



BOULDER PARKS AND RECREATION Master Plan Update

SNAPSHOT OVERVIEW CURRENT STATE, KEY THEMES & TRENDS



Restore | Connect | Sustain

Welcome to Boulder Parks and Recreation

Mission

Boulder Parks and Recreation (BPR) promotes the health and well-being of the entire Boulder community by collaboratively providing high-quality parks, facilities and programs.

"I want to say thank you for working so diligently to keep some of our outdoor spaces open and available during this time of great stress and need in our communities."



Currently, we manage more than 1,800 acres of urban parkland and 138,000 square feet of recreation center space, plus many other recreation facilities, including the Boulder Reservoir, Valmont Bike Park and the Flatirons Golf Course.

BPR is one of many providers of recreation programs in the Boulder community. Before the pandemic, we partnered with recreation and sports enthusiasts to provide over 2,500 different types of programs. Some programs include a fee, while others are subsidized to ensure all members of the community have access to parks and recreation.

Boulder Parks and Recreation Includes:



1

Cemetery



6

Civic Spaces



5

Gardens



1

Golf Course



6

Natural Areas including Boulder Reservoir



56

Parks



49

Playgrounds



3

Recreation Centers



47

Athletic Fields



5

Indoor + Outdoor Pools



4

Dog Parks



2

Skate Parks



1

Bike Park



36 &
44

Tennis Courts and Other Sports Courts

Master Plan Focus Areas



In 2014 Boulder residents helped craft a master plan that is the foundation for the work we do for the community. Since that time, BPR has accomplished many of the master plan initiatives, which were organized by community-driven master plan focus areas. These will carry forward with the current Master Plan update and include:

1. Community Health and Wellness
2. Taking Care of What We Have
3. Financial Sustainability
4. Building Community and Relationships
5. Youth Engagement and Activity
6. Organizational Readiness

New to this update, all long-range plans and initiatives will consider how they impact the city's equity and resilience goals.



Community Health & Wellness

Parks provide **measurable health benefits**, from encouraging direct contact with nature and a cleaner environment, to opportunities for physical activity and social interaction. This focus area emphasizes the **community's desire for BPR to focus on public health and wellness through parks, facilities and programs**, emphasizing the important role parks and recreation services can continue to play in keeping Boulder **healthy and vibrant**.



Taking Care of What We Have

This focus area concentrates on the need to ensure the **long-term viability of the park and recreation system through comprehensive asset management practices**. It captures a broad spectrum of work, ranging from daily operations to ongoing maintenance to the large capital projects that are completed each year as part of the Capital Improvement Program.



Financial Sustainability

BPR is supported by several sources of revenue that fund operations and capital improvement projects. Effective stewardship of these resources means directing them toward parks, programs, and facilities that provide the greatest community benefits. Financial Sustainability efforts ensure we consider the total cost of facility ownership and service delivery in resource allocation and fee setting.



Youth Engagement & Activity

Youth are a priority for the community and there is a strong need to actively engage youth with parks, facilities and programs that are place-based. Parks offer children the daily benefits of direct experience with nature, experiential learning through play and shared experiences, and can be a resource for closing the opportunity gap to drive children's participation in community development, citizenship and democratic processes.



Building Community & Relationships

Focusing on community engagement and cultural activities through outreach programs and initiatives is an important component of our work, helping to build strong neighborhoods and increase social connections. Parks and recreation programs build social capital, promote healthy communities and address social and cultural inequities by providing programming and services for all.



Organizational Readiness

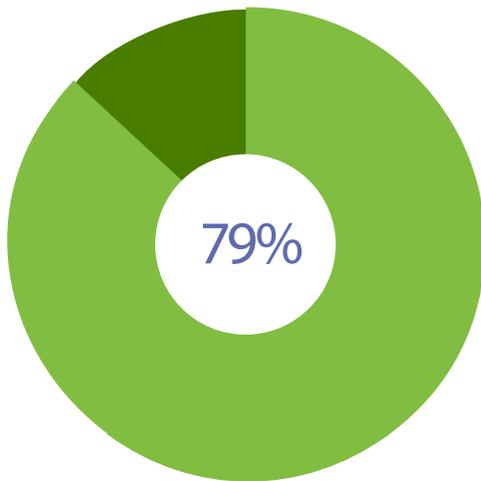
Many demands on budget and staff time are placed on parks and recreation departments, both locally and nationally. It is critical that BPR continue to support a talented, modern team and create more business management practices that leverage the use of new technologies, data driven decision-making, and collaborative decision-making tools to meaningfully respond to changes over time.

