District facilities.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The purpose of the Rockford Park District as a public sector unit of government is to establish and maintain a public park and recreation system for the health, well-being, and entertainment of area citizens. We are funded primarily through two main revenue streams - fees (revenue collected through the fees that we charge for program and facility services), and property tax revenue. People pay their property taxes to the Park District to receive the high-quality services we provide each day. Property tax revenue allows us to charge reasonable fees so that all people can participate. When the fees collected for a particular program do not match the expenses that exist to operate, property taxes are used to subsidize the remaining gap. A "reasonable" tax subsidy is to be achieved at all programs and facilities. Services that generate more of a community-wide benefit can be expected to utilize more tax subsidy compared to services that are geared to an individual or special interest group. Tax subsidy can also be larger in areas where participants do not have the financial means to pay a user fee. Achievement of reasonable tax subsidies will positively impact the *Financial* critical fact.

**PRIII. C. Non-property tax revenue: Non-traditional and non-property tax revenue sources provide support for District facilities, programs, and operations.**

**Executive Director Interpretation:**

The District will aggressively and creatively pursue any and all non-property tax revenue opportunities to assist with additional resources to support its priorities. This includes any revenue opportunity outside of property taxes and fees collected for services provided. (Examples include sponsorships, merchandise, food and beverage expansion, and video gaming). Revenues collected through non-traditional and non-tax methods will help reduce tax subsidies as well as increase the ability to provide higher quality and additional services. Increasing non-tax revenue will positively impact the *Financial* critical fact.

## Organizational Excellence

### (Governing Policy 2.2 Treatment of Staff and Organizational Excellence)

Organizational excellence is achieved internally to provide the highest level of service to citizens.

A. The organization is strategically aligned: Internal organizational excellence results in external organizational excellence. Individual efforts align to provide organizational achievement in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

#### Executive Director Interpretation:

Rockford Park District team members are aligned for achievement. Alignment for achievement means that team members are in the right positions based on their skill set. Dedicated and talented team members execute the District's strategic plan and fulfill the priorities set forth by the community and park board. When the organization is strategically aligned, we will positively impact the *Systems* critical facts.

B. The Leadership System for Maximum Results values and culture is fostered: The organizational culture promotes relationships, innovation, health and wellness, and unifies and inspires team members to work together to achieve the vision, mission, and priorities of the District.

#### Executive Director Interpretation:

When our values are clear, the decisions are easy. We will invest in the strength of our organization and our culture to continue not only delivering high quality park and recreation services, but acting as a leader in our community in its transformation into a Top 25 Community. We are a "One Team, One Goal" organization that seeks to unify and inspire team members to work together to achieve the vision, mission, and priorities of the District. We are an enjoyable, family first, encouraging environment that supports education, fun, and servant leadership. All team members possess and live by the shared values of accountability, agility, diversity, innovation, integrity, passion, and respect. We are relationship oriented, results driven, and service centered. Advancing our relationships to results culture within will have a positive impact on the *Systems, Workload, and Value* critical facts.

C. Continuous Improvement: Operations are fully resourced, promote continuous improvement, and minimize organizational risk exposure.

*Executive Director Interpretation:*

We are a park district rich in history that was built through the generosity of its citizens, strategic partnerships, and dedicated team members. Even during the recession, we've been able to consistently provide outstanding park and recreational offerings to our community; however, with declining revenue both through fees and a declining tax base, which are the District's two main revenue streams, along with population and demographic shifts, we can no longer provide the same level of service without a substantial increase in revenue or a decrease in our footprint.

Investment in our team members can include education and development as well as fair and competitive wages and benefits. In addition, properly resourcing programs, maintenance, and capital needs of facilities and parks will ensure achievement of the priority results, and will result in continued gold medal service delivery to our community. Team members work together to mitigate organizational risk, including strategic, financial, operational, compliance, and reputation.

When resources are allocated to achieve the Board's priorities and the advancement of a continuous improvement philosophy are embraced throughout the District, we will see a positive impact on the *Safety, Infrastructure, Systems, and Workload* critical facts.

## Supplemental Information

*Critical Facts: Defined as significant challenges and opportunities that the District has the ability to impact, and that affect the District's ability to achieve the mission, priorities, and objectives. Cumulative results (summarized below) reflect the input of 27 groups or 220 participants including staff, volunteers, and advisors who completed the activity.*

**YOUTH:** young people need to be engaged to ensure they overcome risk factors and achieve in life

**VALUE:** the District's reputation must be sustained and advanced to maintain value, support, and involvement in our community and region

**PARTNERSHIPS:** redefine and communicate partnership strategies to enhance and advance the mutual benefit

**SAFETY:** thoroughly evaluate and address the overt-to-underlying community and industry threats to customer and staff safety and security

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** focus on facility, equipment, vehicle, tree, park, playground, capital repair and replacement, and deferred and preventative maintenance

**FINANCIAL:** allocate resources to capitalize on opportunities for non-tax revenues such as fees, sponsorships, naming rights, volunteerism, and budget-relieving gifts

**SYSTEMS:** utilize systems (such as Lean, cost recovery, standard operating procedures, District-wide protocols) to improve consistency and overcome weaknesses in District-wide application of business best practices

**TECHNOLOGY:** opportunities exist to employ updated and new technologies (hardware, software, and equipment) to improve effectiveness and efficiency

**WORKLOAD:** the District's footprint has grown, while the workforce and resources have diminished, causing challenges in work/life balance and integration