Master Plan Achievements Since 2014



In 2020, we began updating our master plan to guide our day-to-day work based on changes that have occurred in the last several years. We've achieved many things since 2014.

While there are too many to mention here in the Snapshot, we wanted to highlight a few of our accomplishments in each Focus Area.



79% of Master Plan direct actions have been completed since 2014

Community Health & Wellness

"Healthy Together," a grant funded program that provides low-income youth with physical activity, education and mentors in their neighborhoods.

Classes *specifically designed for older adults* are provided at facilities.

Walk With a Doc and *Be Well Saturdays* have expanded wellness programs in partnership with Boulder Community Health.

211%

Increase in financial aid enrollments

Taking Care of What We Have

Voter approved financial support allowed us to invest in *neighborhood parks, with 15 renovated.*

Our staff has implemented a *Zero-Waste program in all parks.*

We *completed construction on two popular facilities* – Scott Carpenter Pool and the Boulder Reservoir Visitor Center and *finished several plans that outline future priority infrastructure improvements.*

41%

Reduction in backlog repairs since 2014!



Financial Sustainability

From 2014-2020, **16,621 volunteers gave 172,699 total hours of their time to BPR projects and maintenance efforts, allowing staff to focus on other issues, helping ensure financial sustainability.**

BPR outsourced dance, pottery, competitive gymnastics and some summer camps to community partners, allowing BPR to focus more resources on higher-level community-benefit and recreation level programming.



Volunteers gave 21,500 workdays worth of time!

Building Community & Relationships

The *Recquity Pass program*, which offers subsidized facility passes, **initiated over 5,000 visits in the first eight months of its operation.**

Boulder's EXPAND program for people with disabilities offered **new summer camps and sites for participants, enhancing self-esteem and social skills.**



Increase in EXPAND enrollment

Youth Engagement & Activity

Over 1,800 youth were served through diverse & popular BPR and partner supported **summer camp offerings.**

The Youth Services Initiative (YSI) program was awarded a grant to implement the **SPARK After School Physical Activity Program.** It offers after school and summer programming to enhance youth (6-18 years old) physical activity and fitness.



Increase in youth daily participations

Organizational Readiness

Beehive Asset Management Software was implemented to manage \$270 million in park assets more effectively.

As part of the *City of Boulder's Climate Leaders Program*, the City is training leaders from parks and recreation in the science of climate change, so everyday decisions can be informed by a consistent foundation of knowledge.



Reports that took weeks now take minutes

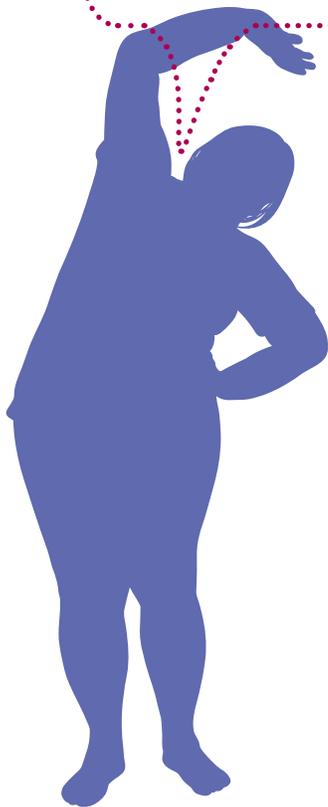
Community Input Affirms Focus Areas

To inform the update, we posted a questionnaire on Be Heard Boulder, in February 2021. It gave residents an opportunity to tell us why they think each Master Plan Focus Area is important and to share their hopes for the future of parks and recreation. The community affirmed the six master plan focus areas for the Master Plan update.

450
SURVEY
RESPONDENTS

Read some of the highlights below and take a look at the full report [here!](#)

Benefits of parks and recreation include increased physical and mental health, which in turn helps decrease pressure on the healthcare system. Having a strong parks and recreation system helps to improve resilience and provide strength to community members in difficult times.



Community
Health & Wellness

At the most fundamental level, financial sustainability is necessary for the parks and recreation system to function well and is extremely important to future planning efforts. It provides reliability in the delivery of services and operations, helps to avoid municipal debt, and anticipates issues so they can be addressed proactively.



Boulder has a good thing going. BPR should continue to focus on keeping existing parks and facilities clean and safe, and upgrading only as necessary. "Quality over quantity" should be BPR's focus.

Taking Care of
What We Have



Financial
Sustainability



A focus on building community and relationships helps to strengthen and promote a diversity of users through inclusion and accessibility.

Parks and recreation programs and services provide youth with opportunities to make friends and connect with community, outlets for stress and time away from computer screens. Participating in parks and recreation activities teach youth to be proud stewards of our environment, provide short- and long-term health benefits, education, emotional development, and the discovery of new passions and hobbies.

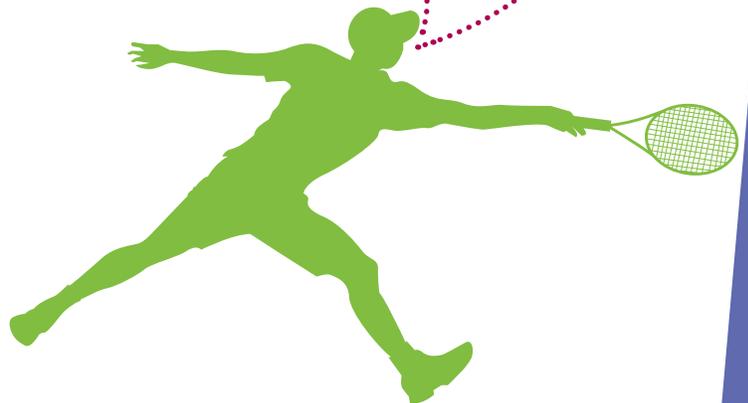
Change is inevitable and organizational readiness is important to face this change successfully and continue to thrive.



Building
Community &
Relationships



Youth
Engagement
& Activity



Organizational
Readiness

Spotlight: Equity & Resilience



What do Equity and Resilience Mean for Parks and Recreation?

While the City of Boulder has done significant work to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and access since the 2014 plan, these issues must continually be addressed proactively and deliberately to:

- Ensure that everyone in Boulder has access to parks and recreation programs and services and feels welcome in those spaces. Leaving people unheard and disconnected is not acceptable.
- Ensure that Boulder Parks and Recreation (BPR) and its staff are able to help mitigate the effects of climate change and are ready and able to adapt and respond to future change and/or crises.
- Preserve urban ecosystems, promoting resilience throughout the community.

City-Wide Initiatives

BPR will continue to collaborate and partner with other city departments and outside organizations to ensure a consistent and aligned approach to defining and incorporating equity and resilience into all city services. These existing efforts will inform the Master Plan update:

- [Boulder Racial Equity Plan](#)
- [Climate Emergency Resolution 1260](#)
- [City Resilience Framework](#)
- [Climate Mobilization Action Plan](#)

Equity is “the just and fair quantity, proximity and connections to quality parks and green space, recreation facilities, as well as programs that are safe, inclusive, culturally relevant and welcoming to everyone. When people have just and fair access, our health and social well-being improve, and our communities can protect and better recover from environmental, social and economic challenges” (National Recreation and Parks Association 2020).

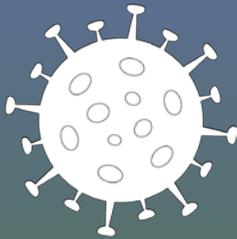
Resilience is the capacity to prepare and plan for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from those experiences. Resilience is becoming an increasingly important issue as climate change and weather events continue to worsen. Parks and public spaces should be prepared for these extreme events and their long-term impacts. Creating resilient places can provide economic and social benefits as well.



Top Stressors:

Pandemic Recovery

The pandemic disrupted access to parks and recreation in 2020-2021



Wildfire, Storms & Drought

Boulder storm events and natural disasters are increasing in frequency



Rising Cost of Living

2021 Boulder median single-family home price = \$1.55 million



BPR has a good foundation of equity and resilience initiatives to build on to ensure they are woven into all Focus Areas.

EQUITY

Building Blocks

- Concerted efforts to provide communications and materials in multiple languages (primarily English and Spanish)
- Providing significant access to programs and services for people with low incomes or disabilities
- Many outdoor passive recreation opportunities are easily accessible to all community members at no to low cost
- Commitment to using equity lens in the Boulder Parks and Recreation Master Plan long-term strategy and community outreach

RESILIENCE

Resources

- Investment in staff education and development ensures BPR can quickly pivot to address sudden and extreme changing situations
- BPR's 56 parks and 236 miles of multi-use paths are part of a regional network of trails and open spaces that provide proven health and wellness benefits and relieve stress
- BPR's urban canopy of 51,500 trees provides shade and cooling against urban heat island effect, improves air quality and adds to Boulder's scenic beauty

Top 10 Current Trends for Boulder Parks and Recreation

2020 was a difficult year, with people around the world struggling to cope with a global pandemic and significant social upheaval throughout our communities. Due to the pandemic, Boulder Parks and Recreation (BPR), like most recreation program and service providers, has had to pivot from business as usual to no in-person activities to virtual options and slowly back again. While the pandemic has resulted in downward trends in certain areas, it has also led to positive trends, including increased usage of outdoor recreation, that are good for the future of parks and recreation. The top 10 trends are listed below in no particular order.



1 Registration Fluctuation
In 2019, BPR welcomed 512,420 visitors to our recreation centers. From 2019 to 2020, users registered for programs through parks and recreation memberships, as drop-ins and for partner programs. Registration and usage fluctuated dramatically in 2020 (due to public health order facility closures)—going from pre-COVID numbers to no registrations, to virtual sign-ups, to partial openings, to closing, and back to partial openings. Enrollment in all BPR program areas decreased and organized team sports were paused for most of 2020. As things begin to open up more fully, we are generally filling program capacity at outdoor facilities, especially at pools and tennis courts.

3 Regional User Population Increase
An unexpected uptick in a regional user population has been seen because many facilities throughout the region have been closed. Users who would not otherwise come to Boulder have been visiting BPR facilities more frequently.

4 Youth and Family Programs are Popular
Youth and family programs are continually requested and special events, including the Halloween Drive-In Movie, have been more popular than expected. Parents in Boulder and surrounding communities are yearning to get their kids outside or in recreation programs/camps to interact with others.

2 Embracing Virtual Programming
The Boulder community embraced virtual programming during the pandemic. It will be important to monitor changes in the next few years to fully understand trends.

5 Increasing Demand in Older Adult Programs
Demand is increasing and older adults are coming back at unexpectedly higher rates because BPR provides opportunities for social engagement in a safe environment.



6 Parks and Natural Areas “Loved to Death”

BPR facilities are aging, and parks and natural areas are being “loved to death” due to increasing popularity of outdoor areas being seen throughout the country.

9 Increasing Volunteerism

Volunteer hours are trending up as a result of city and BPR investments in staff capacity to design and deliver quality volunteer programs and use them as a vehicle for building social capital.

7 Flat Funding

Considering inflation, funding has been flat since 2000, yet BPR has added services, increased pay, established a Living Wage, augmented sustainable practices that require more maintenance and increased Financial Aid.

10 Strong Partnerships and Collaborations

Strong partnerships and collaborations are creating more environmentally, financially and socially successful programming and services, including the Pottery Lab collaboration, partnerships with Open Space & Mountain Parks, University of Colorado, Boulder Housing Partners, Housing & Human Services, PLAY Boulder Foundation and increased philanthropy.

8 Creating Efficiency and Data Driven Maintenance Prioritization

BPR is ahead of many peers in data collection and the push toward “total” asset management. This helps the department make more educated decisions regarding the most efficient way to prioritize and complete maintenance of facilities.

Top 10 Projected Trends To Watch Over the Next 5-7 Years



Moving into the COVID-19 recovery phase and the next 5-7 years, these trends are anticipated to impact the Boulder parks and recreation system. BPR, along with parks and recreation departments across the country, will need to adapt and become more resilient, planning to be more agile and strengthen partnerships with community agencies, private sector providers, volunteer groups, and residents to ensure critical community assets, including recreation programs, services, facilities and parks continue to serve Boulder far into the future.

1 Increased Indoor and Outdoor Recreation Demand

Once people discover the outdoors and recreation, they are unlikely to return to the couch. While demand has fluctuated during the pandemic, local and national trends point strongly to increased, sustained demand for indoor and outdoor recreation, generally filling outdoor program capacity, especially at pools and tennis courts.

2 Change in Daily Habits

COVID-19 has changed the way people work, recreate and exercise. Some people may not go back to the office five days a week moving forward. This will impact demand and usage of BPR facilities, parks and natural areas. Until there is widespread immunity, people may be hesitant to come back to physical indoor locations and may continue their increased use of our outdoor parks and natural areas. At the same time, people may crave the social aspects of in-person indoor classes and fitness programs they have not had access to for months.

3 Dynamic Youth Participation

Youth programming is on the rise. As things are opening back up, baseball and little league registration has been good, because parents are looking for activities their kids can participate in with others.

4 Increased Demand for Wellness Programs, Especially Among Older Adults

Health and wellness programming interest (mind, body and spirit integration) is expected to trend upward, due to modern day stressors and anxiety about the post-COVID landscape. Boulder's population is aging and this group is anticipated to have continued demand for recreation that creates social connections and improves health.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) predicts that "one-third of all park and recreation budgets will face cuts of 25 percent or more in their fiscal year 2021–2022 budgets, and substantial cuts in fiscal year 2022–2023 budgets. Absent adequate federal assistance, the coming budget cuts will be shocking and likely will exceed those from the Great Recession of 2007–2009."

5 **Adaptability and Flexibility in Future Programming**

Future programming and services are key to recovery. We need to think more holistically and dynamically about programming and services. Specifically, adapting to the changes in how people live and work today will be important. Focusing on timing of offerings, combinations of programming, a one-stop registration process, mobile options, flexible spaces and a continued virtual presence will help us move forward post COVID-19.

6 **Balancing Equity with Financial Sustainability**

With future budget and space limitations, we need to focus on determining the highest and best utilization of services and facilities, while still providing additional support to those who need it. Continued refinement of Financial Aid will also be important to ensuring access for all. BPR achieves a high cost recovery for its recreation programs and services, but coupled with Boulder's high cost of living, this creates a tension for middle-class families who want to access these programs and services.

7 **Increased Maintenance and Staff Coordination**

As parks and recreation use is anticipated to grow, we can in turn anticipate increased demands for maintenance. BPR will need to develop strategies to accommodate these increases.

8 **Preparing for Potential Budget Decreases**

As the financial effects of the pandemic continue to impact Boulder over the next 2-3 years at a minimum, concerns about how to maintain existing funding and deal with increasing competition for limited general fund dollars will have to be addressed by BPR.

9 **Making Data Accessible**

Boulder decision-makers and the community have a strong desire for data-based decision making. We have completed several plans and policies with numerous data criteria to support current efforts of taking care of what we have, as well as growing equity and resilience. Over the next 5-7 years, BPR will need to synthesize data collection to communicate decision-making succinctly and transparently. Additionally, the pandemic led to demand for easy-to-use, centralized information hubs. Residents want a convenient, one-stop digital information source to learn about program and facility offerings.

10 **Responding to Climate Change**

The climate is changing. Compared to 50 years ago, Boulder is warmer and drier. We will need to be nimble as a department and anticipate increasing amounts of maintenance and changes to work plans and priorities, especially as natural disasters (e.g., flood, fire) increase due to impacts of climate change.

All photos featuring community members without masks are taken from the BPR archive.

For more information or to learn about ways to provide input, please visit the project page:

[BPRmasterplan.org](https://www.bprmasterplan.org)